

Juneau County Star-Times

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Study: County needs more housing options

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American Institute of Certified Planners Executive Director Dennis Lawrence and Juneau County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Terry Whipple gave a presentation on the results of their 2018 housing study.

Whipple said although "there are many parts to a vibrant economy," the county is "in a race to draw people in." According to Whipple, Juneau County cannot rely on new births alone to continue to grow, but must also bring in outside populations.

The county has an undersupply of people within certain age groups, Lawrence called the cate-

gory of individuals in their 20s the "missing middle." The problem is not only a lack of young people coming in to the county, but also local young people leaving. "Juneau County has lost a lot of those folks," Lawrence said.

Part of the problem is a lack of housing suited to the young demographic's needs. On average, the number of total housing units in Juneau County grew by 21.21 percent every ten years from 1970-2010, but then plateaued. From 2010-2015, growth was 0.7 percent. The report also showed 2,343 housing units were built in Juneau County from 2000-2009, but only 178 were built in 2010 or later.

Additionally, housing has become more expensive for many Juneau County residents. Median owner household income decreased 8.1 percent from 2000 to 2015 in Juneau County while monthly housing costs rose 12.2 percent. For renters household income decreased 13.4 percent while median gross rent increased 15.2 percent.

In 2015, the median renter household paid 30.3 percent of its income on monthly housing costs, compared to 22.8 percent in 2000. The study also found Juneau County has a significantly higher share of housing units at 22.1 percent than the Wisconsin state average of 7.1 percent.



JAKE EKDAHL, STAR-TIMES

Juneau County Corporation Counsel speaks with Board Member Joe Lally before the Feb. 20 board meeting begins.

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LAUREN O'DELL, FOR CAPITAL NEWSPAPERS

The brain drain pain

As young professionals flock to urban areas, rural Wisconsin aims to lure them back

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Since graduating from high school, Zach Dahl has earned a degree in communications and economics from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, served in the U.S. Coast Guard in Alabama, worked in finance in Oregon and returned to Wisconsin to work at the family business, Dahl Financial Group in Sauk City.

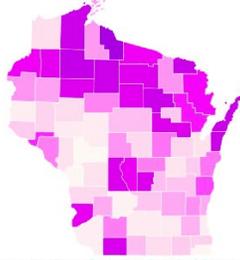
Dahl has a college education, gained work experience and is living in his home state as a working professional. But he is part of a shrinking group in Wisconsin, especially in rural counties.

Throughout the state, young college graduates are increasingly finding themselves facing a dilemma when they return home: stay and accept lower wages while paying down student debt, or leave and pursue more lucrative employment opportunities in urbanized areas.

The phenomenon of educated youth leaving their home area has been dubbed "brain drain," and is ongoing throughout the United States.

Median Age Growth by County (years)

The median age in Wisconsin counties has increased on average by 4.86 from 2000 to 2015.



Map: Jake Ek Dahl | Source: Wisconsin Tax Alliance • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Wisconsin becomes older

A study done by Morris Davis of the University of Wisconsin-Madison found Wisconsin lost an average of 14,000 degree-holding graduates annually from 2008-12.

The rate of young people leaving can be seen in publicly available data. According to the Wisconsin Tax Alliance, the median age in Wisconsin counties has in-

creased on average by 4.86 years from 2000 to 2015.

But some counties have been more affected than others. Juneau County's median age went from 36.6 to 44.4 during that time, an increase of 7.8 years. Adams County increased by a similar amount at 6.9 years, while Sauk County only increased by 0.3. Iron County saw the greatest

increase in median age, from 37.1 in 2000 to 52.4 in 2015, a total of 15.3 years. Iron County's median age increase kept pace with the calendar, aging one and a half decades over 15 years.

Urban and suburban areas like Dane, Milwaukee, and Waukesha counties have been somewhat insulated from the trend, with a slower increase in median age.

When it comes to the share of the county population with a bachelor's degree or higher, urban and suburban counties fare better as well. Juneau County is the second lowest in the state at 12.3 percent, Adams County ranks fourth lowest at 12.8 percent and at 22.2 percent, Sauk County is slightly above the state average of 21.7. The three highest counties are Dane, Ozaukee, and Waukesha at 47.9, 46.1 and 41.2 percent respectively. Clark County, in the rural north-central region of the state, is the lowest at 11.5 percent.

"We have a problem, and there's debate over how big that problem is," Wisconsin Tax Alliance Research Director Dale Knapp said. When it comes to Wisconsin's college graduates, "we are losing them to other states in significant numbers."

Salaries and wages are a common driver for migration to urban areas.

"When you look at average wages and the kinds of occupations that college graduates would be going into, average pay (in Wisconsin), starting pay here is 10 to 15 percent below the national average, and sometimes more than that," Knapp said. Minneapolis, Chicago and Indianapolis are offering competitive pay, that is attractive to college graduates.

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