

THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Introduction and Overview:

This chapter details current conditions, outlines Solon's role in the regional economy, identifies the town's economic development assets, examines visible trends and areas for improvement, incorporates public sentiment, and lays out a direction and strategy to guide the town's economic development efforts for the foreseeable future.

The health of a community is often measured by its economic activity. Income and employment, in addition to describing the nature of the population, can be indicators of current and future demand for housing, recreation, social, and cultural services. This chapter reports on the economy from two perspectives: statistical information and local business issues.

As with many central Maine communities in recent times, Solon has had challenges with regard to economic development. The Historic Profile outlines the active roles of both community leaders and citizens in purposefully attracting employment and tax base to Solon throughout the town's history. These efforts continue to this day, as the town must try to keep up with changes in economic activities as they have shifted from manufacturing and agriculture to a more service-oriented economy, as well as changes in retail consumption patterns.

Per Capita Income Vs. Household Income:

The most conventional measure of a town's economic health is the income of its individuals and families. The Census reports two basic types of income measures: "per-capita income" (PCI) which is simply the aggregate income of the town divided by its population, and "household income" which is the income (usually the median) of the households within the town. The latter is more helpful from a planning perspective, although both are discussed in this chapter.

The PCI is used to determine the average per-person income for an area and to evaluate the standard of living and quality of life of the population. Since PCI divides the number of the town population, including all individuals and not just adults, by the total income of the population, it will inevitably be lower for areas where more people are not working or are working but earning lower wages money. PCI is frequently used in comparing towns or evaluation of a region.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF PER CAPITA VS. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

	Per Capita Income	Median Income
Solon	\$32,840.00	\$56,136.00
Athens	\$26,765.00	\$58,523.00
Madison	\$30,469.00	\$48,750.00
Bingham	\$29,735.00	\$59,688.00
Anson	\$29,112.00	\$48,690.00
Skowhegan	\$29,342.00	\$51,216.00
Somerset County	\$32,452.00	\$56,199.00
Maine	\$42,035.00	\$71,773.00

Source: 2023 American Community Survey

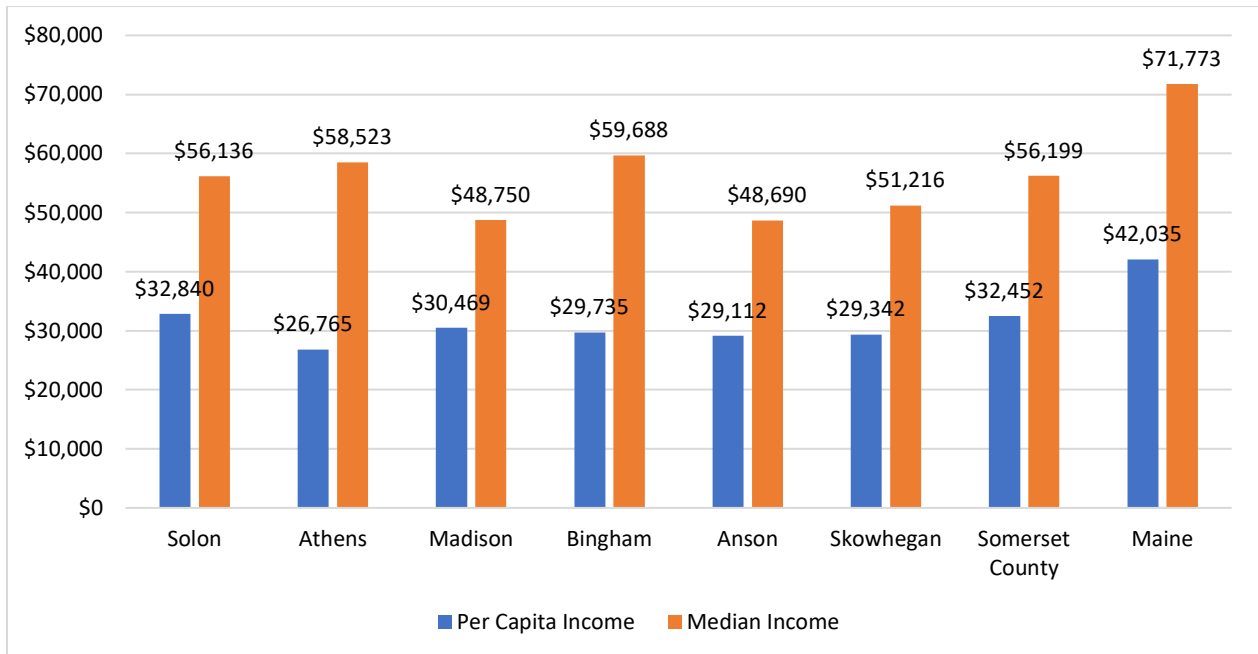
Table 1 Highlights:

- Solon’s Per Capita income was reported to be higher than that of surrounding towns in 2023.
- Solon’s median household income was similar to that of surrounding towns in 2023.

Median household income represents the total gross income received by all members of a household within a 12-month period. The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one half of the population falling below the median income, and one half above the median income. Two factors distinguish it from per capita income:

1. Decreasing household size over time,
2. Changes in the number of members of the household with income.

FIGURE 1: PER CAPITA AND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES OF SURROUNDING TOWNS



Source: 2023 American Community Survey

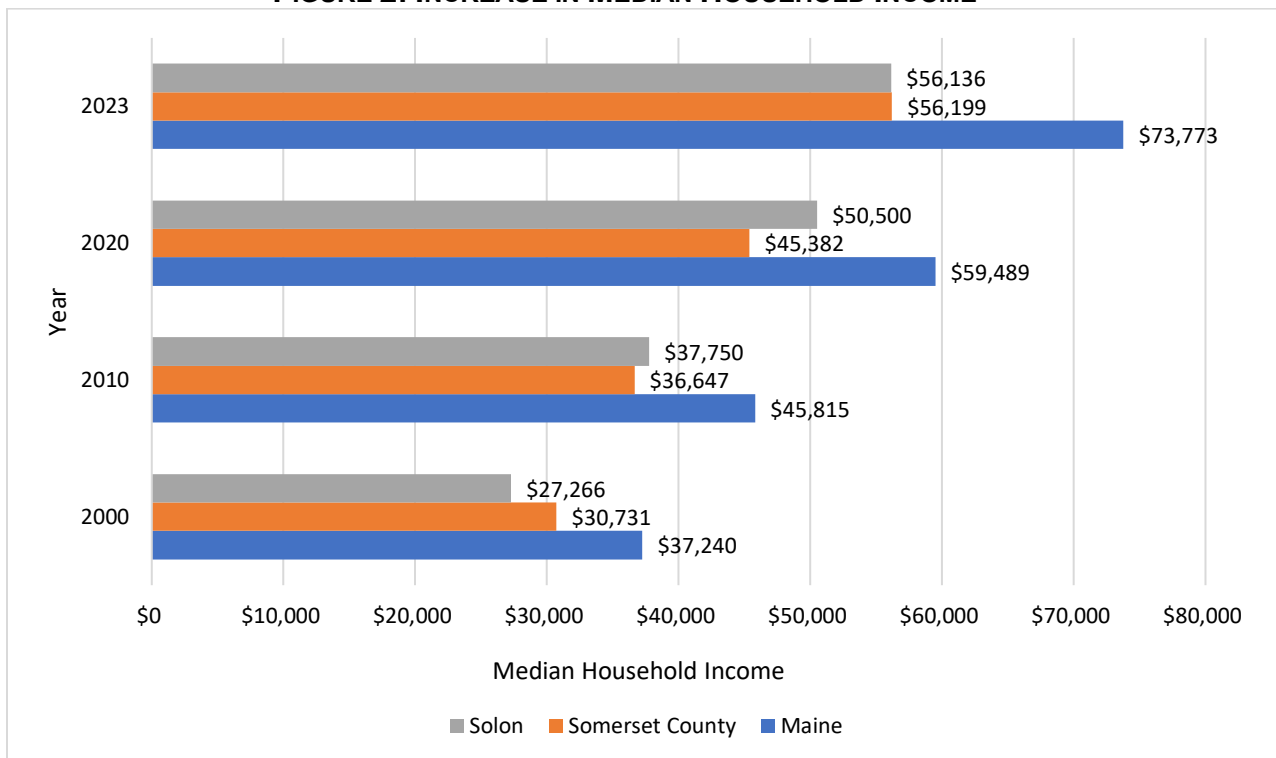
Figure 1 Highlights:

- Solon’s income profile is most similar to Bingham’s.
- Solon’s PCI and median household income are also similar to that of Somerset County, but below the State’s.

Regionally, data shows a modest but notable income gap between Solon and nearby southern Kennebec Valley towns like Madison and Skowhegan, where industrial decline and higher housing costs have slowed income growth. Solon’s relative stability likely stems from its lower living costs, smaller tax burden, and access to varied employment in service and trade sectors. Sustaining this stability will require continued investment in transportation and regional connectivity to support commuting, tourism, and small business activity.

Figure 2 below shows how median household income has changed in the last 20 years for Solon, Somerset County, and the State.

FIGURE 2: INCREASE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME*



Source: 2000 Census, 2010 and 2020 ACS

* Income has been adjusted for inflation

Figure 2 Highlights:

- Maine’s median household income saw an increase of 98% in this time.
- Somerset County’s median household income saw an increase of nearly 83%.
- Solon’s median household income saw an increase of nearly 106%.

These income levels are also a way to assess housing affordability. A housing unit is considered affordable if a household whose income is at or below 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) can live there without spending more than 30 percent of their income (including insurance, utilities, heat, and other housing-related costs). This is true for both renters and owners.

For example, in Somerset County, 80% of the AMI by family size is as follows:

Family of 1: \$47,600	Family of 5: \$73,450
Family of 2: \$54,400	Family of 6: \$78,900
Family of 3: \$61,200	Family of 7: \$84,350
Family of 4: \$68,000	Family of 8: \$89,800

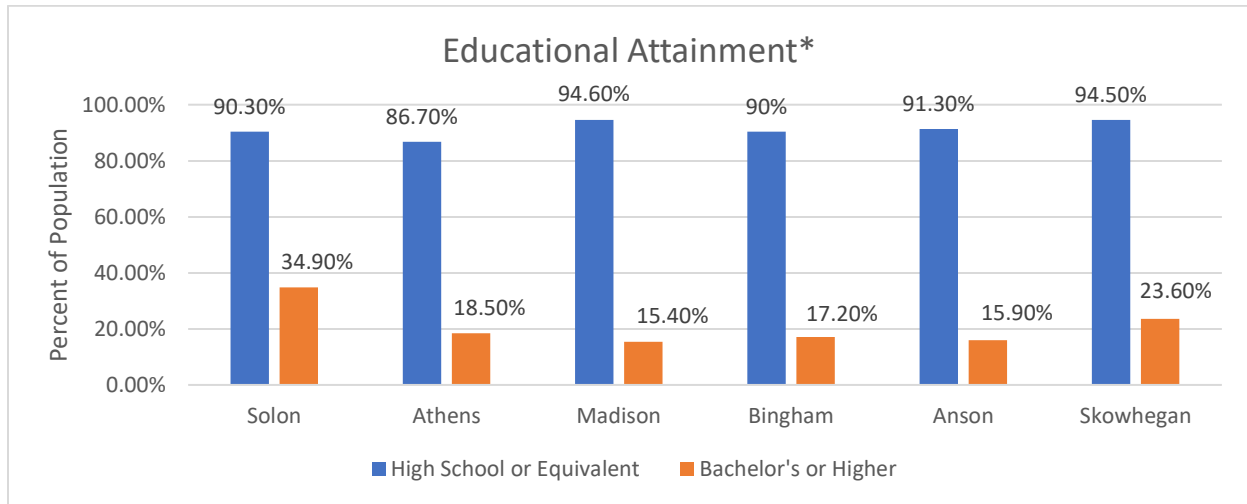
This data is from 2023 and can be found on the Maine Housing website (https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/homeimprovement/80-ami-income-limits.pdf?sfvrsn=6df08615_5). Solon’s median household income of \$56,136.00 multiplied by 0.8 (for 80%) comes out to roughly \$44,909. According to 2023 ACS data, roughly 44% of Solon’s total households make less than 80% of the Area Median Income.

The American Community Survey identified 182 households with social security income, about 45 percent of all households and 133 households with retirement income, however there is probably a significant overlap between the two. The ACS also identified 23 households with Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and 78 households with public assistance income or another type of income assistance.

Educational Attainment:

Another measure of how likely the town is to progress economically is the educational attainment of its residents. Jobs that require mastery of math, science and special skills are more likely to flow to areas with higher educational levels. College graduation is a basic requirement for many professional, managerial and educational professions. And wages are higher for jobs demanding higher educational attainment.

FIGURE 3: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT COMPARISON WITH SURROUNDING TOWNS



Source: 2020 ACS

**For the population between ages 25 to 64 years old.*

Figure 3 Highlights:

- According to the 2023 ACS 5-year estimates, 90.3% of Solon adults hold a high school diploma or equivalent, slightly lower than the Somerset County average (92.9%) and Maine overall (94.5%).
- Solon’s post-secondary education level is higher than that of all neighboring towns.

Solon stands out in post-secondary attainment: 34.9% of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher—roughly double the rate in neighboring towns and well above Skowhegan’s 23.6%. This unusually high share suggests a workforce with strong professional or technical experience, likely including commuters to regional job centers or remote/hybrid workers. Higher educational attainment aligns with Solon’s stronger per-capita income and overall economic stability.

Overall, Solon’s comparatively high share of college-educated adults strengthens its workforce, supports entrepreneurship and employment, and contributes to the town’s income levels and economic resilience.

Local Labor Force and Employment:

The labor force refers to the number of people either working or available to work within the working-age population. Being in the labor force is not the same as being employed. The labor force is the sum of the employed plus the unemployed. For the Census, the working-age population is everyone over age 16 including those of retirement age.

TABLE 2: THREE DECADES OF LABOR FORCE DATA

Year	Working-Age Population	In Labor Force (% of Working-Age Population)	Females in Labor Force	Males in Labor Force	Unemployed
2023	768	463 (60.3%)	225	238	33
2020	738	352 (47.7%)	197	155	7
2010	911	636 (69.8%)	289	347	78

Source: 2000 Census, *2010 & 2020 ACS

Table 2 Highlights:

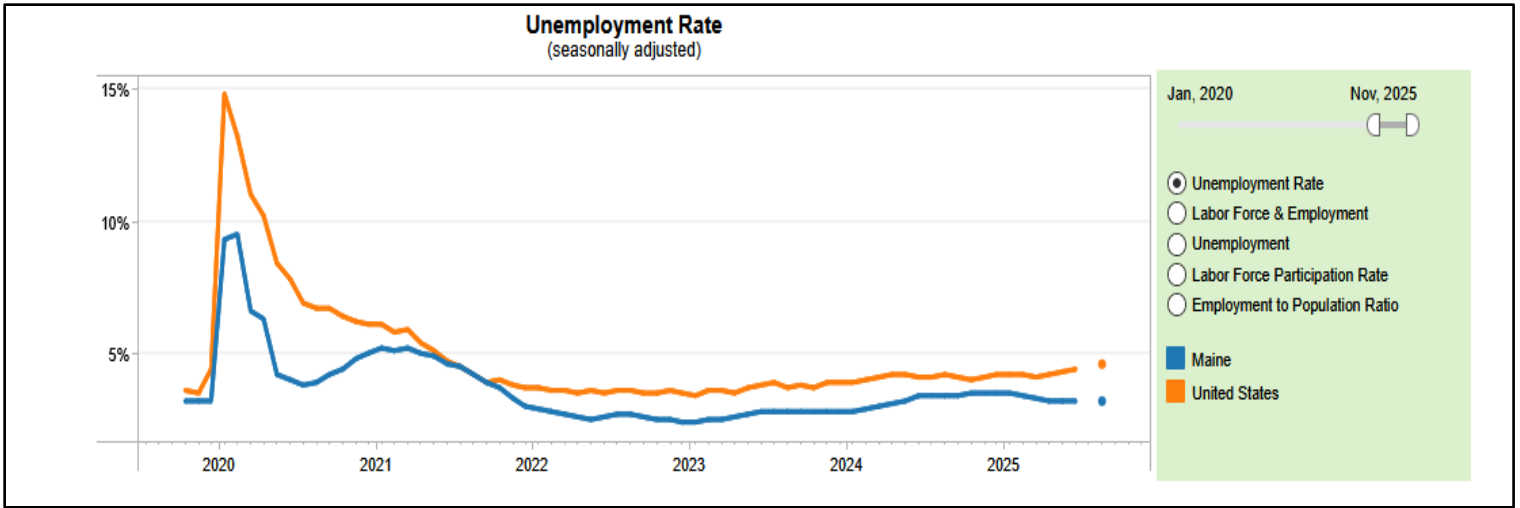
- Between 2010 and 2023, Solon's Labor Force decreased by nearly 16%.
- Females in the Labor force decreased by 64 individuals, or 22%.
- Males decreased by 109 individuals or 31%.
- Unemployment decreased by 45 individuals or 58%.

The decline in those in the Labor Force aligns with statewide trends such as aging populations, smaller households, and limited in-migration. As Solon's working-age population shrinks, labor force participation fell from 69.8% in 2010 to 60.3% in 2023, indicating fewer residents working or seeking work. While largely demographic, this drop may also reflect more early retirement, disability, caregiving, or reliance on part-time or seasonal jobs. Another factor contributing to these statistics is the growing trend of Solon becoming somewhat of a retirement destination.

Unemployment is better reported by the Maine Department of Labor, which conducts surveys. Figure 4 is a graph of unemployment in the United States and the State of Maine, of which Solon is a reflection.

The MDOL defined unemployment as the number of people who are not employed but are actively seeking work. Included are those who are waiting to be called back from a layoff or are waiting to report to a new job within 30 days. The unemployment rate is measured monthly through a sample of households surveyed.

FIGURE 4- UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN MAINE AND UNITED STATES

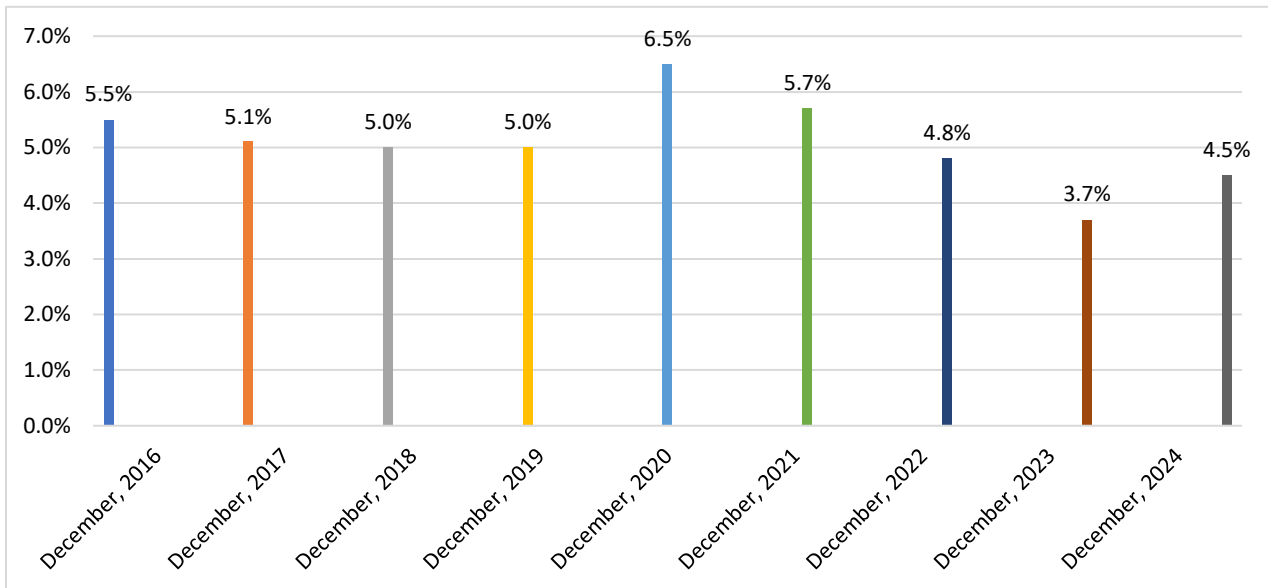


Source: Maine Department of Labor

(<https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/dashboards/unemployment-and-labor-force-estimates>)

The graph in Figure 4 depicts the trend of unemployment dropping until 2020 when the global pandemic hit, then the unemployment rate skyrocketed until approximately mid-2021. Maine did not see the extremes in high rates of unemployment or for as long as the United States during the pandemic. Figure 5 shows Solon’s unemployment rate, taken annually in December each year.

FIGURE 5: SOLON’S UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Source: Maine Department of Labor

Figure 5 Highlights:

- Solon's unemployment rate has fluctuated over the past decade, reflecting both local economic conditions and broader regional and national trends.
- In 2016, unemployment was still high, as Solon was still recovering from the Great Recession of 2014-2015.
- Solon did not see as high rate of unemployment during the global pandemic as the county and State; however, the town has recovered from those higher unemployment rates slower.
- The high unemployment rate in 2020 and the following years can be attributed to the global pandemic.
- By 2022, the region's economy recovered from the pandemic, and unemployment rates began to drop for the next several years.

Over the span of 2023 and 2024, Solon's unemployment rate has remained historically low (3.7% in 2023 and 4.5% in 2024), mirroring statewide post-pandemic labor tightening and indicating that most willing workers are finding jobs. Despite periodic fluctuations over time, the overall trend suggests a resilient small labor market, supported by commuting access to nearby service centers.

Labor Market:

Solon is part of the larger Skowhegan Labor Market Area (LMA), a regional employment center defined by commuting patterns and shared economic ties among neighboring communities. As a small rural town located roughly 12 miles north of Skowhegan, Solon relies heavily on the larger service center for access to jobs, retail, healthcare, and essential services. Many Solon residents commute daily to Skowhegan for work in education, healthcare, manufacturing, retail, and public services, making Solon a typical bedroom community within the LMA. This relationship gives residents access to a wider range of employment opportunities than Solon could support on its own, while allowing them to maintain a rural quality of life.

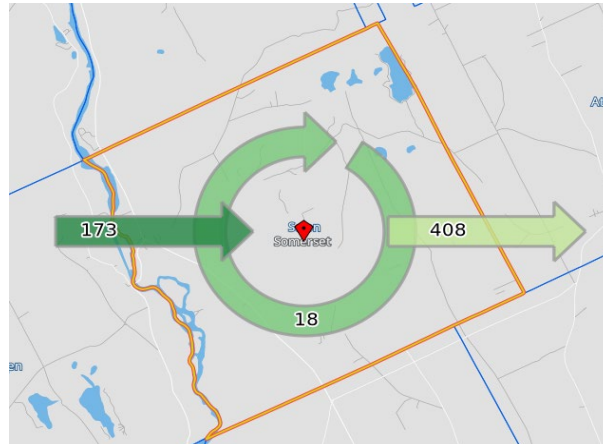
The connection to the Skowhegan LMA also influences Solon's economic resilience. Employment trends, business closures, or expansions in Skowhegan directly affect Solon's labor force participation and household income levels. Additionally, Solon's position along U.S. Route 201, a major commuter and freight corridor, strengthens its functional ties to the LMA by facilitating efficient travel between home and work. As Skowhegan continues to grow, particularly with downtown revitalization efforts, the regional hospital, and emerging industries, Solon is likely to maintain its role as a residential community that supports and is supported by the economic activity concentrated within the Skowhegan Labor Market Area.

Commuting to Work:

Solon is a net contributor of workers to the regional economy, similar to other small towns in the area. The following figures illustrate where Solon residents commute for work, where in-commuters travel from, and how many people both live and work within the town.

This data is based on American Community Survey census taker responses; as such, there may be some inaccuracies or inconsistencies with the data. However, this is the only data available that details this information.

FIGURE 6: FLOW OF WORKERS TO AND FROM SOLON



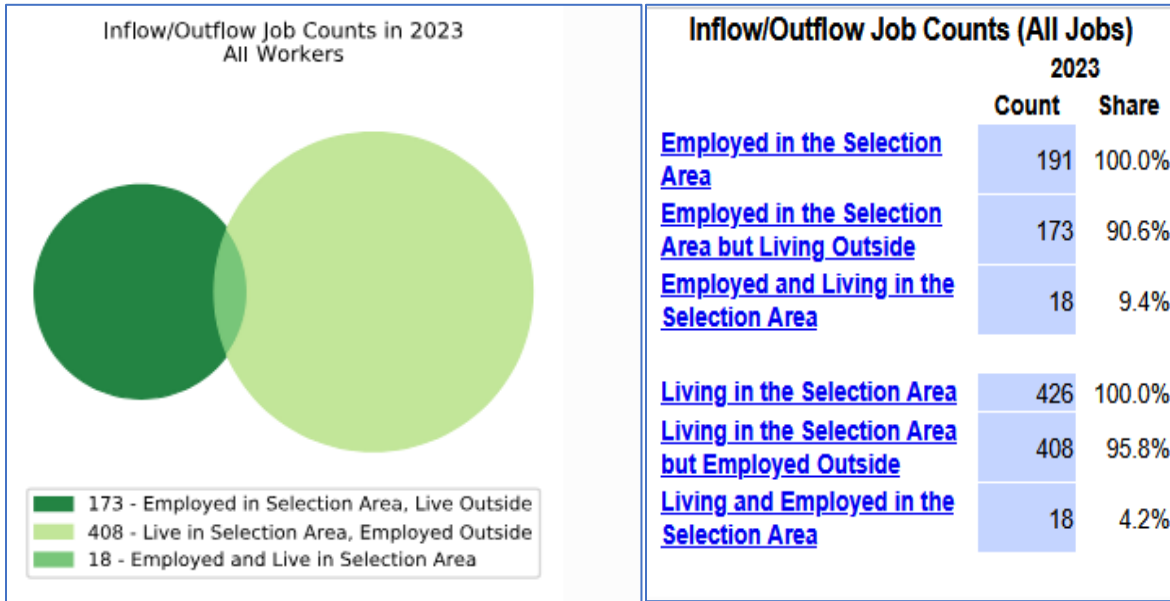
Source: 2023 ACS (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 6 Highlights:

Of the 2023 ACS respondents:

- 408 individuals who live in Solon are employed out of town;
- 18 Individuals who live in Solon also work in Solon; and,
- 173 individuals commute to Solon from another town to work.

FIGURE 7: SHARE OF WORKERS WHO COMMUTE INTO/OUT OF SOLON



Source: 2023 ACS (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 7 Highlights:

- To the left: The dark green circle in Figure 7 represents the 173 individuals employed in Solon but living elsewhere. The larger, light green circle represents the 408 individuals who live in Solon but are employed elsewhere. The overlap of these two circles represents the 18 individuals who live and work in Solon.
- To the right: Of the 191 people employed in Solon, 90.6% (173) live somewhere outside of town and only 9.4% live and work in Solon. Of the 599 people who responded to this Census survey, 95.8% (408) live in Solon but work in another town, while only 4.2% (18) live and work in Solon.
- The inflow/outflow analysis highlights just how strongly Solon depends on external job markets. While 408 residents commute elsewhere for work, only 191 jobs exist within Solon, and of those, just 18 jobs are filled by local residents.
- Meanwhile, 173 workers commute into Solon to fill the remaining positions, primarily in goods-producing industries such as forestry and lumber processing. The net outflow is 408 workers, meaning Solon exports significantly more labor than it imports.

FIGURE 8: WORK DESTINATION FOR SOLON RESIDENTS

Job Counts by County Subdivisions Where Workers are Employed - All Jobs		
	2023	
	Count	Share
Skowhegan town (Somerset, ME)	52	12.2%
Bingham town (Somerset, ME)	49	11.5%
Madison town (Somerset, ME)	23	5.4%
Waterville city (Kennebec, ME)	19	4.5%
Solon town (Somerset, ME)	18	4.2%
Portland city (Cumberland, ME)	16	3.8%
Augusta city (Kennebec, ME)	13	3.1%
Bangor city (Penobscot, ME)	10	2.3%
Lewiston city (Androscoggin, ME)	9	2.1%
Fairfield town (Somerset, ME)	8	1.9%
All Other Locations	209	49.1%

Source: 2023 ACS (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 8 Highlights:

- Of the 408 workers who commute out of Solon, Skowhegan is the predominant importer of workers at 12.2%, followed by Bingham at 11.5%, then Madison at 5.4%.
- All other locations individually account for less than 5% of Solon’s total workforce.
- Nearly half of Solon’s workforce (49.1%) is spread among dozens of smaller destinations, demonstrating a highly decentralized employment pattern typical for rural Maine.

FIGURE 9: WHERE WORKERS LIVE WHO ARE EMPLOYED IN SOLON

	2023	
	Count	Share
Bingham town (Somerset, ME)	25	13.1%
Madison town (Somerset, ME)	20	10.5%
Skowhegan town (Somerset, ME)	18	9.4%
Solon town (Somerset, ME)	18	9.4%
Moscow town (Somerset, ME)	11	5.8%
Embden town (Somerset, ME)	9	4.7%
Anson town (Somerset, ME)	6	3.1%
Canaan town (Somerset, ME)	5	2.6%
Northeast Somerset UT (Somerset, ME)	5	2.6%
Greenville town (Piscataquis, ME)	4	2.1%
All Other Locations	70	36.6%

Source: 2023 ACS (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 9 Highlights:

- At 13.1%, Bingham is the highest contributor to those who travel to Solon for work, followed by Madison at 10.5%.
- Skowhegan and the individuals who live and work in Solon contribute 9.4%.
- All other locations individually account for less than 9% of those who travel to Solon for work.

These commuting patterns underscore several key features of Solon’s economic landscape. First, the town’s residents rely heavily on the job opportunities available along the U.S. Route 201 corridor, particularly in Skowhegan and Madison. Second, Solon’s position within a larger commuter network makes transportation quality, road maintenance, and broadband access especially important to its workforce. Finally, Solon’s role as a quiet residential community, paired with its proximity to service-center employment, continues to shape land use, economic development needs, and the town’s long-term planning priorities.

Job Types:

The table below lists the occupational categories of Solon's workers for 2013 and 2023.

TABLE 3: OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE

Occupation	2013	% of total	2023	% of total
Total in Labor Force	506	-	463	-
Management, business, science, and art	107	24.8%	135	31.4%
Service	124	28.7%	76	17.7%
Sales and Office	68	15.7%	54	12.6%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	67	15.5%	93	21.6%
Production, transportation, and material moving	66	15.3%	72	16.7%

Source: 2013 & 2023 ACS

Table 3 Highlights:

- In 2013, Solon workers' primary occupation was service; in 2023 the primary occupation was management, business, science, and art. This indicates growth in professional and technical fields. This aligns with Solon's relatively high rate of bachelor's degree attainment and suggests an increase in remote workers, educators, healthcare professionals, and individuals employed in administrative or managerial roles, either locally or in nearby service centers such as Skowhegan or other areas.
- Jobs in natural resources, construction, and maintenance grew substantially, rising from 15.5% to 21.6%, underscoring the continued importance of forestry, trades, and field-based occupations in Solon's local economy.

Solon's workforce can also be broken down by industry of employment as in Table 4. This is not as specific as describing a person's actual job because manufacturing, for instance, may include secretaries, managers, sales staff and skilled workers all together. However, breaking industries down in this way provides information to gauge which sectors of the economy are doing well. An additional advantage is that this is the classification that the Maine DOL uses for its annual updates.

TABLE 4: INDUSTRIAL CLASSIFICATION

Industry	2013	% of total	2023	% of Total
Total in Labor Force	506	-	463	-
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	27	6.3%	20	4.7%
Construction	59	13.7%	69	16.0%
Manufacturing	35	8.1%	42	9.8%
Wholesale trade	0	0%	0	0%
Retail trade	71	16.4%	38	8.8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4	0.90%	23	5.3%
Information	5	1.2%	6	1.4%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	6	1.4%	18	4.2%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	31	7.2%	39	9.1%
Educational services, health care and social assistance	143	33.1%	111	25.8%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation and food services	15	3.5%	16	3.7%
Other services, except public administration	8	1.9%	12	2.8%
Public administration	28	6.5%	36	8.4%

Source: 2013 & 2023 ACS

Table 4 Highlights:

- Education, health care, and social assistance declined from 33.1% (2013) to 25.8% (2023)- still the largest sector but shrinking due to retirements, staffing shortages, or regional consolidation.
- Construction grew from 13.7% to 16%, reflecting steady demand for trades tied to housing, infrastructure, and rural development.
- Manufacturing increased from 8.1% to 9.8%, indicating stable or slightly expanding production jobs in the regional labor market.
- Transportation, warehousing, and utilities saw major growth, rising from 0.9% to 5.3%, likely driven by Route 201 access and countywide demand for drivers and utility workers.
- Finance, insurance, real estate, and leasing rose from 1.4% to 4.2%, with professional and administrative services also increasing, suggesting a more diversified workforce and possible growth in remote/hybrid jobs.
- Retail trade fell sharply from 16.4% to 8.8%, consistent with statewide rural retail consolidation and online shopping trends.
- Overall, Solon is shifting from a service-heavy economy to a more balanced mix of trades, professional work, administrative services, and transportation-related jobs, strengthening long-term economic resilience.

This data offers important insight into Solon's economic outlook. While manufacturing often draws attention when a mill or plant closes, the figures show this job category represents only a small share of the local economy. Solon's real strengths lie in health care and education, both strong growth sectors regionally and nationwide, followed by construction. These trends position Solon to benefit more from broader regional economic growth than from changes within the town itself.

Of note is the steady decline in agriculture in Solon. The town used to have many larger farms, but now the only farms left are mostly small hobby farms and homesteads. Just between 2013 and 2023, the job classification of agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining decreased from 6.3% of the labor force to 4.7%. If this job classification was broken down further, the number of jobs in the agricultural field would likely contribute far less to the labor force. This is detailed further in the Agriculture and Forestry chapter.

Not directly included in either table is the significant impact tourism has on Solon's local economy, though many of the industry classification include businesses that are affected by tourism. Solon's abundant outdoor recreational opportunities result in fluctuations of tourists throughout the year. The recreational pursuits depend upon the season because Solon does offer four-season outdoor recreation, such as ATVing and hiking in the spring and summer, hunting, fishing, and hiking in the fall, and snowmobiling and skiing in the winter.

Many business establishments such as the Evergreens Campground, Solon Hotel, the two stores, Pine Tree Acres Campground rely heavily on tourist traffic. Some of these businesses cater specifically to tourists to draw them in. For example, Griswold's Country Store promotes recreational trail use for both ATVs and snowmobiles. They provide parking for trucks with trailers with easy access to the trails, food, and trail maps.

Solon supports tourism by offering links to local businesses on the town website for visitors and residents. The town also maintains minimal regulation of outdoor recreation, helping to encourage and sustain these activities.

Solon's Local Business Climate and Village Area:

Solon's commercial and industrial activity is concentrated along the U.S. Route 201 corridor and in the village center, where existing land use and road access support small retail, services, and light industry. Available land for future growth is limited due to Shoreland Zoning, Floodplain Management, the town's rural residential character, and lack of public utilities outside of the 'in-town' area.

Solon's business landscape consists of a combination of long-established employers, small family-owned operations, home occupations, and community organizations, which support a stable rural economy. Kennebec Lumber Company, the town's largest employer with 100–249 staff, anchors the industrial sector and supports manufacturing, trucking, and natural-resource jobs, as well as supporting other, surrounding businesses indirectly.

Small businesses and service providers further sustain the local economy and downtown activity. Solon Elementary School (about 20 employees) serves as both an educational and employment hub. Local establishments such as Solon Corner Market, Griswold's Country Store & Diner, Foss Enterprise, Solon Hotel, Solon Food Cupboard and Thrift Store, and the Evergreens Campground provide goods and services while drawing foot traffic to the village. Community institutions—including the Solon Volunteer Fire Department, New Hope Women's Shelter, the Town Office, and other municipal departments—employ between 5 and 19 people and play an important role in supporting civic infrastructure.

Most businesses have fewer than 10 employees, reflecting Solon's rural character and reliance on entrepreneurship, trades, and local services. This diversified mix across manufacturing, education, retail, hospitality, and social services provides resilience to economic shifts. Improved broadband and growing remote work opportunities position Solon to attract additional small and home-based businesses, strengthening its role in the Skowhegan Labor Market Area while preserving the community identity residents value.

Solon supports a wide range of home occupations across the community. These small, home-based businesses play an important role in the local economy, reflecting the value residents place on buying locally made products and accessing locally provided services.

Because Solon does not have a traditional downtown area with clustered shops, home occupations help fill this gap by offering diverse goods and services, including children's toys, carpentry, technology and internet-based businesses, customer service, and remote professional work.

Municipal ordinances do not regulate home occupations except for required provisions in the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance. With the recent expansion of fiber-optic internet into previously underserved areas, Solon has seen a notable increase in the number of home-based businesses and residents working remotely.

Solon's business community faces several barriers that limit opportunities for expansion, new investment, and long-term business retention. Solon's lack of formal zoning is both good and bad for economic growth. There is no designated commercial district, and out of necessity most new businesses establish in the relatively small village center. The village area has limited land that is undeveloped, and what is available is constrained by Shoreland Zoning, floodplains, or rural residential uses that are not suited for commercial development.

Businesses in Solon often rely on older buildings, limited utility infrastructure, and modest traffic volumes, which can make expansion costly and reduce the feasibility of attracting new enterprises. Without designated commercial growth areas, industrial utilities, or economic development incentives such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) programs, Solon remains at a disadvantage compared to nearby service centers that can more easily support larger-scale development.

Solon does not have defined priorities for economic development on its own- the town is not large enough or have the capacity to support or encourage economic development. Nor is large-scale economic development desired in Solon. Solon is part of the Somerset Economic Development Corporation that encompasses all of Somerset County and strives to improve the economic condition of the towns in its region. The Somerset Economic Development Corporation promotes appropriate economic development while providing rural towns with a larger, regional resource.

The town is also a member of the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG), which works with towns within its region to support and promote economic development incentives.

Despite challenges common to rural towns in Maine, Solon has opportunities to strengthen its economic base by focusing on sectors that align with its unique assets and regional trends. Outdoor recreation, eco-tourism, and hospitality services tied to the Kennebec River, local trail systems, and the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway present natural growth opportunities. The town is also well positioned to support continued expansion of construction trades, forestry-related businesses, and small-scale manufacturing or value-added wood products given existing employers and regional demand.

Remote work and professional home-based enterprises represent another growing sector, particularly due to the availability of fiber optics. Small retail, food, and service businesses thrive in the village. By continuing to support these types of businesses and continuing to improve necessary infrastructure, Solon can cultivate steady, sustainable economic activity that complements its rural character and strengthens its role within the regional economy.

Solon's Downtown:

To rejuvenate the local economy is to rejuvenate the downtown. The downtown area, which is the historic downtown consisting of present-day Main Street, is a barometer for Solon's economic health. Currently, the downtown area is improving, with few buildings that are vacant or in poor condition. The Solon Hotel, a focal point in the downtown was recently completely redone, which vastly improves the area's appearance.

Another important improvement is the newly replaced bridge between North Main Street and South Main Street. Other improvements include sidewalk maintenance, more green space, streetlights with LED lighting, and an informational sign at the Town Office to detail townwide events.

Solon does not have a Tax Increment Financing district, or any other economic development incentives. Aside from the Somerset Economic Development Corporation and KVCOG, the town does not participate in any economic development incentives.

The town's priorities for economic development mostly consist of improvements to the village area. Solon's economic development priorities mirror those of larger regional organizations and the region.

Some challenges, such as the speed and amount of traffic on Route 201- which bisects the village, cannot realistically be remedied. Rt 201 is a major travel corridor through town and is an essential route for traffic. This road is known for a high volume of traffic, much of which is tractor trailer traffic. The speed at which the trucks travel through the village is a concern with no easy solutions.

Regulation of Economic Development:

Solon's municipal ordinances consist of the Town of Solon Building Ordinance, Site Plan Review Ordinance, Telecommunication Tower Ordinance, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, and Floodplain Management Ordinance. The Building Ordinance has provisions that include setback requirements, and permit application standards. There are no formal zoning districts in Solon, aside from mandatory districts through the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.

Commercial development is regulated by the Site Plan Review Ordinance, which includes performance standards for commercial development administered by the Solon Planning Board, as well as identifying specific locations in Solon where commercial development is desirable- Ferry Street and along Route 201.

The limiting factor for commercial development is that there is no public sewer in Solon and public water is only available in the "in town" area. Additionally, the town does not want public sewer services, as there has not been a need that justifies the expense for this level of infrastructure. Expansion of public water is prohibitively expensive, although it is physically feasible. Expansion would only be possible if a developer or grant covered the cost.

Other important factors in siting commercial development include access to three-phase power and reliable internet service. Solon has sufficient three-phase power in the areas where commercial growth is most appropriate, primarily within the in-town area. In addition, recent fiber-optic expansion has greatly improved internet connectivity, leaving only a few locations without service.

At this time, no expansion of public utilities is needed to support the town's projected economic growth. With the Site Plan Review Ordinance in place, along with existing public water service, three-phase power, internet connectivity, and designated areas for commercial development, the potential for incompatible land uses is minimal.

Economic Growth Projections:

Economic growth in Solon has historically occurred in slow, incremental steps, consistent with its rural character and limited commercial base. Solon also relies heavily on seasonal and tourism through recreation-based assets, such as the Kennebec Valley Trail, the Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway, local outdoor guides, as well as seasonal rental cabins and campgrounds. These provide steady activity throughout the year, contributing to Solon's economy and tax base. Small businesses are an essential cornerstone to Solon's local economy, as are skilled trades, forestry, and education. Another growing sector are residents who work remotely, keeping reliable fiber optics and broadband a continuing priority.

Population trends suggest that Solon will experience little to no population growth over the next decade. The State Economist's projection estimates a decrease from 919 residents to 844, driven primarily by an aging population and fewer young households. With stable or slowly declining population levels, Solon is not expected to generate significant new local job demand. Instead, economic activity will largely depend on regional employment in the Skowhegan Labor Market Area, where residents already commute for manufacturing, retail, health care, and public-sector jobs. As household sizes decline, Solon may see a gradual increase in the number of households even without population growth, but this is unlikely to produce substantial pressure for new job creation within town. Most residents will continue to rely on employment opportunities in Skowhegan, Madison, Bingham, and other towns, supported by Route 201 as the region's principal commuter corridor.

One factor not considered by the State Economist's Office is the large number of non-resident property owners. Individuals who own second homes, seasonal camps, or undeveloped land in Solon make a meaningful contribution to the local economy because they pay taxes that support municipal services they seldom use. In addition, non-resident property owners often have higher incomes than year-round residents, making them more likely to spend more during their time in Solon.

Given these projections, Solon's economic growth will likely remain steady but modest. The community is well-positioned to support home-based businesses, professional telecommuters, tradespeople, and small-scale commercial uses along Route 201 without the need for major expansion of local infrastructure. Continued investment in broadband, transportation connectivity, and village-center revitalization will help strengthen Solon's role within the regional economy while preserving the rural character that residents value.

Analysis of Solon's Local Economy:

- Solon's Per Capita Income is on par or above that of surrounding towns.
- The 2023 median household income is similar that of surrounding towns.
- Both PCI and median household income are similar to that of Somerset County and slightly lower than the State's.
- Between 2000 and 2023, Solon's median household income increased by 106% which surpassed the State's 98% increase in median household income.
- Solon residents have attained a higher percentage of college education than surrounding towns.
- While Solon's labor force has decreased between 2010 to 2023, that is a regional and statewide trend that aligns with the overall aging population and smaller household sizes.
- Solon is part of the larger Skowhegan Labor Market Area and a contributor to the Skowhegan LMA workforce.
- In 2023, Solon's economy employed 173 individuals from other towns who commuted to Solon for work. 18 people who live in Solon also work in the town. And 408 people who live in Solon commute to other towns for work.
- While occupational categories of Solon's workers vary, the highest occurrence was in the management, business, science, and arts field.
- The job type that employs most of Solon's workers is the educational services, health care, and social assistance field.
- Solon has a defined downtown area where the majority of the businesses in town are located.
- The largest employer in town is Kennebec Lumber Company, which in turn supports a myriad of other local businesses.
- Solon has minimal regulatory oversight for land use activities beyond their Building Ordinance, Site Plan Review Ordinance, and Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.