



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT • CITY OF NORTHAMPTON

planning • conservation • zoning • housing partnership • redevelopment • northampton GIS
economic development • community development • historic • community preservation • central business architecture

Wayne Feiden, FAICP, Director of Planning and Development • Wfeiden@NorthamptonMA.gov • 413-587-1265

Northampton Schools Strategic Planning Demographic Background and Sustainable Northampton

The Northampton School Department hired Future Management Systems, Inc., to assist with strategic planning for the Northampton public schools. As part of that process the consultant asked the Office of Planning and Development (OPD) to share its analysis of demographic trends and the effect of the new Sustainable Northampton Comprehensive Plan on growth trends.

Demographic Projections

OPD projects that Northampton's population will be relatively stable over the next 20 years, and will be 28,500 people, plus or minus 1,500, in 2030.

- Northampton's population has been relatively stable for 60 years and remains so, even with a current mild decline.
- Group (congregate and institutional) quarters population has stabilized and is likely to remain stable. Smith College dorms, the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC), Hampshire County Corrections Jail and the myriad of group homes that make up group quarters are unlikely to change significantly.
- The number of housing units will increase at a very low rate. People are still interested in building new homes and there are opportunities for housing at Village Hill (Hospital Hill), some urban infill sites, and a limited number of suburban sites. The amount of land economically and legally available for housing is very limited. New regulations make it much more difficult to develop in the rural and suburban areas of the community and the market demand is very limited. In addition, there will continue to be some conversion of two-family homes to single family homes and other loss of existing units.
- Average household size (people per dwelling unit) will continue to decline. This will be driven by decreases in average family size, the number of children and number of "traditional" families, and a corresponding increase in the number of child-free families, child-delayed families, and especially empty nesters and senior and frail elderly populations.

Most of the quantitative data herein is from the US Decennial Census and Census Projections and the Northampton City Census. We used US census data for city-wide trends. We did a finer grain analysis of household size and age composition using the City Census, which allows us to quantify the number of people and the school age children for each dwelling unit in the city and compare this data by neighborhood and housing type. The city census numbers provided here are aggregated data to protect confidentiality of children under 17. In addition, we used Pioneer Valley Planning Commission data and estimates, when they seemed reliable and as a check on our assumptions. Please note that data from different data sets is not always directly comparable.

Group quarters are congregate living. In Northampton this is Smith College dormitories, the Hampshire County Jail and House of Corrections, the VA Medical Center, nursing homes, homeless shelters, and a myriad of group homes. Group quarter numbers were dropping over the last 50 years, in large part because of the shrinking and closure of the Northampton State Hospital, but they are now stable. The future of the VAMC is the most speculative aspect of group quarters and there is a significant risk it will close in the next 20 years. The VAMC is small enough, however, that its closing would not have a significant effect on overall group quarters population.

Demographic Trends

There are five significant demographic trends in Northampton over the past half-century worth noting.

- Significant **decrease** in group quarters population, especially the institutionalized population with the closing of the Northampton State Hospital. Group quarters population has now stabilized and is unlikely to change significantly.
- A stable population, slightly decreasing over the past 20 years.
- A dramatic reduction in household and family size with smaller families and more single-person households.
- A significant increase in median age and a decrease in the ages 24 to 45 cohort. Northampton's median age is slightly older than that of the US (in 2000, 37.3 versus 35.3) and continuing to increase.
- Suburban single family homes have the largest population and largest number of school age children per dwelling unit of any housing type in the city. Existing urban areas and infill development (both single family and multifamily) generate the smallest population and fewest number of school age children per dwelling unit.

Northampton Population (from US decennial census and census estimates)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2007
Total Population	29,063	30,008	29,664	29,286	29,289	28,978	28,411
Household Population		23,692	24,133	25,007	25,422	25,376	24,680
Group Quarters		6,316	5,511	4,279	3,867	3,602	3,731
Average Household Size	3.25	3.00	2.82	2.86	2.28	2.14	2.14

New Housing Units Do Not Automatically Mean More People

Northampton has witnessed many new housing units, especially during the 1985 to 1988 building boom and to a lesser extent in the boom that recently ended. This increase in units, however, resulted in only a very small increase in community size.

- Average household size continues to drop, albeit at a much lower rate than it did in the period from 1960 to 2000. That is, with fewer people per dwelling unit it takes more dwelling units to house the same number of people.
- New housing is very visible to the community because much of it is in areas previously undeveloped and because new housing typically consumes more land than historical housing patterns.
- A significant number of dwelling units have been lost to other uses. In addition, Northampton had a few tear downs, where a new unit is built to replace an old unit that is torn down. More significantly, many two-family homes have been converted to single family homes.
- The small increase in households and much smaller increase in household population has not made up for the decrease in group quarters population.

The US Census estimates that in the period from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007, 270 new dwelling units were created, but 229 dwelling units were lost.

Fewer Children and Smaller School Aged Population

OPD projects that the number of children in Northampton will continue to decline over the next 20 years, albeit with small up and down blips from time to time.

- Nationwide there is an overall trend to smaller families and fewer children per family. This is especially pronounced in communities with the demographic patterns and relatively small immigration rates like Northampton.

Area of Northampton	Average Household Size	% of School Age Children
Citywide	2.1360 ¹	10% ^{1,2}
Single-Family Homes/Single Units	2.4710 ¹	
Neighborhoods Near Downtown (primarily single family home)	1.86 ²	9% ²
New Suburban Neighborhoods	3.39 ²	29% ²
Older Suburban Neighborhoods	2.72 ²	18% ²
Multi-Family Homes	1.6875 ¹	
Smaller Affordable Housing Projects (NOT include elderly housing or large scale public housing)	1.61 ²	5% ²

Source: US Census¹ and City Census 2007 Partial Extract²

- An increasing amount of the housing starts in Northampton are multifamily units, which is driven partially by available sites and largely by economic demand. These units have significantly fewer children and significantly smaller average household population.
- OPD projects an increase in the population of seniors, the vast majority of whom do not have children living with them. Increases in age-restricted housing (age 55 and above), assisted living units and condominiums marketed primarily to seniors reflect this trend.
- Northampton's population cohort of 24 to 45 year olds, which includes the prime child bearing years, will continue to be smaller than would otherwise be expected in a "typical" population distribution. This is in partially driven by our higher average cost of housing and but even more by the lower number of entry-level professional jobs in the area as compared to fast growing and urban areas of the country. Many graduating college students leave the community, to be replaced by established professionals later in life. Many of the established professionals moving into the community have older children, smaller than average families, or no children.
- A substantially smaller percent of Northampton's population is made up of school age children than the country as a whole. This is the outcome of many of the trends previously described above and is unlikely to change over the next 20 years.

School Age Population Entering K-12 (age 5-17)	Northampton 2000	USA 2000	Northampton 2007	USA 2007
As % of Total population	12.6%	18.9%	9.36%	17.63%

Source

US Census 2000

City Census

US Census

The Redevelopment of Village Hill Will Not Have a Large Effect

OPD projects that the redevelopment of Village Hill (Hospital Hill) will have relatively little effect on overall population trends.

- There will be less development elsewhere in the city as these units are being developed.
 - Many people building at Village Hill would otherwise build elsewhere in town.
 - More lots and housing opportunities at Village Hill will naturally depress the market and decrease developer's incentives for developing in outlying areas of the city.
 - *Sustainable Northampton Comprehensive Plan* (see section below) and related regulations, policies, and investments have and will discourage outlying housing development. Instead, these actions favor Village Hill and sites like it.
- The units at the Village Hill are likely to house fewer people than the average unit developed in suburban locations in the city. Village Hill has a much higher percentage of traditional urban neighborhood single family homes, townhouses, and multifamily homes than other projects, and these types of units produce the smallest number people and children per unit.

Projected Village Hill North Campus Housing at Buildout

Unit Type	# Units	Household Size	Expected Population	% population in K-12	Expected School Age (K-12)
Single Family Homes	114	2.4	274	11%	30
Townhouses	70	1.7	119	9%	11
Apartments	113	1.6	181	6%	11
TOTAL	297		538		52

Source: Data used for projections from US and City Census. Projections are based on comparable areas in town. We averaged results from multiple neighborhoods for a composite most similar to Village Hill. This does NOT include any assisted living project that might be developed.

Sustainable Northampton's Effect on Growth Trends

Future development patterns are likely to be more sustainable with most development in and adjacent to existing urbanized areas (see map below).

- **Development is more likely to occur within the footprint of the existing urban core at Hospital Hill/Village Hill, Pleasant Street, King Street, downtown, Florence, Bay State, Leeds, their surrounding neighborhoods, and a buffer beyond those developed areas.**
- **Development is less likely to occur in the remaining rural areas of the city and in the suburban areas developed since World War II.**

Recently, the City adopted *Sustainable Northampton* as its new comprehensive plan. The plan is a policy document that will guide development in the city over the next decade.

The necessary consensus building process, regulatory reform and neighborhood implementation planning are still in their infancy, but some big picture changes are clear.

- Large scale development will be discouraged in the outlying rural and suburban areas of the City because these kinds of development patterns are far more consumptive of energy and natural resources and create greater financial burdens on the city.

- Development will instead be channeled towards walkable and more sustainable patterns, in places like Hospital Hill/Village Hill, downtown, and other appropriate places in the pre-World War II historically developed areas and roughly a mile out from those places.
- The City will focus on providing services in sustainable areas and not in patterns that underwrite unsustainable development patterns.
- Developers have reported that they understand that the City is discouraging suburban style housing projects in outlying areas.

Although most of the actual policy, regulatory, and investment changes to implement *Sustainable Northampton* have yet to be initiated, the first changes are already underway:

- All new subdivisions now require concrete sidewalks, granite curbs, and sufficient water pressure or sprinkler systems to fight fires. These expensive features will both lower future city costs and make it far more likely that development will occur closer to downtown and Florence, where street lengths per unit are shorter, and not in outlying areas.
- Open space acquisitions are being targeted in part to acquire frontage and prevent development in those outlying areas of the city where it is least appropriate.
- Investments in publically supported development, such as CPA funds for affordable housing, are being channeled away from outlying areas.

