



Council Agenda Item

Meeting Date:	May 5, 2026
Agenda Item:	Memo re Population Forecast from RDG Planning & Design
Staff Contact (name, email, phone):	Mason Becker, mbecker@whitewater-wi.gov

BACKGROUND

(Enter the who, what when, where, why)

The attached draft document summarizes population projections developed as part of the Whitewater Forward Comprehensive Plan Update, currently being worked on in conjunction with RDG Planning & Design. Population forecasting is a foundational component of long-range planning, as it informs land use, housing demand, infrastructure needs, and economic development strategies.

The projection process utilized multiple data sources, including prior planning efforts, regional forecasts, market studies, and stakeholder input. The selected planning assumption is an average annual growth rate of approximately 0.4%, which reflects a balanced approach between higher and lower growth scenarios. Key highlights from the document include:

Projected Population Growth:

Whitewater's total population is projected to reach approximately 17,000 residents by 2045, representing an increase of roughly 1,200 people from current levels, assuming adequate housing and amenities are available.

Land Capacity:

The document notes that sufficient land exists within current city limits to accommodate projected growth, contingent on private development activity.

Student Population Considerations:

The University of Wisconsin–Whitewater student population significantly influences local demographics. The methodology adjusts projections by:

- Separating student population from permanent residents
- Accounting for modest enrollment growth through 2030
- Reintegrating student population impacts into total population estimates
(As shown in the table on page 5 of the document.)

Comparison to Other Forecasts:

The selected 0.4% growth rate falls between:

- Higher historical planning assumptions (e.g., 0.75% from the 2017 Comprehensive Plan)
- Lower or declining projections (e.g., Wisconsin DOA estimates reflecting post-2020 enrollment shifts)

Key Assumptions and Risks:

The projection acknowledges broader demographic trends, including aging populations, lower birth rates, and migration patterns. It also emphasizes that forecasts are not fixed and should be revisited with updated Census data (e.g., 2030).

Achieving projected growth will depend on:

- Availability and affordability of housing
- Economic development and job opportunities
- Quality of life investments to attract and retain residents

PREVIOUS ACTIONS – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

(Dates, committees, action taken)

- The Common Council previously selected RDG Planning & Design to conduct the Comprehensive Plan Update.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

(If none, state N/A)

- N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This is an update for informational purposes only. Work will continue on the Comprehensive Plan Update throughout most of 2026, with completion expected in October.

ATTACHMENT(S) INCLUDED

(If none, state N/A)

- Whitewater Forward Comprehensive Plan Population Forecast (Draft)
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