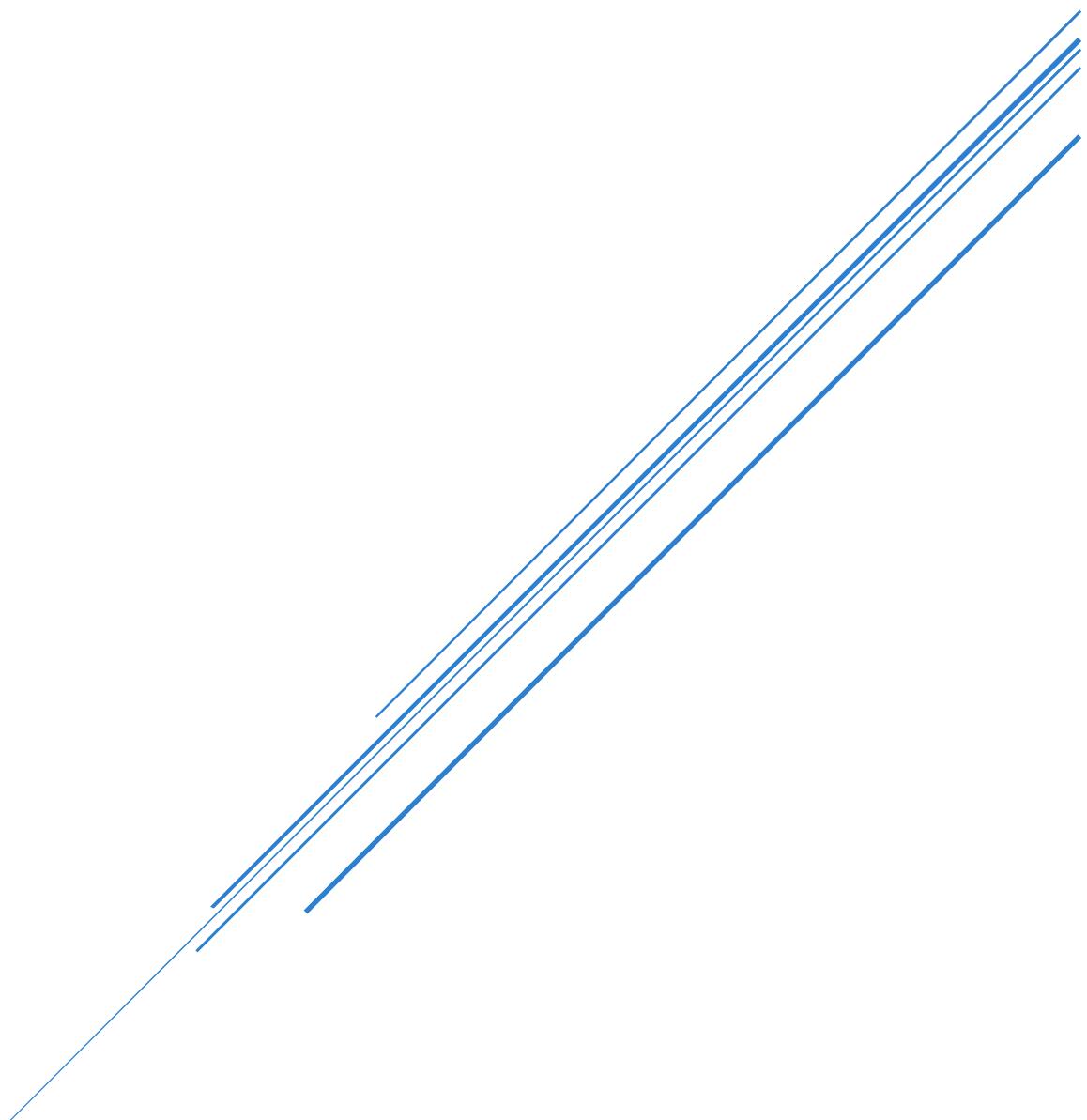


WAUKEGAN, ILLINOIS

Community Profile

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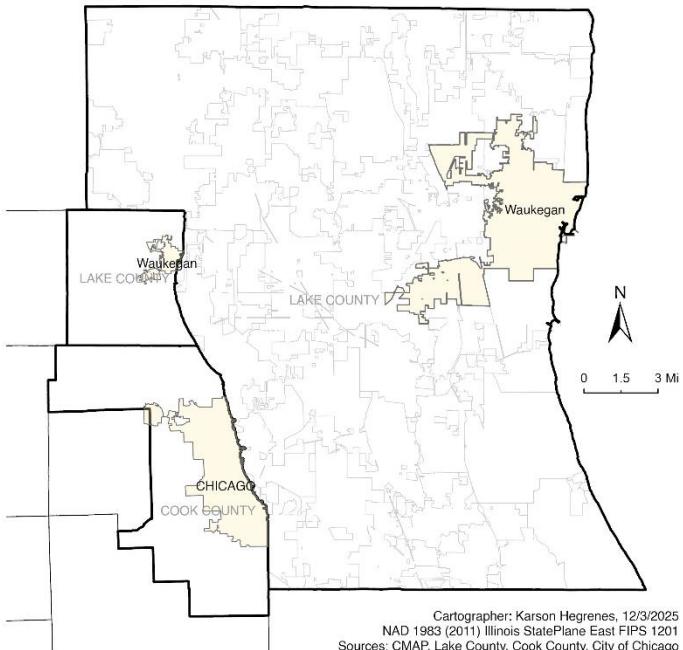
Introduction

Waukegan, Illinois (pronounced “Wah-KEE-ghin”) (**Figure 1**) is a medium-sized city and the county seat of Lake County in the northeast corner of the state. Initially a French trading post, the city takes its name from the Potawatomi for “Little Fort”, which was the settlement’s original name in English (*Waukegan, IL*,

2005; *History of Waukegan | Waukegan, IL - Official Website*, n.d.). Its city center is situated near the shores of Lake Michigan approximately nine miles south of the Illinois-Wisconsin border and 35 miles north-northwest of the Chicago loop. Historically the city’s economy has been dominated by industry, such as ship and wagon building, flour milling, meat packing, and brewing; and its location on Lake Michigan and railroad connectivity with Milwaukee and Chicago enabled its economy to flourish (*Waukegan, IL*, 2005). However, today, the city contains five EPA designated contaminated sites from its industrial past (EPA, 2025). The city fashions itself as the “City of Progress”.

This community profile seeks to summarize and analyze Waukegan by its demographics and population trends, economy, housing, transportation systems, and land use to identify Waukegan’s strengths and weaknesses and illuminate the most pressing issues for city leaders and planners to address in the planning process.

Figure 1: Map of Waukegan in relation to Chicago

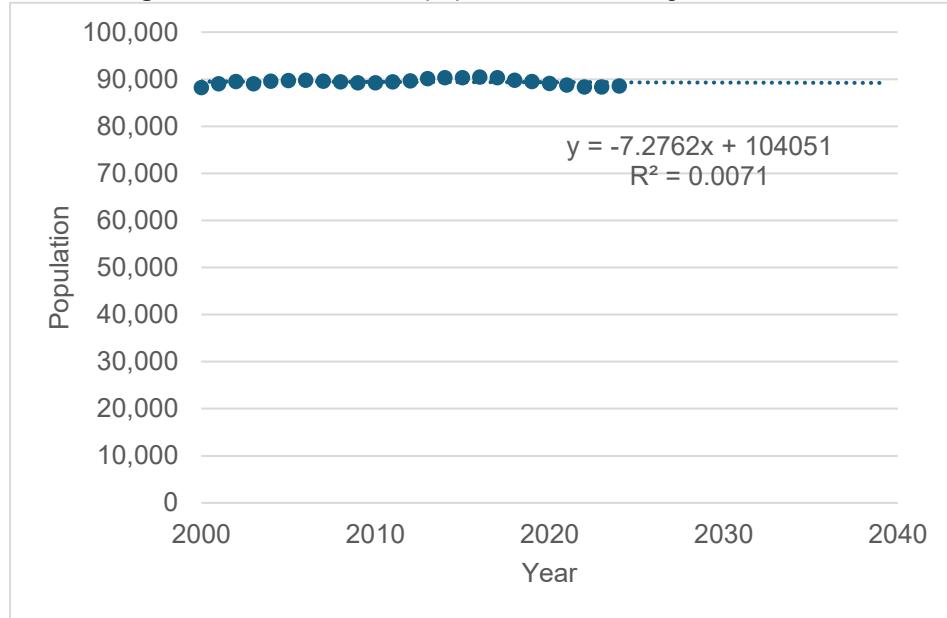


Demographics

As of the 2020 decennial Census, Waukegan has a population of 89,321 inhabitants, a slight increase from its 2000 population of 88,225 (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Over the past 25 years, the city's population has remained relatively stable, with Waukegan seeing its highest population in 2016 with 90,458 residents, but its population has since fallen by nearly 2,000 people to 88,570 in 2024 (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

Looking forward to 2040, modeling Waukegan's population growth using a linear regression model (**Figure 2**), we expect the city's population to increase by a mere 638 people to 89,208. This marginal increase in population is in line with the city's inert population growth trends in the 21st century.

Figure 2: Linear model of population in Waukegan, 2000-2024



Source: U.S. Census

Historically, Waukegan was home to a large community of German immigrants (*Waukegan, IL*, 2005), but the city's race and ethnicity numbers have been shifting for the past several decades (**Figure 3**). In 2000, white non-Hispanic residents comprised

30.9 percent of Waukegan's population, but today that number has dwindled to only 18.1 percent. Waukegan is currently the home of a large and growing Latine community, with 57% of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino of any race in 2023, compared to only 44.8% in 2000 (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning [CMAP], 2025).

Figure 3: Waukegan's changes in race/ethnicity, 2000-2023

	2000 Percent	2009-2013 Percent	2019-2023 Percent
White (Non-Hispanic)	30.9	23.8	18.1
Hispanic or Latino (of Any Race)	44.8	52.5	57.0
Black (Non-Hispanic)	18.6	17.1	15.7
Asian (Non-Hispanic)	3.5	4.0	5.9
Other/Multiple Races (Non-Hispanic)	2.1	2.5	3.3

Source: 2000 Census; 2009-2013 and 2019-2023 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Universe: Total population

Source: CMAP, U.S. Census

In addition to its race and ethnic profile, Waukegan has also experienced a shift in age demographics over the past 23 years towards an older population (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Waukegan's changes in age cohorts, 2000-2023

	2000 Percent	2009-2013 Percent	2019-2023 Percent
19 and Under	33.3	33.1	26.9
20 to 34	27.3	23.2	23.7
35 to 49	20.9	20.7	20.2
50 to 64	10.5	15.1	17.4
65 and Over	7.9	7.9	11.8
Median Age	29.0	30.8	34.6

Source: 2000 Census; 2009-2013 and 2019-2023 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Universe: Total population

Source: CMAP, U.S. Census

Between 2000 and 2023, the city's median age has grown from 29 to 34.6. The most marked shifts in that time frame are among individuals ages 19 and under (-6.4 percent) and between ages 50 and 64 (+6.9 percent).

Economy

Waukegan has a median household income of \$72,841, which is nearly \$8,000 less than the median household income in Illinois overall (US Census Bureau, n.d.), and its poverty rate of 13.3% is nearly 2% higher than Illinois' 11.6% poverty rate (US Census Bureau, n.d.). These metrics have contributed to Waukegan's designation as "economically distressed" by the State of Illinois (*FY25 OSLAD Distressed Communities List1*, 2025).

Closer examinations of Waukegan's economy show the city's labor market profile. The following location quotient (**Figure 5**) provides insight into which industries drive Waukegan's economy. Industries with LQ values above 1 are more concentrated in Waukegan than they are in the lower 48 US states, whereas industries with LQ values below 1 are less concentrated.

Figure 5: Location quotient analysis of Waukegan, IL (2024).

Industry	Waukegan		Lower 48		LQ
	Count	Share	Count	Share	
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0	0.0%	582,970	0.5%	0.00
Construction	743	3.0%	8,326,414	6.4%	0.46
Manufacturing	3,844	15.3%	12,759,827	9.9%	1.55
Wholesale Trade	1,860	7.4%	6,095,220	4.7%	1.57
Retail Trade	2,732	10.9%	15,361,381	11.9%	0.91
Transportation and Warehousing	3,671	14.6%	6,562,473	5.1%	2.87
Information	21	0.1%	3,194,989	2.5%	0.03
Finance and Insurance	347	1.4%	6,282,891	4.9%	0.28
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	369	1.5%	2,416,092	1.9%	0.78
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	768	3.1%	10,763,359	8.3%	0.37
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	4,468	17.8%	9,196,837	7.1%	2.50
Educational Services	217	0.9%	3,269,802	2.5%	0.34
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,914	11.6%	22,282,252	17.3%	0.67
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	862	3.4%	3,005,663	2.3%	1.47
Accommodation and Food Services	1,863	7.4%	14,287,989	11.1%	0.67
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	454	1.8%	4,732,545	3.7%	0.49

Sources: Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), US Census Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Relative to the lower 48 states, the city's economy is dominated by Transportation & Warehousing (2.87), Administration & Support/Waste Management (2.50), Wholesale

Trade (1.57), Manufacturing (1.55), and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (1.47).

Among Waukegan's weakest industries are Finance and Insurance (0.28), Educational Services (0.34), Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (0.37), and Health Care (0.67). Waukegan's LQ values show how its job market is oriented more towards lower-paying, "low-skilled" jobs in industries like logistics, manufacturing, and trade rather than higher-paying, "high-skilled" jobs in industries like science, technology, or finance.

With Waukegan's population remaining stagnant, its job numbers are also relatively lax.

The following shift-share analysis (**Figure 6**) shows which industries most contributed to the city's growth or decline in job numbers between 2010 and 2019 by comparing Waukegan's job numbers over time by sector with the United States' job numbers.

Figure 6: Shift-share analysis of Waukegan, IL, 2010-2019

Industry	Waukegan				United States				National Shift	Industry Mix	Local Shift	Total Shift				
	Jobs		Change	Percent	Jobs		Change	Percent								
	2010	2019			2010	2019										
Construction	524	711	187	35.7	4,994,347	7,473,024	2,478,677	49.6	142	118	-73	187				
Manufacturing	3,005	4,332	1,327	44.2	11,175,487	12,534,818	1,359,331	12.2	817	-451	961	1,327				
Wholesale Trade	1,773	1,813	40	2.3	5,228,088	5,790,931	562,843	10.8	482	-291	-151	40				
Retail Trade	3,744	2,776	-968	-25.9	12,798,182	15,077,094	2,278,912	17.8	1,018	-351	-1,635	-968				
Transportation/Warehousing	447	1,792	1,345	300.9	3,952,473	5,599,500	1,647,027	41.7	121	65	1,159	1,345				
Information	292	142	-150	-51.4	2,652,648	3,226,860	574,212	21.6	79	-16	-213	-150				
Finance and Insurance	637	391	-246	-38.6	5,229,796	5,959,320	729,524	13.9	173	-84	-335	-246				
Real Estate/Rental	244	354	110	45.1	1,783,445	2,264,685	481,240	27.0	66	0	44	110				
Science/Technology	1,121	881	-240	-21.4	7,061,882	9,535,052	2,473,170	35.0	305	88	-633	-240				
Administration	5,933	7,235	1,302	21.9	6,319,906	9,100,129	2,780,223	44.0	1,612	998	-1,308	1,302				
Education	199	220	21	10.6	11,616,851	13,093,231	1,476,380	12.7	54	-29	-4	21				
Health Care	3,263	2,958	-305	-9.3	16,116,544	21,641,413	5,524,869	34.3	887	232	-1,424	-305				
Arts/Entertainment/Recreation	141	292	151	107.1	1,804,488	2,670,406	865,918	48.0	38	29	83	151				
Accommodation/Food	1,452	2,014	562	38.7	9,316,834	13,413,976	4,097,142	44.0	395	244	-77	562				
Other	725	598	-127	-17.5	3,726,279	4,600,519	874,240	23.5	197	-27	-297	-127				
TOTAL	23,500	26,509	3,009	12.80	103,777,250	131,980,958	28,203,708	27.18	6,387	523	-3,901	3,009				

Source: IDES

Analyzing the shift-share results, we see that Waukegan saw a growth of 3,009 jobs

from 2010 to 2019, a rate of 12.8%. Our table shows that during this time, if

Waukegan's sectors grew at the nationwide rate of 27.18%, the city would have gained

6,387 jobs. This disparity in growth is due largely to the fact that Waukegan's growth

numbers in many sectors underperformed compared to nationwide growth numbers. Waukegan's largest sector, Administration, grew by 21.9% in Waukegan versus 44% nationwide. Waukegan also saw growth in industries like Manufacturing (44.2% growth) which grew slower nationwide (12.2%) than the average (28.17%). This analysis shows how Waukegan defies nationwide industry trends, exhibiting massive growth in nationally stagnant industries and limited growth in nationally booming industries. These trends help explain the city's struggling economy.

Housing

The housing profile in Waukegan is similar to the region overall, but different from the rest of Lake County. **Figure 7** shows Waukegan's housing types.

Figure 7: Housing type in Waukegan, 2019-2023

	Waukegan		Lake County		CMAP Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Single Family, Detached	16,895	51.4	179,407	66.4	1,743,869	49.6
Single Family, Attached	2,314	7.0	27,962	10.4	267,616	7.6
2 Units	2,712	8.3	6,937	2.6	233,187	6.6
3 or 4 Units	1,746	5.3	8,751	3.2	276,611	7.9
5 to 9 Units	2,142	6.5	10,000	3.7	272,171	7.7
10 to 19 Units	2,684	8.2	11,817	4.4	158,373	4.5
20 or More Units	4,302	13.1	20,687	7.7	533,018	15.2
Mobile Home/Other*	47	0.1	4,522	1.7	30,668	0.9

Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Universe: Housing units

*“Other” includes boats, recreational vehicles (RVs), vans, etc.

Source: CMAP, ACS

Just under 60 percent of housing in Waukegan is single-family, with 51.4 percent of housing detached single-family and 7 percent attached single-family. Two-flats, three-flats, and four-flats comprise an additional 13.6 percent of the city's housing stock, with most of the rest of the city's housing in the form of larger multifamily buildings. Buildings with 20 or more units make up 13.1 percent of Waukegan's housing stock. Waukegan

proportionally has less housing in the form of single-family homes than the rest of Lake County, but the city has more multifamily units compared to Lake County. This is despite multifamily housing comprising 0.3 percent of Waukegan's land use.

In terms of housing size (**Figure 8**), nearly two-thirds of housing units in Waukegan have two (33.6%) or three (32.1%) bedrooms. The city's housing unit size profile is similar to the CMAP region's as a whole, though compared to Lake County, Waukegan has proportionally twice as many 0 or 1 bedroom units (18% vs 9%), and less than half as many units with 4 or more bedrooms (16.2% vs 33.5%).

Figure 8: Housing size in Waukegan, 2019-2023

	Waukegan		Lake County		CMAP Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
0 or 1 Bedroom	5,920	18.0	24,353	9.0	584,858	16.6
2 Bedrooms	11,047	33.6	63,885	23.7	974,700	27.7
3 Bedrooms	10,558	32.1	91,396	33.8	1,154,991	32.9
4 Bedrooms	4,230	12.9	70,360	26.1	616,835	17.5
5 or More Bedrooms	1,087	3.3	20,089	7.4	184,129	5.2
Median Number of Rooms*	5.0		6.3		6.0	

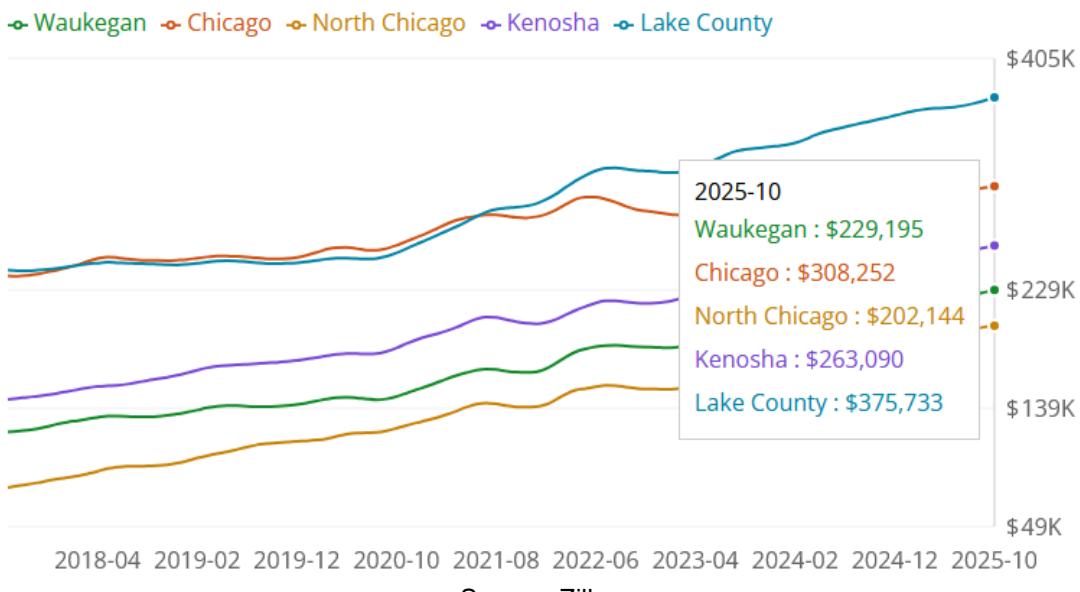
Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Universe: Housing units

*Includes living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens, bedrooms, etc., that are separated by built-in, floor-to-ceiling walls. Excludes bathrooms, porches, balconies, foyers, halls, and unfinished basements.

Source: CMAP, ACS

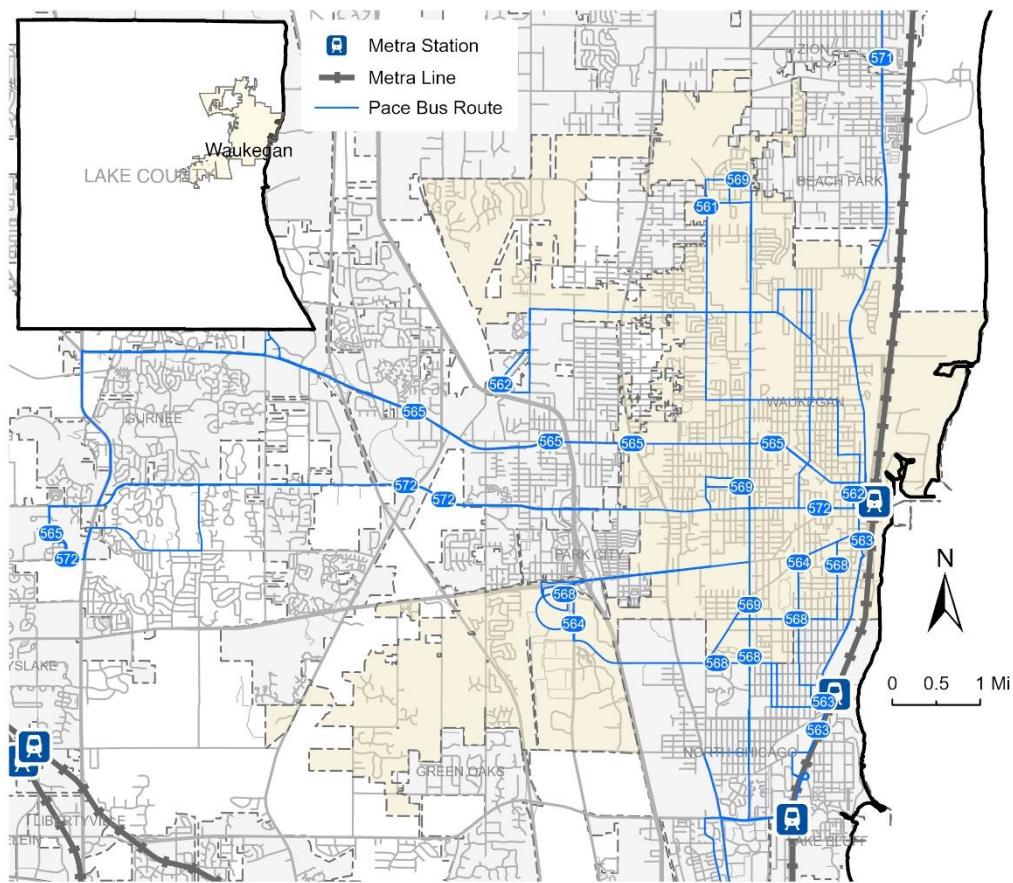
Waukegan is generally more affordable than its peer cities (**Figure 9**), with a Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI) of \$229,195 in October 2025 (Zillow, 2025). This is lower than the similarly sized Kenosha, Wisconsin to its north (\$263,090), but not as affordable as Waukegan's southern neighbor of North Chicago (\$202,144). However, Waukegan is much more affordable than Chicago (\$308,252) and Lake County as a whole (\$375,733) (Zillow, 2025). As with the rest of the Chicagoland region, housing values in Waukegan are steadily rising.

Figure 9: Zillow Home Value Index of Waukegan and peer cities, 2018-2025

Transportation

Waukegan has many different transportation systems. In addition to its robust network of roadways, the city is served by a fleet of Pace buses, and its downtown district has a Metra stop (**Figure 10**).

Among the Pace routes that traverse Waukegan are those numbered 561 to 572 (Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics [RTAMS], n.d.-b). Most of these routes either stay within Waukegan or connect it to major commercial, job, or education centers like the Gurnee Mills Mall, Great Lakes Naval Base, and College of Lake County in neighboring municipalities. Downtown Waukegan's Metra stop on the Union Pacific North Line connects the city to Kenosha, Wisconsin to the north, and the major job and population center of the Chicago Loop 35 miles south.

Figure 10: Waukegan's Pace bus routes and Metra stop

Cartographer: Karson Hegrenes, 12/4/2025
 NAD 1983 (2011) Illinois StatePlane East FIPS 1201
 Sources: CMAP, RTA, Lake County, U.S. Census/TIGER

Commute Patterns

Despite Waukegan's selection of transportation options, the city lacks a robust bikeway system, and most residents commute via automobile. **Figure 11** shows the commute mode share for Waukegan compared to Lake County and the Chicagoland region. In Waukegan, 69.9 percent of commuters drive alone, a higher proportion than in the county (68%) and the region (62%). Waukegan also has a significantly higher proportion of commuters who carpool (17.2%, vs 8.4% in the county and 7.7% in the region), and a lower proportion of residents who work from home (6.7%, vs 17.3% in the county and

16.4% in the region). The city has a lower walk or bike commute share, and despite its Pace bus network and Metra connectivity, Waukegan claims a low overall transit share of 2.5 percent (CMAP, n.d.-c).

Figure 11: Commute mode share in Waukegan compared to county and region, 2019-2023

	Waukegan		Lake County		CMAP Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Work at Home*	2,931	6.7	62,393	17.3	690,746	16.4
Drive Alone	30,566	69.9	245,071	68.0	2,616,122	62.0
Carpool	7,501	17.2	30,265	8.4	326,525	7.7
Transit	1,088	2.5	9,949	2.8	376,771	8.9
Walk or Bike	425	1.0	7,803	2.2	147,732	3.5
Other	1,196	2.7	5,014	1.4	64,598	1.5
TOTAL COMMUTERS	40,776	93.3	298,102	82.7	3,531,748	83.6
Mean Commute Time (Minutes)	26.4		28.8		30.9	

Source: ACS

Vehicle Availability

Despite Waukegan's automobile predominance, compared to Lake County overall, the city has almost twice the percentage of households without access to a vehicle (9.2% vs 4.8%) (**Figure 12**). The city also has a higher proportion of households with access to only one vehicle (35.6% vs 28.4%), and a lower proportion of households with access to two vehicles (32.7% vs 43.7%) compared to the county (CMAP, n.d.-c).

Figure 12: Vehicle availability in Waukegan compared to county and region (2019-2023).

	Waukegan		Lake County		CMAP Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
No Vehicle Available	2,888	9.2	12,254	4.8	423,777	12.9
1 Vehicle Available	11,183	35.6	72,781	28.4	1,196,026	36.5
2 Vehicles Available	10,255	32.7	112,285	43.7	1,112,204	33.9
3 or More Vehicles Available	7,080	22.5	59,340	23.1	544,089	16.6

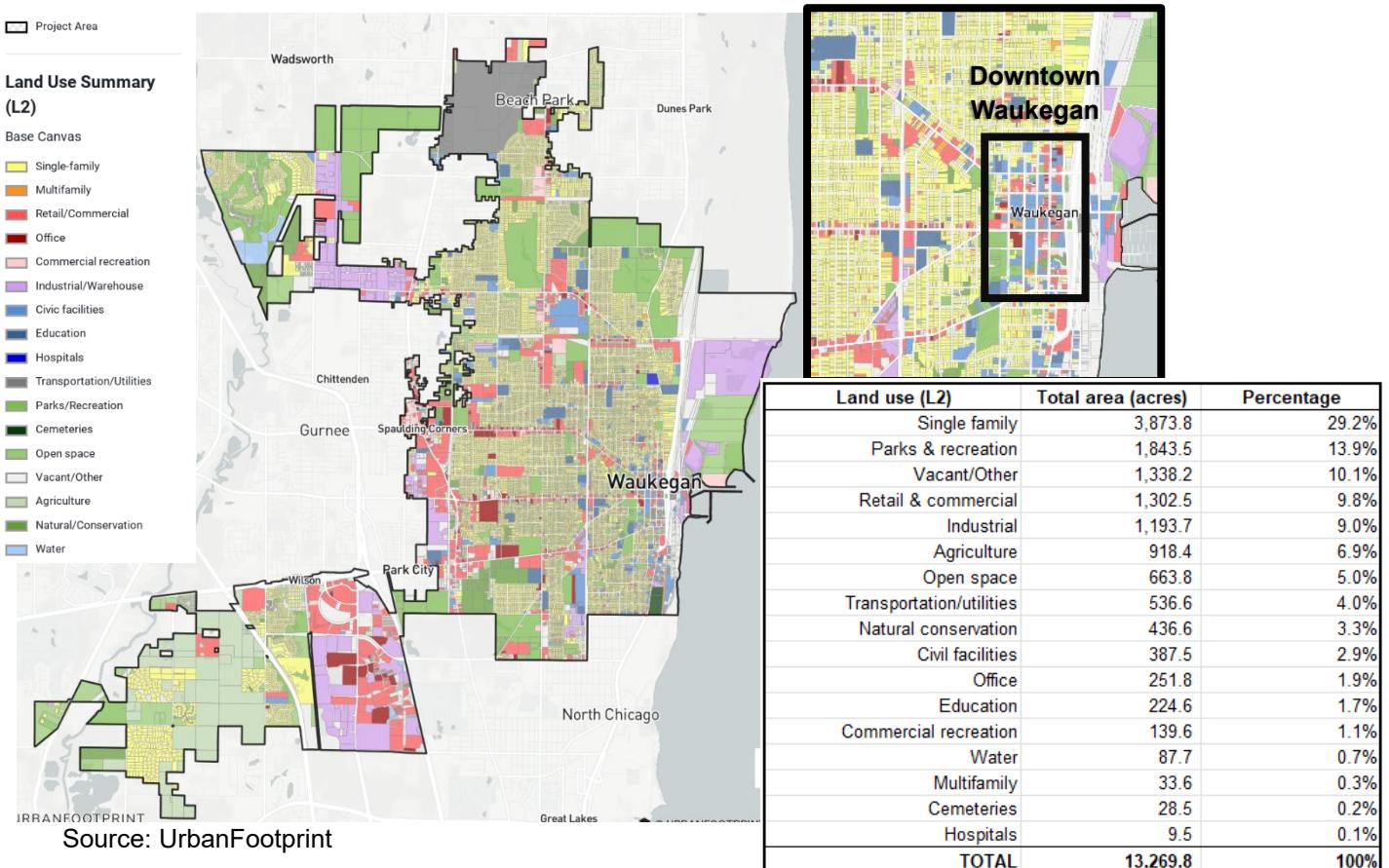
Source: ACS

Land Use

Waukegan is a predominantly single-family community with a mixed-use downtown area near Lake Michigan, outlying commercial and industrial districts at its periphery, and commercial and retail corridors along major thoroughfares.

Figure 13 shows the existing L2 land uses in Waukegan. Single-family, in yellow, dominates most of Waukegan (29.2%), with greenspace visible throughout in green (13.9%), industrial districts on the city's edges and along certain corridors in purple (9.0%), and red retail and commercial districts interspersed (9.8%), with sizeable districts at Waukegan's periphery and along main throughfares. Vacant land within city boundaries are in light gray (10.1%), with sizeable vacant spaces on the waterfront.

Figure 13: L2 land use map and table in Waukegan, 2025

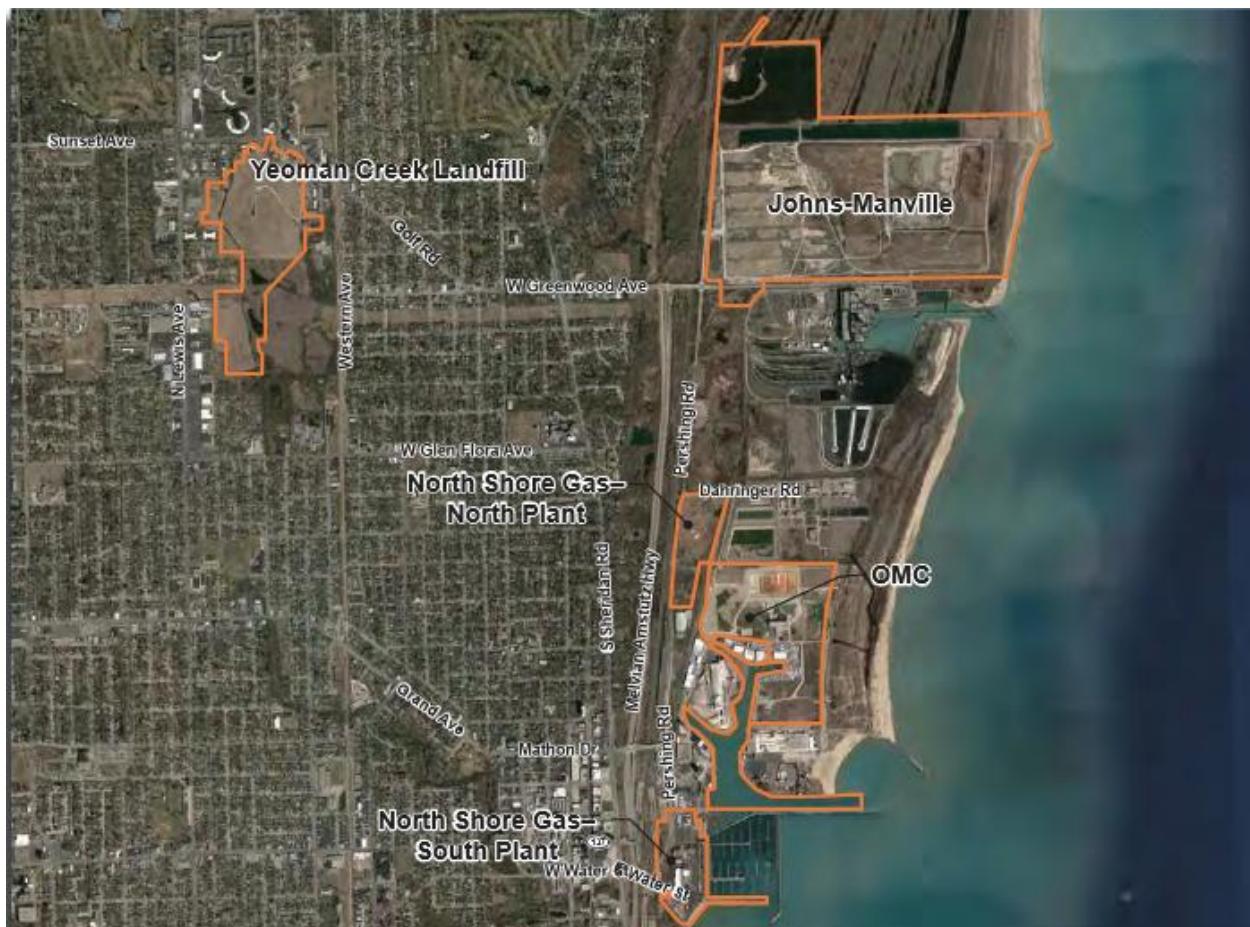


Looking more closely, downtown has a mix of retail, civil, and educational uses. Notably, there are no parcels designated for mixed uses in Waukegan, despite the downtown district reflecting a mixture of individual uses. Other notable land uses with small allocations in Waukegan are Multifamily (0.3%), Education (1.7%), and Office (1.9%).

Environment

Waukegan has a proportionally higher amount of “Vacant/Other” land. Many of these spaces are formerly industrial sites which have been decommissioned and have not been redeveloped because of soil contamination (**Figure 14**).

Figure 14: Five EPA-designated contaminated sites in Waukegan, 2015



Source: EPA, 2015

As of 2015, Waukegan has three Superfund sites (Johns-Manville, Outboard Marine Corporation (OMC), and Yeoman Creek Landfill) and two additional contaminated sites (North Shore Gas North and South Plants) the city is addressing through the EPA's Superfund Alternative Sites (SAS) program (EPA, 2015). In addition to contaminated sites, the city has a newly de-commissioned coal plant on its waterfront between the Johns-Manville and OMC sites. Future planning efforts in the city may revolve around the cleanup and redevelopment of these spaces.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Waukegan has many advantages and disadvantages as city leaders look to guide the city forward and plan its future. The following SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis (**Figure 15**) summarizes the city's bundle of issues that planners and politicians in Waukegan should consider.

Figure 15: SWOT Analysis of Waukegan

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong housing affordability• Diversity of housing types	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Car dependency• Lack of viable alternatives to driving• Economic and population stagnation• Lack of investment
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well-connected to population and job centers through transit• Could improve land use near downtown	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environmental damage from legacy of industrial land uses• Aging population

Conclusion

Waukegan, Illinois is a city whose industrial past continues to influence its trajectory. Contaminated wastelands clog its lakefront. Deindustrialization has caused the city's population to stop growing. Its population is aging and its economy continues to stagnate. Moreover, the city's transportation patterns reflect its predominantly car-oriented built environment. However, in the wake of these circumstances, the city has a richly variegated housing stock that is relatively affordable. Waukegan is also relatively well-connected and well-served by regional transit systems. Its connectivity could position it as a potential place for investment. As Waukegan fashions itself the "City of Progress", there are lots of opportunities for progress in Waukegan as city officials seek to transform Waukegan for the future.

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