

Growing pains predicted for city

Latest report predicts a quarter million more people will live in the tri-county area by 2020

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WATSONVILLE - With a predicted increase in population of 16,800 people by the year 2005, Watsonville will be the fastest growing city in the entire Monterey Bay area. This growth is predicted to be three times higher than Santa Cruz (with a predicted increase of 5,286), according to the 1997 Regional Population and Employment Forecast for Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties.


The tri-county area as a whole is predicted to endure a population jump from the 1995 figures to the projections in 2020. Santa Cruz County is projected to grow to 303,646 by 2020, a 25.5 percent jump — San Benito County is projected to almost double in size, to 80,653, while Monterey County is looking at 173,735 more residents, a 48 percent jump.

The study is done every three or four years by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments

(AMBAG), and if the prediction bears out, Watsonville is in for some major growth pains.

According to the study, Santa Cruz County will grow from a population of 241,935 in 1995 to approximately 270,000 by the year 2005, putting additional strain on schools, highways, sewers, land fills and a dwindling water supply. AMBAG Executive Director Nicolas Papadakis said when putting together the report, increased pressure to

Area population growth



	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2020</u>
Capitola	10,171	11,172	11,500	11,750
Santa Cruz	49,040	55,013	63,866	64,386
Scotts Valley	8,615	11,218	13,284	15,615
Watsonville	31,099	43,620	51,881	55,875
Unincorporated	130,809	136,714	141,183	156,020
Santa Cruz County	229,734	257,737	281,714	303,646

Source: AMBAG

convert farmland to industrial uses was not considered because, "we did not assume any annexations west of the highway."

In both Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, additional water supplies will have to be secured, according to the report. Both counties are already over-drafting the existing supply and increases in the population will only make that problem worse.

The report suggests that future growth in parts of both Monterey and Santa Cruz counties will be constrained unless additional water supplies are secured, through importation, dam construction or other methods.

All three counties face waste water and sewer treatment constraints. In Santa Cruz County the city of Scotts Valley is the most likely to suffer the effects unless the reins are loosened by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Monterey County appears to be better suited to handle the increased population, as the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency's treatment plant was designed for expansion capable of handling the increases predicted by the report.

Some areas which rely on septic tank systems will fare better but researchers noted that the San Lorenzo River watershed is already nearing its capacity and can handle only another six or seven percent population growth. The remaining areas without sewers in the county could accommodate another 15 to 20 percent before reaching capacity.

The pressure on schools, which in

some areas are already bursting at the seams, should also present major headaches. Watsonville, one of the areas which is already seriously overcrowded is also the area predicted to experience the most growth. The Pajaro Valley Unified School District has recently voted to place a \$75 million bond issue on the June ballot in order to build additional schools and the study points out that if the bond passes, the district will be able to accommodate additional growth. If the bond fails to pass, the district will be unable to satisfactorily serve its educational needs.

Future employment opportunities were also studied. In Santa Cruz County the largest gains will be made in the service industries with the addition of over 9,000 new jobs and approximately 3,300 more openings for retail salespersons.

Agriculture, on the other hand, is expected to see a lackluster growth in employment with less than 1,000 new jobs added, but Papadakis said this does not mean production will decrease. "Agriculture will grow very strongly, but not in terms of the number of people employed," Papadakis said. "Mechanization and more efficient agricultural practices will enable production to rise without additional employees. High value and specialty crops are projected to continue to constitute a higher percentage of total production."

Local and state government employment is pegged at about 1,500 new positions.

The study analyzed roadway capacity and identified two areas in Santa Cruz County which are already hard pressed to handle present traffic levels, and would certainly need major overhauls to accommodate

more — Highway One, from Rio Del Mar to State Route Nine and Highway 17, from Highway One to the Santa Clara County line.

In North Monterey County, trouble spots were identified as Highway 156 from Highway One to U.S. 101 and Highway One, from Watsonville to Castroville.

In order to handle additional traffic in these areas the study recommends widening Highway One to four lanes, increased transit service between Monterey and Watsonville, promotion of car-pooling and implementation of rail service from Salinas to San Francisco.

Papadakis said he believes that "for the first time we looked at the infrastructure constraints and I think that's helpful for elected officials when developing future policies."

He went on to say although AM-BAG staff and the Forecast Technical Advisory Committee used reasonable scientific methods to make their predictions, the future is ultimately unknowable and the report is not meant to be a predictor of what will happen. "This is just an educated guess of what we think the future will look like based on two things," Papadakis said, "state and national economic trends and local land use plans. In other words the collective experience of our elected officials in terms of growth as expressed in their general plans."

Because of unpredictable variations which can occur at any time, Papadakis said experience shows that these forecasts are most reliable at the county level and less so for smaller areas like cities and census tracts. Caution should be exercised in relying on these forecasts for such sub-county level areas.