

Chapter 5: Economic Development

Introduction

Orange's economic vision is centered on fostering a dynamic and sustainable business environment that supports long-term growth while preserving the town's character. Historically, Orange has thrived as a regional economic hub, benefiting from its strategic location along major transportation corridors, including U.S. Route 1 and I-95. Over time, the town has adapted to changing market conditions, transitioning from an agriculture-based economy to a diversified mix of commercial, retail, and industrial sectors. The town's economic development strategy leverages its strong retail presence, stable office market, and growing industrial sector to attract investment and create jobs.

A key focus of economic development efforts in Orange is ensuring long-term sustainability. This involves addressing challenges such as retail vacancies, supporting small businesses, and diversifying the town's economic base to reduce reliance on any single industry.

Orange's economic initiatives align closely with regional and state-level development strategies. Collaborations with organizations such as AdvanceCT, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), and the Tourism Board help Orange leverage resources and investment opportunities. Additionally, the town has implemented tax incentives, such as five- and seven-year tax abatements for significant commercial projects, to attract high-value developments.

The town also has an economic development corporation and chamber of commerce which contribute to economic development initiatives in the town. The Orange Economic Development Corporation (OEDC) supports economic development initiatives focused on the Boston Post Road commercial corridor and the industrial area off Marsh Hill Road. The Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to maintaining and expanding business presence in Orange. The Chamber focuses on events, member engagement, and advocacy for local businesses.

Economic Profile

Historic Trends, Recent Changes, and Future Projections

The Town of Orange has undergone significant economic transformation, evolving from its historical agricultural roots into an economy focused primarily on commercial and industrial sectors. This shift was significantly accelerated by the development of major transportation infrastructure such as Interstate 95 and the Wilbur Cross Parkway, which greatly enhanced Orange's connectivity and appeal to regional businesses. Leveraging these transportation networks, the town strategically expanded on the base of agriculture to commercial, retail, and industrial activities along Route 1 and Boston Post Road. This has been accomplished without any incursions into the agricultural open space, or residential areas of Orange.

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In recent years, economic conditions in Orange have shown mixed results across different sectors. The retail sector faces challenges, notably high vacancy rates in key locations such as the Christmas Tree Plaza and the former LA Fitness site, partially due to an oversaturation of certain businesses like gyms, smoke shops, nail salons, and restaurants. Conversely, the industrial sector remains strong, characterized by steady demand for warehouse, storage, and light manufacturing facilities. Industrial developments, including the upcoming storage facility on Salemme Lane and the adaptive reuse of the former Burlington Coat Factory into industrial space, underscore ongoing growth in this sector.

Employment Statistics and Major Industries

Tracking changes in labor force size, employment levels, and unemployment rates over time helps identify key economic shifts, such as periods of job growth, workforce stability, or disruptions caused by external factors like economic recessions or the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). By examining these employment trends, local policymakers, businesses, and residents can better assess the town's economic trajectory, plan for workforce development, and implement strategies to support long-term economic sustainability.

Figure 1. Employment for Orange CT

	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2010	7,137	6,635	502	7.0
2011	7,169	6,673	496	6.9
2012	7,111	6,658	453	6.4
2013	7,079	6,640	439	6.2
2014	7,197	6,830	367	5.1
2015	7,239	6,924	315	4.4
2016	7,285	7,007	278	3.8
2017	7,435	7,200	235	3.2
2018	7,471	7,245	226	3.0
2019	7,546	7,336	210	2.8
2020	7,374	6,915	459	6.2
2021	7,231	6,914	317	4.4
2022	7,613	7,382	231	3.0
2023	7,553	7,335	218	2.9
2024	7,752	7600	152	2.0

Source: CT DOL - <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/laus/laustown.asp>

Labor Force Trends

The labor force in Orange, CT, has experienced steady growth, increasing from 7,137 in 2010 to 7,752 in 2024. Between 2010 and 2019, the labor force gradually expanded, reaching 7,546 before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which caused a slight decline to 7,374 as economic disruptions led some individuals to exit the workforce. However, since 2021, the town's labor force has steadily grown, reflecting economic recovery and increased workforce participation. By 2024, the labor force

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reached its highest level (7,752), suggesting that more residents are either employed or actively seeking work, signaling strong job market conditions in Orange.

Employment Trends

Employment in Orange has largely followed the same trajectory as labor force participation, showing consistent job growth over time. In 2010, 6,635 residents were employed, increasing to 7,600 by 2024. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused employment to dip to 6,915, marking a temporary setback as businesses faced closures and layoffs. Despite this disruption, employment quickly recovered in 2021 (6,914) and has continued to rise, reaching an all-time high in 2024. The steady employment increase highlights Orange's economic resilience, as businesses and industries have successfully adapted and grown.

Unemployment and Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate in Orange has declined significantly from 7.0% in 2010 to just 2.0% in 2024, reflecting consistent economic improvement. Between 2010 and 2019, unemployment steadily dropped as businesses expanded, reaching a low of 2.8% before the pandemic-induced spike to 6.2% in 2020. Widespread economic uncertainty and job losses drove this temporary surge. However, by 2021, unemployment decreased to 4.4%, continuing its downward trend to just 2.0% in 2024—the lowest in the past 14 years. This decline underscores Orange's strong job market, business growth, and economic stability.

Figure 2. Job Counts by Worker Educational Attainment

2022		
	Count	Share
Total (All Jobs)	11,127	100.00%
Less than high school	1,189	10.70%
High school or equivalent, no college	2,191	19.70%
Some college or Associate degree	2,360	21.20%
Bachelor's degree or advanced degree	2,519	22.60%
Educational attainment not available (workers aged 29 or younger)	2,868	25.80%

Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 2022

Total Workforce Overview

In 2022, Orange supported 11,127 jobs, with workers distributed across various educational backgrounds (see Figure 2). The largest category (25.8%) consists of workers aged 29 or younger, for whom educational attainment data is not available. This suggests a significant portion of the workforce is early in their careers, likely working in entry-level positions across retail, hospitality, and service industries.

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Educational Attainment Breakdown

- 10.7% of workers (1,189 jobs) have less than a high school education.
- 19.7% of workers (2,191 jobs) have a high school diploma or equivalent but no college education.
- 21.2% of workers (2,360 jobs) have some college education or an associate degree.
- 22.6% of workers (2,519 jobs) hold a bachelor's or advanced degree, forming the most highly educated segment of the workforce.

The high percentage of workers with some college education or an associate degree (21.2%) offers a significant opportunity to expand certification programs and career advancement pathways in advanced manufacturing, healthcare technology, and business services, helping workers transition into higher-paying skilled jobs. Meanwhile, the relatively small share of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher (22.6%) indicates that although Orange attracts professionals in some industries, there's potential for growth in knowledge-based sectors like biotech, finance, and engineering. Additionally, the large proportion of workers with a high school diploma or less (30.4%) underscores the need for workforce training, apprenticeships, and vocational education programs, ensuring that more residents acquire the skills necessary to fill high-demand jobs in manufacturing, logistics, and technical fields. Expanding these initiatives will enable Orange to develop a more competitive and resilient workforce, fostering long-term economic growth.

Labor Market Overview

The largest share of workers is employed in education, health, and social services, underscoring the critical role these industries play in the local and regional economy. Additionally, the professional, scientific, and management sectors account for 16% of all jobs in Orange, highlighting the town's growing base of high-skill, knowledge-based employment.

According to the U.S. Census "Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector", Orange had 11,127 total jobs across a varied mix of industries in 2022. The largest employment sectors were retail trade, healthcare, accommodation and food services, and transportation and warehousing, reflecting the town's strong commercial foundation and accessibility along major highways.

- Retail Trade led employment with 1,929 workers (17.3%), reinforcing the importance of Boston Post Road as a key retail corridor.
- Health Care and Social Assistance employed 1,029 workers (9.2%), indicating steady growth in medical and social services.
- Accommodation and Food Services supported 1,165 jobs (10.5%), reflecting the town's hospitality and restaurant sector strength.
- Transportation and Warehousing accounted for 950 jobs (8.5%), demonstrating the significance of logistics and distribution industries in Orange's industrial zones.
- Utilities (8.1%) and Manufacturing (7.6%) remain essential components of the local economy, particularly in energy production, light industrial manufacturing, and advanced production technologies.

Smaller but vital sectors include finance and insurance (2.3%), professional and technical services (3.3%), and management of companies (4.1%), pointing to opportunities for corporate and office-based employment growth. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing contribute minimally to the workforce, with only 7 jobs (0.1%), reflecting limited but active farmland operations in the town.

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Orange faces skill gaps in technical and specialized industries, particularly in trades, advanced manufacturing, and emerging technology fields. As the town's median age remains high at 45 years, ensuring workforce renewal will be crucial for sustaining long-term economic growth and filling in-demand positions. Additionally, as household incomes rise, businesses must continue to offer competitive wages and career opportunities to attract and retain skilled labor in a rapidly evolving job market.

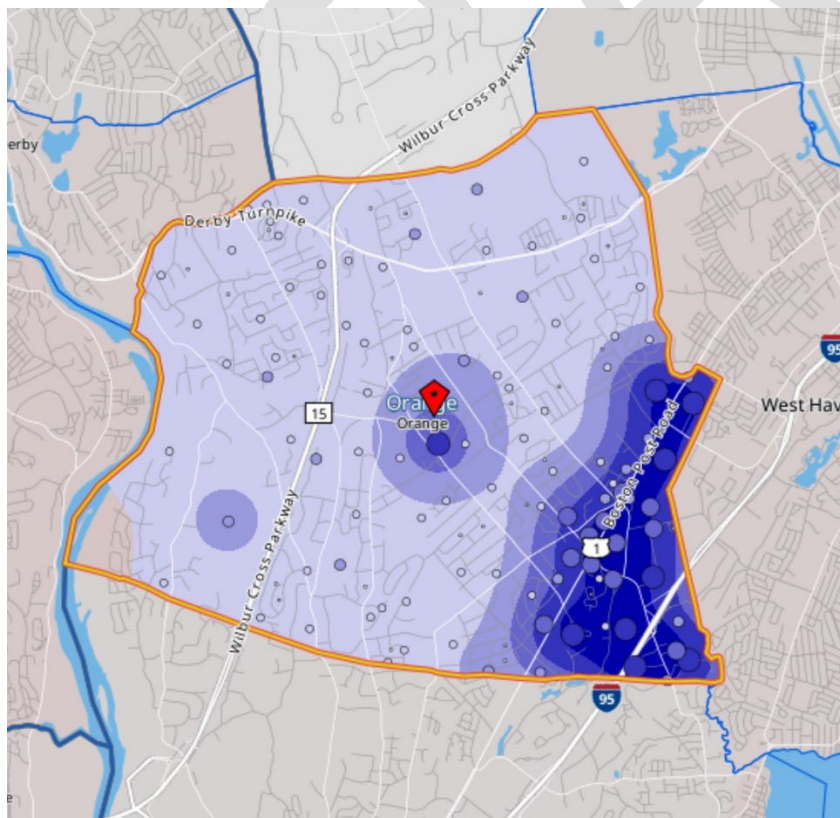
Workforce Training and Development

To address local workforce needs, Orange benefits from collaboration with educational institutions, technical training programs, and regional workforce development initiatives. The town is situated near several higher education institutions, including University of New Haven Orange Campus, Yale University, Southern Connecticut State University, and Gateway Community College, which offer degree programs and workforce training that align with industry needs. Vocational and trade schools in the surrounding region provide specialized training for skilled labor positions in construction, manufacturing, and healthcare.

Commuting Patterns and Regional Workforce Interaction

Orange's labor market is heavily influenced by regional commuting patterns, with many residents traveling to New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, and Milford for employment in sectors such as healthcare, finance, education, and professional services. Conversely, Orange attracts workers from neighboring towns, particularly for retail jobs along Boston Post Road and industrial operations concentrated on Marsh Hill Road (Figure 1). This reciprocal workforce movement underscores Orange's dual role as both a commuter suburb and an employment hub.

Figure 1: Employment Heat Map for the Town of Orange



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The town's strategic location along Interstate 95 and Route 1 makes it an integral part of the regional economy, facilitating both job inflows and outflows. However, limited public transit access—due to the absence of a local train station—can pose a challenge for workers commuting from greater distances.

Major Employers and Local Economic Stability

Pez Candy Inc. remains a significant employer, not only for its manufacturing operations but also for its visitor center, which attracts tourists and generates economic activity. Avangrid, along with its subsidiaries The United Illuminating Company and Southern Connecticut Gas, serves as one of the largest employers in the region, playing a crucial role in the town's energy infrastructure and workforce stability.

The beverage distribution sector is also a strong contributor to employment, with Eder Bros, Inc., a statewide distributor of wine and spirits, providing job opportunities in warehousing, sales, and logistics. The healthcare sector has seen steady growth, particularly with the expansion of Connecticut Orthopedics, which recently consolidated operations into a 36,514-square-foot facility on Boston Post Road.

The town's industrial sector is another key employer, benefiting from proximity to major highways and regional logistics networks. Orange's Marsh Hill Road corridor has been a focal point for industrial development, attracting warehousing, light manufacturing, and distribution businesses.

Current Market Conditions

Retail Sector

Orange's retail market has an overall vacancy rate of 7.98%. Rental rates for retail spaces range from \$16 to \$22 per square foot (triple net) in Orange. Large retail spaces, including the Christmas Tree Plaza and the former LA Fitness site, remain vacant for extended periods, contributing to an oversupply of retail properties. Recent trends show an overabundance of certain businesses, such as gyms, smoke shops, nail salons, and restaurants. This oversaturation limits diversity and weakens the appeal of Orange's retail sector.

Key challenges include filling large retail vacancies. For example, filling the Christmas Tree Shop location is seen as critical to revitalizing the surrounding retail environment.

Office Sector

The office sector maintains a low vacancy rate of 1.76%. Rental rates for office space ranges from \$5.50 to \$8.50 per square foot (triple net). The majority of available office spaces are small units along Boston Post Road, catering to professional services and medical practices. Growth in this sector has been driven by expansions, such as an eye care group purchasing an office building and a physical therapy practice seeking larger accommodations.

Despite steady demand for smaller office spaces in Orange, the sector faces limitations in attracting larger tenants due to a lack of available mid-size to large office properties. Smaller, flexible office configurations remain a strength for the market, while continued medical and professional use is expected to dominate demand.

Industrial Sector

The industrial sector exhibits a balanced market, with a vacancy rate of 3.54% and rental rates ranging from \$5.50 to \$8.50 per square foot (triple net). Recent developments include a new storage facility under construction on Salem Lane and a gas station project by Noble Gas at 88 Marsh Hill Road. Existing industrial spaces, such as 193 and 181 Marsh Hill Road, continue to attract interest, reflecting steady demand.

However, the availability of land for new industrial projects is limited, which may constrain future growth. Orange's industrial sector benefits from its ability to quickly fill vacant spaces, but long-term sustainability will require adaptive reuse and efficient utilization of existing properties.

Competition from Neighboring Towns

Orange faces growing competition from surrounding municipalities, particularly Milford and Shelton, which offer strong commercial, retail, and industrial markets. Milford, with its well-established retail sector and commercial hubs, draws significant consumer traffic away from Orange, affecting local businesses. Shelton's expanding corporate office market and business-friendly policies make it an attractive destination for companies considering relocation, increasing competition for commercial tenants and job opportunities.

Economic Incentives

The Town of Orange's Tax Abatement Program is designed to incentivize business investment and development by reducing property tax obligations for qualifying projects. This program encourages economic growth by attracting new businesses, supporting expansions, and fostering job creation within the town. Businesses that invest a minimum of \$4,000,000 in property development, new construction, or significant renovations are eligible for a 5-year tax abatement, while those investing at least \$15,000,000 qualify for a 7-year tax abatement. These abatements allow businesses to phase in their full tax obligations gradually, reducing initial financial burdens and enabling reinvestment in operational and infrastructure improvements.

The tax abatement applies to commercial, industrial, and mixed-use properties, provided that projects align with the town's zoning regulations and economic development goals. The program is intended to stimulate investment in underutilized areas, enhance property values, and support long-term economic sustainability. Businesses seeking to participate must demonstrate the project's potential for economic impact, including job creation and commercial revitalization. The tax abatement program is particularly valuable in the following strategic development areas:

- **Boston Post Road (U.S. Route 1)** – A major retail and commercial corridor with opportunities for redevelopment and new business attraction.
- **Marsh Hill Road and I-95 Corridor** – A prime location for industrial, logistics, and corporate office developments due to its accessibility to major highways.
- **Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Retail Spaces** – Encouraging businesses to convert underutilized properties, such as former big-box stores, into viable commercial or mixed-use spaces.

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The Tax Abatement Program is a vital tool for business attraction and retention. It strengthens the town's position as a competitive development destination while ensuring that commercial and industrial growth aligns with Orange's broader economic and community objectives.

Opportunities for Future Economic Growth

Orange has significant potential for economic expansion in specialized industries such as biomedical technology, advanced manufacturing, and clean transportation infrastructure, particularly by leveraging its existing industrial land along Marsh Hill Road and the I-95 corridor. With its proximity to New Haven's thriving biotech sector, which includes Yale University's medical and research institutions, Orange is well-positioned to support biomedical firms specializing in medical devices, laboratory research, and healthcare technology production. The town's available industrial sites could be repurposed or developed to accommodate biotech manufacturing, research facilities, and logistics hubs for medical supply distribution, complementing New Haven's expanding life sciences ecosystem.

In addition, Orange's industrial zones provide a strong foundation for clean transportation infrastructure and advanced manufacturing. As the electric vehicle (EV) industry continues to expand, the town could develop EV charging stations, battery storage facilities, and related supply chain operations on its underutilized industrial land. Given Connecticut's push for clean energy and sustainable development, these areas could attract businesses involved in EV component manufacturing, energy storage solutions, and renewable energy integration. By strategically utilizing its industrial properties, Orange can diversify its economic base, attract high-tech industries, and create sustainable job growth while reinforcing its role as a key player in Connecticut's innovation corridor.

Logistics and supply chain development is another area of opportunity. With its location near major highways such as I-95, Route 1, and the Wilbur Cross Parkway, Orange could further develop warehousing, logistics, and distribution centers. Industrial-zoned properties in the town could support last-mile delivery hubs, responding to the increasing demand for regional distribution centers.

Tourism and economic diversification offer promising opportunities for growth in Orange, particularly through the expansion of agro-tourism and heritage tourism. The town is home to several historic farms and a well-established winery, which can serve as the foundation for a broader tourism strategy. Sites such as Treat Farm and Field View Farm provide opportunities for visitors to engage in farm-to-table experiences, seasonal harvesting events, and educational workshops on sustainable farming practices. These activities can attract both local and regional visitors while promoting Orange's agricultural heritage.

Expanding winery tourism also presents a significant opportunity for economic development. Orange is home to the Connecticut Wine Trail member, Orange Vineyard and Winery, which could serve as a focal point for wine tastings, vineyard tours, and special events that draw visitors from across the state.

Recommendations

5.1 Strengthen and Diversify the Business Base

- 5.1.1 *Attract a broader mix of retail, restaurant, entertainment, and experiential businesses to revitalize commercial districts, particularly along Boston Post Road and reduce vacancies in large retail spaces.*
- 5.1.2 *Encourage niche markets such as entertainment venues, boutique retail, and sports complexes to create a distinct commercial identity for Orange.*
- 5.1.3 *Expand the town's focus on advanced manufacturing, biomedical technology, and clean energy industries, utilizing available industrial-zoned land along Marsh Hill Road and the I-95 corridor.*
- 5.1.4 *Actively market Orange to biotech and life sciences firms, capitalizing on New Haven's biotech ecosystem and Yale University's research network to attract medical device manufacturers, research labs, and health-tech startups.*
- 5.1.5 *Promote the adaptive reuse of underutilized retail and industrial properties, converting spaces into mixed-use developments that integrate commercial, residential, and office uses.*

5.2 Enhance Industrial Sector Opportunities and Small Business Growth

- 5.2.1 *Prioritize the reuse of industrial properties such as 193 and 181 Marsh Hill Road, attracting manufacturers, storage companies, and logistics firms to strengthen the industrial base.*
- 5.2.2 *Support industrial uses that align with regional trends, such as renewable energy manufacturing, advanced materials production, and clean transportation infrastructure.*
- 5.2.3 *Offer business development resources, including mentorship programs and marketing assistance, for locally owned small businesses.*
- 5.2.4 *Develop an incubator or shared workspace program to support startups in creative, technology-driven, and professional services sectors.*
- 5.2.5 *Collaborate with regional and state organizations, such as AdvanceCT, to provide small business grants, low-interest loans, and technical assistance.*
- 5.2.6 *Continue to support the Chamber of Commerce and the Orange Economic Development Corporation.*

5.3 Promote Adaptive Reuse and Redevelopment

- 5.3.1 *Target large vacant properties, such as the former Christmas Tree Shop and Burlington Coat Factory, for redevelopment into vibrant commercial or industrial spaces.*
- 5.3.2 *Streamline permitting processes for adaptive reuse projects, making it easier for developers to revitalize older properties and introduce mixed-use developments.*
- 5.3.3 *Leverage tax incentive programs and grant funding to encourage investment in redeveloping vacant retail, office, and industrial properties.*

5.4 Support Workforce Development

- 5.4.1 *Collaborate with local employers, universities, and trade schools to develop workforce training programs in high-demand industries such as biotech, advanced manufacturing, and logistics.*

5.5 Promote Tourism and Community Events

- 5.5.1 *Leverage Orange's existing farms and wineries to expand agro-tourism, including farm-to-table experiences, vineyard tours, and seasonal events such as harvest festivals and wine tastings.*
- 5.5.2 *Develop heritage tourism initiatives to enhance access to historic sites, museums, and cultural attractions that showcase Orange's history.*
- 5.5.3 *Expand eco-tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities, including hiking trails, guided agricultural experiences, and open-space event venues.*

5.6 Maintain a Competitive Business Climate and Retain Key Employers

- 5.6.1 *Provide targeted business incentives and expansion support to industries in biomedical technology, clean energy, logistics, and high-growth sectors.*
- 5.6.2 *Strengthen collaboration with state and regional economic development agencies to attract new employers and maintain Orange's business-friendly reputation.*
- 5.6.3 *Regularly evaluate zoning and regulatory policies to ensure they align with emerging market trends and community needs.*