

Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's (SEWRPC) – A Regional Housing Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2035

On March 13, 2013 the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) unanimously adopted "A Regional Housing Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2035." This plan was guided by a Regional Housing Plan Advisory Committee made up of representatives from the 7 representative counties. The regional housing plan was drafted as a complement and follow-up to the 2035 land use and transportation plans, also adopted by SEWRPC. Staff was invited to review draft documents and participate in meetings throughout the public participation process.

The first step of the planning process was to define the regional housing problems. The problems were broken down into the following seven (7) components:

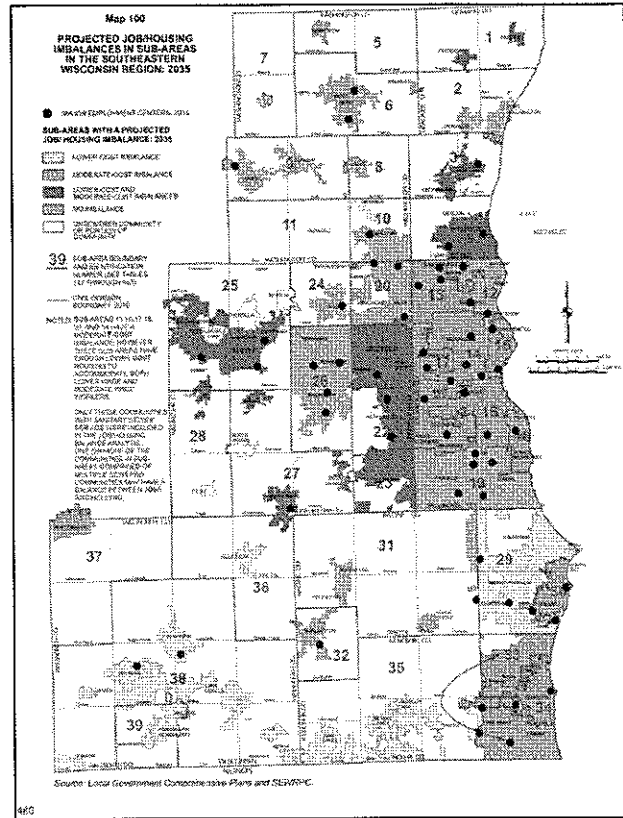
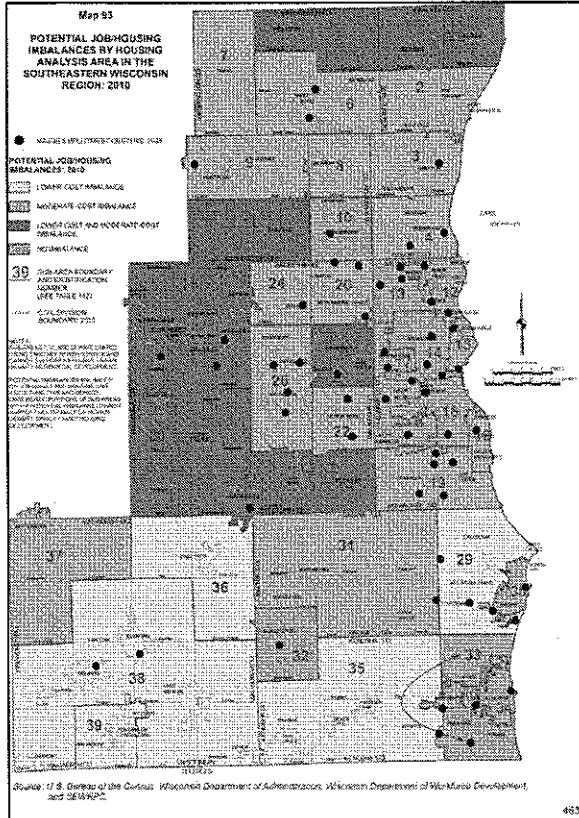
- An imbalance between jobs and housing in sub-areas of the Region and the Region as a whole, particularly an adequate supply of affordable , or "workforce," housing near employment centers;
- Challenges faced in sustaining the present supply of subsidized housing stock in the Region;
- A need for accessible housing stock to accommodate persons with disabilities;
- Housing discrimination;
- Concentration of low-income and minority populations in the Region's central cities;
- The need to encourage sustainable, or environmentally responsible, residential development practices; and,
- The national economic recession and related housing crisis beginning in 2007, which has resulted in falling home prices, restrictions on credit for home mortgages, and foreclosures and abandoned homes in many neighborhoods.

The vision of the plan is to provide financially sustainable housing for persons of all income levels, age groups and special needs throughout the entire Southeastern Wisconsin Region.

The plan details previous and existing housing plans and policies; an inventory of existing housing; new housing opportunities; housing discrimination; demographic and economic characteristics; regional jobs/housing balance; accessible housing; subsidized and tax credit housing; general best practices; and recommendations. With 754 pages of narrative, maps and tables, the Plan contains an abundance of information. Within the Plan, West Allis was analyzed as sub-area 17, alongside Greenfield, Wauwatosa, Greendale, Hales Corners and West Milwaukee.

A primary theme within the plan relates to the question of jobs/housing balances in the region. The jobs/housing balance concept generally refers to a desirable ratio of jobs to housing units, taking into consideration employment opportunities, wages and housing costs. The Plan shows no current or projected jobs/housing imbalance for West Allis. This finding is based on our existing density, range of housing options, location in relation to employment centers and access to public transit.

The Plan focuses on two types of imbalances that were found in the region. Imbalances essentially refer to areas where people can attain employment, but cannot afford the price of housing. Lower-cost imbalances, shown in yellow, are areas with higher percentages of lower-wage employment than lower-cost housing. Moderate-cost imbalances, shown in orange, are areas with higher percentage of moderate-wage employment than moderate-cost housing. Several areas were found to have both low and moderate imbalances, shown in brown. Areas without imbalances, including West Allis, are shown in green.



For communities that have current or projected jobs/housing imbalances, the plan provides specific recommendations for dealing with the imbalance, including, but not limited to, the provision for allowing lower-cost, multi-family and moderate cost single-family developments in zoning codes and comprehensive plans; implementation of regional public transportation; consideration of amending State law to prohibit TIF in communities with an imbalance; revision to Low Income Housing Tax Credit awards to prioritized, "imbalanced" areas; and, using jobs/housing balance as a criterion for Federal and State economic development incentives. These recommendations would both balance housing within the region and reduce concentrations of low-income housing and populations.

Beyond the jobs/housing imbalances, the plan includes a series of recommendations (pages 731-742) to further the identified vision of the plan. The recommendations are broken out by agency of implementation. Recommendations pertaining to West Allis are detailed within the "sewered community" column. As it pertains to zoning, Comprehensive Planning and Plan Commission reviews, the following recommendations were noted:

- Zoning codes should accommodate areas for single-family and two-family homes on lots less than 10,000 sq. ft. with home sizes less than 1,200.
- Zoning codes should accommodate areas for multi-family housing at a density of 10 units per acre.
- Comprehensive Plans and Zoning Ordinances should encourage a variety of housing types, including apartments, townhomes, duplexes, small single-family homes and live-work units. Zoning Ordinances should also allow for a variety of lot sizes and values within neighborhoods.
- Municipalities should review design requirements that apply to new housing that could be made that would reduce the cost of development without compromising the safety, functionality and aesthetic quality of new development.
- Local governments should consider establishing programs and ordinances to stabilize and improve established neighborhoods.
- Zoning codes should allow multi-family developments as permitted uses in certain zoning districts.
- Local governments should consider preparing detailed neighborhood plans for each residential neighborhood or special planning district where significant urban development or redevelopment is expected.
- Local governments should promote good site design through the development of design standards to be incorporated into local zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- Local governments should promote the redevelopment and infill of vacant and underutilized sites, including the cleanup and reuse of brownfields, as a key element in planning for the revitalization urban areas.

The City of West Allis already complies with these recommendations within its Zoning Code, Comprehensive Plan and general practices and procedures. The Regional Housing Plan can serve as a guide for continued implementation and updates.

SEWRPC recommends that local municipalities endorse the 2035 Regional Housing Plan. Endorsement of the plan does not supersede the local Comprehensive Plan, but rather serves as a guide for furthering the vision of providing *financially sustainable housing for persons of all income levels, age groups and special need*. Copies of the plan have been provided to the Department of Development's Planning and Housing Divisions. Complete details of the Plan may be found at www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPC/housing.htm