



# 4 Planning Challenges

The Framework team defined a series of interrelated growth, redevelopment, and conservation challenges facing the region as it moves into the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These challenges, explored in this section of the report, are organized under the following headings:

- Less Population, More Developed Area
- Density Declines & Disinvestment
- Early Suburbs Under Stress
- Underuse of Land & Buildings
- Fewer People, More Miles Traveled
- Rural & Agricultural Land Conversion
- Threats to Natural Resources

*Note: Additional information regarding sewer service areas will be added to subsequent drafts of the report.*



## Less Population, More Developed Area

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region’s urbanized area (as defined by the US Census Bureau) nearly tripled in size, expanding from 123 square miles in 1950 to 367 square miles in 2000. Despite only a modest increase in population over the same period, a little over 7 percent, residential, commercial, and institutional uses spread outward from the region’s traditional centers to occupy large areas of the Towns of Niagara, Lockport and Wheatfield in Niagara County and Amherst, Clarence, Lancaster, Orchard Park, and Hamburg in Erie County.

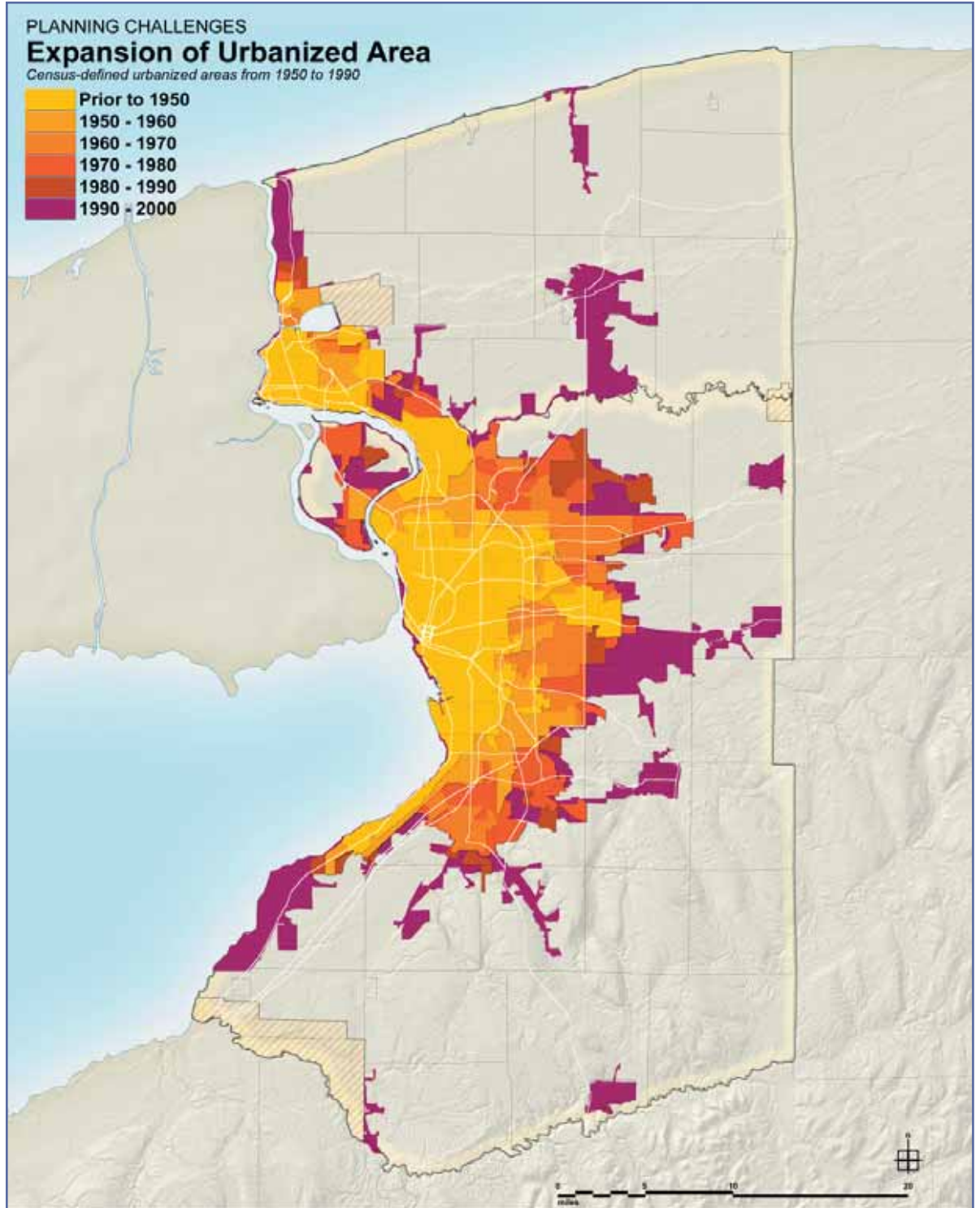
During the last two decades, expansion of the urbanized area has occurred at a pace much greater than the rates of change in population and households. Since 1980, the region’s urbanized area increased 38 percent, while households increased by only 5.5% and population declined by 5.8%.

The increase in number of households is due to a drop in average household sizes over the past 20 years. Though this phenomenon of fewer people per household contributes to higher demand for housing, it doesn’t fully explain the pace and extent of the urbanized area’s expansion. Expansion is fueled by a number of factors with household formation playing only a part.

### Changes in Population, Households and Urbanized Area, 1980-2000

	1980	1990	2000	1980-2000	
	#	#	#	# chg	% chg
Population (total persons)	1,242,826	1,189,340	1,170,111	-72,715	-5.85%
Households	445,193	460,324	469,719	24,526	5.51%
Urbanized Area (square miles)	266	286	367	101	37.97%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1980-2000.





## Density Declines & Disinvestment

As population has dropped and development spread outward from traditional urban and rural centers, the region’s oldest communities have lost households. Where the losses have been greatest, declines have resulted in lower housing values and tax revenues, eroding demand for retail and commercial services, and housing deterioration and abandonment.

Within the region’s developed area, household densities vary greatly—from 5 or more households per acre (3,200 or more households per square mile) in the most densely settled areas to 1 household per acre (640 households per square mile) in the least densely settled. Density tends to correspond to the age of development, with the earliest settled residential areas in Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport and their first ring suburbs having the highest densities and the more recently developed areas having the lowest. In terms of individual localities, the City of Buffalo tops the list with just over 3,500 housing units per square mile, the villages of Williamsville and Sloan are next with a little over 2,000 per square mile each, and Niagara Falls ranks fourth most dense with 1,980 per square mile.

Between 1980 and 2000, the region’s developed areas added households at a much slower rate than rural areas—only a 1% increase in developed areas as compared to a 33% percent increase in rural areas. The areas experiencing the fastest increases are located along the boundary between the developed and rural areas. Areas with increases in density of 5% or more above the regional average include portions of the towns of Wheatfield and Lockport in Niagara County, and areas of the towns of Amherst, Clarence, Cheektowaga, Lancaster, Orchard Park, and Hamburg in Erie County. These areas are the region’s most recently built communities with relatively low overall densities.

### Change in Households by Area, 1980-2000

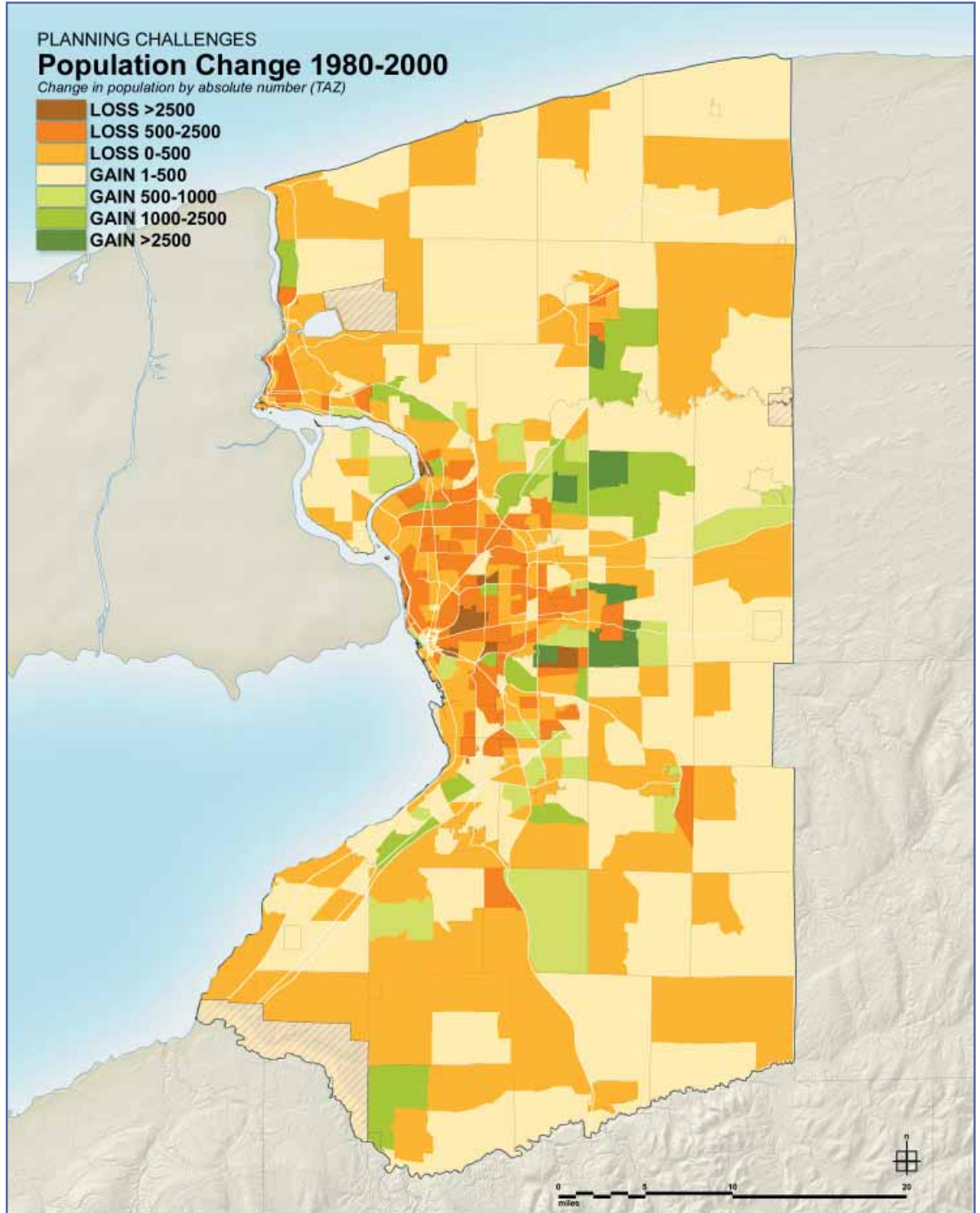
	1980	1990	2000	Chg 1980-2000	
	#	#	#	#	%
<b>Developed Area</b>					
Erie County	323,048	328,287	325,199	2,151	0.7%
Niagara County	59,839	61,594	60,465	626	1.0%
Developed Area	382,887	389,881	385,664	2,777	0.7%
<b>Rural Area</b>					
Erie County	42,114	47,732	55,674	13,560	32.2%
Niagara County	20,530	23,094	27,381	6,851	33.4%
Rural Area	62,644	70,826	83,055	20,411	32.6%

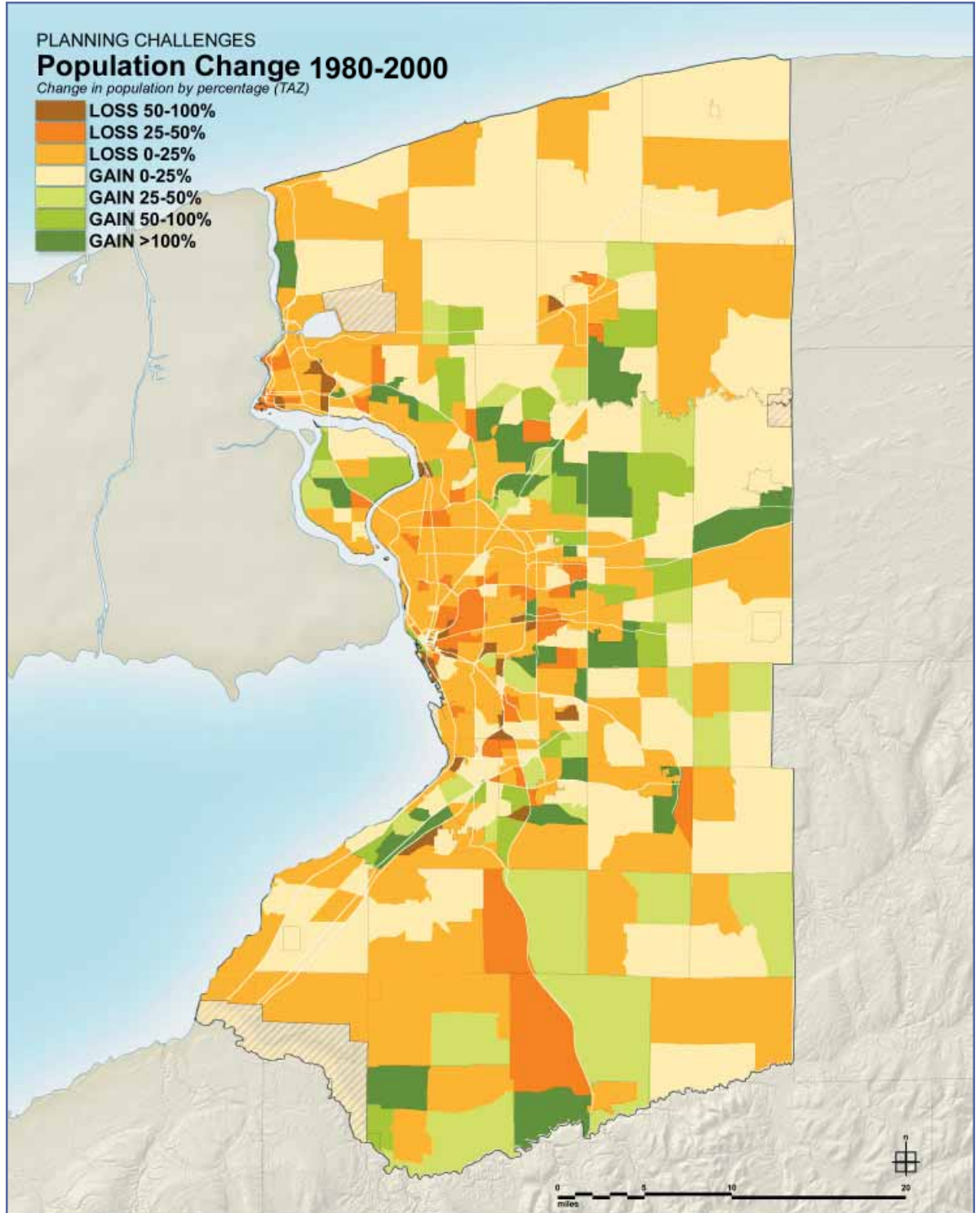
Source: US Census Bureau, GBNRTC, HOK.

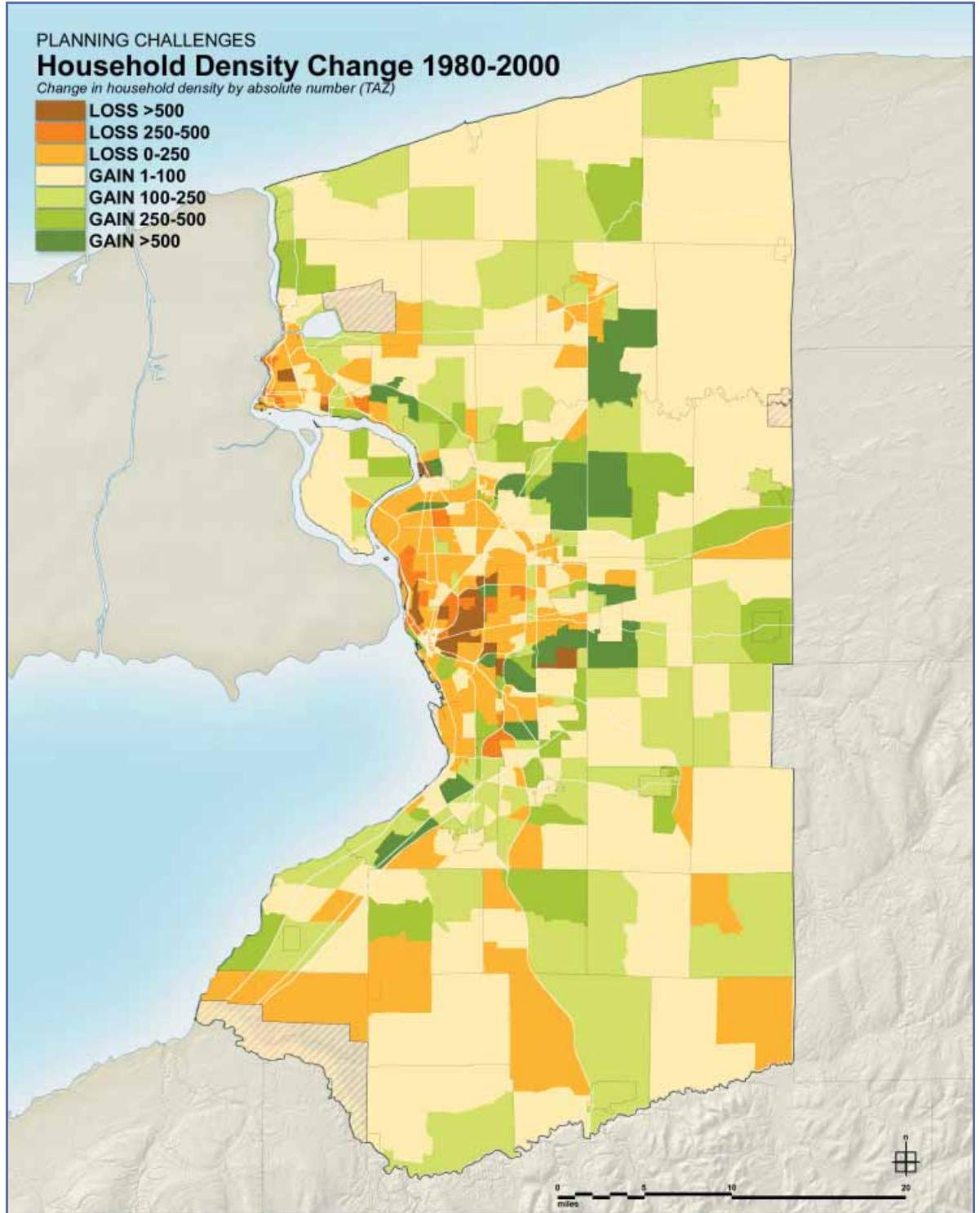


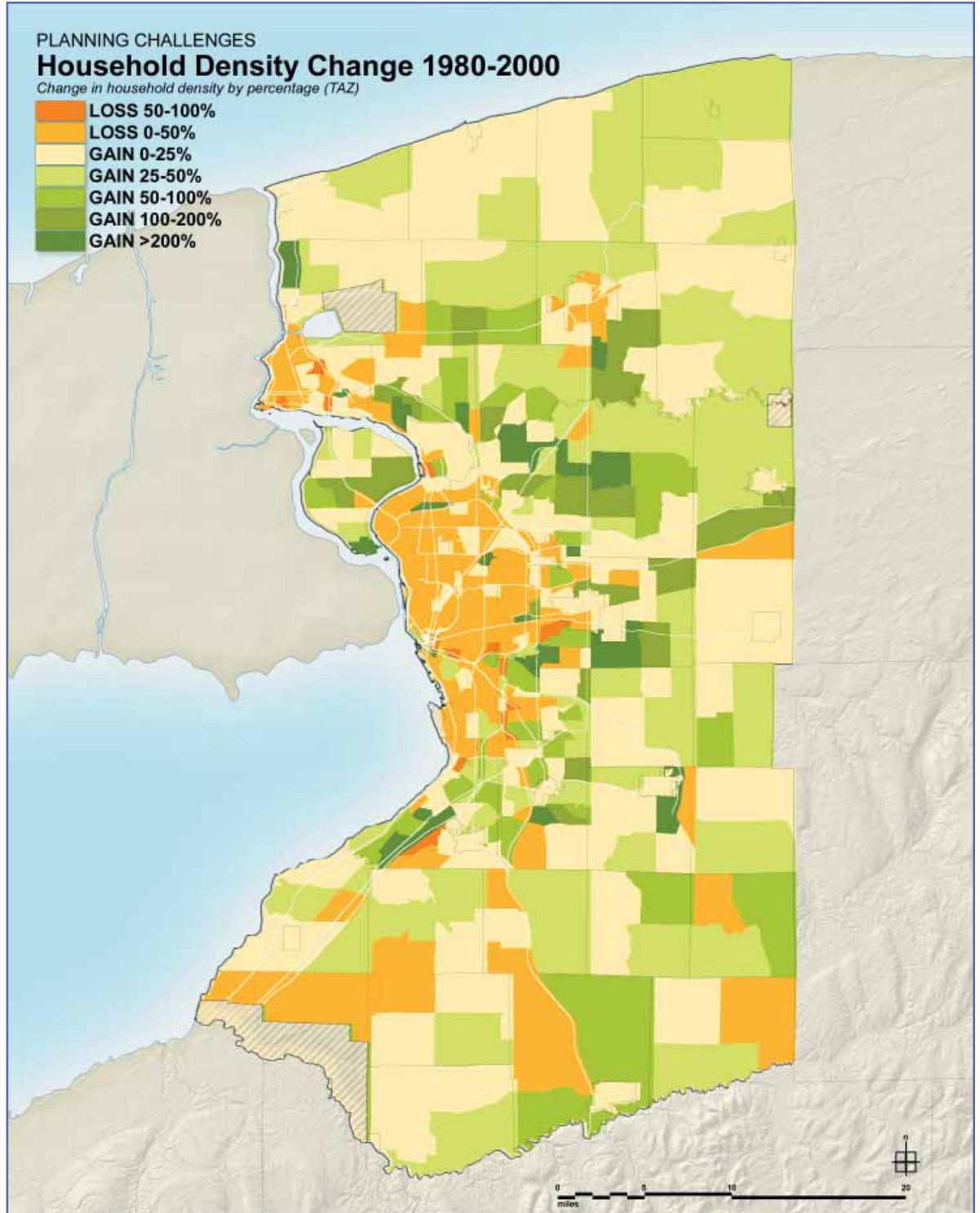
Areas losing households include the region's the most densely settled, inner city neighborhoods and the least densely settled rural village and town centers. The urban areas experiencing decline include portions of the cities of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lockport, Tonawanda, and North Tonawanda along with portions of the town of Niagara in Niagara County and Amherst, Cheektowaga and West Seneca in Erie County. Rural communities experiencing losses include the northernmost towns in Niagara County and the southern tier of towns in Erie County.

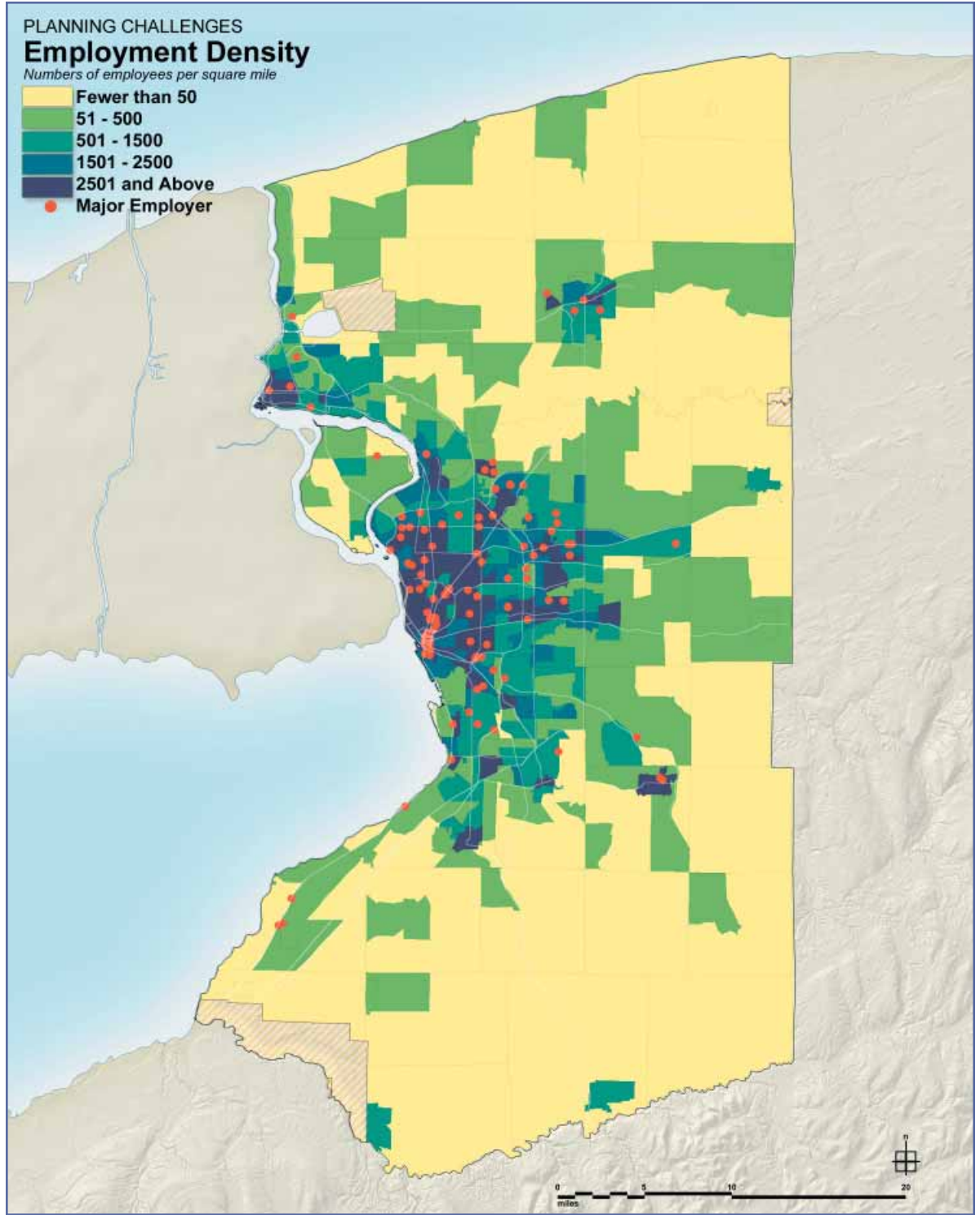
The region's traditional centers of employment also have shifted from core locations to suburban locations, but the need for ready access highway and rail infrastructure have somewhat mitigated the impacts of the change.











*(The red dots show general locations of employers with 500 or more employees.)*