

Growth

Growth rate misses mark

7-9-86

By STEVE SHENDER
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — According to county Planning Director Kris Schenk, the state Department of Finance has traditionally over-estimated the local growth rate in its annual reports on population growth in the state of California.

But a comparison of state estimates with subsequent census data indicates just the reverse. And, according to a state official, the method used by the Finance Department to calculate growth for individual counties is just the opposite of the procedures outlined by Schenk in a news story last Thursday.

The state reported last week that the county's population grew 3.7 percent — to 214,300 people — between July 1, 1984 and July 1, 1985. The

local growth rate exceeded the statewide rate of 2.2 percent during that period, according to the state.

The local population-growth rate reported by the state was more than double the 1.5-percent lid on residential growth which prevailed in the county's unincorporated areas — but not its cities — in 1984-85.

Critics of the county's growth-control ordinance have in the past cited state population-growth estimates as proof that the ordinance, with its residential construction quotas, is not working. County planners have previously insisted that the state estimates have little bearing on reality here.

Schenk attempted to drive that point home last week, when he asserted that state estimates have

Please see Page A5

County growth 'way off'

Continued from Page A1

been consistently higher than local estimates and have proven inaccurate in the past.

Underscoring his point, the planning director said that Department of Finance estimates of county population at the time of the 1980 census were "way off."

They were, but apparently not in the direction Schenk suggested.

In a letter to Deputy Planning Director David Laughlin in May 1980, state officials advised the county that its population had grown to 178,300 as of Jan. 1 of that year. But a U.S. census report, dated April 15, 1980, pegged county population at more than 188,000.

The state also was "way off" in 1975, when Department of Finance officials estimated the county's population at 148,400 as of July 1 of that year.

Several years later, following a statewide census in which 33 counties — including Santa Cruz County

— participated, state officials revised that figure to 156,100.

Schenk said Finance Department officials calculated county growth rates by using a computer model to extrapolate them from statewide figures.

But a Department of Finance official said Friday that the state estimates growth county by county, using local statistics.

John Malson, research manager for the department's Population Research division, said officials in Sacramento compile information from each of the state's 58 counties on such things as changes in addresses on driver's licenses, births, deaths, voter registration and school enrollments.

The state also counts tax returns from each county, Malson said, though that information is usually delayed by as much as two years.

Malson said all of the local data is averaged to come up with a population growth figure for each county.

"If growth is occurring in a coun-

ty, it will show up by these methods," said the state statistician. "They have proven to be fairly accurate."

The Finance Department builds its statewide population figure out of individual county estimates, said Malson.

County population figures are later adjusted when the state reconciles its statewide population estimate with annual U.S. census estimates, Malson said.

When that happens, he said, the state calculates the discrepancy between its total and the Census Bureau's — usually around 1 percent — and revises the county figures up or down according to the difference. All county figures are adjusted by the same percentage, said Malson.

Schenk told The Sentinel that the state derived local growth figures from its statewide total and assigned various growth rates to different counties based on their respective desirability as places to live.