

Population Notes

A look at the demography and geography of Wisconsin



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Applied Population Laboratory • Department of Community and Environmental Sociology • UW- Madison

City of Madison Provides Data about Community Well Being

Madison Neighborhood Indicators is a community information system that provides neighborhood-level data on multiple measures of community well-being through an open access website interface. When the City of Madison began investigating neighborhood indicators in 2007, they looked to the Applied Population Laboratory to support the system's development and implementation. Madison's system, which went full scale in 2009, provides neighborhood level characteristics by bringing together data from a variety of sources and compiling them into a suite of variables used to generate annual neighborhood level reports (e.g., Figure 1). The web-based system is currently online with full reports for 2008 and 2009 and tools to compare conditions from year to year and from one neighborhood to the next (see <http://madison.apl.wisc.edu>).

History of Neighborhood Indicators

The idea that citywide statistics in aggregate could not adequately represent the diversity of neighborhood conditions within the city is not a new one. The concept of using neighborhood indicators to better assess diverse conditions within a city has been around since the 1960s. But for decades using detailed data to track outcomes and to target programs and inform planning efforts remained little more than a concept.

It was not until the 1990s that computer advancements started to make neighborhood indicators feasible from the standpoint of data collection and tabulation. Even then implementation generally required large federal grants or foundation monies to support the massive data acquisition and processing efforts involved. Since then, computing technology and digital record keeping have continued to advance, making neighborhood indicators systems viable for a growing number of cities. At the same time growing costs of policing, incarceration, and healthcare have provided powerful incentives for cities to efficiently target resources at distressed neighborhoods and identify potential problems in at risk neighborhoods before conditions worsen.

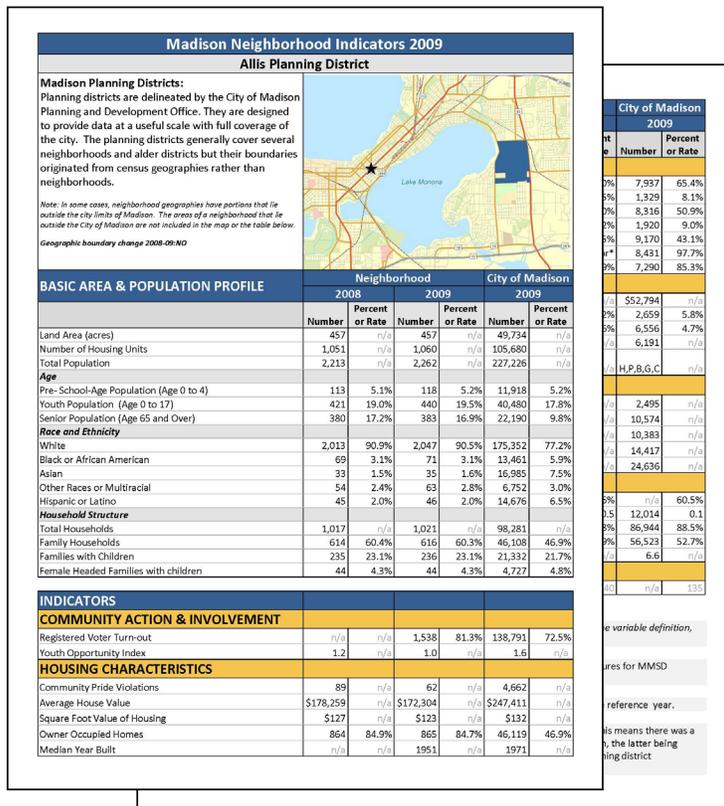


Figure 1. Annual profiles for planning districts and neighborhood association are available in pdf format via the website. Each includes comparison to the previous year data, comparison to City of Madison totals and a list of definitions that explain methods and sources for data collection and tabulation.

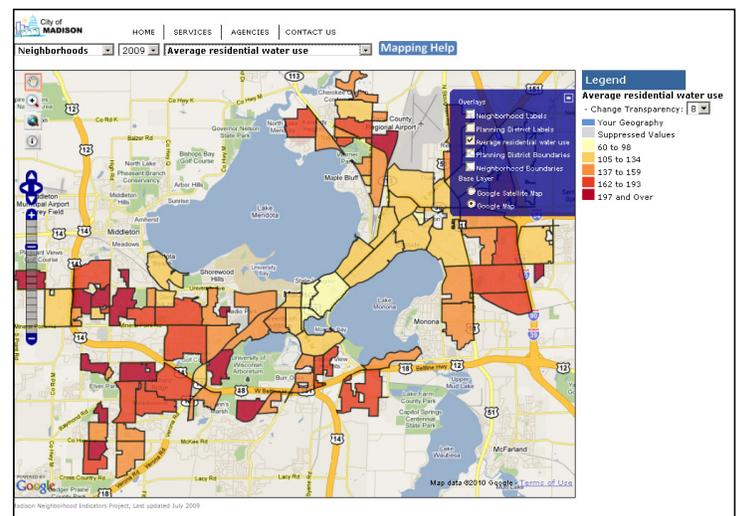


Figure 2. Mapping tools are not only an integral part of the data tabulation for the system, but it is also very useful as data visualization tool. APL staff are also working graphing tools to further facilitate data comparison between geographies and within geographies over time.

Democratizing Data

One important goal articulated by the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) has been to “democratize,” or make readily available, data that have already been collected but might otherwise remain difficult to use and access.

In addition to demographic estimates, the Madison Neighborhood Indicators system includes data from multiple sources, including the Building Inspection Unit, Assessor’s Office, Police and Fire Departments, Housing Unit, Engineering Division, Madison Metro, Madison Metro School District, Public Health of Madison & Dane County, Wisconsin Department of Health, Madison Water Utility, and several other local data providers. While these data are no substitute for the lived experience of residents within those neighborhoods they, nonetheless, provide a means of measuring discrete attributes of the neighborhoods that data users often regard as important when making comparisons.

In order to maximize their utility, data collected by Madison’s system are provided at two different geographic scales; planning district and approximated neighborhood association boundaries. The planning district boundaries are exhaustive, providing complete coverage of the city. The neighborhood association geographies are more piecemeal, but more likely to be familiar and meaningful to city residents. Data are available not only in tabular report formats for each geography but also through an interactive web mapping application (See Figure 2).

Future Development

The project’s development to date has been an exploratory and iterative process, wherein the project staff consulted with data managers, area specialists, residents, and external entities. The thrust of the effort has been to develop indicators that were consistent with the expressed needs of data users, while being available at the temporal and spatial scale that the project required.

Still, the neighborhood indicators project is a work in progress. As we move forward, the steering group continues its effort to refine the acquisition, presentation, and distribution of neighborhood level data and to improve the overall quality and utility of indicator data. The 2009 Madison Neighborhood Indicators report, the neighborhood summary reports, and the website are available for public use and consideration, and the project steering group welcomes your feedback.

This project was authorized and funded by the City of Madison. It is the result of collaborative research between City of Madison staff and David Long, Jim Beaudoin, Dan Veroff, Rozalynn Klaas, and Bill Buckingham at the APL.

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You can find more information about this and other APL projects at: www.apl.wisc.edu

Ongoing at the APL

- Richelle Winkler won the 2010 Kolb Scholarship which is awarded annually to an outstanding Community and Environmental Sociology graduate. Richelle finished her dissertation on the effects of amenity migration on rural destination communities this spring.
- Dan Veroff, Katherine Curtis and Jim Beaudoin conducted an American Community Survey (ACS) and demographic analysis training workshop on April 29th called, American Community Survey Training: Demographic Data Analysis and Application in a New Era. To access the training modules and view a video please visit <http://training.apl.wisc.edu>.
- The Census Bureau recently released the ACS Rural Handbook authored by Paul Voss, Katherine Curtis and Dan Veroff. The purpose of this handbook is to introduce the American Community Survey (ACS) to people who care about, and use social, economic, and housing data for rural communities.
- APL’s web mapping services are moving beyond demographics and into the realm of invasive species. Jim Beaudoin worked with researchers at the UW Center for Limnology and Wisconsin DNR to create the invasive species interactive map system with data on 12,000 Wisconsin lakes. You can interact with this website at www.aissmartprevention.wisc.edu/mappingtool.php
- With census participation at 81%, Wisconsin is currently leading the nation! Data from Census 2010 will start to be released in April 2011 with more detailed data by age, race/ethnicity, sex, housing units, and tenure coming in summer 2011. Data collection is still underway, and the Census Bureau may telephone to confirm your responses.



The Applied Population Laboratory (APL) is a unit within the Dept. of Community and Environmental Sociology at the University of Wisconsin- Madison. Our professional staff provide demographic and geographic analysis on a variety of topics for UW-Extension; UW faculty, staff, and students; government agencies; non-profit organizations; community groups; corporations; and the general public. We often work on a contract basis or through grant funding. We would be happy to discuss with you how APL can support your research needs. Please contact us at:

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