

# Wisconsin Economic Development Corp: Viroqua receives \$250,000 state grant for expansion of downtown food co-op

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*Viroqua Food Co-op to double in size, provide more healthy food choices*

**MADISON** - The City of Viroqua has received a \$250,000 state grant to support the expansion of the Viroqua Food Co-op - a project expected to spur further development downtown.

The Community Development Investment Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) will help fund plans to double the size of the co-op's retail space to more than 9,200 square feet.

Expansion plans include wider aisles, additional indoor and outdoor seating, more checkout lanes, an expanded parking lot and a multipurpose educational area.

Work is now underway on the \$7 million project, which is expected to be completed by July 2018.

"The Viroqua Food Co-op is a focal point of downtown that not only provides a variety of healthy food choices to its 3,700 members, but also has become a gathering place for the community," said Mark R. Hogan, secretary and CEO of WEDC, the state's lead economic development organization. "WEDC is pleased to be one of the many partners who are helping to make this expansion a reality."

"With the expansion of the Viroqua Food Co-op, there is an opportunity for growth through increased employment in the area as well as through expanded

opportunities for the organic farmers to supply their product to their store,” said Viroqua Mayor Larry P. Fanta. “The Viroqua Food Co-op has a strong alignment within the community and the City is happy to share in its vision for a growing, vibrant economy.”

“The Viroqua Food Co-op has become an essential part of life here for many folks,” said Jan Rasikas, the co-op’s general manager. “Every step we take to provide healthy food choices to our families will take us closer to our mission of healthy individuals, a healthy community and a healthy planet.

Rasikas added that WEDC’s grant would allow the co-op to increase its expansion beyond what traditional financing would allow. “This allows us to expand our building in a way that will last at least 10 more years, similar to our relocation and expansion in 2005. This is the best way to spend our collective commonwealth and keep those dollars right here supporting our local food economy.”

The Viroqua Food Co-op opened in a small rented storefront in 1995 as a natural food-buying club organized by a small group of individuals who worked together to provide their families with healthy foods. In 1999, the co-op renovated and expanded its retail space to 920 square feet. In 2009, the co-op opened a new 4,400-square-foot retail store at [609 N. Main St.](#), its current location.

The expansion is expected to allow for ease of shopping, increase customer satisfaction, and bring in new owner-members that may have previously shopped elsewhere because the current store is at capacity.

The project will feature a significantly larger full-size deli; a bakery with made-from-scratch baked goods and a greater selection of wheat-free goods; and a meat department with room for meat processing, and greater selection of meat and seafood.

The expansion will provide more fresh and healthy food options in a rural community with limited grocery options.

Nora R. Schmidt, executive director of the Viroqua Chamber Main Street, noted that the co-op and the local foods movement are major economic development drivers for the region.

“The expansion will create more opportunities and allow the co-op to further

diversify the services and products that they are able to offer,” Schmidt said. “The Viroqua Chamber Main Street is thrilled that the co-op’s membership with our organization connected them to these resources. The Viroqua Chamber Main Street works closely with the WEDC via the Wisconsin Main Street program whose grant opportunities have funded several economic development efforts in Viroqua in 2017.”

WEDC’s Community Development Investment Grant Program supports community development and redevelopment efforts, primarily in downtown areas. Awards are based on the ability of applicants to demonstrate the impact of the proposed project, including public and private partnership development, financial need, and use of sustainable downtown development practices.

“This project is an example of the many ways in which WEDC works with communities throughout Wisconsin to revitalize their business districts,” Hogan added. “Our community development programs are crucial because a vibrant downtown is a major factor in a community’s overall economic vitality.”

Since the program’s inception in 2013, WEDC has awarded \$13 million in Community Development Investment Grants for projects expected to generate more than \$93 million in capital investments statewide.