

City of Darlington Comprehensive Plan 2023 - 2033

Draft for Public Comment

**Public Comment period:
November 23rd, 2022 - January 3rd, 2023**

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Darlington Vision 2032

Vision Statement: “Darlington, while maintaining its small-town culture, will improve its high quality of life, housing options, and natural resource amenities in order to attract industry and residents and be a repeat destination for visitors.”

The above vision statement is a response to the core values identified by Darlington residents and stakeholders and represents a desired future state for the city. The following core values represent the guiding principles for how Darlington makes decisions and how Darlington best views itself and what it offers residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Core Value: Diversity of Housing Availability

Residents and city leadership recognize that housing of all types is in demand. The economic benefits of a diverse housing stock in the community enables population growth, school enrollment, increased labor force, and industry attraction. The city must establish plans to increase life-cycle housing options for senior living, single-family homes, apartments, accessory dwelling units, and condominiums. In doing so, the city will create housing flexibility that attracts new residents and retains current. With deliberate attention, Darlington will thrive with housing availability.

Core Value: Inclusivity

With economic success, Darlington has become a center for immigrant populations who are now a part of the fabric of Darlington. Darlington recognizes the value these residents provide, and continues to appreciate their contributions by considering their needs. These citizens desire to be a greater part of the community, which will strengthen the city. They contribute significantly to school enrollment, local labor force, and community tax base. If immigrant populations prosper, the city will prosper as well. They are part of the “tight-knit” community that makes Darlington a caring town.

Core Value: Intergovernmental Coordination

Being the county seat comes with advantages and responsibilities. As many county-owned properties are located within the city, the two governmental bodies must be flexible to allow for progress over time. Open communication is imperative to creating a culture for success. There are several county-owned properties expected to undergo change in the upcoming years. Clear and open communication with the county and Darlington Township is necessary to planning for and creating the best solutions for future land use in Darlington.

Core Value: Outdoor Recreation

Darlington has long been called “The Pearl of the Pecatonica” and its rural open spaces are cited as the purpose for visiting Darlington. During the public engagement process, residents identified the river, campgrounds, and outdoor recreation as vital opportunities. Making the river more attractive, accessible, and promoting the activities around it is a priority. With strong experience around ATVs, the outdoor culture will be expanded to include a multitude of recreation options for visitors to enjoy the surrounding open space. Darlington will celebrate the rural nature of the area through its promotion. Outdoor recreation is a vital part of the community. will provide economic benefits and will be leveraged when the city invests in it.

Core Value: Small Projects

During the public engagement process residents voiced many attainable projects that can improve the quality of life in Darlington. These projects are reasonable with proper focus, and many can be achieved at low costs or with investments of time. This plan identifies incremental development as a need. Many projects can be solved through conversation and matching opportunities. The city leadership must value small changes, be open to experimentation, and celebrate small wins. These projects will demonstrate action can be used as a blueprint toward success with larger initiatives.

Core Value: The Power of Industry

Revenue from industry contributes to the city's well-being. Darlington has worked hard to establish areas for industrial growth. The city and Lafayette County are well-established to strengthen their relationship in the dairy and cheese sectors and the city positioned as a regional hub. This will work alongside small business development. The city should continue to work to incentivize and promote these areas to benefit from a tax base intentionally positioned through productive industry.

The Planning Process

The Darlington comprehensive planning process brought community stakeholders and residents together to collectively discuss city resources, in order to create a unique, vibrant, and resilient future for the City of Darlington based on the community's desires. This planning process was completed by Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWWRPC) in coordination with the Darlington Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, City of Darlington Planning Commission, and City Common Council.

The planning process included stakeholder identification and engagement, data collection, a review of existing local plans, and extensive community outreach to gather resident and stakeholder input through interviews, public input sessions, and a community survey. That input, along with the most relevant data, is incorporated into the following plan to provide a community-informed and directed vision and guide for the city over the next ten years.

This plan should also be used in tandem with the recent Outdoor Recreation Plan (2020) and the Residential Housing Plan (2021). These plans offer greater details on those subjects.

Community Input

Table 1: Community Input Results

Darlington Community Input	
Public Meetings	Attendants
May 17 - Vision	38
May 24 - Community Resources	35
May 31 - Land Use & Opportunities	30
All Meeting Stats	
Total Attendance	103
Average Per Meeting	34.3
Public Survey Response	
Total Responses	630

A survey was available for all residents and community stakeholders to provide input into the Comprehensive Plan. The survey was available online and paper copies were also made available. Information on access to the survey was distributed via flyers, City website, the *Republican-Journal* newspaper, social media, and in the utility bills that went out in April, 2022. The surveys were available in both English and Spanish and was available between April 4th and May 8th. The results of the survey were used to frame questions for the open house meetings.

Three open house format meetings were held between May 17th and May 31st, 2022. These meetings allowed one-on-one and group conversations with residents around key topics including: Visioning, Economic Development, Community Resources, Leadership, and Land Use among other topics. The meetings were held on Tuesday evenings from 4:00 – 8:00pm at the Municipal Building Gym. There were three to four SWWRPC staff members present to lead the discussions. Spanish translators were on site to assist with the Spanish speaking population and a food truck was present to attract participants.

In addition, on May 17, SWWRPC staff met with outgoing Seniors at Darlington High School to gain a greater understanding of their perspective of Darlington and their plans for the future. A paper survey was completed by 47 students. The results provided information on community issues and retention of youth.

To provide guidance and to supplement public input, a steering committee reviewed and commented on survey and meeting results, as well as preliminary vision, core values, and projects within this plan. The Steering Committee was made up of members from the community, the Darlington Main Street/Chamber of Commerce, Lafayette County, industry leaders, the City of Darlington, and the City Common Council.

Public Notice, Hearing, and Adoption

On November 23rd, 2022 a Class 1 public notice was published in the *Republican Journal* to inform residents and stakeholders that a Draft of the Comprehensive Plan was available for review for the next 30 days. Following the 30-day notice, the planning commission held a public hearing to hear comments and suggestions related to the draft plan on XXXX XXth, 2023. Following the public hearing, the plan commission took action to recommend the City Common Council adopt the Comprehensive Plan. The City Common Council adopted the Comprehensive Plan on January XXrd, 2023.

Table 2: Community Meeting Schedule

Darlington Comprehensive Plan Update Meeting Schedule	
Public Participation Plan Adoption	February 15, 2022
Steering Committee Kick Off Meeting	March 24th, 2022
Steering Committee Data Review	May 10th, 2022
High School Discussion and Survey	May 17th, 2022
Open House - Vision	May 17th, 2022
Open House - Community Resources	May 24th, 2022
Open House - Land Use	May 30th, 2022
Steering Committee Vision and Core Values Meeting	June 21st, 2021
Steering Committee Update Meeting	August 30th, 2022
Steering Committee Plan Draft Review Meeting	November 14th, 2022
Draft notice published and available for public comment	November 23rd, 2022
Plan Commission - Public Hearing	
City Council - Plan Adaption Approval	

Project Scope

Resiliency

A more rapidly changing and developing world has brought global challenges to the front door of many rural communities. Smaller communities tend to struggle with change, and capacity issues handicap the ability to allow for change. This leaves little opportunity to stabilize and become proactive on long-term matters and intentionally focused on being resilient.

In Wisconsin, a changing climate is expected to result in greater precipitation and an increase in average temperature. Impacts of this change are likely to result in more extreme weather-related events with greater impacts to the environment, private property, and infrastructure.¹ This is especially valid in Darlington where flooding has been a persistent challenge, and will likely continue.

Economic downturns have also shown to be a more significant challenge to rural areas. In the eleven years following the Great Recession 2007 – 09, rural areas recover slower than their urban counterparts in the same region of the United States². Small communities, such as Darlington, struggle to recover from economic setbacks in part due to less diversified economies. This plan stresses the importance to be diverse.

To address this, questions and accompanying data were presented to residents and stakeholders to facilitate discussions on how the community can build resiliency and a focus on what is within its control. Focusing on what the city can control allows the community to withstand difficult times or situations, and emerge stronger. Resiliency building is challenging and takes time. The goals of this plan are based on community input, honest evaluations of city leadership and services, and a desire by the city to build resiliency.

¹ Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts. *Wisconsin's Changing Climate: Impacts and Adaptation*. 2018. <https://wicci.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2011-wicci-report.pdf>

² <https://equitablegrowth.org/gaps-in-u-s-rural-and-urban-economic-growth-widened-in-the-post-great-recession-economy-with-implications-amid-the-coronavirus-recession/>

Planning Elements

Wis. Statute 66.1001 outlines nine elements required to be included in a community's comprehensive plan. This plan addresses those nine elements in four chapters. Each chapter had a dedicated public meeting supported by survey input and data collection. Each chapter identifies community assets and needs, followed by corresponding goals, objectives, and actions associated with each chapter's planning elements. The following chapters and their planning elements are listed here:

- Chapter: Darlington at a Glance – Issues and Opportunities.
- Chapter: Economic Development – Tourism, Housing, and Economic Development
- Chapter: Community Resources - Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation
- Chapter: Leadership - Leadership, and Governance
- Chapter: Land Use
- Chapter: Plan Implementation

Darlington at a Glance



Image 1: Darlington 1910 and 2022

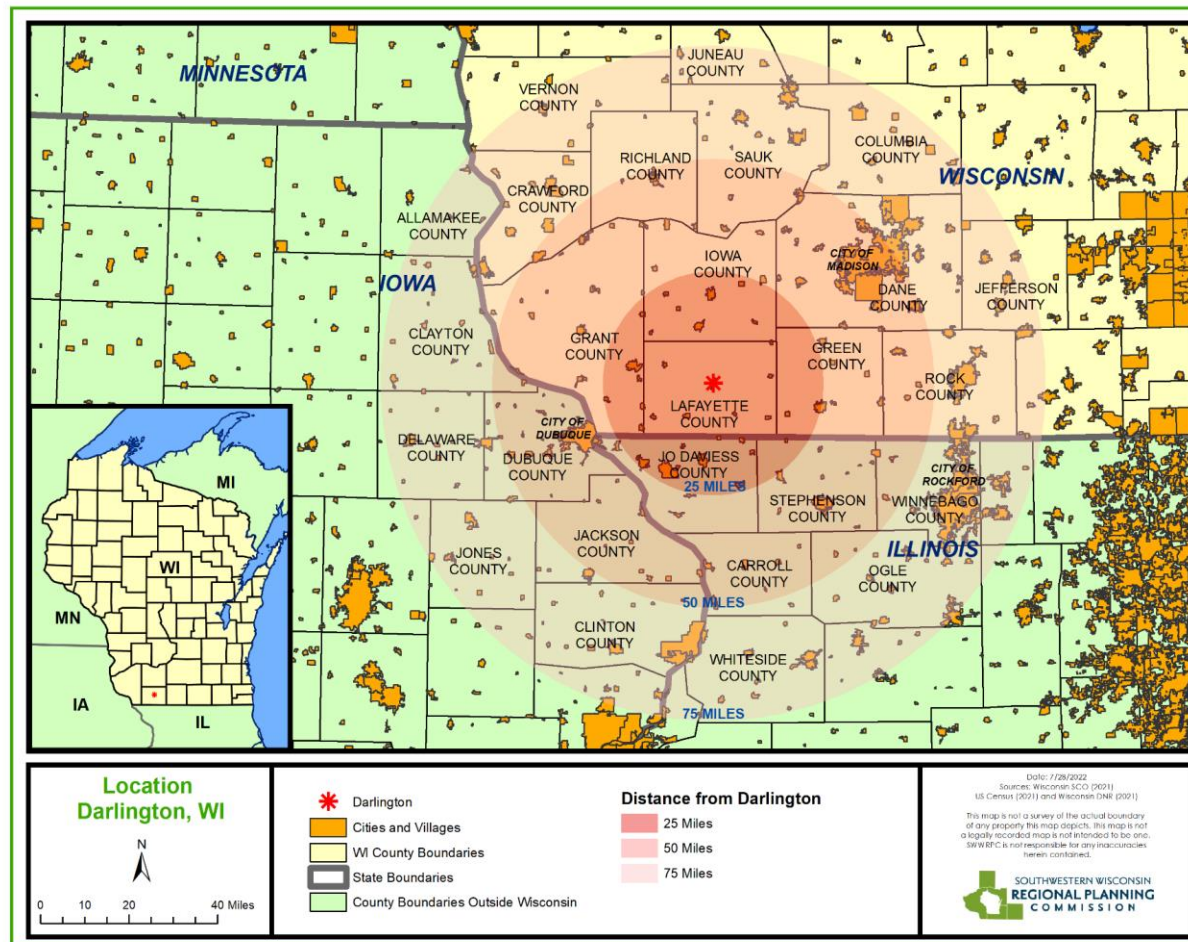
Darlington is located in the center of Lafayette County in southwest Wisconsin and serves as the county seat. The Pecatonica River flows through Darlington and the city has long been called “The Pearl of the Pecatonica.” Darlington began as a small village in the 1840s and began to prosper when the railroad arrived in 1856. Soon after it became the county seat and home of the county courthouse due to its central location in the county. The town changed its name from “Centre” to Darlington in 1869 after early founder Joshua Darling. Since that time, it has been a community dependent on agriculture and county government. It has maintained modest growth continually, with a 2020 population of 2,462. It is the most populous city in Lafayette County.

The city has a total area of 1.65 square miles and is located along Highway 23, a north-south highway. It is located west of Yellowstone Lake State Park and is situated among the rolling terrain of the Wisconsin Driftless Area. Lafayette County proudly boasts that it has no stoplights. Due to the rural nature of the area, it has formed an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) friendly culture. The flooding of the Pecatonica River has been an issue throughout the city’s history. However, the city has remained proactive and has worked to mitigate the impacts within the city limits.

The city has focused on industrial growth on its southern edge for the past twenty years, and has attracted a large number of Hispanics brought by the jobs created in the dairy and cheese industry. Today, twenty percent of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino and 43 percent of the school’s enrollment. These residents are part of the community today and offer great benefits.

Darlington became a Wisconsin Main Street Community in 1996 and has maintained an attractive Main Street, courthouse grounds, and is home to the Lafayette County Fairgrounds. Darlington proudly hosts numerous annual events throughout the year. It is appointed with a strong and stable school district, library, and fire department.

Map 1: Darlington Location



Issues and Opportunities

Issues

A primary goal of gathering public input and conducting analysis on economic and demographic data is to identify significant issues and opportunities that are or are likely to impact the city in the coming years. This section provides an overview of the most relevant opportunities and issues the city will need to address, including diversifying and aging demographics, community capacity (revenue, volunteers, etc.), climate change pressures, and overall resiliency towards economic downturns. Identifying and exploring these opportunities and issues is vital for the city to understand its current situation and to develop a plan for the next 10 years.

Declining and Aging Population

During the public survey an aging and declining population were the highest concerns among residents. Darlington's population in 2020 was 2,462 as reported by the U.S. Census.³ This is an increase of approximately 227 residents since 1990. According to the DOA, the community is projected to lose residents from 2030 to 2040.⁴ The amount of Hispanic or Latino in Darlington has brought significant change increasing from 27 residents in 2000 to 584 in 2020. This has made a population stable that would otherwise show a noteworthy population loss.

Darlington's stable population numbers are to be welcomed as population loss has become common in rural America. This is directly attributed to the Hispanic and Latino population increase. These numbers highlight the importance of welcoming new residents in the community and encouraging future housing development to support the need for a growing workforce.⁵ The following charts and tables show a changing population.

³ US Census Bureau (1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020).

⁴ Wisconsin Department of Administration. (2013). Wisconsin Population & Household Projections. Retrieved 1/5/2021 from https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/Population_Projections.aspx

⁵ County Age-Sex Population Projections, 2010 - 2040, Final Release, Components of Change by Decade (2013). Demographic Services Center, Division of Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin

Figure 1: Darlington Total Population, 1980- 2040

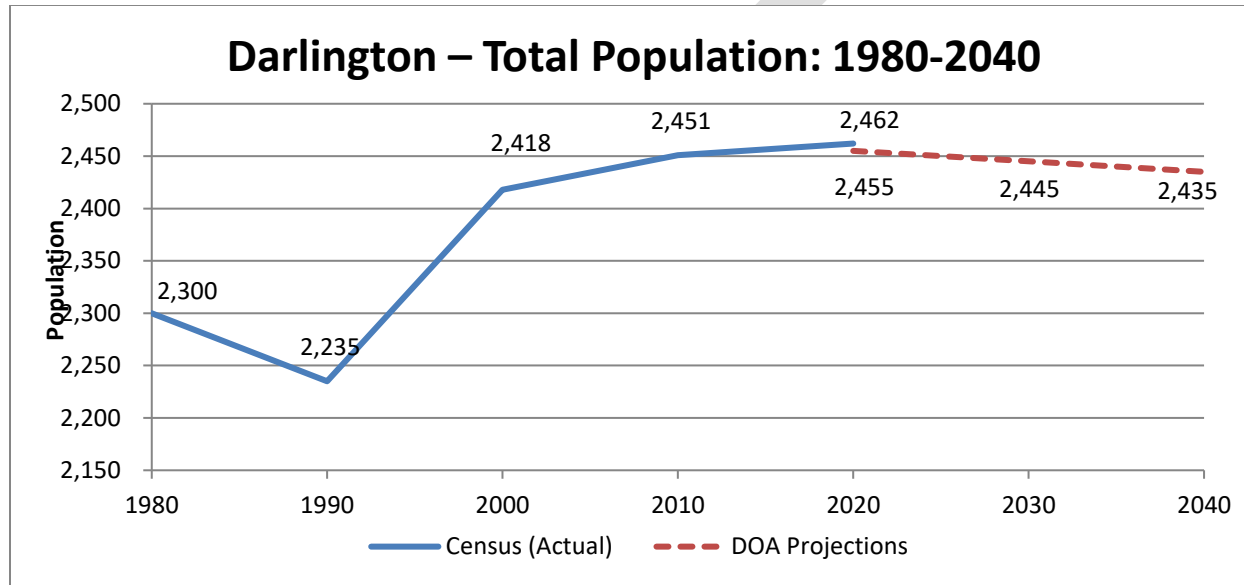


Table 3: Darlington Population, 1980- 2040

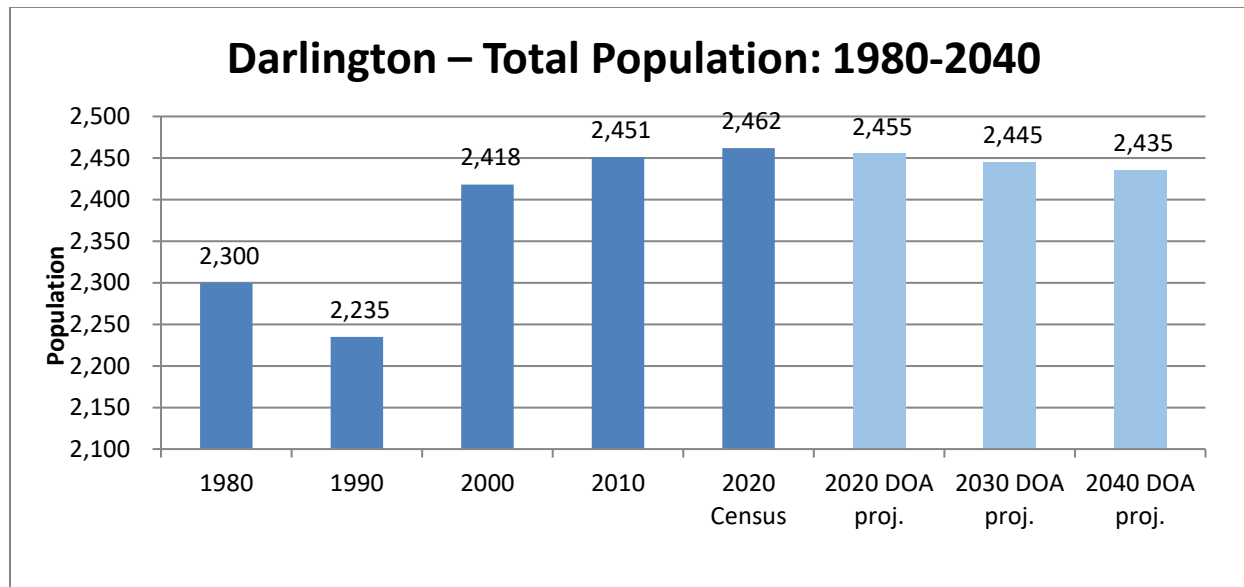


Figure 2: Darlington Population Change by Age Groups 1980 - 2040

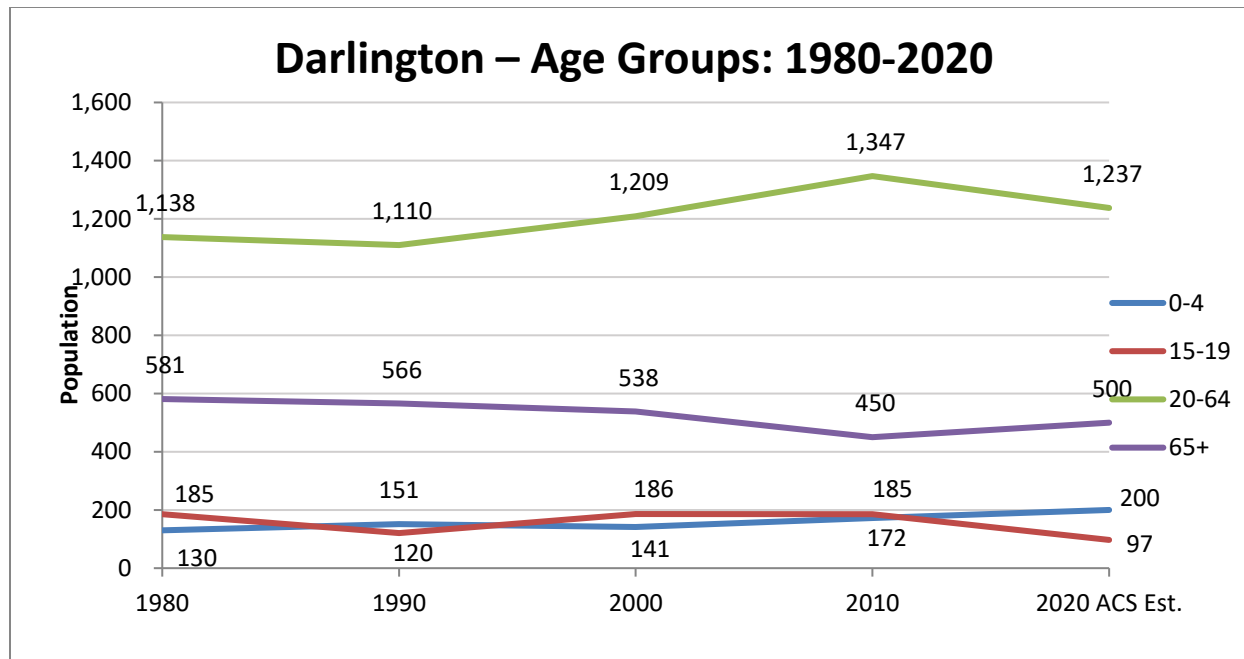


Table 4: Darlington Population Change by Age Groups 1980 - 2040

Age groups	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020 ACS Est.
0-4	130	151	141	172	200
Change	-	21	(10)	31	28
% change	-	16.15%	(6.62%)	21.99%	16.28%
15-19	185	120	186	185	97
Change	-	(65)	66	(1)	(88)
% change	-	(35.14%)	55.00%	(0.54%)	(47.57%)
20-64	1,138	1,110	1,209	1,347	1237
Change	-	(28)	99	138	(110)
% change	-	(2.46%)	8.92%	11.41%	(8.17%)

65+	581	566	538	450	500
Change	-	(15)	(28)	(88)	50
% change	-	(2.58%)	(4.95%)	(16.36%)	11.11%

Figure 3: Darlington Hispanic or Latino Population 1980 - 2020

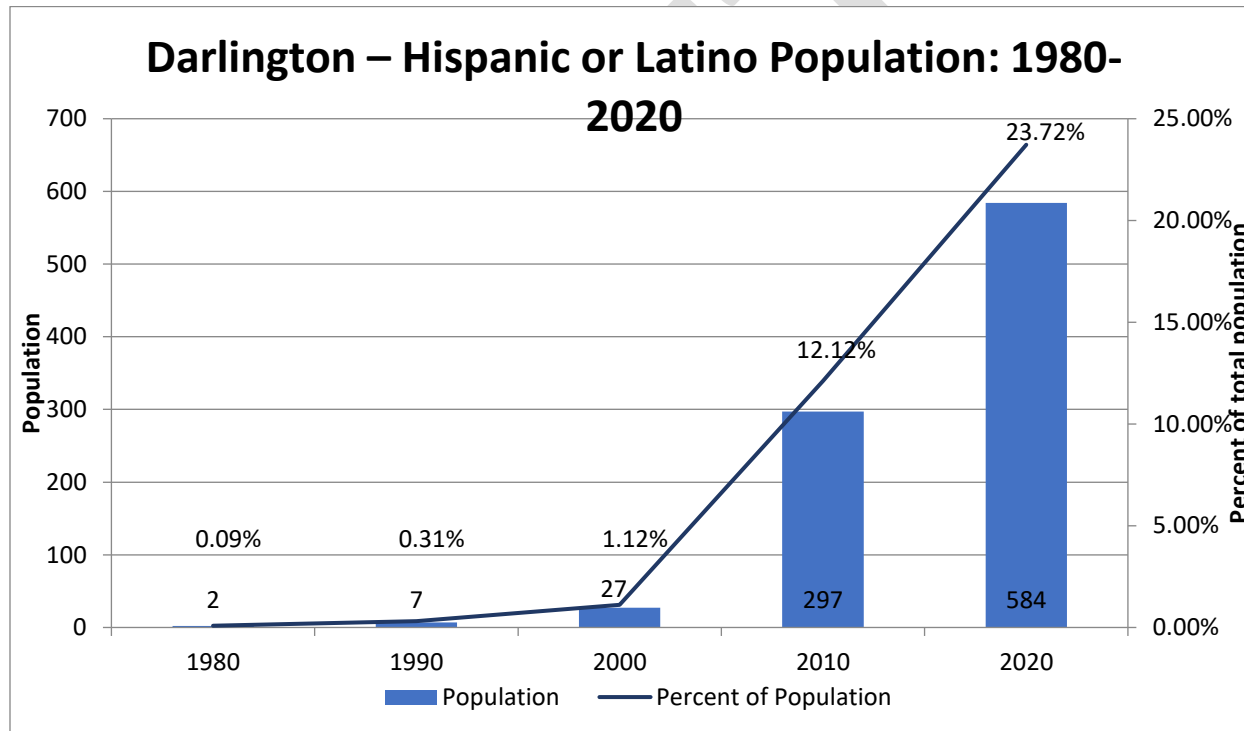


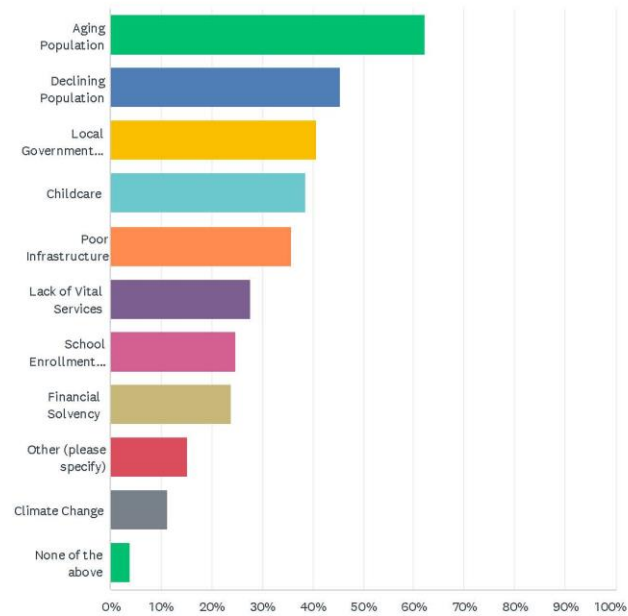
Table 5: Darlington Hispanic or Latino Population 1980 - 2020

Hispanic Population	1980 Census	1990 Census	2000 Census	2010 Census	2020 Census
Hispanic (any race) population	2	7	27	297	584
Change	-	5	20	270	287
% change	-	250.0%	285.7%	1000.0%	96.6%
Hispanic (any race) - percent of total pop.	0.09%	0.31%	1.12%	12.12%	23.72%

Image 2: Darlington Public Survey Bar Graph, What are your greatest concerns for your community over the next ten years?

Q13 What are your greatest concerns for your community over the next 10 years? (select all that apply)

Answered: 344 Skipped: 286



Community Capacity

At each opportunity to provide input, the city leadership expressed a variety of needs best categorized as “community capacity.” According to the Aspen Institute, “Community capacity is the combined influence of a community’s *commitment (will to act)*, *available resources*, and *skills* that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities.”⁶ Examples of community-identified needs include more staff, succession planning for an upcoming city clerk retirement, and an overall community need for volunteers.

⁶ Aspen Institute. *Measuring Community Capacity Building*. Version 3/96. Rural Economic Policy Program. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/csg/MEASURING_COMMUNITY_CAPACITY_BUILDING.PDF

Housing Land Availability

Darlington has a need for housing but has failed to fully take advantage of the demand. Although, housing construction during the last twenty years has occurred near Darlington. It has been located outside of the city limits. Land annexation and purchasing has focused on industrial and commercial sites. The city should be deliberate in its approach towards finding available land for growth and must recognize the return of investment when purchasing and developing land. City officials should work with the Lafayette County Economic Development Corporation (LDC) to move forward and form relationships on this important matter.

Flooding

Since the 1990s, Darlington has been proactive in implementing a flood mitigation plan. Projects such as removal of industry and business from the floodplain, and installing flood shields on main street businesses demonstrate the positive impact of the city's efforts. As the city continues to focus on flooding, it should begin to expand its scope and become proactive with upstream land use. The benefits extend beyond reduced flooding in the city and will include improved water quality, greater wildlife habitat, and increased recreational opportunities. All of this will create a more resilient community.

Opportunities

The city of Darlington, through long-term strategy, has positioned itself as a well-balanced community with tourism, industry, and strong schools. It is an attractive location to live, work, and visit. Opportunities abound in Darlington and its many assets are listed throughout this plan. The city must be intentional with developing land for housing, support businesses looking to locate there, consider the residents needs gathered through the public outreach process, and work with its network of stakeholders, partners, and organizations. The city will continue to approach opportunities in a strategic manner. This will provide a foundation and the rationale behind decision-making and answers *how* the city will accomplish its goals. This plan encourages the city to address future and existing opportunities and offers the following strategies to help the city accomplish its goals.

Image 3: Darlington Public Survey Generated Word Cloud, What are Darlington's Strengths?

Q8 What are Darlington's strengths?

strengths health care bars Small town atmosphere camping community involvement Darlington
people willing sense community people live grocery store nice downtown churches
organizations family minded city Courthouse welcoming tourism Diversity library
school system Jobs Rec trail Alot support Everyone Nice roots
great schools Great school system town trail camp location new
campground wonderful Strong Recreational parks feel
Small town sports good events businesses activities
people opportunities community walking trail
schools know trails etc Main Street clean
Good schools brings Friendly back Great large river
Community pride Friendly people farming safe system Beautiful group
local shops ATV grow Small give recreation culture atv trail Lots area excellent
need nice parks Hospital parks Nice community feel Hometown feeling low crime
County seat Small businesses Caring people live Beautiful Main Street S many

The following strategies are also referenced alongside the recommended actions in the following chapters. Some recommended actions address numerous strategic initiatives, while others are more focused on a specific strategy.

This plan encourages the city to address future and existing opportunities with strategic questions and offers the following strategies to help the city accomplish its goals. These strategies were developed through an evaluation of public input and best practices and should span the 10-year life of this plan.

People Focused - “Does this promote a welcoming and inclusive community?” / “Are we being transparent, welcoming, and trustworthy?”

As mentioned previously, the issue of population is a significant challenge for the city. Public input identified the desire to welcome more young

families into the community and build upon the tourism industry. Yet, public input also identified the city should be a leader in creating a welcoming and inclusive community, a new role for government, if the city is going to attract new residents and workforce. Numerous goals of the city rely on the impacts of this cultural change. In addition to attracting new residents, an inclusive community also requires the city to focus on their existing residents, business owners, and visitors of Darlington.

Capacity Building - “Does this provide the necessary capacity for the city to effectively and efficiently provide residents the services they expect?” / “Does this demonstrate the city’s commitment to our existing staff?” / “Are we taking advantages of the resources available to us?”

In addition to welcoming and including new residents, the city will need to also focus on developing and retaining the human capital to accomplish its long-term goals. Over time, the requirements of municipal public works and utilities, administration, and parks and recreation have grown and become more complex due to both increased requirements and increased demand for services. The complexities and increased workloads require professional staff, who are highly sought after. In order to attract and retain staff, who can likely earn more in larger nearby markets, the city will need to work to organize and define roles, offer the tools and training necessary, and work to make staff feel valued.

Capacity building is also about increasing the means to accomplish initiatives. The city has demonstrated in the past their ability to leverage outside funding to accomplish projects. The city should continue to do so and actively pursue available funding options.

Action Infrastructure - “What *action infrastructure* is in place, or needs to be in place, to address this issue or accomplish this initiative?”

The Aspen Institute’s Community Strategies Group has developed a framework to guide rural development called, *Thrive Rural Framework*. Within this framework, *Organize an Action Infrastructure* is identified as a recommendation for communities to work towards productive action. An *Action Infrastructure* includes, “the institutions, policies, systems, data, information, media, and resources needed to establish, align, and achieve priorities that increase both well-being and outcomes.”⁷

Collaboration - “Can this service be shared with another municipality?” / “Can this product or service be jointly contracted for?” / “Can we achieve this more efficiently and with the same results in cooperation with another organization or municipality?”

Darlington has a limited ability to raise revenue. Tax levies can only be increased in relation to the city’s net new construction, and other sources of revenue are difficult for small cities to implement and manage. At the same time, the cost of services and goods are increasing. In short, revenues are failing to meet expenses – a trend that is expected to continue in the near future. The city will need to learn to do business in a new way. One

way to do this is to collaborate with other municipalities and identify services that can be shared. These services can include sharing staff or jointly contracting for services.

Competition - “Does this make us more competitive?”

Darlington is in competition with other communities for new residents, new businesses, and where tourists and residents spend their time and money. In order to be competitive, the city needs to continue to differentiate itself, as it has in the past through investments in industry attraction, flood resiliency, and the strategic housing projects. Identifying and investing in the city’s competitive advantage will allow the city to accomplish its goals.

Resiliency - “Does this make us more resilient?”

Recent years have demonstrated that global disruptions, pandemics, inflation, and climate change all have local impacts. Additionally, localized events such as severe storms create another level of disruption for communities. As local challenges like population decline continue, disruptions become more impactful and more frequent. Building resilience is working to decrease the impacts of disruptive events. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, reduce the long-term impacts, and evolve. Building resilience is comprehensive and requires addressing all aspects of municipal operations. When evaluating opportunities, the city should ask, “Does this make us more resilient?”

Tourism, Housing, and Economic Development

Darlington values its small-town identity and will continue to steward this asset while building opportunities for new and existing industry, tourism, and residents.

Darlington is an attractive place to live. It's safety, access to the outdoors, and lack of traffic are attributes residents enjoy. Today knowledge jobs are allowing more workers to work remotely with a strong internet connection. This holds the possibility of those seeking rural settings and a more affordable cost of living to seek out places like Darlington.

Assets:

ATV Culture

Darlington has been a leader in establishing itself as an ATV-friendly community on a regional level. It serves as the hub for this specific recreational activity in the county with its network of trails. Although it is difficult to quantify the exact numbers of ATV activity in and around Darlington. It is agreed by residents that it has grown significantly over the last twenty years and has added economic vitality to Darlington and the county. According to Travel Wisconsin, travelers in Wisconsin spent approximately 14% of all tourism dollars, or \$1.9 billion, on recreation. This figure grew by nearly 25% between 2015 – 2019, an increase of \$380 Million. Darlington is uniquely positioned to attract those seeking the growing ATV segment of the tourism economy. The continuation of ATV trail maintenance, trail expansion, campground expansion, weekend rental opportunities, wayfinding improvements, and new restaurants and breweries should all be prioritized over the next ten years.

Industry Center

Darlington has worked to establish industrial growth on the southern edge of town. It has been opportunistic in seeking funding to assist with this development, and it has resulted in a robust industrial park through federal EDA (Economic Development Administration) grants. This has proved to be a great benefit to the tax base and maintaining population and school enrollment. This is a strong city asset that will continue to pay dividends under the pattern that the city has been established during the past twenty years. The city should work to attract industry and will by proving to be an attractive community to live.

Workforce

The Hispanic population's growth has kept this community and school district viable and is a defining reason why industry can stay here and a reason it can thrive in the future. Darlington can take advantage of a growing Spanish-speaking population who provide the labor for many industrial jobs while growing its tax base.

Call out Box Insert

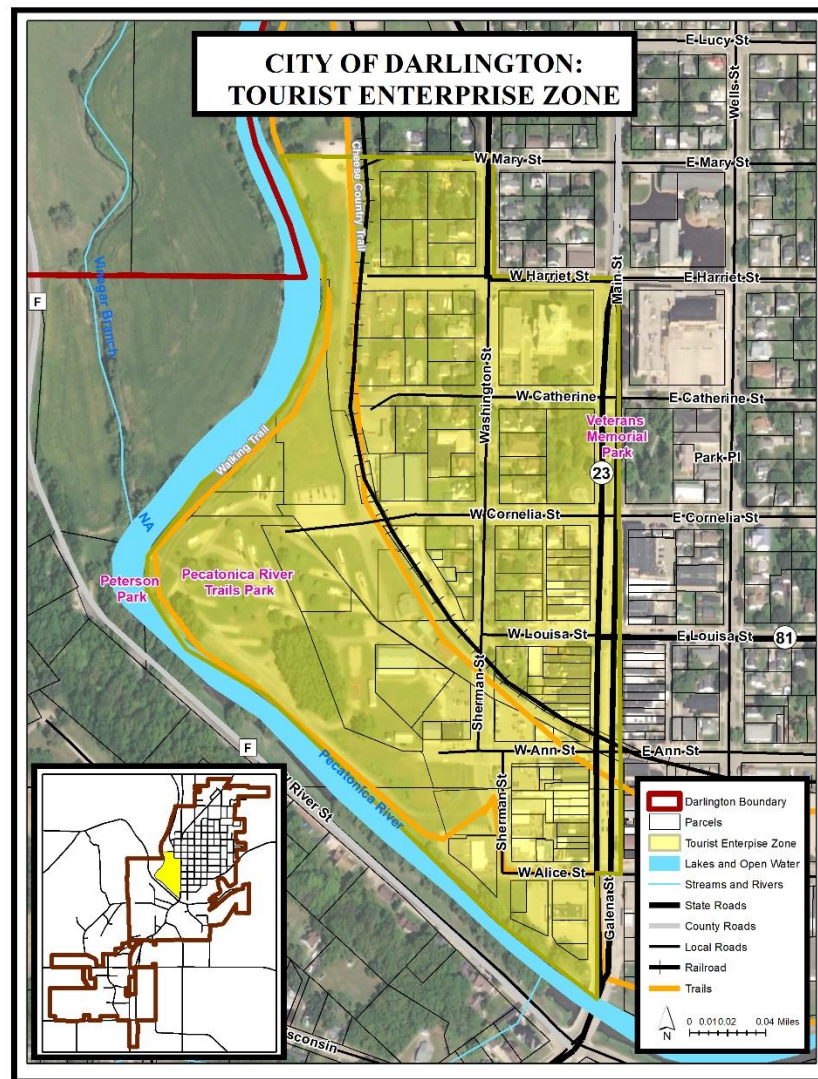
67% of survey respondents would like the city to focus on Business Attraction

Needs:

"Tourism Zone"

Darlington's Main Street serves as a hub for visitors seeking services and entertainment. The area between Main Street and the river offers one of the finest campgrounds in the area. With its shower house, brewery, history museum, access to taverns, over 40 miles of trails, and the Pecatonica River, this area serves as an unofficial tourism zone and is vital to Darlington's tourism economy. The city and tourism officials should work to provide opportunities to create enhancements and be a safe walkable area for people of all ages.

Map 2: Darlington's "Tourism Zone"



Branding and Marketing

Making Darlington a “choice destination” for visitors, recreational lovers, and new businesses is a catalyst for a prosperous future. The need for Darlington to improve how it markets market itself was often repeated during public input sessions. Currently, there are several logos, taglines, and initiatives being used making the mission appear cluttered. This should be consolidated with a logo and tagline that is consistent and agreed upon by all stakeholders involved. Over time a unified message will create a positive brand.

Image 4: Darlington Branding



Housing

During open house meetings and in the community survey, residents frequently discussed the matter of housing availability. The city also learned that housing of all types is needed. The recent success seen with “The Meadows” development serves as a great model of what can be achieved. Focus should be placed on attracting multi-family housing necessary to bridge the lifestyles of young adults and families and to appeal to the workforce required to attract businesses. Additional transitional and age-contingent housing (55+ or 65+) should be developed to encourage city residents to remain in Darlington and open up housing for workforce and new families. As development begins, the city should ensure new housing is marketed appropriately by the city and its partners in order to create momentum towards establishing more housing. During the last twenty years renter occupied homes have increased. Efforts should be made to make them affordable and maintained.

Figure 4: Darlington Public Survey, Housing Type Question Results

Q15 What types of new housing should be considered?

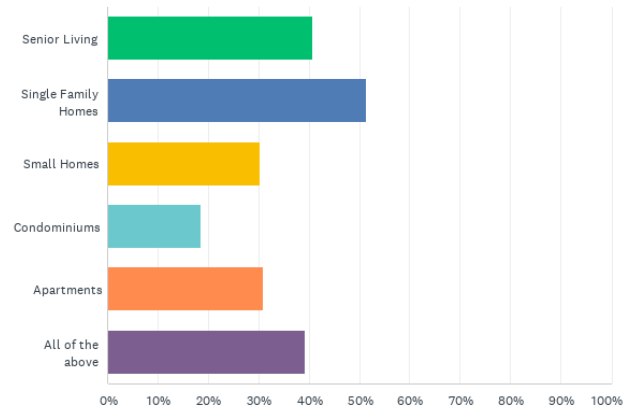
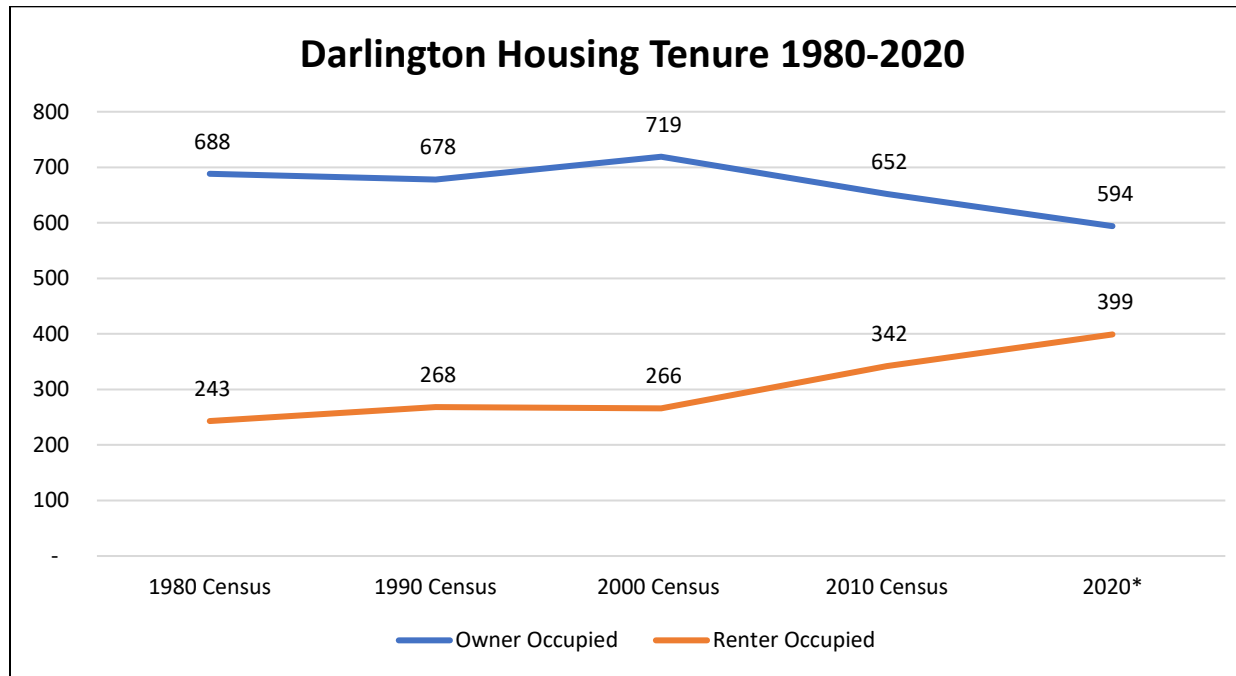


Figure 5: Darlington Housing Tenure 1980 – 2020



Pecatonica River

The city is located at its present location due to the Pecatonica River. Early on it was used for the manufacturing of pearl buttons leading to the city slogan, “The Pearl of the Pecatonica.” Its mill was used for building construction in the area. “The Pec” later served as a popular canoeing river and was the catalyst behind the popular event “Canoe Fest” beginning in the late 1960s. However, in recent years the river has been increasingly difficult to navigate due to fallen trees, and the paddling portion of the Canoe Fest celebration has been minimized to just a few paddlers. Desire to improve the river’s navigability, cleanliness, and access were repeatedly mentioned in the public input sessions held during the planning process. The river, once a source of economic activity due to industry, has the potential to once again be an economic asset if it can become a focus for tourism and recreation use.

In June of 2022, the Comprehensive Plan Committee graded the city’s actions on the recommendations provided in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan. It scored the highest grade on ‘encouraging a mix of economic activities.’ It scored the lowest on ‘protecting and improving the natural resources

within the city and the surrounding area.’ In 2022, the topic of natural resources again shows to be of great importance.

Restaurant Availability

Through the public survey and public input meetings residents expressed the desire for a “family” style restaurant in Darlington. The closing of the Riverwood Restaurant due to continual flooding issues has led to the great need for a quality sit-down restaurant within the city limits, preferably downtown. Residents stated that they are traveling to outside locations for this experience. The city should focus on creating opportunities for this on behalf of residents. Contacting existing restaurant owners, creating financial incentives, earmarking locations, and marketing the opportunity should all be considered for this important issue.

Chapter: Tourism, Economic Development, and Housing		
		Strategy Aligned:
Housing Goal:	Create diverse housing supply for all ages, incomes, and abilities.	
	Target potential land parcels and be aggressive in creating housing of all types for residents and workforce as identified in the recent Darlington Housing Study. Purchase available land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • People Focused • Capacity Building
	Identify and purchase existing buildings that could serve as housing such as downtown buildings, vacant or underutilized buildings that could be re-purposed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • People Focused
	Establish a “Move to Darlington” campaign through internet target marketing at regional urban centers emphasizing the low cost of living and high quality of life in Darlington.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Competition

	<p>Work with Lafayette Development Corporation (LDC) and Prosperity Southwest (PSW) to be “developer-ready.” Create a housing taskforce of informed stakeholders who have the responsibility to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop clear and transparent housing incentives, streamlined permitting policies and timelines, and an inventory of available land. Publish on the city’s website. - Contact, negotiate, and encourage owners of potential housing property to develop or sell their land. Develop and maintain these relationships. Ensure they know who to call if and when they are ready to sell. - Develop marketing materials including industry and school district testimony on the need for additional housing, and invite and meet with housing developers. -Additionally, this taskforce can be prepared to evaluate and pursue funding opportunities related to housing when available. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure • Competition • Capacity Building
	Re-evaluate the existing Property Maintenance Ordinance to ensure neighborhood attractiveness and to protect property values and enforce accordingly.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused
	Work with developers and solicit testimony from large employers, the county hospital, and the school district on the support for additional housing.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Competition
	Create an ordinance to permit accessory dwelling units by right in the city.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People focused

Chapter: Tourism, Economic Development, and Housing		
		Strategy aligned:
Economic Development Goal:	Ensure the economy is diverse and resilient to change.	
	Continue to work with the LDC and SWWRPC to attract industrial and commercial growth on the city's south side and work with intention to fill vacant or underused sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Collaboration • Competition
	Schedule business retention and expansion visits with city leadership and economic development professionals. Be available to assist if they can grow. Include the grocery store to ensure they understand their importance to the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Collaboration
	Collaborate with Darlington Main Street to work with the Wisconsin Main Street Community to ensure downtown businesses maximize their potential revenues using the Main Street Four Element approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency • People Building
	Deliberately work to find locations and operators for family friendly restaurants in Darlington through meeting with existing restaurant owners, communicating the demand in Darlington and creating incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration
	Recognize hunting season as a potential economic attribute. Work with Darlington Main Street and the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration

	LDC to market directly to sportsmen through all tourism channels including hunting trade shows.		
	Implement a city room tax to support economic development work. Work with Lafayette Development Corporation to develop a county wide policy.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Capacity Building
	Ensure childcare is fully provided in Darlington and they are supported for expansion and growth. Organize meeting with stakeholders and utilize grant dollars to assist.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • People Focused

Chapter: Tourism, Economic Development, and Housing			
Tourism Development Goal:	Strengthen the local economy by focusing on recreation-based tourism, and create business diversity on Main Street.		
	With city assistance, expand tourism staffing to strengthen marketing campaigns and increasing visitorship.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Capacity Building
	Work with stakeholders to create a branding initiative that will strengthen and broaden a marketing campaign that is reflective of the towns identity and unique character.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency
	Continue to build on the strength of Darlington's ATV culture and as an outdoor recreation destination. Make the ATV riding experience an easy, accessible, and safe experience and track ATV visitorship numbers.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Collaboration • People Focused

	Expand camping opportunities and increase staff accordingly. Create a system to track users to understand where they come from. Explore owner/operator lease options.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Action Infrastructure
	<p>Focus on the area between Main Street and the river to be safe and walkable, and encourage tourist-friendly businesses to locate there. Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase short-term lodging options • Locate tourism-friendly businesses there • Include child-friendly elements 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration • Competition • Action Infrastructure
	Encourage a paddlesports rental business to locate in downtown Darlington and work to expand ATV rental options. Schedule meetings with potential business operators.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration
	Create and enhance existing kayak landings, fishing spots and increase navigability of the river.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Develop a policy for short-term rentals (Airbnb, VRBO) in Darlington. Host workshops to explain the process and encourage their use.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Capacity Building • People Focused
	Consolidate Darlington branding campaigns as to be more uniform and cohesive. Streamline logos and taglines. Form a committee of stakeholder to navigate the process.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Ensure the Pecatonica River is stewarded as a natural resource to ensure it is of a quality that visitors will desire to use.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency

	Assist the Driver Opera House project as it matures and becomes a destination for visitors and a community asset through financial assistance.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Through Main Street Darlington, work with the Wisconsin Main Street Program on a market study for downtown businesses.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Implement a wayfinding plan to allow greater navigation throughout the area to be used by visitors in cars and ATVs. Consult with the Wisconsin Main Street Program to provide wayfinding services.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Celebrate Lafayette County's cheese heritage with greater purpose. Make cheese accessible to visitors, market local cheese producers, and establish a county cheese auto-tour among other opportunities.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Market Darlington racetrack's "Dirt Track" culture, a marketable niche found at Lafayette County Speedway to racing enthusiasts. Promote the races through Darlington marketing efforts as a unique and fun experience.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Use the picturesque highway north of town to place "gateway" signs to create a sense of anticipation when visiting Darlington. Locate ideal location(s) and create agreement with landowners to install signage.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration

Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation

The City of Darlington is equipped with strong public works, parks system, fire department, and many community organizations. Community needs are able to be accomplished through increased coordination. With a volunteer base becoming fewer the city must intentionally set practices that better draw on its human capital to coordinate projects through completion. The city will proactively maintain its infrastructure, river, and become more resilient through the use of green practices.

Assets:

Parks

Darlington has strong parks, some of which are outstanding for the region. Access to parks and natural spaces provide immense benefits to residents by offering quality locations to improve physical and mental health, creating cleaner air and water, bringing people together, and providing direct value. In the public survey, nearly sixty percent of respondents would like the city to focus on the park system.

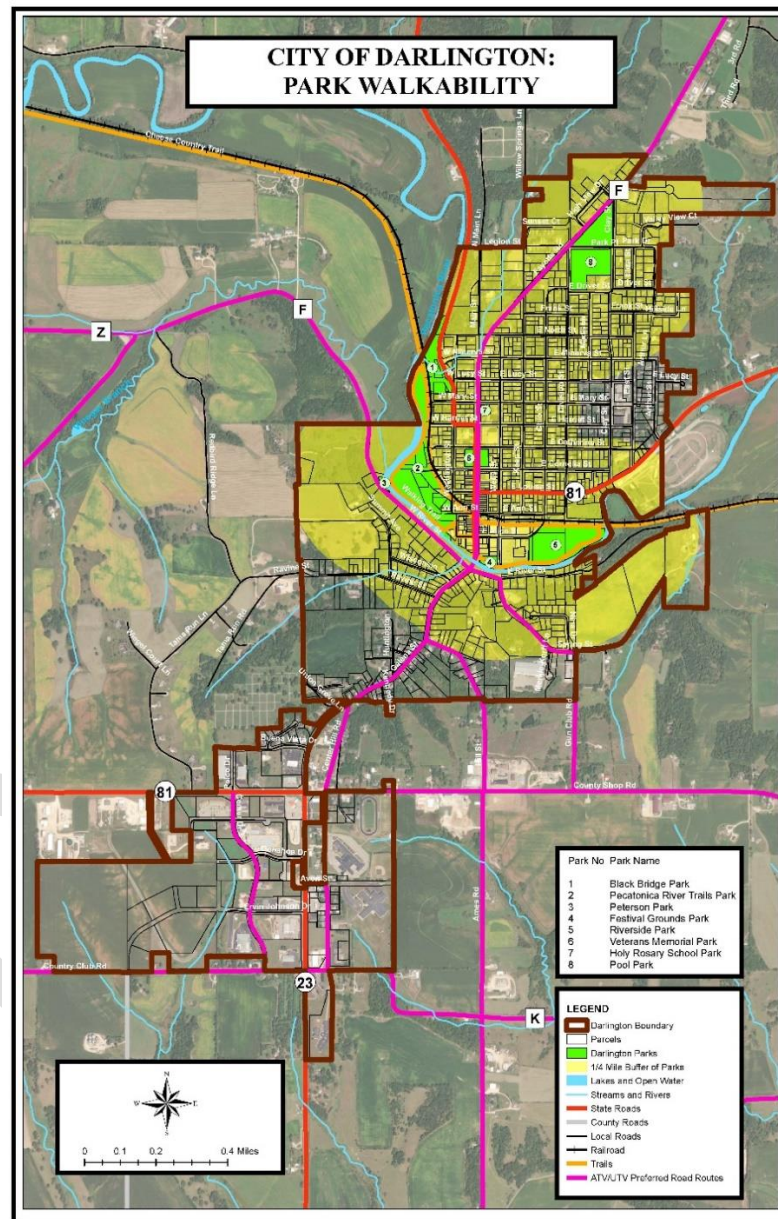
Recent data from Travel Wisconsin, shows that recreational spending by tourists in the state is increasing, with nearly a 25% increase between 2015 and 2019. However, the city has obvious needs within its system including; Peterson Park, an updated pool, and greater amenities at the Festival Grounds. Further developments are needed by networking the parks and trails with a cleaner and more accessible river. The city will benefit from the strength of its parks and establish itself as an outdoor recreation hub with an expansion of its parks and recreation system.

Table 6: State and County Tourism Dollars 2019-2021 (Source: Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Total Tourism Impacts 2019-2021)

Tourism Impacts	Direct Visitor Spending (Millions)			Total Business Sales (Millions)			State and Local Taxes (Millions)		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
Wisconsin	\$13,667.78	\$9,803.58	\$12,856.25	\$22,223.40	\$17,267.12	\$20,928.71	\$1,610.01	\$1,165.38	\$1,388.16
Lafayette County	\$14.57	\$10.32	\$13.68	\$25.24	\$19.56	\$23.01	\$1.80	\$1.27	\$1.45

Map 3: Park Walkability

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Community Events

Fun events that take place in Darlington are mostly organized by volunteers, including Canoe Fest, Taste of Darlington, Cinco-De Mayo Fest, Cruisin' for a Cause Car Show, Luke Fest, Farmers Markets, The Sieg Classic, Tunes at Twilight, Citywide Garage Sales, various ATV rides, and more. Along with events at the Lafayette County Fairgrounds such as the Lafayette County Fair, Stock Car Races, and Pecatonica Valley Antique Days, there is always something to do in Darlington.

Often, these events are only attended by locals from the county. Participants of the public meetings noted that these events could be used to draw in and attract past residents and more visitors from outside the county. They also expressed support for improved marketing of these events. In order to sustain these community events, the city will need to maintain and potentially grow its volunteer base.

Community Engagement

This plan's processes resulted in extensive public input collected through three public input meetings and a community survey involving residents, business owners, and local government officials. There was great engagement displayed in Darlington and it has been reflected in its events, fundraisers, and annual traditions. However, residents recognized that volunteerism is waning and volunteers are aging. But, residents stated during the public outreach process that they are willing to volunteer. Organizations should be proactive in seeking younger volunteers and make the process fun and rewarding. Cooperation, incentives, and marketing are important strategies to build civic engagement.

There is remaining potential to utilize this community pride further through intentional and organized actions that will raise money, recruit more volunteers, and retain younger residents.

Route 23 Reconstruction

Darlington has recently been the location of an extensive highway surface reconstruction project. The stretch of Highway 23 from Minerva Street to County Shop Road was the subject of extensive improvements in 2021 and 2022. This included retention walls, sidewalks, guardrails, driveways, and a new bridge deck over the river in the heart of downtown. Upgrades were also made to water mains, sanitary sewers, storm sewers, and lighting improvements. Recent work on highways outside of the city's boundary's add to improved transport around Darlington. This work provides an attractive, safer and overall nicer experience through the heart of Darlington. This work will be an advantage for Darlington in the next ten years as it works to attract residents and businesses.

Community Associations

The public listed many organizations that are active at some level in Darlington during the public outreach process. The purpose and abilities of

the groups range greatly. The Darlington Main Street/Chamber is affiliated with the State of Wisconsin Main Street Program through the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC). This group is in charge of tourism promotion, community events, and issues focused on the Downtown. It has been active since 1996 and will be an important part of this plan's implementation.

Below is a listing of associations that serve the city with the largest impacts. The city should call on these groups to help to undertake the community-building efforts outlined in this plan, and work with them to achieve community goals. Many churches also have groups to assist in efforts.

Table 7: Darlington Community Associations

Organization	Purpose	Projects	Contact
American Legion Post #214 / VFW	Veterans Organization and Assistance	Dinners, Veterans Memorial	Dave Gough
Canoe Fest	Longstanding Annual Event	Event	Cindy Corley
Cinco' De Mayo Fest	Annual Festival Celebrating Hispanic Heritage	Annual Event	Colleen Williams
Darlington Area Community Fund	Endowment Fund	Micro-Grants	Linda Gebhart
Darlington United Way	Financial Assistance to Groups	Annual Fund Drive	Theresa Monson
Johnson Family	Annual Car Show	Event – Cruisin for a Cause	Mandy Johnson
Darlington Chamber / Main Street Program	Downtown, Tourism, Marketing, Business Support	WEDC Representation	Kristen May
Driver Opera House Restoration, Inc.	Preservation and viability of the Driver Opera House	Regular Events	Jean Kendall
FFA Alumni	Agriculture	Scholarships	Ashley McCarville
Friendship Fund	Assist with unforeseen impacts on families	Financial Assistance	Steve Fitzsimmons
Garden Club	Beautification	Flower Beds	Connie Ubersox
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA)	Promotion & Education of Sustainable Land Use	Education and Workshops	Jim Winn
Lafayette County Farm Bureau	Agriculture Support & Education	Education and Volunteers	Christina Benson
Lafayette County Historical Society	Promotion and Education of Area History	Museums, Events and Education	Barb Nemec
Lafayette County Saddle Club	Horse Enthusiasts	Trail Rides and Shows	

Lafayette Development Corporation	Economic Development	Regular meetings focused on growth	Abby Haas
Lions Club	Kids Programs, Concessions, Fundraisers, Events	Volunteer Support	Brent Erickson
Memorial Health Lafayette County Foundation(MHLC)	Community Development arm of Hospital	Financial Assistance and Volunteer Support	Terri Baxter
Optimist Club (Optimist International)	Community Support	Cheese Curd Food Stands	Lori Garvey
Pecatonica Valley Antique Club	Local Heritage	Annual Event	Joe Kieffer
Prairie View Ryders Snowmobile Club	Snowmobile Promotion	Snow Trails	Josh Riley
Sieg Foundation	Philanthropy, Scholarships, Maintain Sieg Field	Sieg Field and an Annual Event	Mark Whalen
Tri-County ATV Club	Trail maintenance and promotion	Annual brat feed and ride	Kyle McCarville
Wiegel Strong	Fundraiser in memory of Luke Wiegel	Annual Event "Luke Fest"	Bob Wiegel

Needs:

Childcare

In rural communities across America, childcare is an essential service that affects labor force, the and the ability to locate. The lack of childcare puts stress on working families and can remove people from the workforce. In the past generation, changes in work culture and state regulations have added to its complexity and importance. Currently, the childcare landscape in Darlington is cluttered with no single turn-key provider. Meetings should be established to begin a collaborative effort to create a sustainable long-term solution. This will be advantageous when attracting residents, will open the labor pool, and ensure young families have the support needed to thrive in Darlington.

Soccer

During the public outreach process, many residents expressed the need for soccer programs and facilities in Darlington. When outgoing Seniors at Darlington High School were asked what school activities were missing the number one answer was soccer (28%). Currently, non-regulation sized fields are being used at Black Bridge Park and makeshift fields are set up elsewhere. Further questioning found that many residents are leaving the city to play soccer in other towns, likely spending money in those towns while there. With a large Spanish speaking population that is engaged with soccer, youth football becoming less popular in America, and few towns in the area offering soccer, Darlington is well positioned to establish soccer fields to attract tournaments and visitors. Proposed recreational facilities may include full-size fields, youth sized fields, or football fields that can be utilized for soccer with the addition of goals.

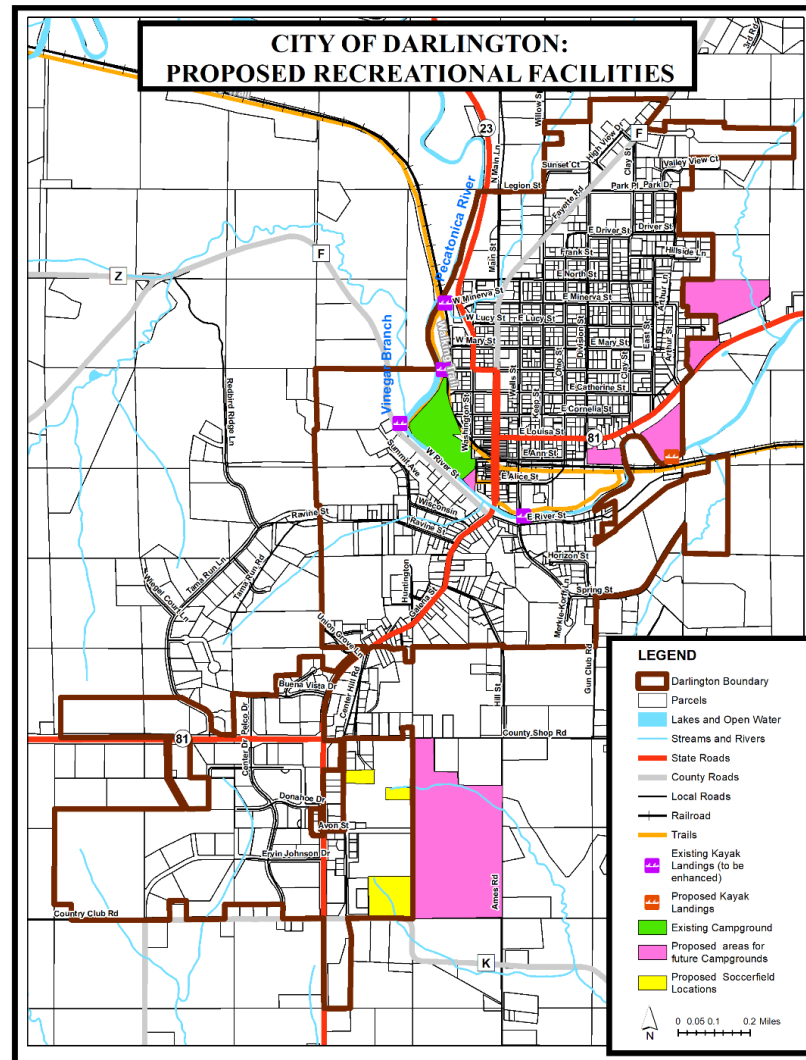
Wayfinding

Darlington has many worthy destinations. Routes connecting parks, community facilities, services, and a robust ATV trail system. These should be easily visible to visitors. Part of making Darlington attractive to visitors and new residents is making them aware of the many great resources available in the city and how to access them. A Wayfinding Plan should be implemented to bring attention and direction to city amenities and places of interest such as historic destinations, dining, shopping, parks, schools, and other regional attractions. Additionally, residents expressed the need to improve signage aesthetics by providing a unique color theme which should be in done in conjunction with a city branding initiative.

Expand Campground Options

The success of the city-owned Pecatonica River Trails Park has established a model that should be continued. Public opinion supports expansion of campground spaces, and viable options exist to expand the campground. This will help establish Darlington as an outdoor recreation area and one that supports the ATV rider. The city has learned a lot since establishing the current campground and can use that knowledge to continue to build on the strategy further. The following map shows potential areas for future campground expansions and recommended kayak landing locations and actions.

Map 4: Proposed Recreational Additions



Chapter: Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation		
		Strategy aligned:
Community Resource Goal:	All residents, business owners, and stakeholders in the city work together to make Darlington a stronger community.	
	Include diversity of members in all community groups, committees, and meetings by purposely inviting Spanish speaking individuals to be on committees and boards and involved in organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration
	Consider re-branding of “Canoe Fest” to more accurately reflect how the community celebration has evolved over the years. Work with members of the Canoe Fest Committee to begin discussions concerning this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration • Competition
	Work with event coordinators to understand their space needs such as a stage for music, electricity, water, and other upgrades to improve event experiences and efficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Competition • Action Infrastructure
	Contribute financially to organizations that are responsible for important events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration

Chapter: Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation		
		Strategy aligned:
Community Resource Goal:	Strengthen existing community assets and invest in new demands to increase the quality of life for residents and visitors with emphasis on parks and recreation for residents and visitors.	
	Ensure the Pecatonica River can be utilized for paddlesports by making it passable and creating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Resiliency

	entry and exit points on the river. Work with the WIDNR on a recreation plan to implement from Calamine to Red Rock (Walnut Rd.)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Competition
	Continue to utilize the Main Street Program to ensure historic preservation methods are correct in the Downtown Historical District. Ensure building owners are informed.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Action Infrastructure
	Establish a dog park to be utilized by residents and visitors.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Develop a financial plan to identify and fiscally prepare for the future needs of the city's facilities and park improvements.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Action Infrastructure
	<p>There is a strong demand for soccer in Darlington. Encourage the formation of soccer leagues through the school and the parks and recreation department.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop land for soccer fields in Darlington that are regulation size(s) and are suitable for competitive play. • Involve soccer players in Darlington as part of the planning. • Inform area towns of the new facilities and program. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Competition • Collaboration
	Develop an annual plan to replace aging water lines.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building
	Formalize property ownership of "Peterson Park" and enhance as a kayak landing, fishing location and picnic spot. Install signage and inform people of the new addition.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Infrastructure • People Focused

	Add a pedestrian trail off of the Cheese Country Trail near Sieg Field to the Fairgrounds.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused
	Inform the public of the many successes that Darlington accomplished. Contribute stories to the local newspaper so citizens are aware, as to foster community pride.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Competition
	Develop and implement a Wayfinding plan to inform visitors of important places as to allow greater use at them. Work through the Wisconsin Main Street Program to develop.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration
	Celebrate lesser-known Darlington attributes and leverage them as possible events or marketing opportunities, i.e., Sylvan Muldoon, Parson Brothers, <i>Public Enemies</i> movie.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Competition

Chapter: Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation			
			Strategy aligned:
Environmental Goal:	Increase resiliency, well-being, attractiveness, and sense of place by respecting the natural environment.		
	Work with the county and upstream landowners to develop a plan to implement conservation practices in order to reduce flooding and increase water quality in the Pecatonica River. Work with the county natural resources staff, the Lafayette County Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA), or private landowners.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused • Collaboration

	Install areas of native grasses and wildflowers near the River Walk for increase of aesthetics in order to stabilize soil and reduce erosion.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused
	Conduct a feasibility study to utilize solar energy on city-owned properties. Encourage the practice to residents utilizing incentives. Consider more efficient lighting upgrades when applicable.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Action Infrastructure
	Visitors and residents enjoy dark skies and is expected in rural areas. Install outdoor lighting that meets the standards set by the Dark Sky Initiative.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused
	Maintain the criteria to keep the city status as a Tree City USA and Bird City.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused
	Design all future development with sustainability features including native plantings, pervious surfaces, and green stormwater management in anticipation of future climate change and their potential weather impacts.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused
	Intentionally plan locations for electric vehicle charging stations downtown and promote these through signage once installed.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused

Chapter: Community Resources, Environment, and Transportation			
			Strategy aligned:
Transportation Goal:	Develop and maintain safe, accessible, and efficient transportation options all modes of transportation throughout the city.		

	Create a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for streets, utility's infrastructure, and city owned facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Action Infrastructure
	Coordinate with Townships, the County and other surrounding municipalities to jointly bid projects and increase competition among bidders. This should result in more bidders due to larger project costs, and potentially lower unit costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	<p>Make Darlington more bicycle friendly. Include bicyclist traffic patterns when implementing street updates and road markings by adding bike lanes. Provide public bike racks at popular destinations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add bike lanes on Clay Street • Add bike lanes on Driver near the park • Add bike lanes on Division Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration • Action Infrastructure
	<p>When rebuilding city streets, give preference to designs that accommodate pedestrian sidewalks. Especially near parks and schools. Seek out funding from state transportation alternative programs to facilitate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair sidewalk on Louisa to Fairground entrance • Repair sidewalk on Ohio Street to Riverside Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Ensure road signage is visible and free from obstructions such as trees and shrubs. Re-locate to more open location if problematic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused

	Promote SWCAP and Lafayette County ADRC shared ride services, bus routes, and day trips by communicating the service to residents.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused. • Resiliency
	Monitor vehicle and pedestrian accidents on an annual basis and evaluate concentrations for potential safety corrections.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused
	Review ADA parking availability during community events. Add to event planning if lacking.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused

Leadership, and Governance

City leadership benefits from passionate individuals who serve on the city for the benefit of the city's function as staff and in leadership roles. The city council and its committees represent the city with experience and civic pride. Individuals in leadership roles possess diverse strengths that can be greater utilized. The city government is well positioned to implement this plan. However, lack of executive leadership and a future city clerk retirement will be handicaps to the process. As this will require change the city must begin conversations to explore ways to navigate this important step.

Assets:

Proven Leadership

Darlington has benefited from long-serving staff and passionate individuals in leadership roles. It has a history of being resilient and being able to take on big projects – as evident in the flood control project. Darlington was accepted and has maintained membership in the Wisconsin Main Street Program since 1996 which provides a paid staff person to work on tourism and downtown business needs, something not found in communities of similar population. Establishing the industrial park and the recent land acquisition for commercial growth on the south side show its ability to act on large projects. This mindset will move the city forward when acting on this plan.

Needs:

Staff transition and Succession Planning

While long-serving City officials are an asset, new and younger representatives on the common council and city staff should be encouraged. New ideas and perspectives are an important resource for the City. The city will need to focus on a new city clerk position as retirement will necessitate a change in that position soon. Consideration of changing the job description to an executive leadership position that will be responsible for achieving measurable goals is recommended. This will be an important step in increasing community capacity. The city will also analyze options for shared personnel and staff services contracting through mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities.

Improve County Dialogue

As the county seat, Lafayette County has a large presence in Darlington. However, there are communication barriers between the city and county. Currently, the future of county-owned properties within and near Darlington have uncertain futures. The city must remain visible in discussions concerning the parcels. The city must also think more broadly about impacts from climate change and its persistent flooding issue. As the city moves forward, it must establish relationships with a variety of partners, and view issues with a bird's eye view that will include the county and township.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

A Capital Improvement Plan is essential for all cities. A CIP is a fiscal management tool which is closely linked to annual budgets. It will outline specific projects to replace infrastructure as well as vehicles and equipment. It can also address facility upgrades and maintenance and is formed through working with city staff and leadership. Over the long-term, a CIP will reduce unexpected expenses and will serve as a blueprint for fiscal stewardship.

Chapter: Leadership and Governance		
		Strategy aligned:
Goal:	Increased responsiveness, transparency, and trust of city leadership and staff.	
	Invest in council training through the League of Wisconsin Municipalities or the UWEX local government center. Require annual training for council and planning committee members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resiliency• People Focused• Collaboration
	Study the impacts and benefits of expanding the administrative capacity of City staff. This includes reviewing the existing staff's responsibilities and evaluating needs. During planned staff turn-over (retirements), re-evaluate the position in terms of	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People Focused• Resiliency

	tasks and needed capacity. Create measurable goals to recognize performance and cost benefits.		
	Invite businesses and organizations to attend public meetings and introduce themselves. If they cannot attend, structure meetings to include visits to local businesses to show support and learn what is needed for local business success.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused
	Work with Lafayette County Emergency Management to develop an emergency operations plan and identify training for elected officials to understand their responsibilities during emergency events. Have staff and city council read the Lafayette County Hazard Mitigation Plan.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency • Collaboration
	Identify and designate weather shelters by type in the community and communicate to residents.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Resiliency
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	Adopt a policy of local procurement. Seek to purchase products and services from local businesses. Encourage local businesses to provide products and services where current gaps exist.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency
	Make a point of celebrating community achievements. Develop a procedure for elected officials to recognize individuals and businesses such as 'Volunteer of the Year' or 'Business of the Year.'		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Resiliency • People focused

Chapter: Leadership and Governance		
		Strategy aligned:

Goal:	Be a proactive government		
	Plan for future staffing changes. Change positional job descriptions to evolve with demands with a focus on a possible City Administrator position.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People focused • Capacity Building
	Continually invest in annual training as part of city employee compensation.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused • Capacity Building
	Establish procedures and conduct annual staff reviews to evaluate job performance and be proactive with opportunities for staff to be more effective in their positions. Update the City Employee Handbook accordingly.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Resiliency • People focused
	Review outdated ordinances, update as necessary, and ensure that ordinances are enforced.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People focused
			•
	Install and maintain backup power at local critical infrastructure sites.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency
	Undertake a cyber audit and pursue actions to remediate shortcomings.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency
	An increase in tourism is desired. Invest in paid staff to grow this important part of the city's economy and be present in tourism related meetings.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Resiliency • Collaboration • Competition

Chapter: Leadership and Governance		

Goal:	Communicate and collaborate with local leadership and think regionally.	Strategy aligned:
	Meet with the School Board on a regular basis concerning community issues. Items could include inclusion, a soccer program, school programs, and volunteerism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • People Focused • Capacity Building
	Meet with county leadership on a regular basis concerning county-owned properties that directly affect Darlington.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • People Focused • Capacity Building
		•
	Develop a boundary and development agreement with surrounding townships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Infrastructure • Collaboration
	Take advantage of nearby destinations such as Yellowstone Lake State Park, Mineral Point, and Shullsburg to drive visitors to Darlington.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Competition • People Focused
	Consider shared service agreements with neighboring communities to contract shared employees, services, and contracts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Resiliency
	Explore the feasibility of purchasing and installing flood gauges at the Pecatonica River at Calamine.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • People Focused
	Maintain communication with SWWRPC and LDC and support county and region-wide efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration

Land Use

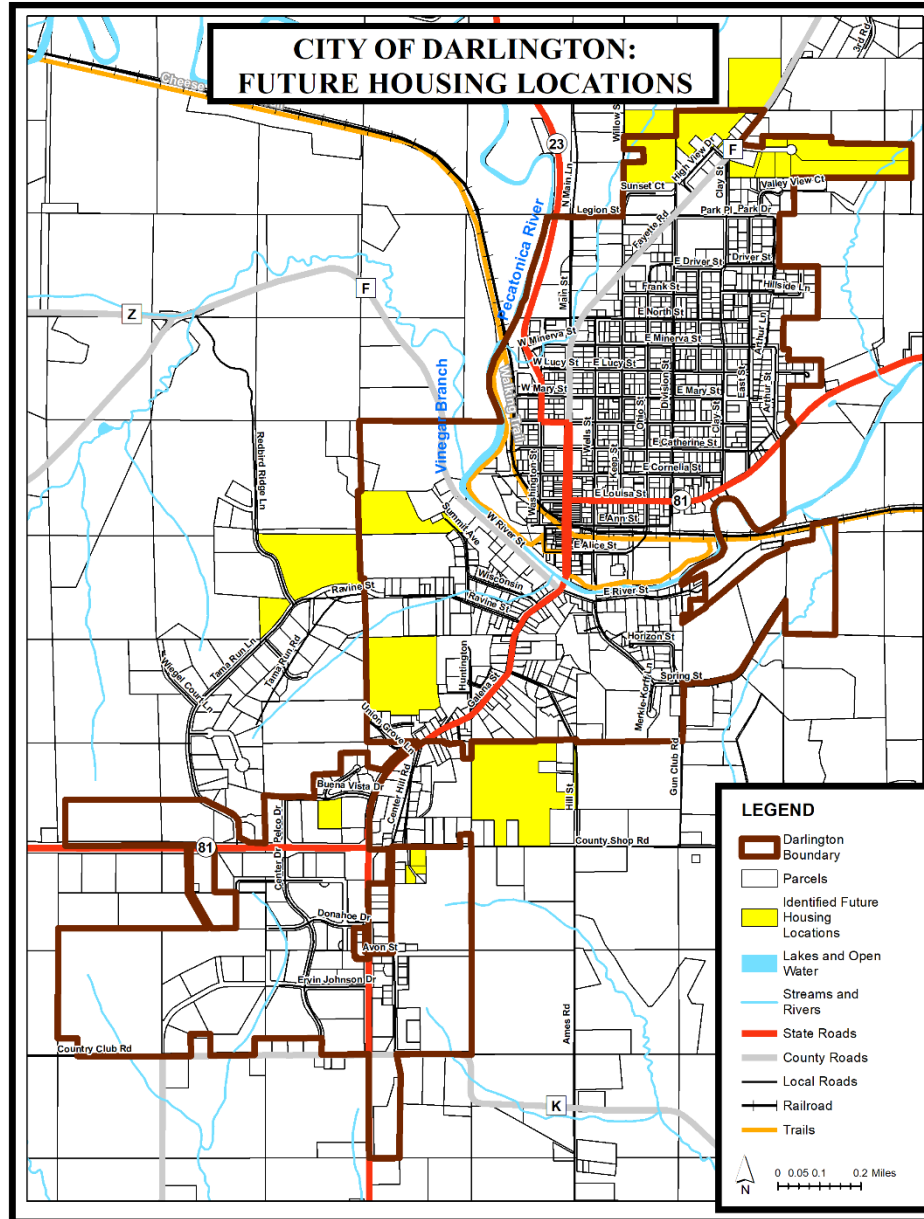
The city should make land use change a priority over the next ten years. Land use impacts all aspects of life in Darlington and is an important component of understanding how the city will thrive over the next ten years. The spatial relationship in and around Darlington is comfortable and open. Growth will not disrupt that feeling. A cohesive, logical, and attainable land use strategy enables the implementation of the actions in this plan. This plan seeks to identify how land will be used in the future and encourage the city to plan development and growth. This chapter reviews the existing land uses in Darlington by exploring the established zoning and presents a future land use map to guide the future development. According to the State of Wisconsin Statutes, the future land use map shall be followed by the city. Any future rezoning must comply with the future land use map.

Assets:

Developable Parcels

The city's boundaries encompass a significant amount of land that can be developed or annexed for development. The city should seek out adjacent land either through purchase or encouraging the sale to a private developer. Although purchasing larger land tracts is more convenient the acquisition of multiple smaller parcels the city can still achieve its goal for housing, industrial, and commercial growth. The future land use map in this chapter identifies future uses of land.

Map 5: Possible Future Housing Locations



Needs:

Updated Zoning

Darlington currently uses a traditional zoning code, which allows development based on particular uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and more. Darlington has seven primary zoning districts currently located within the city: Residential (R), Central Business District (B-1), Highway Business District (B-2), Business Park (BP), Agriculture (A), Downtown Design Overlay District, and Flood Plain Overlay District. All have specific standards found in the city's zoning code (9.12).

This plan identifies several options to be included in the updated zoning ordinance that make the city more competitive for future residents, developers, and industries. One strategy that allows the city be competitive, is flexibility. The city is not sure when its next opportunity for development will come or what it may be, so offering options that create flexibility within the zoning ordinance is beneficial. One example of this is mixed-use zoning that allows residential and commercial uses to co-exist. Another, is to have procedures in place to make annexation simple and efficient to allow developers to purchase, design and build.

Growth options and planning

The city should pursue a boundary agreement with the surrounding township in anticipation of future growth. Developing these agreements will simplify any future annexation. This is an important piece of planning for growth. Planning for growth also involves maintaining contact with owners of the developable land within the city's boundaries. The city should make a regular practice of being informed of the current for-sale status of the high-impact properties within the city's boundaries and on its immediate periphery.

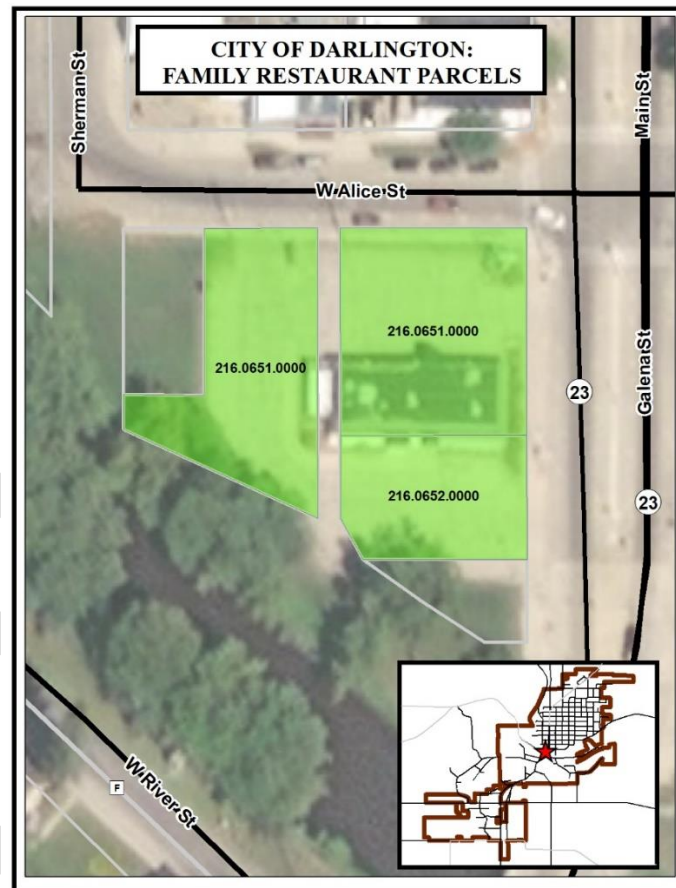
Pecatonica River as a System

As highlighted earlier in this plan. The city has been successful in mitigating flood damage in the city, mostly downtown, through proactive efforts during the last thirty years. However, the river crosses, and is impacted by, multiple governmental entities and private landowners, requiring the city to work upstream if it wishes to further lessen flooding impacts in the city. Slowing water from entering the river, retaining water upstream, and changing land use practices to be able to capture more rainfall before entering the river will greatly benefit the city. This strategy is aligned with utilizing the river better as an outdoor recreation resource, and will make the city more climate and economically resilient. The city will need to work with multiple agencies to implement this robust but important initiative.

"Family Restaurant" Location (128 Main Street)

The former "Family Restaurant" location at the Southwest corner of Alice and Galena Streets has been sitting vacant for several years, and has flooded several times in the past twenty years, which has created difficulty operating, leasing, and selling the space. The city should acquire the parcels it sits on and consider new land use as part of the flood mitigation strategy. Greenspace is a low-cost option for development with signage welcoming motorists to Downtown Darlington.

Map 6: "Family Restaurant" area property boundary's



Progressive Zoning

Zoning updates are often overlooked until situations arise. The city should perform a detailed overlook of its current ordinances. The city of Darlington currently uses a broad traditional zoning code, which allows development based on particular uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, business, and agricultural. The city should also work towards progressive zoning changes to details that makes the city attractive for young families and entrepreneurs. This includes allowing food trucks and home-based businesses by right. This will provide the potential of diversity of businesses and encourage new residents to locate in the city because of the ability to work remotely. Additionally, other items that reflect changing trends that will increase the attractiveness of the city to new residents require clarifications in zoning ordinances such as; short-term rental properties, accessory dwelling units and the installation of solar panels.

Future Land Use

In order for Darlington to provide opportunities for residents and businesses, areas for future growth and development were identified during meetings. A major objective of this Comprehensive Plan update is a Future Land Use plan. The Future Land Use plan is a projection of future development goals for the City. The plan looks ahead to understand where future land uses are best suited. Residents and stakeholders expressed a demand for future housing, recreation, commercial, and industrial development. The Community also desires to conserve Darlington's small-town identity and provide additional community facilities and recreational resources. Maps included in this plan will help guide the city as they work towards proper land use in the future.

In creating the Future Land Use Plan, considerations were given to avoiding incompatible land uses or changes to the preferred character of the city. Additionally, designations were determined to maximize development potential within city boundaries. Industrial/Commercial land uses were focused in areas they already exist, where adequate roads and facilities are present, and the disruptive nature of production and industry are removed from residential areas.

Chapter: Land Use		
		Strategy aligned:
Goal:	Create a modern zoning ordinance that encourages development flexibility within the city.	
	Implement a fee structure and policy that ensures rezoning, variances, and conditional use permitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resiliency• Capacity Building

	are appropriately recorded and able to be presented on a map. Consider working with Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission on an online, interactive zoning map.		
	Permit non-traditional residential development such as accessory dwelling units where all other issues of the building code are addressed.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Consider higher residential density zoning in existing and future developments in order to allow more people on less space.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Utilize Tax Increment Financing when financially responsible and consider the expansion of existing TIF districts if necessary.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • People Focused • Capacity Building
Chapter: Land Use			
			Strategy aligned:
Goal:	Establish options for creative growth.		
	Be aggressive in procuring and annexing land for future growth, including land for residential development.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition • Capacity Building
	Have discussions with Lafayette County about the future of key properties that could greatly impact Darlington such as, the Hospital Building, The County Fairgrounds, and Lafayette Manor.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration
	Utilize the upper floor space in the Municipal Building. Options could include offices or co-working space.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Collaboration

	Prioritize the purchase and removal of the 'Family Restaurant' building and explore best options for its future use.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Focused • Action Infrastructure
	Utilize grants through the WDNR to assist in purchasing land with recreational purposes. Stay current with grant opportunities through communication with the SWWRPC and the LDC.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resiliency • Action Infrastructure

Chapter: Land Use			
			Strategy aligned:
Goal:	An up-to-date future land use map that guides future development.		
	According to state statute, the city must follow the future land use map included in this plan. Any zoning changes that are not in agreement with the future land use map requires an update to the comprehensive plan future land use map.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Infrastructure
	<p>Streamline annexation processes to make building attractive to developers. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having topographical maps created with nearby utilities and easements on potential properties. • Agree on financial incentives ahead of time. • Create developer agreements. • Have an attorney comfortable with the process in place. • Understand the types of housing and their price points needed. • Market accordingly 		

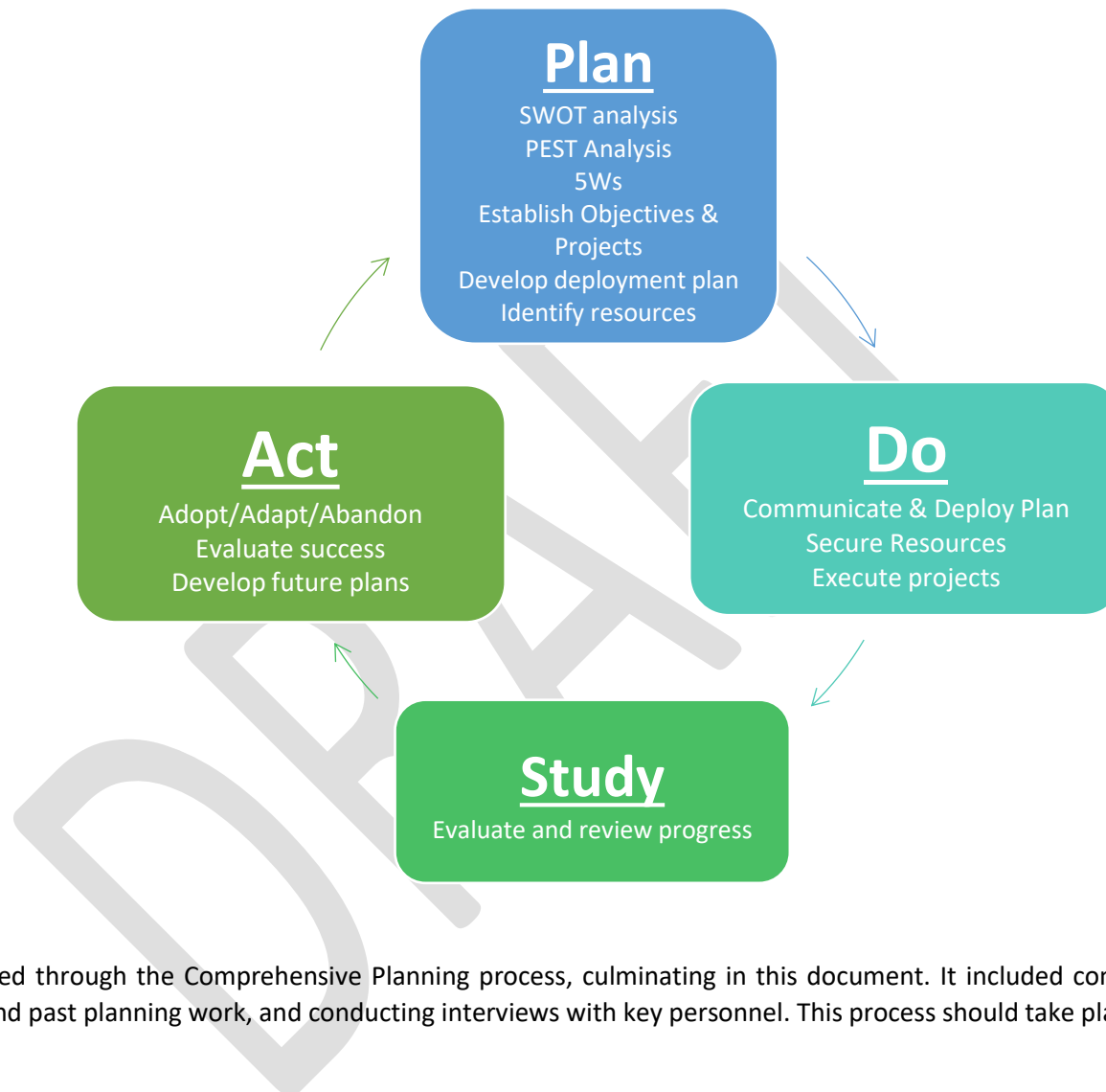
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Plan Implementation

A transition from planning to implementation is required if the city is going to accomplish any of the previously-mentioned goals. The city should utilize the *Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle* to implement this plan. Through the adoption of this plan, the city has made the first step in this cycle. The Comprehensive Plan must remain active and serve as a starting point for the community to implement their desired goals. The PDSA cycle requires this plan to be reviewed regularly and, at times, updated when determined vital to the best interests of the city.

The strategies and actions outlined in this plan range from short-term to long-term, and simple to complex. Some actions will need to be completed before others can begin. During the Plan, Study, Act process, city leaders should work together and reference this plan as a guide to accomplish these goals on an on-going basis, including an annual review of this plan to measure progress.

Figure 6: Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle.



Plan

This is the work completed through the Comprehensive Planning process, culminating in this document. It included community engagement, review of relevant data and past planning work, and conducting interviews with key personnel. This process should take place again no later than 2032.

Do

This phase includes plan roll-out and executing objectives. Key aspects include:

- Identifying responsible parties – They may be city staff, city Common Council members, or asking community associations to step into a role that uniquely fits their mission.
- Identifying required resources and partners - City-wide initiatives – Implement City-wide initiatives such as updating the HR Personnel Manual, improving the payroll system, developing on-boarding programs for staff and City Common Council, and improving the budget process.
- Documentation – Develop or finalize the targets and measures the team will use to measure progress towards continual improvement and plan implementation. This includes both the analysis of existing data and collection of new data to be used to measure progress.

Study

Measuring progress requires a team to monitor and manage implementation, and to record progress. Two major steps should be undertaken.

- Identify the committee or group to monitor progress and ensure there is continued momentum. The team should meet quarterly and be able to connect with City staff, committees, and Common Council. The team should be inter-disciplinary and include Common Council members, City staff, business owners, and residents with varied interests in the community, all of who have a passion for this work.
- Identify and define barriers to implementation in order to overcome or surmount them when possible. When barriers cannot be overcome, they should be documented to inform future planning work. Common barriers to plan implementation include:
 - Legacy rules or procedures.
 - Lack of staff time to work on initiatives.
 - Failure to make choices or trade-offs. Trying to do everything.
 - Choosing to wait for a “better time.”
 - Parochialism / narrow mindedness.

Act

This phase of the process sets the stage for continual improvement. As the City sees progress, documents successes, or meets with barriers on any given initiative, it should look to:

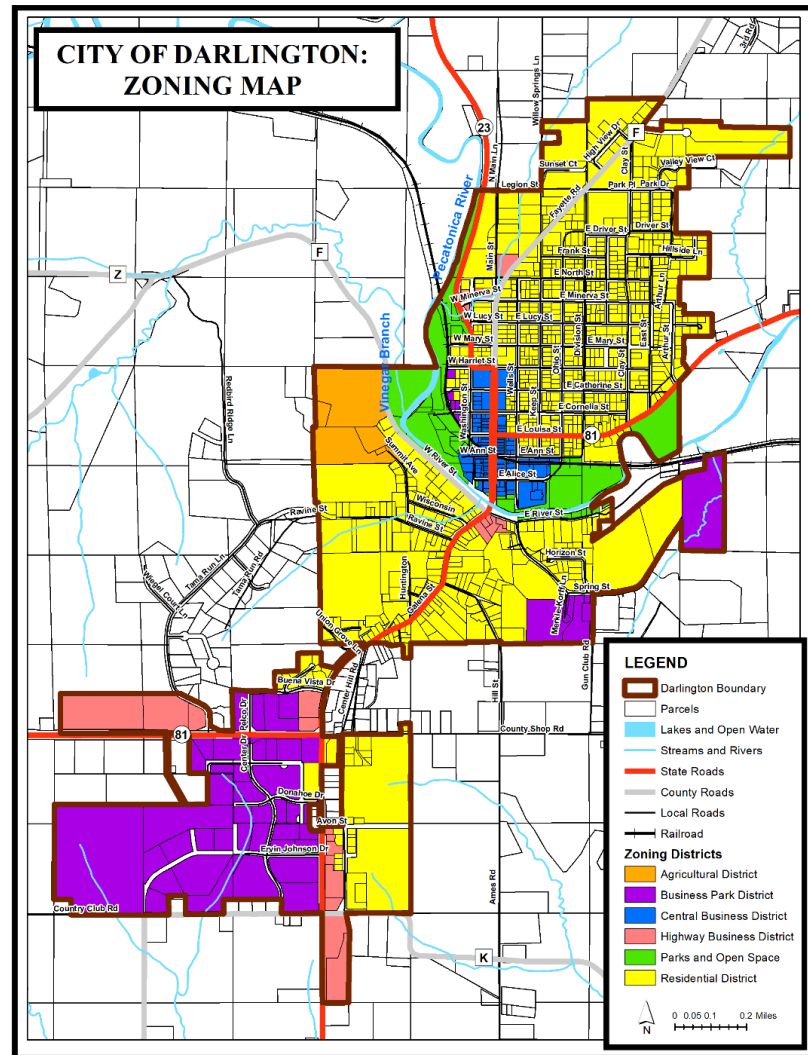
- *Adopt* practices that work and are successful. Formalize them as part of the City’s culture.
- *Adapt* good practices that need improvement. This includes surmounting obstacles, finding efficiencies in existing processes, and

documenting why things don't work.

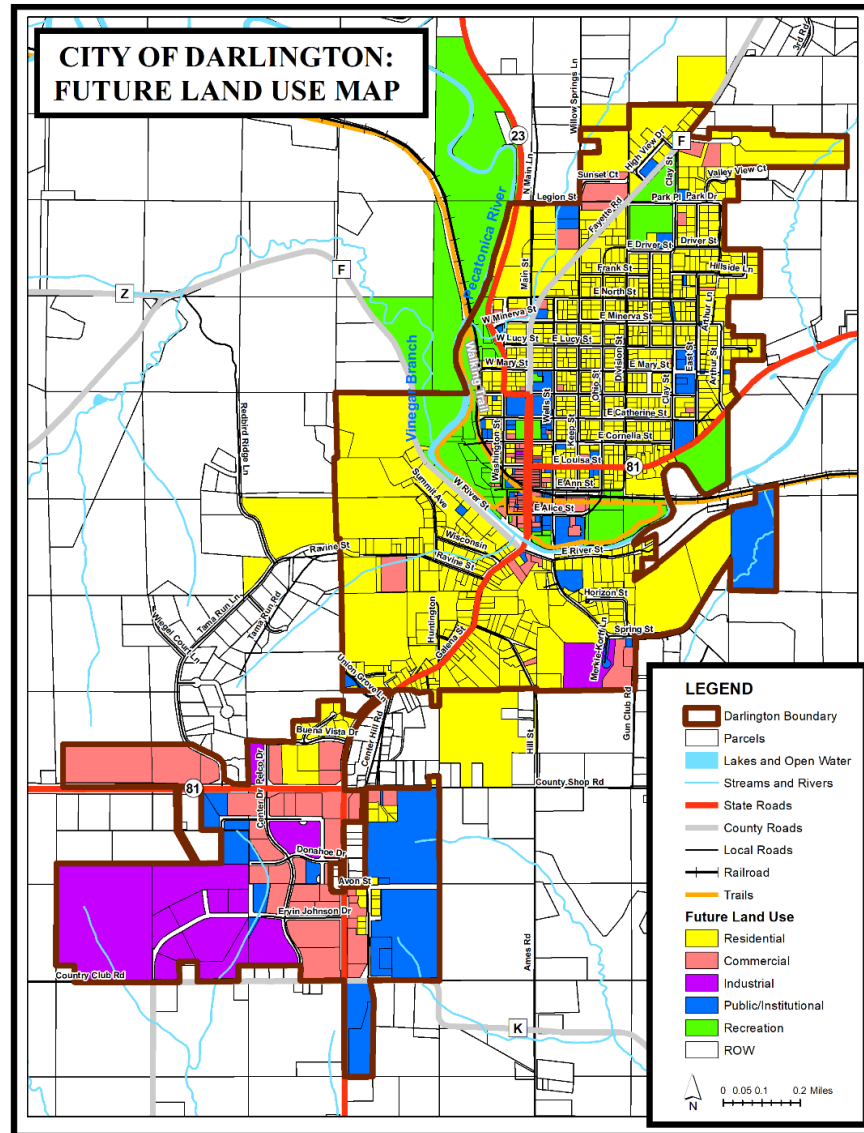
- *Abandon* existing practices that don't support progress. The management team must document the reason for abandonment so they can learn from this and avoid similar issues in the future.

Chapter: Implementation		
		Strategy aligned:
Goal:	Implement continual improvement using the Plan, Do, Study, Act process to ensure the planning work here is implemented and the plan remains a living document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building • Competition • Resiliency
	Utilize this plan and other planning documents. Evaluate the plan on an annual basis for potential changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building • Competition • Resiliency
	Seek to review the Plan, Do, Study, Act process on a semi-annual basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building • Competition • Resiliency
	Ensure all elected officials, city staff, and key stakeholders are familiar with this plan. Include a copy of the plan on the City's website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building • Competition • Resiliency • Collaboration

Map 7: Current Zoning, 2022



Map 8: Future Land Use



The strategies and actions outlined in this plan range from short-term to long-term, and simple to complex. Some actions will need to be completed before others can begin. During the Plan, Study, Act process, city leaders should work together and reference this plan as a guide to accomplish these goals on an on-going basis, including an annual review of this plan to measure progress.

DRAFT