

# ECONOMIC REVIEW

## Unemployment in Greater MetroWest Returning to Pre-Pandemic Levels



Report by:  
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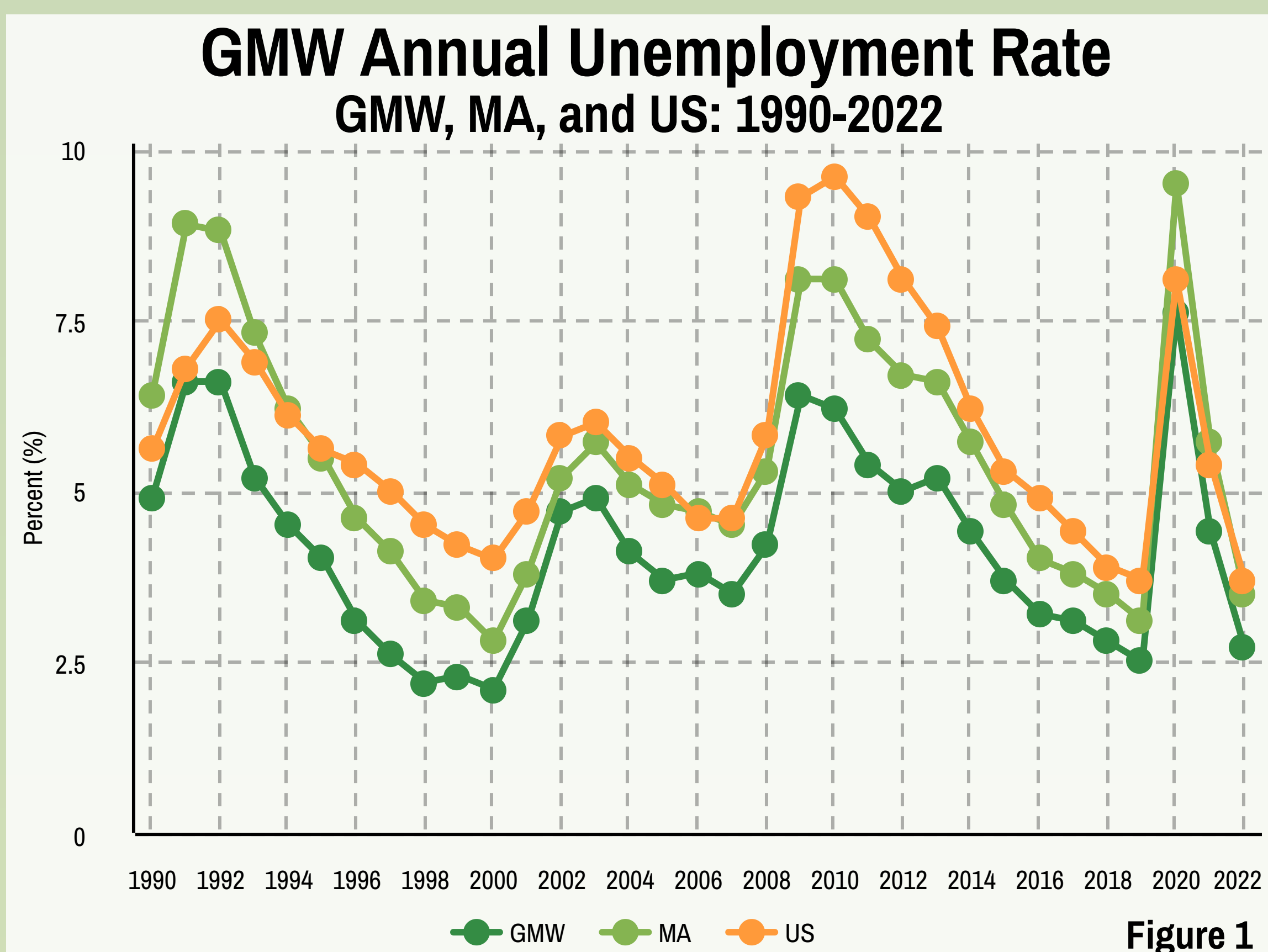
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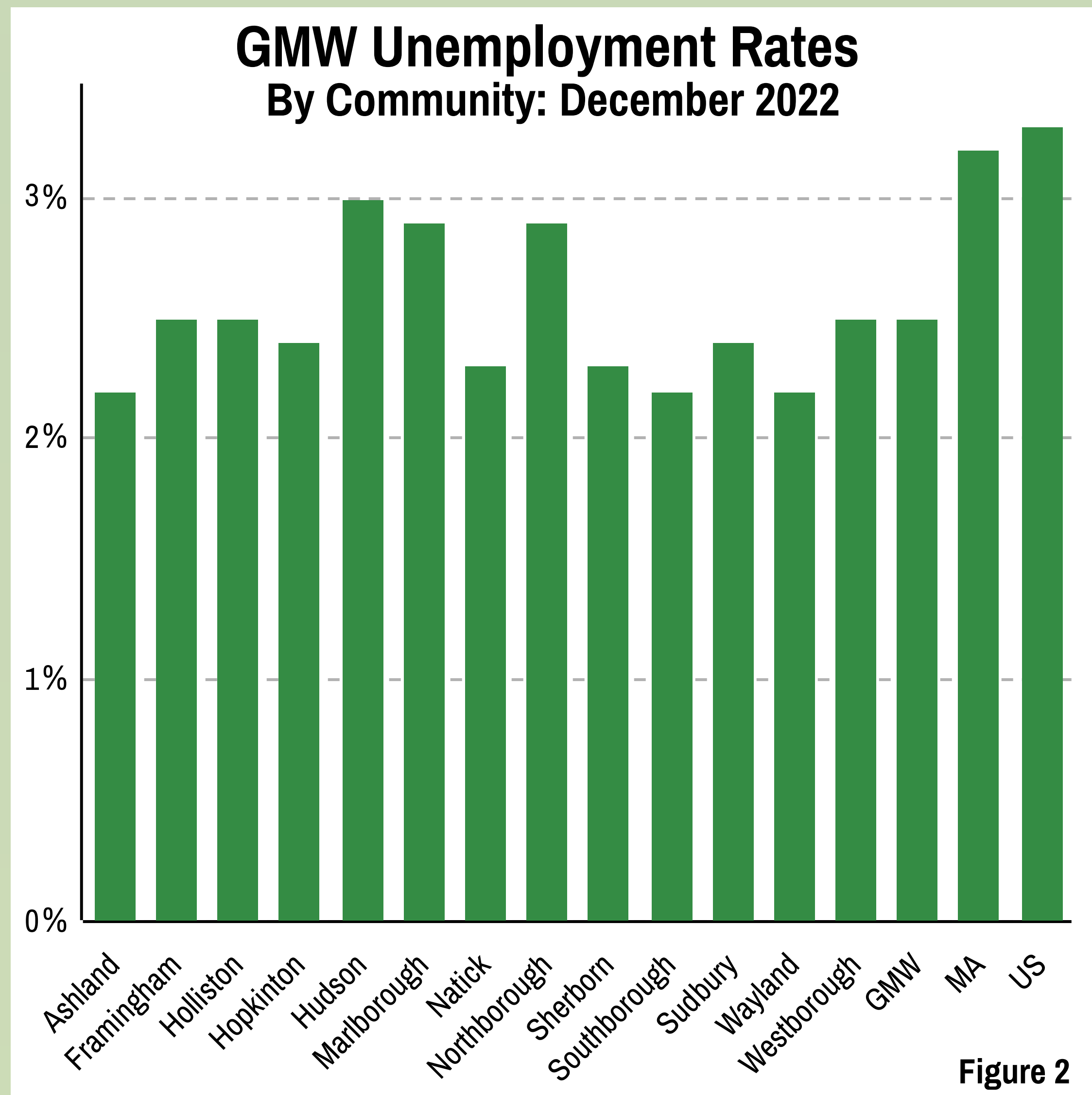


The MetroWest Economic Research Center (MERC) collects unemployment and labor force data for several sub-state regions within Massachusetts from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (MA EOLWD). One of these sub-state regions is the Greater MetroWest region (GMW), which is a combination of the MetroWest and Greater Marlborough regions. In total, the GMW region includes thirteen communities between Boston and Worcester, covering Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Natick, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, and Westborough.

Over the last 32 years, the unemployment rates in the GMW region have continuously followed the same trend as the state and national levels of unemployment rates, with all three measures peaking on four separate occasions between 1990 and 2022. As seen in Figure 1, in the early 1990s, unemployment rates rose with restrictive monetary policies enacted by the Federal Reserve in the aftermath of the Cold War. Secondly, unemployment rates increased in the early 2000s with the collapse of the dot-com technology bubble. Furthermore, in 2008, unemployment rose as a result of the subprime mortgage crisis, and in 2020, unemployment rates skyrocketed with market uncertainty and turmoil due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest unemployment rate in the GMW region was recorded in 2020 at 7.6%.



Looking at unemployment rates in each community in GMW in December 2022, Figure 2 shows that Hudson had the highest unemployment rate in the region at 3.0%, followed by Marlborough and Northborough both at 2.9%. Furthermore, during the same period, the lowest unemployment rate in the region was 2.2%, experienced in Ashland, Southborough, and Wayland. It should be noted that in December 2022, no community in the GMW region had unemployment rates higher than the state and national levels, at 3.2% and 3.3%, respectively.



Additionally, to assess the recovery of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates were analyzed in GMW for March 2020 and December 2022 to see how present levels of unemployment compare to pre-COVID rates. To note, March 2020 was selected for comparison since it was the last month before unemployment rates skyrocketed due to the effects of the pandemic. As Figure 3 illustrates, for the most part, rates of unemployment have decreased to levels lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic, with eleven of the thirteen GMW

communities experiencing a decrease in unemployment rates from the March 2020 rates to rates in December 2022. The only community to experience an increase in unemployment rates over the period was Sudbury, with rates rising from 2.3% in March 2020 to 2.4% in December 2022. The community that saw the largest net change was Marlborough, experiencing a decrease from 3.6% in March 2020 to 2.9% in December 2022. The community that saw the largest net change was Marlborough, experiencing a decrease from 3.6% in March 2020 to 2.9% in December 2022. Hudson and Ashland also experienced significant rate changes. Hudson's rate fell from 3.6% to 3.0%, and Ashland's unemployment rate decreased from 2.7% to 2.2%. The only community to see no change in unemployment rates over the period was Sherborn, which experienced rates of 2.3% for both March 2020 and December 2022.

**GMW Unemployment Rates by Community  
March 2020 vs. December 2022**

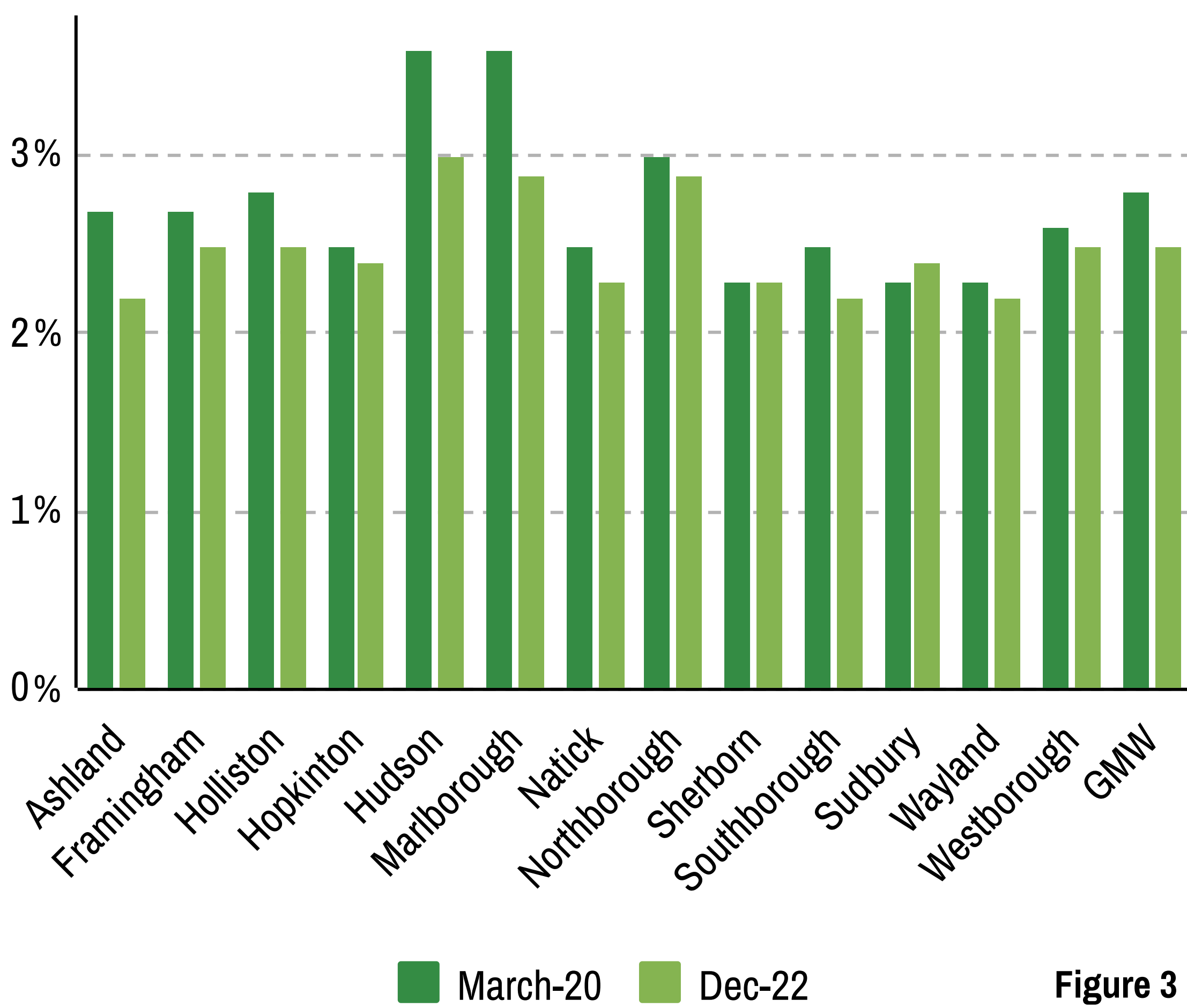


Figure 3

The GMW's labor force in December 2022 was 162,834 individuals. To be considered a member of the labor force in the United States, one must be over the age of sixteen, whether employed or unemployed, not counting those in military service. As seen in Figure 4, the GMW's labor force was dominated by Framingham, Marlborough, and Natick, which combined to hold over half of the region's active workforce with 82,928 individuals. These three were also the only communities to hold over 10% of the labor force share in GMW, with Framingham at 25%, Marlborough at just under 14%, and Natick at just over 12%. Additionally, there were five communities that had less than 5% of the total labor force in GMW. From greatest to smallest they were: Northborough (4.9%), Holliston (4.6%), Wayland (4.4%), Southborough (3.3%), and Sherborn (1.4%). Combined, the smallest five labor force communities made up a total of just under 19% of GMW's labor force, a share smaller than the leading community of Framingham at just under 25%.

The number of unemployed individuals was also broken down for GMW to further analyze unemployment in each community. Those who are recorded as unemployed are individuals who did not hold a job during the survey period but were actively seeking employment. In total, as of December 2022, there were 4,106 unemployed

**GMW Labor Force  
December 2022 Total: 162,834**

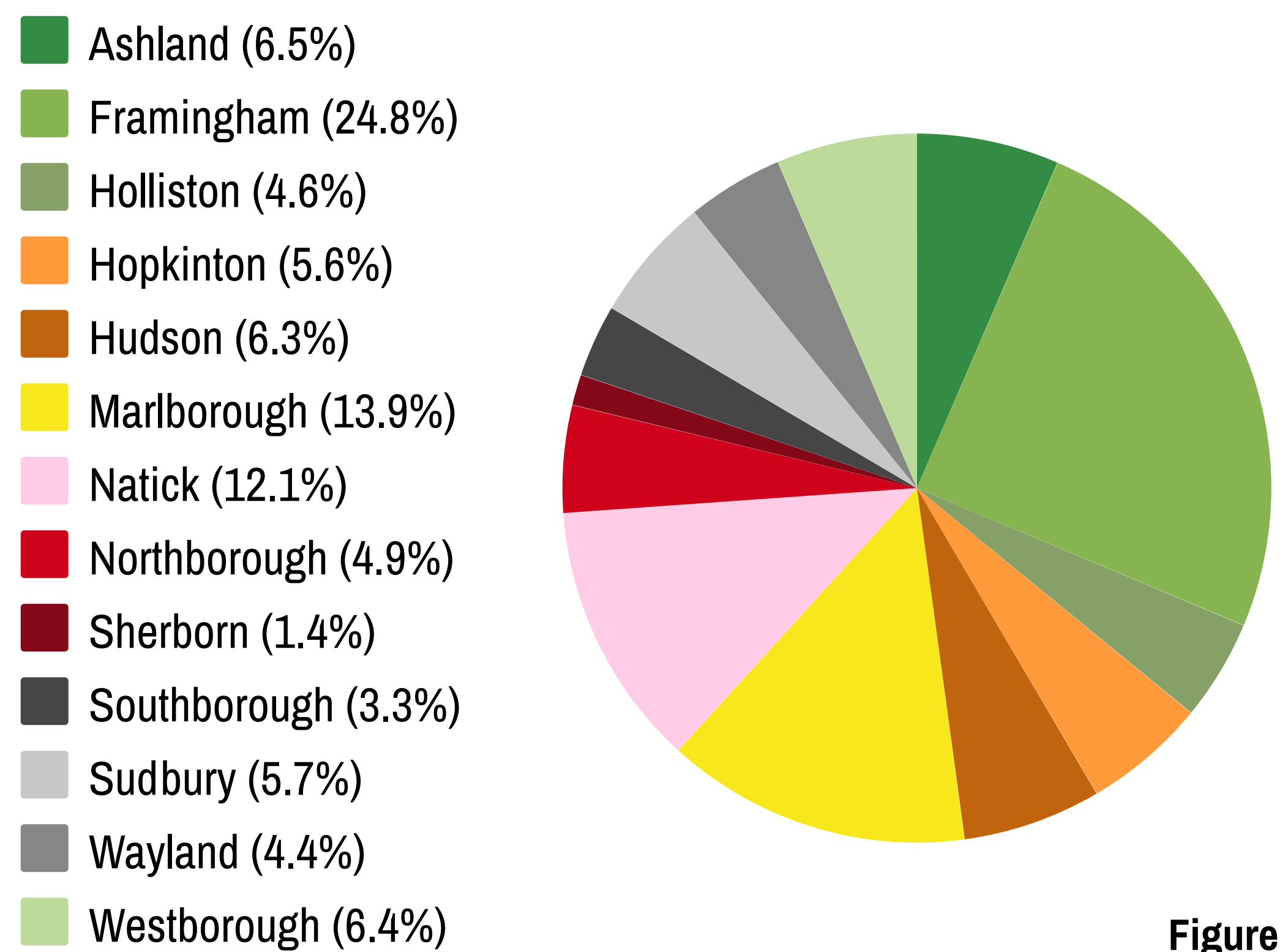


Figure 4

individuals in the region, with almost 1,000 living in Framingham, as seen Figure 5. This means that one out of every four unemployed individuals in GMW live in Framingham. The second highest community in terms of the number of unemployed individuals is Marlborough, with just over 650 individuals, followed by Natick with 457. Combined, these three communities made up over 50 percent of the region's total number of unemployed individuals.

**GMW Number of Unemployed  
December 2022 Total: 4,106**

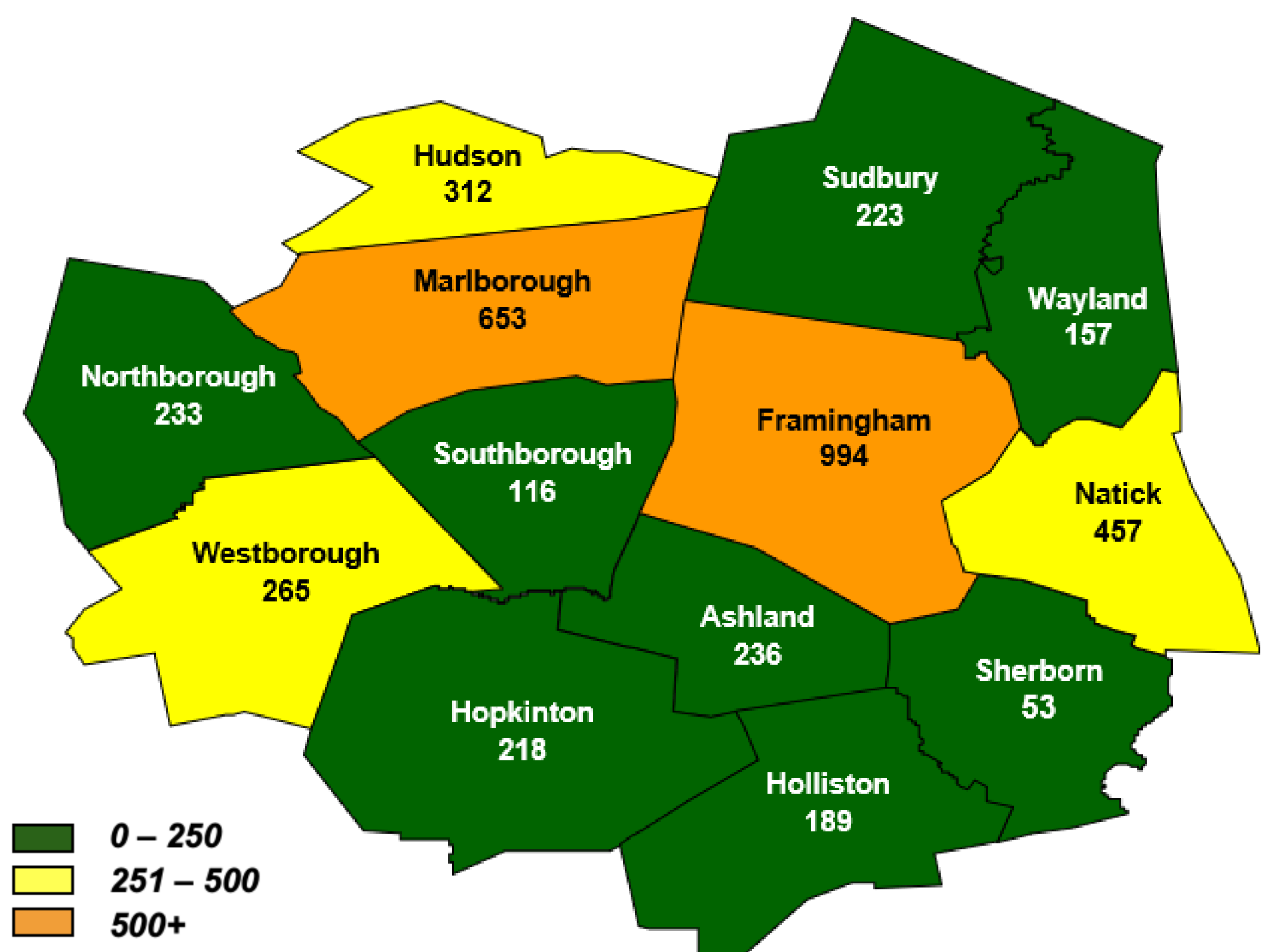


Figure 5

In conclusion, for the most part, rates of unemployment have decreased to levels lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic. Eleven of the thirteen GMW communities experienced a decrease in unemployment rates from the March 2020 to December 2022. Framingham, Marlborough and Natick were the largest contributors to the GMW's labor force, combining to hold just under 51% of the region's active workforce.