

Washburn County Demographic and Housing Trends – 2016

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Population Trends

When looking at local economic and demographic data, it is helpful to look beyond the numbers collected at any point in time to identify patterns, trends, and comparisons that tell a more complete story. Patterns and trends help with recognition of where we are in comparison to where we have been and can help with preparation for change. They affirm or challenge current perceptions, and they help with identification of local strengths and challenges.

For three Censuses in a row, 1970 to 2000, Washburn County's percent increase in population outpaced the state and the nation. This changed with the 2010 Census. Unlike the state and nation, Washburn County lost population in the decade between the 2000 and 2010 Censuses, going from 16,036 people to 15,911.

The actual numbers may not seem high. The county ended up with 125 less people by the end of those ten years. What is significant, though, was the change from population growth to population loss. Deaths have outnumbered births in Washburn County since the 1990 Census. What changed with the 2010 Census was that in-migration did not add enough replacements to offset the county's natural population decrease.

Population estimates for 2016 show that Washburn County basically maintained its population over the last year with an estimated population increase of five people. The county remains slightly ahead of the 2010 Census numbers but only by nine people. According to the Wisconsin Demographic Services Center, Washburn County had an estimated population of 15,920 as of August 2016.

According to the U.S. Census QuickFacts, as of 2013, 96.1 percent of the county population reported as White alone. Hispanics or Latino constitute 1.5 percent of the county's population, the same percent as the population category of Two or More Races. American Indian/Alaska Native represent 1.3 percent, while both Black/African American and Asian are at .5 percent.

Municipal Population

Six townships and one city have seen double digit increases since the 2010 Census; the Towns of Bashaw, Bass Lake, Minong, Spooner and Trego and the City of Shell Lake.

Several Washburn County municipalities lost population in the decade between the 2000 Census and 2010 Census and most of them continue to lose population. Twelve of the twenty-five municipalities in Washburn County lost population Census to Census and, based on 2016 population estimates, eleven of them continue to lose population.

The biggest estimated population loss occurred in the City of Spooner which, incidentally, did not lose population between the 2000 and 2010 Censuses. It is estimated that the City has lost fifty-nine residents since the 2010 Census. Springbrook and Stinnett join the City of Spooner in experiencing double digit population losses in that timeframe.

Only one township in Washburn County, Evergreen, has a population over 1,000. The township of Evergreen actually has a larger population than both villages (Birchwood and Minong) in the county. Conversely, Frog Creek, the municipality located in the far northeast section of Washburn County, and the largest county township in area, has the smallest population by a wide margin with only 128 people.

For more data on municipality populations in Washburn County, refer to the Municipality Population Growth table accompanying this article.

Migration

According to the 2012 U.S. Census American Community Survey, Wisconsin ranks seventh in the nation for the percent of the population born in the state who currently reside in the state. According to analysis by the Wisconsin Taxpayer Alliance, those that move out of Wisconsin during their retirement years migrate to the warm-weather states of Florida, Texas, California and Arizona (listed in order of popularity). Wisconsin gains retirees from the adjacent states of Minnesota and Illinois.

As the members of the Baby Boom generation have reached, or are nearing, retirement age, (<http://www.pewresearch.org/next-america>), while at the same time people in older generations are living longer (72,000 U.S. centenarians in 2015), the populations in more counties are skewing older. Washburn County is a prime example of this trend.

An Aging Population

Washburn County has an estimated median age of 50.4 years. The median age for the State of Wisconsin is 38.

The majority of Washburn County residents are aged 45-64 years old, representing approximately one in three county residents. That percentage has held steady since the 2010 Census. However, more residents in this category are now in the upper end of this twenty year range.

The population age 65 and older has been increasing throughout Wisconsin since the 2010 Census, including in Washburn County. Slightly less than one in four Washburn County residents are over the age of 65, holding consistent since the 2010 Census.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, Washburn County is classified as a retirement destination. Significantly higher aging populations are found all across northern Wisconsin, where many of the counties have an abundance of the natural resource amenities (woods and water) that are attractive to retirees.

The population categories of the 0-4 years old and 45 to 54 years old, had the highest percentage loss of all the age categories in the five years since the 2010 Census, both losing 13 percent.

For more data on the age of Washburn County residents, refer to the Age Distribution-2015 Estimates table accompanying this article.

Housing and Property Values

As of the 2010 Census, seasonal and recreational housing in Washburn County made up slightly less than forty-two percent of county housing units, well above the state average of 7.4 percent. Owner-occupied units made up slightly over 42 percent, significantly less than the state average of 59 percent. The remaining county housing units were either renter-occupied or vacant.

In 2005, permits for new residential construction in Washburn County almost hit the 500 mark, with 492 permits issued. Ten years later, the effects of the residential housing slump which began in 2006, are still being felt in the County.

According to the Washburn County Zoning office, for the tenth year in a row, in 2015 more permits (149) were issued for accessory buildings (i.e. garages and pole sheds) than for any other purpose. For two years, 2013 and 2014, new dwellings/principal dwellings moved up to second, passing the additions to dwellings that had been in second place for the previous seven years. That upward trend did not carry into 2015 when 56 permits were issued for dwellings/principal dwellings and 62 permits were issued for additions to dwellings.

Reflecting the rural nature of the county, six permits were issued for privies and none for billboards. There was only one commercial/industrial buildings permit issued and one for an addition to a commercial/industrial building. Permit issuance is highest in June and July, followed by October.

Equalized Values are calculated annually and used to ensure statewide fairness and equity in property tax distribution (WI Dept. of Revenue). Total equalized (fair market) value in Washburn County increased 2 percent for 2016. Approximately 1 percent of that was due to net new construction of \$119,116,900. Agricultural, Ag Forest and Undeveloped Land were the only categories decreasing in value -3, -2, and -1 percent, respectively. All other categories, Residential, Commercial, Manufacturing, and Forest saw increases. Commercial property saw the largest increase of 3 percent.

According to the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association, the median home sale price in Washburn County reached a high of \$160,000 in 2005 that has not been matched since. The median home sale price in Washburn County has fluctuated in the last five years, up one year and down the next, ranging from a low of \$121,000 (2013) to a high of \$145,000 (2015). For the first seven months of 2016, the year-to-date median home sale price was \$128,000, down 11.7 percent and 7 percent, respectively, from the same time period for both 2015 and 2014 (\$137,500).

Households by Type

The Census 2010 data showed an average household size in Washburn County at 2.27 persons, down from 2.49 in the 1990 Census. Household size in the county continues to shrink, with the 2013 American Communities Survey (ACS) estimating an average household size for Washburn County of 2.12 persons.

The ACS estimates the average family size in the county at 2.61 persons, down from the 2010 Census figure of 2.75. Although 64 percent of households are occupied by families, only 21 percent of the households in the county are families with children under the age of eighteen. Married couple families constitute 53 percent of family households. Thirty-one percent of households are made up of householders living alone, 13.5 percent of which are householders 65 years and older.