

Planning Information Center

Census Data Bulletin

RHODE ISLAND
STATEWIDE
PLANNING
PROGRAM



Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
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Local Population Estimates Show Growth in Providence Metro

Some geographic areas of Rhode Island are gaining population while others are losing, according to the latest city and town population estimates released by the U.S. Census. The estimates benchmarked to July 1, 2012 find that Rhode Island lost 2,275 residents between Census 2010 and 2012. Providence and several of its neighboring cities and towns to the north and west are making gains, while most East Bay, South County, and Aquidneck Island communities are looking at losses. Some of these patterns continue trends from the early 2000s or before while others are newer.

While estimates allow for conjectures or even conclusions about the drivers of population change and its impact on communities, details on the characteristics of that change are also important for planning and development decision-making.

Providence Metro Sees Slow Gains

The state's capital city, Providence, continues to see slow but steady growth. Between the 2010 Census and 2012, the Census estimates that our largest city grew by 390 people, or 0.2%. This is roughly on par with the slow, steady growth that the city has been experiencing for the past decade, and similar to the growth rate at the county level. Providence County gained an estimated 1,656 residents between 2010 and 2012, or 0.3%, and it was the sole Rhode Island county to gain population. Cranston experienced a similar level of growth, while North Smithfield, Cumberland, and Lincoln grew slightly

BY THE NUMBERS

14 number of R.I. municipalities with population gains* between 2010 and 2012

12 number of those municipalities that are located in Providence County

1.7% greatest percentage increase in municipal population: Exeter

390 greatest numeric increase: Providence

* Greater than 0.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 Population Estimates and Census 2010

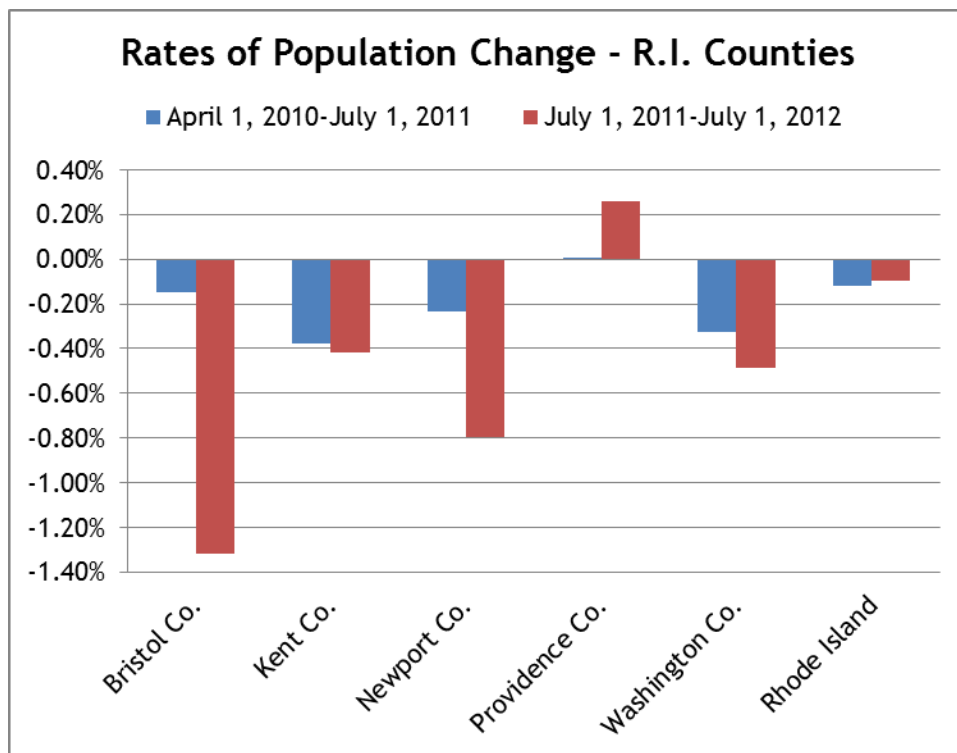
more, between a half and one percent between 2010 and 2012. After many years of decline, East Providence gained a small number of residents since 2010. Central Falls and Pawtucket residents' ranks remain very similar to their 2010 counts, while Woonsocket lost population during the same period. Warwick (not in Providence County) saw a decline of an estimated 799 residents, or 1% of its population.

South County Towns See Change in Trends

The population estimates confirm that a distinct change in growth trends is occurring in Washington County. Towns that saw huge gains in the 1990s and 2000s – Richmond grew by 44.0% during those two decades and South Kingstown and Charlestown both grew by over 20% -- are now seeing modest declines. Every Washington County municipality except Exeter lost 0.7%-1.2% of their population between 2010 and 2012. Exeter gained 108 people, or 1.7% of its population, over the past two years.

ABOUT THE DATA

Data in this Bulletin are drawn from population estimates generated by the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program, which produces annual estimates for the nation, states, counties, and municipalities. The estimates are compared with Census counts from 2010, 2000, and 1990 to judge trends.



Source: U.S. Census, 2010 Census and 2012 Population Estimates

East Bay and Islands Decline

Communities on the East Bay and the Islands continue to see population loss in line with the trends of the past ten years. Newport County lost 1.0% of its population between 2010 and 2012 while Bristol County lost 1.5% of its population. For many towns in these counties, these small losses are nothing new. The city of Newport has had the most drastic decline; over the past fifty years the city has shrunk by nearly half. Other nearby towns that are posting losses like Middletown and Warren have experienced less extreme population decline over the past decade.

Gains and Losses: Significance for Planners

Population decline, particularly at the regional or state level, is often a symptom of poor economic performance. However at the local level, population change often has a complex, dynamic relationship with the built environment, and it can be difficult to parse out the effect of one on the other. For example, a desirable locale may attract population growth and raise housing prices, but beyond a certain point, would-be residents may be turned off by prohibitively expensive homes.

One of the challenges of planning in the context of population change is that the built environment cannot react nimbly to resident fluctuation. For example, modest

population decline does not alone pose a detriment to a city or town, but vacant housing can reduce the feeling of neighborhood safety or attractiveness. Prospective retailers may look warily on any decline in consumer base.

Whether a municipality is gaining or losing population, the composition of population change should inform planning and development. If a town is aging, will seniors have appropriate housing stock, such as homes with ground floor bedrooms, and access to medical care to age in place? If a city is seeing an influx in young workers, will the housing stock enable them to raise families there? If a town receives an influx of inter-

national immigrants, do new residents have access to public transportation, mortgages, and economic opportunities that will allow them to take part in local community development?

Detailed information about changes in your city or town's population may be available through the American Community Survey, but other sources of quantitative and qualitative information might include local social service or medical care providers. A future Census Data Bulletin will explore components of population change, including births, deaths, and international and interstate migration, at the county level.

TO LEARN MORE...

U.S. Census Bureau's State, County, and Subcounty Estimates are available online at <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/index.html>.

For further information about Planning Information Center resources, contact Amanda Martin at Rhode Island Statewide Planning: amanda.martin@doa.ri.gov or (401) 222-4720.