

APRIL 2022

FORT PAYNE, AL

COMMUNITY FACTBOOK

A SUMMARY OF EXISTING TRENDS & CONDITIONS

FORWARD
FORT PAYNE

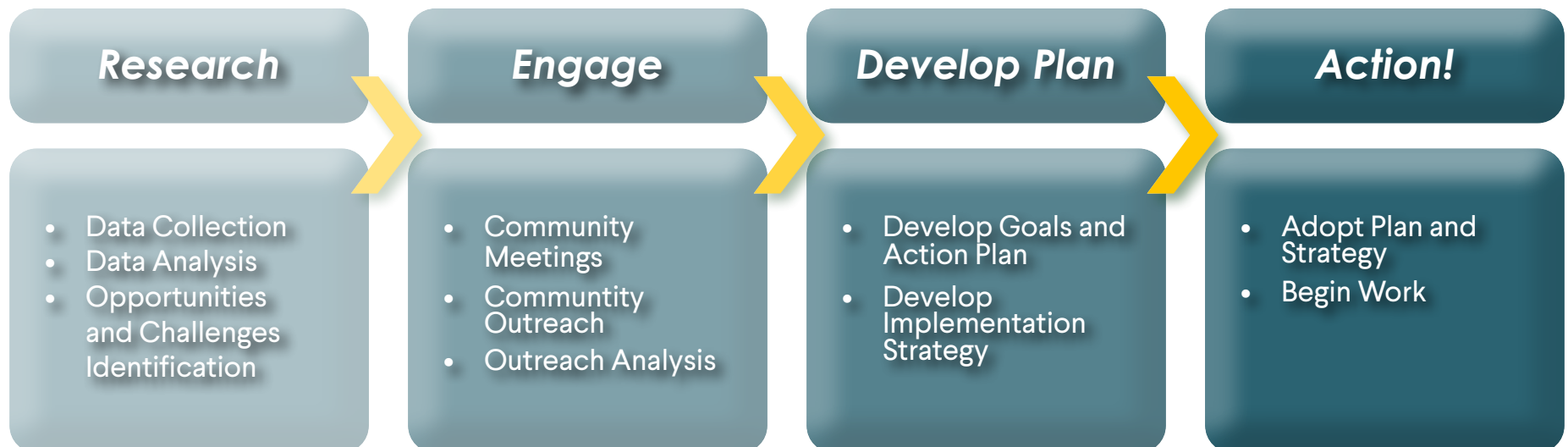
COMMUNITY FACTBOOK

Community Factbook is an analysis of the existing conditions and trends for the city of Fort Payne, AL. It is the first step in a four pronged approach to create and implement a strategic master plan for the community. This report was compiled using research from sources such as the US Census / American Communities Survey, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other recent state data. As an objective analysis, this report does not include any results of public input or stakeholder interviews... these findings will be collected and presented later in the strategic planning process. The following data in this report should be used to spark critical thinking and conversations about the future of Fort Payne and to identify important topics for further exploration in the comprehensive planning process.



In 2022, Fort Payne initiated a strategic master planning process to develop a new comprehensive plan for the city. Known as FORT PAYNE FORWARD, this process draws upon statistical analysis, community and stakeholder vision, and strategic recommendations to generate an action plan that can be used by the city to guide future development practices. The final product is a living document forged by and for the Fort Payne community.

PROCESS OVERVIEW



SUMMARY OF EXISTING TRENDS AND CONDITIONS

This report is structured as a categorical analysis of the current demographic context in which the FORT PAYNE FORWARD planning process will occur and identifies opportunities and issues to address in the final plan. Below are some key findings:

1. PEOPLE



Population and household characteristics and demographic trends.

Key Findings:

Growing Population...

2020 City Population

14,877

From 2000 to 2020, the population of Fort Payne grew by 1,939 people, or 15%.

Aging Population...

Median Age

38.8

The median age fell by 2% from 2000 to 2010, then rose by 9% from 2010 to 2019.

Diversifying Population...

Non White Residents

+ 77%

The racial minority increased from 19% of the population in 2000 to 34% in 2020.

2. PROSPERITY



Economy and employment, income, poverty, housing costs, and education.

Key Findings:

Increasing Poverty...

Poverty Rate

24.1%

The poverty rate in Fort Payne doubled from 12% in 2000 to 24% in 2019.

Falling Incomes...

Median Household Income

\$ 40,776

Median household income fell by 22% since 2000, vs. a decline of 4% statewide.

Declining Homeownership...

Owner Occupied Units

66.9%

The homeownership rate fell by 2% points since 2000, vs. a 5% point decline statewide.

3. PLACE



Development, land use and character, housing, transportation, and environment.

Key Findings:

Growing Housing Stock...

Total Housing Units

6,009

Total housing units in the city grew by 8% since 2000, vs. a 15% statewide increase.

Increasing Traffic...

Hwy 35 Avg. Daily Vehicles

+ 50%

Average daily vehicles on Hwy 35 in downtown increased from 2015 to 2020.

Parks and Green Space...

Park Acreage

46 acres

Fort Payne has 9 city parks plus 20,000 acres of adjacent state and national park land.

1. PEOPLE

Fort Payne is a growing population center in Northeast Alabama. Local population growth from 2000 to 2020 outpaced the population growth in both the county and state. The population trends that the final plan must address include a growing population, aging, and increasing racial diversity.

POPULATION

Fort Payne's population is growing. Along with a growing overall population in DeKalb County, the population of Fort Payne grew by just under 2,000 people from 2000 to 2020. The city has experienced modest yet continuous growth since 1900, however, Fort Payne must make conscious efforts to sustain this trend if it wishes to continue its growth as nationwide growth is beginning to slow down.

Nearby municipalities are growing. The nearby cities of Sylvania, Crossville, Cedar Bluff, Collinsville, and Rainsville all experienced strong population growth from 2000 to 2020. As the regional hub for all of these cities, a strong and vibrant Fort Payne will support the further growth of these cities and potentially help reverse the population decline experienced by other municipalities in the region.

DeKalb County will continue to grow. The county is projected to grow an additional 8.8% in population from 2020 to 2040, or an increase of roughly 6,200 people. This means Fort Payne has a good, but limited source of local growth to channel into the city.

City Population

+ 15%

From 2000 to 2020, the population of Fort Payne grew by 1,939 people.

County Population

+ 11%

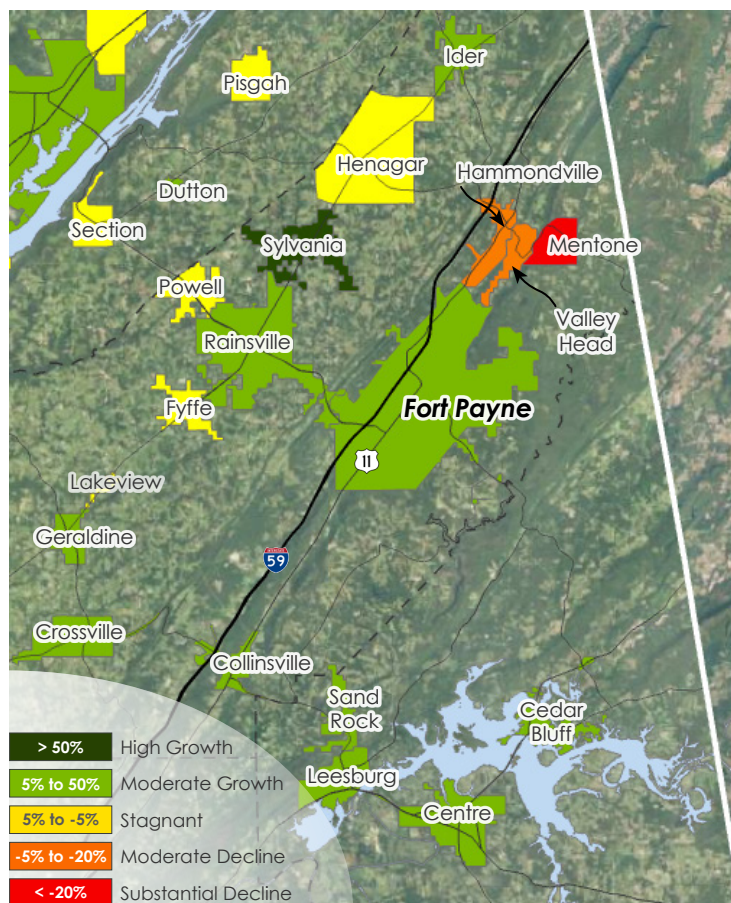
From 2000 to 2020, the population of DeKalb County grew by 7,156.

Region Population

+ 7%

Since 2000, the population of DeKalb and adjacent counties grew by 22,150.

Figure 1.1 - Regional City Growth Rates, 2000-2020



	Growth Rate
Sylvania	50.9%
Crossville	27.9%
Cedar Bluff	25.8%
Collinsville	25.2%
Rainsville	22.4%
Sand Rock	16.1%
Geraldine	15.8%
Fort Payne	15.0%
Leesburg	14.0%
Centre	11.5%
Ider	10.7%
Dutton	6.5%
Fyffe	- 0.4%
Lakeview	- 1.2%
Section	- 1.7%
Powell	- 2.7%
Pisgah	- 3.5%
Henagar	- 4.5%
Valley Head	- 5.6%
Hammondville	- 12.6%
Mentone	- 29.3%

Source: U.S. Decennial Censuses, 2000 & 2020

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Develop a strategy to sustain population growth through both economic development and quality of life improvement strategies.
2. Quantify challenges to Fort Payne's future growth while ensuring city services are sufficient for all residents.

HOUSEHOLDS

Fewer families but more households with children.

Since 2000, the number of family households declined from 3,508 to 3,219 (-8.2%). During the same time period, the number of households with children under 18 grew from 1,749 to 1,816 (+3.8%). This concentration of school age children in a smaller share of family households potentially has ramifications for the city's public education system and the types of amenities needed in Fort Payne.

Households growing in size.

While the total number of households in Fort Payne increased by just 0.4% from 2000 to 2019, larger households demonstrated a much higher growth rate. 6 and 7 person households each increased by roughly 50% while 2 and 3 person households each decreased by roughly 20%. These shifts drove an 8% increase in the city's average household size, which could affect municipal service needs in Fort Payne.

High share of households on SNAP (food stamps).

As of 2019, there are 1,258 households in Fort Payne receiving SNAP assistance, or 25% of all households. This share of households on food stamps is considerably higher than the countywide rate of 18%, the statewide rate of 14%, and the national rate of 12%. The challenge of food security and affordability should be a priority for the city.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Understand how changes in households affect the changing housing market, and how that could impact potential future development.

Total Households

5,066

From 2000 to 2019, the number of households increased by 20.

Households with Children Under 18

+ 4%

In 2019, 1,816 households had children living at home, up from 1,749 in 2000.

Average Household Size

2.7 people

The average household size increased by 8% from 2000 to 2019.

Defining a Household:

The following definitions related to households are used by both the US Census Bureau and Department of Housing and Urban Development. These definitions underly the terms "household" and "family" in the above statistics.

Household:

A person or group of people living together in one housing unit.

Housing Unit:

A house, apartment, mobile home, group of rooms, or single room, which are intended as separate living quarters.

Family Household:

A group of two or more people living together in a housing unit who are related by birth, marriage, adoption, etc.

Figure 1.3 - Household Types in Fort Payne, 2000-2019

	2000	2019	Percent Change	
Total Households	5,046	5,066	0.4%	—
Family	3,508	3,219	- 8.2%	↓
w/ Children < 18	1,749	1,816	3.8%	↑
Single-Parent	787	795	1.0%	—
non-Family	1,538	1,847	20.1%	↑
1 person	1,356	1,675	23.5%	↑
2 person	1,731	1,326	- 23.4%	↓
3 person	877	749	- 14.6%	↓
4 person	648	732	13.0%	↑
5 person	233	285	22.3%	↑
6 person	121	182	50.4%	↑
7+ person	80	117	46.3%	↑

Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000 & American Communities Survey (5-year est. 2015-2019)

AGE

Fort Payne's median age fell during the 2000s but then rose during the 2010s.

The median age of Fort Payne residents is 38.8 years old. That is slightly younger than both DeKalb County (39.5) and statewide (39.4). From 2000 to 2010, the city's median age fell by 2.2% at a time when median age increased by 3% countywide and 5% statewide. However, the city's median age trend reversed from 2010 to 2019, aging by 9% (roughly twice the rate of aging in the county and state). City services and development goals should be tailored to serve the needs of an rapidly aging population.

Youths decreasing as share of total population while seniors increasing in share.

From 2000 to 2019, the share of the population younger than 18 decreased from 28% to 26%. During that same time period, the share of the population 65 and older increased from 14% to 16%. As of 2019, the youth population of Fort Payne is 3,622 while the senior population is 2,216. If the city's median age continues to increase at the same pace as during the 2010s, then half the city's population will be 50 or older by the year 2050.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Prepare strategies for a community that better provides for the needs of an older population while preparing for continued aging in the future.
2. Develop a strategy to grow and retain the youth population by bolstering employment opportunities, varied housing options, and quality of life initiatives.

Median Age

38.8

Fort Payne's median age is lower but increasing faster than both the county and the state.

Households with Retirement Income

+ 22.6%

864 Fort Payne households had retirement income in 2019, up from 705 in 2000.

Senior Population

16%

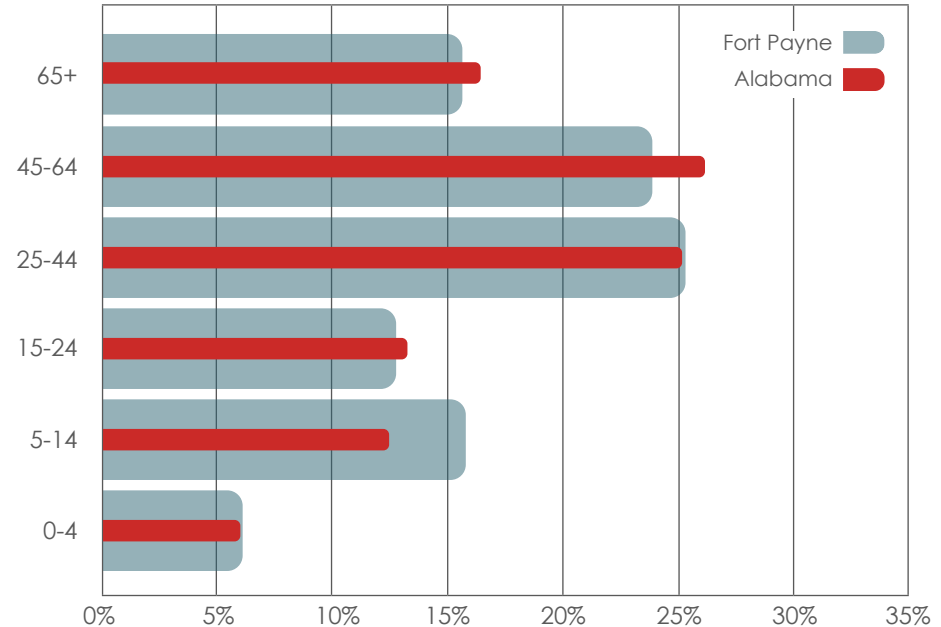
The share of the population 65 and older increased slightly from 2010 to 2019.

Youth Population

26%

The share of the population younger than 18 decreased slightly from 2010 to 2019.

Figure 1.4 - Age Groups, City & State in 2019



Source: American Communities Survey (5-year estimates, 2015-2019)

DIVERSITY

Population growth was driven almost entirely by the Hispanic population.

Between 2000 and 2020, the city's population increased by a total of 1,939 people. The Hispanic population during that same time period increased by 1,617. Therefore, Hispanics accounted for 83.4% of overall population growth and the remainder came from growth in the Multiracial and Asian populations.

Declining White and Black populations.

The White and Black populations of Fort Payne are shrinking, both in total number and as a percentage of the population. From 2000 to 2020, the number of white residents decreased by 1,902 people, or -18%. The white share of the population also fell by -15% points, down to 66%. The city's disproportionately low share of Black residents (3% vs 26% statewide) decreased even further as the city's Black population fell by 27% from 2000 to 2020.

Change in Share of White Population

- 15% pts.

White residents comprised 81% of the local population in 2000 vs 66% in 2020.

Growth Rate of Non White Population

+ 77%

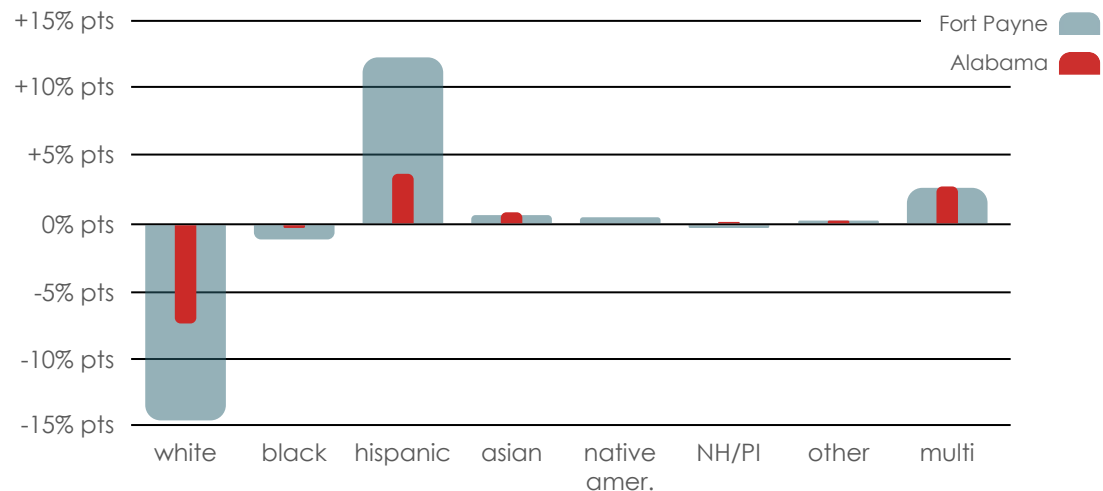
The non-white population increased from 2,471 to 4,364 between 2000 and 2020.

Figure 1.5 - Race & Ethnicity in Fort Payne, 2000-2020

	2000	2020	Growth Rate	
White	10,467	8,565	- 18.2%	↓
Black	582	427	- 26.7%	↓
Hispanic	1,565	3,183	103.3%	↑
Asian	26	104	300.0%	↑
Native American	65	78	20.0%	↑
HI Native/ Pac. Isl.	26	4	- 85.0%	↓
Other	0	26	div/0	
Multiracial	207	543	162.5%	↑

Source: U.S. Decennial Censuses, 2000 & 2020

Figure 1.6 - Change in Share of Population among Racial Groups, 2000-2020



Source: U.S. Decennial Censuses, 2000 & 2020

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Manage the planning process and align goals and outcomes in an equitable manner that is inclusive of the city's quickly diversifying population groups and addresses the unique needs of each group.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Relatively poor health outcomes in the county.

Among Alabama counties, DeKalb County ranks 35 of 67 in overall health outcomes according to a nationwide analysis by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Based on the study, DeKalb County has less violent crime and adult obesity than the statewide averages. However, DeKalb County has less access to exercise opportunities, more suicides, many more drug overdose deaths, and more preventable hospital stays than the statewide averages. Similar to the state, the leading causes of death in the county are cardiovascular disease and cancer, both of which have been linked to obesity. Roughly a third of residents in DeKalb County are obese.

Health Factors Ranking

46 of 67

On health factors (behavior, clinical care, socioeconomics, & environment) DeKalb was bottom 1/3 of the state.

Health Outcomes Ranking

35 of 67

On health outcomes (length & quality of life) DeKalb ranked in the bottom 1/2 of the state.

Driving Deaths

23 per 100,000

The rate of driving deaths in DeKalb county is 15% higher than the statewide rate.

Access to Exercise Opportunities

45%

Access to nearby locations for exercise is 16 percentage points lower than the statewide 61%.

Drug Overdose Deaths

29 per 100,000

The rate of drug OD deaths in DeKalb County is 81% higher than the statewide rate.

Uninsured

19%

The share of people under 65 in DeKalb County is 73% higher than the statewide share.

Opportunities and Challenges

- 1. Develop proactive health policies around existing and emerging health challenges.**
- 2. Better understand the impact of the built environment on community health outcomes.**

2. PROSPERITY

For both jobs and workers from Fort Payne, manufacturing is the primary employer, followed by health care/social assistance, and retail trade. The total number of jobs in Fort Payne decreased substantially between 2000 and 2019, with the manufacturing industry suffering a particularly high loss of over 5,000 jobs within the city. Most jobs in Fort Payne are held by out of town residents. The city has a low median household income and the poverty level is higher than the county, state, and nation.

EMPLOYMENT

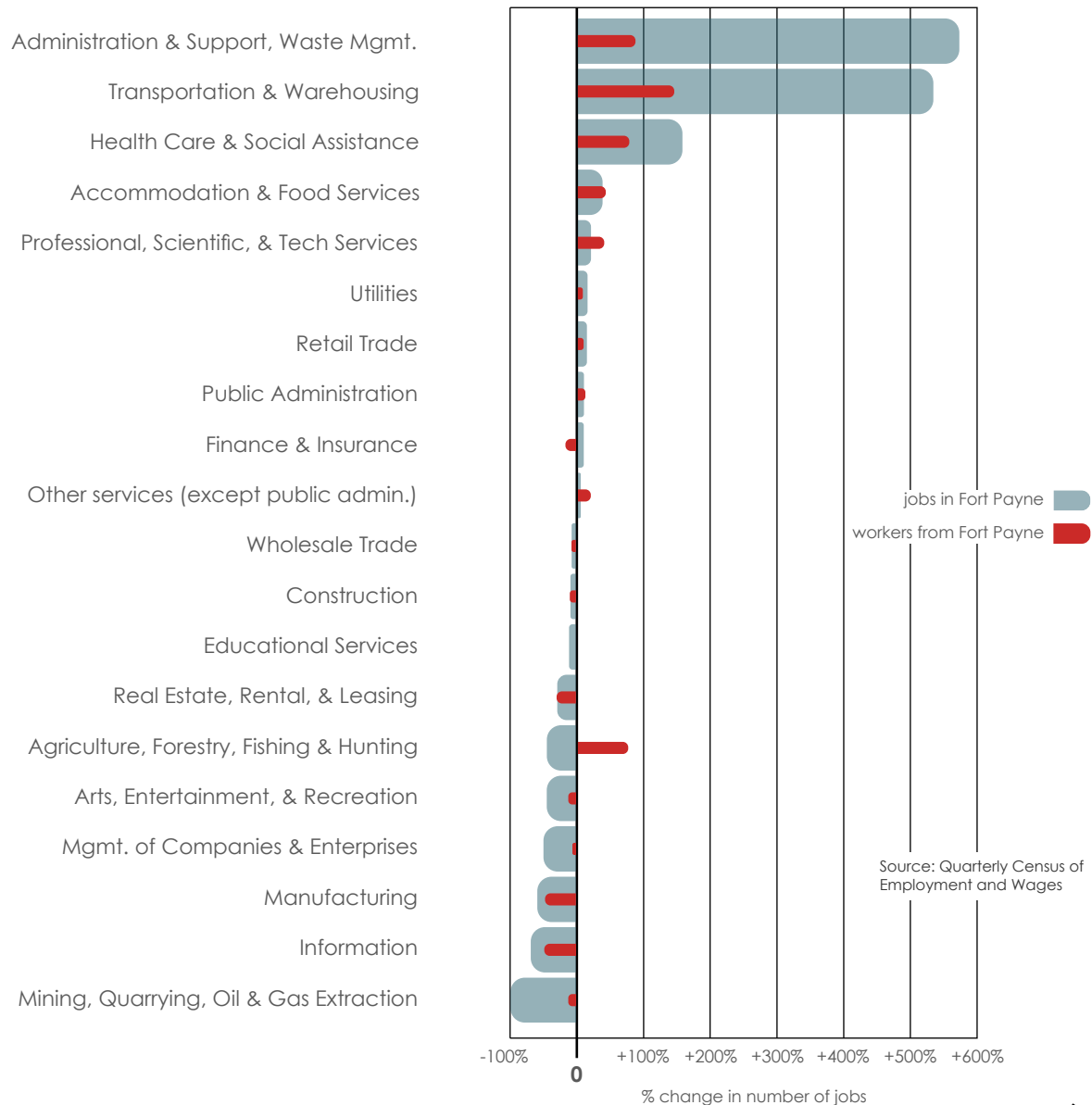
Sharp decline in local employment from 2000 to 2010 followed by expanded employment from 2010 to 2019.

From 2000 to 2010, the number of jobs in Fort Payne decreased from 15,224 to 10,819 (-29%). From 2010 to 2019, nearly half of the jobs lost since 2000 were recovered, increasing to 12,702 (+17%). Of the jobs in Fort Payne, 76% are held by out of town residents, leaving limited employment opportunities in town for residents who want to work close to home.

Important trends in major industries. As of 2019, Manufacturing was the largest employer among jobs and workers from Fort Payne, but it lost more jobs in the city from 2000 to 2019 than any other industry (-5,458 jobs/ -60%). Health Care and Social Assistance was the second largest employer for both jobs and workers from Fort Payne. Unlike the Manufacturing industry, this important employment sector is one of the fastest growing industries in the area. It increased by 1,045 jobs in Fort Payne (+156%).

Local industry specializations. As of 2019, the most important industry specialization for Fort Payne compared to DeKalb county is Management of Companies and Enterprises. Compared to the state, Manufacturing is Fort Payne's most important industry specialization. These specializations, along with growing industries, should be nurtured to form the export basis for Fort Payne's future economic growth.

Figure 2.1 - Growth Rate by Industry Sector in Fort Payne, 2000-2019



OCCUPATIONS

Professional Services is the top occupation for Fort Payne residents. Professional Services is the most common occupation among Fort Payne residents and also had one of the largest growth rates in employment from 2000 to 2019. It grew by 29% (+253 jobs) from 2000 to 2019. Production is the second largest occupation for Fort Payne residents. However, it shrank by 59% (-1,149 jobs) from 2000 to 2019.

Healthcare Support is the fastest growing occupation. Healthcare support had the highest growth rate for workers from Fort Payne from 2000 to 2019 at 519% (+167).

WORKFORCE

Decreasing unemployment along with state trends. Unemployment is only a measure of those without a job who are actively looking for work and does not include discouraged job seekers. The unemployment rate in Fort Payne increased sharply during the 2008 recession and peaked in January 2010 at 15.8%. During the economic recovery of the 2010's, the unemployment rate for Fort Payne fell steadily along with county, state, and national trends. However, the unemployment rate increased sharply again in 2020 due to the economic stress factors of the COVID-19 pandemic, peaking at 11.6% in Apr. 2020. This recovery has been much quicker, however, and local unemployment in Jun. 2021 was only 2.7%, compared to 3.7% in the state and 5.9% in the U.S.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Consider partnering with universities and community colleges to target the needs of employers and potential job markets.
2. Capitalize on industry specializations and growing employment sectors to maximize the local job market and grow the number of jobs and businesses in town.

Figure 2.2 - Employment by Occupation among Fort Payne Residents, 2019

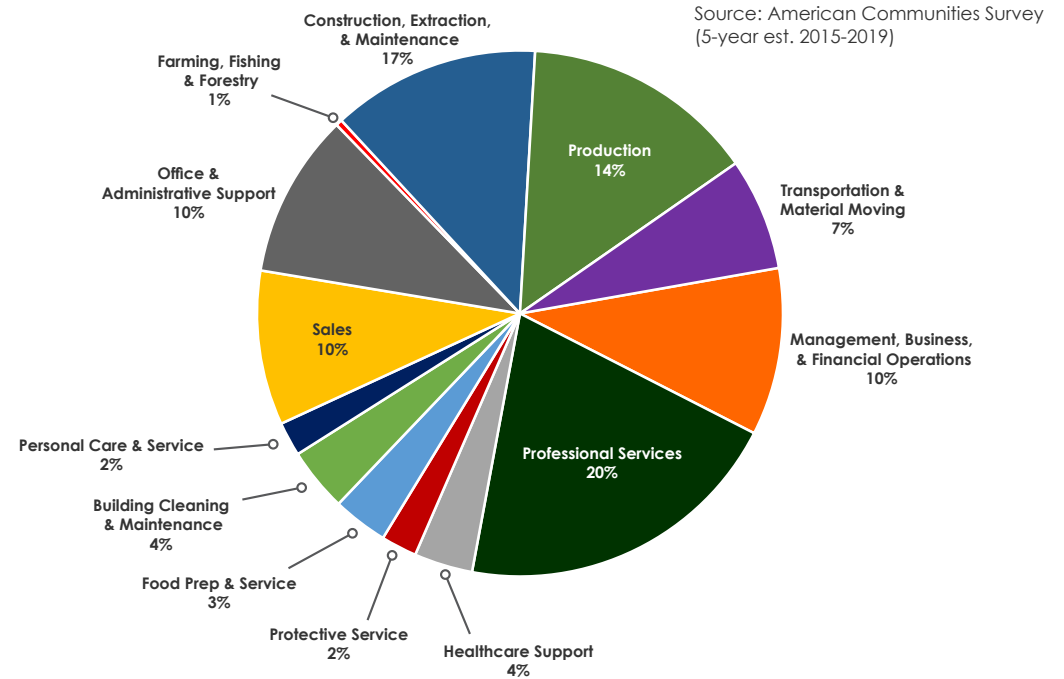
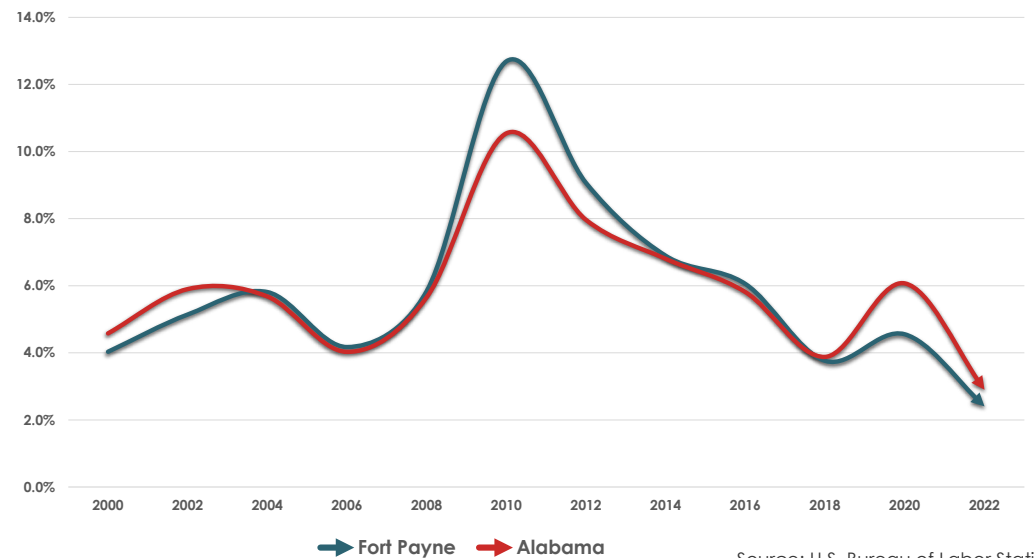


Figure 2.3 - Annual Unemployment Average, 2000-2022



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

PERSONAL PROSPERITY

Median household income falling quickly.

The median household income in Fort Payne in 2000 was \$52,302. Like state and county trends, Fort Payne's median income fell from 2000 to 2010, down to \$45,849. From 2010 to 2019, local median income continued to decline, down to \$40,776 (-\$11,526 since 2000). From 2000 to 2019, median income fell by 22% in Fort Payne vs. a 13% decline in DeKalb County and a 4% decline statewide.

Racial disparities in poverty rates.

Poverty levels are lowest for Asian (0%), White (14%), and Black (16%) residents. Poverty rates are much higher for Hispanic (51%) and Multiracial (62%) residents. Black residents were the only racial group for whom the poverty rate declined from 2000 to 2019. The Black poverty rate is less than half its rate in 2000, while White poverty levels increased slightly and Hispanic and Multiracial poverty levels more than doubled since 2000.

Fluctuations in youth and senior poverty rates.

The poverty rates for youth (<18) and working age (18-64) populations are higher than county and statewide rates while senior poverty is lower. Senior poverty was nearly cut in half since 2000 while youth and working age poverty both more than doubled.

Poverty Rate Calculations

The poverty rate refers to the percentage of the population whose household income falls below the nationally-calculated poverty thresholds. If a household's total (pre-tax) income is less than the corresponding threshold, all members of that family are considered to be in poverty. Thresholds are determined according to family size: for example, the threshold income for a family of four (with two children) in 2020 was \$26,200. The threshold for a single person under the age of 65 was \$12,760.

(Source: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services)

Median Household Income

\$40,776

Fort Payne's median income is lower than the statewide median (\$51k).

Poverty Rate

24.1%

As of 2019, nearly 1 in 4 residents lives below the federal poverty line.

Very Low Income Households

25.3%

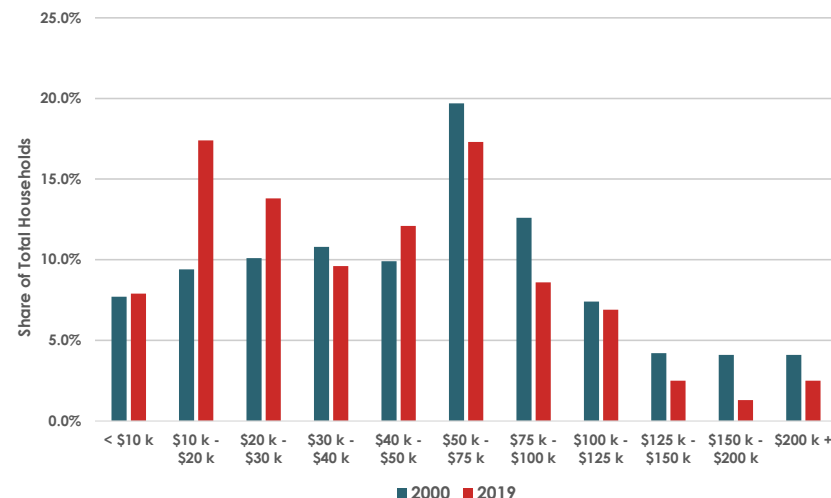
1 in 4 households earns less than \$20k annually (<30% of U.S. median income).

Figure 2.7 - Poverty Rates, 2000-2019

	2000	2019	Change	
Fort Payne	12.4%	24.1%	+11.7% pts.	↑
DeKalb County	15.4%	21.1%	+5.7% pts.	↑
Alabama	16.2%	16.7%	+0.5% pts.	—
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< 18 yrs	15.4%	38.3%	+22.9% pts.	↑
18-64 yrs	10.0%	21.4%	+11.4% pts.	↑
65+ yrs	17.6%	9.8%	-7.8% pts.	↓
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white	9.6%	14.0%	+4.4% pts.	↑
black	34.6%	16.2%	-18.4% pts.	↓
hispanic	21.2%	50.6%	+29.4% pts.	↑
asian	0%	0%	0% pts.	—
multi-racial	24.1%	61.9%	+37.8% pts.	↑

Source: American Communities Survey (5-year est., 2006-2010 & 2015-2019)

Figure 2.8 - Income Distribution in Fort Payne, 2000-2019



Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000 & American Communities Survey (5-year est. 2015-2019)

Median housing costs are relatively stable and low.

The median monthly rent and owner costs in Fort Payne were relatively consistent from 2000 to 2019, with less than 10% fluctuation in the year over year change. Median rent in Fort Payne is 5% lower than the countywide median rent of \$636 and 25% lower than the statewide median rent of \$802. Median owner costs in Fort Payne are 20% higher than the countywide median owner costs of \$518 and 19% lower than the statewide median owner costs of \$774.

Higher cost burden among renters than homeowners.

35% of renters in Fort Payne pay 30% or more of their monthly income in rent, while only 19% of homeowners pay 30% or more of their income to housing. The disparity is less pronounced for extreme cost-burdens, with 8% of renters paying 50% or more of their monthly income for housing and 7% of homeowners spending 50% or more of their income on housing.

The homeownership rate is decreasing while the housing vacancy rate is on the rise.

Fort Payne had a homeownership rate of 67% in 2019, which is 2 percentage points lower than the homeownership rate of 69% in 2000. The current homeownership rate is about the same rate as statewide (69%), but is lower than the homeownership rate for DeKalb County (72%). From 2000 to 2019, the number of vacant housing units increased by 75%, from 539 units in 2000 to 943 units in 2019.

Homeownership Rate

66.9%

Ownership fell from 69% in 2000 to 66% in 2010, then rose slightly to 67% in 2019.

Median Rent

\$602

Median rent in 2019 was lower than the median in both the county and state.

Median Monthly Ownership Cost

\$624

Median owner cost in 2019 was higher than the county but lower than statewide.

Rent as % of Household Income

27.3%

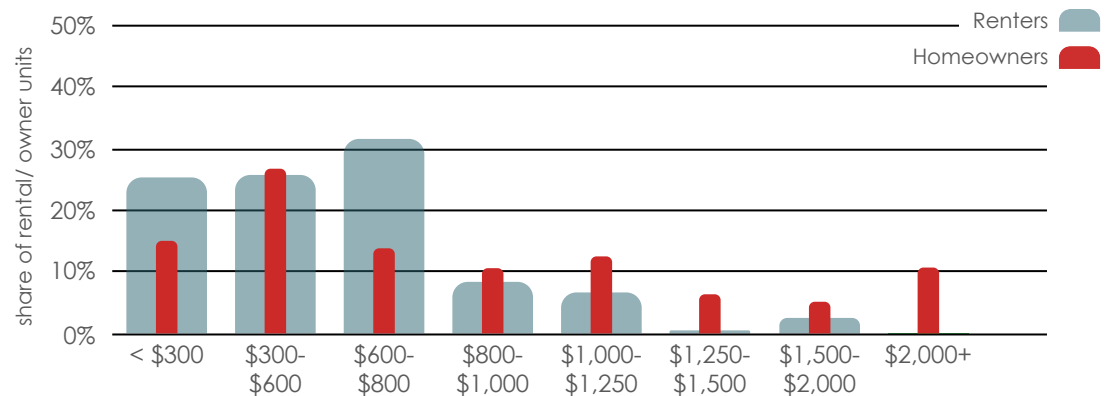
On median, renters spend about a quarter of their income on housing.

Owner Costs as % of Household Income

16.6%

On median, homeowners spend about a sixth of their income on housing.

Figure 2.9 - Distribution of Monthly Housing Costs in Fort Payne, 2019



Source: American Communities Survey (5-year est. 2015-2019)

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Target lower personal prosperity outcomes with quality education, job training, and local employment opportunities.

EDUCATION

Fewer people with less than a high school education and more people with a higher education degree.

In 2000, 34% of Fort Payne residents 25 and older had less than a high school education. By 2019, that proportion had dropped to 29%. Approximately 13% of residents 25 and older had a higher education degree in 2000, but by 2019 the ratio had increased slightly to 17%. This lags state trends for better educational attainment over the same period.

Subject level proficiency at Fort Payne High is very low.

For the 2018 to 2019 school year at Fort Payne High, only 28% of students were reading proficient compared to 45% in the state. Only 21% were math proficient compared to 47% in the state. Just 28% were science proficient compared to 39% in the state. Despite lower proficiency rates, students from Fort Payne High are generally more prepared for college and careers than their counterparts at the county and state level.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Maintain high academic standards and outcomes in area public schools.
2. Partner with continuing education and workforce development entities.

City Schools Report Card

B (89)

For the 2018-2019 year, the Fort Payne School System was rated 89/100.

2021 K-12 Public School Enrollment

3,426

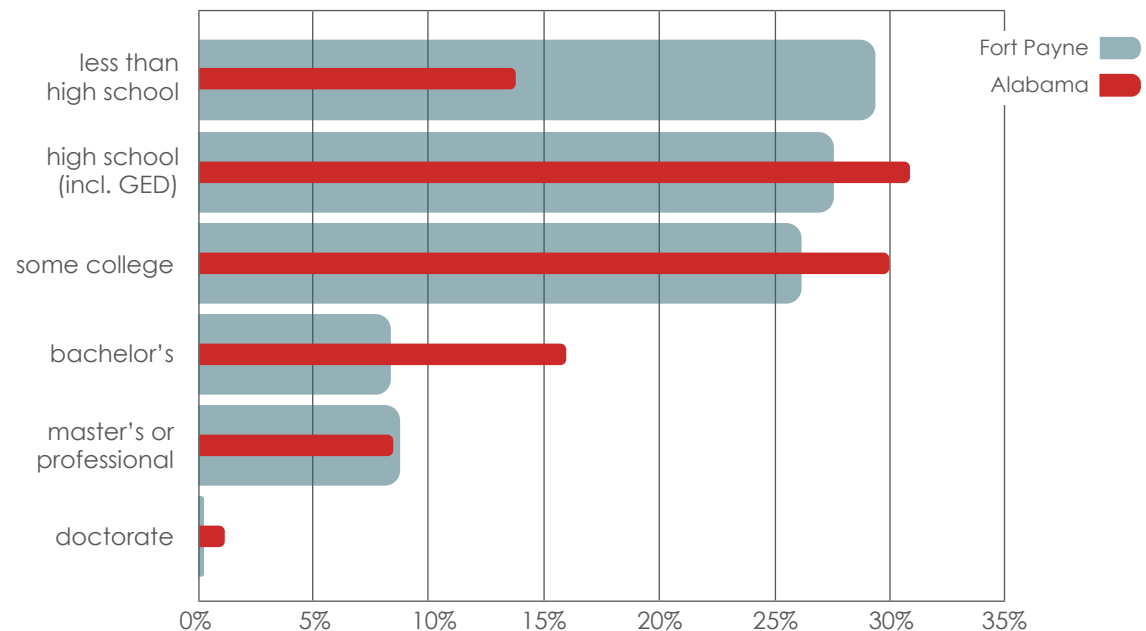
Fort Payne City Schools have ~ 3.5k students. 187 Fort Payne kids were in private school.

College/ Career Readiness

87%

7 of 8 Fort Payne High graduates were prepared for college/ work in 2019.

Figure 2.10 - Educational Attainment in Fort Payne, 2019



Source: American Communities Survey (5-year estimates, 2015-2019)

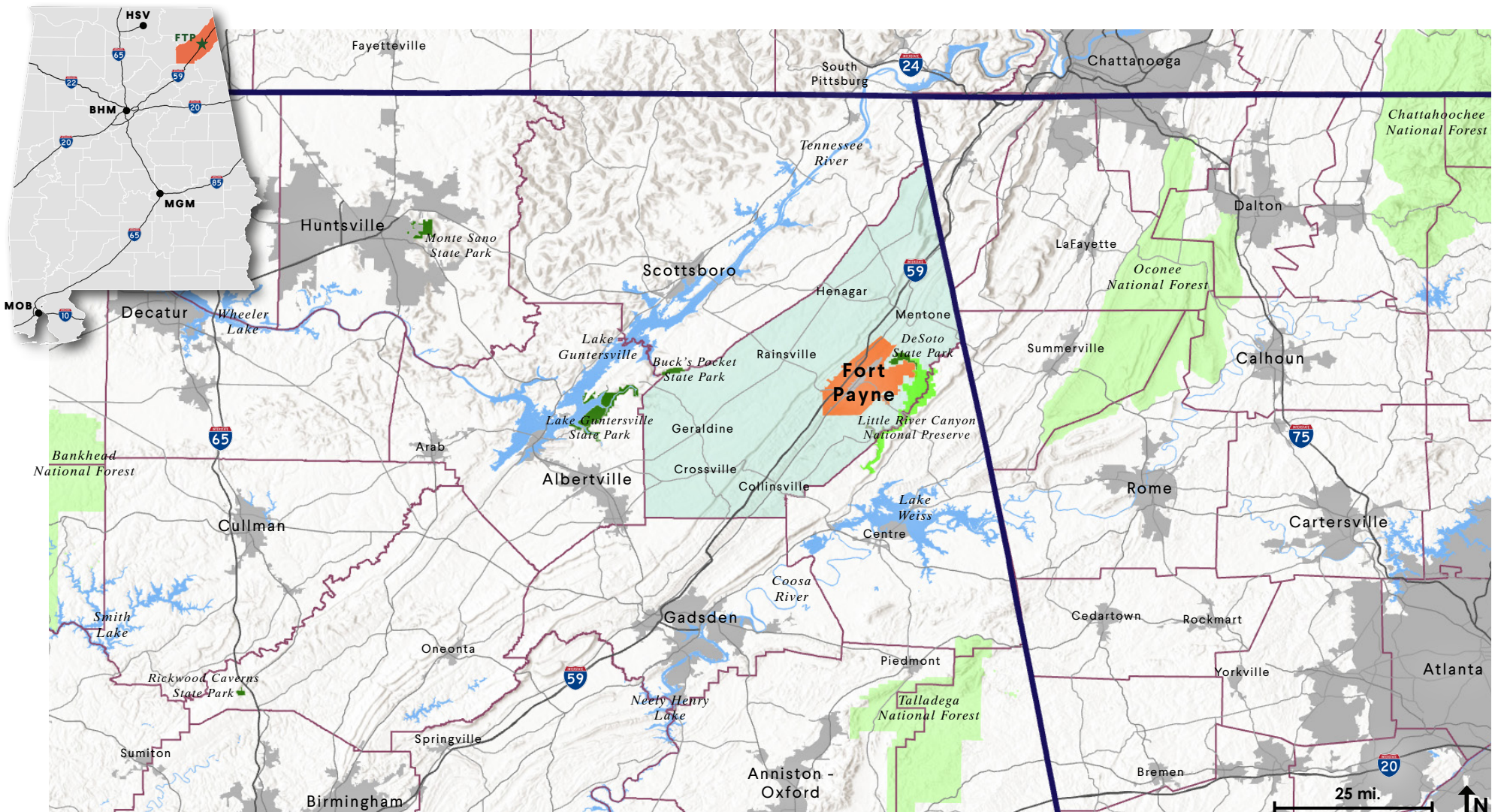
Figure 2.11 - Academic Year 2018-2019 Statistics

Source: Alabama State Department of Education

	Grade	Enrollment	Economically Disadvantaged	Reading Proficiency	Math Proficiency	Science Proficiency	Graduation Rate	College/ Career Readiness
Alabama Schools	B (84)	740,118	53%	45%	47%	39%	90%	75%
DeKalb C. Schools	B (80)	8,781	60%	34%	37%	29%	92%	74%
Wills Valley Elem.	B (82)	889	58%	?	?	?	-	-
Fort Payne Middle	B (82)	1,069	69%	46%	23%	39%	-	-
Fort Payne High	B (84)	994	64%	28%	21%	28%	97%	87%

3. PLACE

Fort Payne is a mid-size city of 56.5 square miles. Part of the Cumberland Plateau region of Alabama, it is nestled in Little Wills Valley between Big Ridge and Lookout Mountain in DeKalb County. The city is located in the northeast corner of Alabama just 13 miles from Lake Weiss and 20 miles from Lake Guntersville. Fort Payne is an urbanized community situated along US Hwy 11, I-59, and the Wills Valley Railroad, about an hour drive from Chattanooga, Rome, and Gadsden. With a fairly dense center, the city's built environment is contained largely to Little Wills Valley. Fort Payne's housing types are varied, with several decent alternatives to the standard single-family detached homes. The city hosts a variety of regionally attended events and offers residents a charming small-city feel near several larger cities and proximity to incredible outdoor recreational opportunities.



DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

Development character goes beyond standard parcel-by-parcel land use classification and describes the look, feel, and function of a district overall. As an example, a downtown may be home to various land uses, but the integration and interaction of these uses help to create the unique character of the district.

From the city's urban core to its outer periphery, Fort Payne's 57 sq miles include a variety of uses and densities. The following is an initial classification of the development types in Fort Payne today. Understanding the current forms of development throughout the city is important, and it is also prudent to understand the development types that do not currently exist. Fort Payne currently lacks a "missing middle" typology of multi-family or clustered housing that transitions from the higher density downtown area and is compatible in scale with single-family neighborhoods. The most prominent development pattern in city limits is still rural/ agricultural, with a few subdivisions and many more homes within the city's well defined central street grid. The more densified nature of the city due to topographic constraints has resulted in a fairly well developed network of sidewalks downtown, however, pedestrian infrastructure is sparse outside the city center and cycling infrastructure is lacking everywhere. There is still ample untouched tree cover on Big Ridge and Lookout Mountain. Lookout Mountain is also where the majority of rural/ agricultural land in city limits is located. The traditional urban fabric of the city occupies the full width of a 6-mile stretch of Little Wills Valley while Big Wills Valley is dominated by industrial uses, commercial strip development, and some subdivisions.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Consider the potential of investing more in the city's central commercial district to enhance the town center/ main street and elevate the experience of residents and visitors alike while providing more opportunity for future jobs and business growth.

Development History

Originally inhabited by Cherokee Native Americans, the modern city of Fort Payne was preceded by Willstown, an important Cherokee village on an ancient Native American trading path. The earliest European settlers in north Alabama originally came from the Carolinas in the early 1800's using this same Native American trail known at the time as the Georgia Road. They settled in and around the Tennessee Valley, establishing small family operated farms. During the period of Indian Removal, a fort commanded by Major Payne was built in 1838 northeast of Willstown and was used as a concentration camp for Native Americans in the region prior to their forced departure on the Trail of Tears. The settlement of Fort Payne developed around this fort, but remained a sparsely populated agricultural community until the 1880's. Fort Payne became the seat of DeKalb County in 1878 and was incorporated in 1889. Population in the area began to grow when rail service was brought to DeKalb County in 1871, providing freight and passenger service between Chattanooga and Birmingham. Beginning in 1889, Fort Payne experienced a 4-year 'boom period' driven by industrial development of local coal and iron resources. Following the city's brief boom years, the economy was redefined by the large scale manufacturing of hosiery starting in 1907, eventually giving Fort Payne the moniker 'Sock Capital of the World'. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Georgia Road was straightened and placed along the west side of the railroad, becoming part of US Hwy 11. Further growth was spurred by the 1960 construction of I-59 less than a mile from downtown. While the manufacturing industry is still highly active in the county, Fort Payne is building a more diversified economy bolstered by a growing tourist industry of the area's abundant historical sites and outdoor recreational opportunities on Lookout Mountain.

Commercial



Industrial



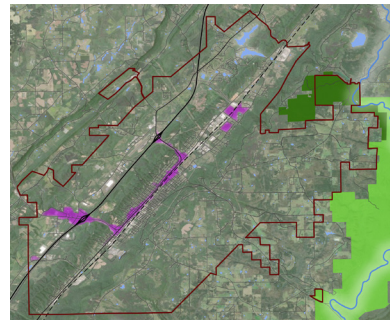
Residential



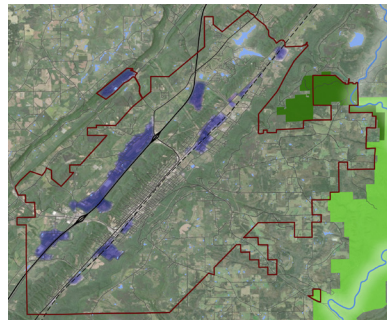
Rural/ Agricultural



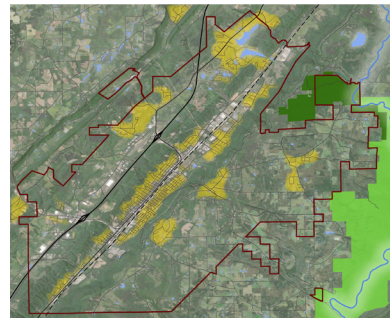
DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER MAP



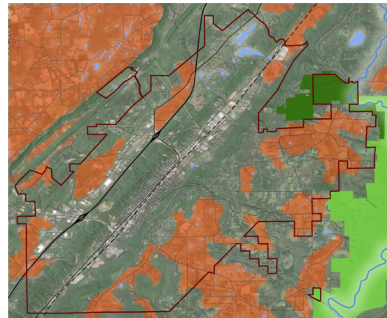
1 mi. **Commercial** ↑N



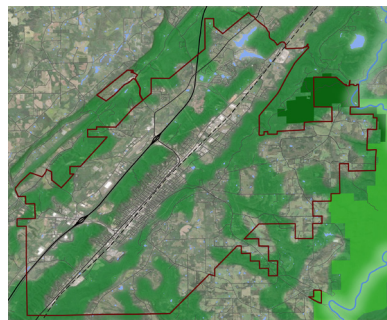
1 mi. **Industrial** ↑N



1 mi. **Suburban Residential** ↑N

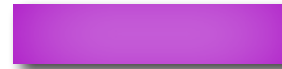


1 mi. **Rural/ Agricultural** ↑N



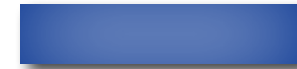
1 mi. **Natural/ Tree Cover** ↑N

Commercial



1,440 acres / 4.0% of city

Industrial



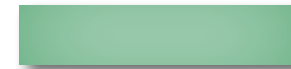
3,392 acres / 9.4% of city

Suburban Residential



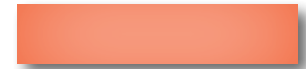
5,120 acres / 14.2% of city

Natural/ Tree Cover

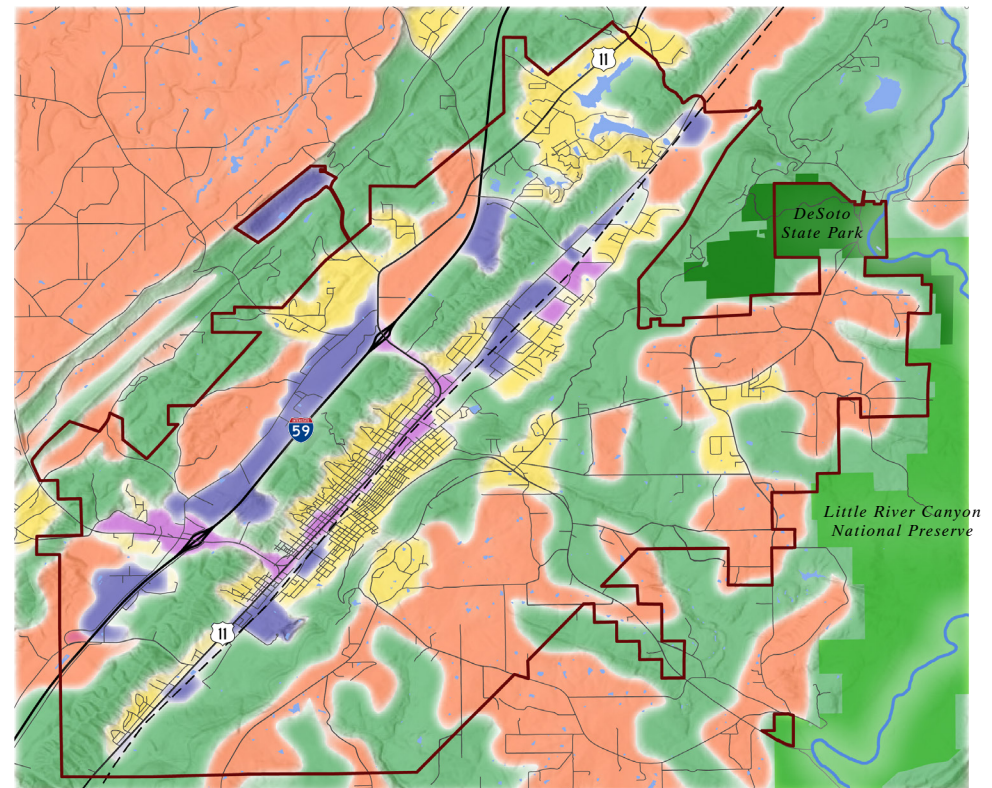


16,640 acres / 46.0% of city

Rural/ Agricultural



9,600 acres / 26.5% of city



1 mi. **Composite** ↑N

HOUSING STOCK

Slowing housing development since the 1970's.

Housing development in Fort Payne was slow before the 1970's but experienced a boom in the 70's during which 27% of the current housing stock was built. Apart from a small increase in the 1990's, housing development in Fort Payne has steadily decreased since the 1970's boom, and the 2010's had the lowest level of new housing construction of any recorded decade.

Missing middle housing.

Despite having a decent stock of multi-family housing for a city its size (approx. 16%), Fort Payne currently lacks true "missing middle housing" (multi-family neighborhoods of transitional density between downtown and single-family neighborhoods).

Increasing residential vacancy.

The percentage of vacant housing units has increased steadily from 10% in 2000 to 12% in 2010. The vacancy rate grew at an even faster rate from 2010 to 2019, with roughly 16% of the city's housing units vacant as of 2019.

Older housing stock than the county and state.

The median year of home construction in Fort Payne is 1978. This makes the median home in Fort Payne half a decade older than the median home in DeKalb County or the median home in Alabama. Only 16% of the homes in Fort Payne have been built since 2000, and only 4% since 2010.

Growth in the Housing Stock

7.6%

From 2000 to 2019, Fort Payne's housing stock grew by a total of 424 units.

Vacant Housing Units

943

16% of all housing units in 2019 were vacant, up from 10% in 2000.

Median Year Housing Built

1978

On median, Fort Payne's housing is older than the county and statewide median (both 1983).

Figure 3.3 - Date of Housing Unit Construction, as of 2019

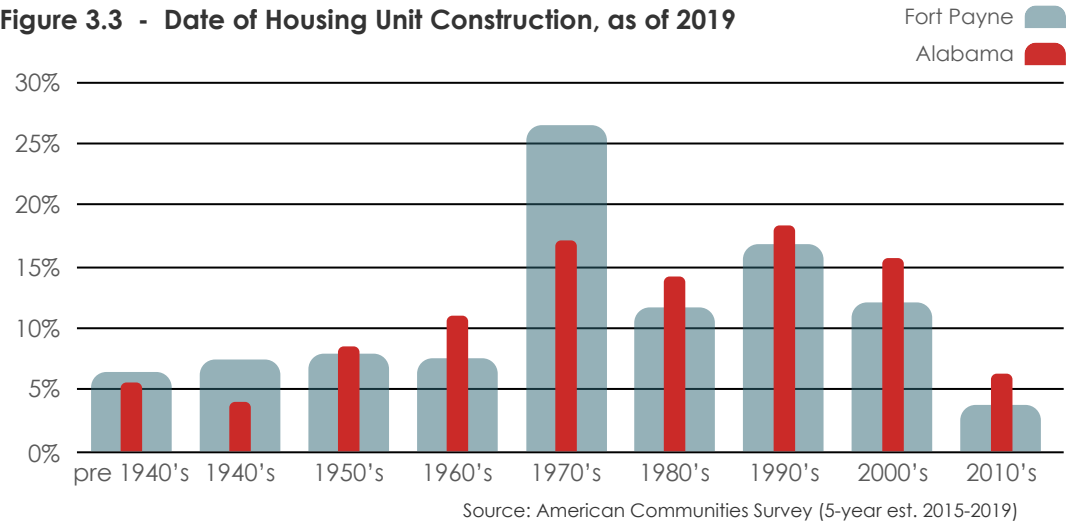
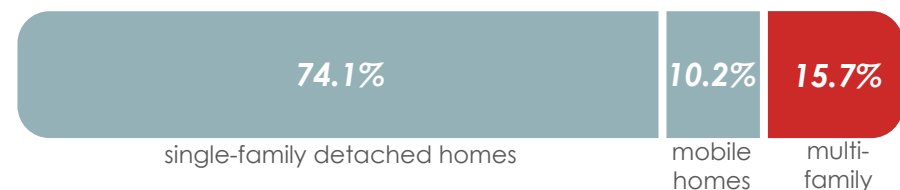


Figure 3.4 - Types of Housing in Fort Payne, 2019



Opportunities and Challenges

1. Lack of new housing construction could be a barrier to future population growth and economic development.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Fort Payne has good park coverage downtown and is a regional hub of outdoor recreation.

The Fort Payne city park system is a well developed network of 9 individual parks scattered throughout the downtown district. These parks provide a variety of user experiences and landscapes that cover 46 acres. Areas within a 10 minute walk of these parks (1/2 mile radius) comprise 2,380 acres that encompass nearly all of the city's street grid, or 6.6% of the city's total area. There are an additional 953 acres of dedicated green space within city limits atop Lookout Mountain that fall outside the city's jurisdiction. These parks: DeSoto State Park and Little River Canyon National Preserve cover an expanse of nearly 20,000 acres and serve as the primary drivers of Fort Payne's emerging ecotourism economy. Little River is the longest mountaintop river in the United States and the canyon through which it flows is the deepest east of the Mississippi River. Despite its wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities, the connectivity between individual parks is lacking and the city's ecotourism industry would benefit tremendously by implementing a comprehensive trail network linking the parks and commercial districts of downtown Fort Payne with the natural wonders perched atop Lookout Mountain.

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Preserve and update existing park spaces and expand recreational opportunities currently offered in the city.
2. Connect key parks and areas of the city with sidewalks and bike lanes along key roadways as well as strategic off-road trails.

Park
Acreage

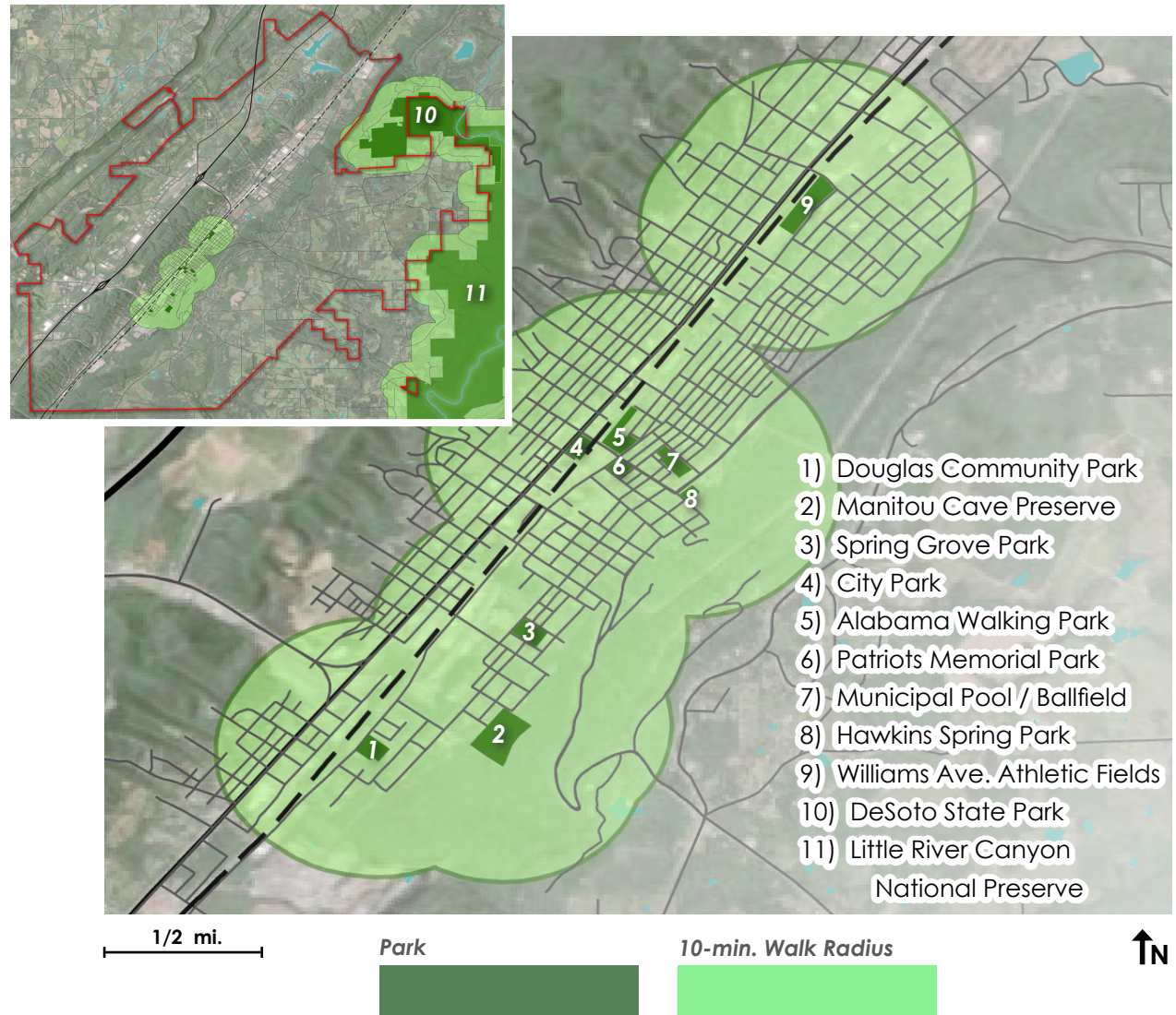
46 acres

The city has 9 parks totaling 46 acres, and is adjacent to a 1,900 acre state park and 20,000 acre national preserve

Pedestrian
Walk Shed

7% of city

Nearly all of downtown Fort Payne is within a 10 minute walk of a park



MOBILITY

Large traffic increases on AL 35.

Fort Payne has two major thoroughfares that conduct traffic directly through downtown. US 11 connects to Birmingham and Chattanooga and sees the most traffic in downtown Fort Payne, however, traffic levels on US 11 have largely remained the same since 2015. AL 35 connects to Lake Weiss and Scottsboro, and despite lower average traffic levels than US 11, traffic on this highway increased by 30% while descending Lookout Mountain, by 50% at the railroad crossing, and by 119% between US 11 and I-59. US 11 remains the downtown's primary artery, although AL 35 is an important emerging secondary corridor for the city.

No grade separated railroad crossings.

There are 19 railroad crossings in Fort Payne city limits, 5 of which are downtown. All of these crossings are at grade. With no overpasses or underpasses, this means the two halves of downtown are cut off from each other whenever a train comes through town.

Lack of cycling infrastructure.

Bike lanes and trails are currently absent from the city's infrastructure. In order to relieve traffic demands and become more of an outdoor recreation destination, the city should invest in trails, bike lanes, and alternate means of transit.



** (percent changes are from 2015 - 2020)

1/2 mi. ↑N

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Beautify important corridors such as Highways 11 and 35, while making improvements for increasing average levels of daily traffic at critical sites.
2. Add sidewalks and bike lanes to key roads and developments to improve local connectivity.
3. Build an overpass downtown that crosses the railroad.

COMMUTE PATTERNS

Decreasing share of residents working in Fort Payne.

Fort Payne has a high percentage of residents working within city limits (about half). Despite this large share of residents working locally, this share has fallen significantly since 2000, from 70% down to 50% in 20 years. This trend is likely due to the decline of manufacturing jobs that were once the lifeblood of the city, forcing residents to seek other employment opportunities elsewhere. This trend also has the potential to impact issues such as traffic congestion.

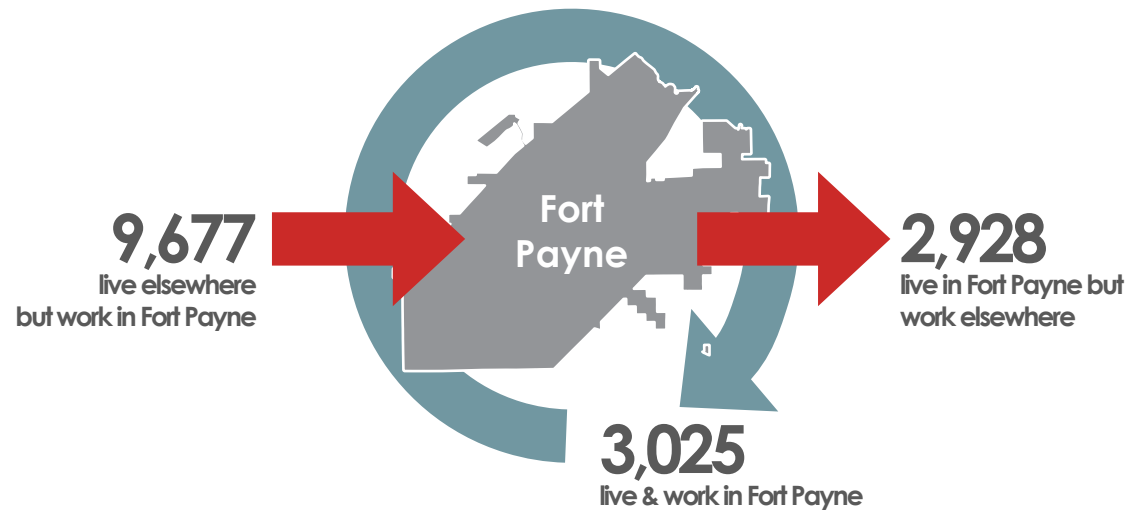
Fort Payne residents having to commute farther for work.

Since 2000, the share of Fort Payne residents commuting less than 10 miles to work has fallen from 75% to 58%. Meanwhile, the share commuting 50 miles or more to work has nearly doubled from 10% to 19%. As of 2019, the average commute time for residents is 19 minutes, up 12% since 2000. The share of residents commuting more than 45 minutes each way to work increased doubled from 7% in 2000 to 14% in 2019.

Smaller share of local jobs held by local residents.

In 2000, 4,727 of 15,224 (31%) jobs in Fort Payne were held by individuals who also lived within city limits. By 2019, the number of local jobs had decreased by 17%, increasing the competition for local jobs. As of 2019, just 3,025 of 12,702 (24%) local jobs were held by Fort Payne residents. As Fort Payne experiences overall population growth, efforts should be made to provide more employment opportunities for residents so that the city can become a place for people to live, work, and play.

Figure 2.4 - Labor Force Origin Destination, 2019



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, On the Map, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

Figure 2.5 - Where Fort Payne Residents are Employed, 2000-2019

	2000	2019
Fort Payne	69.9%	50.8%
Rainsville	2.8%	4.4%
Huntsville	0.8%	3.6%
Gadsden	1.7%	2.6%
Scottsboro	0.7%	2.5%
Chattanooga	2.8%	2.4%
Some other place	21.3%	33.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, On the Map, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

Figure 2.6 - Distance to Work for Fort Payne Residents, 2000-2019

	2000	2019
less than 10 mi.	74.5%	57.9%
10 mi. - 24 mi.	6.9%	10.5%
25 mi. - 49 mi.	8.8%	12.4%
50+ mi.	9.8%	19.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, On the Map, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

Opportunities and Challenges

1. Align planning goals to increase the number of employment opportunities in Fort Payne and target new commuters coming into the city.
2. Better understand municipal economic development strategies specific to regional employment centers.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES LIST

The following list is a summary of the opportunities and challenges derived from the data presented in this report. Each of these findings represents a key topic that should be addressed as the planning process transitions into community engagement and drafting of the final master plan's development goals.

1. PEOPLE

- Develop a strategy to sustain population growth through both economic development and quality of life improvement strategies.
- Quantify challenges to Fort Payne's future growth while ensuring city services are sufficient for all residents.
- Understand how changes in households affect the changing housing market, and how that could impact potential future development.
- Prepare strategies for a community that better provides for the needs of an older population while preparing for continued aging in the future.
- Develop a strategy to grow and retain the youth population by bolstering employment opportunities, varied housing options, and quality of life initiatives.
- Manage the planning process and align goals and outcomes in an equitable manner that is inclusive of the city's quickly diversifying population groups and addresses the unique needs of each group.
- Develop proactive health policies around existing and emerging health challenges.
- Better understand the impact of the built environment on community health outcomes.

2. PROSPERITY

- Consider partnering with universities and community colleges to target the needs of employers and potential job markets.
- Capitalize on industry specializations and growing employment sectors to maximize the local job market and grow the number of jobs and businesses in town.
- Target lower personal prosperity outcomes with quality education, job training, and local employment opportunities.
- Maintain high academic standards and outcomes in area public schools.
- Partner with continuing education and workforce development entities.

3. PLACE

- Consider the potential of investing more in the city's central commercial district to enhance the town center/ main street and elevate the experience of residents and visitors alike while providing more opportunity for future jobs and business growth.
- Lack of new housing construction could be a barrier to future population growth and economic development.
- Preserve and update existing park spaces and expand recreational opportunities currently offered in the city.
- Connect key parks and areas of the city with sidewalks and bike lanes along key roadways as well as strategic off-road trails.
- Beautify important corridors such as Highways 11 and 35, while making improvements for increasing average levels of daily traffic at critical sites.
- Add sidewalks and bike lanes to key roads and developments to improve local connectivity.
- Build an overpass downtown that crosses the railroad.
- Align planning goals to increase the number of employment opportunities in Fort Payne and target new commuters coming into the city.
- Better understand municipal economic development strategies specific to regional employment centers.



FORWARD
FORT PAYNE