Access to Opportunity in Wasatch Front Counties

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In February 2011 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded a three-year Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant to Salt Lake County and a consortium of Wasatch Front agencies.[1] The purpose of the grant was to develop strategies and tools to implement long-term sustainable growth in the Wasatch Front region. The objective of the grant was best expressed by HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan: "Sustainability means creating 'geographies of opportunity,' places that effectively connect people to jobs, quality public schools and other amenities. Today too many families are stuck in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and segregation, where one's zip code predicts poor education, employment and even health outcomes. These neighborhoods are not sustainable in their present state."

An important component of the sustainability grant was the development by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) of a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA). BEBR completed an FHEA for each of the four Wasatch Front counties in 2014 following guidelines provided by HUD. As part of the process, an equity analysis was completed that focused on access to opportunities for education, employment, health care and affordable housing.

The equity analysis included an opportunity index developed by HUD to quantify the number of important community attributes that influence the ability of an individual, or family, to access and capitalize on opportunity. The opportunity index for both an individual census tract and a city is a composite of five indices and is scored from 1 to 10, with 1 denoting poor access to opportunity and 10 denoting very high access to opportunity. The five indices making up the index were school proficiency, poverty, labor market engagement, housing stability and job access. Within each dimension of the opportunity index there were several subcategories to capture various elements of the opportunity dimension. These are summarized in Table 1.

While HUD provided indices only at the census tract level, BEBR created an average opportunity score and scores for all opportunity dimensions for each city and county. The HUD composite opportunity index was mapped for the census tracts and cities in the four Wasatch Front counties. For each county the first figure maps the opportunity index score by census tract and the second figure maps the aggregated score for each city in the county. The census tract map tells a more detailed story of opportunity and shows the areas within a city that lack access to opportunity.

Table 1
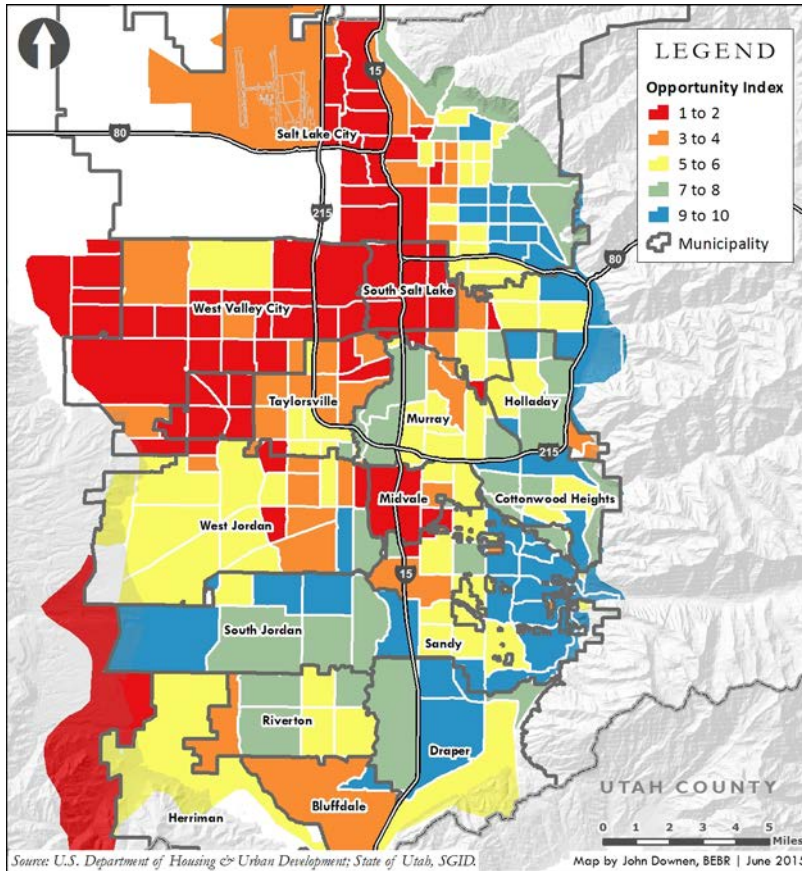**Opportunity Dimensions: Variables and Sources**

Dimension	Variables
Poverty Index	Family Poverty Rates
	Pct. Households Receiving Public Assistance
School Proficiency Index	School Math Proficiency/State Math Proficiency
	School Reading Proficiency/State Reading Proficiency
Labor Market Engagement	Unemployment Rate
	Labor Force Participation Rate
	Pct. with a Bachelor's Degree or higher
Job Access Index	Tract-level Job Counts
	Tract-level Job Worker Counts
	Origin-Destination Flows
	Aggregate Commute Time
	Tract-to-Tract Average Commute Time
Housing Stability Index	Homeownership Rate
	Pct. Loans Low-Cost (Re-Fi)
	Pct. Loans Low-Cost (New Purchases)
	Pct. Vacant (Non-Seasonal)
	Pct. Crowded

Source: HUD.

1. Consortium members included Salt Lake County, Wasatch Front Regional Council, Envision Utah, Mountainland Association of Governments, Ut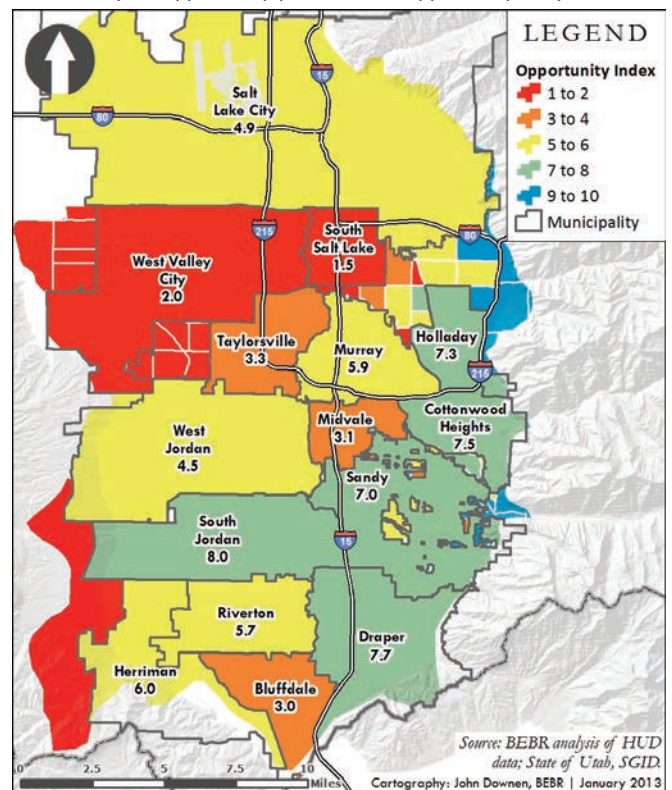ah Department of Transportation, Utah Transit Authority, University of Utah Metropolitan Research Center, and the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, University of Utah.

Figure 1
Opportunity Index by Census Tract in Salt Lake County
(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

middle of the opportunity index scale, the cities in the county varied greatly. The city-level opportunity scores ranged from as low as 1.5 in South Salt Lake to as high as 8.0 in South Jordan. Based on HUD's opportunity index there are five low-opportunity, four moderate-opportunity, and six high-opportunity cities in Salt Lake County.

Salt Lake County Opportunity Index

The two opportunity maps for Salt Lake County highlight clear differences in opportunities for residents on the east side of the county versus those on the west side. Overall, the west-side cities and tracts have lower access to opportunity than the east-side cities and tracts. In fact, the only city to score above a 6.0 on the west side is the city of South Jordan. Using the tract data, only a few tracts on the west side of the county—in South Jordan, West Jordan and Bluffdale—score as high-opportunity (index of 9 to 10) neighborhoods (Figure 1). The largest disparity in opportunity is between the midvalley west region of West Valley City, Taylorsville, and Midvale, which all have index scores below 3.5, and the southeastern cities of Holladay, Cottonwood Heights, Sandy, and Draper, which all have index scores above 7.0.

The lowest opportunity tracts and cities are those with high rates of poverty and high concentrations of minority renters: the cities of West Valley City, Taylorsville, South Salt Lake and the west side of Salt Lake City. These tracts and cities also have high Hispanic and minority concentrations. On the other hand, the east-side cities, especially in the south, are relatively more affluent and dominated demographically by non-Hispanic whites.

The overall weighted average opportunity index in Salt Lake County was 4.9. Each city's composite opportunity index is shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. Although the county average was near the

Figure 2
Opportunity Index by City and Unincorporated Tract in Salt Lake County
(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Table 2					
Low-, Moderate- and High-Opportunity Cities in Salt Lake County					
(1 = low, 10 = high)					
Low Opportunity	**Opportunity Index**	**Moderate Opportunity**	**Opportunity Index**	**High Opportunity**	**Opportunity Index**
South Salt Lake	1.5	West Jordan	4.5	Herriman	6.0
West Valley	2.0	Salt Lake City	4.9	Sandy	7.0
Bluffdale	3.0	Riverton	5.7	Holladay	7.3
Midvale	3.1	Murray	5.9	Cottonwood Heights	7.5
Taylorsville	3.3			Draper	7.7
				South Jordan	8.0
Source: HUD Spreadsheet for Sustainable Communities grantees.					

Davis County Opportunity Index

Davis County is a relatively high-opportunity county. Overall, the mid-county cities of Kaysville, Fruit Heights, Farmington and Centerville offer very high access to opportunity, while Clearfield and Sunset are the only cities in the county to score below 5.0.

Using the tract-level data, two tracts in the southern portion of the county scored below a 5.0; both are in North Salt Lake. Five tracts, all in the northern part of the county, had index numbers of 1 to 2. The tracts scoring a 9–10 are spread throughout the county, from Kaysville in the north to Bountiful and Woods Cross in the south (Figure 3).

The overall average opportunity score in Davis County was 6.3, the highest of the four Wasatch Front counties. Again there is wide variation among the cities. Sunset had the lowest index number at 1.0 and Fruit Heights the highest at 9.5. Based on HUD's opportunity index there are two low-opportunity, four moderate-opportunity, and nine high-opportunity cities in the county (Table 3 and Figure 4).

Figure 3
Opportunity Index by Census Tract in Davis County
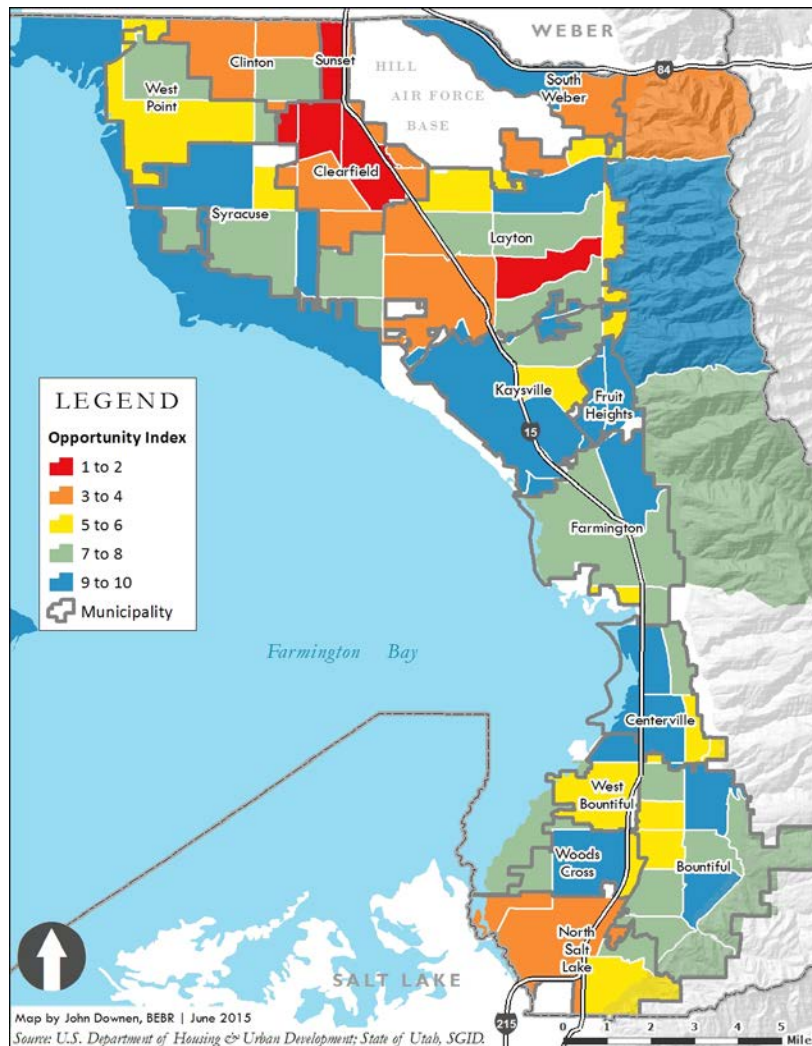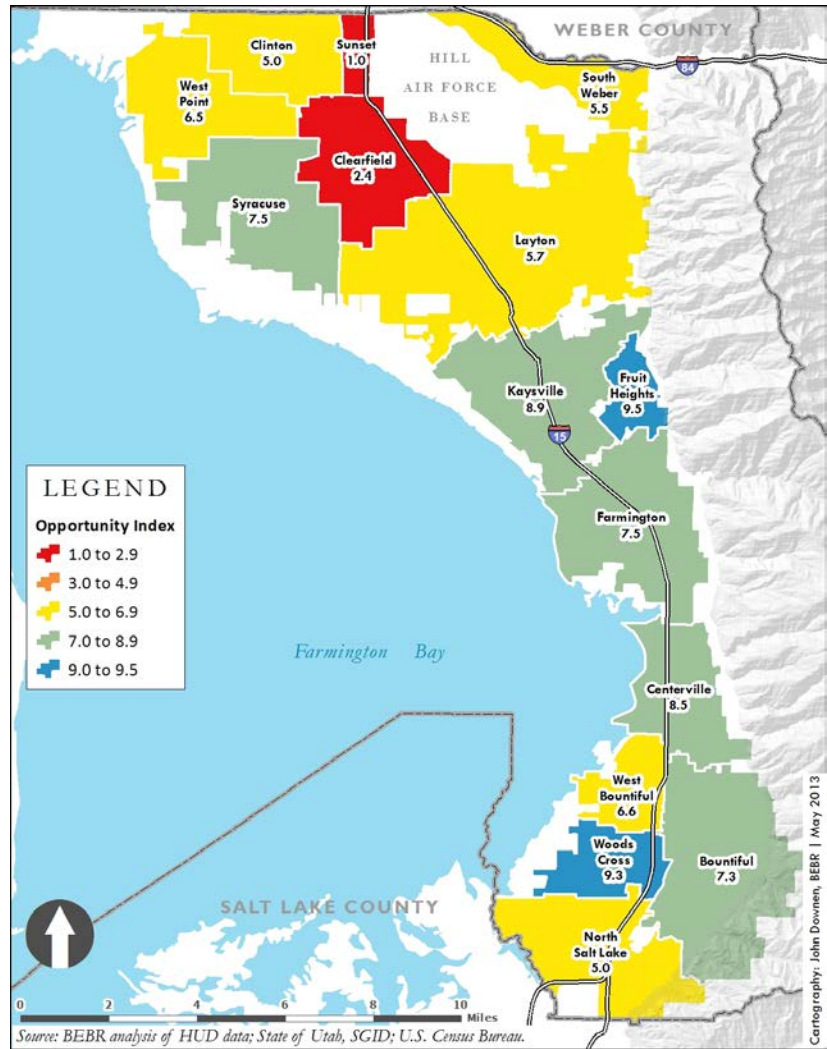(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Map by John Downen, BEBR | June 2015
Source: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development; State of Utah, SGID.

Table 3
Low-, Moderate- and High-Opportunity Cities in Davis County
(1 = low, 10 = high)

Low Opportunity	Opportunity Index	Moderate Opportunity	Opportunity Index	High Opportunity	Opportunity Index
Sunset	1.0	Clinton	5.0	West Point	6.5
Clearfield	2.4	North Salt Lake	5.0	West Bountiful	6.6
		South Weber	5.5	Bountiful	7.3
		Layton	5.7	Farmington	7.5
				Syracuse	7.5
				Centerville	8.5
				Kaysville	8.9
				Woods Cross	9.3
				Fruit Heights	9.5

Source: HUD Spreadsheet for Sustainable Communities grantees.

Figure 4
Opportunity Index by City in Davis County
(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Utah County Opportunity Index

Provo, Orem and the cities to the south offer lower access to opportunity than the northern cities in Utah County. In fact, only three cities south of Provo—Mapleton, Salem and Woodland Hills—scored above a 6.0 (Figure 6). Using the tract data, the only tracts south of Provo to score a 9.0 or above were a small tract in Springville; an unincorporated, sparsely populated tract just west of Springville; and two small tracts just outside of Salem (Figure 5). There are no opportunity-poor cities in the northern portion of the county.

As was the case with Salt Lake County, the lowest opportunity tracts and cities are those with high rates of poverty and high concentrations of minority renters—generally in the cities of Provo, Orem, and Springville. In contrast, cities on the northeastern and southeastern edge of the county, from Alpine to Elk Ridge, are high-opportunity cities.

The overall average opportunity score in Utah County was 4.9. Although the county average was near the middle of the opportunity index scale, the cities in the county varied greatly. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 6, the city-level opportunity scores ranged from as low as 1.5 in Santaquin to as high as 8.0 in Highland. Based on HUD's opportunity index there are three low-opportunity, five moderate-opportunity, and 11 high-opportunity cities in the county.

Figure 5
Opportunity Index by Census Tract in Utah County
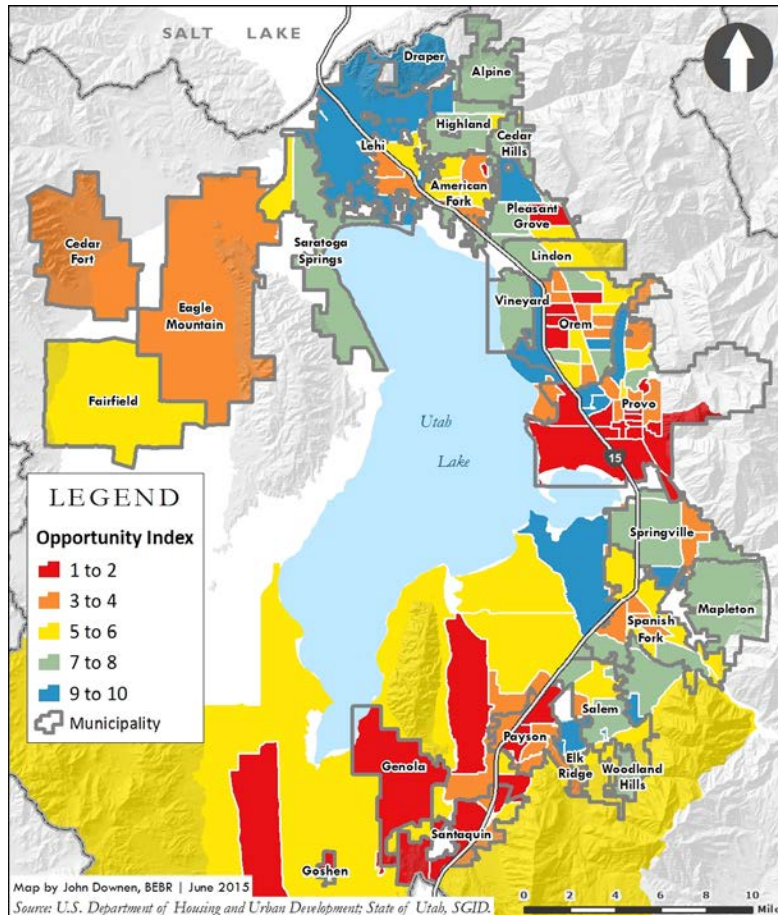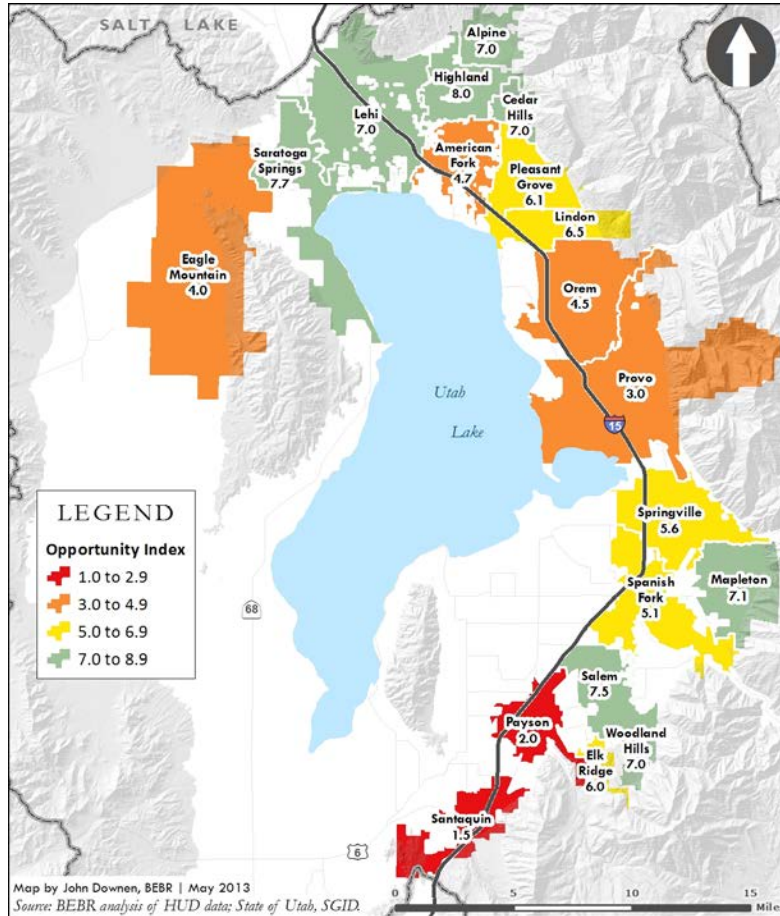(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Table 4					
Low-, Moderate- and High-Opportunity Cities in Utah County					
(1 = low, 10 = high)					
Low Opportunity	**Opportunity Index**	**Moderate Opportunity**	**Opportunity Index**	**High Opportunity**	**Opportunity Index**
Santaquin	1.5	Eagle Mountain	4.0	Elk Ridge	6.0
Payson	2.0	Orem	4.5	Pleasant Grove	6.1
Provo	3.0	American Fork	4.7	Lindon	6.5
		Spanish Fork	5.1	Alpine	7.0
		Springville	5.6	Cedar Hills	7.0
				Lehi	7.0
				Woodland Hills	7.0
				Mapleton	7.1
				Salem	7.5
				Saratoga Springs	7.7
				Highland	8.0
Source: HUD Spreadsheet for Sustainable Communities grantees.					

Figure 6
Opportunity Index by City in Utah County
(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Map by John Downen, BEBR | May 2013
Source: BEBR analysis of HUD data; State of Utah, SGID.

Weber County Opportunity Index

Weber County has a number of census tracts with poor access to opportunity (Figure 7). Ogden City, Plain City, and Marriott-Slaterville are dominated by low-opportunity census tracts. The highest opportunity tracts are located in the northern cities of Farr West, Harrisville and Pleasant View. The only tract not in the northeast that scored a 6.0 or above was in southeastern Ogden by Weber State University. This tract scored a 10.

The composite index score for Weber County was 3.2, the lowest index of the four Wasatch Front counties. The city-level opportunity scores ranged from a low of 2.0 in Ogden, Plain City and Washington Terrace to a high of 7.6 in Pleasant View (Table 5 and Figure 8). Based on HUD's opportunity index there are seven low-opportunity, four moderate-opportunity, and only two high-opportunity cities in the county.

Since the completion of the Sustainable Communities grant in 2014 the opportunity index has garnered considerable interest from local officials. Some cities have begun to develop strategies to improve access or mitigate impediments to opportunity. Improvement and mitigation will be a long-term process that faces considerable resistance from established housing patterns, zoning ordinances and Nimbyism. Nevertheless, the opportunity index is a first step in the process of data-driven evidence, strategy development, and implementation of targeted programs to meet the challenge of neighborhood disparities in opportunity.

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Figure 7
Opportunity Index by Census Tract in Weber County
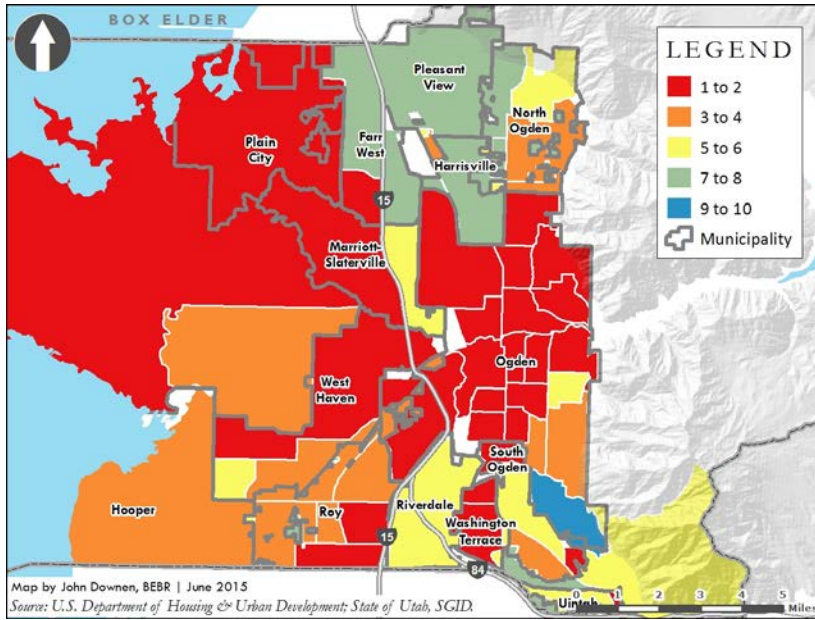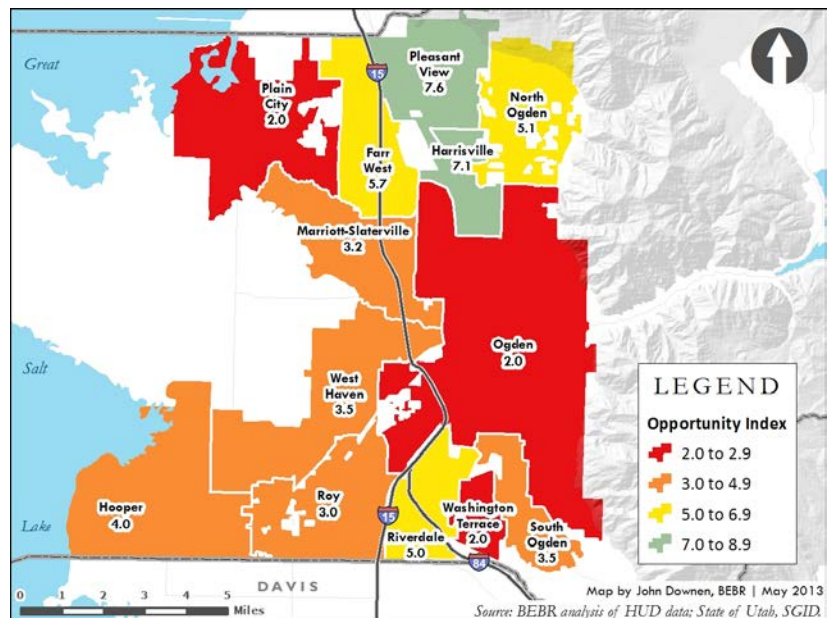(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Map by John Downen, BEBR | June 2015
Source: U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development; State of Utah, SGID.

Table 5
Low-, Moderate- and High-Opportunity Cities in Weber County
(1 = low, 10 = high)

Low Opportunity	Opportunity Index	Moderate Opportunity	Opportunity Index	High Opportunity	Opportunity Index
Ogden	2.0	Hooper	4.0	Harrisville	7.1
Plain City	2.0	Riverdale	5.0	Pleasant View	7.6
Washington Terrace	2.0	North Ogden	5.1		
Roy	3.0	Farr West	5.7		
Marriott-Slaterville	3.2				
South Ogden	3.5				
West Haven	3.5				

Source: HUD Spreadsheet for Sustainable Communities grantees.

Figure 8
Opportunity Index by City in Weber County
(1–2 opportunity poor to 9–10 opportunity rich)

Map by John Downen, BEBR | May 2013
Source: BEBR analysis of HUD data; State of Utah, SGID.

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