



Population Changes in Allegheny County Municipalities: 2000 to 2010

In last week's *Policy Brief (Volume 11, Number 56)*, we documented the per capita spending and revenues for most of Allegheny County's municipalities noting the high, low and average values for several spending and revenue components. We also found a strong correlation between population count and total general fund spending and revenues.

In updating population figures from the 2009 estimates to the 2010 actual Census count we observed that many municipalities had seen increases in that one-year change. In this analysis we will look at the changes in population that took place between the Census years of 2000 and 2010.

Of the 130 municipalities in Allegheny County, we examined 127. The City of Pittsburgh is not included because it is well chronicled in other studies. Trafford and McDonald are not included because they are only partially located in Allegheny County. The 127 municipalities had a combined population of 946,657 according to the 2000 Census. However, by 2010 these same municipalities had seen population fall to 917,200—a decline of 29,457 or 3.1 percent. As we noted in *Policy Brief Volume 11, Number 24*, the County as a whole had a population decline of 4.5 percent during that time. Overall, 101 of 127 municipalities (79.5 percent) lost population over the decade while 25 had an increase and one did not change.

From a percentage change standpoint, the largest gains belonged to Aleppo and Ohio Townships—84.4 percent and 54.1 percent respectively. Pine Township followed close behind with a 50 percent jump. Collier (34.5 percent) and Richland (20.2 percent) Townships comprised the rest of the top five gainers. In all, twelve municipalities had posted population gains of 10 percent or more.

Geographically, nine of the municipalities showing population growth of 10 percent or more were located in either the northern or western part of the County. The other three were located in the south (Jefferson Hills) and southwest (North and South Fayette). Of the 25 municipalities that recorded any rise in population, only two were located in the east (Wilmerding 2.1 percent and Plum 0.7 percent). South Versailles (southeast) had no change.

The five communities with the greatest percentage loss of residents were Braddock (-26 percent) and neighboring North Braddock (-24.2 percent), Duquesne (-24.1 percent), Verona (-21 percent) and Wall (-20 percent). Ten municipalities posted population shrinkage of 15 percent or more. Geographically, nine out of the ten biggest population losers are located in the eastern or southeastern part of Allegheny County. Only Sewickley Heights (-17.4 percent), located in the northwestern part of the County, is not in the east. Overall, 34 of the 127 municipalities—more than one quarter—lost at least ten percent of their populations with the vast majority located in the eastern part of the County.

In raw numbers, Pine Township registered the largest population jump adding more than 3,800 people—the largest increase in the County by over 1,700. Only two other municipalities grew by more than 2,000 residents—South Fayette (2,145) and Franklin Park (2,106). Other municipalities with at least a 1,000 person increase include Moon, Richland, Collier, North Fayette, Ohio, and Robinson. On the other end of the spectrum, Penn Hills had the largest decrease in population (-4,480) followed by McKeesport (-4,309). Both Wilkesburg (-3,266) and West Mifflin (-2,151) also lost more than 2,000 residents. In all, ten municipalities lost more than 1,000 residents.

What do population losses mean in the grand scheme of things? The first consequence already being felt is the loss of political power. Redistricting has become a hot button issue in the County and in Southwestern Pennsylvania as legislative seats are slated to shift from here to other parts of the state, particularly the Southeast. At risk are at least one House seat and one Senate seat in Allegheny County.

Moreover, population loss has serious economic repercussions. Fewer people leads to lower demand for dwelling units, shrinking tax base and weaker demand for local retailers and consumer services. In many cases tax base decline is accompanied by higher tax rates as municipalities struggle to maintain services. Higher taxes are often cited as a factor in outmigration from a community. Indeed, declining population is often the result of declining jobs and higher taxes makes recovering those jobs even more difficult.

Overall, it is somewhat encouraging that about a fifth of the municipalities experienced population increases. The next question would be to learn the sources of that growth, i.e., in-migration from outside the region, movement of residents from other parts of the County or natural increase. But there can be little consolation in the fact that 101 municipalities suffered losses. For the biggest losers outmigration is surely a major explanation. Absence of economic opportunity, crime, and poor schools could all be playing a role in those losses.

In terms of public policy implications, the County and its municipalities ought to be looking for ways to stop the decades' long decline. The County should be focused on creating an environment that will encourage businesses to move to the area and for those already here to expand locally. This has been the challenge for the County for a long time. There are some positives in the outlook, but if the County expects to reverse the

long slide in population, it will need to work harder and get some help from the state in terms of the regulatory and labor climate.

A complete listing of municipality populations can be found on the Allegheny Institute website.

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