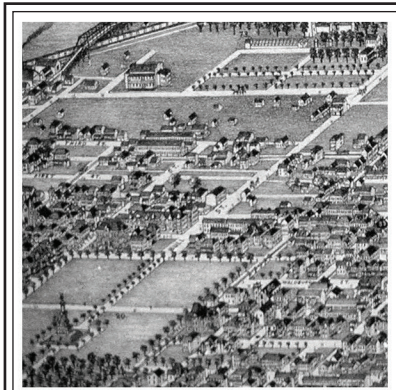# Community Profile

When James Oglethorpe arrived in 1733 with 120 colonies, the bluff that was to become Savannah was inhabited by a small band of Yamacraw Indians led by and elderly chief, Tomochichi.[1] Oglethorpe concluded peace with Tomochichi, and within a year, the colony had grown to 400 people. In ten years, the population was 1,800. The population continued to grow steadily. In 1790, there were 10,769 people living in the colony. By 1820 when yellow fever wiped out one-tenth of the city's population, the total population was 14,737. Between 1820 and 1830, the population declined as a result of the yellow fever epidemic.

Between 1940 and 1950 the growth rate was 28 percent. This was attributable to the shipyard and port activity during World War II. The growth rate during the following decade, 1950 to 1960 was 24 percent and reflects the beginning of national migration to southern states. Between 1970 and 2000, the rate of growth has remained relatively constant at 7 percent. If development patterns and growth rates of the last 30 years remain relatively constant over the next 30 years, Chatham County will reach it's maximum population of 371,000 at the end of 2040, three hundred years after General Oglethorpe founded Savannah.

[1] *"The Dawn of Oglethorpe's Georgia" John E. Worth: Lost Worlds .org*

2.1 Introduction

The population growth of Chatham County from 1790 to 2015 has been relatively consistent. The County's stable growth has insulated the area from the perils of "boom and bust" development that have adversely affected the planning efforts of many communities. Chatham County has a long tradition of planning, and the community plans to continue maintaining its historic character and natural resources while welcoming new residents, many of whom become the strongest advocates of local planning.

2.2 Regional Population

Chatham County is the largest county in a three county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) that also includes Bryan and Effingham Counties. This MSA is part of a larger Savannah-Hinesville-Statesboro Combined Statistical Area (CSA) which also includes the nearby Bulloch, Liberty, and Long Counties (Figure 2.1 below). The Savannah CSA is bordered on the north by the Hilton Head-Bluffton-Beaufort MSA and on the south by the Brunswick MSA.

Regional population has grown due to several technological advances and demographic trends. The invention of air conditioning and widespread mosquito control were precursors to the widespread development in the Savannah area and much of the Southeast region. These technologies made life in the area far more comfortable and convenient.

Figure 2.1: Chatham-Savannah MSA

While these technologies made Savannah a better place to live, the area's economy has grown to serve regional, national and international markets in a variety of sectors.

Historically, the City of Savannah and Chatham County have been the region's largest population center and commercial core. However, over the past few decades, suburbanization has led to large population increases in Effingham and Bryan counties. A widespread network of highways and relatively inexpensive land have accelerated population growth in these counties as well.

The net effect of regional development on the population of Chatham County and Savannah can be considered in three broad categories.

- The manufacturing economy has been surpassed by the service economy. The service economy includes health and medical facilities, retail, hospitality, and business services such as insurance, banking, and advertising.

- Approximately 25 percent of the population of Chatham County at any given time is not included in any official population count. The uncounted population includes commuters who live in surrounding counties but who work and trade in Chatham County; second-home owners who spend only part of the year in the County; students at local universities which attract domestic and international students; and military personnel who are stationed in the region temporarily; and tourists.

- Migration from other parts of the country accounts for approximately 50 percent of the annual growth of Chatham County. Many of these individuals are retirees, thus the growing trend is that the sector of the population that is growing fastest tends to be older and more affluent.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the regional population history and a long-range projection for the Savannah MSA and CSA. Population projections are prepared by the Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) using a standard cohort component demographic methodology which relies upon recent historical fertility, migration, and age data to develop projected population at a county level.
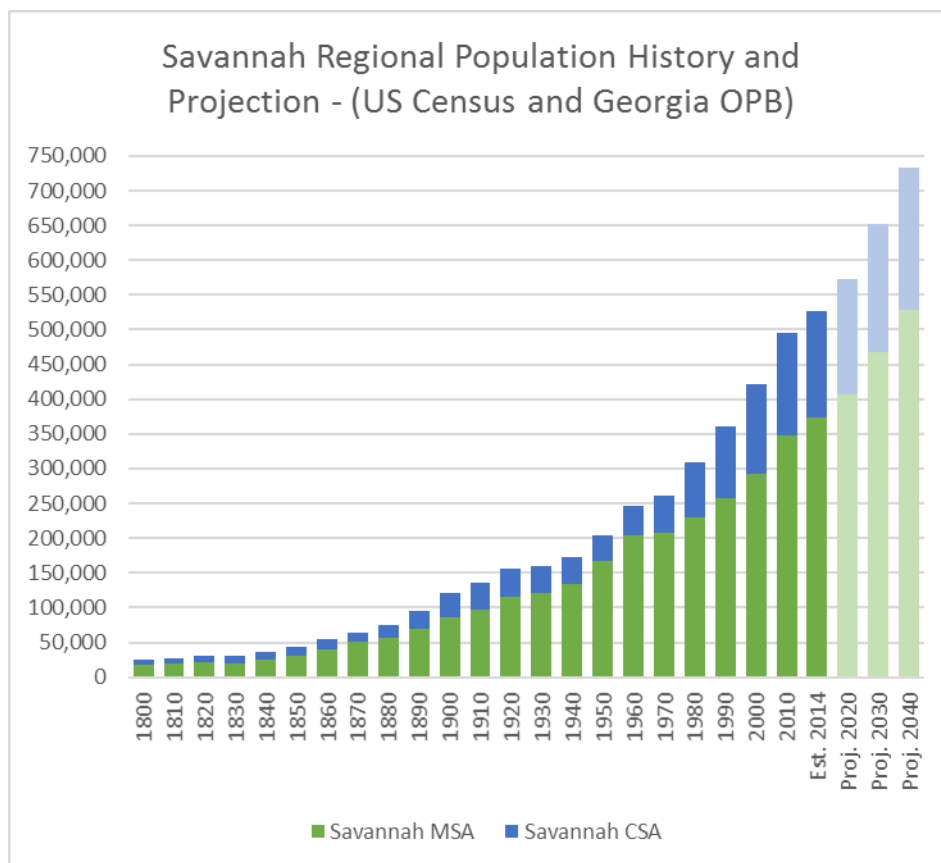

Figure 2.2 Regional Population History and Projections
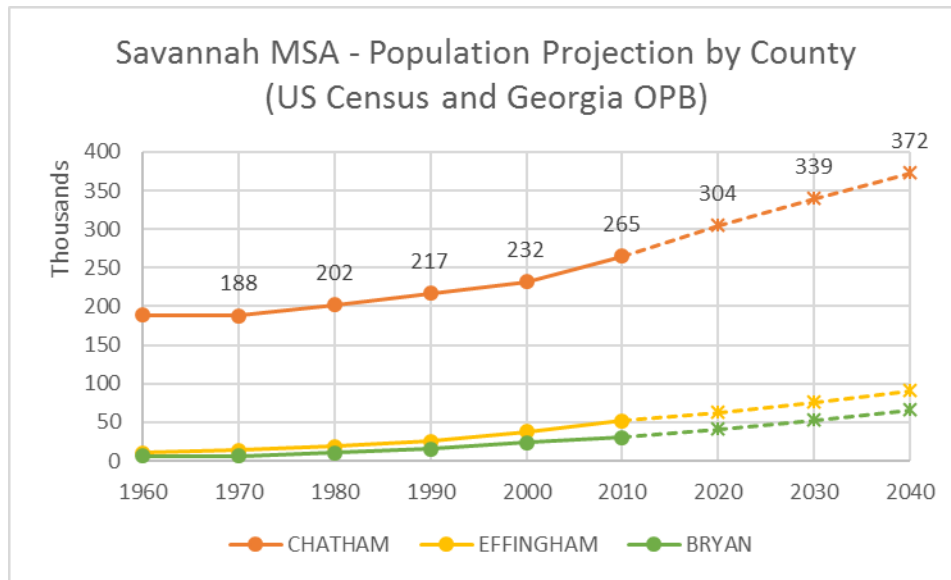
Figure 2.3 Savannah MSA Population Projections

Figure 2.3 examines the recent population history for counties within the Savannah MSA. This chart shows that Chatham County is expected to retain its status as the largest population center in the metropolitan area while its neighboring counties continue to experience growth. The projected Chatham County population for 2040 exceeds 372,000 while the anticipated population of the MSA is over 529,000.

2.3   Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham County

Chatham County includes the City of Savannah, eight other jurisdictions and the unincorporated area. The geographic focus of this plan is the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County.

2.3.1   Residential Population

Records indicate that in spite of regional development outside of these jurisdictions, the combined population of the City and County have generally grown since 1970. However, this growth has occurred primarily in unincorporated Chatham County over the past 30 to 40 years. Many of the same conditions that influenced regional growth affected the growth of the non-urbanized areas of the County.

The 2015 estimated population for the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County is 236,470 (US Census, American Community Survey 2014 estimates of 144,352 in the City and 92,118 in the unincorporated County). Figure 2.4 shows the historical combined population for the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County.
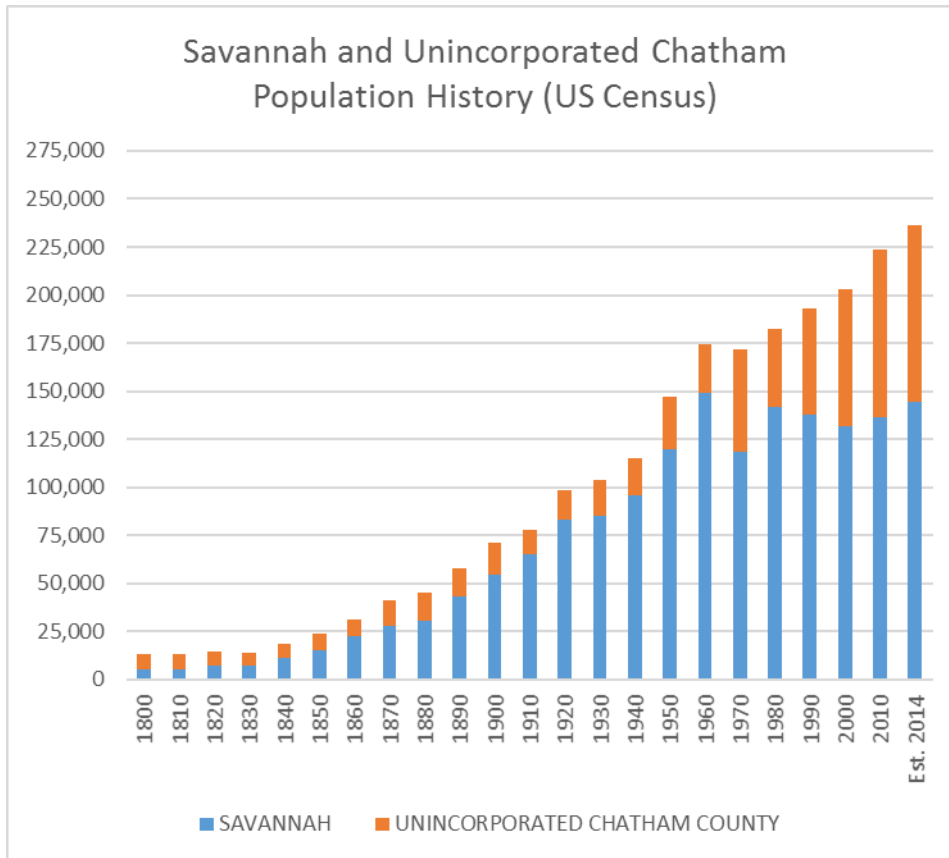
Figure 2.4: Savannah and Unincorporated Chatham Population History

2.3.2 Transient Population

Due to its status as an employment hub and tourism destination there is a substantial population within Chatham County that is transient. There are approximately 127,000 jobs in Chatham County of which approximately 28,500 of these jobs are filled by residents who live outside of Chatham County.[1]

Additionally, approximately 13.4 million overnight visitors stayed in Chatham County in 2014. This is a daily average population increase of nearly 37,000 with many of these visitors coming to the downtown Landmark Historic District.[2] The combination of seasonal, employees and visitor population represents an increase in population of approximately 60,000 people daily.

2.3.3 Demographic Characteristics

There are some relevant demographic differences between the residents of the city of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County. On the whole, City residents are younger than those in the County. The median age of a Savannah resident is 31.4 compared to 34.2 for the County. Figure 2. 5 illustrates the difference in age for the two areas.

[1] Census Transportation Planning Package; Georgia Department of Labor
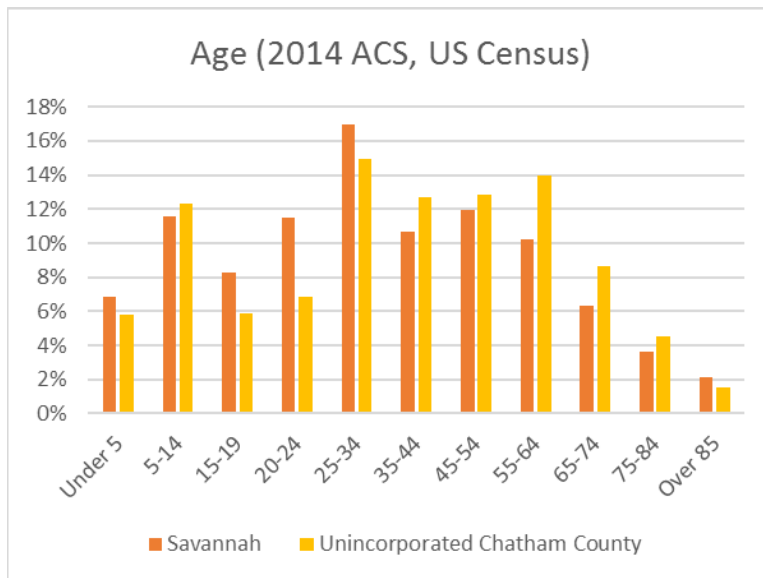[2] *Tourism Forecast*, Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce

Figure 2.5: Age Differences

There are also differences in the racial composition of county and city residents. While a majority of Savannah's residents are African American (54%), the largest racial group in the unincorporated county is white (71%). Figure 2.6 shows the differences in racial composition for City and County residents.
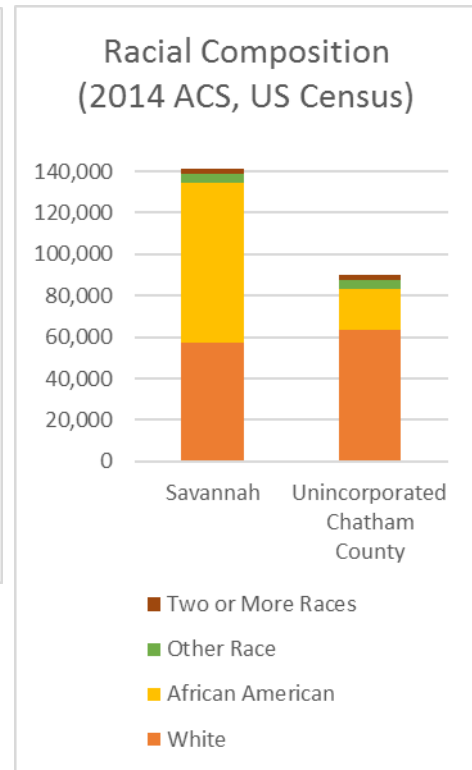

Figure 2.6: Racial Composition

2.3.4 Construction and Family Size

The construction of residential buildings is generally a good indicator of a community's growth. There has been a steady pace of building in the city of Savannah and Chatham County over the past five years. The majority of this construction has been single family detached homes. Figures 2.7 and 2.8 show the recent residential construction trend in Savannah and Chatham County. Estimating the population based on the number of building permits is useful in planning for roads and utilities because a residential dwelling unit represents the potential for population regardless of the occupant's official residence.
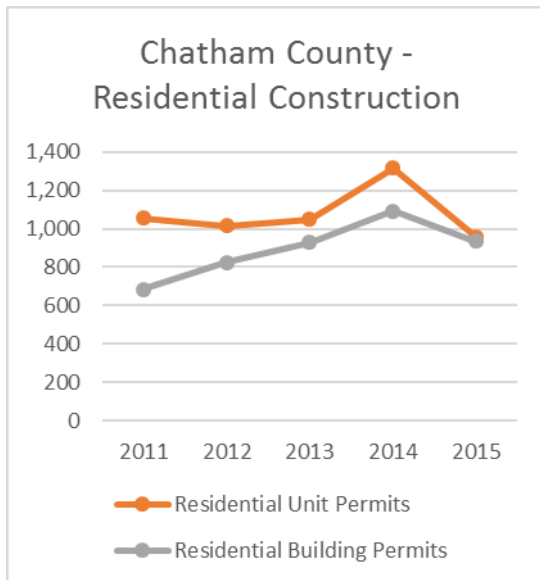
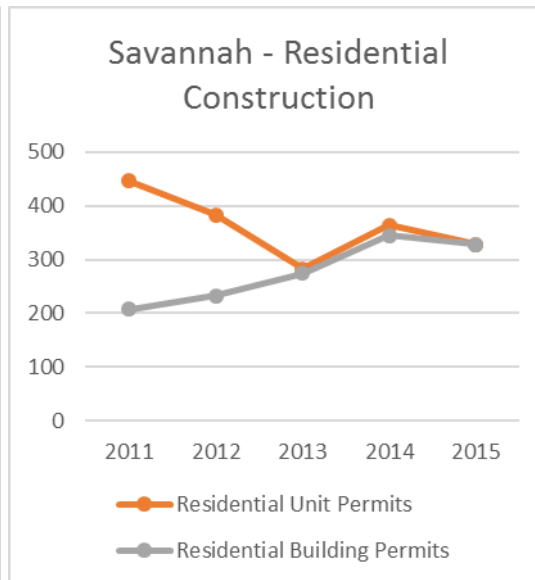**Figure 2.7: Chatham Residential Construction Trends**

Figure 2.8: Savannah Residential Construction Trends

In 1960, the average household size in Chatham County was 3.47 people. By 2010, the average had decreased to 2.55. The smaller household size in Chatham County reflects the number of retirees who have moved into the area and smaller family sizes. This trend is expected to continue as the area becomes attractive to retirees as an alternative to other areas in the Sunbelt Region which have become congested. In 2030, the household size in Chatham County is expected to be at an all-time low of 2.38.

2.3.5   Education and Employment

Two defining characteristics of a community are the levels of education attained and the employment status of its workers.

While the vast majority of residents over 25 years old in the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County have a high school diploma, fewer than one in three have a Bachelor's Degree. Figure 2.9 illustrates the breakdown of educational attainment for people over 25.
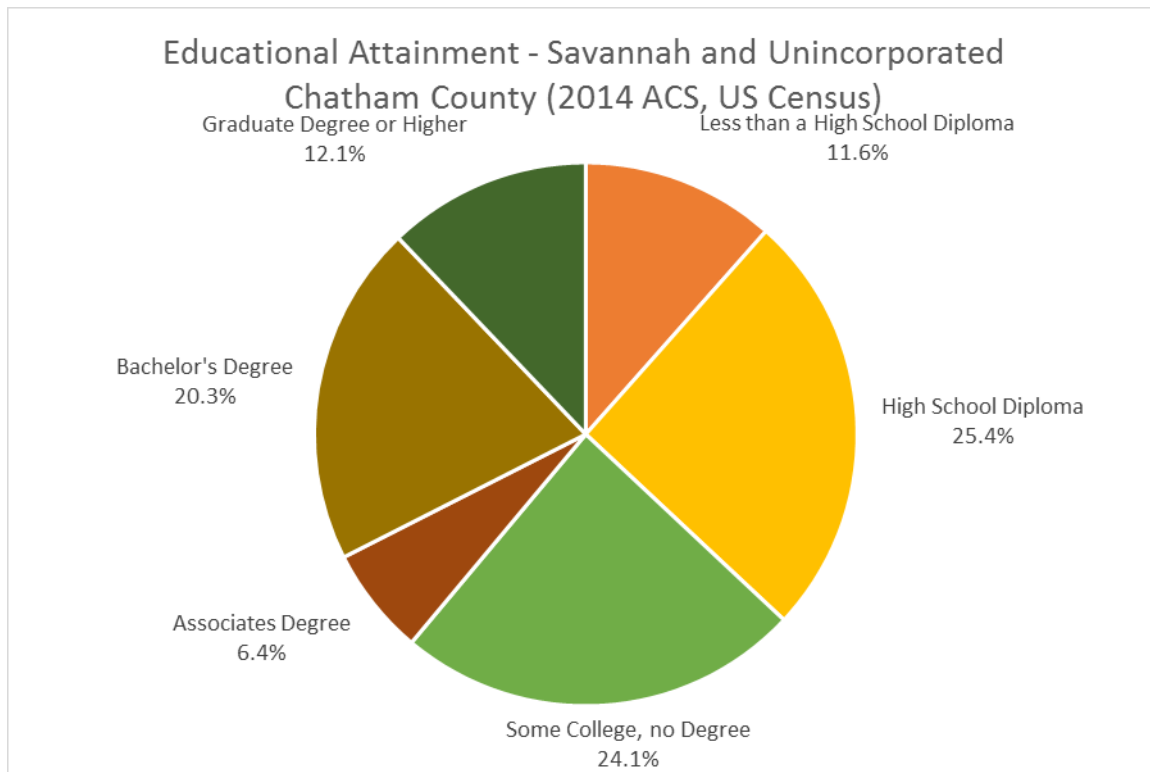
Figure 2.9: Education Attainment for Residents Over 25

Figure 2.10 illustrates the recent local unemployment statistics for Chatham County. The declining unemployment figure indicates that the County is recovering from the recession that hit the nation in 2008.
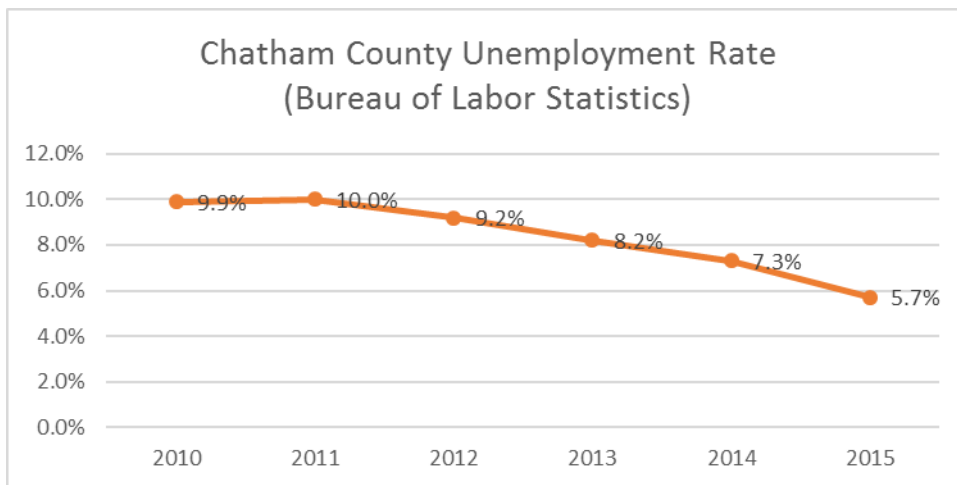

Figure 2.10: County Unemployment Rate

The employment by sector data for the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County is shown in Figure 2.11 next. The figure clearly shows that service, healthcare, education, and retail trade occupations have surpassed manufacturing as the primary source of employment in the area.
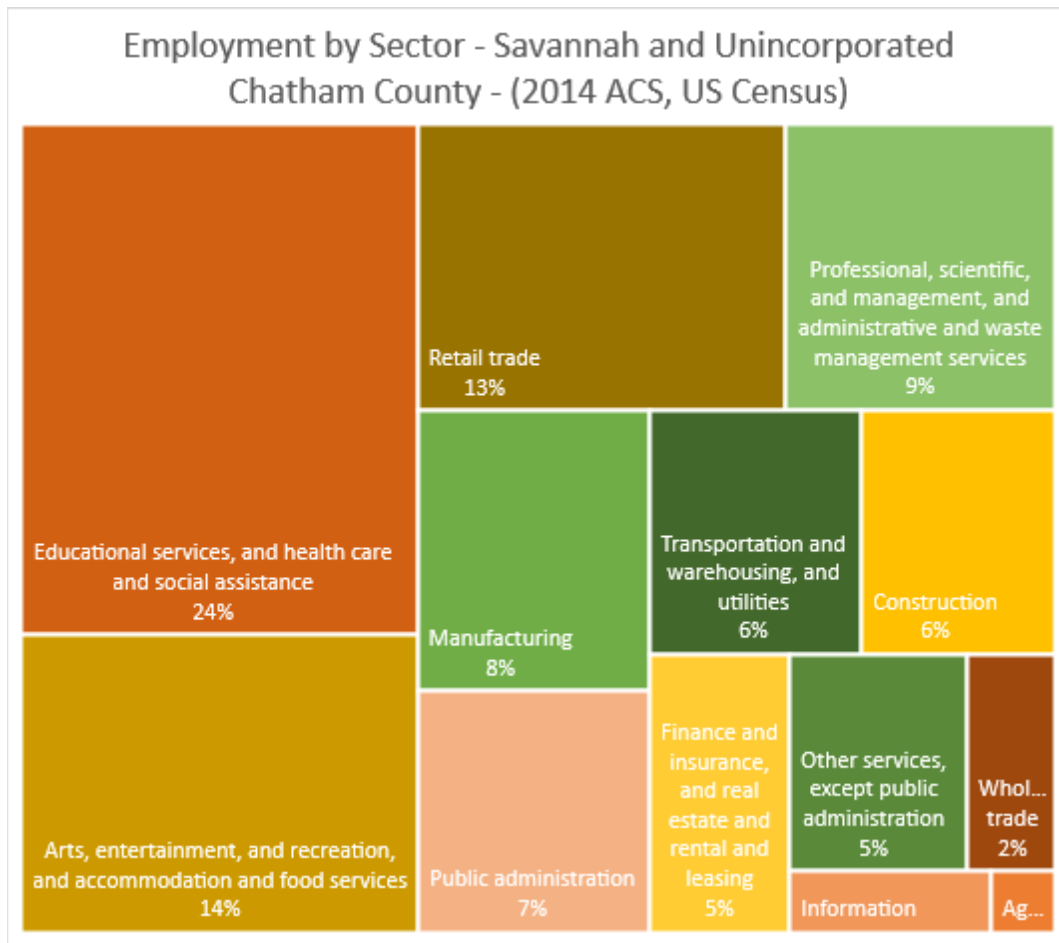
Figure 2.11: Employment by Sector