

## About Peer Areas...

Most fundamentally, Erie Vital Signs (EVS) asks the question: “How is Erie Doing?” The natural follow-up question is: “Compared to what?” There are at least two major ways to answer the latter question:

- 1) compared to how Erie has done in the past; and
- 2) compared to how other areas are doing.

Answer #1 is rather self-explanatory, but #2 is a bit more complicated. We have chosen to answer it in a few ways, depending primarily on data availability.

For many indicators, we have data on the United States as a whole, and the state of Pennsylvania as a whole, and EVS includes data on them when possible. But for some purposes it is better to compare Erie to a set of Peer Areas—areas that are like Erie County in some important ways.

To identify Peer Areas, we started with the idea of metropolitan areas rather than cities. While cities are important political units, they are typically not economic units or social units. We cross the borders between cities and other local municipalities all the time and barely notice it. We think nothing of travelling to Millcreek or Summit Township to shop, or to downtown Erie for an evening’s entertainment, or to take a job in a different township from where we reside. But we would think twice before taking a job in a different metro area, because it would probably mean moving our residence and joining a different community.

For this reason, the federal government has created a set of “official” Metropolitan Statistical Areas, or MSAs.

“Metropolitan Statistical Areas have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties.”<sup>1</sup>

The federal government considers an MSA to be primarily a labor market, or commuting area.

MSAs are typically composed of counties or county equivalents as their basic building blocks.<sup>2</sup> Along with the central county, other contiguous counties are included in the MSA if they are integrated socially and economically. An MSA can be a single county, as is Erie, or may be comprised of many counties, like Atlanta which currently includes 29 counties. MSAs may cross state lines, when warranted, as does the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton MSA.

Early in EVS’s history, the relevant committee chose 13 Peer Areas for Erie County. Some are similar to Erie in key ways, and others are “aspirational”—areas we’d like to emulate. Erie’s 13 Peer Areas and their components are:

**Akron, OH MSA**

Portage County, Summit County

**Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ MSA**

Warren County, NJ; Carbon County, PA; Lehigh County, PA; Northampton County, PA

**Boulder, CO MSA**

Boulder County

**Cedar Rapids, IA MSA**

Benton County, Jones County, Linn County

**Flint, MI MSA**

Genesee County

**Gainesville, FL MSA**

Alachua County, Gilchrist County

**Green Bay, WI MSA**

Brown County, Kewaunee County, Oconto County

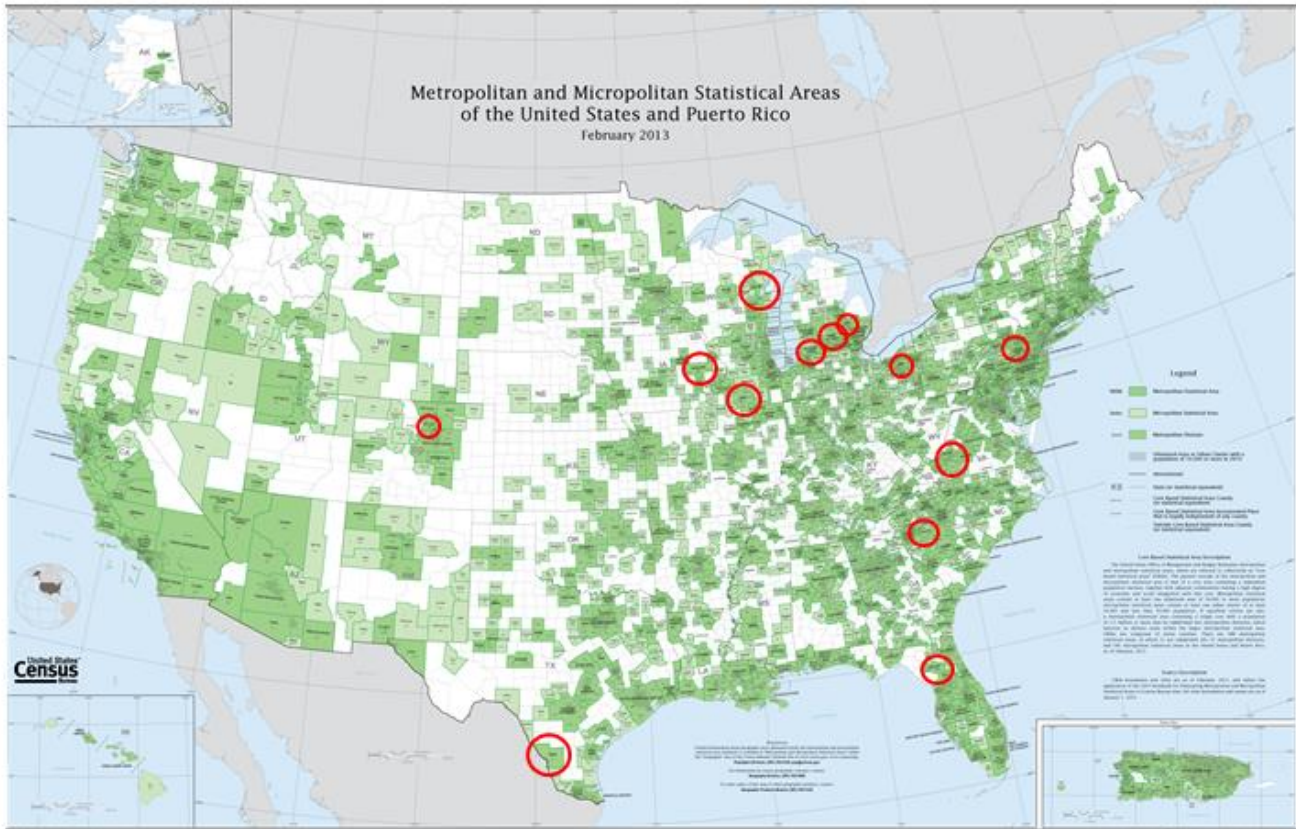
**Kalamazoo-Portage, MI MSA**

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget. *Revised Delineations of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Micropolitan Statistical Areas, and Combined Statistical Areas, and Guidance on Uses of the Delineations of These Areas*. OMB Bulletin No. 13-01, February 28, 2013, p. 2. Detailed information about MSA standards and delineations (definitions) can be found at: <http://www.census.gov/population/metro/>

<sup>2</sup> Louisiana has Parishes instead of counties, for example. Some states include independent cities that are part of no county. In these cases, MSA delineations may include independent cities as well as counties. Massachusetts and Virginia have such cities. Erie peer area Roanoke MSA includes Roanoke and Salem cities.

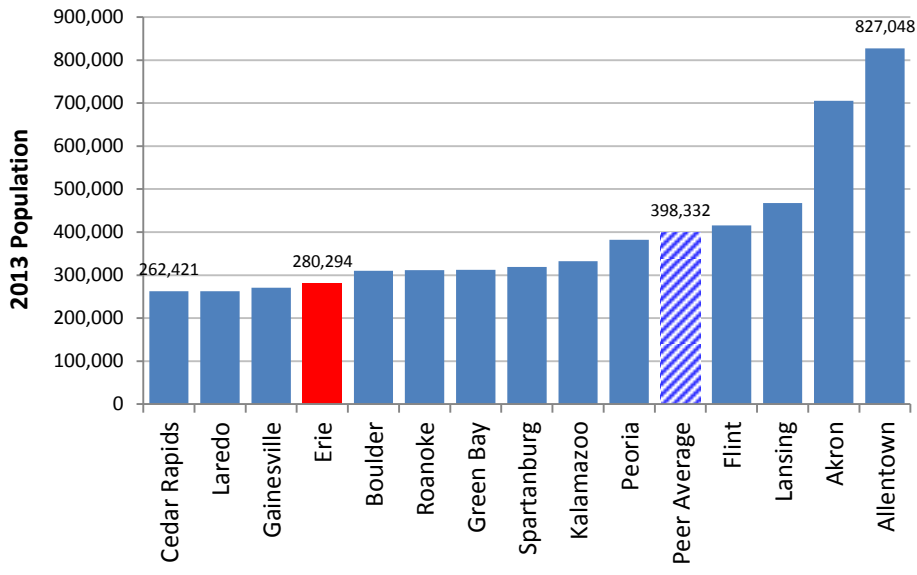
Kalamazoo County, Van Buren County  
**Lansing-East Lansing, MI MSA**  
 Clinton County, Eaton County, Ingham County  
**Laredo, TX MSA**  
 Webb County  
**Peoria, IL MSA**  
 Marshall County, Peoria County, Stark County, Tazewell County, Woodford County  
**Roanoke, VA MSA**  
 Botetourt County, Craig County, Franklin County, Roanoke County, Roanoke city, Salem city  
**Spartanburg, SC MSA**  
 Spartanburg County, Union County



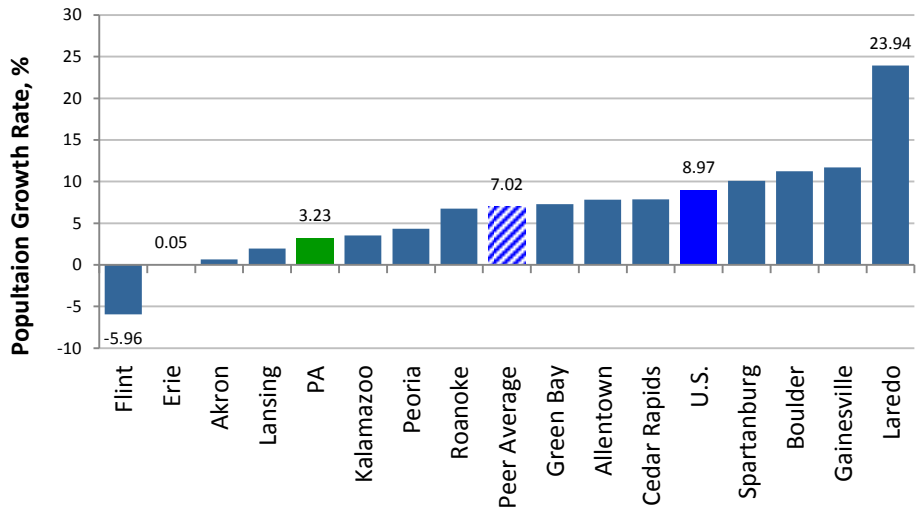
Unfortunately, for some indicators, data are not available for all of the Peers. In those cases, we report the data that are available, even if incomplete. In other cases, the data source does not include data for any of the Peer MSAs. This happens, for example, if the data are compiled by a Pennsylvania state agency. In those cases we may choose to report data for other areas, such as selected PA counties that are similar to Erie County in some way. In a few cases, we report data for components of Erie County such as school districts, when appropriate. And in some rare cases, an important indicator is measured by a local Erie organization and is not available for any other areas. In those cases, the indicator presents time-series data but no peer area data.

The graphs below show Erie and its Peer Areas on a number of selected variables, to give the EVS visitor a feel for how Erie compares with its peers.

### 2013 Population

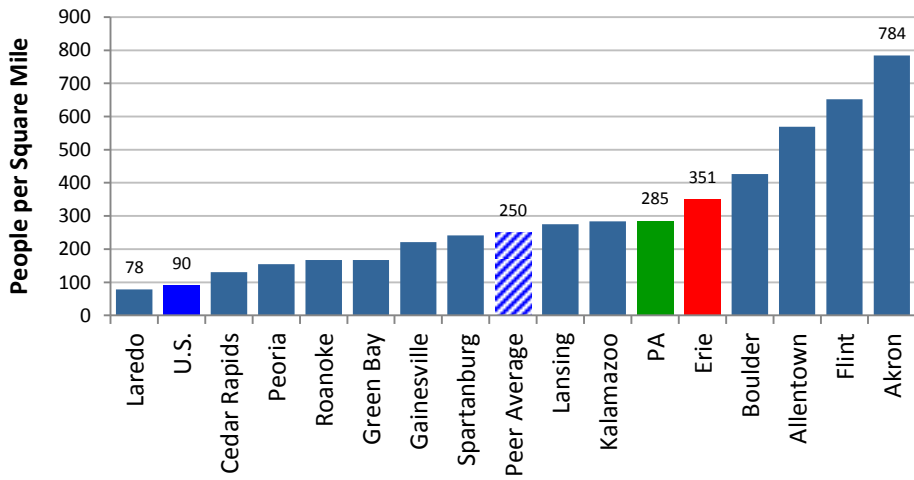


### Population Growth Rate, 2003-13

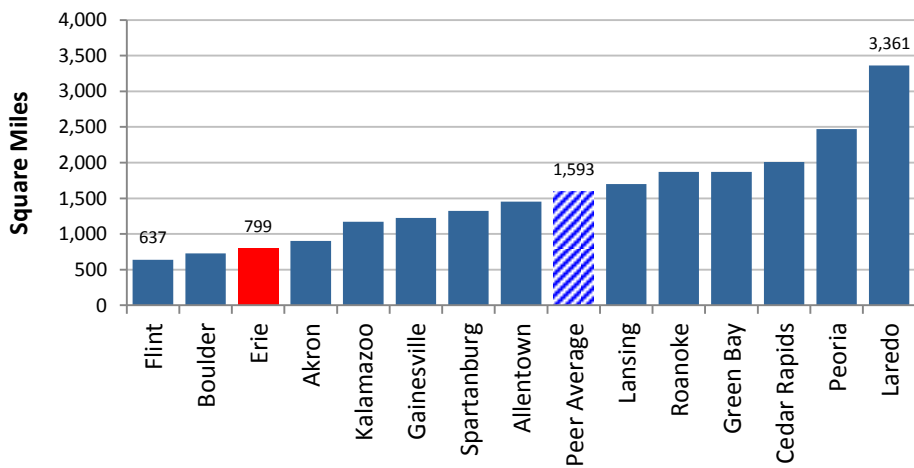


Note: growth rate is for whole 10-year period, not an annual rate.

### Population Density, 2013



### Land Area



### Median Age, 2013

