

The Athens Remote Working Economic Development Opportunity

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Study Goals

1. Examine prospects for attracting remote workers to relocate to non-metro areas like Athens County
2. Design a “scorecard” of remote worker attraction factors to assess Athens’ competitive position
3. Estimate the economic development significance of remote worker attraction
4. Identify other opportunities for remote work to provide economic benefits for Athens residents

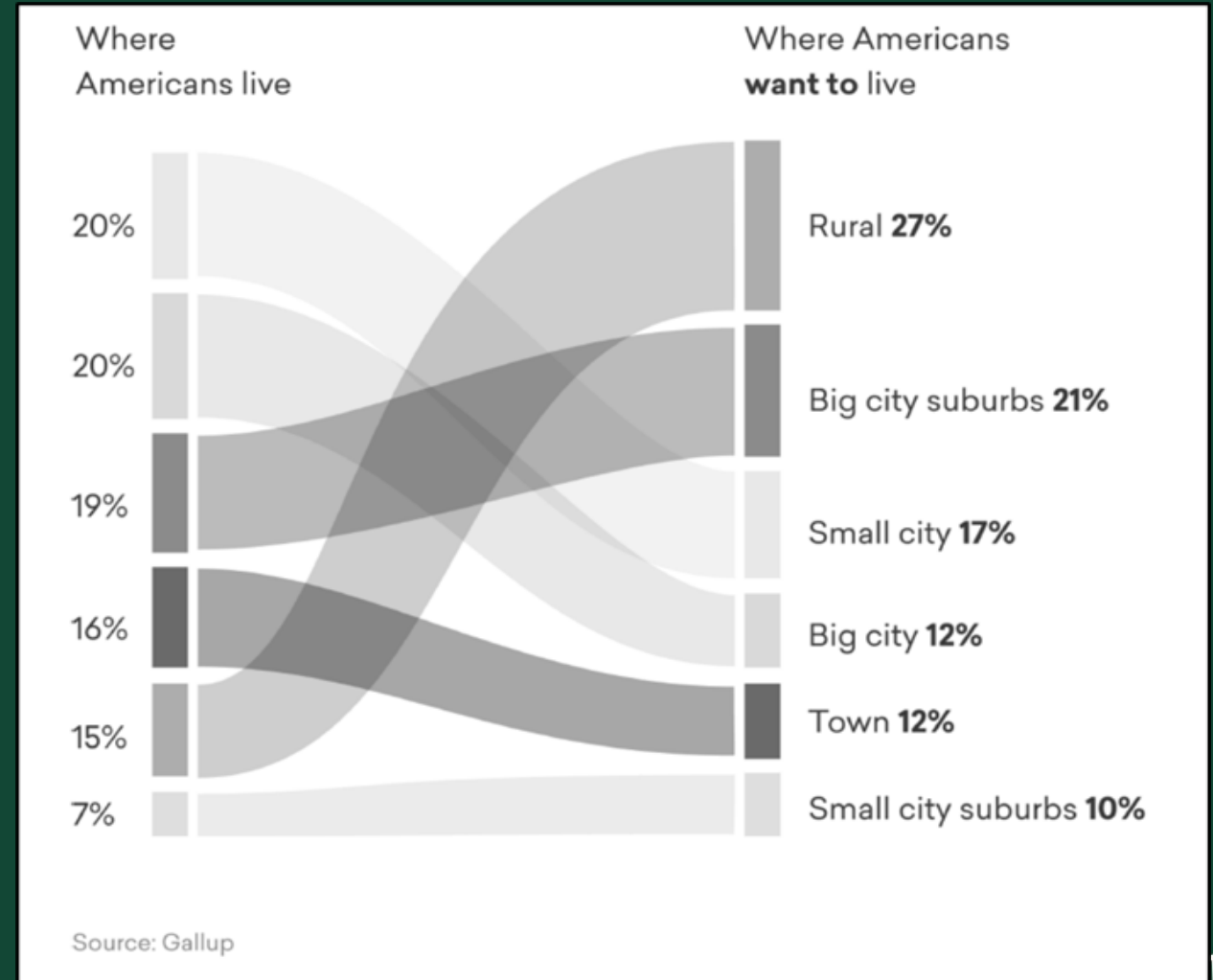
Findings

1. Remote working (RW) – “digital commuting” - accelerated by COVID pandemic, is a sustained but evolving trend
2. RW allows previously thwarted non-metro location preferences
3. Athens is positively positioned to attract such RW relocations
4. The economic impacts of “incented” RW attraction are minimal
5. RW offers more/other benefits to current/prospective residents
6. Emphasizing resident RW benefits may better address Athens’ priorities than relocation incentives

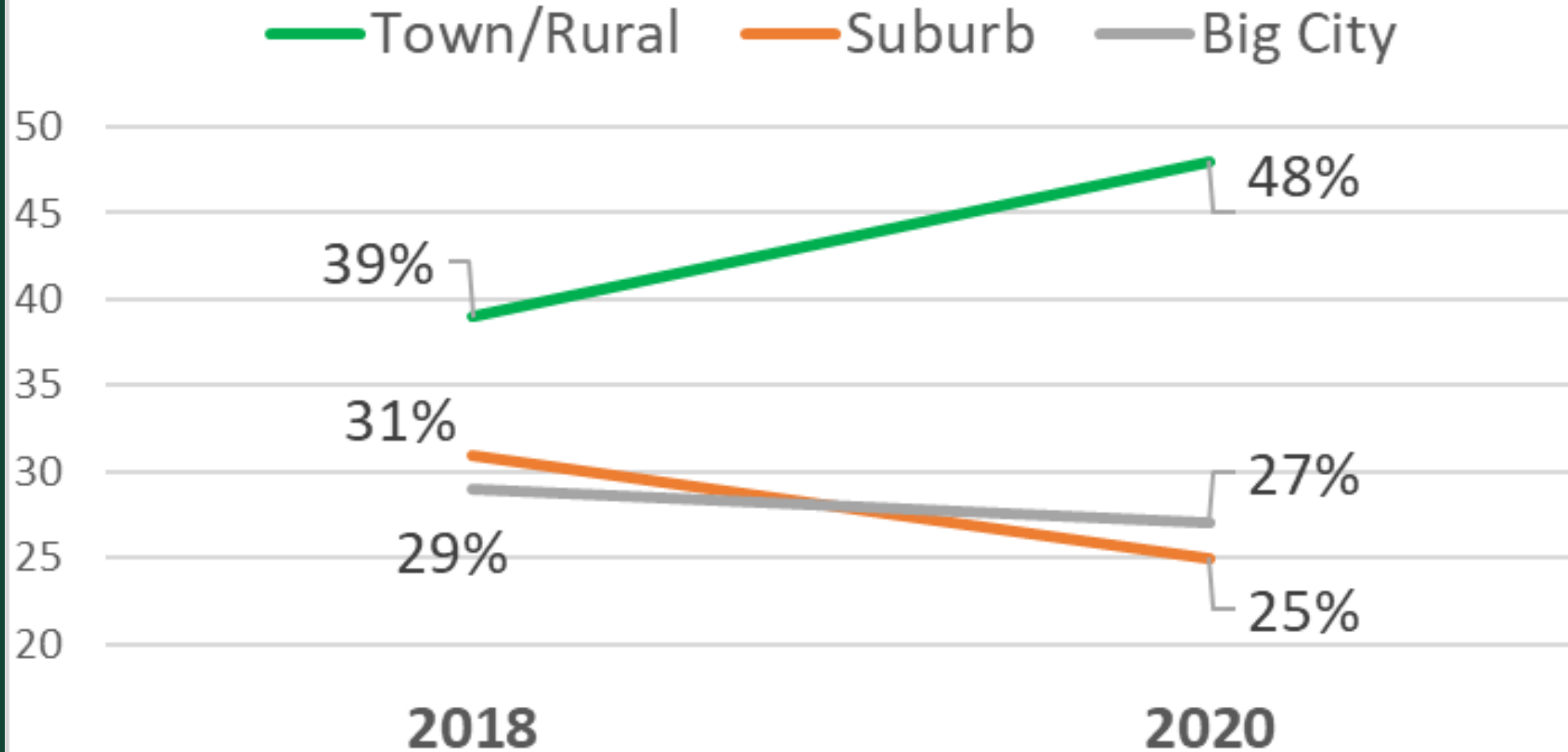
RW is enabling Relocations to Non-Metro Areas

2018 Gallup Poll:

“If Americans did sort themselves according to their desires, there would be an exodus from the big cities and, to a lesser degree, from small cities and town, accompanying a movement to rural areas.”



Gallup Poll of Residence Preference (%)



Major Remote Worker Attraction Factors

INTERNET ACCESS:

Accessible, affordable, sufficient - from multiple ISPs.

ATTAINABLE HOUSING

A primary motivation for many remote workers is home ownership.

CHILD CARE

Availability and affordability of acceptable pre-school, daycare, and afterschool care for remote worker families.

COST OF LIVING

Desire locations that increase the spending power of stable or even declining income.

REMOTE WORKSPACES

Abundant dedicated and informal remote workspaces.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Prospective relocating remote workers seeking non-metro locales emphasize regional outdoor recreation opportunities.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Professional development through training certifications and post-secondary/graduate education.

TRAVEL ACCESS

Expeditious ground transportation and commercial/charter air travel to major business metros.

POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

Preference to live in communities with compatible political values.

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES (?)

Monetary/assistance for location identification, selection, and relocation.

Athens & Remote Worker Attraction Factors

FAVORABLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ATTAINABLE HOUSING• COST OF LIVING• CHILDCARE• OUTDOOR RECREATION• PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION
UNCERTAIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• INTERNET ACCESS• REMOTE WORKSPACES• POLITICAL ALIGNMENT
NEGATIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TRAVEL ACCESS• FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

RW Incentives are Expensive and/or Small...

Program Region	Per Worker Incentive	Budget	Remote Workers Capacity
Vermont	\$10,000	\$500,000	50
Topeka, Kansas	\$15,000	\$900,000	60
Baltimore, Maryland	\$5,000	\$100,000	20
Maine	\$15,660	\$5,000,000	319
Tulsa, Oklahoma	\$10,000	\$1,000,000	100
Fayetteville, Arkansas	\$10,200	\$1,000,000	98
Savannah, Georgia	\$2,000	\$100,000	50
Remote Shoals, Alabama	\$10,000	\$100,000	10
Hawaii	\$665	\$33,250	50
West Virginia (per city)	\$14,500	\$3,000,000	207

...and therefore tend to “Succeed Too Small”
Best case estimates @ average RW \$100k annual income

Program Region	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Vermont	11.5	\$448,392	\$1,611,340
Topeka, Kansas	18.6	\$724,264	\$2,634,873
Baltimore, Maryland	7.2	\$281,658	\$1,024,673
Maine	127.6	\$5,168,336	\$18,219,433
Tulsa, Oklahoma	45.0	\$1,822,690	\$6,425,348
Fayetteville, Arkansas	49.0	\$1,984,707	\$6,996,490
Savannah, Georgia	26.5	\$1,062,174	\$3,729,398
Remote Shoals, Alabama	5.8	\$231,747	\$813,687
Hawaii	31.5	\$1,255,296	\$4,407,470
West Virginia	138.6	\$5,593,891	\$19,640,717

Resident Remote Work's Benefits

1. Imports income for local spending and reduces retail leakage.
2. Saves commuting costs, time, and negative impacts.
3. Retains graduates and early career residents.
4. Increases labor force participation accessibility.
5. Enhances upward mobility opportunities for residents.
6. Diversifies economy in both employment and employers.
7. Grows prime working age (25-54) population for community vitality.

RW Economic Strategy Portfolio

CONTINUE: Support continued remote working by current residents

CONVERT: Help physical out-commuters become remote workers

UPSKILL: Remote work training and outplacement for current residents

RETAIN: Support remote work for Athens graduates and likely out-migrants

REPATRIATE: Target enabling return of remote working former residents

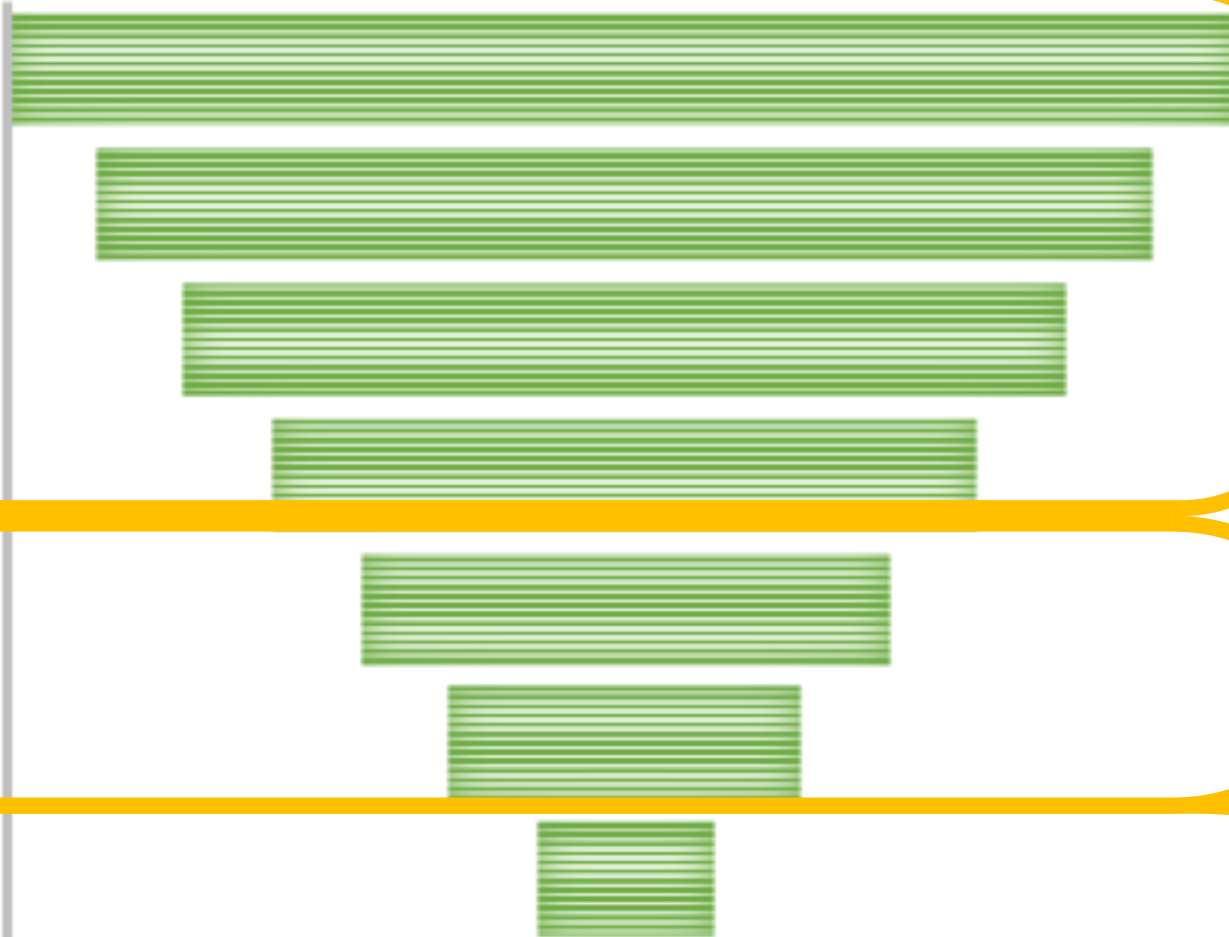
(RE)CONNECT: Attract remote working residents with connections to Athens

INCENTIVIZE(?): Attract remote workers with no connection using incentives

ATHENS AFFINITY TAXONOMY

Affinity Level

Continue
Convert
Upskill
Retain
Repatriate
Reconnect
Incentivize



Conclusion: Enabling>Incenting

Rather than incenting RW relocations, emphasize enabling RW by both current and prospective residents

A comprehensive plan would start with:

- defining how RW outcomes address Athens economic priorities and goals
- thoroughly assessing Athens' "Remote Work Readiness" for diverse opportunities
- identifying key leverage points where intervention would maximize outcomes

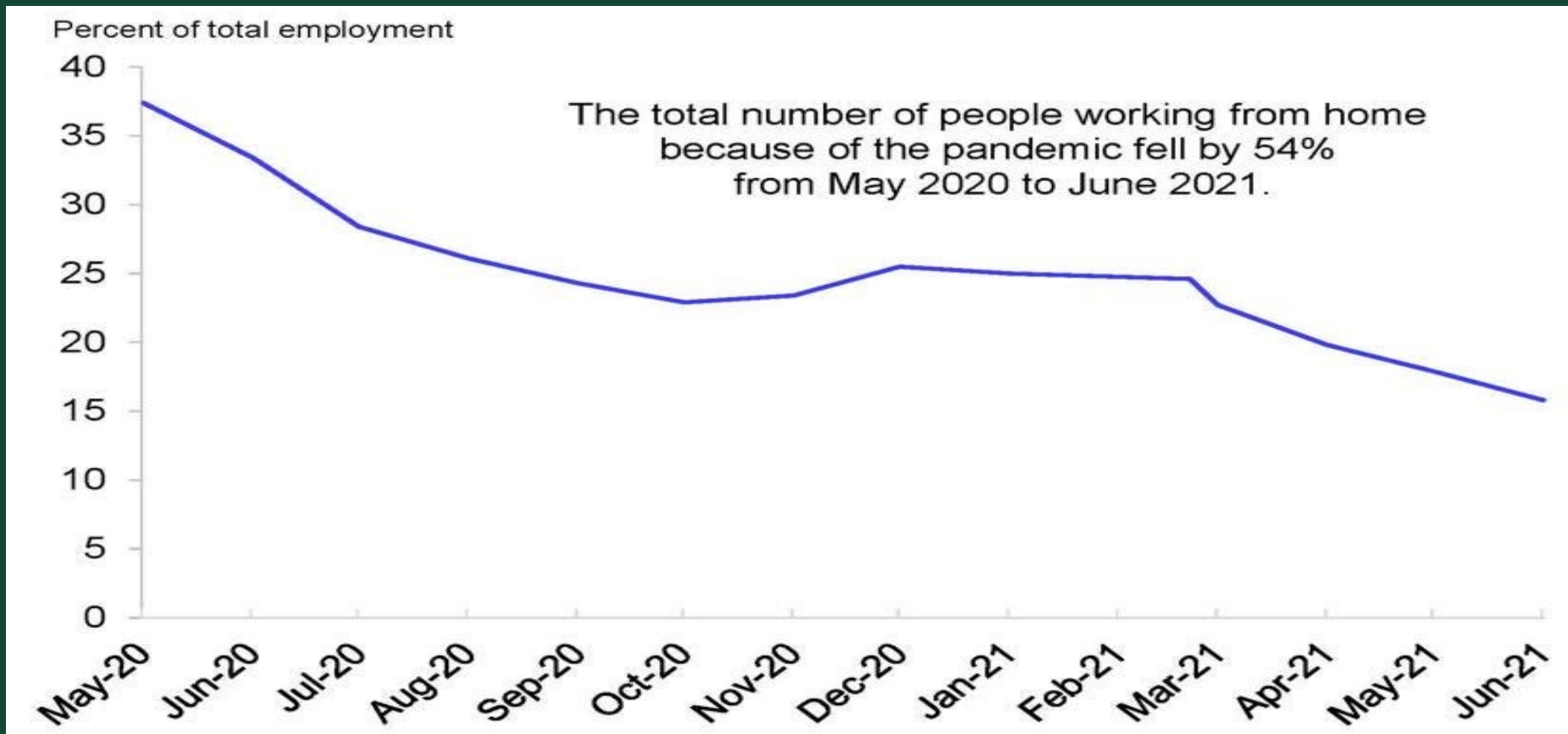


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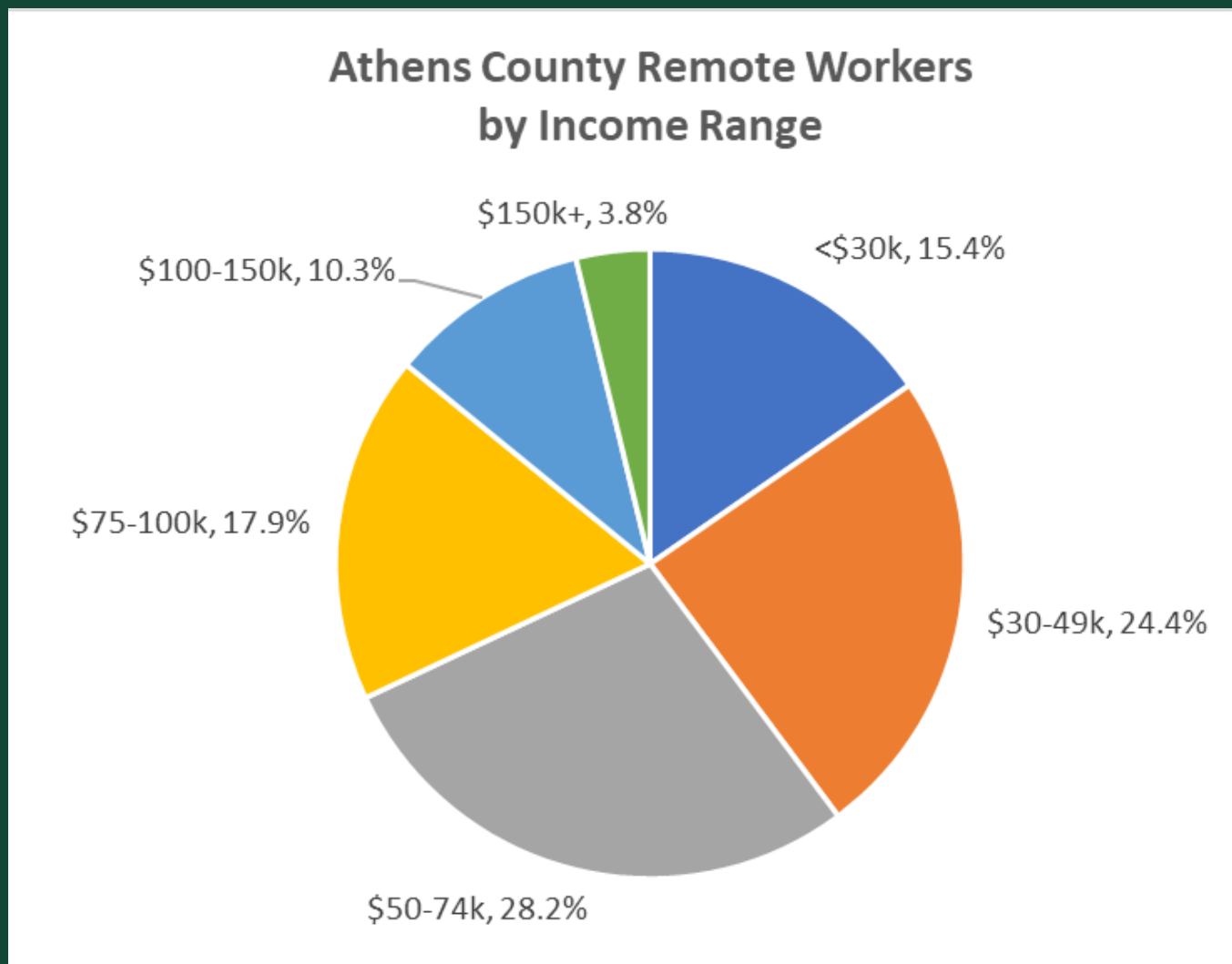
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Remote Work will decline, but continue...



Diverse Remote Workers Benefit Athens



Athens RW Impacts

Economic Impacts of Adding 100 Athens Remote Workers					
Annual Household Income Level	Direct Impacts		Induced Impacts		
	Employment	Income	Employment	Labor Income	Output
<\$30k	15	\$616,000	4	\$138,105	\$496,293
\$30-49k	24	\$976,000	6	\$273,519	\$786,334
\$50-74k	28	\$1,974,000	10	\$397,138	\$1,444,789
\$75-100k	18	\$1,611,000	8	\$326,262	\$1,150,137
\$100-150k	10	\$1,339,000	6	\$258,591	\$907,939
\$150k+	4	\$570,000	3	\$110,080	\$386,501
TOTAL	100	\$7,086,000	37	\$1,503,694	\$5,171,992

Remote Worker Impact vs # of Households by Income Level (2019)

