Pattern Report: Mid-Hudson Valley Faces Stagnant Population Growth, Low Wage Jobs and High Cost of Living

Pattern for Progress released the findings of a year-long, wide-ranging study that finds the Mid-Hudson Valley has reached a demographic cliff that is affecting the socio-economic fabric of the region.

The research, which covers the counties of Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Sullivan and Ulster counties, takes a comprehensive look at various regional trends, including flat population growth, declining school enrollment, stagnant wages, the shrinking labor force and the rising cost of living. The study also examines what these trends mean for the region in the next decade.

“Ten years after the Great Recession, we find a regional economy that is out of alignment with its demographics,” said Pattern President and CEO Jonathan Drapkin. “Our population growth is flat, which impacts not just our schools but also the home-grown labor force. Many high-paying jobs that existed before the Great Recession have been replaced by low-wage alternatives that makes it difficult to raise a family here. This gives young people a cause to leave the area. At the same time, we are becoming older as a region but our economy is not geared toward this reality.”

“As grave as these challenges are, they provide us an opportunity to collaborate and develop strategies to modify our economy so that we can bring the region back into alignment in the coming decade,” said Drapkin.

Below are some of the main findings of the study:

- Every county except Orange has lost population since 2010. The number of births in each county has also fallen over the last decade, and deaths outpace births in three counties – Ulster, Columbia and Greene. The region’s fertility rate of 1.76 is much lower than the replacement rate of 2.1.
- Of the 65 school districts in the study area, only seven have seen an increase in enrollment since 2000. The region has 26,485 fewer students since 2000, meaning it has lost 14.5% of its students. Future population projections looks even more bleak. The region will lose an additional 20,571 students by 2028.
- The median household income decreased in every county except Greene between 2010 and 2017 when the numbers are adjusted for inflation. Lower income households have experienced the sharpest drop in income while the top 20%, have seen their income rise. Part of the reason is that post 2008, the highest paying industries have been bleeding jobs while the sectors that are growing pay less than what it costs to live here.
- The Mid-Hudson Valley’s proximity to New York City makes the cost of necessities like housing, food, childcare, transportation and healthcare higher. That high cost is one of the reasons younger residents are leaving the region and why nearly half of the study area’s adults 18-34 live at home with their parents.

The study contains 23 mini reports on key subject areas that Pattern has identified as having undergone significant changes since the Great Recession. These include demographic changes, the shrinking middle class, student enrollment, housing trends, health care expansion, the labor force, migration trends, the growth of tourism, climate change and property taxes, among others.
Wes Moore Wows Audience at Pattern for Progress' Annual Event on September 24

Regional leaders in business, nonprofits and community organizations gathered at Pattern for Progress’ annual dinner to fete two honorees and hear decorated combat veteran, social entrepreneur and CEO of the Robin Hood Foundation Wes Moore talk about leadership and responsibility.

Moore was the headline speaker at the dinner held on Tuesday, September 24, at Anthony's Pier 9 in New Windsor. He talked about the power of education, transformational leadership, and the paths that people take to achieving their goals as part of an hour-long Q&A with Pattern President and CEO Jonathan Drapkin. He also discussed poverty, its impact, and how it can be overcome.

“We are sending messages to our children and our families every single day about how important they are to us, by the schools they attend, by the water they drink, by the air they breathe, by the food they eat, by the neighborhoods they’re growing up in,” Moore said. “It’s one of the reasons why Pattern’s work is so important.”

Robin Hood is one of the largest anti-poverty forces in the United States.

“Wes is an incredible speaker whose personal story of overcoming challenges showed how a supportive family, an education and good choices can help fight difficult circumstances,” said Drapkin. “He left all of us with many thoughts to mull over.”

Earlier in the evening, Pattern honored two Mid-Hudson Valley champions for their long service to the community.

Glenn Hoagland, president and CEO of the Mohonk Preserve, received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Hoagland led New York’s largest nonprofit nature preserve for nearly 27 years and is a leader in land preservation. He served on Pattern’s executive committee.

Rhinebeck Bank received the “Making a Difference Award.” Under the leadership of President and CEO Mike Quinn, Rhinebeck Bank has provided a $3 million loan pool for the Creative Neighborhood project in Newburgh and another $3 million for the Poughkeepsie Innovation District for development in the heart of both cities. What a great way to make a difference!
Lynne Patton will be Keynote at Pattern’s Housing Forum on November 1

Pattern for Progress announced that its Center for Housing Solutions and Urban Initiatives will host its annual housing conference, with the focus on reclaiming neighborhoods and rebuilding communities.

The conference, entitled “From Blight to Bright: Reclaiming Your Neighborhood”, will be held at the Poughkeepsie Grand on November 1, 2019 beginning with registration at 8:00 am and will feature the following speakers:

- Lynne M. Patton, Region II Administrator for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, will deliver a special keynote address.
- Karen L. Black, Principal of May 8 Consulting, will speak about tools to mitigate blight and revitalize communities through code enforcement.
- Adam Zaranko, President of the NYS Land Bank Association and Executive Director of the Albany County Land Bank Corporation, will speak about the benefits of land banks and best practices for their implementation.
- Brian Pine, of Burlington Associates, will speak about the benefits, best practices, and how-tos for community land trusts, with a focus on affordable housing.
- Madeline Fletcher, of NYS Homes and Community Renewal, will join Karen, Adam, and Brian to moderate a panel discussion between them focusing on comprehensive community development.

“Our 2019 Housing Forum will provide housing practitioners, developers, investors, municipal officials, staff, and local board members with an extremely valuable set of tools that will help bring your community from Blight to Bright” said Pattern senior vice president and executive director of the Center for Housing Solutions and Urban Initiatives Joe Czajka. “Our nationally recognized speakers have an amazing passion for their work and will share best practices on how to improve your community. Pattern is very pleased to bring the Regional Administrator from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide a keynote address about community development and affordable housing.”

Nearly 200 leaders and professionals in the fields of affordable housing, community development, municipal government, housing development, planning and engineering, community lending, and many more industries attend the Center for Housing Solutions and Urban Initiatives’ annual housing conference each year.

Tickets for the conference are available at www.pattern-for-progress.org/events/from-blight-to-bright/

It’s Not Too Late to Apply for Pattern’s Fellows Program

Pattern has a few slots open for its 13th Fellows class that is set to begin October 22.

This year’s Fellows program will focus on leadership and the community, especially on overcoming the “us vs. them” mentality that permeates so much of the current discourse.

Josh Weiss, co-founder of Global Negotiation Initiative at Harvard University and president of Negotiation Works Inc., will join four of the 22 sessions. Other speakers are being chosen for their role in resolving current or recent disputes within the Hudson Valley.

If you have someone in mind for the new class, please encourage them to email Jonathan Drapkin at jdrapkin@pfprogress.org for more information.

For more about Pattern’s 2019 Fellows program, click here.

For more information about Pattern and our initiatives