



Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin

I-41 Corridor Economic Development Strategy Roll-Out

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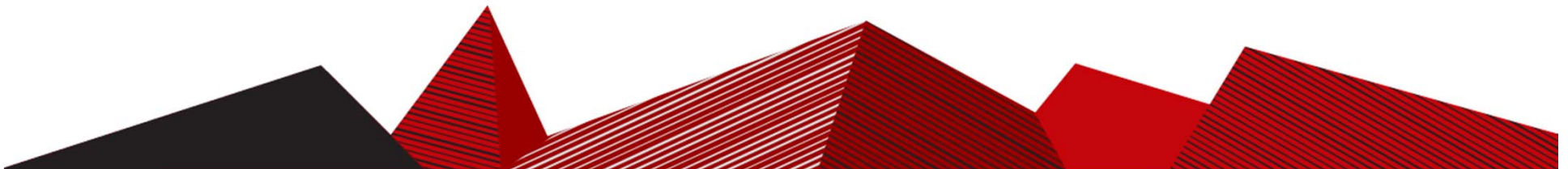
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University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate Student Research Team



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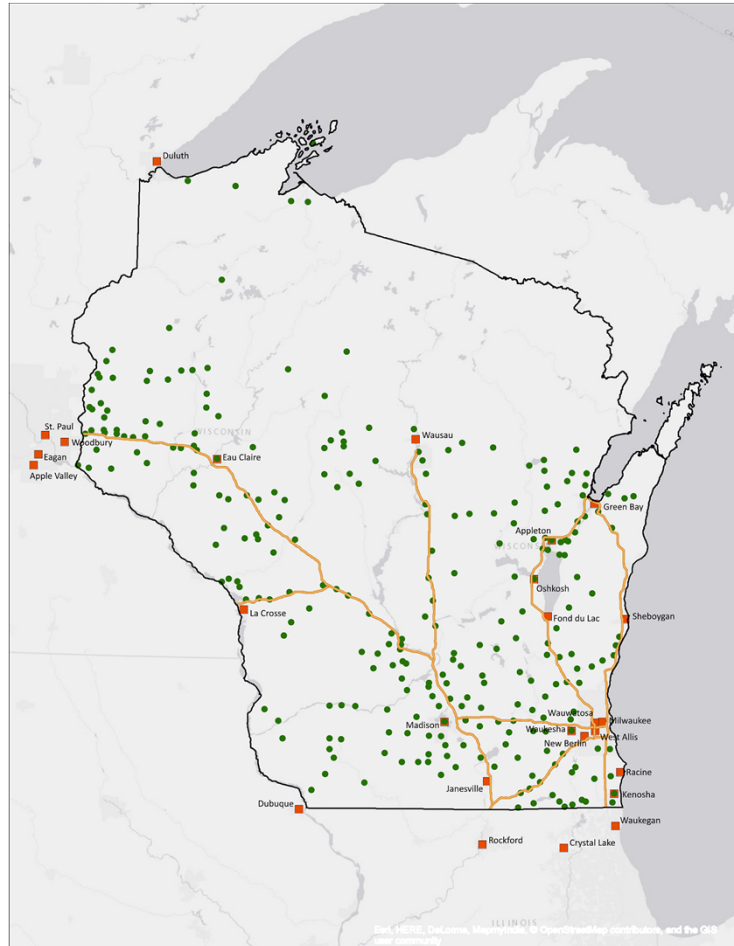
Research Project Framework

- A *strengths* approach—studying communities that are gaining and maintaining young adults rather than those that are losing them
- A community approach—studying municipalities rather than counties
- An “effects first” approach—looking for places with strong young adult populations, and then looking for causes rather than doing programs and then looking for effects
- **Goal**—find positive forms of community development that attract and maintain higher numbers of young adults



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Where Are Young Adults?



All communities that are both gainers and maintainers

Gainers: had an *increase* in the number of young adults from 1990-2010 (median is -22%)

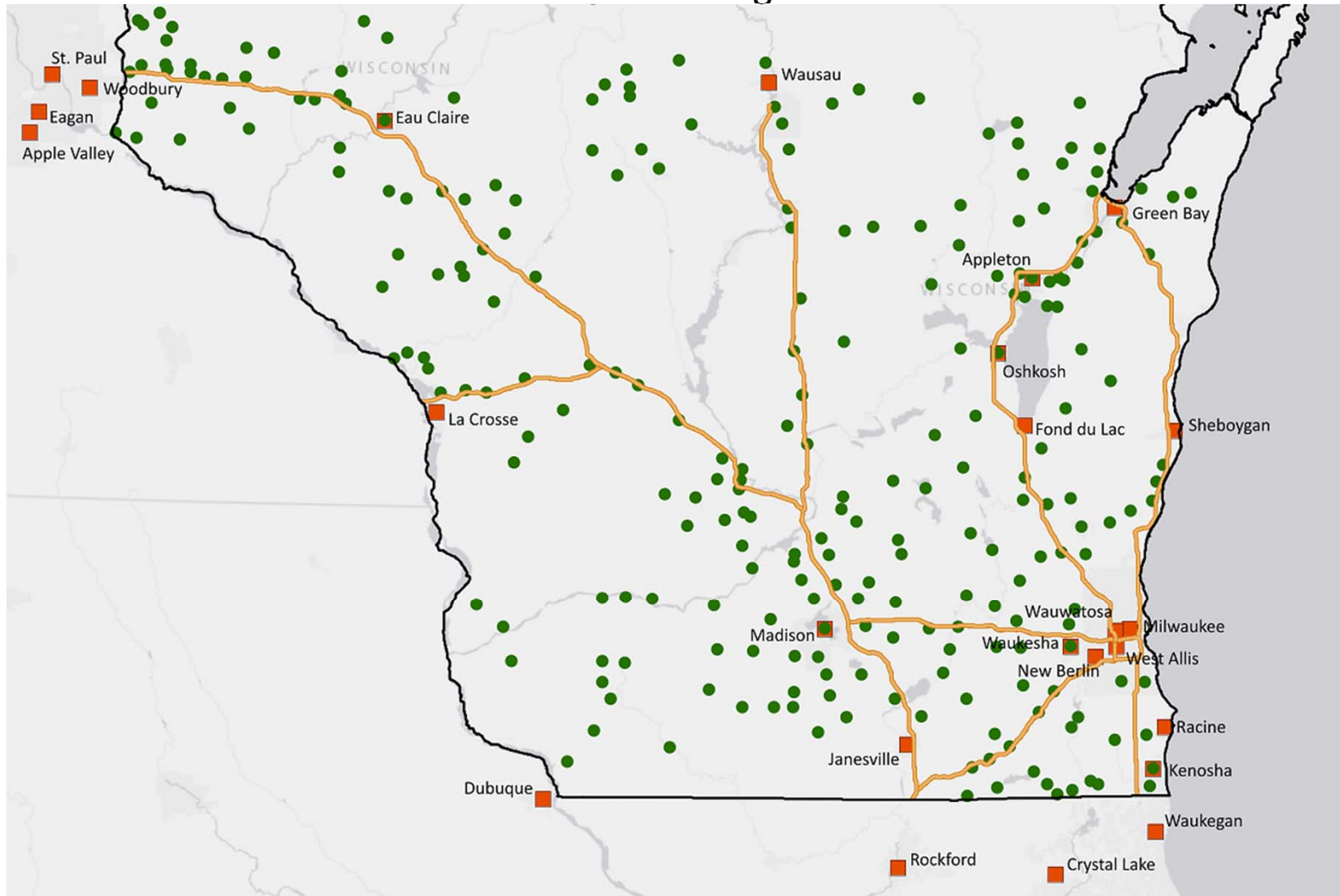
Maintainers: had a young adults proportion above the median of 24%

[Top Gaining Communities and Top Overlapping Communities in ECWRPC](#)

Note: communities in red are larger Wisconsin cities that are not gainers and maintainers, or are cities outside of Wisconsin.

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Where Are Young Adults?

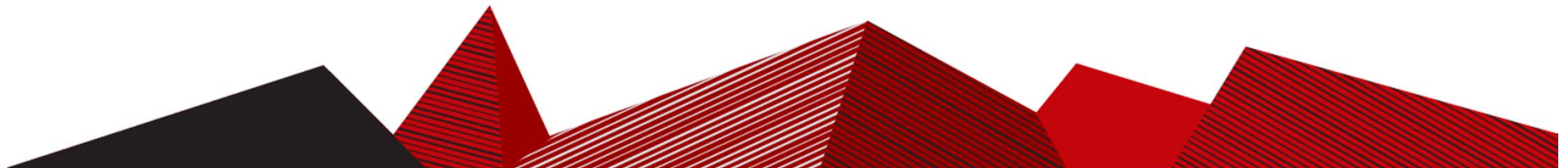
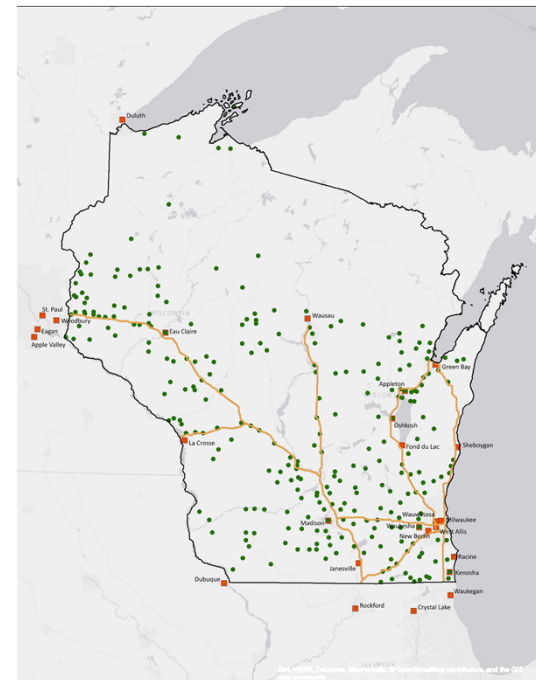


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Where Are Young Adults?

	<u>Gainers /</u> <u>Maintainers</u>	<u>Non-Gainers /</u> <u>Maintainers</u>
Count	280	1600
Average distance (miles) to freeway	15.5	29.4
Average distance (miles) to city >39,000	24.2	33.4
Percent of communities within 20 miles of city >39,000	46%	27%

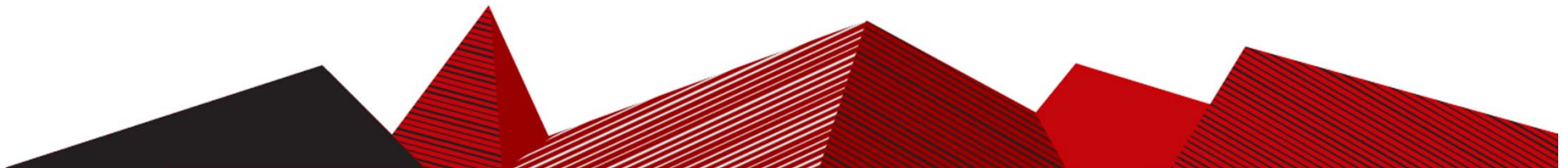
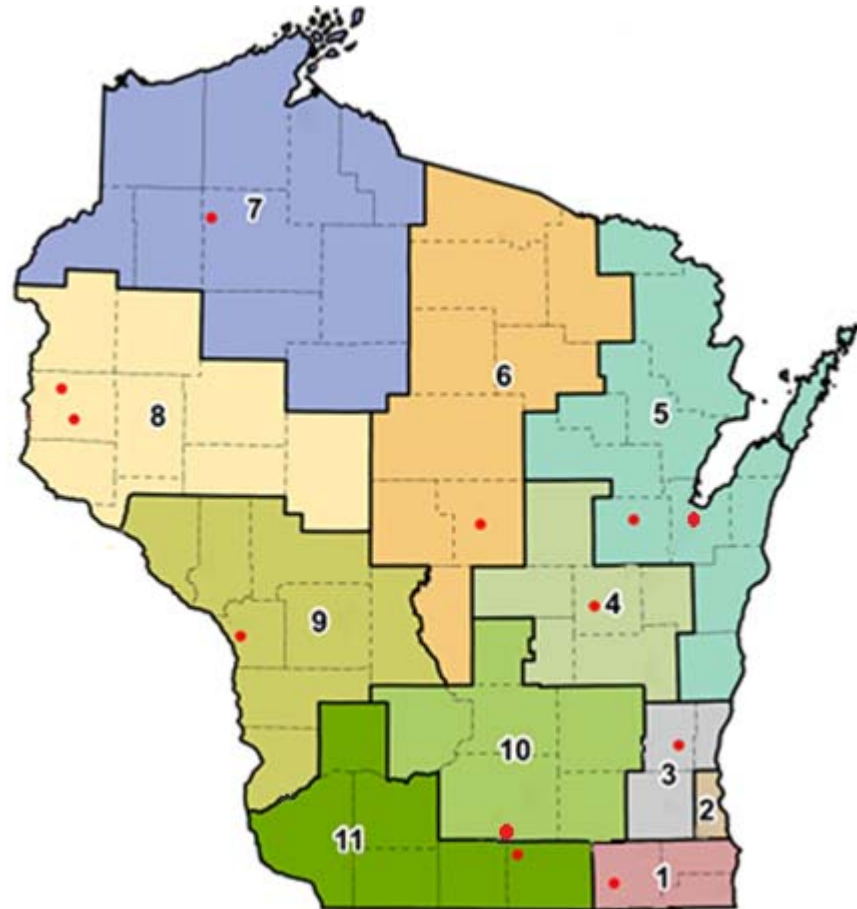
Gainers/maintainers are closer to larger cities and closer to freeways.



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Choosing Case Study Communities

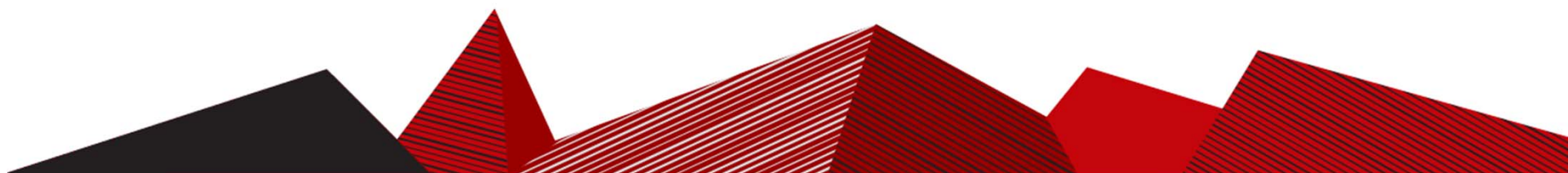
Region 1	Delavan
Region 2	<i>Not studied</i>
Region 3	West Bend
Region 4	Omro
Region 5	De Pere Black Creek
Region 6	Plover
Region 7	Hayward
Region 8	Somerset New Richmond
Region 9	Onalaska
Region 10	Brooklyn
Region 11	Evansville



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Case Study Research Methods

- Moving from “where” questions to “why” questions
- Conducting case studies of municipalities that show more success at gaining and maintaining young adults and potentially hold lessons for other communities
 - Chose one to two case studies per region
 - Gather knowledge to understand the total picture of a community, not just the effect of a single intervention or program to attract young adults
- Learning about the community by involving the community
 - Engage “core group” of local community leaders to inform research
 - Conduct “lay expert interviews” (goal of 12-25 per case—210 total)
 - Ask them about others, not just themselves
 - Look for repetitive themes
 - Accuracy even with “biased” samples
 - Create stories that communities can tell about themselves



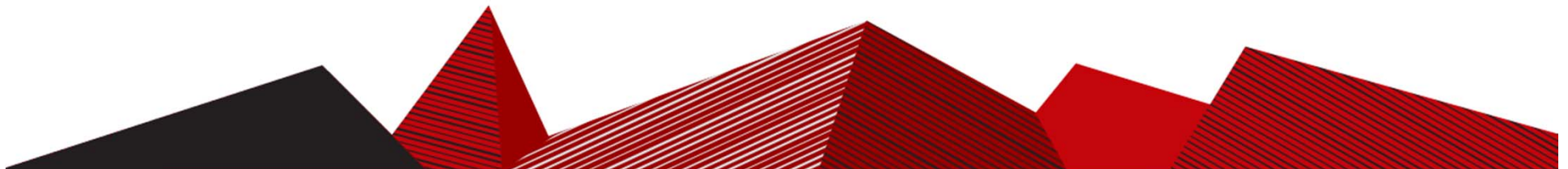
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What We Learned About the “Why?” Question in Northeast Wisconsin

Why do young adults choose communities to live in?

** Indicates a trend seen in other case study communities*

- The “obvious” reasons:
 - Schools - for more than students*
 - Housing - right size and right price*
 - Perception of greater safety in a suburban environment
- The less obvious reasons:
 - Proximity to, and distance from, larger employment / shopping/ entertainment centers – recognizing commuter patterns, growth of e-commerce
 - Appreciation for traditional community/family feel, “it takes a village”
 - Community-centric events, community-centric social clubs (especially those involving youth), sports leagues
- Other reasons:
 - Quality outdoor spaces (parks, trails, pet-friendly)
 - Quality indoor ‘third’ spaces (community center, coffee shop)

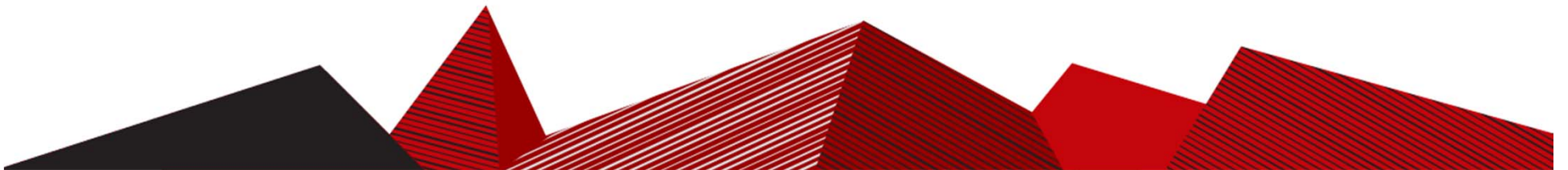


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What We Learned About the “Why?” Question

What challenges do these (and other) municipalities face?

- “Bedroom community” and volunteerism concerns – how do you sustain volunteer-driven community assets?
- “Tipping point” worries (desire to maintain community identity in some cases)
- Absence of resources for youngest adults (teenagers, especially)
- Desire to enhance ‘authentic places’ (downtown facades)
- Call for vibrant third spaces in the community (rural challenge)

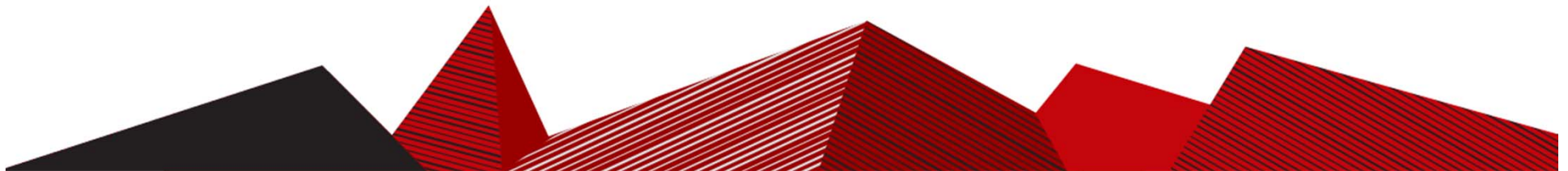


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What We Learned About the “Why?” Question

What is Our Area Doing Well?

- Intentional business development and historic preservation efforts in downtown districts
- Well-attended community events that are beloved by locals, foster strong sense of community
- Diverse workforce opportunities in close, commutable range
- Quality schools, outdoor spaces, community amenities (libraries, community centers, etc.)

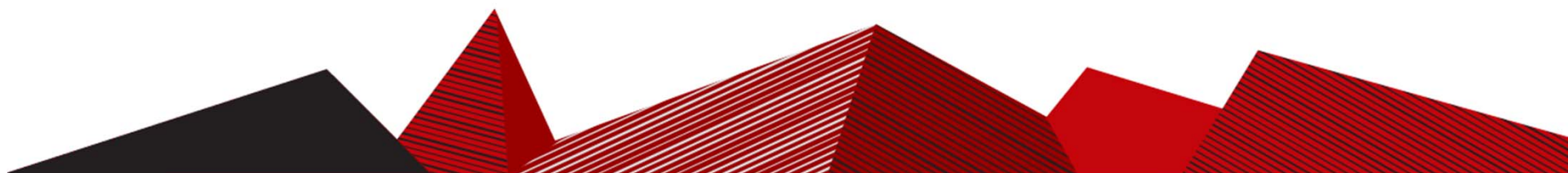


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What We Learned About the “Why?” Question

What Surprised Us?

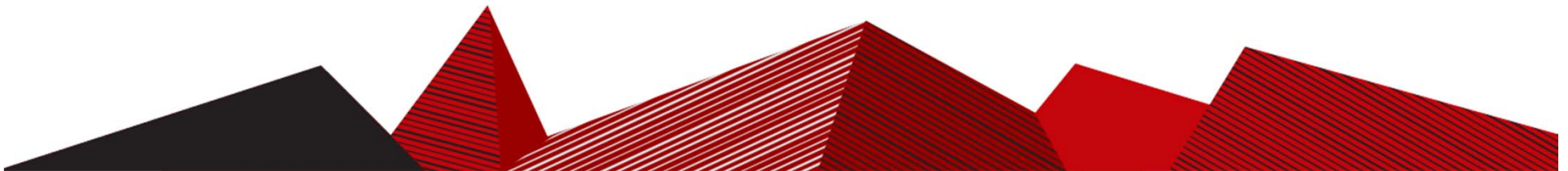
- Desire for retail is seemingly not present
- Desire for local foods is much more critical
- Attracting young singles recognized as a challenge
- Networking/YP programs not mentioned as large draw
- Urban housing not cited as a desire in most places
- Re-envisioning existing assets can be key to community image
 - Plowing recreational trails year-round
 - Allowing dogs into existing recreational spaces



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What Municipalities Can Do About This

- Continued emphasis on regional business attraction
- There may be a minimum set of local amenities needed: outdoor spaces, cafes and restaurants
- Housing needs to be appropriately affordable and appropriately sized for the family age cohort the community is most likely to attract
 - Less expensive smaller housing for new families with new careers
 - More expensive larger housing for growing families moving toward mid-career with higher salaries
- Schools and teachers may need extra special care
 - Residents want to feel like the teachers and administrators know them
 - Residents want the school to feel like it is a community space
- Too much emphasis on growth may be counterproductive

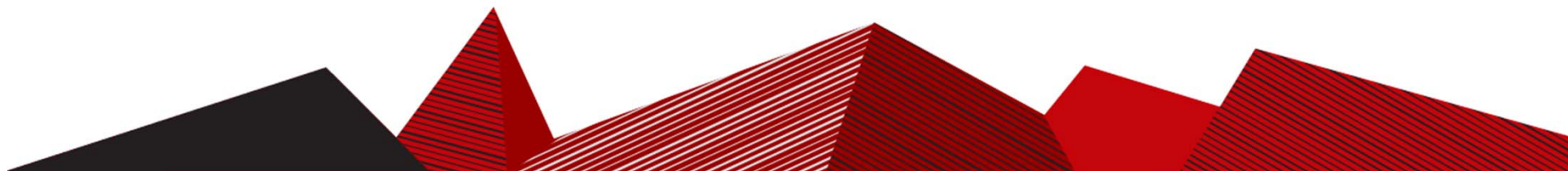


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More Information

- See our report at: <http://apl.wisc.edu/youngadults>

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Outagamie and Winnebago Counties

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