

Downtown Utica Sub-Area Plan

MSU Planning Practicum

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Contents

Downtown Utica Sub-Area Plan	1
Executive Summary	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
Chapter 2: Socioeconomic Profile	14
2.1 Population Demographics.....	14
2.2 Housing Profile	18
2.3 Crime Profile.....	23
2.4 Economic Profile	25
2.5 Transportation Profile	35
Chapter 3: Market Profile	42
Chapter 4: Land Use, Zoning, and Current Establishments.....	45
4.1 Land Use	45
4.2 Zoning	47
4.3 Downtown Establishments.....	49
Chapter 5: Existing Conditions.....	50
5.1 Downtown Form	50
5.2 Streetscape	52
5.3 Bridge.....	54
5.4 Open Space	55
5.5 Wayfinding Signs.....	56
Chapter 6: Situational Analysis	57
Chapter 7: Community Outreach	59
7.1 Community Visioning.....	59
7.2 Online Survey	61
7.3 Results.....	61
Chapter 8: Recommendations	64
8.1. Bridge and Connectivity Enhancements and Recommendations	64
8.2 Open Space Utilization Recommendations	70
8.3 Streetscape and Wayfinding Improvements	73
8.4 Downtown Form Recommendations	85
8.5 Cost and Duration Table	90
Appendix.....	93
Appendix A: Establishments.....	93
Appendix B: Community Engagement.....	94

List of Figures

Figure 1: Downtown Utica Sub-Area Plan	11
Figure 2: Location of Macomb County in Michigan	13
Figure 3: Location of Utica Within Macomb County.....	13
Figure 4: Population Percent Change of Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan 2020; Source: US Census Bureau	14
Figure 5: Ethnicity Breakdown of Utica and Macomb County 2020; Source: US Census Bureau	15
Figure 6: City of Utica Population Pyramid 2022; Source; US Census Bureau.....	16
Figure 7: Macomb County Population Pyramid 2022; Source: US Census Bureau.....	17
Figure 8: Total Number of Units in Housing: City of Utica, MI; Source: US Census Bureau	18
Figure 9: Median Home Value (Dollars): Utica vs. Macomb County vs. Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau	19
Figure 10: Households By Year Built, Utica, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township and Macomb County; Source: US Census.....	19
Figure 11: Tenure By Year Householder Moved into Unit, Utica; Source: US Census Bureau ..	20
Figure 12: Vacancy Rates, Utica, Macomb County, Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau.....	21
Figure 13: Average Rent Price, Utica, Macomb County, Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau	22
Figure 14: Utica Crime Index; Source: City Data	23
Figure 15: Crime Rate Per 1,000, Utica, Shelby Township, Sterling Heights; Source: Michigan State Police.....	24
Figure 16: Median Household Income in Utica 2010 vs. 2020; Source: US Census Bureau.....	25
Figure 17: Unemployment Rate in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau	26
Figure 18: Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau	27
Figure 19: Percent of Population with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher (25 or older) in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau.....	28
Figure 20: Macomb County Employment, 2010-2020; Source: Michigan REAProject	29
Figure 21: Macomb County Employment Growth Index, 2010-2020; Source: Michigan REAProject	29
Figure 22: Change in Employment by Occupation in Utica; Source: US Census Bureau	30
Figure 23: Utica Employment by Occupation in 2020; Source: US Census Bureau.....	31
Figure 24: 2010-2020 Change in Employment by Industry; Source: US Census Bureau.....	32
Figure 25: Employment by Industry in 2020; Source: US Census Bureau	32
Figure 26: Graphical Summary of Shift Share Analysis Results for Macomb County Employment Change from 2010 to 2020; Source: Michigan REAProject.....	34
Figure 27: Utica Residents’ Mode of Transportation to Work, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government.....	35
Figure 28: Utica Residents’ Mode of Transportation to Work from 2010-2020; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government	36
Figure 29: 10 Minute Walking Distance from Downtown Utica; Source: Travel Time	37
Figure 30: SMART Bus Route Stops in Utica; Source: Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation.....	38

Figure 31: Annual Average Daily Traffic in Utica, 2019; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government.....	38
Figure 32: Number of Crashes in Utica, 2019-2022; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government.....	39
Figure 33: Utica Pavement Conditions, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government.....	40
Figure 34: Utica Pavement Conditions, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government.....	40
Figure 35: 10-Minute Walking Distance from Downtown Utica; Source: ESRI.....	42
Figure 36: Utica 2023 Employed Population 16+ by Industry; Source: ESRI.....	43
Figure 37: Utica Consumer Spending in 2023; Source: ESRI.....	44
Figure 38: Utica Land Use Map, 2020; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government ...	46
Figure 39: Utica Zoning Map; Source: City of Utica	48
Figure 40: Existing Condition and Businesses in Downtown Utica; Source: ESRI.....	49
Figure 41: Intersection of Auburn and Cass Facing W.....	50
Figure 42: Auburn Road Facing W; N Side of Auburn	50
Figure 43: Auburn Road Facing W; S Side of Auburn.....	50
Figure 44 Intersection of Auburn and Brownell Facing W	51
Figure 45: Intersection of Auburn and Brownell Facing E.....	51
Figure 46: Auburn Road Facing W; S Side of Auburn.....	51
Figure 47: Auburn Road Facing E From N Side of Auburn.....	52
Figure 48: Intersection of Auburn and Iron Belle Trail Facing E.....	52
Figure 49: Mural on Fire Station Along Auburn Road.....	53
Figure 50: Mural on Side of Building Along Auburn.....	53
Figure 51: Crosswalk Condition Near Police Department Along Auburn	53
Figure 52: Auburn Road Facing E; N Side of Auburn	53
Figure 53: Auburn Road Over Clinton River Facing W; N Side of Auburn	54
Figure 54: Auburn Road Bridge Over Clinton River Facing E; N Side of Auburn.....	54
Figure 55: Auburn Road Bridge Over Clinton River Facing W; N Side of Auburn	54
Figure 56: Memorial Park Clock Tower.....	55
Figure 57: Memorial Park Facing S.....	55
Figure 58: Memorial Park Facing N	55
Figure 59: Public Parking Sign Along Auburn Facing E	56
Figure 60: Wayfinding Sign Along Auburn Facing W.....	56
Figure 61:Wayfinding Sign Along Cass Facing N	56
Figure 62: Group Activity During Community Engagement Meeting.....	59
Figure 63: Dot Sticker Activity from Community Engagement.....	59
Figure 64: Responses From the Three Questions Asked During the Community Engagement...	60
Figure 65: Crosswalk Near Iron Belle Trail and Clinton River After	65
Figure 66: Crosswalk Near Iron Belle Trail and Clinton River Before	65
Figure 67: Light Pole Impeding Sidewalk Over Bridge After.....	67
Figure 68: Light Pole Impeding Sidewalk Over Bridge Before	67
Figure 69: Bridge Over Clinton River After.....	68
Figure 70: Bridge Over Clinton River Before	68
Figure 71: Farmer's Market in Rochester	
https://www.michiganfarmfun.com/place.asp?ait=av&aid=221	70

Figure 72: MLive. 2017. Bates Alley Before and After Pictures. https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2017/10/make-over_of_kalamazoos_bates.html	71
Figure 73: Twitter. 2018. Bates Alley in Kalamazoo. https://twitter.com/Patronicity/status/1072900399613526017	72
Figure 74: Village of Cassopolis. 2021. Downtown Streetscape. https://imaginecass.com/transformations/	74
Figure 75: Auburn Road and Brownell Street After.....	75
Figure 76: Auburn Road and Brownell Street Before	75
Figure 77: Dan Burden. N.d. Raised Crosswalk. https://azdot.gov/business/transportation-systems-management-and-operations/operational-and-traffic-safety/az-step-5	76
Figure 78: St. John’s. 2023. Curb Extensions. https://www.stjohns.ca/en/streets-parking/curb-extensions.aspx	76
Figure 79: Littleton, Colorado. 2024. Downtown Wayfinding Program. https://www.littletonco.gov/Business/Small-Business-Programs/Downtown-Wayfinding-Program	77
Figure 80: Taylor Popielarz. 2018. Vision for Downtown Cassopolis Grows with ‘Imagine Cass’. https://www.abc57.com/news/vision-for-downtown-cassopolis-grows-with-imagine-cass	77
Figure 81: Village of Cassopolis. 2021. Mural at Main Intersection. https://imaginecass.com/transformations/	79
Figure 82: Bloomberg Philanthropists. 2020. Mural in Old Town Saginaw. https://asphaltart.bloomberg.org/projects/saginaw-michigan-usa-beautifying-a-major-downtown-corridor/	79
Figure 83: Iron Belle Trail Near Clinton River After.....	80
Figure 84: Iron Belle Trail Near Clinton River Before.....	80
Figure 85: Michigan State University Extension. 2011. Hophornbeam growing along street in Michigan. https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/native_plants_for_michigan_landscapes_part_1_trees	81
Figure 86: Auburn Road Crosswalk in front of Fire Station Before.....	82
Figure 87: Auburn Road Crosswalk in front of Fire Station After	82
Figure 88: Michigan Municipal League. 2012. Relaxing on a bench in downtown Grand Rapids. https://www.flickr.com/photos/michigancommunities/7007187246/	83
Figure 89: Kevin Zolkiewicz. 2011. Solar trash compactor and recycling in Chicago. https://www.flickr.com/photos/zolk/5619387192	83
Figure 90: Crains Grand Rapids. 2023. Rendering of Hudsonville Flats. https://www.crainsgrandrapids.com/news/real-estate/state-grants-1-2m-to-two-west-michigan-affordable-housing-projects/	86
Figure 91: MLive 2023. Hudsonville Flats. https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2023/10/whats-being-built-along-chicago-drive-itll-have-2-new-restaurants.html	86
Figure 92: 5820. 2019. Denver Fire Station Turned into a Bar. https://www.5280.com/woodie-fisher-kitchen-bar-brings-denvers-oldest-fire-station-back-to-life/	88

List of Tables

Table 1: Population and Percent Change of Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan 2010 vs 2020; Source: US Census Bureau 14

Table 2: Total Housing Units, Utica, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township, and Macomb County; Source: US Census Bureau 21

Table 3 Location Quotients for Utica and the State of Michigan in 2022; Source: US Census Bureau 33

Table 4 Rating of Roads Intersecting Auburn Road in Project Area; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government..... 41

Table 5 SWOT Analysis for Utica..... 58

Table 6 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 1..... 62

Table 7 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 2..... 62

Table 8 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 3..... 63

Table 9: Cost and Duration Table..... 92

Executive Summary

Founded in the late 1830s, Utica, Michigan, is a tight-knit community with a rich history. This report focuses on ways to revitalize Utica's downtown to improve connectivity, streetscape, and downtown form. By assessing the strengths and existing conditions of the downtown district, the Practicum Team has created a report emphasizing how Utica can foster a more consistent and livelier downtown.

The overall goal of the planning and development recommendations in this report are to promote a cohesive downtown that encourages pedestrian traffic along with attracting new businesses and residents. Holding events in available open spaces, enhancing wayfinding signage, establishing traffic calming measures, and creating a uniform downtown are all key to ensuring the longevity of revitalization efforts.

The methods used to complete this report include a detailed socio-economic profile, an existing conditions analysis, a situational analysis, and the feedback from residents obtained during the community engagement workshop and online survey.

Based on the results from the methods mentioned, the following conditions were realized:

Assets:

- Utica has a steady and growing economy with various competitive industries.
- Many housing options are affordable, with low vacancies across the city.
- Utica boasts a highly educated population.
- One of the prominent qualities of this city is the small-town feel that appeals to many residents and visitors.

Challenges:

- The current zoning ordinance limits mixed-use development.
- The median age is continuously increasing.
- There is a lack of recent college graduates in the area.
- There are limited housing options within the downtown district.
- Open spaces throughout the downtown are severely underutilized.
- Pedestrians crossing the street and using the bridge may feel unsafe.

Recommendations:

Utica's downtown district has significant potential to become a bustling and vibrant space. The following four recommendation categories would play a pivotal role in its transformation.

- Bridge and Connectivity Enhancements
 - Reduce bridge speed limit to 15 mph. Reduced driving speed on the bridge will improve safety for pedestrians and discourage commuters from taking Auburn Road as a shortcut to Hall Road.

- Use font size and design to make wayfinding signs more attention grabbing and direct patrons from Jimmy John's Field into downtown.
- Widen the bridge sidewalks to allow for greater pedestrian accessibility. Giving pedestrians more space on the bridge will reduce some of the perceived danger that residents feel about crossing the bridge as well as making it easier for pedestrians with mobility aids to cross.
- Open Space Utilization
 - Improve outdoor seating along the core downtown area by adding benches, chairs, tables, shade elements, and encouraging businesses to provide outdoor seating.
 - Utica can host a farmer's market by joining MIFMA's Community Driven Marketplaces program, which facilitates the exchange between consumers and producers of local food and farm products.
 - Convert the alley into a pedestrian-friendly zone by repaving with decorative materials, adding greenery, seating areas, public art, decorative lighting, and encouraging businesses to activate the space with outdoor seating.
- Streetscape and Wayfinding Improvements
 - Repave the sidewalks downtown or consider putting in pavers in order to make it safer and more aesthetically pleasing.
 - Implement bump-outs at crosswalks and intersections to make crosswalks safer for pedestrians.
 - Adequate parking signage should be installed throughout the downtown for the public parking lots.
 - Include planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants in order to brighten up the downtown area.
- Cohesive Downtown Form
 - Adjust current zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development along Auburn Road.
 - Establish design standards that promote cohesive aesthetics.
 - Place a mixed-use development with a grocery store and apartments in the location of the current City Hall and Police Department.

Utica's downtown has potential to be a vibrant and attractive destination that draws people from all over Macomb County and surrounding areas. Improving connectivity with downtown and Jimmy John's Field, improving downtown form and aesthetics, and taking advantage of open space downtown will benefit the city. The goal of this plan is to aid downtown Utica in becoming a hotspot of activity and development for residents and visitors alike.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This project report is written by current Urban Planning undergraduate and graduate students at Michigan State University enrolled in Practicum. Practicum is the capstone course for Urban Planning students and is intended to give students real-life applications for the skills they've learned throughout their education at Michigan State University. Student groups are assigned a client with a proposed project they work on for the semester. The practicum team is required to produce a professional report and presentation complete with recommendations for its city or project area.

Our team is comprised of two undergraduate and two graduate students all studying Urban Planning. Throughout the process, we have worked closely with Utica and our professors to create a professional plan for Utica, with recommendations based on socioeconomic data and community feedback.

At the request of the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development and Utica City Officials, the practicum team formulated recommendations for potential development initiatives centered around enhancing the downtown experience, specifically focusing on walkability, mixed-use development, and connecting downtown to Jimmy John's Field. The practicum team created recommendations for achieving these goals using socioeconomic data, community feedback, industry data, and case studies.

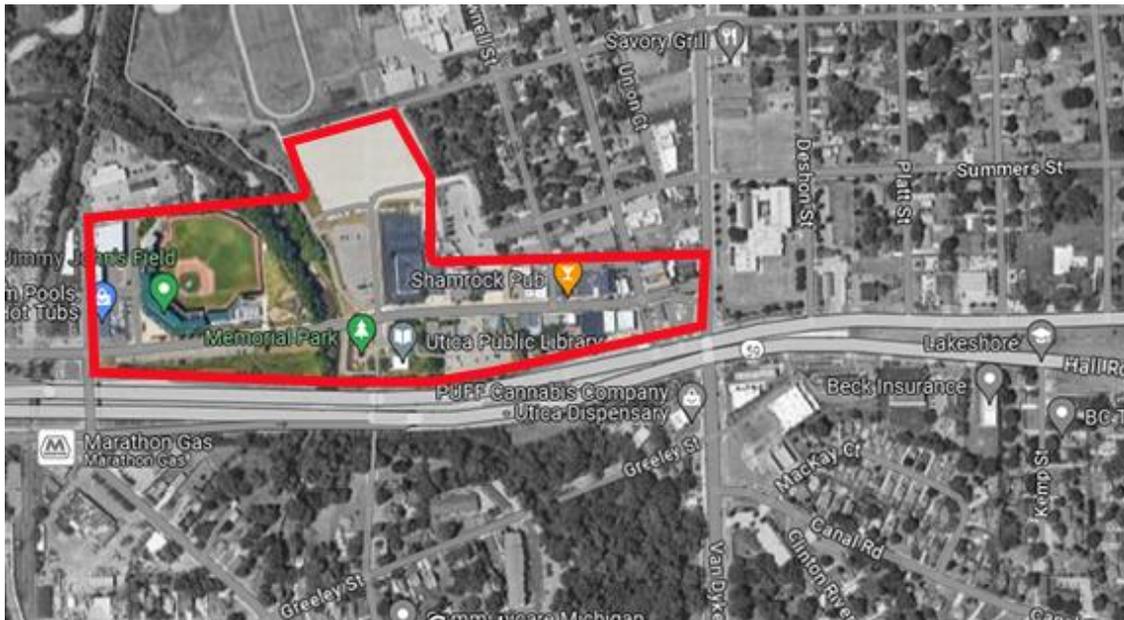


Figure 1: Downtown Utica Sub-Area Plan

The project boundaries for the Downtown Utica Sub-Area plan run along Auburn Road, starting from Jimmy John's Field to the west and ending at Van Dyke Avenue to the east. This includes all parcels along Auburn Road in that area. The project area can be seen in Figure 1. The city's overall goals are to bolster development downtown and enhance placemaking to encourage more downtown activity. The city has identified a perceived gap between Jimmy John's Field and

downtown and would like to see this gap closed allowing for activity to flow freely between the field and downtown. The city has also expressed interest in creating more mixed-use development by relocating its municipal buildings and freeing up land for development in the western portion of downtown, closer to Jimmy John's Field.

Some of the current assets within the project boundaries include the Clinton River, Jimmy John's Field, Memorial Park, a portion of the Iron Belle Trail, and shops and restaurants. Other assets within Utica include the Reptarium (a reptile zoo), Pioneer Park, and Heritage Park.

Historical Context

Utica, Michigan, was founded in the late 1830s. Several settlers moved to this region of the state: the first being the Squire family. The Squire family consisted of the father, Nathaniel, his wife Jemima, and their sons, Hiram, and Thomas. The four of them settled near the river, present-day Cass, and Auburn Road. As the seasons changed, the settlement grew from the four Squire family members to a small community of villagers. The population surge began in the late 1820s with the introduction of sawmills and distilleries, sparking an industrial boom in this region. The village had several unofficial names such as: Hogs Hollow and Harlow. It was not until 1838 that the village was officially named Utica, inspired by the prominent city of Utica in New York.

City Profile

Utica is located within Macomb County in Eastern Michigan, as seen in Figure 2. Utica sits along the Clinton River, which flows southeast and east to Lake St. Clair. The location of Utica within Macomb County can be seen in Figure 3. It is located 21 miles north of Detroit. Utica is one of the smallest cities in Macomb County, with approximately 5,000 residents. The city is bordered to the south by Sterling Heights and Shelby Township. The total area of the city is 1.78 square miles.

Utica is home to an incredible community of residents and many amenities. Many of these amenities are nature-based, such as a portion of the Iron Belle Trail, which runs through the city along the Clinton River. Outdoor enthusiasts pass through Utica to explore the natural beauty that surrounds the city and experience the quaint, small-town feel. In addition, there are picturesque parks that border the Clinton River. The Clinton River offers a variety of recreational activities in summer, such as kayaking and fishing.



Figure 2: Location of Macomb County in Michigan

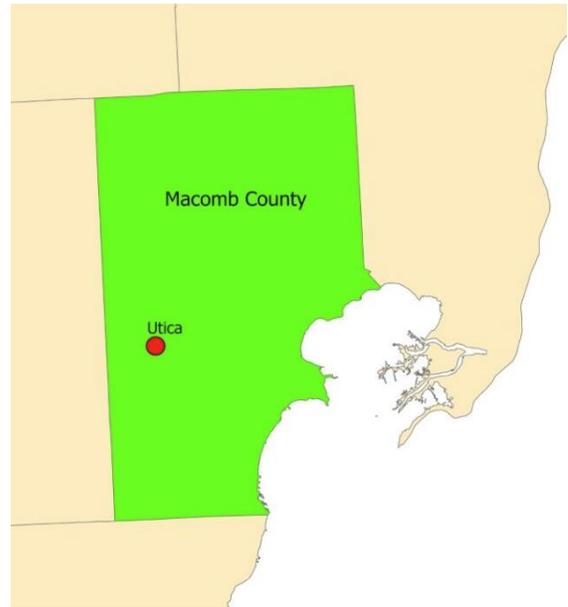


Figure 3: Location of Utica Within Macomb County

Chapter 2: Socioeconomic Profile

2.1 Population Demographics

These population demographics present a comparative analysis of population data between Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan. These charts and graphs focus on better understanding the population growth trends and demographic changes over the past decade.

Population

Population and Percent Change			
	Utica	Macomb County	Michigan
2010	4,759	841,350	9,878,000
2020	5,225	870,791	9,967,000
Percent Change (%)	9.79%	3.50%	0.90%

Table 1: Population and Percent Change of Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan 2010 vs 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

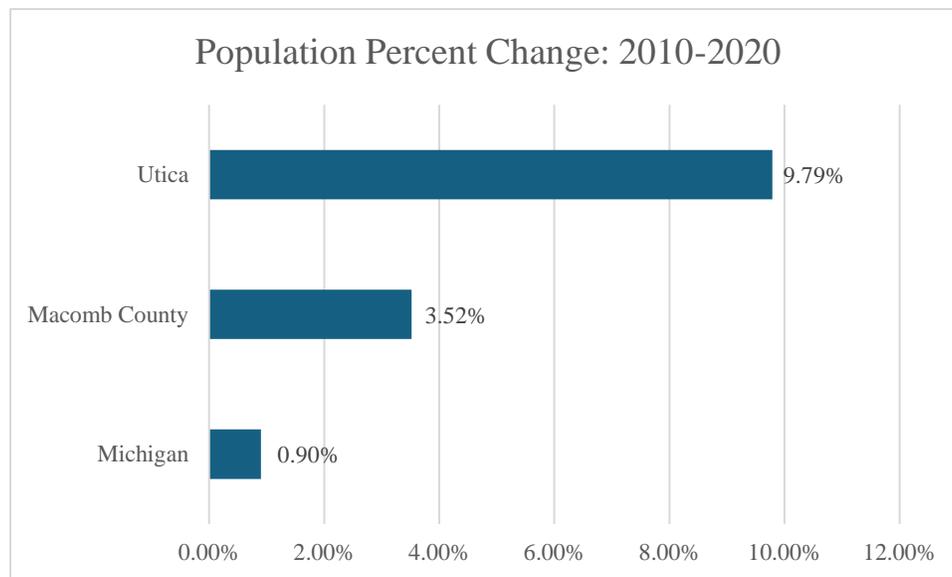


Figure 4: Population Percent Change of Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

In 2010, Utica’s population was 4,759 residents. A decade later, in 2020, the number had grown to 5,225 people. This increase over that decade can be seen in Table 1. This increase shows that Utica’s population is growing at a steady rate. When comparing the city’s growth to other regions, Utica seems to be growing faster than the county and the state. This appears this way due to the large difference in population totals between the city and Michigan. Still, with a 9.79 percent change, Utica is clearly surging ahead with healthy population growth.

Ethnicity Breakdown

Utica's ethnic makeup shares similarities with Macomb County. These similarities can be seen in Figure 5. These similarities are in the top three racial demographics: White, African American, and Asian. Most of Utica's residents (82.4%) identify as White, which is higher than the county's percentage of 77.3%. The second largest ethnic group in Utica is the Asian population, with 4% of the residents identifying as Asian. This aligns with the 4.3% of Macomb County residents that identify as this ethnicity. The last ethnic group widely represented in both regions is African American. Macomb County's African American population is around 12.1%, while Utica's is considerably lower, with only 2% of residents identifying as African American.

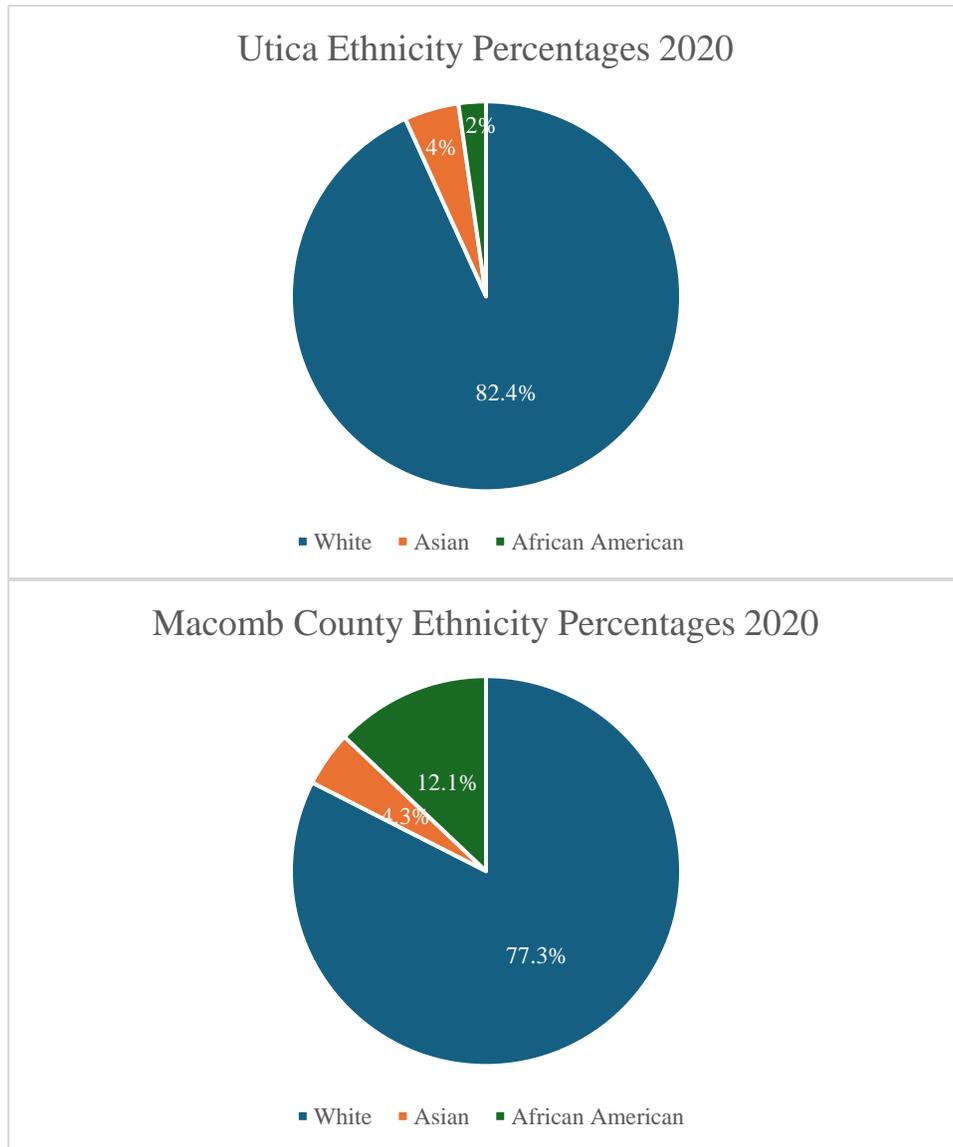


Figure 5: Ethnicity Breakdown of Utica and Macomb County 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

Population Pyramids

Macomb County (Figure 7) has a relatively even age and gender distribution. The county population pyramid is healthy, with an even balance between men and women and a good representation of age groups. Utica's population pyramid (Figure 6) is a little less cohesive. The Utica population pyramid represents an imbalance occurring in the city. The age groups that dominate the city are 35-39 and 65-69. The 15-19 and 20-24 age groups are noticeably lacking compared to several older age groups.

These population pyramids make it clear the Utica has an aging population. The median age for the city has grown from 41.7 years old in 2010 to 45.3 years old in 2020. Macomb County has also experienced a slight increase in median age, with the population aging 3.9 years in a decade.

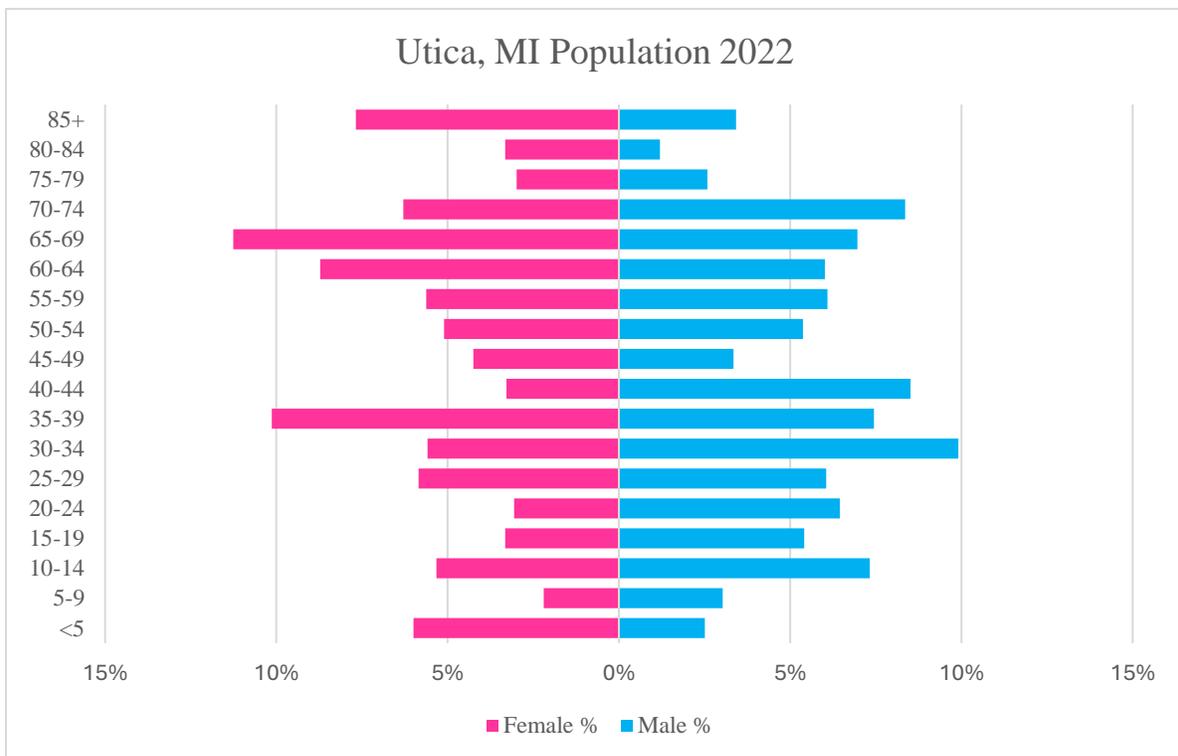


Figure 6: City of Utica Population Pyramid 2022; Source; US Census Bureau

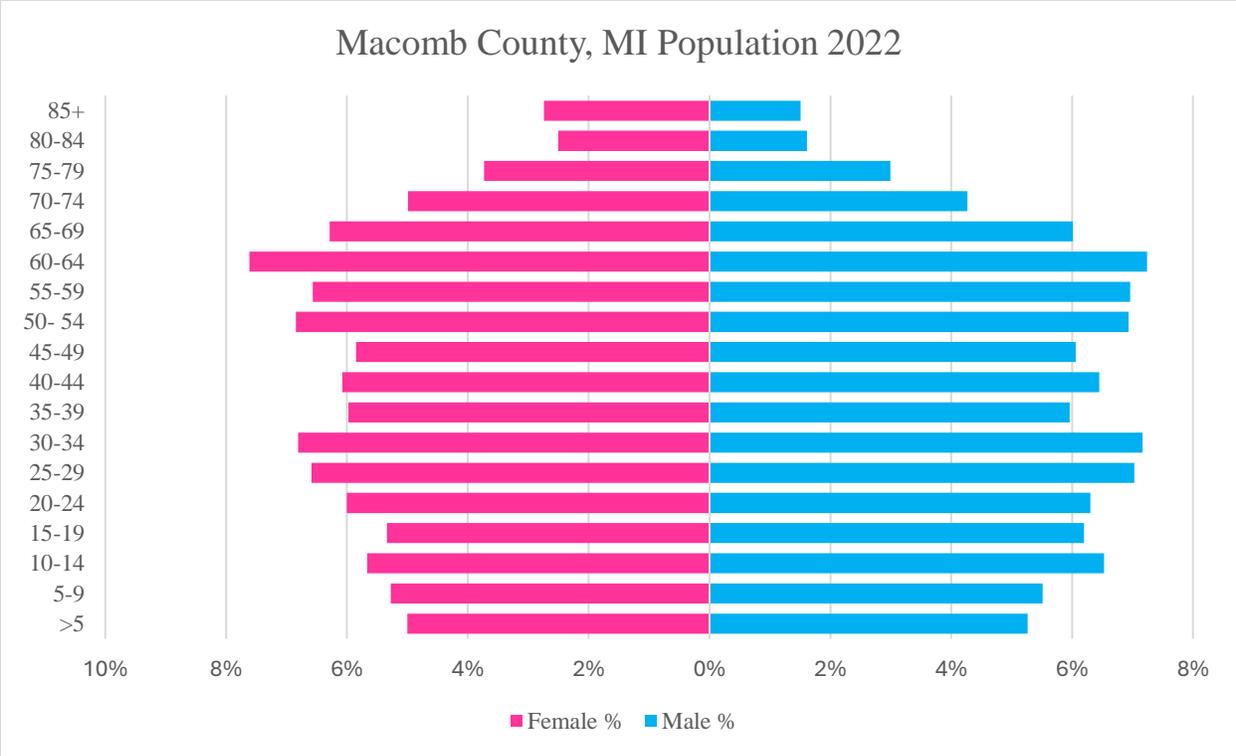


Figure 7: Macomb County Population Pyramid 2022; Source: US Census Bureau

2.2 Housing Profile

Housing Units

It is important to analyze the number of units in housing to help communities understand whether the available housing meets the needs of the residents. Communities need to have various housing options available to their residents. Figure 8 represents the number of units in each structure within Utica. Most structures are either one unit attached, one unit detached, or apartments. A detached unit is a single-family home, while an attached unit is attached to other units by a wall or other element.

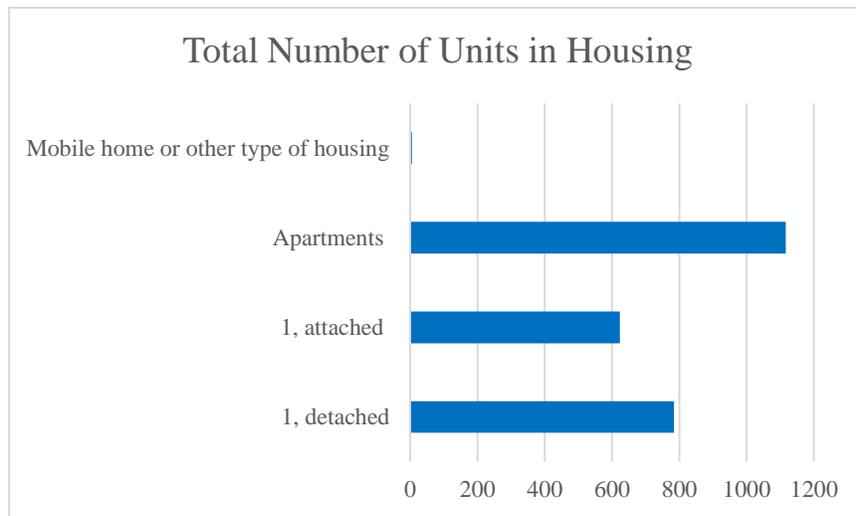


Figure 8: Total Number of Units in Housing: City of Utica, MI; Source: US Census Bureau

Median Home Value

Median home value is helpful in determining if sufficient housing is affordable for residents of a city. The median home value also shows the current housing market conditions. It indicates how affordable a city can be to live in and how the local economy in that city is. Additionally, median home value data can reveal the living conditions in a community. Figure 9 depicts the home value in Utica compared to Macomb County and Michigan. Utica is on par with Macomb County and Michigan, with most home values between \$100,000 to \$299,999. Utica falls behind the county and state with homes valued at \$300,000 to \$499,999 and has virtually no homes valued at \$500,000 or more.

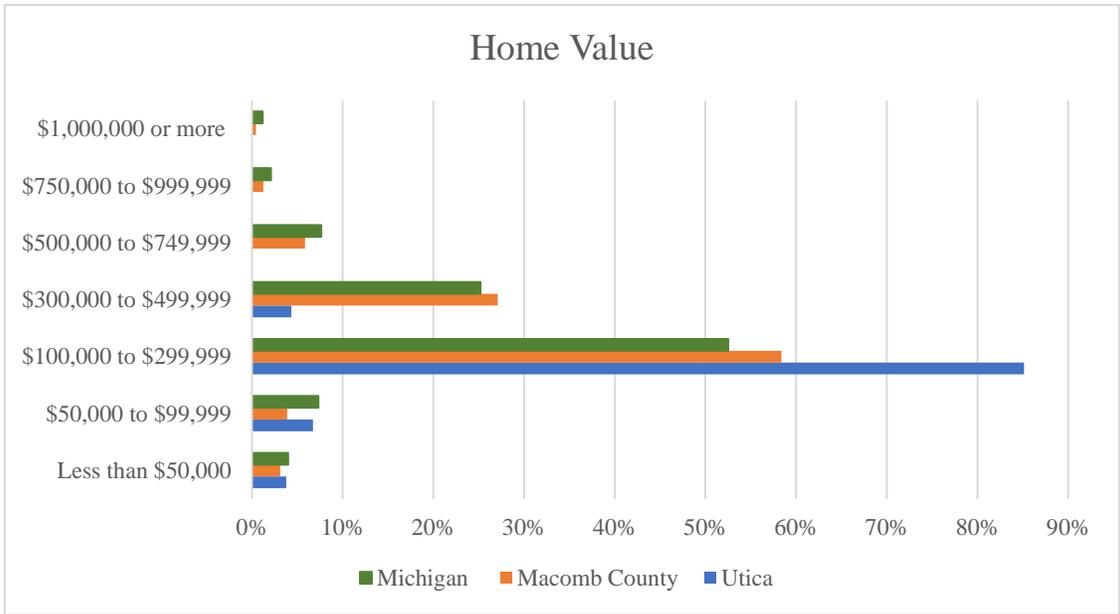


Figure 9: Median Home Value (Dollars): Utica vs. Macomb County vs. Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

Year Built

Knowing what year homes were built can help provide a picture of development trends within a city. If a city has a large amount of older housing within its city limits, it may indicate a low demand for new housing. However, older homes can produce both structural and infrastructural hazards. Figure 10 shows the percentage of homes built between periods in Utica compared to neighboring communities of Sterling Heights, Shelby Township, and Macomb County. The majority of households in all four areas were built pre-2000. Over half of Utica, Sterling Heights, and Macomb County’s housing was built pre-1980. Since 2010, the construction of new households has declined, and since 2020, the construction of new households has been lacking.

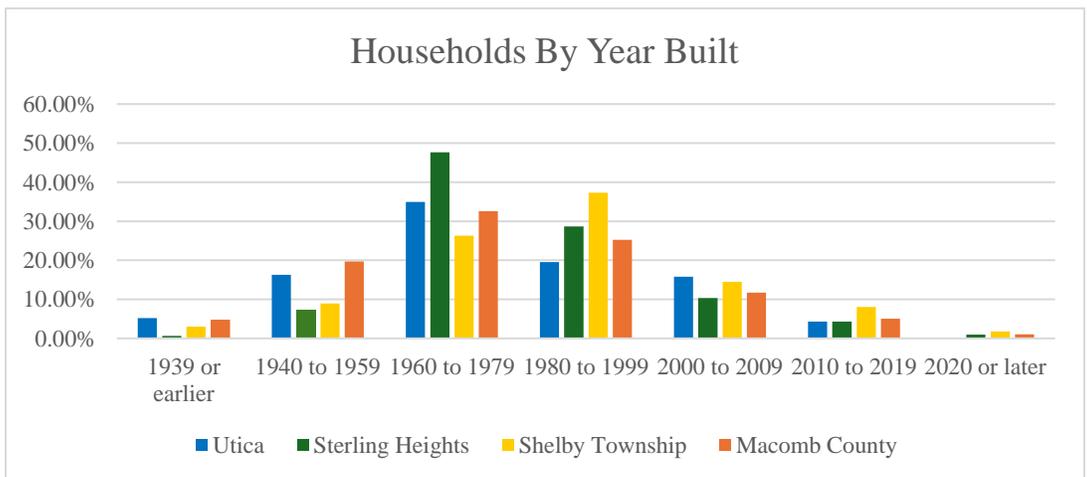


Figure 10: Households By Year Built, Utica, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township and Macomb County; Source: US Census

Tenure By Year Householder Moved into Unit

Knowing the year a householder moved into their unit can benefit cities, as it can help show if residents are constantly moving in and out of the city. It can help cities determine if they have a stable core of residents. Additionally, the data can show trends in whether the household is owner or renter-occupied and how those trends change over time. Figure 11 shows the tenure by year a householder moved into their unit in Utica. Most residents in Utica moved in between 2010 and 2017. The majority of householders in Utica were owner-occupied from 2009 and earlier. From 2010 to the present, most households in Utica are now renters.

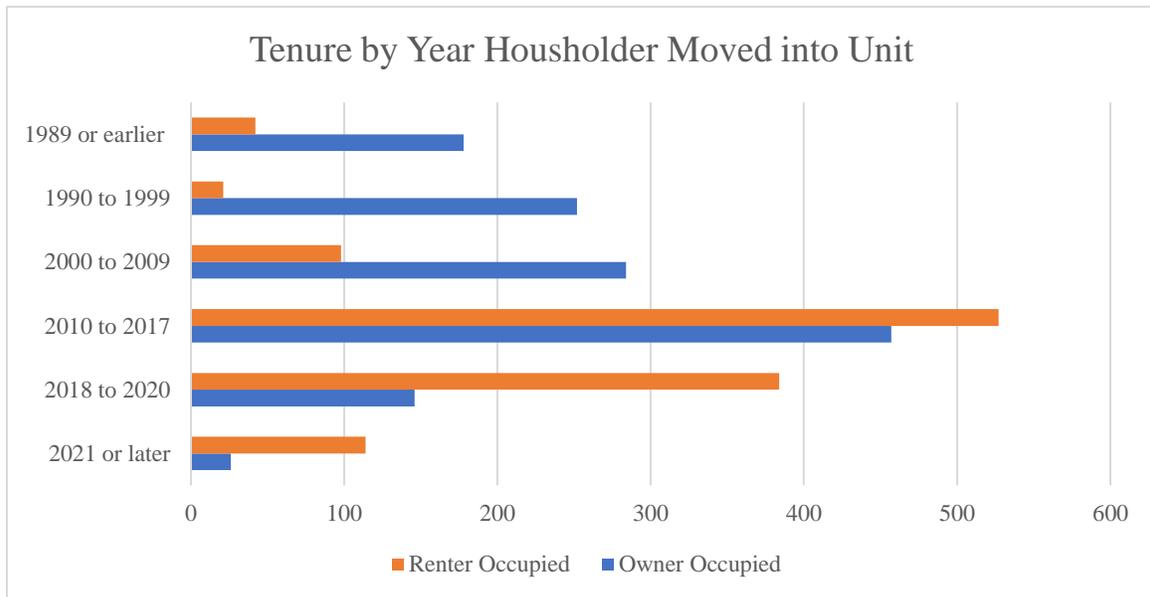


Figure 11: Tenure By Year Householder Moved into Unit, Utica; Source: US Census Bureau

Total Housing Units

Determining the growth or decline of total housing units in a city can help determine whether economic conditions can support an increase in housing units. If the housing units are increasing, it generally supports an increase in the local economy. Table 2 illustrates the total housing units in Utica, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township, and Macomb County. The table compares total housing units from 2010 to 2020. The increase in housing units in all four areas support a growing economy.

Total Housing Units				
Year	Utica	Sterling Heights	Shelby Township	Macomb County
2010	2,463	52,190	30,291	356,626
2020	2,651	53,255	32,970	369,404
Growth Rate (%)	7.63%	2.04%	8.84%	3.58%

Table 2: Total Housing Units, Utica, Sterling Heights, Shelby Township, and Macomb County; Source: US Census Bureau

Vacancy Rates

Identifying vacancy rates is important for communities as it can warn of long-term problems in a city’s economy. A rising vacancy rate could also suggest an abundance of rental units in the area or that there could be economic challenges. Figure 12 represents the vacancy rates in Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan from 2010 to 2022. All three of the areas have seen a decrease in vacancy rates since 2010. Utica’s vacancy rates decreased significantly between 2012 and 2016; since 2022, they are on par with the rest of Macomb County. Utica’s vacancy rate is currently 3.62%. Macomb County is just behind with a rate of 3.87%, while Michigan has a considerably higher vacancy rate of 12.4%.

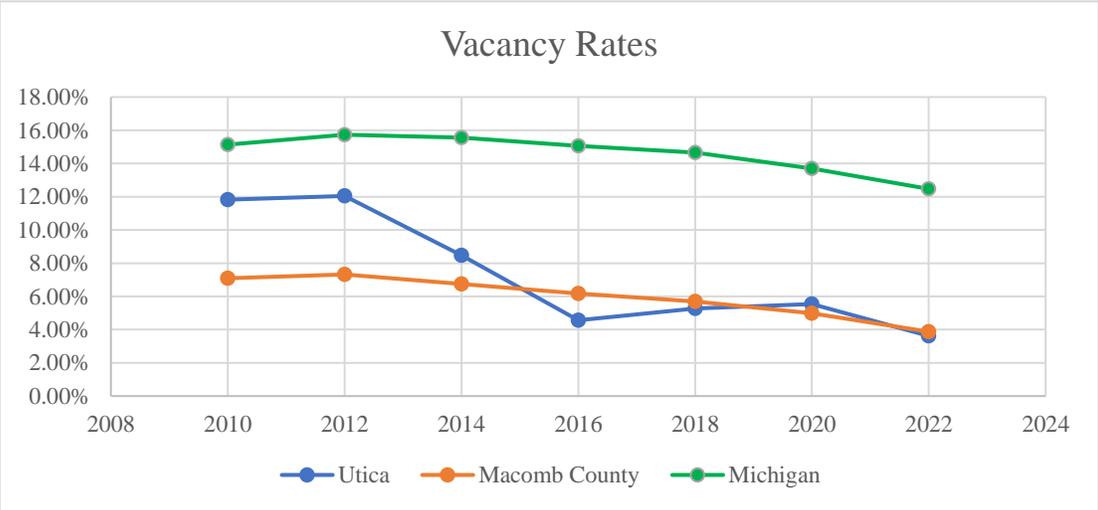


Figure 12: Vacancy Rates, Utica, Macomb County, Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

Average Rent Price

Determining the average rent price in a city is critical as it can depict the economic health of a city's rental market and show the affordability of rent in a particular area. Overall, the average rent price reflects the local economic landscape. If the average rent price is higher, and there is little to no vacancy, that shows that residents' income is high enough to afford the average rent. Figure 13 shows the average rent trends from 2015 to 2022 in Utica, Macomb County and Michigan. Utica's average rent price is lower than both Macomb County and Michigan. Utica's average rent price in 2022 was \$944. Macomb County's average rent price in 2022 was \$1,124, higher than Michigan's at \$1,037.

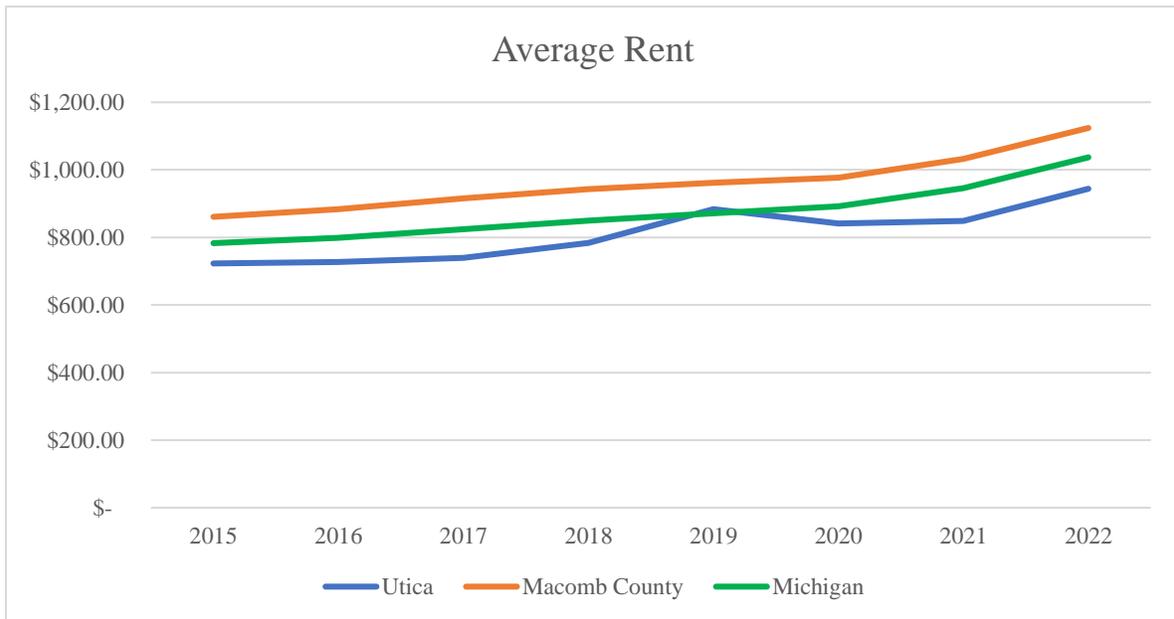


Figure 13: Average Rent Price, Utica, Macomb County, Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

2.3 Crime Profile

Understanding a city's crime rate can be beneficial for several reasons. A high crime rate can deter visitors away from a community or downtown. A decrease in visitors can lead to a decline in the local economy. High crime rates can worry business owners, employees, and customers for their safety when visiting a city's downtown. High crime rates could also cause businesses to close and give the community a bad reputation.

The crime index rate in Utica decreased between 2017 and 2018. The higher the crime index, the more crime occurs in that city. Figure 14 shows that since 2018, the crime index in Utica has been decreasing steadily. As of 2020, the crime index in Utica was at 231.9. The national average in 2020 was 254.8, which puts Utica below the national crime index average.

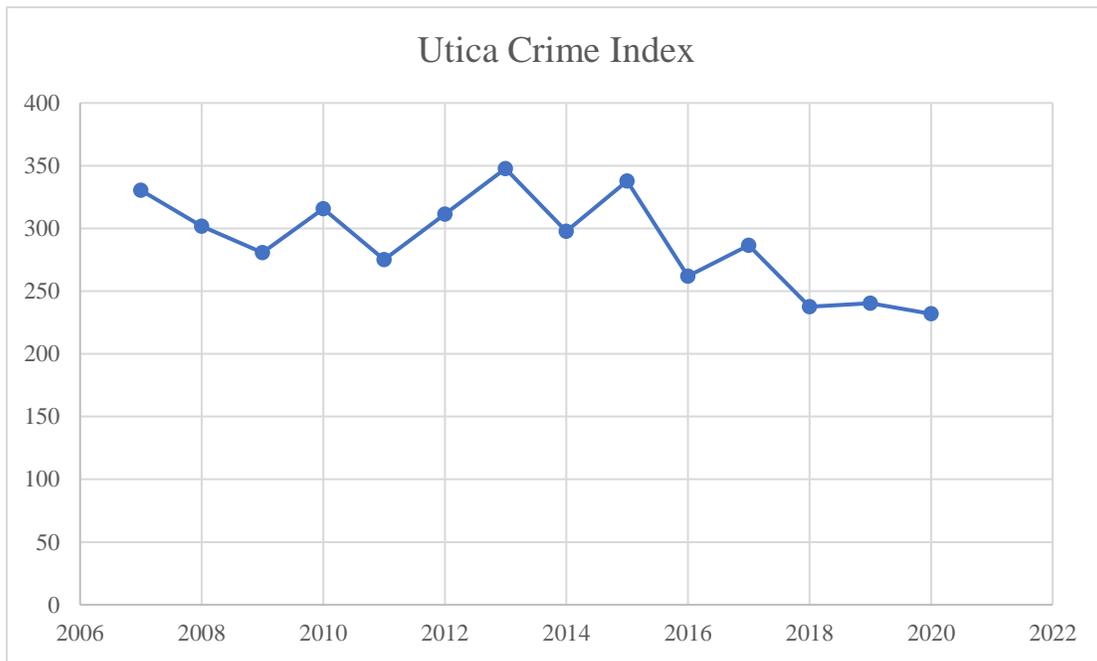


Figure 14: Utica Crime Index; Source: City Data

Figure 15 shows that Utica has a much higher crime rate per 1,000 people than the neighboring cities of Shelby Township and Sterling Heights. The crime rate per 1,000 people in Utica is over double that of Shelby Township and Sterling Heights. Additionally, Figure 16 shows that Utica has a much higher crime rate per 1,000 people than Macomb County and Michigan. While Utica's crime rate is higher than that of its neighboring cities, Macomb County and Michigan, its crime rate per 1,000 has been declining as of recently.

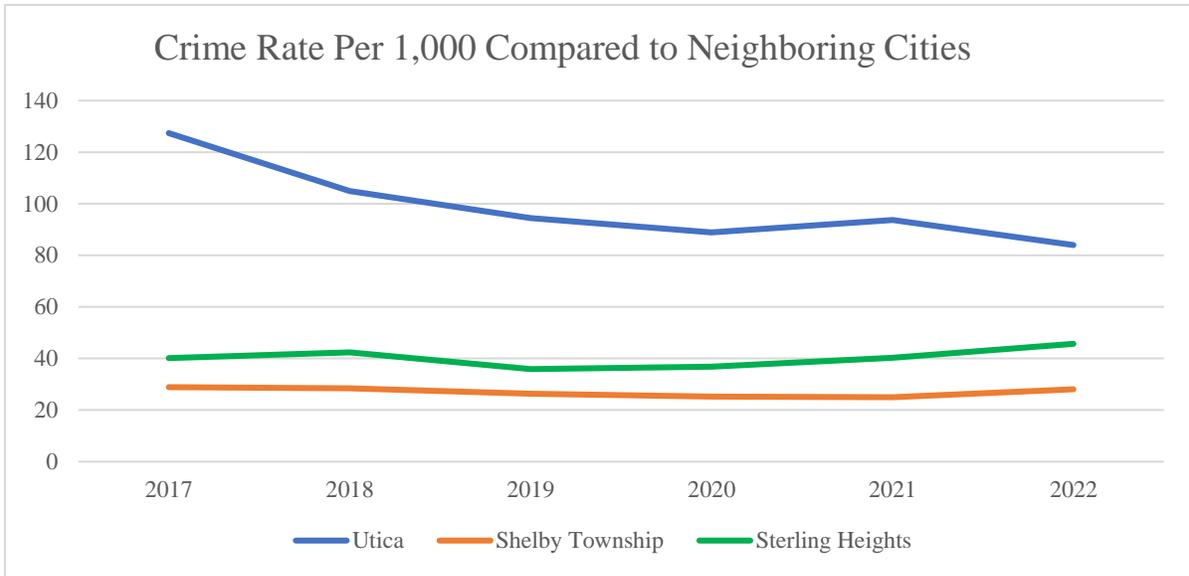


Figure 15: Crime Rate Per 1,000, Utica, Shelby Township, Sterling Heights; Source: Michigan State Police

2.4 Economic Profile

Economic Indicators

The economic profile will look at important economic indicators, such as Utica’s median household income, unemployment rate, percentage of population in poverty, and educational attainment. When analyzed in comparison with data from Macomb County and Michigan, these data sets highlight the city’s economic strengths or weaknesses and provide insight into the health of Utica’s economy. Each indicator helps us to put together a picture of the overall health of Utica’s economy and the quality of life for residents.

Median Household Income

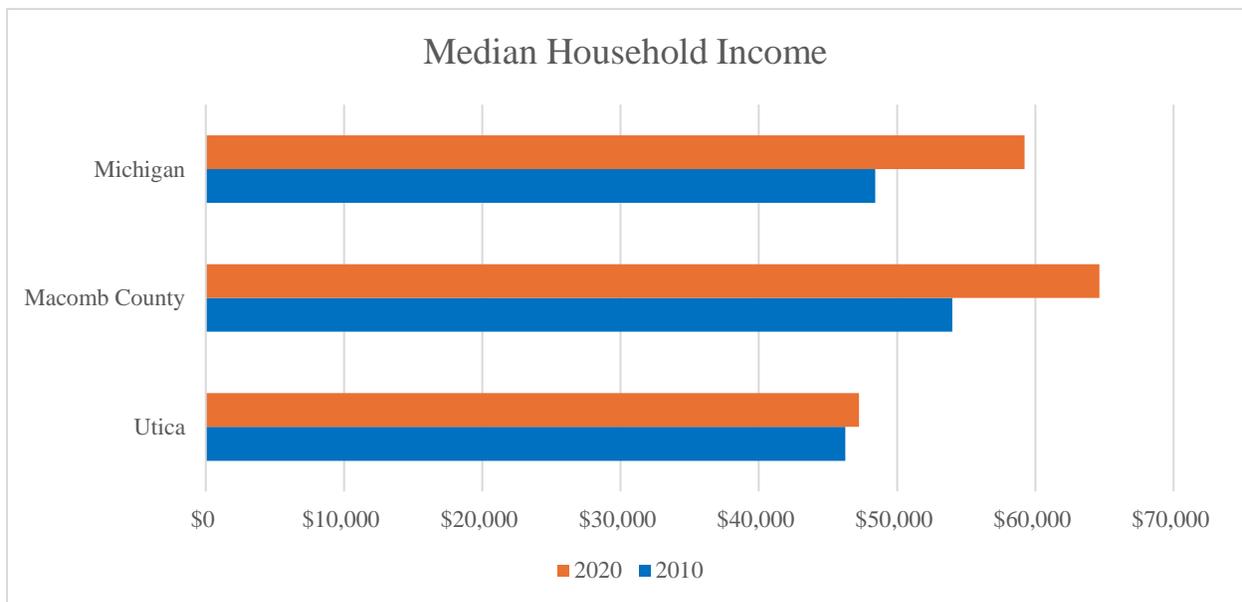


Figure 16: Median Household Income in Utica 2010 vs. 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

Median household income is the most accurate measure for identifying the income of average residents in a geographic area. Looking at the median rather than the mean, the data is unaffected by dramatic outliers representing high or low incomes. Figure 16 compares median household incomes in 2010 and 2020 for Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan. Incomes across all three geographies increased over the ten years, with Macomb County experiencing the highest incomes in both years. Utica trails behind the state and the county, with the median income remaining relatively the same from 2010 to 2020, only experiencing an increase of 2.1%. Comparatively, Michigan (22.3%) and Macomb County (19.7%) experienced increases. Utica residents earn less than residents of their county and the overall state, while experiencing virtually stagnant income growth.

Unemployment Rate

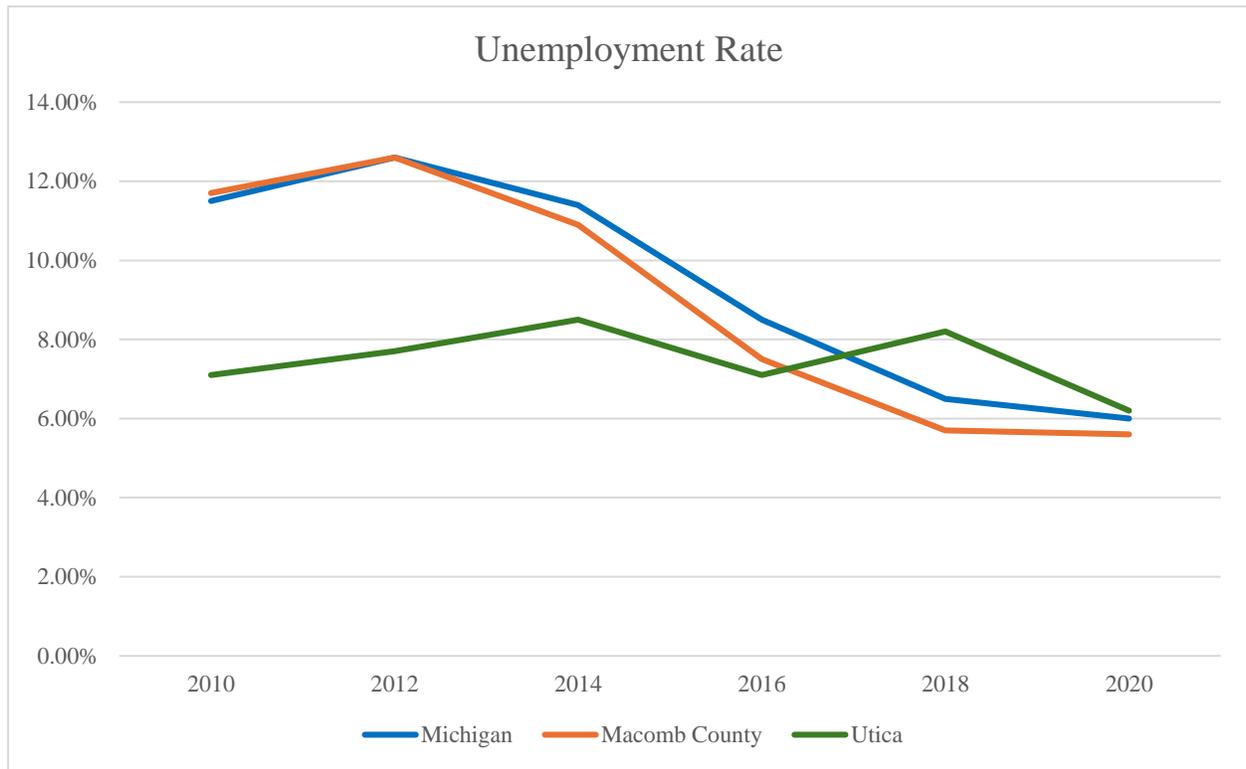


Figure 17: Unemployment Rate in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

The unemployment rate represents the portion of the labor force that is not working but actively looking for a job. Figure 17 compares the unemployment rates for Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan from 2010 to 2020. Until 2016, Utica's unemployment rate has consistently remained below those of Michigan and Macomb County. Both the state and county unemployment rates have been on a steady decline since 2010, in contrast to unemployment rates in Utica, which have experienced more fluctuation. Beginning in 2016, Utica's unemployment rate spiked above Michigan and Macomb County. This rise in unemployment for the city lasted until 2018, when it started to decline toward a rate on par with the state and county. Overall, Utica has experienced more instability in its unemployment rate than Michigan or Macomb County.

Population Below Poverty Level

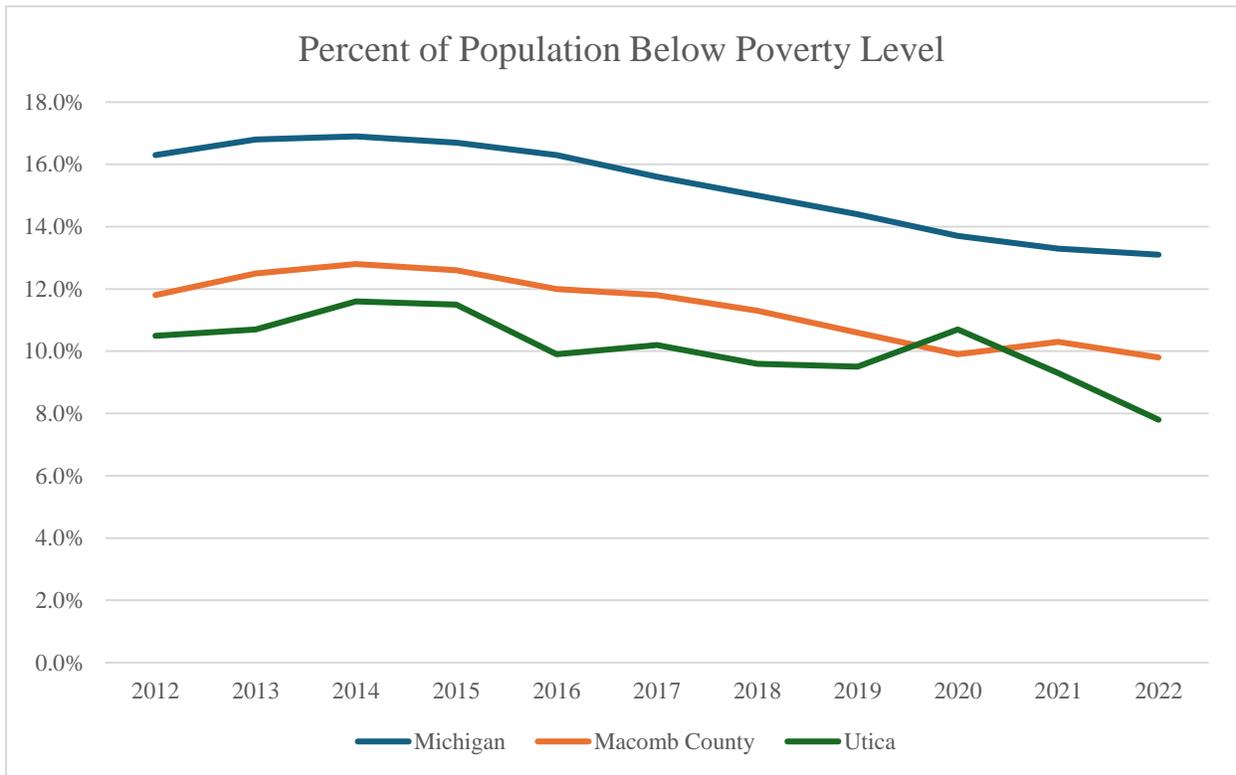


Figure 18: Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

The Federal Poverty Level in 2022 was \$13,171 for an individual, \$16,733 for a family of two, and \$26,496 for a family of four. Figure 18 compares the percentage of the population that fell below the poverty level from 2012 to 2022 within Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan. The percentage of Utica's population below the poverty level has remained lower than the amount for Michigan and Macomb County since 2012. However, in 2020, the portion of its population below the poverty level rose above that of the county. Macomb County's percent of its population below poverty experienced a slight decline, with about 12% in 2012 and 10% in 2022. Michigan experienced a slight decrease beginning in 2012, with about 16% of its population below the poverty level and ending in 2022, below 14%.

Educational Attainment

A city's educational attainment can be important for its economy, as it determines what kind of workers are a part of the labor force. A high educational attainment rate provides a city's economy with a highly skilled and productive labor force. Higher levels of education are also linked to an improved quality of life for individuals. Figure 19 shows the percentage of adults 25 years and older with at least a bachelor's degree for Utica, Macomb County, and Michigan. All three geographies have seen a similar increase in adults with at least a bachelor's degree. In 2020, Utica pulled slightly ahead of Macomb County, with a more highly educated adult population. This high educational attainment rate adds value to Utica's economy compared to the county.

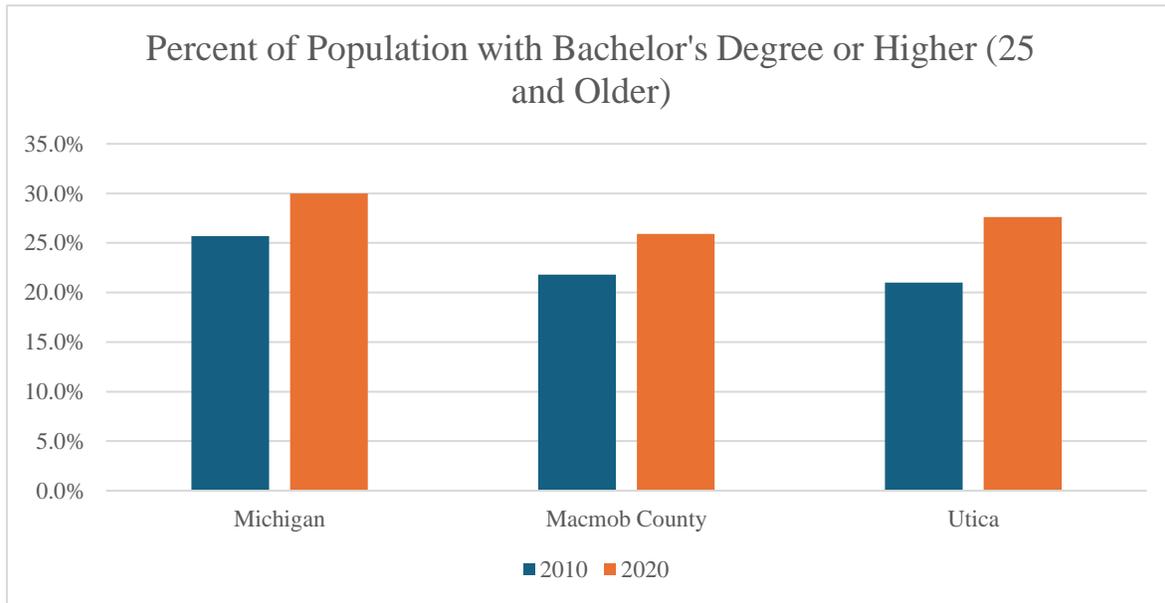


Figure 19: Percent of Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (25 or older) in Utica, Macomb County, and the State of Michigan; Source: US Census Bureau

Employment

The employment section focuses on employment in Utica using data from the US Census Bureau. Observations and analyses of occupational change and growth over time and the city's most important industries were conducted to examine employment trends in the city. By comparing employment in Utica with Michigan and Macomb County with the nation, strengths and weaknesses within the regional and local economy can be determined. These trends are graphed in Figures 20 and 21. The green segments of these graphs distinguish the period used for the analysis. Figure 20 shows that employment in Macomb County has experienced a positive trend in employment growth since 2010. Compared with national employment growth in Figure 21, employment in Macomb County grew at a higher rate than the nation, experiencing a larger increase in employment.

Macomb County Employment, 2010-2020

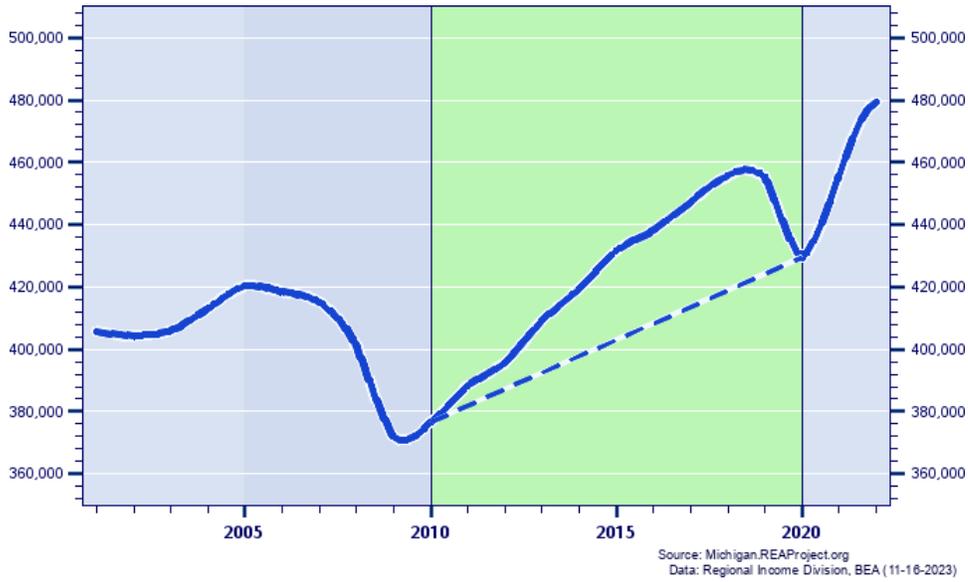


Figure 20: Macomb County Employment, 2010-2020; Source: Michigan REAProject

Employment Growth Index, 2010 = 100%

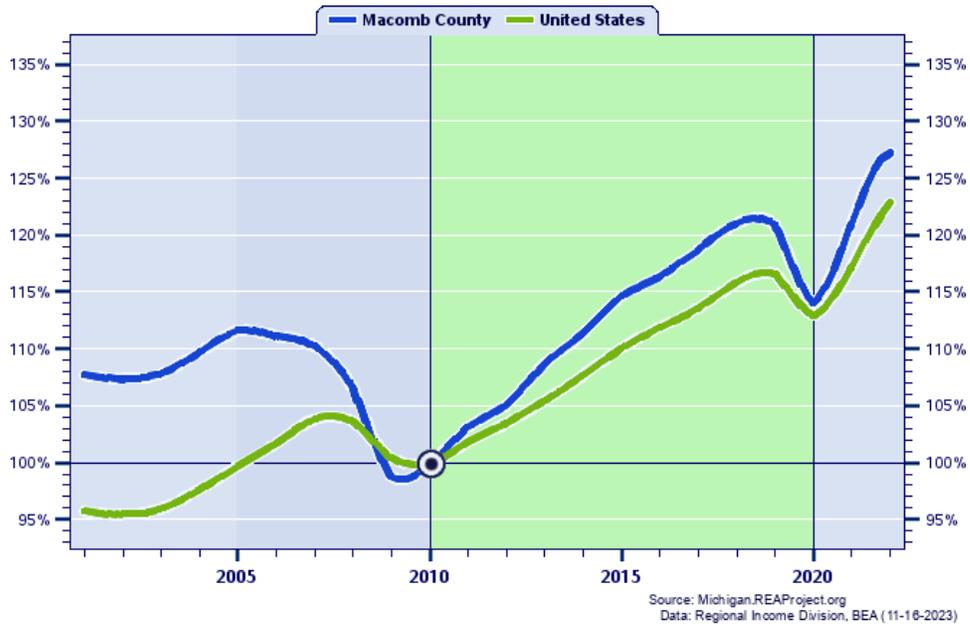


Figure 21: Macomb County Employment Growth Index, 2010-2020; Source: Michigan REAProject

Employment by Occupation

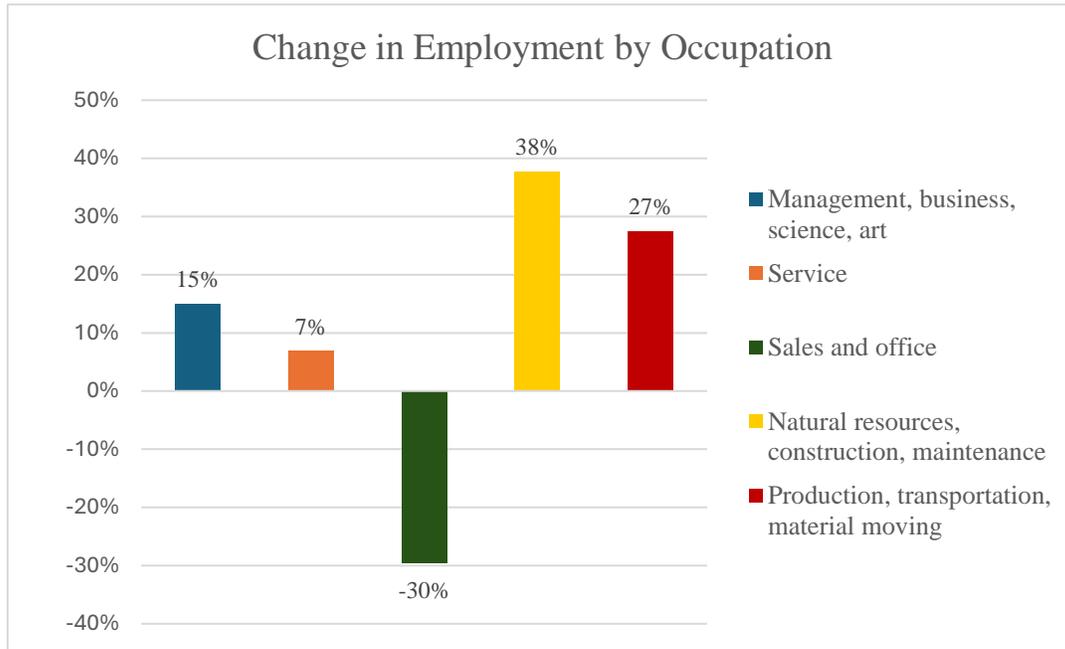


Figure 22: Change in Employment by Occupation in Utica; Source: US Census Bureau

Occupation describes the type of work an employee performs at a job, separate from industry, which describes the main activity, or goods produced by an employer. Figure 22 shows changes in Utica’s employment by occupation using the percent change in the number of jobs within each occupation in 2010 and 2020. The occupations listed by the US Census are Management, business, science and arts, Service, sales and office, Natural resources, construction, and maintenance, and Production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

Throughout the ten years, all occupations have experienced growth and decline, some more than others. Sales and office occupations are the only occupations in Utica that experienced an overall decline, with 868 jobs in 2010 and 611 in 2020 and a percent change of -30%. All other occupations in Utica ended 2020 with more jobs than in 2010, a good sign for job growth within the city. Employment in Natural resources, construction, and maintenance and Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations grew the most since 2010. Figure 23 shows the percentage of Utica employment for each occupation in 2020. Management, business, science, and arts occupations comprise the largest share of employment, followed by Sales and office occupations, despite the decrease in job growth since 2010.

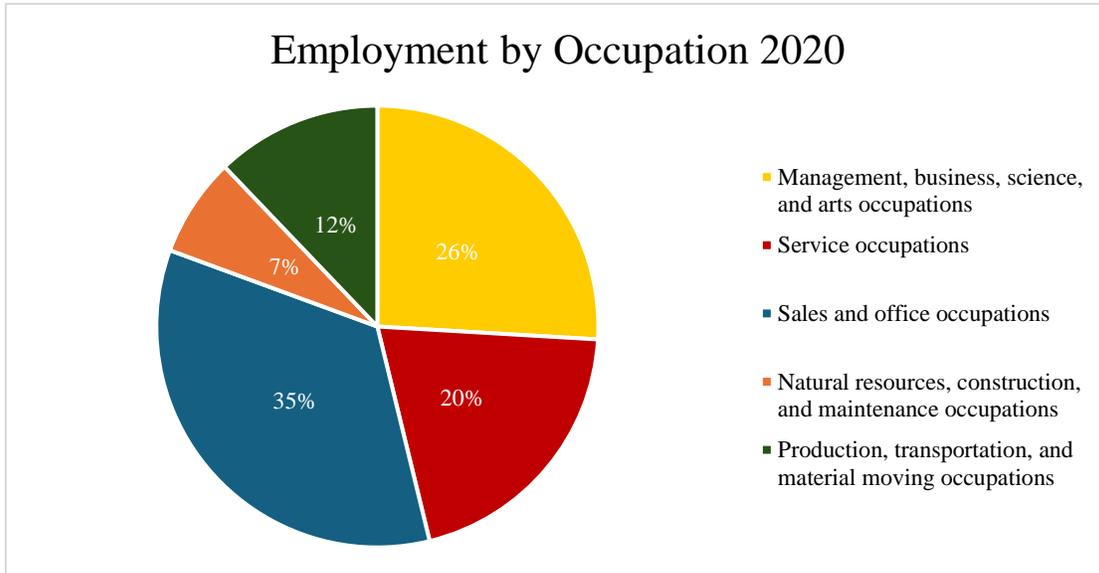


Figure 23: Utica Employment by Occupation in 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

Industry

The city's crucial and growing industries are identified by looking at employment in specific industries compared to employment in all of Utica. Figure 25 shows employment in Utica broken up by industry and the share of overall employment each industry comprises. In 2022, Manufacturing was Utica's largest industry, employing 24% of its workforce. Educational service, health care and social assistance, Retail trade, Professional, scientific, and management, and Administrative and waste management services are the next three largest industries, employing 42% of Utica's workforce. These five most important industries in Utica take up the largest share of employment.

Figure 24 shows the percent change in the number of jobs each industry provides in Utica from 2010 to 2020. Employment in Manufacturing grew the most, experiencing a 58% increase in jobs. Employment in the Retail trade and Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services industries declined by 20% to 38% respectively. Employment in all other industries also declined from 2010 to 2020. Manufacturing, Educational services, health care, and social assistance, Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management, and Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing industries are most important for Utica's economy, sustaining the city's employment growth.

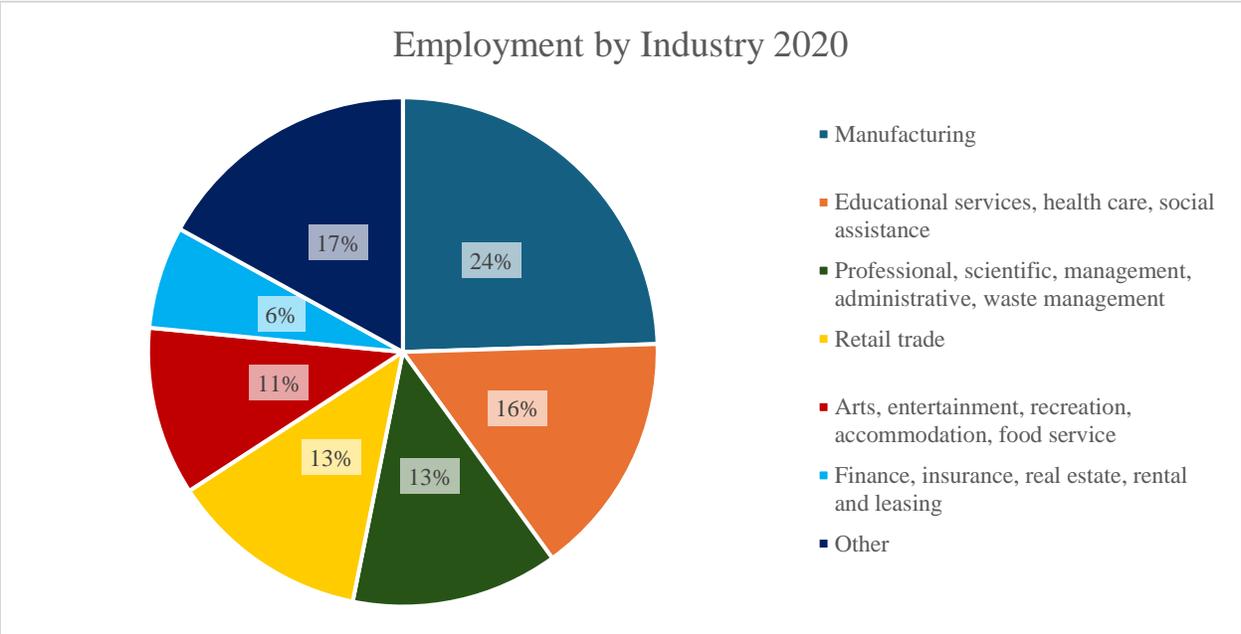


Figure 25: Employment by Industry in 2020; Source: US Census Bureau

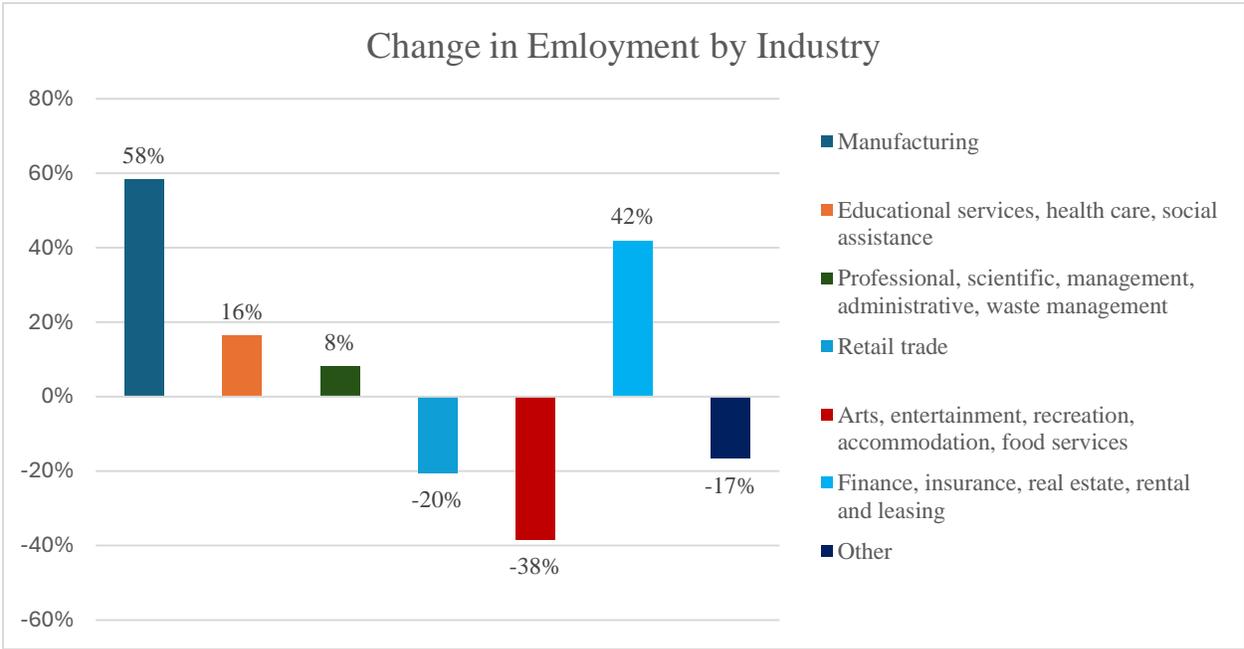


Figure 24: 2010-2020 Change in Employment by Industry; Source: US Census Bureau

Location Quotient

A location quotient greater than 1 implies some degree of specialization within an industry for the local area. Table 3 shows the location quotients for each industry in Utica, descending from greatest to least. Utica has a greater share of employment than the State in Manufacturing, Retail trade, and Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food service industries. All three have a location quotient greater than 1, indicating Utica has a degree of specialization in these industries compared to Michigan.

Manufacturing and Retail trade share a location quotient of 1.3 and have the highest degree of concentration of all industries in Utica. With a location quotient of 1, the Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management service industries have the same share of employment in Utica as in the state. All other industries in Utica have a location quotient of less than 1, meaning these industries are less concentrated in Utica than in the state and are considered import industries.

Industry	Utica 2022 %	Michigan 2022 %	Location Quotient
Manufacturing	24.7	18.6	1.3
Retail trade	14	10.8	1.3
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	9.9	8.9	1.1
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	10.2	9.9	1
Construction	5	5.8	0.9
Wholesale trade	2	2.2	0.9
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.1	4.7	0.9
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	20	23.2	0.9
Other services, except public administration	3.9	4.5	0.9
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	4.7	5.7	0.8
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.8	1.1	0.7
Information	0.6	1.2	0.5
Public administration	0.2	3.5	0.1

Table 3 Location Quotients for Utica and the State of Michigan in 2022; Source: US Census Bureau

Shift Share Analysis

A shift-share analysis identifies economic growth or declines in an area and attempts to attribute changes to either national, industrial, or regional factors. Shift-share analysis consists of three components: national share, industry mix, and regional shift. The national share identifies the portion of regional economic change that can be attributed to total growth in the overall national economy. The national share quantifies this change if the local economy grew along with the national economy.

The industry mix identifies which industries outpaced the national economy's average growth and are growing the fastest. The industry mix helps to identify the portion of change in an industry that is not due to national economic growth. The regional shift helps to identify a region's competitive advantage in an industry. Regional shift identifies growth in a regional industry that cannot be attributed to the national growth in that industry. This component is most significant for this report as observations can be drawn about industries in Utica that have a competitive advantage and are most valuable to the local economy. Figure 26 displays the national share, industry mix, and regional shift for Macomb County. This graph shows that Macomb experienced a positive industry mix and regional shift. These results indicate that employment growth in Macomb County can be attributed to concentrations in faster-growing industries and a regional advantage in the proportion of faster-growing industries compared to the nation.

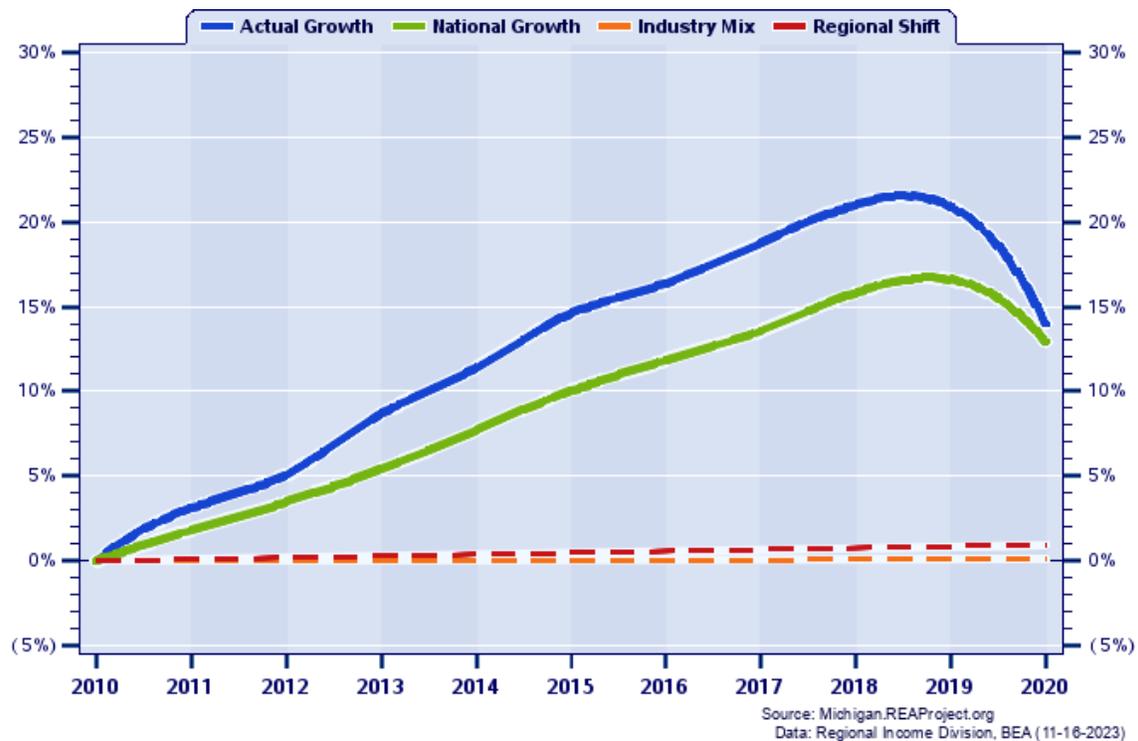


Figure 26: Graphical Summary of Shift Share Analysis Results for Macomb County Employment Change from 2010 to 2020; Source: Michigan REAProject

2.5 Transportation Profile

Methods of Commute

The report from Southeast Michigan Council of Government (SEMCOG), depicted in Figure 27, 2021 shows that 79% of residents mostly drove alone, indicating low use of public transportation at just 3%. While 7% of residents carpooled and 8% worked at home, the percentage of residents who walked or biked was insignificant at 1%.

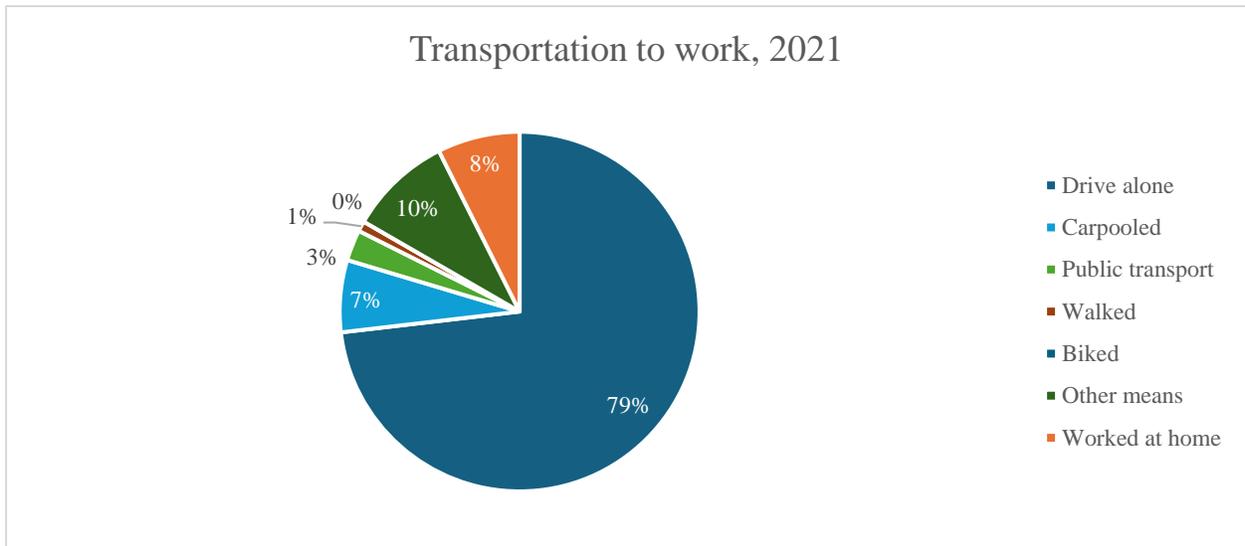


Figure 27: Utica Residents' Mode of Transportation to Work, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Figure 28 shows the mode of transportation used by Utica residents to get to work. When comparing data from 2010, the percentage of residents who drove alone declined from 84.5% to 79.3%, which showed a decline of 5.2% of residents in 2021. There was also a decline in residents who carpooled, dropping from 11% to 6.7%. Although residents rarely commuted by public transportation in 2010, there was a slight increase of 2.2%. In 2010, 1.3% of residents used public transit, while 3.5% used public transit in 2021. The percentage of Utica residents who biked and walked to work showed little change over the years. There was an increase in working from home, from 1.8% to 7.5%.

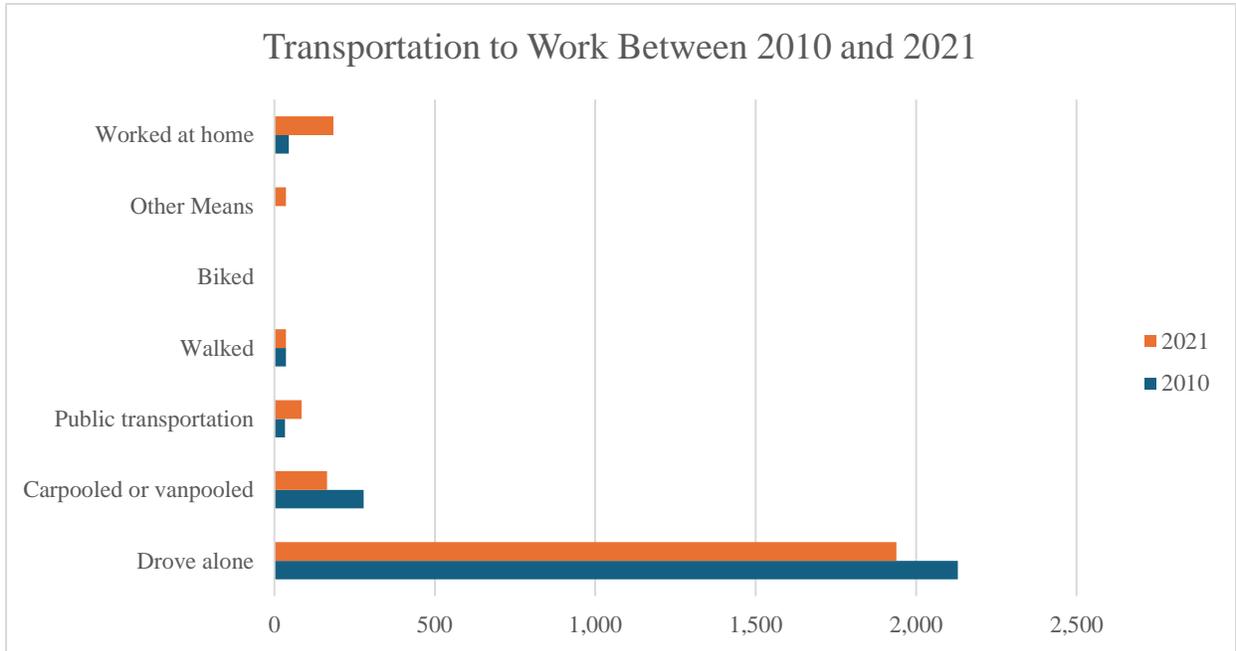


Figure 28: Utica Residents’ Mode of Transportation to Work from 2010-2020; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Average Time to Commute

Based on census data, Utica residents’ average travel time to work was 24 minutes from 2018 to 2022. Compared to neighboring cities, Utica’s average commute is longer. For example, the average is just 22 minutes in Warren and 21 minutes in Roseville, according to each respective city’s reported commuting averages over the same period. The longer commute time for Utica indicates that many residents are traveling outside the metro area for their daily employment.

Access to Vehicle

According to Policy Map analysis of census data from 2017 to 2021, Utica’s rate of vehicles is 1.4 per household, which reveals that most families have access to a private automobile. Utica falls short compared to the Southeast Michigan Regional baseline of 1.8 vehicles per household in the broader prosperous Macomb County area. However, when contextualized compared to the socioeconomic limitations facing the community, 1.4 vehicles still show a respectable level of transportation assets given their size and working-class demographic makeup.

Walking Distance

From the downtown core, several stores, restaurants, and municipal buildings are within five minutes' walking distance. Within a ten-minute walking distance lies Jimmy John's Field and other stores along Van Dyke Avenue, which can be seen in Figure 29. A one-day study (from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) on bike and pedestrian counts conducted by SEMCOG in 2019 found that 2,000 pedestrians walked between downtown and Jimmy John's field or vice versa throughout the study period. (SEMCOG, 2019)

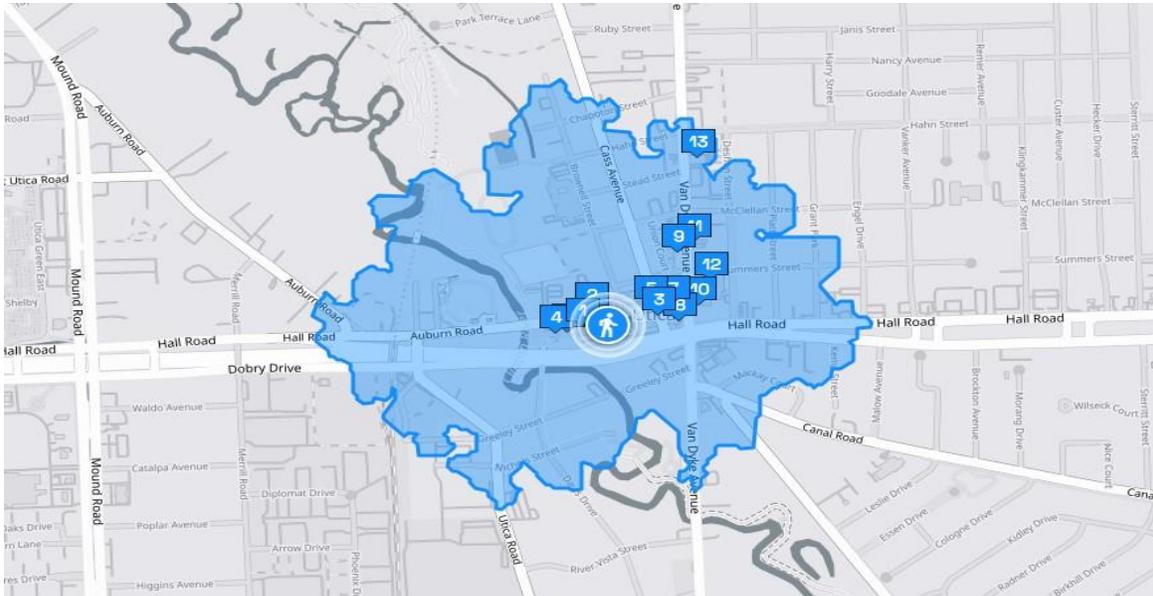


Figure 29: 10 Minute Walking Distance from Downtown Utica; Source: Travel Time

Public Transportation

Utica has no public transportation system. However, Macomb County has the SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) bus system, which serves parts of the southern and eastern sides of Macomb County. Figure 30 shows the bus routes and stops that pass within the Utica city boundaries. SMART does not run through the downtown area but has stops primarily along M-59 and Van Dyke Avenue.

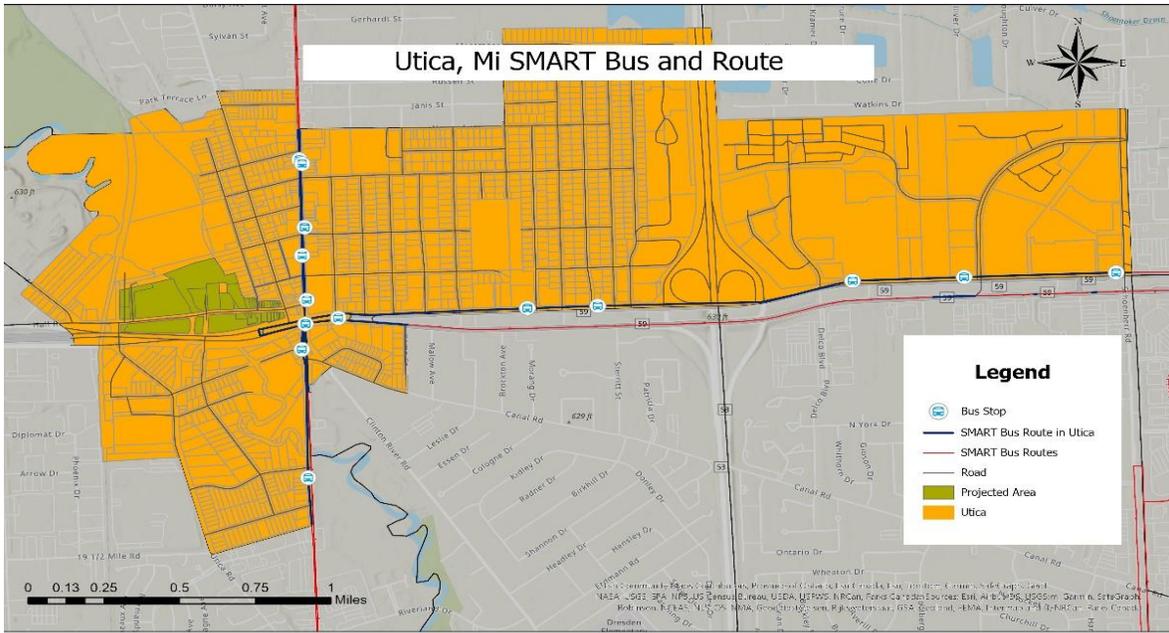


Figure 30: SMART Bus Route Stops in Utica; Source: Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation

Traffic Counts

Traffic counts for Utica can be viewed in Figure 31. According to the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) archive data from 2019, Utica has approximately 20,000 vehicles on the road daily. The major road traveled is M-59, although it does not account for traffic solely traveling to destinations within the city. The lowest traffic count in Utica is approximately 4,000 vehicles on Cass Avenue, which runs from the residential areas north to downtown. The traffic data near the project area, along Auburn Road, is significantly heavier at 7,000 vehicles.

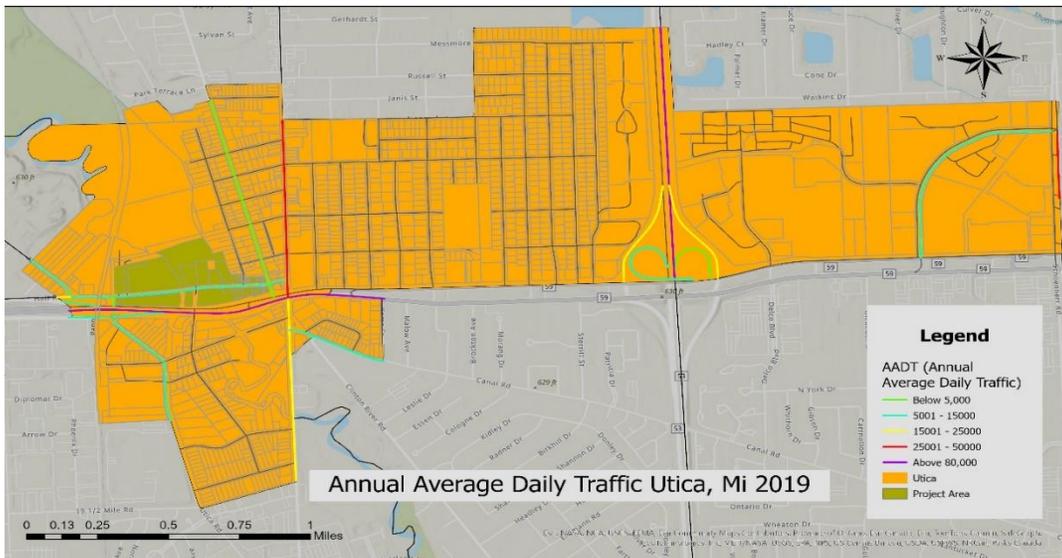


Figure 31: Annual Average Daily Traffic in Utica, 2019; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Annual Crash Rate

Figure 32 shows the number of traffic crashes in Utica from 2018 to 2022. In 2018, there were 506 total crashes, followed by a slight 4% decline in 2019. However, in 2020, crashes dropped by 30% as traffic flow decreased significantly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 and 2022, crashes rose sharply again, returning to levels similar to 2018-2019 averages, with 457 and 480 crashes in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

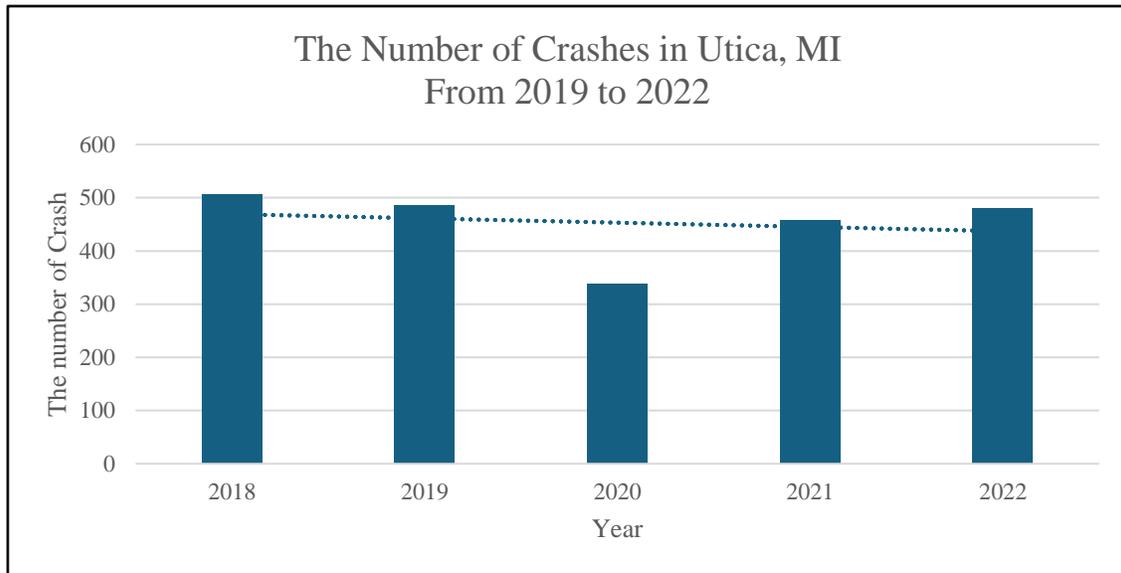


Figure 32: Number of Crashes in Utica, 2019-2022; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Pavement Condition

According to the 2021 SEMCOG report, pavement conditions in Utica are rated as overall fair based on data from Michigan’s Transportation Asset Management Council. The roads in the most critical existing condition are found along major roads such as M-59, Auburn Road, Cass Avenue, and Van Dyke Avenue, as can be seen in Figure 34. Fair-rated roads account for 63% of the pavement in the city, while Poor (32%) and Good (5%) make up the remaining 37% and can be viewed in Figure 33.

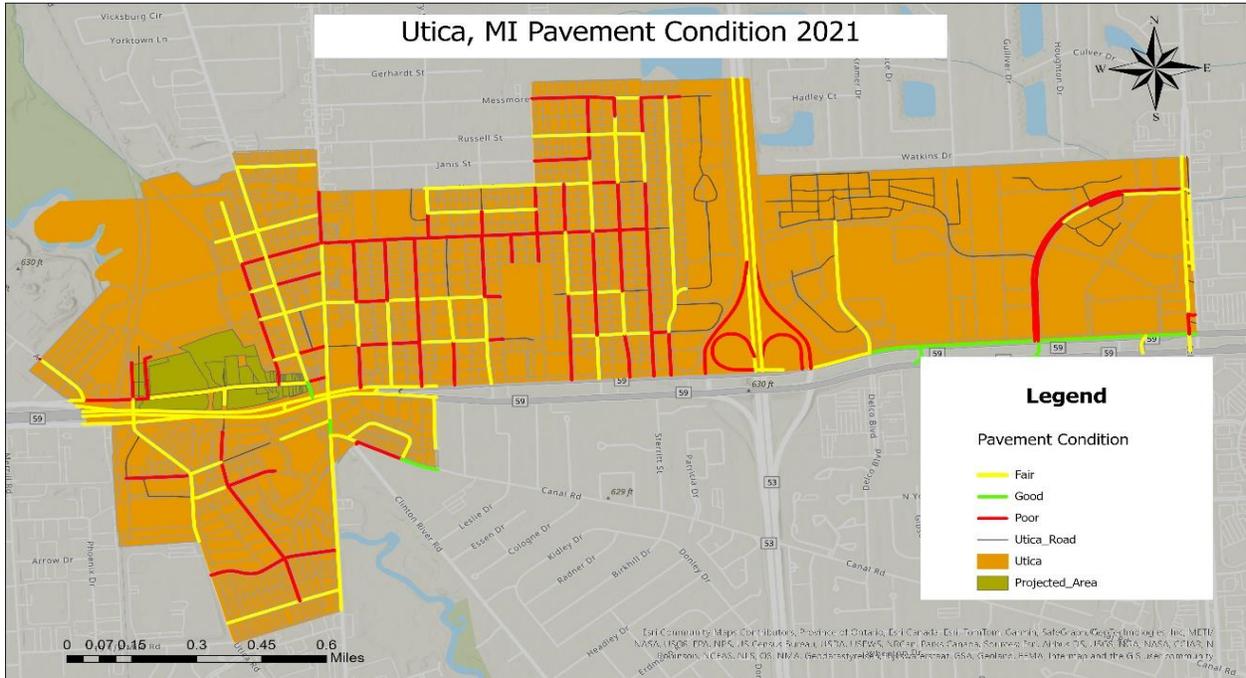


Figure 34: Utica Pavement Conditions, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

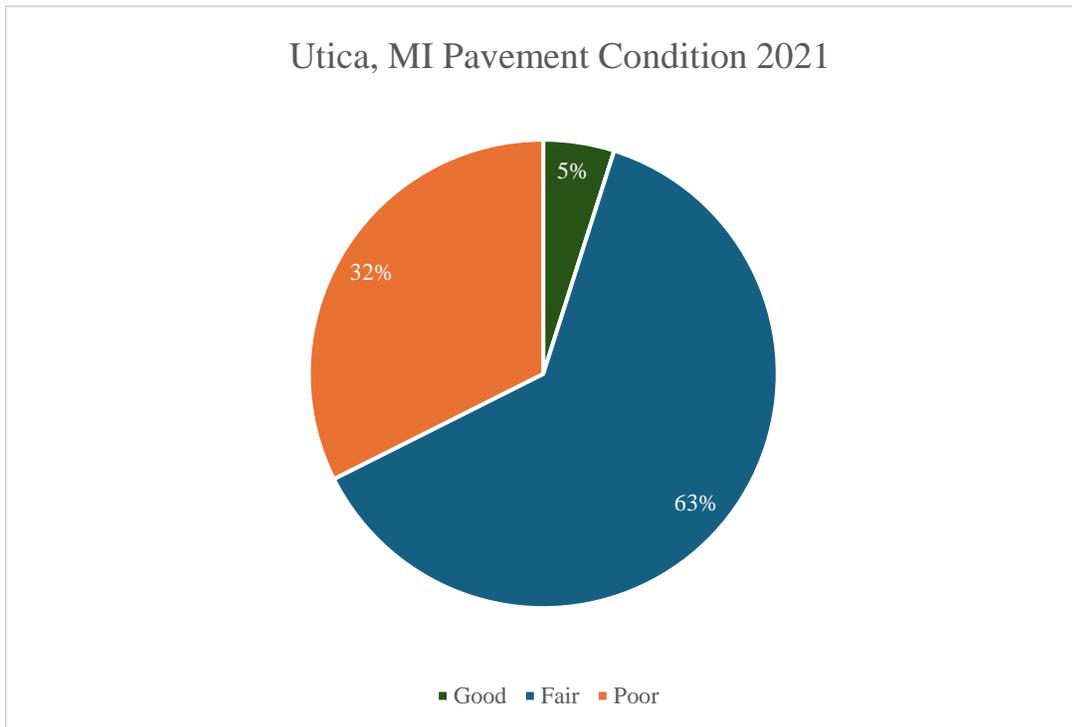


Figure 33: Utica Pavement Conditions, 2021; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Auburn Road runs through downtown Utica, making it the city’s primary road. Four roads intersect along Auburn Road in the project area: Hall Road, West Utica Road, Cass Avenue, and Van Dyke Avenue. The rating of each intersecting road of Auburn Road can be seen in Table 4.

Name of Road	From	To	Rating	Type	Speed
Auburn Rd	Utica Rd W	Hall Rd	Poor	Asphalt	35
Auburn Rd	Hall Rd	Utica Rd	Poor	Concrete	25
Auburn Rd	Utica Rd	Cass Ave	Fair	Asphalt	25
Auburn Rd	Cass Ave	Van Dyke Ave	Poor	Asphalt	25

Table 4 Rating of Roads Intersecting Auburn Road in Project Area; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

Chapter 3: Market Profile

The ESRI Business Analyst market profile provides insights into the projected area within a 10-minute walking distance. This area has an estimated resident population of around 1,100 as of 2023, with a slight projected population decline of 0.02% by 2028. The total daytime population now exceeds 2,000 people, comprised of 551 residents and 1,676 daytime workers commuting from the area.

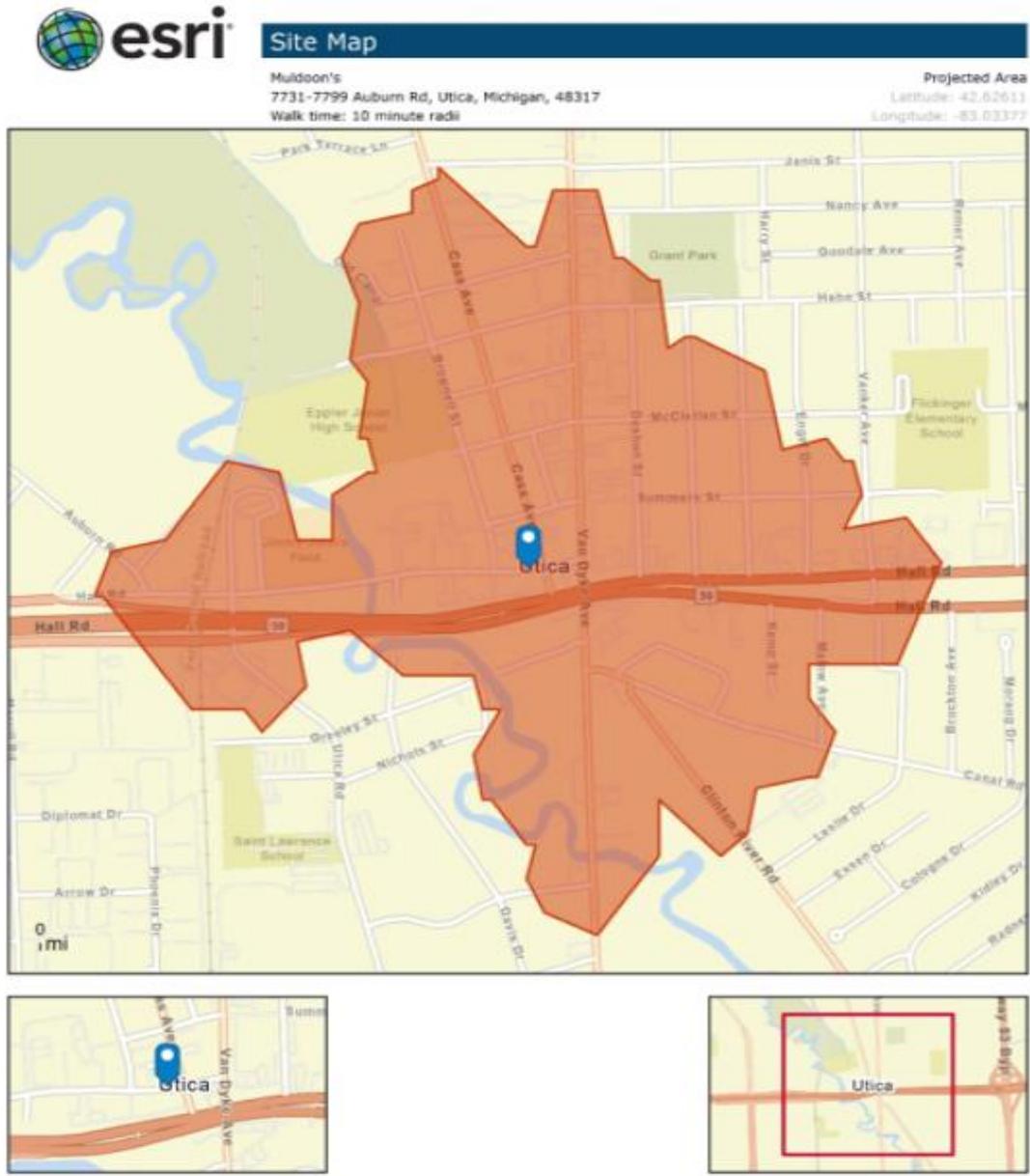


Figure 35: 10-Minute Walking Distance from Downtown Utica; Source: ESRI

Market Profile of Project Area

Residents had relatively high household incomes from the area, with the current median at approximately \$60,339 in 2023. The median income has a favorable 17.5% projected growth rate, in which incomes will increase to \$70,874 by 2028. Employment surrounding the projected site is heavily concentrated in the services and manufacturing sectors, with 2023 estimates showing around 50% of employed residents working in services and almost 19% employed in manufacturing jobs. (See Figure 36)

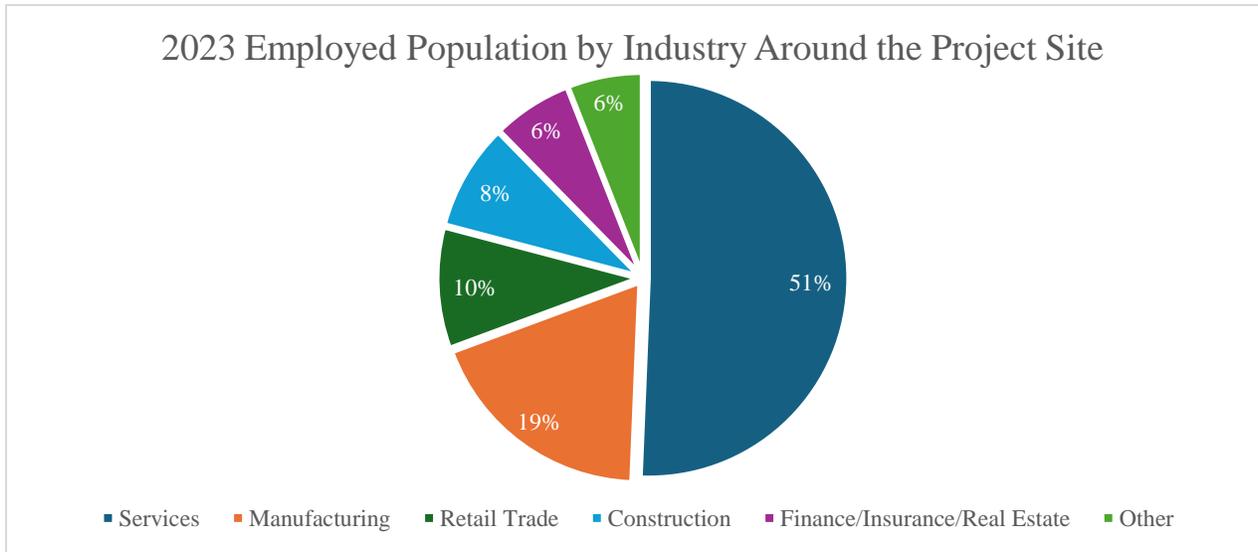


Figure 36: Utica 2023 Employed Population 16+ by Industry; Source: ESRI

Tapestry of the Project Area

According to ESRI Business Analyst, the project area falls within three tapestry segments. Front Porches, Comfortable Empty Nesters, and Rustbelt Tradition. However, Comfortable Empty Nesters is the dominant segment. Comfortable Empty Nesters have a median age of 48 and are married couples, some with grown children no longer living at home. Most households earn income through jobs, but about a third also have retirement funds and investment income. Living in homes built between 1950-1990, these homeowners tend to be physically active and financially secure. They prefer home-cooked meals over dining out, and home improvement projects are a priority.

Consumer Spending of Project Area

In 2023, the pattern of consumer spending around the project area revealed a significant allocation of household budgets towards essential needs, with the largest portions dedicated to shelter at about \$8 million, followed by over \$2 million expenditure for healthcare and food consumed at home. The spending on entertainment or recreation and food away from home had surpassed \$1 million, indicating a demand for outside activities for the residents near the projected area. (See Figure 37)

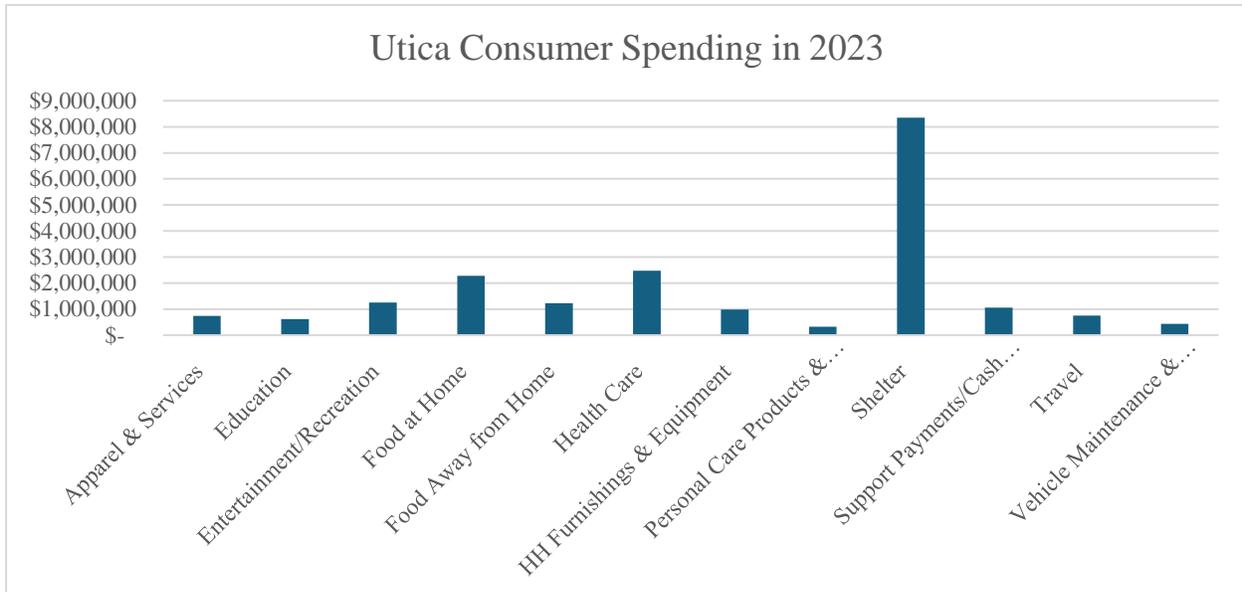


Figure 37: Utica Consumer Spending in 2023; Source: ESRI

Market Analysis

By looking at the market profile, the projected area appears primed for opportunities to attract a younger demographic and drive business investment for several key reasons:

1. With many currently employed in services and manufacturing, there is room to diversify the job market by drawing companies from promising sectors like tech and healthcare. Expanding employment potential in this manner could strengthen appeal for younger job seekers.
2. High spending levels on essential goods, entertainment, dining, etc., indicate a high demand for additional retail and leisure offerings. Strategically welcoming businesses that cater to these interests could encourage the area as a vibrant, amenity-rich locale attractive to both younger residents and investment-minded companies.

Therefore, the range of housing types and lifestyles presents opportunities for mixed-use developments that intermix residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. Thorough steps toward walkable communities of this nature could serve the dual purpose of bringing in young people while encouraging business investment.

Chapter 4: Land Use, Zoning, and Current Establishments

4.1 Land Use

To provide recommendations for the downtown, understanding current land uses is critical. Figure 38 maps the current land uses occupying the downtown project area, outlined in black. Most downtown land uses consist of retail and hospitality with minimal residential land and no mixed-use land. A substantial portion of land at the west entrance of downtown near Jimmy John's Field is used for institutional purposes and is where Utica's municipal campus is located. These buildings include the city's fire department, library, city hall, and police department. One lot of land on the map is designated for parking. However, there is free public parking at the back of the City Hall/Police Department and the Fire Department and street parking along Auburn Road. Only one parcel of land is being used for multi-family housing and it is currently the only residential use downtown. Most of the land downtown is used for traditional office spaces and service establishments.

Land Use Map 2020, Project Area

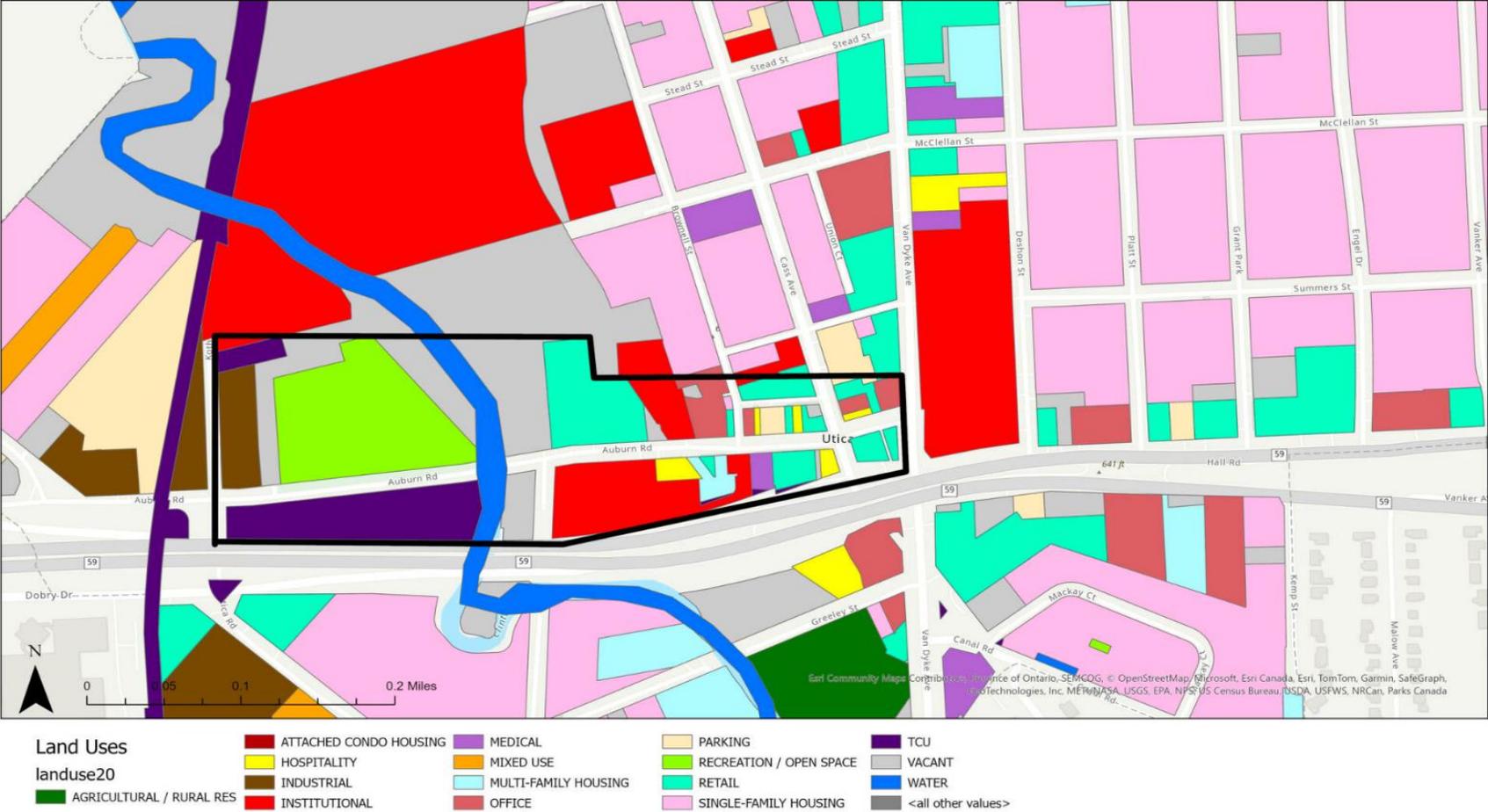
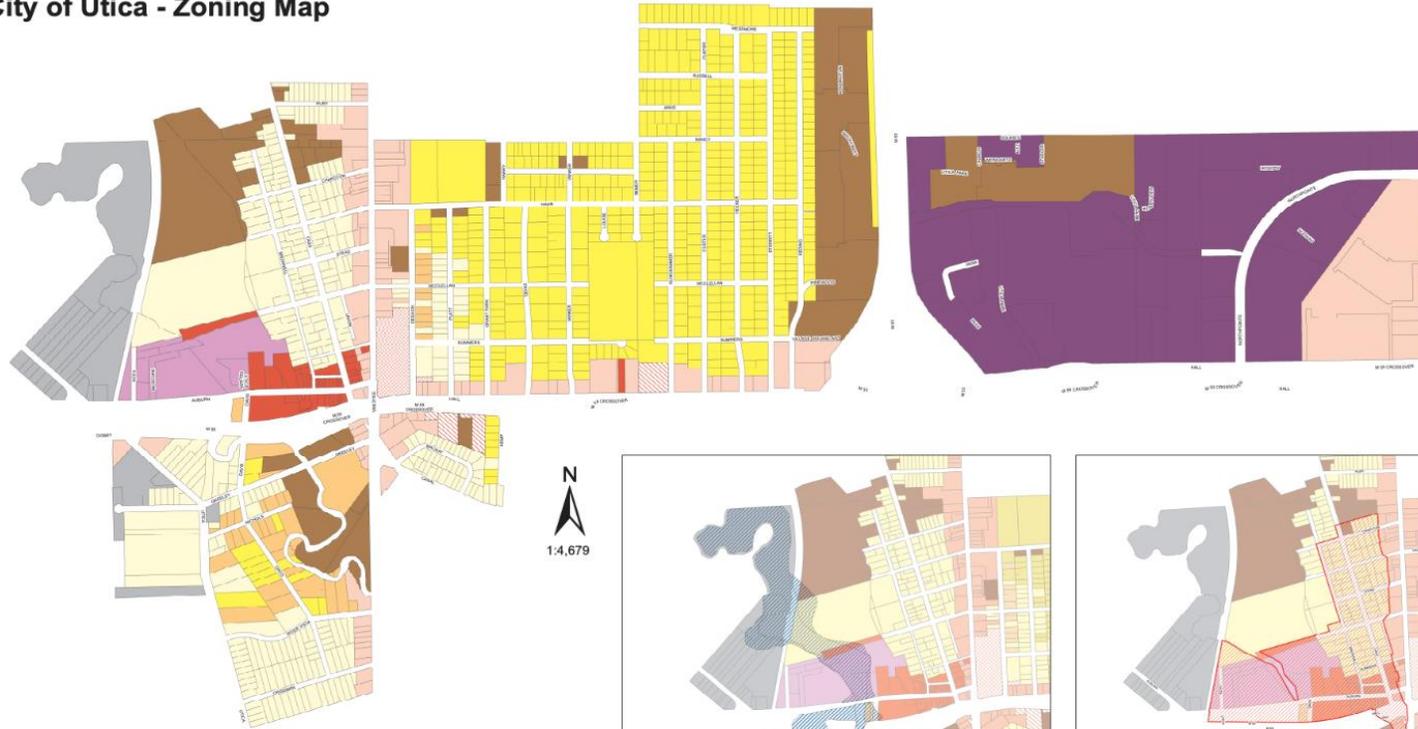


Figure 38: Utica Land Use Map, 2020; Source: Southeast Michigan Council of Government

4.2 Zoning

The current zoning map of Utica (Figure 39) categorizes the downtown into two districts: the downtown mixed-use district (DMXD) and the central business district (C-1). The heart of downtown, at the intersection of Auburn Road and Van Dyke Avenue, is zoned C-1, where most of Utica's downtown businesses are located. This zone allows residential uses when conditions of units on the floors above grade level access, minimum floor areas per unit, and parking minimums are met. The area of downtown, going west towards Jimmy John's Field, is zoned DMXD to encourage mixed-use development that will maintain and enhance the economic vitality of the downtown, as well as the unique character of downtown Utica. Uses within this zone include all uses permitted in zones O-1 and C-1, overnight lodging facilities, and attached single-family dwellings that meet requirements.

City of Utica - Zoning Map



N
1:4,679

Legend

	R-1A		C-1		MXD
	R-1B		C-2		P-1
	R-2		O-1		I
	R-3		DMXD		

Parcel information - Summer 2014

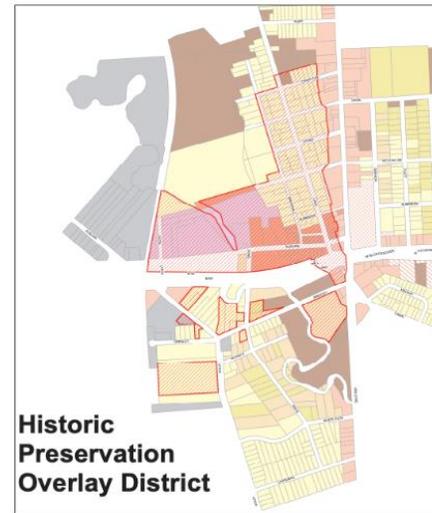
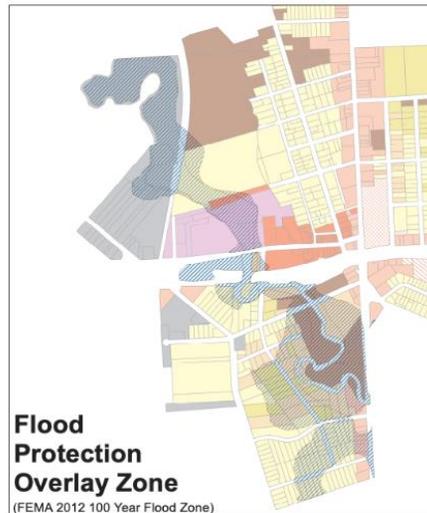


Figure 39: Utica Zoning Map; Source: City of Utica

4.3 Downtown Establishments

There are currently 37 establishments downtown. Of these, nine are restaurants/bars, nine are traditional office spaces, five are retail stores, and seven provide hair styling, automotive services, photography, and dance training services. There are a few outliers, such as Jimmy John's Field and the Polish Century Club of Utica. Utica's Public Library, City Hall, Police Department, and Fire Department are also downtown. Downtown could benefit from a more extensive, more diverse mix of retail shops and services. The current location of these businesses can be seen in Figure 40. A complete list of downtown establishments can be found in Appendix A.



Figure 40: Existing Condition and Businesses in Downtown Utica; Source: ESRI

Chapter 5: Existing Conditions

5.1 Downtown Form

Utica’s downtown has a traditional form, with Auburn Road as the city’s main street, two-story buildings on either side of the street, and parking at the back of buildings. Most of the buildings have traditional brick façades with multiple large windows contributing to the aesthetic, historical appearance of downtown. Downtown is densest at the eastern end of Auburn Road at the intersection with Cass Avenue.



Figure 41: Intersection of Auburn and Cass Facing W



Figure 42: Auburn Road Facing W; N Side of Auburn



Figure 43: Auburn Road Facing W; S Side of Auburn

Toward the western end of Auburn Road towards Jimmy John’s Field and the Clinton River, downtown loses some of its traditional form. One-story buildings with more modern façades and single establishment parcels overtake this part of downtown. This end of Auburn is less dense and less aesthetically pleasing.



Figure 45: Intersection of Auburn and Brownell Facing E



Figure 44 Intersection of Auburn and Brownell Facing W



Figure 46: Auburn Road Facing W; S Side of Auburn

5.2 Streetscape

Auburn Road is two lanes with plenty of street parking on both sides. Sidewalks downtown have substantial room for pedestrians, with a brick pattern on one side of Auburn that continues to Jimmy John's Field. There is ample lighting along the sidewalks with traditional style lampposts spaced along both sides of Auburn Road. Some of the lampposts have trash cans and colorful city banners attached. There are also small bike racks placed throughout downtown on both sides of Auburn Road; however, there are no bike lanes.

The northern side of the street has street trees while the southern side has none until City Hall and the Police Department. The downtown has no other landscaping along Auburn Road besides these few trees. There are no benches along the street or places for pedestrians to rest or sit for a minute. Downtown has multiple crosswalks, one for every intersection. The crosswalks are made of brown brick contrasting the street's asphalt. However, the brick is faded, and crossing Auburn Road, especially at the western end, can be difficult during rush hour. Downtown also has two colorful murals that contribute to its placemaking and vibrancy. The eastern end of downtown is more pedestrian-friendly than the western end with a denser urban form and pedestrian amenities placed more frequently.



Figure 47: Intersection of Auburn and Iron Belle Trail Facing E



Figure 48: Auburn Road Facing E From N Side of Auburn



Figure 49: Mural on Fire Station Along Auburn Road



Figure 50: Mural on Side of Building Along Auburn



Figure 52: Auburn Road Facing E; N Side of Auburn



Figure 51: Crosswalk Condition Near Police Department Along Auburn

5.3 Bridge

The Clinton River runs through downtown Utica at the western end of Auburn Road, separating Jimmy John's Field with the rest of downtown. The bridge over the Clinton River poses many problems for pedestrians. There are sidewalks on both sides of the bridge, however, they are narrow and uninviting. Looking at Figure 53, the left sidewalk of the bridge, facing Jimmy John's Field, ends after crossing the river.

In Figures 54 and 55, a tree and lamppost are placed in the middle of the already narrow sidewalk at the beginning and end of the bridge, forcing pedestrians to maneuver around these obstacles. These obstacles also make it hard for pedestrians with mobility aids to cross the bridge. The crosswalk at the end of the bridge that reconnects the River Bend Trail is hard to cross due to traffic from the bridge despite being accompanied by yellow pedestrian crossing signs. This bridge acts as a barrier for pedestrians wanting to walk from Jimmy John's Field to downtown or vice versa.



Figure 53: Auburn Road Over Clinton River Facing W; N Side of Auburn



Figure 54: Auburn Road Bridge Over Clinton River Facing E; N Side of Auburn



Figure 55: Auburn Road Bridge Over Clinton River Facing W; N Side of Auburn

5.4 Open Space

Open space in downtown Utica consists of Memorial Park located along the Clinton River and next to the Utica Public Library. Memorial Park has multiple benches and tables with landscaping situated around a tall clock tower. It is a great gathering place for Utica residents to spend time and enjoy the Clinton River. The River Bend Trail is a part of the Iron Belle Trail, which spans the entire state and runs right through Memorial Park.



Figure 56: Memorial Park Clock Tower



Figure 58: Memorial Park Facing N



Figure 57: Memorial Park Facing S

5.5 Wayfinding Signs

Utica has multiple wayfinding signs throughout the downtown pointing people to public parking, municipal buildings, trails, and popular establishments. These wayfinding signs are not optimized for their full potential. Many signs have other poles or signs blocking them, making them hard to see from even a few feet away. The signs provide little information, just pointing people in the correct direction with small arrows. Some of the signs' destinations are mainly for people in vehicles which isn't conducive to the signs' small font and obstructed views. Effective wayfinding signs can do a lot in encouraging activity and visitors to downtown.



Figure 59: Public Parking Sign Along Auburn Facing E



Figure 60: Wayfinding Sign Along Auburn Facing W



Figure 61: Wayfinding Sign Along Cass Facing N

Chapter 6: Situational Analysis

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is a planning tool used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an organization, city, or project area. The analysis is used to evaluate, create goals for, and develop plans for a city.

A SWOT analysis provides an overview of the current situation and potential challenges that a city faces. By identifying internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, a SWOT analysis will help with the development of an effective plan. It is important to conduct a SWOT analysis while developing a plan for a city.

1. **Strengths:** The analysis will help identify the strengths of a city. This can include aspects such as infrastructure and assets, which can help with the future growth and development in a city.
2. **Weaknesses:** The analysis can also help to identify the weaknesses of a city. This can include limited infrastructure, lack of a certain demographic, and lacking transportation that should be addressed in the plan for the city.
3. **Opportunities:** The analysis can help identify external opportunities, such as new markets and varied housing options, that can lead to increased growth in the economy and development.
4. **Threats:** The analysis identifies external threats, such as economic instability and disasters, that can hinder the development of a city. It is important to identify threats so the plan can diminish their impacts.

Utica Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jimmy John’s Field • The Reptarium • Memorial Park and Iron Belle Trail connection • Historical/traditional form downtown • Steady and growing economy with competitive industries • Affordable rents and low vacancies • Highly educated population • Small town life and appeal • Variety of hospitality businesses downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing the younger demographic • Missing vegetation in the downtown area • Underutilized spaces throughout the downtown • Unsafe aspects for pedestrians • Not a great mix of restaurants, businesses, housing downtown • Lackluster urban design and aesthetics • Missing housing in the downtown • Doesn’t fully promote walkability • Missing connectivity between Jimmy John’s Field and downtown
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalization of the historic downtown area • Temporary uses of the historic assets like the library and park • Promotion of Utica's small-town charm to attract new residents and businesses • Promote Green Initiative for downtown area • Develop the streets to be more bike and walk-friendly • Improve Public transport to connect the residents to key destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of younger demographic specifically recent college graduates • Limited housing options • Aging buildings in the downtown district • Limited range of industries • Lack of community gathering spaces • Current zoning ordinance limits mixed-use development • Median age continuously increasing over the years

Table 5 SWOT Analysis for Utica

Chapter 7: Community Outreach

7.1 Community Visioning

To better understand Utica’s current needs and future vision for downtown, a community visioning meeting was held on Wednesday, February 7th, 2024, from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Utica Public Library. There were 32 residents and stakeholders in attendance to voice their opinions and ideas on Utica’s downtown.



Figure 62: Group Activity During Community Engagement Meeting

The goal of the community visioning meeting was to gather input on what residents and stakeholders see as a vibrant, enjoyable downtown. This visioning session helped summarize the existing conditions, gather input from residents and stakeholders, and identify the overall goals for the downtown.

As participants entered the library, they were given a short survey to fill out. The survey asked individuals questions regarding where they live, how often they visit downtown, if they feel safe walking or biking downtown and others. Data from the surveys was analyzed at a later date.

At the start of the meeting, a short presentation was given to introduce the practicum team to the community and provide them with background on the project and project area. Additionally, the practicum team showed examples of what can be done in the downtown area to help residents think of ideas for the next activity.

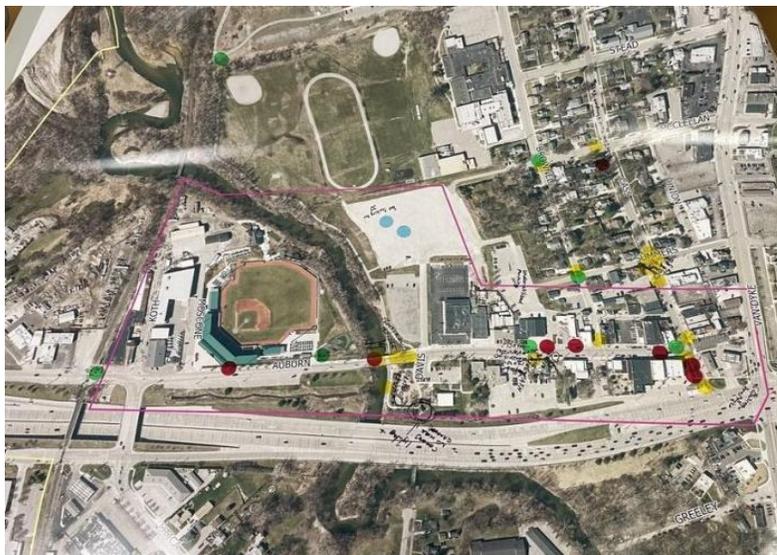


Figure 63: Dot Sticker Activity from Community Engagement

After the initial presentation, all attendees were split into two groups. The first exercise that the groups did was a dot sticker activity. A map of the project area was available, and participants placed a dot sticker at a location where they wanted something addressed. There were four different colors, each color representing something different. Red represented

improved streetscape, yellow represented pedestrian safety, blue represented pop-ups and tactical urbanism, and green represented signage and wayfinding.

While one group was doing the dot sticker activity, another group participated in a more open-ended activity. The second activity was to gather more information from residents, such as their thoughts and ideas about Utica's downtown. There were three questions presented on large notepads for the participants to answer. These questions included:

- What do you like about downtown Utica?
- What do you dislike about downtown Utica?
- What would you like to see in downtown Utica in the future?

Participants talked about their ideas for each question, and the responses were written down on large notepads. (Figure 64)

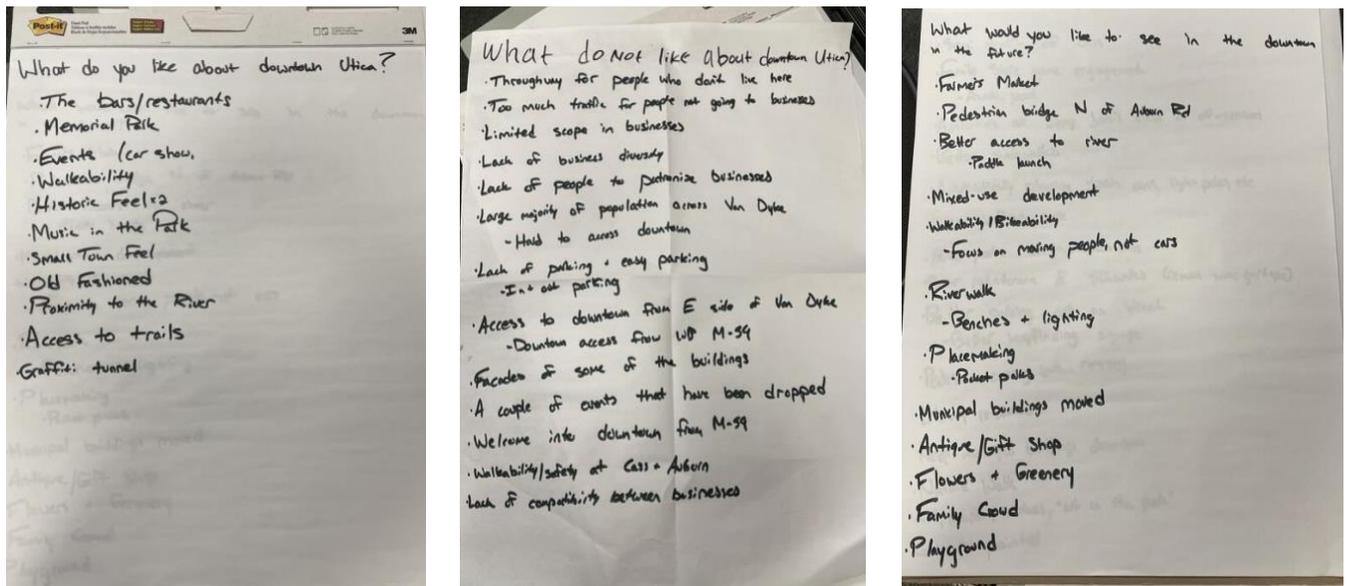


Figure 64: Responses from the Three Questions Asked During the Community Engagement

7.2 Online Survey

Additionally, an online survey was distributed for the residents and stakeholders who could not attend the community visioning meeting. The online survey contained the same questions the participants answered during the community visioning meeting. The survey was available for five days, with 41 additional respondents.

7.3 Results

Once the community visioning meeting was complete and the online survey was closed, the responses were all summarized and grouped into the highest priorities. Between the community visioning meeting and the online survey, there were 73 respondents. The full responses can be found in Appendix B.

The dot sticker activity received plenty of responses from the community that were helpful for the practicum team to analyze. The highest priority in the project area was improving pedestrian safety with nine votes. The next highest priority was improving the streetscape amenities, with seven stickers placed in the project area. The third highest priority was improving and adding the signage and wayfinding throughout downtown, with four stickers placed. The lowest priority was the addition of pop-ups and tactical urbanism, with just two stickers placed within the project area.

The surveys gave the practicum team great data to work with; some of the data is summarized below:

- 41% of respondents said that they visit downtown 1-2 days per week.
- Over half of respondents (51.05%) said, on average, they don't visit more than one business when they visit downtown.
- 53.42% of respondents said that temporary or seasonal events would make residents spend more time downtown. While 47.95% said stores and 32.88% said that additional restaurants and/or bars.
- Over half of respondents (57.53%) said that they walk when going to downtown Utica. Just under half (46.58%) said they drive a car and park, and 20.55% said that they bike.

For the question, “*What do you like about downtown Utica?*”, participants noted that the small-town feel was the most liked characteristic of downtown Utica. Utica has a classic small-town downtown, with old original brick buildings and a two-lane road spanning the downtown. After the small-town feel, the second most mentioned characteristic of what participants liked about downtown was a tie between the bars and restaurants and the old-fashioned, historical look.

What do you like about downtown Utica?	Count
Small-Town Feel	11
Bars/Restaurants	7
Old Fashioned/Historical	7
Memorial Park	4
Events	4

Table 6 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 1

For the second question, “*What do you dislike about downtown Utica?*”, the lack of business diversity was mentioned the most by Utica residents. The second most mentioned response was the traffic from people using Auburn Road as a cut-through to avoid M-59. Tied with the last response was also the lack of parking throughout downtown Utica.

What do you dislike about downtown Utica?	Count
Lack of business diversity	9
Traffic from people cutting through	6
Lack of parking	6
Disconnection between downtown and Jimmy John’s Field	3
Empty storefronts	3

Table 7 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 2

For the third and final question, “*What would you like to see in the downtown in the future?*”, the most common response was to see diverse businesses. Along with diverse businesses, the second most common response was to see a variety of restaurants. The third most popular response to this question was to have more events downtown. Pedestrian safety was another popular response that the Utica residents would like to see in the future.

What would you like to see in the downtown in the future?	Count
Diverse businesses	14
Variety of Restaurants	8
Events	7
Pedestrian Safety	5
Mixed-Use Development	4

Table 8 Top Five Most Recurring Answers for Question 3

Chapter 8: Recommendations

Utica's downtown district has significant potential to become a bustling and vibrant space. The recommendations are separated into four categories that will play a pivotal role in the downtown's overall transformation. These categories include bridge and connectivity enhancements, open space utilization, streetscape and wayfinding improvements, and cohesive downtown form. Below are the main goals for this report, along with examples of other cities that have implemented these goals. Additionally, funding assistance that Utica can apply for is provided.

8.1. Bridge and Connectivity Enhancements and Recommendations

One goal of this report is to provide a plan for better connecting Jimmy John's Field with the rest of the downtown. The Auburn Road bridge over the Clinton River, as it currently stands, poses a significant barrier for pedestrian access downtown. These recommendations are intended to outline steps that can be taken to remedy this barrier and close the gap in connectivity between Jimmy John's Field and downtown.

- **Traffic Calming and Pedestrian Safety**
 - **Implement pedestrian activated flashing lights at the crosswalk after the bridge to increase visibility and help pedestrians cross more easily.**

Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons should be installed at the crosswalk just after the bridge along Auburn Road. The flashing lights would make the crosswalk more visible to drivers from farther away and give them time to slow down for pedestrians. An example of these pedestrian activated flashing lights at the crosswalk can be seen in Figure 66. The figure shows the pedestrian activated flashing lights, planters, street trees, repainted crosswalk lines, a street mural for traffic calming, and proposed 15 mph speed limit.

Design Image 1: Crosswalk Near Iron Belle Trail and Clinton River

The before and after image below shows an improvement of enhanced visibility in the crosswalks and the addition of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at the intersections to enhance pedestrian safety. Additionally, there are street trees and planters, along with a new street mural and a proposed speed limit reduction to 15 mph.



Figure 66: Crosswalk Near Iron Belle Trail and Clinton River Before



Figure 65: Crosswalk Near Iron Belle Trail and Clinton River After

- **Reduce bridge speed limit to 10 or 15 mph.** Due to the sidewalks over the bridge being so narrow and right up against the roadway, reducing the speed limit would make pedestrians feel much safer. Lower speed limits also reduce overall average speeds. Lowering the speed people are struck by even just 5 mph can make a huge difference.¹
- **Consider turning the crosswalk to the east of the bridge into a raised crosswalk.** A raised crosswalk after the bridge would cause vehicles to slow down, making this crosswalk safer for pedestrians.
- **Widen the bridge sidewalks to allow for greater pedestrian accessibility.** Widening the sidewalks on the bridge would make it safer for all pedestrians. As it currently stands, the sidewalks are very narrow, and it makes it hard for two people standing side-by-side to even cross at the same time. Widened sidewalks provide benefits such as safety, mobility, and overall healthier communities.
- **Reposition the current light posts that impede the walkway closer to the curb or edge of the bridge to give pedestrians more space on the sidewalk.** Currently, the light posts over the bridge are in the middle of the sidewalk, making it hard for pedestrians to cross the bridge. Moving the light posts closer to either the curb, or the edge of the bridge, would allow more space for pedestrians crossing the bridge. An example of the light pole being removed can be seen in Figure 67, while an example of lights shining up from the ground to replace the light pole can be seen in Figure 69.

¹ Lowering the Speed Limit. Virginia Mercury. (2021). <https://virginiamercury.com/2021/03/11/lowering-the-limit-how-allowing-15-mph-zones-could-save-lives-in-virginia/>

Design Image 2: Light Pole Impeding Sidewalk Over Bridge

The before and after image below shows the light pole being removed on the bridge over the Clinton River.



Figure 68: Light Pole Impeding Sidewalk Over Bridge Before



Figure 67: Light Pole Impeding Sidewalk Over Bridge After

Design Image 3: Bridge Over Clinton River

The before and after image below shows a buffer between the sidewalk and roadway, as well as lights illuminating up from the ground to replace the light pole that was removed.



Figure 70: Bridge Over Clinton River Before



Figure 69: Bridge Over Clinton River After

- **Connecting Jimmy John’s Field to the Downtown**
 - **Add landscaping in the form of planters and extra lighting along the bridge to make it more aesthetically pleasing.** Adding planters and extra lighting can make crossing the bridge feel safer for pedestrians. Adding planters would make the bridge seem more aesthetically pleasing as well. Adding more light will improve the overall visibility at night and reduce the risk of accidents that occur on or near the bridge.²

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

- Short-Term, Low-Cost Goals
 - Implement pedestrian activated flashing lights at the crosswalk after the bridge to increase visibility and help pedestrians cross more easily.
 - Reduce bridge speed limit to 10 or 15 mph.
 - Add landscaping in the form of planters and extra lighting along the bridge to make it more aesthetically pleasing.
- Long-Term Goals
 - Consider turning the crosswalk to the east of the bridge into a raised crosswalk.
 - Widen the bridge sidewalks to allow for greater pedestrian accessibility.
 - Reposition current light posts that impede the walkway closer to the curb or edge of the bridge to give pedestrians more space on the sidewalk.

Funding Sources

1. **MDOT Local Bridge Program:** The Local Bridge Program uses federal and state funds to help local municipalities replace or rehabilitate their bridges. Applications are sent out annually which are then evaluated and selected with a rating system by program staff and Regional Bridge Councils.
2. **Safe Street and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program:** The Safe Streets and Roads for All program provides grants for regional and local infrastructure initiatives to improve safety on roadways. Planning and demonstration grants and implementation grants are available for municipalities that need help creating an action plan and ones that need help with implementing an already existing plan.
3. **Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program:** The Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods grant program provides funding and support for projects aimed at removing barriers to community activity such as mobility, access, or economic development. There are three grant types available for this program: Capital Construction, Community Planning, and Regional Partnerships Challenge.

² Bridge Lighting. LED Lucky. (2023). <https://ledlucky.net/applications/bridge-lighting/#:~:text=LED%20lights%20provide%20brighter%20and,for%20both%20drivers%20and%20pedestrians>

8.2 Open Space Utilization Recommendations

Utica faces challenges with underutilized parcels and large parking lots that sit empty most of the time. These recommendations help achieve an overarching goal of attracting more visitors and residents downtown, while encouraging walkability by enhancing the open spaces. The recommendations for residents and visitors alike to engage with their community and spend time downtown.

- **Farmer's Market**

- **Consider adding a farmer's market on the weekends.** Community engagement results show that residents would like to see a farmer's market to be held in town. The city should consider adding a farmer's market to either parking lots or in Memorial Park on the weekends. Farmer's markets provide a venue for communities to socialize, revitalize downtown districts, and help educate residents to make healthier food choices.³ An example of a Farmer's Market in nearby downtown Rochester can be viewed in Figure 71.



Figure 71: Farmer's Market in Rochester <https://www.michiganfarmfun.com/place.asp?ait=av&aid=221>

- **Join the Michigan Farmer's Market Association (MIFMA).** The MIFMA's Community Driven Marketplaces program would assist with the exchange between consumers and producers of local food and farm products. Joining this program would allow the city to establish and operate a farmer's market, which would meet the community's expressed interest. MIFMA has offered several membership benefits, such as technical assistance, access to grant opportunities, training, and resources.

³ Farmers Markets and its Benefits. Purdue. (2017). https://www.purdue.edu/hla/sites/hortbusiness/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2017/09/7.VCH_FarmersMarkets-and-Their-Benefits.pdf

- **Summer Festivals**
 - **Expand and build upon festivals the city already hosts, such as Old Mills Arts and Antiques Festival, Food Truck Rally, and the Weekend Unwind Summer Music.** The central location of Utica within Macomb County makes it a prime location to host summer festivals. This would be a great way to showcase the city and attract visitors to downtown Utica. Overall, festivals stimulate local economies, help local businesses showcase themselves, foster social connections, and enrich the lives of those who attend.⁴

- **Public Space Enhancements**
 - **Revitalize Memorial Park with landscaping, lighting, art installations, restrooms, and modern amenities.** Currently, Utica has Memorial Park, which is a great asset to the community, but the existing amenities could be built upon even more. Including restrooms in this area gives Iron Belle Trail users a reason to take a rest and potentially explore the rest of downtown.
 - **Build an outdoor plaza as a public gathering space.** This outdoor plaza could include a stage, seating areas, public art, water features, adequate lighting, and shade for events and performances.
 - **Convert the alley north of Auburn Road into a pedestrian-friendly zone.** The alley is currently used for parking only. It could be improved by repaving it, adding greenery, seating areas, decorative lighting, and encouraging businesses attached to it to activate the space with outdoor seating, as the current alleyway is underutilized and is a great location for creating outdoor space downtown. An example of a successful conversion of an underutilized alley is Bates Alley in Kalamazoo. This conversion was a part of the Public Spaces Community Places Program and can be viewed in Figures 72 and 73.



Figure 72: MLive. 2017. Bates Alley Before and After Pictures. <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2017/10/make-over-of-kalamazoos-bates.html>

⁴ The Vital Role of Fairs and Festivals in Building Strong Communities. Daily Press. (2023.) <https://www.dailypress.net/news/business-news/2023/11/column-the-vital-role-of-fairs-and-festivals-in-building-strong-communities/#:~:text=Conclusion%20%E2%80%93%20Fairs%20and%20festivals%20embody,lives%20of%20those%20who%20attend.>



Figure 73: Twitter. 2018. Bates Alley in Kalamazoo. <https://twitter.com/Patronicity/status/1072900399613526017>

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

- Short-Term, Low-Cost Goals
 - Consider adding a farmer’s market on the weekends.
 - Join the Michigan Farmer’s Market Association (MIFMA).
 - Build upon current festivals throughout the year.
- Long-Term Goals
 - Enhancing Memorial Park by revitalizing the landscaping, installing decorative lighting, and introducing interactive elements like public art or water features, improving accessibility, and providing amenities like restrooms.
 - Build an outdoor plaza as a public gathering space.
 - Convert the alley north of Auburn Road into a pedestrian-friendly zone by repaving it, adding greenery, seating areas, decorative lighting, and encouraging businesses attached to it to activate the space with outdoor seating.

Funding Sources

1. Michigan Farmer’s Market Association: A partnership with the Michigan Farmer’s Market Association would allow the city to get incentives and grant opportunities through the Farmer’s Market Promotion Program. The city would be granted support and incentives to host and promote the farmer’s market to help connect the city with farmers from across the state.
2. Public Spaces Community Places Program: The Public Spaces Community Places Program is a public placemaking initiative created by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). It is designed to use donation-based crowdfunding to support the revitalization or creation of public spaces. MEDC can offer a match for up to \$50,000.

8.3 Streetscape and Wayfinding Improvements

A large goal of this report is to improve the overall streetscape and wayfinding of downtown Utica. The current streetscape of downtown is lacking in certain areas and is not the safest it can be for pedestrians. Additionally, wayfinding throughout downtown is located in suboptimal locations. The recommendations and funding sources are intended to outline steps that can be taken to improve the streetscape and wayfinding in downtown Utica. The Village of Cassopolis, a village in southwest Michigan, took many steps to improve their downtown which is similar to what is being proposed for downtown Utica.

- **Sidewalk Improvements**
 - **Repave sidewalks downtown or consider putting in pavers to make it safer and more aesthetically pleasing.** Currently, a few sidewalks have a brick pattern, however, this pattern does not extend all throughout the downtown. Sidewalks have a desired minimum width of 6 feet, but sidewalk designs should go beyond the bare minimum in both width and amenities.⁵ The Village of Cassopolis replaced their original sidewalks with pavers from their old, cracked sidewalk. The before and after pictures of this taking place can be seen in Figure 74.
 - **Create visible and safe crosswalks through downtown Utica.** The current crosswalks should be repainted or painted a different color to make them stand out for drivers and make them more visible. High-visibility crosswalks use patterns that are easily visible to drivers and pedestrians from farther away.⁶ Additionally, the installation of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB’s) should be implemented to safely allow pedestrians to cross the street. High-visibility

⁵ Urban Street Design Guide. NACTO. (2024). <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/street-design-elements/sidewalks/>

⁶ Crosswalk Visibility Enhancements. FHWA. (2018). <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures/crosswalk-visibility-enhancements>

crosswalks can reduce pedestrian injuries up to 40%.⁷ An example of this in Utica can be viewed in Figure 75.



Figure 74: Village of Cassopolis, 2021. Downtown Streetscape. <https://imaginecass.com/transformations/>

⁷ Crosswalk Visibility Enhancements. FHWA. (2018). <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/proven-safety-countermeasures/crosswalk-visibility-enhancements>

Design Image 4: Auburn Road and Brownell Street

The before and after image below shows an improvement of enhanced visibility in the crosswalks and the addition of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at the intersections to enhance pedestrian safety. It also shows the addition of street trees and a street mural.



Figure 76: Auburn Road and Brownell Street Before



Figure 75: Auburn Road and Brownell Street After

Traffic Calming Measures

- **Consider a raised midblock crossing between Brownell Street and Cass Avenue on Auburn Road.** A raised midblock crossing would make crossing Auburn Road downtown safer for pedestrians. Raised crosswalks can act as a traffic-calming measure that allows pedestrians to cross at grade with the sidewalk.⁸ An example of a raised midblock crossing can be viewed in Figure 77. Additionally, the raised midblock crossing would make drivers slow down as they cross over it. Because of this, it could deter some of the cut-through traffic from Auburn Road back on to Hall Road.
- **Implement bump outs at crosswalks and intersections to make crosswalks safer for pedestrians.** Bump outs make it safer for pedestrians to cross the street as it increases their line of sight for oncoming traffic. The narrowing at a crosswalk would cause drivers to slow down. Bump outs are intended to increase safety, calm motorized traffic, and create additional space for pedestrians crossing the street.⁹ An example of this can be seen in Figure 78. Additionally, an example of this being utilized in the Village of Cassopolis can be found in Figure 74.



Figure 78: St. John's. 2023. Curb Extensions.
<https://www.stjohns.ca/en/streets-parking/curb-extensions.aspx>



Figure 77: Dan Burden. N.d. Raised Crosswalk.
<https://azdot.gov/business/transportation-systems-management-and-operations/operational-and-traffic-safety/az-step-5>

⁸ Raised Crosswalk. FHWA. (2018) https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/step/docs/techSheet_RaisedCW2018.pdf

⁹ Curb Extensions. Minneapolis Street Design Guide. (2023). <https://sdg.minneapolismn.gov/design-guidance/intersections/pedestrian-crossings/curb-extensions#:~:text=Introduction-.Curb%20extensions%2C%20also%20known%20as%20bump%20outs%2C%20are%20an%20extension,the%20boulevard%20and%20furnishing%20zone>

- **Signage and Wayfinding Improvements**

- **Include a gateway sign at Cass Avenue turning off Hall Road, downtown’s southern entrance.** A gateway sign can make downtown Utica look more inviting to visitors. Also, it could draw people downtown that otherwise may not know that it is right off Hall Road. Gateway signs give a sense of place by using visual branding of the place or city.¹⁰ An example of a gateway sign in Cassopolis can be seen in Figure 79.
- **Place wayfinding signage in a better, more visible location.** Wayfinding downtown is located in suboptimal locations, blocked by trees or light posts. Placing wayfinding signage in a visible location for all would be beneficial for everyone. This would help visitors understand where all the city’s assets are located, and an example of high-quality wayfinding signage can be viewed in Figure 80. Wayfinding signage should be placed near key destinations with high pedestrian volumes and clear of any obstructions.¹¹
- **Adequate parking signage should be installed throughout the downtown.** There is plenty of street parking as well as public parking lots throughout downtown. However, the public parking lots are behind downtown buildings with small directional signs. Promoting the underused parking lots with more adequate signage could solve the issue of residents and visitors saying that downtown Utica does not have enough parking.



Figure 79: Taylor Popielarz. 2018. Vision for Downtown Cassopolis Grows with ‘Imagine Cass’. <https://www.abc57.com/news/vision-for-downtown-cassopolis-grows-with-imagine-cass>



Figure 80: Littleton, Colorado. 2024. Downtown Wayfinding Program. <https://www.littletonco.gov/Business/Small-Business-Programs/Downtown-Wayfinding-Program>

¹⁰ Good Signage Helps to Attract Tourists to Your Destination. Wayfound. (2015). <https://wayfound.com.au/good-signage-helps-to-attract-tourists-to-your-destination/>

¹¹ Wayfinding. Global Designing Cities Initiative. (2024). <https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/designing-streets-people/designing-for-pedestrians/wayfinding/>

Public Art and Murals

- **Consider displaying different murals and sculptures in Memorial Park or along the Iron Belle Trail near downtown by local artists throughout the year.** The city should collaborate with local artists in the Macomb County area to support those artists while also beautifying the downtown. An example of murals and sculptures along the Iron Belle Trail can be seen in Figure 83.
- **Build upon the already existing murals on the side of buildings downtown.** The already existing murals on the sides of buildings brighten up the downtown. There are still some blank sides of buildings that could be brightened up with more murals. The murals will bring much value to Utica as cities gain cultural, social, and economic value through including public art.¹² The Village of Cassopolis took an old building that displayed advertisements on the side and turned it into a beautiful mural that says, “Welcome to Cassopolis”, as can be seen in Figure 82.
- **Hire professionals to paint murals in the tunnel along the Iron Belle Trail.** These murals can make the tunnel feel more welcoming for all people and help brighten up a rather dark place.
- **Consider adding street murals at intersections.** Including street murals at intersections would help beautify the overall area. Along with beautification, city streets with asphalt art are considerably safer for pedestrians after incorporating art into the roadway designs.¹³ The City of Saginaw installed street murals at three intersections. Overall, these street murals helped beautify the area, improved street safety and engaged the community.¹⁴ An example of these street murals can be seen in Figure 81.

¹² Why Public Art Matters. Americans for the Arts. (2018).

https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/PublicArtNetwork_GreenPaper.pdf

¹³ Asphalt Art Initiative. Bloomberg Philanthropists. (2024). <https://asphaltart.bloomberg.org/>

¹⁴ Saginaw, MI, Beautifying a Major Downtown Corridor. Bloomberg Philanthropists. (2020).

<https://asphaltart.bloomberg.org/projects/saginaw-michigan-usa-beautifying-a-major-downtown-corridor/>



Figure 82: Village of Cassopolis. 2021. Mural at Main Intersection. <https://imaginecass.com/transformations/>



Figure 81: Bloomberg Philanthropists. 2020. Mural in Old Town Saginaw. <https://asphaltart.bloomberg.org/projects/saginaw-michigan-usa-beautifying-a-major-downtown-corridor/>

Design Image 5: Iron Belle Trail Near Clinton River

The before and after image below shows the implementation of murals and sculptures from local artists. Additionally, it shows street trees lining the trail near downtown.



Figure 84: Iron Belle Trail Near Clinton River Before



Figure 83: Iron Belle Trail Near Clinton River After

- **Street Trees and Plants**

- **Plant street trees on both sides of the street along Auburn Road.** To match the street trees planted on the north side of Auburn Road, the city should plant trees on the south side of Auburn Road too. Street trees have been proven to provide significant benefits to residents including improved air quality, temperature moderation, traffic noise depletion, high property values, traffic calming, erosion control, and improved safety through reduction of solar glare.¹⁵ Ironwood or American Hophornbeam are suitable street trees for Auburn Road. These tree species are suitable for street planting, native to the Midwest, climate adaptable, and utility friendly.¹⁶ They are also known for being tough and resilient when it comes to disease and insects. European hornbeam is another option very similar to the Ironwood and American Hornbeam that requires minimal pruning, however it is not native to the region. These trees are versatile in size too, ranging from 15 to 40 feet depending on size variety. An example of the American Hophornbeam being used as a street tree can be seen below in Figure 85.
- **Install planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants to brighten up the downtown area.** A simple way to improve the overall aesthetics of the downtown area could be placing planters with flowers or vegetation throughout Auburn Road.
- **Consider a buffer between the road and sidewalk by using native plants to make pedestrians feel safer.** Buffers between the road and sidewalk help pedestrians feel safer while walking downtown. It provides a natural space between the pedestrians and the vehicles. It is also a simple way to include greenery downtown. The narrow space between the sidewalk and street is ripe for downtown greening. Ideas of what could be placed in this strip include grass, mulch, and native plants to Michigan.¹⁷ An example of a buffer between the road and sidewalk can be seen in Figure 86 below.



Figure 85: Michigan State University Extension. 2011. Hophornbeam growing along street in Michigan.

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/native_plants_for_michigan_landscapes_part_1_trees

¹⁵ Benefits of Street Trees Besides the Obvious. Town of Stow, Massachusetts. (2010). https://www.stow-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif11851/f/uploads/benefits_of_street_trees_besides_the_obvious1.pdf#:~:text=Street%20trees%20are%20proven%20to,the%20reduction%20of%20solar%20glare.

¹⁶ Native Plants for Michigan Landscapes. Michigan State Extension. (2011).

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/native_plants_for_michigan_landscapes_part_1_trees

¹⁷ Hellstrip Plantings: Creating Habitat in the Space Between the Sidewalk and the Curb. Wild Seed Project. (2023). <https://wildseedproject.net/2018/04/hellstrip-plantings-creating-habitat-space-sidewalk-curb/#:~:text=One%20area%20ripe%20for%20community,planted%20with%20tough%20native%20plants.>

Design Image 6: Auburn Road Crosswalk in front of Fire Station

The before and after image below shows an improvement of enhanced visibility in the crosswalks and the addition of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at the intersections to enhance pedestrian safety. Additionally, it depicts the addition of street trees as well as a buffer between the road and sidewalk with native plants to Michigan.



Figure 87: Auburn Road Crosswalk in front of Fire Station Before



Figure 86: Auburn Road Crosswalk in front of Fire Station After

- **Street Furniture**

- **Install benches for pedestrians.** Including benches downtown is beneficial for pedestrians who may need to sit down and rest, as well as for residents who would like to sit and enjoy being downtown. An example of benches can be viewed in Figure 89.
- **Provide trash and recycling bins to limit the amount of trash that accumulates downtown.** To prevent trash from accumulating downtown, the city should provide trash and recycling bins as shown in Figure 88. The current trash bins are small and might not be able to hold much at once. Additionally, there are no recycling bins located throughout downtown. Providing trash and recycling bins downtown will help with keeping the downtown clean and look more inviting.



Figure 89: Michigan Municipal League. 2012. Relaxing on a bench in downtown Grand Rapids.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/michigancommunities/7007187246/>



Figure 88: Kevin Zolkiewicz. 2011. Solar trash compactor and recycling in Chicago.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/zolk/5619387192>

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

- **Short-Term, Low-Cost Goals**
 - Create visible and safe crosswalks throughout downtown Utica.
 - Place wayfinding signage in a better, more visible location.
 - Install adequate parking signage throughout downtown for the public parking lots.
 - Consider displaying different murals or sculptures in Memorial Park or along the Iron Belle Trail near downtown by local artists throughout the year.
 - Build upon the already existing murals in the tunnel along the Iron Belle Trail.
 - Consider adding street murals at intersections.
 - Plant street trees on both sides of the street along Auburn Road.
 - Include planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants to brighten up downtown.

- Include benches for pedestrians.
- Provide trash and recycling bins to limit the amount of trash that accumulates downtown.
- Long-Term Goals
 - Repave the sidewalks downtown or consider putting in pavers in order to make it safer and more aesthetically pleasing.
 - Consider a raised midblock crossing between Brownell Street and Cass Avenue.
 - Implement bump outs at crosswalks and intersections to make crosswalks safer for pedestrians.
 - Include a gateway sign at Cass Avenue turning off Hall Road, downtown's southern entrance.
 - Consider a buffer between the road and sidewalk by using native plants to make pedestrians feel safer.

Funding Sources

1. [Safe Streets and Roads for All \(SS4A\) Grant Program](#): This program funds initiatives through grants to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries. There is over \$3 billion still available for future funding rounds. This grant can assist with sidewalk improvements and traffic calming measurements.
2. [Redevelopment Ready Communities \(RRC\) Technical Assistance Match Funding](#): The city should go through the [process](#) to become a Redevelopment Ready Community in order to apply for this grant. The RRC Technical Assistance Match Funding is a resource that is available to eligible communities actively engaged in Redevelopment Ready Communities. The match funding can cover up to 75% of a project's cost with the remaining amount coming directly from the community or its partners. This grant can be used to assist with signage and wayfinding improvements.
3. [Michigan Arts and Culture Council Grants](#): This grant assists communities to ensure that every citizen and community in Michigan can enjoy the civic, economic, and educational benefits of arts and culture. This grant can be used to help with public art and murals throughout downtown.
4. [National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant](#): This grant is a creative placemaking grants program. The program supports activities that help integrate arts, culture, and design that help strengthen communities. This grant can be used to help implement public arts and murals throughout downtown.
5. [DTE Energy Foundation Tree Planting Grant](#): This grant is available to any location within Michigan that is in the DTE service area. The objective of this grant is to increase the number of properly planted, established and maintained trees within the service territory of DTE Energy. Projects that fit the criteria for this grant include tree planting projects such as right-of-way, city streets and neighborhood revitalization projects. This grant can assist with planting street trees throughout downtown.
6. [ReLeaf Michigan Program](#): This grant allows trees to be planted on public property or property available to the public. The grant will assist with up to 50% of the funding for

trees and delivery up to \$2,000. This grant can help with the planting of street trees throughout downtown.

7. [Asphalt Art Initiatives Grant Program](#): This grant assists municipalities and cities with projects that demonstrate the impact of asphalt art projects while encouraging cities to develop their own processes for implementing these low-cost activations effectively.

8.4 Downtown Form Recommendations

The current downtown form in Utica offers a variety of businesses with a range of architectural styles. Two main goals are hoped to be achieved with the downtown form recommendations. The first being attracting people, specifically young professionals, into Utica's downtown. The recommendations to accomplish this goal are centered around the introduction of mixed-use development properties along with potential businesses that would thrive in the downtown district. The second goal is to create a uniformed, neat downtown. Currently, on Auburn Road, there are traditional two-story brick storefronts such as the Host Restaurant, the AKD Dance Studio, and the Vino and Vibes Wine Bar. As you continue west along Auburn Road towards Jimmy John's Field, the architectural style begins to shift to single-story businesses with vinyl siding façades. Implementing design guidelines and standards will aid in the creation of a uniform downtown over time.

- **Mixed-Use Development**
 - **Adjust the current zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development along Auburn Road.** The current zoning ordinance does not fully encourage mixed-use development in the downtown area along Auburn Road. Adjusting the zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development could bring in these developments to downtown Utica. Mixed-use developments would also increase the housing options by creating multi-purpose structures along Auburn Road. Mixed-use development spurs revitalization and provides more housing opportunities and choices.¹⁸ An example of a mixed-use development can be seen in Figures 90 and 91. This development is being constructed in Hudsonville, Michigan.
 - **Include different services downtown such as a gym or grocery store.** Currently, there are a lack of grocery stores within the city boundaries. Placing a grocery store, or market, downtown would fulfill the need for these businesses as well as help attract more residents downtown. Additionally, with the goal of attracting a younger demographic, placing a gym in the downtown area could be a strategy to accomplish this. Having a gym downtown, in a multi-purpose structure, encourages a healthier lifestyle by offering convenience, as there is no need to commute to a gym. Including these facilities in the downtown area is one way to increase the amount of foot traffic downtown.

¹⁸ What are the Benefits of Mixed-Use Development?. Metropolitan Area Planning Council. (2010). <https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/what-are-the-benefits-of-mixed-use-development/>



Figure 91: MLive 2023. Hudsonville Flats. <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2023/10/whats-being-built-along-chicago-drive-itll-have-2-new-restaurants.html>



Figure 90: Crains Grand Rapids. 2023. Rendering of Hudsonville Flats. <https://www.craingsgrandrapids.com/news/real-estate/state-grants-1-2m-to-two-west-michigan-affordable-housing-projects/>

- **Design Guidelines and Standards**
 - **Implement height and density regulations.** By implementing these regulations, it will encourage multistory buildings throughout downtown. This would help match the main downtown area that has the older, historic buildings. Adjusting the existing restrictions to allow structures of 5+ stories to be in the downtown district could help with this.
 - **Establish design standards that promote cohesive aesthetics.** Establishing design standards throughout downtown will ensure that new buildings complement the already existing structures.
 - **Enforce or establish new setback requirements for future development.** Pedestrian safety is at the forefront of the city’s goals, and ensuring adequate sidewalk space would maintain a pedestrian friendly atmosphere. The sidewalk should ensure that pedestrians have a safe and adequate place to walk and should be 8-10 feet wide in downtown areas.¹⁹
- **Potential Uses for Vacant Lots if Municipal Buildings are Relocated**
 - **Consider a mixed-use development with a grocery store and apartments in the location of the current City Hall and Police Department.** If the municipal buildings are relocated to a different location, the current site of City Hall and the Police Department would be the ideal location for a 4-5 story multi-use structure. A good use in this location could be a grocery store on the ground floor with a few stories of apartments above the grocery store. This would be a way to address the lack of housing downtown and the need for a grocery store in a centralized area downtown.
 - **Encourage reuse of the Fire Station, if moved, for a bar or restaurant.** The fire station and site would be a great location for a trendy bar or restaurant with outdoor seating. Having a bar or restaurant in this location would help with bridging the gap between Jimmy John’s Field and the rest of the downtown. It would also serve as another business that could draw more people downtown. An example of this can be seen in Figure 92.

¹⁹ Urban Street Design Guide. NACTO. (2024). <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/street-design-elements/sidewalks/>

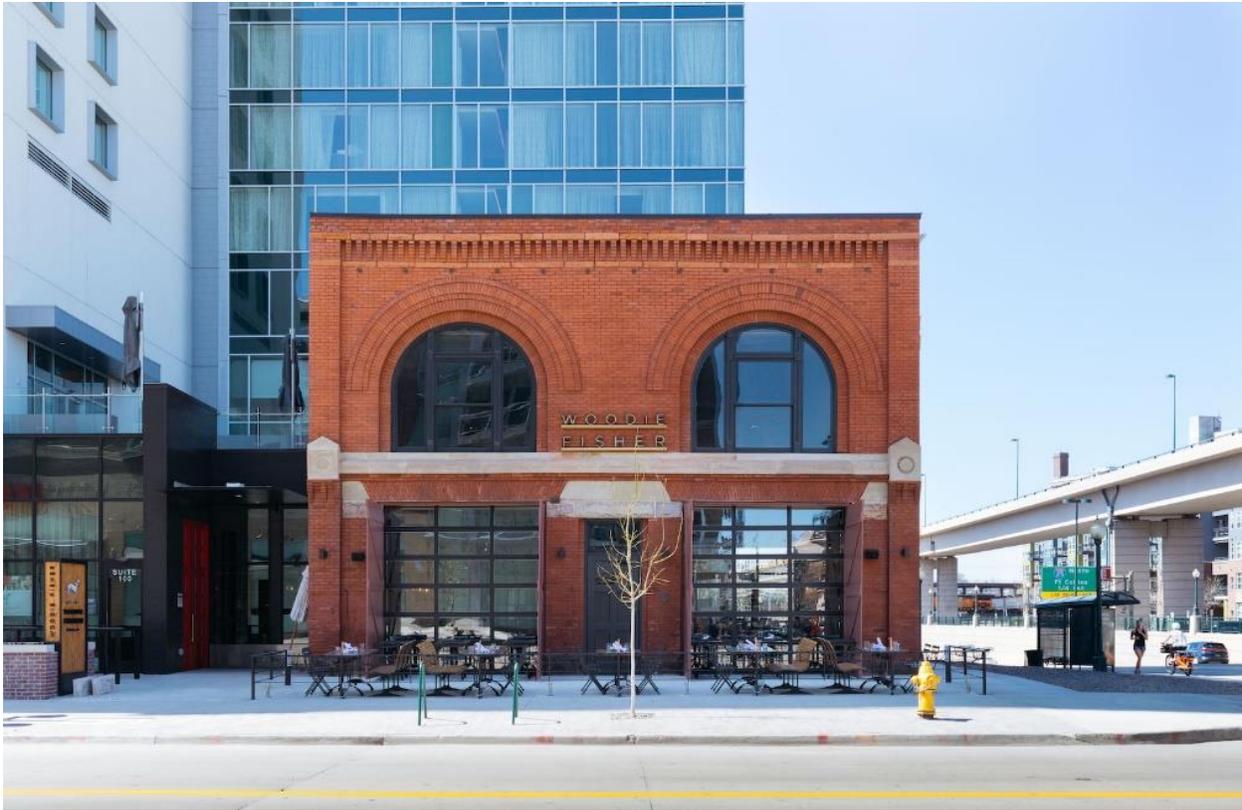


Figure 92: 5820. 2019. Denver Fire Station Turned into a Bar. <https://www.5280.com/woodie-fisher-kitchen-bar-brings-denvers-oldest-fire-station-back-to-life/>

- **Downtown Development Authority (DDA)**
 - **Establish a Downtown Development Authority (DDA).** Establishing a DDA would allow for focused attention on the needs and opportunities of the downtown area in Utica. A DDA will provide a clear point of contact for coordinating businesses, property owners, government agencies, and other stakeholders. They can also help establish a long-term vision and strategic plan, ensuring that the initiatives align with the overall goals of the downtown area. Having a DDA will also allow access to a wider range of funding options like grants and Tax Increment Financing.

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

- **Short-Term, Low-Cost Goals**
 - Adjust the current zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development along Auburn Road.
 - Implement height and density regulations.
 - Establish design standards that promote cohesive aesthetics.
 - Enforce or establish new setback requirements for future development.
 - Establish a Downtown Development Authority (DDA).

- Long-Term Goals
 - Include different services downtown such as a gym or grocery store.
 - Consider a mixed-use development with a grocery store and apartments in the location of the current City Hall and Police Department.
 - Encourage the reuse of the old Fire Station for a bar or restaurant.

Funding Sources

1. [Michigan Community Revitalization Program](#): This program is an incentive program to promote private investment in Michigan communities. It is administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). This tool provides Michigan communities with access to real estate development gap financing for innovative and impactful placemaking, historical redevelopment and job growth in targeted sectors.
2. [Redevelopment Ready Communities \(RRC\)](#): If Utica were to become a Redevelopment Ready Community, it is a state-wide certification program that supports communities to become development ready and competitive in today's economy. It encourages communities to adopt innovative redevelopment strategies and efficient processes. Through this program, local municipalities receive assistance in establishing a solid foundation for development to occur in their communities. Once a community has completed the steps and receives acceptance into RRC, that community will have access to funds and grant opportunities exclusive to this program.
3. [Main Street America](#): Becoming a Main Street Community member should be a long-term goal for the city, as there are several requirements before a city can join. However, it would be worth looking into Main Street America in the future as this is another program offering exclusive funding for economic development.

8.5 Cost and Duration Table

	Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
Low-Cost	<p>9.1.1.a. Implement pedestrian activated flashing lights at the bridge crosswalk</p> <p>9.1.1.b. Reduce speed limit on bridge</p> <p>9.2.1.b. Consider adding a weekend farmer’s market</p> <p>9.2.1.b. Join the Michigan Farmer’s Market Association</p> <p>9.2.2.a. Build upon existing festivals</p> <p>9.3.1.b. Create visible and safe crosswalks throughout downtown</p> <p>9.3.3.a. Place wayfinding signage in a better, more visible location</p> <p>9.3.3.c. Install adequate parking signage throughout downtown for the public parking lots</p> <p>9.3.4.b. Build upon the already existing murals on the side of buildings downtown</p> <p>9.3.5.a. Plant street trees on both sides of the street along Auburn Road</p> <p>9.3.5.b. Include planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants to brighten up the downtown area</p> <p>9.4.2.c. Enforce or establish new setback requirements for future development</p>	<p>9.2.3.c. Convert the alley north of Auburn Road to a pedestrian friendly zone</p> <p>9.3.4.a. Consider displaying different murals or sculptures in Memorial Park or along the Iron Belle Trail near downtown by local artists throughout the year</p> <p>9.3.5.b. Include planters throughout downtown along Auburn Road that have flowers or other plants to brighten up the downtown area</p> <p>9.3.6.b. Provide trash and recycling bins to limit the amount of trash that accumulates downtown</p> <p>9.4.4.a. Establish a Downtown Development Authority (DDA)</p>	<p>9.4.1.a. Adjust the current zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development along Auburn Road</p> <p>9.4.2.a. Implement height and density regulations</p> <p>9.4.2.b. Establish design standards that promote cohesive aesthetics</p> <p>9.4.1.b. Include different services downtown such as a gym or grocery store</p>

<p>Mid-Cost</p>	<p>9.1.2.a. Add landscaping in the form of planters and extra lighting</p>	<p>9.1.1.c. Consider turning the crosswalk into a raised crosswalk 9.3.4.c. Consider having professionals paint murals in the tunnel along the Iron Belle Trail 9.3.6.a. Install benches for pedestrians 9.3.2.a. Consider a raised midblock crossing between Brownell Street and Cass Avenue on Auburn Road 9.3.2.b. Implement bump outs at crosswalks and intersections to make crosswalks safer for pedestrians</p>	<p>9.3.5.c. Consider a buffer between the road and sidewalk by using native plants to make pedestrians feel safer</p>
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<p>High-Cost</p>		<p>9.3.1.a. Repave sidewalks downtown or consider putting in pavers to make it safer and more aesthetically pleasing</p>	<p>9.1.1.d. Widen the bridge sidewalks 9.1.1.e. Reposition current light posts closer to the curb 9.2.3.a. Enhance Memorial Park with interactive elements 9.2.3.b. Build an outdoor plaza for a public gathering space 9.3.3.a. Include a gateway sign at Cass Avenue turning off Hall Road, downtown’s southern entrance 9.4.3.a. Consider a mixed-use development with a grocery store and apartments in the location of the current City Hall and Police Department 9.4.3.b. Encourage reuse of the older Fire Station for a bar or restaurant</p>
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Table 9: Cost and Duration Table

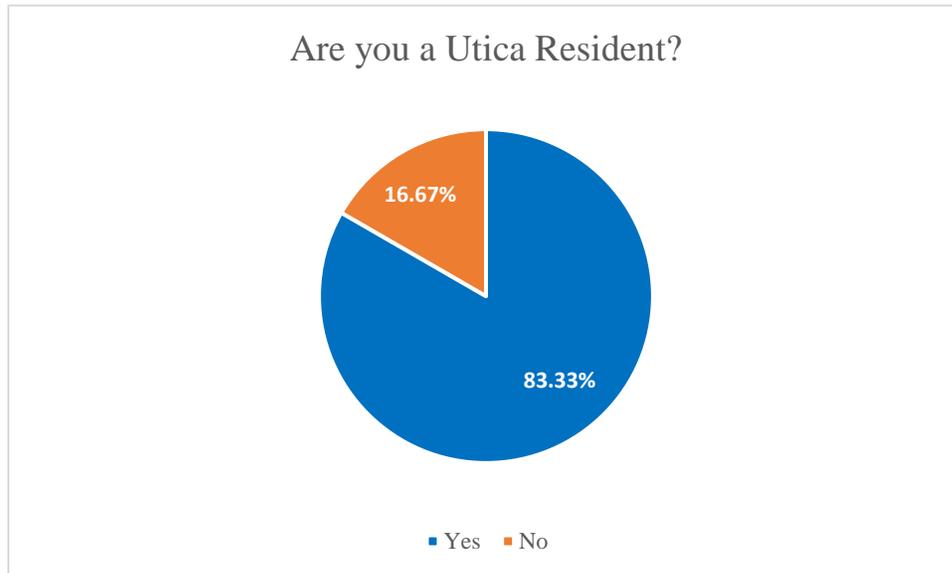
Appendix

Appendix A: Establishments

Restaurants/Bars
Host
Locker Room Saloon
Northern Grind Coffee
Mr. Miguel's (Opening Soon)
Steampunk Tap Room
The Shamrock Pub
Vinnie's Italian Eatery
Vino and Vibes
Office Spaces
A-Line Staffing Solution
BRS Property Management
Cardamone Insurance Agency
Epique Realty
Modi
Momentum
Qolity Financial
State Farm
Temrowski Law Office
Weathertech Consulting Group
Retail Stores
Garage Band Music
Jawbreakers Cardz n' Candy
Kids Gotta Play
Tradewinds Spas
Services
ATD Dance Studio
Deanna's Men's Styling Shop
Flaunt Salon
Royal Beard
Sunoco Gas Station
The3 Studio
USA Tire
Utica Pump
Recreation/Entertainment
Jimmy John's Field
Social Club
Polish Century Club of Utica
Municipal
Utica City Hall
Utica Fire Department
Utica Police Department
Utica Public Library

Appendix B: Community Engagement

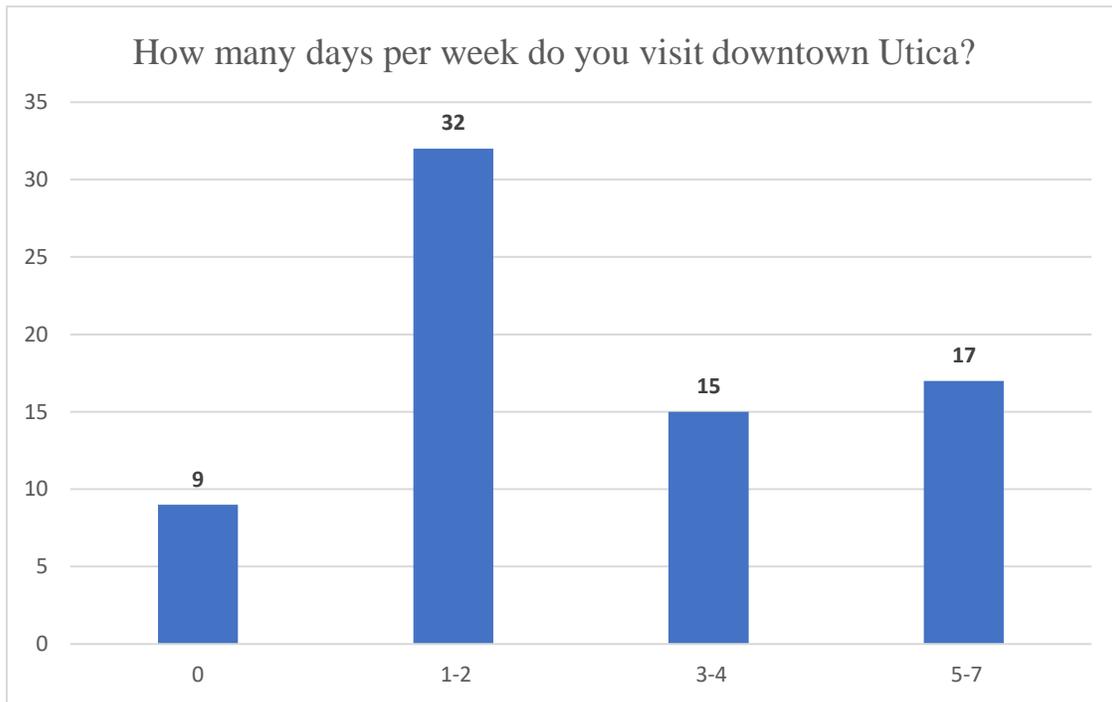
1. *Are you a Utica Resident?*



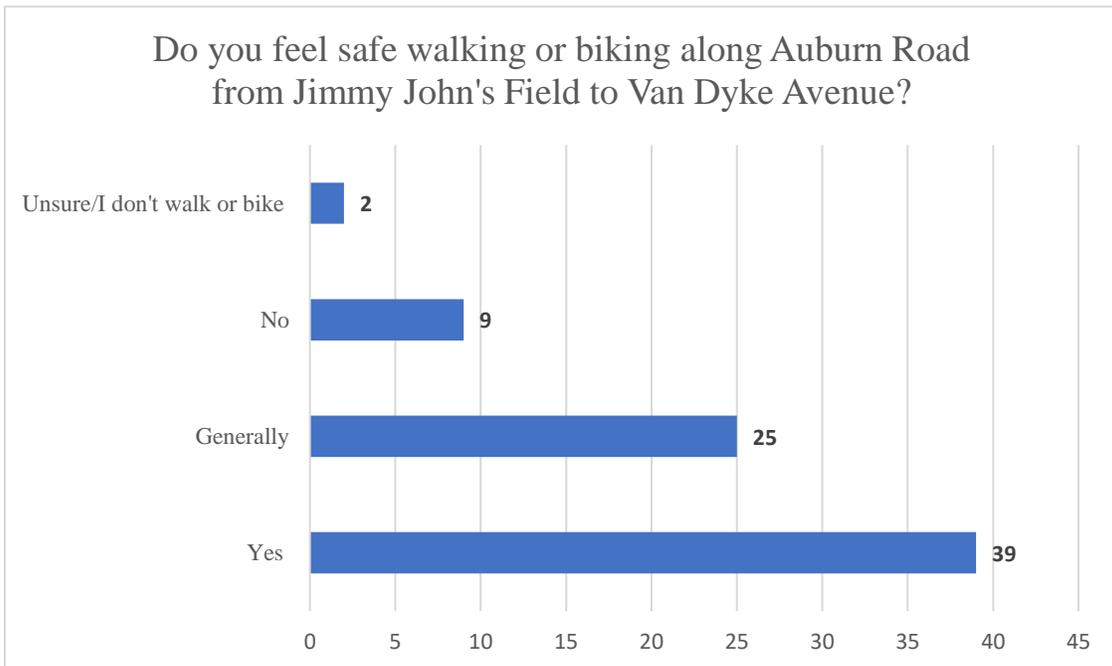
If not, please specify.

- Business Owner
- City Employee
- Shelby Township
- Live on Border
- UHS Alum from Shelby Township
- Sterling Heights Resident
- Sterling Heights, grew up in Utica and still frequent Utica
- Shelby Township
- My son attends Eppler and will go on to Utica

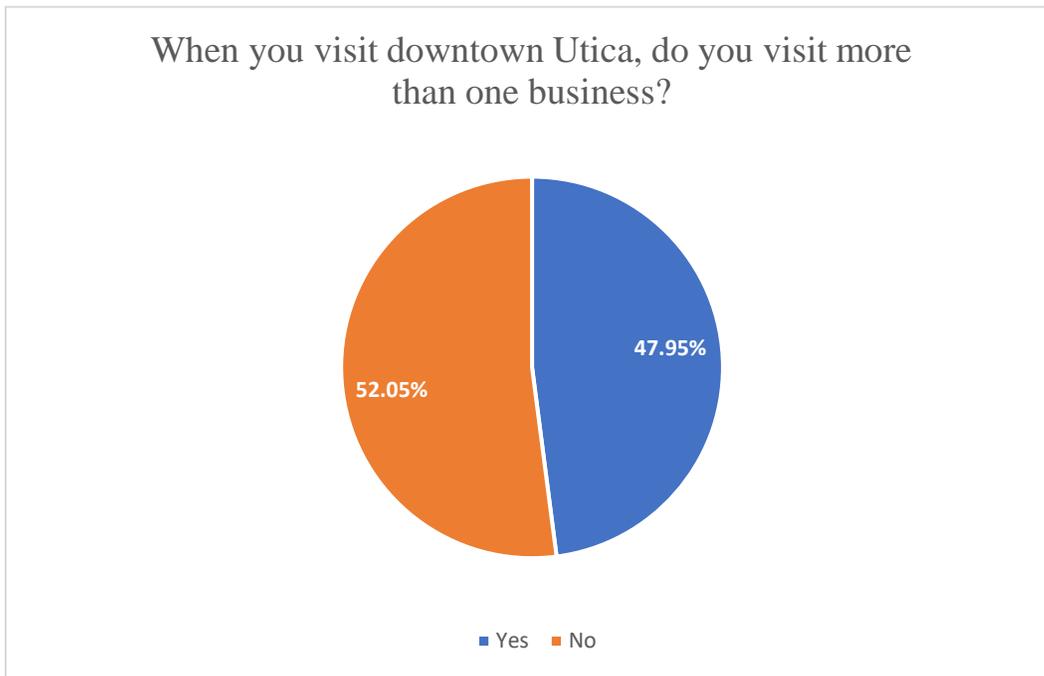
2. *How many days per week do you visit downtown Utica?*



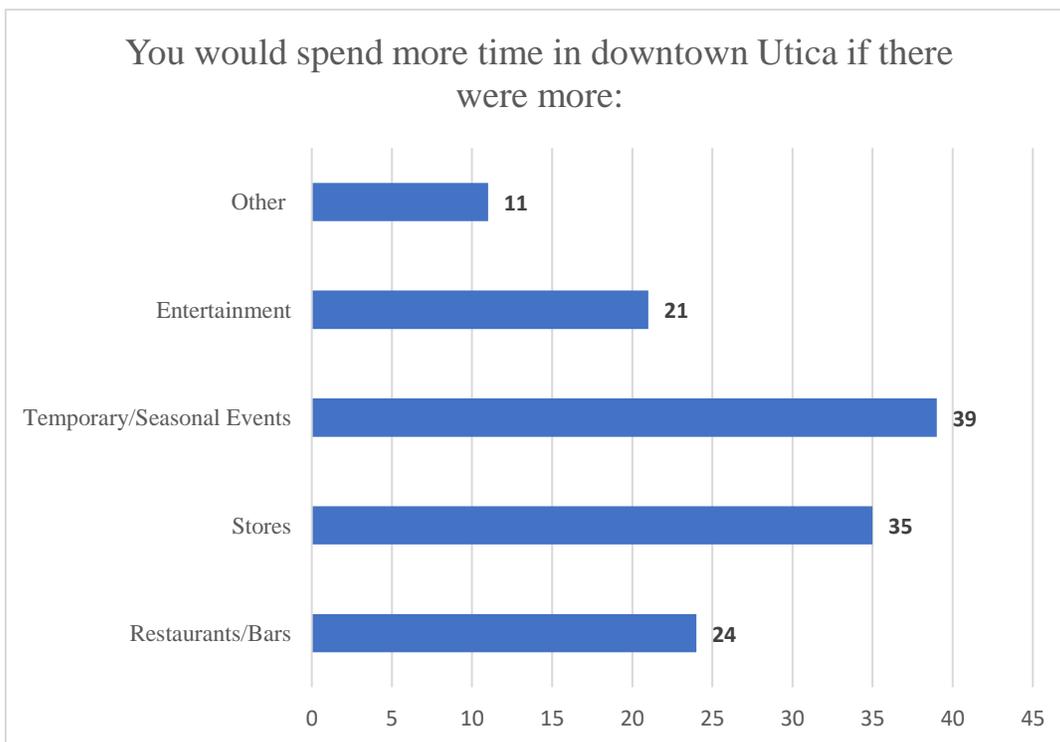
3. *Do you feel safe walking or biking along Auburn Road from Jimmy John's Field to Van Dyke Avenue?*



4. *When you visit downtown Utica, do you visit more than one business?*



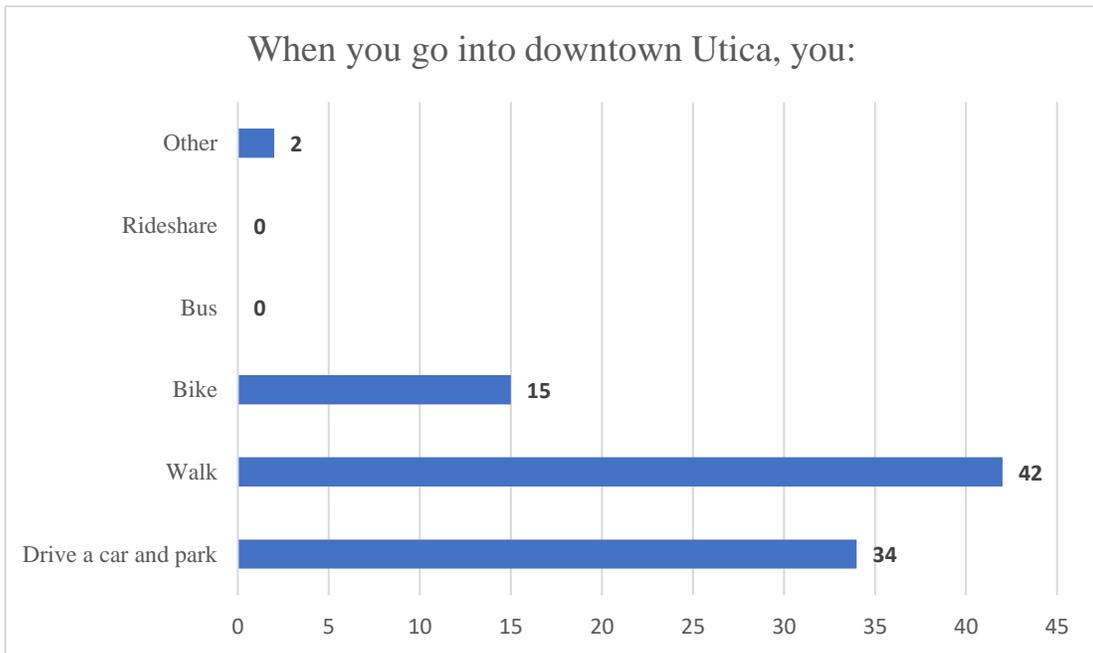
5. *You would spend more time in downtown Utica if there were more:*



Other, please specify.

- “Third places”, currently only Northern Grind truly fits that criteria
- Breakfast/lunch café
- Antique/gift shop
- Family style game establishment
- Utica is a perfect town for more food and little shopping outlets!
- Right type of restaurant and entertainment, too
- Kid friendly things. A nice park, splash pad, Grant Park is too far

6. *When you go into downtown Utica, you:*



Other, please specify.

- Paddle

7. *What do you like about downtown Utica?*

What do you like about downtown Utica?	Count
Small Town Feel	11
Bars/Restaurants	7
Old Fashioned/Historical	7
Memorial Park	4
Events	4
Walkability	4
Safety	4
Location of Library and City Hall	4
Proximity to Home	3
Historic Feel	2
It's Cute	2
Businesses	2
Jimmy John's Field	2
Tunnel Under 59	2
Proximity to River	1
Access to Trails	1
Graffiti Tunnel	1
Preservation of Clinton River	1
Dog Park	1
Quiet	1
Nice Vibe	1
Compactness	1
Murals	1
Cleanliness	1

8. *What do you dislike about downtown Utica?*

What do you dislike about downtown Utica?	Count
Lack of business diversity	9
Traffic from people cutting through	6
Lack of parking	6
Disconnection between downtown and Jimmy John's	3
Empty storefronts	3
Large population across Van Dyke	2
Downtown access from WB M-59	2
Not enough family places	2
Small and unsafe sidewalks	2
Lack of mixed-use	2
Litter/Trash on sidewalks	2
Dive bars	2
Lack of people to patronize businesses	1
Facades of some buildings	1
Events that have been dropped	1
Welcome to downtown from M-59	1
Walkability/Safety at Cass + Auburn	1
No grocery store	1
Not much to do	1
The parking lot/road from Cass to Van Dyke	1
Pedestrians not using crosswalks	1
Lack of street life	1
No mid-block crossings	1
Sidewalk/bridge over river	1
Empty Hogs Hallow building	1
Location of city offices and police station	1
Speeding cars	1
Pedestrian safety	1
Deadness	1
Aesthetics	1
Proposed plans for boutique hotel	1
Safety	1
Too small	1

9. *What would you like to see in the downtown in the future?*

What would you like to see in the downtown in the future?	Count
Diverse Businesses	14
Variety of Restaurants	8
Events	7
Pedestrian Safety	5
Mixed-Use Development	4
Family Crowd	4
Sidewalk improvements	4
Farmer's Market	3
Walkability and Bikeability	3
Pedestrian Bridge N of Auburn Road over the River	2
Riverwalk having better amenities near downtown	2
Municipal Buildings Moved	2
Flowers and Green Infrastructure	2
Semi's off of Cass and Auburn	2
Better parking	2
Museum	2
Cleanliness	2
Historical Features	2
Speed bumps	1
Better Access to River	1
Paddle Launch	1
Moving people, not cars	1
Placemaking	1
Pocket Parks	1
Playground	1
Activities at Jimmy John's in off-season	1
Aesthetically pleasing	1
Better wayfinding	1
Pedestrian Crossing Button (RRFB)	1
Keep Municipal Buildings Downtown	1
Nature Work	1
Art/Murals	1
Painted Crosswalks	1

No more blighted businesses	1
Return of DDA	1
Social District	1
Involvement	1
Quaint	1
Better infrastructure	1
Splash Pad	1
Grocery Store	1
Hotel	1
Small parking deck	1

10. *Is there anything else you would like to add?*

<p>I think high rise parking, lofts and hotel would make it better. Don't compete to be a Rochester. Use the available space and property for shops. Parking structures and expensive loft living is wasted if there is nowhere to shop.</p>
<p>A brewery in the old Hog's Hallow and close the street outside of it to make an outdoor space. See some of the spaces they did in Boise, ID.</p>
<p>I really hate how traffic backs up on Utica Road going north because so many people run the light from Dobry over the bridge to Auburn Road. It's absolutely awful.</p>
<p>Address the restaurant eyesore at Auburn/Cass; explore alleyways like downtown Detroit, revisit ideas from previous visioning session(s) where appropriate and please read/delete inappropriate comments before sharing.</p>
<p>As one of the longest business owners in the historic downtown area, I have witnessed the change through the years. The good is that businesses take pride in updating the area (i.e., Host, Royal Beard and now old Muldoon's being redone and aesthetically better). The bad is that the area is not built to accommodate overdevelopment like downtown Rochester. Much of the parking lots are privately owned here. I have no problem with festivals and community events if the streets are cleaned up after. Based on the past experience, it is not. Garbage from festival goers litter the roads. It is also important to note that anytime the population increases to a small area, garbage is an issue. The downtown area should be put on rotation where the area will be cleaned immediately following the event and every Monday morning after the weekend when patrons visit the bars and restaurants on Auburn. As business owners, we take pride in the area. Pedestrian safety needs to be a priority. Crosswalks with blinking pedestrian safety lights need to be put at every crosswalk. These are now available as solar power. I realize there is a cost involved. However, the cost of someone getting hit is not only more expensive for the city because of litigation, but life changing. I see pedestrians nearly hit every day on Cass. Let's be proactive and focus on pedestrian safety and other pitfalls prior to developing the area.</p>

<p>I've seen some suggestions about things to develop in Utica that are concerning. Suggestions to build large parking structures, hotels, and things in an attempt to be similar to Rochester is ridiculous. We're not Rochester and I have no desire to live in a city like Rochester. I don't want to see the city lose its character while striving to keep up with what surrounding communities are doing. Many of those communities lose their identity while trying to create more tax revenue for the city. Rochester used to be a city of outdoorsmen, people who appreciated nature, hunting, fishing, farming and even had a state park accessible for those activities within its borders. Now it's a city full of people who believe themselves to be affluent and seemingly more concerned with consumerism than those things that grew the area to begin with. I simply don't want the City of Utica to go down that road, but I also want the residents to live in a city they can be proud to call home.</p>
<p>Utica is a gem in the making. Being in the successful vibe of Rochester and downtown Royal Oak. The Utica location is the perfect location to bring people in from the east and west side of town.</p>
<p>Appreciate a visibly Mayor Guy, always available. And councilman Dionne. Also, at Hahn and Van Dyke the Legasea. The architect sign. A clear traffic view from westbound Hahn. Trying to look south is a fatality in the making.</p>
<p>The downtown should prioritize multi-modal uses and adopt many of Birmingham's best practices, including well-lit window displays, knee walls separating parking areas from walking areas, and parking meters.</p>
<p>I have found the people at the city offices very friendly and helpful.</p>
<p>More tween oriented events. They all go to Shelby Township.</p>
<p>I grew up in Utica, love the fact that people care about the downtown.</p>
<p>Not much to attract people other than baseball. Hope the changes talked about take place and happen.</p>
<p>Adding more for the family. The holiday things are fun, but don't just do Utica residents. We live .2 miles away from the border in Shelby and my daughter can never do any of the activities due to being in Shelby. Our backyard is the cemetery of Utica.</p>
<p>A more walkable downtown with places to make it worth parking and stopping for.</p>
<p>If the surrounding businesses in downtown Utica want high rise buildings, build a casino. It would bring people in and out. A casino would bring substantial revenue to the city. Those funds can be used to support charity organizations, invest in community projects, employment and stimulate local growth.</p>
<p>While it is rather 'apples to oranges', the traffic calming streetscape that Auburn Hills implemented looks nice and has definitely controlled the flow. The need to connect the southern part of the city (divided by M-59/Hall Road) and eastern part of the city (divided by Van Dyke) is fundamental to any increase in organic commercial activity for the downtown. Thinking long-term, the city is well-placed as a launching place/stop-off for bikers (and even walkers) that should accelerate when the Iron Belle Trail/Macomb Orchard</p>

Trail link-up and completion occurs. Lots of thought should be given to how best to leverage location and increase overall ‘bike friendliness.’
Walkability across Van Dyke and get truck traffic off Cass Avenue
Downtown Utica is great, but adding things would be a great addition. Property values would definitely go up. I envision a Royal Oak type vibe, only better! (Smaller of course). Also, a parking garage would be great!
Need shopping (i.e., gifts, clothing and family friendly businesses or activities). Need to include a coffee shop/bakery, bike lanes on Auburn/Cass, and relocate the municipal offices (Fire Department, Department of Public Works, Police, Library)
I don’t know how the population issue can be helped when the town housing is filled up unless the city starts allowing multi-tenant homes. Signage at Jimmy John’s Field to bring people downtown would be great. Also, zone for multi-use.
Multi-family residence
Have a more small, old fashioned town feel. Do not have the younger people crowd. This town is a smaller family town, don’t have a younger group age.
I would like to see Utica keep the historic downtown look. We are lucky to have a classic downtown and once it’s gone, it’s gone. Buildings can keep this aesthetic by paint and facades facing the streets with an early 1900 design that makes us keep our classic feel, which surrounding suburbs do not have. Understand our traffic is a huge problem in the morning and evening. Bike lanes are great, but this is Michigan. No one bikes in the winter.
Traffic!!!
So much potential
As a craft beer bar owner, I would love to see more young folks with disposable income to be able to move to Utica. Housing in their price range and increased population density would help, then they would come. If trees block wayfinding signs, please realize they also block business signs (hence why they were removed) a wayfinding sign can be moved, a business cannot. As a cyclist, I love bike lanes – but we will lose street parking. As a business owner, that is concerning. Consider making Auburn Road a safe walking district.
I love Utica and I have had a business here for over 20 years. I hope to continue my business and would like to participate in anything that will facilitate bringing more people into the downtown area. Things that I would like added to the downtown area include a parking structure behind the business façade (possibly behind the current fire station), and themed buildings/architecture that capitalize on the historic aspect of the city of Utica and the hike and bike path and Clinton River.
I am very in favor of the discussion related to developing/updating the downtown Utica area.
Bring back the flowers, fix the sidewalks, and find a way to evict vacant businesses
A wide river walk on both sides of the river, if possible, with vintage style lights and benches to Pioneer Park. Include a picnic area, a Pioneer Park with

<p>playground walking access to the new area – more sidewalks and green spaces. If the police station is moved, keep a mini station in town. Where would the fire station go if moved? More accessible parking and lighting would be great. We need a breakfast and lunch café in town. Jimmy John’s Field could host monthly flea markets, ice skating in the winter, and concerts. Also, the Locker Room needs to join the rest of Utica by trying not to look like 8-Mile.</p>
<p>Please fix the sidewalks on Cass Avenue and please bring back the flowers.</p>
<p>I’d like to see the older buildings that are here properly maintained.</p>
<p>There is always room for improvement. Let’s look for ways to grow our city so it benefits everyone.</p>
<p>Keep it the way it is.</p>
<p>I walk my dog daily in downtown Utica and use the walkway path back to the neighborhood</p>
<p>I would like to see less offices/businesses that are closed during the evening. More restaurants would be a plus. Utilizing empty space (gravel parking lot and beyond) seems like a good idea. If the city builds a parking garage, I like the idea of putting it along the freeway. If it is far from downtown, no one will use it.</p>