



Corridors of Opportunity
**Recommendations
Report**

 CITY of CHARLOTTE

December 2021

Prepared for the City of Charlotte



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Disclaimer

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1 Introduction



Photo credit: City of Charlotte

The City's vision is that everyone of working age living in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity will have a clear, accessible pathway into meaningful employment in careers with long-term potential.

About Corridors of Opportunity

Beautiful, safe and prosperous communities are places where families can grow strong and build legacies for the future.

Corridors are defined geographic areas of a city that often contain major roadways and are vital to the health of Charlotte's communities and the city as a whole. Ideally, corridors link communities and the people within those communities to the resources and businesses they need to live, work and thrive. However, not all corridors and communities in Charlotte adequately connect their residents with economic opportunities.

Six corridors in the city with systemically high unemployment and poverty rates have been identified as focus areas for a special economic development initiative, Corridors of Opportunity. To begin, the City of Charlotte is committing \$38.5 million to catalyze the growth of new jobs and services for residents of the Corridors. In addition, private sector leaders within the region are currently raising funds to match and support the City's investment.

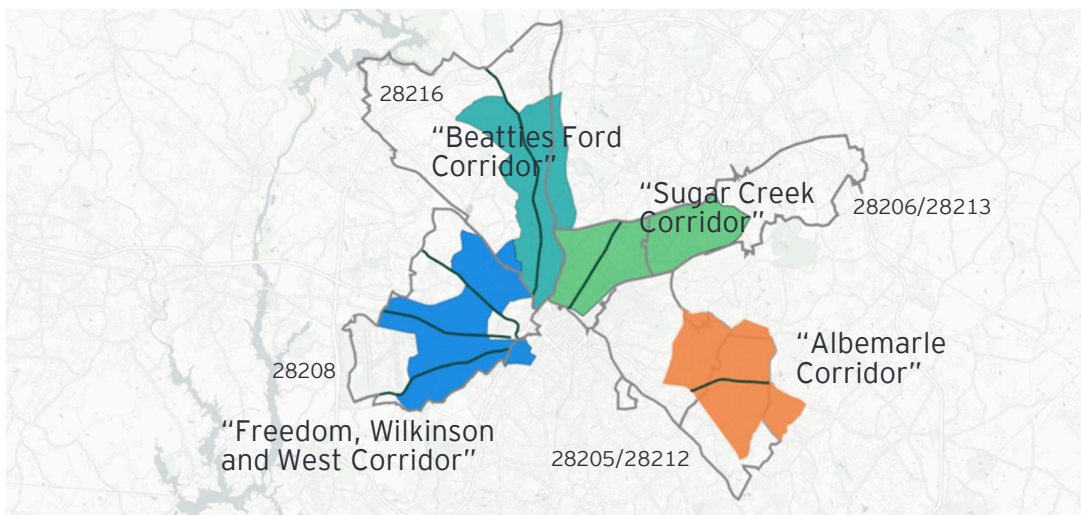
The goal of the Corridors of Opportunity initiative is to provide high-quality services and viable, long-term career paths for corridor residents. The Corridors are rich in history and pride, and that history should be celebrated in the future development that takes place.

The City seeks to create fertile ground for prosperity in the Corridors by bolstering community programs and projects, building on the momentum of past investments and filling in gaps. Projects envisioned for the Corridors include affordable housing, community safety, infrastructure, transportation, workforce and business development, and urban design.

Creating employment and economic mobility for residents of Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity will require a strategic, multi-faceted and collaborative approach between public, private and nonprofit organizations. Bold programs and projects that create meaningful change in the Corridors will require teamwork. The City's role is to coordinate and empower, fund, raise up good work already being done, and prioritize productive partnerships. (Suggestions on the City's role in each recommended initiative are provided in the Implementation section of this report.) This will not be easy work, but it is important work to the future prosperity of the Corridors and also to the city as a whole.

About this report

In November 2020, the City engaged Ernst & Young LLP's economic development practice to lead this study of five out of the six Corridors of Opportunity: Beatties Ford Road and Rozzelles's Ferry Road; Freedom Drive, Wilkinson Boulevard and West Boulevard; North Tryon Street and North Graham Street, and Sugar Creek and I-85. In October 2021, the Albemarle Corridor was added to the analysis. The corridor geographies were grouped into four sub-areas determined by zip code as illustrated below:



The corridor analyses focused on four sub-area zip code-based geographies in Charlotte — 28208, 28216, 28206/28213, and 28205/28212 — which encompass all of the City's six Corridors of Opportunity.

The map to the left illustrates the corridors evaluated. Different colors are used to map each corridor(s) to visually delineate the corridors throughout the reports.

The corridor geographies initially focused on intersections within the city's highest areas of poverty and unemployment and the communities surrounding those intersections. For the purpose of this study and the evaluation needed to understand corridor dynamics, the geographies were expanded and defined at the census tract and zip code levels where data is available.

After defining corridor geographies and grouping the six corridors into four sub-areas, the project team evaluated the corridors through three lenses: workforce, target industries and real estate.

About the corridors

- **Beatties Ford Road & Rozzelle’s Ferry Road (“Beatties Ford Corridor,” 28216 zip code)** – Encompassing areas to the immediate east and west of Beatties Ford Road, and Rozzelle’s Ferry Road, the corridor extends from downtown Charlotte to Interstate 85.

In recent years, employment growth in the 28216 zip code has trailed the Charlotte average. Additionally, many of the employment opportunities in the zip code are in relatively low-wage, low-skill clusters, such as Retail and Entertainment. On a more positive note, in recent years, the area has seen employment growth in higher skill, higher wage clusters such as Healthcare, Back Office, and Professional Services. Collectively, however, these three clusters comprise less than 11% of jobs in the zip code.

Individuals living in both the Beatties Ford Corridor and the larger 28216 zip code possess a multitude of occupational specializations. Residents are more likely than their counterparts living elsewhere in the city to work in occupations such as Transportation, Healthcare Support, Healthcare Diagnostics, Material Moving, and Production. Unlike other zip codes examined as part of this analysis, the 28216 zip has fewer jobs than employed residents. As a result, strategies to promote greater alignment between local skills with available job opportunities must be complemented with efforts to increase overall employment in the area.

- **Freedom Drive, Wilkinson Boulevard and West Boulevard (“Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridor,” 28208 zip code)** — This area is located immediately east of Charlotte Douglas International Airport. It is roughly bounded by Irwin Creek to the south, Scott Futrell Drive to the north, and Interstate 77 to the east.

The 28208 zip code is one of two of the examined zip code where employment growth has outpaced the citywide average during the past five years. Thanks to the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Material Moving and Transportation & Logistics are the top two largest employment clusters. The 28208 zip code is also home to established and growing clusters such as Back Office, Industrial Machinery, and Metalworking, as well as less concentrated employment clusters in Agribusiness and Food, Professional Services, and Health Care.

Residents in both the individual corridor, as well as the broader 28208 zip code, are more likely to work in occupations such as Transportation and Material Moving relative to the citywide average.

- **Sugar Creek Road and I-85 Corridor, North Tryon Street and North Graham Street (“Sugar Creek Corridor,” 28206/28213 zip codes)** – The Sugar Creek Corridor is primarily bounded by Interstate 85 to the north and North Tryon Street to the south between downtown Charlotte and East W T Harris Boulevard.

While Construction is the largest employment cluster in the combined 28206/28213 zip code area, the area is also home to several relatively concentrated manufacturing clusters, including Furniture, Industrial Machinery and Automotive. The area is also home to small but growing service clusters such as Back Office, Professional Services and Health Care.

Corridor residents, as well as those living in the combined 28206/28213 zip code area, are more likely to work in occupations such as Production, Maintenance and Repair, Material Moving, and Healthcare support compared to their counterparts living in other parts of Charlotte.

- **Albemarle Road (“Albemarle Corridor,” 28205/28212 zip codes)** – The Albemarle Corridor is primarily bounded by Independence Boulevard to the west and Interstate 485 to the east with Central Avenue running through the corridor.

As of 2019, Retail and Entertainment are the largest industry clusters for employment in the greater 28205/28212 zip code area. The corridor is home to numerous strong and advancing industry clusters, some of which tend to have higher wages, such as Finance and Professional Services.

Corridor residents are more likely to be employed in lower wage occupations such as Construction, Building Cleaning & Maintenance, and Material Moving as compared to their counterparts in the City of Charlotte.

Additional detail on each corridor are provided in Corridor Snapshots in the Key Findings section of this report, and a deeper examination offered in the stand-alone analysis reports: Workforce Analysis, Target Industry Analysis and Real Estate Analysis.

Overview of our methodology

The Corridors of Opportunity analysis explores the demographic composition, educational attainment dynamics, labor characteristics and potential barriers to opportunity present in four zip code-based geographies in Charlotte — 28208, 28216, 28206/28213 and 28205/28212. For each of these four areas, census tract information was leveraged to identify especially distressed areas, i.e., elevated poverty rates, lower educational attainment levels and disproportionate reliance on public transit. The evaluation included data from the following sources as indicated on charts throughout the reports: US Census Bureau, EMSI, The Charlotte/Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer, Marketline, Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan, CoStar and other sources.

In addition to data analysis, the consulting team conducted 10 interviews with Charlotte-area employers, 12 interviews with workforce development organizations and human service providers, and interviews with real estate brokers. A questionnaire was distributed to over 300 Charlotte residents to understand better the barriers and opportunities faced, particularly by residents of the corridor zip codes. Key findings from these interviews and surveys are provided in subsequent sections of this report.

The study began in November 2020 and concluded in December 2021. The quantitative and qualitative input collected is shared in three stand-alone analytical reports as well as summarized in this report. The three analytical reports are:

- ▶ **Workforce analysis** — During this first phase of the study, the project team sought to understand the demographics, skills and employment conditions of people living within the corridors as well as the jobs currently located in the corridors.
- ▶ **Target industry analysis** — This evaluation assessed the types of industries whose workforce needs not only align with the skills of corridor residents but also provide viable pathways to long-term careers and upward mobility. Those industries could become the targets of economic development — business expansion and attraction efforts. While the pillars of the City's overall Corridors of Opportunity program could be the same for each corridor, each corridor's target industries should be considered when taking tactical actions such as expanding certain workforce programs or making investments in sites and infrastructure.
- ▶ **Real estate analysis** — This phase of the project included an evaluation of current real estate — buildings and land — located within the corridors. For each of the three original sub-areas included in this study, the project team analyzed the age of properties and current utilization to help reveal where development and redevelopment opportunities could be possible. The Albemarle Corridor was not included in this analysis, as it was a focus of a separate and similar real estate study.

These in-depth analyses provide a foundation for the recommendations in this report.

With the findings of these analyses in mind, the project team developed the recommendations offered in Chapter 3 of this report. Goals are suggested as well as potential priorities to help the City and other organizations achieve the vision that all corridor residents will have clear, accessible pathways into meaningful employment in careers with long-term potential.

As a follow-on to the recommendations and Corridors of Opportunity program pillars described in this report, the City and other collaborators may develop more detailed tactics for each recommendation and a tailored plan of action for each corridor.

Key findings

Photo credit: City of Charlotte

3x

City of Charlotte job growth compared with US average, 2014–19

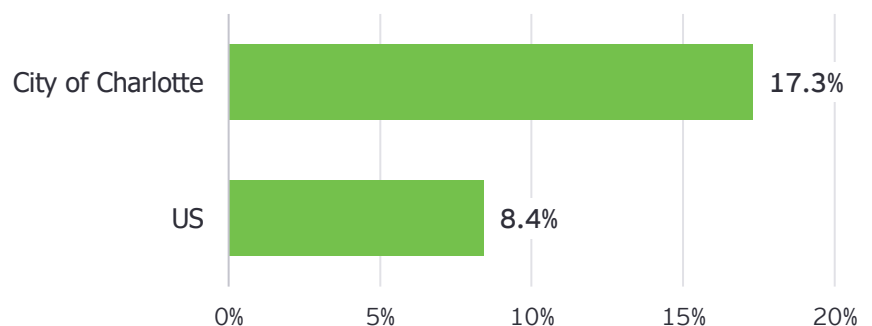


100,000 Charlotte residents lived in poverty, 2019

Introduction

In recent years, the City of Charlotte has enjoyed strong employment growth and greater economic vibrancy. Between 2014 and 2019, the total number of jobs in Charlotte rose 17%, over twice the national rate of increase. In addition to significant employment gains, Charlotte continues to become ever more prosperous. Since 2014, median household income has increased 15%. Wages in the city have risen and the poverty rate has declined.

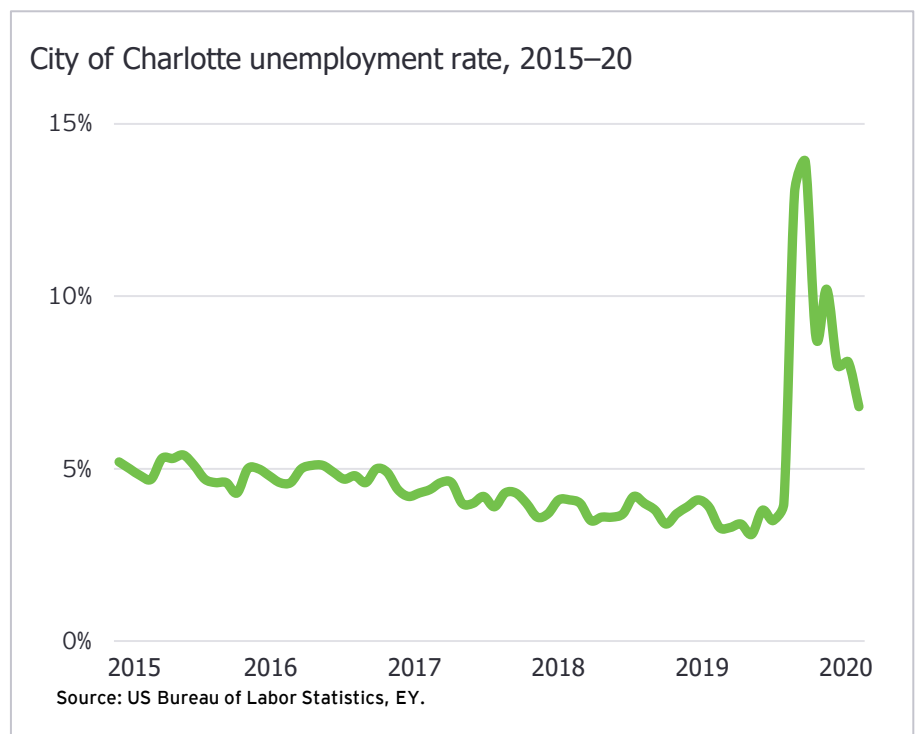
Employment change, 2014 - 2019



Unfortunately, these gains have not been equally shared throughout the city. Despite record levels of employment prior to the pandemic, in 2019 nearly 100,000 Charlotte residents lived in poverty. This figure has undoubtedly risen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn of 2020.

At the end of 2019, the city of Charlotte, overall, was enjoying an unprecedented expansion of employment opportunities. In December 2019, Charlotte increased the number of employed residents for the 109th consecutive month. At just 3.1%, Charlotte’s unemployment rate was at its lowest level in a generation.

Much like cities throughout the world, Charlotte’s growth trajectory came to an abrupt halt at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. But, even before the pandemic wreaked havoc on the economy, high rates of unemployment and poverty were particularly acute in specific areas of the city. This includes the Corridors of Opportunity included in this study — Beatties Ford Road and Rozzelle’s Ferry Road, Freedom Drive, Wilkinson Boulevard and West Boulevard, North Tryon Street and North Graham Street, Sugar Creek Road and I-85, and Albemarle Road and Central Avenue.



As economically destructive as the pandemic has been, it has also helped underscore the important role resiliency plays in a city’s economic development agenda. While the following pages summarize characteristics of the corridors included in this study, they also serve as the first steps in crafting a response to improve pathways toward long-term careers and wealth generation for Charlotteans who have not historically enjoyed such opportunities.

80%

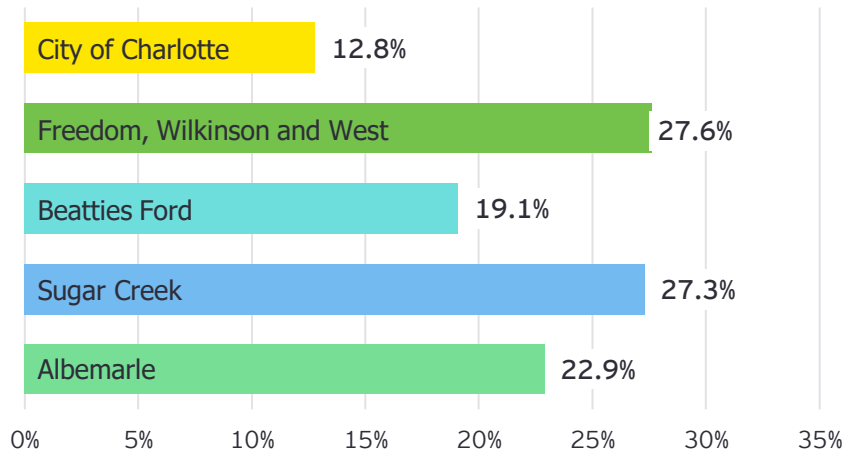
Residents of the corridors who are people of color

Highlights: Workforce analysis findings

The six corridors included in this study share many demographic characteristics. Communities of color, for example, represent nearly 80% of residents in all corridors. The age of corridor residents also skews slightly younger than the city as a whole. Corridor residents are also more likely to experience poverty, have at least one physical disability and rely on public transit.

All six corridors are characterized by high levels of unemployment and poverty. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2019, an average of 5% of Charlotte residents were unemployed. The unemployment rates in the examined corridors, however, ranged from 5% to nearly 11% during the same period. Additionally, these communities are more at risk for elevated unemployment rates in the wake of the pandemic. During the last economic downturn, for example, the unemployment rate in the Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridor topped 20%.

Poverty rate, 2019



Source: US Census Bureau, EY.

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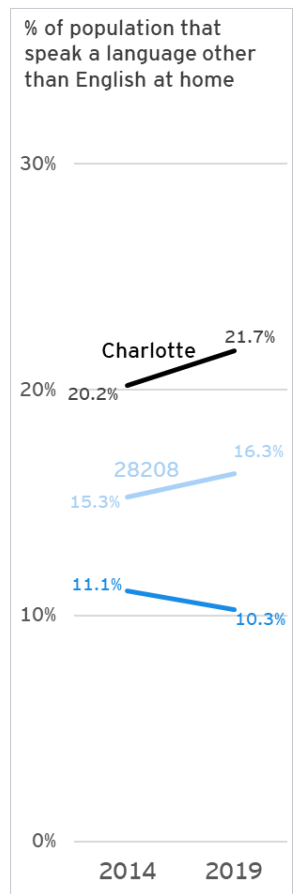
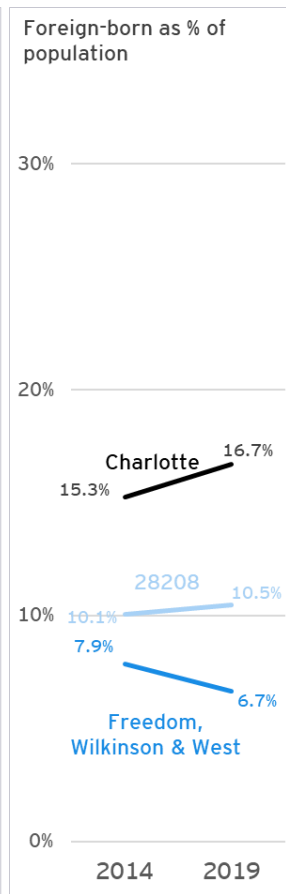
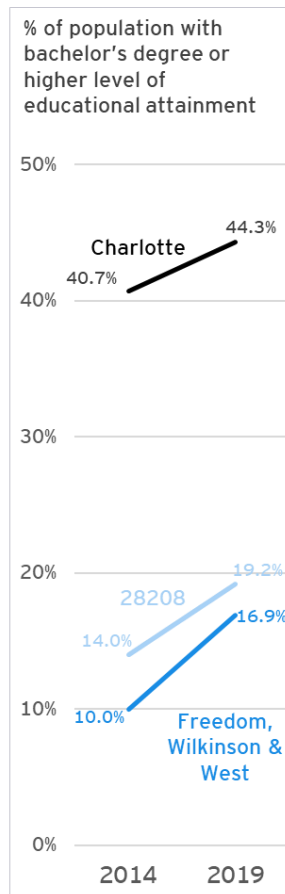
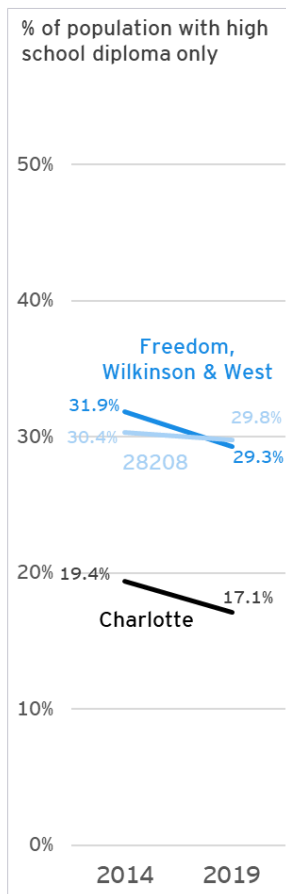
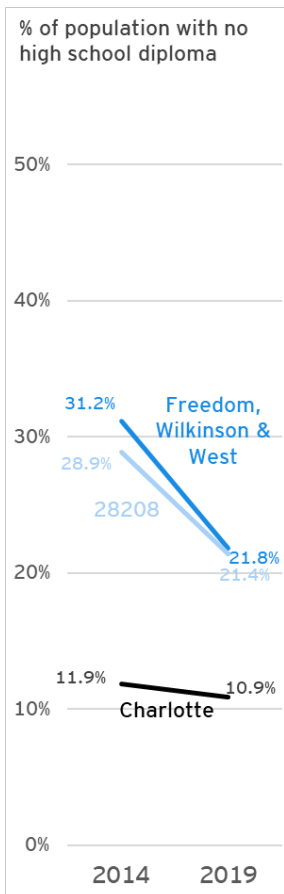
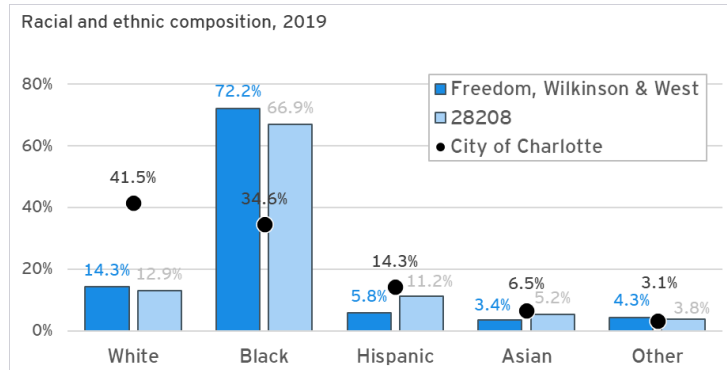
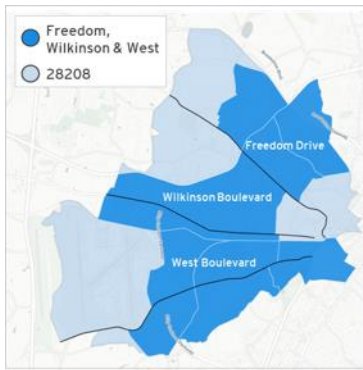
Beatties Ford Corridor residents aged 16–24 who are unemployed

Although many factors ultimately contribute to high unemployment rates within the corridors, educational attainment and age play especially striking roles. In all six corridors included in this study, as well as the city at large, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with lower unemployment rates.

Unemployment rates by age tell a similar story. In the Beatties Ford Corridor, for example, nearly one in three residents between the age of 16 and 24 is unemployed. For residents 55 and older, on the other hand, the unemployment rate is less than 10% in all corridors.

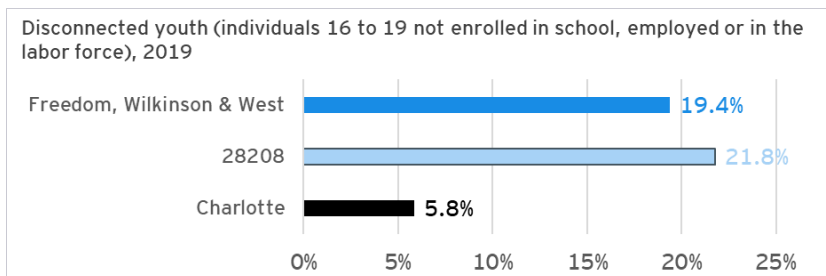
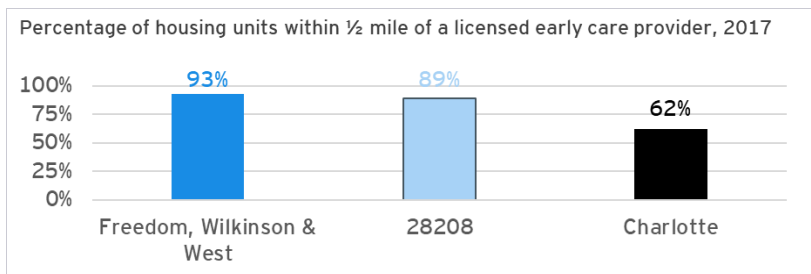
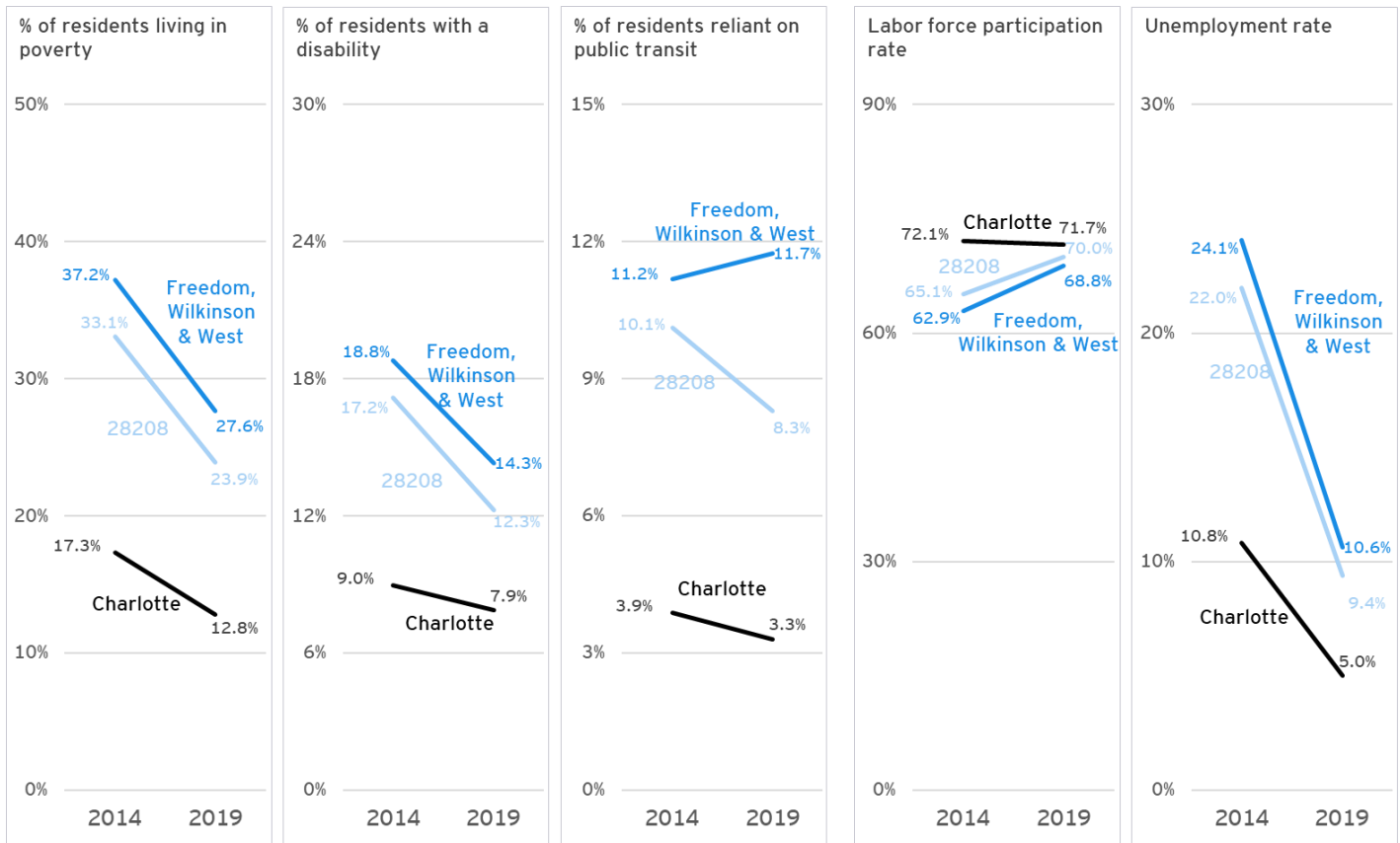
(More detailed snapshots of each corridor are provided in the following pages.)

Workforce analysis findings: Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridor (28208)



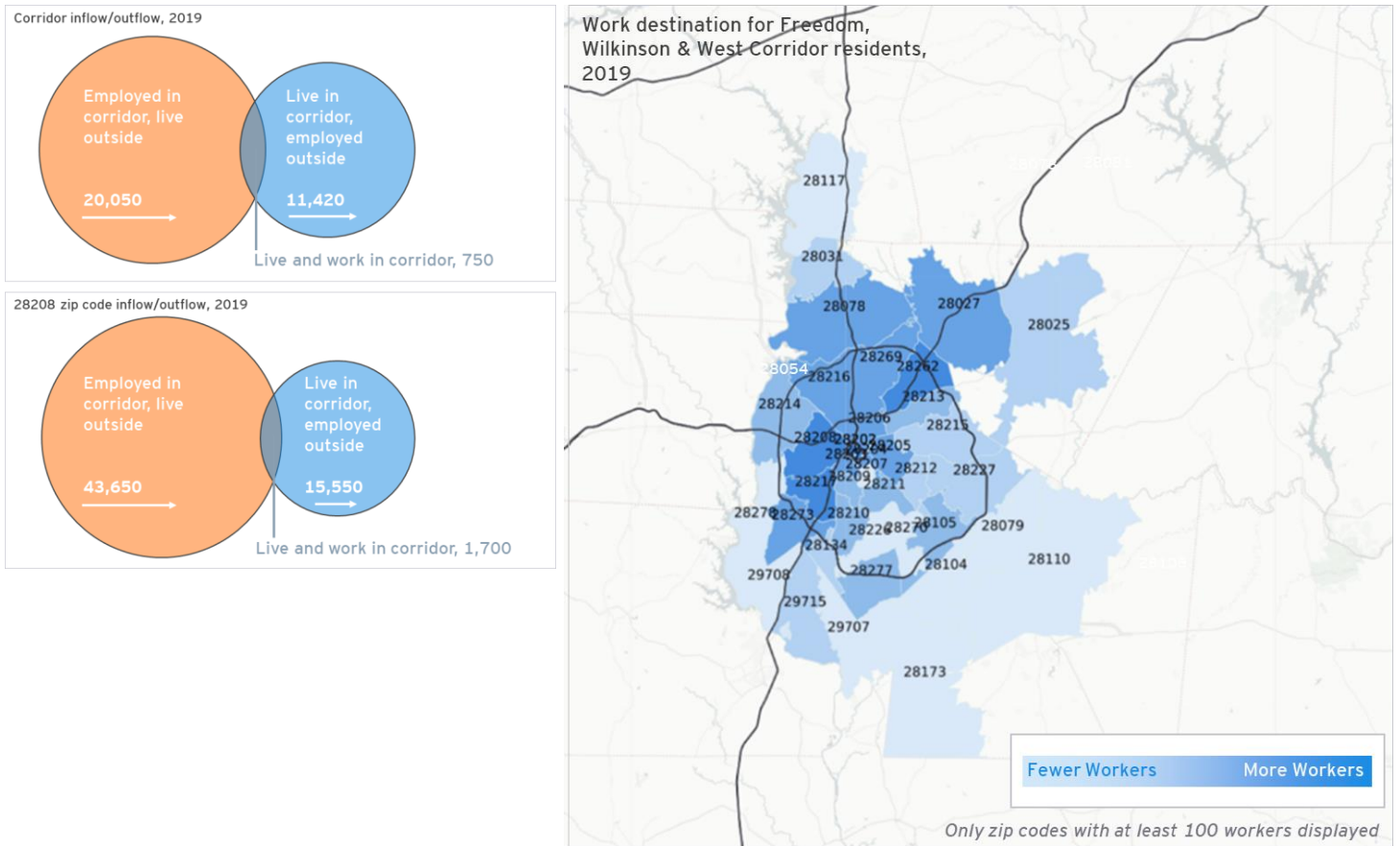
- Communities of color represent over 85% of all residents in the Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridors. Citywide, racial and ethnic minorities comprise less than 60% of Charlotte's population. The population residing in the corridors is also slightly younger relative to Charlotte as a whole. As a percentage of its population, for example, there is a greater proportion of residents less than 18 years old compared to the citywide average.
- Freedom, Wilkinson and West residents are slightly less likely to possess a high school diploma or college degree relative to the average of all residents in the broader zip code. Corridor residents are much less likely to possess a high school diploma or college degree relative to citywide average.
- Compared to the city as whole, both the 28208 zip code and the Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridors are home to relatively few foreign-born residents and non-citizens. The corridors and the greater 28208 zip code both feature proportionally fewer residents that speak a language other than English at home compared to the citywide average.

Workforce analysis findings: Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridor (28208), cont.



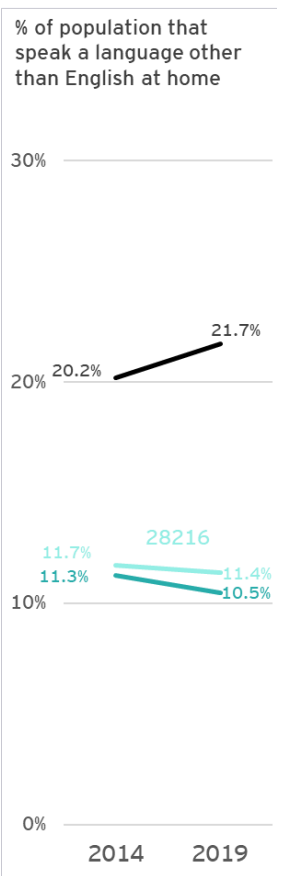
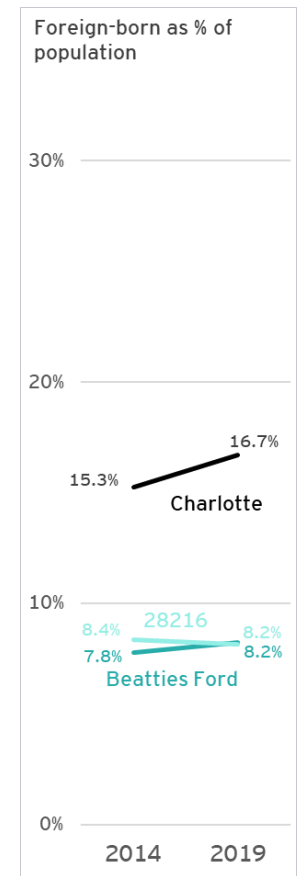
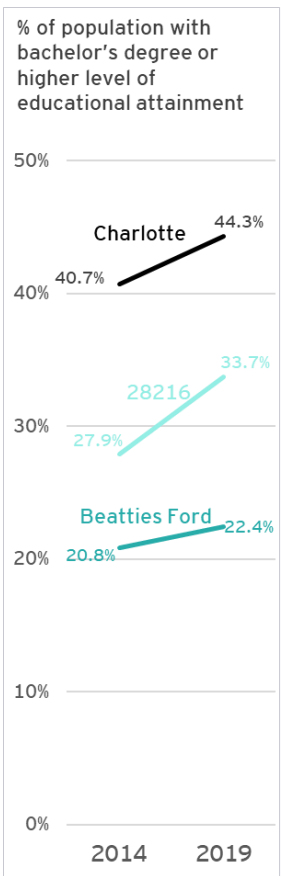
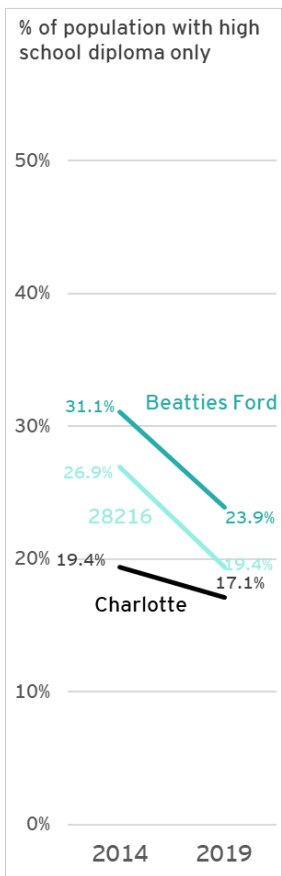
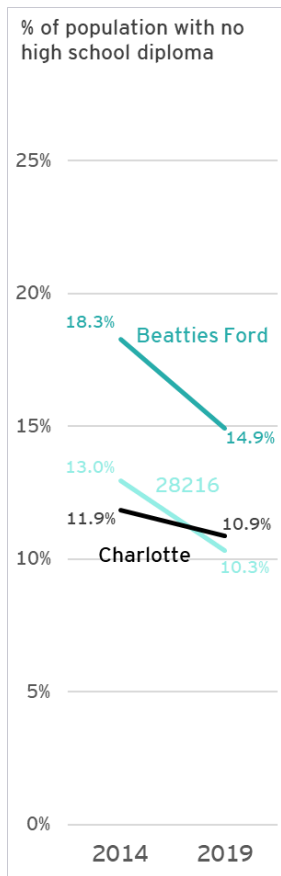
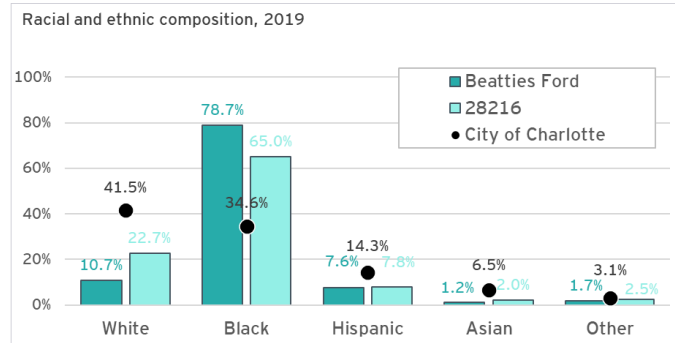
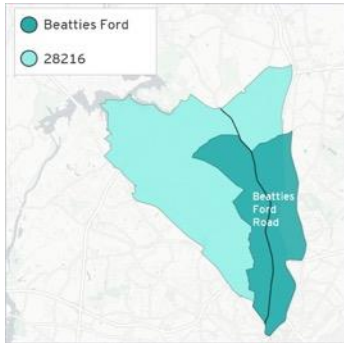
- Although poverty rates in both the Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridors and broader zip code have declined between 2014 and 2019, they remain much higher relative to the citywide average. The corridors and the 28208 zip codes are also home to a larger proportion of residents with one or more disabilities. And, residents are much more likely to rely on public transit relative to their counterparts in the rest of the city.
- Labor participation rates are comparable among corridor, zip code and city residents. Although unemployment rates declined in recent years, the rate in the Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridors is higher on average.
- Compared to Charlotte as a whole, most Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridors and 28208 zip code residents live in relative proximity to a licensed childcare provider.
- Approximately one in five corridor and zip code residents between the ages of 16 and 19 are neither employed nor enrolled in school.

Workforce analysis findings: Freedom, Wilkinson & West Corridor (28208), cont.



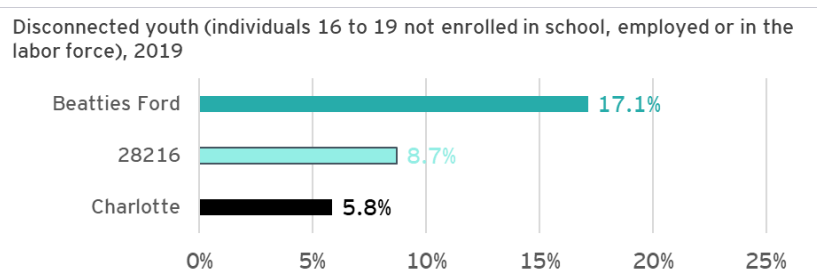
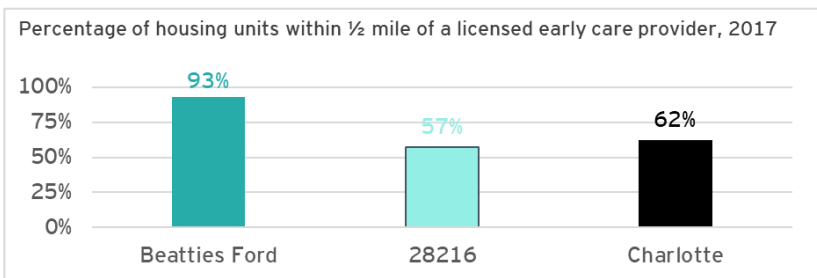
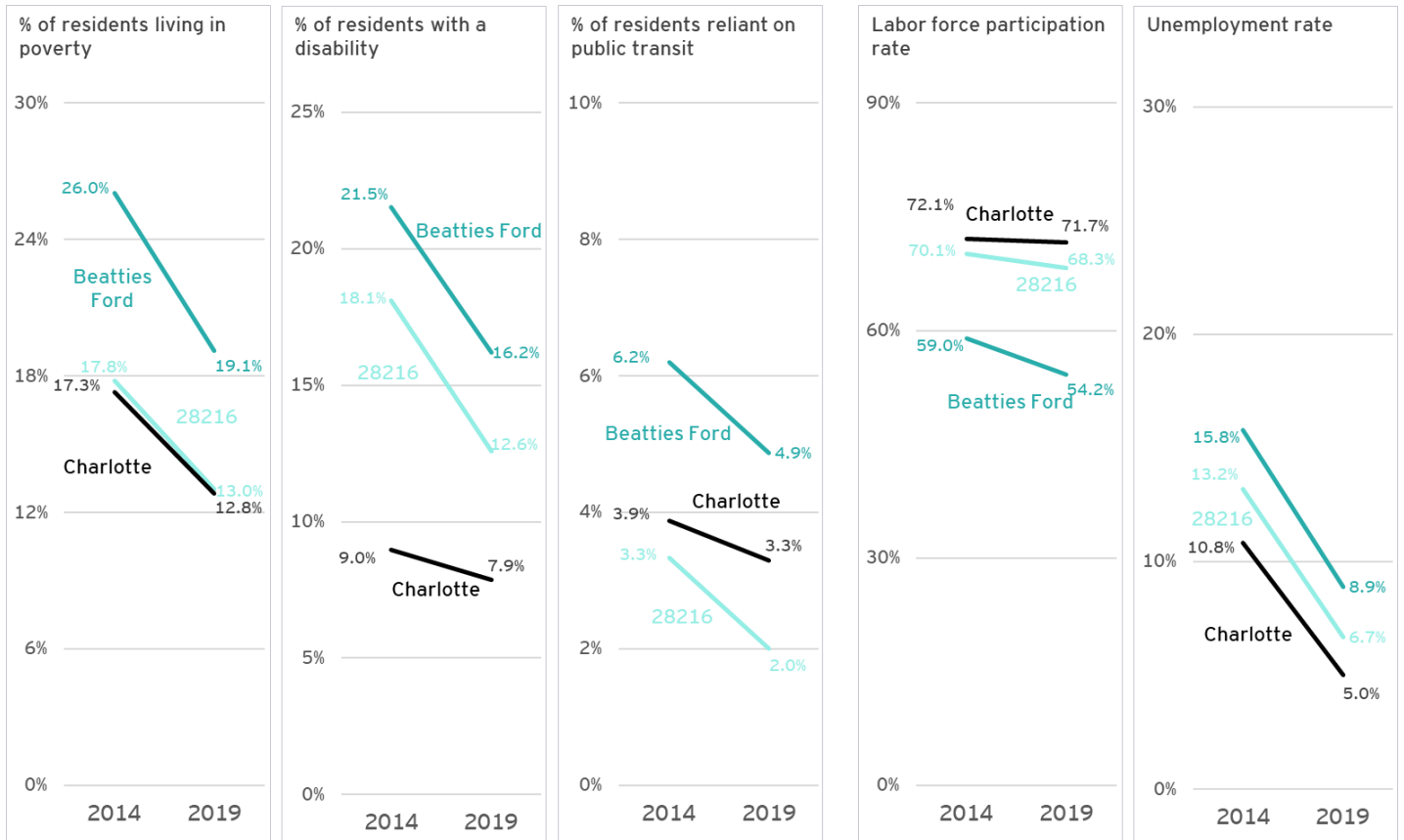
- Employment in the corridor and broader 28208 zip code exceeds the number of employed residents in these communities. Relatively few individuals live and work in either the corridor or the zip code area. Most residents of the corridor and zip code work outside of their home community.
- Nearly 10% of corridor residents work within the 2822 zip code, and an additional 21% work in three adjacent zip codes, including at or near the airport as well as Uptown Charlotte.
- The 28208 zip code is home to nearly 11,000 more jobs than employed residents. As a result, employment figures for virtually every occupation within the 28208 zip code exceed the number of residents employed in these occupations. There are nearly 11,000 more Transportation & Material Moving jobs in the zip code than aligned workers living in the zip code. Other significant gaps include Office & Administrative Support (4,400 plus), Protective Services (2,540), and Maintenance & Repair (2,450). (Source: EMSI)
- Relative to the Charlotte average, corridor residents are more than twice as likely to be employed in Material Moving occupations. Corridor residents are also more likely to be employed in Food Preparation, Personal Care, Transportation, and Building Cleaning & Maintenance. Corridor residents are less likely to be employed in Business & Finance, Computer & Math, Management, and Production occupations. (Source: US Census Bureau)

Workforce analysis findings: Beatties Ford Corridor (28216)



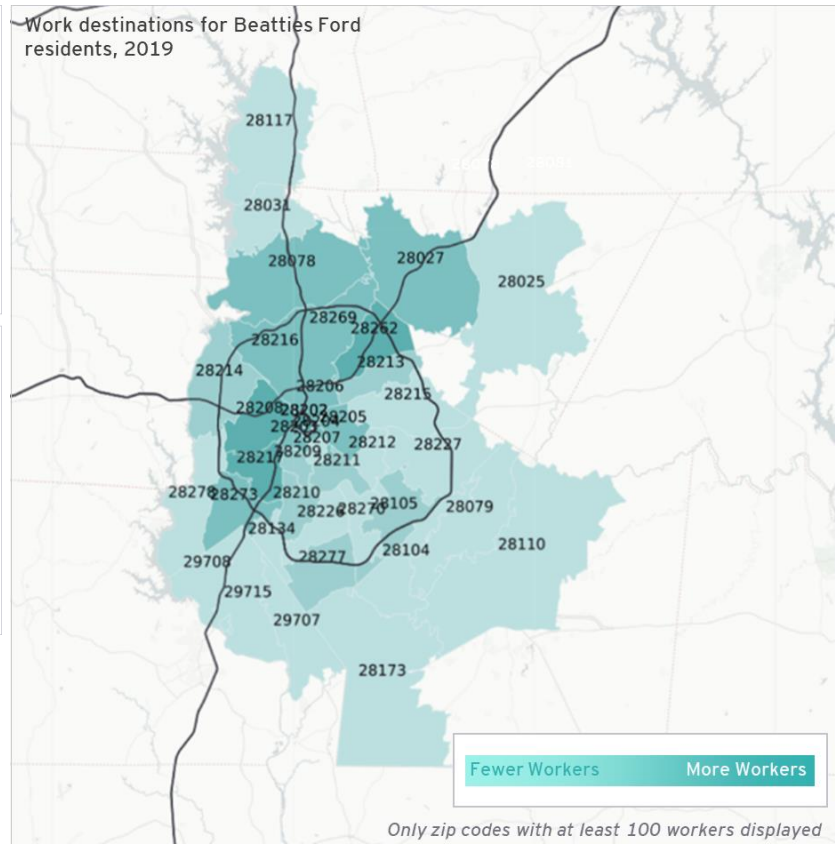
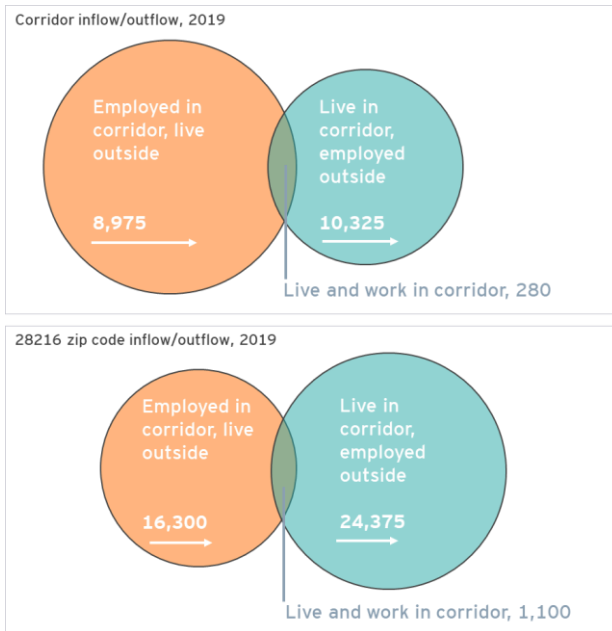
- Communities of color represent approximately 90% of all residents in the Beatties Ford Corridor. Citywide, racial and ethnic minorities comprise less than 60% of Charlotte’s population. Also, the Beatties Ford Corridor is home to a higher proportion of residents 65 years of age and older relative to the citywide average. The proportion of residents in all other age cohorts is comparable to the Charlotte average.
- While educational attainment levels improved between 2014 and 2019 in the Beatties Ford Corridor, they continue to trail citywide averages. Beatties Ford Corridor residents are less likely to possess a high school diploma or college degree relative to the Charlotte and zip code averages. The 28216 zip code exceeded citywide averages in 2019 for educational attainment levels of less than a high school diploma.
- Compared to the city as a whole, both the 28216 zip code and the Beatties Ford Corridor are home to relatively few foreign-born residents and non-citizens. Both the corridor and zip also have fewer residents that speak a language other than English at home.

Workforce analysis findings: Beatties Ford Corridor (28216), cont.



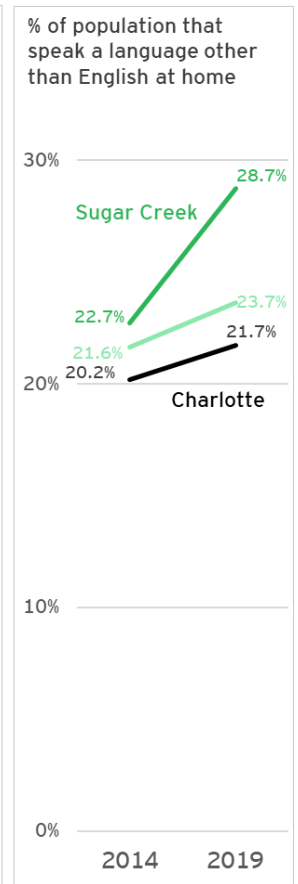
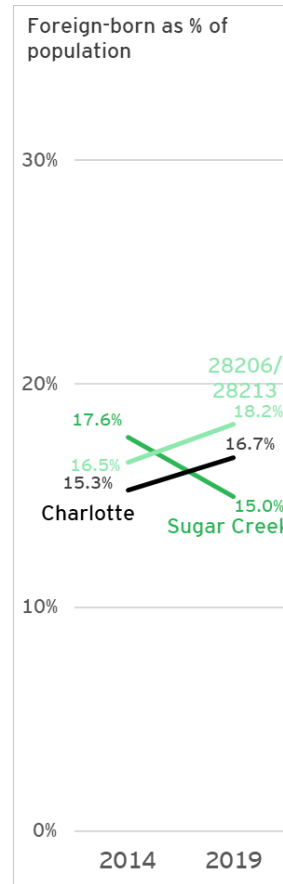
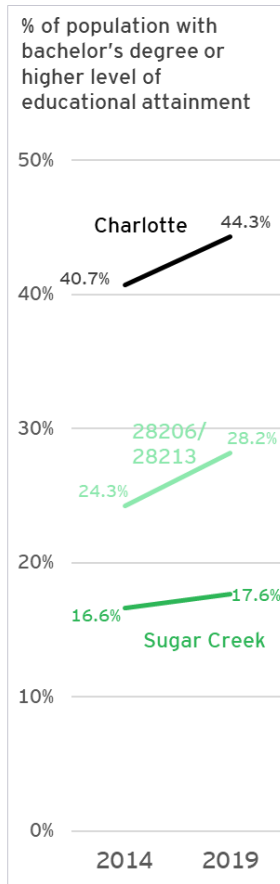
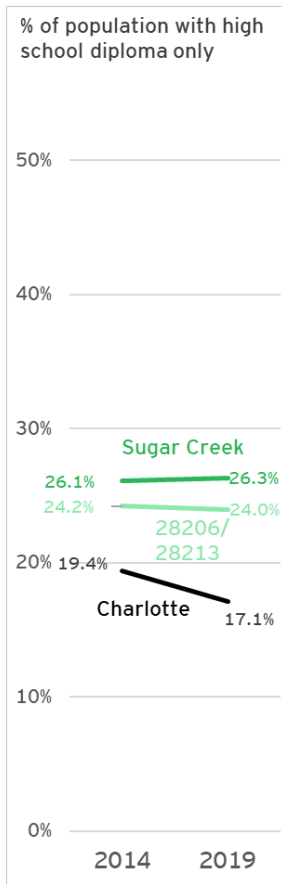
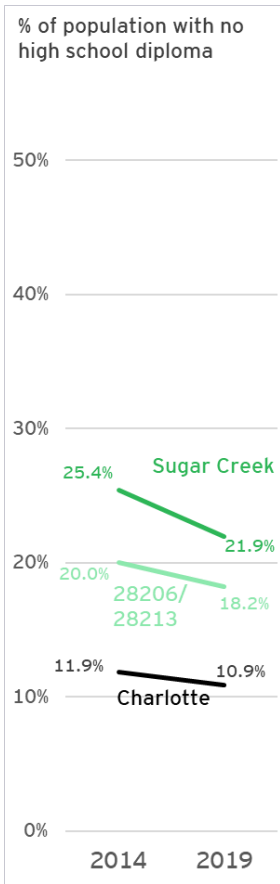
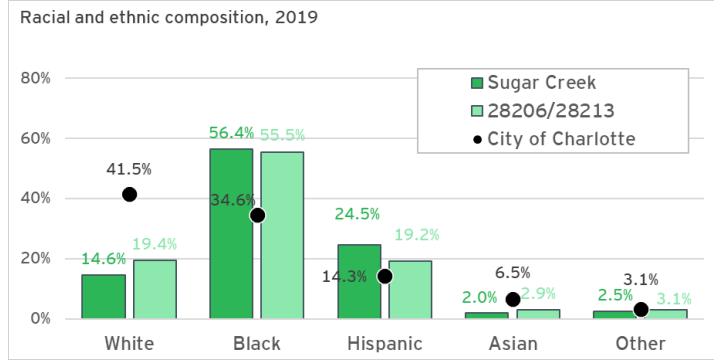
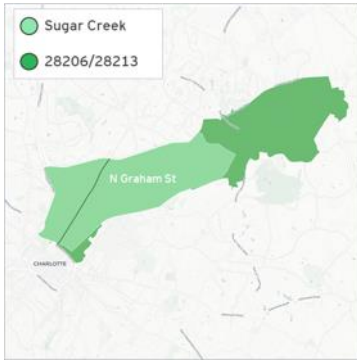
- Although poverty rates in the Beatties Ford Corridor declined between 2014 and 2019, they remain higher relative to both the citywide and the greater 28216 zip code averages.
- Labor participation rates are lower among corridor residents compared to the zip code and citywide averages. The unemployment rate among residents in all examined areas declined between 2014 and 2019. Despite the decline in the Beatties Ford corridor, the unemployment rate remained higher than both the zip code area and citywide averages.
- Corridor residents have higher disability rates and are more likely to rely on public transit compared to the city and zip code. On a positive note most corridor residents live in relative proximity to a licensed childcare provider.
- Over 17% of corridor residents between the ages of 16 and 19 are neither employed nor enrolled in school.

Workforce analysis findings: Beatties Ford Corridor (28216), cont.



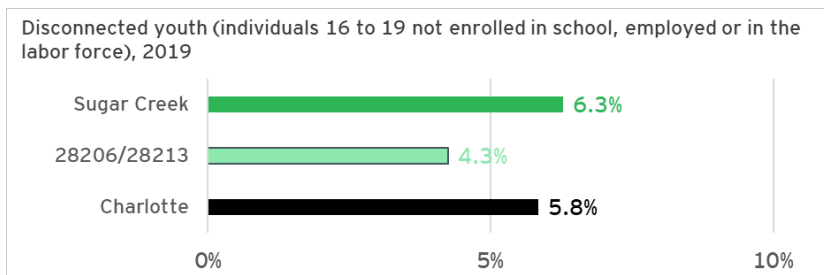
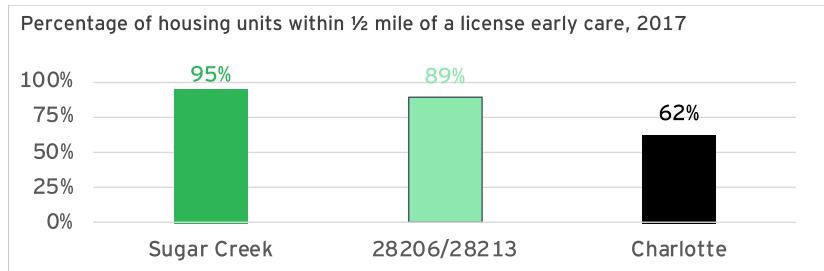
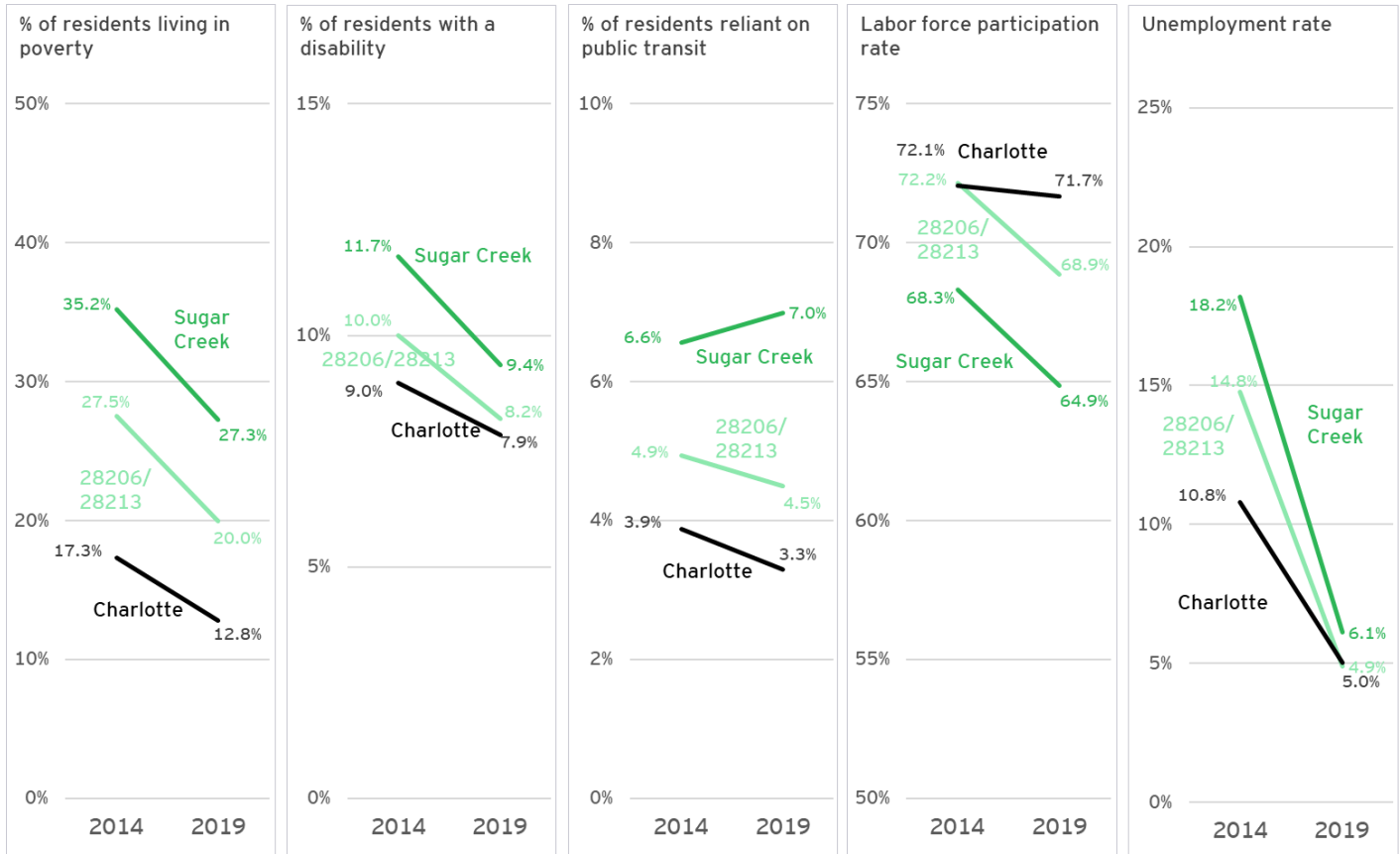
- Approximately 4% of Beatties Ford Corridor residents work within the 28216 zip code, and an additional 20% work in three adjacent zip codes, including at or near the airport as well as downtown Charlotte.
- Employment in the corridor and broader 28216 zip code exceeds the number of employed residents in those communities. Relatively few individuals live and work in either the Beatties Ford Corridor or the zip code area. The vast majority of residents work outside of their home community.
- Employment figures for residents workers in almost every occupation within the 28216 zip code are greater than the number of jobs available in these occupations. Within the zip code, the greatest surplus of jobs relative to resident workers are in the fields of office and administrative support, health diagnostics and technicians, business and finance, and education. (Source: EMSI)
- Relative to the Charlotte average, corridor residents are more than twice as likely to be employed in Building Cleaning and Maintenance and Production occupations. Corridor residents are also more likely be employed in Healthcare, Protective Services, Food Prep., Transportation, and Material Moving occupations. Corridor residents are less likely to be employed in Management, Business and Finance, Computer and Math, and Education occupations. (Source: US Census Bureau)

Workforce analysis findings: Sugar Creek Corridor (28206/28213)



- Communities of color represent over 85% of all residents in the Sugar Creek Corridor. Citywide, racial and ethnic minorities comprise less than 60% of Charlotte's population. The population residing in the corridor largely mirrors the age composition of the city as a whole. The corridor also has a slightly larger proportion of residents between the ages of 18 to 24.
- Educational attainment levels in the Sugar Creek corridor trail that of the broader 28206/28213 zip code area as well as the citywide average. Sugar Creek corridor residents are less likely to possess a high school diploma compared to zip code and Charlotte averages. Residents are less than half as likely to possess a bachelor's degree.
- Between 2014 and 2019, the number of foreign-born residents as a percent of the population declined and, in 2019, comprise a smaller proportion of the Sugar Creek Corridor's population compared to both the overall city, as well as, the combined 28206/28213 zip code area. At the same time, more corridor residents are likely to speak a language other than English at home.

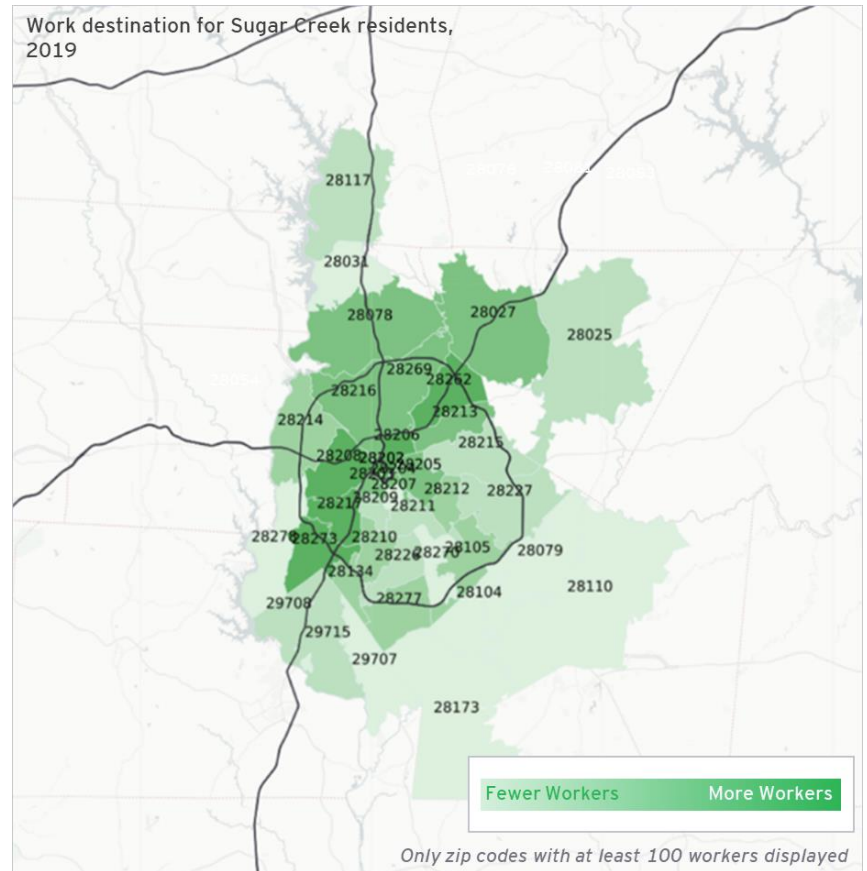
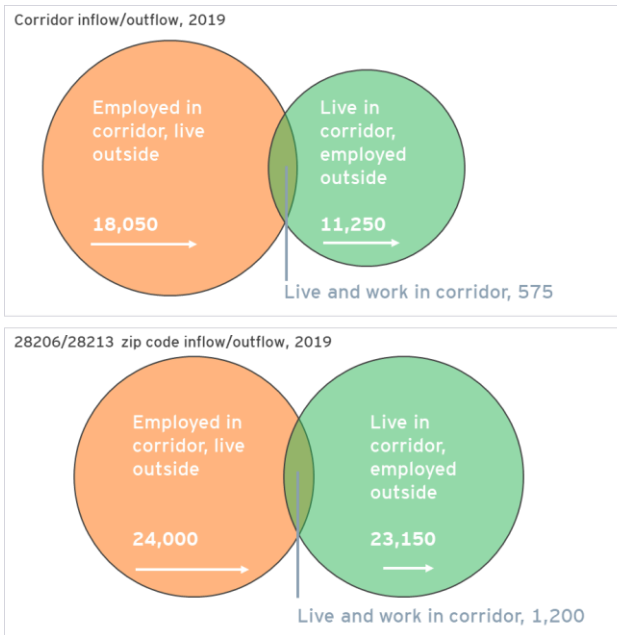
Workforce analysis findings: Sugar Creek Corridor (28206/28213), cont.



Source: US Census Bureau, Charlotte/Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer

- Although poverty rates in the corridor and zip code declined in recent years, they remain much higher than the city average.
- The corridor is home to a higher proportion of disabled residents. And, residents are more likely to rely on public transit.
- Labor participation rates are lower than the city average. While unemployment rates declined between 2014 and 2019, corridor residents experienced slightly higher levels of unemployment compared to both Charlotte and the greater 28206/28213 zip code area.
- Compared to Charlotte as a whole, most Sugar Creek Corridor and 28206/28213 zip code area residents live in relative proximity to a licensed childcare provider.
- Corridor and zip code residents experience much higher levels of violent crime relative to the rest of Charlotte.
- Over 6% of corridor residents between the ages of 16 and 19 are neither employed nor enrolled in school.

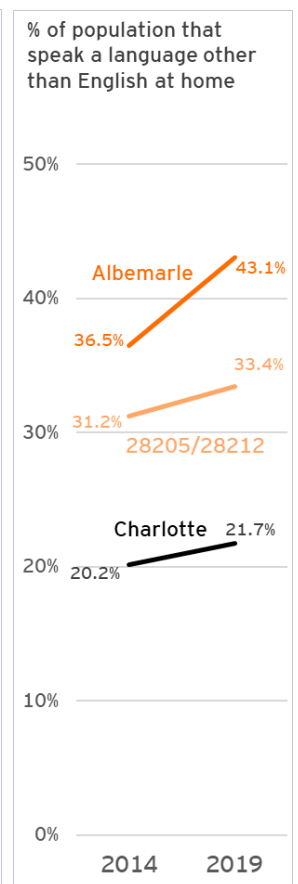
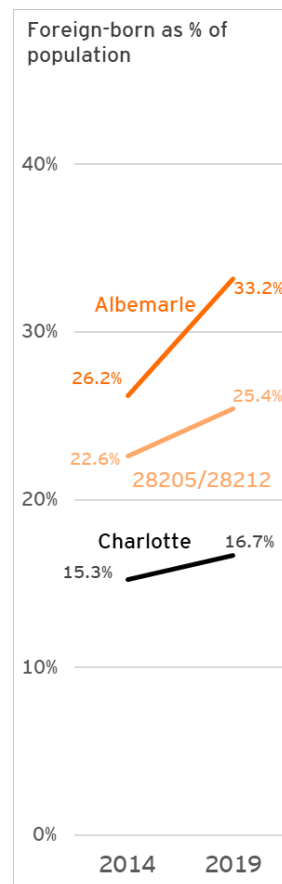
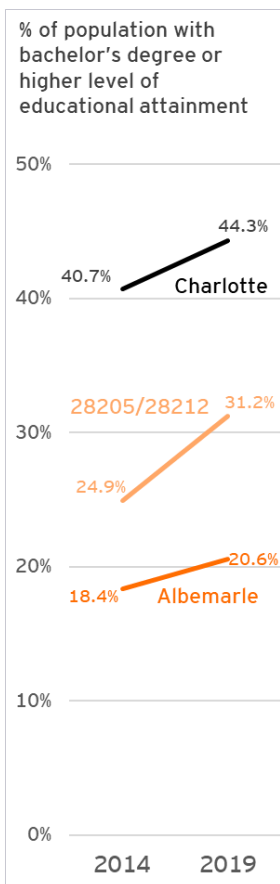
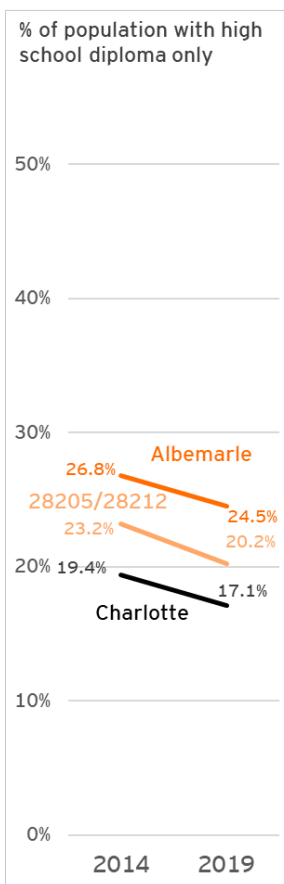
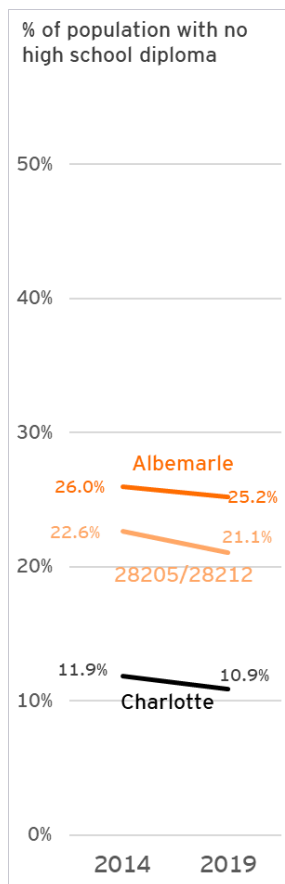
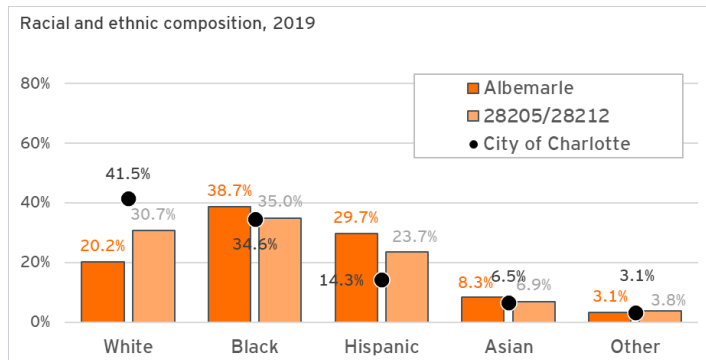
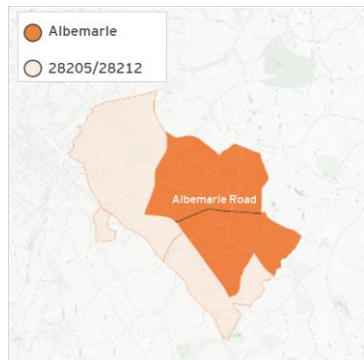
Workforce analysis findings: Sugar Creek Corridor (28206/28213), cont.



Source: US Census Bureau

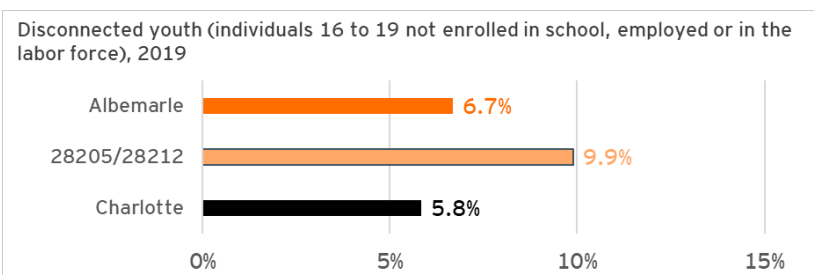
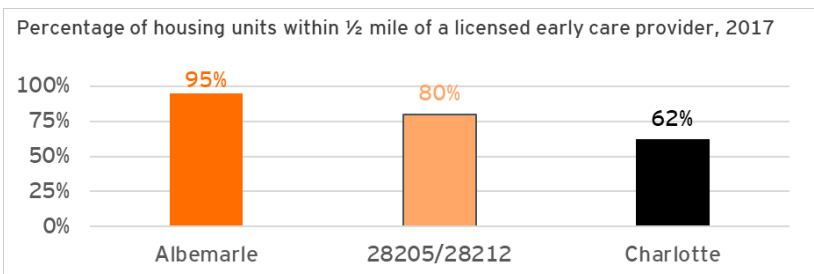
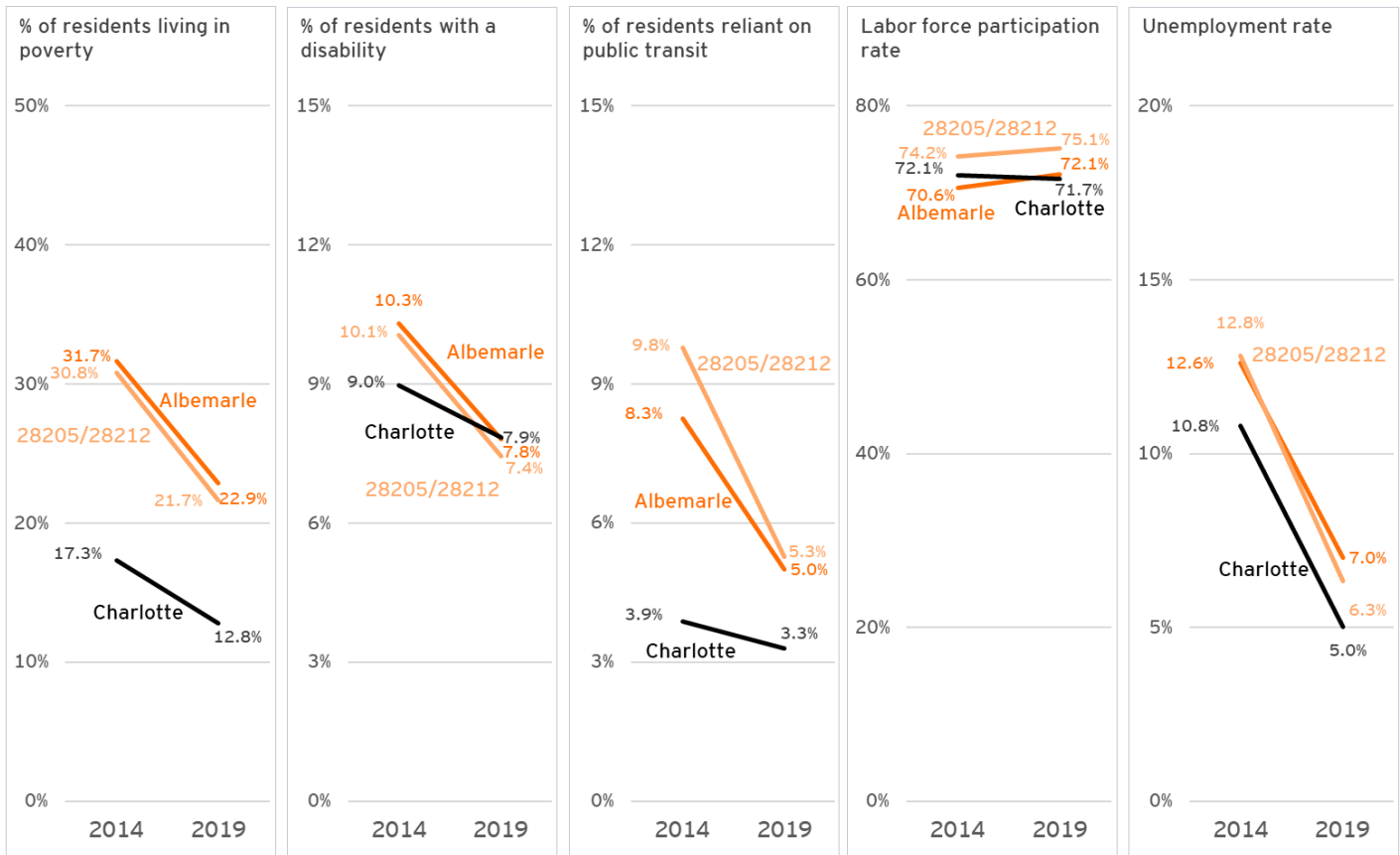
- While jobs in Sugar Creek Corridor exceeds the number of employed residents, the number of jobs and employed residents within the greater 28206/28213 zip code area is almost the same. While more individuals live and work in the 28206/28213 zip codes than do in the Sugar Creek Corridor, relatively few individuals live and work in either the Sugar Creek Corridor or the 28206/28213 zip codes area overall.
- Less than 6% of Sugar Creek Corridor residents work within the combined 28206/28213 zip code area. Relative to other opportunity corridors, Sugar Creek Corridor residents work across a relatively large number of employment centers throughout the city, including downtown Charlotte, the airport, and the northwest intersection of I-85 and I-485.
- While the 28206/28213 zip codes are home to more jobs than employed residents overall, this is not due to an evenly distributed availability of jobs across all industries, but rather, due to an abundance of jobs within a select group of industries. There are over 2,700 more Transportation & Material Moving jobs within the zip codes than aligned workers living in the zip codes. Other significant gaps include Construction (1,400 plus), Maintenance & Repair (787), and Production (1,225 plus). (Source: EMSI)
- Relative to the Charlotte average, corridor residents are more than twice as likely to be employed in Building Cleaning & Maintenance and Production occupations. Corridor residents are also more likely to be employed in Healthcare, Protective Services, Food Preparation, Transportation, and Material Moving occupations. Corridor residents are less likely to be employed in Management, Business & Finance, Computer & Math, and Education occupations. (Source: US Census Bureau)

Workforce analysis findings: Albemarle Corridor (28205/28212)



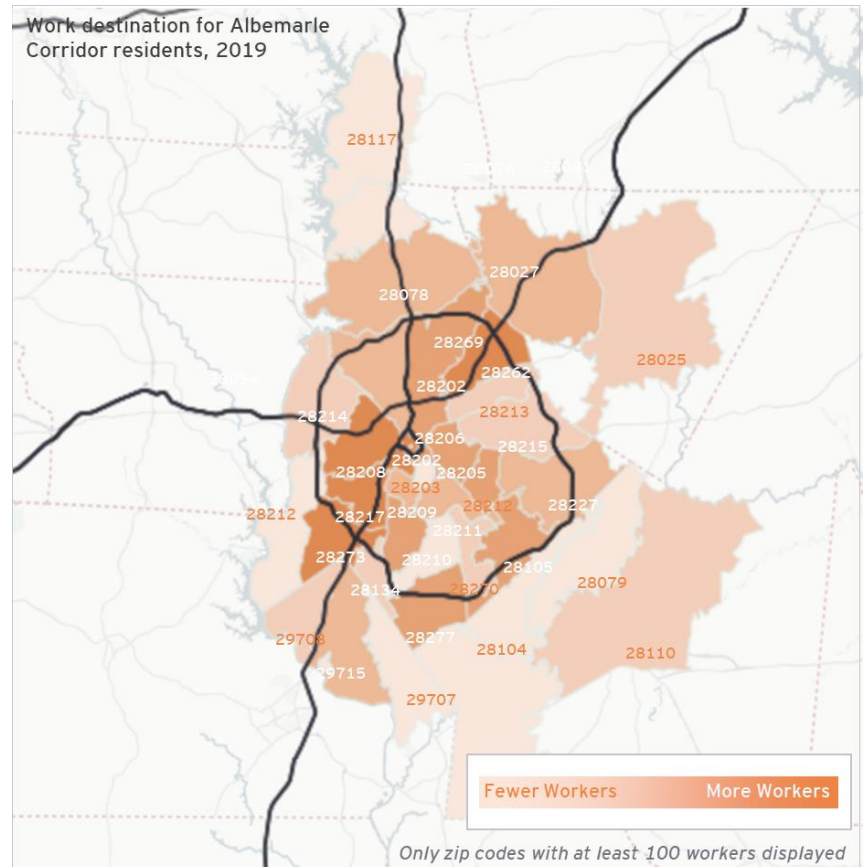
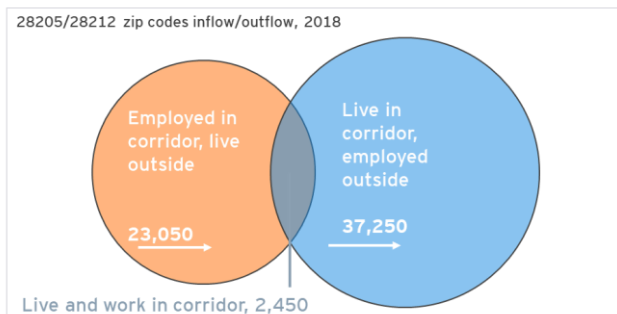
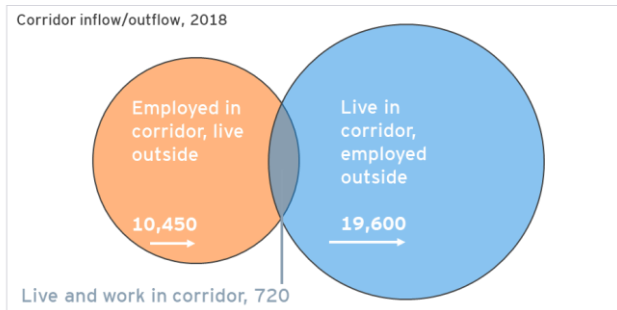
- Communities of color represent nearly 80% of all residents in the Albemarle Corridor. Citywide, racial and ethnic minorities comprise less than 60% of Charlotte’s population. The population residing in the corridor largely mirrors the age composition of the city as a whole. The corridor also has a slightly smaller proportion of residents between the ages of 45 to 64.
- Educational attainment levels in the Albemarle Corridor trail that of the broader 28205/28212 zip code area as well as the citywide average. Albemarle Corridor residents are less likely to possess a high school diploma compared to zip code and Charlotte averages. Residents are less than half as likely to possess a bachelor’s degree.
- Between 2014 and 2019, the number of foreign-born residents as a percent of the population increased and, in 2019, comprised a larger proportion of the Albemarle Corridor’s population compared to both the overall city, as well as, the combined 28205/28212 zip code area. Also, more corridor residents are likely to speak a language other than English at home.

Workforce analysis findings: Albemarle Corridor (28205/28212), cont.



- Although poverty rates in both the Albemarle Corridor and broader zip code area have declined between 2014 and 2019, they remain much higher relative to the citywide average.
- In 2019, the corridor had a similar proportion of residents with one or more disabilities. Corridor and zip code residents are more likely to rely on public transit, despite seeing a decline in reliance between 2014 and 2019.
- Labor participation rates were largely aligned with the city average in 2019 but were below the greater zip code area.
- While unemployment rates declined between 2014 and 2019, corridor and zip code residents experienced higher levels of unemployment.
- Corridor and zip code residents experience higher levels of violent crime relative to the rest of Charlotte.
- Approximately 7% of corridor residents between the ages of 16 and 19 are neither employed nor enrolled in school.

Workforce analysis findings: Albemarle Corridor (28205/28212), cont.



- Employment in both the Albemarle Corridor and the broader 28205/28212 zip code area was less than the number of employed residents in these communities.
- While more individuals live and work in the 28205/28212 zip codes than do in the Albemarle Corridor, relatively few individuals live and work in either the Albemarle Corridor or the 28205/28212 zip codes area overall with most corridor and zip code residents working outside of their home community.
- Less than 7% of Albemarle Corridor residents work within the combined 28205/28212 zip code area. Relative to other opportunity corridors, Albemarle Corridor residents work across a relatively large number of employment centers throughout the city, including downtown Charlotte, the airport, and the northwest intersection of I-85 and I-485.
- The 28205/28212 zip code area is home to over 11,000 more employed residents than jobs. As a result, employment figures for virtually every occupation within the zip code are at a deficit when compared to the number of residents employed in these occupations.
- There are over 1,750 more Office & Administrative Support workers in the zip code than jobs in the zip code. This is also the case for multiple other clusters, including Transportation & Material Moving (1,400+). (Source: EMSI)
- Relative to the Charlotte average, corridor residents are more than twice as likely to be employed in Construction, Building Cleaning & Maintenance, and Material Moving occupations.
- Corridor residents are also more likely to be employed in Production, Maintenance & Repair, Protective Services, Food Preparation, Transportation, and Healthcare Support occupations and are less likely to be employed in Management occupations. (Source: US Census Bureau)

Highlights:

Target industry analysis findings

Most effective economic development initiatives, whether at the corridor, city or regional level, focus their attention on a handful of target industries that align with local assets and vision while providing strong economic opportunities for their residents. This helps ensure that economic development resources are optimized, producing a high return for the whole community.

Selecting target industries is an iterative process combining both quantitative and qualitative information. Through data analysis and conversations, this study honed in on several potential target industries for the corridors that provide immediate job opportunities as well as upward career pathways for local residents.

The target industry analysis begins with a view of whether an industry is growing and then filters through an increasingly local lens until the target is validated. Throughout the process, potential targets are assessed through another filter: whether the industry could make the Corridors of Opportunity more economically diverse, resilient, and sustainable.

Target industry evaluation process

1. Is the industry growing?

Examining global and national trends helps determine if the target industry will likely continue to grow and create future opportunities in Charlotte.

2. Does the industry have a presence in the Corridor?

Existing industry concentrations often reflect competitive strengths and present some of the best opportunities for expansion, recruitment and startup growth.

3. Does the industry fit with the Corridor's assets and workforce?





Local assets (including workforce and real estate) within each corridor support industry ecosystems and expanded activity is an important filter.

4. Does the industry align with the Corridor's goals and provide strong upward career paths for local residents?

The study evaluated each industry on whether it reinforces the goals and needs identified by local stakeholders, using interviews, workshops, and a resident survey.

Through the evaluation process, four target industries and several specific niche industry sectors are recommended for the corridors: (1) technology and administrative support services, (2) health care, (3) logistics and distribution, and (4) manufacturing. All industries are growing, both nationally and locally. The industries also employ people with a spectrum of skill and educational levels, from high school degrees to post-secondary education, providing upward career opportunities for residents. They align with the existing assets of the corridors and skill sets available, including growth in trade skills like construction that expand when the economy is healthy. Finally, they are focus areas for other local and regional efforts, including those of Charlotte Works, the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and the Centralina Economic Development District.

While there are opportunities to advance target industry growth across all of the corridors, some industries are especially suited for specific areas, as suggested in the table below. Therefore, when thinking tactically about corridor developments, the target industries for each corridor should be taken into consideration. Aligning investments with the needs of those industries, combined with targeted marketing outreach, likely will yield stronger results.

	FWW	Beatties Ford	Sugar Creek	Albemarle
 <p>Technology and administrative support services Software/IT Call centers/administrative support</p>	●	●	●	●
 <p>Health care Community health center Practitioner offices</p>	●	●	●	●
 <p>Logistics and distribution Intermodal distribution Warehousing and fulfillment</p>	●	●	●	●
 <p>Manufacturing Food processing Medical equipment and supplies</p>	●	●	●	●
<p>← Construction and trade fields →</p>				
<p>With investment could be strong future target → Currently strong target industry</p>				

Greater detail on each target industry and niche sector — including the occupations and workforce opportunities within each — is provided in the Target Industry Analysis report.

Highlights:

Real estate analysis findings

As part of the study, the EY team analyzed real estate within the original three sub-areas comprised of five Corridors of Opportunity. The goal of the analysis was to highlight areas of the corridors that could be potentially redeveloped to catalyze growth or serve as a location for employers moving into the corridors. Complete findings are available in the Real Estate Analysis report. The Corridors of Opportunity that were examined as part of this analysis include: Freedom, Wilkinson & West Corridor, Beatties Ford Corridor, and Sugar Creek Corridor. The Albemarle Corridor was not included in this real estate analysis as it was the focus of a separate and similar study conducted by the City of Charlotte.

The project team evaluated the real estate composition of the three sub-areas (five Corridors of Opportunity) based on data available from CoStar. The analysis evaluated the current uses of all existing properties, the number of properties, building size, land area, year built, and average percent leased based on the latest CoStar data as of March 2021. The purpose of the evaluation is to understand where future businesses and other development could potentially locate in the corridors to trigger additional growth and creation of opportunities for corridor residents.

Overall, the analysis revealed that existing buildings in all three corridor areas are of poorer quality and older. Despite these attributes, however, most properties are fully-leased and occupied, leaving little modern inventory for businesses considering locating or expanding in the area.

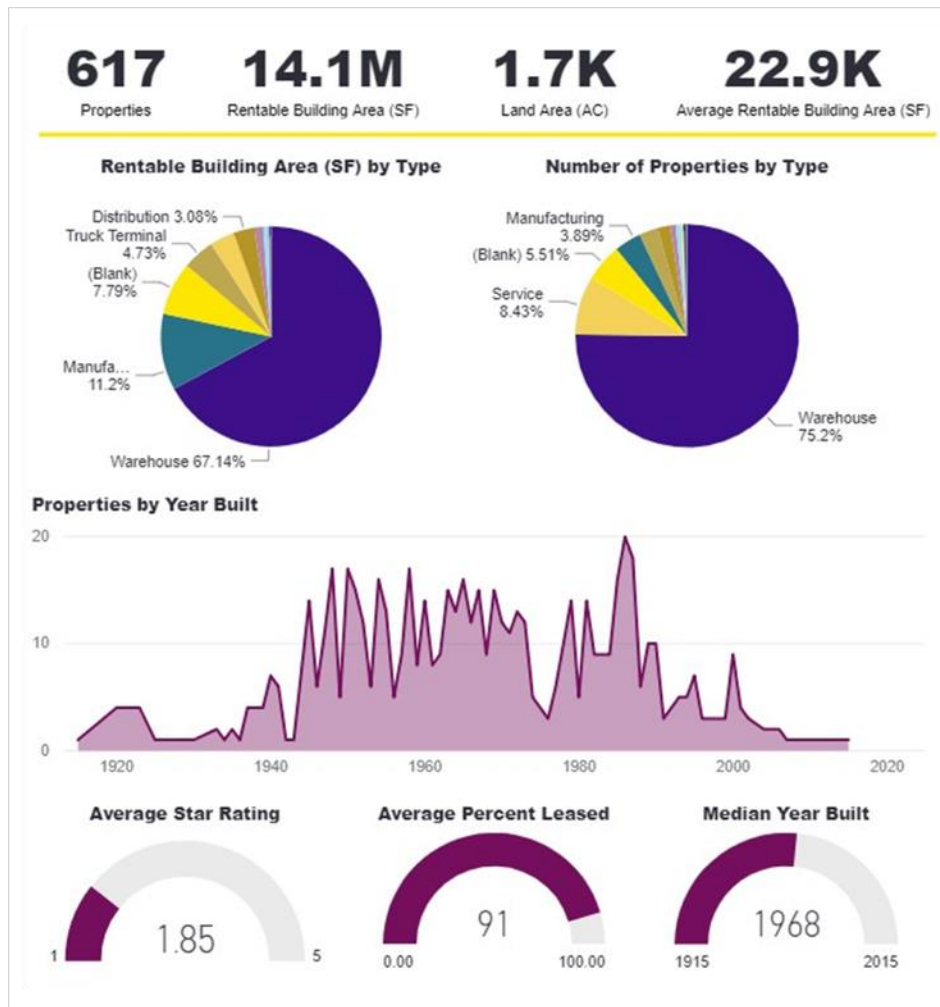
In addition to existing structures, the project team evaluated where vacant land parcels exist. Between the three corridor areas in this study, at this time of this analysis in March 2021 and based on available data, there were 580 total parcels of vacant land accounting for 3,100 acres. Across the board, parcels are generally small, with a majority being 5 acres or smaller. Almost all land acreage is commercial. And, while the 580 parcels figure may sound encouraging, only 46 parcels totaling 101 acres were available for sale across all of the corridor areas included in this study, with an average size of between 1.4 and 2.9 acres.

The data examined in the Real Estate Analysis points to a potential shortage of modern buildings and land parcels of appropriate size and quality for attracting target industry and other major employers into the corridors. This shortage also translates into an opportunity to strategically focus development efforts in key areas of the corridors with strong potential to catalyze other development. Focusing development in those areas first might include multiple coordinated actions such as parceling smaller properties into one larger offering; channeling infrastructure, transit and quality of place investments into those areas; and proactively marketing those areas to private sector collaborators.

Summary of Real Estate Analysis for each corridor

<p>Sugar Creek Corridor</p> <p>A heavily industrial corridor, Sugar Creek has 617 industrial properties listed on CoStar, accounting for 14.1m sf. The Sugar Creek corridor also includes 2.4m sf of office, mostly in general office space, but there are also six medical offices, a few mixed-use office and residential buildings, and an assisted living and rehabilitation center. Development is concentrated along North Graham Street and North Tryon Street.</p>	Predominant real estate	Warehouse, manufacturing
	Rentable buildings, area	Industrial: 617 14m sf Office/Health: 138 2.4m sf
	Buildings for lease	Office: 14 930k sf Industrial/Flex: 42 900k sf
	Buildings for sale	Industrial: 7 449k sf
	Undeveloped land parcels, acreage	Commercial: 160 638 ac Industrial: 22 83 ac

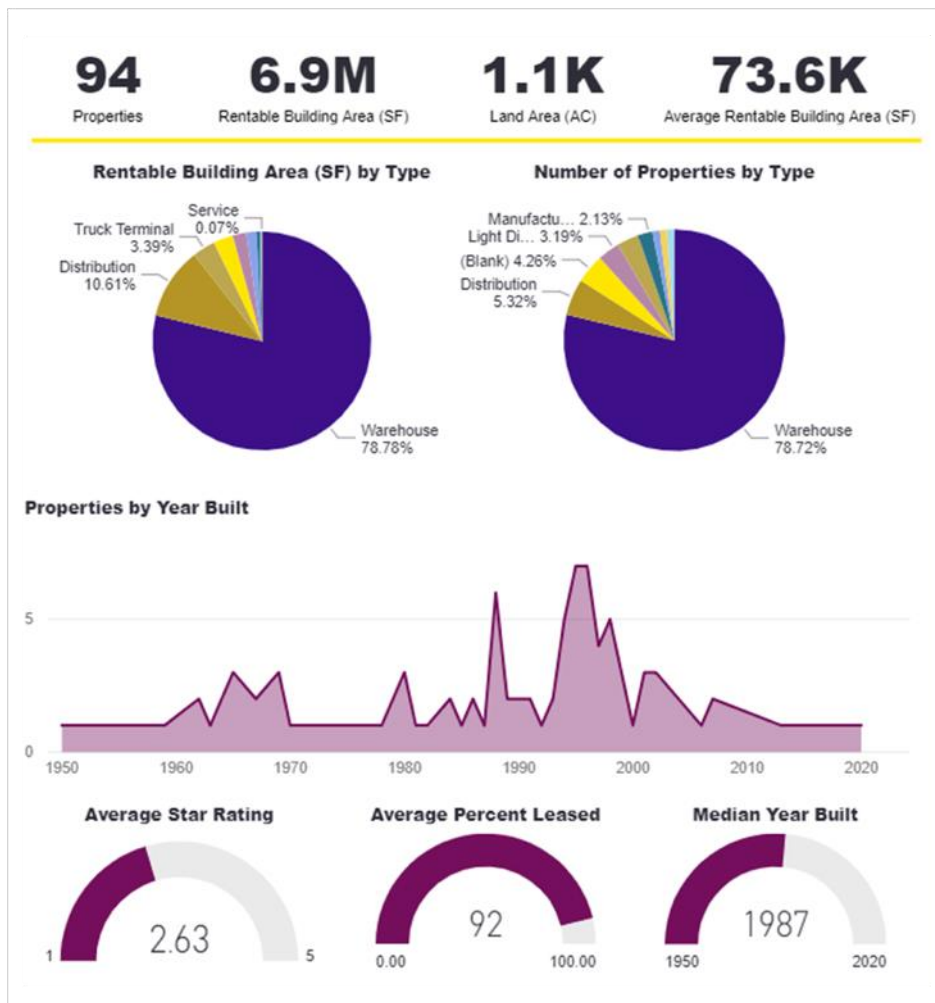
Sugar Creek Corridor – Industrial and Flex Properties



Summary of Real Estate Analysis for each corridor, cont'd

<p>Beatties Ford Corridor</p> <p>As a more residential corridor, Beatties Ford has only 94 industrial and flex properties (out of 1,165 across the corridors), accounting for 6.9m sf. Most of the properties are warehouses are clustered along Wilson Heights and Beatties Ford/Trinity. With the other corridors, the Beatties Ford corridor has less office space, There are 50 total office and health care properties, accounting for 411.9k sf.</p>	<p>Predominant real estate</p>	Residential, warehouse
	<p>Rentable buildings, area</p>	Industrial/Flex: 94 6.9m sf Office/Health: 50 412k sf
	<p>Buildings for lease</p>	Industrial: 13 623k sf Flex: 3 84k sf Office: 1 4.5k sf
	<p>Buildings for Sale</p>	Warehouse: 2 107k sf Commercial: 0 sf
	<p>Undeveloped land parcels, acreage</p>	Commercial: 78 371 ac Industrial: 9 95 ac

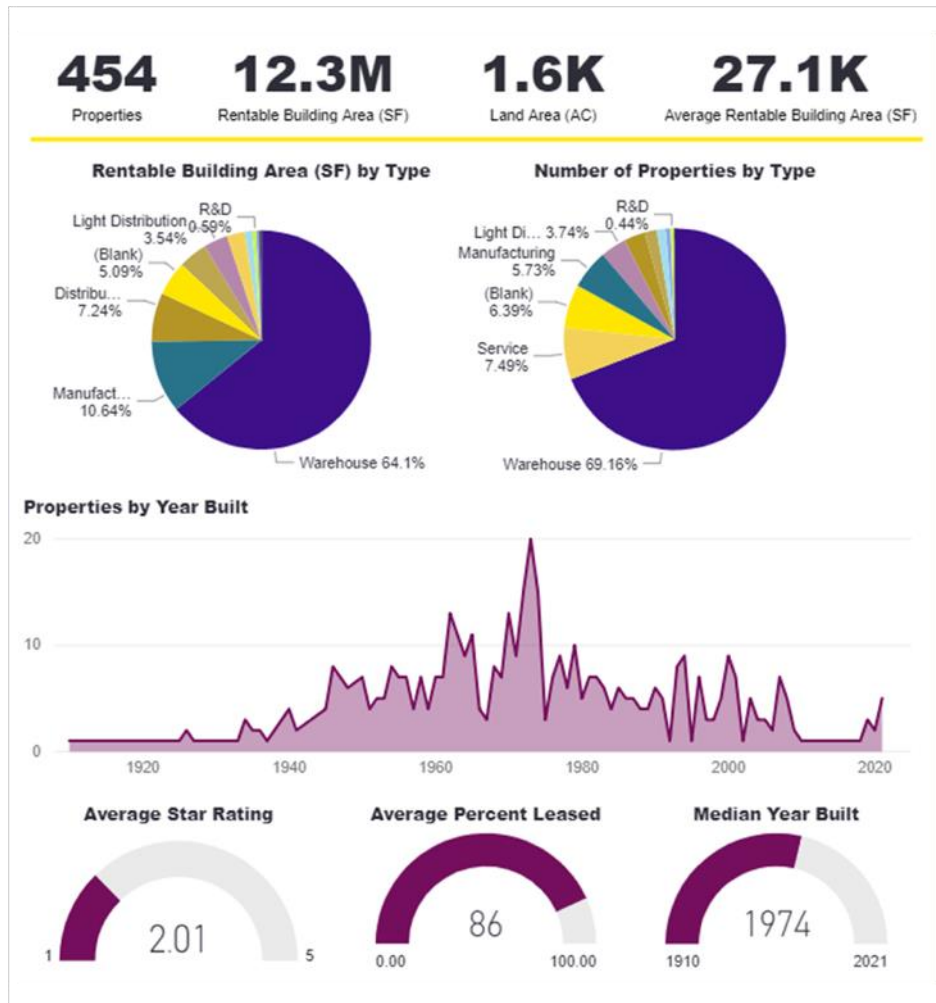
Beatties Ford Corridor – Industrial and Flex Properties



Summary of Real Estate Analysis for each corridor, cont'd

<p>Freedom, Wilkinson, & West Corridors</p> <p>The Freedom, Wilkinson, & West (FWW) corridors have 454 industrial and flex properties, with clusters of larger properties near the airport, especially at the west ends of West and Wilkinson. Compared with the other corridors, FWW has a greater and more diverse offering of office space, with 160 properties accounting for 4.3m sf.</p>	<p>Predominant real estate</p>	Warehouse, manufacturing
	<p>Rentable buildings, area</p>	Industrial: 454 12.3m sf Office/Health: 160 4.3m sf
	<p>Buildings for lease</p>	Industrial: 15 995k sf Office: 21 805k sf Flex: 15 98.5k sf
	<p>Buildings for sale</p>	Warehouse: 2 13.46k sf Industrial: 2 3.25k sf
	<p>Undeveloped land parcels, acreage</p>	Commercial: 184 950 ac Industrial: 43 379 ac

Freedom, Wilkinson & West Corridor – Industrial and Flex Properties



Development focus areas

As discussed earlier, there is a potential need to expand building and land availability within the corridors. Currently, relatively few vacant parcels of land are available, and most are small in size (less than 3 acres). In addition, the existing building inventory is dated and limited.

To begin opening real estate options for potential employers to locate in the corridors, it is recommended that the City and its collaborators concentrate initial investments on specific focus areas with a strong possibility of catalyzing other investments.

The project team began an initial evaluation of where those potential focus areas could be located in the corridors, and eight areas emerged. (Additional study will be needed.) The evaluation considered the following factors:

Potential for development. The preliminary focus areas are in neighborhoods with either some early-stage commercial development and transaction activity or are in locations that are likely to observe development activity within the next three to five years based on (for example) transit system growth or nearby activity. These areas are more likely to attract private developers and higher-quality tenants and are positioned for public-private partnership investment.

Sufficient scale. The focus areas have enough scale of existing commercial real estate and employment generators to warrant larger-scale development that could serve as a catalyst for further growth. The focus areas have larger properties, a concentration of commercial development, and are near or in higher-density areas. A few focus areas for small- to mid-scale development also are suggested.

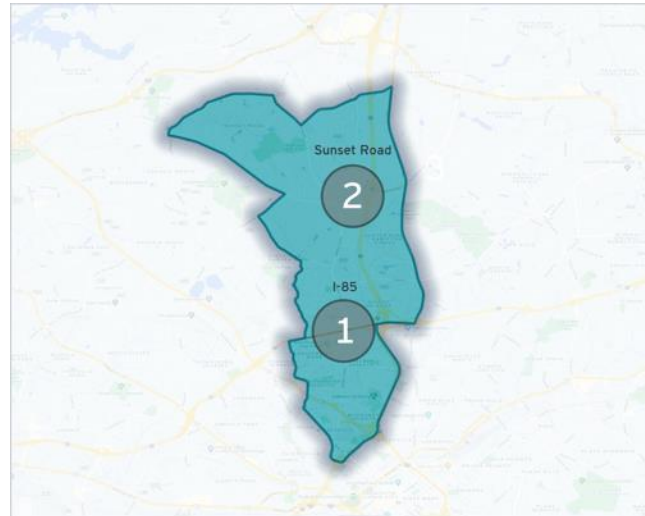
High impact. Although the focus areas have the potential for development and some early-stage investment, they are also areas where further development could have a greater impact on the community. Community developers also note that real estate development must be paired with holistic community-led initiatives that create economic development while reducing the risk of displacement (e.g., through new affordable housing) and loss of culture.

Transitional land use. The focus areas are in parts of corridors that can support the land use required by the previously identified targeted industries. These areas are ripe for redevelopment that would support job creation. They also aid in the transition between residential neighborhoods and commercial districts.

Marginal location. The focus areas are generally located on the margins between communities with more resources and development and communities with fewer resources and less development. Community developers note that development in these locations can help overcome actual barriers to development (e.g., a bridge or highway) or perceived (e.g., perception of safety) and allow for future investment and growth.

While the boundaries of each focus area are suggested below, they should be considered loosely since potential development opportunities may exist outside of the boundaries. This is designed as a guide, and further evaluation is recommended.

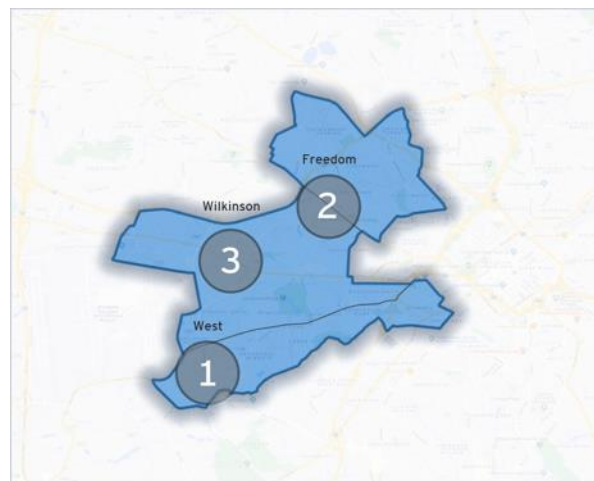
Beatties Ford Corridor Preliminary Focus Areas



1 *I-85*
The I-85 focus area is loosely defined as the area between Brookshire Boulevard and Statesville Road. The southern boundary is Lasalle Street and the northern boundary is N Hoskins Road (to the west of I-77) and Cindy Lane (to the east of I-77).

2 *Sunset Road*
The Sunset Road focus area is loosely defined as the area between Beatties Ford Road and Statesville Road (west to east) and Sunset Road and Lakeview Road (south to north).

Freedom, Wilkinson and West Corridor Preliminary Focus Areas

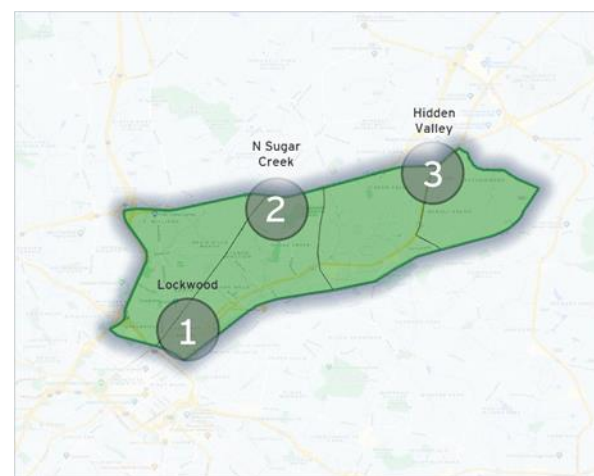


1 *West*
The West focus area concentrates on the area south of West Boulevard, north of Irwin Creek, east of Yorkmont Road, and west of W Tyvola Road.

2 *Freedom*
The Freedom focus area concentrates on the area along Freedom Road from Berryhill Road to I-85 as well as the area along Berryhill road until Rozzelles Ferry Road.

3 *Wilkinson*
The Wilkinson focus area includes both sides of Wilkinson Boulevard and concentrates on the area west of Donald Ross Road and east of the airport.

Sugar Creek Corridor Preliminary Focus Areas



1 *Lockwood*
The Lockwood focus area is loosely defined as the area northeast of W 12th Street, northwest of the light rail tracks, southeast of N Graham Street and Statesville Ave, and southwest of Matheson Ave.

2 *North Sugar Creek*
The North Sugar Creek focus area is defined as the area south of I-85, north of W Craighead Road and Sofley Road, east of N Graham Street, and west of W Sugar Creek Road.

3 *Hidden Valley*
The Hidden Valley focus area is defined as the area south of I-85, north of Orr Road, east of Monteith Drive, and west of N Tryon Street (including the west side of N Tryon Street).



Recommendations

Photo credit: City of Charlotte

The following pages include bold ideas, goals, and recommendations designed to catalyze economic development in the Corridors of Opportunity. The recommendations themselves may be supported by more specific tactical action plans following this study process.

As the labor analysis, target industry analysis and real estate analysis revealed, the four sub-areas and the six corridors they represent share fundamental dynamics and characteristics. Thus, the core platform pillars of the City's Corridors of Opportunity initiative are relevant for all corridors: Opportunity Employers, Opportunity Service Providers, and Opportunity Workers.

The recommendations suggested in the following pages elaborate on how the City could strengthen each of the platform pillars. As the City operationalizes its approach, it should consider that target industries and the specific support for those industries (e.g., workforce programming and real estate development) do vary for each corridor (as outlined in the Target Industry summary section of this report and the detailed stand-alone target industry report). However, while tactics might vary for each corridor, depending on its target industries, the core pillars will be the same. This model allows for the City to adapt tactically over time and as circumstances evolve while the framework stays in place.

Recommendations offered fall into three goal areas:

- **Goal 1: Target Opportunity Employers to locate and expand in the corridors.** The first goal offers suggestions on ways to drive business investment in the corridors to create career opportunities for residents. Ultimately, greater job opportunities with career advancement pathways will help residents generate better incomes and wealth, ultimately improving the quality of life for them and their families.

- ▶ **Goal 2: Spark commercial real estate development and redevelopment within the corridors.** Businesses — existing, new to market and startups — need sites and buildings in which to operate, and the Real Estate Analysis revealed a shortage of available commercial real estate options within the corridors for business investment.
- ▶ **Goal 3: Assist corridor residents with overcoming barriers to employment and accessing career and economic opportunities.** With businesses investing in the corridors, there is a need to simultaneously assist residents with building their skills and overcoming barriers to employment such as attainable childcare, transportation and other needs.

Altogether, the goals and the suggested recommendations are designed to create an ecosystem of sustained long-term economic growth within the corridors, reducing unemployment and poverty rates. Recommendations are designed to be bold and creative. Some are rooted in leading practices from other cities, and some are tailored specifically for the City of Charlotte.

Though inevitably other topics of importance will emerge, at this time, based on thorough research, these three areas are identified as having the highest priority.

Implementation

Following the goals and recommendations, this report shares implementation ideas — what partners will be needed to achieve success, suggestions on measuring momentum and resources that may help progress. The Implementation section of this report also provides an illustration of the core platform pillars.

The City's role in implementation

Although this study is for the City of Charlotte, achieving corridor goals will require cooperation among many community partners. This strategy focuses on actions that the City will be primarily responsible for or where the City can serve as a convener of partners or supporter of existing activities (such as through funding).

The City already has strong relationships with local, regional, and state leaders from public, private, and nonprofit sectors. These connections will be invaluable as the City takes the next steps to implement the Corridors of Opportunity initiative.

Opportunity Employers

Goal 1: Target Opportunity Employers to locate and expand in the corridors.

Increasing business investment and job creation within the corridors will result in greater vibrancy and economic opportunities for area residents. This is especially true if those businesses are committed to achieving the City’s vision, that everyone of working age living in a Corridor of Opportunity has a clear, accessible pathway into meaningful employment in careers with long-term potential.

Achieving this goal will require proactive steps to attract and expand business investment. This begins with a collaborative effort to recognize and reward companies that participate in an Opportunity Employers program. This program, coupled with targeted recruitment efforts, will help drive new growth.

The consulting team interviewed 10 major employers that hire at-opportunity workers in Charlotte. A diverse set of industries were interviewed, including finance, construction, manufacturing, logistics, and consumer services. See key comments below that will inform future employer engagement and collaboration.

Employer interview topic	Comments
At-opportunity hiring experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewed employers all hire workers at the Opportunity-level, with positions requiring a high school/GED degree as well as 1- and 2-year degrees. Some assembly, production, and technician positions don't necessarily require a high school degree. • Some employers need background checks and drug screening for positions in construction, transportation, health, or field customer operations. • Some employers have second-chance hiring programs for justice-involved individuals that removes the conviction question from the initial application.
Training needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most employers have on-the-job training to help new hires improve soft skills or get additional technical training to advance careers. • Some employers expressed a desire for more pre-employment training to help workers improve readiness or expand the availability of hard-to-fill positions in machinery maintenance and construction trades.
Experience with local workforce organizations and social non-profits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers work with local non-profits and educators for training and workforce sourcing. • Some employers have or participate in national hiring initiatives. • Employers collaborate with high schools, community colleges, and universities to communicate career pathways to students and to develop training or apprenticeship programs.
At-opportunity collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers expressed a desire and willingness to continue collaboration in programs for economically challenged populations. • Employers are encouraged by the strong collaboration across philanthropy, government, and corporate community. • Some suggested that even better alignment of programs will reduce fragmentation and achieve greater outcomes.

Recommendations

1.1 Create an Opportunity Employers program.

- ▶ Establish the program and work with employers to define the program criteria. Criteria considerations could include any combination of the following: physical location in the corridors; active engagement of workers living in the corridors; hiring talent from the corridors; offering training into viable career pathways in corridor targets; skills-based hiring for certain entry-level positions (those that do not require a four-year college degree and take into account prior experience and other credentials); commitment to second-chance hiring; participation in related transportation efforts; or providing other workforce and community support services. Consider the findings of the Leading on Opportunity initiative when defining criteria. We recommend requiring employers to meet 75%–80% of criteria to be determined, but not expecting that any will meet 100%. Criteria could vary depending on business size and resources.
- ▶ Develop communications, guidance and resources for businesses that want to become an Opportunity Employer. Opportunity Employer communications will need to be created in the form of a dedicated webpage as well as a brochure that summarizes the initiative, how to get involved and who to contact.

After determining employer interest and willingness to participate, schedule a consultative meeting, perhaps in coordination with representatives of one or two other support partners, or by a partner that will take on that responsibility. Consider offering regularly scheduled information sessions open to employers interested in learning more about the program.

A user-friendly toolkit with more descriptive information can be created as reference to help ensure that employers meet the eligibility requirements, review options for engagement, determine what incentives they are eligible for, if any, how to get started, reporting requirements and any other expectations.

- ▶ **Define value add for Opportunity Employers and consider creating an incentives program.** Benefits of participation could be similar to those offered by the City and Urban League’s RENEW program, for example, such as a pre-screening of potential employees, reduced training costs and the opportunity to provide input on training and workforce development, including volunteer instructional opportunities for company representatives. In addition, incentives in the form of tax credits, wage reimbursements and grants could be offered to Opportunity Employers for reaching determined corridor hiring goals.
- ▶ **Consider hiring an Opportunity Employment Manager** to manage the program, particularly concerning employer outreach and coordination. This new manager will rely on current local partners to engage directly with corridor workers.

1.2 Proactively attract target industry businesses into the Corridors of Opportunity.

The Key Findings section of this report suggests target industries for the corridors included in this study. Through the evaluation process, four core target industries and several specific niche industry sectors were recommended for the corridors: (1) technology and administrative support services, (2) health care, (3) logistics and distribution and (4) manufacturing. (More specificity regarding targets for each is provided earlier in this report.) These targets align with area assets, have growth potential, and provide corridor residents with promising career pathways. Associated with each target, too, are numerous avenues for people to gain trade skills and pursue jobs in those fields, whether directly for target industry businesses or in industries like construction that thrive in healthy economies.

Attracting business investment into the corridors will require the City of Charlotte's economic development team to take proactive steps forward, including working with partners to increase the availability of commercial real estate options for the target industries. In addition, it could possibly entail increasing internal capacity or redirecting resources to drive Corridor-focused investments.

- **Collaborate with employers across the city to consider a corridor location for future expansions.** Existing local companies often create the majority of new jobs in a community. Sparking new development and jobs in the corridors should start with outreach to Charlotte businesses. Armed with corridor marketing tools and programs (see Goal 2), meet with companies and developers to inform them of the target programs available to companies inside the corridors as well as the available workers found in the corridors.
- **Engage in direct outreach to existing target industry businesses.** Within the City's own business attraction efforts, showcase the corridors as competitive location options. This might involve including corridor information within the City's overall economic development offerings and engaging in Corridor-specific campaigns. Inform allies like the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance about the workforce, assets and financial resources available to businesses locating in the corridors and ask them to keep corridors top-of-mind in their own recruitment efforts.

Recovery challenge:

Corridors have available workers who may lack the skills or experience, meanwhile employers need workers now

1.3 Engage with employers already located in the corridors to hire more corridor residents.

As our community emerges from the recession, labor availability will become a growing concern for employers if it has not already. Help wanted signs are already prevalent across all sectors. Recessions cause labor participation rates to fall dramatically, as people lose their job and stop looking for new jobs that do not exist (or are perceived not to exist). As the economy recharges, some workers could remain outside the available labor force — they have entered school, chosen to stay home with children, or have simply disengaged. The Opportunity program may become a new, timely method for re-engaging with workers and bringing them back into the workforce, helping employers address new labor shortages.

- ▶ **Collaborate with employers currently located within the corridors or who hire large numbers of corridor residents for re-employment programs.** While the Opportunity Employers program will work more extensively with onboarding programs for corridor residents, the City can play a broader role in promoting job opportunities to residents through local partners.
- ▶ **Consider creating an Opportunity Job Postings website** where anyone can see what jobs are currently available within the corridors. Use embedding of job postings from any number of data providers at a relatively low cost. This can be tied to the current Jobs Connector in the Open for Business website.
- ▶ **Consider creating an Opportunity Employment Accelerator that includes Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) pre-certification** for corridor residents and employees of Corridor-based businesses. WOTC is a federal income tax credit designed to reward employers for hiring from certain target groups (see the end of this report for additional details). A WOTC credit can average \$2,400 per year for many eligible employees, with a maximum credit up to \$9,600 for those who are unemployed, disabled or veterans. Establishing an Employment Accelerator that offers a WOTC pre-certification process could help relieve employers of administrative burden and increase the likelihood that they open jobs to WOTC-qualified individuals. Concentrate efforts on WOTC certification for 16- to 24-year-old unemployed individuals living in the corridors (whose current unemployment rate is around 33%). The Accelerator could serve as an underlying foundation to the entire Corridors of Opportunity Ecosystem — connecting people served by non-profits directly to employment opportunities as companies.

Real estate

Goal 2: Spark commercial real estate development and redevelopment within the corridors.

As the City of Charlotte seeks to bring more jobs to the corridors to leverage existing workforce skills and empower new labor participation, the City will need to encourage the development and redevelopment of real estate within the corridors. As the Real Estate Analysis revealed, currently available buildings and land parcels within the corridors tend to be limited in availability — older, smaller or already occupied. While this study is not a real estate development strategy, there are recommendations for the City to consider that will help advance more robust real estate offerings. For example, additional studies could help finalize focus areas for initial catalyst investments, determining upgrades needed to make those focus areas more competitive for target industry and other business attraction, and a more in-depth assessment of the City's development tools.

Recommendations

2.1 Promote sites and buildings within the corridors that are ready (or almost ready) for commercial and industrial development.

- **Create an Opportunity Ready Sites program for the corridors.** Site readiness programs identify sites that are primed for commercial/industrial investment based on a set of objective criteria. Questions to answer include whether the size and zoning of a site is appropriate for a particular target industry or desired development. Are there adequate infrastructure and available labor? Does it meet environmental requirements?

Opportunity Ready Sites also could include properties that have plans in place and partners committed to expediting improvements to meet the needs of target audiences. The City can also create new commercial and industrial development opportunities along the corridors through their 2040 comprehensive plan and associated place types and UDO process that will be completed in 2021 and 2022.

The City could work with partners (utility companies, developers) with experience creating site readiness programs to define objective program criteria and a process for identifying sites and buildings. Focus on properties that could house Opportunity Employer businesses and those within the Corridor's target industries.

Next, collaborate with partners to qualify Ready Sites within the corridors, particularly those with high potential to catalyze additional future investment. For properties with potential yet not completely ready for investment, document needed improvements and craft plans to trigger those improvements quickly when needed.

2.2 Identify strategic sites within the corridors for public-private partnerships.

- **Conduct an industrial land survey within the corridors.** Engage an engineering firm or other service provider to identify industrial sites and share guidance on what improvements (e.g., infrastructure or others) could improve the sites for future business investment.
- **Explore the possibility of strategically identifying sites and existing buildings in the corridors to redevelop and repurpose to catalyze investment.** Whereas current tools encourage private developers to make investments and be reimbursed later, a current shortage of viable sites and buildings in the corridors should lead the City to consider the strategic identification of sites. On one level, the lack of available sites demonstrates the high demand for locations in central Charlotte. However, it also may indicate competing demands by residential development.

Site development and even speculative building construction have been tools for economic development corporations across the state for many years. Having more viable commercial/industrial sites in the corridors will improve the ability of the City to attract employers and investment. The Real Estate Analysis report and summary findings in this report suggest eight focus areas within the corridors to evaluate redevelopment potential. Further study as to the specifics of those investments is needed.

- **Consider creating a non-profit Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to be the entity for holding land and sites.** An EDC may be better equipped to receive contributions from diverse stakeholders including philanthropy, corporate, and federal grants from the Economic Development Administration.

2.3 Expand the City's communications platforms for enticing development into the corridors.

- **Expand communications tools to help investors, companies, and developers envision the full potential of the corridors.** A Corridors of Opportunity marketing website and other collateral should provide an overview of the initiative and each corridor, as well as available financing tools, the Opportunity Employer program, Opportunity Ready Sites, workforce initiatives, success stories, and other helpful information to drive interest.

- ▶ **Develop marketing tools to promote Opportunity Ready Sites to businesses and developers.** Helpful materials could include one-page brochures for each site or building and an interactive webpage within an enhanced corridor marketing website that lets visitors search for sites. Include information like maps, current zoning, size of site or building, available labor pool and other helpful information. Provide renderings as available to help potential investors visualize the potential.

2.4 Empower public-private partnerships (P3s).

- ▶ **Expand the City’s tools for encouraging public-private partnerships and better leverage deployment of existing tools.** Public-private partnerships have supported development in Charlotte through the tools available in the City’s Great Places toolkit. Consider ways to expand this toolkit in ways that further encourage public-private partnerships and investment in the corridors. Based on input from stakeholders, it is possible that more can be done to incentivize investment that creates career opportunities specifically for corridor residents.

An additional study may be needed to determine the exact improvements needed. Examine leading practices from other successful cities and benchmark the City’s current offerings against those and collaborate with other area organizations that may already have this research.) Based on this evaluation, assemble a list of desired enhancements and ways to optimize the City’s tools for corridor developments and the next steps needed to make them a reality.

2.5 Create an Equitable Development program.

- ▶ **Create curricula to train and certify minority development professionals to engage in the corridors.** The program could help diversify those participating in real estate development in Charlotte to include local businesses and better reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the city. Through the program, Charlotteans can contribute to energizing economic development within the corridors and generate wealth through revitalization and investment activities.
- ▶ **Consider partnering with or leveraging the AmpUp Charlotte program,** which helps minority business owners increase their revenue through business training, networking, and capital access and contracting assistance. Past cohorts have focused on airport services and health care services; a future cohort could be created specifically for real estate development and construction.
- ▶ **Express the City’s preference for P3 collaborations within the corridors to include Equitable Development partners** and other minority development professionals.

Support Residents

Goal 3: Assist corridor residents with overcoming barriers to employment and accessing career and economic opportunities.

Residents in the Corridors of Opportunity face a disproportionate level of unemployment and underemployment. There is a willingness to work, but too many individuals face barriers to sustainable employment with the potential for economic mobility for themselves and their families. To assess local conditions, the City solicited survey responses in December 2020 from residents regarding their employment status and barriers to finding a new job. Over 300 city residents responded, with 88 residents from Corridor zip codes. Key findings for adult Corridor residents include:

- ▶ For those unemployed, 27% were laid off due to COVID and 40% said it was difficult to find work.
- ▶ Top challenges for finding or keeping a job include needing more education or skills, needing help with interview skills, and finding or affording childcare.
- ▶ Respondents expressed strong interest in careers in government/non-profits, healthcare, technology, culture/entertainment.

In addition, the consulting team interviewed 10 education and workforce organizations that train and guide at-opportunity workers in central Charlotte to understand the landscape of need and service delivery. Key barriers for workers were identified, including:

- ▶ Mental health and substance abuse
- ▶ Criminal backgrounds
- ▶ Lack of education or in-demand skills (technical and “soft”)
- ▶ Digital literacy and financial literacy
- ▶ Homelessness and housing instability
- ▶ Food insecurity
- ▶ Lack of transportation
- ▶ Lack of awareness around resource and education/training needed for career progression
- ▶ Insufficient, quality childcare and preschool (“childcare desserts”)

Just as there is reservoir of unrealized potential for our employed workforce, there is also an untapped pool of entrepreneurial talent in the corridors. There is an increasing number of people who aspire for more than a job, and ultimately want to be a business owner. A lack of awareness around resources, limited exposure to successful entrepreneurs, and a lack of financial and social capital can make it difficult for many to realize their dream of business ownership.

These are systemic, deeply embedded challenges, but with a heightened level of focus, dedicated resources and a sustained commitment, barriers to opportunity can be significantly reduced over time.

Recommendations

3.1 Launch an Opportunity Workforce initiative.

- ▶ **Encourage partners to create Corridor Action Teams (A-Teams).** Leveraging the existing workforce collectives such as the Charlotte Workforce Providers Council, representatives from leading education, training and nonprofit organizations would be curated into an agile team that can assist corridor residents, students and workers with navigating the education, workforce development and employment landscape, as well as serving as a liaison and advocate for aspiring workers and those seeking to change careers to link up with potential employers. Whereas there is strong collaboration among the leaders of the organizations that provide education and training, a more tactical, proactive and rapid-response oriented group is needed to help individuals push through various obstacles. Focus on supporting programs that connect with targeted populations, particularly those focused on assisting unemployed residents in the 16- to 24-year-old age range. In addition, focus on programs with employer support to hire from these cohorts.
- ▶ **Support partners to develop education and training hubs that align with target industries.** Utilizing existing organizational assets and programs, develop and deliver integrated learning through a collaboration involving education and workforce development organizations, nonprofits and employers. The hubs would have a physical location with virtual connectivity capabilities. Education and training employees would partner with industry volunteers to meet resident learning and skills development needs to secure employment with businesses in the target industries. The City's role could be to align and connect organizations already doing this and provide guidance and new funding to expand efforts. Inventory existing programs and consider developing an online navigator tool specific to corridor residents to find education and training as well as career paths.
- ▶ **Explore the possibility of a pilot program that pre-certifies corridor residents for WOTC and other program eligibility.** More details are provided in recommendation 1.3.

3.2 Expand the capacity of existing high-performing nonprofits that serve Opportunity workers and integrate into the corridors or help enhance their operational presence.

Education and workforce organizations interviewed for this project provide a wide array of job training in areas including:

- *Broadband fiber optics*
- *Certified Nursing Assistants*
- *Construction*
- *Customer Service / Help Desk*
- *Data analytics*
- *Entrepreneurship*
- *HVAC*
- *Information technology*
- *Restaurants and food services*

- **Identify high-performing leading practices in Charlotte for investment and support.** Several nonprofit organizations are doing exemplary work within the corridors and in other areas of the city. Identifying those that best meet or have the most potential to meet, the education, training and employment needs of corridor residents is an essential step. In addition to identifying particular organizations, there is also an opportunity to use this strategy to incentivize stronger partnerships and collaboration between organizations. Future RFPs issued from the City for grant funding would describe the leading practices desired, the reporting requirements and the measurement outcomes.
- **Invest in select nonprofits to enhance their operational capacity, integrate their programs and services into the corridors, or both.** Increasing the capacity of leading nonprofits with demonstrated impact to enhance career development and support services for corridor residents helps to ensure that proven models and services are accessible and available to those who need them most. In addition, while financial investment is critical, the City has significant intellectual and subject-matter resources who could be made available to the selected organizations.
- **Leverage financial service companies to provide financial literacy on improving credit scores, saving and investing.** Harnessing Charlotte’s vast financial services talent and resources to provide pro bono education that helps residents acquire financing for personal transportation and mortgages for homes, as well as learning strategies for saving and investing is an immediate solution that can yield long-term benefits. Build on existing programs.
- **Involve business districts and other organizations in the corridors in the decision-making process.** Decisions about program and resource development and allocation to underserved communities are too often made without the input of those most impacted. Consider creating a corridor advisory council made of residents from diverse generations to provide their perspective on program needs in their neighborhoods. This group could also be leveraged to weigh in on other Corridors of Opportunity priorities and initiatives.

3.3 Expand entrepreneurship opportunities for aspiring business owners as a means for increasing wealth and diversifying household income.

- ▶ **Enhance access to existing entrepreneurship and business resources.** Charlotte has an abundance of resources and support programs for small business owners and would-be entrepreneurs, including those managed by the City like AmpUp, Charlotte Business Resources, and the overall work of the Business Innovation Team. However, awareness around these resources is often lacking, and there is an ongoing need for better communication and coordination around these resources and services. For example, when engaging with residents through the Opportunity Workforce initiative, representatives should include questions about interests in business ownership as a standard career exploration inquiry.
- ▶ **Expand the capacity of business incubator and accelerator programs.** Charlotte's entrepreneurial ecosystem is vibrant and continues to evolve. Business incubators, accelerators and co-working spaces for startups and freelancers have played a significant role in strengthening the entrepreneurial climate. However, there are a limited number of programs that explicitly target underrepresented founders and business owners, including people of color and those who may be considered a part of the At Opportunity demographic. Increasing the capacity of these particular programs and helping others develop competencies around serving aspiring entrepreneurs in the corridors will create more equitable business ownership in Charlotte.
- ▶ **Continue advancing initiatives that improve access to capital for minority-owned businesses and other companies based in the corridors.** For those corridor entrepreneurs who are already positioned to start their business or grow and scale an existing one, there are ongoing challenges with access to capital. Race, generational wealth gaps, underwriting requirements, geographic locations and other factors can be barriers to securing various forms of financing and investment. While incubator and accelerator programs are important, capital is essential for small businesses that seek to grow and create jobs. A public-private investment vehicle is needed to cultivate more minority-owned businesses and incentivize others to start or expand their businesses in the corridors, with an expectation of hiring residents and investing back into the community.

3.4 Improve transportation solutions for corridor residents employed by Opportunity Employers.

- ▶ **Explore short- and longer-term transportation solutions.** As the City prepares to enact the comprehensive Transformational Mobility Network transportation plan, there is a need to implement more immediate solutions to reduce mobility barriers. Readily available, cost-effective transportation options should be leveraged to address the transit challenges that residents have now. Longer-term solutions can also be explored that may directly align with Transformative Mobility Network planning or could be supplemental to it.
- ▶ **Explore partnering with education and workforce organizations and private ride-share service companies.** A shorter-term solution to consider is partnering with local colleges and universities and workforce development organizations to subsidize the costs of bus and light rail vouchers for students and clients who need assistance with public transportation. Additionally, a public-private partnership with one or more ride-share service companies can be established to provide “final mile” service to cover any disconnects between bus stops and light rail stations and job sites when the distance to the workplace is not walkable. For example, provide credits or discounts for full ride-share service to and from work for those who do not live in proximity to public transportation options,
- ▶ **Partner with a private company to provide complimentary corridor bus service to and from Opportunity Employer workplaces.** The City can explore a dedicated bus service for corridor residents employed with Opportunity Employers that are not located in their immediate geographic area. This kind of service is typically associated with large Silicon Valley tech employees. Opportunity Employers would need to contribute to cover the cost of employees who benefit from this service.

3.5 Support programs that help corridor residents overcome barriers to education, employment, and career advancement.

- **Access to quality, affordable childcare** is often a significant barrier for people seeking education and employment. The City could adopt leading practices from other communities and encourage Opportunity Employers and other businesses to offer support.
- **Continue to advocate for digital connectivity and inclusion in the corridors.** The City can play an important role as an advocate for digital inclusion. Several existing efforts are taking on the challenge of the digital divide and the corridors are disproportionately affected by this barrier to opportunity. The City's public communication platform, thought leadership and relationship capital would be added value to accelerate the impact of current efforts. Intentionally expand broadband not only to homes in the corridors but also prospective Opportunity Ready Sites to encourage development.

Educate corridor residents on the FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has created the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, which provides low-income families who qualify with a \$50 monthly credit for internet service. Unfortunately, communication about this program has not been sufficient and the program has most likely been underutilized by the communities it was created to help.

Consider funding a Digital Navigators program whereby counselors provide individualized or small group assistance to members of the community who need access to affordable home internet service and coaching in introductory digital skills to become effective home internet users. Assistance can be provided virtually over the phone or through in-person classes. Once internet capabilities are established, Digital Navigator individuals identify needed programs for employment, childcare, food assistance or any other social services through providers' websites.

- **Support the expansion of second-chance programs and the good work already being done by area organizations.** Programs led by Mecklenburg County and organizations such as Center for Community Transitions are amplifying the need to increase second-chance employment opportunities in the community. The City can be a bridge to these programs through the Opportunity Employer framework.



Implementation

Power in partnerships

Although this study is for the City of Charlotte, achieving corridor goals will require cooperation among many community partners. This strategy focuses on actions that the City will primarily be responsible for, but economic development within the corridors will be multi-faceted and affected by many factors. Therefore, it will be necessary for the City to continue building relationships with community partners to realize the full potential of the recommendations in this report, as well as embrace corridor study findings in other City plans. Community support will be invaluable as the City takes the recommended steps.

Regarding the recommendations in this report, actions by the City are categorized based on the City's potential or ideal role:

- Lead and manage
- Convene and catalyze
- Support and encourage

The City already has strong relationships with local, regional, and state leaders from public, private, and nonprofit sectors. These connections should continue to be leveraged as the City continues implementation. Even if a community partner is not directly involved with a goal or recommendation, that does not mean that it does not need to be involved. Community partners also can provide knowledge and expertise, share messaging from the City with a wider audience and champion the strategy in the community. Community partners can help create widespread support for the progress of the corridors.

Open and accessible communication will help the corridor initiative continue its momentum. Develop a corridor progress report to share regular updates with the community.

The City’s role has been identified across each strategy in the table below. Partners and collaborators will include, but are not limited to: employers, non-profits, foundations, workforce development boards, education institutions, economic development organizations, county government, utilities, real estate developers, incubators, and small business service providers.

Corridors of Opportunity strategic framework	City role
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Goal 1: Target Opportunity Employers to locate and expand in the corridors.

Strategies:

1.1 Create an Opportunity Employers program.	Lead/Manage
1.2 Proactively attract target industry businesses into the Corridors of Opportunity.	Lead/Manage
1.3 Engage with employers already located in the corridors to hire more corridor residents.	Lead/Manage

Goal 2: Spark commercial real estate development within the corridors.

Strategies:

2.1 Promote sites and buildings within the corridors that are ready (or almost) for commercial and industrial development.	Lead/Manage
2.2 Identify strategic sites within the corridors for public-private partnerships.	Lead/Manage
2.3 Expand the City’s communications platforms for enticing development into the corridors.	Lead/Manage
2.4 Empower public-private partnerships (P3s)	Convene/Catalyze
2.5 Create an Equitable Development program.	Support/Encourage

Goal 3: Assist corridor residents with overcoming barriers to employment and accessing career and economic opportunities.

Strategies:

3.1 Launch an Opportunity Workforce initiative.	Convene/Catalyze
3.2 Expand capacity of existing high-performance nonprofits that serve Opportunity workers	Support/Encourage
3.3 Expand entrepreneurship opportunities for aspiring business owners.	Support/Encourage
3.4 Improve transportation solutions for corridor residents employed by Opportunity Employers	Support/Encourage
3.5 Support programs that help corridor residents overcome barriers to education, employment, and career advancement.	Convene/Catalyze

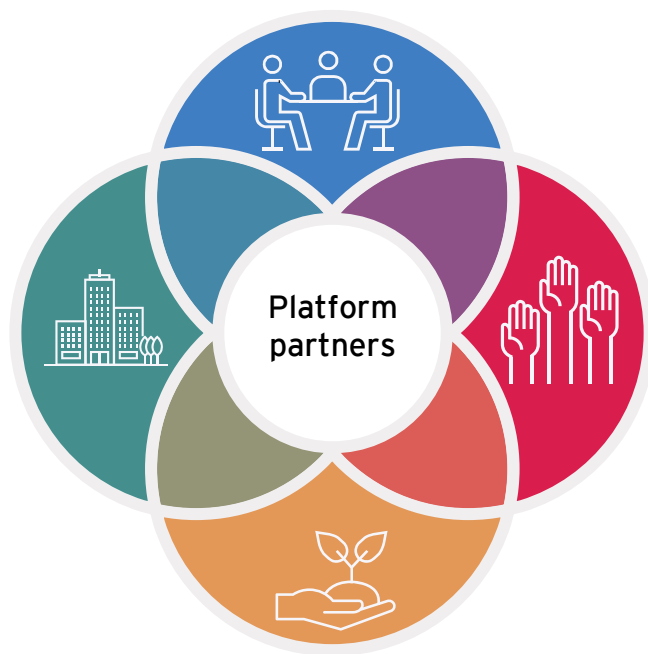
Funding corridor initiatives will be within the realm of City commitments, with support from others as well. In addition to the initial \$24 million allocation, the City could consider adopting other funding tools such as:

- Opportunity Corridor Capital Fund to help fuel expansion of strong, existing programs aligned with the Corridors of Opportunity goals, as well as new startups.
- A Finish Line Grant program to help corridor residents cover unexpected expenses such as transit or childcare.

- Federal government grants from EDA, SBA, and Treasury, in particular, could be directed toward corridor initiatives, including the American Recovery Plan funding flowing into Charlotte, the county and the state. (See more details at the end of this report.)
- Philanthropies could aid in funding specific corridor-related programs.
- Private sector contributions and collaborative effects will be essential to maximizing the potential impact of corridor-related initiatives.

Taking action: building the Opportunity Platform

Transitioning the Corridors of Opportunity Study into action and results will require collaboration from multiple public, private and nonprofit organizations. This “opportunity platform” convenes multiple partners and supports them with shared vision, goals, information, resources, and guidelines.



Opportunity Workers

People living in the Corridors who face barriers to employment like long-term unemployment, food insecurity, lack of transportation and childcare access, disabilities, or justice-related challenges

Opportunity Employers

Located in or near Corridors and hire Corridor residents, often with dedicated programs to assist with training and career development, as well as helping workers overcome barriers

Opportunity Service Providers

Assist with training and job placement for Opportunity Workers, as well as counseling and wrap-around services

Opportunity Developers

Real estate developers that invest in redevelopment and new projects in the Corridors, helping spark business investment and attract jobs with upward career paths; also serve as mentors for minority-owned development companies

Conclusion

This study provides the City and its partners with new research and ideas to continue to take bold action to address long-standing barriers to employment in Charlotte's urban corridors. The Corridors of Opportunity initiative, with its focus on populations and geographies most in need, can serve as a platform and incubator for delivering programs at-scale across employers, at-opportunity workers, and training providers.

Much has been done already in Charlotte to address systemic inequities and the barriers that confront people seeking to improve their lives, expand their careers, and care for their families. The Corridors of Opportunity initiative seeks to build on past success, strengthen existing partnerships, and optimize coordination by the City, employers, and community partners serving Corridor residents. The Corridors "Opportunity Platform" will ultimately expand the workforce available to businesses across Charlotte – investment in the Corridors is an investment in prosperity for businesses as well as workers.

As implementation progresses, participants are encouraged to utilize the research produced in this planning process. Several accompanying research reports are provided in the Appendix to inform future policies and action:

- ▶ The **Workforce Analysis** provides significant data and research on the demographic breakdown of Corridor residents as well as job availability in the Corridors.
- ▶ The **Real Estate Analysis** examined the availability of buildings and sites for lease or purchase in the Corridors and opportunities for new development.
- ▶ The **Target Industry Analysis** identifies industries that are well-suited to the Corridors for future expansion and job creation.
- ▶ Research on **Financial Resources** is provided on new funding opportunities from the American Recovery Plan Act and creating a WOTC credit pre-certification program in Charlotte.



Appendix

Financial resources in this Appendix:

- ▶ New funding opportunities from the American Recovery Plan Act
- ▶ Creating a WOTC credit pre-certification program in Charlotte

Supporting research is also found in prior reports:

- ▶ Workforce Analysis
- ▶ Target Industry Analysis
- ▶ Real Estate Analysis – Key Findings
- ▶ Real Estate Analysis – Complete Report

New funding opportunities from the American Recovery Plan Act

The American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) signed in March 2021 creates a unique opportunity for local governments to lead bold, innovative solutions for the recovery of their economy, workforce and communities. The sheer size of the \$2 trillion initiative and breadth of the issues to tackle will also create a new need for greater alignment across local partners. Whereas Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding was geared toward speed, ARPA funding lends itself to more thought about how the deployment of funds can lead to a game-changing transformation of systemic issues around workforce development, equitable growth, infrastructure and the focus of economic development initiatives.

As of April 2021, numerous provisions in ARPA connect to the mission of the Corridors of Opportunity Initiative:

- **Economic development:** With \$3b in new US Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding (doubling the agency's CARES Act funding), the EDA will become an even bigger player in the evolution of economic development organizations and initiatives. Tourism will receive 25% of funds, and as with CARES, a broad range of potential initiatives can be proposed for grant funding.
- **Small business:** The Small Business Administration (SBA) received additional Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Program funding (\$22b) and is to create a new Restaurant Revitalization Fund (\$25b) that aims to replace lost revenue for restaurants in 2020. A Shuttered Venue program received \$1.2b in funding. A new Community Navigator Program (\$100m) aims to fund pilot projects to help communities connect businesses to recovery programs, with 75% of funds to be spent on marketing the programs locally — which could be done by local chambers of commerce and economic development organizations. The State Small Business Credit Initiative was reauthorized and funded with \$10b to capitalize state and local loan programs, with 25% designated for socially and economically disadvantaged businesses.
- **Public sector:** Widely reported are the new direct allocations to state and local governments, and additional public sector entities will also receive new funding. New direct flexible aid will go to state and tribal governments (\$220b) and cities and counties (\$130b). New transportation funding will help transit agencies, airports, Amtrak and communities under economic distress (\$55b). An additional \$50b in new funding for FEMA will provide disaster relief to state and local governments for COVID-19 response and vaccination deployment.

- ▶ **Workforce:** The US Department of Labor (DOL) will fund further assistance to dislocated workers, and new workforce development dollars are spread across numerous programs.
- ▶ **Individuals:** New aid will be sent directly to individuals, including unemployed workers, students and renters, socially disadvantaged farmers and health care workers requiring childcare, among other target populations.
- ▶ **Education institutions:** By one measure we've seen, education institutions and school districts will receive \$167b in new funding.

Treasury funding presents the most immediate opportunity for the City of Charlotte, which is estimated to receive \$149 million in flexible funding to respond to the pandemic's impacts. In addition, the state of North Carolina will receive another \$5.3 billion, which will fund programs that also help Charlotteans. As funding flows down to local practitioners, some questions will naturally arise:

- ▶ How can we coordinate efforts and build stronger partnerships to maximize the benefits of this new funding?
- ▶ How can we prioritize the recovery of our most affected populations and industries?
- ▶ What steps can communities take to emerge with stronger, more resilient economies?

Building partnerships has been a core focus of innovative economic development planning for many years. The benefits of "holistic economic development" have been proven — we can't address one facet of our community without connecting the dots to other factors, especially those that are talent-related. For example, how can jobs be filled if workers are not properly trained or do not have access to transportation, housing and childcare? How can our residents seek productive careers if they have other barriers to overcome? If having a more prosperous community depends on growing our own local businesses, what can we do to bolster entrepreneurship and new innovation?

Going forward into recovery, new partnerships and tactics will be needed:

- ▶ Focus on working with your partners to identify the programs that will deliver new funding to your community. Consider creating a Funding Alignment Team for information sharing and alignment to optimize impact.
- ▶ Consider this opportunity to access new competitive grant opportunities and assemble your proposal partners. Significant funding from EDA and other sources will be competitive (requiring a proposal), as will some workforce funding, such as the "Reimagine Workforce Preparation" program from DOL.
- ▶ Start now with building your "Community Navigator" and plan to bid on EDA funding for external marketing campaigns.
- ▶ Look to your regional and state governments to find economies of scale in new programs. For example, small business assistance is needed everywhere, but programs could be run (and supported with content) at state and regional levels while implemented locally.

Creating a WOTC credit pre-certification program in Charlotte

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal income tax credit designed to reward employers for hiring from certain target groups, including, but not limited to the following: long-term unemployed, qualified veterans, disabled individuals, food stamp/TNAF recipients, ex-felons, and Designated Community Residents (18–40 years old and living in an Empowerment zone, Enterprise community or Renewal community).

A WOTC credit can average \$2,400 per year for many eligible employees, with a maximum credit up to \$9,600 for unemployed, disabled or veterans. Employers request WOTC credits by submitting new hires' qualifications/paperwork to the NC Department of Commerce. Information on WOTC can be found on the State Commerce website.

Specific to the Corridors of Opportunity initiative, WOTC provides an opportunity to incentivize corridor residents with an annual "coupon" of over \$2,000 per year. While not common, implementing a pre-certification process could increase the employer's effective valuation of the incentive by reducing administrative costs and boosting the likelihood of receiving the credit for a corridor worker hire.

A WOTC Pre-Certification Program could be implemented with assistance by local service providers and Charlotte Works. An important requirement for a WOTC application is that it must come from an employer with a federal EIN. For this reason, we recommend that an employment agency be formed to onboard workers as "new hires" whether or not they are hired by employers. Employers could choose to hire workers temporarily under contract or pay a referral fee to hire permanently. This new employment agency could be a nonprofit, formed and funded by the City, a philanthropy or a combination. Consider this entity to be the "Opportunity Employment Accelerator," which is meant to accelerate a person's career, just like business accelerators onboard, train, and support growing companies.

This Accelerator would have the added benefit of aggregating information on the individuals the City seeks to help — without relying on a network of service providers to share their data. The Accelerator could serve as the underlying foundation to the entire Corridors of Opportunity ecosystem (see the previous page) — connecting people served by nonprofits directly with employment opportunities as companies. Funding the Accelerator should come easy, as it seeks to capture millions of dollars of WOTC credits to the community.

\$24m

New hiring incentives available to employers for 2,000 pre-certified WOTC workers over 5 years

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