

Reconnecting Massachusetts' Gateway Cities **City Profile: Fitchburg**

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This profile provides key economic and demographic trends faced by Fitchburg relating to the MassINC / Brookings Institution report "Reconnecting Massachusetts' Gateway Cities: Lessons Learned and an Agenda for Renewal." To read the entire report, see www.massinc.org or www.brookings.edu/metro/massgateways.htm.

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In recent years, Fitchburg has lost jobs faster than Greater Boston

The City of Fitchburg trailed Greater Boston between 2001 and 2005 on job growth, shedding 1,100 jobs, a 7.7 percent loss, compared to Greater Boston's 6.0 percent, 99,000-job loss over the same timeframe. Additional losses in Fitchburg's surrounding towns gave the entire Fitchburg region a 1,900-job loss.

Since 1960, the city has lost three quarters its manufacturing jobs

From 1960 to 2000, Fitchburg lost 75 percent of its manufacturing employment, or nearly 7,700 jobs, while Greater Boston lost 138,000 manufacturing jobs—a 48 percent loss

More recently, though, Fitchburg has added knowledge industry employment

Between 2001 and 2005, the City of Fitchburg generated a 27.5 percent increase in knowledge industry jobs, the second highest percentage increase of all the Gateways, while the Fitchburg region recorded a 7.7 percent increase. This respectful gain of 230 higher-paying jobs for the city and nearly 160 jobs for the region contrasts with the 7.9 percent, 38,000-job loss in Greater Boston.

Furthermore, technology firms are continuing to locate there

Fitchburg was home to 9 technology firms in 1991; by 2004 that figure had doubled to 18 such firms according to CorpTech data. Likewise, the Fitchburg region added 33 tech firms, bringing its total up from 15 to 48. This significant percentage increase for Fitchburg and its surrounding towns—like most other Gateway Cities and regions—is overshadowed by the enormous gains in Greater Boston, where almost 1,600 new tech firms were established. In fact, Greater Boston increased its share of the state's tech firms from 53 to 60 percent in the 13-year period.

Nevertheless, Fitchburg's per capita income growth is relatively weak

Fitchburg's real per capita income growth of 23.8 percent between 1980 and 2000 trailed the Gateway City average of 24.7 percent and was less than half that of Greater Boston's 59.1 percent gain. The Fitchburg region fared somewhat better, with income growth of 36.1 percent.

And less than one in six adults in the city holds a bachelor's degree

At just 15.4 percent, the share of Fitchburg's 25-and-older population that holds at least a bachelor's degree trails Greater Boston's 41.6 percent figure by more than 25 percentage points. Even Fitchburg's regional mark of 19.5 percent is less than half of Greater Boston's attainment rate.

Meanwhile, Fitchburg's population is growing again

While Fitchburg's 5.1 percent population loss in the 1990s contrasted sharply with Greater Boston's 4.5 percent increase, since 2000 the tables have turned: Fitchburg has returned to modest growth, and its 2.4 percent gain between 2000 and 2005 bettered the 1.4 percent population loss in Greater Boston.

Foreign-born residents make up an increasing share of the city's population

Fitchburg, like many of the other Gateway Cities, saw its foreign-born resident share increase in the 1990s. The city's nearly 4-point gain—from 11.6 to 15.2 percent—was significant, although the city still trails Greater Boston's 18.8 percent mark.

Housing prices in Fitchburg are rapidly appreciating yet remain relatively affordable

From 2000 to 2005, real median home prices in the City of Fitchburg rose 101 percent—nearly three times Greater Boston's 37 percent increase. Yet even with the rapid appreciation, the median home price of \$210,000 in Fitchburg remains much more affordable than the \$429,000 price tag in Greater Boston.

Moreover, housing unit production is rising

According to Census building permit data, Fitchburg is increasing its production of housing units. The city's 156-permit annual average between 2003 and 2005 represented a 50 percent jump over the 104-permit average in the years 2000 to 2002, compared to a 55 percent increase for Greater Boston.