



Center for Community & Economic Development
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Resident Characteristics of Wisconsin's Downtowns

by

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Introduction

Housing has become an important element in comprehensive downtown revitalization efforts. Downtown housing contributes to an active environment that extends activity beyond traditional business hours, and residents who live within a half mile of the middle of a downtown provide a captured market for convenience retail and services.

Demographic data provide a foundation to help downtown business operators understand the nearby resident market. This paper describes certain resident characteristics of Wisconsin's downtowns, including:

- Population
- Population growth
- Household size
- Housing type
- Age
- Education
- Income

This information can be used to help downtown development professionals compare the demographics of their downtowns to those of similar downtowns across the state. The data on downtown population, for instance, could be used as a benchmark for the number of residents living in comparison downtown areas. In addition, the data on personal characteristics of downtown residents could be used to determine the demographic differences (and similarities) between a downtown and other cities.

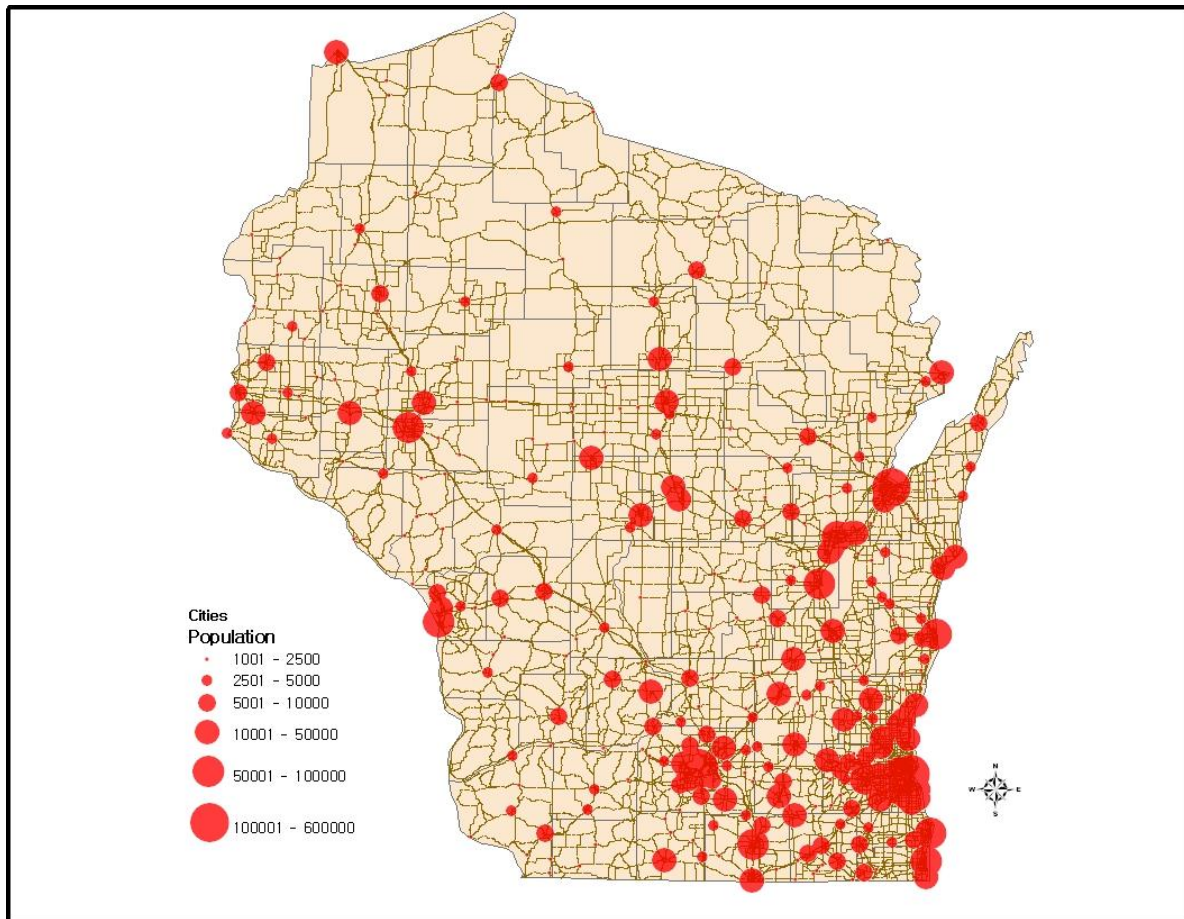
For consistency, most of the following discussion focuses on the demographics of the area within .5 miles of the center of the downtown district.

Identification of Similar Size Communities

The first step in this analysis was to sort all Wisconsin cities and villages by population. Using 2010 population estimates, the following seven groups were formed:

City or Village Population	Number of Communities
1,000-2,500	143
2,500-5,000	60
5,000-10,000	45
10,000-25,000	39
25,000-50,000	13
50,000-100,000	10
Over 100,000	3

The map and table that follow identifies the specific cities and villages that were used. A small number of cities and villages in the state with populations within these ranges were excluded because they either lacked a distinct downtown district or had limited business activity. In addition, an estimated 281 very small cities and villages with less than 1,000 people were not included in this analysis.



Wisconsin Cities and Villages by Population Group

Pop. 1,000-2,500

Abbotsford
Adams
Albany
Arcadia
Athens
Augusta
Bangor
Barneveld
Belgium
Belleville
Big Bend
Black Creek
Black Earth
Blair
Bonduel
Boyceville
Buffalo City
Butler
Cadott
Cambridge
Cameron
Campbellsport
Cashton
Cassville
Cedar Grove
Chetek
Clear Lake
Cleveland
Clinton
Colby
Colfax
Combined Locks
Cornell
Crandon
Cuba City
Cumberland
Darien
Darlington
Deerfield
Denmark
Dickeyville
Dousman
Durand
Eagle
Eagle River
Edgar
Elkhart Lake
Elroy
Fall Creek
Fall River
Fennimore
Fontana-on-Geneva
Fox Lake
Frederic
Fredonia
Galesville
Genoa City
Gillett
Glenwood City
Grantsburg
Green Lake
Greenwood
Hammond
Hayward
Hazel Green
Hilbert

Hillsboro
Hortonville
Hurley
Hustisford
Independence
Iola
Johnson Creek
Juneau
Lake Nebagamon
Lannon
Loyal
Luck
Luxemburg
Manawa
Maple Bluff
Marathon City
Marion
Markesan
Mazomanie
Merton
Mishicot
Montello
Monticello
Muscoda
Nashotah
New Glarus
New Lisbon
Newburg
Niagara
North Prairie
Oakfield
Orfordville
Osceola
Osseo
Palmyra
Pardeeville
Phillips
Port Edwards
Poynette
Princeton
Randolph
Random Lake
Redgranite
Reedsville
River Hills
Rochester
Schofield
Sharon
Shell Lake
Sherwood
Shullsburg
Silver Lake
Somerset
Spencer
Spring Green
Spring Valley
St. Croix Falls
Stanley
Stratford
Strum
Theresa
Thorp
Trempealeau
Turtle Lake
Walworth
Washburn
Wautoma

Westby
Westfield
Weyauwega
Whitehall
Williams Bay
Winneconne
Wisconsin Dells
Wittenberg
Woodville
Wrightstown

Pop. 2,500-5,000

Algoma
Amery
Baldwin
Black River Falls
Bloomer
Boscobel
Brillion
Brodhead
Chilton
Clintonville
Columbus
Cottage Grove
Cross Plains
Dodgeville
East Troy
Edgerton
Ellsworth
Evansville
Horicon
Howards Grove
Jackson
Kewaskum
Kewaunee
Kiel
Ladysmith
Lake Mills
Lancaster
Lodi
Marshall
Mauston
Mayville
Medford
Mineral Point
Mondovi
Mosinee
Neillsville
Nekoosa
New Holstein
Oconto Falls
Omro
Oostburg
Park Falls
Peshtigo
Prairie du Sac
Prescott
Pulaski
Rothschild
Sauk City
Saukville
Seymour
Slinger
Spooner
Thiensville
Tomahawk
Union Grove

Viroqua
Wales
Waterford
Waterloo
West Salem

Pop. 5,000-10,000

Altoona
Antigo
Ashland
Berlin
Burlington
DeForest
Delafield
Delavan
Elkhorn
Elm Grove
Hartland
Holmen
Hudson
Jefferson
Kimberly
Lake Geneva
McFarland
Milton
Monona
Mukwonago
New London
New Richmond
Oregon
Pewaukee
Platteville
Plymouth
Portage
Prairie du Chien
Reedsburg
Rhineland
Rice Lake
Richland Center
Ripon
Shawano
Sheboygan Falls
Sparta
St. Francis
Sturgeon Bay
Sturtevant
Sussex
Tomah
Twin Lakes
Verona
Waunakee
Waupaca

Pop. 10,000-25,000

Baraboo
Beaver Dam
Cedarburg
Chippewa Falls
Cudahy
De Pere
Fitchburg
Fort Atkinson
Germantown
Glendale
Grafton
Hartford
Kaukauna

Little Chute
Marinette
Marshfield
Menasha
Menomonie
Mequon
Merrill
Middleton
Monroe
Muskego
Neenah
Oconomowoc
Onalaska
Pleasant Prairie
Plover
Port Washington
River Falls
South Milwaukee
Stevens Point
Stoughton
Sun Prairie
Two Rivers
Watertown
Waupun
Whitewater
Wisconsin Rapids

Pop. 25,000-50,000

Beloit
Brookfield
Fond du Lac
Franklin
Greenfield
Manitowoc
Menomonee Falls
New Berlin
Oak Creek
Superior
Wausau
Wauwatosa
West Bend

Pop. 50,000-100,000

Appleton
Eau Claire
Janesville
Kenosha
La Crosse
Oshkosh
Racine
Sheboygan
Waukesha
West Allis

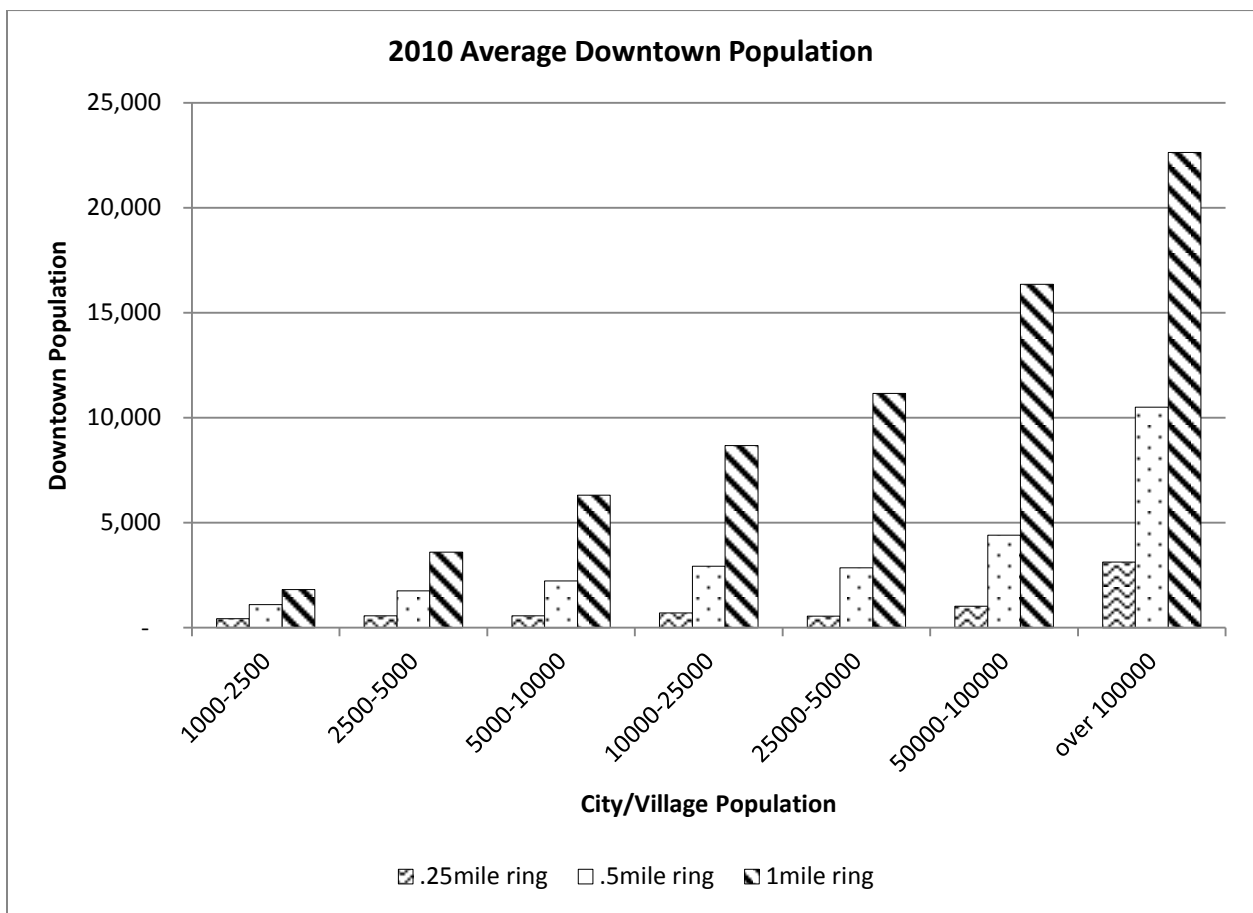
Pop. Over 100,000

Green Bay
Madison
Milwaukee

Data Analysis and Key Findings

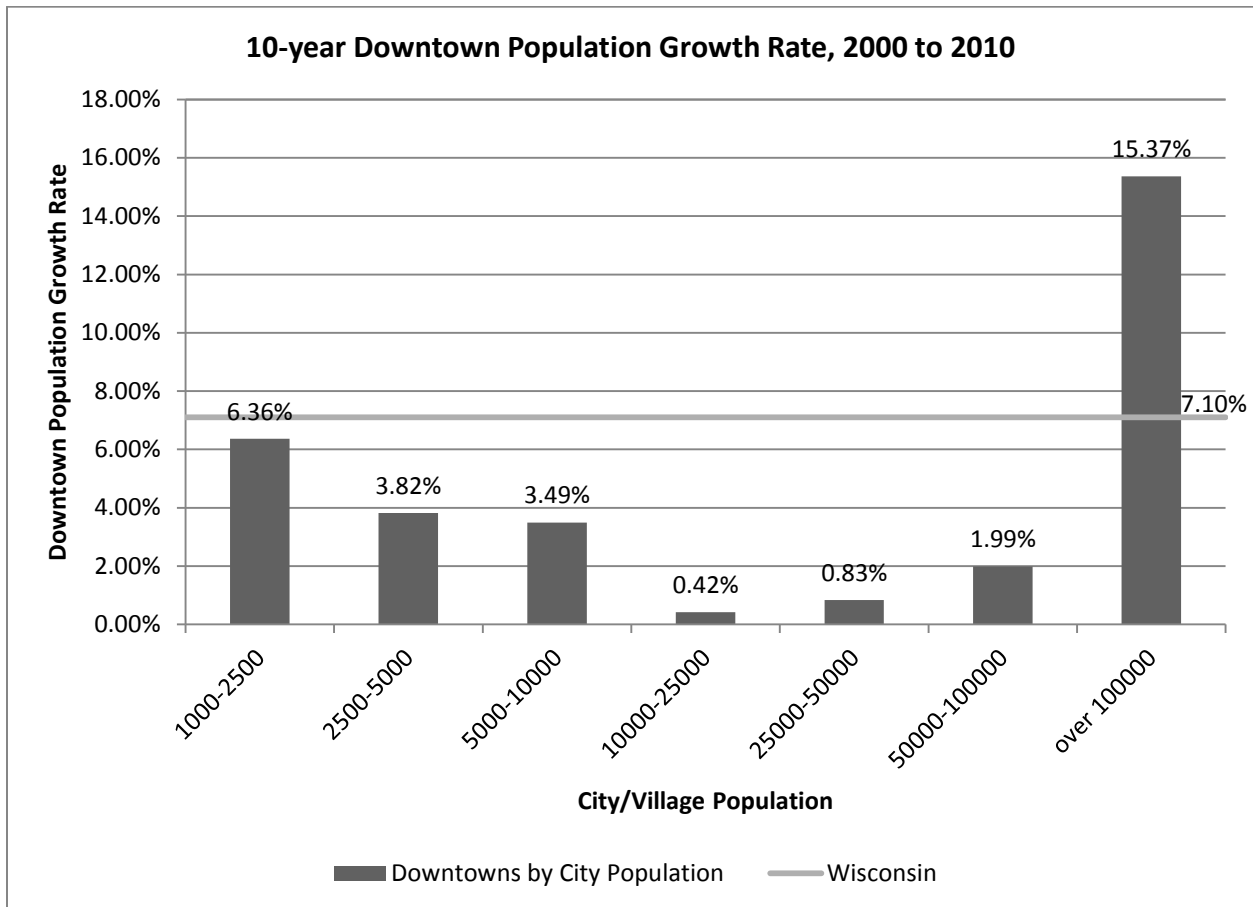
Population in Wisconsin's Downtowns

The population of a downtown area generally increases with the population of the entire city or village in which it is located. However, the relationship is not linear. Smaller cities and villages typically have a much larger percent of their populations living downtown, as these communities are concentrated in smaller geographic areas. Interestingly, most cities in the broad 2,500 to 50,000 population range have similar downtown populations within a half mile ring (1,800-2,900 residents). Larger cities have more populated downtown areas composed of higher density multi-unit structures, but these downtowns typically represent a smaller percent of the population of the entire city.



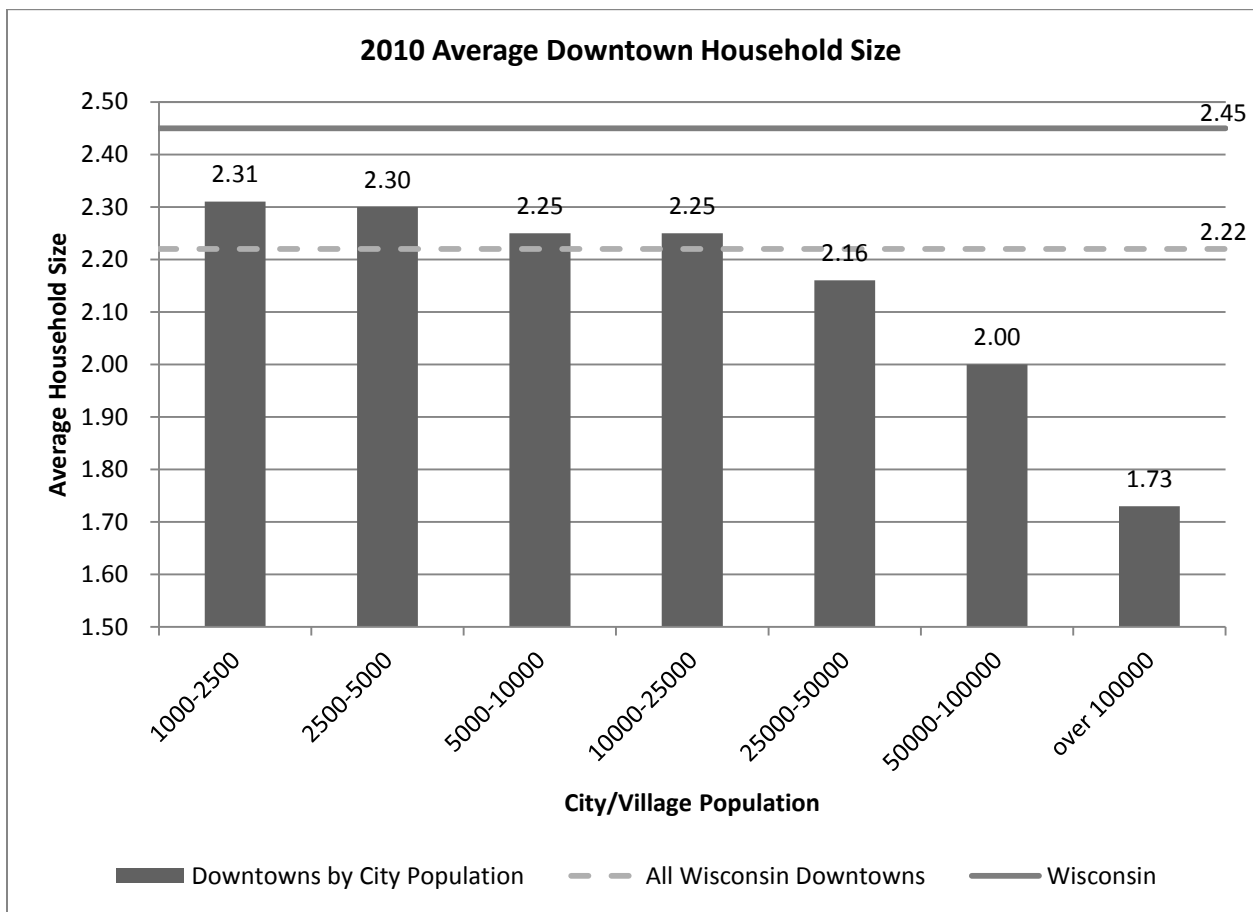
Population Growth

Approximately 10% of the state's population lives within a half-mile of the center of a downtown. From 2000 to 2010, the combined population of Wisconsin's downtowns grew by 4.0%, while the population of the state as a whole grew by 7.1%. The downtowns of the largest cities in the state grew the most, with the downtown populations of cities with over 100,000 residents growing, on average, by 15.4% over the decade. In contrast, the downtowns of mid-sized cities, population 10,000 to 100,000, only experienced modest growth over this period. In particular, the downtowns of cities with between 10,000 and 25,000 residents grew on average by only .42% from 2000 to 2010.



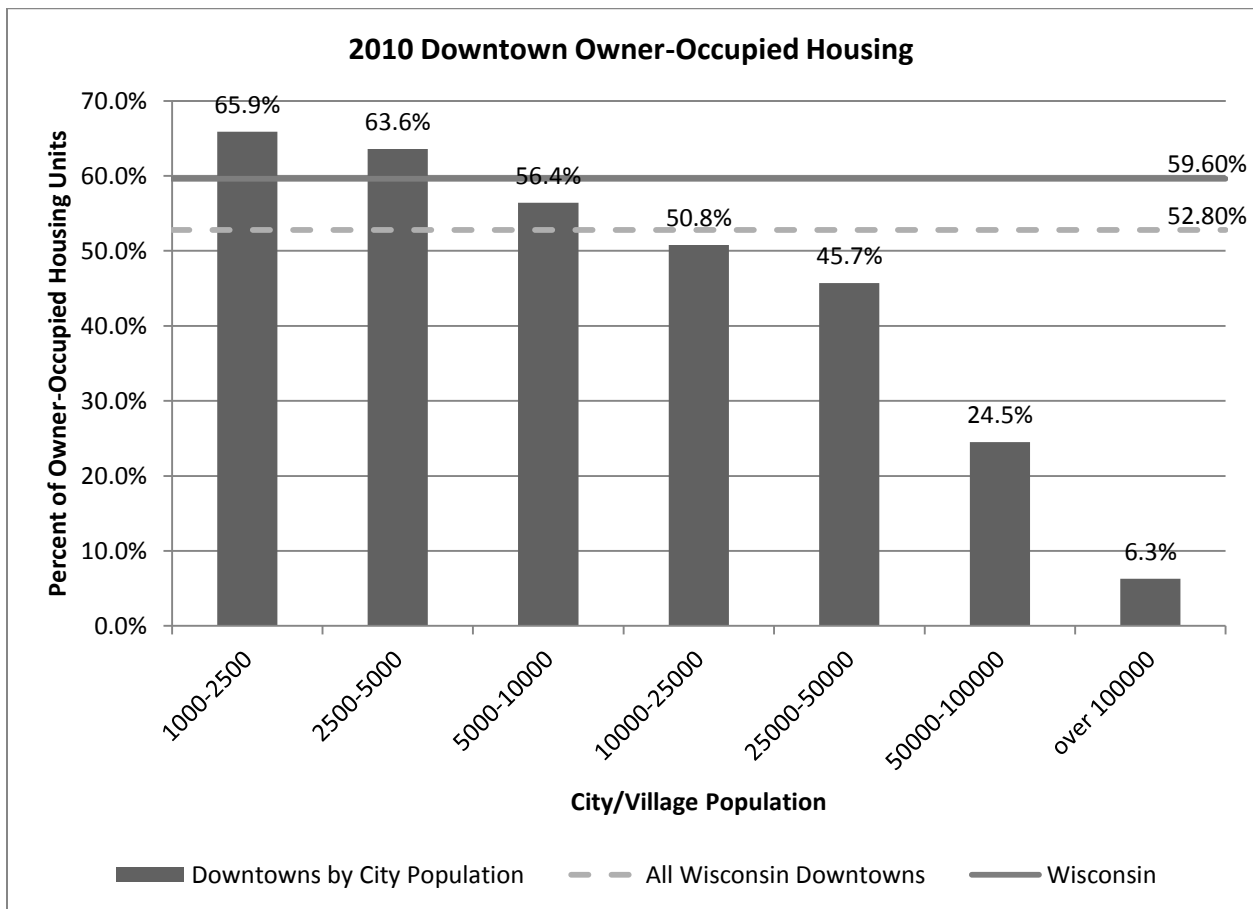
Household Size

Average household size in downtowns tends to be slightly smaller than the state average and significantly smaller in the larger cities. In 2010, 2.45 people lived in the average Wisconsin household. In contrast, the average Wisconsin downtown household had only 2.22 residents. The average household size in smaller downtowns was much closer to the state average, but larger cities, with populations 25,000 and greater, had much smaller households. The largest cities in the state, Madison, Milwaukee, and Green Bay, had the smallest average household size at only 1.73 residents per housing unit. This could be due, in part, to the younger demographic in these cities.



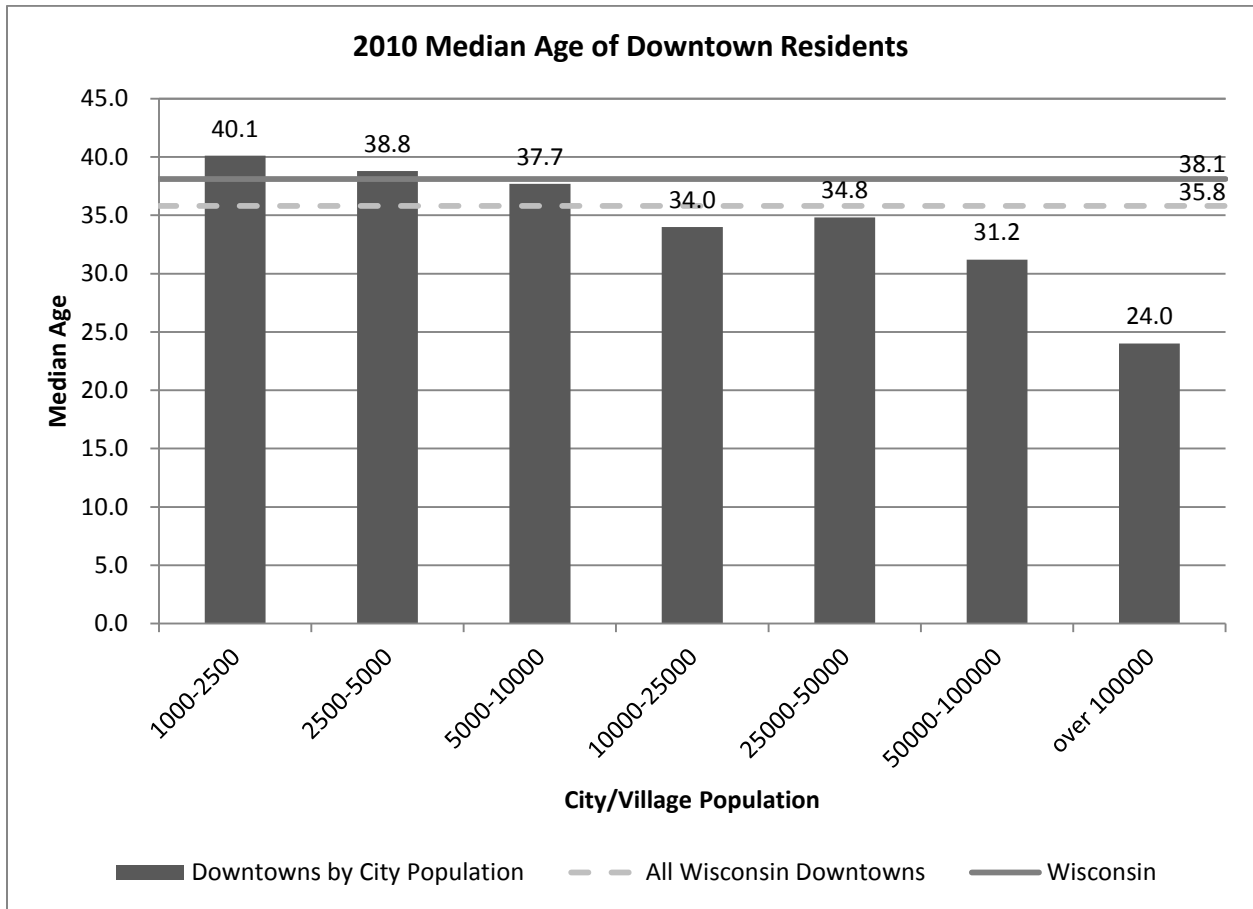
Types of Housing

Generally, the proportion of residences that are owner-occupied is lower in downtown areas than in the state as a whole. In 2010, 52.8% of the housing units in Wisconsin's downtowns were owner-occupied, while 59.6% of the state's housing inventory as a whole was owner-occupied. The downtowns of small cities, with populations under 10,000, on the average have similar proportions of renter- and owner-occupied housing to the state as a whole. On the other hand, renter-occupied housing represents a much larger proportion of housing units in the downtowns of larger cities. The vacancy rates are similar in downtowns of large and small cities alike, and these rates are not significantly different from that in the state as a whole.



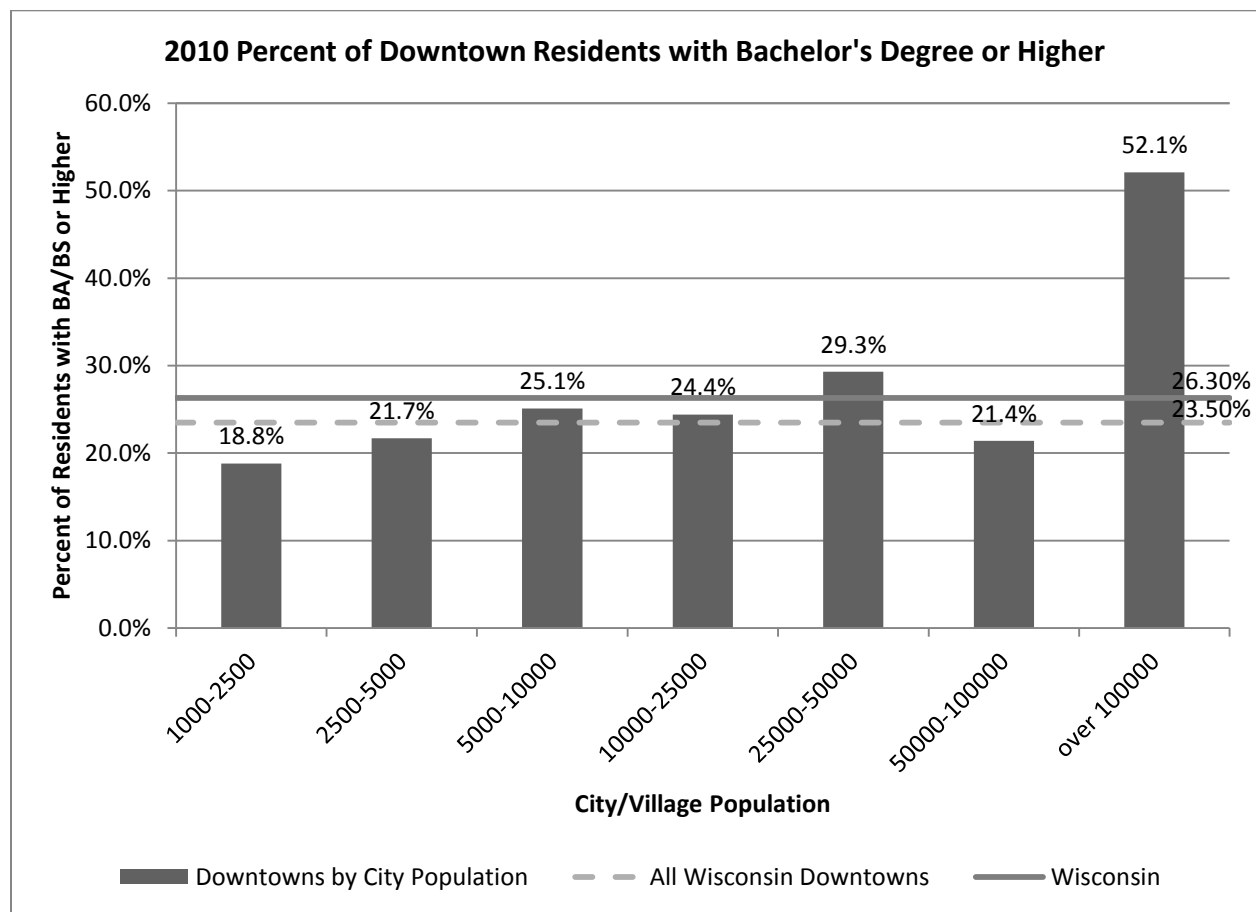
Age of Residents

On average, Wisconsin downtowns have similar age makeup to the state as a whole. However, the downtowns of larger cities tend to have higher proportions of residents in the 18 to 24 demographic and lower proportions of residents less than 15 years of age. In fact, in 2010 only 4% of downtown residents in the largest three cities (Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay) were under 18. These larger cities had 56% of their populations in the student or early-career years of 15-24. Smaller downtowns, on the other hand, skew a bit older than the state as a whole. Downtown households also tend to have fewer children (under 18). Approximately 21% of downtown residents are under 18 compared to 23% for the state.



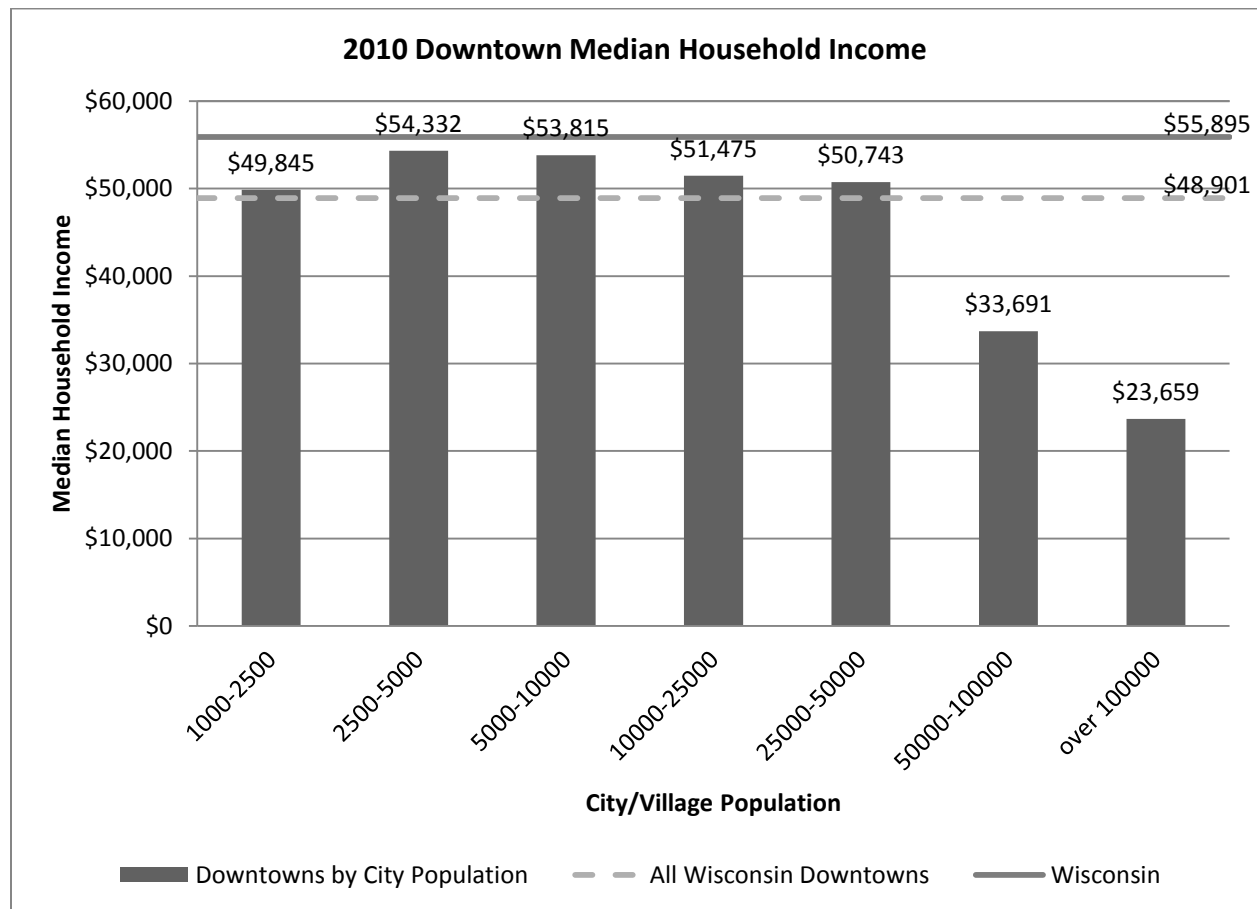
Education Level of Residents

Education of downtown residents (age 25+) varies widely depending on the economic characteristics and size of each community. Residents who have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher make up over 60% of the downtown population in the state’s two largest cites (Milwaukee and Madison). This drops to 18.8% in cities with less than 1,000. Generally, as city size decreases, downtown residents tend to have received less formal education. Notably, however, the percentage of residents who have received a bachelor’s degree or higher in cities with population between 50,000 and 100,000 is lower than one would expect from the overall pattern. It is also important to note that for individual cities, factors other than population, such as proximity to universities, may have a large impact on the education level of downtown residents.



Income Level of Residents

In 2010, the median household income in Wisconsin's downtowns was \$48,900, while the median income in the state as a whole was \$55,895. Median household income was around \$50,000 in the downtowns of cities with populations less than 50,000, but it was significantly lower in the larger cities with populations greater than 50,000. On average, the downtowns of smaller cities had similar income makeup to the state as a whole, while downtowns of larger cities had more households with income less than \$15,000 per year and fewer households with income greater than \$50,000 per year. This was due in part due to smaller households, higher student population, and concentrations of lower income households in the downtowns of larger cities.



Conclusions

Significant differences exist among downtown residents depending on city size and economic character. Generally, the downtowns of smaller cities tend to be demographically similar to the state as a whole, while the downtowns of large cities have significantly different demographics from smaller downtowns and the state in general.

The population of a downtown area generally increases with the population of the entire city or village in which it is located. However, the relationship is not linear. Smaller cities and villages typically have a much larger percent of their populations living downtown as these communities are concentrated in smaller geographic areas. Larger cities have more populated downtown areas composed of higher density multi-unit structures, but these downtowns typically represent a smaller percent of the population of the entire city.

In most downtowns in the state, the average household size is slightly below the state average of 2.45. However, in the largest cities in the state the average downtown house has only 1.73 residents. In smaller downtowns a large proportion of housing is owner-occupied (over 60% in cities with fewer than 5,000 residents), but this proportion drops as city population rises; in fact, only 6.3% of housing is owner-occupied in the downtowns of cities with over 100,000 residents.

In Wisconsin as a whole and in most Wisconsin downtowns, the median age of residents is somewhere between 30 and 40 years, although the median age of downtown residents falls as city population rises. The median age of downtown residents in cities with population over 100,000 is only 24. In addition, residents of the downtowns of larger cities in Wisconsin tend to have received higher levels of formal education than the residents of smaller downtown districts. However, average household income is much lower in the downtowns of larger cities, but this may be due in part to the relative youth of the residents and the smaller households.

It is important to note that although here downtowns were grouped only by the population size of their host cities, other factors, like proximity to larger cities and institutes of higher education, large employers in the area, and status as a tourist destination may also be important determinants of downtown demographics.