



# City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan

## Phase 1

November 2025








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# About This Project

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A decade has passed since the adoption of Syracuse's most recent comprehensive plan in 2014. During the ensuing decade, the City's circumstances as well as those of the Central New York region have continued to trend in a positive direction. In 2023, Syracuse successfully adopted the first comprehensive update of its zoning ordinance since the 1960s. The Interstate-81 reconstruction project has commenced and will include the removal of the elevated viaduct, which has served as a functional barrier between the University Hill Neighborhood and Downtown Syracuse since its construction in the 1960s. The City continues to grow, and redevelopment of existing buildings into new apartments is occurring, contributing to an increase in population within the City for the first time in decades. At the same time, Syracuse has focused on addressing ongoing challenges in neighborhoods that experience persistent disinvestment, concentrated poverty, and highly segregated populations.

Projects like the Onondaga Creekwalk, the Syracuse Connective Corridor, and the Empire State Trail, have added significant new infrastructure which has better connected key assets in the City. Centro is poised to invest in a Bus Rapid Transit system that, combined with the City's updated zoning, could lead to significant new private investment in City neighborhoods. The Blueprint 15 collaboration

is seeking to complete the redevelopment of the Pioneer Homes and McKinley Manor housing projects into a new mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood adjacent to the redesigned I-81. The planned investment by Micron Inc. and their recent announcement to locate their local corporate headquarters in Downtown Syracuse have the City positioned to capture new housing investments for continued growth into the future. Indeed, projections indicate a potential to add over 7,000 households to the City by 2040<sup>1</sup>.

The City is also planning for a changing climate and the need to be competitive on a global scale, as it competes for jobs and residents<sup>2</sup>. These challenges overlap, as many of the interventions associated with reducing greenhouse gas emissions also translate to quality-of-life enhancements for the modern knowledge-based workforce. A changing climate also means increased risks for the City's vulnerable populations who, amongst other challenges, lack access to air conditioning to cope with rising summer temperatures.

While the City has taken steps forward, there is still work to do. Without Micron, projections indicate that the number of households in Syracuse could decline by nearly 6,000 households by 2040<sup>3</sup>. Even with the Micron investment it is possible that the region may



grow as a result of investments by Micron, but the City may not. Syracuse will need to exercise extreme fiscal and programmatic discipline to continue its positive momentum.

As the City embarks on developing a new comprehensive vision for a future brighter than many expected a decade ago, it is critical to understand some of the major influences to consider. In order to better understand those influences, the City conducted an assessment of its current demographics, successes associated with past planning, held conversations with targeted stakeholders to gain perspective on values that should influence future planning considerations, and developed an overall approach to developing a new comprehensive plan for the City that will chart its course for the next decade.

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<sup>1</sup> Housing Onondaga

<sup>2</sup> Research from the Urban Land Institute (ULI) indicates that attracting and retaining knowledge-based workers is crucial for the economic development of cities. ULI's work underscores the importance of urban development strategies that enhance quality of life for knowledge workers. Strategies include creating attractive and sustainable built environments, promoting health communities, fostering social connections, and adapting to evolving work patterns.

<sup>3</sup> Housing Onondaga

# Starting from a Strong Position

## Syracuse Comprehensive Plan 2040 Audit

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In advance of the development of a new Comprehensive Plan, the City conducted an audit of the current plan, *Comprehensive Plan 2040*. The audit investigated which of the current plan's goals are **complete or have been progressed significantly** and which goals are **in progress**.

Interviews were conducted with City staff to gauge the status of goal implementation. During the course of these discussions, themes began to emerge about the direction in which City departments are moving that have implications for future planning, these are called out as **future considerations**.

# Goals That Are Complete or Have Progressed Significantly

## Plan Policy #3

**"It is the policy of the City of Syracuse to cultivate and capitalize on the area's unique character defined by its history while supporting well-designed real estate developments that enhance neighborhoods, lively public spaces, well maintained infrastructure, and dynamic neighborhoods that are linked by well planned transportation, all within an exciting, safe, clean environment."**

An important accomplishment for the City of Syracuse is the continued improvement of its 82-block City center. Over the past 15 years, **Downtown Syracuse** has experienced a tangible resurgence in vibrancy and energy. As the Downtown Committee reports, \$869 million in investment has occurred in downtown since 2010, \$237 million of which is currently underway. Almost half of the investment has been in residential development, primarily via building stock rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. As a result, the downtown residential population has doubled since 2010 and is expected to exceed 5,000 by the end of 2025. While modest by some standards, this shift is apparent in the increase in activity on the City's downtown sidewalks, new maintenance and quality of life investments, and increased activation of ground floor retail spaces. Downtown now hosts over 240 street-level businesses, including 90 restaurants and 50 retail establishments. The tourism draw of Downtown's cultural institutions is

growing as investments, such as the modernization of the Landmark Theater, attract a wider audience of people who pair visits with dining, shopping, and more time spent in the City center. While this shift isn't attributable to any single comprehensive plan recommendation, the vision for this growth is articulated in the 2012 comprehensive plan, and the execution of a combination of recommended actions from the plan by the City and the Downtown Committee has affected this positive momentum Downtown.

## Plan Goal E.2 & E.3

**"Identify technological advancements that might facilitate more efficient, cost-effective, and transparent provision of government services."**

**"Continue to professionalize comprehensive and strategic planning in the City of Syracuse."**

The City's ability to achieve its goals is contingent on the quality and configuration of its **professional staff**. The 2012 comprehensive plan recognized the importance of staff competence in goal E.3, which included action items around establishing the Bureau



of Planning & Sustainability, implementing formal procedures for aligning the Capital Improvement Program with comprehensive plan goals, and supporting neighborhood planning efforts. Since adopting the 2012 comprehensive plan, the City has created the Division of Planning and Sustainability and established full-time positions for historic preservation planning, public art coordination, urban forest management, sustainability planning and special projects within the Department of Public Works (DPW). City Hall has also notably focused resources on bolstering innovation by establishing the Office of Analytics, Performance, & Innovation (API, formerly the I-Team), which serves as an in-house performance management consultant for the City that applies data-driven solutions to City projects and initiatives. The API office has contributed to the data-driven prioritization of road improvements and implementing a City-wide trash cart program, resulting in a 90% reduction in shoulder injury disability claims for City sanitation workers.

## Plan Goal G.1

**"Ensure that Syracuse's zoning ordinance and development regulations are consistent with the character desired of future development."**

**"Overhaul the City's zoning ordinance in order to implement the Land Use & Development component of this plan."**

In June of 2023, after five years of community engagement and project development, the City adopted **ReZone Syracuse**, the first comprehensive update of the City's zoning since 1967. Rezone was guided by recommendations from the 2012 Land Use Development Plan. The zoning update modernized the City code by refining the logic of allowable

development and by making the code more user-friendly. Among many other examples, the new code systematically integrates five tiers of mixed-use zones, reduces parking minimums, requires affordable rental units for large residential developments, identifies building and site design standards, permits reuse strategies for high-vacancy transition areas, improves the pedestrian experience, allows urban agriculture, reduces and clarifies the overall number of zones, and generally allows increased density in the urban core and key neighborhood corridors.

## Future Considerations

While this accomplishment is foundational to achieving desired future growth, changes to the built environment will occur over time as investments are made. The next comprehensive plan must look for ways to realize the vision for urban growth including commercial investment and a greater quantity and variety of housing in challenging market conditions. The City will need to strategically commit resources in areas with the potential to have an outsize impact in a way that zoning as a tool can't do alone. The work for the next 15 years will include financial support and market incentives to achieve new infill and development goals.

## Plan Goal H.1.d

**"Mitigate the adverse effects of vacant property and vacant housing on public safety within City neighborhoods."**

When the 2012 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the **Greater Syracuse Land Bank** had recently been established to help the City increase its tax collection rate and grow the tax base by assembling sites for development. Since its establishment, the Land Bank has acquired 2,209 properties, sold 1,411 properties,

renovated 916 structures, facilitated 438 owner-occupied rehabs, renovated or created 715 housing units, created 22 new business spaces, demolished 646 blighted structures, reduced the number of vacant buildings in the City of Syracuse by 44%, leveraged \$53.5 million in private investment, and returned \$39 million in assessed value back to the tax rolls. The 1,411 properties sold by the Land Bank generate \$2.6 million in local property taxes annually.

### Future Considerations

The Land Bank has become a critical tool for land management and redevelopment within the City of Syracuse, and opportunities exist for honing the Land Bank's role so that it is responsive to evolving conditions and better aligned with the City's neighborhood development strategy. The Land Bank has the potential to play a significant role in the implementation of the 2024 Syracuse Housing Strategy, which will be implemented through the duration of the Comprehensive Plan and targets neighborhood clusters for significant housing reinvestment and development.

## Plan Goal I.1.a & J 10.C

**"Improve quality of life for Syracuse residents- Work to extend the Creekwalk southward, facilitate development of the Erie Canal Trail through Syracuse, and collaborate on completion of the Loop the Lake trail."**

**"Continue with efforts to develop the Onondaga Creekwalk."**

The City has made progress in creating new greenspace by developing and expanding a modern trail system that supports transportation and recreation. Shortly before the 2012 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the City completed the 2.6-mile

**Creekwalk** Phase I, which followed Onondaga Creek from Armory Square to Onondaga Lake. The 2.2-mile Creekwalk Phase II extension was completed eight years later, in 2020. Phase III of the Creekwalk design is currently underway, and \$2 million in funding is committed to planning for a three-mile extension to be installed south of the current terminus at Colvin Street.

In addition to this urban trail, county and regional trails, including Loop the Lake and the Empire State Trail, have progressed significantly and now connect with the City's network. The final leg of the Loop the Lake Trail, known as the 'Canalways Trail Salina Extension' will complete the trail system so that it encircles Onondaga Lake. Design is complete and construction is planned to be undertaken in two phases, one ending in 2027, and the other ending in 2029.

The City's Inner Harbor Local Waterfront Revitalization Program also identifies projects that would further enhance the Creekwalk and contribute to the vibrancy and ecological restoration of Onondaga Lake and Onondaga Creek.

## Plan Goal C.4

**"Reinforce University Hill and Downtown as the core of regional employment and business."**

One of the most deliberate transformations in service of goal C.4. has been the **Connective Corridor** project, a series of public space interventions funded by the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County, Syracuse University, and the Federal government from 2008 to 2016. The nearly \$50 million in projects installed on a 2-mile route between the university and downtown represented urban planning best practices and included dedicated bike lanes, trees and landscaping, branding, lighting, signage, private

façade improvements, public art, park rehabilitation, programming, and free and frequent bus service.

Notably, this corridor has experienced significant investment in the past decade. Multiple 5-story mixed-use apartment buildings have been constructed on formerly underutilized lots. The Connective Corridor project exemplifies the potential for success associated with a coordinated effort to invest in public infrastructure including multi-modal infrastructure, regular transit service, and strategic investments in anchor institutions (public, private, and non-profit) along the corridor.

### Future Considerations

The implementation of I-81 Viaduct project, scheduled to be completed over the next three years, presents an important opportunity for the City to further strengthen the connections between the University Hill and Downtown Syracuse once the I-81 Viaduct is removed.

### Plan Goal J.6.a

**"In furtherance of a Complete Streets policy, the City of Syracuse supports the investigation of more efficient mass transit modes such as light-rail and BRT."**

Centro is advancing a **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** network plan, which is intended to be completed by 2028. The BRT network will consist of two lines. One line will run from Destiny USA to Syracuse University, and the other will begin in the Eastwood neighborhood and extend southwest. The southwestern line will split and have one termination point at Onondaga Community College and a second in the Valley neighborhood. These transit corridors will intersect at the Downtown Syracuse Bus Hub. The routes will be characterized by 24/7 service with 15-minute or less frequency and direct connections with almost all other Syracuse bus routes. Standard

BRT features, including branding, distinctive shelters, user accessibility improvements, lighting, seating, real-time service information, heated sidewalks, community art installations, and transit signal priority, are all planned to be included on the new routes.

### Future Considerations

As the BRT system comes online, it will present the City with an opportunity to incentivize incremental transit-oriented development along these new transit corridors.

### Plan Goal J.2.b

**"Following adoption of the Pedestrian Infrastructure Component, revise the sidewalk ordinance: Determine the best way to maintain year-round accessible sidewalks free of snow, ice, and plant overgrowth. Ensure sidewalks are adequately maintained and safe and accessible to all users. Require different sidewalk designs based on zoning district. Ensure that sidewalk specs support storm water capture efforts and prevent overflow into the storm sewer system."**

In 2021, the City made significant progress toward goal J.2.b. by initiating a **Municipal Sidewalk program**. The program led by the City's Department of Public Works supplements property-owner's sidewalk maintenance. A Citywide annual fee of \$100 for residential properties and \$300 for commercial properties funds repairs and the installation of new sidewalks. The repair approach prioritizes locations that contribute to pedestrian safety, facilitates access to essential destinations such as schools, and occur in coordination with other infrastructure projects. Since the program's inception, the City has reconstructed or repaired 200,000 linear feet of sidewalk. In addition, approximately 800,000 linear feet of sidewalk are included in the winter snow-clearing program.



## Future Considerations

As the City continues to invest in the sidewalk system, increased advanced coordination with multiple City departments has become necessary. Coordination has to account for other priorities including lead water service replacements and investments in the City's street tree system.

integrate art and arts programming within City projects, departments, and facilities. For example, the City has been increasing the utilization of the parks for cultural events, including the recent purchase of a second bandwagon for musical performances. The public art coordinator plans more opportunities to connect artists and community members in park facilities.

### Plan Goal C.1.a

#### **"Facilitate business locations and re-locations within the City."**

The City's Department of Neighborhood and Business Development has successfully provided informational assistance and referrals for financing, business plan creation, and regulatory guidance to new and existing businesses. The City created the Syracuse Financial Empowerment Center (FEC) which is a free service to all residents in and around the City of Syracuse, providing professional, one-to-one financial counseling. The City has also improved its permitting system by allowing online applications and integrating the option for a 3rd party permit reviewer, which can speed up the approval process for developers.

### Plan Goal B.1

#### **"Encourage and promote the development of a vibrant municipal Public Art Program."**

In 2024, the part-time **public art coordinator** position, established in 2009, became a full-time position. This position focuses on facilitating public art in the City and advance the City's interest in creating a community art program. The role will develop opportunities for collaborative efforts to

### Plan Goal G.2

#### **"Protect historic buildings and designed landscapes for the enjoyment of future generations and as an economic development opportunity."**

The City's historic resources have benefited from two recent advancements in historic preservation including the comprehensive revision to the **Historic Preservation Ordinance**, which occurred as part of ReZone Syracuse, and the creation of a full-time Historic Preservation Planner position within the Department of Neighborhood and Business Development. These changes have supported the 2012 comprehensive goals of celebrating the City's heritage, promoting the economic benefits of historic preservation, and prioritizing preservation in land use regulations and City operations. The City has recently identified an additional focus for historic preservation planning.

## Future Considerations

While efforts in the past have prioritized preserving historic structures through regulatory mechanisms, new efforts will also focus on celebrating the cultural narrative of the City through education, outreach, placemaking, and a celebration of community history. The City is also interested in examining how it may support preservation in neighborhoods with scarce resources that would make the regulatory process less onerous.

## Plan Goal Area I: Sustainability

The 2012 Comprehensive Plan's sustainability component included goals related to reducing the City's energy consumption, improving the health of the Onondaga Creek watershed, increasing food, water, and energy independence, reducing waste, and improving quality of life. Successes over the past decade have included implementing the **LED Street Lighting Project**, continued collaboration with Onondaga County to **reduce combined sewer overflows**, implementing the Urban Forestry Master Plan, allowing **urban agriculture and renewable energy** through Syracuse ReZone, establishing a **full-time sustainability coordinator position**, installing **solar panels** at City Hall Commons, **energy upgrades** at the Westcott Reservoir, waste pickup route optimization to **reduce carbon emissions**, and a City-wide **energy bill reduction** from \$12 million to \$3 million annually.

### Future Considerations

Pursuing sustainability is an ongoing effort. The City is beginning to inventory community and municipal operations to inform a consolidated **Climate Action Plan** (CAP) that will provide a feasible 10-15 year vision for greenhouse gas emission reduction and climate mitigation within Syracuse. The City will continue to integrate sustainability considerations into decision-making about infrastructure and other investments.

The Division of Planning and Sustainability is well positioned to think strategically about the implementation of the next comprehensive plan. It can track progress, influence stakeholders, assist other departments, and make connections necessary

to the implementation of specific initiatives. Because of its positive relationships, the Division is in a position to configure and direct workflows between the office of Analytics, Performance, & Innovation, Communications, Neighborhood and Business Development, Public Works, and others. It can essentially act as a project manager- forming teams, tracking progress, and advancing important, long-term initiatives of the comprehensive plan.

# Goals That Are In-Progress

## Plan Goal E.1

### **"Identify opportunities for the consolidation of services that may save taxpayers money."**

Efficient, collaborative maintenance of the complex systems vital to the City of Syracuse is challenging. Yet, in recent years, the City has started operating under a **'dig-once'** approach to installing and maintaining utilities in the public right-of-way. This approach, underpinned by the City's desire to maximize limited resources, requires communication, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving. Under a dig-once approach, City departments, including DPW, Parks, Water, Engineering, Planning, and Analytics Performance & Innovation (API), and public utility providers meet to design projects to accommodate multiple agencies' goals and eliminate the need to intervene in an area repeatedly.

#### **Future Considerations**

Dig once has evolved through the interactions of City departmental actors and requires City leadership and the commitment of department heads and staff to working in collaboration with others to navigate the complexities of turning this policy into action.

## Plan Goal A.2

### **"Complete a Recovery Action Plan (RAP) for Syracuse Parks."**

The Syracuse City Parks Department is responsible for maintaining a 56-park system with limited resources. The 2012 comprehensive plan included multiple goals related to planning for and investing in the park system, including inventorying needs and prioritizing maintenance, preserving historic features, working with neighborhood groups to enhance facilities and services, and conducting a recreation needs assessment. The parks department has grown in the past ten years and has worked with other departments like DPW, the Syracuse City School District, and the land bank to share maintenance costs where feasible.

#### **Future Considerations**

The department is about to begin a **park master planning process** that will guide future investments. It has also dedicated significant resources to implementing the 2020 , by equitably and efficiently managing forest and tree canopy within the City's greenways, tree lawns, and parks.



## Plan Goal Area F: Housing

The 2012 Comprehensive Plan included eight goals related to housing, including encouraging homeownership, focusing new housing around existing anchors, encouraging a variety of housing types, and promoting the maintenance and improvement of existing housing stock. Since 2012, the City has experienced a boom in market-rate apartments in and around Downtown and the Lakefront and progress in affordable housing development in neighborhoods to the immediate east, west, and south of Downtown.

However, the 2024 [Syracuse Housing Strategy](#) identified the continued need to stabilize distressed neighborhoods and develop additional ‘middle’ housing through a multi-year cluster development strategy focusing limited resources around targeted areas. This new approach will require patience, political will, and commitment to systematically and incrementally improving neighborhoods over a longer time horizon.

In 2024, the City also established a [Housing Trust Fund](#), a new mechanism to support the strategy by providing dedicated funds for housing construction, renovation, repair, and rehabilitation. Executing other elements of the strategy will be a focus of the City for the foreseeable future.

### Future Considerations

Goals and recommendations in the new comprehensive plan should be aligned with the housing strategy. As the strategy is implemented, there will be opportunity to support, supplement, and build on investments made in strategic neighborhood clusters.

## Plan Goal D.1

**“Be supportive of the City School District’s stated goal of becoming “the most improved urban school district in America”. – Provide infrastructural support to City schools and surrounding neighborhoods to ensure healthy school environments and safe routes to school. – Continue to support Say Yes to Education, the landmark collaborative program to increase local graduation rates by providing essential educational, financial, and other supports for students in the City School District and their families.”**

The Syracuse City School District plays a critical role in shaping the quality of life and economic opportunities that City residents have access to. City school facilities have improved significantly since the 2012 Comprehensive Plan, thanks to millions of dollars of investment which have been implemented through the [Joint Schools Construction Board](#). The City is on-track to open an \$89 million state-of-the-art [STEAM School](#) in the City’s old Central High School Location. And, since 2009 [Say Yes](#) Syracuse has provided \$15.7 million in higher education scholarships to support 6,550 graduates.

### Future Considerations

At the same time, the City School District faces unique challenges that require more and different resources than suburban regional school districts. The next comprehensive plan could support the school district by focusing neighborhood infrastructure investment around schools, and may find other opportunities to bolster the experience, learning outcomes, and reputation of the Syracuse City School District.

## Plan Goal J.2.a & I.1.a

**"Bike Infrastructure- Implement the Bicycle Infrastructure component of this plan as funds allow. Include the prioritized installation of Bicycle Infrastructure projects in the CIP annually."**

**"Improve quality of life for Syracuse residents-Develop a network of neighborhood greenways with shade trees, green medians, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements."**

Since developing the Bicycle Plan component of the 2012 comprehensive plan, the City has made steady progress toward building out the plan's proposed bicycle infrastructure network while simultaneously evolving treatments and practices to facilitate safer cycling in the City. The City has installed infrastructure on many of the roadways identified in the bicycle plan. Most of these investments have been made on secondary neighborhood streets due to the complexity of adding protected bike lanes to major transportation corridors. The neighborhood network is considered a greenway and now incorporates slower speed limits with enforcement mechanisms, wayfinding signage, and pavement paint. The forthcoming Bicycle Plan update being developed by the City's DPW will formalize these greenway features and consider additional techniques such as chicanes, bump-outs, and traffic circles. No method will be pursued without a maintenance plan ensuring the network's sustainability.

Since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 2014, **micro-mobility** has become an increasingly important part of the City's transportation system. Ridership has grown annually in the City's rideshare program (VEO), confirming the need to accommodate multimodal transportation. A recent agreement with Centro allows the system to extend beyond the City boundary. The continued implementation of the bicycle network will enhance the quality of life and support residents without cars in navigating the City safely and quickly.

## Future Considerations

The City has committed to a **Vision Zero** policy, which will significantly advance the Complete Streets goals outlined in the 2012 comprehensive plan as it is implemented over the next several years. Vision Zero is an internationally accepted strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries by involving diverse stakeholders to set goals for improving the roadway environment. The City is developing a Vision Zero plan with a "complete streets" toolkit, which will help to advance additional investments in the City's mobility network.

## Plan Goal C.3

**"Facilitate revitalization of Syracuse's neighborhood business corridors"**

Syracuse neighborhood business corridors are an important part of many of the City's neighborhoods, and progress has been made toward improving these corridors, specifically on West Onondaga Street, Butternut Street, and James Street. For example, in 2022 the Southwest Gateway District participated in the NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) program, through which \$10 million in grant funding was leveraged to 'expand Syracuse's vibrant downtown to the South and West of the Central Business District into an urban, walkable part of the City.' However, vacancy and blight in many neighborhood commercial corridors are still a challenge.

## Future Considerations

The 2012 comprehensive plan suggested working with neighborhood-based development partners, assessing the conditions of key corridors, addressing identified needs, and facilitating high-density residential development along the corridors. While Syracuse ReZone has set the stage for the outcomes, a strategy of facilitated revitalization backed by financial resources from the City or other entities is needed to accomplish this goal entirely.

# Emerging Goals and Ideas

A third category of information that emerged from interviews and discussions includes ideas and potential goals which were not identified in the previous plan, but came into focus as a possible candidates for inclusion or focus in the next one. These ideas are responsive to new issues or conditions which were not present at the time of the last plan's adoption or they are a continuation of work which has taken place over the last 15 years.

- » Refine, expand, and commit to the 'Dig Once' policy.
- » Prioritize lead pipe replacement in coordination with other infrastructure goals.
- » Incorporate the Land Bank in supporting the Syracuse Housing Strategy and neighborhood commercial corridor development.
- » Accommodate and plan for Micron-induced population influx to the benefit of the City.
- » Coordinate I-81 construction impacts and positively facilitate new development and re-stitching of University Hill and downtown Syracuse. Advocate for the City within the I-81 project and associated redevelopment.
- » Celebrate the cultural narrative of City neighborhoods and residents through arts and historic preservation initiatives such as an interactive website, community historic markers, education, and outreach.
- » Develop and implement projects identified in the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (Onondaga Lake, Onondaga Creek, and Inner Harbor).
- » Minimize concentrated poverty. Focus on addressing issues equitably, including workforce development, increasing transit options, increasing healthy food access, and affordable housing.
- » Implement the Syracuse Housing Strategy in the first series of clusters identified by the plan
- » Develop the Syracuse Waterfront into a mixed-use district with a high-quality design that promotes the quality of life in the City.
- » Expand the footprint of "downtown" to include University Hill, Lakefront, Salina Corridor, and Hawley Green neighborhood.
- » Coordinate implementation of the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan.
- » Ensure that City services are provided equitably.
- » Develop the Downtown Convention Center Neighborhood District by enhancing gateways, improving way-finding for visitors to the City, improving connections to key destinations, and building on recent successes like Hotel Syracuse, the Salt Market, the Tech Garden, and the Chimes Building.







# What's happening

## Community Profile

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Syracuse stands at a crossroads. The City faces a complex interplay of forces that are shaping its present and future: decades of population loss and housing disinvestment, the legacy of infrastructure built to serve a much larger population, persistent and concentrated poverty, and the looming impacts of a changing climate. There is also real momentum, a growing downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, renewed investment, and the transformative potential of projects like Micron and the reconstruction of I-81.

If the optimistic Micron numbers (net + 39,000 new primary and secondary jobs over the next several decades) materialize, and projections hold, Syracuse could receive 200 net new households per year for the next 25 years. If half of those are future homeowners (100) and half are future renter households (100), good comprehensive planning will mean that there's work to do to determine how many of those new households will be consuming existing housing stock and how many will consume new housing products.

The opportunity costs of inaction are steep. Without strategic intervention, Syracuse risks deepening inequality, further fiscal strain, and missed chances for inclusive growth. But with intentional, equity-driven planning, the City can turn these challenges into opportunities—reimagining its housing stock, aligning infrastructure with future needs, and building resilience in the face of climate change.

This is the moment to ask hard questions:

- » How does Syracuse grow smarter? Where should the City prioritize its finite fiscal resources?
- » How can infrastructure investments be prioritized to maximize dollars spent and accomplish multiple objectives?
- » How can the City ensure that growth is inclusive, sustainable, and fiscally sound?

Questions such as these form the basis for the next phase of this comprehensive planning process. This is not just a planning exercise; it is a call to action. It will require broad community engagement, data-informed decision-making, and a willingness to confront trade-offs. It will also require collaboration across sectors and neighborhoods to ensure that Syracuse's future is shaped by those who live, work, and invest here.

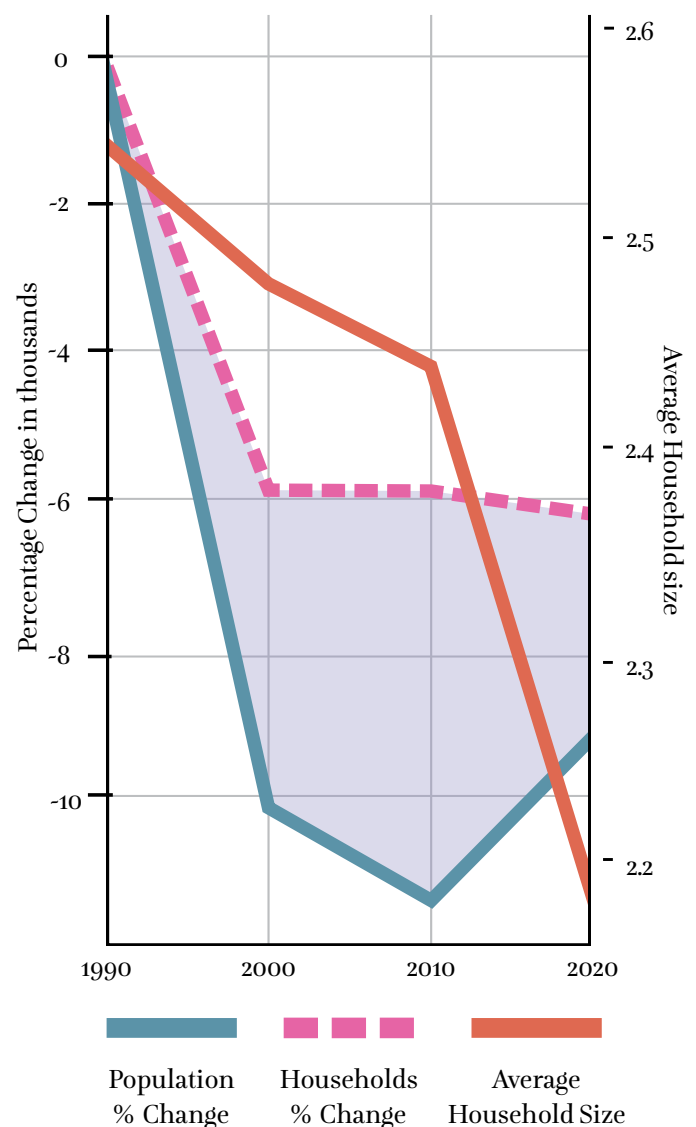
In the immediate future, Syracuse will need to face the combined forces of **population change**, rising **housing costs**, **fiscal constraints** and their attendant impacts on **city infrastructure**, and the impacts associated with a **changing climate**; all of which disproportionately impact the City's poor.

# Population Change

The City lost population from 1990 to 2000, following decades of more significant population decline. While population loss during the 1990s was not insignificant (-15,529), a few points are notable. Losses during the 1990s coincided with a small, but important, reduction in average household size (2.54 to 2.47). While this point does not negate the fallout from continued population loss, the reduction in household size means household losses were somewhat less severe than might otherwise have been.

From 1990-2000, the City's population declined by about 9.5%. At the same time, the number of households declined as noted. This changed over the next decade when average household size in the context of population change resulted in some 4,500 fewer households in Syracuse by 2010. By 2023, the City's population - owing to a combination of outmigration to the suburbs but offset by new immigrant arrivals - had more or less stabilized at about 146,000 people and about 59,000 households.

Population vs. Household Change  
1990-2020



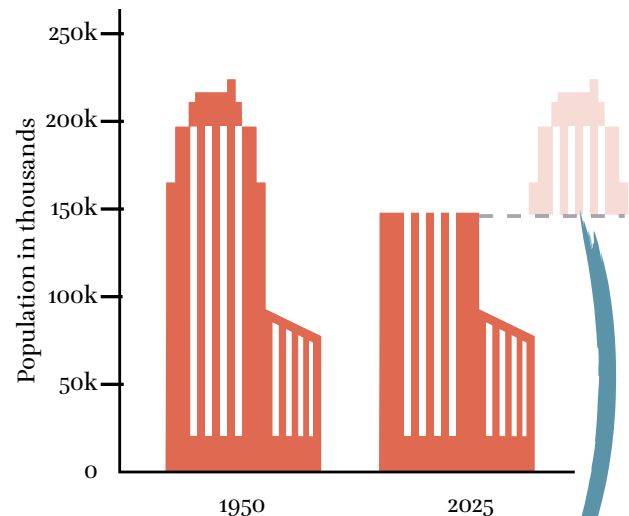


## Population decline means lost revenue

At 146,000 people, the City is some 80,000 people fewer than in 1950, by which time roughly 75% of all residential property in existence today was already built. Along with it, corresponding roads, sidewalks, bridges, pipes, and other infrastructure. In other words, Syracuse was physically built, and incurred the financing obligations that came with it, by and for a City of 220,000, presumed at the time to continue to grow.

Today, about 65% of the Syracuse of 1955 lives in the City, yet carries the various obligations attendant to a much larger City. These obligations place the City at a number of structural disadvantages as compared to the suburbs. These challenges manifest as thousands of underutilized parcels, millions of square feet of underperforming real estate, and billions of dollars in catch-up costs, all of which mean that this comprehensive planning effort will have to consider too much space, too little demand, and more catch-up costs than the City can afford. The City of Syracuse has the difficult task of facilitating consensus on City priorities, which must be balanced against what the City can afford (and those things it can't afford not to do).

Population Decline 1950 vs. 2025



**The city's population has declined 35% since 1950. The remaining 65% are now responsible for the financial obligations of a much larger city.**

## Confronting the multi-faceted challenges of concentrated poverty

The estimated poverty rate for Syracuse in the early 1970s was around 15 percent, and while it was concentrated in certain areas, the rate for the City overall was not high. By 1980, as the combination of deindustrialization and suburban flight began to solidify, that rate had climbed to nearly 20%. By 1990, as manufacturing job losses mounted, the poverty rate climbed to nearly 25%, by 2000 to 28 %, by 2010 to 30%, and today it is among the highest in the nation (#21) at about 26%. It wasn't just that people left for the suburbs; it was that jobs left, leaving large numbers of people in economic distress.

Concentrations of poverty above 20% perpetuate social dysfunctions and are demonstrated to create “stickiness” in economic mobility, meaning it is difficult for young people to escape the grip of poverty and pursue opportunity as they grow up. This “stickiness” is even more acute in areas with extreme poverty, or census tracts with poverty rates above 40%<sup>4</sup>.

One of these compounded problems is childhood poverty, which in Syracuse is at 45.6 %<sup>5</sup>.

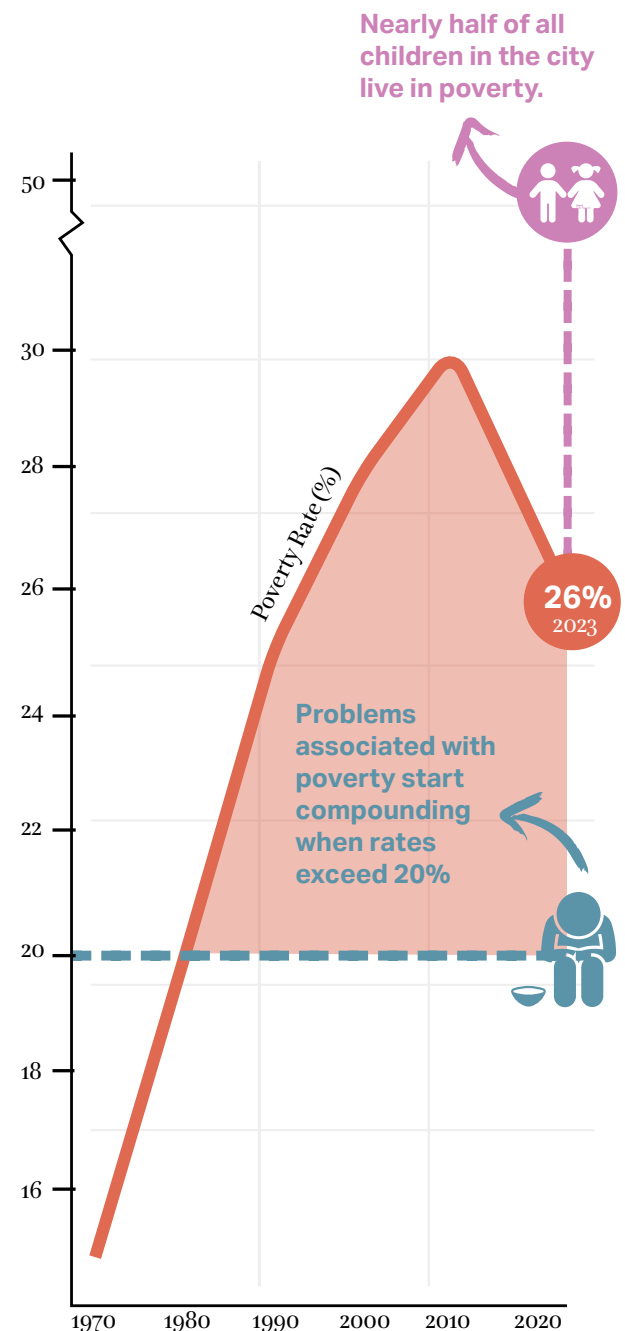
Syracuse has highest child poverty rate of U.S. Cities with a population over 100,000<sup>5</sup>

1. **Syracuse, NY – 45.6%**
2. **Cleveland, OH – 45.3%**
3. **Detroit, MI – 44.2%**
4. **Dayton, OH – 41.7%**
5. **Rochester, NY – 40.8%**
6. **Birmingham, AL – 40.2%**

<sup>4</sup> Economists, such as Raj Chetty and his Opportunity Insights project at Harvard have explored how childhood environments, particularly the level of poverty in a neighborhood, significantly influence later economic success. In addition, the work of sociologist William Julius Wilson highlights how growing up in areas of concentrated poverty, even if not personally poor, can limit economic prospects.

<sup>5</sup> American Community Survey 2008-2023 5-year Estimates

Changes in concentrated poverty  
1970-2023

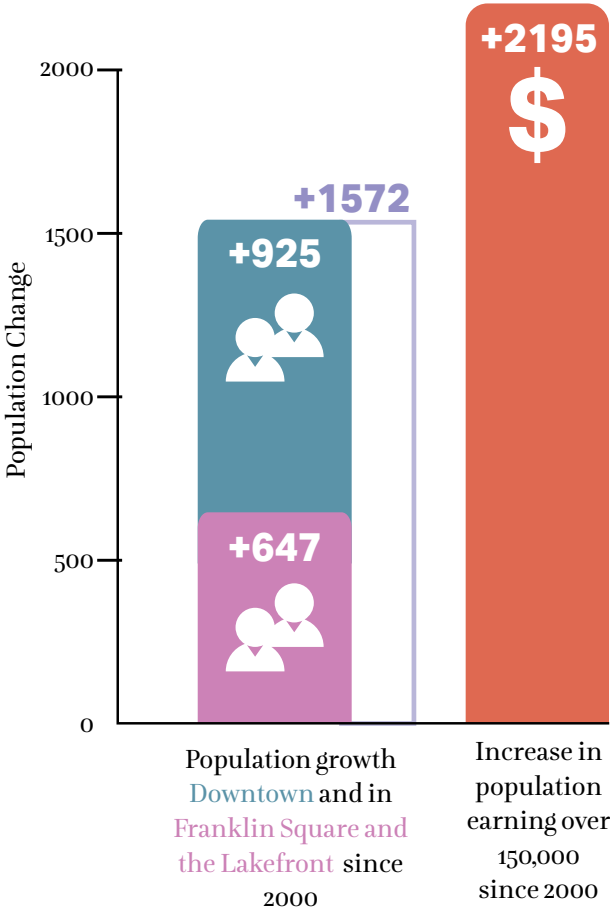


Population growth in Downtown, Franklin Square, and the Lakefront since 2000

This comprehensive planning process will need to confront the multi-faceted problems of poverty, including the desire to, at a minimum, lessen the impacts of poverty on individuals, and specifically on children. But also, the City must contend with the cumulative impacts of concentrated poverty on neighborhood health. These cumulative impacts lead to higher costs for policing, emergency response, and indirectly (as the City does not have the responsibility of providing social services) through increased social service costs.

Population growth in Downtown, Franklin Square, and the Lakefront vs. Foreign-Born Immigration

Relative population stabilization since 2010 (holding steady at an average 58,659 households) is a very promising turn, but it is not clear this trend will hold (2023 ACS estimates a slight decline of households from 2020-2023). The reasons for the clawback in numbers are difficult to discern. It could be that the excellent work around rebuilding downtown (and adjacent neighborhoods) accounts for the improvement. Investments in Downtown Syracuse have certainly enhanced downtown’s ability to be a draw, contributing to net immigration. Downtown added 925 residents between 2000 and 2020, and an additional 647 residents have been added to Franklin Square and the Lakefront over the same period.

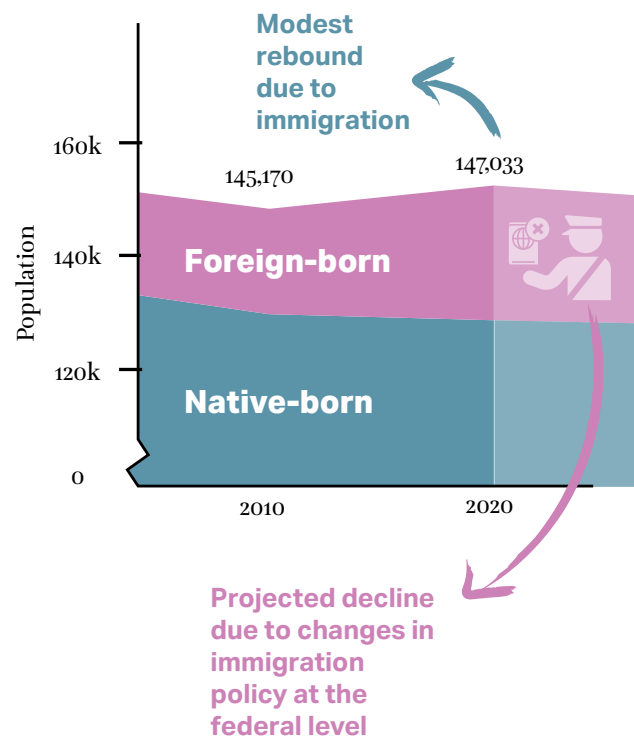


It is likely these new households have positively impacted the City. Indeed, in 2000, 4.98% of the City’s households had an annual income of \$150,000 or more (when normalized for inflation). By 2020, that figure had grown to an impressive 8.79 percent. That’s 2,195 more households in 2020 than in 2000 with an annual household income in 2020 of at least \$150,000 (\$99,000 in 2000). Short of conducting a census, it is very hard to know how many of these higher income households migrated into Syracuse, or, if they did, whether they did so as the result of an improving downtown.

It is also possible that lower-earning households saw their incomes rise. But the point stands that the top end of the City's economic profile has been improving, and population growth both Downtown and in the Lakefront, which grew by 36 and 160 percent respectively, reflects this. As downtown has improved, Syracuse had increasingly more to offer young adults, including local college students, and a higher percentage of those young adults than in preceding decades chose to stay in Syracuse. Finally, as downtown and other parts of the City had more to offer, and as Millennials increasingly delayed family formation, a greater number of young households put off moving to the suburbs.

At the same time, foreign-born immigration since 1990 is attributable to Syracuse's more recent population growth more than anything else. In 1990, for example, 6.5% of Syracuse was foreign-born, and by 2020, the rate was 13%. Applying an estimated average household size of 3, that works out to roughly 2,900 net new foreign-born households since 1990, effectively accounting for all of the City's relative population stability over the last few decades. The City must also consider the implication that if current national anti-immigration policies remain in place, fewer future immigrants are likely to arrive, foreshadowing possible population loss in the years ahead unless other circumstances, such as Micron, materialize in the optimistic numbers that have been forecast<sup>6</sup>.

Population growth due to foreign-born immigration



<sup>6</sup> ACS 2023 1-year estimates indicate that of the 16,992 Foreign born residents of the City of Syracuse, 61.5% entered the U.S. in 2010 or later — equaling 10,450 new residents since 2010, over six times the population increase associated with growth in downtown Syracuse and the Lakefront.





## Poised for Continued Growth

Downtown Syracuse and surrounding neighborhoods continue to experience investment, and downtown median household income has more than tripled since 2010<sup>7</sup>. An additional 476 units of housing are planned or under construction, at 1.4 persons per household<sup>8</sup>, this has the potential to translate to over 660 new residents in the next two years. Pending changes associated with the Interstate 81 project will eliminate or significantly reduce barriers to downtown's continued growth.

The elevated highway that separates Downtown from University Hill, as well as the highway interchange between Interstate 690 and 81 will be removed clearing the way for the development of approximately 30 acres. Additionally, on the northwest side of downtown the reconfiguration of the Interstate 690 and West Street on and off-ramps will eliminate the wall between the Park Avenue neighborhood and Downtown. To the extent possible, Syracuse's Downtown must be allowed to extend and connect with adjacent neighborhoods (i.e., Lakefront, Near Eastside, North Salina Corridor, Hawley Green, Souhside, and the West Onondaga Corridor). In light of the potential for decreased immigration detailed previously, this may be a singular strategy for growth for Syracuse. This growth should be planned for in a proactive way.

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<sup>8</sup> Downtown Committee of Syracuse Housing Needs Assessment and Market Study

<sup>9</sup> Ibid — 1.4 Persons per household was the average household size for Downtown Syracuse in 2023.

# Housing Costs

For some time, Syracuse, like many communities, had to cope with the combined consequences of rising construction costs and the demographic collision of aging Baby Boomers and rising Millennials. Together, these forces have resulted in tight inventories of existing homes for sale at the exact moment when new construction costs have made development prohibitive. These two factors are present throughout the country.

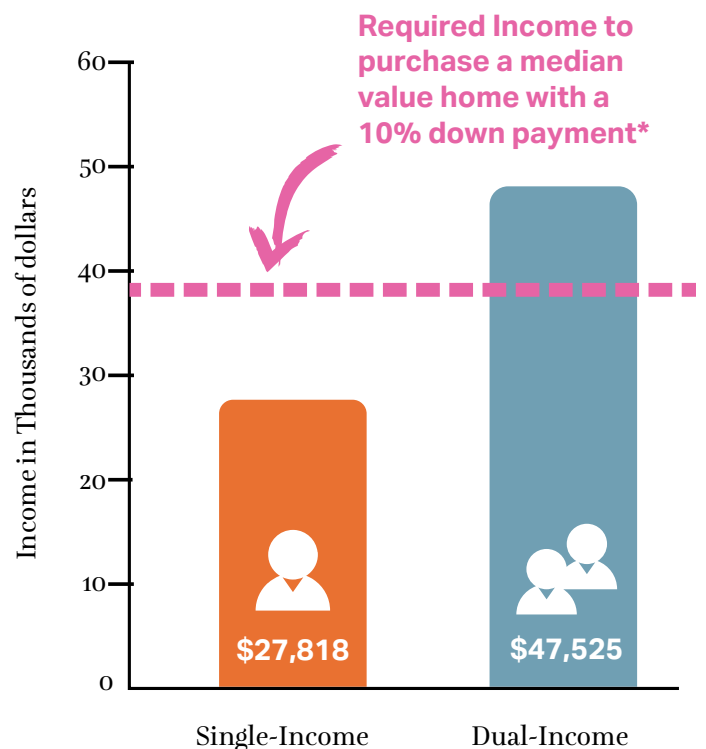
These circumstances may be cause for confusion, because the resulting rise in home prices has been interpreted as evidence of rising demand. However, it is incorrect to assume that rising housing costs in Syracuse are due to the ongoing revitalization of downtown and the Syracuse Lakefront. While housing prices have continued to rise, it has been wrongly concluded that affordability is the key problem to solve. While it is true that Syracuse has an affordability problem, what is even more critical is understanding that there are significant disparities in income that continue to widen.

## Single-earner households face the greatest burden

Very low-income households and especially single-earner households most acutely experience the affordability problem because the housing market has, after 60 years of economic transformation resulting from women joining the workforce, included second incomes and resulting household purchasing power in the cost. The last 30 years have led to an increasing income gap between knowledge workers and everyone else that has been significant

and the impacts of this, too, have been priced into the housing market. The result is that, with few exceptions, it is single-wage-earner households, and especially those without a college education, who cannot afford housing. For the foreseeable future, two-income households will likely be able to pay less than they can afford, while households relying on one income will have to pay more.

### Income required to Qualify for a Mortgage



\*Assumes a median home value of \$186,610 for the Syracuse area

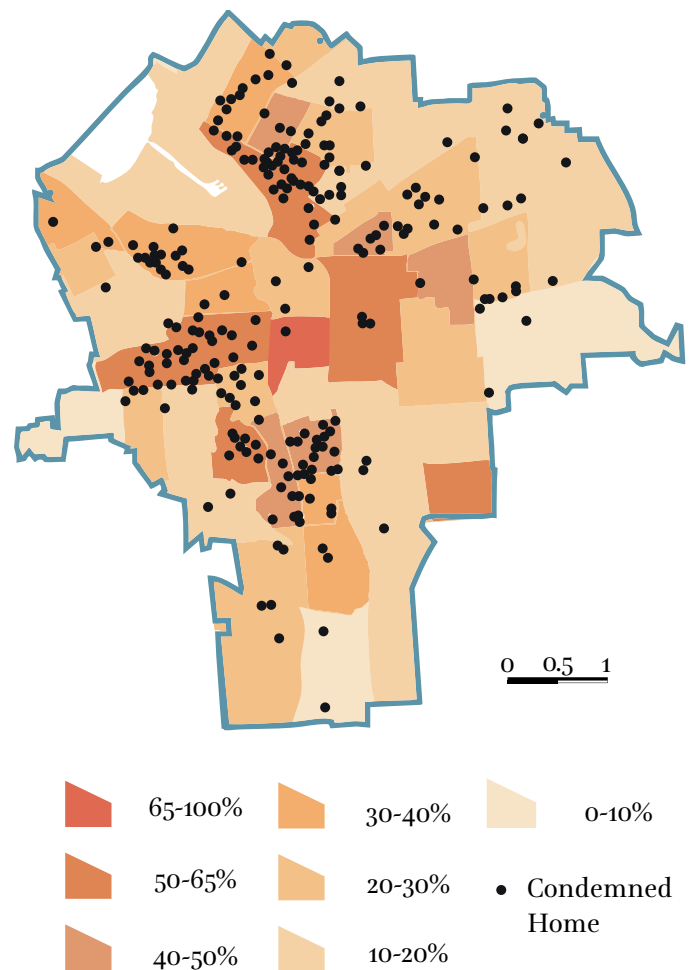
## Low housing costs don't offset high poverty rates

Unfortunately, Syracuse has the extra burden of a significant concentration of Central New York's low-income households, which compounds the pathologies of poverty. This is the situation for roughly 35% of Syracuse's residential fabric, where a third of the City's housing stock has fallen out of the market. These neighborhoods have experienced significant disinvestment, which has led to ever increasing decline as people with choices leave to seek opportunities for better housing and neighborhood health.

While overall the housing market in Syracuse is considered "affordable," the challenges in Syracuse's neighborhoods are more associated with low-incomes than high housing costs. The ratio of overall housing prices in relation to overall incomes is so low that those who are priced out are mainly impoverished or near-impoverished households.

For soft markets that have suffered sustained job and population loss over decades, such as Syracuse, mistaking rising prices and the appearance of too little supply as a problem best solved by more housing, only makes them more vulnerable to their own insidious form of leapfrogging, unless more housing is, by policy, linked to aggressive removal of obsolete housing stock.

Poverty rates and homes "unfit" for habitation





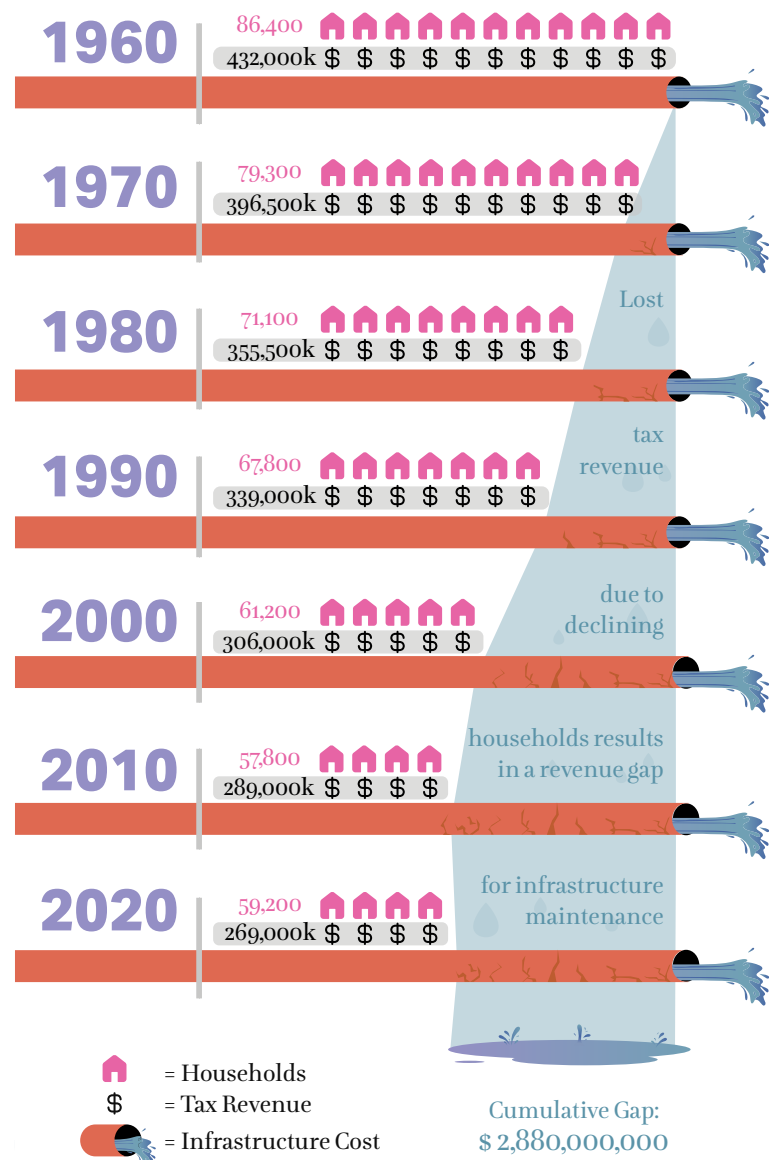
# Fiscal Constraints and Infrastructure Investment

The principal issue is the present inability of the City, on its own, to be able to afford to properly maintain its roads and bridges, water infrastructure, and stormwater management and flood control systems on its own. Syracuse is heavily reliant on state and federal funding, which provide nearly 70% of revenues. Property (11%) and sales tax (11%) comprise less than a quarter of City revenues. The City's revenues are certainly hampered by the loss of population that it has endured since peaking in the 1950's, however, it is still responsible for the size, costs, and maintenance of the infrastructure that was developed to support the considerably larger population and household composition of the mid-twentieth century. While the City's financial position has improved, fewer people generally translates into fewer households, and unless they have incomes (x) high enough to offset population change (y), it will continue to experience fiscal vulnerability.

## Mounting infrastructure costs, shrinking taxbase

The loss of 17,000 households since the mid-20th century cannot be overstated. A City built in 1955 for 225,000 people, and all the sidewalks, streets, and water utilities a City of that size needs, became a City 35% smaller, but all of the costs of a larger City remain. If each household would ordinarily pay \$5,000 a year to the City in taxes, Syracuse has lost an average of roughly \$41M in gross revenue annually (in present value dollars) for each of the last seven decades, or a total of -\$2.88B (gross).

Increasing Tax Revenue Gap for Infrastructure Maintenance due to Population Loss



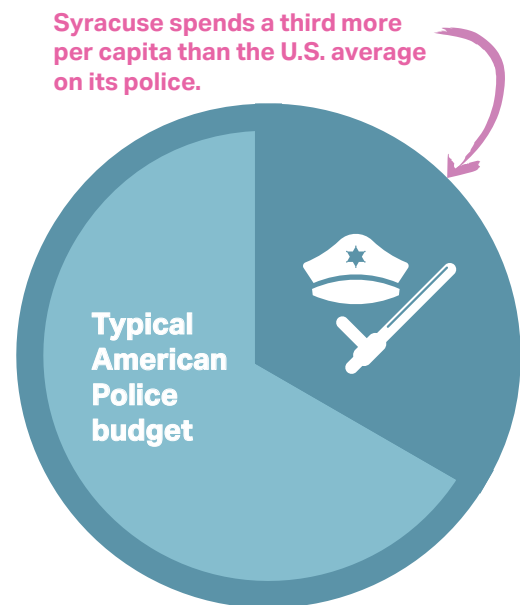


Each year, on average, since Eisenhower was still in his first term, Syracuse has brought in less in tax revenue than needed to afford the cost of infrastructure maintenance. Slowly at first, but by 2000, Syracuse was down more than \$1.14B in cumulative lost tax revenue. When this is understood alongside the reality that during this period the City's poverty rate roughly doubled, the picture is even more troubling. There were roughly 81,000 households in 1955 in Syracuse that had \$410M in tax revenue (in current dollars) to cope with all of the City's financial obligations that included helping roughly 12,200 impoverished households. Today, Syracuse has some 60,000 households and about \$322M in tax revenue to cope with arguably more obligations, not least of which is helping to care for about 20,000 impoverished households. These fiscal challenges make it increasingly difficult for the City to proactively maintain its infrastructure.

Since Syracuse cannot decommission 35% of its intake pipes, pumping stations, conduits, reservoirs, water mains, street draining systems, roads, bridges, speed bumps, signage, snow removal equipment, bus lane maintenance, public facilities, urban forestry, park maintenance, street lighting, and so forth, there is much more to do with much less. Despite the sewer system being a partial County obligation, this general imbalance is problematic. By not decommissioning part of these City utilities and infrastructure, the alternative has been to defer maintenance to stretch fewer dollars further. Madison, Wisconsin for example, has the fiscal capacity to invest more in preventive maintenance whereas more of Syracuse's money goes into reactive repairs<sup>9</sup>. Both are cold-weather cities, but at opposite ends of the prosperity spectrum. Madison spends almost twice per lane-mile on annual care that Syracuse does, a reflection of Madison's comparatively stronger fiscal capacity.

The slow erosion of fiscal strength translates directly into the City having a harder time retaining, much less attracting new households. It also rears its head in other ways. As Syracuse has become poorer both absolutely and otherwise, social problems have worsened and along with it, crime. Today Syracuse has about 3.2 police officers for every 1,000 residents, far higher than the national average of 2.4<sup>10</sup>, costing Syracuse residents more. In every instance of a public need or good, Syracuse residents are paying more for less. This while suburban neighbors are able to use City assets without having to pay for their ongoing maintenance.

### Increasing Economic Disparities Results in Increased Policing Costs



<sup>9</sup>Based on analysis of the City of Syracuse, NY and Madison, WI 2024 annual budgets.

<sup>10</sup> Per FBI Statistics

# A Changing Climate

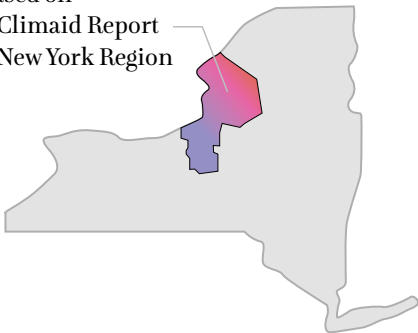
More broadly, the City is experiencing the impacts of a changing climate, including warmer temperatures, increased precipitation, and more frequent extreme weather events. While some experts have suggested that Syracuse could be a climate haven due to its northern location and water resources, the City still faces risks from increased heat, flooding, and potential disruptions to local ecosystems.

As an example, the share of precipitation that occurs during the biggest downpours is expected to increase from 39.7 to 42.7 %<sup>11</sup>. These downpour events are leading to increased flood risk in inland locations. Approximately 20% of buildings within the City are at risk from future flood events. Syracuse’s infrastructure, including its combined sewer system, is susceptible to damage from flooding and extreme weather. This can lead to sewage overflows, contamination of waterways like Onondaga Creek, and disruptions to water and even wastewater services. In addition, flooding and other climate-related events (i.e. high winds) can displace residents, damage homes and businesses, interrupt electric service, and disrupt transportation and other critical services.

Projected Change in Annual Precipitation

Change in Precipitation (%)*			
	Low Estimate	Medium Estimate	High Estimate
2020	0%	4%	8%
2050	2%	7%	13%
2080	3%	9%	15%
2100	1%	14%	26%

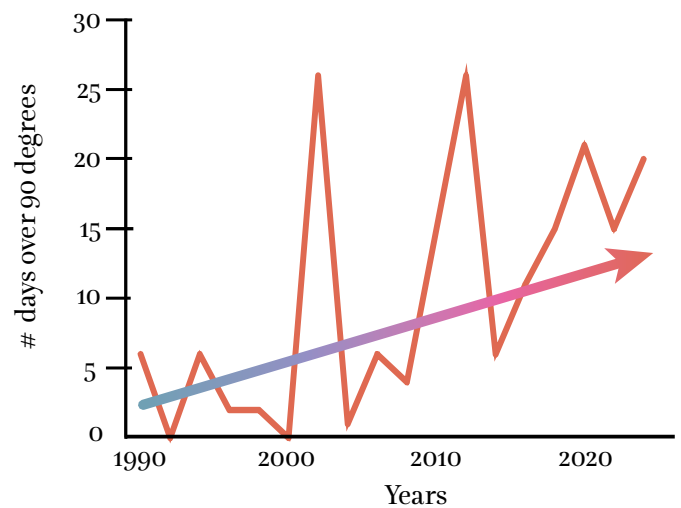
\* Predictions based on New York State Climaid Report for the Central New York Region



<sup>11</sup> A downpour for Syracuse, NY is a two-day rainfall total over 0.8 inches. Around 1990, about 35.0% of precipitation fell during these downpours (source climatecheck.com).

Continued extreme heat is also anticipated, especially during the summer. In 1990, Syracuse experienced about seven days above 89.1°F per year on average. By 2050, projections indicate that Syracuse will experience 33 days per year over 89.1°F. Extreme heat events can pose serious health risks, particularly for the elderly, young children, and those with chronic illnesses. Given the enormity of the child poverty situation in Syracuse, extreme heat is particularly alarming. These climate trends affecting the City must be considered in conjunction with future planning, as they will likely impact infrastructure, public health, and the natural environment. Proactive planning can help to mitigate risks, protect infrastructure, and ensure community well-being.

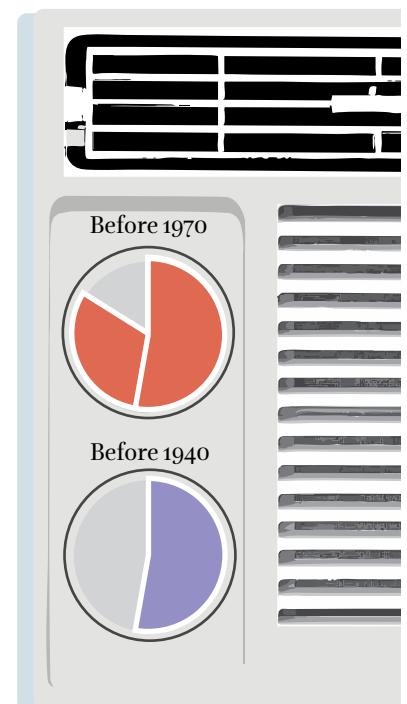
Days over 90 Fahrenheit in 2 year intervals



Access to Air Conditioning

Approximately 84% of households in Syracuse occupy buildings built prior to 1970 (53% of which were built before 1940).

Due to their age and the fact that these buildings are disproportionately occupied by the city's poor, they are unlikely to have air-conditioning.







Civic Partners Stakeholder Group



City Staff Stakeholder Group



# A framework for decision-making

## Stakeholder Engagement Summary

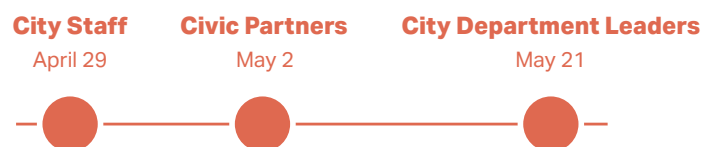
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Syracuse's new comprehensive plan will outline targeted strategies for managing the City's resources and guiding investment and development in the City over the next 10-15 years. The identification of community values will help guide the City as it moves towards the implementation of these strategies.

The City undoubtedly will face difficult choices due to resource constraints. In circumstances where available resources are not capable of addressing all of the City's needs at once, a clearly articulated set of values help guide in the prioritization of choices that are most aligned with Syracuse's future vision. This phase of the comprehensive planning process targeted stakeholders involved in City operations to develop a preliminary understanding of Syracuse's values. Phase II will include a robust public engagement program whereby the Syracuse community will be encouraged to participate in identifying our community values, and review and refine the preliminary values drafted in Phase I.

Three separate groups of stakeholders participated in the preliminary values exercise. The groups included City staff, civic partners from organizations who work on a variety of issues and projects in Syracuse, and City department leadership.

Values are deeply-held, widely-shared beliefs that serve as building blocks for the future of Syracuse. They are aspirational, and reflect what we are willing to fight for. Our best decisions are those that are consistent with our values.



## Process

The preliminary list of potential values, were identified by the three separate stakeholder groups. These groups participated in facilitated discussions during which they were presented with realistic, but fictional development scenarios which included compelling benefits as well as concerning aspects. There were no correct or incorrect reactions to the scenarios, rather, they were used to prompt discussion about what the City would be “giving” and “getting”, and what the City’s response to the proposal should be. As the stakeholder groups discussed how they would respond to the development proposals they were asked to articulate and clarify the values driving their thinking. While the groups identified unique values, some values re-occurred between groups.

## What we Heard

### Decisions no longer made out of desperation

The most consistent discussion point among the stakeholder groups as they worked through the development scenarios is that the City’s negotiating position is different than it once was. In the past, the City acquiesced and accepted mediocre development and uninspired projects for the sake of “development”, but that is no longer the case. The City, exercising an increasing confidence and recognition of its own value, has begun to reject projects or parts of projects that are not aligned with its vision and goals, or whose negative externalities outweigh their benefits.

### Willingness to come to the table

But this confidence does not mean that the City has taken to outright rejection in all cases. Stakeholder discussions organically organized into an effort to find an alternative middle ground that benefits both the City AND the developer or applicant. “We are trying to cultivate a culture and approach where we are always willing to come to the table in the hope that we open the door to something mutually beneficial - that hasn’t always been the case,” said one stakeholder.

### Emphasizing additive investments

Positive changes already underway are influencing this new way of thinking for the City. As the City experiences benefits from recent investments, stakeholders identified the importance of building on success as a way of both reinforcing and leveraging them in support of additive projects and initiatives. Building on the successes of the recent past is an important value. The City must take advantage of positive momentum.

### Articulating and enforcing development expectations

An important part of advocating for a better future involves defining a widely understood vision that stakeholders can collectively pursue. During the discussions, aspects of the proposed development scenarios were deemed unfavorable due to misalignment with a vision for a particular area. Stakeholders acknowledged that part of soliciting better project proposals is communicating vision and standards to the wider development community. Internally, this practice also reinforces the City’s ability to reject or request modifications to proposals that do not meet the standards or align with the priorities of the City. “We want high-quality, well-done design,” one stakeholder group said, “and to get that we need to have firmer standards and not capitulate too soon [in our discussions with project developers].”

### **Acting proactively, not reactively**

The City Department Leaders stakeholder group took the concept of defining a vision one step further, identifying a desire to shift into a more proactive approach to meeting the City's needs. This group wanted to do more than simply reject proposals which fail to address underlying needs. They viewed the establishment of a unified vision as a first step in soliciting and helping to develop projects which best support the people of Syracuse.

### **Reinforcing the market value of downtown**

A key priority that emerged from the discussions was the importance of undertaking activities that strengthen, rather than weaken, the urban core. As the I-81 transformation takes shape, the groups emphasized the importance of making space for taxable development, good urban design elements, and uses that contribute to the vibrancy of the downtown, which is important to both the City's and the region's economic health.

### **Prioritizing the needs of City residents**

As the economic and geographic center of Central New York, the City of Syracuse provides facilities and services that meet many regional needs. While stakeholders recognized the importance of the City's role in service provision to the larger region, they noted that the City is at times overburdened, to the detriment of residents. "We need to make sure that we are taking care of our own needs," one stakeholder said. They noted that one role of City government is to be mindful of the negative externalities that projects and service may pose, and make sure that they are being addressed so as not to compile too much stress on the City or its residents.

### **Supporting projects with multiple benefits**

Many stakeholder groups approached the proposed scenarios by developing creative modifications to the proposals which would make the projects more attractive to the City. A concept that each group embraced was efficiency-developing projects that met multiple City goals or provided a variety of benefits to the City.

### **Practicing long-term thinking**

Finally, every stakeholder group mentioned the importance of practicing long-term thinking in planning and decision making. They noted that achieving a sustained, high-quality of life for current and future residents requires that proposals be considered from the perspective of their long terms effects. This value speaks to the City's commitment to both economic and environmental sustainability. Maintaining balance in the City's checkbook AND ecology through enacting conservation policies, investments in energy efficiency, focusing on decarbonization, pursuing sustainable food systems, protecting habitat, and actively managing the urban forest will serve current and future residents.

The values identified in this process as well as those that will be identified through broader community engagement will become foundational to the New Comprehensive Plan. Recommendations in the future plan will be checked against the values to ensure that they are aligned with the communities priorities. As conflicts inevitably arise and decisions need to be made, those too can be checked against the values established by the community and included in this plan.

# Phase I Summary

## We Are Here

### Starting from a Strong Position

The City of Syracuse embarks on this Comprehensive Plan from a strong position following a decade of positive progress. The City is positioned to make additive investments that build on an optimistic outlook, transformative projects, policies that set the stage for desired development, a capable city staff, and improved market conditions in key parts of the City.

#### MINDSET

Momentum is leading to a sense of positivity and hope in Syracuse, despite some daunting challenges

#### PROJECTS

Creekwalk, Bike Infrastructure, LED Street Lights, Sidewalks Program, STEAM High School, SSI, Surge Link

#### POLICIES

ReZone, Housing Strategy, Urban Forestry Master Plan, Dig Once, Vision Zero

#### CAPABILITY

City Staff Professionalization, Land Bank, Public Art, API Data Analysis

#### MARKET

Downtown growth and investment.  
New housing in Near Eastside and Inner Harbor

## What's happening

### On the Horizon

There are some things we know will change the City forever, even if we don't know how exactly.

Micron-Induced Growth Potential

Redevelopment Opportunities around I-81

Inner Harbor Development

unknown

### Projects Underway

Some projects and policies are underway or recently completed, and their impacts will begin to be felt as the development of the next comprehensive plan commences.

Bus Rapid Transit

Surge Link

Syracuse Surge

Climate Action Plan

Housing Strategy Implementation

Regional Market Updates

Gun Violence Reduction

### Challenges

The City faces some long standing challenges, and can also expect new, unanticipated challenges to arise. The City will need to continue to look for effective, innovative solutions that are aligned with its values.

Lead Pipes

Concentrated Poverty

Soft Housing Market

Absentee Landlords

Vacant Housing

Population Loss

unknown

Mounting Infrastructure Costs

unknown

Climate Change

Imbalance Between Needs & Resources





## City of Syracuse Comprehensive Plan

### A framework for decision-making

In a context of resource scarcity, the City will have to make hard choices about where and how to invest its limited resources. Choices will be evaluated by measuring potential action against the City's established **values** and **principles**.

#### Values

Our core beliefs.  
They explain why we do things. We make decisions based on our values.

**We Practice Long-Term Thinking:** We make decisions sustainably, equitably, with the City's best future in mind.

**We Act in Our Self Interest:** We do not make decisions out of desperation. We prioritize the needs of City residents.

We...

We...

We...

#### Principles

Physical guides that drive decisions by explaining how we do things (i.e., location, form and character, dimension, etc.).  
We execute decisions based on our principles.

**Strengthen Downtown Syracuse through vibrant infill projects, streetscapes, & placemaking investments**

**Reduce concentrated poverty through mixed-income development**

**Grow sustainably by emphasizing additive investments and supporting projects with multiple benefits**

### Focused Future Effort

Since the City can't take on every project and policy overhaul at once, the next comprehensive plan will identify a short list of targeted, high-priority outcomes to focus on over the next decade. Success will look like the achievement of these outcomes in a way that is aligned with the City's values and shaped by its principles.

**We  
Are  
Going  
Here**

#### A few possibilities:

*Get 81 right.*

*Make Downtown Syracuse a stronger, thriving regional center.*

*Institute Dig Once as a non-negotiable Citywide policy.*

*Build a state-of-the-art, modern neighborhood at the Syracuse Lakefront for current residents and prospective Micron employees.*

*De-concentrate poverty.*

*Implement the Housing Strategy.*

*Invest in climate resiliency infrastructure.*

important note:  
this list of values and principles will change as a result of stakeholder and community comments during Phase II of this project





# Focused Future Effort

## Next Steps

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Phase I of the Syracuse Comprehensive Plan has set the stage for additional stages of work to begin expeditiously. Its community profile, plan audit, and compilation of emerging plan components (including potential planning frameworks, priority issues, and values) provide the basis for community-facing work to begin in a manner that tests and builds upon preliminary thinking.

As outlined by the following proposed scope of work, Phase II is proposed to begin in January 2026 and will be comprised of three distinct segments — each with clear and definitive outputs that would serve as the building blocks for subsequent work. These include:

### Phase II-A: Trends, Issues, and Priorities

**Potential Timing: January 2026 – June 2026**

### Phase II-B: Values, Principles, and the Path Forward

**Potential Timing: July 2026 – November 2026**

### Phase II-C: Plan Development

**Potential Timing: December 2026 – June 2027**



## Phase II Planning Process



All three stages of work during Phase II would depend heavily on the work of a representative Steering Committee to advise the planning process, partner with consultants and staff on public engagement activities, and serve as public ambassadors for the project.

### Phase II-A: Trends, Issues, and Priorities

Phase II-A will be a five-month process of analysis and public engagement that yields a refined summary of existing conditions and trends, identification of the “big things” that stakeholders believe the plan absolutely has to get right, and well-defined outcomes that describe what progress on Syracuse’s priorities would look like.

This work will take shape through the following sequential activities:

### Steering Committee Kick-off Meeting

The first meeting of the project’s Steering Committee would introduce members to the project and get right to work on several important questions, including:

- » Syracuse’s recent trajectory on several issues and areas (the committees’ gut sense of whether things have been getting better, getting worse, or staying the same).
- » The “Big Things” that committee members think should be prioritized by the planning process, and why they think the identified issues are so important.
- » Supplemental Deep-Dive Analysis





Based on ideas emerging from Phase I of the plan, as well as “Big Things” flagged by the Steering Committee at their first meeting, a period of targeted analysis will take place that pulls together and builds on existing knowledge of “what is known” about key issues. The goal of this analysis is to ensure as full an understanding as possible of key issues in order to inform prioritization, outcomes selection, and action plan development.

Topics that may be subject to supplemental analysis, involving local and non-local datasets, include:

- » City fiscal conditions and outlook
- » Housing conditions and markets
- » Infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, water/sewer)
- » Parks, recreational, and quality of life amenities
- » Neighborhood commercial districts
- » Downtown investment opportunities

### **Steering Committee Meeting #2**

The Steering Committee’s second meeting would include a combination of education and priority refinement.

- » Presentation of targeted analysis of the “Big Things” raised during the kick-off meeting, clarifying what is genuinely known about those issues.
- » An exercise to narrow the list of “Big Things” to a shorter list of preliminary priorities.
- » An exercise to identify the most important outcomes to achieve in relationship to each priority.

## **Public Engagement – Round #1**

The Steering Committee’s second meeting would coincide with a period of broader public outreach that would similarly work to identify and prioritize “Big Things,” helping to either verify or adjust the list emerging from the Steering Committee. This period of outreach would include:

- » Open House Roadshow: Open house events would be facilitated during the same week as the second Steering Committee meeting.
- » Community Survey: An online survey would be open for one month.

## **Steering Committee Meeting #3**

The Steering Committee’s third and final meeting of Phase II-A would contribute two essential steps to the transition to Phase II-B:

- » Refine and confirm the priorities and outcomes emerging from the committee’s work, as well as input provided by the broader public.
- » Endorse a set of emerging core values that reflect Syracuse’s priorities as well preliminary thinking from Phase I.

## **Report on Trends, Issues, and Priorities**

Phase II-A would conclude with a report that outlines the following:

- » The full list of “Big Things” that were identified through engagement processes.
- » A narrowed outline of utmost priorities and the outcomes attached to those priorities.
- » Summary of what is known about the priorities based on analysis from previous efforts as well as supplemental analysis.
- » An emerging set of core values based on the Steering Committee’s work as values identified during Phase I.

## **Phase II-B: Values, Principles, and the Path Forward**

Phase II-B would push planning process forward through another five-month process that builds the Syracuse Comprehensive Plan’s decision-making framework and solidifies the overall direction that the new plan should take.

The work of Phase II-B would take shape through the following activities:

### **Steering Committee Meeting #4**

At the fourth overall meeting of the project’s Steering Committee, the committee will work to shape the project’s decision-making framework and provide guidance on scenario development.

- » Confirm values identified during Phase II-A; review and refine the planning team’s translation of values into proposed planning principles.
- » Contribute to the setting of parameters for scenario development.

## **Scenario Development**

The planning team will take the trends and patterns analyzed during Phase I and Phase II-A, along with feedback on Syracuse’s priority issues and guidance from the Steering Committee, to create a set of scenarios that will crystalize the tradeoffs and opportunity costs of Syracuse’s potential paths forward— including a scenario that describes what can be expected from a continuation of the City’s current path.

The scenarios will be prepared and presented for general consideration and discussion in order to identify the scenario that reflects the path that Syracuse is able and willing to follow.



## **Steering Committee Meeting #5**

At the fifth overall meeting of the project's Steering Committee, the committee will help select a preferred path forward based on scenarios prepared by the planning team.

- » Review and provide input on what committee members like and don't like about each of the presented scenarios and how they would influence progress on Syracuse's priorities.
- » Identify which scenario has the broadest support from committee members, why they support it, and what it would can be anticipated from an action plan responsive to the chosen scenario.

## **Public Engagement – Round #2**

The Steering Committee's fifth meeting would coincide with a period of broader public outreach—similar to the one in Phase II-A—that would help validate or refine input emerging from the Steering Committee. In particular, this round would be used to present and receive feedback on a proposed decision-making framework for the plan (values and principles) as well as feedback on the scenario's developed by the project team.

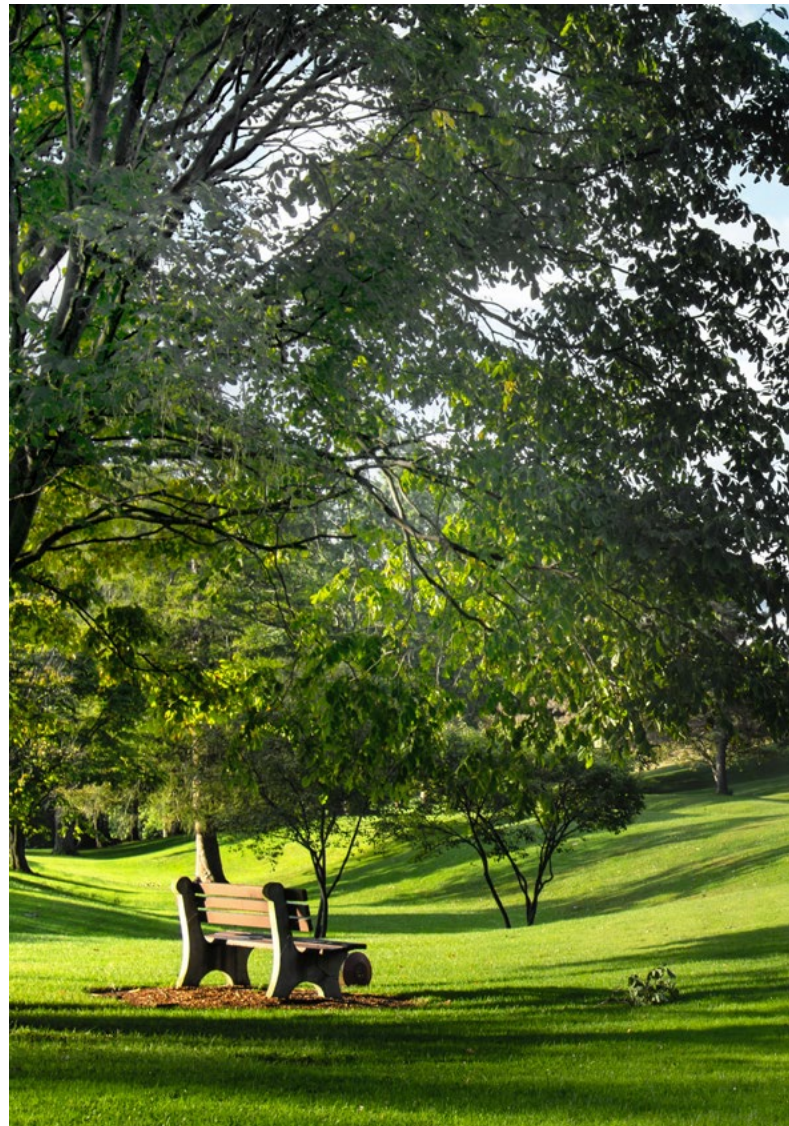
This period of outreach would include:

- » Open House Roadshow: Open house events would be facilitated during the same week as the fifth Steering Committee meeting.
- » Community Survey: An online survey would be open for one month.

## **Report on Values, Principles, and the Path Forward**

Phase II-B would conclude with a report that outlines the following:

- » The finalized decision-making framework for the comprehensive plan, detailing the core values and planning principles that should be used to filter Syracuse's choices.
- » Summary of the preferred scenario and the direction that it indicates for the planning process and action planning for Syracuse's priorities.



## **Phase II-C: Plan Development**

Phase II-C would involve the drafting of the new comprehensive plan over a six-month period, including the compilation of plan components developed during Phase II-A and Phase II-B and the development of an implementation guide and action plan.

The work of Phase II-C would take shape through the following activities:

### **Action Plan Conceptual Development**

The first two months of Phase II-C would be dominated by the planning team's work on a draft action plan that is responsive to Syracuse's priorities, direction from the preferred scenario, and the plan's decision-making framework.

A first draft of a general outline for the action plan will be ready for staff review and input in preparation for presentation to the Steering Committee.

### **Steering Committee Meeting #6**

At the sixth overall meeting of the project's Steering Committee, the committee will provide feedback on the draft action plan outline and begin discussions on what the implementation process would look like.

- » Discuss draft action plan with the planning team and provide feedback/questions on the conceptual framework for the action plan.
- » Discussion that looks ahead to the first 12-24 months of implementation – what's required to put the plan into motion, what comes first, and what role can committee members play during the adoption and implementation process.

## **Full Draft Development for Internal Review**

Feedback on the conceptual framework for the action plan will allow development of the full draft plan to proceed. Upon completion of the draft, it will be circulated first to City of Syracuse staff and the Steering Committee for a first round of feedback and comments, which will shape revisions in preparation for a public review draft.

### **Public Review Draft**

The completion of a public review draft will coincide with a third round of broader public engagement:

### **Public Engagement – Round #3**

- » Open House Roadshow: An overview of the Public Review Draft would be the focus of up to three open house events.
- » Public Comment System: Release of the Public Review Draft online would include a function allowing the public to submit comments for one month.

### **Draft Finalization and Presentation**

Comments and feedback submitted on the Public Review Draft would be analyzed, discussed with City of Syracuse staff, and then translated into a final set of edits to produce a final draft ready for the adoption process.

The planning team will present the final draft to the City Planning Commission and the Common Council in support of adoption.









City of Syracuse

**Comprehensive Plan**

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