

III. NEWTOWN IN PERSPECTIVE: *GROWTH, CHANGE AND TRENDS*

A. INTRODUCTION

To plan for the future of Newtown, it is important to understand how the Town evolved to its current state and to recognize and comprehend the magnitude and character of the forces of growth and change that are likely to act upon the Town in the foreseeable future. This information provides the basis for developing plans that will enable the achievement of the Vision for the Town's future.

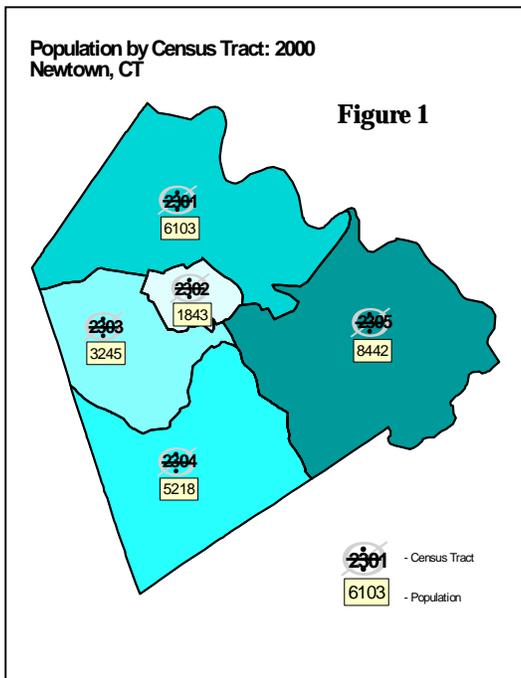
The following provides a summary description of the demographic and physical changes that have taken place in Newtown, followed by a description of likely trends given current market forces and municipal regulatory and investment practices. Plan Memorandum #2, Demographic Overview, provides a full examination of this subject.

B. POPULATION GROWTH

The understanding of demographic and socio-economic trends, characteristics and forecasts is important to the process of updating Newtown's Plan of Conservation and Development. This information provides indications of trends and changes that have an affect on a variety of Town planning issues.

As shown in Table 1, Newtown has experienced population growth in every decade since 1940. The Town's population has now exceeded 25,000 people, with population growth between 1990 and 2000 recorded by the Census at 4,250 persons or nearly 20.5%, making Newtown one of the fastest growing Town's in Connecticut. Putting this growth in perspective, numerical growth in the Town's population over any one decade was most dramatic between 1960 and 1970, when Newtown grew by 5,568 persons. Still, Newtown's population growth between 1990 and 2000 was greater than the total growth experienced between 1970 and 1990.

Census	Population	% Change
1880	4,013	-
1890	3,539	-11.8
1900	3,276	-7.4
1910	3,021	-7.8
1920	2,751	-8.9
1930	2,635	-4.2
1940	4,023	52.7
1950	7,448	85.1
1960	11,373	52.7
1970	16,942	49.0
1980	19,107	12.8
1990	20,779	8.8
2000	25,031	20.5



From a regional perspective, Newtown is located in one of the fastest growing areas of Connecticut and between 1990 and 2000 the rate of population growth in Newtown exceeded that of the eight adjacent communities.

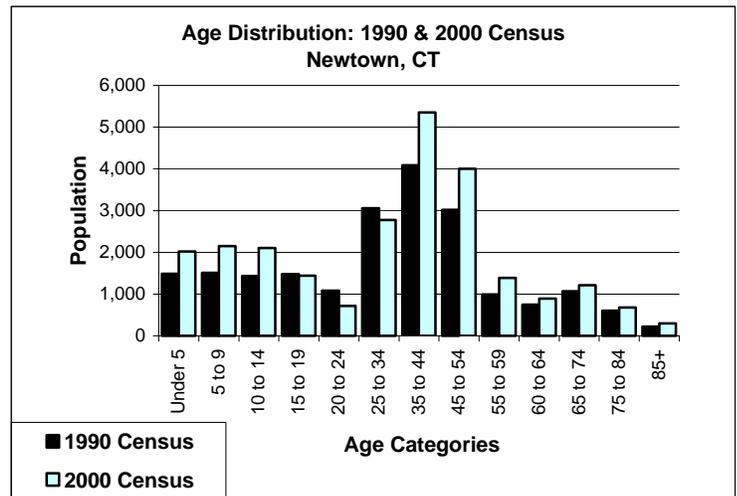
Between 1990 and 2000, 75% of the population growth in Newtown occurred in the northern and eastern areas of Town, in Census Tracts 2301 and 2305, impacting the Town's educational, recreational and transportation systems, among others.

C. POPULATION CHANGES

Similar to most communities in the Connecticut, Newtown's population aged over the decade between the 1990 and the 2000 Census. Pre-School aged population increased by 36% or 538 children between the two censuses. The elementary and middle school aged population (ages 5 to 14) increased by more than 1,300 children. From a planning perspective, these changes in school-aged population impact school enrollment, park and recreation facility planning and youth services planning.

The Town's greatest loss in population occurred in the 20 to 34 years of age cohorts while population in the 35 to 54 years of age cohorts grew significantly and population over 60 years of age also increased between 1990 and 2000. Changes in the Town's elderly population will impact planning for senior facilities, senior housing and senior support services. Newtown's Median Age in 2000 (37.5) was similar to the State average but lower than all of the adjacent communities, with the exception of Bethel.

Chart 1



D. HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

As shown in the accompanying table, the number of households in Newtown almost doubled from 4,209 to 8,235 between 1970 and 2000. The decade between the 1970 and 1980 Census recorded the greatest percentage and numerical increase when 1,541 new households were formed in the Town. Between 1980 and 1990 the Town added another 1,048 households to reach the 1990 count of 6,798. Between the 1990 and the 2000 Census the Town of Newtown gained another 1,527 households (22.5%). All of Newtown's neighboring communities recorded household increases during the 1990's, but at a lower rate of growth. Bethel gained 330 households (5.3%), Bridgewater gained 49 households (7.5%), Brookfield gained 633 households (12.8%), Easton gained 337 households (15.8%), Monroe gained 1,055 households (19.4%), Oxford gained 529 households (18.8%), Redding gained 148 households (5.3%) and Southbury gained 1,016 households (16.4%). Such gains are reflective of area residential development trends and an indication of the attraction these communities hold for residential growth.

Census	Households	% Change
1970	4,209	-
1980	5,750	36.6%
1990	6,798	18.2%
2000	8,325	22.5%

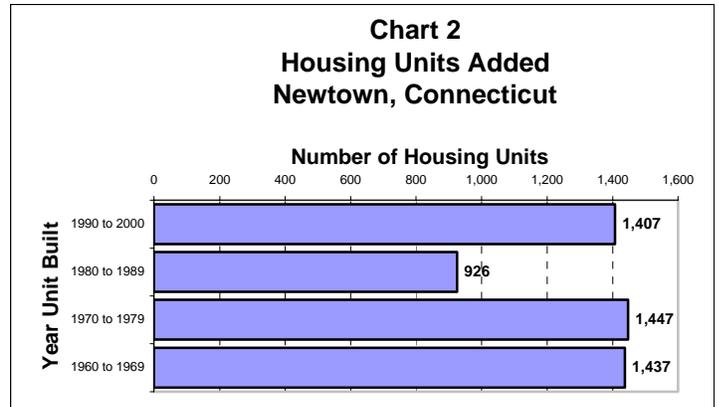
The following information is offered to put changes in the average size of Newtown households over time into context. In 1960, Newtown's average household size was 4.51 persons per household. By 1970 the average had dropped to 3.47 persons, in 1980 it was 3.32 persons, in 1990 it was 2.94 persons and in 2000 it was 2.90 persons per household. While average household sizes have decreased, Newtown and many of its adjacent communities, continue to have a relatively high average household size when compared to the State-wide average of 2.53. Larger household sizes are reflective of Newtown as a young family-oriented community. According to the 2000 Census,

46.1% of Newtown’s households contain individuals with children under the age of 18.

Drops in average household size have occurred throughout the country over the past several decades as the dynamics of our nation’s households have changed. Household sizes have tended to decrease as a result of an increase in single person households, an increase in divorce and separations, the tendency for young professionals to delay marriage and families, and an increase in the number of elderly who remain in their own homes as opposed to residing with family or moving into group quarters.

E. HOUSING GROWTH

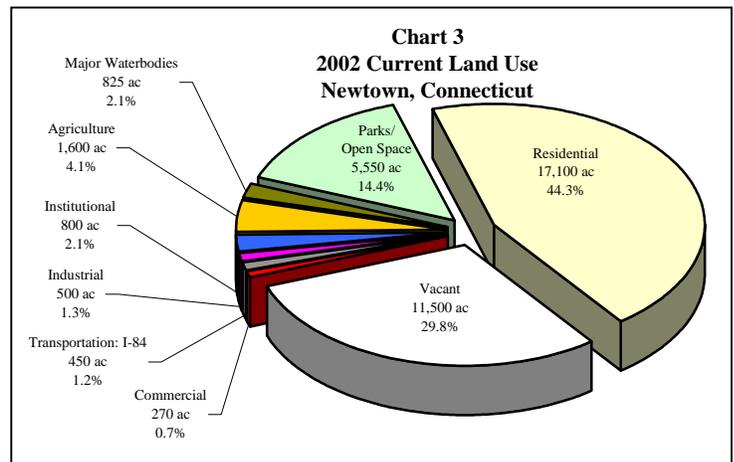
Sixty-one per cent of Newtown’s housing stock was constructed between 1960 and 2000. As shown in the accompanying chart, with the exception of the 1980’s decade, Newtown has experienced a very constant rate of housing growth of between 1,407 and 1,447 dwelling units per decade. Housing developed between 1980 and 2000 accounts for 27.1 % of Newtown’s housing stock, while 33.5 % of the Town’s housing was developed between 1960 and 1980.



Even though the number of housing units developed during the past 20 years is 550 units less than the previous 20 years, the public perception that the rate of housing development within the community has increased during the past two decades is probably due to the “large lot” nature of housing development, which has resulted in an acceleration in the amount of land consumed by residential development on a per house basis. Historically, residential development in Newtown has taken the form of single family detached, owner occupied housing. Newtown’s housing stock, as described by the 2000 Census, consists of 92.8% single family detached housing and 91.9% of Newtown’s occupied housing stock is owner occupied.

F. DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Current Land Use- The Town of Newtown has total land area of approximately 60.4 square miles (38,644 acres). The Town includes a diversity of land use types including residential, industrial, commercial, institutional, agricultural and open space, as indicated on the accompanying chart. This chart also indicates that a significant portion of Newtown remains vacant.



The predominant land use in Newtown is single family detached housing on relatively large lots. Between 1980 and 2001, 14,068 acres, representing 38% of the Town, was subdivided into 2,608 lots for single family detached housing.

Land Use Trends: Newtown is located within a rapidly growing region, by Connecticut standards, and is recognized in the residential marketplace as an attractive place to live. It can be reasonably anticipated that Newtown will continue to face cyclical development pressures to meet the market demands for additional single family detached housing in northern Fairfield County.

Newtown has a large inventory of privately owned vacant land estimated at 11,500 acres (which does not include 1,350 acres of privately held agricultural land) and the 40 year trend of developing single family detached housing in Newtown is likely to continue during the next ten years. The pace of residential development in Newtown will be determined by a combination of market forces for single family detached housing and municipal regulatory practices as they affect the price of a finished building lot.

The residential market has traditionally been cyclical, responding to the ups and down of the supporting regional economy and mortgage interest rates. Newtown's current municipal regulations controlling residential development result in the creation of large lots supporting single family detached housing. While the cost of new housing in Newtown has risen steadily, housing costs in Newtown remain significantly below the cost for comparable housing in lower Fairfield County, where an important portion of the housing market demand originates. As long as the demand for single family detached housing persists in this area of Connecticut, Newtown, with an ample supply of privately owned vacant land and good locational attributes, can anticipate being the focus of residential development activity and the demand for population supporting highway commercial uses will follow the expansion of the residential base.