

RICHLAND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2024-2034



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Introduction

Richland County, Wisconsin, nestled in the scenic Driftless Area, offers a unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and a deep agricultural tradition. The county, named for its rich and fertile lands, has long been a destination for farmers and settlers drawn to its abundant resources and ideal farming conditions. With its meandering valleys, vibrant rivers, and forested bluffs, Richland County is a place where nature and community intertwine. It is home to a close-knit, resilient population that values its rural roots while embracing the diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation, farming, and small-town living.

This comprehensive plan aims to chart a course for the county's development over the next decade, ensuring that Richland County remains a thriving and resilient community for both current and future generations. Developed through robust engagement with local government officials at the town, village, city, and county levels, this plan reflects a collaborative approach to shaping Richland County's future. In addition to input from local leaders, the plan draws upon existing studies and strategies that have been developed in recent years, covering key areas such as transportation, agriculture, hazard mitigation, outdoor recreation, and environmental sustainability. These plans have laid the groundwork for a more integrated and forward-looking approach to county-wide planning.

The Richland County Comprehensive Plan places a strong emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation, land use, and economic development, recognizing that many of the county's most pressing challenges and opportunities require coordinated efforts across municipalities. The planning process has resulted in strategies and action steps organized around these areas, providing a roadmap for aligning the county's land use policies, economic priorities, and growth strategies in a way that benefits all residents. By addressing these core issues, the plan aims to promote sustainable growth and create a vibrant community for years to come.

Core Values

Richland County's practices must be tethered to its principles in order to have a coherent strategy moving forward. Core values serve as the foundation for decision-making, as they hold decision-makers accountable for their choices. The County Board provided the following core values during the strategic planning process:

Integrity

Engage in county work with honesty and transparency in all proceedings. Meet commitments. Value the multitude of experiences on the board and the diversity of opinions this brings to decision-making.

Public Service

Serve the county professionally and with competence. Be efficient and objective in decision-making. Focus on doing work that is relevant to both current and future generations of county residents.

Accountability

Assume ownership of decisions. Be diligent and follow through on projects. Be responsive to the needs of county residents as a whole, while recognizing the intrinsic value of every person.

Open-minded

Govern in a collaborative manner, unbiased by personal interest. Listen to the needs of residents, while being aware of future demands on county services.

Richland County Vision

Richland County will be a leader for resilient rural counties and a place where people love life, enjoy work, and are empowered to raise thriving families.

The Richland County Comprehensive Plan's values and vision are informed by the Richland County Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2021.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to “bounce forward” from disasters and shocks. Flooding, political polarization, and cyber-attacks are just a few of the many challenges faced by local residents, organizations, businesses, and governments. Resilience is about proactive work to weather difficulty and recover stronger.

In Richland County, a coalition of local leaders began meeting in March of 2023 to dedicate efforts toward resilience. Rather than focusing only on putting out immediate issues, this group, called the Richland Resilience Group, has met on a quarterly basis for the past two years to look ahead at the challenges to come, and what may be done to build resilience. In 2024, this group completed four proactive projects in the county: a river gauge implementation plan, groundwater vulnerability research, resilient land use research, and outreach to non-group members.

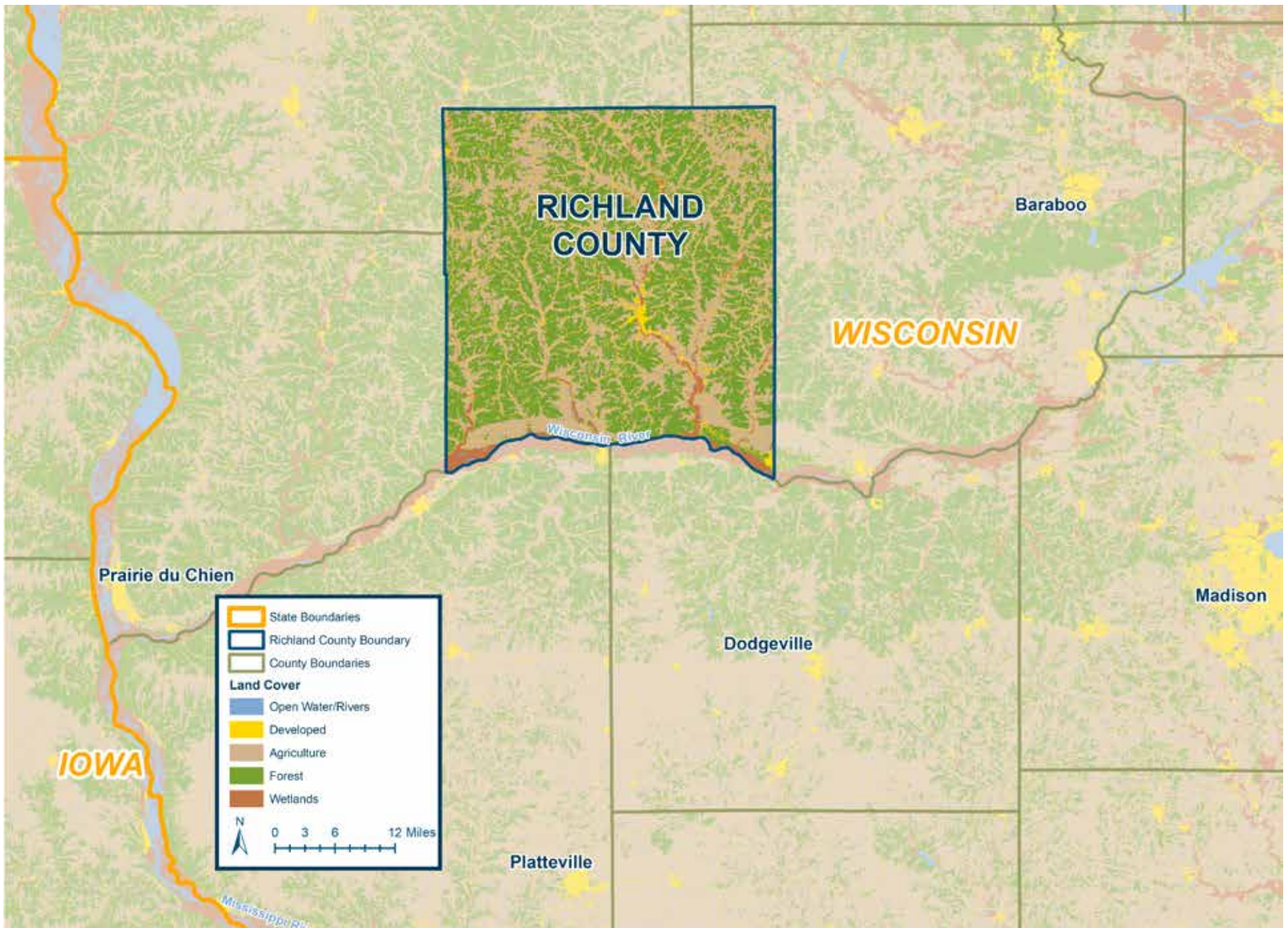
Richland County's efforts to build resilience are key to growing and sustaining healthy communities. This comprehensive plan is another example of resilience work in the county. Through proactive action to increase intergovernmental coordination, responsibly steward natural resources, and identify opportunities for future development, Richland County can improve the lives of today's residents and future generations.





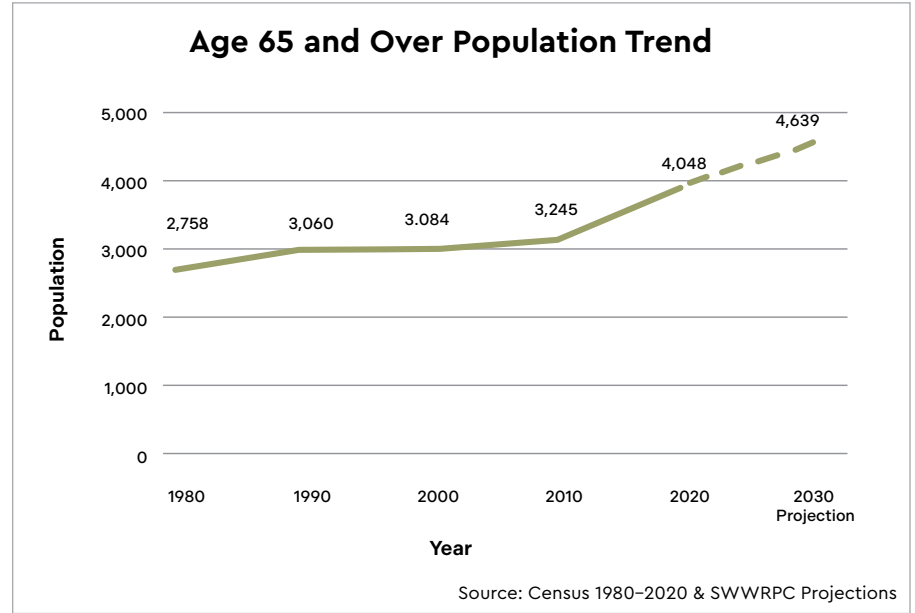
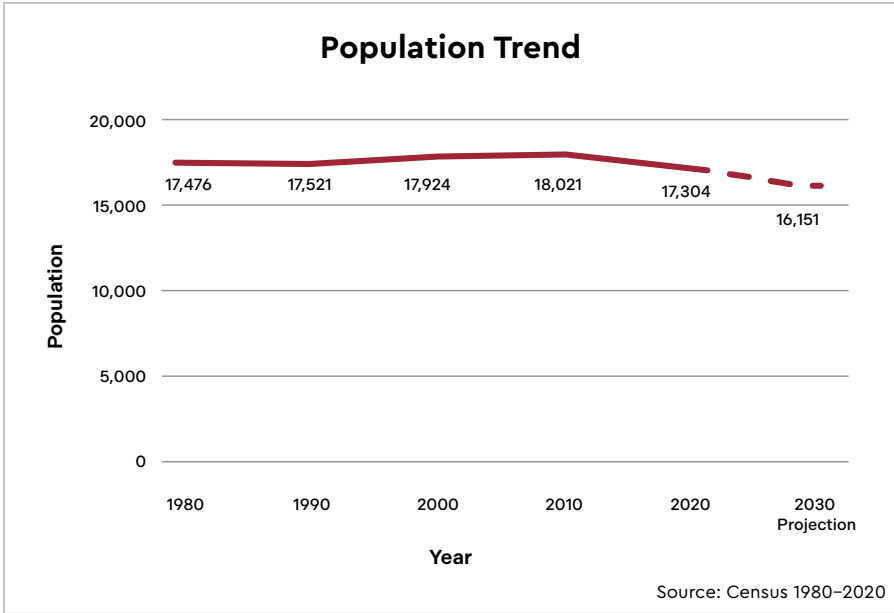
Richland County Today

Richland County is located in the southwestern region of Wisconsin, within the driftless area. It is bordered by Vernon County to the north, Sauk and Iowa Counties to the east, Grant County to the south, and Crawford County to the west.

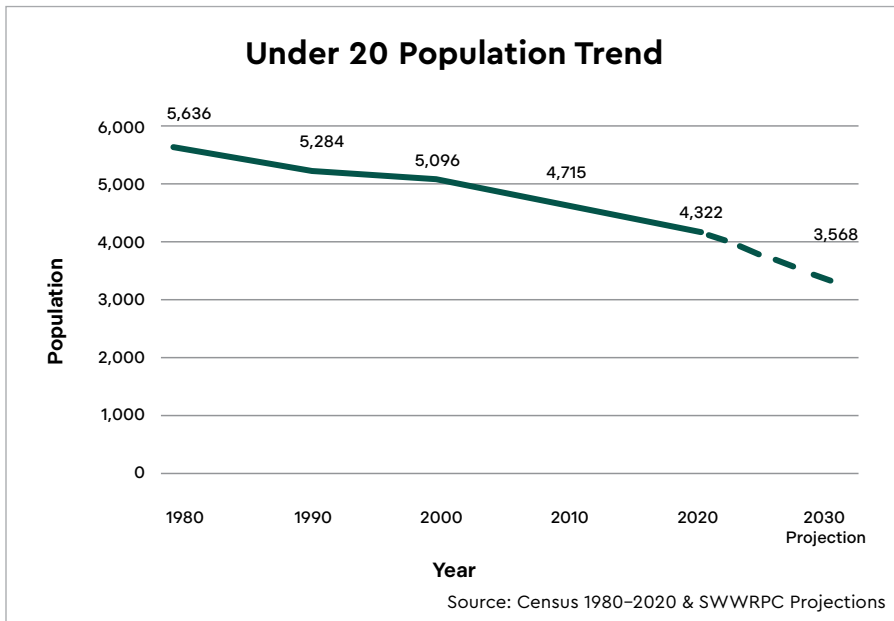
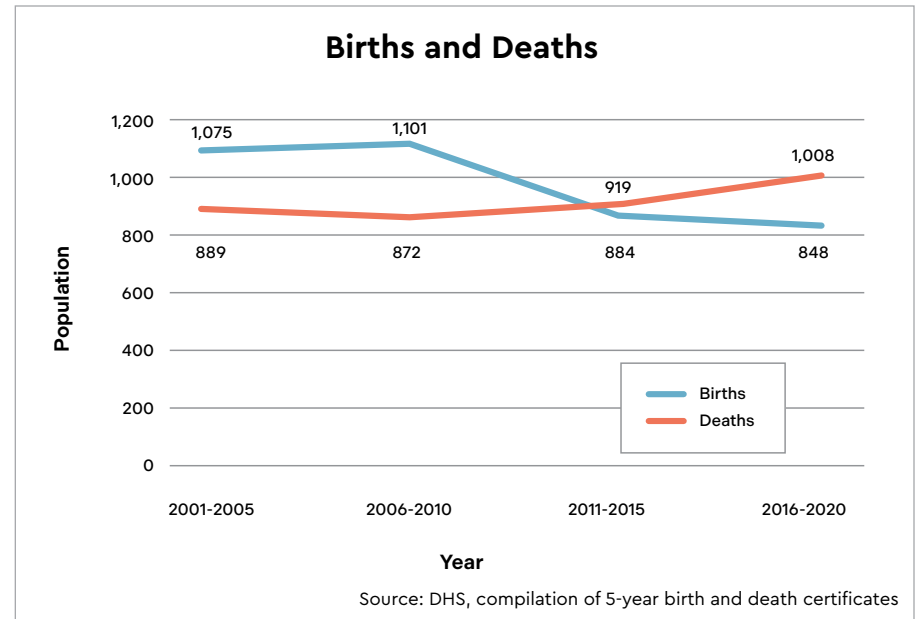
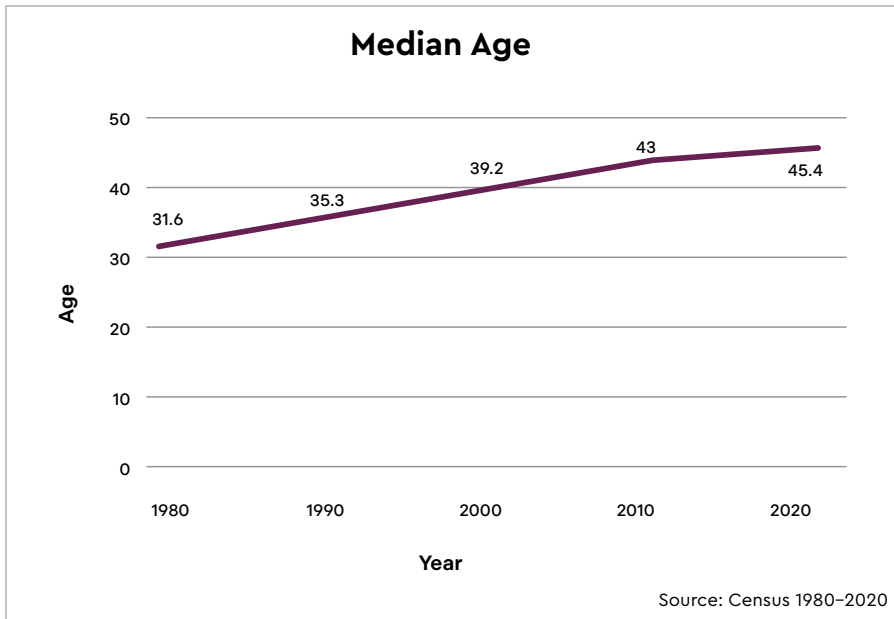


Demographics

Over the past few decades, Richland County has faced significant demographic changes, including a stagnant population from 1980 to 2010 followed by a noticeable decline between 2010 and 2020. Projections suggest this trend will continue, with an even steeper decline expected by 2030. This population shift is accompanied by an aging demographic, as the median age in the county has risen substantially over the past 40 years, primarily due to the growing proportion of residents aged 65 and older. This aging trend is expected to continue, with the senior population projected to increase significantly in the coming years.



Southwestern Wisconsin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) priority 2.1: Support workers of all ages by offering opportunities for mentorship and encore careers.

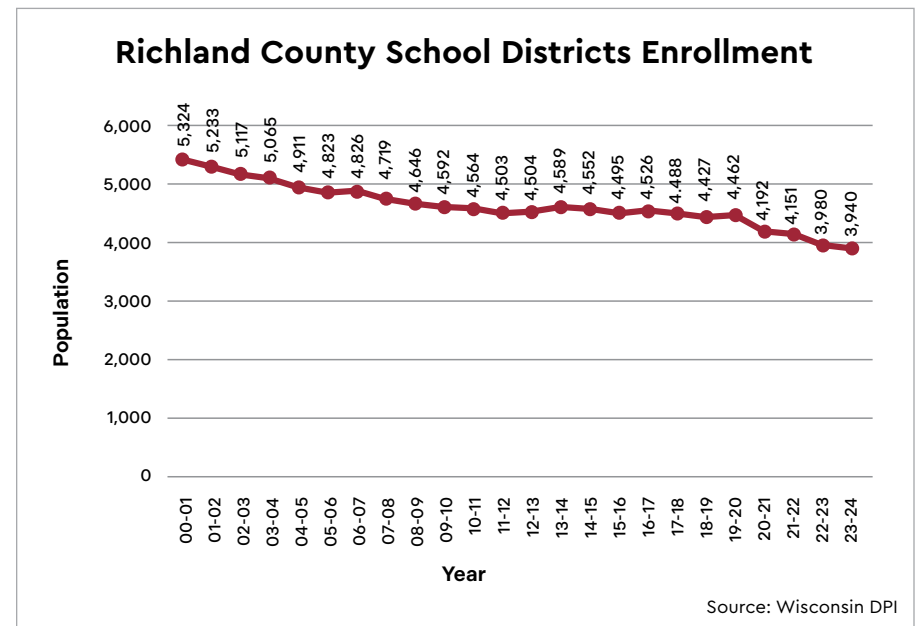
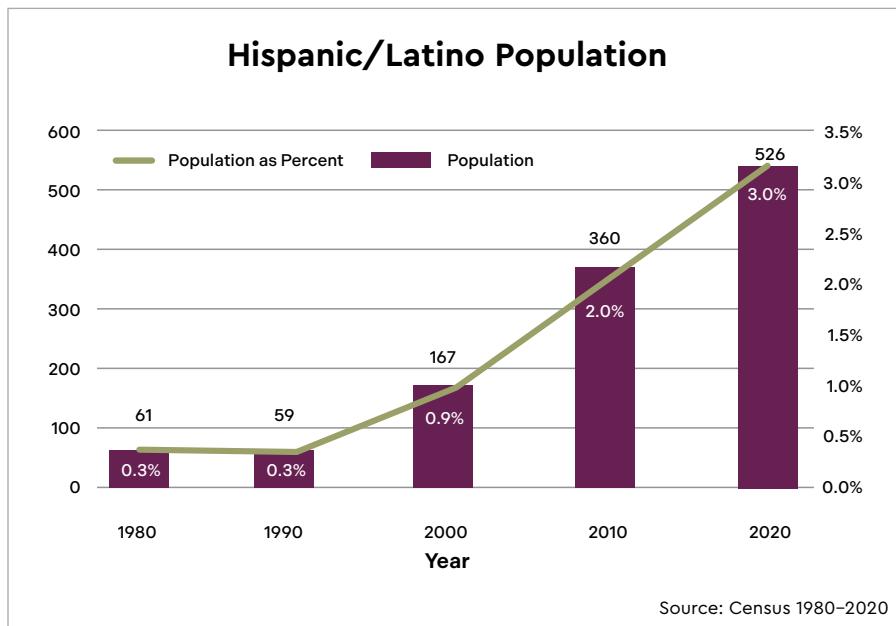


Additionally, Richland County has experienced a decline in its youth population. The number of residents under the age of 20 has dropped by nearly a quarter since 1980, and this decline is anticipated to continue. This reduction in the youth population has had a direct impact on the county's school districts, which have collectively seen a sharp decrease in enrollment. The loss of students has put additional strain on local school systems, which are already grappling with limited resources and staffing challenges.

The **Richland Center Comprehensive Plan** identifies the need to appeal to young adults and suggests encouraging those residents to have a greater say in local government decision making, public projects, and community organizations ('Community Resources').

While the county's overall population shrinks, one notable demographic shift is the growth of the Hispanic/Latino community, which now represents a small but increasing portion of the population. As the overall population continues to decline, the Hispanic/Latino community is expected to make up an increasingly significant share of Richland County's residents.

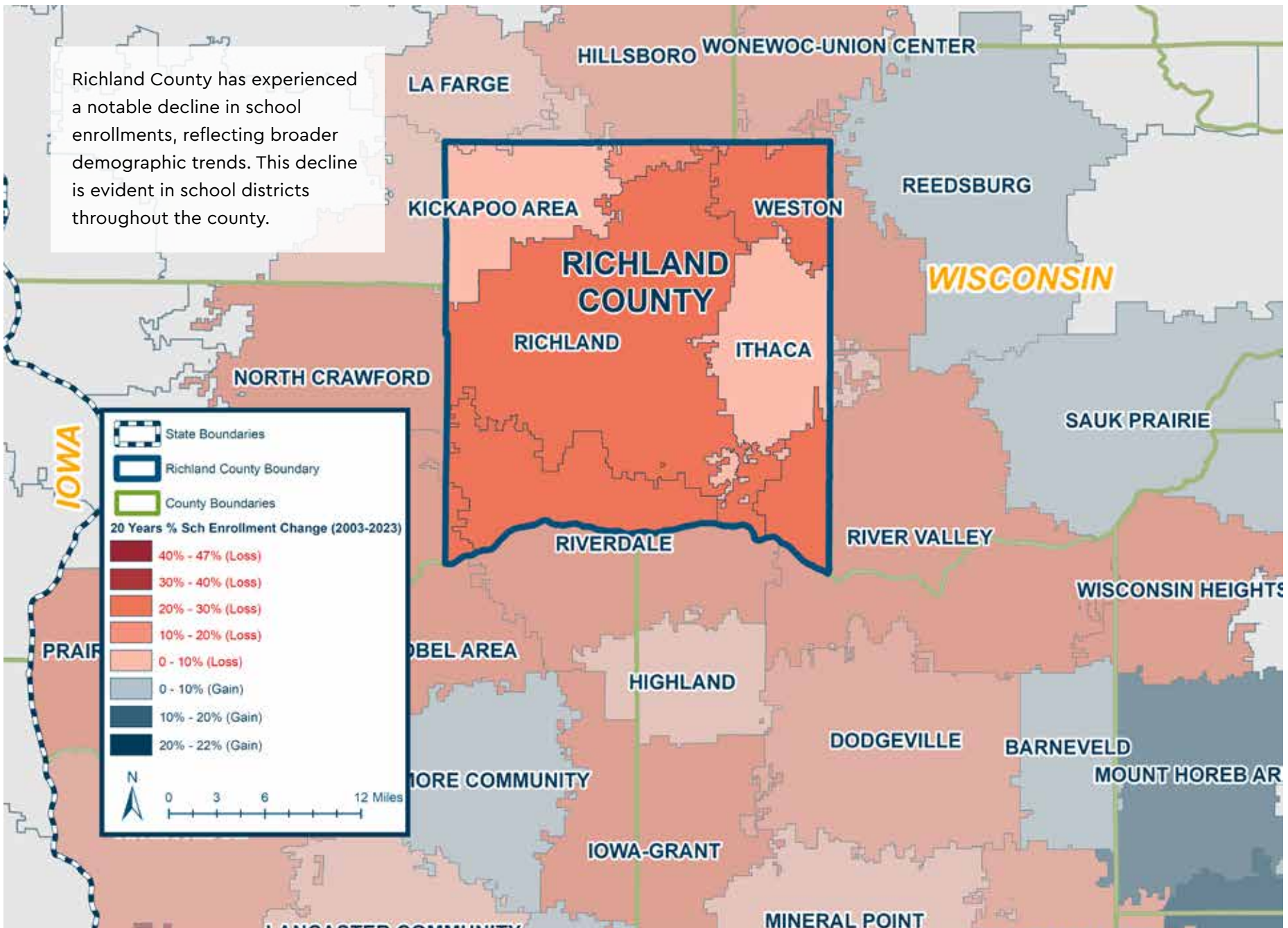
These demographic shifts create both challenges and opportunities for the county. With a shrinking population and an aging community, local governments and service providers must consider more innovative approaches to maintaining services and meeting the evolving needs of residents. Intergovernmental cooperation will be crucial in addressing these challenges. By collaborating across municipalities, Richland County's towns, villages, and school districts can share resources, streamline services, and coordinate efforts to better serve the community, especially in areas like education, healthcare, and senior services. In an era of demographic decline and limited resources, these partnerships will be key to ensuring that the county remains resilient and capable of adapting to future challenges.



CEDS priority 4.3: Address barriers for immigrant and non-English-speaking residents.

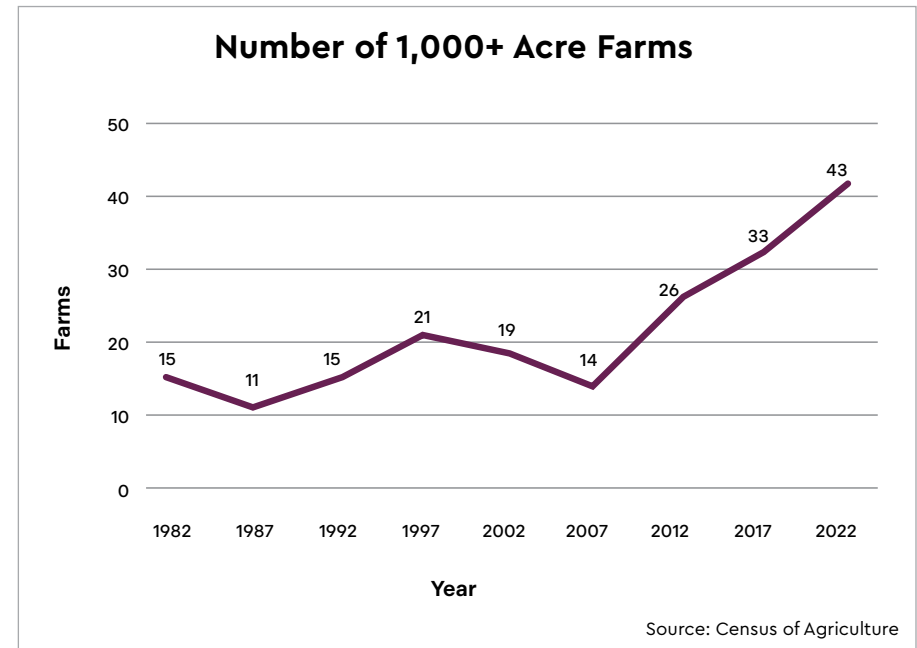
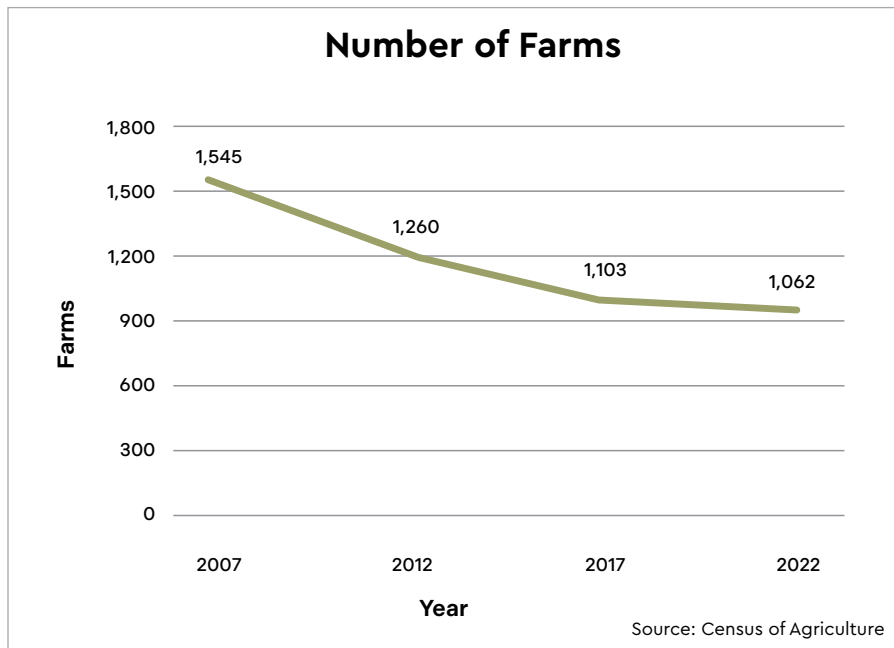
Districts Included are: Richland, Ithaca, Kickapoo, Weston, Riverdale, and River Valley. Since the 2000–2001 school year, these districts have collectively seen a 25.9% decline in enrollment.

Richland County has experienced a notable decline in school enrollments, reflecting broader demographic trends. This decline is evident in school districts throughout the county.



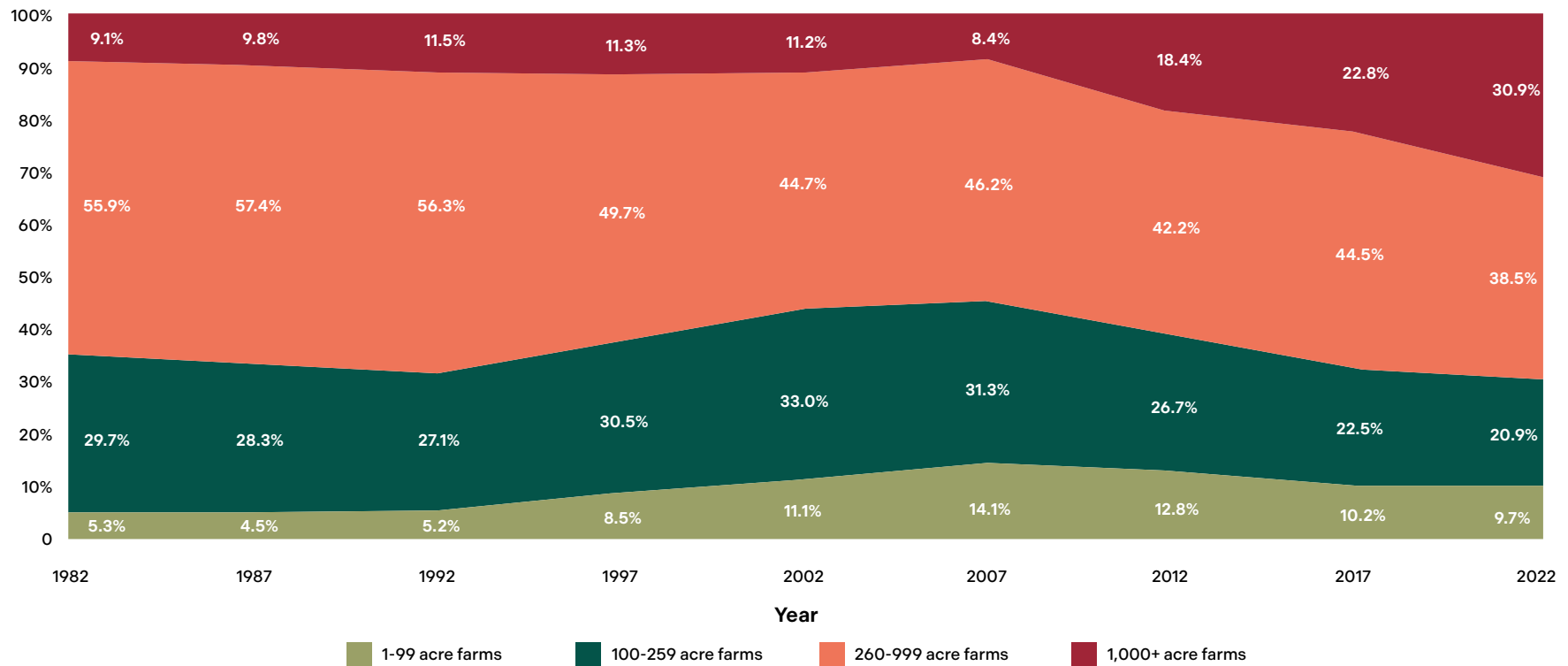
Agriculture

In addition to demographic shifts, Richland County has also seen significant changes in its agricultural landscape. Since 2007, the county has lost roughly a third of its farms, mirroring a broader trend across rural Wisconsin. Over the past 40 years, the structure of farming in the county has shifted dramatically. The number of large farms (over 1,000 acres) has nearly tripled, while mid-sized farms (those between 100 and 1,000 acres) have steadily declined. In contrast, the number of small farms (under 100 acres) has increased, now accounting for nearly 10% of all farms in the county.



These changes reflect broader economic pressures on the agricultural sector, including consolidation and the rising costs of farming. Larger farms have become more prominent, often due to economies of scale, while smaller operations have struggled to remain viable. The decline of mid-sized farms, which traditionally provided a diverse mix of crops and livestock, may also impact the county's rural character and the sustainability of its agricultural economy. As the landscape shifts, these trends present challenges for land use and zoning, as local communities may need to adjust to the growing presence of large agricultural operations and the conversion of farmland to other uses.

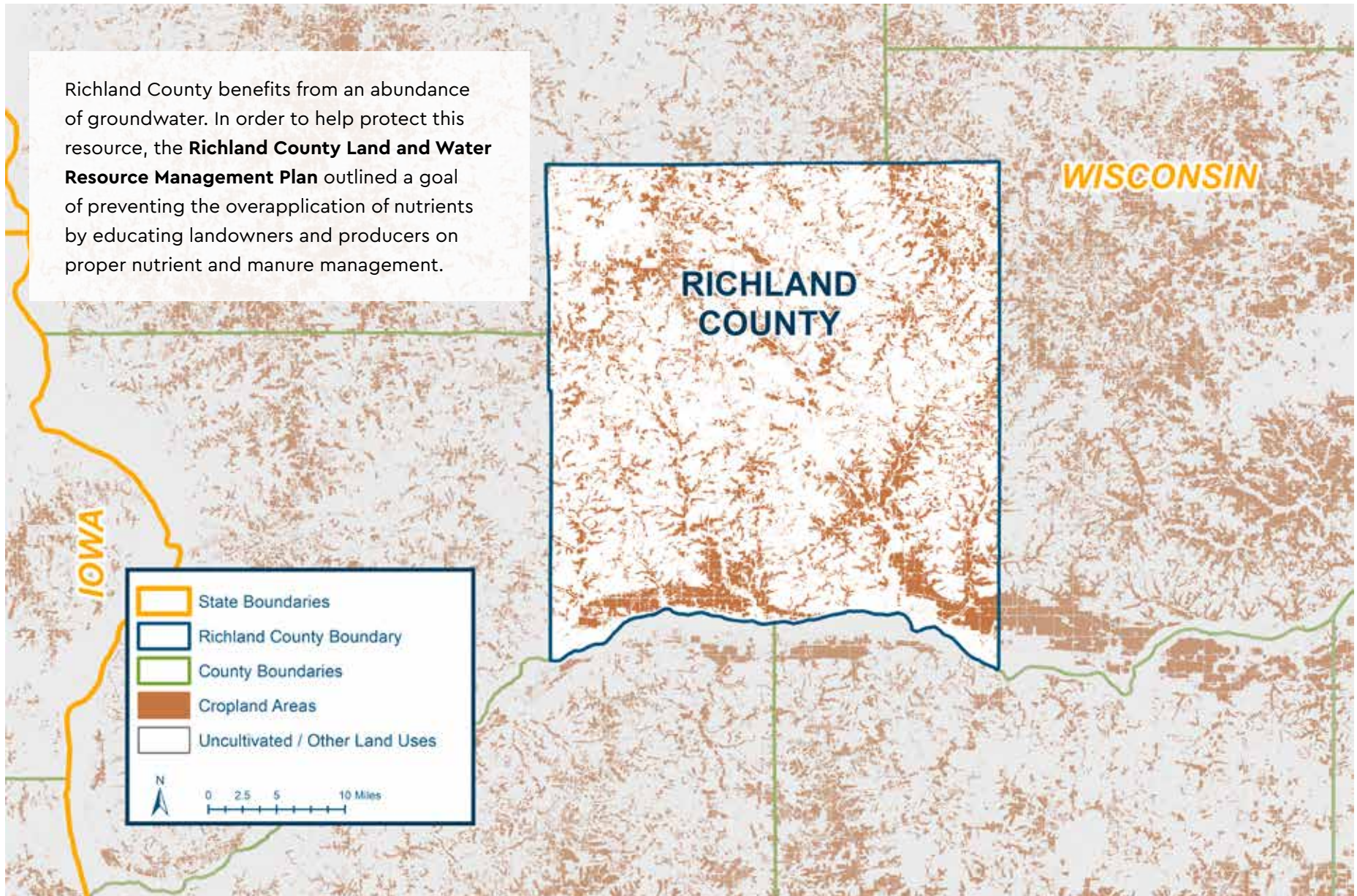
Farm Consolidation Over Time



Source: Census of Agriculture

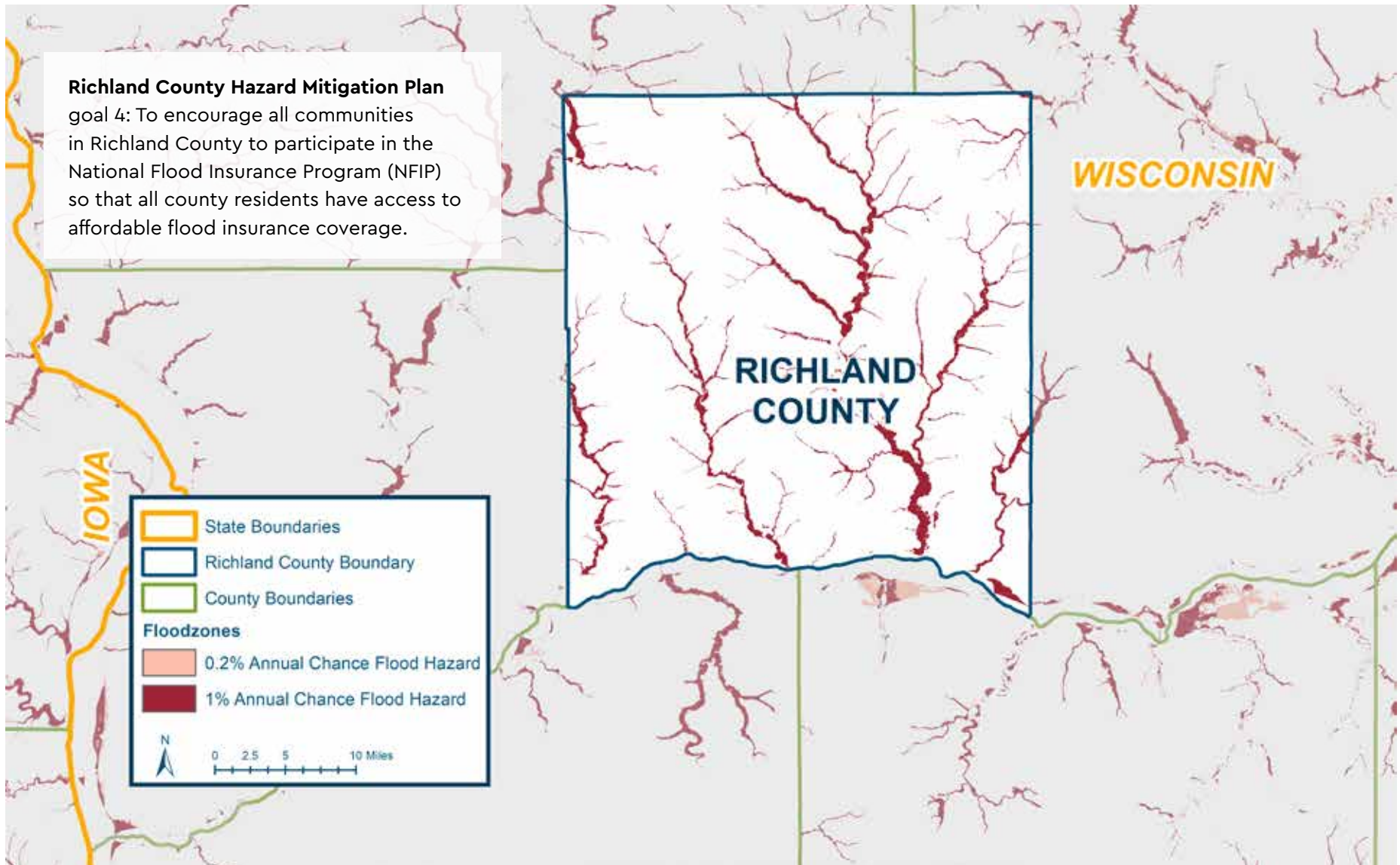
While the loss of farms raises concerns about the future of agriculture in Richland County, it also highlights the need for careful land use planning to balance the growing demand for residential and commercial development with the need to preserve the county's agricultural heritage. Maintaining a sustainable agricultural base while accommodating growth will require thoughtful land management strategies, as the county's agricultural landscape continues to evolve in response to market forces and demographic changes.

Despite ample fertile soil, cropland distribution in Richland County is limited to valleys and relatively flat areas, including near the Wisconsin River in the southern portion of the county.

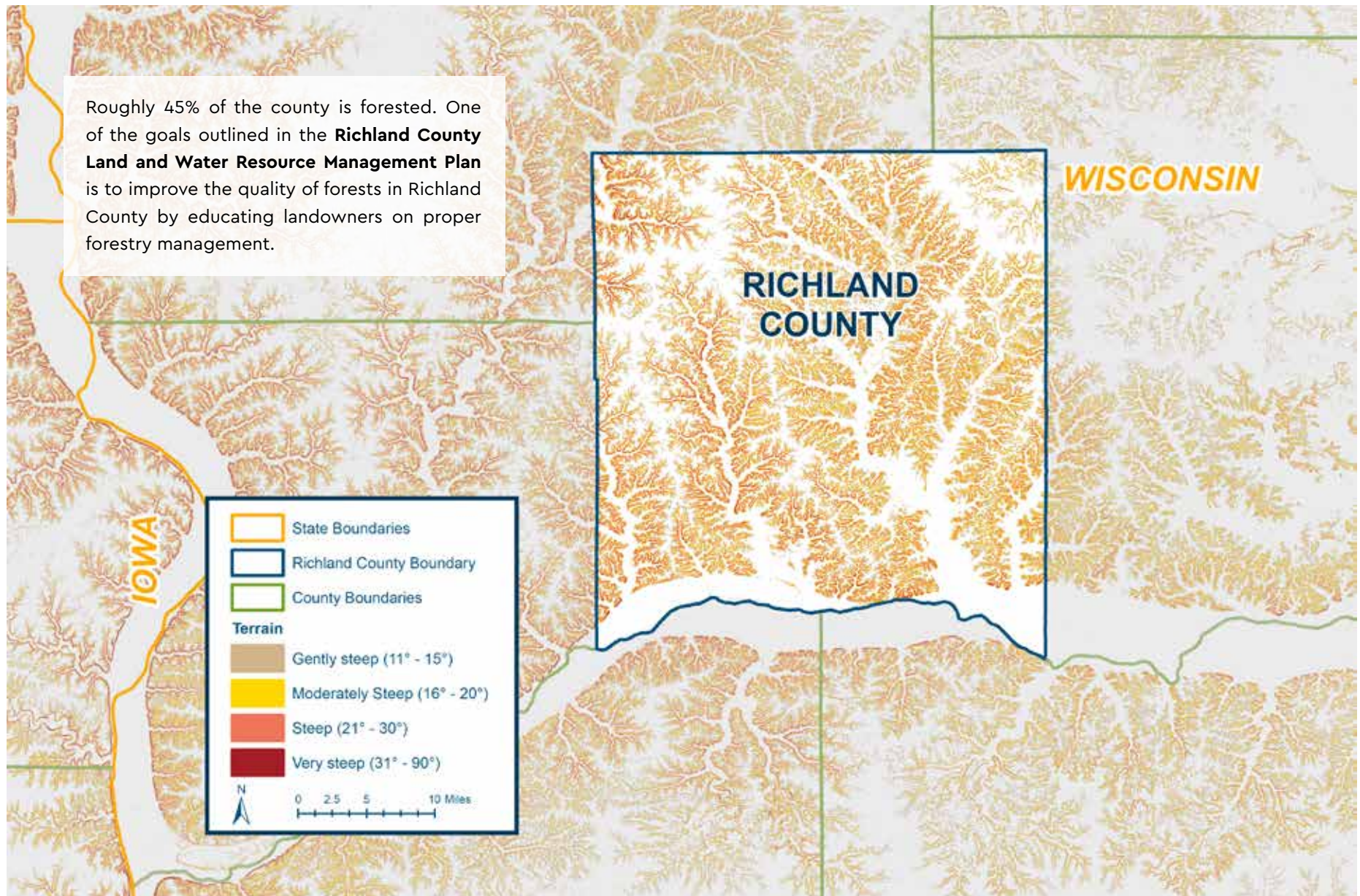


Natural Landscape and Topography

Richland County's geography includes multiple floodplains, particularly due to its location in the Driftless Area, where steep valleys and winding rivers make it prone to flooding.

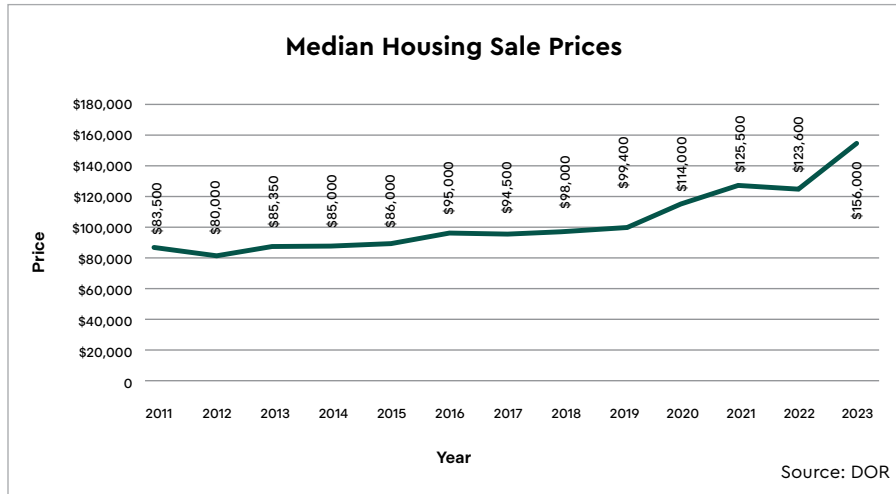


Richland County features a varied topography characterized by rolling hills, valleys, and riverine landscapes. The county is known for its rugged terrain and lack of glacial deposits.

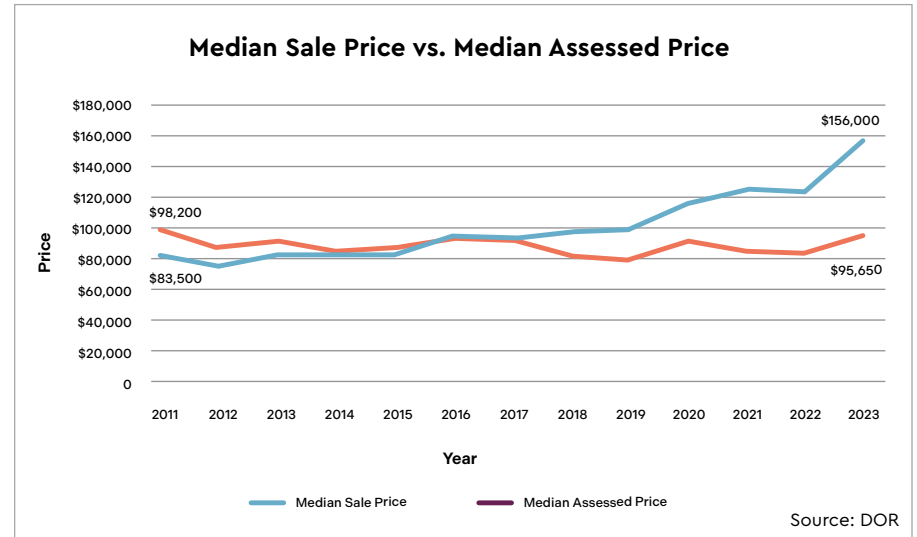


Housing

In recent years, Richland County has seen a sharp increase in housing prices, particularly starting in the early 2020s. The median housing sale price, which had been relatively stable through most of the 2010s, began to significantly outpace the median assessed price starting in 2017. By 2023, the median sale price exceeded the median assessed price by over \$60,000, signaling a growing gap between what homes are worth on the market versus their assessed values. This sharp rise in home prices has occurred alongside slower growth in household incomes, creating an affordability gap for many potential homebuyers in the county.



The **Richland County Housing Study** found that housing that is affordable to first-time homebuyers is generally older, and therefore tends to have significant maintenance issues. Approximately 25% – 35% of realtors' clients are first time homebuyers.



The **Southwest Community Action Program (SWCAP) Community Needs Assessment** found that as of 2020, only 2.61% of the existing housing stock had been constructed since 2010, the lowest in the region (3.6%), as well as Wisconsin (4.52%) and the US (6.21%).

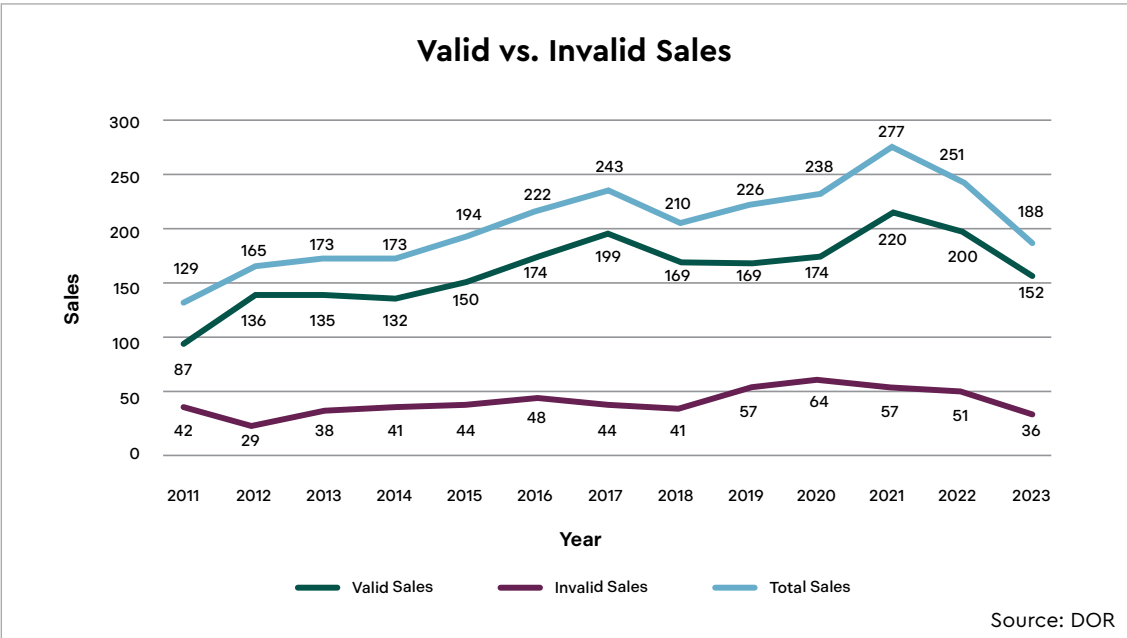
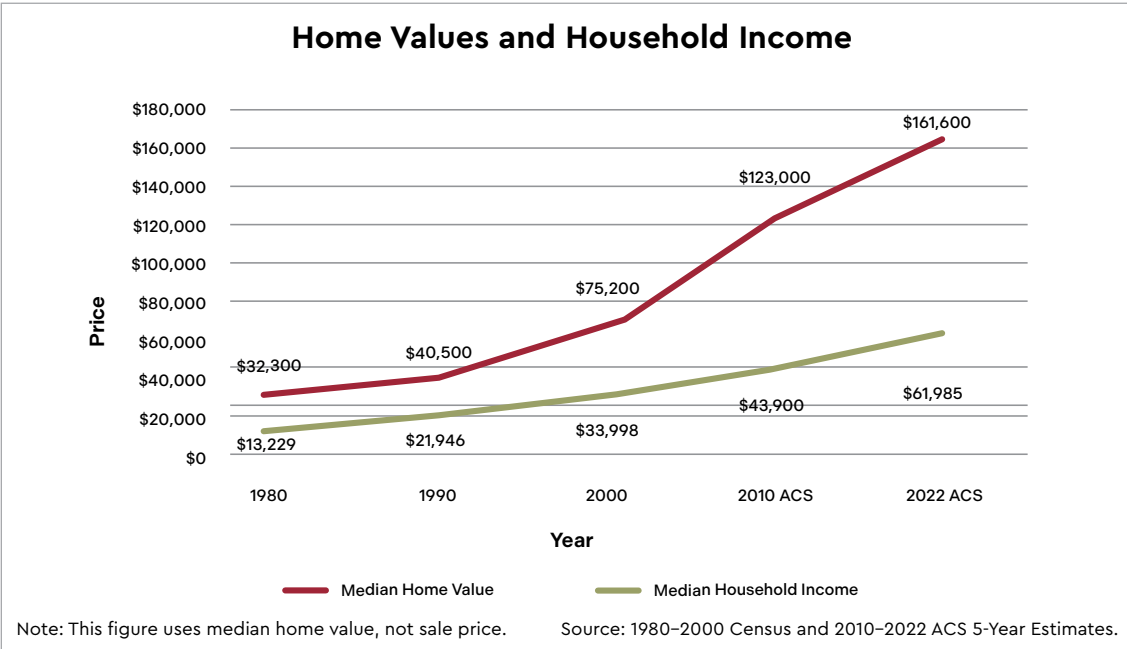
The **Richland County Housing Study** recommends supporting equitable wealth-building opportunities for residents. Examples include:

- Allow ADUs by right in cities and villages. Explore ADUs by right at a county level.
- Streamline permitting and promote installation of residential solar.
- Prioritize equity in zoning policy.

The increase in home prices has been compounded by a high rate of “invalid sales” — transactions between related parties or distressed sales that often do not reflect true market conditions. These sales have made up a significant portion of total sales since 2011, which points to challenges for newcomers and first-time buyers trying to enter the housing market. These properties, often not listed publicly, can complicate the home-buying process, further straining the market for those looking for affordable housing options.

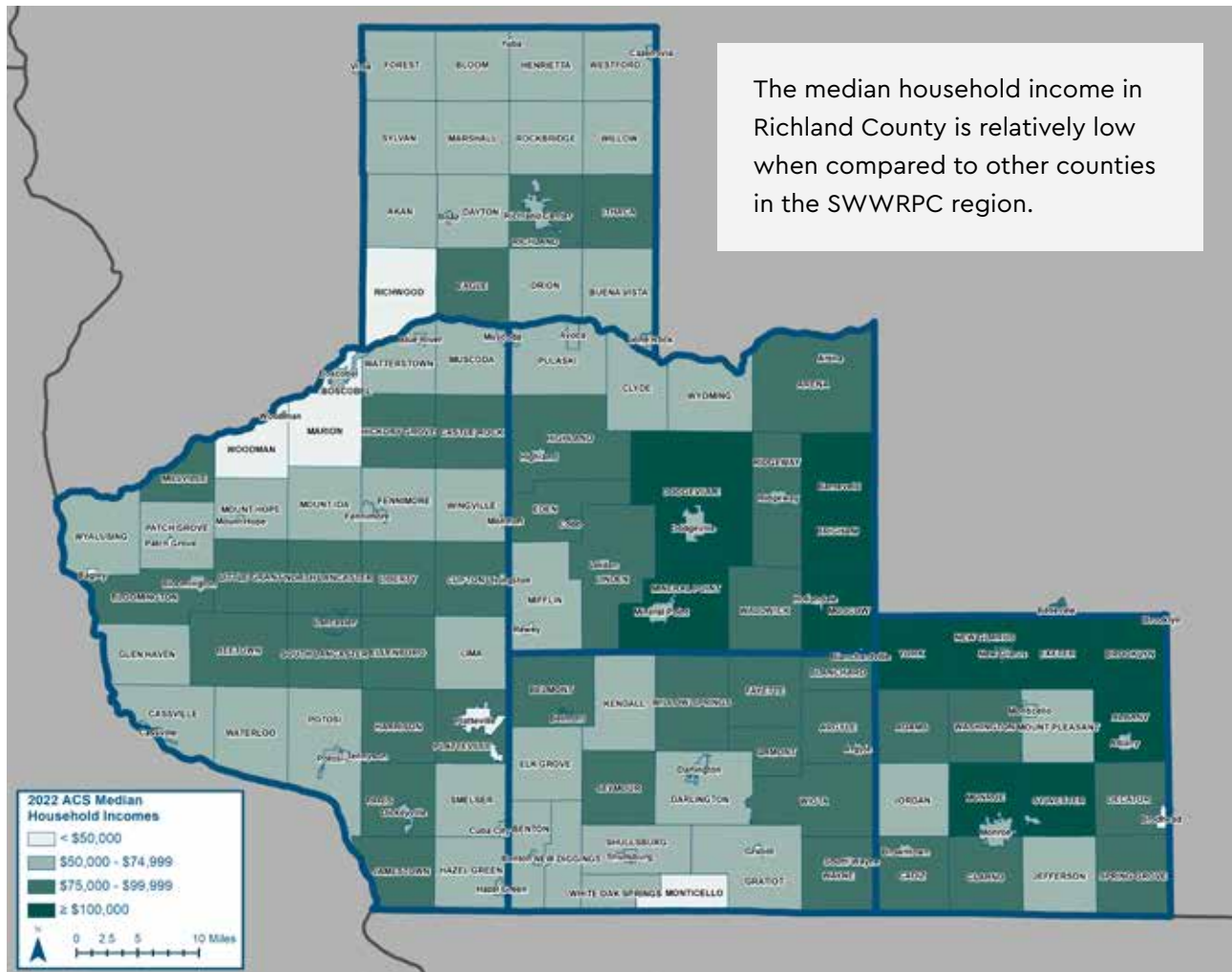
The **Richland County Housing Study** recommends Increase affordable housing options for new and existing residents. Examples include:

- Continue to support a zoning ordinance with only two or three residential districts.
- Develop and promote existing local funding for down payment assistance grants, low-interest maintenance loans, etc.



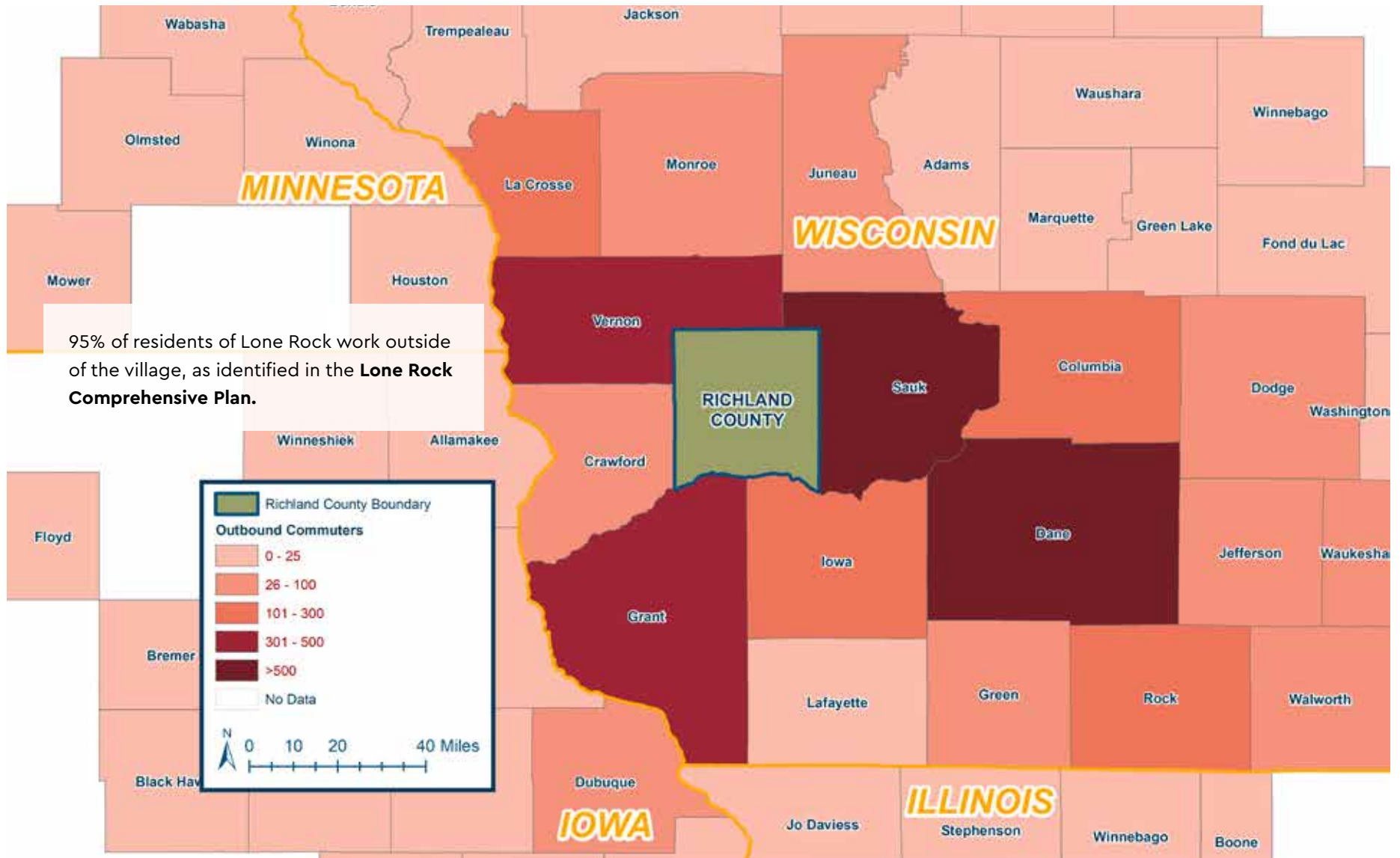
Additionally, after reaching a 10-year high in 2021, the number of total home sales has declined over the past two years, reflecting broader market shifts and growing uncertainty. This slowdown could be tied to several factors, including rising mortgage rates, decreasing affordability, and shifting economic conditions. As the county's population continues to age and younger residents increasingly move elsewhere in search of work and affordable housing, local governments face growing pressure to address housing availability and affordability.

These housing trends are closely tied to Richland County's demographics and economic development goals. The rising housing costs make it more difficult for younger residents, families, and workers to settle in the county, which could further exacerbate the population decline and hinder workforce development. In turn, these challenges put additional strain on local school districts and community services.

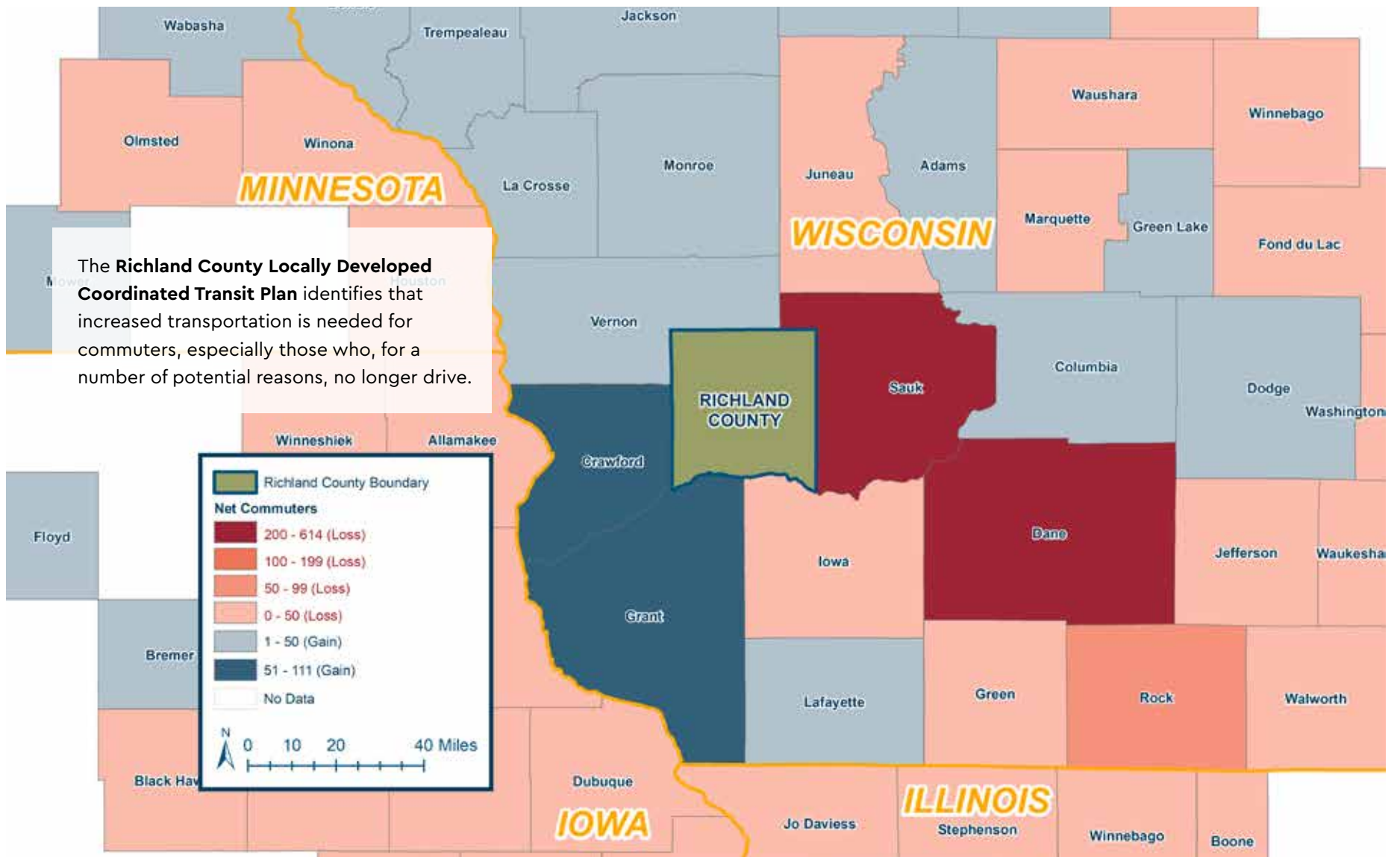


Transportation

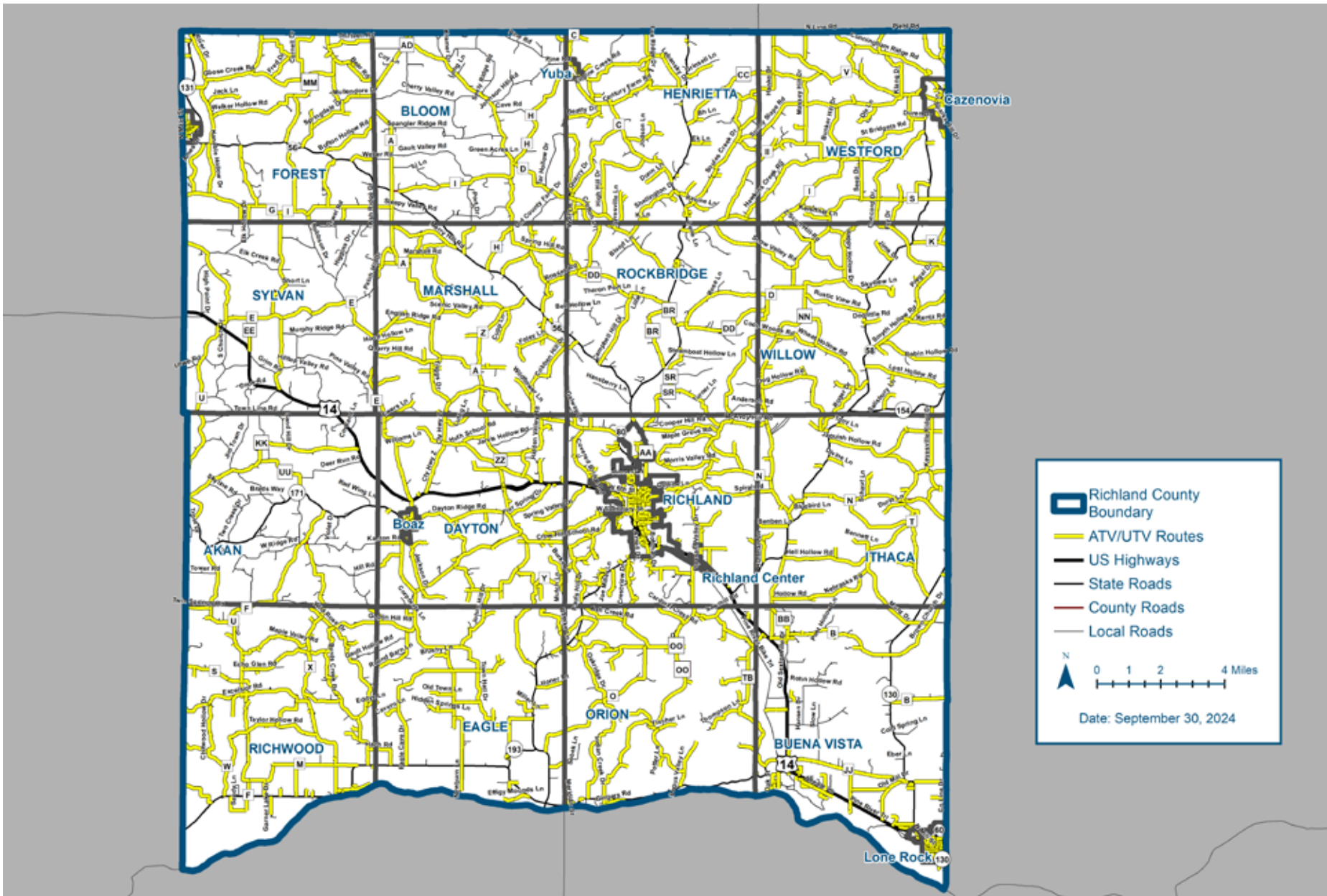
Sauk County receives more outbound commuters from Richland County than any surrounding counties. Other notable receiving counties include Dane, Grant, Iowa, and Vernon Counties.



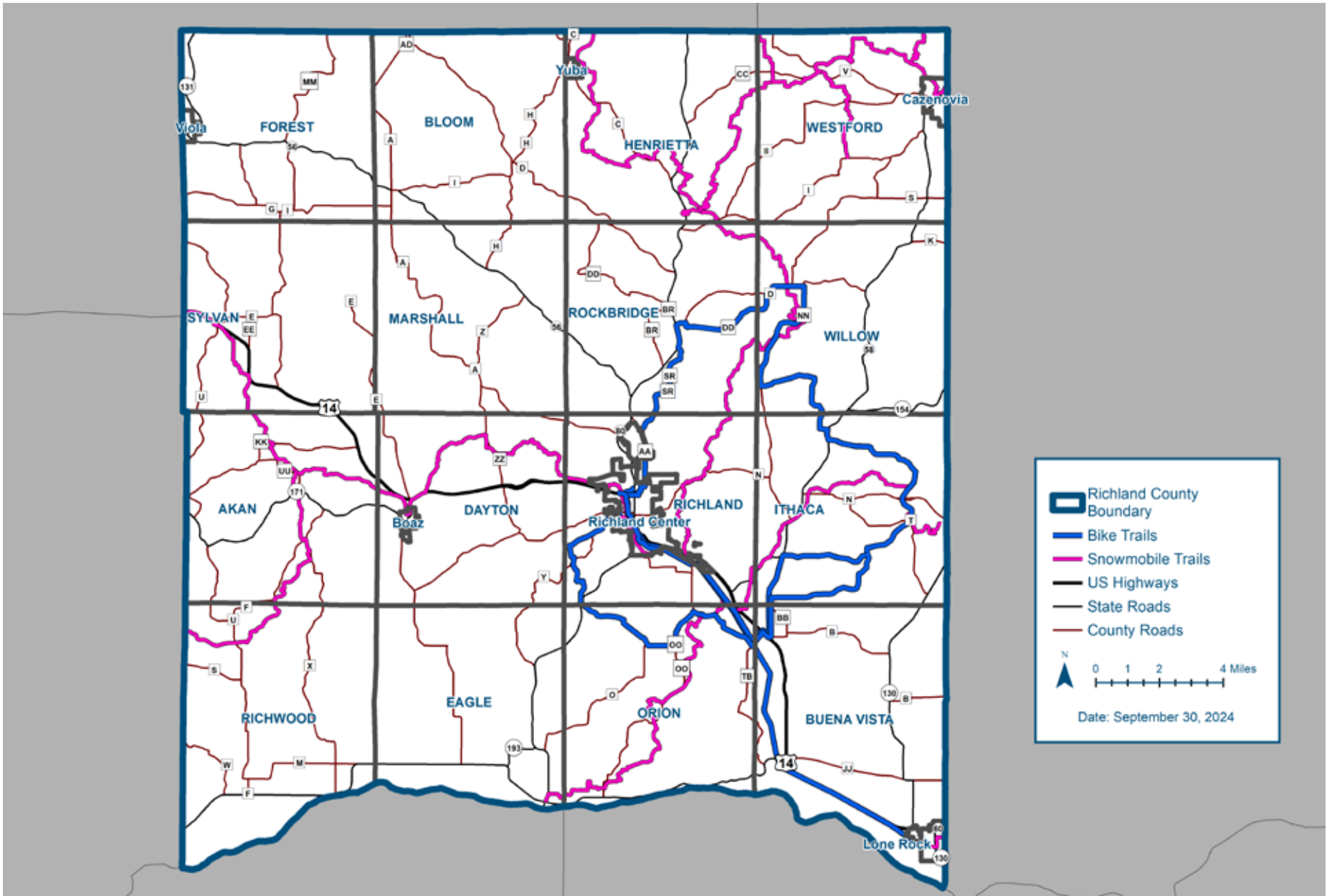
Richland County experiences a significant net loss of commuters to Dane County, followed by Sauk County. Conversely, it attracts a greater net influx of commuters from Crawford County and Grant County than any other county.



Richland County features many ATV/UTV-allowed roads, with each township offering access to these roads.



Richland County provides 134 miles of snowmobile trails and 75 miles of primary bike trails identified by the county.

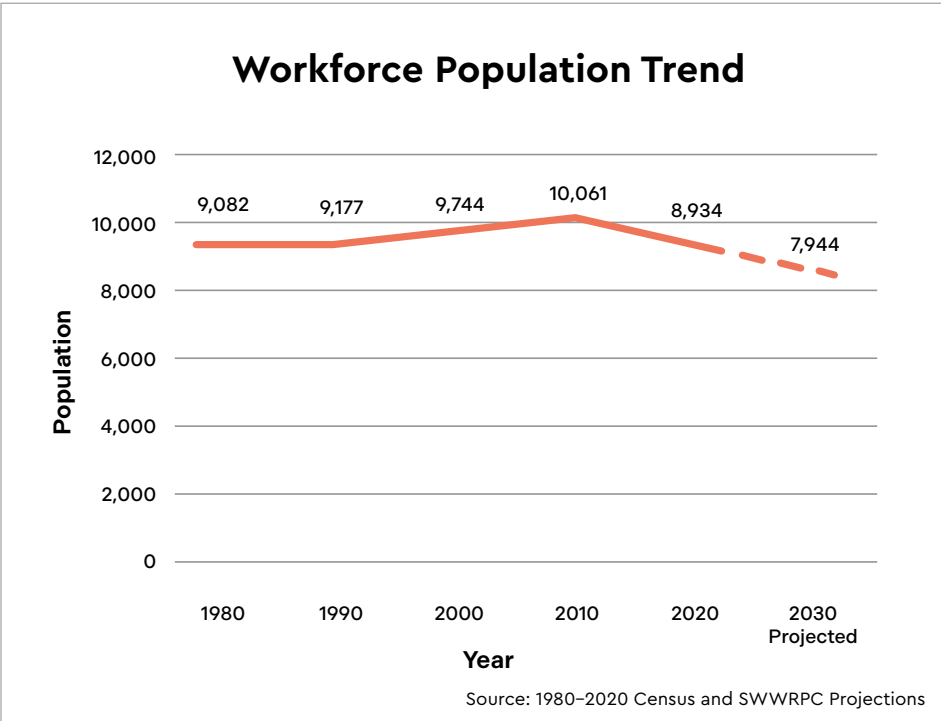




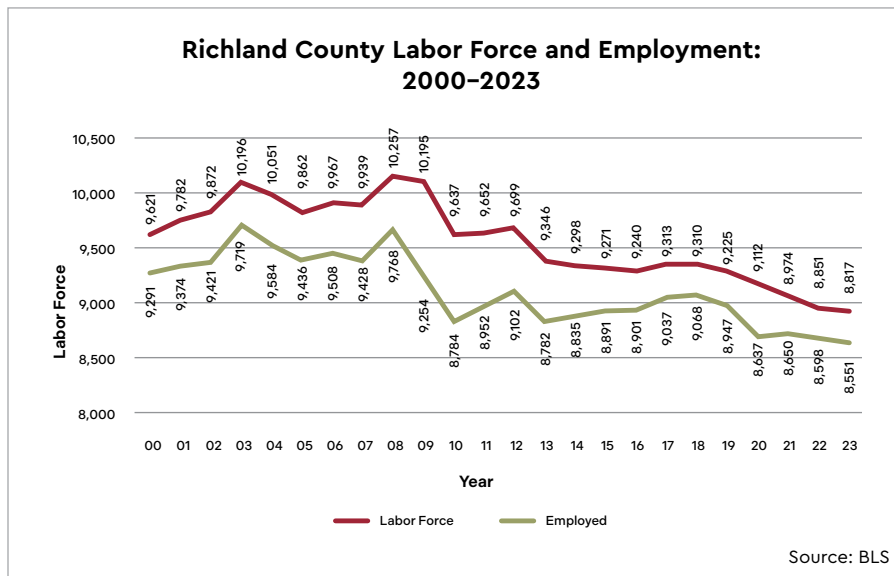


Economic Development

Richland County has experienced notable shifts in its workforce demographics over the past several decades. From 1980 to 2010, the workforce population steadily grew, reflecting both population growth and economic expansion. However, since the 2010s, the workforce has begun to decline, and projections show that this trend will continue through 2030. This decline is driven by several factors, including an aging population, outmigration of younger residents seeking employment opportunities elsewhere, and changing local economic conditions.



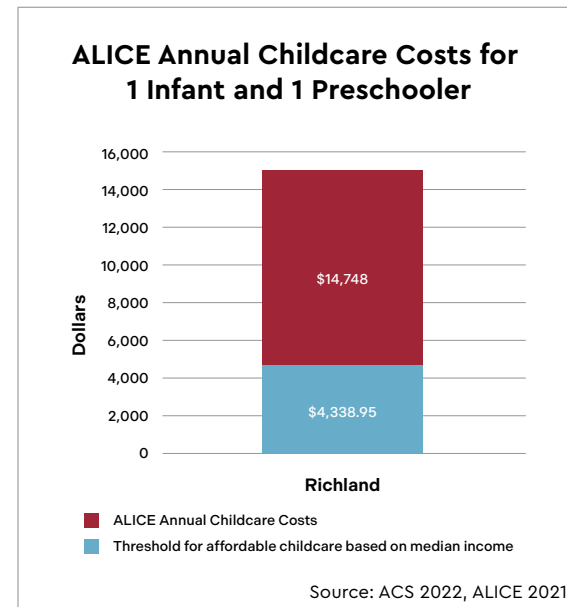
The prime working-age population (ages 20–64) has been particularly impacted. Although the workforce and employed populations peaked just before the 2008 recession, both have steadily declined since, mirroring national and regional trends in rural areas. As the county's median age rises and fewer young people remain to enter the workforce, the challenge of maintaining a robust, local workforce grows more pressing. The shrinking workforce is especially concerning for key industries that depend on a steady supply of workers, such as agriculture and manufacturing.



Agriculture remains one of Richland County's foundational industries, though the workforce in this sector faces its own unique challenges. The county has seen growth in sectors such as healthcare and agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting over the past decade. However, agriculture's labor needs are evolving, with fewer workers entering the field due to a combination of factors, including economic pressures, the consolidation of farms, and an aging farming population. These shifts in agriculture and the wider economy are reshaping the workforce landscape, as fewer young people are choosing to enter farming or stay in rural areas.

The decline in the workforce also has ripple effects on housing, as fewer working-age individuals in the county could result in reduced demand for housing and lower home values, particularly in rural areas. At the same time, rising housing costs are becoming a barrier for families looking to settle in the county, especially as wages in sectors like manufacturing and agriculture fail to keep pace with the increasing cost of living. The affordability of housing, combined with the challenges of accessing affordable childcare, further compounds these issues. For many families, the high cost of childcare often leads to one parent leaving the workforce, reducing overall household income and further diminishing the labor pool.

The **SWCAP Community Needs Assessment** identifies the decrease across the county, region, state, and country in the number of childcare workers. The median hourly wage in Richland County for childcare workers was \$9.84 in 2022, lower than the averages in both Wisconsin (\$10.90) and the US (\$11.64)



CEDS priority 1.2: Increase the quantity, affordability, and quality of childcare options in the region.

Richland County Industries

Industry	2013 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2013 – 2023 Change	2013 – 2023 % Change
Manufacturing	1,580	1,416	-165	-10%
Government	1,071	1,044	-28	-3%
Health Care and Social Assistance	881	1,021	140	16%
Retail Trade	901	858	-43	-5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	364	424	60	16%
Construction	339	364	25	7%
Accommodation and Food Services	329	347	17	5%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	242	215	-27	-11%
Wholesale Trade	194	203	10	5%
Finance and Insurance	155	166	11	7%
Transportation and Warehousing	133	154	21	16%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	265	118	-147	-55%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	78	113	35	45%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	40	72	32	79%
Information	75	55	-20	-27%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	45	44	-1	-3%
Educational Services	39	41	3	7%
Utilities	14	20	7	48%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	<10	<10	Insufficient Data	Insufficient Data
Management of Companies and Enterprises	56	0	-56	-100%
Unclassified Industry	<10	0	Insufficient Data	Insufficient Data

Source: Lightcast

The Richland Center industrial park is currently the only industrial park in the county that has available space for development, presenting a valuable opportunity for economic growth and job creation in the county. By promoting this space, the county could attract a variety of new businesses, including manufacturing, logistics, technology, and service-based industries.



Bringing new companies to the industrial park would not only create direct employment opportunities but also generate a positive ripple effect on the local economy, supporting existing businesses and increasing demand for services such as retail, hospitality, and housing. The influx of businesses will also enhance the county's tax base, providing additional revenue to improve infrastructure, public services, and community amenities.

Richland County currently has a budget of \$30,000 for economic development. This enables the county to serve in a supportive role in its response to future development. The county is supportive of further economic development activities but currently has no clearly defined role. Richland County can encourage economic development in the following actions:

Local Business Grants

Set aside funds for small business grants to support local entrepreneurs. A grant program can encourage innovation and job creation with a streamlined application process.

- The **Richland County Economic Development Considerations** report recommends funding an economic development project grant program.

Downtown Improvement Grant:

Create a small grant to improve downtown business storefronts, enhancing the area's appeal and encouraging foot traffic.

- The **Boaz Comprehensive Plan** identifies a goal to work with Richland County Economic Development, SWWRPC, and owners of vacant businesses to identify and market opportunities to fill vacant spaces.

Richland County Tourism Marketing Campaign

Allocate funds for a digital marketing campaign to promote Richland County's attractions. This could include social media ads, a dedicated website, and promotional materials for local events.

- The **Richland Center Comprehensive Plan** emphasizes outdoor recreation marketing (Economic Development strategy 2).

Community Events

Plan and host community events or festivals to celebrate local culture and businesses. Funds could be used for permits, promotions, and small vendor fees.

Workforce Development Workshops

Organize a series of free or low-cost workshops in collaboration with local vocational schools to provide skill development in high-demand areas. This could involve bringing in guest speakers or trainers.

Partnerships with Local Organizations

Establish partnerships with local schools or nonprofits for joint projects focused on economic development, leveraging resources, and expertise.

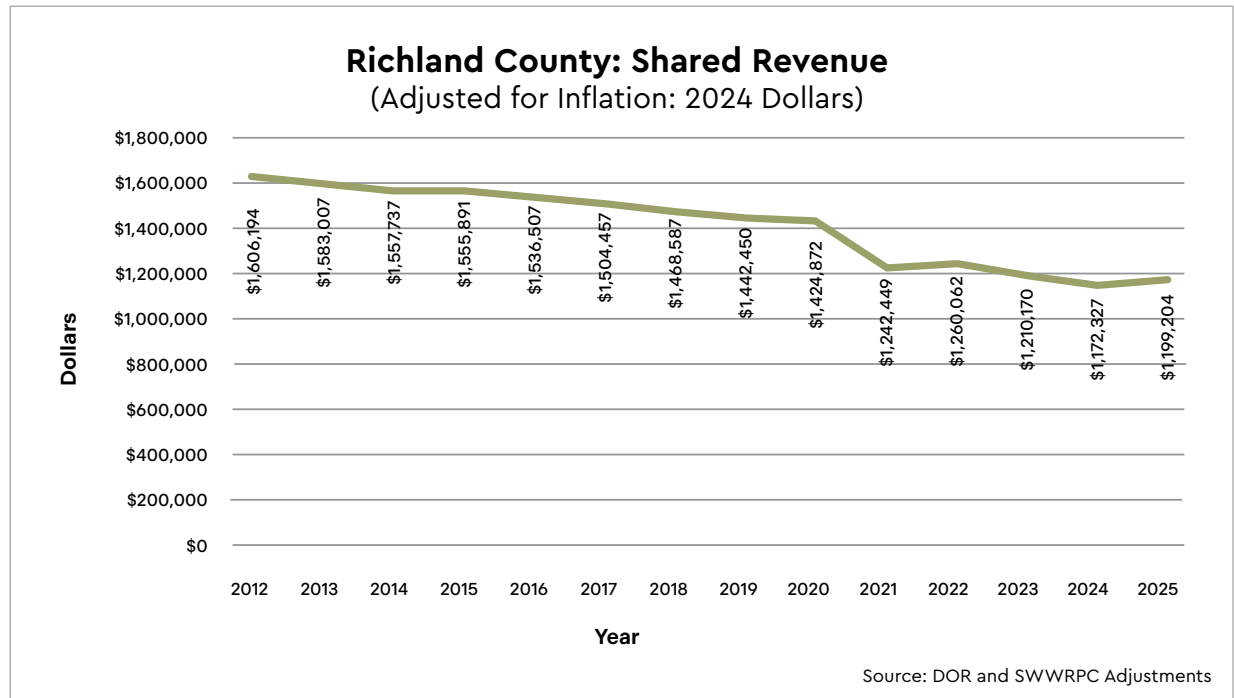
Intergovernmental Cooperation

Intergovernmental cooperation is increasingly essential for Richland County, as local governments face a series of economic challenges that threaten their ability to provide vital services to residents. Constraints such as levy limits, an aging and declining population, lack of development have created financial challenges for local governments. Additionally, the cost of goods and services outpacing shared revenue from state sources, which has historically helped municipalities fund essential programs and infrastructure. With local funds dwindling, local governments are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of their communities while balancing budgets.

Exacerbating this issue is the rising cost of goods and services, which affects everything from road maintenance to public safety. As expenses continue to climb, municipalities are confronted with the stark reality that traditional funding sources are no longer sufficient to cover their increasing operational costs. This situation creates an urgent need for innovative solutions that can help local governments stretch their limited resources further.

Considering these challenges, sharing services between units of local government presents a viable path forward. All units of government in the county offer similar services to similar populations. By collaborating on services such as emergency response, procurement of goods and services, and administrative functions, local governments can achieve significant cost savings while maintaining or even enhancing service delivery to their residents. Intergovernmental agreements can lead to more efficient use of resources, allowing communities to pool their strengths and address shared challenges collectively. This cooperative approach not only fosters a spirit of unity among local governments but also builds resilience in the face of economic uncertainties. The focus of local governments should be on quality service delivery, not who delivers the service.

Embracing intergovernmental cooperation may be the best, if not the only, way for Richland County to navigate the complex landscape of local governance today. By working together, municipalities can innovate and adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring that they continue to serve their residents effectively while maximizing the value of every taxpayer dollar. This collaborative mindset will be crucial in securing a sustainable and prosperous future for all communities within Richland County.



During the planning process, intergovernmental cooperation was a driving force during the engagement process with local government representatives. Officials from all local government units across the county were invited to participate in roundtable discussions and shared their insights on potential shared services and opportunities for collaboration. The outcomes of these discussions have been summarized to highlight important themes and future projects.

Richland County/Richland Center Meetings

The intergovernmental meetings between Richland County and the City of Richland Center focused on a collaborative approach toward future development and community enhancement. Through these discussions, Richland County and the City of Richland Center have established a shared vision and agreed on key projects aimed at addressing community needs and fostering sustainable growth, while also documenting areas of existing cooperation. The initiatives resulting from this cooperation are outlined under the intergovernmental cooperation strategies and actions, where project descriptions and timelines are provided. This partnership underscores a commitment to efficient resource sharing, coordinated planning, and a united effort to meet the evolving needs of Richland County and Richland Center's residents.

Areas of Existing Cooperation Between Richland County and Richland Center

Tourism: The City of Richland Center Tourism Director serves in a "Greater Richland Area" capacity. Through coordination with city-wide needs, the surrounding communities throughout the county benefit from visitors to Richland County; in turn affecting the county as a whole. Currently, the city funds the majority of this position, supported by township room taxes.

Symons Center: The funds to construct the Symons Center were donated to the county by a local community member. Following the donation, Richland County was responsible for operations and the city cost-shares this responsibility 50/50.

ADRC: The Richland County ADRC office is located within Richland Center and provides transportation options to seniors throughout the county.

Emergency Management: The Richland County Emergency Management Director works with the City of Richland Center Emergency Government Coordinator in order to have a unified approach to emergency management.

Procurement: The City of Richland Center and Richland County procure items such as road salt and cut blades jointly in an effort to save money and create efficiencies.

Ambulance: The Richland County Ambulance Service provides services to the City of Richland Center, as well as all or part of ten townships and two villages in the county.

- **Richland County Hazard Mitigation Plan** goal 3: Promote countywide planning that avoids transferring the risk from one community to an adjacent community.

External Communication: Richland County and Richland Center are working with SWWRPC to improve communication with the public.

Towns and Villages Meetings

During separate intergovernmental meetings, town and village officials shared feedback on the potential for shared services and resource-sharing initiatives. Their discussions focused on the possibilities for collaboration across various municipal functions.

Towns Input

Shared Services Groups	Benefits and Barriers	Barriers	First Steps
Clerk, Treasurer, Elections, Patrol Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger volunteer pool for elections • Larger pool for township roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload exceeds paid duties • Compliance with state regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open conversations between neighboring municipalities • Discuss opportunities to establish full-time positions
IT Software, Equipment, Buildings, Procurement and Purchasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint purchasing can create efficiencies between townships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security risks and cost concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with municipalities already sharing IT, equipment, etc. discuss cost-saving measures
Assessor, Engineering, Zoning Enforcement, Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for additional room tax revenue • Cost reduction via shared enforcement of zoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current lack of capacity • Lack of training • Concern over fair share of labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with other townships about room tax implementation • Develop coordinated enforcement strategies

Villages Input

Shared Services Groups	Benefits and Barriers	Barriers	First Steps
Clerk, Treasurer, Elections, Public Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for cost savings and efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload exceeds paid duties • Compliance with state regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open conversations between municipalities • Mentoring from municipalities who are confident in their services • Develop mutual aid agreements
IT Software, Equipment, Buildings, Procurement and Purchasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint purchasing can create efficiencies between townships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security risks and cost concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with municipalities already sharing IT, equipment, etc. discuss cost-saving measures
Assessor, Engineering, Zoning Enforcement, Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing leads to alignment of strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement on costs • Concerns around fairness of time spent in each municipality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the goals of each municipality • Connect with other municipalities to discuss shared interest

Summary of Insights from Towns and Villages

The feedback from town and village officials highlights a strong interest in sharing resources across various municipal services to improve cost efficiency and service delivery. The services identified for potential collaboration include clerks, treasurers, elections, public works, IT software, equipment, procurement, assessor services, zoning enforcement, and patrol services. The motivation behind this interest lies in the reduction of overhead costs, operational efficiencies that take advantage of transferable skills, and enhanced service delivery, especially for smaller towns that face resource constraints.

Benefits of Shared Services

The primary **benefits** discussed by local government officials include:

COST REDUCTIONS

By pooling resources, adjacent municipalities can reduce operational costs, particularly for high-expense items like IT software, public works equipment, and contracted services such as assessor and patrol services. Bulk purchasing and shared procurement agreements are seen as vital strategies for reducing these expenses.

INCREASED EFFICIENCY

Municipalities may reduce redundancies and streamline operations by sharing services. For example, consolidating building inspection and zoning enforcement efforts can help towns avoid the need to hire additional personnel and improve response times. Cross-training employees, such as clerks and treasurers, would also enable towns and villages to maintain continuous service, even during employee absences or transitions.

IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

Sharing personnel, such as town patrol services and election workers, would provide access to a larger pool of trained professionals. This collaboration can also lead to improved coverage and expertise, resulting in better service for residents and less workforce competition.

50% of survey respondents during community input for the **Lone Rock Comprehensive Plan** stated that local government response and accountability was the top concern for their community.

Barriers to Resource Sharing

While the benefits are clear, several **barriers** to implementing shared services were noted:

CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

Richland County's municipalities face limited staffing, making it difficult to engage in the additional coordination required for initial implementation of shared services. There is also concern that existing staff are already overwhelmed, and adding responsibilities could affect service quality.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

Sharing equipment, facilities, and staff introduces logistical issues related to scheduling, transportation, and joint responsibilities. For example, towns and villages may struggle to determine how to share equipment fairly or how to manage shared building facilities effectively.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

There is some hesitation among local officials and residents to embrace new models of service delivery. Concerns about losing control over local services, compliance with state regulations, and the potential complexities of shared management structures may slow down efforts to collaborate.

LOCAL CONTROL

Municipalities may prioritize maintaining local control over services, fearing that shared service agreements could lead to a loss of autonomy in decision-making. Local leaders may be concerned that shared management structures or intergovernmental agreements could dilute their ability to

respond quickly to community needs or make decisions that best reflect the unique priorities of their municipality.

LACK OF TRUST

A lack of trust between neighboring municipalities can hinder collaboration. Without established relationships or a history of working together, local governments may be reluctant to share resources or responsibilities, fearing that one party may not fulfill its obligations or may prioritize its own interests over others. Building mutual trust through transparent communication and successful pilot projects can help mitigate this barrier.

Proposed First Steps

To overcome these barriers and begin the process of sharing services, several **first steps** were identified:

INITIATE COMMUNICATION

Local government officials agreed that open dialogue with adjacent municipalities is essential. Initial discussions would allow towns to assess mutual needs, explore shared interests, and build trust. Regular meetings or forums could provide opportunities to align goals and overcome resistance to change.

The **Richland County Outdoor Recreation Plan** set an objective to coordinate the county's recreation program with the programs of other levels of government and with private enterprise in order to achieve maximum public benefit.

EXPLORE COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Once communication is established, adjacent municipalities could begin exploring specific collaborative arrangements. These might include developing shared service agreements for clerks, treasurers, and town patrol services. Additionally, towns and villages could consider joint purchasing agreements for equipment, IT software, and public works services to achieve immediate cost savings.

COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS

To ensure that collaboration is economically viable, municipalities should conduct a detailed cost/benefit analysis for each proposed shared service or joint initiative. This analysis would assess the financial savings, efficiency gains, and potential challenges associated with each arrangement. By comparing the costs of maintaining separate services versus sharing resources, municipalities can make informed decisions about which services are most suitable for collaboration. Additionally, the analysis should evaluate long-term sustainability and the impact on service quality to ensure that shared services do not compromise the needs of the community. The results of this analysis could guide future decisions and serve as a foundation for drafting formal agreements.

Conclusion

The interest in resource sharing across Richland County municipalities demonstrates a commitment to improving both efficiency and quality of service while addressing growing financial constraints. By taking the initial steps of engaging in open communication, exploring collaborative opportunities, and potentially involving residents through public meetings, towns and villages can move toward practical, shared solutions. However, addressing barriers such as capacity, logistics, and local resistance will be crucial for long-term success.

Intergovernmental Cooperation Strategies and Actions

Strategy 1: Foster inter-governmental collaboration between towns and villages

The **Richland Center Comprehensive Plan** identifies the need to strengthen the relationships with the county and neighboring communities ('Leadership, Cooperation, and Volunteers' strategy 3).

Action 1: Facilitate the creation of shared service agreements between adjacent municipalities, with a review of these agreements annually.

Action 2: Schedule and conduct a series of meetings with town and village officials to identify services that can be shared or consolidated between municipalities.

Action 3: Organize an annual county-wide meeting that encourages direct engagement between neighboring towns and villages to discuss shared resources and joint initiatives.

Strategy 2: Advance project development and resource collaboration

Action 4: Conduct a formal review of the progress of all joint projects with Richland Center annually, with a report summarizing outcomes and next steps.

Action 5: Submit joint grant applications with local municipalities to fund community development projects.

Action 6: Facilitate joint bidding on capital improvement projects with neighboring municipalities.

Action 7: Host an annual county-wide tourism forum with local municipalities in order to increase regional tourism revenue.

Strategy 3: Strengthen communication among local governments

Action 8: Establish regular intergovernmental meetings to discuss collaborative initiatives and share best practices.

Action 9: Create a centralized communication platform for local officials to exchange information and resources.

Action 10: Develop a joint training program for municipal staff to enhance skills in shared services and project management.

Action 11: Promote awareness of successful collaborations through newsletters or community events.

Richland County – Richland Center Project Implementation

Project	Description and Need	First Step	Timeline
Joint accounting software and staff	Combine software and staff to streamline accounting efficiencies	Richland County finance director can conduct monthly audits for the City of Richland Center	2025
Hire joint employee with Spanish language skills	A joint position with Spanish language skills to better communicate with the increasing Hispanic population	Assess the need and workload that this new position would be responsible for	2025
Cultural competency training for staff	Training that educates staff on cultural competency, primarily Hispanic culture due to the increasing Hispanic population in Richland County	Work with SWWRPC to develop a survey for employees, followed by a cultural competency presentation/training	2025
AI training for staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEDS priority 5.1: Embrace artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics. 	Educate staff on artificial intelligence and its benefits when used safely, as it is becoming increasingly present	Meet with SWWRPC and invite department heads and other interested parties to a training	2025
Joint IT services	Combine IT services for streamlined support and potential cost savings	Identify joint workload related to IT	2026
Joint GIS services	Combine GIS software and staff to create efficiencies in mapping and save costs	Identify joint workload related to mapping	2026
Align CIP projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Boaz Comprehensive Plan has set a goal to meet annually with Dayton township and neighboring municipalities to coordinate and bid capital improvement projects to seek out lower rates. 	Align CIP projects in order to move toward joint procurement and engineering bids	Connect with the townships and highway commission to assess feasibility	2026
Joint staff insurance	Unified insurance for county and city staff to ensure comparable benefits	Meeting between Richland County, Richland Center, and school districts to compare plans and assess need	2026
Joint procurement of goods and services	Bid on CIP projects and goods together to create efficiencies in engineering costs	CIP projects must be aligned first	2027





Land Use

Richland County is characterized by a diverse landscape that blends agriculture, forestry, and recreational spaces. The county's land use reflects its rural heritage, with rich farmland, intermixed with forests and natural areas. The Driftless Area influences the county, creating opportunities for outdoor activities like hiking, fishing, and hunting. Across the county, there is limited land for new development, as well as limited land for farming.

Under Wisconsin state law, counties are required to update their future land use maps as a key component of the comprehensive planning process. This requirement, outlined in §66.1001 of the Wisconsin statutes, ensures that land use planning is consistent with local and regional development goals, and helps guide the growth and development of communities in an organized and sustainable manner.

Richland County identified the importance of developing a future land use map that provides a clear vision for growth and development while aligning with the county's goals. The future land use map proposes land use districts such as residential, commercial, agricultural, and recreational. In addition to identifying changes in land use, the future land use map acts as a strategic tool to guide zoning decisions, infrastructure investments, and resource management. By visualizing desired land use patterns, the county can promote sustainable development, protect natural resources, enhance economic opportunities, and improve the overall quality of life for residents.

Each town in the county was invited to provide input on their future land use maps either through a survey or at the future land use map open house. Twelve towns in the county are under county zoning, and thus their input informed the updated future land use maps. For the towns under county zoning that did not participate in either opportunity to provide feedback, current zoning was used to inform the future land use map. The towns that maintain local zoning or are not zoned were also invited to provide input.

Land Use Actions

Action 1: Support the creation of joint boundary agreement between the City of Richland Center and the Town of Richland, ensuring transparency through public meetings and providing updates throughout the process.

Action 2: Review the zoning code annually to ensure fairness of administration.

Action 3: Complete a comprehensive update of the public GIS application, including the addition of all recent zoning changes and data layers.

Action 4: Revise internal GIS data management processes and update all key data layers to improve service efficiency for county residents.

Action 5: Update the farmland preservation plan, incorporating new agricultural trends and climate resilience strategies to support local farmers and preserve farmland.

Action 6: Develop and implement climate resilience strategies, focusing on floodplain management and tree canopy expansion, with measurable goals.

Action 7: Identify and prioritize brownfield sites for redevelopment, with an annual review of progress.

Action 8: Complete a groundwater quality study, assessing water quality conditions in the county and provide a comprehensive report with recommendations for improvement.

Action 9: Conduct a needs assessment to identify key areas for improving access to parks, trails, and recreational facilities, followed by the development of an action plan for enhancing these resources for county residents.

The **Richland County Outdoor Recreation Plan** set the goal to provide quality parks and recreational facilities to meet the needs of county residents.

Richland Resilience Recommendations

The Resilient Land Use Workgroup recommends the following actions based on 2024 project outcomes:

1. Update and Fairly Administer the Zoning Code.

Richland County's Zoning Department has dealt with staff turnover and prior inconsistency in zoning code administration. With new leadership in the Zoning Department, the opportunity for fair and active administration is critical. The following actions are recommended:

- Address existing noncompliant parcels.
- Update the zoning code.
- Ensure fair enforcement going forward.

2. Implement the 2022 Richland County Land and Water Resource Management Plan.

A renewed effort is needed, with emphasis on the following points:

- "Encourage producers to use **cover crops** after harvest and **reduce tillage** frequency or intensity.", page 43
- "Implement the NR 151 performance standards of farming all cropland to tolerable soil loss rates and having a NRCS 590 **nutrient management plan** on priority farms/cropland; collaborate with DNR, as necessary", page 44
- "Assist landowners and producers in converting marginal crop fields to **rotational grazing**, page 44
- "Conduct a follow up **drinking water well study**, page 46
- "Update **manure storage ordinance**, page 48

3. Activate Townships.

Townships need to work together to access resources and education for effective stewardship of land. This may include:

- Resource sharing at the Richland County Towns Association, including about Agricultural Enterprise Areas, nature-based flood mitigation, and farmer-led watershed groups.
- The Zoning and Land Conservation Department should establish relationships and provide education around zoning enforcement with county-zoned townships. Within townships, turnover and lack of expertise in zoning cause issues in consistency and compliance for regulating local land use.

4. Grow County-Wide Resilient Land Use Initiatives.

Combining the Richland Resilience Group's advocacy with Richland County departments' leadership, implement the following practices:

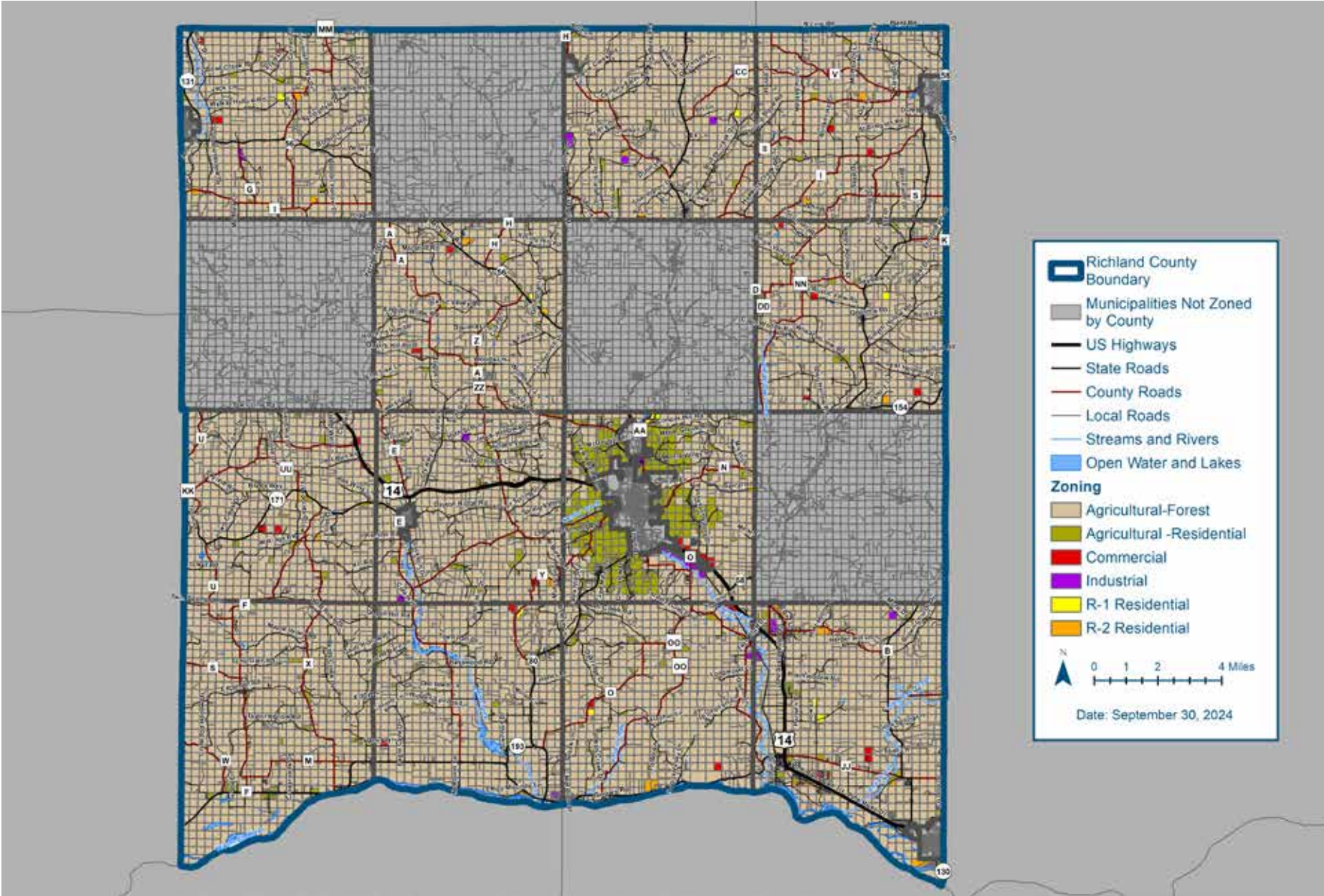
- Zoning and Land Conservation Department:
 - Restore entrenched streams to their floodplains.
 - Promote the installation of conservation practices that prevent water runoff, including vegetative buffer strips and tree planting.

- Incorporate natural flood mitigation strategies into new and existing infrastructure projects.
 - Create "9 Key Element Plans" for all "impaired" watersheds in order to secure grant funding for water quality practices.
 - Adopt a "cluster" development ordinance regulating the subdivision of land for residential purposes.
- Individual Municipalities:
 - Create and update wellhead protection ordinances.
 - Incorporate resilient infrastructure practices listed in 4.d.ii.-iv. below
 - Consider adopting Farmland Preservation Zoning for agricultural areas and/or Agricultural Enterprise Areas after consultation with producers.
 - County Board of Supervisors:
 - Undertake proactive planning for climate change impacts including increased rainfall, drought, storms, and severe heat events.
 - Encourage continued exploration of land use vulnerabilities and opportunities, recognizing that "we don't know what we don't know."
 - Create and implement an ordinance regulating the use and installation of outdoor lighting to prevent/mitigate the harmful effects of light pollution.
 - Explore opportunities to collaborate with other private and public entities to fund programs that promote climate resiliency.
 - Highway Department
 - Establish a plan for bicycle paths and lanes on county and local roads which connect places of residence, work, education, and leisure activities.
 - Design and construct infrastructure anticipating impacts of climate change, including increased frequency and severity of rainfall and storm events.
 - Design and construct infrastructure to connect waterways, streams, wetlands, and wildlife corridors.
 - Design and construct infrastructure to reduce the amount and velocity of storm water runoff.
 - Design and construct infrastructure to capture sediment and contaminants from runoff prior to discharge.
 - Implement policies and practices that minimize the use of salt and other chemical treatments of highways.

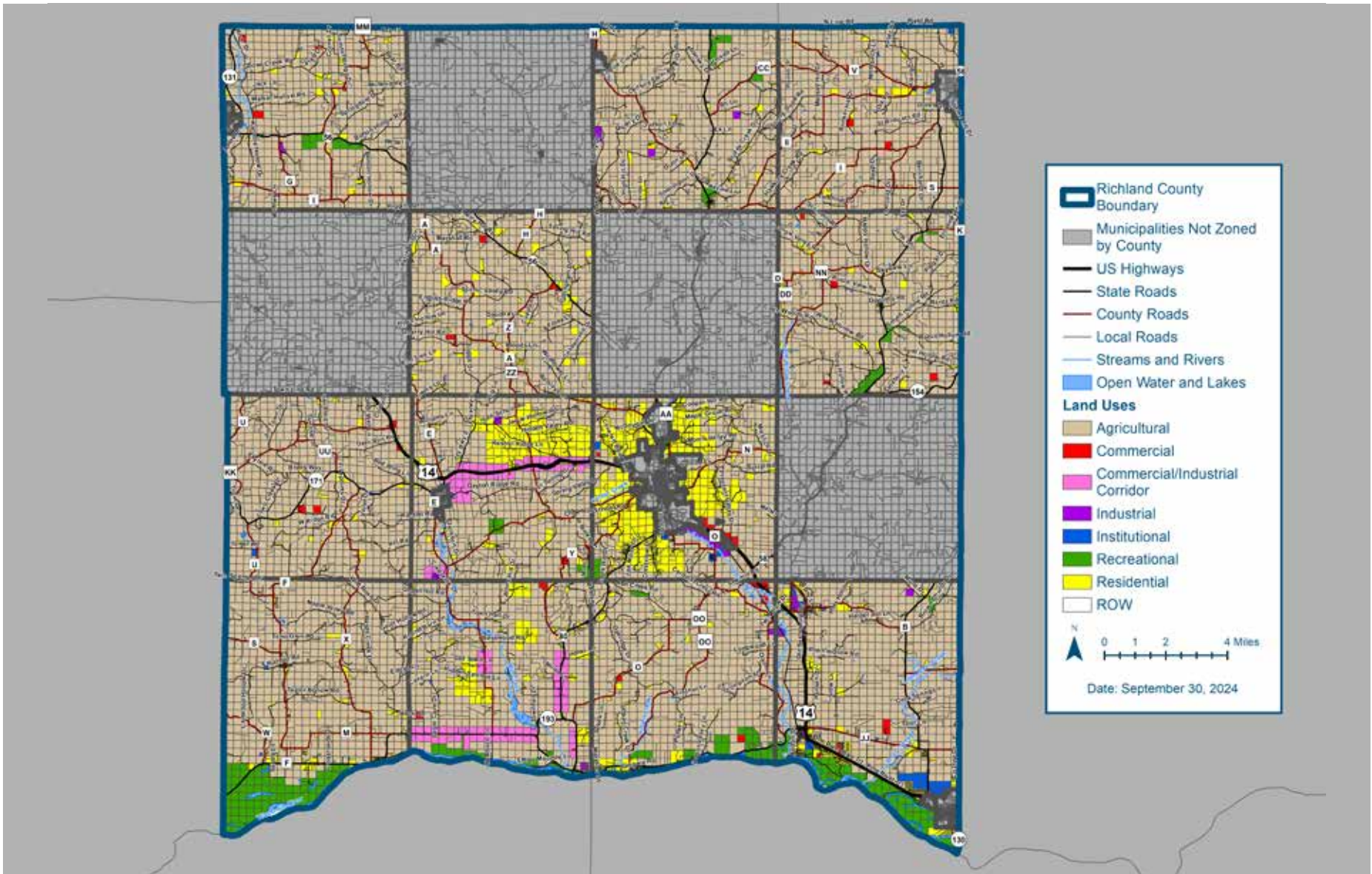
5. Empower Farmers to lead resilient land use practices in Richland County.

- Provide education and opportunities for farmer-led watershed groups.
- Ensure compliance with nutrient management plans
- Offer educational opportunities for practices and cost-effectiveness of regenerative practices such as cover crops and no tilling.
- Promote the use of farming practices which reduce the amount and velocity of runoff, and promote soil health and water quality, such as retention areas and buffer strips that utilize native vegetation to remove sediment and contaminants prior to discharge or absorption.
- Pursue private and public funding for programs that pay producers to adopt resilient land use practices.

Richland County existing land use is predominantly agricultural, however there are pockets of the county designated for recreation and development.



The future land use map for the county was informed by feedback from town officials. Notable changes from existing land use are increased residential land use near Richland Center and commercial corridors identified near major highways. Some more remote parts of the county may have limited opportunities for development.



Implementation

This plan recommends Richland County utilize the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle for implementation. Through the adoption of this plan, the county has made the first step in this cycle. The Comprehensive Plan is not passive and does not represent a satisfied goal, rather it is a starting point for the county 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 county.



Plan

This document is the culmination of the work completed through the comprehensive planning process. It included engagement with local governments, review of relevant data and past planning work, and addressing future land use maps. The Richland County Executive Committee will monitor progress. This process should take place again no later than 2034.

Do

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

- **Identifying responsible parties** – They may be county staff, county board members, or asking community associations to step into a role that uniquely fits their mission.
- **Identifying required resources and partners** – county-wide initiatives – Implement county-wide initiatives such as updating the human resources personnel manual, improving the payroll system, developing onboarding programs for staff and county board, and improving the budget process.
- **Documentation** – Develop or finalize the targets and metrics 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.

Study

The county should monitor the plan through quarterly meetings and record progress. The committee or group to monitor progress should be identified to ensure there is continued momentum, and connect with county staff, committees, and the county board. The team should be interdisciplinary and include board members, county staff, business owners, and residents with varied interests in the community, all of whom have a passion for this work.

They should also identify and define barriers to implementation in order to inform future planning. Common barriers to plan implementation include:

- Legacy rules or procedures, sunk cost or anchoring biases
- Lack of staff time to work on initiatives
- Choices or trade-offs are not made. Trying to do everything
- Reward and recognition programs incentivize the wrong things
- The county doesn't support an initiative, or is in conflict with it
- Leadership does not "walk the walk"

Act

This phase of the process sets the stage for continual improvement across the subsequent 10-year period. As the county sees progress, documents successes, or meets with barriers on any given initiative, it should:

- **Adopt** practices that work and are successful. Formalize them as part of the county's culture.
- **Adapt** practices that need improvement. This requires documenting causes of success and failure during implementation.
- **Abandon** practices that aren't successful or that don't contribute to creating the vision. Document the reason for abandonment so the county can learn and avoid similar issues in the future.

Board of Supervisors Role

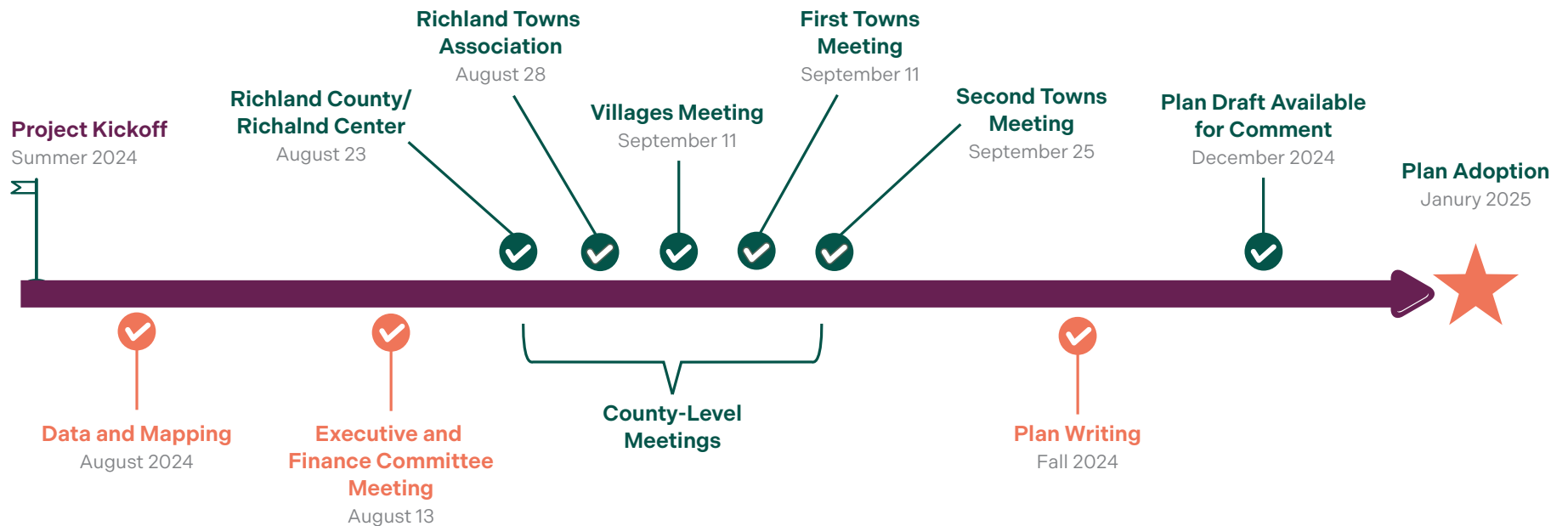
The Richland County board of supervisors plays a crucial role in implementing the comprehensive plan, which serves as a roadmap for the county's growth and development. It is essential for community members to actively engage in this process to ensure the plan's successful execution. Collaboration and participation from residents will foster a shared vision, enabling the community to address current challenges and seize opportunities. Together, local elected officials and the community can enhance the quality of life for future generations, ensuring that Richland County remains a desirable place to live, work, and play.

Planning Process

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 the five chapters – Richland County Today, Economic Development, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Land Use, and Implementation. Recently updated plans in Richland County were summarized and embedded within the county comprehensive plan. Goals, actions, and recommendations associated with each chapter's planning elements have been provided as part of the planning process.

Planning Timeline



Summary of Recent Plans

Recent plans were reviewed and integrated into this plan to avoid duplicating efforts and to ensure that previous work was effectively incorporated. The following plans were reviewed as part of the planning process:

- Richland County Outdoor Recreation Plan (2019)
- Village of Lone Rock Comprehensive Plan (2021)
- Richland County Strategic Plan (2021)
- City of Richland Center Comprehensive Plan (2022)
- Richland County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2022)
- Richland County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (2022)
- Village of Boaz Comprehensive Plan (2023)
- SWCAP Community Needs Assessment (2022)
- Richland County Economic Development Considerations (2023)
- Richland County Housing Study (2024)
- Southwestern Wisconsin Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2024)
- Richland County Locally Developed Coordinated Transit Plan (2024)

Common Themes Throughout Recent Plans

Across the various plans that have been updated in the last 5 years in Richland County, there are a number of common themes. The aging and declining population is frequently referenced, as well as the lack of affordable housing stock. The great access to outdoor recreation and natural beauty is a strength recognized in the recent plans. There is a call to action to address future needs of the county, and young people are viewed as a solution for many of these needs. Volunteerism and involvement in the community is highlighted across the plans, as well as the need for small business support and expanded capacity for economic development. Importantly, these plans identify the need for strong relationships among local units of government in order to provide maximum benefit to the public- a common theme of the engagement with local government officials during the county's comprehensive planning process.



Engagement with Local Government

Public engagement from other recent planning projects in the county was synthesized to inform this plan, drawing on valuable insights and feedback gathered from a wide range of partners. These past efforts provided a solid foundation for understanding community needs and priorities, ensuring that the new plan is responsive to the voices of those who live and work in Richland County.

In order to augment public engagement from previous plans, Richland County sought to actively engage with local units of government, including the City of Richland Center, villages, and towns. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, the county aimed to foster a cooperative spirit among these entities to create a unified vision for future land use and development.

To facilitate this engagement, a series of focus meetings were organized with local government representatives. These meetings served as a platform for discussing intergovernmental cooperation, economic development, and land use, allowing participants to share their perspectives, identify common goals, and explore strategies for working together effectively. By prioritizing these discussions, Richland County aimed to build strong relationships between municipalities, encourage collaborative decision-making, and ensure that the comprehensive plan reflects a collective vision that benefits the entire region.



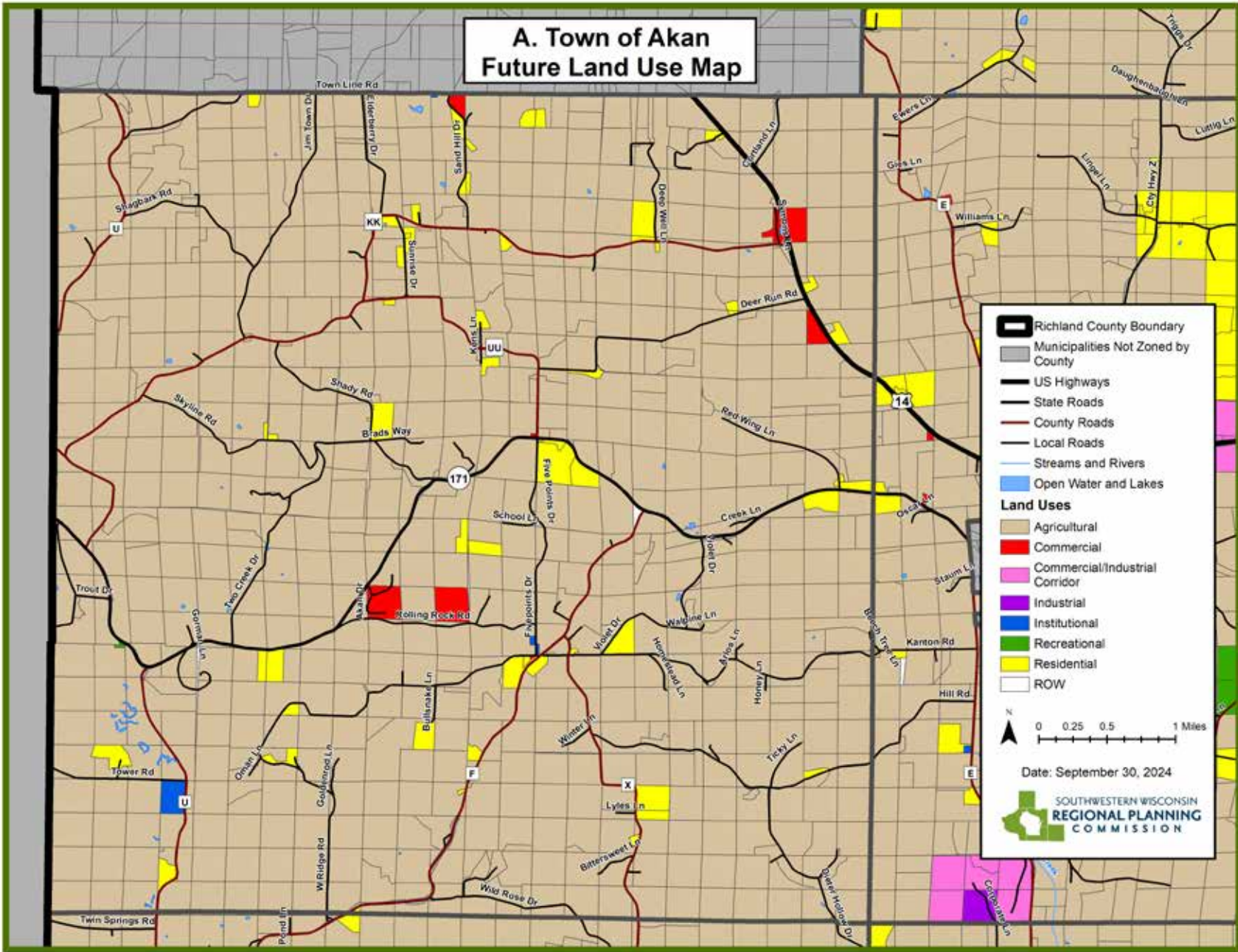


Appendix

Maps

- A. Town of Akan Future Land Use Map
- B. Town of Buena Vista Future Land Use Map
- C. Town of Dayton Future Land Use Map
- D. Town of Eagle Future Land Use Map
- E. Town of Forest Future Land Use Map
- F. Town of Henrietta Future Land Use Map
- G. Town of Marshall Future Land Use Map
- H. Town of Orion Future Land Use Map
- I. Town of Richland Future Land Use Map
- J. Town of Richwood Future Land Use Map
- K. Town of Westford Future Land Use Map
- L. Town of Willow Future Land Use Map

A. Town of Akan Future Land Use Map



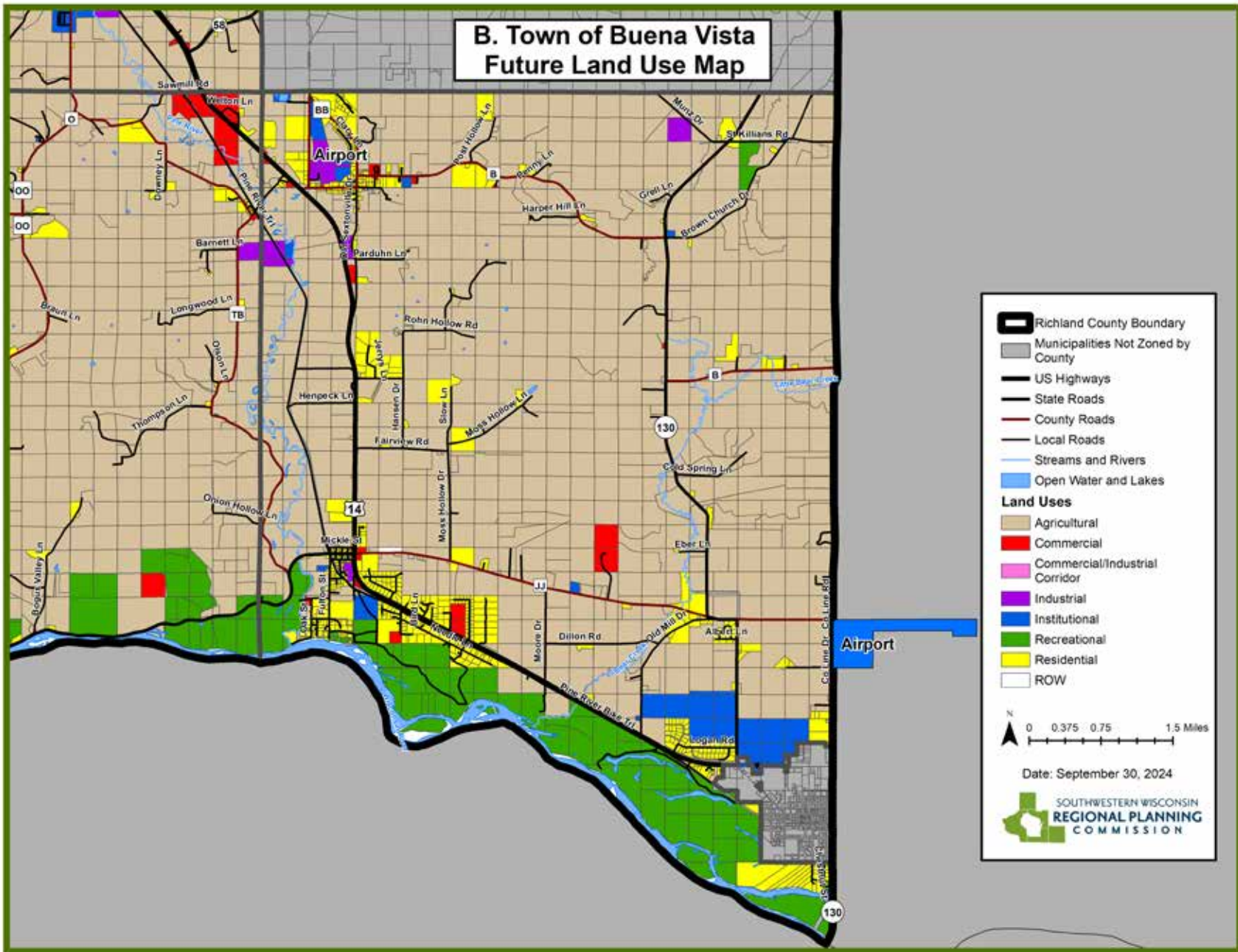
Richland County Boundary
 Municipality Not Zoned by County
 US Highways
 State Roads
 County Roads
 Local Roads
 Streams and Rivers
 Open Water and Lakes

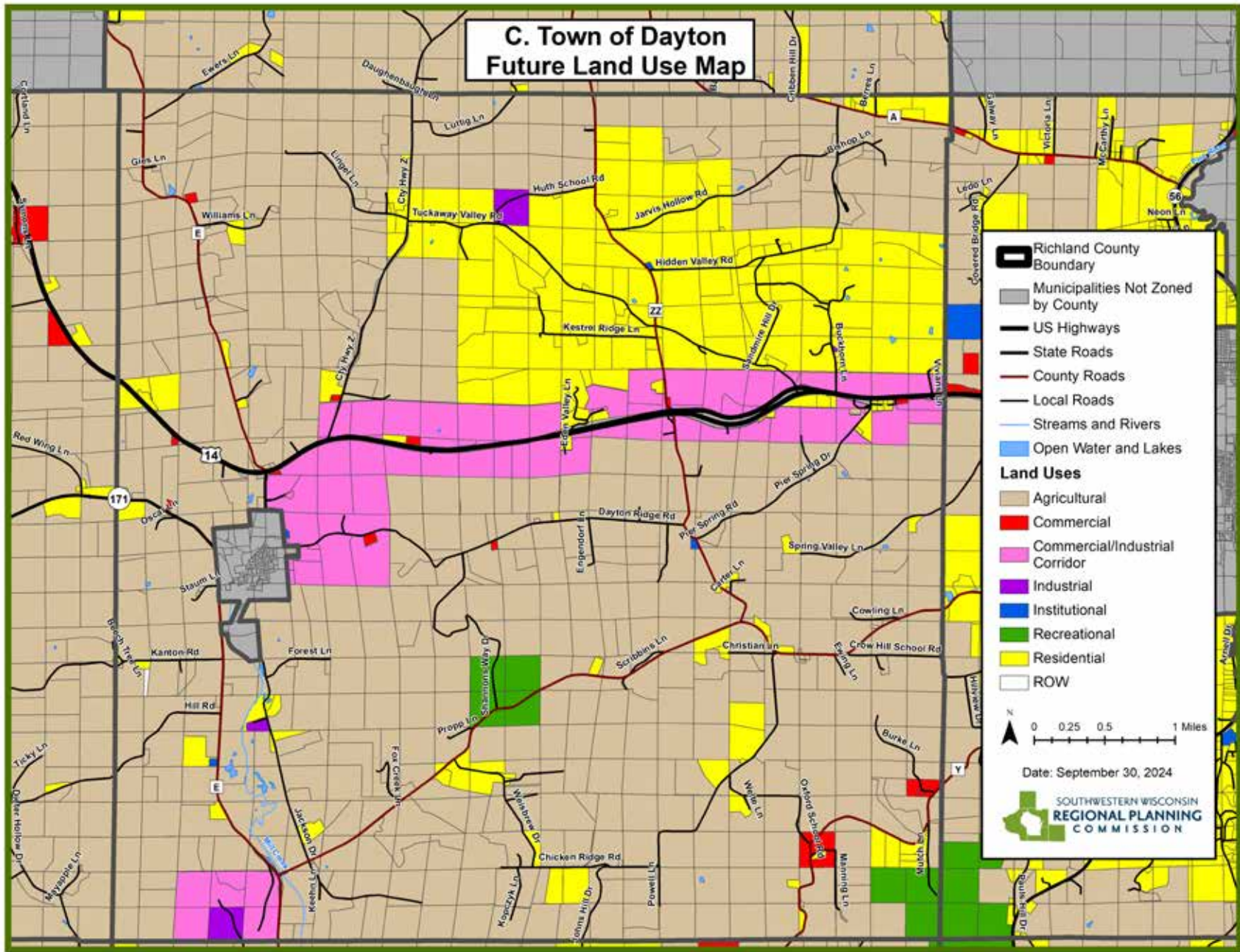
Land Uses
 Agricultural
 Commercial
 Commercial/Industrial Corridor
 Industrial
 Institutional
 Recreational
 Residential
 ROW

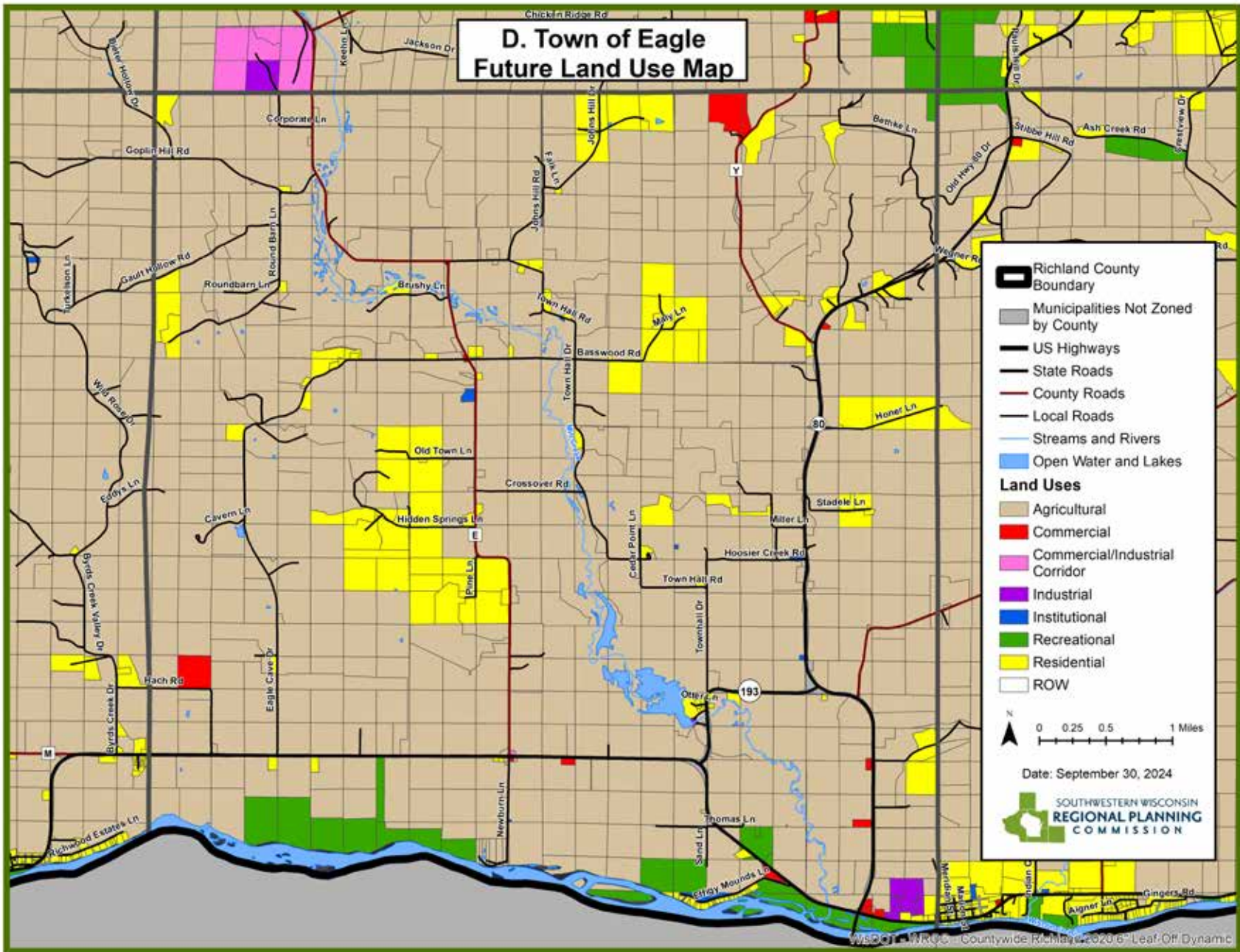
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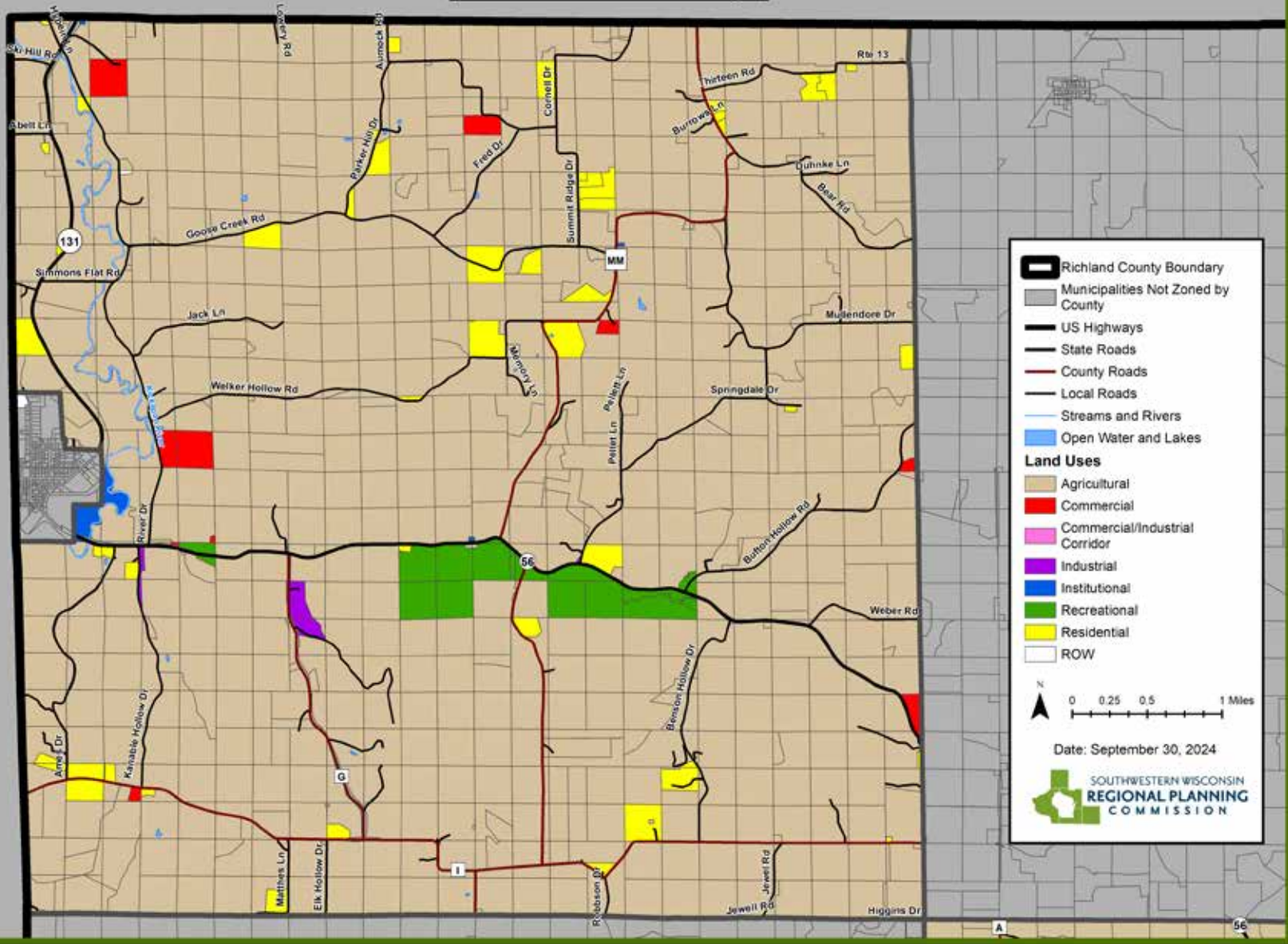
SOUTHWESTERN WISCONSIN
REGIONAL PLANNING
 COMMISSION

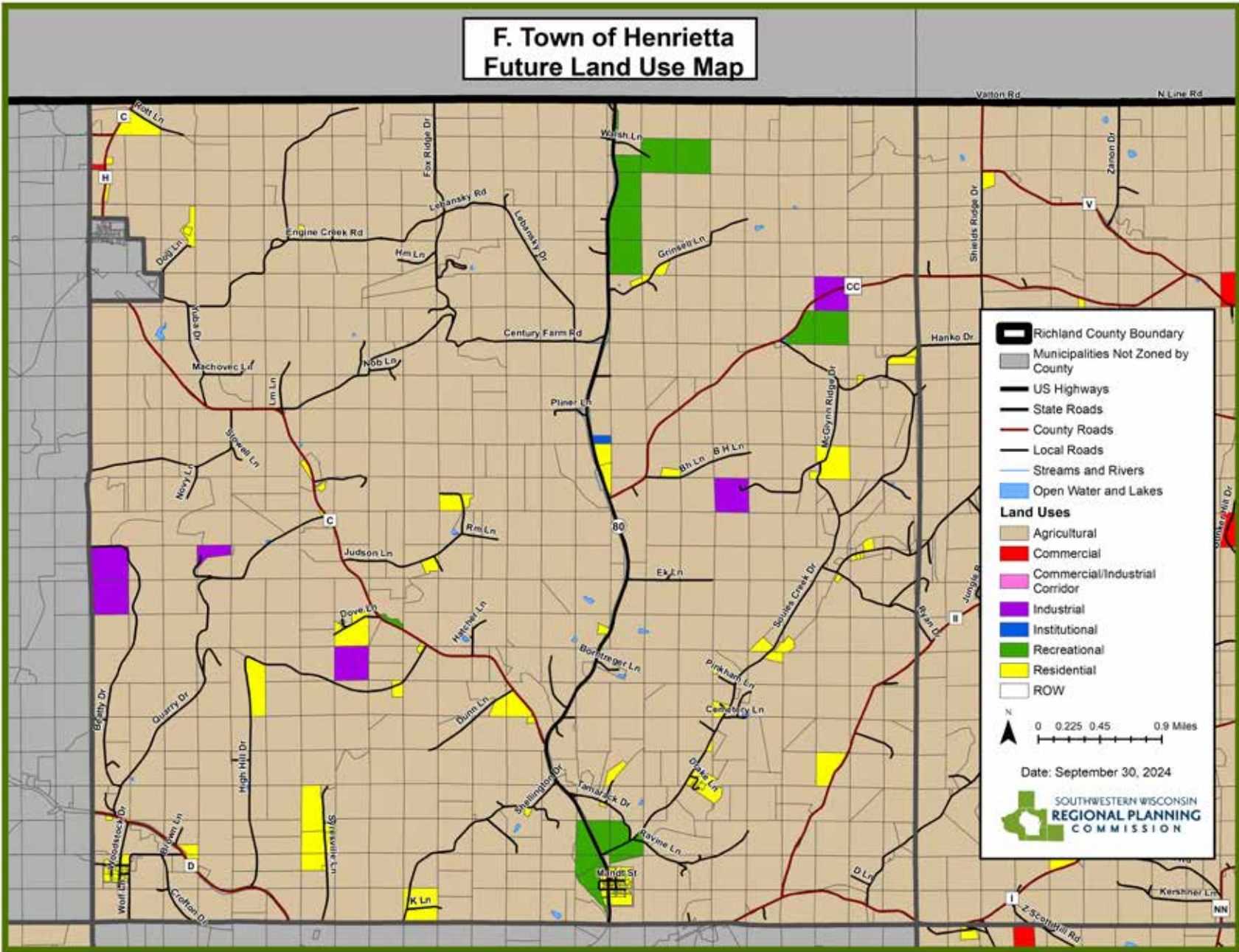


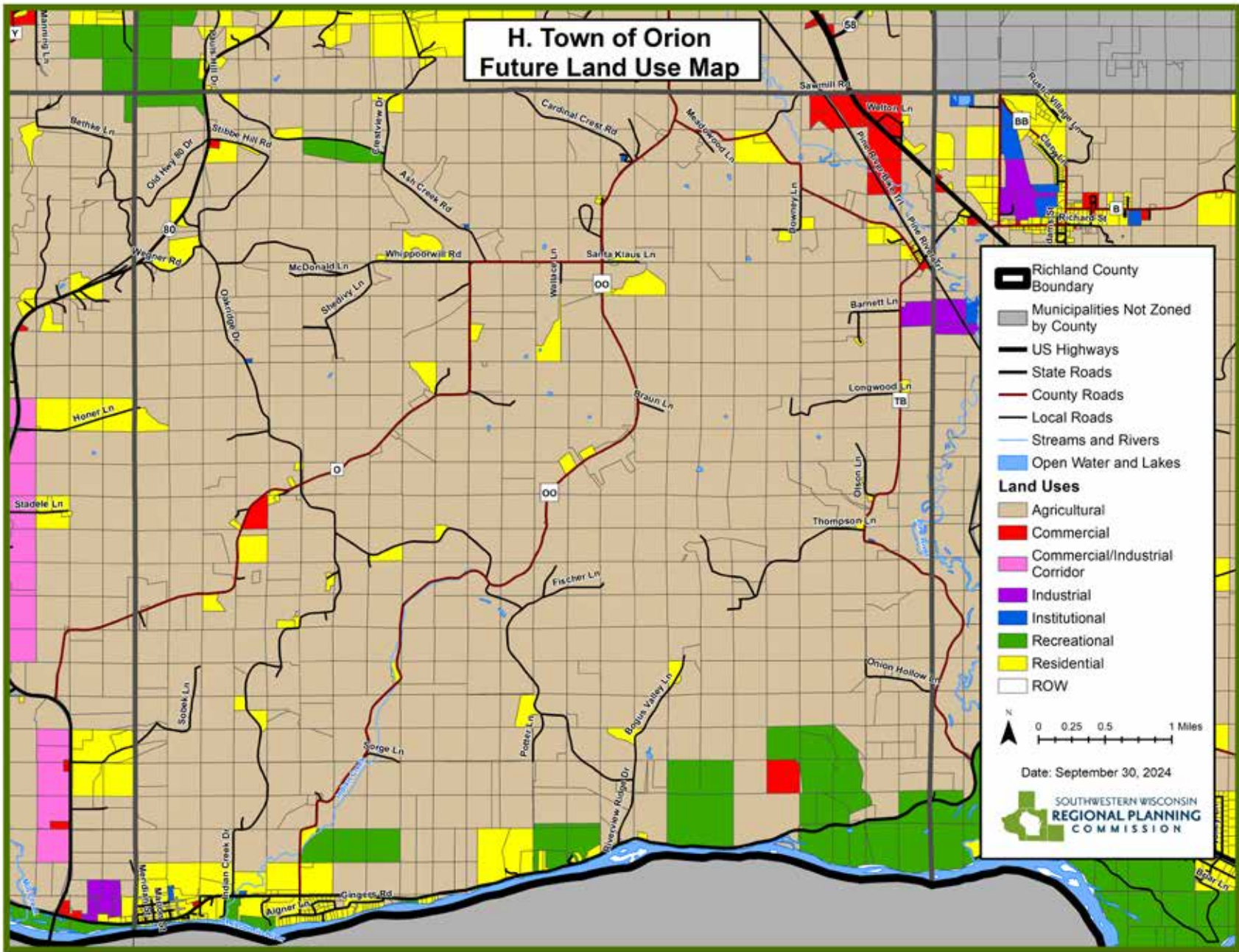




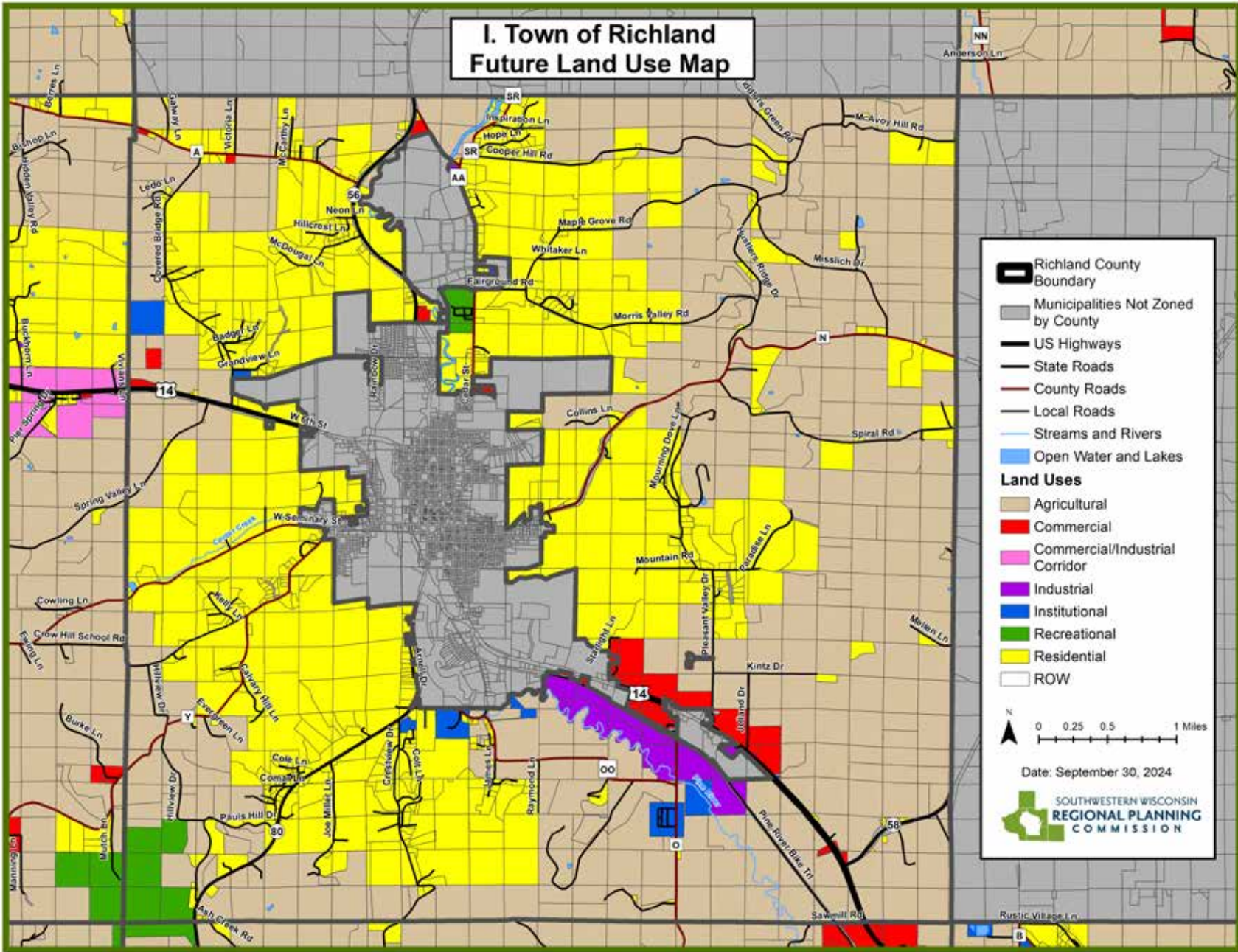
E. Town of Forest Future Land Use Map

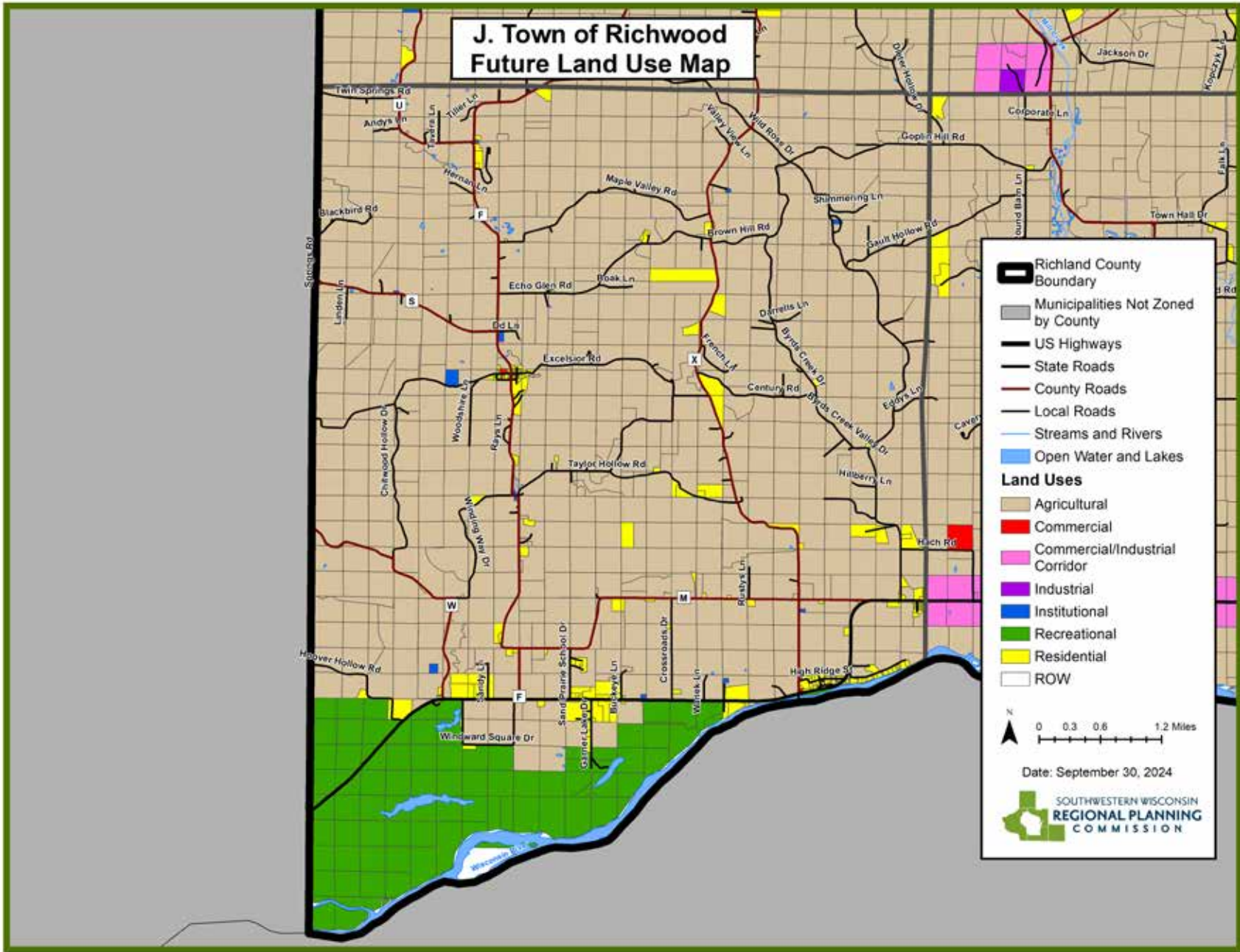




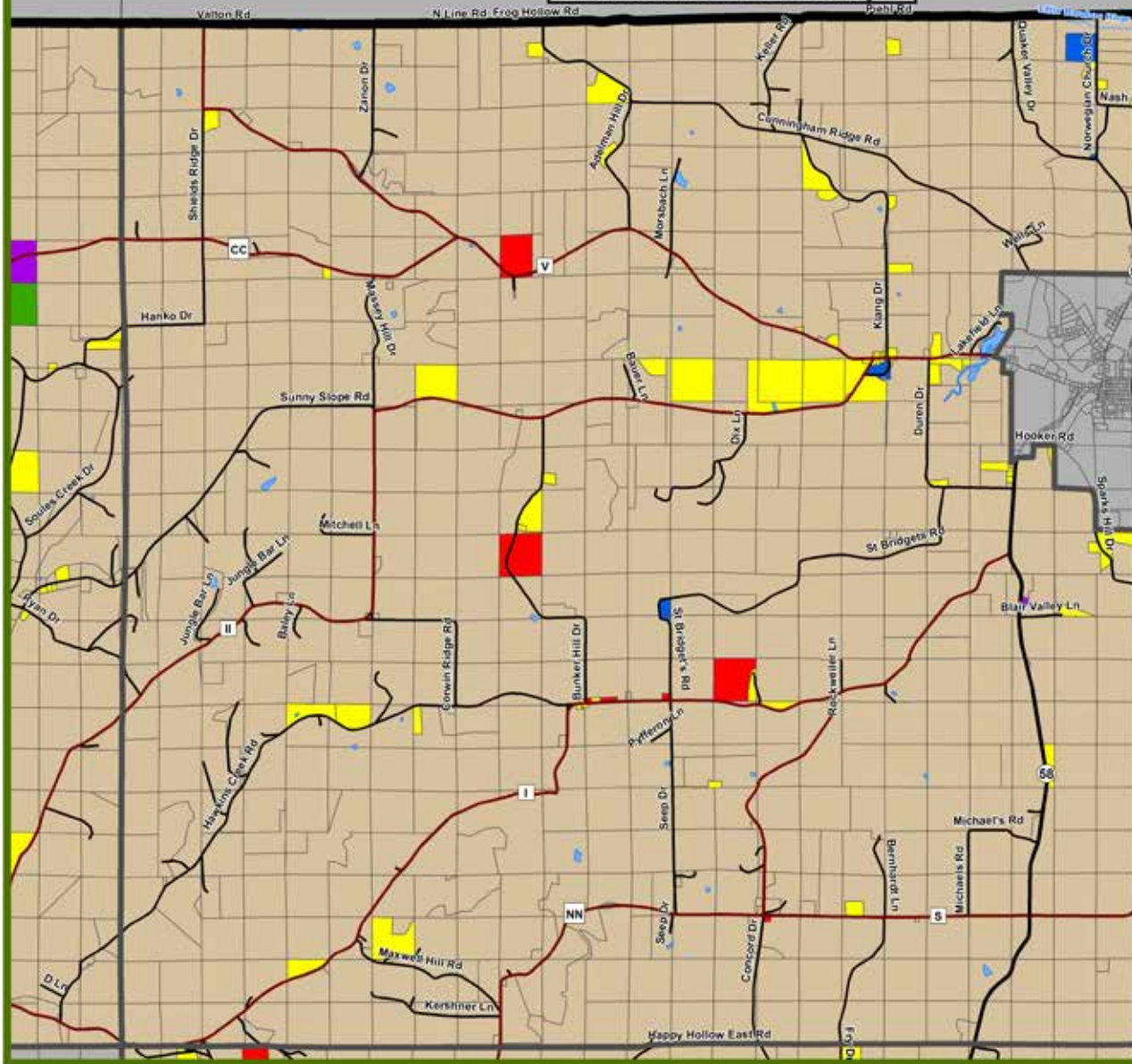


I. Town of Richland Future Land Use Map





K. Town of Westford Future Land Use Map



Richland County Boundary

- Municipalities Not Zoned by County
- US Highways
- State Roads
- County Roads
- Local Roads
- Streams and Rivers
- Open Water and Lakes

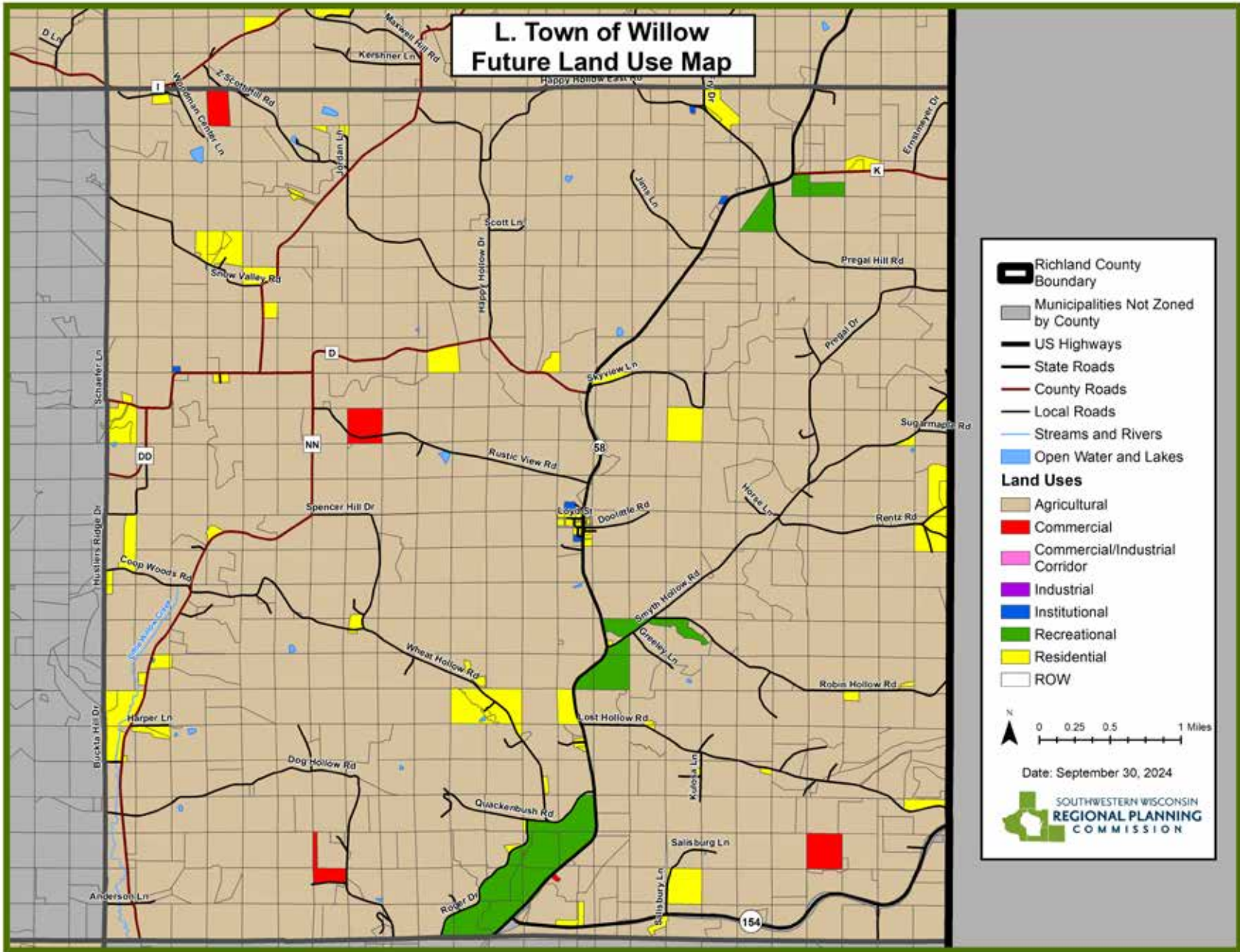
Land Uses

- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Commercial/Industrial Corridor
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Recreational
- Residential
- ROW

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Date: September 30, 2024

SOUTHWESTERN WISCONSIN
REGIONAL PLANNING
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Hold for resolution and ordinance



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