

Jenifer Kaminsky

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Economic Profile of Hartford Vermont

The town of Hartford located in central Vermont benefits from its strategic location at the cross roads of major roads, major rivers, and major destination sights for commerce and recreation. Its proximity to Dartmouth College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire, as well as other health and educational institutions in Vermont, provide a wealth of jobs and business opportunities in the health services and technology industries. The area also possesses many recreation, tourism, and shopping districts. An economic development agenda focusing on these industries – health services and tourism – is essential for Hartford to remain competitive with the region and neighboring New Hampshire.

Demographic Analysis

The town of Hartford has experienced explosive population growth in the last 30 years. The town continues to attract new residents, with over 20% of current residents having lived in a different county in Vermont in 1995 and 17% having moved to Hartford from a different state. According to the 2000 Census median incomes in Hartford range around \$42,990, slightly higher than median incomes in the State or Windsor County, which range around \$40,000. However, 8.7% of Hartford residents live in households with incomes of less than \$10,000, a percentage higher than the state or county (see chart 1). The percentage of Hartford residents with a bachelor degree or higher (32.4%) is also higher than in the state or county. However, a third of residents possess only a high school diploma or some form of equivalency, and 10% less than that (see chart 2). In addition, some working in social services report a large population of homeless and those at risk of homelessness, especially among youth. The population of Hartford is thus divided, between the educated and economically successful and those with fewer means and resources. Any economic development agenda must provide opportunities for both groups. In addition, the town should begin to work with major employers such

as Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and educational institutions such as Community College of Vermont and the Hartford Area Vocational School to develop work force training programs. With such steps Hartford will both upgrade the skills of its current residents and continue to attract new people and new economic activities.

Structure of the Economy

As stated earlier, health services and tourism are the current key industries for Hartford, with over 25% of those working in Hartford employed in those industries. This establishment-based data tells us about who works in Hartford, but the numbers do not give us a picture of where Hartford residents work – Hartford, other cities and towns in Vermont, or New Hampshire. According to the 2000 Census, 32% of Hartford residents reported working in the health, education, or social service industries, suggesting that many travel outside of Hartford for employment. Many of those health services positions are probably located at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center or related firms and institutions. Hartford has been able to capture some of the vitality of the Center, with employment in its own health services industry growing by 235% since 1991 (see chart 3), but to remain competitive with surrounding areas, it will need to attract more firms in the future.

In addition to health services, another 18% of jobs in Hartford are in the tourism industry defined as a combination of the Amusement and Recreation, Eating and Drinking Places, and Hotels and Other Lodging Places industry classifications. These tourism and entertainment related jobs catering to visitors and the professional population residing in Hartford could be a greater source of growth for the economy as well as providing jobs for those with limited skills. Only 8.7% of Hartford residents hold jobs in these industries, suggesting that many are held by those living outside of the town. While the Green Mountains, ski areas such as Stowe and Killington capture, and Lake Champlain, serve as the traditional emblems of Vermont tourism, Hartford contains a range of recreation, shopping, and entertainment destinations. In addition, the area due to its location near the New Hampshire border and at the nexus of various major highways, acts as a gateway to other regions in Vermont. Finally, while many retail stores cannot compete with those in New Hampshire where there is no sales tax,

tourists do look for distinct Vermont products such as locally produced cheeses and maple syrup that could be a boost to retail trade in Hartford.

Comparisons to the State and Windsor County

The analysis of private employment shows that Hartford is somewhat less specialized than the State or County in health services, and as previously stated, Hartford residents are traveling outside of Hartford for employment in this industry. Hartford's locational advantage with its proximity to Dartmouth-Hitchcock, the US Veterans Administration Hospital, and other health services firms and institutions offers an opportunity to expand this industry in Hartford and on the Vermont side of the border in general. Additionally, employment in health services from 1991 to 2000 grew twice as fast in Hartford as it did in the rest of the state or county. Hartford is thus in a position to capitalize on the growth of this sector and possible synergies with nearby institutions in order to expand employment opportunities for residents and build the town's economy.

Analysis of the tourism industry reveals that despite not containing any of the state's premier tourist destinations, Hartford's tourist industry is more specialized than either that in the county or the state. This success is based on the range of popular entertainment and recreation options in Hartford, including the White River Junction Theatre Festival in the summer and Quechee Gorge State Park. Hartford also serves as a cross roads and gateway to the rest of the state, so that many tourists pass through Hartford on their way to other vacation destinations.

Another notable comparison between Hartford and the rest of the State and County is the lack manufacturing jobs in Hartford. Such jobs comprise 3.65% of those in Hartford, while they make up 18.28% and 19.63% of jobs in the County and State respectively (see chart 4), and 8.5% of Hartford residents leave the town each day to take advantage of these jobs. Where many states have lost significant numbers of manufacturing jobs in recent years employment in the aggregated manufacturing industries has remained steady from 1991 to 2000, with some new jobs added. However, none of these industries appear to be growing in any significant fashion either.

Economic Development Agenda

To remain competitive with cities and towns in Windsor County, the State, and neighboring New Hampshire, the town of Hartford needs a diverse and strategic economic development agenda. The town must expand its key industries, increase educational and employment opportunities for all residents, and better capitalize on its proximity to world class educational and medical institutions and famed tourist destinations. In addition, Hartford should begin a campaign to educate local businesses about Hartford's workforce and encourage them to employ Hartford residents.

For health services, this agenda could take the form of expansion of health care facilities in Hartford, creation of space targeted to health services start up firms, and campaigns to attract existing firms to relocate in Hartford. The Town could also work with area social service providers to create a work force training program similar to the Bridges to the Future Program in Boston, where two CDC's work with local hospitals to help entry level health care and research workers increase their skills and develop career ladders to access better paying jobs. Such a program would improve Hartford's health services workforce, helping to attract new firms, while also providing expanded opportunities to those Hartford residents with limited education and credentials.

To build the tourism industry, Hartford should begin with a marketing campaign to increase public awareness of distinct and exciting destinations in the Town. Hartford should also develop tourist centers full of area information and distinct Hartford and Vermont products along major traffic routes and border crossings to capture the tourist traffic traveling through the town on their way to other destinations in the State.

Finally, Hartford must work to address the needs and increase the employment opportunities of its low-skilled and poor residents. Resources, including the Community College of Vermont and the Hartford Area Career and Technology Center, which provides technology education to high school students and adults in the area, should be better utilized to provide job training and credential services. Hartford should work with these schools and area employers to orient skills training to area job opportunities. While the Career and Technology Center offers a wide range of vocational courses, including courses in the health services field, the Community College, serving the Upper

Valley region and located in White River Junction, offers few courses in health services or technology. Neither school offer courses in hotel and restaurant management or other fields related to the tourism industry. Such programs should be developed in an effort to create a skilled workforce that can build the industry and help attract new firms. These skills training programs should be promoted throughout the region to attract people to Hartford.

Appendix: Data

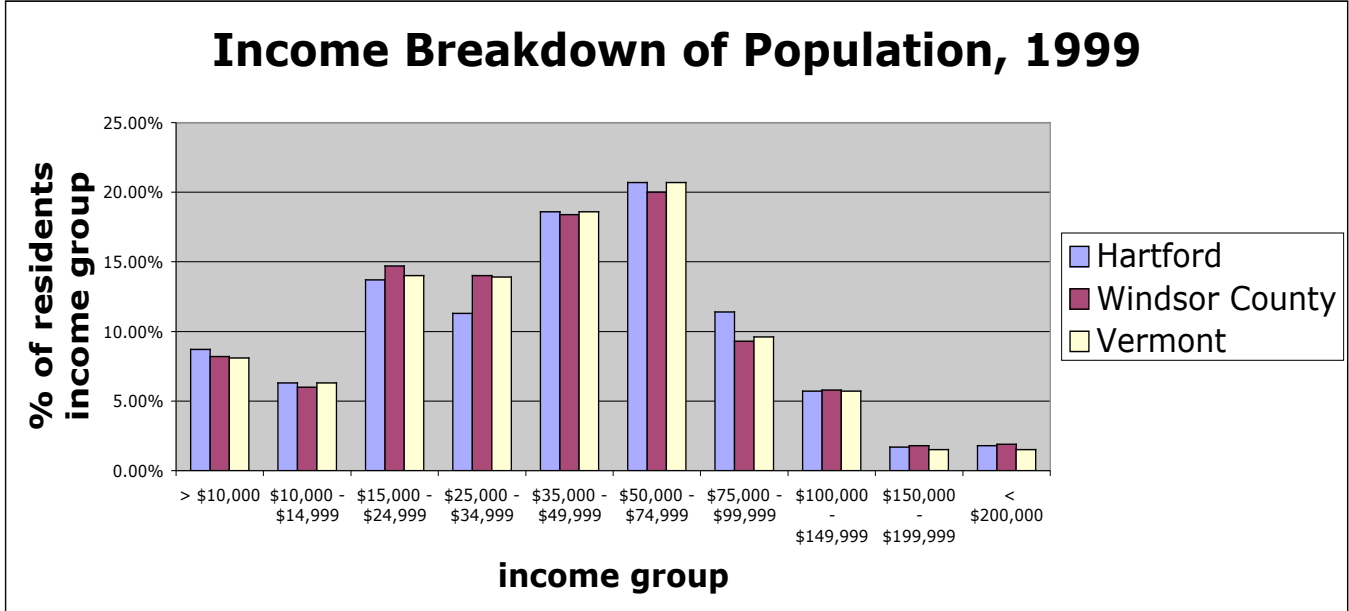


Chart 1: Source - U.S. Bureau of the Census

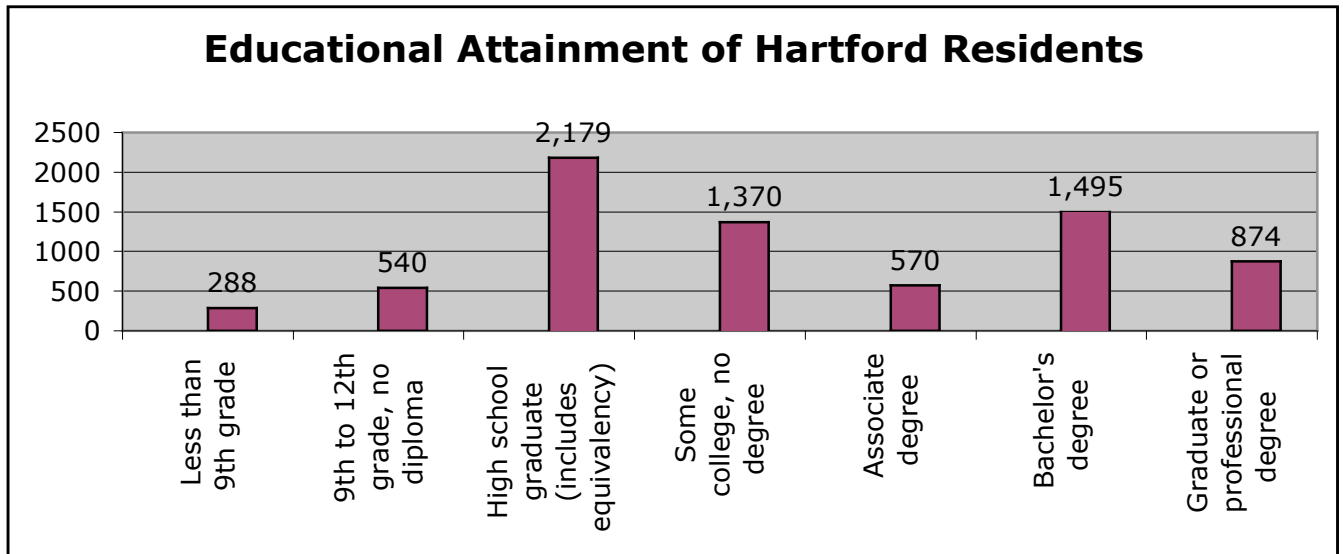


Chart 2: Source – U.S. Bureau of the Census

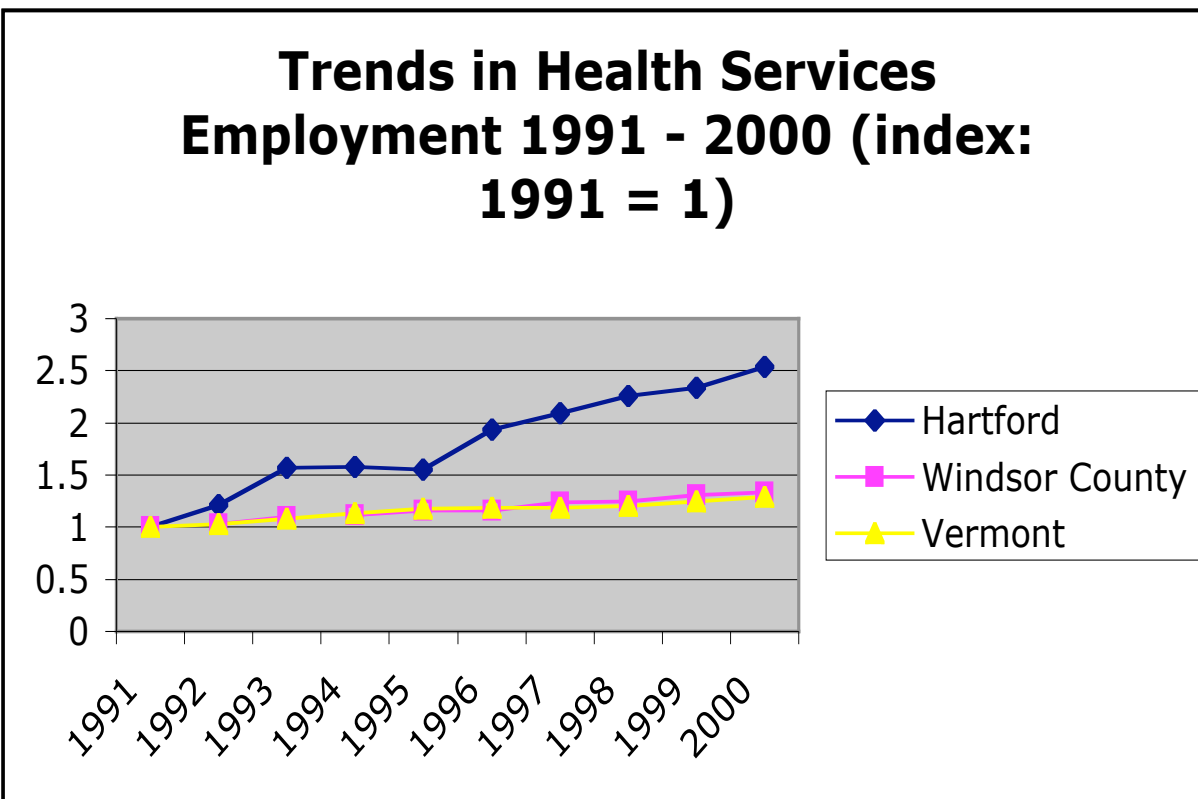


Chart 3: Source – Hartford Data Set

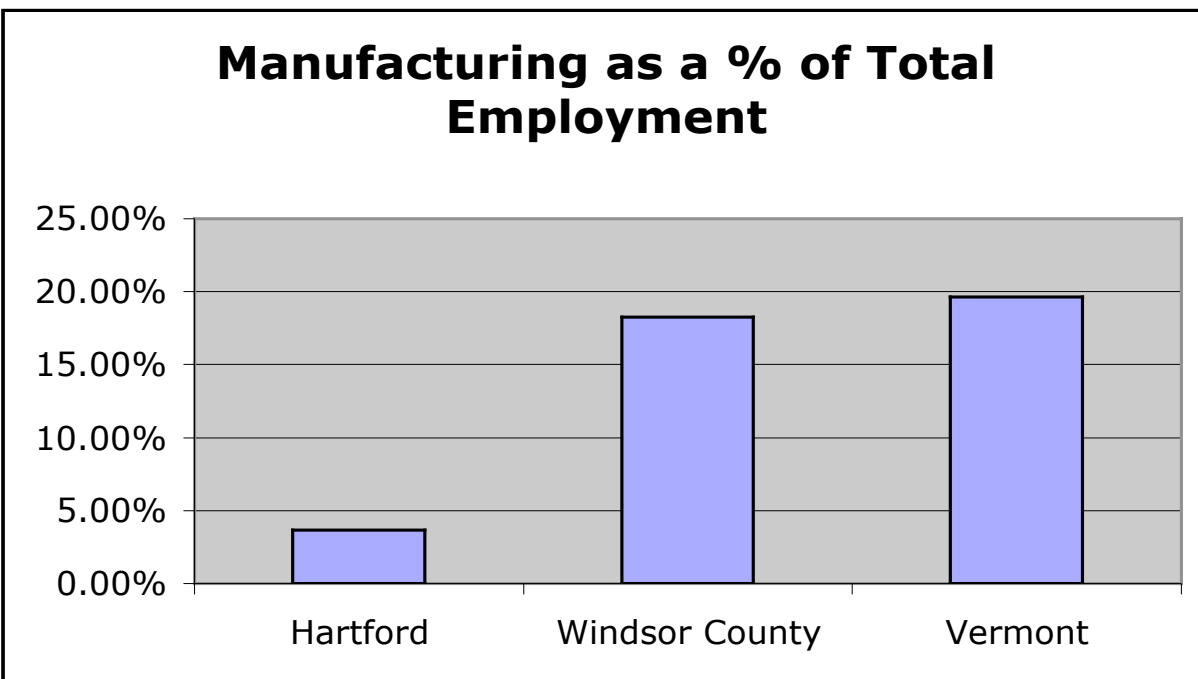


Chart 4: Source – Hartford Data Set