

Chapter III:
POPULATION

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Population Characteristics

Fully understanding the existing demographic, economic and sociopolitical characteristics of Smithfield and the surrounding region is a key component in developing a land use plan that will realistically guide future growth and a housing plan that will help to provide more affordable workforce housing opportunities. With these goals in mind, this chapter includes the most recent population estimates, population growth trends, demographic characteristics and household information. Whenever possible, this chapter incorporates the most recent population estimates provided by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia and Claritas MarketPlace demographic resources. However, the most in-depth and comprehensive information describing the demographic, social and economic conditions found in Smithfield and the surrounding region is still found in the 2000 Census. Although the 2000 Census data are now outdated, they best reflect the unique characteristics of the people who live within the Town of Smithfield and the surrounding region.

Population Growth

A regional growth perspective is vital to understanding existing development pressures confronting the Town of Smithfield. Smithfield is one jurisdiction within the Hampton Roads area of the Commonwealth. The Town is located in the northern portion of Isle of Wight County. Both Isle of Wight and Smithfield are located in the Hampton Roads Planning District (HRPD), an expansive planning district incorporating four counties and ten independent cities. The population of the HRPD in 2000 was 1,533,739. The Weldon Cooper Center estimates that the 2007 population for the HRPD was 1,604,243. The three urban jurisdictions nearest to the Town of Smithfield are the City of Suffolk, the City of Newport News and the City of Hampton. Together, these jurisdictions combine with Isle of Wight County to define Smithfield's regional context. For the purposes of this section of the Comprehensive Plan, these jurisdictions will be analyzed jointly as a means of providing a regional comparison of emerging demographic trends.

While the entire region has experienced strong population growth over the past three decades, these localities have been growing at a decreasing rate since 1970 as illustrated in Table III-1 on the following page. As is reflected in this table, Smithfield reached an estimated population of 6,987 by 2007, and the overall region of influence had grown to approximately 449,968 people. The Weldon Cooper Center provides an annual population estimate for towns, counties and cities throughout the State, and as of the printing of this Plan, the 2007 estimate was the most current state generated population figure provided for the Town. According to the 2000 Census, Smithfield has a population of 6,324 persons.

Smithfield Comprehensive Plan

The Town of Smithfield has grown at rates more than triple that of the regional average since 1970. For example, from 1970 to 1990, Smithfield's population increased at a compound annual growth rate of 2.77 percent as compared to the region's overall growth rate of only 0.86 percent, as is reflected in Table III-2 on page 5. More recently, Smithfield's growth has slowed, yet still continues to grow much faster than the overall region. From 1990 to 2000, Smithfield's population increased by 3.08 percent annually, two full percentage points above the regional rate of 1.02 percent. This emerging pattern of population growth has continued into the most recent period of comparison, from 2000 to 2007, when the region experienced a decrease in its annual rate of growth (from 3.08 to 1.387 percent), and the Town declined from 3.08 percent annual growth in 1990 to 1.38 percent in 2007 (see Table III-3 on page 6). Regional population trends over the past two decades reveal a slow, steady increase in population, with Smithfield and Isle of Wight growing at rates much faster than the region as a whole.

The high rate of growth experienced in Smithfield relative to its neighbors may best be explained by its relative attractiveness to newcomers based upon its unique small town charm, its high quality of life, its access to steady employment opportunities and its wide variety of affordable housing opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, residents of Smithfield enjoy the qualities of small town living while being in close proximity to a major metropolitan area. They also enjoy a unique and walkable Downtown area which boasts a charming historic district and several points of waterfront access. Furthermore, the meat packing industry has been a source of steady employment for generations in Smithfield, while neighboring localities have been subject to the less reliable military based economy in the Hampton Roads area. Finally, the Town has a diverse housing stock that provides opportunities for people across several income levels. All of these factors have combined to allow Smithfield to experience population increases at almost double the regional rate for the last thirty years.

Age

As can be seen in Table III-4 on the following page, the regional population is normally distributed among all age groups. The highest concentrations are found among young adults between the ages of 35-44. Children represent another significant portion of the population. Twenty-two percent of the Town's population is under the age of fourteen. Per Claritas Market Place demographic resources, the Town's median age is 37.4 years of age.

The smallest segment of the population in Smithfield is comprised of those aged sixty-five and older. However, this segment is growing rapidly. In the Town, only 13.7% of the population falls into this age category. This is up from 10.5% in the late 1990's. This trend is consistent with the overall region in which senior citizens comprise approximately 10.5% of the total population (up from 9.5% in 1995). However, this region contrasts sharply to the nearby City of Williamsburg where older residents comprise a significant portion (20%) of its population. Older residents seek housing opportunities in localities which provide amenities they desire. The lack of these types of housing units in both Isle of Wight County and Smithfield are likely to contribute to the small proportion of senior citizens living in the area.

The age distribution of the population of the Town strongly correlates to levels and types of services demanded by residents. The current figures suggest that presently, there are a large percentage of school-aged children who require public education. It can be assumed that this figure will remain strong in the coming years as young couples within the region continue to find affordable living opportunities in the Town and surrounding county. Seniors are another age group whose needs require increased levels of government services. The current age distribution of the population in Smithfield identifies 25.3 percent of the population as falling between the ages of 45 and 64. Over the next twenty years, these people will be entering the retirement phase of their lives. The implications for the Town of Smithfield are substantial as older citizens demand services, particularly those related to health care. If the Town of Smithfield intends to have its citizens remain in town during their retirement years, consideration must be given to providing the suitable living opportunities, services and amenities aging citizens require.

Sex

Based on 2006 estimates, females comprised 52.5% of Smithfield's population. This female "predominance" is consistent with the prevailing national demographic trend. The future aging of the baby boom generation is expected to magnify this trend. Currently, the region and the State are about equally divided between genders, but State demographers project that this trend will establish a slight female majority for those larger geographic areas as well.

Nearly twenty percent (19.44%) of all residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher in terms of educational pursuits. Over seventy-five percent (75%) of all residents have attained a high school diploma, GED or higher degree.

Households

A household, according to the U.S. Census definition, includes all persons who occupy any given housing unit. A housing unit is a single room or a group of rooms occupied as a separate living quarters. Within a housing unit, there must be either direct access from outside the building or from a common hall and complete kitchen facilities must be available for the exclusive use of the members of the household. A single family detached home, a townhouse unit, an apartment and a condominium are all considered single housing units. From the Census Bureau's perspective, all persons whom are not members of households must live in either group quarters, such as dormitories, barracks and rooming houses or institutions, including hospitals, asylums and jails. As seen in Table III-5 on the following page, in each of the jurisdictions comprising the region of influence, non-household residents represent a relatively small proportion of the total population. In Smithfield, non-household populations are not a significant area of concern.

Household Size

Household size is the average number of persons living in a given housing unit. This size is critical in projecting future housing demand. The average household size in a community is determined by dividing the household population by the number of households. The average household size for Smithfield in 2007 was estimated to be 2.49.

Average HH size in Isle of Wight County has decreased drastically over the past thirty years. In 1970, the average household size was 3.59 in the County. In 1980, it decreased to 3.04. By 1990, it had decreased to 2.75. In 2000, the Census determined the average household size in the County to be 2.63.

The regional trend of decreasing household size over the last twenty years is consistent with national demographic trends. The trend is expected to continue in the future as families continue to have fewer children and single parent households become increasingly more common. Moreover, it is likely that both Smithfield and Isle of Wight County will experience an increase in the total number of households as the population continues to grow and smaller households with different needs are formed and enter the market such as transient singles, retirees selling larger homes and married couples without children.

Household Composition

In addition to household size, the mix of household types influences the kind of housing that will be demanded within a community. The 2000 U.S. Census classifies households as families and non-families. A “family” is defined as a household where two or more related individuals live together.

Table III-6 provides a summary of the breakdown by number of residents occupying households in the Town and the overall region.

Household Income

Household income is the total income of all wage earners who live within a household. In most cases, this income level controls the level of retail spending patterns as well as the type and quality of housing a household can afford. Two measures of household income are provided in this analysis: median income and percentage of households by income range. Both measures reveal that the residents of Smithfield have buying power at competitive levels with the residents of neighboring jurisdictions. However, as described in Table III-7 below, Smithfield's median household income level (\$50,543) exceeds the statewide level (\$46,677) by a significant amount. Recent estimates indicate that income levels are rising in the region. As can be seen in Table III-8 on the following page, when 1989 income levels are adjusted for inflation to 2006 dollars, a significant increase in household income is noted. The estimated household income for Smithfield in 2006 was \$50,543.

SUMMARY

The analysis of the current demographic character of Smithfield and its neighboring jurisdictions provides a sound basis for making future planning decisions. Some of the most important characteristics that have been considered during the development of the future land use plan are:

- *The comparatively high rate of population growth in Smithfield relative to the rest of the region;*
- *The high proportion of school age children and relatively low proportion of elder citizens (65+) currently residing in the area;*
- *The significant portion of the population projected to reach retirement age over the next twenty years; and*
- *The rise in household income reflected in the Town over the past two decades.*