

NORTH FORT COLLINS: Social Services at the Urban Frontier

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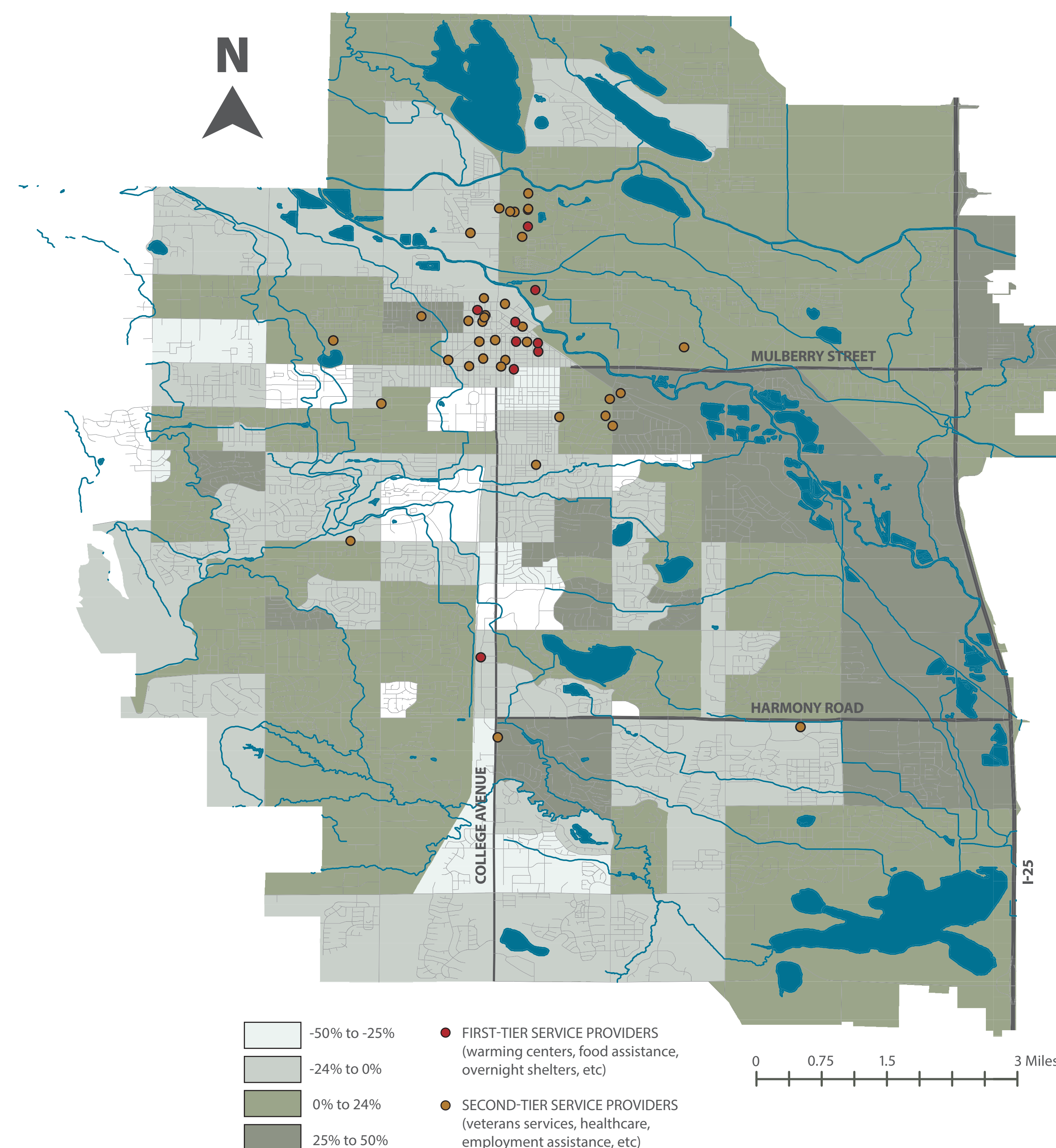
PURPOSE Many of Fort Collins' social services – food banks, homeless shelters, and public health centers – are located in North Fort Collins, in areas previously removed from the city's major population center. Now, due to the city's rapid growth, these areas are becoming urbanized, with higher-density development encroaching on existing social service locations. This new dynamic raises questions about whether Fort Collins' social services have – due to either economic or social forces – felt pressure to relocate even farther from the city center. This research uses a combination of GIS data mapping and qualitative interview analysis to provide insight into these issues.

BACKGROUND Fort Collins is growing incredibly quickly; according to the Coloradoan¹, Fort Collins was the United States' 10th fastest growing population hub in 2015. While development is expanding in many directions, there has been a particular concentration of growth in North Fort Collins. Unfortunately, the number of chronically homeless individuals in the city is also on the rise, increasing by nearly 30% from 2015 to 2016. Many members of the local homeless population rely on social services located in the North Fort Collins area, particularly the clusters of services along Linden between Jefferson and Vine and the area surrounding the intersection of Conifer and North College Avenue. These locations have historically been on the fringe of Fort Collins' urban area. As GIS analysis clearly shows, however, development is quickly encroaching on these areas.

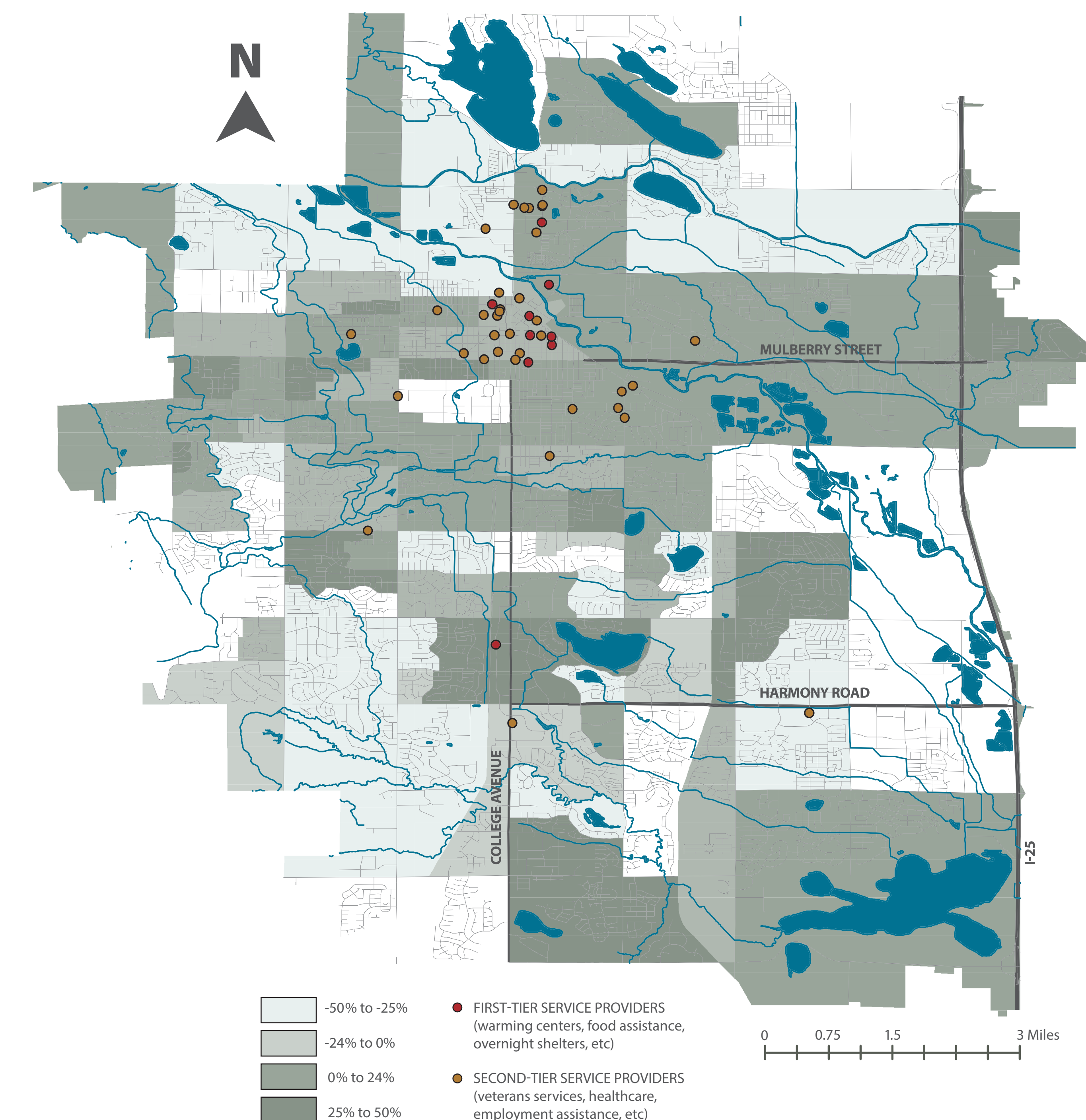
CONCLUSIONS Both service providers and homeless residents face increasing social pressure from encroaching development. Some service providers exist in locations that are exempt from financial pressures (e.g. they do not pay rent or they have buildings officially designated for social services); organizations that do not enjoy these provisions bear the weight of increasing growth-related financial pressures in the forms of rising rents and other costs. These social and financial forms of pressure create an increasing burden on the social service network, as homeless residents feel increasingly uncomfortable during their day-to-day lives, and service providers spend more of their limited resources on managing public perceptions.

SIGNIFICANCE Fort Collins' social service network plays a vital function in the everyday lives of the city's least fortunate residents. Unfortunately, as the city grows, these social services come under increasing pressure from a variety of sources. Rising property values and related rent or property tax increases may mean financial hardship. An influx of residential development may lead to pressure of a social nature, as new residents express displeasure at "unsavory" people or activities in their neighborhood. A more thorough understanding of these complicated dynamics is of interest for many reasons: for consideration as the city plans for long-term growth, for the ongoing social cohesion of Fort Collins' neighborhoods, and for the lives of those whose very existence relies on the accessibility of these organizations.

PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PER CAPITA INCOME, 2010-2015
WITHIN THE FORT COLLINS GROWTH MANAGEMENT AREA²



PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RENT, 2010-2015
WITHIN THE FORT COLLINS GROWTH MANAGEMENT AREA²



“ Oak and College, nobody goes more than 20 blocks from there, cuz then it's like a no-help zone.³

“ I would stay out of town if I could. If the resources were outside of town, I wouldn't even be here. They're in a really bad spot, being in the money-maker zone.⁴

“ Part of why homelessness has become more visible is because we've become more crowded. These issues that were playing out in the middle of nowhere before are now playing out in front of a larger audience. ... If I ran a business I don't know how I'd feel about being next to this place. I'd probaby have mixed feelings. ... I met with the North Fort Collins Business Association recently and there's definitely some people concerned in a way that they didn't use to be. It's clearly increased on people's radar.⁵

REFERENCES

1. Garcia, Adrian. March 24, 2015. "Fort Collins metro adds thousands in 2015." The Coloradoan. <http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2016/03/24/fort-collins-metro-adds-thousands-2015/82230342/>
2. Street, hydrology, growth management area, and service point data from the City of Fort Collins. Income and rent data from the United States Census Bureau.
3. Brendan, homeless Fort Collins resident. From personal interview conducted November 3, 2017.
4. Ryan, homeless Fort Collins resident. From personal interview conducted November 3, 2017.
5. Joseph, director of a homeless-oriented nonprofit located in North Fort Collins. From personal interview conducted October 24, 2017.

