

# From Akron to Zanesville: How Are Ohio's Small and Mid-Sized Legacy Cities Faring?



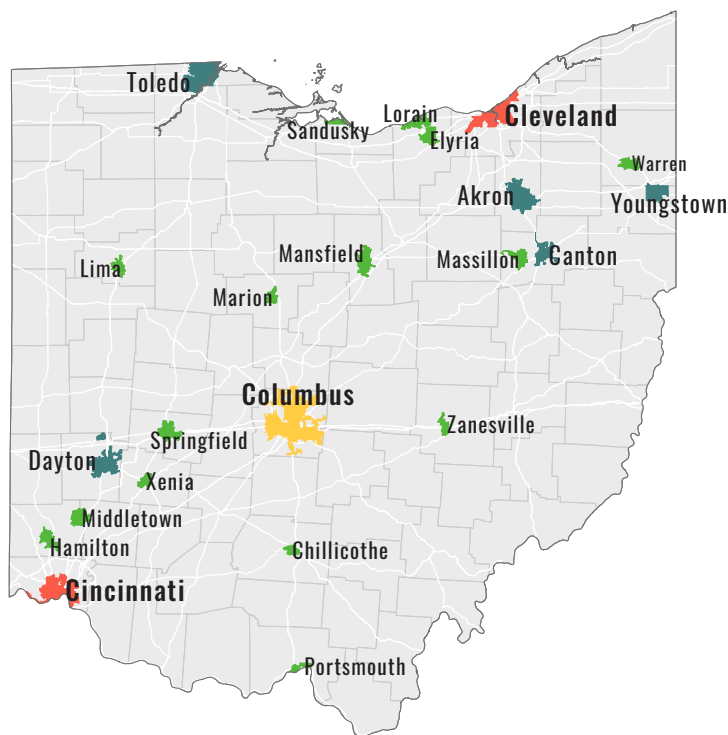
People.  
Land.  
Prosperity.

January 2020 Update



Ohio's small and mid-sized legacy cities are central to the state's heritage of innovation and manufacturing, but they have experienced severe, decades-long economic and population declines. **New data, from 2018, show that these cities are beginning to stabilize — although they are still not as strong as they were in 2000.**

Greater Ohio Policy Center's 2016 report, "From Akron to Zanesville: How Are Ohio's Small and Mid-Sized Legacy Cities Faring?" found that, between 2000 and 2014, the trajectory of Ohio's smaller legacy cities began to diverge from their larger peers, Cleveland and Cincinnati. The report also determined that Columbus' relatively strong economic growth masked statewide challenges. **Many of Ohio's small and mid-sized legacy cities are showing signs of improvement since 2014, but they will require support from the state to be as strong as they were in 2000.**



**Legacy city population loss is slowing.** Ohio's legacy cities of all sizes experienced dramatic population loss from 2000 to 2014. Many continued to lose population from 2014 to 2018 but at much lower rates. The state, overall, and the City of Columbus have experienced population growth.

**Unemployment is down across Ohio's legacy cities.** Unemployment rates ticked down between 2014 and 2018, but levels in all size cohorts and the state as a whole continued to exceed those of 2000. The proportion of adults working or looking for a job — a key indicator of economic health — has remained relatively stable in legacy cities since 2014.

**Poverty and per capita incomes are improving.** Since 2014, all size cohorts have seen a steady decrease in the number of individuals living in poverty. Per capita incomes were also up in 2018 — with some cohorts even slightly surpassing their 2000 levels.

**Housing values and vacancy have seen positive change but remain a challenge, especially in small and mid-sized cities.** From 2014 to 2018, all size cohorts saw declines in home values and growth in long-term housing vacancy. However, median housing values have improved for the state as a whole since 2014; and the number of long-term vacant housing units has decreased statewide — suggesting Ohio's housing markets are starting to stabilize and, in some places, rebuild.

## Percent Change in Key Indicators, 2009 - 2014 and 2014 - 2018

The tables below illustrate the change that has occurred in key indicators of economic health, between 2009 and 2014 and between 2014 and 2018.

	2009 - 2014 Population	2009 - 2014 Unemployment	2009 - 2014 Median Household Income	2009 - 2014 Individuals in Poverty	2009 - 2014 Long-term Vacancy Rate	2009 - 2014 Median Housing Value
State of Ohio	0.4%	11.5%	-6.5%	16.9%	99.3%	-13.0%
Columbus	7.7%	14.8%	-7.2%	12.1%	27.8%	-16.1%
Large Legacy Cities	-10.7%	27.5%	-10.8%	21.3%	35.9%	-17.7%
Mid-sized Legacy Cities	-8.5%	11.3%	-13.1%	22.3%	66.9%	-23.2%
Small Legacy Cities	-2.8%	13.1%	-10.4%	18.9%	43.0%	-16.8%
	2014 - 2018 Population	2014 - 2018 Unemployment	2014 - 2018 Median Household Income	2014 - 2018 Individuals in Poverty	2014 - 2018 Long-term Vacancy Rate	2014 - 2018 Median Housing Value
State of Ohio	0.7%	-36.2%	5.4%	-8.8%	-32.7%	1.9%
Columbus	6.9%	-33.9%	8.8%	-8.5%	-14.7%	4.7%
Large Legacy Cities	-0.2%	-25.8%	5.6%	-7.3%	-0.2%	-6.5%
Mid-sized Legacy Cities	-1.0%	-33.7%	4.0%	-8.4%	-19.6%	-7.4%
Small Legacy Cities	-0.6%	-31.9%	3.2%	-7.8%	5.6%	-5.9%

## Ohio's Legacy Cities

Reinvention Cities/Small Legacy Cities  
(20,000 - 65,000) population)

	City	2018 Population
1	Lorain, Ohio	63,773
2	Hamilton, Ohio	62,259
3	Springfield, Ohio	59,305
4	Elyria, Ohio	53,910
5	Middletown, Ohio	48,449
6	Mansfield, Ohio	46,638
7	Warren, Ohio	39,668
8	Lima, Ohio	37,335
9	Marion, Ohio	36,268
10	Massillon, Ohio	32,366
11	Xenia, Ohio	26,364
12	Sandusky, Ohio	25,012
13	Zanesville, Ohio	25,376
14	Chillicothe, Ohio	21,717
15	Portsmouth, Ohio	20,366



## Mid-Sized Legacy Cities

(65,001 - 285,000) population)

	City	2018 Population
1	Toledo, Ohio	278,193
2	Akron, Ohio	198,314
3	Dayton, Ohio	140,782
4	Canton, Ohio	71,313
5	Youngstown, Ohio	64,734*

\*In GOPC's original 2016 report, Youngstown had >65,000 residents — making it a mid-sized legacy city. Since then, it has lost population to become a small legacy city. To maintain consistency in data analysis, GOPC continues to classify Youngstown as mid-sized legacy city in the 2020 update.



## Large Legacy Cities

(285,000+ population)

	City	2018 Population
1	Cleveland, Ohio	387,398
2	Cincinnati, Ohio	300,357

## Non-Legacy City and State

City	2018 Population
Columbus, Ohio	867,628
Ohio	11,641,879

# Policies for Legacy City Revitalization

While challenges remain for Ohio's legacy cities, research surveying similar cities makes clear that these communities' current conditions do not have to dictate their destiny.

Ohio's legacy cities have an important role in Ohio's future as communities of opportunity where people from diverse backgrounds will choose to live, work, invest, and thrive. Assisting Ohio's legacy cities to be prepared for new economic realities must be a partnership between local and state leaders, with local leaders making and executing revitalization plans that guide state investments and support. **To build a greater Ohio:**

- 1 Enact Placemaking Programs** - Placemaking capitalizes on a community's assets and potential — intending to create public spaces that promote health, happiness, and well-being. Programs that make communities attractive to talent and businesses through physical investments like façade improvements, streetscaping, public art, and mixed-use and transit-oriented development are key to revitalizing legacy cities.
- 2 Enact Capacity Building Programs** - Capacity building is the process by which organizations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, and tools that are needed to do their jobs competently. The state needs to help legacy cities become vibrant, prosperous, and connected places — making them poised to compete in the global marketplace.
- 3 Provide Strategic Tools and Incentives for All Housing Types** - Communities across the state are finding that their low- and moderate-income residents are facing burdensome housing costs. While at the same time, home values are often too modest for market-rate homeowners to secure financing for rehabilitation or new builds. Cities need strategic tools and incentives that spur new housing for all types of homeowners and renters, while also limiting sprawl.
- 4 Invest in Brownfields** - Ohio was once a leader in redeveloping blighted industrial and commercial properties that discouraged investment and economic advancement. The state must invest in brownfield redevelopment by funding the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund to enhance opportunities for job growth and quality of life. Ohio must provide a dedicated source of funding that is flexible, sustainable, and complementary to existing environmental remediation programs.
- 5 Invest in Public Transportation** - Ohio needs to invest in various options to safely and efficiently move people, goods, and services.
  - **Establish a Dedicated Funding Source** - It is paramount that the state establish a dedicated funding source for public transportation, complementing existing state and local funding.
  - **Adopt a Statewide Complete Streets Policy** - More Ohioans are traveling by means other than a vehicle. The state must implement standards and designs in shared road usage — making it safe for all users to access roadways — and create opportunities for transit-oriented development.



*Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with a mission to improve Ohio's communities through smart growth strategies and research. Our vision is a revitalized Ohio. We undertake original research and analysis, develop pragmatic policy recommendations and advocacy strategies, and deploy our convening power to meet the needs of Ohio's local change-makers. We operate statewide.*

399 E. Main Street, Suite 220  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
614-224-0187  
[www.GreaterOhio.org](http://www.GreaterOhio.org)

