The rural/urban divide remains a key issue for the State of Utah and the United States. Politically, economically, and even socially, the differences between these two groups of communities continues to widen. In Utah, urban communities are growing rapidly; rural regions surrounding urban communities are increasingly sharing in this growth. The resulting economic and population expansion changes lifestyles and culture in these towns—turning the rural lifestyle from a daily reality into a cultural heritage. Meanwhile, most remote rural communities gain little from the growth on the Wasatch Front.

Understanding the differences between, and current situation of, urban, rural, and transitioning communities is critical to understanding what steps must be taken to ensure that “all 29 counties and all 245 cities and towns in our state [are] full participants in Utah's tremendous economic success” (Gov. Herbert, 2016 State of the State Address).

This study aims to inform leaders of these communities’ current position and trajectory into the future.

This aim falls in line with the Housing and Community Development Division’s legislative mandate to “carry out continuing studies and analyses of the problems faced by communities within the state” (UCA 35A-8-202(1)(e)). The Community Development Office, a suboffice of the Housing and Community Development division, actively seeks to fulfill this and other legislative mandates by providing technical assistance that supports Utah’s communities.

Through these efforts the Community Development Office envisions Utah communities that are self-reliant, self-determined, and prepared for the future. This study can be a valuable tool for state leaders to recognize the distinct issues facing urban, rural, and transitioning communities and to empower each to proactively and positively shape their community for a better future.

As a rural leader and influencer you can make a difference—in fact, working with your community, you are the only person who can. Margaret Mead, renowned cultural anthropologist, explained that the true force of change in the world are engaged, committed individuals: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Thank you for taking the time to review this information. I invite you to review our other resources and to reach out for help in the effort to achieve your community’s vision for the future.

Sincerely,

Keith Heaton
Director, Community Development Office
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INTRO

Utah is experiencing significant growth—population projections suggest the state will double to over six million residents by 2060. However, the vast majority of anticipated growth is focused on the Wasatch Front and surrounding counties, Washington County, and Cache County; rural counties project little growth. This study breaks the state’s 29 counties into rural, transitional, and urban groupings to help state, regional, and local decision makers understand the trends for these three very important, yet very different, types of counties.

These county groupings are defined as follows (per 2010 census):

**Rural.** Counties with no city over 50,000 and that are not significantly affected by urban growth.

**Transitional.** Counties adjacent to urban counties with a main interstate connection to Urban counties, or remote counties with city populations over 50,000.

**Urban.** Counties with populations over 150,000.

Currently, all transitional counties are considered “rural” counties by many organizations; however, the Community Development Office recognizes that the trajectory of transitional counties—and their future challenges—are transitioning away from a rural reality to a suburban or urban one.

Readers will be able to answer three questions by the end of reviewing the study:

1. What are the socio-demographic and economic trends in rural, transitional, and urban counties?
2. How well do counties in these groupings mirror each other?
3. What resources are available to leaders for community development efforts in Utah?

It is important to note that there are rural municipalities and unincorporated areas within most of the urban and all of the transitional counties. These classifications are not precise, county-level analysis cannot account for all variability across communities. As a result, this assessment is about trends that illustrate general trajectories for different types of counties as it illustrates key considerations for leaders.

County classifications are illustrated in the maps below.
Current demographic data illustrate the existing situation of a community; demographic data over time illustrate the changing trend of a community. Understanding both is important to determine community needs, identify priorities, and prepare for future challenges and opportunities.

The data in this document illustrate current position alongside some historical data points to demonstrate long-term trends. Future projections, where available, are also included to illustrate anticipated changes for Utah’s counties.
Rural counties make up less than 10 percent of Utah’s population. On the whole, rural counties also have a much slower growth rate (both in real terms and as a percentage of total population) than their urban and transitional counterparts. This trend is anticipated to continue with an estimated median growth of 48 percent in rural counties, 73 percent in urban counties, and 152 percent in transitional counties through 2060.

The graphic above and map to the left both show population change between 2000 and 2016 according to the Census Bureau. The scales above show the diverse growth trends across counties while the percentage shows the median score for the county type.
This trend is not new; the graphic below illustrates that urban growth rates have exceeded rural growth rates since the 1940s, while transitional counties’ growth rates started to significantly outpace rural county growth rates in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1940, for instance, rural counties constituted slightly more of Utah’s total population than transitional counties (19.75 and 18.05 percent, respectively). By 2016, however, transitional counties made up 17.92 percent of the total population, while the rural population dropped to only 6.77 percent of the state total.

The Kem Gardner Institute projects this trend intensifying in the future, estimating that rural counties will make up less than five percent (4.97) of total population by 2060, compared to 25.24 percent for transitional and 69.8 percent for urban counties.

This significant increase in population will have important ramifications for all county types; however, transitional counties will likely experience the most significant shift as their demographic transformation results in cultural shifts away from a rural culture and lifestyle to a much more suburban lifestyle. The growth will likely result in enormous changes in expectations for community services, such as police, fire, snow removal, and road repair. These expectations will impact community financial priorities and service levels.

One Cache County employee described how in-migration changed previously “rural” service expectations to suburban expectations by stating, “when it was just farmers, they didn’t care about having half-an-inch of slush on the roads. Now, with all the people who have moved in from [suburban] communities elsewhere, we get calls if the roads aren’t black [shortly] after snowfall.”

While several rural counties are expecting growth over the next 35 years, transitional counties will be those most impacted by cultural changes. In addition to cultural changes and demands for services, infrastructure demands will increase with the population. While growth will justify infrastructure expansion, paying for infrastructure and its long-term maintenance will become an increasing liability.

Current leaders can help avoid pitfalls that have led to significant liabilities in some current high-growth counties by proactively and collaboratively planning for land uses that limit liabilities and keep infrastructure costs at a minimum.
Population change is driven by changes in mortality and fertility rates coupled with net migration. As demonstrated by the graphs below, mortality rates in rural Utah have been, and continue to be, much higher than their urban and transitional counterparts. Interestingly, rural fertility rates have remained relatively consistent (but lower) than urban and transitional rates until around 2010: all rates are very similar.

Nationally, rural fertility rates are generally higher than urbanized communities; rural communities relied on this relatively high fertility rate to maintain population as a large portion of youth moved away. This was not the case in Utah—Utah consistently has the highest fertility rates and urban communities led the state. Despite being historically lower, rural rates have remained consistent; if they decline similarly to their urban and transitional counterparts, population growth estimates are unlikely without major increases to in-migration.
Natural increase is illustrated above while net migration is illustrated below. The graphics illustrate a slight separation between transitional and rural population change that started in the mid 1980s and has increased since. In this time period, transitional county population trends started to track more closely to urban trends than rural. That tendency is projected to continue based on future population projections.
Population pyramids illustrate the percentage of a population in a set of age groups. Generally, a healthy age pyramid has a large base of youth that tapers towards a smaller population at the top. Utah’s urban pyramid looks very healthy. The transitional pyramid has a similar base, however, it drops off significantly at the 25-29 age range. This is likely a result of the three major universities in transitional counties (SUU, Dixie State, and USU), which attract young adults for school who leave the county after graduation. The rural population pyramid shows significantly more variation and a much higher percentage of elderly adults.

Rural leaders often refer to children as their “greatest export”. This graphic illustrates that at the age of 19, population declines significantly as youth leave for college, LDS missions, military service, or work elsewhere. The graph also illustrates what is anecdotally known: that some youth return after college or a few years of professional work. However, most youth are not returning and are not being replaced by in-migration. In contrast, the larger percentage of elderly in rural communities demonstrates many who have stayed or those seeking a quiet place to retire. These elderly populations bring their own set of needs and expectations that can be difficult for rural municipalities to meet including medical facilities and public transportation.

These trends have implications for community culture, institutions, and economics. A volunteer manager for community events in one small, Utah town explained the impact in her community “I am 70 years old—I don’t know how many more years I am going to want to [manage community events]—but there is no one coming up in our community to do it.”

These trends are intertwined with regional economic realities. Youth will not stay when jobs are not available and few employers are interested in relocating when the local labor force is small. For many rural communities, especially those with the smallest labor pools, local economies and job markets rely on government jobs and entrepreneurial innovation from existing residents.
ECONOMICS

Economics in urban, rural, and transitional counties differ significantly. While future economic projections are not available, this document outlines current metrics on the current economic condition and past trends of Utah’s counties.

Similar to the demographic data explored above, readers will note that transitional counties are distinct from both their rural and urban counterparts, however, they are more similar to urban than rural counties.
The Hachman Index compares industry employment diversity at a local level, then compares it to a larger benchmark. Scores closer to 1 are more diverse, while scores closer to 0 are less diverse. This map compares county employment diversity to Utah as a whole—Utah being one of the most economically diverse states in the nation. A county’s employment diversity correlates closely with that county’s ability to weather economic downturns. Counties with a large percentage of employment in a single or a few industries will be severely impacted if there is a downturn in those industries.

Not surprisingly, economic diversity is higher in urban counties while rural counties’ economies are generally more economically distinct.
Utah’s unemployment rate averaged 3.2 percent in 2016, compared with 4.8 percent nationally (BLS). Low unemployment has become a challenge for some firms, as trained, available employees are hard to find in Utah. This is particularly the case in urban and transitional counties.

Over time, Utah’s urban and transitional counties are becoming increasingly similar in their employment patterns, while rural counties diverge—particularly those that follow specific industry cycles (e.g., oil and natural gas price cycles in the Uintah Basin, tourism in Grand County).

The 5.6 percent median unemployment rate in rural counties, as compared with 3.2 in transitional and 2.9 in urban counties is indicative of these differences.

Similarly, employment by sector as a percentage of total employment (illustrated below) shows that there are some significant differences in specific sector employment concentration. For instance, mining and public administration employment are critical components of rural employment while being significantly less so in urban and transitional counties.
Median income in rural areas of Utah rose between the 2000 census and 2016 estimates, while transitional and urban median incomes fell. Despite the increases, the average median income in rural counties remained well behind their urban and transitional counterparts. The median poverty rate rose more slowly in rural compared to urban and transitional counties, likely as a direct result of rural counties’ increasing income; however despite the increase in urban and transitional county poverty, rural poverty rates still remain higher.

Some rural officials have expressed concerns about this data’s accuracy, especially if the income of second-home owners is counted. Inaccurate data could distort local median income so it doesn’t accurately represent the local population.
The labor force across rural counties receded at the same time as urban and transitional counties around the 2008 recession; however, as transitional and urban labor force participation rates have started to climb, rural labor rates remain low and even declining. This is likely related to the challenges in some of the most important sectors for rural employment (oil and gas development in particular) and the high median age of rural residents, which continues to climb.

Roughly 91.7 percent of rural Utahn’s have graduated from high school, on par with urban counties (91.8 percent) and slightly ahead of transitional (90.5 percent). Despite high graduation rates from high school, the significantly lower percentage of residents with bachelor’s degrees illustrates the challenge of out-migration of college-age youth, and the relatively low in-migration rate of those with degrees.

Lower levels of education can correlate with low entrepreneurship and limit the interest of companies that may otherwise be interested in locating within a community.
Home values have increased most rapidly in transitional and rural counties, due in part to a large percentage of second homes in rural and transitional counties. Increasing housing prices and housing availability is a primary concern for rural leaders. Many counties and communities have identified the availability of housing as a primary barrier to economic development within their communities.

An increasing number of jobs in seasonal, tourism-related employment creates housing difficulties: housing costs can exceed wages, and local rentals are used for higher-return short-term-rental opportunities as opposed to longer-term, lower-return seasonal renting.

While creating some extra economic benefits within the community, high rates of second homes can be a primary driver for housing challenges as a large portion of the available housing stock is not available for seasonal and long-term residents.

In discussions with a developer in a remote, but tourist-packed town, the developer explained that home development in rural Utah is unattractive when returns on tourism-related industry are so much higher. Further, he stated that the availability of skilled labor (plumbing, electrical, etc.) within his region was extremely limited, and that hiring outside of the region made development more financially risky, further decreasing the attractiveness of developing homes.

The availability and price of housing for these groups will play an important part in future economic growth in rural counties; addressing the unique concerns of a tourism-based economy will likewise be critical.
COMMUTING PATTERNS

The following maps illustrate commute time to work, the top three counties where workers travel from, and the top three outflowing counties where workers are going. The maps illustrate the strong relationship between transitional counties and their urban counterparts and the importance of regional employment centers for rural residents.

MEAN TRAVEL TIME BY COUNTY (2016)

Average Transitional Travel Time: 23 minutes

Average Rural Travel Time: 18 minutes

Average Urban Travel Time: 22 minutes
WHERE ARE WORKERS COMING FROM?
TOP 3 COUNTIES, STATEWIDE COMMUTING PATTERNS

DATA SOURCES: UTAH AGRC, CENSUS BUREAU 2011-2015 ACS, DWS

WHERE ARE WORKERS COMING FROM?
Top 3 Counties

*Arrow width corresponds with quantity of workers

**Total: 152,096**

**Total: 28,280**

**Total: 2,936**
WHERE ARE WORKERS GOING?
TOP 3 INFLOW COUNTIES, STATEWIDE COMMUTING PATTERNS

**Data Sources:** Utah AGRC, Census Bureau 2011-2015 ACS, DWS

**Statewide Commuting Patterns**

- **Total:** 28,280
- **#1** into Salt Lake County: 152,096
- **#2** into Utah County: 2,936
- **#3** into Washington County: 2,293

*Arrow width corresponds with quantity of workers*
CONCLUSION

All counties are unique. There are, however, distinct similarities in the current position and future trajectory of rural, transitional, and urban counties that should be recognized. Transitional counties are becoming increasingly similar to urban counties. Rural counties face demographic and economic challenges and opportunities that are individually unique but collectively different than their urban and transitional counterparts. Rural communities need to identify strategies that address their unique situations, including opportunities and challenges, in order to ensure the viability and continuance of a high quality, rural lifestyle.

Transitional counties have or will experience development challenges and opportunities facing the outlying urban county communities. Identifying strategies that enable them to maintain their most prized attributes, even as they take advantage of the many opportunities that strong, consistent growth affords.

Communities that do not address their unique challenges will ride the tide of development with little or no ability to help shape their communities’ futures. Many resources are available to assist communities in helping shape their futures, both public and private. With effort and enduring commitment, community leaders can help shape a future that is desirable, attainable, and sustainable.
RESOURCES
The following are public resources available to help communities with a variety of governing and community development efforts.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE
Land Use Academy of Utah (LUAU)
LUAU was funded by the Utah State Legislature and created by public and private partners to provide uniform professional education to the state’s civic leaders and the general public.
lua.utah.gov

Office of the Utah State Auditor
(801) 538-1040 • jeremywalker@utah.gov
Provide taxpayers and government officials with an independent assessment of financial operation, statutory compliance, and performance management for state and local government.
auditor.utah.gov

Utah Association of Counties (UAC)
(801) 265-1331 • info@uacnet.org
UAC helps counties provide effective county governance to the people of Utah by offering a broad range of management and intergovernmental relations services to elected and non-elected county government officials.

Utah City Management Association
Benjamin Reeves, Secretary • breeves@santaquin.org
Professional organization representing city managers in Utah.
www.ucma-utah.org

Utah League of Cities & Towns (ULCT)
801.328.1601 • mryan@ulct.org
ULCT represents Utah municipal government interests at the state and federal levels and provides information, training and technical assistance to local officials.
www.ulct.org

Utah Lieutenant Governor Municipal Certifications
(801) 538-1041
Resource for municipal annexation certifications.
municert.utah.gov

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Economic Development Corporation of Utah (EDC-Utah)
800.574.8824
Non-profit dedicated to attract and grow competitive, high-value companies and spur the expansion of local Utah businesses.
edcutah.org

Governor’s Office of Economic Development: Rural Development
Linda Gillmor • 801.538.8804 • lgillmor@utah.gov
GOED-RD administers small business funds and provides other services like Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR), Enterprise Zone Tax Credits and Rural Fast Tract Grants.
business.utah.gov/programs/rural/

Office of Energy Development
801.538.8718
Provides industry assistance for Utah’s energy and minerals sectors, and engaging in policy planning, outreach and education focused on maintaining an affordable and reliable energy supply.
energy.utah.gov

Procurement Technical Assistance Center
Chuck Spence • 801.538.8655 • cspence@utah.gov
PTAC provides technical assistance to businesses trying to obtain government contracts.
business.utah.gov/programs/ptac/

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
(801) 538-7100 • agriculture@utah.gov
Resource for farmers, ranchers to promote the healthy growth of Utah agriculture. Local field office contacts on their website.
ag.utah.gov

Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), Workforce Development Division
801-526-WORK (9675) • dwcontactus@utah.gov
Provide workforce training, housing and utility assistance, unemployment benefits, provide employment counseling, etc. Find your local office at jobs.utah.gov/workforce/localteam.pdf
jobs.utah.gov

Utah Manufacturers Association
801.363.3885 • uma@umaweb.org
Professional trade association focusing on the betterment of the entire manufacturing industry in Utah.
umaweb.org

Utah Office of Tourism
801.538.1900 • info@visitutah.com
Promotes tourism into the state through marketing and advertising, research and planning, publications, information services, media relations and cooperative programs.
www.visitutah.com

Utah Small Business Development Center
Local Contacts via website
www.utahsbdc.org
USBDC provides consulting services, funding options, and the national chapter can assist local companies in obtaining federal contracts.

Western Rural Development Center (WRDC)
Don Albrechtcc435.797.2798 • wrdc@usu.edu
WRDC is a regional catalyst for capacity building in the West. They provide the Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) which matches industry sectors with local capabilities.
wrdc.usu.edu

World Trade Center Utah, Rural Outreach
Don Willie • 801.859.5094 • dwillie@wtcutah.com
WTCU provides motivation, education, assist in building capacity and expanding the global network of Utah businesses.
www.wtcutah.com
PLANNING & LAND USE
American Planning Association: Utah Chapter
Professional organization representing land use planners in Utah.
Utah APA Listserv—utahapa@cachempo.org—used to ask questions to all subscribed planners and distribute relevant planning information. Subscribe at www.apautah.org/contact.
www.apautah.org

Utah Automated Geographic Reference Center (AGRC)
The State of Utah’s map technology coordination office with expertise in GIS with mapping data resources.
gis.utah.gov

Utah Land Use Institute
(801) 675-6955
Their mission is to raise the professionalism of those involved in the land use arena, including planning and legal professionals, civic leaders, and citizens.
Utahlanduse.org

Utah Property Rights Ombudsman
(801) 530-6391 • propertyrights@utah.gov
Resource for municipal land use questions, helps citizens understand and protect their rights to property ownership and use, and helps resolve disputes.
propertyrights.utah.gov

Utah Rural Planning Group
(801) 468-0133 • info@ruralplanning.org
A program of Utah’s Housing and Community Development Division, the Rural Planning Group supports communities becoming self-determined, self-reliant, and prepared for the future by facilitating coordination between stakeholders, delivering training and tools, and providing planning and technical assistance.
ruralplanning.org

Utah State University Landscape Architecture (LAEP)
Project Assistance Program
435.797.0500
The LAEP Project Assistance program helps those in need of design and planning project assistance.
laep.usu.edu/extension/project-assistance

Regional Planning Program Planners
Provides loans, planning assistance, and other resident services.

Five County AOG
Gary Zabriske • 435.673.3548 • gzabriske@fivecounty.utah.gov

Bear River AOG
Brian Carver • 435-713-1420 • brianc@brag.utah.gov

Six County AOG
Travis Kyhl • 435-893-0713 • tkyhl@sixcounty.com

Southeast Utah AOG
Michael Bryant • 435-637-5444 ext. 414 • mbryant@seualg.utah.gov

Uintah Basin AOG
Kevin Yack • 435-722-4518 • keviny@ubaog.org

ASSET INVENTORY AND MANAGEMENT
Rural Water Association of Utah
(801) 756-5123
Provides professional training, support services, and representation for water and wastewater members to help enhance the quality of services to their customers.
www.rwau.net

Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
801-536-4400 • deqinfo@utah.gov
DEQ provides technical assistance and funding for water quality and wastewater infrastructure projects. See funds at www.deq.utah.gov/FeesGrants/index.htm.
deq.utah.gov

Utah Department of Heritage and Arts (DHA)
801.245.7202 • bsomers@utah.gov
DHA provides a variety of services and funds for arts and cultural projects. See funds at heritage.utah.gov/dha/funding-dha.
heritage.utah.gov

Utah Department of Transportation
801-965-4000 • srwebmail@utah.gov
Manages Utah’s transportation infrastructure. Controls the right-of-way for state highways, many of which are town main streets. Regional office contacts at http://bit.ly/2qDF8cZ.
www.udot.utah.gov

Utah Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)
(435) 797-2933 • nick.jones@usu.edu
Provides local agencies technical workshops, training, and assistance on transportation infrastructure management.
www.utahltap.org

Utah Permanent Community Impact Fund Board (CIB)
Candace Powers • 801.468.0131 • cpowers@utah.gov
CIB provides loans or grants to state agencies and subdivisions of the state that are socially or economically impacted by mineral resource development on federal lands.
jobs.utah.gov/housing/cib

AFFORDABLE HOUSING
Housing & Community Development
(801) 468-0137 • jhardy@utah.gov
HCD provides a variety of funding sources and services to help communities with housing and community development.
jobs.utah.gov/housing/hcdprograms.html

Olene Walker Housing Loan Fund
(801) 468-0144 • sglines@utah.gov
Supports quality affordable housing options that meet the needs of Utah’s very low-income, low-income and moderate-income individuals and families.
jobs.utah.gov/housing/owhlf

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development: Utah (USDA)
(801) 524-4320
USDA provides loans and grants for rural businesses, community facilities and infrastructure, and affordable housing. Key programs include Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program, Business and Industry Loan Guarantees, and Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program.
www.rurdev.usda.gov/ut
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).
(801) 468-0118 • cbrown@utah.gov
CDBG provides grants to cities and towns of fewer than 50,000 people and counties of fewer than 200,000 people. jobs.utah.gov/housing/cdbg

Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Carol Cohen • 801.521.2169 • ccohen@rcac.org
RCAC provides loans, planning, and consulting services to rural communities across the West. www.rcac.org

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development: Utah (USDA)
(801) 524-4320
USDA provides loans and grants for rural businesses, community facilities and infrastructure, and affordable housing. Key programs include Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program, Business and Industry Loan Guarantees, and Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program. www.rurdev.usda.gov/ut

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
801.524.6070 • UT_Webmanager@hud.gov
HUD offers a variety of loans and grants for affordable housing in Utah. portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/utah

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Grant Writing Workshop
Pauline Zvonkovic • 801.524.6076 • pauline.zvonkovic@hud.gov
HUD offers a two-day workshop on grant writing and program development, February 14–15th.

Utah AmeriCorps VISTA Program
801.524.5412 • jmurakami@cns.gov
Grant for AmeriCorps volunteer to help improve lives in communities. Volunteers are funded in the community for three years and work on specific community projects. www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/state-profiles/UT

Utah Center for Rural Life
Wes Curtis • 435-586-7738 • curtis@suu.edu
Works to provide the knowledge, tools and resources needed to address rural challenges at the local level. Hosts the annual Utah Rural Summit and provides the State of Rural Utah presentation to the Utah Legislature. utahlinks.org/urs/

Utah State University Extension
Local Office Contacts at extension.usu.edu/locations
With 33 locations throughout Utah, USU Extension works to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. http://extension.usu.edu/
For more resources, visit ruralplanning.org/toolbox