

# 5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on fostering a vibrant local economy. It outlines strategies to support entrepreneurship, attract investments, and create a favorable business environment. The City aims to stimulate economic growth, job creation, and enhance residents' well-being through targeted initiatives and collaboration with stakeholders.

## ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Downtown:** Downtown Berlin is a community strength and important source of economic activity. There are opportunities to revitalize Downtown for pedestrian-friendly businesses and development on both sides of the Fox River. However, parking/traffic flow issues limit Downtown business accessibility; targeted improvements (signage, one-way street conversions, etc.) could alleviate this strain.
- **Employment Opportunities:** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, most employed Berlin residents work outside the City, while most people working in Berlin commute from other areas. Sixty percent (60%) of survey respondents felt that Berlin lacks adequate job opportunities. Respondents reported working across the region, including in Oshkosh, Ripon, the Appleton metro area, and other nearby municipalities.

### VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

Members of the community expressed desire to have an active Chamber of Commerce that can advocate in the best interest of business owners in the City.

Reinvestment in downtown buildings and sites was ranked the highest development priority; community members envision an activated, walkable downtown with diverse businesses, gathering spaces, and public programming/events.

**76%** of survey respondents indicated that they visit local businesses in the City of Berlin at least 1-2 times per week. Respondents indicated that the highest visited businesses in the City were gas stations, food services, and the Walmart.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS, STRATEGIES, & ACTIONS

### GOAL 1

**Provide a robust local economy for residents and visitors through diverse employment opportunities in commercial, industrial, and recreational sectors.**

### STRATEGIES

1. Develop marketing and/or incentive strategies to encourage new businesses to locate in Berlin, such as retail stores, commercial service businesses, and restaurants.
2. Work cooperatively with public and private entities to promote economic development, especially including the following groups/organizations:
  - i. Green Lake County Economic Development Corporation
  - ii. Local real estate professionals
  - iii. Green Lake & Waushara Counties
  - iv. State agencies (WI DNR, WisDOT, etc.)
  - v. Future economic development organizations, such as a chamber of commerce
3. Support financial incentives, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Public Facilities Funds, for business development meeting one or more of the following criteria:
  - i. Increases the tax base without adding significant service costs.
  - ii. Improves existing neighborhoods through redevelopment and/or expanded access to employment and services.
  - iii. Adds affordable and workforce housing units.
  - iv. Creates new living-wage jobs.
  - v. Supports small businesses.
  - vi. Improves conditions that will attract future quality development, such as a catalytic project in a new redevelopment area.
  - vii. Provides public amenities in a relevant location, such as pocket parks not otherwise required, etc.
4. Support affordable and workforce housing initiatives that expand economic and employment opportunities for City residents of all income levels. See Housing Chapter for strategies to support this initiative.



*ThedaCare Medical Center - Berlin Source: ThedaCare*

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5. Support childcare and after-school/summer programming that meets the needs of income-limited employees and prospective City residents.
6. Promote the redevelopment of underutilized, vacant, or brownfield commercial and industrial areas.
7. Encourage development that is financially sound, environmentally friendly, fits the community character, and does not create land use conflicts.
8. Invest in the City's labor force development and opportunities to meet current and future skill needs by working with local businesses and the Berlin School District to establish training programs.

### ACTIONS

- A. Meet regularly with the counties and neighboring municipalities to ensure that efforts for economic development activities in the region are coordinated.
- B. Identify appropriate areas for additional industrial/manufacturing operations to expand the City's tax and employment base.
- C. Review and revise the City's Tax Increment Finance policy (as needed) to prioritize business attraction, retention and expansion; conduct further internal review of City codes and ordinances every five years to address economic/commercial concerns.
- D. Regularly (at least once per year) meet with industry leaders to ensure that existing businesses have tools and resources to expand and remain in Berlin.

**Streetscape** is a term that is used to describe the natural and built environment of the street, including the roadway and the sidewalk terrace. It is typically defined as the design quality and visual character of the street. The concept recognizes that a street is a public place where people engage in various activities and experiences. Streetscapes and their visual impact largely influences public places where people interact. Making targeted streetscape improvements will ultimately help define a community's aesthetic quality, economic activity, public health, and environmental sustainability.



## GOAL 2

**Prioritize the Downtown area as a pedestrian-friendly and attractive center of economic activity designed to meet community needs.**

### STRATEGIES

9. Support locally owned businesses, small businesses and start-up businesses that are ideal for downtown locations, such as retail and restaurants which encourage foot traffic.
10. Encourage pedestrian-oriented development in Downtown on both sides of the Fox River.
11. Maintain an adequate amount of public parking in the downtown area.
12. Maintain existing infrastructure to support current and potential commercial activities, providing an adequate supply of development/redevelopment sites ready for new business investment.
13. Continue to provide a mix of residential and commercial uses within Downtown.
14. Promote the Fox River for tourism and the location of riverfront businesses.
15. Actively support festivals, recreational and community events that attract visitors and spending at local businesses.
16. Address ways to improve the appearance of downtown and gateways to the City to attract new businesses, visitors, and residents.
17. Explore options to fund, promote, and support the redevelopment of vacant lots/buildings and historic preservation in the Downtown area.

### ACTIONS

- E. Create a Business Improvement District (BID) and improvement plan for Downtown to fulfill a vital role in retail district success by organizing a professional management or volunteer structure for the commercial area. An improvement plan will provide funding mechanisms through special assessments for:
  - i. Upgrades for public utilities
  - ii. Facade improvements
  - iii. Establishment of downtown development criteria
  - iv. Streetscape amenities such as benches, lighting, etc.
- F. Work with local businesses and the counties to market the Berlin area as a tourist destination via brochures, websites, and signage.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Economic development activities play a key role in the quality of life of the community and the City’s long-term viability. This explores the City’s current economic environment and inventories efforts that support community development.

### TIF DISTRICTS

This program helps cities and villages in Wisconsin attract industrial and commercial growth in underdeveloped and blighted areas. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a technique that municipalities use to attract private development and investment to areas that have not seen appropriate growth. TIF may only be used when private development would be too difficult or costly without improvements and incentives sponsored by the municipality. The cost of the improvements or incentives funded by the TIF are repaid by the increased property tax revenues that arise when new development occurs.

The City has four active Tax Incremental Districts (TIDs). All four of the TIDs (No. 1E, No. 2E, No. 15, No. 16, No. 17) are in Green Lake County.

### EMPLOYMENT & GROWTH INDUSTRIES

Table 5.1 highlights employment changes in Berlin from 2010 to 2023. The fastest-growing industry is Retail Trade, which increased by 70%, more than doubling over the past decade. Public Administration and Manufacturing also experienced modest growth, rising by 11% and 9%, respectively. In contrast, all other industries declined during this period. Despite limited growth, Manufacturing remains the City’s largest civilian employer, accounting for approximately 32% of total industry employment.

**Figure 5.1 - Commuting Patterns**  
(U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap, 2022)



- **1,793** - people who work in Berlin but live outside of the City
- **537**- people who both work and live in Berlin
- **2,131** - people who live in Berlin but work outside of the City

**Table 5.1 - Top 5 Growth Industries**  
(U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2010, 2023)

| INDUSTRY  | INCREASE % |
|---|------------|
| Retail trade  | 70%        |
| Public administration   | 11%        |
| Manufacturing   | 9%         |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing | -19%       |
| Construction  | -25%       |

**Table 5.2 - Employment by Industry (ACS 2022)**

| INDUSTRY   | CITY OF BERLIN | GREEN LAKE COUNTY | %DIFF |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------|
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining:                                    | 3%             | 5%                | 7%    |
| Construction   | 7%             | 10%               | 8%    |
| Manufacturing  | 32%            | 24%               | 23%   |
| Wholesale trade  | 0%             | 2%                | 2%    |
| Retail trade   | 19%            | 11%               | 9%    |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities  | 2%             | 4%                | 5%    |
| Information  | 0%             | 1%                | 1%    |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing                              | 5%             | 4%                | 3%    |
| Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services | 2%             | 6%                | 6%    |
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance                                | 19%            | 18%               | 19%   |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services                   | 6%             | 7%                | 7%    |
| Other services, except public administration   | 0%             | 3%                | 5%    |
| Public administration  | 4%             | 5%                | 6%    |

**Table 5.3 - Top Employers in Berlin**  
(WisConomy, WI Department of Workforce Development)

| MAJOR EMPLOYERS              | NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES (RANGE) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Walmart Supercenter          | 100-249                     |
| Berlin Area School District  | 100-249                     |
| Fortifi Bank                 | 100-249                     |
| Ripon Jacket Co              | 100-249                     |
| Wilson-Hurd Manufacturing Co | 100-249                     |

