**Chapter 2 - The Population Element**

The Population Element unlocks an understanding of historical and projected growth on Sullivan’s Island. Without understanding demographics, the Town of Sullivan’s Island would not be able to create initiatives or policies that are effective for the citizenry. Knowing who the constituents are will help the Town efficiently analyze issues and effectively provide services the community.

Information for the Population Element was obtained through the United States Census Bureau, the Town of Sullivan’s Island, and the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG). Unless otherwise stated, data referenced throughout this update is from the Decennial Census, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates (2010, 2015, & 2020) or Esri’s Business Analyst Tool (2023 & 2028). The Town of Sullivan’s Island consists of Census Tract 48 (Figure 2.1).

**History**

Sullivan’s Island has seen a steady population growth pattern since the 1920s. As seen in Figure 2.2, there was a surge in population between 1930 and 1940 due to the increased use of the military facilities located on Sullivan's Island around World War II. However, by the 1960s, the population returned to pre-war levels after Fort Moultrie closed and the military population relocated. Since 1980, the population of Sullivan’s Island has fluctuated between about 1,600 and 2,000 residents with events like Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and the 2008 recession preceding the 1990 and 2010 decennial censuses respectively likely impacting population counts. Figure 2.2 shows the population of Sullivan’s Island increased from 1,791 in 2010 to 2,177 in 2020, a 21% increase overall (or +386 people), leading to the largest population on the island since the military’s presence in the 1940’s.

Figure 2.2: Historical Population Trends

**Projections**

Figure 2.3 shows that the population of Sullivan’s Island is projected to remain steady between 2,100 and 2,200 over the next 20+ years. These projections are widely supported as reasonable considering the limited availability of developable land on the island, local laws established to prevent subdivisions, and zoning regulations that support single-family-oriented development. Projections for the Town’s future population were generated by the BCDCOG using the region’s travel demand model tool.

Figure 2.3: Population Projections

Data Source: US Census & BCDCOG’s TDM

Table 2.1 shows the historical population trends for Sullivan’s Island using the US Decennial Census, ACS Estimates, and BCDCOG projections for the years 2025, 2035, and 2045. This details the net population change in Sullivan’s Island as a whole number and percent.

Table 2.1: Population Trends/Projections for the Town of Sullivan’s Island (1920-2045)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Net Population Change | |
| Year | Population | Number | Percent |
| 1920 | 899 | - | - |
| 1930 | 1,378 | 479 | 53.3% |
| 1940 | 3,598 | 2,220 | 161.1% |
| 1950 | 2,478 | -1,120 | -31.1% |
| 1960 | 1,358 | -1,120 | -45.2% |
| 1970 | 1,426 | 68 | 5.0% |
| 1980 | 1,867 | 441 | 30.9% |
| 1990 | 1,621 | -246 | -13.2% |
| 2000 | 1,911 | 290 | 17.9% |
| 2010 | 1,791 | -120 | -6.3% |
| 2020 | 2,177 | 386 | 21.6% |
| 2025\* | 2,186 | 9 | 0.4% |
| 2035\* | 2,169 | -17 | -0.8% |
| 2045\* | 2,152 | -17 | -0.8% |
| \* Population Projection by BCDCOGs TDM | | | |

**Demographics**

**Age & Sex**

It is important for the Town to understand who resides on the island so that policies and programs can effectively benefit the citizens. Since 2010, residents of Sullivan’s Island have aged quite a bit. This is reflected by the median age rising from 45.6 years in 2010 to 51.7 years in 2022. This increase can likely be explained by the number of residents ages 65 and over doubling between 2010 (12.8%) and 2022 (25.4%), as illustrated in Figure 2.4. If this trend continues, the Town will have to add or adjust existing services, resources, and amenities in the future that are targeted for an older population.

Figure 2.4: Population by Age Groups, 2010, 2015, 2022

Table 2.2 shows the detailed change in age group between 2010, 2015, and 2022, highlighting the significant increase in Older Adults, specifically those ages 65 to 69, and the gradual decrease in Young and Middle-Aged Adults. Other notable shifts between 2010 and 2022 were in the 5 to 9, 30 to 34, 40 to 44, and 50 to 54 age groups.

Table 2.2: Change in Population by Age Group 2010, 2015, 2022

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age Group | 2010 | 2015 | 2022 | 2010-2015  Change (Points) | 2015-2022  Change (Points) | 2010-2022  Change (Points) |
| Under 5 | 1.5% | 6.0% | 3.8% | 4.5% | -2.2% | 2.3% |
| 5 to 9 | 10.0% | 3.6% | 3.1% | -6.4% | -0.5% | -6.9% |
| 10 to 14 | 5.6% | 6.6% | 6.2% | 1.0% | -0.4% | 0.6% |
| 15 to 19 | 5.2% | 7.3% | 8.2% | 2.1% | 0.9% | 3.0% |
| 20 to 24 | 3.8% | 3.7% | 2.4% | -0.1% | -1.3% | -1.4% |
| 25 to 29 | 3.2% | 6.0% | 3.4% | 2.8% | -2.6% | 0.2% |
| 30 to 34 | 7.7% | 3.6% | 1.8% | -4.1% | -1.8% | -5.9% |
| 35 to 39 | 4.3% | 3.9% | 7.7% | -0.4% | 3.8% | 3.4% |
| 40 to 44 | 7.6% | 3.7% | 3.3% | -3.9% | -0.4% | -4.3% |
| 45 to 49 | 6.6% | 9.1% | 9.0% | 2.5% | -0.1% | 2.4% |
| 50 to 54 | 11.1% | 8.8% | 6.9% | -2.3% | -1.9% | -4.2% |
| 55 to 59 | 8.1% | 11.6% | 7.9% | 3.5% | -3.7% | -0.2% |
| 60 to 64 | 12.4% | 9.3% | 11.1% | -3.1% | 1.8% | -1.3% |
| 65 to 69 | 2.1% | 6.2% | 11.3% | 4.1% | 5.1% | 9.2% |
| 70 to 74 | 5.6% | 4.2% | 6.5% | -1.4% | 2.3% | 0.9% |
| 75 to 79 | 2.6% | 2.5% | 4.4% | -0.1% | 1.9% | 1.8% |
| 80 to 84 | 1.5% | 0.8% | 1.1% | -0.7% | 0.3% | -0.4% |
| 85+ | 1.0% | 3.1% | 2.1% | 2.1% | -1.0% | 1.1% |

Another demographic change observed , the male-to-female ratio was approximately 50:50 (101.7 males per 100 females) in 2022. However, this ratio drops to only 38:62 (62.4 males per 100 females) when looking only at residents ages 65 and over. This indicates that of the older population, a majority of them are females.

**Race & Ethnicity**

2022 estimates show that the vast majority of the Town residents identified as White alone, which totals approximately 98% of the total population. Comparatively, in 2010, the second largest group was estimated to be Black or African-Americans, which comprised of 0.7% whereas in 2022, the second largest group was estimated to be Asian alone, which accounted for about 1% of the total populationThis composition was not drastically different from previously recorded decades. In addition to the racial composition of the Town, estimates of the ethnicity of residents was also reported. The percent of Sullivan’s Island residents that identified as having a Hispanic or Latino Origin, regardless of race, increased from 0% in 2010 to 1.6% in 2022.

**Households**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, households may include families or they may include individuals who live by themselves. Families are counted as those who are related and live with each other. From 2010 to 2022, estimates show that the total number of households grew by 5.4%, while the number of families grew at roughly triple that pace at 17.6%. The average household size in 2022 was estimated at2.74 people per household compared to 2.55 people per household in 2010, which suggests families are not only increasing in quantity but in family size as well.



**Educational Attainment**



With some of the highest-valued land per acre in the BCDCOG region, incomes needed to purchase and maintain properties on Sullivan’s Island are greater than other areas within the region. As a result, the education levels, at least over the past 30 years, have remained high for the Town. This is to be expected as higher education levels are positively correlated with higher incomes.

In 2022, over 85% of residents in Sullivan’s Island had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. This was an 8-point increase since 2010. In comparison, the population (ages 25+) of Sullivan’s Island was more educated than IOP (72%), Folly Beach (44%), and Charleston County (48%) with bachelor degrees, however, was only slightly less educated than Kiawah (87%). Furthermore, Figure 2.5 shows the change in educational attainment among Sullivan’s Island residents between 2010, 2015, and 2022. Although estimates show that the percent of people attaining a bachelor’s degree leveled off between 2015 and 2022, this was likely due to residents simply continuing on to attain a graduate or professional degree as that educational group experienced a 12-point increase between 2015 and 2022.

Figure 2.5: Change in Educational Attainment