

Chapter 2: Issues and Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

The Issues and Opportunities chapter provides a foundation for the City of Stoughton’s Comprehensive Plan by examining existing conditions, historic trends, and emerging challenges that will shape the community’s future. Drawing on demographic, housing, and economic data—along with extensive community input—this chapter identifies key strengths to build upon, pressures to address, and opportunities to guide thoughtful, intentional growth. The analysis presented here informs the goals, strategies, and policies that follow, ensuring that future decisions reflect both measurable trends and the priorities of Stoughton residents.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◊ **Stoughton is growing, but slower than other communities in Dane County.** From 2000-2020, Stoughton grew by 6.6%, slower than many other communities in Dane County including nearby McFarland, Oregon, and Waunakee.
- ◊ **Stoughton’s population is aging.** 20% of residents are age 65 or older, the median age is increasing (if trends continue, Stoughton’s median age could approach 47 by 2050), and the share of the population that is of working age is declining.
- ◊ **Housing affordability is the community’s top concern.** 78% of survey respondents identified housing affordability as a top community challenge. Median home values in Stoughton have increased by 53% since 2010, and median gross rent has increased by 50%, while median household income has only increased by 30% in that period.
- ◊ The **median household income in Stoughton is \$79,551**, which is \$11,000 lower than Dane County’s but \$2,000 higher than Wisconsin’s.
- ◊ **Stoughton’s labor force participation rate** (the percentage of the population age 16 or older that are employed or available for work) **has declined 4.2% since 2010**, to 68.7%.

Issues & Opportunities

POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

Stoughton added just 819 residents (about 7% growth) from 2000-2020, following a 63% increase (4,765 new residents) from 1980-2000. Comparatively, the Village of Waunakee grew by 65% from 2000-2020 and 133% from 1980-2000, while the Village of Oregon experienced 49% (2000-2020) and 94% (1980-2000) growth, and the Village of McFarland grew 40% (2000-2020) and 169% (1980-2000). The adjacent Town of Dunkirk declined slightly in population from 1990-2020, while Dane County as a whole experienced steady growth of around 15% each decade.

Figure 1. Regional Population Trends 1980-2020

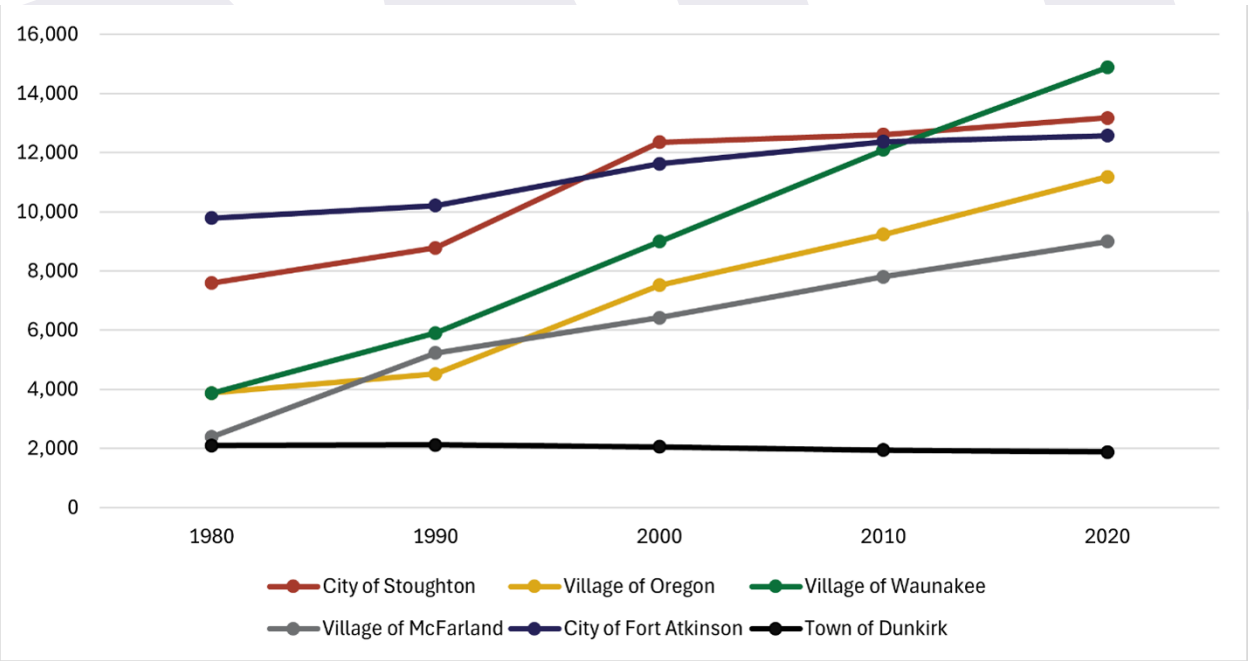


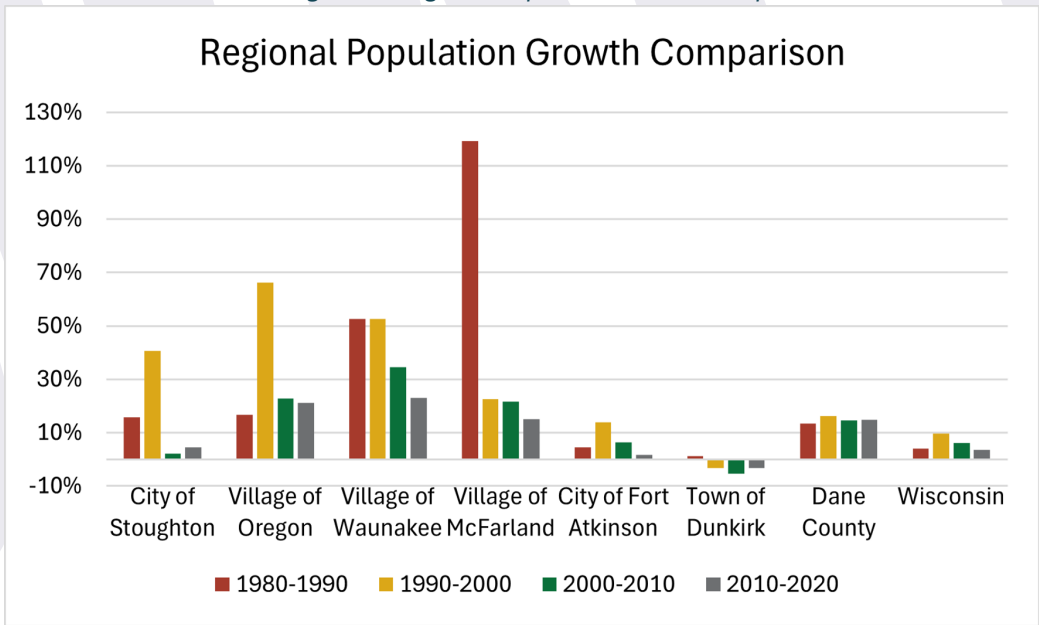


Table 1. Population Trends 1980-2020

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2010-2020 Population	2010-2020 Percent
City of Stoughton	7,589	8,786	12,354	12,611	13,173	562	4.5%
Village of Oregon	3,876	4,519	7,514	9,231	11,179	1,948	21.1%
Village of Waunakee	3,866	5,897	8,995	12,097	14,879	2,782	23.0%
Village of McFarland	2,386	5,232	6,416	7,808	8,991	1,183	15.2%
City of Fort Atkinson	9,785	10,213	11,621	12,368	12,579	211	1.7%
Town of Dunkirk	2,098	2,121	2,053	1,945	1,881	-64	-3.3%
Dane County	323,545	367,085	426,526	489,013	561,504	72,491	14.8%
Wisconsin	4,705,767	4,891,769	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	206,732	3.6%

Source: U.S. Census

Figure 2. Regional Population Growth Comparison



The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) prepares population projections for every jurisdiction in the state typically every five years. Dane County has experienced strong population growth for over 100 years that has been consistently higher than DOA's projections. In 2025 a "Regional Data Group" (RDG) of local planning and demography specialists prepared their own population projections for Dane County and the municipalities located within it. These projections included an analysis of trends in population, housing, and jobs. The RDG estimates the population of Dane County will be 887,000 in 2050, a growth of 325,000 residents (58% increase) from the 2020 Census. More information on the RDG projections can be found in Appendix ___.

The RDG then prepared local population projections based on a county-wide total of 887,000 residents. This group projects Stoughton's population will be 19,500 in 2050, an increase of 6,327 residents (48% growth) from 2020. While these projections are likely much more accurate than DOA's projected population decline for Stoughton (see table below), Becker Professional Services made some additional projections based on both the RDG projections and historic growth trends to serve as the basis for this plan. Public input during this Comprehensive Planning Process indicated a preference for modest population growth in the coming years. The Blended Projected Growth Rate (see table below) is a compounded average of the RDG projected growth rate and Stoughton's actual 20-year historic growth rate. This rate provides a slightly more modest projected population increase than the RDG projections alone and is used throughout this plan to determine future land use, housing, and community facility needs.

Table 2. City of Stoughton Population Projections

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
U.S. Census	13,173						
Dane County Regional Data Group Projections ¹	13,173		15,090		17,170		19,500
Wisconsin Department of Administration ²	13,173	12,995	12,854	12,850	12,846	12,859	12,870
1980-2020 (40-year) Historic Growth Rate Trend ³	13,173	14,113	15,120	16,199	17,355	18,594	19,921
2000-2020 (20-year) Historic Growth Rate Trend ⁴	13,173	13,386	13,603	13,823	14,046	14,274	14,504
First Tier Metro Historic Growth Rate Trend ⁵	13,173	14,716	16,439	18,365	20,515	22,918	25,602
Blended Projected Growth Rate⁶	13,173	13,712	14,274	14,858	15,467	16,100	16,759
Projected Number of New Residents Added Since 2020⁷		539	1,101	1,685	2,294	2,927	3,586

1 Source: Dane County Regional Data Group Population Projections 2020-2050 (included in Appendix)

2 Source: WIS DOA Official Municipal Population Projections, 2020-2050 (2024)

3 Source: Becker Professional Services, based on 1980 to 2020 average annual growth rate (1.39%) compounded annually.

4 Source: Becker Professional Services, based on 2000 to 2020 average annual growth rate (0.32%) compounded annually.

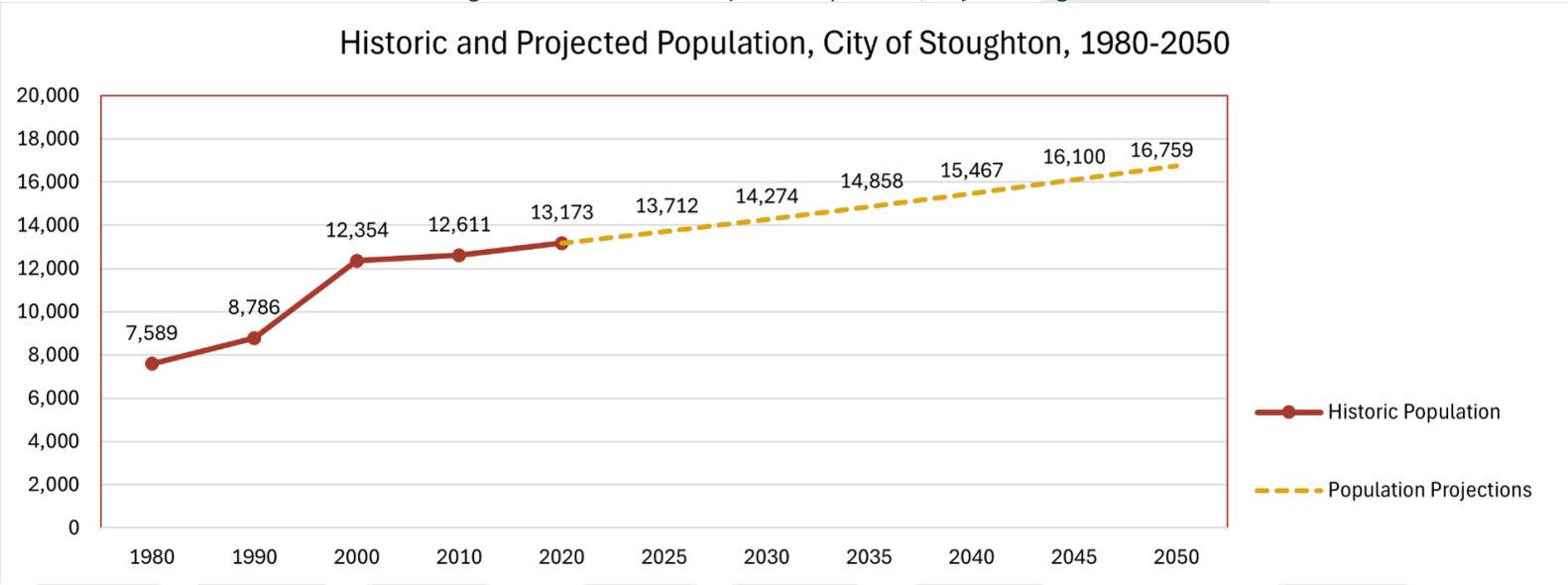
5 Source: Becker Professional Services, based on 2000 to 2020 average annual growth rate (2.24%) for the "First Tier Metro" communities of Cottage Grove, DeForest, McFarland, Oregon, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, and Waunakee, compounded annually.

6 Source: Becker Professional Services, based on the compounded average of the RDG projections and 20-year historic growth rate (0.81%).

7 Source: Blended Projected Growth Rate



Figure 3. Historic and Projected Population, City of Stoughton



Actual future population will depend on market conditions, policies about growth, and development regulations – typically applied in incremental decisions about annexation, zoning, and platting.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

AGE PROFILE

Stoughton’s population, like many other communities, is aging. One in five Stoughton residents is 65 years of age or older, and the median age of residents is 39.9, which is higher than the Dane County median of 36 but lower than Wisconsin’s median age of 40.7. While the senior population has grown from 14.4% in 2010 to 19.9% in 2024, the youth population (those under 18) has remained roughly the same (23.8% in 2010 and 24.0% in 2024) and remains larger than the senior population. Notably, the population under 18 has decreased in both Dane County and the state as a whole.

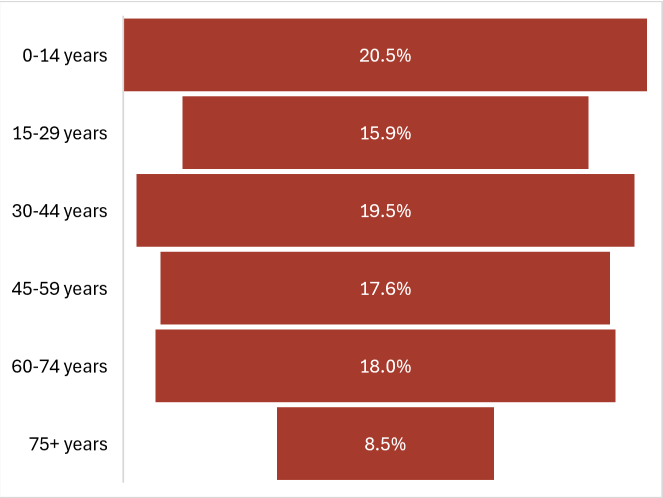
Stoughton’s “workforce population” (a label used to describe those aged 18-64, not necessarily representing the actual number of those in the workforce) has decreased by nearly 6% between 2010 and 2024 to 56.2% of the total population. As discussed further in the Economic Development chapter, this will likely have a negative impact on Stoughton’s economy. It is typically considered “economically healthy” for communities to have a working-age population of around 60-65%, providing a large enough workforce to support both children and elderly dependents.

Table 3. Age and Gender Distribution

	Youth Population			Workforce Population			Senior Population								
	Median Age			Percent Under 18			Percent 18-64			Percent 65+			Percent Female		
	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024
City of Stoughton	35.2	39.2	39.9	28.5%	23.8%	24.0%	56.9%	61.9%	56.2%	14.6%	14.4%	19.9%	52.8%	51.4%	50.7%
Village of Oregon	34.0	37.0	39.6	28.6%	28.4%	26.4%	61.8%	61.8%	60.6%	9.6%	9.8%	12.9%	51.1%	50.8%	50.9%
Village of Waunakee	37.9	37.0	39.6	31.6%	32.1%	28.6%	58.5%	58.4%	57.0%	9.9%	9.5%	14.6%	51.9%	53.4%	50.2%
Village of McFarland	37.3	40.2	41.3	26.9%	23.4%	24.1%	62.8%	66.2%	60.0%	10.3%	10.4%	15.7%	49.9%	50.9%	54.8%
City of Fort Atkinson	37.0	38.4	43.5	24.0%	24.0%	20.0%	61.0%	61.0%	61.4%	15.0%	15.0%	18.6%	51.4%	51.4%	50.1%
Town of Dunkirk	39.0	43.8	55.4	26.2%	19.1%	13.5%	65.2%	71.7%	56.8%	8.6%	14.1%	29.7%	45.9%	50.8%	52.4%
Dane County	33.3	34.3	36.0	22.4%	21.7%	19.0%	68.3%	68.0%	65.3%	9.3%	10.3%	15.8%	50.6%	50.4%	49.9%
Wisconsin	36.0	38.5	40.7	25.5%	23.5%	20.8%	61.4%	62.8%	59.5%	13.1%	13.7%	19.6%	50.6%	50.4%	49.9%



Figure 4. Percent of Population by Age Group



If Stoughton’s median age continues to increase at the rate it has been since 1980, in 2030 the estimated median age would be 41.8, in 2040 it would be 44.3, and in 2050 it would be 46.9 (projections were calculated using a compound annual growth rate of 0.58%).

Table 4. Veteran Status

Veteran Status as Percent of Population, 2024

	City of Stoughton	Dane County	Wisconsin
Veterans	5.8%	4.0%	5.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2024

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Stoughton’s population has historically been predominantly white and not Hispanic or Latino, although the percentage of residents self-reporting as “White alone” has decreased by 5.3% from 2010-2020, the percentage of residents self-reporting as “Two or more races” has increased by 3.9%, and the percentage of residents self-reporting as “Hispanic or Latino (of any race)” has increased 1.9% in that timeframe. Even so, Stoughton is still less racially/ethnically diverse than Dane County and Wisconsin as a whole, although the percentage of Stoughton residents that self-report as “Two or more races” - 5.4% - is higher than both the county (4.3%) and the state (3.5%).

Table 5. Percent of Population by Race and Ethnicity

	City of Stoughton			Dane County			Wisconsin		
Race/Ethnicity	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
White alone	96.7%	95.1%	89.8%	89.0%	84.7%	76.0%	88.9%	83.3%	78.6%
Black or African American alone	0.9%	1.4%	2.0%	4.0%	5.2%	5.3%	5.7%	6.2%	6.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%
Asian alone	0.7%	1.3%	1.5%	3.5%	4.7%	6.3%	1.7%	2.3%	3.0%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race alone	0.4%	0.4%	1.0%	1.4%	2.5%	0.4%	1.6%	0.1%	0.3%
Two or more races	1.1%	1.5%	5.4%	1.8%	2.5%	4.3%	1.2%	1.4%	3.5%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	1.2%	1.8%	3.8%	3.4%	5.9%	7.5%	3.6%	5.9%	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2020, (DP1)



EDUCATION AND INCOME

The distribution of educational attainment in Stoughton is similar to Wisconsin, although the percentage of those with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher in Stoughton (39.3%) is higher than that of the state (34.6%). Dane County on the other hand is well above both Stoughton and the state as a whole at 57.8% of residents with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher, likely due to the University of Wisconsin – Madison being located within the county.

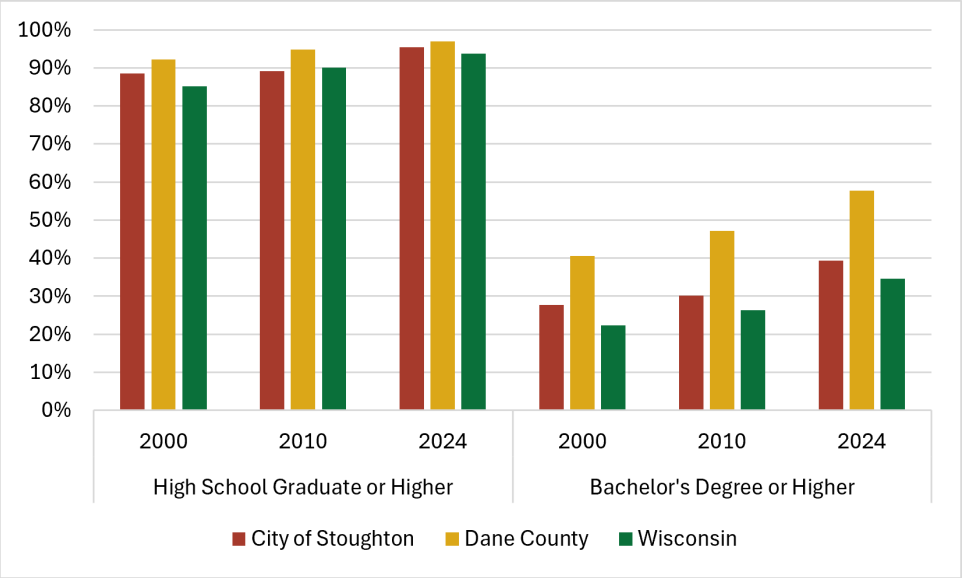
Table 6. Educational Attainment

	City of Stoughton	Dane County	Wisconsin
Educational Attainment			
Less than 9th Grade	0.8%	1.2%	2.4%
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	3.8%	1.9%	3.9%
High School Graduate	23.3%	15.8%	28.8%
Some College, No Degree	21.1%	14.5%	18.7%
Associate's Degree	11.8%	8.9%	11.6%
Bachelor's Degree	28.8%	34.3%	22.6%
Graduate or Professional Degree	10.5%	23.5%	12.0%
High School Graduate or Higher	95.4%	97.0%	93.7%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	39.3%	57.8%	34.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2024

Issues & Opportunities

Figure 5. Educational Attainment Trends, 2000-2024



Over half (52.1%) of households in Stoughton make between \$50,000 and \$150,000, compared to under half (48.8%) of Dane County households and 50.5% of Wisconsin households.

Table 7. Income by Percent of Households

Household Income	City of Stoughton	Dane County	Wisconsin
Less than \$10,000	3.2%	4.2%	4.3%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1.4%	2.8%	3.0%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	3.9%	4.4%	6.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	5.8%	5.4%	6.5%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	10.9%	8.3%	11.2%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21.8%	16.7%	17.3%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13.4%	12.2%	13.8%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16.9%	19.9%	19.4%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	13.7%	10.9%	9.0%
\$200,000 or more	9.0%	15.3%	9.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2024

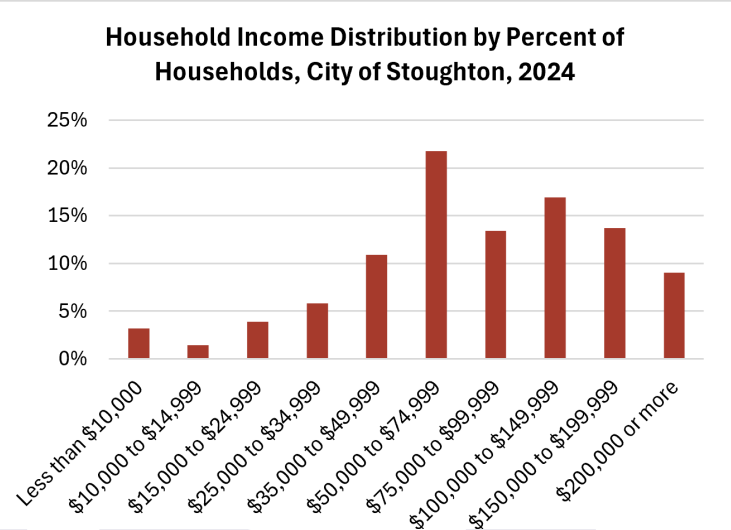
Stoughton’s estimated median household income is \$79,551, approximately \$11,000 less than Dane County’s median household income of \$90,999 and \$2,000 more than Wisconsin’s (\$77,488). Median household income in Stoughton increased by about 30% from both 2000-2010 and 2010-2024 while Dane County’s grew by 19% (2000-2010) and 55% (2010-2024), and Wisconsin’s increased by 12% (2000-2010) and 49% (2010-2024). Household median incomes in Stoughton are generally attributable to the nature of employment (blue collar as opposed to white collar), income stagnation, and a higher number of single-income households.

Table 8. Median Household Income and Poverty Rate

	Median Household Income			% of Individuals in Poverty		
	2000	2010	2024	2000	2010	2024
City of Stoughton	\$47,633	\$61,235	\$79,551	5.0%	9.5%	7.1%
Dane County	\$49,223	\$58,661	\$90,999	9.4%	12.2%	10.0%
Wisconsin	\$43,791	\$49,001	\$77,488	8.7%	13.2%	10.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates 2000-2024

Figure 6. Household Income Distribution





7.1% of Stoughton’s population (911 individuals, 107 families) lived in households with an income below the poverty line in 2024. This is down from 9.5% in 2010 but up from 5% in 2000. Stoughton’s poverty rate is lower than that of Dane County and Wisconsin, which both have a rate of approximately 10% of individuals below the poverty line.

Figure 7. Median Household Income, 2000-2024

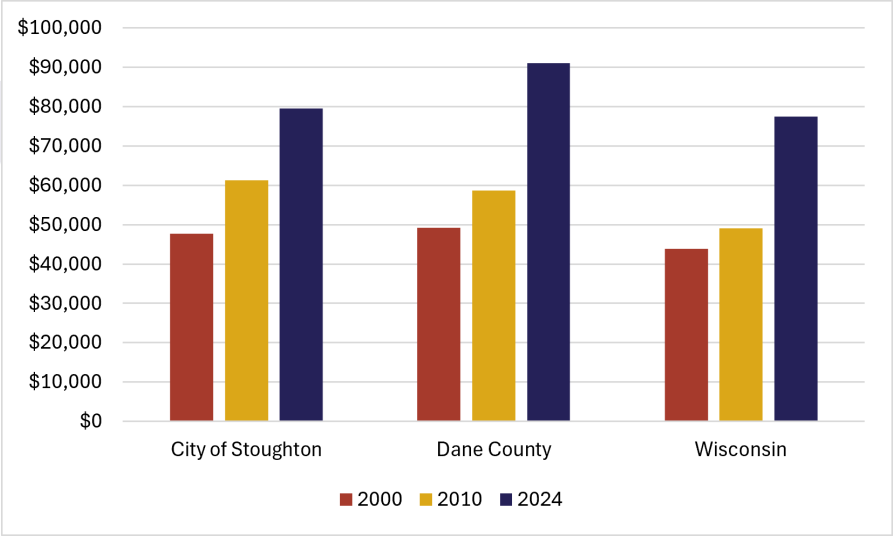


Figure 8. Percent of Individuals in Poverty, 2000-2024

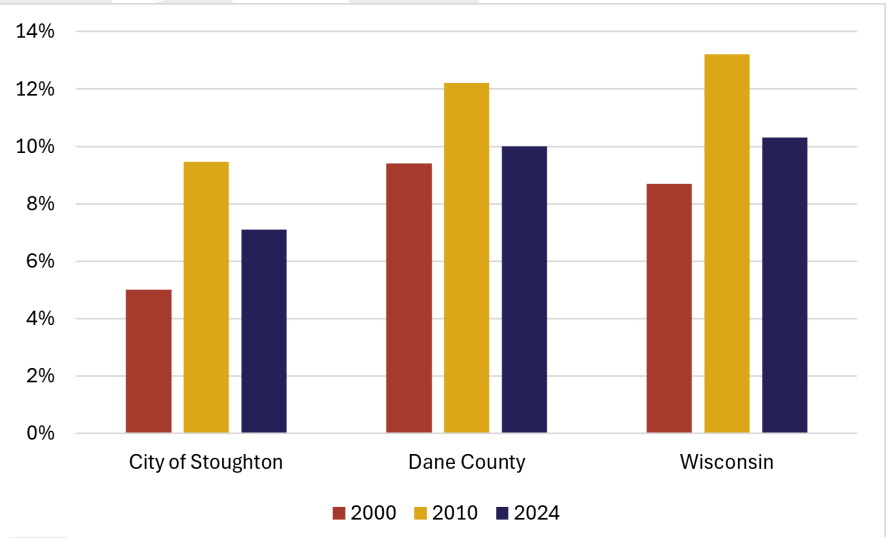


Table 9. Household Projections

	2020	2030	2040	2050
Estimated Number of Housing Units	5,474	6,409	7,138	7,950
Estimated Number of Households	5,262	6,104	6,798	7,572
Estimated Average Household Size	2.46	2.29	2.23	2.17

Source: Becker Professional Services, based on data from the U.S. Census, ACS 5-year estimates, WI Dept. of Administration, and RDG population projections.

HOUSEHOLD TRENDS AND FORECASTS

Consistent with statewide and national trends, Stoughton’s average household size has been declining for several decades, falling from 2.53 in 2000 to 2.33 in 2024. The percentage of households with someone under the age of 18 has also been declining, dropping 13.3% from 2000 (40% of households) to 2024 (26.7% of households). At the same time, the percentage of households with individuals age 65 and older has increased to 34.5%, up from 23.5% in 2010. 28% of households in Stoughton have only one person, down slightly from 29.4% in 2010. Based on these historical trends and projected population growth, household projections were prepared (see table 9 below). In 2050, Stoughton is estimated to have 7,799 housing units and 7,572 households (occupied housing units), with an average household size of 2.17.

The median home value in Stoughton has increased by 53% from 2010-2024 to \$293,500, and median gross rent increased by 49.5% to \$1,157 in that same period. Monthly housing costs are 35% or greater in 15% of all housing units with a mortgage, while that share is 30% of all rent-paying units.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS AND FORECASTS



Issues & Opportunities

Stoughton’s labor force participation rate – the percentage of the population age 16 or older that are employed or available for work – is 68.7%, a decrease of 4.2% from 2010, likely due to Stoughton’s aging population. The unemployment rate – the percentage of those in the labor force that are unemployed – is 1.9%, down from 3.5% in 2010.

Table 10. Labor Force and Unemployment

The largest share of Stoughton residents work in the educational services, health care, and social assistance industry (23.7%), followed by retail trade

	2000	2010	2020	2024	2000	2010	2020	2024
City of Stoughton	72.5%	72.9%	69.4%	68.7%	3.5%	3.5%	1.8%	1.9%
Village of Oregon	76.7%	76.5%	78.5%	70.7%	2.0%	6.0%	1.9%	2.2%
Village of Waunakee	77.3%	76.5%	71.4%	70.8%	1.1%	2.6%	1.6%	1.4%
Village of McFarland	79.7%	79.3%	75.3%	72.5%	1.7%	3.0%	3.9%	3.4%
City of Fort Atkinson	72.1%	69.7%	71.0%	69.8%	4.5%	4.5%	1.8%	4.5%
Town of Dunkirk	76.6%	74.2%	67.6%	61.5%	2.7%	9.8%	1.5%	1.0%
Dane County	75.0%	73.8%	71.6%	71.5%	3.8%	6.6%	2.5%	2.0%
Wisconsin	69.1%	68.3%	66.1%	65.4%	4.7%	8.9%	3.6%	3.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census 2000; American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2010-2024

(12.6%, a decrease of 1.4% from 2010) and construction (12%, an increase of 3.9% from 2010).

Table 11. Employment by Industry

Industry	Percent of Workers, 2010	Percent of Workers, 2024	Percent Change	Percent of Workers, 2024
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	23.1%	23.7%	0.6%	29.0%
Retail trade	14.0%	12.6%	-1.4%	9.2%
Construction	8.1%	12.0%	3.9%	4.5%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	5.5%	11.6%	6.1%	18.1%
Manufacturing	15.2%	11.0%	-4.2%	9.6%
Public administration	4.5%	7.3%	2.8%	4.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	5.8%	5.6%	-0.2%	7.7%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	9.0%	5.5%	-3.5%	6.9%
Other services, except public administration	5.9%	4.5%	-1.4%	3.5%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.3%	2.3%	-2.0%	3.2%
Information	1.8%	1.9%	0.1%	1.5%
Wholesale trade	2.6%	1.3%	-1.3%	1.3%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.1%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%

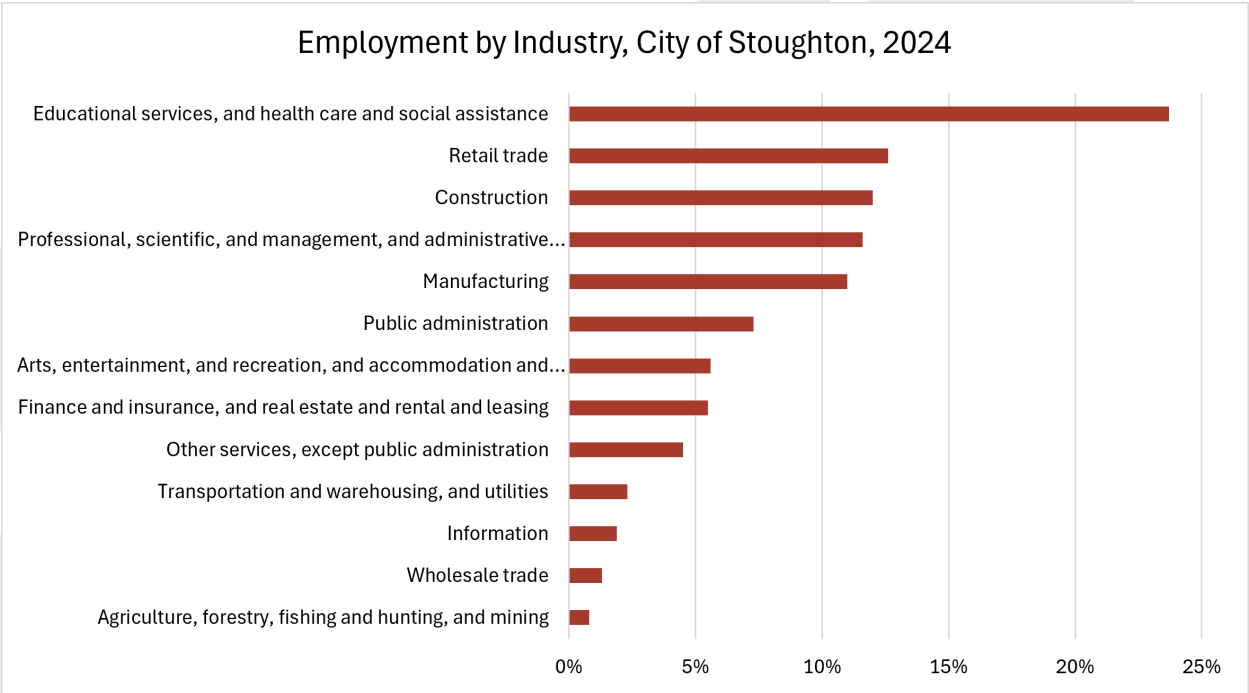
Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2010 and 2024



Issues & Opportunities

Stoughton’s primary economic activities are in the manufacturing, education, health, and social services industries.

Figure 9. Employment by Industry



Stoughton falls within the South Central Workforce Development Area (WDA), which includes Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Marquette, and Sauk Counties. The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development conducts employment projections for Wisconsin’s 11 WDAs every two years. Employment in the South Central WDA is expected to increase 7.9% from 2022-2032, slightly faster than the state’s employment growth rate of 7.1%.

The Information industry is projected to grow the most in the South Central WDA at a rate of 20.6% from 2022-2032. While much of the employment in this industry is driven by Epic Systems, other software developers and publishers are also contributing to this growth.

Second to the Information industry in projected growth is Construction, expected to grow 15.2% from 2022-2032, followed by Professional and Business Services at 13.1% and Leisure and Hospitality at 12.9%. The three industries seeing the smallest growth are Government at 1.9%, Natural Resources and Mining at 3.8%, and Manufacturing at 4.7%.

The number of self-employed workers is expected to grow by 6.9%.

COMMUNITY INPUT

City staff and the Plan Commission wanted this comprehensive plan update to include an emphasis on public engagement and a broad range of community input. These efforts are outlined in the Introduction chapter of this plan and in the adopted Public Participation Plan in Appendix ___, and the full analysis of public input results is included in Appendix ___.

The community survey received **1,063 responses**, nearly double the number of survey respondents from the 2017 comprehensive plan update and above the City’s goal of 1,000 responses. 875 responses (82%) were from City residents, representing nearly 9% of Stoughton’s adult population. Engagement included residents from all City wards as well as individuals from surrounding towns within the Stoughton Area School District. View the summary of community input [here](#)

VISION, GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

A vision statement, goals, and associated strategies and actions were developed through the planning process to articulate the community’s desired future and how to achieve it.

A vision statement is a positive, aspirational view of how the community wants to be in the future. This statement sets the tone for the entire comprehensive plan and provides a shared sense of direction for residents, officials, and decision-makers.

Goals are broad, long-term statements that describe an overall desired outcome for the community’s future.

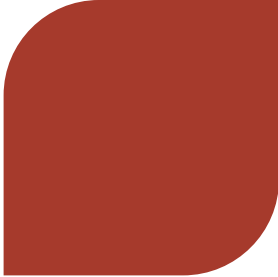
Strategies and actions are the practical, concrete elements that translate these broad goals into actionable steps the community can take to achieve this desired future.

For the purposes of this plan, strategies describe the general methods the City will use to achieve its goals, while actions are specific tasks that put these strategies into practice.

COMMUNITY VISION

Based on public input, a vision statement was developed that describes the type of community Stoughton intends to be in 20 years:

The City of Stoughton is a welcoming and connected community that honors its rich cultural heritage and small-town character while embracing purposeful, well-designed growth. Stoughton champions sustainability, local businesses, diverse housing opportunities, and responsible stewardship of the land and waterways, while fostering vibrant neighborhoods, a strong local economy, and accessible parks and natural areas.



Issues & Opportunities

TOP PRIORITY GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIONS

(will be added when all goals, strategies, and actions from each chapter are finalized)

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Issues & Opportunities

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