



NEWS RELEASE

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March Economic Trends

May 6, 2019 – Lackluster activity marked metro Milwaukee economic indicators in March as 10 of 23 indicators tracked monthly by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) improved from year-ago levels. March’s aggregate is down from February’s 12 positive indicators.

“March marks the second time in four months that less than half of the indicators tracked were upward pointing,” said Bret Mayborne, the MMAC’s economic research director. “This follows a period of 82 consecutive months in which a majority of local indicators pointed upward.”

Highlights of the report include:

- Nonfarm employment growth was small in March, posting a net addition of 1,000 jobs on a year-over-year basis. March’s 0.1% gain was down from the 0.6% increase registered in February (over February 2018).
- By major industry sector, March’s job trend was a mixed bag. While five of ten major sectors posted year-over-year gains, two were unchanged, while three saw employment declines in this 12-month period.
- Both local housing and real estate indicators tracked by the MMAC registered similar March declines. Existing home sales in the metro area fell 14.9% vs. year-ago levels while mortgages recorded in Milwaukee County decreased 14.8% over the same time period.

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MMAC Monthly Economic Trends – Page 2

Milwaukee's tight labor market may be contributing to slower overall job growth. The metro area's seasonally unadjusted jobless rate fell to 3.2% in March, down 0.3% percentage points from its year-ago levels. March's local unemployment rate ranks below both the state's 3.3% and the nation's 3.9% rates.

Other unemployment indicators were mixed. While the number of unemployed fell 8.6% (vs. March 2018), to 26,500, the number of new unemployment compensation claims rose 4.6%, to 2,871, following February's 13.4% increase – the first back-to-back increases in this indicator in almost six years (since June 2013).

Indicators: March 2019 vs. March 2018

Nonfarm employment levels in the metro area averaged 868,400 in March, up slightly (+0.1%) from year-ago levels. The growth trend in jobs has weakened over 2019's first three months, with January's 0.7% and February's 0.6% year-over-year gains coming in prior months.

March employment increases were posted in five of ten major industry sectors. The other services and manufacturing sectors led the way with year-over-year gains of 1.3% and 1% respectively. Job gains were also posted in the education & health services (up 0.9%), financial activities (up 0.8%), and leisure & hospitality (up 0.6%) sectors. Two other sectors – trade, transportation & utilities and government – saw unchanged job levels.

Job losses hit in three major industry sectors. The construction, mining & natural resources sector posted the largest loss in percentage terms with a 2.3% decrease. The professional & business services (down 1.8%), and information (down 1.5%) sectors also posted employment declines.

Among manufacturing production worker indicators, the length of the average workweek rose 2.4% in March, to 42.9 hours – this indicator's fourth consecutive year-over-year increase. Average weekly earnings for such workers fell marginally to \$966, while average hourly earnings decreased at a 2.3% pace to \$22.51.

Both Milwaukee area housing and real estate indicators tracked by the MMAC pointed downward in March. Existing home sales for the metro area fell 14.9%, to 1,150, this indicator's seventh consecutive year-over-year decline. Mortgages recorded in Milwaukee County posted a 14.8% decrease (to 1,647), coming on the heels of February's 11.3% gain (vs. one year ago).

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MMAC Monthly Economic Trends – Page 3

New-car registrations in the metro area rose 16.1% in March over year-ago levels, to 1,691. March's increase marks this indicator's first gain in nine months. Air passengers using Mitchell International Airport numbered 663,804 in March, down 3.8% from year-ago levels.

Other Indicators (latest available)

Consumer prices nationally, as measured by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Consumers (CPI-U), rose 1.9% in March (vs. March, 2018) to 254.202 (1981-84=100). As of 2018's first half, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics no longer produces a consumer price index for the Milwaukee area.

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Statistical table attached.

Metropolitan Milwaukee Business Indicators

March, 2019

	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-19	868.4	869.4	867.4	0.1%	-0.1%	0.5%
Construction, mining & natural res. (000)	Mar-19	29.4	29.3	30.1	-2.3%	0.3%	-0.6%
Manufacturing (000)	Mar-19	118.8	118.2	117.6	1.0%	0.5%	0.9%
Trade, transportation, & utilities (000)	Mar-19	146.0	146.6	146.0	0.0%	-0.4%	0.5%
Information (000)	Mar-19	13.3	13.3	13.5	-1.5%	0.0%	-1.2%
Financial activities (000)	Mar-19	50.9	50.9	50.5	0.8%	0.0%	1.3%
Professional & business services (000)	Mar-19	124.2	123.5	126.5	-1.8%	0.6%	-2.8%
Education & health services (000)	Mar-19	173.5	175.5	172.0	0.9%	-1.1%	2.0%
Leisure & hospitality (000)	Mar-19	78.4	78.9	77.9	0.6%	-0.6%	1.2%
Other services, exc. public (000)	Mar-19	47.2	46.9	46.6	1.3%	0.6%	1.9%
Government (000)	Mar-19	86.7	86.3	86.7	0.0%	0.5%	0.3%
LABOR FORCE DATA							
Civilian labor force (000)	Mar-19	825.9	829.2	829.0	-0.4%	-0.4%	-0.4%
Employed (000)	Mar-19	799.5	802.9	800.0	-0.1%	-0.4%	-0.1%
Unemployed (000)	Mar-19	26.5	26.3	29.0	-8.6%	0.8%	-6.5%
Unemployment rate							
Metro Milwaukee	Mar-19	3.2%	3.2%	3.5%	-0.3(4)	0.0(4)	-0.2(4)
Wisconsin	Mar-19	3.3%	3.3%	3.6%	-0.3(4)	0.0(4)	-0.2(4)
United States	Mar-19	3.9%	4.1%	4.1%	-0.2(4)	-0.2(4)	-0.2(4)
New unemployment compensation claims	Mar-19	2,871	3,476	2,744	4.6%	-17.4%	4.2%
HOURS & EARNINGS (mfg. production workers)							
Avg. weekly hours (manuf.)	Mar-19	42.9	42.9	41.9	2.4%	0.0%	2.4%
Avg. weekly earnings (2)	Mar-19	\$965.68	\$980.69	\$965.80	0.0%	-1.5%	-0.1%
Avg. hourly earnings (2)	Mar-19	\$22.51	\$22.86	\$23.05	-2.3%	-1.5%	-2.4%
HOUSING & REAL ESTATE							
Existing homes sold	Mar-19	1,150	864	1,352	-14.9%	33.1%	-7.5%
Mortgages (number) (3)	Mar-19	1,647	1,595	1,933	-14.8%	3.3%	-11.5%
TRANSPORTATION							
Airport passengers	Mar-19	663,804	500,470	690,383	-3.8%	32.6%	6.1%
New-car registrations	Mar-19	1,691	813	1,456	16.1%	108.0%	-4.0%
OTHER INDICATORS (latest available)							
Consumer price index (1982-84=100)							
United States (CPI-U)	Mar-19	254.202	252.776	249.554	1.9%	0.6%	1.6%

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