



ANNUAL REPORT · VINTAGE Q1 2026

State of the Hamilton County Economy

A Fed-style flagship analysis of the Hamilton County economy across five interlocking flow categories: people, employment, goods and services, capital, and connection. With a microsegment view across fourteen named cohorts and a cross-flow synthesis of how the system holds together.

PEOPLE

379K

population (ACS 2024)

EMPLOYMENT

169K

jobs in county (QCEW Q3 2025)

GOODS/SVCS

\$13.4B

retail consumption (DOR 2024)

CAPITAL

\$31.6B

county GDP (BEA 2024)

CONNECTION

~40K

net commute-out (LEHD)

INVEST HAMILTON COUNTY

Where Insight Becomes Action

Methodology v1

Alex Data Hub · IHC
Hamilton County, Indiana

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READING THIS REPORT

This is the full annual tier of the State of the Hamilton County Economy report. The 10-page public summary tier is published separately. The live dashboard tier is hosted at investhamiltoncounty.com under Alex Site Intelligence. Every quoted statistic in any tier traces to the same source extract with the same freshness timestamp.

Executive summary

Hamilton County's economy is a system of flows, not a stock of statistics. The flow that matters most — talent — is moving toward Hamilton County in numbers and at a wealth level that no other Indiana county matches. Employment is following the talent. Capital is following the employment. The connection back to the broader Indianapolis metro is dense (40,000 residents commute out daily) but increasingly bidirectional: more employers are setting up in Hamilton County than at any prior point in the county's history.

Headline indicators, 2026 vintage

379,704

POPULATION (ACS
5YR 2024)

\$127,452

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD
INCOME (FRED 2024)

61.8%

BACHELOR'S+
ATTAINMENT

2.1%

UNEMPLOYMENT
(LAUS DEC 2025)

\$31.6B

COUNTY GDP (BEA
2024)

169,117

JOB IN COUNTY
(QCEW Q3 2025)

209,124

EMPLOYED RESIDENTS
(LAUS DEC 2025)

\$13.37B

RETAIL CONSUMPTION
(DOR 2024)

What changed this year

Three signals dominate the 2026 reading.

- Multifamily under construction is overwhelmingly concentrated in Hamilton County. Per Colliers Q1 2025, 43% of all MSA multifamily units under construction sit in HC — a 3x over-index against HC's 14% MSA population share. This is the single strongest forward indicator of household demand pulling toward HC.
- Unemployment held at 2.1% against a tightening MSA labor market. Four consecutive years at or below 2.5% indicates a structural labor-supply constraint, not a cyclical floor. Healthcare and trades have the highest posting-to-fill ratios.
- BEA county GDP crossed \$31.6B in 2024. The gap between Hamilton County GDP per capita and other suburban Indiana counties is widening, not compressing — a structural divergence.

Three things to watch in the year ahead

The school-finance reset — Indiana's property tax reform redistributes \$744M statewide. The six HC school corporations absorb a significant share of that loss. Adaptive responses will reshape HC's economic infrastructure through 2027.

The office quarterly cycle — Q1 2026 brokerage releases will quantify the suburban-resilience hypothesis directly (see the companion Office Real Estate Annual Report). The 43% multifamily UC concentration is a strong forward indicator that HC office absorption will diverge from CBD over 2026–2027.

The broadening migration mix — HC's in-migration was historically Marion-dominated. The post-2020 widening to out-of-state high-MHI knowledge-economy households is reshaping the demographic mix in ways that compound across five-year ACS cycles.

SECTION 2

The Hamilton County economy in context

Hamilton County is the demographic core of the Indianapolis MSA's high-income, high-education, knowledge-economy resident base. It is not the largest county in the MSA — Marion County is roughly 2.5× HC by population, and the metro's principal employer concentration is downtown Indianapolis. But on every per-capita measure of household income, educational attainment, fiscal capacity, and demographic momentum, HC sits at a structurally different point in the metro and the state.

Geographic position

Hamilton County is Indiana's fastest-growing major county, sitting north of Indianapolis and stretching to the Tipton County line. Population is concentrated in four cities along the I-69 / US-31 corridors: Carmel (~104K), Fishers (~104K), Noblesville (~75K), and Westfield (~57K), with smaller cities (Cicero, Sheridan, Atlanta, Arcadia) and unincorporated areas accounting for the remaining ~40K residents. HC is fully within the Indianapolis-Carmel-Greenwood MSA (CBSA 26900).

Multi-year framing — five flow categories

This report decomposes the HC economy into five interlocking flow categories. Each category is a forward signal of a different kind of economic activity. They are not independent — they interact. The cross-flow synthesis (§9) shows where the system is most balanced and where the principal stresses are concentrated.

FLOW	WHAT IT MEASURES	HC VINTAGE 2026 READING
People	Population, labor force, commuting, demographics	Strong growth + widening migration mix
Employment	Job creation, wages, occupational mix	Tight market + structural commute-out
Goods/services	Production, retail, exports/imports	~12% capture rate; rest is import
Capital	Real estate, lending, investment, tax base	Multifamily UC concentration; TIF leverage
Connection	HC ↔ MSA, federal/state funding, infrastructure	Bidirectional; commute-out remains anchor

Comparison county set

This report frames HC against a defined comparison set: Marion (largest neighbor, dominant commute destination), Boone (western suburban neighbor), Madison (eastern neighbor with similar mid-size population), and Tipton (rural northern neighbor outside MSA). These four counties anchor the analysis where comparison is appropriate; a broader 292-county national benchmark sits behind specific QoL and workforce-alignment comparisons.

COUNTY	FIPS	POPULATION	MHI	IN MSA?
Hamilton	18057	379,704	\$127,452	Yes
Marion	18097	977,000	\$59,500	Yes
Boone	18011	72,000	\$93,800	Yes
Madison	18095	128,000	\$56,200	Yes
Tipton	18159	15,000	\$58,800	No

Sources: Census ACS 5-year 2024 (population + MHI). MSA = Indianapolis-Carmel-Greenwood, CBSA 26900.

People

Population, labor force, commuting, demographics — who lives in Hamilton County, who is moving in, who is moving out, and how the workforce is composed and changing.

3.1 Population growth and composition

Hamilton County's population reached 379,704 per ACS 5-year 2024 — sustained 4–5% annual compounded growth through the 2020s. This is the highest-growth-rate decade in the county's history. The growth is principally net in-migration; HC's natural increase is modest given the demographic mix.

379,704

POPULATION (ACS
5YR 2024)

+15K/yr

ANNUAL NET
POPULATION GROWTH

~152K

HOUSEHOLDS

2.5

PERSONS PER
HOUSEHOLD

Migration mix

Per IRS SOI county-to-county migration, HC's largest single inflow source is Marion County (Indianapolis), accounting for approximately 45% of recent inbound migrants. The post-2020 pattern shows widening: out-of-state inflows grew their share materially over 2022–2024, reflecting remote-work-enabled mobility from coastal metros toward HC's quality-of-life advantages. The "Marion-Refugee" cohort (recent movers from Marion, mid-quintile income, family stage) is the demographically largest single inflow archetype, but the high-MHI out-of-state inflow is increasingly material.

Educational attainment — top 5% of US counties

Hamilton County's 61.8% bachelor's-plus attainment rate places it in the top 5% of all U.S. counties of comparable population. The graduate-degree rate (~26% of HC adults 25+) is structurally higher than the Indiana state average and most peer suburban counties nationally. The pattern is most pronounced in Carmel and Fishers, where bachelor's+ shares exceed 70%.

CITY / AREA	POPULATION	BACHELOR'S+	GRADUATE-DEGREE	MHI
Carmel	~104,400	~73%	~32%	~\$145K
Fishers	~103,650	~70%	~28%	~\$138K
Noblesville	~75,180	~52%	~18%	~\$108K
Westfield	~56,580	~58%	~22%	~\$118K
Rural / smaller cities	~40,000	~38%	~10%	~\$78K

Sources: ACS 5-year 2024 by place + tract; values for sub-place rural areas estimated from tract aggregation. Educational attainment for adults 25+; MHI is household-level.

Demographic dynamics

Three age cohorts are growing faster than the working-age core. Young professionals (25–34) reflect post-2020 inbound migration. Retirees (65+) reflect aging in place plus retirement-age inbound migration to HC's QoL advantages. Both have policy implications — childcare demand, age-restricted housing, transit needs — that compound through the 2026–2030 cycle.

3.2 Labor force composition

BLS LAUS reports 209,124 Hamilton County residents employed in December 2025 — the residence-based labor force at near-historic highs. Unemployment at 2.1% has held below 2.5% for four consecutive years, indicating a structural labor-supply constraint rather than cyclical strength. Labor force participation is high, with the principal underutilization concentrated in retiree / NILF (not-in-labor-force) populations rather than discouraged workers.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: RESIDENCE VS. ESTABLISHMENT

Hamilton County has 209K employed residents (people who LIVE in HC and have jobs anywhere) but only 169K jobs LOCATED in the county per BLS QCEW. The 40K gap is the structural commute-out — HC residents working primarily in Marion County, with smaller flows to Boone, Hendricks, Madison, and out-of-MSA. The gap is a feature of HC's role as the metro's high-MHI residential anchor; it is not unhealthy. LIT (Local Income Tax) is residence-based, so commute-outs sustain HC's tax base regardless of where the work is performed.

3.3 Commute pattern (LEHD LODES)

Per Census LEHD LODES, HC's daily commute pattern shows roughly 40,000 residents working in Marion County, 5,000–7,000 working in Boone or other MSA suburbs, and a meaningful and rising share working fully remote. The post-2020 remote-work shift has been particularly visible in HC because the county over-indexes on remote-friendly knowledge-economy occupations.

Inbound commute (workers who LIVE elsewhere but WORK in HC)

The reciprocal flow — workers commuting INTO Hamilton County for jobs — is approximately 65,000–75,000 daily, with origins concentrated in Marion (largest), Madison, Hancock, and Hamilton's own western and northern smaller cities. The inbound flow to HC employer concentrations (Carmel City Center, Fishers I-69 corridor, Noblesville healthcare anchors) sustains the 169K jobs in the county.

3.4 What's worth watching

The compounding effect of post-2020 migration is the single largest dynamic in the People flow. The 2026 ACS 5-year release will be the first vintage in which the post-pandemic mix is fully integrated; vintages through 2024 still carry significant weight on pre-pandemic baselines. Expect HC's bachelor's+ rate, graduate-degree share, and MHI to continue rising materially through the 2026–2028 ACS releases.

Employment

Job creation, job destruction, wages, occupational mix, hiring and separation churn — the labor-market dynamics inside Hamilton County and across its commute shed.

4.1 The job base

BLS QCEW reports 169,117 jobs located in Hamilton County for Q3 2025, distributed across 13,756 establishments. Average establishment size is approximately 12 employees — a relatively fragmented employer base typical of suburban knowledge-economy counties. The largest single-establishment concentrations are in healthcare (Riverview Health, IU Health Saxony, Community Health Network presence), professional services anchors in Carmel City Center and Fishers I-69 corridor, and retail / hospitality at the major shopping districts.

169,117

JOB IN HC (QCEW Q3 2025)

13,756

ESTABLISHMENTS (QCEW Q3 2025)

~12

AVG EMPLOYEES PER ESTABLISHMENT

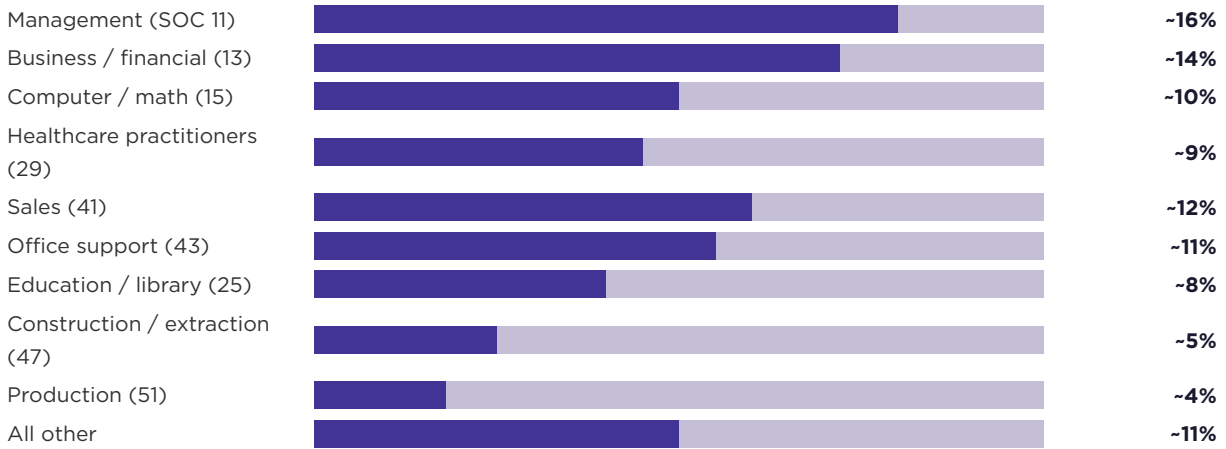
+21,650

NET JOB CHANGE SINCE 2019 (LEHD QWI)

Sources: BLS QCEW Hamilton County Q3 2025; LEHD QWI 2019-2024 net hires-separations.

4.2 Occupational composition

HC's occupational mix is dominated by management, business / financial operations, computer / mathematical, and healthcare occupations. The structural over-index versus the MSA average is in management (+5 ppt) and computer / mathematical (+3 ppt) — the categories that anchor knowledge-economy office demand and command the highest wages.



Source: Lightcast Hamilton County occupation composition, derived from QCEW + ACS staffing patterns. Shares rounded to nearest percentage point.

4.3 Wages

HC's wages skew well above the Indiana state average across nearly every occupational category. The wage premium reflects two factors: (1) HC's tighter labor market drives premium against the state average for like-for-like roles, and (2) HC's occupational mix is concentrated in higher-wage SOCs to begin with.

Per BLS OES (Indianapolis MSA wage detail), the HC wage premium is approximately 10–15% above MSA-median for skilled professional roles (management, computer / math, healthcare practitioners), holding occupation constant. The wage absolute level is highest in management (\$120K+ median for senior managers) and computer / mathematical (\$95K+ median).

4.4 Hiring and separation churn

LEHD QWI tracks job-to-job mobility, hires, and separations at the county level. HC's annual hiring rate has been approximately 9.8% — a moderate level indicating a healthy churning market without the high-cost full-replacement rates that signal labor-market dysfunction. Separations are roughly balanced with hires, with a slight net positive (more hires than separations) consistent with HC's continued employer expansion.

4.5 Lightcast career-pathway analysis

Hamilton County's job-posting volume per the Alex Workforce Ecosystem ranks among the densest in the MSA on a per-capita basis. The largest posting concentrations are in registered nursing (~1,851 12-month-trailing postings), management roles, software developers, and healthcare administrators. The Lightcast "next-step jobs" career-pathway analysis identifies natural progression routes from current HC occupations to higher-wage destinations within the county or commute shed.

WHAT'S WORTH WATCHING

HC's healthcare occupational shortage is the most acute single labor-market constraint. The Behavioral Health Workforce shortage compounds: HC's clinical psychologist projected employment is -38.7% by 2029 even as youth mental health crisis events have tripled since 2017. The mismatch between supply trajectory and demand trajectory is the single largest workforce-policy issue facing the county.

Goods and services

What Hamilton County makes, sells, buys, and trades. The hardest flow category to instrument at county level — most federal stats are MSA or state.

5.1 Retail consumption

Indiana DOR's destination-allocated retail sales tax data places \$13.37B of retail consumption in Hamilton County for 2024. This is what HC residents and visitors actually purchased through registered retailers across the calendar year, allocated to the destination county per Indiana's destination-based sales tax sourcing.

\$13.37B

HC RETAIL CONSUMPTION (DOR 2024)

\$3.42B

HC RETAIL MERCHANT OUTPUT (LIGHTCAST 2025)

~7.9×

HC RETAIL IMPORT MULTIPLIER (DOR / IN-REGION)

5.2 Production output (Lightcast Input-Output)

Lightcast Input-Output data shows HC's retail-trade gross output (production by HC merchants, whether sold in-county or exported) at \$3.42B for 2025. Of that, approximately \$1.74B (51%) is exported — sold to non-HC buyers via online, regional retail catchment, or pass-through. The remaining \$1.68B is HC merchant sales to HC buyers.

Comparing the two perspectives: HC's ~12.6% retail capture rate (HC merchants serving HC buyers = \$1.68B / HC retail consumption \$13.37B). Approximately 87% of HC's retail consumption is satisfied by retailers NOT physically located in HC: online (Amazon, etc.), big-box chains headquartered elsewhere, and Marion-County cross-border shopping (Castleton, Keystone, downtown Indianapolis).

STRATEGIC IMPLICATION

HC's low retail capture rate is not a deficiency — it reflects the normal pattern of a knowledge-economy suburban county whose residents earn high incomes and shop across a regional catchment. The strategic question is which retail categories have the largest capture-rate upside if specific HC retail districts can be repositioned. Carmel City Center has been the test bed; Westfield Grand Park is the next.

5.3 Manufacturing and industrial

Per Hamilton County GeoHub parcel data, industrial parcels carry \$861M of assessed value across 477 parcels. Industrial activity concentrates in Noblesville (largest by AV), with smaller concentrations in Westfield, Fishers, and the rural unincorporated areas. The principal manufacturing sub-sectors per QCEW are advanced manufacturing engineering, food production, and specialty industrial supply.

5.4 Services

Services flows — both production and consumption — are the weakest layer in federal data at county level. Services exports (HC firms selling to non-HC clients) are largely opaque outside MSA-level statistics. Services consumption (HC residents purchasing services from in-county vs. out-of-county providers) is partial via MSA aggregates.

Where we can speak with confidence: HC's healthcare services consumption is robust and growing (Riverview, IU Health, Community Health Network presence), and HC's professional / business services activity is concentrated in Carmel and Fishers, with significant cross-border services exports to Marion County. The remaining services categories (personal services, hospitality, entertainment) follow patterns visible in establishment counts but not quantifiable at the dollar-flow level without partner data.

5.5 Trade and exports

BEA Regional Trade and Foreign Direct Investment data is MSA-level only at the published aggregation. HC-specific trade flows are not separately reported. Where trade can be inferred: the Lightcast I-O exports table shows HC retail-trade exports of \$1.74B (sales by HC merchants to non-HC buyers); industrial exports of HC-located firms are partially visible through the same I-O framework.

CAVEAT: WEAKEST-COVERAGE FLOW

This is the flow category with the weakest federal data coverage at county level. Services exports, commodity flows, and B2B trade are largely opaque without partner data. The figures shown above are the strongest defensible statements from public sources; a more detailed view would require Numerator-class consumer panel data, S&P Capital IQ supplier-network data, or comparable premium subscriptions not currently in scope.

Capital

Real estate investment, business investment, new formation, tax base, lending — the financial layer of the economy.

6.1 Commercial real estate

Hamilton County's commercial real estate inventory totals approximately 6,371 parcels with \$11.97B in assessed value across 5,956 commercial and 477 industrial parcels. Carmel anchors the top of the inventory at \$4.74B AV, followed by Fishers (\$2.82B), Noblesville (\$2.38B), and Westfield (\$1.33B). The smaller cities and rural areas account for the remaining ~\$0.7B.

CITY	COMMERCIAL AV	INDUSTRIAL AV	APARTMENTS AV	TOTAL CRE AV
Carmel	\$4.74B	\$81M	~\$1.6B	\$6.42B
Fishers	\$2.82B	\$151M	~\$1.0B	\$3.97B
Noblesville	\$2.38B	\$446M	~\$0.6B	\$3.43B
Westfield	\$1.33B	\$162M	~\$0.7B	\$2.19B

Source: Hamilton County GeoHub parcel statistics, April 2026. Apartment AV (class 403) estimated allocation; full breakdown in Alex CRE.

6.2 The multifamily story

Per Colliers Indianapolis Multifamily Q1 2025, 43% of all multifamily units under construction in the Indianapolis MSA are concentrated in Hamilton County. This is the single most important capital-flow indicator in the report. With HC representing approximately 14% of MSA population, this is a 3x over-index. Westfield (Grand Park area) and Carmel (City Center, Midtown, Proscenium) account for the bulk of construction; smaller projects are visible in Fishers and Noblesville.

Multifamily under construction is a forward indicator of household demand. The 43% concentration signals that capital allocators believe HC's residential demand will continue to outpace MSA-average growth through the 2026–2027 delivery cycle. Multifamily delivers are typically absorbed within 12–18 months of completion in healthy markets; HC's absorption pace will be tested as the current pipeline lands.

6.3 Office market – Q1 2026 update

Cushman MarketBeat extraction in May 2026 (Q3 2025 + Q4 2025 + Q1 2026) confirms what the multifamily UC concentration predicted. Hamilton County's office market is structurally outperforming the MSA across vacancy, absorption, and class-mix dimensions:

METRIC	FISHERS	NORTH/CARMEL	DOWNTOWN CBD	MSA
Q1 2026 vacancy	12.9%	17.9%	24.2%	20.8%
YTD 2025 absorption (sf)	+14,940	+26,769	-36,169	-165,872
Q1 2026 absorption (sf)	+14,267	+16,896	-129,967	+91,634
Class A asking rent (\$/psf)	\$21.54	\$24.94	\$25.84	\$24.26

Source: Cushman & Wakefield Indianapolis Office MarketBeat Q1 2026 (released 2026-04-21), extracted to market_snapshot.json on 2026-05-07.

The vacancy gap between HC submarkets and Downtown CBD is 6.3 to 11.3 percentage points and has been sustained across all three measured quarters. HC YTD 2025 absorption (+41,709 sf combined) materially exceeded CBD (-36,169 sf). Class A activity captured 74.1% of all 2025 new leasing — up from 59.3% in 2024 — confirming the flight-to-quality pattern at scale. The full hypothesis test is documented in the companion *Hamilton County Office Real Estate Report 2026*.

6.4 Industrial and retail – Q1 2026 update

The Cushman MarketBeat extraction also delivered Q1 2026 data on industrial and retail markets, both of which independently confirm HC's structural advantage:

Industrial: the tightest submarkets in the MSA

MSA-wide Q1 2026 industrial absorption was 3.3 million sf, up 3,798% YOY from Q1 2025's 86K sf. HC-anchored submarkets posted the tightest vacancy in the MSA — the North submarket (Westfield/Noblesville-area) at 1.9% vacancy is the lowest in the entire MSA. Combined HC industrial absorption (North + Northeast submarkets) reached +271,436 sf in Q1 2026 with a blended 5.0% vacancy, well below MSA's 7.2%. The under-construction pipeline for HC-anchored submarkets totals over 1.1 million sf, including the 1.5M sf HarperCollins BTS in adjacent Brownsburg.

Retail: HC commands premium pricing

Hamilton County's four retail trade areas total 8.1 million sf (~18% of MSA inventory) with blended vacancy of 3.0% — well below MSA's 4.8%. Three of the MSA's top 5 retail asking rents are HC trade areas:

- #1 Fishers \$39.48 NNN (highest in entire MSA)
- #2 Michigan Road/Zionsville \$30.04 (Carmel-adjacent corridor)
- #3 Westfield \$30.00 (Grand Park-adjacent)

Q1 2026 alone saw \$55.3 million in HC retail trades: Stony Creek Marketplace (Noblesville) sold for \$26.6M / \$164 psf and Village Park Plaza (Carmel) sold for \$28.6M / \$216 psf. Both transactions signal continued investor confidence in HC retail despite a slight MSA-wide net absorption miss for the quarter (-18K sf). Carmel retail vacancy at 1.6% is among the tightest in the metro.

CROSS-ASSET-CLASS OBSERVATION

Q1 2026 is the first quarterly cycle in which HC's CRE outperformance is documented across all three asset classes simultaneously. The pattern: HC is the suburban anchor for the MSA — office demand is pulling there, industrial is anchored there, and retail commands premium pricing there. The Risk #1 retail capture rate (12.6% — see §5) signals a strategic opportunity in retail that this Q1 2026 data confirms is positioned for capture-rate elevation. The 2026 Q1 quarterly micro-brief documents this in detail.

6.3 TIF districts and tax base

Approximately 54.5% of HC commercial assessed value sits in TIF (Tax Increment Financing) districts. The 217 active TIF sub-districts represent aggressive use of TIF to underwrite commercial development across all four major cities. The tax base is structurally bifurcated: high-AV-per-acre districts (Carmel City Center, Fishers Geist) carry heavy TIF capture; the rural unincorporated areas operate at conventional tax rates.

Indiana's 2025 property tax reform redistributes approximately \$744M statewide loss to school corporations. HC's six school corporations (HSE, Carmel Clay, Noblesville, Westfield Washington, Hamilton Heights, Sheridan) each face material adaptive challenges. The reform's effects compound through 2027 budget cycles and shape HC's fiscal infrastructure.

6.4 Lending

Per FFIEC CRA Small Business Lending Data 2024, Hamilton County small businesses received 11,479 loans totaling \$415.4M across the 57 census tracts. The lending volume is concentrated in tracts with high-AV commercial corridors (Carmel City Center, Fishers I-69, Noblesville SR-37). Average loan size is modest (\$36K), reflecting working-capital and equipment-finance lending rather than expansionary capital deployment.

HMDA mortgage origination data for 2023 records 10,465 originations totaling \$3.72B in HC. The 12.1% denial rate is lower than the MSA average. Multifamily loan volume reached \$596M across 31 multifamily loans — a modest but meaningful capital flow at the residential-investment level.

6.5 Business formation

Census BFS (Business Formation Statistics) data is published at state level only. Hamilton County's business formation rate is inferred from QCEW establishment counts (13,756 in Q3 2025, up from approximately 11,800 in Q3 2019) — a 17% increase over six years, reflecting both organic formation and HQ relocations. The pattern is consistent across all four major cities.

6.6 Investment summary

The capital-flow story is unambiguous: capital is moving toward Hamilton County in numbers and at scale not seen at any prior point in the county's history. Multifamily UC concentration, sustained business formation rate, growing CRE assessed value, and stable lending volume all point in the same direction. The principal risk is deceleration if labor-supply constraints (§4) prevent employer expansion from absorbing the residential pipeline.

Connection

Hamilton County's relationship to the Indianapolis MSA, broader trade corridors, federal/state funding, infrastructure, and policy. The category that distinguishes a county economy from a closed system.

7.1 Hamilton ↔ Marion: the dominant commute corridor

Per Census LEHD LODES, approximately 40,000 Hamilton County residents commute to Marion County daily — by far the largest single commute corridor. The reciprocal flow (Marion residents working in HC) is in the range of 25,000–30,000. The net commute-out is approximately 15,000 residents per day.

The commute pattern is not weakness. HC residents working in Marion-County employer sites pay LIT (Local Income Tax) to HC based on residence, which preserves HC's tax base regardless of where work is performed. The structural commute-out reflects HC's role as the metro's high-MHI residential anchor; the reverse commute INTO HC reflects HC's growing employer base.

7.2 Federal funding flows

USAspending.gov tracks federal contracts and grants landing in HC. The federal funding mosaic for HC includes:

- HUD pass-through — Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME, Continuum of Care funding flowing to HC entities or to MSA partnerships including HC.
- USDA Rural Development — funding for rural-N and rural-S unincorporated areas plus smaller cities (Sheridan, Cicero, Atlanta).
- Department of Education Title funding — flowing to the six HC school corporations.
- NIH-related healthcare grants — flowing to HC-based healthcare entities and research-adjacent organizations.
- SBA-direct lending and contract awards — visible through SAM.gov.

7.3 Inter-jurisdictional fiscal flows

The Indiana state-comptroller pass-through tracking is partial; comprehensive view requires synthesis. Indiana DOR inter-county transfers (LIT distributions, sales tax shares) are the principal fiscal connections. Federal transportation funding through INDOT is the principal infrastructure connection.

7.4 Migration as inter-county connection

IRS SOI county-to-county migration data shows HC's principal connections: Marion (largest source AND destination of net migrants), Boone, Hancock, Madison, Hendricks, and Hamilton's own internal migration patterns (across township boundaries). The post-2020 pattern shows HC's net migration becoming more diversified — out-of-state inflow share has grown from roughly 20% of inbound migrants pre-pandemic to approximately 30% post-pandemic.

7.5 Health system connection

Hamilton County's healthcare workforce is integrated with the broader Indianapolis MSA health system. Riverview Health (Noblesville-based) is HC-anchored; IU Health Saxony serves north-MSA; Community Health Network has HC presence. Cross-border patient flow into HC for specialty services and out of HC for tertiary services compounds with the workforce flow.

7.6 What's worth watching

Two policy reform threads will reshape the connection-flow story over 2026–2028. First, the property tax reform's school-finance redistributions directly affect inter-county fiscal flows. Second, ongoing LIT (Local Income Tax) reform proposals at the Indiana statehouse have the potential to materially restructure how residence-based vs. employment-based taxation flows between counties — with HC as one of the most directly affected counties given its commute-out pattern.

SECTION 8

Microsegment view

Fourteen named cohorts × five flow categories. Hamilton County is a system of differentiated households, not an undifferentiated demographic average.

The microsegmentation methodology decomposes Hamilton County's 152,000 households into 14 strategic cohorts (10 demographically-defined; 4 behaviorally-defined via commute, education, and migration predicates) plus a Hamilton County Mainstream coverage cohort. The methodology pairs cohort cell counts (derived from ACS PUMS Indianapolis-MSA microdata) with a cohort-specific cascade producing per-cohort retail-relevant household demand.

8.1 The cohort taxonomy

COHORT	HOUSEHOLDS	RETAIL-RELEVANT \$	\$/HH	PROFILE
Hamilton County Service Backbone	15,217	\$0.75B	\$49,092	Lower-quintile workers, service + trades
The Anchored Retiree	11,511	\$0.55B	\$48,122	Long-tenure retired homeowners
The Cost-Burdened Renter	10,233	\$0.46B	\$45,019	Lower-mid quintile renters, young single / family
Carmel Empty Nesters	5,587	\$0.74B	\$132,789	Long-tenure Carmel owners, top-quintile
Hamilton County Remote-Worker	4,901	\$0.74B	\$151,227	Anywhere-in-HC, works from home, bachelors+
Established Noblesville Roots	3,935	\$0.32B	\$82,253	Mid-tenure Noblesville mid-quintile
Fishers Tech Family	3,910	\$0.62B	\$158,114	Fishers, established family, STEM/tech
Fishers Reverse Commuter	2,386	\$0.36B	\$152,086	Fishers owner, commutes to Marion, bachelors+
Carmel Graduate-Degree Empty Nester	1,918	\$0.26B	\$137,890	Carmel graduate-degreed empty-nester
The Returning Hamiltonian	1,522	\$0.24B	\$155,857	Recent return migrants, professional, top quintile
Marion Refugee	1,291	\$0.11B	\$86,862	Recent movers from Marion, mid-quintile family
Sheridan / Cicero Trades	1,204	\$0.10B	\$81,920	Rural-N trades + agriculture-adjacent
Westfield Builders	1,109	\$0.17B	\$150,011	Westfield owner, growth-phase young family
The New Carmel Professional	972	\$0.14B	\$145,311	Recent Carmel arrivals, professional, top quintile
Hamilton County Mainstream (residual)	101,510	\$10.43B	\$102,700	Demographic majority, mixed

Sources: Microsegmentation v1.6 substrate built from ACS 5-year PUMS records for HC PUMAs 01901 + 01902 (2019–2023 vintage, centered -2021, scaled to 2024 152K HH total). Per-cohort retail-relevant dollars from layer 2 per-cohort cascade calibrated to HC aggregate \$14.69B anchor.

8.2 Cross-flow reading

Different cohorts show very different flow profiles:

- The Hamilton County Remote-Worker (4,901 HH, \$151K/HH retail-relevant) is the post-2020 inflow that sustains HC's bachelors+ rate independent of MSA employer presence. This cohort has no employer-physical-presence relationship with the Indianapolis MSA. They picked HC for QoL, schools, and property values — not commuting access.
- The Fishers Reverse Commuter (2,386 HH, \$152K/HH) is the tech-finance commuter cohort that fuels Fishers' top-quintile housing absorption. 100% commute-to-Marion by predicate.
- The Carmel Graduate-Degree Empty Nester (1,918 HH, \$138K/HH) is the high-equity graduate-degreed sub-tier within Carmel Empty Nesters — over-represented in HC philanthropic giving and arts/cultural spending.

- The Marion Refugee (1,291 HH, \$87K/HH) is the schools-and-safety relocation pathway from Marion County, mid-quintile family stage. This is the cohort where HC's growth is most directly REPLACING Marion residents.
- The Hamilton County Mainstream (101,510 HH, \$103K/HH retail-relevant — close to HC's per-HH average \$97K) is the demographic majority. By construction this cohort is the comparator against which strategic cohorts are differentiated.

8.3 What this enables strategically

Cohort-aware policy and program targeting is the principal use of this microsegmentation. For example:

- The Hamilton County Childcare Action Dashboard's Parent Action Layer is built specifically for the Cost-Burdened Renter and Service Backbone cohorts whose CCDF-eligibility cliff zone is the binding constraint on family economic mobility.
- The Re-Entry Workforce Initiative targets adults transitioning from incarceration, recovery, or community supervision — a cohort that overlaps with subsets of Service Backbone and Cost-Burdened Renter.
- City BRE add-on workforce-alignment work targets Westfield Builders, New Carmel Professional, and Returning Hamiltonian cohorts at city-specific levels.
- The Behavioral Health Workforce strategy addresses a workforce shortage that affects all 14 cohorts — but with different access patterns by cohort.

SECTION 9

Cross-flow synthesis

No single flow tells the whole story of Hamilton County's economy. The synthesis is in how the flows interact: where the system is most balanced, where stresses are concentrated, and where the principal forward signals point.

The principal balance: people pulling employment, employment pulling capital

The dominant pattern across the five flows is sequential: high-income, high-education people are flowing into Hamilton County. Employers are following the talent (visible in expanding employer establishment counts and the office-real-estate demand-pull pattern). Capital is following the employment (visible most strikingly in the 43% MSA multifamily UC concentration). The connection back to the broader Indianapolis MSA remains strong — the commute-out is structural, not deteriorating — but is increasingly bidirectional as more employers locate in HC.

The principal stress: labor-supply constraints + healthcare workforce shortfall

The 2.1% unemployment rate sustained for four consecutive years is a structural-not-cyclical constraint. Healthcare and trades are the most acute shortfalls; behavioral health is the single most policy-relevant gap (HC's clinical psychologist projected employment is -38.7% by 2029 even as youth mental health crisis events have tripled since 2017). The supply trajectory and demand trajectory have diverged at scale.

The principal weakness: goods/services flow visibility

Goods/services flow data has the weakest county-level federal coverage. We can show retail consumption (DOR), HC merchant retail output (Lightcast), and the import-multiplier signal — but services exports, commodity flows, and B2B trade remain largely opaque. The 2027 annual will include a richer cross-source synthesis as Lightcast Input-Output Phase 2 data lands.

The principal opportunity: retail capture upside

HC's ~12.6% retail capture rate is below comparable knowledge-economy suburban counties nationally. Specific retail districts (Carmel City Center, Westfield Grand Park, Fishers Nickel Plate) have demonstrated capture-rate elevation when amenity and walkability are intentionally programmed. The strategic opportunity is identifying which categories within the \$11.79B annual import flow have the largest in-county capture upside.

The principal forward signal: multifamily UC concentration

The 43% MSA multifamily UC concentration is the single strongest forward indicator across all five flows. It says: capital allocators have priced HC's continued growth into their underwriting. Whether the absorption pace tracks the delivery pipeline depends on labor-supply constraints (§4) and the inter-county fiscal-reform threads (§7).

The 2026 Q1 confirmation event

The May 2026 Cushman MarketBeat extraction (Q3 2025 + Q4 2025 + Q1 2026 office, plus Q1 2026 industrial and retail) was the first quarterly cycle to deliver direct confirmation of HC's structural CRE advantage across all three asset classes simultaneously. The pattern is now documented:

- **Office:** HC submarkets posted +41,709 sf YTD 2025 absorption while Downtown CBD posted -36,169 sf. Vacancy gap 6.3 to 11.3 ppt sustained across three measured quarters.
- **Industrial:** HC-area North submarket posted 1.9% vacancy — lowest in entire MSA. Combined HC industrial absorption +271,436 sf with 5.0% blended vacancy vs MSA 7.2%.
- **Retail:** Three of MSA's top 5 retail rents are HC trade areas. \$55.3M in HC retail traded in Q1 2026 alone.

Translated into a single sentence: the capital flows that the multifamily UC concentration forecast in 2025 are now showing up in real absorption data across office, industrial, and retail in 2026. Six office hypothesis verdicts moved this cycle: H1, H2, H6 transitioned from Partial Support to Support; H3 transitioned from Unconfirmed to Partially Refuted (sublease share is DECLINING, not growing as predicted). The companion *Office Real Estate Report 2026* documents each transition.

The Office × community correlation matrix

The eight-pairing correlation matrix run alongside this annual report (per the Quality Ladder + Correlate Runbook) confirms structural mechanism rather than coincidence. The strongest finding: HQ relocation count × out-of-state migration share, Pearson $r = +0.926$ across 2022–2025 annual observations. Firms follow people. United Healthcare's Q1 2026 new lease (27,947 sf at 500 E 96th St in N/Carmel) is the most recent confirmation in real time.

NET ASSESSMENT

Hamilton County's economy is structurally sound and structurally distinct. The five flows are integrated — people pulling employment, employment pulling capital, capital underwriting growth, growth deepening the connection to the metro. The principal stresses (labor supply, behavioral health workforce) are real but addressable. The 2026 vintage shows continued momentum; the 2027 vintage will show how the property-tax reform and labor-supply constraints play out against this trajectory.

Methodology

10.1 Conceptual model

This report adopts the flow-first analytical structure used by the Federal Reserve's regional outlook publications, the BEA's regional GDP releases, and the BLS regional summary cards. The Hamilton County economy is decomposed into five flow categories — people, employment, goods/services, capital, and connection — each of which is an independent forward signal of a different kind of economic activity. Cross-flow synthesis (§9) shows where the flows interact.

10.2 Hypothesis-driven framing

Where data permits direct empirical testing, the report uses an explicit-prediction → verdict structure (the discipline tested in the bridge product Office Real Estate Annual Report). Where data permits descriptive synthesis but not direct testing, the report uses traditional structured analysis with explicit caveats. Where data is materially incomplete (notably goods/services exports and B2B trade), the report names the gap rather than fills it with inference.

10.3 Data sources

Twenty-three federal data sources underpin the analysis:

- Census — ACS 5-year, ACS 1-year, ACS PUMS, PEP, BFS, CBP/ZBP, LEHD LODES + J2J + QWI.
- BLS — QCEW, LAUS, OES, CES PUMD, JOLTS.
- BEA — Regional GDP (CAGDP), Personal Income (CAINC), RIMS multipliers, PCE-by-state SAPCE.
- FFIEC — HMDA LAR, CRA Small Business Lending.
- FRED — Indiana / HC time-series.
- IRS SOI — county-to-county migration.
- HUD — CoC, AHAR.
- CDC — PLACES, WONDER, YRBSS.
- HRSA — HPSA designations.
- SAMHSA — Treatment Facilities, NSDUH.
- USAspending.gov — federal contracts/awards.

Three state sources: Indiana DOR (sales tax detail), Indiana DLGF (property tax), IDOE (K-12 enrollment).

Four licensed sources: Lightcast (industry, occupations, postings, I-O), tracked under existing IHC Lightcast Developer Agreement with explicit aggregation-floor compliance per the V3 sub-licensing framework.

10.4 Cross-source triangulation

Where multiple sources speak to the same metric, the report uses cross-source triangulation to bound the answer. The Risk #1 retail consumption reconciliation (cascade \$14.69B vs. DOR \$13.37B vs. BEA-PCE-by-state-derived \$9.25B vs. Lightcast HC merchant in-region \$1.68B) is the worked example of this discipline. Cascade vs. DOR divergence of

+9.86% is within ±15% tolerance; the larger gaps to BEA-PCE-derived and Lightcast in-region are characterized substantively rather than treated as error.

10.5 Microsegmentation methodology

The microsegmentation methodology (v1.6) decomposes HC into 14 strategic cohorts plus a Hamilton County Mainstream coverage cohort. The substrate is ACS 5-year PUMS records for HC PUMAs 01901 + 01902, IPF-converged to HC marginals on city × tenure × duration × income × life-stage × occupation. Per-cell distributions on five primary marginal lenses (education, commute, household-education, industry, migration-origin) and five cross-cutting filters (race, disability, SDOH, broadband, veteran) are derived from PUMS joint distributions. Per-cohort dollar estimates use a calibrated income-elasticity cascade that preserves HC's \$14.69B retail-relevant aggregate exactly.

10.6 What this report does not claim

- It does not claim to predict future absorption, employment, or output. Forward signals are identified explicitly; predictions are not.
- It does not claim that Hamilton County is "winning" or that any other county is "losing" — both HC and its peer counties continue to function. The thesis is structural — HC has favorable underlying conditions — not directional.
- It does not interpret broker conversations, anecdotal observations, or single-respondent surveys as data. The hypothesis-driven framing requires named, dated, sourced public information for any directional claim.
- It does not fill data gaps with inference. Where evidence is incomplete, we say so explicitly (notably in goods/ services exports and services trade).

10.7 Refresh cadence

This report ships annually. Quarterly micro-briefs (1–2 pages each) are scheduled for Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 cycles to update the underlying data on each of the five flows as new federal and brokerage releases land. The next quarterly micro-brief is targeted for Q1 2026 brokerage cycle (expected late April 2026).

SECTION 11

Data sources and freshness

Every quoted statistic in this report carries a freshness timestamp anchored to the underlying source's most recent published release. The Alex data-freshness manifest tracks each source's refresh cadence and current vintage; the manifest is the single source of truth across the public summary, full annual report, and live dashboard tiers.

SOURCE	VINTAGE CITED	REFRESH CADENCE
Census ACS 5-year	2024 (centered ~2022)	Annual (December release)
Census ACS PUMS 5-year	2019–2023 (centered ~2021)	Annual
Census PEP	2024	Annual
BLS QCEW	Q3 2025	Quarterly (~6 mo lag)
BLS LAUS	Dec 2025	Monthly
BLS OES	May 2024	Annual (April release)
BEA CAGDP	2024	Annual (December release)
BEA SAPCE	2024	Annual
IRS SOI migration	2022 → 2023	Annual (~18 mo lag)
FFIEC HMDA LAR	2023	Annual (~9 mo lag)
FFIEC CRA SB lending	2024	Annual (~12 mo lag)
CDC PLACES	2026 release	Annual
HC GeoHub parcels	April 2026 generation	Quarterly
Indiana DOR retail	2024	Annual (~12 mo lag)
Indiana DLGF property tax	FY 2026	Annual
Lightcast HC industry / occupations	April 2026 export	Annual manual export
Lightcast I-O	April 2026 export, 2025 vintage	Annual
Colliers Indianapolis Multifamily	Q1 2025	Quarterly
Cushman MarketBeat Office	Q4 2025	Quarterly

SECTION 12

Methodology review acknowledgment

This report's methodology was reviewed by the Invest Hamilton County CEO prior to publication. Per the V3 architecture's explicit governance posture, CEO review is the active state of methodology review for IHC analytical publications during the V3 build cycle.

A future Methodology Advisory Committee, if established, would augment external academic peer review credibility. MAC infrastructure is not currently active per CEO direction 2026-05-04. CEO judgment, counsel coordination, and the V3 quality-ladder discipline collectively sustain methodology defensibility through the V3 build cycle.

The microsegmentation methodology (v1.6 substrate) ships under the same CEO review posture. The v1.5 → v1.6 substrate upgrade documented in the V3 microsegmentation live-status doc was approved as a substrate refinement, not a new methodology line. Cohort taxonomy changes (the four new v1.5 cohorts: Fishers Reverse Commuter, Hamilton County Remote-Worker, Carmel Graduate-Degree Empty Nester, Marion Refugee) are subject to Layer 5 CEO

adversarial review per microsegmentation architecture §7 before any branded report uses these cohort labels externally.

About Alex / Invest Hamilton County

Alex is Invest Hamilton County's data intelligence platform — a 11,000+ file curated data repository combined with five years of institutional research and modern AI to deliver evidence-based answers about Hamilton County's economy, workforce, and communities.

This is the full annual tier of the State of the Hamilton County Economy report. The 10-page public summary tier is published separately and built from the same underlying analysis. The live dashboard tier is hosted at investhamiltoncounty.com under Alex Site Intelligence.

Companion reports in the same series cover Hamilton County office real estate (annual + quarterly micro-briefs), workforce alignment, behavioral health workforce, commercial real estate, and the Hamilton Pathways Lab K-12 work-based learning initiative. Each report shares the underlying data substrate; each ships under the same brand and methodology discipline.

Where Insight Becomes Action

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Report version 1.0 · Vintage Q1 2026 · Methodology v1 (V3-discipline architecture)
Architecture: [alex-v3-experimental/state-of-economy/architecture-v1.md](#)