

MOVING THE NEEDLE?

How Kenosha County measures up on key economic and social indicators

Kenosha County has shown impressive economic growth over the past decade, attracting new headquarters for major companies like Uline and Nosco and becoming home to large new distribution and production facilities for Amazon and HARIBO. Despite the considerable challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Kenosha County’s economic prospects for the future would also appear bright given its ideal location in the bustling I-94 corridor between Chicago and Milwaukee.

But how does Kenosha County’s economic performance stack up with other similar counties in the Midwest and nationally? Moreover, to what extent have Kenosha County’s recent economic development efforts made an impact on the well-being of the county’s overall population in areas such as employment, income, and poverty reduction?

In this report and the accompanying (and more extensive) [data tool](#), we gauge Kenosha County’s recent economic performance and the well-being of its population using a broad set of economic and social

indicators. We organize these indicators into six categories: Population and Demographics; Education, Health, and Safety; Employment and Financial Stability; Housing; Economic Activity; and Property Values and Taxes.

In addition to documenting Kenosha County’s progress since 2010 on each indicator, we provide data for a set of 11 “comparison” counties to understand how Kenosha is doing relative to counties in the Midwest and nationally that have similar characteristics. These data reveal strengths and weaknesses and can be used to set priorities for the county’s future advancement.

General information about each county included in our analysis is provided in the table below. Most are Midwestern counties located within a two-hour drive of a major metro area and have similar population totals (both countywide and in their principal city) and demographics as Kenosha County. We also include several “aspirational” counties that provide benchmarks on many indicators that Kenosha can strive to reach, including higher median household incomes. These

Basic characteristics of Kenosha County and comparison counties

County	State	County Population	Principal City	City Population	Comparison Type
McLean	Illinois	170,954	Bloomington	78,680	Peer
Tippecanoe	Indiana	186,251	Lafayette	70,783	Peer
Scott	Iowa	174,669	Davenport	101,724	Peer
Kalamazoo	Michigan	261,670	Kalamazoo	73,598	Peer
Greene	Ohio	167,966	Beavercreek	46,549	Peer
Outagamie	Wisconsin	190,705	Appleton	75,644	Peer
Racine	Wisconsin	197,727	Racine	77,816	Peer
Kenosha	Wisconsin	169,151	Kenosha	99,896	
Cumberland	Maine	303,069	Portland	68,408	Aspirational
Frederick	Maryland	271,717	Frederick	78,171	Aspirational
Kent	Michigan	657,974	Grand Rapids	198,917	Aspirational
Olmsted	Minnesota	162,847	Rochester	121,395	Aspirational

Source: U.S. Census Bureau – Decennial Census 2020



counties were selected with the input of the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, which commissioned this research.

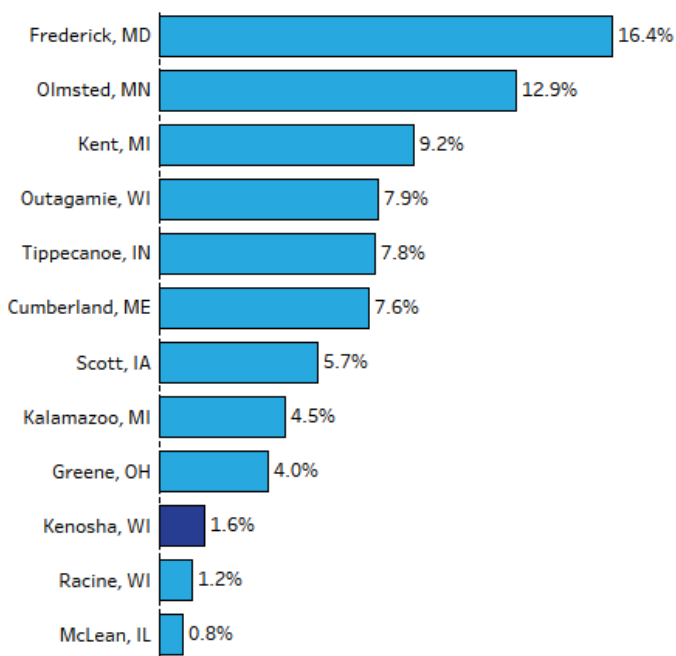
For each set of indicators, we summarize key insights from our analysis below and complement them with charts or graphs from the accompanying [data tool](#). The data tool contains visuals for every indicator mentioned in this summary report (plus additional charts and graphs for many) as well as additional indicators and visuals not included here. It also cites the data sources used for each chart.

POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

Kenosha County's population total has not changed much since 2010, but its population is aging relatively quickly as well as becoming more racially diverse.

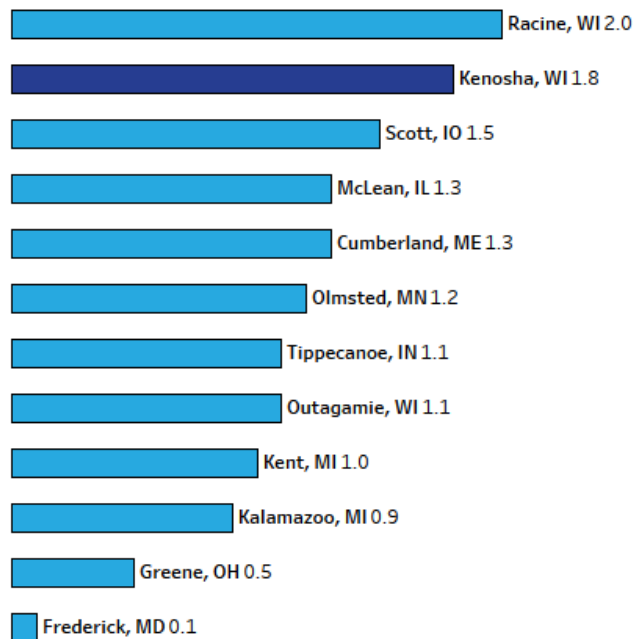
Slow population growth. Population growth can reflect community and economic vitality. Despite its image as a growing community with strengthening connections to the Chicago metropolitan area, Kenosha County's population grew relatively slowly between 2010 and 2020, adding fewer than 3,000 residents. The county's population growth rate of 1.6% during that period was lower than in most selected comparison counties (**Figure 1**), only outpacing neighboring Racine and McLean County, IL.

Figure 1: Change in Population by County, 2010 to 2020



Aging and diversifying population. During the last decade, Kenosha County's population has aged relatively quickly. Between 2010 and 2019, Kenosha's median age grew by 1.8 years, which was a larger increase than in all comparison counties but Racine (**Figure 2**). Seniors now make up a larger and growing share of the county's overall population, while youth under 18 account for a smaller and shrinking share.

Figure 2: Change in Median Age by County, 2010 vs. 2019



Kenosha County's population also has grown more racially and ethnically diverse. Perhaps most notably, the county's Hispanic/Latino (+25.2%) and Asian (+19.2%) populations grew rapidly, while its white (-6.1%) population shrank.

EDUCATION, HEALTH, & SAFETY

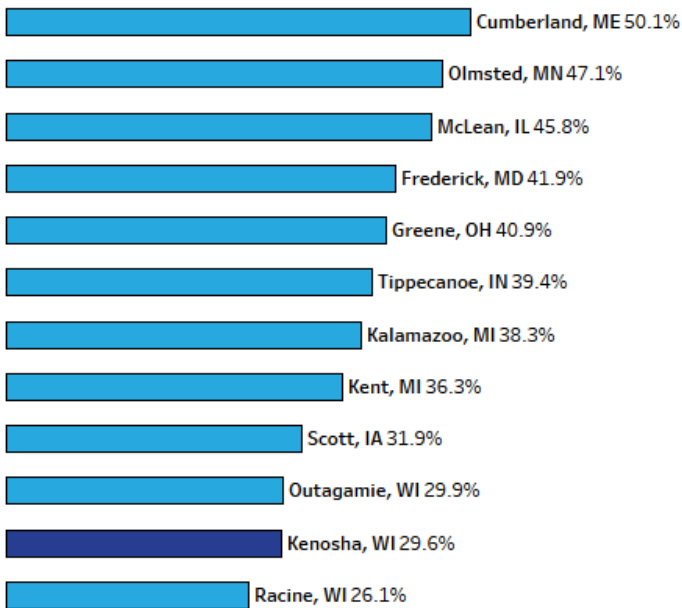
While Kenosha County has made recent progress on many measures related to education, health, and safety, mixed or negative pictures emerge when comparing Kenosha with the selected peer counties on some of the key indicators we examined.

Educational attainment is rising but lags. Improved educational attainment can both reflect and help to generate higher-paying jobs in a community. Educational attainment is steadily increasing in Kenosha County, and since 2010, Kenosha has increased the share of its population ages 25 and over with bachelor's or advanced degrees faster than all but one comparison county. However, the share of the



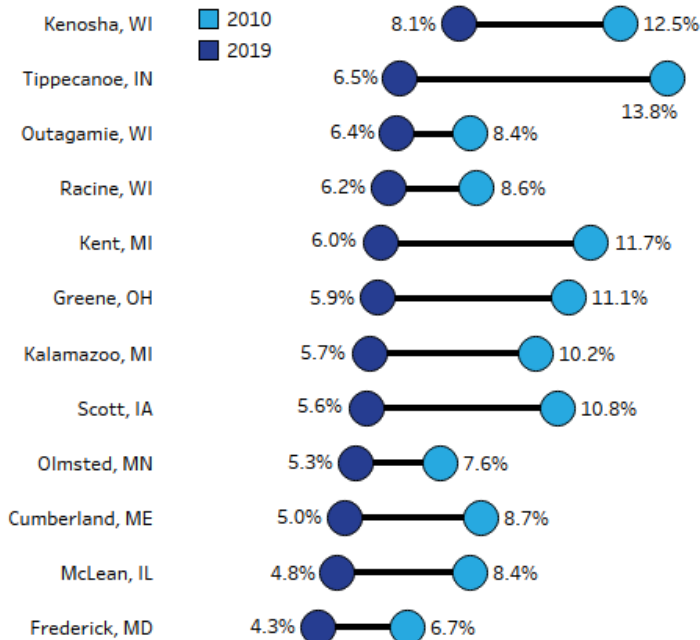
county's adult population with bachelor's degrees or higher (29.6%) continues to lag all selected comparison counties but Racine (Figure 3).

Figure 3: % of Adults with Bachelor's Degree or Higher by County, 2019



Many individuals lack health insurance. Access to health insurance is an important indicator of community health and well-being. Though a smaller share of Kenosha County's population was uninsured in 2019 than in 2010, the uninsured accounted for a larger

Figure 4: % Uninsured by County, 2010 vs. 2019



share of the overall population in Kenosha County

(8.1%) in 2019 than in all of the selected comparison counties (Figure 4).

Property crime is down, but violent crime has increased.

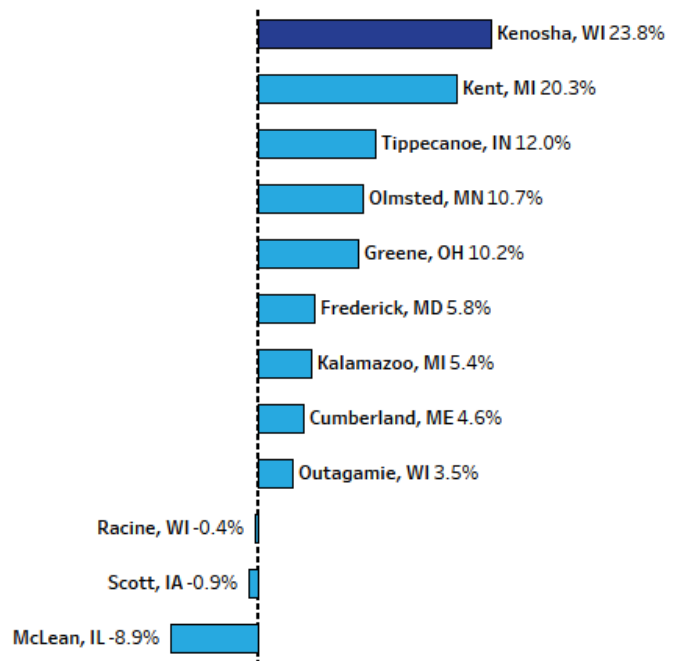
Crime rates are another factor that can influence a community's ability to attract and retain residents. Reported incidents of property crime in Kenosha County have been cut in half over the last decade, but violent crime increased during that time. On a per-capita basis, Kenosha County's property crime rate ranks near the bottom of the comparison counties, while its violent crime rate falls in the middle of the pack.

EMPLOYMENT & FINANCIAL STABILITY

On a number of measures tied to employment and the financial health of county residents, Kenosha has trended in a positive direction since 2010 and is competitive with the selected comparison counties. Yet, some other indicators, such as average annual worker pay, reveal more mixed or troubling trends.

Strong growth in total employment. One of the primary goals of economic development efforts is to increase local prosperity by creating jobs and maximizing employment opportunities. Kenosha County has seen impressive growth in total employment over the last decade. In fact, there were 23.8% more jobs in Kenosha County in 2020 than in 2010, which was a larger increase than in all selected comparison counties

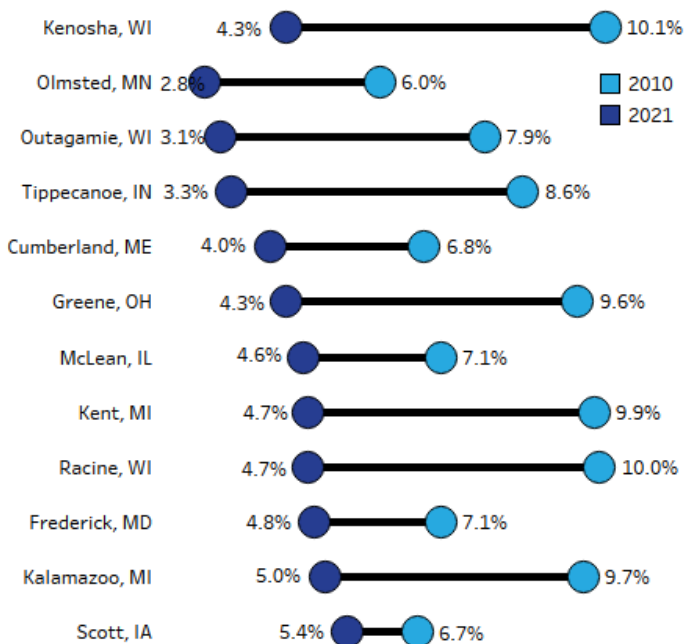
Fig 5: Change in Total Employment by County, 2010 to 2020



(Figure 5). These data are based on employer locations rather than workers' places of residency.

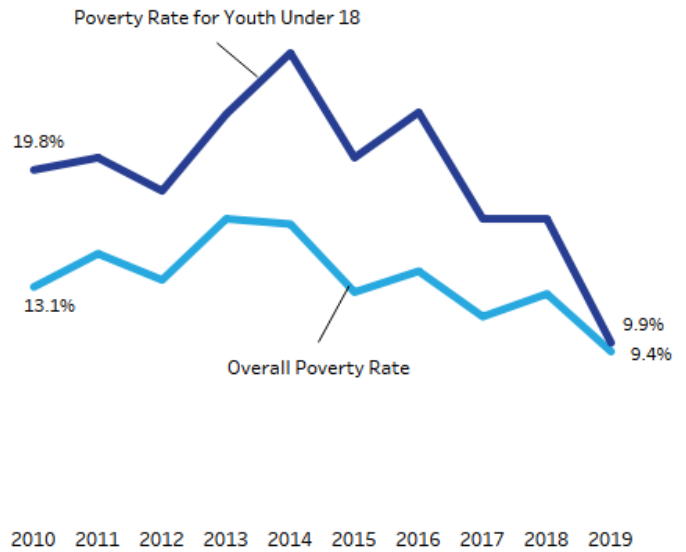
Unemployment rate has dropped. Kenosha County also has seen a sharp reduction in its unemployment rate over the last decade – a positive indicator that county residents have benefitted from the county’s strong recent job growth. The unemployment rate measures the community’s unemployed population as a share of those participating in the labor force (either working or actively seeking work). Kenosha County’s unemployment rate has fallen considerably over the last decade, from 10.1% in 2010 to 4.3% in 2021 – a larger percentage point decline than in all other comparison counties (Figure 6). During that time, Kenosha improved from having the highest unemployment rate of those counties in 2010 to a lower rate than more than half of those counties in 2021.

Figure 6: Unemployment Rate by County, 2010 vs. 2021



Poverty rate has fallen. The poverty rate measures the share of individuals whose income falls below a minimum amount needed to cover basic needs, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The poverty rate decreased substantially in Kenosha County between 2010 and 2019, particularly among youth under 18 (Figure 7). In fact, the youth poverty rate was cut in half in Kenosha County, which was the second-largest percentage-point improvement (-9.9%) among the comparison counties. In 2019, Kenosha County’s

Figure 7: Poverty in Kenosha County, 2010 to 2019



overall poverty rate (9.4%) was below the median among the comparison counties (10.8%).

Household incomes are competitive overall, but deep racial disparities exist. Kenosha County’s 2019 median household income (\$65,997) was near the median among the comparison counties and slightly above the national median (\$65,712), though several aspirational counties (e.g. Olmsted County, MN at \$80,096) show there is still considerable room for improvement.

More troubling is that the median household income for Black households in Kenosha County (\$32,328) is less than half the median among white households (\$70,416) and considerably lower than the national median among Black households (\$43,862). To a lesser extent, the median income among Hispanic households in Kenosha County (\$53,066) also lags.

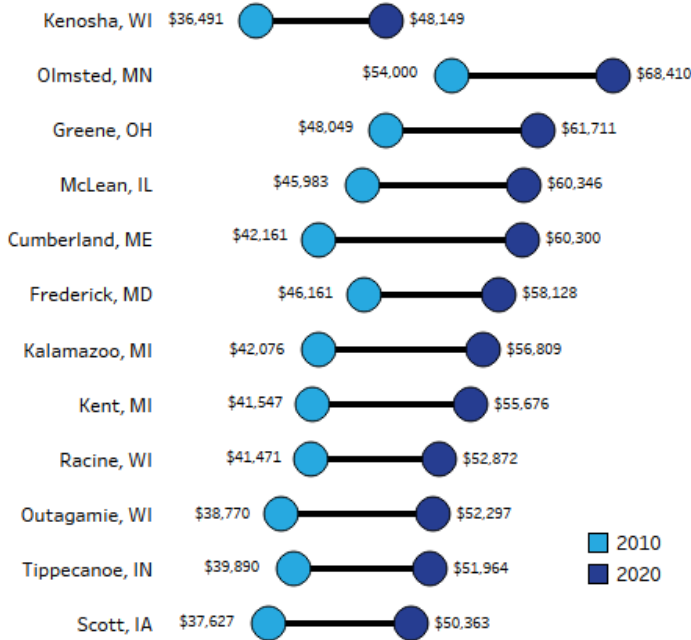
Wages are low. Despite its competitive median household income, wages are lower in Kenosha County than elsewhere. The average annual earnings across all workers increased considerably in Kenosha County between 2010 and 2020, but the county started and ended the decade with lower average pay than all selected comparison counties (Figure 8).

Kenosha’s relatively low wages could reflect the types of industries that are more concentrated there than elsewhere. For example, largely due to the presence of Amazon, the warehousing and storage industry employs



a higher share of Kenosha County residents (12%) than any other industry, and the 2020 average annual wages of workers in Kenosha County were considerably lower in warehousing and storage (\$34,837) than across all industries (\$48,149).

Figure 8: Average Annual Pay by County, 2010 vs. 2020



Location quotients (LQs) provide further insight by comparing the concentration of jobs in Kenosha County with national averages. An LQ of 1.0 indicates that Kenosha County has one job in that industry for every

one job nationally, while higher LQs signal higher-than-average job concentrations. These data show that the concentration of warehousing and storage jobs in Kenosha County is nearly 10 times the national average (Figure 9). Other industries that employ large numbers of workers and for which employment is at least twice as concentrated in Kenosha County as nationally include merchant wholesalers, food manufacturing, and management of companies and enterprises.

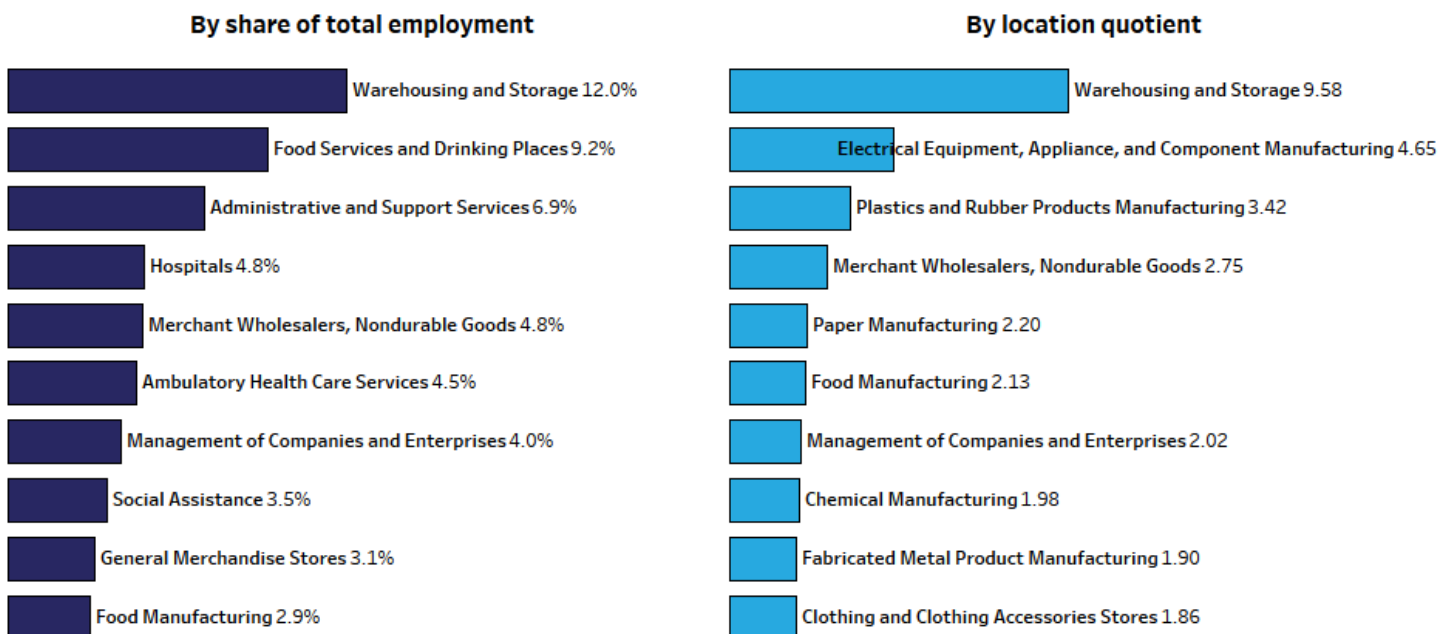
HOUSING

In many respects, Kenosha County's housing market appears strong, with increasing home values and a relatively high homeownership rate. However, renters are struggling more in Kenosha County than in many peer counties, and Kenosha's slow pace of new housing development may be exacerbating a broader trend of sharply rising home prices.

Strong and increasing home values. After declining from 2010 to 2014, Kenosha County's median home value has risen steadily and reached \$203,200 in 2019. Among the comparison counties, Kenosha's median home value is only exceeded by three aspirational counties with considerably higher median household incomes (Figure 10).

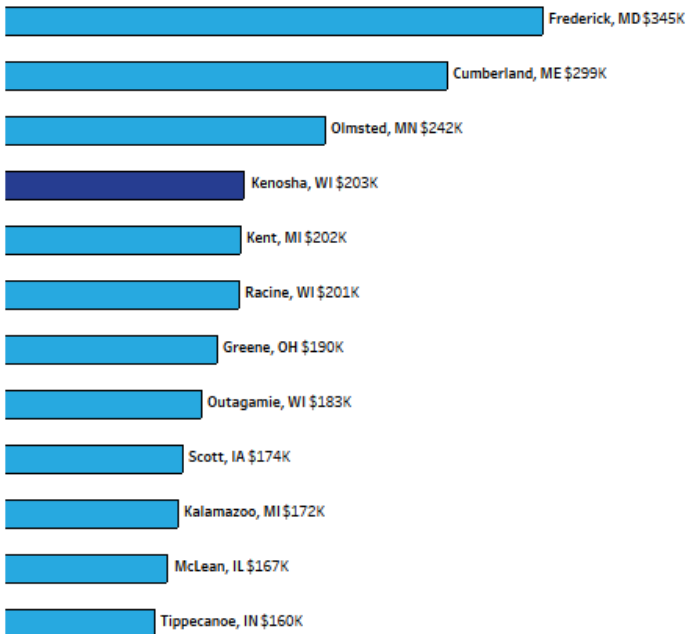
High and increasing cost to buy a home. Kenosha County's limited supply of new housing could be among a number of factors causing housing prices to increase.

Figure 9: Top 10 Industries in Kenosha



Since January 2019, the monthly median price for homes in Kenosha County listed for sale on Realtor.com has fluctuated between roughly \$250,000 and \$300,000, with occasional spikes above that range. While two months of data does not make a trend, Kenosha's median listing price jumped to \$396,500 in March 2022 and \$374,900 in April 2022, which were the highest monthly medians in recent years and were higher than the medians in all but three comparison counties.

Figure 10: Median Home Value by County, 2019



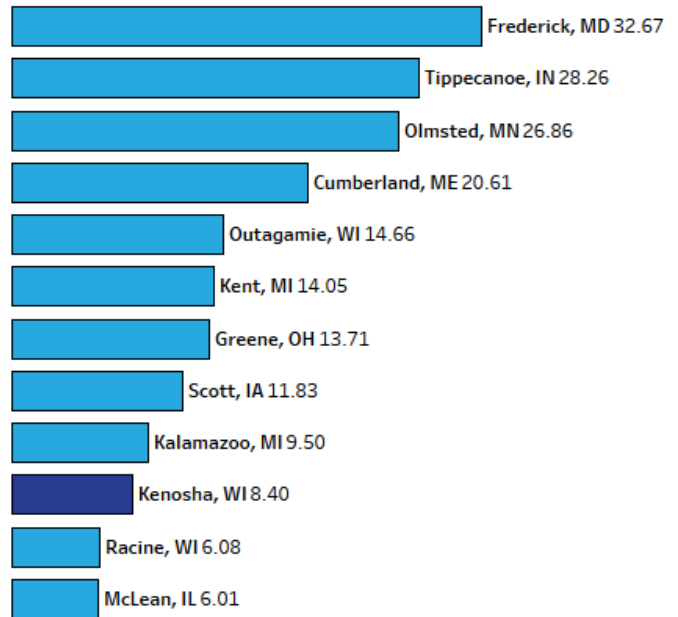
The COVID-19 pandemic also has caused the cost of buying a home to rise in Wisconsin and nationally due to increased demand and limited supply. According to the Wisconsin Realtors Association, [the median home price in Wisconsin rose 21.2% between 2019 and 2021](#).

Solid homeownership rate. Homeownership is widely considered an effective strategy for individuals and families to build wealth and achieve financial stability. In Kenosha County, roughly two-thirds (66.1%) of households own their homes – a rate that has been relatively stable for the last decade and is slightly higher than the national rate (64.1%). Kenosha's homeownership rate is competitive with the peer counties, though three aspirational counties and Outagamie County, WI each have homeownership rates above 70%.

Slow pace of new home construction. On a per-capita basis, the number of new housing units permitted in

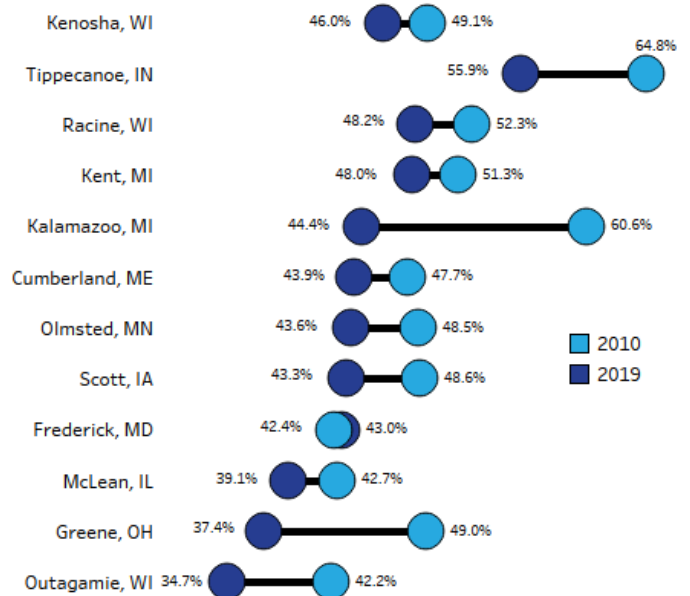
Kenosha County between 2017 and 2020 was lower than in all comparison counties but Racine and McLean County, IL (**Figure 11**). (Those are also the only two comparison counties whose populations have grown more slowly than Kenosha County's since 2010.)

Figure 11: New Housing Units Permitted Per 1,000 Residents by County, 2017-2020 Average



Rent burden a common issue. While rental housing affordability is difficult to define, one commonly cited metric is for households not to spend more than 30% of their gross income on rent. The share of Kenosha County's households that spend more than that amount

Figure 12: Households Spending >30% of Income on Rent by County, 2010 vs. 2019



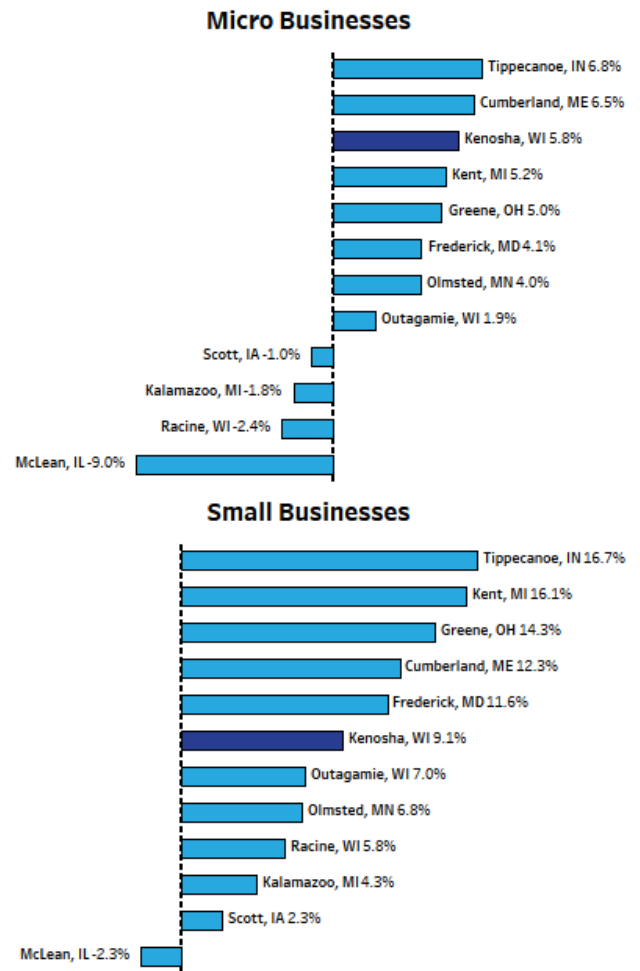
improved slightly from 2010 to 2019 but at 46% remained higher than in eight of the 11 comparison counties in 2019 (Figure 12). Several comparison counties saw much greater reductions in rent-burdened households than Kenosha during that period.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Kenosha County has several other notable strengths and weaknesses with regard to recent economic activity and how its local economy stacks up with peer counties nationally.

Solid growth in number of small businesses. Between 2012 and 2020, Kenosha County’s pace of growth in micro businesses (those with between one and nine employees) and small businesses (10-99 employees) was higher than in more than half of the selected comparison counties. As shown in Figure 13, Kenosha’s 5.8% growth in micro businesses during that period outpaced all but two selected comparison counties, while small business growth in Kenosha County (9.1%) also was above the median among the comparison counties (8.0%).

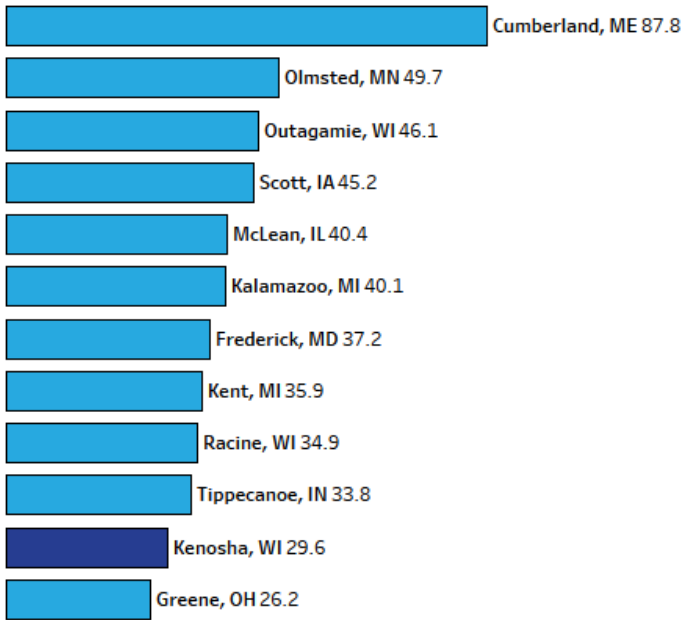
Figure 13: Change in Businesses by County, 2012 to 2020



Relatively few arts, entertainment, & recreational establishments. One area of potential weakness in Kenosha County’s economy is its limited number of organizations and businesses in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector. Access to cultural and recreational activities contributes to community vitality and quality of life and can be a factor in attracting and retaining both residents and businesses. On a per-capita basis, Kenosha County ranked near the bottom of the comparison counties in the number of arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments in operation in 2020 (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation Establishments per 100,000 Residents by County, 2020



Weak productivity. Productivity is another area where Kenosha County lags its peers. Gross domestic product (GDP) measures the value of all finished goods and services produced within an area. In non-inflation-adjusted terms, Kenosha County's GDP rose steadily over the last decade at a pace that was competitive with the comparison counties. However, in 2020, Kenosha County's output per employee (\$114) ranked at the bottom of the comparison counties, which were led by McLean County, IL at \$191. This could again reflect difference between the industry concentrations in Kenosha and the comparison counties.

PROPERTY VALUES & TAXES

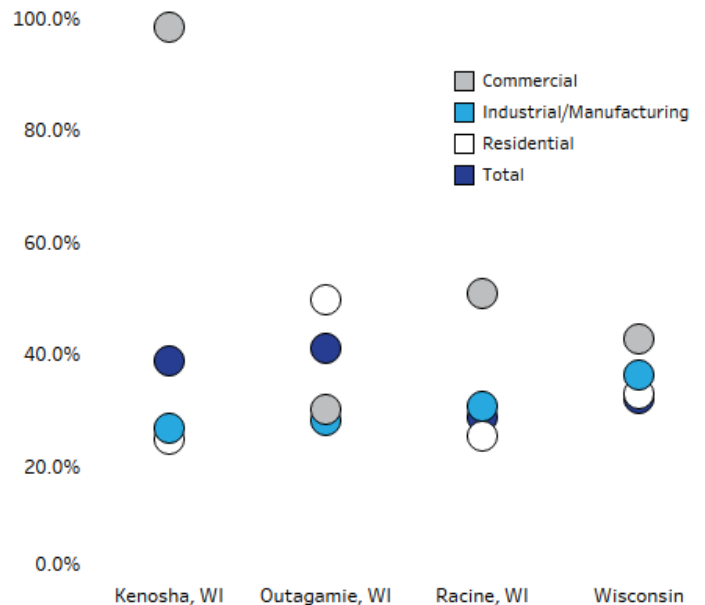
Property values are another important indicator of a community's economic health, while state and local tax rates can impact competitiveness in attracting and retaining residents and businesses. Our analysis shows Kenosha County is comparable with its peers on both, though we also find Kenosha is distinct in the extent to which commercial property is driving overall growth.

Commercial property values have doubled since 2010.

In Kenosha County and many other counties, total equalized values declined in the years immediately following the Great Recession but have grown considerably since 2013. A higher share of Kenosha County's total equalized value is tied to commercial property than in Racine and Outagamie counties, and

Kenosha has seen its total commercial value nearly double since 2010, far outpacing those other counties (Figure 15). Data were only consistently measured (and thus comparable) for counties within Wisconsin for this indicator.

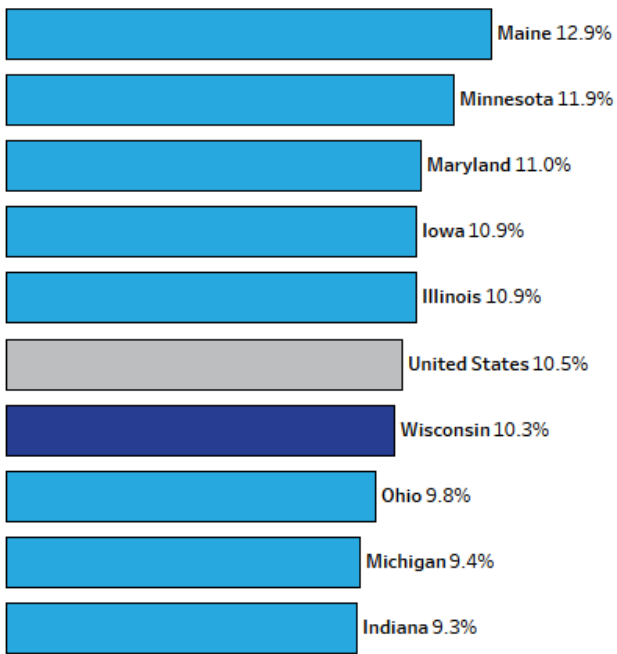
Figure 15: Increase in Equalized Value by County and Type of Property, 2010 to 2021



Tax rates are competitive. In 2019, total taxes in Wisconsin added up to \$5,275 per capita, which was lower than the national average and lower than in many states where our selected comparison counties are located. The "tax burden" (combined state and local taxes relative to total income) was also lower in Wisconsin than nationally (Figure 16). Wisconsin ranked sixth of nine comparison states on both of these metrics.



Figure 16: Tax Burden by State, 2019



Overall, these findings suggest that progress has been made on many fronts, but much work remains to ensure that the benefits of new economic development and jobs are maximized and flow to all Kenosha County residents. We hope these findings provide critical context for local business and elected leaders as they seek to gauge the effectiveness of their economic development efforts, set priorities for the future, and develop strategies for continued advancement.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Our analysis finds that Kenosha County has trended in a positive direction on many social and economic indicators over the last decade, and that Kenosha stacks up well next to peer counties in the Midwest and nationally on a number of those measures. The county has doubled its total commercial property value since 2010 while increasing its number of small businesses at a competitive pace. Encouragingly, these factors have contributed to total employment increasing faster than in all of our selected comparison counties, steep declines in unemployment and poverty, and relatively high and increasing home values.

Several areas of weakness emerge from our analysis as well, however, which policymakers and business and civic leaders should consider. Kenosha County ranks at or near the bottom of our comparison counties on several economic indicators, such as average annual worker pay, productivity, and the prevalence of businesses and organizations in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, which contribute not only to the economy but also to quality of life. We also find Kenosha County underperforming on a number of social indicators, with relatively low educational attainment, high rates of rent burden and lack of health insurance, deep racial disparities in income, and rising levels of violent crime.

