Plan On It

DUTCHESS COUNTY PLANNING FEDERATION

3 Takeaways (and 1 Big Headache) from the Initial 2020 Census Release

By: Dylan Tuttle, Planner

In September, the Census Bureau released the first big round of data from the 2020 count. Called the "Redistricting" data, this first release is primarily intended to allow governments to begin redrawing electoral districts in response to the decade's population shifts. It contains population totals at every geographic level along with total housing units, households, and group quarters populations (group quarters include prisons, student housing, and the like). It also includes basic race statistics. Far more detailed data will be released at some point next year, but there are some big takeaways for Dutchess County in this initial round. We have to preface those takeaways, however, with a discussion of a standard Census headache that got quite a lot larger this time around; group quarters.

Group Quarters: A Decennial Hassle

Population figures for institutional housing – prisons, dorms, nursing facilities, etc. – are collected differently than for regular households. Each institution's administration usually submits their total to the Census Bureau, rather than having an enumerator come knocking on every dorm room or jail cell. After each of the past three censuses, County and municipal officials have found errors with these submitted totals. In 2000 and 2010, the issue was that a prison population was assigned to the wrong Census block, throwing off the population totals in a few municipalities. In both years, municipal officials used the Census's correction process to get the issue fixed.

For 2020, we again had this prisoner location issue – most of the Fishkill Correctional population was assigned to a field nearby rather than the actual prison buildings, affecting Beacon and Fishkill's totals. But we have also found serious issues with the reported student housing totals at several colleges and boarding schools. For the most part, these errors are connected to the pandemic.

What We're ~~Reading~~ Watching

Ever wonder what your friendly county planners are reading, watching, and listening to these days? We created this segment to share interesting books, podcasts and more to further spark your interest in the how's and why's of placemaking. We hope you find it inspiring!

Emily's WEBINAR Review

VISION ZERO NETWORK

The Vision Zero Network regularly produces high-quality, thoughtful webinars about transportation safety, highlighting the 'safe systems' approach. This approach states that traffic deaths are preventable, that humans will make mistakes, and that our transportation system and infrastructure need to be forgiving, so that when we make mistakes, we are less likely to be seriously injured or die.

A good introduction to the Safe Systems approach is Safe Systems: The Foundation of Vision Zero.

A personal favorite, Words Matter: Effective Vision Zero Messaging, looks at how we communicate safety issues and encourages us to put them in context as part of a system, rather than as individual events or failings. A simple change, such as describing 'crashes' instead of 'accidents', emphasizes that crashes are preventable.

National case studies, such as Berkeley, CA's efforts to change their police force's role in traffic enforcement, are also interesting.

Past webinars, interviews, case studies and other resources are available at https://visionzeronetwork.org/

College and boarding students are typically supposed to be counted at school, since that's where they spend most of the year, even if they're away on break on the actual Census date of April 1. In 2020, most schools were at least partially shut down on that day, but they should have submitted the number of students that would normally have been on campus. Instead, we found that many schools received incorrect or unclear information from the Census and submitted the actual total from that date. In Red Hook, Bard was low by nearly 1,100 students – roughly 13% of the Town of Red Hook's population. Marist and Vassar each were about 600 students low, and some boarding schools show similar issues – particularly the Trinity-Pawling school, which had no students recorded at all.

These errors have a real impact on municipal finances. Thankfully, the Census is aware that group quarters counts were particularly difficult in 2020, and is planning to consider changes to them as part of a special review process. If accepted, the changes will help municipalities ensure that they get their fair share of any population-based funding.

3 Takeaways from the 2020 Census

With the understanding that we are working to address the group quarters issues discussed above, we can still get some general takeaways from the data:

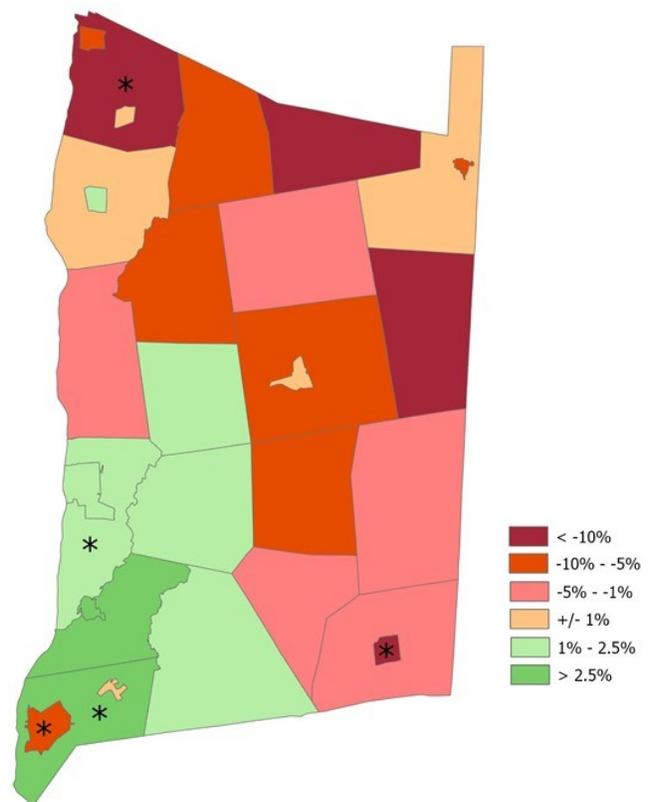1. **Our population is basically flat, but shifting geographically**
   Officially, we lost 1,577 people between 2010 and 2020, but nearly all of that can be explained by the roughly 1,400-person drop in the prison population that came with state law changes. In fact, with the school group housing issues we found, in reality we likely grew by a few hundred people even with that prison population decline.

   Where that population is, however, continues to change. Except for the Village of Rhinebeck, every town and village in our rural north and east lost population or stayed flat. The more urban/suburban southwest portion of the county, meanwhile, added nearly 5,000 people.

COVID-19 and the Census

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges for the Census, with the official Census date of April 1 arriving in the chaotic early weeks of the US spread. The availability of online data submission eased the pressure, and the Bureau also responded by pushing back many deadlines, allowing more time for enumerators to conduct in-person surveys and reviewers to process the submitted data. While we have found issues with group quarters data, we have not found red flags in the regular household data.

Though the 2020 decennial data appears to be sound, the Census Bureau was not comfortable with the quality of its normal American Community Survey (ACS) – the more detailed questionnaire it sends to a sample of the population. Instead of releasing the 1-year ACS the Bureau has announced experimental estimates for 2020 that will be available on a separate webpage, but only at the national and state level. They will release 5-year ACS data that includes 2020, since any increase in the margin of error will be lessened as it is folded into data from four other years.

Percent Change in Municipal Population, 2010-2019:
*Municipalities marked with an * have possible group quarters issues that will be investigated in the Census Bureau's Count Question Resolution and Group Quarters Review processes. Source: US Census Bureau*

< -10%
-10% - -5%
-5% - -1%
+/- 1%
1% - 2.5%
> 2.5%

2. We're more diverse – but how much more?

Thirty percent of our population identified as something other than "white alone" in this Census – an increase of 10% from 2010. Some of this is an actual increase in the non-white population percentage, but some of it is also the result of changing perceptions of our own identities. Most of that 10% increase comes from residents who marked themselves as "Two or More Races" or "Some Other Race alone," as shown in the table below.

	2010		2020		
	Number	%	Number	%	% Change
Total Population	297,488		295,911		
White Alone	238,387	80.13%	207,251	70.04%	-10.10%
Black or African American Alone	29,518	9.92%	32,289	10.91%	0.99%
American Indian of Alaska Native Alone	893	0.30%	1,312	0.44%	0.14%
Asian Alone	10,437	3.51%	10,781	3.64%	0.13%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Alone	108	0.04%	74	0.03%	-0.01%
Some Other Race Alone	10,345	3.48%	18,380	6.21%	2.73%
Two or More Races	7,800	2.62%	25,824	8.73%	6.10%

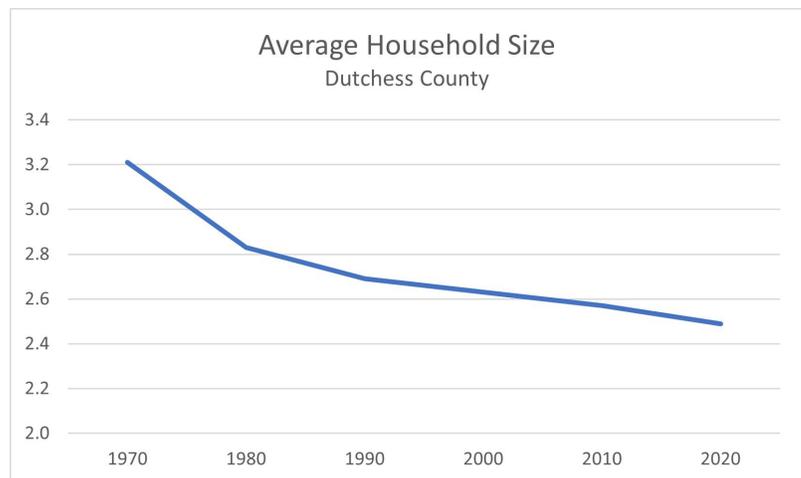*Percent Change in Racial Distribution in Dutchess County, 2010-2020*
Source: US Census Bureau

Parsing out what is population change and what is self-perception change is complicated, but it is telling that over 23,000 of the people who marked "Two or More" described themselves as at least partially white. The total percentage of people marking themselves as at least partially white was 82.3% in 2010 and 77.9% in 2020, a decline of 4.4%. This is in line with the nation, which saw the "White alone" population drop by 10.8% while "White alone" plus white in combination dropped by 3.8%.

3. Household size continues to decline

In 2020 our average household size was 2.49 people. That's down from 2.57 in 2010, continuing a trend that goes back many decades. This 3% drop translates to a few thousand more housing units that our population takes up.
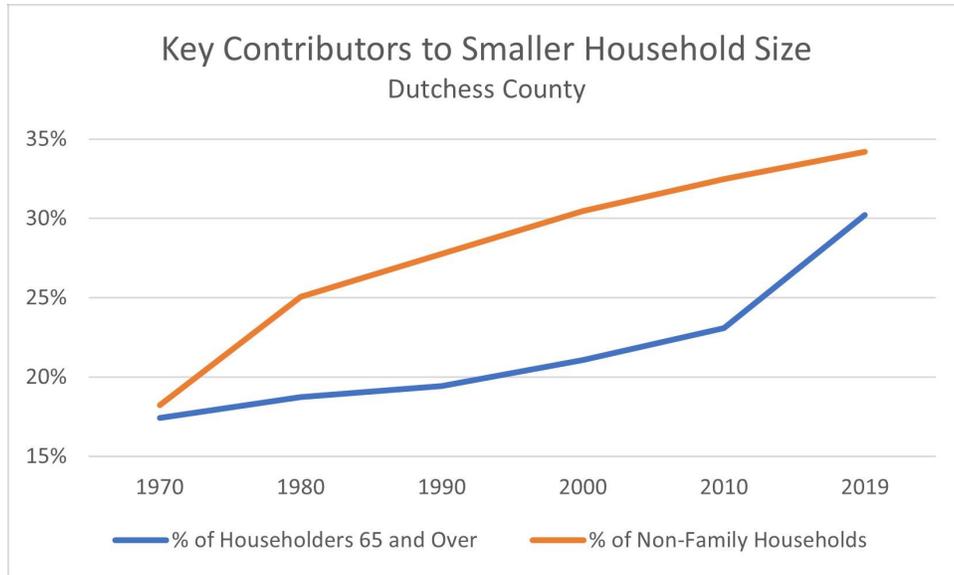
The more detailed data that the Bureau will release next year will help us unpack this trend, but we can infer a few things using 2019 American Community Survey sample data. First, people are living longer, and particularly, they are living longer in their own homes. Changing preferences and expectations, coupled with programs like the Enhanced STAR tax credit, mean more seniors are living in the same homes they raised their families in, rather than with family or in a retirement community. Those homes may have had four or five people in them twenty years ago, and now they have one or two. With the Baby Boom generation entering this demographic, the percentage of households where the head of household is over 65 has spiked significantly since 2010, from 23% to an estimated 30% in 2019. That percentage will only increase in the coming years.

Average Household Size in Dutchess County, 1970-2020
Source: US Census Bureau

Second, "families" make up a smaller percentage of households than they used to. Part of that is the older householders again, many of whom live solo. The long-term rise of divorce rates also contributes. Another likely factor is delayed household formation: the period in between leaving your parents' house and starting your own family has lengthened on average, so many people in their 20s and 30s who would have been part of a family several decades ago are now still living alone or with roommates.

Key Contributors to Smaller Household Size
Dutchess County

— % of Householders 65 and Over — % of Non-Family Households

Factors Contributing to Household Size Decline in Dutchess County, 1970-2020
Source: US Census Bureau

What Comes Next?

The Census Summary Files, which provide much more detailed information than this initial Redistricting release, are expected to be available in early-mid 2022. From them we will get a clearer picture of householder age, household type, characteristics of ethnic and racial sub-populations, and a lot more. All Census data from 2020 and 2010, along with American Community Survey data from the last decade, can be found on the US Census Bureau's website, and data profiles for Dutchess County and its municipalities can be found on our website. This data can be complicated, so we encourage anyone in Dutchess County who is using it for decision making to reach out to us for guidance.

More Information
US Census Bureau
Dutchess County Census Information

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This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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