



Community Economic Analysis for Rural Wisconsin Communities

MAY 7, 2024



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

History and Motivation



- Many rural communities struggle with identifying opportunities and strategies to move the community forward. The CEA-RWC program leverages resources to engage in comprehensive community economic development planning.
- Building on historical CEA efforts, UW-Extension partnered with WEDC to create a structured, yet flexible strategic planning process that builds on existing strengths to:
 1. Better organize for community economic development by building a strong, inclusive local leadership team;
 2. Further identify economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges;
 3. Increase comfort with the range of policy options and strategies to pursue;
 4. Develop an action plan comprised of 3-5 strategic priorities identified by the community;
 5. Expand working relationships with partners (federal, state, local, and philanthropic organizations) to explore funding options and support for the implementation of the plan.

Rural Wisconsin Communities in the Pilot Program

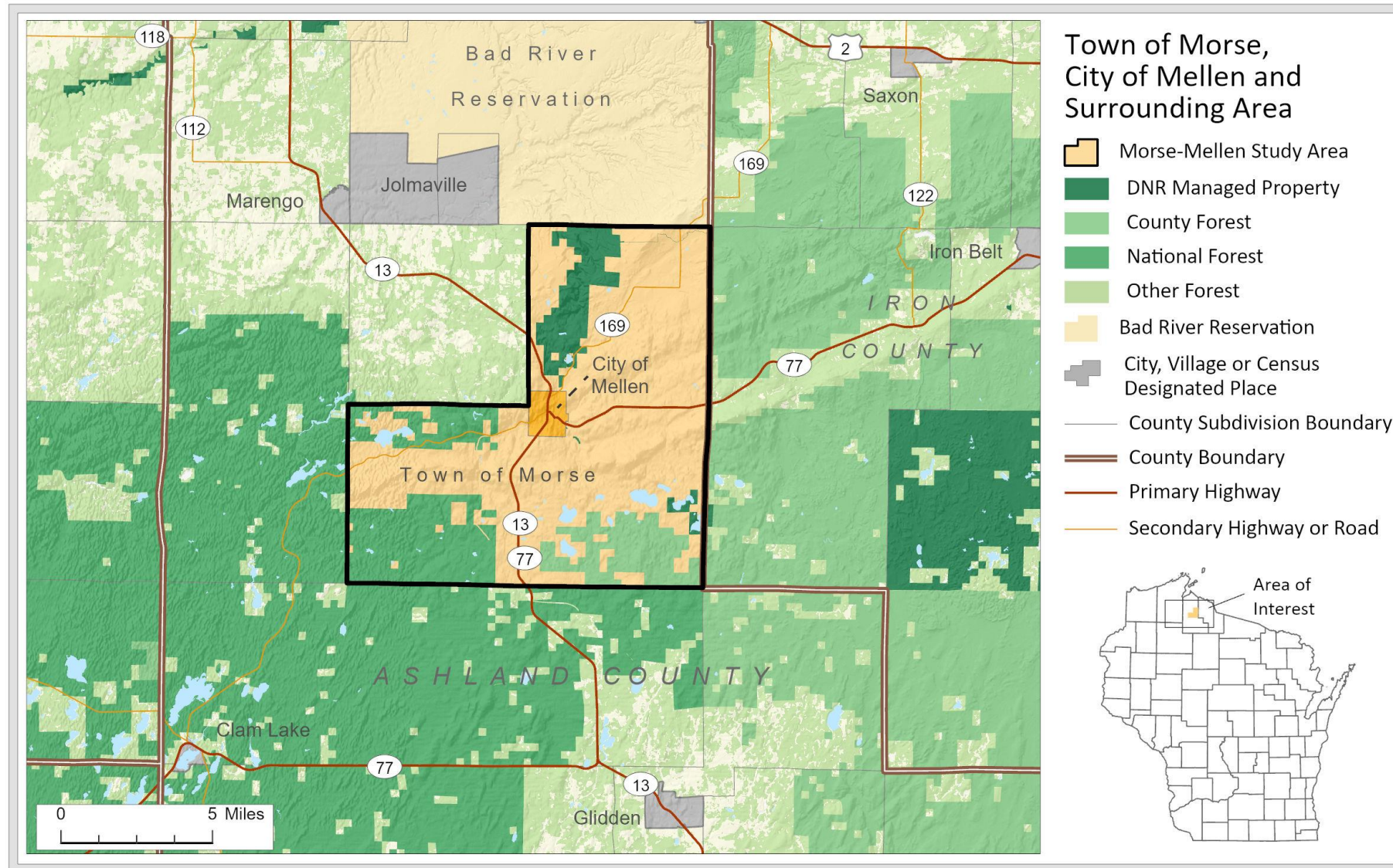


Lac du Flambeau Tribe

LAC DU FLAMBEAU BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA INDIANS



Town of Morse and City of Mellen Background



Community Economic Analysis Process



Pre-planning: Organize for launch with project leadership team



Session 1: Data presentation and discussion on local economy



Session 2: Community Capitals Framework & environmental scan



Session 3: Clarify and prioritize strategic issues



Session 4: Draft Community Economic Development Action and Implementation plan



Post-planning Support: Extension and community partners support the connection between goals and resources.

Town of Morse and City of Mellen Study Team Members



Jeff Ehrhardt,
Chairman, Town of
Morse Board of
Supervisors

Jim Brennan, Chair,
Town of Morse
Comprehensive
Planning Committee

Dan Scudder,
Community member
and retired WIDOT
engineer

Leza Wells, Mellen
Chamber of Commerce
Board

Denise Lutz, Executive
Director, Ashland
County Housing
Authority

Terry Peters, Owner,
Terry Peters Logging,
and Mellen School
Board member

Richard Huber, Ashland
County Board member
representing Mellen
and part of the Town of
Morse

Robert Aldrich,
President, Friends of
Copper Falls State Park
NGO

Lonnie Polencheck,
Accessibility Consultant

Nate Delegan, Mellen
City Council Member

Jeff Peters, Director,
Mellen Brownstone
Center

Kelly Meredith,
regional mural artist

Division of Extension CEA Team



Lissa Radke,
Ashland County
Community Development
Educator

Steven Chmielewski,
Waukesha and Jefferson
Counties Community
Development Educator

Tessa Conroy, Community
Economic Development
Specialist, Associate
Professor of Agricultural
and Applied Economics

Steve Deller, Community
Economic Development
Specialist, Professor of
Agricultural and Applied
Economics

Caroline Corona,
Community Economic
Development Research
Assistant

Brandon Hofstedt,
Community Economic
Development Program
Manager

Matt Kures, Community
Economic Development
Specialist

Kristin Runge, Community
Economic Development
Specialist

Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



Why Should we Consider Economic and Demographic Data?

Uses:

- Stimulate discussion;
- Affirm or challenge current perceptions;
- Identify local strengths and weaknesses;
- Recognize and prepare for change.

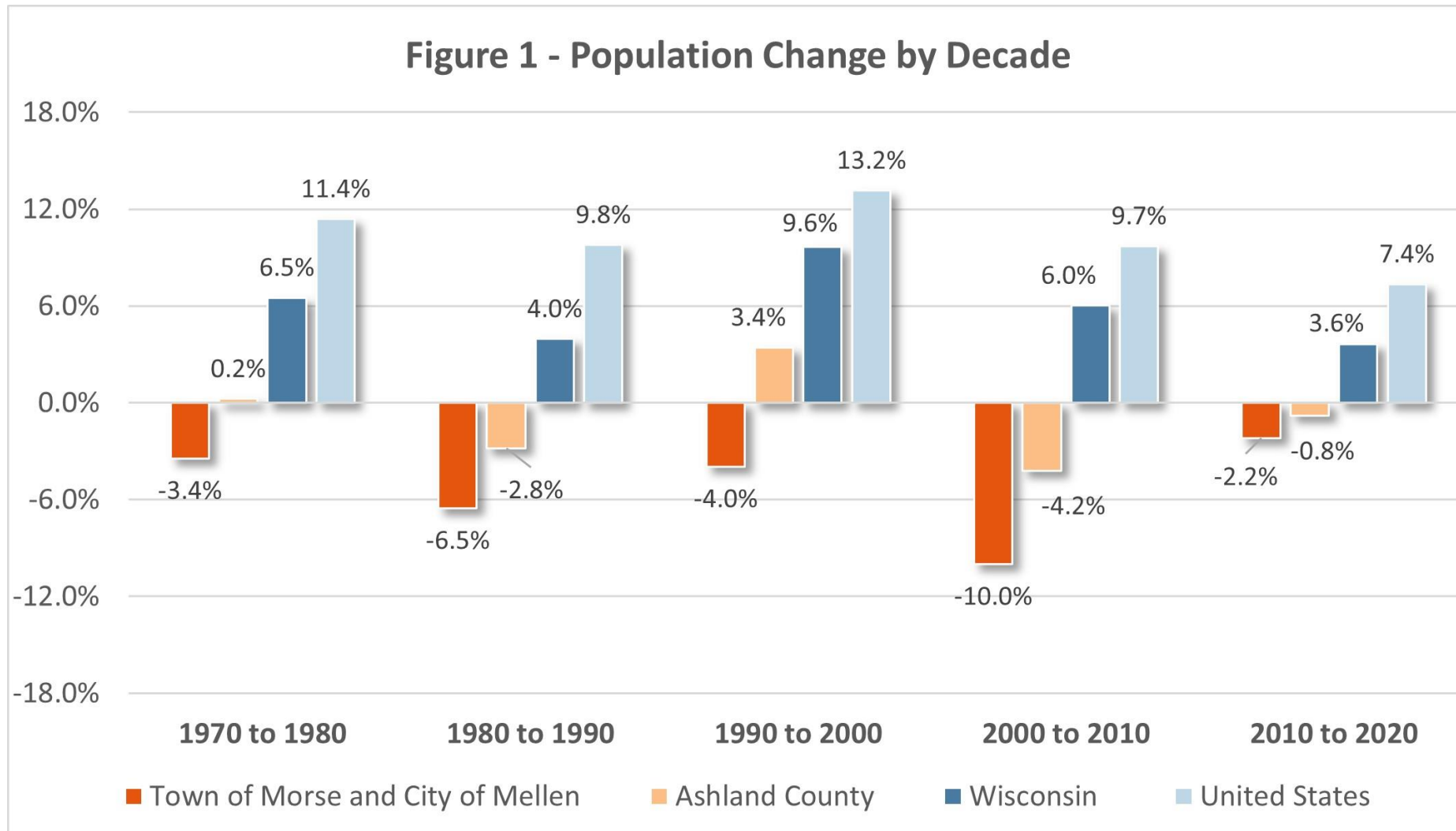
Considerations:

- Looking for patterns, not a single answer;
- More concerned with trends than precision;
- Focus more attention on comparing figures rather than ranking them.

Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



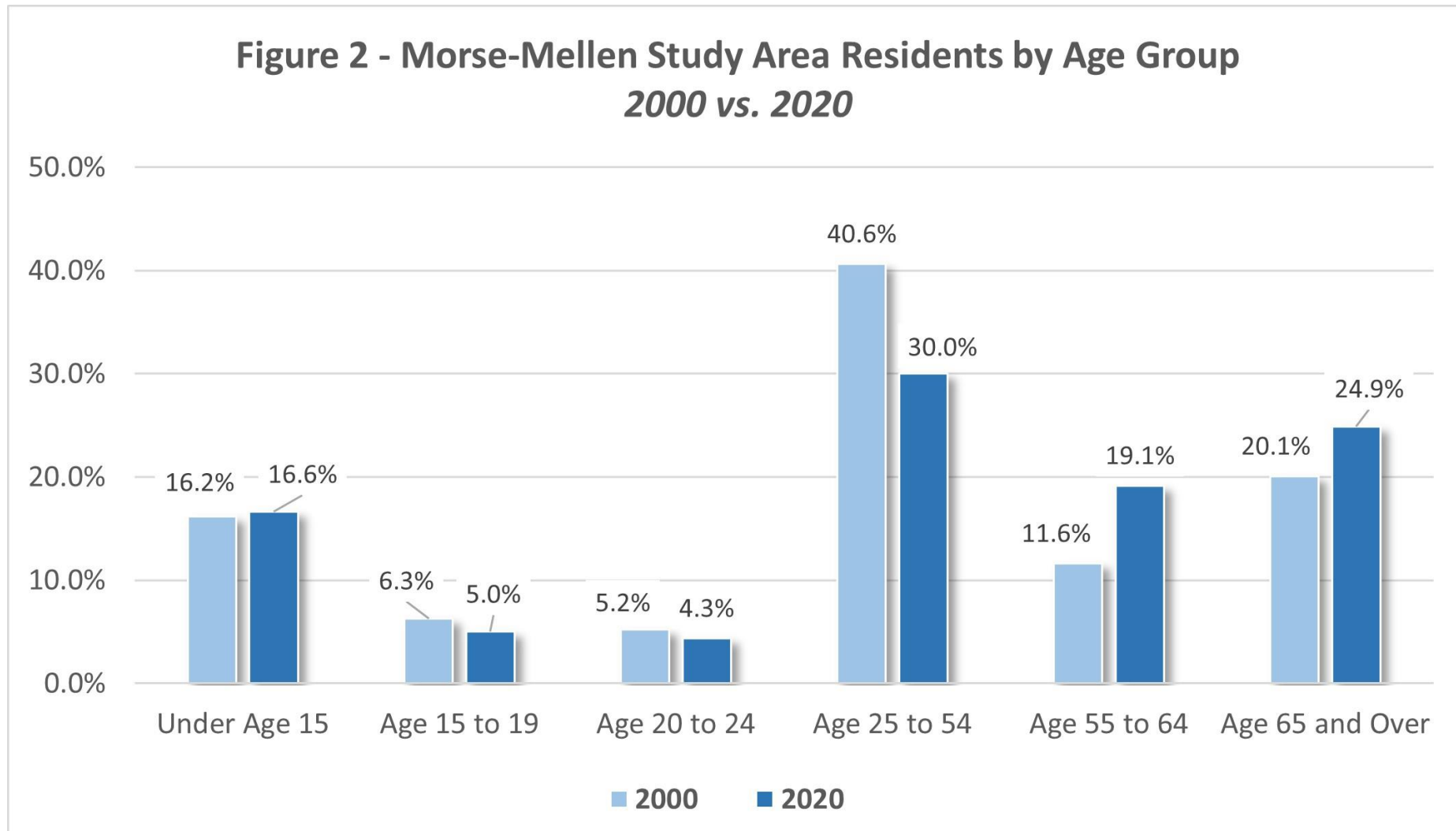
Figure 1 - Population Change by Decade



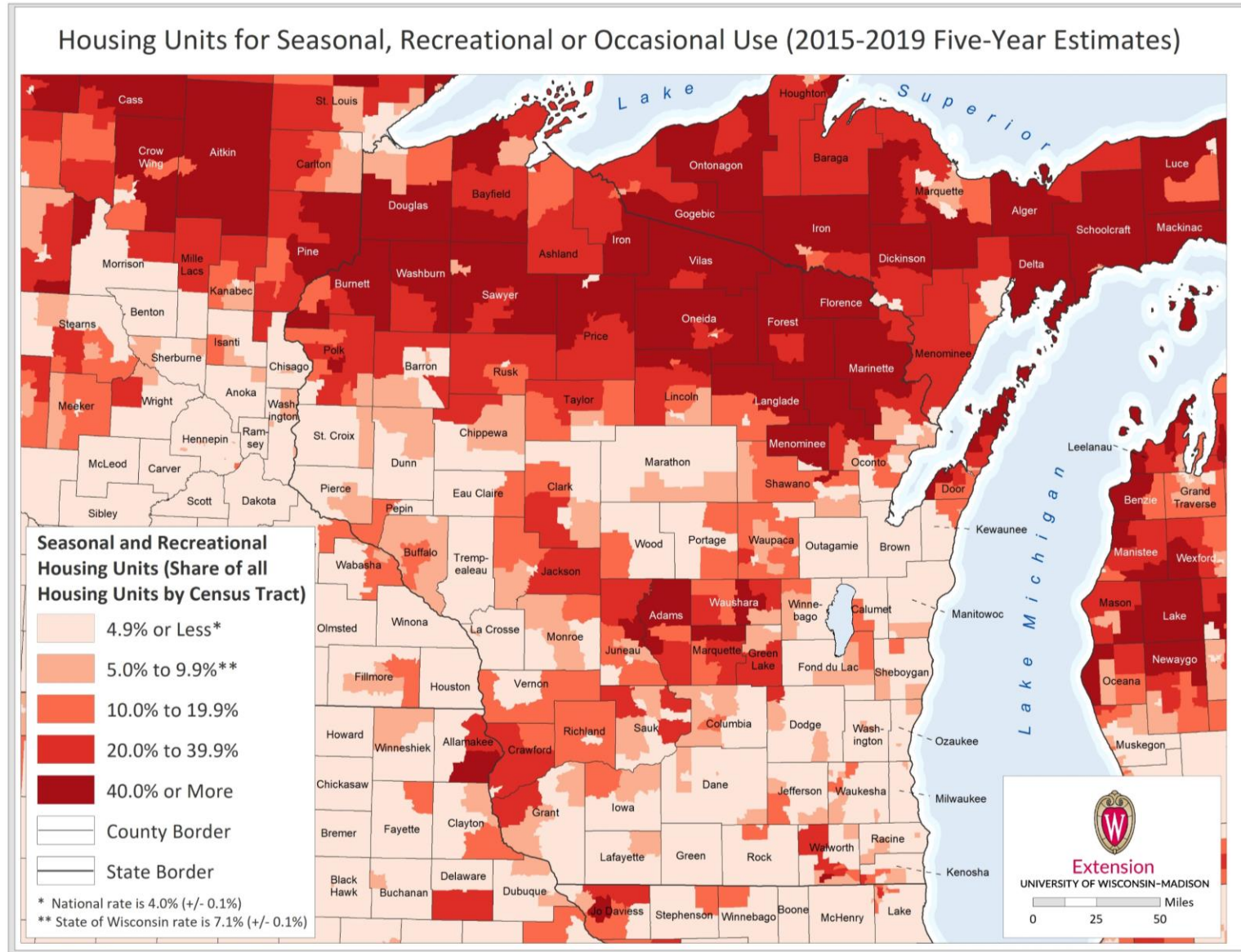
Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



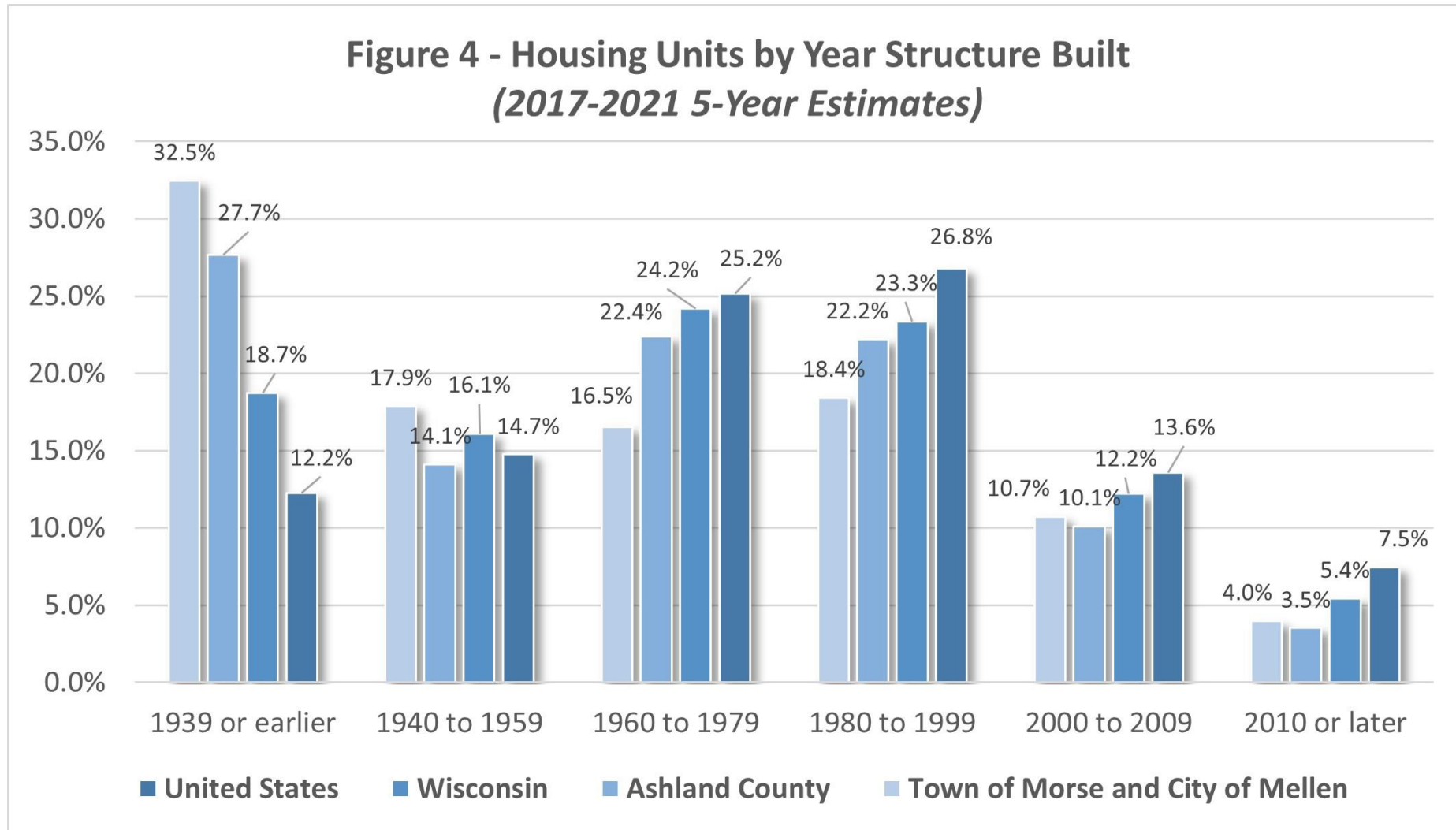
Figure 2 - Morse-Mellen Study Area Residents by Age Group
2000 vs. 2020



Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



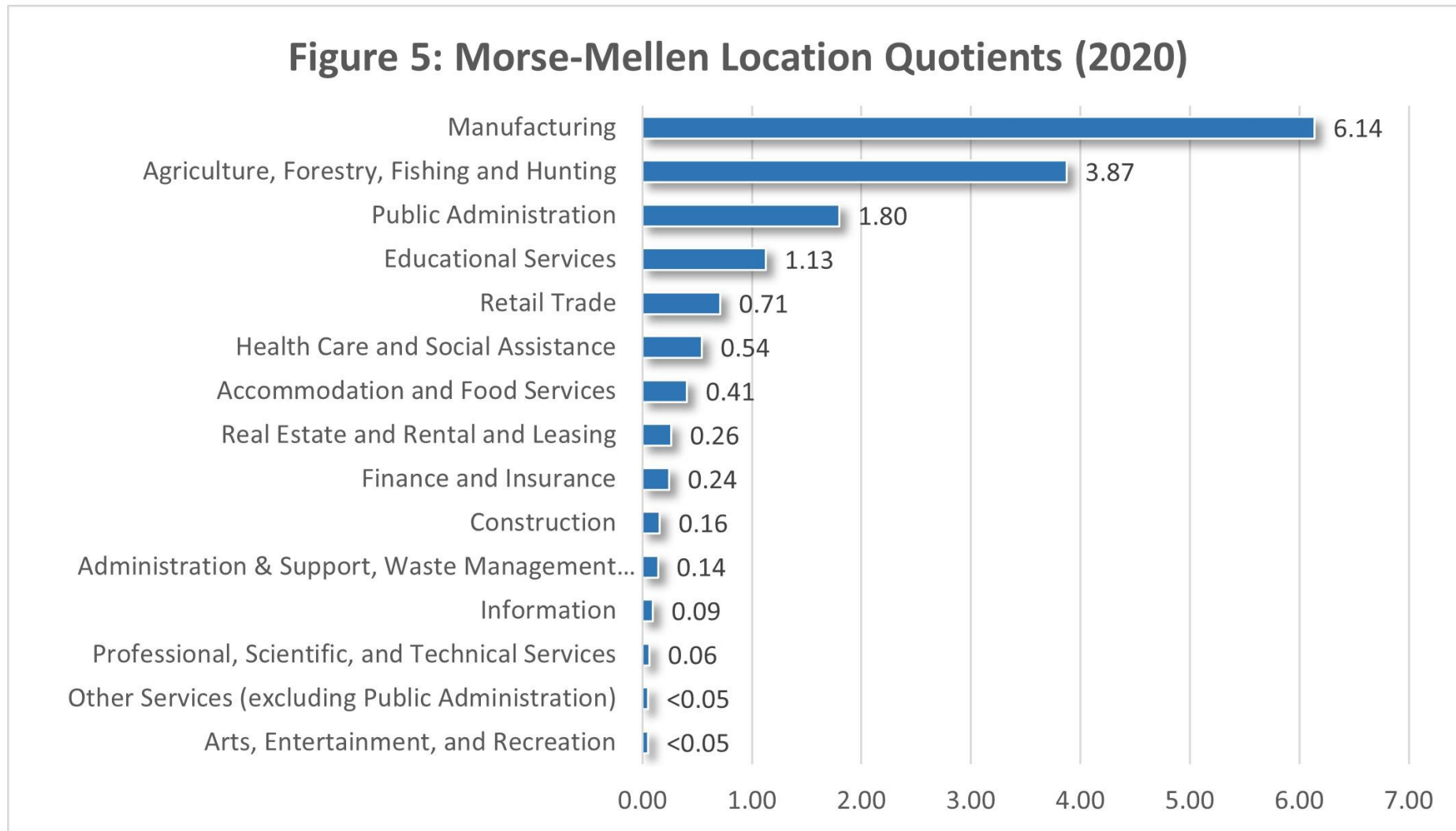
Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



Session 1 - Data Presentation & Discussion on Local Economy



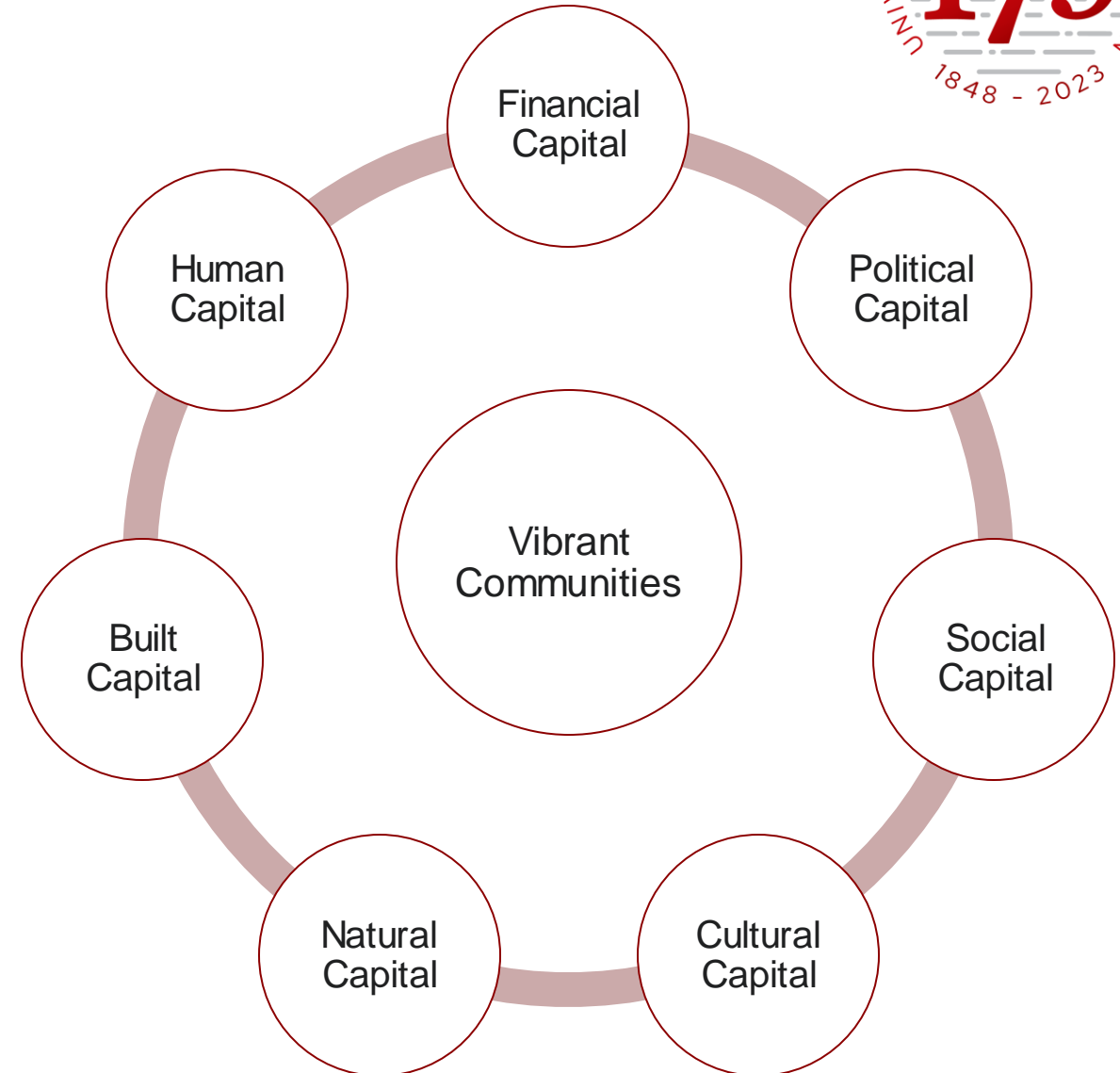
Figure 5: Morse-Mellen Location Quotients (2020)



Session 2 - Community Capitals Framework & Environmental Scan



- **Community Capitals:** A Systems Thinking Approach to Community Economic Development
- What are the assets available to the community?
- What assets are strength that the community can build upon?
- What assets are deficient that need investments?



Session 2 - Community Capitals Framework & Environmental Scan



Internal Community Strength Examples

- Manufacturing businesses are strong;
- Environmental Assets: Copper Falls State Park, Chequamegon Nicolet National Forest, etc.
- The larger businesses donate funding and give support to community projects;
- Legion Memorial Library and Senior Center;

Internal Community Weakness Examples

- Limited volunteers;
- Infrastructure repairs are overdue, and we always need more of them;
- U.S. Forest Service campgrounds are no longer usable; they're already developed, but are closed to the public;
- Lack of motorized and non-motorized trails;

External Community Opportunity Examples

- Designation as a low-income or under-served community in national grant applications qualifies us for special federal or state assistance;
- About 250,000 people visit Copper Falls State Park annually;
- Existing motorized and non-motorized trails are all around the city that could be networked to Mellen.

External Community Challenge Examples

- Lack of sufficient funding;
- Snow banks!;
- We have extreme storms (floods and snow) that can harm infrastructure, houses, services, etc.;
- Insufficient access to regional health care, child care, housing or senior care services.

Session 3: Clarify and Prioritize Strategic Issues



Goal - fundamental decisions and actions that will help to shape and support the plan's implementation.



Objective(s) – Shorter-term steps to achieve the goals



Strategies - Actions to address goal and objectives
Resources - People, organizations & partners needed
Point of Contact - Who will lead or co-lead
Timeline - start and stop, or by what date?
Outcome - How will we know this was successful?

Morse-Mellen Identified Strategic Issues:

- Downtown Renovations and Business Development;
- Housing;
- Community Conversations;
- Recreation, Ecotourism and Natural Amenities.

Each Issue forms the Basis for a Goal

Session 4: Draft Community Economic Development Action and Implementation Plan



Objective 1: Explore and inventory new funding and resource options to secure and leverage incentives and assistance for building renovations, new investment, and entrepreneurial support					
STRATEGY	RESOURCES	POINT OF CONTACT	TIMELINE	OUTCOME	
Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	People, organizations, & Partners needed	Who will co-lead?	Start and stop, or by what date?	Measurement: How will we know this was successful?	
Objective 2. Establish a safe hike/bike/ski trail to Copper Falls from Mellen through careful planning and infrastructure development. Consider all potential routes to provide residents and visitors with a safe and enjoyable outdoor experience.					
Objective 3: Leverage knowledge, resources, and talent to engage and incentivize developers and builders to provide/develop appropriate housing					
B. Explore existing funding tools to improve downtown (ex: Look at financing tools, look into...	1. Review plan through roads plan,				
	2. Continue meet state bridge on I-Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NWRPC UWEX Kelly Westlund (UWEX Housing Coordinator) Denise Lutz (Ashland Co Housing Authority) Tony Jennings (Realtor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lissa Radke (UW Extension Ashland County) 	January 2025-December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community leaders are more knowledgeable and intentional about how to pursue funding options through different mechanisms At least one new grant application is identified, submitted, and approved for funding.
	3. Partner with Park to add transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local realtors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tony Jennings Jeromy Rux James Moran 	January 2024-December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posting and selling of new and old units



Town of Morse and City of Mellen
Community Economic Analysis & Development Plan

2024

GOAL 1: Improve downtown Mellen through renovations, business development and community investment.



Objective: Explore and inventory new funding and resource options to secure and leverage incentives and assistance for building renovations, new investment, and entrepreneurial support

Example Strategies

- Continue to strengthen existing downtown leadership team;
- Explore and leverage existing funding, resources and tools to improve downtown;
- Provide entrepreneurial support for downtown business operators and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Objective: Establish a downtown development plan, considering the needs of businesses, local residents and tourists to attract investment.

Example Strategies

- Inventory existing downtown buildings and businesses and explore what similar and successful towns/communities are doing to help us find successful projects and develop community pride;
- Gather trade area data (Ex: traffic counts, visitor profile, resident profile, visitors demand, resident demand). Determine target trade area.
- Explore ways to address building code compliance (Ex: Look at gray space building idea).

GOAL 2: Increase the number of new and existing rehabbed housing units that addresses gaps in current community housing needs and balances environmental and sustainable development



Objective: Complete a housing assessment for the Mellen-Morse area, including unincorporated population clusters and identifying existing housing assessment efforts in the area.

Example Strategies

- Establish a housing steering group/committee to coordinate housing strategies and secure content needed;
- Develop and conduct a survey to determine housing stock conditions and projected community needs to inform lenders and investors on current opportunities;
- Inventory which Mellen-owned lots are available and whether they have utilities for development;

Objective: Explore building options with developers to get more information and build relationships and develop local capacity

Example Strategies

- Explore similar communities that have successful housing developments to determine how they work and determine a regional approach to partnering;
- Define incentives and resources that can be offered to developers;
- Identify options for funding, development, roles/responsibilities and partnership within Ashland County;
- Review and update related Mellen ordinances;

Goal 3: Community Conversations: Establish mechanisms and processes to enhance the communication throughout the communities.



Objective 1: Establish a central location to access community news both online and in-person.

Example Strategies

- Determine where an in-person contact will be located;
- Determine where the online central location is to exist;
- Identify what kind of information is needed and ways to share info with users;
- Determine all existing community web pages that are active or inactive; determine whether all are needed;
- Inventory which Mellen-owned lots are available and whether they have utilities for development;

Objective 2: Inventory all available communication tools currently being used

Example Strategies

- Identify and investigate the use of current online and in-person tools and effectiveness;
- Investigate whether to use poster boards, sandwich boards on Hwy 13 and at events, branded rack cards and postcards, school newsletter messages;
- Identify new ways to share information with the public (e.g. Morse sends tax bill with communication info);
- Partner with existing community social and traditional media to cross-promote events, activities;

Goal 4: The Mellen-Morse area will identify strategies to leverage our outdoor resources responsibly and support businesses that cater to motorized and non-motorized outdoor activities, establishing food, taverns, repair/sales, and lodging services that can enhance the outdoor experience for visitors and residents.



Objective: Establish a safe hike/bike/ski trail to Copper Falls from Mellen through careful planning and infrastructure development.

Example Strategies

- Review plans: Hwy 169 deck trail plan through wetlands and town roads plan, determine project;
- Continue to develop plans that meet state requirements between bridge on Hwy 169 and Red Granite Trail;
- Partner with Copper Falls State Park to address concerns with transportation safety;
- Work with Friends of Copper Falls State Park and North Country Trail leadership to consider trail network changes that enter the Park;

Objective: Assess existing amenities and consider new nature-based amenities for residents and visitors

Example Strategies

- Stay aware of grant opportunities by developing an annual calendar of grant opportunities;
- Inventory existing nature-based opportunities (Example: Mellen School Forest Trail);
- Determine short- and long-term approaches to increase recreation/tourism businesses (example: explore ski-jouring);
- Coordinate with Park Falls and City of Mellen for entertainment and educational programs. Assist with scheduling speakers to describe their recreation/ecotourism success stories;

Community Economic Development Action and Implementation Plan



Progress, Outcomes, Lesson Learned and Next Steps

Contact Information



Matt Kures

Community Economic Development Specialist
Community Development Institute
Economic Development Administration University Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

432 N. Lake St, #437
Madison, WI 53706

Phone (608) 265-8258
matthew.kures@wisc.edu

Steven Chmielewski

Community Development Educator
Waukesha & Jefferson County
Community Development Institute
University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

515 W Moreland Blvd AC G22,
Waukesha, WI 53188

Phone (262) 548-7781
steven.chmielewski@wisc.edu

<https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/>