

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

MARCH 2016

FROM THE DIRECTOR

"A city is not gauged by its length and width, but by the broadness of its vision and the height of its dreams."
Herb Caen

I was a geography major so maps and the information they portray hold a special fascination for me. So I have to confess, it was a "pretty map" that inspired this edition of *Growth and Development Trends*. This inspiration for this edition for *Growth and Development Trends* came from a pretty map. Dana Clukey, our Planner/Demographer responsible for creating this report had put together a brightly colored map as a prop to talk with second graders during Community Planning Month in October to talk about how Greensboro has grown over the years (see pages 4 & 5). She hung it just inside her office wall and that map generated a lot of discussion among other staff and people visiting the department.

So for this issue we decided to take a look at Greensboro's annexation history and it has some interesting stories to tell. It explains why some parts of our city are laid out in a neat grid, while others the roads don't connect with each other as frequently. We also took a look at what it costs to deliver services to a city of approximately 134 square miles. The section on the budget and costs start on page 6.

In 2011 the state annexation laws changed dramatically. We still annex property into the City but only if the property owner requests it. Our challenge for the foreseeable future is to "grow from within" in a way that ensures the quality of life the people of Greensboro enjoy. It also means embracing new and different development types that helps us take advantage of the services already here. All of which requires a good bit of public discussion and our hope is this report will help inform those discussions.

Promoting Quality Growth Throughout Greensboro,
Sue Schwartz, FAICP
Director, Planning Department

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"Promoting Quality Growth Throughout Greensboro"

Growth by Annexation: Numbers

Growth

The City of Greensboro began with just 42 acres in 1808. That's roughly the size of the Carolyn S. Allen Community Park and Athletic Complex, slightly smaller than the Bennett College campus and one-tenth of the size of downtown Greensboro today. From these humble beginnings, the City has now grown to over 85,000 acres, or 135 square miles.

The pattern of growth tells an interesting story. In its early days, Greensboro was a city of streets set on a grid with similar city limits. With a large expansion of the city limits in the 1950s came a changing landscape of city boundaries. Not only did the size of the city change, but so did the shape. As a new suburban pattern of development emerged nationwide, Greensboro was no exception. The mid-20th century was a time of innovation, rapid growth and prosperity. Most people had a car and neighborhoods with curvilinear streets were built further from the city center. On the Annexation History map, there is a clear difference in the grid streets of the older portions of the city and the street patterns of areas added after 1950.

Table 1. Acreage by Time Period and Acreage and Percent Increase by Decade

Time period	Acreage	Increase from previous time period	
		# of Acres	% Increase
1920s	11,402.0		
1930s	11,419.9	17.9	0.2%
1940s	11,505.9	86.0	0.8%
1950s	31,683.7	20,177.7	175.4%
1960s	35,009.0	3,325.3	10.5%
1970s	39,043.8	4,034.8	11.5%
1980s	51,355.1	12,311.3	31.5%
1990s	69,699.7	18,344.7	35.7%
2000s	84,240.4	14,540.7	20.9%
2010s	85,605.1	1,364.7	1.6%

Source: City of Greensboro GIS Data

Another change to state law occurred in 1974, allowing cities to satellite annex, explaining some of the non-contiguous pieces on the Annexation History map starting in the 1970s. Outward growth slowed during the '60s and '70s, but picked up again in the '80s and continued in the following two decades. The large acreage increases during these decades are similar to the over 20,000 added in the 1950s. Since 1980, most annexations have occurred to the north and west of the city. The airport and industries located near it became increasingly important to Greensboro's growth.

Image 1. Bird's Eye View of Greensboro, 1891



Source: Ruger & Stoner & Burleigh Litho. (1891) *Bird's eye view of the city of Greensboro, North Carolina*. 1891. [Madison, Wis] [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/75694899>.

By The Numbers

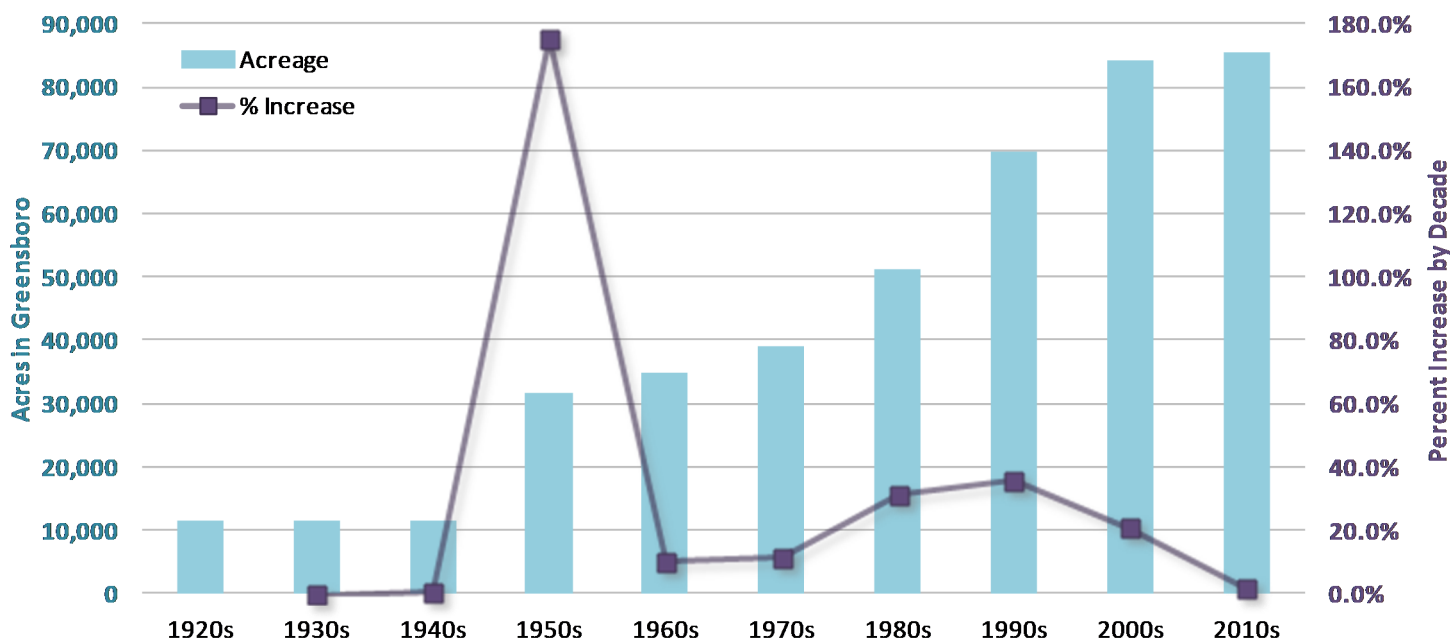
While Greensboro has grown over the past 200 years, there have been times of significant expansion. The time period of the greatest growth was during the 1950s, when the City expanded by 175%, seen in Table 1. The post-war economy was booming nationwide, but particularly in the Triad. Manufacturing, textiles and tobacco were all flourishing. Additionally, state laws changed, allowing cities to annex by petition. The areas of the City that experienced the greatest growth surrounded the center city, or were located near highways and thoroughfares like Wendover Avenue.

Image 2. Aerial View of Greensboro, 1957



Source: Carol W. Martin/Greensboro Historical Museum Collection

Chart 1. Acreage and Percent Increase by Decade



Source: City of Greensboro GIS Data

Today

In the past decade, Greensboro has seen little outward growth. Not due to the economy or the recession, but in response to changes to state law regarding city-initiated annexation. For the foreseeable future, annexations will be on a voluntary basis, driven by the need for water and sewer services from the City.

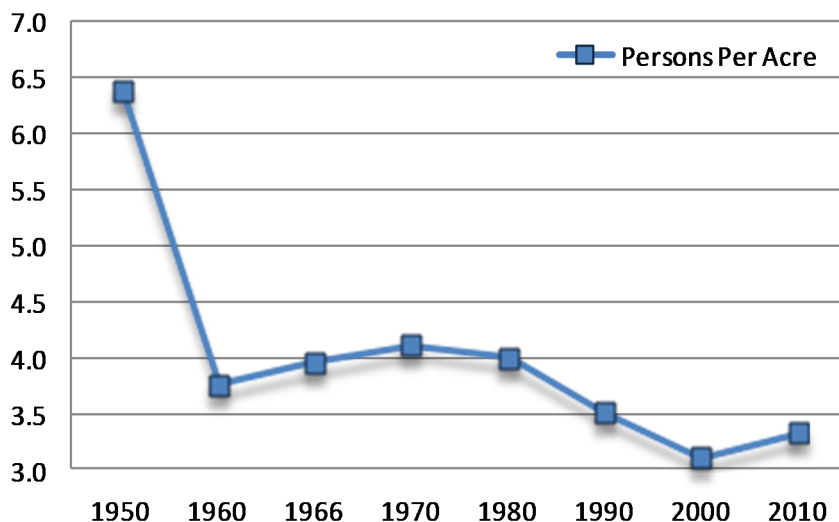
What does this mean for the city's future? How will we need to adapt? As we begin growing differently, there are policy implications that need to be evaluated. Infill development must become the primary way for the city to continue to grow its population and property valuation, by filling in vacant lots and improving underdeveloped spaces.

Population Density

Population density, or the number of people per acre, has changed significantly in Greensboro over the past century. Before the period of significant expansion in the 1950s, the city was more densely populated with there being 6.4 persons per acre. Recent findings show that Greensboro is more spread out now, with 3.3 persons per acre in 2010. Lower densities create upward pressure on tax rates and need for city services.

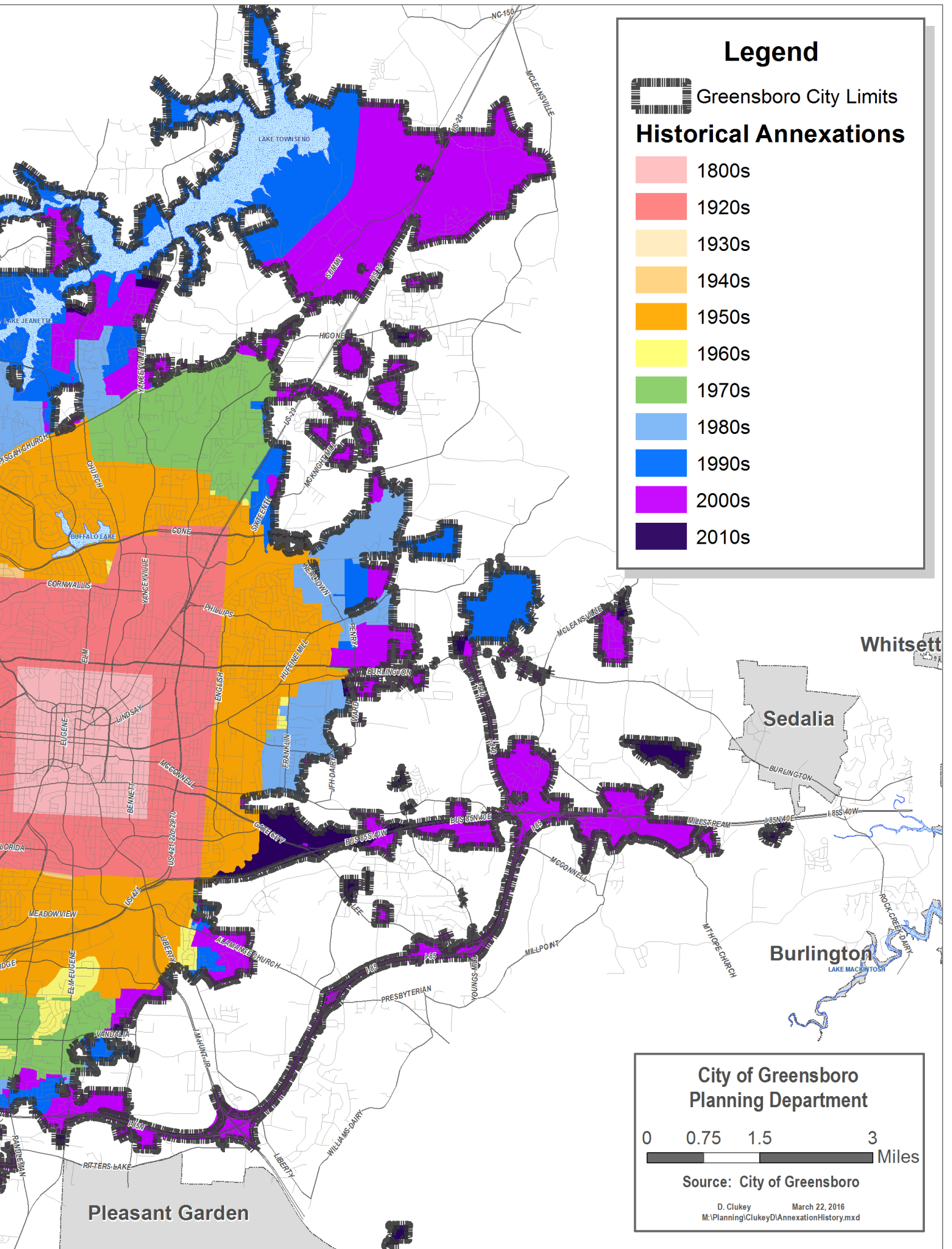
For more information on the local economy and how things are looking up, check out the Growth and Development Trends Report from January 2016 on the Planning Department's statistics webpage: <http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/statistics>

Chart 2. Historical Population Density in Greensboro



Source: US Census Bureau, 1950-2010 Census of Population and Housing

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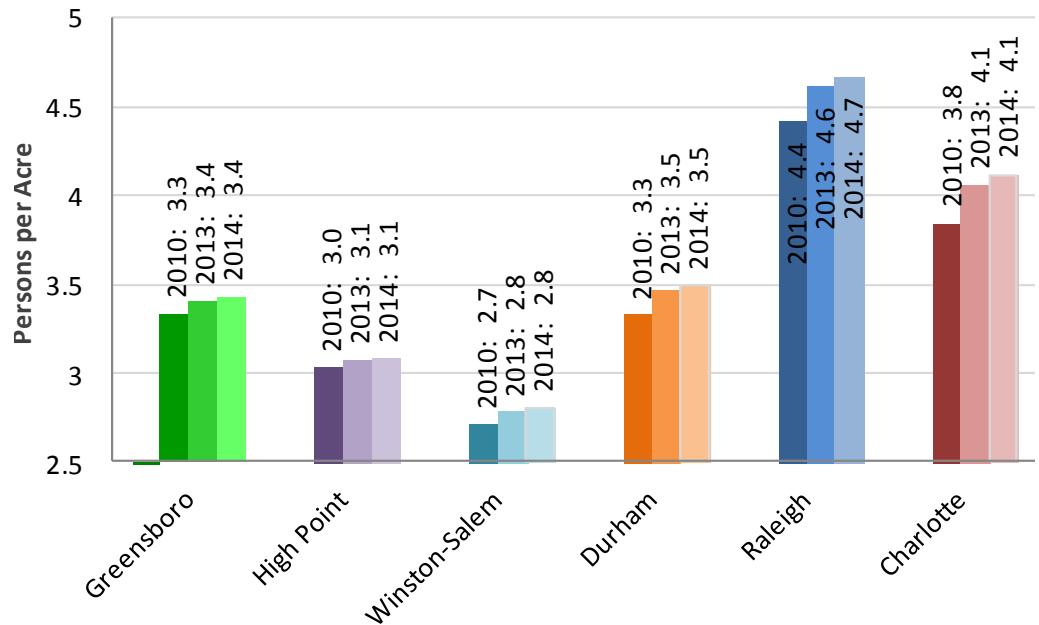


Budget Figures

Population Density In Comparable Cities

The two largest cities in the state experienced the greatest increase in population density from 2010 to 2014. Charlotte's population density increased at the highest rate (7.3%) and Raleigh's increased by 5.6%. In the same time period, Greensboro's population density increased by 2.8%.

Chart 3. Population Density in Comparable NC Cities, Select Years 2010-2014



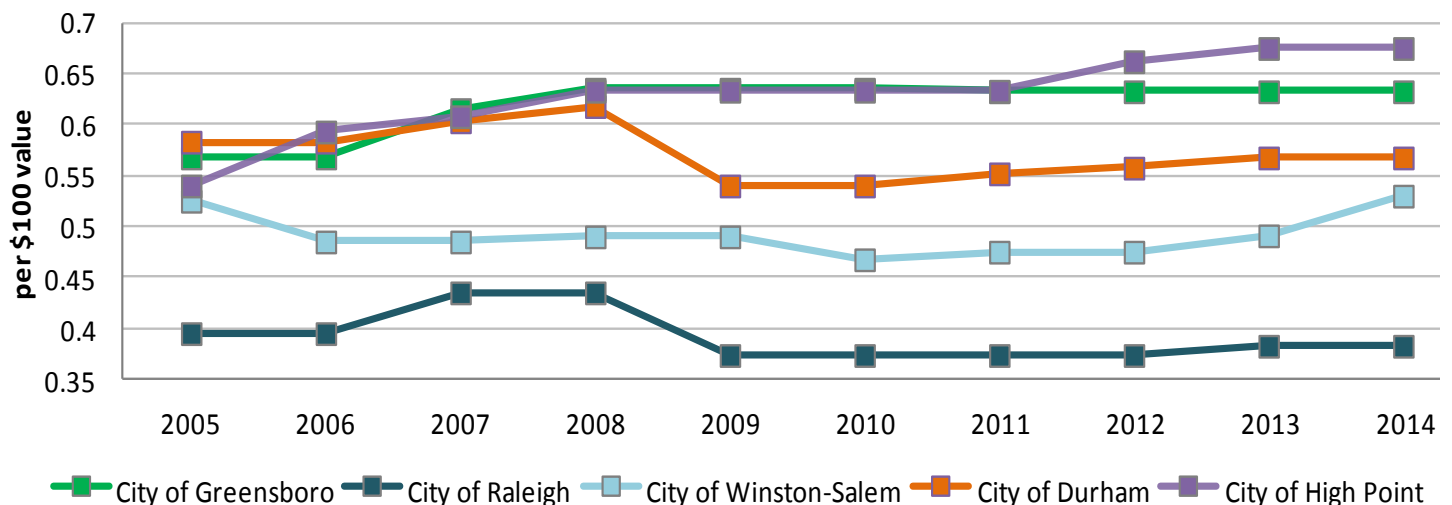
Source: NC Office of State Budget and Management

Tax Rate and Revenue

Over the years, the tax rate in Greensboro has remained relatively stable. Like most other comparable NC cities, the past five years have seen little change in tax rates. Years showing the largest changes in rates and valuation are most likely due to re-valuations.

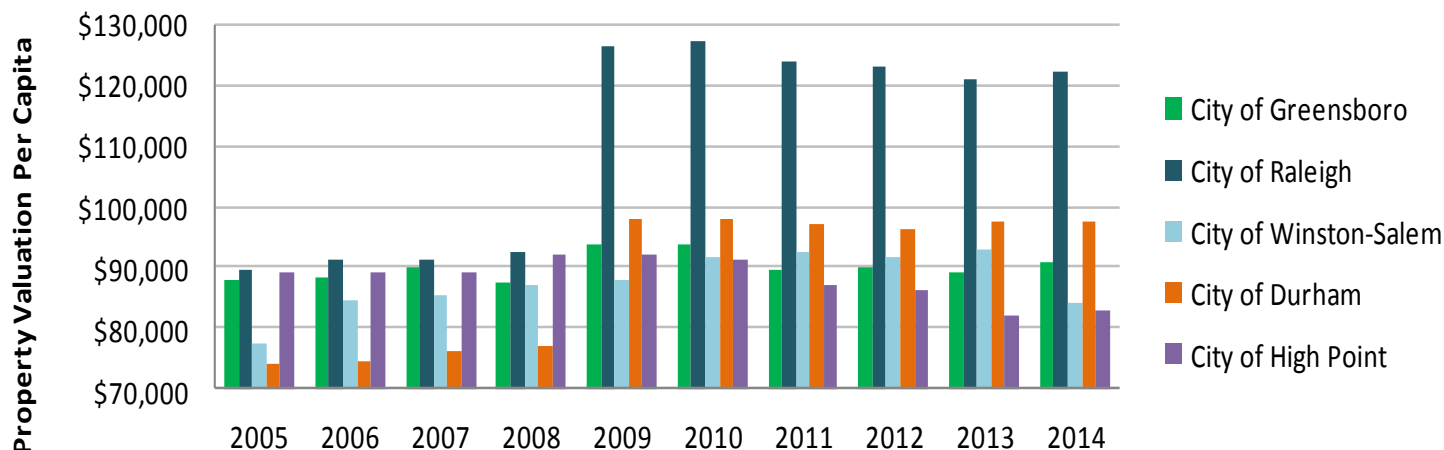
The assessed property valuation per capita plays an important role in evaluating a city's revenue. This valuation reflects economic value and worth of property and when multiplied by the tax rate, provides the expected revenue that a city is to receive from property taxes. While the Greensboro property tax rate is one of the highest among the selected NC cities (Chart 4), the valuation that the rate is lower than other cities (Chart 5). The assessed property valuation per capita has remained stable in Greensboro for the past decade (an increase of 3.4%), while it has risen sharply in Raleigh (36.2%) and Durham (32%).

Chart 4. Tax Rates in Comparable NC Cities, 2005-2014



Source: Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFR)

Chart 5. Total Assessed Property Valuation Per Capita in Comparable NC Cities, 2005-2014



Source: Total Population and Current Expenditure Values from Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFR); Analysis by City Staff

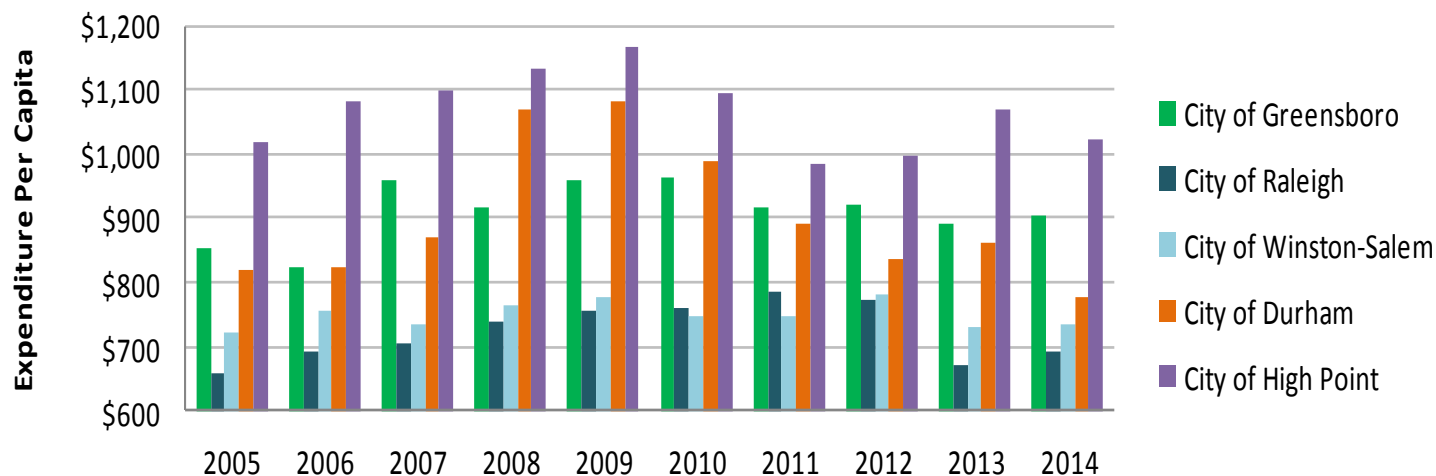
*High Point data may include electric utility expenses

Expenditures

Current expenditure data (all governmental expenditures excluding capital and long term debt payment) was collected for comparable NC cities (Chart 6). Greensboro and High Point have the highest expenditures per capita. In the time period examined, Greensboro experienced the highest percentage increase (6.3%) while Durham's expenditures per capita decreased by 5.3%.

Provision of services vary from city to city, also effecting tax collection. For instance, the City of Greensboro maintains a public library system, while most other cities do not. For more information comparing property tax rates and user fees for major North Carolina cities, see the "Current Property Tax and User Fee Report" on the Budget Department's studies webpage: <http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/managementstudies>

Chart 6. Current Expenditures (Governmental) Per Capita in Comparable NC Cities, 2005-2014



Source: Total Population and Current Expenditure Values from Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFR); Analysis by City Staff

*High Point data may include electric utility expenses

Key Findings

- Like most southern cities, Greensboro's growth accelerated after World War II and its growth was auto oriented.
- State law changes can explain spikes and declines in annexation figures.
- Annexation is now a more limited option for the City's future growth.
- The City's population density (# or persons /acre) today is almost half of what it was in 1950 (6.4 to 3.3 Persons/Acre)
- There is a correlation to a degree between higher municipal per capita expenditures and lower population density.