



# Affordable Housing Readiness Tool

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## Introduction

### ***Affordable Housing Readiness Tool***

The U.S. is experiencing a shift in expectations for provision of affordable housing: HUD has rolled out new Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing guidelines; mixed income developments are replacing former public housing; and state level Qualified Allocation Plans often reward access to transit and inclusion in mixed income communities with increased points. In addition, income inequality in Atlanta is on the rise and the north/south metro divide in income and race remains clearly demarcated (2013). In addition, access to opportunity is recognized as critical for achieving high quality of life; affordable housing alone is insufficient (Briggs 2005). Given these shifts, it is important that the field not rely on availability of land or concentration of low income residents as primary metrics indicating potential for success of affordable housing. Rather, assessing the community from a holistic frame will ensure greater equity in access.

In this paper I will first explore key aspects of equity, access and limitation of displacement, through review of a variety of tools developed to assess access to opportunity in communities across the country. These tools include transit-oriented development typologies, community indicator projects, program and community performance measures, program scorecards, and program dashboards.

I will follow this review with a description and application of the *Affordable Housing Readiness Tool*. The *Affordable Housing Readiness Tool* provides a standardized approach to assessing a parcel's readiness for provision of equitable affordable housing. By comparing the data for a census tract to the metro area as a whole, one can determine if there may be other areas presenting stronger access to opportunity, while also identifying areas of challenge in the target community. The tool can then not only be used for determining affordable housing placement, but also to guide community and economic development priorities.

## Literature Review

### Equity

The concept of equity implies that all people, regardless of income levels, cultural backgrounds or social status, have equal access to opportunity, including access to stable employment, quality education, affordable and safe housing, health care, and other critical needs. The Puget Sound Regional Equity Network adds to the above definition of equity, indicating that low income people must have the opportunity to benefit from growth and change in their communities rather than being displaced as higher income residents move in (Partnership 2012). Communities of opportunity provide diverse, affordable housing choices which open up access to critical needs: high performing schools, public services, multi-modal transportation, and living wage jobs (Briggs 2005). The geography of opportunity concept addresses housing from a community development standpoint, recognizing that housing alone is insufficient to improve peoples' lives holistically. Instead, Briggs highlights the relationship between place and access to employment, education, health care and services as key; where you live will determine your access to these opportunities (Briggs 2005). HUD's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing guidelines align with Brigg's goals for communities of opportunities, calling for elimination of racial and ethnic concentrations of poverty, reduction of disparities in access to community assets, and narrowing gaps in housing supply (HUD 2013). Disparity in access to employment, transit, services, and affordable housing continue to plague metro Atlanta and the U.S. as a whole, with a distinct separation between the northern suburbs and the central and southern areas of the region in metro Atlanta. As employment centers have moved away from center cities and transit, minority and low income residents find themselves increasingly isolated from these opportunities due to lack of transit and housing access (Briggs 2005). Income segregation is on the rise, increasing from 1970-2000; the political economy of place argument indicates that services will be better provided in higher income communities than low income, and thus increasing access to affordable housing in these areas is critical (Briggs 2005, DeFilippis and Fraser 2008). Income and race segregation also greatly impact school access, as property taxes fund school districts, and those in lower income areas are typically under resourced. Evidence has found that students who attend integrated schools by race and income levels are more likely to achieve economic and social opportunity (Briggs 2005).

Given these challenges, and the shifting patterns of urbanization we are seeing in metro Atlanta, I will focus my efforts on creation of a tool to assess the ability of a development to increase equity for low to moderate income residents, equating increased equity to increased access to opportunity. Key aspects of equity – access and limitation of displacement, will be explored through a variety of tools developed to assess access to opportunity in communities across the country. These tools include transit-oriented development typologies, community indicator

projects, program and community performance measures, program scorecards, and program dashboards.

## **Equity Focused Tools**

*These tools focus on increasing access to opportunity.*

- ***Metro Atlanta Equity Atlas***
- ***Mapping Susceptibility to Gentrification***
- ***The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity's Communities of Opportunity Framework***
- ***Reconnecting America, Complete Communities***

**The Metro Atlanta Equity Atlas**, developed by a collaborative team of practitioners and researchers led by the Partnership for Southern Equity, provides a baseline view of equity in the metro region. Rather than focusing on a specific development type such as TOD, the Atlas seeks to provide an illustration of Atlanta disparities in Education, Economic Opportunity, Housing, Health, Transportation, Environment and Public Safety (2013). The report highlights Atlanta's significant income inequality, with a Gini Coefficient of .572, the highest of 20 major cities assessed, also illustrating that much of the income inequality in the city is between the northern and southern sectors of the city (2013). The report also highlights a spatial mismatch between housing and job centers, with many employment centers in the northern part of the city while affordable workforce housing concentrates in the south (2013). An additional significant data point is that of rising diversity in Atlanta; 90% of population growth in the last ten years is from minority residents, and Gwinnett, a suburban county, exhibits the highest Esri index of diversity for the metro area at 77 out of 100 (The U.S. rate in 2010 was 60.6) (2013, Esri 2013). The Housing analysis highlights the disparities in black and white wealth generation via housing, as well as the availability of affordable rental housing across the metro area; again the north/south dividing line is evident (2013). Equity disparities continue in analyses of car ownership and transit access. Those owning one or more vehicles typically reside in metro Atlanta's most wealthy counties, while increasingly, low-income families without access to a vehicle are finding themselves in suburban counties lacking in infrastructure (2013). Also highlighted is the importance of not only housing costs, but housing plus transportation costs in considering affordability. The report highlights that 80% of metro households spend 45% or more of their income on these combined costs (2013).

**Strengths and Applicability:** The importance of this tool is the recognition of the economic disparities between northern and southern sectors of Atlanta, the spatial mismatch between job centers and workforce housing and lacking transit accessibility to overcome this mismatch, and

recognition of increasing ethnic diversity across Atlanta. **Challenges:** A challenge with the tool is the lack of specific recommended actions for addressing these issues.

**Mapping Susceptibility to Gentrification:** When new resources and development are brought to an area, demographic and financial changes are likely to follow suit; this change, often described as gentrification, has the potential to displace existing community residents, who are then unable to benefit from new opportunities. Gentrification occurs when real estate investment, income, and educational attainment in an area rise, indicating that in-migration is leading to a new demographic make-up (Chapple 2009). This definition does not address displacement, as gentrification does not absolutely have to lead to significant displacement if appropriate safeguards are put into place. In *Mapping Susceptibility to Gentrification*, neighborhoods which gentrified in San Francisco from 1990 to 2000 were assessed to identify factors which might make an area more susceptible to gentrification. Key criteria found to predict potential for gentrification include the percent of people who take public transportation (it is important to note that core transit riders are typically defined as lower-income, minority residents); access to parks; a higher percentage of renters and minority residents; a higher percentage of non-family households; lower median rents and existence of public housing; income diversity; the share of income coming from in-migrant new residents; and renters paying more than 35% of their income towards housing (Chapple 2009). These criteria can be applied to other census tracts and compared against results for tracts which gentrified in the past to assess potential for gentrification.

**Strengths and Applicability:** This system is applicable when assessing the impact of equitable development, as limiting displacement should be a primary goal of any equitable effort. While gentrification does not guarantee displacement, its presence does require specific action to be taken to ensure equitable access to improving communities. **Challenges:** Utilization of this system to assess potential for gentrification relies on comparison to past change (which must also be measured), increasing the complexity of implementation.

**The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity's Communities of Opportunity Framework** offers a holistic view of opportunity, connecting housing, education, health care, employment, transportation, and civic engagement as critical pieces (Powell et al. 2007). The Kirwan framework addresses opportunity spatially, mapping it across regions to identify areas of low and high opportunity. This framework was utilized within *The Growing Transit Communities Partnership of Puget Sound*<sup>1</sup> (Powell et al. 2007). Fair housing is a critical component of their work, as segregation by income and race inherently provides disproportionate access to opportunity for lower income and minority groups, and must be addressed as the foundational aspect of improving access to opportunity (Powell et al. 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> The strengths and challenges of the framework will be assessed via analysis of the Puget Sound tool.

The Kirwan framework lists various high opportunity factors including access to safe, sustainable and high quality employment, quality schools, a clean/safe environment, health care, transportation, child care and neighborhoods (Powell et al. 2007).

**Reconnecting America** developed a system to assess “complete communities”, which they define as access to quality education, good jobs, affordable housing, healthy food, health care, amenities, transportation, and parks and recreation (Brooks and Ohland 2012). The study also defines “opportunity areas” as neighborhoods which have some aspect of a complete community in place that can be built upon (Brooks and Ohland 2012). They have developed a grading system for metropolitan statistical areas across the U.S. based on these criteria. The system is comprised of 33 indicators which are organized by four categories: Living; Working; Moving and Thriving (Brooks and Ohland 2012). Living seeks to ensure housing affordability, mixed-incomes, and residential density near transit (Brooks and Ohland 2012). Working focuses on employment access, assessing employment density, jobs in a community, jobs accessible via a 45 minute transit commute, and low-moderate income jobs accessible (Brooks and Ohland 2012). Moving focuses on multi-modal transportation access, looking at use and safety, and thriving looks at physical and mental health, assessing access to healthy food, physical activity, green space and culture access, and overall well-being (Brooks and Ohland 2012).

**Strengths and Applicability:** The system provides a grading methodology which allows for use of publicly available data and provides means for comparison of different metro areas.

**Challenges:** Their system is focused on access via fixed-guideway transit only, and reviews each criterion in this context. The system is also developed for the metro area overall, rather than assessing different neighborhoods within a larger urban area.

## **Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Typologies**

*The primary focus of these tools is to identify the strongest transit station areas for development, defined by equitable development goals.*

- **Denver Equity Atlas**
- **eTOD Score**
- **The Growing Transit Communities Partnership of Puget Sound (GTC)**

Equitable Transit Oriented Development seeks to ensure that TOD provides access to resources, needed services, education, transportation, and housing for all. Efforts address both improving access through TOD, as well as limiting displacement as a result of TOD, which may drive up residential prices. While specifically focused on TOD, these are issues which could apply to any significant new development, and thus this perspective is valid for a broad approach. Studies have found that 86% of “transit rich neighborhoods” are more racially and economically diverse than the average census tract in the metropolitan area (Pollack, Bluestone,



and Billingham 2010, 11). In addition, low to moderate income residents are the very people more likely to use the transit amenity, and typically require it to get to school, jobs, health care, and other basic needs (Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010). Not only are these the very people that need transit and the associated development to manage costs, their presence also makes the area more susceptible to gentrification; areas with higher levels of renters are more likely to gentrify (Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010). Transit-rich neighborhoods are more susceptible to gentrification: a study of change in 42 neighborhoods across 12 metro areas found that income levels rose in more than 60% of the transit-rich neighborhoods; population grew more quickly in 64% of the neighborhoods than the metro area; owner-occupied housing construction grew more quickly; and more than 70% of the neighborhoods reported higher in-migration rates than the city as a whole (Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010, 22-23). Improvements in transit are likely to drive up property values and thus rent and sale prices; this can lead to gentrification and displacement, or rising housing cost burdens, if provisions are not put into place to protect affordability and provide diverse choices for residents (Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010). Thus it is critical to assess potential for displacement early, to ensure proactive efforts can be taken as development proceeds.

**Denver Equity Atlas:** The Denver Equity Atlas seeks to establish baseline metrics for measuring the impact of transit-oriented development on equitable outcomes (Barry et al. 2012). Key areas assessed include access to affordable housing, employment, education, health care, healthy foods and recreation (Barry et al. 2012). Denver defines low income at 80% AMI, and is concerned not only with concentrations of poverty, but also concentrations of elderly residents (Barry et al. 2012). In assessing access to affordable housing, Denver uses the CNT Housing + Transportation Costs guidelines of no more than 45% of income spent on both. They also assessed demand, determining that 40% of the demand for services provided by TOD would be expected to come from those earning 80% AMI or less (Barry et al. 2012). Therefore, a focus on affordable housing has been prioritized for their TOD efforts, including ensuring preservation of subsidized units. With regards to employment, Denver focuses on equitable access to employment; GIS analysis indicates that job locations and worker locations are mismatched, with only 25% of low skill jobs able to be accessed within 90 minutes by transit in Denver (Barry et al. 2012). The next area of concern is that of quality education; school improvement is a critical aspect of TOD, both because families are unlikely to move to areas without quality schools, and there must be equitable access to high performing schools (Barry et al. 2012). The connection between health and transit is also explored, with both the ability of transit to provide access to health care and healthy foods, but also the fact that people who ride transit are often more physically active than those that drive, and that dense development, such as that that might be associated with TOD, is often associated with lower levels of obesity (Barry et al. 2012). Denver's equity atlas seeks to establish the baseline for their efforts, to not only guide where and how future development around transit should proceed, but also to measure their progress in the future.

**Strengths and Applicability:** The atlas provides a strong overall picture of access to opportunity in key areas, as well as how transit-oriented development might impact this access. The guide also outlines action items to increase equitable outcomes in each priority area.

**Challenges:** This system focuses primarily on utilizing transit to access opportunity, rather than how development itself can offer access.

**eTOD Score:** Northeastern University has developed an equitable TOD scoring system, which assesses different transit station areas to determine the type of development for which they are best suited (2012). Their system evaluates access to housing, services/resources, employment, and transit (2012). To fully consider the capacity of stations for equitable TOD, the scoring system looks at characteristics of transit including availability, quality and use, the representation of core transit riders (those lacking a vehicle, renters, low income people, minorities, and immigrants), and features of nearby development (walkability, density, access to employment, and access to affordable housing) (2012). The system measured each item as follows on a half mile buffer around a station or high frequency bus stop:

- **Transit** – Transit access shed – the area that can be accessed within thirty minutes by transit; the CNT transit connectivity index measuring frequency of service; and transit use per the American Community Survey (ACS).
- **Orientation** - Percentage zero car households; households with incomes under \$25,000; and the percentage of renters.
- **Development** – Walkability using Walk Score; density – households per acre per ACS; employment gravity, which is the quantity of and distance to employment; and affordability, which assesses both housing and transportation costs per CNT guidelines (2012).

Stations were scored on a point system with results ranging from 10 to 50, and then categorized into four areas – transit-oriented, transit-supportive, transit-related; and transit-adjacent. Results can then be used to make determinations of the type of development or action needed at a station, whether increased transit service, development of affordable housing, or development of commercial resources to serve the area (2012).

**Strengths and Applicability:** While this specific system was developed to assess Boston, the idea of assessing characteristics of the neighborhood which interact with one another as discussed above<sup>2</sup>, resulting in a score which can help guide future decision making, is applicable across communities and project types. Also, while the system categorizes transit stations by score, they do not indicate that this is positive or negative, rather that this should simply guide action (2012). **Challenges:** This scoring system can only assess whether the station area is ready for equitable TOD, and what actions might be taken to address any equity issues. The

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<sup>2</sup> See discussion of core transit ridership, and potential for displacement in communities of high renter population.

system does not assess a specific project and its ability to impact equity in the area, though the information gathered could help to determine this.

**The Growing Transit Communities Partnership of Puget Sound (GTC)**, with CTOD and Strategic Economics, developed a station area typology which provides overall ratings and guidelines for development of each stations area (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). Through GTC's work with the Kirwan Institute, they developed a set of five opportunity indicators which they mapped to identify areas of high and low opportunity; these scores then influenced the community typology (Partnership 2012).

**Figure 1: Puget Sound Opportunity Indicators**

Education	Economic Health	Housing and Neighborhood Quality	Mobility and Transportation	Health and Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• math test scores</li> <li>• reading test scores</li> <li>• student poverty</li> <li>• teacher qualification</li> <li>• graduation rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to living wage jobs</li> <li>• job growth trends, 2000–2010</li> <li>• unemployment rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vacancy rate</li> <li>• foreclosure rate</li> <li>• high cost loan rate</li> <li>• housing stock condition</li> <li>• crime index</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cost per commute</li> <li>• proximity to express bus stops</li> <li>• average transit fare</li> <li>• percent of commuters who walk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• distance to nearest park or open space</li> <li>• proximity to toxic waste release</li> <li>• percent of area that is within a food desert</li> </ul>

Source: Equity, Opportunity, and Sustainability in the Central Puget Sound Region

Data for these opportunity indicators is collected via a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census (ACS and 10 year), the Puget Sound Regional Council, HUD, state school report cards, and the EPA (Council 2010). Focused on achieving equitable development, the GTC effort seeks to guide development which will offer housing choice, access to employment, and access to needed resources and services, walkability, and increased density (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). They do this through creation of *People* and *Place* profiles for each transit station, which are then assessed against one another. The *People* Profile addresses access to opportunity and displacement risk. Access to Opportunity is measured through assessment of education quality, housing and neighborhood quality, health and environment, and access to multi-modal transportation (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). Displacement risk evaluates market and demographic trends compared to other block groups, risk factors including the percentage of renters, minority residents and residents who are housing cost-burdened, and general demographic and community data (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). The *Place* Profile addresses physical form of the neighborhood and the potential for change (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). Physical form is assessed via pedestrian connectivity, transit performance, physical structure of streets, population, and mix of uses in the neighborhood (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013). Market strength and potential for change are considered via real estate variables, employment patterns, housing density, household income and household size (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013).

Each station area is scored on People and Place criteria, with results normalized to 100; they are then placed into eight implementation approaches to address any deficiencies and preserve strengths:

1. Community Enhancement – Areas in weak markets with limited opportunity that may present an opportunity to engage in community development activities to expand opportunity. Long-term approach.
2. Market Priming – There is mid-term opportunity, with weak urban form and emerging markets; infrastructure improvements and a comprehensive plan are priorities.
3. Facilitated Equitable Development – These areas have high access to opportunity and a strong market, but therefore possess potential for displacement. Preservation of affordability while supporting growth is critical.
4. Proactive Equitable Development – In these emerging markets, strategies seek to preserve affordable housing while expanding access to opportunity.
5. Facilitated Diversification – With strong transit access to employment and other resources, these areas require focused efforts to improve housing choice and expand development of mixed-use projects.
6. Market/Growth Catalyst – While having strong connectivity via transit and a good affordable housing supply, these communities require job creation strategies.
7. Expanded Affordability – These are very strong areas from a market, transportation and opportunity standpoint, but thus are lacking sufficient affordable housing and require intervention in that direction.
8. Preserve, Monitor, Connect – These are areas which are industrial and employment job centers and not found to be suited for housing. They are to be preserved as employment centers, ensuring sufficient transit access. (Strategic Economics and Center for Transit Oriented Development 2013).

**Strengths and Applicability:** This system presents a strong example of an objective, quantitative measure which guides development decisions and aligns with city priorities. The scoring system tied to a typology is an effective tool which can be understood by both community members and practitioners. **Challenges:** The report did not provide a description of the results or a benchmark for what sufficient employment, affordable housing, or resources looked like in each community. Thus, the results are somewhat unclear.

## **Program and Community Performance Metrics**

*Performance metrics are primarily utilized to measure change over time and assess success or challenge in a particular initiative. They set benchmarks and targets, as well as mechanisms for measurement and timeframes for assessment.*

- **Choice Neighborhoods**
- **Central Corridor Key Outcomes**
- **Performance Metrics for the City of Los Angeles**

**Choice Neighborhoods:** The first performance measurement system reviewed is that for Choice Neighborhoods. Choice Neighborhoods is a holistic neighborhood revitalization program which seeks to develop energy efficient, mixed-income public and assisted housing; improve health, safety, employment and education outcomes for residents of public and assisted housing; and to improve access to jobs, services, schools, public resources and transportation (Smith et al. 2010). The Urban Institute has proposed a system for performance measurement of Choice Neighborhoods programs; an item of note is that while Choice is a national program with stated guidelines and requirements, local implementation varies significantly. Thus, the system must be flexible enough to apply to numerous activities implemented in different fashions across project sites. The proposal outlines a logic model, with the broad goals of Choice linked to specific activities, outputs, and ultimately end-outcomes (Smith et al. 2010). The proposed system develops outcomes and associated indicators across each goal of Choice, also providing a data source, including program reports and national sources such as HUD, National Center for Education Statistics, A Picture of Subsidized Households, LIHTC and Section 8 data, FDIC Insured institutions, USPS Vacancy data, IRS Zip Code data, and Zip Code Business Patterns from the Census (Smith et al. 2010). Due to the variety of activities that may be employed at the local level, the system is lengthy and does not dictate what a program looks like, rather outlining characteristics all programs should employ (Smith et al. 2010). For example, many programs might improve the physical, cultural and social environment of the development, so the indicators instead focus on the amount of activity delivered, the timeliness of this delivery, and the cost, which can apply across the board (Smith et al. 2010).

**Strengths and Applicability:** This is a detailed system which can apply to diverse local projects regardless of implementation strategy. Choice Neighborhoods is a holistic effort addressing access to opportunity; thus the associated measures have applicability to assessing equitable development. **Challenges:** This is a complicated system, and relies heavily on reports to be completed by each Choice grantee, rather than publicly available data sources. Thus replicability is somewhat limited as is long-term data collection after the grant has closed.

**Central Corridor Key Outcomes Report:** The Central Corridor Funders Collaborative seeks to expand access to opportunity on the Central Corridor Light Rail Line in Minneapolis-

St. Paul, Minnesota. The collaborative has developed four priority outcomes by which to assess access to opportunity:

- Access to affordable housing: Mix of incomes – AGI and AMI, CNT Housing + Transportation costs.
- Development of a strong economy: Mix of business types, size of businesses, and resident access to employment within a transit shed.
- Development of vibrant transit-oriented places: Walk Score, and business and residency density.
- Coordination and collaboration with community residents: Survey to assess common goals, knowledge, and collaboration levels. (Egbert and Mueller 2011)

**Strengths and Applicability:** The system sets up these indicators as questions, with the answers the outcomes and associated indicators. For example, the first housing question is “Are low-income people still able to live near the Central Corridor?” The outcome is then a mix of household incomes evident, indicated by Adjusted Gross Income of households and later combined housing and transportation costs (Egbert and Mueller 2011). This provides an illustrative method, which both practitioners and community members can comprehend. In addition, all data utilized is publicly available, except the locally completed surveys. The system is also implemented on a yearly basis, providing a vision of progress and challenge across the project (Egbert and Mueller 2011). **Challenges:** From the reports, it is unclear how those involved with the Central Corridor effort should use the data to drive policy or action; specific recommendations are not made. In addition, clear benchmarks and targets are not set, limiting ability to measure success.

**Performance Metrics for the City of Los Angeles:** The next effort reviewed is one that developed performance metrics for the City of Los Angeles, focused how to improve the livability, health, economic, and equity impacts of their transportation system (Brozen et al. 2012). First, health, equity, and sustainability were identified as key aspects of a livable city; following, they identified how these factors interacted with the transportation system (Brozen et al. 2012). Factors identified and assessed include complete and living streets, focused on both physical accessibility and equity; economic impact; and environmental components. Aspects of *Complete Streets* which address equity include streets which work for all ages and abilities; increase access to critical needs such as employment, education and health care, and resources like green space and amenities; reduce transportation costs; and increase economic development (Brozen et al. 2012). Aspects of *Living Streets* which address equity issues include integration of equity into design and function; creation of affordable housing and mixed income development; and limitation of displacement (Brozen et al. 2012). The goal of this effort is to benchmark current status, and then to guide future development and planning efforts to achieve greater livability.

**Strengths and Applicability:** This effort views transportation as integrated with overall community development efforts, asking people to see the linkages and recognize how decisions in transportation might impact overall quality of life and access to opportunity. **Challenges:** It is unclear how one would assess the ability of a complete street to increase economic development or asset-building in a resident. Some of the measures may be overly ambitious in their connecting efforts. Also, the metrics actually assessed, which are very transit and infrastructure focused, do not clearly address the components of the Complete and Living Streets guidelines, which calls into question the model.

### **Smart Growth/New Urbanism Scorecards**

*While many may not automatically associate Smart Growth with equity, many aspects actually align: increased density can make the financial aspects of a mixed income deal feasible; many Smart Growth guidelines call for access to multi-modal transportation options; and housing type and cost diversity is a priority. In addition, the APA definition of Smart Growth specifically highlights equitable access and benefit: Smart Growth “promotes a sense of place, preserves natural and cultural resources, equitably distributes costs and benefits of development...and expands the range of transportation, employment, and housing choices (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009).”*

**The Smart Growth Audit:** The Atlanta Regional Commission has developed the Smart Growth Audit, which allows local governments to assess comprehensive plans’ and zoning regulations’ capacity to promote and support smart growth development (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). The Audit reviews local zoning code to determine if the current code supports and incentivizes mixed use development, including density bonuses or transportation plans promoting multi-modal transit. The tool provides a potential checklist assessing land use consumption, direction of growth, density, urban form, land use, jobs/housing balance, open/green space, energy conservation, water quality, air quality, housing, transportation, parking, infrastructure, permitting, and regional/intergovernmental relations (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). This tool quantifies many smart growth principles and provides a strong framework for a local municipality assessing readiness for mixed use and smart growth development. The toolkit provides a system for developing and implementing a smart growth audit, recognizing that each locality may require different mechanisms.

**Strengths and Applicability:** The toolkit outlines a process for creating an audit tool which may prove helpful in developing locally utilized equity assessments. Also, many Smart Growth priorities concern issues of equity and access and may be utilized in an equity tool as well. The tool provides potential analysis of policy, which would be helpful in determining potential for equitable impact. **Challenges:** The toolkit is very big picture, starting at the land use plan and general development patterns, rather than a specific project or small area. In addition, the

example tool does not clearly result in a score or assessment; each item instead has a yes/no response with notes, which do not clearly build upon one another to lead to specific action.

**Smart Growth Scorecard:** The Livable Communities Coalition, until recently a smart growth advocacy and capacity building organization in Atlanta, developed the Smart Growth Scorecard, which provided a tool for expert jury review of proposed development projects prior to construction.

The tool offers a checklist which is completed by the expert panel, assessing the following criteria:

- Location and Service Provision – Access to schools with capacity for additional students is included, though school performance is not assessed.
- Density and Compactness – The tool awards a higher rating for higher density development.
- Diversity of Uses – The tool awards a higher rating for a mix of uses, and also calls for them to be close enough to be accessed via walking.
- Diversity of Housing – A minimum of four housing types and four price points is sought, with a limit on housing costs to 30% of income and more than 10% of units affordable per local guidelines. These housing types should be mixed within the community, rather than being segregated.
- Accessibility, Mobility and Connectivity – The tool awards a higher rating for accessibility within ¼ mile to basic needs including food, employment, school, housing, recreation, and religious entities. Transit is also accessible within ¼ mile by walking, and the overall street network is connected.
- Pedestrian Safety, Streetscapes and Parking – The streets and sidewalks are safe, complete and walkable.
- Community Needs and Local Development – The tool assesses whether the project increases employment opportunities providing living wages. Also important is access to an employment center within ½ mile, especially when jobs provided are aligned with local residents' skill-sets and capacity.  
(Livable Communities Coalition 2008).

Each attribute is given quantified metrics for rating a project. Location is assessed differently on whether the project is proposed for a greenfield, brownfield or infill site, as well as by the proximity to other development (Livable Communities Coalition 2008). The tool also assesses whether the project aligns with the community's comprehensive plan (Livable Communities Coalition 2008). Excellent density is indicated as greater than four d.u. per acre for residential and a FAR equal or greater to four for commercial plan (Livable Communities Coalition 2008).



Parking is also sought to be limited, with an excellent rating requiring less than two spaces per 1000 gross sqft of commercial space, and less than one space per residential unit. The assessment seeks diversity of uses from at least four different uses in a small project, to at least eight in a large one, and two in an infill project; it also cites the importance of the uses not being represented in the surrounding area. Diversity of housing is also an important goal, with the highest scorecards being those projects that offer at least four different types of housing and four different pricing options, all of which are then mixed throughout the development. Accessibility is critical in mixed use development, and the scorecard recognizes this with an excellent rating requiring five or more frequent uses within a ¼ mile of the project and transit within ¼ mile that provides access to services and employment. Connectivity with surrounding streets and within the development, as well as access and safety for pedestrians and bikers is sought. The prevalence of crosswalks, bike lanes, and safe speeds/road calming is sought. The scorecard quantifies effective driving and parking lanes at 10-11 ft. wide for driving and 8 for parking, with every street having a sidewalk of differing widths for residential and commercial. Lighting, street trees, protection (by parked cars or planting) for pedestrians must be in place. The Smart Growth Scorecard even seeks to assess a projects ability to develop a sense of place through determination of use of design principles ranging from cultural expression to history, variety, architectural style, gateways, symbolism, natural views and originality (Livable Communities Coalition 2008).

**Strengths and Applicability:** The scorecard provides quantifiable measures to assess access, diversity of options, and density, while also assessing a variety of holistic factors. **Challenges:** Implementation of this system is more cumbersome, as expert judges must complete the assessments. The scoring mechanisms seem somewhat subjective, and there is no clear action outlined as a result of scores.

**Livable Centers Initiative:** The Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative seeks to encourage local municipalities to plan increased multi-modal access to jobs, employment and housing, and greater livability according to Smart Growth principles (Atlanta Regional Commission 2013). The program has identified quantifiable metrics which were utilized in a 2009 impact evaluation study. Key indicators used in assessing the LCI funded communities include Jobs/Housing Balance, Density, Internal Street Connectivity and Street Route Directness, Use Mix and Balance, and Vehicle Miles Traveled (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). Areas have a strong jobs/housing balance if their ratio of jobs to housing is between 1 to 1.5 jobs per housing unit (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). Density is assessed as strong with 8 units or more per acre, and was also assessed as number of residential units within ¼ mile of a transit station (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). Connectivity is determined through number of connections to transportation options and the amount of pedestrian activity. ARC assesses use mix with a grid system, scoring zero if two of the same uses are next to one another (Atlanta Regional Commission 2009). VMT is assessed both by CO2 emissions and miles traveled.

**Strengths and Applicability:** The LCI tool provides example metrics which align development and revitalization efforts with transportation access, and sets clear benchmarks for the Atlanta metro Area. **Challenges:** The LCI tool does not highlight housing price and type diversity as goals which would increase the equitable impact of LCI efforts.

## **Programmatic Dashboards**

*Programmatic Dashboards provide a visual representation of progress towards various benchmarked indicators.*

**The Anchor Institution Dashboard** assesses both the state of a community, as well as the actions of the anchor institution (Dubb, McKinley, and Howard 2013). The dashboard focuses on community issue areas which the anchor institutions have the most likelihood of impacting: economic development, education partnerships, health and safety, and community building. (Dubb, McKinley, and Howard 2013). Challenges experienced in their process included identifying the true role of the anchor institution in the community, defining the geographic boundary of the community impacted, and collecting and attributing results (Dubb, McKinley, and Howard 2013). Their research highlights the importance of developing benchmarks, measuring inputs of resources, and utilizing policy indicators (Dubb, McKinley, and Howard 2013). The final dashboard aligns outcomes in the three categories with associated indicators and data sources, with the report offering examples of institutional efforts in each outcome area.

**Strengths and Applicability:** This tool presents a place-based approach, in which a geographic area and the impacts of investments are assessed using a structure of outcomes and indicators. A similar structure may prove applicable in the system I will develop. **Challenges:** An Anchor Institution is likely to take on more of a programmatic role than a more traditional development opportunity would, and thus the indicators presented here are limited in applicability.

**Healthy Development Measurement Tool:** Developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health, this tool includes 125 indicators of social, environmental and economic conditions, development targets, and strategies to achieve results. The tool's ultimate goal is to help integrate health outcomes into planning efforts (Dannenburg, Frumkin, and Jackson 2011). The Sustainable Communities Index, which developed out of the tool, compiles 100 measures to track objectives in areas of environment, transportation, civic engagement, public facilities, education, housing, economic opportunity, and health systems (Sustainable Communities Collective). Each indicator is presented with an overview of its importance, methods for calculating interpreting results, and limitations of data (Sustainable Communities Collective). The SCI program also created a healthy development project checklist, which is specifically

targeted to new developments and their impact on sustainability from environmental, transportation, community, and equity standpoints (Sustainable Communities Collective).

**Strengths and Applicability:** The development checklist offers a potential format for my tool, though it does not offer a clear scoring system or action items to take based on the ratings.

**Challenges:** The development tool is not implicitly connected to the SCI indicators, thus it may be difficult to fully assess success and determine implications of results.

## Community Indicators

Community Indicators are systems which provide a way to benchmark progress, illustrating a community's current status, as well as providing a system for measuring future impact. Phillips describes indicators as a "balance sheet" for a community (Phillips 2003). Indicators can be put in place to identify problems, support future action, target investment, or evaluate efforts to date (Coulton 2008). They are broad, having the ability to measure social, environmental, and economic and quality of life factors. Common community indicator categories include *Quality of Place*, which assesses the character and qualities of a place; *Livability*, which while also place focused, concerns factors which make people want to live in a particular community; *Quality of Life*, assessing access to resources and individual well-being; *Sustainable Development*, a more scientific assessment looking at the degree to which a development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"; *Performance Measurement*, to assess how well a system or development is operating; and *Healthy Communities*, to assess community mental, physical and social health (Sawicki 2002, Phillips 2003).

Indicators can be described as system or performance indicators, with system focused on existing characteristics, and performance illustrating how well it compares to a target or set of goals (Phillips 2003). While system indicators may be helpful in evaluating a problem or issue and designing a response, performance indicators will be necessary to assess actual impact of solution or program; they are often used in conjunction with one another (Phillips 2003). When utilizing indicators, they are often looked at under three areas: environmental, economic and social, and can have varied scale, implemented at the neighborhood, local, regional or national level (Phillips 2003). Scale is critical to development of indicator systems: *Quality of Life* typically focuses on the person, while *Quality of Place* is concerned with the actual geographic area and its objective criteria (Sawicki 2002). These two indicators are linked however, as *Quality of Place* can have significant impact on *Quality of Life*; and, individual characteristics will impact how much a neighborhood effect influences different people (Sawicki 2002, Ellen and Turner 1997). Geographic scale will impact not only availability of data, but also the type of impact that can be assessed; as described by Sawicki, data is available at the Micro (Individual impact – surveying people), Aggregate (Statistical aggregations – US Census Data), Spatial (Utilizing

individual and aggregated data with a tool like GIS) and Place (Data for a geographic area such as access to employment or transit) scales (Sawicki 2002, Sawicki and Flynn 1996).

The use of neighborhood level indicators is relatively new as technology has improved access to data; the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership attempts to support this level of work in communities (Phillips 2003).

Phillips outlines 9 criteria for indicator selection as follows:

1. Validity – Is the indicator supported by underlying data?
2. Relevance – Is the indicator relevant to the community and the issues they are facing?
3. Consistency and Reliability – Can measurement of the indicator be applied in the same way over time by different people?
4. Measurability – Is the indicator something that can be assessed through data, whether qualitative or quantitative?
5. Clarity – Simply put, do people understand what the indicator is saying?
6. Comprehensiveness – Does the indicator provide a wide-ranging picture or view of an issue?
7. Cost-effectiveness – How expensive is it to collect data? Is the cost reasonable?
8. Comparability – In using this indicator, can one compare the geography being measured to other similar geographic areas? Also, are the data points which measure different indicators available at the same geographic scale (Coulton 2008)?
9. Attractiveness to the Media – Can one use the results of the indicators to tell a story? (Phillips 2003)

And perhaps most importantly, can you get the data to measure the indicator (Phillips 2003)?

As one looks to identify indicators, a helpful tool may be the Catalog of Administrative Data Sources, which outlines administrative data sources which can be used at the local or neighborhood level (Coulton 2008). Other important factors to consider when creating community indicators include the following:

- The scope of the project – Is this an ongoing effort the indicators can shape, or is it ending and this is simply performance assessment?
- The goals of the project
- The audience – Who will read these results? What will it impact?
- Geographic area impacted – What area should you measure? What is your community? (Finkle 2004)

When considering which indicators to assess, it is important to consider both individual characteristics as well as place characteristics, as they are often intertwined (Sawicki 2002,

Greenberg 1999, Ellen and Turner 1997). Not only does *Quality of Place* impact *Quality of Life* and *Livability* measures, but individual personality and beliefs impact personal feelings towards and effect of Place (Greenberg 1999, Sawicki 2002, Ellen and Turner 1997). Greenberg has also called for one to look at a “hierarchy of needs” when identifying indicators, noting that crime and blight top the list of priority items for surveyed residents, above access to services or employment in determining quality of place (Greenberg 1999). In contrast Ellen and Turner cite the role of social capital and civic infrastructure in mediating neighborhood/place impacts (Ellen and Turner 1997). Ellen and Turner have identified six overarching areas in which a neighborhood or place can impact an individual: quality of local services, adult engagement, peer influence, social capital, crime incidence, and access to jobs/education. Their research indicates that access to services, information and economic opportunity matters most in assessing neighborhood impact on adults – the spatial mismatch of these resources to ones’ housing is critical (Ellen and Turner 1997). An additional consideration is that of non-linear effects, in which an indicator has increasing impact after a certain threshold point; poverty rate and percent of non-professional workers has been found to have both endo- and exodynamic impact on results past a defined threshold; poverty rate increased at a much steeper rate past a rate of 54%, and percent of non-professional workers above 77% predicted changes in female head of household, poverty and rental rates (Galster, Quercia, and Cortes 2000).

Ultimately, it is critical to determine the purpose of an indicator initiative prior to identifying key indicators; also, the researcher must determine whether they are focused on assessing individuals or the place (Sawicki and Flynn 1996). While it is noted that these impacts are often intertwined, the goal of the indicator system should fall into one or the other area of focus.

## Affordable Housing Readiness Tool

The U.S. is experiencing a shift in expectations for provision of affordable housing: HUD has rolled out new Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing guidelines; mixed income developments are replacing former public housing; and state level Qualified Allocation Plans often reward access to transit and inclusion in mixed income communities with increased points. Given these shifts, it is important that the field assess location of new affordable housing developments strategically, not relying on availability of land or concentration of low income residents as the metrics indicating potential for success of affordable housing.

I will create an indicator system assessing *Quality of Place*, recognizing the significant impact place has on individual resident's access to opportunity and quality of life. With this indicator system I will assess the readiness of a place for affordable housing development using various equity criteria and benchmarking that data against the five county Atlanta region. The results of this measurement tool will help to guide development priorities for low to moderate income residents, focusing not simply on provision of affordable housing, but also on provision of resources necessary for equitable access to opportunity.

## Methodology

As I am approaching this analysis from the perspective of access to opportunity, I will collect the following data points for the census tracts which a targeted neighborhood encompasses, as well as for the five county Atlanta region (Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb and Gwinnett). As defined in the literature review, access to opportunity equates to access to critical resources including the following:

- **OUTCOME:** *Low to Moderate Income residents will have access to employment that is a match for their skill levels.*
- **OUTCOME:** *Low to Moderate Income residents will have access to quality education.*
- **OUTCOME:** *Low to Moderate Income residents will have access to affordable, decent housing opportunities in areas of diverse income levels.*
- **OUTCOME:** *Low to Moderate Income residents will have access to resources supporting a healthy lifestyle.*
- **OUTCOME:** *Low to Moderate Income residents will have access to multi-modal transportation opportunities to reach employment and other basic needs.*

The following data in Table I will be collected within each outcome category:

**Table I: Affordable Housing Readiness Tool Data**

Demographic Overview		Data Source
	Population	U.S. Census 2010
	Income and Concentration of Poverty	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Household Composition and Family Status	American Community Survey 2008-2012
Employment		
	Employment and Unemployment Rates	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	The top five industries by NAICS and their skill level association	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
	Resident Education Levels	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	CNT Employment Access Index <sup>3</sup>	Center for Neighborhood Technology(CNT) Housing + Transportation Index
Housing		
	Tenure	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Vacancy Rates	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Age of Construction	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Median Housing Values – Owner Occupied	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Median Rent	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Percent of Income Spent on Housing Costs	American Community Survey 2008-2012
	Subsidized Housing and Expiration Dates	National Housing Preservation Database
Education		
	Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)	GA Department of Education
	CCRPI (College and Career Ready Performance Index)	GA Department of Education
Commercial Access		
	Retail and Service Businesses per Census Tract	Reference USA
	Grocery Store Access	Reference USA and USDA Food Access Atlas
Transportation		
	CNT Housing + Transportation Costs	Center for Neighborhood Technology Housing + Transportation Index
	Transportation Costs	Abogo
	Walk Score	Walk Score
	MARTA Rail and Bus Access – ¼ Mile to Bus; ½ Mile to Rail	MARTA Shape files
	CNT Transit Access Shed Index <sup>4</sup>	CNT Housing + Transportation Index

<sup>3</sup> The Employment Access Index is a weighted measure developed by CNT to estimate both the quantity of and residents' access to the jobs in a Region (2003-2011).

<sup>4</sup> The Transit Access Shed is defined as the optimal accessible area from any block group within 30 minutes by public transportation scaled by the frequency of service (2003-2011).

Not only one must review the above data points, but also benchmark the local values against those of the larger Atlanta area to determine if they are in a more secure position to provide access to opportunity for LMI residents than other neighborhoods in the metro area. In the event the data points reveal that a community is in a worse position to provide access to opportunity, its readiness for affordable housing may be questioned. I have chosen to benchmark these data points using a quantile method in ARC GIS, in which the census tracts in question will be assessed in their relation to Atlanta area results.

To test the tool, I have identified two parcels with development potential in neighborhoods which are evolving, though in markedly different directions. The first, the Mechanicsville Community, is located in close proximity to Downtown Atlanta. The parcel which has been chosen, 330 Crumley Street, is owned by the Atlanta Housing Authority and was part of the Hope VI master plan for the demolition and redevelopment of McDaniel Glen public housing. Much of the former public housing site has been redeveloped as Columbia at Mechanicsville apartment homes, with some additional scattered site redevelopment completed as well. The site at 330 Crumley St. remains undeveloped at this time. The next community is West Midtown, a swiftly evolving industrial area in close proximity to Georgia Tech and Midtown Atlanta. The selected parcel, 981 Huff Road, is owned by Amli Residential, and is amidst significant new, higher-end multi-family development. Because both parcels are in urban environments, I have chosen to use the five county Atlanta region of Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb and Gwinnett counties for benchmarking.

## **Area Overviews – Present State**

I will first provide a review of the present state of each community, then providing a comparative analysis to the five county Atlanta region (Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb and Gwinnett).

### **West Midtown Overview**

West Midtown is located northwest of Downtown Atlanta, in Fulton County. The primary Census Tract is 89.02.

### **Population**

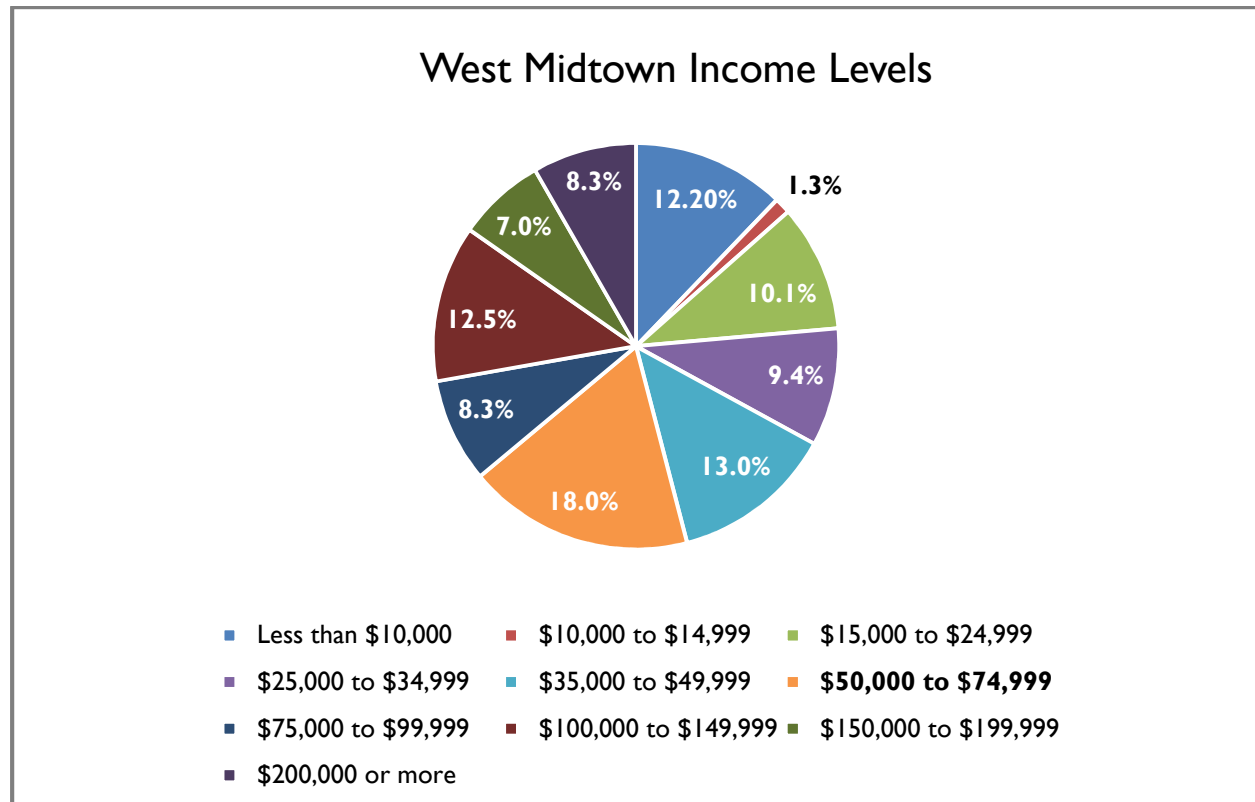
West Midtown has 5,765 residents; 65.4% of residents are between twenty and thirty nine years of age, with only 11% of residents under 18, and 2.5% 65 years or older (2010). 60% of residents are White, 23.9% Black, and 10.3% Asian (2010). The majority of West Midtown residents are non-family households; 29.4% of West Midtown households are families, but only 12.9% have children (2010). Only 1.9% of households are led by a single female householder (2008-2012a).



## Income

Household income is fairly dispersed in West Midtown; As shown in Figure 2, 18% of residents earn between \$50,000 and \$74,999, but overall earnings are relatively evenly dispersed from \$15,000 to \$150,000 (2008-2012b). 17.4% of residents live in poverty (2008-2012b). Median household income for the neighborhood is \$52,535 (2008-2012b).

**Figure 2: West Midtown Income Levels**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

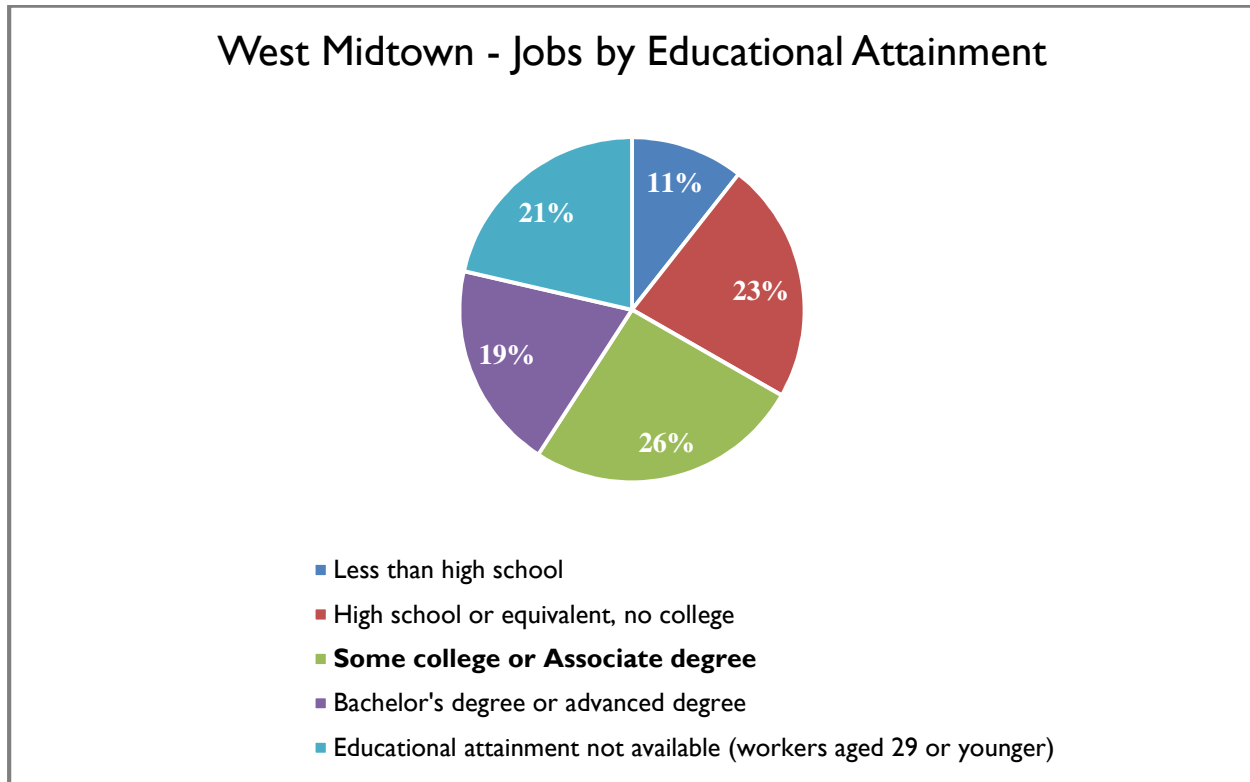
## Employment

In assessing the labor force as a whole, 83% of West Midtown residents are employed, 7% unemployed, and 10.1% do not participate in the labor force (2008-2012b). Of those participating in the civilian labor force, 92% are employed, and 8% unemployed (2008-2012b). The top five industries per NAICS classification in West Midtown are *Administration & Support*, *Waste Management and Remediation*, *Manufacturing*, *Wholesale Trade*, *Accommodation and Food Services*, and *Retail Trade*. Per the Brookings Institution, *Administration and Support*, *Accommodation and Food Services*, and *Retail Trade* are low skill level jobs, while *Manufacturing* and *Wholesale Trade* fall in the middle skill level category<sup>5</sup> (Tomer et al. 2011). Given that 73.3%

<sup>5</sup> Brookings classifies jobs as low, medium, or high skill based on the ratio of bachelor degree holders in each industry.

of West Midtown residents possess a bachelor's degree or higher, this distribution may not fully meet the employment needs of residents (2011b). As shown in Figure 3, only 19% of the jobs in West Midtown are held by those with a bachelor's degree or higher (2011b).

**Figure 3: West Midtown Jobs by Educational Attainment**



Source: On the Map: US Census LEHD

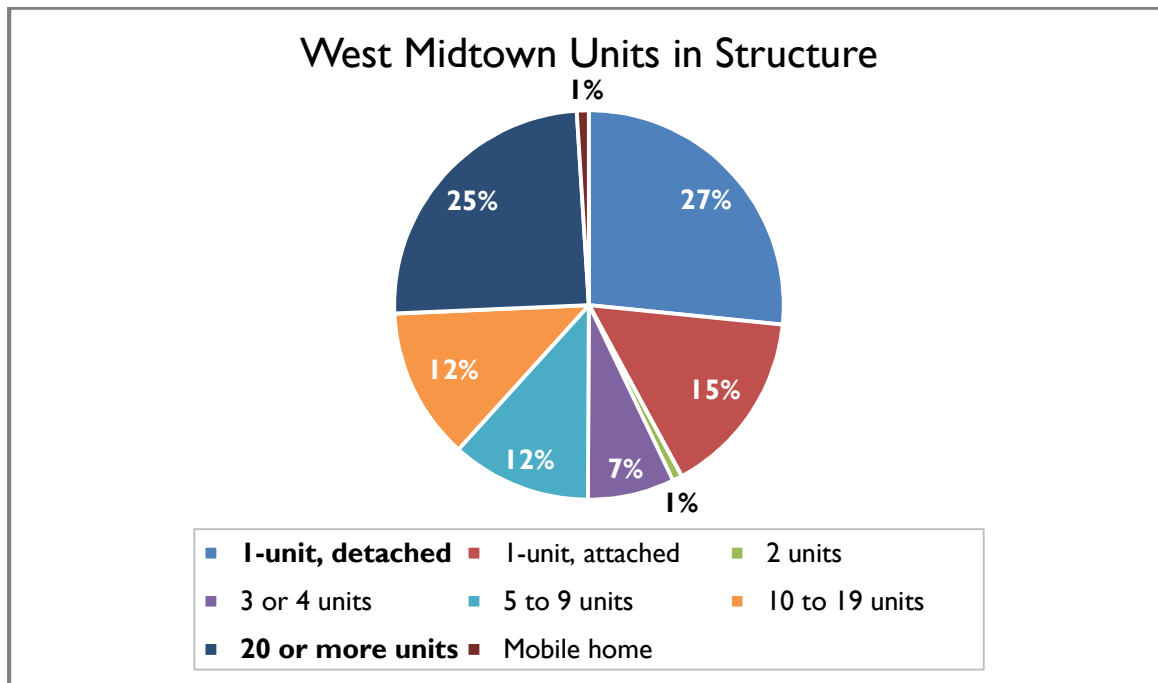
Per the US Census LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, only 5.1% of West Midtown residents live and work in the same census tract. Given West Midtown's location next to Midtown Atlanta, an area of high employment concentration, it is well sited for employment access overall.

The majority of people that work in the area must commute in to the neighborhood, and limited transit access may limit opportunity. Per the CNT Employment Access Index, the area has access to between 66,000 jobs per square mile to 87,000 jobs per square mile (2003-2011). 31% of residents travel less than 10 miles to get to work each day; 44% however travel 10-24 miles, and 24.9% travel 25 miles or more (2011b).

## Housing

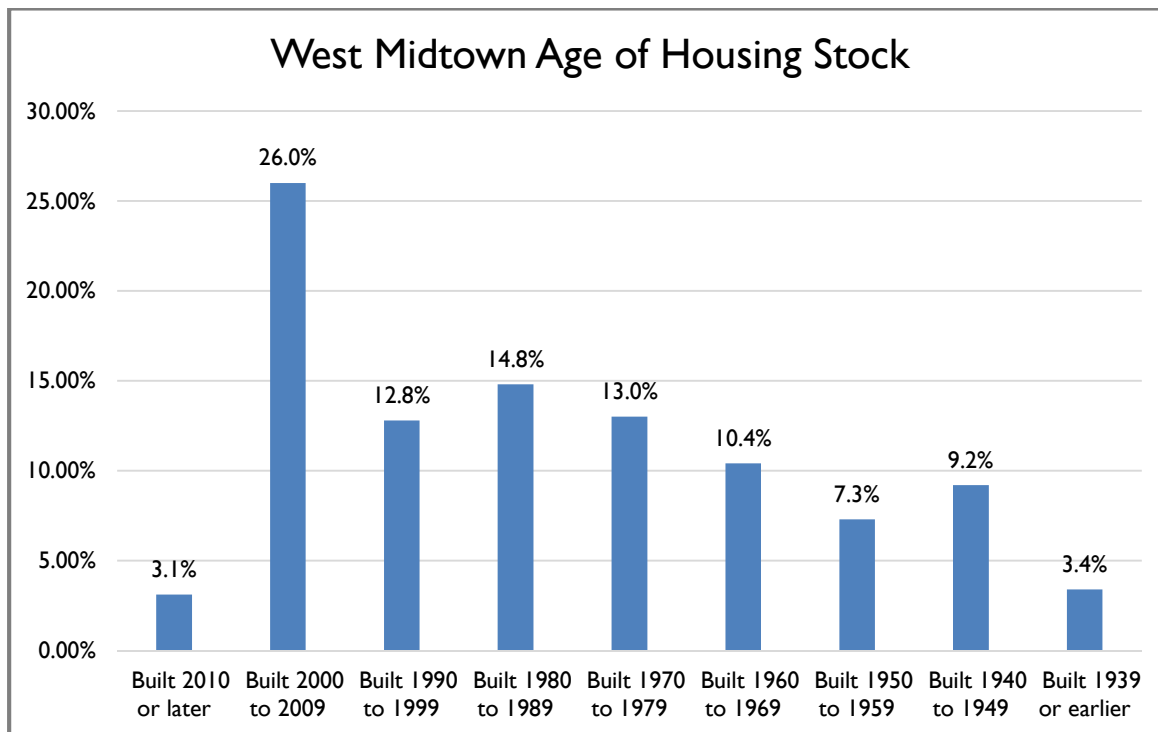
West Midtown has low housing vacancy rates at 10% (5.9% owner, 8.9% rental) (2005-2008). 52% of housing is rental housing, with 27% of units 1-unit detached housing, and 25% of housing multi-family, 20 units or more (2005-2008). As shown in Figures 4 and 5, multifamily housing of 5 units or more makes up 49% of housing in West Midtown, and there has been significant new multi-family housing under construction, with 29.1% built since 2000 (2005-2008).

**Figure 4: West Midtown Units in Structure**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

**Figure 5: West Midtown Age of Housing Stock**

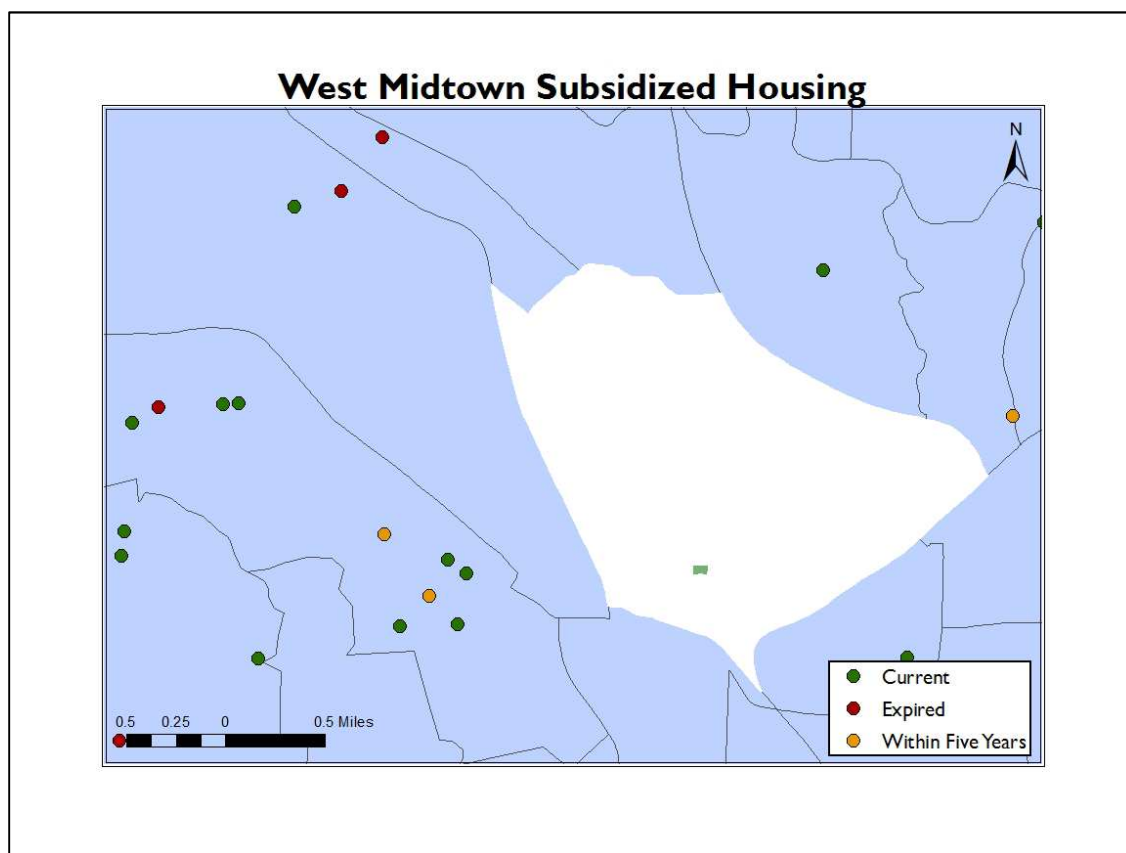


Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

Owner occupied home values are fairly high with 27% valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999 and 30% valued between \$300,000 and \$499,999 (2005-2008). Despite these high home values, 67% of home owners with mortgages spent less than 30% of their income on housing costs. Median rent is \$982/month, and 47% of renters spend 30% or more on housing costs (2005-2008).

As illustrated below in Figure 6, West Midtown is served by limited subsidized housing. The 89.02 Census Tract has no subsidized housing, but a one mile radius from 981 Huff Road contains twenty subsidized properties, 14 of which have subsidies current beyond the next twenty years. Many of these properties are in lower income census tracts however with less access to opportunity as defined by this paper.

**Figure 6: West Midtown Subsidized Housing**



*Source: National Housing Preservation Database*

### **Housing + Transportation Costs**

When adding transportation costs to the calculation, West Midtown residents spend a higher percentage of income on these basic costs; per the CNT Housing + Transportation Index, residents spend between 48% and 51% of their income on housing + transportation costs

(2003-2011). This is a significant increase from when only housing costs were assessed. Per Abogo<sup>6</sup>, 981 Huff Road residents will pay an average of \$1081 a month on transportation costs. While this is not significantly higher than Mechanicsville, it is important to note that income levels are much higher in West Midtown, thus lessening this burden.

## **Education**

The West Midtown community is served by Atlanta Public Schools:

- Rivers Elementary School
- Sutton Middle School
- North Atlanta High School

Both Rivers Elementary and Sutton Middle met AYP and are also highlighted as distinguished schools (GA DOE). North Atlanta High School did not meet AYP in either testing criterion, in math or language arts performance, or in graduation rate (GA DOE). While a positive factor that the area has two strong schools, given the very low percentage of children in the area, this factor is less critical to the current population.

## **Commercial Access**

West Midtown is situated in an area with many businesses, however the majority are home decoration or industrial in nature (2014c). Within a quarter mile of 981 Huff Road, there are 38 businesses of varying nature; when this is extended to one half mile, this increases to 135, and includes 15 restaurants (2014c). Of the 135 commercial businesses within ½ mile of 981 Huff Road, 11% are restaurants, 10.37% are furniture stores, and 9% (3% each) are plumbing supply, hair salons, and interior designers (2014c). This retail mix is not terribly strong within one half mile, but residents do have good access to necessities (including two full service grocery stores) within 2 miles that are served by a MARTA route. The USDA Food Access Research Atlas indicates that food access in West Midtown is generally strong, with only 0.67%(38 people) without access to a grocery store within one mile and only 10 low income people unable to access a store within one mile (2014a)<sup>7</sup>.

## **Multi-Modal Transportation**

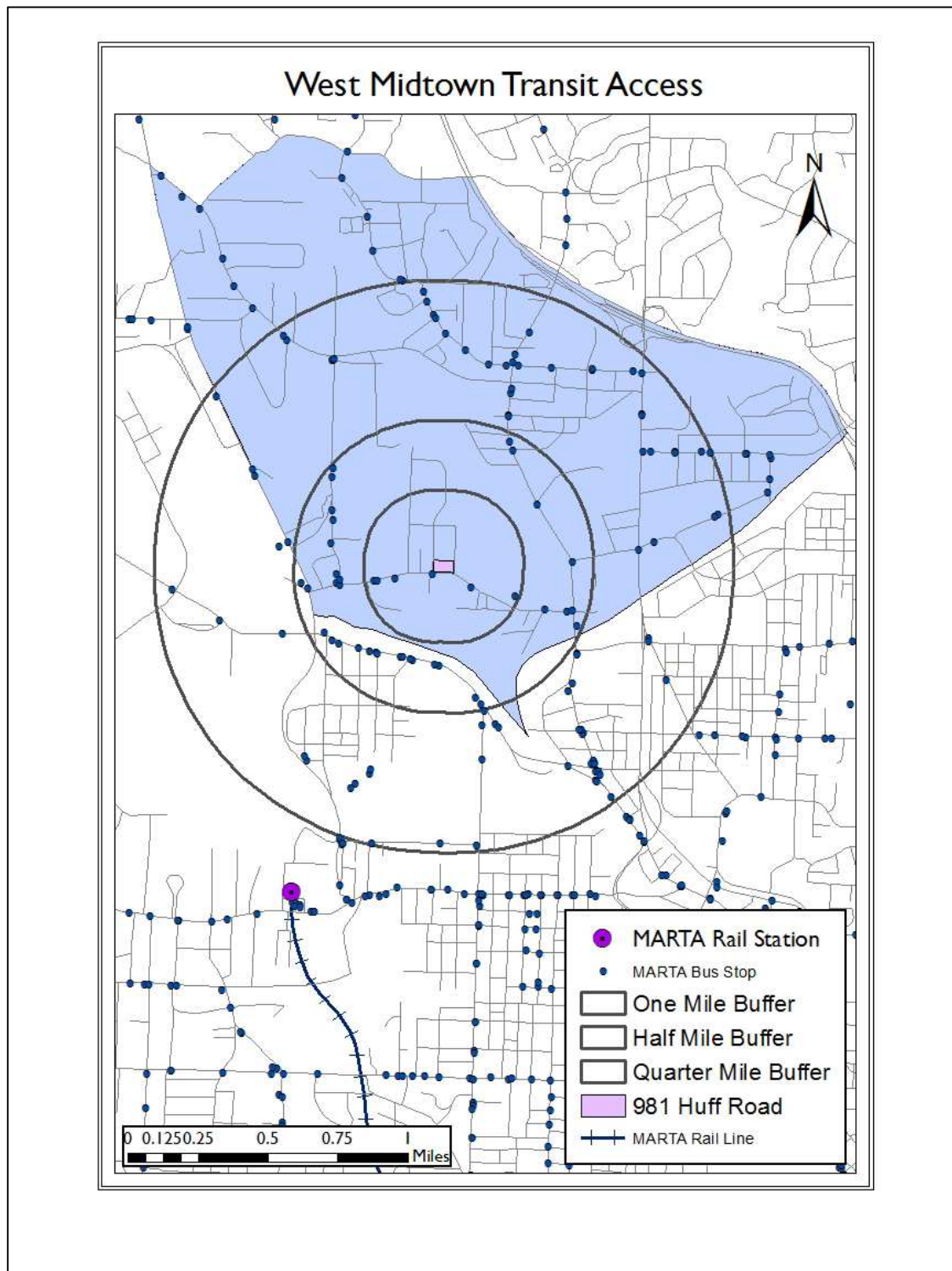
West Midtown has limited bus access and no nearby rail access. As shown below in Figure 7, limited bus service serves the immediate area, and the closest rail station (Bankhead) is over 1 mile away and separated by active freight rail lines. Per the CNT Transit Access Shed Index, West Midtown residents can reach between 103 km<sup>2</sup> and 157 km<sup>2</sup> within thirty minutes via transit. The Walk Score for the site is 49, indicating that it is car dependent, and the transit score is only 38, indicating few options (2014d).

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<sup>6</sup> Abogo pulls data from the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing + Transportation Affordability Index and calculates transportation costs by address.

<sup>7</sup> This is for the entire census tract. When assessing 981 Huff Road, the distance to the closest grocery store is 1.8 miles.

Figure 7: West Midtown Transit Access



Source: ARC MARTA Shapefiles

### **Mechanicsville Overview**

Mechanicsville is located in the central part of the city of Atlanta, in Fulton County. The primary Census Tracts are 44 and 120.

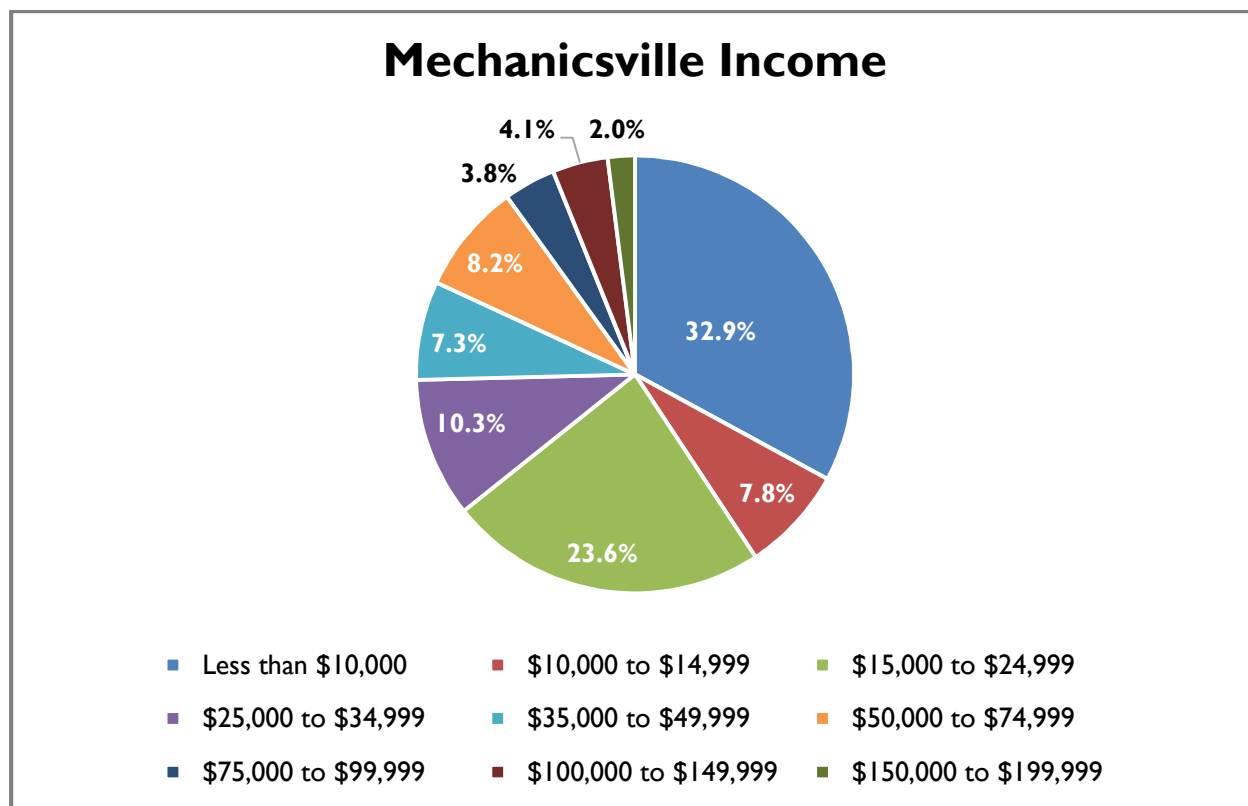
### **Population**

The Mechanicsville community is home to 5,156 people, a high percentage of which are young; 31% are under 18, and almost 10% are under 5 (2010). The area is 92% Black and 4% White. 39.35% of Mechanicsville households are families (2010), and 26% of all households are led by a single female householder (67% of family households are headed by a female householder) (2008-2012a).

### **Income**

Mechanicsville household income levels are on the whole low, with 33% of residents earning less than \$10,000, and a median household income of \$18,638 (CT 44) and \$16,941 (CT 120) (2008-2012b). Poverty in both census tracts is high, with 32.1% (CT 44) and 43.10% (CT 120) of residents living in poverty, and 37% and 56.9% of children under 18 living in poverty (2008-2012b). These levels indicate concentrated poverty.

**Figure 8: Mechanicsville Income**

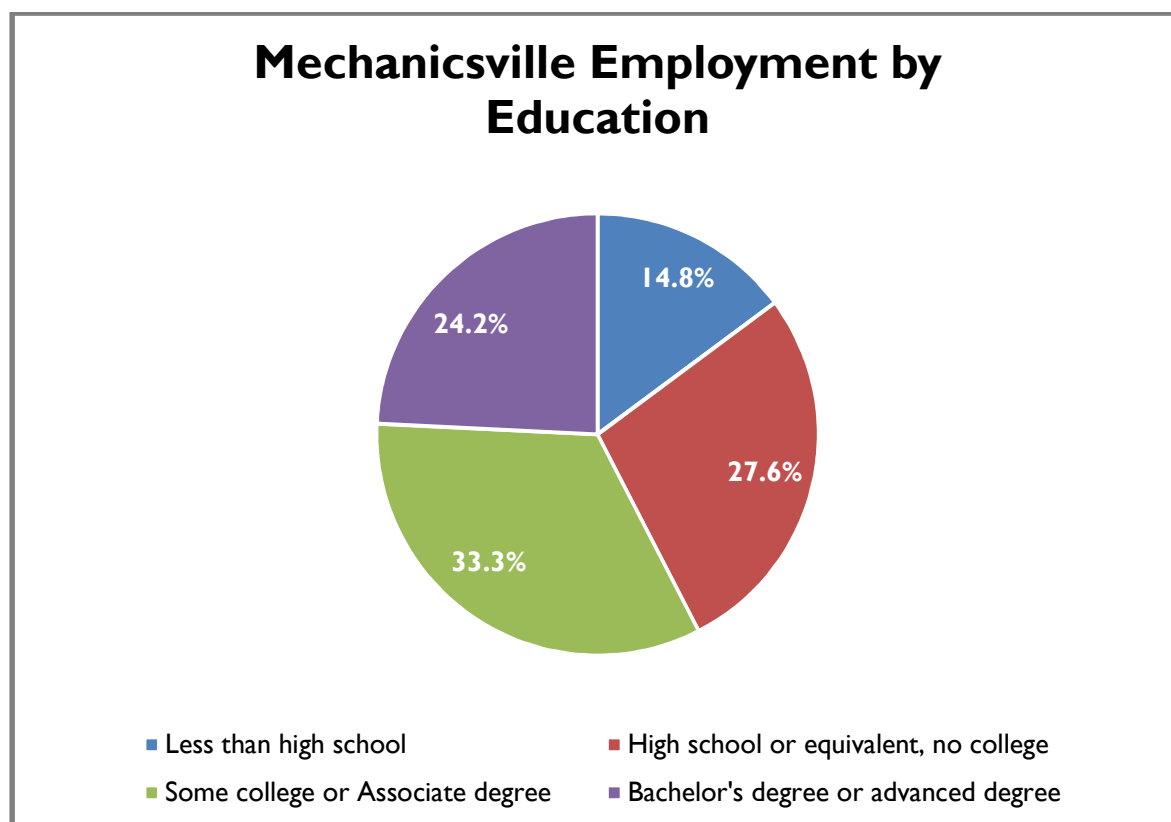


Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

## Employment

In assessing the labor force as a whole, 48% of Mechanicsville residents are employed, 15% unemployed, and 36% do not participate in the labor force (2008-2012b). Of those participating in the civilian labor force, 76% are employed and 24% unemployed (2008-2012b). These rates are far inferior to Metro Atlanta rates. The top three industries per NAICS classification in Mechanicsville are *Accommodation and Food Services*, *Health Care and Social Assistance*, and *Educational Services* (2011b). Per the Brookings Institution, *Educational Services* and *Health Care* are classified as high skill level jobs, while *Accommodation and Food Services* is classified in the low skill category<sup>8</sup> (Tomer et al. 2011). As shown in Figure 9, only 24.2% of Mechanicsville workers 29 or over possess a bachelor's degree or higher, while 75.78% earned less than a bachelor's degree. This distribution of employment opportunities may not fully meet the current employment needs of Mechanicsville residents in the neighborhood (2011b).

**Figure 9: Mechanicsville Employment by Education**



Source: US Census, On the Map, LEHD

<sup>8</sup> Brookings classifies jobs as low, medium, or high skill based on the ratio of bachelor degree holders in each industry.

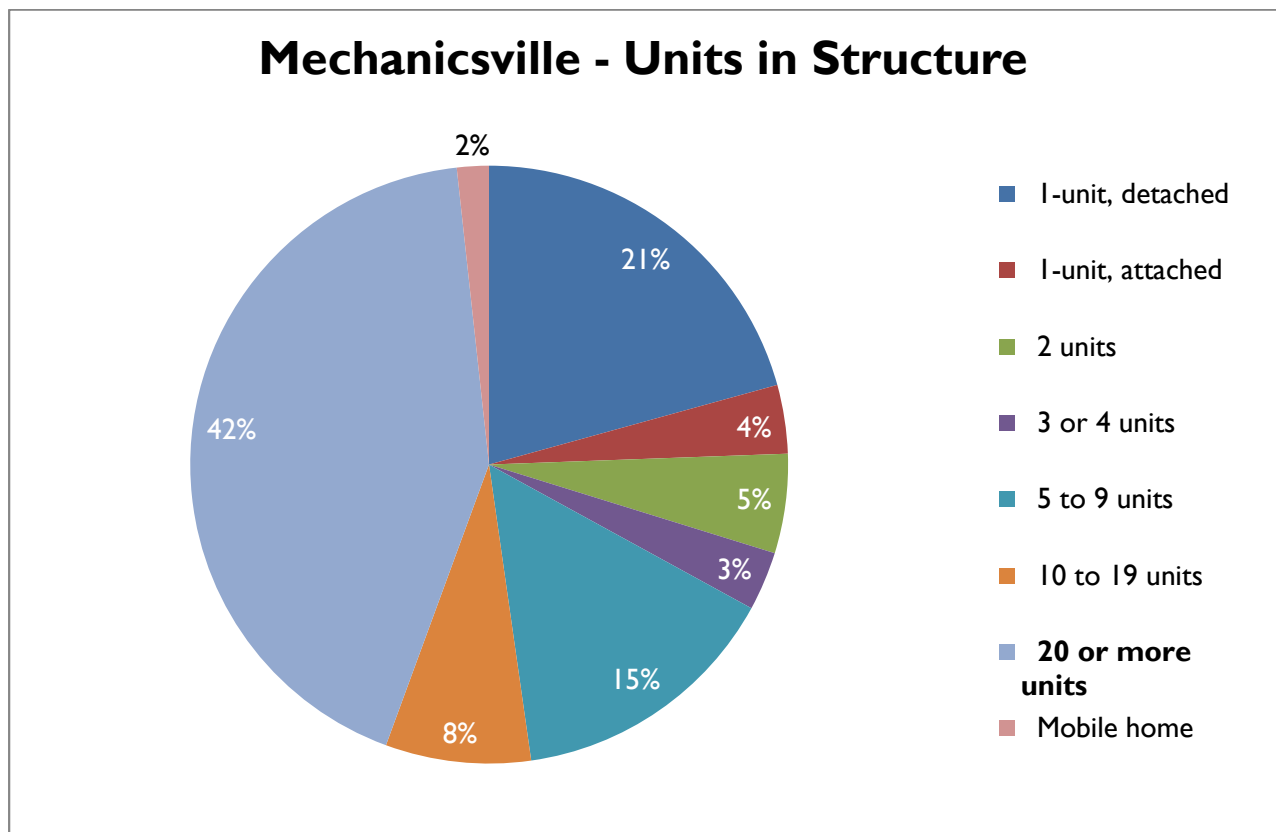


Per the US Census LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, only 1.5% of Mechanicsville residents live and work in the same census tract. Given Mechanicsville's location next to Downtown Atlanta, an area of high employment concentration (in all skill areas), Mechanicsville is actually well sited overall for employment access. Per the CNT Employment Access Index, the area has access to over 85,000 jobs per square mile (defined per block group); this is a strong density for the Atlanta metro area (2003-2011). Likely due to this strong access, many residents do not travel great distances for employment: 41.2% of Mechanicsville residents travel less than 10 miles to get to work each day (2011b). But, 40.8% travel 10-24 miles, which may be due to a mismatch in local skill level and employment opportunity (2011b).

## Housing

Mechanicsville experiences significant vacancy rates, with 25% vacancy overall (14.4% owner, 4.4% to 14.4% renter) (2005-2008). 77% of occupied housing is rental housing, with the majority of Mechanicsville housing being multi-family - 42% of housing is 20 units or more (2005-2008).

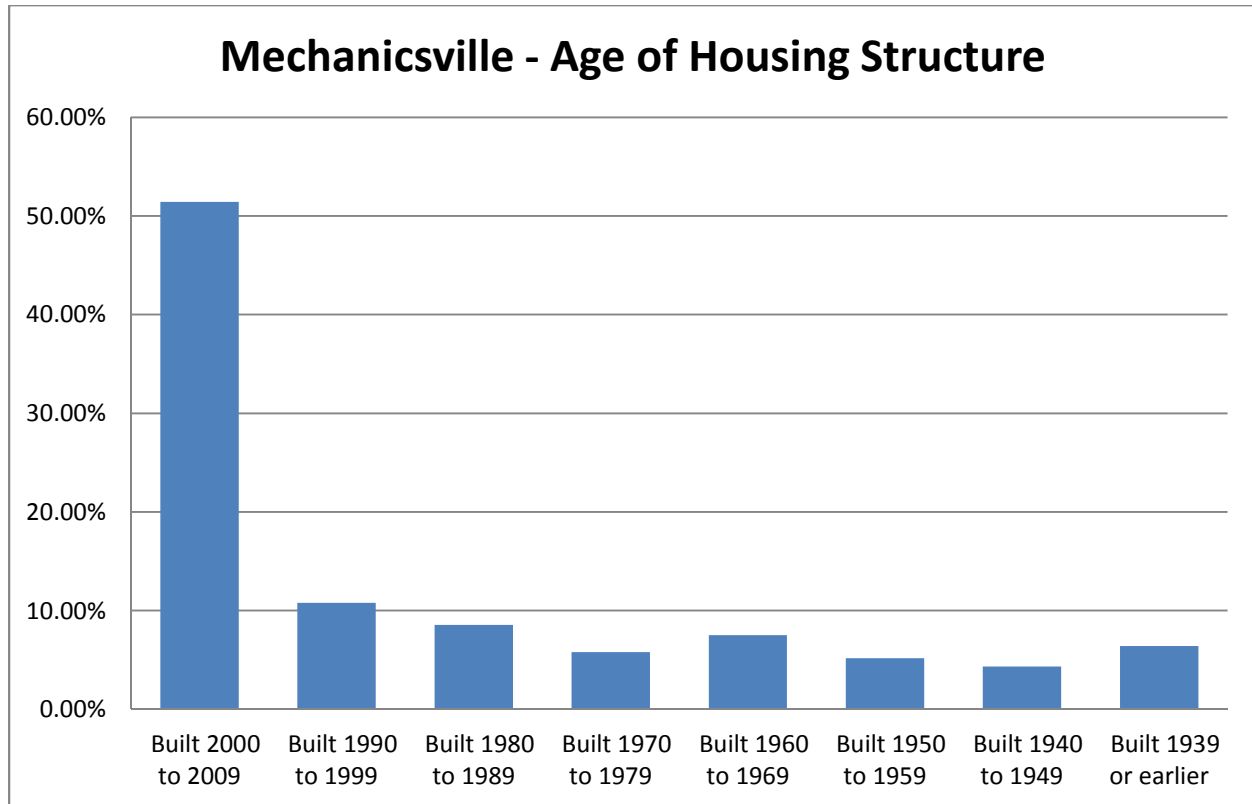
**Figure 10: Mechanicsville Units in Structure**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

As illustrated in Figure 11, housing stock is young, with 50% built since 2000; much of that development stems from one development, Columbia at Mechanicsville (2005-2008).

**Figure 11: Mechanicsville Age of Housing**

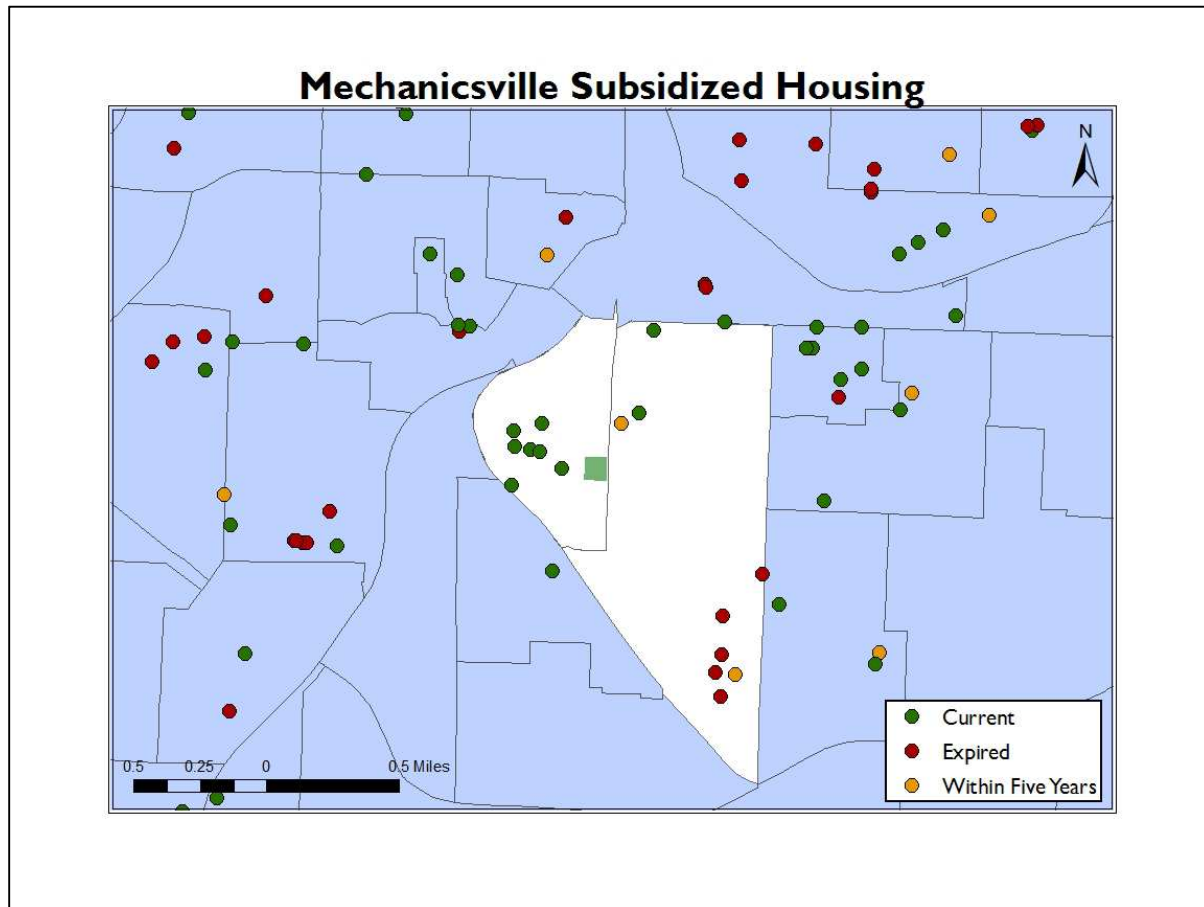


Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

Owner occupied home values vary widely (only 434 total), with 41% valued \$150,000 - \$199,999 (2005-2008). Median rent ranges from \$622 to \$691 a month (CT 44 and 120), and even though this rate is significantly lower than Atlanta area median rent, income levels are quite low in this community; 58.9% of renters spend 30% or more of their income on rent (2005-2008).

As illustrated in Figure 12, subsidies and thus affordability of five of sixteen subsidized housing developments have already expired. An additional two expire within five years, with the remaining nine still current. Additional properties exist within the general vicinity of the Mechanicsville census tracts, with the majority current on affordability.

**Figure 12: Mechanicsville Subsidized Housing**



Source: National Housing Preservation Database

### **Housing + Transportation Costs**

Among the four block groups in Mechanicsville, *Housing + Transportation* costs range from 25% to 43% of household income (2003-2011). Per Abogo, 330 Crumley St. NW will see an average of \$974/month spent on transportation alone (Abogo, 2014). While lower than the Atlanta region, when considering median household income in the area is only \$18,638 (Census Tract 44) and \$16,941 (Census Tract 120), this cost poses significant obstacles for a family attempting to reach employment, a grocery, or other necessities.

### **Education**

The Mechanicsville community is served by Atlanta Public Schools:

- Dunbar Elementary
- King Middle
- Maynard Jackson High School

Of these three schools, only King Middle met adequate yearly progress (AYP) overall, and this is with only an adequate school improvement status (2011a). Maynard Jackson did not meet the AYP standard for graduation rate, mathematics or English performance (2011a). Dunbar

Elementary did not meet AYP for mathematics or English performance, but did meet the standard for attendance (2011a). King Middle School met AYP in mathematics and English performance, as well as in attendance rate (2011a). Given the high percentage of families in this community, this level of performance raises concerns for both current and future residents.

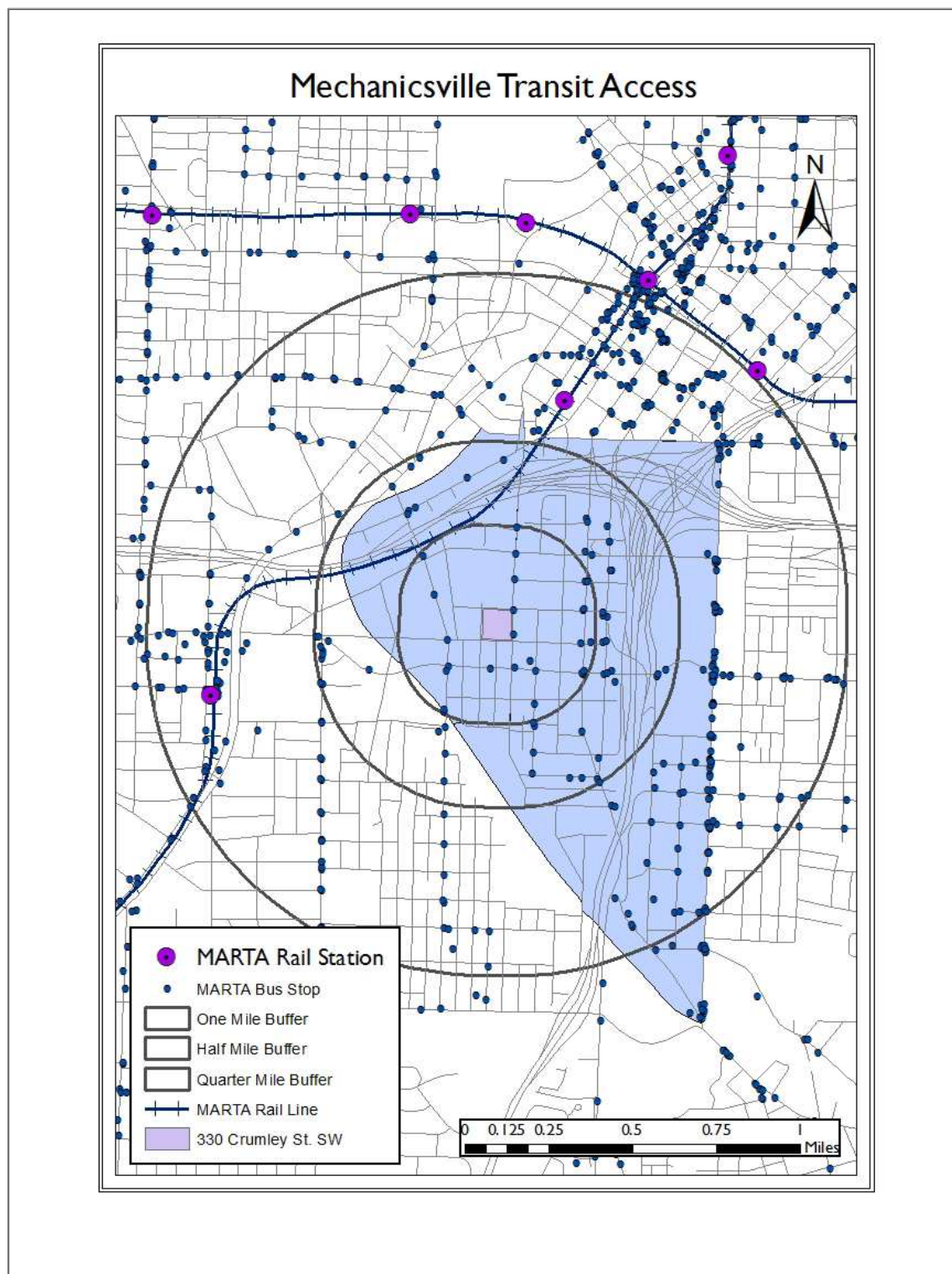
### **Commercial Access**

While data indicates that only 10.73% of Mechanicsville Residents and 6.92% of low income Mechanicsville Residents live 1 mile or more from a grocery store (2014a), these numbers are somewhat misleading (2014c). While two businesses which are classified as *Supermarkets/Other Grocery (Exc Convenience) Strs* by NAICS are located within a quarter mile of the 330 Crumley Street Parcel, neither is a major grocery store (2014c). Within 1 mile this expands to 23 businesses in the same classification, however again, these are largely small corner stores, without a national chain grocer represented (2014c). 106 other retail offerings are within one mile of the parcel, with 15% women's clothing, 8% convenience stores, 12% electronic stores, and 11% shoes stores (2014c). While this access is relatively strong, the neighborhood is bordered on the north and east sides by I-20 and I-75, significant barriers to walkability and access.

### **Multi-Modal Transportation**

As shown below in Figure 13, Mechanicsville is well situated to access transit via MARTA bus and rail service. While neither rail station is within ½ mile, two – Garnett and West End, are less than one mile away from 330 Crumley St. SW, and the Georgia State Station is just over one mile away. There are numerous bus stops throughout the community providing strong transit access.

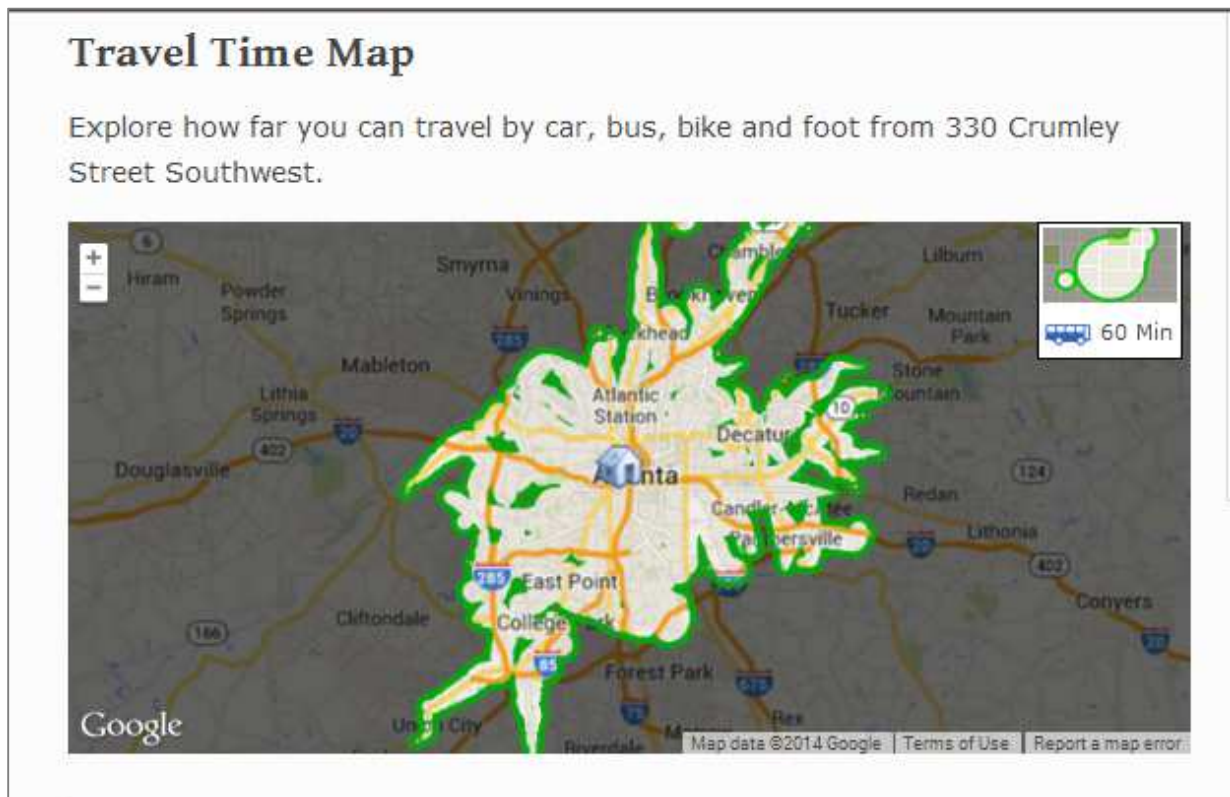
Figure 13: Mechanicsville Transit



Source: ARC MARTA Shapefiles

Per the CNT Transit Access Shed Index, Mechanicsville residents can travel between 173 km<sup>2</sup> and 323 km<sup>2</sup> within thirty minutes via transit. As shown in Figure 14, the Walk Score map illustrates the distance one can travel via transit from 330 Crumley St. SW in 60 minutes. Mechanicsville's Walk Score is 62, Transit Score is 58, and Bike Score is 52, classifying this neighborhood as "somewhat walkable" and ranking it 32 out of 162 Atlanta neighborhoods (2014d).

**Figure 14: Walk Score Travel Time Map**



Source: Walk Score

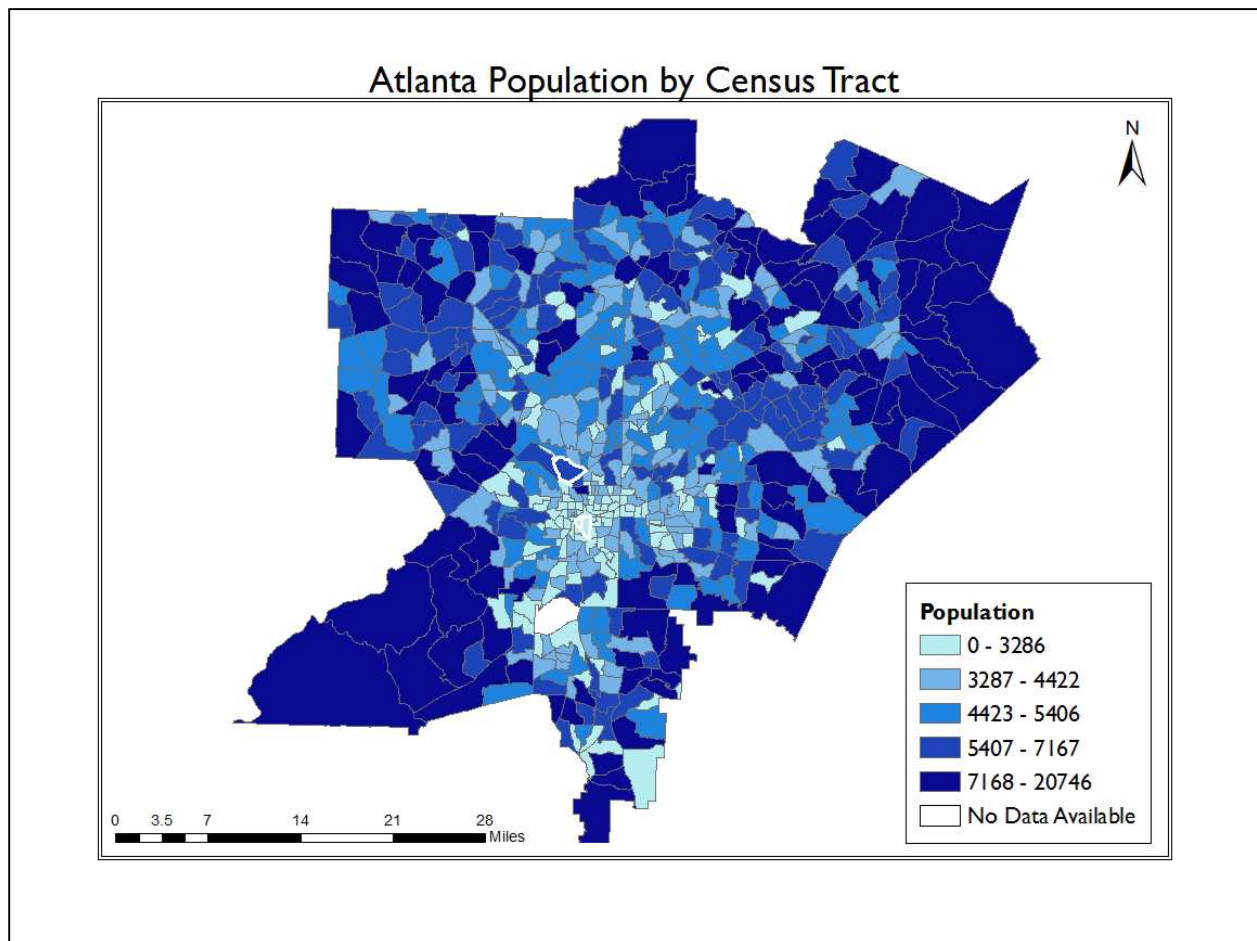


## **Comparative Analysis**

### **Population**

With a total population of 3,365,297, the Atlanta metro is made up of five primarily urban counties. As shown in Figure 15, Mechanicsville census tracts 44 and 120 are in the bottom 20% for population by census tract, while West Midtown tract 89.02 is in the upper 40% of population (2010). While West Midtown has greater population, it also has a land area over twice as large as Mechanicsville.

**Figure 15: Atlanta Population**

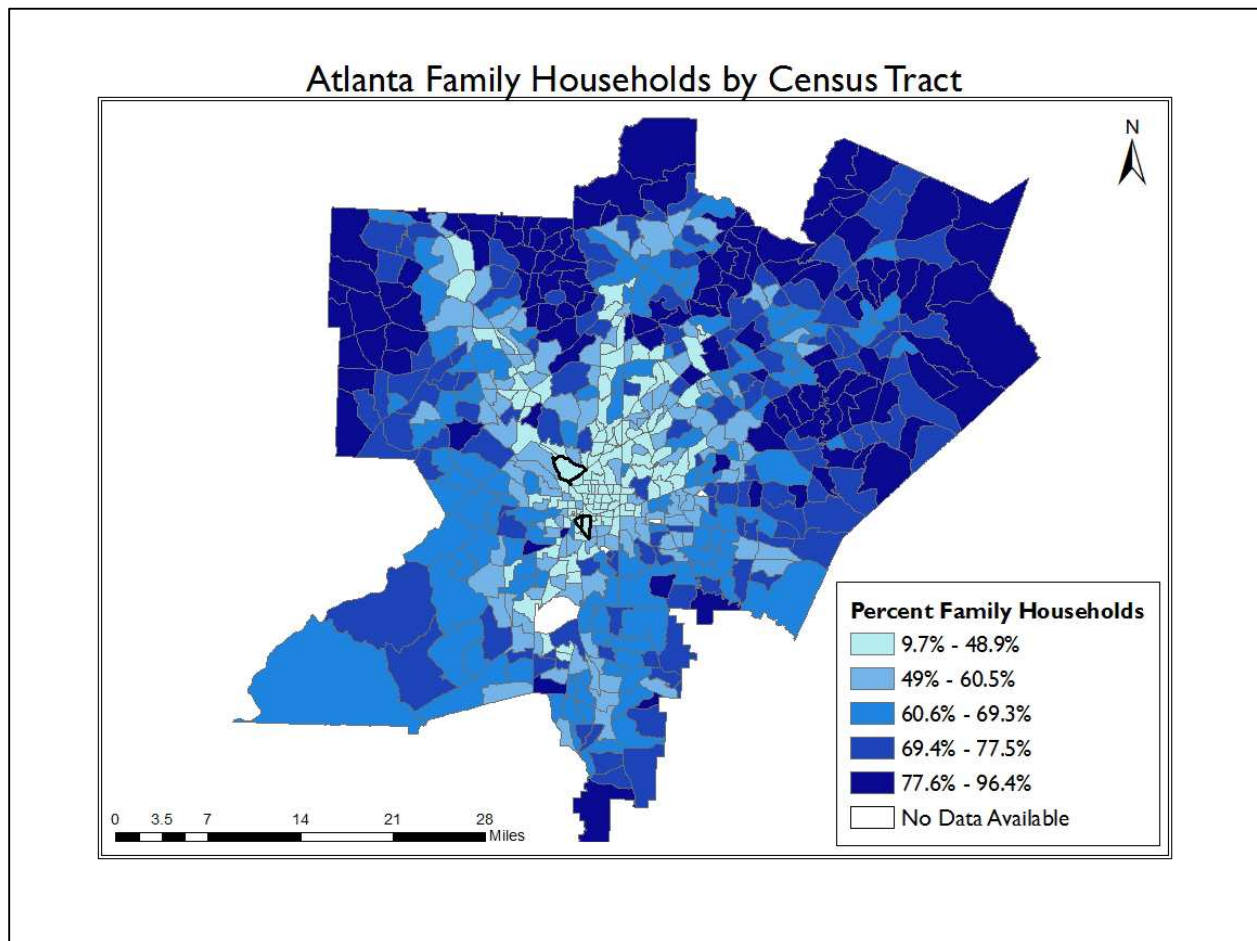


Source: U.S. Census, 2010

One third of the Atlanta area population is under 18; 56% are between 18 and 64, and 8.3% are over 65 (2010). Both West Midtown and Mechanicsville also fall in the bottom 20% for children under 17, though Mechanicsville tracts have a higher percentage of children (31% under 18) (2008-2012a).

As shown below in Figure 16, the percentage of family households varies widely from 9.6% to 96.6% families in Atlanta area census tracts (2008-2012a). Household composition analysis shows that the two tracts fall in the bottom 20% of Atlanta census tracts for percent family households, though the Mechanicsville tracts have slightly higher rates of family incidence (2008-2012a). This lower percentage may indicate that family units and amenities are less vital in these two communities, though in the community itself, 31% of Mechanicsville residents are under 18.

**Figure 16: Atlanta Family Households**



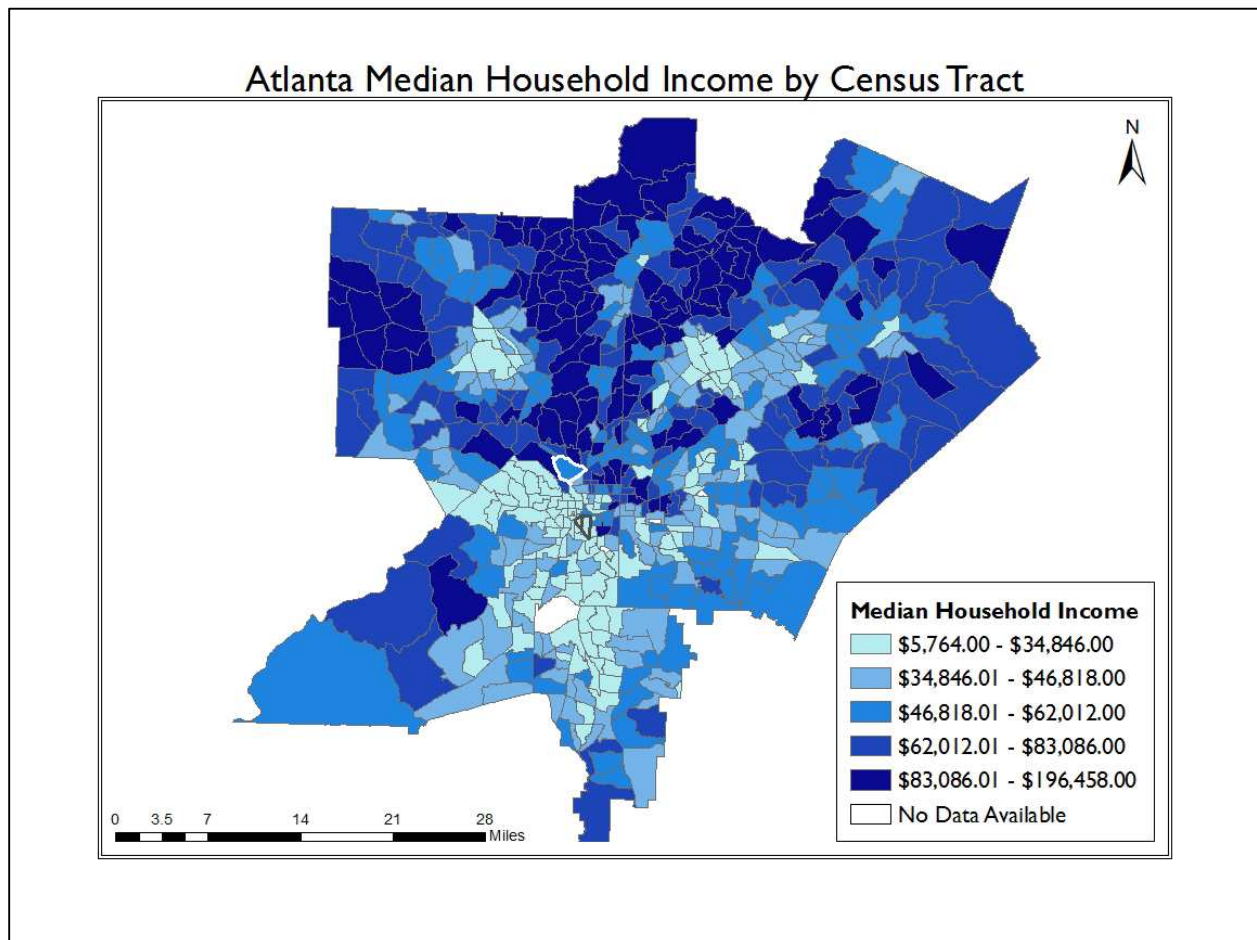
Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)



## Income

Median Household Income ranges significantly across the five counties from \$5,764 to \$196,458 (2008-2012c), with the median household income for the five county area \$54,310 (2008-2012c). As illustrated below in Figure 17, the two census tracts vary widely in assessment of household income. Mechanicsville median income is in the bottom 20% of Atlanta census tracts, while West Midtown falls in the middle 20% (2008-2012a).

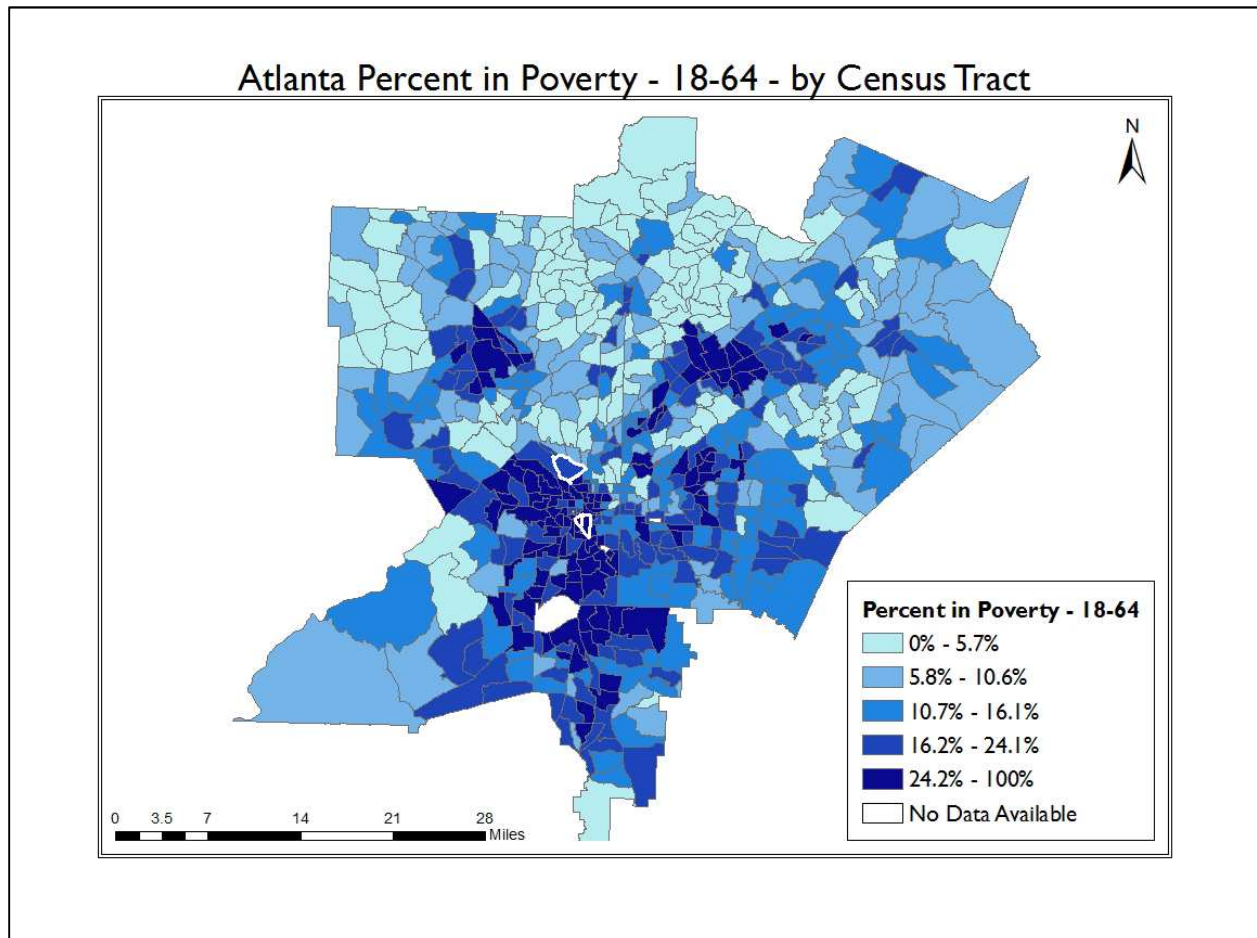
**Figure 17: Atlanta Median Household Income**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

The poverty rate for the Atlanta area ranges from Census Tracts with zero residents living in poverty to a high of 100% of residents living in poverty (2008-2012c). As shown in Figure 18, for residents from 18-64, West Midtown falls in the middle 20% of those living in poverty, while Mechanicsville falls in the top 20% (2008-2012a).

**Figure 18: Atlanta Poverty Rate, 18-64**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

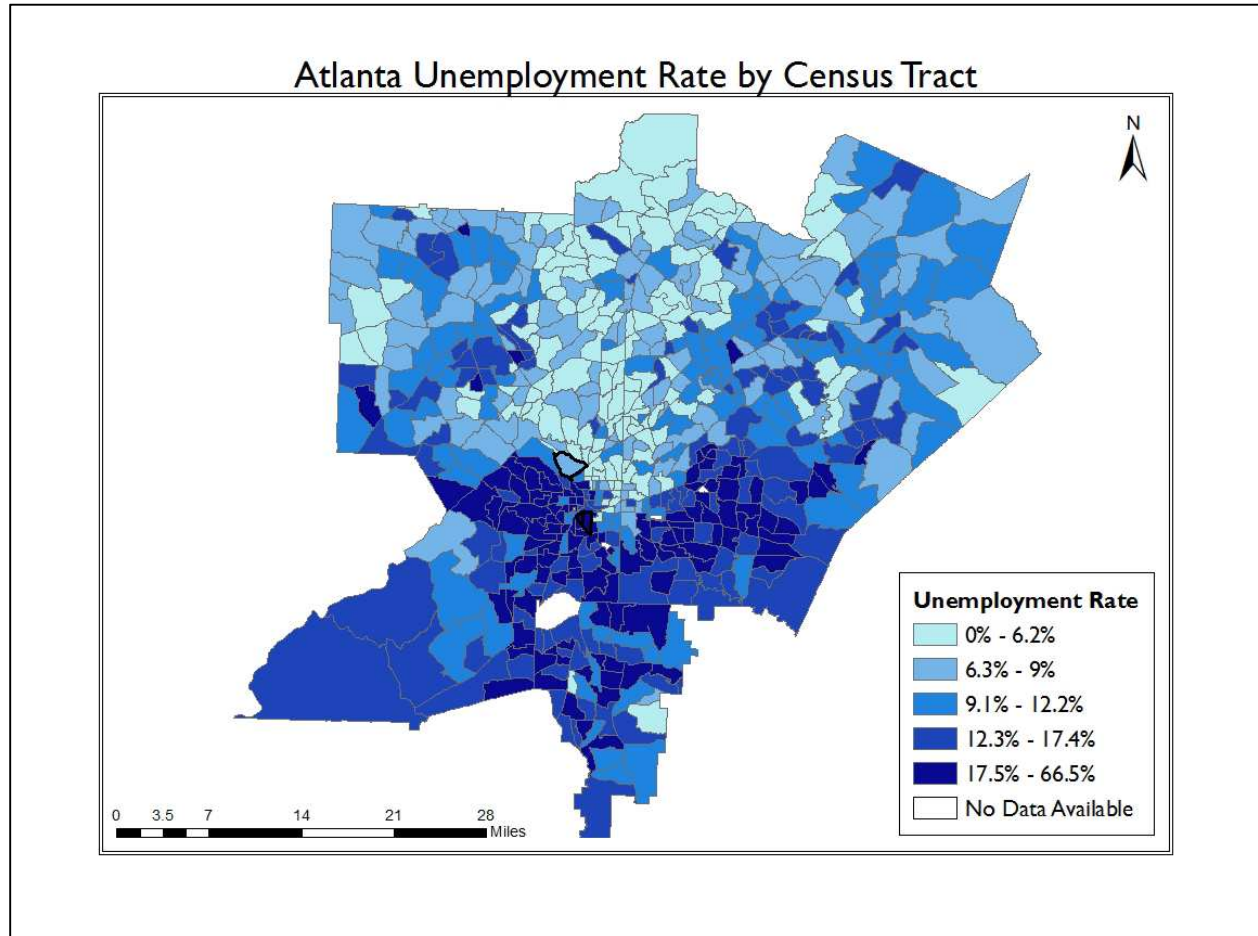
While some might offer that these results indicate more of a need for affordable housing in Mechanicsville due to more low income residents, I offer that this result cautions one to place more affordable housing in an area of concentrated poverty. West Midtown's lesser representation of residents living below the poverty level offers an opportunity to increase income diversity in the neighborhood through affordable housing provision.

## Employment

In assessing the labor force as a whole, 60.9% of Atlantans are employed, 8.7% unemployed, and 30.3% do not participate in the labor force (2008-2012b). When assessing the Civilian Labor force only, 12.4% of the Civilian Labor Force are unemployed(2008-2012c). These rates are worse than the US as a whole, (US unemployment 6% when looking as a whole, or 9.3% for

civilian labor force only) (2008-2012b). Shown below in Figure 19, West Midtown falls in the bottom 40% for unemployment, however Mechanicsville finds itself in the top 40%, indicating that there are challenges with access to employment in the community.

**Figure 19: Atlanta Unemployment Rate**



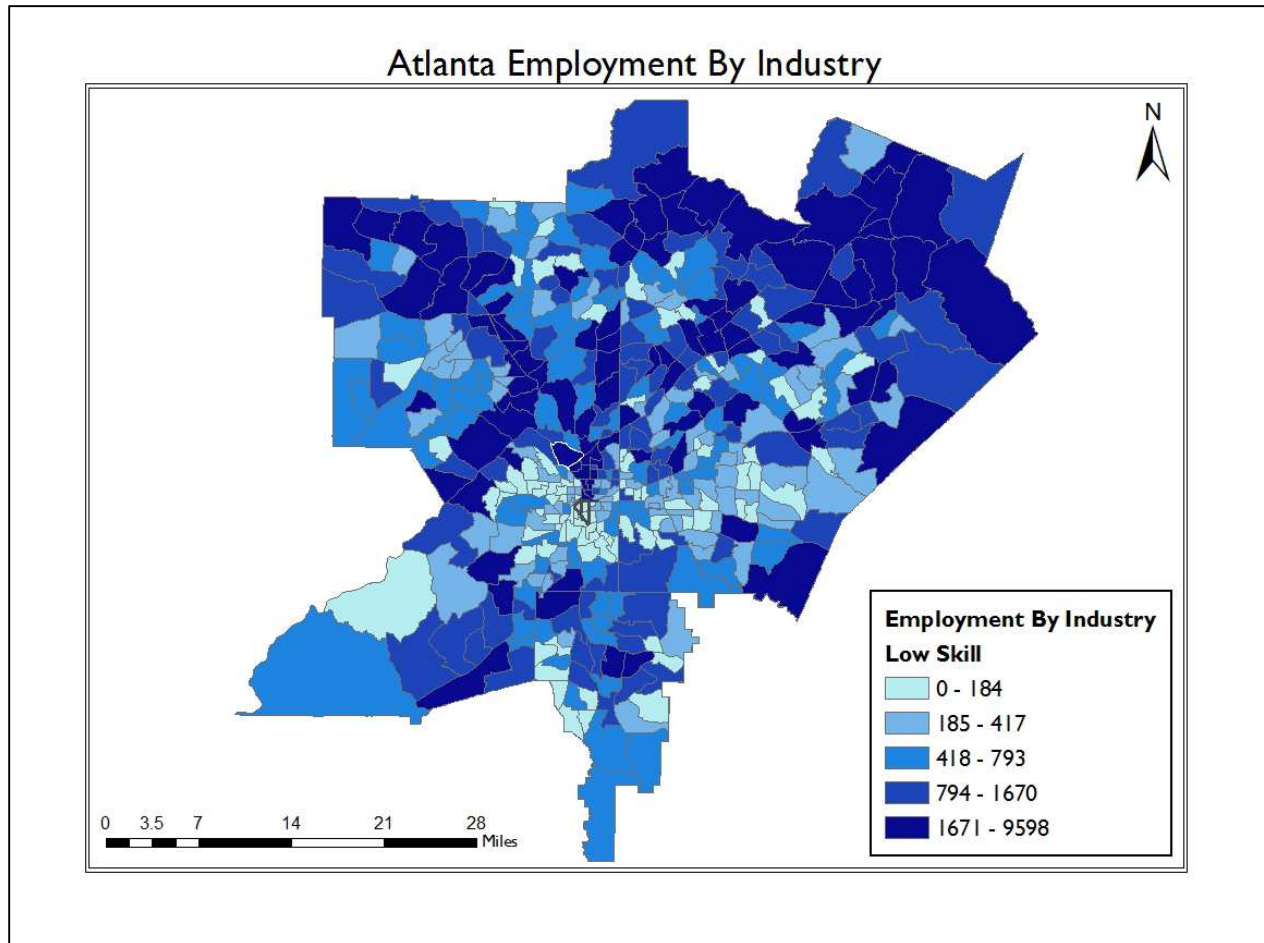
Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

The top three industries per NAICS classification in the Atlanta MSA are *Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services, and Retail Trade* (2008-2012c). Per the Brookings Institution, *Professional, Scientific and Management* and *Educational Services and Health Care* are classified as high skill level jobs, while *Administrative and Waste Management Services and Retail* are classified in the low skill category<sup>9</sup> (Tomer et al. 2011). 39.8% of Atlanta residents possess a bachelor's degree or higher, while 60.1% have earned less than a bachelor's degree; thus this distribution aligns fairly well with the skillsets of Atlanta residents (2011b). Utilizing the Brookings' classifications, the below maps (Figures 20,21,22) illustrate the dispersion of employment

<sup>9</sup> Brookings classifies jobs as low, medium, or high based on the ratio of bachelor degree holders in each industry.

opportunities by skill level across the five county Atlanta area. Figure 20 shows that the West Midtown tract has an average number of high skill jobs, landing in the middle 20% of Atlanta Census Tracts. West Midtown also has a stronger representation of low and medium skill employment opportunities, which aligns with earlier analysis indicating that the top five industries in West Midtown fall in Middle and Low Skill categories.

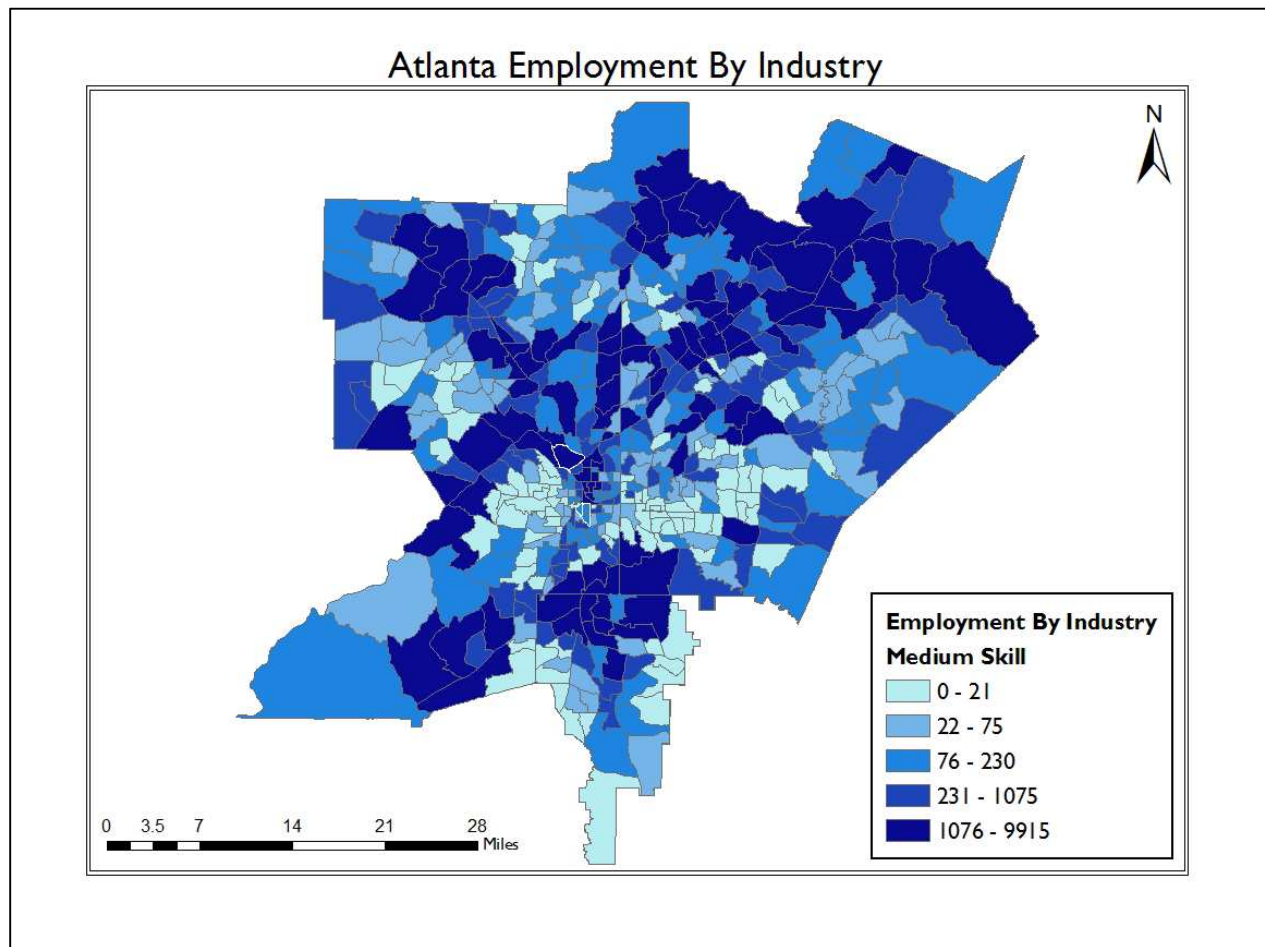
**Figure 20: Employment by Industry - Low Skill**



Source: U.S. Census, On the Map

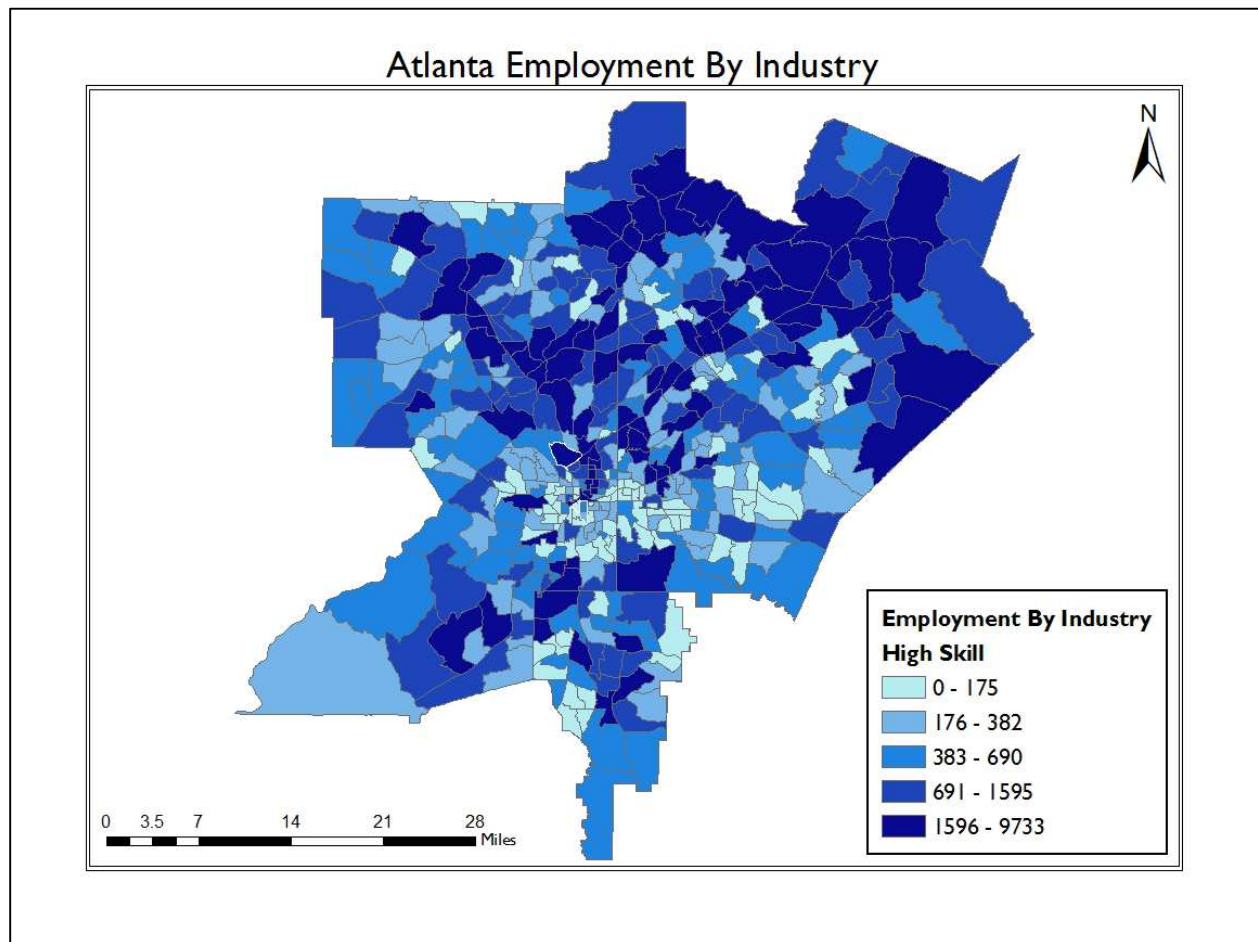


**Figure 21: Employment by Industry - Medium Skill**



Source: U.S. Census, On the Map

**Figure 22: Employment by Industry - High Skill**



Source: U.S. Census, On the Map

Given that West Midtown has low and medium skill employment opportunities within the census tract, it therefore presents a strong opportunity for LMI residents seeking employment. 60% of Atlanta residents have not received a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating that low and medium skill level jobs are in high demand. Mechanicsville in contrast falls in the bottom 20% for all employment regardless of industry as illustrated in Figures 20-22. The area is however in close proximity to Downtown Atlanta which has a higher incidence of employment opportunities (of all skill levels), making it a more reasonable location for affordable housing despite a lack of employment opportunities in the tract itself.

Getting to employment is another challenge; the CNT Housing + Transportation Index Employment Access Index illustrates that only 12.7% of Atlantans have access to 46,000 jobs per square mile, while almost 40% have access to less than 12,000 jobs per square mile<sup>10</sup>. The CNT Housing + Transportation Index illustrates that the concentration of employment opportunities is in the central to northern part of the Atlanta area ((2003-2011). Given this, it is not surprising that 39% of metro Atlantans travel from 10-24 miles each day to get to work. In addition, the Brookings Institution completed an analysis of access to employment via public transportation, with Atlanta ranking 91 out of 100 major metropolitan areas(Tomer et al. 2011). Per the Brookings Institution, 22% of overall Atlanta MSA jobs are accessible via transit within 90 minutes, but only 14.7% of population can reach these jobs within 90 minutes (Tomer et al. 2011). Further analysis shows that 54.8% of low skill jobs and 57% of high skill jobs are in neighborhoods with public transit, but only 15.5% of high skill and 17.2% of low skill employees can reach their job within 90 minutes by transit. Atlanta ranks 87 out of 100 metro areas in both these aspects (Brookings 2014).

West Midtown and Mechanicsville both fare somewhat strongly in access to employment opportunities; Mechanicsville has strong transit access via bus and rail, and West Midtown offers a strong representation of low and medium skill employment opportunities, lessening the need for transit access to reach employment.

## **Housing**

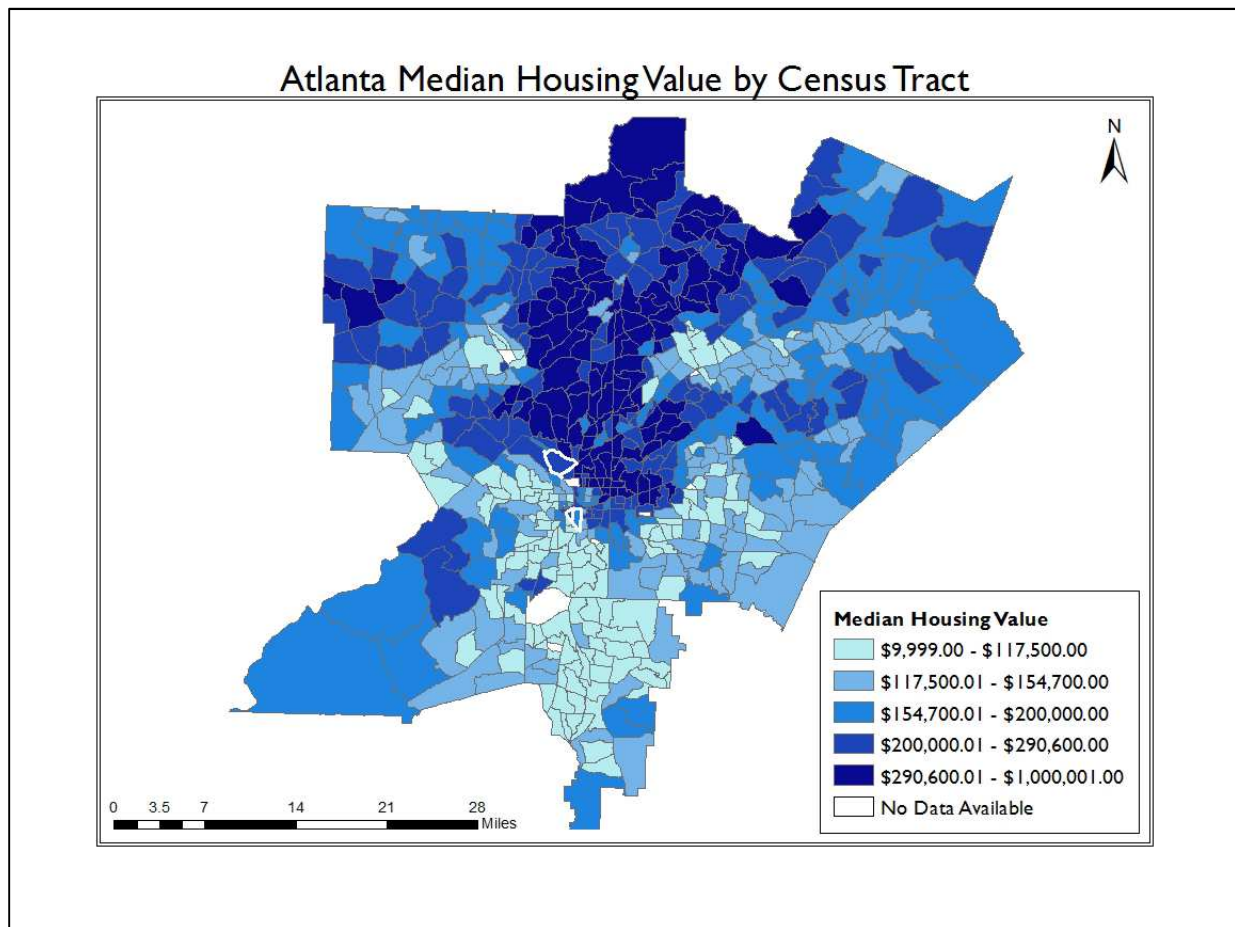
61.4% of the five county Atlanta area's housing is owner occupied, while 38.7% is renter occupied(2008-2012c). 87% of this housing is occupied, with 13% vacant (2008-2012c). The majority of Atlanta housing is single unit detached (59.8%), with only 6% 50 units or more (2008-2012c). The median home value in the area ranges from \$9,999 to over \$1,000,000, with the median for the five county region at \$189,059 (2008-2012c). The median rent payment is \$961, and median selected monthly owner costs as a percentage of household income is 24.8% for owners, and 31.8% for renters (2008-2012c). When assessing the two identified neighborhoods, West Midtown home values are high relative to other census tracts in the Atlanta area, falling in the top 40% of values, as shown in Figure 23 (2008-2012c). Mechanicsville

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<sup>10</sup> The CNT Employment Access Index indicates that 46,000 Jobs/Sq Mile is the top category.

in contrast, falls in the middle 20% to lower 40% in this statistic (Also important to note is that Mechanicsville overall has little owner occupied housing) (2008-2012c).

**Figure 23: Atlanta Median Housing Value**

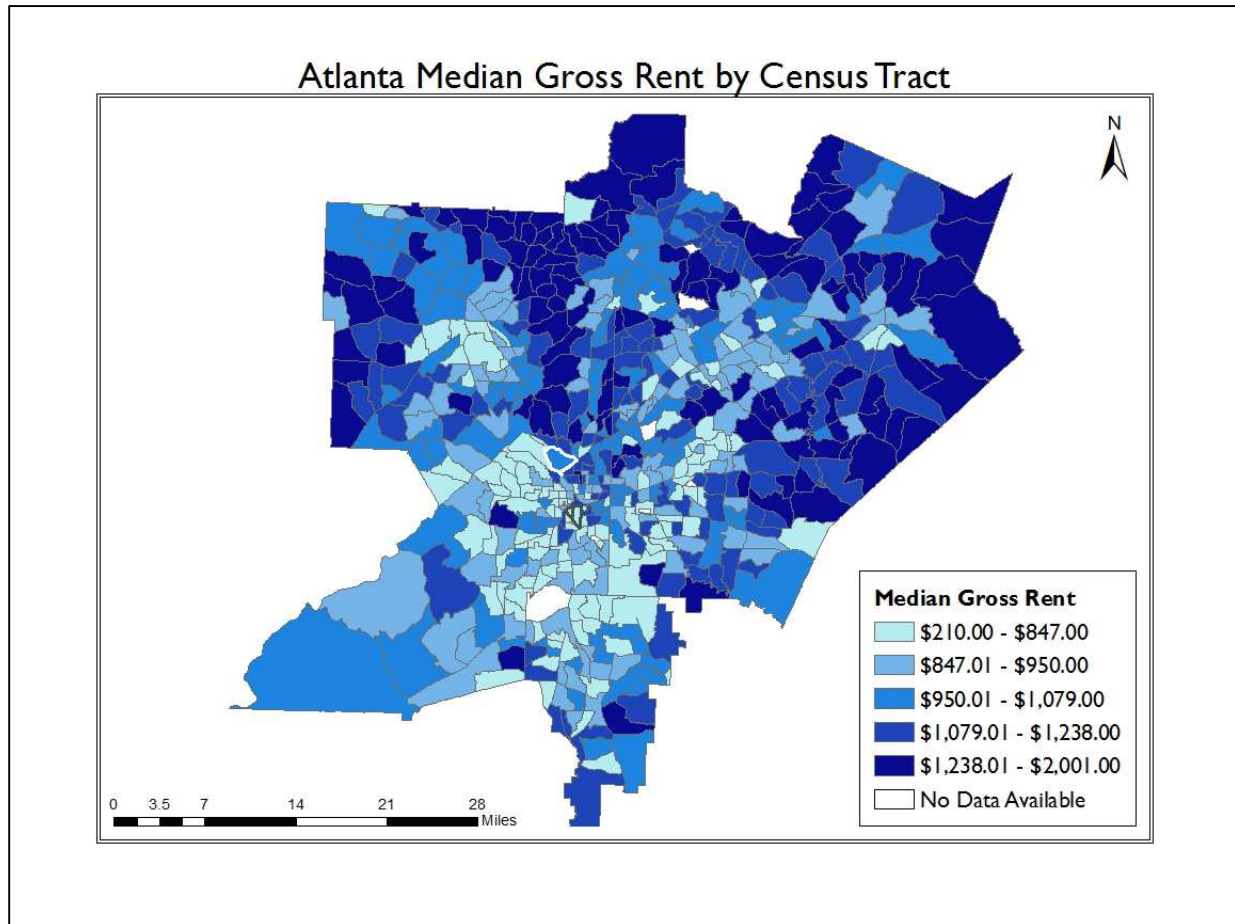


Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)



Even with higher costs, West Midtown also boasts higher incomes, and thus falls in the middle 20% of Atlantans paying 30% -50% on household costs (2008-2012c). Mechanicsville residents find themselves in the top 20% across the area in percentage of income spent on housing costs. Illustrated below in Figure 24, rent in Mechanicsville is quite low, falling into the bottom 20% of Atlanta census tracts, while West Midtown rents are in the middle 20% (2008-2012c).

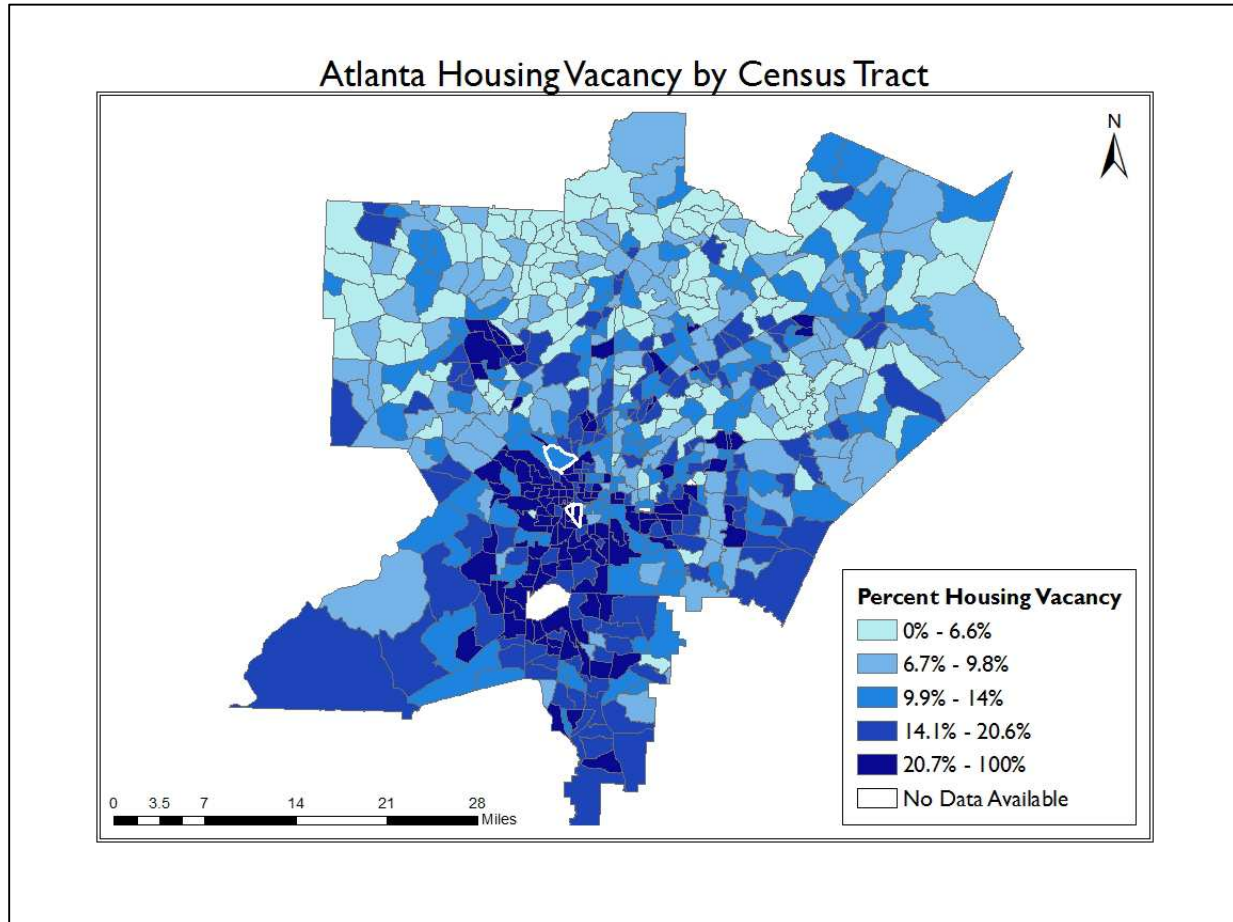
**Figure 24: Atlanta Median Gross Rent**



Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)

As shown in Figure 25, vacancy in West Midtown is in the bottom 40%, while Mechanicsville census tracts have higher levels of vacancy, falling in the 60%-80% ranges for the Atlanta area (2008-2012c).

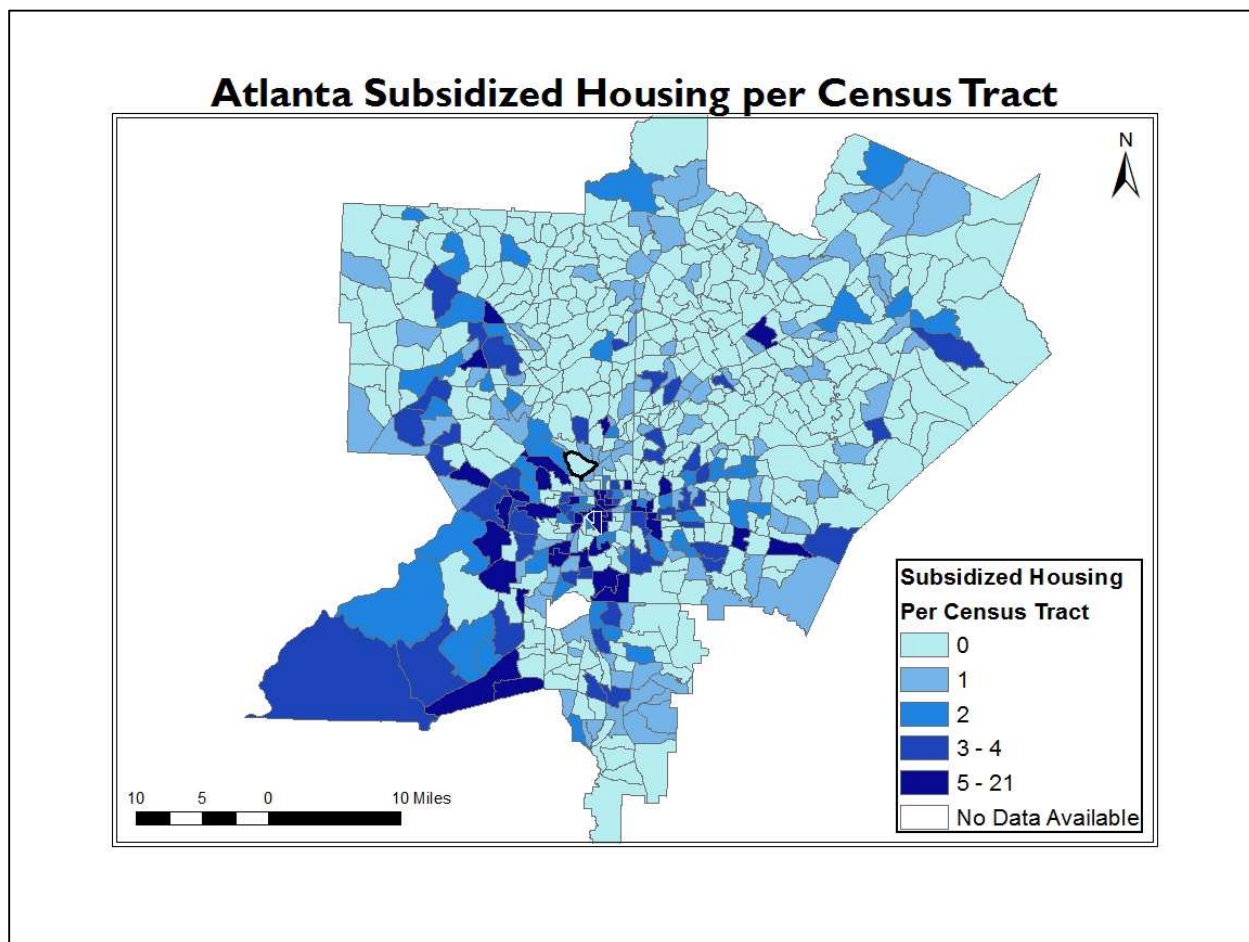
**Figure 25: Atlanta Housing Vacancy**



*Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2008 to 2012 (5-Year Estimates)*

Shown below in Figure 26, the majority of Atlanta's subsidized housing is located in the central to southern part of the city, with few dispersed projects throughout the five county area. Mechanicsville currently has a strong representation of subsidized, affordable units, with many projects' affordability still intact. West Midtown in contrast lacks affordable housing in CT 89.02 (though there are developments approximately one mile away). Mechanicsville falls into the top 20% for subsidized projects per census tract, while West Midtown falls in the bottom 20% with zero.

Figure 26: Atlanta Subsidized Housing



Source: National Housing Preservation Database

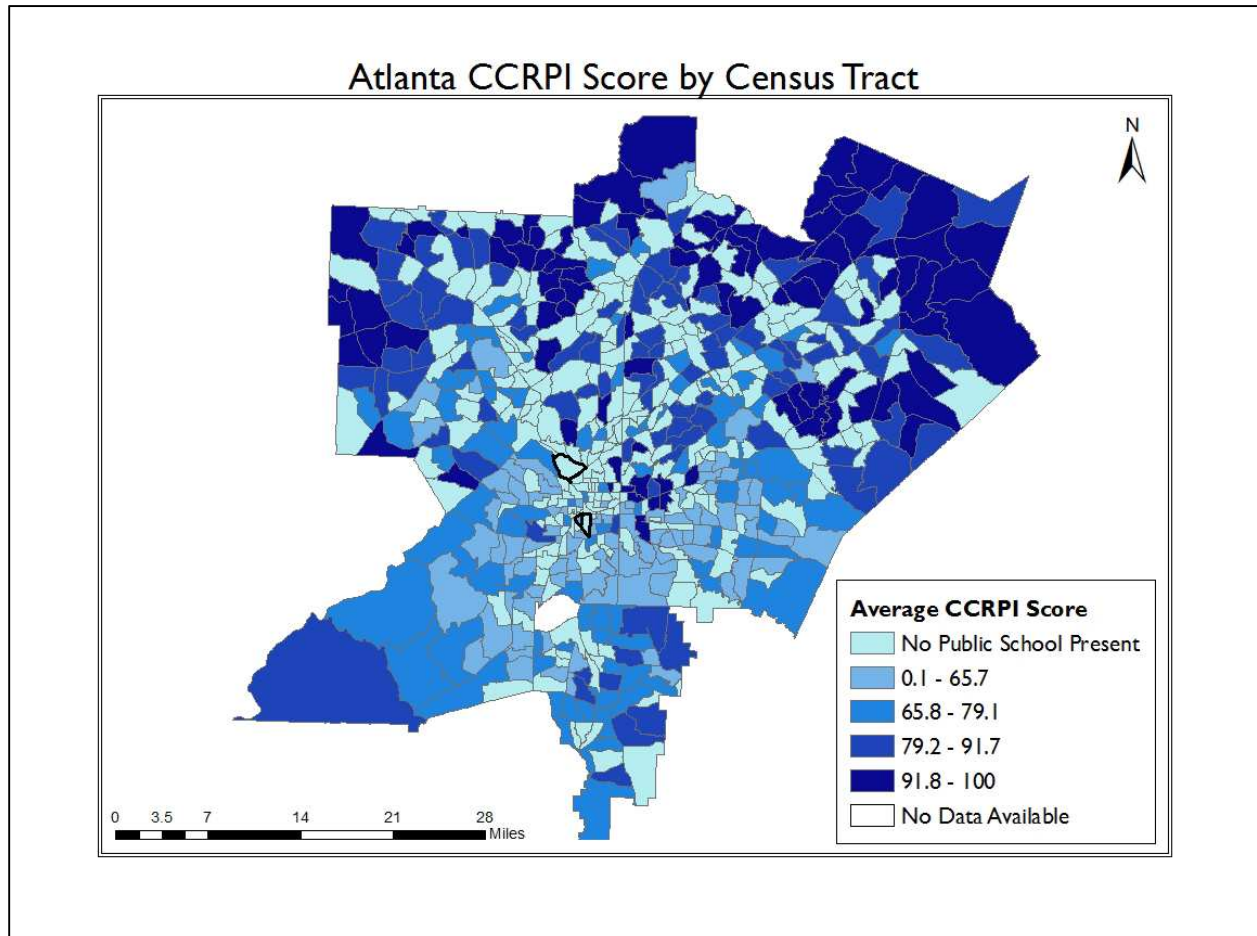
Given the high home and rent values present in West Midtown in contrast to the comparatively low values for Mechanicsville, combined with the high vacancy in Mechanicsville and low vacancy in West Midtown, I find that West Midtown presents a more appropriate affordable housing site than Mechanicsville. In addition, Mechanicsville and surrounding tracts already possess a disproportionately high number of subsidized developments in comparison to the Atlanta area as a whole; to avoid further concentrating poverty, greater dispersion should be sought.

### Education

Out of a total of 646 schools in the five county region, 207 (32%), did not meet Annual Yearly Progress Requirements in 2011 as defined by the Georgia Department of Education (2011a). A new school assessment system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) was implemented in 2013 and assesses a school on Content Mastery, Post High School/Middle School/Elementary School Readiness, and Graduation Rate/Graduation Rate Predictor. While the study census tracts themselves do not have schools located within, the schools which the

parcels are zoned for have been assessed. Figure 27 below shows the census tract CCRPI score dispersion. West Midtown schools fall into the middle 20% to top 40% of schools based on CCRPI scores; Mechanicsville schools in contrast fall into the bottom 20% (2014b). While West Midtown currently has less children than Mechanicsville, its school performance make it a preferential choice for family housing.

**Figure 27: Atlanta CCRPI Scores**



Source: Georgia Department of Education

## Food Access

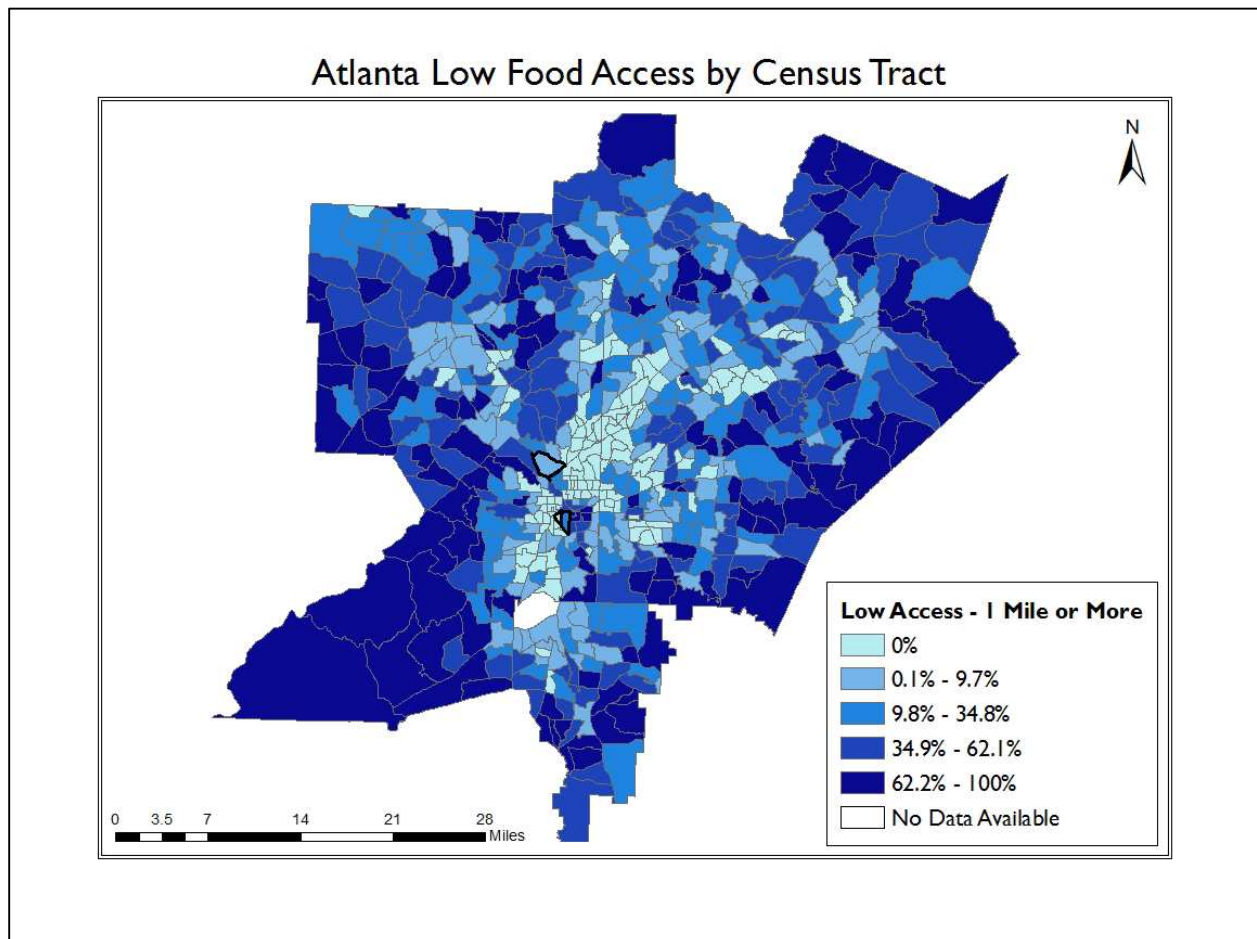
In the five counties, the percent population with low food access ranges from 21% (Fulton) to 40% in (Cobb)<sup>11</sup>, with between 6.4% (Fulton) and 14.3% (Clayton) of low income families experiencing low access to a grocery store (2014a). Shown below in Figure 28, West Midtown falls into the bottom 40% of Atlanta Census Tracts for the percentage of people who live further than one mile from a grocery store, while Mechanicsville falls into the middle 20% for CT 120, and the bottom 20% for CT 44. These results are somewhat misleading, as the

<sup>11</sup> 1 mile or more from a grocery store in an urban area; 10 miles or more from a grocery store in a rural area.



majority of shopping options within one mile of 330 Crumley St. SW are small corner stores, while West Midtown offers two large grocery stores within 2 miles and on a bus route. West Midtown offers greater ease of access to large grocery stores, while Mechanicsville offers greater numbers of small stores, which may or may not offer healthy food. Overall food access in West Midtown is strongest and presents a stronger opportunity for families to live a healthy lifestyle via healthy food access.

**Figure 28: Atlanta Low Food Access**



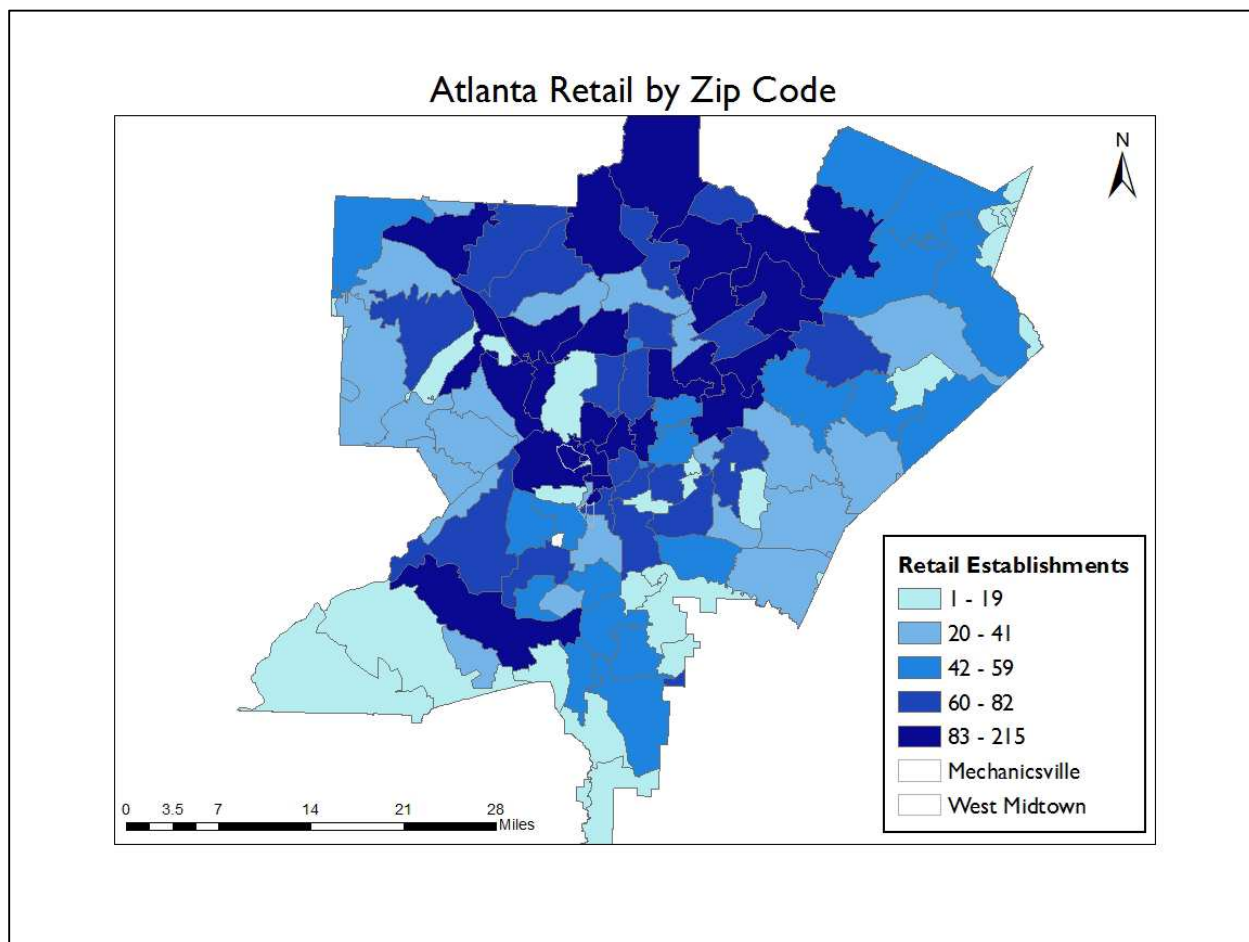
Source: USDA Food Access Research Atlas

### **Retail access**

As shown in Figure 29, West Midtown retail access is strong, falling in the top 20% for the Atlanta area. While this is a broad retail category, the neighborhood has strong access in the census tract to retail. Mechanicsville in contrast has lower access, falling in the top 40% and bottom 40% for retail access<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Retail access is available by zip code. Thus, Mechanicsville data crosses over the census tracts.

**Figure 29: Atlanta Retail Access**



Source: Reference USA

## Transportation

79% of Atlanta households spent 45% or more of household income on housing and transportation costs combined (2003-2011). The average percentage of income spent on these combined costs for the Atlanta MSA is 52.37% (2003-2011). Transit access and the distance one can go on transit is relatively limited in the Atlanta area. CNT has completed a transit access shed analysis<sup>13</sup>, which illustrates that the majority of metro Atlantans<sup>14</sup> (62.3%) can essentially not travel anywhere within 30 minutes via public transit(2003-2011). The metro area's Walk Score is only 46 and Bike Score is 43, classifying Atlanta as a car dependent city (2014d) . There are pockets of walkability, but the metro area as a whole is not pedestrian friendly. West Midtown spends a comparable amount to the Atlanta MSA overall on housing plus transportation costs, presenting a challenge for new residents. This is likely largely due to

<sup>13</sup> The Transit Access Shed is defined as the optimal accessible area from any block group within 30 minutes by public transportation scaled by the frequency of service(2003-2011).

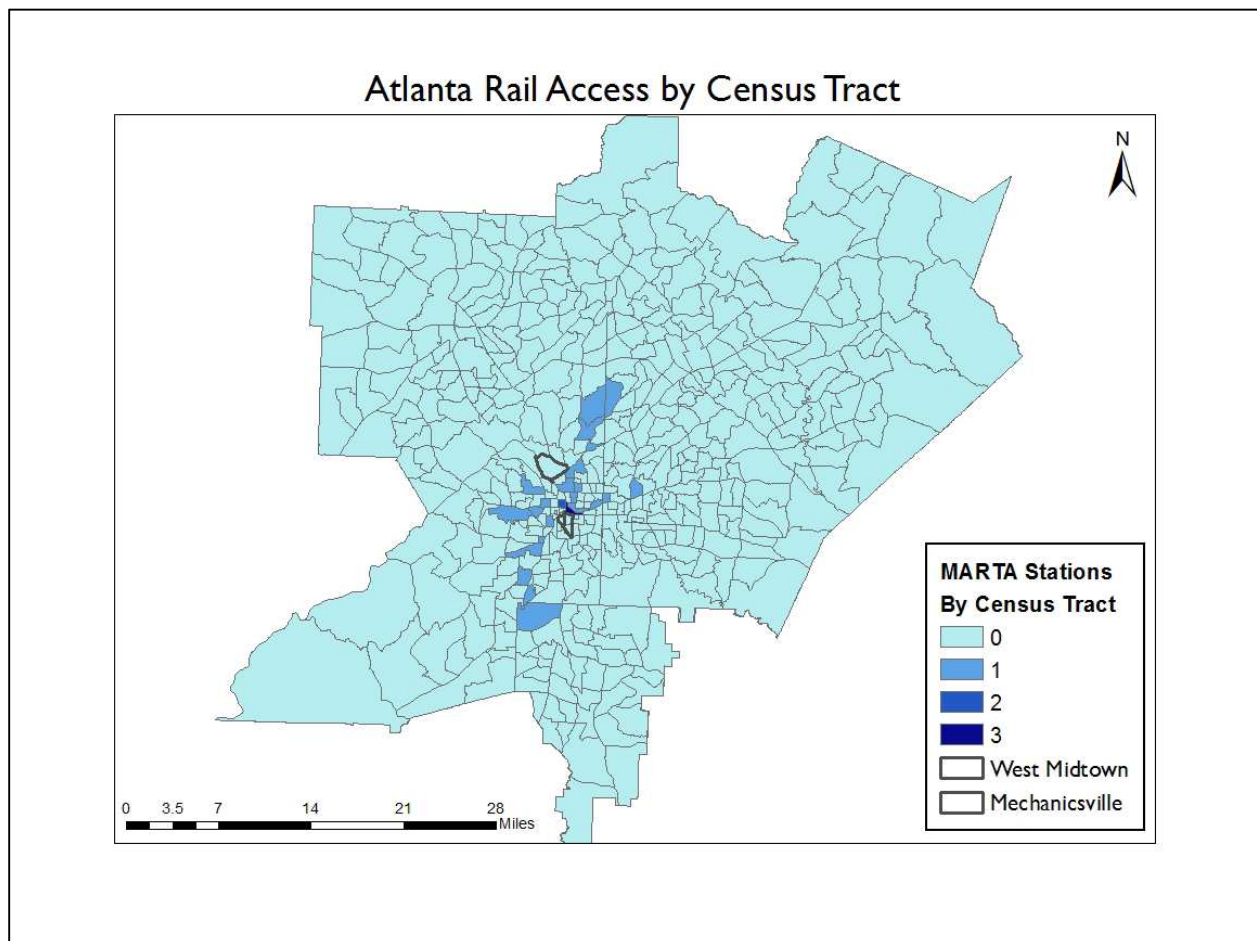
<sup>14</sup> CNT Defines the Atlanta MSA as the 29 County Region.

the limited transit access in the area. Mechanicsville in contrast has lower costs due to strong transit access.

Figures 29 and 30 below illustrate the location of rail stations and bus stops in Metro Atlanta. While Mechanicsville does not have a rail station in the census tracts, there are stations within one mile of the study parcel. The neighborhood overall enjoys strong transit access via bus and rail, and thus has lower overall transportation costs. West Midtown is lacking a rail station and any close access, but does have bus stops throughout. As shown in Figure 30, West Midtown and Mechanicsville both fall in the top 20% of bus stops per Census Tract in Atlanta (MARTA only).

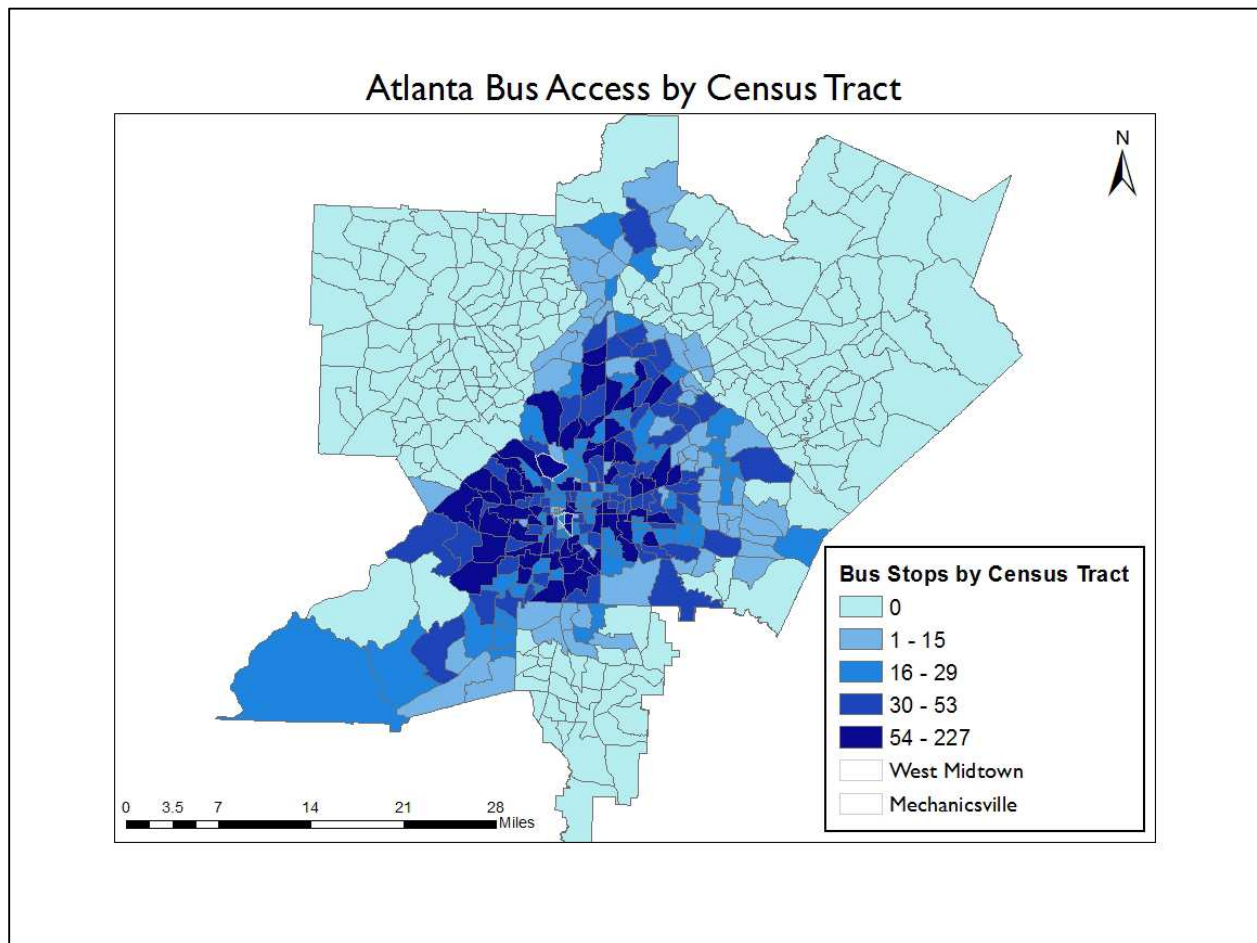
Mechanicsville multi-modal transportation access is much stronger than West Midtown, which may be a better environment for low to moderate income residents dependent on transportation other than a personal vehicle.

**Figure 30: Atlanta MARTA Rail Station Access**



Source: ARC MARTA Shapefiles

Figure 31: Atlanta MARTA Bus Stop Access



Source: ARC MARTA Shapefiles

## Conclusion

In siting affordable housing, ensuring access to employment, commercial amenities, multi-modal transportation, and quality education are just as important as the access to the affordable housing itself. The affordable housing siting tool highlights the importance of viewing a community in relation to the metropolitan area as a whole, as well as in viewing a community holistically. To achieve greater equity in provision of affordable housing, we must view all these data points and their associated geographies together when making siting decisions.

Below, Table 2 is a comparison of 981 Huff Road in West Midtown and 330 Crumley Street NW in Mechanicsville to the five county Atlanta area.



**Table 2: Neighborhood Comparison to the Atlanta Region**

<b>Neighborhood Results in Comparison to the Atlanta Five County Region</b>		
<b>Data Point</b>	<b>West Midtown</b>	<b>Mechanicsville</b>
<b>Median HH Income</b>	Middle 20%	Bottom 20%
<b>Poverty</b>	Bottom 40%	Top 20%
<b>Unemployment</b>	Bottom 40%	Top 20%
<b>Low and Medium Skill Jobs</b>	Top 40%	Bottom 20%
<b>Housing Values</b>	Top 40%	Middle 20% to lower 40%
<b>Rent</b>	Middle 20%	Bottom 20%
<b>CNT H+T Costs</b>	Similar to Atlanta Metro	Lower than Atlanta Metro
<b>Housing Vacancy</b>	Bottom 40%	Top 40%
<b>Subsidized Housing Incidence</b>	Bottom 20% (None)	Top 20%
<b>Quality Schools CCRPI</b>	Middle 20%	Bottom 20%
<b>Retail/Commercial Access</b>	Top 20%	Bottom 40% and Top 40% <sup>15</sup>
<b>Food Access – Low Access</b>	Bottom 40% <sup>16</sup>	Middle 20% <sup>17</sup>
<b>MARTA Rail and Bus<sup>18</sup></b>	Top 20% for bus; Bottom 20% for rail.	Top 20% for bus; Bottom 20% for rail.
<b>Walk Score</b>	Slightly higher than Metro Atlanta	Significantly Higher than Metro Atlanta

**Key –**

- **Red** = Poor Indicator for Affordable Housing Readiness
- **Gray** = Average Indicator for Affordable Housing Readiness
- **Green** = Positive Indicator for Affordable Housing Readiness

The above results illustrate that Mechanicsville rates predominantly poor as a site for affordable housing when considering access to opportunity. The area presents strongly in multi-modal transportation opportunity and Housing + Transportation costs, but exhibits questionable results for eight of thirteen outcome areas. In the metrics of median income, employment,

<sup>15</sup> Data is by zip code and splits across census tract.

<sup>16</sup> See food access discussion; actual food access stronger than map indicates.

<sup>17</sup> See food access discussion; actual food access weaker than map indicates.

<sup>18</sup> MARTA only.

poverty, and access to low and medium skill jobs, Mechanicsville is in the bottom 20% for the metro area. While these results speak to current residents rather than potential residents, they highlight existence of concentrated poverty combined with high unemployment, which may suggest low access to opportunity in this community. Thus, a decision to site additional affordable housing in the area without first addressing employment opportunity and employment readiness is questionable. In provision of affordable housing, Mechanicsville performs robustly. Rent and housing values are low, and subsidized housing presence is high, indicating that the area already has significant affordable housing opportunity. Additionally, vacancy levels are high compared to the metro area as a whole, indicating that additional housing stock may not be needed<sup>19</sup>. Housing + transportation costs are lower than for the Atlanta metro area however; this presents a potential opportunity for affordable housing, as it not only allows people to access affordable housing but also affordable multi-modal transportation. Amenity access also varies significantly in the Mechanicsville community. Education is the most concerning metric, with schools falling in the bottom 20% for CCRPI scores, the current assessment tool used by the Georgia Department of Education. This calls for significant concern when siting family housing in the area; education quality should be improved before additional youth are attracted to the area. While retail<sup>20</sup> and grocery access is mixed, the quality of retail in the area is questionable. People may have access to stores, but it is unclear as to whether they can purchase healthy foods and necessities. The area in which Mechanicsville excels is multi-modal transportation. With access to multiple bus lines, MARTA stations within one mile, and higher walkability than the Atlanta area overall, the community does present strong multi-modal opportunity. Given all these factors together, Mechanicsville presents a strong opportunity for community and economic development prior to any additional affordable housing development. These efforts could then potentially attract market rate development and housing, increasing investment, income diversity, and ultimately opportunity in the area.

West Midtown in contrast ranks moderately on nine of thirteen outcomes, and low on only transportation access. While a larger number of positive indicators would be preferred, the area still presents moderate potential for affordable housing siting, and presents as preferable to Mechanicsville. In examining the metrics of household income, poverty, unemployment and access to low and medium skill jobs, West Midtown is predominantly middle of the road. The community is an area of mixed incomes, relatively low unemployment, and high access to low and medium skill jobs. This suggests that the area has moderate access to opportunity for low to moderate income residents, especially where access to employment is concerned. Housing values and rent in the area are also mid-range, though high enough that affordability may be an issue. Housing + Transportation costs are also in line with the metro area, signifying financial stability could become a challenge for low to moderate income residents. The area does

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<sup>19</sup> This does not address quality of housing however.

<sup>20</sup> Data available is by zip code rather than census tract. Thus differing results cross the census tract.

however have low vacancy and no subsidized housing incidence indicating that an opportunity exists for affordable housing provision, especially given the employment opportunities. Amenity access is also stronger in West Midtown than in many areas of Metro Atlanta. The public schools in the community fall in the middle 20% of the CCRPI performance indicator. While there is room for improvement, this is a strong result that would provide opportunity for families. Retail and food access in the area is strong; while food access data indicates that access is low, there are two significant grocery stores within two miles and on a bus line, increasing accessibility for residents. Transportation is an area which could present challenge for low to moderate income residents, as there is no rail access, a Walk Score only slightly better than the Atlanta area, and few bus lines within a ½ mile of the parcel. However, given that the area itself presents stronger employment and commercial access opportunities, West Midtown still offers great potential for affordable housing provision. The area is also currently the target of significant private market investment, which one would expect to increase development and provision of amenities in the area. This development may also continue to increase housing costs; thus affordable housing provision will become even more vital in this area.

When siting affordable housing, one must review a diverse set of data to ensure equitable access to opportunity for low to moderate income residents. While an area may present easy entry and little opposition, this does not equate to providing equitable access to resources for residents. This affordable housing readiness tool provides a system for illustrating the current position of Atlanta area communities on an equity scale; an important measure when considering provision of affordable housing.

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