

Changing Housing Affordability in Chittenden County

Introduction

Chittenden is Vermont's most populous county, containing Burlington city and metro area, with a population of over 100,000. Outside of Burlington, growing suburbs give way to the rural farmland and small towns that make up much of Vermont. Changing in the county between 2000 and 2010 include growing communities of Color and increased commercial and residential development outside of Burlington. Burlington makes up the 11 smallest census tracts shown in the middle left side of the maps. The city is a refugee resettlement location, and is home to growing communities of Somali-Bantu and Nepali immigrants. For these and longer term residents of Burlington, it is critical that housing stay available and affordable.

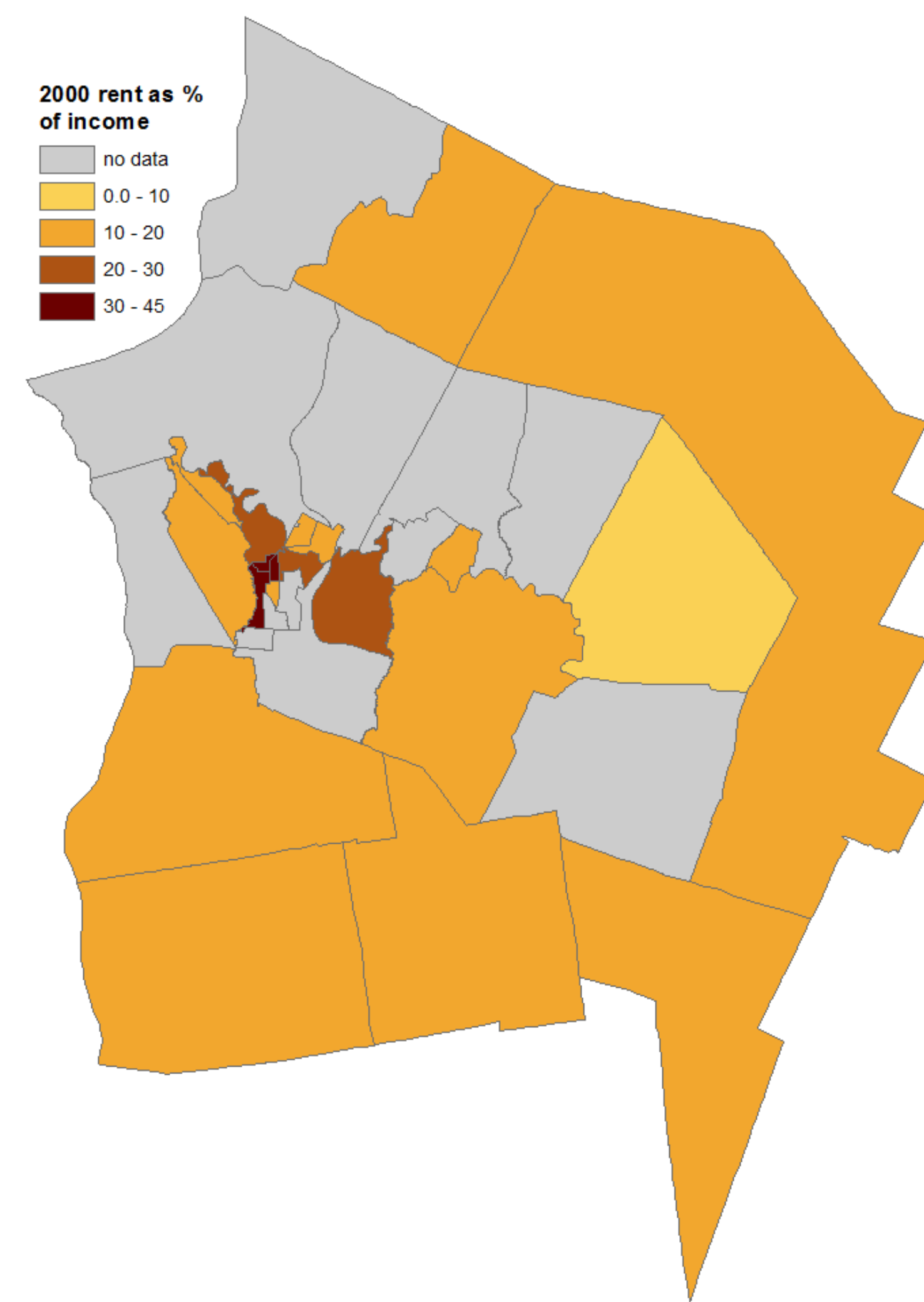
Founded in 1961, and serving Burlington and surrounding communities, the Burlington Housing Authority seeks to "promote, provide and preserve affordable housing in ways that encourage resident self-sufficiency and support healthy neighborhoods". The BHA does not serve all of Chittenden county, but working in partnership with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, it could expand its work, services, and policies to ensure affordability beyond the Burlington metro area.

Using GIS to represent shifts in rent, income, and affordability, these maps can direct policy efforts towards keeping Chittenden county healthy, vibrant, and growing.

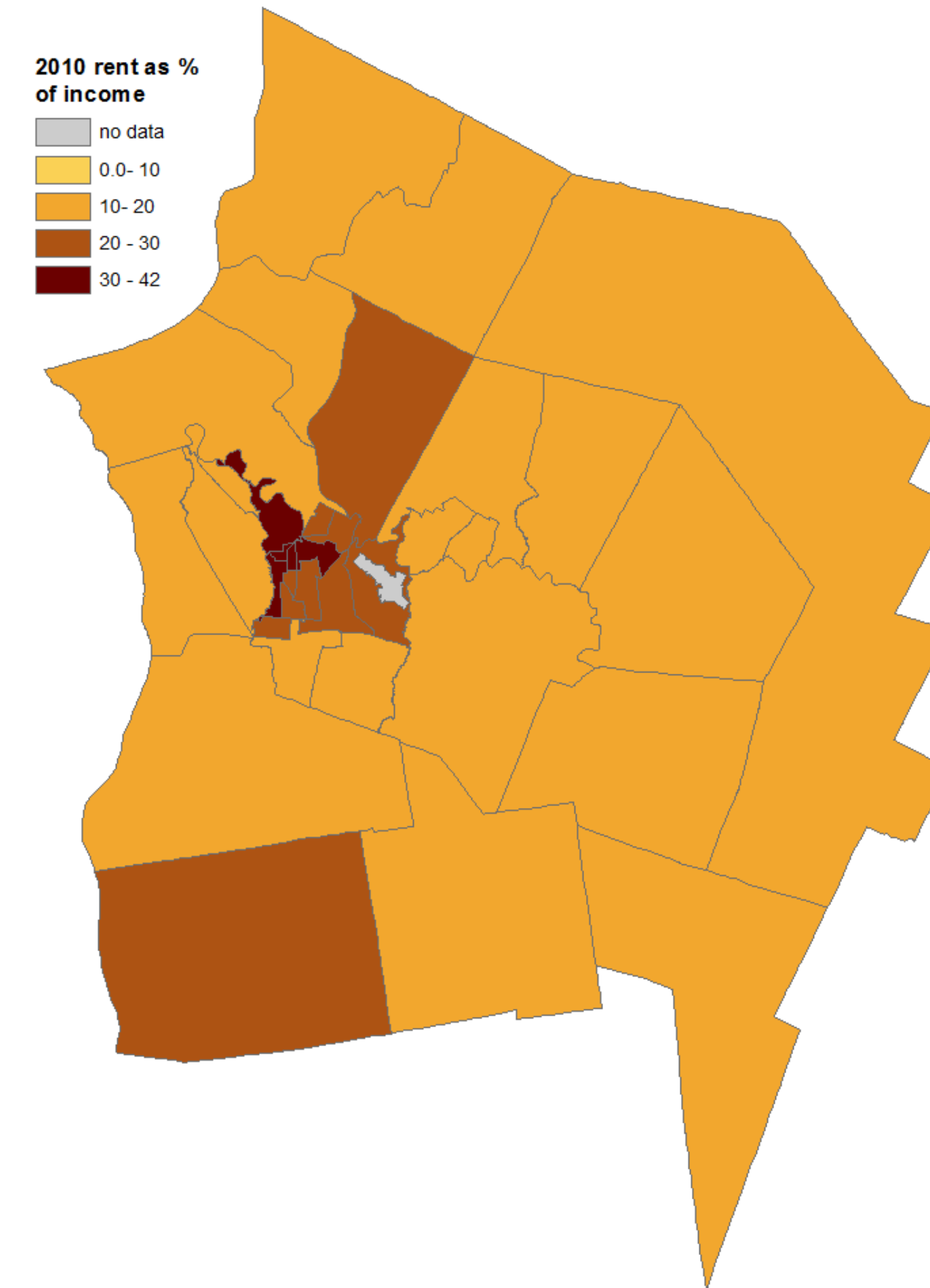
Methods

Data was collected from the American Community Survey and used to show changes in median household income and median rent by census tract over a ten year span. Data was classified by quantile to show the relative position of each census tract in rent and income. Although both income and rent shift between 2000 and 2010 due to inflation, the maps are able to show overall changes in relative position. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, rent should make up no more than 30% of a household budget in order to afford other necessities and have secure housing. The affordability maps represent rent as a percent of income, and were manually classified to show tracts in which median rent is greater than 30% of me-

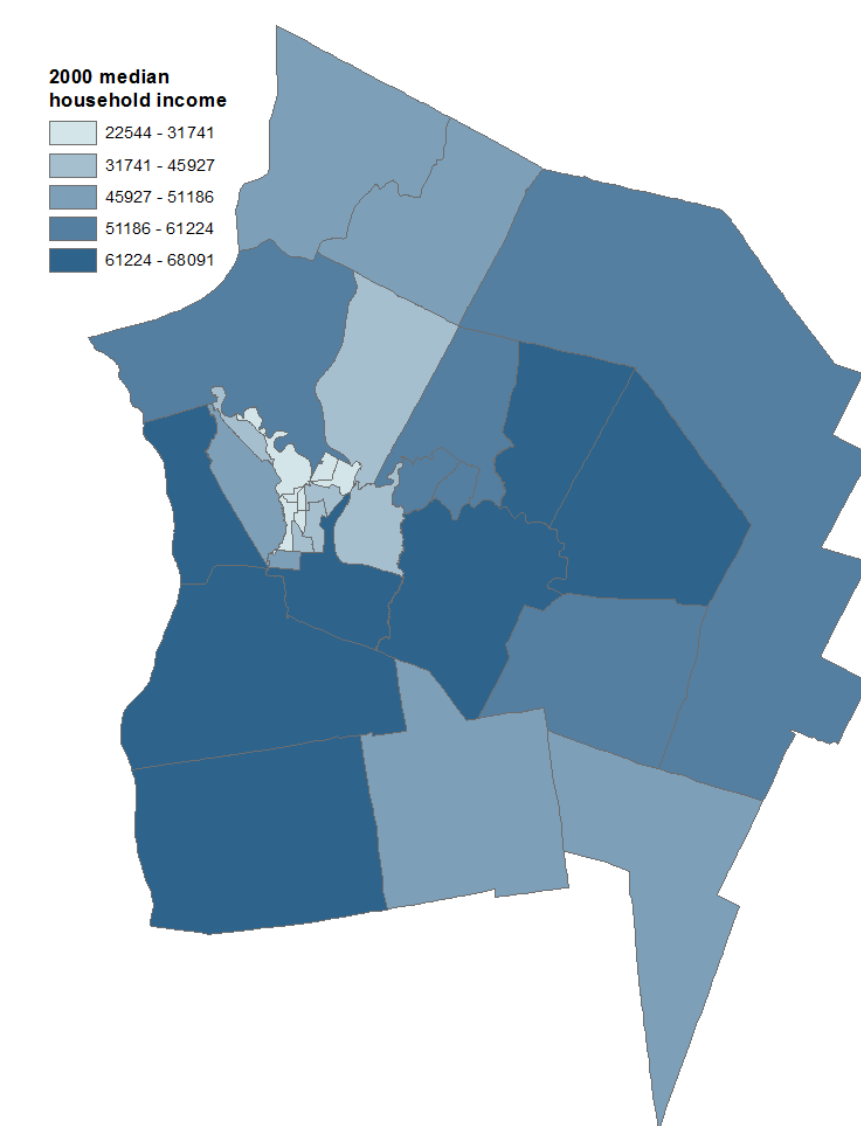
dian household income. Although rent is not entirely representative of affordability, as many Chittenden county residents are homeowners, renters tend to makeup the most housing-insecure population and therefore the group for whom affordability is most important. Likewise, household income was used to represent the total earnings of the occupants of each rental unit, whether they are single renters, living with housemates, or families. These data choices may result in some error, and medians do not represent the full range of data, but overall trends will still be visible.



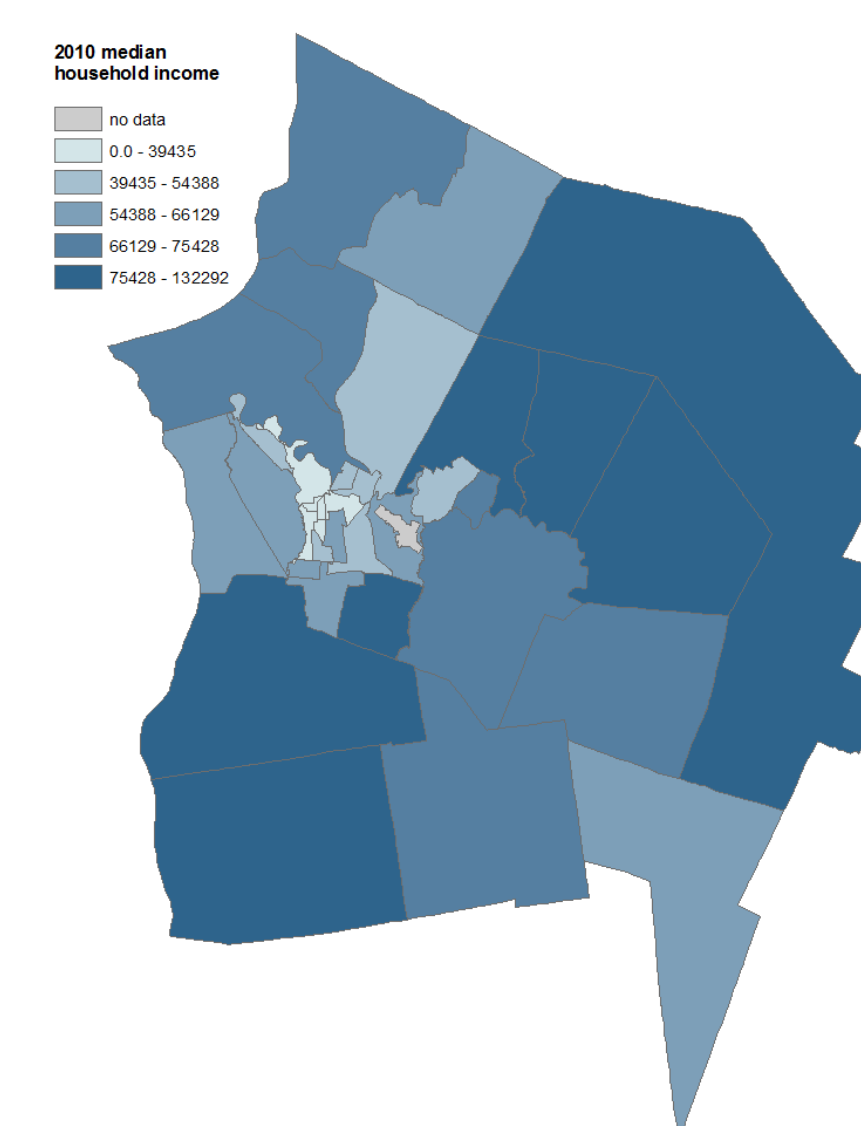
2000 Affordability



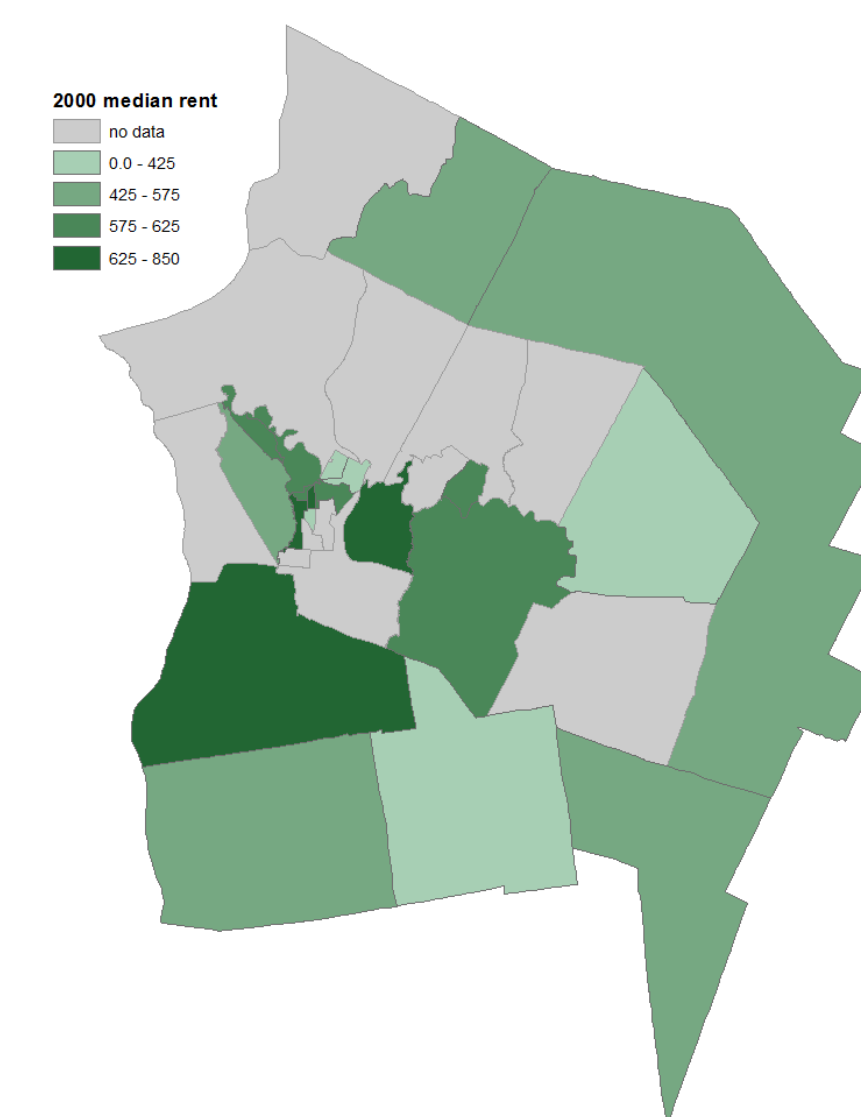
2010 Affordability



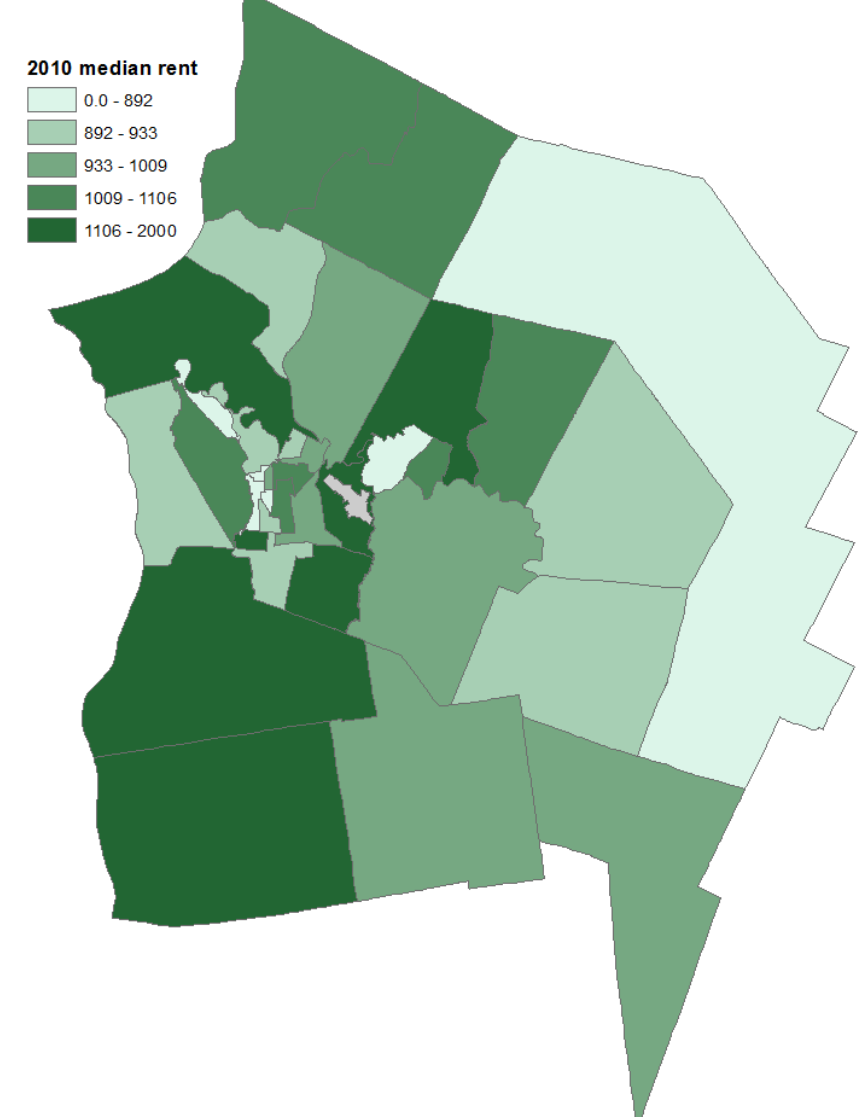
2000 Median Household Income



2010 Median Household Income



2000 Median Rent



2010 Median Rent

Results

Although data was not available for the 2000 median rent, significant shifts in affordability can still be seen. Of the tracts outside of Burlington for which data was available for both years, 4 out of 5 became less affordable. Of Burlington's 11 census tracts, only 3 had a median rent that was less than 30% of median income (affordable) in 2010. The 3 most affordable census tracts were in the South End of the city, which is the wealthiest. By looking at the median income and rent maps, it is clear that although Burlington does not have the highest rents in the county, its tracts tend to have

lower income compared to the rest of the county. Outside of Burlington, relative incomes shifted towards the higher end of the spectrum. Although shifts in rent are harder to interpret due to missing data, for the tracts that can be compared rent seems to have gotten relatively cheaper. Because of relative shifts in income however, this did not translate into increased affordability. The blank tract in all three of the 2010 maps is the Burlington International Airport, which was given its own tract between the 2000 and 2010 census.

Conclusion

Increasing affordability in Chittenden county requires both increasing median income, and decreasing median rent. These policy efforts should be focused in Burlington, as it is the most populous and least affordable, and particularly in the census tracts where median rent makes up more than 30% of median income, as shown by the dark red tracts in the 2010 map. The first can be achieved by multiple tactics, including instituting a livable wage, attracting higher paying employers (companies like Dealer.com,

which has raised median income in the South End), and improving public transportation so that employment is accessible to more members of each household. The second must be the result of development and housing regulations. Between 2010 and the present, at least 3 new apartment complexes have been built in the census tracts that are identified above as unaffordable. Although Burlington policies ensure that a certain percent of these apartments will be affordable, these percentages must be increased.

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Coordinate System:
NAD_1983_2011_StatePlane_Vermont_FIPS_4400
Data Sources: American Community Survey (Census 2000, 2010)
TIGER Shapefiles

