

Chapter 2. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

2.1 POPULATION

Sussex County is currently home to over 215,622 permanent residents according to the Census's July 1, 2015 population estimate (US Census, 2016). It is the fastest growing county in Delaware, and has experienced strong growth since 1950, particularly in recent decades (Table 2.1-1).

Table 2.1-1 Sussex County Historical Population Trends		
YEAR	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE
1950	61,336	-
1960	73,195	19
1970	80,356	10
1980	98,004	22
1990	113,229	16
2000	156,638	38
2010	197,145	26
July 1, 2015 (estimate)	215,622	9

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

As compared to the State of Delaware, Sussex County has grown almost 70 percentage points faster at approximately 169 percent in the past 50 years (Table 2.1-2).

Table 2.1-2 Population Change, 1960-2010				
GEOGRAPHY	TOTAL POPULATION		ABSOLUTE CHANGE	GROWTH RATE
	1960	2010		
State of Delaware	446,292	899,778	453,486	102%
Kent	65,651	162,978	97,327	148%
New Castle	307,446	538,912	231,466	75%
Sussex	73,195	197,145	123,950	169%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

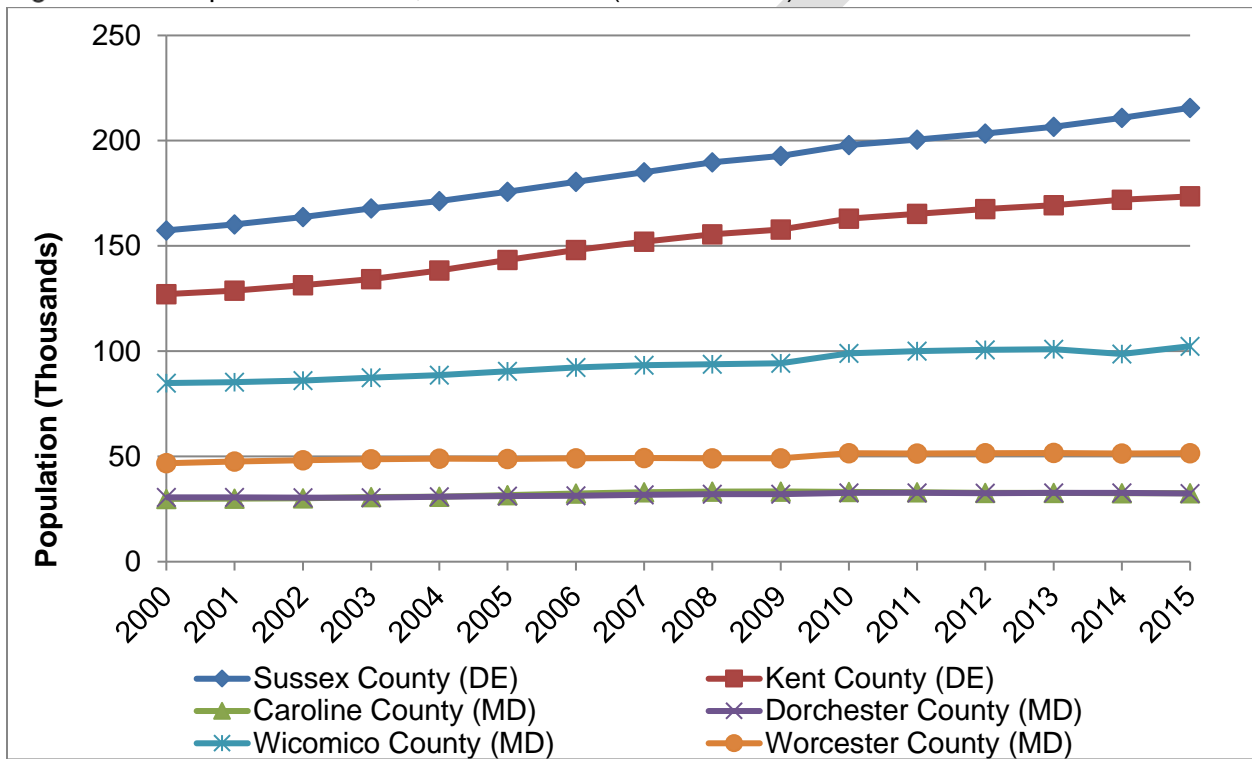
Even in recent years, Sussex County continues to grow faster than all of its neighboring counties, including its Maryland neighbors (Table 2.1-3 and Figure 2.1-1). Over the 15-year period from 2000 to 2015, Sussex County grew at a rate of 37 percent, slightly higher than Kent County (36.5 percent).

Table 2.1-3 Neighboring County Population Comparison, 2000 to 2015							
COUNTY	2000		2010		2015		
	TOTAL	% CHANGE	TOTAL	% CHANGE (2000-10)	TOTAL	% CHANGE (2010-15)	% CHANGE (2000-15)
Sussex County, DE	157,389	n/a	197,145	25.3%	215,622	8.9%	37.0%
Kent County, DE	127,109	n/a	162,922	28.2%	173,533	6.5%	36.5%

Caroline County, MD	29,828	n/a	33,069	10.9%	32,579	-1.5%	9.2%
Dorchester County, MD	30,586	n/a	32,682	6.9%	32,384	-0.9%	5.9%
Wicomico County, MD	84,864	n/a	98,905	16.5%	102,370	3.5%	20.6%
Worcester County, MD	46,772	n/a	51,470	10%	51,540	0.1%	10.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

Figure 2.1-1 Population Growth, 2000 to 2015 (in thousands)



Source: US Census Bureau, 2016

The Delaware Population Consortium (DPC) projects that Sussex County will continue to grow in population by 2045. The DPC is a cooperative organization in Delaware that is comprised of state, county, and local governments. Each year the DPC produces a set of population projections for the state, the three counties, and major municipalities in Delaware. According to the DPC's Annual Population Projections released on October 27, 2016, there will be over 260,000 permanent residents living in Sussex County by 2045. Table 2.1-4 below depicts the Delaware Population Consortium's population projections for permanent residents in Delaware and its counties.

Table 2.1-4 Delaware Population Consortium Permanent Resident Population Projections of Sussex County Compared to other Delaware Counties and the State

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045
Kent	162,978	173,529	180,912	187,199	193,038	198,264	202,731	206,665
New Castle	538,912	555,786	572,820	586,643	595,664	601,298	603,667	603,523
Sussex	197,888	215,622	229,479	240,825	248,810	254,531	258,760	262,137
State of Delaware Total	899,778	945,937	983,211	1,014,667	1,037,512	1,054,093	1,065,168	1,072,325

Source: Delaware Population Consortium, 2016

It is important to note that both the U.S. Census and DPC population numbers do not provide a full picture of County growth because the population data does not count seasonal residents. This is particularly important in Sussex County which is popular as both a primary and secondary home destination. According to the U.S. Census, Sussex County had an estimated 37,501 seasonal housing units in 2015. During peak vacation season, those homes could be accommodating over 93,000 additional people if an average of 2.5 people (the average household size in Sussex) were inhabiting each of the seasonal units. If an average of four people were inhabiting each unit, that number would grow to over 150,000 additional residents during the peak season.

An understanding of the County's seasonal population is needed to have a full understanding of the impact of population growth on the County's resources, infrastructure, and demand for services. Sussex County is a draw for seasonal visitors and other tourists, and tourism has become an indispensable part of the local economy. At the same time, it is important to consider how seasonal residents and tourists impact the County's housing supply, roads, utilities, and natural environment. Additional residents in the County, whether permanent or seasonal, create increased traffic on roads, additional housing needs, and additional demands on utilities and services. Cumulatively these changes can adversely affect the natural environment. In addition, in recent years the County has seen growth of the tourism season. Historically, peak tourist season in the County occurred between late May and early September. More recently, the tourism industry has created more attractions and events to extend the peak season from as early as April to as late as November.

At the request of the Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission as part of this Comprehensive Plan process, the DPC prepared seasonal population projections for Sussex County (Table 2.1-5). The seasonal projections assume an 80% occupancy and 3.3 persons per seasonal household. When the seasonal population of the County is accounted for during peak vacation season, the peak population of the County may be as high as 385,100 in 2045. It is also important to note that this number does not include seasonal visitors staying in hotels, motels, campgrounds or visitors who come for the day and return home at night.

Table 2.1-5 Delaware Population Consortium Permanent and Seasonal Resident Population Projections for Sussex County

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045
Permanent Residents	197,888	215,622	229,479	240,825	248,810	254,531	258,760	262,137
Seasonal Residents	91,793	99,003	107,164	112,693	118,508	120,523	122,572	122,963
Total Population	288,938	314,379	336,643	353,518	367,318	375,054	381,332	385,100

Source: Delaware Population Consortium, 2016

While the Delaware Population Consortium has been the primary source of population projections for counties and cities in Delaware, other independent sources have also prepared population projections for Sussex County. One such report prepared by Robert Siegel & Associates, Inc. in April 2017, suggests that the total population of Sussex County during the peak season may grow even higher than the DPC's 385,100 estimate in 2045. The report estimates that there is a possibility of 495,810 people by 2045 (351,801 permanent residents plus 144,009 seasonal residents). This estimate hinges on sharp population growth of permanent residents driven by new economic development and employment. Historically, population growth in Sussex has been driven by natural increase (births minus deaths) and migration (retirees).

While realization of the 2045 population numbers in the Siegel report may be possible in Sussex County's future, a more likely scenario may be a population estimate somewhere between the DPC and Siegel numbers. At the request of the County Planning and Zoning Commission, a population estimate that is 15% higher than the DPC 2045 estimate is also considered in chapters for planning purposes in order to account for any unforeseen spurs in population growth in the next several decades.

2.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

Growth is also bringing population diversity to Sussex County. This section presents information on demographics of Sussex County's population. Note that demographic level information is only available for the Sussex County's permanent population and not the seasonal residents. Additional demographic information is presented in the Economic Development and Housing Chapters.

Between 2000 and 2015, the population growth of white residents has outpaced the population growth of black and other non-white residents. In addition, the number of Hispanic residents grew rapidly during this same period.

Table 2.2-1 Sussex County Ethnicity and Race Trends			
RACE/ETHNICITY	2000 POPULATION	2015 POPULATION	2000-2015 PERCENT CHANGE
White Alone (Non-Hispanic)	125,857	161,290	28%
Black Alone (Non-Hispanic)	23,319	26,320	13%
Other Races, Including Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic Population	7,462	7,608	2%
Hispanic of Any Race	6,915	20,404	195%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016; Delaware Population Consortium, 2016

The DPC also includes demographic information in its annual population projections (Table 2.2-2). In terms of population number, white residents will continue to comprise the largest proportion of Sussex County's population in 2045. However, there will be notable growth in the black population, other races, and Hispanic populations between 2015 and 2045.

Table 2.2-2 Sussex County Ethnicity and Race Projections								
RACE/ETHNICITY	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	PERCENT CHANGE 2015-2045
White Alone (Non-Hispanic)	161,290	169,975	176,309	179,139	179,553	178,677	177,399	10%
Black Alone (Non-Hispanic)	26,320	27,976	29,512	30,982	32,427	33,888	35,364	34%
Other Races, Including Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic Population	7,608	8,634	9,538	10,265	10,695	10,757	10,467	38%
Hispanic of Any Race	20,404	22,894	25,466	28,424	31,856	35,438	38,907	91%

While Sussex County's total population is growing, it is also becoming older. The median age increased from 44.6 years to 47 years between 2010 and 2015, an increase of 2.4 years. The increase in median age was significantly greater than the State's increase of 1 years and greater than the counties in Delaware and neighboring counties in Maryland (Table 2.2-3).

Table 2.2-3 Change in Median Age, 2010-2015			
GEOGRAPHY	MEDIAN AGE		ABSOLUTE CHANGE
	2010	2015	2010-2015
State of Delaware	38.3	39.3	2.6%
Sussex County	44.6	47.0	5.1%
Kent County, DE	36.1	37.0	2.4%

New Castle County, DE	37.2	37.5	0.8%
Caroline County, MD	37.8	40.1	5.7%
Dorchester County, MD	43.1	43.8	1.6%
Wicomico County, MD	35.7	35.5	-0.6%
Worcester County, MD	47.5	49.1	3.3%

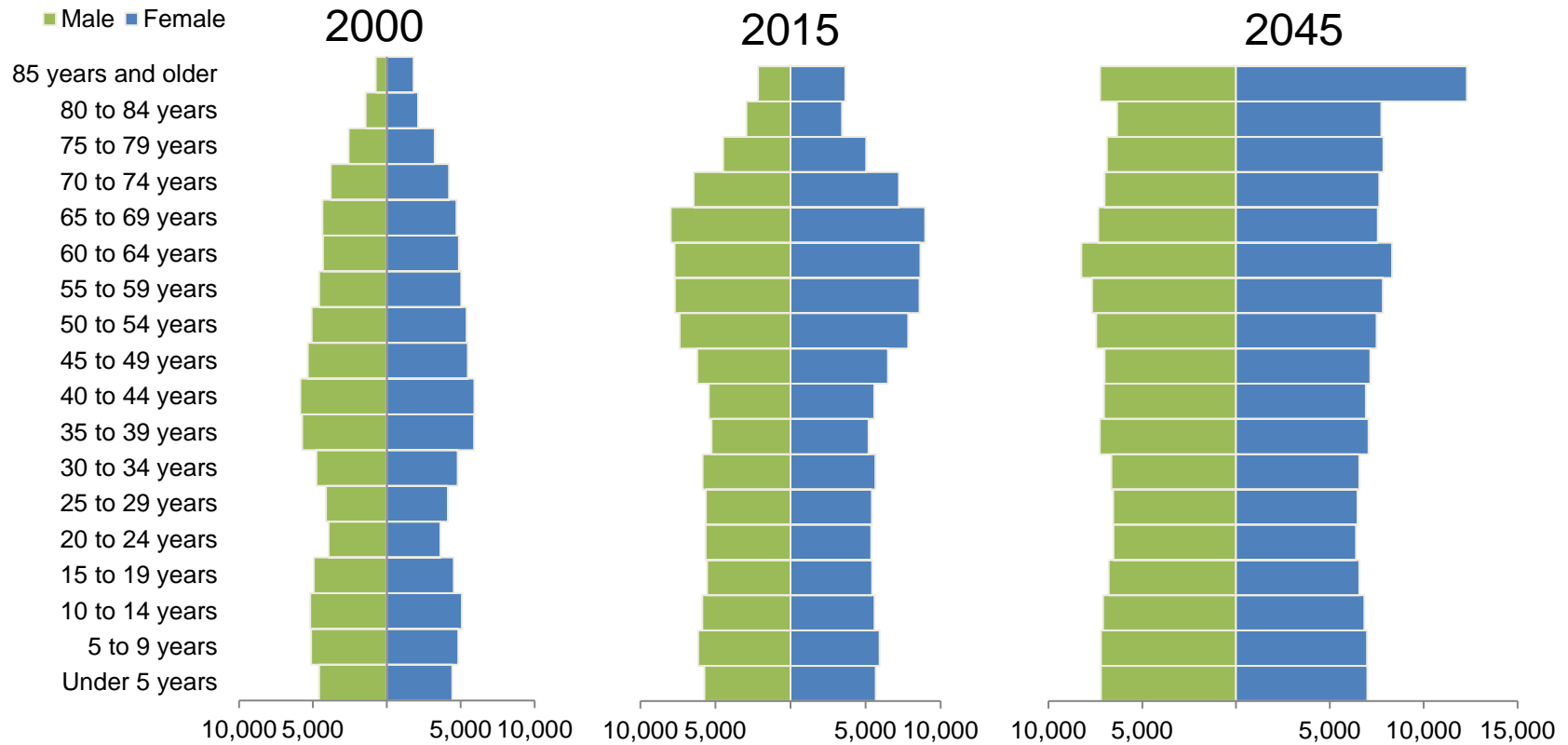
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

The aging population is apparent in the population age distribution between 2000 and 2015 (Figure 2.2-1). The highest growth occurred in the age groups between 50 and 69 years old (also known as the Baby Boomer Generation). This was the fastest growing age group between 2000 and 2015, with an increase of 69%. This is not surprising given Sussex County's popularity as a retiree destination. Sussex County's lower tax rates, natural environment, quality of life and housing opportunities are attracting retirees, owners of second homes, and other older householders in great numbers. Some seasonal visitors buy a second home in Sussex with the intent that it will become their regular retirement home.

As this "boomer" population group continues to age through 2045, it moves up in the population pyramid. The largest increase in population will be in the 85+ demographic which is expected to see a 235% increase by 2045.

This aging population of Sussex County will have workforce preparedness effects in terms of potential skill deficits of older workers as well as generating demand for certain occupations to serve their needs, such as healthcare, long-term care, and transportation. These issues are discussed in the below sections as well as in other chapters of the plan.

Figure 2.2-1 Population Age Distribution, 2000, 2015, and 2045 in Sussex County, DE



Source: US Census Bureau, Delaware Population Consortium

2.3 IMPLICATIONS OF POPULATION GROWTH

Sussex County has been the state's fastest growing County and is forecasted to remain in that position for the foreseeable future. While population growth can have positive effects on the local economy, diversify communities and generate new tax revenues, other impacts are also likely including increased demands for infrastructure and public services. By understanding these changes, local officials can inform business and civic leaders and the public while developing plans for the future of Sussex County. Some of the notable changes created by growth include:

- **The need for more new schools and school expansions.** While the State has traditionally funded much of these costs, State financial resources are constrained and currently subject to great demands. Fortunately for Sussex County schools and for the State's school funding situation, many new Sussex County residents are retirees or other older people without school-age children.
- **More central water and sewer services.** Population growth, increased housing density, and heightened concerns for surface and groundwater quality means that new water and sewer service areas must be created and existing ones expanded. In addition, the degradation of water quality of individual/private wells and the failure of on-site septic systems will also create demands for sewer and water services in the future. While customers and rate payers will bare most of these costs, additional capital planning and investment will be required
- **More traffic and traffic congestion.** Low density housing and single-use development generates more household trips that depend entirely on automobiles. Demand for more roadway capacity (additional lanes, new roads and improved intersections) requires considerable investment of new public capital. Traditional sources of transportation funding, like motor fuel taxes are diminishing and falling short of growing needs. Better community design, pedestrian and bicycle connections, mixed use development, travel demand management strategies and transportation alternatives can reduce and delay growing demands for more roadway capacity.
- **More health care, social, and para-transit services.** As population increases and median age continues to increase in Sussex County, more health-related services will be needed, affecting both hospitals and other health care providers. As health care costs increase and more of the population is under insured, demand for public health services will increase requiring more public funding sources. Also, income households create more demand for publicly-funded social services and non-traditional para-transit services.
- **More affordable housing.** Reflecting national trends, market prices for Sussex County homes and apartments have been steadily increasing. This trend also reflects the County's popularity as a first home and second home destination. Housing cost increases will continue to put safe and decent housing out of the reach of many low- and moderate-income households. This will further exacerbate the County's affordable housing challenges.

- **More public recreation land, recreation facilities, and open space.** As the Sussex County population increases and diversifies, expectations and demands for more parks, recreational opportunities, and outdoor activities are likely to grow. At the same time, increases in personal leisure time and leisure time activities for active retirees have generated growing interests in new sports, both active and passive. Young people of school age now participate in multiple sports including baseball, basketball, lacrosse, and soccer. Many Sussex County seniors and retirees have expressed their growing interest in active lifestyles demanding amenities such as sidewalks, trails, and pickleball courts. Outdoor enthusiasts of all ages with interests in camping, hiking, and kayaking are looking for access to woodlands, waterways, and other natural areas.

As Sussex County's population continues to change and grow, it will be important to identify opportunities to address or more effectively manage potential impacts to local land use, environmental resources, economic development initiatives, and infrastructure – including transportation mobility. With the right planning mechanisms in place, and a desire to realize the Vision statements set forth in this Plan, the County will be able meet the needs of all residents who choose to make Sussex County their home.