

A Century of Classification: The Census Bureau's Urban and Rural Classification, 1910-2010

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Urban and Rural Classification

- The Census Bureau has officially defined urban areas since the 1910 census.
- The Census Bureau identifies urban and rural population, housing, and territory solely for the purpose of statistical presentation and comparison.
- Urban areas are defined following each decennial census using population counts.
- The Census Bureau's definition of "urban" has evolved to keep pace with changes in settlement patterns as well as changes in theoretical approaches to interpreting and understanding the growth of urban areas.

Urban and Rural Classification

- Prior to each census, we review and revise, if necessary, the criteria used to define urban areas.
- Periodic review ensures the continued usefulness and relevance for statistical data tabulation and analysis.
- Periodic review also ensures that the delineation process utilizes the best possible data, procedures, and methodologies.
- Despite criteria changes, the common theme across all decades has been to identify the built-up, densely settled urban landscape.

Urban and Rural: 1874 through 1906

- 1874 through 1900, two population thresholds used to identify urban places: 4,000 and 8,000
- 1906 Supplementary Analysis: “urban” defined officially as including incorporated places as well as New England towns with 2,500 or more inhabitants.
- “Rural” was not specifically identified.

Urban and Rural: 1910 through 1940

Urban encompassed:

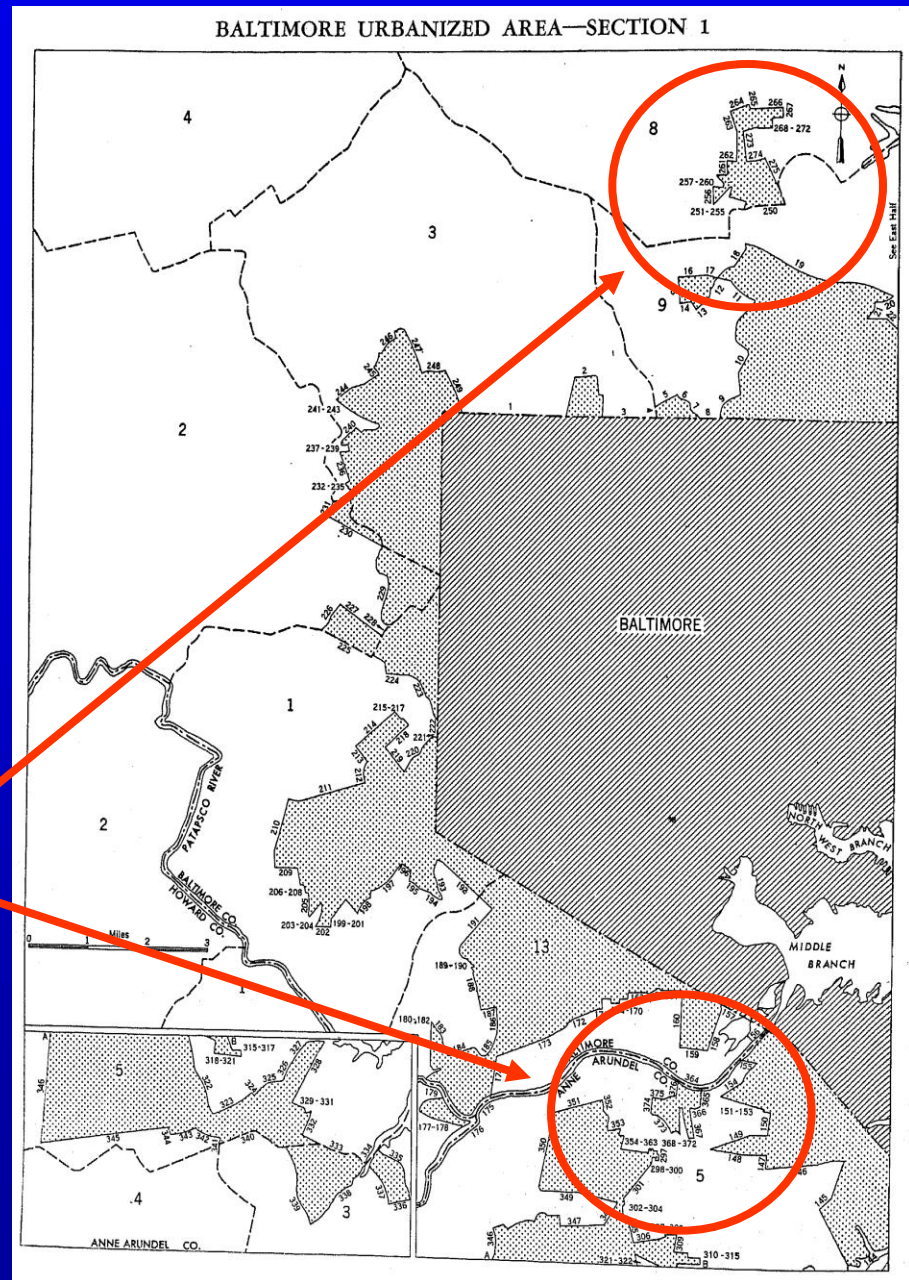
- Incorporated places of 2,500 or more population
- Special rules employed for towns and townships as well as other unincorporated territory in selected states.
- Intent of special rules was to identify densely populated, unincorporated territory that was urban in character.

Urban and Rural: 1950 Census

- Urbanized area concept adopted to identify densely settled territory adjacent to cities of 50,000 or more people;
- Discontiguous, high density areas included, but linking corridors were not classified as urban;
- Census designated places (CDPs) adopted;
- Outside urbanized areas, incorporated places and CDPs of 2,500 or more people classified as urban.

1950 Census Urbanized Area Delineation: Baltimore, MD

Discontiguous
qualifying territory
added on north
and south



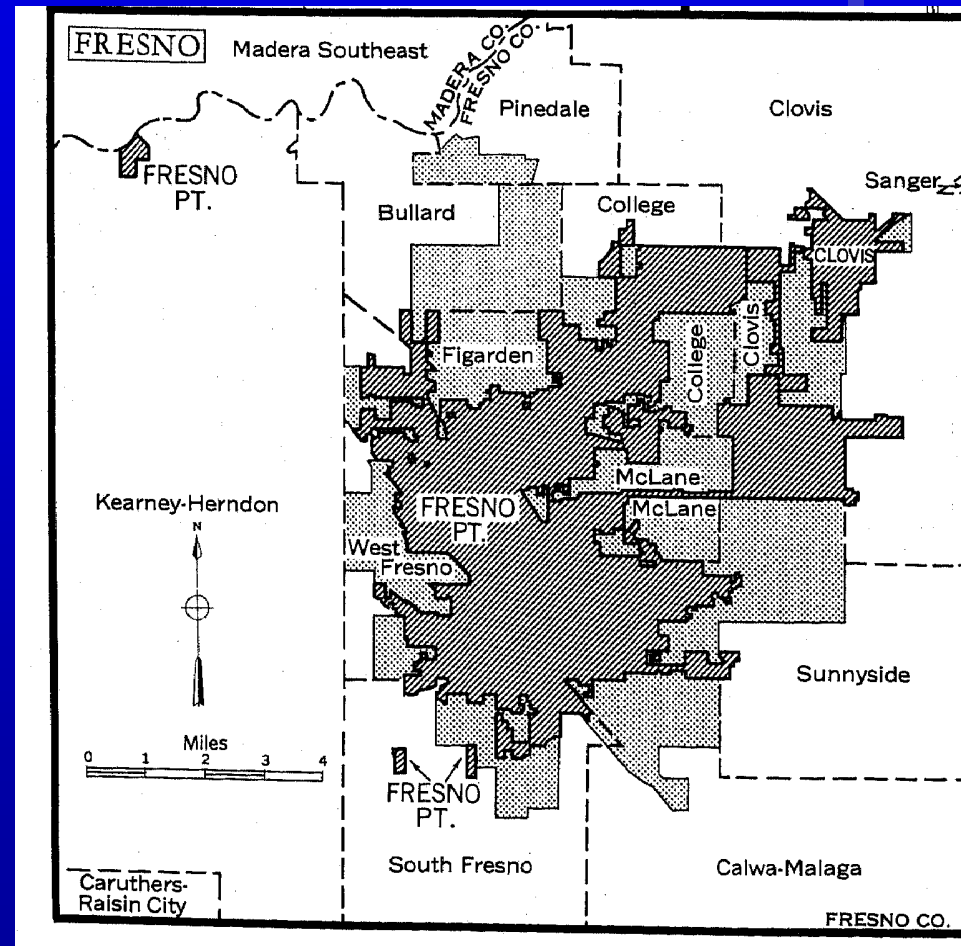
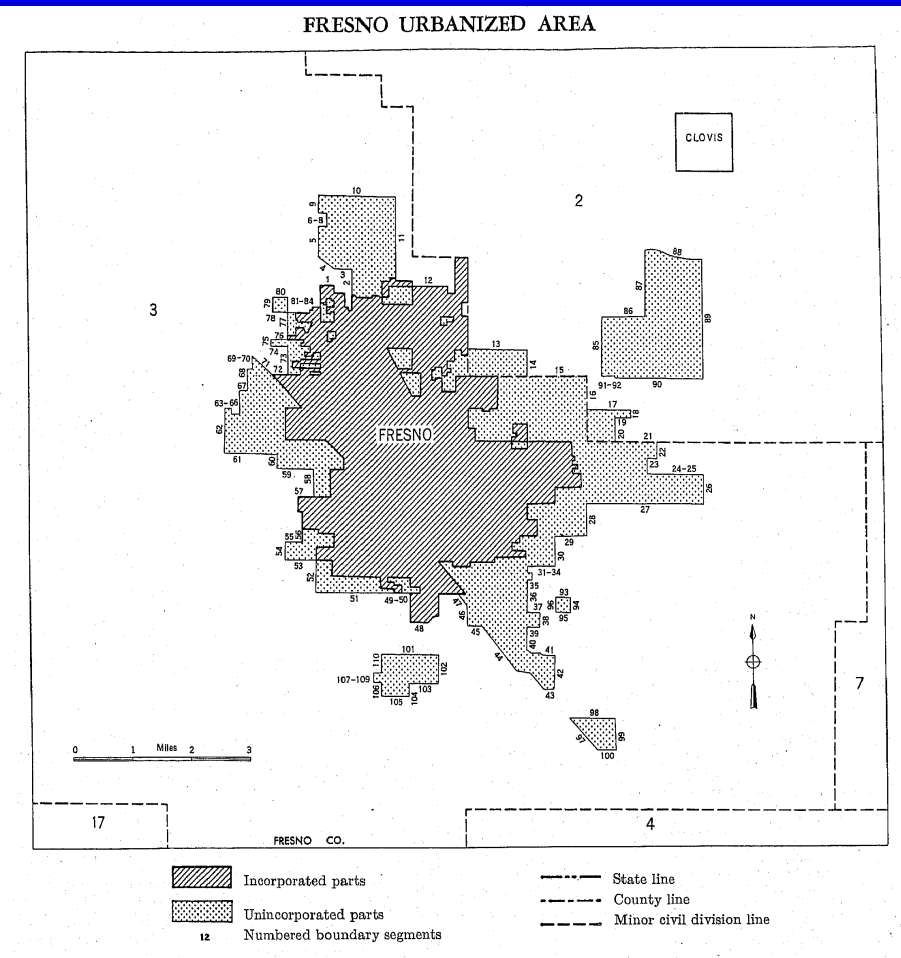
Urban and Rural: 1960 through 1990

- Basic concepts and criteria remain unchanged;
- Interactive, paper map-based delineation;
- Previous decade's boundary provided the starting point for delineation;
- Analysis units are places, enumeration districts and "small enumeration districts;"
- Central place criteria changes, mainly affecting requirements to initiate delineation;
- Jump concept is implemented as a guideline; intervening, low density corridor included in area.
- 1970: adoption of extended city concept.

Fresno, CA Urbanized Area

1950 Census

1960 Census



Urban and Rural: 1990

- UA criteria published in the *Federal Register*;
- Use of interactive delineation software;
- Population density analyzed by census block, grouped to form analysis units;
- Still place-based, but densely settled core of a place must contain 50% or more of total population;
- High level of spatial resolution; some subjectivity in decision-making, particularly regarding low density gaps of short distances;
- Undevelopable territory identified based on USGS quads and local sources, where available.

Urban and Rural: Census 2000

Urban encompasses:

- Urbanized Areas of 50,000 or more people.
- Urban Clusters of 2,500 up to 50,000 people.
 - Both defined based on population density at the census block and block group levels.

Rural: territory not included in urban areas.

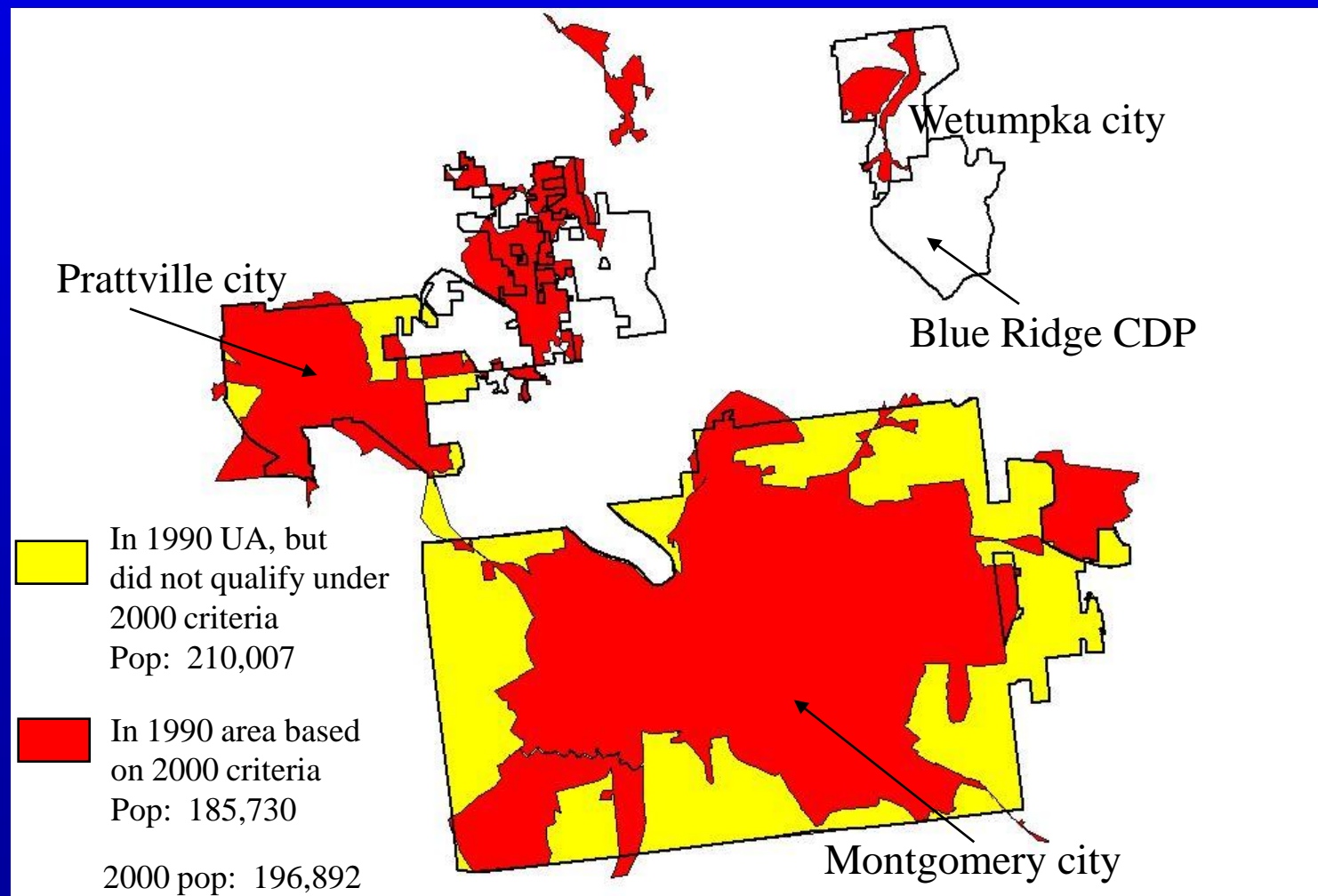
Urban and Rural: 2000

- Objectivity, consistency, and transparency were key goals;
- Adoption of urban cluster concept, replacing urban places outside urbanized areas;
- Place boundaries not taken into consideration;
- “Zero-based” delineation;
- Automated delineation software utilized;
- Adoption of “hop” concept to account for short gaps;
- Extension of jump distance from 1.5 to 2.5 miles;
- Use of nationally consistent land use/land cover data to identify undevelopable or “exempted” territory.
- Splitting of large agglomerations based in part on metropolitan area definitions.

Urban Population, 1990 and 2000, based on current criteria

- Census 2000: 222,360,539 (79%)
- 1990 population: 194,097,220 (78%)
 - 10.5 million reclassified from rural to urban
 - 3.4 million reclassified from urban to rural
- 14.6% increase in urban population

Montgomery, AL and Prattville, AL urban areas: 1990 (based on former and current criteria)

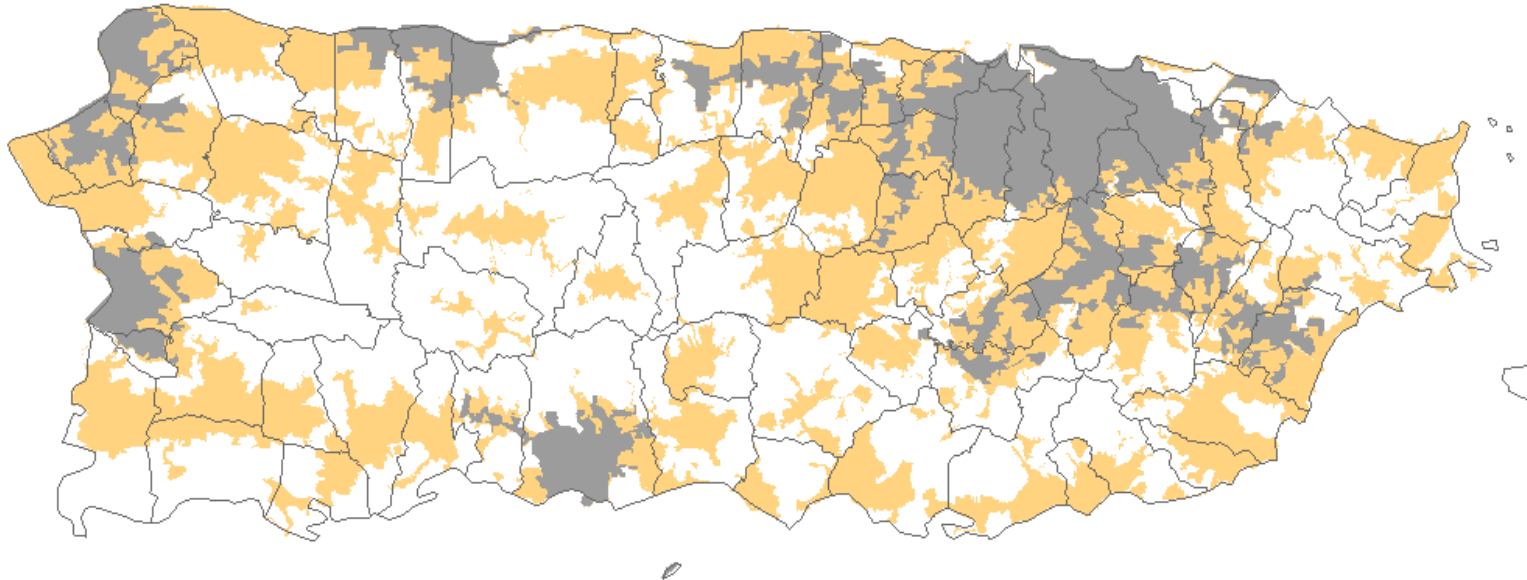


Urban and Rural Issues: 2010

- Identification of non-residential urban land uses located on fringe of the urban area;
- Objective, independent methodology and criteria for splitting large urban agglomerations;
- Comprehensive identification of undevelopable territory— particularly wetlands and steep slopes;
- Delineation of urban areas in Puerto Rico and the Island Areas—criteria and methodology changes in 2000 had a substantial effect on the extent of urban areas. Do the areas as defined accurately represent urbanization? Are they relevant to data users?

Map 1

Urban Areas 1990-2000, Puerto Rico

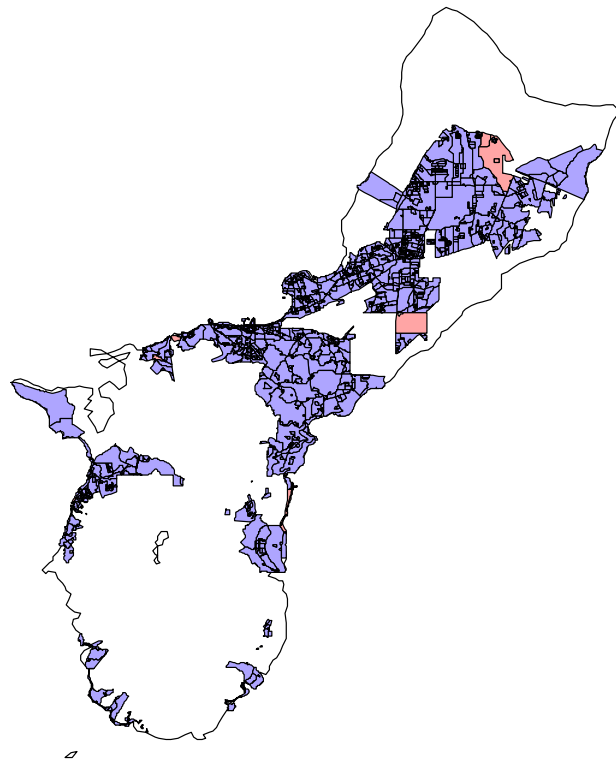


Legend

- 1990 Urbanized Areas
- 2000 Urban Areas (Urbanized Areas and Urban Clusters)
- Municipio Boundaries

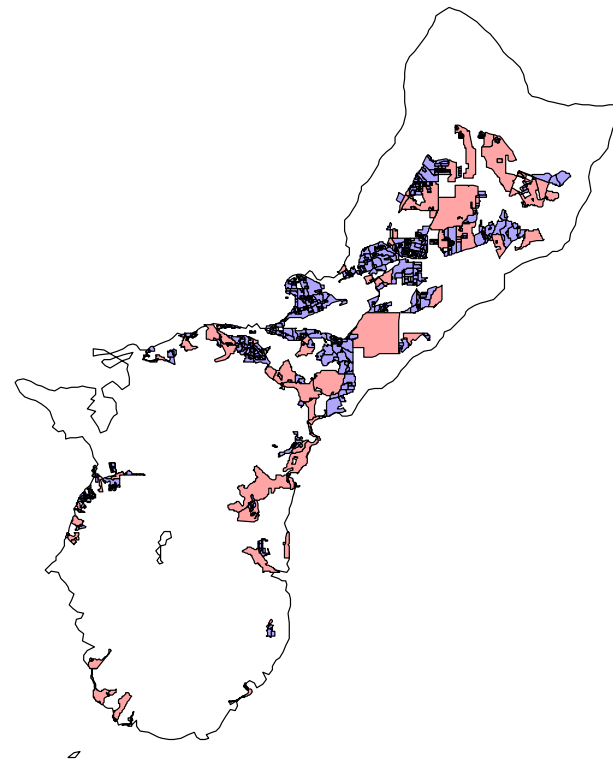
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Guam UA Core with Hops and Jumps
2000 Census 1000 PPSM



 Hop and Jump Blocks
 Core Blocks

Guam UA Core with Hops and Jumps
2000 Census 5000 PPSM



 Hop and Jump Blocks
 Core Blocks

Urban and Rural Issues: post-2010

- Intercensal Updates?
 - Annual data from ACS points out need for intercensal updating of urban area extents;
 - If able to do this, what data source could be used? Data must be available at the census block level.
 - Is transparency and replicability a goal?
- Identification of “suburban” and “exurban” areas within the urban/rural classification?

Post-2000 Development: Sebring, FL



**Sebring, FL
Urban Cluster**

Questions? Comments?

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