



Town of Morse and City of Mellen  
Community Economic Analysis &  
Development Plan

2024



**Extension**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Economic Development Corporation.

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# ACRONYMS

AADC	Ashland Area Development Corporation
Homegrown	UW Madison, Extension Community Entrepreneurship Program
NWRPC	Northwest Regional Planning Commission
ORP	Office of Rural Prosperity at the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
RWEI	Rural Wisconsin Entrepreneurship Initiative
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture/Rural Development Office
UWCC	University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives
UWEX	University of Wisconsin Extension
WEDC	Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
WHEDA	Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Agency

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Economic development doesn't happen by chance. Economic development happens when people come together and plan a path for success.**

The Town of Morse and the City of Mellen are collaborating to create economic development plans that will enhance the lives of our residents, enhance our retail and industrial base, improve and/or expand our housing stock, coordinate communications, and make our pristine area a destination tourism location while still protecting our Northwoods environment.

In January of 2023, the Morse & Mellen Economic Development Planning Analysis (MMEDPA) Group of over 40 local residents began meeting with UW-Extension Economic Development specialists as part of the Community Economic Analysis for Rural Wisconsin Communities. Our group brainstormed and identified 25 big ideas regarding our community's strengths and weaknesses. Over the course of 2023 we narrowed our scope to 4 major goals that encompassed our big ideas and began to form a plan to meet our goals.

Our UW-Extension partners have connected our group with numerous resources. We now have access to the US Dept of Agriculture (USDA) representative and partner with the Ashland Area Development Corporation (AADC) and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) who serve our region. We hope that these agencies can connect our locals with regional entrepreneurs and funding sources to help reach their goals.

We also always keep in mind that within the Town of Morse at least 10% of the US iron ore reserves are still to be mined.

If you are interested in being a part of this planning process, please contact the Town of Morse or the City of Mellen.

Together Morse and Mellen are preparing for growth while protecting our natural beauty. Let's work to grow our community and make it the best place to live and work!

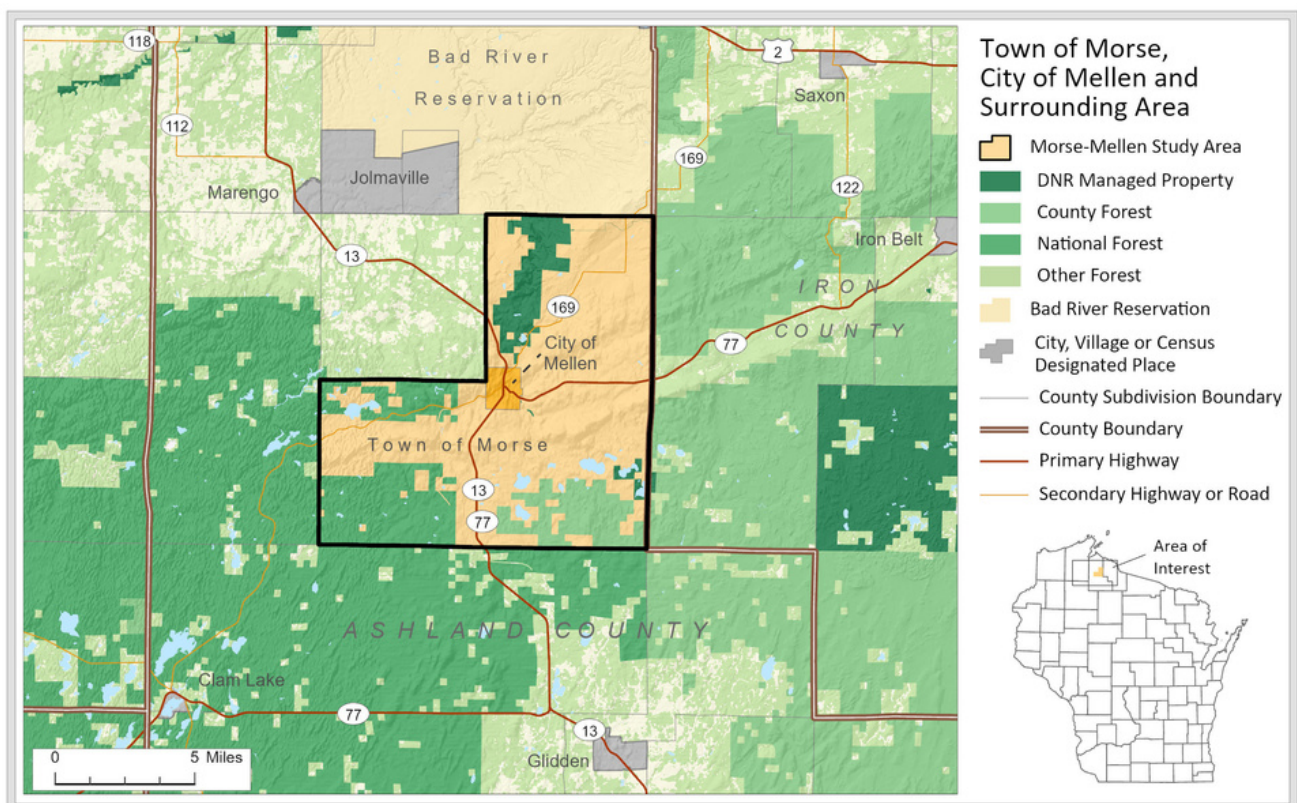
Jeff Ehrhardt  
Chairman  
Town of Morse

Terry Van Buren  
Mayor  
City of Mellen

# EXPLANATION OF STUDY AREA

For this study, the leadership team used the City of Mellen and the Town of Morse as the boundaries for mapping and data purposes. In some cases, the group used broader geographies including county data and nearby census tracts. The plan provides direction for a collective approach between Mellen-Morse and its neighboring communities.

**Map 1: Boundaries of the Study Area**



# LEADERSHIP TEAM

The development of this strategic plan for the Morse-Mellen area was a collaborative effort led by a dedicated and experienced leadership team. Comprised of individuals with a diverse set of skills and backgrounds, this team reviewed economic and demographic trends for the area, reviewed the area assets and amenities, conducted an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC), and identified priority areas. These efforts have culminated in the development of this strategic plan that will guide community and economic development efforts for the Morse-Mellen area. The leadership team included:

- Jeff Ehrhardt, Chairman, Town of Morse Board of Supervisors
- Jim Brennan, Chair, Town of Morse Comprehensive Planning Committee
- Dan Scudder, Community member and retired WI DOT engineer
- Leza Wells, Mellen Chamber of Commerce Board
- Denise Lutz, Executive Director, Ashland County Housing Authority
- Terry Peters, Owner, Terry Peters Logging, and Mellen School Board member
- Richard Huber, Ashland County Board member representing Mellen and part of the Town of Morse
- Robert Aldrich, President, Friends of Copper Falls State Park NGO
- Lonnie Polencheck, Accessibility Consultant
- Nate Deegan, Mellen City Council Member
- Jeff Peters, Director, Mellen Brownstone Center
- Kelly Meredith, regional mural artist

This effort was supported by a team for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension including:

- Lissa Radke, Ashland County Community Development Educator
- Steven Chmielewski, Waukesha and Jefferson Counties Community Development Educator
- Tessa Conroy, Community Economic Development Specialist, Associate Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics
- Steve Deller, Community Economic Development Specialist, Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics
- Caroline Corona, Community Economic Development Research Assistant
- Brandon Hofstedt, Community Economic Development Program Manager
- Matt Kures, Community Economic Development Specialist
- Kristin Runge, Community Economic Development Specialist

# INTENT OF PLAN

The Community Economic Analysis for Rural Wisconsin Communities (CEA-RWC) program is a joint effort between the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to bring a structured community economic development strategic planning program to a set of five rural Wisconsin communities throughout the state. Mellen-Morse is one of five communities chosen for this pilot program.

As many rural communities struggle with identifying opportunities and strategies to move the community forward, the CEA-RWC program leverages resources to engage in comprehensive community economic development planning.

This program is a structured, yet flexible strategic planning process to build on existing strengths to:

- Better organize for community economic development by building a strong, inclusive local leadership team,
- Further identify economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges,
- Increase comfort with the range of policy options and strategies to pursue,
- Develop an action plan comprised of 3-5 strategic priorities identified by the community, and
- Expand working relationships with partners (federal, state, local, and philanthropic organizations) to explore funding options and support for the implementation of the plan.



# INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW

Rural communities, including the Town of Morse and City of Mellen (also referred to as the Morse-Mellen study area), have faced numerous demographic, sociological and economic transitions over the last few decades. While these changes are often viewed in terms of rural competitive disadvantage or decline, these changes have created both distress and opportunities for rural regions. Accordingly, as the Morse-Mellen Community Economic Analysis effort works to develop strategies and initiatives to enhance the study area's economy and quality of life, it is important for community stakeholders to address and recognize both challenges and assets present in the community and broader region.

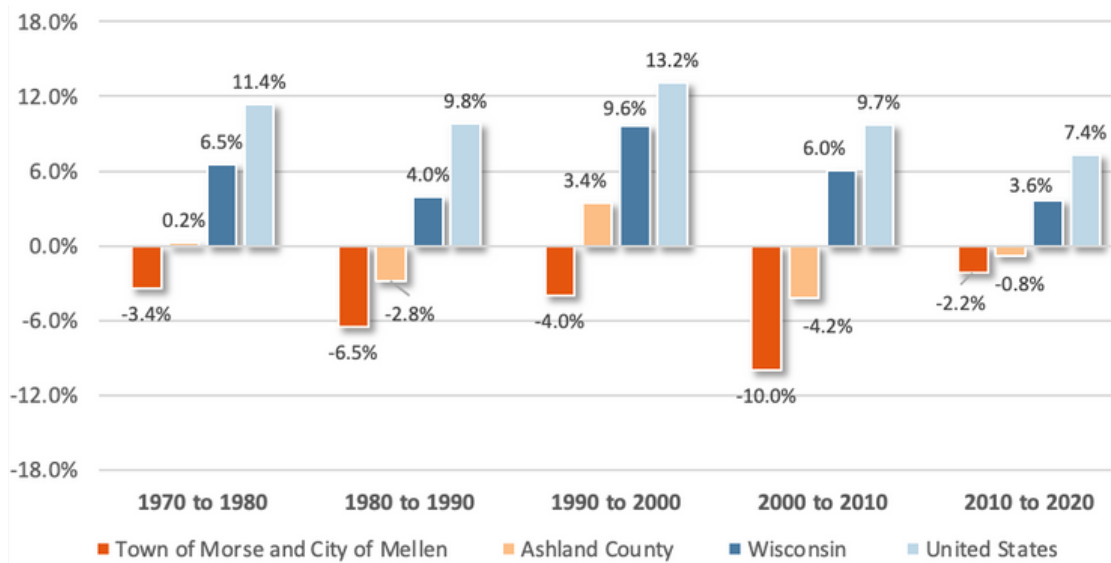
The Town of Morse and the City of Mellen boast a picturesque setting, nestled alongside the historic Bad River, surrounded by the captivating Chequamegon National Forest and the Penokee Mountain Range. Originally established in 1888 as a railroad town to cater to the thriving logging and wood processing industries, Mellen has retained its primary industry as wood processing mills, albeit with a decline in supporting industries due to volatile wood product markets.

While the challenges the Morse-Mellen area faces may seem formidable, the community possesses exceptional natural assets that hold the potential to establish a vibrant and sustainable tourism sector, capable of addressing our other needs. The Morse-Mellen area has the distinct advantage of being near an attractive and popular state park with other immediate surroundings including an extensive network of recreational trails, riverways, pristine lakes, abundant wildlife, and a rich rural history and culture.

## POPULATION

Similar to many rural areas, the Town of Morse and City of Mellen have experienced population declines over the past several decades (Figure 1). While the study area's 2020 population of 1,197 residents is -2.2% lower than it was in 2010, the loss over this period was notably less than the -10.0% decline between 2000 and 2010. The rates of population change in the Mellen-Morse study area also somewhat reflect the minimal gains and losses in Ashland County over this period. Furthermore, the population loss in the most recent 2010-2020 period mirrors rates found in other communities along the Highway 13 corridor traversing Taylor, Price and Ashland counties.

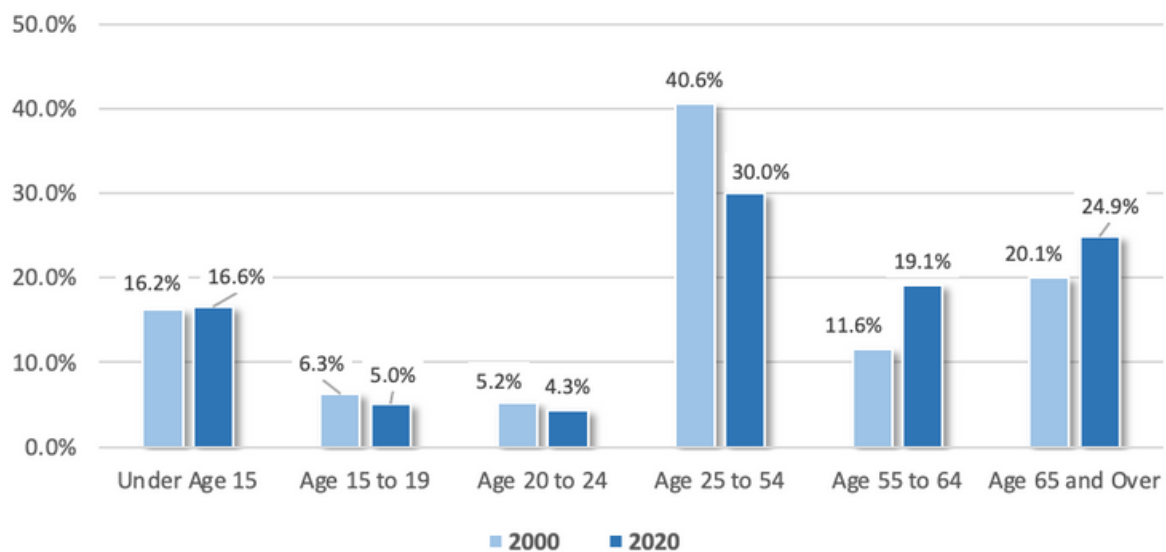
**Figure 1: Population Change by Decade**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Wisconsin Department of Administration

In addition to changes in the study area’s total population, the Town of Morse and City of Mellen have also experienced shifts in their resident’s age distributions over the last two decades (Figure 2). Specifically, the share of prime working age residents (e.g., ages 25 to 54) dropped from 40.6% to 30.0% between 2000 and 2020. In contrast, the shares of residents between the ages of 55 and 64 increased from 11.6% to 19.1% while the share of residents ages 65 and over grew from 20.1% to 24.9% over the same period.

**Figure 2: Mellen-Morse Area Residents by Age Group 2000 vs. 2020**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 and 2020 Decennial Census

The changes to age distributions in the Morse-Mellen study area somewhat mirror those occurring in the United States, State of Wisconsin and Ashland County. However, the study area has a notably larger share of individuals ages 55 to 64 (19.1%) compared to the state (14.2%) and national (13.1%) averages. The Town of Morse and City of Mellen also have a higher share of individuals ages 65 and over (24.9%) than the state (18.0%) and United States (16.8%). The decline in the region's working age population and increasing share of individuals aged 55 and older creates several implications for community economic development initiatives in the Mellen-Morse study area:

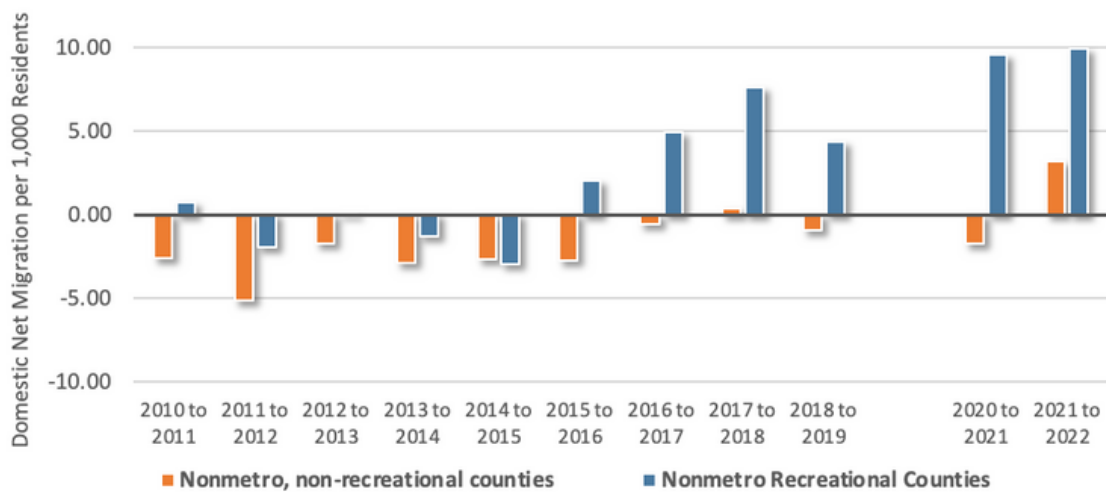
- Regional employers may need to explore additional strategies for attracting and retaining employees or enhancing productivity through other means;
- A greater share of residents approaching retirement age could create a new pool of volunteers in the community;
- As individuals between the ages of 55 and 64 may have a high entrepreneurial propensity in rural areas, there may be additional opportunities for the region to support new business formation;
- The shifting age structure of the region could impact the future types of housing units needed.

Despite the population declines over the last five decades, residents of the Morse-Mellen study area should not resign themselves to future losses. Indeed, many rural areas in Northwest and North Central Wisconsin counties gained population over the past decade, particularly those that are located in so-called "recreation counties". As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, recreation counties are identified based on their reliance on employment and earnings in select industries including entertainment, recreation, accommodations, eating and drinking places, and real estate. The recreation county designation is also based on a county's percentage of vacant housing units that are intended for seasonal or occasional use. Wisconsin has 23 counties assigned to the recreation county typology including Ashland County and neighboring/nearby Bayfield, Sawyer, Washburn, Iron, Vilas and Oneida counties.

The population growth in recreation counties is partly driven by recent increases in net in-migration (Figure 3). More specifically, the overall net migration rates for non-metro recreational counties switched from negative to positive in the pre-pandemic period between 2015 and 2019 and increased even more after the onset of the pandemic in 2020. While Ashland County did not follow this pattern precisely, the county did experience positive net migration in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 periods despite many years of negative net migration. Note that the net migration measure does not determine whether more people moved to recreational counties or more people remained in these counties who would have

otherwise moved. However, the growing net migration rate for non-metro recreational counties compared to the rates found in non-metro, non-recreational counties suggests that many residents are placing a greater value on the natural and non-natural amenities that recreational counties offer. The Morse-Mellen study area may also be able to leverage community economic development strategies that build upon these trends.

**Figure 3: Domestic Net Migration Rates 2010 to 2022: Wisconsin Nonmetro Recreational and Nonmetro, Non-Recreational Counties**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

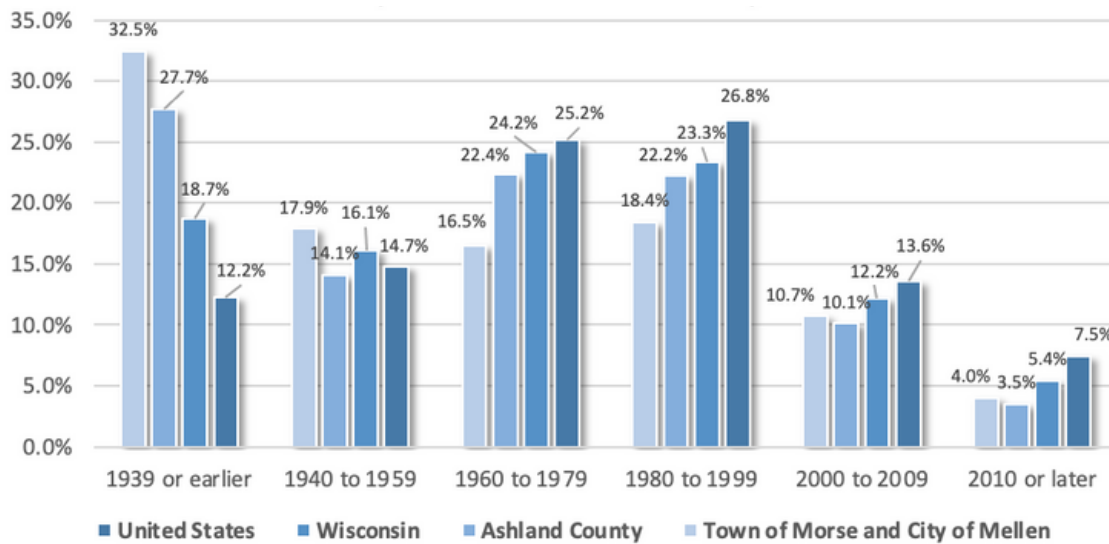
The lack of population growth in the Morse-Mellen study area relative to other surrounding rural areas in recreation counties may be driven by a variety of factors. Transportation infrastructure, broadband availability, properties with lake access, or other considerations could potentially explain some of the differences in growth rates. The study area’s housing stock could also influence the region’s growth rate if there is not a sufficient quantity or quality of housing units for prospective residents.

## HOUSING

While housing stock can (and should) be assessed from a variety of perspectives, the distribution of housing units by year constructed provides one basic perspective on quantity and quality (Figure 4). Reflecting the slowdown in residential construction after the Great Recession, the share of housing units built in 2010 or later is lower than in the prior decade for the United States, Wisconsin, Ashland County and the Morse-Mellen study area. Nonetheless, the share of occupied housing units built in the study area over the last decade is not considerably different than the shares in Ashland County or the state, which may reflect housing shortages found throughout many regions of Wisconsin.

A more sizeable difference in the study area’s share of units built in different time periods is evident in those units built in 1939 or earlier. Almost a third (32.5%) of the Morse-Mellen study area’s housing units were built prior to 1940, compared to just 18.7% in Wisconsin and 12.2% in the United States. The quality of housing units built during this period is unknown. Some of these units could be of high value if they have been maintained or renovated. It is likely, however, that a share of these units does not meet the needs or expectations of many residents. Accordingly, the Morse-Mellen study area may face both quality and quantity issues concerning its housing stock.

**Figure 4: Housing Units by Year Structure Built (2017-2021 5-Year Estimates)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

## KEY INDUSTRIES

The Morse-Mellen study area has an opportunity to further leverage its recreational assets into community economic development opportunities. The study area is the gateway to Copper Falls State Park which receives over 200,000 visitors per year. Approximately 18 percent of the study area’s housing units are specified as seasonal and recreational units, with a significant number in the surrounding area as well. The study area is also adjacent to the Chequamegon National Forest which provides a diversity of recreational opportunities.

Capturing potential spending by users of these recreational assets requires offering goods and services desired by these individuals. Specifically, visitors and tourists often desire access to retail enterprises, entertainment opportunities and eating and drinking establishments. Importantly, these business categories are important quality of life contributors to residents as well. Not unlike many other small communities, however, the Morse-Mellen study area faces a challenging market for the provision of many goods and services given its location and

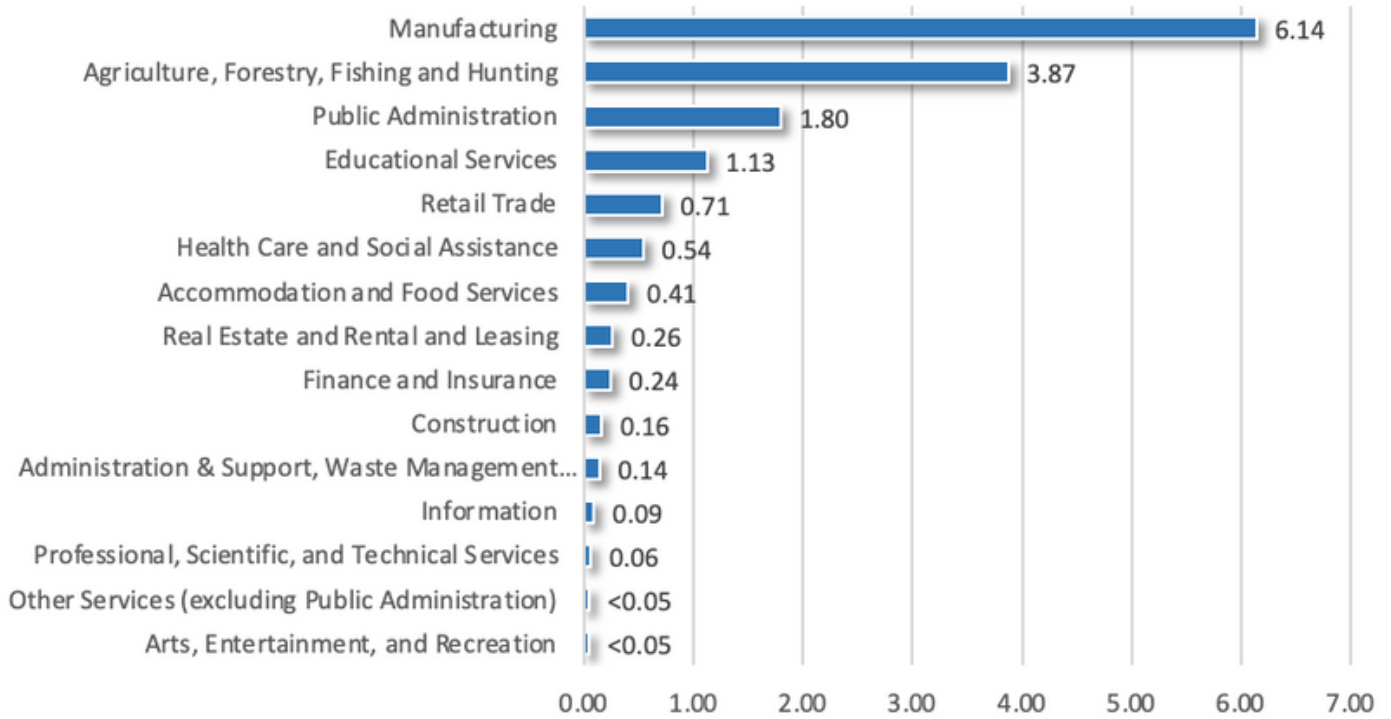
market size. As a result, the communities face a potential leakage of revenues to shopping opportunities in the surrounding region.

Employment location quotients provide one basic perspective on the potential availability or deficit of various goods and services in the study area. In this example, location quotients are calculated by comparing a given industry's share of total employment in the Morse-Mellen study area to the same industry's share of overall employment in the United States. The critical value for a location quotient is 1.0. An LQ of 1.0 means that the GSD has the same proportion of employment in an industry as the nation. An LQ greater than 1.0 denotes that an area's share of employment in a given industry is greater than its national share. Conversely, an LQ less than 1.0 indicates an area's employment in an industry is below the U.S. percentage.[1]

Location quotients greater than 1.0 are important as they imply that an area has a specialization in those industries. More specifically, an LQ greater than 1.0 suggests that an industry is producing more goods or services than can be consumed locally. These goods and services are in turn exported out of the region, connecting the area to external economies and bringing outside dollars into local communities. In contrast, an LQ less than 1.0 suggests that local industries are not meeting demand (demand is greater than supply) and the good or service must be imported.

Several industries in the Morse-Mellen study area have location quotients significantly greater than 1.0 (Figure 5) including public administration (1.80); agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (3.87); and manufacturing (6.14). In terms of total employment, manufacturing and educational services are the two largest industry sectors. In contrast, many industry categories that serve residents, cater to visitors, and otherwise contribute to quality of life have location quotients below 1.0, suggesting that local demand is not being met and spending is occurring elsewhere. These industries include accommodation and food services; retail trade; health care and social assistance; other services; and arts, entertainment and recreation. While additional market research is needed to confirm development opportunities in these categories, filling these potential demand gaps with local establishments could both enhance the local economy and improve quality of life perceptions of future households that may consider the communities as a place of residence. Many of these business categories are also well-suited to fill commercial spaces in downtown Mellen.

**Figure 5: Mellen-Morse Location Quotients (2020)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau LODES

[1] Due to accuracy issues with employment data, location quotients between 0.75 and 1.25 are generally considered not to be significantly different from 1.0.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE MORSE- MELLEN AREA

## CEA-RWC PROCESS

Priority areas outlined in this strategic community economic development plan were identified through a multi-step process where the planning team engaged in strategic thinking and generative discussion. These discussions relied on both Mellen-Morse area demographic and economic trends and research as well as on the local knowledge of the Morse-Mellen area stakeholders. This effort began with core members of both the community leadership team and the Extension outreach team working together to prepare for logistics and communications for the launch of the program. The program included four main sessions where the Extension and the Morse-Mellen area leadership team addressed core components and phases of strategic planning.

Prior to the start of the CEA-RWC Process, local leaders from the Morse-Mellen area met on several occasions to begin the vetting process and to help hone in on priority areas. From January 2023 through March 2023, this group met on two occasions to begin these conversations - see appendix for notes from these meetings.

**Session 1:** On April 25, 2023, the leadership team launched the process by identifying and establishing a team of community leaders ready to commit to a process for community economic analysis and action planning, with a shared understanding of expectations and roles. Agenda topics included: project overview, the desired outcome and a community and economic data discussion in the review of the Morse-Mellen area.

**Session 2:** On May 8, 2023, the leadership team reconvened to conduct an environmental scan of the Morse-Mellen area and help clarify and prioritize the strategic issues that the community can address. To assist in thinking about the different components of the Morse-Mellen area, the Community Capitals Framework was shared to give consideration of the different components that make up a healthy rural ecosystem for a vital local economy and social well-being.

**Session 3:** On May 24, 2023, the leadership team met to identify three to five strategic priorities. The leadership team then prioritized and identified the following topics as the



strategic issues to focus on with this effort:

- Downtown Renovations and Business Development
- Housing
- Community Conversations
- Recreation, Ecotourism and Natural Amenities

Between sessions 3 and 4, a subcommittee of Extension and Morse-Mellen area worked together to draft the initial strategic plan with a strong focus on clarifying goals and objectives. This draft was then brought to discussion with the community leadership team at Session 4.

**Session 4:** On July 12, 2023, the leadership team met to review the draft plan, clarify the priorities, goals and objectives, and identify resources and components needed for successful implementation. Following this meeting, the leadership team decided to hold individual meetings with subgroup members to further discuss and develop priority areas. The subgroups met on the following dates and on the following topics:

- August 21, 2023 - Downtown Renovations and Business Development
- August 28, 2023 - Housing
- September 11, 2023 - Community Conversations
- September 25, 2023 - Recreation, Ecotourism and Natural Amenities

**Session 5:** The local leadership group decided to hold one additional session on October 2, 2023 to present the updated goals, objectives, and strategies to community participants and gather feedback from them. This information was used to update the overall plan.

## CEA-RWC GOALS

The following goals were identified as fundamental decisions and actions that will help to shape and support the plan's implementation.

- Downtown Renovations and Business Development
- Housing
- Community Conversations
- Recreation, Ecotourism and Natural Amenities

Essential to each of these priority areas is incorporating effective communication. Community within rural communities is paramount for enhancing social connections, supporting community members, cultivating a robust sense of unity, and promoting a positive community image. By utilizing well-established communication channels, communities can effectively highlight their unique assets, such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, and local businesses. This not only helps in showcasing the community's distinct offerings but also strengthens the bonds among its members, fostering a greater sense of cohesion and collective identity.

## GOAL #1: DOWNTOWN RENOVATIONS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The Morse-Mellen area is home to a myriad of small businesses. Promoting local economic development in Morse-Mellen requires supporting existing businesses and creating and attracting retail stores and services that cater to visitors of Copper Falls State Park and other natural areas. The downtown area of the City of Mellen, serves as a hub of commerce, culture, and social engagement within the region, making it indispensable for its potential economic and social contributions. Downtown Mellen is the heart of the business district for the Morse-Mellen area. Despite the limited presence of retail and tourism-related businesses in the Town of Morse and the City of Mellen, these communities hold immense potential as gateway destinations to popular attractions like Copper Falls State Park and surrounding natural assets. Recent efforts by residents have led to the initial renovation of the long-vacant historic Mellen Bank, now known as the Mellen Brownstone Center. This non-profit project aims to establish a coffeehouse, a small gallery or museum, and a community internet access site, contributing to the revitalization of downtown Mellen and attracting both residents and visitors. Revitalizing downtown Mellen is crucial to attracting visitors, providing essential services, and creating a vibrant atmosphere. Promoting local economic development in Mellen-Morse requires attracting retail stores and services that cater to visitors of Copper Falls State Park and other natural areas.

## GOAL 1: Improve downtown Mellen through renovations, business development and community investment.

Objective 1: Explore and inventory new funding and resource options to secure and leverage incentives and assistance for building renovations, new investment, and entrepreneurial support				
STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
A. Continue to strengthen existing downtown leadership team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>AADC</li> <li>NWRPC</li> <li>Mellen Chamber</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business owner(s) w/ Chamber</li> </ul>	March 1, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active downtown participation with businesses</li> </ul>
B. Explore and leverage existing funding, resources and tools to improve downtown (ex: Look at TID/TIF and other financing tools; look at WEDC downtown renovation grants; look into remodel grant options)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>Todd Johnson (UWEX)</li> <li>Erinn Welty (WEDC)</li> <li>Real Estate Agent</li> <li>Banks/Credit Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown Group/Team</li> </ul>	April, 2024-December, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established documentation of resources available</li> <li>Application of at least one resource or funding option</li> <li>Co-developing support for local arts/beautification initiative to improve social district</li> </ul>
C. Provide entrepreneurial support for downtown business operators and aspiring entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>Maggie Cornelius (UWEX)</li> <li>Homegrown (UWEX program)</li> <li>NWRPC</li> <li>AADC</li> <li>UWCC</li> <li>Other area chambers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown Group/Team</li> </ul>	January, 2024-December, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application of best fit entrepreneurial ecosystem support programs and business development support programs</li> <li>Plan and implement targeted business development assistance for interested and existing entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluate Impact of Objective 1:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many businesses served, dollars invested, vacant spaces filled, etc.</li> <li>Enhancement of Mellen-Morse identity and strengthen the branding efforts in collaboration with other communities in Ashland County.</li> <li>Engagement of local artists, volunteers, and stakeholders to support and initiate these projects.</li> <li>Quarterly updates provided to community on progress</li> </ol>				

**Objective 2: Establish a downtown development plan, considering the needs of businesses, local residents and tourists to attract investment.**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
A. Inventory existing downtown buildings and businesses and explore what similar and successful towns/communities are doing to help us find successful projects and develop community pride (business mix peer community comparison)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>• Steve Chmielewski (UWEX)</li> <li>• Downtown Market Analysis</li> <li>• Other area chambers</li> <li>• WEDC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• Mellen Chamber of Commerce/ Team</li> </ul>	March, 2024 - September, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain and share baseline data from downtown footprint</li> <li>• Identify and engage peer communities in conversation about successful efforts for increasing pride and confidence for investment</li> </ul>
B. Gather trade area data (Ex: traffic counts, visitor profile, resident profile, visitors demand, resident demand). Determine target trade area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>• Steve Chmielewski (UWEX)</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• SBDC</li> <li>• AADC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mellen Chamber of Commerce/ Team</li> </ul>	March, 2024 - September, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain and share baseline downtown data</li> </ul>
C. Explore ways to address building code compliance (Ex: Look at gray space building idea; learn from/replicate Brownstone building example)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>• Local Government Education (UWEX)</li> <li>• Tony Jennings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• City Council</li> </ul>	March, 2024 - September, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad understanding of building code strategies and resources</li> </ul>
D. Envision development options, reach consensus on development vision including brand, and determine most feasible initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WEDC/ORP</li> <li>• UWEX</li> <li>• USDA</li> </ul>		March, 2024 - December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform potential investors and developers</li> </ul>
E. Retain, grow, and attract entrepreneurial businesses to the community through new investors and community investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UWEX</li> <li>• WEDC/ORP</li> <li>• U of MN- Extension</li> <li>• AADC</li> <li>• Local Government</li> <li>• Banks/Credit Unions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mellen Chamber</li> <li>• Town of Morse Supervisors</li> <li>• City Council</li> </ul>	March, 2024- December, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantify new investment annually</li> </ul>

Objective 2 (cont.)				
STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
F. Increase attractiveness of area with tree planting and increasing diversity of native vegetation. Develop a tree or vegetation plan that includes monitoring health, continual watering, etc. Talk with other communities about their successes with trees/plantings. Involve private property owners in this effort. Consider pursuing youth in tree plantings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beautification committee</li> <li>• Involve Todd Barman to review downtown tree research (what works/doesn't)</li> <li>• Involve an arborist to make recommendations on tree placement in town, encourage public/private partnerships.</li> <li>• Purchase low cost trees and shrubs through annual Ashland Co Land Conservation Department sale</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beautification Committee</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trees are ways to keep people downtown longer</li> </ul>
G. Continue to pursue broadband planning, fund development and support for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UW Extension Broadband Work Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• Coordinate with Bayfield Wireless, Centurlink (Brighspeed, and Norvado)</li> </ul>		
<b>Evaluate impact of Objective 2:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishment of a downtown development plan</li> <li>2. How many businesses served, dollars invested, vacant spaces filled, etc.</li> <li>3. Improvement in downtown appearance</li> </ol>				

Sub-Group Members: Tony Jennings, Michelle Teigen, Kelly Meredith, Business owner from Mellen, Banker or Chamber director; Jeff will give direct invite to Cookie Carbon & Lesa Wells & Ryan Broeniman (owns Northland foods), Jeff Ehrhardt, Jim Brennan and Dan Scudder, Todd Barman on TIDs, Ashland County UW-Extension

## GOAL #2: HOUSING

Housing impacts nearly all aspects of community life. It is essential for economic development, job creation, population attraction and retention, public health and safety, as well as social diversity and equity. Sufficient housing stock that meets the needs of current and potential residents at all income levels is essential for creating healthy economic development conditions in the County.

Meeting the diverse housing needs of the area, including single-family homes, worker housing, starter homes, and apartments, is essential. The Morse-Mellen area lacks affordable, quality housing for its residents. The City of Mellen owns at least 19 buildable sites and the goal team identified at least 72 parcels within the City of Mellen or the Town of Morse as vacant or with homes that need to be demolished. Attracting people, particularly new workers, to the Mellen-Morse area and retaining local talent require strategies that address housing limitations and promote livability and affordability.

**Goal 2: Increase the number of new and existing rehabbed housing units that addresses gaps in current community housing needs and balances environmental and sustainable development.**

**Objective 1: Complete a housing assessment for the Mellen-Morse area, including unincorporated population clusters and identifying existing housing assessment efforts in the area.**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Establish a housing steering group/committee to coordinate housing strategies and secure content needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UWEX</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• Denise Lutz</li> <li>• Richard Huber</li> </ul>	March, 2024-May, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group meets regularly</li> <li>• Mellen zoning ordinances reviewed</li> </ul>
2. Develop and conduct a survey to determine housing stock conditions and projected community needs to inform lenders and investors on current opportunities. Develop a plan for how to develop and distribute the survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX)</li> <li>• Kristin Runge (UWEX)</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> <li>• UW Extension specialists to help with Qualtrics survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	January-June, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified housing project/areas/needs</li> <li>• Housing group drafts policy recommendations to ensure housing for current and future demographic trends</li> </ul>
3. Inventory which Mellen-owned lots are available and whether they have utilities or not for development  Take a tour of these available lots and take photos to determine what's needed to sell them  Take a tour to identify vacant/possibly vacant houses/dwellings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX)</li> <li>• Kristin Runge</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> <li>• Steering Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	January-June, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified housing projects/areas/needs</li> </ul>

**Objective 1 (cont.)**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
4. Promote to area residents the regional home energy efficiency loans available at Housing Authority and Northwest Regional Planning Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashland County Housing Authority</li> <li>• City of Mellen</li> <li>• Town of Morse</li> <li>• Ashland County Health and Human Services</li> <li>• USDA Rural Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denise Lutz</li> <li>• Brittany Kerfoot</li> <li>• Theresa Koosmann</li> </ul>	Survey May 1, 2024 - June 1, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile and analyze survey results</li> <li>• Increase in residents' engagement with home improvement opportunities</li> </ul>

**Evaluate Impact of Objective 1:**

Short Term Impact (1-2 years):

1. Quarterly updates are provided by Housing Team to M-M CEA group
2. Appropriate/clarified ordinances.
3. Determine quality of existing housing stock
4. City owned lots are promoted with incentives for development.

Long Term Impact (2-5 years):

1. Increase new and improve old housing units



**Objective 2: Explore building options with developers to get more information and build relationships and develop local capacity**

STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
<p>1. Explore similar communities that have successful housing developments to determine how they work and determine a regional approach to partnering.</p> <p>Suggested communities: New site in Ashland, Hayward, Mason, Washburn, Hurley, Twin Ports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX)</li> <li>• Kristin Runge</li> <li>• Karl Green (UWEX)</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> <li>• WHEDA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	<p>March 1, 2024 -December 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of successful options for housing development</li> </ul>
<p>2. Define incentives and resources that can be offered to developers.</p> <p>Determine whether developers need to have free lots or not</p> <p>Develop a request for proposal for developers that want to build housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	<p>March 1, 2024-December, 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual updates promoted</li> <li>• Publicized local benefits and opportunities in newspaper, etc</li> </ul>
<p>3. Identify options for funding, development, roles/responsibilities and partnership within Ashland County</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> <li>• Ashland County Housing Authority</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• Jeff Peters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	<p>March 1, 2024-December, 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational program/campaign to raise awareness and increase participation</li> <li>• Publicized local benefits and opportunities in newspaper, etc.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Review and update related Mellen ordinances</p> <p>Review Ashland County, Bayfield County, and Town of Mason’s housing ordinances for relevance</p> <p>Explore ordinances and cost benefits of tiny housing, especially for worker and senior housing options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX)</li> <li>• Karl Green (UWEX)</li> <li>• WHEDA</li> <li>• County Zoning Administrator</li> <li>• Jim Warren (City Council &amp; Buildings and Grounds)</li> <li>• Rich Huber, Ashland County Board Member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> <li>• Tony Jennings, Lissa Radke, Kelly Westlund</li> </ul>	<p>March 1, 2024 - December 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaged County Zoning to preserve character of Mellen</li> <li>• Determined how to clarify local ordinances.</li> <li>• County and City support updated ordinances</li> </ul>

**Objective 2 (cont.)**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
5. Develop and improve local talents and knowledge to improve grant writing capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lissa Radke (UWEX)</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• USDA - Rural Partners Network</li> <li>• Business Club with School</li> <li>• Corey Lake (Shop teacher)</li> <li>• Jeff Peters</li> <li>• Todd Barman (UWEX)</li> <li>• Laura West-Kralick (USDA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Group</li> </ul>	March 1, 2024- December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One high school student actively involved to also advocate for community development initiatives</li> </ul>

**Evaluate Impact of Objective 2:**

Short Term Impact (1-2 years)

1. Increased local capacity to secure new funding

Long Term Impact (2-5 years)

1. Increase new and improve old housing units

**Objective 3: Leverage knowledge, resources, and talent to engage and incentivize developers and builders to provide/develop appropriate housing**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Recruit local and regional grant writing assistance to write grants that develop and improve housing; develop an annual calendar of federal and nonprofit grant opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• UWEX</li> <li>• Kelly Westlund (UWEX Housing Coordinator)</li> <li>• Denise Lutz (Ashland Co Housing Authority)</li> <li>• Tony Jennings (Realtor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lissa Radke (UW Extension Ashland County)</li> </ul>	January 2025-December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community leaders are more knowledgeable and intentional about how to pursue funding options through different mechanisms</li> <li>• At least one new grant application is identified, submitted, and approved for funding.</li> </ul>
2. Work with local realtors to list and actively promote lots listed for sale on the MLS and Mellen municipal website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local realtors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tony Jennings</li> <li>• Jeromy Rux</li> <li>• James Moran</li> </ul>	January 2024-December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posting and selling of new and old units</li> </ul>
3. Identify and build partnerships with finance specialists, local government, developers, and builders for planned development  4. Conduct training and webinars about local Community Land Trust options  5. Explore revolving loan funding options with AADC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local and regional bank, credit unions</li> <li>• NWRPC</li> <li>• UW Extension Housing Coordinator</li> <li>• AADC</li> </ul>	UW Extension Housing Coordinator	January 2025-December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and secure housing developer(s) commitments</li> </ul>

**Evaluate Impact of Objective 4:**

Short Term Impact (1-2 years):

1. Community leaders are more knowledgeable and intentional about how to pursue funding options through different mechanisms

Long Term Impact (2-5 years):

1. Increase new and improve old housing units

Sub-Group Members: Tony Jennings, Michele Tegen, Leza Wells, Jamie Peters, Jeff Ehrhardt, Dwight Clagette, Denise Lutz, Kelly Westlund, UW Extension specialists

## GOAL #3: COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Open and regular communication within our communities is essential for not only economic development opportunities but also volunteering and community engagement. Engaging and communicating with community members plays a crucial role in building and strengthening social connections.

Given the pressing needs and challenges that rural communities face, open and regular communication is a vital tactic for addressing many local issues.

Recognizing the pressing need for enhanced internal and external communication within Mellen-Morse to drive community economic development, **the primary goal for this priority area is to refine and elevate both internal and external communication efforts.**

- Internally, the objective is to ensure that community members are well-informed and aware of the positive developments taking place in the area. This increased awareness will foster community pride and encourage active engagement in local initiatives.
- Externally, the focus is on attracting visitors to the area. By effectively promoting Morse-Mellen's unique attributes and opportunities, we aim to entice individuals from outside the area to become part of the Morse-Mellen community, contributing to its growth and vitality.

### Goal 3: Community Conversations: Establish mechanisms and processes to enhance the communication throughout the communities.

Objective 1: Establish a central location to access community news both online and in-person				
STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Determine where an in-person contact will be located	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library/senior center potential to serve as in person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mellen Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	Determined by May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new centralized information location is defined and developed.</li> </ul>
2. Determine where the online central location is to exist  3. Identify what kind of information is needed and ways to share info with users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jenny Thewis, Mellen librarian, interested in maintaining the site</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Inactive websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leza Wells, Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A comprehensive Mellen-based website developed to link all community information sources (ex: churches, chamber, meeting minutes...) in one virtual and in-person location</li> <li>Monthly calendar of events</li> </ul>
4. Determine all existing community web pages that are active or inactive; determine whether all are needed.  5. Talk to current website domain owners to engage participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth involvement w/business class</li> <li>Mr. Eder (Mellen School Teacher)</li> <li>Social Media Inventory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leza Wells</li> </ul>	May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media inventoried and connections updated</li> </ul>
6. Determine if there are any budget needs to support online and in-person initiatives. If so, search for funding sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Webmaster to lead, develop/fill role through ongoing school service project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Webmaster</li> <li>Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>Librarian</li> </ul>	May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of Mellen and Morse webpage and outdated chamber site are addressed collectively</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluate Impact of Objective 1:</b> 1. Increased traffic on the primary web site as identified through Google analytics. 2. Quarterly updates provided to community on progress				

**Objective 2: Inventory all available communication tools currently being used.**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Identify and investigate the use of current online and in-person tools and effectiveness. Investigate whether to use poster boards, sandwich boards on Hwy 13 and at events, branded rack cards and postcards, school newsletter messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review website analytics</li> <li>Student newspaper staff and/or communications class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jeff Ehrhardt will talk to school teacher and class to be involved</li> </ul>	February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review Google analytics to gather information about users' experiences</li> </ul>
2. Identify new ways to share information with the public (e.g. Morse sends tax bill with communication info; Determine messages by first and second Tuesday in November after town/city meetings); investigate whether to publish a quarterly newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include information with tax bill</li> <li>Snow plowing agreement - add info here</li> <li>Calendar of events with Senator Quinn</li> <li>Flyers?</li> <li>Billboards?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>Mellen Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>MHS Shop Teacher</li> </ul>	December 2024: Morse sends tax bill with information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents are informed about:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CEA Initiatives</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3. Partner with existing community social and traditional media to cross-promote events, activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ex. Roly Poly contest in spring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mellen Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	Throughout the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increase in the amount and reach of all tools used to share information</li> </ul>

**Evaluate Impact of Objective 2:**

1. Quarterly updates provided to community on progress

**Objective 3: Help the Mellen Weekly newspaper increase its saturation rate/circulation**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Talk with newspaper staff to see what they need and what's working successfully.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newspaper staff/owners</li> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> </ul>	Start, January 1, 2024 and Stop, December 31, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mellen Weekly Record circulation totals will be assessed</li> </ul>
2. Determine how the community can further support the local newspaper and increase its circulation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Mellen Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• Sandy Christl</li> <li>• Kim Christl</li> </ul>	February 2024	

**Evaluate Impact of Objective 3:**

1. Circulation numbers for the Mellen Weekly Record newspaper increase from the rate at January 1, 2024.
2. Quarterly updates provided to community on progress

**Objective 4: Investigate the use of a shared electronic alert network to inform communities emergency incidents.**

STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Determine cost for electronic alert messaging system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ashland Co Emergency Management Coordinator</li> </ul>	Christine Dzwonkowski	May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An estimate for the cost of a messaging system is developed</li> </ul>
2. Gather phone numbers in a survey/other means to build a participant list				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A contact list is developed</li> </ul>
3. Determine which local partners should be involved; identify opt-out options				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A usable and effective contact list is developed and ready to use</li> </ul>
4. Promote participation at community events				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serves emergency purposes for information sharing</li> </ul>
5. Promote participation and volunteering at community events.				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual and in person volunteering opportunities further fulfilled</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evaluate Impact of Objective 4:</b>                      Outcome 1: Increase participation rate at community events.                      Outcome 2: Increase volunteerism at events.</p>				

Sub-Group Members: Terry Van Buren, Leza Wells, Jenny Thewis, Mellen Weekly Rep., Mardy Ehrhardt, Bob Aldrich, Jim Brennan, Jeff Ehrhardt, Dan Scudder, UW-Extension Agent(s)



## GOAL #4: RECREATION, ECOTOURISM, AND NATURAL AMENITIES

### PRIORITY– RECREATION, ECOTOURISM, AND NATURAL AMENITIES

Recreation, ecotourism, and natural amenities are vital for rural communities and their residents. They bring economic growth, create jobs, and support local businesses. Recreation and natural amenity-based economic development draw visitors, boost the local economy and enhance community well-being. When done effectively, these approaches can also foster community pride and social cohesion by showcasing the unique heritage and natural assets of rural areas. By investing in these assets, rural communities can sustainably grow, preserve their identity, and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Preserving the rural, small-town quality of life while promoting eco-tourism is a priority for the Morse-Mellen area. The Town of Morse and the City of Mellen boast a rich array of natural amenities and outdoor recreational opportunities that are attractive to visitors and enhance the quality of life for residents. The region's abundant recreational opportunities, such as hiking trails, fishing spots, and camp grounds, offer a haven for outdoor enthusiasts to unwind and connect with nature. The economic benefits of promoting and strengthening recreational opportunities and improving access to the natural environment stimulate local businesses and generate revenue for the community.

Community members are well aware of three potential developments that may affect all four goals, but especially this goal: An open pit iron ore mine whose epicenter is a short distance from Mellen's downtown; a major expansion of Xcel Energy's overhead power lines along and branching from Highway 13; and an Enbridge Energy petroleum pipeline that will dissect Mellen and the Bad River watershed.

**Goal 4: The Mellen-Morse area will identify strategies to leverage our outdoor resources responsibly and support businesses that cater to motorized and non-motorized outdoor activities, establishing food, taverns, repair/sales, and lodging services that can enhance the outdoor experience for visitors and residents.**

**Objective 1: Work with US Forest Service to reopen campgrounds: Reopening Forest Service campgrounds that were shut down requires collaboration with the Bad River Tribe, Ashland County, and neighboring municipalities.**

STRATEGY Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	RESOURCES People, organizations, & Partners needed	POINT OF CONTACT Who will co-lead?	TIMELINE Start and stop, or by what date?	OUTCOME Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Inventory all available private and public campsites within the Mellen School District geography (Mineral Lake, Lake 3, Copper Falls State Park, Wildwood Haven, Frontier Campground, Camp Eagle Ridge, Highbridge Hills and Disc Golf, others)	Local Campground Work Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>• Jim Brennan</li> <li>• Rebecca Heiden</li> <li>• Friends of Copper Falls State Park</li> </ul>	Mellen Chamber Office	May, 2024- July 1, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A complete list of private and public campsites and their amenities</li> </ul>
2. Develop a brochure that lists information about all campsites, lodging and amenities within the Mellen School District geography. 3. Determine how to promote this factsheet to the public including visitors.	Ashland County Chambers of Commerce offices	Mellen Chamber Office with Ashland, Glidden Economic Development Corp, Butternut Chamber	March 1, 2024- December, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the brochure in a marketing campaign for the area.</li> </ul>

**Objective 1 (cont.)**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
<p>3. Explore partnership opportunities to secure funding and address the challenges posed by U.S. Forest Service campground closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Wisconsin’s federal legislators to support reopening and funding the campsites</li> <li>• Contact U.S. Forest Service leaders to get information about closure status and possibilities to reopen the site . Discuss with Michael Martin (Hayward Ranger’s Station), Park Falls or Glidden regional superintendent or managers)</li> <li>• Contact neighboring communities Bad River Tribe, Glidden, Clam Lake, etc.--to collaborate on this as needed.</li> <li>• Coordinate a letter writing campaign to federal legislators to support this initiative to reopen federal campgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ashland County Chambers of Commerce offices (Ashland, Butternut, Glidden, Mellen)</li> <li>• Weekly radio show co-host with Chamber (Hartland Communication)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebecca Heiden</li> <li>• Jim Brennen</li> <li>• Jeff Ehrhardt</li> </ul>	<p>April, 2024-December, 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine how reopening campsites will be supported financially and physically maintained</li> </ul>

**Objective 2. Establish a safe hike/bike/ski trail to Copper Falls from Mellen through careful planning and infrastructure development. Consider all potential routes to provide residents and visitors with a safe and enjoyable outdoor experience.**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Review plans: Hwy 169 deck trail plan through wetlands and town roads plan, determine project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>North Country Trail personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim Brennan</li> <li>Comprehensive Plan Committee</li> </ul>	March 1-December 2024	
2. Continue to develop plans that meet state requirements between bridge on Hwy 169 and Red Granite Trail		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town of Morse Comprehensive Plan Committee</li> </ul>	March 1-December 2024	
3. Partner with Copper Falls State Park to address safety concerns with transportation safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage Penokee Trails group for input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town of Morse Comprehensive Plan Committee</li> </ul>	March 1-December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine final trails project and seek updated cost estimates</li> </ul>
4. Work with Friends of Copper Falls State Park and North Country Trail leadership to consider trail network changes that enter the Park		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>Mike Thewis</li> </ul>	March 1-December 2024	
5. Secure additional funding and resources that leverages Enbridge donation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan for all trail grooming with community financial and volunteer support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town of Morse leadership</li> </ul>	March 1-December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote year round du-use trail systems (include ski trails for winter, current low percent of ski trails, and attraction w/ 20+ km)</li> </ul>

Town of Morse Comprehensive Plan Committee

**Objective 3. Assess existing amenities and consider new nature-based amenities for residents and visitors**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Stay aware of grant opportunities by developing an annual calendar of grant opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grants.gov</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AADC</li> <li>USDA</li> </ul>	June 2024	
2. Inventory existing nature-based opportunities (Example: Mellen School Forest Trail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mellen School forest trail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jeff Ehrhardt</li> <li>Forest teacher</li> </ul>	May 1, 2024	
3. Determine short- and long-term approaches to increase recreation/tourism businesses (example: explore ski-jouring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neighboring community collaboration to cross promote trail systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebecca Heiden</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morse/Mellen and neighboring trails in Upson, Glidden and Butternut benefit from increased promotion</li> <li>Develop pamphlet/flyer with Chamber promoting South Ashland local experiences per season (driving tour, fall color tour, year round things to do)</li> </ul>
<p>4. Coordinate with Park and City of Mellen for entertainment and educational programs. Assist with scheduling speakers to describe their recreation/ecotourism success stories.</p> <p>5. Contact and cooperate with existing motorized groups and neighboring communities to assess trail improvements (Look into developing new motorized and non-motorized trails)</p> <p>6. Explore cost/benefit of increased motorized use (Explore UW Extension research and report from statewide specialists)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at regional trail connection opportunities -- review Intergovernmental Cooperation in the local Comprehensive Plan (Example: Explore how our trails also complement or connect with trails in Glidden, Ironwood and Red Cliff Trails)</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add rack card stand or kiosk distribution system at public locations to promote local information</li> <li>Install kiosk at North Country Trail, wayside on GG, and little league field with trail head to promote city</li> <li>Install signs at four entrances to Mellen</li> <li>Conversations with mining company to develop collaboration on use of old rail line access</li> </ul>

**Objective 4: Pursue Dark Skies designation for Mellen, Copper Falls State Park, or the region.**

<b>STRATEGY</b> Steps and actions to address goal and objectives	<b>RESOURCES</b> People, organizations, & Partners needed	<b>POINT OF CONTACT</b> Who will co-lead?	<b>TIMELINE</b> Start and stop, or by what date?	<b>OUTCOME</b> Measurement: How will we know this was successful?
1. Contact the International Dark Sky organization for information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jim Brennan</li> </ul>	Jim Brennan	December 2023	
2. Secure additional support as needed that help develop nature-based astronomy programs	Northland College and student astronomy club, Nature Conservancy, Landmark Conservancy, Bad River Band, UW-Madison Astronomy Department	Jim Brennan	June 2024	
3. Begin steps to complete the application  4. Complete the Dark Sky application  5. Explore Dark Sky designations beyond the Park as tourist attraction to other parts of the township	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northland College</li> </ul>	Jim Brennan	June 2024  December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain official Dark Sky designation by March 2026</li> <li>• Mellen ski tower becomes star viewing platform as tourist attraction and is promoted</li> </ul>

# CONCLUSION

The Town of Morse and the City of Mellen are committed to creating a vibrant and thriving rural community. We would like to express our deep gratitude to our partners at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Extension, and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation for their collaboration in crafting this vision for our community.

This strategic plan represents our shared mission to support the ongoing success of the Morse-Mellen area by providing additional opportunities where members of the community can come together to turn their aspirations into reality. Our approach is built upon a foundation of our existing strengths, which we aim to leverage to fulfill our objectives, and this journey toward a stronger region is rooted in a public-private partnership dedicated to making our community an even better place to live, work, and play.

As we move forward, our commitment to the continued success of Morse-Mellen centers around four key goals: creating a vibrant downtown and business district, enhancing communication within the community, addressing the critical need for increased housing options, and strengthening the ecotourism industry of the area. These goals are backed by an action plan that incorporates continuous feedback from our community members.

This strategic plan acknowledges that Morse and Mellen, like many rural communities, face both challenges and opportunities stemming from demographic and economic changes. We understand the need to identify, embrace, and address these dynamics to steer our communities toward a brighter future. Looking ahead, we are committed to engaging members of the Mellen-Morse area community in the implementation of this strategic plan. We invite your active participation and input, and we pledge to keep you informed about our progress regularly. We view this as an ongoing conversation, one that will shape the future of Morse-Mellen together.

The success of our strategic plan hinges on the support and collaboration of local, regional, and state agencies. We must work collectively to share resources, ideas, and best practices that have proven effective in similar rural communities. Strengthening our relationships at all levels is crucial, as we seek additional information, technical assistance, and opportunities for productive discussions. The true strength of our community lies in the combined efforts of its members and the wealth of resources at our disposal. Together, we can build a stronger, more vibrant Morse-Mellen area.

# APPENDIX

## Morse+Mellen Economic Development Meeting: March 28, 2023

### Notes About 23 Big Ideas

The stakeholder group brainstormed 23 ideas for consideration as community or economic development initiatives at the group's first meeting on January 31, 2023. These topics were discussed in more detail at this meeting, and similar topics were grouped into major issues. These ideas or groupings are not listed in any specific order.

#### Recreation and Tourism

- Rails to Trails opportunities
  - Want to connect existing Mellen/Morse corridors to others in this region (from Iron and Ashland County especially)
  - Want to explore options of railroad easements for trail developments; Butternut is also interested in this
- US Forest Service Campgrounds
  - Current Actions: Lobbying of the USFS to open the campgrounds through Sen. Tiffany's office
- Hike/Bike Trail to Copper Falls State Park
  - Hwy 169 will be resurfaced in 2025. Several resolutions have been passed by local entities in support of adding a hike/bike trail to both sides of Hwy 169 when it's redone. DOT is reviewing them for consideration.
  - Have numerous resolutions from local entities and local government to add hike/bike lanes on each side of Hwy 169 when it's repaired in 2025
- Copper Falls Pavilion Project
  - Friends of CFSP volunteers have raised money through concession sales, a grant to build a new pavilion that can be reserved by special groups and events; a foundation is scheduled to be poured this spring
  - Food is not usually sold at the Pavilion except for recent fundraisers that were held to raise money to build a new pavilion that can be reserved for special events.
  - The current pavilion can't be reserved for use, as it's only available first-come, first served. Many users asked for a reservable option. So a 30 x 50 foot pavilion will be constructed within a year, after much fundraising in the past two years and a grant from the Knowles Foundation.
- Dark Skies Initiative
  - Friends of CFSP is very interested in pursuing a designation for the Park, as this is an asset that can bring in more visitors, scientists. The park superintendent is supportive of this. It's unique in that only one other WI state park has this designation—Newport Park in Door County.



## Ecotourism

- A “play where you work/work where you play” model
- Need more connected motorized recreational trails. Currently, can’t get to Cozy Valley businesses through Morse/Mellen trails, nor go to Ashland or into Hurley and Iron County.
- Need more loop trails, not out and back routes
- Trail riders need access to restaurants and bars to be attractive
- Butternut wants a rail to trails opened, so we could talk with them about a shared effort.
- Mellen is already designated a “Trail Town” by the North Country Trail Association, but there aren’t amenities to bring or keep hikers here (especially a restaurant, hiking supplies)
- The North Country Trail links us to all of Michigan and western Wisconsin.
- How can we determine the economic impact of the North Country Trail or of motorized trails?
- People want access to Nature, like the CFSP, including hikers and bikers.
- Silent sports visitors are the main users of campground according to Wildwood Haven Campground
- How can we reopen the USFS campgrounds? Can we talk with the local ranger about this for a resolution? Some efforts to lobby with Sen. Tiffany have already begun.
- What options do we have to develop new trails and where can they be developed? Can we talk with the Watko railroad to use their abandoned line as a corridor? It needs to be open from Mellen to Upson to get into Iron County trail system
- USFS barricades trails in winter –why and can we reopen them?
- How can the Mellen Chamber of Commerce help with this?
- All visitors want restaurants, but they’re expensive to start up and maintain, and they need employees, but where will those come from?
- The golf course is one restaurant that stays open and serves food, but it’s out of town. How can we promote it as a place to go to eat; can CFSP help us promote restaurants/bars somehow?
- Current businesses also need support with an adequate workforce such as Copper Ridge. Can business needs be coordinated in some way to help them get met?
- More events are needed to bring people in and see how nice it is here
- All of our businesses need to be better publicized. Can we do that collaboratively somehow? In state tourism magazines such as Travel Wisconsin or the Milwaukee Journal?
- Ashland Chamber can help promote the whole county (Mary McPhetridge is open to requests for help). Some events are already promoted through there, such as an annual mural tour called “Follow the Mural Brick Road” in the fall. Help promote Mellen’s murals.
- Are there seasonal things we can do to attract people to town in Mellen, such as a pop-up ice cream stand?
- We need to give people a reason to stop in Mellen, like something attractive and suitable for social media like Instagram. People stop and take photos of attractive or funny or natural icons, post them on social media, which is free advertising for us.
- Need to focus on beautifying along Hwy 13 so people find it attractive and want to stop in town.

- Do one simple thing to start a momentum of interest in Mellen and the area, such as community art, the Mellen Bank restoration project and beautification.
- Northwest Regional Planning Commission has a Bounce Back program for businesses to help pay for facelifts of store fronts
- Need a coordinated effort to pull off any successful change
- Question: How are we falling short—what’s needed that we don’t have? What are the next steps to getting noticed for what we do have now?
- Mellen/Morse is hard to market. The most beautiful places are privately owned. MFL land is open to hiking or hunting but without trails, who wants to access it? We’re not going to advertise free places to do, like take a walk on MFL land.
- Who is currently marketing the area to tourists and what are they saying? Who is paying for ads (the golf says they do)
- With the limited amount of traffic we get through town, Copper Ridge says they can’t stay open all week as it’s not economically feasible and there’s trouble getting workers. Locals don’t eat out there enough.
- Can the chamber coordinate marketing the town?
- What events would be feasible? CFSP has a fall festival that brings in about 1,500 to 3,000 over a weekend

### **Alternative Energy and Green Technology**

- Solar Power: More solar power is now used in the US than coal power (?). Solar is the power source for the future, all trends are showing that will happen.
- Need data on energy use from Xcel energy
- Can solar be installed at CFSP buildings as needed?
- New Electric Vehicle Economy/Charging Stations: More and more visitors will be looking for these as they travel north to visit and recreate

### **Business Development**

- Business Plans for Retail in Mellen (connected to the following initiatives)
  - Superior Choice Credit Union plans to tear down and rebuild, but it’s not known who will use the new building yet.
  - The legal issue related to the vacant lot downtown will take time to resolve through more conversations with the owners.
- Downtown Renovation
  - Steve Chmielewski offered a [downtown tool kit](#) that Extension has developed that could be used to address some of the downtown issues.
  - Ken Pearson from WI Economic Development Corp could also be invited to a future meeting to describe his agency’s resources that can help
- Workforce Development
  - Mills and logging operations will become more automated to reduce work force costs
  - 5 to 10 years is crunch time for loggers
  - Mills need skilled laborers and ways to train them

- Loggers can get training at Gogebic Tech College; how many students go through it though?
- How do we recruit workers? Mainly through word of mouth locally. The mill market is very competitive and all mills will need to be set up so they can compete better with better salaries and benefits.
- Welcoming New Workers/Immigrant Services
  - Incoming workers need to be incorporated into all aspects of the area, especially if they're from out of the country
  - Immigrants need special services to be successful: translators or an effective way to speak English to help with transitions
  - Workforce housing is a big problem for new workers of all types
  - The school has some methods to welcome new students and their families; have open houses that could help with welcome activities (school population is about 250 to 300 kids, can handle up to 500)
  - The municipalities could welcome, or there could be a welcome committee of ad hoc members. Some programs with international visitors have host families in the community
  - Need to welcome new businesses too; the local chamber of commerce and the Ashland chamber can help do this effectively
  - WI senator Quinn has been informed about the need for housing of all types and especially affordable workforce types of housing
- Mellen Brownstone Restoration and Use: Lots of momentum on this building that will be an anchor to downtown.
- Community Public Art

### **Adult Medical and Day Care Services**

- (No comments yet)

### **Public and Private Landscaping**

- (No comments yet)

### **State Highway Road Conditions**

- (No comments yet)

### **Broadband**

- What areas of Morse/Mellen don't yet have adequate service coverage at? Where is there some coverage? Where is there good coverage?
- What are the next steps to getting broadband at the state minimum standard for everyone?
- Services need to be affordable
- Ashland County is part of a multi-county grant funding project through NWRPC as the convener to get federal infrastructure funds.
- Current service providers are CenturyLink and Norvado. Can we look into other types of providers also?
- There's a strong need for virtual learning for our kids

### **Housing**

- Need new housing that's affordable to all kinds of working people.
- The city owns buildable lots but none have sewer or water hook ups yet

- Need public funding to build decent housing
- Housing should be deeply connected to workforce development efforts; day care facilities should also be tied to these two.
- One form of housing that would be effective is to have apartments upstairs and stores below
- USDA and HUD have grants to help develop these for seniors especially
- Impact 7 in Rice Lake develops this kind of housing all the time

### **Mining Impacts**

- If a mine is developed, it would directly affect both communities. But we think mine development is not going to happen for years.
- It would be useful to re-establish conversation with the new mineral rights holders to develop a good working relationship before a new mine is proposed (be proactive).

### **Access to Local Food**

- We're not sure what this really means yet, needs more defined approach as to what's needed
- There are occasional farmers markets or food stands that pop up in Mellen, not sure who runs them
- Some local growers are already connected to the Ashland Food Cooperative and are selling local food there
- Northland College has some local agriculture programs available, including a "Sustainable Agriculture" major for students. How would we connect to them for help? Are there cooperative sustainable ag groups (CSAs) that could sell food subscriptions here too?
- Arnold Wendler is a local farmer that grows some food and might be selling it informally; need to find out more about his capacity—could he offer food at the Mellen Northland Foods grocery store?
- Need to know who are the vendors? Who could grow more and sell it at the Mellen grocery?
- At one-point Jay Emmert sold five-acre lots to people who wanted to grow food, need more info about that, is he still doing it, what happened to that land now?

### **Dog Park**

- Would be useful for local residents and visitors

### **Teen Center**

- (No comments yet)