



Request for Information (RFI) – La Crosse County Farm Proposals

County Farm Development, West Salem, Wisconsin

Location: Eastern edge of the Village of West Salem

Size: ±115 Acre Site, ±96 Buildable Acres

Features:

- Prime, scenic Lake Neshonoc frontage
- Mixed-residential development opportunity
- Connected to greenways and recreational amenities
- Adjacent to West Salem School District campus
- Near Lakeview Business Park and major employers
- Walkable access to downtown West Salem



Purpose

Soliciting development teams' initial interest in the use and development of County-owned land through public-private partnership. The project will leverage County assets and resources to develop a mixed-use residential development in partnership with the Village of West Salem.

Response Deadline

We look forward to your response and consideration. Information and expressions of interest are due by August 7th, 2026 to Sam Bachmeier, Economic Development Specialist at sbachmeier@lacrossecounty.org.

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Housing demand in the Greater La Crosse region has grown significantly, creating an urgent need for diverse and attainable housing options. To address this, La Crosse County and the Village of West Salem are inviting innovative proposals for the development of County-owned land known as the County Farm. This 115-acre site offers a unique opportunity to create a mixed-use, mixed-density neighborhood that meets current and future housing needs while enhancing West Salem's character.

Historically used for agriculture, the County Farm is now ready for transformation into a vibrant, walkable neighborhood. Preferred proposals will deliver a variety of housing options, including affordable and workforce housing, within walking and biking distance of major employers such as the West Salem School District and Lakeview Health Center.

The property falls within the Village of West Salem's TID 2 and its surrounding ½ mile buffer, which has established a 'Pay-As-You-Go' method of financing to be used on most projects. This development has the potential to serve as a regional model for public private partnerships.

Through this Request for Information (RFI) process, La Crosse County seeks to identify qualified development partners and evaluate potential concepts for phased development. Responses will inform County and Village leadership as they determine next steps, which may include issuing a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) and negotiating a development agreement.



Project Goals

1. Cultivate Community Support

For the project's success, it's imperative that the community have a voice in the development process.

2. Deliver Economic Feasibility

Create a development that generates sufficient taxable value to support infrastructure while remaining realistic and marketable to prospective homeowners and businesses.

3. Prepare for Phased Growth

Develop a long-term strategy that meets housing needs for current and future generations through thoughtful, staged implementation.

4. Protect Sensitive Natural Resources

Preserve, enhance, and protect natural amenities in the northern portion of the site, which includes floodway areas, wetlands, and riparian shoreline, to benefit all county residents.

5. Strengthen Community Connections

Integrate the site with Lake Neshonoc, downtown West Salem, schools, parks, and employment centers while maintaining the Village's character.

6. Inspire Investment & Innovation

Build on a century of public ownership and prior investments to attract visionary partners and deliver a transformative project.

7. Produce a High-Quality Neighborhood

Design a development that stands out regionally for its livability, sustainability, and long-term value.

8. Supply Missing Middle Housing

Address critical gaps in the local housing market by offering attainable options for working families and diverse income levels.



Residential Market

Between 2025 and 2035, projected household growth for the Greater La Crosse Area is estimated at 2,448 households. A development at the County Farm could capture a portion of the projected growth within the County where there's significant demand. Housing should consist of rental and/or owner-occupied options in a range of price points that appeal to any demographic, but particularly working families seeking undersupplied housing types.

In 2025, La Crosse County hired a consultant to complete a data-driven regional housing study. The housing study is attached to this RFI as Appendix A1. Appendix A2 is a market analysis of County-owned land which was informed by the local housing market trends and the housing study.

Housing Study Findings:

Current Market Conditions and Housing Cost Burden:

- Median home value: \$243,300 (2023)
- Median rent: \$1,023 (2023)
- 13% of households spend more than 30% of income on homeownership
- 43.2% of households spend more than 30% of income on rent

Demand for Affordable and Entry-Level Housing:

- 55% of projected housing demand comes from households earning below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI)
- Strong demand for homes priced for households earning 60 to 120% AMI, but supply remains inadequate.
- Shortage of 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom units for both owners and renters
- 3-bedroom and 4-bedroom units preferred by households earning above 120% AMI

Price Point Gaps:

- Significant shortage of single-family homes priced between \$200,000 and \$300,000
- Homes priced up to \$400,000 sell quickly; even high-income households compete for homes under \$350,000

Rental Market Pressures:

- High student renter population strains supply
- Of 187 market-rate apartment buildings in the County, only 45% offer units affordable to households earning below 80% AMI
- 76.6% of renting households earn below 80% AMI

Demographic Trends:

- La Crosse County has one of the highest headship rates in the Upper Midwest (+4.3% from 2014 to 2023), driven by smaller household sizes and population growth
- Low housing turnover due to long tenure rates, aging population, and increased demand for senior housing options



Site Details

La Crosse County has owned much of the County Farm property since the late 1800's. Through previous public-private partnerships, much of the 500+ previously County-owned acres have been developed into public community assets, such as the Lakeview Business Park, recreation areas surrounding Lake Neshonoc, the school district campus, and the Lakeview Healthcare and Assisted Living Center. These developments, along with the strength of the school district and the area's vibrant local culture, make West Salem an attractive location for families.

115 remaining acres have been designated for future mixed residential development since as early as 2002. This site offers a prime opportunity to create a connected, livable neighborhood that complements existing community amenities

Site Boundaries:

- North - Lake Neshonoc
- East - Village Boundary
- South - Garland Street / Lakeview Business Park
- West - School District Campus / Mark Street



Aerial image of the site located east of the West Salem School District campus.

Public Partnership Opportunities

La Crosse County is committed to building a strong, collaborative relationship with a development team that shares a clear and innovative vision for the County Farm site. The success of this project depends on partnership.

All partners should consider their role in creating significant economic, social, and environmental benefits for the community. The following tools and resources may be available and negotiated as part of the development process:

1. **Tax Incremental Financing.** The Village Adopted TID 2 in 2020 having an expenditure period ending in 2035, with the purpose of assisting in the funding of this Development project. Obligation of TIF funds for proposed improvements is not guaranteed and may be negotiated in a future development agreement. A 'Pay-As-You-Go' method of financing has been established as the primary financing approach to be used on most projects within TID 2. The TID 2 project plan is included as Appendix B3 within this document.
2. **Property Ownership.** The County owns a substantial portion of the project area, allowing land value to be considered in negotiating a development agreement.
3. **Grants.** Due to the unique nature of this site, with its extensive recreational linkages, adjacency to major natural areas and proximity to the urban core, many grant opportunities may be considered.
4. **Tax Abatement-Tax Credits.** Multi-use projects may qualify for programs administered by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA).
5. **Loans.** The County currently administers several economic development loan programs. Depending upon the development strategy, both County and State loan programs may be available to assist in long term financing.
6. **Bonds/Debt Issuance.** Given the magnitude of the project and its potential long-term impact on the area's economic sustainability, various forms of bonds including, but not limited to, general obligation bonds, revenue bonds, and developer funded TIF options.
7. **Technical and Project Management Support.** The County's Planning and Development staff will be committed to the successful outcome of this project and will be available for project support to be determined in the developer's agreement.
8. **State and Federal Assistance.** The project's location, size, and multi-faceted features, offers many opportunities for additional public support.
9. **Clean Energy Programs.** The opportunity to plan and develop a sustainable project may offer additional assistance through clean energy programs through State tax incentives, utility programs like Focus on Energy and others. See the Wisconsin State Energy Office's guide entitled, "Financial Incentives for Energy Projects in Wisconsin".
10. **Other approaches** as identified through collaboration and case studies.

Submission Requirements

Submission Requirements

The County seeks a highly qualified development team. The team must demonstrate their ability to plan, execute, and oversee all aspects of the project, including land planning, design, environmental remediation, infrastructure and site development, financing, construction, and comprehensive project management. The County will also consider proposals from developers interested in developing only a portion of the property.

For this RFI, the County is requesting the following from interested firms/teams:

- Letter of interest.
- Broad project vision and development approach. Provide a clear, innovative, and broad vision for a mixed-use development, supported by a practical and thoughtful implementation strategy. Proposers must specify whether they're interested in the whole property (± 115 acres) or only a portion of the property for their project.
- Brief qualification statement highlighting experience with projects of a similar complexity.
- Portfolio representing examples of prior development projects and partnerships. Demonstrate a history of successful public-private and non-profit partnerships characterized by trust, integrity, and collaborative outcomes that benefit all stakeholders.
- Provide evidence of financial strength and organizational capacity to execute a project of this magnitude, including access to necessary resources and expertise. Express financial feasibility and whether financial support will be required.
- Estimated timeline for project completion, including phases of development if applicable.
- Indicate whether sub-contracted developers and builders will partner to complete certain project phases and build certain housing types.
- Questions for the County and Village regarding project parameters.
- Availability for a County/Village/developer discussion.

Due Diligence

Prior to submitting an expression of interest, respondents are encouraged to review supporting documents in the Appendices and all publicly available sources of information regarding the County Farm site. Gaining familiarity with local ordinances and processes for development approvals and public participation is encouraged.



Proposed Timeline

2026	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
1. Housing study complete												
2a. RFI preparation												
2b. RFI posted												
2c. Expressions of interest/proposals due												
2d. Review of proposals												
2e. Village & County feedback & direction												
3a. RFP preparation												
3b. RFP posted												
3c. Vendor conference & site tour												
3d. Proposals due												
3e. Review of proposals												
4. 2027 County projects & budget review												
2027	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
3e. Review of proposals												
3f. Interview 1												
3g. Interview 2 (tentative)												
3h. Board decision (tentative)												
5. Master developer selection	To be determined											
6. Public engagement & planned unit development (PUD) design	To be determined											
7. Village review & subdivision/zoning approval	To be determined											
8. Builder and subcontractor selection	To be determined											
9. Development agreements	To be determined											
10. Construction of public infrastructure	To be determined											

La Crosse County has developed the tentative timeline shown above. The timeline represents the anticipated tasks to be completed in 2026 & 2027. Depending on the duration of County and Village review and discussions with potential development teams, the timeline will be adjusted. Flexibility will be maintained to ensure thorough evaluation and collaboration throughout the process.

RFI Response Deadline

Information and expressions of interest are due by August 7th, 2026. Please submit to Sam Bachmeier, Economic Development Specialist at sbachmeier@lacrossecounty.org.



Other Provisions

Reservation of Rights

The County of La Crosse reserves the right to:

- Cancel or withdraw the RFI prior to the submission deadline.
- Modify or issue clarifications to the RFI prior to the submission deadline.
- Modify the deadline for submissions or other actions.
- Reissue the RFI, a modified RFI, or a new RFI, RFQ or RFP whether any submissions have been received in response to the initial RFI issuance.

Ownership and Use of Submissions

All submissions shall be the property of the County of La Crosse, and the County may use all ideas in any submission.

Further Efforts

The County may request that developers clarify their submissions and/or submit additional information pertaining to their submissions.

Non-Binding

Selection does not constitute a commitment by the County to execute a final agreement or contract with the developer.

Non-Liability

By participating in the RFI process, the developer agrees to hold the County and its officers, employees, agents, representatives, and consultants harmless from all claims, liabilities, and costs related to all aspects of this solicitation.

Appendices

The following appendices are links. To view the documents, press Ctrl + click to follow the link.

- Appendix A1** [Housing Study](#)
- Appendix A2** [Market Analysis of County-Owned Land](#)
- Appendix B1** [2009 County Farm Master Plan](#)
- Appendix B2** [Development Plan for County Owned Land in West Salem \(Engineering Study\)](#)
- Appendix B3** [The Tax Incremental District #2 Project Plan](#)
- Appendix B4** [Village of West Salem Comprehensive Plan](#)
- Appendix C1** [Site Map of Remaining Field Acres](#)
- Appendix C2** [Proximity Map](#)
- Appendix D** [Draft Mixed Density Scenarios](#)
- Appendix E** [2025 Appraisal](#)