



NEWS RELEASE

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March Economic Trends report for metro Milwaukee shows improvement, but recovery far from complete

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MILWAUKEE – Business activity indicators for the metro area trended upward in March as six of 22 available indicators improved over year-ago levels, according to a monthly report by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC.) March’s total is up from the four positive indicators registered in February.

“Renewed business optimism as well as an improving economic trend among local indicators suggest continuing movement toward a fuller recovery,” said Bret Mayborne, the MMAC’s economic research director. “Nonetheless, getting back to the relative prosperity we were experiencing prior to the pandemic will likely take some time, as the metro area’s employment base still needs to add back over 50,000 jobs to reach pre-downturn levels.”

Highlights of the data include:

- Metro area jobs averaged 808,600 in March, down 6.2% from year-ago levels. March’s decline ranks smaller than the 7% decrease posted in February and marks the smallest year-over-year decline recorded in the pandemic downturn.
- All 10 major industry sectors posted year-over-year job declines in March. As has been the case throughout this recession the leisure & hospitality (down 23.1%) posted the largest percentage job decline. Conversely the professional & business services sector posted the smallest decrease, down 1% or roughly 1,200 jobs vs. one year ago.
- The metro area’s seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate for March stood at 5.2%, matching February’s rate but 1.5 percentage points higher than one year ago. Wisconsin’s March rate ranked lower at 4.8% while the U.S. rate ranked higher (6.2%).
- The number of unemployed continues to post double-digit increases over year-ago levels. Unemployed numbered 42,000 in March, up 42.9% from one year ago.
- Jobs in manufacturing numbered 113,300 in March, down 4% from one year ago. March’s percentage decline matches that posted in both January and February.

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- The length of the average workweek for manufacturing production workers recovered from a weak February total. The workweek length for such workers rose 4.2% in March vs. one year ago (to 41.8 hours) recovering from the 1.5% decline posted in February. March worker earnings indicators were also positive. Average weekly earnings for such workers increased 7.7% (to \$990) while average hourly earnings rose 3.4% (to \$23.68).
- Air passenger totals at Mitchell International rose against year-ago levels for the first time in 13 months. March's 7.5% increase (to 335,540) is due in part to early sharp declines in passenger levels on the leading edge of the pandemic one year ago and a notable increase over February levels (up 85%).
- Metro area new-car registrations for March fell 4.9% from one year ago.
- The trend in local housing and real estate indicators was mixed in March. Metro area existing homes sold posted a small decline from year-ago levels, down 1%. Mortgages recorded in Milwaukee County continued to register large year-over-year gains, up 63.6% in March to 4,228.

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Note

Seasonally unadjusted data is used in this analysis thus month-over-month job changes may be due to seasonal effects. A truer month-to-month trend is captured in seasonally adjusted data. Unfortunately for most metro areas the breadth of employment and unemployment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is almost exclusively released in not seasonally adjusted form. Total nonfarm employment is available as a seasonally adjusted series for the metro area.

The seasonally adjusted series showed a loss of 112,400 jobs in April 2020 (vs. March), the beginning of the Covid-19 recession. Since that time, the local economy added back 59,300 jobs cumulatively in the month-over-month record over the May 2020 to March 2021 period or 53% of the initial loss.

Statistical table attached.

Metropolitan Milwaukee Business Indicators

March 2021

	Month	Current month	Previous month	Year ago	% chg. from yr. ago	% chg. prev. month	% chg. year to date (1)
ESTABLISHMENT DATA							
Total nonfarm payroll employment (000)	Mar-21	808.6	805.7	861.8	-6.2%	0.4%	-6.8%
Construction, mining & natural res. (000)	Mar-21	29.0	25.0	31.8	-8.8%	16.0%	-14.7%
Manufacturing (000)	Mar-21	113.3	113.4	118.0	-4.0%	-0.1%	-4.0%
Trade, transportation, & utilities (000)	Mar-21	139.1	139.6	144.1	-3.5%	-0.4%	-3.4%
Information (000)	Mar-21	12.2	12.2	13.2	-7.6%	0.0%	-7.8%
Financial activities (000)	Mar-21	48.0	48.5	50.7	-5.3%	-1.0%	-4.0%
Professional & business services (000)	Mar-21	117.9	119.0	119.1	-1.0%	-0.9%	-2.5%
Education & health services (000)	Mar-21	166.4	165.9	174.9	-4.9%	0.3%	-5.4%
Leisure & hospitality (000)	Mar-21	59.6	58.7	77.5	-23.1%	1.5%	-25.1%
Other services, exc. public (000)	Mar-21	44.6	44.4	46.2	-3.5%	0.5%	-4.2%
Government (000)	Mar-21	78.5	79.0	86.3	-9.0%	-0.6%	-8.8%
LABOR FORCE DATA							
Civilian labor force (000)	Mar-21	799.7	797.9	799.5	0.0%	0.2%	-1.1%
Employed (000)	Mar-21	757.7	756.2	770.1	-1.6%	0.2%	-2.8%
Unemployed (000)	Mar-21	42.0	41.7	29.4	42.9%	0.7%	47.4%
Unemployment rate							
Metro Milwaukee	Mar-21	5.2%	5.2%	3.7%	1.5(4)	0.0(4)	1.7(4)
Wisconsin	Mar-21	4.8%	4.9%	3.8%	1.0(4)	-0.1(4)	1.1(4)
United States	Mar-21	6.2%	6.6%	4.5%	1.7(4)	-0.4(4)	2.4(4)
New unemployment compensation claims	Mar-21	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
HOURS & EARNINGS (mfg. production workers)							
Avg. weekly hours (manuf.)	Mar-21	41.8	40.5	40.1	4.2%	3.2%	1.6%
Avg. weekly earnings (2)	Mar-21	\$989.82	\$962.69	\$918.69	7.7%	2.8%	7.0%
Avg. hourly earnings (2)	Mar-21	\$23.68	\$23.77	\$22.91	3.4%	-0.4%	5.2%
HOUSING & REAL ESTATE							
Existing homes sold	Mar-21	1,264	903	1,277	-1.0%	40.0%	2.3%
Mortgages (number) (3)	Mar-21	4,228	3,570	2,585	63.6%	18.4%	61.9%
TRANSPORTATION							
Airport passengers	Mar-21	335,540	181,359	312,064	7.5%	85.0%	-46.6%
New-car registrations	Mar-21	1,208	749	1,270	-4.9%	61.3%	-7.7%
OTHER INDICATORS (latest available)							
Consumer price index (1982-84=100)							
United States (CPI-U)	Mar-21	264.877	263.014	258.115	2.6%	0.7%	1.9%

Notes: (1) The average or cumulative figure year-to-date vs. the same total one year ago. (2) Not adjusted for inflation. (3) Milwaukee County only. (4) Percentage point change.

Figures are not seasonally adjusted except where indicated (SA).

Figures are for metro Milwaukee (Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington & Waukesha counties) except where indicated.

Sources: Wisconsin Dept. of Workforce Development, Multiple Listing Service, Milwaukee County Register of Deeds Office, Mitchell International Airport, Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation, and U.S. Dept. of Labor