

3 | Population

3.A POPULATION TRENDS

The year 1960 is often cited as a turning point in Vermont history. That year marked the first time in a century that Vermont's population increased between census periods. For the preceding 100 years, the state experienced out-migration as the country expanded westward and people left the countryside for industrial jobs in the cities, resulting in steady population decline. The year 1960 was also the start of Waitsfield's second period of population growth, as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-3 illustrates population growth since 1960 in Waitsfield relative to the Mad River Valley, Washington County and the state. More recently, the entire Mad River Valley experienced rapid population growth in the 1990s, but Waitsfield continued to grow at a slower rate than the other two valley towns of Fayston and Warren. Since 2000, it appears that this trend has continued, although the rate of growth valley-wide has slowed considerably. The town's lower growth rates are explained largely by the greater availability of land for development in Fayston and Warren, which have fewer acres committed to farming than Waitsfield. The town's growth rate in the '90s was higher than the rates in either Washington County or Vermont, a trend that appears to have continued since 2000.

The town's population growth during the 1990s, as in the 1980s, was due largely to a natural increase (number of births exceeding the number of deaths) in the population. However, due to renewed in-migration, people moving into town also contributed to local population growth in the 1990s. While the number of births have decreased over the last several years (see Figure 3-2), natural increase appears to have been the major component of population growth in Waitsfield during the 2000s.

3.B POPULATION PROFILE

A statistical profile of Waitsfield's population as documented by the 2000 Census and a comparison to the valley, county and state population is presented on page 13. This data should be updated when more current information becomes available. Waitsfield's

population in 2000, compared with that of the county and state, was:

- ◆ Somewhat older with a higher median age and relatively fewer children, but also a slightly smaller percentage of population over 65 years of age.
- ◆ Less "native" to Vermont with relatively more residents having been born out-of-state and in foreign countries.
- ◆ More formally educated with higher percentages of residents having obtained high school and college degrees.
- ◆ Generally wealthier with having higher per capita and median family incomes.
- ◆ Less impoverished with relatively fewer individuals, families, children and elderly below the poverty level.
- ◆ Similarly lacking in ethnic diversity with minorities representing only two percent of the town's population.

Age Distribution. The population characteristic that is perhaps most important for planning purposes is the town's age distribution and how this distribution has changed over the past 20 years (see Figure 3-8). The most striking aspect has been the growth in the 35-64, and 65+, age groups, and the corresponding decrease in the younger age groups. Waitsfield's population, following nationwide trends, is aging. This trend is attributable to a number of factors, including the natural aging of the baby boom generation, many of whom moved to Waitsfield in the 1970s, started families and stayed. Recent growth in the age 35 to 64 group also may be attributable to the 1990s in-migration of middle-aged residents seeking an improved quality of life and/or early or partial retirement.

The aging of the population is evident locally in the recent decline in births and school enrollments, as well as a tight local labor market for seasonal and entry-level jobs. The town's age distribution is also important for anticipating future trends and planning for future needs. Waitsfield, and the rest of the Mad River Valley, is somewhat unique because of the area's recreation resources, which appeal to a demographic

that may be choosing where to live based more on lifestyle preferences than employment opportunities. This is especially evident when examined in a regional context.

It is likely that Waitsfield, along with other valley towns, will continue to attract aging baby boomers, including a growing number of “empty-nesters” who are more mobile, and seek more leisure time activities, an attractive environment and a high quality of life. Looking to the future, Waitsfield should anticipate that in-migration will become a more important component of population growth over the next several decades. Current trends also suggest that there will be an ongoing demand for more cultural and recreational facilities and services, and an increasing need for services to support an aging and elderly population over the next 20 years.

3.C POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The most recent population projections for Waitsfield and the Mad River Valley were derived from related forecasts prepared for the Central Vermont Region, and represent a “status quo” forecast based on past trends. Based on the most recent projections, Waitsfield is expected to maintain a relatively stable rate of population growth through 2030, with an average annual growth rate of 1.2 percent or an average increase of 25 people per year. The town will continue to grow more slowly than its neighbors. At these rates, the population will exceed 2,000 by the year 2020. Policy changes, infrastructure improvements, zoning density changes, the construction of a municipal sewer

system in Irasville, or the significant loss or gain of jobs in the region, could alter these projections.

3.D SEASONAL POPULATION

While the number of full-time residents is traditionally used for planning purposes to determine a community’s size, needs, and rates of growth, seasonal and visitor populations can also place significant demands on local facilities and services.

Although Waitsfield’s 159 seasonal housing units represent only 8.3 percent of second homes in the valley, the town offers approximately 30 percent of the valley’s commercial lodging beds. Waitsfield is also a regional commercial center, serving the needs of nearly all the valley’s seasonal and year-round residents. It is estimated that the valley’s temporary population can reach 13,000 during the peak tourist season.

Past growth projections often assumed that future vacation housing would be located adjacent to recreation attractions, and therefore result in only minor seasonal population increases in Waitsfield. Experience has shown, however, that any growth in population or seasonal visitation in the valley affects town infrastructure, services and facilities. The larger effective population, the year-round population plus the total visitors who could be expected to be in town for a sustained (as opposed to peak) period, is a critical factor in determining the town’s capacity for future growth, and the impact of future regional development on Waitsfield.

Figure 3-1: Waitsfield Historic Population Table

Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
1791	61	1890	815	1990	1,422
1800	473	1900	760	2000	1,659
1810	647	1910	709	2010	
1820	935	1920	682		
1830	958	1930	723		
1840	1048	1940	706		
1850	1,021	1950	661		
1860	1,005	1960	658		
1870	948	1970	837		
1880	938	1980	1,300		

Source: US Census

Figure 3-2: Waitsfield Vital Statistics

Year	Births	Deaths	Year	Births	Deaths
1989	29	13	2001	16	8
1990	22	5	2002	26	4
1991	19	6	2003	24	13
1992	26	11	2004	22	7
1993	21	10	2005	19	11
1994	29	8	2006	15	9
1995	21	9	2007	10	17
1996	19	9	2008	15	15
1997	24	8	2009	19	14
1998	26	9			
1999	17	2			
2000	26	8			

Source: Vermont Department of Health and Waitsfield Town Annual Reports

Figure 3-3: Comparison of Population and Average Annual Growth Rates

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Waitsfield	661	658	837	1,300	1,422	1,659		0.0%	2.4%	4.5%	0.9%	1.6%	
Mad River Valley	1,331	1,285	1,717	2,913	3,440	4,481		-0.4%	2.9%	5.4%	1.7%	2.7%	
Washington County	42,870	42,860	47,659	52,393	54,928	58,039		0.0%	1.1%	1.0%	0.5%	0.6%	
Vermont	377,747	389,881	444,731	511,466	562,758	608,827		0.3%	1.3%	1.4%	1.0%	0.8%	

Source: US Census

Figure 3-4: Comparison of Households and Average Annual Growth Rates

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Waitsfield	179	264	521	574	734		4.0%	7.0%	1.0%	2.5%	
Mad River Valley	352	530	1,147	1,413	1,960		4.2%	8.0%	2.1%	3.3%	
Washington County	12,318	14,133	18,626	20,948	23,659		1.4%	2.8%	1.2%	1.2%	
Vermont	110,754	132,041	178,394	210,650	240,634		1.8%	3.1%	1.7%	1.3%	

Source: US Census

Figure 3-5: Average Household Size

	1990	2000	2010
Waitsfield	2.29	2.27	
Mad River Valley	2.39	2.29	
Washington County	2.50	2.36	
Vermont	2.57	2.44	

Source: US Census

Figure 3-6: Waitsfield Households by Type

	1990		2000		2010	
Non-Family Households						
Single-Person	129	22%	187	25%		
Multi-Person	50	9%	62	8%		
Family Households						
Married Couples with Children	158	28%	155	21%		
Married Couples without Children	179	31%	250	34%		
Female Single-Parent	33	6%	46	6%		
Male Single-Parent	13	2%	15	2%		
Other Family	12	2%	19	3%		

Source: US Census

Figure 3-7: Median Age

	1990	2000	2010
Waitsfield		40.3	
Washington County		38.5	
Vermont		37.7	

Source: US Census

Figure 3-8: Age Profile of Waitsfield Residents

	<5	5 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 29	30 to 34	35 to 39	40 to 44	45 to 49	50 to 54	55 to 59	60 to 64	65 to 69	70 to 74	75 to 79	80 to 84	85+
1990	110	106	91	67	60	131	152	174	122	91	86	45	52	43	53	16	14	9
	8%	7%	6%	5%	4%	9%	11%	12%	9%	6%	6%	3%	4%	3%	4%	1%	1%	1%
2000	87	107	98	88	83	97	119	139	180	156	130	86	43	64	49	37	40	12
	5%	7%	6%	5%	5%	6%	7%	9%	11%	10%	8%	5%	3%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%
2010																		

Source: US Census



3.E GOALS

3.E-1 Accommodate a sustainable level of population growth in a manner that fosters a diverse population that includes people and families from a range of income and age groups, and that does not overburden community facilities, services or the town's natural and cultural resources.

3.F POLICIES

- 3.F-1 Anticipate and plan for a year-round population growth rate of 0.5 to 1.5 percent per year (approximately 20 to 30 new residents each year) over the next 20 years.
- 3.F-2 Coordinate with neighboring valley communities to accommodate a reasonable effective (full-time + seasonal residents) population, and peak populations, in a manner that benefits local residents and businesses and does not overburden town services and facilities.
- 3.F-3 Encourage, through land use and housing goals and policies, a socially and economically diverse population that includes families with children, young adults who grew up in the community, senior citizens and those new to town.