



Effective Strategies – Equitable Systems – Strong Communities

Moving The Needle: Making Your Community Development Data Work For You

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Today's Takeaways

1. Recognize the impact of local contexts and expertise
2. Learn about our four-step process for conducting community and/or economic development data-driven analyses or assessments
3. Identify ways you can make your analytical or assessment work more grounded, inclusive, and feasible

The Equitable Community Development Practice Area at **Community Science**

Equitable community development promotes opportunity and systems changes for those living in place or seeking economic security. Our focus is on the systemic inequities historically and currently extracting wealth and opportunity from marginalized individuals due to their race and ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, health or disability status, socioeconomic status, geographic location, as well as other attributes.



Could vacant office spaces across the U.S. be the solution to a national problem?

New housing construction slowed as campaigns focus on affordability.

Once a retirement community, King City navigates growth

Younger people left metro areas for smaller cities during the Covid era, and many aren't going back 'anytime soon'

America's Changing Economic Landscape: A New Growth Trend

Navigating The 'Bananas' Housing Market Of 2024

Strategies for staying ahead in an unpredictable housing landscape.



Change is guaranteed in community and economic development

Community, Economic, and Housing Changes Manifest Many Ways because of Local Contexts



Built Environment

- New Development
- Aging Buildings or Infrastructure
- Changing Natural Landscape
- Changing “Common Spaces”



Demographically

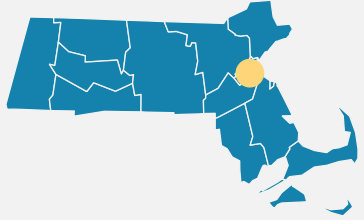
- New Residents
- Displacement
- Outmigration
- Aging in Place



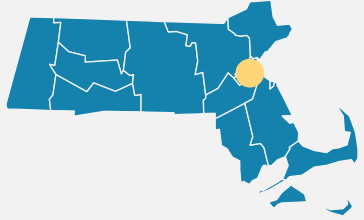
Politically and Legally

- New Policies/Rules
- New Political or Community Leaders or Movements
- New Activities

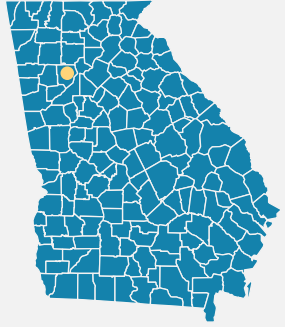
Boston, MA 2007



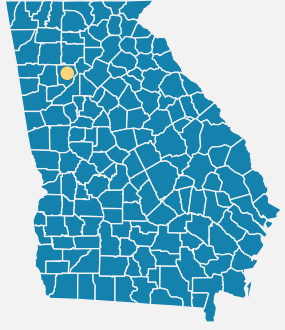
Boston, MA 2024



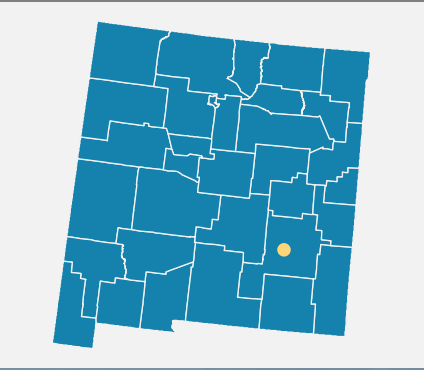
Marietta, GA 2012



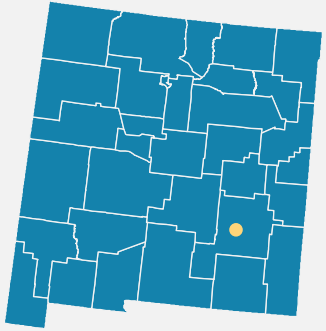
Marietta, GA 2024



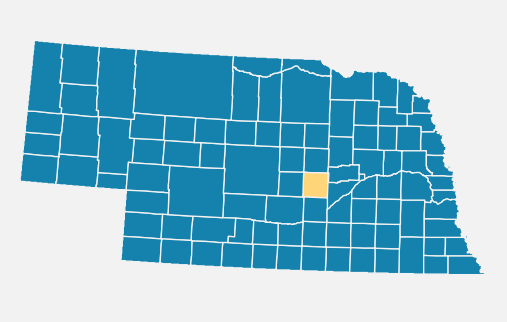
Roswell, NM 2022



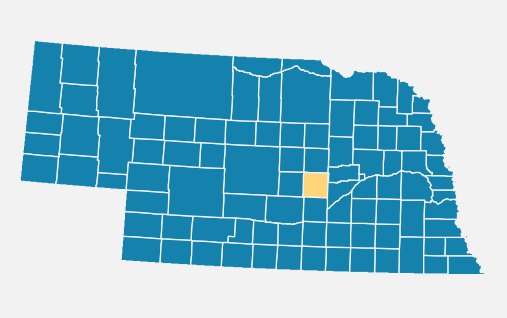
Roswell, NM 2024



St. Paul, NE 2012



St. Paul, NE 2023

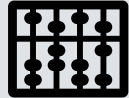




Measurement and Planning **are Possible**

- We can measure and strategize around community and economic development changes
- Many data resources are available to help inform decision making and strategy
 - U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local or State Government Administrative Data, etc.
- But the ungrounded simple “input-to-output” of data can often lead to uninformed insights and reactive strategy

Common Challenges and Hurdles when Conducting Assessments



Measurement Challenges

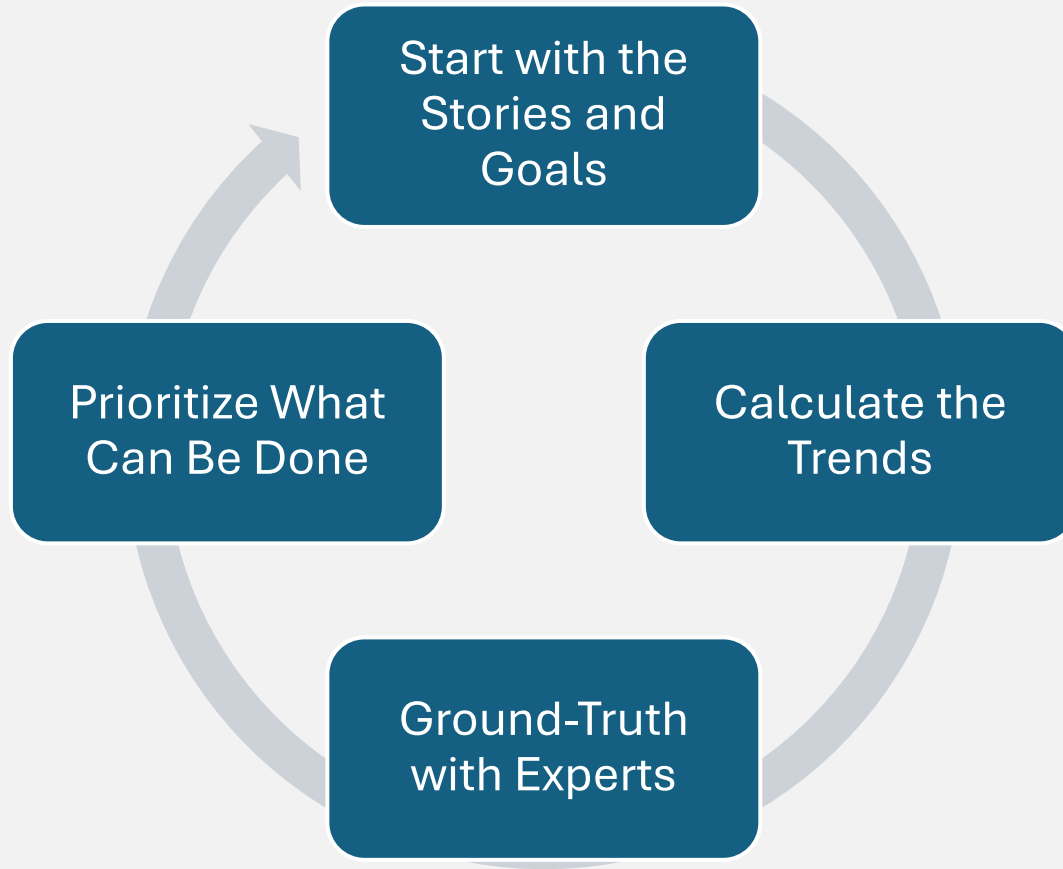
- Not sure of where to find data that would be most meaningful
- Need very specific or localized data
- Unaware of the scale of an impact or change (e.g., remote work)
- Not knowing how to measure or account for intangible changes (e.g., policy changes)



Strategy Challenges

- Unsure of where or how to begin
- Not sure of how (or if) to involve community input
- Focusing on one topic or issue and fail to see the compounding elements
- Cherry-picking solutions (e.g., I need data showing we need more parking)
- Biases towards the needs or demands of one group

Community Science's Approach



- Pairs strategic and measurement insights with community engagement
- Yields a holistic view of the community, economic, or housing change
- Identifies appropriate and approachable interventions

Start with **the Stories**



The “story” can be found in the initial reason for the engagement

- “We need more housing”
- “We need more jobs”

Identifying the prevailing issues from local stories and contexts

- Talk to the primary contacts (i.e., who initiated the engagement)
- Consult periodicals or community boards
- Compare similar places and apply the context(s)

Probe for the stories from primary contacts

- “What do you want your place to look like a year from now, five years from now, ten years from now, etc.?”
- What are the assets of your place that make it unique?

Start with the Stories – An Example Engagement

Small City, U.S.A.

- “We need more market-rate housing” was the story from primary contacts
- Discussions showed an interest in attracting new residents, attracting new employers, and building a stronger taxbase
- Background research and discussion with other contacts revealed the city’s associated stigma of poverty, crime, and homelessness
- Market-rate housing was seen as the panacea for desired revitalization
- From there, the initial focus shifted to both an assessment to market-rate housing need as well as an assessment of current housing needs and economic development metrics



Calculate **the Trends**

- Quantitative analysis of available data (or working to collect primary data)
- Start with key foundational metrics
 - Population growth
 - Housing growth
 - Economic trends
- Identify metrics from “the stories”
 - Building stock age
 - Business growth
 - Measures of crime
- Visualize the trends

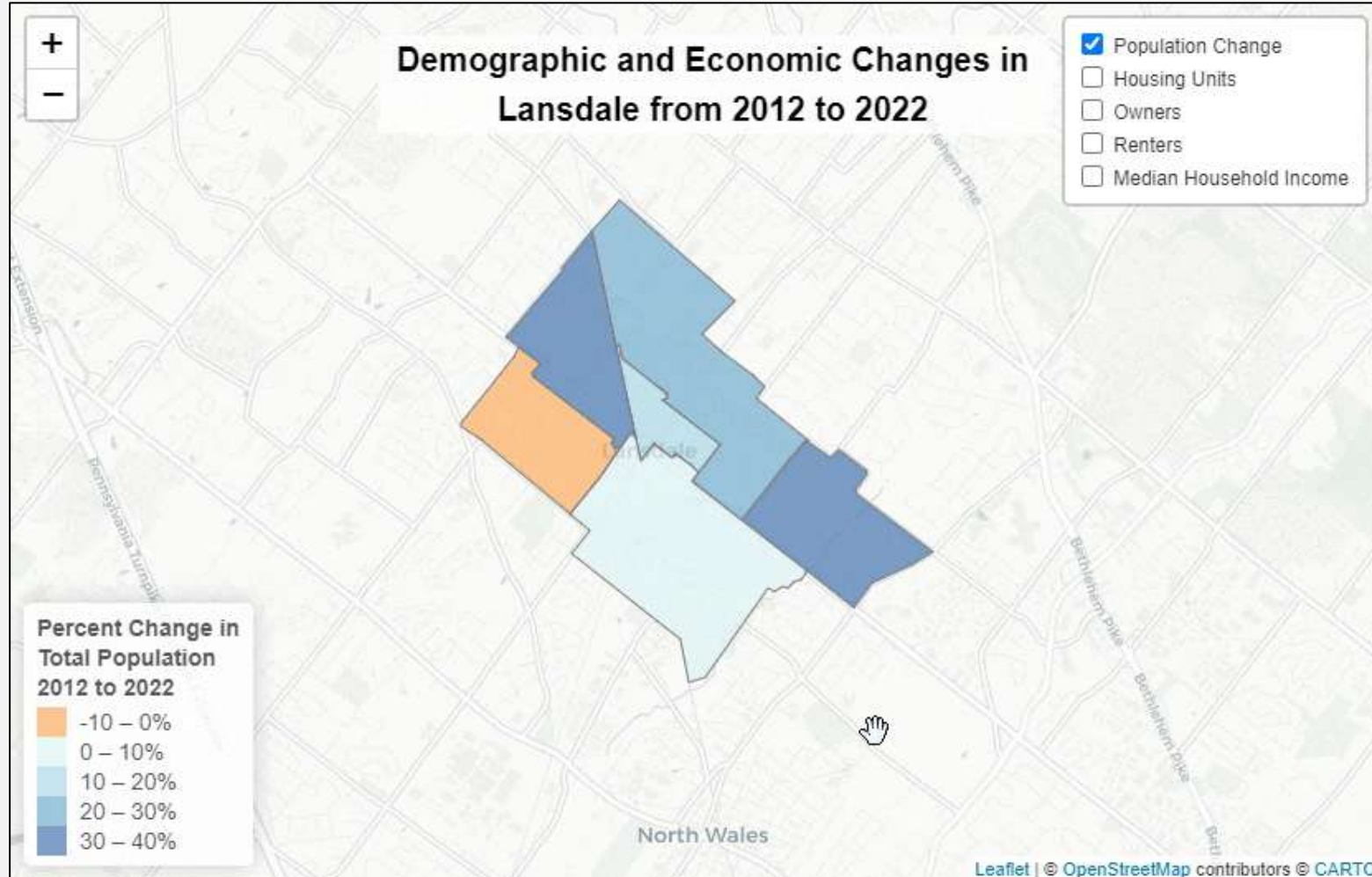
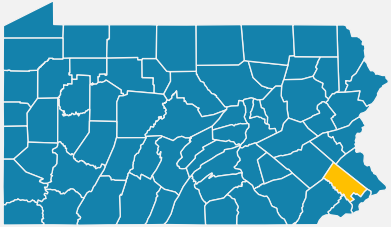


Calculate the Trends - Examples



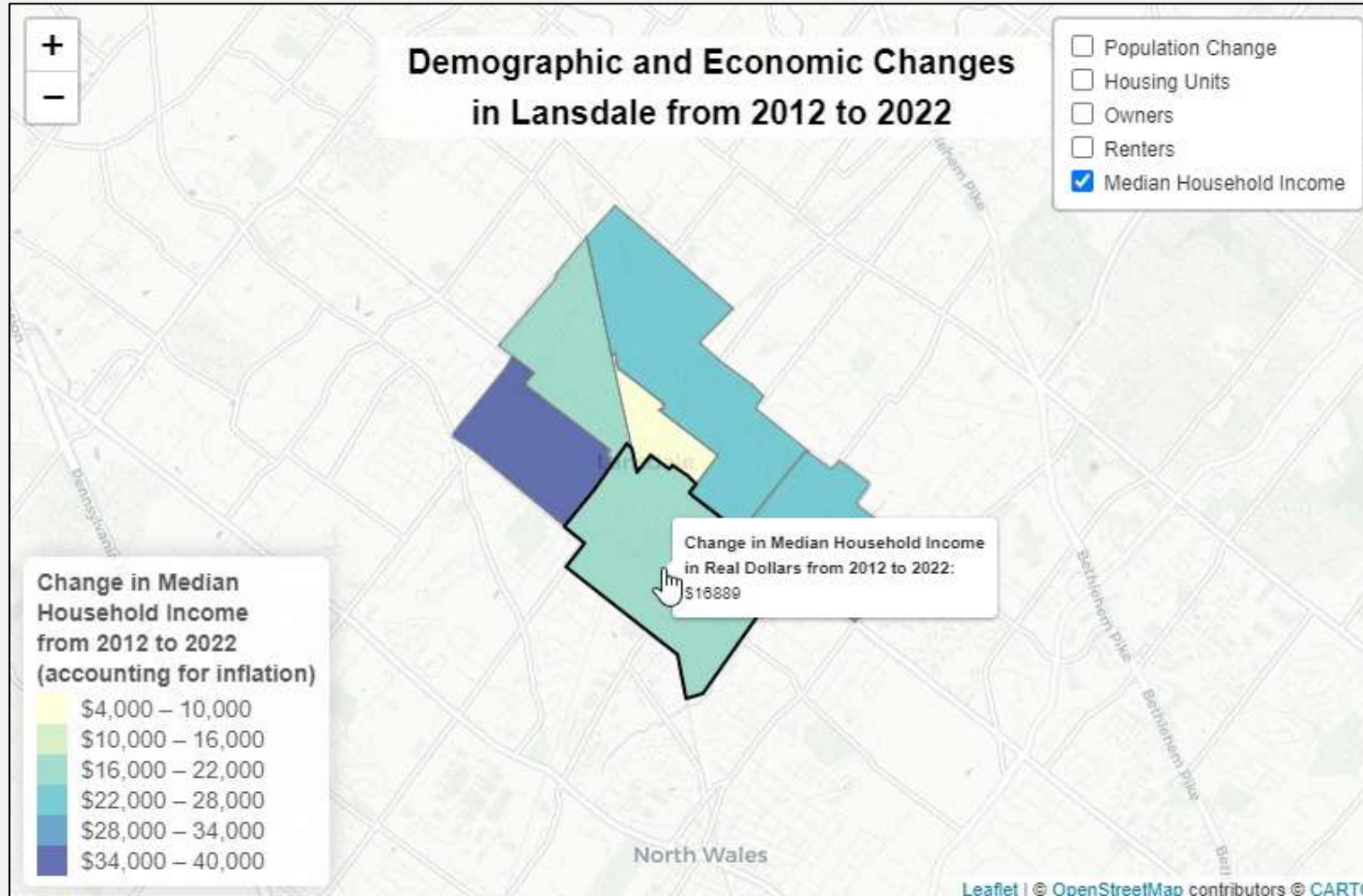
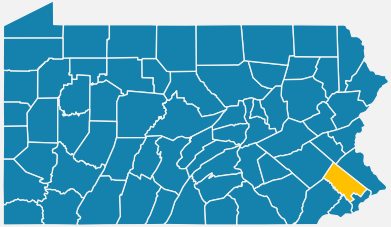
Neighborhood Population Changes

Lansdale, PA



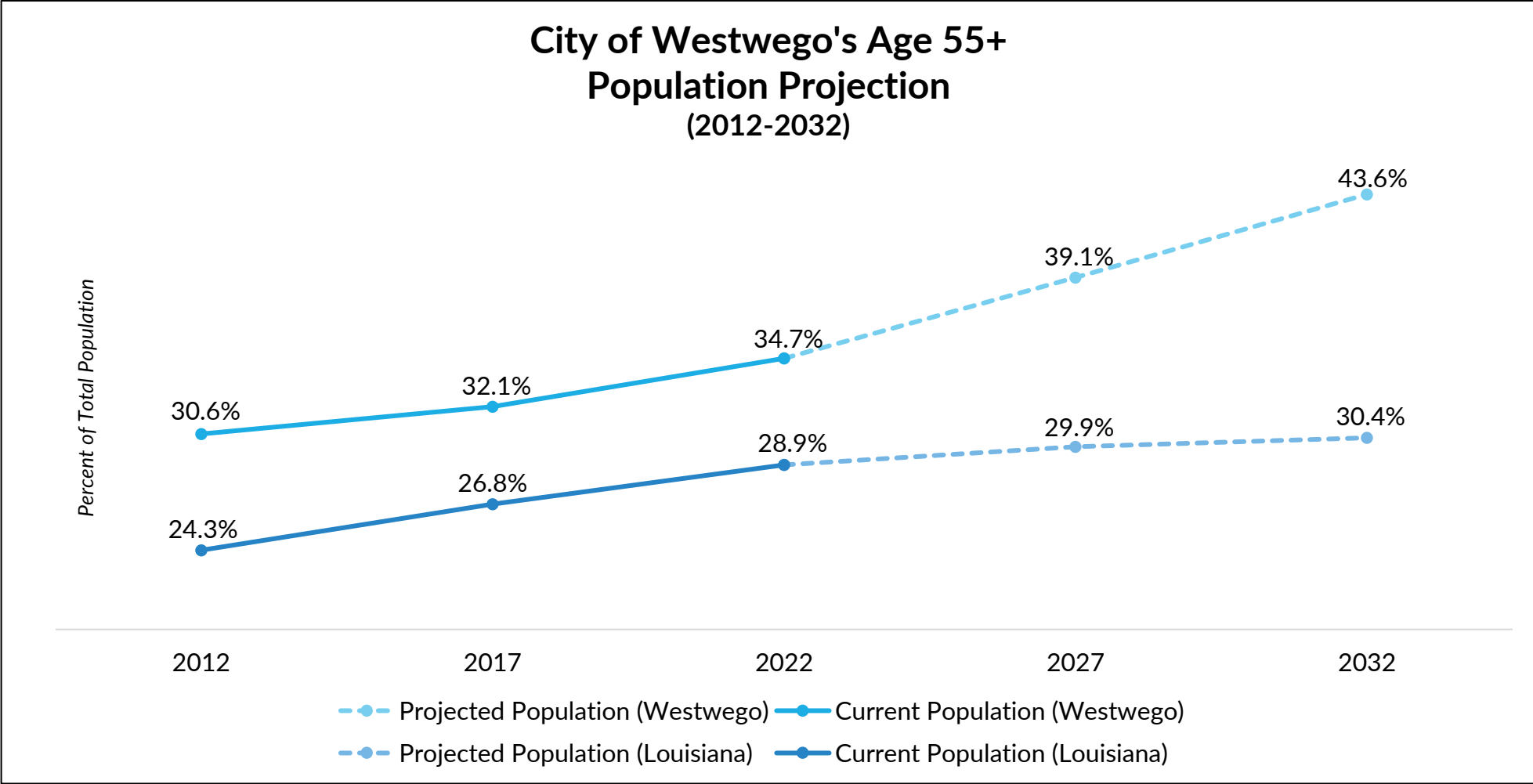
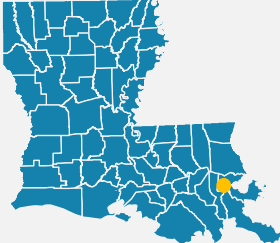
Median Household Income

Lansdale, PA



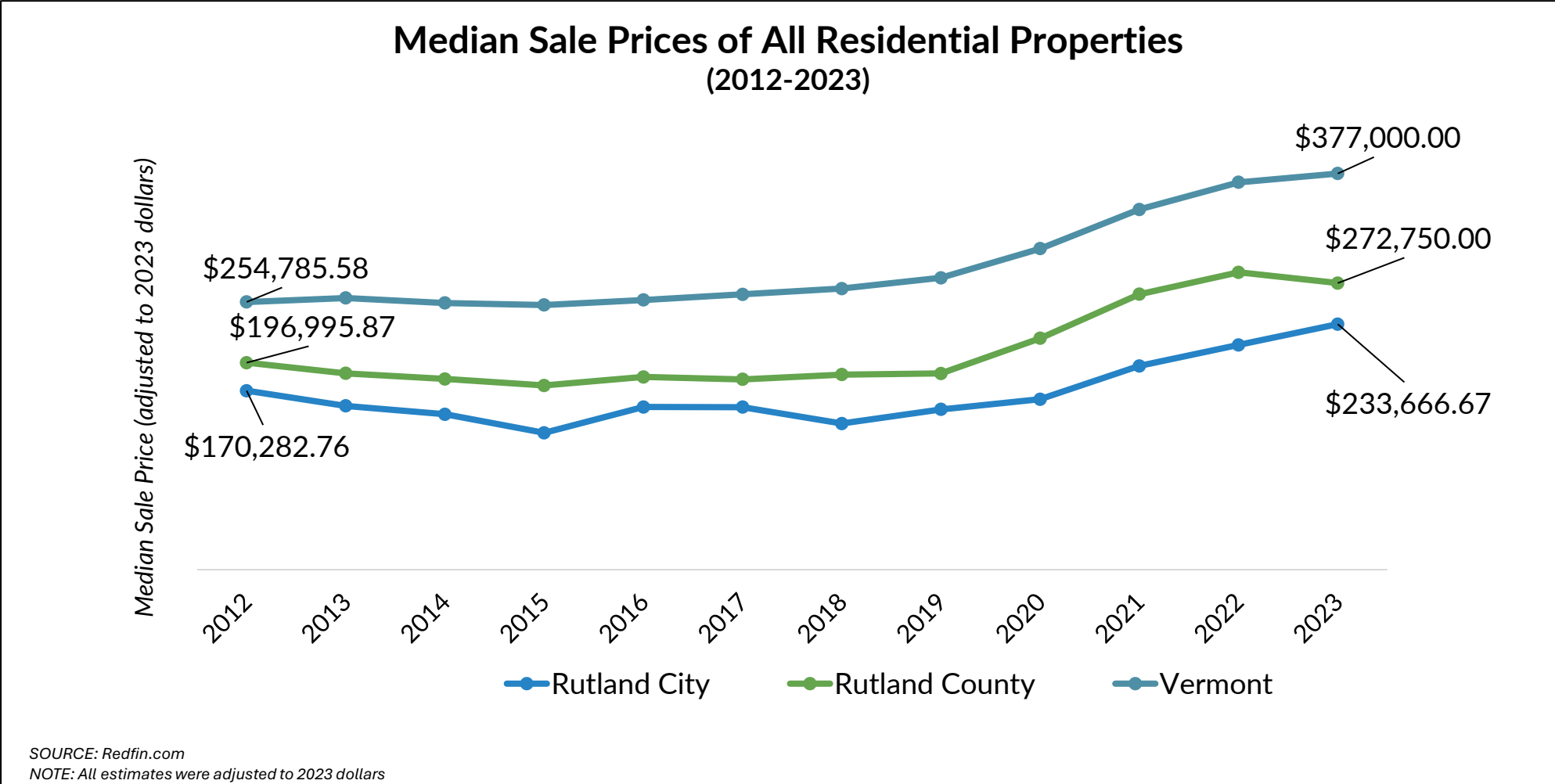
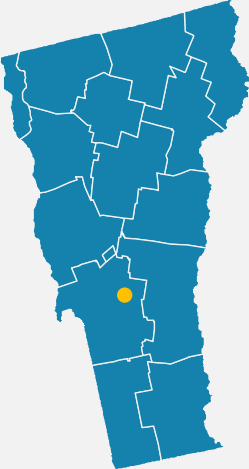
Aging Population Projection

Westwego, LA



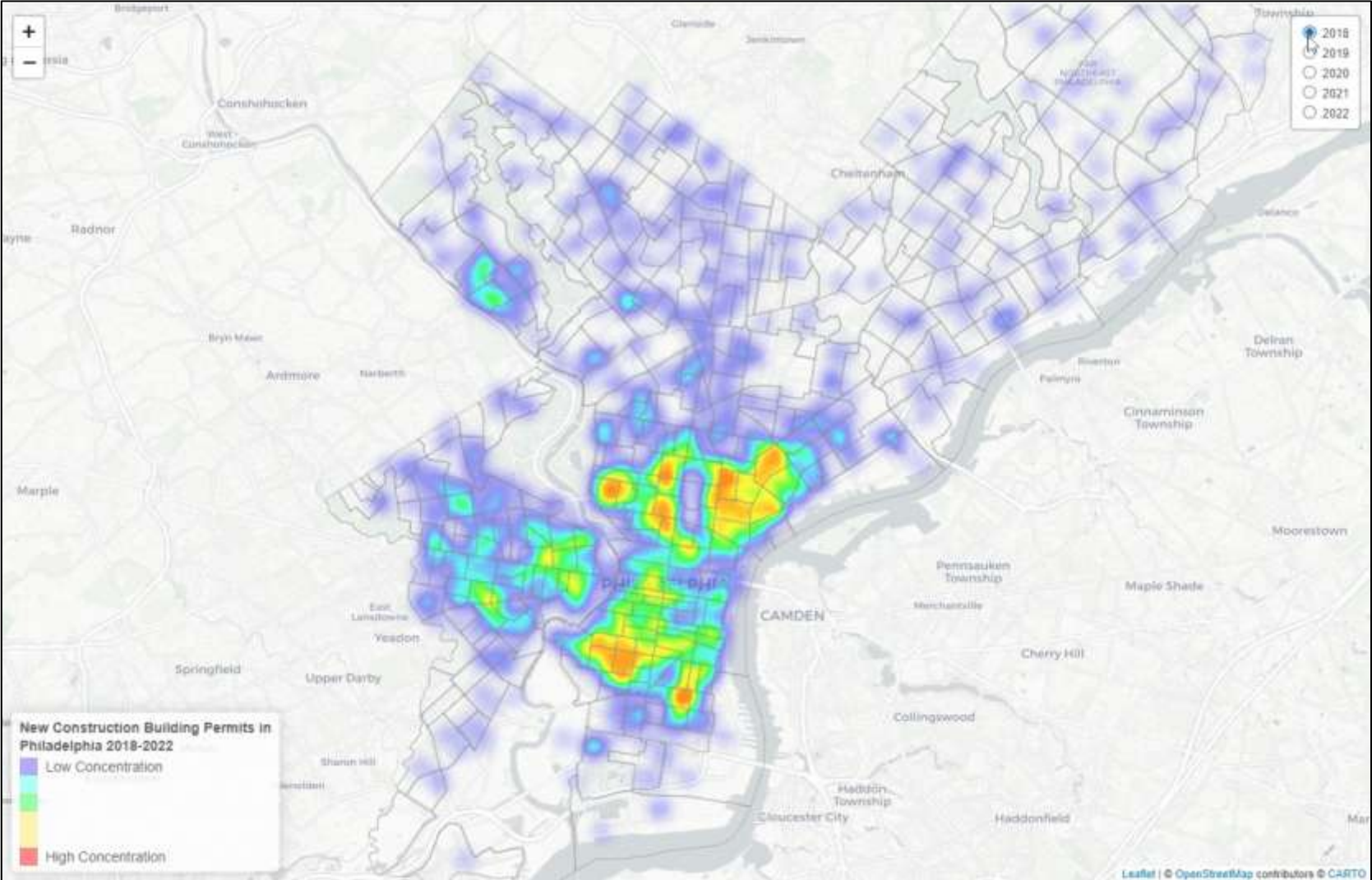
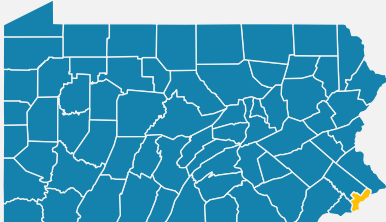
Comparing Housing Prices

Rutland, VT



Tracking New Construction

Philadelphia, PA



Considerations when Calculating the Trends

- Not every story or goal is going to have readily available data (there isn't a magic "data tree" out there)
 - E.g., demographics of local business owners
 - May require identification of "proxy metrics" or your own data collection
- It always better to plan out a prioritization of metrics before starting an analysis
 - Prevents "drowning in data"
- Data verification, cleaning, and visualizing take time
 - Build in check-in points to share progress and to allow for redirections on time and within budget

- Expertise comes in many forms
- Identify who knows the most about the identified issues and trends as well as who will be the most impacted
 - Housing Professionals
 - Local Community Leaders/Groups
 - Government Officials
 - Business Owners/Chamber of Commerce Officials
 - Residents
- Identify the key factors happening now (or will happen soon) that could affect these trends
 - Proposed new business tax
 - Large employer shutting down or leaving

Ground-Truth with Experts – An Example Engagement

Small City, U.S.A.

- Data showed that market-rate housing would exceed majority of current residents' financial means
- Asked about affordable housing trends with government officials, local housing professionals, investor-developers, and local renters
- Story of successful use and development of affordable housing but also an associated stigma from other communities and the use of local hotels to house unhoused populations during the COVID-19 pandemic



Considerations when Ground-Truthing with Experts

- Not all quantitative trends will pan out on the ground
- Administrative data will miss developing or potential trends that only those on the ground can see
- It is important to identify the most impacted as experts
 - Those traditionally left out of decision-making processes deserve to be heard
- Check your ground-truthing strategy and questions with your primary contacts
 - Avoids misinterpretations
 - Checking your own biases
 - Avoids inequitable promises

Prioritize **What Can Be Done**

- Synthesize what you've learned
 - Triangulation of data
- Identify the prevailing findings directly related to the reason of the engagement
 - Policy that negatively impacts housing development
 - Increasing unaffordability
- List the biggest opportunities and barriers
 - Growing group of community investor-developers
 - Employment opportunities

Prioritize What Can Be Done – Strategizing Solutions

- Identify the feasible “levers of change”
- Based on the opportunities and barriers, identify what you have control over or what you can impact
 - Create new financial incentive program or policy for development
 - Form a community advisory group
- Build in a “reversed timeline” for your strategy
 - What can you do in one year, the next six months, and next month to reach your goal
- Be proactive, rather than reactive
 - Build in adaptability

Prioritize What Can Be Done – An Example Engagement

Small City, U.S.A

- Listed barriers and opportunities to market-rate housing development
 - Showed the many barriers when simply focusing on market-rate development alone
 - Showed barriers related to limited control/agency
 - Showed opportunities to mixed-income development or offering market-rate housing opportunities within affordable housing development projects
 - Showed opportunities around de-stigmatizing the city's "brand," the institutional knowledge of city officials, and the success of home-grown investor-developers



Strategizing Solutions – An Example Engagement

Small City, U.S.A.

- The levers of change were resource curation, relationship building, and de-stigmatizing (i.e., incentivizing community investment)
 - Make financial and building resources available for local investor-developers
 - Continue to build relationships with existing and new investor-developers, nearby developers, as well as state and community actors
 - Continue to work against the stigma narrative by hosting events that attract regional visitors and potential investors



Considerations

- The process is cyclical
 - Calculating the Trends and Ground-Truthing can often lead to new stories or questions
 - Saturation reached by prioritization and consent
 - As well as timing and budget
- We need to check our own biases and interests
 - Sometimes an “interesting finding” may not be necessary
 - Your job is to translate the findings and information for the intended audience (i.e., speak their language)
- Compensate community members for their expertise, when possible
 - It was not a part of their job to provide expertise



Q & A



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Community
Development Data
Work For You



THANK YOU