



January 31, 2023

Mr. Ron L. Holmes, GISP
GIS Manager
Dept of Land Use – GIS Services
87 Reads Way
New Castle, DE 19720

RE: Census Tract 19.02

Dear Mr. Holmes,

Soon, significant demographic changes are expected in South Wilmington due to the planned South Market Street Redevelopment Project (i.e., Riverfront East).¹ The area is slated for over 4,000 new residential units,² in addition to office space and parking. This development will usher in extraordinary changes to the number of people that reside in South Wilmington, adding several thousand more residents to the approximately 2,100 that currently live there, which includes about 1,400 people in the core residential community of Southbridge.

South Wilmington is encompassed by Census tract 19.02 and split into two block groups. The block groups “split” the core residential community of Southbridge into two parts, making it difficult to utilize data at the block group level to examine population shifts, economics, levels of education, and other important markers of community vitality and needs. At the Census tract level, the core residential community of Southbridge makes up approximately 67% of the tract’s overall population, and the tract has relatively clear concentrations of residents according to race in different parts of the area. For example, around 86% of the tract’s African-American population lives in Southbridge, while only approximately 12% of the tract’s white population resides in Southbridge. Notably, since the year 2000, the white population in South Wilmington has grown significantly and resides mostly outside of Southbridge, in Christina Landing. Christina Landing residents generally have higher incomes than residents of Southbridge, “skewing” Census data at the tract level and making it difficult to parse out the area’s overall needs based on poverty/wealth, employment/unemployment, mobility, and housing costs.³ Coupled with known parallels between race, education, wealth, and income, the patterns of racial concentrations in the area reflect a growing racial-economic divide that is happening across the broader city of Wilmington, but are obscured by the current geographic boundaries. Indeed, as many new residents are expected because of the South Market Street Redevelopment Project, with those residents generally also being of higher income than the average Southbridge resident, the need for updated geographic boundaries to illustrate the area’s diversity of communities most accurately and clearly is paramount.

¹ <https://www.wilmingtonde.gov/Home/Components/News/News/6248/225>

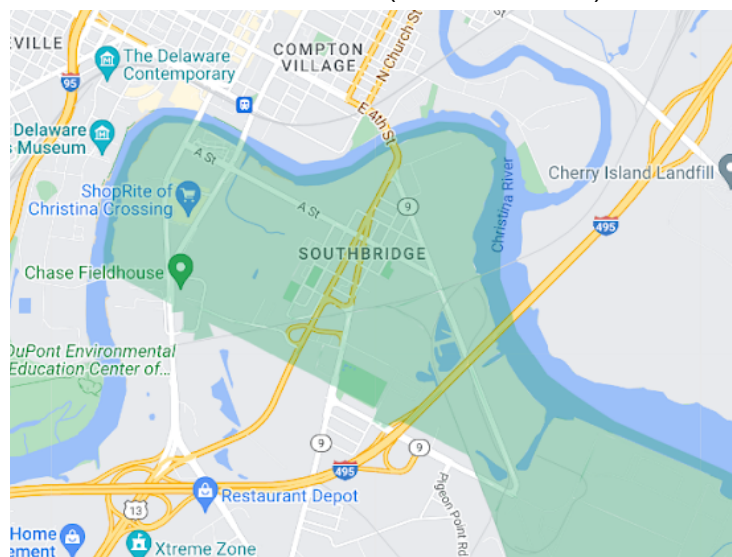
² <https://outandaboutnow.com/whats-next-for-the-riverfront/>

³ <https://wilmapco.sharefile.com/share/view/s88d0f1c7cc9342648c589a08cda2f8cf>

As is noted in the Southbridge Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP), action item Community Empowerment (CE) 02, we suggest that New Castle County examine the Census tract and block groups in the area to re-draw geographic boundaries to better reflect the area's current and anticipated spatial patterns of residents of different demographic groups. **We have created an interactive map⁴** with several possibilities that we believe could better serve the area, as well as the community of Southbridge, specifically.

Below, please find one variation of this proposed change that includes two Census tracts and three block groups⁵. As you can see, the Census tracts are split so that the core residential community of Southbridge is fully contained in the eastern Census tract and one or two easternmost block groups.

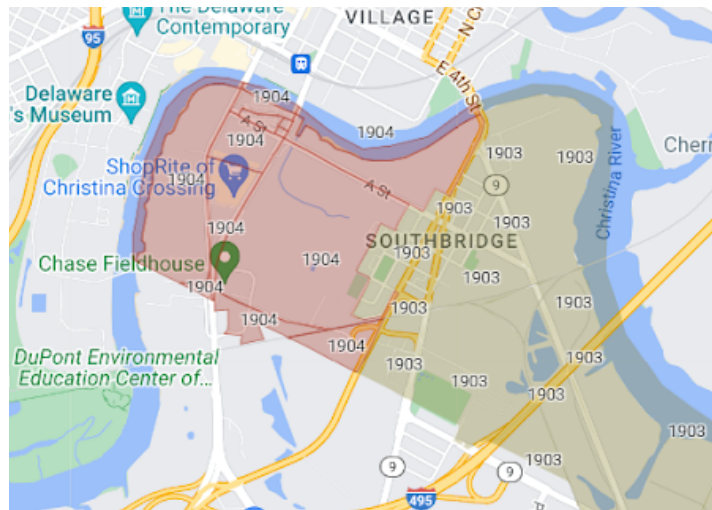
Current Condition (1 Census Tract)



⁴ <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1W9L99E5cB7iBS4VqJ7raZ4pMVNEykAc&ll=39.71665594063512%2C-75.534321&z=14>

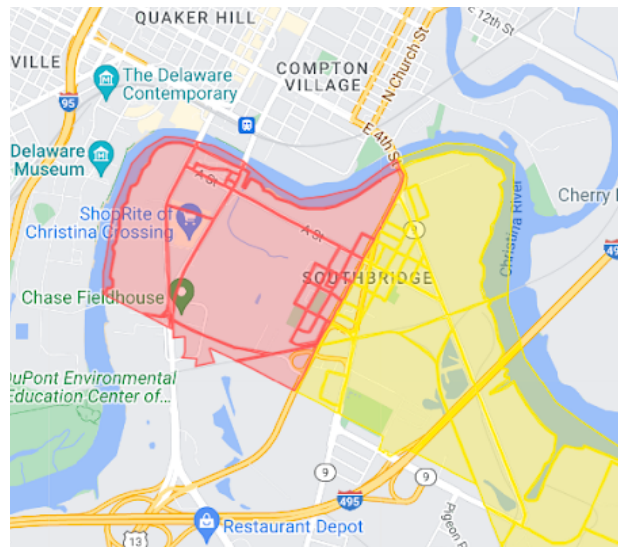
⁵ Note that this works with Census blocks as they currently exist. Splitting the block along the north side of A Street that borders Southbridge along the Church Street axis and including it in the newly created tract, as shown better in our interactive map, may be optimal.

Possible Condition (2 Census Tracts)



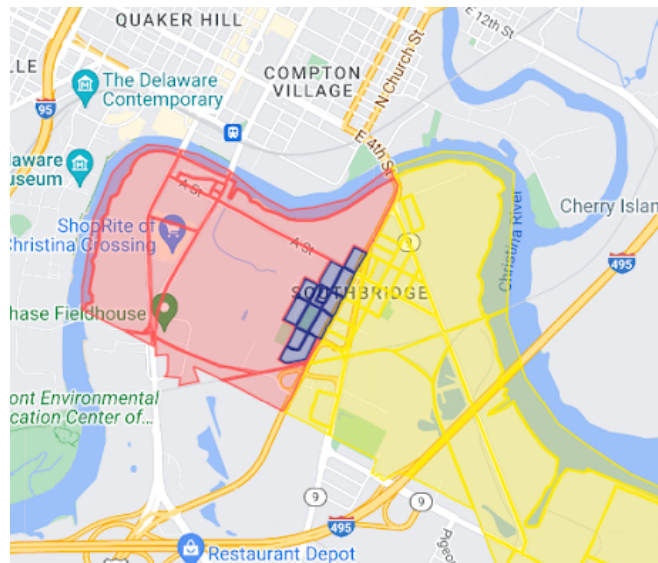
Another, perhaps interim, possibility is to maintain the integrity of Census tract 19.02, but to introduce a third block group into South Wilmington, as shown below. This would have the effect of properly separating Southbridge and Riverfront East developments⁶.

Current Condition (2 Block Groups)



⁶ Note that this works with Census blocks as they currently exist. Splitting the block along the north side of A Street that borders Southbridge along the Church Street axis and including it in the newly created block group, as shown better in our interactive map, may be optimal.

Proposed Condition (3 Block Groups)



Southbridge has clear social and economic needs, as a community, that Christina Landing (and we expect the Riverfront East) does not, including unemployment, poverty, and housing needs, as well as issues of environmental injustice. We propose, for example, that the core residential Southbridge be included in a single Census tract of its own and use Church St. as a residential boundary to the west. Though important for helping alleviate long-term flooding issues in Southbridge, including the new Southbridge Wilmington Wetlands Park in a proposed tract boundary will not alter the way that local, state, and federal funds may be sought because it does not include any residential space and is not an area slated for residential development. Given the expected South Market Street Redevelopment Project, which, again, will dramatically increase the total population in South Wilmington and likely draw in mostly new residents to the area, it is very likely that the Census tract would have to be altered *anyway* in order to remain in accordance with [federal guidelines](#). Per those guidelines:

“In order to ensure a minimal level of reliability in sample data and minimize potential disclosures of sensitive information, a census tract should contain at least 1,200 people or at least 480 housing units at minimum, and 8,000 people or 3,200 housing units at maximum. PSAP participants should aim to create census tracts that meet the optimal population of 4,000 or 1,600 housing units and maintain the minimum thresholds...”⁷

It is crucial that any equity funds be sought and used appropriately in South Wilmington for the community of Southbridge, and not used, in part, to fund redevelopment that will not directly benefit the current residential community of Southbridge. In addition, as the area’s anticipated residential changes incur significant upward changes in wealth, income, and home values, we

⁷ <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2018-24567/p-28>




do not want the specific social and economic needs of Southbridge obscured as a result of being included in the same Census tract as Christina Landing and the Riverfront East. Overall, any needs and subsequent efforts at enhancing equity and vitality in the community could be accurately assessed when the Southbridge is separated from its neighbors to the west.

Along with our letter, we have included two presentations recently given to the SWPN that showcase, in more detail, some demographic changes in South Wilmington that have occurred since the 2000 Census and help to illustrate the growing need for clearer Census boundaries. In addition, Dr. Perez and Mr. Swiatek co-authored a publication in the Delaware Journal of Public health that demonstrates these issues.⁸ Our paper focuses on how health data in the area may be obscured by demographic shifts and possibly misattribute health benefits of green infrastructure in the area that is tied to development. We welcome your thoughts on these presentations and publication in future discussions and look forward to your response to our letter.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments. Should you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to talk this proposal through, please contact us at:
SouthWilmingtonPlanningNetwork@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Haneef Salaam
President, Southbridge Civic Association

DocuSigned by:

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Hanifa Shabazz
Interim Executive Director, Southbridge Community Development Corporation

DocuSigned by:

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Britt Salen
Co-Chair, South Wilmington Planning Network

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9495474/>