

City of Ann Arbor's Comprehensive Land Use Plan

2050





source: City of Ann Arbor

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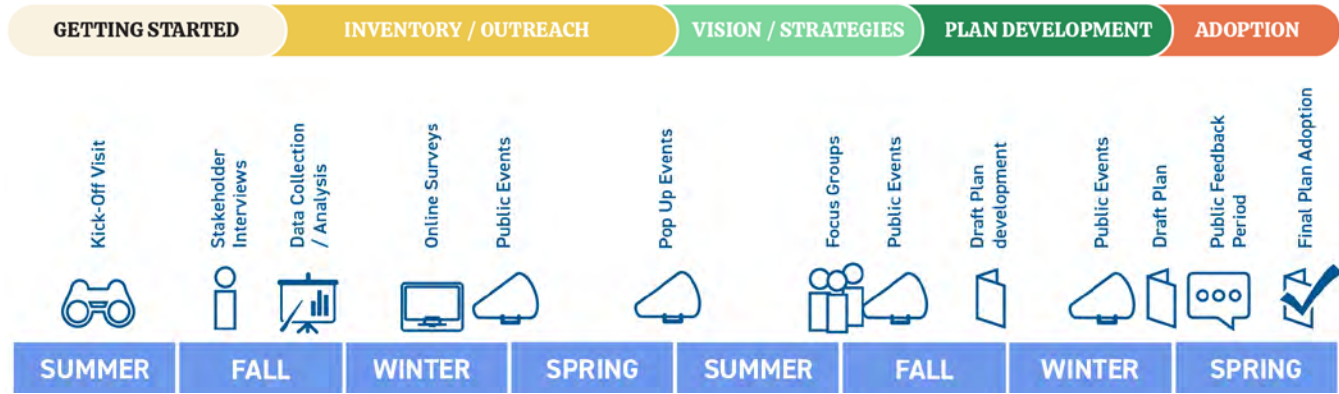
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About the Comprehensive Plan

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Planning Commission and the City Council, is a document that sets out the city's future vision and priorities, guiding its development for decades. The plan includes decisions on land use, policy changes and priorities for public projects over the next 25 years, taking us to 2050.

The Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan was developed over a two-year period, which included research on existing conditions, data collection, and community engagement. These activities informed the development of a collective vision and strategies that would guide the plan's creation.



Why is it important? What can the Comprehensive Plan do?



It ensures that land use and development decisions are **guided by both data and shared community values**.



It can help **balance competing interests and determine how best to allocate and leverage resources**.

What are its limitations? What can't the Comprehensive Plan do?

It is not a law, and its adoption does not change any laws, regulations, or requirements that apply to the physical development of the city. Rather, it provides strategic direction on how regulations should evolve to achieve our goals.

It is not set in stone, but a living document that is revisited and adjusted as needed. The city will regularly assess progress and determine if, how, and when updates are necessary to respond to emerging trends and challenges. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that this review occur at least every five years following the plan's adoption.

It is not a cure-all. While it is comprehensive in name and scope, many other factors influence change in the city, such as federal and state policies, private ownership, market forces, financing, business trends, among others.

How does the city influence development?



The Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document. Future Land Use is aspirational and provides a vision. What it does: plans for growth and development through land use and infrastructure, providing guidance for the unified development code and public investment.

The Unified Development Code is a regulatory ordinance, a legal framework for implementing land use vision. What it does: controls height, area, bulk, location, and use of buildings and premises; zoning districts relate to land use categories but are not synonymous.

Significant public investment in infrastructure will also be required. Water, sanitary sewers, stormwater, electrical transmission, public safety, public transit, etc. and the staffing required to accommodate growth.

**Changes to the UDC and infrastructure are outside the scope of this plan*

About the Planning Process

The Comprehensive Plan was not developed in a vacuum. It was guided by a Steering Committee of community stakeholders who provided input on key issues and analysis, shaped the engagement process, identified potential partnerships to implement the plan's ideas, and ultimately helped to shape the vision and plan with the Planning Commission.

Two important steps in the process are the plan's adoption and implementation. The former grants the plan official status and allows city resources to be allocated, while the latter identifies leading agencies, stakeholders, and organizations to turn the plan's strategies into action.

We plan so as to create an orderly development of the city that is coordinated with available and necessary infrastructure and services. This plan is a living document that will continue to reflect best practices and ever-evolving community needs. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act states that at least every five years, a municipality shall review its plan to determine if it needs to be amended.



Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan Resolution

City Council identified the following as key components to include in the Comprehensive Plan:

1.

Carefully consider and implement those portions of the A²ZERO Living Carbon Neutrality Plan applicable to land use and development activity in the city.
2.

In the context of a largely developed city, make recommendations for adding new homes and densification in single-family zoned areas, and other areas and zoning districts.
3.

Develop recommendations and policies that promote fewer zoning districts or categories, that contain more flexibility for re-use and adaptability over time.
4.

A proposed land use framework that seeks to emphasize values over specified land use limitations where possible.
5.

Recommendations and policies that undo and/or seek to repair past land use policies and regulations that resulted in exclusion of people based on race, income or other characteristics and other inequities.



Past Plans

In an effort to streamline and simplify, the updated Comprehensive Plan will replace five existing plans into one unified document.

- **2004** Natural Features Master Plan
- **2009** Ann Arbor Land Use Plan
- **2009** Ann Arbor Downtown Plan
- **2013** Ann Arbor Sustainability Framework
- **2013** S State Street Corridor Plan

The Comprehensive Plan will incorporate three existing plans:

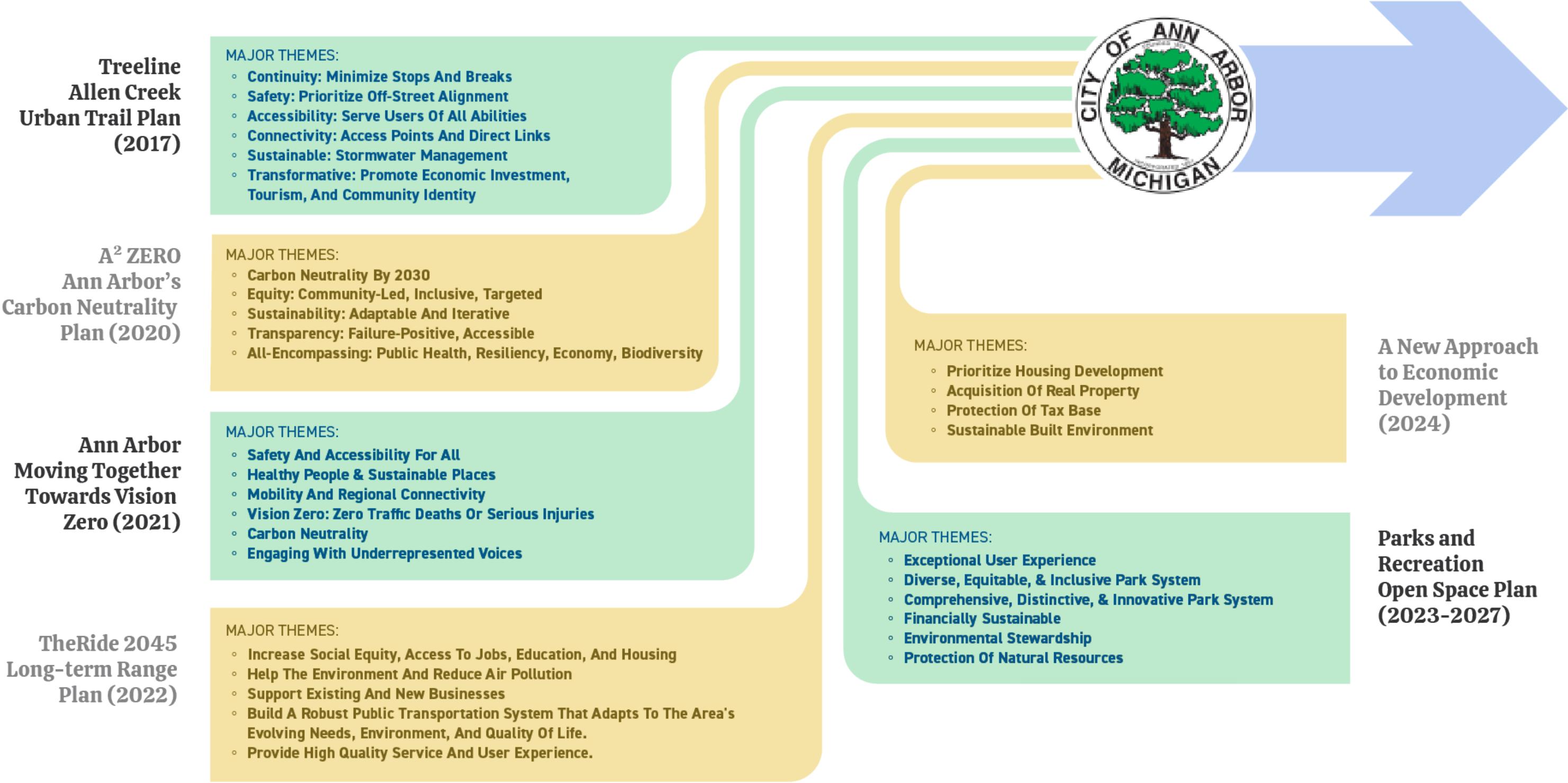
- **2017** Treeline Allen Creek Urban Trail Master Plan
- **2021** Ann Arbor Moving Together Towards Vision Zero (Moving Together)
- **2023-2027** Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan

The Comprehensive Plan aligns with these existing plans:

- **2020** A²ZERO - Ann Arbor's Living Carbon Neutrality Plan
- **2022** TheRide 2045 Long-Range Plan
- **2024** A New Approach to Economic Development

Plans to Incorporate and Align With

Summary of major themes from city plans developed by the consultant team .



A History of Ann Arbor and its Development

The City of Ann Arbor was founded in 1824 and incorporated as a city in 1851. After an unsuccessful bid to become the state capital, city leaders successfully persuaded the University of Michigan to relocate from Detroit to Ann Arbor in 1837. This move set the city on a trajectory of growth, shaping it into the thriving hub for living, learning, and business that it is today.

The city’s growth can be broadly divided into four distinct eras:

01 Indigenous History

The first people to inhabit and shape the landscape of present-day Ann Arbor were the Anishinaabe, including the Odawa, Ojibwe and Potawatomi tribes, as well as the Fox, Wyandot and Sauk peoples. These communities lived, traveled and traded along trails that followed natural features—many of which later influenced Ann Arbor’s modern roadways and park system.

Between 1807 and 1855, a series of treaties between the United States and various Tribal Nations resulted in tribes ceding most of their land in Michigan, including Ann Arbor, for minimal compensation. Many Indigenous people were then forcibly removed to reservations. This displacement paved the way for significant settler expansion in the early 19th century.¹

¹ Michigan History Center, Michiganology.org

02 Founding & Formative Years (1824-1939)

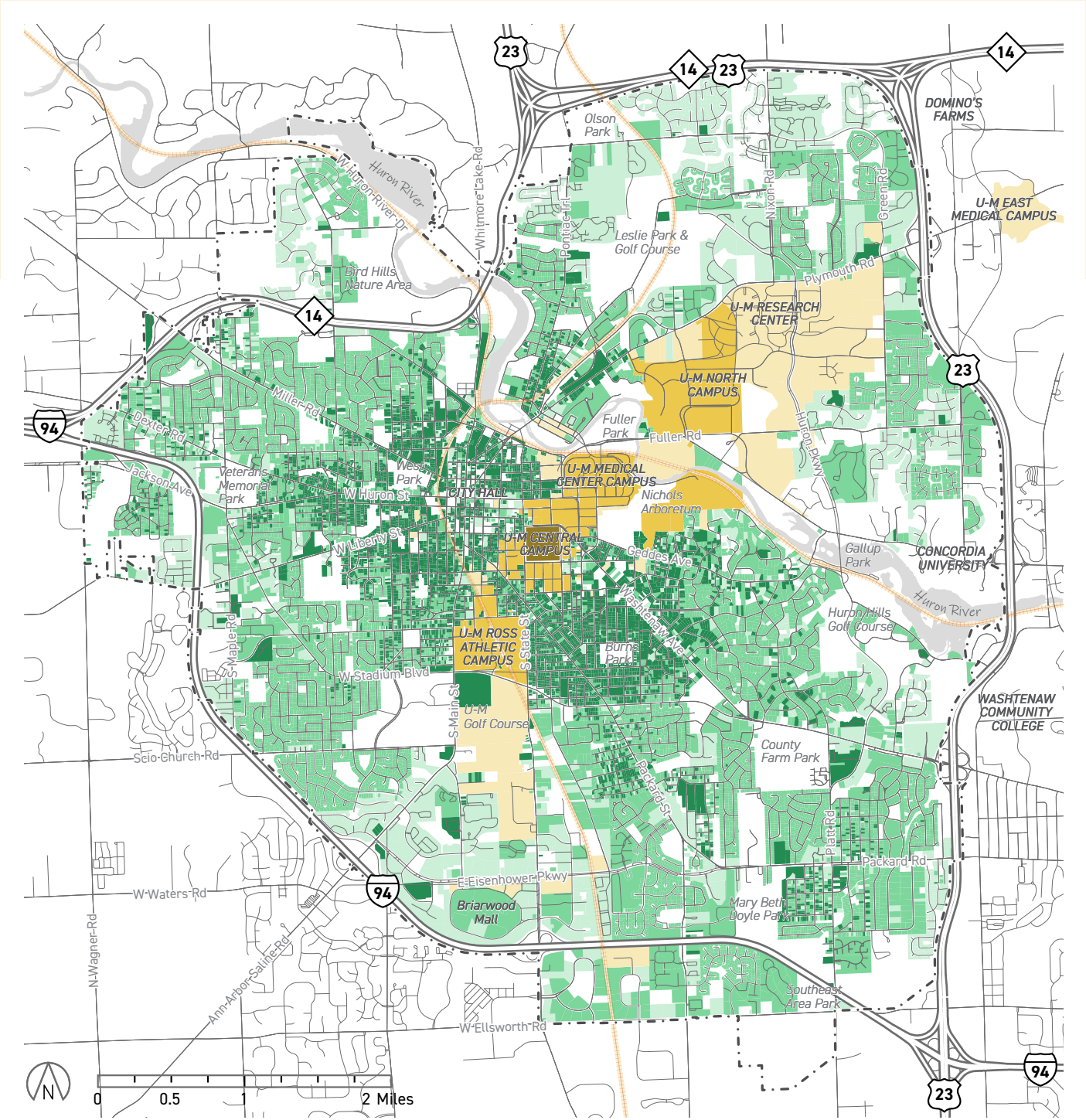
Ann Arbor as a city began taking shape during this period with the original land platting, the relocation of the University of Michigan from Detroit to Ann Arbor and the introduction of policies and infrastructure that laid the foundation for future growth. The city’s early development was concentrated around the Huron River, Downtown, and Central Campus.

03 Growth & Automobile Era (1940-1979)

This era was marked by explosive postwar expansion, major infrastructure realignments and an eventual shift from growth to preservation. The city’s rapid development and urban renewal policies led to a backlash, resulting in efforts to protect the built environment in its existing form—a trend that would shape Ann Arbor’s next phase.

04 Urban Consolidation & Policy Shifts (1980-Today)

This era marked the buildout of the city’s last remaining greenfield sites at its edges, shifting the focus toward infill development within existing urban area, particularly downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. It also reflected a changing mindset around infrastructure: instead of prioritizing large-scale projects like new highways, the city began reimagining existing systems, such as adding bike lanes to established streets. Additionally, zoning changes laid the foundation for a new chapter in Ann Arbor’s evolution.



Map
Ann Arbor’s Growth Over Time

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, City of Ann Arbor - Assessors data, 1874 Map of Ann Arbor, 1965 Map of Ann Arbor, 2023 Map of Ann Arbor

Founding & Formative Years
1824-1939

Properties (Built before 1940)

U-M Campus (As of 1874 Map of Ann Arbor)

Growth & Automobile Era
1940-1979

Properties (Built 1940-1979)

U-M Campus (As of 1965 Map of Ann Arbor)

Urban Consolidation & Policy Shifts
1980-Today

Properties (Built 1980-Today)

U-M Campus (As of 2023 Assessors Ownership Data)

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Ann Arbor for All – Comprehensive Plan

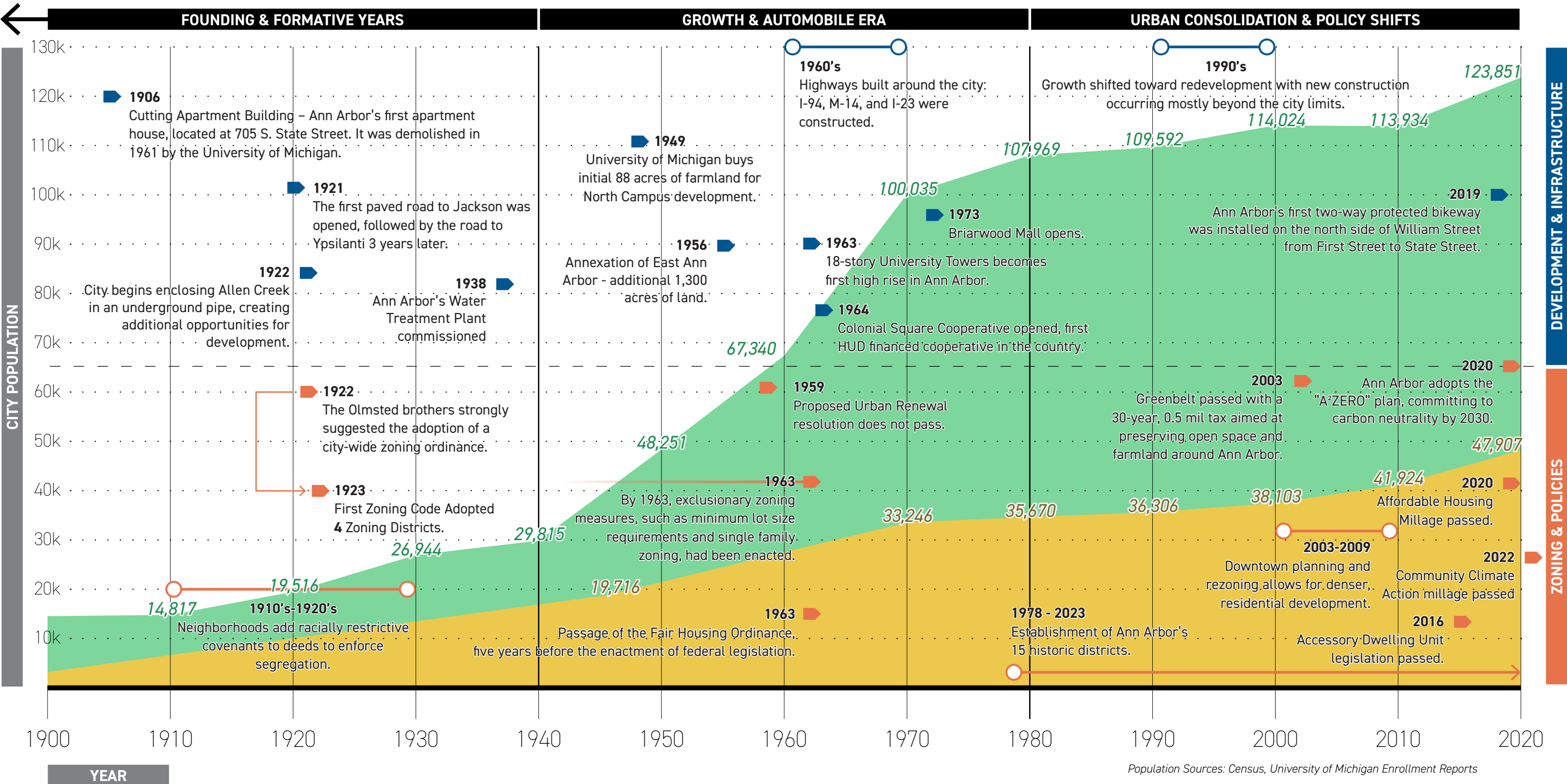
Introduction

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Major Events That Impacted Ann Arbor's Development in Relation to the City's Population Growth

This chart presents a selection of policies and developments that had a lasting impact on shaping Ann Arbor, though it is not an exhaustive list of all influential factors.

University of Michigan Population
Total City Population



Additional Detail On The Major Events That Impacted Ann Arbor's Development

Founding & Formative Years (1824-1939)

Foundations are set for the city and university:

- 1824:** John Allen and Elisha Rumsey laid out the original plot of land.
- 1837:** University of Michigan opened in Ann Arbor, relocating from Detroit.
- 1839-1878:** Major railroads connect Ann Arbor to Detroit, Chicago, & Toledo.
- 1899-1919:** U-M population triples and cements its role as the dominant driver of the economy.
- 1906:** Ann Arbor's first apartment building - Cutting Apartment Building is built.

New policies set the stage for future growth (& exclusion):

- 1910's-1920's:** Neighborhoods add racially restrictive covenants to deeds to enforce segregation.
- 1921:** The first paved road to Jackson was opened, followed by the road to Ypsilanti 3 years later.
- 1922:** Olmsted brothers created a park plan and strongly suggested the adoption of a city-wide zoning ordinance.
- 1922:** City begins enclosing Allen Creek in an underground pipe, creating additional opportunities for development.
- 1923:** Ann Arbor's first zoning ordinance was adopted with 4 districts.
- 1938:** Ann Arbor's Water Treatment Plant commissioned.



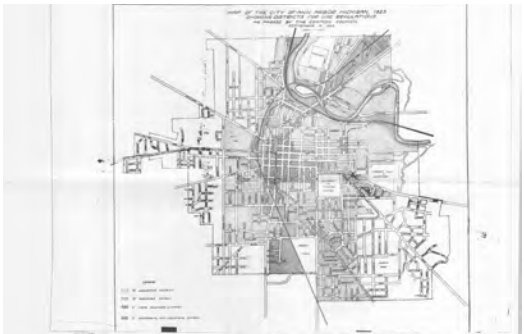
Left: Michigan Central Station - 1886

source: Ann Arbor District Library



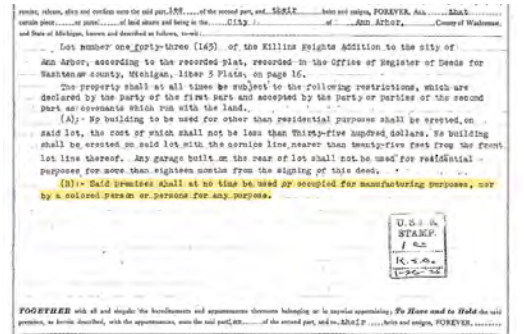
Left: Cutting Apartment Building - 1906

source: Ann Arbor District Library



Left: Ann Arbors first zoning map - 1923

source: University of Michigan Library



Left: Killins Subdivision, Restrictive Covenant - 1925

source: Justice InDeed

Growth & Automobile Era (1940-1979)

The city moves beyond downtown:

- 1952:** Construction begins on U-M North Campus.
- 1956:** East Ann Arbor was annexed, adding 1,300 acres to the city.
- By 1963:** Exclusionary zoning measures, such as minimum lot size requirements and single family zoning, had been enacted.
- 1960s:** Highways built around the city.
- 1961:** Cutting Apartment Building demolished by the University of Michigan for parking.
- 1964:** Colonial Square Cooperative opened, first HUD financed cooperative in the country.
- 1973:** Briarwood mall opens.

Urban renewal fails but impact occurs:

- 1959:** Proposed Urban Renewal resolution does not pass.
- 1970s:** Packard-Beakes bypass rejected - Ann Arbor's Black community still experienced significant displacement impacts.
- 1978:** Ann Arbor passes a historic preservation ordinance, creating its first historic district in the Old West Side.

Urban Consolidation & Policy Shifts (1980-Today)

The city looks inward, shifting development focus to the core:

- Gentrification displaces residents from historically Black neighborhoods - See page 24 for more detail.
- 1982:** Downtown Development Authority (DDA) created.
- 2003:** Greenbelt passed, aimed at preserving open space and farmland around Ann Arbor.
- 2003-2009:** Downtown updates zoning and design guidelines, making way for denser, residential development.

Rethinking of infrastructure & how the city develops:

- 2016:** Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance adopted.
- 2019:** Ann Arbor's first two-way protected bikeway was installed on the north side of William St. from First St. to State St.
- 2020:** Ann Arbor adopts the "A²ZERO" plan, committing to carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 2021:** New Transit Corridor (TC1) zoning district created to add density outside of downtown.
- 2022:** Parking minimums removed across the city.



source: University of Michigan



source: Ann Arbor District Library



source: Ann Arbor District Library

Top Left: UM North Campus Model, 1952

Top Right: M14 construction, 1965

Left: Proposed Packard-Beakes bypass route, 1972

Below: Newly built Briarwood Mall, 1974



source: University of Michigan Library



source: Ann Arbor News

Left: Updated zoning (2003-2009) ushers in a new era of hi-rise development downtown.

Below: William Street bikeway.



source: Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority

Ann Arbor Today

Population Trends

Ann Arbor’s population growth over the last few decades has plateaued as Washtenaw County picks up demand for housing.

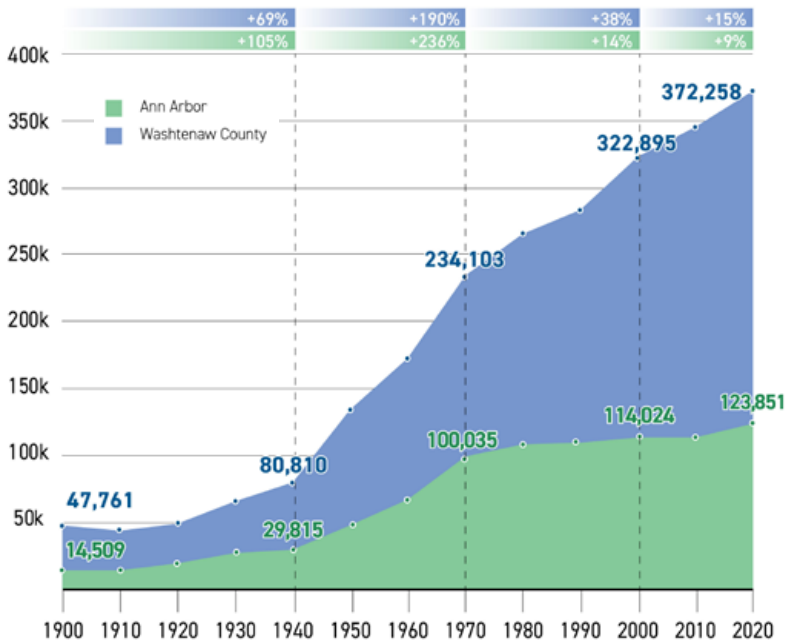
Since the 1970s, Ann Arbor’s population growth has slowed, even as the surrounding Washtenaw County continued to expand significantly. This trend is closely correlated with and was caused by the depletion of the city’s inventory of previously undeveloped land and the impact of legal constraints on new housing production within city limits. Ann Arbor grew 24% between 1970 and 2020 compared to Washtenaw County that grew by 59% during the same period. Since 1970, Ann Arbor’s share of the Washtenaw County population has declined every decade to a low of 33% in 2020.¹

Most of the city’s growth since the 1970s can be attributed to the growth in the student population. Between 1970 and 2020, incoming University of Michigan students accounted for 62% of the city’s population growth, making up 14,661 of the total 23,816 increase.² In recent years the University’s enrollment has continued to rise, reaching a record enrollment in 2024. This trend tracks with the population growth by age group from 2000-2020 which shows that the student-aged group has grown 17%.³

1 U.S. Census 1920-2020
2 University of Michigan Enrollment Reports
3 U.S. Census 2000-2020

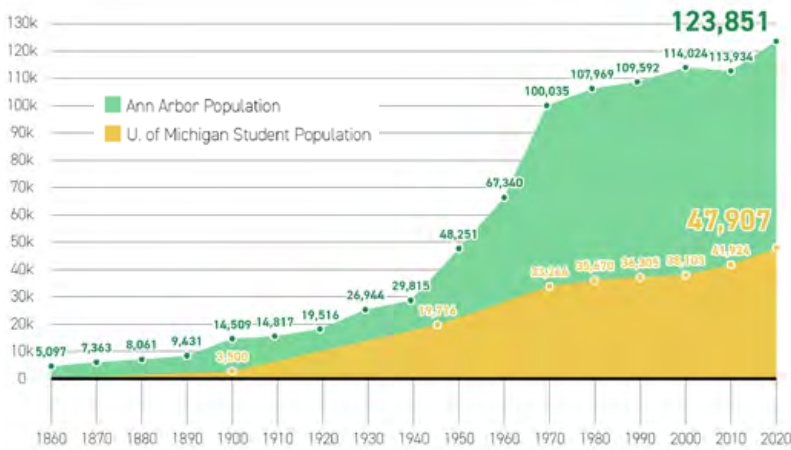
Population trend, Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County

source: U.S. Census 1920-2020, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) 2050 Forecasts



Population trend, Ann Arbor and University of Michigan

source: U.S. Census 1860-2020, University of Michigan Enrollment Reports



In general, the population is aging and family-aged residents (both under 18 and 35-64 cohorts) are decreasing. Between 2000 and 2020, the population age 65 and over increased 59%, while the population 35-64 decreased by 9% and the population under 18 decreased by 21%.⁴ Family households (defined as consisting of a householder and one or more other people related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption) are a smaller share of Ann Arbor’s households (43% of all households) compared with Washtenaw County (56% of all households).⁵

4 U.S. Census 2000-2020
5 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year data, 2018-2022

Housing Trends

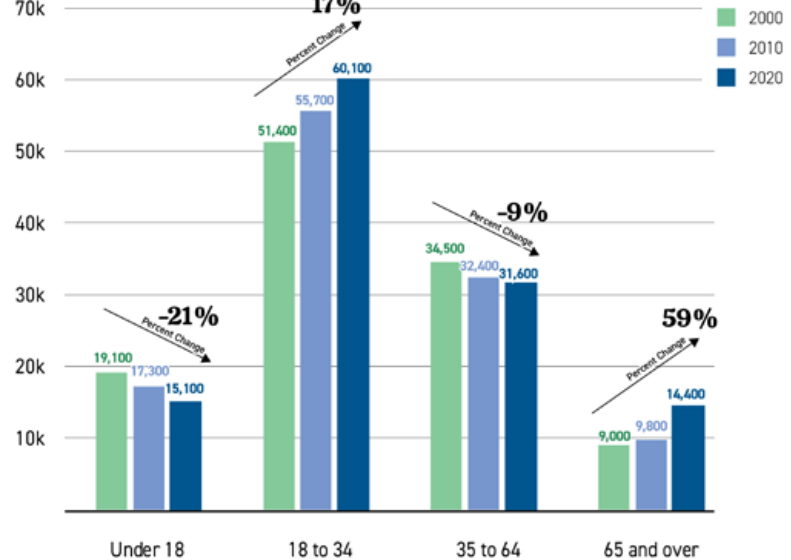
Ann Arbor’s pace of new construction has slowed in recent decades and demand for new housing has outpaced supply, impacting affordability.¹ The flattening population growth is a symptom of a lacking housing supply; people cannot move here unless there are units to house them.

Ann Arbor’s housing market has struggled to keep pace with growing demand for decades, creating affordability challenges and straining sustainability efforts. The pace of housing construction has slowed in recent decades, according to an analysis of both census data and the city’s Assessor’s Office data. Housing development is also shifting from single

1 Refer to the “Housing Appendix” for sourced research articles on the relationship between housing supply and prices.

Age trend

source: U.S. Census, 2000-2020



family housing to apartment building construction. An analysis of the city’s Assessor’s Office data shows that the peak of construction of all structures (commercial and residential) occurred between 1940-1969, and that the type of construction has shifted since 2000 from mostly single family development to commercial development (which includes larger multifamily developments of 5 or more units). With regard to housing units, census data shows a similar peak occurring in the 1960s with decreases in subsequent decades (see charts on p. 16). Short term rental uses have also reduced permanent resident housing opportunities in certain neighborhoods.

Ann Arbor’s current zoning ordinance, the UDC, has 3 different districts:
Residential Districts: **53.2%** of total area
Mixed Use Districts: **4.1%** of total area
Non Residential & Special Purpose Districts: **42.7%**

On their own, all the single family districts (R1) account for **34.8%** of parcel land area

Ann Arbor has developed over time as most cities have by building on undeveloped land within city limits, but as such land has diminished, construction has slowed significantly. This trend has been incrementally accelerated by the city’s greenbelt millage, which places constraints on some surrounding properties. At the same time, rising development costs have made new projects increasingly expensive or unfeasible. This imbalance between supply and demand has put cost burdens on many residents, changed the composition of the city’s households (with fewer family households than the county), and priced potential residents out of the city,² meaning many people commute in and out of the city for work, services or recreation.

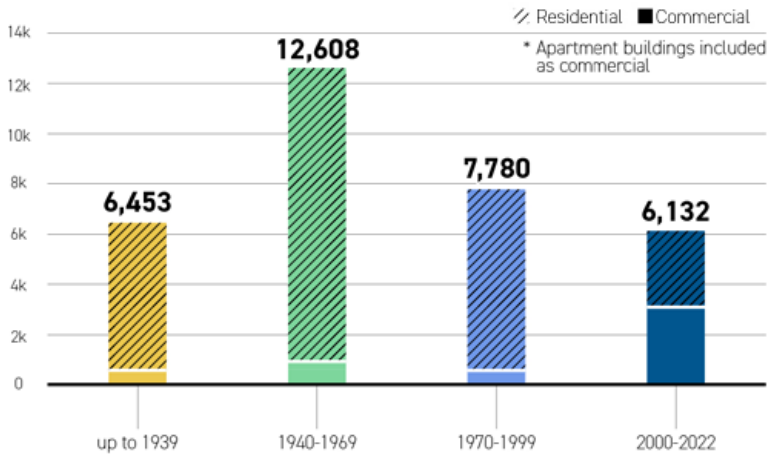
Ann Arbor residents are more cost-burdened than the region (cost-burdened households are defined as spending over 30% of their income on housing costs): 38% of owner-occupied households and 53% of renter-occupied households are cost-burdened. However, 51% of the cost-burdened renters are in the student-aged cohort, householders 15 to 24 year old.³

² In the 2024 Comprehensive Plan survey, 55% of people who do not live in Ann Arbor would like to, but cost was cited as a major factor

³ ACS 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

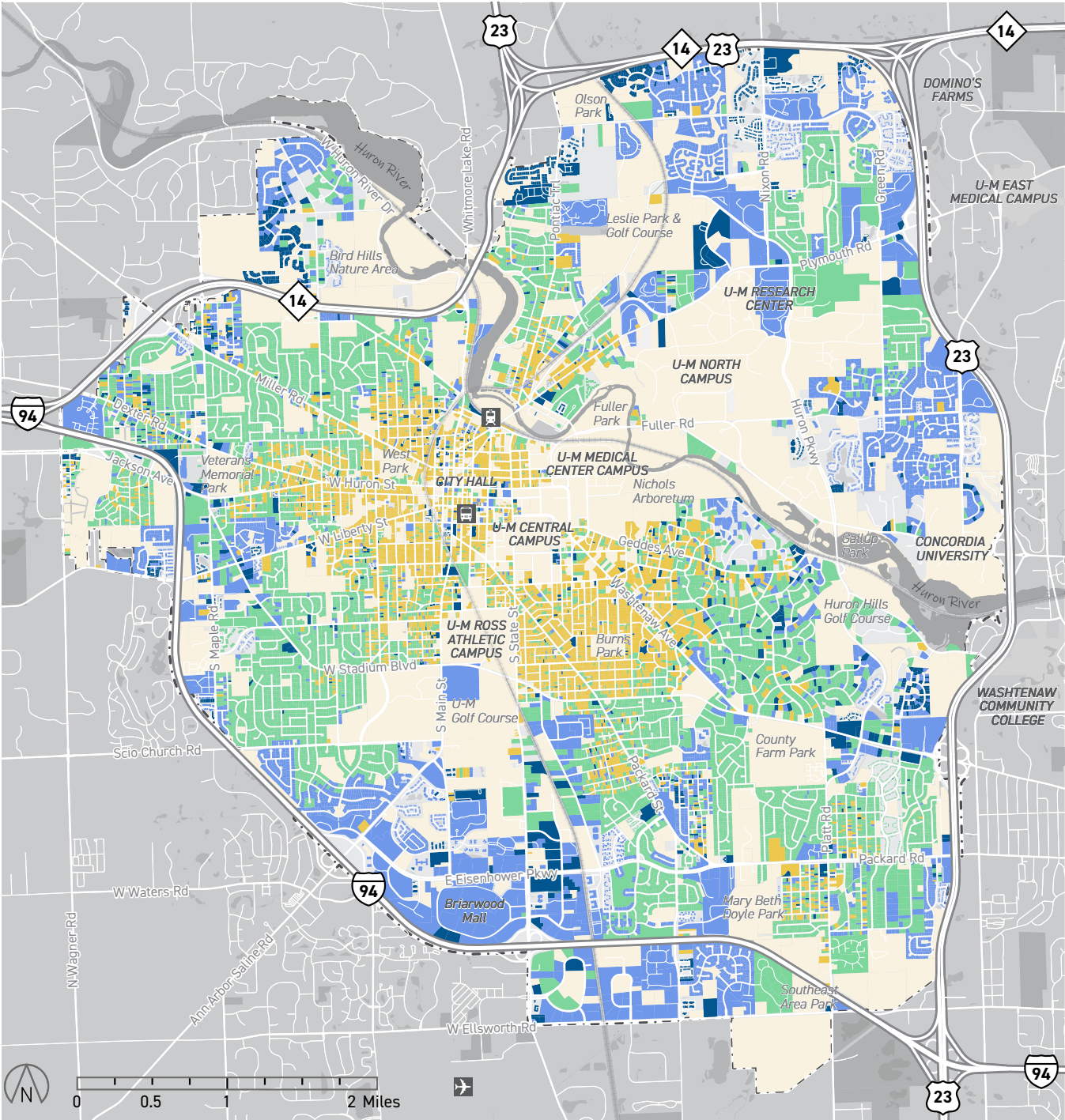
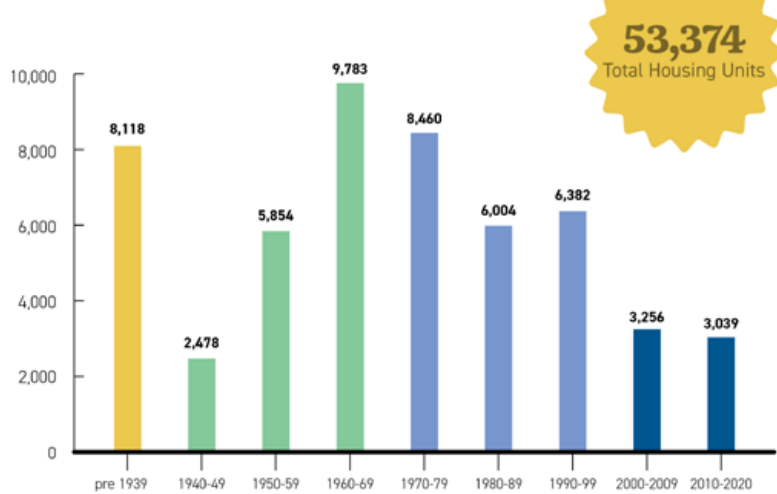
Year structure built by use (pre-1939 - 2022)

source: City of Ann Arbor Assessor’s Office



Number of housing units by year built (pre 1939 - 2020)

source: US Census ACS 5-year Estimates (2018-2022)



Map

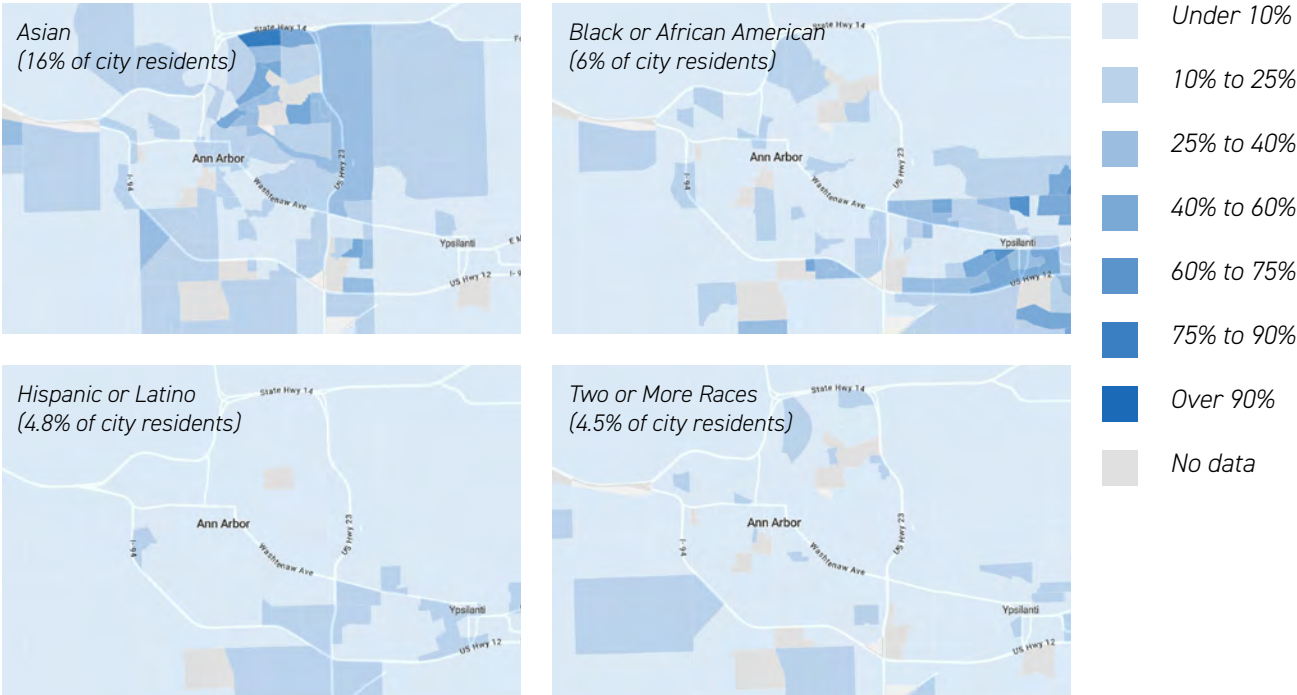
Year Structure Built - By Property

- N/A (includes tax exempt)
- Up to 1939
- 1940-1969
- 1970-1999
- 2000-2022

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS, Washtenaw County GIS, City of Ann Arbor Assessor’s Office

Population by Race or Ethnicity

source: ACS 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 via Social Explorer



Proximity to Amenities

Access to essential destinations is crucial for quality of life, but people of color are more likely to reside in neighborhoods with limited access to groceries, parks, and schools.

Retail is concentrated downtown, around anchor institutions and in auto-oriented shopping centers along corridors, but there are limited neighborhood-serving shops and services in many parts of the city. There are spatial inequities regarding who has access to walkable retail, particularly for residents without a car. Aside from downtown, most residents do not live within a 10-minute walk of commercial corridors and hubs. Parks are another key amenity. Ann Arbor boasts a strong park system, with a higher ratio of park acres to residents than comparably-sized cities. According to the Trust for Public Land, a vast majority of Ann Arborites (92%) live within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared to 55% in all U.S. urban cities and towns.¹ Nevertheless, not all parks are equal with regard to size and amenities, and some areas of the city have less park access.

¹ Trust for Public Land ParkServe

Sustainability

Buildings in 2024 accounted for roughly two-thirds of community emissions, and transportation one-third.

Building emissions were split between direct emissions, mostly from fossil gas consumption, and electricity, from the fossil fuel origin of much of our purchased electricity.²

² <https://analytics.a2gov.org/superset/dashboard/osi-performance-metrics/?standalone=2>

Commuting Patterns

Ann Arbor residents and workers commute daily to access services and destinations, and while downtown areas are walkable and bikeable, cars are the dominant way people get around the city.

Many of Ann Arbor's vehicle miles traveled are by people going to work. Over half of Ann Arbor residents who work commute by car.¹ Additionally, a large number of workers who do not live in Ann Arbor, commute in. Based on 2021 U.S. Census Longitudinal Employment-Housing Dynamics (LEHD) data, there were 93,760 primary jobs in Ann Arbor. Only 18% of Ann Arbor employees live in the city, meaning 82% of the people who work in Ann Arbor commute in from elsewhere (over 76,000 people) and over half of them travel from more than 10 miles away.² Using 2019 LEHD employment figures (which are used in SEMCOG projections to account for pre-pandemic conditions), there were 109,697 people who work in Ann Arbor; 22% lived in Ann Arbor, while 78% commuted in from elsewhere.³ In a 2018 survey of individuals commuting into Ann Arbor, a lack of affordable housing was '[t]he reason most often given for preferring to commute from a distance in spite of preferring a shorter commute.'⁴

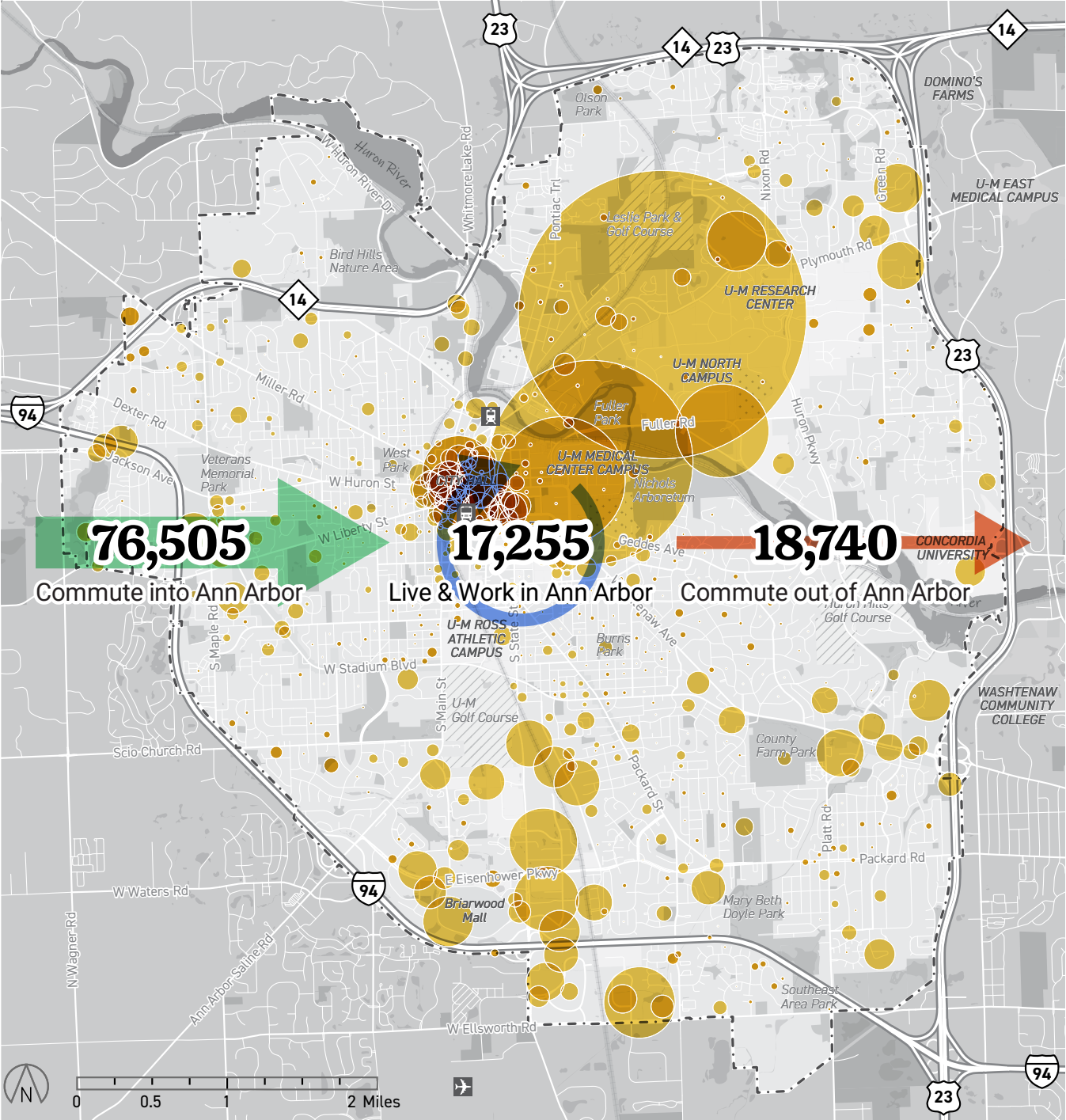
While the city's A²ZERO plan outlines a goal to cut vehicle miles traveled in half by 2030, achieving that goal depends on making it easier for residents to choose other ways to get around instead of driving. This could include making room for some of the commuters to live in the city and reduce their commutes. At the same time, investments in more efficient and connected transit will require increased density to support ridership, in accordance with TheRide's 2045 Long-Range Plan.

¹ ACS 5-year estimates, 2018-2022
² U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, OnTheMap Application, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov> - Primary Jobs 2021
³ U.S. Census Bureau LEHD data, OnTheMap Application, Primary Jobs 2019
⁴ <https://www.getdowntown.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/GetDowntown%20Commuter-employee%20and%20Decision-Maker%20Report%2C%202018.pdf>



Beloved neighborhood commercial spaces, like Jefferson Market, are rare within Ann Arbor's residential fabric.

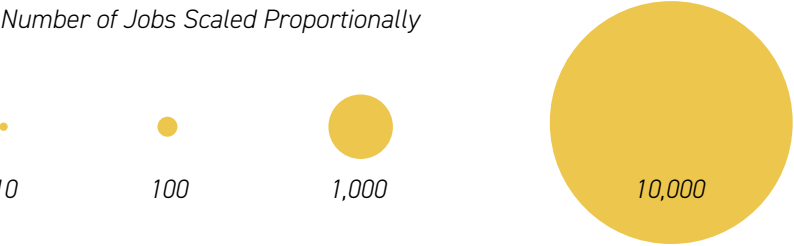
source: Current Magazine



Map
All Primary Jobs – 2021

source: City of Ann Arbor GIS,
Washtenaw County GIS, Census LEHD -
On The Map data - Primary Jobs 2021

Number of Jobs Scaled Proportionally



Tax Revenue and the Economy

Ann Arbor relies on property taxes generated from residential uses

Ann Arbor has a high property tax rate, but comparable with other cities of similar population in Michigan, and is heavily reliant on property taxes generated from residential uses. More than half of the city's budget (52%) is funded by property taxes.¹ Unlike cities such as Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids, which have more diverse tax bases², the burden to support city services in Ann Arbor falls primarily on residential property taxpayers. Smaller scale residential properties (four units or fewer) generate 63% of property tax revenue. When broken down across all revenue sources, they represent the single largest share of the city's tax base at 33%. High property values and high property taxes contribute to an unaffordable housing stock. This combination is especially impactful on first time homebuyers trying to enter the market.

Large multifamily properties, classified as commercial by the city's Assessor's Office, make up 6% of the total tax base and 12% of property tax revenue.³ From 2014 to 2023, residential taxable values were the primary driver of growth, contributing \$1.5 billion of the \$2.6 billion increase. However, commercial values (including large multifamily development) have grown at a faster rate, rising 67% over the same period compared to 47% for residential.⁴

¹ Michigan Community Financial Dashboard, Michigan Dept of Treasury, <https://micommunityfinancials.michigan.gov>
² MI Community Financial Dashboard, <https://micommunityfinancials.michigan.gov/>
³ 2023 CAFR, Ann Arbor Municipal Disclosure form downloaded from MSRB EMMA database
⁴ 2023 CAFR, Washtenaw County Taxable Values report (various years)

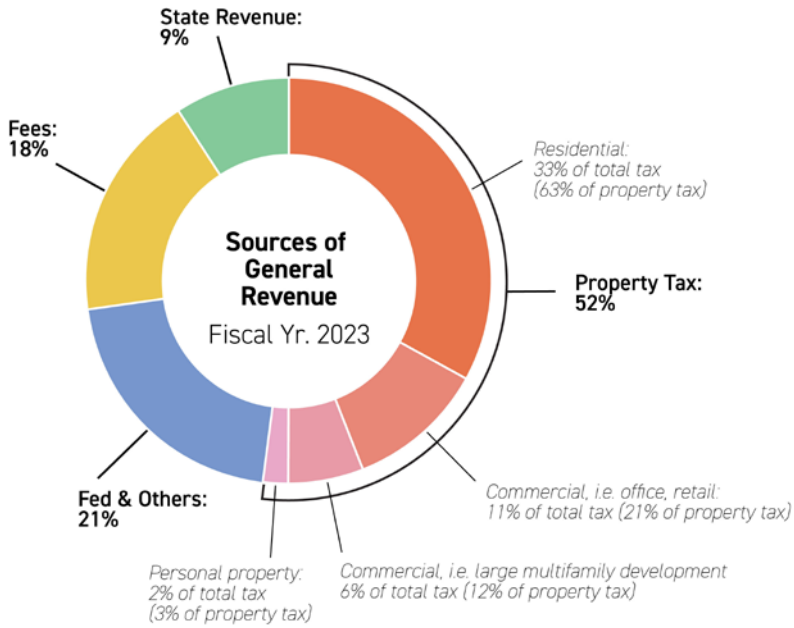
Ann Arbor's economy is heavily dependent on the university

Ann Arbor's economy is heavily dependent on the University of Michigan, the fourth most reliant region on anchor institutions in the country.⁵ Anchor institutions (such as universities and hospitals) contribute 27% of employment-related economic activity in the Ann Arbor region, compared to just 9% nationwide.⁶

The city's ability to expand its tax base is limited because 42% of the land area in Ann Arbor is tax-exempt. Most of the city is already developed and less than 13% of the city's land is available for redevelopment under current regulations.⁷ How Ann Arbor utilizes its land will be crucial in shaping its future and strengthening its financial health.

⁵ Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Anchor Economy Dashboard - Anchor Economy Full Data Set, <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/surveys-and-data/community-development-data/anchor-economy-dashboard>
⁶ Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Economic Reliance on Anchor Institutions, May 2024
⁷ City of Ann Arbor's Assessor's Office

Ann Arbor Budget Revenue



source: NP analysis 2023 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and Ann Arbor Municipal Disclosure form downloaded from Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (MSRB) EMMA database

Identifying Sources of Demand

SEMCOG 2050 projections are based on historic trends that have been determined by policy decisions of the past that have constrained housing production.

Over the last 100 years (1920–2020), Ann Arbor’s share of the Washtenaw County population has averaged 38%. After peaking at 43% in 1970, that share declined each decade to a low of 33% in 2020. This decline corresponds to the city’s undeveloped land being largely built out, leading to reduced housing production. The SEMCOG population projections extend this trend to 2050, forecasting Ann Arbor’s share to fall further to 32%, with a total population of 135,800. Had Ann Arbor maintained its historic average share of 38%, its population in 2020 would already have exceeded SEMCOG’s projection for 2050. However, these projections do not reflect the actual demand for more housing in Ann Arbor. Instead, they implicitly assume that existing zoning constraints on new development will remain in place. At the same time, commuting projections from multiple sources, though varying in details, consistently show that the number of daily commuters into Ann Arbor will continue to be substantial. This further underscores the demand for housing opportunities within the city.

This plan, under the direction of the City Council, is undertaking an effort to remove some of the constraints on building new housing so that population is not constrained by our housing supply. The strategies in this plan present an opportunity for the city to have influence to shape these trends in the coming decades.

Ann Arbor population as a share of Washtenaw County population, 1920–2020 ¹

source: U.S. Census, 1920–2020

	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Washtenaw County	49,520	65,530	80,810	134,606	172,440	234,103	264,740	282,937	322,895	344,791	372,258
Ann Arbor	19,516	26,944	29,815	48,251	67,340	100,035	107,969	109,592	114,024	113,934	123,851
Ann Arbor % of County Population	39%	41%	37%	36%	39%	43%	41%	39%	35%	33%	33%
Potential Ann Arbor Population if constant 40% of Washtenaw County	19,808	26,212	32,324	53,842	68,976	93,641	105,896	113,175	129,158	137,916	148,903

Ann Arbor population as a share of Washtenaw County population, projected 2030–2050

source: SEMCOG 2050 Forecast

	2030	2040	2050
Washtenaw County	384,851	409,072	421,412
Ann Arbor	128,646	134,448	135,800
Ann Arbor % of County Population	33%	33%	32%
Potential Ann Arbor Population if constant 40% of Washtenaw County	153,940	163,629	168,565

¹ SEMCOG’s regional and county forecasts are based on extensive analysis of Southeast Michigan’s competitiveness relative to other regions throughout the country, given each region’s unique socio-economic characteristics. SEMCOG’s community forecasts are informed by small area demographic and economic trends, and local data collected from communities, including adopted land use policies and future planned development projects. As such, SEMCOG’s forecast reflects both local development priorities and broader trends shaping Southeast Michigan’s economic and demographic growth.

Ann Arbor is a job center that is projected to grow, but commuting patterns are unsustainable.

SEMCOG projections for 2050 employment use 2019 for the base year as 2020 employment was artificially low due to the COVID recession. Using 2019 employment data to match SEMCOG’s base year, 78% of Ann Arbor workers commuted into the city from elsewhere, which differs from the 2021 rate of 82% of Ann Arbor workers commuting into the city from elsewhere.¹ Using the SEMCOG 2050 employment projection of 154,545 jobs in Ann Arbor and a commute rate of 78–82% would mean over 120,000 workers would be commuting into the city.² A goal of this plan is to reduce the number of workers commuting into the city by making room for some of the commuters to live in the city in closer proximity to jobs and amenities.

Over the last decade, the University of Michigan has steadily increased enrollment.

The enrollment growth of the University of Michigan has created housing market pressure. Since 2015, the University of Michigan has added 9,208 students, averaging an additional 1,000 students per year.³ A record number of applications were received for fall 2025. While the university is building a new residence hall on the former Elbel Field site, most students still must find housing off-campus.

Housing gaps outstrip housing production

The 2022 Michigan State Housing Development Authority Statewide Housing Plan identified a housing gap of 313 owner units and 2,262 renter units to meet 2030 goals, which would amount to a need for 322 units total per year in the years 2023–2030.⁴ The Statewide Housing Plan targets simply apportion the state’s five-year housing target—75,000 housing units—proportionally across Michigan cities and regions. These aspirational numbers do not attempt to quantify actual housing demand or needs in Ann Arbor and do not account for long-term shortfalls in local market rate housing construction. The DDA’s 2020 Housing Needs Assessment for Downtown Ann Arbor provides a better indicator of the extent of Ann Arbor’s housing shortage, which is acute.

It identifies demand for 2,500–2,750 rental units between 2020–2025, which would amount to 417–458 units per year just downtown.⁵ According to the city’s certificate of occupancy data for the last 5 years, the 5-year average for housing production has been 520 units per year citywide. While this rate of housing production could cover the housing gap for downtown alone, it is not enough to cover the whole city. Downtowns typically absorb 30–40% of a city’s housing so the housing gap citywide would be expected to be considerably higher than the 2022 Statewide Housing Plan. Furthermore, in preparing for growth, the city should take into consideration Ann Arbor’s lag in share of county population, expected continued growth in jobs, and expected continued growth in University of Michigan enrollment.

Housing gaps

source: Michigan’s Statewide Housing Plan, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, 2022; Housing Needs Assessment: Downtown Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority, 2020; City of Ann Arbor Certificate of Occupancy data

Statewide Housing Plan	
Citywide rental and owner units needed for 2030 target	2,575
Citywide rental and owner units needed per year	322
Downtown Housing Needs Assessment	
Downtown rental units needed (2020–2025)	2,500 - 2,750
Downtown rental units needed per year	417 - 458
Average citywide housing production per year (over last 5 years)	520

¹ U.S. Census Bureau LEHD data, OnTheMap Application, Primary Jobs 2019 and 2021

² SEMCOG 2050 Forecasts

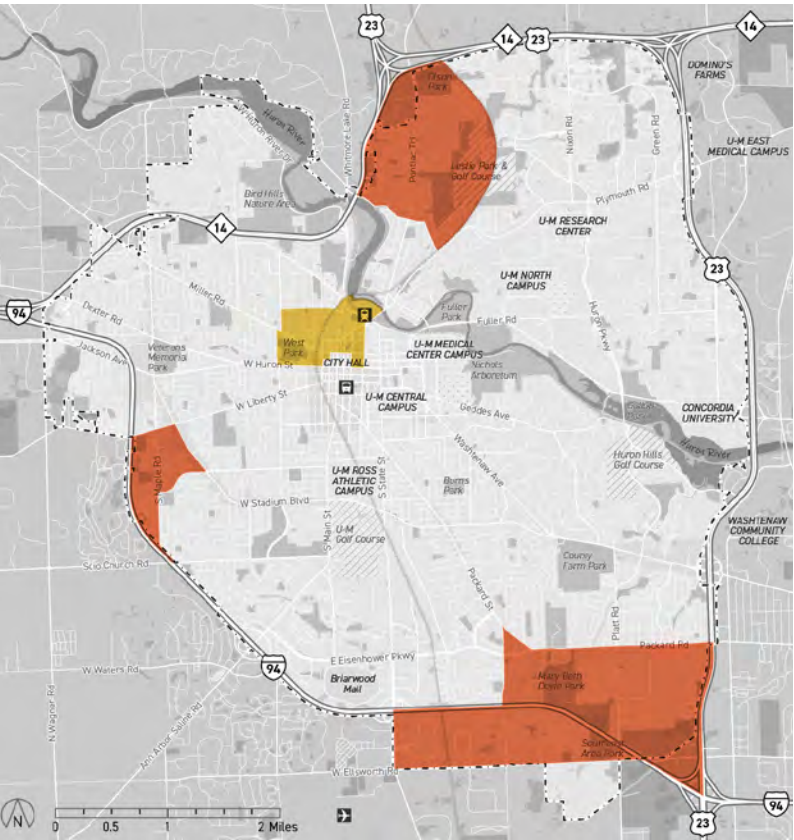
³ University of Michigan Enrollment Reports

⁴ Michigan’s Statewide Housing Plan, Michigan State Housing Development Authority, 2022

⁵ Housing Needs Assessment: Downtown Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority, 2020

Positioning This Plan In History

As Ann Arbor enters a new era of growth and development, it is essential to position this plan within a historical context and learn from the past. The evolution of its historically Black neighborhoods serves as a microcosm for how various city policies have not only displaced communities but also reshaped the fabric of urban life—including zoning, housing affordability, social cohesion, and transportation infrastructure—and offers a learning opportunity for a new path forward. Historically, Black residents were excluded from living in other parts of the city and were limited to the West Side, Old Fourth Ward, and Kerrytown (shown on the map to the right), parts of which were located near the city's few industrial sites such as a slaughterhouse and a junkyard.¹ Ongoing discrimination persisted through mechanisms such as restrictive covenants (until 1948),² realtor and mortgage lender bias,³ and exclusionary zoning laws that codified single-family zoning and later policies that increased minimum lot sizes.⁴ Today, few Black families remain in these neighborhoods, and the concentration of Black residents has shifted from the center to the periphery of the city.⁵



Census Tracts where Black residents account for 20% or more of the population.

1960 source: Social Explorer, US Census 1960 Tracts Only, 2020 source: Social Explorer, US Census 2020 - PL94, , MLive

The share of the Black population living in Ann Arbor's historically Black neighborhoods (West Side, Kerrytown, Old Fourth Ward) peaked at **45%** in 1970, but declined to **8%** by the 2020 census.

¹ Ann Arbor News, "Changes Urged in R4 Housing Study", (October 9, 1968). MLive, "Old neighborhood residents recall life in Ann Arbor in the 50's and 60's" (September 12, 2018).
² Justice InDeed project.
³ Ann Arbor News, "City's blacks: still a long way to go", (January 27, 1980).
⁴ Ann Arbor Zoning code up to 1963
⁵ Decennial Census, Census Tract Level (1960-2020) - Ann Arbor News, "City's Black Neighborhoods Disappearing" (October 20, 1986).

Picture 01: Dunbar Community Center - 1951, Bentley Historical Library

Picture 02: Packard-Beakes Bypass - 1972, Ann Arbor Sun

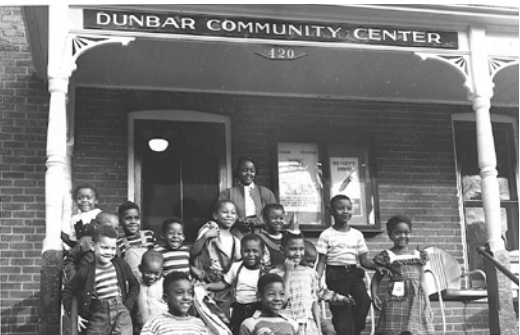
Picture 03: City's Black Neighborhood Disappearing -1986, Ann Arbor News

Picture 04: DeLong's BBQ Closing - 2001, Ann Arbor News

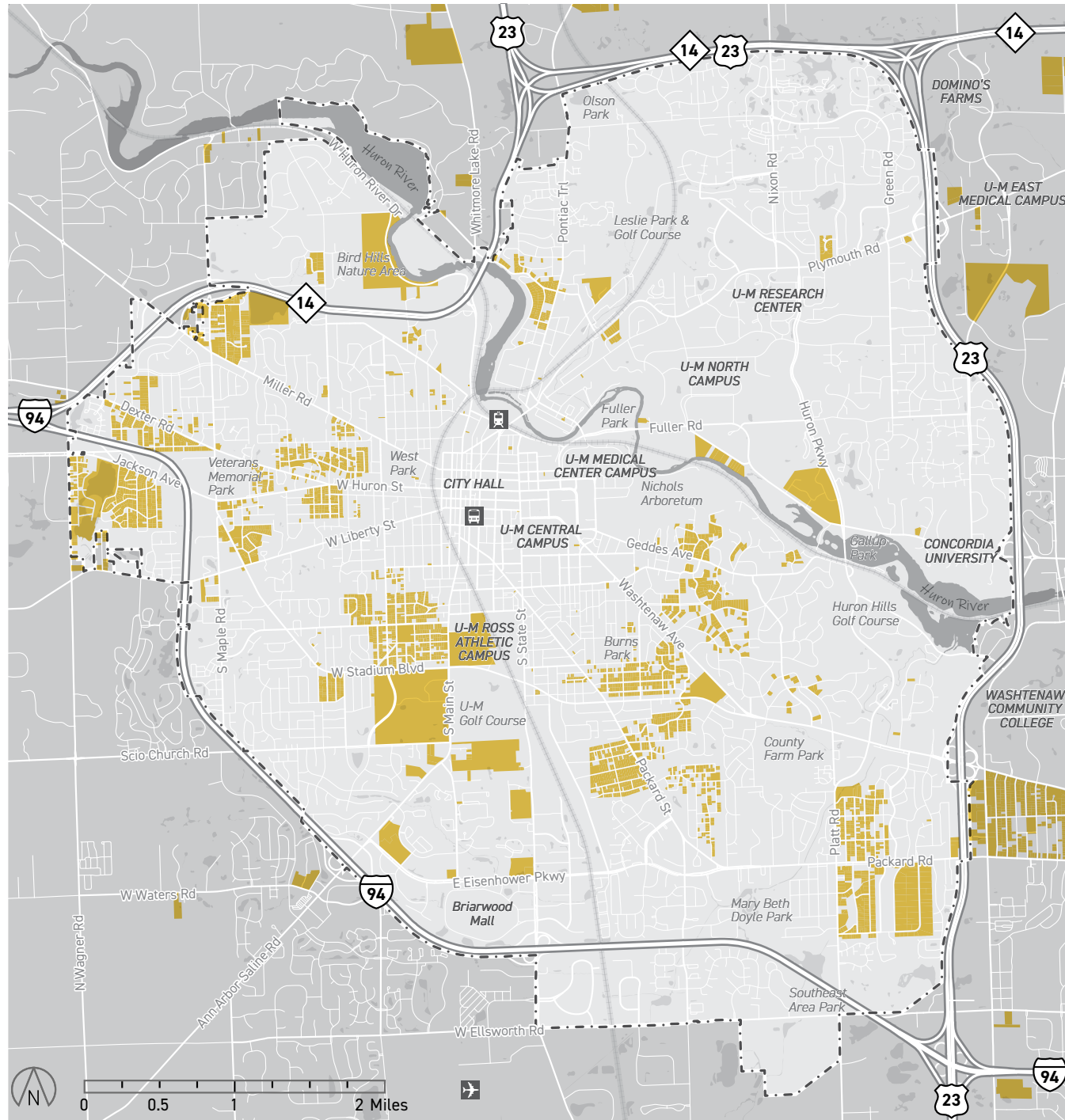
Unlike in other cities where displacement is often attributed to redlining, large-scale urban renewal, or highway projects, Ann Arbor's experience stems from a series of smaller-scale events and policies that collectively produced similar adverse outcomes.

Key factors contributing to the disintegration of these Black neighborhoods include concentrated code enforcement in the 1960s that disproportionately affected Black homeowners and rising property taxes that forced many residents to sell homes they could no longer afford.⁶ Urban Renewal initiatives—such as the Packard-Beakes bypass buyouts—displaced families in the name of proposed expansion,⁷ while the closure of vital community institutions, like neighborhood schools, further disrupted social cohesion.⁸ Ultimately gentrification,⁹ the proximity to downtown, and increased property values priced out long-time residents.¹⁰

The passage of the City's Fair Housing Ordinance in 1963, approved five years before the federal law, marked the official end of formal segregation, theoretically opening up new opportunities for Black residents to live in a broader range of neighborhoods. However, many Black families were effectively pushed to the periphery of the city, where they lacked the walkable access to amenities and opportunities that central neighborhoods once provided. Consequently, families not only lost the chance to build generational wealth as these once-vibrant neighborhoods became among the most expensive in the city, but they also lost the close-knit community connections that proximity to downtown once fostered.



⁶ Ann Arbor News, "City's Black Neighborhoods Disappearing" (October 20, 1986).
⁷ Ann Arbor Sun, "City Council's Iron-Triangle To Choke Black Community", (1972). MLive, "Old neighborhood residents recall life in Ann Arbor in the 50's and 60's", (September 12, 2018).
⁸ Ann Arbor District Library, 7 Cylinders Studio, "There Went the Neighborhood: the Closing of Jones School" documentary film (2022).
⁹ For definition see Glossary of Terms.
¹⁰ Ann Arbor News, "City's Black Neighborhoods Disappearing", (Oct. 20, 1986).



Map
Racially Restrictive
Covenants

Parcels Containing Racially Restrictive Covenants

This map shows parcels Justice InDeed volunteers have identified a racially restrictive covenant. These provisions, which were used primarily in the first half of the 20th century, prohibited primarily Black, but also other individuals from living or purchasing certain properties based on their race, ethnicity, or religion.

Our most updated map is available at our website: JusticeInDeedMI.org.

*source: City of Ann Arbor GIS,
Justice InDeed Project*

What can we learn from this history? The city's move toward exclusionary zoning—most notably the widespread adoption of single-family zoning and increased minimum lot sizes—has driven up housing costs while failing to meet the diverse needs of residents. This shift, coupled with the transformation of Ann Arbor from a compact, walkable city into an auto-centric one composed of single-use districts, has deepened social and economic disparities and made the city less sustainable in an ever-changing environment. A return to walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods aims to enhance social cohesion and better serve community needs while promoting environmental sustainability.

Moreover, the city must focus on reparative actions that promote equity across all neighborhoods. Rather than focusing on preserving the status quo and solely protecting the existing character and natural environment, future policies should aim to distribute the benefits of increased housing and commercial opportunities more equitably, ensuring the flexibility needed for sustainable growth.

This plan embraces the values of Affordability, Equity, Sustainability, and Dynamism to guide Ann Arbor into the future. Like many cities, Ann Arbor faces the challenge of balancing growth with climate action, housing accessibility and infrastructure resilience. By integrating these principles, the city can create policies that not only prevent the mistakes of the past but also actively work to repair them.

Meeting the challenges of this new era requires a holistic approach—one that acknowledges the past, adapts to the present, and builds a city that is truly for everyone. This is the vision of an Ann Arbor for All.

“The conditions in north central Ann Arbor did not just happen. Custom and skillful planning created the situation, and it will take skillful planning to find solutions to the problems facing citizens of this city.”

- City Planning Commissioner David R. Byrd - 1968.

