Downtown Albany Strategy

Data Sources & Methodologies Summary

Updated February 2026

I. Purpose

This summary outlines the data sources and methods used to assess Downtown Albany's needs, assets, and opportunities for future growth. Throughout the DTAS planning process, data analysis provided a baseline of existing conditions and directly informed the development of growth targets. These targets reflect current needs and assets, peer city benchmarks, and community priorities, helping to guide future actions and progress.

II. Data Sources & Methodology

Chapter 1: Albany's Moment

Chapter 1.1: A Capital City (pgs. 1-3)

- Descriptions of CAP and the State's commitments to Albany (including the mention of the Governor's $400 million commitment to Downtown and $200 million to revitalizing its core) reflect press releases and CAP materials from the Governor's Office and Empire State Development (ESD).
- The estimate of over $4 billion in public support for projects in Albany under Governor Hochul's leadership reflects the combined costs of a number of key projects, as listed in State project announcements and agency webpages. These projects include (with sources in parenthesis):
    - Livingston Avenue Rail Bridge (project funding/implementation webpages);
    - Wadsworth Laboratory (new facility announcement materials);
    - Central Warehouse demolition (City and State announcement materials); and
    - NY CREATES Albany NanoTech Complex investments (State and NY CREATES announcement materials).
- The DTAS engagement participation tally of more than 2,300 people is based on MIG and Highland's engagement tracking, including workshop attendance, survey responses, event sign-ins, etc., including ~700

Chapter 1.2: Downtown Albany is Essential (pgs. 4-5)

- "Within one-mile of the Capitol, there are roughly 220 acres of vacant parcels and surface parking. This is the equivalent of more than 140 city blocks that must be brought back to productive use."
    - Estimates based on the Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany, which tracks parcel size and vacancy. These estimates reflect the City's maintained parcel inventory at the time of analysis.
- "Like many capital cities, a large portion of Albany's property, approximately two-thirds, is tax-exempt. This already strains municipal resources and concentrates the burden onto taxable properties. For example, Albany's combined City–County–School tax rate is about $28 per $1,000 of assessed value—roughly 30% higher than the Capital Region average."
    - Estimates based on a tax rate comparison memo provided by Capitalize Albany and International Downtown Association (IDA) staff and validated with underlying public data, including NYS Comptroller and municipal and school levy tables for Downtown Albany.
- "By mid-2025, the City of Troy had 2,300+ new or renovated units completed in the prior year or in the pipeline (about 1,500 new)."
    - Estimates from: "Churchill: Troy is building lots of apartments while Albany...isn't," Chris Churchill for the Times Union, July 2025.
- "Albany's 2025 Housing Audit found that since 2023, 100% market-rate proposals largely disappeared aside from a handful of small projects."
    - Estimates from the City of Albany's *Housing Audit* report prepared by Camoin Associates in December 2025.
- "Nationally, the median downtown covers just 2.2% of city land yet contains 24% of city jobs and generates an average 22% of citywide property tax revenue."
    - Estimates from the International Downtown Association's (IDA) *Value of Downtown* report (2018).

Chapter 1 Maps

- **Downtown Albany Strategy Area map** (pg. 3): This one-mile radius reflects the primary geography used across DTAS (see Geography 1 below). In select cases, different geographies were used to collect and analyze certain data points based on data availability restrictions. See pages 10-14 of this memo for an overview of the different geographic areas used across DTAS.
- **Vacant Parcels & Surface Parking map** (pg. 4): Parcel data, including vacancy status and surface parking designation, was provided via the Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district. This data relies on inputs from the County Assessor's office as well as analyses conducted by City staff. These estimates reflect the City's maintained parcel inventory at the time of analysis.

- **Population Density map** (pg. 7): Population density estimates were provided by American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates at the Census Block Group level and aggregated into buckets by MIG.

Downtown Population Density Comparison Chart: Albany and Peer Cities (pg. 6)

- Four peer cities—Hartford, CT; Worcester, MA; Providence, RI; and Madison, WI—were selected to represent different stages of potential future growth for Downtown Albany. These cities share key characteristics with Albany, including geographic size, built form, climate, and demographics. Each has a denser downtown than Albany, ranging from slightly denser (Hartford) to nearly ten times denser (Madison), offering a spectrum of possible growth trajectories.
- Population density estimates for Albany and the peer cities were calculated using consistent American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (2019–2023). To enable meaningful comparison, each city was assigned a custom Downtown boundary encompassing the central business district and select inner urban commercial areas. In Albany, this boundary includes the BID core, Empire State Plaza, and portions of Arbor Hill, the Warehouse District, and the South End (see Geography 5).
- The chart also incorporates benchmarks from the International Downtown Association's Vitality Index, which identifies target population densities for emerging, growing, and established downtowns. These benchmarks helped inform Albany's 2030 and 2035 growth targets. https://downtown.org/ida-vitality-index/

Chapter 2: Where We're Headed

Growth Targets (pg. 10-11)

- **Triple Downtown's Residential Base by 2035**
  - **The Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) core's (Geography 2) current population of ~1,150 residents**: estimated using ESRI Business Analyst population data for 2023 using the Downtown BID service area (see Geography 2). ESRI's population estimates are adjusted from American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, 2019-2023. Previous estimates developed by the BID of ~800 residents were last updated in 2021.
  - Per ESRI's population estimate, the Extended Downtown area (Geography 5) has a population density of **~3,976 residents per square mile** as of 2023. The densities for peer cities is as follows:
    - Hartford: 8,109
    - Worcester: 10,462
    - Providence: 13,099

- **Add 1,500 Jobs Downtown in 5 Years; 3,000 in 10 Years**
  - Per Lightcast, Downtown currently has about **22,000 jobs** (Geography 3). About half of these are public-sector, and over 85% are either public-sector or office-based jobs.
  - Downtown added ~850 new jobs between 2019-2024. Baseline projections from Lightcast (based on Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates) place job growth at +1,100 from 2024-2029 and an additional +700 from 2029-2034.
  - Downtown's target growth of 1,500 net new jobs within 5 years and 3,000 within 10 years reflects a stabilization and slight increase over recent growth (which has varied year-over-year).

- **Reach 5 Million Annual Visitors, 90-Minute Stays, 150+ Event Days**
  - According to 2025 aggregated mobile device visitation analytics data for Downtown (Geography 2), Albany draws about 3 million annual unique visitors to the Downtown area. These visitors spend an average of 74 minutes Downtown.
  - Peer cities – including Hartford, CT; Worcester, MA; and Providence, RI – have between 3-5 million annual unique visitors to their downtown districts, according to 2025 data from aggregated mobile device visitation analytics.
  - According to aggregated mobile device visitation analytics, visitors to Downtown Albany spend an average of 74 minutes in the area. Values for peer cities are consistently around 90-95 minutes.
  - Downtown's target of 5 million annual unique visitors and 90-minute average stays reflect increased visitorship to put Albany on par with its peer cities via increased events, additional third places, and other amenities that both attract visitors and encourage them to dwell longer.

- **Achieve $3 in Private Investment for Every $1 of CAP Funding**
  - This measure tracks private dollars committed to DTAS projects compared to CAP dollars invested across the overall DTAS project portfolio.
  - "Private" includes private equity and private debt that is directly tied to a DTAS project's financing plan.
  - "Committed" means funds that are formally committed (e.g., executed term sheet/commitment letter, board approval, or closing documents), and is tracked separately from dollars closed/spent.
  - Because some CAP-funded projects are enabling investments that may not directly generate private dollars, this metric is calculated portfolio-wide.
  - Double-counting will be avoided by assigning each private commitment to a single DTAS project and counting it once at the time it is committed.

- **Put 3 Catalytic Sites Under Construction Within 3 Years**
    - Downtown Albany has several large, high-profile sites (including Central Warehouse, Kiernan Plaza, and Liberty Park) that are already in the process of exploring redevelopment alternatives.
    - Other potential sites for catalytic development projects have not yet begun this process.
    - Downtown's target of 3 catalytic sites under construction within 3 years allows time for projects already underway to reach the construction phase, and/or additional sites to move through the planning process into construction. This timeline is ambitious but achievable for both types of projects.

- **Improve Positive safety ratings (+15%) and evening foot traffic (+25%)**
    - Positive safety rating" is measured through a standardized Downtown perception survey administered on a recurring basis. The survey could be designed and maintained by the City of Albany in coordination with the Downtown Albany BID, using a consistent set of questions each year.
    - It would be implemented either (a) directly by City/BID staff using an online and intercept format, or (b) by a third-party research/engagement firm retained by the City/BID.
    - Respondents will be asked to rate whether Downtown feels safe and welcoming during the day and at night using a simple rating scale (e.g., very unsafe → very safe; not welcoming → very welcoming). "Positive" is defined as the share of respondents selecting the top response options (e.g., "safe/very safe" and "welcoming/very welcoming"). Results will be reported annually, with the same geography used each year (DTAS Strategy Area or Downtown BID core) to allow apples-to-apples tracking.
    - Foot traffic is measured using anonymized, aggregated mobile-device visitation analytics that report visit counts and patterns during defined hours. The City/BID will be responsible for selecting the data source or vendor and reporting results annually, using a consistent time window and geography.

Chapter 4: The Where: Investment Areas

Albany's Downtown Heart (pg. 24)

- **~1,150 people live in the downtown BID core**
    - Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst population data (2023) for the Downtown BID service area (Geography 2); earlier BID estimates were from 2021.
- **~86% of jobs are office/government**
    - Estimated using Lightcast data for Geography 3.
- **~35% of storefronts show vacancy or low visibility**
    - Estimated using visual analysis of Google Street View images from July-August 2025 for this district (Geography 4)

o CoStar-reported retail vacancy appears inconsistent with observed ground-floor conditions in DTAS Investment Areas; therefore vacancy/visibility was estimated through a 2025 visual review of storefront conditions.

Albany's New Downtown Neighborhoods | Broadway Landmarks (pg. 38)

- **~50 housing units along Broadway/Liberty Park**
  - o Estimated using CoStar and ESRI Business Analyst data for Geography 4
- **~60% of nearby jobs are public-sector**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast data for Geography 3
  - o Lightcast estimates were manually adjusted upwards for this district due to nearby presence of SUNY building and Empire State Plaza; meanwhile, many private-sector jobs in Downtown are located further north and west.
  - o Final estimate here is a rough approximation that may over- or under-represent the actual share of public-sector workers around this district.

Warehouse District Gateway (pg. 42)

- **Fewer than 200 residents and 100 units**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
  - o Estimated using CoStar and ESRI Business Analyst data for Geography 4
- **500-600 workers across <50 firms**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for Geography 4

South End Gateway (pg. 46)

- **~20% of residents are still cost-burdened**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **Low job density (<0.5 jobs per resident) and median household income (~$42k)**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for Geography
  - o Population and income estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **No new builds in a decade; poor property condition (~100 homes)**
  - o Estimated using Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district; based on number of outstanding building violations (Geography 4)
- **Significant number of vacant lots (~220+ parcels)**
  - o Estimated using Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district (Geography 4)

International District (pg. 50)

- **Lower household incomes – about ~34% < $15k; only ~5% ≥ $100k**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **High unemployment (~25%) and reliance on service-sector jobs (>50%)**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **High storefront churn (17+ vacancies)**
  - o Estimated using visual analysis of Google Street View images from July-August 2025 for this district (Geography 4)

- o CoStar-reported retail vacancy appears inconsistent with observed ground-floor conditions in DTAS Investment Areas; therefore vacancy/visibility was estimated through a 2025 visual review of storefront conditions.
- **16k+ daily cars**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **Multicultural depth - ~32% foreign-born, ~75% non-white**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **100+ independent businesses**
  - o Estimated using DataAxle data via ESRI Business Analyst for this district (Geography 4)

Center Square (pg. 54)

- **Limited affordable options (> $1,500/mo avg)**
  - o Estimated using CoStar data for this district (Geography 4)
- **~62% government, nonprofit, labor, or faith-based jobs**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4,)
- **Vacant or inactive sites - 10+ storefronts**
  - o Estimated using visual analysis of Google Street View images from July-August 2025 for this district (Geography 4)
  - o CoStar-reported retail vacancy appears inconsistent with observed ground-floor conditions in DTAS Investment Areas; therefore vacancy/visibility was estimated through a 2025 visual review of storefront conditions.
- **Highest population density downtown (~25k / sq mi)**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **Diverse income mix (~35% <$50k; 35% $50-$100k; 30% ≥ $100k)**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **~90 restaurants/retail/recreation businesses**
  - o Estimated using DataAxle data via ESRI Business Analyst for this district (Geography 4)
- **93% non-chain storefronts**
  - o Estimated using DataAxle data via ESRI Business Analyst for this district (Geography 4)

Clinton Square Arts & Heritage District (pg. 58)

- **Low job density (~1:4 jobs-to-residents)**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **Minimal commercial development (0 in last decade)**
  - o Estimated using CoStar and Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district (Geography 4)
- **Poor property condition (~150 homes)**
  - o Estimated using Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district; based on number of outstanding building violations (Geography 4)
- **High residential vacancy (~19%); many vacant or underutilized (~36%) parcels**

- o Estimated using CoStar and Building Blocks data platform maintained by the City of Albany for this district (Geography 4)
- **Middle-income growth trending above downtown (+2.5%/yr vs. +1.6%)**
  - o Estimated using ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)
- **High share of cultural jobs (~27%)**
  - o Estimated using Lightcast and ESRI Business Analyst data for this district (Geography 4)

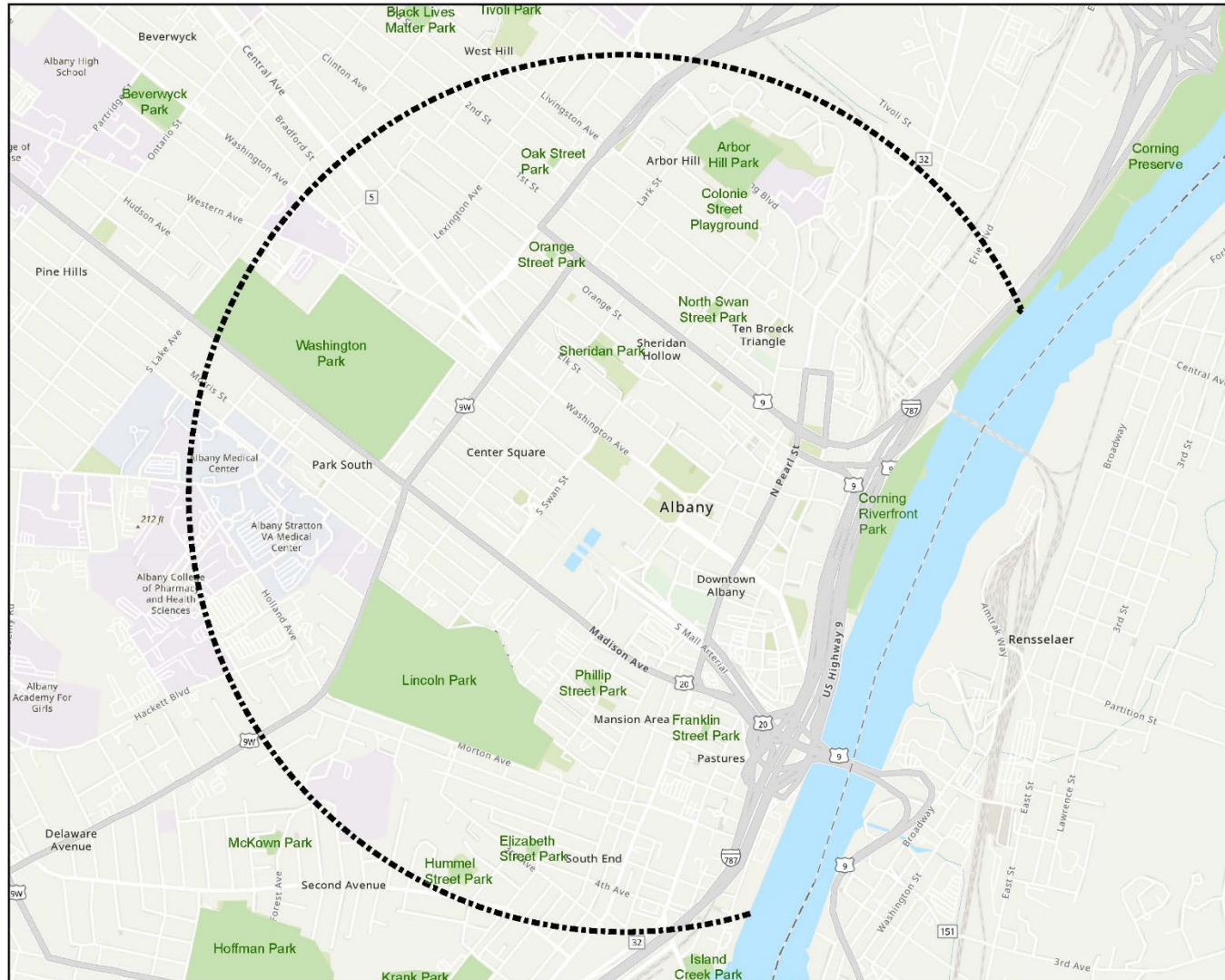*Chapter 6: Implementation*

Chapter 6.3: Beyond CAP: Necessary Reforms (pgs. 74-75)

- "In 2023, Albany expanded IZ through the Unified Sustainable Development Ordinance (USDO), increasing the required affordable set-aside to 7-13% at 60% Area Median Income (a well-intentioned effort to deepen affordability and ensure more households benefit from new development)."
  - o See the City of Albany Unified Sustainable Development Ordinance (USDO) (2023), including the Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) requirements codified therein.
- "Albany's recent, independent housing audit (2025 City of Albany Housing Audit) and related local reporting reach a consistent conclusion: the current IZ framework is discouraging new market rate production and is not reliably producing affordable units where need is greatest. The audit shows that after the 2023 change, the development pipeline shifted sharply away from 100% market-rate proposals—the share of units in 100% market-rate applications fell from 42% (2017–2023) to just 3% (2023–2025), while 100% affordable units rose from 13% to 70% of units in applications. Overall multifamily rental applications also dropped from an average of ~650 units/year (pre-change) to below ~400 units/year (post-change)."
  - o See the City of Albany 2025 Housing Audit.
- "Vacancy does not resolve through enforcement alone. The Strategy calls for coordinated code and rehab tools that move buildings toward productive reuse, supported by clear standards and a real pipeline, such as: a Vacant Building Registry with escalating fees and required inspections; clear "secure and weather-tight" minimum standards; fee relief or fast-track reviews when an owner is under contract and meeting rehab milestones; small gap financing to get stalled buildings back into active rehab (e.g., Albany's vacant-building rehab assistance, paired with programs like NY Main Street); and a clear backstop for chronic cases through tax foreclosure and transfer to responsible owners, perhaps via the Albany County Land Bank."
  - o See the following program materials and resource guides:
    - New York Main Street (NYMS) Consolidated Funding Application 2019 Available Resources Guide, compiled by New York Homes and Community Renewal (HCR)
    - City of Albany Vacant Building Rehabilitation Program Guidelines (2017)
    - Albany County Land Bank Programs Materials webpage
- "…(a Parking Reform Network analysis cited locally found ~29% of Downtown real estate is parking)."
  - o See the Parking Reform Network's parking lot map and parking land-share analysis webpage.

<u>Chapter 6.4: Toward Stronger City-County Delivery Capacity (pgs. 75-76)</u>

- "Its track record is tangible: Metroplex reports leveraging ~$1.68 billion in additional project investment since inception (through 2024), and in 2024 alone it cites 80+ project announcements totaling ~$535.5 million in new investment and 800+ new jobs."
  - See the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority's <u>2025 Mission Statement and 2024 Performance Report</u>.

III. Geographies Utilized in DTAS

Geography 1: DTAS Strategy Area – One-mile radius from the NYS Capitol; primary geography used throughout DTAS, except as noted below

Geography 2: Downtown BID Core – BID service area; used for residential base and business estimates

Geography 3: Jobs Geography – ZIPs 12207 & 12210; used for Lightcast-based workforce estimates

Geography 4: DTAS Investment Areas/Districts – District polygons; used for "THE NOW" statistics in Chapter 4

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. | Empire State Development
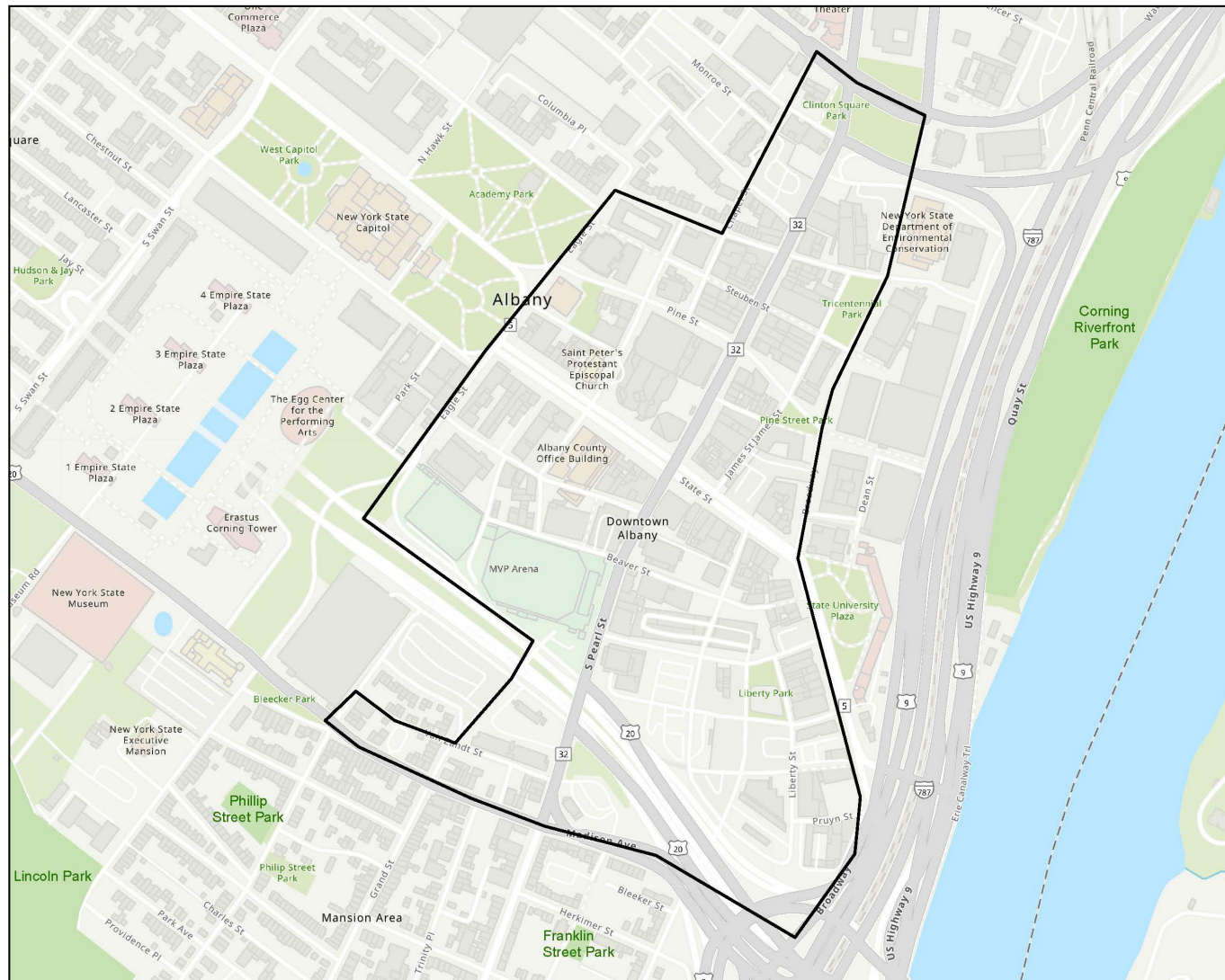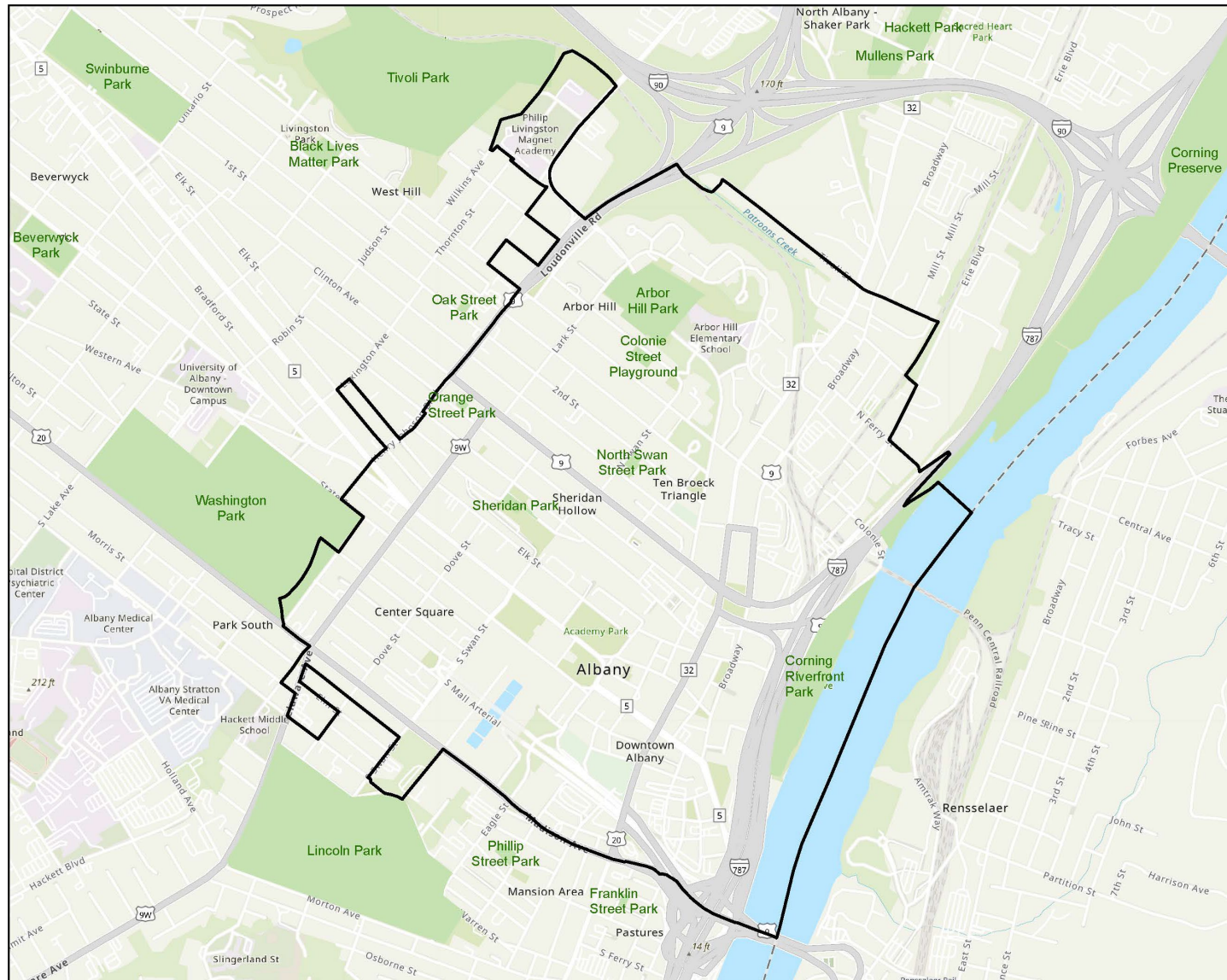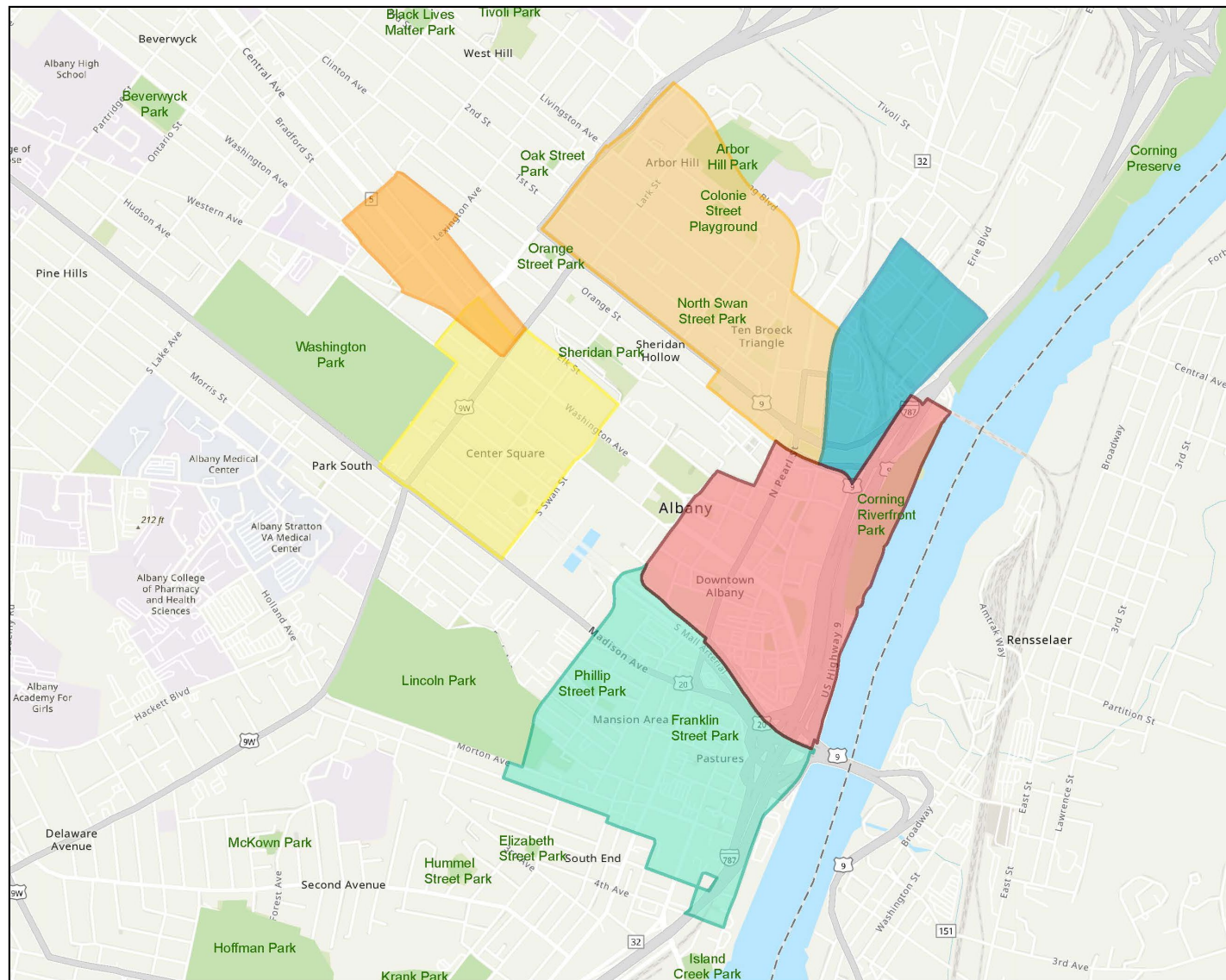
Downtown Albany Strategy

LEGEND

- Albany's Downtown Heart & Albany's New Downtown Neighborhood
- Warehouse District Gateway
- South End Gateway
- International District
- Center Square
- Clinton Square Arts & Heritage District

Note: The focus area geographies shown here are the areas used to collect data and metrics for each neighborhood. These are slightly larger than the DTAS Investment Areas shown throughout the report in order to capture neighborhood context and an adequate data sample size.
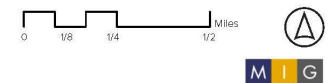
Geography 5: Extended Downtown – Broader Downtown area including Empire State Plaza and core commercial areas adjacent to Downtown; used for density targets to improve comparability with peer city Downtown size + composition