



2023 ISSUES

Capital investments at regional UW System campuses

Completion funding for the UW-Eau Claire Science and Health Sciences Building

Approval of the UW Board of Regents capital request for \$231.2 million in completion funding for the UWEC Science & Health Sciences Building will make it possible to go immediately to construction bids to have the facility open by the fall of 2026. Since the first phase of funding was enumerated in the 2019-21 State Budget, design has moved forward for a single replacement building that can be constructed to replace the current outdated Phillips Science Hall. Including a key partnership with Mayo Clinic, the project meets 21st century STEM research and education needs, providing regional economic and healthcare benefits far beyond the borders of the campus.

This building will house UWEC's STEM and Health Sciences departments and the intensive research laboratories they require. The Science and Health Sciences Building includes 10,000 square feet of laboratory spaces funded by Mayo Clinic to further their research partnership with the university, allowing for enhanced collaboration with UWEC faculty and students, as well as a permanent home for the high performance supercomputing array donated by Hewlett Packard Enterprise. These modern teaching and research spaces, in addition to new Nursing simulation teaching laboratories, will help UW-Eau Claire continue to produce the STEM and health sciences graduates regional industries need.

UW-Stout Heritage Hall Renovation Project

First included in the UW System Capital Plan in 2007, the UW Board of Regents has prioritized the requested \$138.9 million in capital funding to undertake major renovations and additions to modernize UW-Stout's Heritage Hall. The renovation addresses instructional environments, operational efficiency, and state-of-the-art workforce training and services. Built in the early 70s and now serving more than 2,000 students every year, this 133,000 square foot building was graded as "fail" in nearly every category in an independent architectural study.

The Heritage Hall Renovation Project supports UW-Stout's capacity as Wisconsin's Polytechnic University to address forecasted workforce needs in hospitality and tourism, health and wellness services, childcare, and education by increasing Stout's already unmatched post-graduation employment rates. The renewed applied learning spaces, expanded development of career-focused programs, market-driven professional development offerings and community services, and innovative collaboration with business and industry will enhance its value to the state's economy, taxpayers, and students.

Economic development and tax reform

Thank you: Sale of excess state land in Chippewa Falls for economic development

With continuing business expansions in the Chippewa Falls area, the community is struggling to meet persistent strong demand for economic development property because of a shortage of available land. We appreciate the move by the Department of Administration to sell 70 acres of state land in Chippewa Falls that has been deemed “excess land.”

Consider tax reform initiatives that would eliminate or significantly decrease the state’s income tax burden

This would enhance the state’s competitiveness and ability to attract and retain talent, while potentially providing an opportunity to address other tax fairness issues without jeopardizing overall state revenues and essential services.

Address the squeeze on local governments and outdated funding formulas

Despite the overall improved nature of the tax burden carried by Wisconsin residents, local governments face financial challenges based upon revenue and levy limits, as well as long-outdated municipal shared revenue and school funding formulas. This has led to referendums disproportionately increasing property taxes, as well as the imposition of vehicle registration fees, because they are the only tools available to them. It is time to review the state’s promises and restrictions on these units of government, and consider the appropriate balance among property, sales and income taxes.

Workforce development

Provide state leadership on talent attraction and retention

It’s essential for the state to help address the workforce shortage through initiatives to attract and retain talent – including marketing the positive attributes of the state and its regions to attract new talent, encouraging former residents and students to return, highlighting opportunities for transitioning veterans, and keeping Wisconsin graduates in the state.

Thank you...

...for the \$650,000 allocated in 2022 by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) in its Talent Attraction & Retention Marketing Cooperative, providing matching funds to support local and regional talent attraction and retention initiatives. The state should continue to enhance and expand this and other efforts.

Address housing supply and affordability

Wisconsin’s housing shortage across all levels is closely related to the workforce crisis, as well as having a detrimental effect on affordability. We support innovative efforts on the state level to increase supply and affordability, including things like a sales tax exemption for workforce housing developments, tax credits for workforce housing creation, a workforce housing rehabilitation loan program, a local housing investment fund program, and reviewing regulations, policies, and building codes to ensure that they are up to date and do not unnecessarily hamper construction activities or increase costs. State policies, regulations and statutes should encourage infill development, creation of missing middle housing types, compact growth, efficiency of public resources, and the ability to build the types of housing demanded by the marketplace.

Address the childcare crisis

The availability and affordability of childcare has become an increasingly acute issue for employers, families, and childcare providers. This has inhibited the ability of families to take full advantage of employment opportunities and for employers to have full access to the potential talent pool. What’s more, childcare providers are faced with a business model that makes it challenging to pay competitive wages and deal with regulatory hurdles. Covid relief funding has provided stopgap assistance to maintain some capacity, but is temporary and inadequate to provide a long-term solution. There is an urgent need for innovation on the part of the state to address the funding, business model, and regulatory oversight of early childhood care and education in ways that will effectively deal with availability, affordability, and

accountability for quality and safety. This by necessity must address the business model for childcare providers, especially in their ability to attract and retain motivated, high quality staff.

Thank you...

...for the State of Wisconsin's application of federal Covid relief dollars to programs such as Child Care Counts to support childcare programs and help maintain capacity.

...for the Dream Up! Child Care Supply-Building Grant Program under the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide communities and providers with opportunities to pursue innovative strategies to address shortfalls and build capacity. United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley is leading a team of community partners that received a \$75,000 Dream Up! Grant.

Eliminate backlogs in occupational licensing and institute regular reviews of standards

There is a need to address Wisconsin's occupational licensing system both in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of the service the Department of Safety and Professional Services provides to licensed occupations, and to provide a periodic review of the need and appropriateness of all occupational license standards.

Professionals in many occupations have reported significant backlogs in receiving credentials from DSPS, hampering their ability to work and earn a living. It's important for DSPS to take steps to improve the management of these functions to be responsive to the needs of these professions.

Government regulation and licensure is appropriate when it provides necessary standards to ensure public safety, professional competence, and fairness. It is important to keep regulations up to date based upon changes in technology and best practices. Regulations should not be burdensome in ways that inhibit responsible activities, or serve to block appropriate economic competition. The state should have a system to periodically review the need, value, and standards for each profession subject to occupational licensing.

Professional standards regulations should be harmonized with other states to make it easier for competent professionals to move from one state to another for employment opportunities.

Infrastructure

Prioritize continued expansion of broadband access to unserved and under-served areas.

Availability of broadband has become as essential in today's economy as electricity and telephone service. Connecting rural Wisconsin towns, villages, and communities with reliable broadband requires a strategic and thoughtful approach. As funding is deployed, it should prioritize appropriate data collection, mapping, and sufficient speeds. Cooperatives, telephone companies, and middle-mile backbone networks all play a critical role in broadband delivery.

Build out electric vehicle charging infrastructure to include major highway corridors and rural areas.

With significant federal funding for EV stations on the way, the preparation, planning, and investments in building out Wisconsin's charging station network must include small and medium-sized communities. Economic development partners like local electric utilities will play an important role in fulfilling the needs of the traveling public. Legislative action is appropriate to incentivize the production and deployment of charging infrastructure. It's important for all parties to work together to solve the issues that held up legislation in the last session, balancing the need to encourage private enterprise with the need to increase access.

Expand passenger rail service to the Chippewa Valley and other major state cities

We support the expansion of passenger rail service in high-potential Wisconsin corridors as a needed and worthwhile investment for the economic future of our state. The Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha train service has been one of the most successful services in the country, and similar benefits should be provided to other major state economic centers. Frequent service to more cities will help attract and retain business and the talent critical to its success; provide a convenient,

economical, and environmentally-friendly alternative to driving; accelerate economic growth opportunities; improve quality of life; increase tourism; and add resiliency to our transportation system.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides significant federal funding for corridor development that is for the first time on par with federal funding formulas for other modes like highways. The next step in eligibility is to submit corridors for designation by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) by its March 20 deadline. We support the anticipated submission to FRA of the Chicago-Milwaukee-Chippewa Valley-Twin Cities corridor by Wisconsin DOT, and an Eau Claire-Menomonie-Hudson-Twin Cities regional corridor by the Chippewa-St. Croix Rail Commission.

Position Wisconsin to benefit from coming federal infrastructure funding opportunities

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes significant competitive and formula funding for state and local investments in water infrastructure, roads & bridges, aviation, and freight & passenger rail. It's important for Wisconsin to be prepared to seek and utilize these funding streams in all areas where they will provide benefits to our economy.