GREATER OHIO POLICY CENTER

People. Land. Prosperity.

January 2017 Update - From Akron to Zanesville:
How Are Ohio's Small and Mid-Sized Legacy Cities Faring?

Newly released data on the 2015 conditions of Ohio's smaller legacy cities show that although most places experienced some modest signs of improvement between 2014 and 2015, none reversed the trend of economic decline seen since 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. **This pattern continued into 2015, and in some cases grew starker.**

o The proportion of adults working or looking for a job – a key indicator of economic health – improved in large legacy cities between 2000 and 2015. These cities were the only type to see improvement in this rate over this time period, which is particularly notable given that the rate of adults in the workforce nationally also declined. Small and mid-sized legacy cities, however, experienced relatively significant declines in their workforces over this period.

o The mid-sized legacy cities – Akron, Canton, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown – resemble their larger neighbors in many ways, including their challenges with entrenched poverty, low household and per capita incomes, and substantial rates of housing vacancy and abandonment. But the signs of recovery emerging in Cleveland and Cincinnati are not apparent in the economic health data of the mid-sized cities. From 2000 to 2015, mid-sized cities saw the greatest declines in incomes, the greatest growth in housing vacancy, and largest declines in home values. From 2014 to 2015, vacancy rates held steady but housing values in mid-sized cities continued to decline.

o Changes in poverty rates showed even greater divergence between smaller legacy cities and the "3Cs" – Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati. Although changes in poverty rates between 2014 and
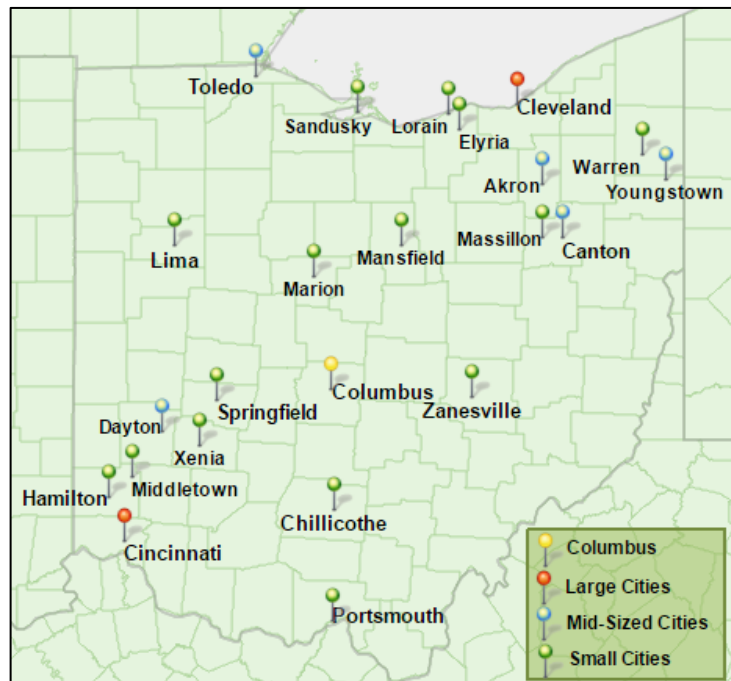
2015 were modest across all city types, the 3Cs saw their poverty rates decline on average while poverty continued to increase slightly in smaller legacy cities.

Still, there were small signs of improvement across all city types.

o   Unemployment rates ticked down in all city types between 2014 and 2015. By 2015, Columbus and the state as a whole recovered their unemployment rates to 2009 levels. Mid-sized legacy cities also approached their pre-Recession unemployment levels. However, unemployment levels in all city types and the state as a whole continue to exceed 2000 levels.

o   Additionally, per capita incomes increased between 2014 and 2015 in all city types. Over the same time span, household incomes in Columbus increased, remained steady in small and mid-sized legacy cities, and declined in large legacy cities. In no city type, however, did per capita or household incomes recover to 2009 levels.

Dayton
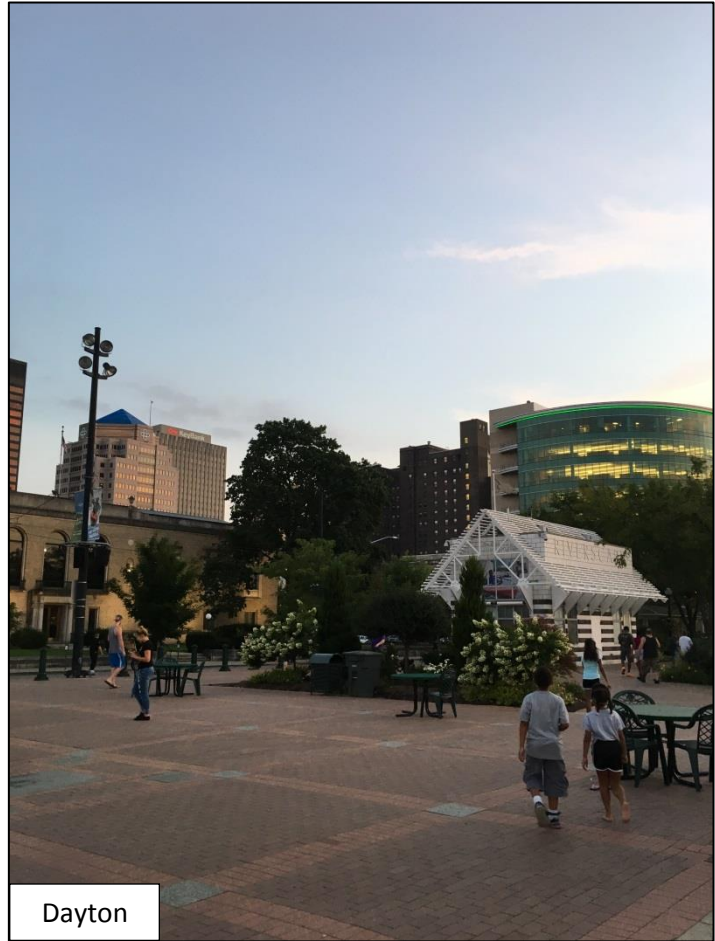
Strategies for Smaller Legacy City Revitalization

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

Akron – Photo by Shane Wynn

To ensure a thriving future, Greater Ohio Policy Center urges local and state policymakers to adopt a two-pronged strategy for economic development and revitalization in smaller legacy cities: invest in people and invest in quality of place.

Concretely, this means investing in programs that build the capacity and skills of local workforces while simultaneously investing in physical and cultural amenities that retain and draw high-skilled workers and their families. Proven strategies for achieving these goals include:

1. Promote Asset-Based Economic Development—Creating and promoting places where highly-skilled workers want to live and play is an increasingly important strategy in promoting economic development in places of all sizes.

- Embrace a multifaceted statewide economic development strategy focused on making Ohio's existing communities attractive places to live, work, and play.
- Help cities maximize an essential and finite resource—clean land—through the creation of new financing mechanisms and regulatory reforms that complement current remediation programs.

Portsmouth

2. Sustain Strong Neighborhoods—To rebuild communities, local governments require stronger tools to combat the challenges related to housing vacancy and abandonment.

- Ensure that cities have the necessary tools to deal with nuisance properties and unscrupulous landlords, such as fast-tracking the court appointed receivership process for blighted and abandoned industrial and commercial properties.

3. Shape Ohio's Workforce for the Future—Communities need committed, well-trained workers in order to compete and thrive economically.

- Promote the creation of fellowship or leadership programs that encourage younger people to get involved in important public and private-sector jobs on the local and state level.
- Support workforce development strategies that tackle labor force issues at the community-wide level and that connect low-income/low-skilled workers with training for jobs that exist in their community.

Cleveland

4. Build 21st Century Infrastructure and Transportation Networks—Employers and employees alike require safe, modern infrastructure and transportation options.

- Ensure local governments have the appropriate resources and financing mechanisms to modernize sewer and water infrastructure, including the ability to properly manage assets and regionalize smaller systems to achieve economies of scale.
- Provide adequate funding to public transportation so that transit agencies effectively connect workers to jobs.

5. Ensure Ohio's Communities Have the Resources to Succeed – Policy solutions should account for differing local conditions and avoid "one size fits all" strategies.

- Create size or distress-related designations for municipalities to guide the legislative or administrative allocation of state resources.

Percent Change in Key Indicators, 2000-2015

	Population	Unemployment	Median Household Income	Individuals in Poverty	Long-Term Vacancy Rate	Median Housing Value
State of Ohio	▲ 2%	▲63%	▼12%	▲49%	▲113%	▼9%
Columbus	▲16%	▲54%	▼13%	▲47%	▲104%	▼8%
Large Legacy Cities	▼15%	▲72%	▼23%	▲38%	▲126%	▼20%
Mid-Size Legacy Cities	▼12%	▲68%	▼25%	▲55%	▲234%	▼24%
Small Legacy Cities	▼3%	▲81%	▼23%	▲72%	▲169%	▼20%

Toledo

Marion

Youngstown
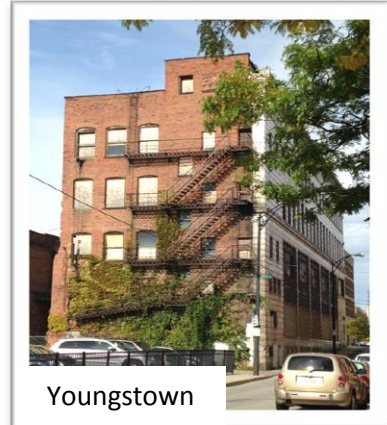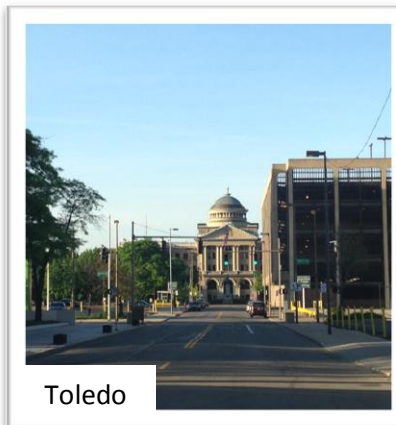
Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with a mission to champion revitalization and sustainable growth in Ohio. We use education, research, and outreach to develop and advance policies and practices that create revitalized communities, strengthen regional cooperation, and preserve Ohio's open space and farmland. We are based in Columbus, Ohio and operate statewide.