

Chapter 3

Understanding Birmingham Today ...for a Better Birmingham Tomorrow



*"A city that values and builds off its
historic assets and character."*

1. The City of Birmingham and 21st-Century Trends

The 21st century is an urban century. The majority of the world's people now live in urban centers. Increasingly, it is metropolitan centers that are competing for people and resources, even though states and nations remain important. Strong central cities are essential to the success of metropolitan regions. "Next Economy" is the term increasingly used for the era of innovation and opportunity that is emerging from the economic crisis of the Great Recession.¹ The Next Economy will be built on technological innovation and advanced production, exports, resource-efficiency and clean, reliable and affordable energy. It also requires a workforce with the education and skills to take advantage of the millions of new jobs and occupations that will provide a good quality of life. Metropolitan areas and cities will be in the forefront of creating and benefiting from the Next Economy, but they must plan and invest for this future. How can the City of Birmingham meet the challenges of the 21st century?

In early 2012, the Economist Intelligence Unit was asked to compare several hundred global cities for competitiveness. Defining competitiveness as "the demonstrated ability to attract capital, businesses, talent and visitors," they analyzed the cities in terms of eight categories: economic strength, human capital, institutional effectiveness, financial maturity, global appeal, physical capital, environment and natural hazards, and social and cultural character.² When they asked global businesses what kinds of location criteria they used, "quality of life" along with availability of human capital and talent, were among the top criteria. One company indicated that they looked for cities that are "forward thinking," because the firm wants to make long-term commitments.³

In addition to this global world of urban competition, the 21st century ushered in a new generation—the Millennials or Gen Y—the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. It is this generation that will shape and inherit the City of Birmingham envisioned by this comprehensive plan. The numerically biggest generation in American history, Millennials are the first generation born into the digital age, the most educated generation ever, the most racially and ethnically diverse, and more likely to live in

¹ Bruce Katz, "How to Build the Next Economy," February 14, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/02/how-to-build-the-next-economy/71160/>

² Economist Intelligence Unit, *Hot Spots: Benchmarking Global City Competitiveness* (2012), p. 5. <http://www.citigroup.com/citi/citiforcities/pdfs/hotspots.pdf>. The Economist Intelligence Unit is the research and analysis arm of the company whose flagship product is *The Economist* magazine.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17

central cities than other post-World War II generations.⁴ The Urban Land Institute (ULI), the research institution of the real estate development industry, identified them as “technologically savvy, highly mobile, and hungry to build careers while delaying families. They gravitate to more urban places looking for jobs and crave interactive environments that nurture social diversity and fun. They prefer flexible working situations, want to live in stimulating neighborhoods, and don’t mind dealing with less individual space. At the same time, new immigrants and less well-educated young people seek places that allow financial and cultural growth.” Other trends the ULI identified in a 2011 report include:⁵

- **Technology will reshape workplaces.** *Office tenants will decrease space per employee, and new office environments will need to promote interaction and dialogue. Offices will be transforming into meeting places more than work places, with an emphasis on conference rooms, break areas and open configurations. Developers will craft attractive environments to attract young, talented workers.*
- **Major companies will value space that enables innovation.** *They will continue to pay more for space in a global gateway served by a major international airport, or in 24-hour urban centers. Hard-to-reach suburban work places will be less in demand.*
- **The influx of Generation Y, now in their teens through early thirties, will change housing demand.** *They are comfortable with smaller homes and will happily trade living space for an easier commute and better lifestyle. They will drive up the number of single households and prompt a surge in demand for rentals, causing rents to escalate.*
- **For most people, finances will still be constrained, leading to more shared housing and multi-generational households.** *Immigration will support that trend, as many immigrants come from places where it is common for extended families to share housing. This may be the one group that continues to drive demand for large, suburban homes.*
- **The senior population will grow fastest, but financial constraints could limit demand for adult housing developments.** *Many will age in place or move in with relatives to conserve money. Developers may want to recast retirement communities into amenity-laden “age friendly” residences. Homes near hospitals and medical offices will be popular, especially if integrated into mixed-use neighborhoods with shops, restaurants and services.*
- **Energy and infrastructure take on greater importance.** *Businesses cannot afford to have their network connections down, and more will consider self-generated power or onsite generator capacity.*

What does this mean for the City of Birmingham? First, it demonstrates how an educated and skilled workforce, quality of life, distinctive character, effective governance, and economic success are all interrelated. Second, it illustrates the importance of planning and a strategic approach to the future. This comprehensive planning process and

⁴ Pew Research Center, *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next* (February 2010), www.PewResearch.org.

⁵ Urban Land Institute, *What’s Next? Real Estate in the New Economy* (October 2011) www.uli75.org.

document is Birmingham's first full citywide plan in 50 years. During the last half-century, the city has experienced a transition from manufacturing to services; the dismantling of the Jim Crow system of segregation; "white flight;" and then a more general phenomenon of population decline and disinvestment. At the same time, the city is an increasingly important player in the Next Economy, and a downtown renaissance is underway. The challenge is to expand opportunities throughout the city for all its present residents, create opportunities for young people to stay in the city, and to make the city the destination for talented newcomers to the region. The City of Birmingham's many assets can be the foundation for a new urban century of opportunity, livability and sustainability:

- **The power of place.** With its ridge-and-valley topography and lush greenery, Birmingham offers a beautiful natural environment for many of the city's neighborhoods. With a historic downtown and neighborhoods that grew out of small towns, the city's core and older neighborhoods have the pedestrian-friendly street grid, neighborhood centers, and local parks that are increasingly sought after by city residents. At the same time, the city's large nature parks and emerging greenway system will make it possible for residents to experience nature without leaving the city limits. This combination of urban lifestyles with access to nature creates a powerful mix for quality of life.
- **The power of people and partnerships.** The City of Birmingham remains the historic, cultural and entertainment center for the entire metropolitan area. Home to numerous museums, theaters, arts and music venues, a zoo and botanical garden, the city core is also the region's destination for festivals and events. The city's historic role in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s gives it national and international prominence. While the city and region are continuing to work out the legacies of segregation and the civil rights movement, there are many partnerships and circles of commitment—faith-based organizations, philanthropic efforts, neighborhood groups, and organizations of young urbanites—who invest their social capital of relationships and dedication in making the city a good place to live.
- **Opportunities and prosperity from the Next Economy.** The City of Birmingham continues to host the majority of jobs in the region and unlike many older cities, has retained a very strong downtown economy. The transition from a manufacturing economy to a diversified service economy has been underway for decades, and the city is known as a center of medical, technology, and financial and professional services—as well as increasing prominence as a regional sport center and "food scene." Providing Next Economy opportunities to a broader group of city residents through improved public education and workforce development is a critical challenge for the future.

- **Establishing a record of performance.** New leadership in the private and public sector is establishing a record of performance in the city. Railroad Park, Cross-Plex, the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System plan, Regions Field, the Birmingham Education Foundation, and the Woodlawn Foundation are examples of initiatives that are delivering on promises and creating new opportunities in the city. Data-driven, community-based, collaborative, and transparent approaches to creating a successful 21st-century Birmingham will build trust and create a legacy of performance.

As described in Chapter 2-The Community Speaks, the hundreds of Birmingham residents and other stakeholders who participated in comprehensive plan public meetings repeatedly focused on four high-priority issues they believe are critical to the city's future: creating a high-performing school system that prepares all students for further education or good jobs; developing transportation alternatives, especially good public transportation, to connect the city internally and with the region; revitalizing neighborhoods by removing blight and vacancy and enhancing quality of life; and providing a fertile environment to create new businesses and jobs. Each of these priorities is challenging and requires a long-term perspective. The depopulation, job loss, school enrollment decline, and neighborhood disinvestment we see today occurred over 50 years. At the same time, a long-term perspective starts with a plan, with putting new strategies in place in the short term, and then building on the short-term activities to replicate and accelerate success. As long as Birmingham continues to be the region's employment and cultural center, and if the cost and length of average commutes continues to rise, there will be powerful reasons to live in the city. But proximity to work is not enough. The city must become more competitive as a place to live for all kinds of households and families. This comprehensive plan can help Birmingham rise to the challenges of the 21st century to become a city whose economic opportunities and quality of life encourage current residents and their children to stay and attract new residents to make a home and a career in the city.

The remainder of this chapter identifies key existing conditions in 2011–2012, when this comprehensive plan was prepared. Understanding Birmingham today is critical to taking the appropriate steps to attain the community's vision for Birmingham tomorrow.

The review of City of Birmingham conditions that follows is organized to provide information on demographic and land use trends and then to follow the sequence of the thematic sections of the comprehensive plan:

- **Green Systems.** Birmingham's green systems are at the foundation, because the city's natural environment and resources, its topography and landscape, and the natu-

ral systems of water and air underlie and influence all our human uses of the land and stewardship of the environment.

- **Housing and Neighborhoods.** This section focuses on the way we live on the land as an urban community.
- **Prosperity and Opportunity.** The city's economic conditions influence the levels of opportunity and prosperity available to residents and businesses.
- **City Systems.** The man-made infrastructure systems, facilities and services make it possible for neighborhoods and the economy to function in the city.

trends at a glance

FIGURE 3.1: POPULATION CHANGE BY COMMUNITY, 2000–2010

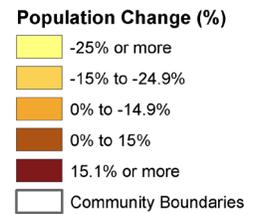
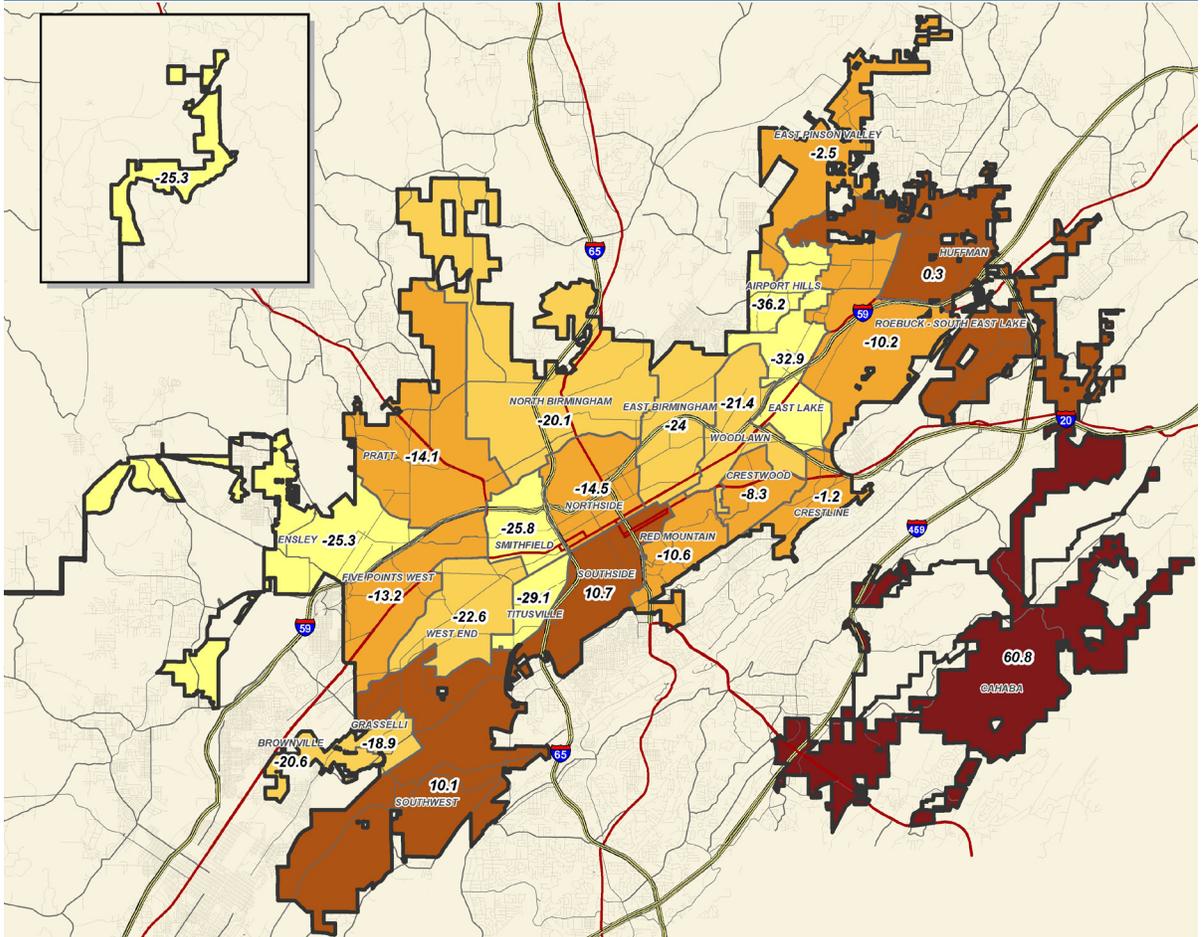
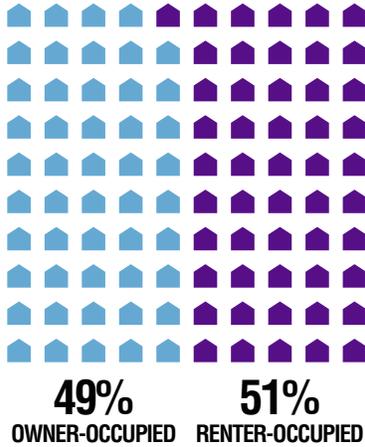
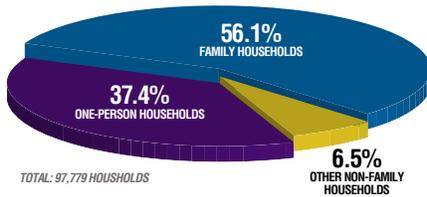


FIGURE 3.2: OWNERSHIP VS. RENTAL



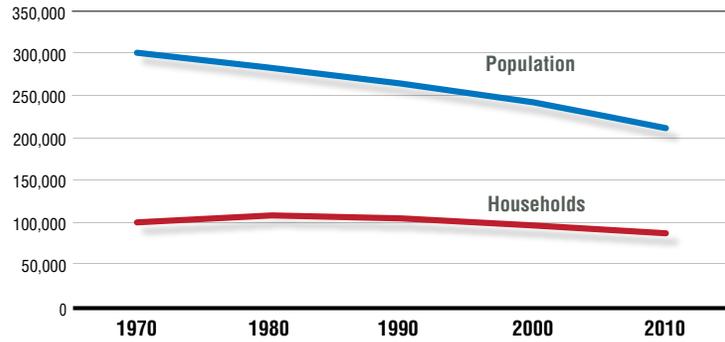
SOURCE: 2010 CENSUS

FIGURE 3.4: HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE



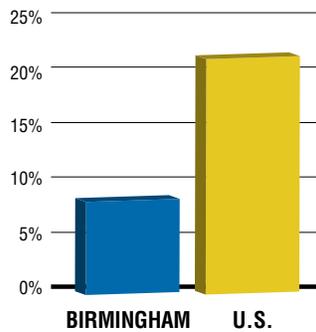
SOURCE: 2005-2009 ACS

FIGURE 3.3: CHANGE IN POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLDS, 1970-2010



SOURCE: 2010 US CENSUS

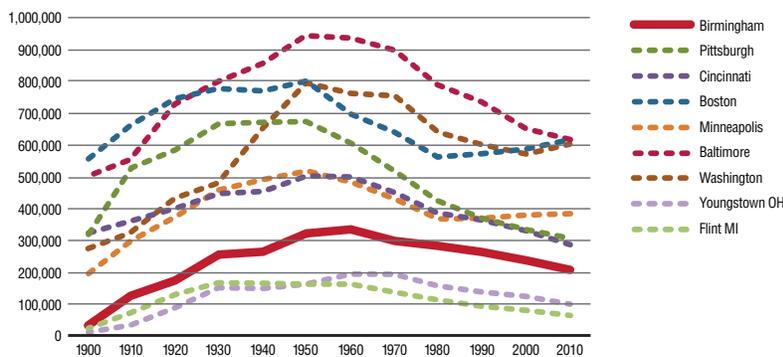
FIGURE 3.5: TRADITIONAL NUCLEAR FAMILIES*



* Husband, wife, and their own children under 18

SOURCE: 2005-2009 ACS

FIGURE 3.6: POPULATION CHANGE FOR SELECTED CITIES, 1900-2010



SOURCE: 2010 US CENSUS

What does it mean?

- **The number of households is more important than the number of people.** Birmingham's loss of 37% of its population between 1960 and 2010 is not unique. Most industrial cities peaked in population in 1950 or 1960, before the suburban expansion of the second half of the 20th century. Households were bigger then, too. Cities today have many single-person households and families are smaller than they used to be. Although the City of Birmingham lost 30% of its population between 1970 and 2010, the total number of households declined by only 10%.
- **Families with children are leaving the city.** Between 2000 and 2010, the number of family households with children under 18 declined by nearly 30%. The number of traditional nuclear families—a married couple with their own children under 18—declined by 43%. Birmingham does not have to have a majority of family households, but the city needs to be a place that families believe is a good place to raise children.

FIGURE 3.7: GETTING AROUND WITHOUT A CAR

34	Number of bus routes
13.5%*	Percent of city households with no car

*28,000+ people



There is no premium public transit service that could attract riders who have other alternatives. The transit system has been in a continuing crisis over operational funding for a number of years.

FIGURE 3.8: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM—HOW RESIDENTS GET TO WORK

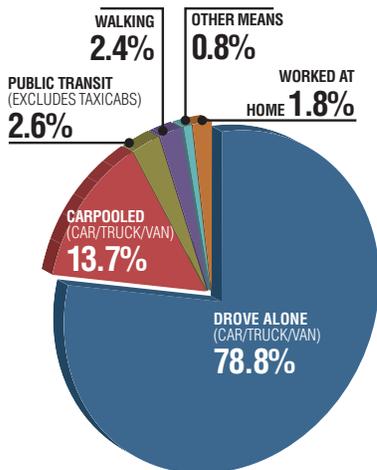
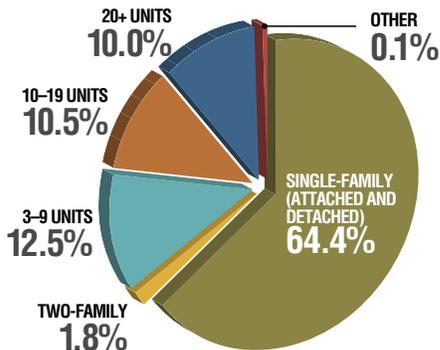


FIGURE 3.9: GETTING AROUND METRO BIRMINGHAM COMPARED TO THE NATION

	Fourth-highest average miles driven per day in the US at an estimated cost of \$7,000 a year
	Third worst city in the US for biking
	16th out of 54 metro areas in preventable pedestrian deaths over the last decade

FIGURE 3.10: HOUSING UNITS (OCCUPIED & VACANT) BY TYPE



SOURCE: ESRI ACS HOUSING SUMMARY (2005-2009 ESTIMATE)

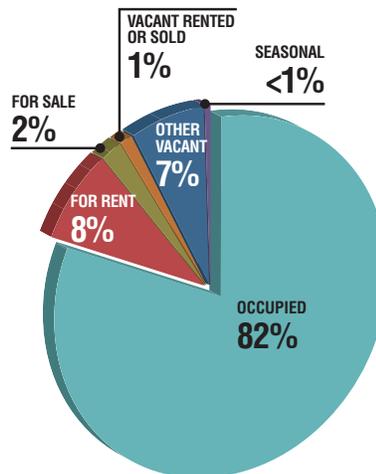


About 8,000 housing units are vacant and out of the housing market, and there are thousands of vacant lots in residential neighborhoods.



Most of the city is made up of residential neighborhoods, and the majority of housing units are single-family homes.

FIGURE 3.11: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM—HOUSING UNIT OCCUPANCY, 2010



SOURCE: 2010 US CENSUS



Many neighborhoods need more occupied housing units to support retail and services in their neighborhood commercial districts.

Birmingham has an extensive park system: over 3,000 acres of parks and nature preserves owned and operated by the City and nonprofit organizations.



Large vacant or underutilized sites remain as a legacy of Birmingham's mining and industrial history.



In the last decade, new housing construction has created a City Center neighborhood of about 4,000 people living in apartments and condos.

What does it mean? The power of place

- **Birmingham is getting greener.** Railroad Park, Ruffner Park, and Red Mountain Park are creating new city and regional destinations. Valley Creek and other floodplain areas are planned to become parks and greenways. The Our One Mile campaign will include the city in a network of regional greenways.
- **The city's neighborhood park system has limited funding.** Three major parks—Avondale, Cooper Green and Crestwood—have been renovated with capital bond funding. However, funding for everyday maintenance and programming is very constrained.
- **Birmingham has a variety of neighborhoods that could attract new residents.** Older housing stock needs to be renovated and supplemented with new housing. The fate of many neighborhoods will depend on the outcome of the generational transition that will occur over the next two decades as elderly homeowners pass on.
- **Blight—abandoned and derelict housing, vacant lots—is a critical challenge** in many neighborhoods, especially those closer to the city center.
- **Commercial corridors and many neighborhood commercial districts have vacant stores and lots.** Many neighborhoods need more occupied housing units to support retail and services for their needs.
- **Pollution remains a concern.** Contamination at vacant industrial sites and adjacent areas, pollution of waterways, air pollution with elevated ozone levels, and lead paint in older housing and in soils are among the issues that can affect human health and safety, as well as constraining economic redevelopment.
- **There are few practical alternatives to getting around by car.** Transit routes, frequency, and overall service do not attract riders who have a choice. A vision plan for bicycle and pedestrian routes has existed since 1995, but there has been little progress in its implementation.
- **City government has limited control over basic infrastructure.** It has responsibility for the storm drainage system and local streets, but water, sewer, and other utility systems are owned and operated by other public or private entities.

A NOTE ON THE DATA

Data for the comprehensive plan was gathered from public and private sources. Census 2010 data is used when available. Some data is from the American Community Survey (ACS). The US Census Bureau no longer collects housing and economic data in census years through the long form census form. Instead, the Census Bureau conducts surveys every year and releases data based on rolling three-year averages through the ACS. Proprietary databases, such as ESRI Business Analyst and EMSI, were also used to make estimates when data from public sources was unavailable. For example, the State of Alabama does not provide employment data by city, so the planning team used proprietary data by zip code and land use data to estimate the number of jobs in the City of Birmingham.

2. Population and Land Use Trends

A. THE CITY HAS LOST POPULATION TO THE REGION BUT REMAINS THE REGION’S JOB CENTER.

1. Birmingham is the core city of a large metropolitan region.

The City of Birmingham, comprised of 152 square miles of land and water, is at the center of the Birmingham-Hoover Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The MSA is a seven-county region of 5,332 square miles, with a population of 1,127,741 at the time of the 2010 census.¹ Population in the MSA grew 7.2% in the 2000 to 2010 decade. Nonetheless, in 2010, 75% of the MSA population was concentrated in Jefferson and Shelby Counties. The city’s 2010 population density is 1,396 persons per square mile, with 588 households per square mile.

While the city continues to be the region’s biggest employment center, as a whole it has been losing population to suburban communities and semi-rural (sometimes called “exurban”) locations since 1970. Population grew rapidly in Shelby, St. Clair and Chilton

¹ The seven counties are Bibb, Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby and Walker counties.

TABLE 3.1: TOTAL POPULATION BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN REGION

	2000	2010	CHANGE
City of Birmingham	242,820	212,237	-12.6%
Birmingham-Hoover MSA	1,052,238	1,128,047	7.2%
MSA without City	809,418	915,810	13.1%

counties between 1970 and 2010: more than 400% in Shelby County alone. St. Clair County, east of the city along I-20, has also been growing rapidly in recent years. The suburban and exurban growth on former agricultural and forest land is characterized by low-density, single family housing served by strip commercial development, forming bedroom communities concentrated along transportation routes to the City of Birmingham, which continues to be the region’s most important employment center.

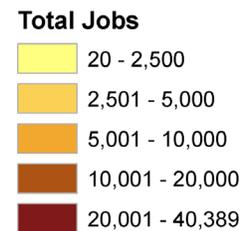
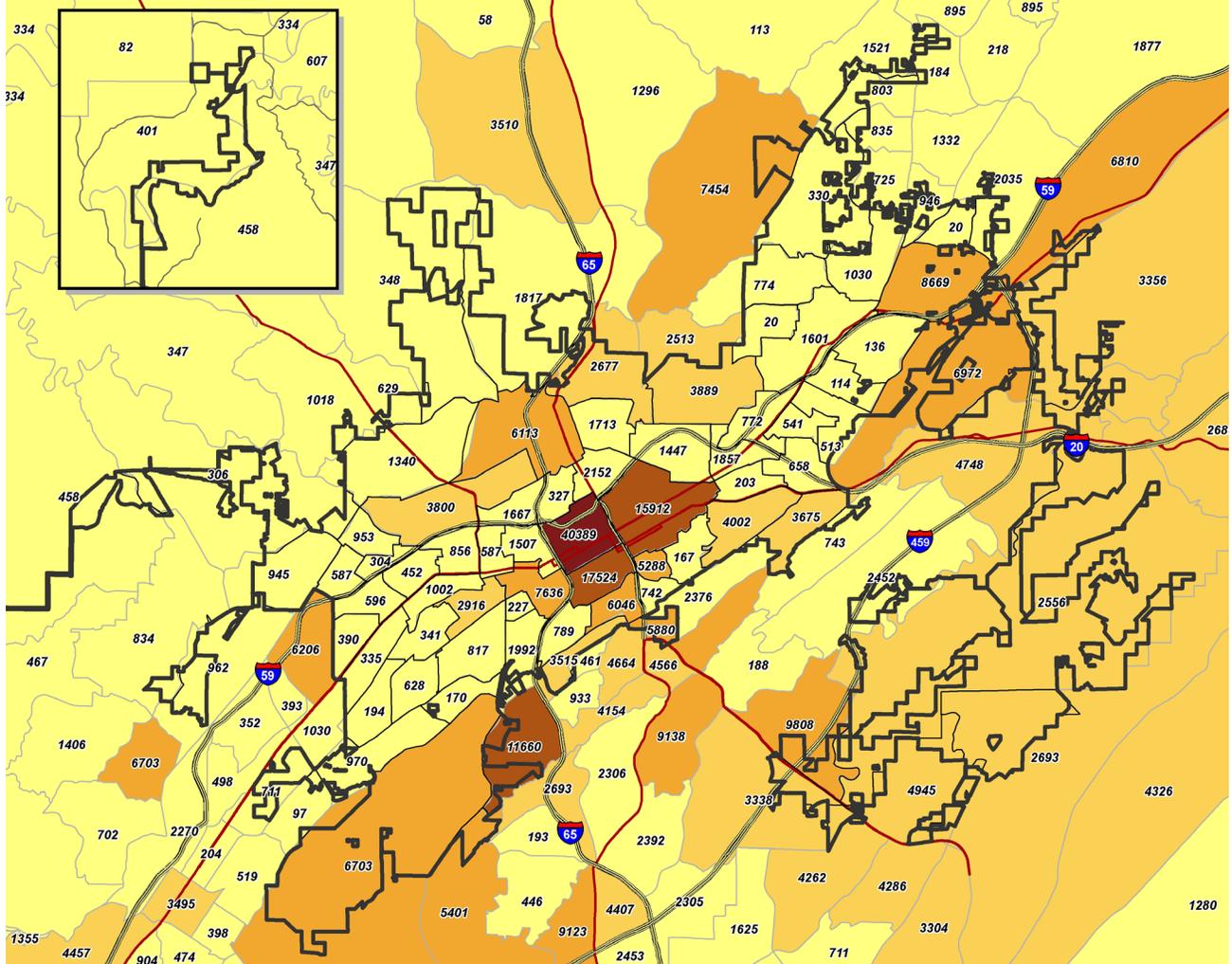
Governance in the region is fragmented by multiple jurisdictions.

Unlike many cities in the South and West, Birmingham is surrounded by other municipalities and has relatively little unincorporated land on its borders. There are 52 municipal jurisdictions in Jefferson and Shelby counties alone. The municipalities on the southern border of the city, such as Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood, tend to be more affluent, while other small cities that began as mining or industrial camps are often struggling. In many respects, the City of Birmingham’s role and its experience within its metropolitan region has more in common with the experience of formerly industrial Northeastern and Midwestern cities, sometimes known as the Rustbelt, than with the recent growth of other southern cities like Charlotte. Rustbelt cities, like Birmingham, were once powerhouses of industrial manufacturing and their regions are typically divided into many smaller jurisdictions. “New South” cities like Charlotte became prosperous based on services and real estate development and have been able to expand by annexation to include economically diverse neighborhoods.

Regional organizations focus on the metropolitan area.

Regional organizations that play an important role for the city’s long-term destiny are the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Birmingham Business Alliance (BBA). The MPO is the federally designated regional

FIGURE 3.12: TOTAL JOBS | BIRMINGHAM VICINITY BY CENSUS TRACT



organization for transportation planning in Jefferson and Shelby counties and is housed in the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, which has an advisory planning role for the seven-county MSA. The MPO works with local jurisdictions in Jefferson and Shelby counties to plan and program federal transportation investments. It is responsible for creating a long-term Regional Transportation Plan, as well as programming short-term funds. The BBA focuses on promoting economic growth and development in the seven-county Birmingham-Hoover MSA. It was created in 2009 by the merger of the Birmingham Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Development Board. In 2010, the BBA released *Blueprint Birmingham*, a five-year strategic plan for regional economic growth.

2. The city is part of an emerging “megaregion.”

Birmingham is included in the emerging Piedmont Atlantic Megaregion—one of eight major regions in the United States identified by researchers as areas with interrelated economic systems within a common ecosystem and linked by shared transportation systems. The Piedmont Atlantic Megaregion stretches from the Carolinas, through the Atlanta region, to Birmingham, generally following the I-20 and I-85 corridors. It is called an “emerging” region because of the significant extent of rural area remaining between the metropolitan areas. Moreover, as is the case in the Birmingham metropolitan area, intra-metropolitan coordination remains limited. However, as the metropolitan areas in megaregions grow more connected, with increasing demands on transportation and water infrastructure for example, the value of coordinating policies over a broader geographic scale will grow.²

B. HISTORIC GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT, AND PLANNING

Like many other cities, Birmingham’s post-Civil War, nineteenth century roots can be found in the nexus of natural resources, transportation, and real estate speculation. The city’s development has been marked by the boom and bust cycles of the mining and industrial economy, the struggle for civil rights, the legacy of residential segregation by race, and the ongoing transition from a primarily industrial economy to a service-based economy.

1. The railroad crossing becomes “The Magic City.”

Birmingham’s founders named the city in the hopes that it would emulate its English namesake as a manufacturing metropolis. Founded after the Civil War in the Appalachian piedmont where coal, iron ore, and limestone were abundantly available in close proximity to make steel and at the point where important railroad lines were converging, Birmingham in 1871 was destined to be a company town.³ The physical development of the city was marked by the

region’s topography—the steep mountain slopes to the north and south of Jones Valley and the floodplains of Village and Valley Creeks—as well as by the location of industrial furnaces or mines and the railroads that served them. Outside of the original city located around the railroad reservation, mining and industrial communities sprang up spontaneously to house workers, and industrial firms later laid out company towns for their employees.

Growth was so fast between 1881 and 1920 that Birmingham was nicknamed the “Magic City.” Like all industrial and mining boom towns, early Birmingham was an uncomfortable, unsanitary, and dangerous place for everyone. From the beginning, the work force was both black and white and the two racial groups tended to live on different blocks or in different company-built camps or towns even before legally-defined racial segregation. A major annexation in 1910 added 70,000 people and 48 square miles to the city, including the towns of East Birmingham, North Birmingham, Thomas, and Ensley. In the late nineteenth century, Birmingham’s industrial elite lived in the South Highlands and Forest Park neighborhoods, while new suburbs were built for the white working class in Eastlake, Woodlawn, Ensley and West End. By the 1920s the affluent elites were beginning to move “over the mountain” to areas that eventually become separate municipalities such as Mountain Brook and Homewood.

In the early 20th century, most of the African-American population lived in areas considered less desirable—in the floodplains of the creeks, along railroad lines and near heavy industry, and in alleys. These neighborhoods lacked paved streets, streetlights, and sewer and water infrastructure. However, the small African-American middle class and professionals tended to live in Enon Ridge and Smithfield (where the black architect Wallace A. Rayfield designed many houses).

2. Birmingham’s early plans were innovative—but not implemented.

The City Plan. Birmingham’s first City Plan was issued in 1919. It contained recommendations on transportation, natural resources, parks, downtown, and a land use system based on the idea of neighborhood centers. It also proposed the establishment of zoning districts. Created by Warren H. Manning, who had worked with the firm of Frederick Law

² For more on megaregions, see <http://www.america2050.org/megaregions.html>

³ The brief review of Birmingham’s land use and planning history in this section is heavily indebted to Charles E. Connerly’s “The Most Segregated City in America:” *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

Planning in Birmingham, 1919–2004								
1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
1919 City Plan of Birmingham (not implemented except for civic center)	1926 First zoning ordinance (includes zoning by race)	1952 “Preliminary Plan” issued by Planning Board as prerequisite to urban renewal	1961 First Comprehensive Plan (very limited implementation)	1971 Neighborhood Planning Program	1991 Birmingham Comprehensive Plan update (generalized policy statements)			
1925 Olmsted Park Plan (not implemented)	1943 Birmingham Planning Board created.	1958 Economic Report	1964 “Design for Progress” downtown plan by local AIA chapter	1974 Citizen Participation Plan	2004 City Center Master Plan			
				1980 Master Plan for Downtown				

Olmsted, the plan included many innovative proposals, such as the creation of neighborhood centers, a park system to retain floodwaters, and separate water systems for drinking water and for recycled graywater for industrial cooling.⁴ Except for the establishment of zoning seven years later, the only part of the city plan that was implemented was a “city beautiful” style plan for the downtown civic center (the public buildings surrounding Linn Park).

The Olmsted Plan. The Manning plan was followed in 1925 by a parks plan created by the nation’s foremost landscape architects and planners, the Olmsted Brothers. Building on the City Plan, it proposed a network of parks, including management of the Village Creek floodplain by making it open space. The plan was never implemented but interest in the plan has been revived in the last decade.

The First Zoning Ordinance. Efforts to establish a zoning ordinance came to fruition in 1926. This ordinance created a system of racial zoning, despite the fact that in 1917 the US Supreme Court had struck down a law prohibiting real estate sales to African-Americans (*Buchanan v. Warley*). The Birmingham ordinance was fashioned as a “separate but equal” system that prohibited whites from living in areas zoned for blacks and blacks from living in areas zoned for whites. Less desirable areas, such as floodplains and industrial areas, were designated for black occupancy. Legal challenges to Birmingham’s racial zoning system began in the late 1940s and the US Supreme Court found it unconstitutional in 1951.

Planning Board. The Birmingham Planning Board was created in 1943 to advise on planning issues, but by 1950

the city had no subdivision regulations, no housing code, and no planning staff except for the city engineer and a draftsman.

3. The struggle for civil rights is intertwined with Birmingham’s planning and development history.

Legacy of substandard housing. During the first half of the 20th century, repeated housing surveys found that a significant percentage of the city’s housing stock was substandard, with poor sanitary conditions, and lacking in public services, especially in neighborhoods zoned for African-Americans. In 1950, 45% of the housing stock had no indoor plumbing, and 85% of blacks lived in substandard housing.

The enforcement of health and sanitary codes after World War II also resulted in demolition of housing in black residential areas. As the city grew, black demand for housing grew, while the areas zoned for blacks did not. Challenges to racial zoning by African-Americans who moved into North Smithfield, which had been zoned for whites, sparked the bombings that made the neighborhood into “Dynamite Hill.”

Annexation History

- 1910**
Annexation of mill towns adds 48 square miles and 70,000 people, including East Birmingham, North Birmingham, Thomas, Ensley
- 1949**
Six new census tracts added by annexation
- 1959**
Attempted annexation of suburban communities fails
- 1964**
Attempted merger with Mountain Brook, Homewood, Fairfield, Irondale, Midfield fails
- 1971**
“One Great City” annexation proposal fails
- 1970s–80s**
Annexation of 69 sq miles: Oxmoor, Smithfield Heights/ Daniel Payne area; extension to Birminghamport; small areas to northeast and east; Cahaba area

⁴ Lance M. Neckar, “Developing Landscape Architecture for the Twentieth Century: The Career of Warren H. Manning,” *Landscape Journal*, (Fall 1989), 85-86.

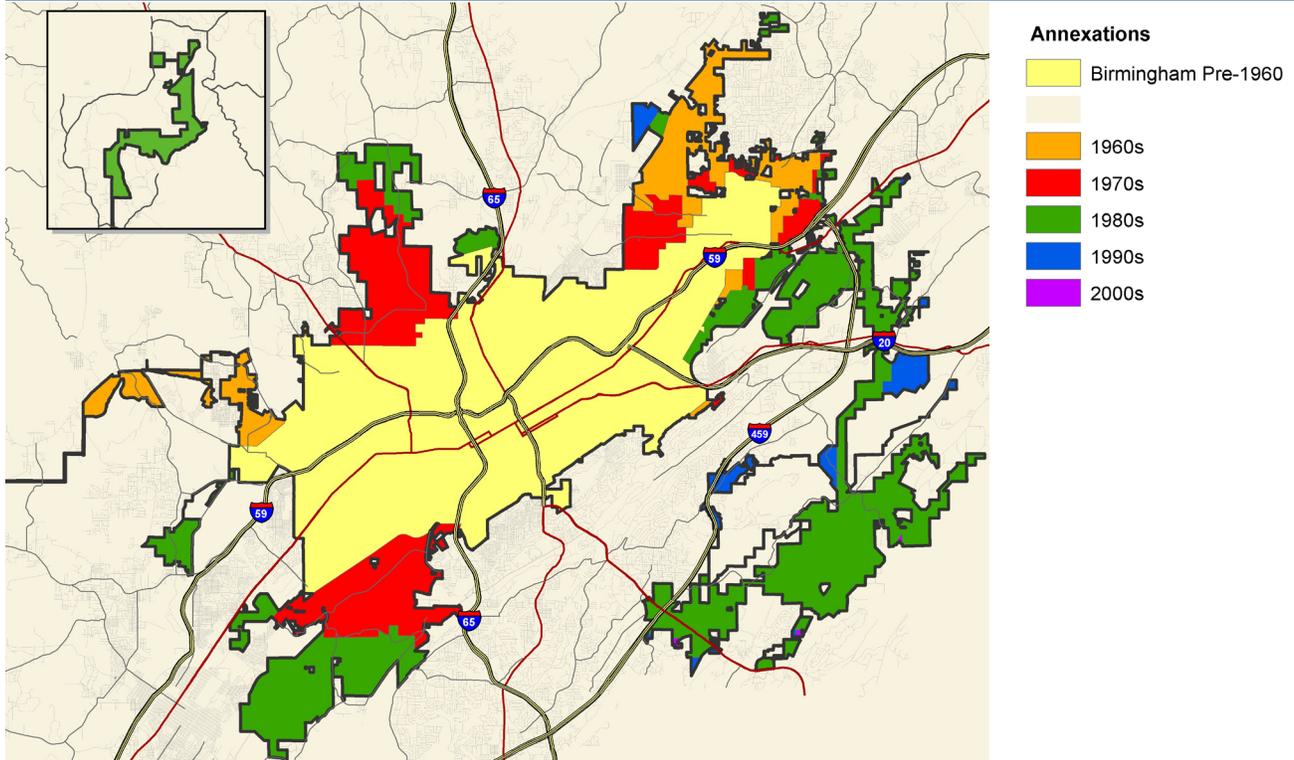
City planning after 1950. After the federal government passed urban renewal legislation in 1949, the city identified three poor African-American areas in Southside, Ensley and Avondale as candidates for urban renewal. The federal law required an urban renewal plan that was consistent with a city comprehensive plan, which the city did not have. In 1952, therefore, the Birmingham Planning Board issued a “Preliminary Report” to serve as a comprehensive plan that included general recommendations on transportation and public facility improvements as well as identifying the urban renewal target areas. As was the case in cities around the country, urban renewal projects and interstate highway construction during the 1950s and 1960s displaced many residents without providing sufficient alternative housing and reinforced de facto residential segregation.

The first comprehensive plan. In 1957, the group which later became Operation New Birmingham called for a citywide comprehensive plan. This effort led to the creation of a series of documents: a 1958 report on the economy and the city’s first comprehensive plan in 1961. The economic report recommended diversification of the economy and investment in quality community facilities such as

schools, parks, and streets in order to attract new kinds of industry and new residents to the city. The Birmingham manufacturing economy was stagnating and its retail and trading economy was not as competitive as those sectors in other southern cities. The 1961 comprehensive plan focused on improving the city’s facilities and amenities—such as a recommendation to expand the city park system by 1,700 acres—and emphasized the importance of a strong downtown. The park system was closed in 1963 during the civil rights struggle, but Birmingham leaders did focus on downtown redevelopment. In 1964, the local architectural community developed the Design for Progress plan which became the general guide for downtown development until the 1980 Downtown Plan.

Annexation after 1950. Birmingham’s leading role in the civil rights struggle was behind three unsuccessful annexation efforts from 1959 to 1971. The white leadership of the city attempted to annex or merge with surrounding white suburbs. These efforts failed because of school desegregation, which was at the root of the “white flight” that increasingly affected the city during the 1960s and 1970s. Annexation initiatives since 1971

FIGURE 3.13: ANNEXATION HISTORY | 1960–2011



have focused either on small, predominantly African-American communities or on unbuilt land with water supply protection, development and fiscal potential. The annexation of the Cahaba area during the 1980s under the administration of Mayor Richard Arrington, proved to be particularly valuable for the city, as the US-280 corridor became the location for new retail and office development. During the 1990s and 2000s, annexation has been limited to smaller areas.

C. LAND USE

1. Land use is not the same thing as zoning.

“Land use” is an umbrella term for the activities that actually occur on a given parcel of land, such as residential, retail, industrial, agricultural, or transportation uses. Land uses can change over time—for example, when a farm becomes fallow land and then is turned into a residential subdivision. Zoning is the tool that a local government employs to regulate the uses of the land.

Land use and zoning are not identical. For example, land that has nothing built on it can be zoned for a use that has not yet been developed; land uses can be “grandfathered” or “nonconforming” (meaning that they existed before the land was zoned for a different use); and zoning categories can permit more than one use—for example, an area zoned for industrial uses may also permit commercial uses, which may come to predominate in the area.

The Existing Land Use Map shown in Figure 3.14 is based on the City of Birmingham’s land use map, whose content was updated in fall 2011 by the city’s Division of Planning for the purposes of this comprehensive plan. The City’s land use map includes a much more detailed range of land uses than Figure 3.14. For this map, land uses were aggregated into a smaller number of categories so that the overall pattern of land use in the city would be more easily understood.

According to the City’s land use data, half of the land area within the city limits does not have buildings or structures on it: parks and open space account for 17% of the total land, agriculture (which is really forestry since it is almost

all timber land) takes up 16% of the total, and another 16% is more generally categorized as vacant. The city’s large nature parks—such as Red Mountain and Ruffner—help give it a large amount of unbuilt land, as do the more recently annexed and mostly undeveloped areas on to the north, southwest and southeast. Some 22% of the total land is residential, with commercial and industrial uses occupying another 12%. Within these residential, commercial and industrial areas, however, there are vacant buildings and unoccupied lots.

2. Land use is regulated by the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.

The City of Birmingham zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations are the primary tools by which the city regulates land uses. Municipal authority to regulate land use arises from the police power, which is the power to protect public health, safety and welfare. Zoning initially arose as a way to separate noxious land uses, such as highly polluting industry, from residences. Zoning also typically regulates lot size, density, and building dimensions such as height and massing.

For the most part, the Birmingham zoning ordinance is a modified cumulative or pyramid zoning system, in which the most restrictive zoning districts (single-family homes) are permitted in subsequent less restrictive zoning districts. For example, Birmingham’s business districts also allow residential uses. The city’s zoning ordinance has ten residential districts, four business districts, four industrial districts, two agricultural districts, as well as two mixed-use districts and several special zoning districts for health care, institutions, planned recreation and other special cases. Two overlay districts, for the US-280 corridor and for the Highland Park neighborhood, provide additional standards that “overlay” the base zoning requirements.

The Highland Park overlay district establishes “form-based” zoning requirements for this neighborhood. Form-based zoning, which has emerged in the last twenty years as an alternative to traditional “Euclidean” zoning (so named from the US Supreme Court case in 1916 that established municipal zoning authority), focuses on building form, rather than separation of uses, in order to create or preserve a human-scaled environment that is pedestrian-friendly.

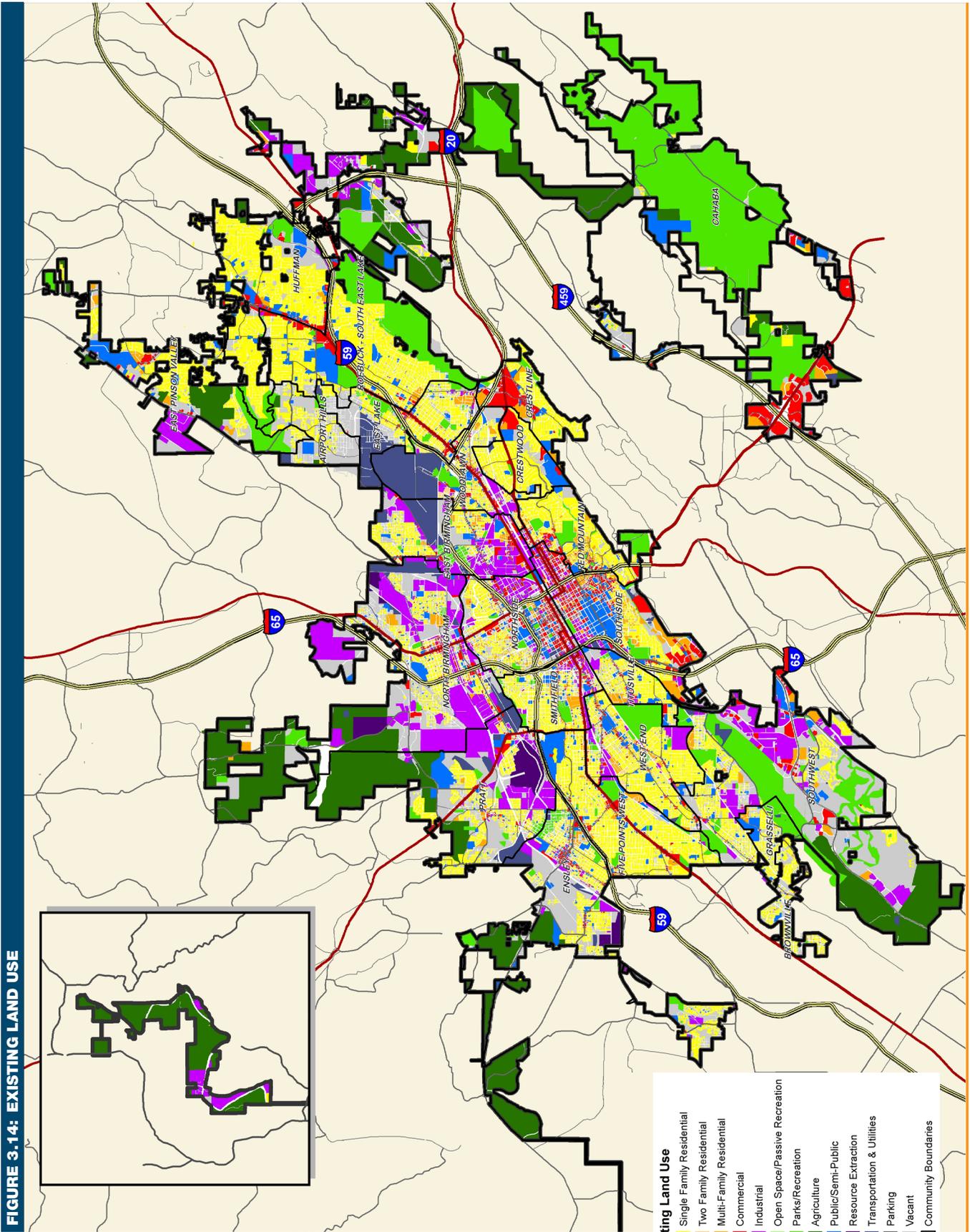


FIGURE 3.14: EXISTING LAND USE

SOURCE: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM GIS

LAND USE	ACRES	PERCENT
Residential	19,348	22%
Commercial	3,383	4%
Industrial	7,179	8%
Parks and open space*	14,633	17%
Agriculture/Forestry	14,150	16%
Public /semi-public	4,491	5%
Resource extraction	715	1%
Transportation/utilities	9,344	11%
Parking**	233	0%
Vacant	14,383	16%
TOTAL	87,861	100%

* Designated parks and open space, such as cemeteries, flood protection and floodway lands, water protection land.

** Parking as a primary use (parking structure or lot), not parking accessory to another use.

SOURCE: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM GIS LAND USE

Subdivision regulations control the development of multiple lots and the streets and other infrastructure needed to access the lots. The purpose of these regulations, updated in October 2011, is to ensure that the soils, topography, geological and hydrological conditions, and other circumstances are suitable for safe development of the properties for the desired land uses and that the new development conforms to design standards for infrastructure. Subdivisions of 15 or more lots must make available suitable land for parks and/or schools, or obtain a waiver from the Director of Parks and Recreation and/or the Superintendent of Schools.

The Birmingham Planning Commission has adopted a “Complete Streets” policy for both new and retrofit projects within the city. Complete Streets are designed to accommodate all users: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The policy is advisory to the city and to the regional planning organizations.

3. Development trends are mixed.

The City of Birmingham is experiencing a mixture of development conditions, reflecting vastly different markets and circumstances in different parts of the city. As of early 2012, real estate market conditions favor rental properties and six large rental developments have been announced—

in several locations including downtown, Oxmoor, and Southside.

Downtown. Over the course of the last decade, downtown Birmingham experienced new investment and development in a variety of forms: redevelopment of existing buildings for residential and commercial use; new construction of residential and mixed use projects; revitalization of cultural icons like the Alabama Theater; Park Place, a successful mixed-income HOPE VI residential development; creation of a major new amenity in the form of Railroad Park; and additions and renovations to the medical district and the UAB campus. Downtown was one of the very few areas of the city to see an increase in population and households between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. With a slowdown in private development as a result of the financial crisis of the Great Recession, several private projects, such as the Pizitz Building, are taking longer to complete than originally hoped. Projects supported by public funds are going forward, including a Westin hotel at the Birmingham-Jefferson County Convention Center and a new baseball stadium near Railroad Park.

Older neighborhoods. Many of the older neighborhoods of the city, with the exception of the southside neighborhoods, have experienced disinvestment since the 1970s as population has declined. This disinvestment is manifest in the number and growing extent of abandoned and vacant properties in residential areas. It is not uncommon to find enclaves of several blocks of attractive and well-maintained housing with blight and vacancy in nearby blocks. Similarly, the combination of fewer households to support sales and changes in retailing over recent decades has resulted in empty storefronts in the traditional, main street style commercial districts that used to serve these older Birmingham neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are designed to be urban in character, with sidewalks and relatively small lots. In a number of locations over the decades, poorly designed and constructed multifamily developments were inserted in these older neighborhoods and in some cases, these developments have also become vacant. Real estate markets in these kinds of neighborhoods are very weak.

Revitalization efforts in some older neighborhoods have brought an infusion of philanthropic and public funds

to support new housing (for example, the the Woodlawn Foundation and Tuxedo HOPE VI development) and commercial spaces, and several individual developers have created small portfolios of renovated single family homes for sale or rent in neighborhoods with good housing stock, such as East Lake. A few small market-rate subdivisions built in recent years can also be found.

The older city neighborhoods that continue to be stable, with strong real estate markets, are on the south side of the city adjacent to affluent suburban communities. These neighborhoods have high amenity values—historic character, parks, and nearby neighborhood-serving retail—and are urban in character with relatively dense, pedestrian-friendly environments. Both single-family and multifamily housing attracts residents without difficulty. The continuing success of these neighborhoods, as well as the rise of downtown, shows that neighborhoods with urban character can be competitive in the Birmingham region.

Suburban-style neighborhoods. In contrast to the city’s older neighborhoods, with their history as independent small towns, suburban-style neighborhoods emerged in areas farther from downtown such as Roebuck-Huffman to the northeast and Oxmoor to the southwest. Developed mostly from the 1960s on, these neighborhoods were built to be car-dependent and many do not have sidewalks. Retail areas were developed on major arterial streets with strip shopping centers, large expanses of parking in front of the stores, and no expectation of walking access.

Vacant industrial sites. Birmingham’s transition from a manufacturing economy to a service-based, knowledge economy has left a legacy of large vacant and underutilized industrial sites, many of which are also brownfield sites. A few, such as the Trinity Steel site, have been remediated and are ready for new uses.

Significant vacant commercial and institutional sites. There are a number of large vacant properties in the city, such as Carraway Hospital and Century Plaza Mall. Trinity Medical Center, which is moving to a location on US-280 which will still be inside the city limits, will also leave its current site on Montclair Road.

D. POPULATION COMPOSITION AND TRENDS

1. Total population numbers have declined since 1960.

Total population. The City of Birmingham’s total population peaked in 1960 at 340,887 and has declined 37% to 212,237 over the fifty years to 2010. Although there may have been some undercounting during the 2010 census, which is not uncommon in urban areas, the trend remains clear. While the intensity of the civil rights struggle during the 1960s and the establishment of school desegregation during the 1970s produced a particularly strong white flight reaction in the 1970s and 1980s, Birmingham’s population decline also resulted from broader trends that affected industrial cities throughout the country. Figure

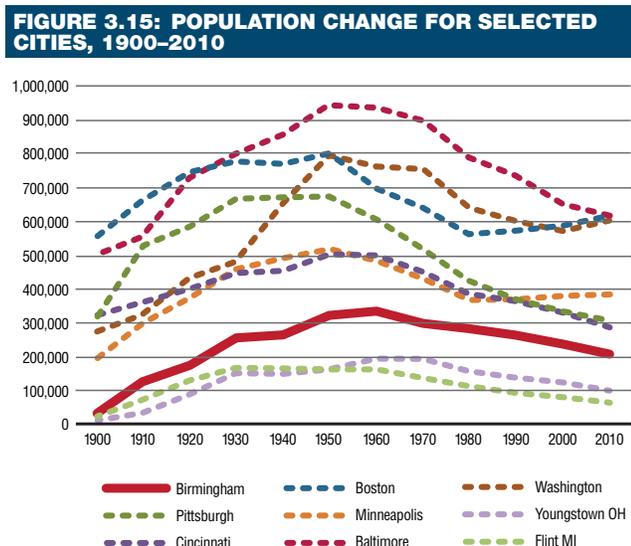


TABLE 3.3: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM TOTAL POPULATION 1960-2010

CENSUS YEAR	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE
1960	340,887	
1970	300,910	-11.73%
1980	284,413	-25.38%
1990	265,968	-6.49%
2000	242,840	-8.70%
2010	212,237	-12.60%

SOURCE: US CENSUS

SOURCE: 2010 US CENSUS

3.15 shows that Birmingham's general population trend over the 20th century has not differed much from cities such as Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Boston. However, towards the end of the 20th century, a few of these cities saw a slight increase in population. While population decline was a common experience for many older cities between 1960 and 2000, some of these cities were retaining population and attracting new residents by the early 21st century. The demographic composition of these new populations was not the same as in 1960 and total populations were unlikely to reach the 1960 highs, but urban living was once again highly attractive in cities with a strong economy and quality of life. Population decline in the second half of the 20th century does not have to presage a destiny of permanent urban decline.

The decline in total population numbers is only part of Birmingham's demographic story. The composition of today's population—number and type of households, as well as the composition of the population by gender, age, race and ethnicity—also tells us how the city is faring.

2. Households include fewer families and more singles.

Number and size of households. Although many US cities lost population in the last 50 to 60 years, the decline in the number of households has typically not been as steep because the average number of people per household (“average household size”) declined steadily until 2000. (The Great Recession produced a slight increase in average household size in the 2010 census because young adults and others did not form new households, living with parents or doubling up.)

Compared to 1950 and 1960, there are many more households made up of only one or two people. In 2010, 27 percent of all US households were made up of one person, more than double the 13 percent of single person households in 1960. The 2010 average household size in the US was 2.69 persons. Cities typically have smaller household sizes and the City of Birmingham follows this trend. In 1990, the average household size was 2.26 persons in Birmingham, decreasing yet again to 2.17 in 2000. In 2010, however, still following the national trend, average household size in Birmingham was somewhat higher at 2.27 persons.

TABLE 3.4: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM HOUSEHOLDS 2010

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total households	89,382	100%
Family households*	49,155	55%
Nonfamily households	40,227	45%
Households with individuals under 18 years	24,494	27%
Households with individuals 65 years and over	20,474	23%
Householder living alone	33,690	38%

*Families = persons related by blood or marriage

SOURCE: CENSUS 2010

TABLE 3.5: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS 2010

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total family households	49,155	100%
Husband-wife without own children under 18 in household	15,172	31%
Husband-wife with own children under 18	7,057	14%
Female-headed households, no husband, own children under 18	10,868	22%
Male-headed households, no wife, own children under 18	1,349	3%

SOURCE: CENSUS 2010

TABLE 3.6: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM HOUSEHOLDS WITH INDIVIDUALS UNDER 18 YEARS

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total Households with individuals under 18 years	24,494	100%
Husband-wife with own children under 18	7,057	29%
Female-headed households, no husband, own children under 18	10,868	44%
Male-headed households, no wife, own children under 18	1,349	6%

SOURCE: CENSUS 2010

Type of households. The census divides households into “family” and “nonfamily” households. Family households are made up of persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, including married couples who do not have children living at home. Nonfamily households include single person households and households made up of unrelated people. (They do not include people who live in institutional settings such as college dormitories, nursing homes, or prisons—the Census counts these people as living in “group quarters.”)

Household trends in the City of Birmingham are consistent with a number of long-term, national changes in types of households. While in 1960, 85 percent of all households in the US were family households (and most of them were married-couple households), by 2010 only 66 percent of all households were family households. The nuclear family household—a married couple with children under 18 living under the same roof—made up only 21 percent of all American households in 2010. Today, both men and women are waiting longer to marry, more couples live together without marrying, more people live alone at some point in their lives, and life expectancy has increased.

Family households. In Birmingham, in 2010, only 14 percent of the family households were made up of a married couple with their own children under 18 living at home. (These married, two-parent families constitute only 8% of all Birmingham households, nearly two-thirds less than the national average.) A quarter of all family households are single parent families with their own children at home (the vast majority are single female households). (See Table 3.5)

Households with children. Another way to look at families is from the point of view of households that include children under 18 years old. Seventy-nine percent of the City of Birmingham households with children include at least one biological or adoptive parent. The remainder of the family households with children are headed by grandparents or other non-parent relatives, or other caretakers.

	2000	2010	CHANGE
City of Birmingham	50,880	38,058	-25.2%
Birmingham-Hoover MSA	219,064	223,612	2.1%
MSA without City	168,184	185,554	10.3%

SOURCE: US CENSUS

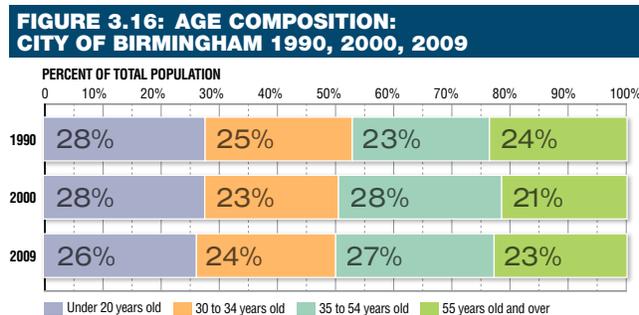
Family households are a significant source of Birmingham’s population decline. According to the Census, there were 30,603 fewer persons in the City of Birmingham in 2010 than in 2000, including 10,132 fewer family households. The number of family households with children under 18—whether married couple or single parent families—declined by nearly 30% between 2000 and 2010. The number of households made up of a married couple with their own children under 18 declined drastically—by 43%. In contrast, the number of families with children in the Birmingham-Hoover MSA outside of the city grew modestly over the same period.

3. The city’s age composition is similar to the region as a whole.

As the baby boom generation ages, the City of Birmingham, like most communities across the country, is getting slightly older, but the overall age composition of the city’s population has not changed very much.

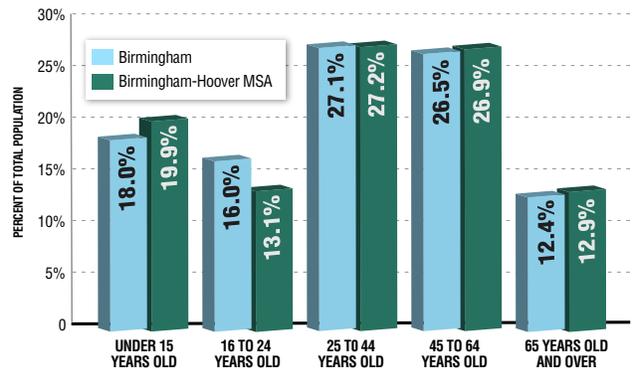
	1990	2000	2010
City of Birmingham	33	34.3	37.5

Often, older industrial cities with declining populations like Birmingham’s tend to have a relatively higher proportion of older residents as the younger working-age population seeks employment opportunities elsewhere. However, in Birmingham, the age composition of the city’s population is much like that of the Birmingham-Hoover MSA, with the exception of a slightly lower percentage of children under 15 and a somewhat higher percentage of youth in the late teenage and early adult years, probably because of the college student population in the city. The city’s elderly population is slightly lower than in the MSA as a whole.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS

FIGURE 3.17: AGE COMPOSITION: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM AND BIRMINGHAM-HOOVER MSA, 2010

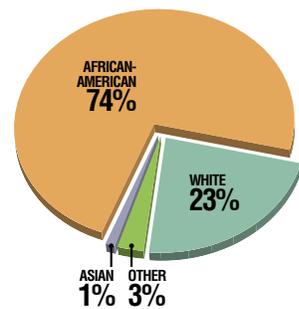


SOURCE: 2010 U.S. CENSUS

4. The city is predominantly African-American.

Nearly three-quarters of the City of Birmingham population is African-American. Whites make up 23% of the population, Asians account for 1%, and a remaining small percentage is made up of people who identify with other racial categories.

FIGURE 3.18: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM 2010 RACIAL COMPOSITION



SOURCE: 2010 U.S. CENSUS

Hispanics/Latinos can be of any race. At the time of the 2010 census, they made up 3.6 percent of the total city population. Two-thirds of the city’s Latino population is of Mexican origin. Although this group’s 7,704 persons is a relatively small number, it grew significantly in the last 10 years.

5. School enrollment has declined steadily for decades.

Public school enrollment in the City of Birmingham has declined by approximately 50% in the last thirty years, from about 50,000 in 1980 to approximately 25,000 in 2011. Over 80% of students are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, which means that they come from low-income families. While smaller families have resulted in fewer schoolchildren in many communities around the country, Birmingham’s falling public school enrollment is also the

result of declining public confidence in the school system over many years. Parents with choices have either enrolled their children in private schools or, increasingly, have moved from the city into suburban jurisdictions with better schools.

6. Because of demographic trends, the city will not reach its 1960 peak population soon, if ever.

Population projections are based on past trends. Population projections are not the same as population predictions. Projections are based on historic population changes, known future housing and economic development projects, and evaluations of trends in the economy and development. Future population is composed of the net result of births minus deaths and in-migration minus out-migration. While it is important to understand likely outcomes if current trends are extended, it is also important to be aware that if conditions and trends change, population movements can change as well.

Using population projection methodology based on current trends produces projections of continued decline for most of the City of Birmingham. The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPC) provides the most detailed population projections for the metropolitan area and sub-areas. The most recent projections to 2035 forecast continued population decline for most of the City of Birmingham and continued sprawling development patterns for the region as a whole, unless there are “significant redevelopment efforts.” The only exception is downtown, which is projected to have a population of over 6,700 by 2035. The RPC points out that the “traditional large neighborhoods of the City of Birmingham,” such as East Lake/Woodlawn, Tarrant Airport Area, North Birmingham, Pratt City/Ensley, and West End/Midfield, “consist of some of the oldest housing within Jefferson County.” Birmingham’s downtown contains the only two census tracts with significant population growth between 2000 and 2010.

The strategies in this comprehensive plan are intended to help the City of Birmingham community—government and its partners—change the conditions that have led to fifty years of population decline. However, because nationwide and local demographic trends are very different in the 21st century than they were in 1960, the city will not

return to the population and household configurations of 1960. Today, families are smaller and there are many more small households and single person households. Rather than focusing on population numbers per se, it is more important to focus on improving quality of life, which will help retain and attract people to live in the city.

3. Green Systems and Sustainability

In recent years there has been growing community interest in enhancing Birmingham's green systems. This has resulted from increased generational awareness, public discourse on local, national, and global environmental issues, and success stories in conservation and parks development.

Numerous state, regional and local public and governmental agencies and private organizations are involved in the creation, conservation and maintenance of open spaces and corridors, in addressing and promoting awareness of environmental quality and environmental justice issues, and promoting and implementing sustainability initiatives. Since 2000, there has been a surge in the number of nonprofit groups and advocacy organizations whose missions in some way relate to Birmingham's green systems. Public authorities, utility providers, major developers and landowners, and a variety of business interests are also playing an important role in the conservation of open space, resource management, and influencing public policy on environmental and sustainability issues in the Birmingham area.

A. NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

The City of Birmingham lies in the Ridge-and-Valley Appalachian ecoregion which is located between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Cumberland Plateau in parallel ridges and valleys of various heights and widths stretching northeast to southwest.⁵ The area abounds in natural resources—from the rich mineral deposits in its mountains to the rare aquatic life in its waterways. The city's piedmont

⁵ An "ecoregion" is a relatively large geographical area that contains characteristic and distinct groups of natural communities and species.

location is a geographic transition point that supports significant, unique biodiversity, notably on the Cahaba River and Turkey Creek.

1. The city is located in the Black Warrior River and Cahaba River watersheds.

A watershed is all the land area that drains precipitation into a stream or waterway, or that supplies the stream with ground water. There are five major watersheds partially in the city: Valley Creek, Village Creek, Five Mile Creek, Shades Creek, and the Cahaba River. Shades Creek flows into the Cahaba River and the other creeks flow into the Black Warrior River. With the exception of the Cahaba River and Shades Creek, where the predominant land uses in the city's portion of the watershed are forestry and open land, all of the watersheds are predominantly residential with a mixture of other land uses. Because of the lack of historical data and early stages of the current monitoring system, the City's stormwater management consultant found in 2009 that "it's not possible at this time to make any hard or statistically significant conclusions regarding water quality needs."⁶ However, Village Creek has been listed as an impaired stream (pathogens and agricultural pesticides). The upper watershed contains the Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport and is mostly residential otherwise, while the middle and lower watershed is predominantly industrial.

The Cahaba River and the Black Warrior River provide drinking water to metropolitan Birmingham. The Cahaba River has also been listed for impairment due to siltation that affects habitat.

The Cahaba River is the longest free-flowing river in Alabama, draining over 1,800 square miles in central Alabama, and is recognized for the diversity of its aquatic life, as well as its general habitat and recreational value. Portions of the Cahaba River have also been listed for impairment due to siltation that affects habitat. Lake Purdy, a water reservoir owned by the Birmingham Water Works Board, is located in the Cahaba watershed.

Much of the city is located in the headwaters of the Black Warrior River Watershed, which drains 6,276 square miles

⁶ FY2008-2009 NPDES Annual Report. [Malcolm Pirnie]

in northwest Alabama. Like the Cahaba, the Black Warrior River is notable for its aquatic diversity and recreational value. The Black Warrior River is also Birmingham’s link to the gulf port of Mobile for shipment of coal, lumber, and other commodity goods.

2. The Birmingham area includes significant biodiversity, especially in the Cahaba River watershed.

According to the Alabama Natural Heritage Program, a number of rare, endangered or threatened species have been reported in Jefferson County, including several globally rare species. Some of these species may exist in the city’s natural areas. According to the Nature Conservancy, the Cahaba River includes “at least 69 rare and imperiled species in this watershed, 12 fish and mussel species listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and 131 species of freshwater fish, more than any other river its size in North America.”⁷

⁷ The Alabama Natural Heritage Program is based at Auburn University and maintains a database by county of rare and endangered species. It is part of an international network of data sources on ecology established in all 50 states and Western Hemisphere nations. www.alnhp.org; <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/>

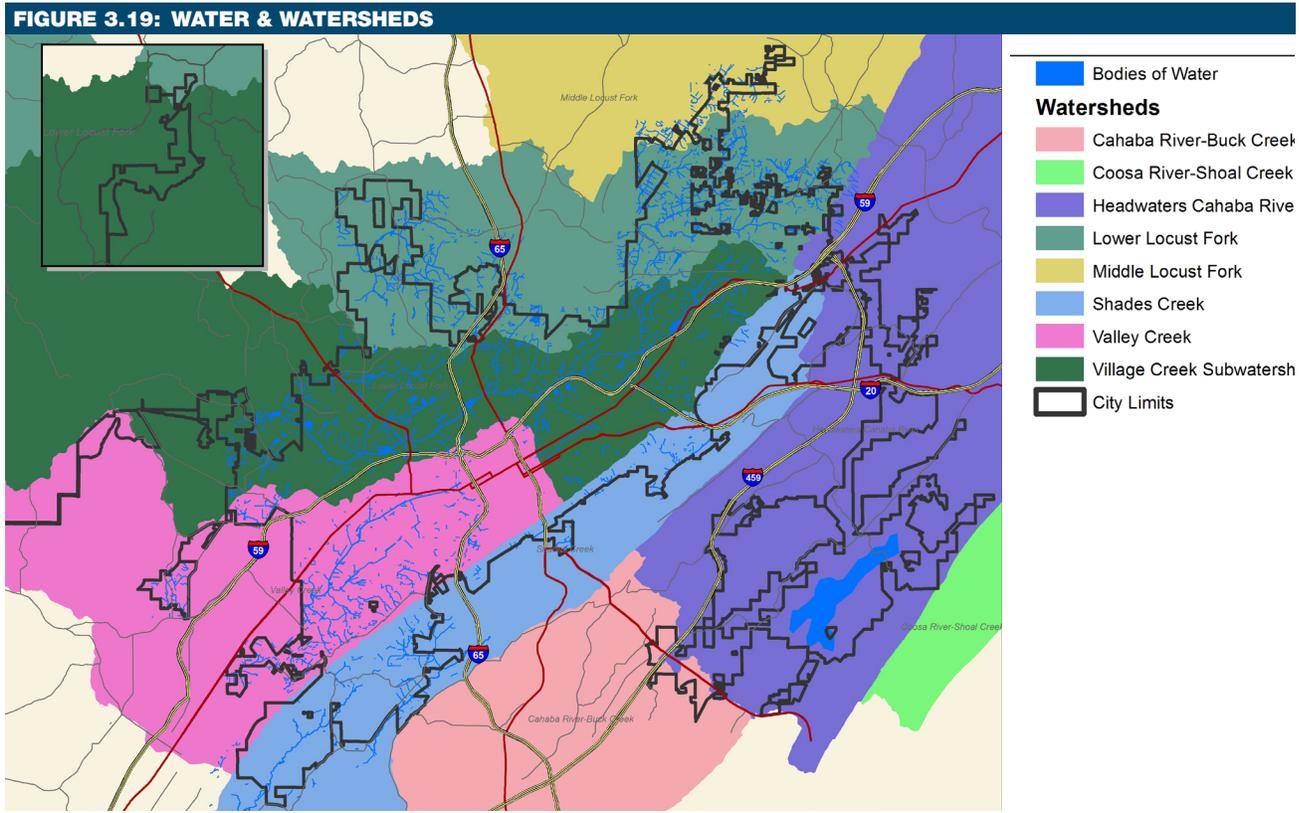
3. Major projects have resulted in significant environmental successes.

As Birmingham continues its transition from an economy based on mining and industry to one driven by health care and other services, vacant mines and foundries are seeing a second life as regional parks (Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, Red Mountain Park and Vulcan Park), greenways, and historic landmarks (Sloss Furnaces).

In 2003, a consortium of local governments including three counties and twenty cities developed the Upper Cahaba Watershed Study. This planning process has raised the level of regional dialogue on water quality and other environmental issues.

Over the years of industrial dominance, waterways like Village Creek and Five-Mile Creek (at the northern edge of Birmingham) became polluted and efforts are currently underway to improve water quality and restore the natural habitats. The Freshwater Land Trust (originally known as

regions/northamerica/unitedstates/alabama/placesweprotect/cahaba-river-landscape-conservation-area.xml



the Black Warrior Cahaba River Land Trust) was funded by Jefferson County during its first ten years as part of the consent agreement with the EPA. The land trust was a “Supplemental Environmental Project” intended to acquire riparian and greenway properties to reduce nonpoint source pollution and enhance stream corridor and aquatic habitat. Since its creation, the land trust has acquired a total of 4,300 acres in fee and 200 acres in conservation easements along multiple waterways and in other strategic locations. Acquisitions by the Freshwater Land Trust led to the establishment of, and additional acquisitions for, Red Mountain Park. The Trust has created a leadership group, Village Creek Champions, to highlight stewardship activities for Village Creek. In addition, the Trust managed the planning process for the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail system, a greenway master plan for Jefferson County, funded through the county’s Health Action Partnership. The plan identifies routes for interconnected walking trails, bike paths, sidewalks and blueways to connect neighborhoods, parks and other community destinations.

The Southern Environmental Center, at Birmingham Southern College, has developed ten “ecoscapescapes” as outdoor learning sites and neighborhood amenities using vacant and abandoned lots. One is located on the campus of Birmingham-Southern College but the others are located in neighborhoods such as Arlington-West End, Brown Springs, College Hills, North Birmingham, Seven Springs, and Woodlawn.

4. Air quality has improved but requires continued vigilance.

In late 2011, the EPA proposed that the Birmingham metropolitan area be certified as complying with federal air quality standards for the first time in two decades. The American Lung Association in 2013 ranked Birmingham as the 14th most polluted metropolitan area for ozone and the 24th most polluted metropolitan area for particulate matter.⁸ This is a significant improvement over previous years. Many businesses, citizens and non-profits have collaborated to improve air quality, such as programs like CommuteSmart,

⁸ www.stateoftheair.org; also see www.asthmacapitals.com (Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America)

a program to reduce Single-Occupancy-Vehicle (SOV) commuting by providing services to support car- and van-pooling, as well as other transportation alternatives.

5. Environmental justice is an issue in some neighborhoods.

Environmental justice programs focus on the need to redress existing and prevent future inequitable distribution of environmental burdens and impacts. For example, low income and minority communities throughout the country typically have been more likely to experience adverse environmental impacts such as pollution from industrial facilities or transportation projects. Another example of an environmental justice initiative is the use of U.S. EPA authority to order cleanup of hazardous substances in North Birmingham neighborhoods including Collegeville, Fairmont and Harriman Park. Birmingham has a history of residential streets in close adjacency to sites with heavy industry use.

B. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Within the City of Birmingham there are over 3,500 acres of park land for public use owned and managed by the City and other groups. This gives the city approximately 17 acres of park land per 1,000 persons, a commonly-used metric. According to the Trust for Public Land (TPL), this puts Birmingham slightly below the median of 20.3 acres for the group of low-density cities in which the city was included.⁹ A significant portion of the parks inventory can be found in two major nature parks, Ruffner Mountain and Red Mountain. While these are wonderful resources, they do not meet the day-to-day needs of many Birmingham residents for community and neighborhood parks. The TPL and other urban park advocates emphasize the accessibility of parks—how many residents can reach a park within a ten-minute walk—as much as total acreage in evaluating city park systems. The TPL conducted a Recreation and Open Space Needs Assessment in 2008 for the Jefferson County Greenways Commission that found that people would be more likely to use parks and open space if they

⁹ Trust for Public Land, 2011 City Park Facts, page 13. <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-city-park-facts-2011.pdf>

could walk or bike to the parks. Hiking, walking, and biking trails, as well as new parks, were supported by 82% of respondents to the survey.¹⁰

Much city-owned park land is legally dedicated to park use and cannot be transferred, sold or used for another purpose without a public referendum vote. Similarly, land created through flood mitigation must remain open land. City-owned park land which has not been dedicated could potentially be sold or developed.

1. The 1925 Olmsted Parks Plan is a source of inspiration nearly a century later.

In 1925 the Birmingham Parks and Recreation Board published the Olmsted Brothers' "A Park System for Birmingham." This countywide plan, based on the 1919 City Plan, recommended acquisition of a network of strategic lands to protect the drinking water supply, the preservation of floodplains, natural drainage systems and ridge tops, as well as numerous park expansion and development projects. Although several individual parks were created, the plan as a whole was not implemented. However, in recent years the Freshwater Land Trust and other groups in Birmingham have increasingly recognized this visionary plan as a foundation for contemporary park improvement goals. The Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail plan is one of several initiatives inspired in part by the environmental principles of the Olmsted Brothers' plan.

2. The City of Birmingham park system is governed by a board appointed by City Council.

The board provides direction to the Parks and Recreation Department and establishes park policies. The five member Parks Board holds 124 individual properties, which comprise over 2,000 acres throughout the city. However, the Parks Board does not have any independent funding, so all staff, capital projects, and maintenance are paid for by the City. Major renovations were recently completed at Avondale Park, Greenwood Park, Cooper Green, and Crestwood Parks. A list of City-owned parks can be found in Chapter 4 of the Birmingham Data Book prepared by the

City's Department of Planning, Engineering, and Permits as an adjunct to this comprehensive plan.

The city system includes a variety of park and greenspace types, from pocket parks and neighborhood parks to public golf courses and greenways. Operation of the park system involves interaction among multiple city departments in addition to the Parks and Recreation Department. The Department of Planning, Engineering, and Permitting acts as the project manager for parks and recreation improvements and new construction. The Public Works Department is responsible for park maintenance. Maintenance staff within the parks department was transferred to the Public Works Department in the 1990s. A commensurate portion of the expanded Public Works Department's budget was to be reserved for park maintenance as a part of the reassignment of staff. City financial constraints have recently made full funding of park maintenance and operations difficult. Some city parks are also supported by a number of "Friends of the Park" community organizations. Several special city-owned park properties, such as Vulcan Park, Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, the Birmingham Zoo, Railroad Park and the Botanical Garden are managed and operated by public-private partnerships.

The Community Development Department (CDD) and the Floodplain Management office have also contributed to the city's park system. Historically, a portion of Community Development Block Grant funds managed by CDD was available to the parks department for park improvements. However, those funds are no longer available. The Floodplain Management office has engaged in past flood-mitigation efforts, which have included floodplain buy-outs, in coordination with FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and CDD, along Village Creek in Ensley and Vanderbilt Road. These efforts created opportunities to develop new park facilities, such as the planned Greenwood Park.

3. A number of unique parks serve the entire region.

The City is fortunate to include several unique and well-used public parks. Some are formally part of the city parks system while others are managed and, in some cases, owned by other entities.

¹⁰ Draft 2035 Birmingham Regional Active Transportation Plan (August 2011), p. 1-1.

- **Kelly Ingram Park** is located adjacent to the Civil Rights Institute and includes interpretive features about events of the Civil Rights Movement, many of which happened at or near the park. The Civil Rights Institute and Urban Impact, Inc., provide tours of the park's historic interpretive elements.
- **Vulcan Park and Museum** sits atop Red Mountain overlooking downtown. Owned by the City and operated by the Vulcan Park Foundation, the 10-acre park includes the iconic 1904 Vulcan statue, the world's largest cast iron statue, and an interpretive museum of industrial history. Adjacent to the park is a one-mile rail-trail that runs along the north face of Red Mountain.
- The **Birmingham Botanical Gardens** is a 67.5-acre park owned by the City and operated by the Friends of the Botanical Gardens. Adjacent to the zoo, the park serves both as an environmental education facility as well as a tourist destination, attracting 350,000 visitors each year.
- The **Birmingham Zoo** occupies 45 acres of its 123-acre site south of Red Mountain and is owned by the City and by the nonprofit Birmingham Zoo, Inc. It is one of the largest zoos in the southeast drawing some 450,000 visitors each year.
- **Railroad Park**, an urban recreational park in downtown Birmingham that opened in 2011, was created and is now operated by the nonprofit Railroad Park Foundation on a four-block former brownfield. The park has been a tremendous success and symbol of the continuing revitalization of downtown.
- **Ruffner Mountain Park** is an urban nature preserve of 1,011 acres established in 1977 in northeast Birmingham and operated by the nonprofit Ruffner Mountain Nature Center. It includes 11 miles of hiking trails and an environmental educational center.
- **Red Mountain Park** is overseen by the Red Mountain Greenway and Recreational Area Commission, which was created by the State Legislature in 2007. Like Ruffner Mountain, Red Mountain Park was once an iron mine. Opened in 2012, the park is restoring the environment while also honoring its industrial history with interpretive elements.

4. Recreation centers and stadiums serve local and regional groups.

The city operates 18 recreation centers with activities six days a week, 17 public swimming pools, 2 public golf courses, and 4 public tennis centers staffed by a tennis pro (as well as tennis courts in many parks). The city is also home to two historic stadiums and a new downtown baseball stadium that has opened for the 2013 season.

- **Legion Field** is a 70,000-seat football stadium located in McLendon Park west of Downtown Birmingham. In 1996 the facility was used for preliminary soccer matches as part of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. It currently serves as the home field for the UAB Blazers. The City Parks and Recreation Department is housed in the ground floor of the stadium.
- The oldest surviving professional baseball stadium in the United States, **Rickwood Field** is owned by the City and operated by Friends of Rickwood Field. Rickwood hosted several farm teams until 1987, when the Birmingham Barons moved to a modern facility in suburban Hoover south of Birmingham. The stadium was renovated in 2005 and remains an important site in professional baseball history.
- **Regions Field**, Birmingham's new downtown baseball park, is located at the southwest corner of Railroad Park. The Birmingham Barons moved back to the city when the 8,500-seat stadium was completed. The project also includes a Negro Leagues Museum on 16th Street.

C. SUSTAINABILITY AND GREEN PRACTICES

The Birmingham community is making progress in incorporating green practices and sustainability thinking into everyday life.

1. City government is beginning to take steps to incorporate sustainability.

As part of the 2009 federal stimulus program, Alabama Power, UAB and Southern Company Services were awarded energy efficiency funding and the City of Birmingham was awarded an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant of \$2,469,900 which was used to install

geothermal heat pumps in eight recreation centers. The Mayor has designated a staff member to be responsible for environmental initiatives.

2. Universities often take the lead in sustainability.

Colleges and universities around the country have been among the leaders in promoting sustainable practices for practical reasons—because they are long term stewards and users of buildings and sites—and as part of their educational role. Green initiatives at UAB provide an example of local efforts. The 2011 College Sustainability Report Card program gave UAB an overall “C” grade for sustainability, but the institution is making progress by establishing new efforts and programs. UAB initiatives include:

- First greenhouse gas emissions inventory is underway
- Rooftop solar panels to charge electric vehicles on campus
- Four buildings meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, a green-building certification program) criteria, and there is a green roof on the Hulsey Center
- Use of water conservation technologies and practices
- Use of energy conservation technologies and practices for lighting and mechanical equipment
- GreenLight—sustainability-themed student living
- Bike paths on major campus arteries
- Bike sharing program with 10 bikes
- Partners with CommuteSmart
- Car-sharing program through Hertz
- Endowment invested in renewable energy funds

In early 2012, UAB held a sustainability conference and announced the establishment of the Sustainability Smart Cities Research Center, with plans to focus some of its efforts on Birmingham.

3. Birmingham offers recycling.

The City of Birmingham’s Public Works Department provides curbside and drop off recycling for most single-family detached dwellings but lacks recycling-specific trucks that can make the process much more efficient. Tenants in multifamily buildings are less likely

to recycle because building management must provide the opportunity. The Alabama Environmental Center has long provided drop off services at its Downtown Recycling Center and special events such as an electronics recycling day. In late 2011, it received a grant through the Jefferson County Department of Health to expand recycling services including glass and office paper pickup service for Downtown Birmingham, expanding UAB’s recycling program, purchasing 20,000 curbside recycling bins for Birmingham residents, and providing recycling at events and festivals. It is also notable that over 90% of the debris from the April 2011 tornado was recycled.

4. Alternative energy sources.

Alabama has some limited incentives for energy efficiency and alternative energy. The state has an opportunity to enhance its existing incentives.

5. Green building design is becoming more widespread.

Like their counterparts throughout the country, architects and developers in the Birmingham region are increasingly incorporating green building practices that reduce energy and resource use in new development, and designing buildings that meet LEED standards. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and is a certification program created by the US Green Building Council. There are several LEED-certified buildings in the City of Birmingham, including the Ruffner Mountain Nature Center, a dormitory at Birmingham-Southern College, and the APCO Employee Credit Union, and some new buildings meet LEED criteria without certification.

The Birmingham Airport’s renovations will include state of the art green elements including greater use of natural sunlight; energy-efficient LED lights and sensors; harvesting rainwater for use in toilets and urinals; solar water heating; recycling of construction materials; energy-efficient heating and air conditioning; use of native, drought-resistant plants in landscaping; and green housekeeping and maintenance practices. Despite a doubling of the size of the terminal, it is expected that these “green” aspects of the renovations will cut water costs by 40%.

6. Urban agriculture is expanding.

Urban agriculture is a growing national movement, especially in cities with vacant land, to strengthen local food systems and public health, and to bring environmentally sustainable uses to vacant land. Birmingham is the site of one of the most well-known urban farms in the country, the Jones Valley Teaching Farm. It is both a production farm that sells produce through farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and sales to upscale restaurants, and an educational program for youth and the community at large that provides experiential learning about sustainable agriculture and nutrition. In addition to Jones Valley Teaching Farm, there are several community garden sites in Birmingham neighborhoods, such as the West End Community Garden.

7. Green infrastructure is becoming more widespread.

Green infrastructure in the broadest sense includes all the interconnected natural systems that keep the environment healthy. The term is increasingly used to refer to the use of natural systems for stormwater management, including swales, rain gardens, detention ponds, pervious pavement, and constructed wetlands. The purpose is to promote natural infiltration of stormwater rather than transfer it through pipes to streams. Much of the city's stormwater system is in traditional storm sewer pipes, but Birmingham's flood-mitigation projects are creating a green infrastructure system in the floodplain of the major creeks.

4. Housing and Neighborhoods

A. HOUSING

1. The majority of Birmingham homes are single family houses.

Nearly two-thirds of the housing units in the City of Birmingham are single-family houses. An additional 23% percent of the units are in small to medium sized multifamily buildings with fewer than 20 units, and only 10% (approximately 10,000 units) are in buildings with 20 or more units.

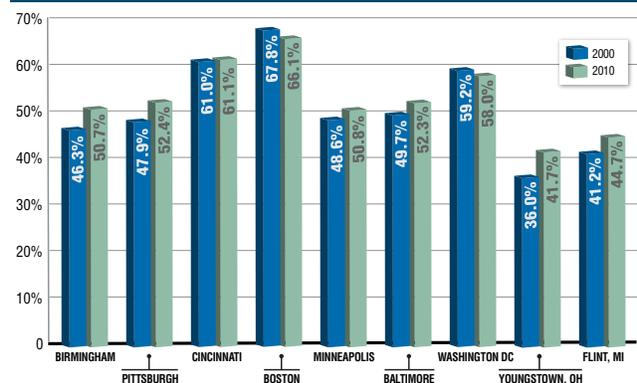
HOUSING TYPES	PERCENT
Single family	64.4%
Two family	1.9%
3–9 Units	12.5%
10–19 units	10.5%
20 or more	10.0%
Other	0.6%

SOURCE: CENSUS BUREAU

2. City of Birmingham households are almost equally divided between owners and renters.

Forty-nine percent own their housing units and 51% rent. In the Birmingham-Hoover metropolitan area as a whole, about 71% of households are owners and 29% are renters. There is often an assumption that a higher percentage of owners rather than renters is always preferable because homeowners have a stake in keeping up the neighborhood. Birmingham's greater proportion of renters is not unusual for urban centers, nor does a high rental rate always

FIGURE 3.20: PERCENT OF RENTER HOUSEHOLDS IN SELECT US CITIES



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS

correlate with lower incomes. In Table 3.20, Boston and Washington, DC, (which are growing cities) have higher percentages of rentals than cities such as Birmingham and Pittsburgh, which continue to decline in population. The cities of Youngstown, OH, and Flint, MI, which are often identified as true “shrinking cities,” actually have lower percentages of rentals than many growing cities.

3. Nearly 20% of housing units are vacant.

While there are nearly 109,000 housing units in the City of Birmingham, only 82% were occupied at the time of the 2010 census. Some of these were units on the market for rent or for sale, but nearly 8,000 were not being marketed at all. Moreover, the 2011 Jefferson County assessor’s list shows 10,812 tax delinquent properties “in the hands of the state” located in the City. This is 42% more than the 7,546 tax delinquent properties found only five years earlier in a 2005 study.¹¹ The tax liens on these properties were brought to auction and not sold. The owners may redeem these properties for another three years. Some of these are vacant lots, and therefore not counted as housing units, and a small percentage are non-residential properties.

¹¹ Mary Elizabeth Evans, *The Prevention, Management and Re-Use of Jefferson County’s Tax Delinquent Property*, Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University, April 2005, page 3.

TABLE 3.9: HOUSING OCCUPANCY

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Total housing units	108,981	100.0%
Occupied housing units	89,382	82.0%
Vacant housing units	19,559	18.0%
For rent	8,417	7.7%
For sale only	2,105	1.9%
Rented or sold, not occupied	640	0.5%
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	481	0.4%
All other vacants	7,956	7.3%

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS 2010

4. Market-rate housing in Birmingham is affordable compared to many other cities—but many people need “affordable” housing that is below market rate.

Housing is typically defined as “affordable” when a household pays no more than 30 percent of its income for housing-related costs. For rental housing, this figure includes rent and utility expenses; for homeowners, it includes mortgage payments, taxes and insurance. The “no more than 30% of income” standard is used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for its housing programs.

A wide variety of people need below-market affordable housing. They include persons on fixed incomes (the elderly and disabled), working individuals and families who earn low wages, and homeless and special-needs populations with supportive-service needs. In Birmingham, this group can include people like restaurant workers, maintenance workers, retail salespersons, and health care aides. Members of these households are productive members of the area workforce and essential to some key economic sectors, such as health care.

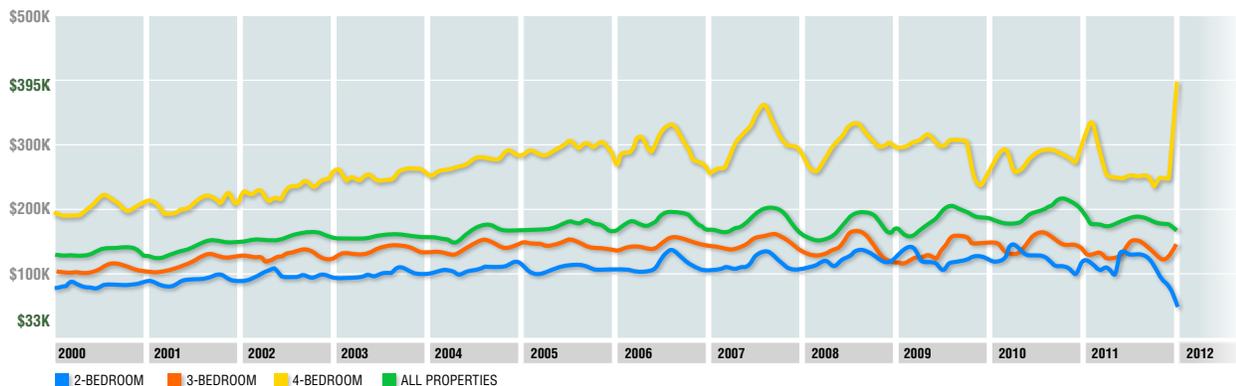
5. The housing market in much of the city is weak.

Much of Birmingham has long been a “weak market” city, experiencing declining real estate values as a result of years of population decline and disinvestment. The national housing and foreclosure crisis that began in late 2007 has exacerbated these conditions. The areas that typically have stronger residential markets are the southside neighborhoods. In-town neighborhoods and northern neighborhoods tend to have lower values than other parts of the city. According to the real estate website *Trulia.com*, the sales price of City of Birmingham homes has declined 27.5% over the last five years (in contrast to a national decline of 11% and statewide decline of 16%). From September to November 2011, the median sales price for homes in the city was \$116,000.¹²

Although much of Birmingham’s housing is relatively old, age alone is not the issue, as the values of many historic neighborhoods demonstrate. However, in weak market

¹² www.trulia.com

FIGURE 3.21: MEDIAN SALES PRICE—BIRMINGHAM | 2 -BEDROOM, 3-BEDROOM, 4-BEDROOM, ALL PROPERTIES | ALL YEARS



SOURCE: TRULIA

neighborhoods, the older housing is often small, does not meet the needs of modern households, and has not been maintained. For too long, investing in improvements has been more costly than the value of the house itself. Except for scattered infill housing and small subdivisions in the southside neighborhoods and a few other locations, new market rate housing development during the 2000–2010 decade occurred primarily in the city center as urban rental housing, and in the Oxmoor area, where several suburban-style subdivisions were built. Building permits for single-family homes have declined from 313 in 2006 to 117 in 2010, with an average cost of construction of \$171,402. As mentioned earlier, market rate rentals are under development as of early 2012.

According to real estate professionals, one of the difficulties in the city real estate market is that there are a number of stable subareas of neighborhoods where housing is in good condition and can attract buyers, but where appraisals for mortgages are based on a wider area that includes disinvested blocks. As a result, even after the buyer and seller have agreed on a price—clearly the “market price”—the appraisal will be lower, which then pushes values down.

6. The median household can afford to buy the median house for sale in the Birmingham region.

The Alabama Center for Real Estate’s Housing Affordability Index for the second quarter of 2011 found that the median sales price for a single-family house in the Birmingham-Hoover MSA was \$148,732, requiring a minimum

household income of \$30,127 to buy the house at prevailing mortgage rates. This was the approximate median income in the City of Birmingham in 2009, indicating that the median household could afford the median house in the region.

7. The foreclosure crisis has also had a significant impact on the Birmingham market.

A snapshot of the housing market as of late December 2011, showed 1,539 homes listed for sale in the City of Birmingham, of which the most expensive was priced at over \$600,000 in Crestwood and the least expensive (a two-bedroom, 800 sf home) was priced at \$2,800 in Wauhoma. Thirty-eight percent of the homes listed for sale on Trulia.com were in foreclosure, including the property in Wauhoma. Twenty-five houses were for sale at less than \$10,000. December is the usual low point for housing sales. Six months later in June 2012, two houses were selling for over \$1 million in Forest Park.

There is a range of rental housing available in the City of Birmingham, including single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments. A recent report calculated that a household making the estimated average hourly wage for a renter (\$12.46/hr) could afford a rent of \$663 a month. A minimum wage earner (\$7.25/hr or approximately \$15,000 per year full time) could afford rent of \$377 a month.¹³

¹³ National Low-Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2011, p. 17-18, www.nlihc.org

8. There continues to be a high need for subsidized affordable housing in the city.

According to the most recent Census Bureau estimates, 41% of City of Birmingham homeowners and 50% of renters spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Nearly 30% of renters spend 50% or more of their income on housing. Assisted-housing programs have many technical requirements. In most, households pay no more than 30% of their income, and the government pays the difference. Standard definitions are based on an “area median income” (AMI) that is calculated annually by HUD for metropolitan areas. The FY 2012 AMI for a household of four persons in the Birmingham-Hoover area is \$61,400. Most HUD programs target households with 80% or below the AMI, adjusted for household size. For a family of four in the Birmingham-Hoover area, that would be \$50,250. Because incomes within the City of Birmingham tend to be lower than in the rest of the metro area, assisted housing programs in the city typically serve households at 50% or below the area median.

Assisted housing programs. Government programs have been created to help people obtain decent, affordable homes. “Assisted housing” is housing that is made available at below-market cost through government programs to households who meet income-eligibility requirements. The role of housing assistance varies according to the strength of the local housing market and the cost of housing. In high-cost markets, subsidies are required if affordable housing is to exist at all. In weak and/or low-cost housing markets, like many parts of Birmingham, many market-rate housing units—both rental and ownership units—are inexpensive and meet the standard for affordability for many low-income households. While a segment of Birmingham’s market-rate housing inventory, both rental and ownership, is very affordable, much of it is in poor condition.

Assisted housing programs in Birmingham are administered primarily by the Housing Authority of Birmingham District (HABD) and the City’s Community Development Department. Nonprofit organizations also provide some housing assistance. Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV, previously known as “Section 8”) provide federal funds to make up the difference between what a

tenant can afford to pay (30% of income) and the monthly rent, up to limits set annually by HUD. Tenants with vouchers are not tied to a particular location, and the holder of the voucher can go anywhere in the United States to rent a place to live. In practice, most remain in the City of Birmingham. In 2011, HABD owned or managed 5,531 public housing units of which 3,534 were occupied, and managed 4,933 Housing Choice Vouchers. There are 14 public housing developments with an average of 331 units each. HABD has successfully transformed several public housing developments into mixed-income developments through the federal government’s HOPE VI program. HABD has planned a program of improvements and modernization for many of the authority’s developments and is pursuing funding for large scale redevelopment along the lines of HOPE VI for four public housing developments. As of 2011, the average annual income of public housing households was \$9,249.

Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program. Through 2007, 51 housing projects (16 with new construction) in the city had been redeveloped or newly constructed with the aid of federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits.¹⁴ Tax credits are the major source of financing for mixed-income projects around the country, and in Birmingham they have created 3,574 affordable units (901 new) and 148 market-rate units (all new).

City of Birmingham housing programs. The Community Development Department manages housing programs focused on homeownership including down payment and closing cost assistance; deferred loans (up to \$25,000) and grants (up to \$600 for critical repairs, which can be requested by the same resident again every three years); and loans to upgrade and rehabilitate substandard or multifamily housing. The department receives a total of about \$5.5 million a year in federal funds for homeownership, rehabilitation and supportive housing programs. Because housing resources are limited and the need is great, they are provided only to households with very low incomes (30% of AMI or below) and the resources are spread throughout the city.

¹⁴ Created by the 1986 federal Tax Reform Act, the LIHTC program has become the major source of financing for affordable rental housing in the United States by providing tax benefits to developers of housing that meets specific criteria. The LIHTC program provides a dollar-for-dollar reduction in a developer’s tax liability for a ten-year period.

Nonprofit housing partners. Community-based non-profits that partner with the City and others to provide permanent and temporary housing opportunities include Habitat for Humanity; Worldchangers Rehabilitation; Rising West Princeton; the YWCA; First Light; Cooperative Downtown Ministries; Aletheia House; BEAT (Bethel Ensley Action task Force); and the Interfaith Hospitality House.

Homelessness is a significant problem in Birmingham. One Roof, a coalition of homeless program providers, estimates that 7,500 to 9,000 people in Jefferson, Shelby and St. Clair counties experience homelessness at some point in a year. The 2011 annual one-night survey found 1,950 homeless persons (with slightly more than half in shelters), of whom 536 were chronically homeless. Family and teen/youth vulnerability to homelessness is a problem. Chronically homeless persons often suffer from substance abuse, severe mental illness or both. Studies have found that providing housing and supportive services for chronically homeless persons is less expensive than the hospital, mental health, and legal system costs that result when they access services on an emergency basis. The City of Birmingham, following national policy, has adopted a “Housing First” plan focused on providing housing and supportive services.

B. NEIGHBORHOODS

Birmingham neighborhood identities are based on the city’s history of annexing independent towns and, more recently, the development of subdivisions. The older neighborhood identities predate their absorption into the city, and Birmingham residents have a very strong sense of neighborhood. In the 1970s, residents created a system of neighborhoods with identified boundaries grouped in “communities” made up of two or more neighborhoods. There are now 99 recognized neighborhoods and 23 communities. These groupings have not been significantly changed since the 1970s, except to add new neighborhoods and communities.

1. Birmingham’s Citizen Participation Plan was one of the first in the nation.

The changes in the city as a result of the civil rights struggle and requirements for federal funding led to a neighborhood planning process in the 1970s and the

creation of the City’s Citizen Participation Plan, one of the first in the nation. The neighborhood and community system mentioned above was created at this time (See Figure 3.22). Neighborhood leaders are elected by residents, these leaders then meet in the 23 communities to elect community leaders, and then these leaders make up the Community Advisory Board.

The program focused for many years on how federal community development funds were to be distributed among neighborhoods, with a guaranteed minimum amount for every neighborhood to be used for projects or events in the neighborhood. The Department of Community Development and the Mayor’s Office of Citizen Assistance remain the major liaisons with the neighborhood/community system, but funding for neighborhood activities and capacity building has become scarce. Federal community development funds for the City of Birmingham have declined by 46% since 1980, while the general fund budget has increased by over 400% in the same thirty years. At the same time, population loss has changed the profile of many neighborhoods. The decline in funding and population has weakened the effectiveness of the citizen participation program.

2. Commercial Revitalization Districts are intended to promote good design.

There are 28 Commercial Revitalization Districts established by ordinance. Many cover downtown and adjacent areas but the city’s traditional neighborhood centers and shopping strips on major arterials are included. Projects in these districts are subject to design review and, in many cases, offer rebates for façade and other improvements.

3. The Main Street Program targets nine commercial districts.

The Main Street revitalization program, which was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has a four-point approach:

- **Organization:** Volunteer committees, usually anchored in merchants’ associations, govern the program and do much of the work.

- **Promotion:** Marketing, events and other campaigns create a positive image for the area.
- **Design:** Physical improvements and attractive design create an appealing environment for shoppers, workers, and residents.
- **Economic Restructuring:** A competitive and balanced commercial mix meets consumer needs and brings new businesses into vacant or underutilized spaces.

The Birmingham Main Street Program is a nonprofit organization that typically has received about half its funding from the City. Unlike most Main Street programs, many of the Birmingham districts lack a strong merchant association and volunteer base and cannot support Main Street managers. Because of funding constraints and neighborhood conditions, the Birmingham program has focused efforts on Woodlawn (where the program office is located), Avondale, East Lake and Ensley. Dependent on City funding and grants, the program has focused on renovating space and marketing it to creative businesses and on creating a distribution system for fresh food. As of spring 2012, Birmingham Main Street has merged with Operation New Birmingham to form REV Birmingham.

4. Widespread scattered blight and vacancy is a huge challenge.

Blight, inadequate housing, and environmental concerns are not peculiar to recent decades in Birmingham. As noted earlier, nearly half of Birmingham housing had no

indoor plumbing in 1950 and the city had no housing code until 1957, when it was adopted under federal pressure as a condition of receiving urban renewal funds. The city’s early development pattern of workers’ camps and villages surrounding mines and plants sometimes left a legacy of environmental issues. Black neighborhoods under segregation typically had poor housing conditions and few amenities. Although by 1990 almost all of Birmingham’s housing units were connected to the water and sewer systems, the upheavals and economic dislocations of the previous three decades had produced a legacy of vacancy and housing deterioration. The large number of tax-delinquent properties in the hands of the state, as mentioned earlier, is a critical issue for revitalization. Figure 3.25 shows that tax-delinquent properties are widely distributed across city neighborhoods.

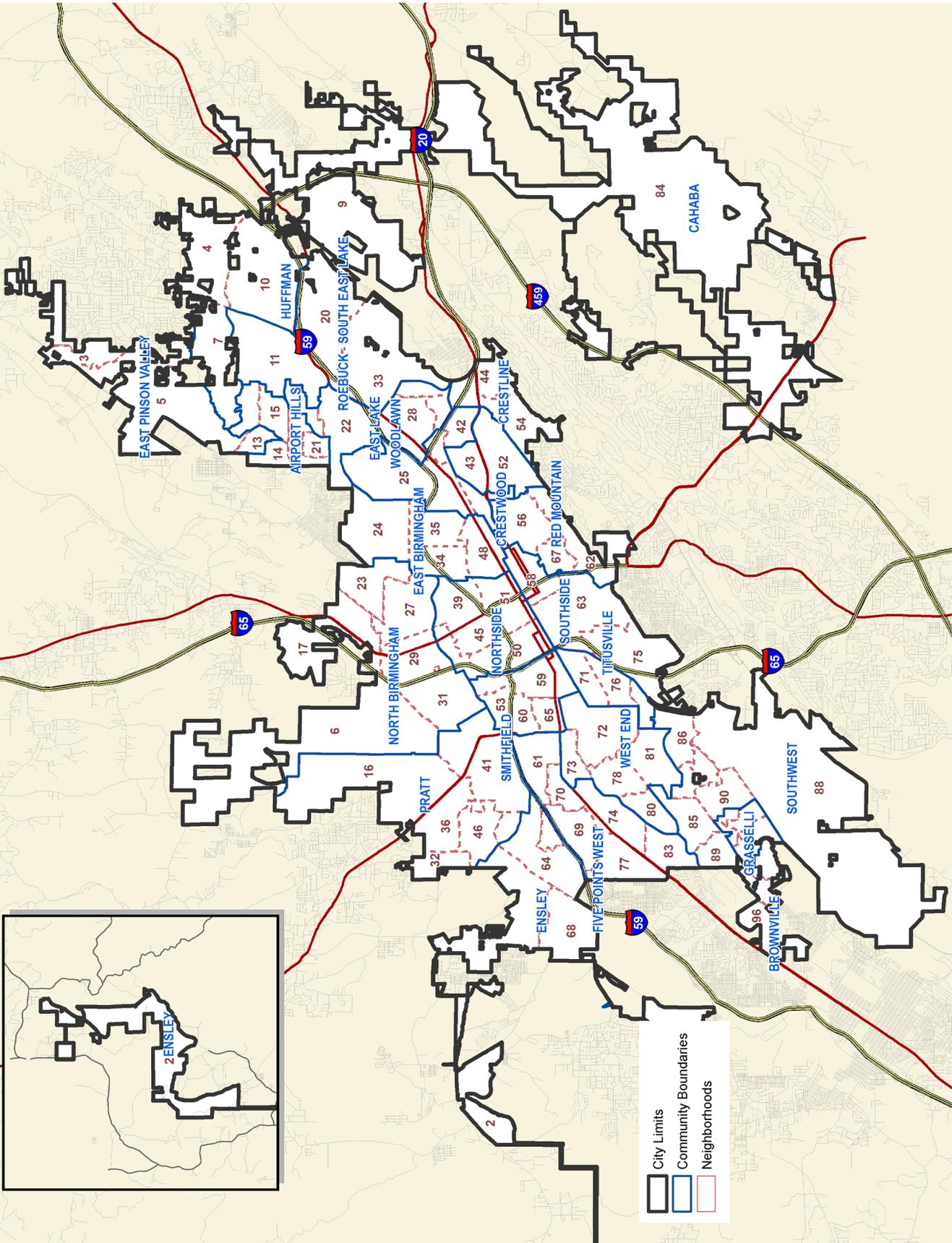
5. The lack of grocery stores has become symbolic of limited neighborhood-serving retail and services in many parts of Birmingham.

With high rates of obesity and related illnesses, such as diabetes, in the population, Jefferson County and the City of Birmingham are focusing on promoting healthy lifestyles. A recent study commissioned by Main Street Birmingham found that the eastern and northern parts of the city can be considered a “food desert” because of the lack of full service grocery stores, and that a much larger portion of the city lacks “food balance,” which is defined as having closer access to fast food vendors than to a grocery store. Another study that included data from Birmingham, concluded that access to fast food was a stronger indicator of poor food choices than the presence or absence nearby of a grocery store. In any case, grocery stores are often the anchor stores of neighborhood shopping areas and attract smaller retailers that serve residents.

TABLE 3.10: TAX-DELINQUENT AND VACANT PROPERTIES CITYWIDE		
	PARCELS	ACRES
Tax Delinquent Properties in hands of the State	10,812	2,604
Residential	10,067	2,187
With Structure	4,271	1,265
Without Structure	5,796	922
Commercial/Industrial	745	417
With Structure	369	305
Without Structure	376	112
Vacant but not in Hands of State	17,185	59,176

SOURCE: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM (JEFFERSON COUNTY ASSESSOR, 2010 DATA)

FIGURE 3.22: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITIES



ID	NEIGHBORHOOD	ID	NEIGHBORHOOD	ID	NEIGHBORHOOD	ID	NEIGHBORHOOD
1	Apple Valley	26	Wahouma	51	Central City	76	South Titusville
2	Sherman Heights	27	Collegeville	52	Crestwood South	77	Belview Heights
3	Sun Valley	28	East Lake	53	East Thomas	78	Oakwood Place
4	Spring Lake	29	North Birmingham	54	Crestline	79	Dolomite
5	Echo Highlands	30	Brown Springs	55	Oak Ridge	80	Germania Park
6	Hooper City	31	Acipco-Finley	56	Forest Park	81	West End Manor
7	Killough Springs	32	Sandusky	57	South Pratt	82	Woodland Park
8	Bridlewood	33	South East Lake	58	Southside	83	Green Acres
9	Liberty Highlands	34	East Birmingham	59	Smithfield	84	Overton
10	Huffman	35	Kingston	60	College Hills	85	Jones Valley
11	Roebuck	36	North Pratt	61	Bush Hills	86	Mason City
12	Maple Grove	37	South Woodlawn	62	Redmont Park	87	Powderly
13	Pine Knoll Vista	38	Gate City	63	Five Points South	88	Oxmoor
14	Brummitt Heights	39	Norwood	64	Ensley	89	Riley
15	Penfield Park	40	Evergreen	65	Graymont	90	Garden Highlands
16	Smithfield Estates	41	Thomas	66	Tuxedo	91	Tarpley City
17	Fairmont	42	Oak Ridge Park	67	Highland Park	92	Industrial Center
18	Zion City	43	Crestwood North	68	Wylam	93	West Goldwire
19	Brownsville Heights	44	Eastwood	69	Ensley Highlands	94	Grasselli Heights
20	Roebuck Springs	45	Druid Hills	70	Fairview	95	Hillman
21	Airport Highlands	46	Central Pratt	71	North Titusville	96	Roosevelt
22	North East Lake	47	East Avondale	72	Arlington - West End	97	Hillman Park
23	Harriman Park	48	North Avondale	73	Rising - West Princeton	98	West Brownville
24	Ingenook	49	Enon Ridge	74	Central Park	99	East Brownville
25	Woodlawn	50	Fountain Heights	75	Glen Iris		

FIGURE 3.23: COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION DISTRICTS

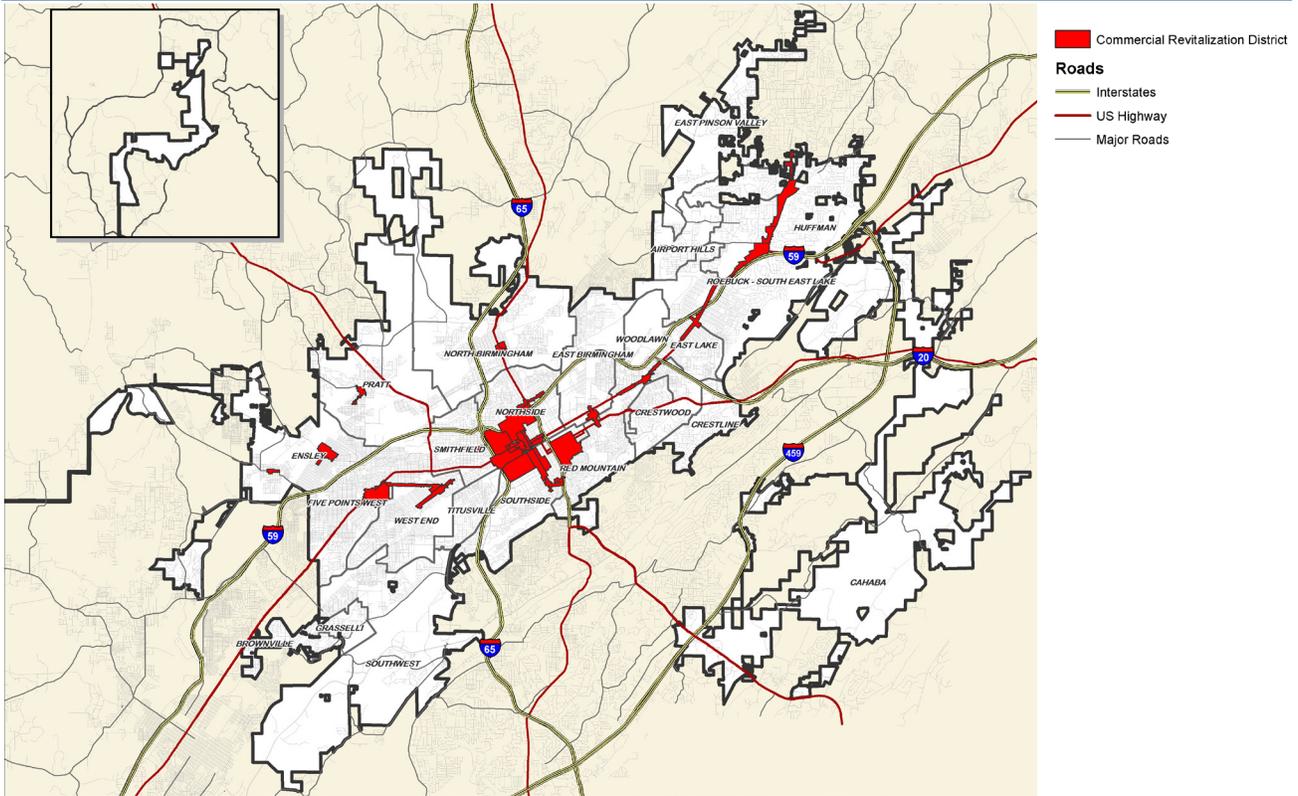
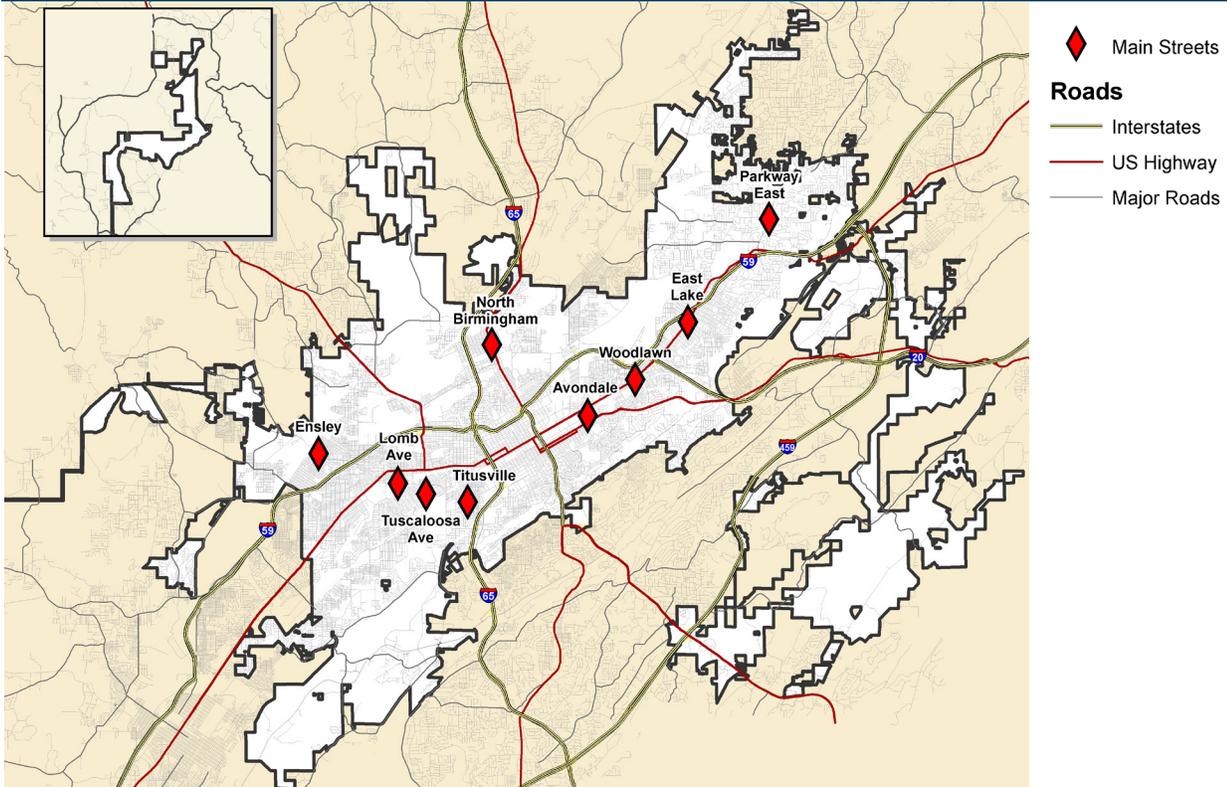


FIGURE 3.24: MAIN STREET PROGRAM



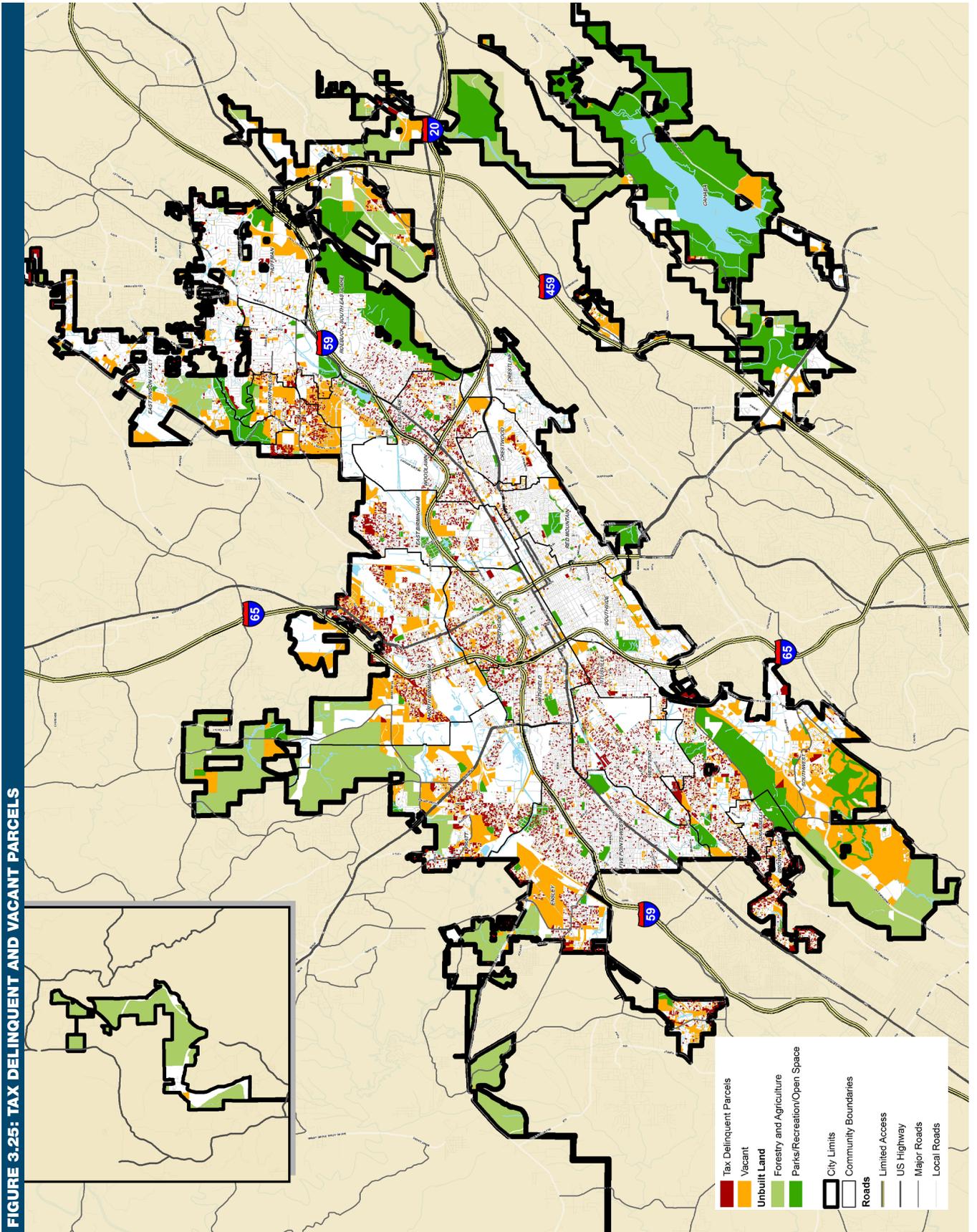
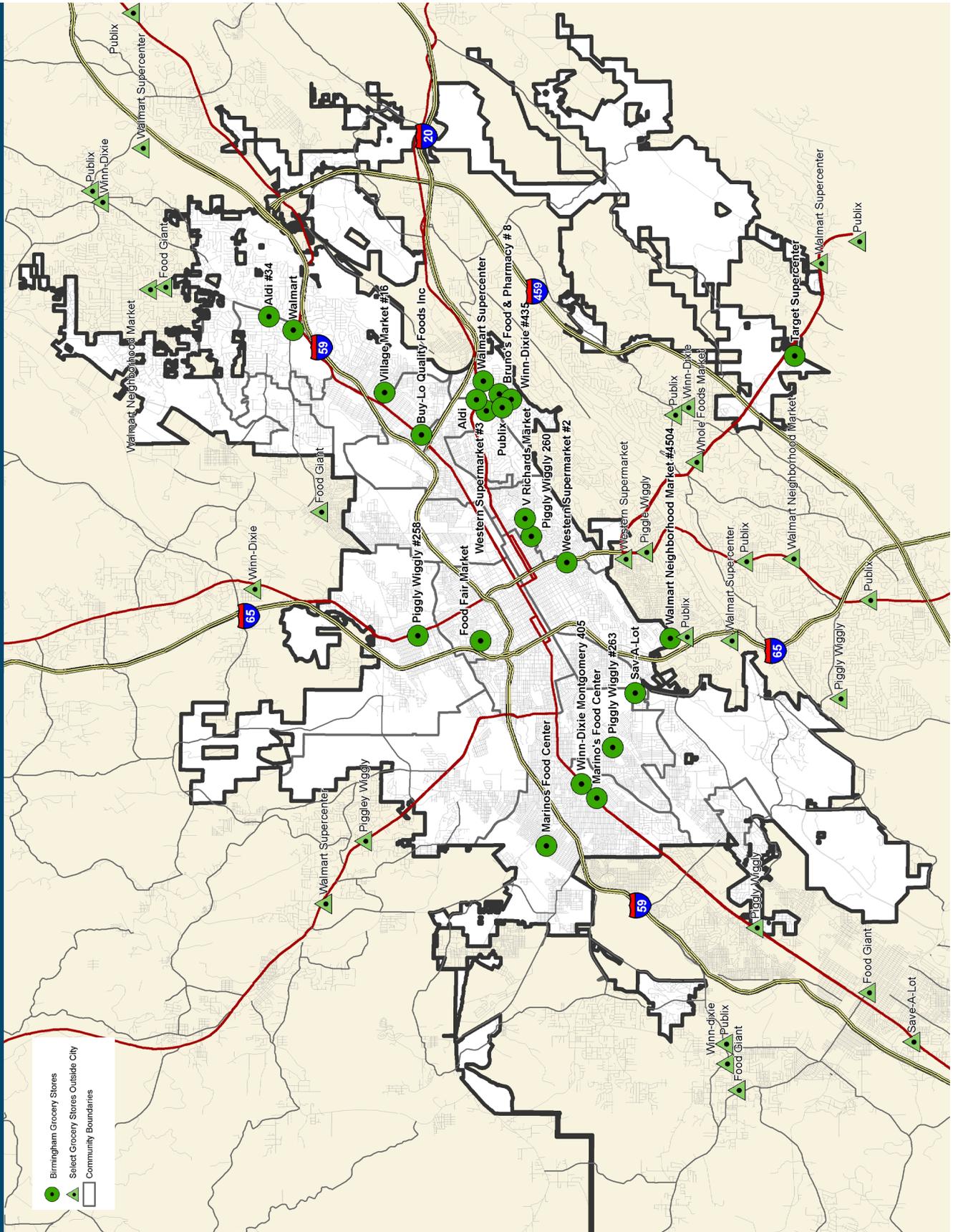


FIGURE 3.26: GROCERY STORES



C. HISTORIC RESOURCES

Birmingham has 146 individual sites and multi-site historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including three National Historic Landmarks: Bethel Baptist Church, Sloss Furnaces, and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. There are 40 National Register Historic Districts with multiple properties, and special groups, including ten historic fire stations and three historic apartment hotel groupings. National Register listing is an honor but only requires that the federal government evaluate and mitigate any impacts that result from federal projects. Otherwise, property owners are free to alter or demolish listed properties, as long as they comply with state and local law (including local historic district regulations).

Like other cities, Birmingham has also designated nine local historic districts. In these nine local historic districts, property owners have agreed to a design review regulatory process based on an adopted Historic Preservation Plan in order to protect the historic character of a defined area from inappropriate alterations, additions and demolition. The City's Design Review Committee is the regulatory body. Buildings or districts listed on the National Register, eligible for listing, or meeting state legislative criteria, may be designated as local historic districts.

A list of historic resources in Birmingham can be found in Chapter 4 of the City of Birmingham Data Book prepared by the City's Department of Planning, Engineering and Permits for the comprehensive plan process as an adjunct to the plan.

5. Prosperity and Opportunity

Although the iron and steel industry that created Birmingham still has a presence in the city, it began declining after World War II, and by the 1980s the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) was already the city's biggest employer. The transition from manufacturing to services as the city's economic base and the diversification of the city's economy has been underway for 50 years.

A. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

1. The city remains the largest employment center in the region.

The City of Birmingham is increasingly facing competition from other communities in the metropolitan area and the nation and some of the local industries with high concentrations of employment are also industries that show significant employment declines in 2000–2010. Retaining existing economic assets and expanding the number of jobs is a critical task for the city's future.

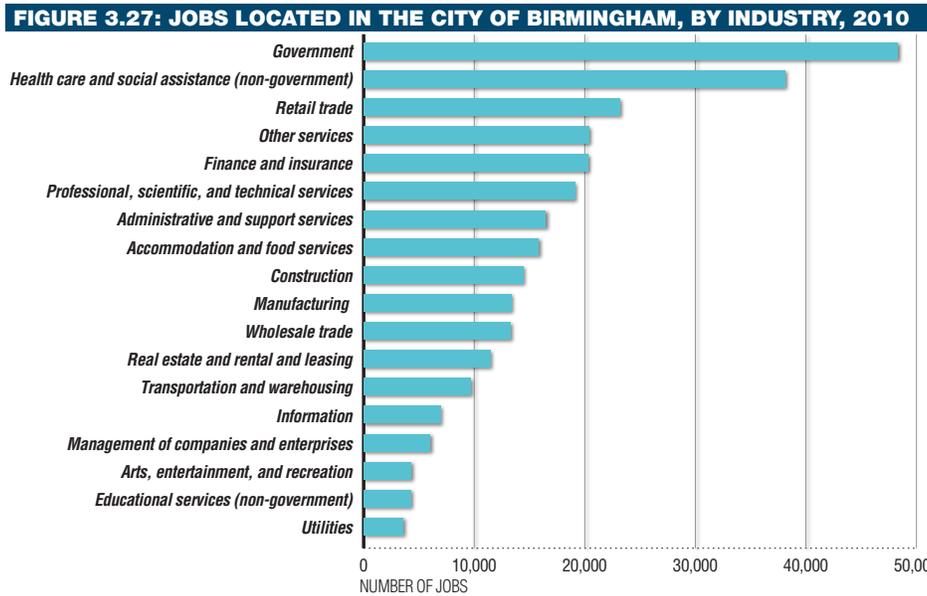
Employment in the City of Birmingham declined during the 2000–2010 decade in contrast to growth in the Birmingham region as a whole as well as the state and the nation. While

all of these areas have lost jobs since the Great Recession of 2008-9, Birmingham's decline has been more severe. At the same time, the city's employment decline of four percent during the decade was only about one-third as great as its population decline, indicating some degree of strength in its economic base.

Birmingham's health care industry is its largest single industry by a wide margin. The industry has experienced strong growth during the past decade, particularly in its ambulatory care segment. It also employs more Birmingham residents than any other industry. Other important industries are retail, "other services" (notably personal household services and religious organizations), finance and insurance, and professional, technical and scientific services.

Employment trends among industries show a mixture of growth and decline. The strongest growth has occurred in "other services," health care, management of companies and enterprises (e.g., corporate offices), and finance and insurance, while the most severe declines have occurred in manufacturing, construction, information, and retail.

Local industries in the strongest competitive position, as measured by relatively high concentrations of employment, include utilities, information, management of companies and enterprises, health care, and wholesale trade. However, utilities, information, and wholesale trade experienced high



SOURCE: EMSI

rates of employment decline during the 2000–2010 decade, indicating a declining role in the city’s economic base.

Among the regional target industries identified in the Birmingham Business Alliance’s (BBA) *Blueprint Birmingham*, the city is in the strongest position in health care, finance and insurance, biological and medical technology, and arts, recreation, and tourism, with some potential niche opportunities in diverse manufacturing.

The city economy has a diverse occupational structure with a mix of jobs by skill and wage levels. The largest occupational categories are office and administrative support, sales, health care practitioners, and management. The fastest growing occupations are personal care and service, business and financial operations, education, and health care practitioners.

Over the last decade, the number of middle income jobs has declined, with growth at both ends of the wage spectrum (although much higher growth at the low end.)

B. THE CITY WORKFORCE

1. Birmingham has many challenges in workforce development and reducing disparities.

A competitive city and region for the Next Economy depends on a skilled and educated workforce. Because of lower educational and skill levels, city residents, particularly African-Americans, are less likely to hold the higher-paid jobs in the city than residents of other communities in the region.

City residents are more likely to be unemployed than residents of the region as a whole. They are also more likely to be outside the labor force altogether than their peers elsewhere in the region, the state, or the region. These differences are especially significant for African-American residents of the city.

City residents are employed in a wide range of industries and occupations. Among industries, they are most likely to be employed in health care, followed by retail, education, manufacturing, and accommodation and food services. Among occupations, they are most likely to be employed in office and administrative support, followed by sales, transportation and material moving, food

preparation and serving, and production. Residents employed in some of these occupations, including office and administrative support, transportation and material moving, and production, may be vulnerable to job loss since city employment in these occupations has declined significantly over the past decade.

In general, **city residents are somewhat more likely to be represented in lower-wage occupations** and less likely to be represented in higher-wage occupations.

Educational attainment among Birmingham residents is somewhat lower than their peers at both the regional and national levels. A lower percentage of residents 25 and older have obtained high school diplomas, although the difference is not great. The more substantial differences are in the proportion of residents who have obtained

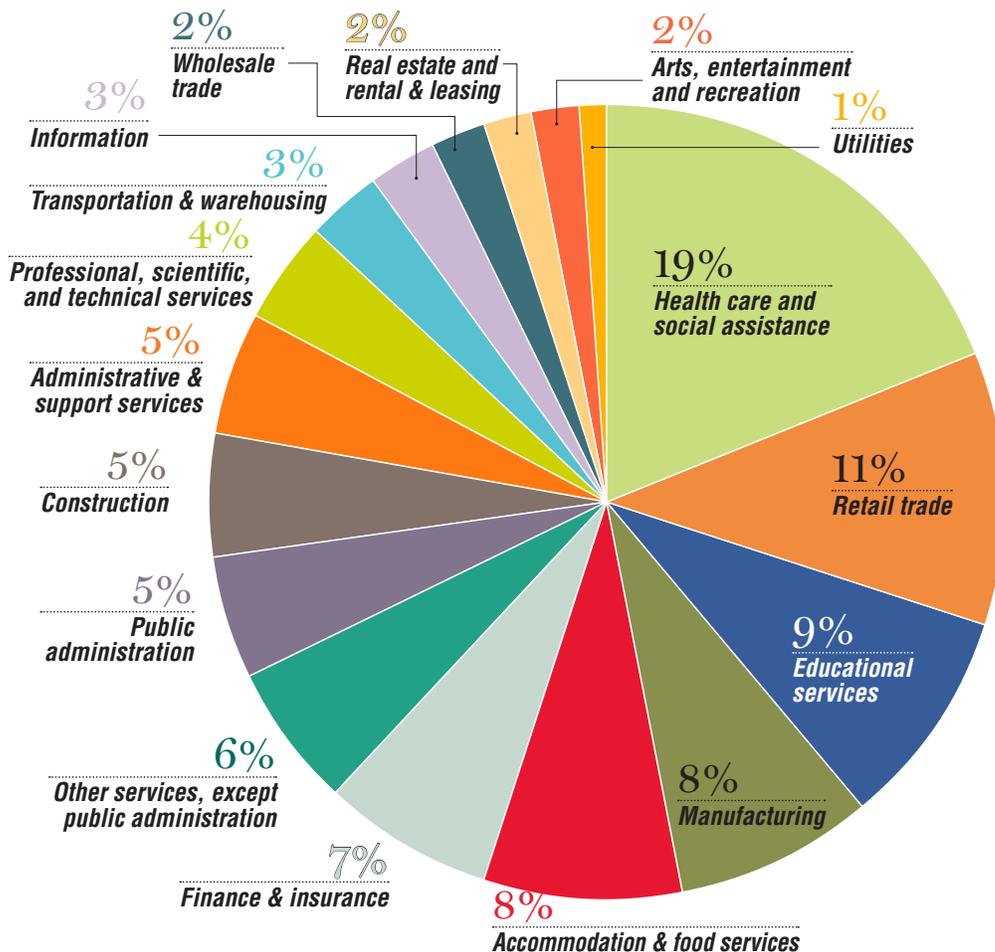
post-secondary degrees, which are increasingly a key to obtaining well-paying jobs.

Lower educational attainment and employment levels have contributed to income disparities between Birmingham residents and their peers at the regional and national level.

Birmingham households earn considerably lower incomes and experience higher poverty rates. Among Birmingham residents, the non-white population earns considerably less income and experiences higher poverty rates than whites.

Occupations of Birmingham residents vary significantly by race and ethnicity. Whites tend to be much more heavily represented in management and professional occupations than other racial and ethnic groups.

FIGURE 3.28: JOBS HELD BY CITY OF BIRMINGHAM RESIDENTS, BY INDUSTRY, 2009



SOURCE: EMSI

Educational attainment varies significantly by race. More than double the percentage of whites has obtained bachelor's or graduate degrees than either African-Americans or Hispanics.

Unlike many mature cities with declining populations, Birmingham has not seen a disproportionate aging of its population relative to the region or the nation. In fact, it actually has a higher proportion of residents in the prime working-age 25–44 year age group.

was almost double the MSA and national rates, which were about equal. Approximately 40 percent of children under 18 live in poverty. Income levels and poverty rates in Birmingham vary considerably by race and ethnicity, with whites having significantly higher incomes and lower poverty rates than other groups.

2. Although fewer city residents overall have a post-high school degree, residents in the 25-34 age group are more likely to have post-secondary education than their peers in the region and the nation.

C. INCOMES AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

1. City residents have lower incomes and higher poverty rates on average than other residents of the region and the nation.

Incomes. Lower occupational skills and education attainment levels typically correlate with lower incomes. Income levels in the City of Birmingham are considerably lower than the average for the Birmingham-Hoover MSA and the nation. Among *all* Birmingham households, the median income in 2009 was \$30,000, 68 percent of the MSA average, and only 61 percent of the U.S. average. Among *family* households, the median income of \$39,700 lagged the MSA and national by similar ratios. Per capita incomes were also lower, but by smaller ratios, suggesting that some of the differences in median incomes may be accounted for by smaller household and family sizes in the city.

Education. City of Birmingham adults 25 or over are slightly less likely to have a high school diploma than adults in the region or the country. They are substantially less likely to have a post-high school degree: 71 percent of Birmingham residents 25 and over have not obtained a post-secondary degree. The percentage of Birmingham residents with at least an associate's degree is only 85 percent of the MSA average and 83 percent of the national average. The differentials in higher-level degree attainment are even higher. At the graduate or professional level, the percentage of Birmingham residents who have obtained a degree is 75 percent of the MSA average and 67 percent of the U.S. average.

Poverty. Poverty rates are also substantially higher in Birmingham. The city's poverty rate of 28 percent in 2009

However, there is a positive trend, because city residents in the 25–34 age group are more likely than older residents to hold post-secondary degrees, including bachelor's and graduate degrees. In fact, Birmingham actually outperforms the nation in this regard, which has seen a decline in educational attainment from the 35–44 age group to the 25–34 age group.

FIGURE 3.29: POVERTY RATE, 2009: BIRMINGHAM, BIRMINGHAM-HOOVER MSA, AND U.S.

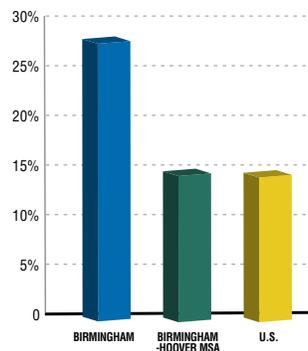
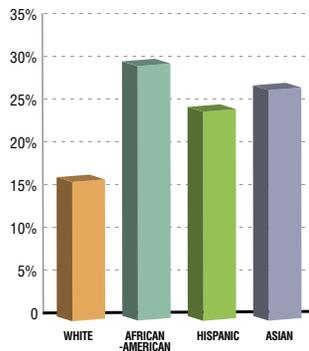


FIGURE 3.30: POVERTY RATE OF BIRMINGHAM RESIDENTS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, 2005–2009 AVERAGE



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2009

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2009

Disparities in educational attainment. Educational attainment varies significantly by race. Twenty percent of African-Americans and 46 percent of Hispanics age 25 and over have not graduated from high school compared to 20 percent of whites. Conversely, 38 percent of whites have received a bachelor's or graduate degree compared to 14 percent of African-Americans and 15 percent of Hispanics. Asians are far more likely than all other groups to have reached this level.

FIGURE 3.31: MEDIAN INCOME

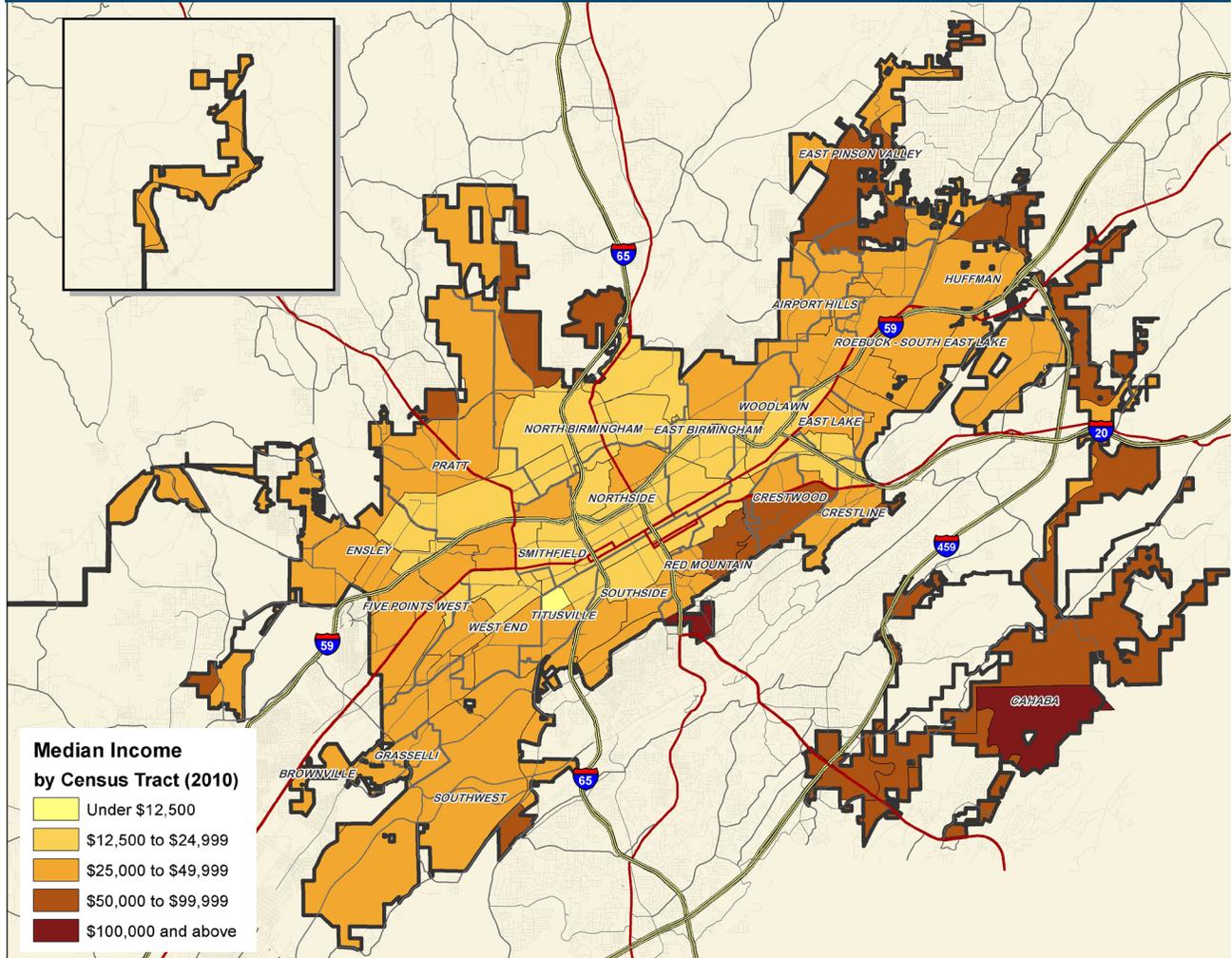
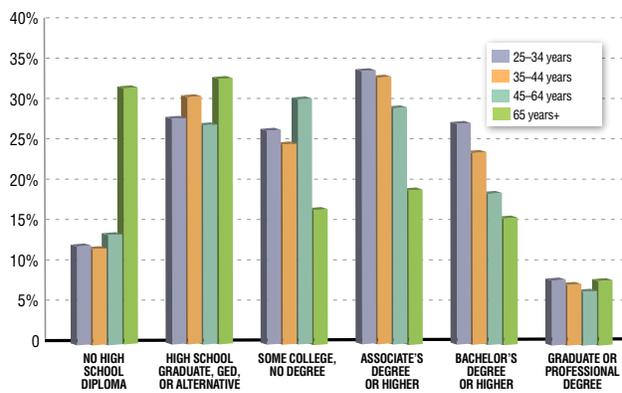
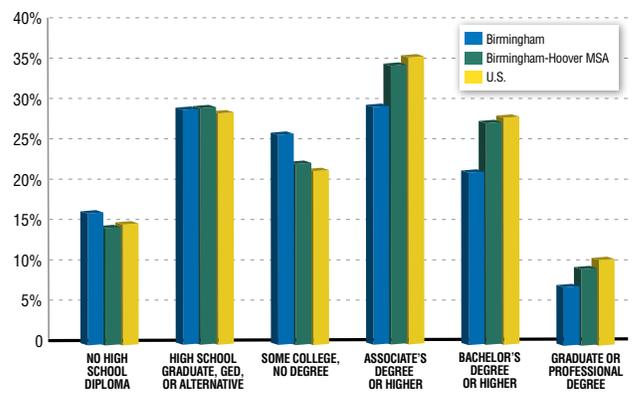


FIGURE 3.32: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR BIRMINGHAM POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2009



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2009

FIGURE 3.33: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR POPULATION, 2009: BIRMINGHAM, BIRMINGHAM-HOOVER MSA, AND U.S.



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2009

6. Strengthening City Systems and Networks

A. TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

1. The City of Birmingham and the entire metropolitan area is extremely car dependent and development over recent decades has made it more so.

While the City of Birmingham remains the major employment center, development outside of the city means that residents of the Birmingham metropolitan area drive approximately 34 miles a day—the fourth highest average daily mileage in the United States at a cost of \$133 a week or nearly \$7,000 a year. The most traffic congested corridors are I-65 and US-280, which bring commuters to the city center.

In 1970, nearly 11% of all trips in the City of Birmingham were by transit, while in 2009 the corresponding number was 2.5%. Increasing traffic congestion, rising gasoline prices, downtown housing growth, and greater interest in healthy lifestyles have all begun to spark more interest in transportation alternatives. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has completed numerous plans that would enhance transit and increase options for bicycling and walking. Regional leadership organizations, such as the Birmingham Business Alliance, have expressed support for the expansion of transit.

Roadways. There are 2,337 miles of roadway within the city. Roadway projects within or near the city include:

- **Corridor X/Interstate 22.** This new interstate begins at US-31 and will link the city with Memphis. It is expected to be completed in 2014.
- **I-20/I-59 project.** Although a feasibility study has been completed on the concept of lowering I-20 at the I-59 interchange downtown, Alabama DOT is focused on rehabilitation of the elevated highway.
- **Northern Beltline project.** A proposal to construct a 52-mile interstate through northern Jefferson County to fully connect the interstate system serving the City of Birmingham is popularly known as the Northern Beltline.

2. Birmingham has the largest transit system in Alabama, but needs improvement in reliability and a dedicated funding source.

Birmingham falls well below the U.S. average transit mode share of 5% and faces many barriers, such as lack of coordination, local support, and funding, that prevent transit from improving. The net effect is a chronic inability of BJCTA to effectively make the most of the resources that are available. Surveys shows that the current system is viewed as unreliable, unappealing, and transportation of last resort. However, within the city, an estimated 13,307 households do not have access to a private vehicle. At the average household size of 2.7 persons, this could cover as many as 30,000 persons. It has been estimated that while

FIGURE 3.34: CITY OF BIRMINGHAM TRAVEL MODE SHARE, 2009

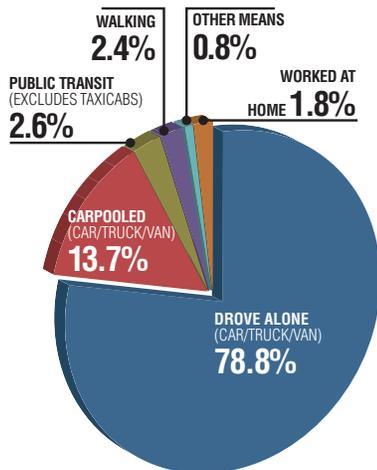


TABLE 3.11: TRANSPORTATION MODE SHARE COMPARISONS, 2009

AREA	DRIVE ALONE	CAR-POOL	PUBLIC TRANSIT	WALK	OTHER MEANS	WORKED AT HOME
City of Birmingham	78.8%	13.7%	2.6%	2.4%	0.8%	1.8%
Greater Birmingham only	85.4%	9.4%	0.4%	0.9%	0.6%	3.2%
Mobile	84.5%	10.8%	0.5%	1.6%	0.7%	1.9%
Montgomery	83.9%	10.7%	1.1%	1.7%	0.8%	1.9%
Huntsville	86.3%	7.5%	0.6%	1.5%	1.4%	2.7%
Alabama	84.0%	10.3%	0.4%	1.3%	1.0%	2.5%

98% of the zero-vehicle households were located near a bus stop, bus routes gave them access to only 29% of the jobs in the region.¹⁵ Inexpensive parking downtown, which can cost as little as \$3 per day, as well as the unreliability of the circulator trolley, both function as disincentives to trolley ridership for those who have a choice. With a transit mode share to work of about 2.5% (in 2009), half the U.S. average, the city still has the highest mode share of any municipality in Alabama. Despite a decrease in ridership since 2004, participants in the comprehensive plan process placed an improved transit system among the highest priorities for the city’s future.

Bus and paratransit. Public transportation by bus is provided by the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA) in 38 fixed routes (of which 34 are within the city), as well as a door to door demand-response service for disabled persons. This is the largest transit system in the state of Alabama. The fixed route system is radial, focused on downtown, though a few routes act as circulators within neighborhoods. Bus headways (the time between service) are typically 30–60 minutes. Additional paratransit service for senior citizen and disabled populations are provided by a number of nonprofit agencies, with ClasTran (Central Alabama Specialized Transportation) consortium of agencies as the primary provider. Buses operate on compressed natural gas (CNG) and have bicycle carriers.

TABLE 3.12: BJCTA UNLINKED PASSENGER TRIPS BY YEAR

2000	2,646,784
2001	2,755,563
2002	2,950,501
2003	3,632,884
2004	3,913,067
2005	3,833,954
2006	3,678,559
2007	3,253,691
2009	3,223,156
2010	2,942,097

Operational funding for the bus system is limited to fares and funding from local jurisdictions. Unlike most regional transit agencies, BJCTA receives no state funds for operations. (Alabama is one of four states that give no funds for transit.) The City of Birmingham is required to pay 10% of its property tax for transit, Jefferson County is required to pay a smaller

percentage of property taxes according to a formula, and other municipalities that desire transit service pay according to a formula based on cost per hour times the number of service hours. Additional small amounts of funding come from a portion of the beer tax and proceeds earned from the Birmingham Racing Commission. Funding for capital expenses is available from the federal government but a local match is generally required. Even when federal funds have been appropriated, the local match has not always been forthcoming.

A recent study included the BJCTA in an analysis done for the Memphis transit system of peer transit systems.¹⁶ The other systems were Jacksonville (FL), Tampa (FL), Louisville (KY), Norfolk (VA), Charlotte (NC), Dayton (OH), Nashville (TN), and Columbus (OH). The City of Birmingham had the third lowest average population density of core cities within this group (only higher than Nashville and Jacksonville). In comparison to these transit systems, the BJCTA had the lowest transit usage per capita (4.4 unlinked passenger trips per capita compared to a peer average of 16.4), the highest operating cost per passenger trip (\$8.15 compared to the peer average of \$5.37), the highest operating cost per passenger mile (\$1.53 compared to the peer average of \$1.11), and the highest subsidy per trip (\$7.33 compared to the peer average of \$4.40).¹⁷

Visionary transit plans. The Birmingham regional MPO has created a long-range vision for a regional transit system for six major corridors in the region. It distinguishes commuter and circulator service types and introduces the concept of superstops. This would change today’s system, which requires that every route travel through the downtown Central Station where passengers can make transfers, to a system where transfers can be made at several superstop. This would improve efficiency and convenience for most riders. Two projects with more detailed planning are:

- *The In-Town Transit Partnership (ITP) Project.* ITP is a transportation plan for downtown and adjacent neighborhoods designed to connect key destinations in the City Center, including the UAB/Hospital District, and

¹⁵ Adie Tomar, “Transit Access and Zero-Vehicle Households,” Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program (August 2011).

¹⁶ Memphis Area Transit Authority Peer Review Draft, May 2011, Nelson\Nygaard.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Figure 19, page 45.

Five Points South, the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center and proposed Entertainment District, the new Intermodal Center, government buildings, arts and culture destinations, the Civil Rights District and the Entrepreneurial District. The plan includes dedicated bus lanes (eventually to serve as part of a regional Bus Rapid Transit system), amenities at bus stops, and connector routes to link with surrounding adjacent neighborhoods. It is intended to support new development and redevelopment in the city center around transit stops. Funding for this project has not been identified and it currently lacks the champions from the downtown community to move it forward.

- *Southwest Corridor Transit Study.* Underway in 2012, this study will analyze ways to improve transit (with a focus on a potential Bus Rapid Transit line) on the US-11/Bessemer Highway corridor from downtown towards McCalla.

Inter-Modal Center. The Birmingham Intermodal Transit Facility, in planning since the mid-1980s, is advancing to construction. The downtown center will include the BJCTA, intercity bus (Greyhound), intercity passenger rail (AMTRAK), bicycle amenities, taxi and car and van pool services, as well as a structured and surface parking.

3. Policy and planning initiatives seek to improve the generally poor conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The Birmingham metropolitan area has attracted unfavorable attention as a biking and walking region:

- > The ninth most dangerous city in the nation for pedestrians.¹⁸
- > Among the three worst cities for bicycling.¹⁹
- > Sixteenth out of 54 metro areas in preventable pedestrian deaths over the last decade.²⁰

The city as a whole has a “Walk Score®” of 40 (the top score is 100), meaning that on average, there are few amenities within walking distance. (Selma and Florence are the only

other cities in Alabama with a walk score as high as 40.) However, downtown Birmingham’s zip code, 35203, has a walk score of 94, earning it the description, “walker’s paradise.”²¹ Walk Score® ranks communities based on concentration of and walkable proximity to daily needs such as businesses, schools, entertainment, and parks rather than the walking environment. The ability to walk to destinations spans the extremes in Birmingham; from suburban-style neighborhoods at the edge of the city that lack nearby amenities to the walker’s paradise downtown. A measure of the walking environment itself, Pedestrian Level of Service, which considers the quality of the walking environment, such as crosswalks, lighting, and shade, has not been calculated for Birmingham.

Bicycle facilities are also limited though there is growing interest in bicycle travel, as evidenced by the new UAB and Alabama Power bike-sharing programs and the Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System Plan. There are three roadway segments in Birmingham with striped bike lanes or marked shared lanes totaling less than 1.4 miles (sections of 7th Avenue South, and 16th Street South). In 1996, the MPO adopted the “Birmingham Area Bicycle, Pedestrian & Greenway Plan.” The MPO has updated this plan with the “2035 Birmingham Regional Active Transportation Plan: A Strategic Plan for Walkways and Bikeways in Jefferson and Shelby Counties” (in draft form as of August 2011).

The Birmingham Planning Commission has adopted a “Complete Streets” policy, advisory to the City and the MPO, to promote street and streetscape design that accommodates all users.

4. Inter-city passenger rail, bus and air service is available in Birmingham.

AMTRAK offers daily passenger train service to Atlanta, New Orleans and New York, while Greyhound and Megabus provide inter-city bus service. The Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, Alabama’s busiest airport, served nearly 3 million passengers in 2010 on 7 airlines with 120 flights per day to 50 cities. A \$200+ million renovation of the airport is underway as of 2012.

¹⁸ AARP Bulletin, November 9, 2009.

¹⁹ *Bicycling* magazine, May 2010.

²⁰ Transportation for America: Dangerous by Design, 2011. <http://t4america.org/resources/dangerouslybydesign2011/states/worst-metros/>

²¹ www.walkscore.com

5. Birmingham has major freight transportation connections of national importance.

Born at the intersection of two railroad lines, the City of Birmingham today is one of only seven cities nationwide where major East and West rail carriers meet, making it well-positioned for goods distribution to markets in the Midwest and Northeast. Three Class I railroads serve Birmingham: CSX, Norfolk Southern, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe. A short-line railroad, the Birmingham Southern Railroad Company, provides switching service in Birmingham on 84 miles of track. The Port of Birmingham (“Birminghamport”) on the Black Warrior River is connected to the Port of Mobile on the Gulf of Mexico for imports and exports of bulk commodities. Commodities will also move between rail and truck at the Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility being built in McCalla as part of Norfolk Southern’s Crescent Corridor rail expansion project stretching approximately 2,500 miles from New Orleans to Newark, Delaware. The renovation of the Birmingham airport includes a major expansion of its cargo capacity. In addition to these major freight facilities, there are a number of trucking companies located in the Birmingham area.

B. INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Birmingham’s sewer, water and utility infrastructure is operated and maintained by entities other than the city. The only infrastructure, other than roads, owned and operated by city government is the storm drainage system and associated right-of-way. It is therefore extremely important that the City identify its interests and priorities related to infrastructure operated and maintained by other entities and participate fully, to the degree possible, in their management.

1. The city’s drinking water supply is controlled by the Birmingham Water Works Board, whose board is appointed by the City Council.

The Birmingham Water Works Board (BWVB) owns and operates the drinking water system that serves the city, as well as the rest of Jefferson County and four other counties. The BWVB was established in 1951 as an independent public utility, meaning that it operates independently

of city government and finances operations and capital expenditures from its own revenues. The Board’s five members are appointed by the Birmingham City Council. Through 200,000 connections, the Water Works serves approximately 600,000 people. About half of its service is in the City of Birmingham. The system covers 759 square miles, has 3,966 miles of water pipes, can reliably produce 184 million gallons of water a day through four filtration plants, and has access to 289 million gallons of water per day from its four water sources. In addition, an industrial water supply network provides less treated and more inexpensive water for industrial uses. Water demand is projected to be about 222 million gallons per day by 2075. BWVB has an ongoing maintenance program, currently budgeted at \$24 million annually, to replace and maintain current facilities. Since about half the system’s customers are in the city, approximately half of the maintenance budget is used for the system within the city.

After the severe droughts of 2000 and 2007, the BWVB began planning to make sure that the region would continue to have a reliable water supply. In addition to encouraging water conservation by the public and lowering the rate of water loss in the system, the BWVB is developing water wells to access untapped groundwater for use only during droughts. In addition, the Board is expanding its supply area to upper Holt Lake on the Black Warrior River. About three-quarters of the water is expected to be returned to the river as treated wastewater.

The only drinking water source located within the City of Birmingham is Lake Purdy, a 990-acre reservoir created in 1923 by damming the Little Cahaba River. The lake has a drainage area of only 43 square miles, and the Water Works Board has purchased much of the land around the lake to protect it from point and nonpoint pollution. Lake Purdy is typically used as a secondary source of water during the dry months.

Since 2008, development in the Cahaba River/Lake Purdy watershed has required approval from the BWVB in order to control pollution impacts from erosion, wastewater disposal, stormwater runoff, and use of toxic or hazardous substances. The watershed protection policy adopted by the BWVB includes prohibitions and controls on “key contaminating land uses,” performance standards for non-

point source pollution and private wastewater systems, a requirement for site development plans, identification of potential exemptions, and enforcement measures.

In conjunction with the BWWB's policy, the City of Birmingham has also developed land use policies to protect the watershed from adverse impacts. Only low-impact development in conservation areas is allowed and vegetative buffers are required along streams.

2. The wastewater system is controlled by Jefferson County.

The Jefferson County Department of Environmental Management operates the sanitary and industrial wastewater collection and treatment facilities in the county. With 9 basins and wastewater treatment plants and 170 pumping stations, the system serves approximately 478,000 persons, including residents of the City of Birmingham.

Two of the sewer plants are located in the City of Birmingham:

- The Village Creek plant serves approximately 232,000 people, including most of the City of Birmingham. Treated effluent runs into Village Creek. The design capacity of the plant is 60 million gallons a day, which will be doubled to 120 million gallons a day.
- The Cahaba River plant serves approximately 38,200 people, mostly in the near southern suburbs of the city, and sends treated water to the Cahaba River.

3. Stormwater and drainage is the only major infrastructure system, except for local roads, for which the city government is directly responsible.

The stormwater system ranges from natural drainage ways to large multi-barreled reinforced concrete box culverts. The majority of the City's storm sewer system drains to one of five main channels—the Cahaba River, Five Mile Creek, Shades Creek, Valley Creek or Village Creek. Valley and Village Creeks receive stormwater primarily from the urban core of the City. The Cahaba River, Five Mile Creek and Shades Creek collect water from areas that are more suburban in character.

Discharges to the City's storm sewer system are regulated by the EPA's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), which is administered by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). ADEM has issued the City a NPDES permit that regulates stormwater discharges. The conditions of the permit are enforced by the City of Birmingham's Planning, Engineering and Permits Department. The City requires that all new construction projects meet the ADEM erosion control Best Management practices. Each set of construction plans and specifications must include Erosion Prevention and Sediment Control designs.

Within the City of Birmingham, the City's Stormwater Management Division tests stormwater discharges periodically for the presence of pollutants of concern and to determine if pollution mitigation measures are having the desired effect on water quality.

Capital improvements generally consist of extensions of existing storm sewer systems. Maintenance is performed by the Department of Public Works. Maintenance measures range from brush removal from creek banks (regular cycle) to unclogging inlets (as needed or reported).

In order to control and mitigate pollutants from existing or potential development, especially on areas that are environmentally impaired or sensitive, the City of Birmingham relies on its Flood Mitigation/Stormwater Management Plan with regulations in zoning, subdivision controls, erosion controls, and building codes. Activities include reclamation of brownfields, floodplain property acquisition, establishment of parks, and restoration projects. As noted earlier, the BWWB Lake Purdy/Cahaba River Watershed Protection Policy is also focused on pollutant control and mitigation.

Although development regulations require that the post-development runoff rate equals the pre-development runoff rate, in general they do not focus as much on decreasing impervious surfaces or increasing permeability so that more stormwater infiltrates and is absorbed on site. Requiring that the rate of runoff not exceed pre-development conditions often results in the creation of detention ponds, which sometimes can be designed as amenities. However, this is not the same as low-impact

development that uses pervious surfaces, rain gardens and other strategies to limit the volume of stormwater runoff.

4. Utilities provide electric, gas, and telecommunications services in the city.

Electric and gas service. In general, all areas of the City of Birmingham have access to high quality electrical power suitable for industrial, commercial, business or residential applications. Electrical power is provided by the Alabama Power Company, a subsidiary of the Southern Company. Alabama Gas Company is the main supplier of natural gas within the city. These utilities are regulated by the state Public Service Commission.

Telephone, internet and network services. High Speed Internet, cellular voice and data services, landline local and long distance telephone, and cable television services are generally available throughout the Birmingham area from at least one service provider. Wired internet service is available in most locations within the city. High speed data service is available between Birmingham and most large cities by the national fiber optics network. Fiber and copper facilities along the major thoroughfares within Birmingham provide telephone and digital services to meet residential and business customer service need. AT&T/Bellsouth is the regulated provider of land line service. Mobile telephone service is available from all the major providers: AT&T, Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile, and Verizon, and cable or satellite TV choices include AT&T U-verse, Bright House, Charter, Comcast, DirecTV, and Time Warner.

Digital divide. National surveys indicate that internet access is increasing among minority populations and low-income populations. Data indicate that 71% of African-Americans and Latinos use the internet, compared to 83% of whites, and whites are more likely to have broadband access at home. As might be expected, internet use is lower for low-income households. Only 65% of households with incomes under \$30,000 a year—which would include nearly half of households in the City of Birmingham—use the internet. Educational level also plays a role, with 45% of persons who lack a high school education using the internet.²² The

Birmingham library system has 292 computers for public use. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people who do not have direct access to a computer, especially teenagers and young adults, are increasingly acquiring smartphones that give them internet access, as well as text and apps—effectively skipping the home computer stage. Digital communication focused on smartphones is predicted to become increasingly widespread in the next five years.

C. FACILITIES AND SERVICES

1. Birmingham City Schools seek higher academic performance and stabilized enrollment.

In the school year 2011/12, Birmingham City Schools had an enrollment of 25,100 students, almost 10,000 fewer than in 2005, less than 10 years ago. In 1980, the system had about 50,000 students. The flight of families with children from Birmingham over the last decade, discussed earlier, is reflected in these numbers. Of the 51 active public schools, 11 have occupancy ratios of 50% or less, and almost all are operating at less than capacity. There are 12 vacant school buildings owned by the school system. A capital improvement program, based on a study that assumed 3% annual population growth, will result in several new schools, after which the system will have capacity for 37,364 students—plenty of room to grow from current enrollment. Declining enrollments result in declining funding as well.

A strategic plan for comprehensive curriculum, academic achievement and operational changes was put into place in 2010. The plan includes the following:

- Expanded pre-K program
- 7 career academies in 6 high schools with a total of 14 planned
 - > Areas: engineering, health science; architecture and design; urban educators; hospitality and tourism; business and finance; information technology; and law
 - > Preparation for industry certification tests
 - > Partnerships with companies/organizations across city

²² Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project, Trend Data, www.pewinternet.org.

- Every high school offers AP classes
- International Baccalaureate program at 2 schools
- Dropout Recovery Program for accelerated degrees for 17–21 year olds who have left school
- At-Risk program for students at risk of dropping out
- Summer Learning Opportunities
- Parent University
- Weekly professional development for all teachers
- Modernized technology

In addition, the school system added parent and community programs and has been collaborating with the Birmingham Education Foundation (ED), a nonprofit supported by foundation and corporate funding, to work with the school system and its stakeholders to improve public education in the city. Emerging from a community participation initiative to develop a public school improvement agenda sponsored by The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham called Yes We Can!, ED has provided funding for career academies, has sponsored Parent Academies, and provided other support.

2. The Public Works Department maintains city property and manages solid waste.

The Department of Public Works has responsibility for maintaining city facilities and property, including landscaping, beautification, minor maintenance of right-of-way (ROW), public spaces and vacant lots, and application of herbicides and fertilizers using Integrated Pest Management (IPM). DPW is also responsible for mosquito abatement during the summer months, trash and garbage pickup, and management of the city landfills.

The seven divisions within the Public Works Department are:

- **Facilities:** maintenance of all city facilities
- **Operations:** trash and refuse collection, street cleaning, and the clearing of drainage
- **Horticulture/Urban Forestry:** grass mowing on city rights of way and vacant lots, and tree planting and pruning

- **Code Enforcement:** enforces codes and ordinances governing issues such as junk cars; dumping and trash/debris; safety conditions in vacant buildings, etc.
- **Minor Construction:** demolition, constructing sidewalks, curbs and gutters
- **Administration:** payroll and personnel matters for the department
- **Landfill:** disposal of the trash, garbage and recycling

There are 1,100 employees in the Department of Public Works. The types of employees are administrative personnel, skilled laborers and unskilled laborers, refuse collectors, grass cutters, truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, guards, and landscape crew. The Department of Public Works has 2,000 vehicles in its inventory. The other equipment in the department are landscape, truck and brush, roll-off cutters, front end loaders, and rubber tire loaders. DPW equipment is used for double the average recommended life span (14–16 years instead of 7–8 years). Approximately \$5 million is needed for new equipment.

The Code Inspectors and Environmental Officer within the Public Works Department enforce the City of Birmingham codes and ordinances which cover issues such as abandoned property, garbage disposal, inoperable vehicles, washing of vehicles, plumbing guidelines, junk and scrap on public ways, and the stewardship of ditches and gutters. Public Works is responsible for ensuring that vacant and abandoned properties do not become hazards or public nuisances. There are 15 Code Inspectors/Enforcers and one Environmental Officer with arrest authority.

The City does not have an operable asset management system tied to GIS with information on when city property was put in service, property conditions, maintenance schedules, and so on. Asset management systems have been found to save money in the long term.

3. The city's two landfills are expected to have capacity for several decades.

The City of Birmingham Public Works Department collects, transports, and stores residential solid waste in the City. Residences have bi-weekly services for refuse and bi-monthly services for all other solid waste collection. The

City is divided into approximately 64 collection routes. Public Works also collects from small non-manufacturing businesses if they use less than 4 typical garbage containers per collection day. Other businesses and property owners contract with private haulers. No special restrictions are placed on transporters of waste, and they are free to travel all public streets and rights-of-way.

There are two municipally-owned landfills in the city:

- The **New Georgia Landfill** is located in the northern part of the City and accessible from Interstate 65 and US-31. New Georgia Landfill accepts nonhazardous waste from the city and Jefferson County with a maximum daily volume of 1,200 tons of waste. It consists of 616 acres with a municipal solid waste disposal area of 1 acre and a construction and demolition waste disposal area of 5 acres. The landfill has some infrastructure to recover methane gas.
- The **Eastern Area Landfill** in the eastern part of the city is accessible from Interstate 459, Interstate 59 and US-11. The landfill occupies 370 acres with a disposal area of 72 acres and accepts nonhazardous wastes up to a maximum average daily volume of 1,200 tons a day. Leachate is pumped into storage tanks and monitoring before being discharged to the sewer system

The city's Solid Waste Master Plan was prepared assuming annual population growth of 3.5% based on a 2000 census population of 249,459. Given the decline in population during the 2000–2010 period and the fact that any population growth is likely to proceed more slowly than 3.5% per year, landfill capacity is expected to be sufficient well beyond the 20 year time horizon of this comprehensive plan, particularly if recycling increases. With the current daily 600 tons per day rate of disposal, the combined landfills have the airspace capacity to surpass the next 30 years.

4. Hazard mitigation planning focuses especially on tornado and flood hazards.

The City of Birmingham participates in the hazard mitigation planning process led by the Jefferson County Emergency Management Agency. The 2009 Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan includes the

county's Interim Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan contains long-term strategies for the following hazards: tornadoes, severe storms, floods, earthquakes, winter storms and freezes, droughts and heat waves, dam and levee failures, wildfires, landslides, and sinkholes.

The major hazard mitigation issues in the City of Birmingham are the ongoing floodplain program in the Village Creek and Valley Creek floodplains and the program to include construction of "safe rooms" in the rebuilding of Pratt City after the 2011 tornadoes, as well as other areas in the city's "tornado alley."

5. Public safety departments are modernizing their systems.

Police. A recent comparison of overall crime risk in major US cities based on an analysis of FBI data over the 2003-2009 period placed Birmingham as tied for third place with Orlando, FL.²³ The index is constructed so that an index of 100 is the average crime risk for American cities, meaning Birmingham, with an index of 380 in this period, had more than three times the risk of crime overall than the average city. The majority of crime in all of these cities is property crime. In an analysis of 2010 city crime rates by the *Congressional Quarterly*, Birmingham was listed as number 10, with St. Louis in the top spot.²⁴ Crime rates in Birmingham have been declining in recent years, with murders and robberies down about 40% and, as in every community, crime is a bigger problem in some parts of the city than others.

The Police Department is closer to full strength in 2012 than it has been in many years with 840 officers on the street and 60 in the police academy. A new precinct building is under construction at Five Points West for the West Precinct, one of four. The command staff has a monthly CompStat meeting to understand data and identify hot spots, and patrols meet weekly. Because of technology deficits, many staff still need to keep statistics by hand.

The Department does not have a strategic plan at present, but expects to prepare one, along with a manpower study

²³ Data source: *Onboard Informatics*, via *US News & World Report*. 2010 Data.

²⁴ http://os.cqpress.com/citycrime/2010/City_crime_rate_2010-2011_highlightow.pdf

and a beat study. The community policing program has three elements: engage the community, make partnerships, and engage the media. The Community Services Division provides a civilian crime prevention officer in each precinct and 18 school resources officers. The civilian officers work with mentally disabled persons, among others, and a special program, Project SAFE (Stopping Abuse in the Family Environment), provides anger management and group counseling for domestic abusers.

Police department priorities include:

- **New headquarters building downtown.** The current facility has one unusable floor, inadequate support for technology for a full laboratory, and need for better physical security in the parking lot.
- **New municipal jail.** The current jail in Southside was built by inmates many years ago and is in poor condition. Discussions about solutions have included a regional jail, a state jail authority, or privatization.
- **Improvements to precinct buildings.** The East and South precincts have unfinished buildings and the North building needs rehabilitation.
- **Creation of a fifth precinct for the downtown area.** The precincts are very large geographically. If Birmingham's West precinct were a city, it would be the sixth largest city in population in the state.
- **Studies and a strategic plan needed.** The department needs a beat study based on population changes, a manpower study, and an overall strategic plan.
- **Technology and data.** Police officers have laptops, but direct reporting is not possible. Collecting data is still very labor intensive. Federal grants have been obtained for some upgrades to records management. Computer aided dispatch is being installed in 2012.
- **Vehicle shortage.** The City does not have a vehicle rotation policy, so police run vehicles around the clock and sometimes have to wait at a shift change for the car. The department plans to start a small take-home program for officers who live in Birmingham, starting with five cars.

Fire. The Fire Department has 31 stations, with a 32nd to be built in Oxmoor Valley, and the Pratt City station damaged by the 2011 tornado. There is some overlap in service areas. There are approximately 200–250 calls per month per truck, and the average response time is 4 minutes. Fire stations are important community anchors and the department's goal is to make every fire station a safe place for the surrounding community. Firemen attend all neighborhood association meetings and the associations help support the fire stations. The department's Citizens Fire Academy trains citizens to assist in fire emergencies. The department pursues every grant possibility and is usually successful. Because of the many older, deteriorated buildings, as well as vacant and blighted properties in the city, there are many fires in Birmingham. Ensley, the West End, and some parts of East Birmingham have the most fires. There are two hazardous materials unit, including one that is available to the entire region.

Department priorities include:

- Newer vehicles and apparatus
- Additional manpower
- Facility improvements
- Enhanced training opportunities.

Emergency Medical Services. The Fire Department is the only emergency service provider in the city, though private ambulances do transfers. Rescue units arrive within 6 minutes, with most arriving within 4 minutes. All Fire Department personnel have basic EMT training and there are about 170 paramedics. Additional paramedics would make it possible to have two full paramedics for each call.

6. Birmingham's Library System is doing more with less.

The Birmingham Public Library System, established in 1886, consists of 19 branch libraries and the central library in a total of 368,000 square feet of space. Its mission is "to provide the highest quality library service to the community for life-long learning, cultural enrichment and enjoyment." The system serves the city and region with books, DVDs, audio books, music, downloadable audio books and ebooks, over 2,000 programs within the libraries and nearly 300 programs presented outside the library, 292

public computers and computer training, meeting space for community groups, and numerous programs for children and youth. The library collections include manuscripts and rare books of local, regional and national importance. In 2010 the library system served 1.9 million visitors, making it the most visited “tourist attraction,” according to the Birmingham Business Journal. In 2012, the central children’s library was identified as one of the 10 best in the country. In addition to funding from the city, the library system receives some support from the Friends of the Birmingham Library, a citizens’ group. Another support organization, the Birmingham Library Foundation, is being revived.

Birmingham’s libraries are very important community anchors. They welcome people of all ages and walks of life and connect people to their community and to the world. While the number of registered users and the number of circulated materials have been increasing, staffing and funding have decreased in recent years as part of the City’s financial tightening. The acquisitions budget is now slightly over 5% of the system’s budget, less than half the 12% regarded as the standard. The repair and maintenance budget declined by over 60% between 2009 and 2012, library buildings are suffering from deferred maintenance, and the Central Library needs more space, putting some special collections at risk. Renovation or replacement of the Central Library is a priority. The library system has a 2011–2016 strategic plan which includes focus areas on strengthening fundraising from outside sources (including grants), partnerships, and community support; planning for physical improvements; and other major improvements.

7. The City of Birmingham owns and supports cultural institutions of regional importance.

Unlike many cities, Birmingham owns a number of cultural institutions and venues and provides varying amounts of operational and capital funding. In addition to the Botanical Gardens and the Zoo, which are owned by the City but managed by nonprofit organizations, the City owns the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Civil Rights Institute and Museum, Arlington House, Sloss Furnaces Museum, the Southern Museum of Flight, and Boutwell Auditorium.

Birmingham Museum of Art. Founded in 1951, the Birmingham Museum of Art is regarded as one of the finest art museums in the Southeast. Located in the civic center of downtown Birmingham with a building of 150,000 square feet and a sculpture garden of 30,000 square feet, the museum has over 24,000 art objects from around the world and many historic periods. Admission is free, approximately 100,000 visitors come to the museum each year, and it operates programs for children, youth and adults, including programs with the city and county school systems. The museum is governed by a city-appointed Museum Board and museum staff are employees of the city. In FY 2011, approximately \$3.1 million in city funding supported the museum, which also has an associated nonprofit, the Birmingham Museum of Art Foundation. The museum would like to expand to accommodate growing collections.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Located in the historic Fourth Avenue Business District across the street from Kelly Ingram Park and the 16th Street Baptist Church, the institute is a large interpretive museum and research center that tells the stories of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The institute has been open since 1992 and continues to successfully focus on its core mission of promoting “civil and human rights worldwide through education.”²⁵ This is done through both a self-guided walking tour of its permanent and temporary exhibits as well as a comprehensive, resource-rich, education program. The museum is an affiliate in the Smithsonian Affiliations program.

Arlington House. Built in 1845, Arlington House is the only antebellum mansion in the City of Birmingham and operates as a decorative arts museum. The property is owned and maintained by the city, while the interior furnishings and collections are cared for by the Arlington Historical Association. There is an annual Christmas open house and the house is available for private functions.

Sloss Furnaces. The Sloss Furnaces iron manufacturing complex, dating originally from 1881, is a National Historical Landmark operating as an educational museum and metal arts community. The site escaped demolition

²⁵ <http://www.bcri.org/index.html>

in the 1970s when Birmingham voters approved bond funding to stabilize and refurbish the site to become a museum. The complex is owned by the city, which in FY 2011 expended approximately \$580,000 for staff and operations. The Sloss Furnaces Foundation is an associated nonprofit. As of 2012, the city has contributed \$4.2 million towards construction of a visitor's center with a total cost of \$5.8 million.

Southern Museum of Flight. The Southern Museum of Flight, located near the airport, is a civil aviation museum started by the Birmingham Aero Club. Soon after the construction of the present facility in 1983, the City agreed to take ownership of the property and provide operational funding. The museum operates as a nonprofit and accepts donations. In FY 2011, the City provided approximately \$580,000 in funding.

Boutwell Auditorium. Formerly Birmingham Municipal Auditorium, Boutwell is a downtown entertainment venue with 6,000 seats built in the 1920s that needs upgrading. Although its features are outdated, local entertainment promoters say it plays an important role as a mid-size venue. A 2008 report estimated a need for \$4 million worth of improvements, leading some to call for demolition and discussion that the art museum next door could expand to the site. As of 2012, the City plans to renovate and update the auditorium.

In addition to the cultural institutions which the City owns, it also provides contributions and financial support for other institutions. For example, the City is ultimately anticipated to provide \$2 million out of the \$5 million expected cost for a new children's museum at the McWane Science Center.

7. Fiscal Issues

The biggest generators of revenue for the City of Birmingham are sales, business, and occupational taxes. Alabama has one of the lowest property taxes in the country. The City expects that the catalyst projects of 2011–2012, including CrossPlex, the hotel and entertainment center at the convention center, and the new Regions Field baseball stadium will all help bring visitors and produce revenue for

the City. The capital budget is mainly derived from bond finance projects. Downtown is a Tax Increment Financing District in which downtown public improvements are financed on the basis of increased tax revenues expected from downtown development. The City receives no state aid. Federal funds for transportation projects are funneled through the Alabama Department of Transportation. The City is an entitlement community for Community Development Block Grant and HOME funds, programs which have been declining steadily since 1980, and it can receive other federal funds for specific programs if it is successful in competitive grant rounds.

In the budget process, all departments submit their wish lists for additional staff and for capital improvements. The budget office makes projections and the Mayor, Chief of Staff and Chief of Operations work with the budget office to create a budget. Capital budget decisions are based on availability of debt service and come from the Mayor, with input from the City Council and the public.

8. 21st-Century Birmingham: Planning for a New Future

As this comprehensive plan is being written, at the start of the second decade of the 21st century, the City of Birmingham is making significant progress in the long transition from industrial powerhouse of the South to a competitive New Economy city known for an increasingly vibrant, live-work-study-play downtown; beautiful parks and emerging greenways; historic resources; and new expressions of Southern culture, whether in food or music. This chapter identified four key areas as the foundation for the future: the power of place; the power of people and partnerships; opportunities and prosperity from the Next Economy; and establishment of a record of performance. In all of these areas, the City of Birmingham has much to build on, but it also faces many obstacles and difficulties. This plan focuses especially on goals and strategies for removing the obstacles and mitigating the difficulties:

- **The power of place.** As in many cities, downtown is being transformed with an influx of investment, residents—both Millennials and empty nesters—and cultural excitement. But many Birmingham neighborhoods continue to struggle with disinvestment. This plan focuses on policies, programs, and place-based strategies to improve quality of life in the city’s neighborhoods so that current residents want to stay in the city and new residents are attracted to live in the city. A strategic focus on improving and expanding the livability of Birmingham’s neighborhoods is a centerpiece of this comprehensive plan.
- **The power of people and partnerships.** The comprehensive plan repeatedly emphasizes the importance of coordination, cooperation and collaboration as essential to successful implementation of improvement strategies. The comprehensive plan cannot—and should not—be implemented by city government alone. Even within city government, more information-sharing and coordination is critical to improving quality of life. Business, nonprofit institutions, and resident associations need to work together.
- **Opportunities and prosperity from the Next Economy.** Birmingham faces two challenges to making the most of its Next Economy opportunities: educating and training a local workforce to take advantage of new employment options, and retaining and attracting talent. The first challenge includes investing in education from pre-school to post-secondary training and in a set of coordinated programs for adults, from basic education and job-readiness to workforce training. The second challenge means making the city an attractive location for people with sought-after skills, so that those who are educated in Birmingham want to stay, those who are recruited from elsewhere see Birmingham as a place of opportunity and high quality of life, and entrepreneurs at all levels find the city a good place to start and run a business.
- **Establishing a record of performance.** As this plan is being written, the City, with many partners, has established a successful record with a number of initiatives and projects, from Railroad Park and the new Regions Field to a federal grant to begin implementation of the Red

Rock Ridge and Valley Trail System. This comprehensive plan will help the City and its partners move beyond individual programs and projects to a broader, interconnected set of strategies and coordinated actions. A successful record of performance and strong collaboration will send a signal to funders and investors that the City of Birmingham is a place where plans get implemented.