

Growth

Sentinel Editorial

Our Growth Outlook

One of the questions we keep hearing is "How fast is Santa Cruz growing?"

It is a question that is difficult to answer now although we will have a much better idea of the population growth when the federal Census occurs next spring.

However, as we have stated, we believe the Census will show Santa Cruz county to have a population around 126,700 persons.

On this premise we would guess that the current growth rate has been about 3.4 per cent or just about double that of the present growth rate in California and three times that of the nation.

Despite many remarks that unless something is done, Santa Cruz is going to become another metropolitan sprawl, the growth rate of the past five years gives little indication that such will be the case although we will be the first to admit that we would prefer to see some improved planning regarding land uses.

In 1940, Santa Cruz county had a population of 45,057 persons and by 1950 the total had grown to 66,534. By 1960 the total county population was 84,219 and the special census in 1965 found 106,246 persons in the county.

In the 15-year period from 1940 to 1965, the population growth was about 25,000 while in the next 15 years from

1955 to 1970, the population probably gained 56,000 persons.

It would be our guess today that the population by 1985 will be about 201,000 although if the intense competition for money continues to hamper the housing industry, the 1985 population might be as low as 178,000.

While the current estimates show a greater population gain between 1965 and 1970 than from 1960 to 1965, the primary reason for this is the difference in student population at the University of California campus, an increase of about 2500 persons in the past five years.

Our future estimates on population are based on a continued slump in home building plus a slowdown in the growth rate at UCSC due to the state and federal budget limitations.

If housing were to bounce back to the 1962-63 era, we would expect that the growth rate would jump from 3.4 per cent to around 5 per cent or roughly from 4300 a year to around 6000 persons.

In order to accomplish such a growth rate there would have to be several changes in the local economic scene. For one thing, the university and industrial growth, even at a moderate rate, would develop more young families of child-bearing age into the area.

Probably there would be a slight slowdown in the in-migration rate of retired persons so that the average dwelling unit occupancy would jump closer to the state average than our present 2.85 average.

Previous records show the area could probably support housing starts in the vicinity of 2000 to 2500 dwelling units per year or more than double our current rate.

In this regard, however, we are assuming normal financing conditions instead of the current mess we are in on home mortgages and credit restrictions.

If you could get houses and apartments built today, we could probably only handle 1200 or so under the present fiscal restraints so the housing factor has to be based on changing conditions as far as future growth is concerned.

The ability of the economic growth of the community to sustain population increases depends, of course, upon the rate of growth although past history in the last 15 years has shown that the area has been steadily improving with total employment running ahead of population growth in some periods.

In this regard, the fact that we do attract a large number of retired persons, not in the labor market, has been a strong aid to our total economic stability.