

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Washburn County’s economy, like many of its surrounding counties, relies heavily on natural resources. The county’s many lakes and woodlands sustain tourism and manufacturing, two of the main stays of the local economy.

Several factors or characteristics of the labor force and the economic base of the county play a major role in its economic development and will be discussed in this element. In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of the county with respect to attracting and retaining businesses will be explored along with an inventory of the top 20 existing businesses. Finally, state, federal, county, and regional economic development programs and organizations will be identified that apply to Washburn County.

6.2 66.1001 REQUIREMENTS

This element shall assess categories or particular types of new businesses and industries desired by the county and assess strengths and weaknesses with respect to attracting and retaining businesses and industries. Objectives, policies, goals, maps, and programs to promote the stabilization, retention, or expansion of the economic base will be compiled. Regional, state, and federal economic development programs that apply to the county will be identified.

6.3 LABOR FORCE

The labor force is that portion of the population 16 years or older that is employed or unemployed but actively looking for a job. Table 6.1 gives an overview of some of the characteristics of the population and labor force in Washburn County and Wisconsin.

Table 6.1: General Characteristics of the Population

Characteristics	Washburn County	Wisconsin
Labor Force, 2002	8,044	3,027,589
Unemployment Rate, 2002	7.1%	5.5%
Labor Participation Rate, 2002	62.2%	73.0%
Education Beyond High School (25 or older), 2000	44.0%	50.6%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher (25 or older), 2000	15.2%	22.4%
Per Capita Personal Income, 2001	\$21,108	\$29,196
Median Household Income, 1999	\$33,716	\$43,791
Average Annual Wage, 2002	\$22,869	\$32,422
Poverty Rate, 1999	9.9%	8.7%
Median Age, 2000	42.1	36.0

Sources: 2000 Census SF 3, WI Department of Workforce Development

Washburn County's population over the age of 60 is a much larger share of the total than the state or the nation. This is reflected in the county's median age (42.1), which is substantially higher than the state (36.0) or the national (35.3) median age. The largest age group in the potential labor force of Washburn County, which comprises 23 percent, is the over 65 age group.

The labor force participation rate is the number of residents who are either working or looking for work divided by the total non-institutional population over 16 years of age. One of the primary reasons for the low labor force participation rate in the county is the large share of population over age 65. An increasingly aging labor force, a low birth rate, and the loss of younger workforce members will have dire consequences on the future labor supply of Washburn County and, therefore, will have an effect on the county's economy.

Unemployment rates are on the rise in the county and the state, partly due to a loss in manufacturing jobs that began in 2001. Nearly half of all the job loss in 2002 in Washburn County was caused by the decline in production jobs, with industrial equipment manufacturers being the hardest hit. High unemployment rates in Washburn County are also caused by the numerous seasonal and part-time jobs, many of which are for laborers and entry-level positions.

Although Wisconsin had a higher majority (69%) of high school students that pursued some form of post secondary education after graduation in 2000-2001 compared to a national estimate (60%)¹, it lags behind the nation in its ability to retain those students following completion of their degree program. The national average is 71.3 percent compared to Wisconsin's 61.6 percent.² Washburn County, like the state, suffers from this college out-migration commonly referred to as the "Brain Drain" and is reflected in the numbers in Table 6.1. Additionally, Washburn County has a lower number of students seeking post secondary education than the state; however, it should be noted that **census** post secondary education data does **not** include those who have participated in vocational or technical training/certificate programs unless the minimum of an associate degree is or will be awarded. Given the large manufacturing presence in the state, vocational/technical programs have high participation rates in these areas.³ It is most likely that the composition of the industry base and the lack of professional jobs in the county contribute to this lower number.

Low wages are a fact of life in Washburn County and is a significant factor causing low incomes and a high poverty rate. There are several reasons for the low wages that are endemic in the county. Nearly half of all employment in the county is in the trade or services industry division, which consists of many seasonal and part time jobs; therefore, the people in these jobs do not work the standard number of hours in a year, which reduces the average annual wage. In addition to being part time and seasonal, many of these jobs are in trades where hourly wages are low. Furthermore, because of the seasonality of many jobs, there is more turnover and every time someone starts a new job, they generally start at the lowest wage. One more contributing

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

² Indiana's Human Capital Retention Project. Graduate Migration from Indiana's Postsecondary Institutions. Bloomington, IN. Indiana Fiscal Policy Institute. March 1999

³ Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Mortarboards, Paychecks, and Crystal Balls: The Link Between Education and Wisconsin's Labor Force. October 2002

factor to the low wages is that many of the jobs in the county are for laborers and entry-level positions, which often translates to lower wages.

6.4 ECONOMIC BASE

Washburn County is a rural county with only one city that has a population greater than 2,500, the City of Spooner. It has one of the major Wisconsin north-south freeways, U.S. Highway 53, running through the middle of the county and another major highway, U.S. Highway 63, running from the southeast corner to the northeast corner. Thus, a great proportion of the local economic activity occurs near the cities and towns that are located along this highway system.

Employment by Industry

Based on data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Washburn County was home to an average of 594 businesses with 5,819 jobs in 2002. Table 6.2 lists the county’s businesses by industry sector using the new North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Jobs that are exempt or otherwise not covered by unemployment insurance are not included in the Covered Employment and Wages tabulations.

Table 6.2: Washburn County 2002 Covered Employment and Wages Using NAICS

Industry Sector	Average Number of Businesses	Average Employment	Avg. Annual Wage	% Of Total Businesses	% Of Total Employment
All Industries	594	5,819	\$22,870	100.0%	100.0%
Construction	90	234	\$24,478	15.1%	4.0%
Education & Health	49	1,325	\$26,209	8.2%	22.8%
Financial Activities	43	218	\$30,497	7.2%	3.7%
Information	8	60	\$28,603	1.3%	1.0%
Leisure & Hospitality	96	689	\$9,820	16.3%	11.8%
Manufacturing	40	1,052	\$26,834	6.7%	18.1%
Natural Resources & Mining	16	84	\$19,430	2.9%	1.4%
Other Services	33	157	\$18,047	5.5%	2.7%
Professional & Business Services	40	102	\$22,521	6.6%	1.8%
Public Administration	43	688	\$25,869	7.2%	11.8%
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	136	1,209	\$20,434	22.9%	20.8%

Sources: WI Department of Workforce Development, U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, **nonemployers** are businesses with no paid employees but are subject to federal income tax. These nonemployers are typically self-employed individuals or partnerships that they have chosen not to incorporate. Nonemployers are not reflected in any of the detailed sector-specific reports published by the Census Bureau. In 2000, there were 1,528 nonemployer establishments in Washburn County. **Per Census 2000, the share of self-employed and unpaid family members in Washburn County (13.7%) is twice as great as in the State of Wisconsin (6.4%).**

The Other Services category includes businesses such as: repair and maintenance, funeral homes, barber and beauty shops, and religious organizations. Included in the Natural Resources sector

for Washburn County is agriculture (5 crop producers) and forestry and logging (9 businesses). In the Manufacturing sector, there are many different types of manufacturers with nine wood product businesses, six machinery producers, and five fabricated metal product manufacturers located in the county.

As shown in Table 6.2, the largest number of jobs in the county is in the Education and Health industry sector. Under the new classification system, NAICS, school districts are included in the Education and Health sector, not with government jobs. Furthermore, the Cities of Spooner and Shell Lake each have a hospital and a skilled nursing care facility in that category.

The largest number of businesses is in the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities industry sector. This is mainly due to the 90 small retail establishments in the county, including everything from food and clothing stores to florists and nurseries. The rest of the sector is mostly transportation and warehousing companies (32).

Although the Manufacturing sector has only 40 businesses, it has the third largest number of employees. One of the reasons is that the largest business in the county (the only one with 250-499 employees) is a manufacturer, Link Snacks, Inc., located in Minong along Business Highway 53 in northern Washburn County.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2001, farm employment comprised 5.9 percent of total employment in the county. In some communities, however, it is the prime contributor to the economy and provides a stable market for many service and retail businesses.

Washburn County Businesses

Table 6.3 lists the top 20 employers in Washburn County as of June 2003 per the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. More than two-thirds of these companies are located in or near the Cities of Spooner and Shell Lake, both of which are situated along the Highway 53 and 63 corridors. Only 2 of the top 20 employers are located in the City of Birchwood, which is in the southwest corner of Washburn County and is not situated on either of the major roadway corridors.

Table 6.3: Top 20 Employers in Washburn County in Rank Order of Number of Employees

Employer Name	Industry Product or Service	Employment Size Range
Link Snacks, Inc.	Meat Processing	250-499
School District of Spooner	Elementary and Secondary Schools	100-249
Spooner Health System, Inc.	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	100-249
Birchwood Lumber & Veneer	Hardwood Veneer and Plywood Mfg.	100-249
County of Washburn	Executive & Legislative Offices	100-249
Schmitz's Spooner Economart	Supermarket & Grocery Store	100-249
School District of Shell Lake	Elementary and Secondary Schools	100-249
Department of Natural Resources	Administration of Conservation Programs	100-249
Ready Fixtures Co.	Wood Fixtures and Partitions Mfg.	50-99
Railroad Crew Transport	School & Employee Bus Transportation	50-99
Indianhead Medical Center	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	50-99
School District of Birchwood	Elementary and Secondary Schools	50-99
T & T Tool, Inc.	Machine Shops	50-99
Terraceview Living Center	Skilled Nursing Care Facility	50-99
WI Indianhead Technical College Administration	Junior Colleges and Technical Institutes	50-99
Northwood School District	Elementary and Secondary Schools	50-99
Indianhead Community Action Agency	Other Individual and Family Services	50-99
Department of Transportation	Regulation & Admin. of Trans. Programs	50-99
BFI Waste Systems of North America	Solid Waste Landfill	50-99
Spooner Golf Club, Inc.	Golf Course and Country Clubs	50-99

Source: WI Department of Workforce Development, June 2003

Worker Commuter Patterns

Table 6.4 shows the commuting patterns for Washburn County based on Census 2000 data. The county has a large share of residents employed outside of the county. More than 31 percent of the commuting workforce who live in the county traveled elsewhere for a job. Roughly four in every ten workers who left the county traveled to Barron County and another three out of ten headed for Sawyer County. The most popular destination is the City and Town of Hayward in Sawyer County.

Most of the workers traveling into Washburn County come from Burnett, Barron, and Sawyer Counties. The City of Spooner attracts the most commuters.

Table 6.4: Washburn County Commuting Patterns, 2000

Live In:	Work In	Count	Travel To:	From:	Count
Washburn Co. WI	Washburn Co. WI	4,861	Washburn Co. WI	Washburn Co. WI	4,861
	Barron Co. WI	826		Burnett Co. WI	400
	Sawyer Co. WI	618		Barron Co. WI	370
	Burnett Co. WI	171		Sawyer Co. WI	361
	Douglas Co. WI	128		Douglas Co. WI	227
	Polk Co. WI	47		Polk Co. WI	42
	Hennepin Co. MN	47		Bayfield Co. WI	18
	St. Louis Co. MN	38		Eau Claire Co. WI	18
	Eau Claire Co. WI	34		Milwaukee Co. WI	17
	Ramsey Co. MN	30		Cook Co. WI	17
	Rusk County, WI	23		Taylor Co. WI	16
	Chippewa Co. WI	21		Chippewa Co. WI	12
	Anoka Co. MN	16		Lafayette Parish LA	12
	Dakota Co. MN	13		Racine Co. WI	11
	La Crosse Co. WI	12		Elsewhere	99
	St. Croix Co. WI	10			
Elsewhere	120				
Totals		7,015	Totals		6,481

Source: Census 2000, County to County Worker Flow Files, WI Dept. of Workforce Development

6.5 ATTRACTING AND RETAINING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Historically, business attraction has centered on manufacturing and will likely continue to do so; but increasingly, attracting retail, tourism, technology, and service-oriented businesses has become important in order to diversify and expand business clusters in the area. To be successful, an attractive and competitive environment must be provided. Entrepreneurship and small business development are necessary to create new jobs and provide stability to the local economic base.

Because of structural changes in the economy and the transition from a primarily physical-labor industrial age economy to an intellectual-labor, information age or knowledge-based economy, the development of technology-based businesses has become even more important to attract high-skilled, high-paying jobs. Washburn County, as indicated in the following sections, has the necessary amenities, such as high-speed access, adequate power sources, and access to financing to attract knowledge-based businesses.

It is estimated that 85 percent of the employment in an area is generated by the existing businesses; therefore, retaining these companies is a high priority for local officials and economic development organizations. To accomplish this, the obstacles that restrict the growth of existing businesses must be removed and assistance must be given to help businesses remain competitive in a global economy. This section provides information on existing programs, initiatives, infrastructure, and organizations available to attract/retain businesses and industries in Washburn County.

SuperiorLife Technology Zone Program

In June 2002, Washburn County was one of six counties in Northwest Wisconsin designated as a Technology Zone (called SuperiorLife) by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce. Developed out of the Build Wisconsin initiative, the Technology Zone program brings \$5 million in income tax incentives for high-tech development in the area. The Technology Zone program will help the county generate high-wage jobs through the startup and expansion of technology-based businesses.

The SuperiorLife Technology Zone designation is designed to attract and retain high-wage workers to the region and foster regional partnerships to promote entrepreneurship. The Department of Commerce will certify eligible businesses for tax credits based on their ability to create high-wage jobs and investment and support the development of high-tech industries in the region.

Workforce Development

WoodLINKS-USA is a program designed to respond to the serious lack of skilled workers in the wood industry. It is an industry education partnership designed to enhance the wood product industry competitiveness and economic development through significant improvement of entry-level work force skills.

The WoodLINKS program is designed to attract young people to the wood industry and provide solid wood manufacturing education through high schools. The program combines traditional classroom training with experienced based learning both in schools and in cooperating industry partners. In Washburn County, Shell Lake High School in the City of Shell Lake has added this program to their curriculum.

Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) is an accredited postsecondary educational institution serving Northwestern Wisconsin. Its administrative office and a learning center are located in Washburn County. Although neither a campus nor a branch is located in the county, there are several in neighboring counties within an easy commute. WITC offers customized training and technical assistance to business and industry to help them become more competitive, increase productivity, and to retain workers. This customized training is available at the business site or in a campus classroom setting.

The Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program, Inc. (NWCEP) is a non-profit corporation whose mission is to strengthen the economy by providing effective and efficient workforce development services to businesses and workers. In existence since 1968, it administers programs to help local youth and adults gain marketable skills and find better jobs. In addition, NWCEP provides a variety of services, including workshops, conferences, and newsletters for businesses and business development. Although its main office is in Ashland, it has a satellite office located in Washburn County.

Business Development Assistance

There are several options available for small businesses in Washburn County seeking technical assistance. One is the Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation (WBIC), a partner organization formed by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC). Since its

beginning in 1996, WBIC has developed a unique array of technical, financial, and business support services for start up and expanding businesses. This work involves analyzing a firm's financial needs including preparation or review of financial projections, analyzing requirements and procedures of the various financing programs, identifying the appropriate funding sources, structuring sources and uses of funds, and the preparation of forms and documents needed in applications.

Another source for technical assistance is the University of Wisconsin-Superior Small Business Development Center (SBDC). It assists entrepreneurs, small business owners, and managers who are in the pre-venture, start-up, or existing business stage. SBDC offer confidential, one-to-one counseling on business management topics through personal visits, email, and telephone. The center maintains a business-to business network so a new business can ask for business expertise from a pertinent resource.

Technical assistance for small businesses is also available through the SCORE Association (Service Corps of Retired Executives), which is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration. There is a chapter in neighboring Douglas County that offers help with any business questions, strategy, and concerns. Small business counseling is available via telephone, email, workshops, and activities.

Access to Financing and Venture Capital

Small businesses create the lion's share of new jobs but are the least able to obtain reasonable financing for job-creating expansions and start-ups. Because of the shortage of long-term financing, small businesses are frequently unable to match the term of financing with the life of the asset.

The Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation (NWBDC) is a non-profit corporation formed by NWRPC to address the critical need for business financing in Northwest Wisconsin. Its office is located in the City of Spooner in Washburn County. It is targeted at the best economic development opportunities of the area: the timber and wood products industry, tourism, and other manufacturing and service industries.

NWBDC manages three revolving loan funds (RLFs) and a technology seed fund. The overall goal of the RLFs is to stimulate private sector investment in long-term business assets and to create new jobs. The funds partially fill the gap in private capital markets for long-term fixed rate financing. The technology seed fund can be used to complete research and development activities and validate the technology, develop prototypes, and file patents and copyrights.

In late 2000, a community-based venture capital (equity) fund called the Wisconsin Rural Enterprise Fund, LLC (WREF) was established by the Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation. It was formed to create a capital fund that would provide self-sustaining, moderate growth through financial investments made in rural businesses that meet the WREF criteria.

Technology intensive businesses, which have the potential to create high-skilled, high-wage jobs in rural areas, are the targeted businesses. Currently, it is the only Northwest Wisconsin community-based venture capital fund; and its members include, besides WBIC, rural electric cooperatives and local community development organizations.

In addition to the NWBDC loan funds, Washburn County has a local revolving loan fund available to small businesses for start up and expansion purposes. The fund was originally established by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce to help a county business. As that money comes back in, it is being used to help other businesses.

6.6 TECHNICAL AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Washburn County has excellent transportation facilities to serve existing and future businesses. As mentioned earlier, one of the major north-south freeways runs through the center of Washburn County providing easy truck freight access to businesses in the county. Rail freight is also easily accessible with the Canadian National Railroad (CN) line that crosses the northeast corner of the county. The CN line provides the opportunity for direct access to international commerce through Canada and a gateway to the rest of the United States through Chicago, Illinois. A shortline railroad, the Wisconsin Great Northern Railroad, is available to haul freight between Spooner and Hayward Junction, providing connection to CN.

Other physical infrastructures, like sewer, water, natural gas, electrical services, and telecommunications are available to businesses in select municipalities. Rural areas in Wisconsin, such as Washburn County, are further ahead than many urban areas in the availability of high speed Internet access. Technology infrastructure in Washburn County is widespread and includes T1, T2, T3 lines, DSL, cable, dial up, and fiber optic.

6.7 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Based on input from representatives from economic development organizations, the county board, local businesses, and local units of government from Washburn County, the following strengths and weaknesses of the county were identified with respect to attracting and retaining businesses and industries.

Strengths

- Good access to state highway system
- TIF Districts
- Strong work ethic
- Local revolving loan funds
- Availability of land for development
- High regard for public services
- Abundant clean water supply
- Convenient location to technical schools
- Good secondary school system
- Abundance of recreational amenities
- Strong support by County Extension
- Strong tourist industry
- Northwest Regional Planning Commission located in county
- Industrial park development
- Strong local economic development organizations
- Proximity to Twin Cities
- Strong county forest system
- Lots of public land available
- Strong banking community
- Good economic diversity within county
- High quality environment
- Community civic and religion organizations

Weaknesses

- Under employment & unemployment
- “Brain Drain” of youth
- Desire of some residents to remain “status quo” with no expansion
- Inadequate school facilities in some areas
- Lack of access to public lands
- Aging population base
- Lack of public transportation
- Lack of professional type jobs – too many low paying jobs
- Perception by some that government is anti-growth
- Lack of shopping opportunities
- Lack of competitively priced local retailers
- Local merchants decline
- Inadequate airport facility
- Lack of rail opportunities
- Lack of money to support higher wages
- Lack of major common carrier
- High taxes
- Escalating land values
- Less than adequate job at marketing tourism

6.8 QUALITY OF LIFE

A good quality of life is becoming increasingly important to employers and employees alike, not only in Wisconsin, but around the country. Washburn County has a premium quality of personal life, with a beautiful physical environment, excellent quality and quantity of water, a good public education system (K-12 and vocational), excellent public services, and an above average labor force with a good work ethic. Natural, recreational, and lifestyle amenities abound throughout the county and tranquility and solitude of the great outdoors is plentiful.

The lack of traffic jams and low crime rates enhance the quality living environment. Clean, unpolluted air, as well as lots of open space for recreation and expansion, adds to the general overall quality of life to residents of Washburn County.

6.9 BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY SITES

Washburn County, specifically the City of Spooner, is home to the largest business incubator (over 72,000 sq. ft.) in the Northwest Enterprise Center Network, which was established and is managed by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, a regional economic development organization. Enterprise centers provide affordable, flexible lease space and a variety of shared professional and technical services to start-up and small growing firms in order to enhance their prospects for growth and profitability.

Throughout the county, additional local units of government have land or, sometimes, buildings available and suitable for business and industrial development. Each of the incorporated units of government has dedicated industrial parks located in their jurisdiction. Below is a listing of industrial park space available for development. In some cases, land already has public facilities located within the industrial areas.

- Village of Minong – 16 acres
- City of Shell Lake – 50 acres
- City of Spooner – 130 acres
- Village of Birchwood – Under development

6.10 TOURISM IMPACT TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Washburn County is a vacationland for local and distance travelers and ranks 52nd in the state for traveler spending. Its natural amenities, an abundance of woods and water, significantly contribute to the number of visitors to Washburn County. Businesses that cater to tourism, such as motels, resorts, campgrounds, B&Bs, and retail stores complement the hundreds of miles of snowmobiling and biking trails as well as the many parks, golf courses, historic sites, and area attractions.

Tourism is an extremely vital part of Washburn County's economy. According to the State Department of Tourism, visitors to Washburn County in 2003 spent a total of \$54 million. Summer is the top tourism season and generated traveler expenditures of \$23 million. Winter/spring travelers spent \$18 million and fall visitors spent \$13 million.

Since 1993, travel expenditures in Washburn County increased 132 percent, from \$23 million to \$54 million. Counting all people in 2003 employed both directly and indirectly as a result of tourism in Washburn County, traveler spending supported 1,438 full-time equivalent jobs. Translated to total county employment, it means that roughly 18 percent of all people employed in Washburn County are in jobs created by tourism. Employees in the county earned an estimated \$33 million in wages generated from tourist spending.

The total impact of tourism extends far into the county, making a contribution to schools and local governments. Local revenues (property taxes, sales taxes, lodging taxes, etc.) collected as a result of tourist spending in Washburn County resulted in an estimated \$2 million in 2003. State revenue (lodging, sales and meal taxes) generated in the county due to travelers was another \$7 million.

The economic impact to Washburn County based on seasonal homes is significant. According to Census 2000, over 35 percent of total housing units in the county are for seasonal or recreational use.

6.11 REDEVELOPMENT AND CONTAMINATED SITES

The Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Element of this plan identified and evaluated 68 known leaking underground storage tank sites throughout Washburn County that have localized contamination problems. In addition to these sites, other environmentally contaminated sites may exist that have not yet been identified.

Many of the known contaminated sites have active commercial and industrial activities on the premise. However, in some cases, properties may be underutilized or vacant and have the potential for redevelopment.

Re-development of underutilized or vacant lots that have known contamination is encouraged. Property owners and developers are encouraged to work with Washburn County, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and Wisconsin Department of Commerce to access state and federal funds that may be available to cleanup contaminated areas and put back to use these valuable commercial and industrial lands.

6.12 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

There are many programs at the federal, state, county, and regional level that can help Washburn County in the support and development of economic development efforts. In addition, there are programs available to assist individual businesses in start-up and expansion. This section contains a list of the major agencies and programs that are most likely to be used by the county in its economic development efforts. In addition to programs, there are economic development organizations throughout the county that provide assistance to local units of government and businesses. These are also listed in this section.

FEDERAL

Economic Development Administration

The U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration offers two programs for assistance with economic development that apply to Washburn County. One is the Public Works and Economic Development Facilities Assistance Program, which supports the construction or rehabilitation of essential public infrastructure and development facilities necessary to generate private sector jobs and investment, including investments that support technology-led development, redevelopment of brownfield sites, and eco-industrial development. Secondly, the Economic Adjustment Assistance Program is available to: (1) address the immediate needs of businesses and communities presently undergoing transition due to a sudden and severe job loss; and (2) demonstrate new and proactive approaches for economic competitiveness and innovative capacity for threatened regions and communities.

USDA Wisconsin Rural Development

Several loan and grant programs of benefit to the county and local business development are available from the USDA Rural Development. One of those programs is the Community Facility Guaranteed Loans Program, which provides funding to local units of government to construct, enlarge, extend, or otherwise improve community facilities providing essential services in rural areas and towns.

The Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants Program helps develop projects that will result in a sustainable increase in economic productivity, job creation, and incomes in rural areas. Projects may include business start-ups and expansion, community development, incubator projects, medical and training projects, and feasibility studies.

The purpose of the Business and Industry Direct Loan Program is to improve, develop, or finance business, industry, and employment and improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. Loan purposes include purchase and expansion of land, equipment, buildings, and working capital. Loans to public bodies can be used to finance community facilities and construct and equip industrial plants for lease to private businesses.

The Community Facilities Direct Loans and Grants Program provides funding for essential community facilities (CF) such as municipal buildings, day care centers, and health and safety facilities. Examples include fire halls, fire trucks, clinics, nursing homes, and hospitals. CF loans and grants may also be used for such things as activity centers for the handicapped, schools, libraries, and other community buildings.

STATE

Wisconsin Department of Commerce

At least three programs are available to local units of government through the Wisconsin Department of Commerce. The first program is the Community Development Block Grant for Economic Development (CDBG-ED). Its purpose is to provide resources to local governments that will enable them to assist economic development projects in their community. The local unit of government is the applicant and recipient of the funds. A specific business, which must be located in a municipality of 50,000 or less, is loaned the funds for eligible business development uses. When the funds are repaid to the local government, they may stay in the community to be used as a revolving loan fund to assist other businesses in the community.

The second program is the Community Development Block Grant Public Facilities for Economic Development (CDBG-PFED). Its purpose is to provide grant funds to local governments that will enable them to provide needed public facilities (i.e., streets, sewer mains, water mains, etc.) to private business enterprises that are going to create full-time jobs by starting or expanding their businesses because of the availability of the funded public facilities.

The third program available from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce is the Community-Based Economic Development Program (CBED). Its purpose is to provide financing assistance to local governments and community-based organizations that undertake planning or development projects or that provide technical assistance in support of business (including technology-based businesses) and community development.

Wisconsin Departments of Tourism and Commerce

The Tourism Development Initiative is a multi-faceted program designed to assist tourism businesses that have been severely affected by consecutive winters with minimal snowfall. The program offers planning and training grants that focus on tourism development and diversification at the business and municipal levels. A Snow Emergency Loan is available to qualifying small businesses that can document significant revenue loss caused by the lack of snow.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Available from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is a program called the Transportation Facilities Economic Assistance and Development Program (TEA). The intent of the TEA program is to help support new business development in Wisconsin by funding transportation improvements that are needed to secure jobs in the state. A governing body, a business, a consortium group, or any combination thereof can apply for TEA program funding.

REGIONAL**Northwest Regional Planning Commission**

The Northwest Regional Planning Commission is a cooperative venture of the local units of governments in the ten counties of Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, and Washburn and the five tribal nations of Bad River, Lac Courte Oreilles, Red Cliff, St. Croix, and Lac du Flambeau in the region. The purpose of NWRPC is to assist the communities of the membership to promote sustainable economic development, develop public facilities, provide planning and technical services, efficiently manage and conserve natural resources, and protect the environment. Every five years, NWRPC, with the cooperation of the local units of government in its region, prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the entire northwest region.

In an effort to build a focused development strategy for the northwest region, NWRPC developed three non-profit development corporations, each focusing on a specific area need and opportunity including financing for business start up and expansions (Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation), technology-based business development (Wisconsin Business Innovation Corporation), and affordable housing (Northwest Affordable Housing, Inc.).

Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation

A strategic partner of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, the Northwest Wisconsin Business Development Corporation has available revolving loan funds to address a gap in private capital markets for long-term, fixed rate, low down-payment, and low interest financing to assist businesses in job creation/retention and growth.

SuperiorLife Technology Zone Program

The Technology Zone program was developed out of the Build Wisconsin initiative, which is firmly based in the concepts of promoting regional cooperation and developing a technology base. Washburn County is part of the SuperiorLife Technology Zone and won designation as such by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce (WDOC) in 2002. Each designated zone will get \$5 million in income tax incentives for high-tech development. The WDOC will certify eligible businesses for tax credits based on their ability to create high-wage jobs and investment and support the development of high-tech industries in the region. The SuperiorLife Technology Zone offers the potential for growth in the computer software, medical, and forestry clusters, among others.

LOCAL

Economic Development Organizations

Several economic development organizations dedicated to community and business development exist in Washburn County. Following is a list of organizations that promote economic development or provide assistance to local units of government and businesses and industries within the county.

Washburn County Industrial Development Agency

The Washburn County Industrial Development Agency, LTD oversees the county's CDBG-ED, revolving loan fund. The fund is available to local businesses to increase productivity and spur job creation through expansion and growth.

Washburn County Economic Development Corporation

The Washburn County Economic Development Corporation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit economic development group representing businesses and local units of government in Washburn County. The corporation's task is to increase employment opportunities throughout the county by meeting with businesses from outside the county that may be interested in relocating to the county. The corporation also meets with existing businesses interested in retaining or expanding their local employment base. Overall, the goal of the corporation is to create and retain employment opportunities and improve the environment for economic development in the county.

Shell Lake Area Economic Development Corporation

The Shell Lake Area Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is primarily a resource organization for companies looking for information, including financial, on the City of Shell Lake. By "selling" the community to prospective business owners, the EDC has been successful in attracting about a dozen companies to locate in the community, mainly in the Shell Lake Industrial Park. Another activity of the EDC is promoting business workshops, which are held on a regular basis.

Spooner Redevelopment Authority

Created in 1988, the Spooner Redevelopment Authority assists in urban renewal and community development programs and projects. By undertaking qualified redevelopment projects, planned, integrated, stable, safe, and healthful neighborhoods, the provision of healthful homes, decent living environment, and adequate places for employment will result for city residents.

Birchwood Economic Development Committee

The Birchwood Economic Development Committee, headed up by the President of the Village of Birchwood, is currently involved in several projects. One is trying to establish a TIF district in the village. The committee also has a goal of developing more housing in Birchwood, which will aid in the attraction of new businesses and help provide housing for employees of existing local companies.

Other Programs

There are many more federal, state, and local programs offering assistance to businesses that are too numerous to mention here; however, they are listed in the Economic Development Manual prepared by the Wisconsin Bankers Association and the Wisconsin Financing Alternatives booklet prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

6.13 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES, ACTIONS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

A set of recommended goals, objectives, and action steps have been developed to assist in the overall economic development effort of Washburn County.

Goal: Encourage economic development that will provide enhanced employment opportunities, whereby the increased job opportunities will in turn raise the overall compensation of employees in the county, providing a living wage.	
Objectives	Action-Plan
1. Provide for education and training to prepare local workers for current and future job opportunities.	Support and work with local school officials on expanding the school-to-work program.
	Encourage development of programs on up-and-coming positions anticipated for the market, such as Certified Nursing Assistance (CNA) training.
2. Encourage the development of a diverse economic base that includes light manufacturing, tourism, and forest product industries.	Direct industrial development to areas with the infrastructure and services to support the development.
	Promote and expand industrial sites and other future sites identified closer to urban centers that have existing sewer, water and other necessary public infrastructure.
	Balance the need for economic development with the desire for quality of life issues, including odor, noise, dust, and property rights.
3. Encourage development of high-tech jobs throughout the county.	Work with local companies in an effort to utilize the tax credit program available through the Superior Life Technology Zone.
4. Encourage the coordination of economic development efforts throughout the county.	Utilize the Washburn County Economic Development Corporation (WCEDC) as a community building partnership.

	<p>Continue having the WCEDC meet with local manufacturing businesses to gauge future development needs.</p>
	<p>Expand the WCEDC visits to local businesses to include the retail and tourism sectors.</p>
	<p>Expand existing and develop new revolving loan funds to assist in local economic development efforts.</p>
	<p>WCEDC, Washburn County Extension, and UW-Superior Small Business Center should collaborate on a training series targeted to local governments.</p>
<p>5. Identify existing or potential brownfield sites for redevelopment purposes.</p>	<p>On identified brownfield sites, work with the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.</p>
	<p>Where applicable, utilize state and federal programs for redevelopment purposes.</p>
<p>6. Encourage the expansion of tourism related industries throughout the county.</p>	<p>Consider the allocation of additional county appropriations towards the development and marketing of tourism throughout the county and in cooperation with regional marketing efforts.</p>
	<p>Develop a full range of recreational opportunities throughout the county, including horse, ATV, snowmobile, hiking, ski, and mountain biking trails.</p>