



It's where you belong!



Five-Year Strategic Plan | 2022-2027



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mayor's Message	3
Mission   Vision   Motto   Core Values	4
Strategic Priorities	
Thriving Economy	6
Innovative Public Services	8
Cohesive and Connected Culture	10
Fun and Vibrant Community	12
Strong Regional Alliances	14
Appendix	16
Acknowledgements	20

# MAYOR'S MESSAGE



I am proud to present the City of Wausau Five-Year Strategic Plan for 2022-2027. This plan is an aspirational endeavor for the future of Wausau and an essential look at understanding who we are, who we want to be and how to get there. Its success depends on all of us working together – City Council, City staff, and our residents and businesses – to implement the plan, report and evaluate its progress and make adjustments to continue moving the City of Wausau forward.

This Strategic Plan is the result of a collaborative process that engaged our community. We invited you, our residents and businesses, to let us know how we are doing, to share your ideas and to envision the future of Wausau. We reached out to a wide array of community stakeholders and organizations, as well as our own advisory boards and commissions and city staff. Through our collective efforts we fine-tuned our mission and core values, created a vision and set strategic goals and objectives for the City of Wausau.

I would like to thank the Strategic Planning Steering committee for their support and leadership in this process and members of the City's leadership team for their thoughtful and conscientious contributions to this planning.

Our City Council and staff are determined, dedicated and ready to put in this plan into action while keeping our residents' input and direction at the center of the decision-making process. This is an exciting time for Wausau as we build upon our successes and, together, lead our community to an even better future.

Katie Rosenberg

Mayor

# MISSION | VISION | MOTTO

## Mission Statement

Enhance our community's quality of life and foster a sense of belonging for generations to come.

## Vision Statement

Wausau is a fun, vibrant, and highly connected community providing diverse and accessible social, arts, cultural and outdoor recreational experiences and a thriving economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve success and happiness.

## Motto/Tag Line

Welcome Home to Wausau...  
It's where you belong

## Professionalism

We are solution-oriented and work collaboratively to deliver service at the highest standards every time, in every situation.

## Accountability

We accept responsibility and take ownership for our actions.

## Integrity

We act ethically, honestly, and lead by example by having our actions reflect our word.

## Respect

We strive to seek understanding and treat everyone equitably and with compassion.

## Innovation

We consciously strive to be thought-leaders and creative in seeking opportunities to improve our service delivery

# THRIVING ECONOMY

## Strategic Goal

Develop strategies and services to support existing business and workers and attract and retain a skilled workforce and innovative businesses.

## Current State

Like many communities across the U.S. businesses are still trying to determine how to fit into the post-COVID economy. Rising inflation and supply chain issues are affecting every aspect of life for residents and businesses. At the same time, Wausau is experiencing record levels of new construction that will have a positive impact on the City's revenue. The City has continued its strategic focus on diversifying the housing options available in the community, expanding manufacturing jobs in the Wausau business campus, and partnering with Marathon County Development Corporation (MCDEVCO) to facilitate gap financing needed by businesses.

## Future State

Wausau will work in concert with businesses and other governments in the region to form a cooperative ecosystem in which mutuality reinforcing government and private sector activities contribute to a vibrant community by leveraging the city's strengths in the competitive industry sectors. Wausau will achieve a reputation as an outstanding place to do business, powered by a community-reflecting workforce that is well-supported with diversified housing choices, affordable homeownership opportunities and services that allow workers to fully participate in their career or job of choice and advance their prosperity and standard of living. Wausau's pro-business brand and reputation for entrepreneurship will become a magnet for innovation. Wausau employers will have access to a skilled and developed workforce and workers will have access to meaningful and well-paying career pathways.



## Objectives

1. Optimize room tax revenue investment to contribute to our thriving economy.
2. Develop human resources to maintain a quality workforce.
3. Highlight our strengths such as health care, agriculture, local businesses, and tourism to build community pride and recognition of community assets.
4. Partner to create wraparound services (childcare, transportation, etc.) for workforce development.
5. Continue to collaborate with businesses to create new and improved existing housing stock.

## Performance Measures

- Increase in number and type of workforce supports
- % increase in housing units created
- % increase in housing units improved
- % increase in residents who agree the City is doing a good job in helping to create a thriving business environment and economy (community survey - establish baseline and trend over time)



# INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SERVICES

## Strategic Goal

Create and implement practices, policies, and procedures to enhance and optimize public services for our community.

## Current State

In recent years the City has placed a premium on innovation, with department leadership empowering employees to look for ways to improve and modernize the processes and systems that are used to provide services and programming to the community. Even with this positive thrust the City is still recovering from the Great Recession of 2008 and is now grappling with the impacts of the Great Resignation and the massive re-location that occurred during the pandemic. The City is challenged with finding adequate staffing to fill vacancies and retaining skilled employees in an increasing competitive job market.

## Future State

The City delivers exceptional service by working to understand the challenges facing customers, residents and community and incorporating sustainability and resiliency into the core functions of all City departments. City staff are innovative problem-solvers and continuously improve their work processes and practices so City departments can respond rapidly to changing customer needs and demands. The City provides an environment where employees feel engaged and encouraged and have opportunities for growth. Staff and managers have effective tools and templates to work efficiently and operating processes and procedures are designed to focus on what customer's value to the City delivers the right services when and where needed. As part of the City's efforts to maintain its workforce the City has created a focus on professional development that increases the engagement of employees at all levels and results in employees who stay with the City, preserving institutional knowledge.



## Objectives

1. Implement creative strategies for service delivery to meet the needs and expectations of our changing community.
2. Attract and retain a City excellent workforce to maintain and increase public service.
3. Maintain and enhance City support at public activities/events so that those events remain safe and efficient.
4. Invest in solutions to ensure environmental sustainability for generations to come.
5. Streamline City processes so new and/or existing businesses operating in Wausau have a set of clear expectations.

## Performance Measures

- % increase in business that feel the quality of services provided to businesses by the City meets or exceed their expectations (business survey – establish baseline and trend over time)
- Employee retention rate (tracked annually and trended over time)
- % increase in residents who safe and welcomed at community events (community survey – establish baseline and trend over time)
- % increase in residents who agree that the City is doing a good job of creating a healthy natural environment that sustains the community for current and future generations (establish baseline and trend over time)
- Identify sustainability goals and develop a plan to achieve them (for example: reduction in City facility energy usage, landfill diversion rate, water usage per capita)



# COHESIVE AND CONNECTED CULTURE

## Strategic Goal

Foster a community culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity so that all who live in and visit Wausau feel welcomed.

## Current State

After Wausau and Marathon County made national headlines in May of 2021 when the County Board voted down a resolution embracing diversity, the City has embraced a leadership role in tirelessly promoting Wausau as a “community for all.” The City Council passed the “We Are Wausau” resolution to acknowledge that people’s differences are not consistently respected and to express the determination to move above and beyond all forms of bias and exclusion. With this resolution the City acknowledged there are policies and practices that have created barriers that disproportionately affect refugees and other marginalized segments of the community and that more work is needed to counteract racism and create more opportunity for community members who are under-served or adversely affected by practices that are not equitable.

## Future State

Wausau’s communications and community engagement activities and events are welcoming, accessible and culturally responsive. Community members feel welcome and heard and the City uses the input and feedback we receive from the community’s diverse voices in our planning and decision-making. City programs and services protect Wausau’s vulnerable residents, populations and neighborhoods and a mix of amenities are available that are inviting and interesting to all communities that call Wausau home.



## Objectives

1. Create a capable, accessible, and reliable communication system in the community to foster transparency and involvement.
2. Market the fun and vibrant social, cultural, and natural recreation opportunities in our community so that people feel a sense of belonging.
3. Create and support innovative programs to better connect newcomers to Wausau to their community.
4. Create innovative shared services with our partner communities resulting in greater regional success and efficiency.

## Performance Measures

- Satisfaction of Wausau newcomers with their life in the community (survey on arrival and one year later)
- A multi-channel system for communicating with the community is in place
- A marketing strategy to promote social, cultural and recreational opportunities has been created and implemented
- % increase in resident satisfaction with City communication and engagement (community survey – establish baseline and trend over time)
- % increase in residents overall trust in City government (community survey – establish baseline and trend over time)
- % increase in residents satisfaction with City-sponsored events and activities (community survey – establish baseline and trend over time)



# FUN AND VIBRANT COMMUNITY

## Strategic Goal

Cultivate and promote the social, cultural, arts, and natural recreation opportunities in our community.

## Current State

The City continues to support a rich array of programming and recreational opportunities throughout the community, including over 350 acres of park lands and trails, sponsorship of events in the River District and use of the city's room tax revenue and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to support events and programming provided by Wausau's community-based organizations. Historic landmarks, the arts and art related events are key cultural resources for Wausau with performing arts, galleries, museums and public art all serving as a hub for people in Central Wisconsin to enjoy. The City and its residents are interested in creating more opportunities to nurture a stronger and more cohesive community, embracing diversity and social interaction and ensuring that a physical and cultural environment with ample gathering places and community-wide events exists to foster these qualities. The City is committed to the goal of continually improving downtown by promoting it as tourist destination, a neighborhood for urban residents and a center of commercial activity. Recent improvements in streetscapes, walkability and parking availability will meet the needs of downtown residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

## Future State

Wausau is a cohesive and connected community that considers all cultural, racial and socio-economic factors in order to provide access and opportunities to diverse residents and businesses. The city is a lively, inviting and welcoming designation for residents and visitors alike. Downtown is characterized by attractive buildings and a vibrant street life with interesting places to shop, dine, connect and recreate. These amenities are intentionally inviting to all of Wausau's various communities. Downtown is a place that offers diverse housing options and fosters creative, flexible work environments, business innovation and the arts. Wausau's well-maintained and improved parks and open spaces provide accessible opportunities for everyone in the community to enjoy trails, parks and an active, healthy lifestyle.



## Objectives

1. Cultivate continued opportunities for growth in recreation and quality of life offerings from the City to foster economic diversity and community inclusivity.
2. Support diverse community activities that attract participation and understanding of Wausau's history, recreational activities and culture.
3. Deliberately encourage and incentivize the mall redevelopment so that a vibrant downtown is created.
4. Create a destination development plan so that room tax is optimized and the City draws tourists and new residents.
5. Deliberately develop the Riverlife area to better connect the community.

## Performance Measures

- % increase in residents who feel welcomed and included in the community (community survey – establish baseline and trend over time)
- Continue to develop the River Edge Trail and complete the West Side Trail in 5 years
- Re-examine the City's special event permits and policies to establish the amount of support and a set of criteria for types of events
- Use the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation. Plan (CORP) to evaluate the City's 37 parks for its offerings of economic diversity and community inclusivity. (Progress: Evaluate 3-4 parks per year)



# STRONG REGIONAL ALLIANCES

## Strategic Goal

Organize and lead a regional collaboration with local municipalities to create a common message and destination plan for Wausau and the region.

## Current State

While there is renewed interest and effort to collaborate on tourism and mental health services across municipalities in within Marathon County, regional communication and collaboration has been poor historically. Communities within the County have competed against each other for businesses and they market themselves individually rather than as an entire region, and there is no cohesive approach to economic development and marketing. Residents in Wausau are demanding increased transit from MetroRide, and it has been difficult to achieve the level of cooperation that would allow expansion of bus routes and schedules within the city and the towns immediately outside the city's boundaries.

## Future State

Wausau will strengthen and expand its cooperative activities with all governments in the region, resulting in an open spirit of cooperation with other cities and the county, increased levels of service to Wausau residents and a cooperative approach to expanding, retaining, and recruiting new businesses and industries to the area. MetroRide services are expanded, serving the needs of Wausau and the surrounding towns and villages. The communities in the region work together to promote sustainable practices that protect our natural environment to ensure a sustainable legacy for future generations and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Residents will regard the natural environment as one of Wausau's most valuable and defining characteristics and visitors will enjoy the ease of access and proximity to natural areas and the community's many recreational opportunities.



## Objectives

1. Create and lead a municipal regional coalition so that resources are optimized.
2. Explore the development of regional collaboration so a regional identity is established and a common shared vision and message is established and used.
3. Host waterfront activities such as parties and events to showcase regional unity through a natural resource.
4. Support and lead in green and eco-friendly efforts and initiatives for a cleaner, healthier, and sustainable environment.
5. Develop a plan for economic alignment for the region to build a skilled and available workforce.

## Performance Measures

- Number and type of regional initiatives and partnerships with shared resources
- Regional branding and identity plan is completed and implementation progress is measured
- Increase in waterfront activities offered

# AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY PLAN

## Letter from the Mayor

Wausau has embarked on a community-wide journey to make our city an even better place for residents of all ages and abilities. As the population of 65 years or older continues to increase in our region, we want to ensure that our community's older adults remain in their neighborhoods, living independently and with access to services, amenities and opportunities for community engagement. We are in the process of assessing our community, engaging with residents across the city and in our neighborhoods to learn more about their daily concerns and challenges. As we learn more, we will update our citywide Strategic Plan, as well as this companion Age-Friendly Community Plan to reflect the new information we receive. In the meantime, we intend to pursue age-friendly strategies within the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. These age-friendly components are captured here in this companion plan.

Our work going forward includes engaging with our city departments in incorporating an aging lens into all of our daily planning, programming, and services. We will look at our public spaces, buildings and parks to ensure they are meeting the needs of everyone. We will look at our restaurants, shops, museums and other entertainment venues to pave the way for inclusive entertainment. Working with employers, we will empower our older workers, strengthening the entire workforce by creating intentional cross-generational connections and mentorship. I invite you to join us as an advocate, ambassador or volunteer. Together, we will continue working with our community's older adults to honor and respect them and help to ensure for them an active, safe and healthy lifestyle.

Sincerely,

Katie Rosenberg



## Introduction to Age-Friendly Communities

As the U.S. population ages and people stay healthy and active longer, communities must adapt. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Network of Age-Friendly Communities helps participating communities become great places for all ages by adopting such features as safe, walkable streets; better housing and transportation options; access to key services; and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities. Well-designed, livable communities promote health and sustain economic growth, and they make for happier, healthier residents – of all ages.

AARP has identified 8 Domains of Livability – features that impact the well-being of older adults – that help make communities more livable for people of all ages. The following are the 8 Domains of Livability and their descriptions:

- 1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings:** People need public places to gather – indoors and out. Green spaces, seating and accessible buildings (elevators, zero-step entrances, staircases with railings) can be used and enjoyed by people of all ages.
- 2. Transportation:** Driving shouldn't be the only way to get around. Pedestrians need sidewalks and safe, crossable streets. Dedicated bicycle lanes benefit non-drivers and drivers alike. Public transit options can range from the large-scale (trains, buses, light rail) to the small (taxis, shuttles or ride share services).
- 3. Housing:** AARP surveys consistently find that the vast majority of older adults want to reside in their current home or community for as long as possible. Doing so is possible if a home is designed or modified for aging in place, or if a community has housing options that are suitable for differing incomes, ages and life stages.
- 4. Social Participation:** Regardless of a person's age, loneliness is often as debilitating a health condition as having a chronic illness or disease. Sadness and isolation can be combated by having opportunities to socialize and the availability of accessible, affordable and fun social activities.
- 5. Respect and Social Inclusion:** Everyone wants to feel valued. Intergenerational gatherings and activities are a great way for young and older people to learn from one another, honor what each has to offer and, at the same time, feel good about themselves.
- 6. Work and Civic Engagement:** Work does not need to be an all or nothing experience. An age-friendly community encourages older people to be actively engaged in community life and has opportunities for residents to work for pay or volunteer their skills.
- 7. Communication and Information:** We now communicate in ways few could have imagined a decade ago. Age-friendly communities recognize that information needs to be shared through a variety of methods since not everyone is tech-savvy, and not everyone has a smartphone or home-based access to the internet.
- 8. Community and Health Services:** At some point, every person of every age gets hurt, becomes ill or simply needs some help. While it's important that assistance and care be available nearby, it's essential that residents are able to access and afford the services required.

# AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY PLAN

## Wausau's Age-Friendly Profile

The population over 65 years of age is typically entering retirement and requires services like accessibility to healthcare, senior facilities, universal housing and variety of transportation options to access services and programs. Wausau's population of 65 years or older increased from 15% of the total population in 2010 to 17% in 2020. While that is not significant growth, Marathon County's population of 65 years or older has increased by 30% over the last three decades and the state experienced a similar trend of 25% over 30 years. Although Wausau does not match the county and state trends in growth of this population cohort, the city has a higher percentage of population over 65 years of age than the rest of the region or the state. As members of the baby boomer generation continue to retire at a rapid pace, the need for an age-friendly approach to community living will be more important than ever.

## Age-Friendly Community Vision and Values

### Vision

In Wausau all residents can remain and thrive as they age and be a powerful resource in making our city a better, stronger, more inclusive community for everyone. Age-friendly means a place that is vibrant and livable for all ages, where daily life is healthy, safe and comfortable, people are well connected via transportation options, communication methods and plentiful social activities, and the community is enriched by the creation of intergenerational relationships.

### Values

- Everyone is respected and included, regardless of cultural or religious background, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, ability, socioeconomic status or geographic location.
- Age- and ability-friendly business development will have a positive effect on the community's economy.
- Residents of all ages, abilities, races or ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses are involved in deciding priorities, shaping actions and bringing about change.
- Age-friendly environments and communities benefit all age groups.
- We will utilize, whenever possible, existing services and/or help to expand our capacity and new services will be created only when needed services are not available.

## Age-Friendly Action Plan

The City will focus its initial efforts in the following Age-Friendly Domains:

### Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Complete the expansion of the city's RiverWalk trail along the Wisconsin River in a manner that is totally accessible.

### Transportation

- Support and advocate through the City's Bike and Pedestrian Committee alternative transportation with a heavy emphasis on bike paths and lanes and sidewalk improvements.
- Implement the City's Economic Development Committee resolution for more off-road trails and paths by applying for a transportation grant to implement these improvements.

### Housing

- Expand living options for seniors by converting Riverside Terrace - an assisted living facility without a waiting list and full occupancy - to elder living where residents can hire their own in-home health providers.

### Social Participation

- Continue to support The Landing senior center at the Wausau Woodson YMCA.
- Continue to support and connect the activities of the Aging and Disability Resource Connection, Optimists, Rotary, Elks, Golden Kiwanis and other services clubs that play a central role in connecting and engaging seniors in social activities.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This strategic plan is the result of the combined efforts of our City's residents, elected officials, employees and stakeholders. The City of Wausau would like to thank all those who participated in the months-long process of providing knowledge and insights. The City also expresses gratitude to the BerryDunn consulting team for providing direction and expertise throughout the various stages of the process and to Faithful Consulting for providing expert engagement of Wausau's Hmong community.

## Strategic Planning Steering Committee

Katie Rosenberg, Mayor

Benjamin Bliven, Police Chief

Liz Brodek, Development Director

Ken Day, Community member

Jean Frankel, Executive Assistance to the Mayor

Leah Giordano, Library Director, Marathon County

Mary Anne Groat, Finance Director

Luis Melendez, Business Owner

Tim Van de Yacht, Community Member

Sarah Watson, Alderperson, 8th District

Meilyn Xiong, Business Owner

## BerryDunn Consulting Team

Jonathon Grace, Principal

Michelle Kennedy, Project Manager

Charline Kirongozi, Facilitator

## Faithful Consulting

Yenyee Lor, President

