

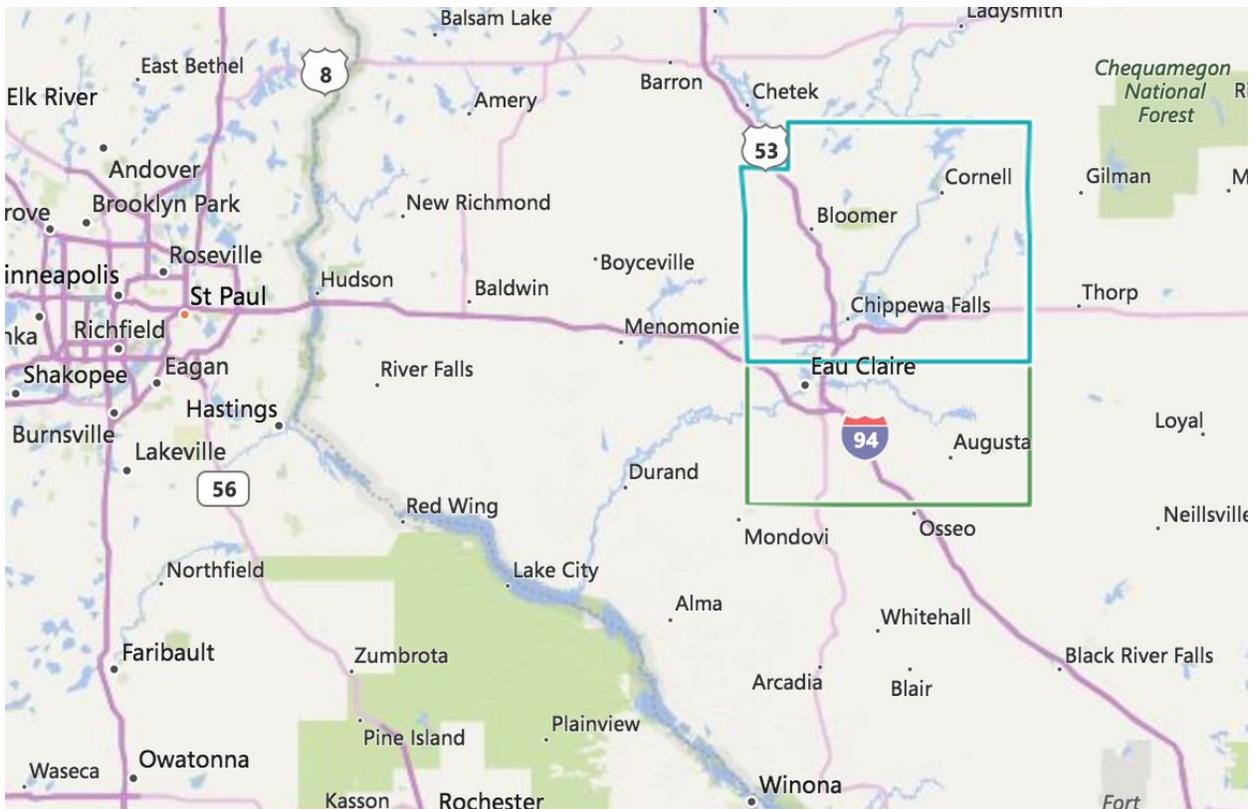
Area Overview

2.1 Area overview

Objector - Best Western Plus Eau Claire Conference Center

Applicant - the proposed conversion of a Country Inn and Suites into a Best Western

The Objector, Best Western Plus Eau Claire Conference Center, and the Applicant, Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, are both located in the Eau Claire Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in the state of Wisconsin. The MSA spans the Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls Counties and covers an area of about 1,637 square miles. In 2016, the median income was \$51,376, a 1.51% increase from the previous year. With a population of 167,484 people, the MSA is the 252nd most populous metropolitan area in the United States ([U.S. Census Bureau 2017 Estimate](#)).



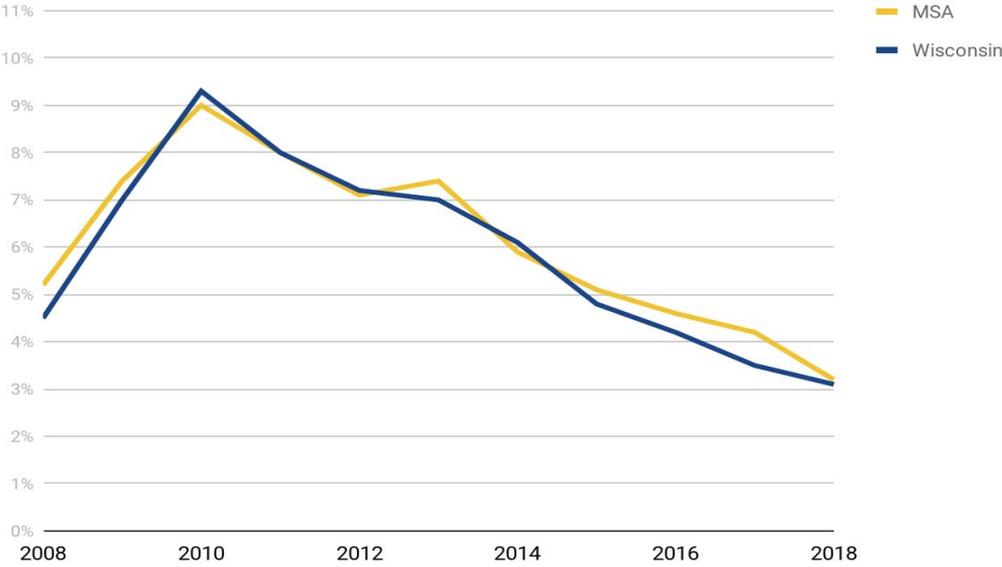
2.2 Economy

As of March 2018, 3.2% of people in the Eau Claire MSA were unemployed, while the U.S. average at the time was 4.1%. In 2016, the per-capita personal income of the MSA was \$42,737. During that same period, 13.3% of people in the MSA lived below the poverty line. The following table provides an overview of key economic indicators of the Eau Claire MSA.

Indicator	Value
Population (2017 Estimate)	167,484
Unemployment Rate (March 2018)	3.2%
Total Employees (March 2018)	91,320
Poverty Rate (2016)	13.3%
Estimate of Per-Capita Personal Income (2016)	\$42,737

The following graph shows the changes in unemployment rates for both the MSA and the state of Wisconsin. It can be noted that the MSA's unemployment rate has been close to, if not higher than, the statewide rate in the last ten years. However, by both measures unemployment is declining, reaching an all-time low in January of 2018.

MSA and Wisconsin Unemployment Rates



2.3 Business

The major industries that employ people in the Eau Claire MSA are healthcare, retail and manufacturing. Compared to the national median household income of \$57,617, the median household income in the MSA is slightly lower at \$51,058 ([American Community Survey](#)). In 2016, male full-time employees made 1.32 times more than their female counterparts. The highest wage disparity between men and women can be found in Management positions. The following table lists the number of jobs for the top ten industries in the MSA in 2016. ([American Community Survey by the US Census Dept.](#))

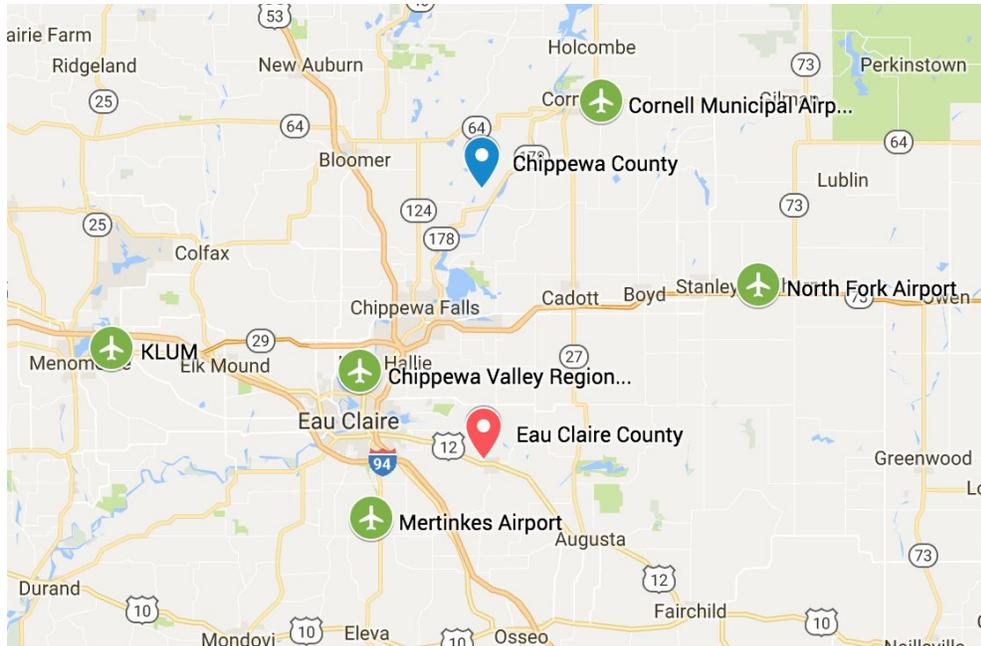
Industry	# Jobs (2016)
Education, Healthcare and Social Assistance	22,527
Retail Trade	13,650
Manufacturing	12,643
Accommodation and Food Service	6,704
Science, Management, Administration and Waste Management	5,700
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	5,518
Construction	4,634
Other services	3,683
Public Administration	2,842
Agriculture	2,142
Total	80,043

2.4 Transportation

There is a variety of modes of transportation in the Eau Claire MSA, including airports, highways, mass transit and rail.

2.4.1 Airports

- Chippewa Valley Regional Airport (EAU), the largest airport in the northern Wisconsin area, is a general-use facility owned and operated by Eau Claire county. The only commercial airline that currently serves the CVRA is United Airlines, with Chicago O'Hare International Airport being the top domestic destination.
- The CVRA's limited service can be attributed to the relatively small population of the MSA, especially compared to areas like Milwaukee or Green Bay whose international airports serve about 4.5 million passengers a year, compared to the CVRA's 21,304 flights in 2016.



2.4.2 Highways

The MSA is connected to major cities in Wisconsin like Madison and Milwaukee due to the extensive highway system. The Eau Claire MSA includes I-94, US-12, US-53, as well as state highways such as State 29, State 37, State 85, State 93, State 124, State 178 and State 312.

2.4.3 Mass Transit

Mass transit in the MSA is available in the form of local buses as well as long-distance Greyhound routes. The Eau Claire Transit system is the only local bus route that serves the cities of Eau Claire and Altoona, while the Greyhound has multiple stops in the MSA including downtown Eau Claire and the Chippewa Falls Holiday Gas Station.

2.4.4 Rail

Many of the MSA's more extensive railroads were abandoned in the late 1900s, and have since been converting to recreational trails. The remaining lines however are used for freighting throughout the Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls area.

2.5 Conclusion

The Eau Claire MSA has seen consistent population growth in recent years. With a convention center being developed in the next three years, the MSA will likely see much more traffic to the area.

Strengths

- The unemployment rate has been decreasing since 2010, and the trend is projected to continue downward.

- Diversity in the area is continuing to grow, with a significant Hmong population in the MSA as well as the state of Wisconsin.
- The median property value in the area has been rising since 2011.

Weaknesses

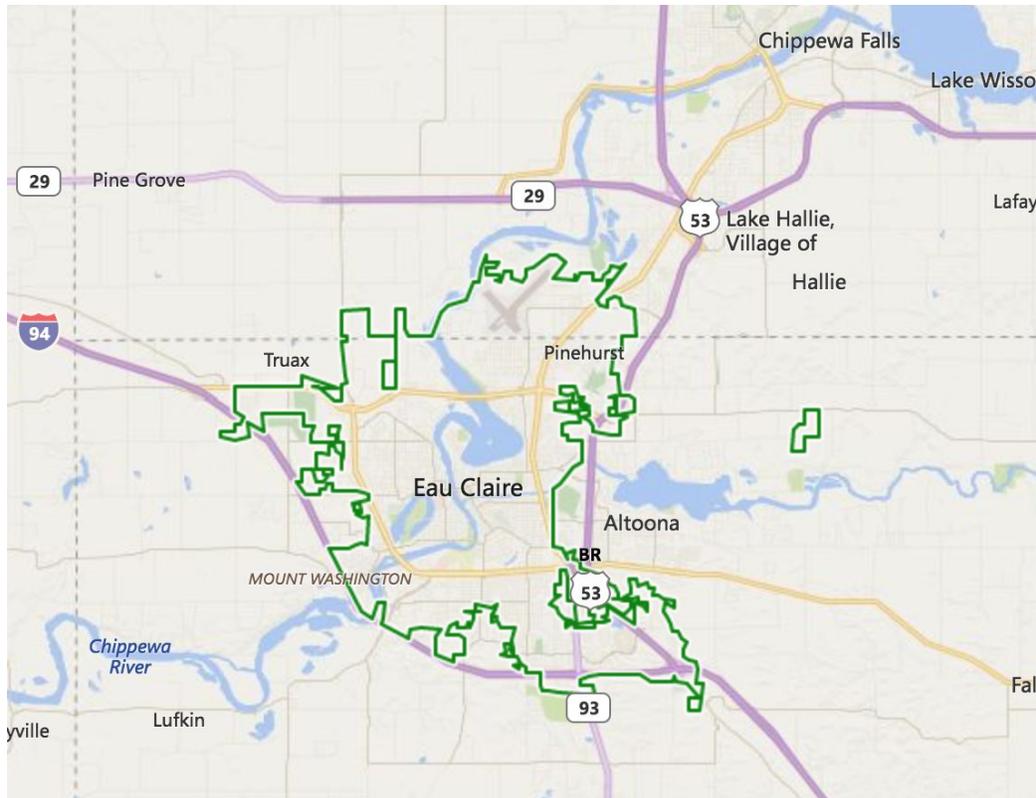
- The poverty rate in the MSA has increased to be almost equal to that of the U.S. at 13.3%
- The only major airport in the area (CVRA) has one airline, making it difficult for air travel in and out of the area.

Submarket Overview

3.1 Eau Claire city, Wisconsin

Both the Objector and the Applicant are located in the city of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. With a population of almost 70,000 people, the city covers an area of 34.14 square miles.

([census.gov](https://www.census.gov)) As of late, the city has undergone its own kind of renaissance as the downtown area gets busier. The city's top industry includes jobs in Management, Business, Sciences and Arts ([datausa](https://datausa.io)).



The population has been slowly rising; By July 2016, the population had reached 68,339 -- a 3.21% increase since the 2010 census.

3.2 Economy

In March of 2018, the unemployment rate in Eau Claire was 2.4%, which is lower compared to the national rate of 3.9%. The city of Eau Claire is increasingly being recognized for tourism as more and more culture festivals gain popularity, bringing more money into downtown Eau Claire. Some of the top employers in the MSA are Mayo Health System, Sacred Heart Hospitals, and Menard Incorporated. The table below shows the ten largest employers in the city.

Company	# Employees
Menards Home Improvement Centers, Inc	45000+
Mayo Clinic Health System -- Eau Claire	3500+
Eau Claire Area School District	1300+
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire	1300+
Sacred Heart Hospital	1300+
Midelfort Clinic Ltd	1000+
United Healthcare Services	500-999
Hutchinson Technology Inc	500-999
Chippewa Valley Technical College	500-999
City of Eau Claire	500-999

(source City of Eau Claire Department of Development)

The following table provides some key indicators about the economy of Eau Claire.

Indicator	Value
Population (2016)	68,339
Unemployment rate 2018	2.4%
Total employees	37922
Poverty rate	17.7%
Median Household Income (estimate)	\$45,403

(source ACS 5-year estimate)

3.3 Business

The city of Eau Claire has been developing and expanding economic and business opportunities. City initiatives to increase business activity as well as gain local tourists have been set in place in recent years to make the city a more widely recognized urban area in the Midwest.

- In 2002, the City of Eau Claire started the North Barstow Redevelopment program and since then, new hotels, housing complexes, and multi-use buildings have opened, transforming the industrial area near the Chippewa River into a more urban and pedestrian-friendly area.
- The city also started Creative Economy Week in 2015 - a week of May with events like historic food tours and entrepreneurship panels to draw locals and tourists into downtown Eau Claire to see what makes the city unique and to celebrate a budding economic movement.

3.4 Transportation

As the seat of Eau Claire county, the city of Eau Claire shares many of the same transportation systems. Air travel, public transit, long-distance bus lines, and rail are all common modes of transportation for the city.

3.4.1 Airport

The Chippewa Valley Regional airport is the only airport that serves the city of Eau Claire. Through United Airlines, the only commercial line available in the CVRA, passengers can fly to and from Chicago O’Hare where they can then make a connecting flight to any domestic or international destination.

3.4.2 Public Transit

The Eau Claire Transit system has thirteen bus lines with various daily, monthly, and student passes and free wifi. The City of Eau Claire also has live GPS bus tracking available as an app as well as on its website for passengers who are waiting for their rides.

3.4.3 Major Highways

Interstate 94 runs south of Eau Claire and continues southeastward towards Milwaukee. Some other major expressways are U.S. Route 12, U.S. Route 53, Highway 29, Highway 37, Highway 85 and Highway 93.

Major City	Distance from Eau Claire	Time*
Milwaukee, WI	246 mi	3 h 40 min
Madison, WI	178 mi	2 h 46 min
Green Bay, WI	193 mi	2 h 56 min
Kenosha, WI	281 mi	4 h 48 min

(*driving time is assumed without traffic) (Source TravelMath.com)

3.4.4 Long-Distance Bus

The Greyhound Bus Line runs through Eau Claire from Minneapolis to Milwaukee via 1-94, and the Jefferson Lines Bus Service service has a stop in the city on the route from Minneapolis to Green Bay via Highway 29.

3.4.5 Rail

The railroad that passes through Eau Claire is the Union Pacific Railroad, which operated as a passenger train service until 1963. It is now a freight line, however the city plans to revive passenger service by 2030 as it was deemed a critical transportation option by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

3.5 Conclusion

As a developing urban hub in northern Wisconsin, Eau Claire has much to look forward to and growth opportunities to explore.

Strengths:

- The city spans both Eau Claire and Chippewa counties, making it an important and growing area for new business, homes, and other development opportunities.
- Thanks to the recent cultural revival, the city reaps the benefits of tourists coming to explore festivals and concerts like the Eau Claire Music and Arts Festival, which was co-founded by Bon Iver's Justin Vernon.
- The health and technology industries in Eau Claire employ more than twenty percent of the population, with more and more job opportunities on the rise.

Weaknesses :

- The city's median annual income of \$45,403 is lower than the median income of the U.S.
- With 17.7% of the population living in poverty, the city of Eau Claire's poverty rate is three percent higher than the national average.
- With only the CVRA serving the Eau Claire area, air transportation to and from Eau Claire is limited.