



Northern Virginia Regional Commission

NEWS RELEASE

New Demographic Trends Seen In Northern Virginia Population Shifts

November 13, 2008
NVRC 08.23

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While the results of the 2010 U.S. Census are about two years away, some important demographic trends are emerging in Northern Virginia which may be in response to the impacts of home foreclosures, the financial meltdown, rising fuel costs and immigration enforcement dynamics. Northern Virginia may be experiencing what has been called a "demographic inversion" which describes a trend of migration from the outer suburbs to the inner suburbs, more urban suburbs and changes in cities.

In a presentation to the Northern Virginia Regional Commission recently, Ken Billingsley, NVRC's Director of Information and Demographic Services, said changes in metropolitan migration and settlement patterns are rearranging populations in different and more complex ways. Decades ago, residential development growth was centered in the inner-ring suburbs of Northern Virginia and later Fairfax County. During the past seven years, 75 percent of the net population increase has been along the outer-rim in Prince William and Loudoun counties and in Manassas and Manassas Park.

Based on latest estimates from the Center for Public Service, during the first seven years of this decade Northern Virginia's population has grown by 268,000 or approximately 38,000 people per year. Since population growth is slowing, Billingsley predicted the decennial Census count would be close to that recorded during the 1980s and 1990s, meaning three decades in a row with roughly the same net population increase — 350,000 to 370,000 — almost the same number of people living in Prince William County today.

"What makes this dramatically different from past historical cycles of metropolitan growth and decentralization is the rapid transition in the racial and ethnic makeup of the population," he said.

In the United States last year, Hispanics accounted for about half of the nation's population increase. Eighty percent of the population growth is in what is generally called the minority population, Billingsley said. "And it won't be long until all new population growth will come from these groups."

In Northern Virginia, recent population growth is coming from these groups:

- Hispanics 36%
- Asians 28%
- Non-Hispanic Whites 18%
- African Americans 14%
- Other 4%

About five years ago, the nation was projected to become “majority-minority” by 2050. With the newest Census projections, the date has been moved up eight years to 2042.

The nation’s school-age population, now 42 percent minority, will reach the “majority-minority” threshold by 2024. In Northern Virginia, the school-age population is about 44 percent minority; enrollment in public schools crossed the “majority-minority” threshold two years ago with Fairfax County leading the way.

The most dramatic indication of the demographic inversion in Northern Virginia is the movement of tens of thousands of immigrants and minorities to the outer suburbs, reversing a settlement pattern that had characterized suburbia for half century, Billingsley said.

In 1980, Prince William County was 90 percent white; by 1990, the figure had dropped to 80 percent. According to the latest (2007) Census estimates, Prince William County is 2 percentage points away from becoming majority-minority with 48 percent minority, the second highest in the region behind only Manassas Park.

During the past seven years, when Prince William County experienced the largest growth spurt in its history increasing by more than 80,000 people, 94 of every 100 new residents were a person of color — Hispanic, African-American, or Asian.

Next month the Census Bureau will release the most comprehensive information from the American Community Survey, a preliminary snapshot of the 2010 Census. In the last Census, foreign born in Northern Virginia comprised 1 of every 5 residents. Based on the latest American Survey estimates, the figure has risen to 1 of every 4 Northern Virginians.

Billingsley noted that the population shift and the demographic inversion are inextricably linked, with the predominantly minority families now finding the inner suburbs too expensive while non-Hispanic whites are returning to the cities and inner suburbs as they downsize their living spaces and look for urban amenities.

For more information about Northern Virginia’s demographic trends, contact Ken Billingsley at kenb@novaregion.org or 703-642-4621. To view Billingsley’s presentation to the Northern Virginia Regional Commission visit <http://www.novaregion.org/trends>