

City planners predict leap in population

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SANTA CRUZ — Population will jump from 46,000 to 56,000 by the year 2000 as the city builds on its vacant lots and its people continue to crowd existing housing.

"What we see is that the city has become more urban. People are working more. They're driving more. They're having more children," city planner Joe Hall said as the city planning department released its year-end projection of future growth.

The report predicts larger household sizes and increased enrollment at UC Santa Cruz that will have a dramatic effect on city population by the year 2000.

By the year 2000, an additional 3,200 university-affiliated residents will live in the city.

The impact of university growth over the next 20 years on the city "cannot be overstated," says the report, titled "Preparing for 1990 and Beyond." The information is to be used in the drafting of the city's 1990-2005 General Plan.

By the year 2000, an additional 3,200 university-affiliated residents will live in the city, the report says. The figure is considered a conservative estimate, because growth projections released by the university in June have already proved to be too low.

If the trend in increasing household sizes continues, the number of people in each household may increase from the 1985 figure of 2.36 to 2.48 by the year 2000, the report says.

The planners predict no slowing of traffic congestion. "It is important to remember that traffic problems within the city are on the order of a much larger city," the report says. This is because Santa Cruz is a major tourist destination located at the juncture of three highways — Highways 1, 9 and 17. Much of the traffic is not local, say the planners.

The report shows the growth in the number of vehicles in the city and the county outstripped population growth to the point there is about one registered vehicle for each resident. However, the number of vehicles in the city and county still falls below the state ratio of vehicles to population.

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"Reliance on automobile travel is continuing to increase at significant rates; this suggests that certain degrees of traffic congestion simply cannot be avoided," the report states.

Data showed annual daily traffic volumes at the Mission/Chestnut intersection increased by slightly over one-third in the last ten years, from 30,000 to 40,500 daily trips.

From 1972 through 1984, Public Works Department statistics reveal Laurel Street traffic has swelled by nearly 100 percent. Traffic on High Street and Seabright Avenue increased by over 100 percent.

Bus ridership, however, was generally constant between 1981 and 1985, the report showed.

Additionally, "bicycles do not appear to constitute a large segment of work-related transportation."

Other highlights from the report:

JOBS

- The number of jobs in the city increased by 12 percent from 1980 to 1985, from 24,500 to 27,500.

- During the same period, the number of jobs in the county increased by 21 percent, from 65,000 to 78,400.

- Since county economic growth has exceeded city growth from 1970-85, the percentage of jobs within the county that are located within the city continues to decline (from 37.7 percent in 1980 to 35 percent in 1985).

- This trend will "undoubtedly continue" because the city has few acres of available, vacant commercial and industrial land compared with other cities and unincorporated areas of the county.

- The projected number of additional jobs based on vacant commercial and industrial land in the city is about 5,000.

This figure would be reduced by about 800 jobs if 20 acres on the west side were converted from industrial to residential use, as has been proposed.

- The rate of employment growth in the city and county dropped significantly between 1980 and 1985, compared with the period from 1970-80.

Growth for the last five years was figured at 14 percent, compared with 72 percent for the previous period.

- Although the electronics industry is the single largest new component of manufacturing in the city and county, its volatility makes it extremely difficult to gauge its potential — or overall impact on the economy.

TOURISM and the ECONOMY

- A trend in growth in retail and service sectors of the economy over the past several years is projected to continue. Expansion in these sectors is attributed to general population growth in the county and tourism.

- Tourist spending in the city composes between 20 and 25 percent of annual retail sales.

- Tourism has been a "dynamic" sector of the local economy in the past five years and will continue to grow.

- From 1980-85, 138 new motel or hotel rooms were built in the city. In fiscal year 1985-86, an additional 131 rooms were built. Room construction increased by 17 percent in the last five-year period. Prior to 1980, virtually no new hotel or motel accommodations had been built in the city.

- City revenues from the motel-room tax increased from \$190,000 in 1974-75 to \$1.45 million in 1984-85. Part of the increase was due to a change in rate in the tax from eight to 9.5 percent in 1983.

- No clear relationship could be established between the weather and tourist-spending patterns. "The effect of weather on tourism in the Santa Cruz area appears to be inconclusive. Other factors, such as the general state of the economy and gas prices or availability "may have a more direct impact on tourism."

HOUSING

- There is the capacity for another estimated 3,100 residential units in the city.

- "The city will reach residential build-out in 12 to 20 years."

- Areas on the city's far west side have the greatest capacity for residential construction because of the number of large parcels of undeveloped land. The areas with the fewest opportunities for residential construction are the Yacht Harbor, Mission Street corridor, downtown and north of Lincoln Street.

In light of the housing statistics, the planners raise these issues:

- Should the city rezone industrial land into residential districts?

- Should regulations be loosened for construction of accessory units?

- Should houses be built on areas currently reserved for greenbelts?

Finally, the planners ask the basic questions:

"How can the city attempt to meet the demand for housing, or should the city accept that it has limited capacity and simply not grow beyond a certain population?

And —

"To what extent is the city master of its own destiny?"