

# ZONING AND SEGREGATION IN SYRACUSE, NY

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# Zoning & Segregation in Syracuse, NY

## INTRODUCTION

In 1963, residents of Syracuse's 15th Ward—a segregated neighborhood home to 8 out of every 9 Black residents of the city at the time—marched in protest of housing segregation. They were part of a national movement which drew attention to racist practices and policies that denied housing opportunity to most Black Americans, and their activism led to the creation of state and national fair housing laws later that decade.

But 58 years later, despite the passage of state and federal fair housing laws that outlawed housing discrimination, Syracuse is still segregated by both race and class. A 2015 report by the Century Foundation found that poor Black and Hispanic Syracusans are more likely to live in a high poverty neighborhood than in any other city in the country. The same report found that poor white Syracusans are more likely to live in a high poverty neighborhood than poor white people living in all but four other cities in America.

Syracuse's entrenched segregation is the result of many factors outside of local control, including global economic trends, national demographic shifts, and state and federal housing and transportation policies. But one contributing factor that Syracuse does control and can change is its municipal zoning code. Zoning governs the types of housing and businesses that can be built or operated in different parts of the city, and it has helped create an urban environment where poor people cannot access housing in many neighborhoods. In a city where poverty and race are strongly correlated, this economic segregation leads to racial residential segregation.

Syracuse is currently rewriting its entire zoning code for the first time since 1967. You can read the current zoning code and district regulations [here](#) and look at the current zoning map [here](#). This is a critical opportunity to dismantle one part of the legal structure that perpetuates housing segregation in our community. In order to successfully eliminate zoning barriers to economically and racially integrated neighborhoods, we first need to understand how zoning came to occupy a place in that structure.

## SYRACUSE'S FIRST ZONING CODE

Syracuse passed its first zoning code in the early 1920's. This was a time of great upheaval for American cities when the end of World War I, the Great Migration, and rapid urbanization and industrialization created new challenges for major metropolitan areas. Cities across the nation turned to professional planners to try and solve the urban problems created by these enormous social, demographic, and economic changes.

One such problem was racial violence. Overtly anti-Black urban riots became much more common in northern cities during and directly after World War I. This period of racial violence reached its climax during the Red Summer of 1919, when whites in dozens of cities and several rural communities rioted and killed hundreds of Black men, women, and children.

This wave of violence crashed into Syracuse when white striking iron workers attacked Black strikebreakers at the Globe Malleable Iron Works multiple times over the course of that summer.

Image #1: 1919 Newspaper Clippings

## NEGRO TAKEN TO HOSPITAL AFTER CLASH

Heroic Fight Staged Near  
Globe Malleable Iron  
Works.

ARRESTS ARE MADE

Bricks and Stones Fly in  
Pitched Battle With  
Strikers.

"Ah sed, c'mon boys. picks up a bit o' iron pipe which lays neah de waik and sta'ts wid my men," Pratt told the police in giving his version of the affair.

"Ah tells the strikers they gotta clear our path. Boy, then it happened. Dey sen' a brick over. Ah ducks and it found a restin' place on the head o' one of my men. Then another brick. Ah gave dat plenty o' room to pass me and it clips another one of the other men back o' me.

"Then ah opens up. I let that bit o' iron go into the crowd. A second later them striking gents throws up a h'rage of stones, bricks and clubs which fell all 'round and on us.



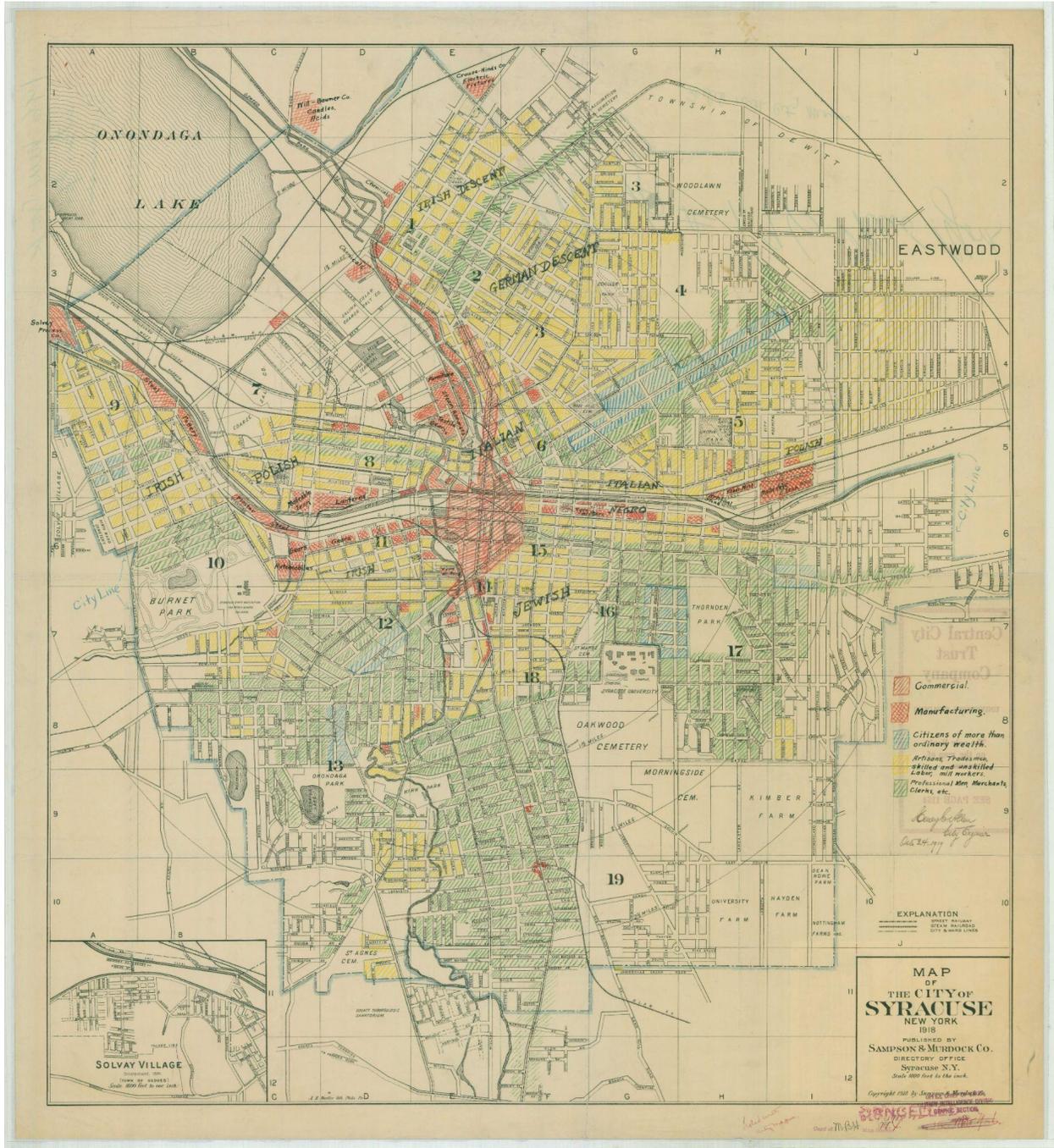
Herald Artist Vic Lambdin Pictures Scene of Early Morning Fracas When Several Men Were Hurt Near the Globe Malleable Works.

The Syracuse Herald depicted industrial riots at the Globe Malleable Iron Works in starkly racial terms.

Source: Syracuse Herald, 1919

Although the immediate cause of these riots was a labor dispute, local reporting always presented them in racial terms. News articles identified the participants' race, transcribed their quotes in racialized dialect, and included illustrations that depicted strikebreakers with racist stereotypes. The news media melded industrial labor disputes and racial unrest.

Image #2: 1919 Residential Classes Map



City Engineer Henry C. Allen's map of Syracuse's residential classes. *Source:* National Archives

Just months after those riots, Syracuse City Engineer Henry C. Allen created a map that divided and labeled the city's residential neighborhoods according to the presumed class, heritage, and race of its residents. Newer neighborhoods built on the city's hills were labeled as being home to "citizens of more than ordinary wealth" and "professional men," while "skilled and unskilled labor[ers]" were sorted by their ethnicity and shown occupying older, low-lying neighborhoods near the city's center.

This map identified a small area east of Downtown as Syracuse's only Black neighborhood, but Allen labeled it a manufacturing district rather than a residential area. To be sure, there were factories as well as homes in that area, but the same was true of other neighborhoods—such as the Northside—that Allen labeled as residential. In fact, Syracuse's lone Black neighborhood is the only spot on the entire map where a racial, ethnic, religious, or class group is shown living in a manufacturing district despite the fact that factories were common in many segregated white neighborhoods at that time. From City Hall's perspective, segregated white neighborhoods were 'residential' even if they included factories, but a neighborhood occupied by Black families was not truly residential. Ideas about what makes a place 'residential' or 'industrial' were tied up with ideas about race.

The next year, City Hall began to put these ideas into law. In 1920, Syracuse Common Council asked the city planning commission to create the city's first zoning law. When the planning commission completed the ordinance in early 1922, the Syracuse Herald Journal explained its logic:

*"The idea of zoning is to restrict certain areas to residential use... Downtown commercial areas and industrial reservations are set up in the zoning system. Residences may be constructed in the commercial or industrial districts if anyone wants to put them there. In the main, property on the heights will be protected against the objectionable intrusion of business or industry, with attending unsightliness and nuisances. With city growth the lower sites have been taken over by business and industry and zoning recognizes this fact."*

The same article quoted Newell B. Woodworth, chairman of the city's planning commission, describing the benefits of the new zoning ordinance:

*"Zoning will guarantee a definite and safe place for industrial investment; protect home neighborhoods from unwarranted commercial and industrial invasion; promote ownership of homes and contented labor relations."*

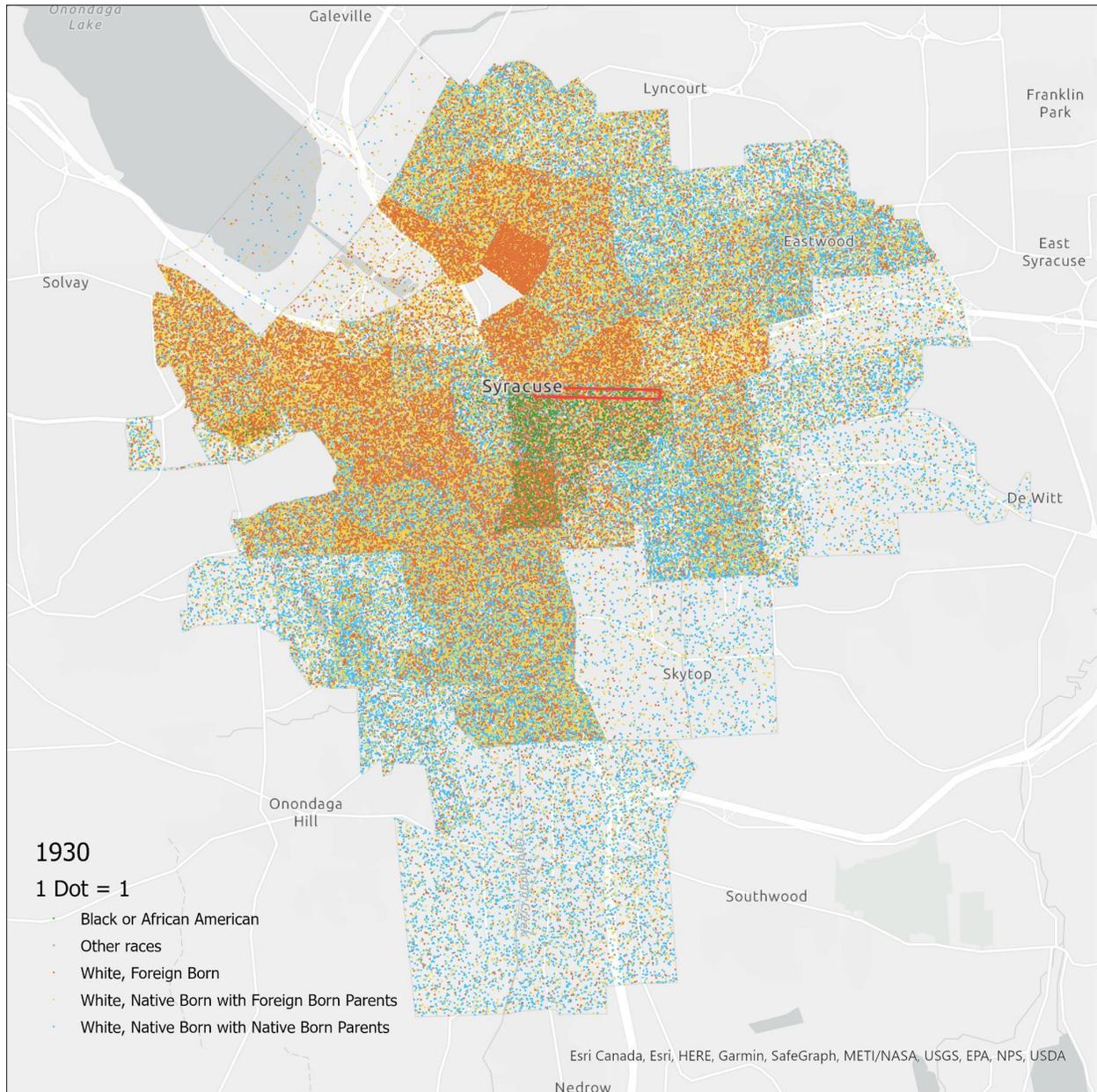
Zoning was a direct response to fears about industrialization, and industrialization was associated with racial diversification. Factories created nuisances like smog and smells, but they also implied the presence of Black families and the potential for labor unrest and racial violence.

By banning industrial development in residential neighborhoods while at the same time allowing the continued presence of residences in industrial areas "if anyone wants to put them there," the zoning code entrenched existing segregation that confined Black families to housing on "lower sites" next to factories and preserved the city's largely undeveloped "heights" for new residential neighborhoods to be occupied by "professional men" and "citizens of more than ordinary wealth."

# DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE UNDER ZONING

1930

Map #1: 1930 Racial Dot Map



Source: 1930 Census. Notes: Data for Northside census tract unavailable.

Although zoning was part of a broad municipal response to urban anxieties that included fears of racial mixing, Syracuse's first zoning code did not have an immediate effect on racial segregation.

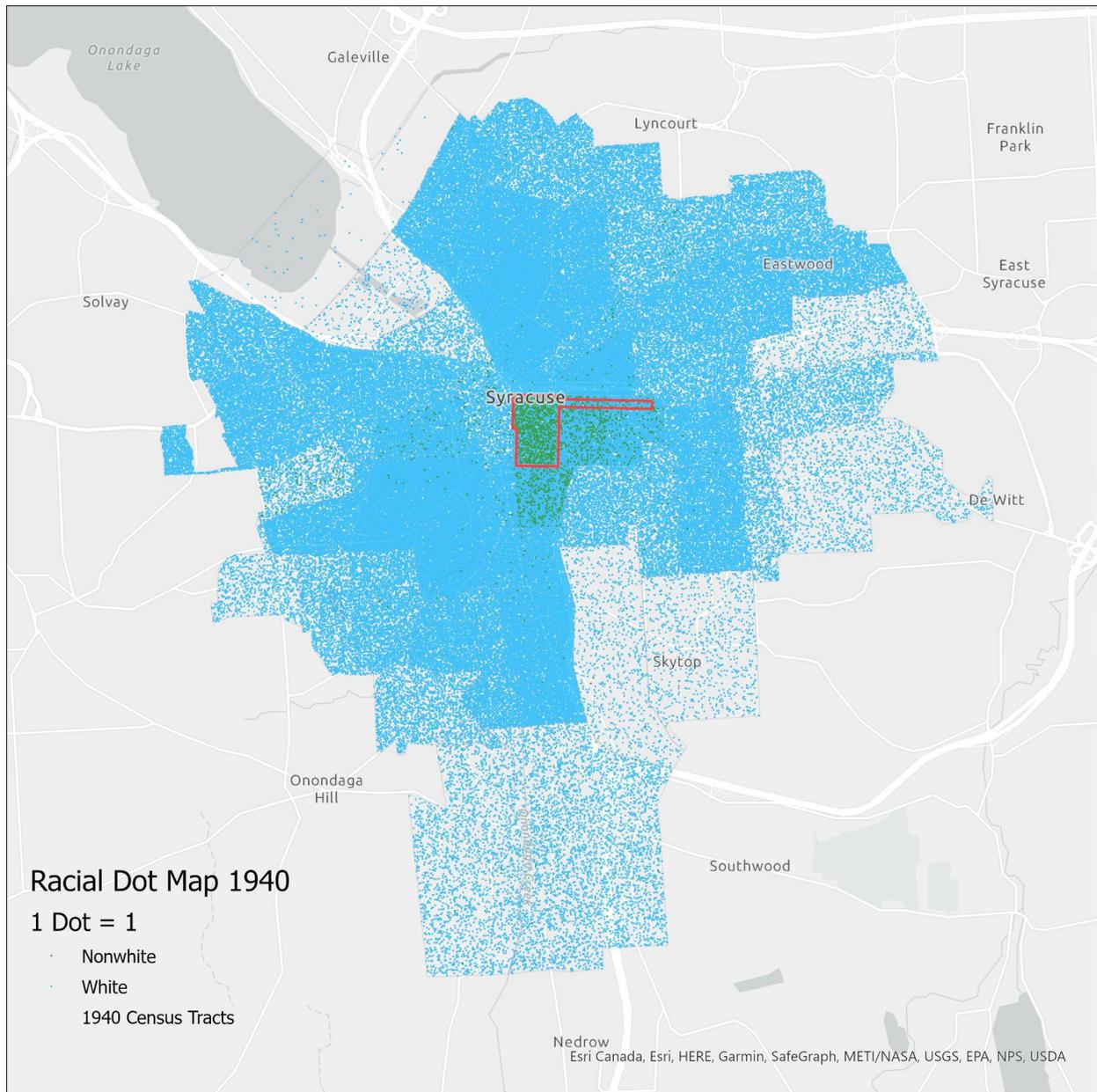
In the decades after World War I, overt racism in the housing market confined Syracuse's growing Black population to the same area on the Eastside—a neighborhood known as the Washington-Water Strip, outlined in red on the map.

Discriminatory housing practices barred Black families from moving into both established white city neighborhoods and new semi-suburban residential developments at the city's edge.

This map shows the racial makeup of Syracuse's population in 1930. Each dot represents one person. Blue, red, and yellow dots stand for white people (the different colors distinguish between "native born" whites and recent European immigrant groups. 1930 was the last year the census made this distinction and all subsequent maps will represent white residents with blue dots only), green dots stand for Black people, and other colors stand for people of other races.

# 1940

Map #2: 1940 Racial Dot Map



Source: 1940 Census.

New Deal programs intended to improve housing and increase homeownership explicitly excluded Black families. The Federal Government's Home Ownership Loan Corporation worked with local bankers, appraisers, realtors, and other officials to create Residential Security Maps that reflected perceived lending risk.

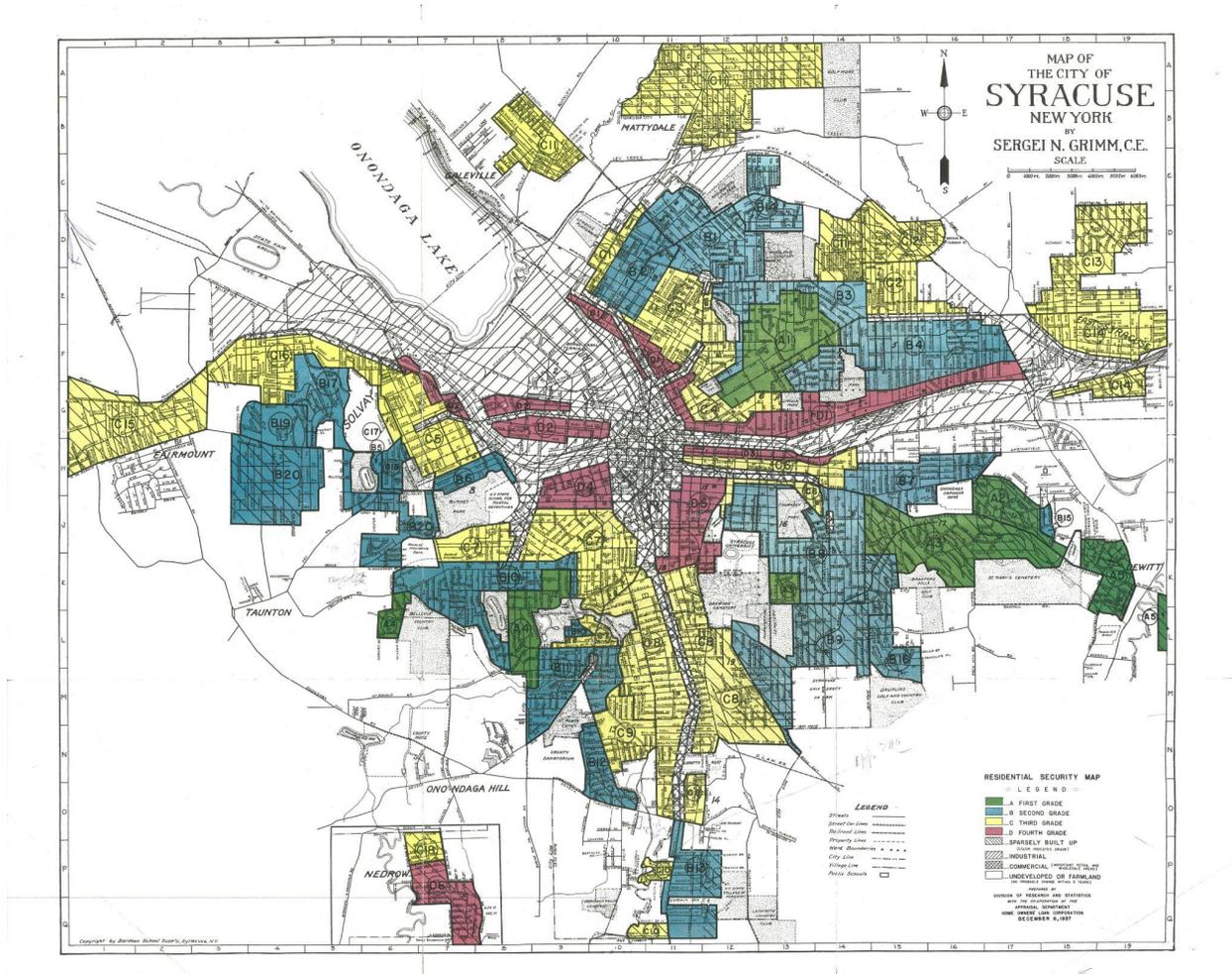
Areas were color-coded and graded using criteria that included the age and condition of housing, proximity to amenities like parks or noxious land uses like polluting industries, and the economic class

and ethnic and racial composition of existing residents. Neighborhoods colored red (i.e., redlined), were deemed “hazardous” or highest risk, and residents of such neighborhoods were generally cut off from accessing both private and federally-backed home loans.

Syracuse's HOLC map looked strikingly similar to the map City Engineer Henry Allen created 15 years before and redlined both the Washington-Water strip and 15th Ward, outlined in red on the map above.

This map reflects the era's discriminatory lending practices, as residents of predominantly Black neighborhoods were excluded from receiving any government-subsidized loans.

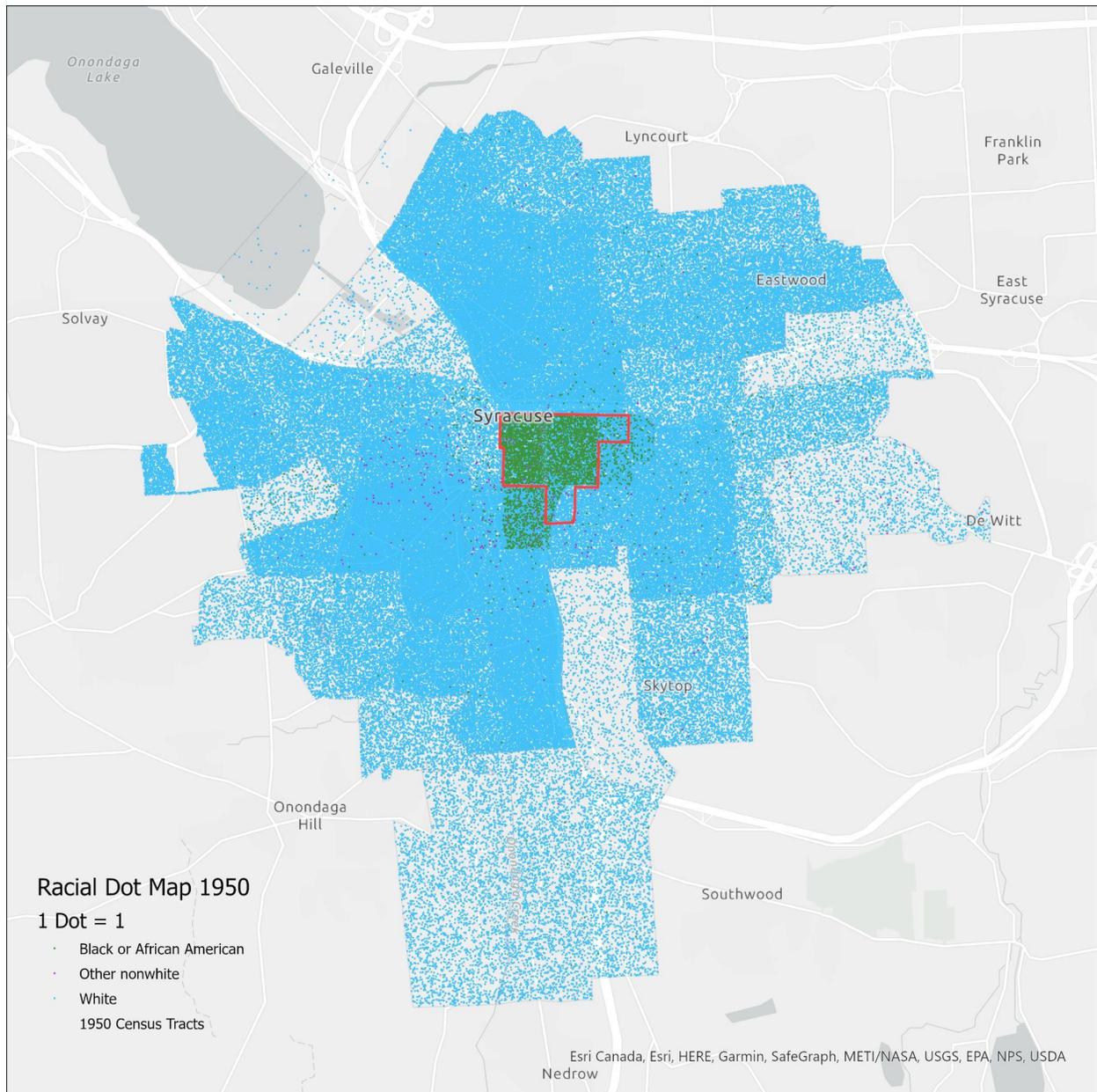
Image #3: HOLC Map



Source: Mapping Inequality.

# 1950

Map #3: 1950 Racial Dot Map



Source: 1950 Census.

By the middle of the 20th Century, Syracuse's City Hall had demolished the Washington-Water Strip neighborhood (this was the city's first act of "urban renewal"), and the 15th Ward (outlined in red on the map) had grown to become home to 8 out of every 9 Black Syracuse residents.

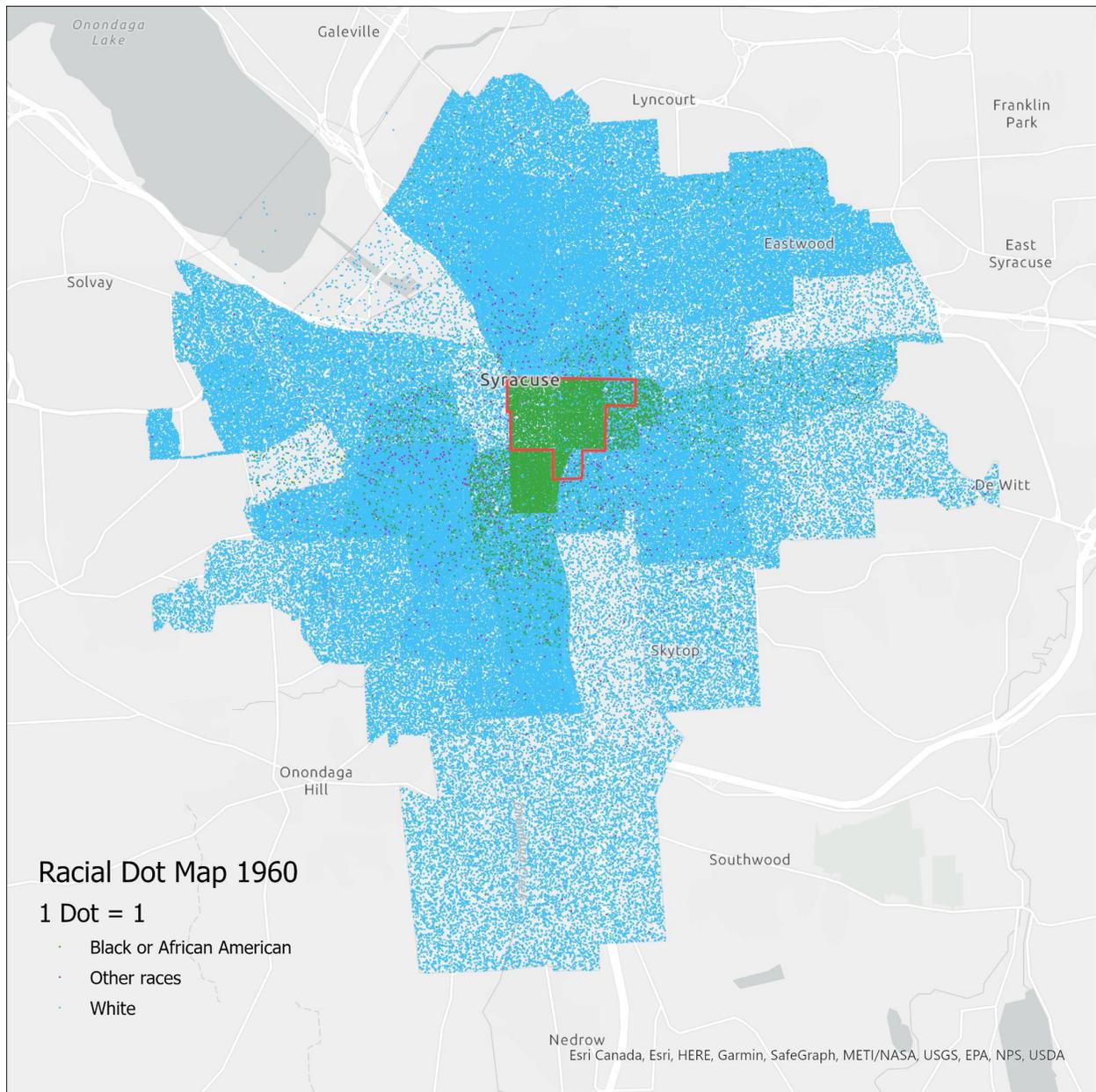
The city's growing Black population was confined to this very small area by overlapping, mutually reinforcing racist housing policies and practices perpetrated by individual homeowners, local landlords, the real estate industry, and the city, state, and federal governments.

Slumlords exploited this segregation by charging artificially high rents and refusing to invest in or maintain their properties. At the same time, City Hall refused to enforce its own building codes. All the while, Black tenants had few other housing options.

You can read more about housing conditions in the 15th Ward here: [Highway Robbery: How Syracuse neighborhoods were razed to construct Interstate 81](#)

## 1960

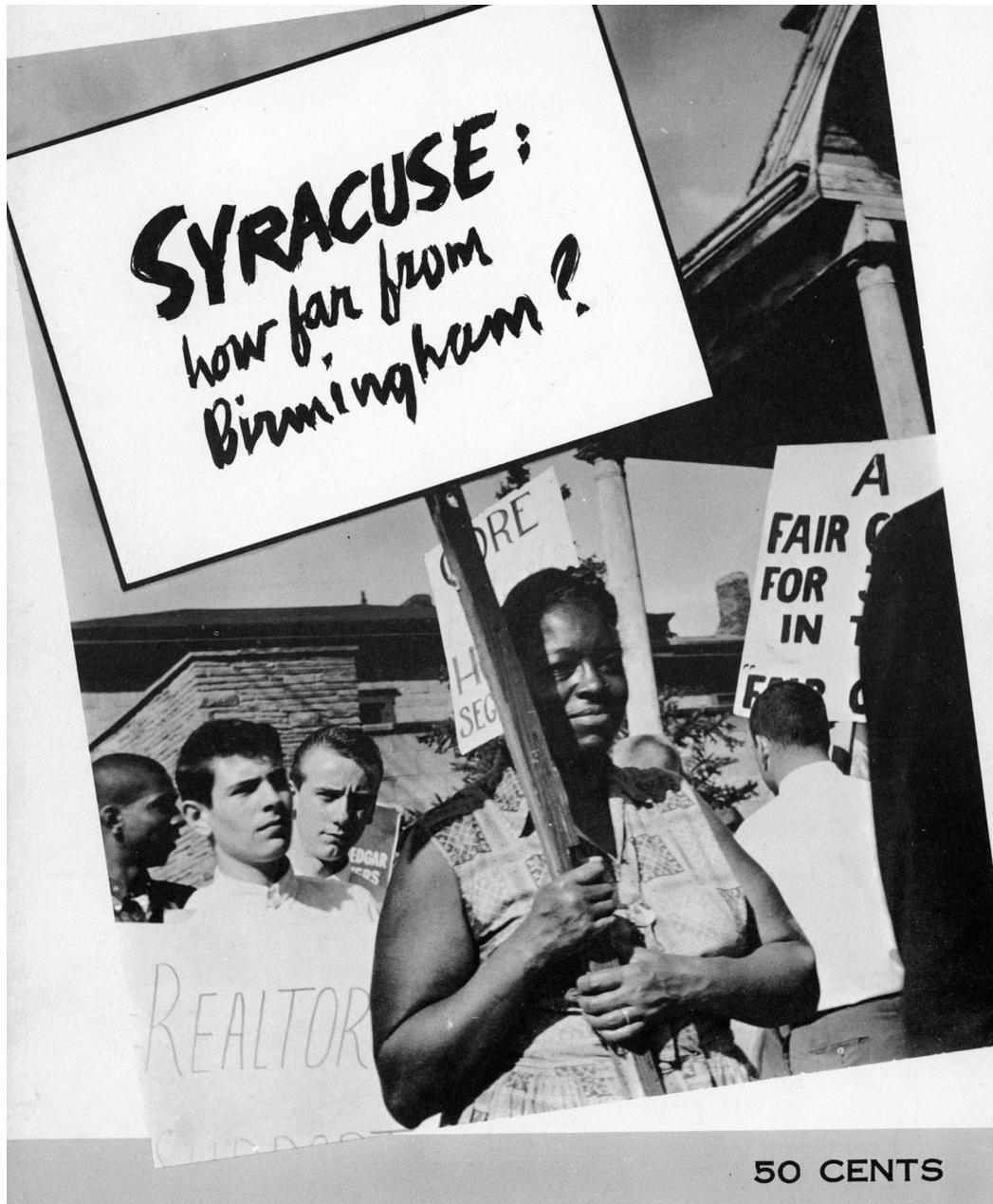
Map #4: 1960 Racial Dot Map



In the 1960's residents of the 15th Ward, outlined in red, demonstrated against poor housing conditions. Protestors connected residential segregation in Syracuse to the racist Jim Crow regime in southern states like Alabama.

Rather than invest in the existing neighborhood, City Hall used Urban Renewal projects and the construction of Interstate 81 to demolish the 15th Ward and displace hundreds of Black families.

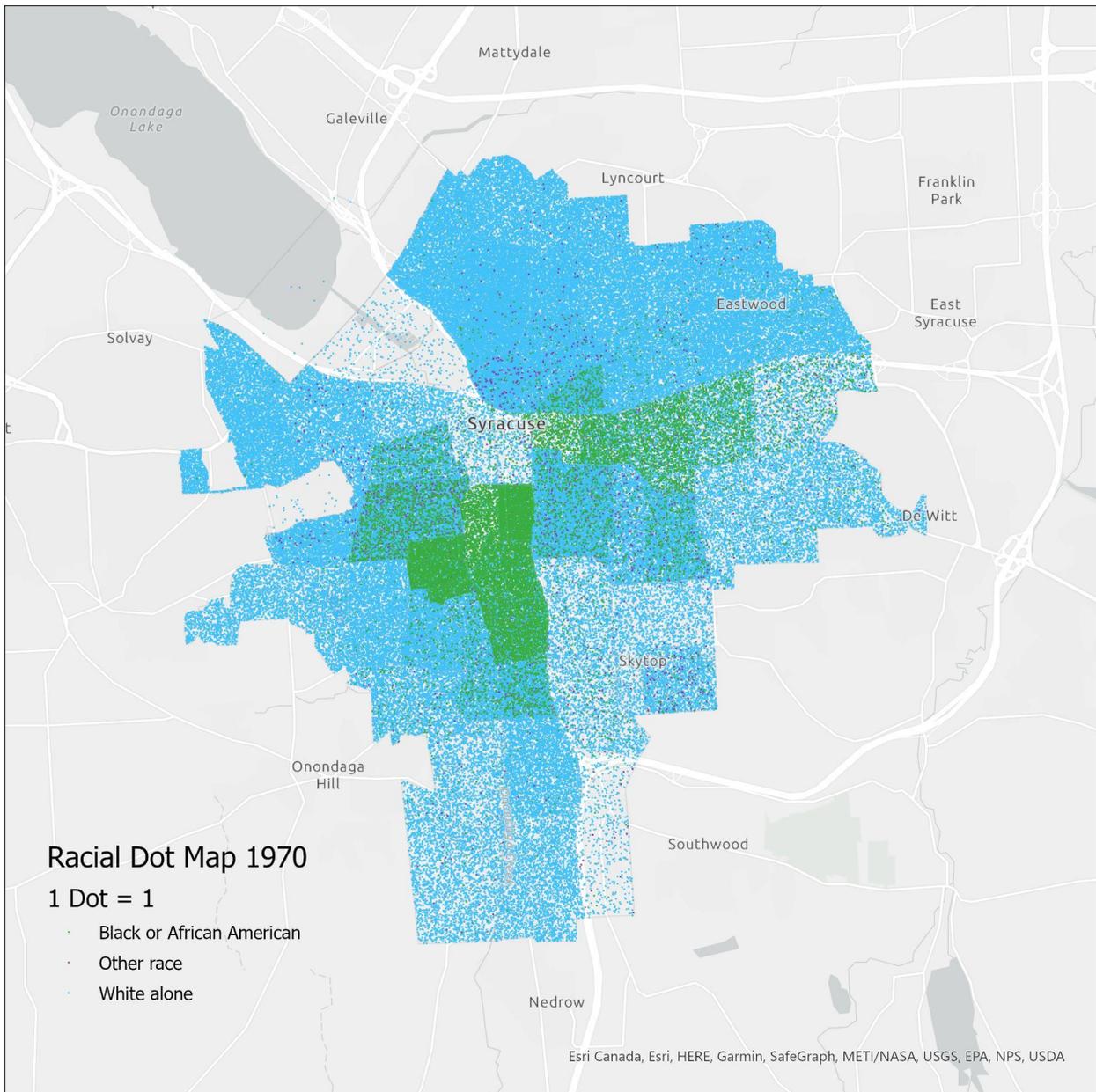
Image #4: Congress of Racial Equity Pamphlet



A pamphlet created by the Syracuse chapter of the Congress of Racial Equity. *Source:* Onondaga Historical Association.

# 1970

Map #5: 1970 Racial Dot Map



Source: 1970 Census.

By 1970, displaced Black families had moved into previously all-white neighborhoods on Syracuse's South and East Sides. New fair housing laws outlawed many of the overtly discriminatory practices that had maintained racial residential segregation, and urban renewal relocation programs placed many Black families in new public housing developments in these neighborhoods.

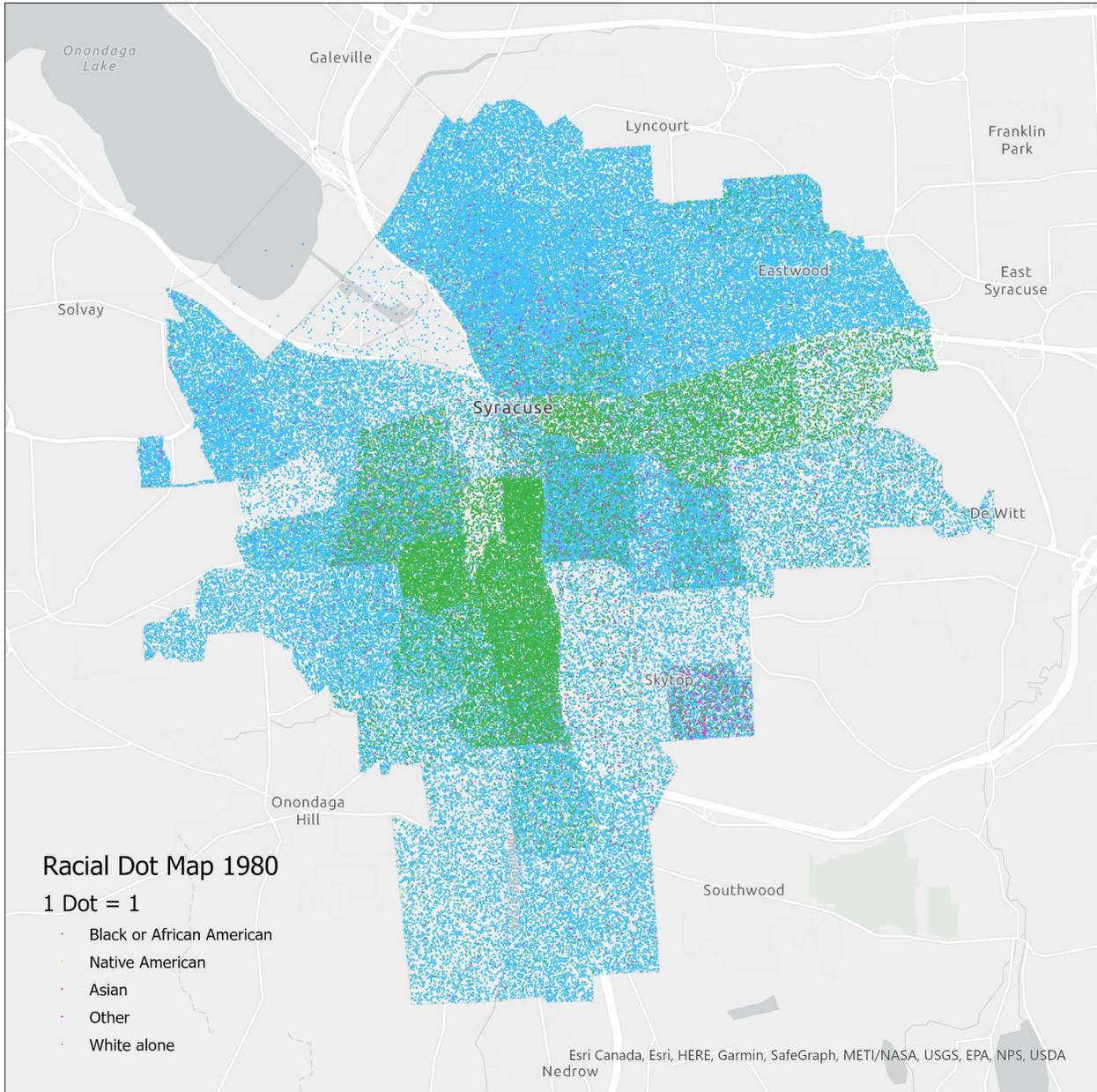
Meanwhile, City Hall tinkered with its zoning ordinance. Various amendments made the document more restrictive and more complicated. For example, the total number of zoning districts more than doubled

between 1922 and 1956, and the most restrictive residential zoning district went from allowing both 1 and 2-family homes to only allowing 1-family homes.

In 1967 the Common Council rewrote the entire ordinance to simplify the changes that had been made to the original zoning code. That 1967 ordinance remains largely in effect today.

## 1980

Map #6: 1980 Racial Dot Map

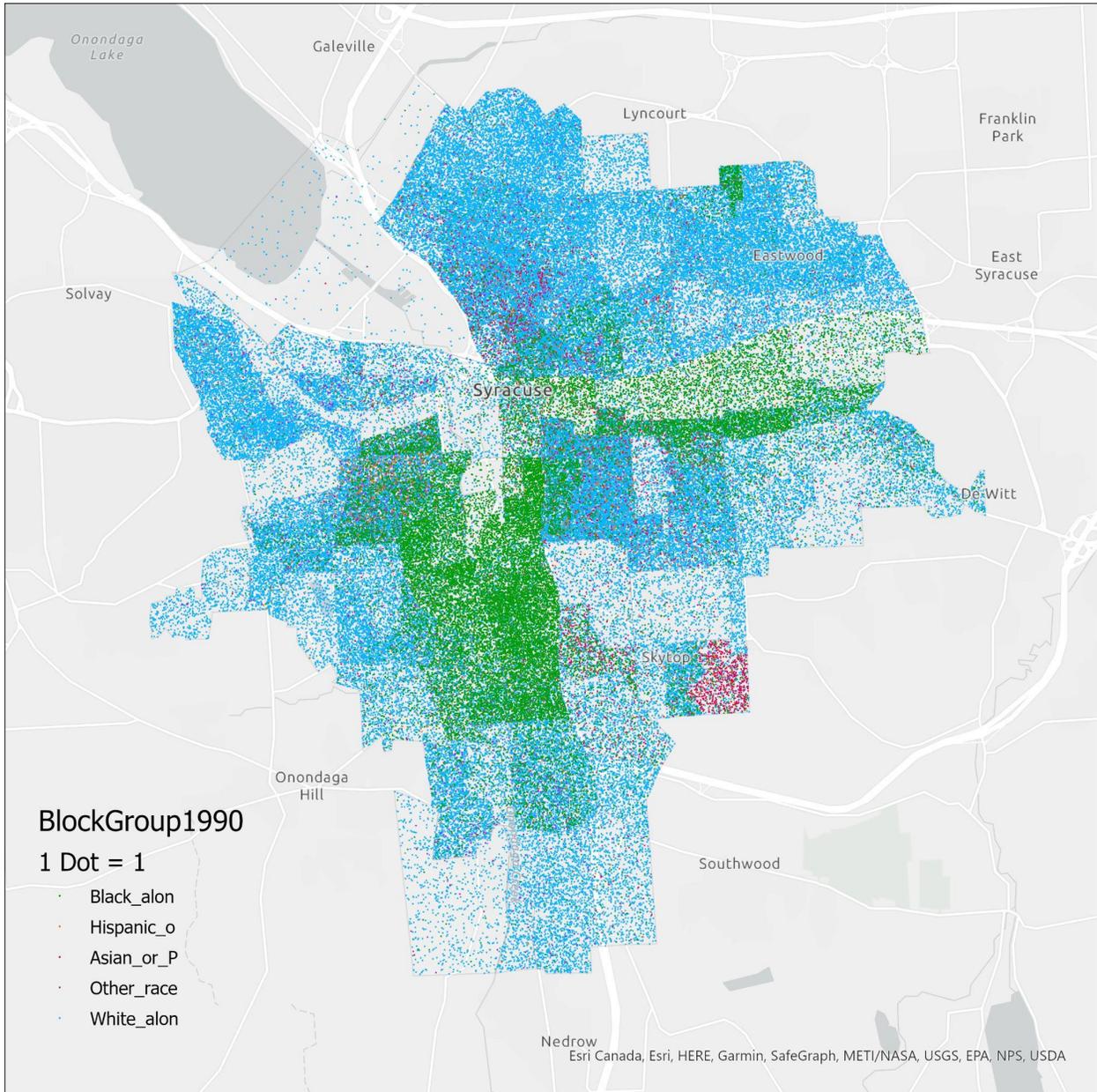


Source: 1980 Census.

Syracuse's growing Black population spread into new neighborhoods through the second half of the 20th century.

## 1990

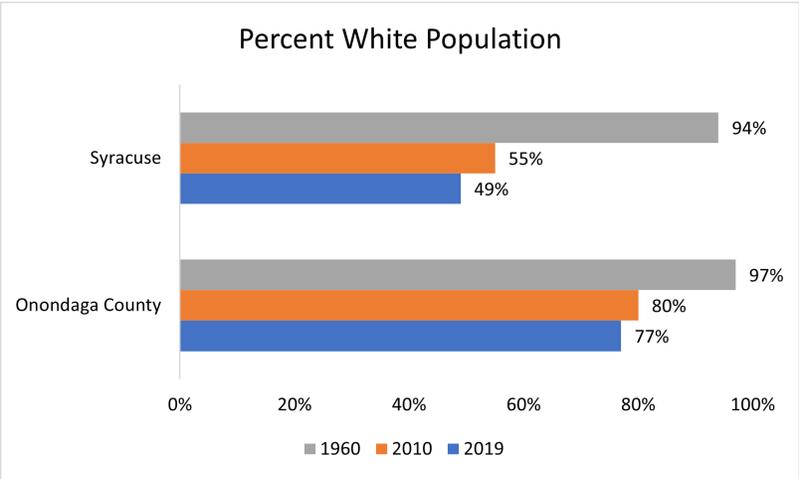
Map #7: 1990 Racial Dot Map



Source: 1990 Census.

But at the same time, white families continued to move out of the city. These racially disparate outcomes were often encouraged by race-neutral government policies and discriminatory practices from the local real estate industry.

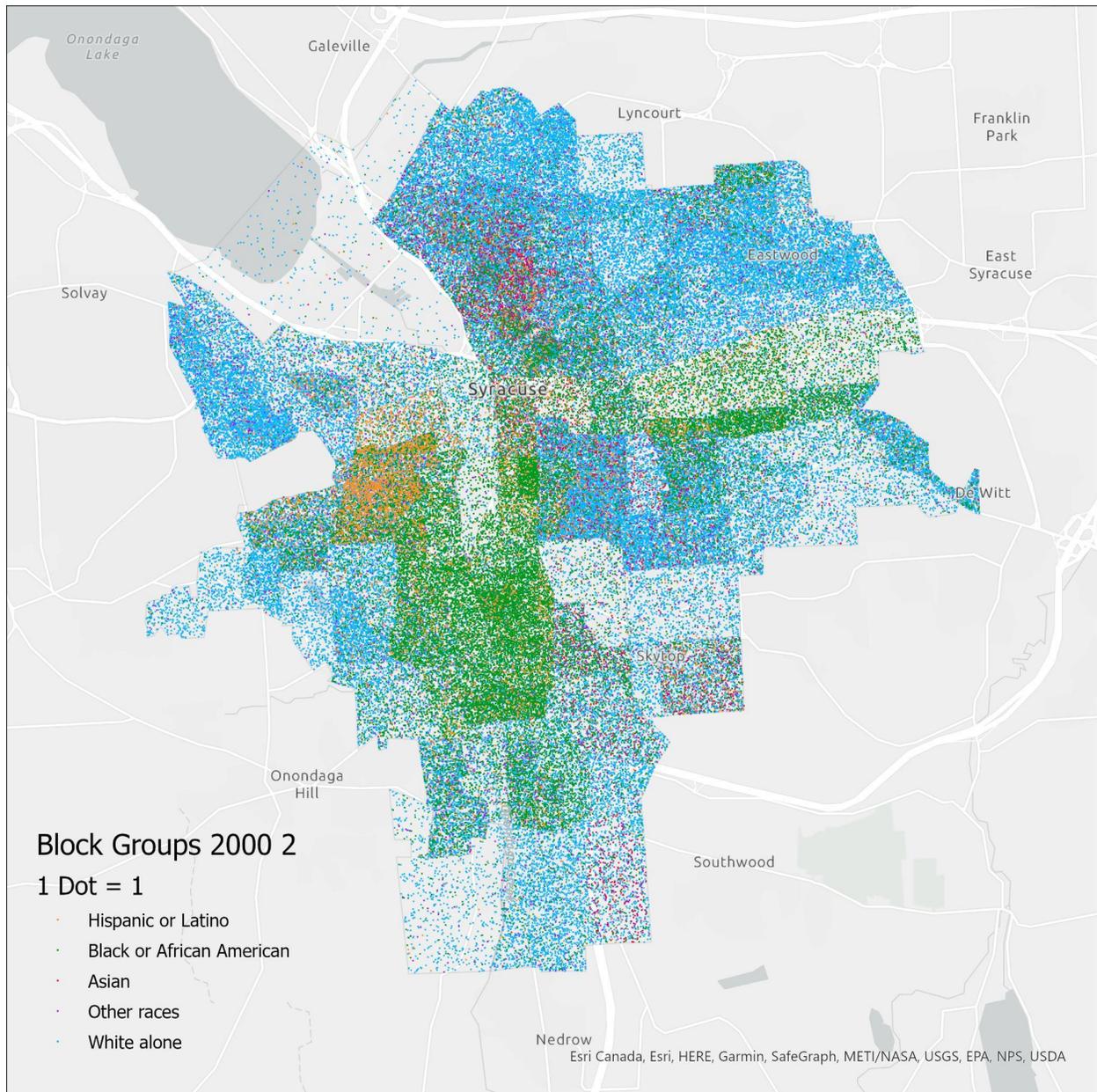
Image #7: Percent White Population, Syracuse & Onondaga County, 1960-2019



Source: 1960 Census, 2010 5-Year ACS Data & 2019 5-Year ACS Data.

**2000**

Map #8: 2000 Racial Dot Map

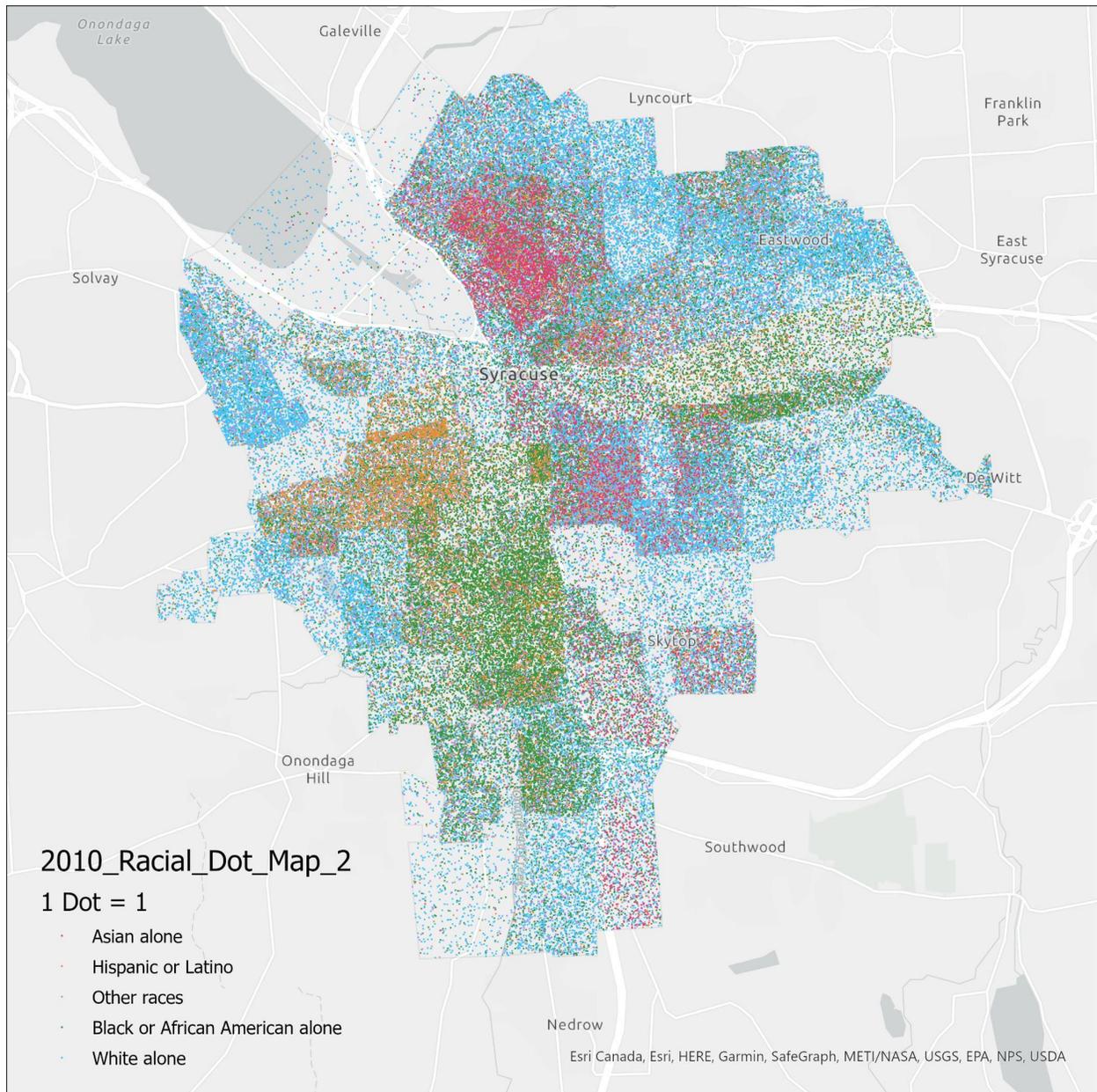


Source: 2000 Census.

As a result, areas that had once been segregated white neighborhoods became segregated Black neighborhoods.

**2010**

Map #9: 2010 Racial Dot Map

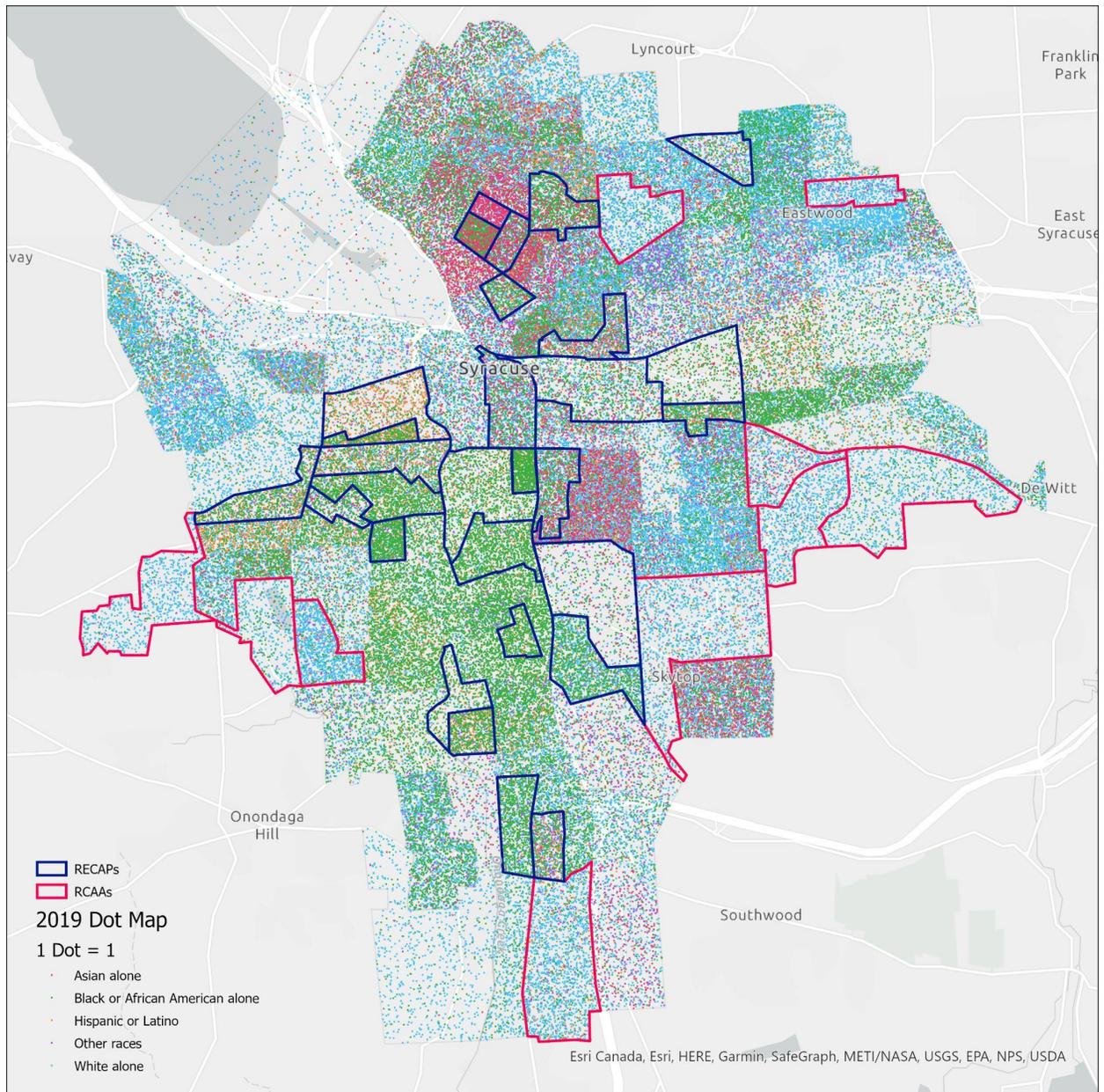


*Source:* 2010 Census.

In the 21st Century, Onondaga County became one of the top refugee resettlement sites in the nation, and new immigrant groups often settled neighborhoods close to the city's center.

2019

Map #10: 2019 Racial Dot Map with RECAPs and RCAAs



Source: 2019 5-Year ACS Data.

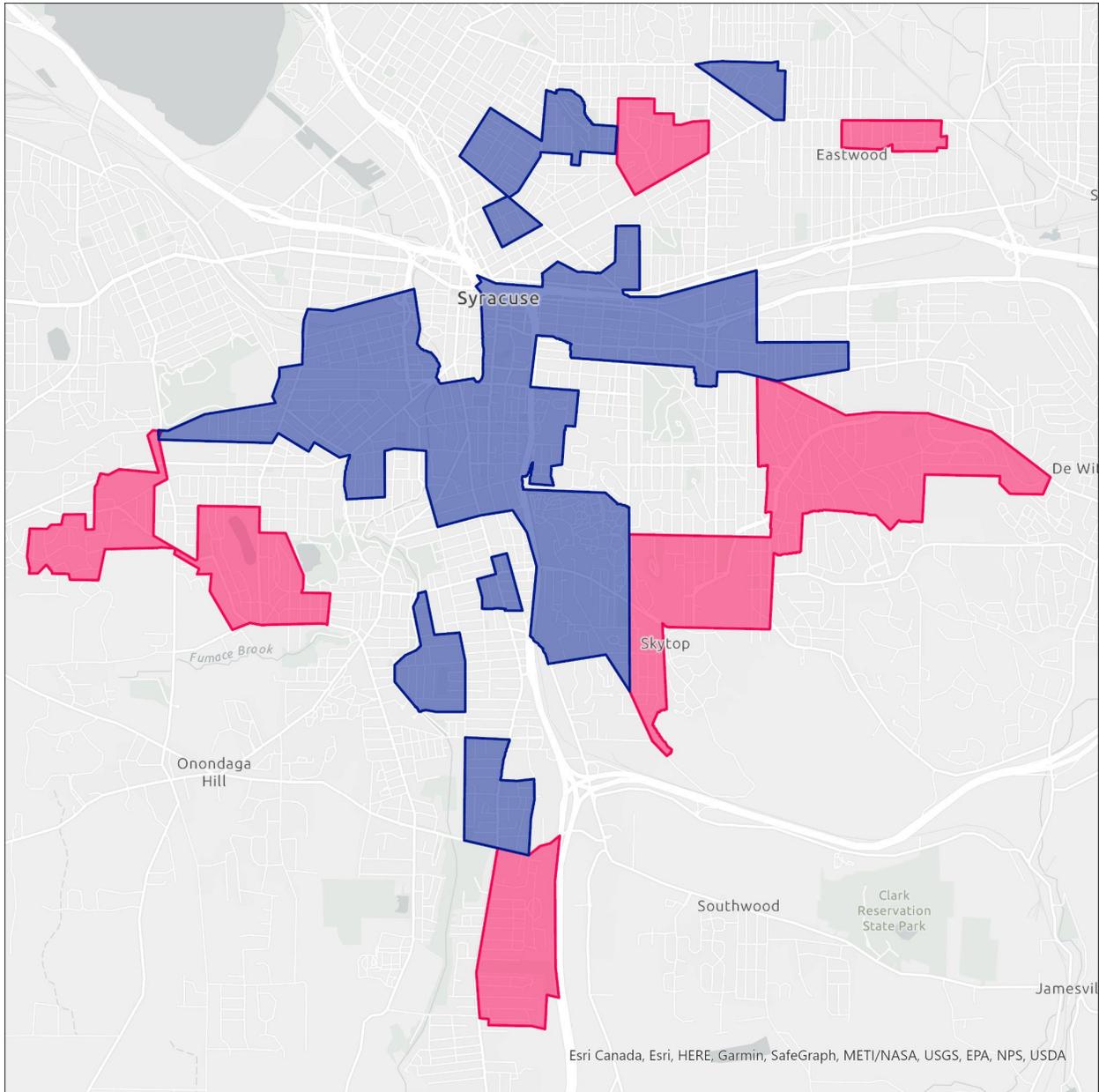
Despite decades of demographic change, Syracuse remains largely segregated by race and economic class.

According to the Census Bureau's 2019 5-year American Community Survey, eleven Syracuse census block groups have median household incomes greater than \$76,552 (double the citywide median). Ten of these block groups have a population of at least 65% white residents (Syracuse's overall population is

50% white). These racially concentrated areas of affluence (RCAs) are outlined in pink on the map and make up 7% of Syracuse's total population.

Another twenty-nine census block groups have poverty rates of more than 40% and populations that are more than half non-white. These racially concentrated areas of poverty (RECAPs) are outlined in blue on the map and make up 21% of Syracuse's total population.

Map #11: Dissolved RECAP & RCA Boundaries

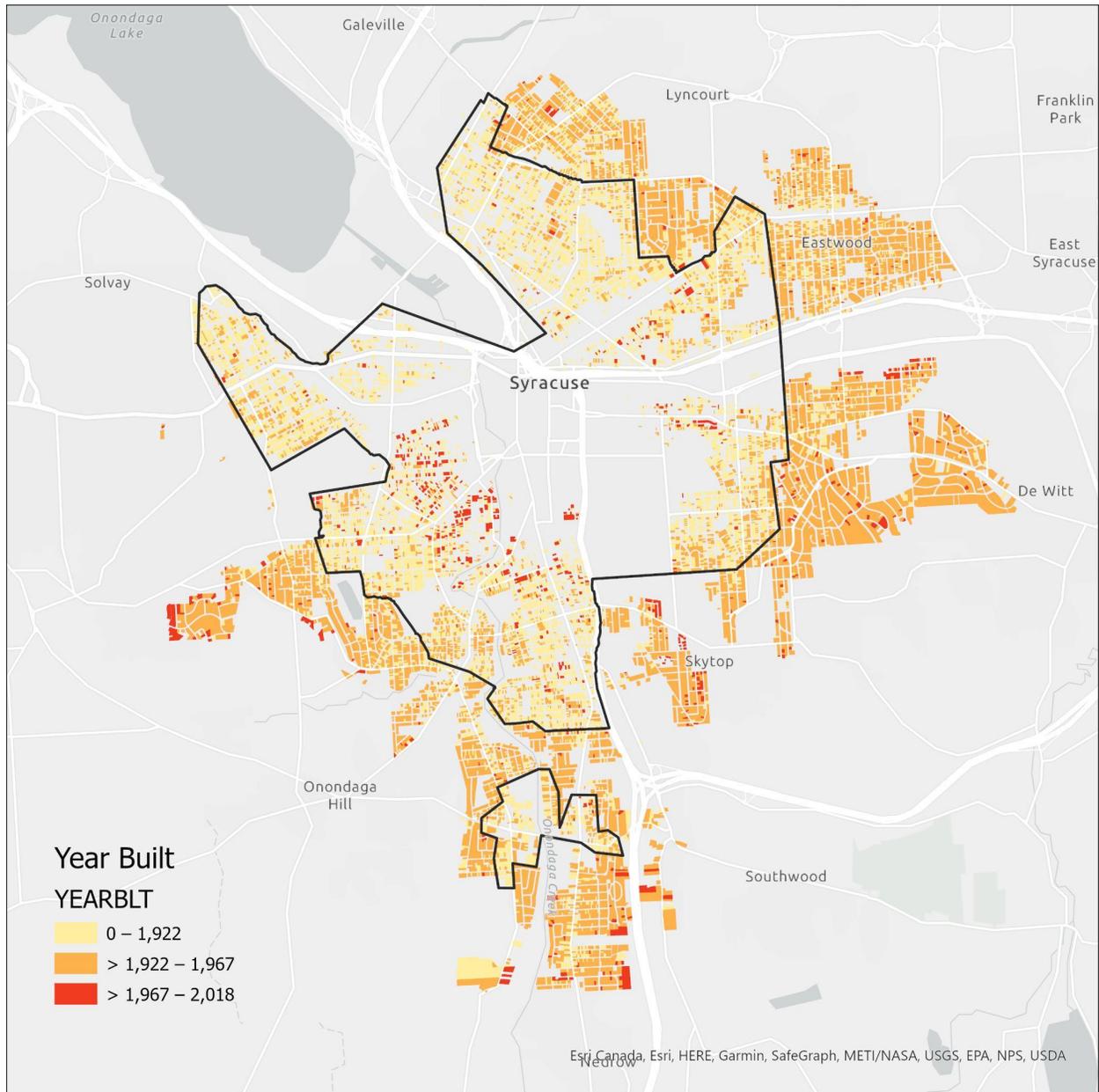


These individual block groups are often clustered together and form large contiguous areas of racially concentrated affluence and poverty. By examining how the zoning code regulates RCAs differently than RECAPs, we can see how zoning contributes to racial and economic segregation in Syracuse.

# ZONING'S IMPACT ON SEGREGATION

The contours of Syracuse's current racial and economic segregation follow the extent of the city's development in 1922. This was the year that Syracuse adopted its first zoning code, a law that has shaped the city's development in ways that contribute to segregation today.

Map #12: Residential Parcels by Year Built with 1922 Development Boundary



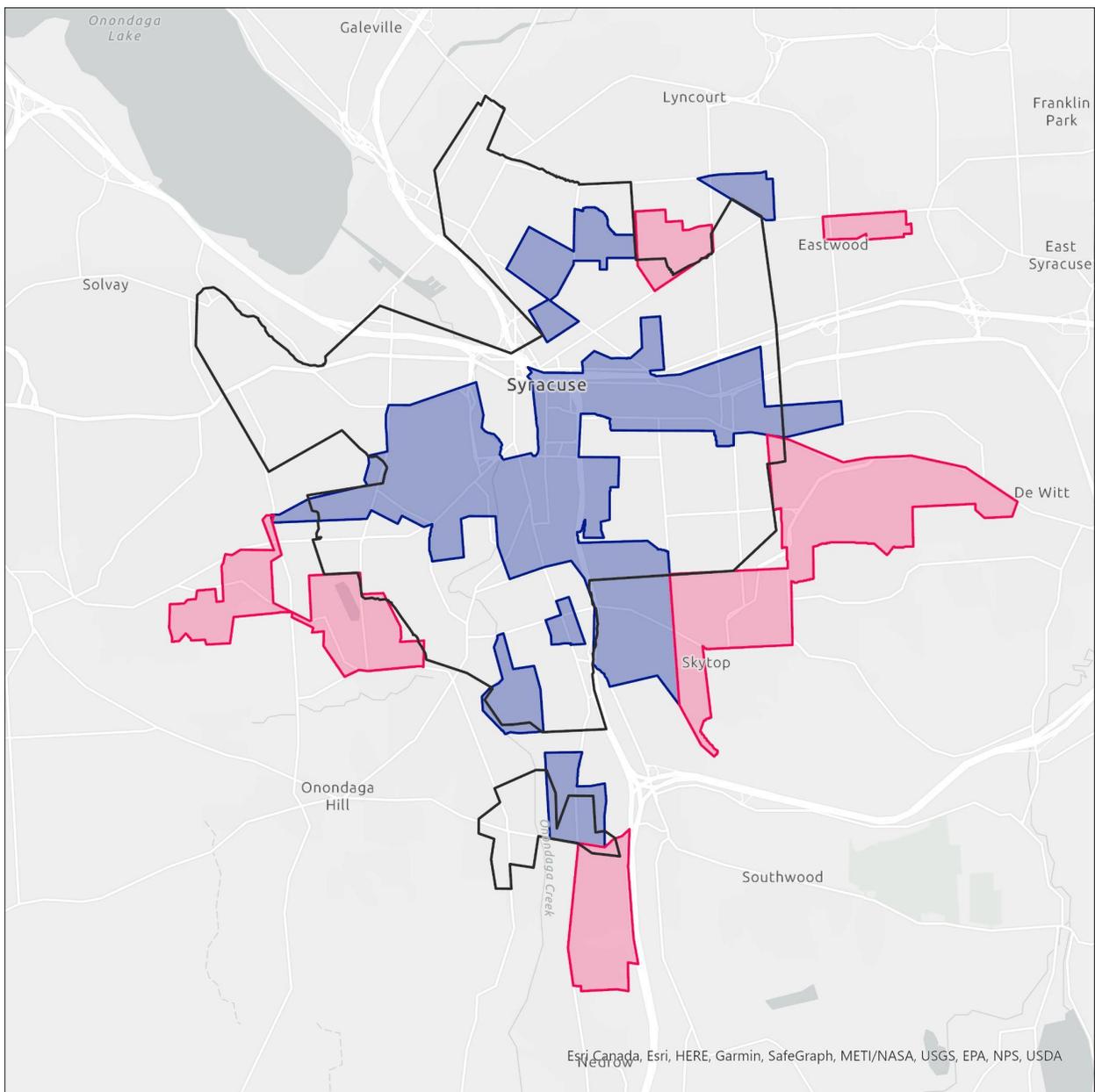
Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

Map #12 shows buildings constructed before 1922 (the year the city passed its first zoning code) in yellow, those built between 1922 and 1967 (the year the current zoning code was passed) in orange, and

those built after 1967 in red (City Hall's parcel file lacks 'year built' data for many buildings in the city's center). The black line shows the approximate extent of Syracuse's development in 1922. Most neighborhoods were predominantly developed either before or after 1922—the year the city passed its first zoning ordinance. There are very few places with an even mix of pre- and post-1922 housing.

In general, buildings constructed before 1922 are closer to the city's center while those constructed after 1922 are at the city's edge. The one notable exception is the area along Seneca Turnpike in the Valley. This used to be the village of Onondaga Hollow, and much of its housing is significantly older than the neighborhoods that surround it.

Map #13: 1922 Development Boundary with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries

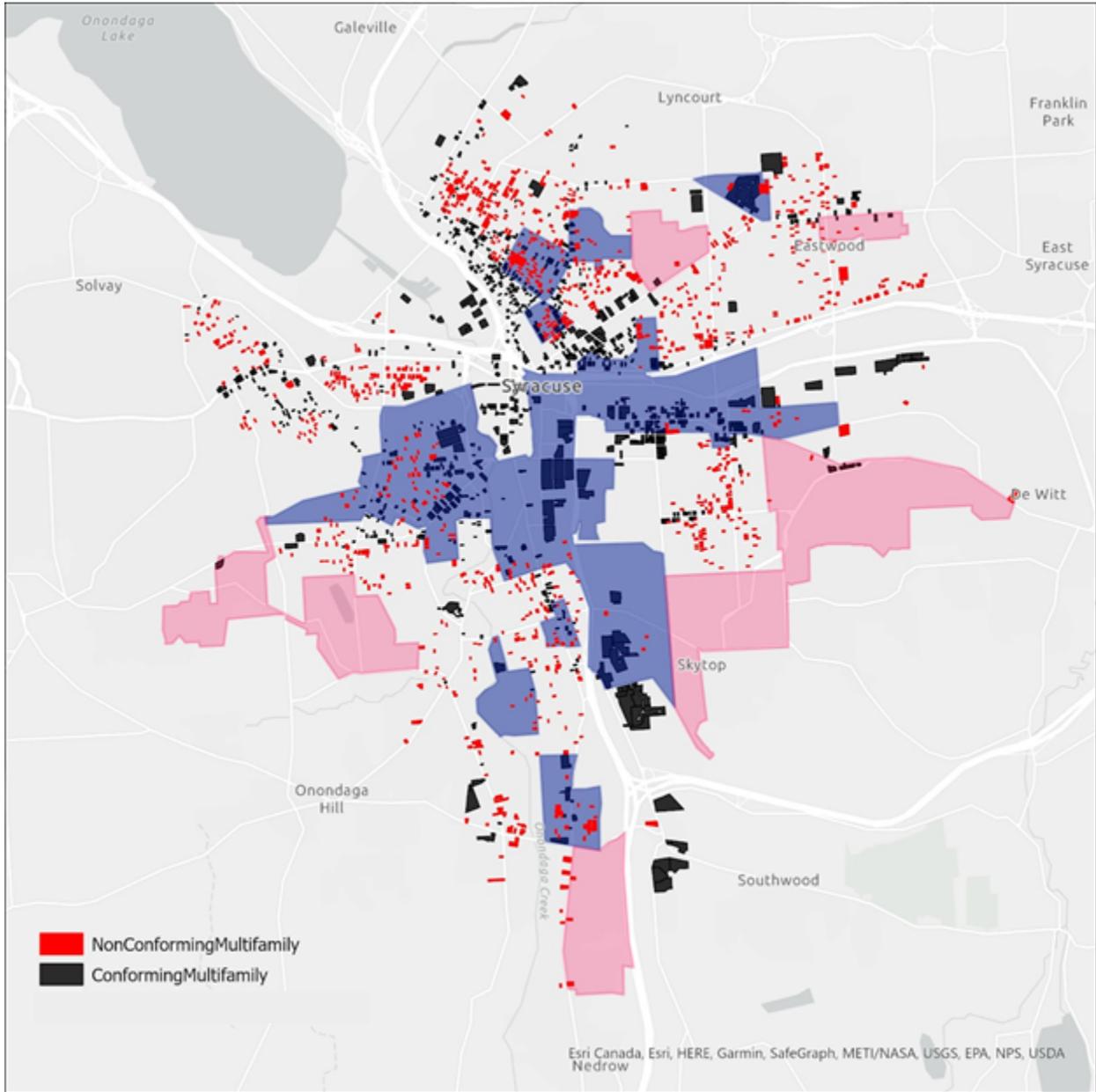


Syracuse's RCAAs were developed almost entirely after the city first began exercising control over the shape and style of new residential development through its zoning code. In contrast, the city neighborhoods that became RECAPs were built out before City Hall put these restrictions in place.

Recent redevelopment has occurred largely within neighborhoods that were originally developed before the city's first zoning laws, where new construction has replaced aging housing.

Not every neighborhood built before 1922 is a RECAP and not every neighborhood built after 1922 is an RCAA, but every RCAA was developed after the city passed its first zoning ordinance and most RECAPs were built before zoning restricted the size, shape, and type of new housing.

Map #14: Multi-family Buildings with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries



Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

Multi-family homes (defined in the zoning code as a building "designed for or occupied by three (3) or more families as a residence") make up 40% of Syracuse's housing stock and are an important part of almost every neighborhood's character.

These types of housing tend to be more financially accessible to low-income households. This is in part because each unit can be built at less cost than a detached single-family house, and it is also in part because multi-family housing more often tends to be rented and is more affordable to people with little or no wealth. Households with incomes below the citywide median are more than four times as likely to rent as to own their housing. Non-white households are also more than four times as likely to rent as to own

their housing. In a city like Syracuse where income and wealth are highly correlated with race, multi-family housing can be a powerful tool to desegregate residential neighborhoods.

However, newer neighborhoods, primarily RCAs, contain very little multi-family housing compared to the city as a whole. This is a direct result of the 1922 zoning code which only allowed the construction of single and two-family dwellings in what it called "Class A Residential Districts."

Older neighborhoods built before the adoption of the first zoning code are more likely to have a greater variety of housing types, including multi-family housing. Of multi-family units with "Year Built" information included in the city's parcel data, **78% were built pre-zoning.**

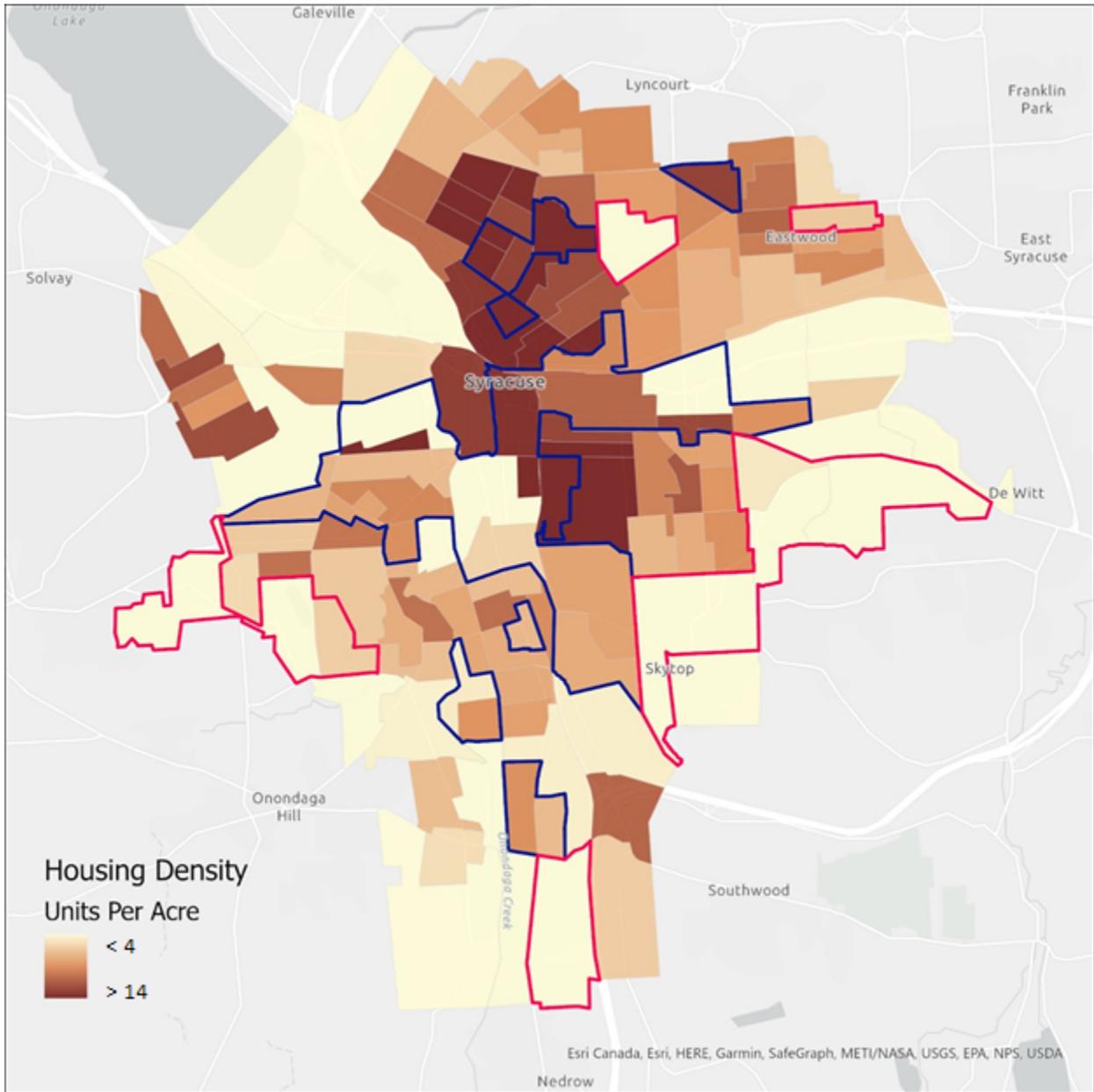
While the City's first zoning ordinance placed significant restrictions on multi-family housing, the current municipal zoning ordinance is even more restrictive than the 1922 ordinance, and it bans these traditional types of housing in many of the neighborhoods where they already exist. Multi-family buildings highlighted in red could not be built under the current zoning ordinance. The zoning code labels them as "nonconforming uses" and it puts restrictions on their occupancy and upkeep.

Additionally, the current zoning code labels thousands of two-family homes as non-conforming, despite their legalization across all residential districts in the 1922 zoning code.

Taken together, these "non-conforming" buildings account for **9,902 homes** in the city. That's **15%** of Syracuse's total housing stock that could not legally be reconstructed today.

The current zoning code labels much of the existing multi-family housing in Syracuse's RCAs as illegal nonconformities.

Map #15: Housing Density with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries

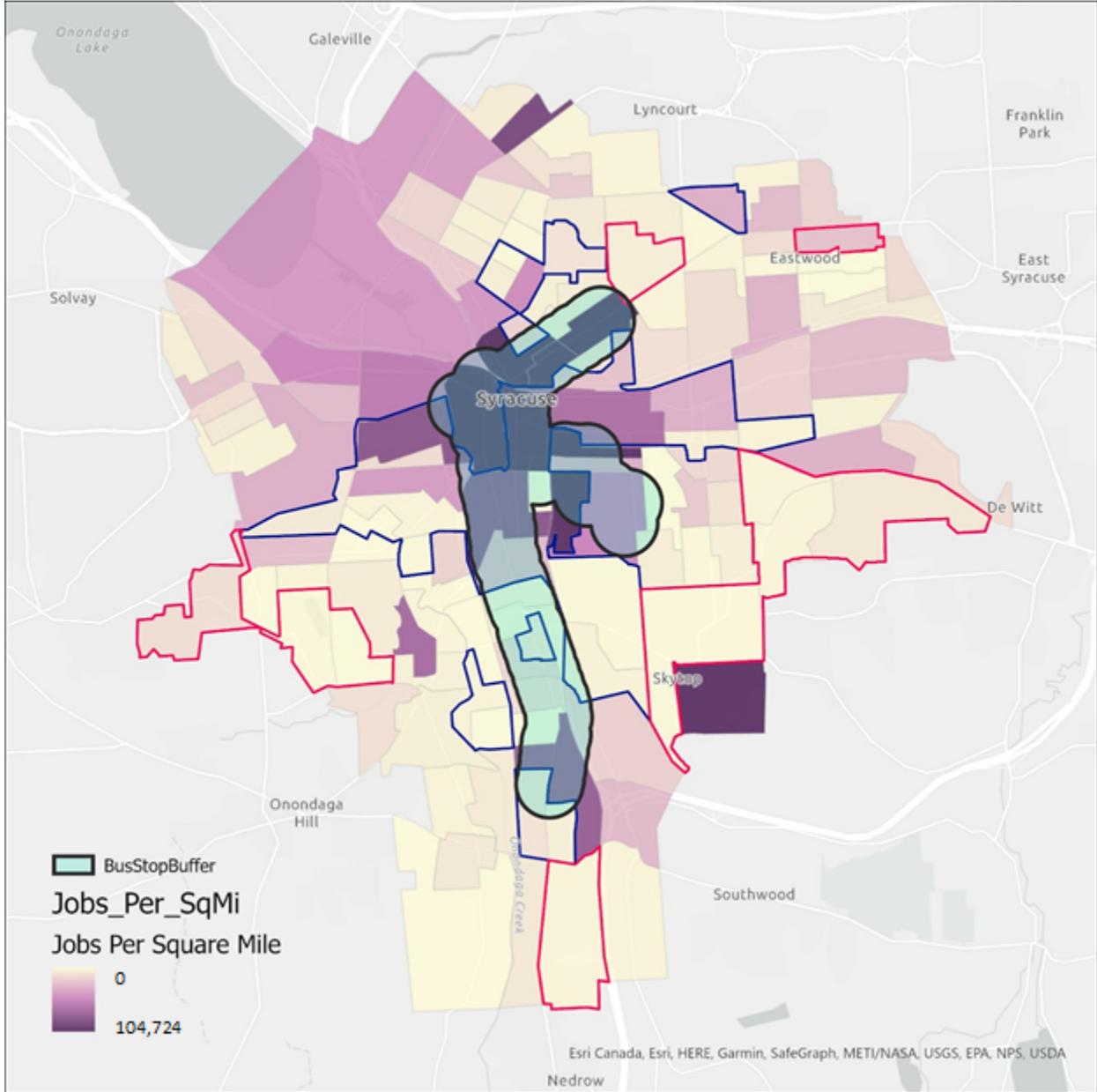


Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

The zoning code also influences the size and shape of housing in a neighborhood. Map #16 shows the number of homes per acre in each census block group.

Newer neighborhoods constructed after 1922 were built much more sparsely in part because the zoning code requires new construction to use large parcels with lots of space between buildings. This drives up the cost of housing and makes it less affordable while also limiting the number of people who can live in these neighborhoods.

Map #16: Job Density with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries and Quality Transit Service



Source: Census OnTheMap, 2018.

Notes: Bus stop buffer is within .25 miles of a regularly serviced bus stop.

The spatial distribution of jobs throughout Syracuse also follows patterns of zoning and residential segregation. Map #16 shows the number of jobs per acre in each census block group.

RCAAs, all of which were developed after the city adopted its first zoning ordinance, are more likely to be job deserts than are pre-zoning neighborhoods. They are zoned almost exclusively for residential use, so anyone living in them needs to leave the neighborhood to find work or to run simple errands.

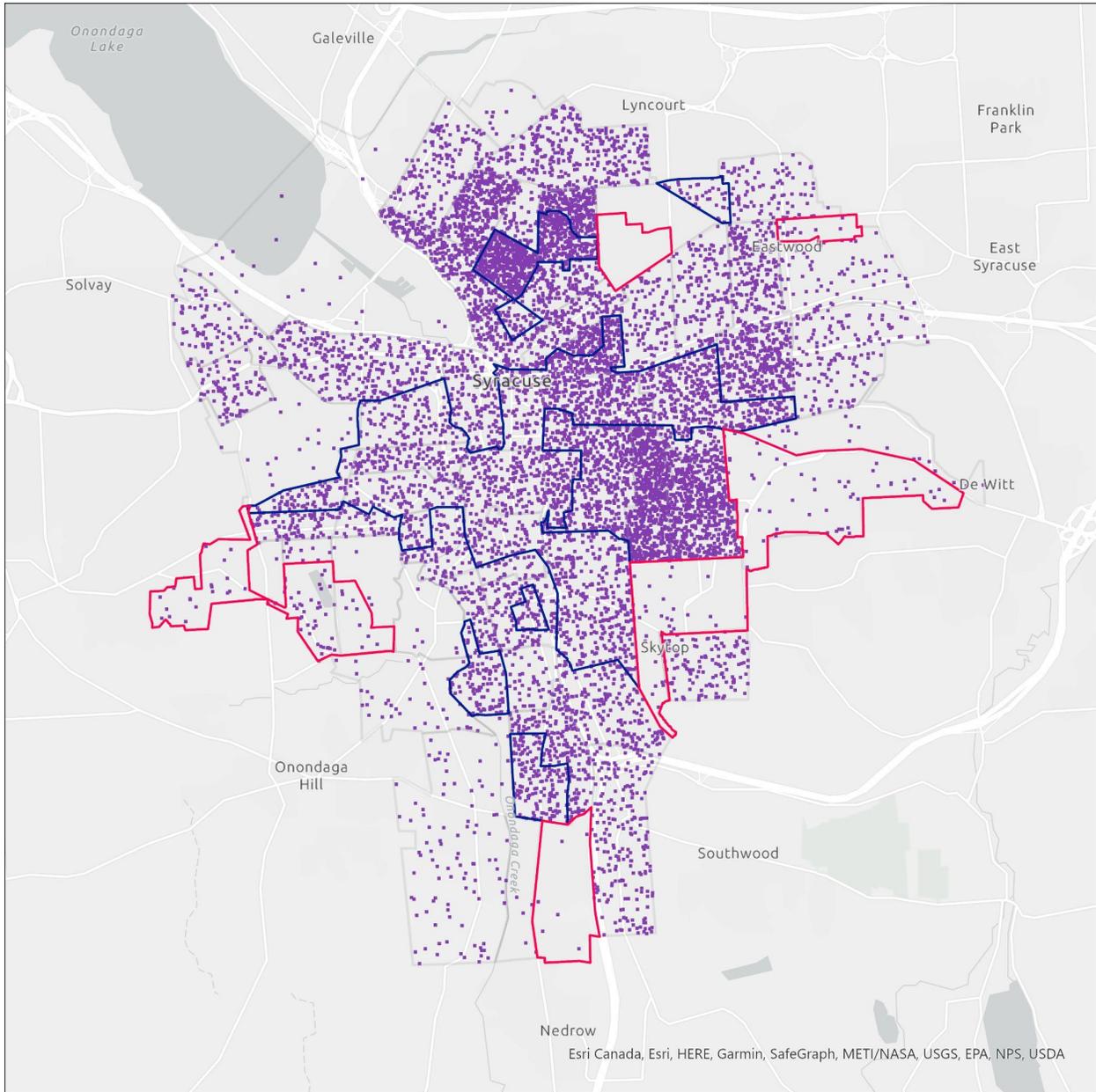
Disinvestment deprives some RECAPs of commercial activity, so they are also less likely to have jobs than other city neighborhoods where the zoning code allows commercial development.

Transit service helps to overcome this spatial mismatch in certain parts of the city. But because transit is partially determined by development patterns, zoning blunts its effectiveness at fighting segregation.

The black outline on Map #16 shows areas where the bus runs at least once every 30 minutes on average on weekdays. Frequent transit connects many RECAPs to centers of employment, but it does not provide access to RCAAs because their sparse housing cannot provide the residential density necessary to justify quality transit service.

The lack of both jobs and transit service in RCAAs combine to make life impractical in these spaces for families that do not own a car. In Syracuse—a city where Black families are more than twice as likely as white families not to own a car—this dynamic contributes to racial residential segregation.

### Map #17: Geographic Mobility of Residents Under Poverty Level with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries



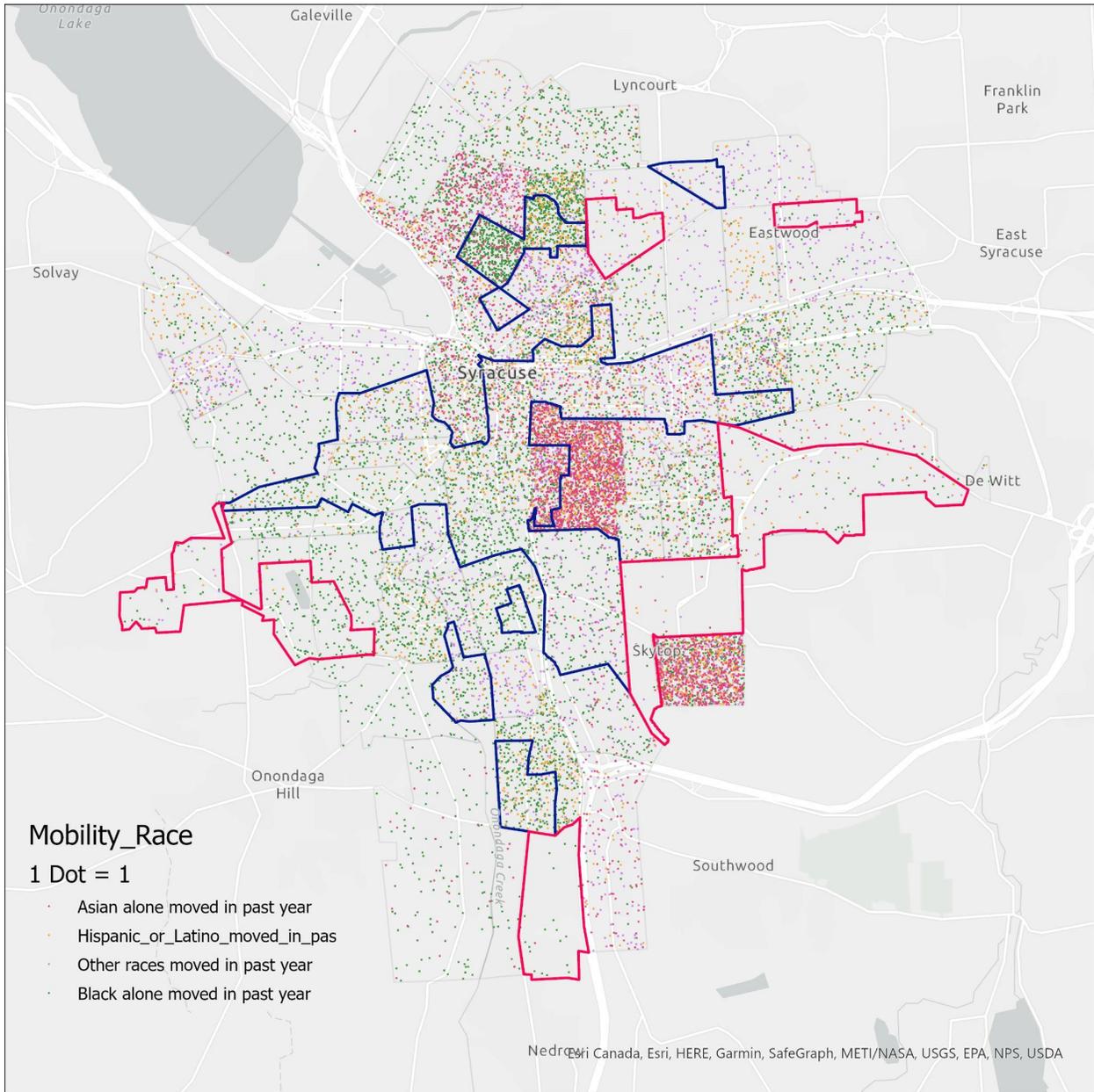
Source: 2019 5-Year ACS Data.

Notes: 1 purple dot = 1 person under poverty level. Pink boundary = RCAA. Blue boundary = RECAP.

All of these policies contribute to racial and economic segregation by decreasing residential mobility between RECAPs and RCAAs. In particular, low-income and non-white households are practically unable to move into wealthier, whiter neighborhoods.

Map #17 shows every person experiencing poverty who moved into a new home in Syracuse within the past year. Almost no people living below the poverty level were able to move into an RCAA.

Map #18: Geographic Mobility of Non-White Residents with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries



Source: 2019 5-Year ACS Data.

Notes: Pink boundary = RCAA. Blue boundary = RECAP.

Map #18 shows every non-white person who moved into a new home in Syracuse within the past year. Very few non-white households were able to move into an RCAA.

## REZONE

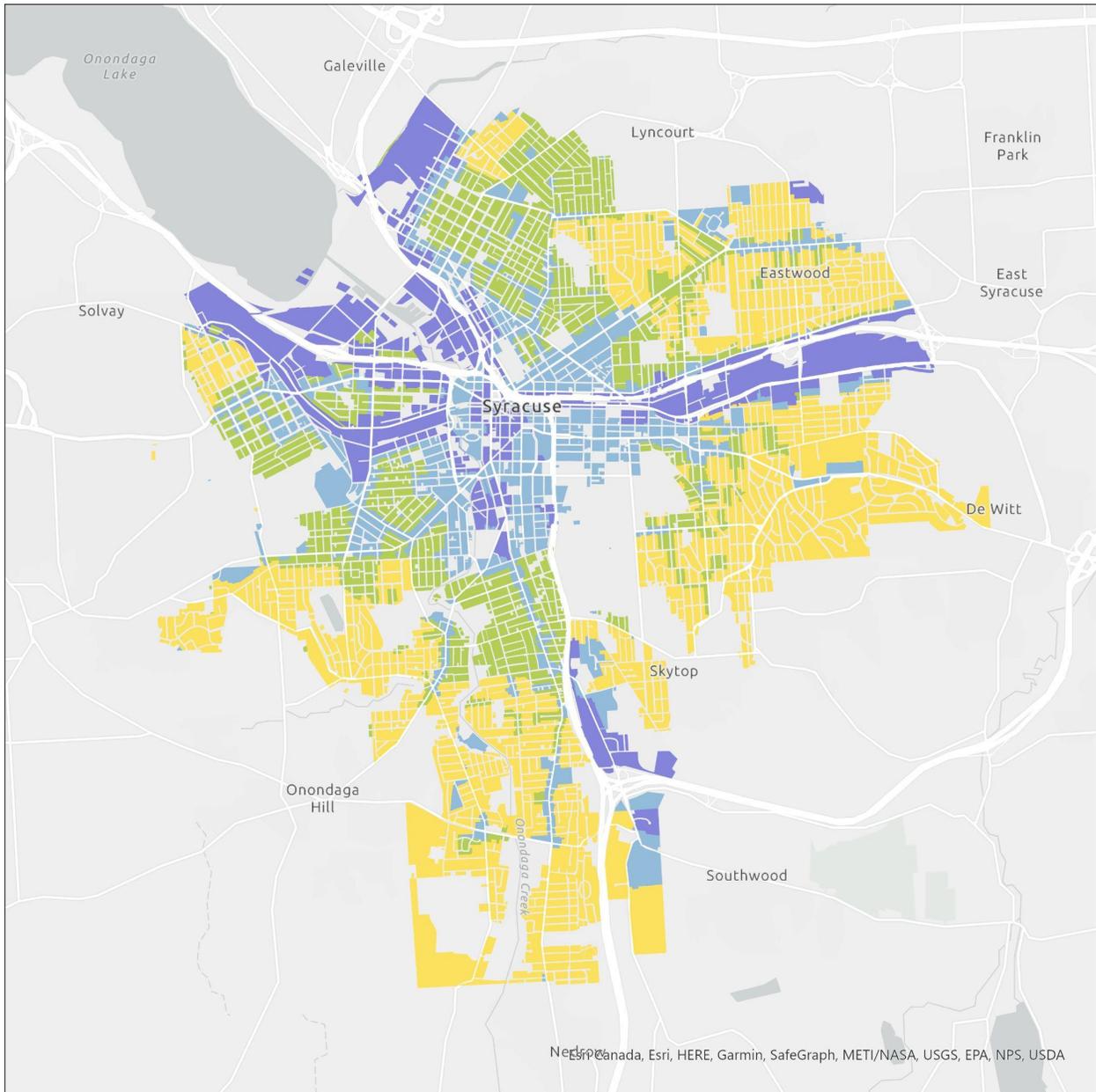
City Hall is currently drafting a comprehensive revision of the municipal zoning code. This project—called ReZone—presents a critical opportunity to reduce residential segregation and promote

integration throughout the city. You can read ReZone's most recent public draft and district regulations [here](#) and see the most current draft map [here](#).

ReZone makes many important changes to the current zoning code, such as the simplification and consolidation of zoning districts, streamlining the zoning review process, and creating a reasonable accommodation procedure for people with disabilities.

However, if enacted as written, ReZone's most recent draft would do very little to remove the barriers to housing choice that currently contribute to residential segregation in Syracuse.

Map #19: Current Zoned Density



We can compare the current zoning code to the ReZone proposal by sorting each ordinance's zoning districts into four different categories according to the amount of housing they would permit.

**Yellow:** 1-family homes

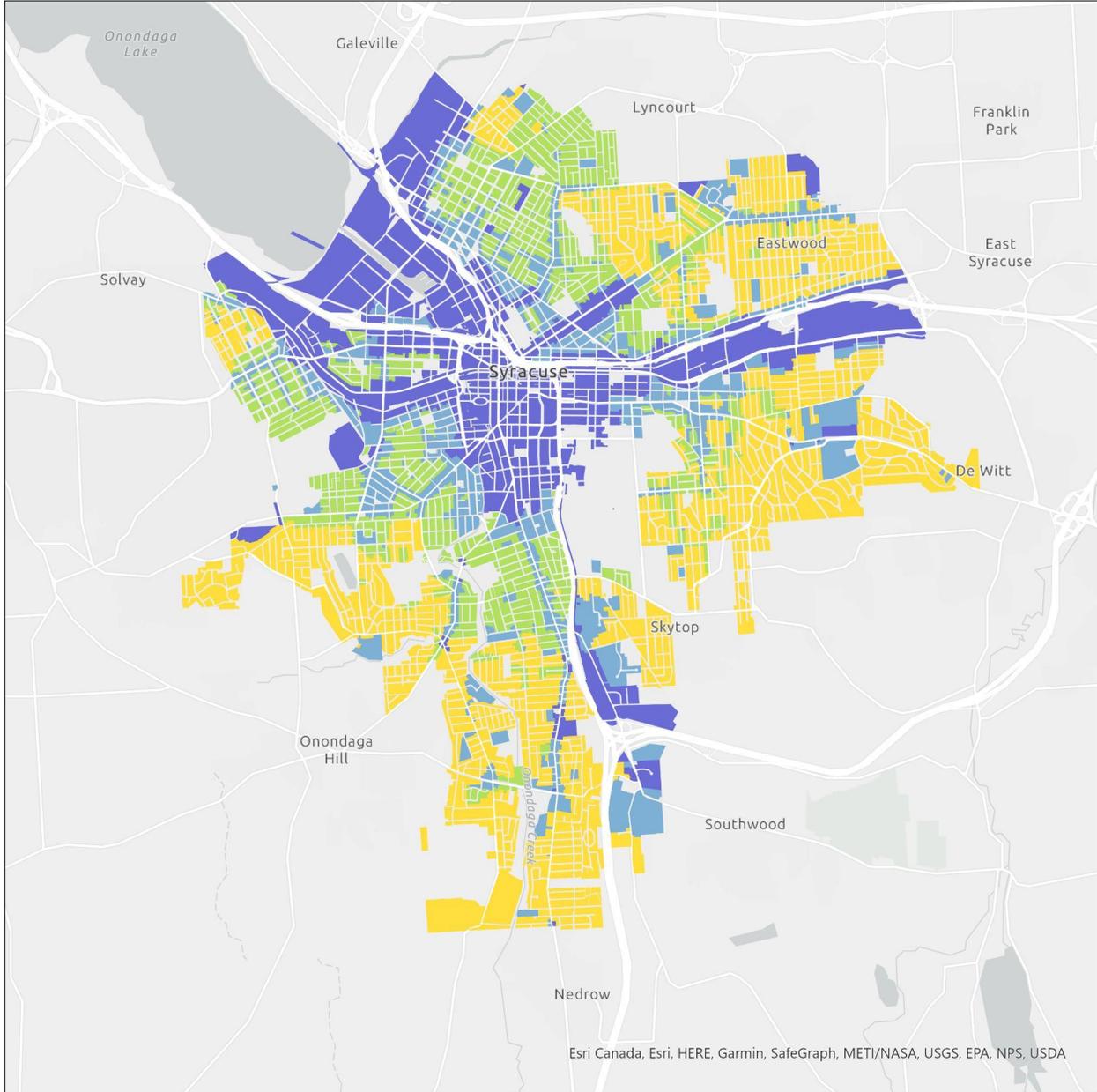
**Green:** 1-family homes and 2-family homes

**Light blue:** 1-family homes, 2-family homes, and small multi-family homes

**Dark blue:** 1-family homes, 2-family homes, small multi-family homes, and large multi-family homes

Map #19 shows the current zoning map sorted into these four categories. Non-residential parcels or parcels in planned institutional districts, such as Syracuse University, are not shown.

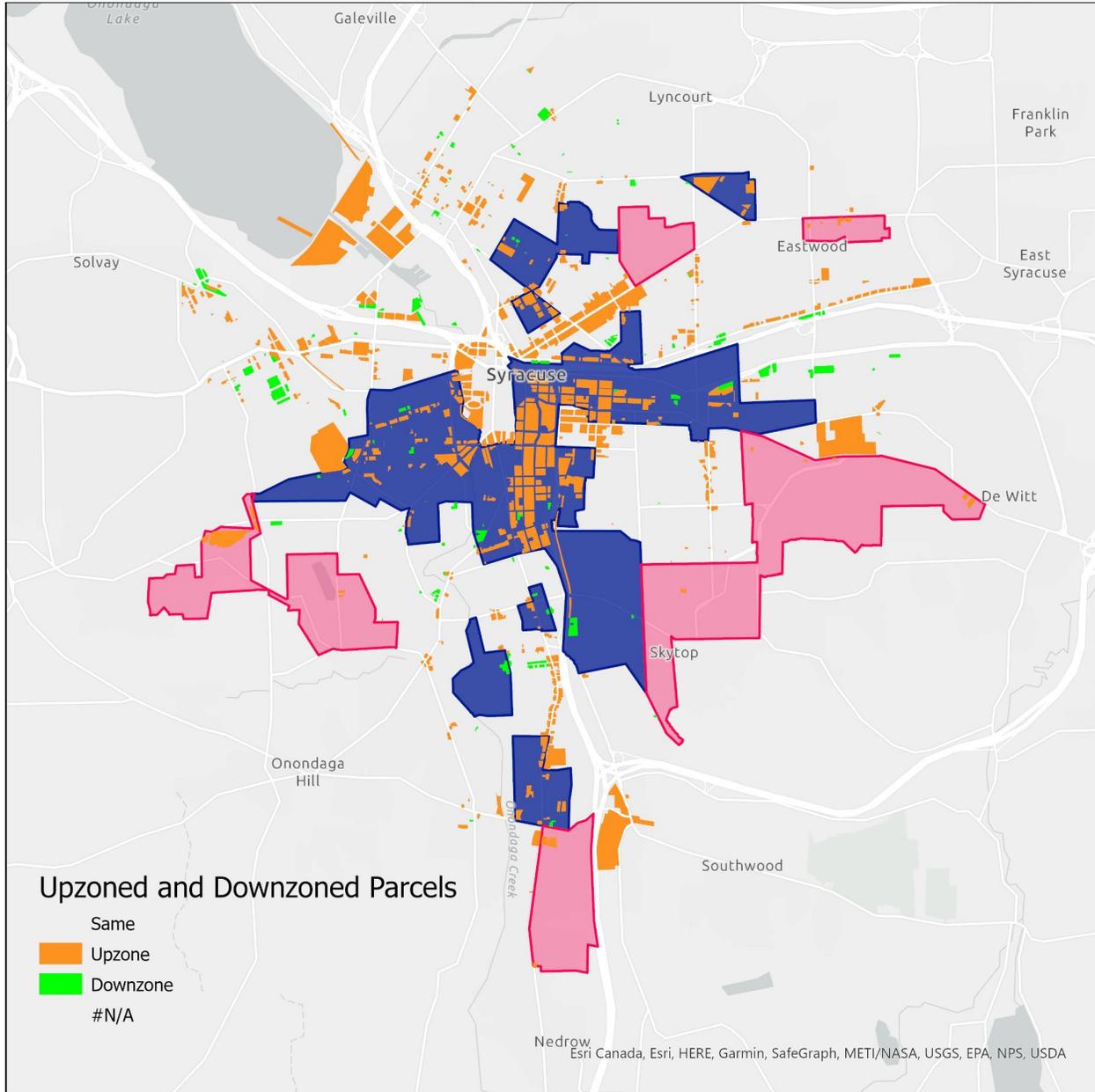
## Map #20: Zoned Density under ReZone



*Notes:* Zoned for 1-family homes = yellow. Zoned for 1-family homes and 2-family homes = green. Zoned for 1-family homes, 2-family homes, and small multi-family homes = light blue. Zoned for 1-family homes, 2-family homes, small multi-family homes, and large multi-family homes = dark blue.

Map #20 shows the most recent ReZone proposal sorted in the same way. Note the shift to higher density (darker blue) in the City center from the current zoning code to Rezone's most recent draft.

## Map #21: Upzoned & Downzoned Parcels with RECAP & RCAA Boundaries

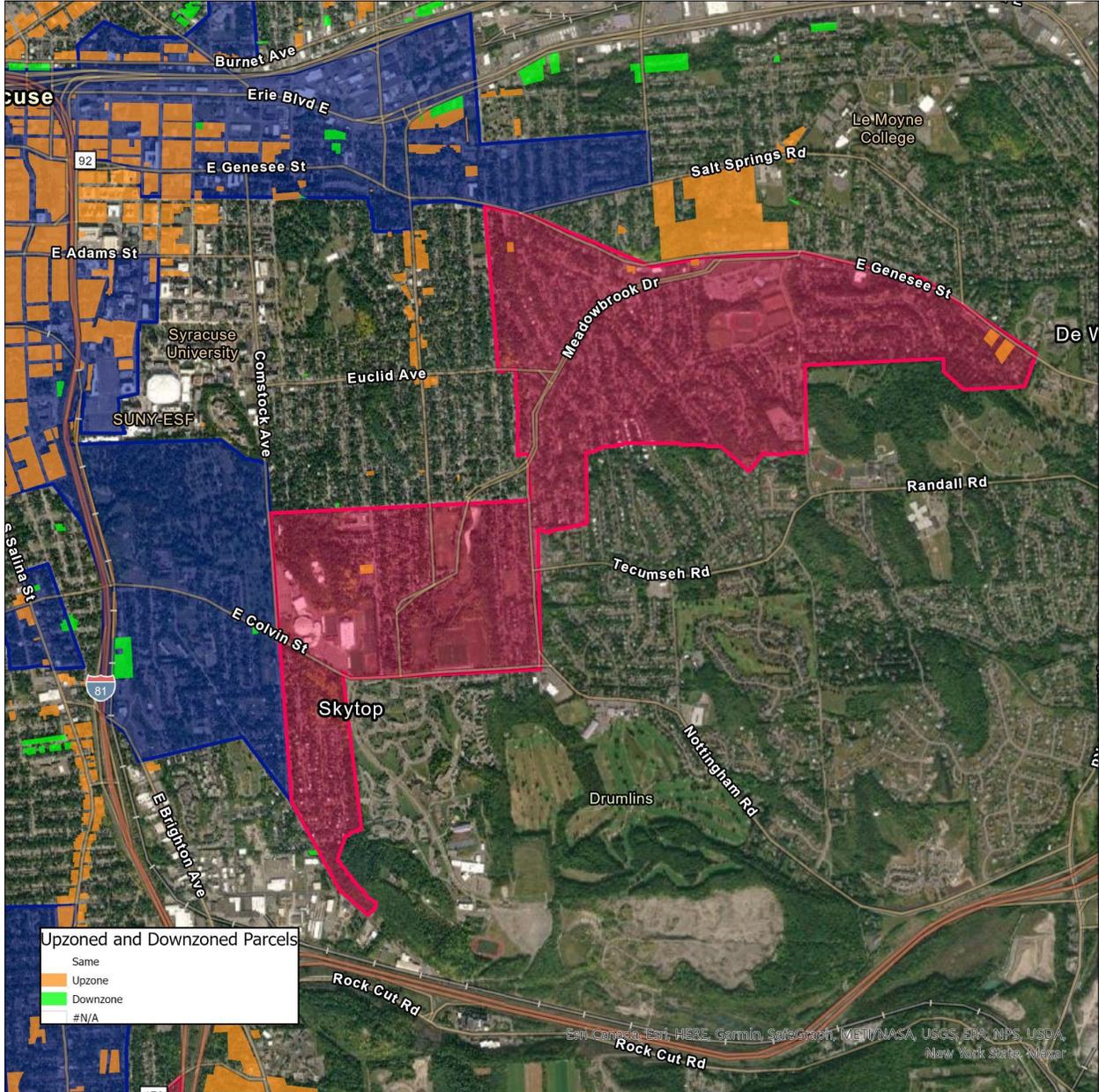


Map #21 shows the changes between the current zoning map and the most recent ReZone proposal. Parcels colored orange would allow more housing under ReZone. Parcels colored green would allow less housing.

Although ReZone improves on the current zoning code in certain areas, it is unlikely to change the conditions that have contributed to racial and economic segregation in Syracuse. In certain cases, ReZone has the potential to exacerbate the negative effects of the city's residential segregation.

We will now explore what these changes, or lack thereof, mean for different Syracuse neighborhoods and for the city as a whole.

Map #22: ReZone Tour, Eastside RCAAs

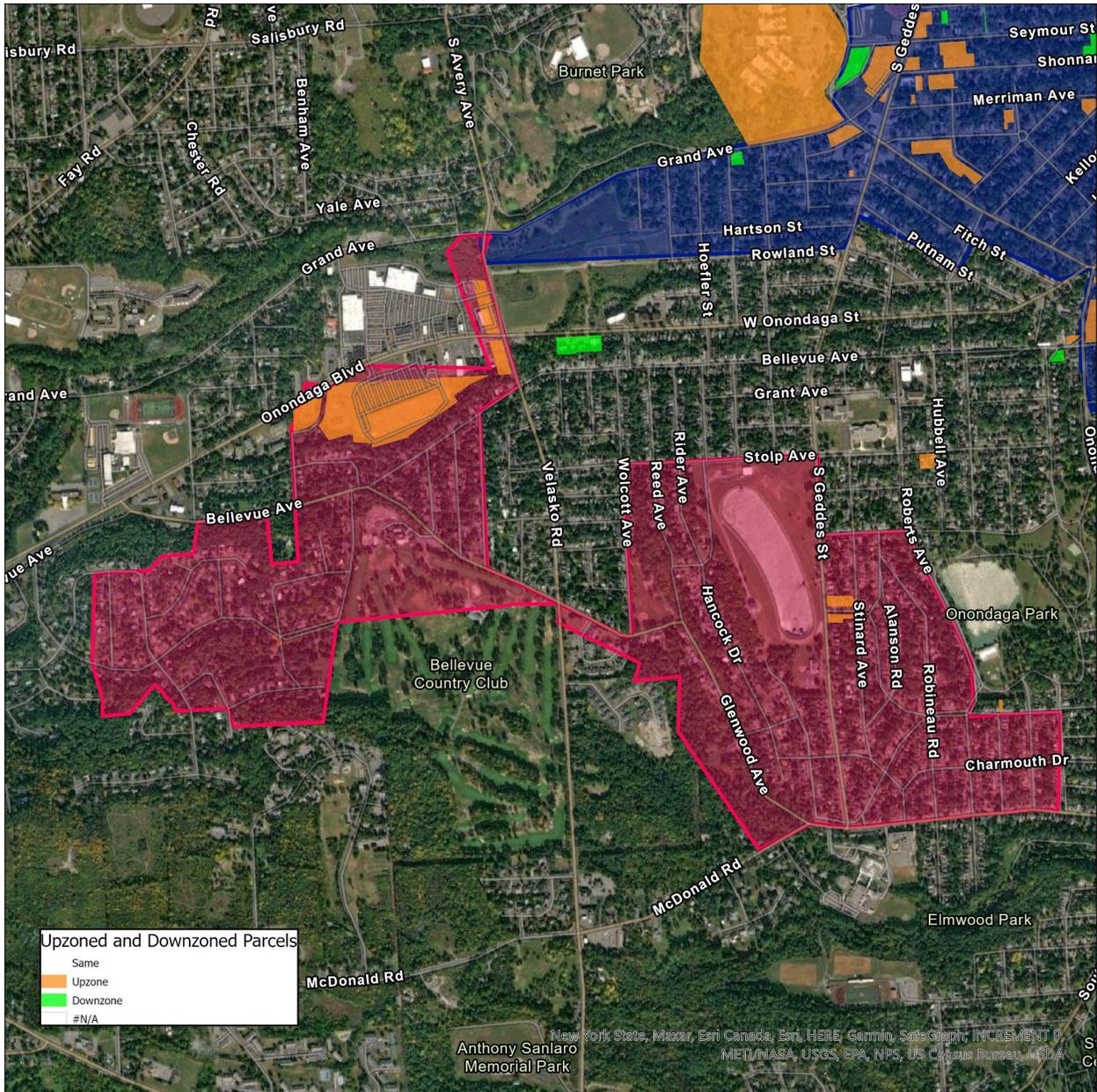


In the Eastside census block groups that qualify as RCAAs, ReZone would do very little to change the overall system of zoning that has contributed to this area's lack of racial and economic diversity.

ReZone would leave a huge area of restrictive zoning intact. The city's Land Use & Development Plan (the document that guides ReZone) justifies this stasis as a way of maintaining these areas' "character." The Land Use & Development Plan claims—erroneously—that these areas were always restricted to 1-family houses, and it ties their character explicitly to the fact that they were built after the city adopted its first zoning code:

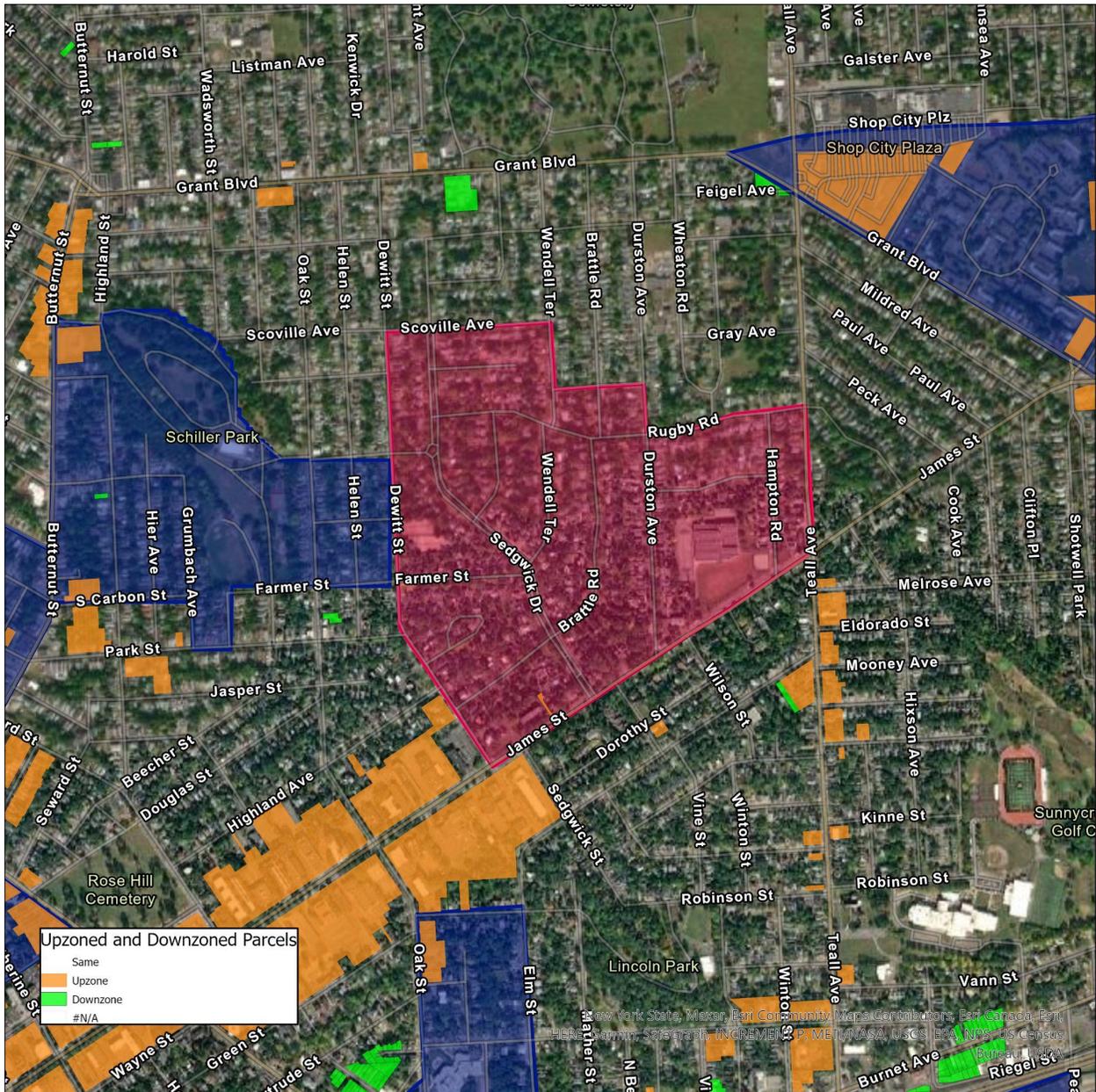
"These areas developed just after the advent of zoning and were designed as some of the first entirely residential, single-use enclaves."

Map #23: ReZone Tour, Westside RCAAs



ReZone treats the RCAAs on the city's Westside similarly. It would allow new multi-family housing to be built in Onondaga Plaza (should the property's owner ever choose to redevelop it in that way), but it would make no significant changes in the restrictively zoned residential neighborhoods adjacent to the Bellevue Country Club and Upper Onondaga Park.

Map #24: ReZone Tour, James Street



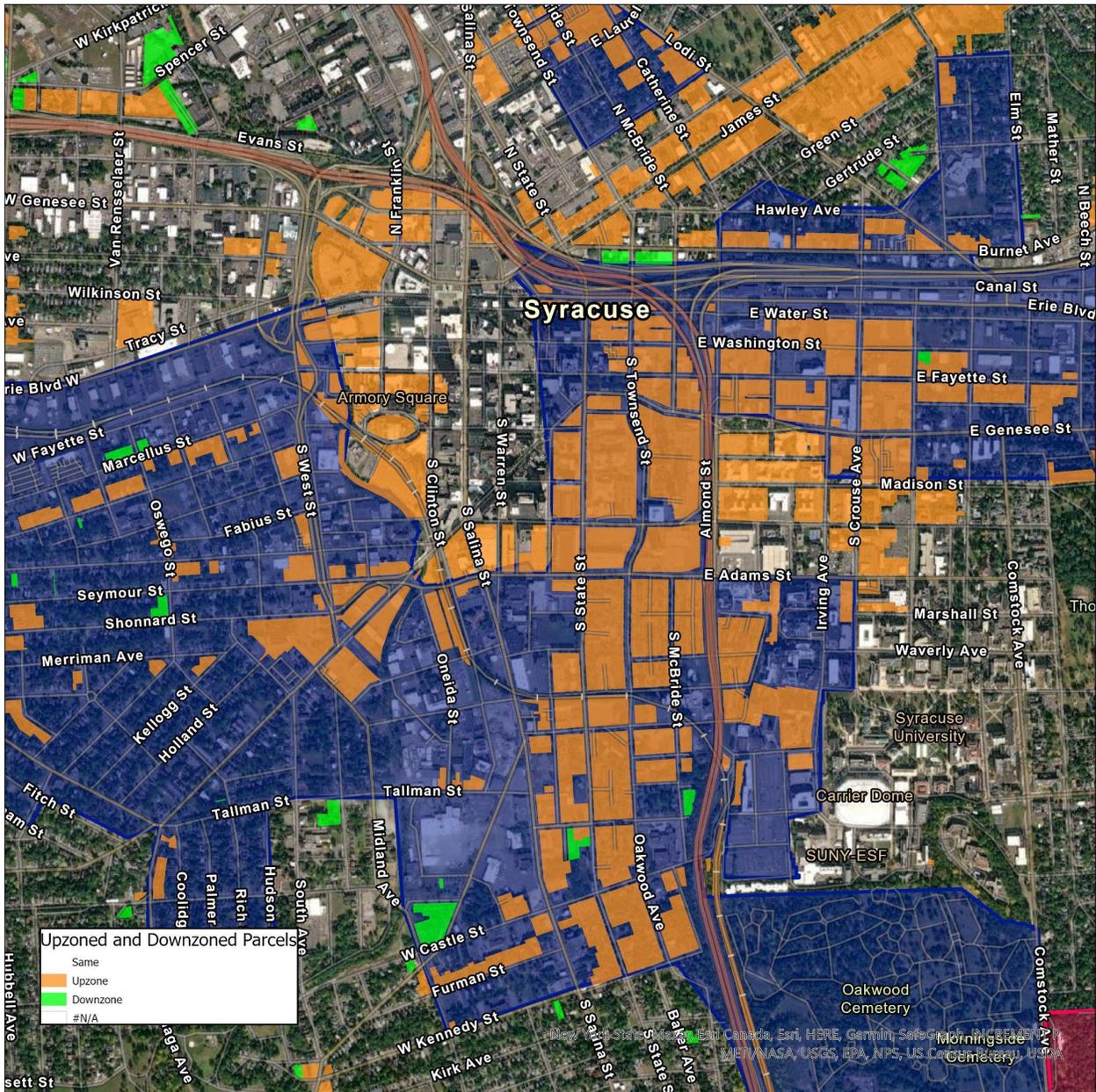
ReZone maintains this stasis even in RCAs where the Land Use & Development Plan's stated principles call for more residential density.

The Plan aims to "enable and encourage higher-density development and mixed-uses along major transportation corridors" by "focusing growth and denser development along these corridors [to] encourage more residential units to locate within walking distance of mass-transit, enabling more efficient provision of transit service."

James Street is one of Syracuse's primary transit corridors, and ReZone does allow more residential density along it between State and Sedgwick Streets. But ReZone makes no changes along this corridor

after James Street passes through an RCAA. North of Dewitt Street, the Land Use & Development plan abandons the principles of sustainability and smart growth and instead concerns itself with neighborhood character.

Map #25: ReZone Tour, Downtown RECAPs



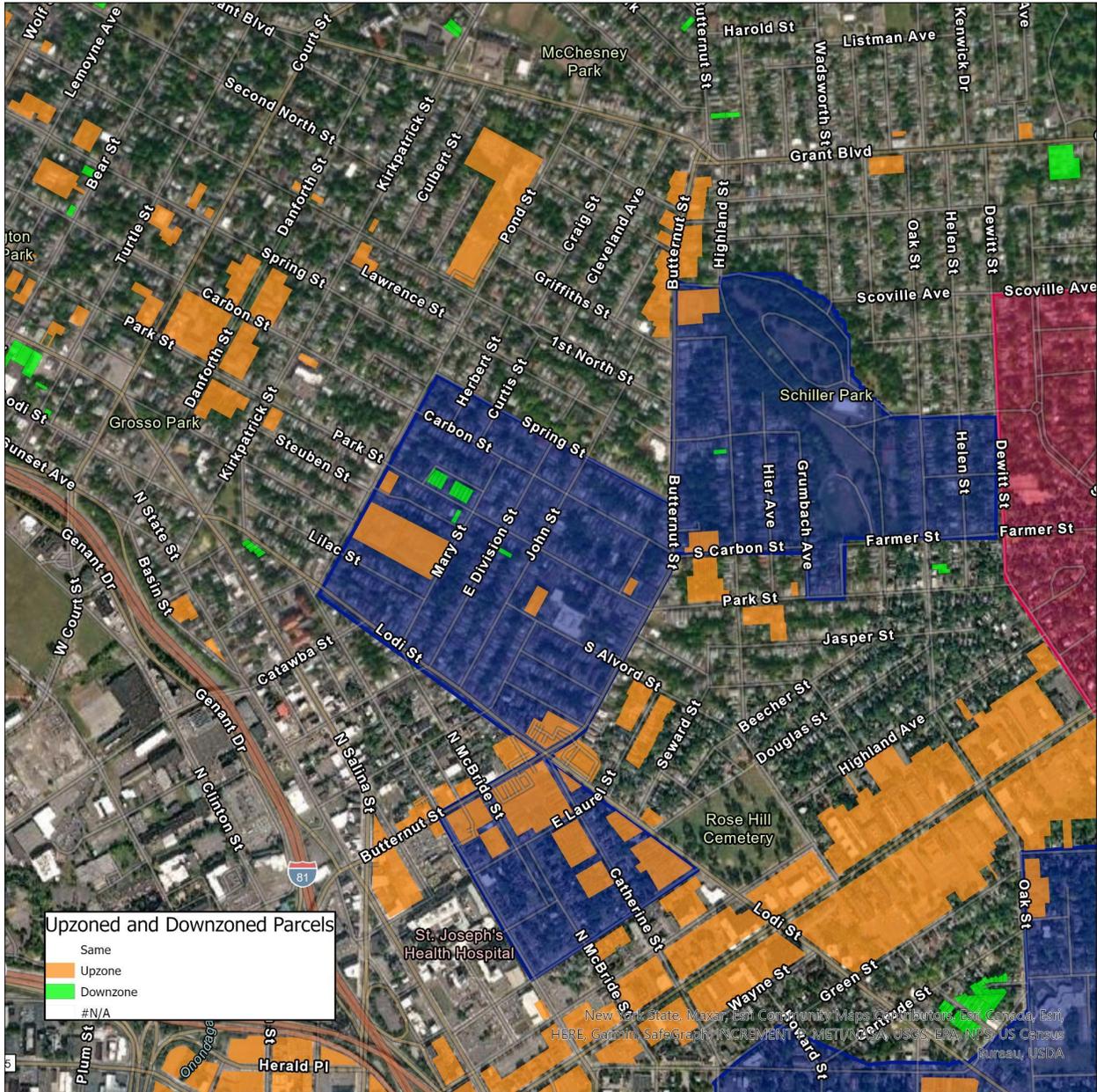
Contrast that stasis with the major revisions ReZone will make in the RECAPs around Downtown. These block groups include two major public housing developments—Central Village and Pioneer Homes—that the Syracuse Housing Authority intends to redevelop in the near future. They also used to contain a third public housing development—Kennedy Square—that New York State demolished in 2013. ReZone will significantly increase the amount of housing that can be built in these areas.

The Land Use & Development Plan justifies this zoning change as a way to "smooth the transitions between Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods" so that these neighborhoods may "benefit from their proximity to downtown and entice private property owners to revitalize these areas, which provide affordable residential options within walking distance of the downtown core."

While it is good to improve neighborhood services in areas that have suffered from disinvestment, any new investment must benefit existing residents, so the focus on private investment in an area where much of the housing is publicly owned is cause for concern.

By continuing to place strict limits on multi-family and mixed-used development in RCAAs while simultaneously re-zoning historically disinvested neighborhoods of color for high-density residential and commercial development with the express intent of inducing private investment, the proposed ReZone plan threatens to concentrate new development in RECAPs where it could displace low-income residents of color.

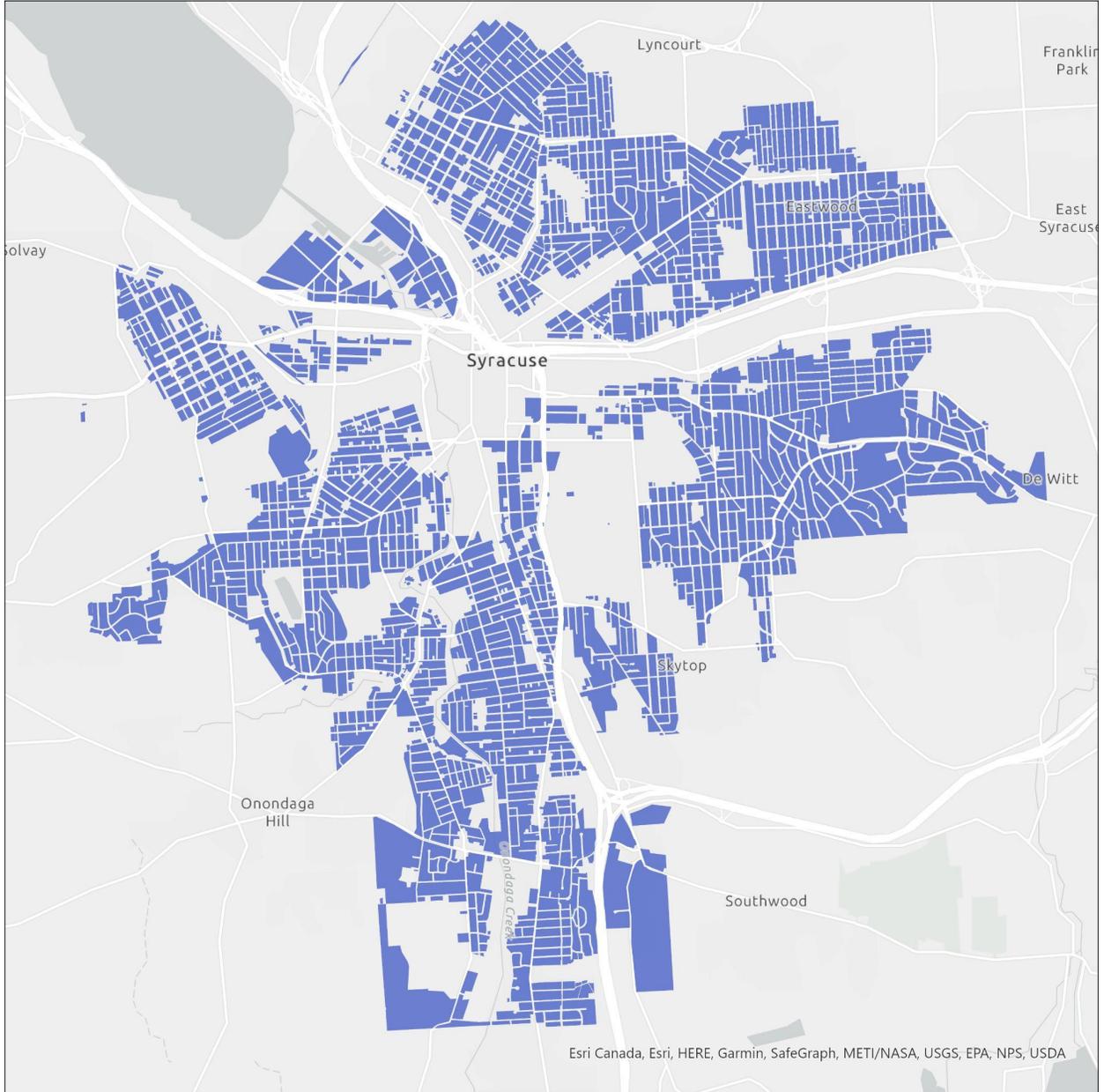
Map #26: ReZone Tour, Northside RECAPs



In other RECAPs, the zoning code does need to allow more and larger multi-family housing. This part of the Northside has been the most densely populated area of Syracuse for more than 100 years, and it is full of small-scale apartment buildings. However, the current zoning code bans apartments in much of this area, so many people's homes are labeled as 'non-conformities' and cannot be easily modified to accommodate the neighborhood's growing population.

ReZone could amend zoning in this area to legalize the housing that already exists and to make the neighborhood more adaptable in the face of population growth, but instead it proposes to change very little.

Map #27: Current Zoning Code, Residential Areas

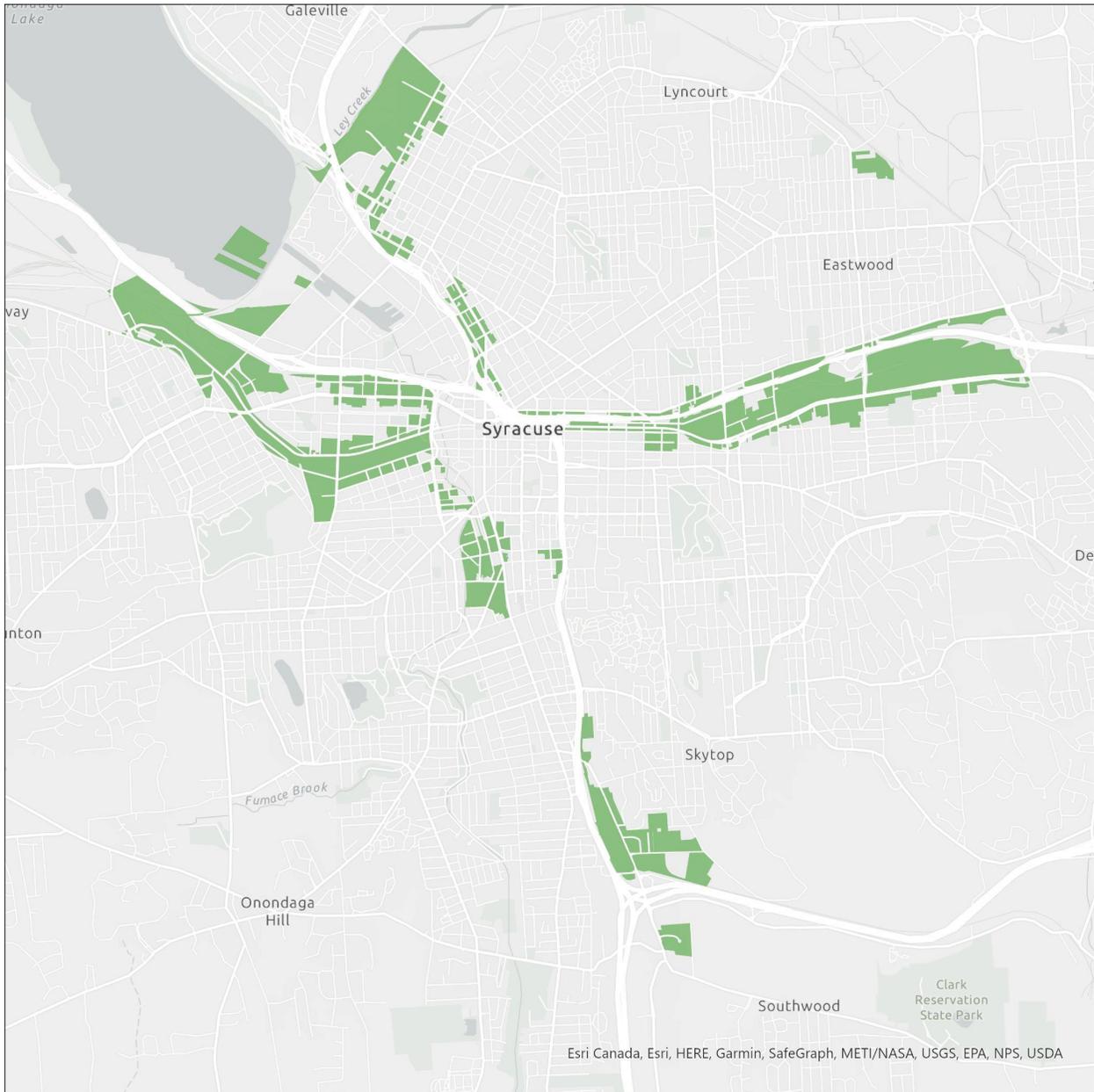


Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

Both ReZone and the current zoning code also creates problems for people with disabilities. It only allows group homes—a common living arrangement for people with disabilities—to operate 'as of right' in a few commercial and industrial districts and in **no** residential districts.

Were a group home to try to operate in any 'residential' neighborhood (shown in blue on Map #27), it would first need to acquire a special permit from the Common Council. This process includes public meetings where members of the public may voice opposition to such housing based upon stereotypes or discriminatory beliefs about people with disabilities.

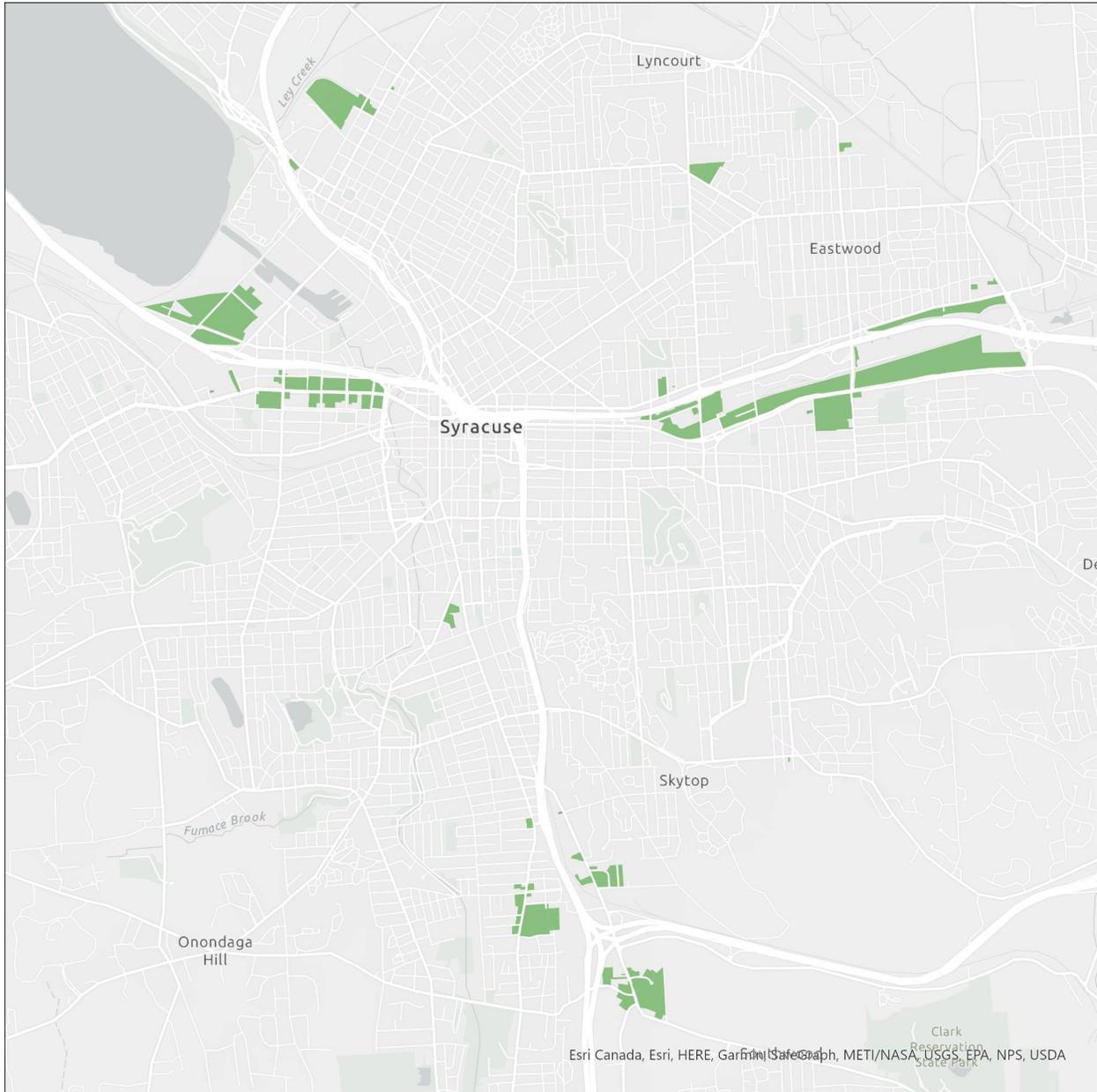
## Map #28: Current Zoning Code, Residential Care Facilities Allowed as of Right



Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

The areas shown in green on Map #28 are the only places where a group home may operate 'as of right' under the current zoning code. This imposes an extra barrier to providing housing for people with disabilities, isolates disabled residents from the larger community, and likely violates state and federal civil rights laws.

Map #29: ReZone, Residential Care Facilities Allowed as of Right



Source: Syracuse Parcel File.

ReZone would further restrict areas where "residential care facilities" can be built as of right. This is not only a missed opportunity to promote community integration for people with disabilities, but worsens an existing problem.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Use ReZone to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing**

There is a clear relationship between zoning and the spatial distribution of classes of people protected by the Fair Housing Act. As a recipient of cash grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the City of Syracuse has a legal obligation to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing through its administration of any program or activity that relates to housing or urban development. Therefore, the City of Syracuse must use ReZone to proactively address residential segregation in city neighborhoods.

However, neither ReZone nor the Land Use & Development Plan currently include this goal in their lists of "Guiding Principles" or "General Purposes."

The City of Syracuse should incorporate "Affirmatively Further Fair Housing" as an objective of ReZone and revise the proposed zoning code in a manner that reduces barriers to more racially, ethnically, and economically integrated neighborhoods that are accessible to people regardless of disability. This report provides some suggestions to achieve that outcome, but City Hall should also produce an official Housing Plan (it currently has none) that can detail how to combat residential segregation and improve housing choice through zoning reform and other housing policies. The most recent draft of the federal budget reconciliation act includes funding for municipalities to produce housing plans and zoning ordinances that achieve these goals.

### **Don't Downzone Existing Buildings**

There are multi-family homes across large swaths of the city, but the current zoning code is written as if this should not be the case. In fact, it bans multi-family housing in neighborhoods where apartment buildings have always been a fact of life and an essential component of neighborhood character.

ReZone should remove these apartment bans from neighborhoods such as the Northside, Westcott, Eastwood, Southside, and Valley. This will make it easier both to maintain the city's existing housing and to replace it when necessary, especially as most multi-family buildings in Syracuse are over 100 years old and in need of renovation or redevelopment.

### **Allow More Types of Housing Across the City**

In order to combat residential segregation, ReZone must do more than just legalize Syracuse's existing housing stock. The zoning rules and regulations that govern development in residential neighborhoods on the city's edge are part of a legal structure that was designed to enforce racial and economic segregation, and they must be changed.

ReZone should allow multi-family housing to be built in any residential zoning district, subject to uniformly applied restrictions on density and design that allow small-scale multi-family housing on typical city lots. This would promote integration and resilience in the face of demographic change by allowing a greater variety of housing types.

## **Allow More Mixed-Use Development Across the City**

Housing choice is determined, in part, by access to transportation, services, and opportunities for employment. Zoning contributes to racial and economic segregation in Syracuse by restricting that access in certain neighborhoods through bans on transit-supportive and commercial development.

ReZone should allow more mixed-use development in areas where it is currently banned in order to make walking, biking, and busing practical transportation options for people living in neighborhoods across the city.

## **Remove Restrictions on Group Homes**

Group homes should be allowed to operate as of right in every residential neighborhood in the city, subject to uniformly applied restrictions on density and design. It is unreasonable and likely unlawful to require housing for people with disabilities to receive a special permit simply to live in a residential neighborhood, particularly when similar housing types are not subject to the same restrictions.

## **Beyond Zoning**

Zoning is a very specific tool that cannot end residential segregation or neutralize its negative effects by itself. Legalizing existing housing types in Syracuse's older neighborhoods may encourage better property maintenance, but it cannot force a landlord to adequately maintain a tenant's home. Allowing more housing in more neighborhoods will help mitigate development pressure in the area around Pioneer Homes, but it will not prevent gentrification and displacement. Streamlined permitting processes will make construction easier, but they will not ensure that everyone who needs a home can get one. Encouraging more construction of quality multi-family units can provide Syracuse residents more housing options, but it does not guarantee these homes will be affordable for the people who need them most.

Syracuse needs to pursue additional housing strategies that will complement reforms to the zoning code. These should include tenant protections like good cause eviction requirements, anti-displacement measures like a community opportunity to purchase act, and new approaches to homeownership such as limited equity cooperatives and community land trusts.

And, in order to affirmatively further fair housing, Syracuse absolutely must produce more meaningfully affordable housing in neighborhoods across the city where the current zoning code has contributed to racial and economic residential segregation.

Affordable housing mandates for large residential developments and incentives for affordable infill development can help meet some of this need. However, direct funding for social housing development remains the most effective way to ensure that new affordable housing will be developed in a way that intentionally combats segregation. Syracuse should create a housing trust fund to support the activities of non-profit and public agencies who build affordable housing. The fund should have a dedicated source of revenue such as payments from SIDA's PILOT agreements, and it should only be used to fund new housing construction that is designed to affirmatively further fair housing in Syracuse.

## **CONCLUSION**

For 100 years, Syracuse's municipal zoning code has contributed to racial and economic segregation in the city. The ordinance was passed in response to the massive demographic, economic, and social changes sweeping over the entire country in the period just after World War I, and it was intentionally designed to exclude Black Americans from living in the new suburban developments being built on the city's edge at that time. Today, a century later, those same developments remain some of the most racially and economically segregated in Syracuse in no small part because of the zoning ordinance.

In order to combat that segregation and affirmatively further fair housing, Syracuse must rewrite its zoning ordinance to allow different types of housing across the city so that people of different means, with different kinds of families, and in different stages of life can find a home in Syracuse.

# Appendix

## Methodology

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s 2015 "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" rule, reinstated by the Biden administration in 2021, requires that "program participants certify that they take meaningful actions that... transform racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity" (Restoring Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Definitions and Certifications, 2021). Municipalities are required to identify racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty ("RECAPs"; HUD defines these as census tracts where the population is 50 percent or more residents of color and where 40 percent of households live below the poverty level) and take "meaningful action" to increase fair housing choice and decrease disparities in access to opportunities such as education and transportation.

The theory of concentrated poverty was developed by sociologist William Julius Wilson in the 1980s to explain persistent urban poverty, and is premised on the idea that when poverty is spatially concentrated, negative impacts on families are amplified and exacerbated. This work has inspired extensive "neighborhood effects" literature that ties residential location to quality of life indicators, and "opportunity mapping" projects that predict future outcomes of children such as household income based on residential location (Chetty et. al, 2020, CNY Fair Housing, 2014).

The concentration of poverty in the United States is racialized. One in four Black poor and one in six Hispanic poor live in high poverty neighborhoods, compared to one in 13 poor whites nationwide (Jargowsky, 2015). Racially concentrated poverty is even stronger in the Syracuse MSA, as two of three poor Black residents, three of five poor Hispanic residents, and one of five poor white residents live in high-poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015). Poor families of color are more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods and have less access to many resources than poor white families, reducing social mobility.

However, the recent and often narrow focus on racially concentrated areas of poverty has often ignored the other side of segregation - racially concentrated areas of affluence. The racial concentration of poverty has largely been treated as an isolated phenomenon, despite its inextricable connection to broader inequities and relations (Shelton, 2018 & Goetz et al., 2019). The sole focus on the problems of racially concentrated areas of poverty can further stigmatize poor communities of color as undesirable or problematic, ignoring their strengths and networks. Narratives about areas of concentrated poverty may pathologize the social behaviors of their residents, shifting the causes of poverty to the choices and behavior of the individual. Shelton writes that "such an exclusive focus on concentrated poverty ultimately mistakes the symptom for the cause," which can lead to myopic policy goals such as the deconcentration of poverty through dispersal and displacement, rather than addressing the root causes of these spatial inequities.

As poverty has become more concentrated nationwide, including in Syracuse, wealthy neighborhoods have become more isolated (Jargowsky, 2015, CNY Fair Housing, 2020, Reardon and Bischoff, 2014). The segregation of affluent families is now higher than the segregation of poor families and white

families are less likely to live in diverse neighborhoods than Black and Latino families (Reardon and Bischoff, 2014 & Frey, 2020). Although enclaves of white wealth perpetuate the racialized concentration of poverty through resource hoarding and exclusion, they have largely escaped the same critical public examination or targeted policies that low-income neighborhoods have. The framework of “racially concentrated area of affluence” (“RCAA”) methodology was introduced by researchers to problematize this framing and examine the unearned privileges and power conferred to rich whites who also live in economically and racially segregated neighborhoods (Goetz et al., 2019).

The mapping of RECAP and RCAAs in this analysis are useful in illustrating zoning’s role in segregation. The mapping of racially concentrated areas of affluence and poverty capture both racial and economic segregation, which are highly correlated both in Syracuse and nationwide. Our analysis argues that a more equitable rezone should work to deconcentrate both poverty and wealth to promote integration within Syracuse.

As described above, HUD defines racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty as census tracts where the population is 50 percent or more residents of color and where 40 percent of households live below the poverty level. The 40 percent poverty threshold has been accepted as a standard definition of concentrated poverty by researchers for over thirty years, although its usefulness has recently been questioned by critical geographers due to the federal poverty level’s outdated standard for determining need and the arbitrary determination of the 40% threshold (Jargowky & Bane, 1991, Shelton, 2018).

As RCAA methodology is relatively new and reporting is not mandated by HUD, there is no widely accepted standard. Goetz et al. define an RCAA as a census tract where the household median income is two times the national median income and the population is 80% white, while Shelton defines an RCAA as census tracts where the household median income is two times the city household median income and that are more white than the city as a whole, and also creates “relative” definitions of racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty and affluence to identify areas that are relatively rich or poor to the local area.

Drawing on this literature, our analysis uses the HUD standards for RCAPs (poverty rate of at least 40%, at least 50% nonwhite) because these standards are relevant to the City of Syracuse’s responsibility to comply with HUD’s AFFH rule, but we applied those standards to census block groups rather than census tracts. This yields a more refined analysis of the patterns of segregation in Syracuse because census block groups more closely align with established neighborhood boundaries in Syracuse.

We find that 29 census block groups qualify as RCAPs by this standard. These block groups are home to 30,644 people (21% of Syracuse’s total population).

Our analysis adjusts national RCAA standards to fit Syracuse’s demographics. We define RCAAs as block groups where the household median income is at least \$76,552 (double the citywide household median income) and where 65% of residents are white, as there is a natural break in the percentage of white residents by census block below this point.

We find that 10 census block groups qualify as RCAAs by this standard. These block groups are home to 10,470 people (7% of Syracuse’s total population).

It should also be noted that, while racial and economic segregation exists between Syracuse neighborhoods, it is much more prevalent at the County level. There are no RECAPs located within Onondaga County outside of Syracuse, but there are an additional 105 block groups in the County's suburbs (home to 150,450 people or 47% of the County's population outside the City) that would qualify as RCAs under our analysis. Zoning also plays a role in this more regional segregation, and Onondaga County also has a responsibility to affirmatively further fair housing.

## Data Sources

Parcel data is retrieved from the Q1 2020 Parcel data (property tax records) maintained by the Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency, last updated on February, 2020. Analysis accuracy is limited to parcel file accuracy. The original parcel file contains 41,335 parcels, comprising 62,899 total housing units ("Units"). Of all Q1 2020 parcels, 639 (1.5% of original parcels) had no zoning district listed in the attribute table. ReZone zoning data was accessed through a FOIL request to the Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency.

For purposes of this analysis, all land with a current land use of an athletic field, cemetery, country club, county owned public park, land under water, municipal public park, playground, water supply, water transportation, schools and college or university were excluded to improve accuracy, as these land uses are unlikely to be developed for residential, commercial, or industrial use in the near future. All parcels zoned "PID" (Planned Institutional District) were excluded from analysis, as this land does not undergo normal zoning processes and is controlled by large institutions such as universities and hospitals that are unlikely to convert their land to publicly available housing. Lastly, parcels that compose Syracuse University's South Campus were excluded (1,108 total units), as Syracuse University's data reporting process is unclear and these apartments are not available for occupancy by the general public.

For purposes of this analysis, multi-family housing is defined as any building with three or more units, as treated in the Syracuse zoning code. As the parcel data contains two land use fields, `landuse` and `land_use` were cross referenced to ensure all multi family homes are included in our analysis. For buildings where `landuse` = "Apartment", "Multiple Residence", "Detached Row Building," "Attached Row Building," "Office Building" or "Three Family Home" but `units=0` or 'null,' parcel addresses were cross referenced with Zillow, Apartments.com, County property tax records and other internet sources and manually adjusted to more accurately reflect the number of multi-family units. For `land_use=single family` or two family but `units = 0` or blank, number of units were also adjusted to reflect the land use (single family = 1, two family = 2). Of all units included in our analysis, 26,135 of 64,757 (40.4%) adjusted total units are multi-family units.

Demographic data including race, poverty, and income are provided by the 2019 American Community Service 5-Year Data. Additional data sources are listed under their respective map.

## Density Recode

Grouping	Bin	Old Zoning	ReZone
Non-Residential	0	RS	OS
		CBD-LB	
		IB	
		HSD	
		PDD	
		PSD	
		PID	PID
Single-family	1	RA-1	R1
Two-family, single family w accessory use	2	RA	R2
		RAA	R3
		T4	
Small multi-family (density requirements >500 sf/unit AND (if applicable) FAR <3.0)	3	RA-2	R4
		RB-1	R5
		RB-1T	MX1
		RB	MX2
		RB-T	
		RC	
		OA	
		OB	
		BA	
		CBD-OSR	
		CBD-GS	
		CBD-GSA	
		CBD-MDR	

		CBD-HDR	
Large multi-family (density requirements <500 sf/unit AND (if applicable) FAR <3.0)	4	CBD-R	MX3
		CBD-OS	MX4
		T5	MX5
Industrial and commercial	4	IA	CM
		CA	LI
		CB	PDD

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