



# 2022 ISSUES



## LA CROSSE AREA | WESTERN WISCONSIN REGION



### CHILDCARE

The childcare industry in Western Wisconsin has been in drastic decline for many years. La Crosse County alone has lost more than 350 childcare businesses in the last 20 years. This is not a new problem, but the lingering issue has continued to impact the community and our businesses. When parents lose access to childcare, they can't go to work, jeopardizing the stability of the companies they work for. At the scale we're witnessing, the ripples of lost access to childcare are impacting the economic vitality of our region. Western Wisconsin businesses and the Chamber recommend financially incentivizing childcare owners (both centers and family) to open more classrooms or centers. We also recommend financially supporting the increased costs associated with opening new rooms or centers including possible wage supplementation as a long-term strategy for attracting and retaining high quality care providers.



### TRANSPORTATION

Efficient transportation is an essential component of living and working in Western Wisconsin. It is also critical to bolster tourism in the area.

#### Roads & Electric Vehicles

Transporting our workforce to where they need to be more safely and more quickly is critical to our community, as is transporting the many products and supplies leaving from or coming to Western Wisconsin businesses. As supply chain issues and inefficiencies have persisted nationwide for more than two years, it is imperative that even the smallest delay in transport on a local level be mitigated adequately to reduce the damages caused to our businesses. We strongly support the development and strengthening of funding mechanisms to support state and local road improvements.

We also encourage a balanced approach toward Electric Vehicles and related infrastructure to support a growing nationwide trend, consumer demand, and supply of Electric Vehicles. As we look ahead to the advancement of vehicles and utilizing electricity as a fuel option, it is our goal to advocate for the support and funding needed to build out necessary infrastructure developments and invest in the future of transportation for our community.

#### Regional Airport

The La Crosse Regional Airport is one of the core drivers of economic vitality in this area, essential for our business community to thrive and for new businesses to relocate here. We encourage additional funding for airport development and infrastructure improvements. We also support the pursuit of additional air service options to enhance the economic impact the airport provides and offer ease of use to the many business flyers in the region.



## Outdoor Recreation & Trail Systems

As a community situated on the Mississippi River and within the Bluffs of the Coulee Region, much of our economic impact centers on the commercial and recreational opportunities supplied by our proximity to natural landmarks. We advocate for a balanced use approach to maintaining and improving the Mississippi River and its surrounding areas. We encourage and support expanded trail systems and projects that increase access to recreational practices such as hiking, biking, and walkable paths. We believe these trail systems are important to community health, to increase visitors to the area, and as a unique method in attracting a talented workforce to the region.



### **UW-LA CROSSE: PRAIRIE SPRINGS COMPLETION/COWLEY HALL DEMOLITION PROJECT**

The Prairie Springs Completion/Cowley Hall Demolition Project (PSSC II) remains UW-La Crosse's highest capital project priority. PSSC II provides 30 innovative science learning spaces for our quality faculty to mold in-demand Wisconsin STEM and health workers – helping Wisconsin and the La Crosse area economy grow. With strong support from the business community, employers with STEM workforce needs, close community partners, and private investors, we recommend the Joint Committee on Finance approve this project within the 2023–2025 Biennial Budget.

Please view these videos detailing the Prairie Springs Science Center Completion – Cowley Hall Demolition Project

- [Video 1](#)
- [Video 2](#)



### **WORKFORCE & TALENT ATTRACTION**

Western Wisconsin businesses are struggling with filling their workforce needs. The area's unemployment rate has continued to hover around 3.0% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics). Yet, as our businesses look to grow, evolve, and maintain their services, they cannot due to a severe workforce shortage. It is necessary for the State of Wisconsin to investigate a continued long-term investment in talent attraction, talent development, and talent retention programs. Some of the State programs that are making an impact on our area that we encourage continued support are:

- Budgeting for Talent Attractions and Retention. In addition, WEDC recently released a grant opportunity for communities to secure up to \$75,000 in funding to support marketing initiatives for Talent Attraction and Retention. If awarded, we plan to utilize these dollars to increase our impact through our regional Talent Attraction Campaign and First Friend Program. Our businesses have continued to invest in Talent Attraction and will contribute more than \$200,000 over a three-year period.
- Pathways and Apprenticeship programs and Upskilling resource programs such as ones run through the Department of Workforce Development have continued to positively impact our area and workforce.
- Credential and Licensing through Wisconsin Department of Safety & Professional Services. With a strong higher education school such as Western Technical College, we have many opportunities to continue to collaborate on such programs and enhance our skilled workforce.