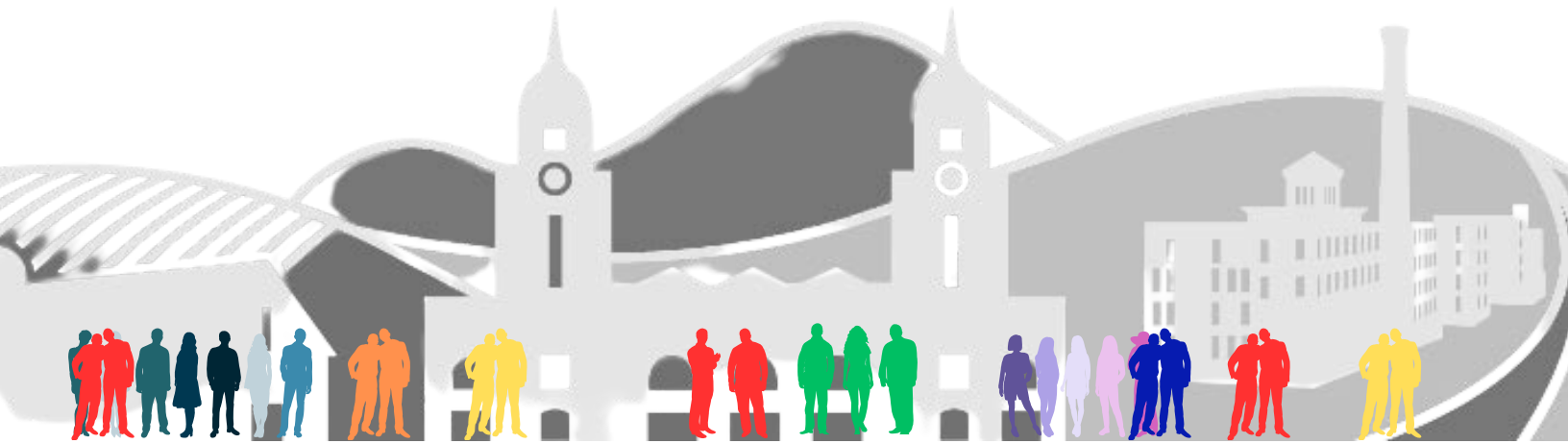




Southern Worcester County

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Front and Central
2023 - 2028







Prepared by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) with the support of the Economic Development Administration.

Acknowledgments

The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission would like to express our sincere gratitude to our SWC EDO Board members, member communities, community members, state and local partners, small businesses, non-profit and community-based organizations, higher-learning institution partners, and all others who participated in the 2023-2028 CEDS process. We appreciate your input and the positive contributions you make to our region every day in your line of work.

A Special thank you to the U.S. Economic Development Administration for their support of this project.



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BROOKFIELD APPLES BOSTON

RICHARDS Furniture

BROOKFIELD MOTOR CO

WELCOME TO BROOKFIELD MASSACHUSETTS 1660

MEET JOHNNY W APPLESEED BORN IN MASS.

ELsie ELM HILL FARM

POOR Richards

OAKHOLM FARM

APPLE COUNTRY FAIR

Salem Cross

Old Brookfield Inn

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Town of Spencer



100th ANNUAL SPENCER FAIR

FLEXCON CO.

GULF

SPENCER PRODUCTS

WELLS GREAT BIG WINNER

ALTA CREST SIBLE

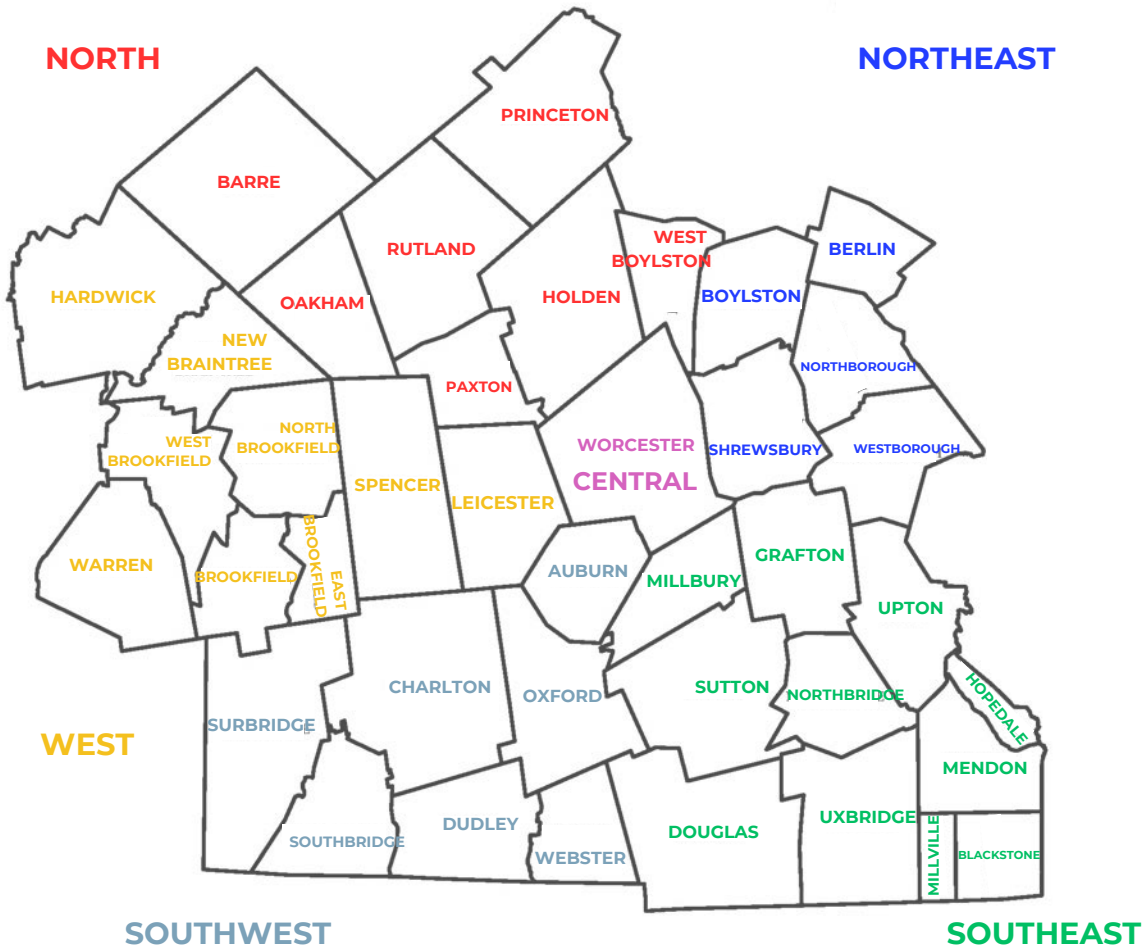
Jac

Our CMRPC REGION Communities

AUBURN
 BARRE
 BERLIN
 BLACKSTONE
 BOYLSTON
 BROOKFIELD
 CHARLTON
 DOUGLAS
 DUDLEY
 EAST BROOKFIELD
 GRAFTON
 HARDWICK
 HOLDEN
 HOPEDALE

LEICESTER
 MENDON
 MILLBURY
 MILLVILLE
 NEW BRAintree
 NORTH BROOKFIELD
 NORTHBOROUGH
 NORTHBRIDGE
 OAKHAM
 OXFORD
 PAXTON
 PRINCETON
 RUTLAND
 SHREWSBURY

SOUTHBRIDGE
 SPENCER
 STURBRIDGE
 SUTTON
 UPTON
 UXBRIDGE
 WARREN
 WEBSTER
 WEST BOYLSTON
 WEST BROOKFIELD
 WESTBOROUGH
 WORCESTER





Photography: Caio Gutierres

A Vision for Central Massachusetts

2028



2023

In 2028, our region will be a vibrant **hub for innovation, creativity**, and community. Our workforce will be more resourceful because of the vast **opportunities** available for **education and entrepreneurship**. Our unique communities and our **high quality of life** will be shaped by the success of our **resilient small businesses and community organizations**. Our people will have **access to the resources** they need to thrive in the regional economy.

Central Massachusetts will be a destination for **responsible development**, exceptional **recreation, inclusive culture, home-grown** delicacies, and all that life has to offer.



INTRODUCTION



Our region was designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) in December of 2022 by the US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA).



The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is one of 13 regional planning agencies in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. CMRPC works with 40 member communities that are part of Southern Worcester County (SWC).

The 2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) is made possible by a grant provided by the EDA. This CEDs was developed by the SWC Economic Development Organization (EDO) and our regional stakeholders, communities, higher-learning institutions, community-based organizations, and residents, and supported by CMRPC leadership and staff members.

The 2023-2028 CEDs will enable our growing region to continue to thrive. It aims to guide the region for the next five years, providing critical

objectives and action items derived from an in-depth and rigorous six-month community engagement and outreach process. During this process, CMRPC staff members engaged hundreds of residents and stakeholders from across the region. From the thriving life sciences sector to entrepreneurial small business owners, we collected qualitative and quantitative data to examine the trends of our growth and identify roadblocks for economic prosperity.

This CEDs covers a wide range of topics, including workforce





development, business support, quality of life, municipal capacity, regional collaboration, and economic development. These topics are relevant to people living in every corner of the region and are the cornerstones of our future economy. This document includes detailed analyses of these topics. This analysis, together with our community engagement, informed the goals, objectives, and action items for the CEDS.

This continued growth is a testament of the region's economic and social resiliency.

We have never been more optimistic for the future of the region's economy and its ability to withstand potential future shocks. This CEDS will carry the SWC region over the next five years to an even brighter future.

We want to thank our SWC EDO board members for their input and leadership.

Equity and resiliency are fundamental concepts that have played a critical role in the overall composition of this document.

Equity and resiliency are fundamental concepts that have played a critical role in the overall composition of this document. Over the past five years, the region successfully endured the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite being hit hard in the beginning of the pandemic, the region continues to see rapid and tremendous growth.



Recreation Facilities
Where and how would you like to see improvements made?

Facilities	Votes	Ideas
North Oxford Fields and Facilities	•	
Town Common	•	
High School and Middle School Athletic Fields	•	•
Greenbriar Fields and Facilities	•	•
Carbuncle Pond Facilities	•	•
Justin Field, Treasure Land Playground, and Community Center and Facilities	•	•
Chaffee School Playground	•	•
Clara Barton School Playground	•	•
Ruel Fields and Facilities	•	•
Dudley Road Boat Launch	•	•

The 2023-2028 CEDS synthesizes input from our communities, regional and local data, best planning practices, and state and federal law. It is the product of a robust community engagement process coupled with a public survey and a visioning workshop. It draws on the expertise of committee members and subject matter experts.





COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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ADVISORY ROLE

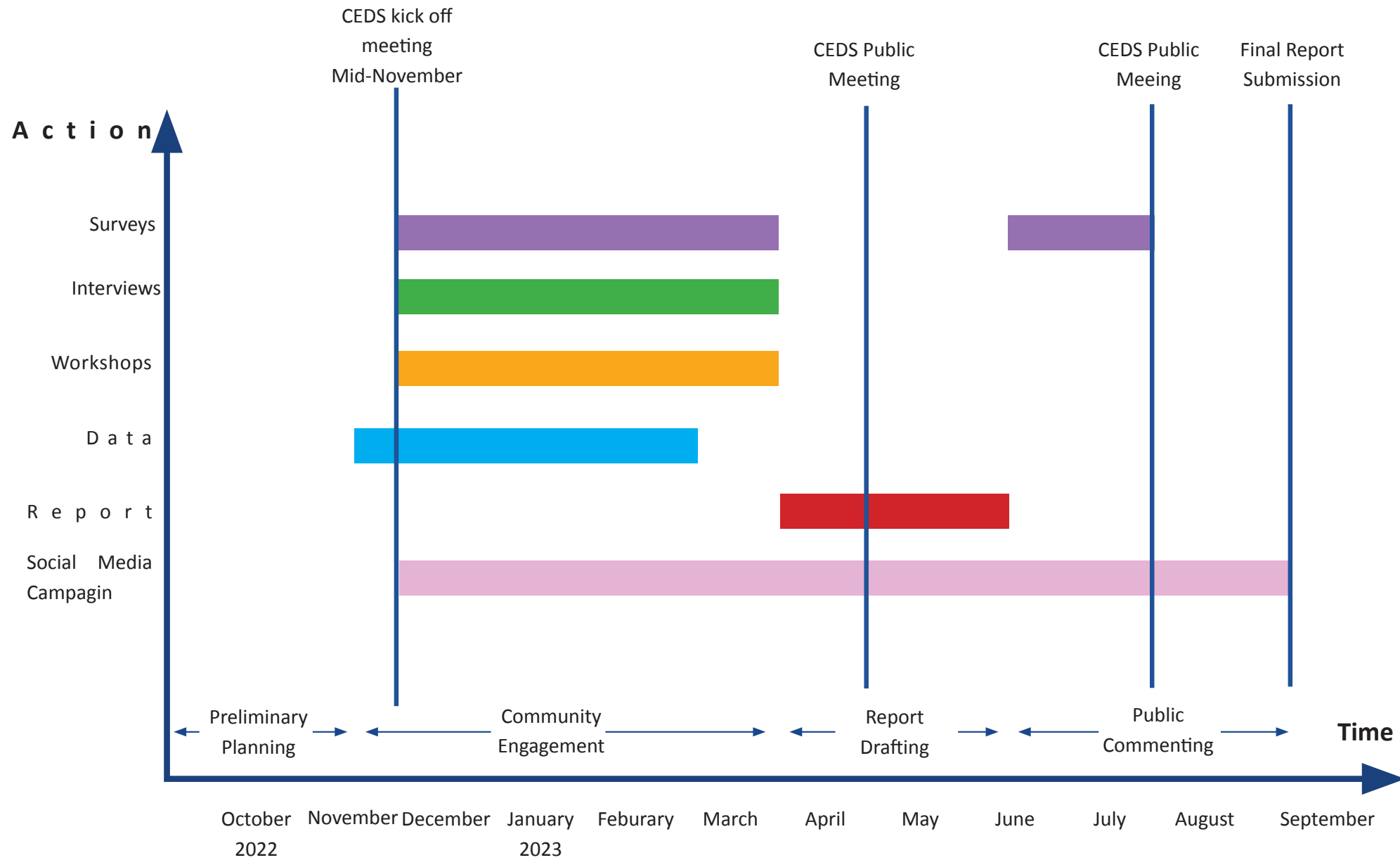
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- Lyndon Nichols**, Area Director, USDA
- Kimberley Ingalls**, Business Operations Director, Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership
- Lyndon Nichols**, Area Director, USDA
- David Sullivan**, Director of Economic Development & Business Recruitment, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce



CEDS Timeline



CEDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



CEDS Community Engagement

CEDS Community Outreach efforts engaged with our stakeholders and the public using multiple methods to ensure that we take all voices into account.





PHOTOGRAPHY: CAIO GUTIERRES



SECTION I SNAPSHOT OF THE REGION



Our region was designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) in December of 2022 by the US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration

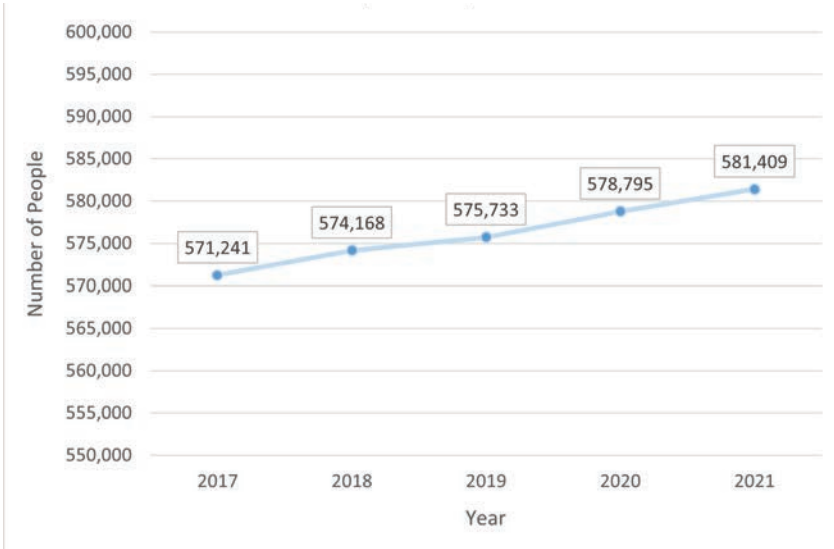


Figure 1. CMRPC Service Region Population 2017-2021. CMRPC Population 2017-2021. U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

The region's population growth is partially attributable to the increasing in-migration of people-of-color (POC) and immigrants. According to the United States Census Bureau, the region is now home to an increasingly diverse population. In 2017, the POC population was predominantly located within the cities of Worcester and Southbridge and the towns east of Worcester. By 2021, more communities in the region, especially Charlton, Upton, Webster, and Rutland, had become noticeably more diverse (Map 1 & 2).



The region's population growth is partially attributable to the increasing in-migration of people-of-color (POC) and immigrants.

Our region has grown significantly over the past five years

Population Growth
Over the past five years, the Southern Worcester County (SWC) region has experienced significant growth. Despite the economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, Central Massachusetts is successfully navigating an increasingly complex

economic landscape, leveraging its strong and connected community to weather challenges. This section will illustrate ways our region has grown, including in terms of population, population diversity, jobs, education, income, and other indicators. It will document how the region has evolved and how it can continue to improve.

The last five years have been marked by some of the most challenging events in the region's recent history, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these challenges have also brought unprecedented

opportunities. The region's population has continued to grow. In 2017, the regional population was 571,241, and in 2021, the population expanded by more than 10,000 people to 581,409 (Figure 1). The Commonwealth experienced a 0.7 percent population loss between 2020 and 2022, yet the Worcester New England City and Town Area (NECTA) experienced a slight population growth of 0.1 percent during the same period.¹



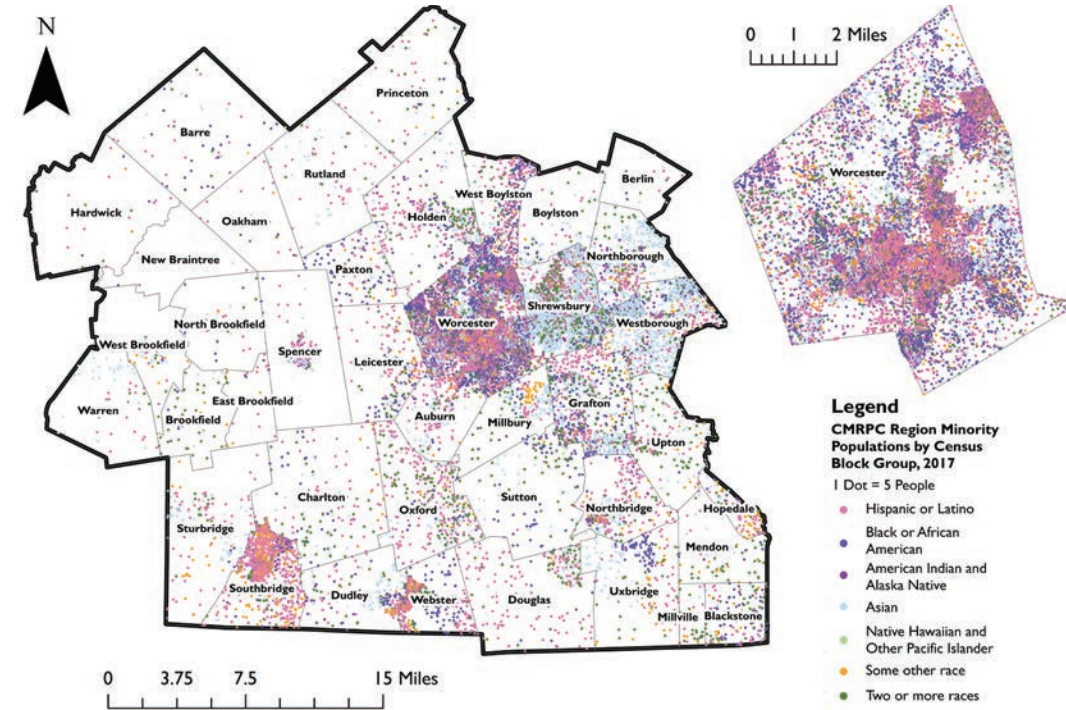
The region has many community-based organizations, such as the Latin American Business Organization (LABO), African Community Education (ACE), and the Southeast Asian Coalition.

Community-Based Organizations

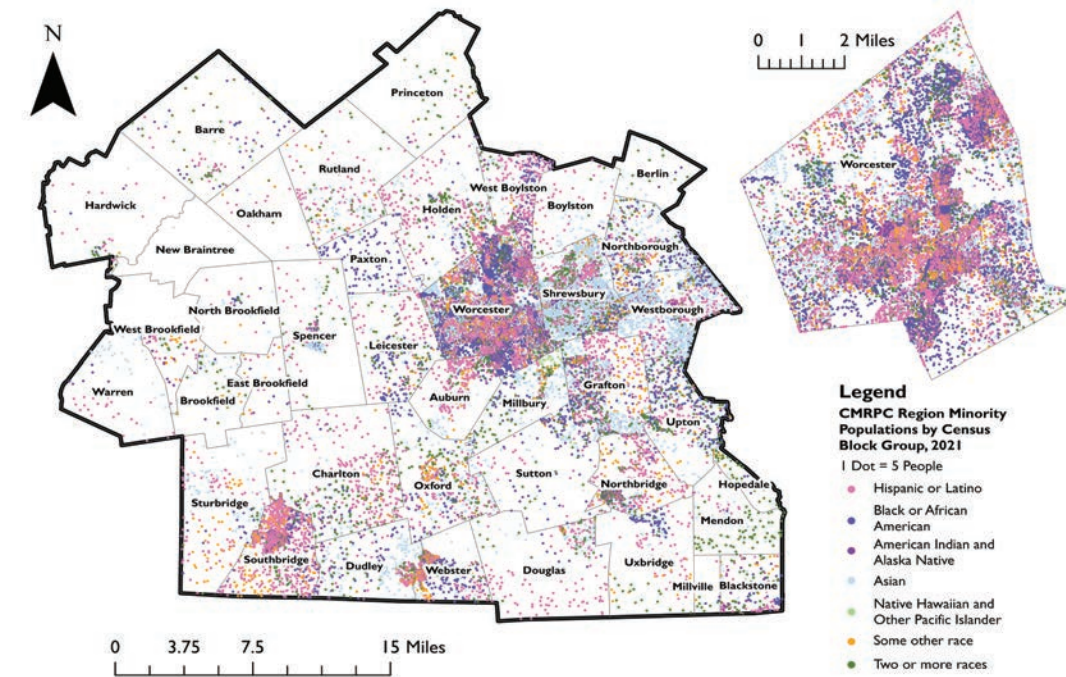
Central Massachusetts has many community-based organizations such as the Latin American Business Organization (LABO), African Community Education (ACE), and the Southeast Asian Coalition (SEAC). These organizations are at the forefront of assisting POC, immigrants, and minority-owned business communities. They work to ensure that every member of the community has the resources they need to succeed.



Community-based organizations are at the forefront of assisting POC, immigrants, and minority-owned businesses.



Map 1. CMRPC Region Minority Population 2017. U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 2. CMRPC Region Minority Population 2021. U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



The region's higher education institutions have experienced strong enrollment recently.

Educational Attainment

The region aims to increase educational attainment, and improvement in this measure has already begun during the last five years. In many communities, high school completion has increased, with some seeing seven percent growth in high school degree or equivalency attainment (Map 3).

Higher Education

Central Massachusetts' higher-learning institutions experienced strong enrollment over the past several years, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2017, 31,604 students attended universities in Central Massachusetts.² In 2022, that number grew to 39,421, a 25 percent increase from 2017.³ Central Massachusetts has eleven higher-learning institutions, and these institutions continue to advance economic growth and social equity. In 2017, 7,568 individuals were employed by the region's higher-learning institutions, resulting in \$685 million in salary payments.⁴

Business Community

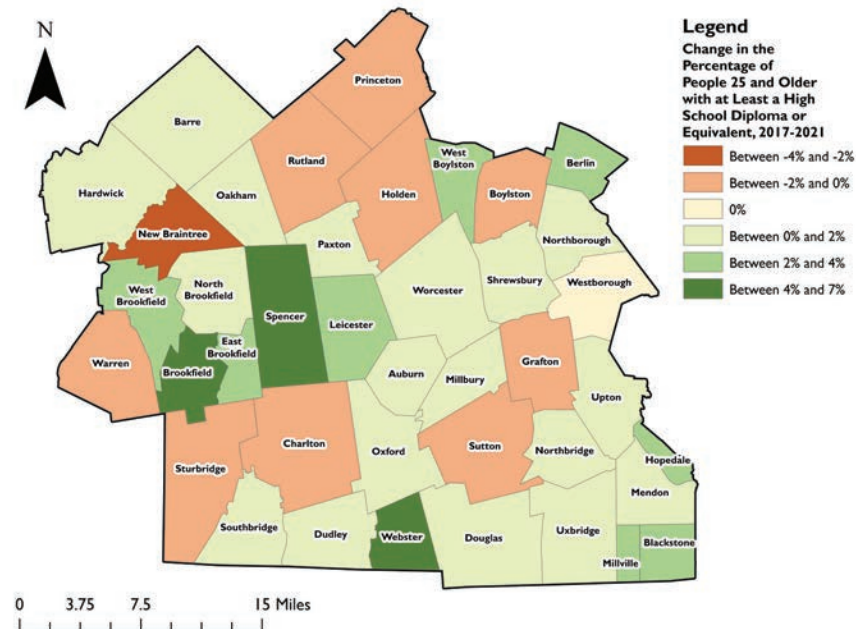
The region has a thriving business community. In 2017, businesses in Worcester County earned more than \$157 million in revenue, not including \$81 million of revenue paid to businesses in the City of Worcester. In addition, more than \$8 million of property and real estate taxes were levied from these businesses.⁵ In 2022, more than \$1.2 billion was paid to a 12,889 subset of employees in the region."⁶

11
higher education institutions

39,421
students

In 2022, 39,421 students attended universities in Central Massachusetts, a 25 percent increase from 2017.

Central Massachusetts has a thriving business community. In 2022, more than \$1.2 billion was paid to 12,889 individuals employed in the region.

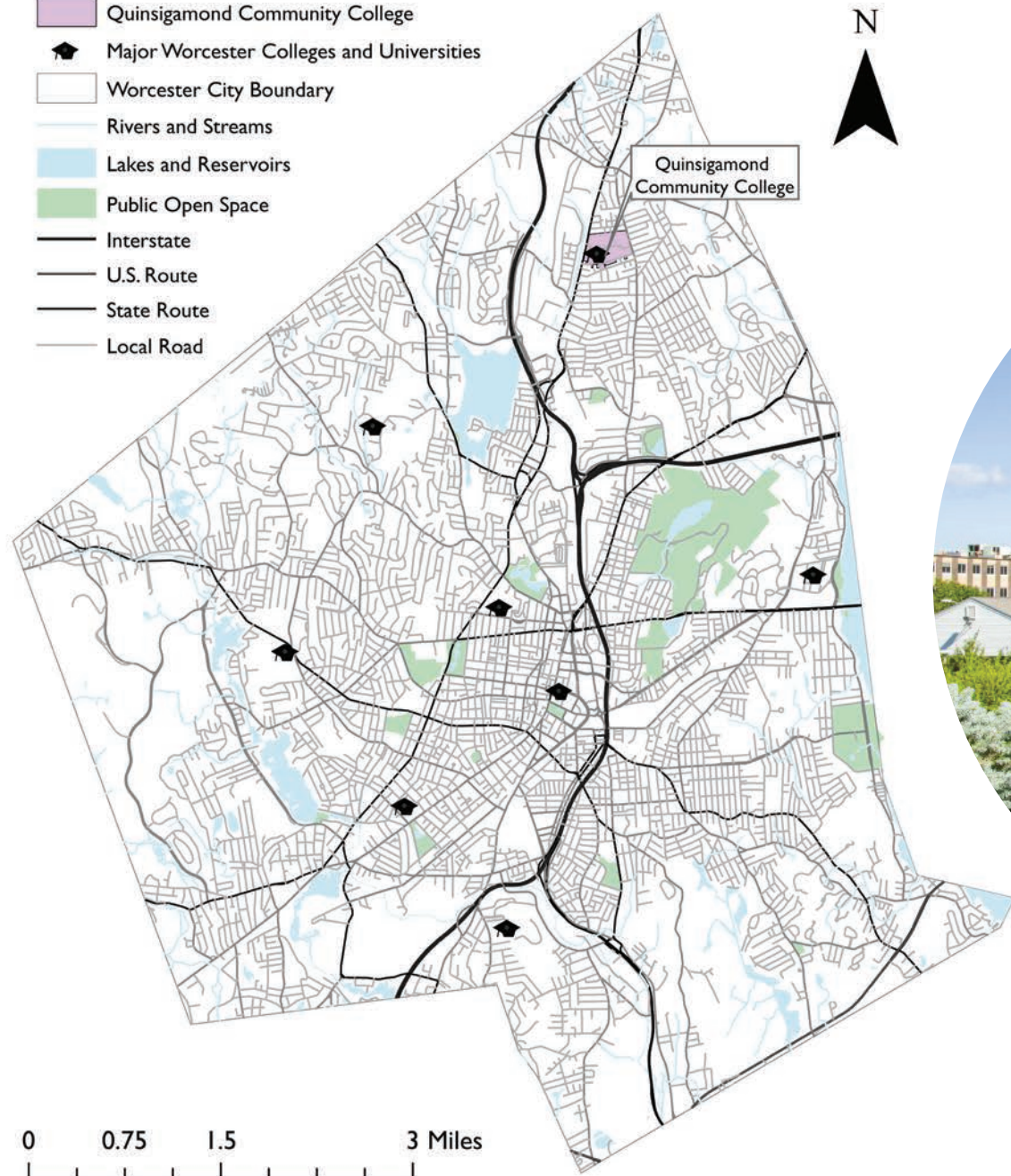


Map 3. CMRPC Service Region Change in Percentage of People 25 or Older with at Least a High School Diploma or Equivalency by Municipality, 2017-2021. Data source: "American Community Survey, 2017, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

Spotlight: Quinsigamond Community College

Legend

- Quinsigamond Community College
- ▲ Major Worcester Colleges and Universities
- Worcester City Boundary
- Rivers and Streams
- Lakes and Reservoirs
- Public Open Space
- Interstate
- U.S. Route
- State Route
- Local Road



One of the most valuable assets in the region is Quinsigamond Community College (QCC). Established in 1963, QCC offers a great variety of courses aimed at providing students with educational opportunities and preparing them to enter the workforce. Over the past five years, QCC has grown its programs and focused on curricula currently unavailable at four-year institutions. According to the Annual Report for Academic Affairs at QCC, the college expanded the Adult Community Learning Center to provide increased programs for general education such as ESL and GED. Further, the college established the Biomanufacturing Technician Pre-Apprentice Training and Fast Track Skills Academy for fast-growing sectors in the region.

QCC aspires to provide more opportunities to those in the region, and it wants to expand workforce training in biomanufacturing, life science, and apprenticeship programs in the healthcare, human services, education, and financial services sectors. However, the college has many challenges, including funding, finding qualified faculty for high-skill programs, equipment, and software to “stay ahead of the curve.”

The importance of QCC to the regional economy cannot be overstated. When asked about the role QCC and other vocational training schools should play in the region, Kathy Rentsch, expressed, “Community Colleges should be a central focus to economic and workforce development.”

Job Growth

The number of jobs in the region is also rising. Despite brief growth in unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's jobs rebounded by the end of 2020. In April 2023, the Worcester Metropolitan Area had 3,100 more jobs than it did in February 2020.⁷ This indicates that, despite

experiencing job losses at the beginning of the pandemic, greater Worcester has not only recovered all of its lost jobs but also added new ones. The metropolitan area experienced 1.9 percent job growth from 2021 to 2022. The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute projects that Massachusetts will

continue to see a growth in jobs and employment and that the Central Massachusetts region will see similar trends.⁸

1.9% job growth 2021-2022



Recently, many communities, especially those in the north of the region, have experienced significant decreases in unemployment.

Employment

The region's job growth mirrors a similar reduction in unemployment. Although Massachusetts was among the states hardest hit by the 2020 Recession, many communities in the region recovered quickly, experiencing a sharp reduction in unemployment in 2021.

Pre-pandemic, the regional unemployment rate was 4.84 percent, with many communities in the region having unemployment rates of 3.5% or greater and some communities having especially high unemployment rates, which drove the regional average higher than that. Unemployment sharply rose during the first months that the pandemic hit the United States. Recently, many communities, especially those in the north of the region, have experienced significant decreases in unemployment. In some cases, they have unemployment rates below pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2, Map 4 & 5).



Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development



Blackstone Valley Hub (BVH) is a regional center for workforce development, and its mission is to provide a source of trained personnel to serve local industry in the Blackstone Valley and the surrounding areas. The facility is staffed with highly trained instructors drawing from local schools, vocational training institutions, and industry professionals. The BVH facility also has all of the requirements to serve the training needs of residents, including industry standard machine tools and an IT system. The BVH provides training courses on CAD, welding, machining, advanced technology training, etc. Further it provides training courses at Worcester House of Correction.

The BVH recently acquired another 4,400 square feet of space, in which a fully equipped electronics lab will be located.



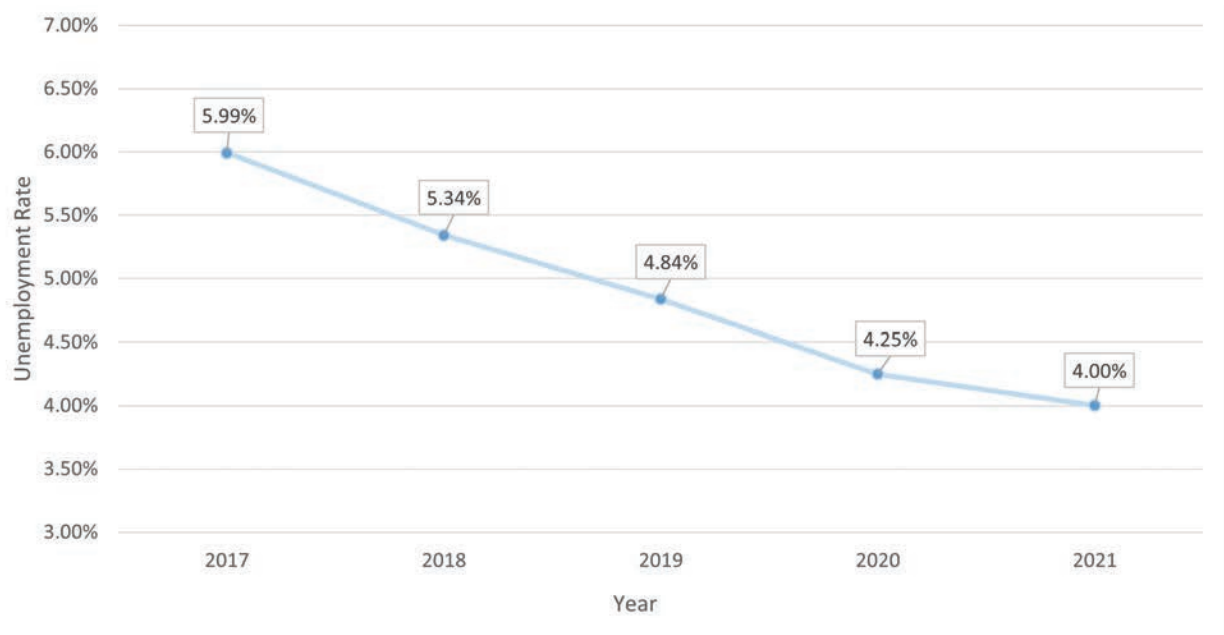
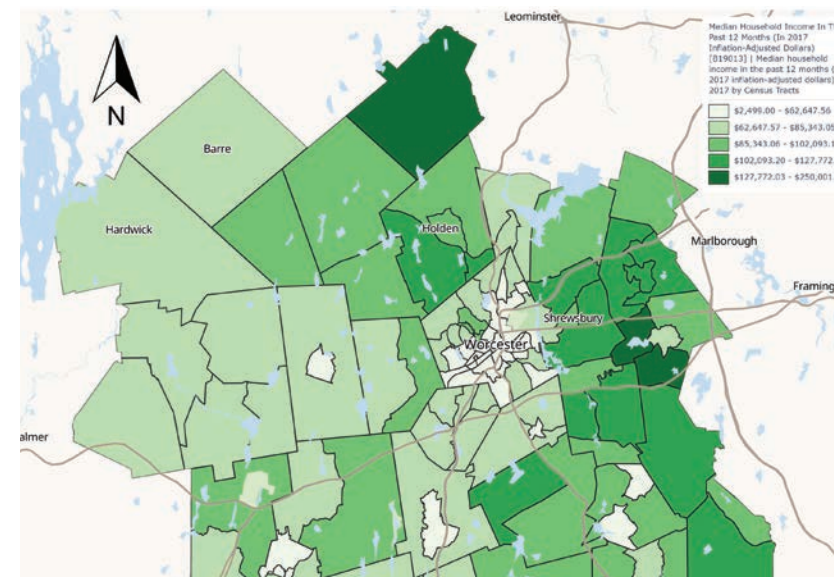


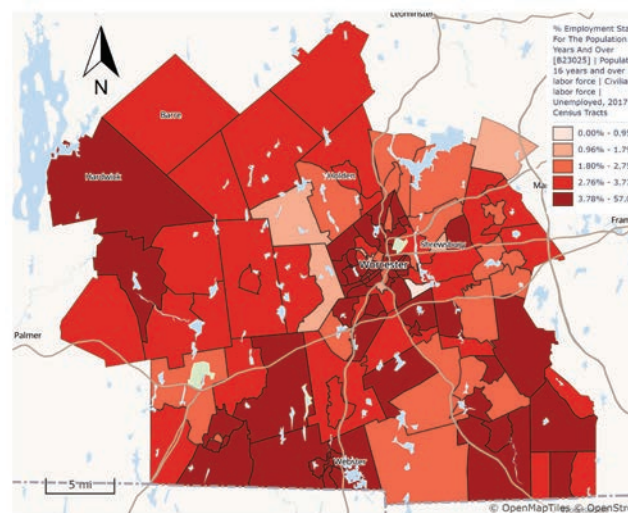
Figure 2. CMRPC Region Unemployment Rate 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

Median Income

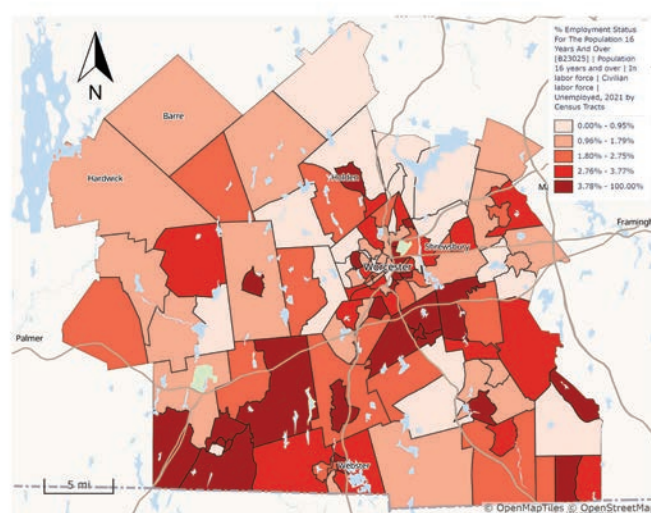
Another notable indicator of the region's trajectory is the growth in median household incomes across the region. In 2017, the average median household income for SWC Census Tracts was \$72,390. Five years later, this figure had grown to \$77,965, marking a 7.7 percent growth over this period (Map 6, 7, 8). During the same period, Massachusetts saw a growth of 2.7 percent. This indicates that the region is increasing its wealth at a more rapid pace than Massachusetts overall. Although the Commonwealth has a higher median household income than Central Massachusetts, the region is quickly closing the gap.



Map 6. CMRPC Region Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2017. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 4. CMRPC Region Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

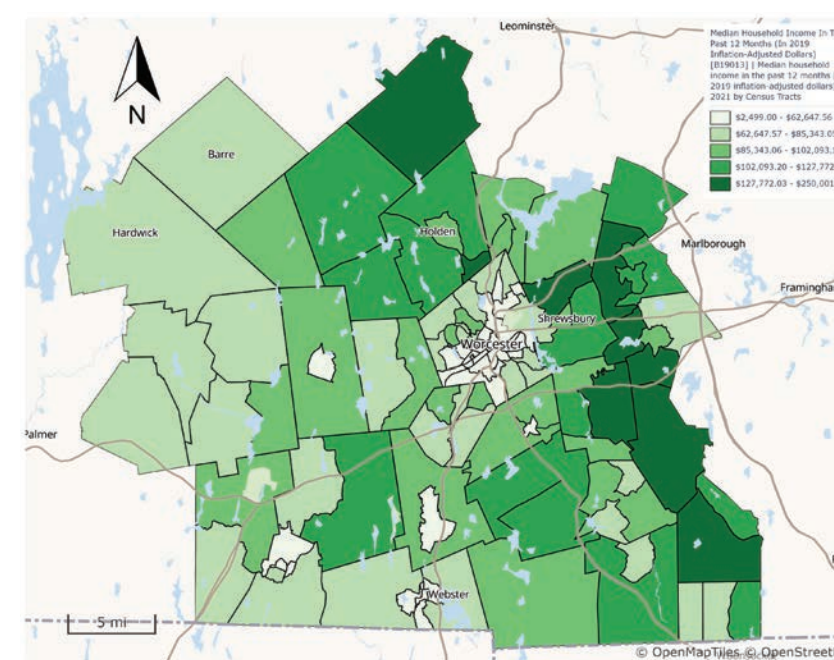


Map 5. CMRPC Region Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

7.7%
median household
income growth
2017-2021



**Increases in
median household
incomes have
been accompanied
by reductions in
poverty**



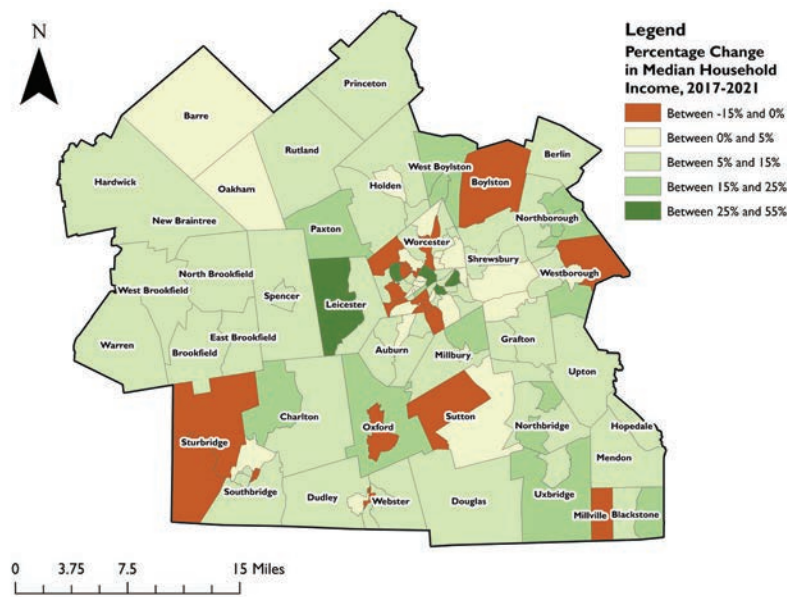
Map 7. CMRPC Region Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

Poverty Rates

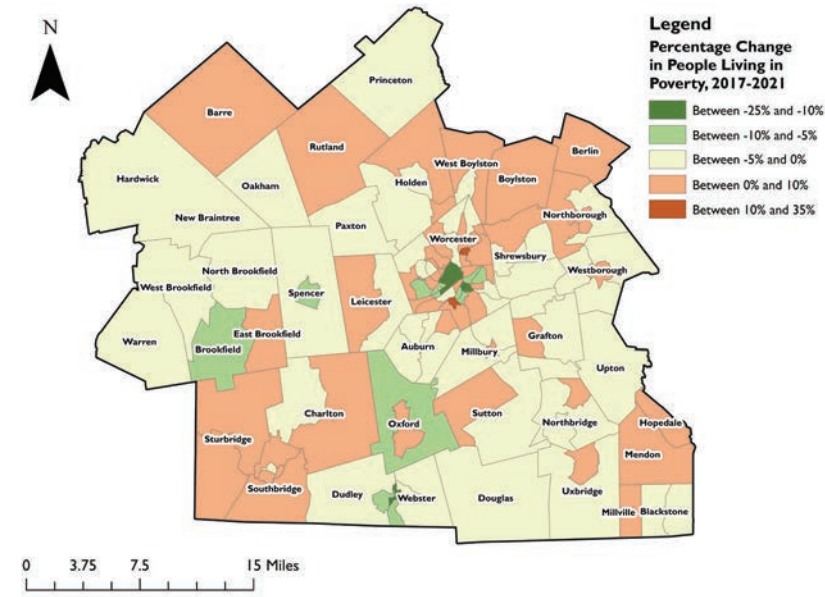
Increases in median household incomes have been accompanied by reductions in poverty in many communities. Towns in the western, eastern, and southern parts of the region saw more significant reductions in poverty than many towns in the northern, southwestern, and southeastern areas.

Some towns in southwestern and western sections also saw reduced poverty, yet overall poverty rates in these areas as well as in parts of the Town of Southbridge and City of Worcester remain high (Figure 3; Map 9, 10, 11). According to the United States Census Bureau, the poverty rate in Massachusetts went from 10.5 percent in 2017 to 10.4 percent in 2021. Although this overall reduction is small, the state had a one percent decline in poverty from 2017 to 2019. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the poverty rate skyrocketed back to 10.4 percent.⁹ However, with the state of the economy continuing to recover from the pandemic, all indicators point to a lower future poverty rate for both the Commonwealth and the region.

Poverty rates in southwestern & western sections of the region & parts of the City of Worcester, remain high.



Map 8. CMRPC Region Percentage Change in Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2017-2021 Updated. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 11. CMRPC Region Percentage Change in People Living in Poverty by Census Tract, 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

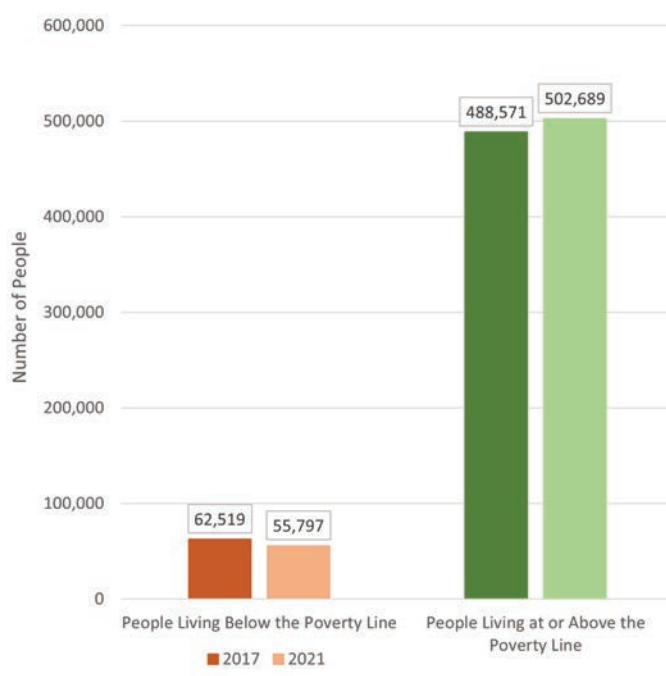
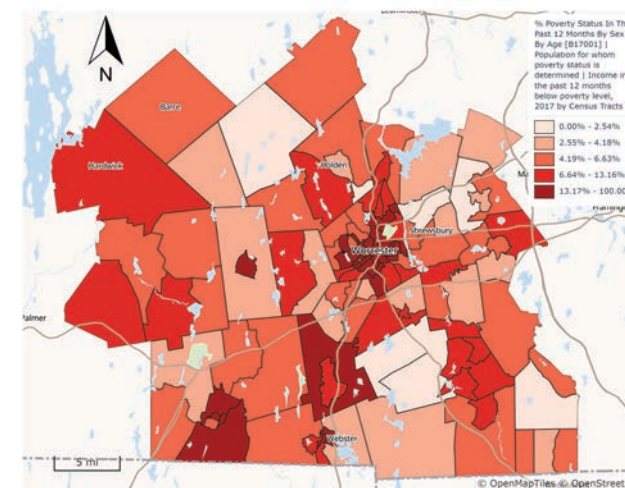
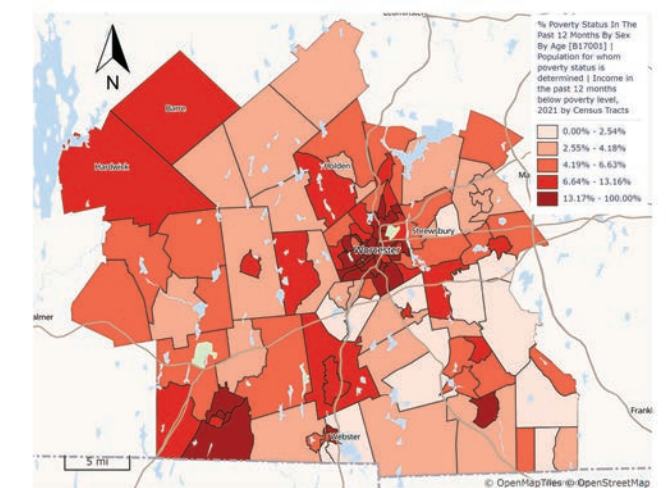


Figure 3. CMRPC Region Poverty Level 2017 and 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 9. CMRPC Region Population Living in Poverty by Census Tract, 2017. U.S. Data source: Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 10. CMRPC Region Population Living in Poverty by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



The poverty rate in Massachusetts went from 10.5 percent in 2017 to 10.4 percent in 2021. These indicators suggest a lower future poverty rate in the region.

Development

The past five years were also marked by changes in market demand and investment within the region. There was an unprecedented level of development and development



interests in the region, from downtown Worcester to the smallest towns. As the economic engine of the region and the second largest city in New England, the City of Worcester continues to experience significant growth and investment. Downtown Worcester is expected to add over 2,000 new housing units over the next few years, some of the largest scale developments in recent history.¹⁰ The transformation of the Canal District and many other parts of the city continues to attract development interests, residents, and visitors. With increased investment and unprecedented revitalization efforts, the city is being transformed into a better place for people to live and work. It is imperative that these improvements to the downtown are affordable to all and do not push out longtime residents.

Business Growth

The region's economic growth is successful in large part due to the continued growth of small businesses. While many of these businesses were significantly



Downtown Worcester is expected to add over 1,000 new housing units over the next few years.

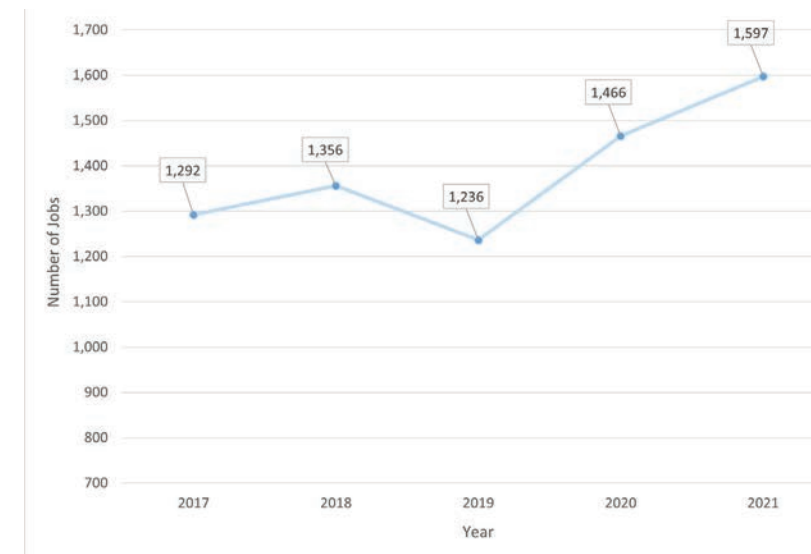


Figure 4. CMRPC Region Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining Jobs 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's communities came together to ensure that these small businesses were supported during this difficult time. As a result of unwavering community support, the number of small businesses and entrepreneurs in the region has recently grown.

Startups

According to the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, more than 5,000 new businesses started in 2020 and 2022, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022





alone, 2,772 new businesses were established in the region. This steady growth indicates a stable and thriving economy in Central Massachusetts.¹¹

Farming

Historically farming-centered, the region is still home to many operating farms. While the COVID-19 pandemic, the loss of agricultural land, and the growing climate crisis have impacted the region's farms, the area's agricultural sector continues to endure (Figure 4; Map 12; Table 1).

Life Sciences

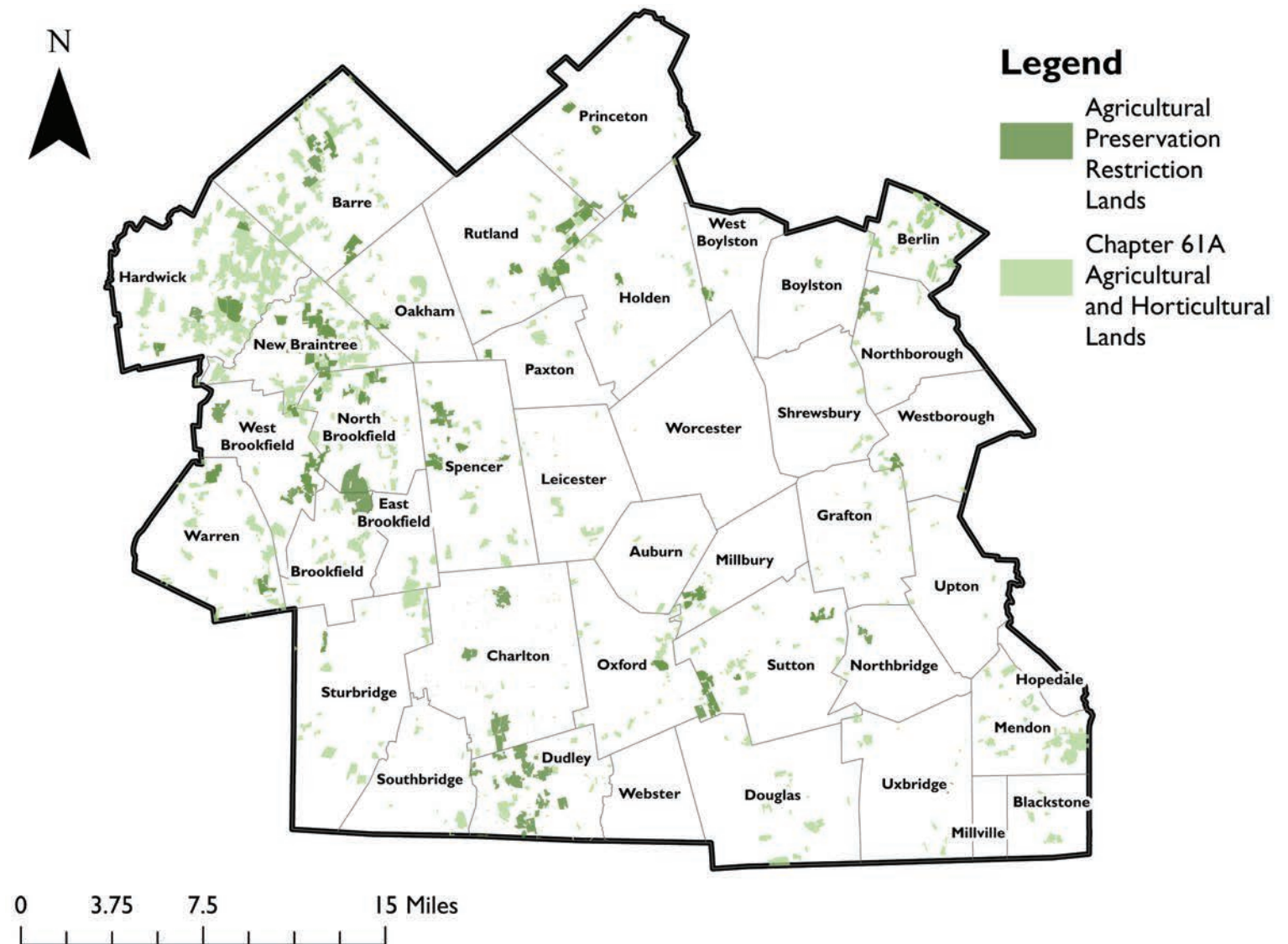
The region also has a thriving professional, scientific, and management sector, especially in the biotech and healthcare industries (Figure 5). The region's education,

5,000
new businesses
2020-2022



2,772 new
businesses were
established in the
region in 2022.

The growing climate crisis and sprawl have led to the loss of agricultural land and pressure on the region's farms.



Map 12. CMRPC Region Protected Agricultural and Horticultural Lands. Data source: MassGIS. "Massachusetts Interactive Property Map." (2021). Accessed August 15, 2023. <https://massgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/OnePane/basicviewer/index.html?appid=47689963e7bb4007961676ad9fc56ae9>; MassGIS. "MassMapper - MassGIS Data: MDAR Agricultural Preservation Restrictions." (2022). Accessed August 15, 2023. <https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov/>.



healthcare, and social assistance sectors grew from 83,096 jobs to 85,916 jobs over the past five years, indicating steady growth (Figure 6).

Anchored by Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives (MBI), the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School (UMass Chan), the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (MCPHS), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), the region has seen significant growth in the biotech and life sciences sector. According to a 2022 report by international real estate firm Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis Group, the Worcester metro area has the 15th largest cluster of life sciences talent in the country, beating out large metro areas like Dallas, Austin, and Sacramento. Worcester's ranking was independent of the Greater Boston Area, which ranked as #1 on the list.¹² In 2023, new and emerging life science companies are expected to create hundreds of new jobs across the region. According to a rating system developed by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council (MBC), 11 communities in the region received the BioReady designation, a testament to the area's robust talent pipeline and infrastructure. These BioReady communities are Worcester, West Boylston, Shrewsbury, Westborough, Grafton, Northbridge, Uxbridge, Auburn, Oxford, Charlton, Sturbridge.¹³

Worcester County	2017	Change 2012-2017
Farms	1,568	1%
Land in Farms (acres)	95,308	-6%
Average Size of Farms (acres)	61	-7%
Average Market Value of Products Sold per Farm (\$1,000)	41,579	13%

Table 1. USDA Data on Worcester County Farms. Data source: 2017 Census of Agriculture. "County Profile: Worcester County". (2017). Accessed August 11, 2023. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Massachusetts/cp25027.pdf.

Manufacturing

The eastern part of the region continues to see large-scale development due to its proximity to major transportation routes. Historically, communities along Route 146 (Rt 146) and the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) corridors served as major manufacturing centers and key transportation hubs. The Blackstone Valley was one of the nation's first manufacturing hubs, dating back

to the 1700s. In the past five years, manufacturing has declined by nearly 2,000 jobs. However, top employers such as Polar, Flexcon, Table Talk, Rand Whitney, and Wyman Gordon continue to invest in the region, supplying over 30,000 jobs in beverages, adhesives, packaging, and metals manufacturing. As manufacturing continues to slightly decline, retraining opportunities in growing sectors such as warehousing, construction,

education, and healthcare will be crucial.

Distribution Centers

Today, modern distribution centers are increasingly common in these communities, giving these historic towns renewed purpose. According to labor statistics, the region's transportation, warehousing, and utilities jobs grew from 11,850 in 2017 to 13,506 in 2021, a 14 percent increase (Figure 7).



According to a report published by the Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis Group, the City of Worcester is one of the strongest emerging hubs for biomedical research and ranks among the top 15 hubs for the sector in the country.

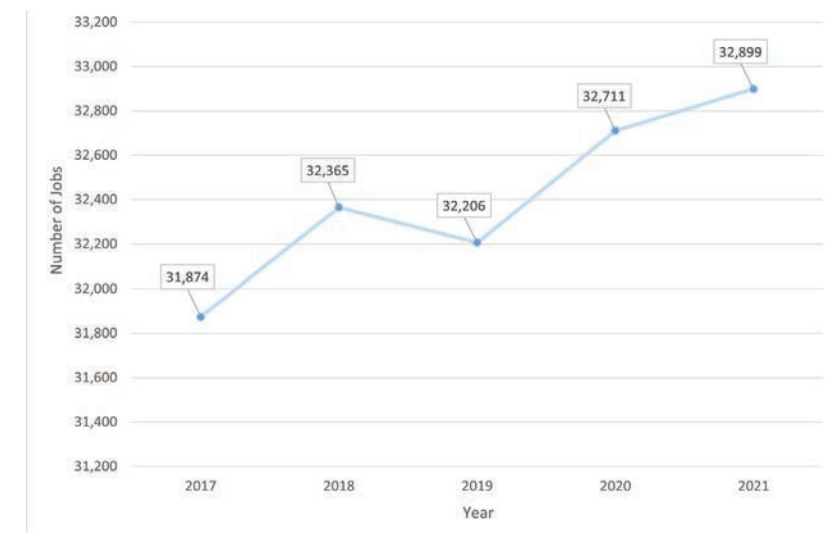


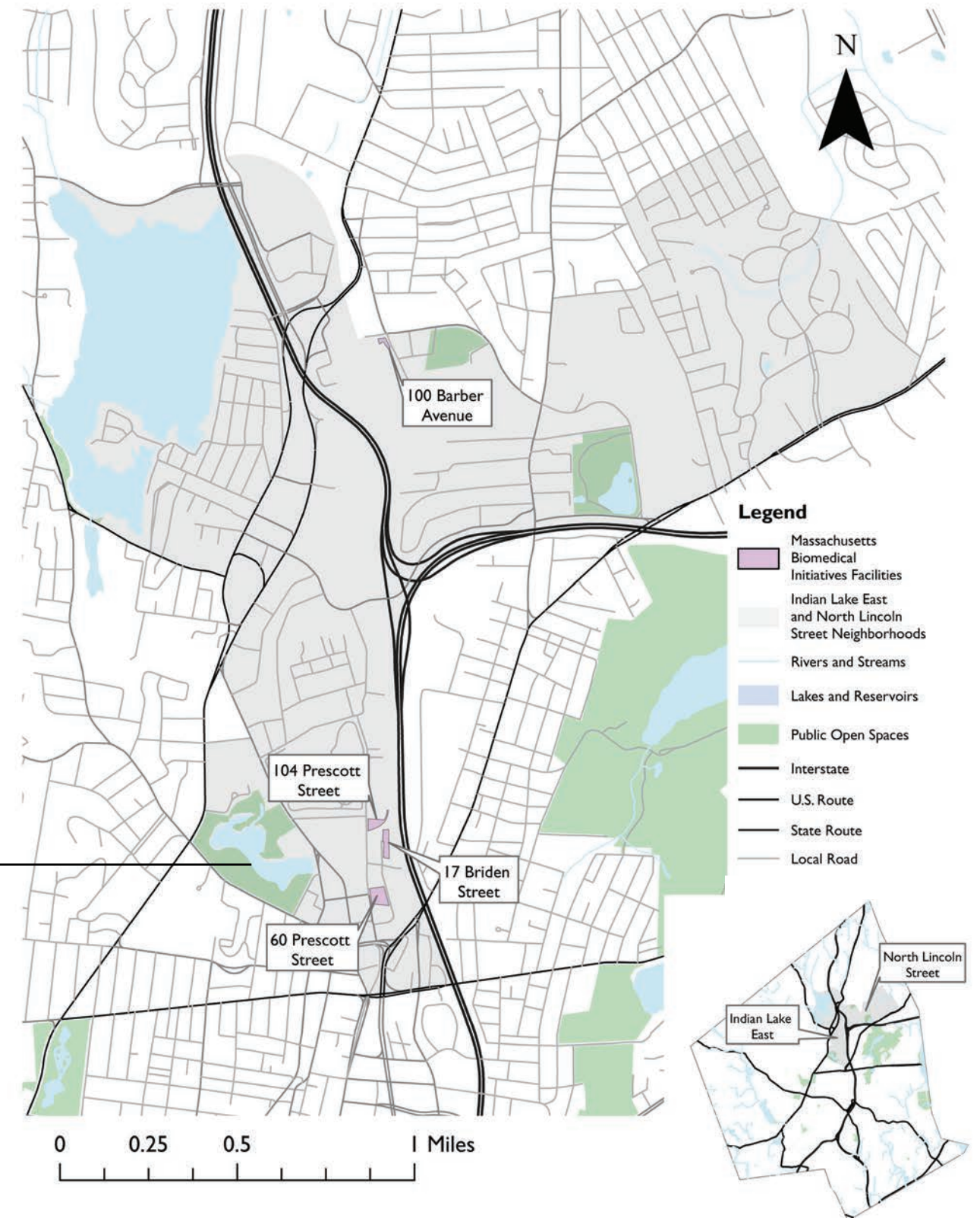
Figure 5. CMRPC Region Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services Jobs, 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

Massachusetts Biomedical Initiative (MBI)

MBI is an organization at the forefront of creating and incubating biotech and science companies. MBI assists emerging biotech companies and collaborates with higher education institutions and other government organizations to promote Massachusetts as a global leader in the life science and innovation industry. In 2022, MBI purchased approximately 57,000 square feet of space in Worcester to provide greater opportunities for these emerging companies. MBI continues to seek opportunities to promote Central Massachusetts as the new innovation hub outside of the Boston area.



Spotlight: Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives and Opportunities in Life Sciences Innovation





Distribution and fulfillment centers are emerging in Uxbridge, Sutton, Worcester, Boylston, Charlton, and Northborough. These enterprises are expected to employ thousands of workers from the region's communities and continue to create economic development and employment opportunities. It is imperative for the region to make sure that jobs created by these developments are well-paying and not overly strenuous; it is also imperative that these developments steer away from environmentally sensitive areas.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure investments throughout the region are supporting anticipated growth; however, additional infrastructure is needed to facilitate private development. Among the region's top priorities are improvements to public infrastructure, including but not limited to public water, public sewer, and roadways. Many of these infrastructure projects serve as the catalyst for development projects in certain areas, providing greater opportunity to revitalize the region's communities and make them more resilient.

Preservation

Central Massachusetts has numerous picturesque, historic small towns that predate the founding of our country. While many

these towns are changing to meet the needs of their residents and foster economic growth, they are also embarking on preservation and adaptive reuse projects aimed at renovating and repurposing historic buildings. In Berlin, an old church was renovated to become a new community gathering space, giving renewed life to the town center. In Southbridge, an old school and an old factory were redeveloped to provide housing to the diverse community that calls Southbridge home. In Dudley, Stevens Mill is being reused to provide attractive affordable housing options along the French River. In Warren, the town is actively seeking opportunities to develop the abandoned Wrights Mill.



Additional infrastructure investment is needed throughout the region to facilitate private development and anticipated growth.

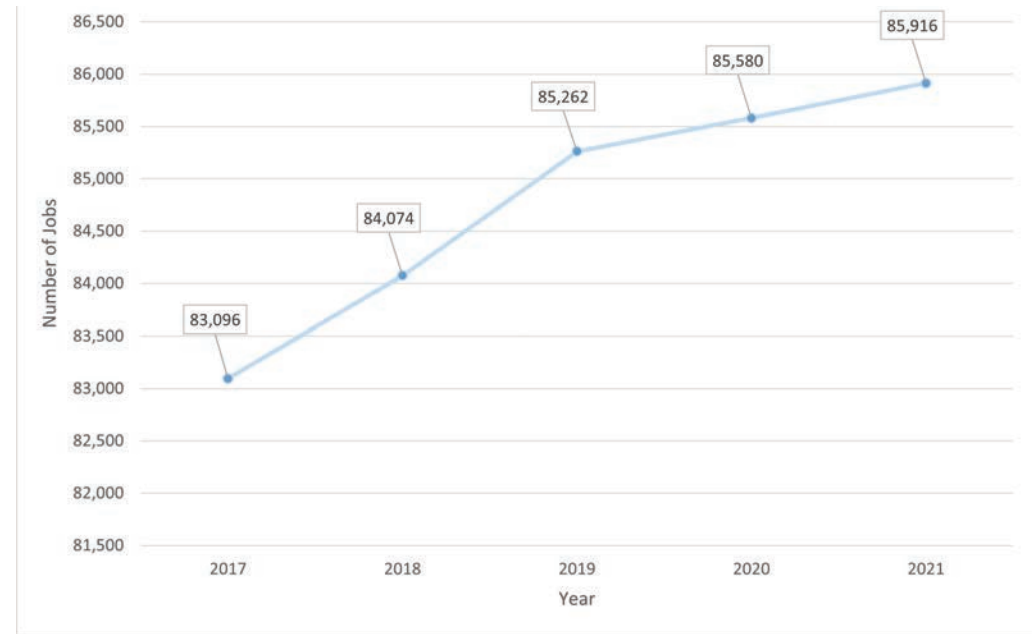


Figure 6. CMRPC Region Educational Services, Healthcare, and Social Assistance Jobs, 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

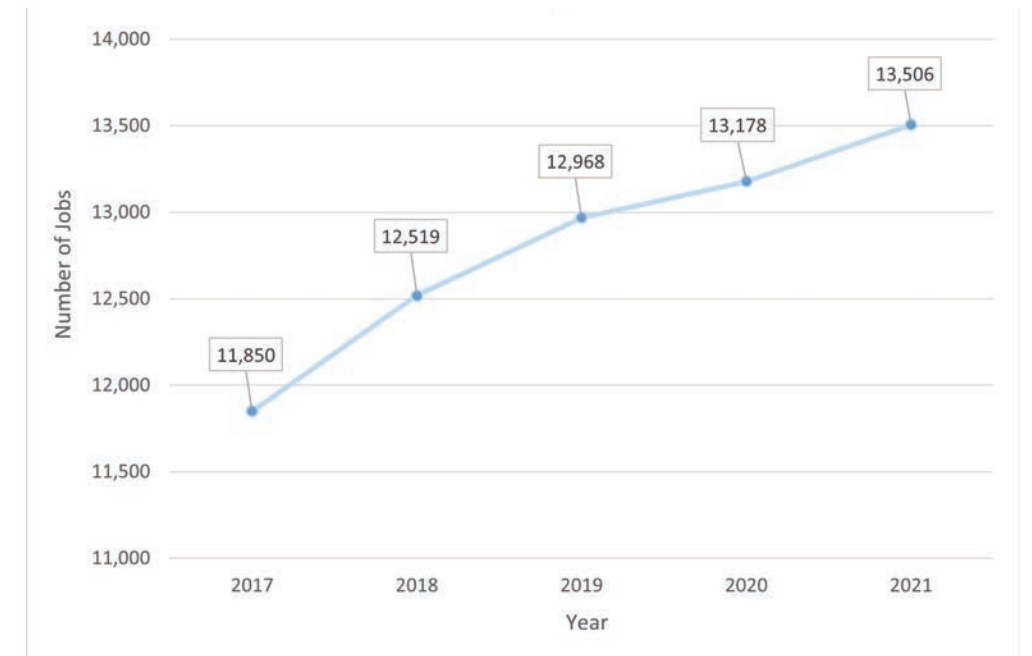
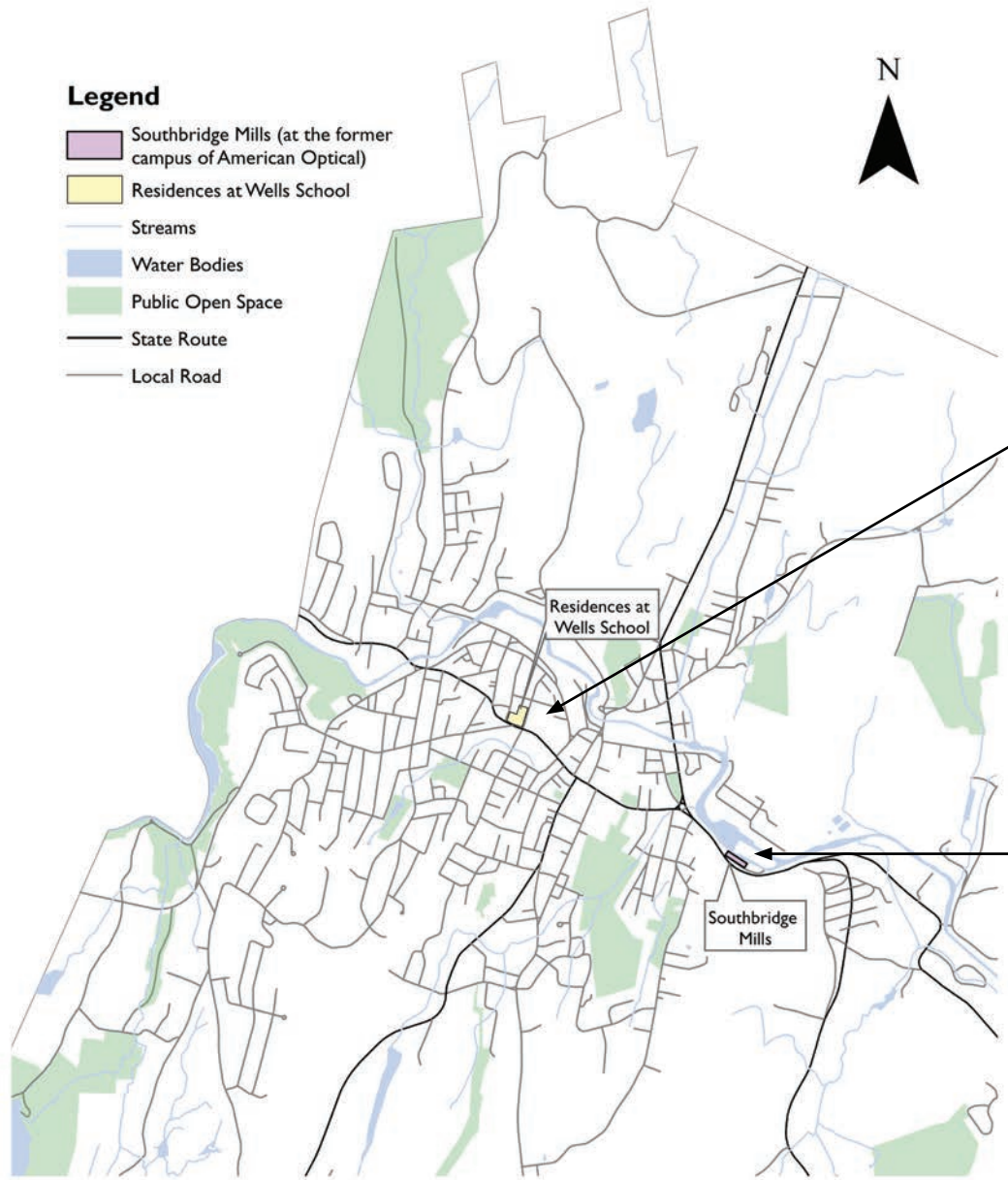


Figure 7. CMRPC Region Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities Job, 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

**Town of Southbridge
Affordable Housing Development**

Spotlight: Innovative Housing in Southbridge



Southbridge is a post-industrial town located in the southeastern corner of the region. Home to more than 17,000 residents, this community is one of the most diverse towns in Central Massachusetts. As a microcosm of the Commonwealth, Southbridge faces a significant housing shortage. In 2021, construction began on the Southbridge Mills project, redeveloping a portion of the former American Optical campus into 48 new units of rental housing. In addition to this

development, the 106-year-old Wells School has been converted into 56 affordable units for older adults. These historic conversions directly benefit Southbridge residents, providing new housing options while honoring the history of the community.



Central Massachusetts Regional
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SECTION II THE IMPACT OF COVID-19





70 percent of businesses indicated that they had suffered from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its community-wide impacts prompted a number of changes throughout communities in the region. Even during this difficult time, SWC demonstrated

resiliency, coming together and supporting those in need. CMRPC and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC) conducted a survey at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 93 businesses that participated in the survey, nearly 70 percent indicated that their businesses had suffered extreme impacts, with 29 percent responding that they were somewhat impacted. When asked about the percentage of employees they had to lay off, 51 percent of respondents said none were affected and about a quarter

of the respondents said that all employees were laid off. Most respondents expressed that they have some levels of worry about the future of their businesses or organizations. This survey was conducted just months into the pandemic.

While much of the Commonwealth switched to remote work at the beginning of the pandemic, more than half of the survey respondents indicated that their businesses are unable to operate remotely. The WRCC survey showed that small businesses experienced the most

Small businesses experienced the most severe pandemic-induced disruption.

pandemic-induced disruption, with many having been in dire need of financial and operational assistance; this was especially the case for businesses outside of Worcester in towns with less resources and where it is near-impossible to offer remote working options.

While the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the region, SWC came out of the pandemic stronger because its communities came together to help one another during this difficult time. Under the leadership of the Federal and State governments, many agencies



According to Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, in Worcester County there were 2,731 new businesses created in 2020-2021, a





and organizations provided resources to those in need. The SWC EDO helped these agencies and organizations as well as many businesses during the pandemic by providing grant assistance and informational resources.

Even though the region's business community was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, thousands of businesses were started in 2020 and 2021. According to Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, in Worcester County, there were 2,383 new businesses in 2020, a 0.5 percent drop from the previous year. In 2021, there were 2,731 new businesses, a 14.65 percent growth compared to 2020. Massachusetts saw a 10 percent growth in new businesses in 2020. One in six new businesses that were started in the Commonwealth in 2021 were established in the SWC region. This is a testament to the region's economic resiliency.¹⁵

The next section of this CEDS will focus on improving economic resiliency by addressing economic development and social issues. The action plan of this CEDS will focus on improving the resiliency of the region so that it can withstand economic shocks in the future and recover from them stronger.



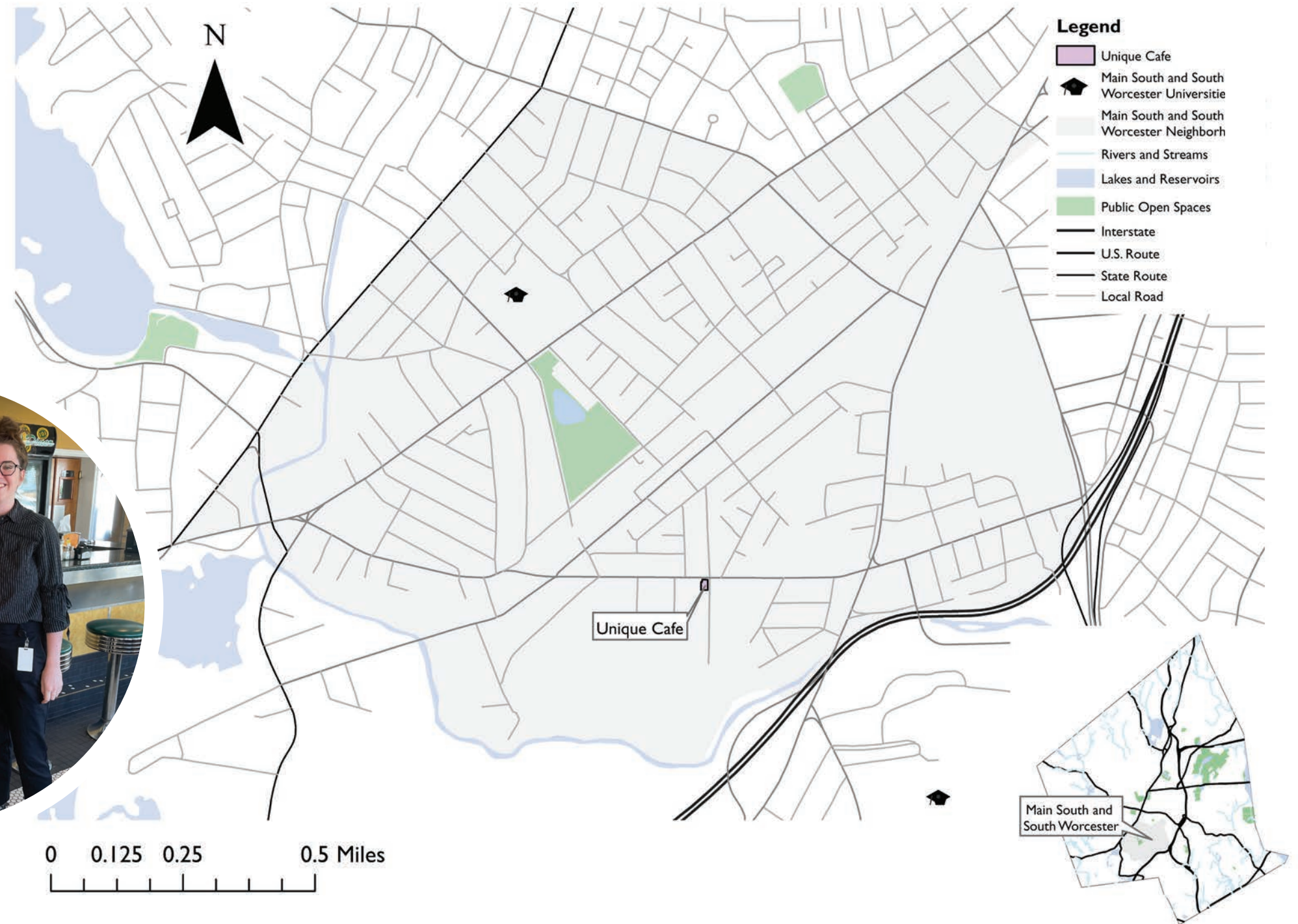
The Story of Unique Cafe

Owned by local entrepreneur Nadine James, Unique Café serves up a taste of Jamaica in Main South, Worcester. Fueled by her love of cooking, Nadine opened shop during the pandemic to bring a taste of home to Jamaican folks unable to travel. Within a short time, Nadine lost her lease and equipment due to unfair landlord practices, and was forced to shutter the business. Thanks to support from the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC), Nadine re-open her café at a new location just one year later. Unique Café is now a staple of the Main South neighborhood, relying on volunteers and family.



Although Nadine is supported by community organizations such as the WRCC and other local groups, businesses like Unique Cafe could greatly benefit from tax breaks, legal advocacy, and small business grants.

Spotlight: Unique Cafe and the Importance of Support for Small Businesses

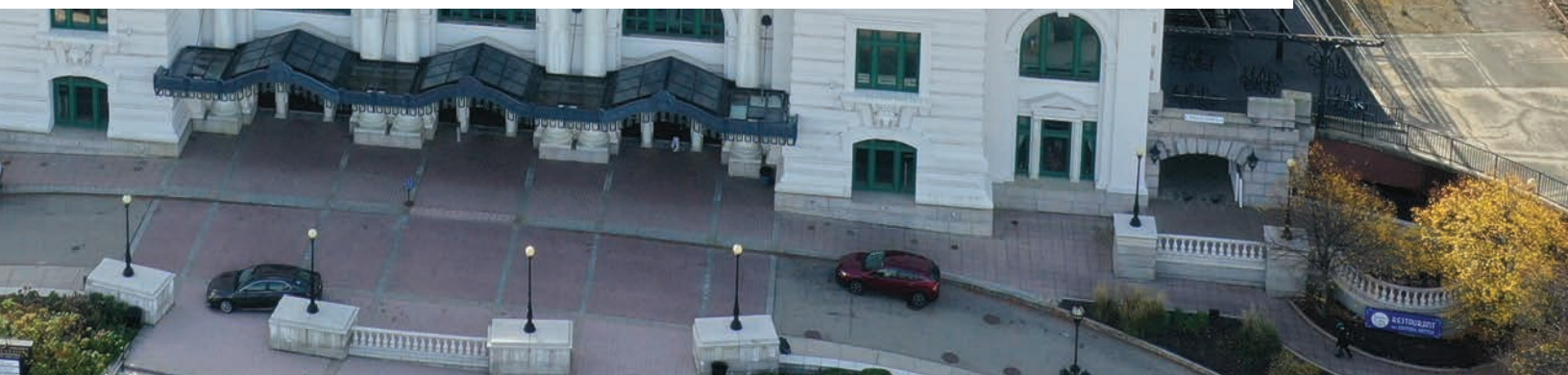




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SECTION III STRATEGIC PRIORITIES





Photography: Matt Jablonski

Income and Employment

Differential access to educational resources and attainment contribute to many issues, and a community's average income is one of the most conspicuous indicators of educational outcomes. Communities with higher average incomes have more property tax funds to use in improving public education. Although the previous section illustrated that the median household income of the region has grown over the past five years, there remain significant earning gaps among people who call SWC home. While white residents typically earn more than \$33,000 every year, most black residents' incomes fall into the \$25,000 to \$33,000 bracket, with many earning less than \$17,000

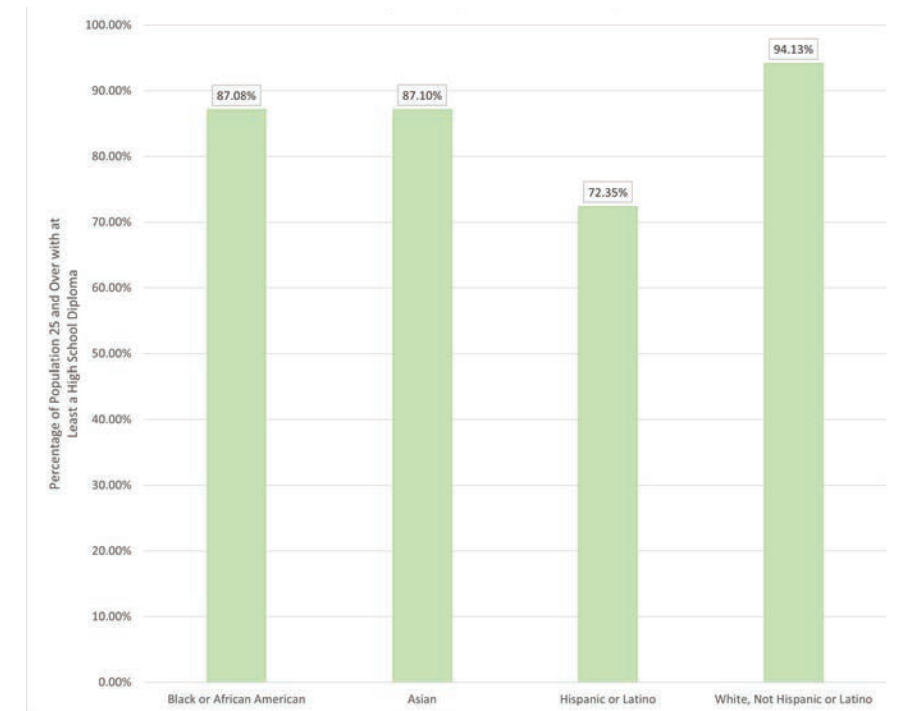


Figure 8. CMRPC Region Population with at Least a High School Diploma by Race and Ethnicity. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.



This section highlights a set of priorities for Central Massachusetts for the next five years.

Regional Priorities

While many facets of the region have improved, there are still many areas that require attention. Despite the region's overall resiliency, there remain many individuals, small businesses,

institutions, organizations, and farms that need assistance. There are many economic development opportunities that Central Massachusetts can take on, but many issues remain roadblocks to the region's future. This section of the CEDS provides a set of priorities for the next five years.

Education

A hub of high-quality education, the Worcester area attracts thousands of students from all over the globe. Though the region's educational attainment has increased over the last five years, there still exists

a considerable disparity between racial groups. White residents in the region have an abundance of educational resources. In most communities, less than five percent of white residents do not have a high school diploma. Conversely, Black and Latinx residents in selected areas see well over 50 percent of residents not having a high school diploma. Providing high-quality, equal educational opportunities must continue to be a priority so that the region grows equitably. MassReconnect is working to bridge this gap through free community college tuition.





Photography: Matt Jablonski



The gender income gap is present among middle-income earners and top earners alike.

annually. Similarly, most Hispanic residents earn between \$15,000 and \$31,000, with many earning below \$15,000 annually. This data indicates a considerable gap between the incomes of white residents and their people of color counterparts (Map 13, 14, 15).

Furthermore, the region shows a considerable gender gap in earnings. While males in Worcester County had median annual earnings of \$50,202 in 2021, females only had median annual earnings of \$35,105. The gender pay gap is also present among top earners. By Census Tract, median earning for males topped at \$240,000, while the top median earnings for females was just \$163,000, a difference of more than

gender income gap

47%
difference in earnings

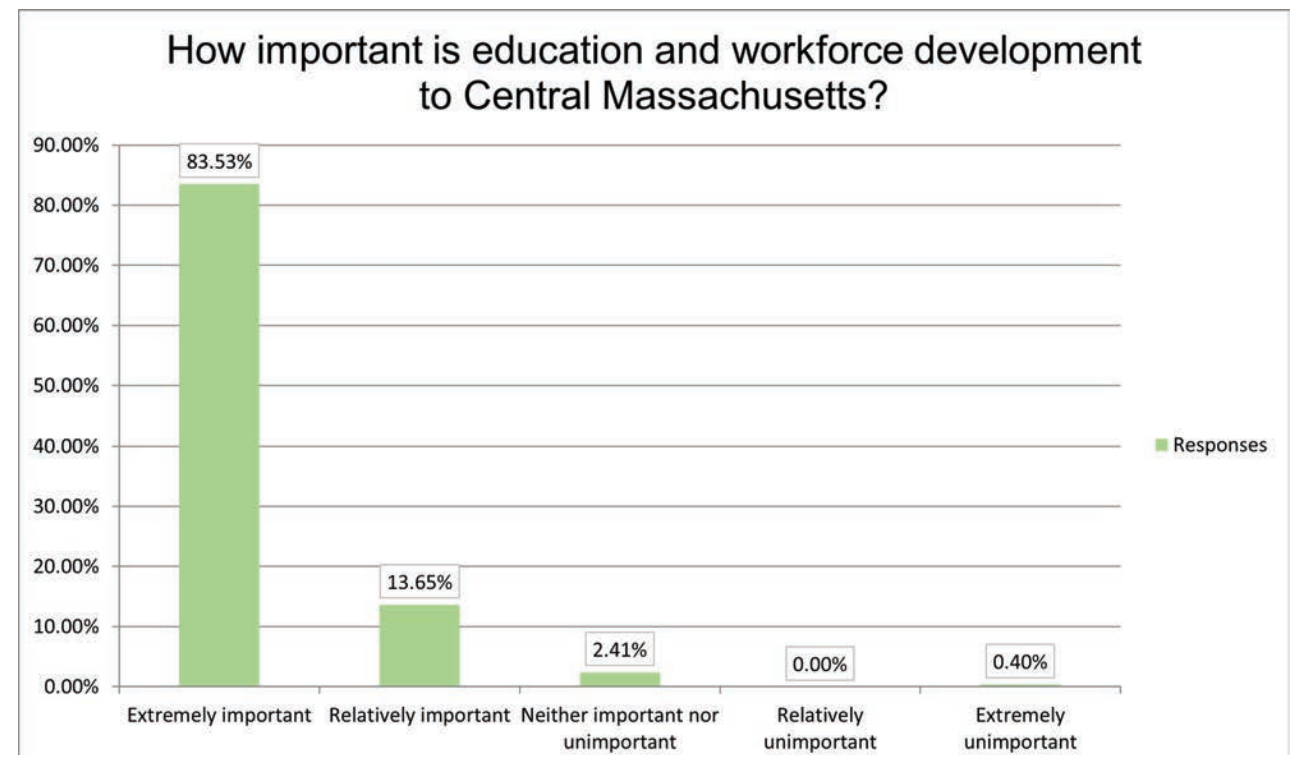


Figure 9. Survey Results on the Importance of Workforce Development. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

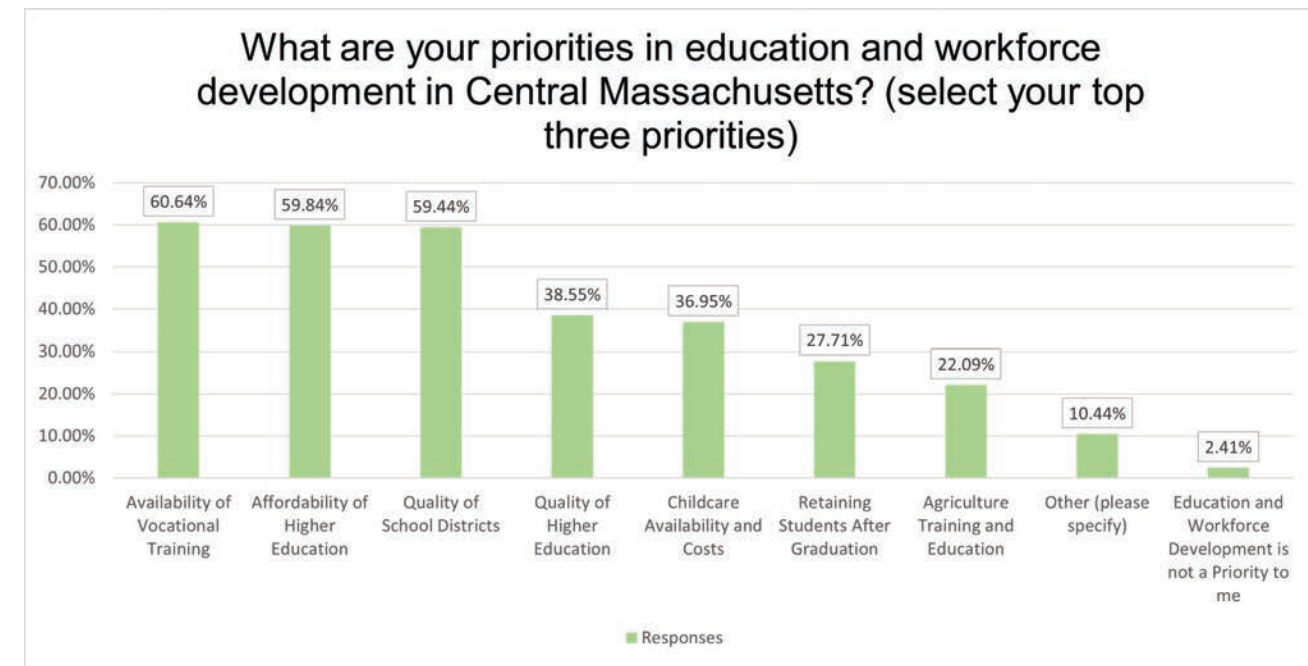


Figure 10. Survey Results on Workforce Priorities. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

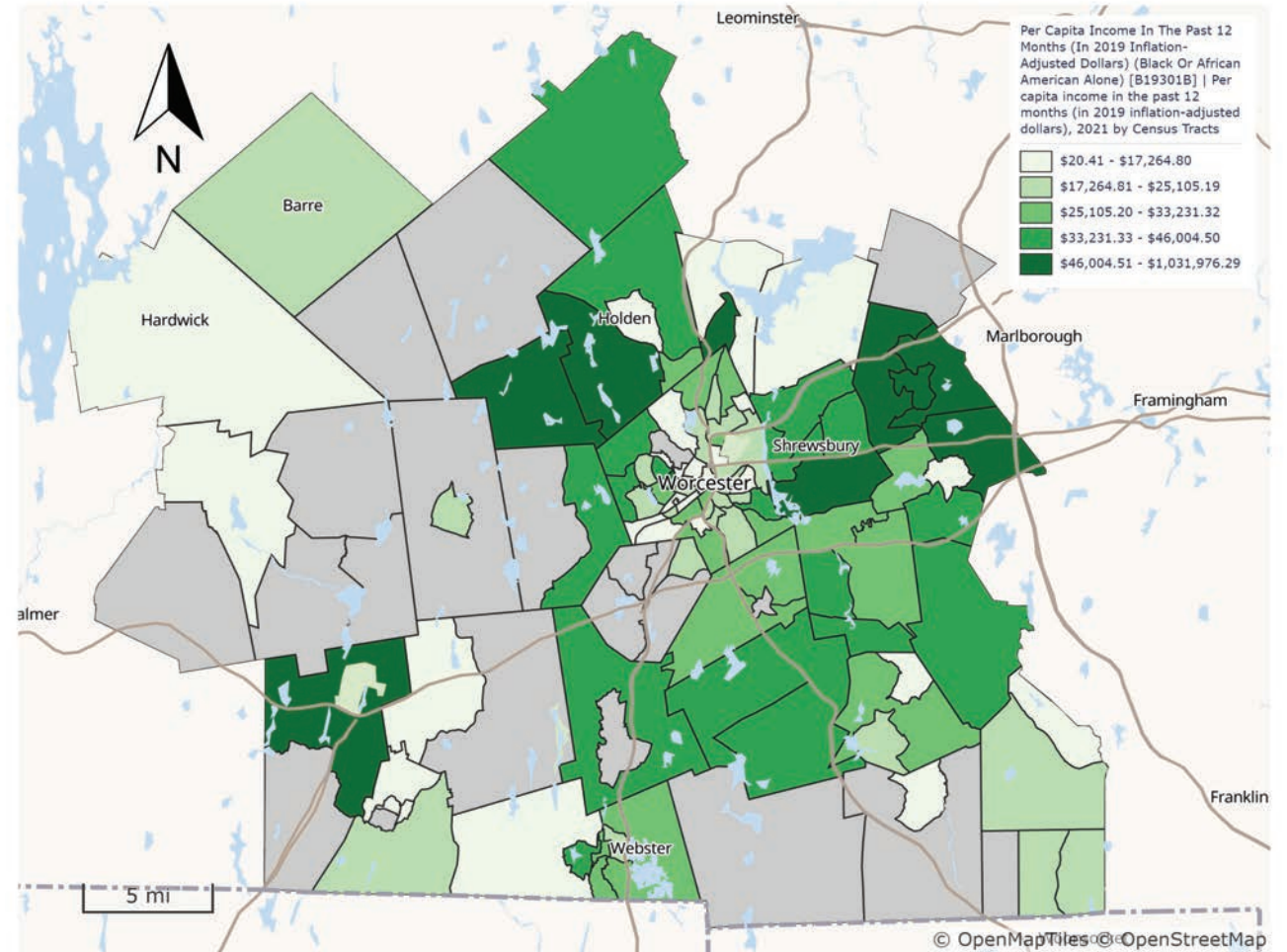


Central Massachusetts is becoming increasingly diverse with new communities moving to the area.

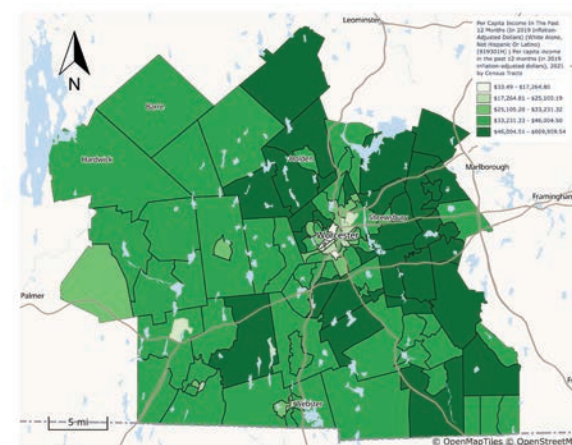
47 percent (Map 16 & 17).

The success of the region's economy is dependent on the successes of individuals. Over the past several months, CMRPC has met with many non-profit organizations that serve people of color (POC) and immigrant communities in the region. As part of these conversations, the overwhelming theme that emerged was that Central Massachusetts is becoming increasingly diverse with new communities moving to the area. As these communities continue to expand, many immigrants are having difficulty attaining the education and/or certifications necessary to

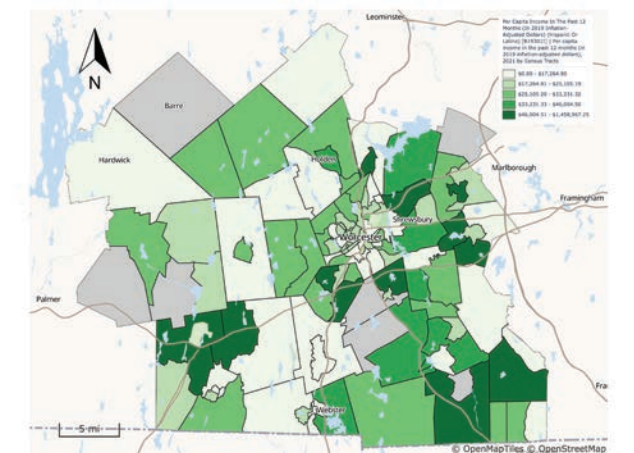
Prolonged and intricate recertification processes force qualified immigrant jobseekers to forgo high-paying employment.



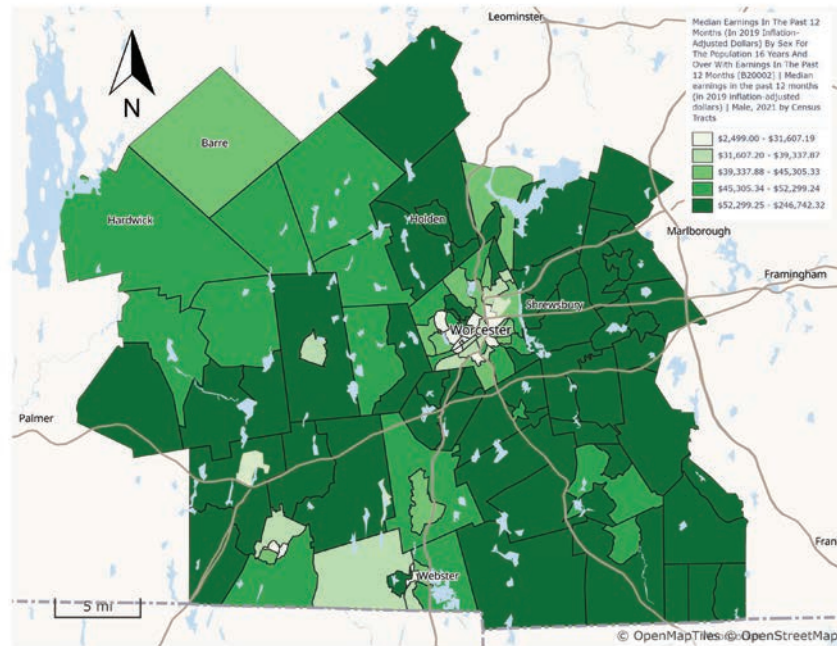
Map 14. CMRPC Region Black or African American Population Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 13. CMRPC Region White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

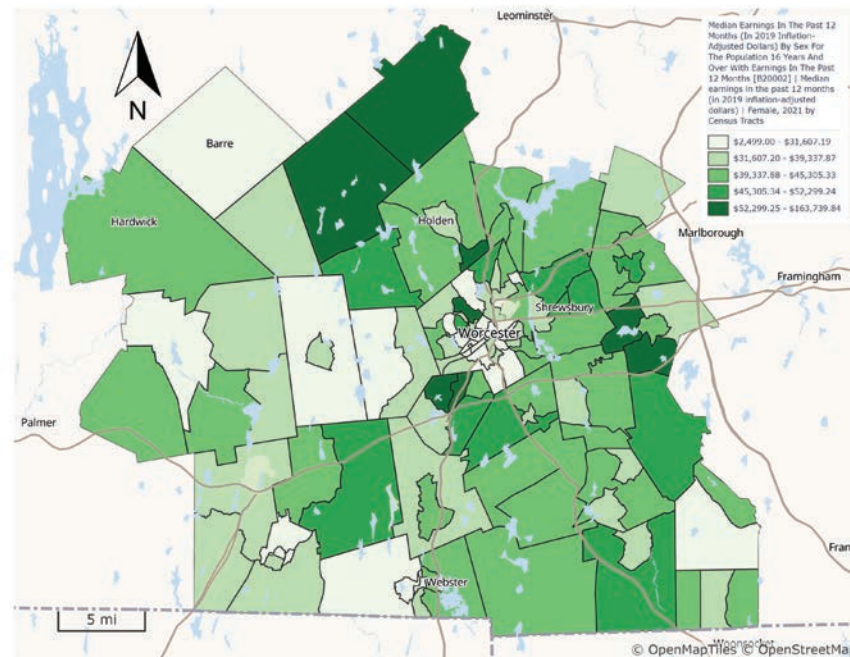


Map 15. CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Alone Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 16. CMRPC Region Median Earnings of Men by Census Tract, 2021.

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 17. CMRPC Region Median Earnings of Women by Census Tract, 2021.

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

pursue employment opportunities. Often, members of these communities possess high-paying credentials in their native locales but must undergo different certification processes to qualify for high-skilled and high-paying jobs here in the US. Prolonged and intricate recertification processes force qualified jobseekers with appropriate credentials and experience to forgo high-paying employment opportunities. This recertification obstacle is a deterrence for those seeking to move and contribute to the region and comes at a cost to the region's economy. Innovative programming is needed to overcome this obstacle and help empower immigrant communities.

Inequality

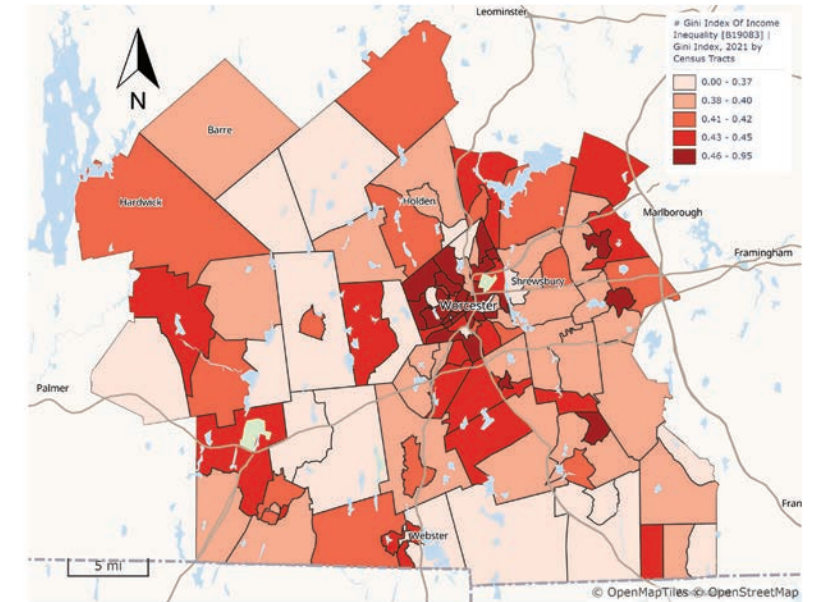
GINI index is another indicator of income inequality. Many areas in our region have GINI indices above 0.43. The United States has a GINI index of 0.48, and Massachusetts has a GINI index of 0.49. Although this indicates that the income inequality in the region is slightly lower than that of the state, the region still

Unemployment rates show a gap between different racial groups in the region.

has areas with extremely high GINI indexes, indicating that the work to improve income equality is still far from done (Map 18).

Race and Unemployment Rates

Similarly, unemployment rates show a gap between different racial groups in the region. Unemployment rates for white residents in most regional communities are below three percent while African American and Latinx counterparts in many areas see unemployment rates that are well over 40 percent. Furthermore, recent trends in the unemployment



Map 18. CMRPC Region GINI Index of Income Inequality by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Figure 11. CMRPC Region Unemployment Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2017-2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



rate throughout the region tell a similar story. While white and Asian residents in the region had an unemployment rate over three percent in 2017, many communities have cut their unemployment rates to less than one percent in 2021 (Figure 11). However, many Black and Latinx communities are still experiencing unemployment rates as high as 48 percent. In addition, reductions in unemployment rates among white residents in 2020 and 2021 were not shared by Black and Asian residents in the region, who saw increasing unemployment rates during that same period. This indicates that POC populations in the region face additional systemic challenges to accumulating wealth, compared to their white counterpart (Map 19, 20, 21).

Community-Based Organizations

The region has many community-based organizations which aim to advance equity by helping people of color and immigrant communities. However, many of these organizations are struggling to provide the vital services and resources many people within these communities need. Funding is the biggest issue in the day-to-day operation of these organizations. Some of them, despite not having many staff members manage dozens of public and private grants while also providing language, career, business, housing, and citizenship programs among other services.

48% unemployment rates among POC populations

Cost of living

Calculated by MIT, the “living wage” is the minimum income standard that, if met, draws a very fine line between the financial independence of the working poor and the need to seek out public assistance or suffer consistent and severe housing and food insecurity. In light of this fact, the living wage is perhaps better defined as a minimum subsistence wage for persons living in the United States. Living wage amounts are calculated by adding the cost of food, childcare, insurance premiums and health care, housing, transportation, other necessities, civic engagement, broadband, and taxes for a specific region.

In Worcester County, all living wage calculations indicate that an individual needs to earn a salary higher than the Massachusetts minimum wage to provide for their household. For example, the minimum wage is \$3.28 less per hour than the living wage for a single adult with no children. In a household



In Worcester County, an individual needs to earn a salary higher than the Massachusetts minimum wage to provide for their household.

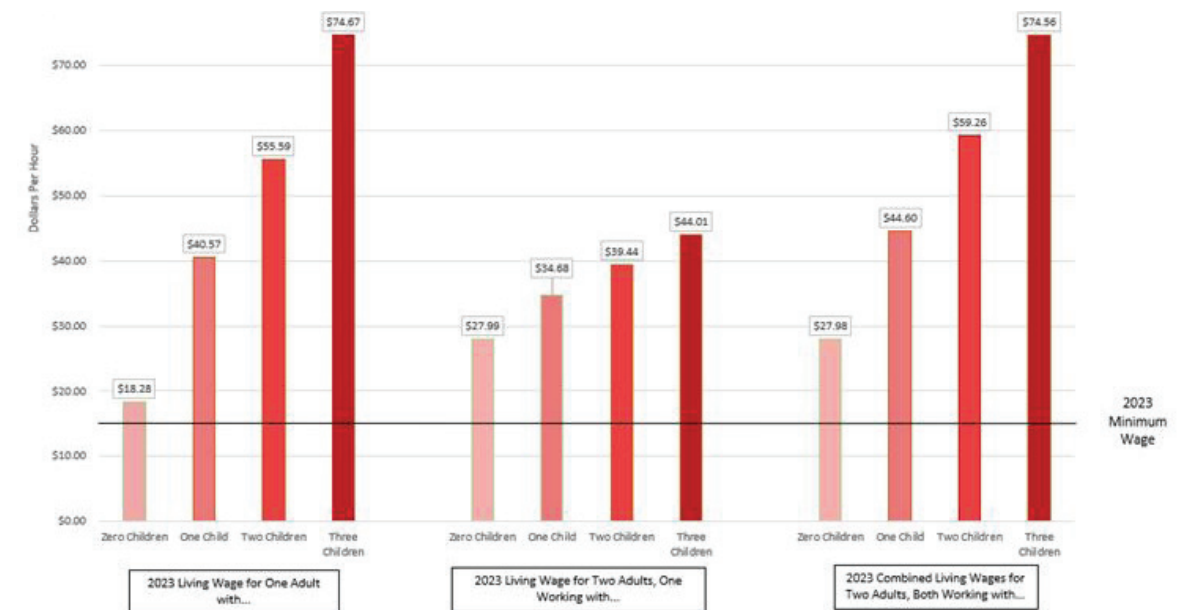
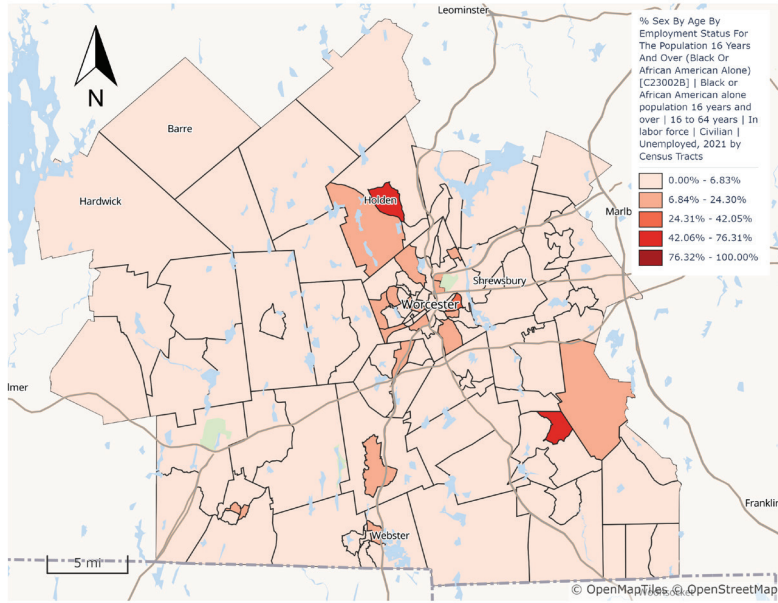
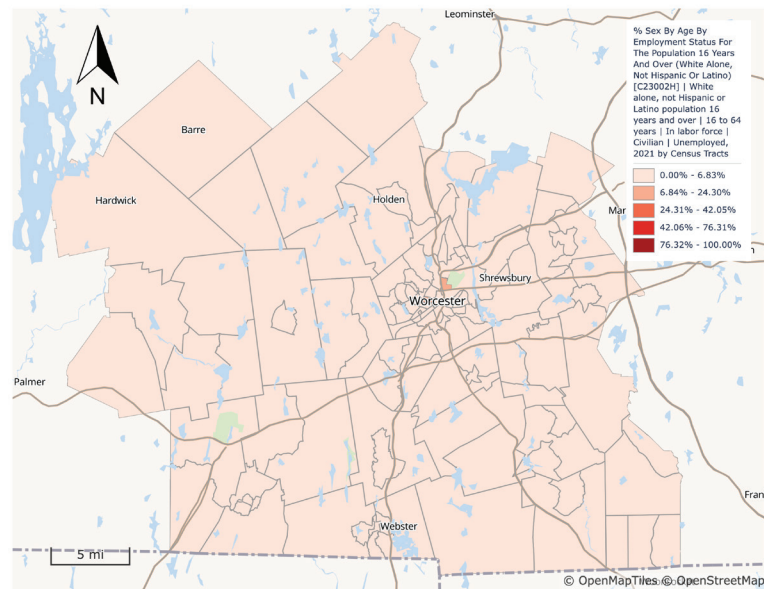


Figure 12. Data source: MIT. “Living Wage Calculation for Worcester, MA”. (2023). Worcester County Living Wage Required for an Individual to Support their Household Compared to Massachusetts Minimum Wage 2023. Accessed July 11, 2023. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/49340>.





Map 19. CMRPC Region Black or African American Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 20. CMRPC Region White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

with two working adults and two children, each parent would need four minimum wage jobs to catch up to the living wage (Figure 12).

The extensive community engagement conducted from September 2022 to March 2023, revealed that the region's relative affordability, compared to the Boston area, is one of its greatest strengths. Despite this strength, stakeholders also identified unaffordability as one of the greatest threats to the region's future. The rising cost of living is a burden for lower-income individuals, particularly older adults in the region.

Aging Population

SWC is home to 91,218 older adults, representing approximately 16 percent of the population. The older population grew from 81,687 in 2017 to 91,218 in 2021, marking a 11.6 percent increase. While the United States is projected to have more older adults (65 and older) than children for the first time in 2035, Central Massachusetts is projected to see this shift much earlier - between 2025 and 2030. By 2040, at least 30 percent of residents of the region will be older adults, with some communities reaching an older adult population of at least 35 percent. This progressive shift has begun during the previous decade, as shown in the population pyramids of 2010 and 2020 (Figure 13 & 14).¹⁶

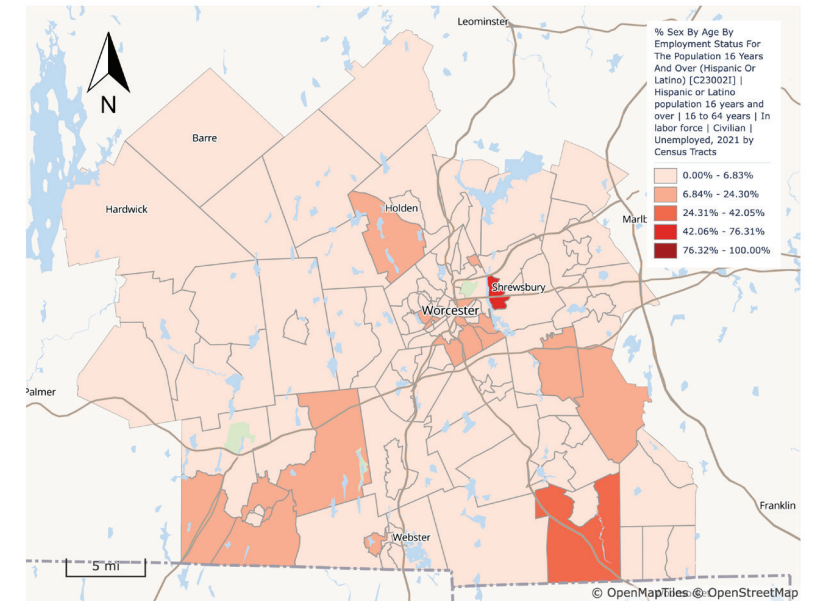
The region also faces challenges ensuring older populations can age

The region's relative affordability, compared to the Boston area, is one of its greatest strengths.

comfortably in their communities. Financial capacity is one of the most important factors informing ability to age-in-place. In SWC, there is a stark difference in income between age groups, with older populations at a severe disadvantage. Median household income in the region is more than \$81,000 and as much as \$250,000 for householders 25 to 64 years of age; yet most older householders in the region earn between \$37,000 to \$81,000, with many earning less than \$37,000 or even as little as \$2,500 annually. In addition to income challenges, there is a lack of affordable and accessible housing for older adults. Many older individuals would like to stay in their communities for as long as possible; however, the lack of aging-in-place



Many older individuals who seek to stay in their communities lack aging-in-place assistance, policies, and programs.



Map 21. CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

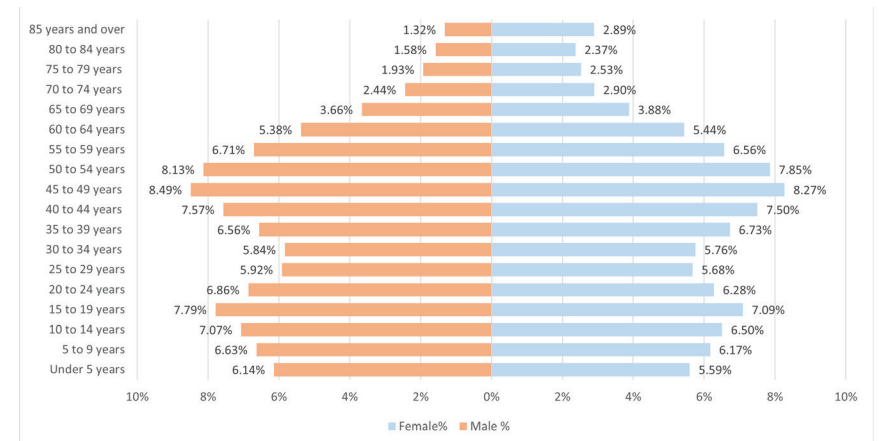


Figure 13. Worcester County Population by Age and Sex, 2010. U.S. Census Bureau. "U.S. Decennial Census, 2010." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

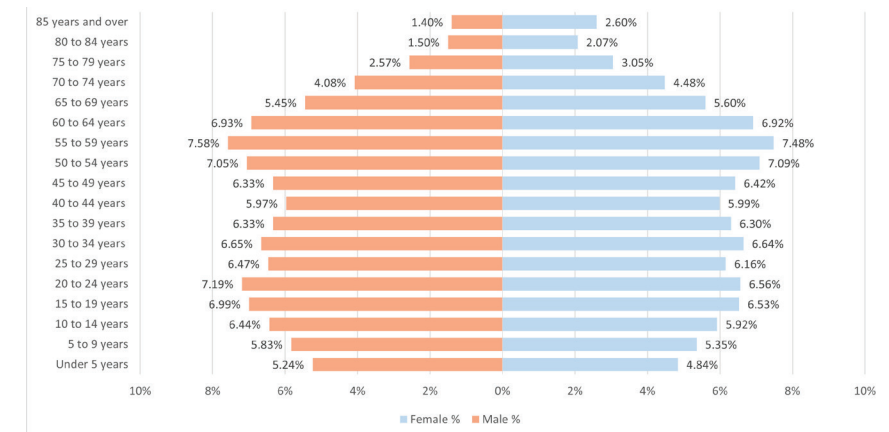
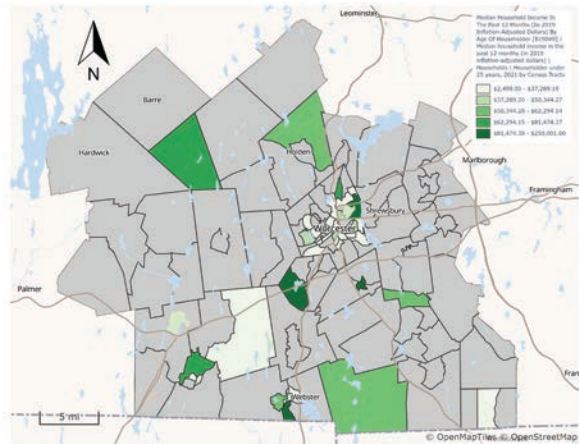


Figure 14. Worcester County Population by Age and Sex, 2020. U.S. Census Bureau. "U.S. Decennial Census, 2020." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 22. CMRPC Region Householder Under 25 Years Old Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

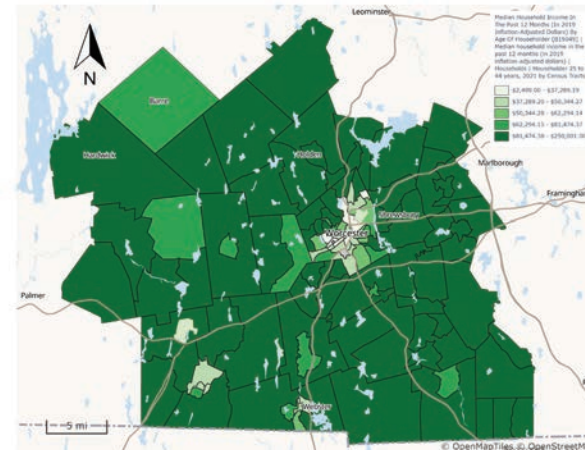
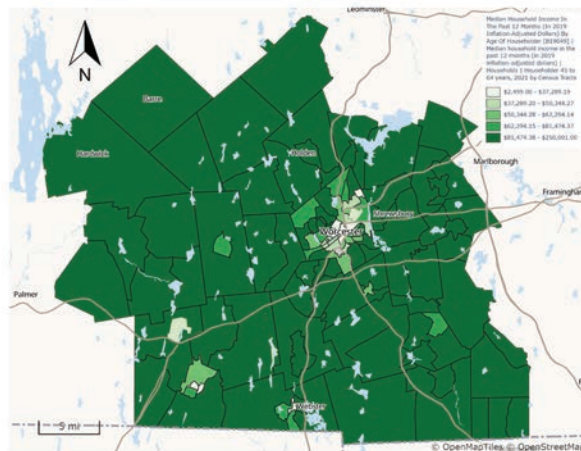
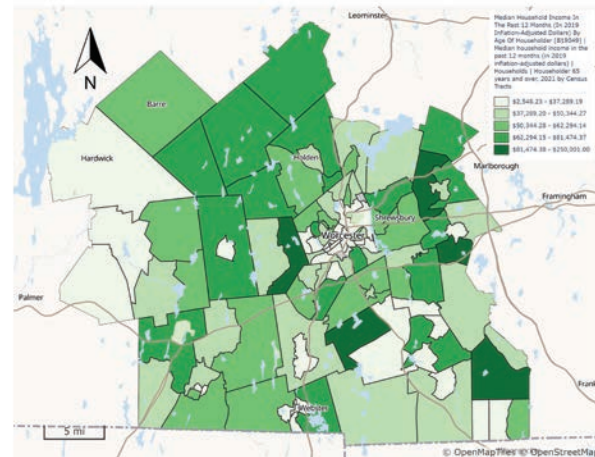


Figure 23. CMRPC Region Householder 25 to 44 Years Old Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 24. CMRPC Region Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 25. CMRPC Region Householder 65 Years and Over Median Household Income by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

however, the lack of aging-in-place assistance, policies, and programs makes staying difficult (Map 22, 23, 24, 25).

Limited mobility and social isolation are also common among the region's older adults. While access to public transportation can help alleviate such issues, community engagement has revealed that

many older adults do not take advantage of public transportation opportunities due to these services' lack of convenience, accessibility, timeliness, and information and communication materials. Older adults who cannot or do not feel comfortable driving use walking as a key mode of transportation, yet poor sidewalk conditions and ADA compliance issues often

make walking more difficult in some locales. Additionally, many older adults depend on call-to-service shuttles to get to medical appointments and other essential services; however, these shuttles are not readily available to all older adults in the region.

Transportation

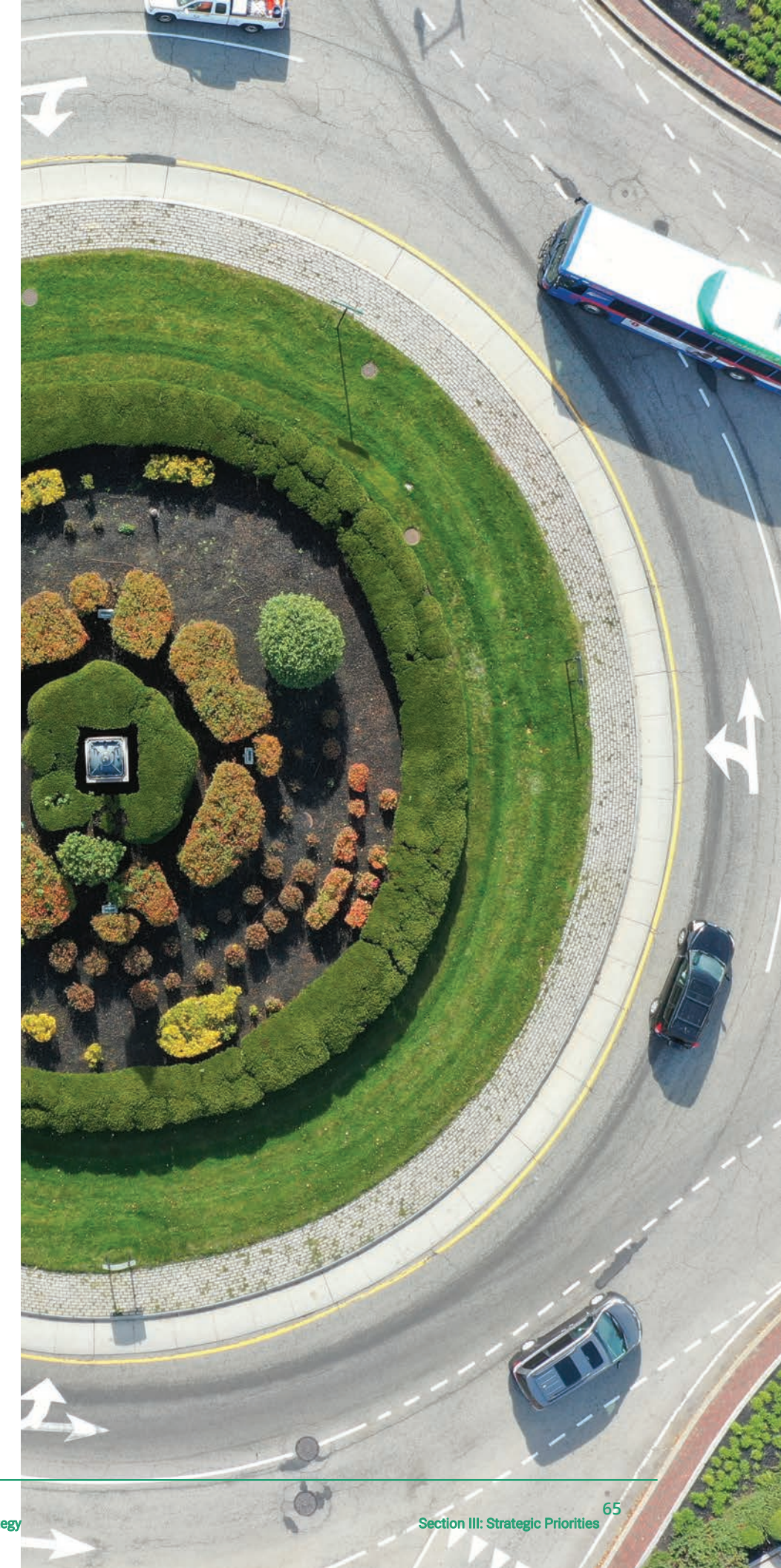
Known as the Heart of the Commonwealth, Central

Massachusetts boasts unparalleled access to major cities throughout New England. Our proximity to these markets presents the region with a unique opportunity to grow the economy. Maps 26 – 31 and Maps 35 - 37, show the transportation routes that connect our region with surrounding areas. There are currently untapped opportunities to expand the region's transportation network.

From a commercial perspective, the private sector has been utilizing the region's central location to its advantage, constructing state-of-the-art distribution and fulfillment centers. From an individual user perspective, the region is automobile-centric and can be difficult to navigate without access to a personal vehicle. During the community outreach phase of this plan, stakeholders expressed that transportation is difficult, especially for those who do not have a car. Our stakeholders indicated that Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) services are not sufficient



The region's central location presents an advantage for the development of distribution and fulfillment centers.



to support students, lower-income individuals, and new immigrants in our region, and that these individuals struggle to get to work, school, and, ironically, Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicle (RMV) locations.

As populations within the region continue to grow, connectivity amongst these populations is critical. The existing public transportation system could be improved through additional first and last mile connections which can help workers from smaller communities get to emerging employment opportunities. Some of these service gaps are a result of underfunding of the regional transit authority. Economic activity is also challenged

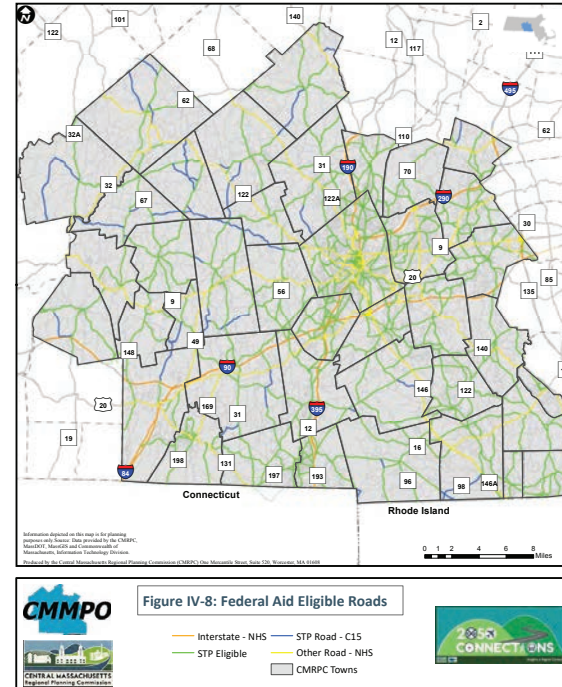
by the region's overburdened roadway network, with bumper-to-bumper traffic a deterrent to prospective business and residents. Furthermore, the current ownership configuration of the region's rail network among freight rail operators makes it hard for new passenger rail services begin operation in the region. Coinciding with the age of the system, this issue shows how the system requires upgrades to serve the increased needs of growing communities.

The region's transportation network also impacts how easily residents can access necessary goods and services. Although the region has many farms, grocery stores, and

farm-to-table operations, it also has many food deserts (areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food). These deserts are partially attributable to inadequate transportation infrastructure, which is a typical requirement of chain grocery stores (Map 32 & 33).



WRTA services are not sufficient to support lower-income commuters such as students and new immigrants.



Map 26. Federal Aid Eligible Roads. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections>.

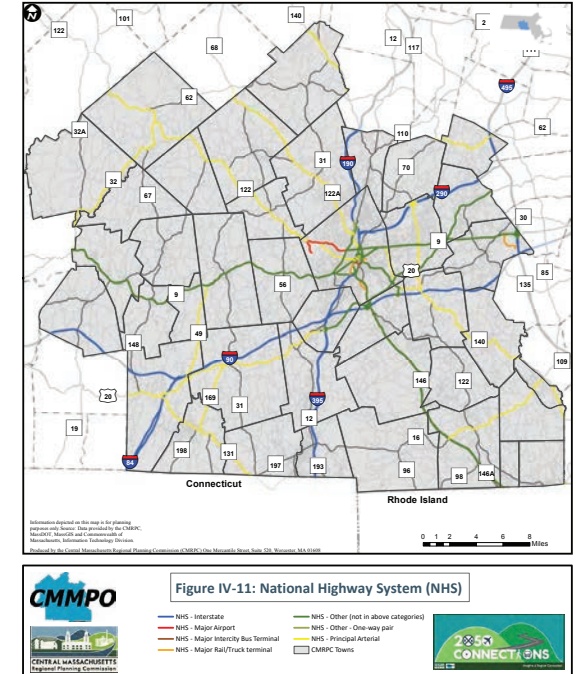
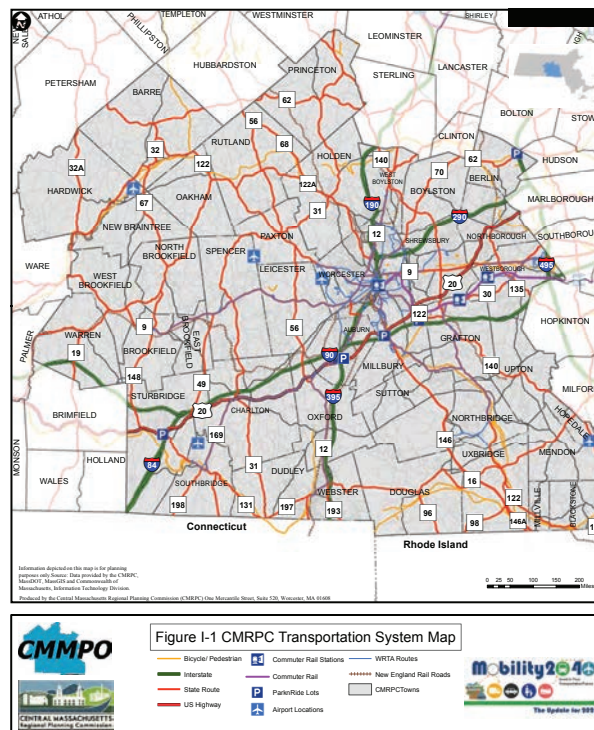
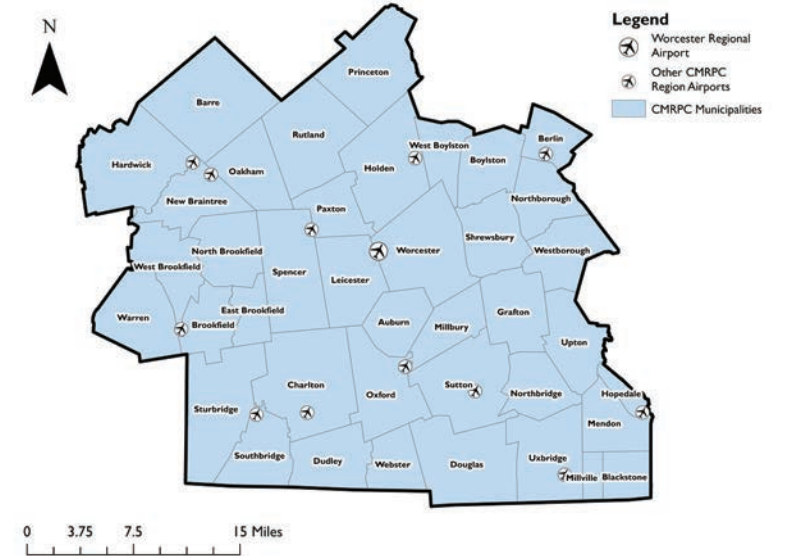


Figure 27. Region National Highway System Routes. National Highway System. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections>.



Map 28. CMRPC Regional Transportation System Map. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "Mobility 2040" (2016). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://cmrpc.org/mobility2040update>.



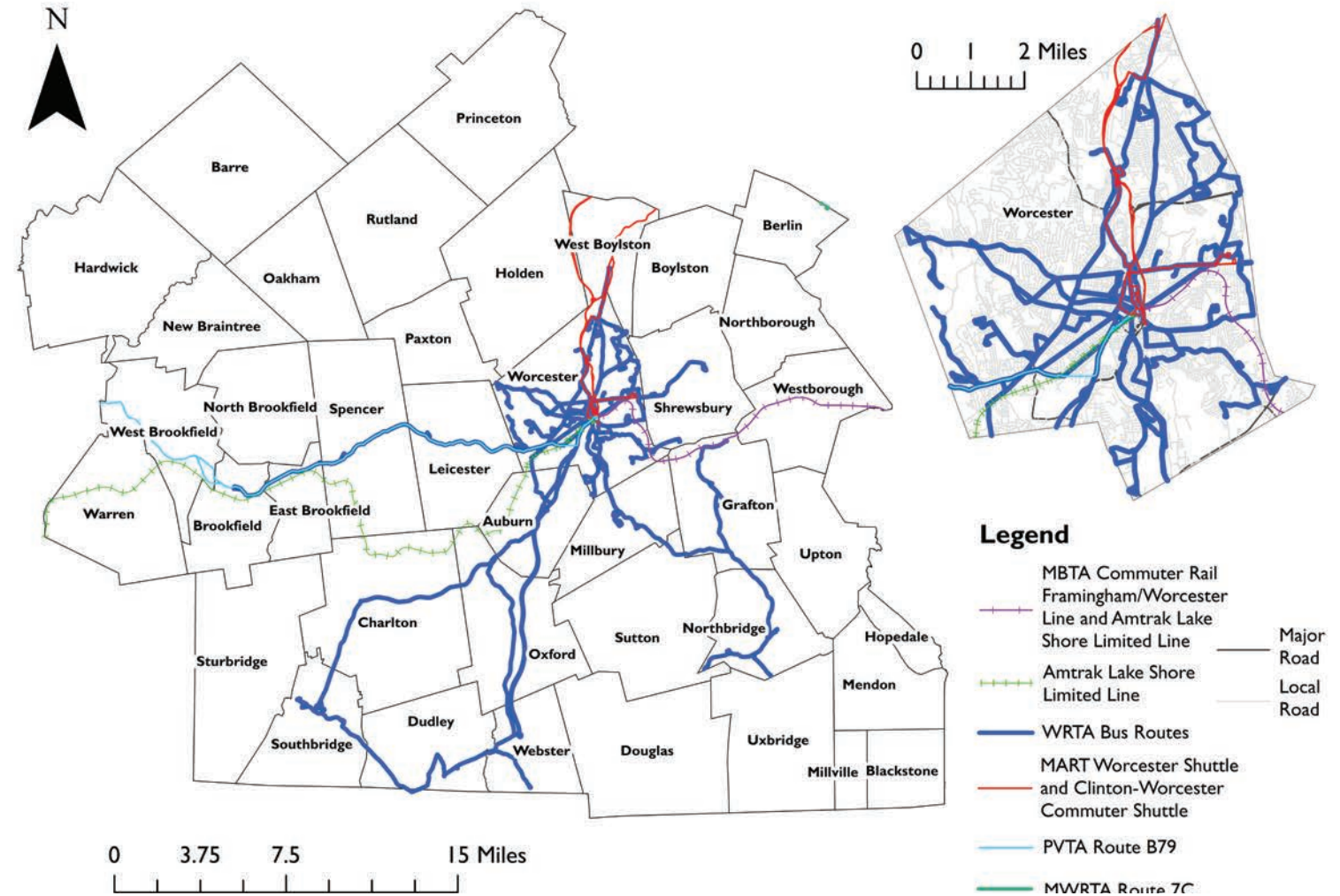
Map 29. CMRPC Region Airports. Data source: Massachusetts geoDOT. "Airports." (2023). Accessed August 14, 2023. https://geo-massdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/17eb7e286f4e4942aeef500f5ef6bfcd_0/explorer.



Many residents have a difficult time traveling a long way to visit doctors and seek acute medical care.

Similarly, residents in rural portions of the region often find themselves in a health care desert, or an area more than five miles from an acute care facility. Although many municipalities offer access to shuttle services for older adults to go to medical appointments in other municipalities, community engagement conducted for this plan indicated that such services are insufficient; many residents have a difficult time traveling a long way to visit doctors and seek acute medical care (Map 34).

During community engagement, regional stakeholders expressed support for an enhanced transportation network. Survey respondents strongly supported fixing insufficient infrastructure, increasing transit options, and making town centers more walkable. Such improvements will enable the region to take full advantage of economic development opportunities (Figure 15).



Map 30. CMRPC Region Fixed Public Transportation Routes. Data source: Massachusetts geoDOT. "RTA Bus Routes." (2023). Accessed August 14, 2023. https://geo-massdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/1cb5c63d6f114f8a94c6d5a0e03ae62e_0/explorer; MassGIS. "MassDOT Roads." (2022). Accessed August 14, 2023. <https://massgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=b06138b158694703a97d038be9a89610>; MassGIS. "MassMapper - MassGIS Data: Trains." (2022). Accessed August 14, 2023. <https://maps.massgis.digital.mass.gov>.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes to the region's communities and downtowns. With more people working from home, businesses that rely on in-person workers have been struggling; parking garages have recently often been half-full at best, and restaurants have either worked to adapt to the new environment or have been forced to shutter. People

are simply not "out and about" like they used to be, and this has had an economic impact.

Despite people increasingly working from home, there is an unsatisfied demand for walking that the past century of automobile-centric planning did not foresee. According to the National Association of Realtors 2023 Community and Transportation Preferences Survey, which surveyed



With more people working from home, businesses that rely on in-person workers have been struggling.

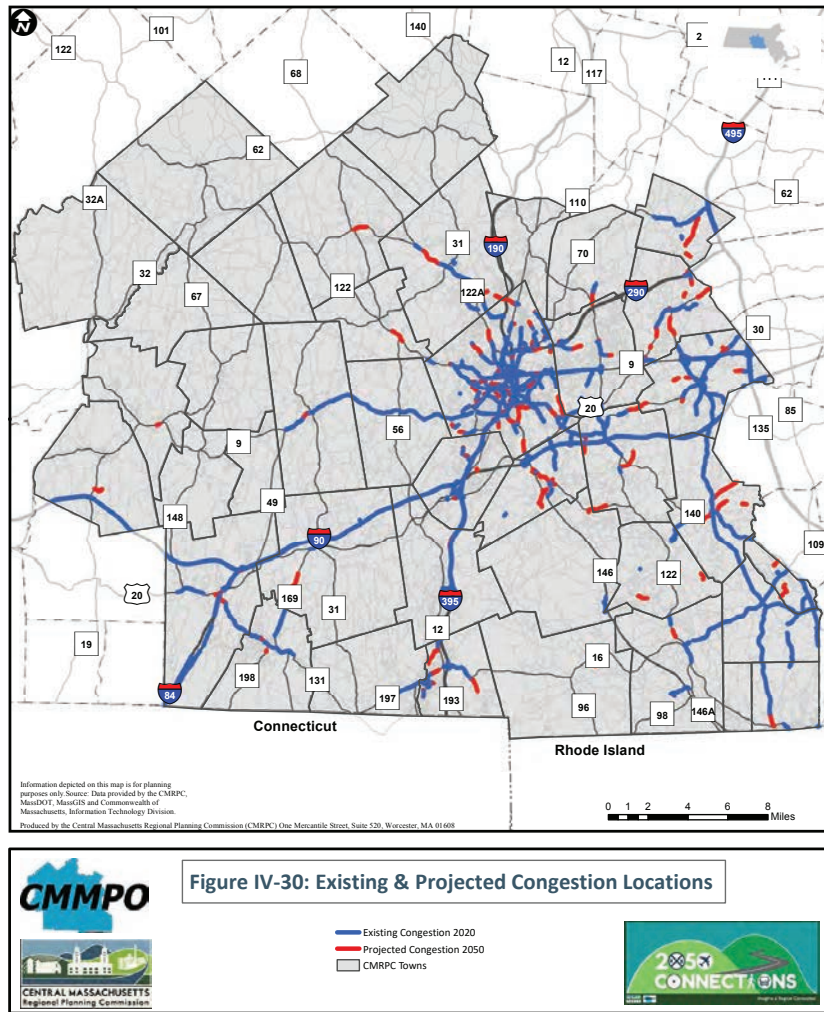


Figure 31. CMRPC Region Existing and Projected Congestion Locations. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections.org/2050Connections>.



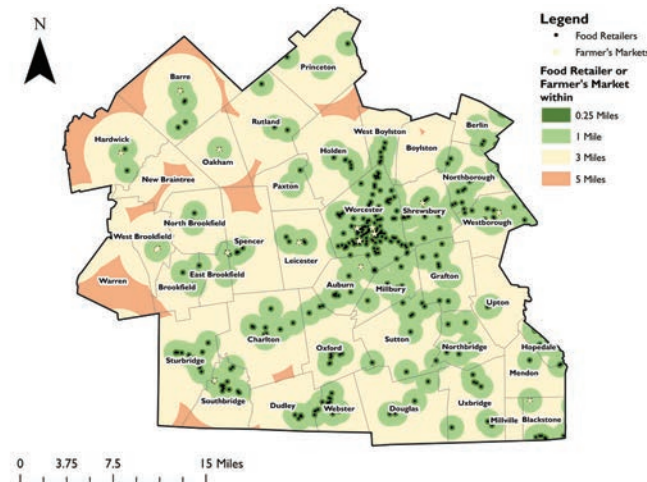
a wide range of Americans, 79 percent of respondents deemed walkability as "very" or "somewhat" important, and 78 percent expressed that they would pay more for a home in a walkable community. In addition, the survey also shows that "Young adults prioritize walkability the most, with 90 percent of Gen Z and millennial respondents indicating they would pay more for a home in a walkable community."¹⁷

On top of pedestrian and bike connectivity (Maps 35, 36, 37) many people in the region want to see other positive changes in their downtowns and town centers. Downtown revitalization plans and municipal master plans are tools that can help revitalize downtowns. There is a widely shared dream for more businesses and services in our downtowns. However, there are many obstacles to this dream becoming a reality.



Many residents in the region want to see their downtowns and town centers revitalized.

79%
of respondents favor walkability



Map 32. CMRPC Region Food Retailer Access, 2021, and Farmer's Market Access, 2023. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections>.

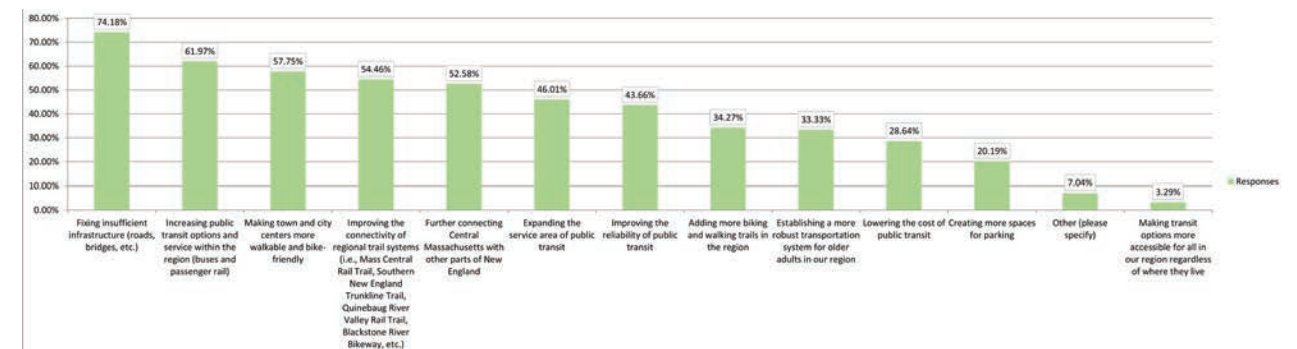
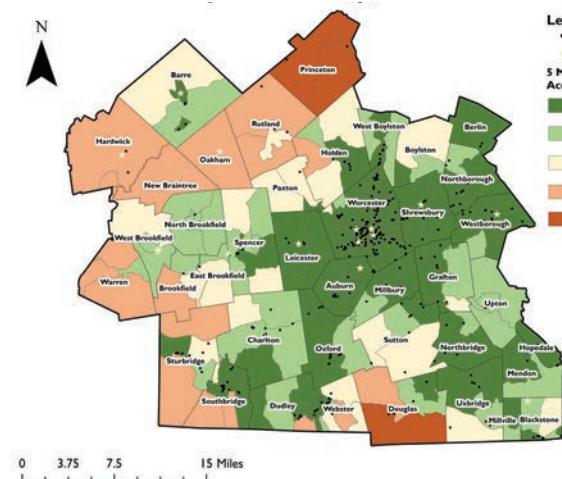
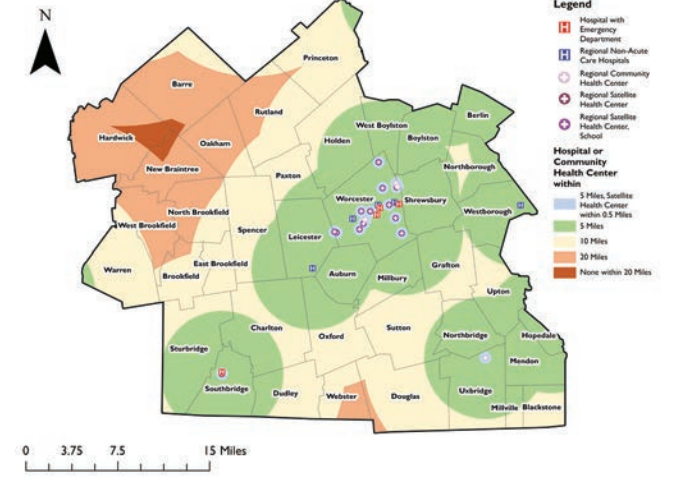


Figure 15. Survey Results on Transportation Improvements. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic

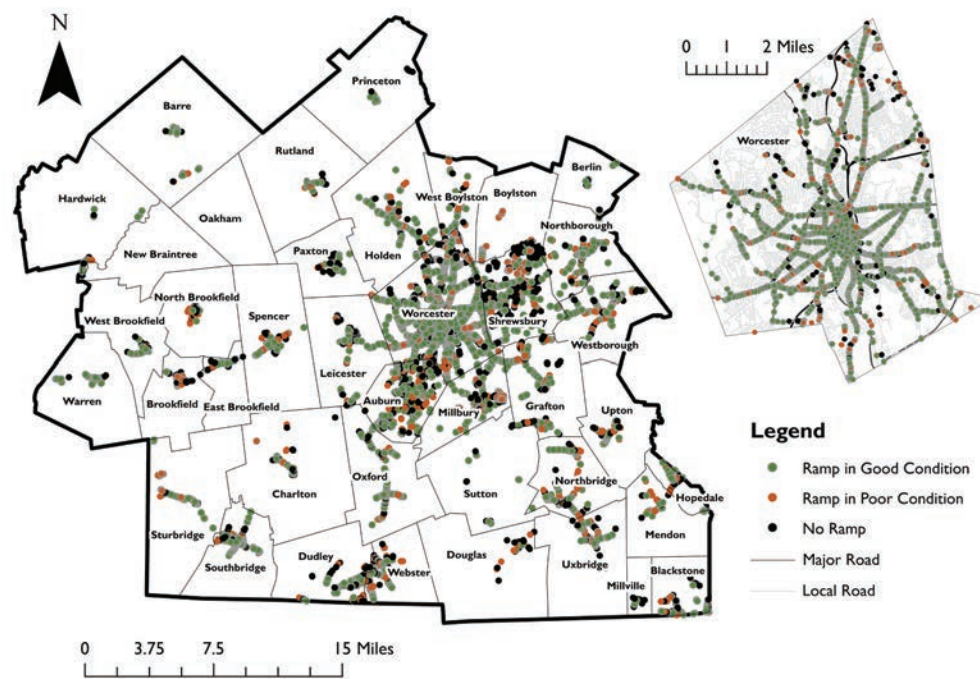


Map 33. CMRPC Region Food Access Index by Block Group, 2016. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections>.

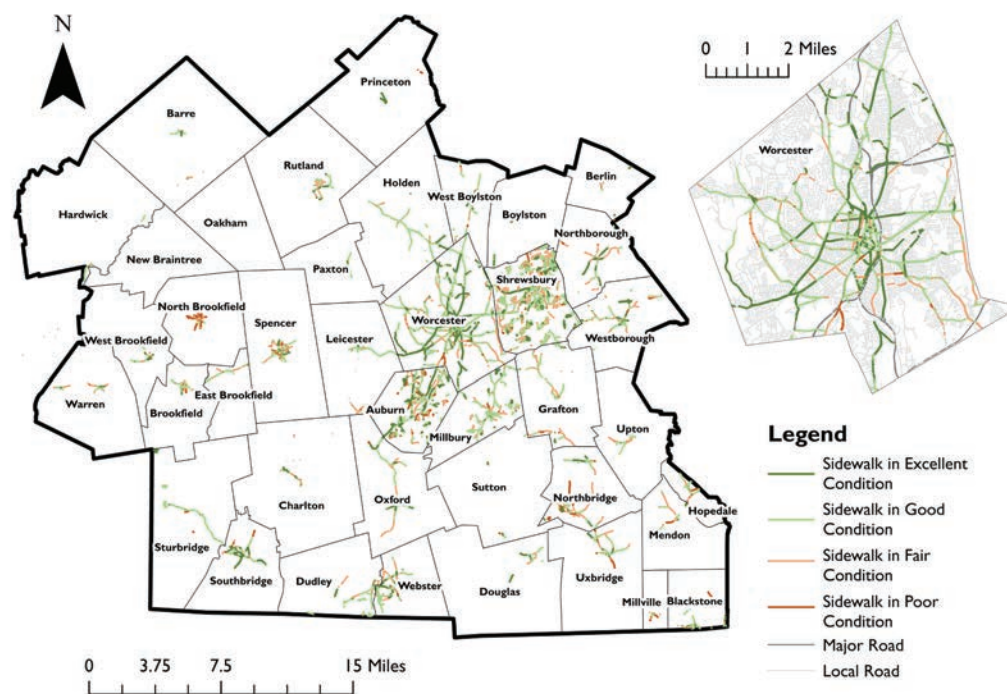


Map 34. CMRPC Region Hospital and Health Center Access, 2019. Data source: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization. "2050 Connections" (2023). Accessed August 11, 2023. <http://www.cmrpc.org/2050Connections>.

Portions of rural areas are de facto food deserts, or lack access to healthy food. In contrast, the urban areas of Worcester have a "food swamp" effect—an oversaturation of fast food and unhealthy options. Lower income residents become trapped in an unhealthy nutrition cycle that leads to dietary diseases. Better access to healthy food options will help alleviate the problem.



Map 35. CMRPC Region ADA Ramps. Data source: ArcGIS REST Services Directory. "CMRPC ADA Ramp Database." (n.d.). Accessed August 11, 2023. https://services3.arcgis.com/wid5AQd6BHjWWq1h/arcgis/rest/services/CMRPC_ADA_Ramp_Database_Public_View_RO/FeatureServer.



Map 36. CMRPC Region Sidewalks. Data source: ArcGIS REST Services Directory. "CMRPC Sidewalk Database." (n.d.). Accessed August 11, 2023. https://services3.arcgis.com/wid5AQd6BHjWWq1h/arcgis/rest/services/CMRPC_Sidewalk_Database_Public_View_RO/FeatureServer.



Understaffed local governments lack the necessary resources to provide robust municipal services.

Municipal Capacity

The region's increasing population presents challenges for municipal capacity. Region-wide, local governments are struggling to provide core services to ever-enlarging constituencies. More than half of respondents to the CEDS survey expressed that municipal staffing capacity is an issue in their municipality (Figure 16). At least 40 percent expressed concern about the financial stability of their town (Figure 17).

Understaffed communities lack the resources to provide robust municipal services, develop strong regulations, facilitate clear permitting and beneficial zoning processes, and promote the well-being of residents. The effectiveness of municipal government impacts economic development: ease of doing business in a community and its reputation for being business friendly are key considerations for most developers. Lacking the ability to staff town offices and operate efficiently slows development timelines and is a disincentive to investment.



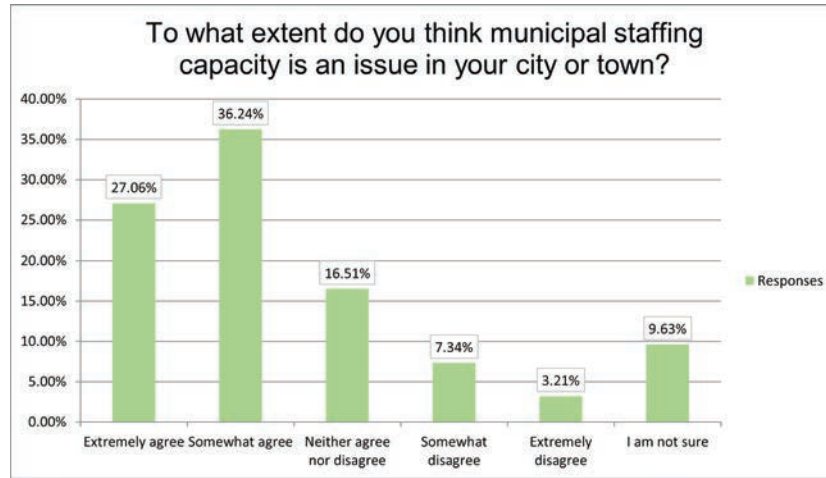


Figure 16. Survey Results on Municipal Capacity. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

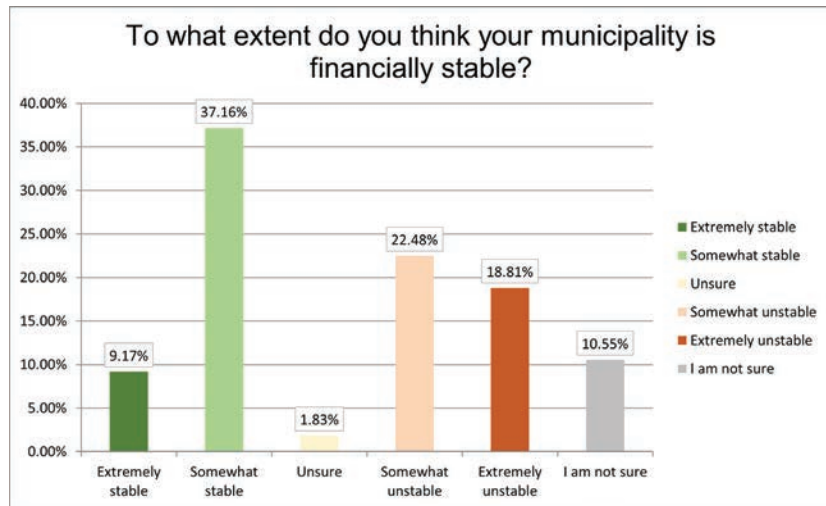


Figure 17. Survey Results on Municipality Financial Stability. Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

During stakeholder interviews, town officials also expressed challenges related to civic engagement and awareness. Interviewers heard that communicating and engaging with the public is time-consuming and difficult as well as that town government often fails to reach all residents. Although most towns have started using social media to fill communication gaps, many towns do not have the capacity to

incorporate social media either due to broadband inaccessibility or lack of staff capacity.

For smaller municipalities, inter-municipal hiring agreements (i.e., job sharing) present an opportunity to increase services. Communities can also work with existing organizations such as the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Worcester Business Resource Alliance to boost their

For smaller municipalities, inter-municipal hiring agreements (i.e., job sharing) present an opportunity to increase services.

capacity. Such organizations could share opportunities with Central Massachusetts businesses in support of economic development.

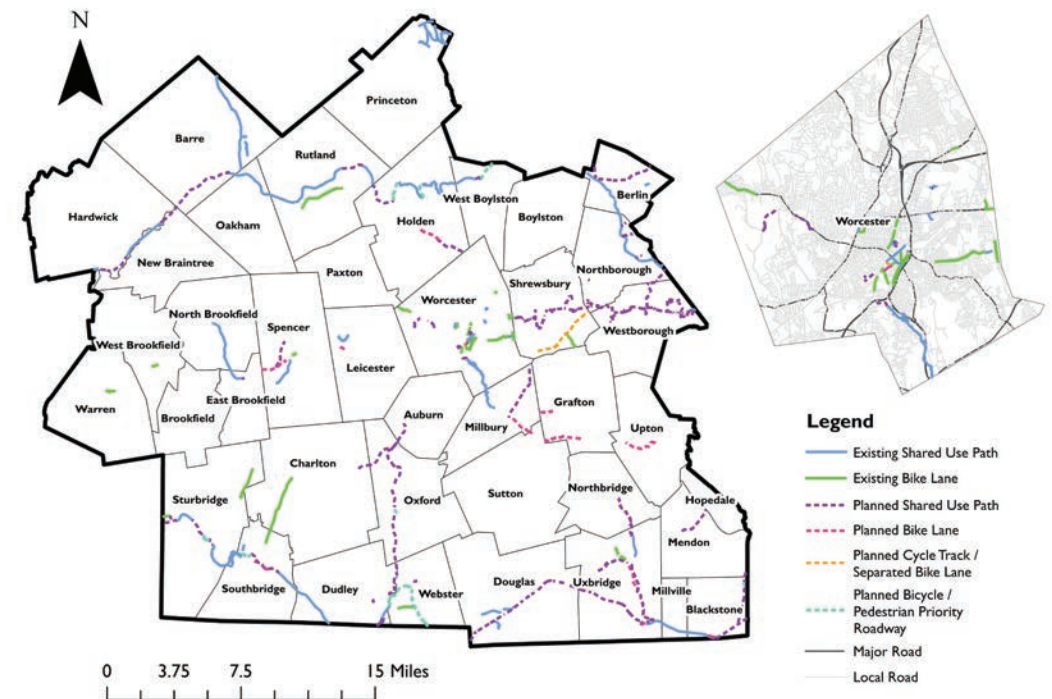
Zoning

Zoning and land use patterns present potential roadblocks for businesses looking to locate in the region. Restrictive zoning and land use practices, including large lot size and frontage requirements and prohibitions against mixed use development, are common, especially in the region's rural communities. Although these practices prevent locally unwanted land uses, they have a detrimental impact on small businesses seeking to locate within the scenic and historic downtowns.

The single-use zoning and automobile-centric land use practices that have been dominant over the past 100 years exacerbate segregation, cause suburban sprawl, and strain local resources.¹⁸ Segregating uses by type creates

a dependency on automobiles, especially in a region where public transit offerings are limited. This in turn can make it difficult for new small businesses to attract clientele in areas lacking walkability and/or parking options. Amending zoning to allow for a mix of uses, more density, and reduced lot size and setbacks will encourage more dense and walkable town centers where people want to be and where businesses can thrive.

Outdated and restrictive land use practices are some of the most significant barriers facing the business community. These practices prevent businesses from locating in the small-town centers, impede the implementation of revitalization efforts, and prevent communities from becoming more



Map 37. CMRPC Region Bicycle Infrastructure. ArcGIS REST Services Directory. "Multimodal / Priority Trails Network: Existing Bike Infrastructure and Planned Bike Infrastructure." (n.d.). Accessed August 11, 2023. https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/arcgis/rest/services/Multimodal/Priority_Trails_Network/FeatureServer.



vibrant places.

Infrastructure

The region’s infrastructure varies greatly, with urban core and peri-urban areas enjoying the most robust infrastructure and the economic benefits that follow. In the region’s more rural areas, infrastructure is often limited and insufficient for commercial and industrial development. While the City of Worcester has public drinking water, most municipalities in the region have a mix of public water and private wells, with public water service concentrated and expanding out from around town centers. Four communities have no public water supply at all (Map 38). A similar picture is the case for wastewater removal; however, such infrastructure is in even shorter supply, with one quarter of the region wholly lacking public sewer services (Map 39).

Infrastructure is a key determinant in whether municipalities can attract and cultivate new businesses. Most types of economic activity—including retail, food services,



Infrastructure is a key determinant in whether municipalities can attract and cultivate new businesses.



manufacturing, personal and home services, agriculture, and even housing—rely on safe and well-managed water and wastewater disposal for daily operations. In much of the region, a lack of water and sewer infrastructure impedes economic development and quality of life. New development will require new types of resilient infrastructure to support it. Improving regional water and sewer systems can lead to the construction of workforce housing as well as the creation of resilience-building jobs for residents of the region.

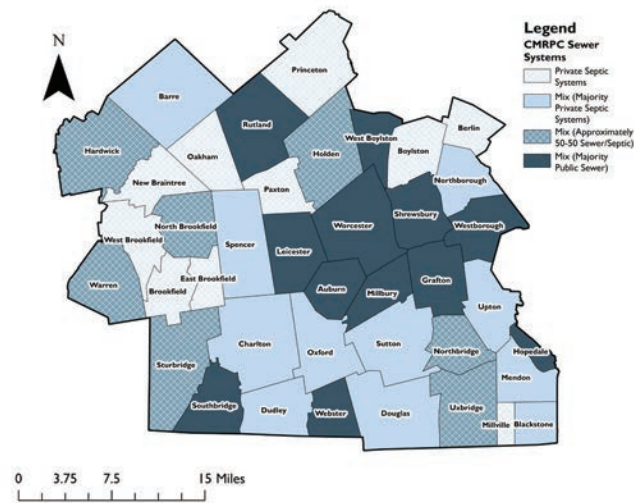
Digital access is now considered essential infrastructure. Without

high-speed internet, residents are unable to take full advantage of education, employment, social services, and community resources. As of 2023, the region still has many broadband deserts. Out of 309,951 households in Worcester County, 12 percent have no internet access, and 9 percent lack a computer, smartphone, or tablet. The lack of high-quality and affordable internet has negative implications for education and workforce development opportunities and impedes economic growth in the region (Map 40).

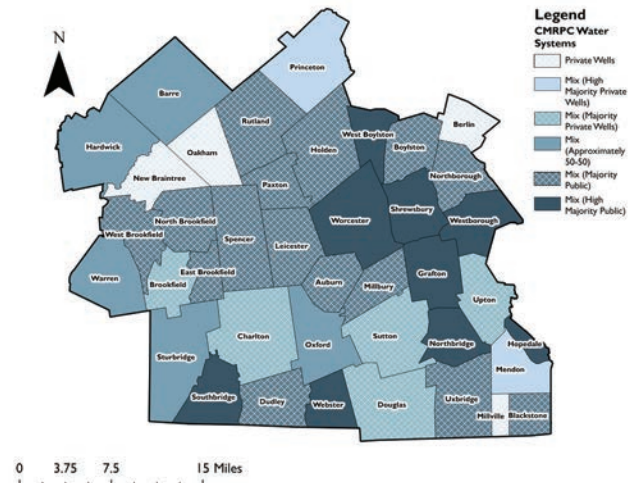
The region’s aging infrastructure must be upgraded to be resilient

to future challenges, and these upgrades are an economic opportunity that can lead to the creation of many well-paying, fulfilling jobs as well as increased quality of life for all residents of the

As of 2023, the region still has many broadband deserts. Out of 309,951 households in Worcester County, 12 percent have no internet.



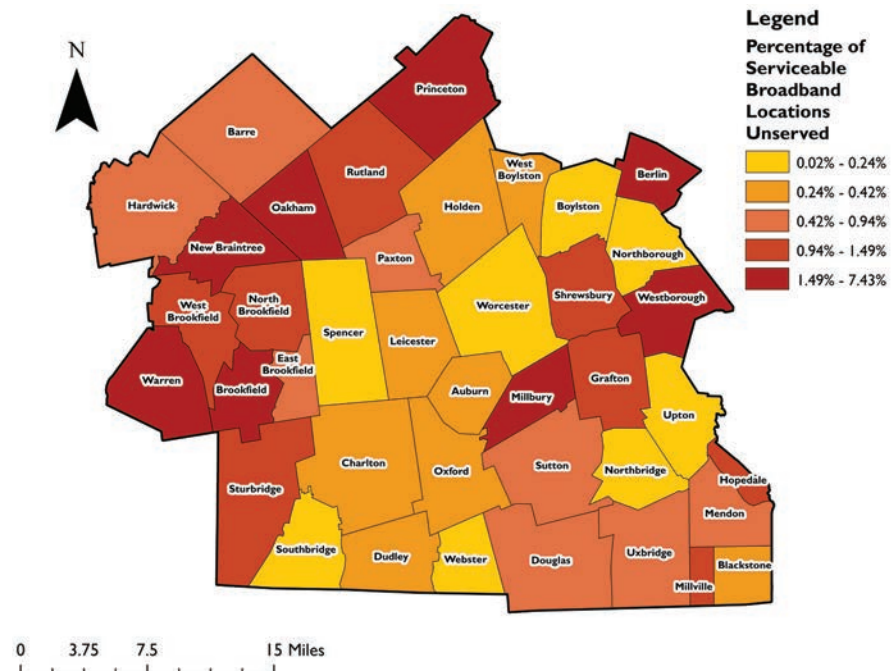
Map 38. CMRPC Region Water Systems by Municipality. Data source: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. "Bridge to Resiliency: The Regional Infrastructure Plan." (2023). Accessed August 11th, 2023. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/vojyp0f87m6avr/EEAInfrastructurePlan.pdf?dl=0>. region.



Map 39. CMRPC Region Sewer Systems by Municipality. Data source: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. "Bridge to Resiliency: The Regional Infrastructure Plan." (2023). Accessed August 11th, 2023. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/vojyp0f87m6avr/EEAInfrastructurePlan.pdf?dl=0>.

Housing

Housing affordability is a top concern for households and housing is a critical structural component of a healthy, prosperous economy. A sufficient supply of housing affordable to the local workforce helps sustain thriving communities. Attracting and retaining employment opportunities typically relies on a strong affordable housing stock. Compared to Boston, Central Massachusetts' housing market is relatively affordable. Compared to many other parts of the country, all of Massachusetts – including Central Massachusetts – is very expensive. For Central Massachusetts residents, wages are not keeping up with housing costs, and housing is increasingly unaffordable. Among



Map 40. CMRPC Region Percentage of Serviceable Broadband Locations Unserviced by Municipality. Data source: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. "Bridge to Resiliency: The Regional Infrastructure Plan." (2023). Accessed August 11th, 2023. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/vojyp0f87m6avr/EEAInfrastructurePlan.pdf?dl=0>.

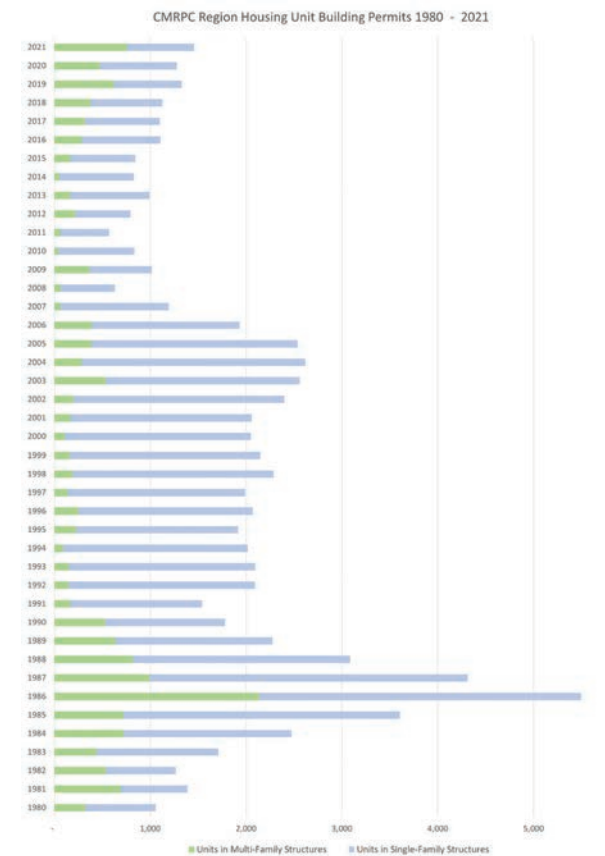
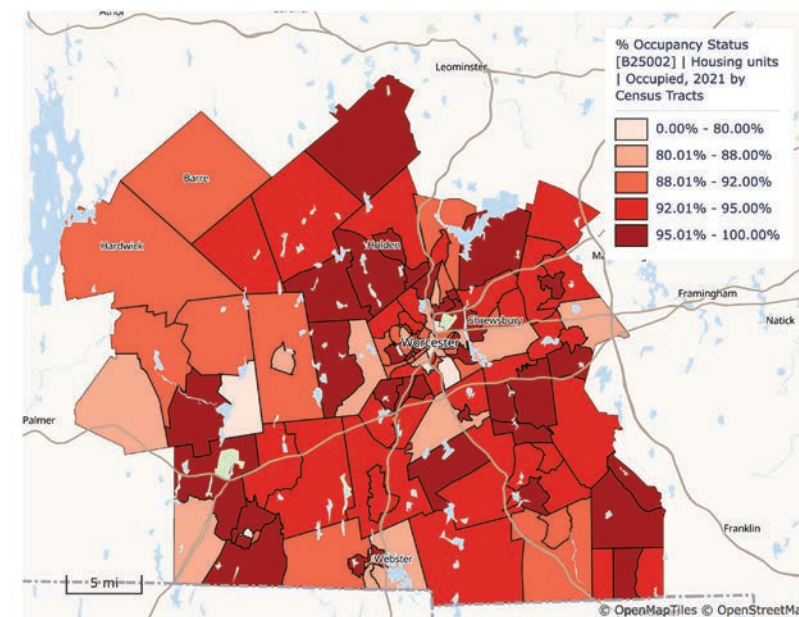


Figure 18. CMRPC Region Housing Unit Building Permits, 1980-2021. Data source: The Warren Group. "Housing Unit Building Permits, 1990-2021". Our Data. Accessed August 15, 2023. <https://www.thewarrengroup.com/>.



Map 41. CMRPC Region Percentage of Housing Units Occupied by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

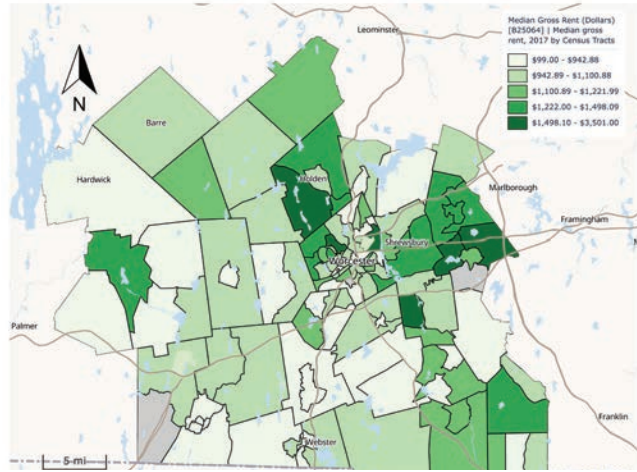


Population growth paired with limited construction is driving up the demand for housing.

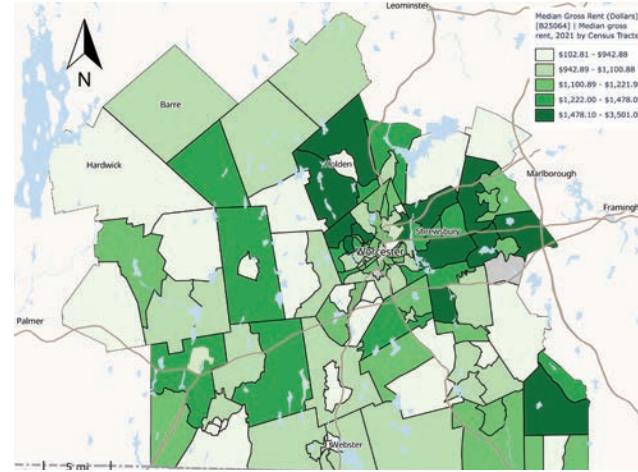
other factors, population growth paired with limited construction is driving up the demand for housing.

After peaks in the 1980's and early 2000's, the number of housing unit building permits in the region has twice declined and later recovered; the number of building permits issued has been recovering since the 2008 recession. Housing construction has declined precipitously since the construction boom of the mid-1980s, and peaks of recent growth cycles (2004 and, tentatively, 2021) have been modest in comparison (Figure 18). The discrepancy between housing unit construction and housing unit need has resulted in limited vacancy, high demand, and subsequent price increases.

Vacancy and occupancy rates are important indicators to a healthy housing market—vacancy allows for people to move at different stages of their lives and for in-migration and out-migration. The industry standard for vacancy rates varies by housing tenure; healthy vacancy rates for rentals are around six percent, while vacancy for owner-occupied units



Map 42. CMRPC Region Median Gross Rent by Census Tract, 2017. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.



Map 43. CMRPC Region Median Gross Rent by Census Tract, 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

is around 2 percent.²⁰ Some areas of the region have very low vacancy rates and high occupancy rates: Brookfield, Southbridge, Leicester, Holden, Grafton, Sutton, Webster, and Westborough have between 0% and 2.85% residential vacancy rates. Low vacancies can drive up housing prices significantly, especially in populated cities such as Worcester. This increase in housing prices can have ripple effects across the entire region (Map 41).

In 2021, the median sale price of a single-family home in Central Massachusetts was \$400,000 while the median income of a household in Central Massachusetts was \$93,076. Assuming a household has access to \$40,000 for a 10 percent down payment, a family making the average household income would spend 42.6 percent

of their net monthly income on a monthly payment.²¹ Households are considered housing cost burdened when they spend more than 30% of their income on housing and associated costs. Rising housing costs and limited housing inventory make it challenging to retain local and regional workforces. If housing affordability trends continue, businesses (especially small businesses) may be impacted by labor shortages.

A significant proportion of residents of the region rent their homes, and rises in rental prices caused by increased housing values can put stress on people who are often already struggling to make ends meet. Median gross rental prices rose in many parts of the region between 2017 and 2021, and these increases were especially apparent

in areas within the west side of Worcester and within towns to the east, north, and southwest of the city (Map 42 & 43). It is imperative that regional stakeholders work together to provide affordable rental options for people who seek them, so that they are not rent-burdened as they

In 2021, the median sale price of a single-family home in Central Massachusetts was \$400,000 while the median income of a household in Central Massachusetts was \$93,076.

often currently are.

As a social determinant of health, housing impacts the ways people can invest in themselves and their communities. Households that spend less on monthly rent or mortgage payments have increased options for how they use their remaining income, whether they decide to spend it on healthy food options, on medical care, or to support local businesses. People who live closer to where they work spend less time commuting and can spend more time becoming civically involved, participating in leisure activities, focusing on their health and well-being, enjoying time with family and friends.

Additionally, resources are required for people facing homelessness or vulnerability to homelessness. Literature on homeless populations suggests that "Housing First" policy is the most effective way to increase financial stability among these populations. This policy supplies stable housing to people before or alongside other assistance, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment as well as assistance finding employment.²² Compassionate approaches to housing will allow our communities to reach their full potential.

Central Massachusetts needs a mix of housing options that reflect the needs of people living in the region, including affordable housing and alternatives to single-family housing.

Further, shifting demographics indicate an unmet and growing demand for housing that meets the needs of older households; These older households often prefer smaller units with accessibility features in more walkable neighborhoods which are close to amenities.

Overall, housing availability is one of the most important factors of economic development. Excellent housing is a way to retain talent for the emerging tech and biotech sectors as well as retain essential service workers. For all people, from college graduates to older adults looking to age in place, housing is the most basic yet critical part of the economy. Consistent with other areas of the Commonwealth, Central Massachusetts has a housing affordability issue. This

issue is becoming worse, especially for those who are more vulnerable to displacement. Unaddressed, the lack of affordable, available housing threatens to impede the economic development of the region.



Brookfield, Southbridge, Leicester, Holden, Grafton, Sutton, Webster, and Westborough have between 0% and 2.85% residential vacancy rates.



Photography: Matt Jablonski



The City

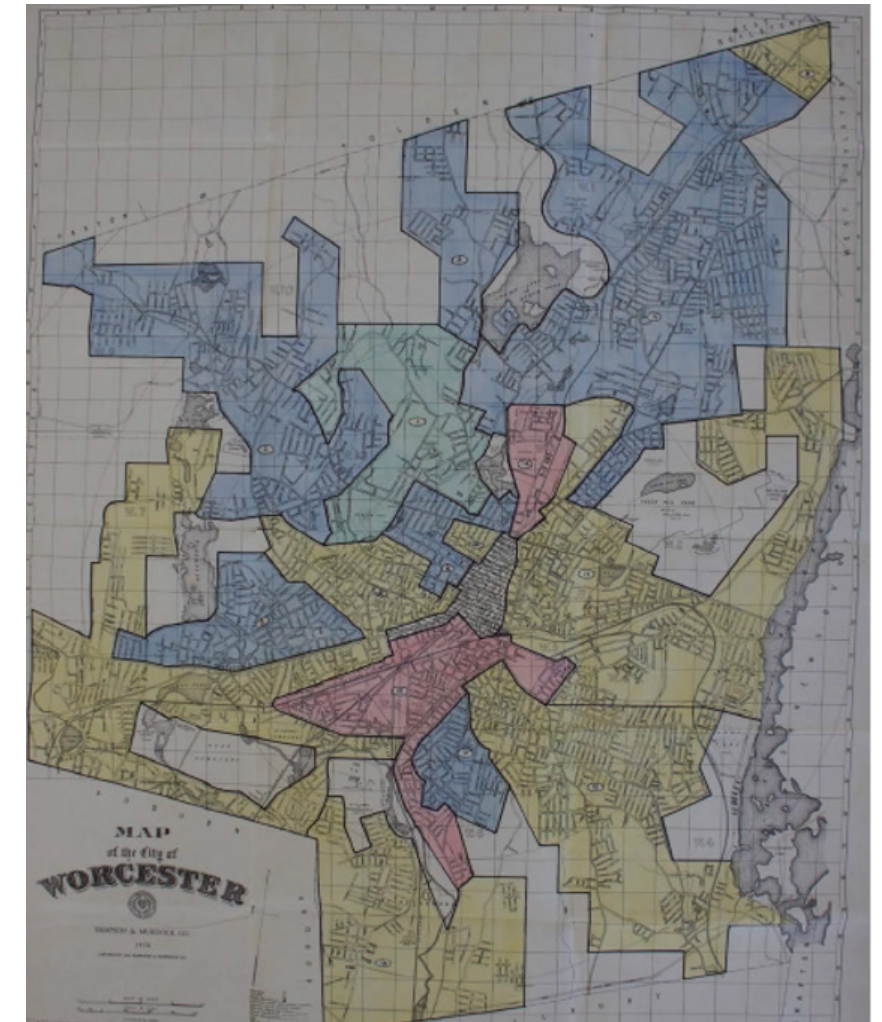
The City of Worcester is the cornerstone of the Southern Worcester County economy. The communities surrounding Worcester rely on the city for resources, services, products, employment, trade, and entertainment. For the region's rural and suburban communities to thrive, the urban center to which they are connected must also flourish. Within the City of Worcester, an unequal pattern of development – the legacy of discriminatory federal, state, and local policies and practices— is constraining economic growth.

In the 1930s, the practice of redlining segregated cities by race and class. Worcester's redlining map, drawn in 1936 by the federal government, banking industry, and real estate industry, outlined areas as "best," "still desirable," "definitely declining," "hazardous," and "business." The purpose of such classifications was to identify areas with minority and low-income populations and prevent investment and lending in such neighborhoods. While the maps are no longer utilized, their legacy of disinvestment and discrimination affects such areas today.

Worcester neighborhoods deemed "hazardous" in the 1936 redlining map include modern-day Main South, South Worcester, Indian Lake East and North Lincoln Street. Areas deemed "definitely declining" include modern-day Quinsigamond Village,

Broadmeadow Brook, Webster Square, Beaver Brook, Morris Square, Plantation Street, Chandler Hill, Grafton Hill, and Union Hill as well as northern parts of modern-day Indian Hill and Burncoat. When comparing Map 44, which shows formerly redlined areas, and Table 2, which shows Worcester neighborhoods by Social Vulnerability Index Score, a clear correlation between redlined areas and contemporary inequity is evident. Indeed, in the present day, many who reside in formerly redlined neighborhoods have limited English language skills, have low health insurance coverage rates, low incomes, and lower educational attainment, and do not have the means to easily travel around.

The stigma surrounding such neighborhoods has been carried over to the present day as well. Many people living in Worcester's underinvested neighborhoods serve crucial roles in the region, providing the essential services that the region needs. However, these residents also are members of vulnerable populations. The region has a responsibility to counteract historical and systematic racism and classism through economic investment and home buyer assistance. The region must also avoid pricing out families renting in Worcester (a process known as gentrification) and increase opportunities for wealth and prosperity for all neighborhoods



Map 44. Worcester Redlining Map. McClelland, W. C. Map of the City of Worcester: Realty Map. Map. Worcester: Sampson and Murdock Company, 1936. From the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, "Static Income, Rising Costs: Renting in the Heart of the Commonwealth", 2021. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c4dc8d80f88a4a18b02e015c1fde9100> (accessed August 15, 2023). and people in the region.²³

Stigma and Lack of Voice

Deindustrialization in the 20th century has brought the decline of manufacturing in New England, and Worcester was significantly impacted. But after decades of efforts and economic development, Worcester is now one of the safest cities in the nation. Our population is growing and our economy is heading in the right direction.

There is a clear correlation between redlined areas and contemporary inequity. Redlining left a legacy of disinvestment and discrimination that still affects some Worcester neighborhoods.



Today, formerly redlined neighborhoods are characterized by low social mobility.

According to *US News*, Worcester was ranked the 8th safest city in the United States.²⁴ However, the stigma of Worcester being “dangerous” and “left behind” continues to haunt the city and our residents, hampering economic development opportunities.

When asked about the cause

of the continued stigmatization of Worcester despite the reality of increased safety in the city during interviews, many regional stakeholders expressed that media plays a significant role in perpetuating this stigma. Due to declined demand, traditional communication methods for local news such as local newspapers have diminished in our

region. Many local newspapers such as Grafton News, Auburn News, Charlton Villager, Southbridge News, Spencer New Leader, Sturbridge Villager, and Webster Times are published through non-local press companies, causing a gap in current communication methods for local news and events.

With no local “voice”, it is difficult to tell local success stories; this causes the stigma to stick, and hinders economic growth in the region. Worcester has seen a resurgence from the de-industrialization era and has the highest population in its history. The news and media need to reflect successes and should market the region as it is—a vibrant, historic, and beautiful place for anyone to settle down and visit.

Travel, Tourism, and Culture

Travel, tourism, and culture are significant aspects of the regional

1936 Zone	Modern day neighborhoods included in zone	1936 rank	2022 social vulnerability index score (rank among 15)
1	Salisbury Street and Hammond Heights	Best	0.351 (1)
2	Tatnuck and West Side	Still Desirable	0.446 (2)
6	Elm Park	Still Desirable	0.664 (3)
4	Burncoat and Greendale	Still Desirable	0.725 (4)
8	Northern parts of Indian Hill and Burncoat	Definitely Declining	0.726 (5)
12	Grafton Hill and Union Hill	Definitely Declining	0.730 (6)
5	Colombus Park and around Clark University	Still Desirable	0.737 (7)
3	Indian Lake and Assumption University	Still Desirable	0.753 (8)
11	Plantation Street and Chandler Hill	Definitely Declining	0.793 (9)
10	Morris Square	Definitely Declining	0.801 (10)
9	Webster Square and Beaver Brook	Definitely Declining	0.833 (11)
7	Vernon Hill	Still Desirable	0.867 (12)
14	Indian Lake East and North Lincoln Street	Hazardous	0.886 (13)
13	Quinsigamond Village and Broadmeadow Brook	Definitely Declining	0.888 (14)
15	Main South and South Worcester	Hazardous	0.895 (15)

Notes: Modern day neighborhoods were determined by the Worcester Business Journal and the Worcester Regional Research Bureau. The Social Vulnerability Index is a composite score from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control made from 16 U.S. Census data points to determine neighborhoods’ potential negative effects on human health; a higher score indicates a more vulnerable population. The points include measures of poverty, unemployment, per capita income, education, health insurance, number of children, elderly population, population with a disability, single parent households, minority population, population speaking limited English, large apartment buildings, mobile homes, crowding, population with no vehicles, and group quarters.

Table 2. Worcester Redlining and Social Vulnerability Index. Worcester Regional Research Bureau, “Static Income, Rising Costs: Renting in the Heart of the Commonwealth.” (2022). Accessed August 14, 2023. <https://www.wrrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Static-Income-Rising-Costs-WRRB.pdf>.

Worcester has seen a resurgence from the de-industrialization era and has the highest population in its history. The news and media need to reflect and promote its success stories.





economy. According to Discover Central Massachusetts, “The economic impact of tourism in Central Massachusetts region is more than \$570 million.”²⁵ Untapped potential remains, especially in ecotourism and agritourism, with tourism representing the third largest industry in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts²⁶ but a much smaller share of the region’s economy. As shown in Charts 19 and 20, tourism that supports local businesses, protects existing character, and leverages arts and culture enjoys strong support across the region and presents a viable pathway for development.

According to the Massachusetts Cultural Council, cultural tourists²⁷ have higher levels of income,

spending \$62 more per day and \$200 more per trip compared to other travelers. Cultural tourists also include multiple destinations during a visit and stay one half-day longer at each destination. Central Massachusetts possesses innumerable cultural assets that have enabled it to capture part of this burgeoning market, including the Worcester Art Museum, the Hanover Theater for Performing Arts, Old Sturbridge Village, New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, and countless other historic, artistic, natural, and recreational gems. Such creative and cultural enterprises are major sources of employment, having contributed an estimated \$180 million in wages in FY21.²⁸

To increase market capture, the region needs to expand planning for tourism, culture, and complementary strategies that underscore sense of place, such as historic preservation.

Over the past decade, the City of



Central Massachusetts, should build the necessary infrastructure to help grow travel, tourism, and the cultural economy.

Worcester has expanded planning and programming for arts and culture. This is evidenced in the City’s Cultural Plan and Main Street Reimagined initiatives, which have brought street murals, maker spaces, breweries, and cultural events downtown and helped reinvigorate the city center. Region-wide, more can be done to facilitate and engender arts and culture in our region. Especially in communities outside of Worcester, public art, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and community events are underutilized means of economic development. Artist workspaces, too, are hard to come by; the region possesses few, if any, live and work spaces dedicated to the arts and culture workforce. Such infrastructure is necessary for creators to remain in their trades, reside in Central Massachusetts, and help grow the travel, tourism, and the cultural economy.

Climate Change

Central Massachusetts is experiencing the effects of climate change. Extreme weather events, reduced water availability, and changes in plant and wildlife populations are pervasive and at record levels. By the end of the century, the region anticipates an additional 3 to 4 inches of rain per year.²⁹ Sea level rise to the east of Central Massachusetts is projected to cause an influx of climate migrants to the region, causing indirect economic and social disruption (

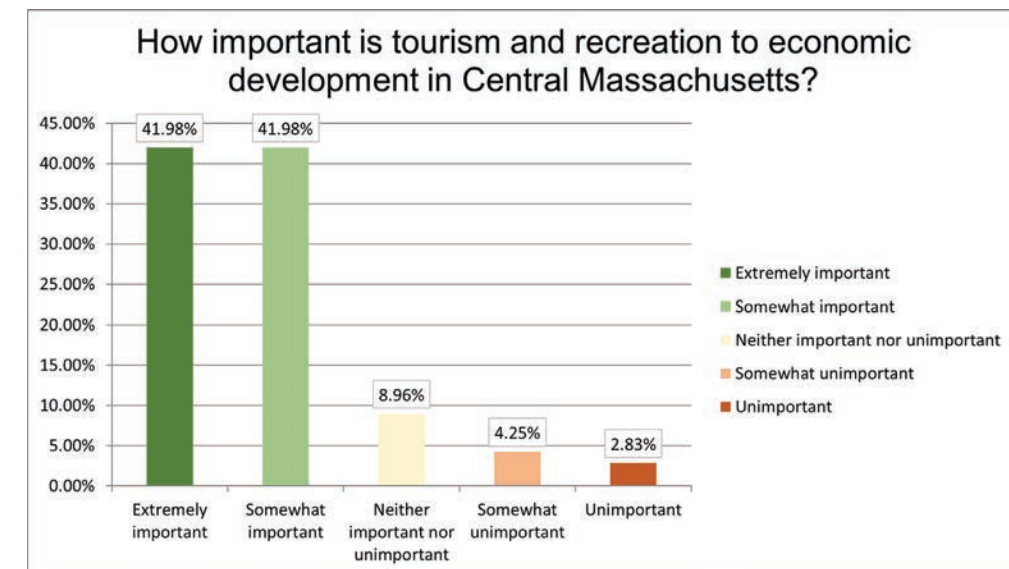


Figure 19. Survey Results on the Importance of Tourism. Data source: Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

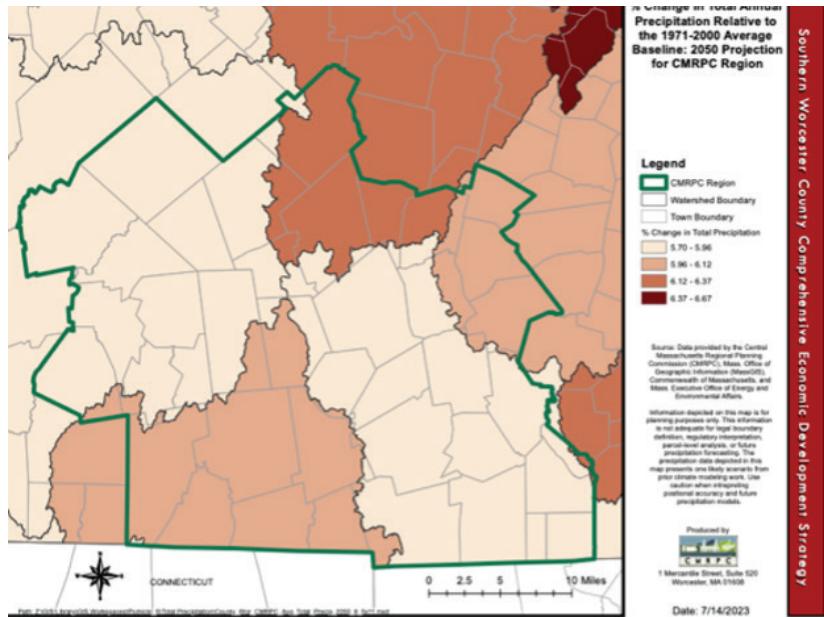


Figure 20. Survey Results on Tourism Action Items. Data source: Data source: CMRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Survey, 2023.

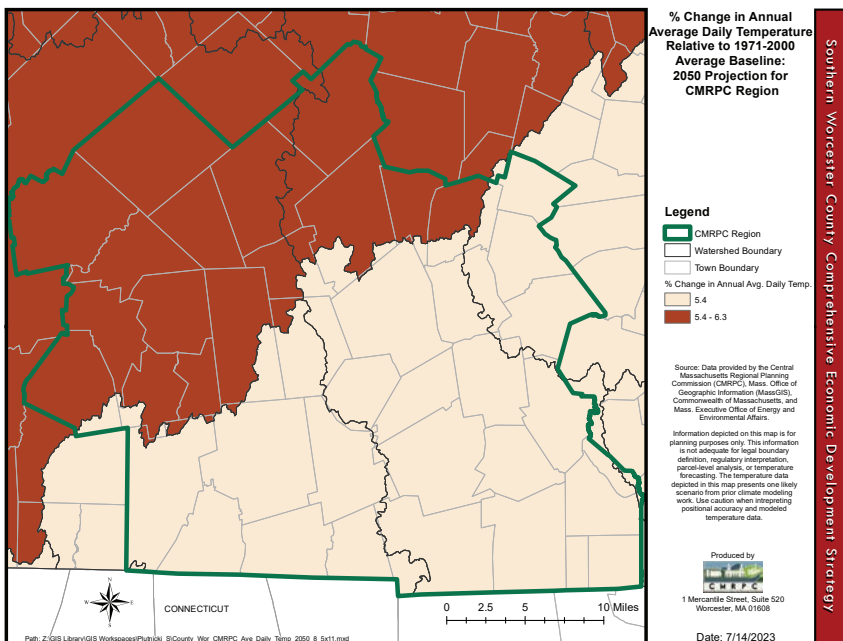
Map 45).

By 2030, the summer mean temperature could increase by 3.6 °F. By 2070, there could be 38 more days above 90°F, contributing to extreme heat health impacts (Map 46).³⁰ Along with these other impacts, climate change is expected to further increase the frequency of extreme weather events. As warmer oceans provide more energy for storms, both past events and future

models suggest that the intensity of tropical storms and hurricanes will increase, including along the New England coast. Damage from these storms has and will continue to cause devastating impacts for structures. An increase of flooding, extreme heat, droughts, and natural disasters also threaten the region’s historical farmland. Innovative farming techniques will be necessary to counteract changing climate patterns.



Map 45. Percent Change in Total Annual Precipitation Relative to the 1971-2050 Average Baseline, 2000-2050 for CMRPC Region. Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. “Resilient MA, Climate Change Clearinghouse for the Commonwealth.” (n.d.). Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/ResilientMAMapViewer/>.



Map 46. Percent Change in Annual Average Daily Temperature Relative to the 1971-2050 Average Baseline, 2000-2050 for CMRPC Region. Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. “Resilient MA, Climate Change Clearinghouse for the Commonwealth.” (n.d.). Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/ResilientMAMapViewer/>.

Climate resiliency has the potential to create new jobs.

Climate resiliency has short-term and long-term implications for the economy. First and foremost, climate resiliency has the potential to create new jobs, particularly green jobs. Green jobs may include jobs in industries that produce goods or services that directly improve the environment, or they can include newer “indirectly green” jobs that incorporate environmentally focused strategies and skills. Similarly, the farming innovations necessary to preserve and enhance the resiliency of our farmlands can help the region become more focused on local food sources, increasing food access and sustainability despite projected future global food network fluctuations. Short-term, climate adaptation may entail significant investments in hard infrastructure, disruptions to supply chains during extreme weather events, and loss of property and infrastructure. Long-term implications of climate resiliency include improved economic stability and reduced risk.

Childcare

The childcare and early education sectors are vital to the region’s economy. They are source of jobs



and wages as well as enablers of other sectors, allowing parents to participate in the workforce despite their childrearing responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the role of childcare in a functioning economy. In 2020, childcare facilities and schools across the nation shuttered, and parents were forced to cover gaps in childcare without notice. More than 2 million women left the labor force virtually overnight, many for the purpose of childrearing, and at a rate more than four times that of men.³¹ As of the most recently available data, childcare facilities have yet to return to pre-pandemic capacity, and women have not recovered employment gains realized prior to the pandemic.³²

In the Commonwealth, which has the second most expensive childcare market in the United

States, the lack of affordable childcare has enormous impacts at the household and macro-economic level.³³ According to a 2021 report by the Boston Foundation, “[T]he U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has estimated that childcare is affordable if it costs no more than 7 percent of a family’s income. ‘By this standard,’ according to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute, ‘only 5.4 percent of Massachusetts families can afford infant care.’”³⁴

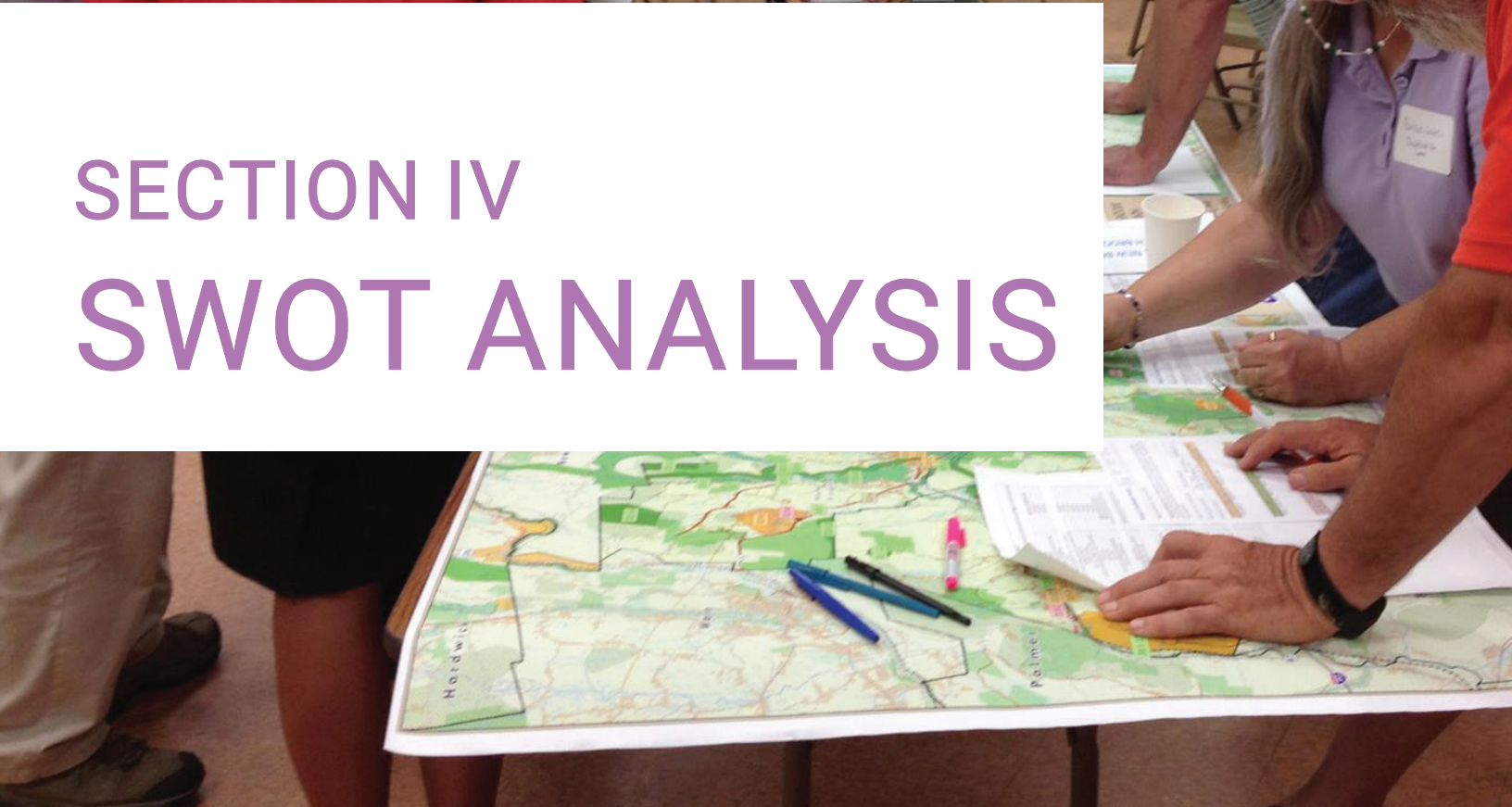
Unable to afford appropriate and necessary childcare, many of the region’s families must forgo external childcare, often at the expense of a full-time income, or be cost burdened by hiring help they cannot truly afford. Forgoing external childcare also has implications for the future

workforce. Long-term, beneficial effects of early social engagement and informal learning—the type that occurs in childcare settings—on educational and career attainment are well-documented.

As the region looks to fully engage all workers in its economy, it must consider the impacts of insufficient childcare infrastructure on households, workforce development, worker recruitment, and worker retention. The region should advance and lobby for state and federal policies that fund universal pre-k education, help working parents afford childcare, and normalize employer or state provision of childcare services.



SECTION IV SWOT ANALYSIS



SWOT Analysis

An assessment of our region's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

STRENGTHS

- Historical Assets
- Community-based Organizations
- Low Unemployment Rates
- Growing Median Household Income
- Overall Low Poverty Rates
- Open Space and Recreation Opportunities
- Central Massachusetts' Natural Beauty
- Strong Development Interests
- Recreation Opportunities
- Central Location
- High Quality K-12 Education
- High Quality Higher Education
- Vocational Training Schools
- Demographic and Geographic Diversity
- Healthcare Industry
- Agriculture

OPPORTUNITIES

- Economic Resiliency
- Agri- and Eco-Tourism
- A Thriving Agriculture Sector
- Education and Workforce
- Population Growth
- Workforce Development
- Regional and Cross-Sector Collaboration
- A Thriving Biotech Sector
- A Thriving Warehousing Sector
- Airport, Railroad, and Roadways
- Arts and Culture
- Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse
- Availability of Jobs
- Business Development
- Entrepreneurship Support
- Broadband Access
- Certification Transferal for Immigrants
- Marketing and Branding Central Massachusetts

WEAKNESSES

- Transportation
- Land Use and Zoning
- Housing Availability
- Areas with High Poverty Rates
- Low Walkability and Bikeability in Areas
- High Unemployment Rates in Areas
- Lack of Good Media Coverage
- Relatively Concentrated Arts and Culture
- Relatively Low Financial Literacy
- Lack of Awareness of Business Support

THREATS

- Housing Unaffordability
- Rising Costs of Living
- Differential Access to Educational Resources
- Income Inequality (race and gender)
- Food and Healthcare Deserts
- Lack of Resources for Non-profits
- Areas with Growing Poverty Rates
- Deteriorating Infrastructure
- Municipal Capacity and Support
- Water, Sewer, and Energy Systems
- Climate Change and Resiliency
- Inequity and Discrimination
- Aging Population
- Perception of Crime
- Reputation of Central Massachusetts
- Childcare



Photography: Matt Jablonski

Our state leads in educational services, healthcare, and social assistance compared to the U.S.

Economic Specialization - Emerging and declining industries

A Location Quotient is an indicator of a region's economic specialization. By examining location quotients in our region compared to the Commonwealth and the United

States, one can quickly identify and understand the specialized sectors in the Central Massachusetts region. Furthermore, we understand how different sectors in our region have grown or contracted by comparing 2017 and 2021 location quotients.

Leading Sectors

Compared to the Commonwealth, Central Massachusetts leads in manufacturing, wholesale trade, agriculture, transportation and warehousing, construction, retail trade, and education and healthcare. Between 2017 and 2021, wholesale

trade, agriculture, transportation and warehousing, construction, and education and healthcare services, other services, public administration, finance, insurance and real estate, information sectors grew in the region, as compared to the Commonwealth. However, manufacturing, arts and entertainment, accommodation, and professional, scientific, and management contracted as compared to the Commonwealth. When compared to the United States as a whole, the Central Massachusetts region leads in



Compared to the Commonwealth, Central Massachusetts leads in manufacturing, wholesale trade, agriculture, transportation and warehousing, construction, retail trade, and education and healthcare.

educational services, healthcare, and social assistance, manufacturing, information, and financial services, insurance, and real estate sectors.

Overall, our region is ahead of the nation in high-skilled sectors, such as education and healthcare, information, finance and insurance. Although our region lags behind the Commonwealth in high-skilled

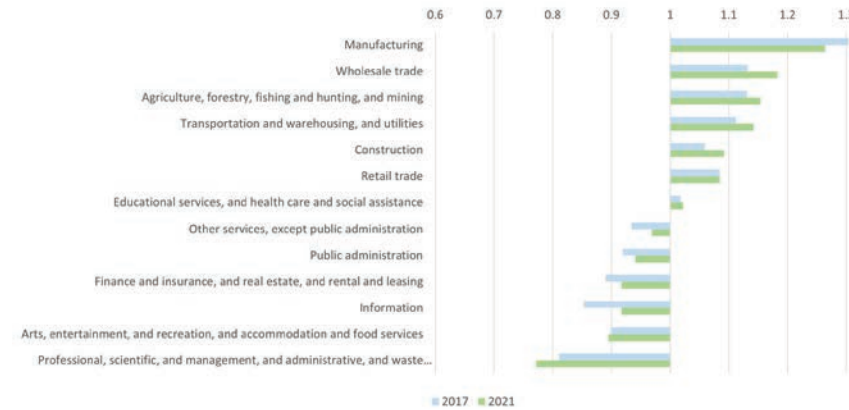


Figure 21. Location Quotients of NAICS Sectors for the CMRPC Region Compared to Massachusetts in 2017 and 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

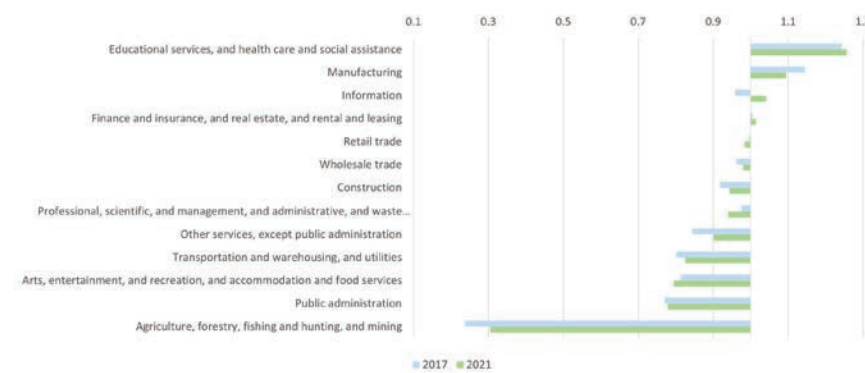


Figure 21. Location Quotients of NAICS Sectors for the CMRPC Region Compared to the United States in 2017 and 2021. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. "American Community Survey, 2017-2021." Explore Census Data. Accessed August 11, 2023. <https://data.census.gov/>.

sectors, we lead in sectors that are imperative to our economy such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, warehousing, and agriculture. These sectors open plentiful opportunities for our region to grow our economy.

Overall, our region is ahead of the nation in high-skilled sectors, such as education and healthcare.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Development along Priority Corridors
- Projects that Involve Increased Community Benefits
- Projects that Foster Growth in Emerging Sectors
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Projects
- Economic Development Planning to Support Growth
- Public Infrastructure Projects that catalyze growth
- Digital Equity Projects
- Transportation Improvement Program Projects
- Housing Development and Innovative Housing Solutions Projects
- Transportation Projects that Enhance Transit and Accessibility
- Regional Adaptive Reuse Projects
- Transportation Projects that Promote Walkability and Bikeability
- Urban Redevelopment Projects
- Development in Rural Areas
- Climate Resiliency and Infrastructure Projects
- Projects that Involve Partnership with Higher-learning Institutions
- Agriculture and Food Systems Projects
- Historic Preservation and Arts and Culture Projects
- Projects that Promote Regional Collaboration and Communication
- Projects that Enhance Municipal Capacity
- Agri-, Eco-, and Culture Tourism Projects
- Town and Village Center Projects including Planning Projects
- Open Space and Recreation Projects
- Regional and Cross-regional Trail Projects
- Projects that Encourage Workforce Education
- Projects that Support Businesses and Business Owners
- Social Safety Net Projects



SECTION V ACTION PLAN

Vision Statement

This vision for Central Massachusetts addresses the current needs and priorities of the region for the next 5 years. It draws on a robust community engagement process with input from stakeholders and residents.



Photography: Matt Jablonski



In 2028, our region will be a vibrant **hub for innovation, creativity**, and community. Our workforce will be more resourceful because of the vast **opportunities** available for **education and entrepreneurship**. Our unique communities and our **high quality of life** will be shaped by the success of our **resilient small businesses and community organizations**. Our people will have **access to the resources** they need to thrive in the regional economy.

Central Massachusetts will be a destination for **responsible development**, exceptional **recreation**, **inclusive culture**, **home-grown** delicacies, and all that life has to offer.



GOAL 1

Our region will work towards providing more equitable and impactful access to life-long educational opportunities to create and enhance an environment that maximizes individuals' skills in an effective workforce.

Central Massachusetts has great potential to expand current offerings of K-12 and adult education through community colleges, non-profit training programs, and trade schools. Effective workforce education will solve current gaps in employment sectors and facilitate creativity.



GOAL 2

Our region will have a vibrant, diverse, and resilient business ecosystem by collectively fostering a robust support system.

The residents of our region should have ample opportunities for starting and growing the small businesses that sustain our communities. As Central Massachusetts continues to evolve, our communities should anticipate emerging sectors, such as warehousing and biotech. Simultaneously, there is a need to support historically significant sectors of our region, including agriculture, farming and manufacturing. Advancing resources and partnerships for businesses will be key to achieving robust business support.



GOAL 3

Our region will continue to identify and invest in ways to improve the overall quality-of-life for more meaningful engagement with the economy.

To sustain a strong economy that works for its communities, quality of life enhancements, efficient transportation, housing that is affordable, effective and accessible health care, comprehensive childcare, and age-friendly policies. Until these needs are met more broadly, residents will not be able to support the local economy through civic participation, buying local, and engaging with entrepreneurship. A happy and healthy community is able to learn new skills, think creatively, and produce meaningful work.

Encouraging more mixed-use development and higher densities in selected areas can allow for greater economic growth. Creating vibrant downtown clusters of commercial and residential development brings customers and employees closer to work, fostering strong communities.



GOAL 4

Our region will continue to focus on promoting our unique and diverse economy while celebrating the cultural contributions of our communities.

Central Massachusetts is a vibrant place with diverse offerings for residents and tourists alike. The region should work to establish itself as a leader in emerging industries and recreational offerings, especially in Ecotourism and Agritourism.



GOAL 5

Our region will collaborate with community partners to increase civic engagement and awareness in support of a strong economy that equitably reflects the needs and aspirations of the community.

An assessment of municipal capacity gaps is critical to optimize current land use and permitting procedures within local governments. Specifically, communication between local governments and residents requires modern solutions and capacity building. Regional and subregional solutions to cover municipal responsibilities will foster collaboration and efficiency.



GOAL 6

Our region will capitalize on existing resources to implement thoughtful development that will support all facets of economic growth.

Central Massachusetts faces dual responsibility to maintain aging infrastructure while developing new infrastructure to support growing industries and housing. The rising costs of infrastructure acts as a deterrent to economic growth, and requires modern solutions. Our communities need assistance in facilitating sustainable development practices particularly through land use and zoning and community benefits.

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- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.



Central Massachusetts Regional
Planning Commission
One Mercantile Street, Suite 520
Worcester, MA 01608

A wide-angle aerial photograph of a pond surrounded by a dense forest of trees in full autumn foliage. The colors range from bright yellows and oranges to deep reds and browns. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with scattered white clouds. In the distance, some buildings and more trees are visible on a hillside.

SECTION VI IMPLEMENTATION



Central Massachusetts Regional
Planning Commission
One Mercantile Street, Suite 520
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APPENDIX



Appendix

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Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission - CMRPC

September 5 · 🌐



NOW OPEN: Comment period for the Southern Worcester County Economic Development Strategy 2023-2028. Follow the link to read the draft plan and fill out a commenting survey



CMRPCREGIONALSERVICES.ORG

Southern Worcester County Economic Development Strategy

This economic development strategy will create a vision, goals, and strategies for the region regarding business development, workforce, education, housing, agriculture, and tourism



Regional Services

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About Us

2023-2028 Southern Central Massachusetts Economic Development Strategy

DOCUMENT DRAFT

The Economic Development Strategy will create a vision, goals, and strategies for Southern Central Massachusetts.

The CEDS draft document will be open for public comment until mid-September. Please utilize the green form below for comments, revisions, and suggestions.

Central Massachusetts CEDS Public Comment Period Survey Responses

#1 Overall, to what extent does the 2023-2028 CEDS align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

How do the goals, objectives, and action items (sections 5, 6, 7) align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

Please provide additional comments using the space below.

What is your gender?

Male

What is your age?

35-44 Years

What is your ethnicity?

White

In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts?

I live in Central Massachusetts

Submit Date

2023-11-07 15:44:52

#2 Overall, to what extent does the 2023-2028 CEDS align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

How do the goals, objectives, and action items (sections 5, 6, 7) align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

Please provide additional comments using the space below.

What is your gender?

Male

What is your age?

18-34 years

What is your ethnicity?

White

In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts?

I live in Central Massachusetts

Submit Date

2023-09-14 16:34:33

#3 Overall, to what extent does the 2023-2028 CEDS align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

How do the goals, objectives, and action items (sections 5, 6, 7) align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

4 = Align

Please provide additional comments using the space below.

What is your gender?

Female

What is your age?

18-34 years

What is your ethnicity?

White

In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts?

I work in Central Massachusetts

Submit Date

2023-09-07 18:37:03

#4 Overall, to what extent does the 2023-2028 CEDS align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

5 = Extremely Agree

How do the goals, objectives, and action items (sections 5, 6, 7) align with your vision for Central Massachusetts over the next five years?

5 = Extremely Agree

Please provide additional comments using the space below.

What is your gender?

Male

What is your age?

18-34 years

What is your ethnicity?

Asian

In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts?

I come to Central Massachusetts often for various reasons.

Submit Date

2023-09-05 14:33:27

EDO Draft Comments

Page 2-5 There's a 2 full pages of space between the start of the text and the end of the text with all the pics in the middle. Maybe find a way to do text on one half of the page and reduce number of pictures?

Page 5 Don't think that you capitalize "Pandemic"

Page 8 Timeline graphic clips into the next page, I'm sure you are aware

Page 11 Section title might be better suited to say a Snapshot of the Region or something similar. I feel that saying we are successful off the bat doesn't leave much room for improvement and we certainly have a lot to improve on

Page 12 Might want to say in the graph title "CMRPC Service Region Population" rather than "CMRPC Population"

Page 14 As a map nerd I really like this page

Page 15 This page is numbered as 11 and then starts with 12 on the next one. Educational Attainment refers to Map 3 but map 3 is several pages later so might want to say which page it's on. The justify indentation of the Higher Education column makes the middle sentence look really crowded. Might want to push the word "universities" to the next line

Page 12 Business Community has interesting stats, where'd you get them from? The statement "in 2017 more than \$157M was paid to businesses" is a bit confusing, maybe say revenues were \$157M instead. With COVID relief money it may be confusing to read The 12,889 employees in the region is really low. Is this a subset of the total workforce?

Page 17 Should say Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development as title, new name

Pages 19+20 Really like the maps on these pages comparing 2017 to now.

Page 22 When talking about poverty it is important to note that there is persistent poverty in Worcester and other areas like Southbridge. These areas are significantly lower income than the rest of the region and this disparity should be something we aim to address in the CEDS

Page 23 I would say 2,000 new units. There's 1,000 going up around Polar Park alone City has \$2.5 billion of investment underway in new construction right now

Page 25 More than 5,000 businesses between 2020 and 2022, not 2020-2021. It's a two year period New business starts in Central MA from 2020-2021: 2,731 (+14.7%) New business starts in Central MA from 2021-2022: 2,772 (+1.5%) For Farming you might want to instead say Agriculture. You say in the Farming column that agriculture continues to prosper but the text box on the next page says we are losing farmland, not sure which point you want to make

Page 27 Instead of UMass should say University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School (UMass Chan) – they are particular about this as you probably know The CBRE sentence could be changed a little here: "According to a 2022 report by international real estate firm CBRE, the Worcester metro area has the 15th largest cluster of life sciences talent in the country, beating out large metro areas like Dallas, Austin, and Sacramento. Worcester's ranking was independent of the Greater Boston Area, which ranked as #1 on the list."

Page 28 Manufacturing section could be longer? Not much mention of any employers like Polar, Flexcon, Table Talk, Rand Whitney, etc and innovative advanced manufacturers like Solvus Global, Multiscale Systems. And might want to mention how the history of the entire Blackstone Valley was one of the nation's first manufacturing hubs dating back to the late 1700s

Page 34 I've noticed some of the graphics overlap with the blue line and text at the bottom of each page, hopefully this gets sorted and less cluttered

Page 37 Make sure to mention when the poll was taken (2021 right?)

Page 38 I think the highlighted text box should say "In Worcester County there were 2,731 new businesses created in 2020-2021, a 14.7% increase from the previous year."

Section III I would think about retitling this section as "Priorities" or "Strategic Priorities"

Page 44 I think we mean "inequitable" not "unequal educational resources"

Page 57 Not sure if you want to delve into the food security bit but did my masters thesis on this and can offer some insight. Food deserts are a problem for rural communities but not so much denser areas like the city where you are commonly within a mile of a grocery store. In the city you more have effects called "food swamps" which are when there's an oversaturation of fast food and unhealthy options like corner store/bodega packaged and processed foods. Lower income residents including those who have a hard time getting transportation end up trapped in an

unhealthy cycle of consuming food that leads to dietary diseases and lower income. You also have a “food mirage” effect in the region where you have places like Whole Foods and Trader Joes in Shrewsbury which are only a couple miles from poor neighborhoods in Worcester which paint the illusion that these neighborhoods have access to healthy foods. But really they cannot afford it and can’t get transportation there anyway. Local food justice nonprofits offering SNAP accessible healthy and local foods help solve these issues. Page 72 I think housing is addressed very well. Only suggestion would be to add that Worcester is one of the fastest growing major cities in the Northeast and housing production has not kept up. About 2,000 units of multifamily are underway in the city with another 2,000 proposed. However these are almost all rental – we lack robust single-family and condo home production to encourage first-time homeownership. The ratio of renters to homeowners has increased dramatically in recent years and our single family home costs have been one of the fastest growing in the country according to several national real estate analysis firms. We have no safety valve to release renters into the homeowner market and alleviate price pressures on rents. Page 42 (number got reset? Should be 75) Worcester was ranked #8 on safest cities in the US by US News <https://realestate.usnews.com/real-estate/slideshows/safest-places-to-live-in-the-us#:~:text=Worcester%2C%20Massachusetts&text=Worcester%20is%20considered%20a%20safe,total%20of%201%2C714%20for%202020>. Page 43 To the news desert paragraph and stigmatization of Worcester I would add that Boston-based media often does not come out to Worcester unless it’s crime related. Probably 85%+ of stories from the Globe and Boston-based news stations is about negative stories. Page 85 Typos in the highlighted text box “edication and helthcare”

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

November 09, 2023 Quarterly Meeting Minutes

Zoom Virtual Meeting

Attending Officers		Attending Sub Regional Delegates
Chairperson: Howard N. Drobner, Boylston		North: Otto Lies, Holden
Vice Chair: Robert Hassinger, Grafton		Northeast: Julianne Hirsh, Northborough
Treasurer: Daniel Schur, Westborough		Southeast: Walter Baker, Sutton
Clerk: Timothy Wheeler, Berlin		West: Jeffrey Howland, New Braintree
Asst. Clerk: Barur Rajeshkumar, West Boylston		Southwest: Andrew Coles, Auburn
CMRPC Delegates and Alternates		
Brandon Avery, North Brookfield		Robert King, Oxford
Joe Belrose, Blackstone		Sean Kowalczyk, East Brookfield
David Bloom, Paxton		Eli Laverdiere, Uxbridge
John Boyce, Holden		Ann Neuburg, Princeton
Mary Bulso, Blackstone		Purna Rao, Shrewsbury
Richard Clark, Dudley		Meg Schlesman, Douglas
William Cole, Hardwick		Taylor Stedman, Sturbridge
Andrew Coles, Auburn		William Talcott, Sutton
John Daniel, Southbridge		William Trifone, Dudley
Marc Frieden, West Boylston		Jean Vincent, Charlton
David George, Holden		Michael Wilkes, Northbridge
Meg Haight, Hardwick		Pamela Williams, Millville
Guests		
Carolyn MacDonald		
Laura Ziton		
CMRPC Staff		
Janet Pierce	Sujatha Krishnan	Trish Settles
Matthew Deiulis	Kerrie Salwa	Constance Mellis
Richard Rydant	Tyler Distefano	Kevin Krasnecky
Eric Gemperline		

1. Business Meeting:

Chairperson Howard Drobner called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. noting the presence of a quorum. Executive Director Janet Pierce conducted a roll call of CMRPC delegates and alternates.

- *Approval of Minutes:* Barur Rajeshkumar motioned to approve the minutes from the Quarterly Commission Meeting on September 14, 2023. Robert Hassinger seconded the motion. The motion was approved by roll call vote, with fourteen (14) abstentions.
- *Chairperson's Welcome:* Chairperson Drobner welcomed the attendees and detailed recent Executive Committee discourse which pertained to the Legislative Affairs Sub-Committee and the potential of involving the quarterly commission's attendees in

approving CMRPC's pursuit of a variety of planning and funding opportunities. Chairperson Drobner explained that the Legislative Affairs Sub-Committee will draft an updated charter for the Executive Committee to consider in time to present it at the January Quarterly Meeting. He added that Ms. Pierce would be creating a survey for the full commission to provide input on what matters they would like to hear about at Quarterly Meetings. Details on this survey would be provided soon.

- 2. Adoption of the 2023-2028 Southern Worcester County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):** Following a brief recounting of the importance, purpose, and intent of the CEDS by Kerrie Salwa, Director of Economic Development from RCCP, Robert Hassinger moved to adopt the 2023-2028 Southern Worcester County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), seconded by Jeffrey Howland. **Motion Approved by roll call, with two (2) abstentions and one (1) no vote.**

3. Welcome and New Business:

- Ms. Pierce welcomed and thanked the attendees for the votes of support for the 2023-2028 CEDS and invited guests to reach out to Kerrie and her staff about potential EDA opportunities.
- Ms. Pierce began her report by encouraging the attendees, if they haven't already, to subscribe to the CMRPC newsletter- and look at the many available grants at the bottom of the newsletter- as well as inviting attendees to partake in upcoming Citizen Planner Training Collaborative's fall webinars.
- Ms. Pierce closed by once again thanking the Commission for their support for the CEDS and CMRPC's tremendous growth in staff and our scope of work over the last year.

4. Presentations:

Ms. Pierce invited Richard Rydant to introduce WRTA's Public Transit Administrator, Joshua Rickman, and other transportation staff, whom all presented a comprehensive report of *'all things transportation'*. The presenters covered a transit overview, what the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO), the importance, purpose, and application of Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), current available data services- traffic counts, travel time studies, culvert assessments, etc.- and what is next for the CMRPC Transportation Division. Staff took a variety of questions and provided answers during the presentation over the call as well as in the *'ZOOM'* chat.

5. Adjournment of Official Business Meeting:

Barur Rajeshkumar made a motion to adjourn at 8:38 pm, Sean Kowalczyk seconded the motion. The motion passed by roll call with four (4) no votes, and the business meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Matthew Deiulis, CMRPC

Approved by CMRPC Commissioners on January 11, 2024 at January 2024 Quarterly Meeting

Howard Drobner 17-JAN-2024

Howard Drobner, Chair, CMRPC Executive Committee

In the absence of Timothy Wheeler, Clerk

Imagine Our Future



Municipal Capacity



Tourism and Recreation



Housing



Businesses and Economic Development



Polar Park, WooSox



Agriculture



Workforce Development



Education



Transportation

Central Massachusetts - Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



Join Us: December 15, 2022 @9:00AM

Polar Park, 3rd Floor Board Room

Entrance through GATE D

Address: 100 Madison Street, Worcester, Mass 01608

The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is tasked with updating the Central Massachusetts Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

We invite all to join us at our kick-off event at Polar park in December to discuss the future of our region's economic development strategies.

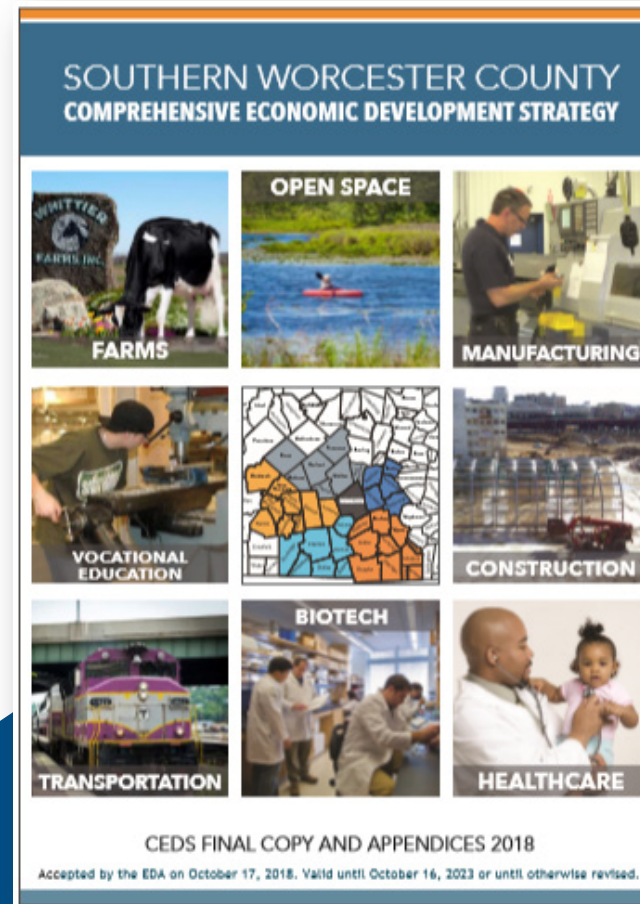


CEDS Overview



What is CEDS?

- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) is a five-year plan for fostering economic development in the region
- Highlights economic opportunities, constraints, regional assets, and presents the region's goals and strategies for implementation, a regional resiliency plan, and standards for annual evaluation and updating of the CEDS process
- A CEDS is the result of a "regionally-owned" planning process designed to guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.
- CEDS provides a coordinating mechanism for individuals, organizations, local governments, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about the economic direction of their region.



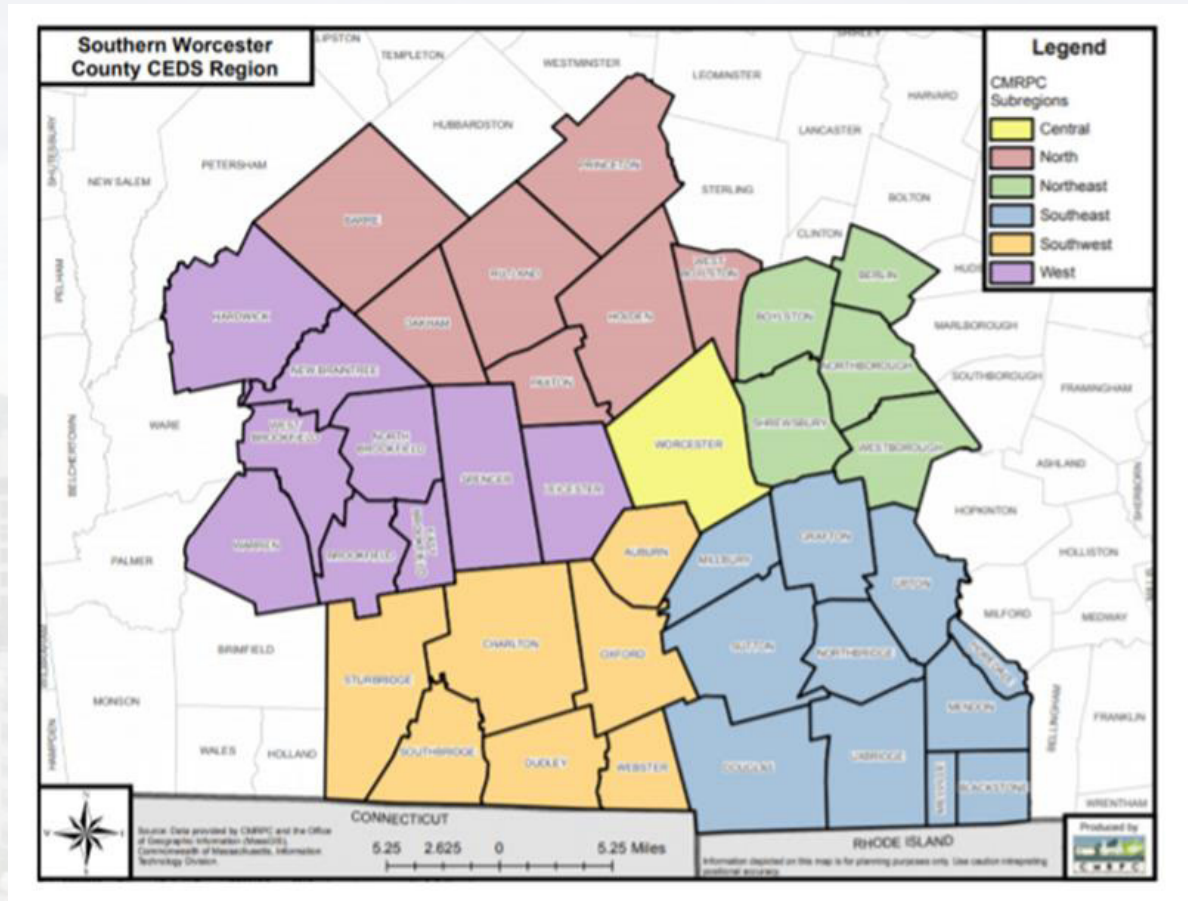
CEDS Goals

- Goal I: Create and operate a robust regional economic development program
- Goal II: Site availability, development and support infrastructure
- Goal III: Creation of a steady and robust talent turnpike
- Goal IV: Regulatory flexibility and development tools
- Goal V: Enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit



What is EDO?

- Economic Development Organization (EDO)
- Economic Development District
- Economic Development Administration
- EDA Programs



Thank You

Kelly Arvidson

Vice President, Mass Development

Elizabeth Cruz

President, Latin American Business Organization

Sheila Cuddy

Executive Director
Quaboag Valley CDC

Peter Dunn

Chief Economic Development Officer,
City of Worcester

Kim Engalls

Executive Director, Massachusetts
Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Chris Faucher

Assistant Vocational Director
Bay Path Technical High School

David George

Town Planner, Town of Rutland

Jeannie Herbert

Executive Director, Blackstone Valley
Chamber of Commerce

Peter Hoffman

Chair, Berlin Economic Development
Committee

Julie Holstrom

Senior Project Manager, WBDC

Jeff Howland

DPW Director
Town Engineer
Town of Shrewsbury

Kevin Kuros

Regional Director, Mass. Office of
Business Development

Joe Laydon

Town Manager, Town of Upton

Meghan Liddy

SVP Capital Markets
Kelleher Sadowsky

Tim Loew

Director, Becker College

Barry Lorion

District Highway Director, MassDOT

Shyla Matthews

Vice President, Mass Development

Mackenzie May

Executive Director
Central Mass Grown

Alix McNitt

Executive Director, Central Mass
South Chamber of Commerce

Jon Milas

Executive Director
Webster Dudley Chamber

Lyndon Nichols

Area Director, USDA

Jon Niedzielski

District Director, Congressman Mc-
Govern's Office

Karen Pelletier

Vice President of Operations
Director of Education and Workforce
Development
Worcester Regional Chamber of
Commerce

Janet Pierce

Executive Director, CMRPC

Thias Rentas

Marketing & Communications Coordi-
nator
Harrington Health Care System

Kathy Rentsch

Assistant VP
Quinsigmond Community College

Kevin Shaunessy

Account Exec. National Grid

Josh Lee Smith

Member, Westborough Economic
Development Commission

Anh Vu Sawyer

Executive Director
Southeast Asia Coalition

Tony Sousa

Town Planner, Town of Oxford

Jeremy Thompson

Manager of Policy & Planning
495/Metrowest Partnership

Jeff Turgeon

Director, CMREB/Central Mass HIRE

Jon Weaver

Mass Biomedical Initiative



The Work We've Done

- The SWC EDO Board has met 52 times (27 times in the year of 2020)
- The Full SWC EDO Board of Directors met 14 times, 15th is TODAY!
- Worked on and submitted 7 EDA applications on technical assistance, tourism, and infrastructure
- We have partnered with countless organizations over the past 5 years on issues such as education, small business development, life science, recreation, infrastructure etc.
- During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we have worked partners across the region to respond collaboratively to the pandemic



How Has Our Region Changed

- Small businesses
- Downtowns
- Supply Chain
- CARES Act, ARPA, IIJA, IRA
- Population swelled over the last 5 years
- Healthcare, education, life science, warehouse/distribution
- Continue the momentum of building resiliency



Community Engagement Timeline



CEDS Timeline



The CMRPC has developed a rigorous timeline for our community engagement efforts.



Fall 2022

Winter 2023

Spring 2023

Summer 2023

Timeline

The CMRPC starts the preliminary planning process to update Central Massachusetts Comprehensive and the drafting of the CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will be officially underway. In the Winter of 2023, the CMRPC will engage with our stakeholders and the public using many methods to make sure that no voice is left behind.

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will close out by end of March 2023. The CMRPC will analyze survey and interview data, both qualitative and quantitative, and report this data back to our stakeholders and the public.

The CMRPC will focus on drafting the report and post-report-drafting public comment process. The CMRPC will organize an additional public meeting and a reflection survey process to facilitate the public commenting process

Action Items

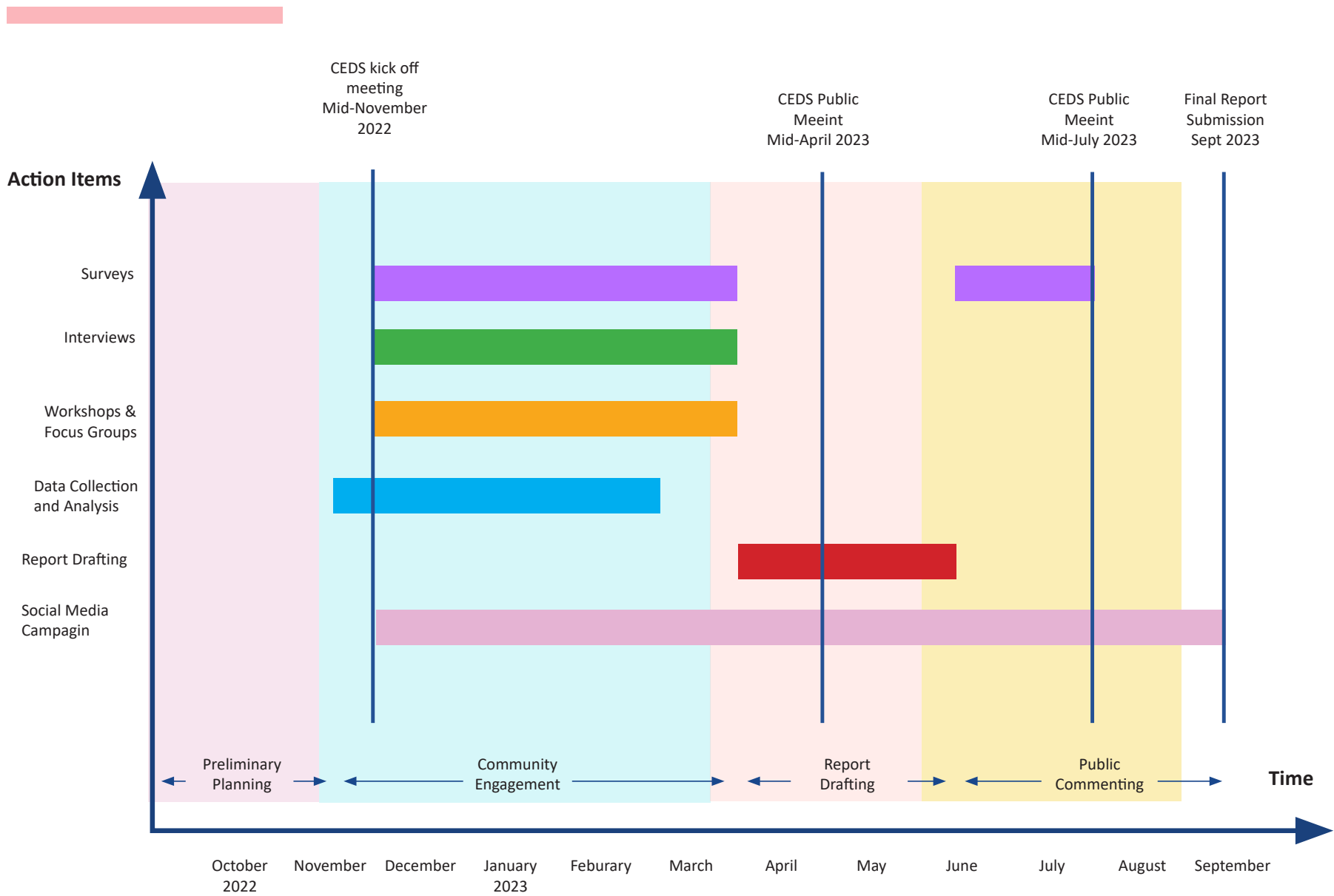
- Preliminary Planning Process
- Identify stakeholders
- Survey Drafting
- Social Media Campaign planning
- Kick off Public Meeting Planning
- Preliminary Data Collection Process
- Interview Questions and Prompts Drafting
- CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan Drafting
- Central Massachusetts CEDS kick off

- CEDS survey opens mid-November
- CEDS business owners interviews
- CEDS institutions and government interviews
- CEDS non-governmental organizations interviews
- Workshop (scheduled workshops, planning boards and select boards meetings)
- Social media campaign
- Preliminary data collection
- Public meeting planning and preparation

- CEDS survey closes March 31, 2023
- CEDS Preliminary Survey data analysis
- CEDS interview data summarization and analysis
- CEDS public meeting in mid-April to report back on data and our community engagement efforts
- Preliminary data collection and analysis
- Report drafting planning and preparation
- CMRPC community engagement reflection and evaluation

- Report-drafting process ends by June 2023
- Post report-drafting public meeting planning and preparation
- Public meeting in mid-June 2023
- Public commenting process
- Preparing for CEDS final report submission to Federal EDO
- Include public comments in the final report
- CEDS post-drafting reflection survey opens June 2023
- Post-drafting reflection survey data summarization and analysis
- Final stakeholder engagement

CEDS Timeline



Community Engagement Methods





TAKE THE SURVEY

- Multiple choice questions (five-point or seven-point scale)
- Choose all that apply
- Ranking questions to gauge priorities
- Open-ended questions or commenting
- Demographic questions to collect basic information such as age, gender, race and ethnicity, town/city affiliation, zip code* from respondents



CEDS Post-report Survey

The post-report survey aims to aid the public-commenting process that will commence in July 2023 after the drafting of the report.

The survey aims to capture public sentiment toward the plan. This survey will ask respondents to review the plan and answer questions regarding whether or how the plan chapters align with their expectations and their goals for economic development in Central Massachusetts.



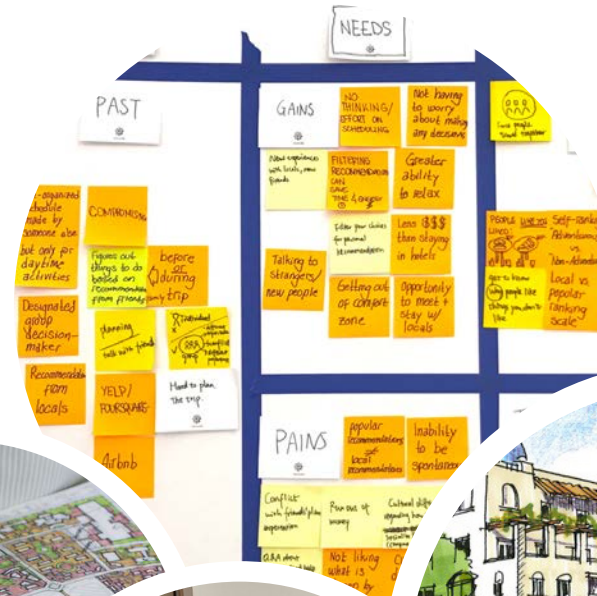
Interview Prompt

- Please tell us about your business.
- What part about being in Central Massachusetts do you like? (Hint: It could be about maybe a diverse and strong workforce, or transportation, or other features.)
- What would you like to change or see changes if there is something about the region you could change?
- Is there anything you would like to see but do not have as a business owner?
- Do you feel there is collaboration between business groups?
- Have you ever used city state and federal resources? What are they? How do you think the resources helped you? What's lacking?
- Has there been any hardship to obtain government resources?
- Do you think the governments' objectives are aligned with the region's businesses?
- For farms: what would make your operation more sustainable in the future?
- Do you currently collaborate with business owners/government agencies/higher-learning institutions?
- Do you have any plans for collaboration with governments, communities, business owners?
- Do you have any programs to retain students?
- Where do your students go after graduation?
- What are some resources that are most popular? What are the least popular?
- Do you have any plans for additional resources or assistance?
- What is an opportunity for you?
- What do you think is/are the biggest economic development challenges/roadblocks?
- Do you think there is disconnect between governmental agencies and business owners?
- What would you like to see happen in your agency that will be conducive to fostering more economic development opportunities in Central Massachusetts?
- What is the geographic area you or your organization serve?
- What do people mostly come to you for? Who are the people that come to you?
- What do you wish the government had in terms of economic development?
- What support or capacity do you need from the government?
- Do you have any capacity issue?
- How do you feel about your resiliency and what do you need to become more resilient



CEDS Workshop and Focus Groups

The CMRPC has identified various organizations and opportunities to conduct workshops and focus groups with our stakeholders in our region. We will go to town planning boards and select boards meetings, Chambers of Commerce, town Economic Development Committee meetings, sub-committee meetings, and various non-governmental organizations in Central Massachusetts.



CEDS Workshop and Focus Groups

CMRPC social media campaign includes two fundamental elements. A website for economic development strategies update that will feature our public meetings, project information, surveys, progress updates, news, and other elements that are conducive to enhancing our community engagement efficacy. Social media accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and/or LinkedIn to promote our project and community engagement efforts, such as surveys or workshop posters





STRENGTH



WEAKNESSES



OPPORTUNITIES



THREATS

Central Massachusetts Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies Update Survey

The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission is updating the Central Massachusetts Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies. In this survey, you will be asked to reflect on multiple areas, including education and workforce development, economy, economic development, and employment, municipal capacity and support, agriculture, transportation, and tourism and recreation. We appreciate your participation.



Vision Gauging

Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (S.W.O.T Analysis)

Please indicate whether the below topics are strengths, weakness, opportunities, or threats of the Central Massachusetts Region

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Education and workforce development				
Economy and employment				
Economic development and businesses				
Municipal capacity and communication				
Entrepreneurship				
Agriculture				
Transportation				
Aging				
Arts and Culture				
Open space and recreation				
Tourism				
Housing				
Equity and diversity				

Education and Workforce Development

Education and workforce development are closely related. Central Massachusetts is home to many higher learning institutions and has the potential of a highly educated workforce that can serve the region.

How important is education and workforce development to central Massachusetts?

- Extremely important
- Relatively Important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Relatively unimportant
- Extremely unimportant

What are your priorities in education and workforce development in Central Massachusetts? (select your top three priorities)

- Higher-education quality
- Higher-education affordability
- Quality of school districts
- Vocational training availability
- Vocational training quality
- Retaining students after graduation
- Agriculture training and education
- Childcare availability and costs
- Education and workforce development is not a priority to me
- Other: _____

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us anything else about education and workforce development in Central Massachusetts?

Economy, economic development, and Employment

Economy, economic development, and employment are the most important indicators of our region’s quality of life and long-term economic stability. Please take a moment to answer the below questions on economic resiliency, economic development barriers, and the development our region needs.

What are the most important factors to long-term economic stability and resiliency in Central Massachusetts? (Choose up to four)

- Having more diverse workforce
- Having a more educated workforce
- Higher-education attainment and quality
- Basic education attainment and quality (school districts)
- Early-childhood education attainment and quality, including childcare
- Governmental programs and assistances
- Regional collaboration and regionalism
- Vocational training for workforce
- Small businesses and local economy resiliency
- Cyber security
- Climate resiliency
- Public health
- Diversification of the sectors in our economy
- Retaining a young workforce
- Other: _____

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Central Massachusetts economic development?

<i>Central Massachusetts...</i>	Extremely Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Extremely agree	I’m not sure
has sufficient economic development						
has employment opportunities for all with various skillsets						
has sufficient governmental assistance, programs, and resources for economic development						
provides economic development opportunities for all municipalities in the region						
is a place where everyone can find a place to live, work, and play						
sufficient level of regional collaboration to secure economic development opportunities						
is a great place for farms and the agriculture sector to thrive						
has sufficient and affordable housing for all in the region						

has sufficient high-paying employment opportunities						
has affordable and available childcare options and facilities						
has sufficient and high-quality and affordable education opportunities						
is a destination of investment						
has sufficient transportation network and infrastructure to support economic development						
retains sufficient young and diverse workforce						
residents are highly supportive of more economic development						
needs more innovative solutions to secure more economic development opportunities						
has enough resources to sustain economic growth for the existing population						
has a growth mentality and culture						
has sufficient support for entrepreneurship and the creative class (artists)						

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us about other barriers for the economic growth of Central Massachusetts.

To what extent do you think the below types of economic development opportunities are important to Central Massachusetts?

	Extremely important	Somewhat Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant	Unimportant
Housing and affordable housing development					
Light industrial development (warehouses and assembly lines)					
Heavy industrial development (factories)					
General office spaces					
Lab spaces for bio-medical industry					
Small and local businesses					
Agriculture and agricultural tourism					
Climate resiliency, open spaces, and eco-tourism					

Higher-education development					
Mixed-use development (housing and commercial/retail)					
Entrepreneurship and start-ups					
General tourism					
Workforce development					
Non-profit organizations					
Collaborative workspaces (a communal space where everyone can come in and work)					

Please use the space below to tell us anything else you would like to tell us about the economy, economic development, and employment in Central Massachusetts

Municipal Capacity and Support

To what extent do you think your city/town/village is financially stable?

- Extremely agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Extremely disagree
- I am not sure

To what extent do you think municipal staffing capacity is an issue in your city/town/village?

- Extremely agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Extremely disagree
- I am not sure

Do you think social media or other electronic services is a good way for municipalities to keep citizens informed and involved in economic development?

- Extremely agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Extremely disagree

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us anything else about municipal capacity and support and economic development.

Agriculture

Central Massachusetts has some of the highest working farms per capital in Southern New England. To preserve our agricultural industry is to preserve our traditions as well as the future of our region. Please answer the below questions about our region's agriculture.

To what extent do you agree with the below statements

	Extremely Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Extremely disagree	I am not sure
Central Massachusetts agriculture sector is prominent and thriving						
Farming is viable and feasible in Central Massachusetts						
Climate change has had some impact on farming in Central Massachusetts and will continue to make farming less viable						
Central Massachusetts provides sufficient resources for farms and the agriculture industry						
Central Massachusetts residents value our farms and the agriculture industry						
Innovative ideas and agricultural tourism could elevate the agriculture industry in the region						

What are some ways to support the agriculture industry in Central Massachusetts?

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about agriculture in Central Massachusetts.

Transportation

If you were awarded \$50million from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, please select 5 areas you would spend this fund.

- Making town and city centers more walkable and bike-friendly
- Fixing insufficient infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.) in the region
- Adding more biking and walking trails in the region
- Adding more public transit (buses and trains) options within the region
- Making public transit services more reliable (adhere to schedules)
- Lowering the cost of public transit (trains and buses)
- Expanding the service area (covered area) of buses and trains
- Adding more trains and buses to increase the frequency of transit
- Making transit options more accessible for all in our region regardless of where they live
- Connecting Central Massachusetts with other parts of New England
- Establishing a more robust transportation system for older adults in our region
- Putting more parking in place
- Other: _____

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about transportation in Central Massachusetts.

Tourism and recreation

How important is promoting tourism and recreation in Central Massachusetts to the economic development?

- Extremely important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Unimportant

What are some action items for promoting tourism and recreation?

- Improve walkability and bike-friendliness on roadways
- Promote small and local businesses
- Promote arts and culture
- Promote connectivity
- Protect green and open spaces
- Protect historic resources
- Promote the region's farms
- Promote innovative tourism such as agriculture-tourism and eco-tourism
- Marketing our small towns
- Other: _____

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about recreation and tourism in Central Massachusetts.

Demographic Questions

The CMRPC tries to reach everyone in our community throughout the planning process. These demographic questions will help us understand who we are hearing from and ensure that the project reflects the community it will serve. The information collected in this survey will be reported in aggregate, which means your personal information will not be associated with these responses and will be kept anonymous. We thank you for participating in this survey and help Central Massachusetts build a better future.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe: _____

- Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

- 18 years or younger
- 18 – 34 years old
- 35 – 44 years old
- 45 – 54 years old
- 55 – 64 years old
- 65 – 74 years old
- 75 – 84 years old
- 85 years and over
- Prefer not to answer

How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx or Spanish
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer

In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts? (select all that apply)

- I live in Central Massachusetts
- I work in Central Massachusetts
- I come to Central Massachusetts often for various reasons
- Other: _____

What town do you live in? (Dropdown list)

What is your zip code?

Are you a business owner in Central Massachusetts? If yes, in what town(s) is(are) your business(s) located?

Do you rent or own your home?

- Rent
- Own
- I live with others but do not pay rent
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Thank you.

Thank you very much for participating in our survey. Your responses have been recorded. If you have any questions, please contact Kerrie Salwa, project manager at the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission at ksalwa@cmrpc.org

Please also help us circulate this survey to make sure that we can hear from as many people in our region as possible. Economic development is planning for our future, and your participation is a vital part of it.

If you would like to follow the development of this project, please leave your name and email address below and we will make sure to keep you update! More exciting news to come!

Name:

Email:



Central Massachusetts
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)

**Community Engagement
& Outreach Plan
2022 - 2023**



Executive Summary



It is our sincere hope that our region continues to take on beneficial economic development opportunities to continue to grow.

The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is one of the thirteen regional planning organizations in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The CMRPC is tasked with updating the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Southern Worcester County—which consists of the City of Worcester and thirty-nine other cities, towns, and villages. With the COVID-19 Pandemic affecting our region in many profound ways, the economic development strategies update is ever more crucial to the future of our region, to realize our region’s strengths and weaknesses so that we can take on more economic development opportunities to make our region a better place to live and work for all.

It is our sincere hope that our region continues to take on beneficial economic development opportunities to continue to grow. Economic Development planning is planning for the people and the future. Our beautiful region is diverse, and it has everything from the second largest city in New England – Worcester, to the quaint, historical, and unimaginably beautiful

small towns. This level of diversity is our proudest strength. However, it presents tremendous challenges regarding community engagement and the many different voices our region’s people have. The CMRPC is committed to engaging with various stakeholders and the public from all over our region to understand Economic Development challenges and opportunities.

The CMRPC wants to make sure that we engage and communicate with as many people in our region as possible so that this plan is truly our people’s plan. This Community Engagement Plan serves as the blueprint for our community engagement efforts to try to reach every corner of our community. We have identified a wide range of stakeholders including business owners, neighborhood and community-based organizations, planning boards and other governmental personnel, higher institutions and other not-for-profit institutions, and many others who represent many facets of our economy in Central Massachusetts.

The CMRPC has developed a rigorous timeline for our community engagement efforts.



Fall 2022

Winter 2023

Spring 2023

Summer 2023

Timeline

The CMRPC starts the preliminary planning process to update Central Massachusetts Comprehensive and the drafting of the CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will be officially underway. In the Winter of 2023, the CMRPC will engage with our stakeholders and the public using many methods to make sure that no voice is left behind.

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will close out by end of March 2023. The CMRPC will analyze survey and interview data, both qualitative and quantitative, and report this data back to our stakeholders and the public.

The CMRPC will focus on drafting the report and post-report-drafting public comment process. The CMRPC will organize an additional public meeting and a reflection survey process to facilitate the public commenting process

Action Items

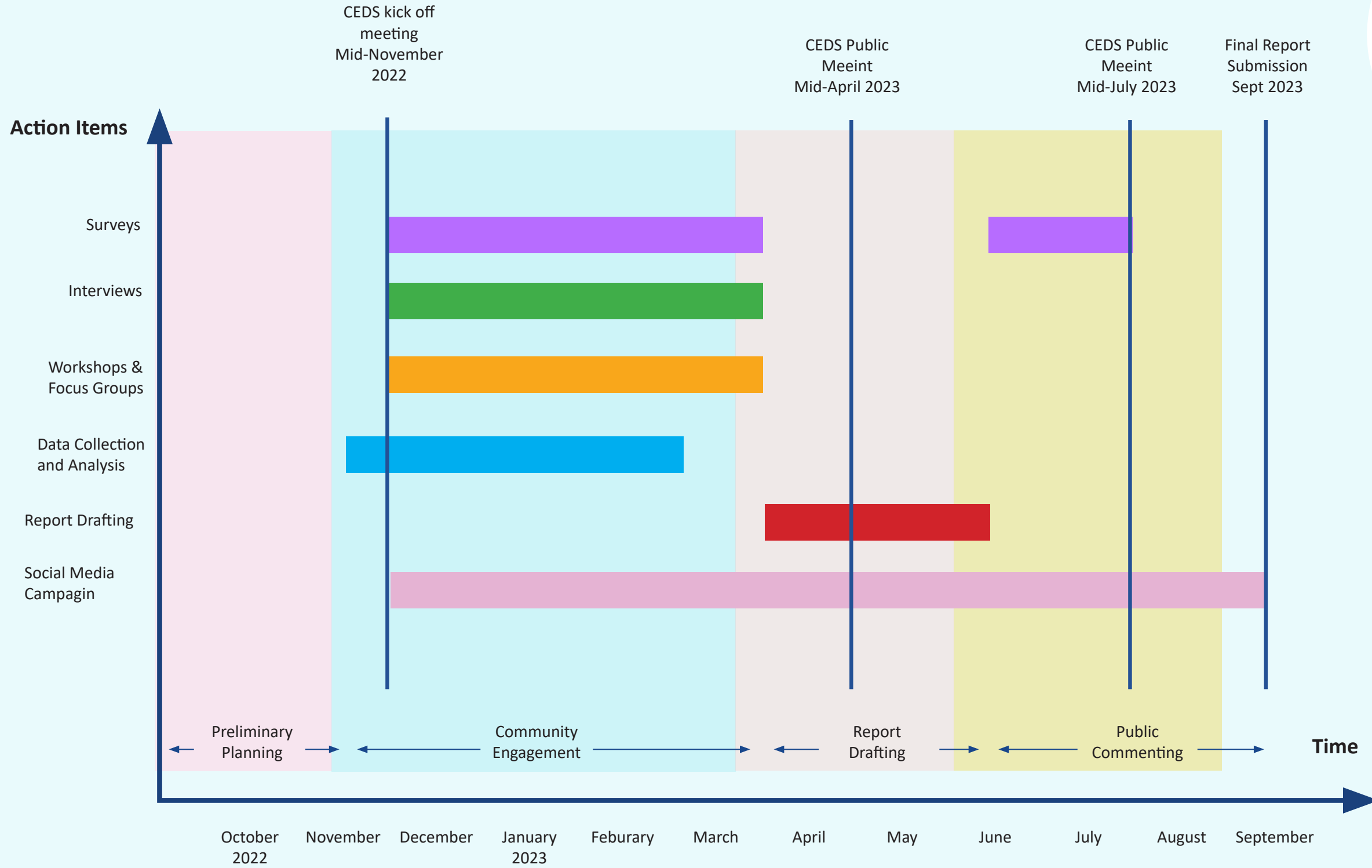
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- Identify stakeholders
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- Kick off Public Meeting Planning
- Preliminary Data Collection Process
- Interview Questions and Prompts Drafting
- CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan Drafting
- Central Massachusetts CEDS kick off

- CEDS survey opens mid-November
- CEDS business owners interviews
- CEDS institutions and government interviews
- CEDS non-governmental organizations interviews
- Workshop (scheduled workshops, planning boards and select boards meetings)
- Social media campaign
- Preliminary data collection
- Public meeting planning and preparation

- CEDS survey closes March 31, 2023
- CEDS Preliminary Survey data analysis
- CEDS interview data summarization and analysis
- CEDS public meeting in mid-April to report back on data and our community engagement efforts
- Preliminary data collection and analysis
- Report drafting planning and preparation
- CMRPC community engagement reflection and evaluation

- Report-drafting process ends by June 2023
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- Public meeting in mid-June 2023
- Public commenting process
- Preparing for CEDS final report submission to Federal EDO
- Include public comments in the final report
- CEDS post-drafting reflection survey opens June 2023
- Post-drafting reflection survey data summarization and analysis
- Final stakeholder engagement

CEDS Timeline



**Community
Engagement
Methods**



The CMRPC plans to conduct two surveys to inform our plan. The first survey will be conducted from November 2022 through March of 2023. This preliminary survey will be expansive and will allow the public and our stakeholders to inform us about current situations, and visions for Central Massachusetts, as well as topics that should be included in this new Economic Development Strategies Plan. The survey will feature many types of questions. The survey is attached in the appendix of this plan.

- Multiple choice questions (five-point or seven-point scale)
- Choose all that apply
- Ranking questions to gauge priorities
- Open-ended questions or commenting
- Demographic questions to collect basic information such as age, gender, race and ethnicity, town/city affiliation, zip code*, income*, and levels of education* from respondents

TAKE THE SURVEY

The post-report survey aims to aid the public-commenting process that will commence in July 2023 after the drafting of the report. The survey aims to capture public sentiment toward the plan. This survey will ask respondents to review the plan and answer questions regarding whether or how the plan chapters align with their expectation and their goals for economic development in Central Massachusetts. Additionally, the survey will attempt to obtain respondents' demographic information, similar to the preliminary survey. The post-report survey is attached in the appendix of this plan.



The CMRPC is prepared to interview a wide array of stakeholders across our region. We have identified three groups that we would like to focus our interview efforts on, although our interviews are not at all limited to the groups we have identified. These groups include business owners and individuals (small businesses, farms), governments and institutions, and non-profit and community-based organizations.

For business owners and individuals, the CMRPC would like to focus on visioning as well as understanding challenges to obtaining governmental and other resources.

Interview Prompt

- Please tell us about your business.
- What part about being in Central Massachusetts do you like? (Hint: It could be about maybe a diverse and strong workforce, or transportation, or other features.)
- What would you like to change or see changes if there is something about the region you could change?
- Is there anything you would like to see but do not have as a business owner?
- Do you feel there is collaboration between business groups?
- Have you ever used city state and federal resources? What are they? How do you think the resources helped you? What's lacking?
- Has there been any hardship to obtain government resources?
- Do you think the governments' objectives are aligned with the region's businesses?
- For farms: what would make your operation more sustainable in the future?



For different levels of governments, such as small-town governments, planning boards, regional chambers of commerce, regional planning agency, as well as higher education institutions, we would like to understand how government agencies are reflecting economic development policies, collaboration, and resources.

Interview Prompt

- Do you currently collaborate with business owners/government agencies/higher-learning institutions?
- Do you have any plans for collaboration with governments, communities, business owners?
- Do you have any programs to retain students?
- Where do your students go after graduation?
- What are some resources that are most popular? What are the least popular?
- Do you have any plans for additional resources or assistance?

- What is an opportunity for you?
- What do you think is/are the biggest economic development challenges/roadblocks?
- Do you think there is disconnect between governmental agencies and business owners?
- What would you like to see happen in your agency that will be conducive to fostering more economic development opportunities in Central Massachusetts?

Lastly, for non-profit organizations, we would like to understand how they collaborate with governmental agencies, colleges and universities, and business owners, the help they offer, and the resources they need to continue to thrive in our region.



The CMRPC is considering three public meetings to kick off the CEDS process, a mid-process report meeting, and a post-drafting meeting. The three public meetings will serve as a media to keep those who are following the process updated. The kick-off meeting will officially start of community engagement process in November when the preliminary survey has been drafted and approved by our sub-committee members. This public meeting will raise additional awareness and will help us kick off our community

engagement efforts.

The mid-process report meeting will happen in April 2023 after the preliminary survey has been closed. In this meeting, the CMRPC will report out information gathered during the preliminary survey process, including topics to include in the economic development strategies update as well as representation in our communities. The meeting and information shared and gathered at the meeting will further enable us to update our economic development strategies.

The post-drafting meeting will facilitate our Post-report Reflection Survey process to see whether and how our plan aligns with the goals of the people of our region. The Post-report Reflection Survey data will also be included in the final report to be submitted to the Federal Economic Development Organization.

Interview Prompt

- What is the geographic area you or your organization serve?
- What do people mostly come to you for? Who are the people that come to you?
- What do you wish the government had in terms of economic development?
- What support or capacity do you need from the government?
- Do you have any capacity issue?
- How do you feel about your resiliency and what do you need to become more resilient



CEDS Workshops and Focus Groups

The CMRPC has identified various organizations and opportunities to conduct workshops and focus groups with our stakeholders in our region. We will go to town planning boards and select boards meetings, Chambers of Commerce, town Economic Development Committee meetings, sub-committee meetings, and various non-governmental organizations in Central Massachusetts.



CEDS Social Media Campaign

The aim of the CMRPC social media campaign is centered around using modern and entertaining ways to further augment our community engagement efforts, promote our planning processes, as well as seeking additional and innovative ways to engage with the public and our stakeholders. CMRPC social media campaign includes two fundamental elements.

- A website for economic development strategies update that will feature our public meetings, project information, surveys, progress updates, news, and other elements that are conducive to enhancing our community engagement efficacy.
- Social media accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and/or LinkedIn to promote our project and community engagement efforts, such as surveys or workshop posters





Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
1 Mercantile Street
Worcester, MA 01608
www.cmrpc.org



THE FUTURE OF OUR ECONOMY

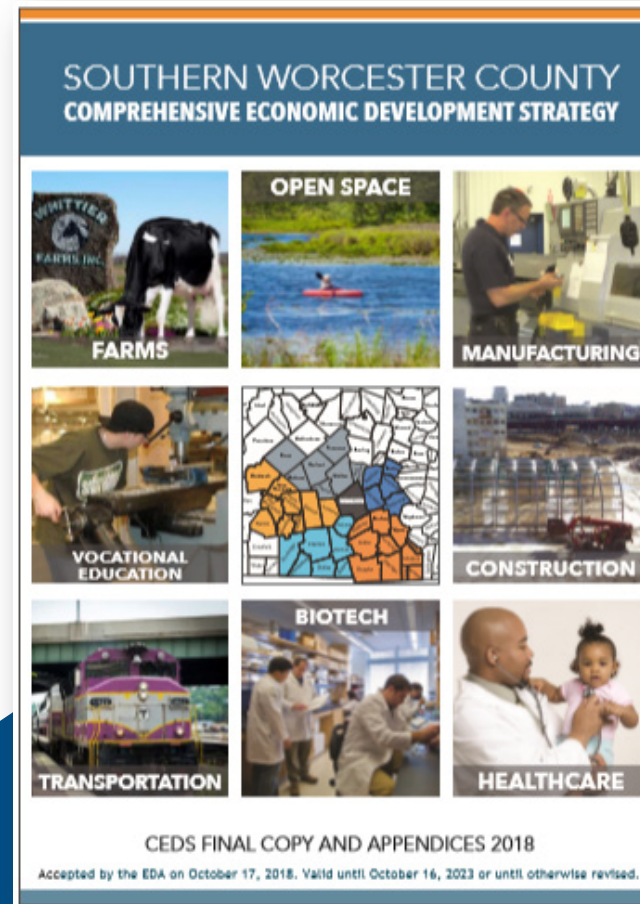
MAY 4 2023



CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission

What is CEDS?

- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a 5-year plan for fostering economic development in the region
- Highlights economic opportunities, constraints, regional assets
- Presents the region's goals and strategies for implementation, a regional resiliency plan, and standards for annual evaluation and updating of the CEDS process
- A CEDS is the result of a "regionally-owned" planning process designed to guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.
- A CEDS provides a coordinating mechanism for individuals, organizations, local governments, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about the economic direction of their region.



2018 CEDS Goals

- Goal I: Create and operate a robust regional economic development program
- Goal II: Site availability, development and support infrastructure
- Goal III: Creation of a steady and robust talent turnpike
- Goal IV: Regulatory flexibility and development tools
- Goal V: Enhancing the entrepreneurial spirit



Thank You

Kelly Arvidson

Vice President, Mass Development

Elizabeth Cruz

President, Latin American Business Organization

Sheila Cuddy

Executive Director
Quaboag Valley CDC

Peter Dunn

Chief Economic Development Officer,
City of Worcester

Kim Engalls

Executive Director, Massachusetts
Manufacturing Extension Partnership

David George

Town Planner, Town of Rutland

Jeannie Herbert

Executive Director, Blackstone Valley
Chamber of Commerce

Peter Hoffman

Chair, Berlin Economic Development
Committee

Julie Holstrom*

Senior Project Manager, WBDC

Jeff Howland

DPW Director
Town Engineer
Town of Shrewsbury

Kevin Kuros

Regional Director, Mass. Office of
Business Development

Joe Laydon

Town Manager, Town of Upton

Meghan Liddy

SVP Capital Markets
Kelleher Sadowsky

Tim Loew

Director, Becker College

Barry Lorion

District Highway Director, MassDOT

Shyla Matthews

Vice President, Mass Development

Mackenzie May

Executive Director
Central Mass Grown

Alix McNitt

Executive Director, Central Mass
South Chamber of Commerce

Jon Milas

Executive Director
Webster Dudley Chamber

Lyndon Nichols

Area Director, USDA

Jon Niedzielski

District Director, Congressman Mc-
Govern's Office

Karen Pelletier*

Vice President of Operations
Director of Education and Workforce
Development
Worcester Regional Chamber of
Commerce

Janet Pierce

Executive Director, CMRPC

Thias Rentas

Marketing & Communications Coordi-
nator
Harrington Health Care System

Kathy Rentsch*

Assistant VP
Quinsigmond Community College

Kevin Shaunessy

Account Exec. National Grid

Josh Lee Smith

Member, Westborough Economic
Development Commission

Tony Sousa

Town Planner, Town of Oxford

Jeremy Thompson

Manager of Policy & Planning
495/Metrowest Partnership

Jeff Turgeon

Director, CMREB/Central Mass HIRE

Jon Weaver

Mass Biomedical Initiative

The Work We've Done

- The SWC EDO Board of Directors Executive Committee has met 52 times (27 times in the year of 2020)
- The full SWC EDO Board of Directors met 15 times
- Assisted with the submission of 7 EDA applications relating to technical assistance, tourism, and infrastructure
- We have partnered with countless organizations over the past 5 years on issues such as education, small business development, life sciences, recreation, infrastructure, etc.
- During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we have worked with partners across the region to respond collaboratively to the pandemic



How Has Our Region Changed

- Small Businesses
- Downtowns
- Supply Chain
- CARES Act, ARPA, BIF/IIJA, IRA
- Population swelled over the last 5 years
- Healthcare, education, life science, warehouse/distribution
- Continue the momentum of building resiliency



Community Engagement Timeline



CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission

CEDS Timeline



The CMRPC has developed a rigorous timeline for our community engagement efforts.



Fall 2022

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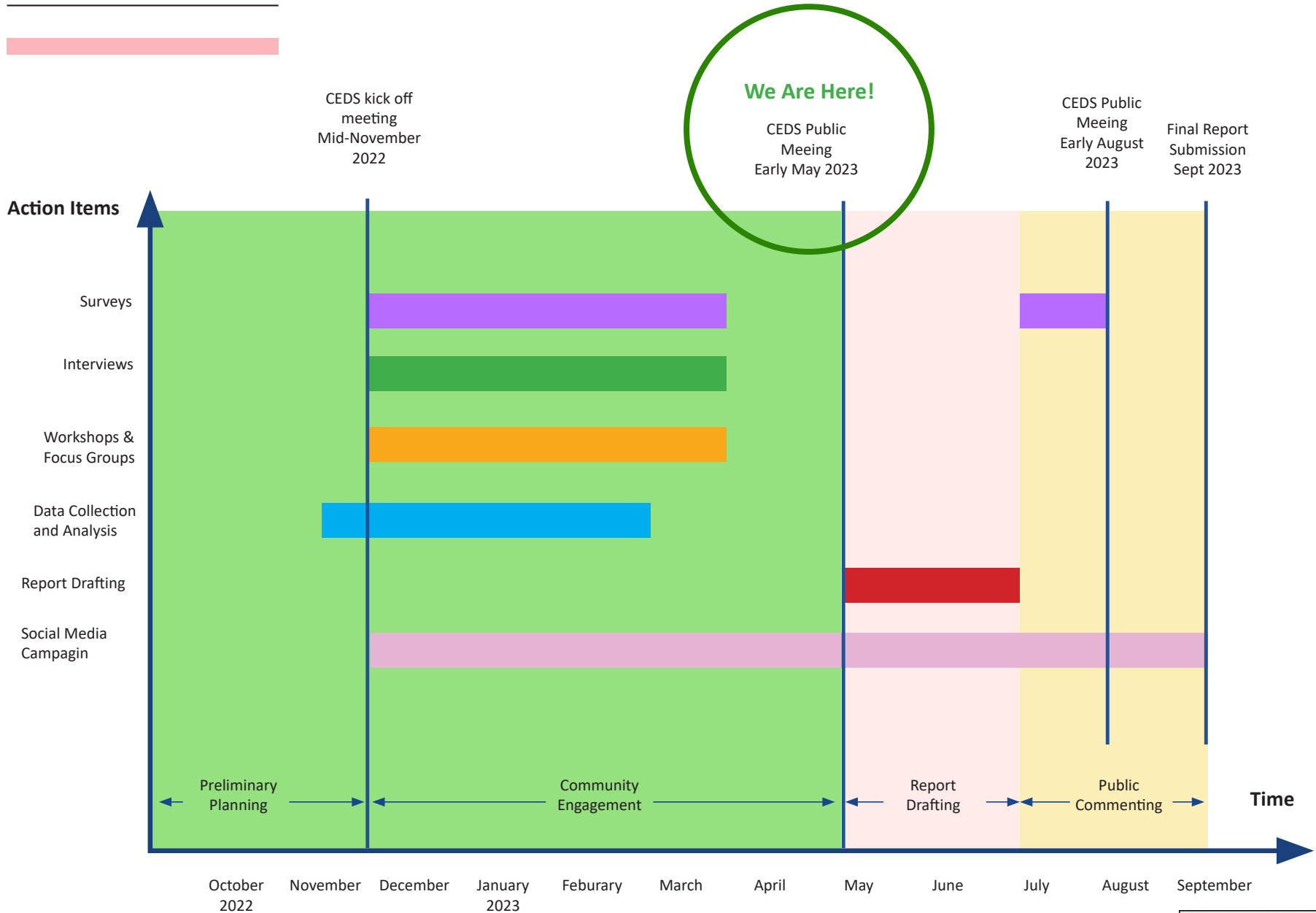
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- Preliminary Data Collection Process
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- Central Massachusetts CEDS kick off

- CEDS Survey
- Interview with higher institution partners
- Interview with non-profit partners
- Interview with community-based organizations
- Social media campaign
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- Public meeting planning and preparation

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CEDS Timeline



Community Engagement Results



The Work We Have Done

- Survey
- Interviews
- Workshops
- Meeting Takeovers
- Data Collection
- Social Media Campaign



- December 2022 - April 2023
- Survey Objective: Gauge priorities, challenges, and experiences
- Asks respondents to reflect on areas such as education and workforce development, economy, economic development, employment, municipal capacity and support, agriculture, transportation, recreation and tourism.

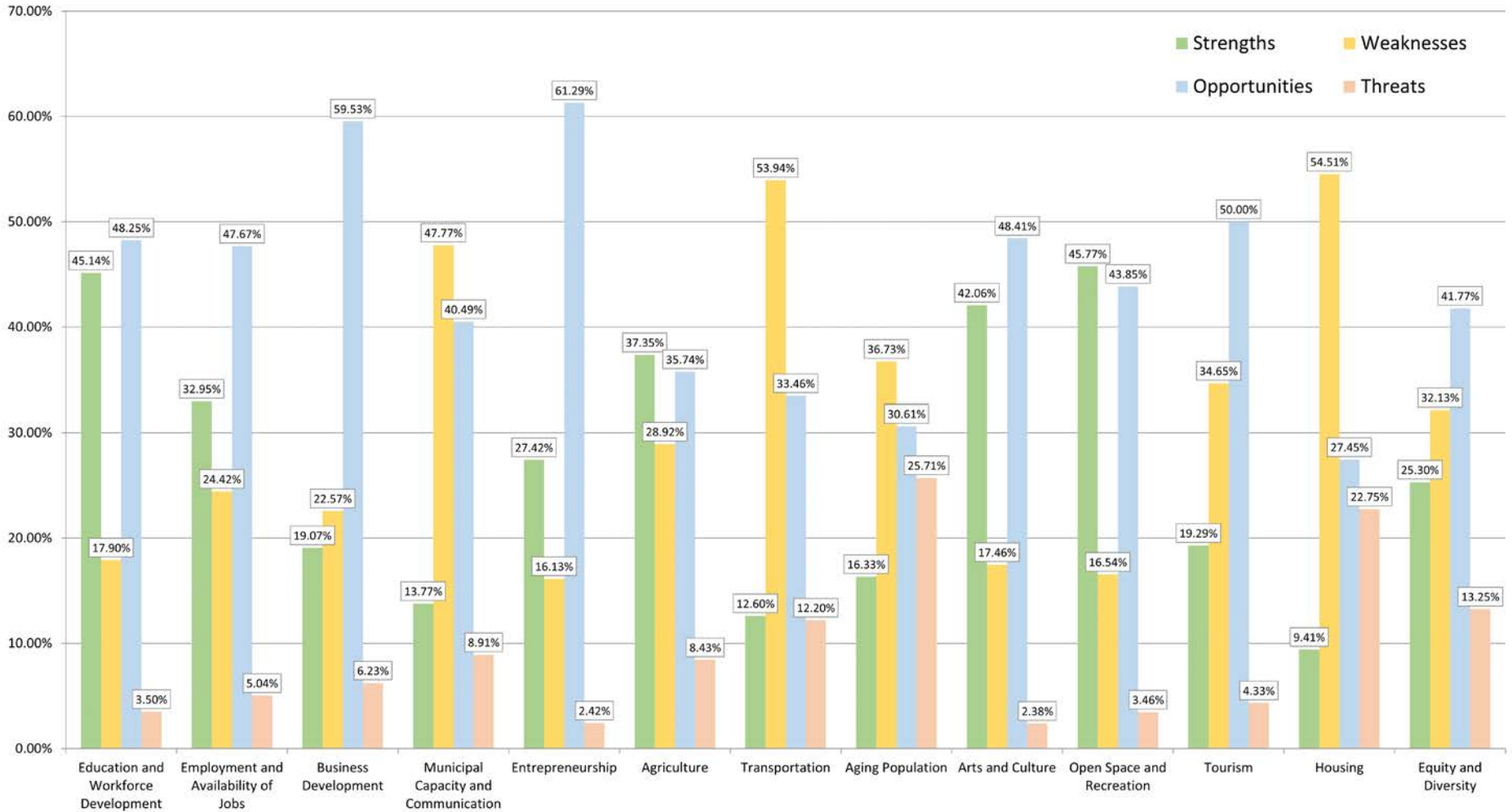
TAKE THE
SURVEY



Question 1

- Strengths: Open Space & Recreation (46%), Education and Workforce Development (45%), Arts & Culture (42%). Only 9% of respondents selected Housing as a strength
- Weaknesses: Housing (55%), Transportation (54%), and Municipal Capacity & Communication (48%) were the three most-selected weaknesses.
- Opportunities: Entrepreneurship (61%), Business Development (60%), and Tourism (50%). Housing (27%), Aging Population (31%), and Transportation (33%) were the least selected opportunities.
- Threats: Aging Population (26%), Housing (23%), Equity & Diversity (13%), and Agriculture (12%)

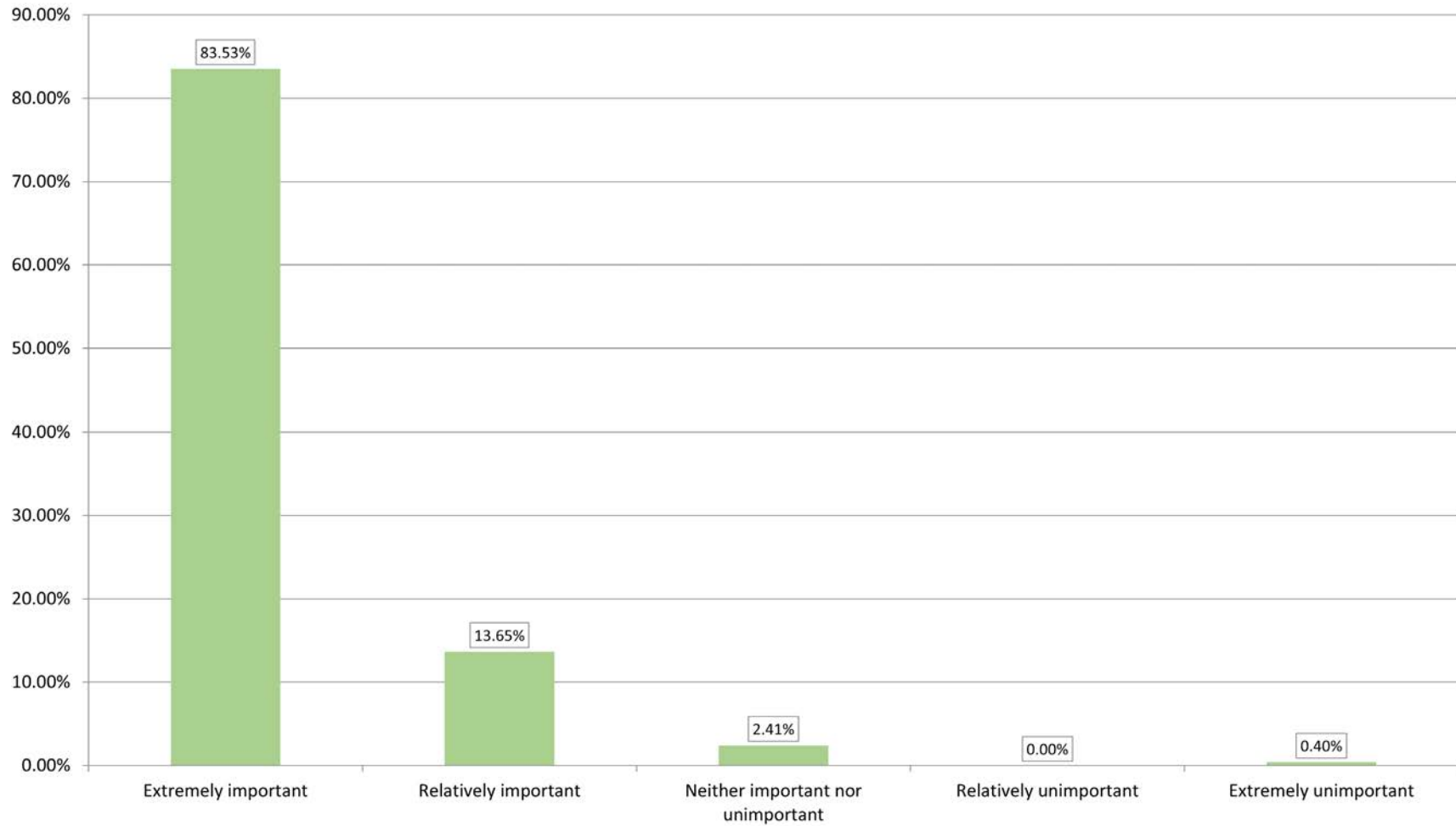
Please indicate whether the below topics are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats of Central Massachusetts



Question 2

- More than 97 percent of survey respondents think Education is important

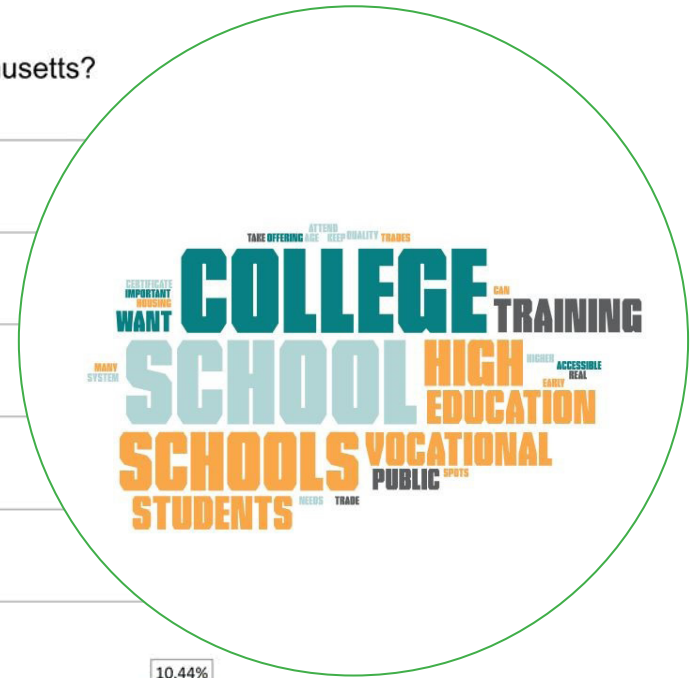
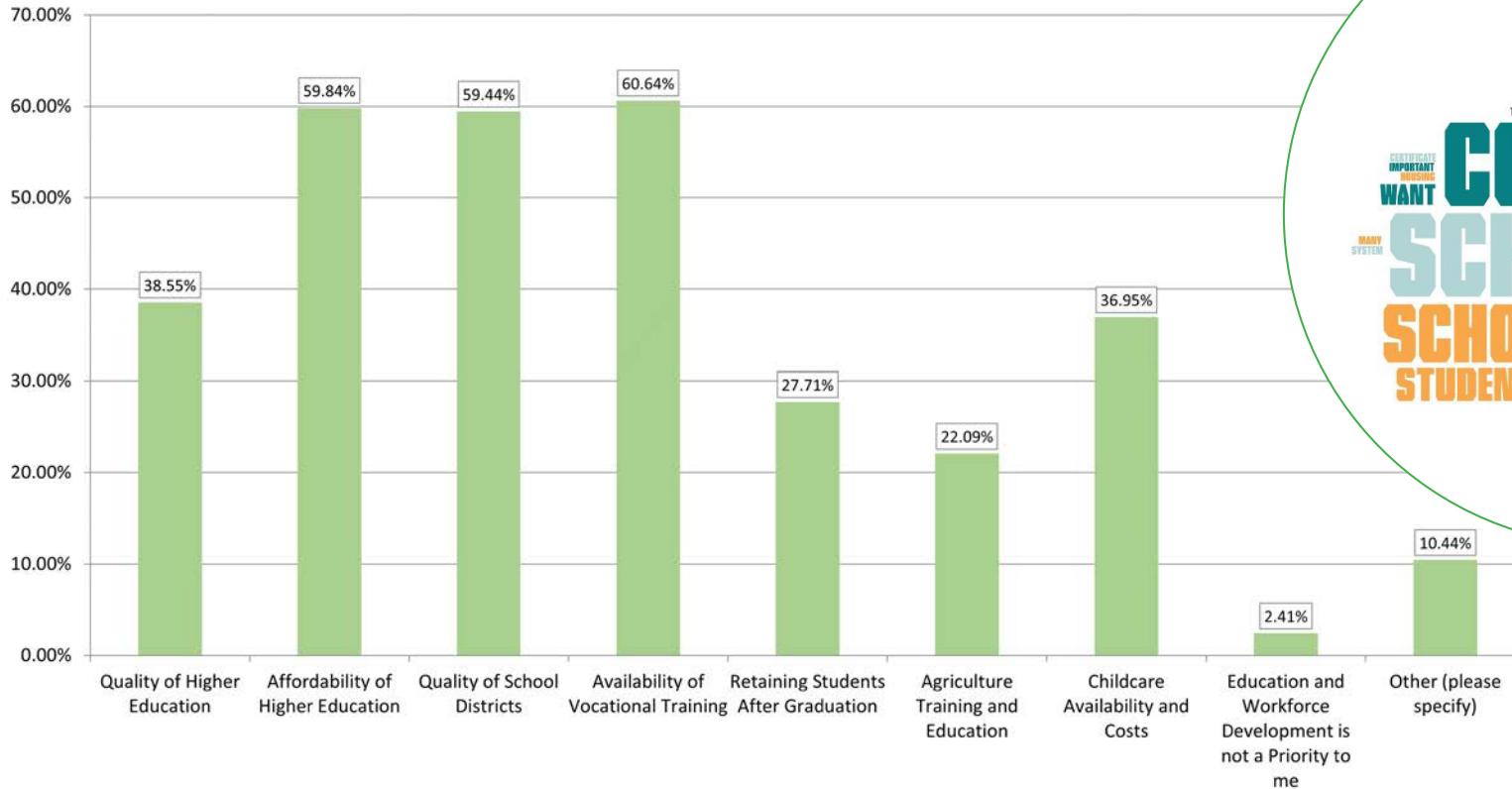
How important is education and workforce development to Central Massachusetts?



Question 3

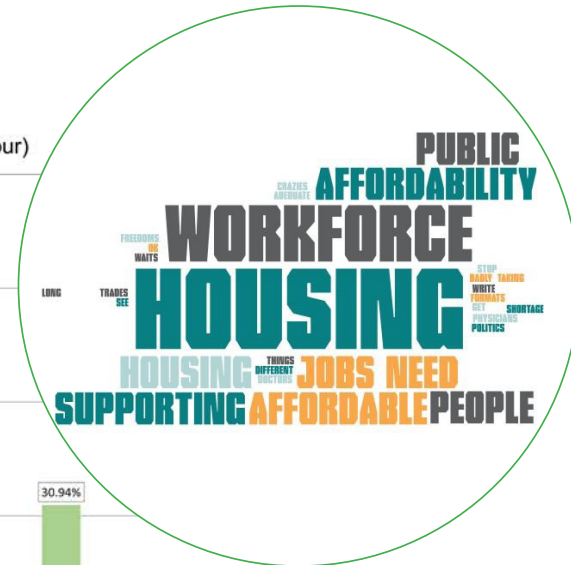
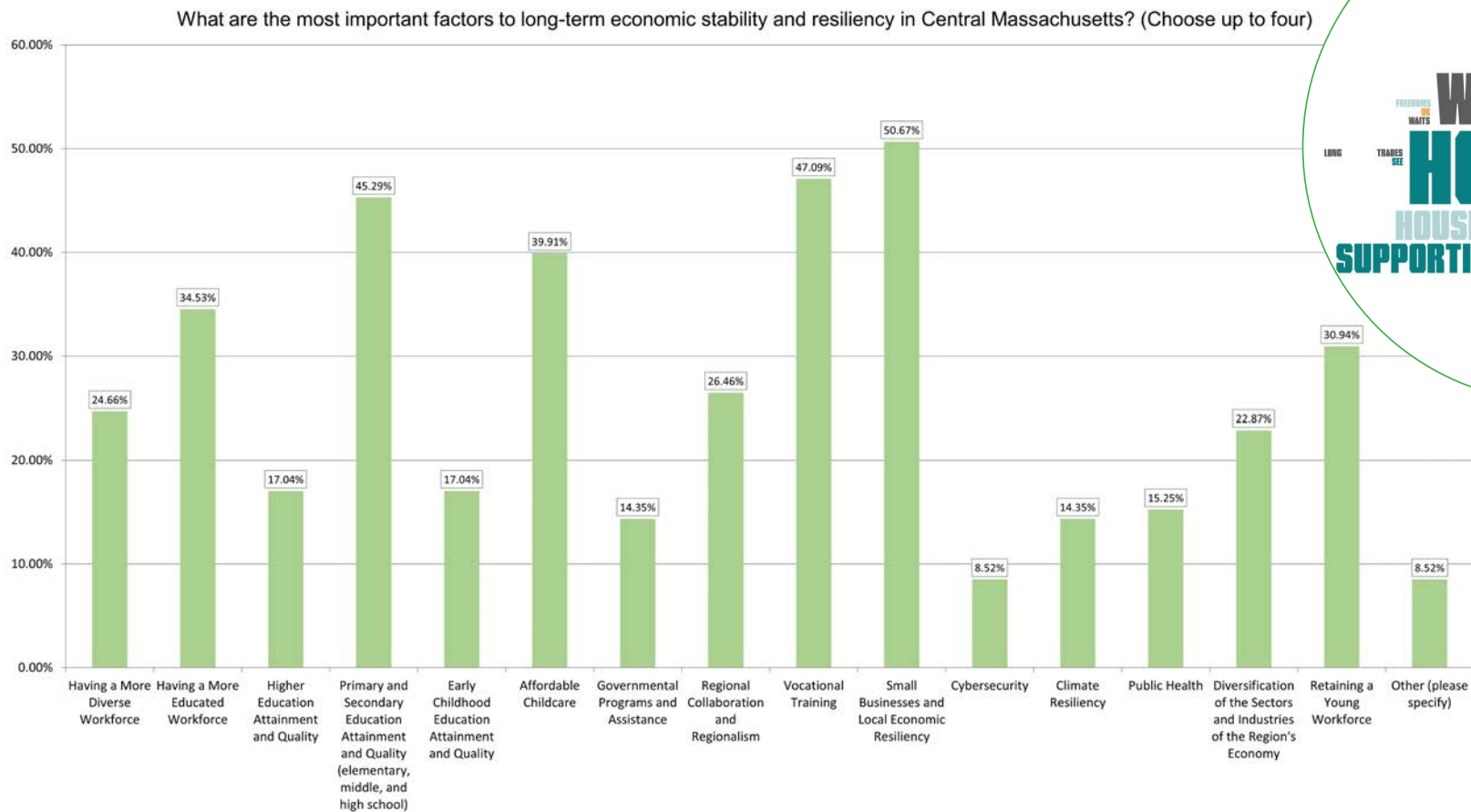
- The top-three most selected Education and Workforce Development priorities are: Availability of Vocational Training (61%), Affordability of Higher Education (60%), Quality of School Districts (59%)
- Only 2% of respondents said that “Education and Workforce Development is not a Priority to me”

What are your priorities in education and workforce development in Central Massachusetts?
(select your top three priorities)



Question 4

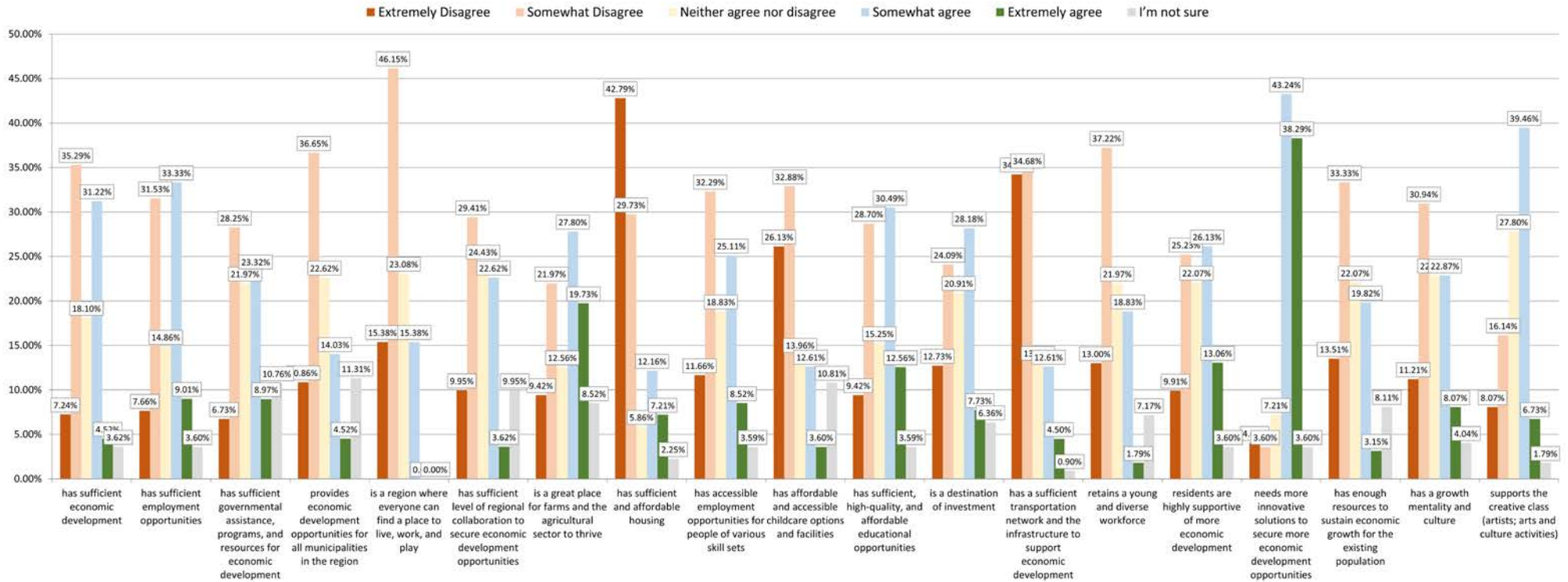
- 47% of respondents selected Vocational Training as an important factor to long-term economic stability and resiliency in Central MA, and 45.29% of respondents selected Primary and Secondary Education Attainment and Quality (elementary, middle, and high school)
- Just 17% of respondents selected Higher Education Attainment and Quality as an important factor



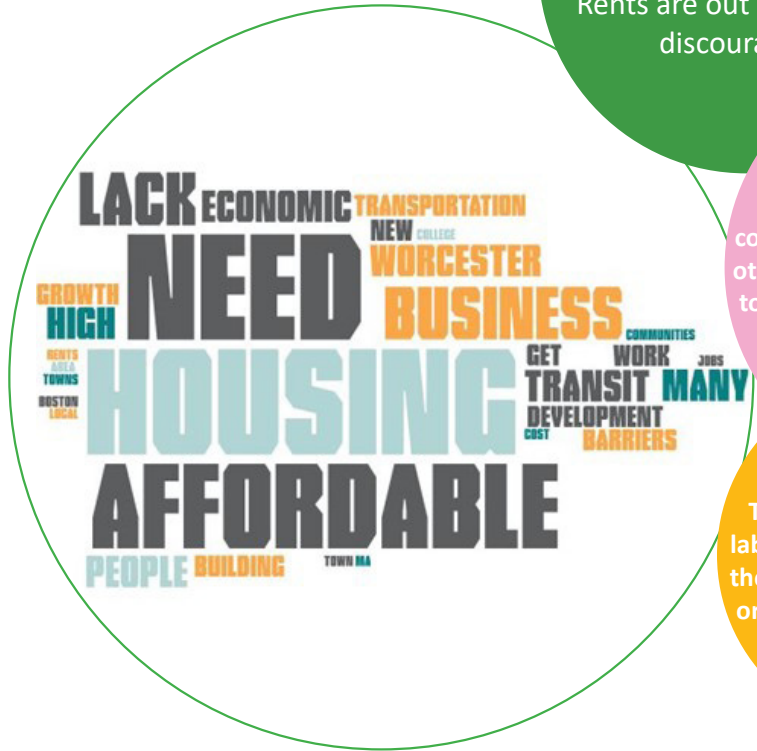
Question 5

- The three statements that respondents extremely disagreed with the most are that Central MA has: “sufficient and affordable housing”; “has a sufficient transportation network and the infrastructure to support economic development”; and “has affordable and accessible childcare options and facilities”
- The statement that respondents both somewhat and extremely agreed with the most is that the region “needs more innovative solutions to secure more economic development opportunities”

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about economic development in Central Massachusetts? Central Massachusetts:



Question 6



I'm trying to find a space for my dance studio. Towns are not easy to work with. Rents are out the roof. It's discouraging.

The definition of economic development is different for every community and some communities do it really well, while others seem to struggle. Sometimes town management and politics are the barriers for progress in this area. It's about engagement of all ages

Investments in transportation and infrastructure on the local budgetary level is weak. Too much dependence on grants. Many communities do not support affordable housing. Both are needed for economic development.

The biggest barrier is that labor and materials costs are the same as Boston but rents or return on investment are lower.

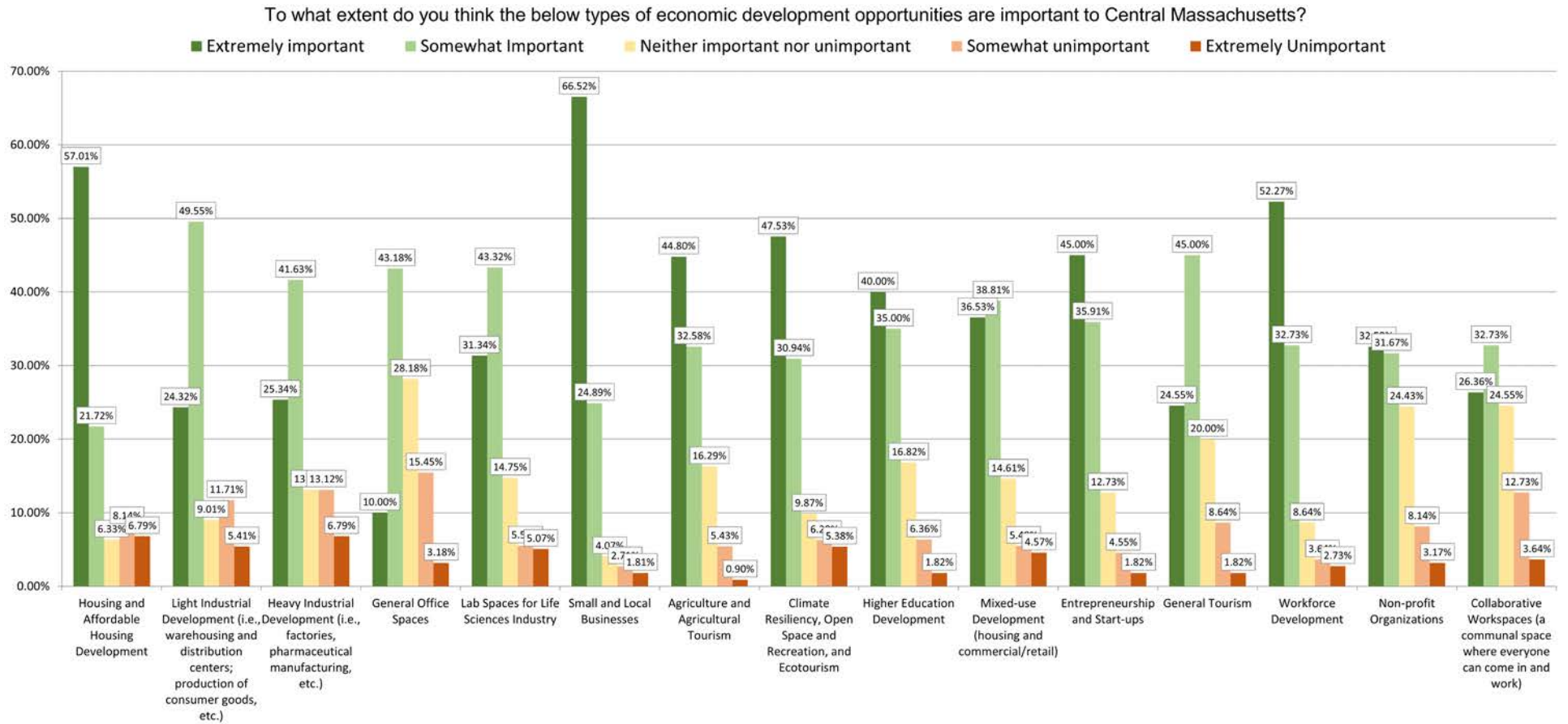
Many vacant storefronts seem to go unfilled but there's a need for business/studio space. The median income is not high enough to meet the median cost of housing, which creates barriers to the middle class - "affordable" housing means more than just Section 8.

We need to dramatically grow the size of the central MA workforce and market. High tech industries are chasing talent, particularly younger talent, and we need to be a dynamic and affordable home for the workforce. To do this, we will need our suburban and rural communities to think about housing and economic growth. We also need to improve the service of the WRTA/MBTA to allow younger people to travel back and forth from Boston & Worcester without a car.

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us about barriers to economic development in Central Massachusetts.

Question 7

- “General Office Spaces” was the only answer to receive less than 20% of responses indicating that it was an extremely important economic development opportunity
- Small and Local Businesses received the most responses as an extremely important economic development opportunity



Question 8

Please use the space below to tell us anything else you would like to tell us about economic development opportunities in Central Massachusetts.



Many current zoning bylaws support agriculture by right in many places, and I think this is overall a good thing and could be taken advantage of through more community farms and gardens across the region.

Many vacant storefronts seem to go unfilled but there's a need for business/studio space. The median income is not high enough to meet the median cost of housing, which creates barriers to the middle class - "affordable" housing means more than just Section 8.

More messaging about how cities grow and become better and what happens during that growth. Sell them economic development for all...but bring the solutions.

Bring on more opportunities... that make the area attractive for people to visit as well as live. Think open space is a huge attraction these days - hiking, pickle ball, kayaking, dog parks. More opportunities for teens to hang safely are needed.

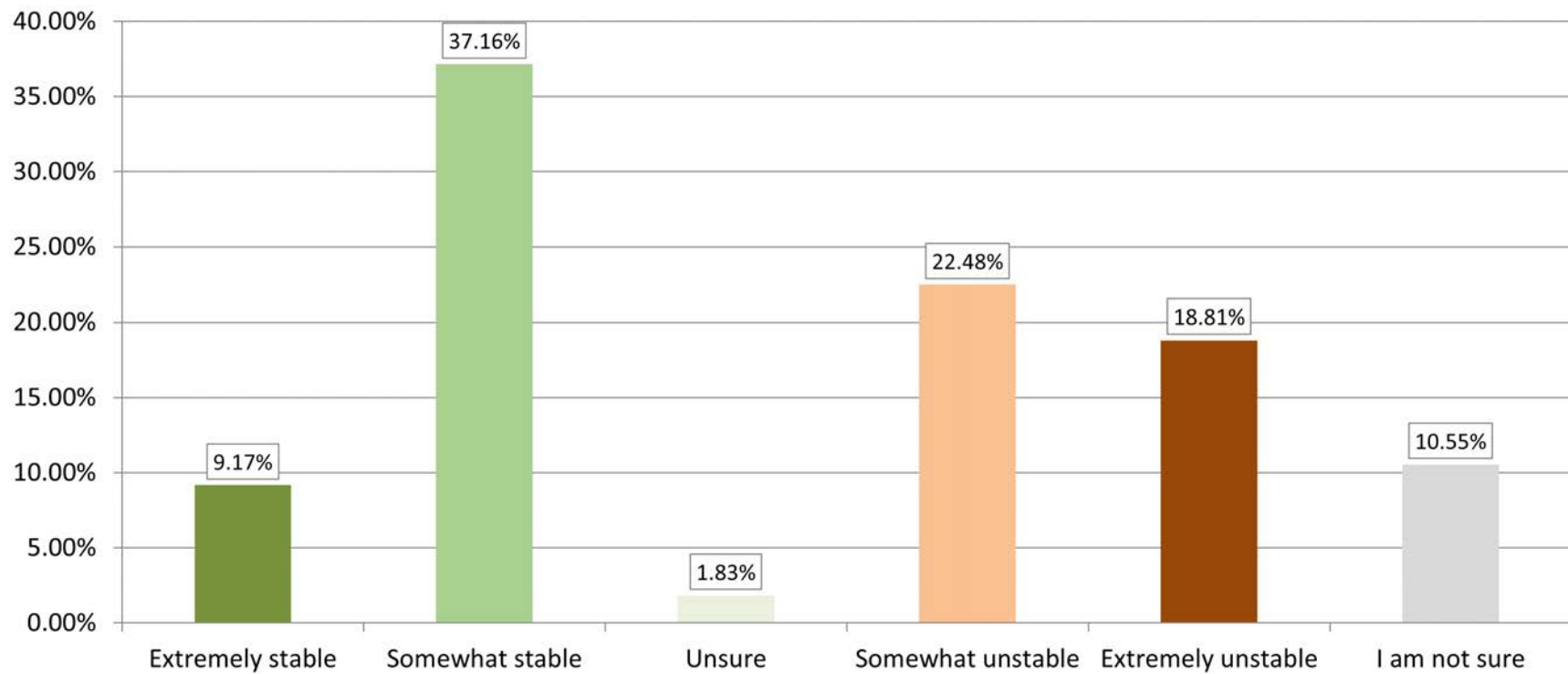
More regional collaboration and cooperation would benefit the region.

Reflect our changing society as a whole. To the many prospective new Worcesterites, high scoring schools, health-care and distinctive downtowns, neighborhoods, and amenities are what they go for. Worcester faces a terrible legacy of continuous poverty and racial issues, and a continued decentralization of economic and residential life. Capitalize on the culture that Worcester people have built by themselves. Art and music are gold. There is so much talent here. Invest in this cultural hot spot. Invest in our parks.

Question 9

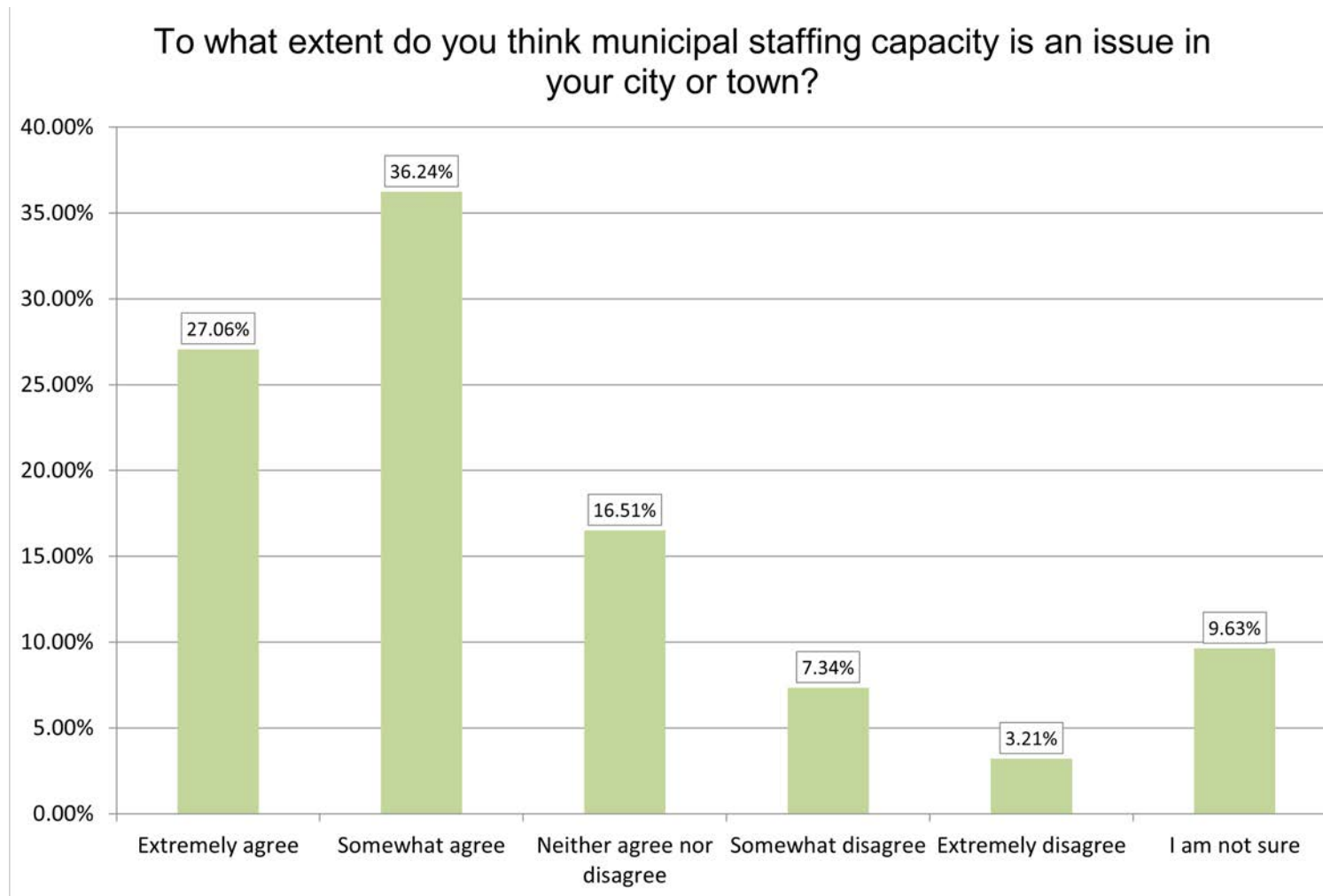


To what extent do you think your municipality is financially stable?



Question 10

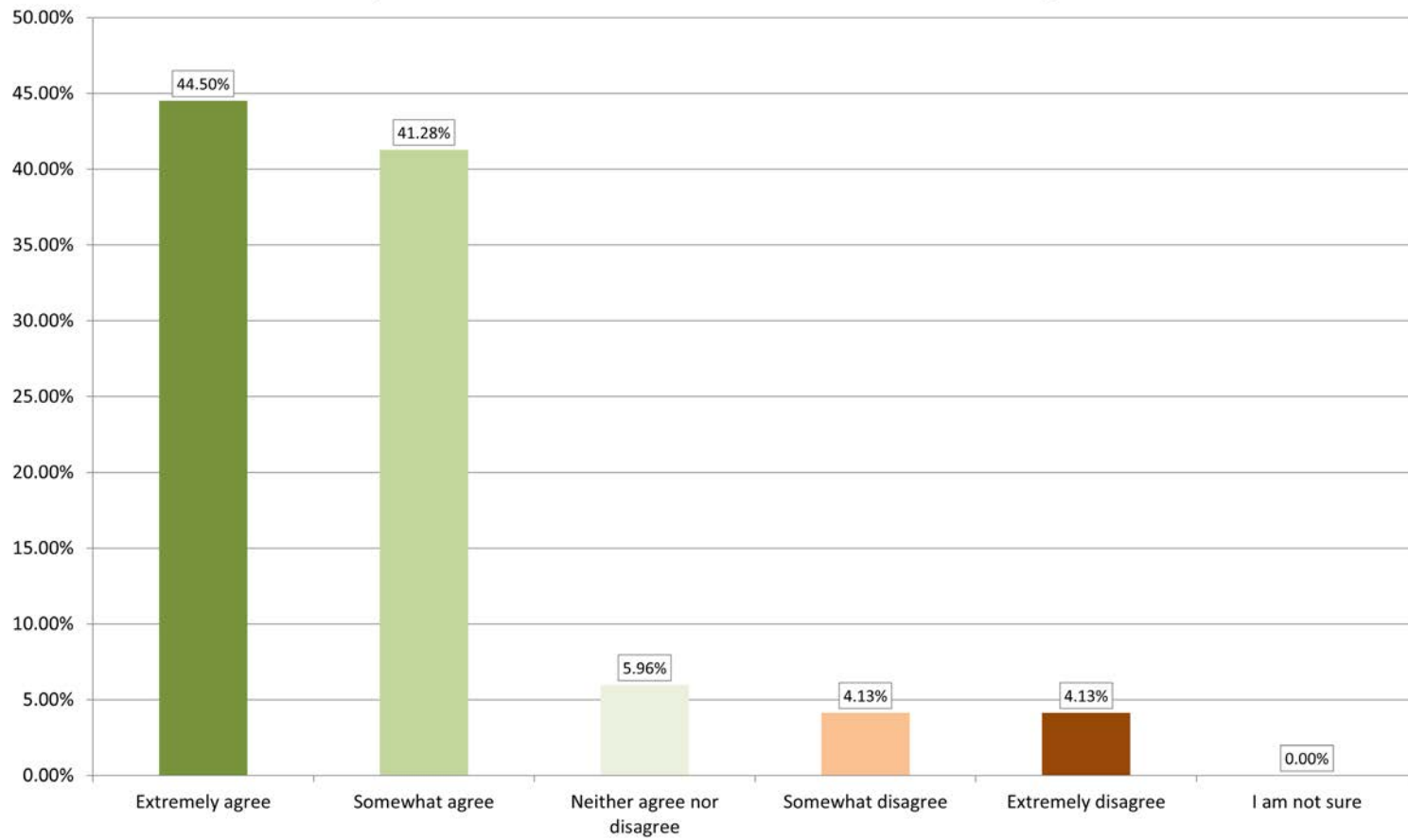
- A clear majority of respondents selected that they either extremely agree or agree that municipal staffing capacity is an issue in their town or city



Question 11

- A clear majority of respondents selected that they either extremely agree or agree that using social media and electronic services are good ways to keep citizens informed and involved in economic development

Do you think social media or other electronic services are good ways for municipalities to keep citizens informed and involved in economic development?



Question 12

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us anything else about municipal capacity and support as it relates to economic development.

The word cloud contains the following terms: MUNICIPAL, TOWNS, MUNICIPALITY, COMMUNICATION, MUNICIPALITIES, LOOK, TOWN, NEED, CITY, KEEP, HIGH, JOBS, ENOUGH, GOVERNMENT, STAFF, POSITIONS, BUDGET, LOCAL, MEDIA, SOCIAL, TAXES, CITIZENS, WANT, ECONOMIC, DEVELOPMENT, PEOPLE, RESIDENTS, and GROWTH.

It's good to keep people informed, and there should be more emphasis on how the average citizen can learn and contribute to this process.

Municipalities can't compete with the private sector in terms of salary, benefits, or potential for professional growth or opportunities to create change.

Sometimes development causes taxes to go up b/c additional companies/housing add a strain on the public services of a town where the town has to find funds to cover the increased responses to emergency calls and education costs. Taxes are really high as it is.

Many communities are short staffed and where some are trying to move to online methods, the residents need to have reliable access to wireless communication and the ability to navigate online portals.

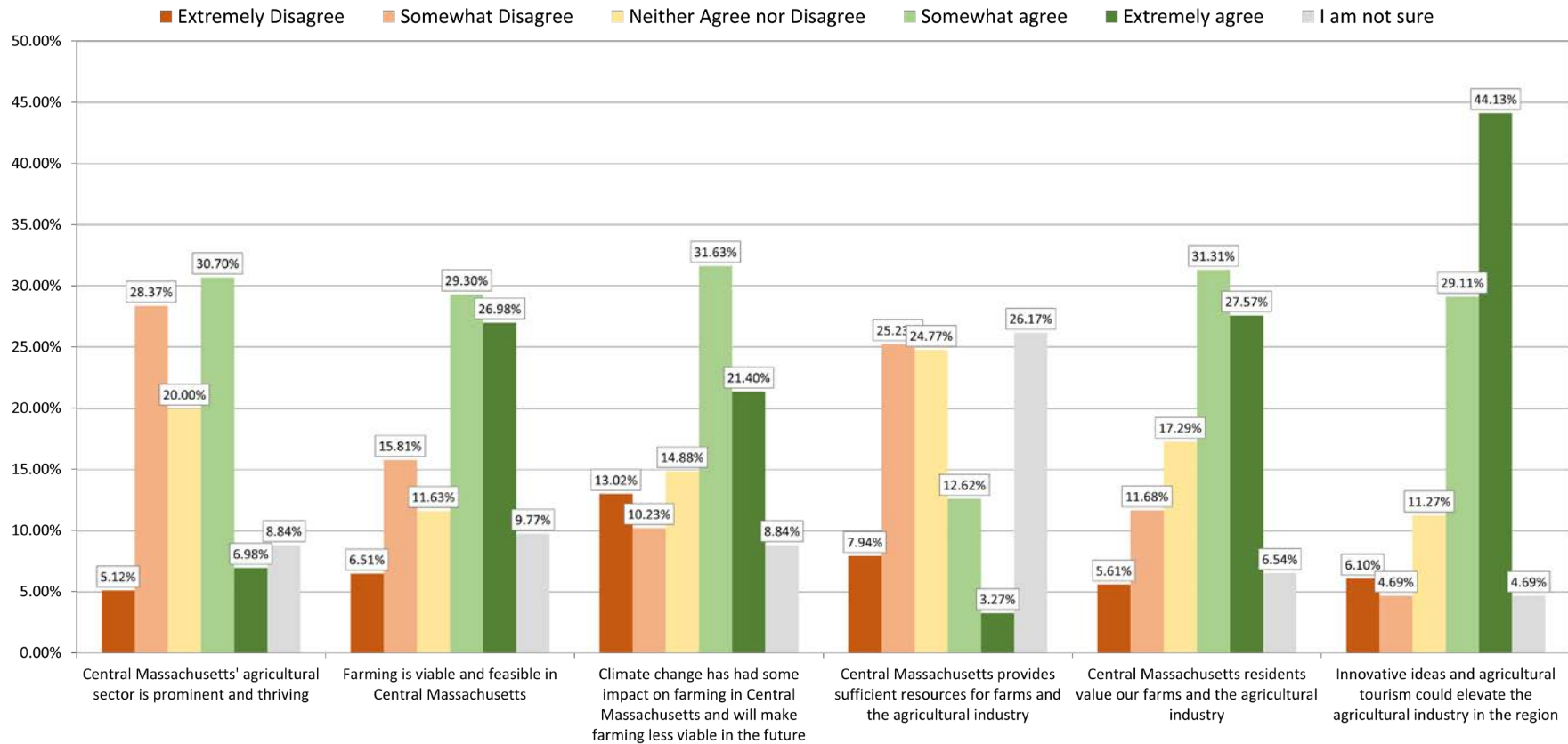
We have had multiple rounds of employee cuts over the decades. The financing of local government on local property taxes is no longer a solid foundation for building and sustaining enough human capital to manage a modern municipality. We need to re-examine municipal governmental funding or we will always be at a loss for really achieving long term success.

I think towns need to be more vocal to its residence. Not enough social media, and education to the people of the municipalities.

Question 13

- Over 33% of respondents either extremely disagreed or disagreed that “Central Massachusetts’ agricultural sector is prominent and thriving”
- Over 33% of respondents either extremely disagreed or disagreed that Central Massachusetts provides sufficient resources for farms and the agricultural industry
- 44% of respondents indicated that they extremely agree that “Innovative ideas and agricultural tourism could elevate the agricultural industry in the region

To what extent do you agree with the below statements?



Question 14

What are some ways to support the agriculture industry in Central Massachusetts?



Question 15

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about agriculture in Central Massachusetts.



Stress the importance of local farms providing local food which keeps the carbon footprint down from importing food. Have towns promote a farm day. Give farmers tax relief.

Creating new small community gardens and farms are likely more viable in the future than creating new large-scale farming operations in the region, but even smaller farms could go a long way in helping with regional food security if enough resources are put into them and if the food they produce is sold at stores and supermarkets in addition to farmer's markets.

More and more local farming and hobby farming are not valued- people have more and more restrictions on what they would like to do even in "right to farm" towns.

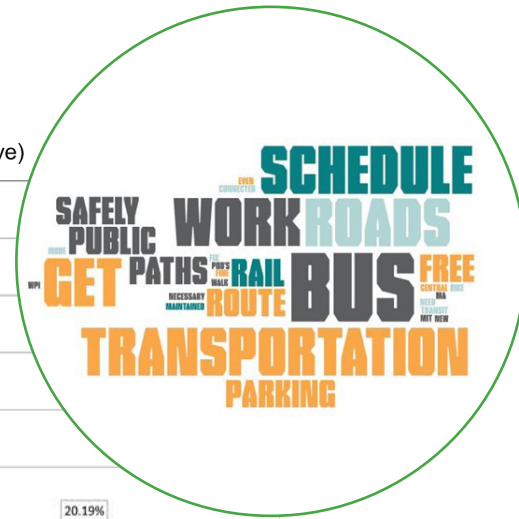
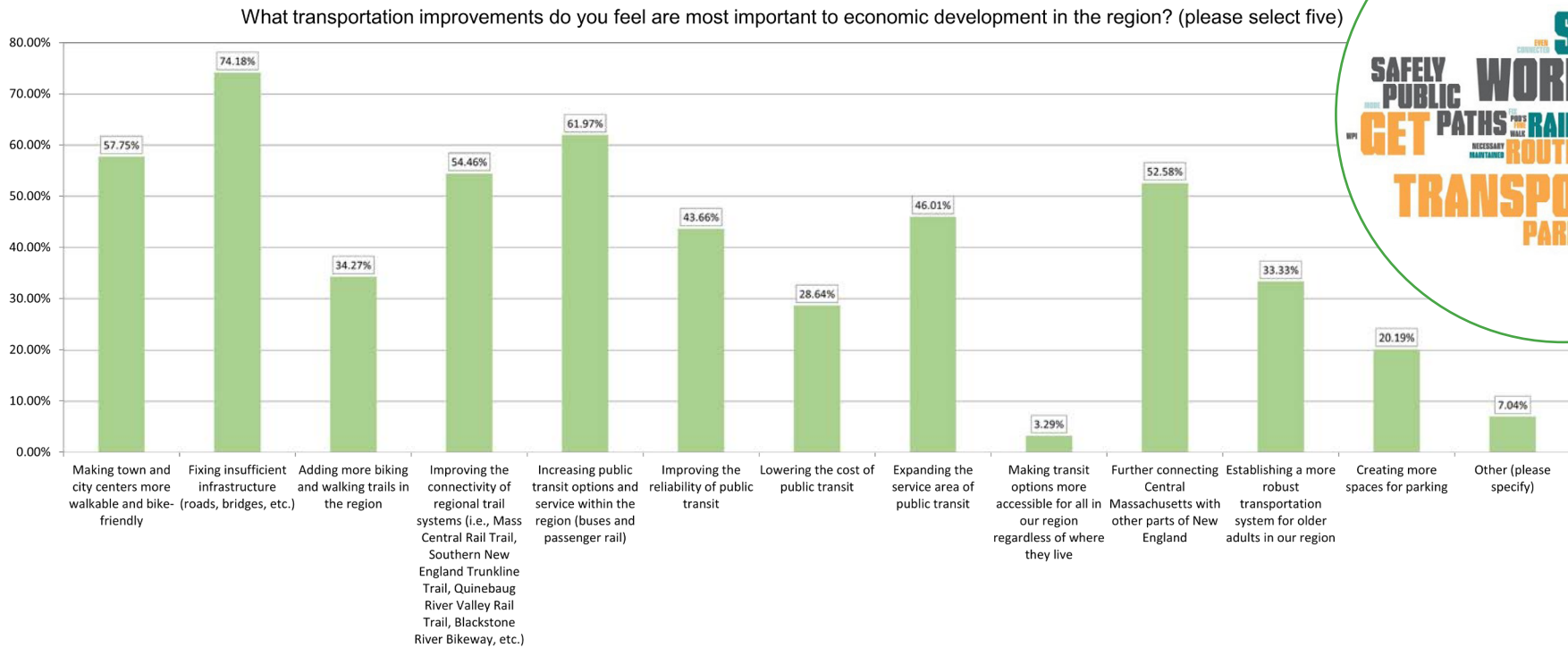
New England stone walls resonate with anyone from here. Those were built for farmers. Most of those farms were lost. We should protect the viable farms we have, for they essentially are the backbone of New England. On a crisp fall day, where do you want to be?

Many small communities seem to identify with their agricultural history even though they've long ago moved on. Would be nice to refocus on the future, not the past.

Overall I believe the affordability to maintain agriculture in Central Mass is an issue. Farms have had to be innovative to lean on tourism to remain viable. The seasonality of the region impacts overall sustainability along with a generation aging out of the industry.

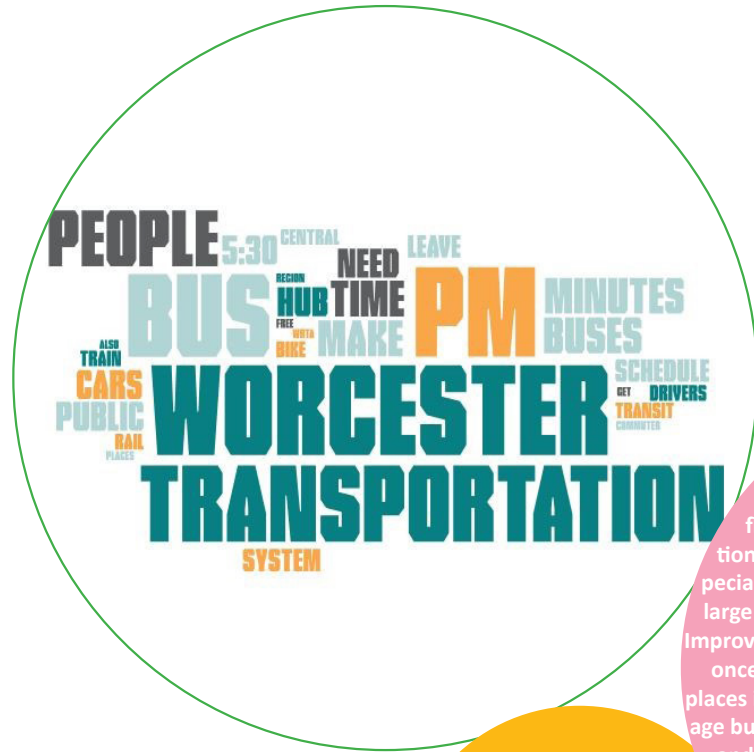
Question 16

- About 75% of respondents responded that fixing insufficient infrastructure is the most important transportation improvement, followed by increasing transit options and making town centers more walkable.
- Increasing rail connectivity within Massachusetts and New England have been deemed important at around 50%.



Question 17

Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about transportation in Central Massachusetts.



The WRTA is not an efficient method for travelling in Worcester. We need a simpler and more efficient transit system that allows people to travel without cars.

We need a comprehensive and reliable transit system if Greater Worcester is going to function as a metropolitan area. Right now the WRTA isn't getting the job done. They can't attract and retain drivers because they pay below market rate. They can't sustain the schedule or the routes without the drivers. Workers can't rely on transit as a system as a result.

People fear taking the bus. It is also completely unreliable, as are flights from ORH to JFK. Constant cancellations. Improving transportation is important, especially for young people and aging people and the large population of Worcester people without cars. Improvements are a must and a creative bus campaign once improvements are made is a must. Establish places in the city center for people to visit and encourage bus riding. Kids love it. Appeal to college students and populate the buses with everyday people. It will take a while to make that happen, so maybe start by having free transportation on weekends and collaborating with events to advertise availability.

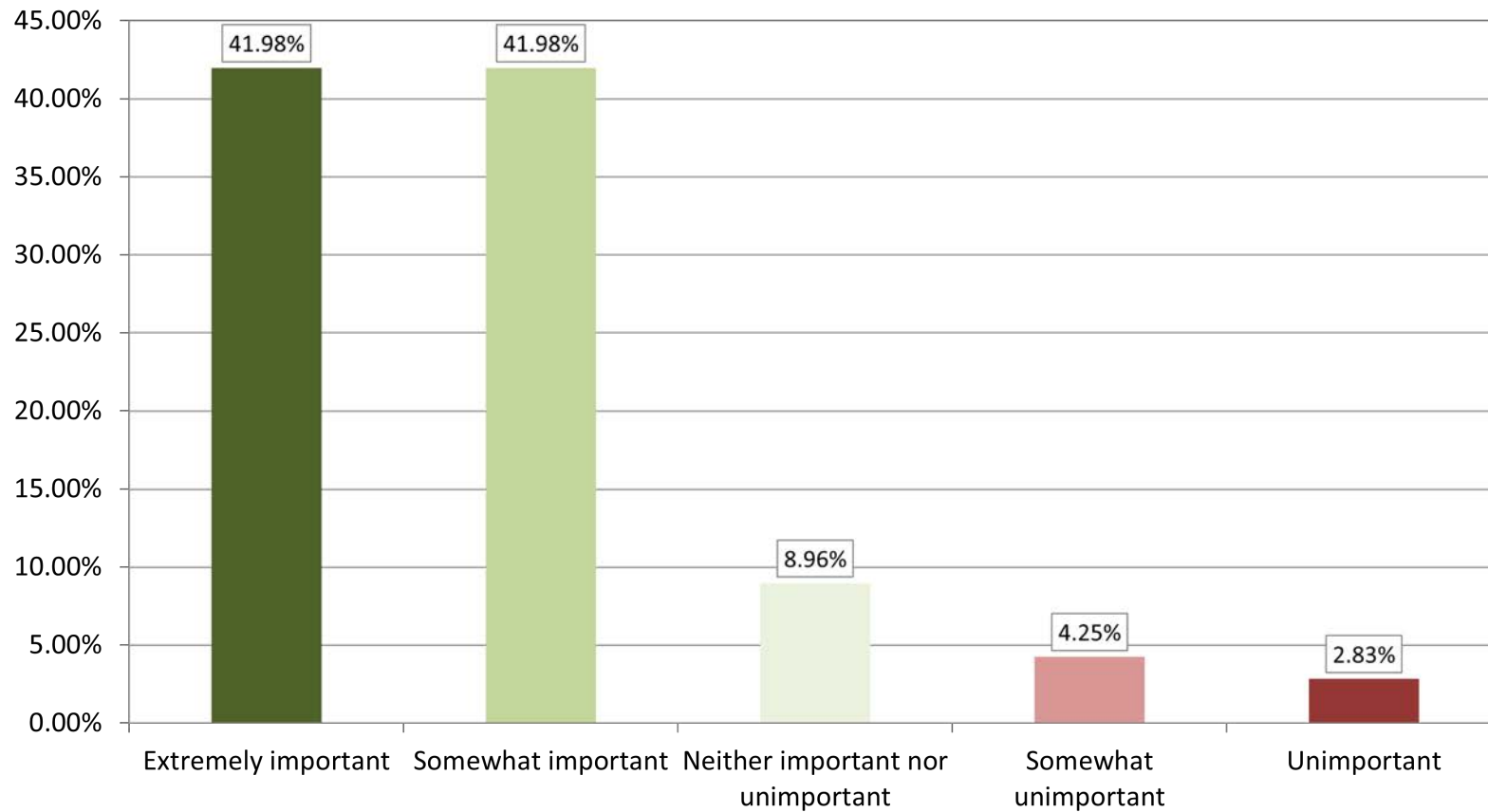
Car culture is still dominant. Hard to imagine that changing. So how can we make that experience better in the near/mid-term?

The WRTA bus system could substantially improve the frequency of its service, should make sure that it serves places where residents have the highest need for public transportation, and should keep its buses fare-free in order to ensure that people with lower incomes can equitably access transportation. In the long-term, light rail within Worcester and commuter rail outside of Worcester in the region should be built to reduce car-dependency and increase public transportation equity. Also, exploring bike/walking paths that are not shared by cars could help increase mobility for people who think it is too dangerous to bike alongside cars.

Question 18



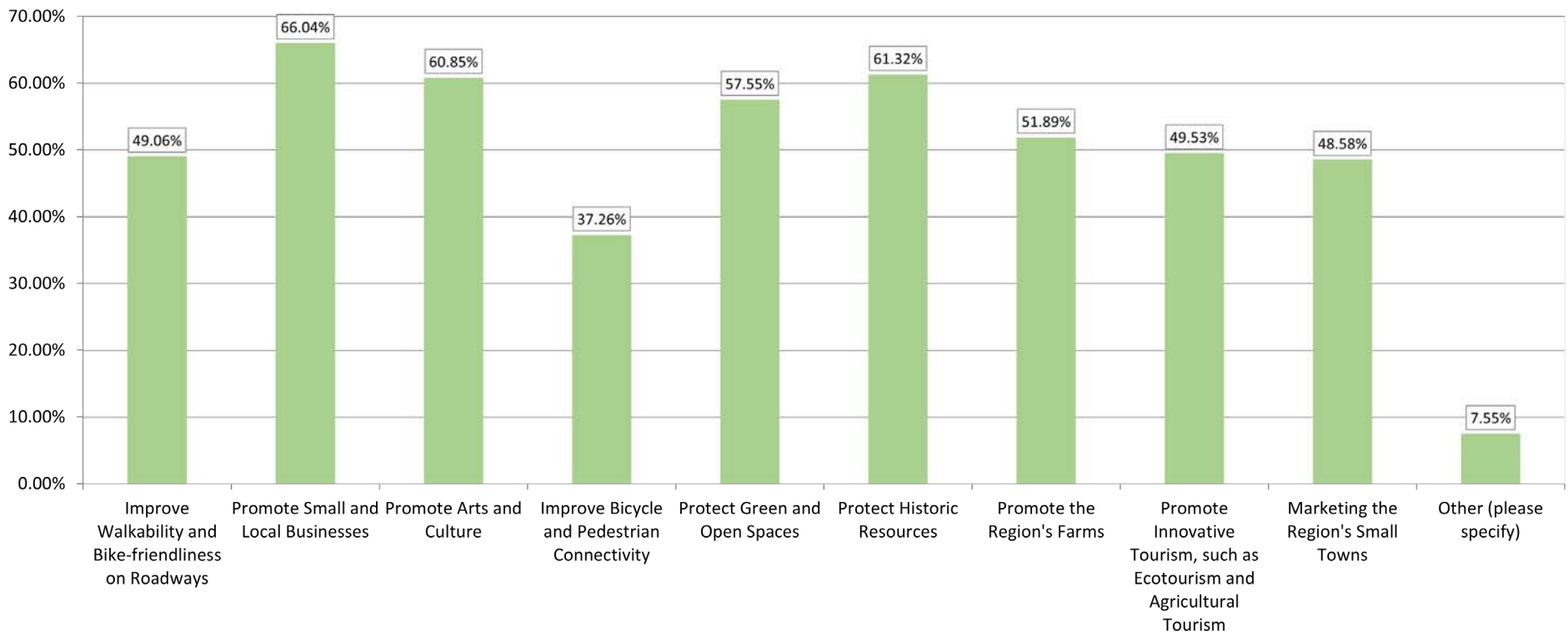
How important is tourism and recreation to economic development in Central Massachusetts?



Question 19

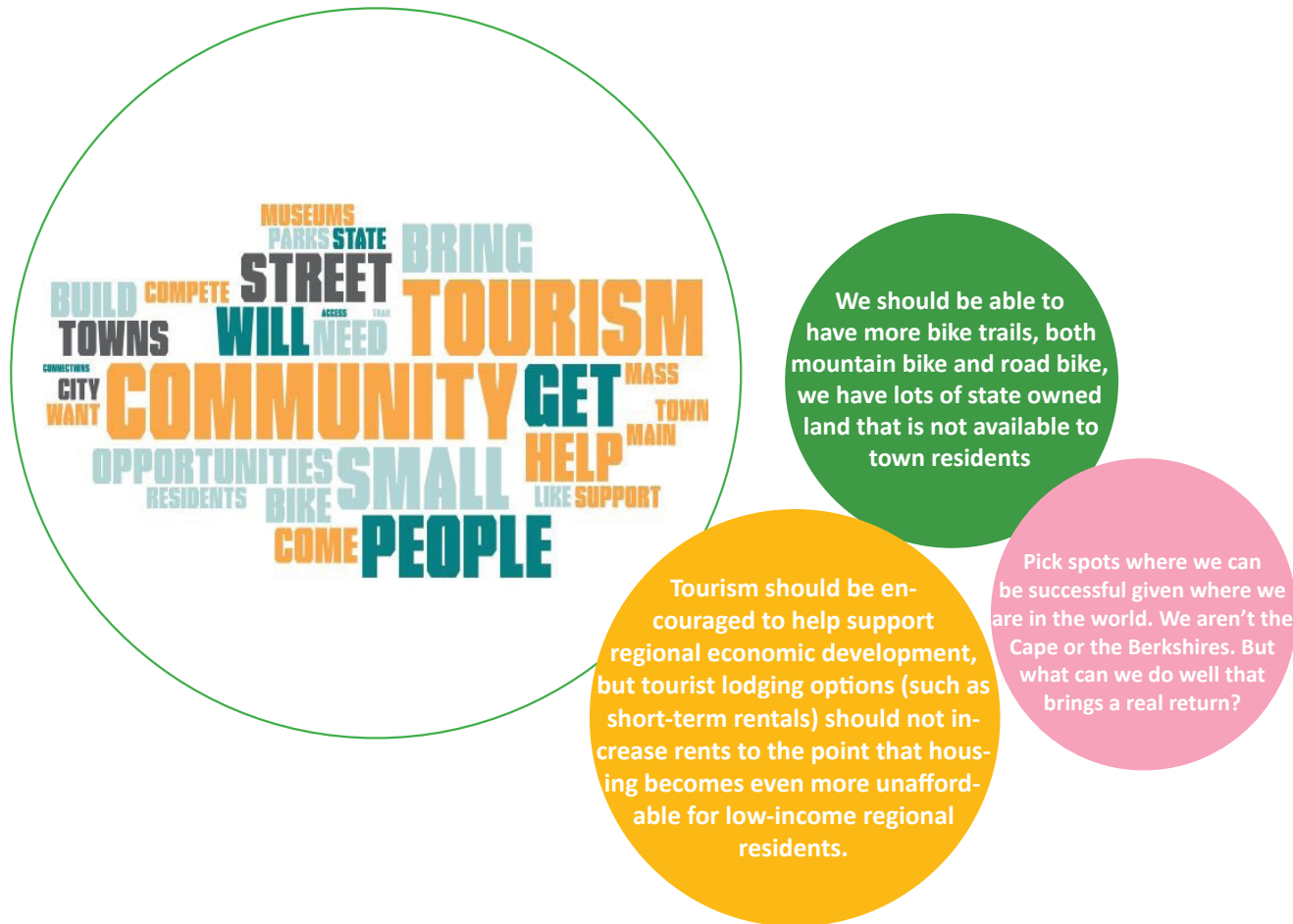
- Respondents value promoting small and local businesses and protecting historic resources in the region, followed by promoting arts and culture and protecting green and open spaces.

What are some action items for promoting tourism and recreation?



Question 20

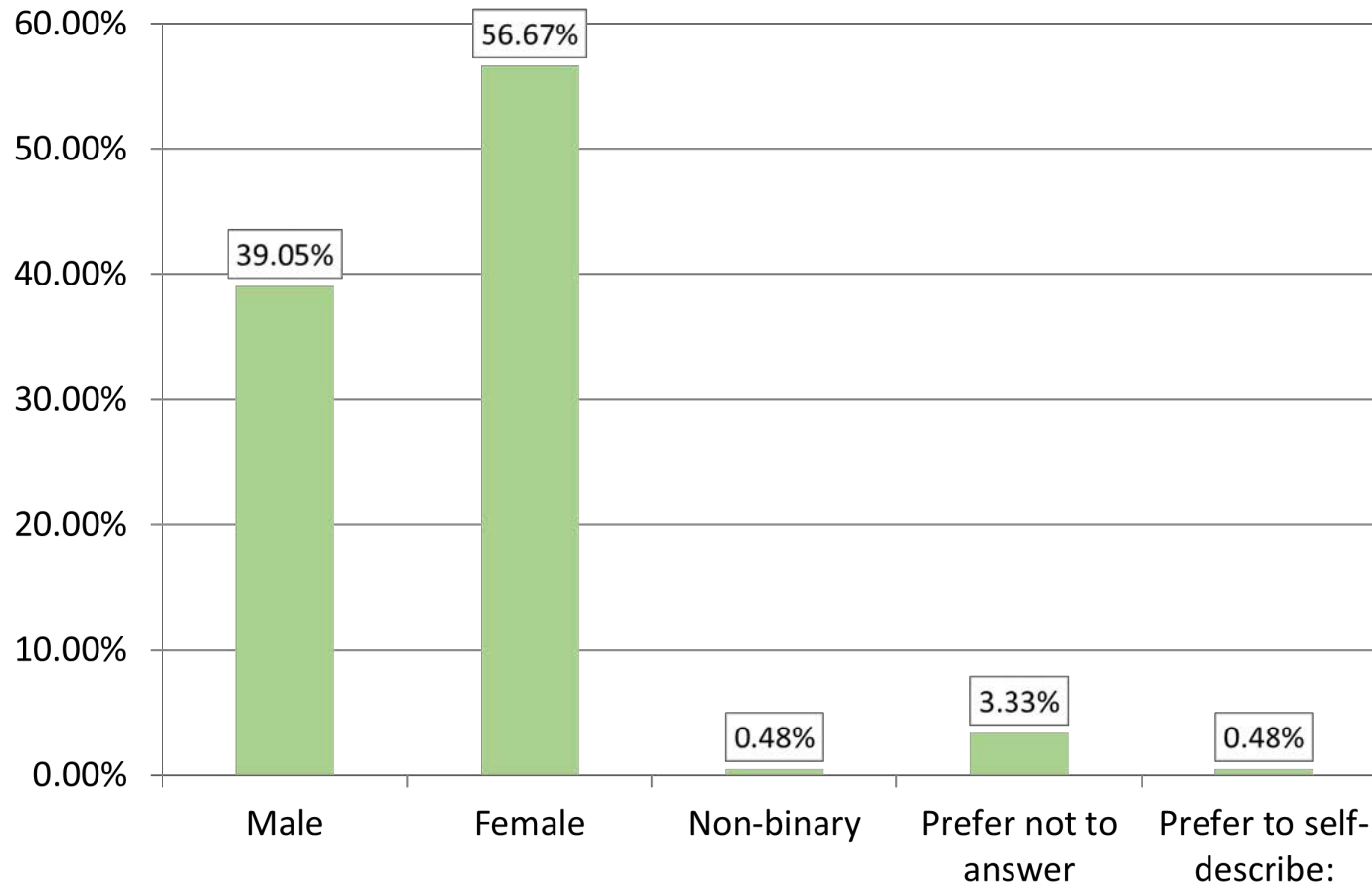
Please feel free to use the space below to tell us more about recreation and tourism in Central Massachusetts.



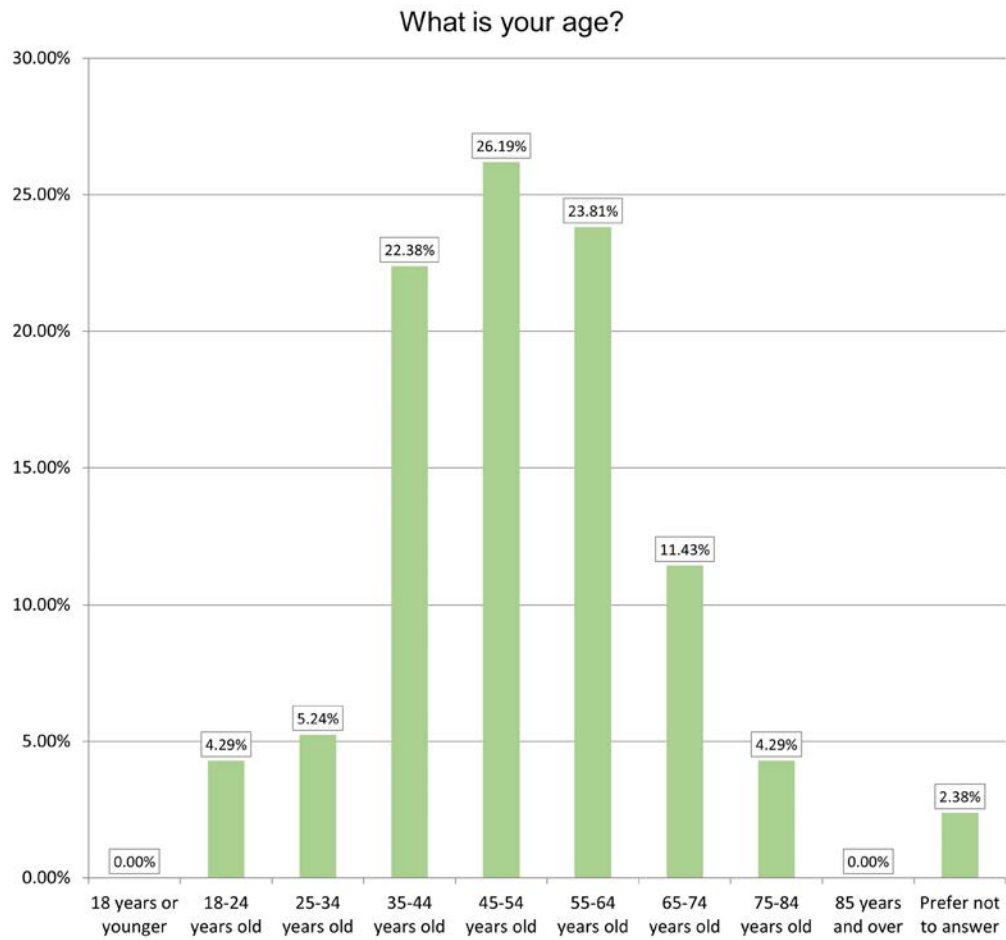
Question 21



What is your gender?



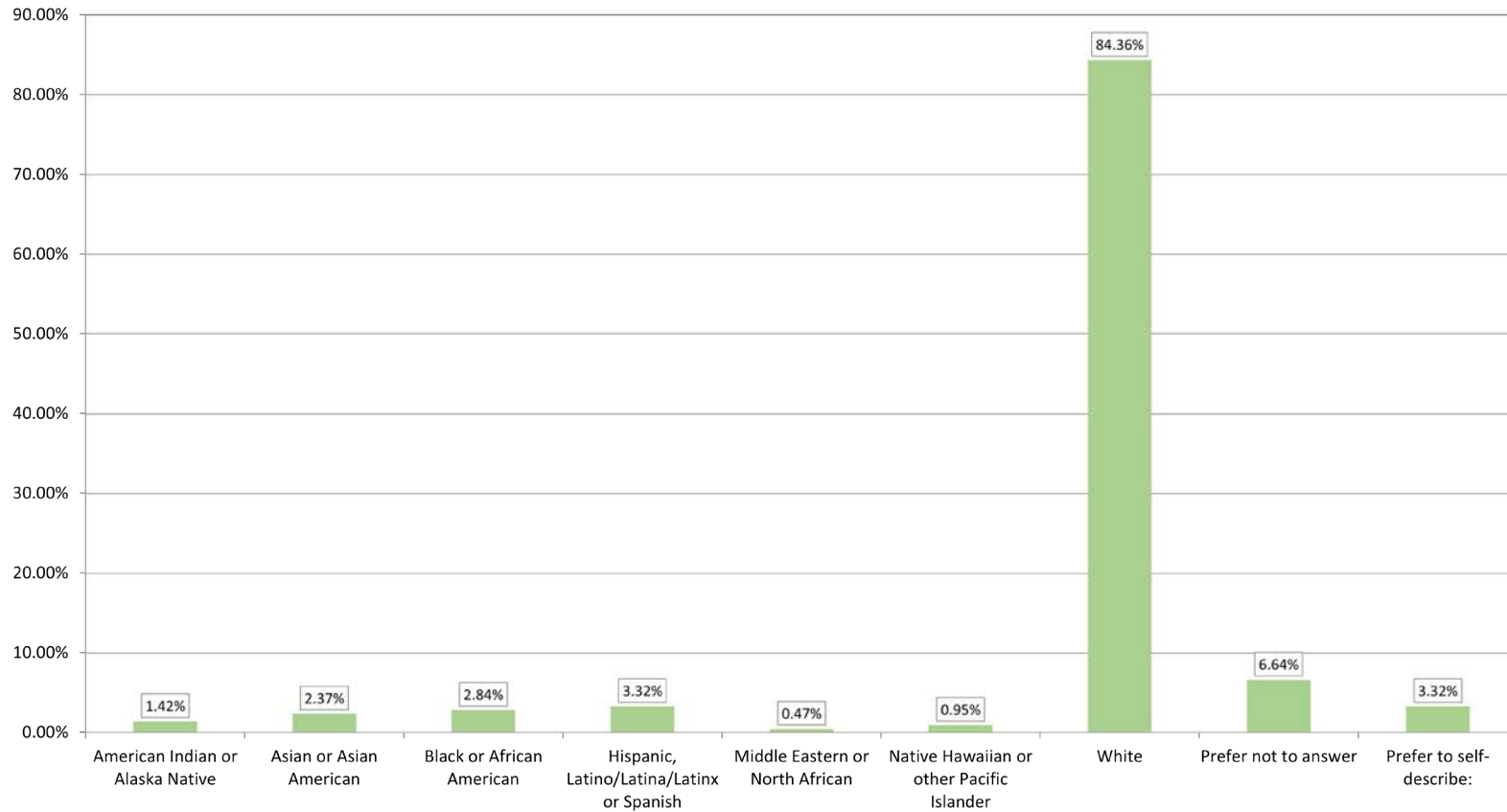
Question 22



Question 23



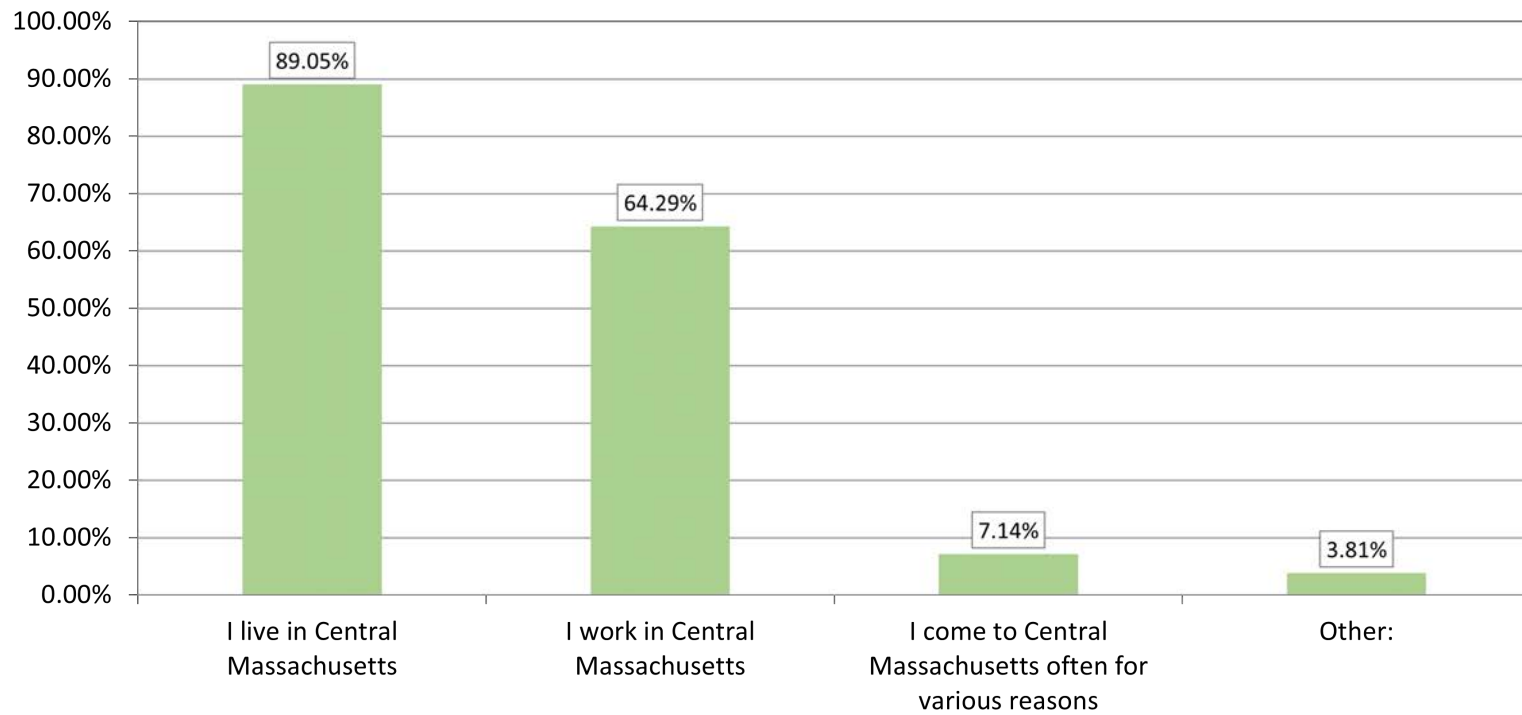
How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply)



Question 24

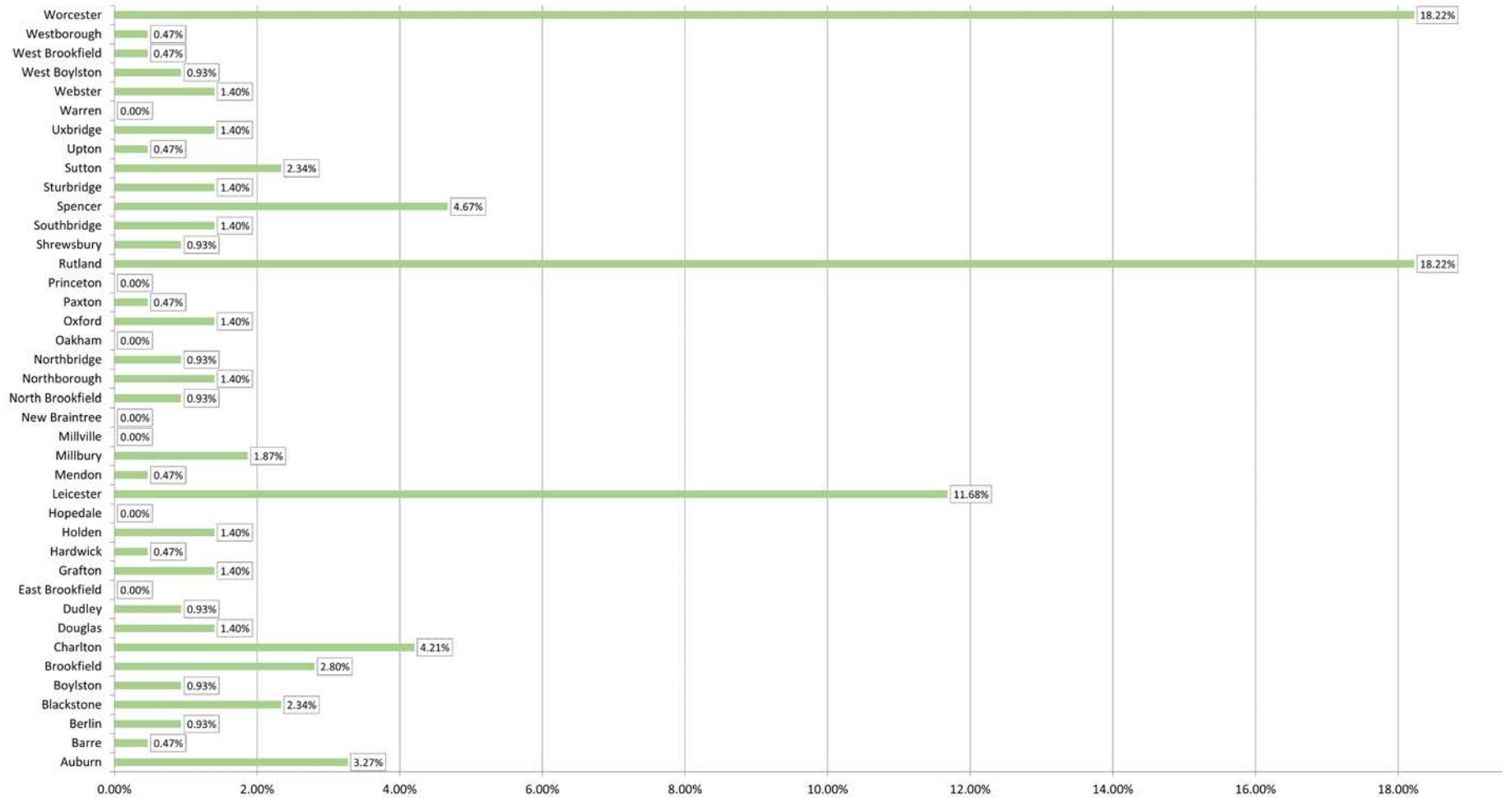


In what way(s) are you affiliated with Central Massachusetts?
(select all that apply)



Question 25

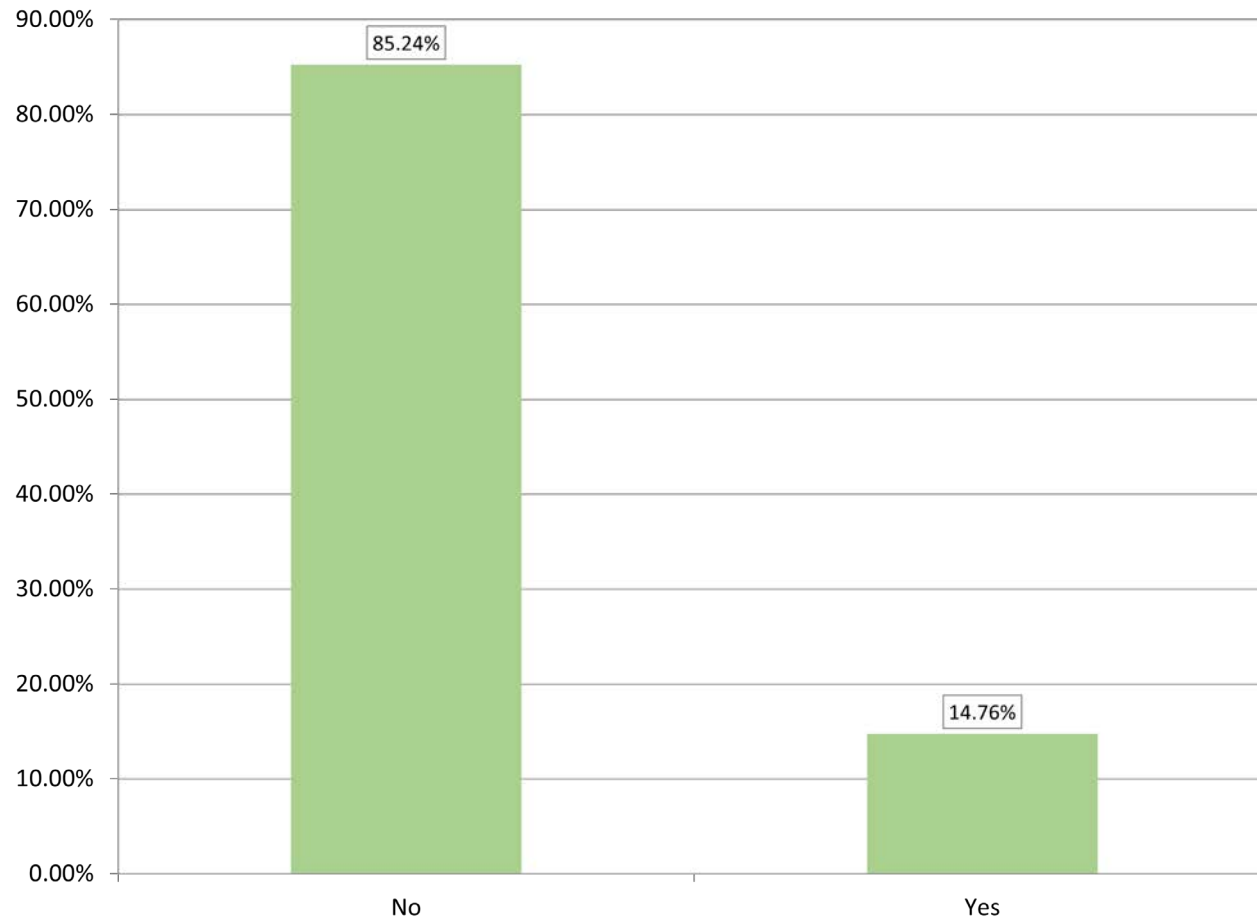
What town do you live in?



Question 27



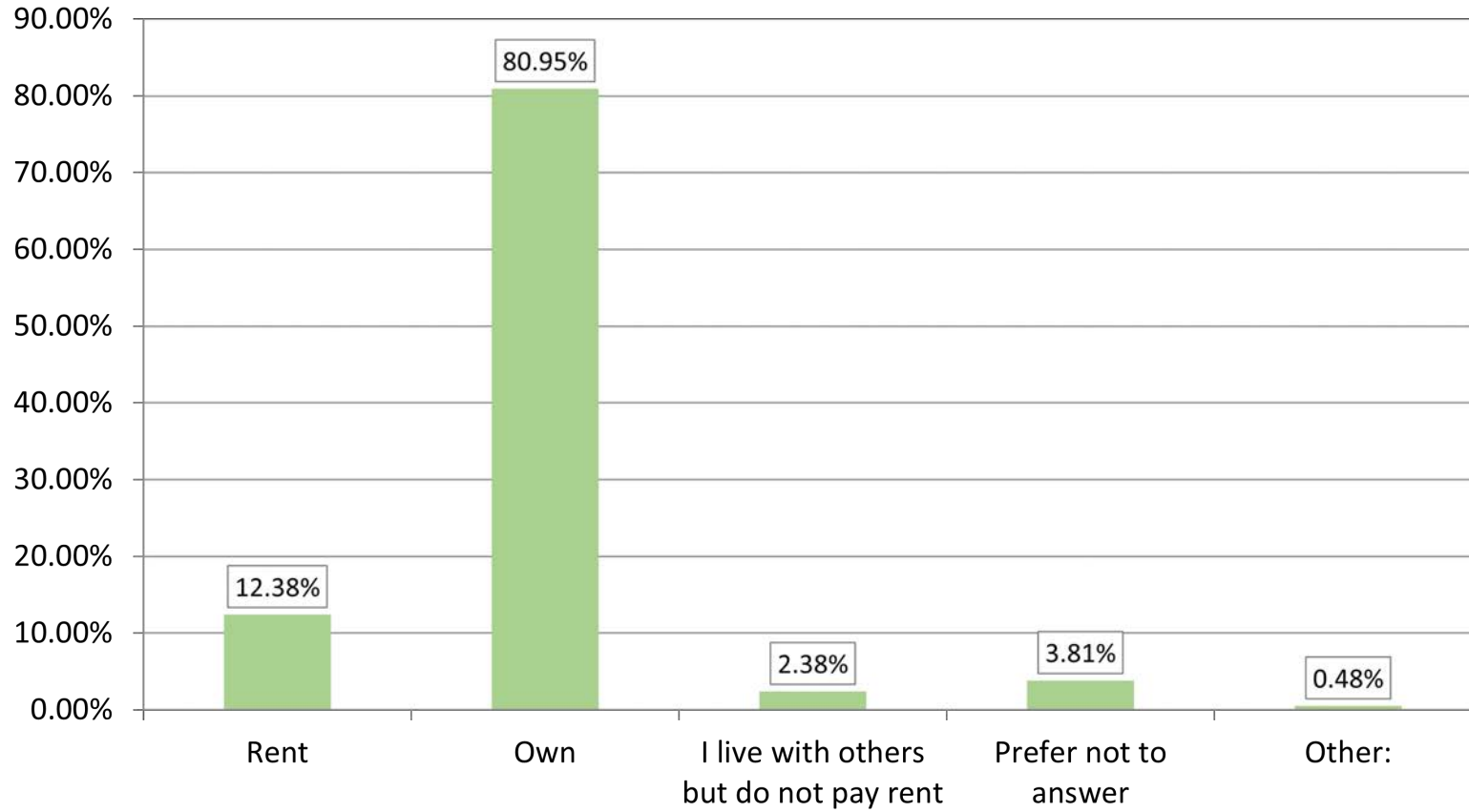
Are you a business owner in Central Massachusetts?



Question 28



Do you rent or own your home?



Question 29

Please use the space below to leave any additional comments.



I am a 17-year member of the Planning Board and will be 70 years old in May. I'm not running for re-election after our May 1 town election. I hope in the future younger residents will be willing to put the time in to achieve some of these goals.

I think housing, affordability and access is the number one most pressing issue right now. We are going to lose high-quality people who cannot afford to be here.

There is so much potential for economic development. We have to focus on the roots of the problem and invest in creating a viable lifestyle here for young people. The supporters of culture across all sectors are aging out. Young people must find a place here or the cultural areas will go unsupported. Every organization we work with is petrified of the future because their benefactors are aging out and they need to connect to young people. Worcester must connect with young people and support the creative and intellectual capital that abounds. These are kids with deep pockets that spend their time and money in Boston and New York too while they are at school in Worcester. City pride goes a long way. Connect with the people who want to spend time and money here.

Many farms are sold off and become housing developments. The rural character in MA is dwindling. Farms will become museums or a time gone past if we don't promote our local farms.

Now is Worcester's time for growth. Let's go.

CEDS Interviews and Workshops

- Governments and Institutions
- Non-profit Organizations
- Other stakeholders and individuals





80+ Individuals
28 Towns



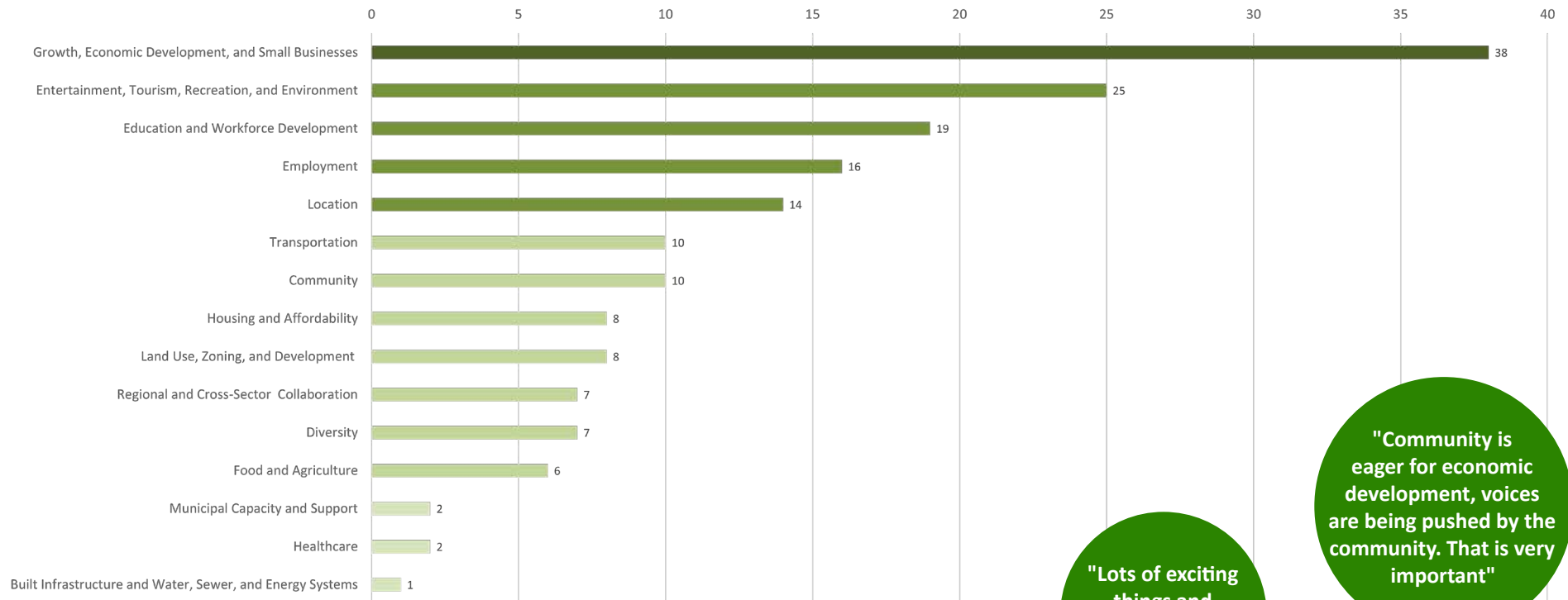
160+ Individuals
8 Organizations



40+ Individuals
15+ institutions

CEDS Interviews and Workshops

Number of CEDS Public Comment Tags by Category: Strengths



- The biggest strengths in the CMRPC region stakeholders identified in the SWOT analysis were growth, economic development, employment, and small businesses, entertainment, tourism, recreation, and environment, and education and workforce development.
- Its location approximately in the center of Massachusetts and New England and Worcester being an inland city that is still well-connected to other cities
- Many opportunities for new economic development in the region, especially in the biotech/life sciences industry
- Strong spirit of collaboration in the region and there being many citizens very active business, government, and projects improving social welfare and economic opportunity
- Strong educational system in the region, especially for higher education

"Lots of exciting things and development are happening in Worcester. "

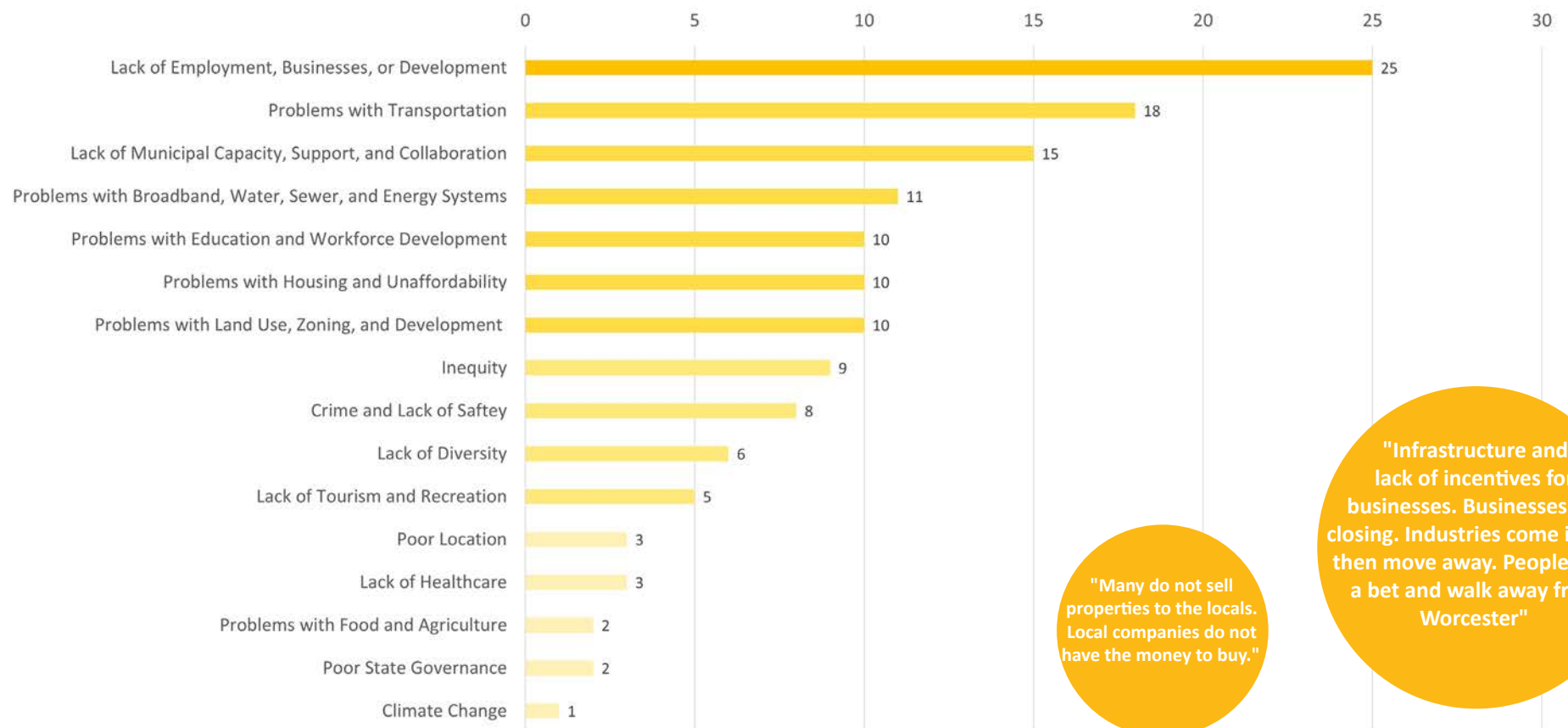
"Community is eager for economic development, voices are being pushed by the community. That is very important"

"Food production and services. Breweries. Nice restaurants to go to."

"Good balance between access to capital intensive things and relatively reasonable prices. Access to labor force"

CEDS Interviews and Workshops

Number of CEDS Public Comment Tags by Category: Weaknesses



- The biggest weaknesses in the CMRPC region stakeholders identified in the SWOT analysis were lack of employment, businesses, and development, problems with transportation, and lack of municipal capacity, support, and collaboration.
- The region's transportation network, especially public transit
- Lack of equitable inclusion of people from historically-marginalized backgrounds, especially in leadership roles
- Small businesses facing challenges with high costs of operation, driven by both the market and the state, and competition from larger businesses
- Regional infrastructure systems and the regional housing stock needing improvement
- Rising unaffordability of both housing and business operations
- A lack of municipal capacity to address pressing regional needs

"Many do not sell properties to the locals. Local companies do not have the money to buy."

"Infrastructure and lack of incentives for businesses. Businesses are closing. Industries come in and then move away. People take a bet and walk away from Worcester"

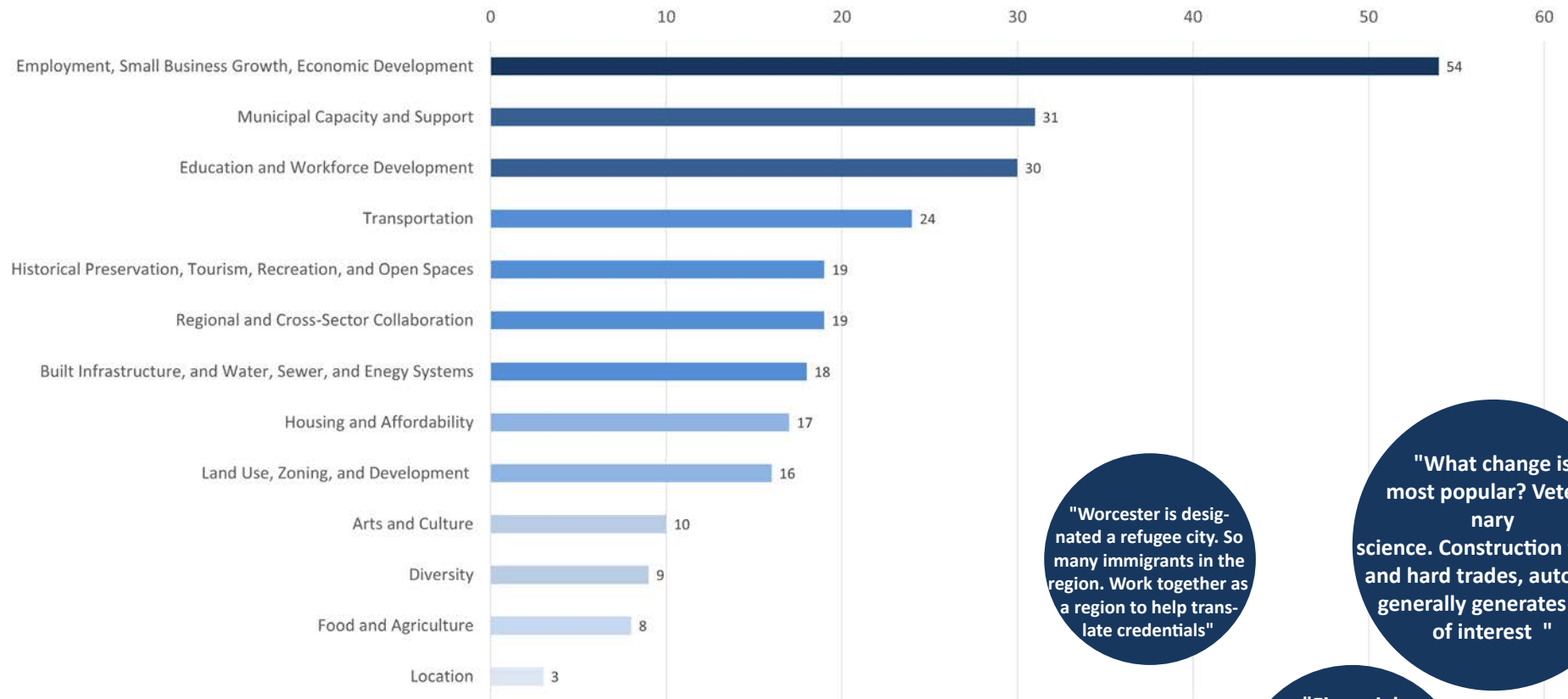
"Difficult getting people with high credential individuals to get position"

"Very hard to attract businesses to small towns. Businesses go to clusters."

"The economics of how we get our spaces built. Cost to build too high in gateway cities."

CEDS Interviews and Workshops

Number of CEDS Public Comment Tags by Category: Opportunities



- The biggest opportunities in the CMRPC region stakeholders identified in the SWOT analysis were employment, small business growth, and economic development, municipal capacity and support, and education and workforce development.
- Increased workforce development from stronger trade schools, universities, and businesses
- Locally-based entrepreneurship and start-ups
- The importance of having ambitious and wide-ranging goals in future planning and implementation efforts
- Rehabilitating buildings to support affordable housing and small business development.
- Having a more well-connected region through trail systems and other forms of transportation.
- Being able to capitalize on the beautiful landscapes of the region and the potential of agriculture.
- Improving equity in the region and continuing to be welcoming to and supported by diverse groups of both immigrants and long-time residents

"Worcester is designated a refugee city. So many immigrants in the region. Work together as a region to help translate credentials"

"What change is most popular? Veterinary science. Construction trades and hard trades, auto tech generally generates lots of interest "

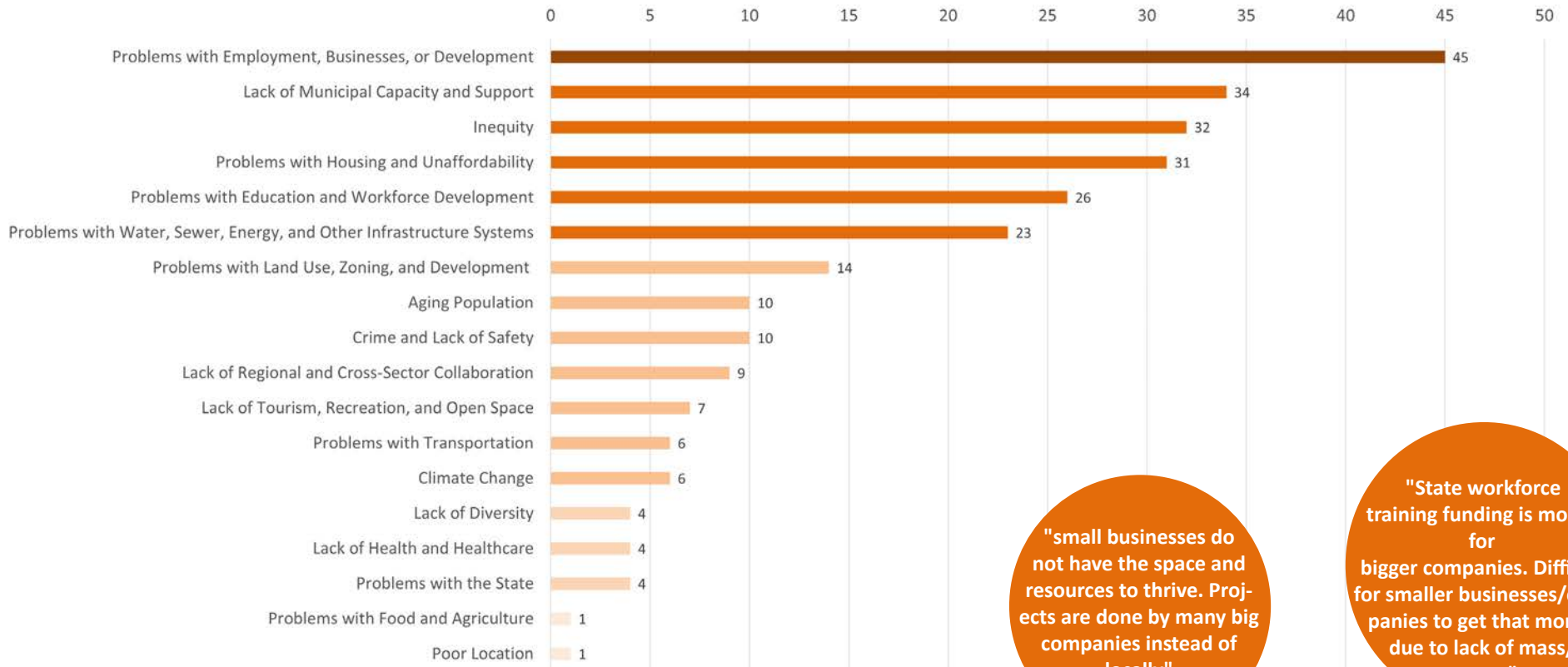
"Financial literacy is improving but brown and black businesses and non-profits continue to struggle"

"Career opportunities small- to mid-size companies"

"Venture capital. Strong initiatives our abilities to take new techs and keep them here"

CEDS Interviews and Workshops

Number of CEDS Public Comment Tags by Category: Threats



- The biggest threats to the CMRPC region stakeholders identified in the SWOT analysis were problems with employment, businesses, and development, lack of municipal capacity and support, inequity, and problems with housing and inaffordability.
- Small businesses closing due to rising operational costs and competition from larger businesses
- Education in the region not having enough financial and other support, leaving students behind and leading to long wait lists for trade schools and community college programs
- Competition with Boston and other parts of the country leading to more outside control of regional organizations
- People leaving the region either because they are displaced by gentrification, rising costs of living, and a lack of housing supply or because they find opportunities elsewhere after being educated in the region
- The region not being able to effectively serve an aging population
- Inequity and prejudice based on race/ethnicity, class, and geography

"small businesses do not have the space and resources to thrive. Projects are done by many big companies instead of locally"

"State workforce training funding is mostly for bigger companies. Difficult for smaller businesses/companies to get that money due to lack of mass/power"

"Branding the region is difficult. No affiliate TV station. Telegram is shrinking."

"Central Massachusetts loses talents to other parts of the state "

"Lots of places don't have economic development opportunities"

CEDS Social Media Campaign

- Facebook posts
- LinkedIn posts
- Constructed a project website
- Social Media blasts from our partners
- Emailed survey to all 40 towns in the region
- CMRPC Newsletter



**CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission**
Southern Worcester County
Comprehensive Economic
Development Strategy
2023-2028

SURVEY NOW OPEN

Help Build the Economic Development Strategy for our Region

Workforce | Education | Housing |
Small Businesses | Agriculture

Survey closes | March 31st

cmrpcregionalservices.org/ceds



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**CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission**



**CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
Regional Planning Commission**

CEDS Trends 2023

- Trend I: Workforce and Education
- Trend II: Housing accessibility and affordability
- Trend III: Transportation and Transit
- Trend IV: Supporting Businesses & Permitting ease
- Trend V: Universal (basic needs, childcare, healthcare, personal finance, food and shelter, broadband)
- Trend VI: Agriculture and Tourism
- Trend VII: Municipal Capacity
- Trend VIII: Infrastructure and Development
- Trend IX: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- Trend X: Regional Collaboration
- Trend XI: Economic and climate resiliency
- Trend XII: Telling our stories
- Trend XIII: We are proud of our communities



Next Steps



Fall 2022

The CMRPC starts the preliminary planning process to update Central Massachusetts Comprehensive and the drafting of the CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan

Winter 2023

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will be officially underway. In the Winter of 2023, the CMRPC will engage with our stakeholders and the public using many methods to make sure that no voice is left behind.

Spring 2023

Central Massachusetts CEDS Community Engagement efforts will close out by end of March 2023. The CMRPC will analyze survey and interview data, both qualitative and quantitative, and report this data back to our stakeholders and the public.

Summer 2023

The CMRPC will focus on drafting the report and post-report-drafting public comment process. The CMRPC will organize an additional public meeting and a reflection survey process to facilitate the public commenting process

Timeline

Action items

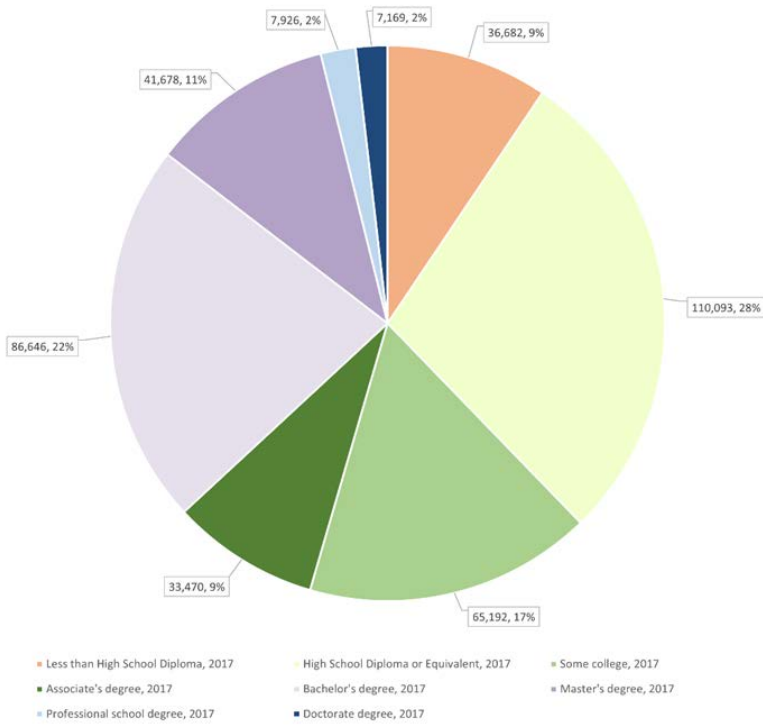
- Preliminary Planning Process
- Identify stakeholders
- Survey Drafting
- Social Media Campaign planning
- Kick off Public Meeting Planning
- Preliminary Data Collection Process
- Interview Questions and Prompts Drafting
- CEDS Community Engagement and Outreach Plan Drafting
- Central Massachusetts CEDS kick off

- CEDS Survey
- Interview with higher institution partners
- Interview with non-profit partners
- Interview with community-based organizations
- Social media campaign
- Preliminary data collection
- Public meeting planning and preparation

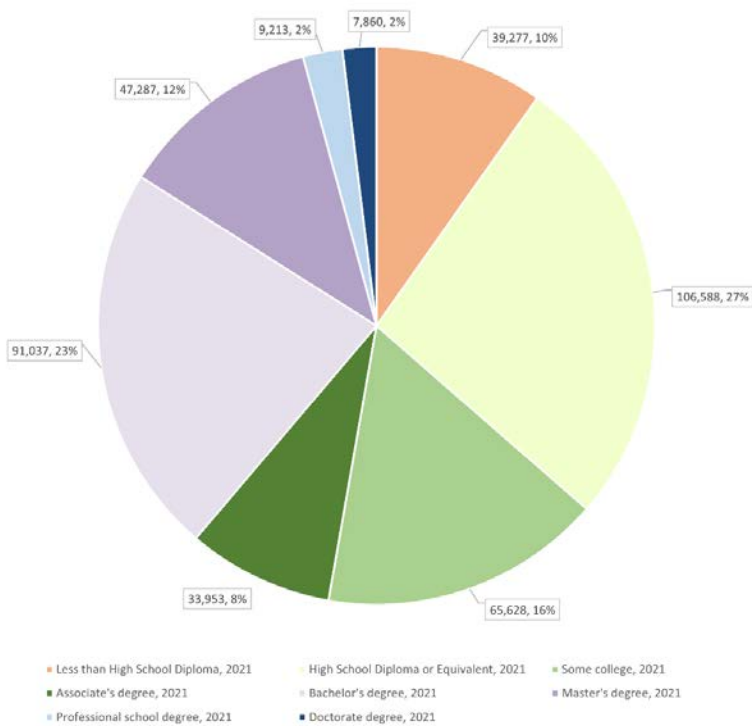
- CEDS survey closes March 31, 2023
- CEDS Preliminary Survey data analysis
- CEDS interview data summarization and analysis
- CEDS public meeting in mid-April to report back on data and our community engagement efforts
- Preliminary data collection and analysis
- Report drafting planning and preparation
- CMRPC community engagement reflection and evaluation

- Report-drafting process ends by June 2023
- Post report-drafting public meeting planning and preparation
- Public meeting in mid-June 2023
- Public commenting process
- Preparing for CEDS final report submission to Federal EDO
- Include public comments in the final report
- CEDS post-drafting reflection survey opens June 2023
- Post-drafting reflection survey data summarization and analysis
- Final stakeholder engagement

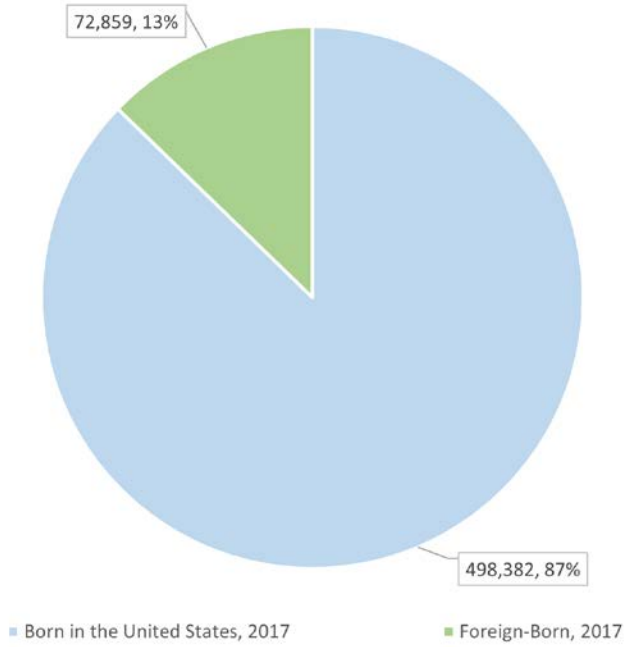
CMRPC Region Educational Attainment, 2017



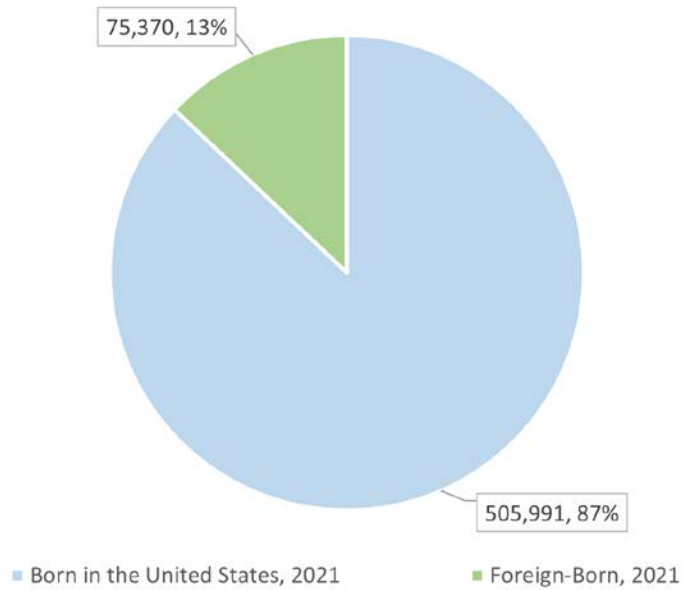
CMRPC Region Educational Attainment, 2021



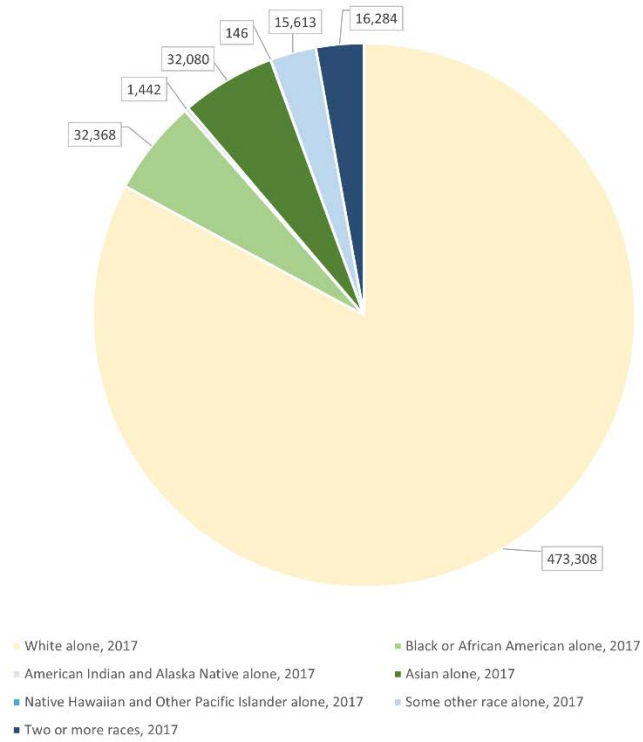
CMRPC Region Foreign Born Population, 2017



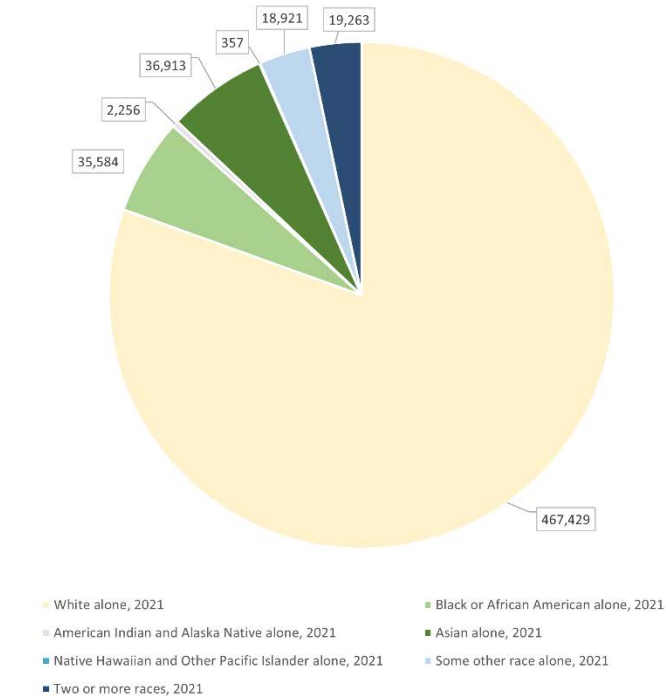
CMRPC Region Foreign Born Population, 2021



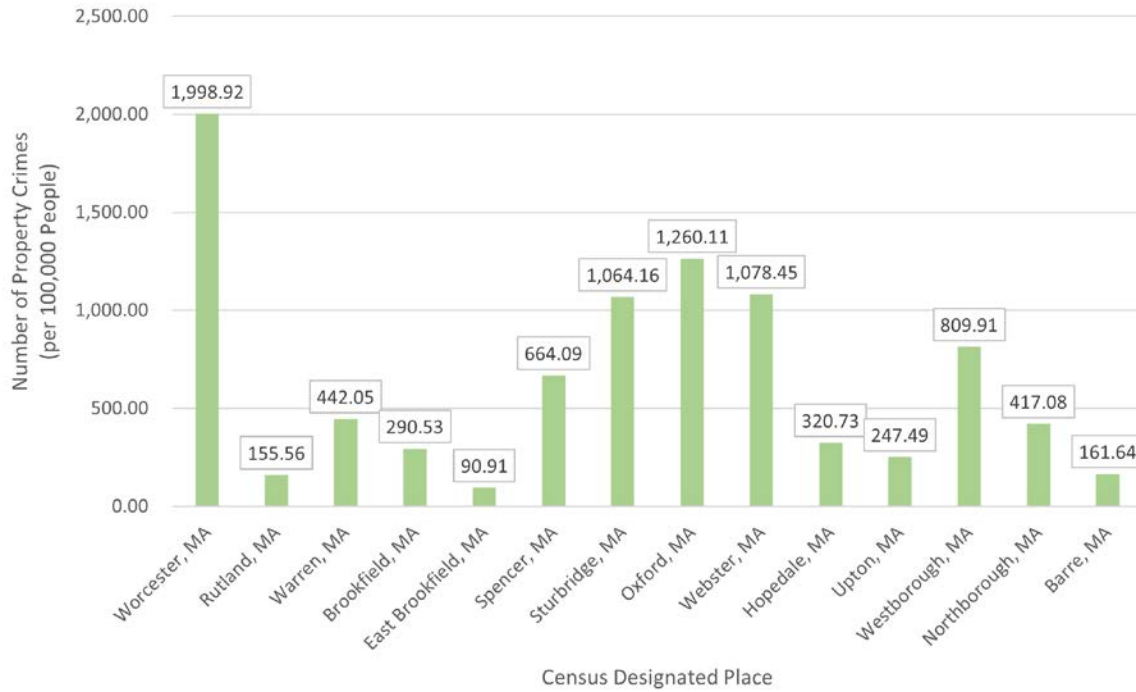
CMRPC Region Population by Race, 2017



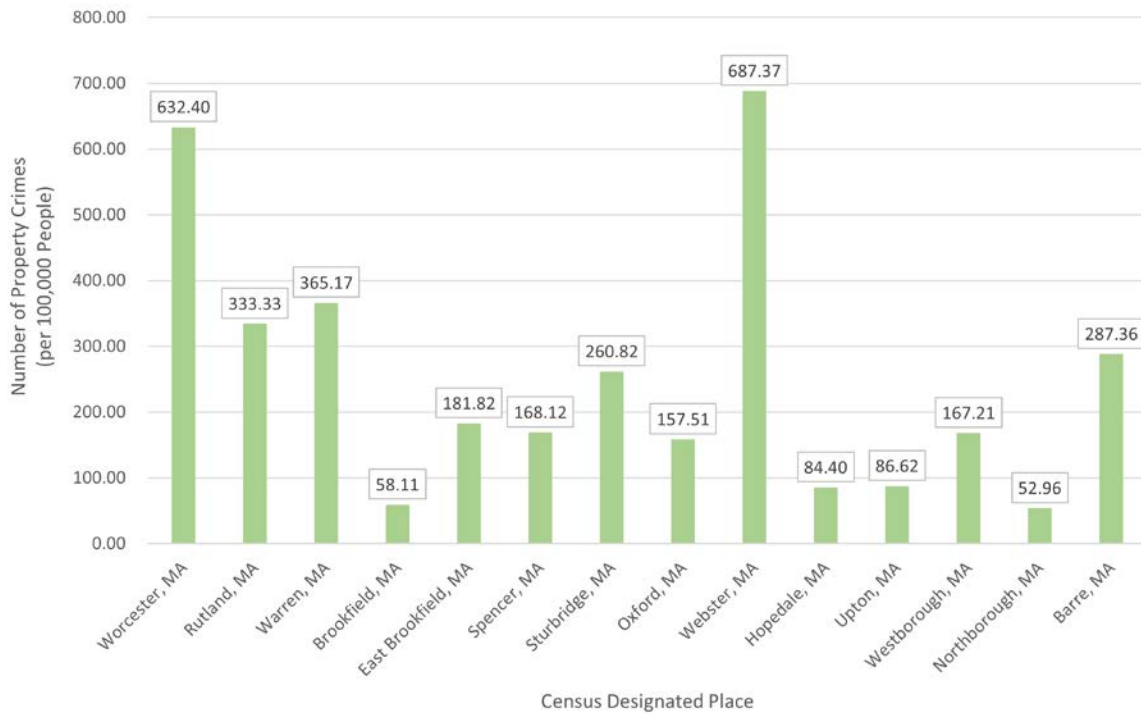
CMRPC Region Population by Race, 2021



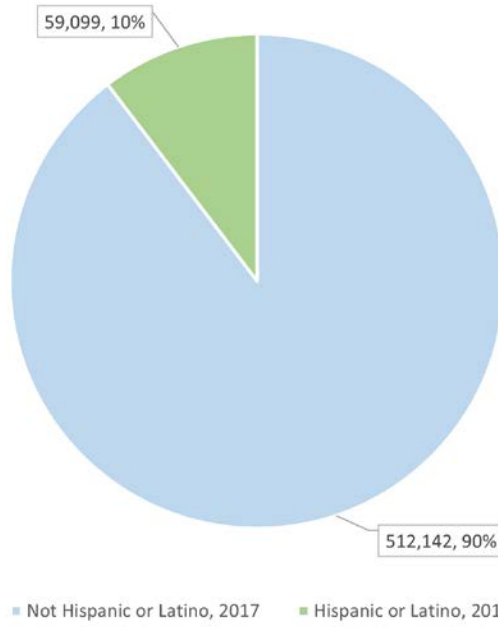
CMRPC Region CDPs Average Property Crime Rate (per 100,000 People), 2020



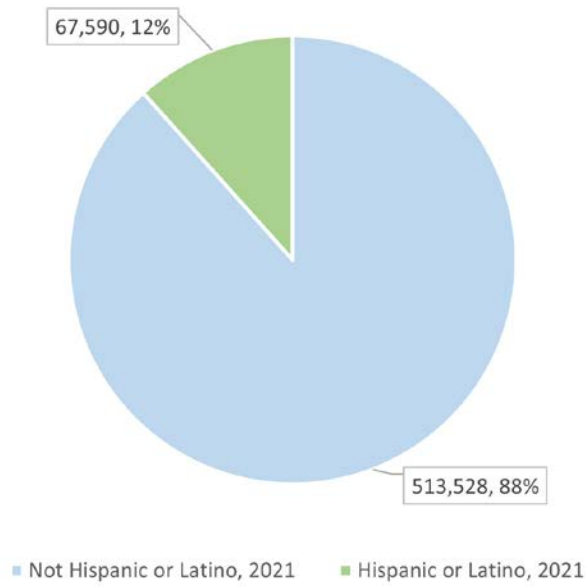
CMRPC Region CDPs Average Violent Crime Rate (per 100,000 People), 2020



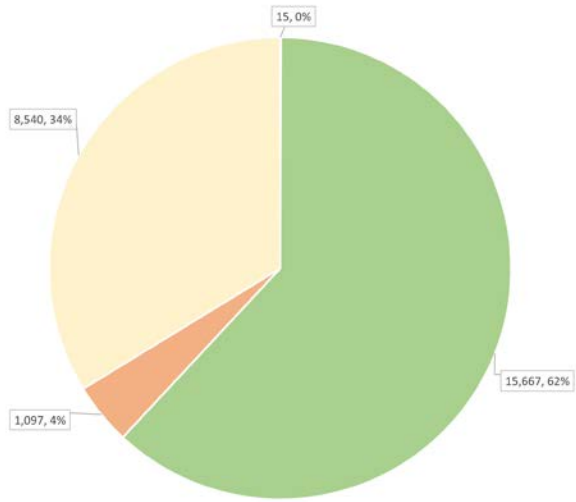
CMRPC Region Population by Ethnicity, 2017



CMRPC Region Population by Ethnicity, 2021

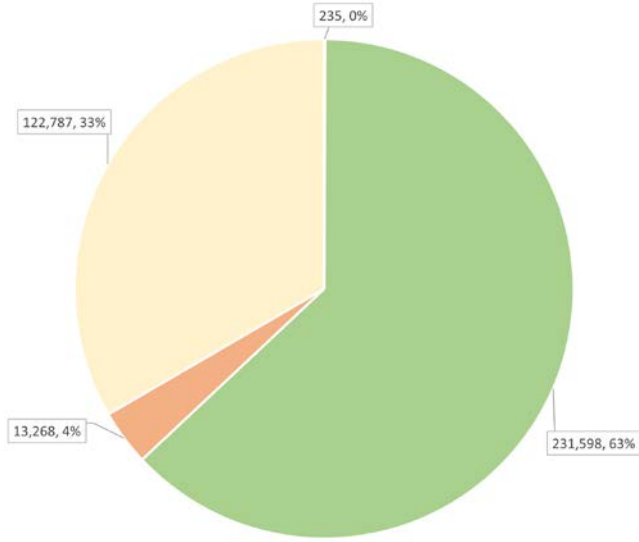


CMRPC Region Asian Alone Population
Labor Force, 2017



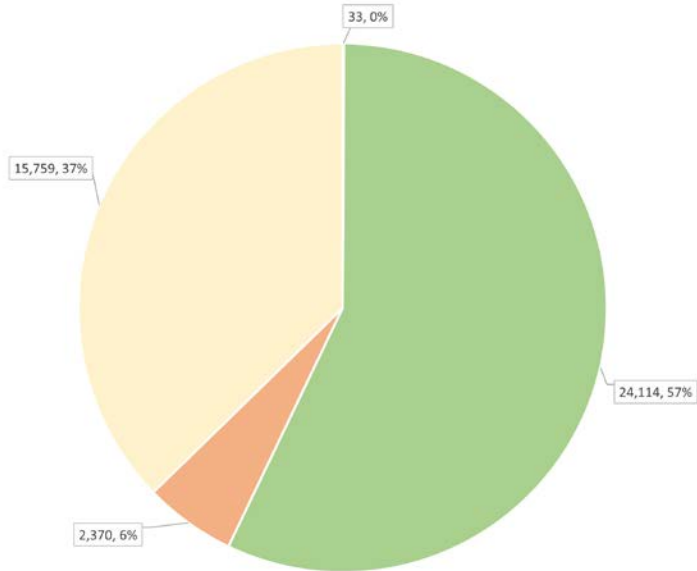
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2017



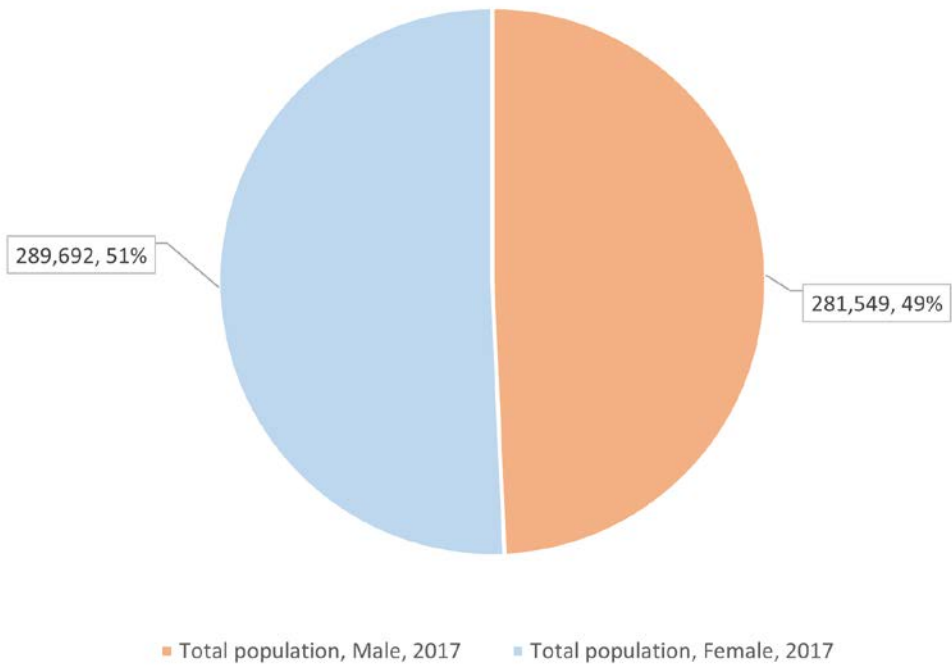
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2017

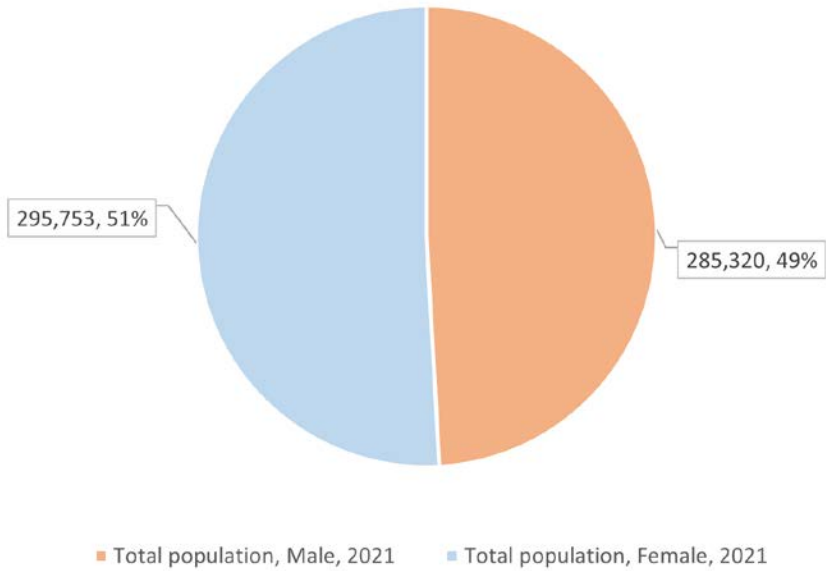


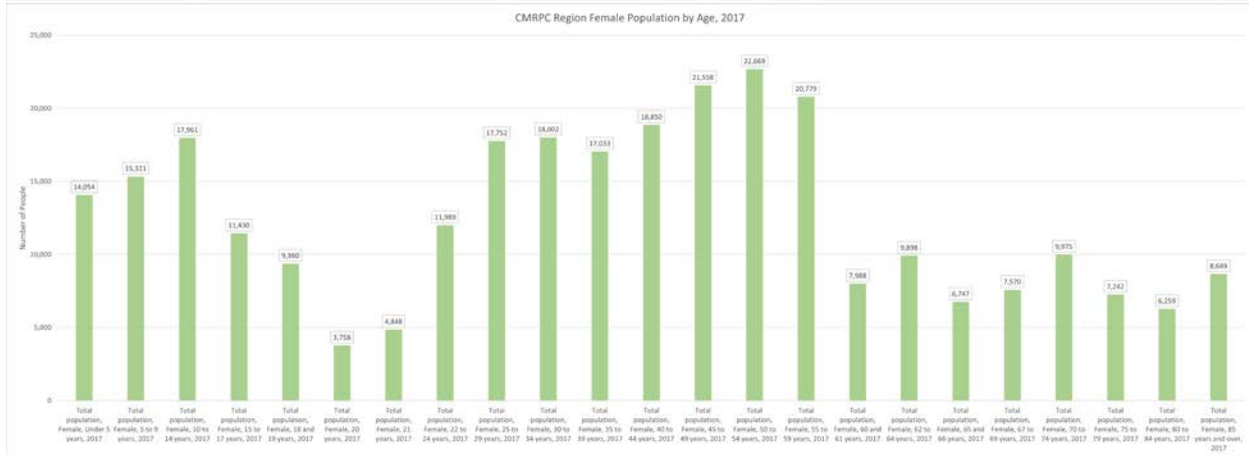
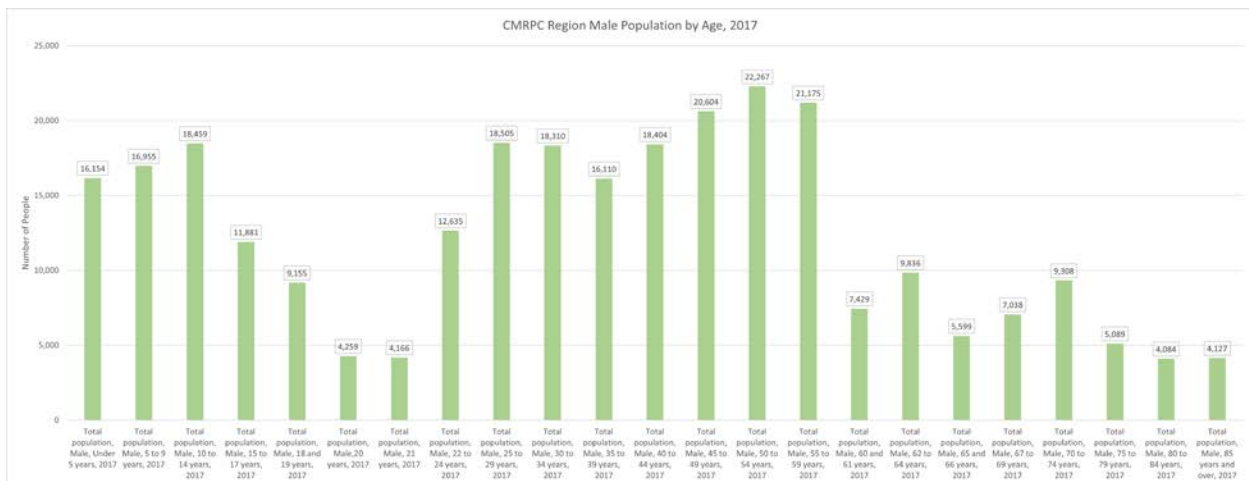
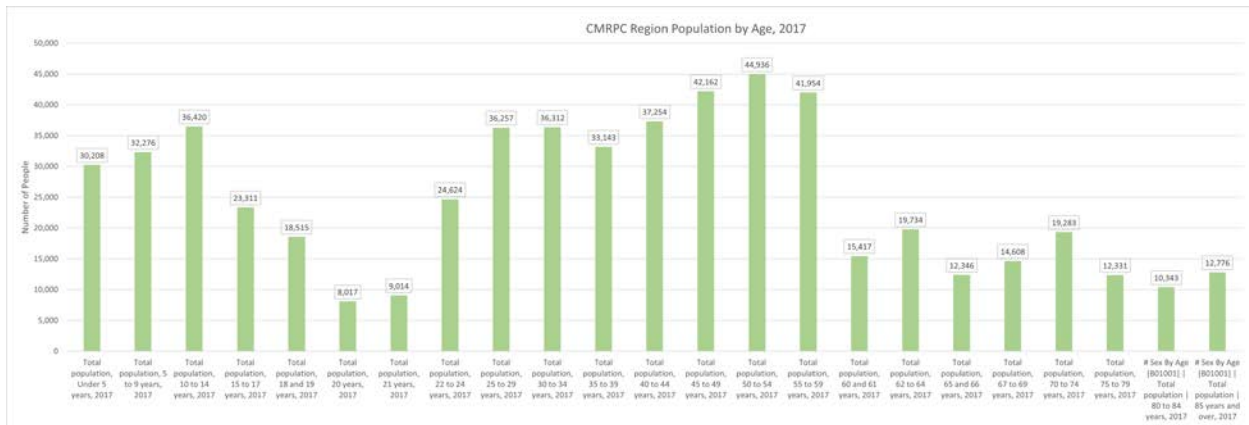
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
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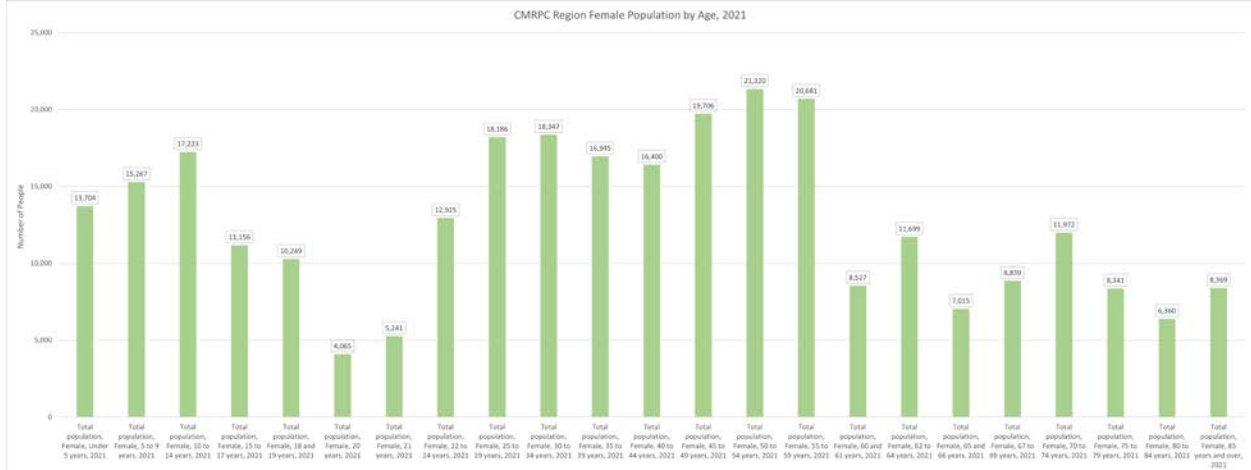
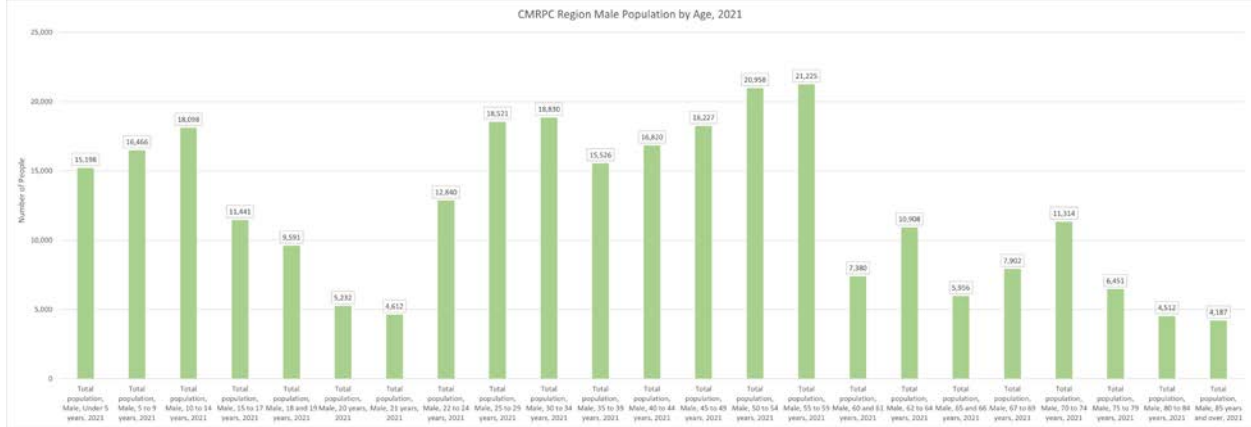
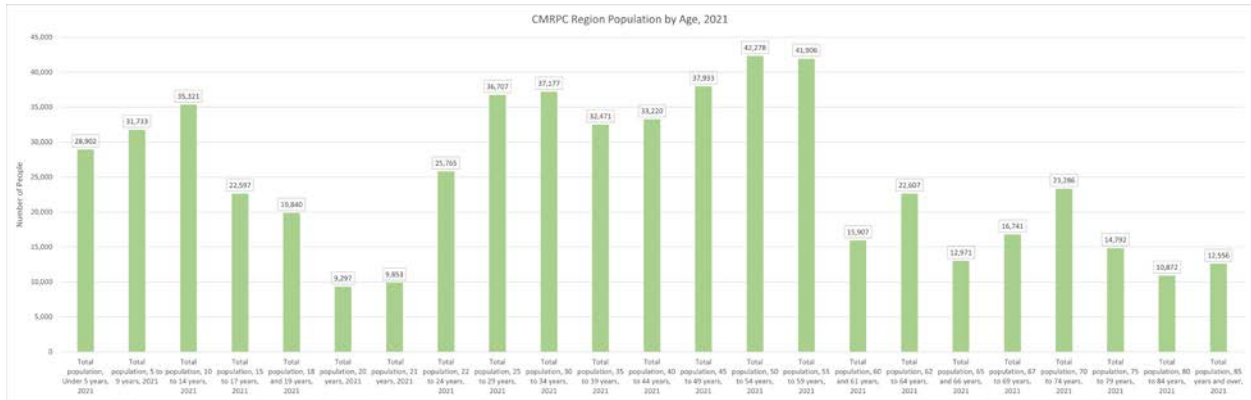
CMRPC Region Population by Sex, 2017



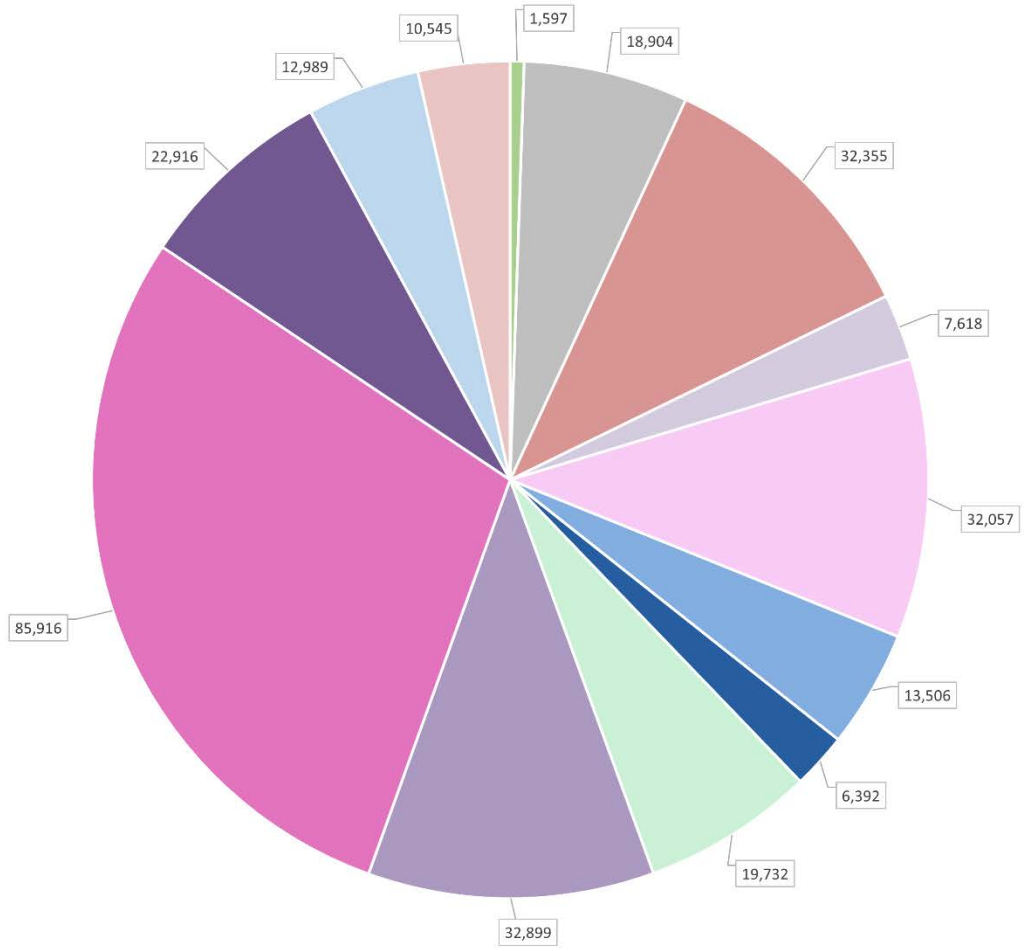
CMRPC Region Population by Sex, 2021





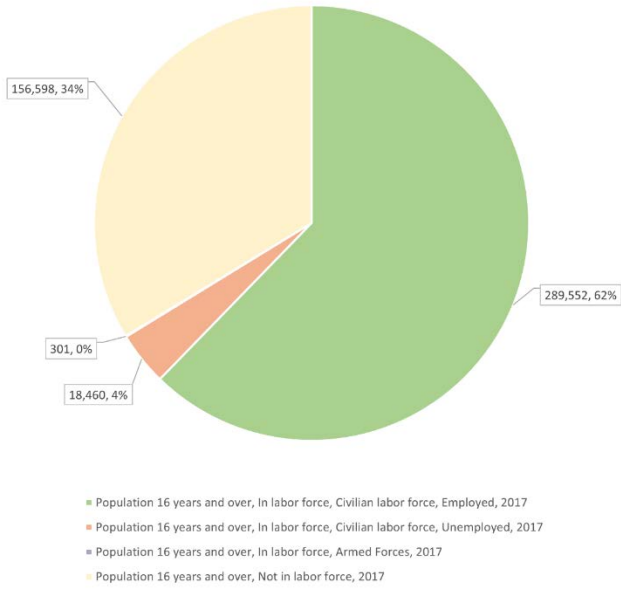


CMRPC Region Jobs by Industry, 2021

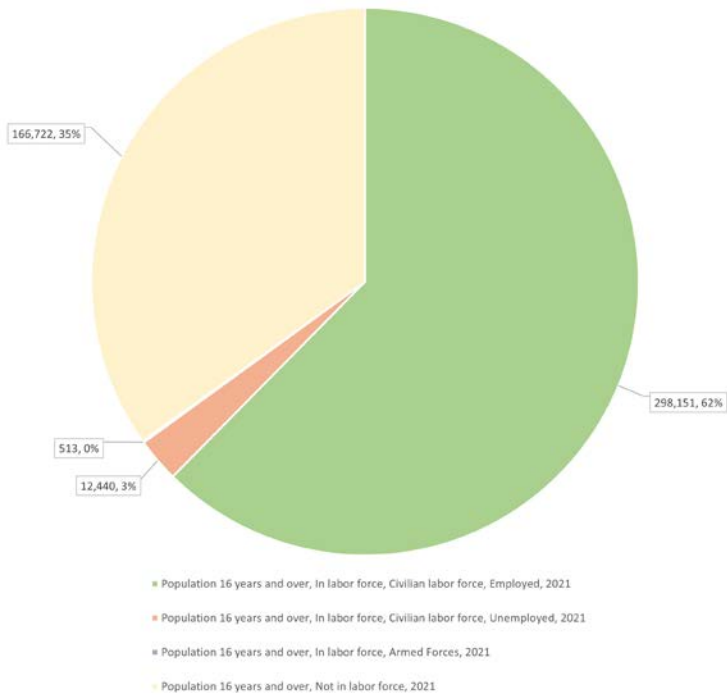


- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining, 2021
- Construction, 2021
- Manufacturing, 2021
- Wholesale trade, 2021
- Retail trade, 2021
- Transportation and warehousing, and utilities, 2021
- Information, 2021
- Finance and insurance, and real estate, and rental and leasing, 2021
- Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative, and waste management services, 2021
- Educational services, and health care and social assistance, 2021
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services, 2021
- Other services, except public administration, 2021
- Public administration, 2021

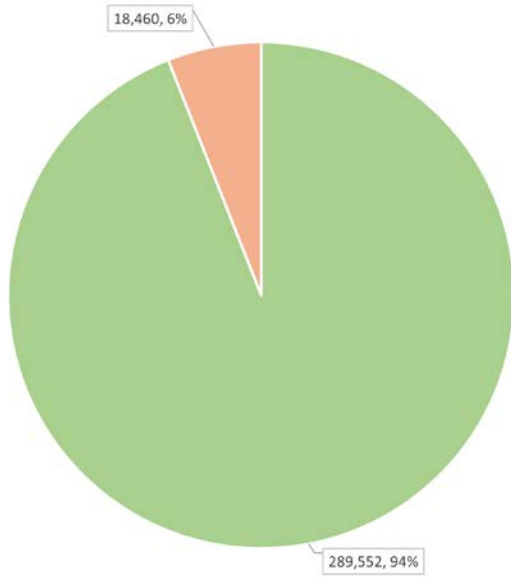
CMRPC Region Labor Force, 2017



CMRPC Region Labor Force, 2021

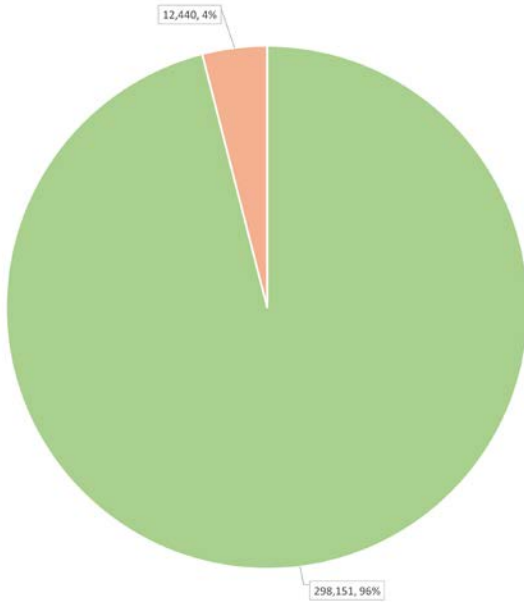


CMRPC Region Civilian Employment, 2017



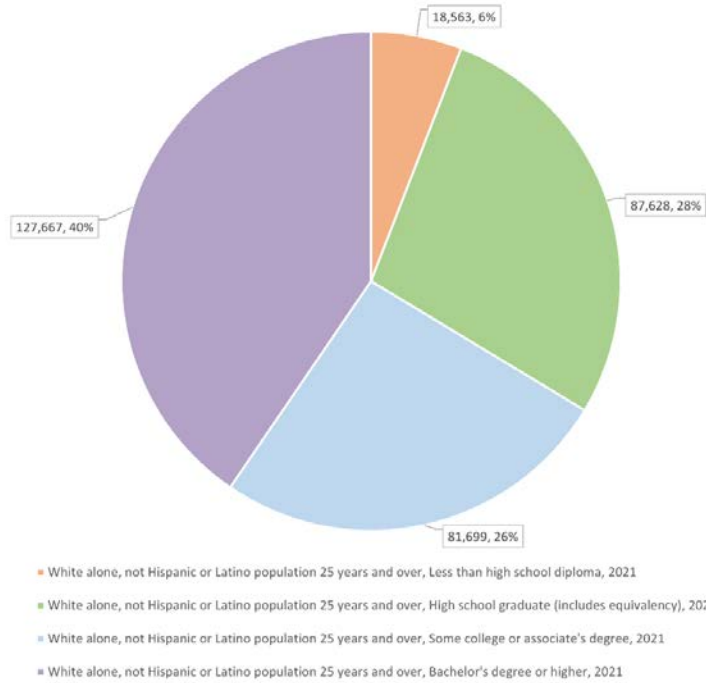
- Population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian labor force, Employed, 2017
- Population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian labor force, Unemployed, 2017

CMRPC Region Civilian Employment, 2021

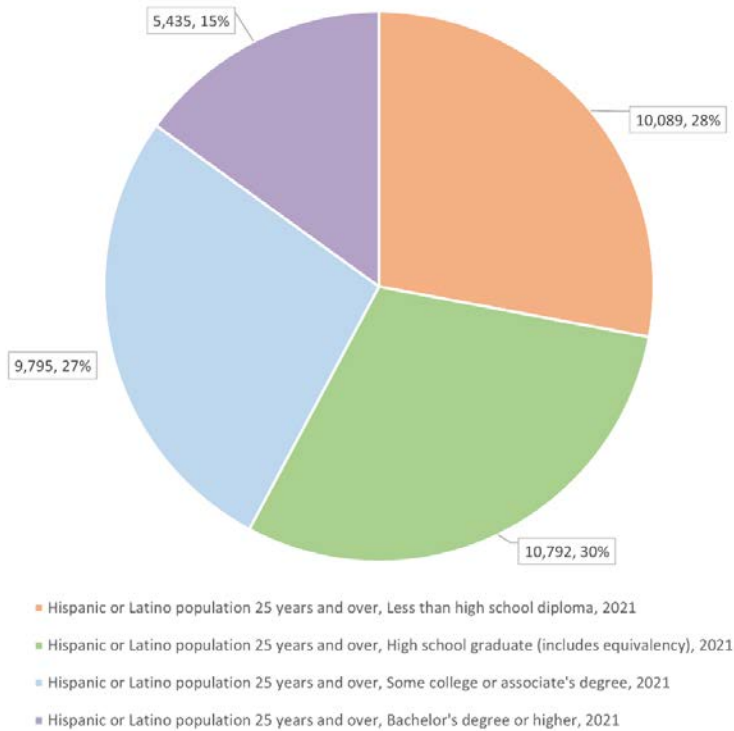


- Population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian labor force, Employed, 2021
- Population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian labor force, Unemployed, 2021

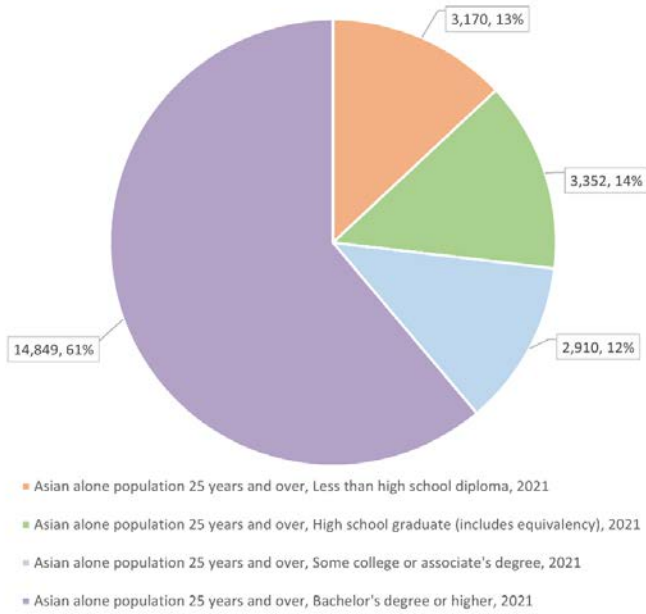
CMRPC Region White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Educational Attainment, 2021



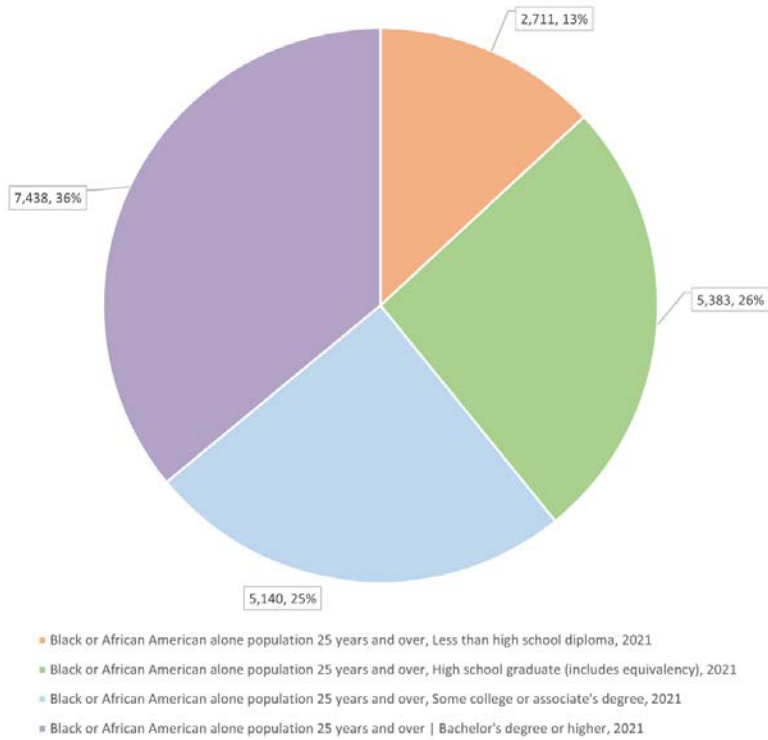
CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Population Educational Attainment, 2021



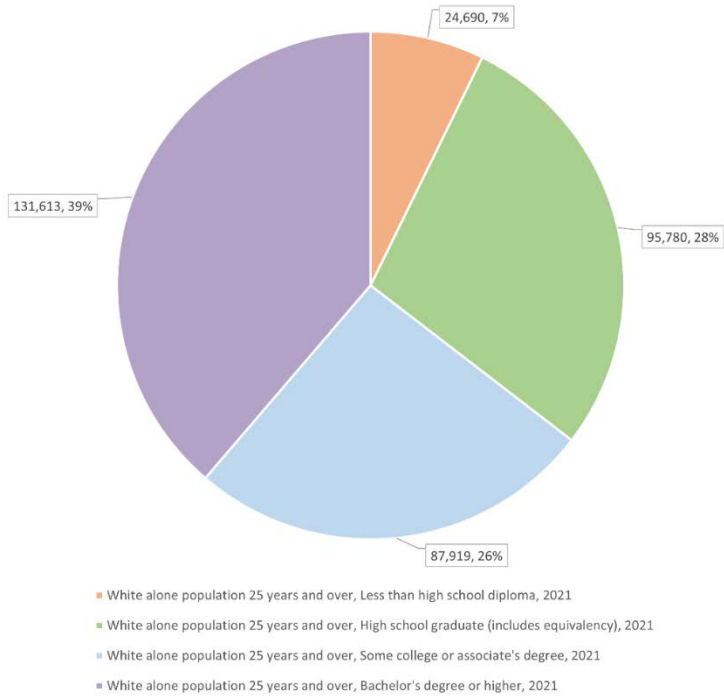
CMRPC Region Asian Alone Population Educational Attainment, 2021



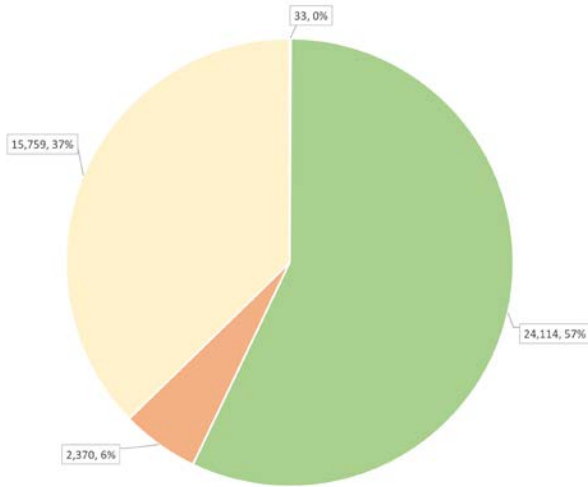
CMRPC Region Black or African American Alone Population Educational Attainment by Census Tract



CMRPC Region White Alone Population
Educational Attainment, 2021

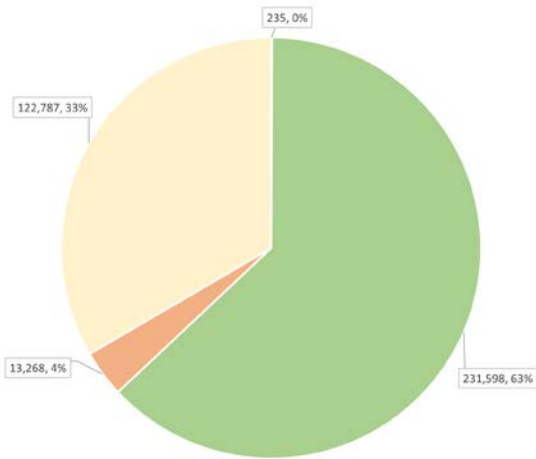


CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2017



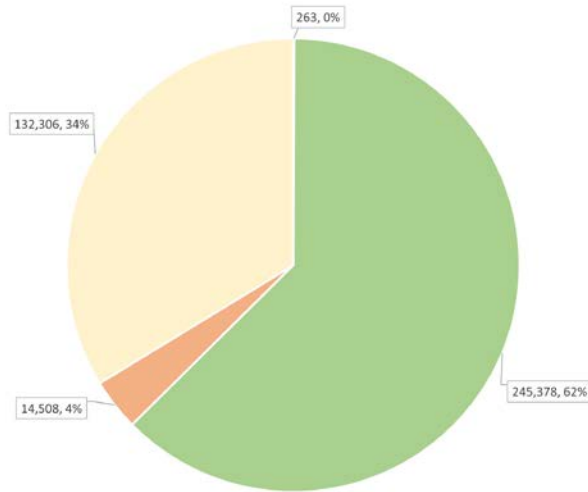
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CMRPC Region White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2017



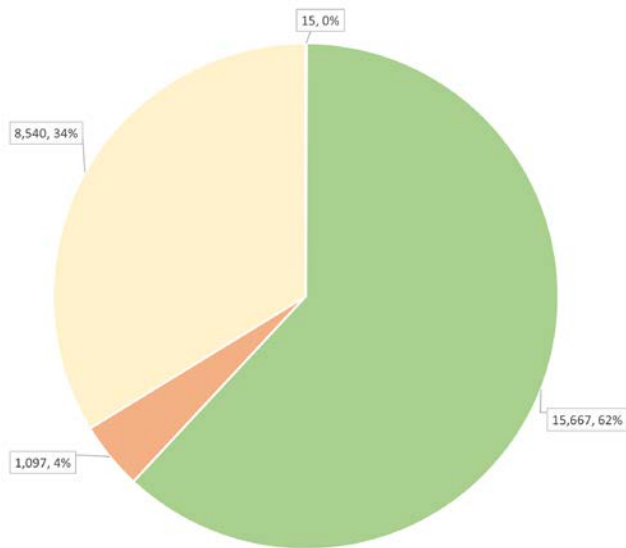
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region White Alone Population
Labor Force, 2017



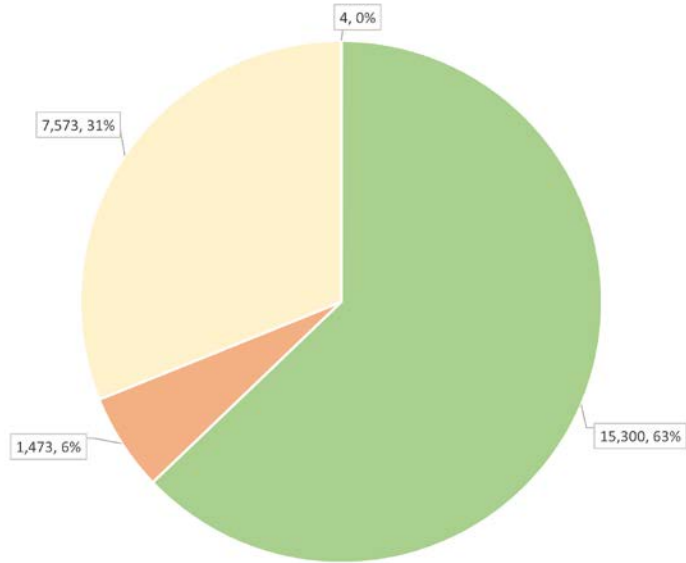
- White alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- White alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- White alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- White alone population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region Asian Alone Population
Labor Force, 2017



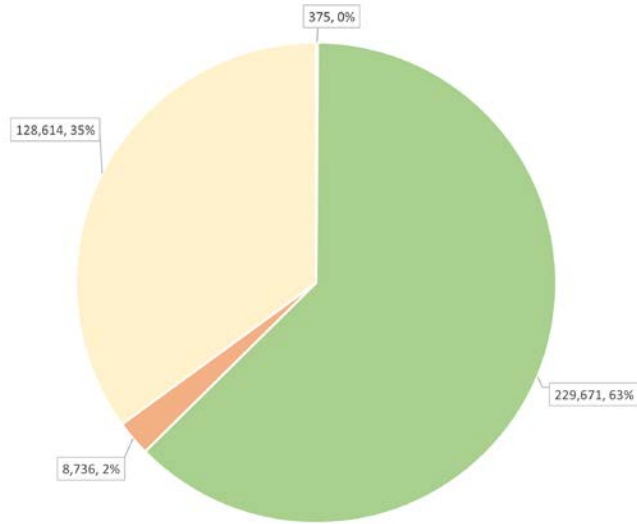
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- Asian alone population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region Black or African American Alone
Population Labor Force, 2017



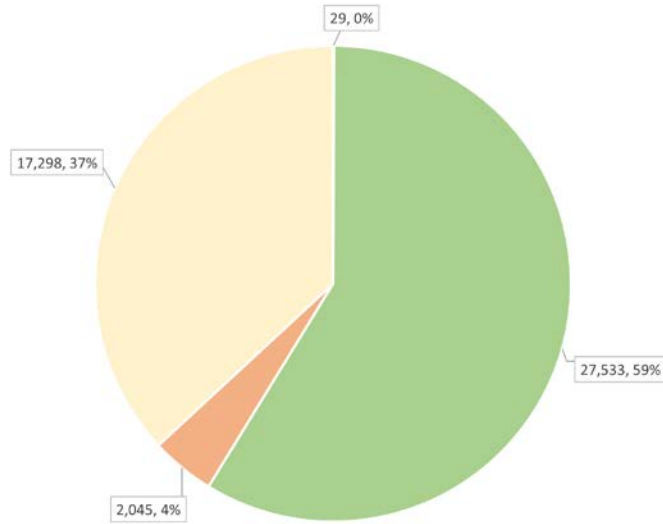
- Black or African American alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2017
- Black or African American alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2017
- Black or African American alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2017
- Black or African American alone population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2017

CMRPC Region White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2021



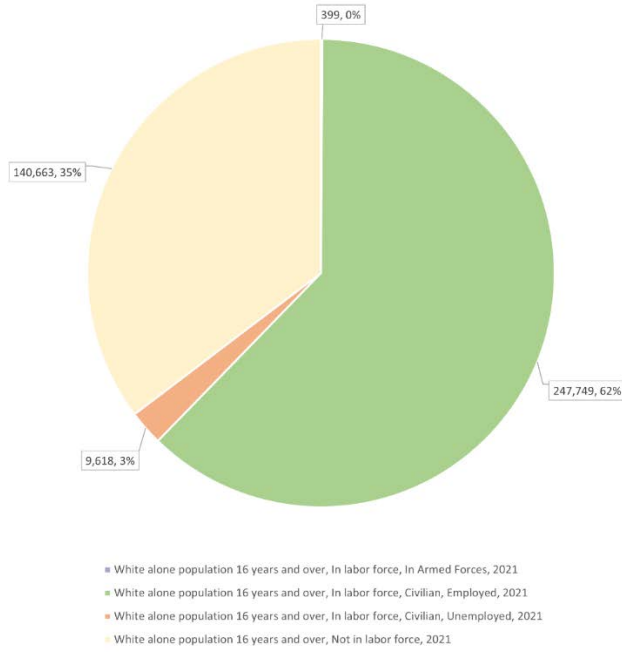
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2021
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2021
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2021
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2021

CMRPC Region Hispanic or Latino Population Labor Force, 2021

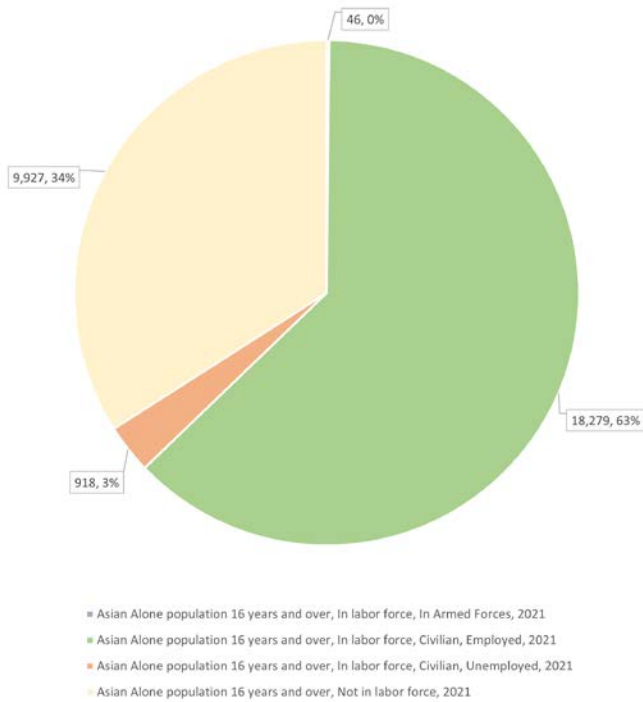


- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2021
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2021
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2021
- Hispanic or Latino population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2021

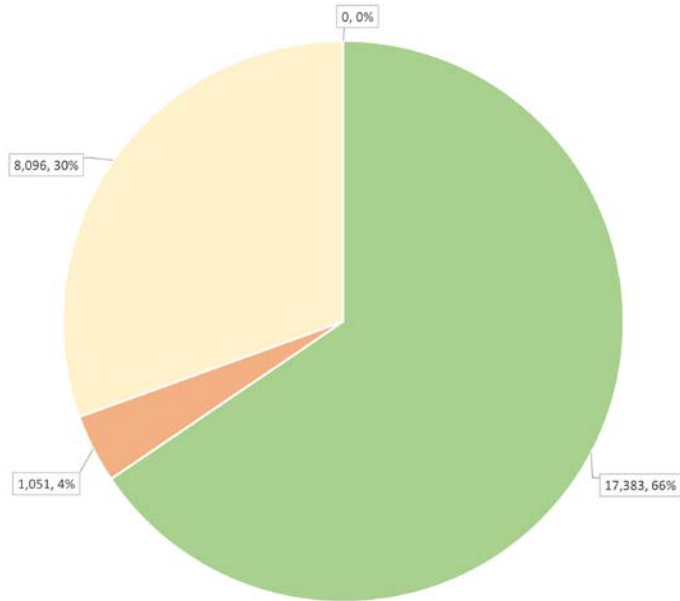
CMRPC Region White Alone Population
Labor Force, 2021



CMRPC Region Asian Alone Population
Labor Force, 2021

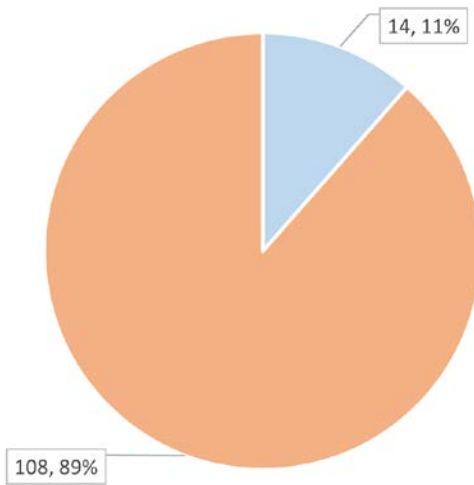


CMRPC Region Black or African American Alone
Population Labor Force, 2021



- Black or African American Alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, In Armed Forces, 2021
- Black or African American Alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Employed, 2021
- Black or African American Alone population 16 years and over, In labor force, Civilian, Unemployed, 2021
- Black or African American Alone population 16 years and over, Not in labor force, 2021

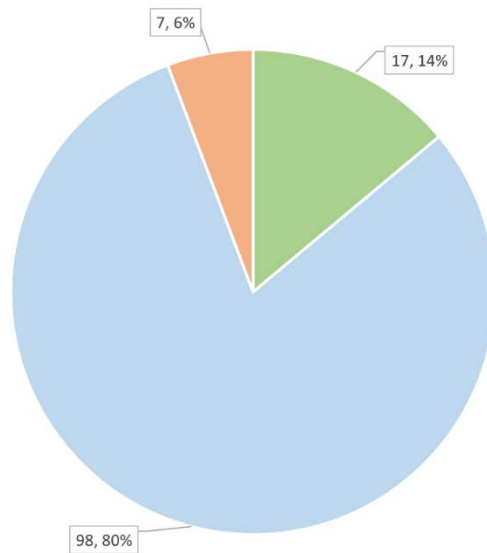
CMRPC Region Census Tracts Median Earnings by Sex, 2021



In the average Census Tract in the CMRPC Region, men earn \$15,901.65 more than women per year.

- Female Median Earnings Higher Than Male Median Earnings, 2021
- Male Median Earnings Higher Than Female Median Earnings, 2021

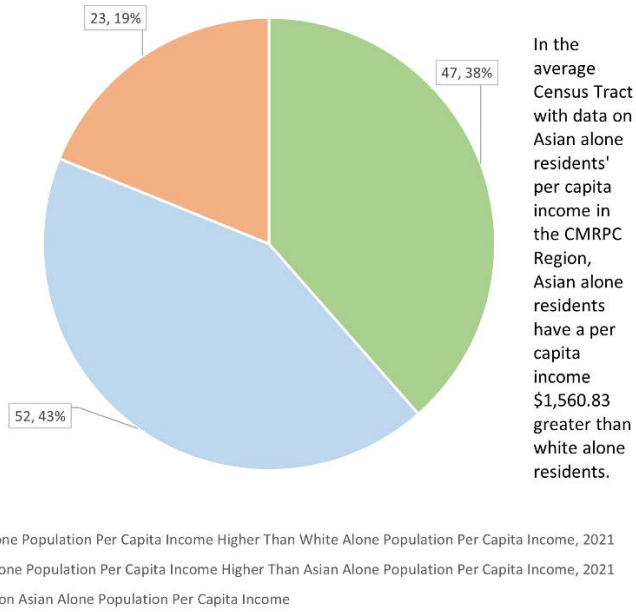
CMRPC Region Census Tracts Per Capita Income by Ethnicity, 2021



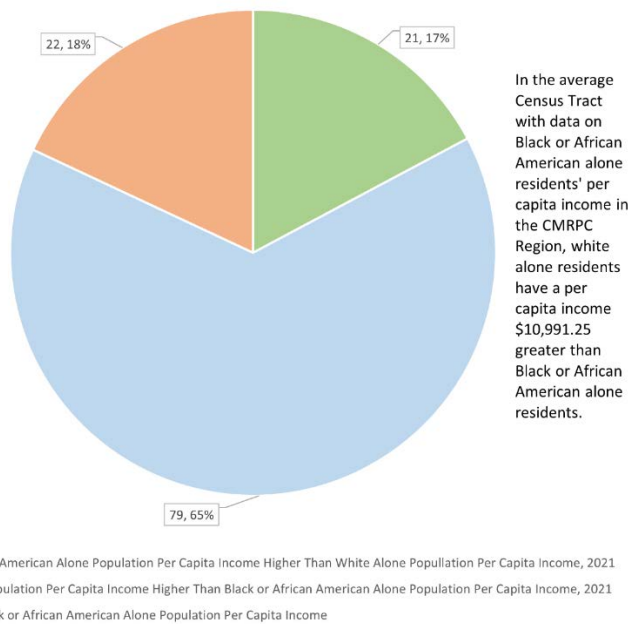
In the average Census Tract with data on Hispanic or Latino residents' per capita income in the CMRPC Region, white alone, not Hispanic or Latino residents have a per capita income \$13,852.98 greater than Hispanic or Latino Residents.

- Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income Higher Than White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income, 2021
- White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income Higher Than Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income, 2021
- No Data on Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income

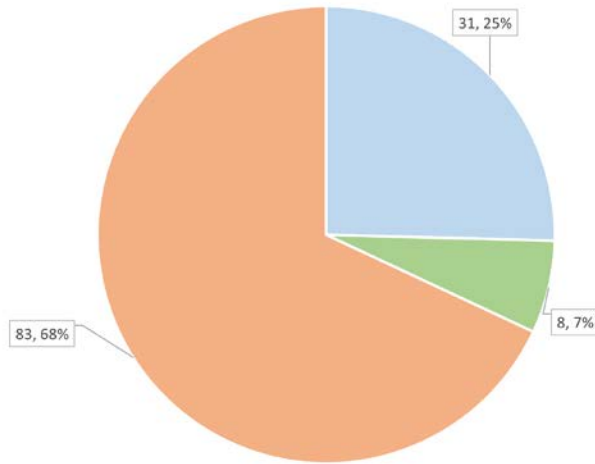
CMRPC Region Census Tracts Per Capita Income, Asian Alone Population and White Alone Population, 2021



CMRPC Region Census Tracts Per Capita Income, Black or African American Alone Population and White Alone Population, 2021



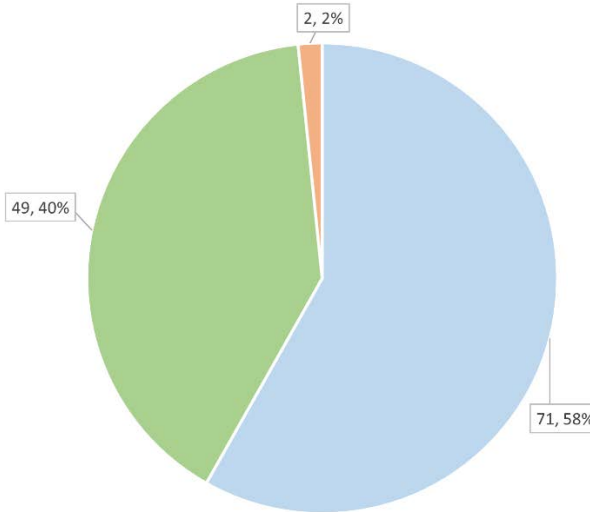
CMRPC Region Census Tracts Median Household Income, Householders 45 to 64 Years Old and Householders Under 25 Years Old, 2021



In the average Census Tract with data on householders under 25 years old median household income in the CMRPC Region, householders 45 to 64 years old have a median household income \$29,490.82 greater than householders under 25 years old.

- Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income Higher Than Householder Under 25 Years Old Median Household Income, 2021
- Householder Under 25 Years Old Median Household Income Higher Than Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income, 2021
- No Data on Householder Under 25 Years Old Median Household Income

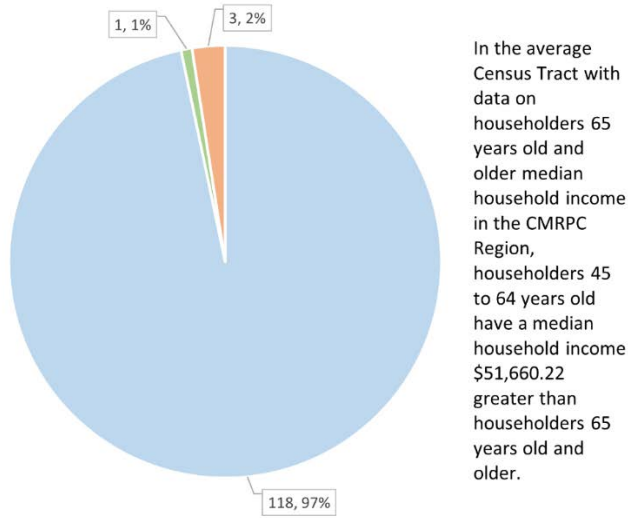
CMRPC Census Tracts Median Household Income, Householders 45 to 64 Years Old and Householders 25 to 44 Years Old, 2021



In the average Census Tract with data on householders 25 to 44 years old median household income in the CMRPC Region, householders 45 to 64 years old have a median household income \$6,081.33 greater than householders 25 to 44 years old.

- Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income Higher Than Householder 25 to 44 Years Old Median Household Income, 2021
- Householder 25 to 44 Years Old Median Household Income Higher Than Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income, 2021
- No Data on Householder 25 to 44 Years Old Median Household Income

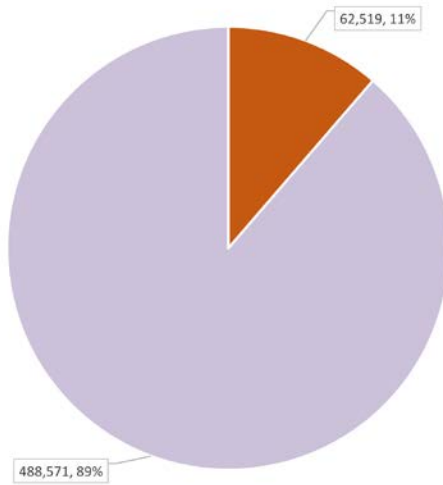
CMRPC Census Tracts Median Household Income, Householders 45 to 64 Years Old and Householders 65 Years Old and Older, 2021



In the average Census Tract with data on householders 65 years old and older median household income in the CMRPC Region, householders 45 to 64 years old have a median household income \$51,660.22 greater than householders 65 years old and older.

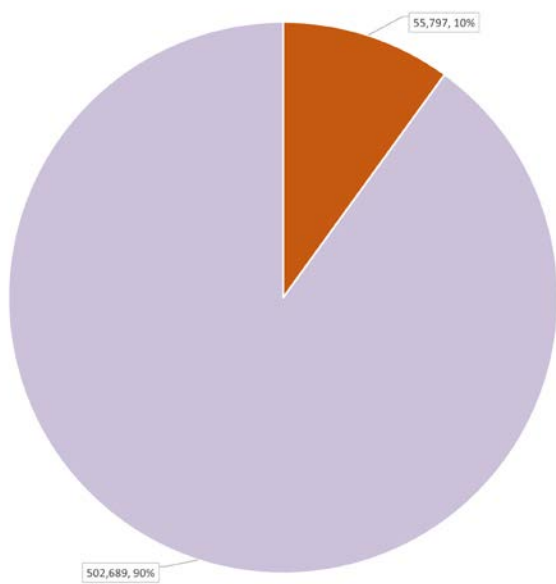
- Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income Higher Than Householder 65 Years Old and Older Median Household Income, 2021
- Householder 65 Years Old and Older Median Household Income Higher Than Householder 45 to 64 Years Old Median Household Income, 2021
- No Data on Householder 65 Years Old and Older Median Household Income

CMRPC Region Poverty Status, 2017

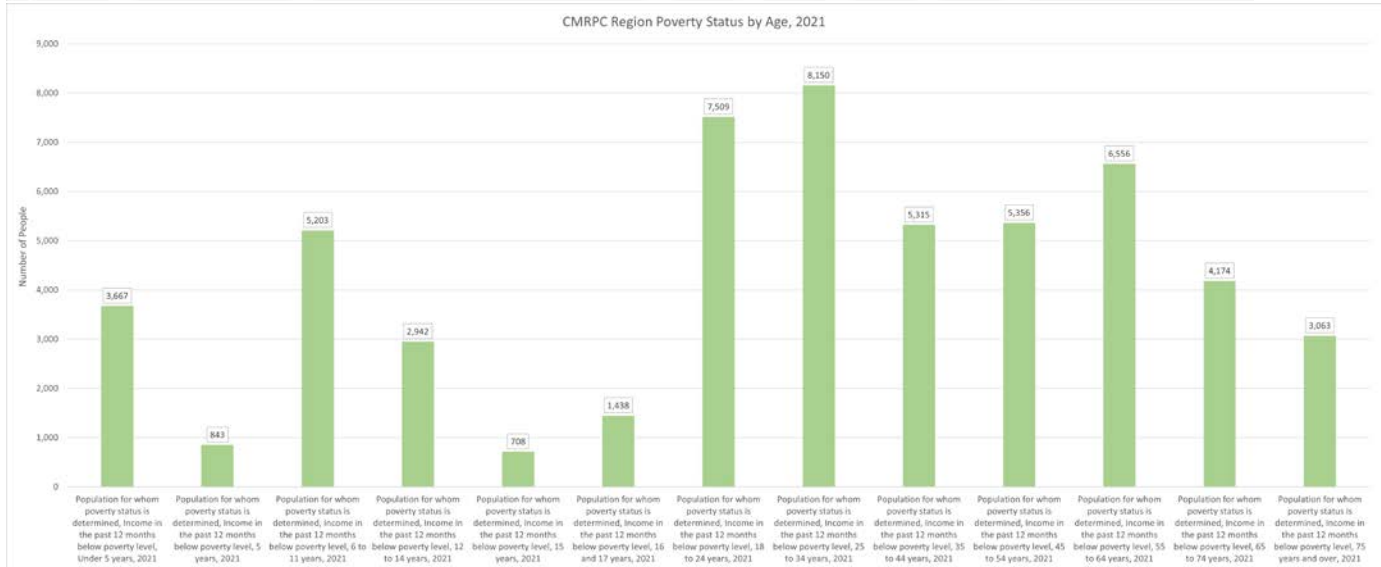
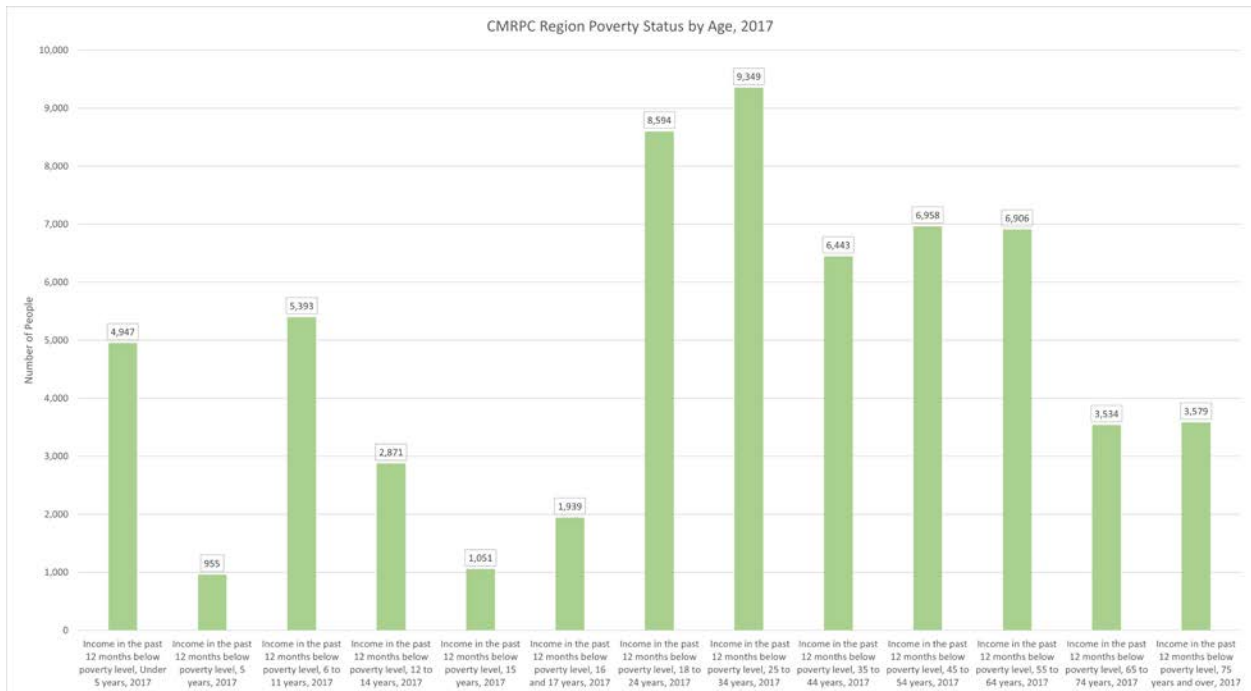


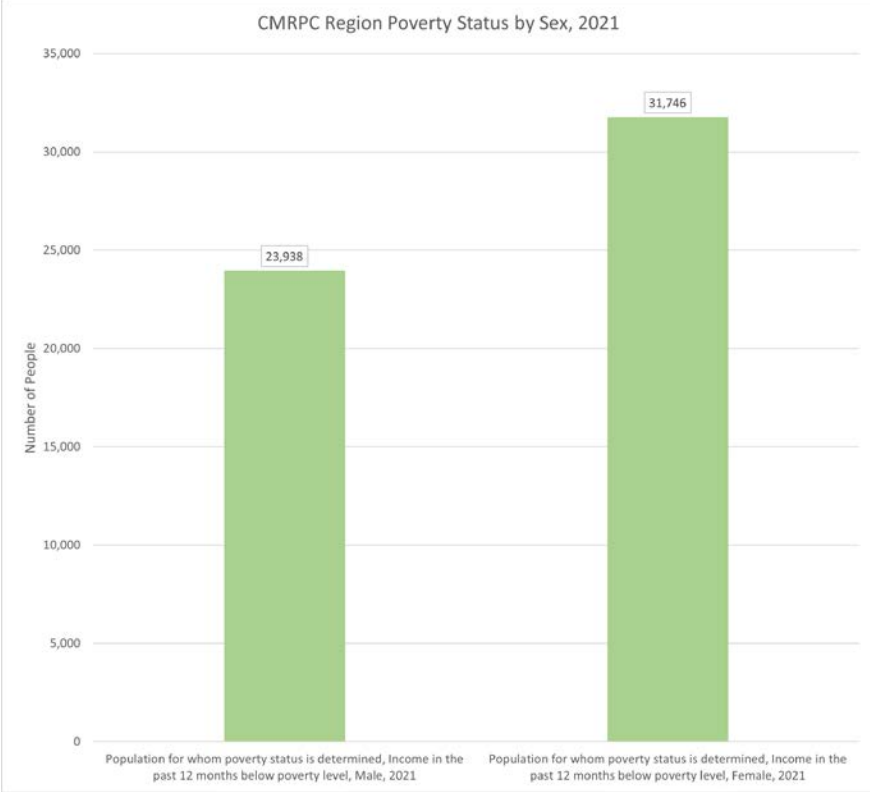
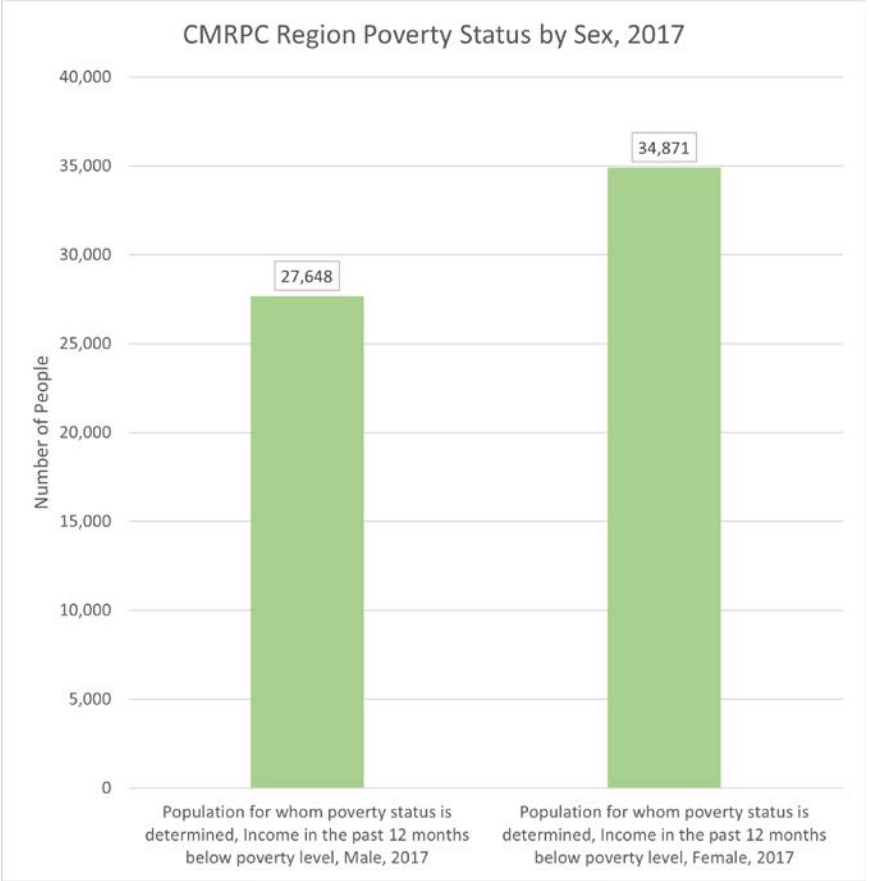
- Population for whom poverty status is determined, Income in the past 12 months below poverty level, 2017
- Population for whom poverty status is determined, Income in the past 12 months at or above poverty level, 2017

CMRPC Region Poverty Status, 2021

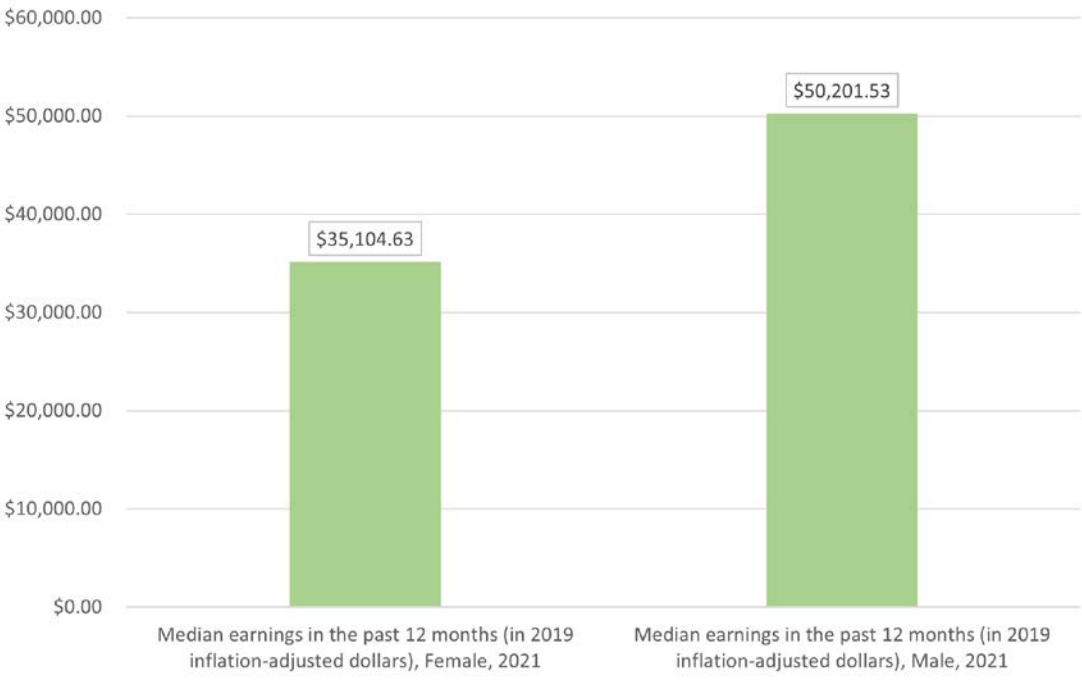


- Population for whom poverty status is determined, Income in the past 12 months below poverty level, 2021
- Population for whom poverty status is determined, Income in the past 12 months at or above poverty level, 2021

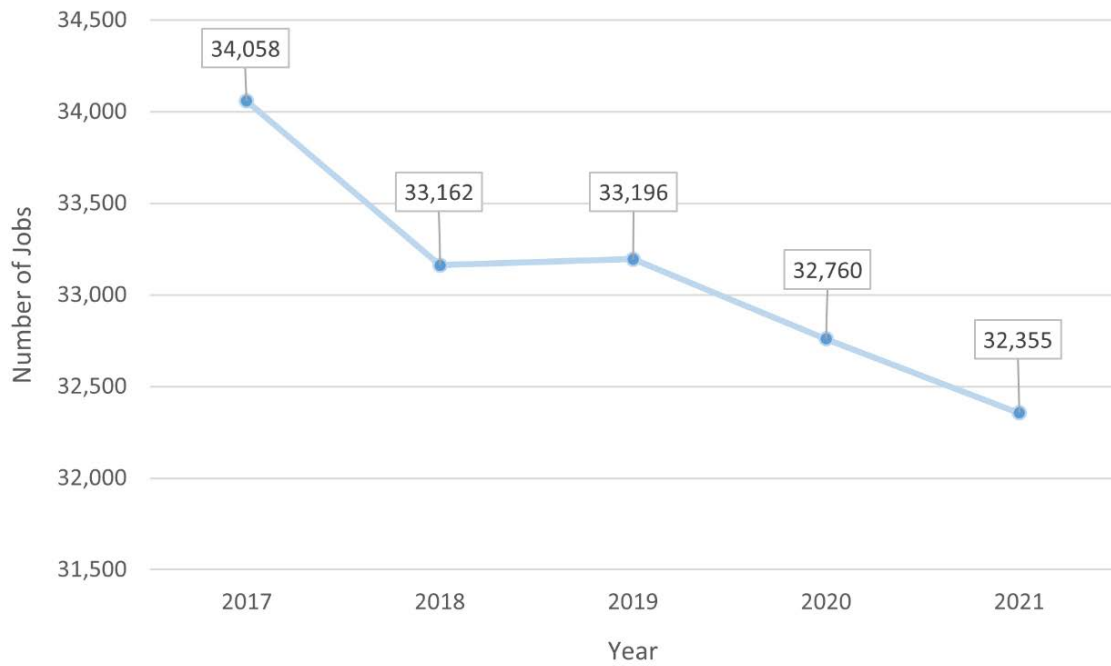




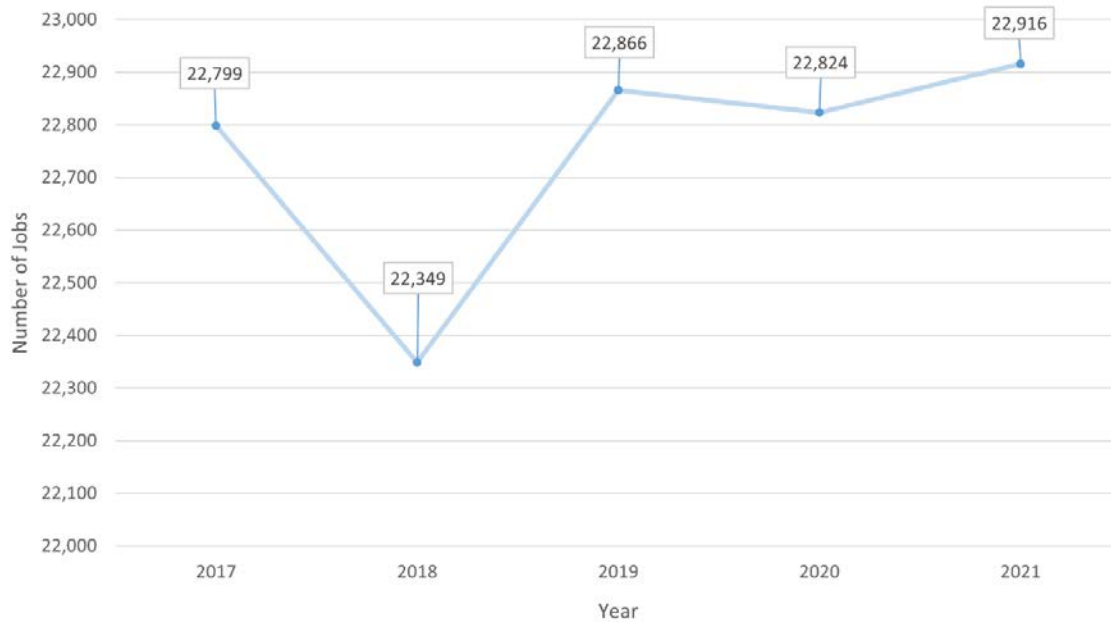
CMRPC Region Median Earnings by Sex, 2021

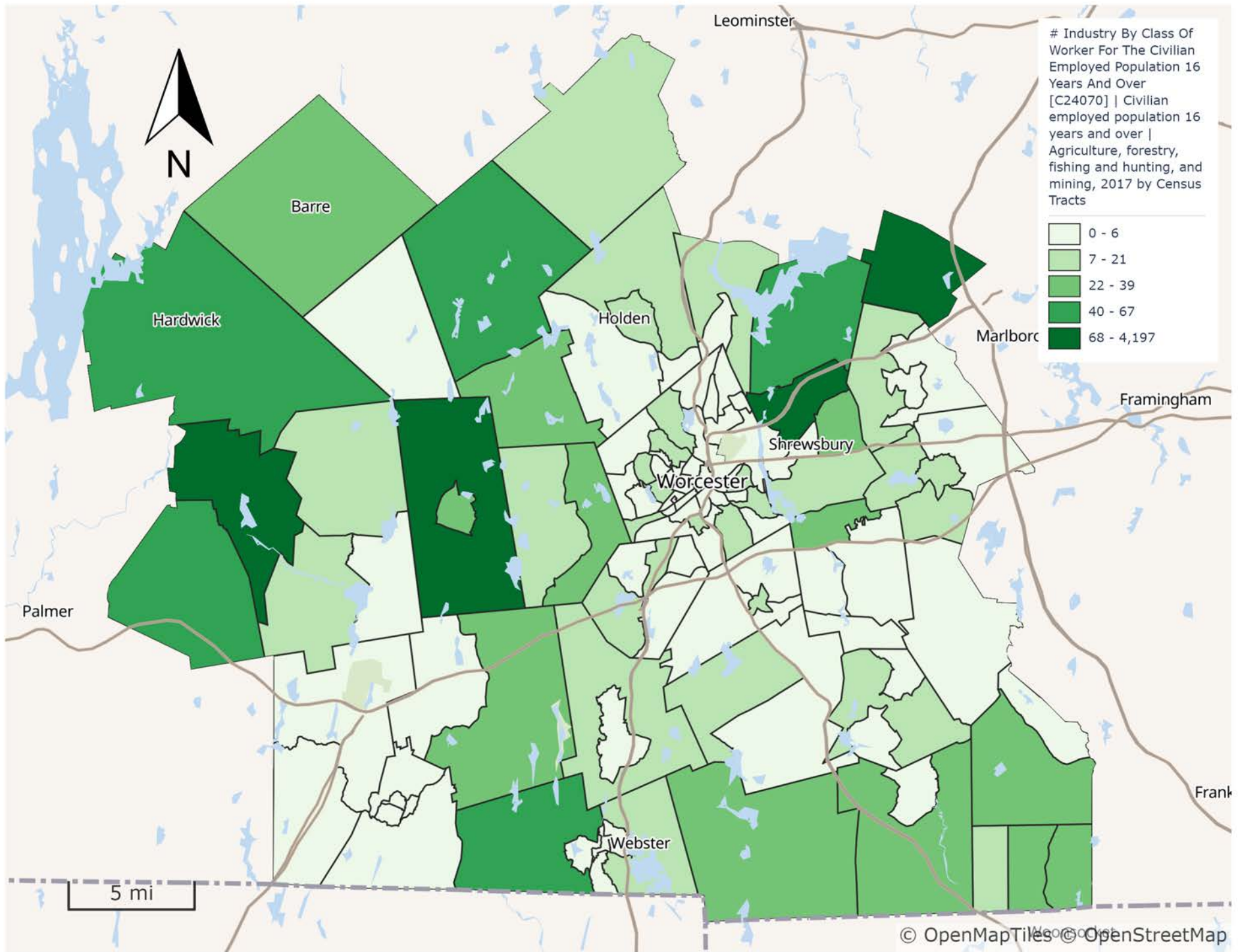


CMRPC Region Manufacturing Jobs, 2017-2021

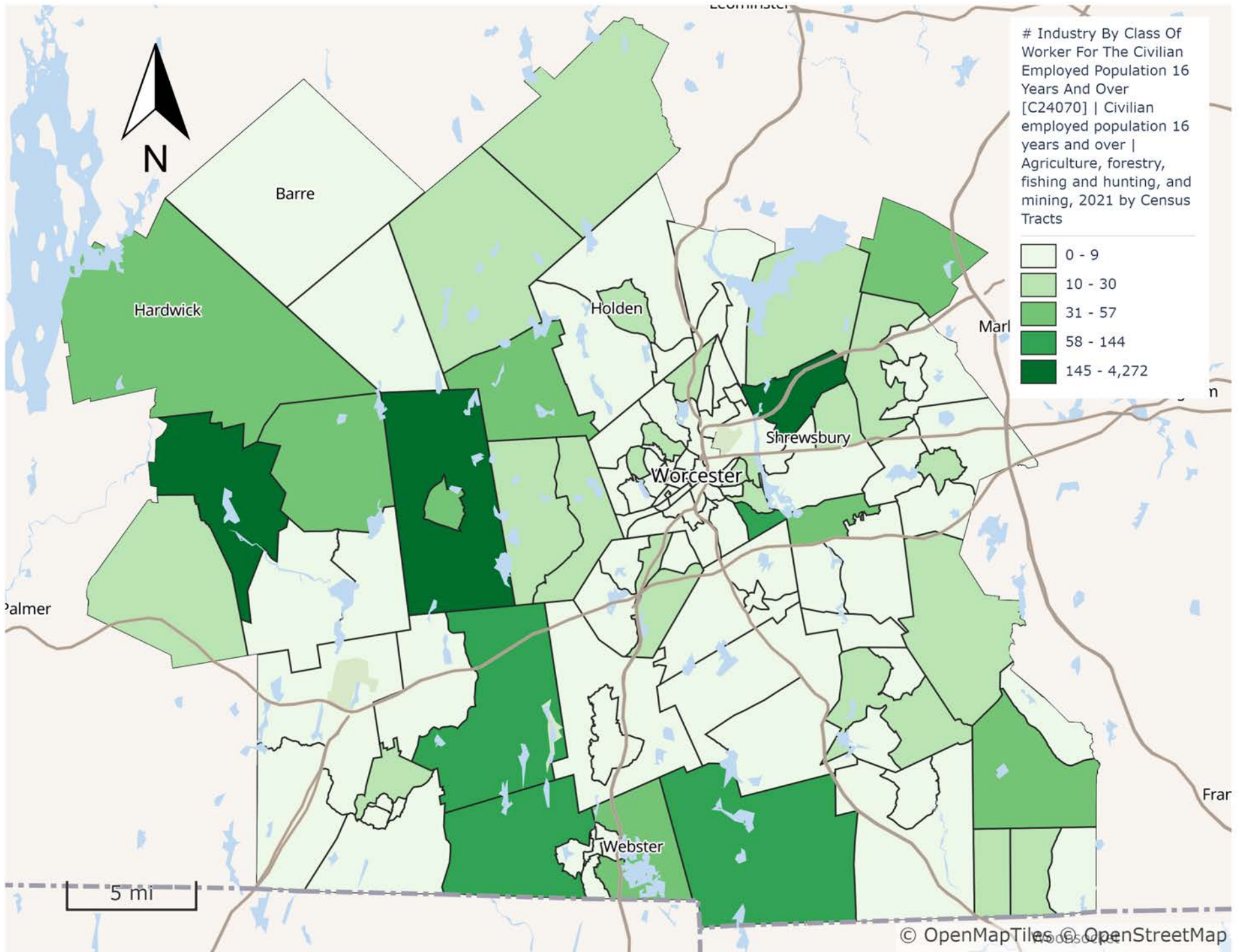


CMRPC Region Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services Jobs, 2017-2021

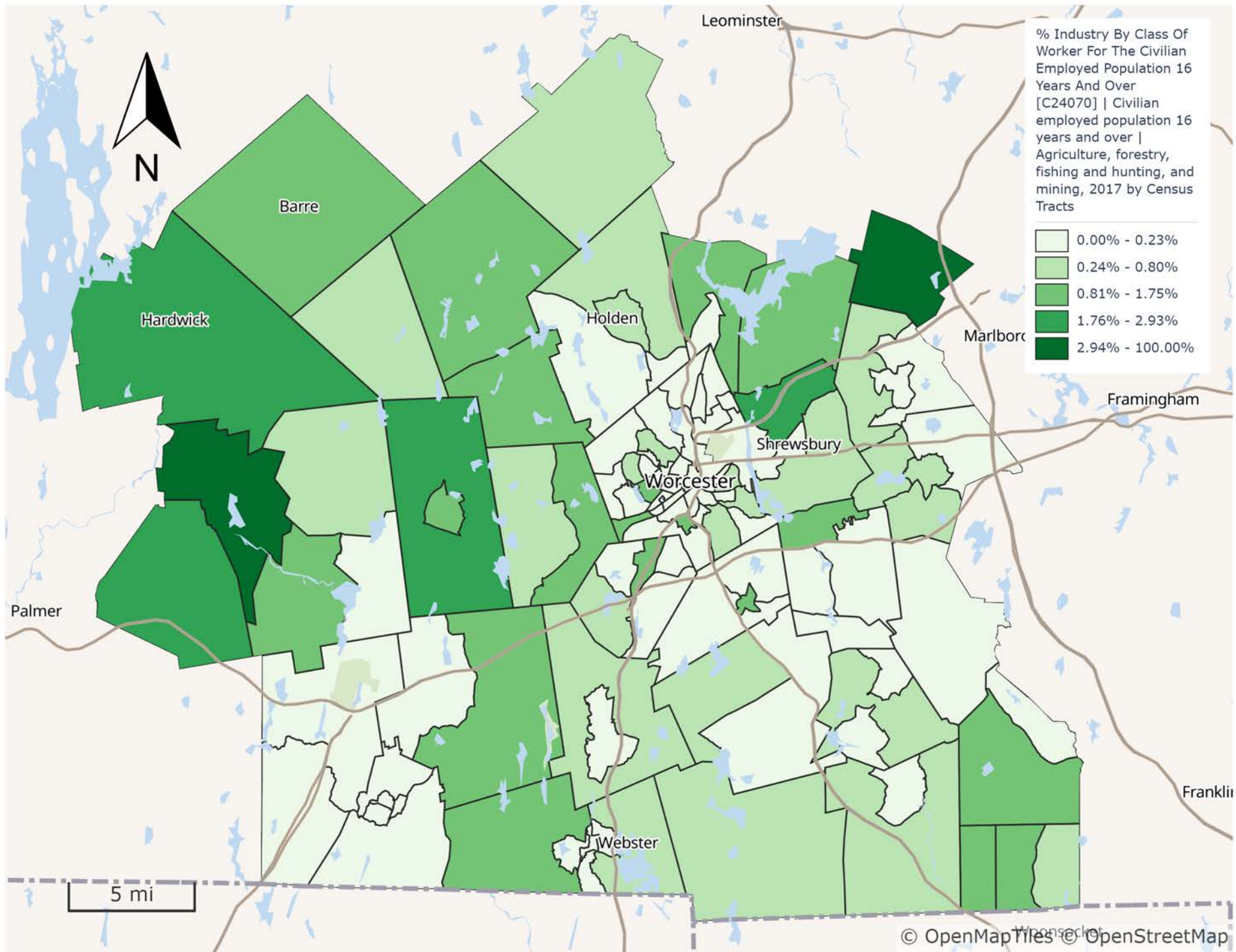




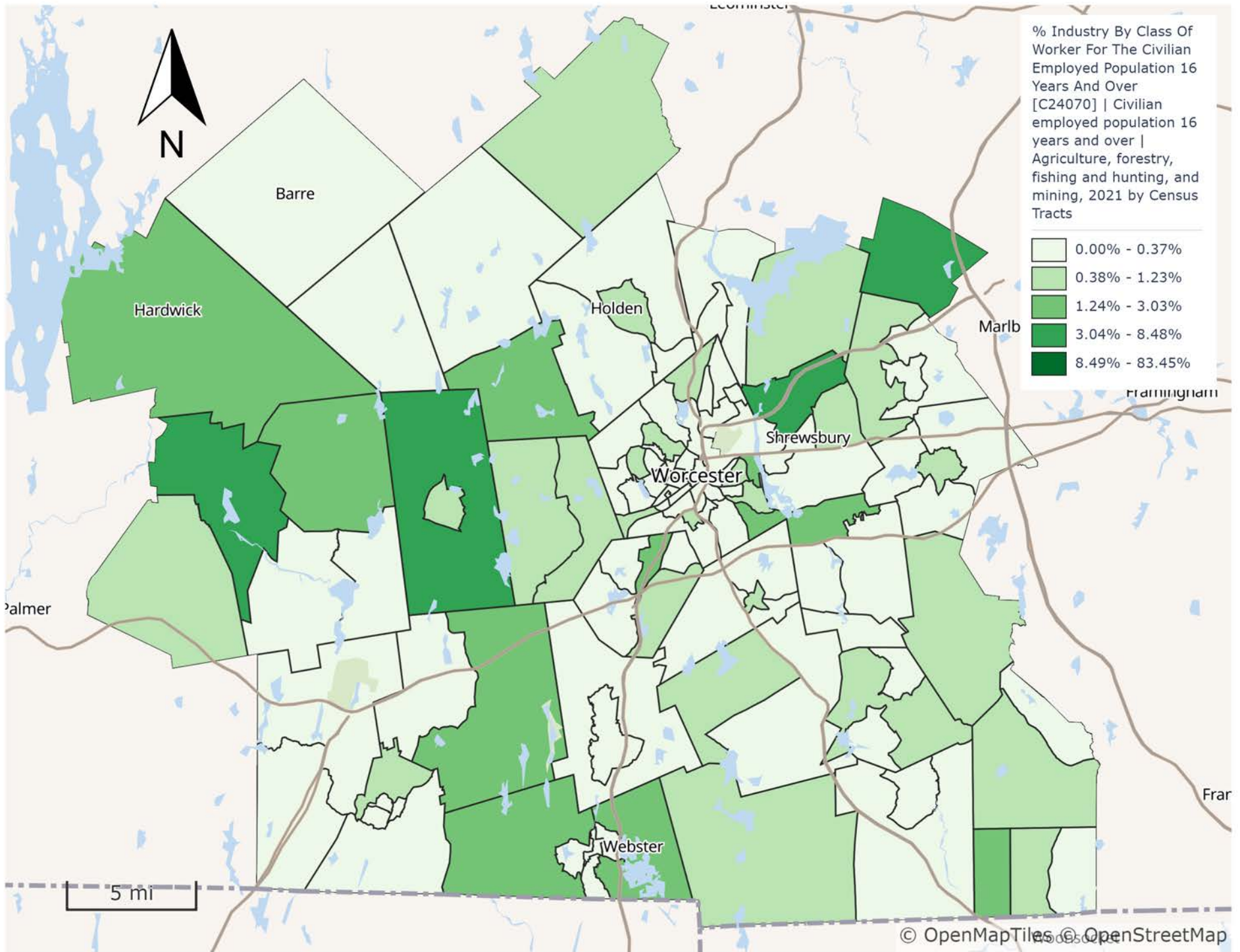
CMRPC Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining Jobs by Census Tract, 2017



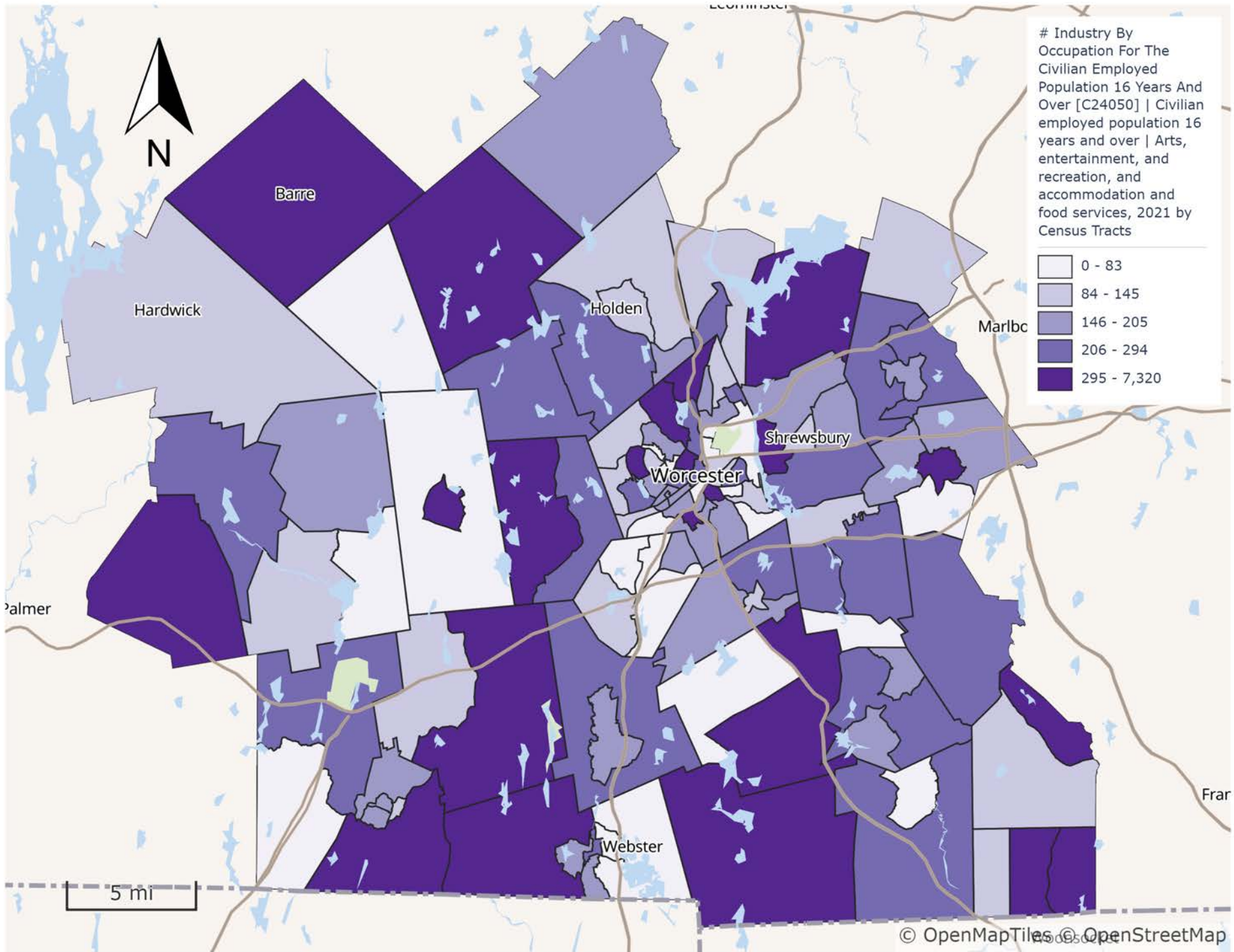
CMRPC Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



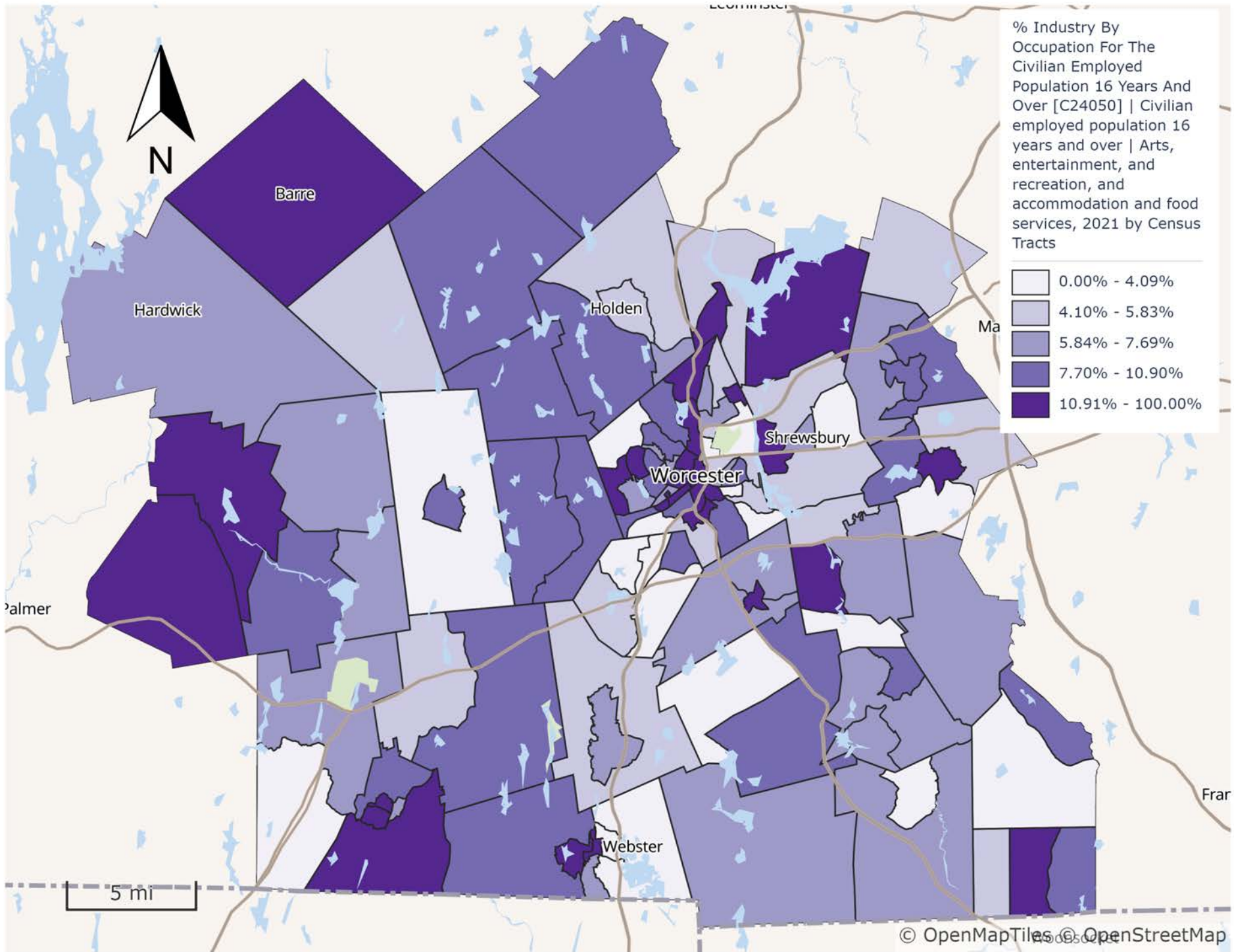
CMRPC Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2017



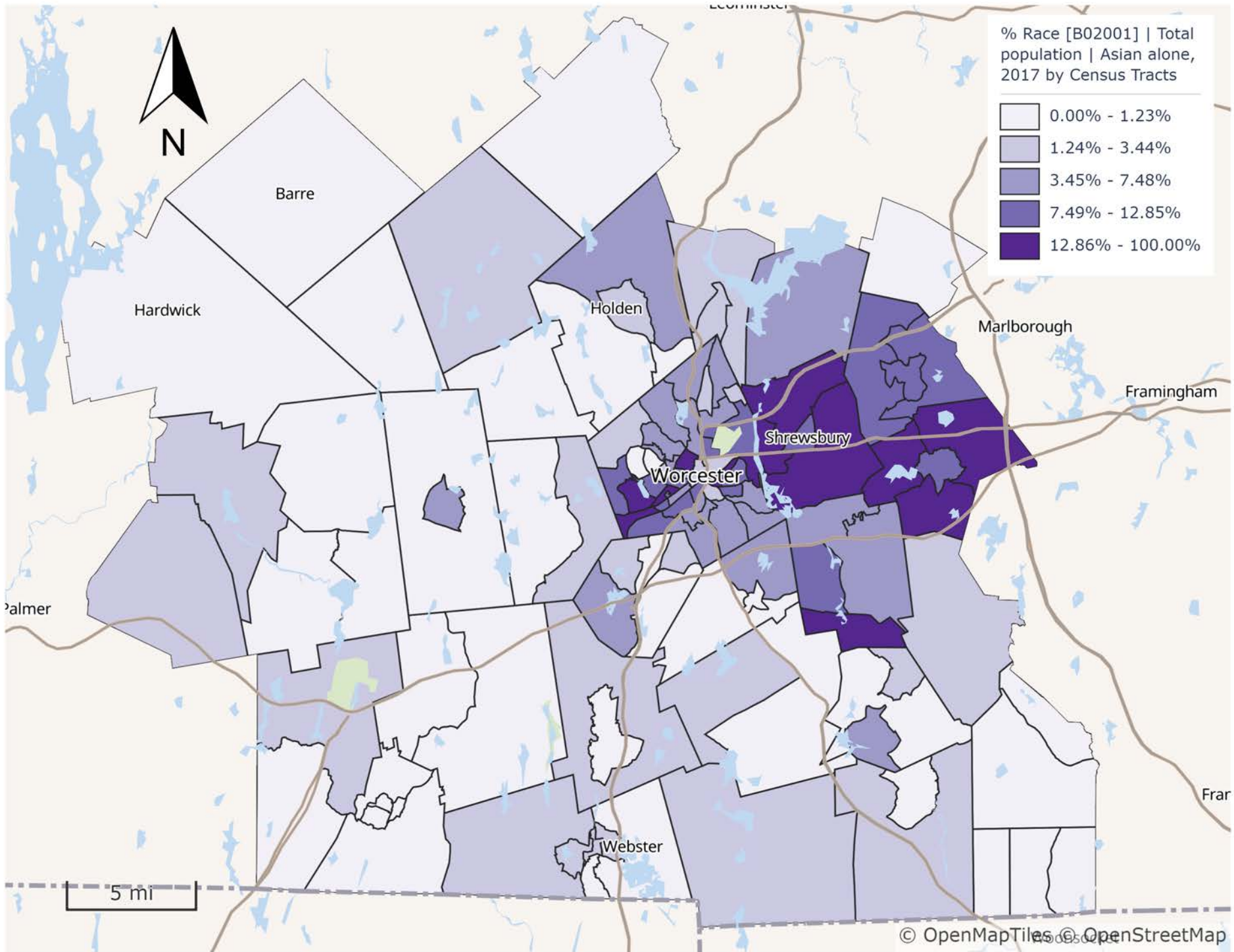
CMRPC Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



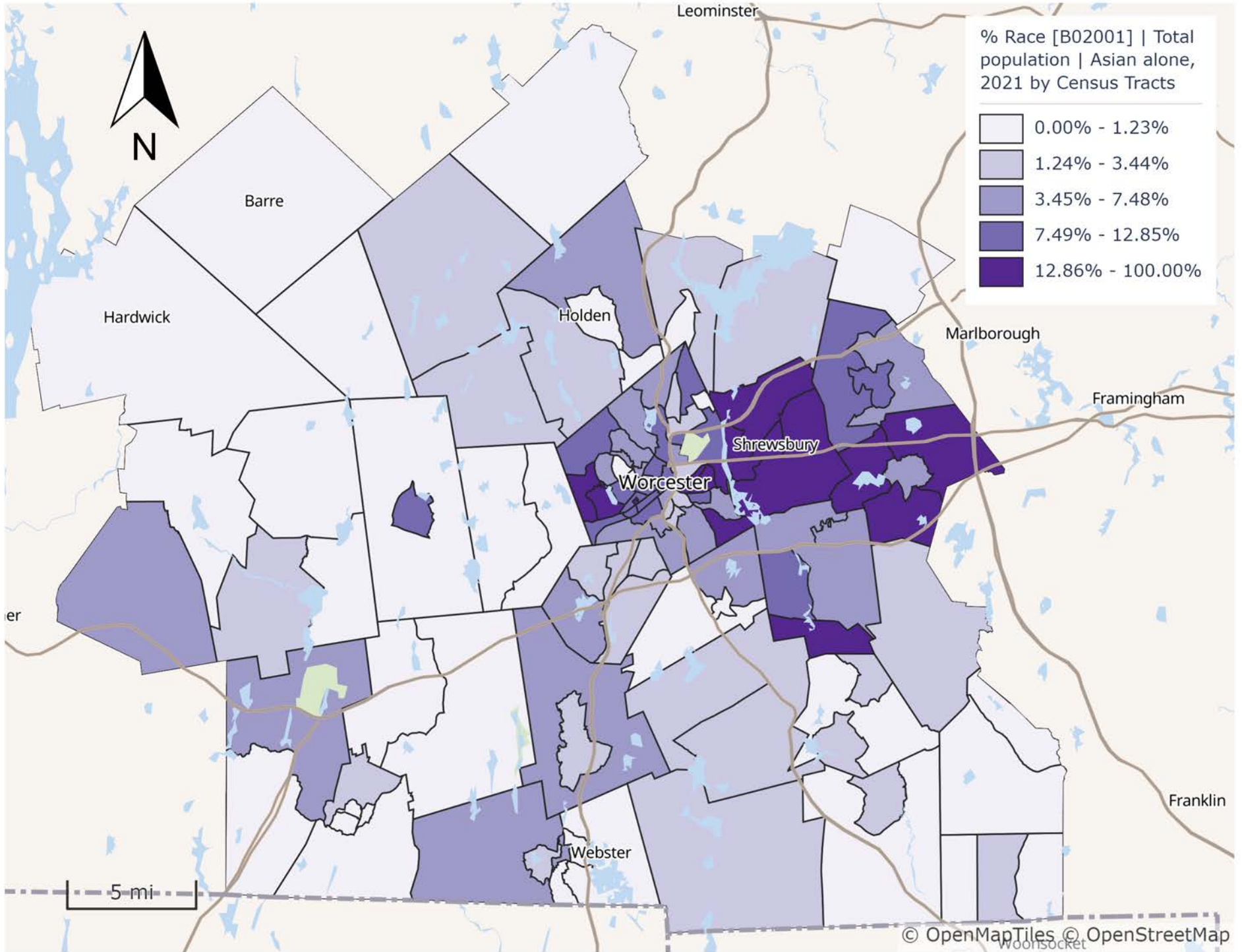
CMRPC Arts, Entertainment, Rec., Accommodation, and Food Services Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



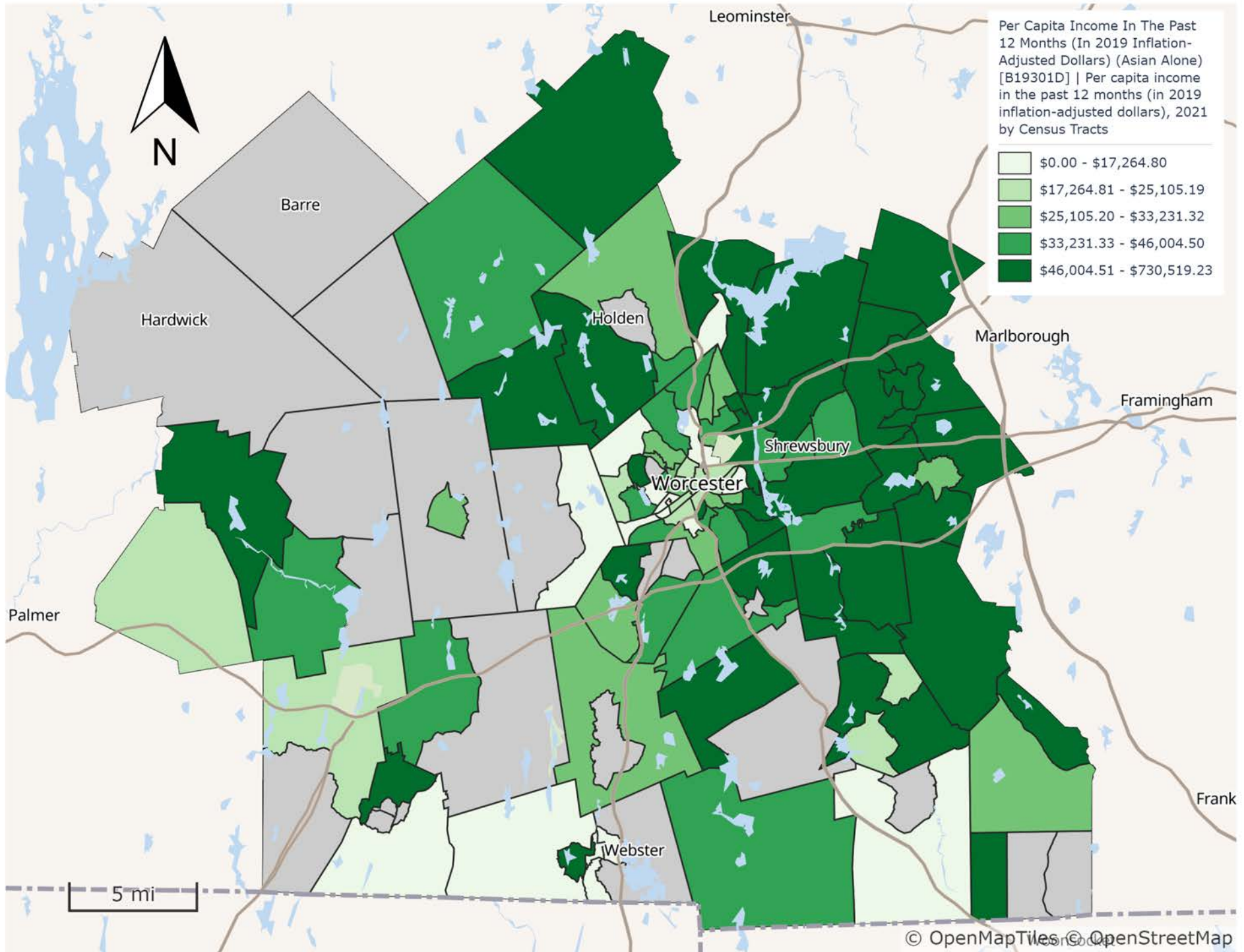
CMRPC Arts, Entertainment, Rec., Accommodation, and Food Services Jobs % by Census Tract, 2021



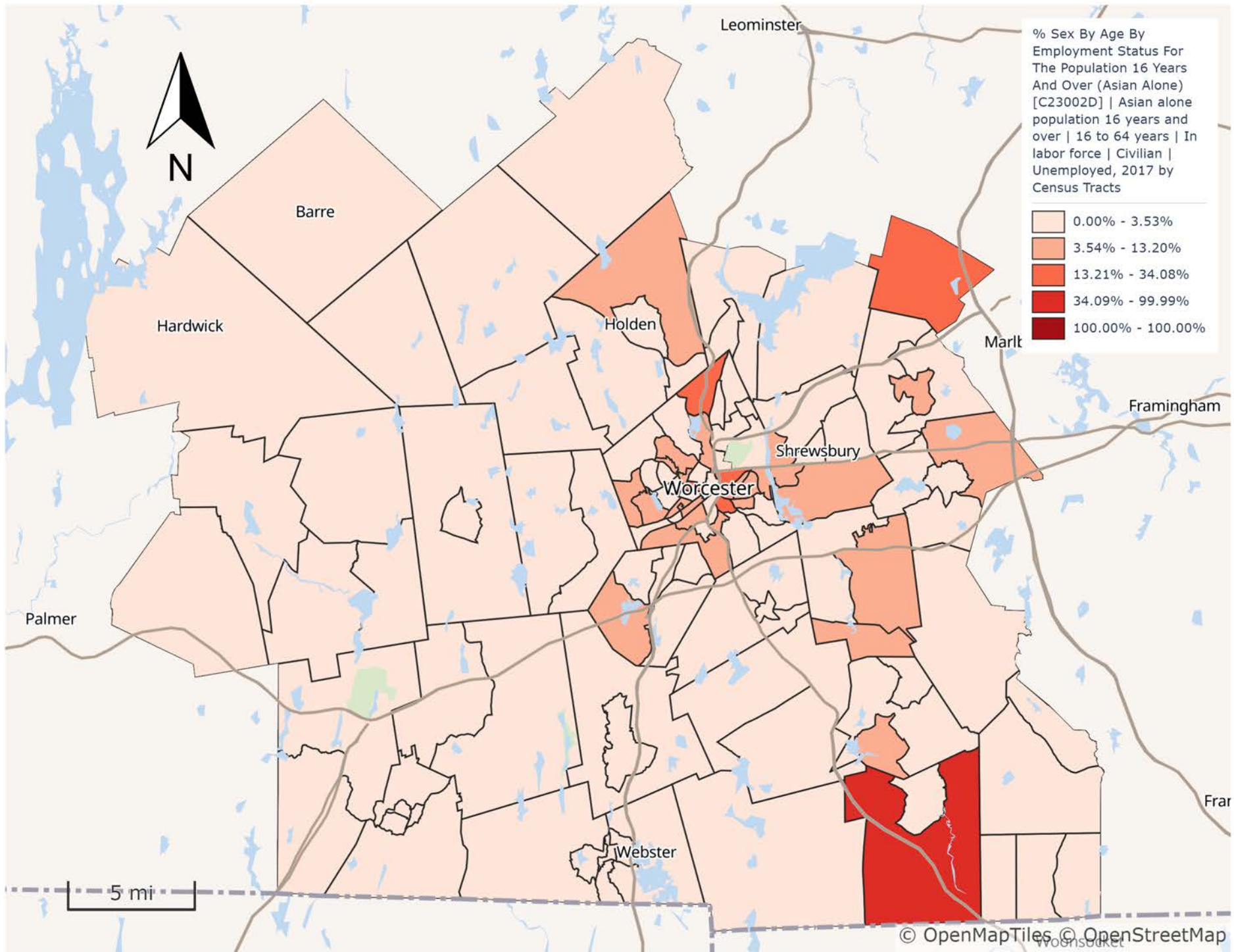
CMRPC Asian Alone Population by Census Tract, 2017



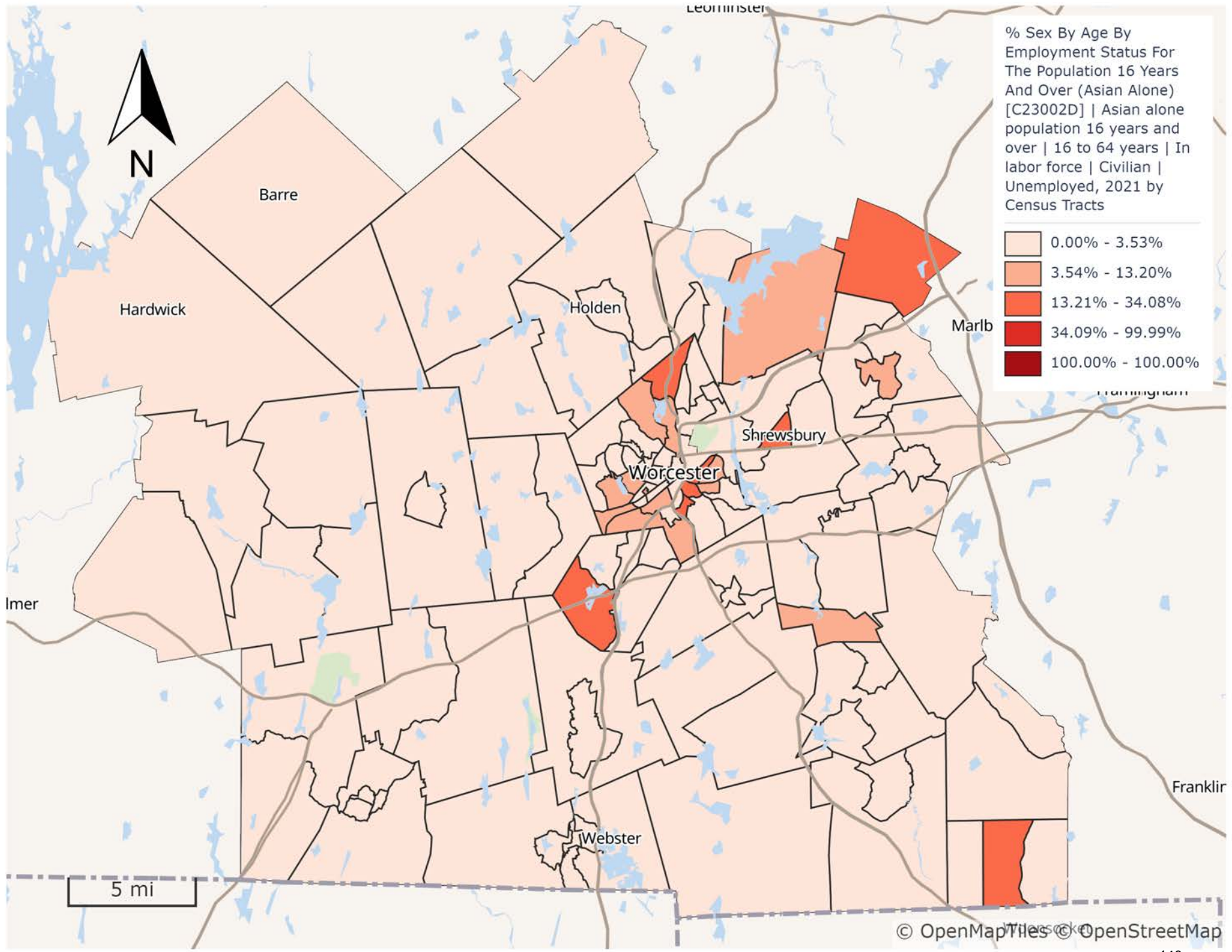
CMRPC Asian Alone Population by Census Tract, 2021



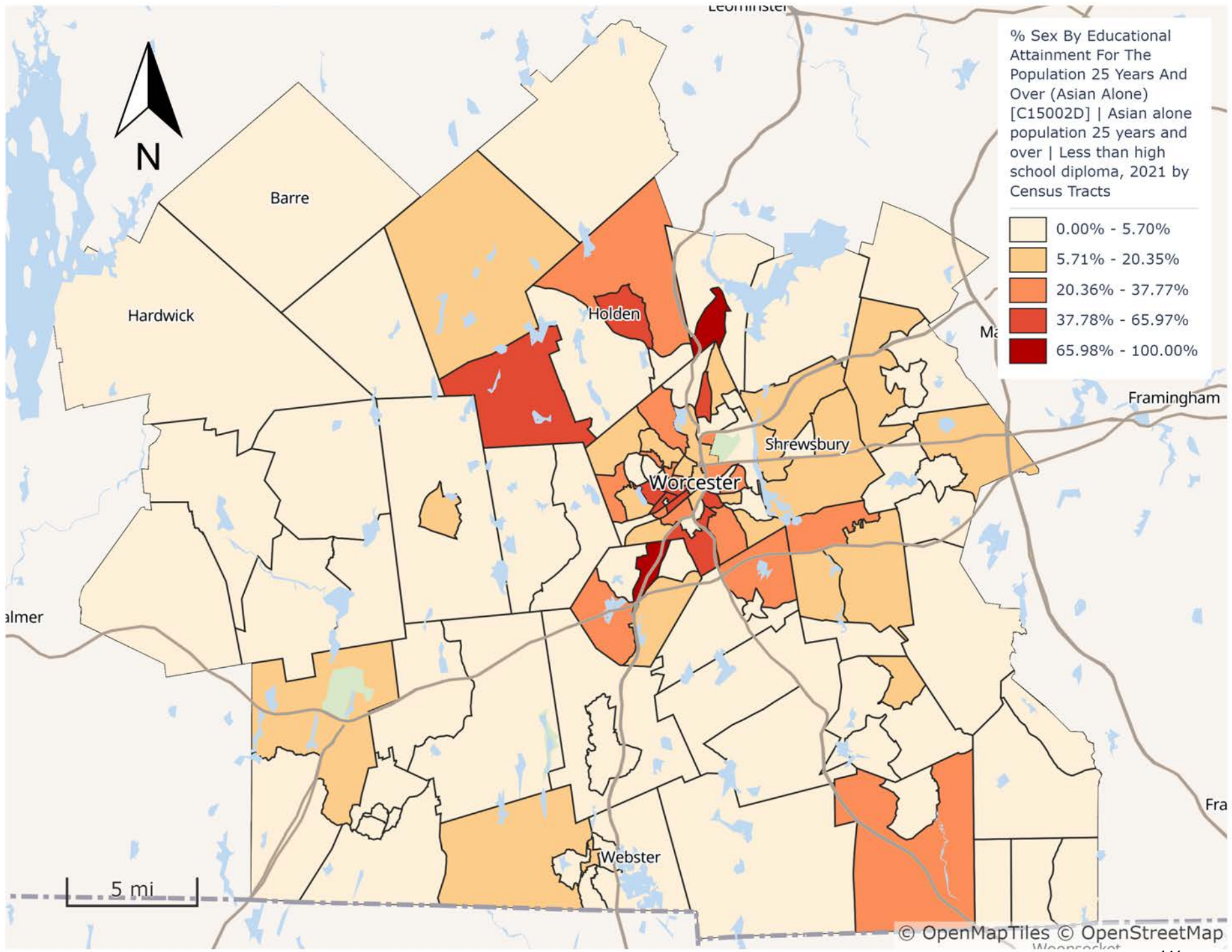
CMRPC Asian Alone Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021



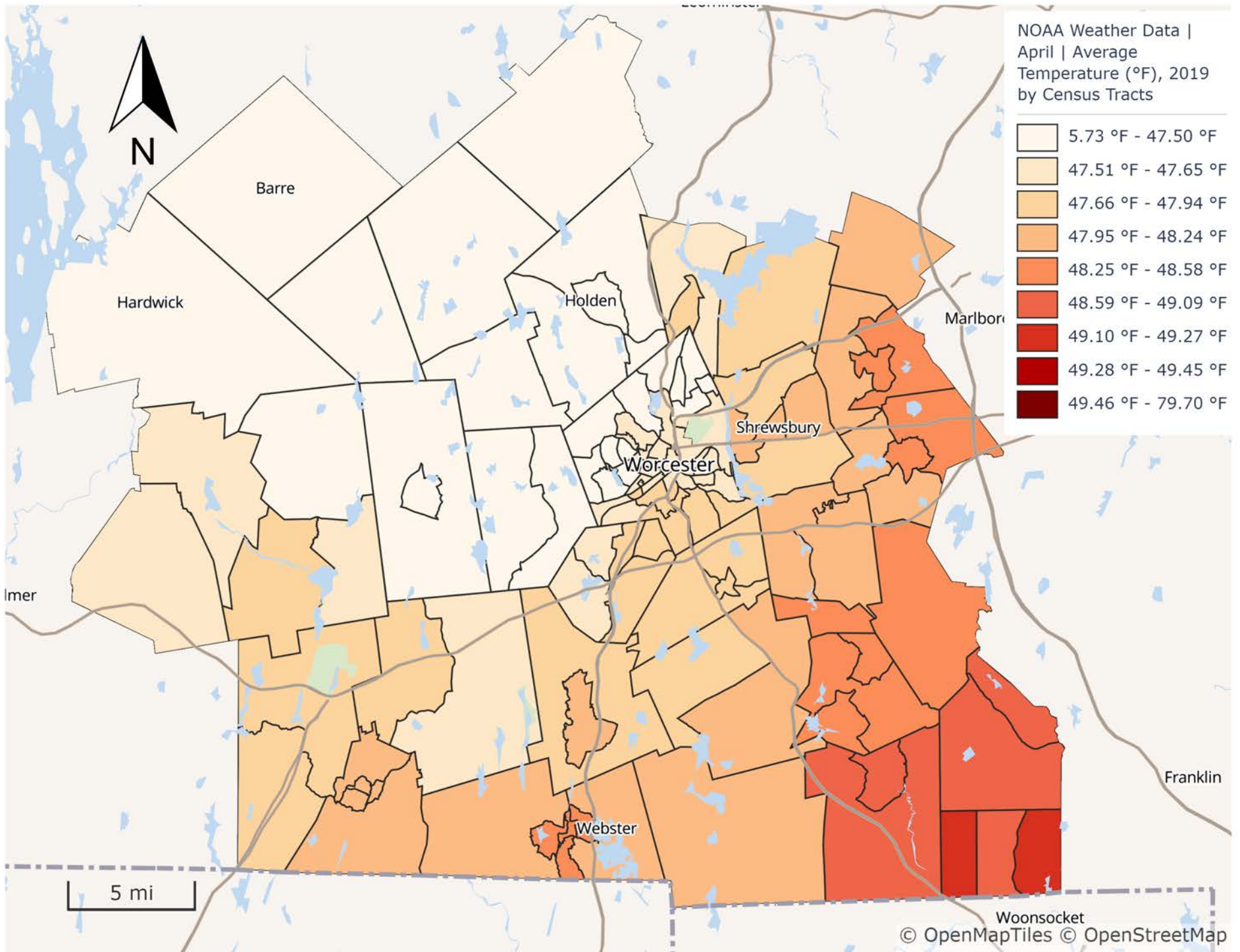
CMRPC Asian Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017



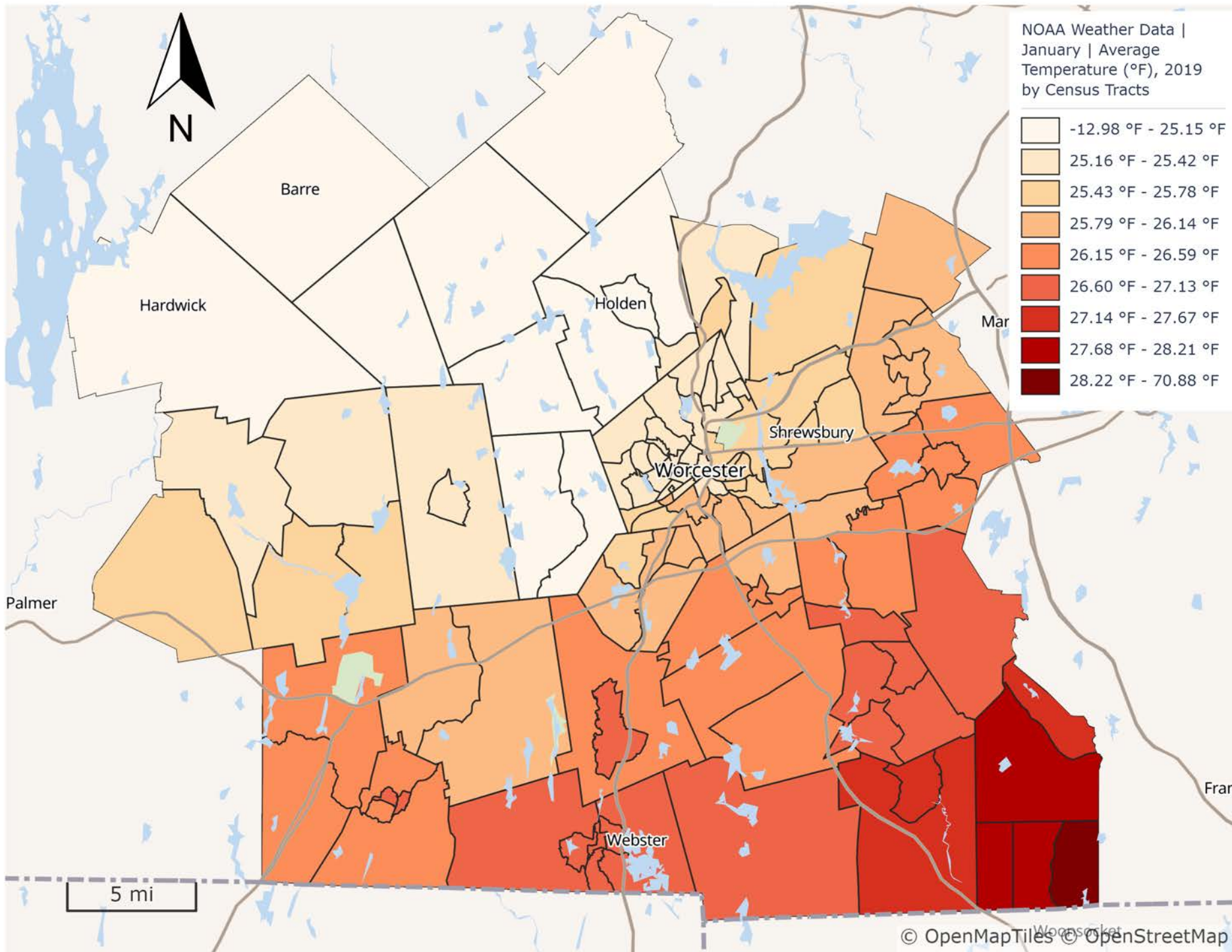
CMRPC Asian Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021



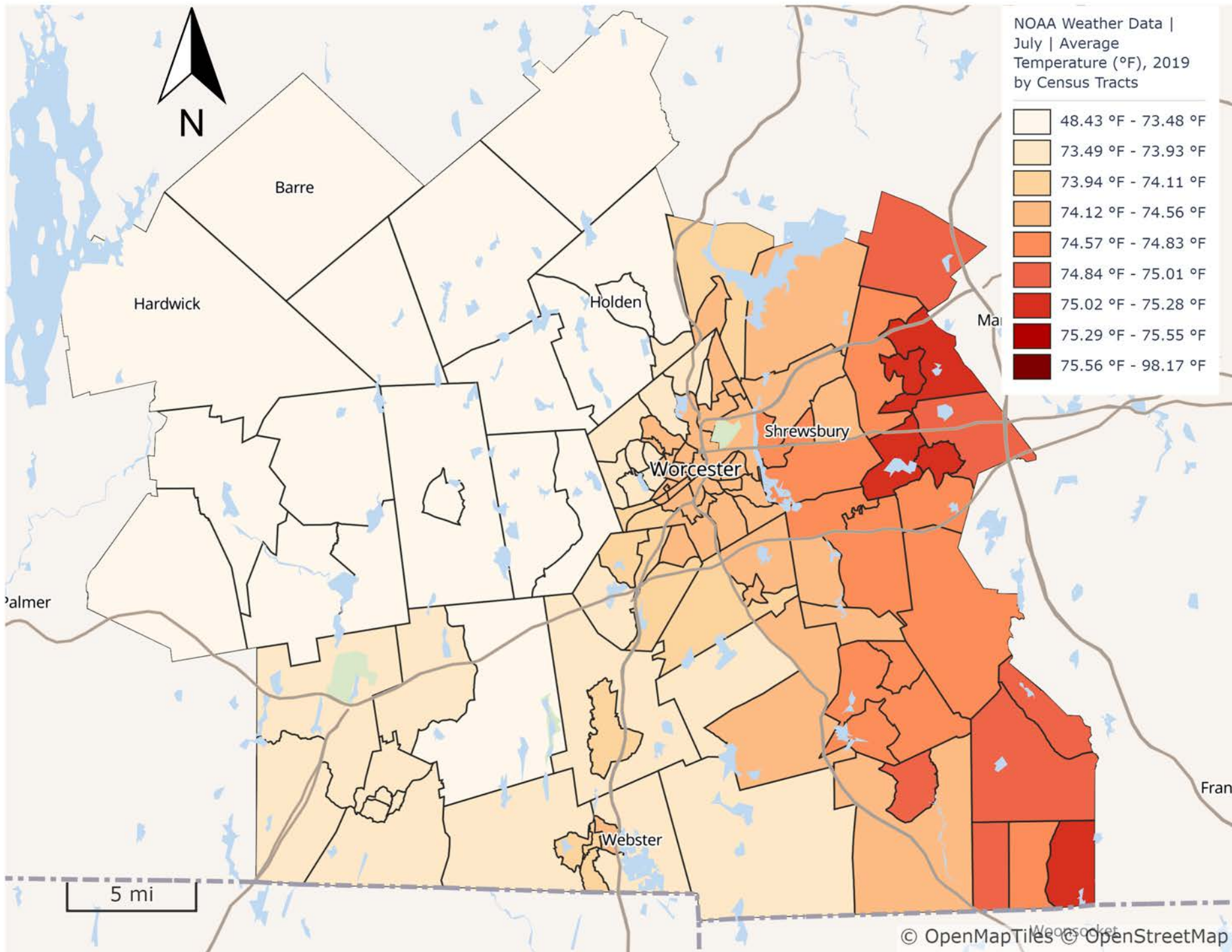
CMRPC Asian Alone Population With Less Than a High School Diploma by Census Tract, 2021



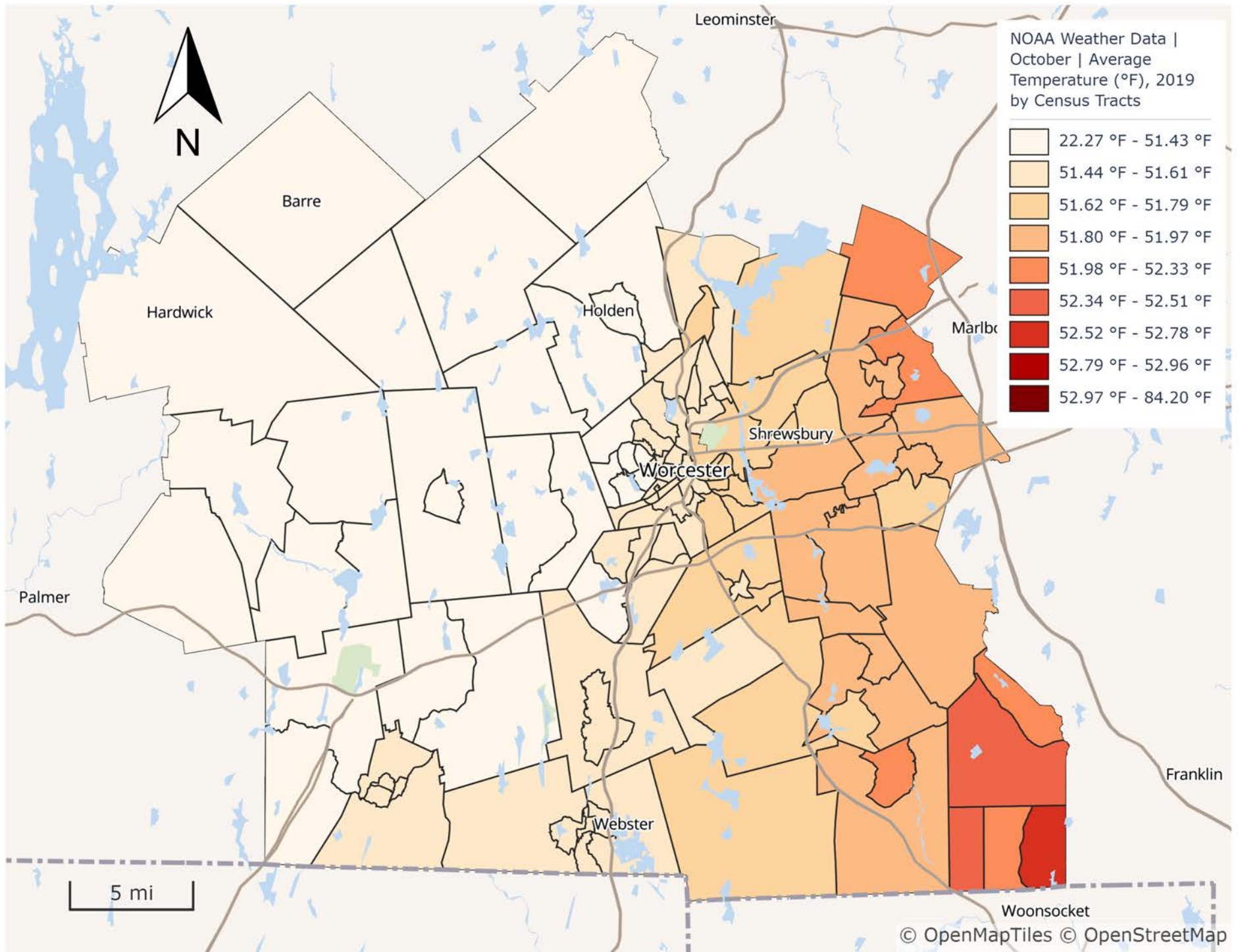
CMRPC Average Temperature by Census Tract, April 2019



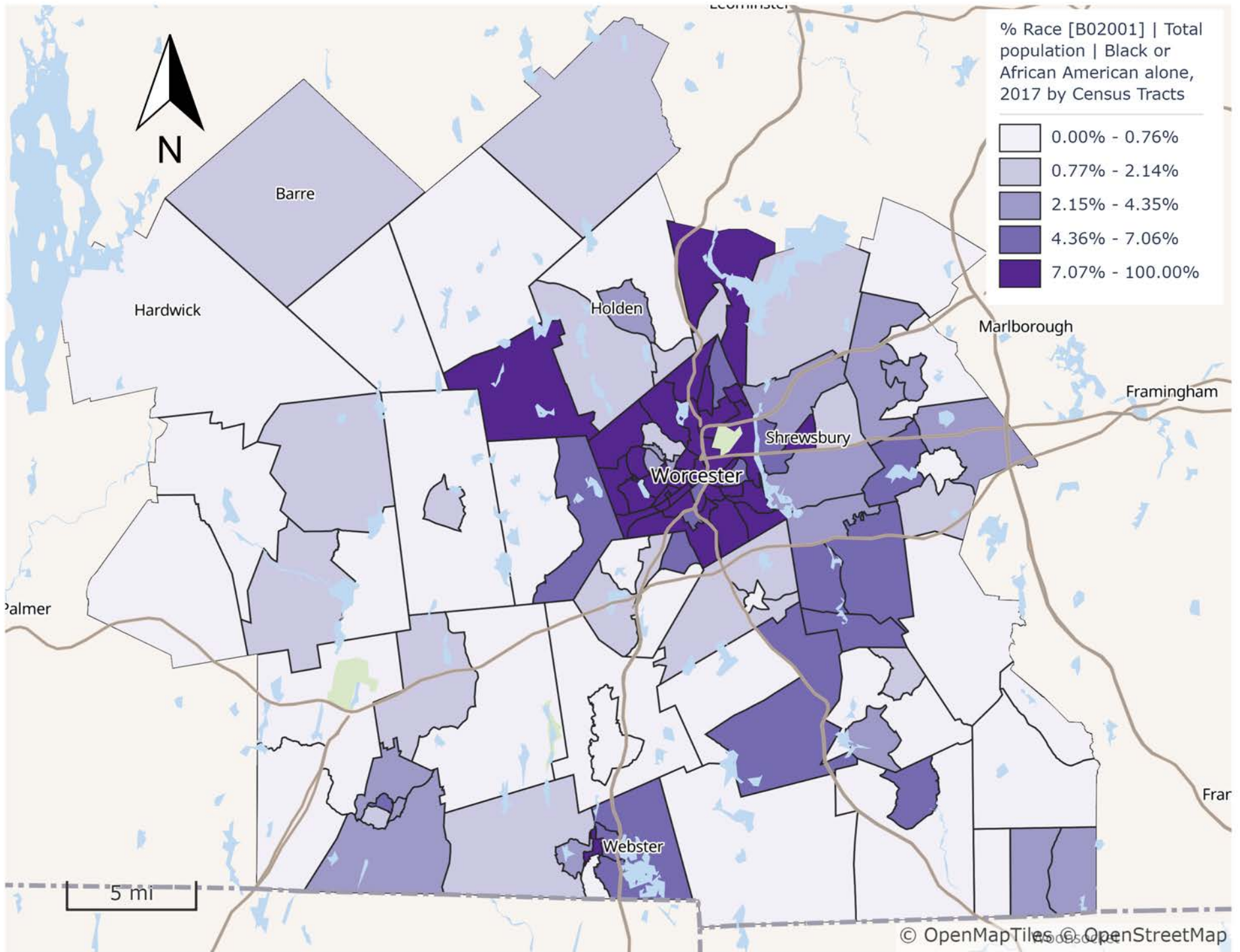
CMRPC Average Temperature by Census Tract, January 2019



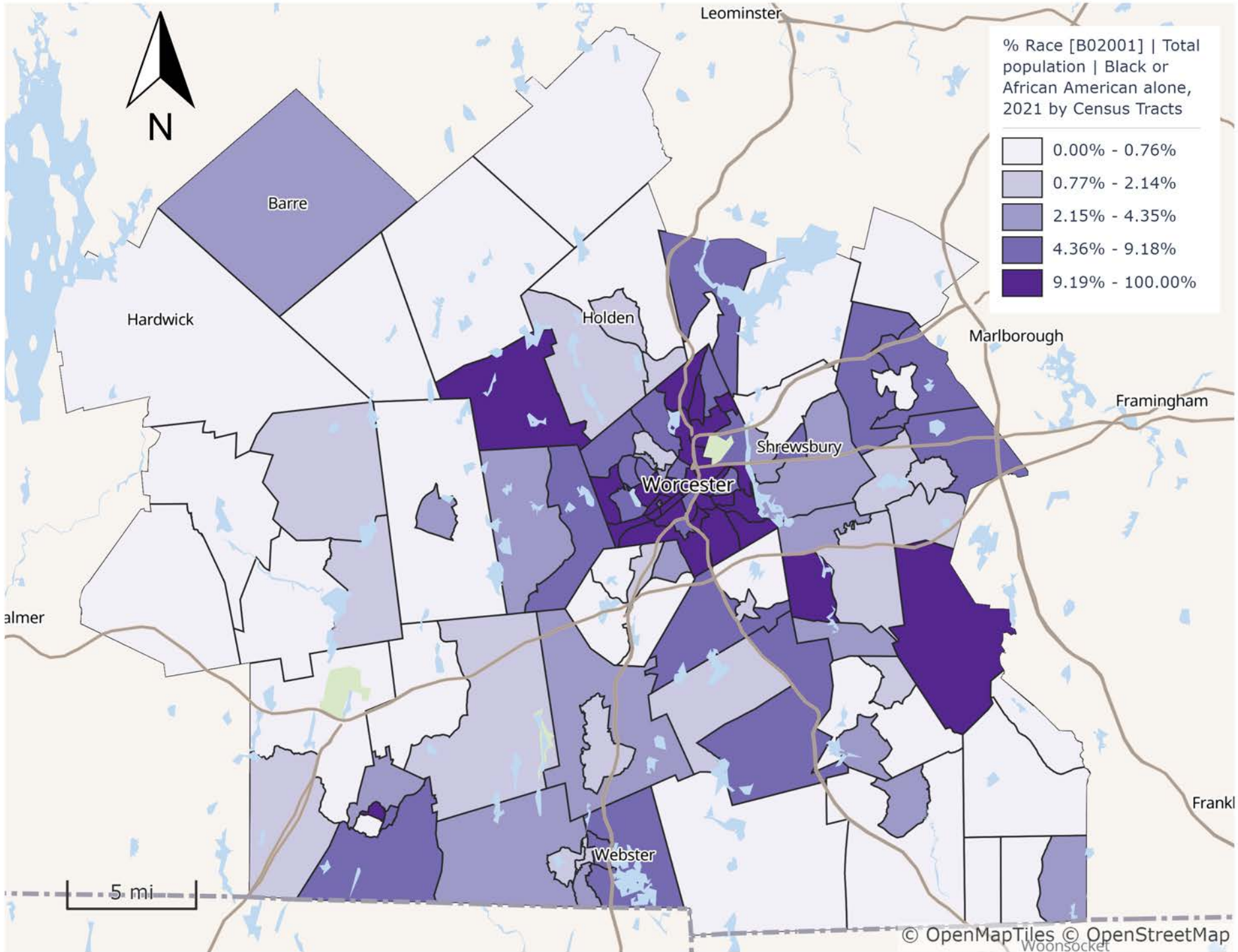
CMRPC Average Temperature by Census Tract, July 2019



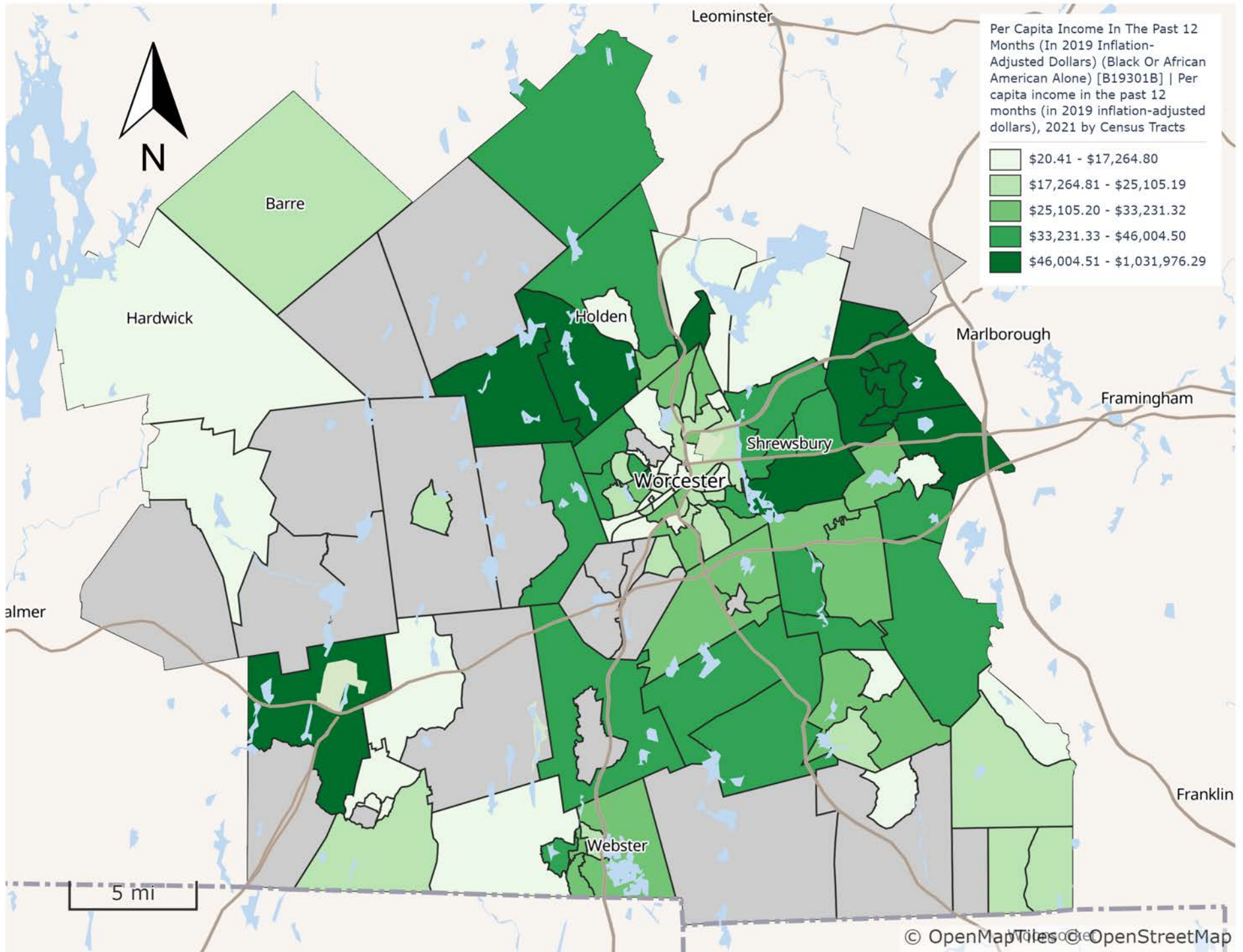
CMRPC Average Temperature by Census Tract, October 2019



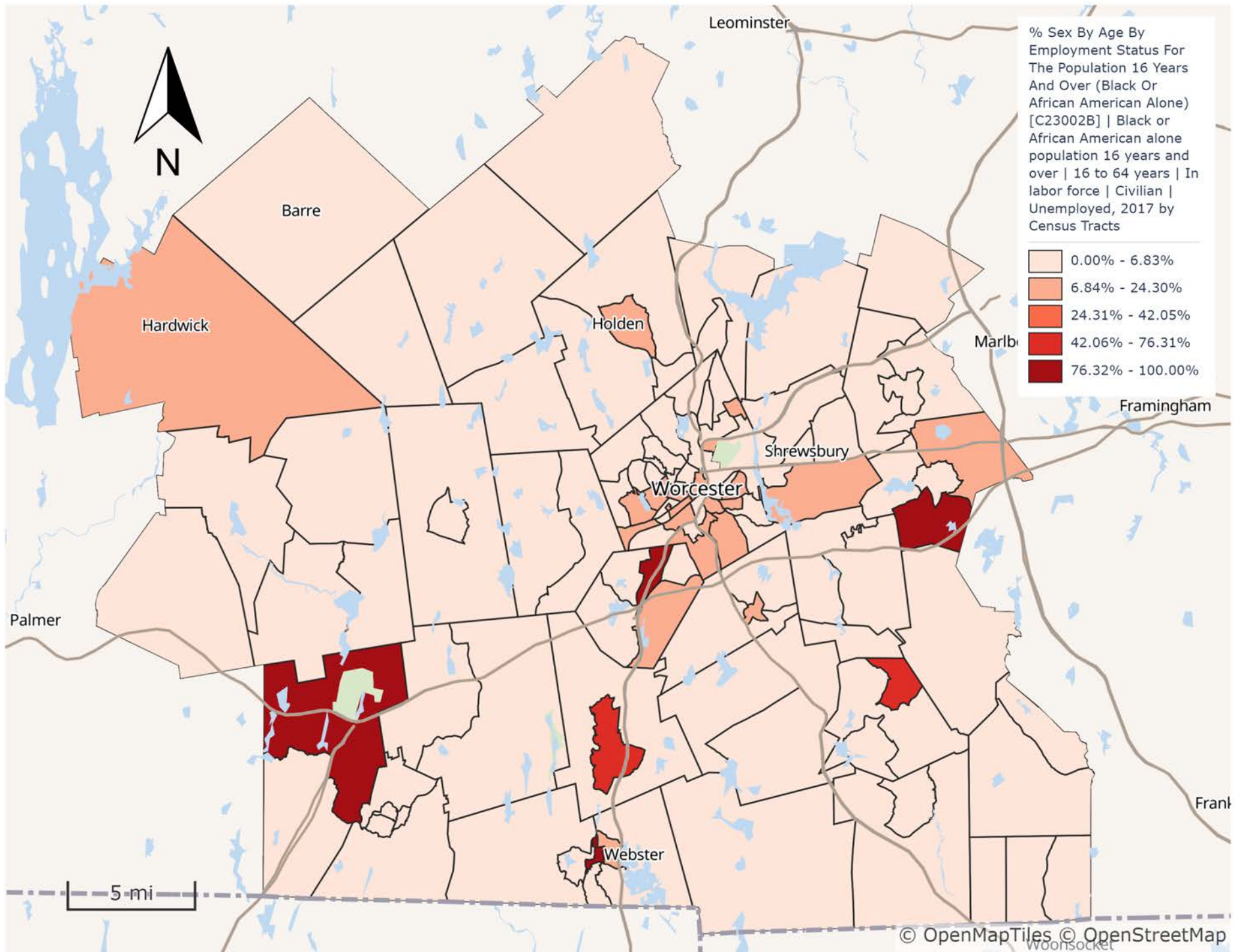
CMRPC Black or African American Alone Population by Census Tract, 2017



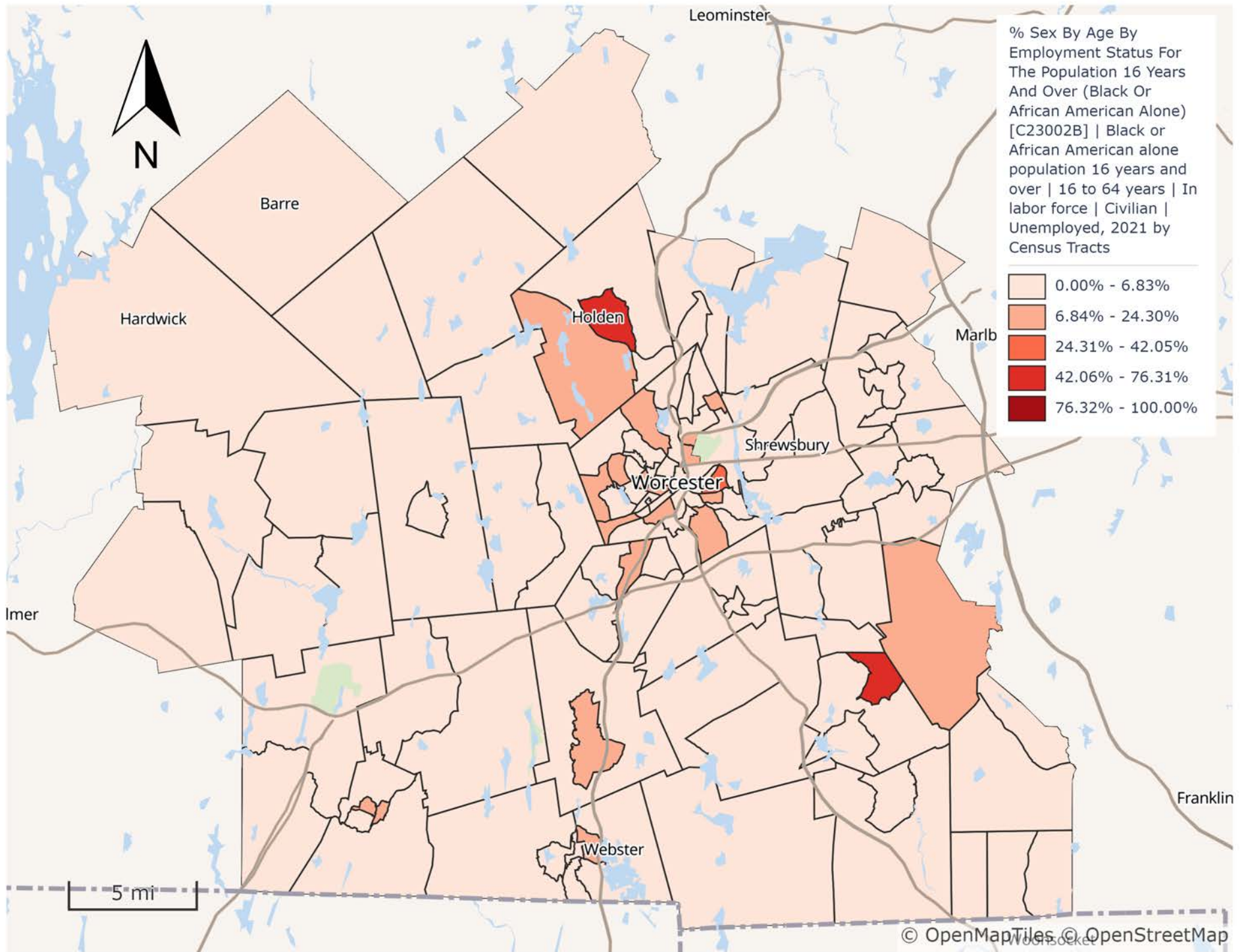
CMRPC Black or African American Population Alone by Census Tract, 2021



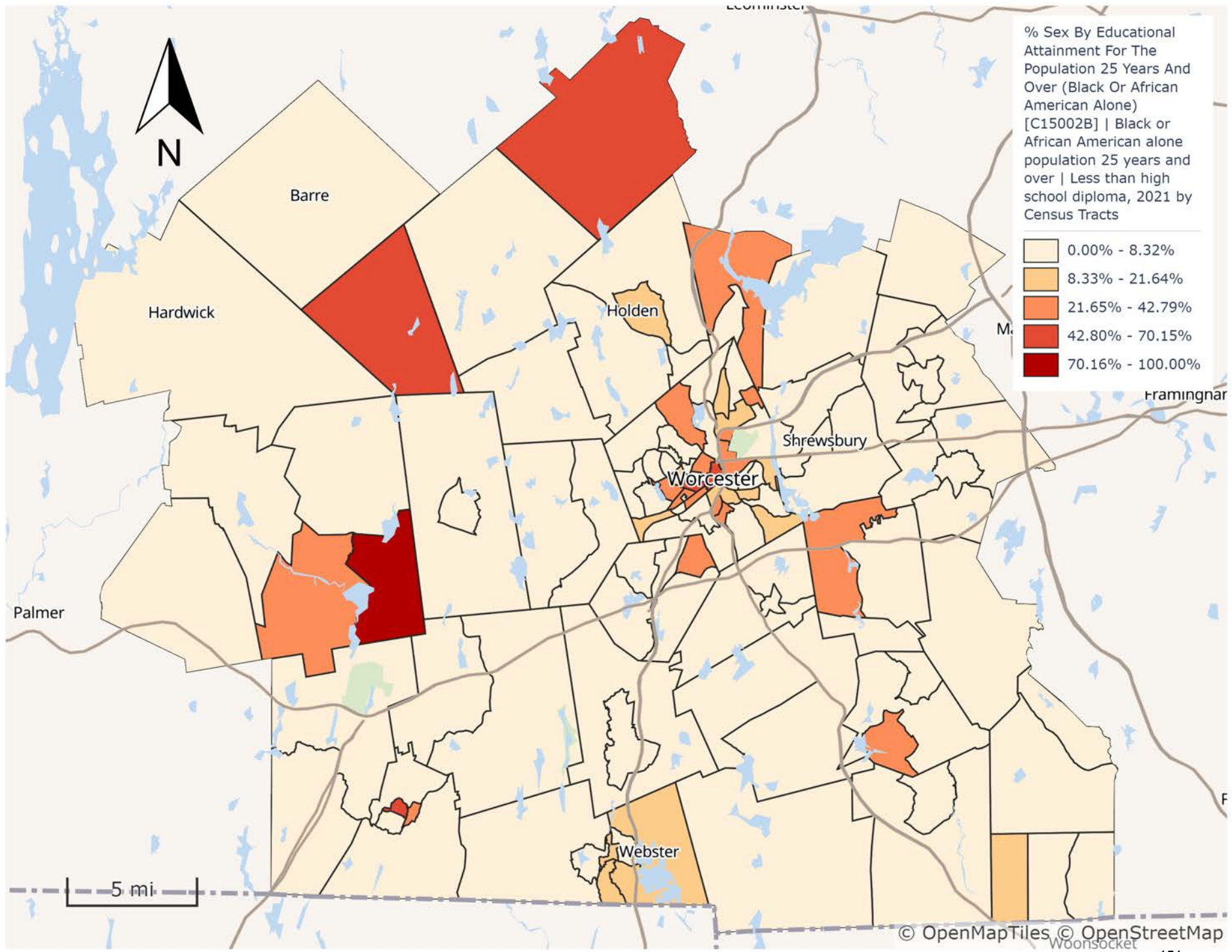
CMRPC Black or African American Alone Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021



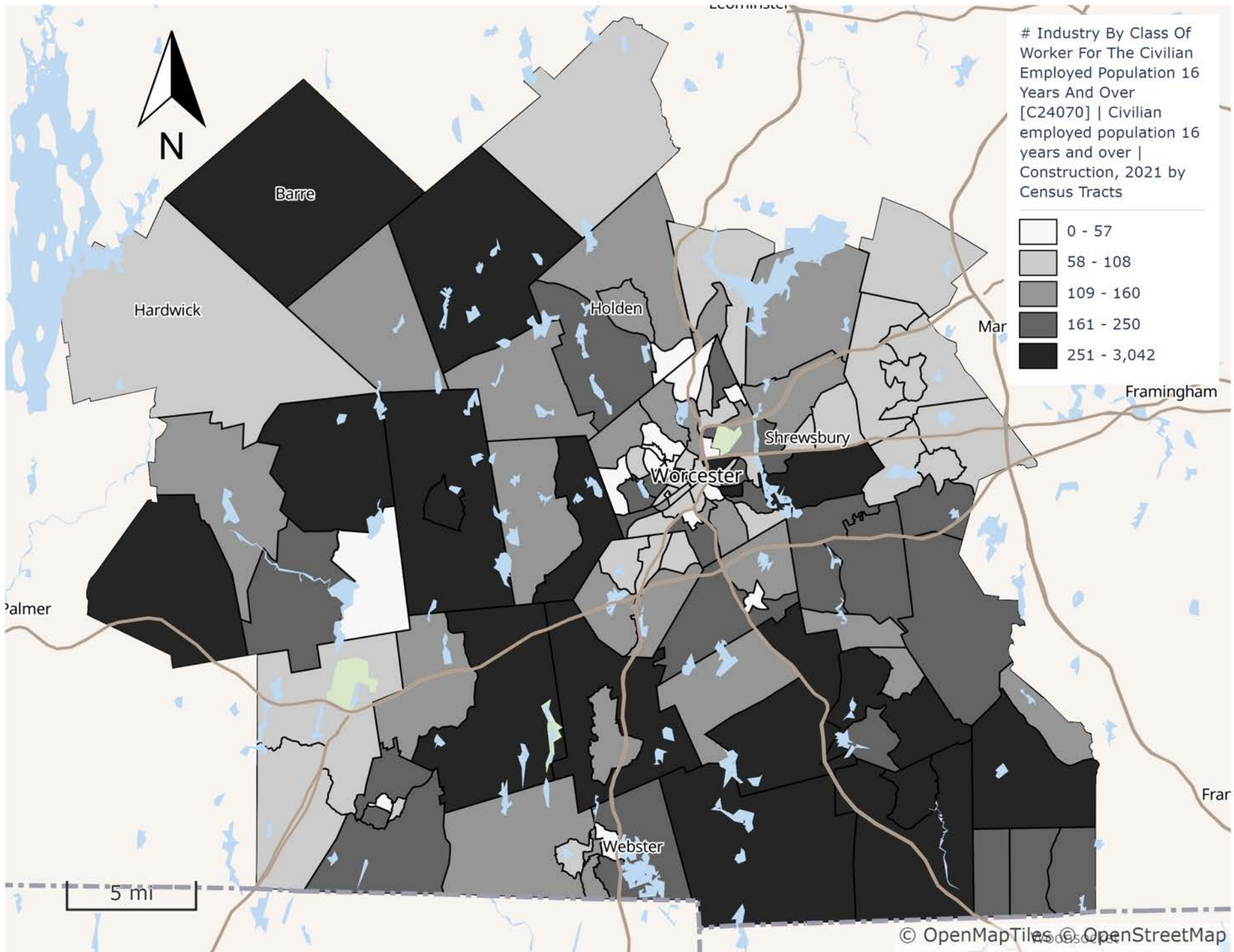
CMRPC Black or African American Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017



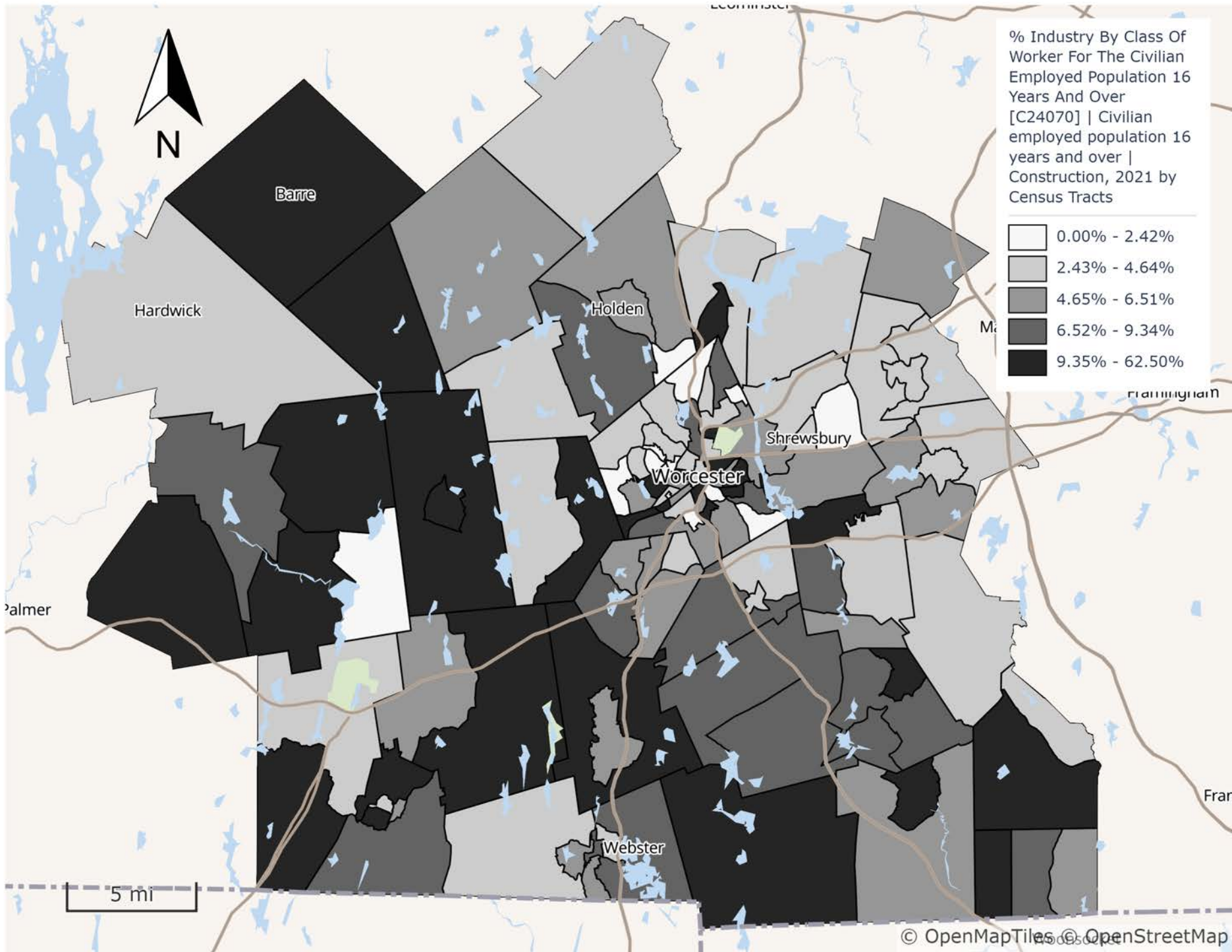
CMRPC Black or African American Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021



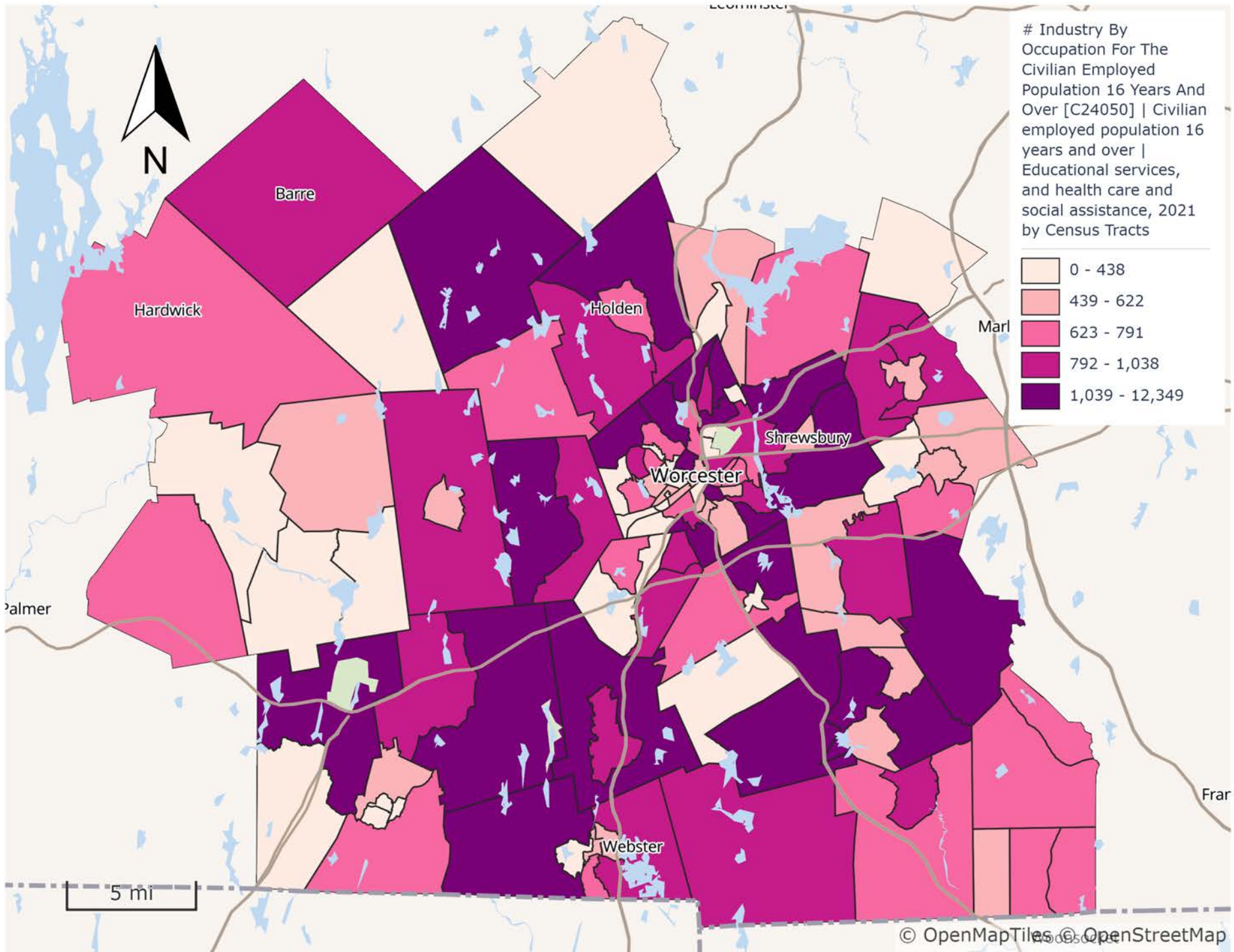
CMRPC Black Alone Population With Less Than a High School Diploma by Census Tract, 2021



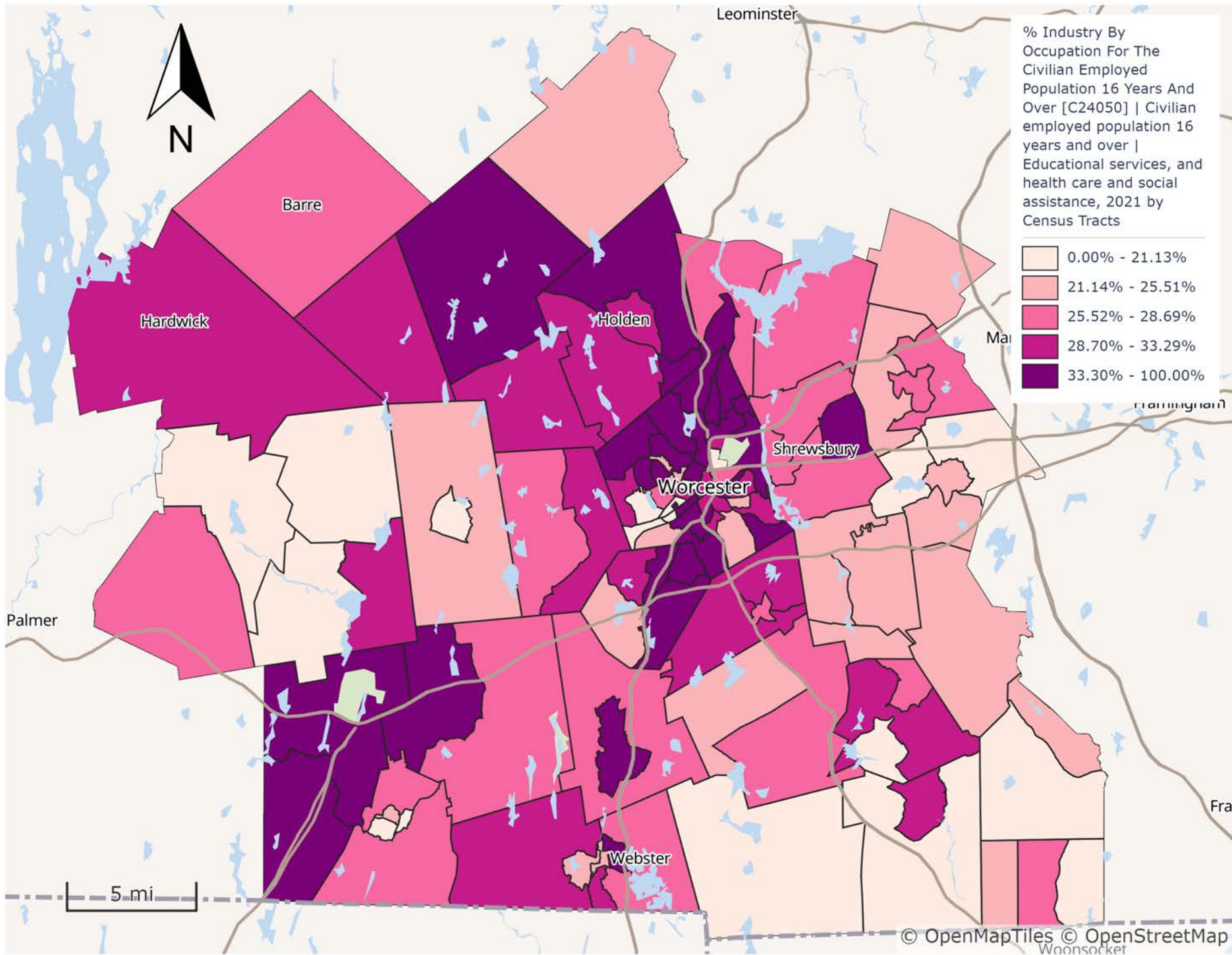
CMRPC Construction Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



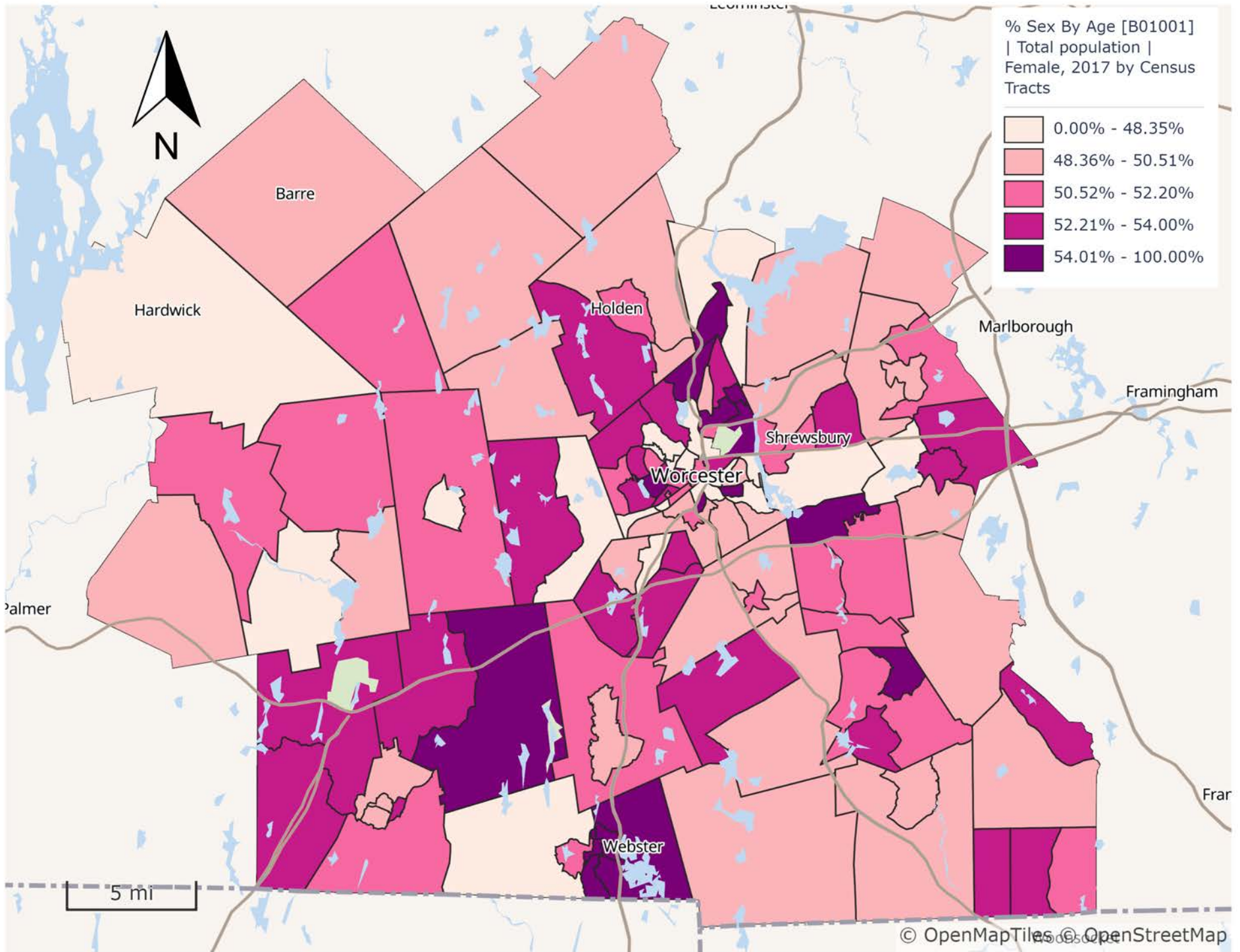
CMRPC Construction Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



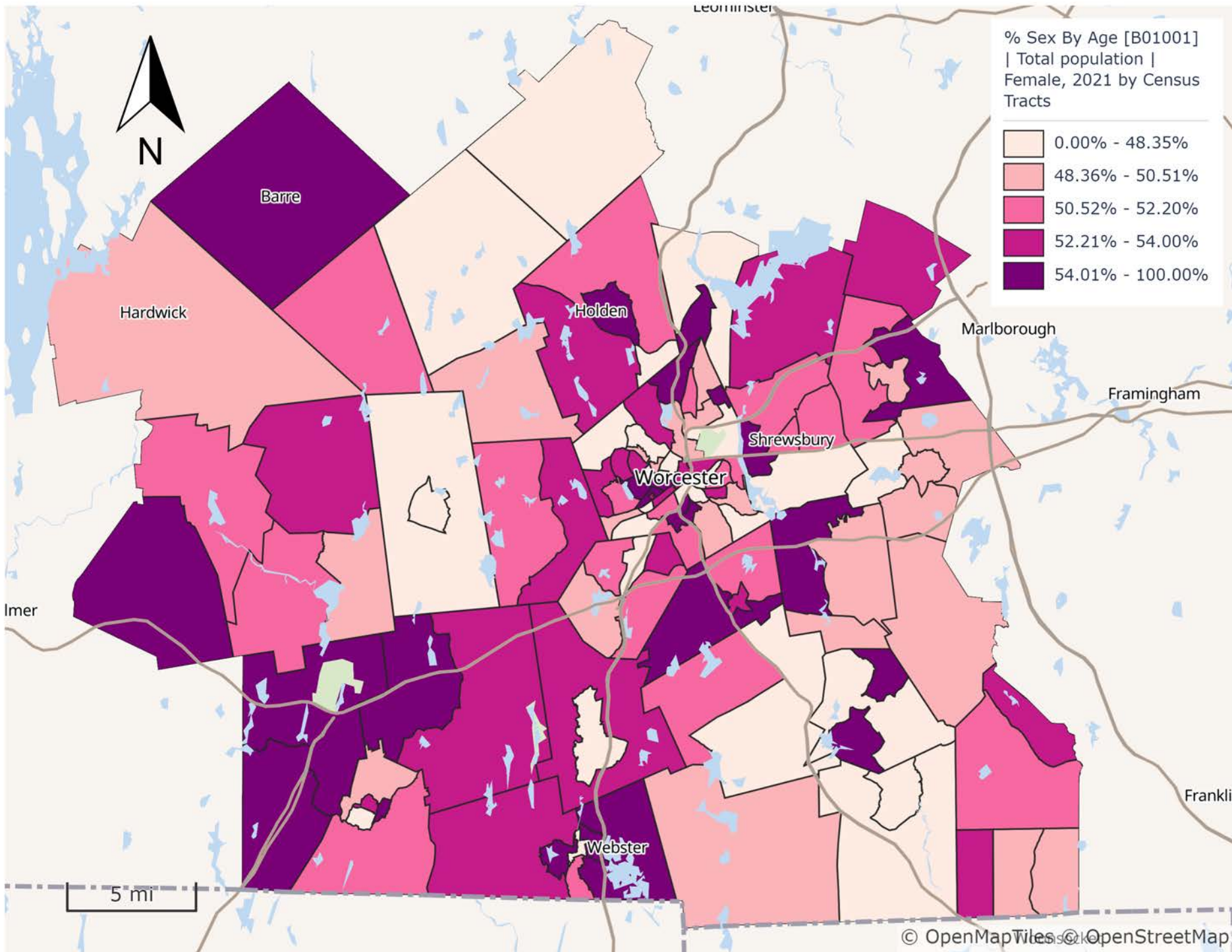
CMRPC Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



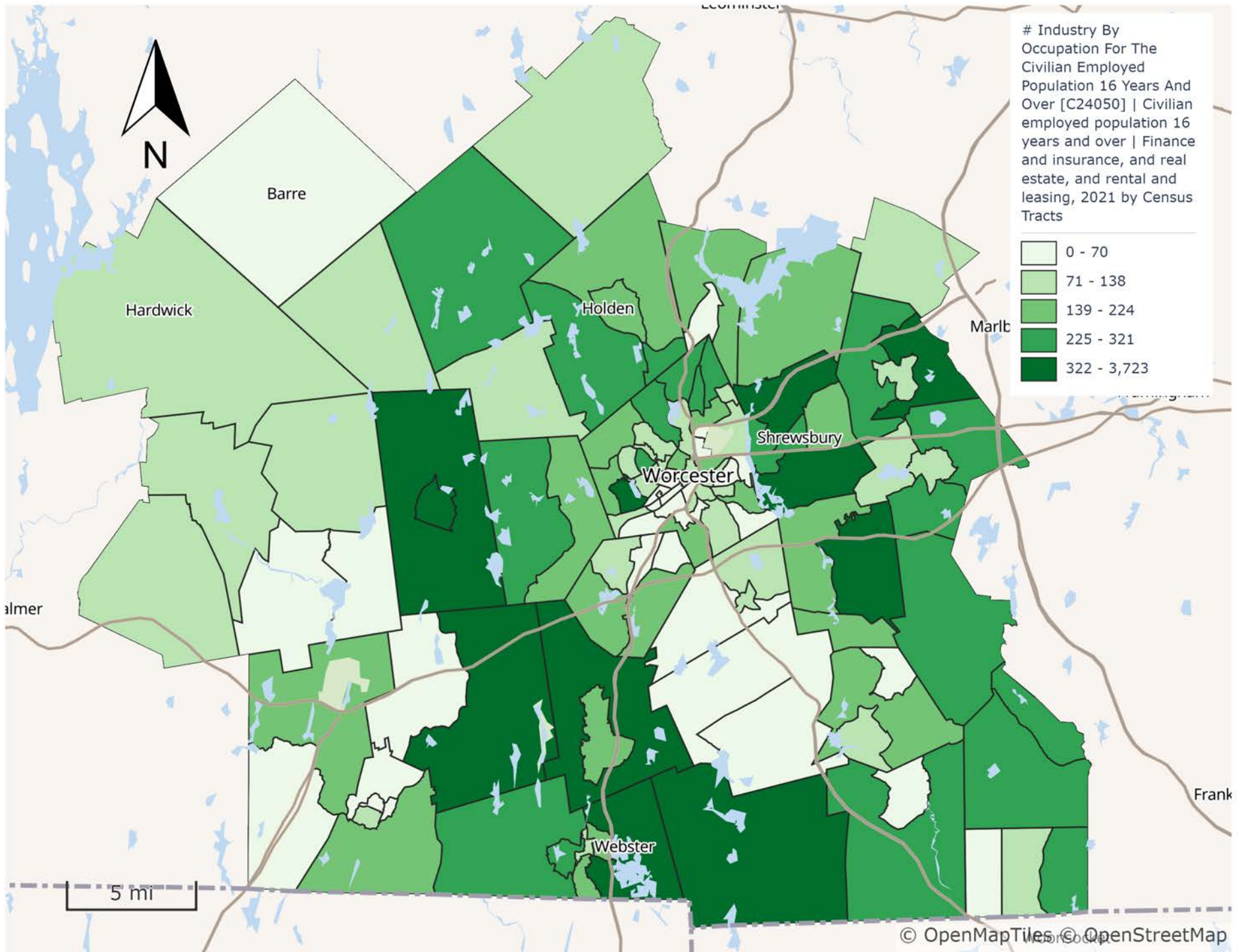
CMRPC Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance Jobs % by Census Tract, 2021



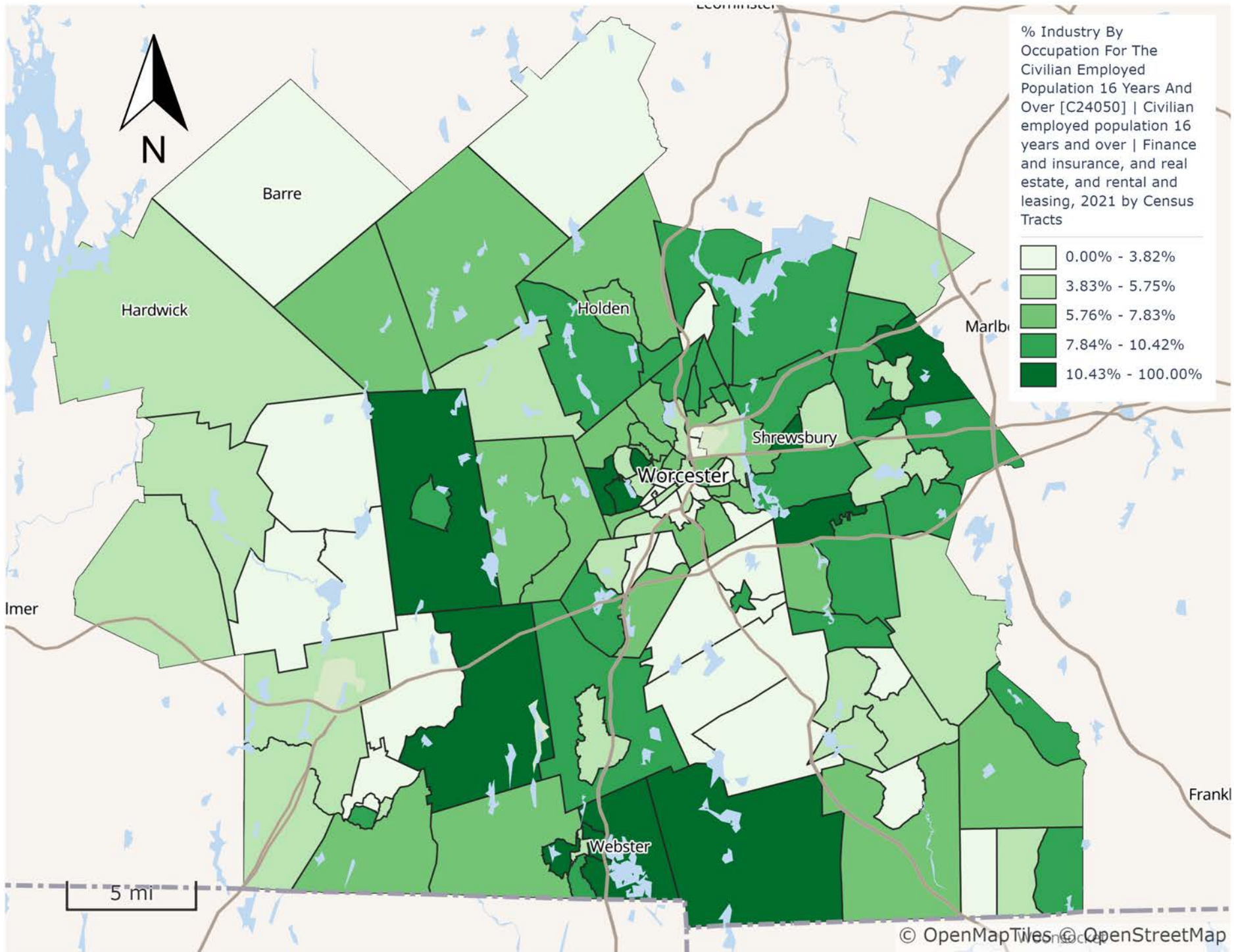
CMRPC Female Population by Census Tract, 2017



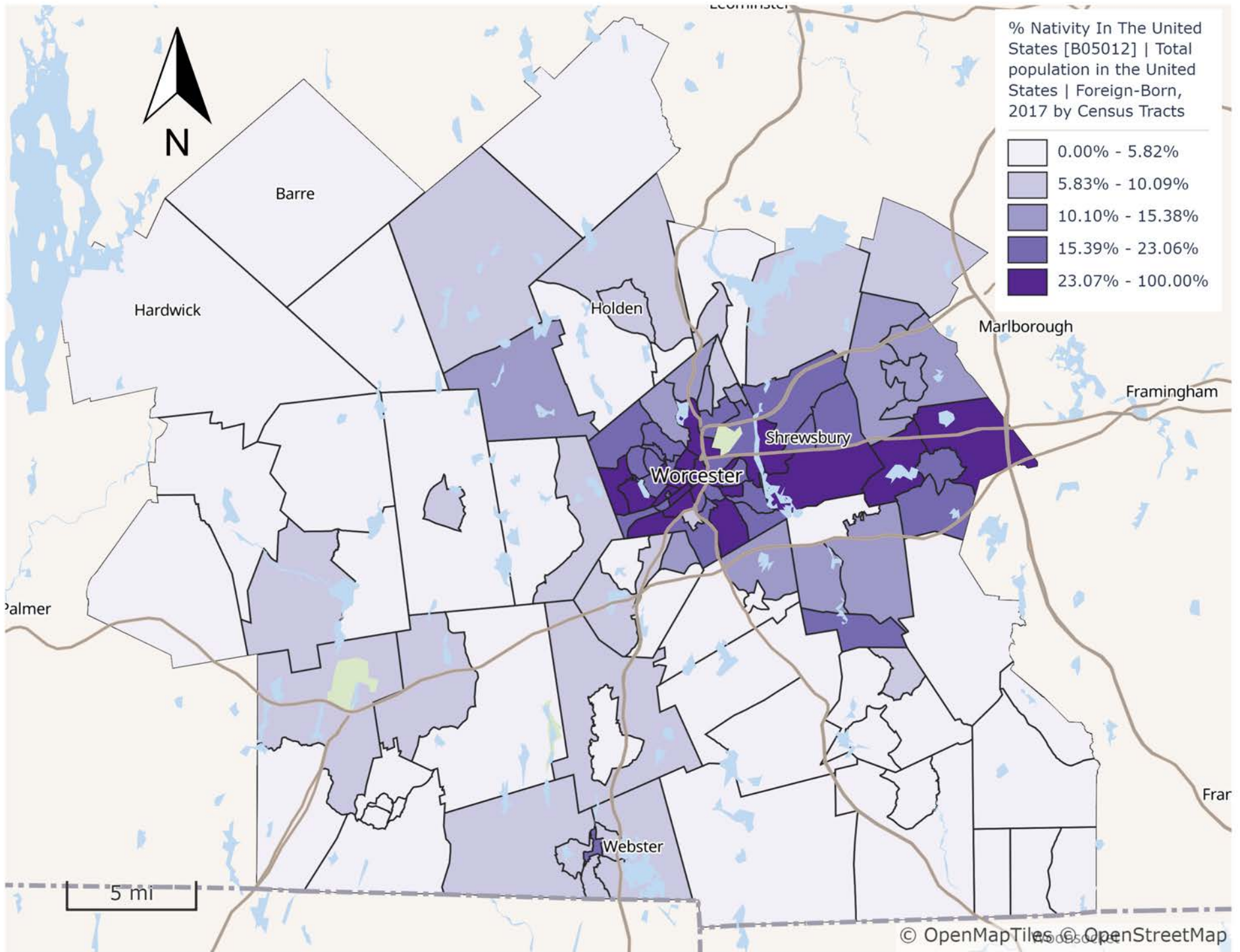
CMRPC Female Population by Census Tract 2021



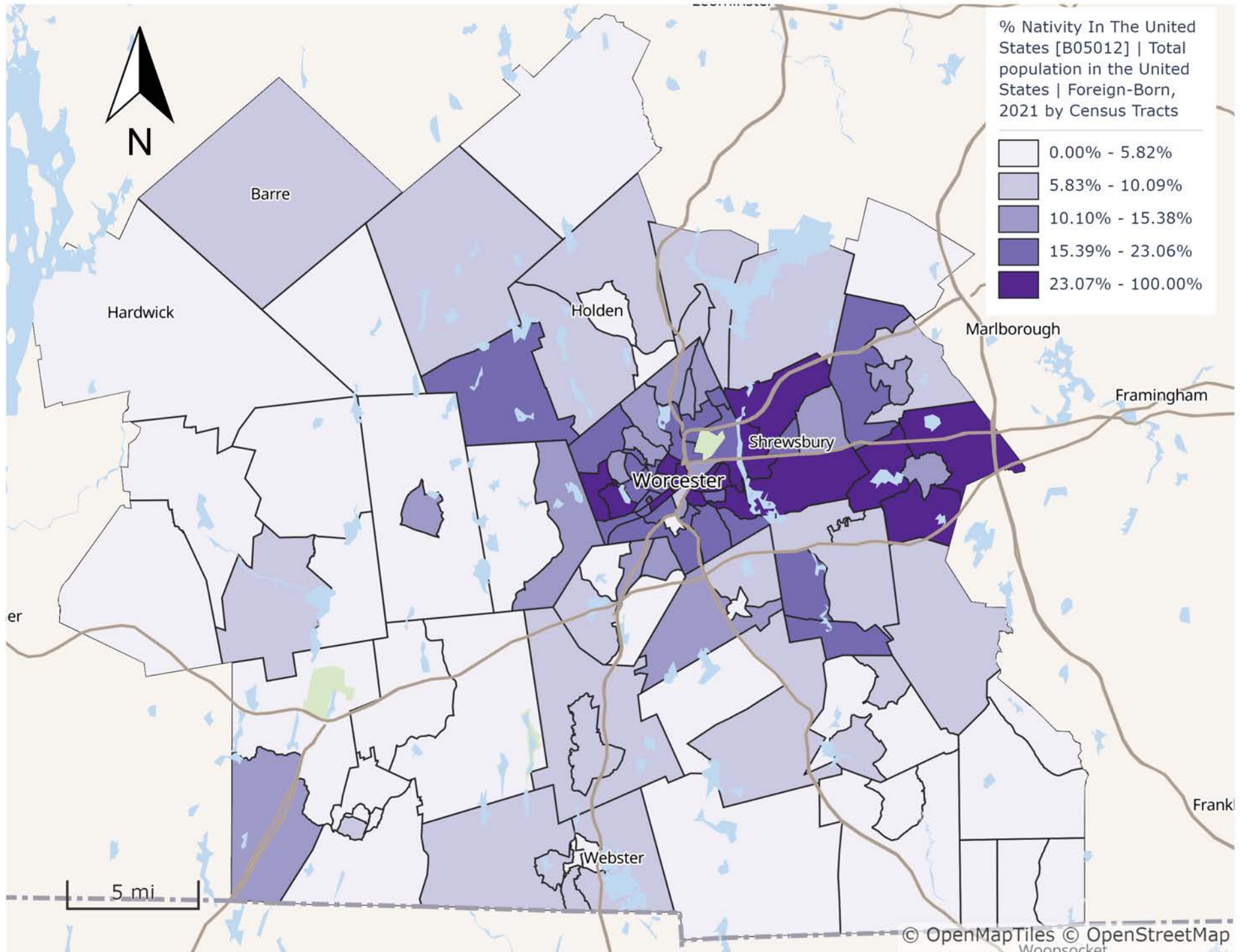
CMRPC Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



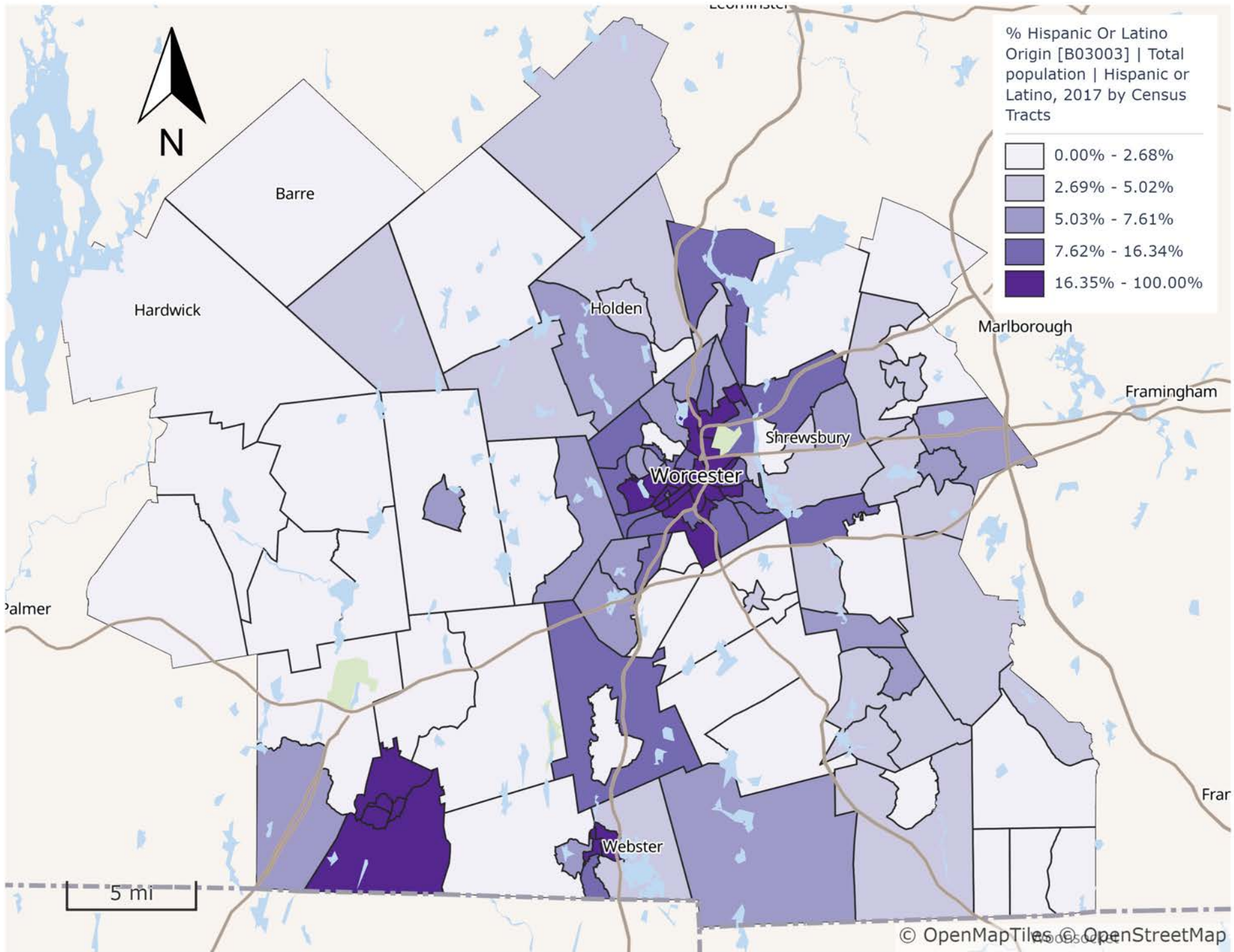
CMRPC Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



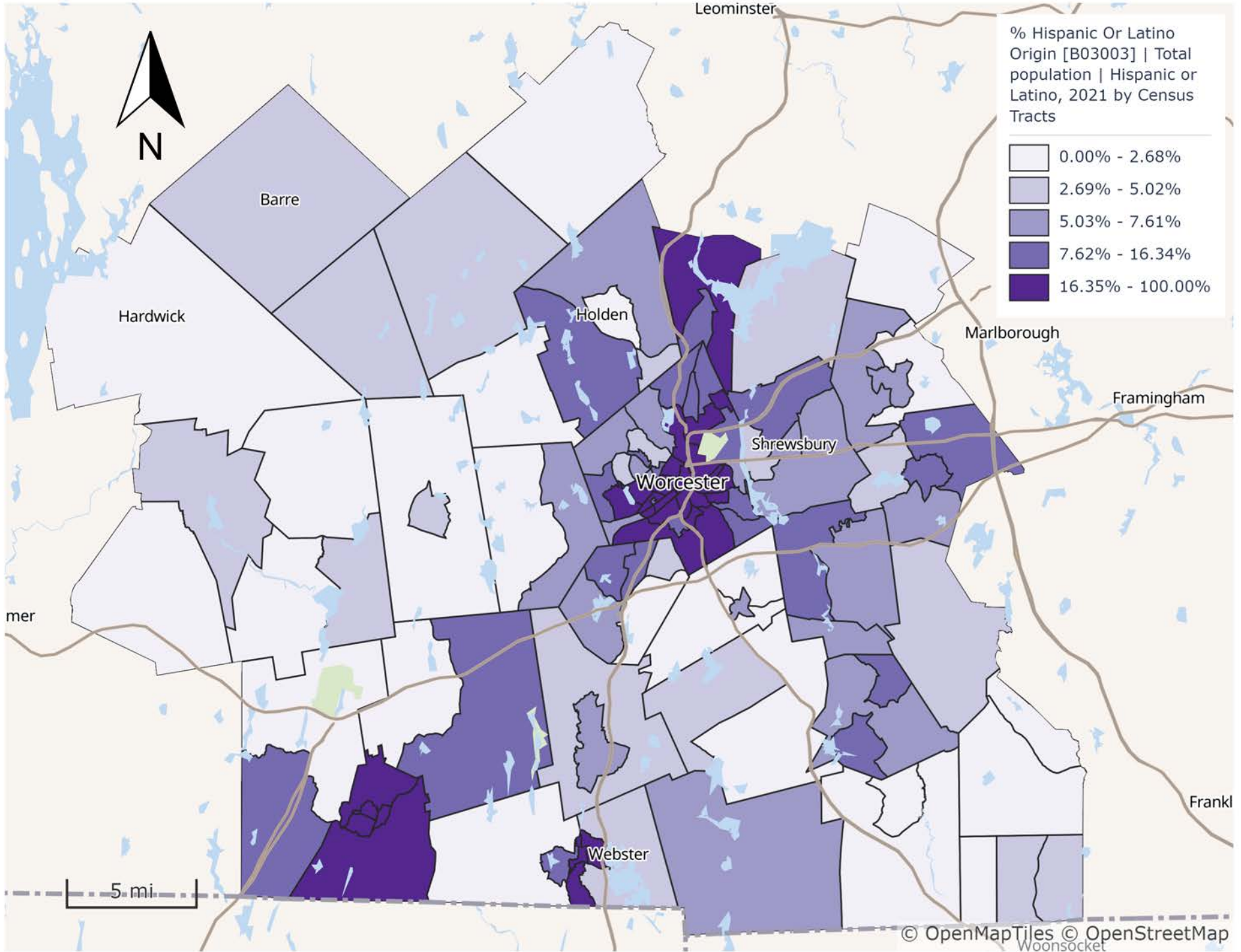
CMRPC Foreign Born Population by Census Tract, 2017



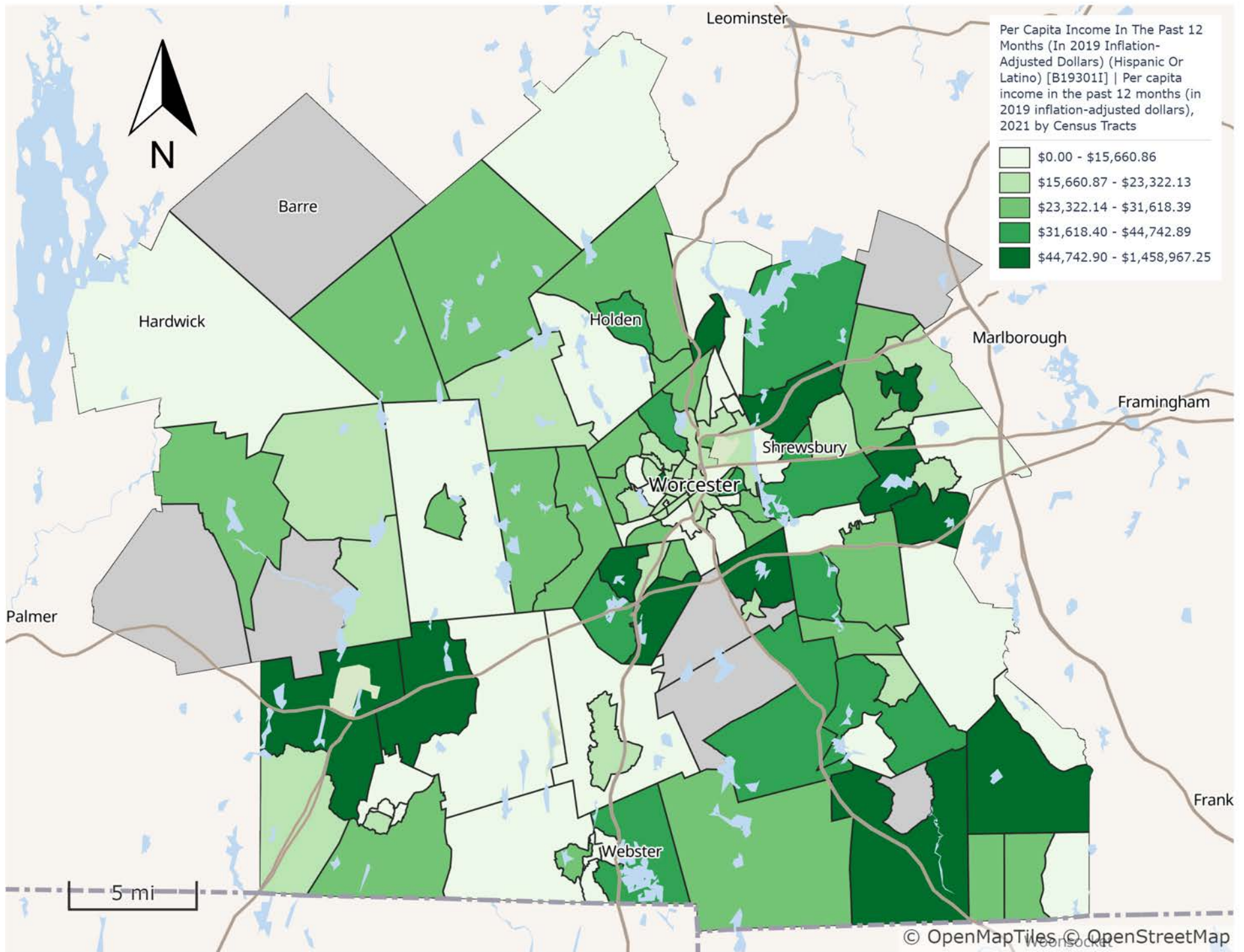
CMRPC Foreign Born Population by Census Tract, 2021



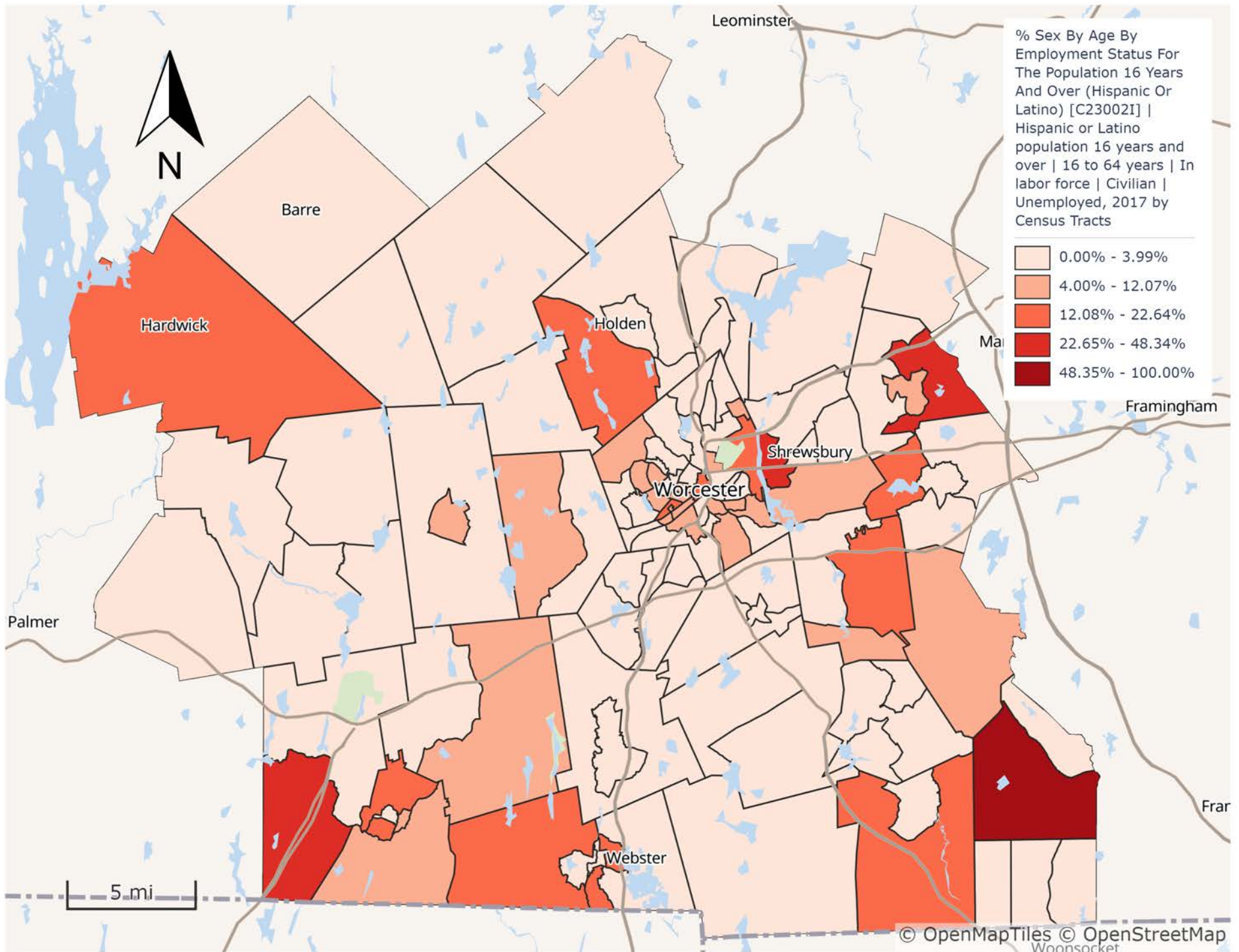
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Population by Census Tract, 2017



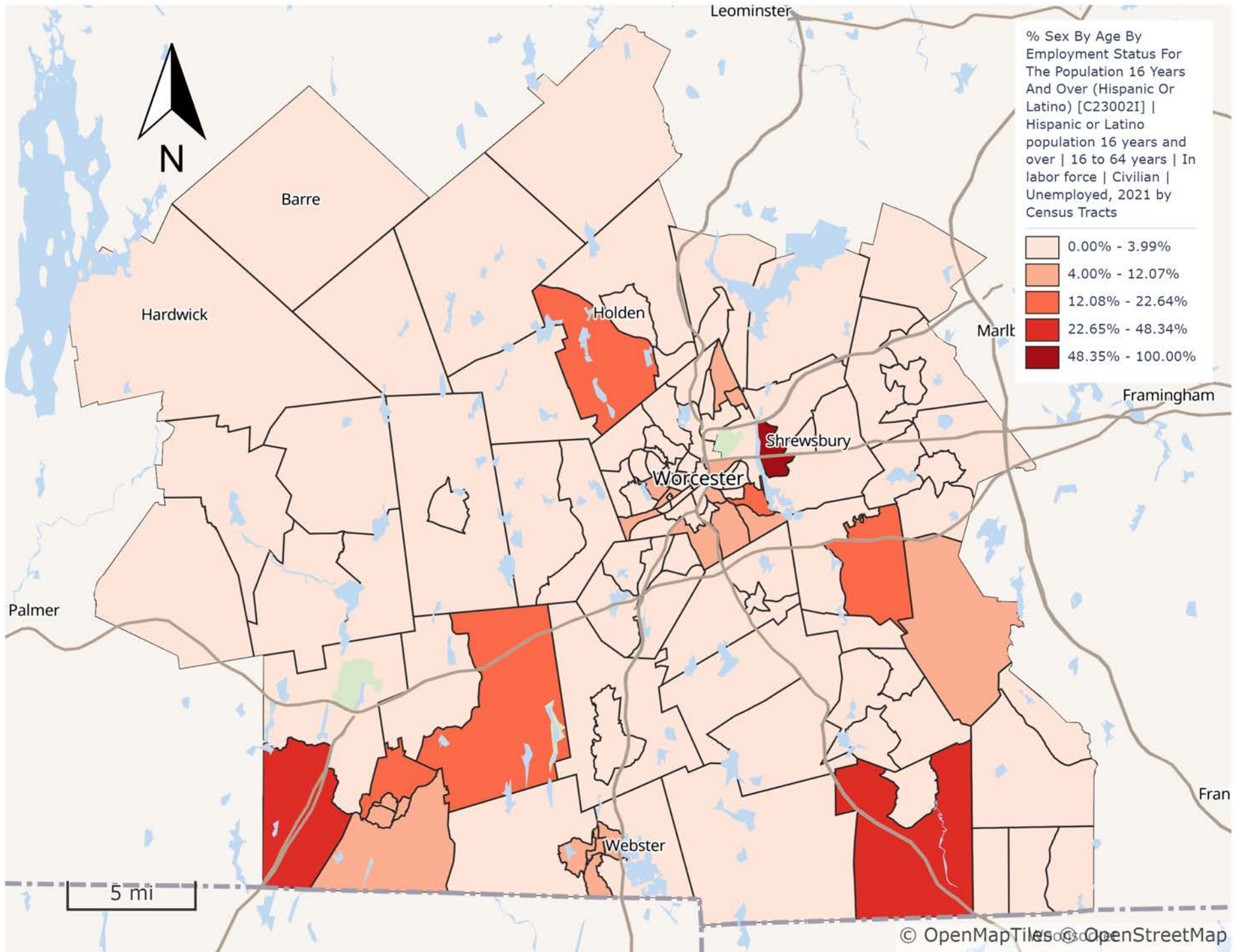
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Population by Census Tract, 2021



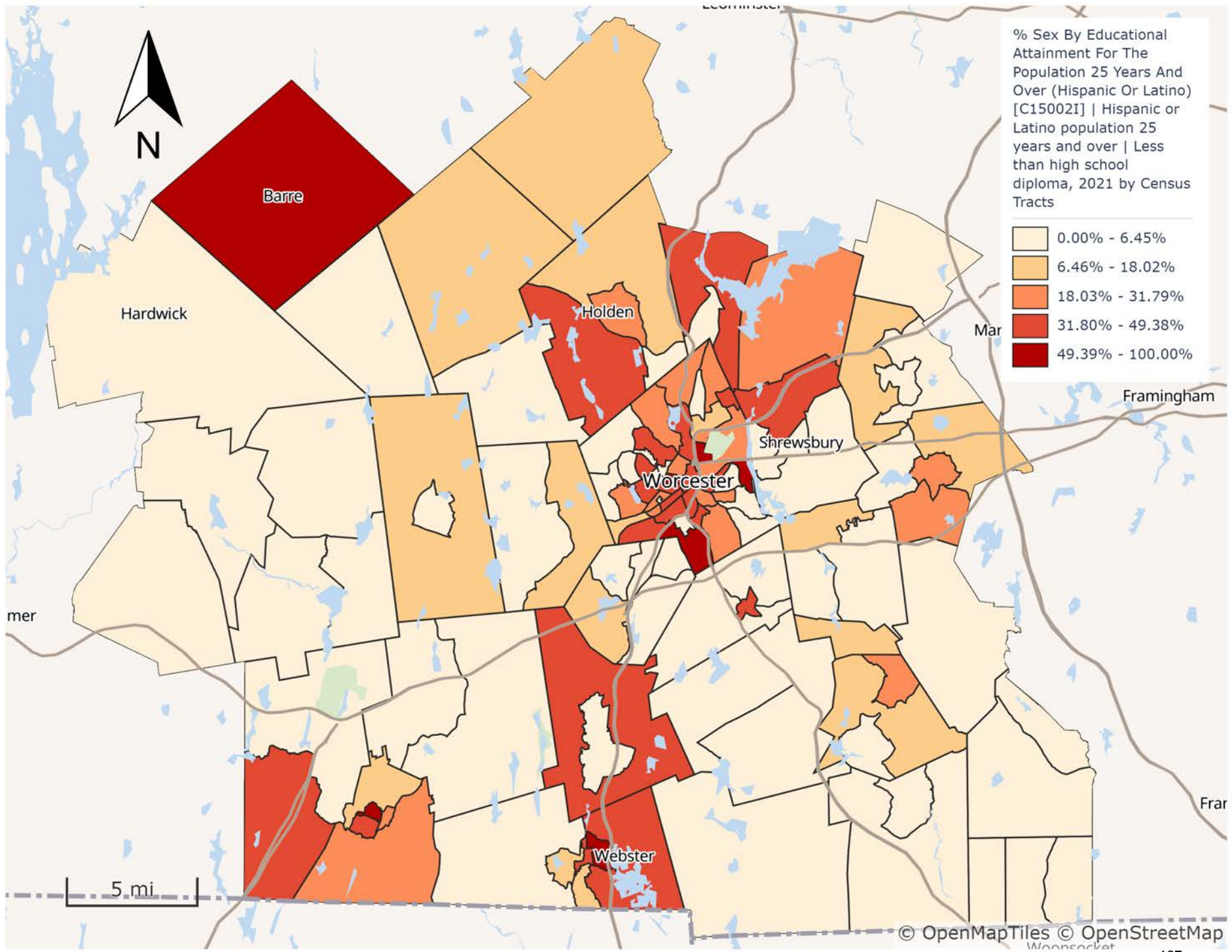
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Alone Population Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021



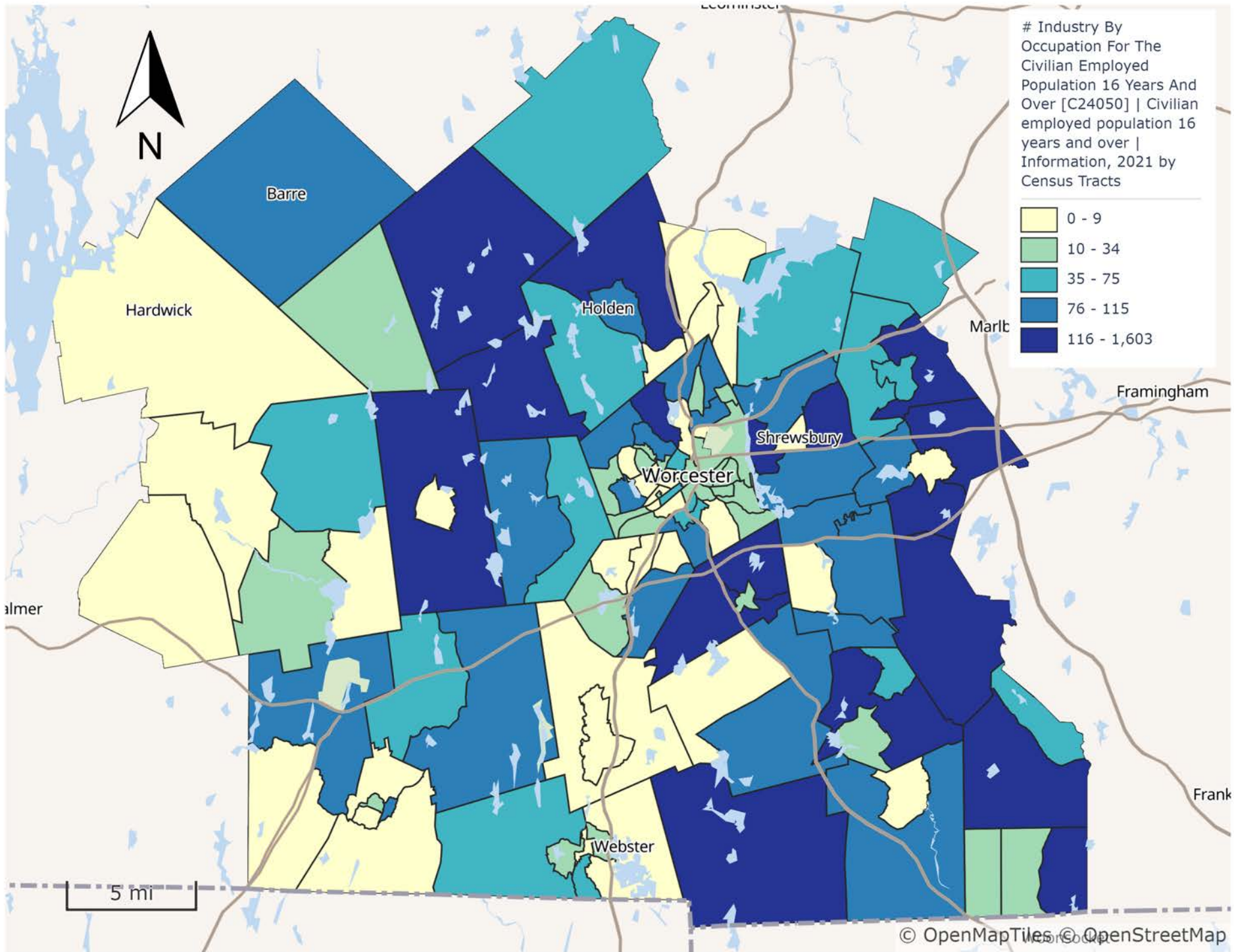
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017



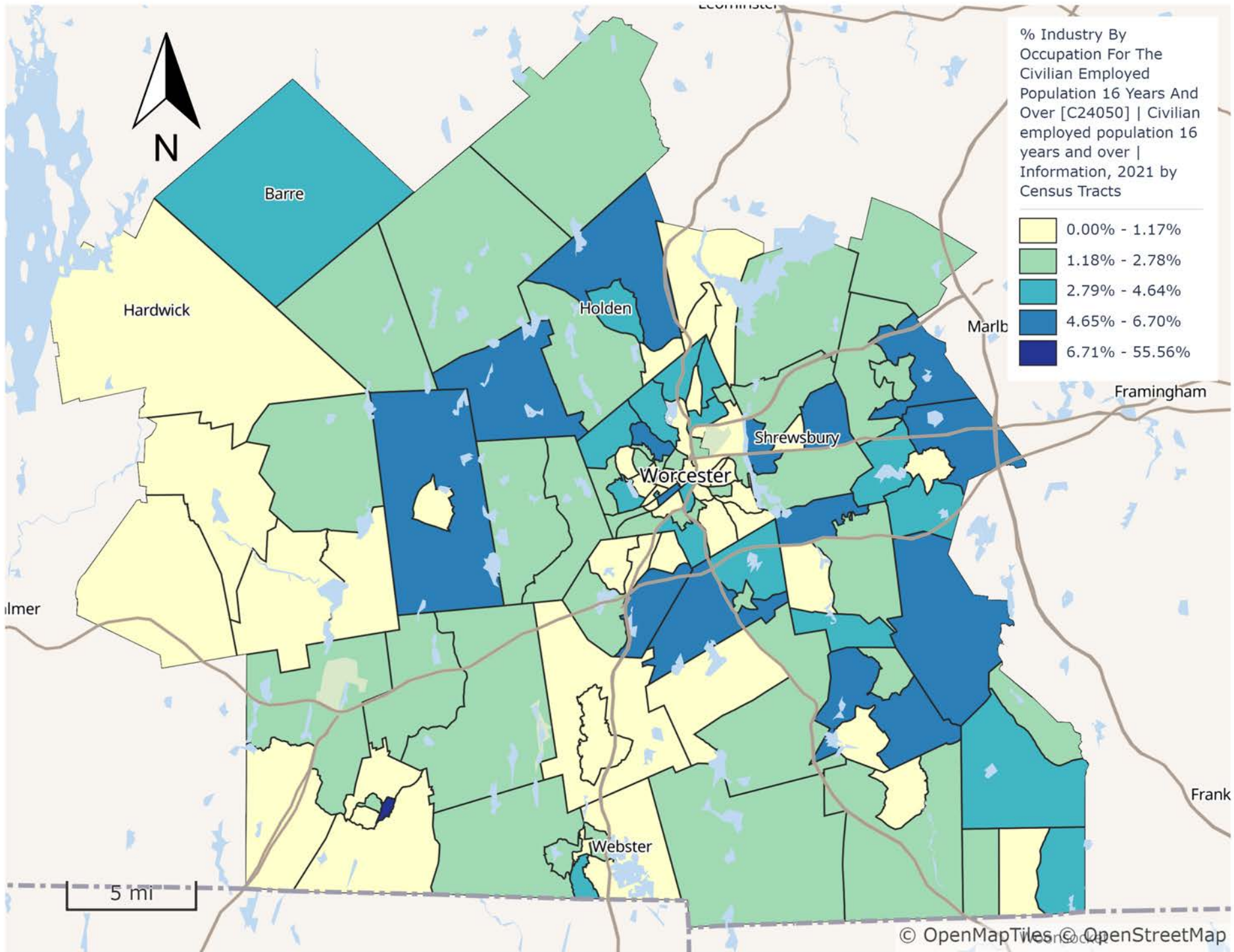
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021



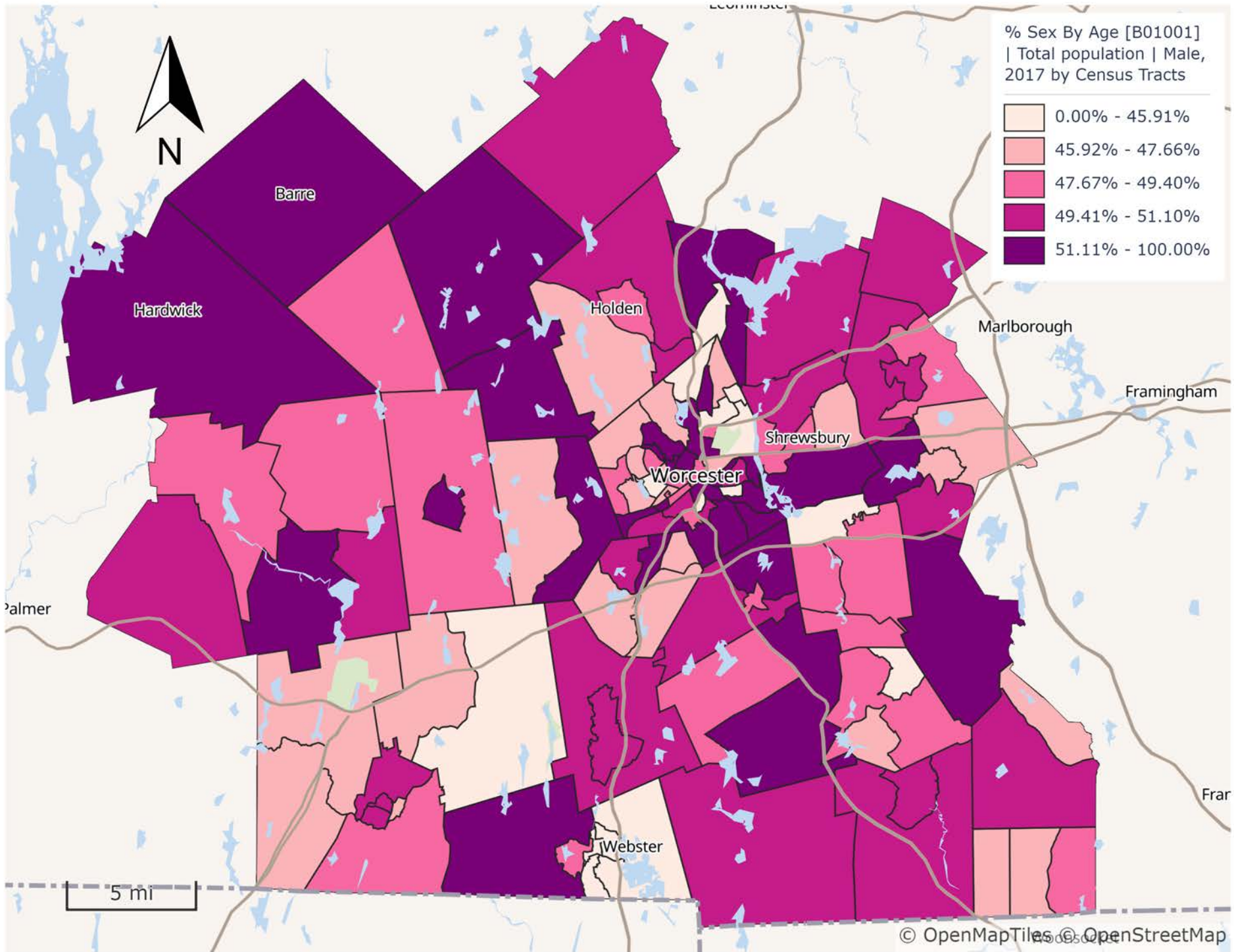
CMRPC Hispanic or Latino Population With Less Than a High School Diploma by Census Tract, 2021



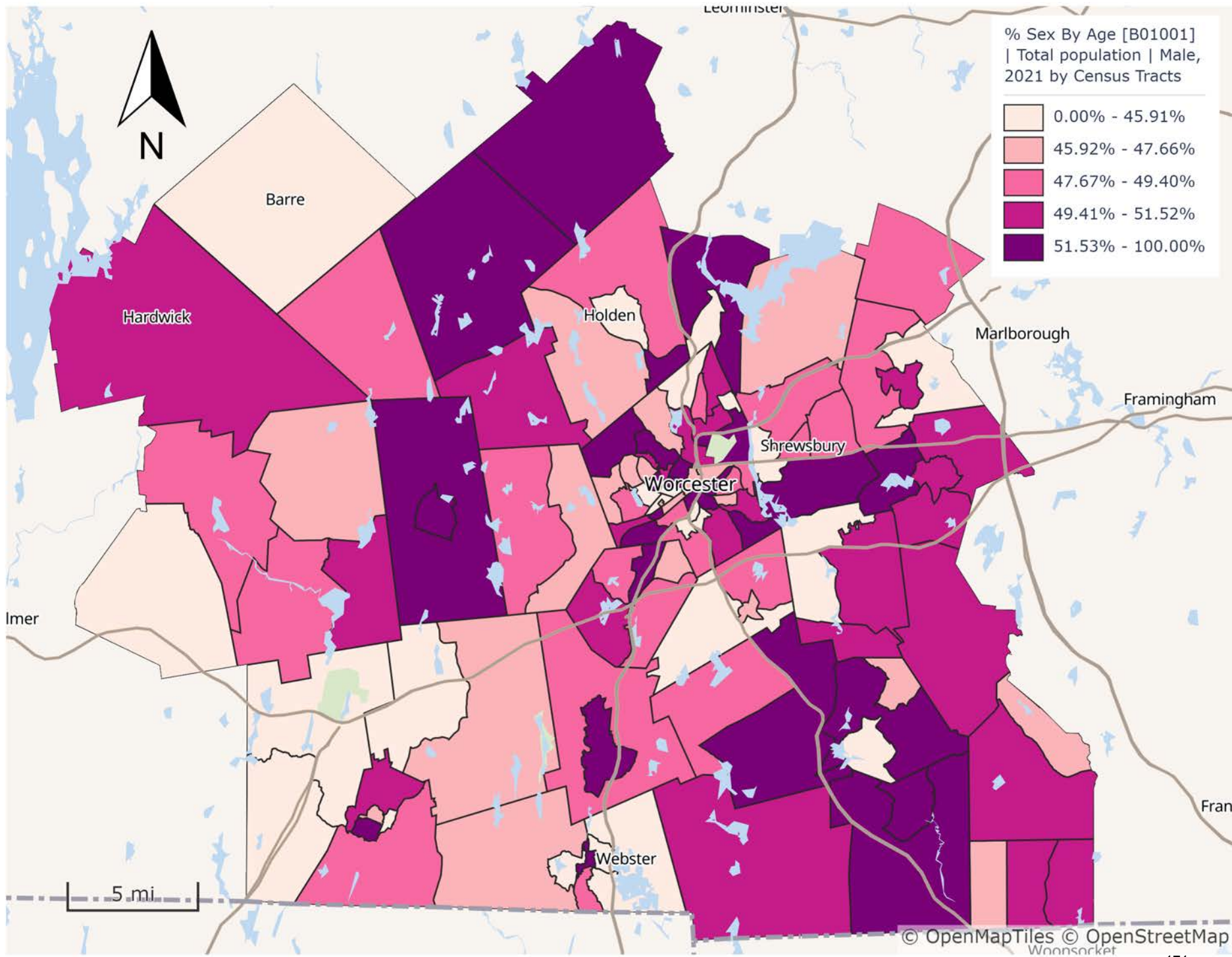
CMRPC Information Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



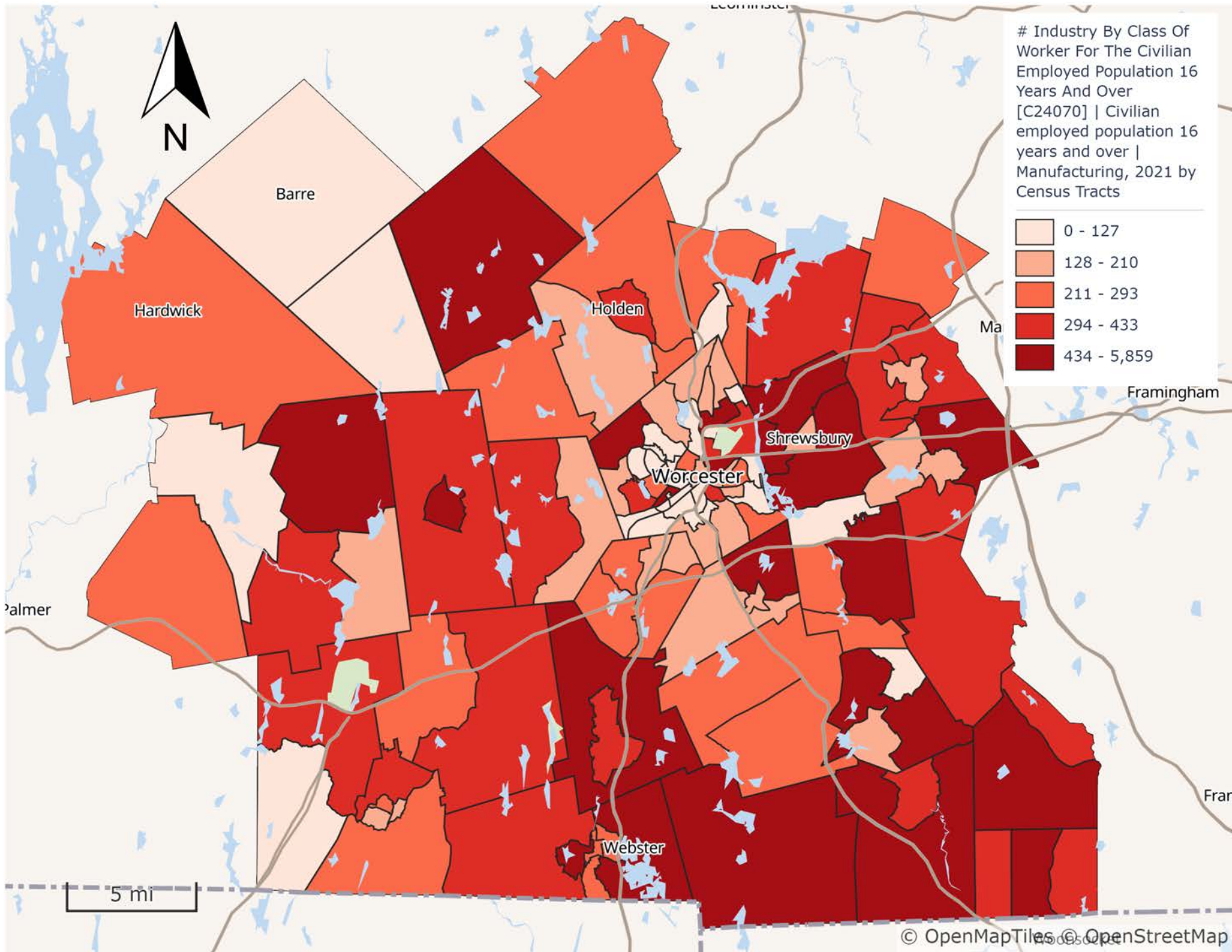
CMRPC Information Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



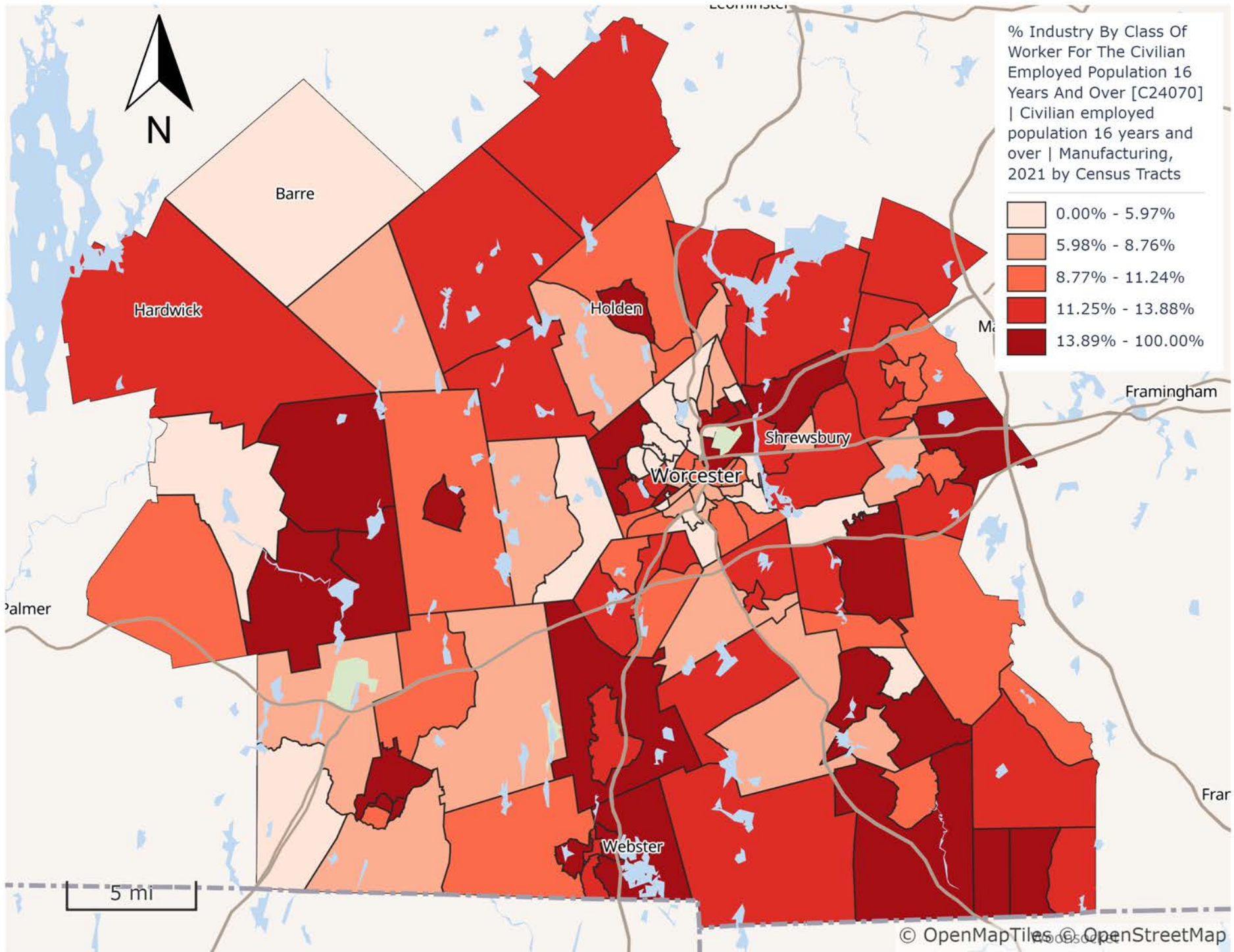
CMRPC Male Population by Census Tract, 2017



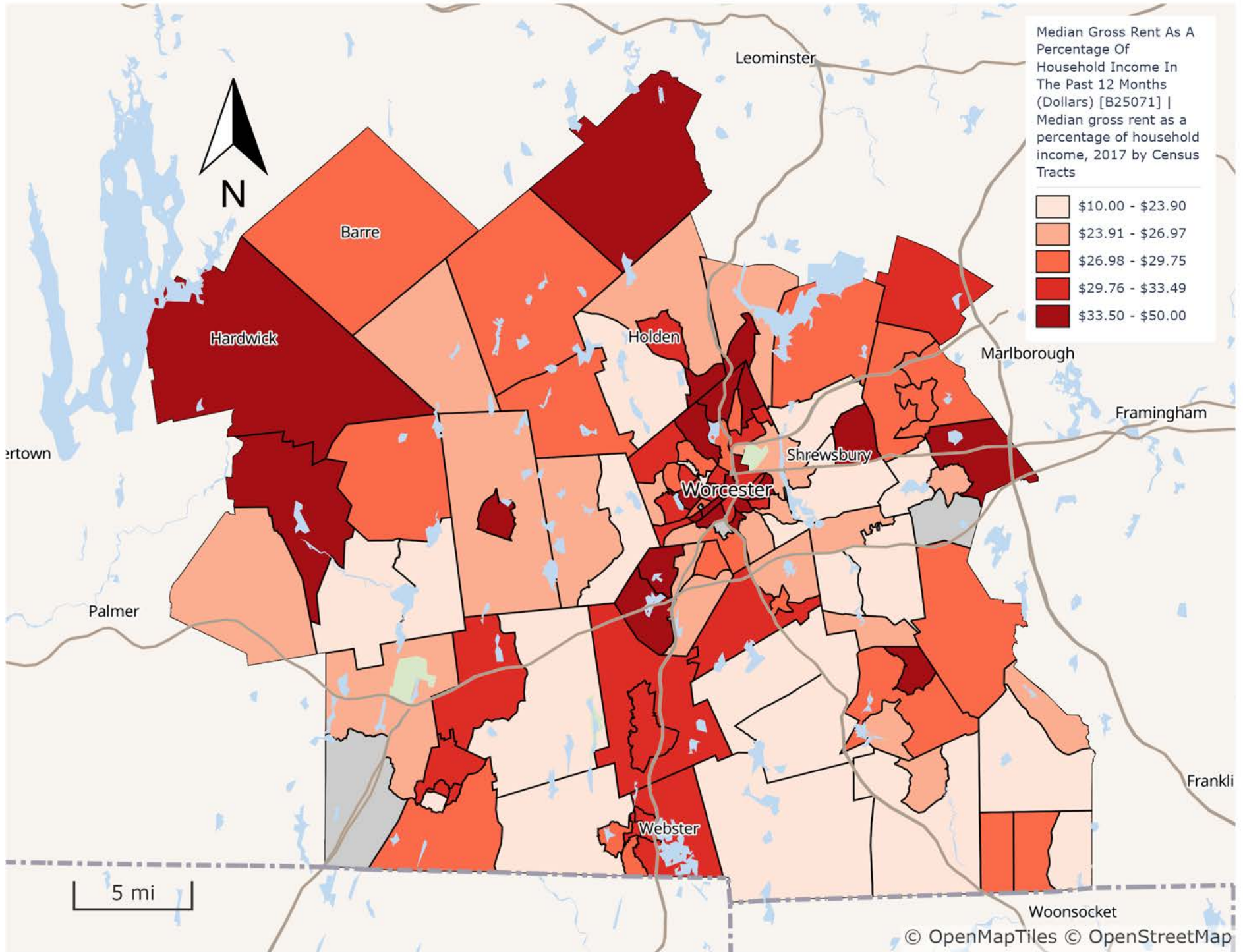
CMRPC Male Population by Census Tract, 2021



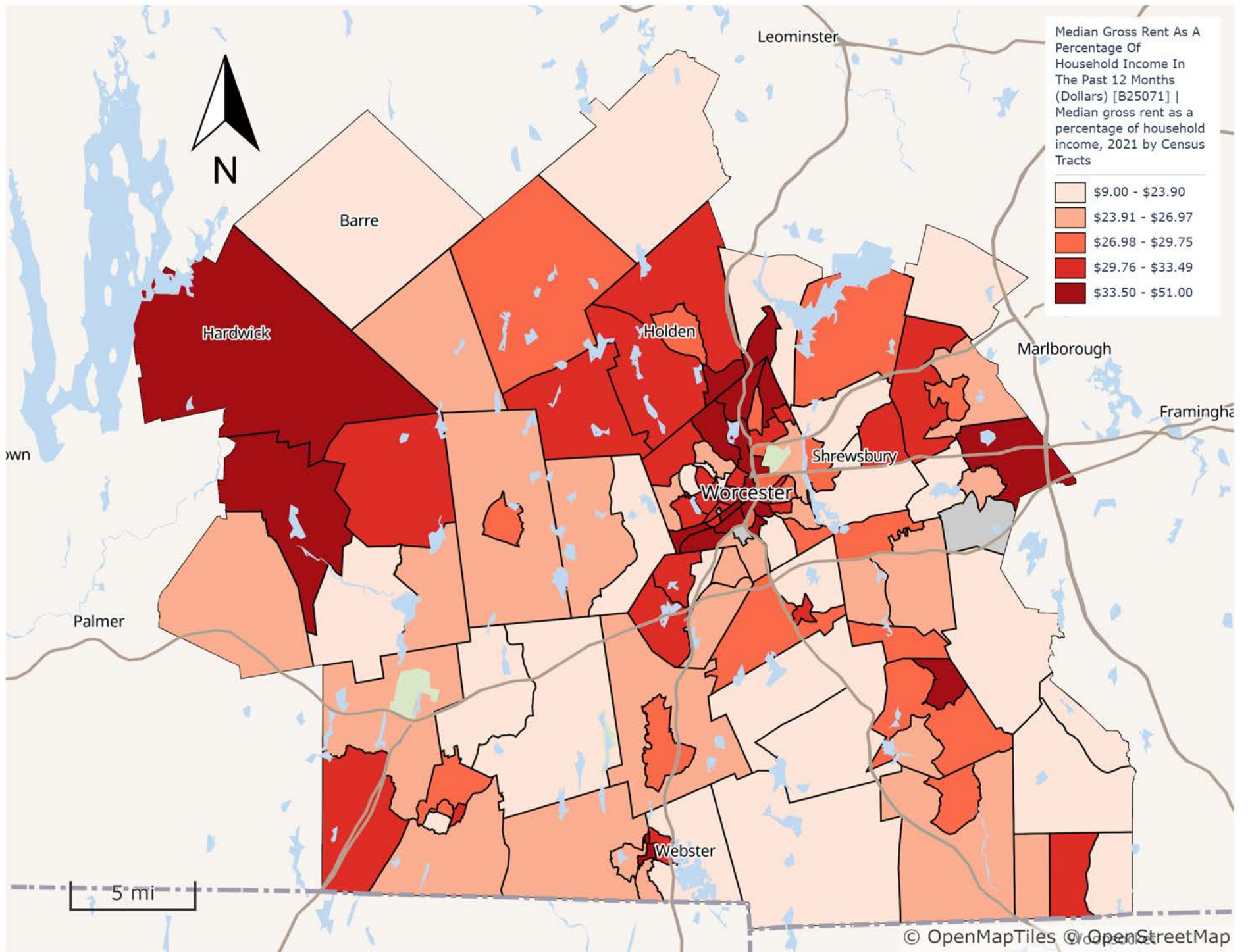
CMRPC Manufacturing Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



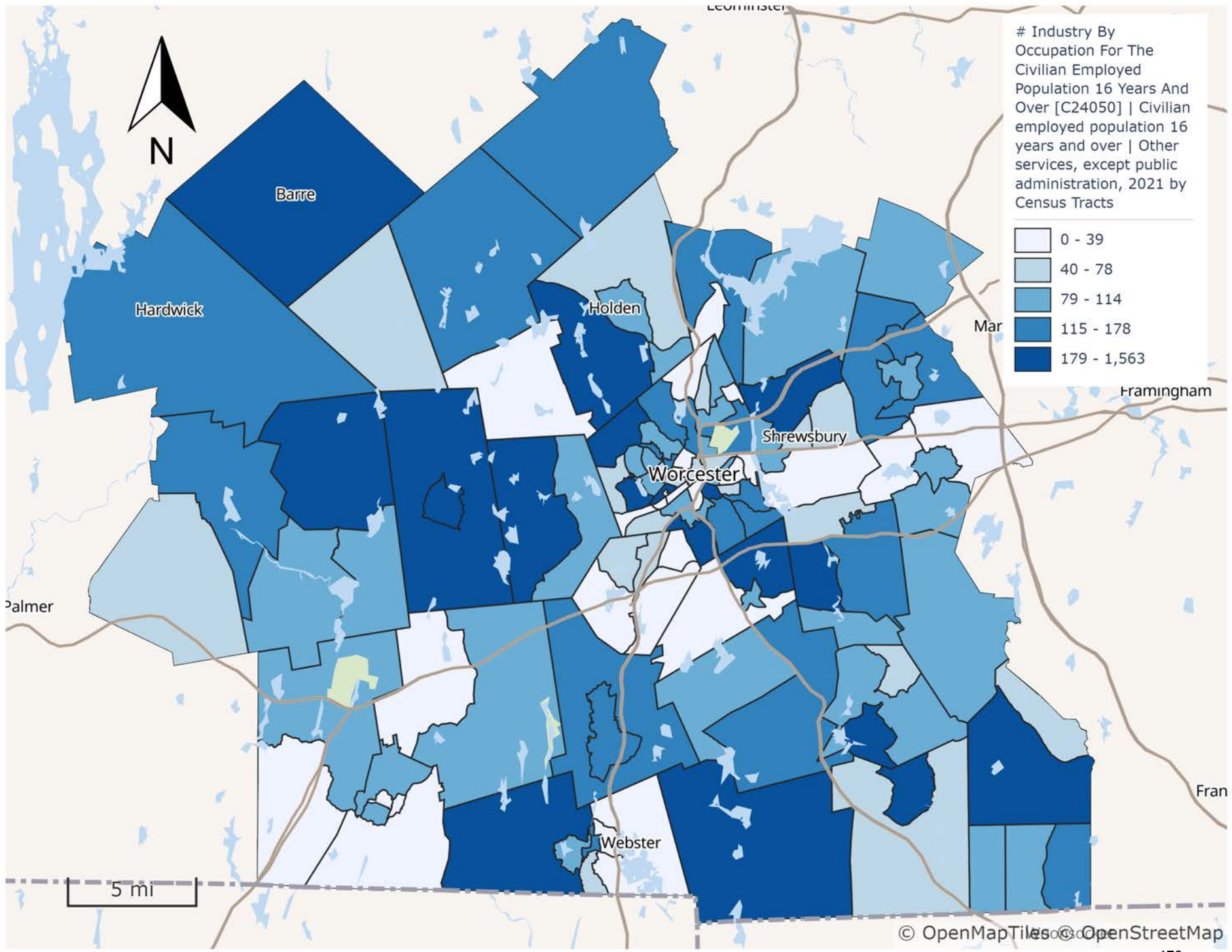
CMRPC Manufacturing Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



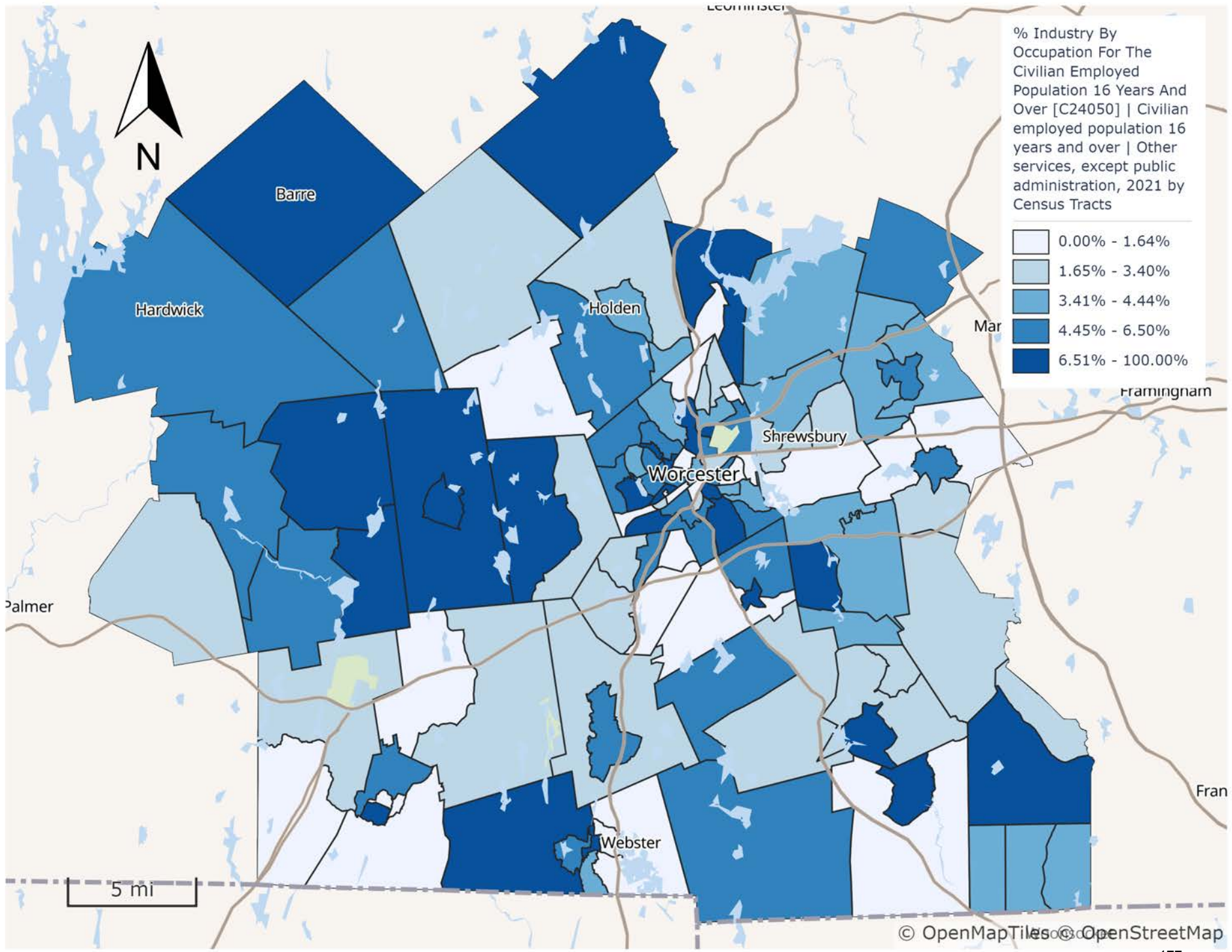
CMRPC Median Gross Rent per 100 Dollars of Household Income by Census Tract, 2017



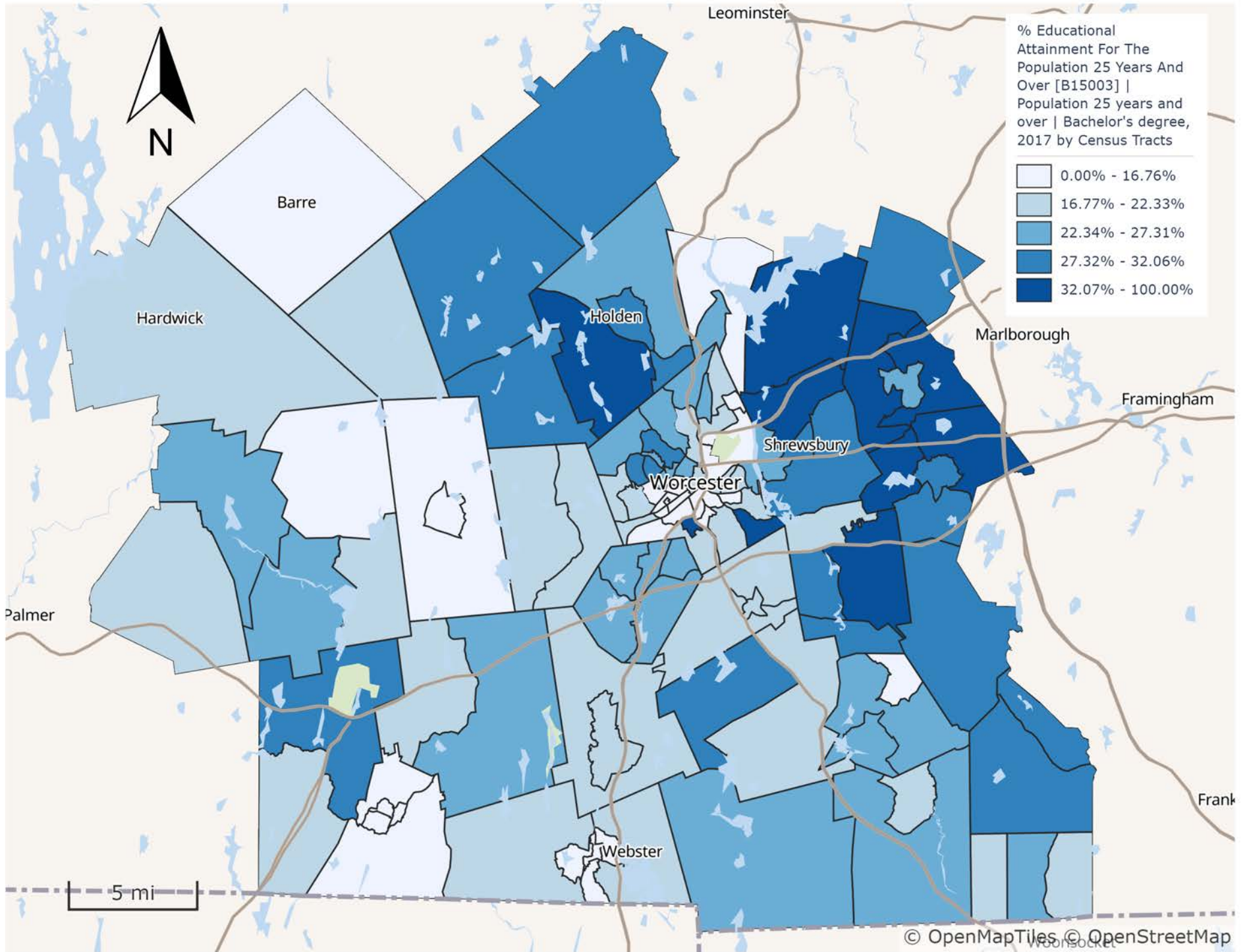
CMRPC Median Gross Rent per 100 Dollars of Household Income by Census Tract, 2021



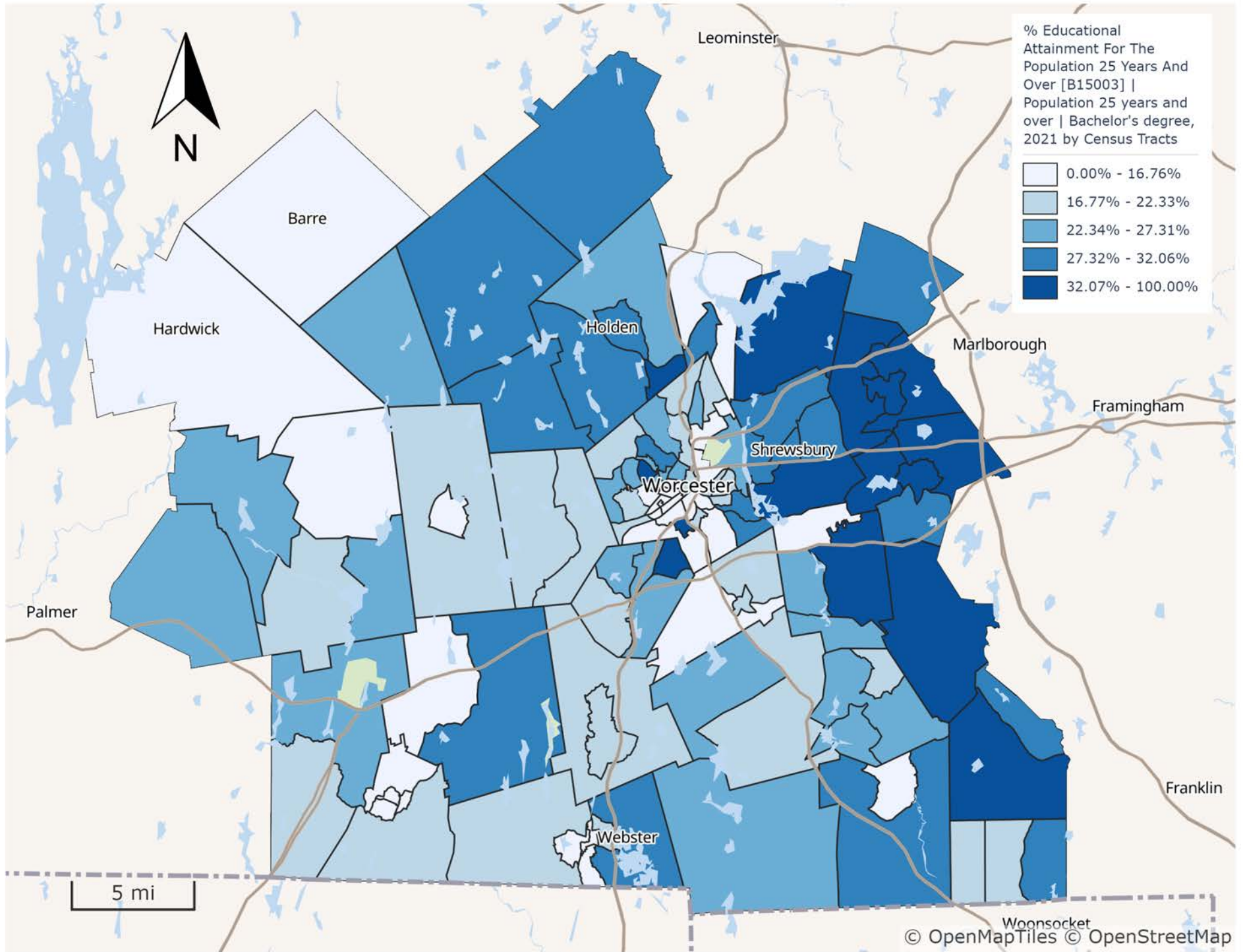
CMRPC Other Services, Except Public Administration Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



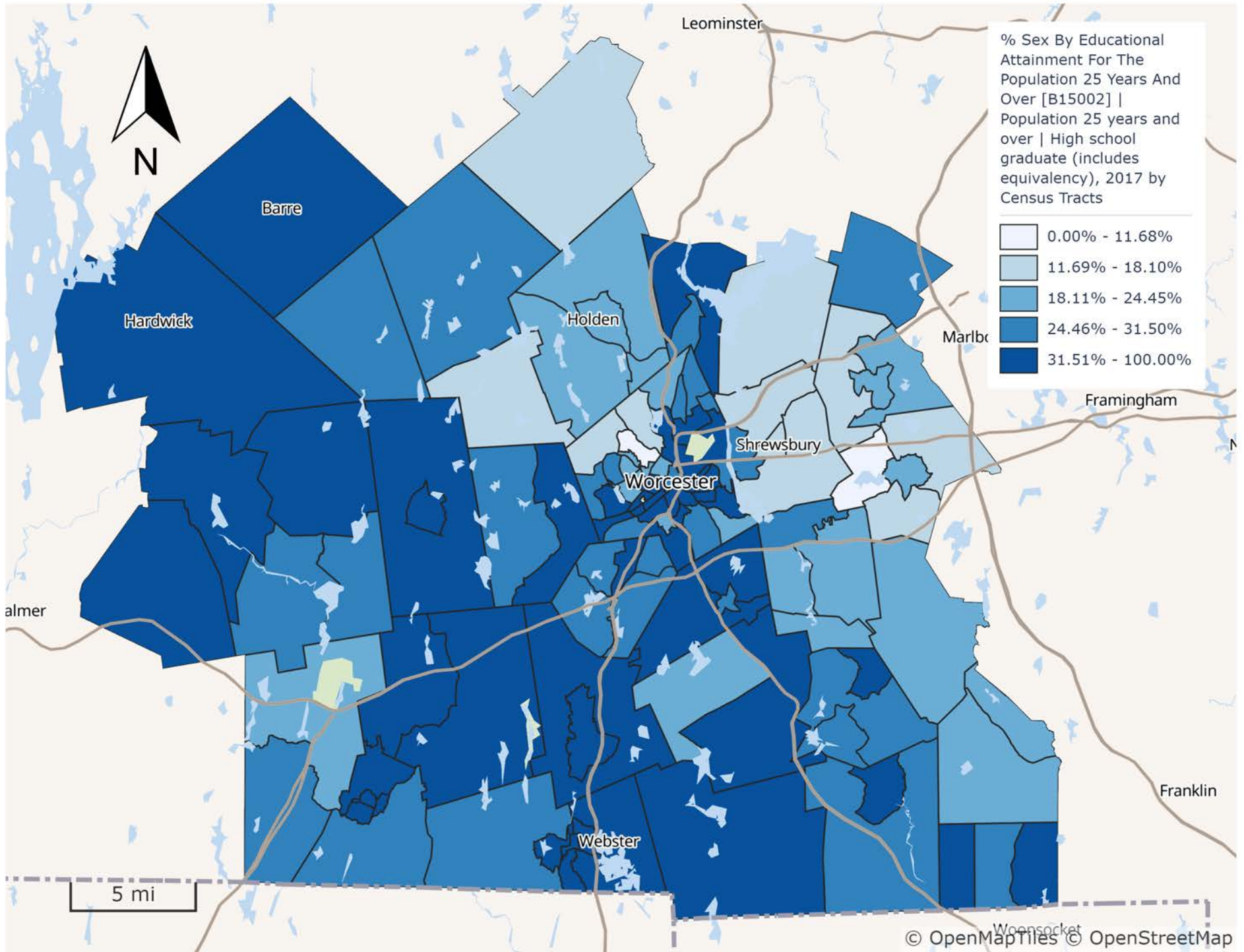
CMRPC Other Services, Except Public Administration Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



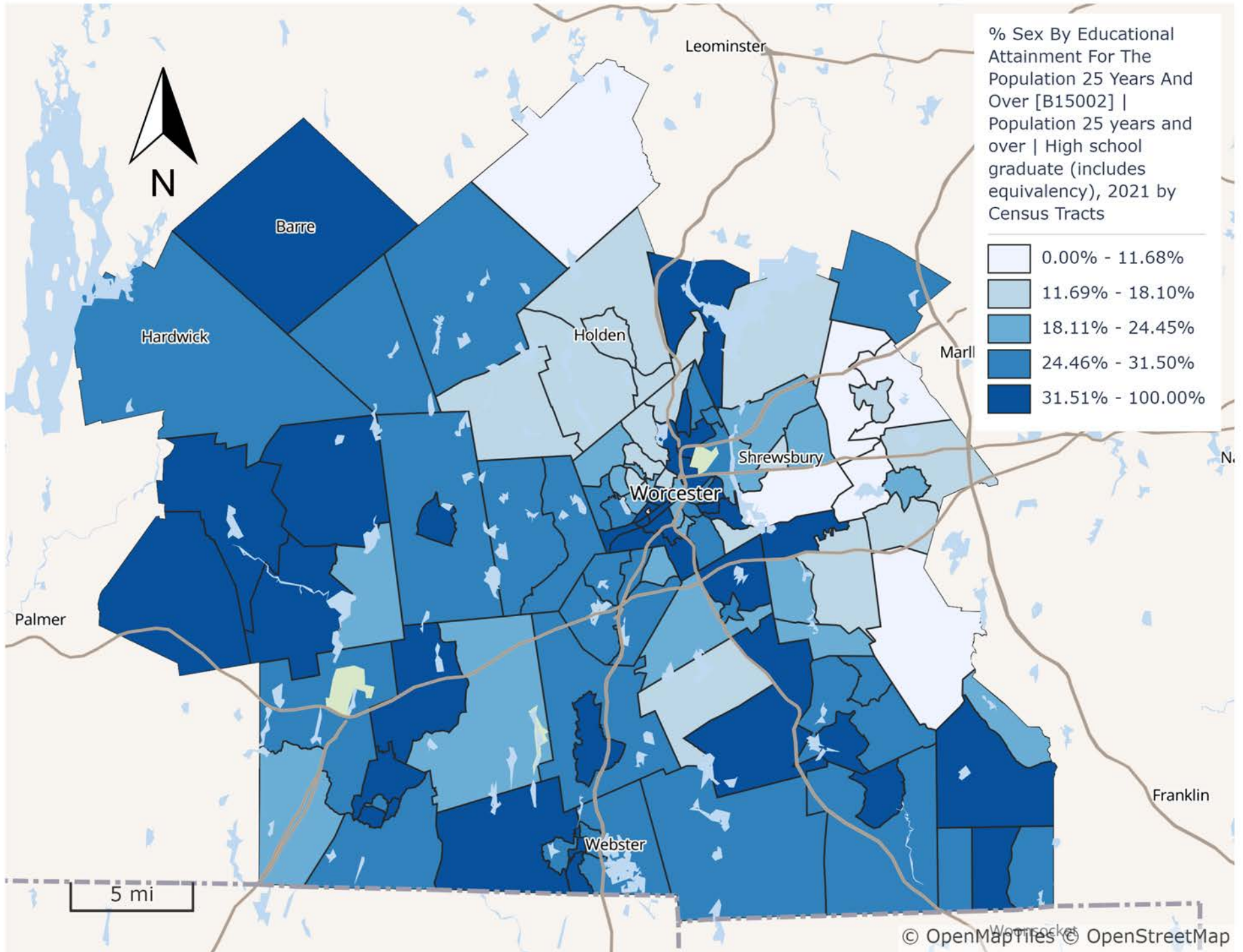
CMRPC Bachelor's Degree Attainment by Census Tract, 2017



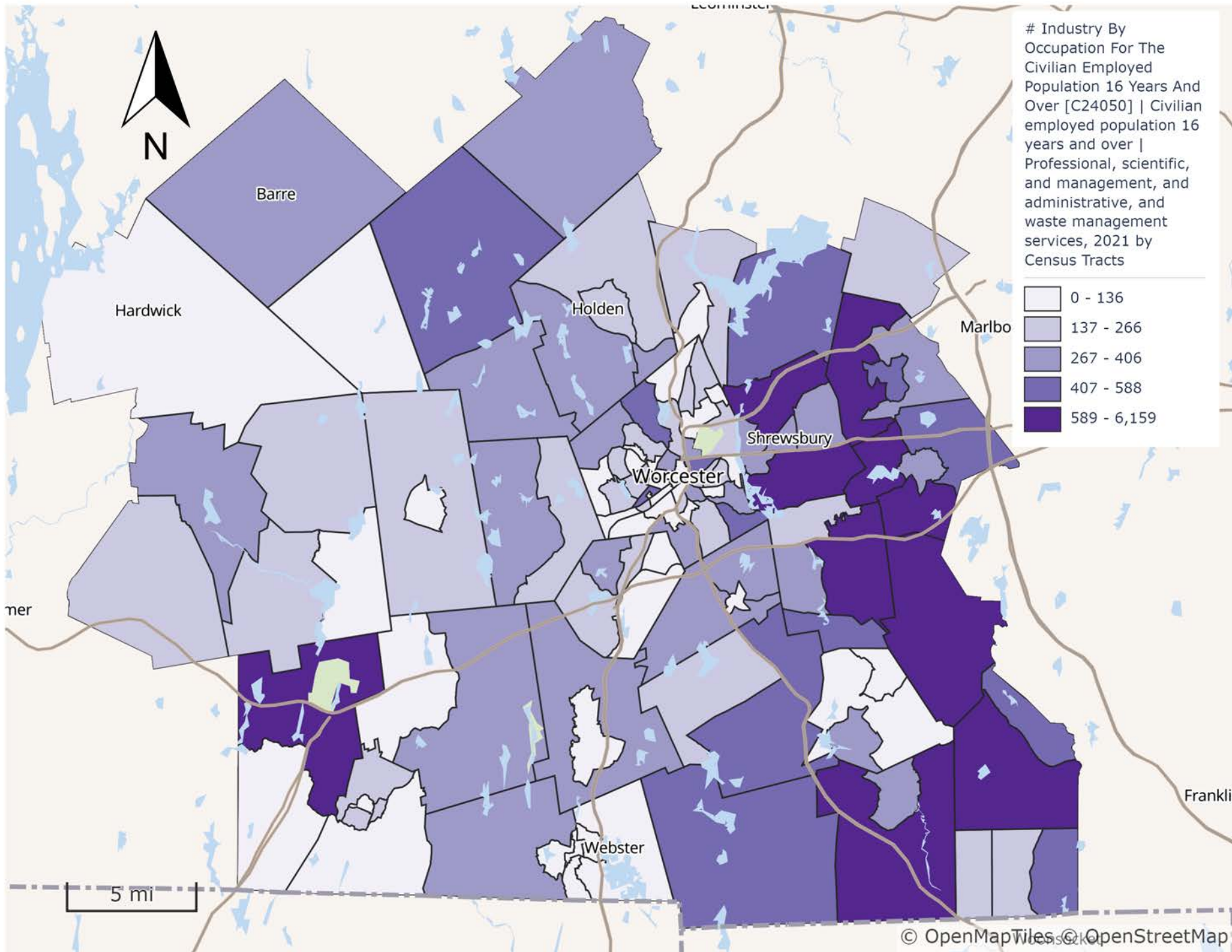
CMRPC Bachelor's Degree Attainment by Census Tract, 2021



CMRPC High School Diploma Attainment by Census Tract, 2017

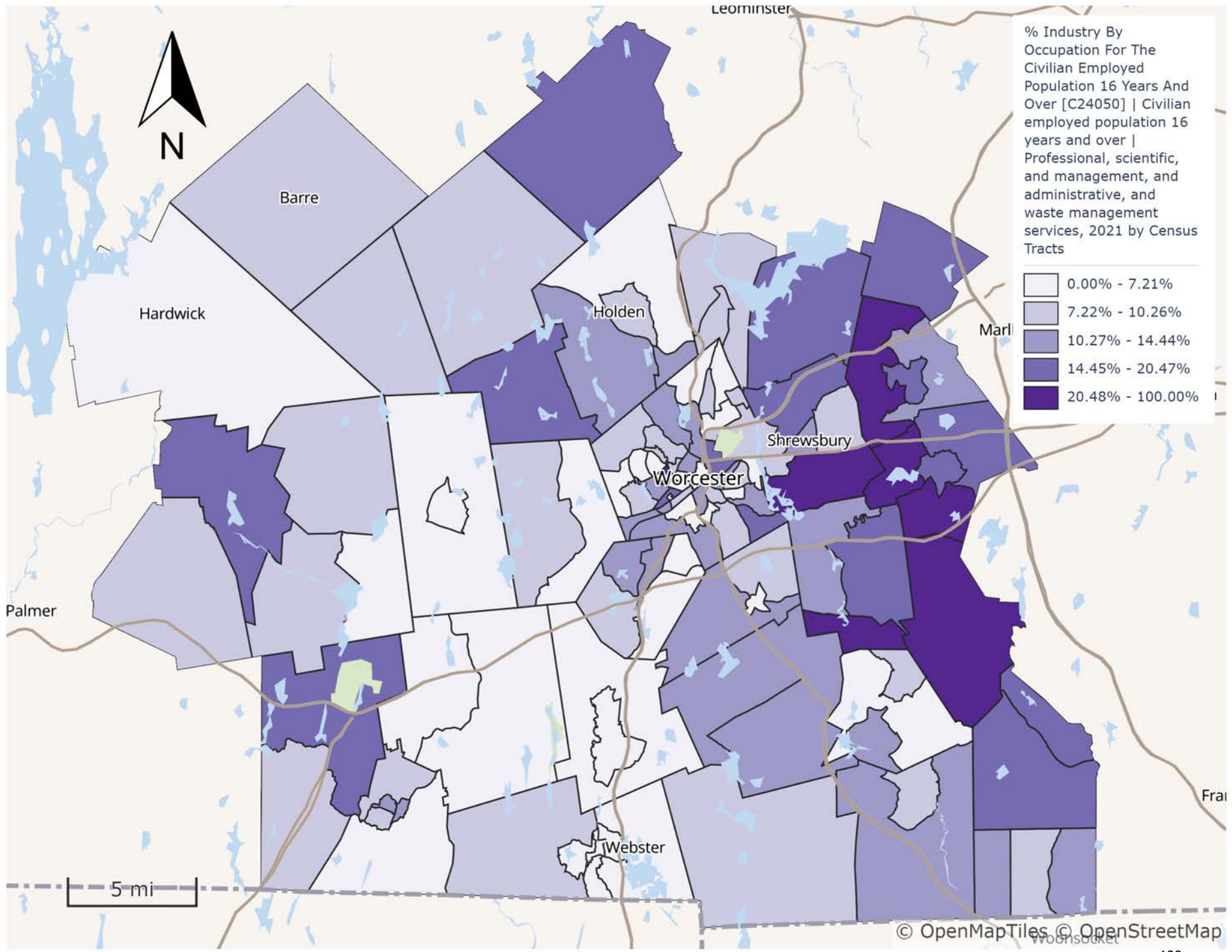


CMRPC High School Diploma Attainment by Census Tract, 2021

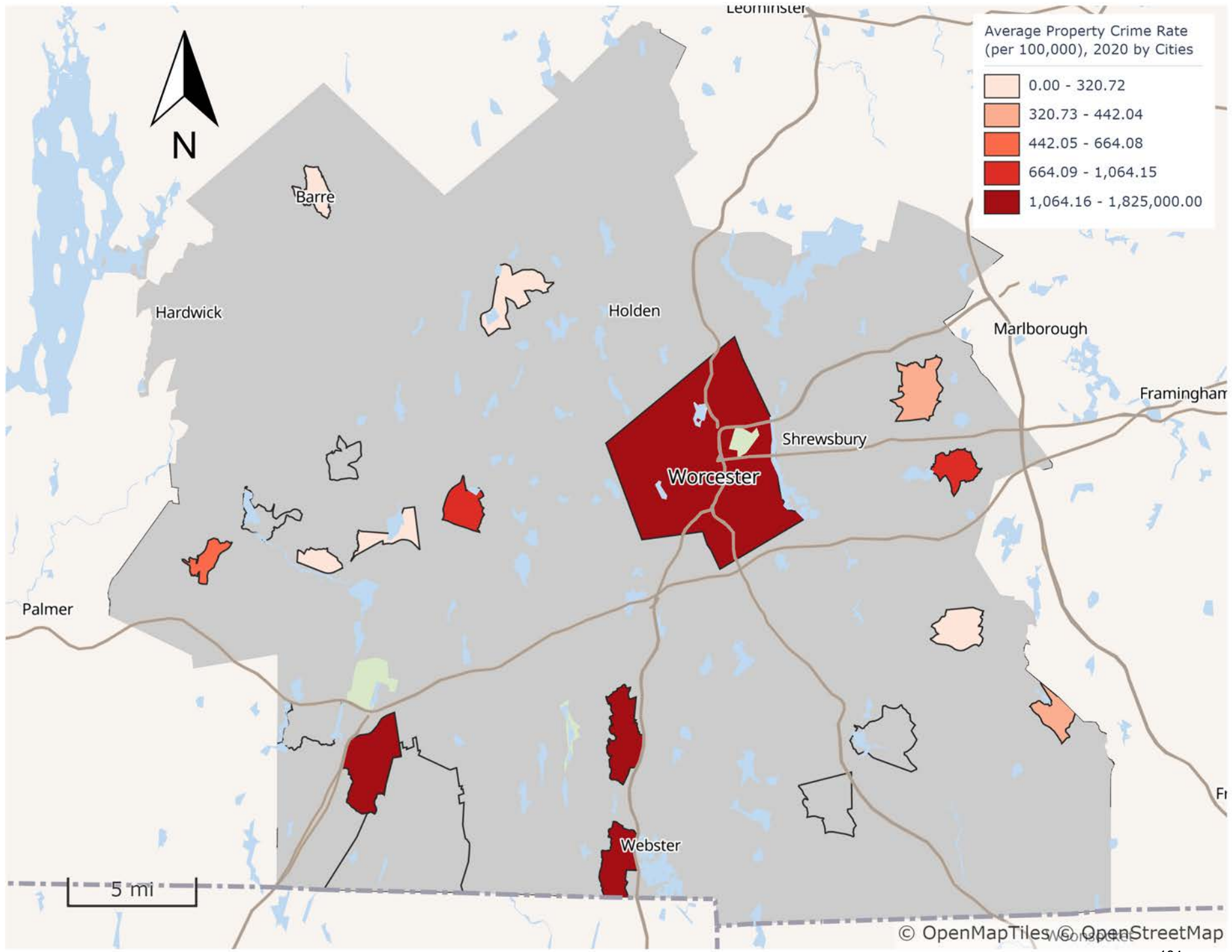


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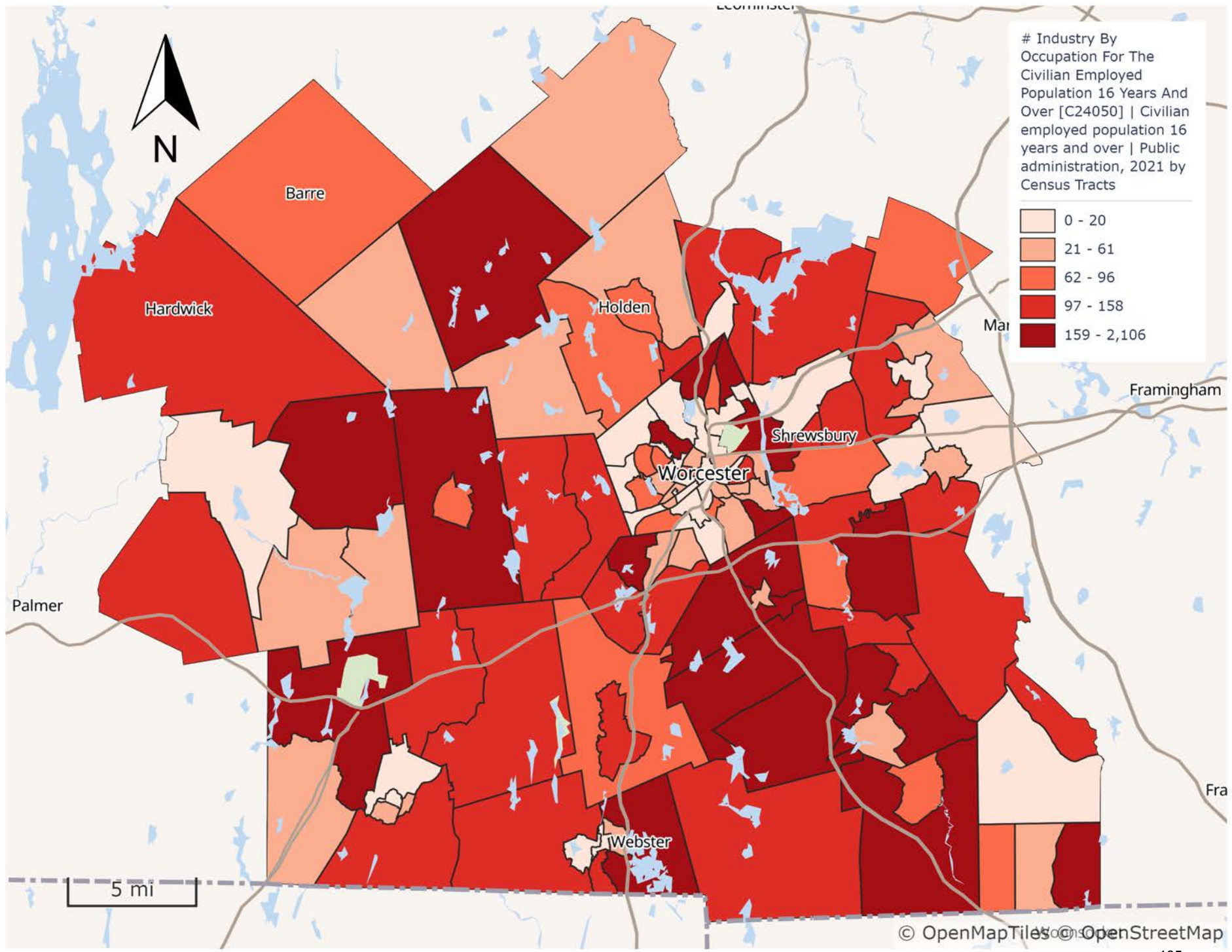
CMRPC Professional, Sci., Management, Admin., and Waste Management Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



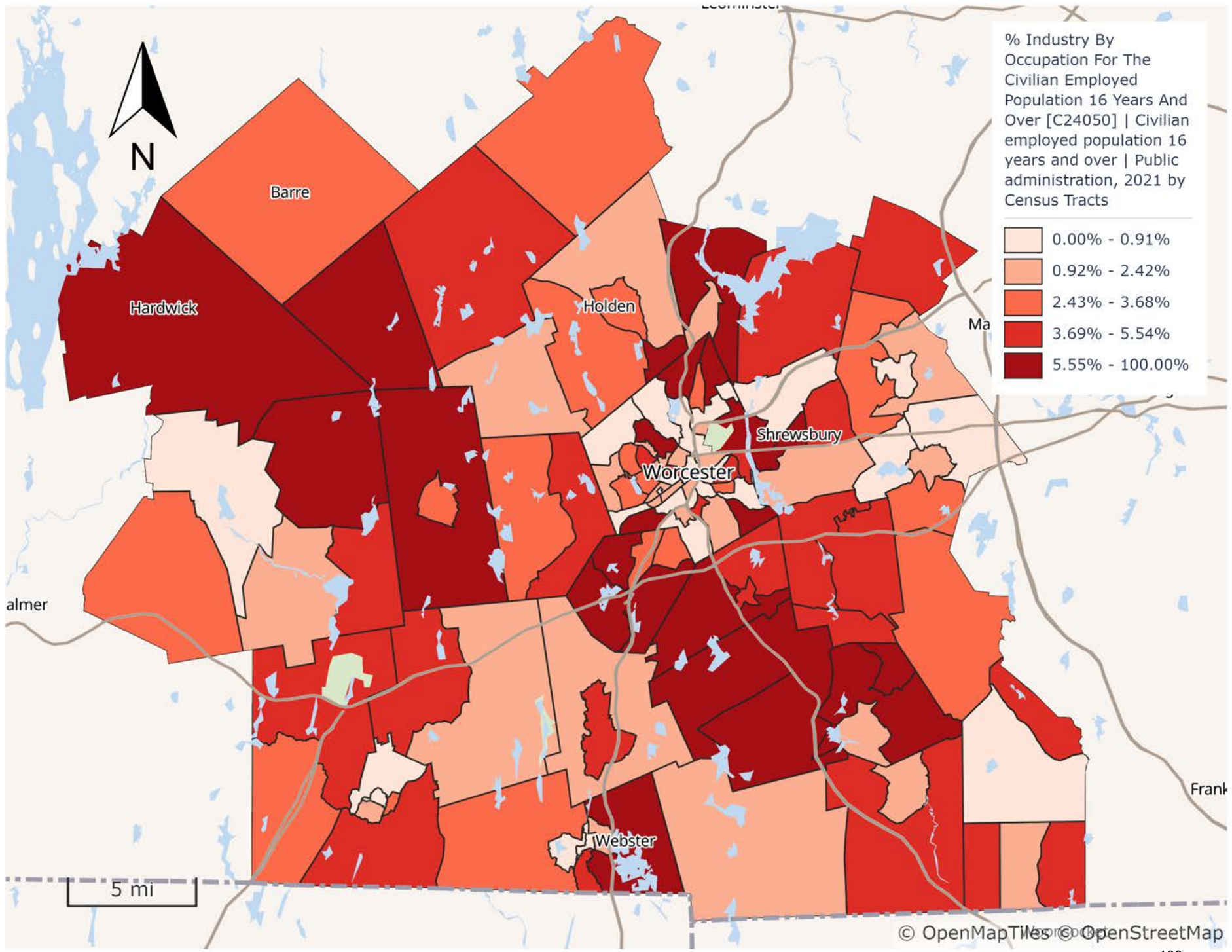
CMRPC Professional, Sci., Management, Admin., and Waste Management Jobs % by Census Tract, 2021



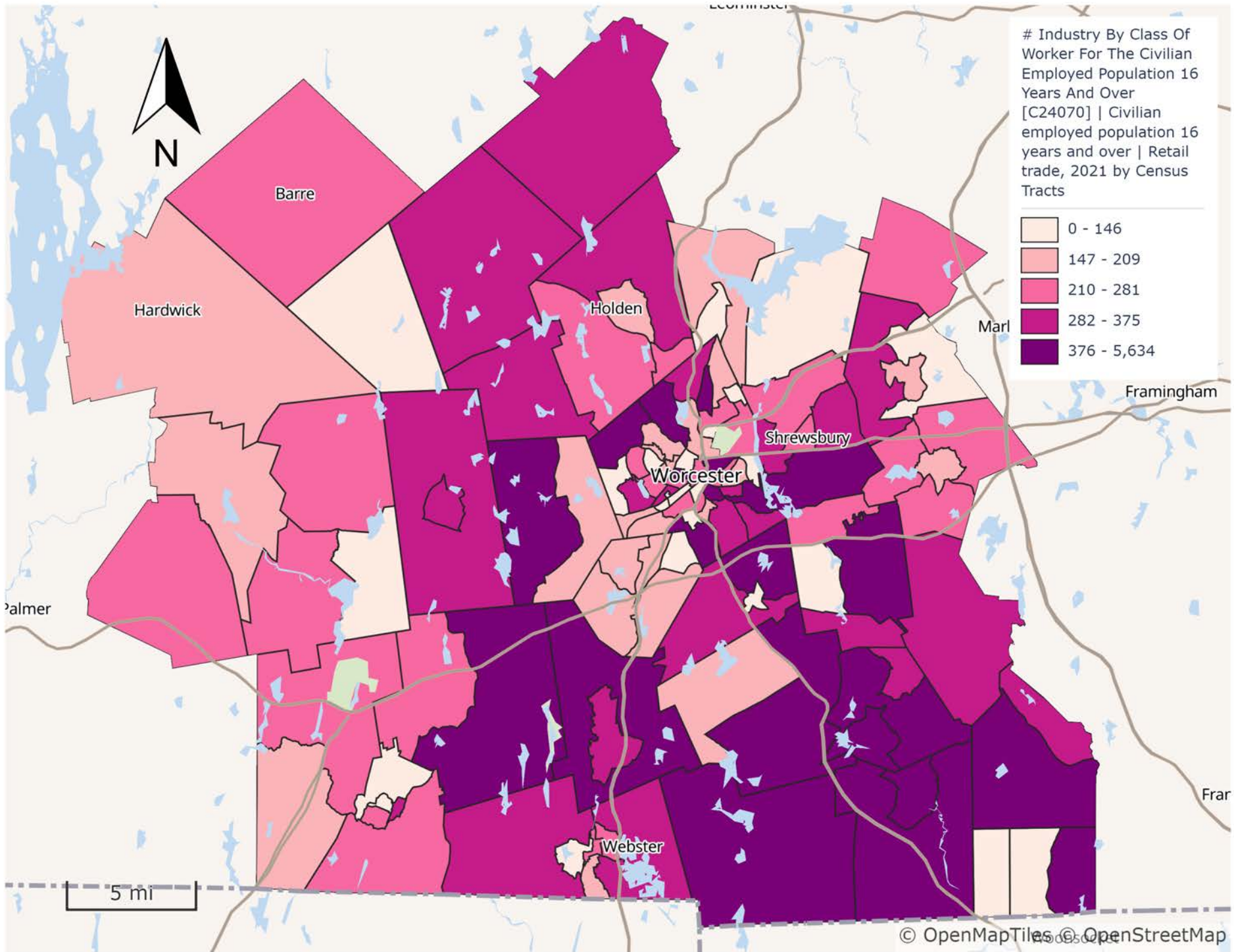
CMRPC Property Crime Rate by Census Designated Place, 2020



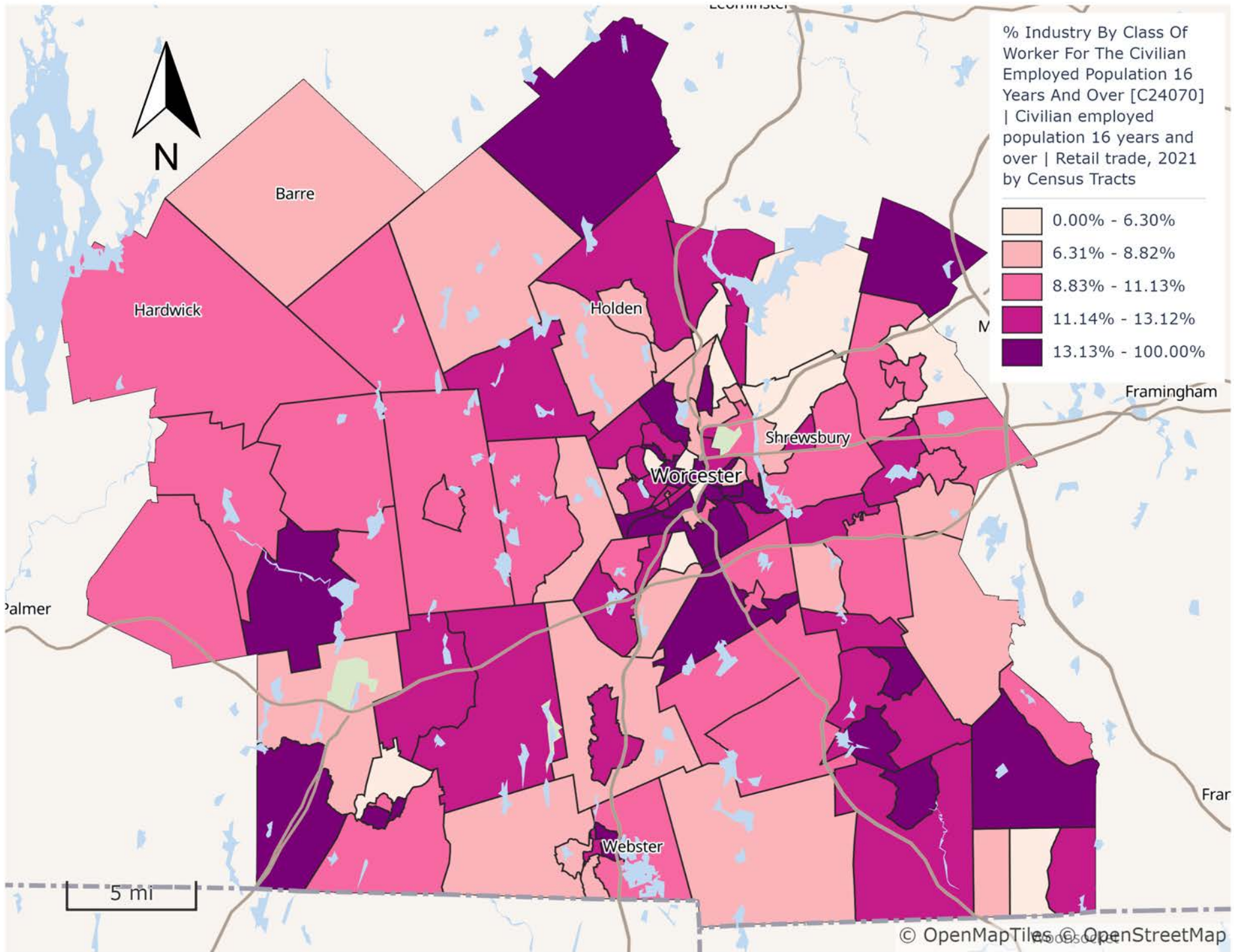
CMRPC Public Administration Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



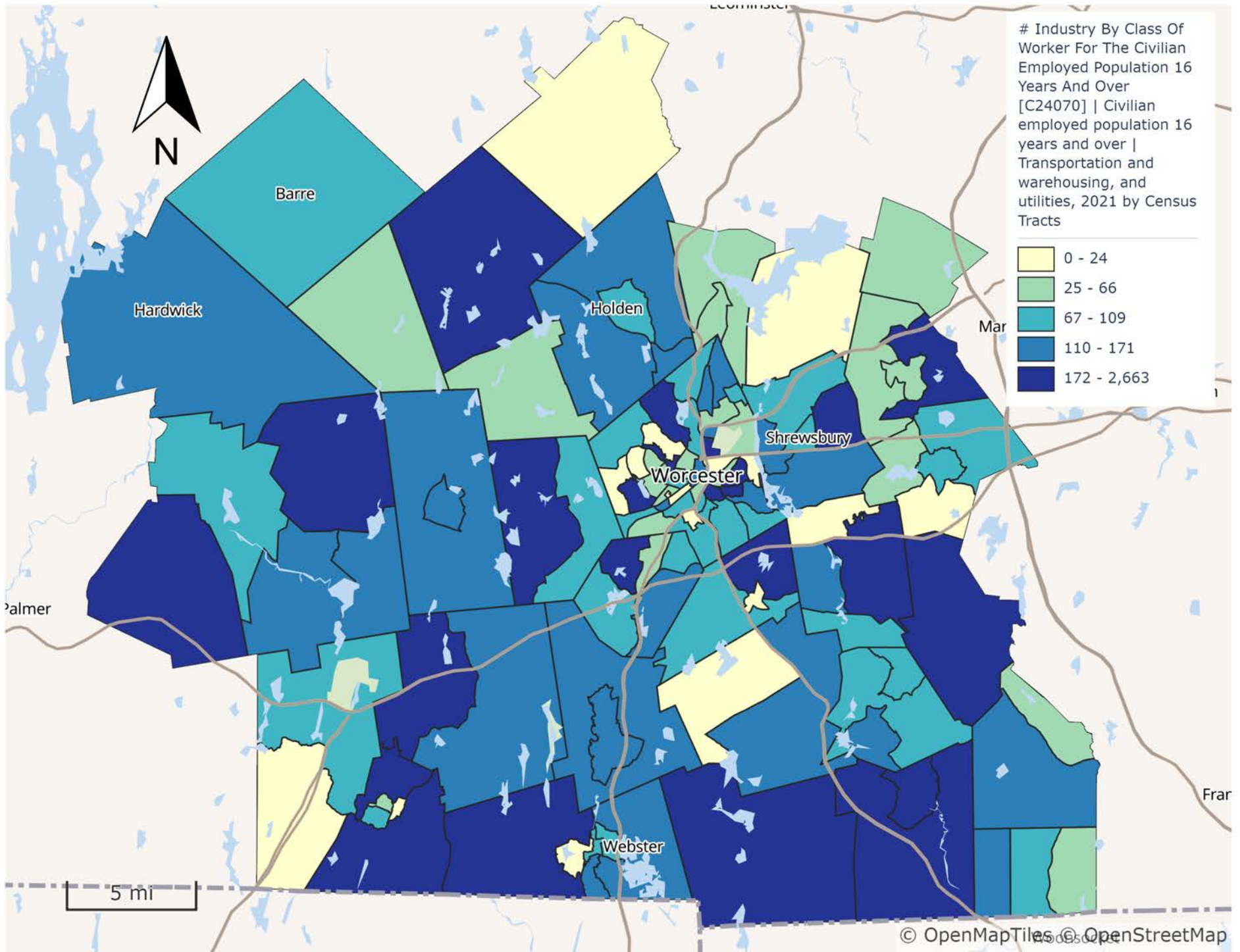
CMRPC Public Administration Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



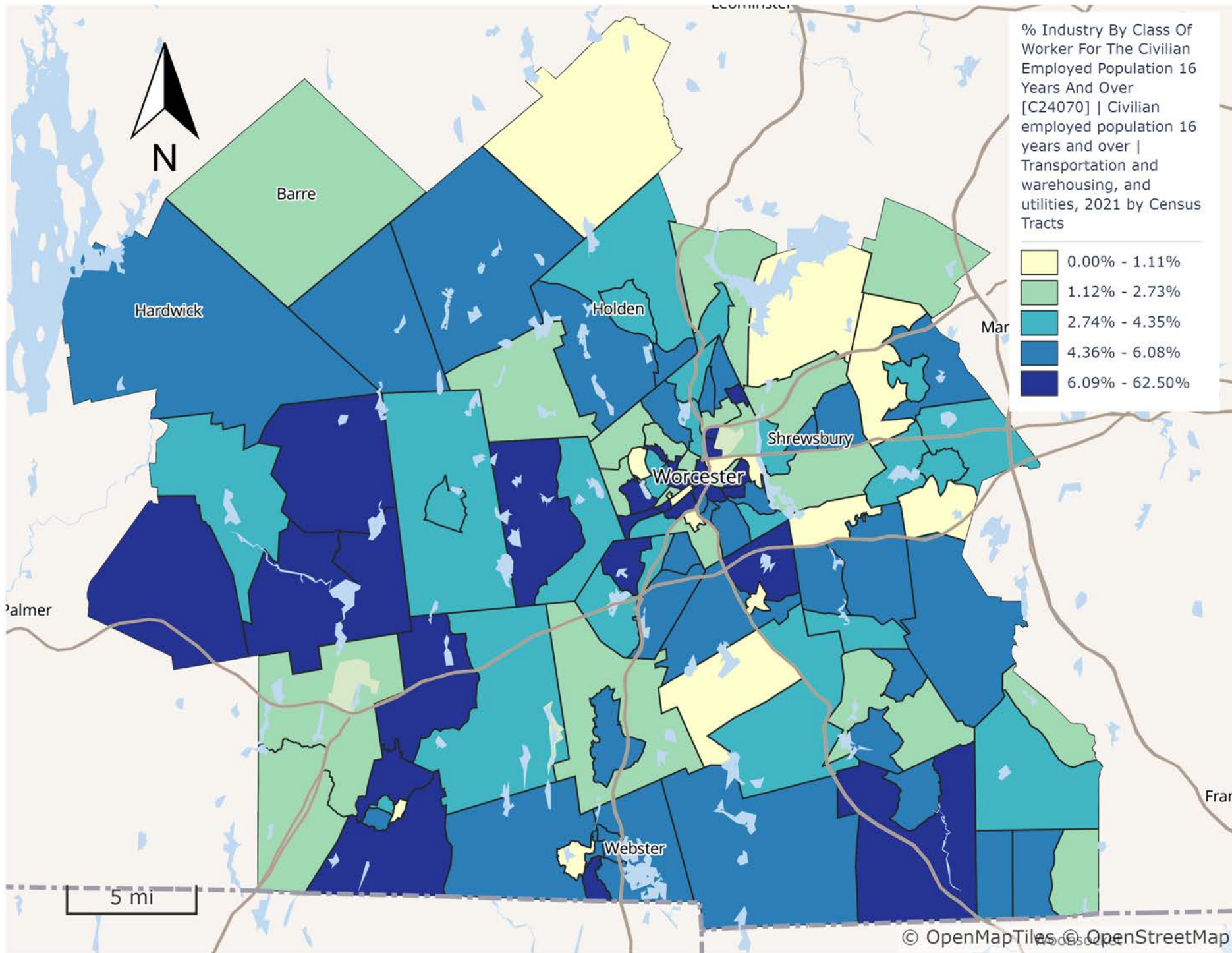
CMRPC Retail Trade Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



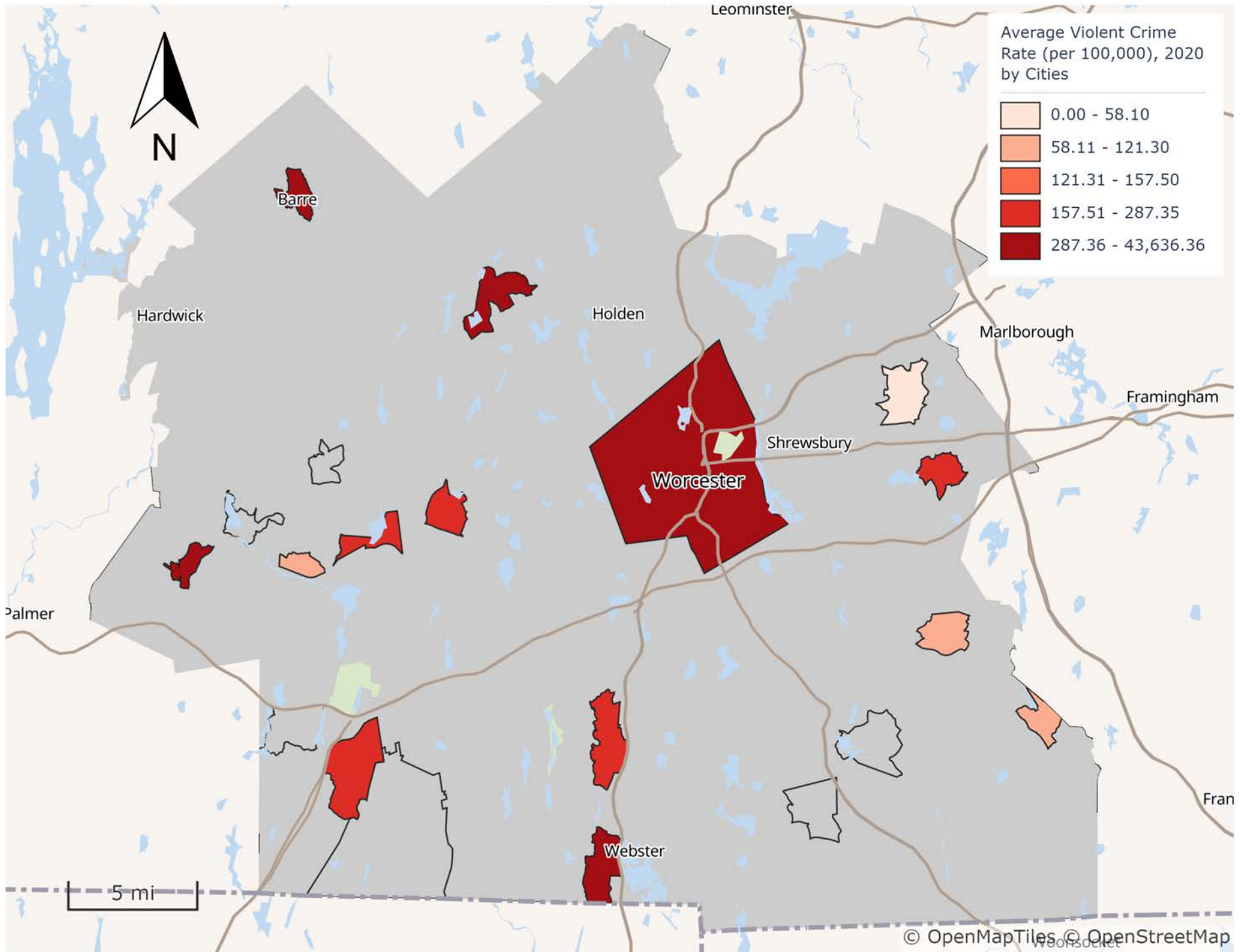
CMRPC Retail Trade Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



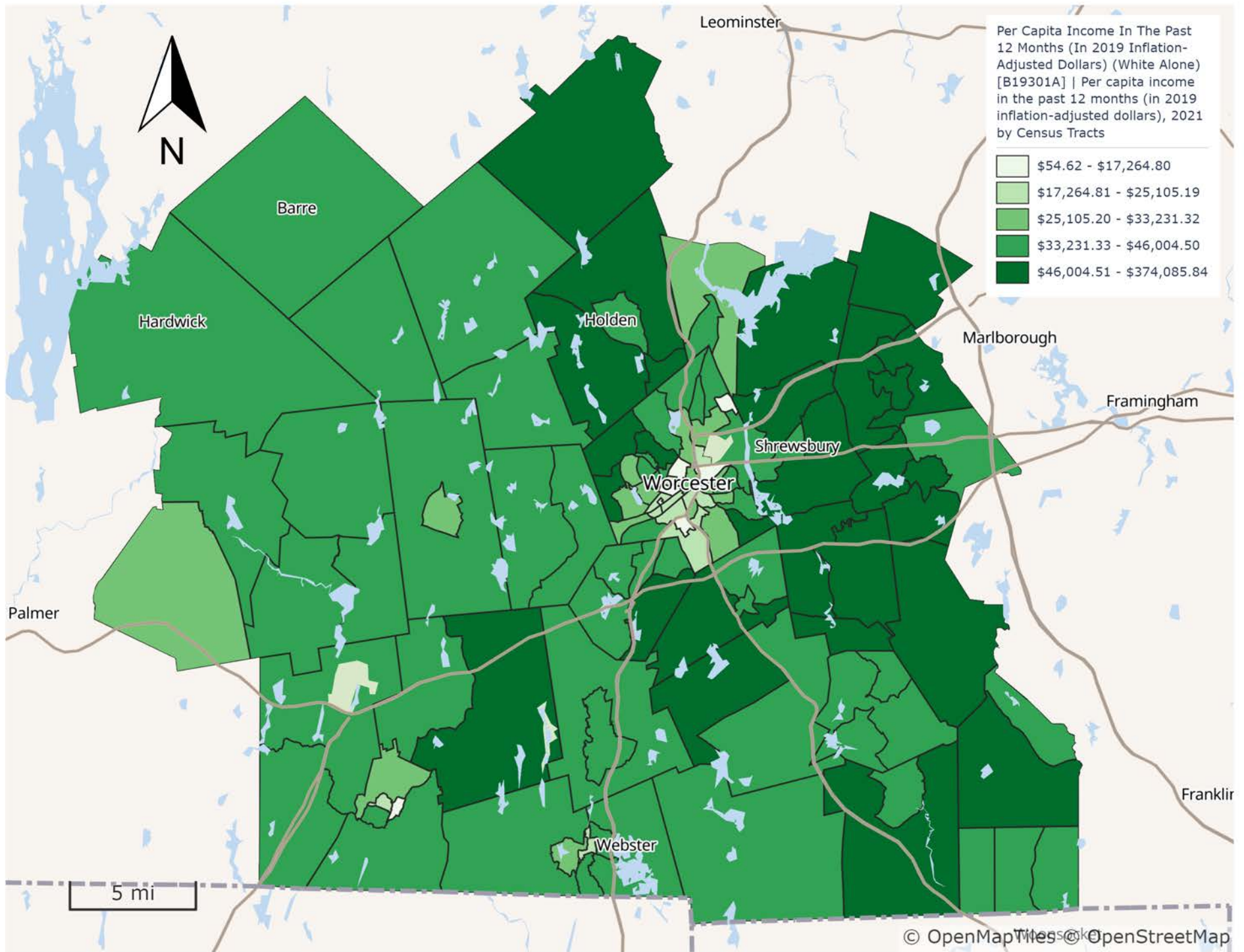
CMRPC Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities Jobs by Census Tract, 2021



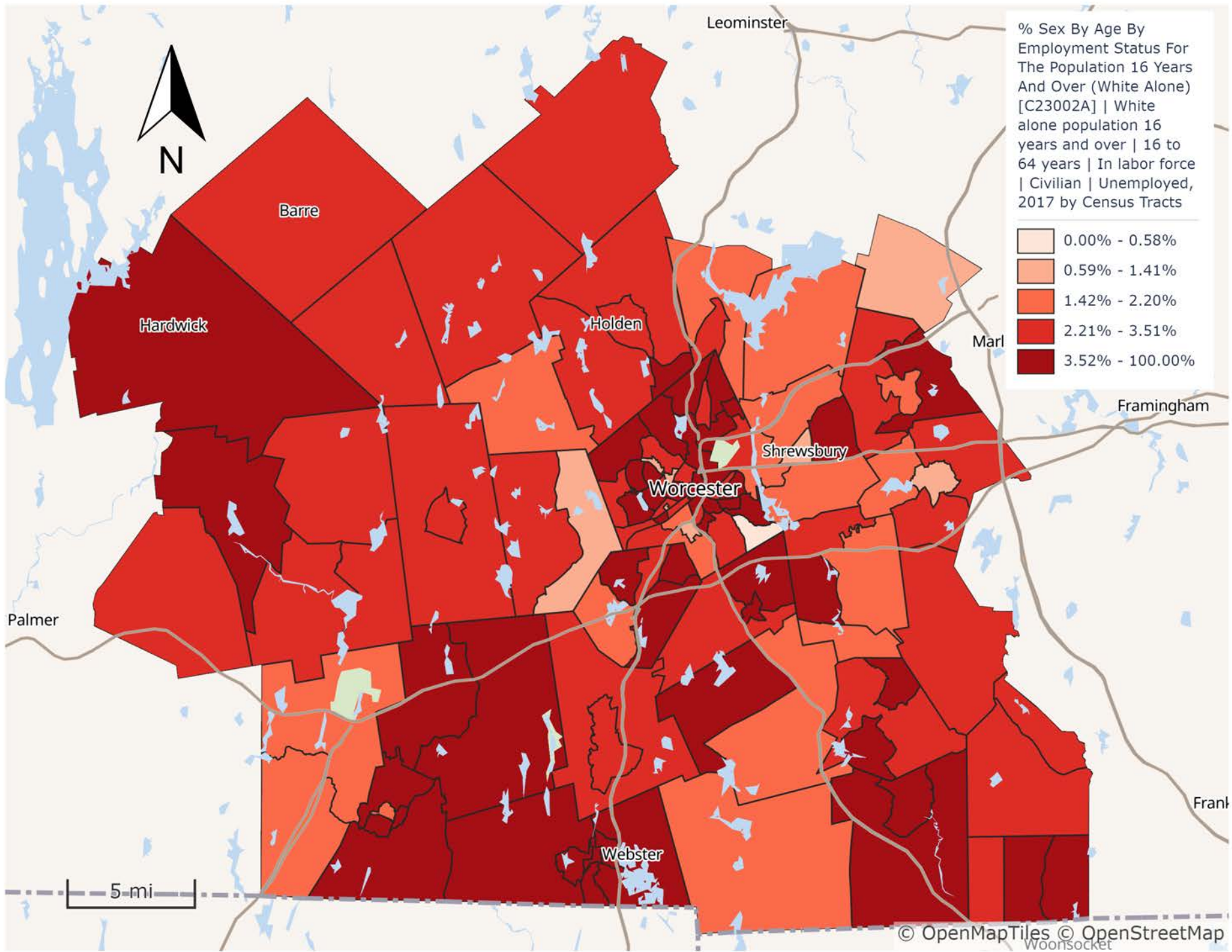
CMRPC Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021



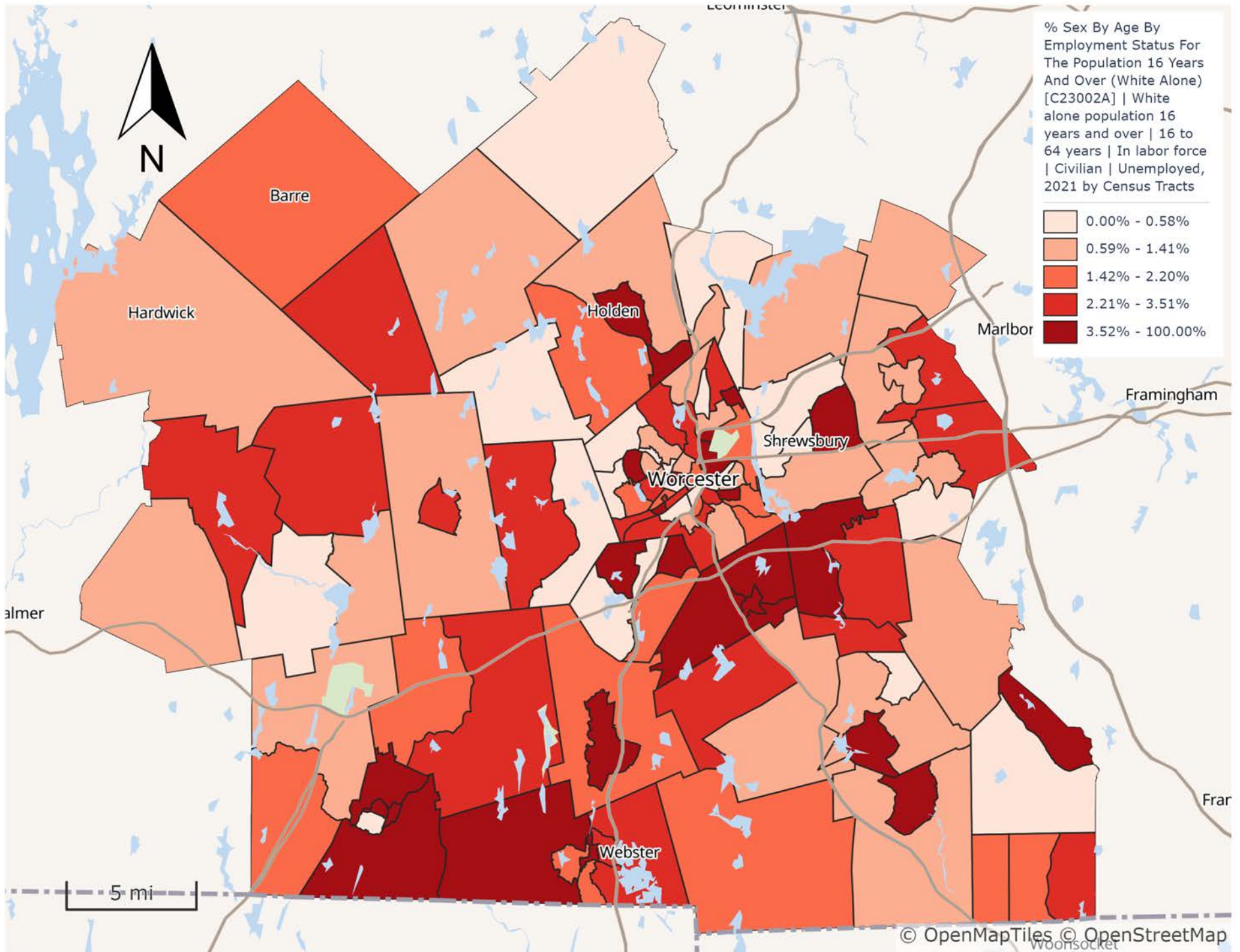
CMRPC Violent Crime Rate by Census Designated Place, 2020



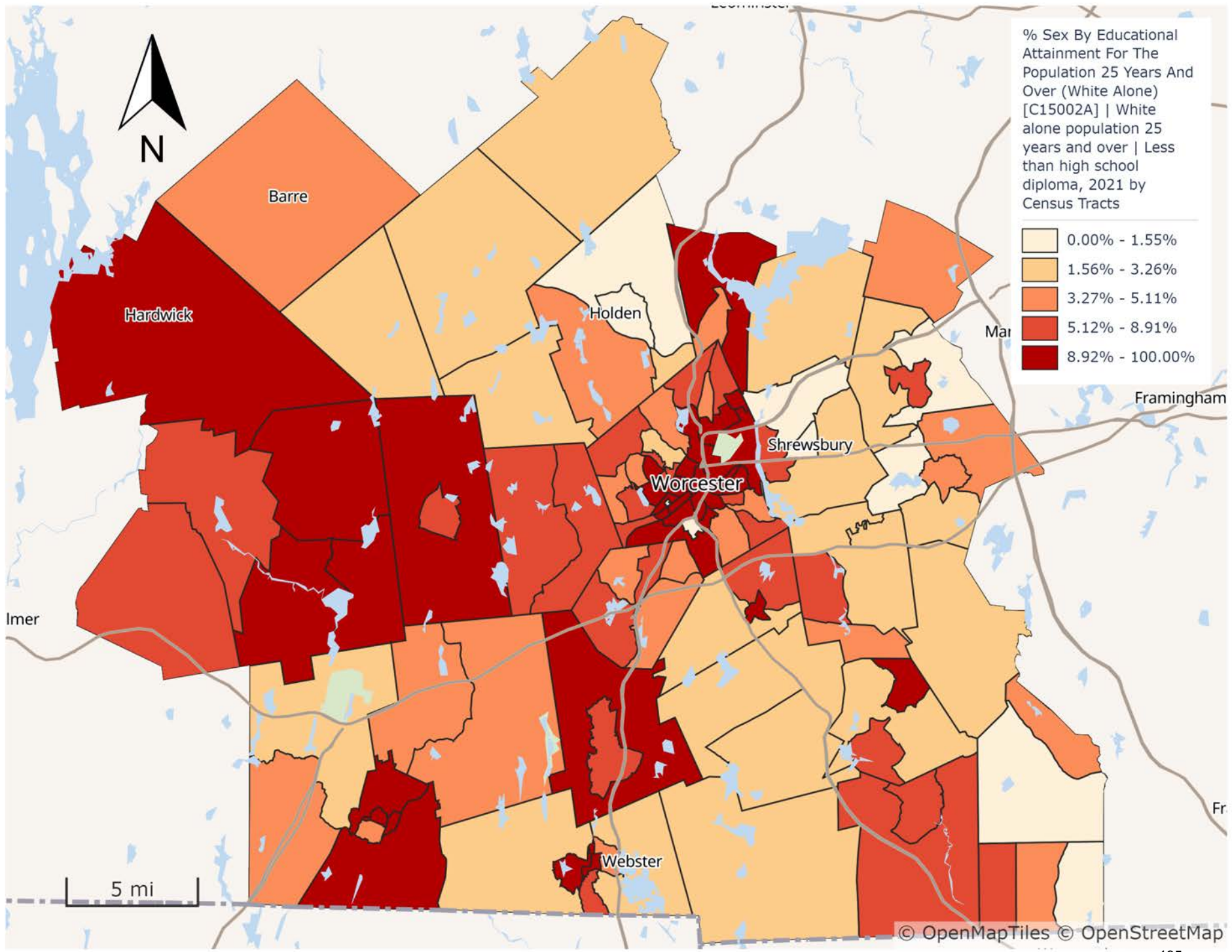
CMRPC White Alone Population Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021



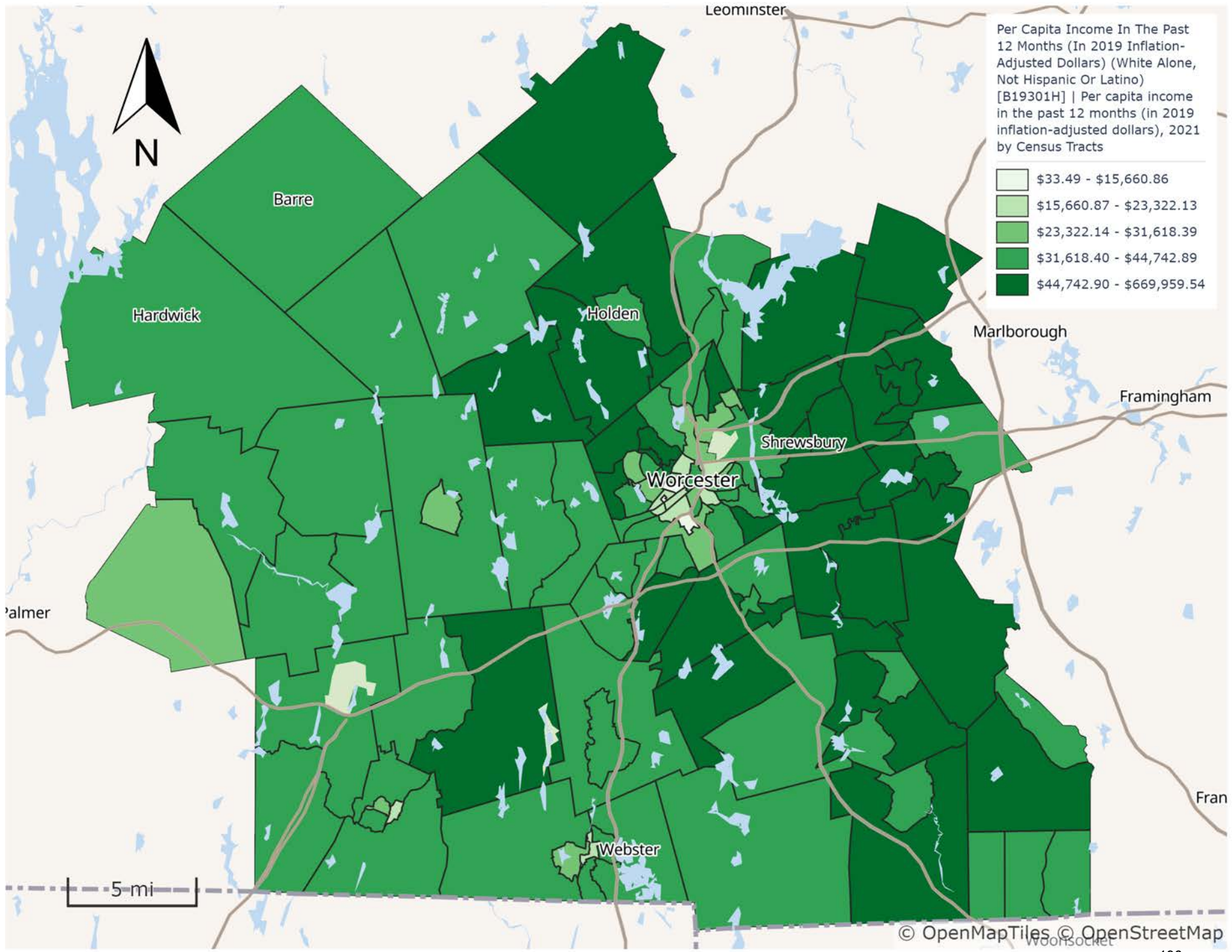
CMRPC White Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017



CMRPC White Alone Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021

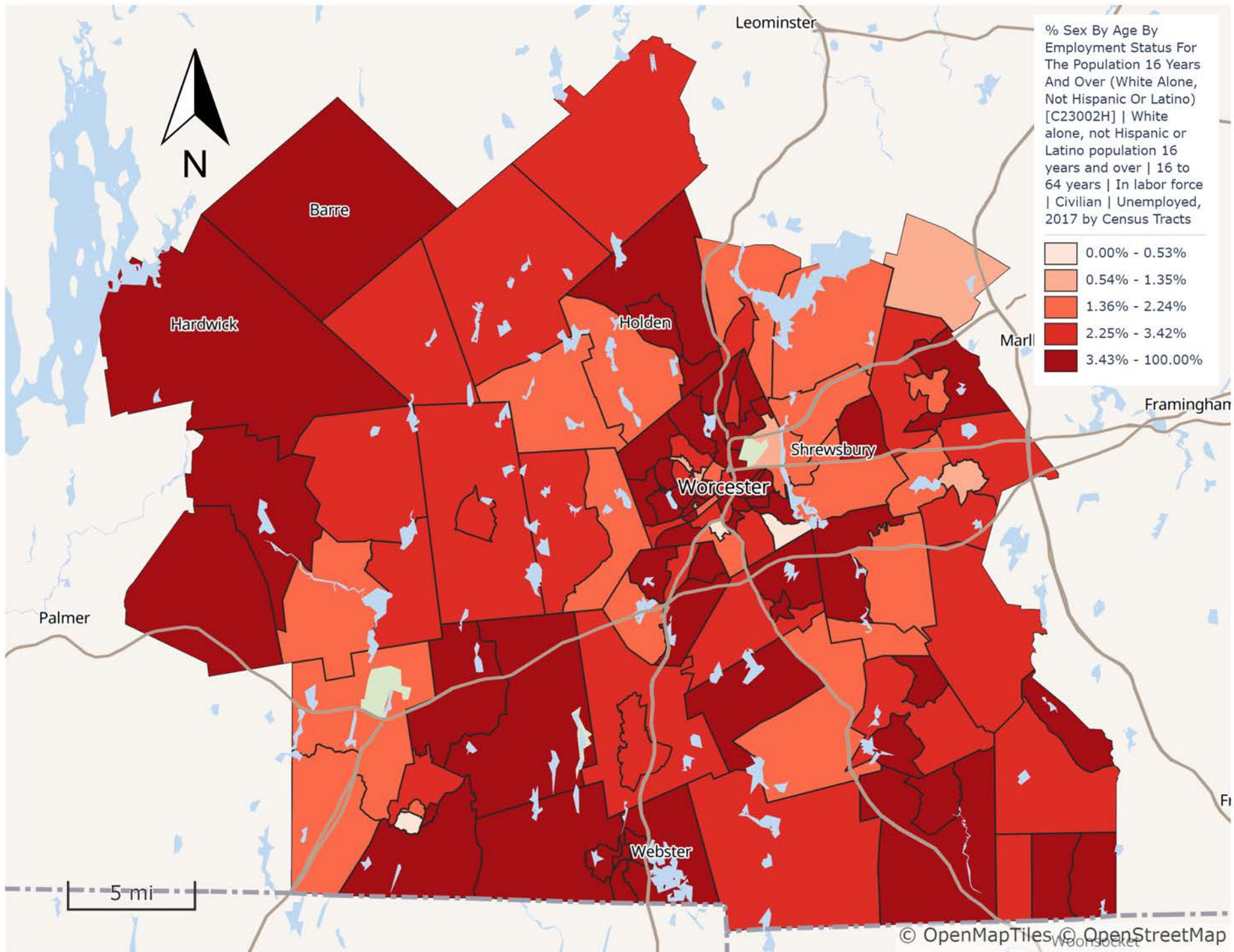


CMRPC White Alone Population With Less Than a High School Diploma by Census Tract, 2021

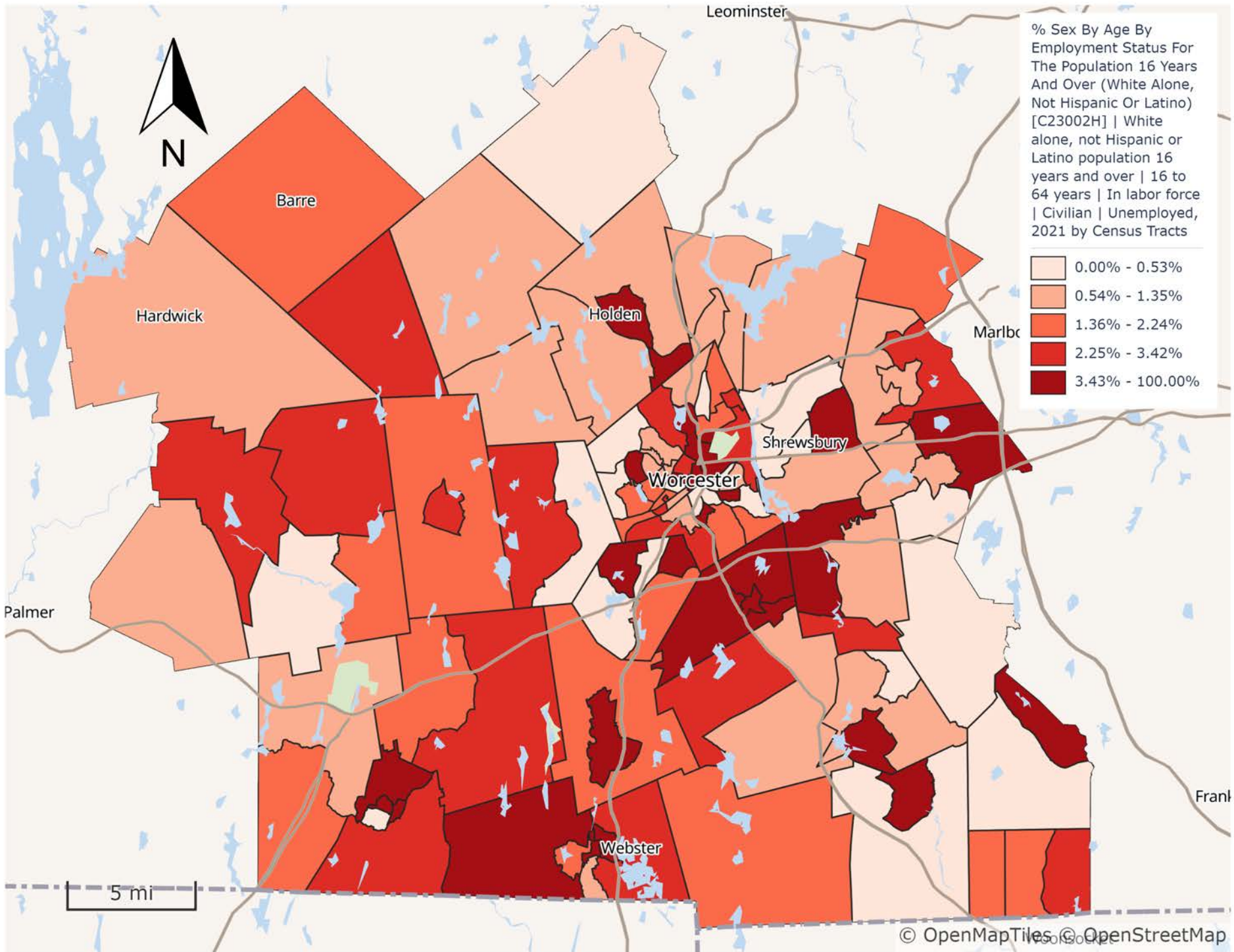


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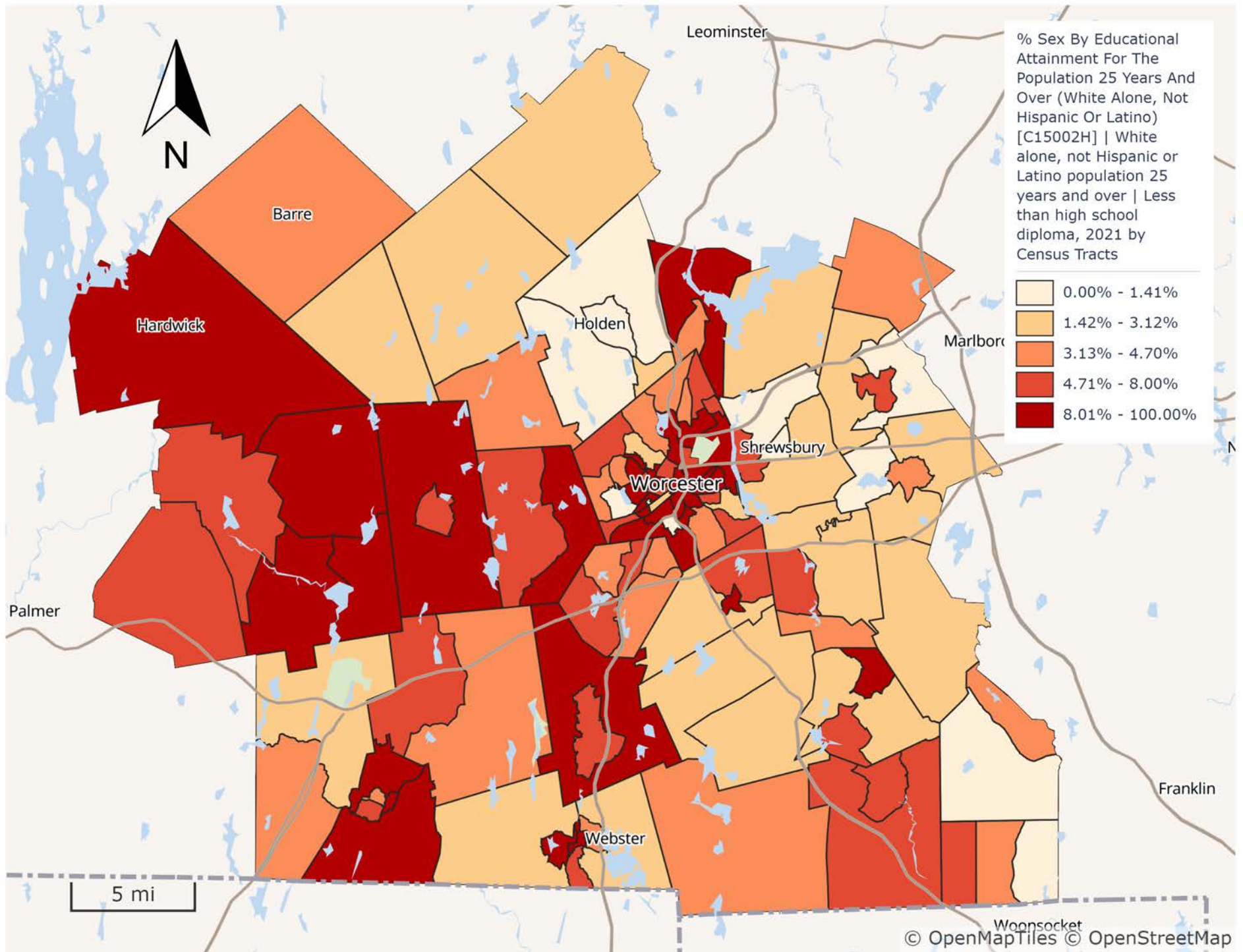
CMRPC White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino Population Per Capita Income by Census Tract, 2021



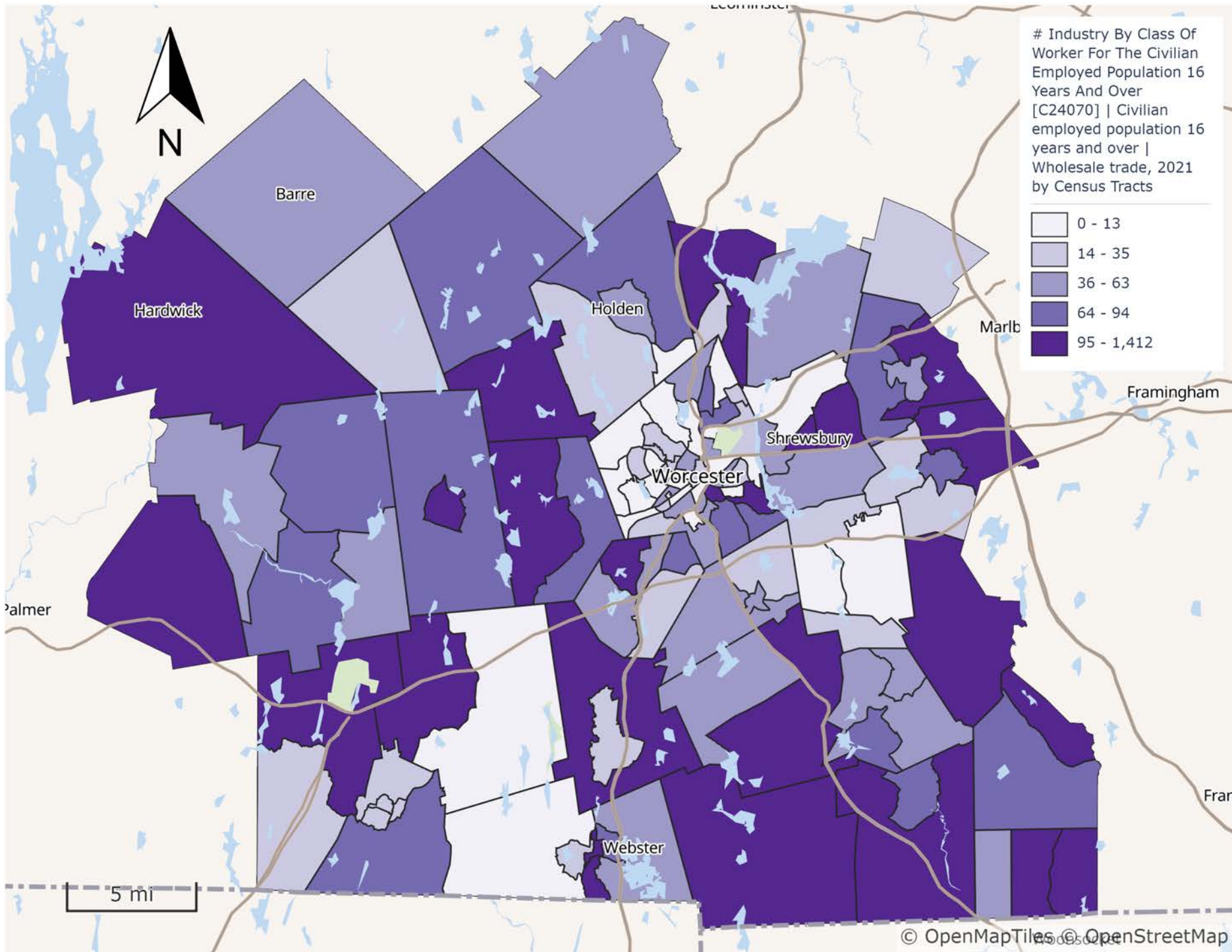
CMRPC White Alone, Not Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2017



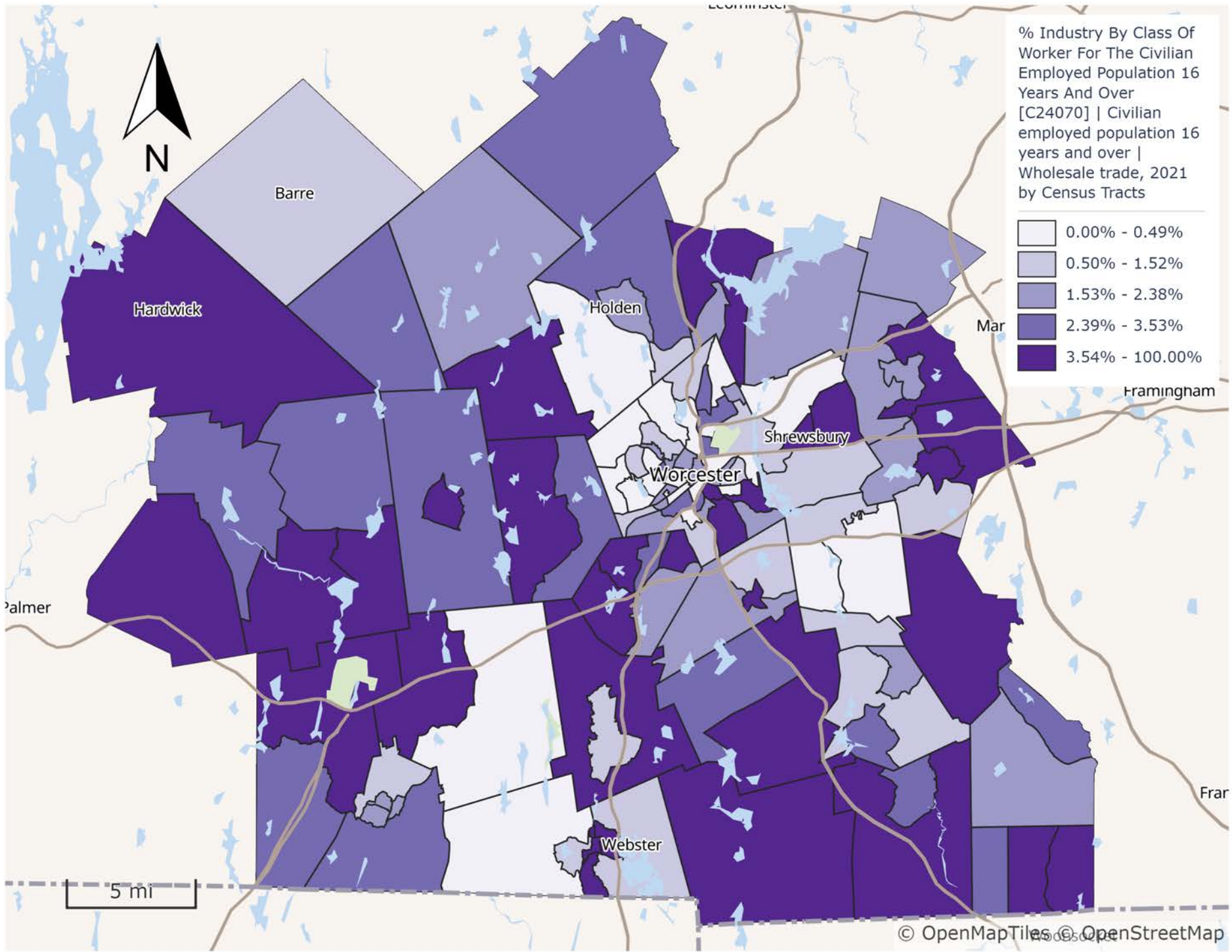
CMRPC White Alone, not Hispanic or Latino Population Unemployment Rate by Census Tract, 2021



CMRPC White Alone, Not Latino Pop. With Less Than a High School Diploma by Census Tract, 2021



CMRPC Wholesale Trade Jobs by Census Tract, 2021

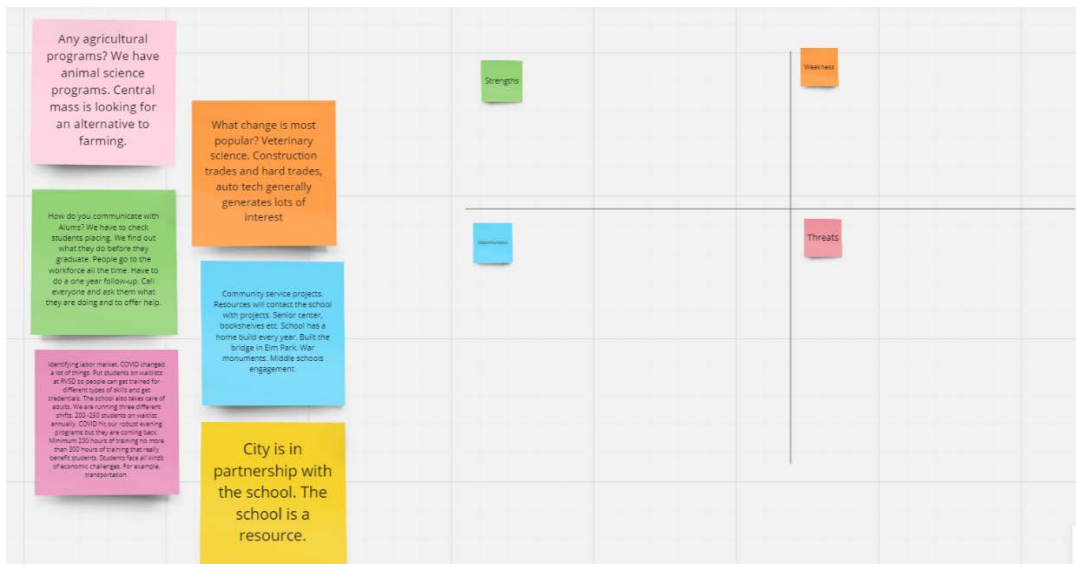


CMRPC Wholesale Trade Jobs Percentage by Census Tract, 2021

Meeting with Clark University 11/18/22 SWOT Analysis



Meeting with Bay Path Technical High School 12/7/22 SWOT Analysis



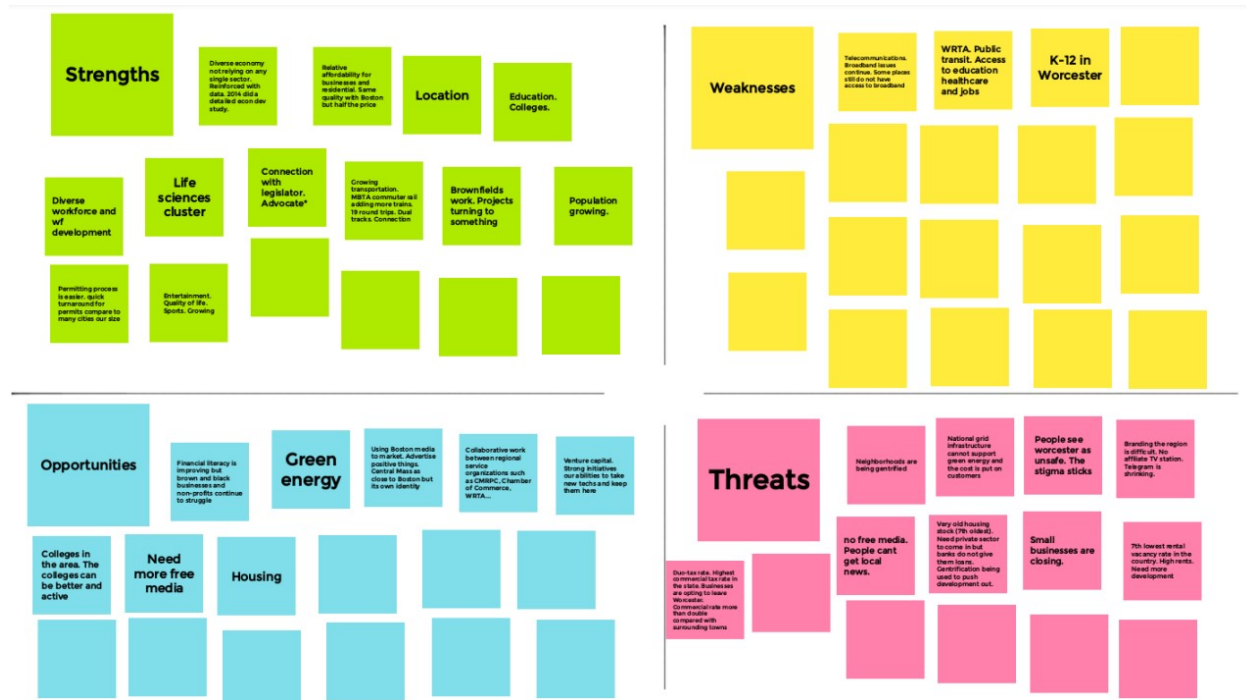
Meeting with Worcester Business Resource Alliance 2/2/23 SWOT Analysis



Meeting with Quinsigamond Community College 2/13/23 SWOT Analysis



Meeting with Worcester Chamber of Commerce 2/27/23 SWOT Analysis



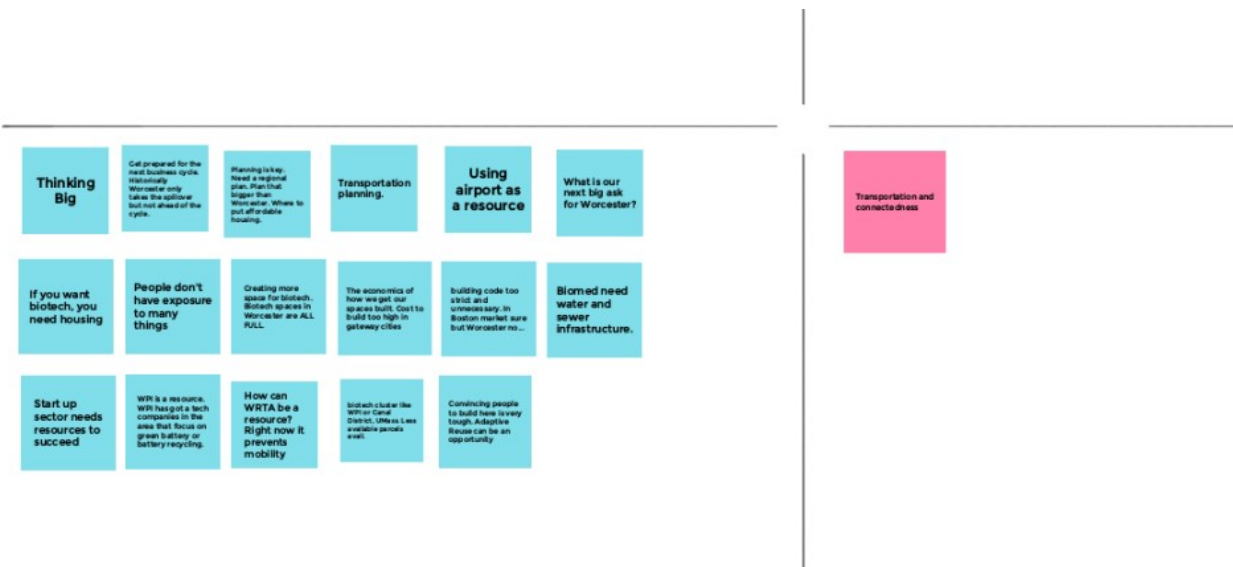
Quarterly Meeting 3/9/23 SWOT Analysis



Meeting with Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce 3/30/23 SWOT Analysis



Massachusetts Biomedical Initiatives 3/31/23 SWOT Analysis



Meeting with EDC 4/13/23 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Worcester location
- People love to live out here in the country side in Oakham
- north Brookfield for grocery, barns for gas, Factors for other services.
- Homebased businesses in Oakham. Lots of them very successful
- Homemade Pesto in Oakham
- cultural diversity
- Oakham has bylaw that asks owners if single family house to allow family house given appropriate lot size.
- Open spaces. Mass. does a great job
- Rail trail goes through oakham
- undevelopable land in Oakham

Weaknesses

- weakness old infrastructure and building
- Sidewalks

Opportunities

- Route 20 and development
- Making our small towns destinations
- Nico's college is an asset in Dudley
- Information sharing with nearby towns (e.g. greenfield)
- Marijuana growing?
- Free public transportation
- Innovatively rehabilitate buildings
- Elderly housing using boys and girls club in Worcester
- ADU bylaws
- Revolving rail trail in Dudley, looking to be some economic development jump start
- Stevens linen site development

Threats

- Lack of industry
- Lots of places dont have economic development opportunities
- Dudley does not have any decent. Getting to Dudley's off track. Most businesses and industries do not use Dudley as Pro choice.
- Lack of involvement from higher learning institutions
- Threats Worcester limited developable land
- limited sewer capacity
- aging population
- Affordability of elderly housing
- High land costs
- infrastructure in smaller towns
- increase in tax rates, esp for older adults
- People are not able to age in place
- lack of affordabl ehousing
- High cost of renovating old building



Prepared by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) with the support of the Economic Development Administration.