

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION METROPOLITAN POLICY PROGRAM

# Asheville: Sustainable, Robust, and Inclusive Growth in the 21st Century

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Downtown Association Speaker Series  
Asheville, North Carolina  
July 3, 2007

*Redefining the challenges facing  
metropolitan America and promoting  
innovative solutions to help  
communities grow in more inclusive,  
competitive, and sustainable ways.*



## Basic tenets:

1. The nation is changing rapidly. We are metro.
2. How you grow physically affects how you grow economically. Quality of place matters.
3. Innovations abound! Asheville has done so much already but lessons from others never hurt.





The nation will continue to grow by leaps and bounds over the next couple decades

- In 2030, about half of the buildings in which Americans live, work, and shop will have been built after 2000;
- Most of this growth will occur in the south and the west
- The Asheville metro is expected to grow by 42%.

*Where, what, and how will all this new growth be accommodated?*



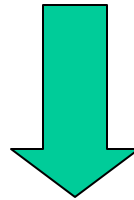
## Geographic Refresher – Metropolitan Asheville



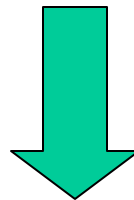


# Asheville: Sustainable, Robust, and Inclusive Growth in the 21st Century

**What are the major trends affecting metro  
areas today?**

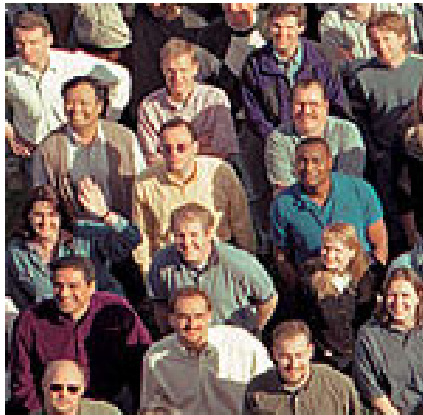


*What do these trends mean for Asheville's Quality of Place?*



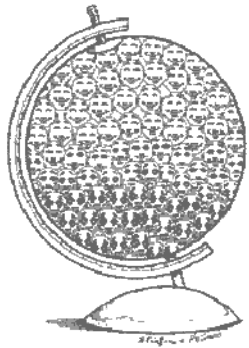
*How should Asheville grow in ways that are  
sustainable, inclusive, and economically robust?*

# Profound demographic, economic, social, and cultural forces are reshaping the nation



Demographically, the country is growing, aging, and diversifying.

Economically, the nation is being transformed by globalization, deindustrialization, and technological innovation.



Culturally, the nation is changing its attitude towards cities and suburban living.



These changes are presenting new opportunities to attract new kinds of households.

**Household sizes are smaller**

**More childless couples, immigrants, empty nesters, elderly**

**More and smaller housing units**

**Greater relevance than ever is being put on attracting highly educated and skilled workers**

***Place matters!***





**Single family**



**Apartments for rent**



**Assisted living**



**Big box**

This growing and diverse population demands a range of choices in housing, neighborhoods, shopping, and transportation

**Town centers**



**Automobile**



**Non-motorized**



**Rail**





The problem is that many places are not equipped to respond to these changes



**Lack of housing types**



**Separated land use**



**Uneven metro growth**



**Automobile dominated**



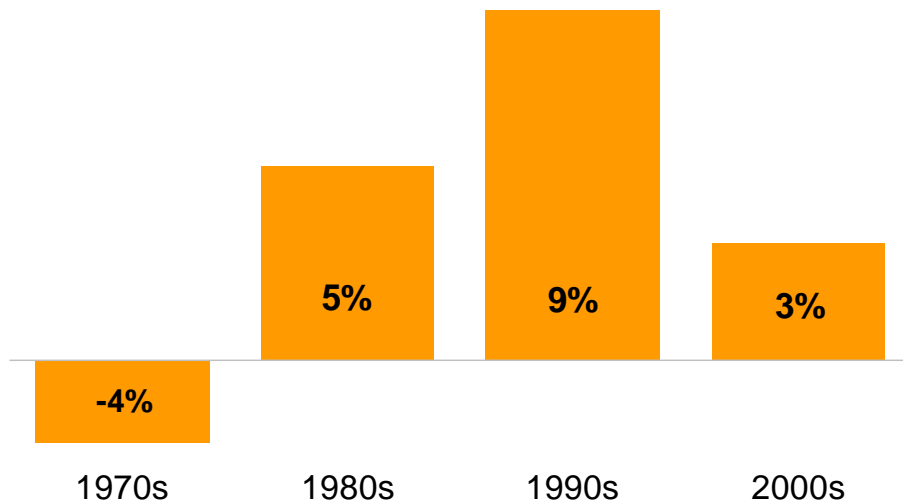
**Declining commercial corridors**

This matters because we know that the primary determinant for how a city grows is based on the metropolitan area it is in

Average city and metro area population change, by category, 1990-2000

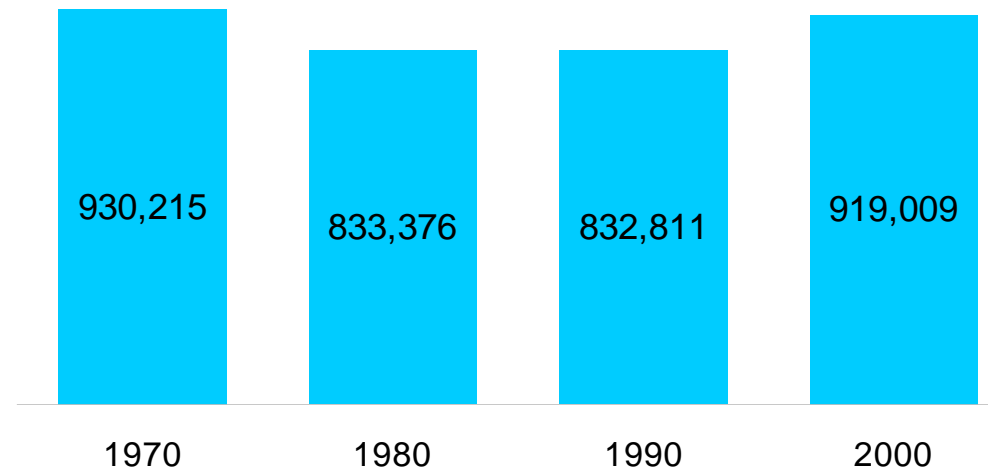
City Category	Number of Cities	City Population Change	Metro Population Change
Rapid Growth (over 20%)	18	31%	26%
Significant Growth (10 to 20%)	23	15%	22%
Moderate Growth (2 to 10%)	33	6%	13%
No Growth (-2 to 2%)	6	0%	11%
Loss (below -2%)	20	-7%	6%

Nationally, recent demographic and market changes have already led to a surge of population in cities and downtowns.



Population growth in 50 largest cities, 1970-2005

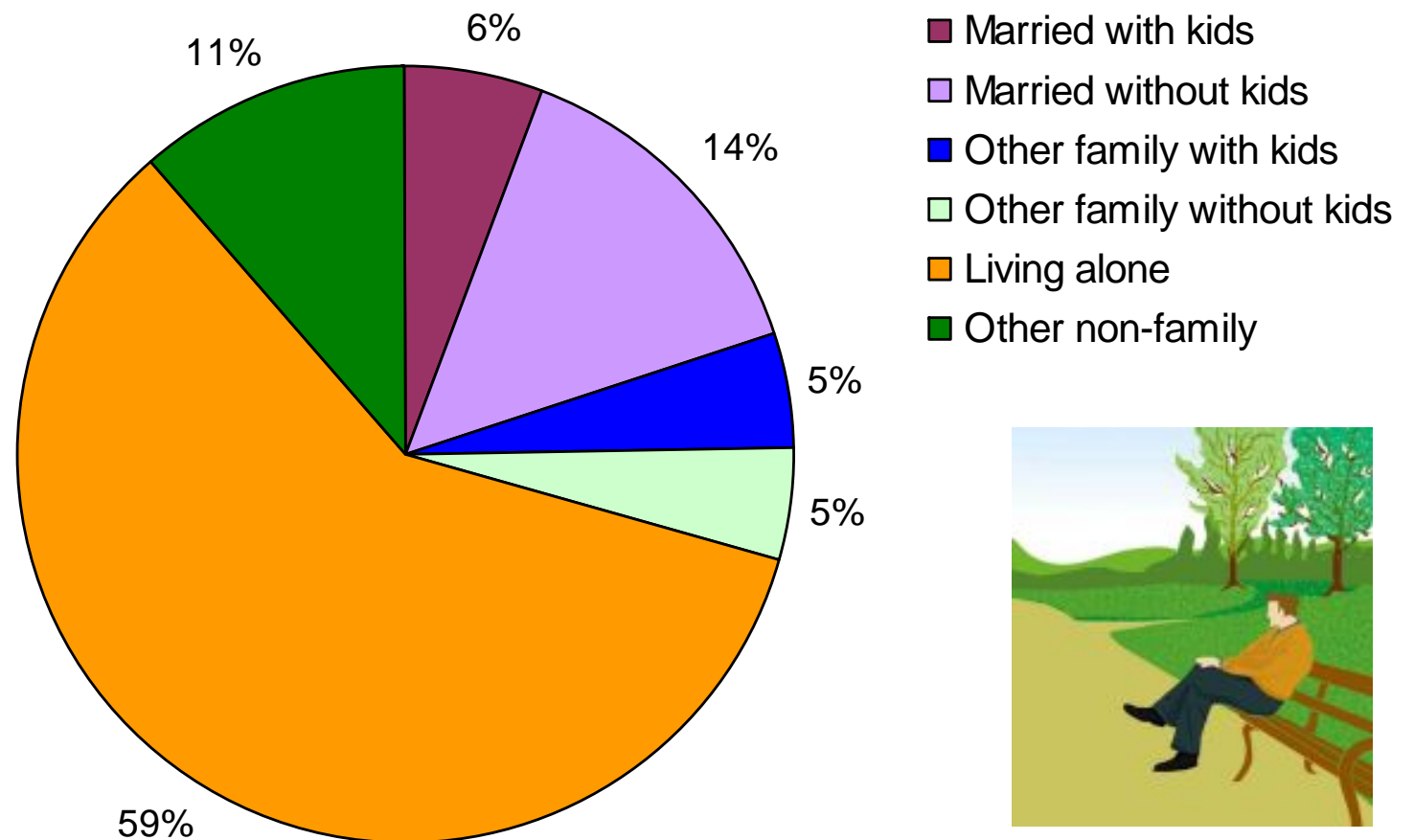
Total population, 45 U.S. downtowns, 1970-2000





The majority of downtowners in 2000 lived alone; the next largest group contained young couples without kids

Downtown  
households by  
type, 2000



## This urban resurgence has had major effects on transportation



**Transit ridership is up, especailly in cities where new rail lines have been constructed.**



**Non-recreation walking is up markedly, as is walking to school.**



**Downtowns with efficient, functioning transit systems are surging.**

## How does Asheville reflect these trends?

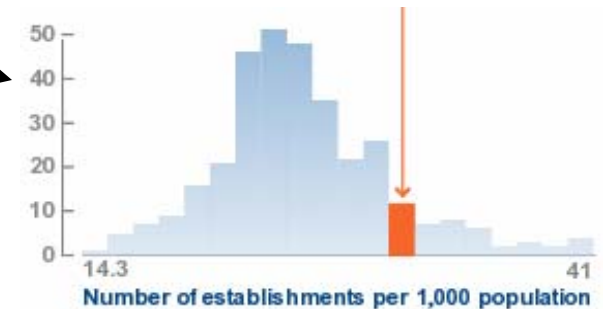
Percent of residents under 18: 21.8%  
(ranks 304<sup>th</sup> of 331)



Average household size: 2.3 (ranks 319<sup>th</sup>)



Establishments per capita: 30 (ranks 43<sup>rd</sup>)

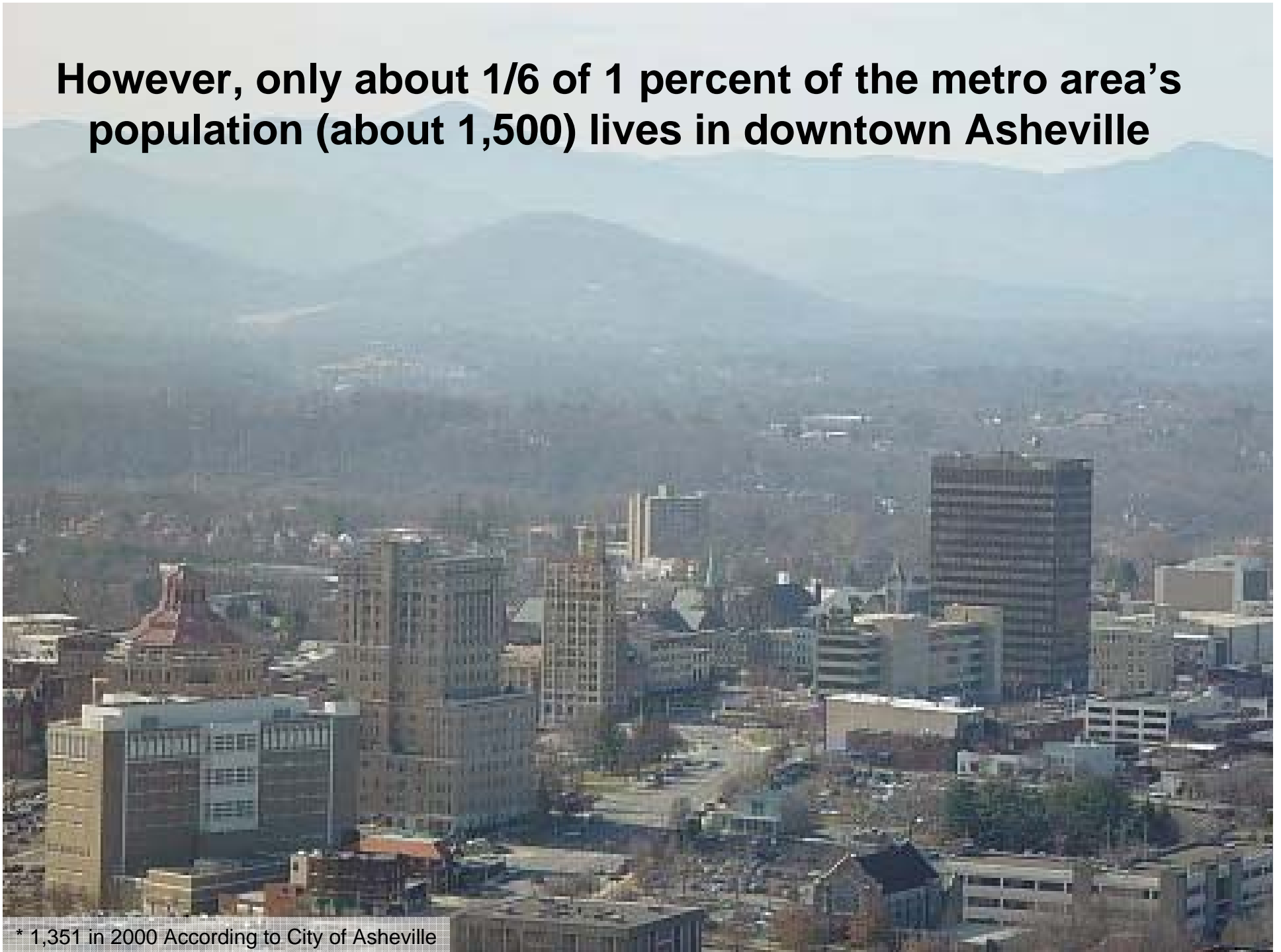


Restaurants per capita: 1 (ranks 26<sup>th</sup>)



*Ranks near the middle of the pack for most other indicators: education, income, poverty, unemployment*

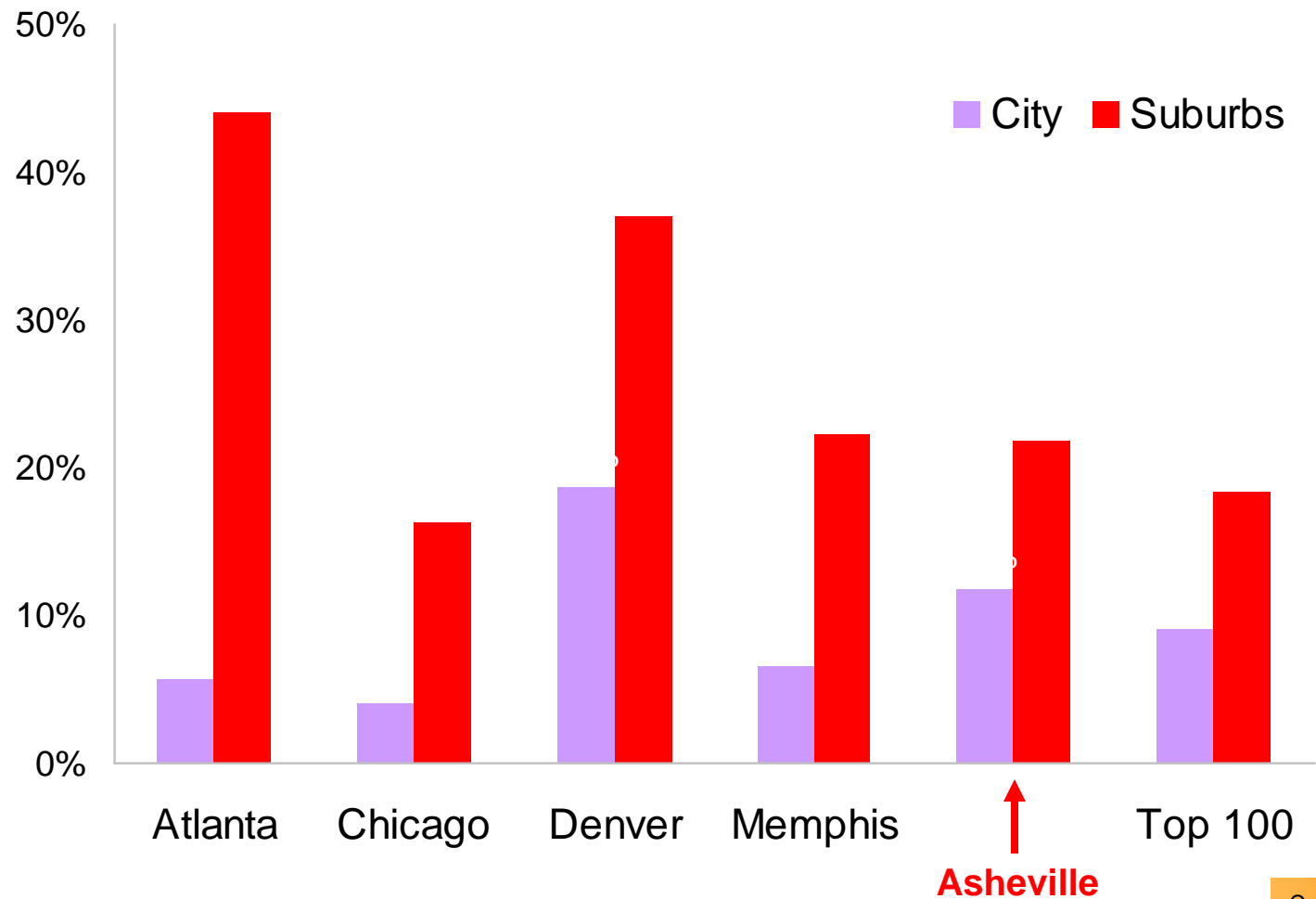
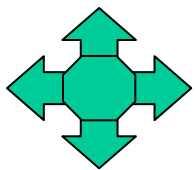
**However, only about 1/6 of 1 percent of the metro area's population (about 1,500) lives in downtown Asheville**



\* 1,351 in 2000 According to City of Asheville

In addition to the downtown renaissance, population is continuing to decentralize in nearly every U.S. metropolitan area

Selected cities and suburbs, population growth 1990-2000

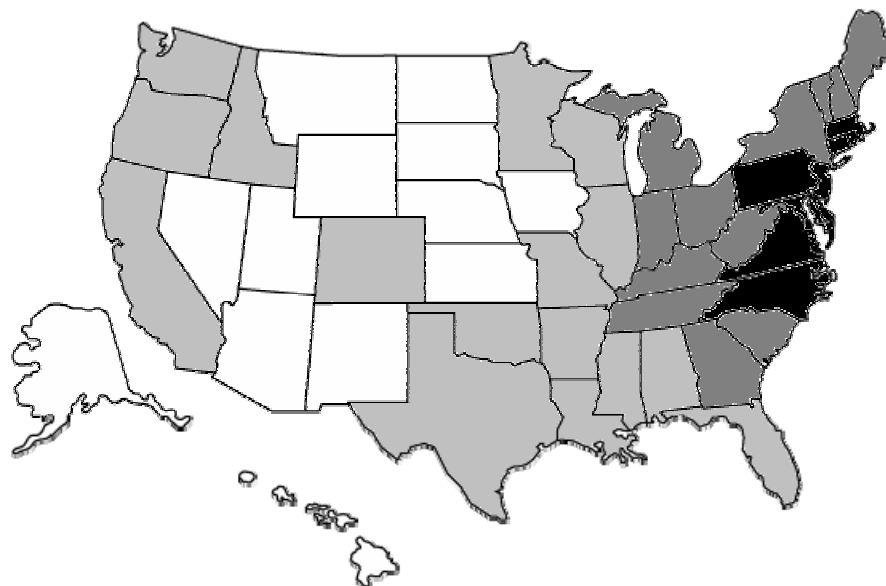


Source: Census

Context

From 1980 to 2000 the states with the highest rates of rural land loss were concentrated in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic

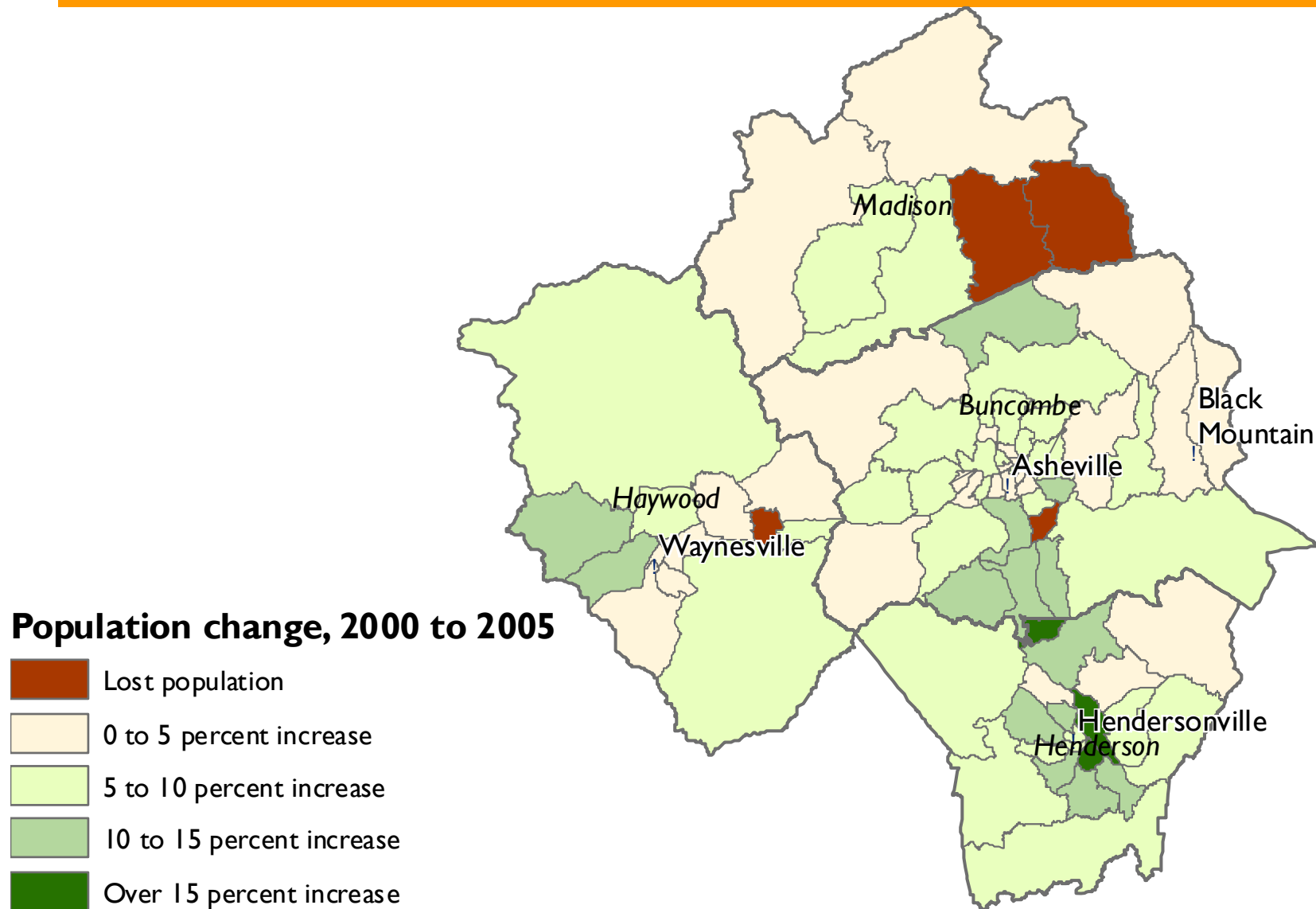
Loss in develop-  
able rural land,  
1980-2000



***Since 1980 only Texas lost more rural land than North Carolina in absolute numbers***

***Amazingly, the Asheville metro lost 115,000 acres – the entire state of Arizona lost 282,000.***

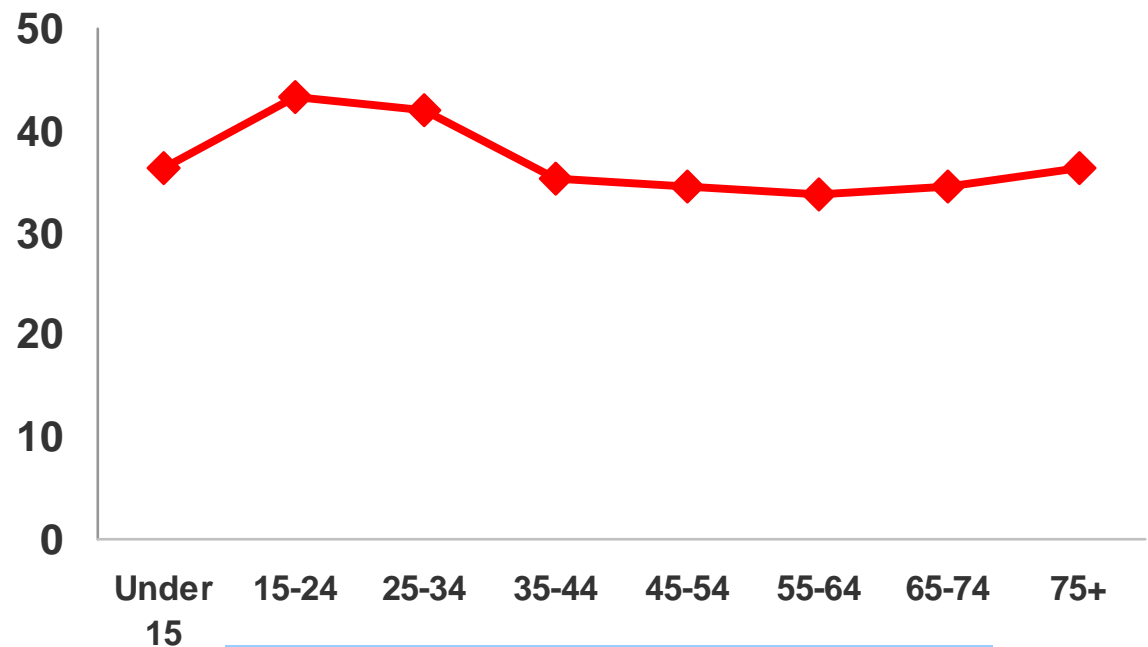
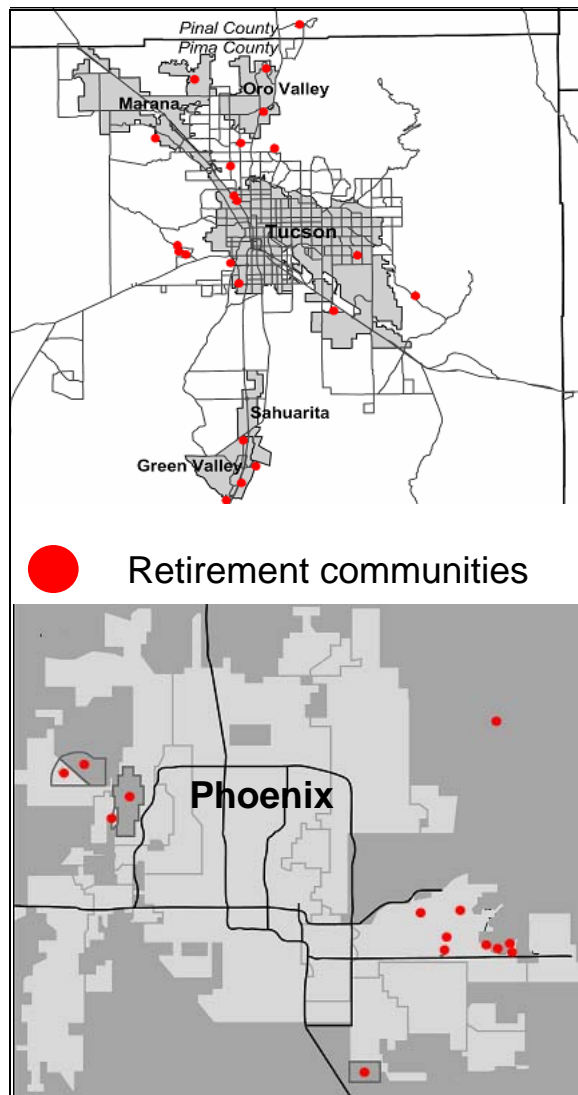
Most of the growth in the Asheville metro in recent years seems to be heading to the south, away from the core



Source: Census

Context

A “senior tsunami” of elderly residents appears to be choosing sub- and ex-urban areas in large numbers

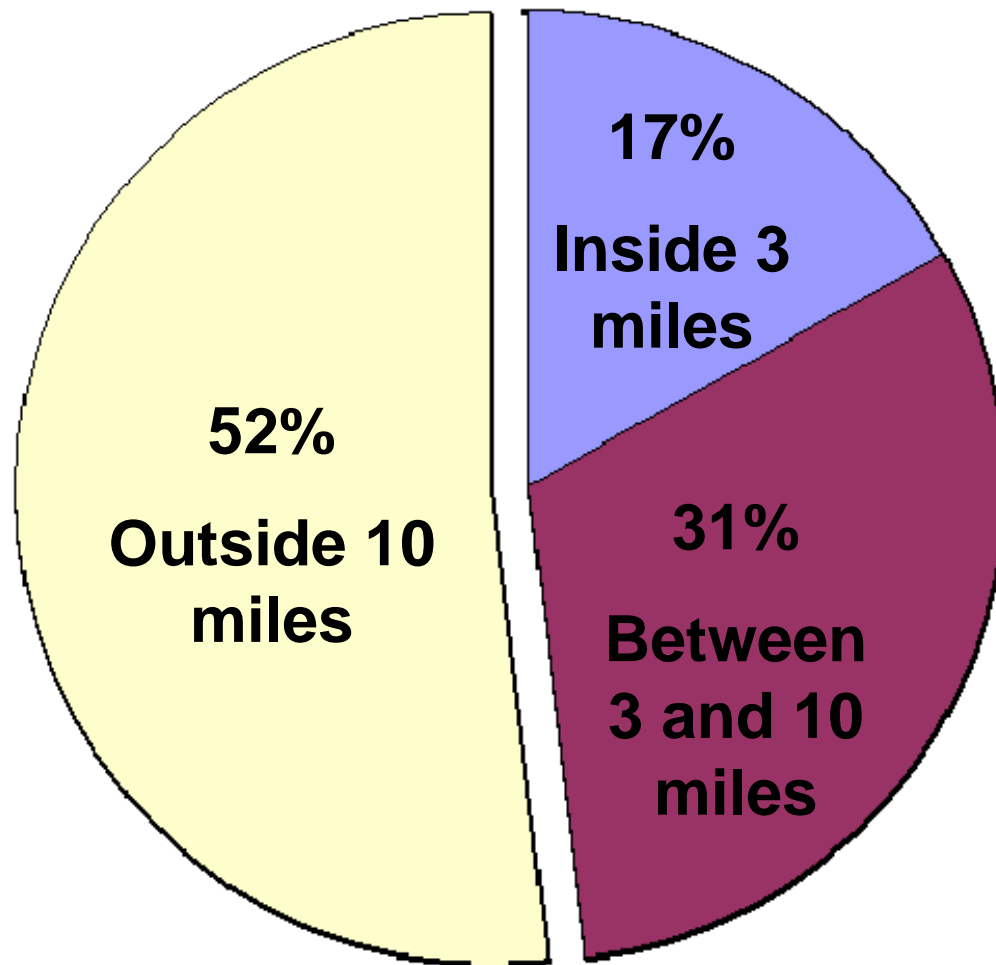


Percentage of Metropolitan Residents Residing in Central Cities by Age Group, 2000

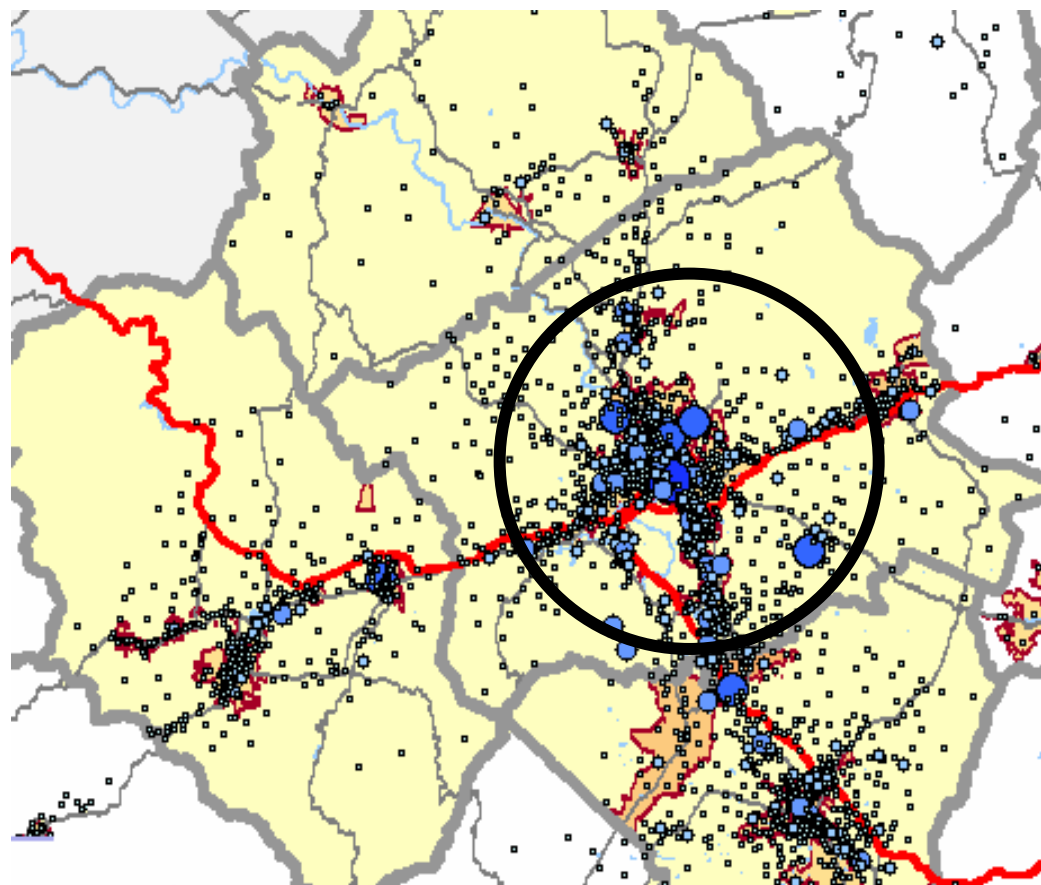


Over half of all jobs in large metropolitan areas are located more than 10 miles outside of downtowns

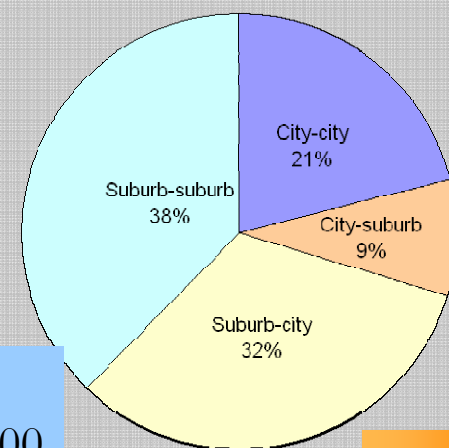
Share of jobs within 3-, 10-, and greater- than-10-mile radius of center, 2002



Fortunately for the Asheville metro, about 53 percent of jobs are within 10 miles of the core and commuting patterns are relatively balanced



Asheville metro commuting patterns, 2000



Context



## How does Asheville reflect larger transportation trends?

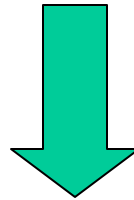
- A very large percentage of the roadway miles are high speed interstates and freeways
- VMT per capita in Asheville is twice as high as the nation
- Less than one-quarter of one percent of workers take transit (5% for nation)
- Percent who walk or “other” to work is twice as low as the nation (4.2%)
- Asheville has no rail service and ranks 262 out of 283 in bus volumes per capita



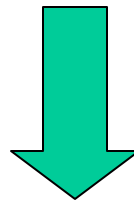


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**What do these trends mean for Asheville's Quality of Place?**



*How should Asheville grow in ways that are  
sustainable, inclusive, and economically robust?*

**While there is no single definition of quality of place, our working definition runs like this:**

***Quality of place refers to the bundle of amenities or qualities that make an area desirable (or undesirable)***





## **Economist Richard Florida defines quality of place as a three-dimensional package of attributes:**

1. “What’s there”—Built and natural amenities



2. “Who’s there”—A diversity of people

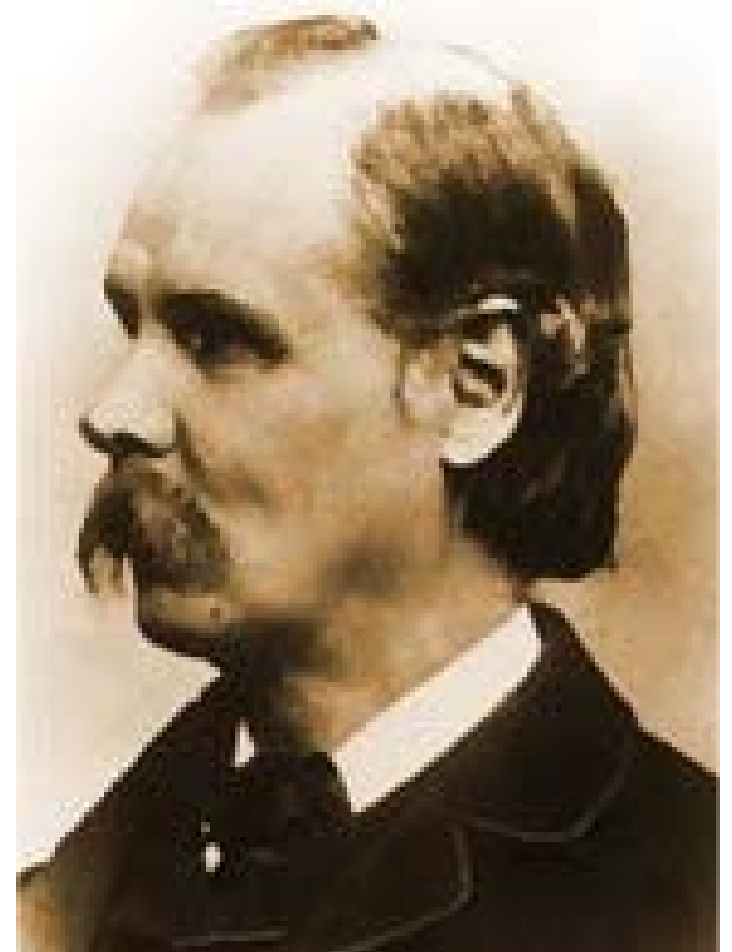


3. “What’s going on”—An assortment of cultural and entertainment activities





Adam Smith, "The Wealth of Nations," 1776



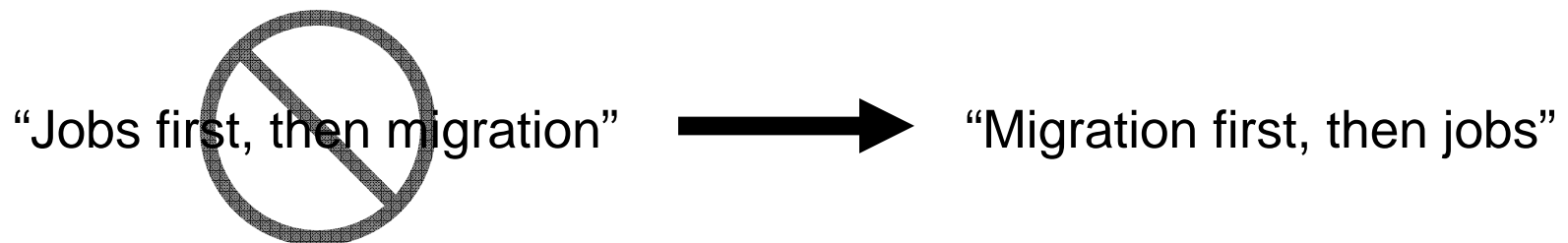
Alfred Marshall, "Principles of Economics," 1890

**In light of these theories, economists see quality of place as a sound economic development strategy**

**Experts agree that economic development must must be based on a place's unique strengths**

**While these theories appear to apply mainly to urban areas, they in fact are applicable in rural places, too**

***This implies a new theory of economic development:***



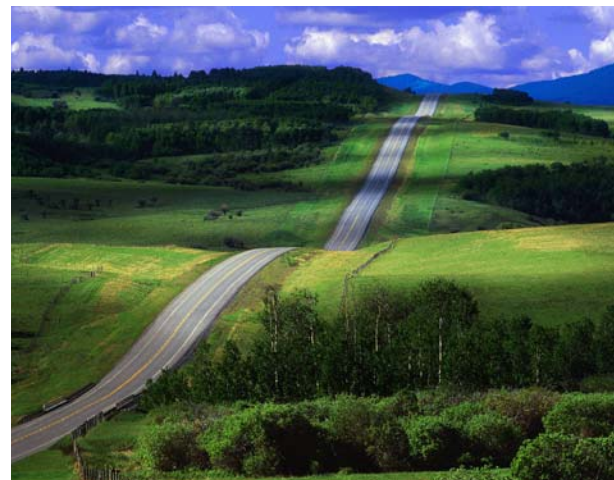


**But this is more than a nice idea: empirical evidence backs up the importance of quality of place for both urban and rural areas**

Quality of place matters in urban areas



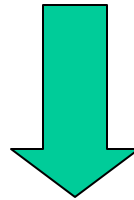
Quality of place matters in rural areas



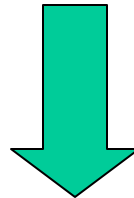


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**How should Asheville grow in ways that are sustainable, inclusive, and economically robust?**

# Five building blocks of healthy cities and metros

1



**Downtown**

2



**Neighborhoods**

3



**Corridors**

4



**Green Space**

5



**Waterfront**

# 1. Downtown

Instead of downtowns with:

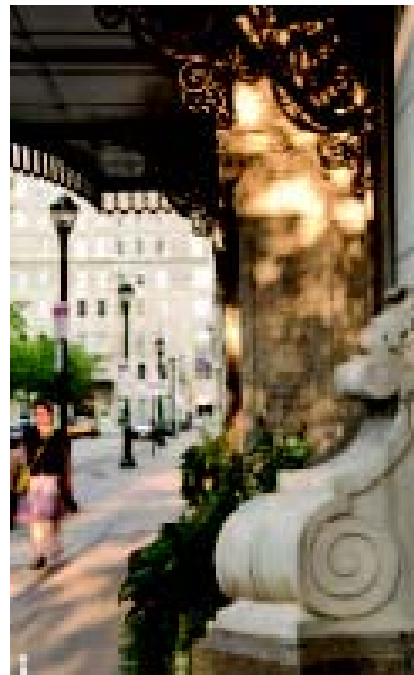
- Monolithic buildings
- Single destinations
- Sterile environments
- Densities comparable to suburban office districts



# 1. Downtown

Some places are densifying and diversifying:

- Living downtowns
- Higher density
- Entertainment
- Cultural destinations
- Strong design
- A new focus on schools





# Albuquerque is making long-term investments in its downtown

## The vision and investment:

- “Bury the box” design hides movie theater and large parking structure
- Private/public partnerships in infrastructure improvements
- A portion of property value increases goes to an affordable housing trust
- Mixed-income housing in the heart of downtown



A Vision

## The outcomes:

- A vibrant downtown with more housing, office, and retail options
- A pedestrian-friendly, walkable environment
- Increased economic diversity from continually expanding housing opportunities for all income groups
- Removed surface parking



Progress

# Chattanooga is pursuing more educational opportunities for families living in and around the downtown

- Chattanooga opened two magnet elementary schools in its downtown
- Schools are specifically designed to appeal to middle-class families living or working downtown
- Schools partner with UT-Chattanooga (also downtown) for curricula and staff development
- Today, Chattanooga has one of the largest shares of families with children among U.S. downtowns



Battle Academy



Brown Academy for  
Classical Studies

## 2. Neighborhoods

Instead of neighborhoods with:

- Enclaves of low-income housing and concentrated poverty

OR

- Standard middle class suburban housing

OR

- Exclusive neighborhoods of high-priced housing





## 2. Neighborhoods

**Some places are creating neighborhoods of choice:**

- **Mixed income housing**
- **Reconnecting into the street grid**
- **Strong design across all housing types**
- **Access to mainstream services**



# In St. Louis, the Vaughn high rises were transformed into a new mixed-income neighborhood of choice



Vaughn High Rises in 1995

- Four nine-story buildings
- 656 units
- Typical of 1950s-era, urban renewal public housing towers



Murphy Park Homes

- Townhouses, garden apartments and single-family homes
- 413 units
- “New Urbanist” design and “defensible space” technique



Jefferson Elementary

- Leverages \$5 million in corporate and philanthropic money
- Technologically advanced educational facilities
- New principal with wider control over teachers and curriculum

## 2. Neighborhoods

Instead of public services  
such as libraries:

- In stand alone buildings
- With singular activities
- Constructed with an institutional design
- Sited in areas difficult to access

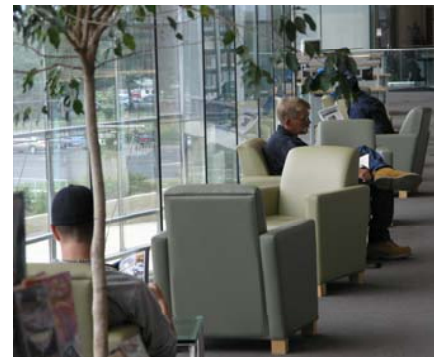




## 2. Neighborhoods

**Some are places are creating neighborhood centers**

- **Multiple public services in one building**
- **Strong iconic design**
- **Educational classes including computer training**
- **Mixed uses such as retail or cafes**
- **Free access to the internet**



# In London, the Idea Store created a new public center in a transitioning neighborhood



## The outcomes:

Motivated adjacent merchants to improve facades and signage

Significantly increased patrons, who receive new knowledge, services and training

New housing recently constructed nearby

Area has become a neighborhood focal point

## The vision and investment:

- Over 17,000 new CDs, books, and DVDs
- Daily periodicals
- Dedicated information library
- A cafe
- Free internet access
- State-of-the-art learning spaces and classrooms
- Spaces for teaching dance

### 3. Corridors

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Instead of corridors with:

- Low density, separated uses, suburban style development
- Poor design quality of buildings and signage
- Auto-dominated areas





### 3. Corridors

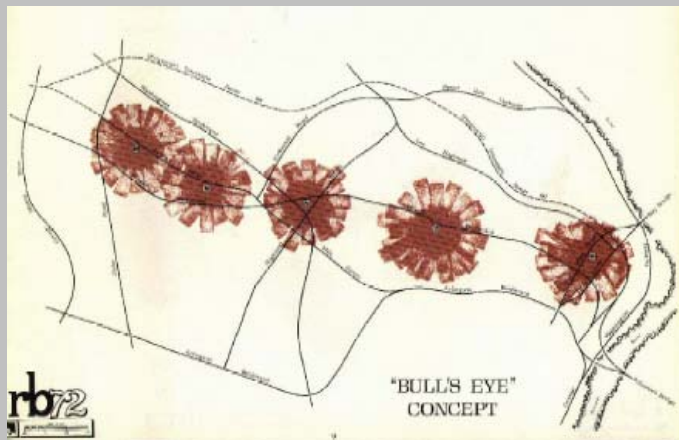
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**Some places are extending transit with:**

- **Clustered mixed-use development near stops**
- **Strong emphasis on design**
- **A focus on the pedestrian**
- **Increased connectivity between people and uses**
- **A range of modes beyond rail**



# Virginia's Arlington County fundamentally remade a troubled suburban corridor – and plans to do it again



## The vision and investment:

- In 1972, sector plans were created around each metro station to establish land use and development guidelines and ensure a mix of commercial residential and office uses



## The outcomes:

- The Rosslyn-Ballston corridor now contains 18,000 housing units and 14 million square feet of office space
- 73,000 jobs are located within a third of a mile from the corridor

## 4. Green Spaces

Instead of green spaces with:

- Standard maintenance
- Barren open space
- Limited activities





## 4. Green Spaces

Some places are “re-creating” their green:

- Strong emphasis on structured activities
- Activities linked to the range of demographics
- Removal of dark corners to increase visibility and safety
- Sculptures
- Wireless hot spots

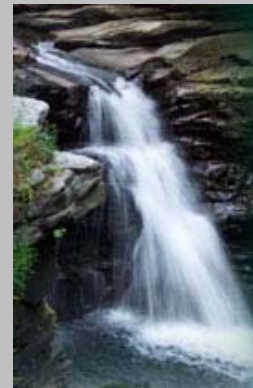


# Scranton reclaims its 165-acre Nay Aug Park

## **The vision and investment:**

Previously claimed by gang and criminal activities, the park was reclaimed:

- Razed decrepit park facilities or rehabilitated into a wildlife refuge or food stands
- New structured activities such as a children's playground, waterslides and a public theatre
- Improved trails, picnic areas, lookouts to the gorge and roaring brook



## **The outcomes:**

- Now a destination for thousands of visitors a year
- Housing values adjacent to the park increased significantly higher than the city average

## 5. Waterfront

Instead of waterfronts with:

- Outdated industrial uses and brownfields
- Large infrastructure disconnecting the waterfront from the city
- Limited pedestrian activity and connectivity





## 5. Waterfront

Places are reclaiming their waterfronts by:

- Removing infrastructure barriers
- Extending downtown
- Creating neighborhoods of choice
- Designing pedestrian-oriented corridors
- Activating green spaces



# Trenton is downsizing its highways to transform the city

New Jersey DOT evaluated the feasibility of converting Route 29 (which separated Trenton from the river) into an “urban boulevard”



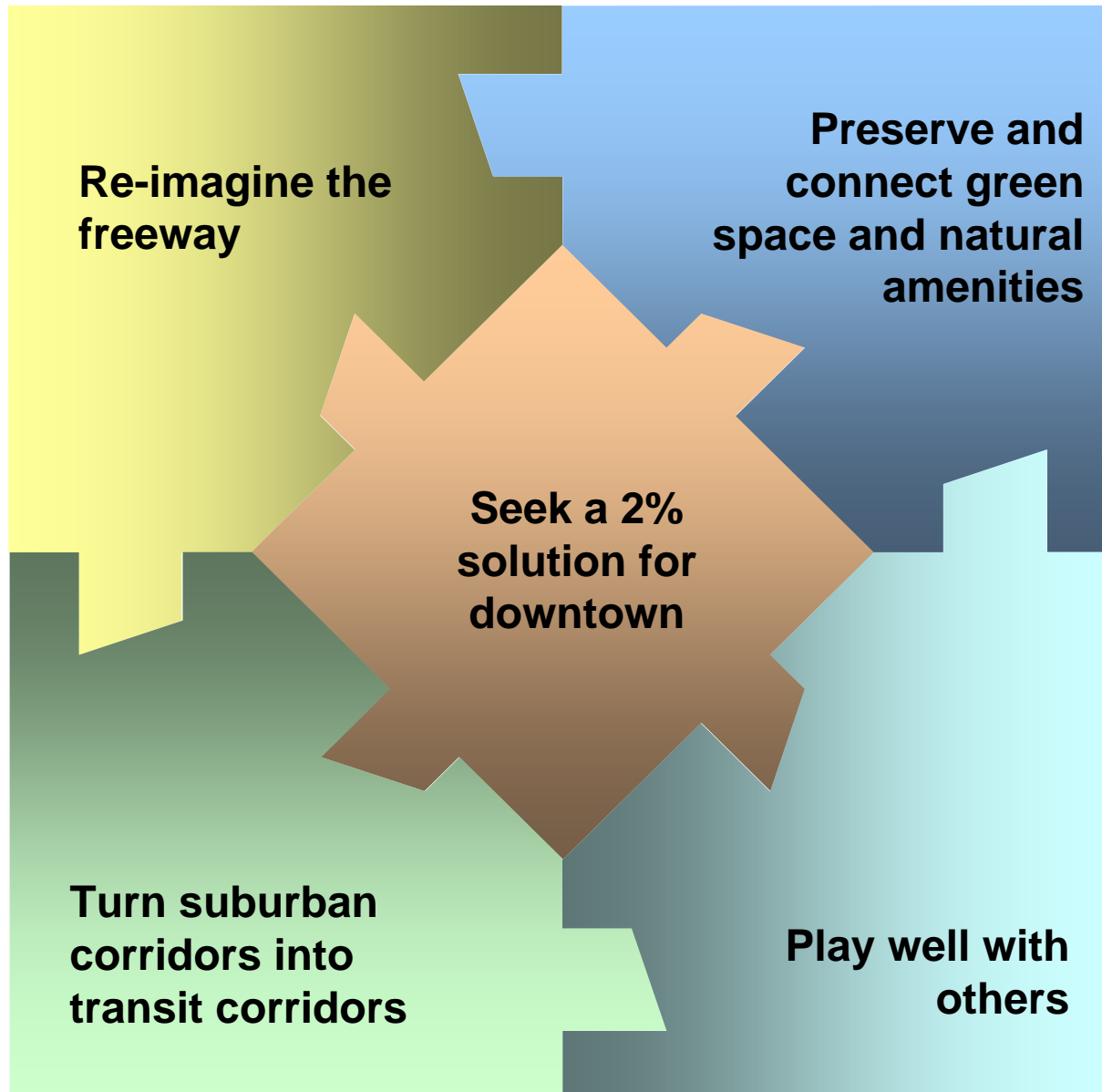
Before

Downsizing the freeway opened up land for redevelopment and connected the city to the river, with better vehicular movements overall



After

Asheville has done a lot – *but there is more to do!*





visit metro:

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[www.brookings.edu/metro](http://www.brookings.edu/metro)  
[rpuentes@brookings.edu](mailto:rpuentes@brookings.edu)