City of

Wisconsin Dells

Issues and Opportunity Element

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Intent

Wisconsin Statutes require the Comprehensive Plan contain an Issues and Opportunities Element. This Element is to include background information on the local governmental unit and a statement of overall objectives, policies, goals and programs of the community to guide the future development and redevelopment over the 20-year planning period. Background information is to include population, household and employment forecasts to develop the Comprehensive Plan, and demographic trends, age distribution, educational levels, income levels and employment characteristics. This Element acts as the base for each succeeding Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Background

The City of Wisconsin Dells has long been considered one of the premier family resort and recreation destinations in the State of Wisconsin and the Midwest. The beauty and splendor of the area began attracting tourists not long after the founding of Kilbourn – now Wisconsin Dells – in 1855. Early tours of the area were conducted by rowboat until the first steamboat began offering tours through the Dells in 1873. Intrigued by the images of landscape photographer H.H. Bennett, more and more visitors flocked to the area. By the 1890s souvenir shops, more steamers, boat landings, and other tourist attractions were well established; foreshadowing the City's future as a mecca for family recreation and sightseeing.[1] A century later, in 1999, it was estimated that the greater Wisconsin Dells community benefited from almost $600 million in tourism-related expenditures by visitors to the area.[2]

> "Wisconsin Dells has long been considered one of the premier family resort and recreation destinations"

Despite the success of its tourism industry, residents and local officials have several concerns about the City's future. The community is faced with maintaining and building upon the area's status as a premier destination, including the revitalization of its River District and Downtown, while maintaining the community's unique character and natural beauty. Increased competition from other area communities is also perceived as a potential threat. As a result of these concerns, the City has initiated this process to prepare a Comprehensive Plan under the State's Smart Growth legislation to help guide its decision-making regarding land use, infrastructure, economic development, and other community issues over the next several decades.

The Issues and Opportunities Element is to provide a snapshot of the current community, an analysis of past trends that helped shape the current community, and discussion of the community's aspirations for its future. By gaining a clear understanding of the present community, a more effective plan for achieving its goals for the future can be developed. With this in mind, the Issues and Opportunities Element is organized to provide the general physical, economic, and social context to help form the basis for the other Elements of the Plan. In addition, public participation efforts to help define important issues and establish a "vision" for the future of the community are detailed within this Plan Element, and help to form the basis of the goals and objectives and implementation strategies put forth in the remaining Plan Elements.

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[1] Wisconsin Dells – Lake Delton Chamber of Commerce Web Site.
[2] "Economic Impact of Expenditures by Travelers on the Wisconsin Dells Area, Calendar Year 1998," Davidson-Peterson Associates, Inc, Kennebunk, Maine.

Location

Wisconsin Dells is located along the scenic Wisconsin River in the south-central portion of the state, approximately 50 miles north of Madison, the State Capital. With access to Interstate Highways 90/94, U.S. Highway 12, and State Highways 13, 16, 23, and 127, the Dells area is easily accessible from several major population centers in the Midwest, including Chicago, Milwaukee, and Madison from the south and southeast, Minneapolis/St. Paul from the northwest, and Green Bay and the Fox Valley from the northeast. Its location along these transportation routes is a key factor in the City's success as a tourist destination.

Local Government

The Wisconsin Dells municipality is organized around a strong Mayor/Council form of government. The City has a Plan Commission organized under Wis. Stats. 62.23. The City Plan Commission was created by City Ordinance, and consists of 7 members. The Mayor is the presiding officer and member; along with other City elected and appointed officials. There are also three citizen members who are not City officials. As required by the current Statute, the Commission's citizen members are persons of recognized experience and qualifications.

Consistent with the Smart Growth initiative, it is the responsibility of the Commission to prepare a Comprehensive Plan for the development of the City, and to refer the Plan to the Common Council for adoption by ordinance.

As prescribed by Wisconsin's Smart Growth legislation, this Plan will address the nine (9) required Plan Elements as follows:

1. Issues & Opportunities
2. Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources
3. Housing
4. Economic Development
5. Utilities & Community Facilities
6. Transportation
7. Land Use
8. Intergovernmental Cooperation
9. Implementation

The City also has numerous Committees, Boards and Commissions that oversee other general and specific operations of the City.

Demographic and Statistical Analysis

It is only through a clear understanding of the present community and the past events and trends that have helped shape the current community that we can effectively plan for the future. One way to help gain this understanding is through an analysis of demographic and development statistics over time. The following is an analysis of population, housing, employment, income, and economic trends experienced in the community over the last several decades, as well as projections for the future should these trends continue. A good understanding of these trends will help with the formulation of goals and objectives for the various Plan Elements aimed at continuing, altering, and/or accelerating these trends over the next several decades.

Population

Any analysis of population figures for the City of Wisconsin Dells should recognize not only permanent City residents as reflected in U.S. Census data, but also the presence of a seasonal population consisting of tourists and a temporary workforce that is not reflected in the census figures. At any point in time during the peak season, the number of people within the Wisconsin Dells/Lake Delton area may be upwards of 10 times greater than the official population figures for the community. Even though this seasonal population does not call the Dells their home, their presence impacts many community facilities and services, such as the transportation system, sewer and water treatment systems, and police and emergency response services.

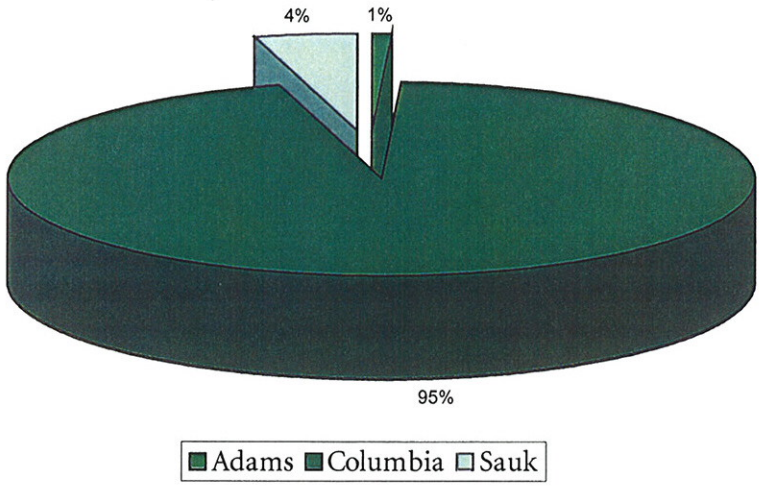
The corporate limits of the City of Wisconsin Dells include properties within three counties: Adams, Columbia, and Sauk. The older portions of the City, including the downtown area, and about 95% of the City's residents reside within Columbia County. Although fairly large in area, most of the property within the City that lies in Sauk County (west of the Wisconsin River) contains commercial-recreational uses, so there are relatively few permanent City residents living in Sauk County. Annexation of properties within Adams County during the 1990s has resulted in a Wisconsin Dells/Adams County population of 19. The following figures illustrate the City's population distribution between the three Counties over the last several decades.

Wisconsin Dells' Population Distribution by County

County	1970	1980	1990	2000
Adams	0	0	0	19
Columbia	2277	2337	2262	2293
Sauk	124	184	136	106
Total	**2401**	**2521**	**2398**	**2418**

Source: U.S. Census.

Wisconsin Dells' Population Distribution by County 2000



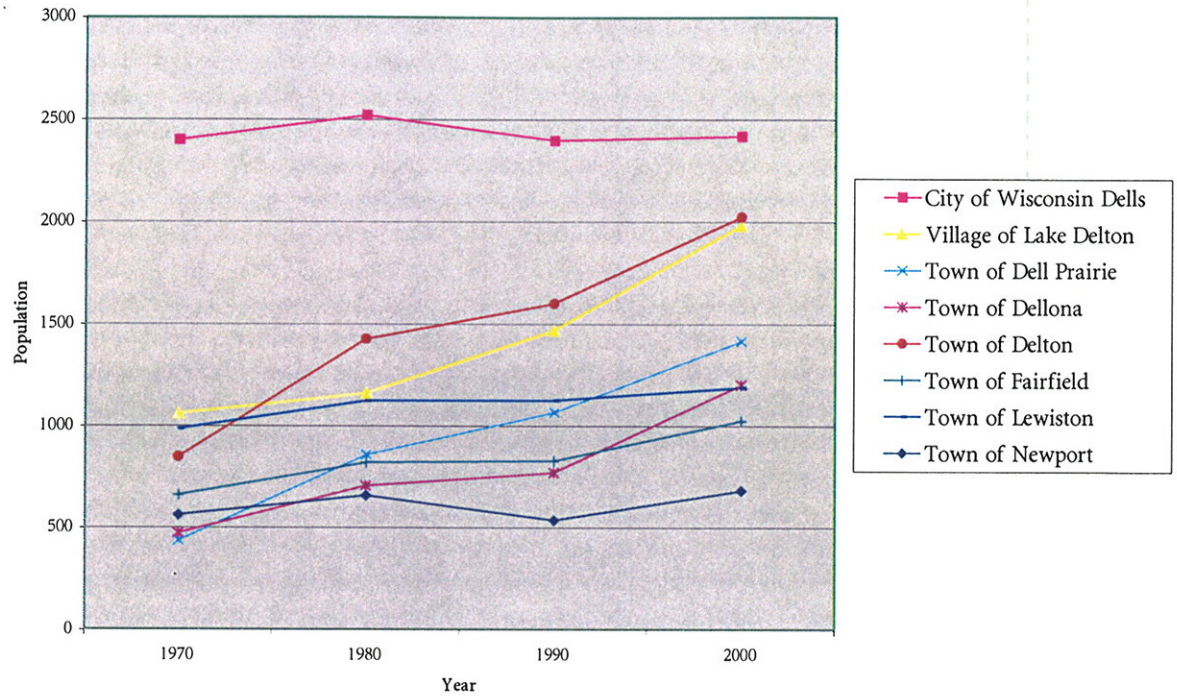
Wisconsin Dells' total population has changed very little over the last 30 years. The steady population figures are likely due to a relatively slow rate of new housing construction over this period and an overall decrease in the number of persons per household. In comparison, surrounding jurisdictions and nearby communities have experienced moderate-to-strong residential growth, as illustrated by the following figures.

Population Trends - Wisconsin Dells, Region and State

Municipality	1970	1980	1990	2000	% Change 1990-2000
State of Wisconsin	4,417,821	4,705,642	4,891,769	5,363,675	10%
City of Wisconsin Dells	2,401	2,521	2,398	2,418	1%
Village of Lake Delton	1,059	1,158	1,466	1,982	35%
Town of Dell Prairie	435	856	1,063	1,415	33%
Town of Dellona	472	705	768	1,199	56%
Town of Delton	846	1,426	1,599	2,024	27%
Town of Fairfield	658	819	826	1,023	24%
Town of Lewiston	984	1,122	1,123	1,187	6%
Town of Newport	562	657	535	681	27%

Source: U.S. Census

Population Trends 1970-2000

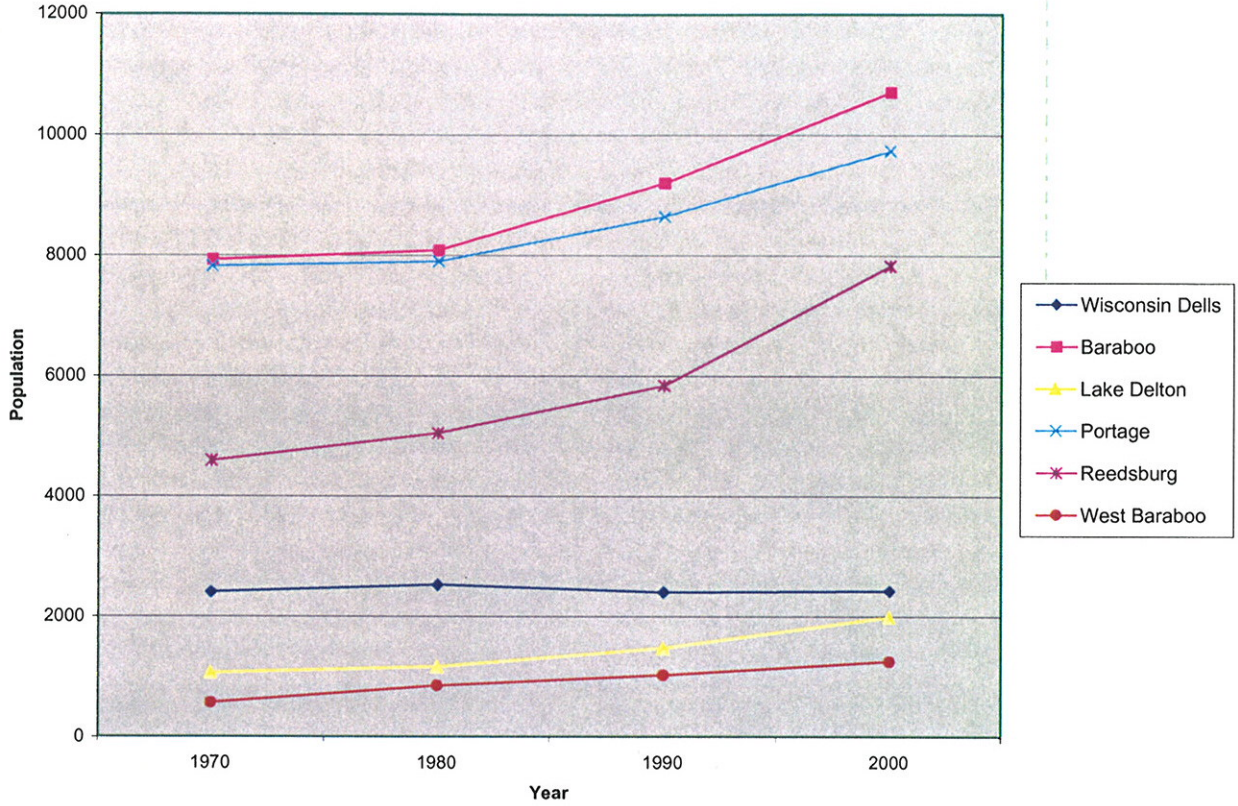


A look at population data from a more regional perspective reveals similar trends:

Wisconsin Dells Population Comparison With Communities in Region					
Municipality	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**% Change 1990-2000**
Wisconsin Dells	2401	2521	2398	2418	1%
Baraboo	7931	8081	9203	10711	16%
Lake Delton	1059	1158	1466	1982	35%
Portage	7821	7896	8640	9728	13%
Reedsburg	4585	5038	5834	7827	34%
West Baraboo	563	846	1021	1248	22%

Source: U.S. Census

Regional Population Comparison



The community's attitude and acceptance of additional residential growth over the next several years will likely have an influence on its future population. Some new development occurred in the 1990s, but over the last several years the construction of new non-seasonal residential housing units appears to have virtually stopped. If this trend continues, it is likely that the City's population will decline over the next two decades. The slow growth in new housing units likely reflects the nature of the area's economy, with a booming tourist industry providing a boost to the tax base and funneling money into the community, but providing mainly seasonable jobs and relatively few alternative employment opportunities. With few employment incentives for families to move into the area, a significant increase in residential growth is unlikely. Due to the aging of the overall population, even a moderate increase in building activity will likely not result in a significant increase in overall population. Population projections through 2020 developed by the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) suggest that the City's population will begin to decline over the next two decades. DOA projections predicted a decline in the 2000 population as well, but the City's population actually increased slightly.

"The community's attitude and acceptance of additional residential growth over the next several years will likely have an influence on its future population"

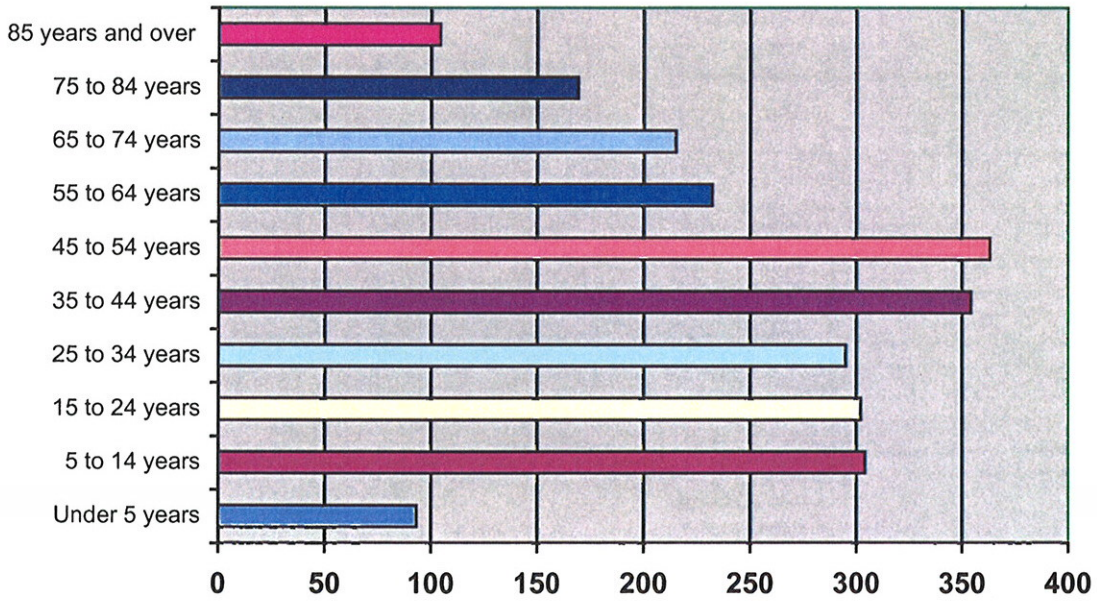
This was apparently due to annexation activity and limited residential development. With additional annexation and a more aggressive position regarding residential development, the projected decline in population would likely not occur.

Significant challenges and opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation face the City in achieving new growth plans. Principal among these is some of the very same physical conditions, which make the City so attractive as a premier tourism destination. Dramatic topography, including steep slopes and drainage ravines, are obstacles limiting development feasibility in some areas of the City. An additional challenge, limiting annexation opportunities, lies within the fact that large tracts of land adjacent to the City are under the ownership of the State of Wisconsin and other non-for-profit organizations with little motivation for coming into the City limits. A final reality facing the City is the fact that in outlying areas, many of the longstanding agricultural parcels have already been subdivided into large lots, 5 to 20 acres, for rural residences, vacation homes, and other uses. This practice has left only limited areas for more new urban designed residential development, in character and density, to occur and for new planned unit developments to occur.

Age, Gender & Ethnicity Distribution

The median age of residents of the City of Wisconsin Dells is 40.6, compared to 44.5 for Adams County, 38.0 for Columbia County, 37.3 for Sauk County and 36.0 for the State. Among surrounding communities, Dellona (37.7), Delton (36.9), and Fairfield (39.1) had lower median ages than the City. The Census also recorded 1,131 males (46.8%) and 1,287 females (53.2%) in the City of Wisconsin Dells. The following chart illustrates the City's population by age group:

Wisconsin Dells Population by Age Cohort



Although it is difficult to measure the actual population of the Dells vicinity during the peak tourist season, it is clear that the nearly 10,000 hotel rooms, cabins, and camp sites house a potential population far greater than the permanent population that indicated residency in Wisconsin Dells and Lake Delton in the 2000 Census. The Wisconsin Dells' Visitors and Convention Bureau indicates that the Wisconsin Dells/Lake Delton area has the capacity to house about 50,000 visitors per night, and that the average occupancy of hotel rooms during the peak season is 72 percent. Wisconsin Dells is in the unique position of having a relatively small population of less than 2,500 people, but having to plan its infrastructure and service systems to accommodate 15 to 20 times that amount at peak periods.

Age, Gender & Ethnicity Distribution

As with its overall population, the diversity of the Wisconsin Dells' population has changed very little over the last several decades as well. The racial mix of permanent residents has remained almost unchanged from 1990 to 2000. However, the ever-changing tourist population and temporary workforce likely adds a great deal of diversity to the area's population at any given point in time.

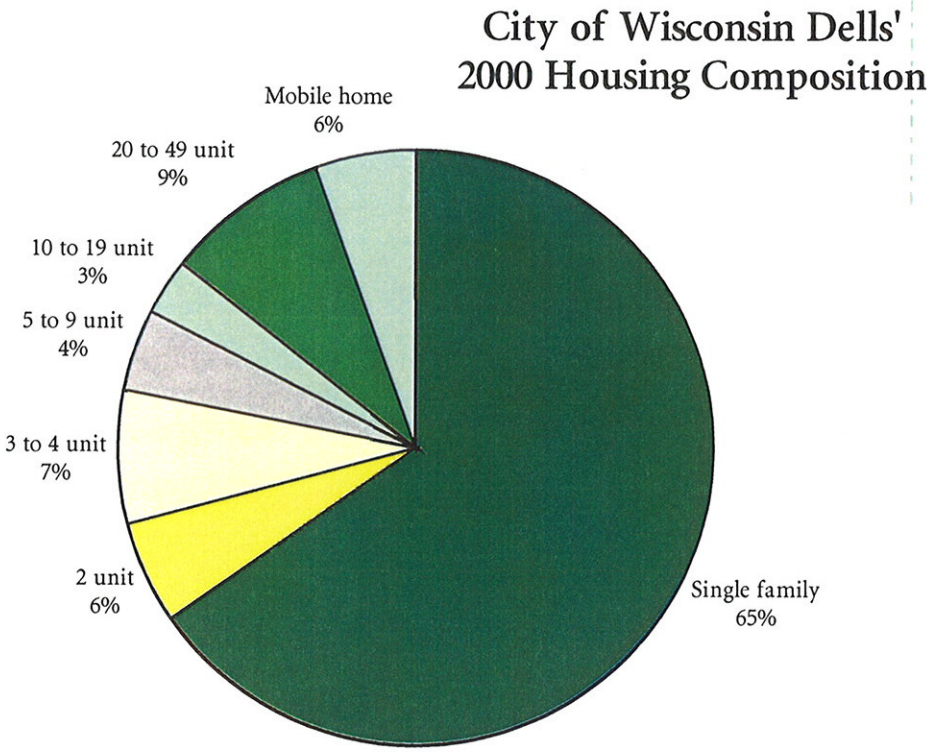
Wisconsin Dells Population by Race

	Year 1990	Year 2000
Total Population	2,398	2,418
White	2,362	2,359
Black / African American	0	9
American Indian & Alaskan Native	24	21
Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander*	6	6
Asian*	N/A	0
Other	1	8

Source: U.S. Census

Housing

The total number of housing units in Wisconsin Dells increased from 1,076 in 1990 to 1,179 in 2000 – a 9.6% increase. Over the same period, Adams County experienced a 13.7% increase, Columbia County experienced a 17.8% increase, and Sauk County experienced an 18.9% increase respectively. By a final comparison, the Village of Lake Delton experienced a 25.8% increase in new homes over the same period.



There were a total of 967 occupied housing units in the City of Wisconsin Dells in 1990, which increased to 1,025 in 2000. Detailed occupancy of these units breaks down as follows:

Wisconsin Dells Housing Occupancy				
Tenure	**1990**	**% (1990)**	**2000**	**% (2000)**
Owner occupied	621	57.7%	645	54.9%
Renter occupied	346	32.2%	380	32.4%
Vacant Units	109	10.1%	150	12.7%
Total Units	**1,076**		**1,175**	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000

Median Housing Values (MHV) and Rent Levels				
	1990 MHV	**2000 MHV**	**1990 Rent**	**2000 Rent**
Wisconsin Dells	$52,200	$117,833	$331	$383
Adams County	$47,000	$83,600	$320	$357
Columbia County	$55,600	$115,000	$356	$437
Sauk County	$55,200	$107,500	$353	$442
Wisconsin	$62,500	$112,200	$331	$540

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000

Household Income

The 2000 median household income in the City of Wisconsin Dells was $58,800. This figure compares to $33,408 for Adams County, $40,064 for Columbia County, $41,941 for Sauk County and $43,791 statewide. The table below compares household income in Wisconsin Dells to that of the entire three County region.

2000 Household Income	Wisconsin Dells	Adams County	Columbia County	Sauk County
< $15,000	15.6%	16.9%	11.7%	12.5%
$15,000 - $24,999	17.1%	18.2%	11.8%	13.3%
$25,000-$34,999	16.2%	17.1%	13.0%	13.7%
$35,000-49,999	15.7%	19.1%	19.1%	21.0%
$50,000-74,999	19.2%	18.2%	26.0%	23.1%
$75,000 or more	16.0%	10.2%	17.8%	16.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-3, Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000

Population Projections
The DOA has prepared population projections for the City of Wisconsin Dells based upon data up to and including the 2000 Census. Projections suggest continued growth loss for the City. In addition, an analysis of historical growth rates for the City, over the last 30 years, also finds a continuing trend of growth loss.

Official Population Projections						
Agency	1990*	2000**	2005	2010	2015	2000 – 2015
Wisconsin DOA	2,398	2,418	2,337	2,301	2,244	-137
Rate of Decrease		+0.08	-3.34%	-1.54%	-2.47%	-7.19%

Historic Population Counts					
Agency	1970	1980	1990	2000	1970 – 2000
U.S. Census	2,401	2,521	2,398	2,418	+17
Rate of Increase		+4.99%	-4.87%	+0.08%	+0.70%

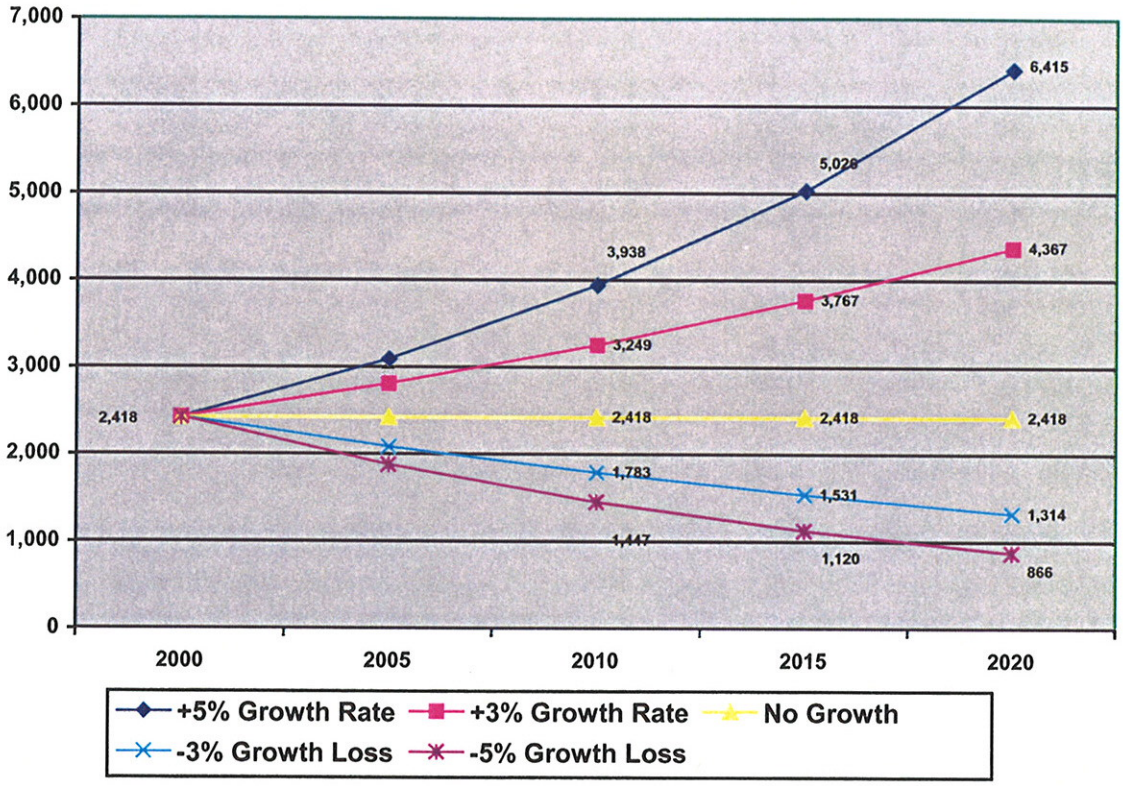
** U.S. Census*

Based upon the 2000 Census, recent growth loss trends, development interests, and the City's desire to pursue growth, it appears that new projections for the City are warranted. The following projections are offered for consideration to assist with the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan. Calculations where made on an annual basis based upon the projected rate.

Potential Rates of Population Growth					
	U.S. Census	Projections			
Growth Scenario	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
+5% Growth Rate	2,418	3,086	3,938	5,026	6,415
+4% Growth Rate	2,418	2,941	3,579	4,354	5,298
+3% Growth Rate	2,418	2,803	3,249	3,767	4,367
+2% Growth Rate	2,418	2,669	2,947	3,254	3,593
+1% Growth Rate	2,418	2,541	2,670	2,807	2,950
No Growth	2,418	2,418	2,418	2,418	2,418
-1% Growth Loss	2,418	2,299	2,186	2,079	1,977
-2% Growth Loss	2,418	2,185	1,975	1,785	1,614
-3% Growth Loss	2,418	2,076	1,783	1,531	1,314
-4% Growth Loss	2,418	1,971	1,607	1,310	1,068
-5% Growth Loss	2,418	1,871	1,447	1,120	866

Source: Vierbicher Associates, Inc.

City of Wisconsin Dells' Potential Alternative Growth Rates



Looking at broad population trends, with the baby-boomer segment of the general population beyond childbearing age and trends toward smaller households, one might find the "Reduced Growth" and "Moderate Growth" scenarios to be the most reasonable of the projections. However, at a micro level there are a host of additional factors that can impact population growth, including location, annexation and the efficiency of the regional transportation system, the quality of life and desirability of the community, and local government policies and attitudes toward growth.

Economic Issues

At the risk of overstating the obvious, Wisconsin Dells' economy rests heavily on the tourism industry. Studies commissioned by the Visitor Bureau estimate traveler expenditures by visitors in 1999 at nearly $600 million, supporting over 23,000 jobs. It is estimated that about 2.4 million people visit the area over the course of a year, with 1.3 million visiting between May and August.

> "Wisconsin Dells' economy rests heavily on the tourism industry"

The 1992 Economic Census counted a total of 127 retail establishments within the City, with 89 (70%) open the entire year. Retail establishments in existence at the time included 57 eating and drinking places (45% of total), 35 miscellaneous retail stores (28%), 12 food stores (10%), and 6 apparel and accessory stores (5%). The Economic Census also reported 129 taxable service industries, of which 73 (57%) are open year-round. This total includes 59 lodging places (46%), 35 amusement/recreation services establishments (27%), and 10 personal services (8%). These numbers have likely increased over the last decade.

Outside of the retail and personal service industries, most of which are geared toward tourism; the City's economy is much more limited. In a Community Profile prepared by Alliant Energy, a list of major employers and manufacturers includes Big Joe Manufacturing, Co. with an estimated 200 employees, and then several establishments employing between 4 and 20 people.

Input from the public as part of this planning process has indicated that there is some dissatisfaction regarding the lack of commercial services available for the resident population. Despite the retail and service focus of the local economy, residents must travel to other nearby communities for many of their day-to-day needs. The lack of grocery stores and non-tourist oriented clothing stores are just two examples.

Income, Employment and Education

As with general population data, much of the quantified information for the community regarding income, employment and education is available only for the permanent resident population of the City. An ever-changing seasonal workforce, much of which resides in seasonal housing units provided within the community, is not reflected in U.S. Census data, for instance. Therefore, the information provided here must be reviewed with these factors and these limitations on available data in mind.

According to 1990 U.S. Census data, the median household income of Wisconsin Dells residents in 1989 was $26,957, as compared to $28,360 for Columbia County overall and $29,442 for the State of Wisconsin. U.S. Census Bureau estimates for the year 2000 are $39,654 for the City, $41,718 for the County and $42,973 for the State.

2000 U.S. Census figures for Wisconsin Dells indicate that of workers 16 years of age or older, about 54% worked within Wisconsin Dells. As expected, the highest percentage of City residents are employed in the retail trade and entertainment industries. Retail trade and entertainment make up about 39% of the resident workforce, followed by manufacturing with 16%, educational & health services at 15%, construction at 7%, professional services at 7% and finance, insurance and real estate at 4%. About 20% of employed residents indicated travel times to work in excess of 20 minutes, revealing a substantial number of individuals who commute to other communities for employment. Over two-thirds indicated that they drove to work alone, while 16% carpooled, 10% walked, and 7% worked at home.

City of Wisconsin Dells - Industry of Employment

Industry	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	18	1%
Construction	82	7%
Manufacturing	207	16%
Wholesale trade	41	3%
Retail trade	130	10%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	43	3%
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	52	4%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	87	7%
Educational, health and social services	197	15%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	382	29%
Other services (except public administration)	55	5%
Public administration	35	3%

Source: U.S. Census

City of Wisconsin Dells - Occupation		
Occupation	**Number**	**Percent**
Management, professional, and related occupations	376	30%
Service occupations	251	19%
Sales and office occupations	298	24%
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	2	<1%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	93	8%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	229	18%
TOTAL Workers 16 and over	1294	*100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
**Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding*

The Wisconsin Dells Visitors & Convention Bureau indicates that the Wisconsin Dells/Lake Delton Area employs about 9,000 seasonal workers per year – about 8.5 times larger than the resident workforce.

Public Schools
The School District of Wisconsin Dells' consists of four schools – Wisconsin Dells High School, Spring Hill K-8, Lake Delton Elementary, and Neenah Creek. Combined enrollment as of January 2002 is 1,729. Enrollment projections obtained from the School District indicate a potential decline in school enrollment with 1,689 students anticipated in 2003 and 1,637 in 2004. These enrollment projections mirror population projections and anticipated overall growth within the City of Wisconsin Dells. As stated in the Issues and Opportunities Element, some new development occurred within the City in the 1990s, but over the last several years the construction of non-seasonal residential housing units has virtually stopped. If this trend continues, it is likely that the Wisconsin Dells population will decline over the next two decades. At the same time, the growth scenario for the Village of Lake Delton may differ, which would impact decisions about the entire School District not just the City of Wisconsin Dells. Lake Delton grew by nearly 36% between 1990 and 2000, while the Wisconsin Dells growth rate was just under 2% during this same period.

The Appleton-based firm Hoffman Corporation prepared an Existing Facilities Assessment Report for the Wisconsin Dells' School District in 2001. The information from the Assessment Report that follows is intended to address the Smart Growth requirement of describing the location, use and capacity of existing public facilities and providing an approximate timetable that forecasts the need to expand or rehabilitate existing facilities or create new facilities. While the baseline information provided here is sufficient for purposes of the Comprehensive Plan, it will be important to refer to the full report for detail and recommendations regarding site upgrades and maintenance, traffic flow and access along with other observations specific to each facility.

The Facilities Assessment Report notes that areas within the school facilities do not meet current guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) but have been "grandfathered" in because they were present prior to the enactment of ADA in 1994. Meeting the provisions of ADA will be a requirement of any remodeling, addition or facility replacement work in the future.

City of Wisconsin Dells – School Enrollment		
Population 3 years and Over Enrolled in School	504	100%
Nursery school, preschool	37	7%
Kindergarten	27	6%
Elementary (grades 1-8)	239	47%
High School (grades 9-12)	131	26%
Enrolled in college, undergraduate years	59	12%
Enrolled in graduate or professional school	11	2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

City of Wisconsin Dells – Educational Attainment		
Population 25 years and Over	1,732	*100%
Less than 9th grade	90	5%
9th to 12th grade	205	12%
High school graduate	617	36%
Some college	370	21%
Associate Degree	151	9%
Bachelor's degree	198	11%
Master's degree	53	3%
Professional school degree	46	2%
Doctorate degree	2	0.11%
Percent high school graduate or higher	83%	
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	17%	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
**Figures do not equal 100% due to rounding*

The above statistics can be used by the City and the community as a resource for general information about the City's population. More importantly, it paints an overall picture of the Wisconsin Dells community that is useful in preparing population forecasts and analyzing development trends. This information, together with input from the Plan Commission and information gathered through the public participation process, will form the basis for the goals, objectives and implementation strategies contained within this Plan.

Visioning / Public Participation Activities

The City of Wisconsin Dells provided several opportunities for citizens to get involved and have input into the development of this Plan. The City also completed several exercises at public meetings to help formulate a "vision" to guide the development and implementation of its Comprehensive Plan. The following is a discussion of these activities and the information and direction received as a result.

Public Participation Procedures Manual

At the onset of this process, the City adopted a Public Participation Procedures Manual to follow as the development of the Plan proceeds. The approved Manual is included in this Plan as Appendix 1. The Manual outlines the process by which the public was encouraged to participate.

Open Public Meetings

One component of the procedures requires that all Planning Commission meetings at which the Comprehensive Plan is discussed be open to the public. Several Planning Commission meetings were held over the duration of this process to discuss procedures and policies related to the Plan, help establish direction and a vision for the community, and discuss individual Plan Elements. All meetings during this process complied with the procedures set forth in the Public Participation Procedures Manual and the State's open meetings law.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

On January 8, 2001, the City Plan Commission participated in an initial activity commonly called a S.W.O.T. analysis, or "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats". This process involved a brainstorming session to generate a working list of items under each category, followed by a prioritization exercise to rank the importance of each of the factors. From each list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, Commission members were asked to individually select the three most important in each category. A tally of the number of times an item was prioritized provides an indication of the importance of that item to the participating group.

Listed below are the results of the S.W.O.T. analysis, including all items under each category that received "votes" from Commission members. A complete list of items considered is included as Appendix 2. As part of the exercise, the initial S.W.O.T. included a listing of "issues," which were items that could not be classified as a strength, weakness, opportunity or threat. These issues are also detailed below. Therefore, the exercise has been labeled a "S.W.O.T.I." analysis. The following are the results of the S.W.O.T.I.:

Strengths*	Weaknesses*

• Natural Scenery – Area and River (7)
• Accessible Location (6)
  – Interstate System
  – Amtrak
• Tourism and Revenue Brought In (3)
• Strong Business Community and Visitors Bureau (3)
• Name Recognition – "The Dells" (2)
• Available Food/Lodging/Entertainment (2)
• Part-Time Jobs for Youth and Extra Household Income (1)
• Rich History of Area (1)
	• Seasonal and Year-Round Housing; Lack of Moderate Income Housing (8)
	• Shortage of Peak Season Employees (7)
	• Transportation (3)
	  – One Bridge
	  – Road Layout
	• Reliance on Tourism Industry (2)
	• Lack of Public Transportation (2)
	• Lack of Reasonably Priced Land for Development (2)

SWOT

Opportunities*	Threats*
• More Growth, Including Entrepreneurial and Year-Round Tourism/Convention Opportunities (6) • Premier Resort Tax (.5% of Sales; Use for Infrastructure) (4) • Wisconsin River – Potential for Improvements for Public Access; Take Advantage of Natural Beauty. (4) • Annexation (3) • Development Along 13/16 Corridor (Adams/Portage) (2) • Sell Good Quality Product (2)	• Potential Increase in Size of Lands in Area Under Sovereign Nation Status; Unfair Competition from Tax Structure (7) • Potential for Police "Incidents" to Become P.R. Nightmare (3) • Softening of Economy (3) • Earlier School Year Start; Potential for Year-Round School (2) • Excessive Number of Government Entities in Area (2) • Over-Commercialization, i.e., Outgrow Market (2) • Absentee Business Owners with No Community Involvement (2) • Loitering in Downtown (2) • Being "Out-Marketed" for Tourism (1)

SWOT

Issues

- Municipal Relations Between the City and Neighboring Communities
- Teachers and School Administrators Living Outside of Community
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Child Abuse and Neglect

**The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of votes each item received.*
"Issues" were not prioritized.

Stakeholder Interviews

Another technique employed to help gather information from the public regarding community issues and concerns was the use of "stakeholder interviews" - focused interviews with a selected group of individuals representing a wide variety of interests within the community. Stakeholder interviews were conducted by Real World Research, Inc., with the assistance of Vierbicher Associates, Inc., and occurred on January 25 and 30, 2001. The complete Stakeholder Interview Summary Report, prepared by Real World Research, is included as Appendix 3. The executive summary from the report follows.

Executive Summary

- Stakeholders generated a large number of ideas and issues. Most comments focused on hopes for the future and goals they hoped the Plan would accomplish (over 180 comments).
- Stakeholders mentioned significantly more recent developments that caused them concern than recent developments that they were excited about (about 90 compared to 60 comments).
- When asked what recent events made them feel like things were headed in the right direction, the most common items focused on the Business Improvement District and downtown infrastructure improvements. A significant number of comments focused on improvements to traffic flow and the streets; increased attention to residential concerns; and the move towards year-round tourist activities.
- The most common items mentioned as a concern included changes to the mixture of downtown businesses, and the lack of a unified look or character to the Dells. Other concerns included safety concerns, lack of focus on residential issues, traffic, and a variety of employment issues.
- A significant number of stakeholders felt that attitudes were biggest barriers to getting things done in the Dells. A number of people also mentioned that financing would always be an issue.
- When asked how to make the planning process more effective, most people said that effective communication would be crucial and offered a number of specific suggestions for how to get the word out. A number of people also mentioned that it would be important to demonstrate that participation would have a direct effect on the planning process, while others suggested that the best way to get people motivated was to show how the Plan and its accomplishments would have an impact on people's direct interests.
- Participants in the interviews also offered a list of groups and individuals to involve in the planning process. There was significant overlap in many of the groups and individuals mentioned.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interpreting information gathered from the SWOTI and stakeholder interviews and using it to help guide the development of the Comprehensive Plan is crucial to the eventual implementation of the Plan and the creation of the environment envisioned by the community. In general, there appear to be concerns about the downtown and a feeling that the recent establishment of a Business Improvement District and commencement of infrastructure improvements is a positive move on the part of the City. There are concerns about the lack of residential growth in the City, particularly for families with moderate incomes, and an over-reliance on the tourism industry – although it is recognized that this will always be the driving force of the local economy. There are concerns about the local transportation system, although recent improvements are seen as positive steps. These exercises have identified a number of opportunities and ideas to help formulate a vision for the community's future.

Vision Statement

The SWOTI Analysis, Stakeholder Interviews, and other public discussion activities resulted in the City adopting the following Vision Statement for the City of Wisconsin Dells. This Statement will provide direction for the development of the goals, objectives, and implementation policies contained in this Plan, and should be referred to as a guide for City officials as decisions are made within the 20-year planning window associated with this Plan.

The City of Wisconsin Dells seeks to maintain and improve upon its unique character as a community that balances its position as the Midwest's premier recreation destination with its intimate residential environment and cultural heritage. The community is committed to providing visitors with a unique recreational experience, unsurpassed in quality, by fostering creativity, entrepreneurship, and a cutting-edge tourism industry. The community also strives to improve its quality of life and to encourage new residential growth through the promotion and preservation of its natural and cultural resources and by providing an appealing and inviting visual environment.

Comprehensive Plan Goals

- Provide general guidance and direction for future growth and development.
- Provide meaningful opportunities for the public to take part in important community issues to address land use decisions.
- Cooperate among nearby and overlapping units of governments.
- Communicate the importance of a healthy economy to all City functions.
- Provide a range of viable transportation alternatives.
- Maintain the highest level of service quality to protect and preserve public health and safety.

Guiding Principles for the City of Wisconsin Dells' Comprehensive Planning Program

I. Compact Growth
Direct most new development to areas currently served by public utilities and roads while providing sufficient additional arterial roads and trunk utilities to attract private investment and keep land prices competitive.

II. Neighborhoods
Continue to improve existing neighborhoods and districts while redeveloping blighted or obsolete properties, rehabilitating others and filling vacant or underutilized sites.

III. Natural Environment
Safeguard and improve environmental features as a means of promoting sustainable urban development, revitalization and quality of life.

IV. Municipal Growth
Capture as much regional growth as possible and expand the municipal tax base while improving neighborhood quality and the natural environment.

V. Transportation
Build a diversified transportation system that supports other goals of this Plan.

VI. Regional Planning
Encourage adjacent towns and villages to adopt plans and zoning consistent with the preservation of agriculture, protection of natural resources and cost-efficient urban growth and assist to do so at the City level.