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## No surprises in local growth estimates

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The U.S. Census Bureau has estimated the number of people living in Santa Cruz County has grown by 16.1 percent since 1980, but that's not exactly news to local officials.

For years, state analysts have been telling county officials the area has been growing faster than they would like.

The Census Bureau gauged that the number of people living in incorporated and unincorpor-

ated parts of the county grew by 30,400 residents between April 1, 1980 and July 1, 1986.

The total population has grown from the 188,141 residents counted in the 1980 Census to 218,500 estimated to be living in the county today, the bureau stated in a report released Sunday.

While the federal estimates give an idea of how fast the entire county is growing, they do not gauge individual growth rates for each of the four cities

and the unincorporated parts of the county.

Statistics provided each year by the state Department of Finance, however, show markedly different rates of growth in each jurisdiction. The varying rates reflect the different politics, economy and amount of developable land in each area.

The "big picture" provided by the federal figure, however, more or less jibes with the countywide figures provided by the state, Tom Burns, assistant

planning director, said.

"If anything," Burns said, "they slightly suggest the Department of Finance projections are high."

State figures released over the years have indicated the population in the unincorporated areas is growing at a faster rate than allowed by the county's growth-control system, Burns said.

County officials are well aware of that trend, Burns said, and are watching it closely.

The higher-than-expected growth has been traced to increasing household size, Burns said.

That trend is beyond the direct control of the county's growth-control system, which limits the number of housing permits issued each year.

County planners may soon recommend adjustments to the formulas used to correlate housing permits and population growth to better account for increasing household size,

Burns said.

Both the state and federal figures reflect analysts' best guesses on population growth, Burns said. To devise the estimates, consider such information as the number of births and deaths recorded in the area, and the number of new phone connections and Medicaid applications.

The results of the 1990 Census — the next official head count — will reveal how accurate the estimates are, Burns said.