

Quality Neighborhoods for Regional Prosperity



Source: maps.google.com



We envision a Capital Region where all residents
have the opportunity to live, work and play
in communities of choice.



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Introduction

The Problem

Capital District neighborhoods are deteriorating while resources and population sprawl into the surrounding suburbs, towns and countryside. Regional success depends on a strong central core, affordable neighborhoods of choice, and improved quality of life for all citizens.

Context

The context of the problem is best summarized by this excerpt from a 2005 PolicyLink report:¹

“America’s older urban centers...face significant obstacles to realizing a sustainable economic future. These places—often referred to as rust belt, weak market, slow growth, or undercapitalized cities— are struggling to reposition themselves in the face of a changing economy, and the movement of people and resources out of urban centers to other parts of the region, other parts of the country, or overseas. Left behind are abandoned and disinvested neighborhoods where residents lack meaningful access to economic and social opportunities. As growth continues to move toward the outer edges of regions, older, once-stable suburbs face similar issues of distress and decline. These conditions not only prohibit access to opportunities for people with the least resources, but also undermine the ability of the entire region to compete and grow economically.”

“The need for local, regional, and state leaders to rise to the challenge of equitable revitalization in older core cities is urgent. If leaders do not act now, poorly allocated investments will further exacerbate economic disparities in older core cities and isolate low-income residents from quality housing, good schools, efficient transit, community amenities, and living-wage jobs.”

Regional growth and success cannot be achieved while city neighborhoods are collapsing. Suburban and rural communities have a vested interest in strengthening core cities and creating affordable housing in their towns and villages.

Why Quality Neighborhoods Matter

A vibrant regional economy requires communities of choice and opportunity in a healthy urban core. Regional prosperity starts with quality neighborhoods. Meaningful community development must foster and sustain affordable neighborhoods – for everyone’s benefit. Current policies fail to acknowledge the interdependence of rural communities, suburban prosperity, urban health, and quality of life. Quality affordable neighborhoods benefit the entire region.

For example:

- Healthy core cities relieve pressures of sprawl.
- The ecological benefits of sustainable development are good for everyone.
- Open space and wise land-use is good for the economy and improves quality of life.

¹ Excerpt from the Executive Summary of Shared Prosperity, Stronger Regions: An Agenda for Rebuilding America’s Older Core Cities, by PolicyLink. Full report available at: www.policylink.org

- Older Americans (the largest growth demographic in our region) need affordable neighborhoods that are safe, accessible and desirable. Increasingly, these Americans are returning to central cities and town centers.
- Maintaining a healthy economy requires a diverse workforce of competent and dependable workers available for the full range of jobs. Low wage workers need affordable neighborhoods of choice accessible to employment centers.

“Affordable workforce housing is the cornerstone to a thriving...economy.”²

- Equitable development ensures that the fruits of our regional economy benefit all to maximize opportunity and choice.
- Redevelopment puts under-utilized and abandoned property back on the tax rolls.
- The renovation of abandoned buildings generated substantial local revenue and jobs while improving quality of life and strengthening the local tax base.
- Affordable housing impacts all facets of life:

“Without stable, affordable housing, people are hard pressed to succeed in jobs, education, or raising a family. Substandard conditions cause chronic health problems. High rent means less money for childcare, food, and transportation. Children entering and leaving classrooms in the middle of the year face serious education challenges; they receive no consistent attention by teachers who know their history and are constantly out of step with the experiences of their peers. Frequent moves also make saving and financial planning difficult and reduce the ability of families to form community support systems.”³

- People care about affordable housing and what government to address it. According to the largest trade association in the country:

“Seven out of ten respondents want government to make affordable housing a higher priority.”⁴

- Concentrated growth is more cost-effective than sprawl.⁵

Characteristics of a Quality Neighborhood

There are eight characteristics of decent, affordable and sustainable neighborhoods: safety; education; jobs; financial capital and services; planning and problem-solving skills; cultural institutions; public infrastructure; and affordable housing – in that order of importance.⁶

Our recommendations attempt to respond, at least in part, to these characteristics. However, our expertise is limited, particularly in the areas of health, safety and education. We hope that you, the reader, will have much to suggest. Your comments are encouraged.⁷

² Steven F. Sullivan, owner of Olde Bryan Inn and Longfellows Inn & Restaurant quoted in the brochure of the Workforce Housing Partnership of Saratoga County.

³ PolicyLink: “Affordable Housing Development 101”
<http://www.policylink.org/EDTK/AH101/Why.html>

⁴ National Association of REALTORS®, 2004 Housing Opportunity Pulse Survey.

⁵ *Estimating the Fiscal Impact of Alternative Futures for the Capital Region*, prepared by the Capital District Regional Planning Commission, Capital District Transportation Committee & University at Albany Dept. of Geography & Planning with funding assistance from the Center for Economic Growth, October 2007.

⁶ Characteristics of decent, sustainable, affordable neighborhoods adapted from *Urban Problems and Community Development*, R. Ferguson and W. Dickens. Brookings Press, 1999.

⁷ Email comments and suggestions to edah1@aphome.org

A Capital Region Program Agenda

“For too many communities, the future just happens.”⁸

A Work in Progress

This document is a work in progress. The authors seek to:

1. **Share ideas** about what works and what doesn't work.
2. **Foster dialog** about topics which are largely absent from current public debate.
3. **Build a local network** of people and organizations who care about these issues and who want to do something about it.
4. **Influence progress** through government, public institutions, and grassroots support.

Revitalizing and maintaining healthy urban areas needs to be a regional priority. A first-class region needs first-class cities and town centers. This outline summarizes community needs and policy directions. We have begun adding specific local recommendations and hope you'll help us add more.

Planning & Problem Solving

A neighborhood cannot be decent, sustainable and affordable if citizens are isolated, alienated and powerless.

Planning

- **Good Government Planning** – Municipal, regional, statewide. In our fragmented, home-rule state, coordinated planning is hard to come by.
Recommendation #1. – Organizations such as the Capital District Regional Planning Commission that are involved in regional planning should be supported and expanded.

- **Stronger County Planning Departments** – County planning departments should have greater authority to review, approve and influence local municipal decisions which impact quality of life throughout the region.
Recommendation #2. – Introduce NYS Legislation which requires development projects with implications beyond a single municipal jurisdiction to reviewed by county planning departments.



⁸ *Smart Communities*, Suzanne W. Morse, 2004.

- **Public-Private Partnerships** – Encourage employers, public housing authorities, religious and social organizations, and colleges to participate as partners in neighborhood stabilization through the development of affordable housing.

Recommendation #3. – Add and expand partnerships such as the Albany Midtown Program which draw on public and private resources from a variety of stakeholders.

- **Planning by Neighborhoods, For Neighborhoods** – Neighborhood organizations should lead local planning in cooperation with and support from local government. Tools should include the use of neighborhood planning charrettes. These accelerated, collaborative community planning exercises work on the neighborhood level and involve existing residents and stakeholders.

Recommendation #4. – Local planning should start at the neighborhood level, relying heavily on input and leadership from neighborhood organizations. Planning charrettes should be supported by, but not administered by local government.

Policy Advocacy

- **Awareness** – Increase public awareness of the ways that property tax policy, regional development unfairly disadvantage people and neighborhoods while recognizing the diversity and strength of these communities.

Recommendation #5. – The Capital District Homeownership Collaborative is working to increase awareness of these issues. Planners and advocates at all levels of government need to evaluate current policy with an eye towards equity.

- **Smart Growth** – Promote efforts locally to reduce sprawl and grow in sensible and sustainable ways that improve, not detract, from quality of life.

Recommendation #6. – Local planning boards should review current zoning laws and amend regulations to not only accommodate but encourage smart growth measures.

- **Leveling the Playing Field** – Advocate structural reform so that communities pay their fair share for service received. For example:
 - The State Department of Transportation is fully responsible for plowing, filling potholes, resurfacing and reconstructing State highways in rural areas and suburbs until the State highway enters the city. Similarly, county roads are maintained by county government. There are no county roads in cities so maintenance rests totally with cities.
 - A major city expense not found in most rural and suburban areas comes from uniform services, police and fire. Suburbs like the Town of Clifton Park near Albany and rural areas get their law enforcement from State Police and Sheriff patrols.
 - Most state park and recreational facilities and programs occur outside of cities. When the State is engaged in cities as it is with state designated heritage areas, the State is a "partner" meaning that the city incurs the ongoing cost of operating heritage area visitor centers and programs.⁹

⁹ *Our Cities Continue to Shrink; There Goes our Future* by Paul M. Bray, August 2003.

- Nearly two-thirds of the value of real property in the City of Albany is exempt from taxation.¹⁰

Recommendation #7. – Most Capital District residents are not aware of how taxes, public services and state aid are unequally applied to cities and suburbs. Local leaders should engage in a frank public discourse on these topics leading to meaningful state-level reforms.

Financial Equity

A neighborhood cannot be decent, sustainable and affordable unless the residents of that neighborhood have fair financial opportunities.

New Advantages for Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

- **Economic Development Zones** – Create local development zones in the areas of greatest need, particularly the lowest income census tracts.

Recommendation #8. – Insist that tax abatements and other public resources produce measured and verifiable results for people and communities in need.

- **Community Benefit Agreements** – Large projects with substantial public investment should include tangible provisions which ensure equitable community benefits to the surrounding communities.

Recommendation #9. – Major publicly funded projects such as the Albany Convention Center and Luther Forest Technology Campus should be required by state and local ordinance to enter into local community benefit agreements.

- **Money Management & Asset Building** – Support Individual Development Account (IDA) programs and other means of helping low-income residents build assets while saving for a home purchase, small business or education.

Recommendation #10. – Support and expand the Capital District Individual Development Account (CDIDA) program administer by the Affordable Housing Partnership and funded primarily by the Federal Home Loan Bank. Visit <http://www.ahphome.org/cdida.htm> for details.

Resources & Financing

- **Housing Trust Funds** – Establish local housing trust funds with permanent and ongoing sources of revenue, guided by ample community participation in program targeting and decision-making and with a high degree of public accountability.

Recommendation #11. – Support existing efforts to create an Albany County Housing Trust Fund and consider similar efforts in other counties.¹¹

- **Land Conservation Trust Funds** – Suburban and rural areas of the Capital District are quickly losing the open space resources that support quality of life in these areas.

Recommendation #12. – Establish similar trust funds, or a jointly administered fund, to finance acquisition, protection and maintenance of parks, farm land and open space.

- **Community Development Financial Institutions** – Expand lending capital of local CDFIs like the Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region (CLFCR) to make more affordable housing, community and economic development loans.

¹⁰ “Capital Punishment”: An analysis of the fiscal impact of State government policies and tax-exempt property on the City of Albany, The PFM Group, October 2010.

¹¹ Visit www.housingtrustfund.net for details.

Recommendation #13. – Support and expand the work of organizations like the Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region www.mycommunityloanfund.org

- **Streamline SONYMA** – Streamline processing of State of New York Mortgage Association home purchase financing so that lenders, Realtors, and homebuyers are more able to promote and take advantage of an otherwise excellent financing product.

Recommendation #14. – Identify direct originators of SONYMA products which do not require subsequent underwriting by SONYMA.

- **Anti-Predatory Lending Initiatives** – Albany/Schenectady/Troy has the 19th highest incidence of high-cost home purchase lending in minority neighborhoods of 130 metro areas studied nationally.¹² Expand education, alternatives and affordable financing to prevent and correct predatory business practices, particularly on low-income people and the elderly.

Recommendation #15. – Support and replicate initiatives that educate consumers and provide meaningful alternatives to high-cost and predatory lending practices such as the HomeSave program, www.ahphome.org/homesave.htm.

- **Energy Efficiency** – With renewed interest in promoting energy efficiency and green-tech jobs, legislation such as Green Jobs / Green New York has create new opportunities for improving the quality and efficiency of older buildings while expanding job opportunities

Recommendation #16. – Contract with community-based organizations to conduct outreach training and technical assistance around energy efficiency.¹³

- **New Resources & Tools** – Recent legislation and creative thinking have opened new avenues that local communities need to examine. A wealth of ideas have emerged around the country with relevance locally.¹⁴

Recommendation #17. – Explore new tools such as land banking, tax increment financing, mixed- use zoning and other strategies.

Tax Equity

- **Tax Equity** – Tax abatements and adjustments for tax equity. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are overtaxed relative to their real estate value. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are often underserved relative to parks and public spaces.
Recommendation #18. – Implement fair share assessments. Challenge communities to compare their assessments with actual sales in target neighborhoods.
- **Use of Federal Funds** - CDBG and other housing and development funds are awarded to cities based in large part on the needs of low income residents. In many cities, the uses of the funds received are disproportionally low for the intended beneficiaries. What's more, low income neighborhoods often pay twice for city services – such as paying property taxes for street repair; then losing CDBG allocations for community services to pay for street repair a second time.

¹² *The Impending Rate Shock: A Study of Home Mortgages in 130 American Cities.* Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), August 15, 2005. www.acorn.org

¹³ NYSERDA is expected to enter into one such agreement with the Affordable Housing Partnership of the Capital Region in October 2011. Connect at www.GreenCapitalRegion.org.

¹⁴ Several of many websites dedicated to new and emerging community development tools include: www.communityprogress.net ; www.stablecommunities.org ; www.policylink.org.

Recommendation #19. – Insist that CDBG allocations produce verifiable results for people and communities in need.

Insurance

- **Accountability** – Hold insurance companies accountable to community investment standards to end insurance redlining.
- **Impact of Vacant Buildings** – Hold owners of vacant buildings financially liable for negative insurance impacts on neighboring property owners.

Recommendation #20. – Introduce State or local legislation that limits property insurance payouts until damaged parcels are code compliant. (e.g. Owners of fire gutted buildings should not be allowed to run off with insurance payouts, only to leave the burned out shell for the tax payer.

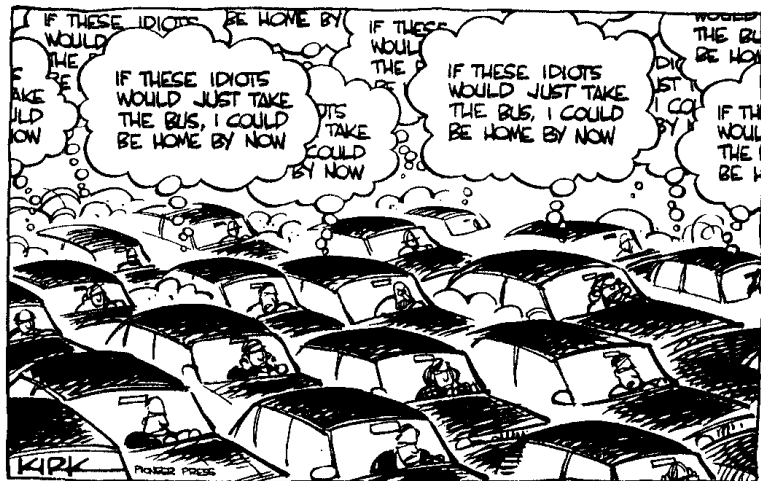
Public Infrastructure

A neighborhood cannot be decent, sustainable and affordable unless that neighborhood receives government services and infrastructure on a par with the rest of the community.

Transportation

- **Transit Oriented Development** – Developers, municipalities and transit planners need to work together to remove barriers and create incentives for high-density, transit oriented development along public transit corridors.

Recommendation #21. – Include plans for transit oriented development in conjunction with expansion of public transit, light rail and intermodal hubs.



- **Safe Streets** – All communities need improved traffic safety for drivers and pedestrians and bicyclists. Streets are not only thoroughfares for automobiles, they are also public spaces where people walk, bike, meet, shop and play.

Recommendation #22. – Increase traffic safety enforcement, improve site design standards, and make capital improvements such as bicycle lanes, urban forestry and pedestrian accommodations.

Health & Ecosystems

- **Community Gardens** – Support and expand the infrastructure of protected community gardens throughout the urban core.
Recommendation #23. – Support organizations such as the Capital District Community Gardens.
- **Parks** – Urban and suburban area need ample opportunities for quality recreation.
Recommendation #24. – Expand regional greenways and urban riverfront access programs.
- **Agriculture** – In rural areas, permanent steps must be taken to protect farmland and the integrity and sustainability of local agriculture.

Recommendation #25. – Encourage the acquisition of conservation easements and property tax incentives to land owners who ensure permanent preservation of land for agricultural use.

- **Green Infrastructure** – Throughout the built environment, infrastructure systems such as storm water, sewer, garbage collection, energy and recycling systems should support and protect the health of natural ecosystems. Recognize that infrastructure expansions fuel sprawling growth patterns. Concentrate on improving existing systems.

Recommendation #26. – Upgrade existing infrastructure with green systems wherever possible, especially in existing settlements.

- **Environmental Health** – Much work needs to be done to improved environmental health in public spaces and homes.

Recommendation #27. – Continue and expand lead and asbestos hazard education with an emphasis on everyday common sense to reduce risk exposure. Increase lead-safe contractor training opportunities.

- **Healthy Food Systems** – Many neighborhoods lack facilities to buy healthy food at reasonable prices.

Recommendation #28. – Promote local access to quality food, especially locally produced food, through neighborhood stores, farmers' markets, consumer coops and partnerships such as the Capital District Community Garden's Veggie Mobile and Healthy Convenience Store Initiative.¹⁵

Affordable Housing

*A neighborhood cannot be decent, sustainable and affordable unless the community plans to improve and not remove the neighborhood. "Affordable housing creates jobs, adds to the local tax base, increases family stability, and reduces health, education and transportation costs. Providing an adequate supply of decent affordable homes makes good economic sense and enables families to reach their full potential."*¹⁶

Development and Management

- **Nonprofit Developers** – Support the development work of locally-based nonprofits, including Community Land Trusts as a means of improving, maintaining, and sustaining quality affordable housing.

Recommendation #29. – Support small scale projects, preferably in the context of broader plans, as they are often most appropriate and have greatest long-term benefit.

- **Track Records** – For-profit and non-profit developers alike should be rewarded for good track records and discouraged for bad.

Recommendation #30. – Investors who bid on municipal property tax foreclosures should not be allowed to bid at subsequent auctions if building permits have not been pulled to renovate earlier acquisitions.

- **NYS Homes and Community Renewal NPC/RPC Program** – The network of locally-based Neighborhood Preservation Companies and Rural Preservation Companies should be strengthened and challenged to grow in effectiveness.

Recommendation #31. – Introduce performance based additional awards to the existing core NPC/RPC administrative funding available through NYSHCR. This will challenge marginal organizations to improve while rewarding effective organizations with increased funding. In areas

¹⁵ www.cdcg.org

¹⁶ Center for Community Change: <http://www.communitychange.org/>

such as Albany where multiple organizations exist, NPCs should be rewarded, not penalized, if they choose to coordinate and/or consolidate programs, services and operations.

- **Private Development Incentives** – Local government should encourage private-sector development of affordable housing through incentives for projects which incorporate permanently affordable housing units.
Recommendation #32. – Developers of affordable housing units could access fast-track planning approvals, higher unit density allowances, reduced permit costs, or other incentives.
- **Rental Housing** – Continue to develop and maintain decent affordable rental housing, in cities, suburbs and rural areas.
Recommendation #33. – Introduce “Workforce Housing” legislation at the county level which grants expedited permitting and/or density bonus and the like for rental projects which include affordable rental units. Increase public funding for affordable rental rehab programs.
- **Ownership Hybrids** – Current tenure options are largely limited to either individual homeownership or traditional rental property. We need more options to meet the needs of an increasing diverse and mobile population.
Recommendation #34. – Explore opportunities for Mutual Housing Associations, Co-Housing and Limited Equity Coops, new options for seniors and other alternatives to individual homeownership and absentee-owned rental housing.
- **Homeownership Zones** – Support and expand mixed-use, mixed-income development in strategic “Homeownership Zones” within core cities.
Recommendation #35. – Identify strategically important ‘transitional’ neighborhoods where significant, concerted and coordinated development effort can achieve significant impact.
- **Community Land Trusts** – Capacity building initiatives for Community Land Trusts to acquire and permanently preserve affordable housing.
Recommendation #36. – Expand the capacity of the Albany and Schenectady CLTs. Consider NYS-DHCR Rural Preservation Company funding to establishing new Saratoga County CLT and Rensselaer County CLT.
- **Workforce Housing** – Develop affordable housing throughout the region to meet the needs of the local workforce. At present, many employees can not afford to live in communities where job growth is most robust.
- **Rural Communities** – The affordable housing crisis facing rural New Yorkers is well documented. Efforts expand and maintain the availability of affordable housing is an urban, suburban and rural issue.
Recommendation #37. – Support programs such as the NYS Rural Preservation Program (RPC) that address affordable housing in town, villages and rural areas.¹⁷

Housing Opportunity

- **Fair Share Housing Policies** – Many municipalities have limited the supply of affordable housing in their communities through zoning.
Recommendation #38. – New York State should litigate and enforce the “fair share” provision of affordable housing at the county level, where many zoning regulations and local reaction discourage the provision of affordable housing.
- **Real Estate Services** – Maintain and expand professional real estate services that promote affordable real estate in urban areas. A healthy neighborhood includes a healthy

¹⁷

Example: Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, www.acrha.org

real estate market – one which is characterized by stability and opportunity for all, rather than speculation and absentee ownership.

*Recommendation #39. – Learn from the experience of Community Realty, a nonprofit real estate brokerage working to promote homeownership and strengthen city neighborhoods.*¹⁸

- **Foreclosure Prevention Services** – There are households in every neighborhood in the Capital Region facing foreclosure due to job loss from the economic downturn. Studies show that if these families receive advice from housing counselors and legal services providers, they have a much greater chance of achieving a successful outcome. Keeping a family in their home has important benefits not only for the family, but for the neighborhood and municipality, yet funding for counseling services has been eliminated. *Recommendation #40. – Support counseling and legal services programs to assist families facing foreclosure.*
- **Homeownership Centers & Support Programs** – Create and invest in support programs for owner-occupied multi-family properties, such as homeownership counseling, education, home repair financing, matching grants, landlord training and others. Homeownership center programs help first-time homebuyers succeed while providing substantial financial benefit to the local economy.¹⁹ *Recommendation #41. – Increase local promotion and support of independent nonprofit homeownership centers such as those in Albany, Schenectady and Troy.*²⁰

Housing/Jobs Balance

- **Job Training** – Employers need a trained workforce. Government, nonprofits, private industry and educational sectors need to work together to ensure a skilled workforce and equitable access to jobs. With good paying jobs, people can afford housing. *“My profits were being limited because we hadn’t focused on a sustainable community. There was a lot more labor, it just wasn’t properly educated or prepared.”*²¹
- **Green Jobs & Housing** – Training programs for the new green economy can be linked effectively with housing efficiency programs. This expands job opportunities while improving our housing stock. *Recommendation #42. – Expand green-collar job training and placement while driving demand for energy audits and retrofits in the marketplace.*²²
- **EAH Incentives** – *Employer Assisted Homeownership* connects the needs of employers, employees and neighborhoods to everyone’s benefit.²³ Employers need housing for a quality workforce. *Recommendation #43. – Expand employer-sponsored homebuyer incentives. Visit <http://www.ahphome.org/library/eah%20summary.pdf> for details.*

¹⁸ Example: Community Realty, www.yourownhome.org
¹⁹ Example: Affordable Housing Partnership, www.ahphome.org
²⁰ Examples: Affordable Housing Partnership www.ahphome.org; TRIP NeighborWorks Homeownership Center; Better Neighborhoods Inc. www.better-neighborhoods.org.
²¹ Austin, Texas executive as quoted in *High-Tech Growth and Community Well-Being: Lessons Learned from Austin, Texas*, a report of the Nonprofit Executive Roundtable by the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, University at Albany, State University of New York, Spring 2006.
²² Example: <http://www.nyserda.org/GreenNY/>
²³ Details at <http://www.ahphome.org/library/eah%20summary.pdf>

*"We can keep our valuable entry-level employees in our community, caring for their neighbors."*²⁴

- **Small Business Education** – Expand and enhance small business training courses offered through locally based organizations.²⁵
- **Center for Micro Enterprise Development** – Support local efforts to promote and encourage micro enterprise development.
Recommendation #44. – One such effort worthy of support provides technical assistance, training and other support to start-up and growing micro enterprises through a strategic alliance between the Capital District Community Loan Fund, the School of Business of the College of Saint Rose and the Albany Center for Economic Success.
- **Sustainable Business Networks** – Private enterprises and concerned citizens can work together to create a sustainable local economy. In Cleveland, for example, anchor institutions partnered with new worker-owned vendors in the community to build community jobs and wealth.²⁶
Recommendation #45. – Explore large-scale, worker-owned, local-sourcing initiatives such as the "Cleveland Model" Evergreen Coop which builds synergy between major local institutions such as colleges and hospitals and local job creation.

Housing Design

- **Smart Design** – Current zoning and codes are sometimes at odds with sensible design solutions.
Recommendation #46. – Review and revise local zoning ordinances and permit review processes to accommodate and encourage sensible design standards such as New Urbanism, transit oriented development, and traditional neighborhood design.
- **Housing Quality** – State-funded affordable housing programs should expect – and fund – quality design and construction so that affordable housing is desirable and lasts. Affordable housing (and neighborhoods) should not deteriorate to housing of last resort.

Vacant Buildings

- **Brownfield Redevelopment** – Convert liabilities into opportunities for development within urban cores.
Recommendation #47. – Focus regional economic development efforts within urban cores, reinvigorating abandoned brownfields and similarly underutilized central locations.
- **Minimize Demolition** – Improve Capital District Cities' tax foreclosure and vacant building programs to intervene earlier and minimize City-financed demolition.
Recommendation #48. – Create a program to use NYS's new Bonding authority for stabilizing buildings. Design City and County government systems to allow for appropriate intervention and minimization of demolition. Where demolition makes sense, improve the usability of resources such as RESTORE-NY by local municipalities and nonprofit organizations.
- **Hold Owners Accountable** – With ownership comes responsibility. Local municipalities should pass the cost of higher police, fire and code services to owners of vacant building.

²⁴ David Andersen, CEO of Saratoga Care, Inc. quoted in the brochure of the Workforce Housing Partnership of Saratoga County.

²⁵ For example: Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region, www.mycommunityloanfund.org.

²⁶ For example: www.capitaldistrictlocalfirst.org & www.evergreencoop.com

Assess owners of vacant buildings a fire department surcharge to offset the cost of maintaining and protecting vacant buildings.

- **Foreclosure Prevention** – Support early intervention through use and support of nonprofit budget and credit counseling agencies.

Recommendation #49. – NYS should implement a Pennsylvania-style “Homeowner’s Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program” (HEMAP).²⁷ In the wake of recent financing trends, the impact of foreclosures on local communities is certain to swell. The program would help prevent foreclosures by providing loans to homeowners who fell into default but who are able to resume making payments, to cure the arrears and reinstate their mortgages.

Behind the Scenes

The Authors

This draft was written by Eric Dahl, Joe Fama, Roger Markovics and Bob Radliff with input from friends and colleagues. The opinions expressed are our own, and do not necessarily reflect the organizations with which we are affiliated.

A Local Network

Much local expertise about affordable housing and community development can be found in an informal network of organizations that calls itself the Capital District Homeownership Collaborative. Together, these organizations offer 150 years of collective housing and community development experience and offer a broad menu of existing products and services available in Albany, Schenectady and Rensselaer counties:

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| • Affordable Housing Partnership | www.ahphome.org | 518-434-1730 |
| • Albany Community Land Trust | www.albanyclt.com | 518-426-1296 |
| • Better Neighborhoods, Inc. | www.better-neighborhoods.org | 518-372-6469 |
| • Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region | mycommunityloanfund.org | 518-436-8586 |
| • Community Land Trust of Schenectady | www.cltofschdy.org | 518-372-7616 |
| • TAP, Inc. | www.tapinc.org | 518-274-3050 |
| • Troy Rehabilitation and Improvement Program | www.triponline.org | 518-690-0020 |

This document has not been endorsed nor adopted by any of these organizations.

Contact Us

This document is a work in progress. We want to hear from you. For more information, or to add your comments and suggestions, contact Eric Dahl: 518-434-1730 x409 or edahl@ahphome.org. We continue to conduct interviews and hope you have ideas to share with us.

²⁷ Details at <http://www.phfa.org/consumers/homeowners/hemap.aspx> For more information on efforts in NYS, contact Kirsten Keefe, Empire Justice Center, kkeefe@empirejustice.org.

Appendix

Statewide Policy Resources

Our emphasis is on local solutions here in New York's Capital District – starting with healthy affordable neighborhoods. For those seeking a statewide policy perspective, a wealth of useful information is available which we need not reinvent:

- **Pratt Center** – *Time for a Gut Rehab: Rebuilding New York State's Affordable Housing Legacy*. Pratt Center for Community Development, 2006. <http://www.prattcenter.net>
- **Policy Link** – *Shared Prosperity, Stronger Regions: An Agenda for Rebuilding America's Older Core Cities*. Policy Link, 2005. <http://policylink.org/>
- **At Home in New York** – *At Home in New York: A Housing Policy for New York State*. Contributors include the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of NYS, NYS Rural Housing Coalition, and staff of State agencies, October 15, 2006. <http://npcnys.org/> and <http://www.ruralhousing.org/>

Further Reading

Thankfully, there is a wealth of excellent literature and thought on the subject of equitable development. The following sources have reinforced our thinking locally and are worthwhile further reading:

Balanced Housing for a Smart Region: Policies for Addressing the Housing Problems of the New York Metropolitan Region. Citizens' Housing and Planning Council and the CT/NJ/NY Regional Plan Association, July 2006.

Community Development Corporations and Smart Growth: Putting Policy Into Practice, Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University & Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. October 2005. www.jchs.harvard.edu/

Estimating the Fiscal Impacts of Alternative Futures for the Capital Region. Capital District Regional Planning Commission, Capital District Transportation Committee and University at Albany Dept. of Geography & Planning. October 2007. www.cdrpc.org

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Facts & Figures

Capital District Demographic Quiz²⁸

1. Over the last 50 years there has been a steady migration of middle class households out of the cities and to the suburbs. True
2. Barring unforeseen events, this trend will likely continue for the next ten years. True
3. What percent of the region's residents now live in the areas cities? 50%
4. What is the CDRPC projection of city residents for 2025? 41%
5. What percent of the people living in the cities are poor? (Hint: Total for the region 8.5% or 63,000 people.) 14%
6. What percent of the region's poor live in the cities?) 72%
7. Of all households in the Capital Region earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, what percentage live in the cities? 45%
8. Of all households in the Capital Region earning over \$50,000 a year, what percentage live in the cities? 32%
9. What percent of the people living in the cities are minority? (non-white) 12%
10. What percent of the regions minority population lives in the cities? 74%
11. What is the average household size in Capital Regions cities? (Hint: regional average household size is 2.59 people.) 2.30 people
12. What percent of the region's retail sales occurred in the cities? (1992) 53%

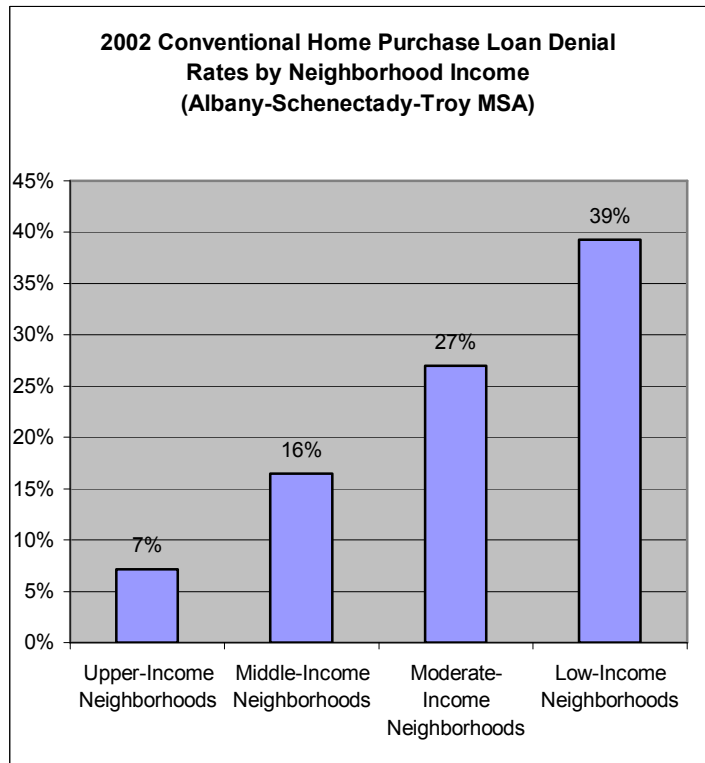
Online Data

- For regional data, maps and indicators, visit www.cdrpc.org
- For FHA foreclosure trends down to the zip code, visit <https://entp.hud.gov/sfnw/public/>
- For US Census reports and data, visit <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- For "Home Mortgage Disclosure Act" (HMDA) lending data, visit <http://www.ffiec.gov/>

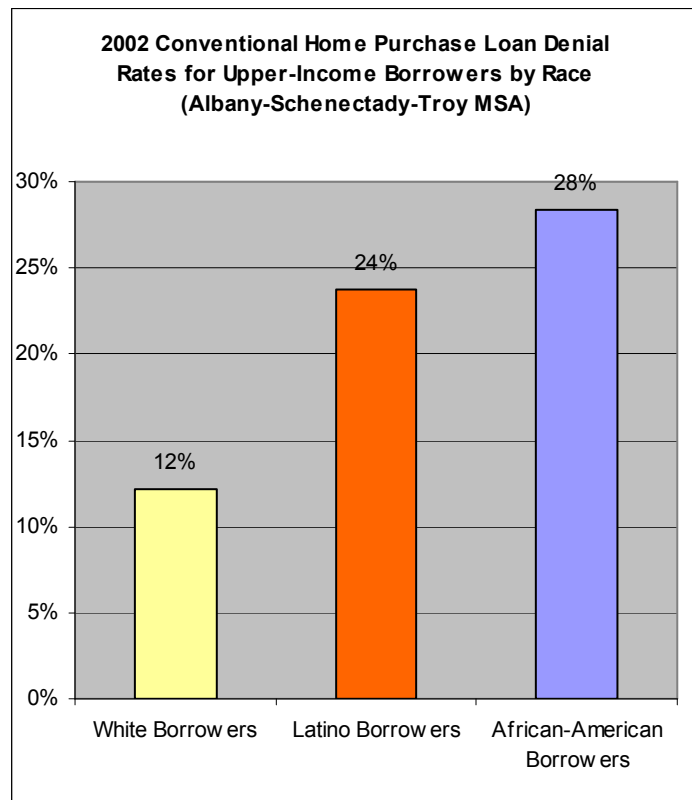
²⁸ Courtesy of Joe Fama, TAP Inc. 2006.

Local Lending Disparities

Of 115 metropolitan areas studied...²⁹ Albany-Schenectady-Troy had the 9th highest disparity in denial rates between conventional homebuyers in low and moderate income neighborhoods compared to buyers in upper income neighborhoods.

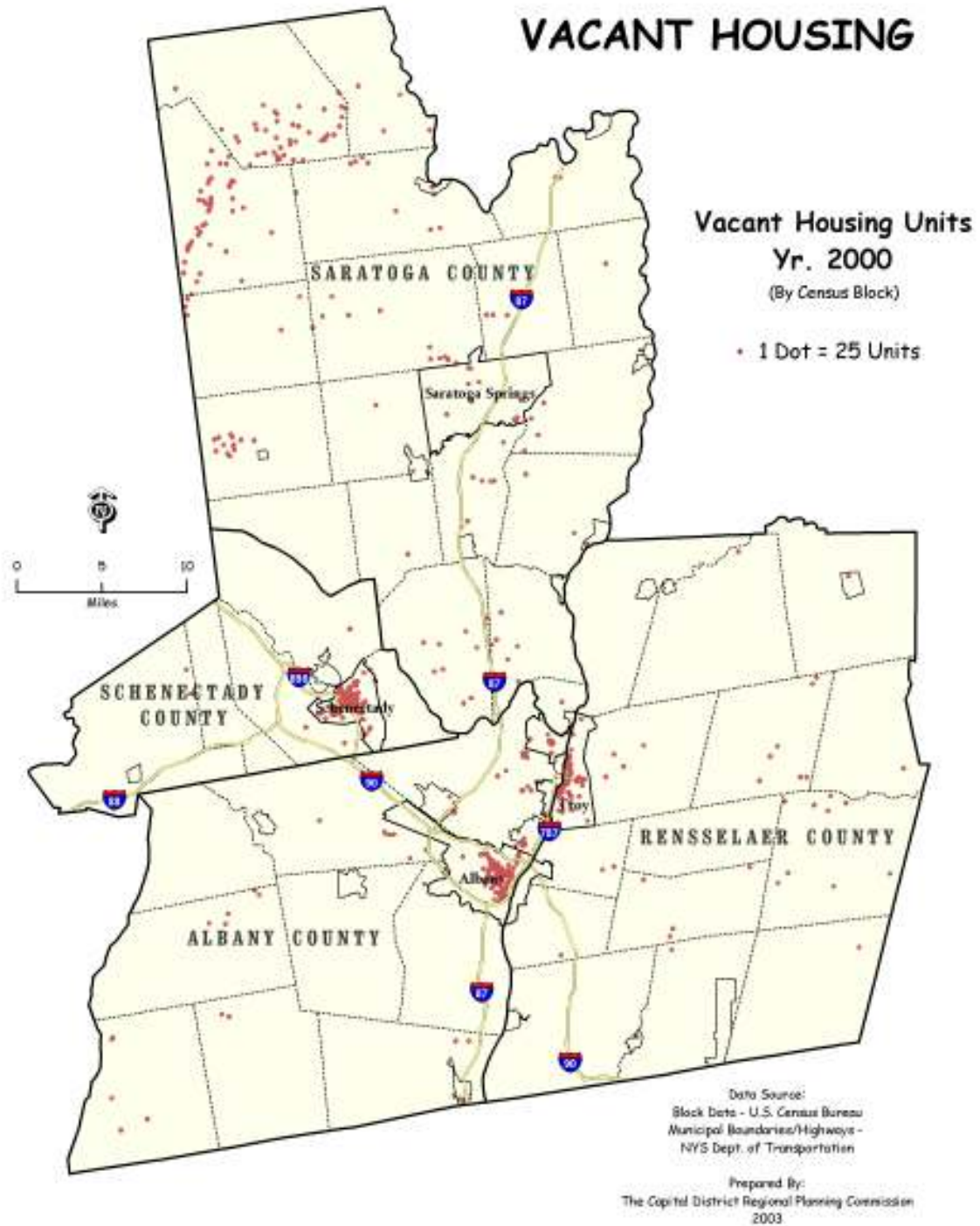


Albany-Schenectady-Troy had the 5th highest disparity in denial rates for upper-income African-American borrowers compared to upper-income whites.

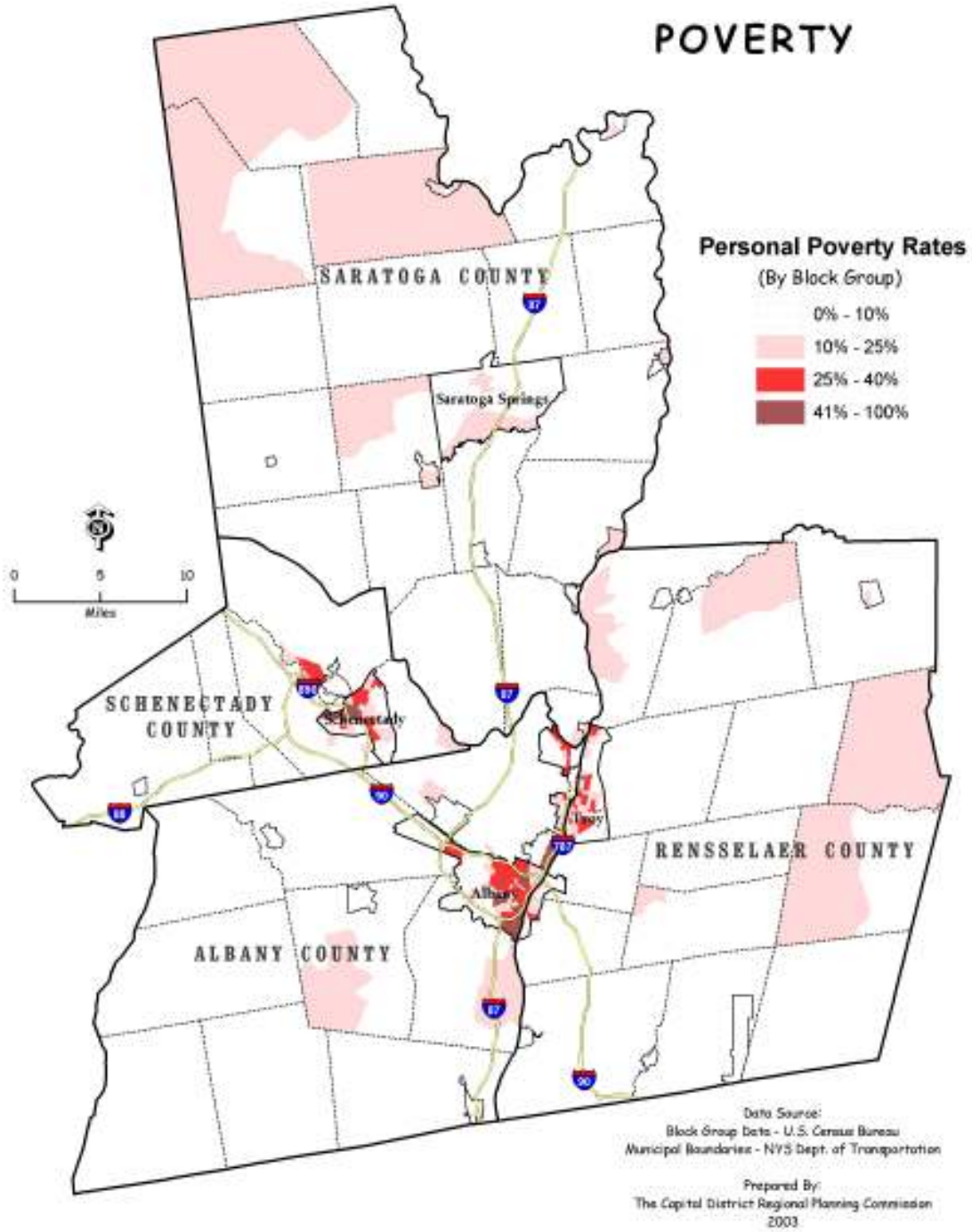


²⁹ *The Great Divide: Home Purchase Mortgage Lending Nationally and in 115 Metropolitan Areas.* ACORN, Oct. 2003. www.acorn.org

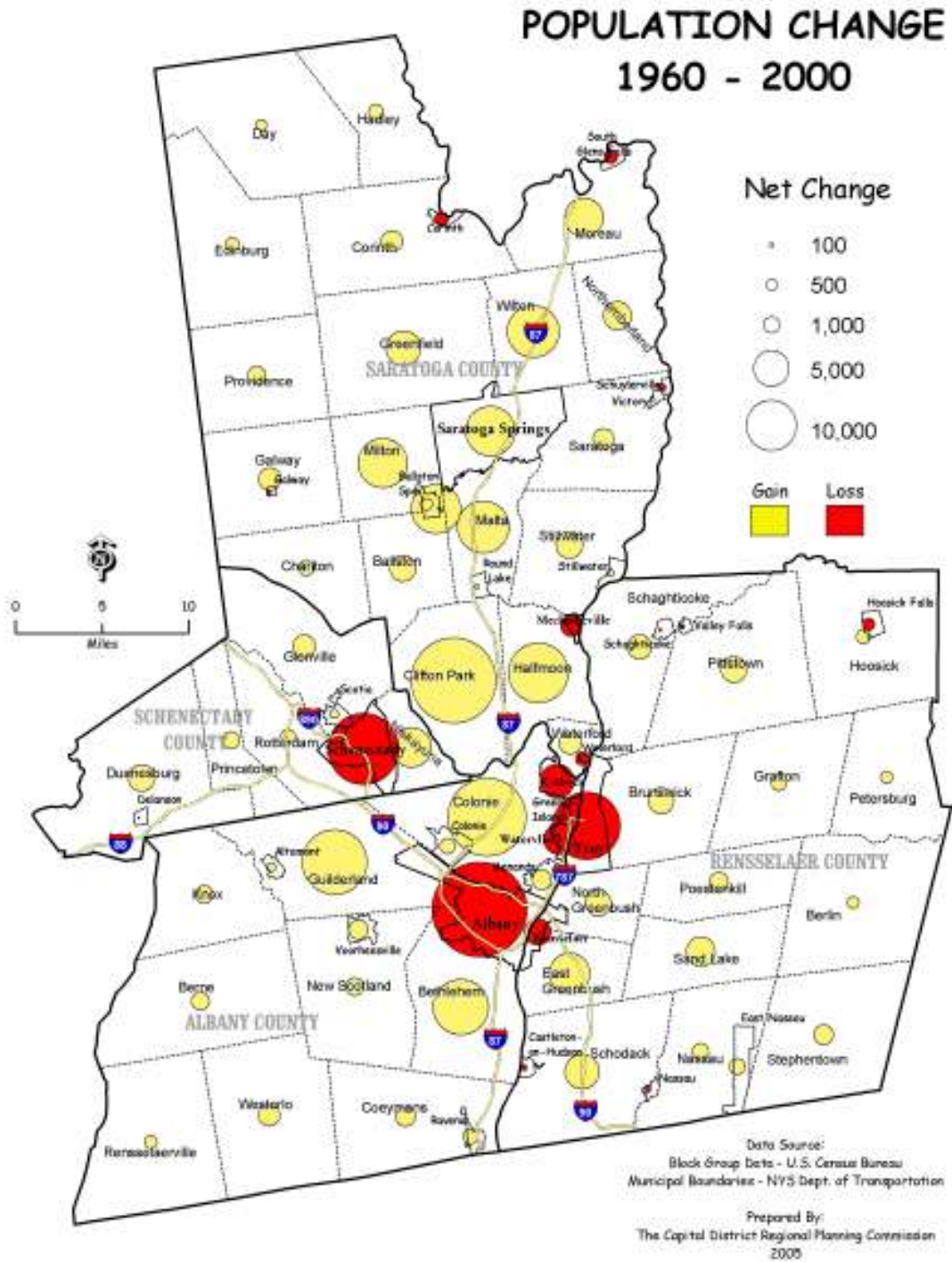
Vacant Units (From CDRPC.org)



Poverty Rates (From CDRPC.org)



Population Gain-Loss (From CDRPC.org)



Lewis Mumford Center - State of the Cities Report (excerpt)

Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY MSA

Data for the Metro Region and its Central Cities and Suburbs

Counties in this metropolitan area: Albany County , Montgomery County , Rensselaer County , Saratoga County , Schenectady County , Schoharie County. Cities in this metropolitan area: Albany, NY , Schenectady, NY , Troy, NY , Saratoga Springs, NY

“The following chart shows a series of indicators representing the socioeconomic status of the region. In the last two columns are measures of the city-suburban disparity on each indicator. Their calculation depends on the indicator. On indicators like median income, where a higher value reflects more prosperity, the measure is the city value divided by the suburban value. On indicators like percent unemployed, the measure is the suburban value divided by the city value. This way, for every indicator a value of the disparity measure greater than 1.0 means that the city is doing better than the suburbs; a value less than 1.0 means the city is doing worse. If the value rises over time, it means the city's relative position is improving; if it declines, that represents a relative deterioration.

Median household income has been reported by the Census Bureau for metro areas and individual cities. For suburbs, for cities where there is more than one central city in the metropolis, and for metro areas that cross state lines, we provide estimates of the median income. These are based on either linear or Pareto curve interpolation from grouped data. For 1990, where income has been reported in 25 categories, the estimates are quite precise. For 2000, because only 9 categories of income have been reported, the estimates are subject to some error.

The last row shows index values that combine all the indicators. Some metro areas have improved on some indicators but declined on others. To evaluate the net change, we calculate a standardized score on every indicator (based on the 1990 mean and standard deviation) and use the average of these scores as an overall index value, where a higher value indicates more prosperity. This index is similar to the one on which we have ranked metro areas, cities, and suburbs above. The overall index of city-suburb disparity (last two columns of the last row) is the city index value minus the suburb index value -- a positive value means that the city is doing better than the suburbs.”

Socioeconomic Indicators:

	Metro Region		Central City		Suburb		Central City-Suburb Disparity	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Median HH income	42,087	43,250	32,414	30,761	46,544	48,247	0.7	0.64
Per capita income	19,665	22,303	17,121	18,543	20,682	23,666	0.83	0.78
% Below poverty	8.8	9.4	16.2	19.5	6	6	0.37	0.31
% College	23.6	28.2	23.9	26.9	23.5	28.7	1.02	0.94
% Professional	35.9	38.5	35.3	36.6	36.1	39.2	0.98	0.93
% Unemployed	5	5.6	6.7	10.2	4.4	4	0.66	0.4
% Homeowners	64	64.6	42.4	42	73.4	73.3	0.58	0.57
% Vacant housing	8.5	9.3	8.8	11.3	8.3	8.5	0.94	0.75
Index Score	0.52	0.91	-0.46	-0.57	0.94	1.45	-1.4	-2.02

For the complete report, visit: <http://www.albany.edu/mumford/>

Homeownership Collaborative

Members of the Capital District Homeownership Collaborative offer a wide range of existing resources throughout the region:

	TRIP	AHP	BNI	ACLT	CLTS	TAP	CLFCR
HOMEOWNERSHIP SERVICES							
Homebuyer Education (Workshops)	●	●	●				
Homebuyer Education (One-on-one)	●	●	●		●	●	
Budget / Credit / Financial Counseling	●	●	●		●		●
CDIDA Matched-Savings Program	●	●	●				●
'Section 8' Homeownership Program Counseling	●	●	●				
Post-Purchase Assistance	●	●	●	●	●		
Landlord Training	●						
Mortgage Default Counseling	●	●	●				
Community Realty (Nonprofit Brokerage)		●					
RENTAL ASSISTANCE							
Tenant Assistance	●		●	●			
Rental Management	●		●	●	●	●	
Resident Services				●	●		
HOUSING REHABILITATION							
Housing Quality / Lead Inspections	●					●	
Home Repair Resources	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Rehabilitation/New Construction	●		●	●	●	●	
Mixed Use / Commercial Development						●	
Architectural Services / Historic Preservation						●	
GRANTS and FINANCING							
Development and Other Financing to Nonprofits							●
Down-Payment / Closing Cost Assist.	●	●	●				
Mortgage Originating / Loan Packaging	●	●					●
Refinancing / Anti-Predatory Lending	●	●					
Micro Enterprise Lending / Training			●				●
OTHER RESOURCES							
Tool Library			●				
Investor Property Program	●						
Loan Portfolio Management		●					●
YouthBuild Construction Training				●			
Urban Design / Planning Services						●	

Contrasting Good & Bad Public Policy

Characteristics of Good Policy	Characteristics of Current Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wise use of public resources. Effective and prioritized to meet greatest need. <p><i>Example: One time grants for down-payment assistance for owner occupants targeted to distressed neighborhoods.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Band aid funding without hope of substantive improvement. <p><i>Example: Allocating more money for demolition than for repair of buildings is like responding to an epidemic by subsidizing burials.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preservation of investment to maximize long-term impact. <p><i>Example: Public investments, subsidies, and other philanthropic contributions, that are treated as public "equity" and preserved for the longest possible term.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wasted resources. <p><i>Example: Throwing money at a problem as a political expedient with no real hope of results.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smart design. Reuse and maintain existing buildings and infrastructure. <p><i>Example: Historic preservation. Brownfield redevelopment.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At best, non-planning. At worst, planning for removal and displacement. <p><i>Example: Removal of problem buildings, or even neighborhoods without any consideration of how they became a problem or any meaningful effort at a solution.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships and collaboration, especially between the nonprofit, public and for-profit private sectors. <p><i>Example: Capital District Homeownership Collaborative.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divide and conquer. <p><i>Example: Funding that pits one agency against another in a battle for resources inadequate for meaningful improvement.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local decision making which is ethical, transparent and accountable. <p><i>Example: Well-run democratically controlled nonprofit organizations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remote decisions with a sense that nothing can be done. <p><i>Example: NYS budget process.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed-use/mixed-income approach to strengthening neighborhoods. <p><i>Example: Homeownership Zone development in strategically important neighborhoods.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased concentration and 'containment' of poverty. <p><i>Example: Tolerate unacceptable conditions in "worst" neighborhoods until there is no choice left but abandonment.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't displace. Help people grow in place. Promote personal and geographic stability. <p><i>Example: See Policy Agenda.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban removal. <p><i>Example: Since 1995, Buffalo has spent in excess of \$30 million to demolish more than 4,500 vacant buildings, according to Center for Community Change.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional planning that acknowledges urban/suburban/rural interdependency. <p><i>Example: CDRPC/CDTC Quality Region Task Force.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmented planning that pits 'us' against 'them.' <p><i>Example: Funding of school systems. Interstate road systems that dump traffic into cities.</i></p>