

8. Economic development

This section presents information about the economy within the Town of Marshall. Economic development, which can be defined as the type and level of business activity within an area, is often based on a combination of factors including market forces, regulation, and the extent of the local government’s encouragement and participation. The Town of Marshall has historically been a rural town with an economic base consisting primarily of agricultural activity revolving around dairying. To this day, Marshall still has the largest number of farms in Rusk county and this trend is likely to continue given the suitability of the land for farming and growing crops.

In recent years, however, there have been a variety of small businesses and entrepreneurial endeavors in the community in addition to farming and agriculture. Much business growth concerning residents of Marshall, also occurs outside the town in areas where infrastructure is more readily available. Different types of development in surrounding areas however, can have an impact on Town growth, quality of life, and even its ability to pay for Town services. For this reason, Marshall wishes to pursue economic development opportunities that will enhance the rural character of the area and assure the community the means to provide for the services and infrastructure needs of present and future residents.

Labor force and economic base

Earnings analysis. In order to understand the existing wage-earning realities within Marshall, it is important to understand “earnings” data and to compare Town of Marshall data to the County and the State.

“Earnings” are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as the algebraic sum of wages or salary income and net income from self-employment, representing the amount of income received regularly before deductions for personal income taxes, Social Security, bond purchases, union dues, Medicare deductions, etc. Table 8.1 compares mean (average) earnings, and median (middle) household and per capita income for households and individuals in communities within the Marshall area and Rusk County.

| Municipality | Mean Earning Per Household | Median Income Per Household | Median Per Capita Income |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Town of Marshall | \$35,670 | \$33,281 | \$11,411 |
| Village of Sheldon | \$38,790 | \$28,125 | \$13,562 |
| Village of Conrath | \$36,328 | \$30,417 | \$16,838 |
| Rusk County | \$30,071 | \$31,344 | \$15,563 |

Note: These statistics are from the last Census in 2000 and have increased in recent years for all municipalities listed above. While updated data is not available for individual municipalities, Rusk County 2007 data reveals that the median household income was \$36,955 compared to the state median household income in 2007 that was \$50,567. This last report is prior to the 2009 recession when Rusk County had the highest unemployment in the state for three consecutive months last spring, and as of October 2009 still had double digit unemployment throughout the entire county, which inevitably impacts households in the Town of Marshall, as well.

Percent in labor force and unemployment. Table 8.2 gives an overview of some of the characteristics of the population and labor force in the Town of Marshall, per 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data.

| Item | Number | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Population 16 years and over | 434 | 100% |
| In labor force | 293 | 68% |
| Civilian labor force | 293 | 68% |
| Employed | 284 | 65% |
| Unemployed | 9 | 2% |
| Percent of civilian labor force | 3 | (X) |
| Armed forces | 0 | 0 |
| Not in labor force | 141 | 33% |

The labor force is defined as members of the population 16 years or older who are employed, or if unemployed, are looking for jobs.

Employment by occupation. Table 8.3 provides information regarding the type of occupation in which Town of Marshall residents were employed in 2000. The management, professional and related occupations was the largest category of occupation that employed Marshall residents, followed by production, transportation and material moving occupations. Interestingly, farming, fishing and forestry occupations was listed as the occupation employing the least number of Marshall residents.

| Occupation | Number | Percent |
|---|--------|---------|
| Management, professional, and related occupations | 100 | 35.2 |
| Service occupations | 30 | 10.6 |
| Sales and office occupations | 46 | 16.2 |
| Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations | 16 | 5.6 |
| Construction, extraction, and maintenance | 31 | 10.9 |
| Production, transportation, and material moving occupations | 61 | 21.5 |

Data is also available from the 2000 U.S. Census that lists the class of workers in the Town of Marshall, displayed in Table 8.4.

| Class | Number | Percent |
|--|--------|---------|
| Private wage and salary workers | 158 | 56% |
| Government workers | 27 | 10% |
| Self-employed workers in own not incorporated business | 93 | 33% |
| Unpaid family workers | 6 | 2% |

Future industry projections. Data is not collected on industry projections at the town or county levels, but it is useful for planning purposes and future economic development to know what types of industries will be requiring future employees. Table 8.5 details industry projections for northwest Wisconsin from 2004 to 2014. Given that the Township is located in the southeastern most corner of Rusk County, the proximity of potential employers in Chippewa, Eau Claire and Taylor counties, in addition to Rusk, provides more employment opportunities.

According to the data, the Education and Health Services industry is projected to grow the most in the region at 21%. Within that category, the Ambulatory Health Care Services sector is projected to grow by 41.5%. The only industry projected to lose employment is the Manufacturing industry, which within the past year (2009) has seen serious declines in all of Rusk County's major manufacturing plants, due to the recession that is impacting the housing and construction industries.

Environmentally contaminated sites

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Environmental Remediation and Redevelopment Program maintain a list of contaminated sites, or "brownfields," in the state. The DNR defines brownfields as "abandoned or under-utilized commercial or industrial properties where expansion or redevelopment is hindered by real or perceived contamination."

Examples of brownfields might include a large abandoned industrial site or a small corner gas station. Properties listed in the DNR database are oftentimes self-reported, and do not necessarily represent a comprehensive listing of possible brownfields in a

community. With over 300 identified sites in Rusk County and several in the Village of Sheldon and vicinity, there are currently no open sites in the Town of Marshall.

Local economic base analysis

The economic base in the Town of Marshall is mainly agricultural, without a defined commercial center or area. The community supports the development of agriculture-related businesses that are in harmony with existing land uses and are complimentary to the agricultural activities that currently exist in the Town, as well as other appropriate scale businesses for a rural township concerned with maintaining its "rural character." As shown in the list below, Township residents have begun, and are running more than 25 other types of businesses, in addition to numerous family farms, that all contribute to economic development in the Township. These include:

- several home and commercial construction companies
- a buggy refurbishing shop
- several furniture factories
- a saw mill
- an apiary (honey business)
- a consignment auction business
- an auto repair shop
- two lime businesses
- a concrete business
- a printing shop
- a Christian bookstore
- an excavating and heavy equipment operator business
- a bar that serves food



Table 8.5 Industry Projections for the Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Area, 2004-2014 (Source: WI Dept of Workforce Development)
(Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor and Washburn Counties)

| Industry Title | 2004 Estimated Employment | 2014 Projected Employment | 2004-2014 Employment Change | 2004-2014 Percentage Change |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Total Non-Farm Employment | 69,700 | 76,620 | 6,920 | 9.9% |
| Construction, Mining, Natural Resources | 3,610 | 4,140 | 530 | 14.7% |
| Manufacturing | 12,720 | 12,560 | -160 | -1.3% |
| Food Manufacturing | 1,600 | 1,630 | 30 | 1.9% |
| Plastics and Rubber Products Manufacturing | 1,030 | 1,120 | 90 | 8.7% |
| Machinery Manufacturing | 1,510 | 1,430 | -80 | -5.3% |
| Trade | 10,680 | 11,330 | 650 | 6.1% |
| Food and Beverage Stores | 2,160 | 2,270 | 110 | 5.1% |
| Transportation and utilities | 3,610 | 3,950 | 340 | 9.4% |
| Financial Activities | 2,310 | 2,540 | 230 | 10.0% |
| Education and Health Services | 13,540 | 16,380 | 2,840 | 21.0% |
| Ambulatory Health Care Services | 2,070 | 2,930 | 860 | 41.5% |
| Nursing and Residential Care Facilities | 2,280 | 2,570 | 290 | 12.7% |
| Leisure and Hospitality | 7,990 | 9,170 | 1,180 | 14.8% |
| Information/Professional Services/Other Services | 7,160 | 8,100 | 940 | 13.1% |
| Government | 8,080 | 8,450 | 370 | 4.6% |

- local tourism and campground businesses
- a midwifery business
- an agronomy business
- a milk hauling business
- logging businesses
- a pottery studio
- dog grooming and dog training business
- several plant and produce businesses
- a distributor of natural vitamins
- a business involving making and selling rugs

Strengths and weaknesses for attracting/retaining business.

Strengths include: 1) a strong agricultural sector; 2) well-suited for home-based businesses; 3) natural resource based (river and streams) for provision of outdoor recreation; and 4) a strong entrepreneurial spirit, as evidenced in the variety of businesses existing throughout the Township. Weaknesses are few other than a small and dispersed population, which for many of the above businesses, is not problematic. Another current weakness concerns limited telecommunications amenities (e.g., high speed internet and cellular telephone service) which can constrain the formation of additional home-based businesses in the Township, though as reported under the Utilities section, is vastly improving.

Findings from the surveys

Town of Marshall survey. Given the agricultural nature of the township, the survey only addressed a few questions concerning economic development. The committee was interested in knowing whether or not residents/landowners believed that the Township should consider the investment of public funds for services when other kinds of private development was proposed. The majority, 51%

disagreed, 17% agreed, and 33% indicated they didn't know. Table 8.6 lists the types of businesses that residents/landowners felt the most important to attract for economic development in the Town.

| Business | # Responses | Business | # Responses |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Agriculture | 73 | Tourism businesses | 28 |
| Light industry/ manufacturing | 56 | Retail development | 22 |
| Service businesses | 35 | Heavy industry/ manufacturing | 15 |
| Private development | 29 | High tech industries | 14 |

In addition to the types of businesses that the Town should attract to the area, listed in Table 8.6, other suggestions included “home-based businesses” and “logging businesses (e.g., sawmills and other wood using industries).” Regarding what concerns about economic development residents/landowners had, responses included:

- “Not enough jobs in the area.”
- “I am hopeful that economic development will occur in the near future and that there will be opportunities for people to work and live here with a good quality of life.”
- “It’s away from big industry so there is a need to develop what works in our area.”
- “Recreation land use set beyond agriculture uses. Look at how to promote tourism to the area – it is the future!”

- *“I am afraid the people who were able to do as they pleased on their land now want to tell others how to use theirs.”*

Rusk County survey responses. When respondents were asked if Rusk County should focus on creating new economic development and job opportunities or simply retain existing jobs without attempting to attract new job opportunities, 65% of Marshall respondents indicated that “both” should be done.

In selecting the top five job opportunities that they felt were most suitable for development in the county, the Marshall responses, listed from the top priority to the least, were:

- Light manufacturing/industrial (62%)
- Any living wage job (43%)
- Health care related (41%)
- Forestry related (41%)
- Recreation related (40%)
- Agricultural related (35%)
- Education related (35%)
- Tourism related (33%)
- Heavy manufacturing/industrial (32%)
- Green/bio-energy related (26%)

Discussion of the findings

While the Town of Marshall has historically had the most farms and land in agriculture of any of the other townships in Rusk County, it is interesting to note that in the 2000 U.S. Census only 16 residents in the Township identified their primary occupation as being in farming, fishing and forestry related occupations. But it is also during this

period of time, and the prior decade (1990 to 2000), that farmers in the area who had been farming for many years, were retiring from farming. And often the children of these farmers, instead of taking over the family farm, were going away to college and/or were moving to larger cities and urban areas where they could earn more money than they would realize from farming, at that point in time..

There were many farms that were sitting idle as it was difficult to sell a farmstead for market value. It is also during this last decade (2000-2010) that many Amish families have been moving into the area and buying many of these farms. While many of these Amish families engage in a variety of entrepreneurial business ventures, such as building and operating furniture factories and a buggy refurbishing shop, many are also farming, and making a living off the land. Thus, with the next census it will be interesting to see if there is an increase in the number of individuals who list their occupation as farming, fishing and forestry occupations.

A major concern that impacts economic development and the ability of small businesses to conduct business is the lack of high speed internet and cellular telephone services, as indicated under the Utilities and Community Facilities section of the survey. However, since the survey was administered in the spring of 2009, steps have been taken to resolve these infrastructure issues.

While comments throughout the survey often focused on the lack of jobs in the Township, it is interesting to see the variety of businesses that have been started and are providing a livelihood for many of the Township residents. As one person commented, *“It’s away from big industry so there is a need to develop what works in our area.”* Evidently, a number of Township residents have followed this advice, which only goes to show that in difficult economic times, such as we

have experienced this past year with many of the larger manufacturing plants in the area laying off hundreds of workers, local ingenuity can come to the forefront in providing economic opportunities for many of our Township residents.

Recommendations

Table 8.7 lists goals, objectives and policies concerning the economic development element.

| <p align="center">Table 8.7 Economic Development Goals & Objectives</p> |
|---|
| <p>Goal 1: Ensure a business climate that is compatible with the agricultural environment of the Town.</p> |
| <p>Objective 1.1 Encourage businesses that maintain the peace and quiet of the Town. Objective 1.2 Attract and retain businesses that compliment the agricultural environment and improve the employment and income base of the Town.</p> |
| <p>Goal 2: Promote and maintain the economic base in the Town of Marshall</p> |
| <p>Objective 2.1 Ascertain that possible needs for economic development are met, particularly telecommunications capabilities. Objective 2.2 Foster home-based businesses through revolving loan funds from various relevant government programs. Policy 2.1 (a) Support opportunities for farm family businesses, home occupations and agriculturally related businesses to assist farm families. Policy 2.1 (b) Investigate and inform town residents of federal, state, or private funding opportunities to support small business ventures.</p> |



Maple syruping in the Township

