

Growth ✓

Think it's crowded? Wait for year 2005

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SANTA CRUZ — By the year 2005, the population of Santa Cruz County is expected to increase between 34.6 percent and 43.4 percent over what it was in 1985, according to growth projections issued by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) and the State Department of Finance.

According to the state Finance Department's Population Research Division, which recently issued the higher projection, the total population of both the county's unincorporated and incorporated areas will grow to 307,400 by 2005, up 93,100 from the 214,300 people estimated by state officials to have been living here as of July 1985.

Deputy County Planning Director Tom Burns called the state's figures "interesting." But he said the county prefers to rely on the lower AMBAG numbers.

Release of the most recent state population-growth projections came last week as the Board of Supervisors voted to impose a 1 percent cap on residential growth in the county's unincorporated areas in 1987.

Supervisors must set annual limits on the number of residential building permits that may be issued in the county's unincorporated areas under Measure J, the growth-control ordinance overwhelmingly approved by county voters in 1978.

Supervisors authorized the issuance of 468 new building permits in 1987. They will be added to the nearly 1,490 authorized but unclaimed permits that have built up since Measure J's passage. If all of those permits were claimed this year, the residential growth rate for the county's unincorporated area would turn out to be approximately 3 percent.

According to the Department of Finance, which estimates the county's population stood at 218,100 as of

July 1986, there will be 239,700 people living here by 1990 — an increase of 9.6 percent over a four-year period.

The Department of Finance, which — unlike AMBAG — projects to the year 2020, estimates that 347,900 people will make their homes in the county by then.

Mary Heim, the Population Research Division's projections manager, said state analysts base their forecasts on 1980 census figures, after figuring in birth, death and migration rates.

Heim said it's currently estimated that in-migration will add 3,300 people a year to the county's population between now and 1990.

Burns said that the state's figures are "higher than any of the other estimates that have been done." He said the county relies more on lower population projections prepared by AMBAG.

AMBAG bases its projections in part on job-market expectations. Explained AMBAG regional planner Steve Williams, "We start out by doing an employment forecast; then we translate that into a population forecast for adults between the ages of 18 and 64. Then we do a population projection for children and seniors."

Williams said AMBAG also takes local jurisdictions' land-use policies into consideration when it does population projections. The agency does not consider the impact of growth-control ordinances on population growth, he said. It's forbidden from doing that by state law.

According to AMBAG's forecast, the county's total population will grow to 224,600 by 1990, 15,100 less than projected by the state. The discrepancy between AMBAG and state forecasts for 2005, the farthest into the future that AMBAG pushes its official projections, is 28,200.

Williams said that because AMBAG and the state use different methods, "It's not unusual that the forecasts do not agree."