Bridging the Urban and Rural Divide in Erie County

Infrastructure, Resources, and Services

JEFFERSON
EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this Group Action Project by the Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy (JCLA) 2022 Cohort is to assess Erie County's urban-rural divide in consideration of infrastructure, resources, and services. The cohort spent seven months visiting, learning about, and researching nine municipalities across Erie County in part to inform this project. The group had to first clearly define infrastructure, resources, and services as well as how they applied to rural and urban areas. It then examined eight subcategories under the umbrella of infrastructure, resources, and services to include: broadband, economy and workforce, education, energy and utilities, healthcare and emergency services, housing, public transportation, recreation and how they are viewed in the nine municipalities.

The cohort believes that the urban-rural divide is an oversimplification based on geography and fails to account for a number of factors, such as lived experiences and interconnectivity found in each community; the diverse populations in both urban and rural communities; suburban populations; similarities between multiple populations despite urban-rural classifications; and nuanced differences between each rural community. Further, secondary research, both local and national, may indicate divides between rural and urban, but what the group found across Erie County is a unique structure of various municipalities that further contribute to the complexity of such a divide.

Not every municipality sees, knows of or believes in this divide, which begs further questions of perception and impact. Much of what the cohort experienced and what its research reflects indicates that urban-rural divides that exist, with the exception of public transportation, are likely linked more to class and status than to geography. Work is being done through various plans, initiatives, and organizations, but there is still a lot that can be done to achieve long-term, sustainable, collaborative growth.

While this action project does not propose new plans or courses of action, it will showcase where the county is and where the cohort wants to see it go. By the end of this report, our hope is that the reader will have a better understanding of the "urban-rural divide" and what similarities, differences, challenges, and opportunities exist for nine communities in terms of infrastructure, resources, and services.

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I. Introduction

When one envisions Erie County, Pennsylvania, he or she may consider Erie's urban core, where an abundance of cultures converge as new Americans redefine areas once home to different immigrant clusters. Another may envision a picturesque beach day spent at Presque Isle State Park followed by dinner at one of the many restaurants along West Eighth Street. Alternatively, one may envision rolling agricultural fields bathed in the light of the golden hour of an autumn evening or the sense of belonging felt during community festivals held in small downtown districts. These idyllic depictions highlight that Erie County is home to a diverse array of dynamic and welcoming communities; of both urban and rural makeup. The presence of these diverse communities and the abundance of interconnections and cooperation required for all of them to succeed should be celebrated.

The reality of governing these numerous communities and meeting the needs of such a diverse populace, however, is complicated. Erie County is home to 38 municipalities (cities, boroughs, and townships), 13 school districts, and a large county government while being represented by a slate of state and federal elected officials. The county is also home to a nearly equally divided voting block that serves as a bellwether for key state and federal elections. The recent history of Erie County's communities is very much defined by their access to key transportation and freight corridors that now manifests itself as north and south of Interstate 90. Areas north of Interstate 90 and closer to Lake Erie are more densely populated and home to the majority of the county's largest employers.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, further revealed the county's longstanding racial and economic divides. Communities of color in Erie County have long been underserved and neglected, facing redlining, poorer health outcomes, lower rates of educational attainment, homeownership, and economic mobility, [1] and higher exposure to pollution and toxins, [2] among other factors. This culminated in the passage of an ordinance by Erie County Council in 2020 recognizing racism as a public health crisis. [3] Rural poverty, in addition to urban poverty, remains a challenge for community leaders as trauma, poverty, lack of access, and other challenges intersect. Households lacking adequate or any internet coverage faced numerous challenges with at-home learning during pandemic closures. [4]

As communities across the globe consider the social, economic, and environmental recovery required to forge a new, pandemic-altered future, recognizing the diversity of constituent lived experiences will be essential. This is especially true of Erie County. As a result, the 2022-23 JCLA cohort, was tasked with the following challenge:

Assess Erie County's urban-rural divide in consideration of infrastructure, resources, and services.

As a result of presentations from community leaders and consultation with other sources, the following document provides an analysis of the Erie County urban-rural divide, considers the implications of this framing, and proposes recommendations to foster new intercommunity cooperation to increase access to critical infrastructure, resources, and services.

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1 "Resolution Number 43, 2020: A Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in Erie County," *Erie County Council,* September 8, 2020, accessed December 9, 2022, Here.
2 "Environmental Justice Index (EJI) Explorer," *United States Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry*, accessed December 9, 2022, Here.
3 "Resolution Number 43, 2020: A Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in Erie County," *Erie County Council,* September 8, 2020, accessed December 9, 2022, Here.
4 Styborski, Jeff, "Recognizing the Rural Digital Divide: Online connectivity obstacles for households in Wattsburg Area School District," March 2, 2022, accessed December 9, 2022, Here.

II. Methodology and Limitations

i. Methodology

Charged with assessing the urban-rural divide in Erie County, the JCLA cohort utilized a mixed methodology approach. The first necessary step involved defining key words from the project challenge including "infrastructure," "resources," "services," "urban," and "rural." The following definitions are modified from Merriam-Webster to allow them to be distinguished from one another:

- *Infrastructure* - A devised delivery mechanism for resources and services
    - Infrastructure is the basis for resources and services; a link to adequacy or inadequacy of resources and services
- *Resources* - Inherent or natural source of supply, support, or aid
- *Services* - Goods and amenities delivered

To define "urban" versus "rural," the following US Census Bureau definitions[5] were considered:

Urban
- Metropolitan or Urbanized Areas - Area containing 50,000 residents or more and with an overall population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile
- Micropolitan or Urban clusters - Area home to at least 2,500 but fewer than 50,000 residents and an overall population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile

Rural
- Areas not considered urban, or areas home to fewer than 2,500 residents and population density of less than 1,000 people per square mile

While the US Census Bureau determines urban from rural based on population density and totals, the JCLA cohort studied Erie County communities by municipal boundaries (cities, boroughs, and townships). Through JES-coordinated civic engagement sessions, the cohort consulted directly with the following municipalities: Cities of Corry and Erie, Boroughs of Albion, Edinboro, North East, and Union City, and Townships of Fairview, Harborcreek, and Millcreek. Figure 1 showcases those areas of Erie County deemed urban and rural, which do not align with municipal boundaries.[6]

Additionally, all municipalities visited by the JCLA cohort are home to urban census tracts. Though this may be the case, when visiting these communities, it became clear that defining them as rural and urban should be based on additional factors. Those areas considered "urban clusters" in Erie County are entirely surrounded by rural areas and are defined in many ways by this relative isolation. Therefore, these urban clusters were considered rural for the purpose of analysis. Those municipalities home to "urbanized areas" are considered urban. Figure 2 outlines municipalities consulted, their US Census Bureau status, and the label determined by the cohort.

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5 "2010 Census Urban and Rural Classification and Urban Area Criteria," *United States Census Bureau*, revised October 8, 2021, Here.
6 How Does the US Census Bureau Define 'Rural'," Rural America, *United States Census Bureau,* accessed December 5, 2022, Here.
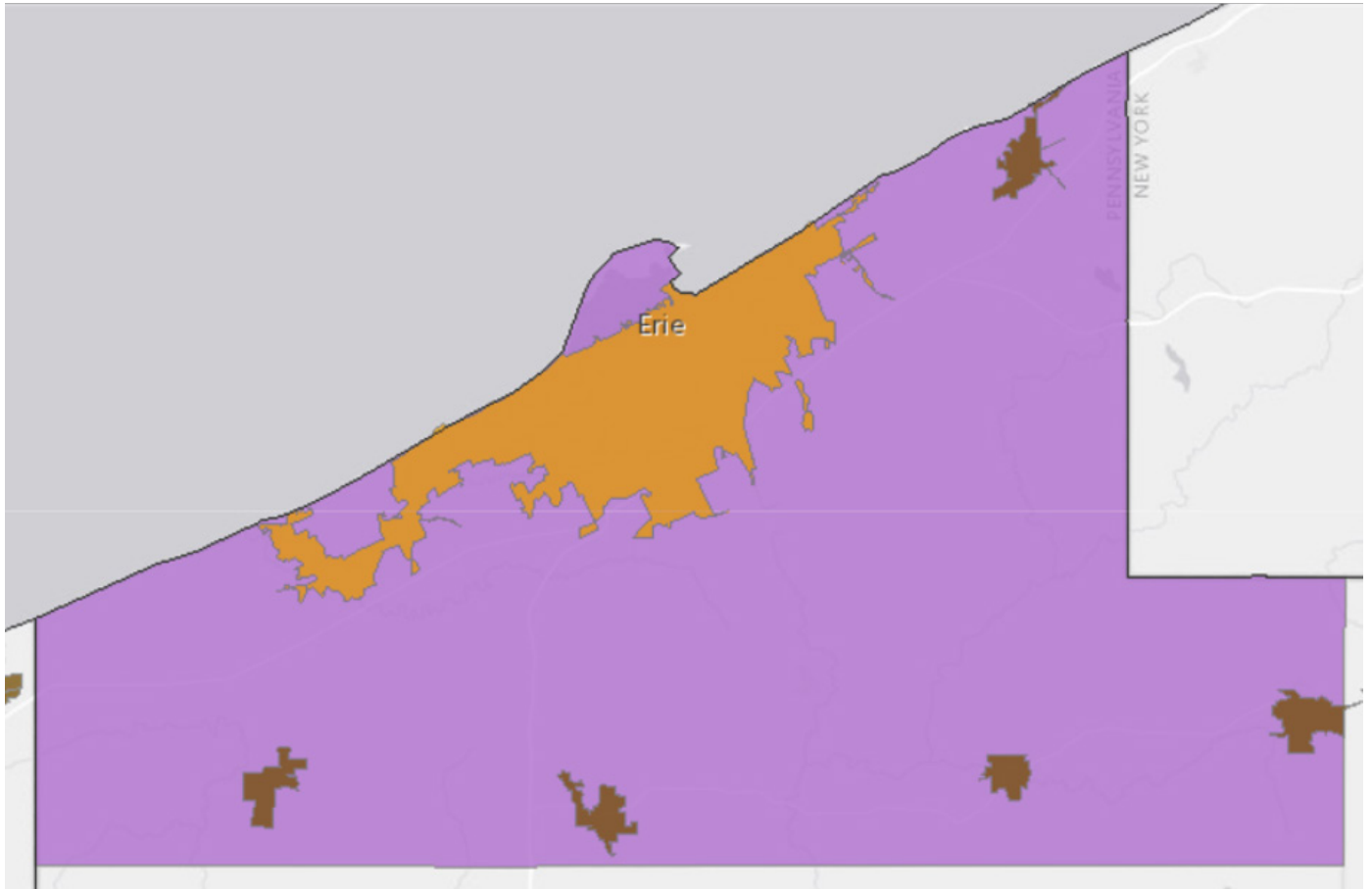
Figure 1: Map of US Census Bureau urban areas in Erie County, Pennsylvania

Municipality	US Census Bureau Designation & Type (Urban vs Rural)[7]	Municipal Population[8]	JCLA Designation (Urban vs Rural)
City of Corry	Urban - Urban Cluster	6,210	Rural
City of Erie	Urban - Urbanized Area	94,831	Urban
Albion Borough	Urban - Urban Cluster	1,528	Rural
Edinboro Borough	Urban - Urban Cluster	4,964	Rural
North East Borough	Urban - Urban Cluster	4,106	Rural
Union City Borough	Urban - Urban Cluster	2,927	Rural
Fairview Township	Urban - Urbanized Area with rural	11,138	Urban
Harborcreek Township	Urban - Urbanized Area with rural	16,635	Urban
Millcreek Township	Urban - Urbanized Area with some rural	54,073	Urban

Figure 2: Community urban versus rural designations, US Census Bureau and JCLA.

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7 How Does the US Census Bureau Define 'Rural'," Rural America, *United States Census Bureau,* accessed December 5, 2022, Here.
8 "PCT014 | HOUSEHOLD TYPE (INCLUDING LIVING ALONE) BY RELATIONSHIP FOR THE POPULATION 65 YEARS AND OLDER [21]," Decennial Census, *United States Census Bureau,* accessed December 5, 2022, Here.

Based on primary and secondary, qualitative and quantitative research, the group profiled Erie County municipalities and considered commonalities and differences among these political subdivisions. The municipalities profiled include those which the cohort connected with directly through JES-organized civic engagement sessions. Based on common themes discussed during these sessions, 10 subcategories requiring infrastructure, resources, and services to operate were selected for profiling.

However, based on capacity, only the top area of need within each of the 10 subcategories based on the municipalities considered was discussed under the umbrella of either infrastructure, resources, or services. Therefore, this document is divided into three primary sections (infrastructure, resources, and services), and within those, subcategories are considered that are covered in the analysis and concluding portions of the document.

1. Infrastructure
   - Broadband
   - Infrastructure
   - Recreation

2. Resources
   - Energy and Utilities
   - Healthcare and Emergency Services

3. Services
   - Commerce and Industry
   - Education
   - Public Transportation

To profile each community, the group derived qualitative data from various primary sources including site visits, interviews with elected officials or staff, comprehensive plans, and other government documents. A diversity of sources, both primary and secondary, informed the quantitative data collection process. Academic studies, newspaper articles, comparative analyses, and demographic data from various government agencies were reviewed. *Figure 3* considers demographic metrics for each of the municipalities that were overarchingly considered for their connections to our assessment of urban-rural differences in access to infrastructure, resources, and services. *Figure 4* features those elected officials and staff with which unstructured interviews were completed.

Municipality (Urban/Rural)	Below Federal Poverty Line (%)[9]	Median Household Income ($)[10]	Mean Household Income ($)[11]	People of Color (%)[12]	Relative Population Change (2000-2020) (%)[13]
City of Corry (R)	28.3	37,192	57,811	5.4	-10.0
City of Erie (U)	24.7	40,201	55,262	33.8	-9.4
Albion Borough (R)	12.3	48,750	57,916	5.4	-5.2
Edinboro Borough (R)	24.7	36,695	60,225	12.4	-40.0
North East Borough (R)	18.7	58,336	71,204	9.0	-12.1
Union City Borough (R)	20.1	42,292	51,608	6.6	-18.3
Fairview Township (U)	4.9	94,009	123,141	8.1	9.0
Harborcreek Township (U)	10.9	69,250	84,272	8.3	8.8
Millcreek Township (U)	8.3	71,762	93,385	11.7	3.6
Erie County	15.7	55,949	74,780	17.8	-3.7

Figure 3: Demographic Metrics by Municipality

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9 "S1701|POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS," 2021: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.
10 "S1701|INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS," 2021: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.
11 "S1701|INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS," 2021: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.
12 P1| RACE," Decennial Census, *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.
13 P1 | RACE," Decennial Census, *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

ii. Limitations

The narrow scope of community research and outreach are limitations in this project methodology. The group interfaced directly with three dozen people in positions of power within Erie County. Due to limited capacity to appropriately conduct research with human subjects, the group did not incorporate surveys or interviews with individuals outside of JES-sponsored activities. Pursuit of these methodologies and an expansion of perspectives considered would have produced a much greater volume of qualitative data and possibly greatly altered perceptions of these communities.

Erie County is home to 38 municipalities and an expansive county government system home to at least 32 departments and divisions.[244] Six members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and two senators also represent portions of the county. The JCLA cohort met with nine municipalities, three House members, one senator, and several Erie County officials. The resulting assessment of the urban-rural divide, though it considers a diversity of communities, is not informed by all local governments or elected officials.

Additionally, among the number of municipalities considered, the group observed vastly different levels of capacity for public information sharing, strategic and comprehensive planning, and governance. These factors limited the ability of the group to uniformly assess some conditions and understand the breadth of strategies previously undertaken to foster inter-governmental and intercommunity collaboration.

As alluded to previously, defining those terms outlined in the project objective proved challenging. There are areas of intersection between the use of "infrastructure," "resources," and "services." Additionally, there is no universally agreed upon designation for "urban" versus "rural." Based on available resources and the confines of those communities studied, the cohort ultimately adapted definitions from reliable sources for the purpose of analysis. Erie County is home to many communities that would be considered "suburban" as well, but the US Census Bureau and the project challenge did not acknowledge this category. The analysis section will further describe concerns associated with defining an urban-rural divide versus a more nuanced interpretation.

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14 "Departments," *Erie County Pennsylvania,* accessed December 7, 2023, Here.

Session Dates	Location(s)	Speaker Name(s) & Title(s)
June 12-14, 2022	Harrisburg	• Judge Victor Stabile, PA Superior Court • Ryan Bizzarro, PA House of Representatives, 3rd District • Patrick Harkins, PA House of Representatives, 1st District • Robert Merski, PA House of Representatives, 2nd District • Ezra Thrush, PennFuture Director of Government Affairs • Melissa Batula, PA Department of Transportation Executive Deputy Secretary • Jeff Warner, PA Department of Agriculture, Deputy Secretary for Animal Health and Food Safety • Dan Laughlin, PA State Senate, 49th District
June 20, 2022	Erie County (History)	• Andrew Roth, Jefferson Educational Society Scholar-in-Residence • Pat Cuneo, Jefferson Educational Society Director of Publications • Judy Lynch, Jefferson Educational Society, Board of Trustees & Former Erie County Executive
July 21, 2022	Erie County (Economy)	• Kim Thomas, Infinite Erie Executive Director • Perry Wood, Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority Executive Director • Kenneth Louie, Economic Research Institute of Erie Director • Amy Bridger, Penn State Behrend Senior Director for Corporate Strategy & External Engagement
August 18, 2022	Erie's Urban Core - **Millcreek & Harborcreek Townships**	• David Robinson, Jeremy Peterson, Ed Torres, Mathew Sam Filippo, Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority Staff • Kim Clear, Millcreek Township Supervisor • Tom Bruno, Chief, PA Department of Environmental Protection, Office of the Great Lakes
September 1, 2022	Erie County (Government)	• Andre Horton, Erie County Councilman, District 2 • Judge John Trucilla, Administrative Judge, Erie County Court of Common Pleas, 6th Judicial District • Jessica Horan-Kunco, Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development Director • Brenton Davis, Erie County Executive
September 22, 2022	West Erie County - **City of Corry, Union City & North East Boroughs**	• Patrick Gehrlein, North East Borough Manager • David Robinson, Union City Family Support Center, Board of Directors • Brody Howard, Corry Higher Educational Council Executive Director
October 13, 2022	East Erie County - **Albion & Edinboro Boroughs**	• Albion State Correctional Institution Staff • Jason Spangenberg, Edinboro Borough Manager & Finance Director
December 8, 2022	**City of Erie**	Liz Allen, Erie City Council President Joe Schember, Mayor, City of Erie David Forrest, City of Erie Planning Director Emily Fetcko, Erie Downtown Partnership CEO

* Bolded locations above indicate those governmental entities profiled by the JCLA cohort.

Figure 4: 2022 JCLA sessions and speakers from which the cohort derived qualitative data.

III. Erie County Infrastructure, Resources, and Services

i. Infrastructure

a. Broadband Infrastructure

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated great access barriers to high speed, or broadband, internet service across the United States. As educational institutions, healthcare providers, employers, and government and civic organizations had to rapidly adapt during times of closure to meet constituent needs, inadequate internet infrastructure quickly arose as a grave barrier. The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines broadband internet as a service that provides a minimum of 25 megabytes per second (Mbps) download and three Mbps upload speeds.[2][45] Federal overreporting by providers of access to internet and speeds was known well before the outbreak of the pandemic, but this misinformation led to great consequences.[16] Now, leaders at all levels are considering how to most effectively deploy additional infrastructure to close access gaps.

Numerous studies have shown that there are many areas of Erie County that cannot access reliable fixed internet service while others have access but fall well below the FCC broadband definition. The 2017 collaborative Northwest Pennsylvania Community Technology Action Plan led by the Northwest Commission and the Erie County Broadband Initiative are examples of such work.[17][18] While the FCC data, based on information submitted from providers, shows that there are small gaps in broadband coverage in all nine of the municipalities profiled by the JCLA (*Figure 5*), the data look much different when considering citizen-based surveying (*Figure 6*).[19] For example, while all of the city of Corry (rural), absent a small portion on its eastern border, have broadband access per FCC data, the citizen reporting data reveal a lack of access.[20] Additionally, the average internet download speed in Corry is reported as 20 Mbps in its own Community Strategic Plan.[21] Similarly, residents in North East rated internet service as one of the top 10 lowest rates areas of satisfaction in the community, and their resulting comprehensive plan outlines a lack of adequate internet coverage but cites challenges to affecting change at the municipal level.[22] Portions of the city of Erie (urban), Millcreek, Harborcreek, and Fairview Townships (urban), and Union City, Albion, North East, and Edinboro Borough (rural) show the same data disparities.[23]

15 "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

16 Meinrath, Sacha D., Hannah Bonestroo, Georgia Bullen, Abigail Jansen, et. al, "Broadband Availability and Access in Rural Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, June 2019, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

17 "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

18 Community Technology Action Plan: Northwest Pennsylvania, The Northwest Commission and the Connected Community Engagement Program, December 2017, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

19 "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

20 "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

21 #positivelyCORRY: Community Strategic Plan 2021-2031, czbLLC, March 2021, Here, 44.

22 "North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis," The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, February 11, 2022. accessed Here.

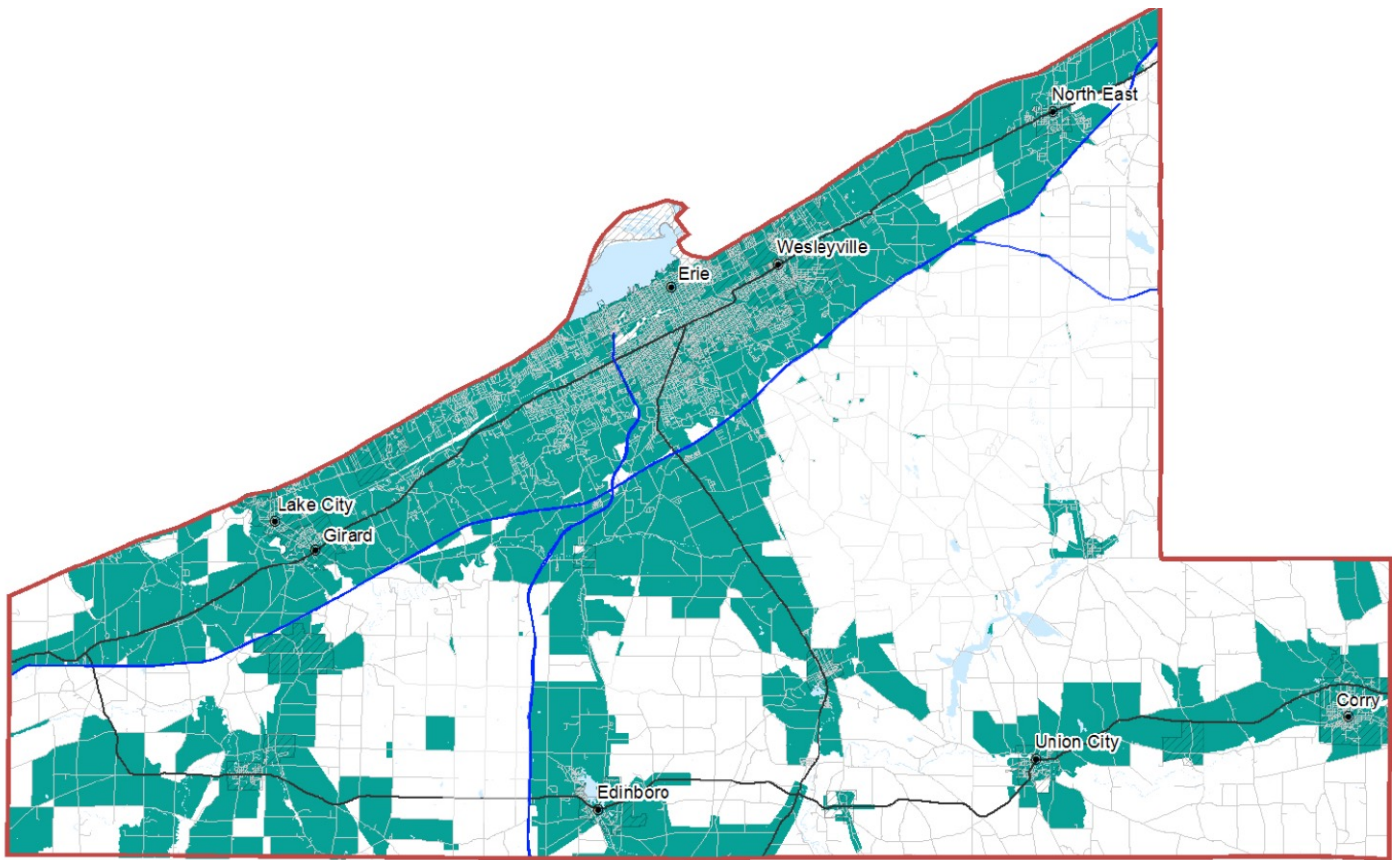*23* "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

Figure 5. Estimated Erie County Broadband Coverage Based on FCC Data, 2018
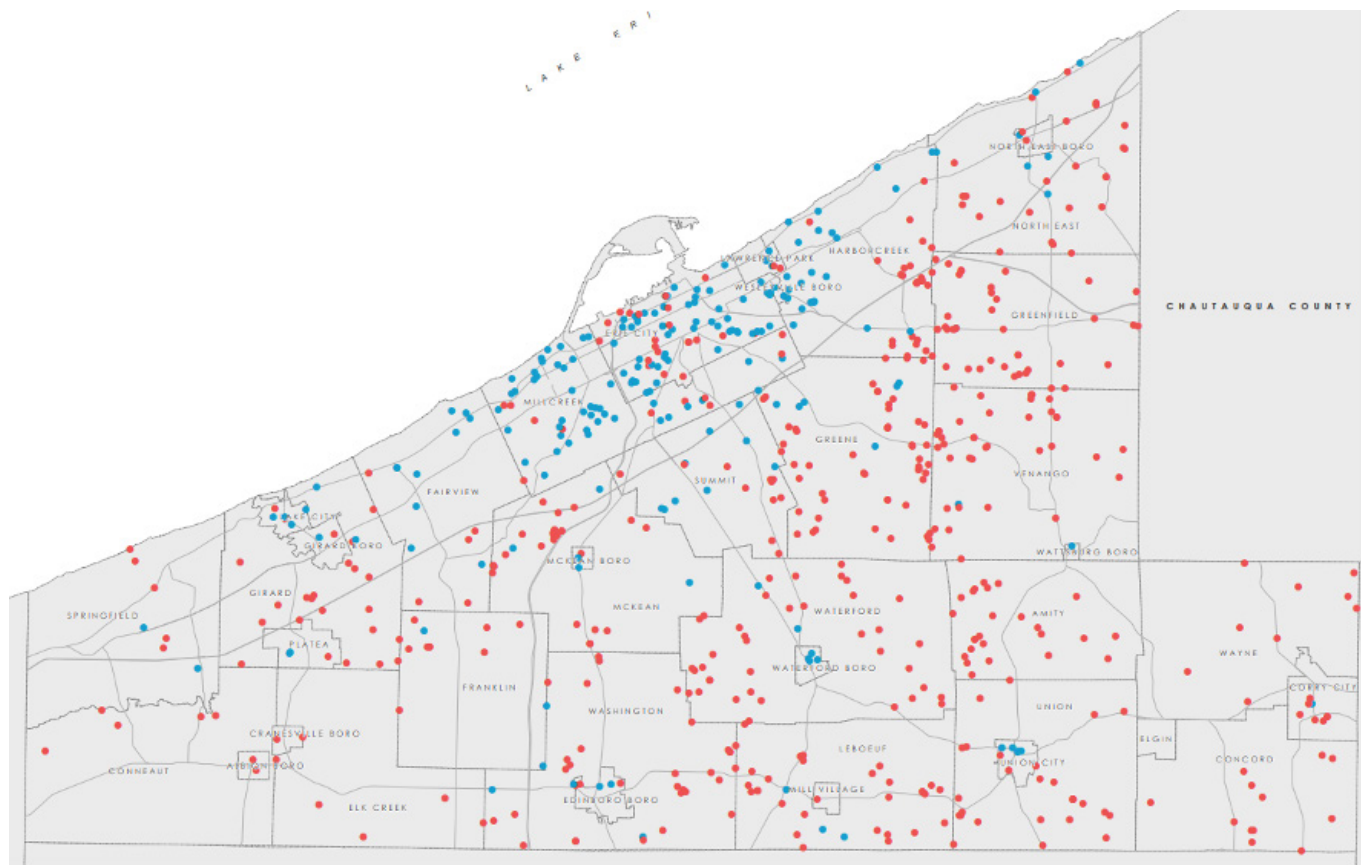
Figure 6. Data points for citizen internet speed surveying showcasing broadband speeds

Despite portions of the county being home to a number of internet providers including at least four cable providers (Armstrong, Spectrum, Windstream, Mastervision), two DSL or phone line providers (Verizon, Windstream), three satellite providers (Starlink, Viasat, HughesNet), three fiber providers (Velocity Network, Armstrong, Windstream), and five mobile wireless providers (AT&T, Blue Wireless, Spring, T-Mobile, Verizon), a majority of the county does not have broadband access.[24] [25] [26] [27] [28] The Erie County Broadband Initiative reports that 99 percent of the geographic area north of Interstate 90 includes broadband coverage compared to 25 percent south of the highway.[29] This indicates that there are significant infrastructure gaps in rural areas compared to urban areas in Erie County. However, when data was considered at the household level, all nine municipalities profiled were home to areas without broadband coverage.

Action taken in recent years at federal, state, and county levels showcases that individual municipalities should not face sole responsibility for addressing access barriers. More specifically, former Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper and Erie County Council supported the creation of a $2.5 million Municipal Infrastructure Gap Program with the county federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation that supports broadband infrastructure projects. Federal priorities included service that meets upload and download speeds of 100 Mbps and that provides funds to broadband networks "owned, operated, or affiliated with providers with less pressure to turn profits and with a commitment to serving entire communities" such as local governments, nonprofits,

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24 "Velocity Network Keeps Erie County Connected: Giving You the Business." Erie News Now, 2022, Here.

25 "Union City borough, Pennsylvania," United States Census Bureau, accessed November 28 2022, Here.

26 "7 Best Internet Providers Near You," In My Area, accessed November 29, 2022, Here.

27 "National Broadband Map," BROADBAND Now, accessed November 14, 2022, Here.

28 "Community Directory," Harborcreek Township, accessed December 5, 2022, Here.

29 "Erie County Broadband," Erie County Government, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.

and co-operatives.[30] This program incorporates federal, county, and municipal efforts.

Led by the Erie Area Council of Governments (EACOG), in partnership with Erie County, including the County Executive and Department of Planning and Community Development and the Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority (ECGRA) announced the launch of a countywide broadband expansion feasibility study in October 2022. According to an EACOG press release, "the broadband expansion study will analyze existing broadband infrastructure and coverage gaps and recommend implementation strategies for expanding and improving internet access throughout Erie County.… This multi-municipal project will ensure smaller municipalities, which may not have the financial resources or staff to implement a project of this scope are included." Additionally, this work is being supported by a $50,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, $50,000 from ECGRA, and $25,000 from Erie County.[31] EACOG membership includes 23 of the County's 38 municipalities, including the city of Erie, Millcreek, Harborcreek, and Fairview townships, and Albion and Edinboro boroughs.[32]

Lastly, New Localism Associates, contracted to complete a playbook for the deployment of primarily Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding in Erie County, by the Jefferson Educational Society, Erie Insurance, and the Erie Community Foundation, outlined goals for broadband infrastructure. One of 35 investment projects, the playbook seeks to "invest in complete broadband regionally." Benefits to broadband expansion cited include "creating additional educational opportunities, particularly for post-secondary education, increasing workforce competitiveness, and creating new opportunities to attract remote workers." The work of Impact Corry to implement fiber is framed as a catalyst for expansion, and the cost for such a project was undetermined at the publication of the plan.[33]

In November 2021, the federal Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act allocated $65 billion to improve US broadband access.[34] Pennsylvania shortly followed with the creation of the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority in December, tasked with creating a statewide broadband plan and distributing federal and state monies to local communities.[35] As a result, the FCC charted a path to updating its data, known to have reporting errors. In December 2022, the FCC announced the release of this data through an interactive mapping platform that allows local communities to challenge the results by January 13, 2023. Recognizing errors in provider reporting integrity, the FCC stated that the success of this data collection and use will be dependent upon "consumer and stakeholder engagement." Finalized data will be utilized to determine state allocations of federal infrastructure funds based on the number of unserved and underserved residents.[36] Therefore, states and local governments have an incentive to work together to file challenges, including Pennsylvania. The PA Broadband Development Authority has provided resources to local governments, including in Erie County, regarding interpreting and challenging the FCC data.[37] Discussions are ongoing in Erie County given the lack

30 "Water, Sewer, and Broadband Infrastructure: Erie County Municipal Infrastructure GAP Funding Program," Erie County, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.
31 "Erie County Broadband Expansion Study," Erie Area Council of Governments, October 2022, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.
32 "Members," Erie Area Council of Governments, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.
33 "Erie's Inclusive Growth," The Nonprofit Partnership, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.
34 "North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis," The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, February 11, 2022. accessed Here.
35 "Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority," Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.
36 Barrett, Rick, "The FCC has a new broadband map, and you can challenge the results," Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, December 13, 2022, Accessed December 19, 2022, Here.
37 "PA Broadband Authority Provides Resources for FCC Map Challenges," Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, December 19, 2022, Here.

of accuracy with prior FCC data. In summary, to ensure Erie County receives every dollar of federal funding possible for broadband infrastructure, the federal, state, county, and municipal governments must cooperate and engage citizens meaningfully.

Discussions around broadband infrastructure investment in Erie County and beyond showcase several key points related to the prompt for this research. Firstly, there is a clear urban and rural divide in Erie County regarding broadband access, most clearly defined as a north and south of Interstate 90 phenomenon. However, when access is considered at a household level, it is clear that the history of inaccurate FCC data on broadband availability led to insufficient access in each municipality profiled. Therefore, though broadband access is most starkly lacking from rural communities, every community has a stake in improving and expanding infrastructure. This is the foundational argument for entities such as the EACOG serving as leaders for research and implementation. Discussions about broadband also highlight the vital nature of community engagement and input. Without citizen-based research, our current understanding of access gaps would not have been possible. With this in mind, it is recommended that Erie County continue to engage residents, business owners, and institutions (consumers) in research and project-based discussions regarding broadband infrastructure.

b. Housing

Home ownership has long been a marker of success, opportunity, and wealth within the United States. Therefore, looking at the demographics related to housing provides important information about quality of life and opportunity. When exploring the different regions in Erie, it was evident that there were strong differences between certain types of communities as it related to the physical appearance and quality of housing. This housing analysis considers median household income, rates of home ownership, and median value of owner-occupied housing units. This does not discount the importance of addressing issues such as blight, rental costs, and affordable housing.

Median Household Income

While looking at differences between income in different Erie County municipalities, there are some trends. The median household income for Erie County comes in at $52,863, which is lower than the state of Pennsylvania ($63,627). The urban core along with the rural municipalities profiled all come in under that median: Edinboro ($33,942), Corry ($34,126), Albion ($41,750), the City of Erie ($43,186), and Union City ($48,281).[38] [39] [40] North East, the remaining rural area, is just above the median at $54,888. The remaining urban municipalities, often considered suburban, are home to income values above the county median: Harborcreek ($65,790), Millcreek ($66,639), and Fairview ($95,978).[41]

Home Ownership

The trends are similar when it comes to the rate of owner-occupied versus renter-occupied status. Erie County as a whole has 67 percent of properties listed as owner occupied, close to the state's average rate of 69 percent. Again, it is primarily the city of Erie and rural regions that fall under that median: Edinboro (39 percent), North

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38 "Union City Borough, Pennsylvania," 2022, United States Census Bureau, Here.

39 "Albion, PA - Profile data," Census Reporter, Here.

40 "Erie, PA," Data USA, Here.

41 The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, *North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis*, February 11, 2022, accessed Here, 24.

East (47), City of Erie (52), Union City (63), Albion (64), and Corry (64).[42 43 44] It should be noted that Edinboro and the city have universities within their region, which often relies on higher rates of rental properties for its student populations. Other urban communities, at the fringe of the urbanized area, had rates higher than the county and state: Millcreek (70), Harborcreek (79), and Fairview (90).[45]

Median Value of Houses

The trends of rural and urban core municipalities being on the lower end of the spectrum continues with the median value of owner-occupied housing. The median value for Erie County as a whole is $138,500, significantly under the state's median, which stands at $187,500. Rural municipalities and the city of Erie fall quite a bit under these values: Corry ($78,700), city of Erie ($90,500), Union City ($95,200), and Albion ($103,700).[46 47 48] North East is closer to the county's median at $134,600.[49] Edinboro is the only rural community that is above the county's median with a value of $166,500.[50] Fairview ($167,800), Harborcreek ($172,700) and Millcreek ($176,100) are on the higher spectrum of the county.

Summary

It is worth mentioning that the data found here is primarily from the 2020 census. Since then, there has been a noted housing shortage across the country, raising the average cost of homes as well as interest rates. In 2022, the median sales price for a single-family home in Erie County increased by 12.9 percent from 2021.[51] Between 2018 and 2022, single-family home values increased in the county almost 70 percent.[52] A recurring theme from the municipal visits was that the cost of living in Erie was much lower than other metropolitan regions and this was a compelling reason to live in the region. This narrative might be shifting at a time when national trends are mirrored in the county, with rising costs of living far outpacing individual incomes.

As these demographics show, both rural municipalities and the city of Erie seem to have more similarities, particularly with some of the struggles associated with housing. These communities have less owner-occupied housing, lower income levels, and lower median house values. Regarding these housing metrics, those "urban fringe" or suburban communities stand apart for their favorable metrics.

c. Recreation

Recreational spaces are assets that bring communities together with the common goals of time with family, fun, connecting with nature, and new experiences. Many of the municipalities this cohort visited over the last several months highlighted their recreational resources and the benefits these resources bring to their communities.

42 "Albion, PA - Profile data," Census Reporter, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.
43 "Union City borough, Pennsylvania," 2022, United States Census Bureau, Here.
44 The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, *North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis*, February 11, 2022, accessed Here, 24.
45 "Fairview, PA- Profile data," DATA USA, accessed on December 8, 2022, Here.
46 "Albion, Pa. - Profile data," n.d.
47 "Union City Borough, Pennsylvania," 2022, United States Census Bureau, Here.
48 Baran, Andrej, Jo Jorgensen, n.d, "Erie, Pa.," Here.
49 The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, *North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis*, February 11, 2022, accessed Here, 24.
50 "Edinboro, Pa.," Data USA, accessed October 26, 2022, Here.
51 Lahman, Sean, "Record hot real estate market pushes Erie County home sale prices to $175,000," GoErie.com, accessed December 3, 2022, Here.
52 "Erie Home Values," Zillow.com, accessed December 3, 2022, Here.

Resources mentioned included trails, parks, event spaces, conserved lands, and beaches, particularly along Lake Erie. Throughout the year, these recreational spaces serve as venues for many community events that bring together the local community, other Erie County residents, and visitors. Many of these municipalities incorporated recreational space improvements in their public comprehensive and strategic plans.

The city of Erie features a diverse array of residential neighborhoods. Though the city contains about 47 public parks and green spaces, most notably Frontier Park with its mile-long walking perimeter,[53] many of the county's more popular attractions, such as Presque Isle State Park, Waldameer Park and Water World, and Presque Isle Downs and Casino, lie outside the county's rural areas.

The city of Erie also has much to offer in terms of entertainment options. The city is home to the Ontario Hockey League's Erie Otters, as well as to the Detroit Tigers' AA Eastern League minor league baseball team, the Erie Seawolves. The city also owns and operates the Erie Zoo. People from urban and rural communities alike enjoy these recreation and entertainment options with residents from all corners traveling to explore the county's recreational offerings.

Edinboro also offers diverse recreational spaces. These spaces include Edinboro Lake, eight public parks, and two golf courses located within or near the borough. Edinboro Lake is a 245-acre body of water with accompanying parks and playgrounds. The lake stays busy during summer with boats, kayaks, and lakeside activities. There is also a guarded beach, public boat launches, and a fishing pier with access for those with disabilities.[54]

Fairview Township offers six recreation spaces maintained by the townships: Pleasant Ridge Park and Disc Golf Course, Avonia Beach, Struchen Flats Park, Fairview Central Park, Fairview Flag Park, and Buseck Memorial Park.[55] These parks are maintained by the Fairview Parks and Recreation Authority, whose mission is to "build a public recreation program into and about public parks, schools, grounds, and facilities for the benefit of the citizens of the community."[56] Many events are hosted at these parks each year that attract visitors from not just Fairview but members of outside communities as well.

Harborcreek Township Supervisor Dean Pepicello stated to the cohort that Harborcreek has nine parks and recreation areas, including, but not limited to, Shades Beach, Whitford Park, Rolling Ridge, Community Park, and Slade Park. These parks include many amenities, particularly in support of local sports programs. There are also several large parks with open space and hiking trails, including Six Mile Creek Park and Highmeyer Park.

Millcreek Township offers 31 different parks and recreation spaces available for public use throughout the township,[57] including parks, picnic pavilions, and two community pools.[58] The township's Parks and Recreation Commission oversees all of the municipality's recreational spaces. Millcreek Township also offers access to Presque Isle State Park, which offers year-round recreation opportunities throughout the "3,200-acre sandy peninsula that arches into Lake Erie."[59] Presque Isle State Park attracts visitors from Erie County, statewide, nationally, and internationally each year. According to the Presque Isle State Park user survey conducted by Pennsylvania Sea Grant, the park annually hosts 4.2 million visitors.[60]

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53 "Frontier Park walking and running - Erie, Pennsylvania, USA.*"* Pacer. Accessed October 26, 2022, Here.
54 "Parks and Recreation." Borough of Edinboro, accessed November 14, 2022, Here.
55 "Public Parks" Fairview Parks and Recreation, accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
56 "About Us" Fairview Parks and Recreation, accessed December 18, 2022. Here.
57 "Facilities Map." Millcreek Township Pennsylvania. Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
58 "Facilities Listing." Millcreek Township Pennsylvania. Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
59 "Presque Isle State Park." Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
60 "Pennsylvania State Park User Survey." Pennsylvania Sea Grant, accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

There has been a major focus on the barriers to access in Union City, both in general transportation and travel into recreation, and travel along and through paths and trails.[61] Union City does have a park and recreation plan with the purpose to increase the opportunities for recreation and enjoyment for both Union City residents and visitors.[62] This plan is being used to lay the groundwork and guide future investments in Union City's parks and recreation spaces as well as guide current maintenance of Southwest, First Avenue, Devereaux, Caflisch, and Nature Parks. [63] The comprehensive park and recreation planning committee conducted outreach to current residents to identify the current needs of the community and which projects they would like to see in their neighborhood as well as what will attract visitors to the area.

To align with Corry CONNECTS' active transportation vision,[64] the "#positivelyCORRY: Community Strategic Plan 2021-2031"[65] includes strategies to "improve and link [Corry's] green spaces" with biking and hiking trails.[66] #postivelyCORRY notes that Corry's own parks and other green spaces are disconnected and inaccessible from one another for pedestrians and cyclists. The plan also addresses improvements needed to Corry's Greenway Junction Trailhead and East Branch trails, and sections of the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail. Itself a "mega corridor" of the Industrial Heartland Trails,[67] a completed Erie to Pittsburgh Trail would connect not just the city of Erie to Pittsburgh, but also connect Erie (through Corry) to Clymer, New York, Oil Creek State Park; Morgantown and Parkersburg, West Virginia; and Cumberland, Maryland. However, only the first phase of five was included in the strategic plan, focusing on connecting Corry green spaces to one another and to the Junction Trailhead, and does not yet address connecting the trailhead to the city of Erie and therefore the Erie County to Pittsburgh route. Further opportunities exist on the county level to connect Erie to Corry's "emerald necklace" of connected green spaces, to the rest of the Industrial Heartland Trails via the mega corridor.[11]

North East is a Lake Erie coastal community. The borough independently manages three parks, the township maintains two, and the only lakeside park at Freeport Beach is cooperatively managed. The North East Recreation Commission is collaboratively supported by the borough, township, and North East School District. In North East, improving community parks is one of three top goals in the new community comprehensive plan. Leaders aim to establish a Parks and Recreation Board, increase citizen involvement in improvements, increase public facility usage, and to pursue grant funds for park master planning and improvements.[68] The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan sets a goal of providing access to parks, trails, and open space within a 10-minute walk for all Pennsylvanians. The portions of North East designated as high/medium need for access are those in the outer lying regions of the borough.[69]

Albion currently has one park in the borough, but the municipality manages a total of five in the region: Caflisch Park, Deveraux Park, First Avenue Park, Southwest Park, and Willow Street Ball Field. Within Albion's comprehensive plan of 2019, improvements to the sole municipal park remain one of the top four priorities in the community. Within this plan, goals included: establish a parks and recreation board, build community support, and increase citizen involvement, usage, fundraising for the park and its events, and create a master plan for the park's future.[70]

61 "Union City Borough Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan," accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, City of Corry, Blue Zones Project Corry, and Erie County Health Department, October 2020, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
65 #positivelyCORRY: Community Strategic Plan 2021-2031, czbLLC, March 2021, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
66 #positivelyCORRY: Community Strategic Plan 2021-2031, czbLLC, March 2021, accessed November 13, 2022, Here, 36.
67 "IHTC Mega Corridors and Major Trails," Industrial Heartland Trails Coalition, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
68 "North East Area Comprehensive Plan," November 1, 2022, Here, 63.
69 "10-Minute Walk Stats: Erie County," 10-Minute Walk Access to Parks, Trails, and Open Space (County Data), Accessed November 14, 2022, Here.
70 Albion Borough Council, "Albion Comprehensive Plan," Albion Borough, Accessed on November 21, 2022, Here.

All of these recreation opportunities available throughout the municipalities this cohort visited are excellent. However, access to these spaces is limited to some in Erie County. Transportation tends to be the biggest barrier, as detailed in the transportation section of this report; public transportation is improving but is not yet widely accessible throughout the county. Without public transportation, citizens would need the ability to either walk or drive to these spaces.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Pennsylvania Public Land Trust partnered with the Trust for Public Land to evaluate access and strategically look at creating equitable access to recreation spaces in the future.[71] The initial phase of this report was to look at and identify "gap areas," meaning spaces throughout the state where citizens did not have recreation access within a 10-minute walk and drive radius from where they live. The study looked at access to trailheads and local and state parks. Throughout this analysis they ranked the areas as having 10-minute access, moderate need, high need, and very high need.[72] According to the 10-minute walk analysis, 48 percent of Erie County has access to parks and trailheads, including 71 percent of the minority population and 58 percent of low-income households.[73] Erie County ranks first in Pennsylvania, according to this study, for needed access to trails, with 54.99 percent of the county's population considered underserved, meaning the majority of the county is more than a 10-minute walk from a trail. [74] Increasing access is part of the strategic plans discussed above. Increasing the access could come in the form of making trailheads more accessible, adding more park space, and increasing public transportation to these spaces.

The value of parks to local municipalities is immeasurable. These benefits are recognized by many communities, which include them in their comprehensive and strategic plans. Recreation is a gateway to bringing communities of diverse backgrounds together in a space to enjoy not only one another but also the area. The opportunities for visitors to learn something about a new place through recreation and enjoyment is something many of these municipalities have viewed as an investment in their communities. Based on the research above, both urban and rural municipalities, as well as the state, are investing in ways to attract visitors to show off what their areas have to offer through parks and recreational spaces.

ii. Resources

a. Energy and Utilities

Drinking Water

Each of the nine municipalities profiled is home to some degree of public drinking water access. The largest county public drinking water system is Erie Water Works (*Figure 2*), the Erie City Water Authority. Erie Water Works supplies "potable water directly to the City of Erie, the Township of Lawrence Park, the Borough of Wesleyville, and portions of Millcreek, Harborcreek, Summit, and McKean Townships. Bulk water is sold directly to the Summit Township Water Authority and Fairview Township Water Authority for distribution."[75] The city of Corry maintains its own drinking water reservoir and infrastructure, managed by its Water

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71 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "Access to Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Areas: Methods and Key Findings by The Trust for Public Land," page 3, Accessed December 18, 2022. Here.
72 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "Access to Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Areas: Methods and Key Findings by the Trust for Public Land," pages 3-12, Accessed December 18, 2022. Here.
73 "10-minute Walk Access to Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces" Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources," Accessed December 14, 2022. Here.
74 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "Access to Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Areas: Methods and Key Findings by the Trust for Public Land," page 23, Accessed December 14, 2022. Here.
75 "Service Areas," Erie Water Works, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

Department.[76] The boroughs of Albion,[77] Edinboro,[78] North East,[79] and Union City[80] also all maintain and operate separate drinking water systems. While Erie Water Works and the North East water system rely on surface water, drawing directly from Lake Erie, all other municipally operated systems rely on groundwater.[81]

While location in an area of abundant freshwater resources is certainly a key asset for drinking water distribution, the reality of delivering drinking water to residents is more complex. Several rural municipalities noted a high need for money to maintain drinking water systems. For example, the city of Corry noted that a series of water main breaks in 2016 caused the entire city water supply to drain from its reservoir, creating a loss of service. As a result, the city outlined a phased approach for $17.9 million in infrastructure upgrades, paid for with low-interest loans. More work needs to be done, as Corry acknowledged: "While the current projects focus on the most significant problems and risks, many more miles of aging water lines have yet to be replaced."[82] Similarly, the 2018 Albion Borough comprehensive plan detailed recent challenges including a lack of supply during dry summer months and water pressure issues. As a result, the need for at least one new well and one water tower were identified.[83] When the cohort visited North East Borough, Manager Pat Gehrlein shared that providing capacity to maintain an independent water system given the municipality's relative isolation in the county was a challenge.

76 "Water," City of Corry Water Department, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
77 "Water/Sewer," Albion Borough, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
78 "Water and Sewer," Borough of Edinboro, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
79 "Water Department," Borough of North East, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
80 "Union City Municipal Authority," Union City Borough, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
81 "Drinking Water Reporting Systems: Source Information," Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
82 Pennsylvania Economy League, "City of Corry, Strategic Management Planning Program Report," page 49-50, City of Corry, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.
83 "Comprehensive Plan 2018: Albion Borough Water System," Comprehensive Plan 2018, Borough of Albion, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
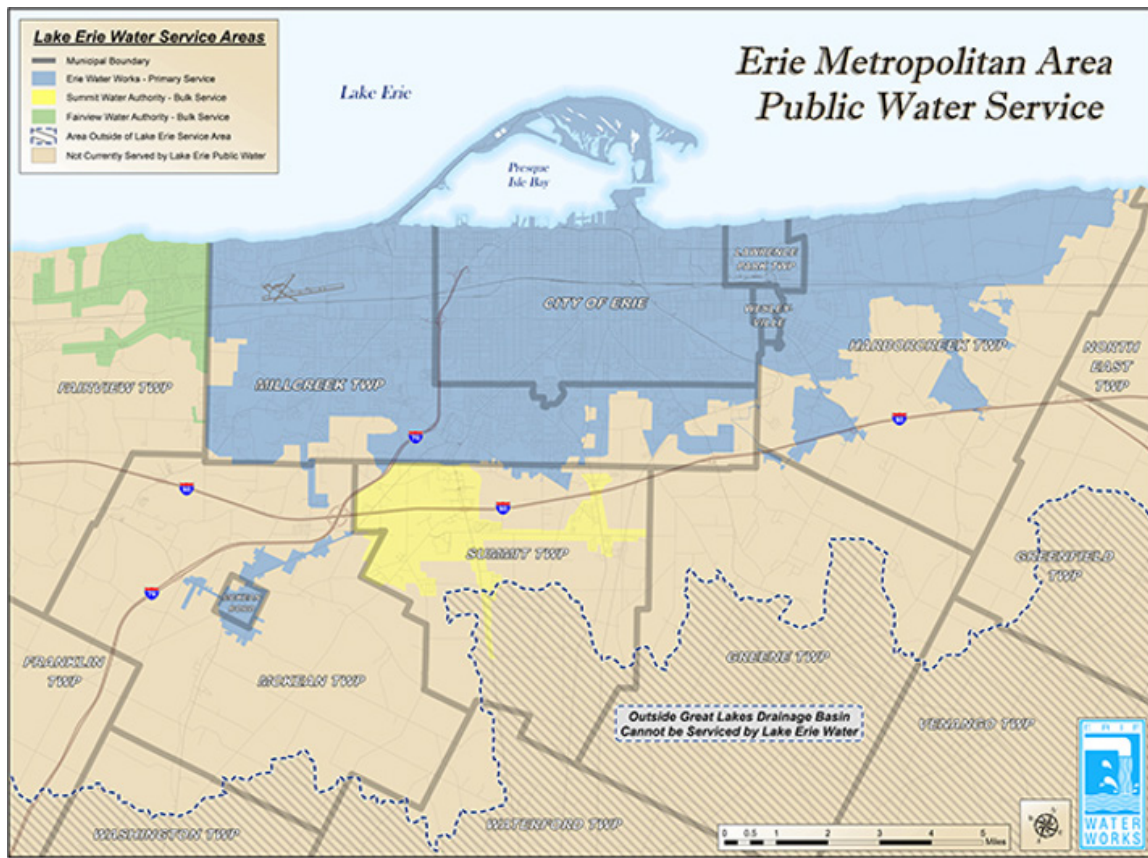
Figure 7: Map of Erie Water Works Service Areas

The substantial need for monetary investment has been highlighted recently in the city of Erie. The Erie Water Works' Lead Line Grant Project recently received $18 million, including $14.9 million in grant funds, to replace lead service connections throughout the city. Recent federal stimulus and infrastructure funding allowed for a significant majority of investment to be grant-funded. With the new funds, 2,700 connections will be replaced within a few years, whereas approximately 4,000 were removed over the preceding two decades.[84] Rural communities, in addition to the city of Erie, are home to aging infrastructure that in some cases dates back nearly 150 years. At the same time, these communities have faced declining populations,[85] subsequent declining tax bases, and as a result, the resources required for maintenance and upgrades have become an increasingly greater burden.

In several of the remaining urban communities in Erie County, often considered suburban, language about the resources needed to effectively manage water systems tends to be different. Coming from a sprawl and growth mindset, both the Fairview[86] and Harborcreek[87] Township comprehensive plans prioritize changes to zoning and land development ordinances to limit extensions of public water to preserve the "rural quality of life" and "unique natural features" in their jurisdictions. Resources needed to execute these goals include informed planning commissioners and elected officials, and possibly policy revision.

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84 "Erie will get $18 million to remove lead connections from city water system," Your Erie, October 19, 2022, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.

85 P1 | RACE," Decennial Census, *United States Census Bureau,* Accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

86 "Comprehensive Plan," Fairview Township, 2012, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.

87 "Harborcreek Township Comprehensive Plan: A Community Development Policy Guide," Harborcreek Township, 2010, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.

While Millcreek, Harborcreek, and Fairview townships have access to public water, many residents in these communities instead get their drinking water from private wells or springs, which are not regulated for drinking water quality.[88] The National Ground Water Association recommends that well owners check and test, annually, their infrastructure for mechanical issues and the presence of contaminants.[89] The lack of any government oversight on private drinking water quality means residents with these systems must have the educational and monetary resources for routine inspection and maintenance.

Sewer/Wastewater

Resource challenges and considerations also prevent profiled municipalities from providing public sewer access to each resident. The Erie Wastewater Treatment Plant serves approximately 200,000 residents in at least portions of the following municipalities: City of Erie, Millcreek Township, Summit Township, Harborcreek Township, Wesleyville Borough, Lawrence Park Township, and Fairview Township.[90] However, each of the municipalities maintains its own sewer authority that owns and operates the local infrastructure despite combined treatment. The remaining five rural municipalities studied are also home to not only sewer infrastructure but wastewater treatment plants.[91] [92] [93] [94] [95] The maintenance, upgrading, and expansion of wastewater infrastructure are all expensive endeavors. Similar to the discussion about drinking water systems, the City of Erie and the rural boroughs profiled face disproportionate burdens due to aging infrastructure. Additionally, each borough must maintain not only its own delivery but also treatment infrastructure.

In areas of Erie County where public wastewater systems do not reach, septic systems and small flow treatment facilities (SFTFs) are methods of human waste disposal. However, septic systems, in particular, are more prone to early failure in the county due to sandy soil properties. As a result, a massive increase in construction of SFTFs has taken place and now there are more than 500 of these facilities in Erie County, which is the highest of any other county in Pennsylvania.[96] The Erie County Department of Health seeks to inspect SFTFs once per year, but funding and staffing capacity are challenges due to the high volume of these facilities and unique nature of the issue in Erie County.[97] Regular inspection is important to ensure that these systems are functioning properly and to prevent human and environmental health hazards, including the runoff of sewage directly into water resources.

Drinking Water & Sewer/Wastewater Summary

Differences in access to clean, safe drinking water and effective wastewater treatment in Erie County are not easily distinguished on an urban-rural basis. More specifically, the urban fringe municipalities profiled are

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88 "Private Water Supply Education and Water Testing in Erie County," PennState Extension, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

89 "Lead Line Grant Project: Service Connection Replacement Project," Erie Water Works, Accessed December 1, 2022, Here.

90 "Bureau of Sewers," Erie Sewer Authority, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

91 "Waste Water Treatment: City of Corry Waste Water Treatment Plant," City of Corry, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

92 "Borough Wastewater," Borough of North East, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

93 "Newsletter, Spring-Summer 2012," Municipal Authority of Borough of Union City, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

94 "The Edinboro Wastewater Treatment Facility," Informational Brochure, Borough of Edinboro, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

95 "Comprehensive Plan 2018: Albion Borough Sewer System," Comprehensive Plan 2018, Borough of Albion, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

96 "Our Water, Our Future: A Common Agenda for Protecting Pennsylvania's Lake Erie Watershed," PennFuture, 2020, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

97 "Our Water, Our Future: A Common Agenda for Protecting Pennsylvania's Lake Erie Watershed," PennFuture, 2020, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

subject to more recent system expansion due to sprawl experience compared to the cities of Erie and Corry and the four boroughs. Though residents of Millcreek, Fairview, and Harborcreek benefit from the expansive systems controlled by Erie Water Works and the Erie Sewer Authority, they are also home to many private drinking water wells and wastewater treatment systems. Though priority challenges differ due to the age of existing infrastructure and development pressure, a common resource challenge remains clear: financial capacity to effectively maintain infrastructure and services.

Several initiatives by Erie County seek to address these challenges. Erie County budgeted $2.5 million of its $52.4 million American Rescue Plan Act allocation to the Municipal Infrastructure Gap Program to support water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure improvements.[98] This program is another resource to address long-deferred maintenance and improvements. Erie County provides additional planning and compliance support for both public and private drinking and wastewater systems through its Department of Health. The department oversees Water Supply and Water Pollution Control programs, enforcing the rules and regulations of the Pennsylvania Safe Drinking Water Act, and Clean Streams Law and Sewage Facilities Act. To address water pollution concerns associated with private wastewater systems, the Department of Health created an SFTF inspection program and a repair fund for residents, but both are supported by time-limited grant funds.[99] The county's 2015 comprehensive plan, *Emerge 2040*, also included a recommendation to "improve the ability of Erie's water and sewer utilities to support development and protect the environment by creating a peer-to-peer exchange to coordinate planning and identify opportunities to share resources." A five-year update of the plan indicates some progress for this recommendation, but more collaboration is needed.[100]

Urban sprawl over the past 50 years or more dramatically shifted Erie County's drinking and wastewater distribution systems. Millcreek, Fairview, and Harborcreek benefitted from major expansions of regionalized authorities. Municipalities and the county, however, now face challenges to maintain and upgrade aging infrastructure in areas of historic population density and recent decline but also to ensure that an increasing number of private systems in sprawling communities remain properly inspected to prevent pollution.

Heating & Electricity

In Erie County, residents have limited choices when it comes to utility service due to the regulated nature of Pennsylvania's natural gas and electric utilities. Electrical service is provided by Pennsylvania Electric Company (Penelec) while natural gas service is provided by National Fuel.[101] While service delivery is regulated and limited, Erie County residents are able to select an energy supplier of their choice through the Consumer Choice program.[102]

Recent shifts in the global energy market have significantly increased electricity prices and, as a result, Erie County residents are paying an average of 18.35¢ per kilowatt hour, for residential electric service and delivery. This is paying a premium of more than 24 percent compared to the average price paid by Pennsylvanians (14.79¢ per kWh), and more than 26 percent higher than the national average of (14.46¢).[103] In the past 12 months,

98 "Water, Sewer, and Broadband Infrastructure: Erie County Municipal Infrastructure GAP Funding Program," Erie County, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.
99 "Our Water, Our Future: A Common Agenda for Protecting Pennsylvania's Lake Erie Watershed," PennFuture, 2020, Accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
100 "Emerge 2040 Five-Year Status Report," Erie County, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.
101 Martin, Jim, "Energy costs soar as Erie heads into winter. Here are ways to save, and to get payment help," Erie Times-News, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
102 "Gas or Electric Switch," Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.
103 Hope, Matt, "Erie, PA Electricity Overview," Find Energy, September 27, 2022, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

Erie County residents have experienced an increase of nearly 20 percent in the price paid for electricity.[104] Natural gas prices have also increased significantly. National Fuel announced in September 2022 that it projected an increase of nearly 50 percent during the 2022-23 heating season (November 2022 to March 2023) compared to the previous year.[105] However, Erie County is experiencing a far more dramatic increase, with prices increasing from $4.96 per MCF for the 2021-22 heating season to $9.04, an increase of more than 83 percent.[106] For Erie County households that fall under the federal poverty line, electricity and natural gas bills pose a significant energy burden, consuming between 12 percent and 24 percent of household income.[107]

With its easy access to Pennsylvania's significant natural gas reserves, Erie County uses a greater percentage of natural gas for heating (more than 78 percent), than the national average of 50 percent. Electricity accounts for a smaller portion of Erie County's heating fuel (10 percent) compared to the national average (nearly 29 percent). The remaining heat is generated from heating oil or propane. Heating oil prices in recent years have not experienced the same dramatic change as gas and electricity, remaining relatively unchanged, but the price of propane has increased more than 56 percent in the past year.[108]

According to the Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan, about 34 percent of all electricity generation came from natural gas power plants in 2017, greatly affecting Erie County's reliance. Statewide, only 4 percent of electricity generation came from renewable sources and 29 percent of all Pennsylvania greenhouse gas emissions were tied to electricity generation. A 2019 executive order from Governor Tom Wolf established a statewide climate goal of a 26 percent reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 and an 80 percent reduction by 2050.[109] To match these goals, significant reductions in emissions will be needed across Pennsylvania, including Erie County, which is responsible for more carbon dioxide emissions from electricity consumption than 88 percent of all counties in the US.[110]

Recognizing the need for climate mitigation, or the reduction of human-initiated fossil fuel emissions, *Emerge 2040*, the most recent county comprehensive plan, laid out goals for the development of a county climate action plan and the establishment of a renewable energy accelerator.[111] Though progress has been made by several partners of the county, these recommendations have not been brought to fruition. For both of these efforts to succeed, urban and rural communities would need to work cooperatively.

Though county-level collaboration has not yet been completed around renewable energy deployment, significant plans for development are occurring. The city of Erie recently completed a solar project at its Central Fire Station allowing it to be solely powered with renewable energy.[112] Additionally, 15 or more commercial-scale solar development projects have been proposed in Erie County municipalities, largely in rural areas. As a result, many municipalities, including North East, began to revise local ordinances to allow for and regulate such development.[113]

104 Martin, Jim, "Energy costs soar as Erie heads into winter. Here are ways to save, and to get payment help," Erie Times-News, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

105 "National Fuel Advises Customers to Expect Higher Heating Bills This Winter," National Fuel Gas, September 22, 2022, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

106 "Shop for Your Home," PA Gas Switch, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

107 Hope, Matt, "Erie, PA Electricity Overview," Find Energy, September 27, 2022, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

108 Martin, Jim, "Energy costs soar as Erie heads into winter. Here are ways to save, and to get payment help," Erie Times-News, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

109 Althoff, David, "Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan," PA Department of Environmental Protection, 2021, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

110 Hope, Matt, "Erie, PA Electricity Overview," Find Energy, September 27, 2022, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

111 "Emerge 2040 Five-Year Status Report," Erie County, Accessed December 16, 2022, Here.

112 Swift, Chelsea. "Erie Central Fire Station to solely operate on solar power," July 13, 2022, Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

113 Crowe, Paul. "Community Solar Project Proposed for North East Township by Clean Choice Energy," North East PA Online,

As municipalities of all types in Erie County face opportunities for renewable energy deployment, opportunities now exist for collaborative policymaking, grant writing, and consultancies.

With the passage of the federal Infrastructure Investments and Jobs and Inflation Reduction Acts in 2021 and 2022, respectively, there will be significant new subsidies for renewable energy development. For the United States, Pennsylvania, and Erie County to meet their climate goals, communities must be positioned to take advantage of these incentives. Rising energy costs, limited diversification in energy and heating resources, and slow growth of renewable energy are resource challenges felt across Erie County, regardless of urban or rural status. Therefore, as Emerge 2040 posits, great progress can be achieved with intermunicipal cooperation.

b. Healthcare and Emergency Services

Healthcare, fire, police, and emergency medical services (EMS) are critical for communities yet not all municipalities across Erie County have them. A common tone across JCLA's municipality visits was that of gratitude for what healthcare and emergency services were being utilized but also frustration for those that lacked services.

At the urban side of the spectrum in the heart of the city of Erie are three major hospitals, UPMC Hamot, Allegheny Health Network's St. Vincent Hospital, and Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM). LECOM branches out into the county alongside other health networks and agencies, such as in Corry. Corry's medical needs are serviced by Corry Memorial Hospital, a member of the LECOM hospital network. In addition to being a 20-bed critical access hospital, Corry Memorial provides laboratory services, occupational health, rehabilitation, surgery and radiology.[114] Services are available at the hospital as well as rural health clinics in Corry, Union City, and Clymer, New York.[115] Corry Memorial, represented by its Community Health Improvement Committee, developed the Community Health Care Improvement Plan 2021-2024,[116] which "reflects the strategic issues, overarching challenges and priorities identified with the Blue Zones Corry Project." The plan is stated to be revised at least every three years.[117] It identifies the following overarching challenges facing the health of Corry citizens: poverty; health inequity; primary care provider shortage for underserved residents; medical/mental health provider shortage; educational attainment; mental health stigma; opioid epidemic; cultural competency; and household factors.

Though some rural areas have no major health services, other municipalities feature them.[118] North East, for example, has a number of healthcare services, largely concentrated in the borough. UPMC operates a women's health clinic and a private family practice office. There are three mental health provider offices, three home health care agencies, two substance misuse facilities, two veterinary hospitals, three dentist offices, and three pharmacies, among other services. Edinboro's health services include Adagio Health and Boro Women's and Family Health available for feminine care, along with a nursing facility, Edinboro Manor.[119]

In coordination with the various healthcare services, EMS is a crucial necessity for municipalities across

Accessed December 18, 2022, Here.

114 Community Health Care Improvement Plan 2021-2024, Corry Memorial Hospital Community Health Improvement Committee, July 2022, Here.

115 Corry Memorial Hospital, LECOM Corry Memorial Hospital, accessed November 28, 2022, Here.

116 Corry Memorial Hospital Community Health Improvement Committee, "Community Health Care Improvement Plan 2021-2024," 2.

117 Corry Memorial Hospital Community Health Improvement Committee, "Community Health Care Improvement Plan 2021-2024," 2.

118 "North East Area Comprehensive Plan," accessed November 14, 2022, Here.

119 Visit Edinboro: Health Clinics, n.d, accessed December 5, 2022, Here.

the county.[120] Through its significant tax base, Erie supports full-time paid staffing for EMS services. Other communities such as Albion and Union City have[121] [122] EMS and ambulatory services provided to their municipalities by EmergyCare, which is headquartered in Erie.

In collaboration with local EMS and ambulatory services, police and fire departments are crucial to communities.[123] The Erie Fire Department and Erie Police Department cover roughly 20 square miles of territory, with seven fire stations and 183 police officers, as of June 2022. Corry Police employs 10 officers, including the chief and one clerk. Espousing a "community policing" philosophy,[124] Corry Police operate a citizen non-emergency hotline to respond to community questions and concerns. Other community policing programs include a medication waste drop box in collaboration with the Erie County Department of Health and a community neighborhood watch program with monthly meetings. All dispatching is done for the Erie County Department of Public Safety.[125] The Edinboro Police Department is available for emergency and non-emergency services in the borough.[126] It should be noted, Washington Township, like many other townships and boroughs, relies on the Pennsylvania State Police. However, state police enforce only state laws and not community ordinances. Edinboro, like all rural communities, also has a volunteer fire department.[127] Millcreek Police provide round-the-clock services with 65 paid officers.[128] North East Police also serve their borough.

Though some communities such as the Erie, Corry, North East, and Edinboro have thriving emergency services, not all communities across the county can say the same. In North East, a reduction in volunteer capacity for fire and EMS services has posed a challenge in recent years. The historic creation of Baker Creek through the borough to improve fire suppression capacity has led to significant downtown flooding issues.[129] Heavier and more frequent rain associated with climate change has led to persistent flooding, streambank erosion, high property damage costs, and high flood insurance premiums.[130]

Additionally, though Albion formerly had a police force, it was disbanded in 2019 by the Albion Borough Council over cost. State police serve the community.[131] Harborcreek also relies on state police, as explained by Supervisor Dean Pepicello during the JCLA's municipality visit. It has three volunteer fire departments in conjunction with two other local municipalities.[132] Harborcreek does have a good working relationship with the Pennsylvania State Police.[133] Union City has its own paid police department and volunteer fire department.

One municipality that has responded to a manpower crisis in the emergency services sector was Corry in 2012 when it joined a preexisting intergovernmental agreement to create the Conelway Regional Emergency Management Agency (CREMA) to "assume responsibility for response to any natural or man-made disaster emergencies within [CREMA constituent municipality] areas."[134] In addition to Corry, CREMA consists of

120 "List of Stations – City of Erie, PA Fire Department." n.d. Erie Fire Department, accessed November 27, 2022, Here.
121 n.d. Accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
122 Albion Volunteer Fire EMS Department, Albion Volunteer Fire EMS Department, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
123 "List of Stations – City of Erie, PA Fire Department." n.d. Erie Fire Department, accessed November 27, 2022, Here.
124 "A message from the chief," City of Corry, Pennsylvania, accessed November 28, 2022, Here.
125 "History," City of Corry, Pennsylvania, accessed November 28, 2022, Here.
126 Edinboro Police Department, n.d., accessed December 5, 2022, Here.
127 ECED, n.d, accessed December 5, 2022, Here.
128 Fire & EMS Protection. Accessed December 10, 2022, Here.
129 "North East Area Comprehensive Plan," accessed November 14, 2022, Here.
130 "Climate Impacts to Erie" Pennsylvania Sea Grant, accessed November 14, 2022, Here.
131 Bruce, David, "Albion Council Disbands Police Force," Erie Times-News. Erie Times-News, October 1, 2019, Here.
132 "Emergency Management-Harborcreek," n.d, Here.
133 N.d, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.
134 "About us," Conelway EMA, accessed November 28, 2022, Here.

Wayne Township, Concord Township, Elgin Borough, Venango Township and Amity Township, which span rural areas in both Erie and Crawford counties. CREMA's mission is not to respond to emergencies on behalf of each municipality; instead, its staff reports to an Emergency Operations Center that "coordinates with various levels of government, non-profit [organizations], etc. to coordinate information, equipment, and supplies" to emergency responders in their constituent townships, boroughs and city.[135]

This snapshot of healthcare and emergency services in Erie County municipalities reveals a few thriving systems but also the challenges that many communities, especially rural communities, face by not having permanent or fully manned services. More interregional collaboration and coordination of efforts and resources need to be done to improve healthcare and EMS systems across Erie County.

iii. Services

a. Education

Education is a tool for development, and among conversations across the municipalities a distinction regarding uneven educational outcomes in Erie typically honed in on the barriers to education for the student base. Population demographics, class size, and available educational experiences vary throughout each region. Concerns about education are among school board discussions along with access and capacity to maintain qualification for better resources.[136] [137] From a conversation in Union City, "Children can't be what they can't see."

Erie has private and public primary schools, along with secondary education facilities and universities. The figure below (Figure 8) breaks down the public high schools in Erie County.

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135 *Newsroom*, "Frequently asked questions," Conelway EMA, accessed November 28, 2022, Here.
136 "Meetings, Agendas, Minutes & Reports," Millcreek Township School District, accessed December 6, 2022, Here.
137 "Agenda/Minutes," General McLane School District, accessed December 6, 2022, Here.

Region	School	Enrollment	Student:Teacher Ratio	Local Rank	State Rank	College Readiness Index	Graduation Rate	Total Economically Disadvantaged (% of total)
Erie	Collegiate Academy	806	17:1	#1	13	43.0/100	99 percent	100
Fairview	Fairview H.S.	543	15:1	#2	44	29.5/100	98 percent	20
Millcreek	McDowell H.S.	2,184	15:1	#3	138	23.3/100	94 percent	36
Harborcreek	Harborcreek H.S.	649	15:1	#4	151	25.0/100	97 percent	28
Albion	Northwestern H.S.	422	13:1	#5	175	21.8/100	96 percent	49
North East	North East H.S.	505	14:1	#6	212	13.6/100	86 percent	34
Waterford	Fort LeBoeuf H.S.	669	13:1	#7	217	11.9/100	93 percent	43
Girard	Girard H.S.	507	14:1	#8	233	10.6/100	94 percent	44
Lawrence Park	Iroquois H.S.	353	16:1	#9	245	12.6/100	83 percent	88
Corry	Corry H.S.	611	9:1	#10	332	16.6/100	95 percent	100
Edinboro	General McLane H.S.	686	14:1	#11	421	3.6/100	97 percent	25
Union City	Union City H.S.	311	11:1	#12	497	N/A	93 percent	75
Wattsburg	Seneca H.S.	412	13:1	#13-14	507 - 676	N/A	93 percent	25
City of Erie	Erie H.S.	2,267	15:1	#13-14	507 - 676	N/A	64 percent	100
City of Erie	Perseus House Charter School of Excellence	444	17:1	#13-15	507 - 676	N/A	70 percent	99

Figure 8: Public High School Ranking in Erie County[138]

In an effort to condense the substantial number of educational facilities in Erie County, we will address data available across public high schools along with available primary school metrics. With reference to size and location across Erie County, we hope to spotlight the commonalities and disparities evident in high school education.

A study conducted in 2015 for the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) cites the strongest predictors that a student is likely to drop out are family characteristics such as socioeconomic status. Students who come from low-income families, who are the children of single, young, unemployed mothers, or who have experienced high degrees of family stress are more likely than other students to drop out of school. Of those characteristics, low socioeconomic status has been shown to bear the strongest relationship to students' tendency to drop out.[139]

Of the indicators available, cited in the above figure (Figure 8), Erie County is home to similar sized institutions across urban and rural lines. These include the 2 largest schools, McDowell High School and Erie High School - both with over 2,000 students enrolled. McDowell High School is located in Millcreek, and Erie High School

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138 "These Are the Best High Schools in the Erie, PA Area.," U.S. News & World Report, accessed November 30, 2022, Here.
139 Ritter, Barbara, "Factors Influencing High School Graduation," Spring 2015, Here.

is located in the City of Erie. Although both schools have a student base upwards of 2,000, with McDowell trailing behind Erie's enrollment within 3 percent, the two high schools have a difference in graduation rate of almost 30 percent. McDowell High School has a graduation rate of 94 percent, while Erie High School has a graduation rate of 64 percent. With two high schools with similar class sizes within 5 miles of each other and a matching student-teacher ratio of 15:1, the largest differences include the student body's socioeconomic status and diversity. 100 percent of Erie High School's student population is categorized as economically disadvantaged, while only 36 percent of McDowell's student base is categorized as such. Furthermore, McDowell High School consists of 15.1 percent minority enrollment while Erie High School has a student base with minority enrollment at 64.6 percent.

Disparities in graduation rate are reflected in rural areas with smaller student bases as well. Iroquois High School has a student base of 353, of which 88 percent are "economically disadvantaged," the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

Erie's top ranked school, Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy, skews much of the correlation between economic disadvantages versus graduation rate. Although a part of the Erie Public School system, Collegiate is a magnet school with an application process. To be accepted at Collegiate, a student must "a minimum grade point average of 3.0, national standardized test scores at the 75th percentile or above, and two teacher recommendations."[140] Even with the top ranked school accounted for, graduation rate is not solely predicted or impacted by the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

Ritter's 2015 study continues, "An integrated approach that looks at multiple indicators will address the complex composite of why students do not succeed in school. While each indicator and predictor needs attention, many factors are present in each individual."[141]

Efforts to approach the nuances of education and access have begun in Erie County under the community school model.[142] Through United Way, the community school model is "focused on removing nonacademic barriers that prevent students from being mentally present and engaged at school."[143] This is achieved through four pillars specialized for the Erie region, including: positive environment for wellness and learning, expanded learning times and enrichment opportunities, authentic family engagement, and community and neighborhood partnerships. There are 16 United Way community schools serving more than 8,000 children in four Erie County School Districts: Erie's Public Schools, Girard School District, Iroquois School District, and Union City School District.[144] Although Union City has a student base of 69.9 percent economically disadvantaged students,[145] the district has a graduation rate of 93 percent. This is high compared to Pennsylvania's average public school graduation rate of 87 percent.[146] Students in Erie Public Schools that are a part of the community school media were well above the benchmarks in most categories of the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System.[147] In both urban and rural settings, the community school model aids in lowering the barrier to students.

The Corry Area School District currently has two Title I schools, the primary and intermediate schools. Title

140 "School Background," Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy, 2021-2022 Profile, Here.
141 Ritter, Barbara, "Factors Influencing High School Graduation," Spring 2015, Here.
142 "United Way Community School.," Union City Area School District, accessed November 30, 2022, Here.
143 "United Way Community Schools," accessed November 30, 2022, Here.
144 "Community Schools," United Way, accessed November 30, 2022, Here.
145 "Union City Area School District," Future Ready PA Index, accessed December 13, 2022, Here.
146 "Top 10 Best Graduation Rate Public Schools in Pennsylvania (2022-23)," Public School Review, accessed November 30, 2022, Here.
147 "Erie students get an A-plus for academic growth in 2021-22s," GoErie, November 29, 2022, Here.

I is a 100 percent federally funded supplemental education program that provides financial assistance to local educational agencies to improve educational opportunities for educationally deprived children. Title I programs are designed to help children meet the state content and performance standards in reading, language arts, and mathematics.[148] Title I support is currently being considered in North East. Two key challenges outlined in the North East School District Comprehensive Plan are increasing numbers of documented student mental health concerns and the families who qualify for free and reduced meals.[149] Inclusion in the federal Title I program has been considered to enable the district to address these concerns, but capacity is considered a key limitation.

Education is impacted by a variety of factors that are not distinctive by urban and rural lines. Instead, problems with graduation rate, college readiness, etc. follow through lines of access. Issues of access are not unique to just the education system. Through collaboration and partnerships between school districts, social service organizations, businesses, the public sector, universities and more, the barriers to education in urban and rural school districts will allow for a more comprehensive learning experience for all Erie's students, benefiting the students, their families, and the secondary and higher education facilities.[150]

b. Economy and Workforce

Much can be said about the economy of Erie County, and the JCLA 2022 cohort applauds the work done by previous JCLA cohorts. It owes particular gratitude to the 2019 and 2021 cohorts for their work on Erie's blue economy[151] and the future of work in Erie County.[152] For fuller context, statistics, analyses, and recommendations regarding those topics and more, we recommend referencing the work done by those cohorts. Additionally, we recommend reviewing *A Competitive Realities Report & Target Industry Strategy for Erie County, Pennsylvania,*[153] commissioned by the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership and compiled by Garner Economics in 2019, and *Erie's Inclusive Growth: A Framework for Action*[154] by New Localism Associates, funded in part by the Jefferson Educational Society and its partners.

In an effort to connect the Erie County economy to the urban and rural divide, we will address portions of data and analysis. We hope to bring attention to the present and future commonalities and disparities evident between the urban and rural economies in the county.

Due to its natural resources and placement in the wider Great Lakes industrial region, Erie County's economy has historically been one of manufacturing. In the recent past, "the gradual decline in iron and steel production led to the emergence of non-manufacturing labor sectors, such as healthcare, retail, and service industries."[155] As described at length in *The Future of Work in Erie County*, the county as a whole has faced a variety of challenges in this transitional era. Declining population and a smaller labor pool, disparate education attainment, as well as income inequality and its disproportion to cost of living are indicators that mark potential weaknesses in a less-than-robust workforce economy.[156] Erie County's population declined 3.5 percent over the last decade,

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148 "Title I," North East School District, accessed November 20, 2022, Here.

149 "North East SD, District Level Plan: 07/01/20220- 06/03/2023," accessed Here, 76.

150 Patricia Burch, Jada Estrada-Miller, "Strengthening Community Schools Through Improved Data Systems," PACE, March 2022, Here.

151 Blue economy in Erie county, 2019 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, 2020, Here.

152 The future of work in Erie county, 2021 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, March 2022, Here.

153 A competitive realities report & target industry strategy for Erie county, Pennsylvania, Garner Economics, LLC., April 15, 2019, Here.

154 Katz, Bruce and Florian Schalliol, *Erie's inclusive growth: A framework for action*, New Localism Associates, July 5, 2022, Here.

155 The future of work in Erie county, 2021 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, March 2022, Here, 12.

156 Ibid.

dropping by 9,690 people to 270,876.[157] Further, the 2021 JCLA cohort found "the 'Great Resignation' of Baby Boomers and the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted workforce participation, leading to worker shortages in the local economy, which has remained relatively stagnant for nearly two decades as compared to the national GDP growth."[158]

In regard to urban, suburban, and rural community distinctions specifically, disparities exist in education attainment,[159] median household incomes,[160] and industry-specific employee distribution.[161] Perhaps unsurprisingly, these disparities find some rural municipalities at a disadvantage, whereas suburban areas like Millcreek and Harborcreek enjoy more favorable statistics across all above data points. However, positive statistics also are reflected in the rural areas of North East and Fairview.

The data found in those latter two communities match anecdotes heard by the cohort along its site visits: Some rural citizens, specifically those in Union City, sense a divide between communities north and south of Interstate 90, based on perceptions of wealth, adjacency to metropolitanism, and "threat," rather than evenly across a rural and urban divide (according to Dave Robinson of the Union City Family Support Center). Fairview, a "rural" area north of I-90, has the highest number of high school graduates, the second highest population of bachelor's and advanced degrees behind suburban Millcreek Township,[162] and the highest average median household and per capita incomes of data available.[163] Similar trends of post-secondary degree attainment are seen in North East, which is above the county average in both income and education.[164] [165]

This nuance is not limited to North East and Fairview. For example, both in educational attainment and in median income areas, Union City and Albion have similar data sets with the city of Erie. Erie's similarities with southern Erie County municipalities are even more apparent when zooming in specifically to the urban core ZIP codes. Edinboro, a borough in southwestern Erie County and south of I-90, is an outlier. Edinboro, which is home to PennWest Edinboro University, has the highest average of advanced degrees in the county (*Figure 9*).[166] This is clearly related to the university, which employs scores of professors and other staff with advanced degrees. This potentially points to a divide not necessarily in urban-rural terms, but in terms of education and other factors.

157 The future of work in Erie county, 2021 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, March 2022, Here, 14.

158 Ibid.

159 "Educational attainment," American Community Survey 2018, U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

160 "Income in the past 12 months (in 2021 inflation-adjusted dollars)," American Community Survey 2021, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

161 "Industry by sex for the full-time, year-round civilian employed population 16 years and over," American Community Survey 2021, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, accessed December 15, 2022, Here.

162 "Educational attainment," American Community Survey 2018, U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

163 "Income in the past 12 months (in 2021 inflation-adjusted dollars)," American Community Survey 2021, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

164 Ibid.

165 "Educational attainment," American Community Survey 2018, U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, accessed December 14, 2022, Here.

166 Ibid.

Educational attainment average by populations aged 25 years and over in percentages of total population, 2018

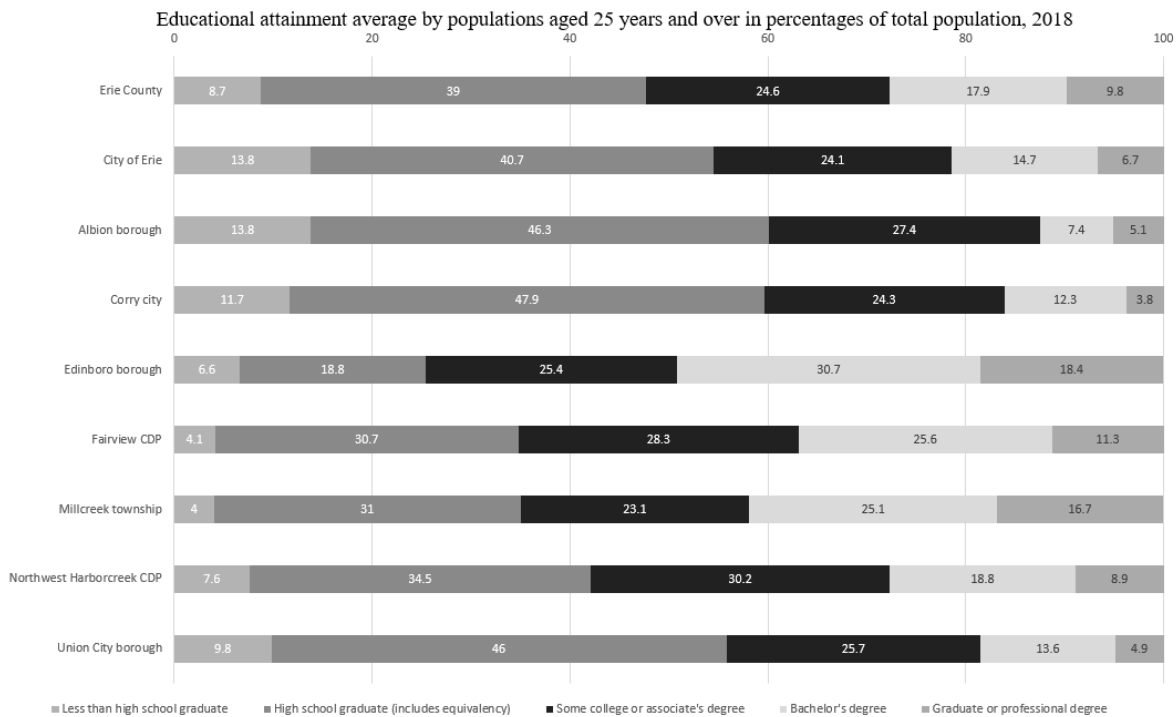| Municipality	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate (includes equivalency)	Some college or associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate or professional degree
Erie County	8.7	39	24.6	17.9	9.8
City of Erie	13.8	40.7	24.1	14.7	6.7
Albion borough	13.8	46.3	27.4	7.4	5.1
Corry city	11.7	47.9	24.3	12.3	3.8
Edinboro borough	6.6	18.8	25.4	30.7	18.4
Fairview CDP	4.1	30.7	28.3	25.6	11.3
Millcreek township	4	31	23.1	25.1	16.7
Northwest Harborcreek CDP	7.6	34.5	30.2	18.8	8.9
Union City borough	9.8	46	25.7	13.6	4.9

Figure 9: Education Attainment by Municipality, 2018.[167]

Additional divides may arise from employer and industry outlooks. In addition to the challenges of population loss and unequal educational attainment, post-industrial Erie County has undergone a shift in industry shares and continues to do so. For decades, both the urban core and other areas of Erie, and rural areas like Corry, Union City, and North East, were homes to manufacturing plants. Continued outsourcing of labor has resulted in attrition of manufacturing industries across the county.[168] In 2001, manufacturing companies were the highest contributors to the Erie real GDP with more than a quarter of the county's revenue; however, in 2020 that share had fallen to under one-fifth of the GDP, amounting to a deficit of nearly $2 billion[169] (*Figure 10*). This decrease in GDP contribution is even larger than similar national and statewide trends (see *Figure 11*). The GDP of Manufacturing has been overtaken been overtaken collectively by health care, finance, insurance, real estate, education, and social assistance, but manufacturing remains a potent sector[170] (*Figure 10*).

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167 Ibid.

168 *The future of work in Erie county*, 2021 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, March 2022, Here, 12.

169 *The State of Erie's Economy: Bridging the Urban and Rural Divide in Erie County*, Kenneth Louie, Ph.D, Economic Research Institute of Erie, presented July 21, 2022.

170 Ibid.

Figure 10: Evolution of the Erie Economy by industry shares of Erie real gross domestic product, from 2001 to 2020.[171]
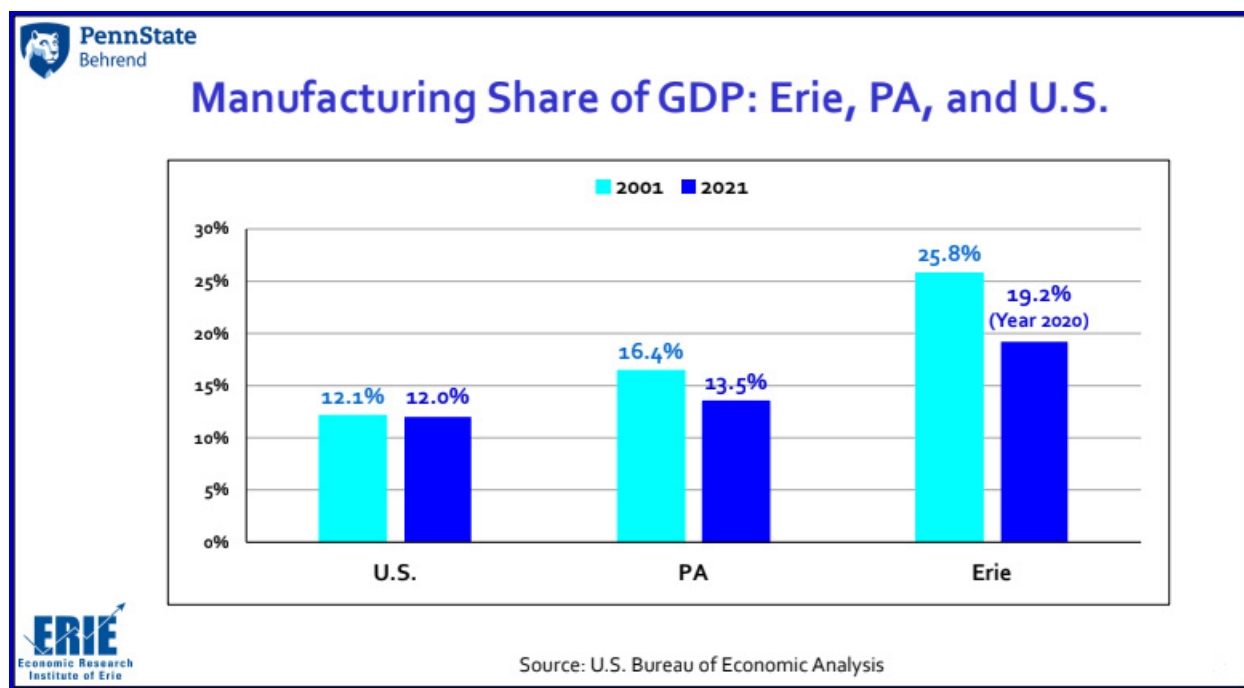

Figure 11: Share of manufacturing industries of the U.S., Pennsylvania, and Erie gross domestic products in 2001 and 2021.[172]

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171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.

The impact of this trend is expected to be felt more widely by certain municipalities. Places like Union City and Corry, where more than one-third of residents are employed in manufacturing,[173] will be affected if this trend continues. However, again this trend is not necessarily seen along an urban-rural divide: Manufacturing losses will be felt across the county, with nearly 20 percent of Erie residents reporting employment in manufacturing, and it is Erie's highest percentage of employment (*Figure 12*).   Suburban Millcreek and Harborcreek too will likely be affected as a large percentage of their residents work in manufacturing, whereas rural Albion reports low numbers of residents employed in manufacturing. This again may demonstrate that any economic divides in Erie County are more nuanced than simply along an urban-rural continuum.

FULL-TIME, YEAR-ROUND CIVILIAN EMPLOYED POPULATION 16 YEARS AND OVER BY INDUSTRY AND MUNICIPALITY (based on 2020 ACS 5-year estimates) Note: The table shown has been modified by user selection for relevancy and clarity.										United States Census Bureau
Industry	Erie County total	Erie city	Albion borough	Corry city	Edinboro borough	Fairview township	Millcreek township	North East borough	Northwest Harborcreek	Union City borough
Total workforce	100% (85,650)	100% (28,154)	100% (437)	100% (1,621)	100% (1,352)	100% (2,885)	100% (18,783)	100% (1,413)	100% (2,725)	100% (920)
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	0.67%	0.54%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.29%	0.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.54%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0.20%	0.33%	0.00%	0.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.18%	0.00%
Construction	4.78%	3.89%	0.16%	8.14%	3.18%	2.01%	4.12%	2.90%	5.54%	1.63%
Manufacturing	20.33%	19.24%	0.42%	31.46%	8.51%	18.89%	18.61%	28.87%	22.53%	37.07%
Wholesale trade	2.65%	3.08%	0.02%	3.08%	0.00%	1.70%	2.06%	1.70%	2.02%	9.02%
Retail trade	8.70%	9.75%	0.13%	8.14%	8.80%	5.16%	9.06%	7.08%	8.00%	3.80%
Transportation and warehousing	4.13%	4.02%	0.09%	1.73%	0.00%	3.54%	3.89%	1.98%	3.96%	5.00%
Utilities	0.87%	0.48%	0.01%	2.65%	0.00%	2.29%	1.41%	1.56%	0.00%	0.98%
Information	1.08%	1.25%	0.01%	3.21%	2.66%	0.00%	1.79%	0.00%	0.62%	0.00%
Finance and insurance	6.53%	5.17%	0.10%	8.45%	6.29%	11.65%	8.82%	4.46%	10.72%	3.04%
Real estate and rental and leasing	1.42%	1.44%	0.01%	4.13%	0.00%	7.69%	1.66%	0.57%	0.33%	1.30%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	6.37%	5.91%	0.08%	2.59%	10.80%	8.56%	7.95%	3.54%	2.53%	9.46%
Educational services	8.65%	6.30%	0.14%	4.87%	23.45%	13.03%	9.68%	3.54%	10.02%	5.76%
Health care and social assistance	19.61%	22.83%	0.25%	12.71%	19.53%	19.10%	17.73%	28.59%	18.39%	9.02%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	3.84%	9.12%	0.02%	2.84%	10.36%	2.67%	4.96%	12.88%	4.07%	3.70%
Public administration	3.72%	3.59%	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	6.38%	4.21%	1.13%	6.72%	1.30%

Figure 12: Employed civilian population by industry and municipality[174]

Reflective of insurance's and finance's continued growth in GDP contribution is the recent ascension of Erie Insurance as Erie County's largest employer.[175] Again reflective of above trends, Wabtec Corp., the successor company to the county's former top employer GE Transportation, continues to fall in employment rankings; in 2022, it fell from second to sixth in a list compiled by the state Department of Labor and Industry.[176] Interestingly, according to 2020 census data, still many more full-time employees were employed in

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173 "Industry by sex for the full-time, year-round civilian employed population 16 years and over," American Community Survey 2021, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, accessed December 15, 2022, Here.
174 Ibid.
175 Martin, Jim, "Wabtec, successor to Erie's longtime employment leader, slips to 6th spot," GoErie, Erie Times-News, Feb. 21, 2022, Here.
176 Ibid.

manufacturing than insurance, with finance and insurance making up a much smaller number (*Figure 12*). This perhaps demonstrates the larger number of manufacturing companies across the county as compared to finance and insurance as a whole, with Erie Insurance holding a larger share of its respective industry employees than any one manufacturing employer. Meanwhile, "Wabtec remains the county's top manufacturing employer, but it has fallen across all industries to sixth place as ranked by the number of employees."[177]

Erie's Inclusive Growth: A Framework for Action playbook's first strategy 1.1 will attempt to address the loss of manufacturing by developing a new manufacturing center in Erie County. The estimated cost for such a center, deemed a "shovel ready project," is $56 million. Goals include the creation of approximately 5,000 jobs, increased median wages, union representation, waste reduction locally and globally, and expanded access to utilities in the area. The playbook's investment overview for this strategy states:[178]

> A center of manufacturing competitiveness could provide the capability to transition to a sustainable economy in the areas of plastics recycling, metal casting, and [rail][179] transportation. The center would include an advanced polymers and materials lab to design more sustainable and recoverable plastics as well as metal castings labs for prototyping and a heavy industrial battery testing facility to design zero emission long-haul transportation.

Agencies, investors, and public servants are positioned to continue developing the county's transitional economy. Whether these strategies will address the urban-rural continuum and social class divides will remain to be seen. As the 2021 JCLA cohort wrote, "By leveraging the current strengths of Erie County and exploring new opportunities, civic leaders and stakeholders can reduce unemployment, revitalize distressed neighborhoods, and minimize brain drain."[180]

c. Public Transportation

Public transportation in Erie County was mentioned regularly in the JCLA conversations with public officials, particularly those in rural areas. Their concerns included lack of use, lack of service, and inconvenient bus routes and schedules. Additionally, anecdotal conversations within the JCLA 2022 cohort showed a lack of awareness, use, and education about public services among these young professionals and their friends and families. During a visit to the Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA), transit professionals indicated their awareness of these challenges, related to rural areas. Secondary research on opinion of public transit also indicates a negative perception of awareness, need, ease of usage, and availability of services. Transportation disparities could, and perhaps do, create a very literal gap between our remote rural regions, particularly south of I-90 and other urban areas, most notably the city of Erie.

The EMTA provides public transportation within Erie County as shown in *Figure 3*. In June 2022, EMTA officially opened a new joint operations facility within the city, the result of $72 million of local, state, and federal funding.[181] EMTA's fixed route service (the "e") operates 28 fixed routes throughout the county, and its paratransit service (the LIFT) provides transportation assistance for disabled individuals and various county programs.[182] EMTA also provides Park-N-Ride services within Erie proper, with the cultural loop running from

177 Ibid.

178 Katz, Bruce and Florian Schalliol, *Erie's inclusive growth: A framework for action*, New Localism Associates, July 5, 2022, Here, 36.

179 Thomas, Kim, email, January 31, 2023.

180 The future of work in Erie county, 2021 Jefferson Civic Leadership Academy Cohort, Jefferson Educational Society, March 2022, Here, 11-12.

181 Mathias, Matt, "EMTA holds ribbon cutting for new facility," YourErie.com, WJET/WFXP, June 14, 2022, Here.

182 "Agency Profile – Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, November 20,

the Bayfront Intermodal Station to several downtown Erie venues.[183] However, an average Erie household has two cars, and 71.4 percent of Erie commuters drive to work alone; less than 4 percent regularly took public transit to work in 2020.[184]
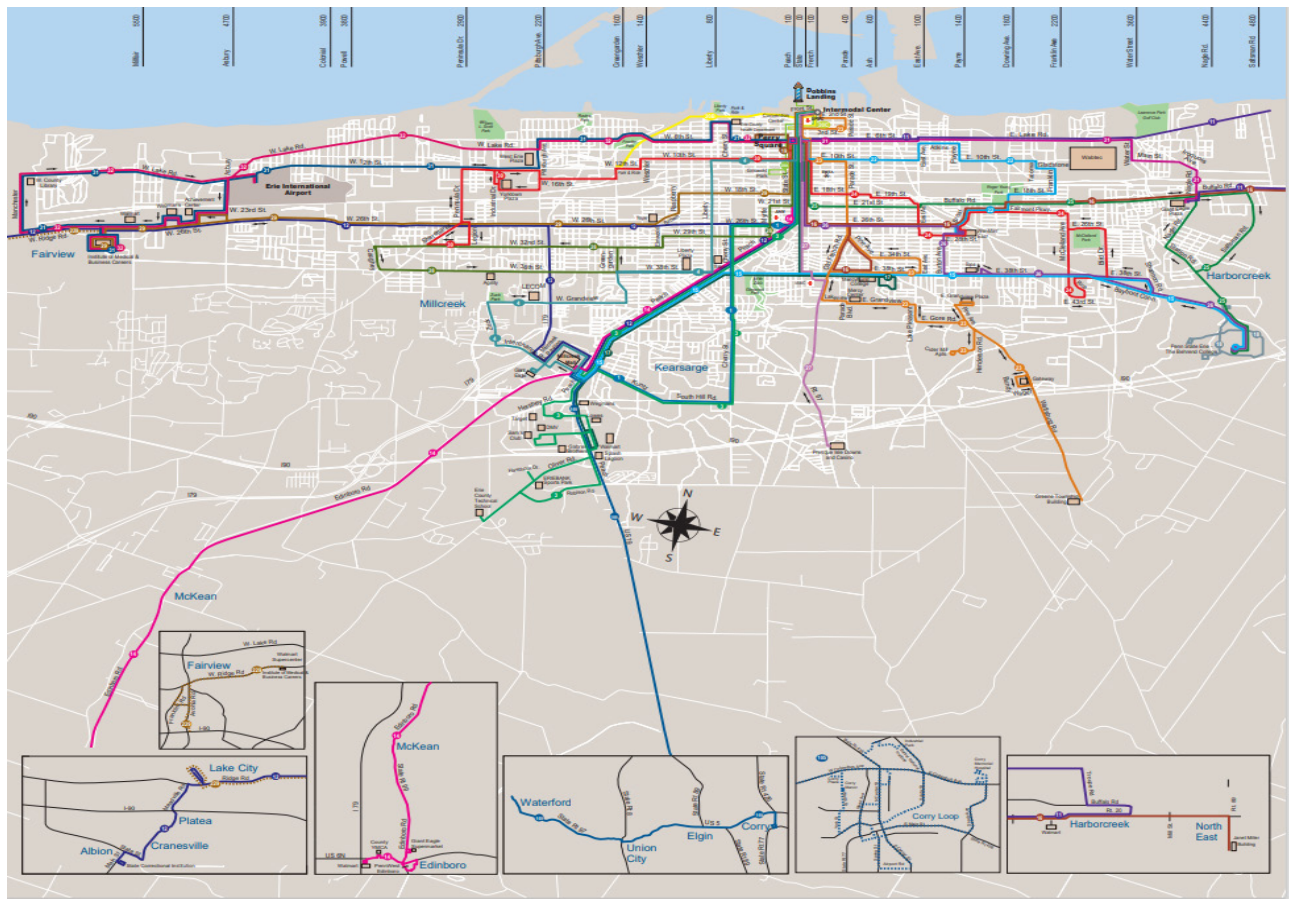

Figure 13: Map of EMTA bus routes throughout Erie County

As mentioned, public transportation tends to be a challenging issue for rural communities. The "e" and LIFT have routes that travel between the city and Albion,[185] North East,[186] Corry and Union City,[187] and other rural areas,[188] though these scheduled routes are limited to morning departures from these municipalities and afternoon arrivals to the city. Further, many rural areas only receive service during the work week. Public transportation is utilized for labor commuting even less in the county than in urban areas. For example, in Albion, 81 percent of residents drive alone to work, 9 percent carpool, 5 percent work from home, 4 percent walk, and 1 percent use public transit.[189] Even fewer commuters in Corry,[190] Union City,[191] and North East[192] utilize public transportation for their commute to or from work, at zero percent for all commuters from those

183 "Park-N-Ride Services – Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, accessed November 27, 2022, Here.

184 "Erie, PA," Data USA, accessed November 29, 2022, Here.

185 "Route 12," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, August 28, 2021, Here.

186 "Route 16," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, August 29, 2022, Here.

187 "Route 105," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, June 13, 2020, Here.

188 "Routes," Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority, ErieMultimedia, accessed November 30, 2022, Here.

189 "Albion, Pennsylvania," Data USA, accessed November 29, 2022, Here.

190 "Corry, Pennsylvania," Data USA, accessed November 13, 2022, Here.

191 "Union City borough, Pennsylvania," United States Census Bureau, accessed November 29, 2022, Here.

192 "North East, Pennsylvania," Data USA, accessed November 29, 2022, Here.

particular areas. Any correlation or causation between the high number of personal car drivers and the limited bus service to these areas requires more intentional assessment.

Public perception of the usefulness or satisfaction of EMTA services in rural areas tends to be low. In North East, public transportation was the "lowest rated area of satisfaction" by respondents to a recent public survey, due in part to a limited number of route stops.[193] In Corry, the top reasons preventing respondents from taking the EMTA buses are "1) Not interested, 2) It takes less time to drive and park, 3) Bus stop locations are not convenient to where I live." Ninety-three percent of Corry respondents never use the EMTA buses on average to get to work, school, or other destinations.[194]

This is not to say that there is a lack of opportunity nor a want for improved rural public transportation. While acknowledging the above responses, Corry is positioned for collaborative transportation with the city of Erie and other rural areas of the county due to its ongoing strategic development and inroads to sustain or improve its infrastructure and services. In October 2020, Corry, the Erie County Department of Health, and Blue Zones Corry published an active transportation plan, Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS.[195] The report utilized previous planning efforts such as the 2020 Corry Community Survey, work by Blue Zones, various recreation and lands feasibility studies and plans, the Pennsylvania Active Transportation Plan, and its own original assessment and analyses, including surveys and interviews. Corry CONNECTS then provides a vision of Corry as "a community where residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can walk, bike or access transit to reach the places where they live, work, play and pray" based on the resulting data.[196]

Corry CONNECTS' proposed outcomes include encouraging EMTA bus ridership and improving stops.[197] The improvement of EMTA services in Corry attempts to address various data collected in Corry CONNECTS' research, including the aforementioned lack of interest in using public transportation and the inconvenient bus stop locations within Corry. Respondents' opinions reflected that "public transportation is important to many households" but "there are no bus shelters in Corry, [whereas] they should be pervasive because of bad weather."[198] A strategy highlighted to improve access and use of public transit is to partner with EMTA and its teaching bus service to help users become familiar with bus services, usage, payment, and safety through three learning events a year.[199] Additionally, it proposes a new bus shelter in a high-use location that serves users least likely to drive. The new bus shelter would be assessed for traffic and usage before further stops are implemented.[200]

Other transportation options are limited as well. Erie County's only taxi company closed in 2019.[201] Errand services are available, but only by advanced appointment and only within a 10-mile radius of downtown Erie[202] which would not include most of the county. As of 2022, both Lyft and Uber services are available; however, services have been reported as irregular and difficult to acquire in the evening and nighttime, when EMTA services are also unavailable to the more rural areas in Erie county.[203]

193 North East Area Comprehensive Plan Existing Conditions Summary & Analysis, The Erie County Department of Planning & Community Development, February 11, 2022, Here, 48.

194 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, City of Corry, Blue Zones Project Corry, and Erie County Health Department, October 2020, accessed November 13, 2022. Here, 12.

195 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, City of Corry, Blue Zones Project Corry, and Erie County Health Department, October 2020, accessed November 13, 2022. Here.

196 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, 3-12.

197 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, 81.

198 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, 14.

199 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, 45.

200 Corry, Pennsylvania CONNECTS: 2020 Active Transportation Plan, 55.

201 "Erie Yellow Cab suddenly closes," Erie News Now, Lilly Broadcasting, last modified June 28, 2019. Here.

202 "Rates," Hansen's Errand Service, accessed November 29, 2022. Here.

203 "Taxis and shuttles," Erie International Airport: Tom Ridge Field, accessed November 29, 2022. Here.

In addition to bus transportation, Erie has limited transit service to our neighboring metropolitan areas and beyond. Union Station, opened in 1927, serves as the sole railroad station for Amtrak.[204] The Erie Amtrak stop at Union Station is along the Lake Shore Limited train route, directly between those in Buffalo and Cleveland. Lake Shore Limited begins and ends in Chicago to the west and New York City or Boston to the east, depending on stops chosen.[205] However, there is only one daily train arrival/departure for eastbound and westbound destinations each. During the pandemic-affected 2021 fiscal year, Union Station saw just over nine thousand Amtrak riders total,[206] a decrease of more than 11 percent from 2020.[207]

Much of the above indicates that, while a lack of education, understanding, availability, and use of public transit is an obstacle for all communities, there is a gap in public transportation services offered between rural and urban Erie County to the detriment of rural residents specifically. Rural communities show a vast majority of workers (that do not work at home) drive or carpool in private vehicles and do not show need for, satisfaction with, or desire to use public transit for their commute given its inconvenience and limited nature. However, data is not reliably available for: those not reporting their commute; those who have transportation needs beyond or exclusive of travel for work; those retired or without work; and those not accurately reflected in census data such as youth and traditional-age college students not living at home, and the unhoused population. This gap also includes any use that is not directly related to labor commuting, such as travel for shopping, recreation, or travel to appointments and childcare. It is difficult to assess the total need, if any, of improvement and availability of public transportation services so further needs and satisfaction assessments are necessary. This is especially critical considering the impact a gap in public transit is likely to have on other services and resources, such as local economies, education, health, food, and recreation.

204 "Erie, PA (ERI)," Amtrak, National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 2022, Here.

205 "Lake Shore Limited Train," Amtrak, National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 2022, Here.

206 Amtrak fact sheet fiscal year 2021, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Amtrak Government Affairs, National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 2022, Here.

207 Amtrak fact sheet fiscal year 2021, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Amtrak Government Affairs, National Railroad Passenger Corporation, 2020, Here.

IV. Analysis

Throughout our research, conversations, and city and county site tours, it became clear that economic change and recovery across our nation and more directly in Erie have resulted in vastly different opportunities and outcomes for individuals and families based on where they live. Within this observation, it has been noted by economic and development scholars that there is an urban-rural divide narrative that further solidifies these trends. Ultimately, it suggests that despite growth of our cities and urban areas, rural communities are growingly lacking economic potential and residential value. While our cohort recognizes this reality, we also suggest that this divide is not clearly or fully understood. Urban and rural areas are often pitted against each other, which, ultimately, further isolates them. The urban-rural divide narrative, whether political, economic or cultural, ignores nuances within broader urban-rural trends and misses opportunities to develop solutions for more sustainable growth.

Rural poverty, drug abuse, undereducation, and feelings of hopelessness are very real, but so, too, are urban poverty, drug abuse, undereducation, and feelings of hopelessness. At the same time, rural entrepreneurship has become revitalized with the help of internet sales across once deeply rooted rural towns that centered on manufacturing. Even as many major cities prosper, their success has been met with other serious challenges, such as gentrification, lack of affordability, racial inequality, and industrial hyper-specialization. It is time for the narrative to shift from urban vs. rural to a shared economic future.

Bridging the economic divide between urban and rural areas will require states, regions, and localities to understand and bolster the relationship between urban and rural areas in economically meaningful and strategic ways. Integrated urban and rural areas can boost each other's economies. A viable path toward long-term growth, then, is to strengthen these urban-rural economic interdependencies.

After delving into nine municipal areas in Erie County, our cohort concluded that urban areas outpace their rural counterparts in broadband access. Translating this to a macro level, states with overall higher levels of broadband access have generated more economic success. Extending affordable broadband to rural areas is essential and steps are being taken for it to happen in Erie County. Meanwhile, the impact of Erie County Community College is not yet clear given its newness but it appears that urban residents have better access than their rural peers to both primary and higher education learning spaces, such as collaborative efforts in Corry with the Corry Higher Education Council.[208]

More than a geographic divide, rural and urban residents continue to share major challenges associated with poverty, but not necessarily levels of educational attainment. Although urban areas have somewhat stronger rates of high-value business growth (growth of establishments in exporting industry sectors), rural areas don't appear disadvantaged in this way. Defying stereotypes, many rural areas outpace their urban peers in creating high-value businesses. Additionally, most states do not have significant urban-rural divides in prosperity growth, which is defined as their per capita contributions to state gross domestic product. Both urban and rural areas contribute to states' economies.

In Erie County, discussions that center on the urban-rural divide are often crude and omit commonalities of race, income, and education. More evidence suggests that class divide is a truer description than geographic divide. Economic and population factors show urban populations have more in common with those in outer-rural areas, such as Corry, Union City, and Albion than they do with suburban areas. It appears that more affluent people can be found in some rural areas like North East and Fairview than in the city of Erie, and they have more in common with suburban populations, as reflected in many metrics. Public transportation is one of the few, if not only, substantiated urban-rural divisions. Most gaps that do fall along urban and rural divides also do so along class and status.

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208 "Education," Corry Higher Education Council, Accessed February 6, 2023, Here.

These nuanced findings demonstrate the ever-evolving complexities of the urban-rural divide. However, one consistent theme is the importance of infrastructure connectivity and market access, indicating that sustainable growth is dependent on the connectedness of places, not entirely their designation as urban or rural.

The following recommendations are derived from our research:

1. Further Research Needed

The first recommendation is to do more thorough qualitative research on the issues addressed here. Much of our data was informed by quantitative research, along with interview sessions with elected officials in different regions. To better understand some of the challenges and opportunities present in bridging the urban and rural divide, one needs to understand the lived experiences, perspectives, assets, and voices of those most affected by the divide. One of the questions that our cohort kept coming back to was, "is a divide inherently bad, and do people in these communities want to bridge it?" There is a long history of disenfranchised populations having been the object of policy affecting them without their consent. Our first recommendation is to better understand the needs of the communities to better determine next steps, services, and resources to benefit them.[209] This is particularly important in rural communities because much more research has been done in urban areas.[210]

Data derived from research needs to be distributed widely in affected regions and made accessible to the general public. Given that the communities in rural and urban regions in Erie County are not homogenous, language describing the issues needs to be understandable to all those affected.

2. Collaboration

To better bridge urban and rural communities, there needs to be further collaboration and partnership. This should be intentional and multifaceted. There should be both regional and statewide coordination and collaboration, showing how the benefits of working together can be a model that could be replicated across the commonwealth. Additionally, efforts like this should not be restricted to public administration, but should have a balance with public and private partnerships.[211] [212] It won't be easy because many of the challenges arising from the perceived and actual divide between these communities has been the result of governmental policy and private industry decision-making.[213] [214] The most successful bridging will happen with a large group of stakeholders working on the challenges. The issues and stakeholders should include but not be limited to:

- **Broadband** - Erie County Broadband Study
- **Economy and Workforce**- Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership
- **Education** - United Way of Erie County Community Schools Model
- **Healthcare and Emergency Services** - EMS Training Center on the former Mercyhurst campus at North East
- **Energy and Utilitie**s - Intermunicipal contracting
- **Housing** - Mercy Center for Women's implementation of additional housing unit for women and children
- **Public Transportation** - EMTA Strategic Plan
- **Recreation** - Erie County Parks & Recreation Coordinator

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209 Brian Dabson, "Regional solutions for rural and urban challenges," n.d.

210 Emery N Castle., JunJie Wu, and Bruce A. Weber, "Place orientation and rural–urban interdependence," n.d.

211 Glendening, Parris N, "The best of times, the worst of times: An unconventional conclusion," n.d.

212 Brian Dabson, "Regional solutions for rural and urban challenges," n.d.

213 Christina McFarland, "Strengthening Intra-regional Connectivity: Implications for Bridging the Urban–Rural Divide," State and Local Government Review 51, no. 4 (2019): 259-266.

214 Daniel T. Lichter, and James P. Ziliak, "The rural-urban interface: New patterns of spatial interdependence and inequality in America," n.d.

3. Public Narrative and Perception

An issue that came up repeatedly on this project was the power of narrative in perpetuating a sense of division between urban and rural spaces. Differences between these groups clearly exist, but that does not mean that the communities are necessarily divided. It could mean they are on symmetrical, complementary tracks.[215] [216] It is important for both communities to focus on sharing a narrative of interdependence rather than division.[217] Challenging the competitive narrative is difficult, but it is one that can help highlight the strengths, resources, and assets of all regions in Erie County.

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215 Daniel T. Lichter., and James P. Ziliak, "The rural-urban interface: New patterns of spatial interdependence and inequality in America," n.d.

216 Daniel T. Lichter., and David L. Brown, "Rural America in an urban society: Changing spatial and social boundaries," n.d.

217 Daniel T. Lichter., and James P. Ziliak, "The rural-urban interface: New patterns of spatial interdependence and inequality in America," n.d.

V. Conclusions

Over the past seven months, the JCLA cohort worked to assess Erie County's urban-rural divide in consideration of infrastructure, resources, and services. More specifically, it analyzed eight subcategories that include: broadband, economy, education, energy and utilities, healthcare and emergency services, housing, transportation, and recreation and how they are interrelated through the nine primary municipalities visited during the session: Albion Borough, city of Corry, Edinboro Borough, city of Erie, Fairview Township, Harborcreek Township, Millcreek Township, North East Borough, and Union City Borough.

The cohort concludes that the urban-rural divide is an oversimplification based on geography and fails to account for many factors, such as lived experiences and interconnectivity found in each community; diverse populations in both rural and urban communities; suburban populations; similarities between multiple populations despite urban-rural classifications; and both clear and nuanced differences between each rural community.

This paper indicates, based on the cohort's experience and research, that any urban-rural divide that does exist is likely linked more to class and status than to geography. Work is being done throughout Erie County in many of these areas, as pointed out in the analysis section. But more work needs to be done on many levels to achieve long-term, sustainable growth in collaborative ways.

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VII. 2022 Cohort

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Douglas Massey, Erie County Community College

Branden Montgomery, Community Access Media

Autumn Parker, Allegheny College

Katie Patterson, Penn State Behrend

Kyle Rodney, Erie Insurance

Colin Russ, Pricewaterhouse Coopers

Susmita Sarki, Quality of Life Learning Center

Erin Sekerak, Junior Achievement of Western PA

Scott Tarasovitch II, Erie Insurance

Tywonn Taylor, Career Dreams/Booker T Washington Center

Clark Tieman, Penn State Behrend

Jenny Tompkins, PennFuture

Hilda Torres, GECAC

Olivia Wickline, expERIEnce Children's Museum