

District of Columbia Population and Housing Trends

Issue Fall 2005

Introduction

The Census Bureau provides the District of Columbia with vital information on the demographic changes that have occurred in the city recently and in the past. Information from the census includes data on the demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of the population. Data on these characteristics are very helpful toward making policy and private business decisions. The data also provides a framework for assessing and directing federal, state, and local government programs designed to improve public well-being. This report focuses on general population and housing trends in the District from 1950 through 2000, with a brief look at future trends.

In its 68.5 square miles, the District of Columbia (later referred to as the 'District') is comprised of a diverse population. The District's population and housing trends reflect historical changes in fertility, mortality, and internal and international migration. Over the latter half of the 20th century (1950-2000), the District's population experienced several changes. The total population declined continuously from 1950 to 2000. The senior population (65 years and over) rose in number and percent of the total population from 1950 through 1990. Only at the 2000 decennial census did the senior population show a decline in both number and percent for the District. Nationally, the senior population increased in number throughout 1990, but declined in percent from 1990 to 2000 as well. From 1970 to 1990, the youth population (ages 0-15 years) declined in number and percent in the District. In the year 2000, although the number continued to decline, the percent of youths increased slightly. The racial composition of the population also changed significantly. In 1950, the population was 64.6% white and 35% black. By 2000, the District's population reversed

itself racially, with 60% black and 30.8% white. In terms of ethnicity, the earliest data recorded showed that Hispanics comprised 2% of the District's population in 1970, and increased to 7.9% in 2000.

The American dream of owning a home became a reality in the 20th century for a majority of households in the US. In the censuses prior to 1940, most Americans reported renting their homes. By 1950, according to the Census Bureau, most Americans owned their homes due to post-World War II economic boom, favorable tax laws, a rejuvenated home building industry and easier financing. Nationally, the homeownership rate was 66% in 2000. However, the District did not follow the national trend. Homeownership in the District was the lowest when compared to states at 32.3 % in 1950 and 41.9% in 2000. The District, if compared to other states, remained the only state still below 50% homeownership rate. Renters continue to outnumber homeowners in the District.

According to the Census Bureau, since renters are more likely than owners to live alone, the District had the highest percentage of one-person households in 1950 (14.3%), and was the clear leader in 2000 with 44%. However, if the District is compared to other cities, which is the more appropriate unit for comparison, the results are more closely aligned with city living. For example, in 2000, the homeownership rate in New York City was 30.3%, San Francisco was 35%, and Baltimore City was 50.3%. Thus, the District's ranking depends on what it is being compared to.

by
Joy Phillips
Robert Beasley
& Art Rodgers



Population Trends

Population Size

In 1950, the District reached its peak population of 802,178. Since 1950, the District's population has declined to 572,059 in 2000, according to the Census Bureau. This represents a 29% decline over 5 decades. Figure 1 shows that the steepest decline occurred during the 1970s, when the city lost almost 120,000 residents. During the 1990s, the District's population declined by 35,000.

The principal cause of the District's population decline was not a net exodus of households, but rather a substantial decline in household size. Figure 2 shows the decrease in the size of the average household since 1970. In 1970, the average DC household contained 2.72 residents. In 2000, the average DC household contained 2.16 residents.

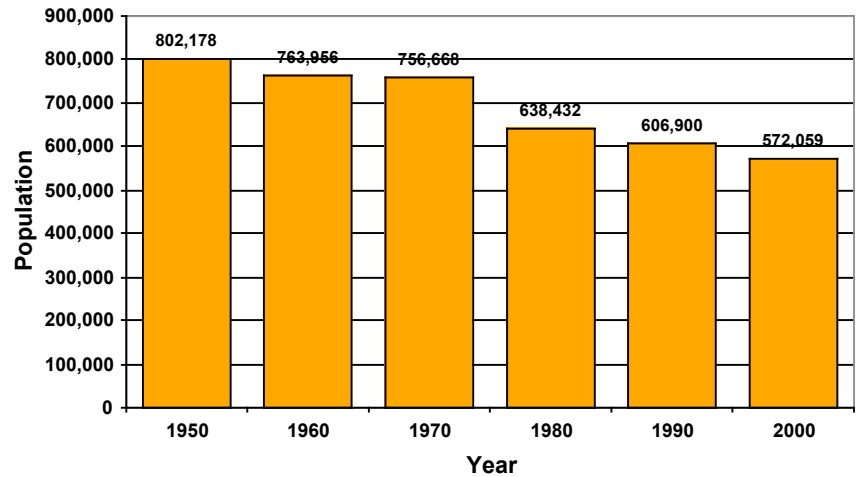
Census Bureau data also illustrate the District's changing role within the rapidly expanding Washington region. In 1950, DC had 46% of the region's population. In 2000, DC had 12% of the region's population. According to the Census Bureau, 56% of the households leaving the District during the 1990s moved to the suburbs – 25% of the households leaving moved to Prince Georges County, and another 13% moved to Montgomery County. By contrast, more than 60% of the households moving into the District during the 1990s came from outside the Washington Metropolitan region entirely.

Racial/Ethnic Composition

The District's racial composition has been changing over the past five decades. The black population numbered 280,803 in 1950, increased to 537,712 in 1970, but decreased to 343,213 in 2000. The white population, on the other hand, peaked in 1950 at 517,865, declined to 172,000 in 1980, and was recorded at 175,300 in 2000. The other racial group that can be directly compared from 1950 to 2000 is the American Indian and Alaska Native population that grew from 330 in 1950 to 1,466 in 2000. The earliest recorded data for the Hispanic population showed an increase from 15,600 in 1970 to 44,953 in 2000. As a percentage of the District's population, Hispanics increased from 2% in 1970 to 7.9% in 2000. Figure 3 from Census Bureau's data shows what the District was like racially in 1950 as compared to 2000. The District's population was 60% black, 31% white, 3% Asian, and 6% other races in 2000.

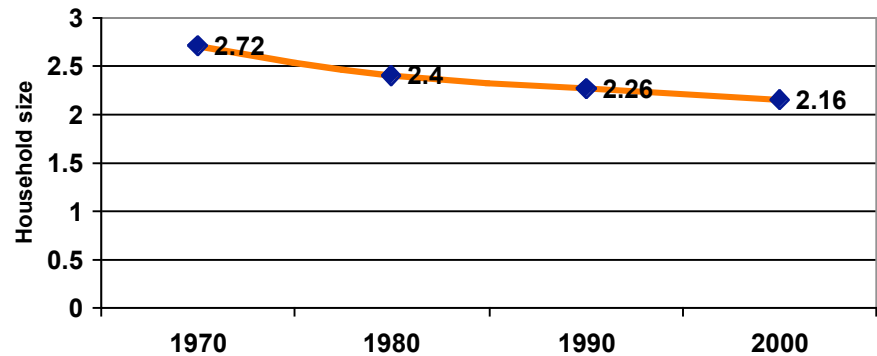
POP TRENDS continued on page 3

Figure 1. District of Columbia Population 1950-2000



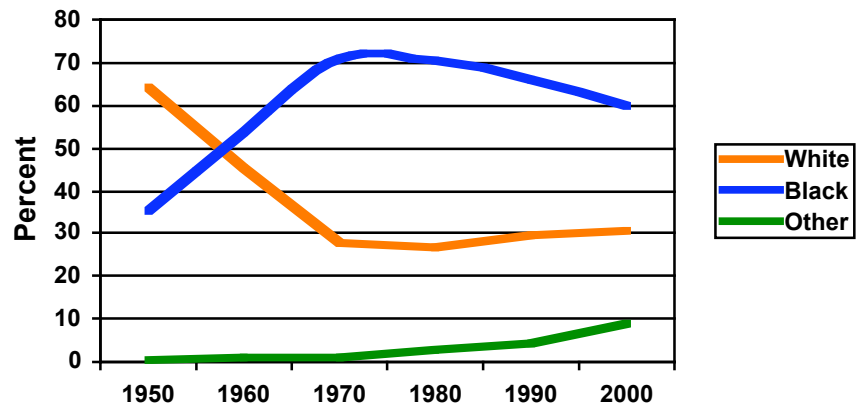
Source: District of Columbia, Office of Planning, State Data Center

Figure 2. District of Columbia Average Household Size 1970-2000



Source: District of Columbia, Office of Planning, State Data Center

Figure 3. District of Columbia Racial Composition 1950-2000

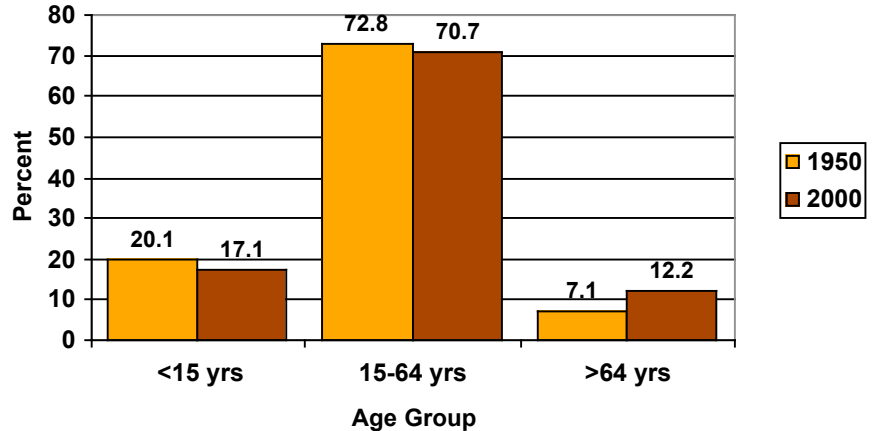


Source: District of Columbia, Office of Planning, State Data Center

Figure 4. District of Columbia Residents by Age Group 1950-2000

Age

The past several decennial census years have documented changes in the age make up of District residents. The single biggest change has been the number of households with children decreasing significantly between 1950 and 2000 (Figure 4). In 1950, there were 160,860 District residents under age 15, comprising 20.1% of the population. In 2000, there were 97,939 children under age 15, comprising 17.1% of the population. The number of children under 15 years of age declined 39% over the fifty-year period. The number and percent of seniors showed a different trend (Figure 4). In 1950, there were 56,687 District residents over 65 years of age. Both the number and percent of seniors peaked in 1990 at 77,847 and 12.8%, respectively. However, in 2000 the population 65 years and over showed a decline in both number and percent – 69,898 and 12.2%, respectively. The senior population represents a larger share of the population



Source: District of Columbia, Office of Planning, State Data Center

today than 50 years ago. Like the nation, the District has been aging. Moreover, according to earlier census projections, the number

and percent of residents over 65 years are projected to increase by 2025 as the “baby boom” generation matures.

Housing Trends

A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms, or a single room occupied as a separate living quarters, or if vacant, intended for occupancy as a separate living quarters. A household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. Vacant housing units are not counted as households.

While the population continued to decline over the past 5 decades, the number of housing units and households increased. The number of housing units in 2000 was 20% higher than in 1950. In 1950, there were 229,738 housing units of which 220,074 (96%) were occupied. In 2000, there were 274,845 housing units of which 248,338 (90%) were occupied. Thus, while the population dropped by over 230,000

residents in 50 years, there was a net increase in housing units of over 45,000 and an increase in households of over 28,000. The decline in population size coupled with an increase in the number of housing units and households can be partly explained by the reduction in the average household size from 2.72 persons in 1970 to 2.16 persons in 2000.

From 1980, the Census Bureau has documented significant changes in the types of households that live in the District. In 1980, the District had 133,600 “family” households (53%) and 119,500 “non-family” households (47%). By 2000, these percentages were reversed, as the number of family households was 114,166 (46%) and the number of non-family households was 134,172 (54%). Non-family households include single persons and unrelated individuals living together. In terms of single

person households as a separate category, the District had 14.3% single person households in 1950 with a steady increase to 44% in 2000. This increase in the percent of single person households is reflected in the decrease in household size discussed above. The District’s average household size is one of the smallest among US cities. Part of this decrease in household size was the decline in the number of married couples with children. Married couples with children decreased 25% between 1980 and 2000.

Another component of household type are those residents not considered to be part of a household, but who instead live in group quarters. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of persons living in group quarters (university dorms, nursing homes, military barracks, etc.) increased from 31,800 to 35,600.

Population and Housing Forecasts (2005-2030)

The D.C. Office of Planning (OP) is the primary point of contact for the District government with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) in developing the Cooperative forecasts. The Office of Planning has the responsibility for preparing the District’s forecasts for population, households and employment for submission to the COG Cooperative regional forecast. Within OP, the State Data Center is the unit responsible for developing the final forecast report.

Figure 5: District of Columbia Population and Households Forecasts 2000-2030

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	Number	% Change
Population	572,100	577,500	608,700	642,000	672,600	711,200	732,500	160,400	28%
Households	248,300	252,000	265,300	280,700	292,900	308,200	317,700	69,400	28%

Source: District of Columbia, Office of Planning, State Data Center (July 2005).

Both top down and bottom up methodologies are used in developing the District’s forecasts. Using decennial census data as control totals, the task is to document the extent

to which there have been gains or loses in population and households. The top down
POP AND HOUSING continued on page 4

process for 2005-2030 forecasts utilizes Census 2000 numbers for population and households. The Census 2000 data provide a definitive basis for population, number of households and household size. With the jurisdictional totals established as controls, the bottom-up methodology determines where there has been substantial creation or removal of households at the small area level. The bottom-up approach is used as a check to see if the jurisdictional control totals are in need of adjustments and to ensure that population and households numbers are distributed appropriately.

Figure 5 provides a summary of the population and households forecasts for the next twenty-five years. These forecasts show the city's 2005 population at 577,000, which is approximately 25,000 persons higher than the official July 1, 2004 estimate released by the Census Bureau (and an increase of 5,000 people from the 2000 Census). The forecasts show the city adding 31,000 residents by 2010, another 34,000 residents between 2010 and 2015, and another 30,000 residents between 2015 and 2020.

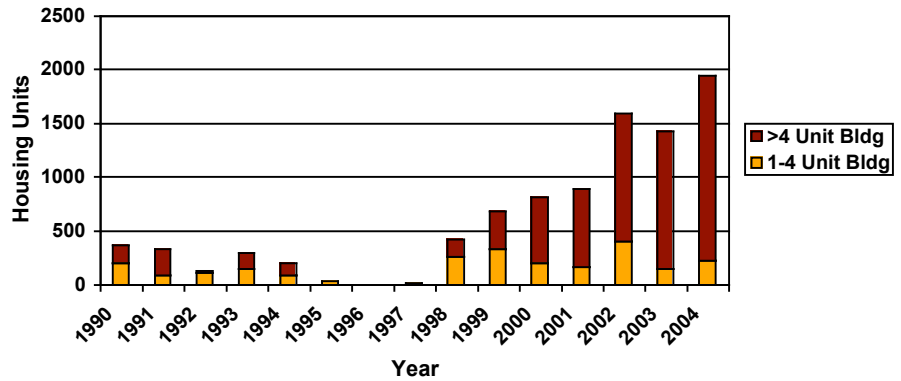
The Census Bureau records show the number of occupied households at 248,300 in 2000. This number is forecast to increase by 17,000 households by 2010, and another 27,000 by 2020. By 2030, the number of occupied households in the District is predicted to reach 317,700.

More recently, from 2000 to 2004, it appears that the District has been growing in terms of the number of households. New housing starts tracked by the Census Bureau and the Office of Planning document a tremendous increase in the annual production of housing units in the District.

Figure 6 shows that while in 1996 there were zero new housing starts in the District, the past four years have averaged well over 1,500 units per year. Starting in 2001, the DC Office of Planning started tracking development projects larger than 10 units in the city. Information on projects was collected from a variety of sources including development review cases, building permits, certificates of occupancy, news articles and real estate organizations.

Information collected included the status of a project (completed, under construction, planned, conceptual), the land use (residential, commercial, industrial et al), type of construction (new construction, vacant rehab, occupied rehab, change of use), number of units, and other data. Since 2000, there

Figure 6. Residential Construction in the District of Columbia 1990-2004



Source: US Census Bureau

were 8,518 new residential units completed that were either new construction, vacant rehab, or change of use. The total number of units delivered during the same time period including occupied rehab was 15,582. This information does not include the number of units completed in buildings smaller than 10 units. Information from market research firms indicates that the impact on building vacancy rates during this time period has been negligible. This suggests that the units are being occupied by new households.

The District's household forecasts for 2010 and 2015 are primarily based on known projects in various stages of planning and development. In addition to the 15,582 units completed from 2001 to 2004, there are 10,605 units currently under construction, 6,616 planned, and 13,086 in the conceptual pre-development stages, for a total of 45,551 units.¹

Projects that are now under construction that have recently been approved are presumed to be completed by 2010 (unless detailed staging data indicates a longer buildout period). Projects in the preliminary planning or conceptual stages are presumed to start construction in 5 to 15 years.

Forecasts for 2015-2030 are based on a number of variables, including:

- Buildout estimates for major local development initiatives, including about a dozen "new neighborhood" sites around the city
- Land capacity data for major vacant sites, based on current zoning and Comprehensive Plan designations
- Land capacity data for "underutilized" sites (defined based on land to improvement value ratios) in areas where the Comprehensive Plan supports revitaliza-

tion and infill. Again, current zoning is presumed to remain in place, and has been used to generate estimated housing unit yields.

The forecast for the next 25 years is a balanced look at prospects for the future. It is our 'base scenario' or most likely outcome of the future. However, risk factors like heightened security, inflation, housing market trends, energy prices, and budgetary outcomes can push economic activity stronger or weaker, and thereby influence population movements and housing trends. At this point, the Office of Planning deems that the economy is tilting more toward the upside than downside.

¹ "Completed" is defined as receiving a certificate of occupancy. "Under Construction" is defined as receiving a building permitted, "Planned" as projects that have applied or been approved for Financing, Historic Preservation, EISF, Zoning. "Conceptual" are defined as either private projects that OP has limited knowledge from news articles, or other publications, or are longer-range public planning efforts such as Reservation 13 or SW Waterfront. Units under construction are expected to deliver within two years. Planned Projects are expected to deliver within 2 - 5 years, and Conceptual are expected to start construction within 5 - 15 years.

For additional information contact:
 D.C. Office of Planning
 State Data Center
 801 North Capitol Street, NE
 Suite 4000
 Washington, DC 20002
 (202) 442 7600
 (202) 442-7638 FAX
 www.planning.dc.gov



Government of the District of Columbia