

Wheat Street Baptist Church Church Profile

January 2022



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OUR CHURCH INFORMATION

Wheat Street Baptist Church is a historic African-American church of approximately 300 members located in the heart of Atlanta, GA. Wheat Street has a large commuter population with about 35% of the population living within 5 – 10 miles of the church and 60% of the population living more than 10 miles from the church.

As an established church in the Atlanta Area, our congregation is multi-generational with 11% of its congregants that are children/youth (17 or younger), 13% that are young adults (18-39), 11% that are middle age (40 – 54), and 65% that are 55 years and above.

Wheat Street members come from a plethora of backgrounds (26% single, 39% married, 17% widowed, 18% divorced) with varying educational and employment histories (from Trade School Certifications to Undergraduate and Post Graduate degrees.)

Church Website: <https://www.wearewheatstreet.org/>

Pastoral Search Committee Address: PO Box 578, Union City, GA 30291

Church Organizational Chart: Appendix A

Community Demographics: Appendix B

OUR HISTORY

Historic Wheat Street Baptist Church (WSBC), located in Atlanta's "Sweet Auburn" District, was organized in 1869 and celebrated its 152nd anniversary on July 25, 2021. The current church edifice was completed in 1937 and included the main sanctuary, balcony level, and the beautiful stained-glass windows.

Wheat Street emerged from First Baptist Mission (which later became Friendship Baptist Church) pastored at the time by Rev. Frank Quarles. When discontentment arose among some parishioners due to the inconvenience of traveling across town to First Baptist, Rev. Quarles consented to organize another mission known as Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church on Howell Street in 1869. This new church, organized with seven members, would later become Wheat Street Baptist Church.

The Church would relocate several times and was even destroyed in the Great Fire of Atlanta in May 1917. But with God's unchanging hand, the Church was rebuilt in August 1921 at its present location on the corner of Auburn Ave and William Holmes Borders, Sr. Drive.



In its history, Wheat Street has had seven pastors. The Church's most renowned pastor was Rev. Dr. William Holmes Borders, Sr. who was called as Wheat Street's 5th pastor in 1935 and served the church 55 years until his retirement in 1988. Rev. Borders was known as a visionary, motivator, administrator, evangelist, organizer, author and a poet who described himself as God's "Errand Boy". Many programs that started during Rev. Borders' pastorate are still in place today. For example, Hosea Williams Feed the Hungry Program started in Wheat Street's Christian Education Building Auditorium. The Butler Street YMCA was also formed in the basement of the Church building in 1984.

Rev. Borders believed in keeping the members involved. There were four adult choirs that sang every Sunday, a children's choir, and a Chanters Ministry that recited scriptures from memory. There were two female and male usher boards and numerous ministries, including a Prison Ministry. Annual celebrations were held for the Church Anniversary, Graduate Recognition, Women's and Men's Day, and Youth Day. A poet and orator himself, Rev. Borders penned the famous poem "I Am Somebody" which would later be adopted by the Rev. Jesse Jackson for his PUSH organization. The poem, which celebrated famous Black Americans successful in all walks of life, was recited at Church and other special celebrations.

Rev. Borders also envisioned improving the lives of the church members, the Black community in a segregated Atlanta and around the world. To that end, Wheat Street accomplished much under Rev. Borders' pastorate:

- Rev. Borders' sermon "Seven Minutes at the Mike in the Deep South" was carried during World War II over US Armed Forces Radio, a first for an African-American preacher.
- Wheat Street built its Christian Education Building in 1955 for the Church, a 21,000 square foot facility with a commercial kitchen, 250 seat auditorium, and 20+ classrooms that housed church and community programs.
- Wheat Street established the first black church-sponsored federal credit union in the United States in March 1956. The Credit Union provided home, auto, and other loans for African-Americans who otherwise had limited access to financial institutions.
- Wheat Street partnered with the Federal government to build Wheat Street Gardens, the first church-sponsored, affordable housing community (500 units) in the country in 1964.
- Wheat Street developed Wheat Street Plaza North & South in 1969, retail shopping centers on two corners at the intersection of Auburn Ave and Jackson St. (across from the MLK National Park) to provide shopping access for Black Atlantans.
- Wheat Street again partnered with the federal government to build Wheat Street Towers, the first church-sponsored, affordable senior housing community (208 units) in the country in 1972.
- Wheat Street was the first black church to broadcast its Sunday church service on network TV (WSB Channel 2 – an ABC affiliate) for the Atlanta viewing audience in the 1970s – impactful gospel TV programming for a black church at that time.
- Wheat Street formed the Wheat Street Charitable Foundation, a separate entity, which by 1999 had become the largest landowner in the "Sweet Auburn" area.

Rev. Borders also authored several books, the most popular of which was "Handy Man of the Lord: The Life and Ministry of Rev. William Holmes Borders". Under Rev. Borders' dynamic leadership Wheat Street Baptist Church became known as "God's Mighty Fortress on Auburn Avenue where the doors swing back on Welcome Hinges".

In June 1989, Wheat Street Baptist Church called their 6th Senior Pastor, Rev. Michael Neeley Harris, who served as pastor until retiring in 2015.

Rev. Harris led the church to do the following:

- Renovation of the Church's First Unit
- Rejuvenation of the Church's Action Mission Ministry which provides food and clothing for the least of these.
- Initiation of several new ministries, including a Deaconess Board, the Couples Club, Noonday Bible Study, and the SASSY Club (a seniors group).

Rev. Ralph Watkins was called as the 7th Pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church in 2018 and served until 2020. He focused on building bridges between young adults and the church to develop future leaders for the twenty-first century church, while respecting the traditions of old.

Wheat Street's seven pastors in chronological order:

1. 1869-1874: Rev. Andrew Jackson
2. 1875-1897: Rev. William Henry Tillman
3. 1898-1929: Rev. Peter James Bryant
4. 1930-1937: Rev. J Raymond Henderson
5. 1937-1988: Rev. Dr. William Holmes Borders, Sr.
6. 1989-2015: Rev. Michael N. Harris
7. 2017-2020: Rev. Ralph Watkins (also interim pastor: 2016-2017)

HOW OTHERS SEE US

Wheat Street Baptist Church (WSBC) is a Historically Black Church located in the heart of what was formerly referred to as “The Black Mecca” in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition to attracting non-believers to Christ through worship, WSBC is also known as a place for creating individual and political change within the community through its various ministries.

Present Ministries

- Associate Ministers
- Deacons’ Ministry
- Mothers’ Ministry
- Action Mission/Community Outreach
- Hearing Impaired Ministry (First in the city)
- Children / Youth Ministry
- Young Adult Ministry
- Christian Education (Bible Study, Sunday School, etc.)
- Education Ministry: Hope Hill Elementary, David T. Howard Middle School
- Greeters & Parking Lot Ministry
- Music Ministry
- Media Ministry
- Kitchen Ministry
- Liturgical Dancing
- United Sisterhood
- Mighty Men
- Ladies Who Usher
- JPB Usher Board
- WHB Usher Board
- Men Who Usher
- Youth Ushers

There are also opportunities to revive and establish new ministries:

- Nurses Guild
- Substance Abuse (for example: Alcoholic Anonymous Association Branch)
- General Counseling (with referrals as needed for problems of grief, marriage, drugs, parenting)
- Hand Bell Choir
- Updated Children & Youth Ministry
- Chanters
- Revised Sunday School
- Comprehensive, Spirit-Filled Music Department
 - In Church Service
 - Social Activities such as Jazz & Arts events
- Revised Usher Boards
- Intergenerational Activities
- Revised Nursery Ministry
- Children’s Church (during in-person Church service in safe, secure location)
- Drama Ministry
- Revised Prison Ministry
- Community Needs Ministry (meet needs such as help with utility bills, language translation, etc.)
- Singles Ministry
- Couples Ministry
- Other Ministries the new pastor may suggest

Potential Areas for Growth

Membership/Fellowship

- Actively reach out to the current and commuter residents living and working in Atlanta
- Develop a relationship with colleges and universities to create programs and internships that will attract this population to WSBC
- Increase volunteerism in church missions and activities to serve the community
- Re-establish the bond between the surrounding churches to promote unity within and across denominations

Finance

- Increased contributions to the Church from tithes, offerings and other donations
- Support the development of comprehensive financial records/budgets to be distributed to congregation and staff

Church Partnerships

- Develop a strong relationship with the Wheat Street Charitable Foundation, understanding how it operates, and its benefit to WSBC
- Continue community impact partnerships such as Hope Thru Soap and the Hope Hill Elementary School & David T. Howard Middle School Partnerships.

THE CHURCH LIFE

Wheat Street Baptist Church has a rich history and an abundant church life!

Pre-Pandemic there were a variety of Sunday School Classes offered with content for all ages, from toddler to seasoned saint. Also, Midweek Bible Study would occur on Wednesdays with classes for children (K-5), youth (6-12), and adults. The two adult Bible Study Classes included, "Through the Bible in One Year" and "God's Will vs. Our Will." Nowadays, Sunday School is offered virtually for students K-5 through our youth and children's Young Disciples Ministry (YDM). Wednesday Night Bible Study is offered virtually for adults each week as well. As far as the Children's Ministry and Child Care Services Pre-Pandemic, the Nursery Ministry served babies and young children (ages 0-5) during morning worship.

Other than Midweek (Wednesday Night) Bible Study, no Midweek Children's programs were held, but there were many pre-pandemic seasonal Children's Ministry events and opportunities inclusive of occasional Children's Chapel services and annual events such as the Easter Eggstravaganza, The Fall Festival, as well as combined children and youth Easter and Christmas Sunday School plays and speeches etc.

In addition, prior to the pandemic, the Youth Ministry at Wheat Street would participate and compete in a Bible Bowl Competition, against other local churches, in which youth would display their knowledge of God's Word by answering various Biblical questions. Youth also participated in the Chanter's Ministry where they would memorize and recite popular scriptural passages monthly during morning worship. Other youth programming included an annual Youth Explosion showcasing their talents and abilities in tandem with youth and children from other area churches. Our youth also participated in programming with our children's ministry such as our annual "Back-To-School Bash".

Currently, our church has been focused on building virtual connections. These opportunities would include ministry opportunities for our Senior Adults and Singles. At one time, we had a SASSY Club (Spiritually Anointed Seniors Still Young) for our more seasoned saints as well as a Young Adult Fellowship for single and married young adults ages 18-40. Wheat Street does not offer a small group Bible Study at this time; however, as our membership increases, we would be open to this addition to our current whole group panel Bible Study.

Reflecting even further on our Church Life, someday soon, Wheat Street Baptist Church (WSBC) would like to continue developing and expanding several ministries, groups, and events that we occasionally offer. We presently have a Hearing Impaired Ministry that signs during service and sponsors the annual "Sing Sign" city-wide event. Furthermore, we have had a few opportunities to assess Spiritual Gifts via classes held for new members, church leaders, and attendees at our women's conference. Our women's ministry is the United Sisterhood. The Sisterhood has a special day, luncheons, and monthly meetings. They partake in visitation of the sick and donations to the bereaved. Our men's ministry is the Mighty Men of Wheat Street which meets quarterly for a "Chat-N-Chew". They also sponsor a Prayer Service event prior to the annual

Men's Day Service. Interest has been expressed in forming a Veterans' group for those who may have had difficult experiences while in service. WSBC would also love to provide additional support ministries for those in need.

Our church is committed to mission involvement having collected Mission Offerings for several years. Presently, Wheat Street Action Mission feeds, clothes, and ministers to those in need such as the homeless on Mondays and Wednesdays. The Action Mission also sponsors the Adopt-A-Family Christmas event, serving more than 25 families, sharing lunch, teaching the Word, singing carols, and giving gifts.

Also, there have been recent community service opportunities for our Wheat Street members. Twice a month our church hosts a community service opportunity with Hope Thru Soap, a local community partner offering meals, portable showers, haircuts, clothing, and grooming items to those without a home.

Wheat Street Baptist Church has participated in Ecumenical worship events such as Thanksgiving, New Year's Eve, and Ash Wednesday services through the Auburn Avenue Collaborative, a group of churches in our immediate "Sweet Auburn" Historic District. Also, WSBC's former pastors often invited the congregation and a choir to accompany him as he brought the Word to other congregations or groups. Recently discipleship classes were offered to church leaders. Revivals occur rarely. Wheat Street welcomes and embraces all of these.

As the Wheat Street congregation begins to grow and thrive after the pandemic, we are open to expansion in several areas. Intergenerational Activities have occurred through our Mother's Board working with our teenage and young unwed mothers. Also, congregants of all ages attended a pre-pandemic church picnic and the yearly Men Who Usher picnic. We would love to also explore having a day-care ministry, a drama ministry, and a community basic needs ministry.

The congregants of WSBC are a family who are looking for a spiritual leader to help oversee the ministries of WSBC and further develop our vision for church and community. They should be a team builder who is consistent, decisive, and ready to receive our love and respect. We welcome their insight, knowledge, and godly wisdom to steer us to be the congregation God wants us to be!

OUR WORSHIP LIFE

The worship life of the Wheat Street Baptist Church (WSBC) has many facets and has changed over the years due to new administrations and trends in worship. Described here are the experiences that happen occasionally in our worship services:

- During special occasions such as Women's & Men's Day and the Church Anniversary, litanies or Responsive Readings are used.
- The Church Covenant was read during service on the first Sunday of the month for many years.
- New songs are periodically introduced to the congregation to sing in unison.
- The "Gloria Patri" is sung to culminate the Chanters' scripture recital.
- Richard Smallwood's "Total Praise" is sung at the end of the 1st Sunday church service.
- Computer-generated music accompaniment is rarely used, except by the dance ministry and during some special occasions.
- Sometimes, we like for our minister to share leadership of worship with students in ministry who have been properly trained; but prefer the Pastor to lead worship.
- Having the minister take the primary role in the Order of Worship is important knowing sometimes he or she will use input from the Worship Committee or others.
- Our minister's wearing a robe or stole seems appropriate for funerals, Graduation Recognition Day, Communion Sunday, and other special occasions as deemed necessary. Otherwise, a suit or Casual Sunday wear is acceptable.

In our worship life at WSBC, for varied reasons, these have not materialized:

- The development of a Worship Committee
- Also, lay leaders do not pray in worship service unless it is a special occasion. (Prayers are primarily led by the clergy or deacons)

Our worship life is spiritual and there are experiences we would consider incorporating:

- Unison prayers would again be welcomed.
- The Hand Bell choir would again be welcomed.
- Having the piano and the organ played simultaneously is also a desire.
- In addition to the guitar and drums currently used, horn instrument(s) would be a great enhancement.
- Unison Bible readings are not included; there are screens in the sanctuary available for many of these types of experiences.

- We would love to have the children participate in worship including, but not limited to, the Children's Choir and the Youth Choir directed by a trained professional.
- Having stories told to the children, preferably by the Pastor (or one of the trained Associate Pastors), would be a delight and a benefit. If not, then a trained storyteller would be an acceptable consideration.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

At Wheat Street, we believe in the Holy Trinity: God, Jesus Christ (the Son of God, our Savior), and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, co-equal and co-eternal having precisely the same nature and are worthy of precisely the same worship, confidence, and obedience. The Bible teaches this doctrine in the Old and New Testaments.

We believe the Bible is the Holy Scripture of the Christian religion telling the history of the Earth from its earliest creation to spread Christianity in first Century A.D. and beyond. Baptism is the Church making commitments to the believer and the believer making commitments to the Church. The Lord's Supper is meant to function like a net, catching any unchecked pride or bitterness that church members might be harboring towards one another.

Our Core Values / Beliefs:

1. We believe that God's Word is the authoritative guide for the work of God's church.
2. We believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and well and speaks to and through the church and we will be led by the Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus' model of a daily ministry of liberation is the mode of ministry we embrace and practice.
4. We believe that God is doing a work of liberation in the world and our goal is to hear God and be in line with mission and work of God in the world.
5. We believe that forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ is the primary work of the church
6. We believe in an open door and table, in that all people are welcomed at Wheat Street and they are eligible to serve, worship and give because they are members of the family of God.

The purpose of the Church is "The Great Commission": to worship, to fellowship, to create disciples, and fulfill our mission.

MISSION & VISION

MISSION STATEMENT

We are in union with God's work of liberation in the world. We reach outside the walls of the church to be the church. We are committed to innovation and change as God's calls us to reach and disciple people by doing ministry that makes a real difference 365 days a year. We get people closer to God, their community and God's will for their lives and the church by keeping it real.

VISION STATEMENT

We exist to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who make a real difference in the world by actively seeking the justice, freedom, liberation and peace of God. (Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 1:16-20; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 7:1-23; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 1:6-11; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:23-37; Philippians 4:4-9).

MINISTRY OVERVIEW

Wheat Street has a strong legacy of leadership and service elevating God's people. The church ministries focus on outreach to positively impact those we serve – children, families, and the homeless. We are anxiously looking forward to working together with our new senior pastor to build on our legacy with new, creative ideas.

Current Community Involvement:

Homeless Support

-Action Mission Ministry

Outreach

-Hope-Hill Elementary

-David T. Howard Middle School

-Old Fourth Ward Business Association

-College Internships (seminary students, GSU support for Action Mission, GSU students teaching at WSBC-sponsored schools)

Future Opportunities

-Partner: Hope-Thru-Soap (revive)

-Partner: Georgia Justice Project

-Partner (Ebenezer): Ending Mass Incarceration

-Partner (Interfaith Children's Movement): Sweet Auburn Village

-Substance Abuse, Daycare, Drama

-Jobs Ministry, Community Basic Needs

Going forward, Wheat Street has several opportunities for improvement. We believe that the strong spiritual leadership of a new pastor – with the support of the congregation – will enhance the awareness of our church in the Atlanta community and have a positive impact on church growth. The pastor’s preaching, teaching, personality, and community involvement must be dynamic and engaging to enable membership growth as well.

Church growth focused on young adults and families will enable Wheat Street to strengthen and diversify its congregation. Colleges and universities in the Atlanta metro near the church offer a great opportunity to serve and mentor these young adults through the most formative years of their life. And, as Atlanta grows and residents return to the inner City, Wheat Street has an opportunity to inspire with its message and service to attract young families to the church as the next generation of faithful to serve at God’s Mighty Fortress on Auburn Avenue.

WHAT WE WANT TO DO AND WHAT WE WANT OUR PASTOR TO DO

The Congregation has primary responsibility for the following (with Pastor involvement/input):

- Preparing & implementing Operating & Capital Budgets (budget / financial management)
- Identifying & Evaluating needs of the community and working to meet those needs
- Encouraging, providing opportunities for the congregation / individuals to be informed and involved in Christian witness (mission promotion)
- Maintaining a Choral and/or music program(s) of the church (music directing / performing)
- Creating an atmosphere in which persons feel accepted, included, cared for and part of the group (nurturing fellowship)
- Developing, leading a ministry with adolescents which nurtures youth toward Christian faith commitment and discipleship (youth ministry)

The Pastor has primary responsibility for the following (with Congregation involvement / input):

- Developing & maintaining programs and activities for enlarging the membership, the vision and ministry for the church. (church growth).
- Demonstrating keen sensibilities to other languages, ethnicities, and / or cultural groups and settings (multi-cultural sensitivity)

Pastoral direct responsibilities include the following:

- Leading the preaching ministry with time for preparation/reflection on the Word, and commitment to share the Word's power and its implications for individuals, the church, the community and the world. (preaching)
- Providing a teaching ministry that is based on theological, educational, and historical foundations. (education)
- Communicating a comprehensive understanding of the Bible and Christian theology in terms relevant to persons' lives. (interpreting the faith)
- Providing by word and presence an empathetic understanding of and concern for persons in the routine and joys as well as the crises and transitions of life, giving assistance where appropriate and feasible. (pastoral care)
- Resolving conflict situations with persons and groups to ensure peace and harmony. (conflict management)

- Making formal and informal connections with church members or others in their homes, at work or in other settings. (visitation)

MINISTERIAL PRIORITIES

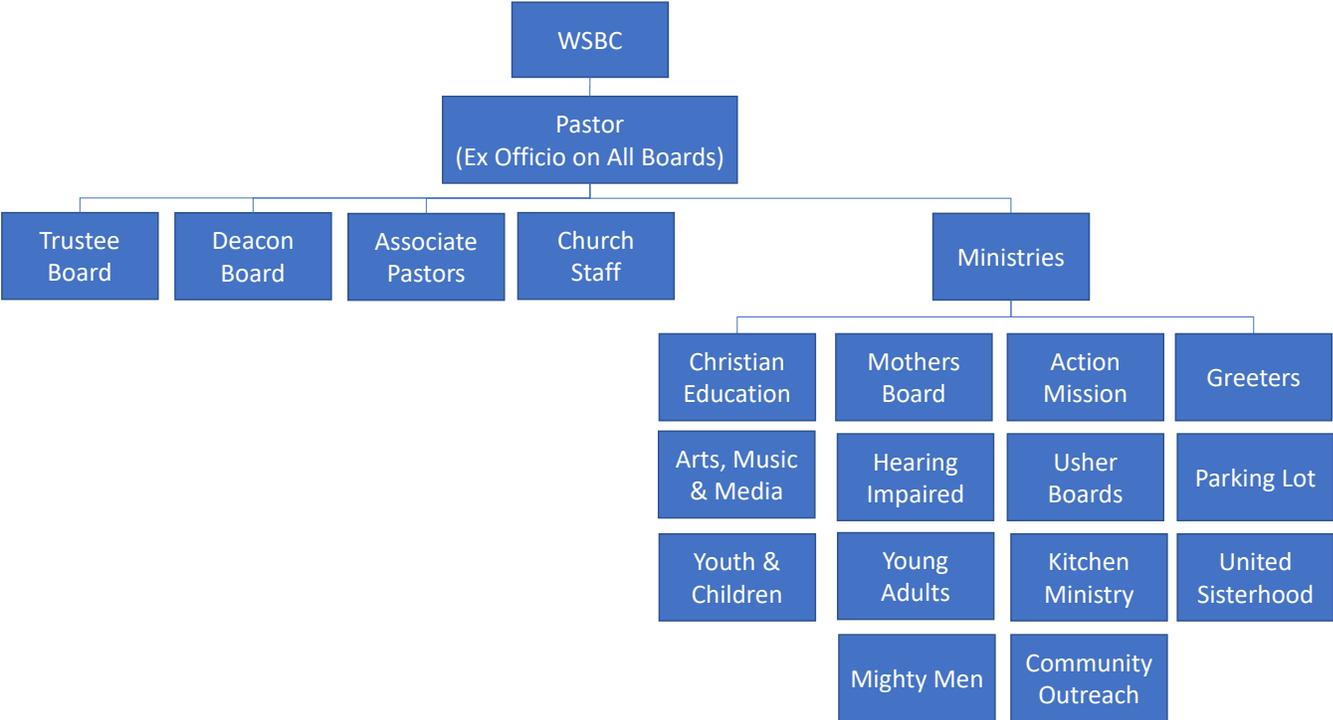
- 1st: Preaching
- 2nd: Leadership
- 3rd: Church Growth
- 4th: Youth Ministry (youth & children)
- 5th: Education
- 6th: Pastoral Care
- 7th: Visitation
- 8th: Conflict Management
- 9th: Budget
- 10th: Leadership Development

Goals and Vision for our Pastor

- 1. Shepherd
- 2. Community Engagement
- 3. Outreach
- 4. Counselor

At Wheat Street Baptist Church, the Word of God, uplifting music and a spirit-filled congregation have always been the key factors in our worship service. We welcome the explanation and application of the Word of God as it relates to our daily Christian life. We believe in the importance of prayer with every church activity beginning and ending with prayer. We believe that everything we do should be for the Glory of God!

Appendix A – WSBC Organizational Structure



Appendix B – Community Demographics

30312 Demographics Summary

Population 2019

With 24,782 people, 30312 is the 163rd most populated zip code in the state of Georgia out of 727 zip codes. But watch out, 30312, because [30121](#) with 24,742 people and [31410](#) with 24,727 people are right behind you.

Race & Ethnicity 2019

The largest 30312 racial/ethnic groups are Black (50.7%) followed by White (39.3%) and Hispanic (4.2%).

Median Income 2019

In 2019, the median household income of 30312 households was \$57,740. 30312 households made slightly more than [30104](#) households (\$57,692) and [30527](#) households (\$57,722). However, 20.6% of 30312 families live in poverty.

Median Age 2019

The median age for 30312 residents is 33.1 years young.

Source: <https://www.georgia-demographics.com/30312-demographics>