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CIRBN
City of Bloomington
- City Manager's Office
- City Clerks Office
- Economic Development Department
- Fire Department
- PACE Department
- Parks and Recreation Department
- Police Department
- Public Works Department
- Water Department

City of Bloomington Township Assessor
City of Bloomington Public Library
Ecology Action Center
McLean County Health Department
McLean County Chamber of Commerce
McLean County Museum of History
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McLean County Regional GIS Consortium (McGIS)
McLean County Wellness Coalition
West Bloomington Revitalization Project

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to guide the physical planning and development policy for the community over a twenty year horizon. A sound understanding of the existing conditions is the key to developing a meaningful comprehensive plan that can have a long lasting impact on the community.

Identifying existing conditions helps to establish a reference point from which future decisions can be made. By providing a context of facts and framing the key issues, the people involved in the planning process have an understanding of the City and its characteristics.

This Existing Conditions Report is prepared as the first phase of the three-phase comprehensive planning effort for City of Bloomington, Illinois. In its draft format, this report will form the basis for conversations during the next phase of the planning process, the Community Visioning. A final copy of this report, reflecting the community feedback on this report, will be presented to the Planning Commission and the City Council toward the end of Phase 3 for adoption (May/June 2015).

The target audience for this report is community members as well as City of Bloomington staff and elected officials. It is organized into the following chapters:

1. **Historical Context** provides an insight into the roots of community and its influence on urban form.
2. **Demographics** covers the current demographic composition and highlights some future trends.
3. **Housing** identifies a few key characteristics of the housing stock such as type, value, ownership and affordability of housing in Bloomington.
4. **Land Use** discusses growth trends, current land use and zoning.
5. **Economics** reviews the major economic sectors in Bloomington and the Bloomington-Normal metro area, labor force issues and retail sales.
6. **Infrastructure** describes the condition of the City-owned infrastructure such as streets and sewers and also discusses the privately owned utilities such as electricity and gas.
7. **Health and Safety** highlights the impact of land use on health and discusses the public safety services such as fire and police.
8. **Natural Environment** examines the natural resources of Bloomington and the surrounding area.
9. **Community Facilities** identifies both City-owned facilities such as City Hall and the Bloomington Public Library, as well as public and private schools in the area.
10. **Regional Context** provides a perspective on issues at the state and national levels as well as technological or other advances that may have an impact on communities in the near future.

Most chapters are briefly introduced with some key facts about the topic. The key findings in those chapters give the reader a brief snapshot of what to expect within that chapter. A majority of the discussion in the chapter is data-driven. Readers can expect extensive use of location-based analysis using Geographic Information System (GIS). Limitations of the analysis include lack of data at micro scale, data spanning multiple years (2007-2013), and potential errors in compiling local data from a variety of sources.

At the end of most chapters, summaries of relevant plans and other ongoing efforts are provided. This is to ensure that the work done either by the City or other community members is not repeated, but built upon.

Some chapters include relevant news clips. Recent items in the news tend to have an influence on peoples' opinions as we prepare to envision our future. They also provide a context in which the comprehensive planning process takes place.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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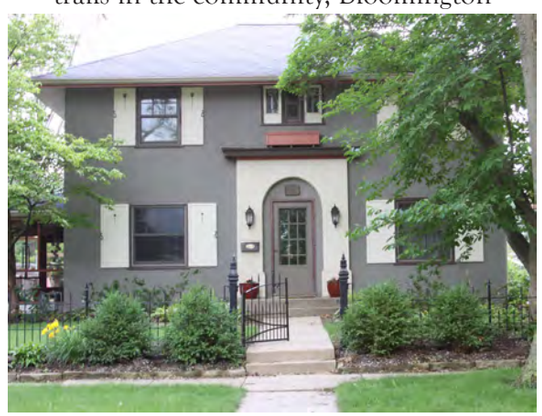
KEY FINDINGS

The City of Bloomington and the Bloomington-Normal metropolitan area have always enjoyed a stable economy in relation to many central Illinois communities as well as the state. This can be attributed to the many strengths of the area such as a strategic location between the population centers of Chicago and St. Louis, accessibility via road and air transportation, major employers, and the quality of neighborhoods and schools. Below are some key strengths identified in this report:

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Bloomington's population in 2010 was 76,610 and has grown 18.21% since 2000 and 91% since 1970. This growth rate was much higher than many of the surrounding communities.
- The natural environment of Bloomington and the surrounding area exhibits no physical constraints for growth.
- Bloomington's population is becoming increasingly educated. In 2010, 92.9% of the population over the age of 25 years

had a high school diploma, 44% of which had a bachelor's degree or higher. Both of these percentages are higher than those of the state. This indicates a highly skilled workforce.

- At a 7.4% unemployment rate, Bloomington's unemployment was much lower than that of the state in 2013. It should be noted that the unemployment rates in Bloomington and the metro area were lower relative to the state during the recent recession (2007-2009).
- The top 20 major employers in the metro area are a mix of sectors including finance, business and professional service, education, health, government, and leisure and hospitality. Together they provided 32,032 full time jobs in 2014.
- Due to its well paying jobs, strategic location, and accessibility via road and rail transportation, the Bloomington-Normal area's primary laborshed is central Illinois, and the secondary laborshed extends as far as Chicago. The new high speed rail project in Normal, once completed, has great potential to expand the primary laborshed.
- The Bloomington-Normal metro area and 20 other central Illinois communities are now served by the Central Illinois Regional Broadband Network (CIRBN) fiber optic network. This new tool provides high speed internet service at affordable cost. This new capability provides the area with new economic development opportunities.
- After reaching an all-time low in 2012, the number of new housing permits in the City increased in 2013. This is an encouraging sign of a rebounding economy.
- Bloomington has a healthy mix of housing types from single-family to multi family; historic mansions to modern homes; 1,500 square feet to 6,000 square feet. This diverse mix of homes caters to the diverse demographics of Bloomington.
- With nine acres of park per every thousand residents and over 25 miles of bike trails in the community, Bloomington



provides rich recreational opportunities for all of its residents.

- Bloomington's low crime rate is a sign of a relatively safe community. It should be noted that total crime in 2013 was less than that of 1989.

While these and other attributes make Bloomington the wonderful place it is, there are some areas of concern that need to be addressed to help keep Bloomington's great quality of place.

- Bloomington's demographic profile indicates an aging population. Consistent with national trends, the City's fastest growing age group is 45-64 years. Comprehensive planning is a great place for the community to address questions such as: can Bloomington be a community that allows our seniors to age in place? If so, what qualities make it more livable for them?
- While Bloomington's median household and family incomes were both higher than that of Illinois, they were both lower when compared to year 2000 inflation-adjusted

dollars. This is the trend at state and national levels as well. However, it is troublesome to note that the households making less than median income are geographically concentrated in the core of the City.

- In line with national trends, Bloomington's younger population group, 0-19 years, is growing at a slower pace in comparison to the older age group, 45-64. The distribution of this growth is not even throughout the City. The established neighborhoods, primarily served by the landlocked School District 87, are seeing a loss of younger populations. With District 87 serving nearly half of the City, this trend should be a matter of concern for the City and District 87.
- Median home values and median rents are both lower when compared to that of the state averages. However, 23% of all homeowners and 39.1% of renters are burdened with housing costs (paying 30% or more of their household income on housing). The percent of homeowners burdened is higher than that of the state at 17%.

- The majority of the rental properties are in the core of the City. Vacancy rates of rental properties are typically higher than those of ownership properties. Consistent with this trend, there is a higher concentration of vacant housing units in Bloomington's core. The long-term vacancy rate (vacant for 36 months or more), has grown from 2000 to 2010. This can be a sign of blight.
- In 2010, Bloomington's homeownership rate was 62.9%, nearly four and half percentage points lower than that of Illinois. Bloomington's median family income was higher than that of the state by $9,746. Typically, higher median incomes are associated with higher homeownership rates in the community. However, that was not the case in Bloomington. This could be attributed to several reasons such as student populations, transient workforce, or affordability of housing.
- Bloomington has experienced a tremendous amount of growth in the last 50 years. Since 1970, the City's population increased by 91%, its physical boundary increased by 147%, and street mileage has more than doubled. While growth is a positive sign for the City, it is important for the City to manage the growth efficiently so as not to put a burden on City services.
- The City of Bloomington currently has nearly 2,000 acres of vacant land with access to the City's infrastructure such as streets, water and sewer. The City should exercise caution before annexing more land.
- In 2014, the top 20 employers accounted for 32,032 full time jobs to the area economy, 50% of which were contributed by State Farm Insurance Companies. The future outlook of State Farm Insurance is key to the area's economy.
- The majority of the City's existing infrastructure was built between 1950 and 1980. Some of the existing infrastructure is deteriorating to a point where it is not providing an adequate level of service.
- Water usage in Bloomington is 11.5

million gallons per day or 4.3 billion gallons annually. This results in about 22 months of supply derived from the lakes at capacity. This is matter of concern during the drought months.

- The expansion of Bloomington has resulted in conversion of 1,794,624 acres of surrounding farmland since 1970. While convenient to have unlimited constraints for expansion, Bloomington and the metro area's growth poses a threat to the prime farmland in McLean County.
- Sugar Creek, Goose Creek, and Kickapoo Creek are the three major drainage ways in the community, comprising a total of approximately 59 miles. A majority of the creek banks are experiencing erosion.
- About 61.5% of McLean County residents were overweight or obese in 2009. Two major causes of obesity are sedentary lifestyles and access to fresh food. Land use can play a significant role in addressing these issues.
- Several of the low income census tracts predominantly located on the west side of

the City are currently designated as food deserts. This indicates a lack of access to healthy food.

- The National Fire Protection Association recommends a response time of six minutes for 90th percentile of calls. In 2013, 73.5% of all fire calls and 63.9% of all EMS calls were responded within six minutes. This is a matter of concern.

Challenges facing Bloomington are not unique. However, the geographic concentration of the issues in the core (inner City), that is primarily served by a landlocked school district makes the situation more complex.

The next several pages contain maps illustrating Bloomington's issues in the Core and their effects on District #87. Given the overall strengths of Bloomington, now is the time to address the core issues facing the community.

There will not be a right, wrong or easy solutions to these complex situations. The approach going forward should be "what is best for Bloomington?" The solutions must come from within the community during the public outreach phase.

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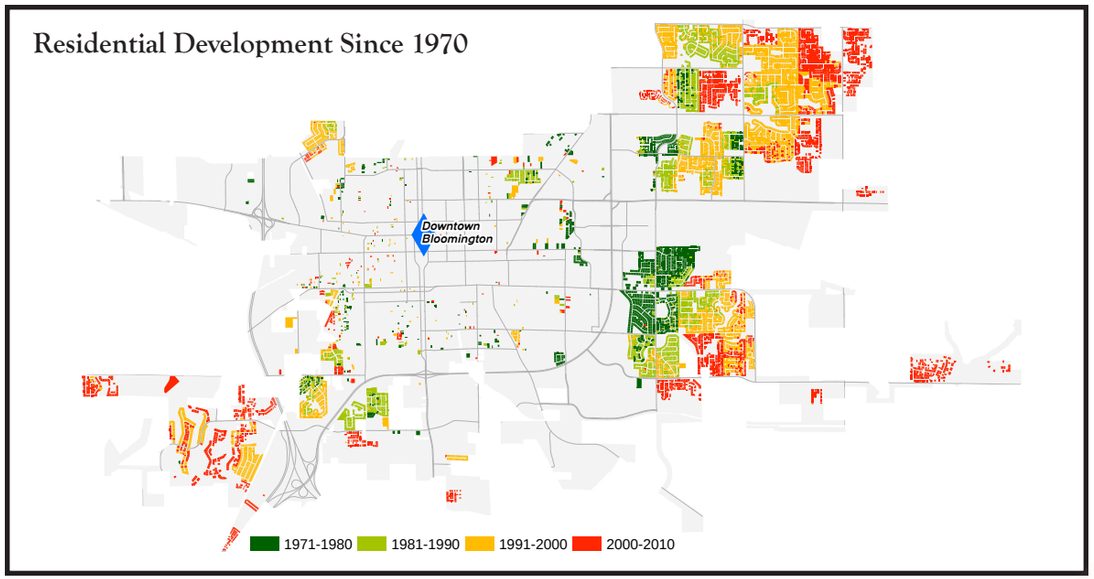
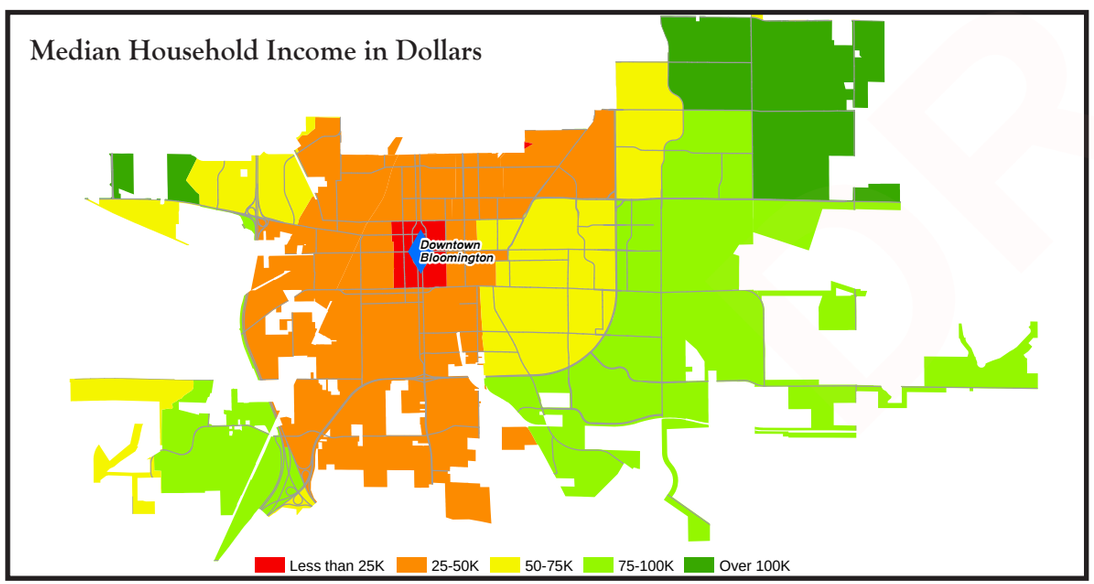


The majority of housing in Bloomington's core area is older

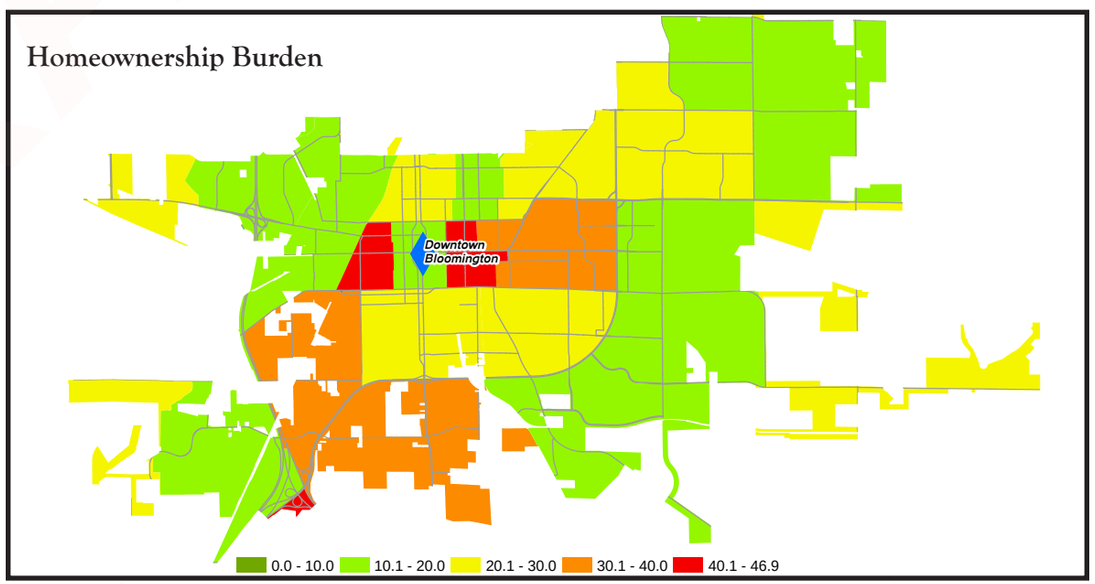
Bloomington's CORE ISSUE

Like many communities across United States, Bloomington's core (inner city) has suffered considerable disinvestment in the last few decades. The City's consolidated plan, Historic Preservation Plan, Downtown Strategic Plan and the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, are a few ongoing efforts by the City and the community to bring the core back to its past glory.

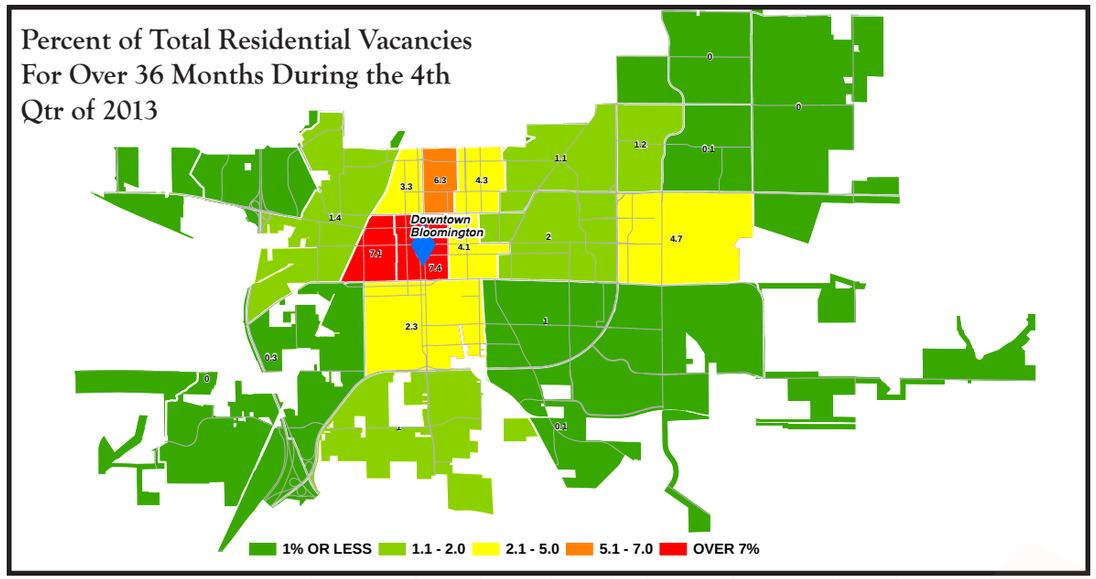
However, due to the complexity and magnitude of this issue, it needs to be addressed much more comprehensively. Depending on the metrics of the issues presented here, the boundaries of the core extend to Interstate 55 on the west and Veterans Parkway on the east. That is nearly 50% of the City. Acknowledging the need to address the inner city issues and defining the boundaries of the core for targeted redevelopment are the critical first steps in addressing this challenge.



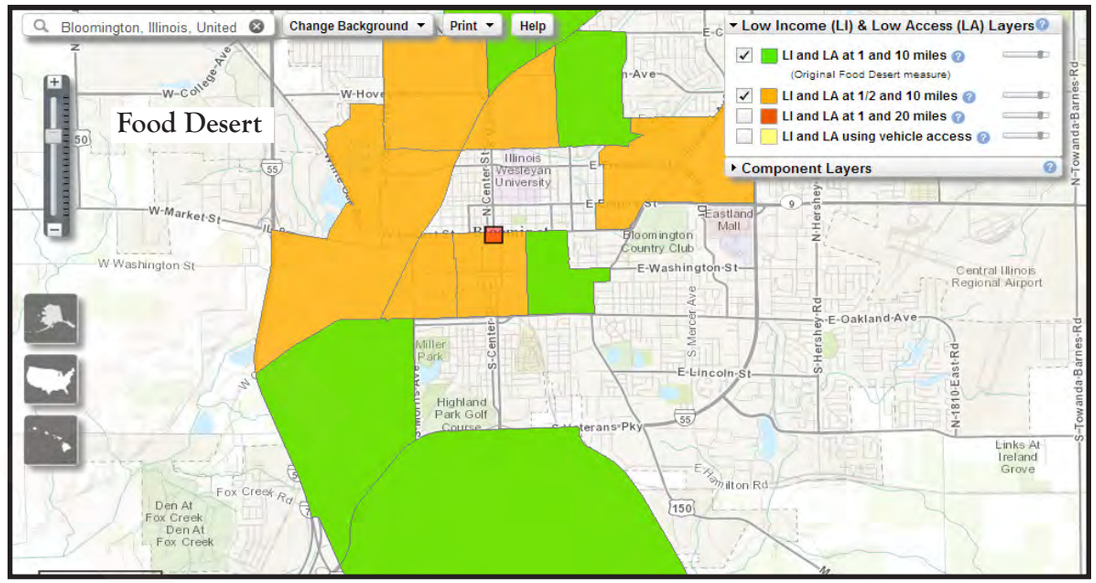
Median incomes in the core are lower than that of the City.



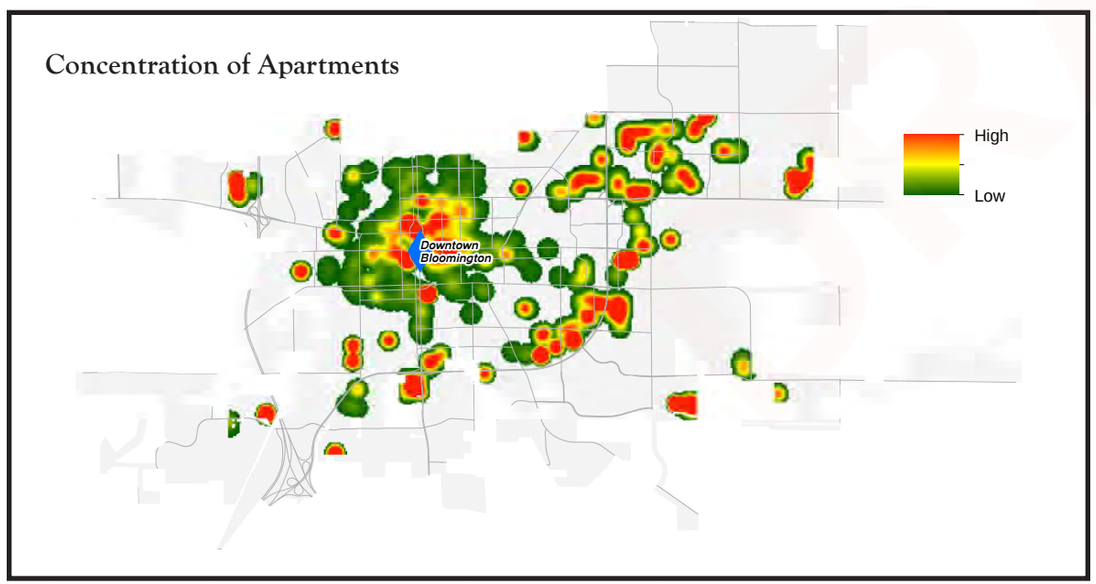
Percent of homeowners burdened with housing costs (paying 30% or more of their income on housing) are more in the core of the City.



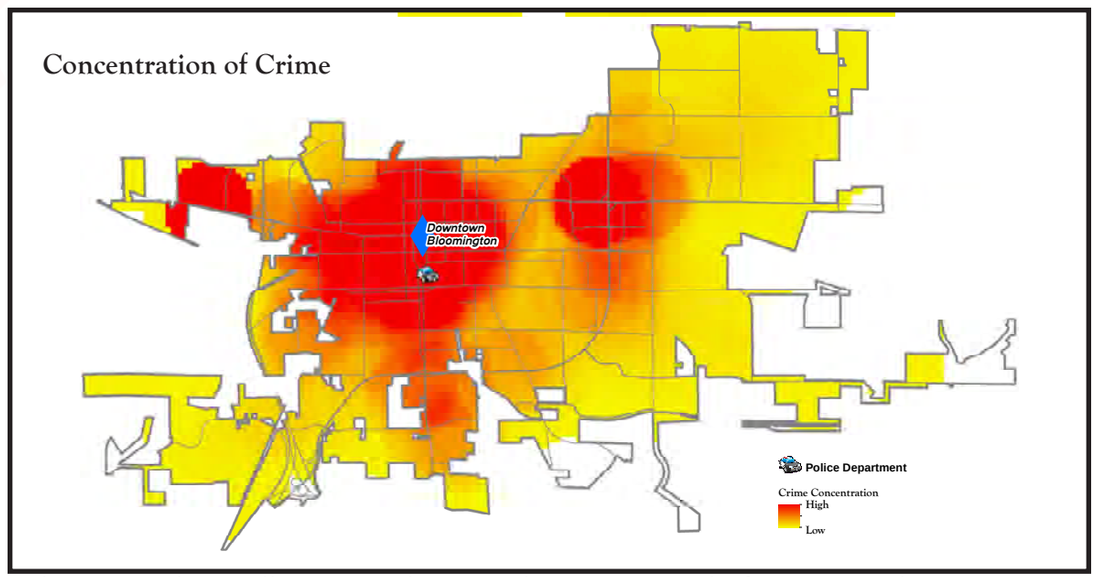
Long term vacancy rates (36 months or longer) are higher in the core than along the periphery. Long term vacancy rates can be a signal of blight.



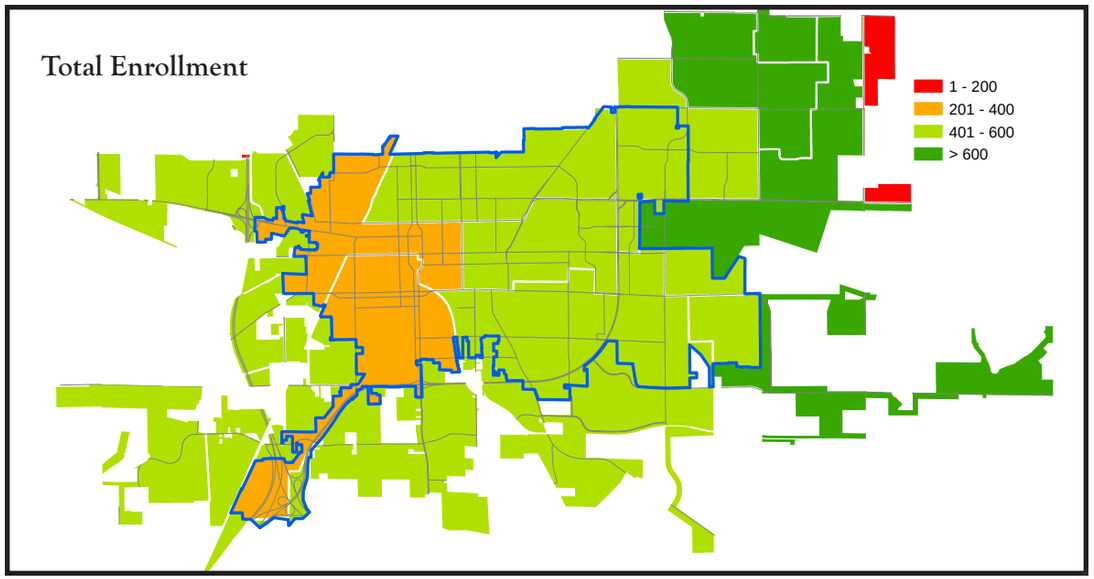
A majority of the west side of the City is classified as a food desert by the United States Department of Agriculture.



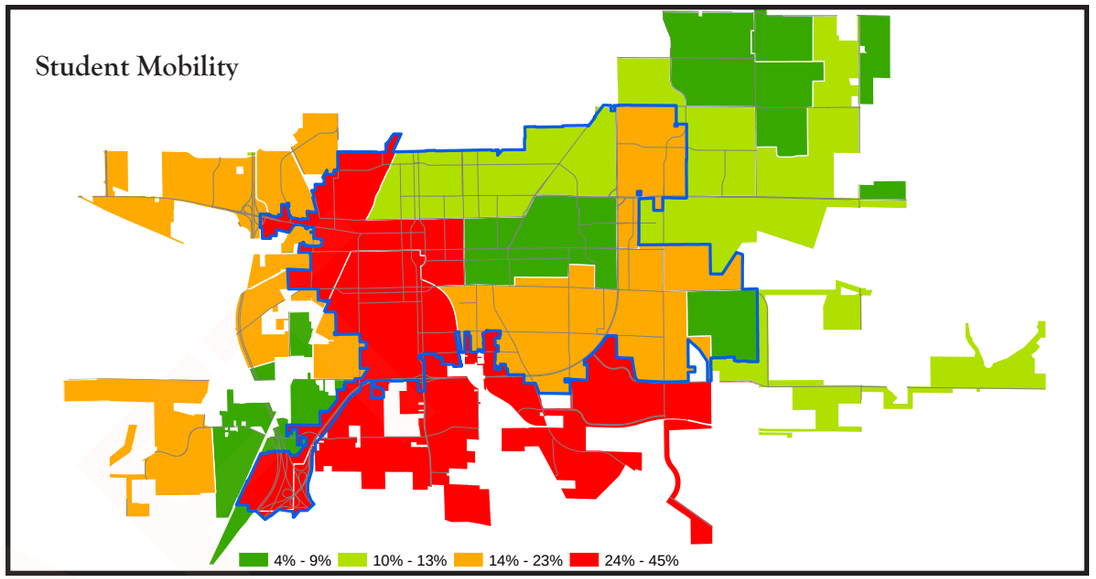
There is a significant concentration of apartments in the inner city.



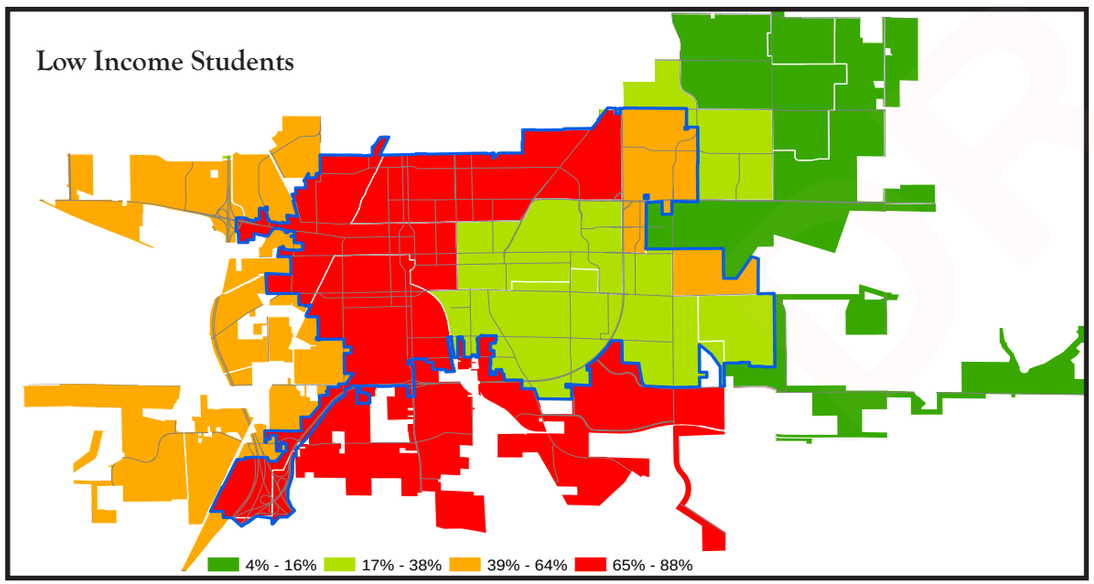
Bloomington's overall crime rate has gone down. 2014 marks fewer crimes than in 1989. However, most crimes are concentrated in the core and correlate with housing densities.



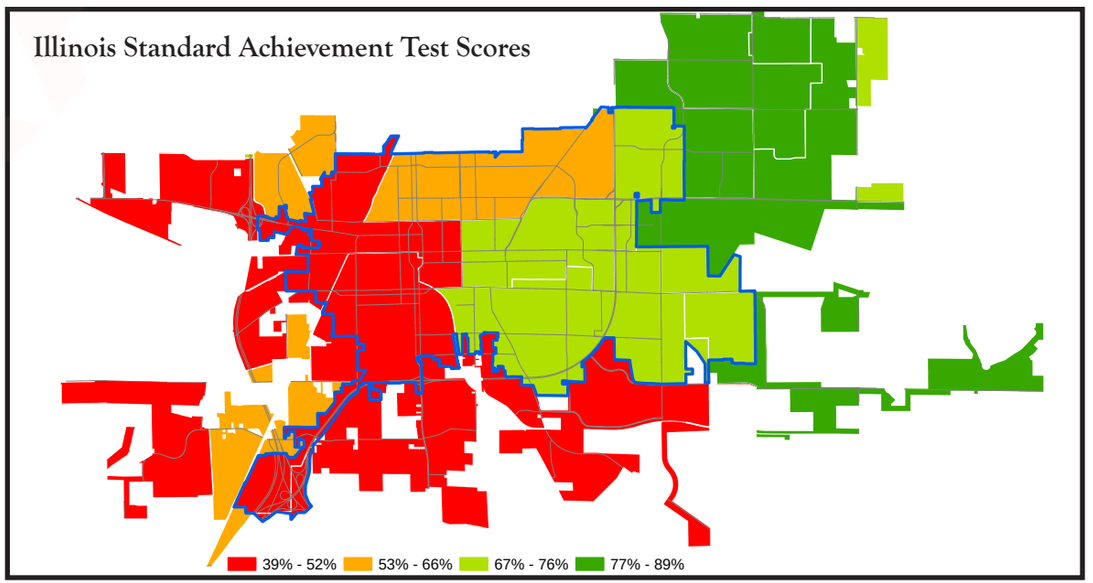
According to District 87, the total enrollment in 2010 is slightly less than that in 2000.



Concentration of the rental units in the core may be resulting in higher student mobility.



Lower median incomes in the core results in an increased percentage of low income students in District 87.

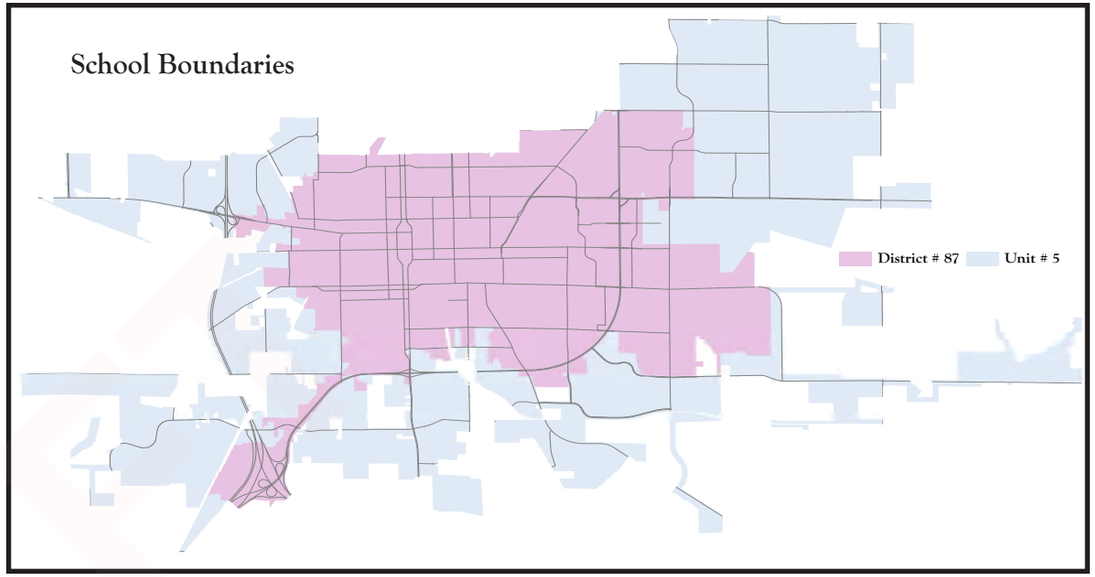


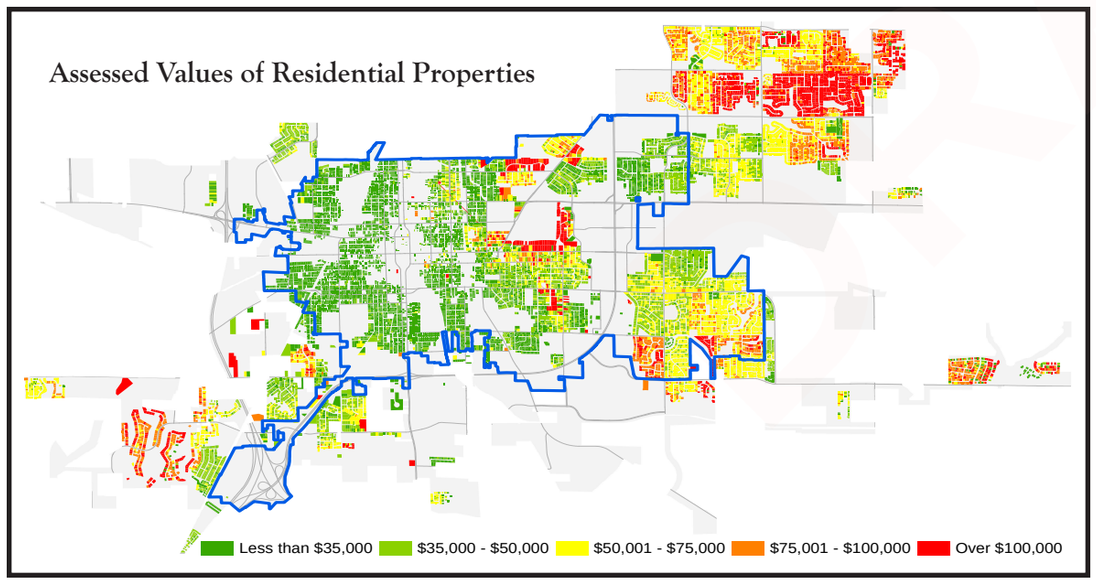
Various social issues facing the youth might result in lower academic performance.

EFFECT ON District 87

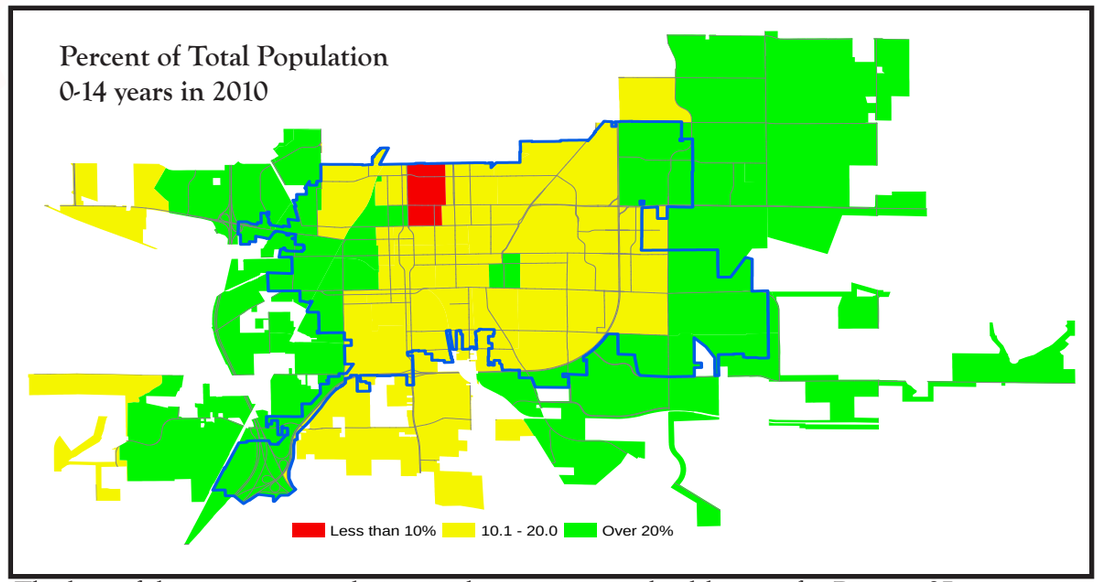
The City of Bloomington has an abundance of excellent public schools. There are two school districts that serve the City, Unit 5 and District 87. Bloomington's core is served primarily by District 87, which is landlocked.

The community issues in the core have a significant negative effect on the schools. The health of the neighborhoods is often related to the quality of the schools in that area. This is particularly true in District 87 where most elementary schools are neighborhood schools. "Is this a school district issue or a community issue?" is one of the several complex questions the community should be prepared to answer during this comprehensive planning process.





The lower assessed value on residential properties might eventually result in decreased revenue for District 87.



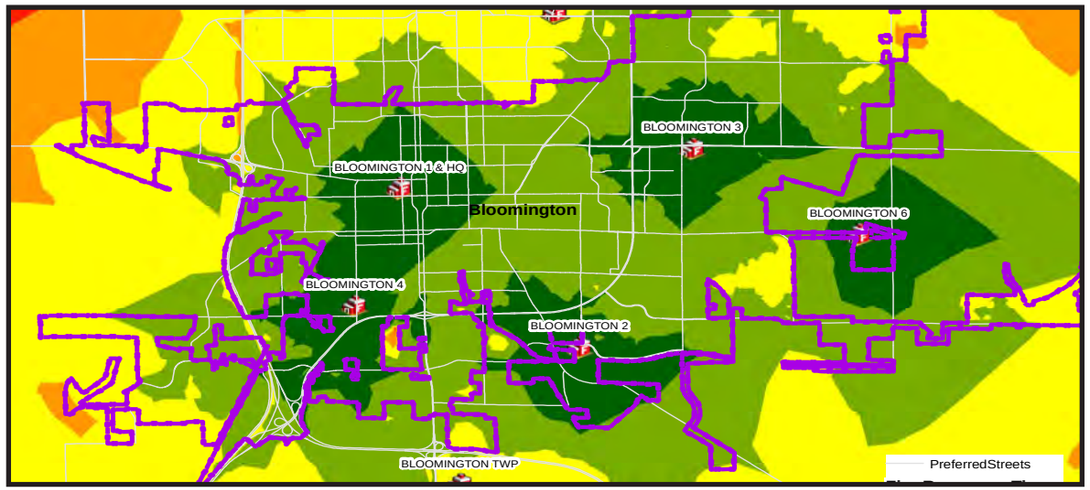
The loss of the younger population in the core is not a healthy sign for District 87.

Bloomington's CORE ASSETS

While there are challenges, Bloomington's core has many unique assets that are crucial to help addresses these challenges. A few of those include the availability of City infrastructure and services, a street network that promotes sustainable living, high tax rate per acre generated due to densities, proximity to employment centers, historically significant homes, Illinois Wesleyan University and a major commercial node, the Downtown.

Currently the biggest asset for the core continues to be the good schools. Bloomington's core is positioned well with unique assets that can be leveraged to make it economically competitive and self sustaining. However, a concerted effort is needed to make the core as vibrant as the rest of the community.

Fire Response Travel Times



The core is currently well served by the City's infrastructure and services. For example, the travel times for fire response in the majority of the core is six minutes or less.

Examples of Representative Street Patterns Before 1970

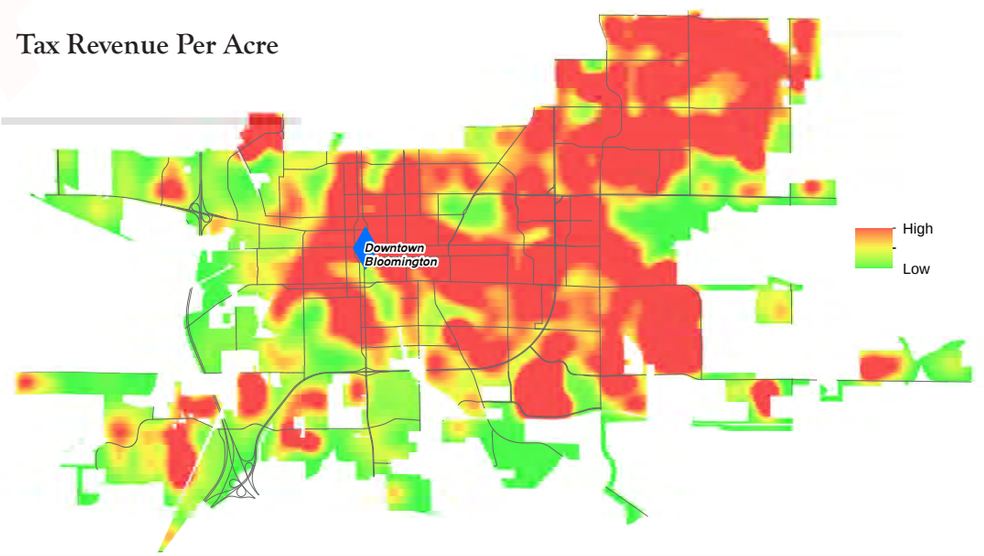
Before 1900
East of Downtown

1901-1920
Whites Place & Clinton Boulevard

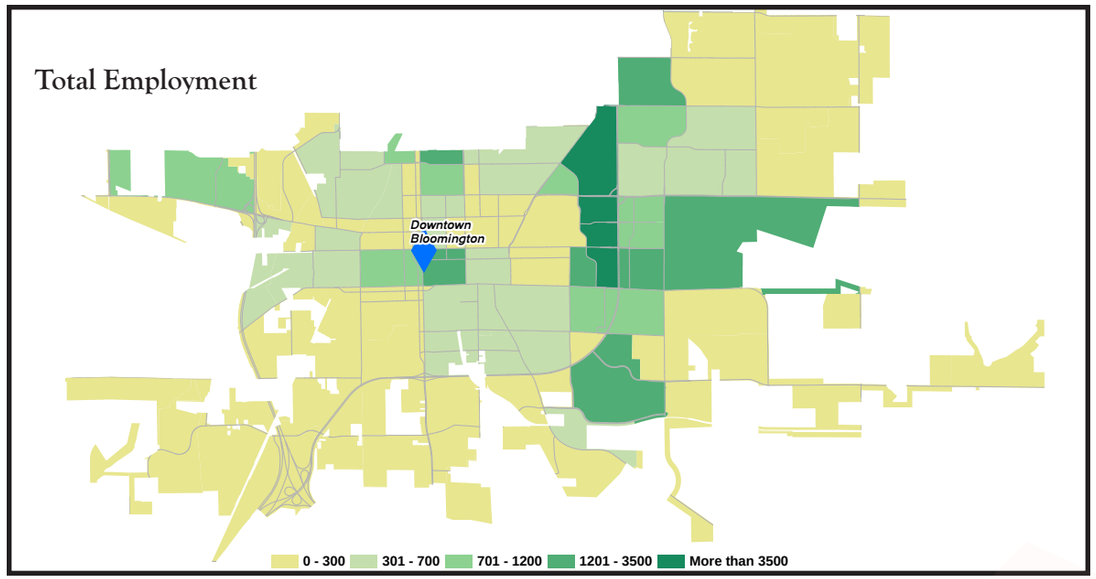
1921-1940
Founders Grove

The core is served by a grid street pattern that encourages travel by both auto and alternative modes, encouraging a sustainable and healthy lifestyle.

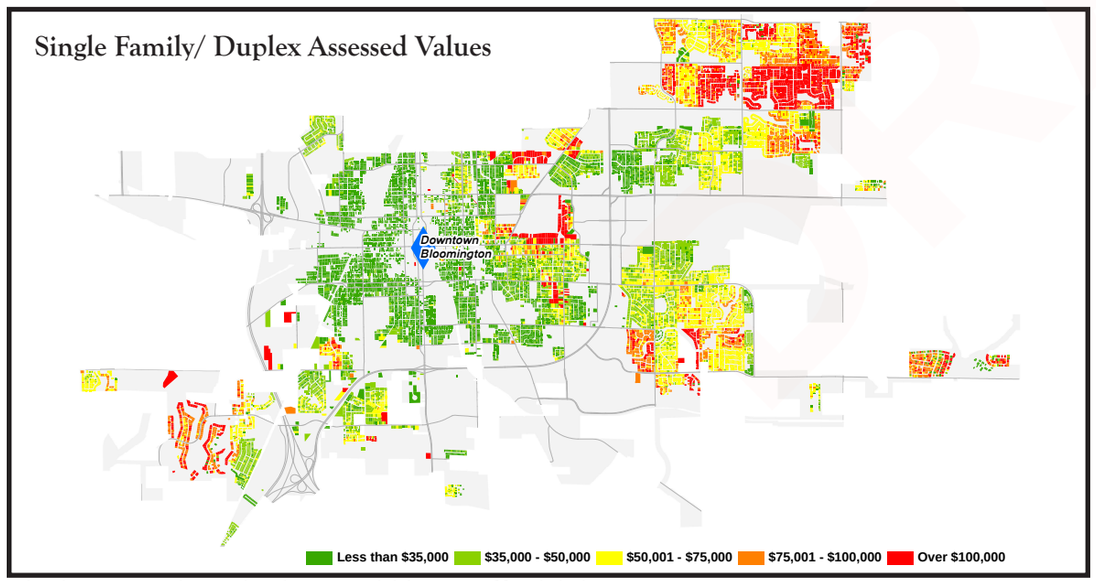
Tax Revenue Per Acre



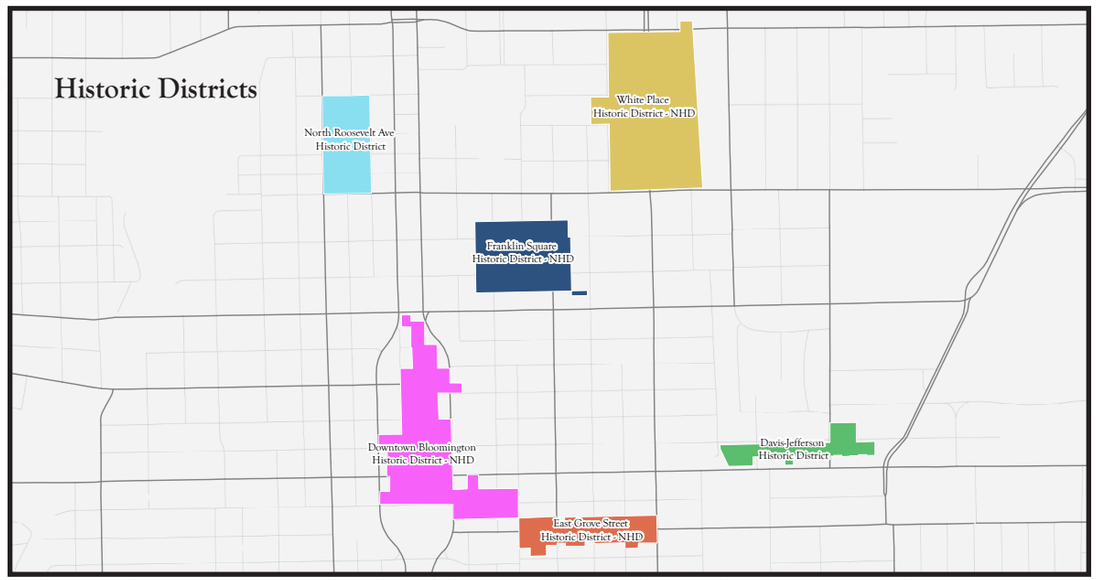
The core continues to bring in higher taxes per acre. This is partly due to the higher densities in this area.



The City of Bloomington continues to house a strong concentration of jobs from major employers to local businesses. It is also well-situated with accessibility to a majority of the employment centers.



The lower residential values could boost affordability.



The core has numerous cultural and historical places that make it unique. These unique assets should be preserved and capitalized.

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