
3. IN PERSPECTIVE

One way to assess “how Southington is doing” is to establish its current development status, examine growth trends and identify demographic characteristics. Knowing who we are and where we are then allows benchmarking to compare Southington to other communities on the basis of shared characteristics such as geographic location, population size and socioeconomic conditions.



WHO WE ARE

■ Population and Household Trends Summary

Data reviewed includes actual census data for 1990 and 2000 with estimates for 2005 and projections for 2010 provided by ESRI, a leading source of demographic information. The data is presented in Appendix A. The following is a summary of findings and trends.

❖ HOUSEHOLD/POPULATION

- Southington’s population during the 1990s grew at a steady 3.1% which was slightly below the 4.5% of the 1980s. Southington’s overall population expansion was generally on par with the state but well below suburban neighbors of Berlin (11.9%), Cheshire (11.13%), Farmington (14.7%) and Wolcott (11.1%).
- Over the next decade, the town’s population growth rate is expected to increase slightly translating to an overall gain of 5.6% by 2010.
- Household formation in Southington grew by 9.5% over the past decade, or

1,317 households, in comparison to 12.8% in previous decade (1980-1990). In contrast, the County and the State recorded a more moderate increase of 3.2% and 5.7%, respectively.

- Family households continue to be an important component in Southington accounting for nearly 75% of the household base. However, non-family households are projected to expand by 2.5% annually in Southington over the next five years, or nearly five times the rate of growth for family households.
- A notable decline in married couples with children is observed indicative of the impact of recently developed age-restricted housing in town. Between 1990 and 2000, married couples with children declined by -3.2% compared to county with -0.6% drop and a net increase of 3.1% within the state.
- Southington's household population is getting slightly older with 26.1% of Southington's households 65 and older as compared to 21.7% in 1990. Southington's median age is also somewhat older than the state at 41.6 years as compared to 38.8 for Connecticut.
- ESRI age projections indicate that Southington can be expected to follow State trends and experience an overall decline in the number of school age children (5-14 years) between 2000 and 2010, particularly in the 5 to 9 age group.

❖ INCOME

- Households in Southington are relatively affluent with 30.1% of its households earning above \$100,000 as compared to 24.6% for the County and 28.1% for the state.
- Median income in Southington is \$70,789 (2005 estimate) as compared to \$59,492 for the County and \$64,462 for the state.
- Median income in Southington has kept healthy pace with inflation over the 2000 to 2005 period averaging 3.4% a year.
- Per capita income is growing at even a slightly faster pace of 4.5% but lags behind the state indicative of the greater share of households with families in town (77%) versus Connecticut (67%).

- Although growing in affluence, Southington continues to display significant income diversity with even distribution of households earning incomes between \$35,000 and \$150,000.

❖ HOUSING TRENDS

- Southington is a significant source of new housing in the region with housing production averaging 207 housing permits a year between 1997 and 2004 for a total of 1,660 units in the 8 year period.
- Southington accounted for 22% all permits issued within the immediate region between 1997 and 2004, with nearly double the total number issued in Bristol, Farmington or Berlin which followed Southington in permit activity.
- Consistent with past housing trends, single-family homes continues to dominate new product in Southington with 74% of new housing permits in 2004 associated with single-family units (both fee simple and detached condo). However, condo permits, both attached and detached, appear to be on the rise accounting for one-third of the permit total in 2004.
- Home ownership has increased from 77.8% to 78.9% that has resulted from a rise in single-family housing which increased from 68.5% to 70.9%.
- According to 2000 census, more than 51% of Southington's residents are new to the town having relocated to the community between 1990 and 2000. One-third of those residents moved to Southington between 1995 and 2000.

❖ EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- Southington residents are well educated to meet a wide range of job opportunities with 54% reporting a high school degree and some college which is slightly above the county and on par with the state. Meanwhile nearly a third of Southington's adult population reported a bachelor's degree or better. Only 14% lacked a high school degree as compared to 17.7% for the region and 16% for the state.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Southington is one of the seven communities that comprise the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Area. The others are Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, New Britain, Plainville and Plymouth. Though small, this region has a diversity of development patterns, ranging from urbanized to rural. Physically the largest town in the region in land area, Southington falls in the mid-range based on population. It is the third largest community behind New Britain (71, 538) and Bristol (60,062) and has more than twice the population of Berlin (18,215) and Plainville (17,328). The most rural community in the region is Burlington, with a 2000 population of 8,190.

Southington and Plainville probably have the most in common of the Towns in the region. They are linked historically by a shared origin in Farmington and physically by Route 10 and a common boundary that visually merges in development patterns. Plainville is more densely developed than Southington, accommodating 44% of the population and 50% of the housing units in only 27% of the land area. Reflective of its small size and dense development pattern, Plainville's population growth has been relatively stable since 1970, hovering around 17,000. Southington's population steadily increased during the same period, experiencing a 28.4% increase overall.

POPULATION

Of the state's 169 towns only 6 are "comparable" to Southington in terms of total population as reported in the 2000 Census — that is, within a 5,000-person range in either direction, or a population between 35,000 and 45,000. These communities are the Town of Groton (39,907), Middletown (43,167), Norwich (36,117), Shelton (38,101), Torrington (35,202) and Wallingford (43,026). Of these towns, Groton, Shelton and Wallingford have been selected as peer towns because they are generally comparable in land area, access and external influences on development (e.g., highways, market pressures, etc.)

When compared with these towns Southington's population growth between 1990 and 2000 was moderate, coming in the lowest of the four towns. In all four of the Towns the rate of growth in housing units exceeded that of population, with Southington showing the second highest rate of growth in housing units. In spite of this Southington is the least dense per square mile in housing units. Since 2000 (through 5/24/05) housing permits for 937 units have been issued; 211 (23%) of

**Table 3-1
Peer Town Comparisons: Population**

| POPULATION SIZE | SOUTHINGTON | GROTON | SHELTON | WALLINGFORD |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Population 2000 | 39,728 | 39,007 | 38,101 | 43,026 |
| Growth 1990-2000 | 3.1% | -11.6% | 7.6% | 5.4% |
| Housing Units 2000 | 15,557 | 16,817 | 14,707 | 17,306 |
| Growth 1990-2000 | 9.1% | 1.3% | 13.3% | 8.6% |
| Land Area Sq. Mile | 35.99 | 31.3 | 30.57 | 39.02 |
| Density/Sq. Mile | | | | |
| Population | 1,103.8 | 1,275.2 | 1,246.4 | 1,102.7 |
| Housing | 432.2 | 537.4 | 481.1 | 443.5 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census

these have been for duplex, condominium and apartment units, higher density types of housing. The rate of increase in this five year period is 72% of the total housing unit increase that occurred between 1990 and 2000 of 1,299 units.

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The State Department of Education developed Education Reference Groups (ERGs) to provide perspective in terms of district-level resources/expenditures and student achievement when comparing school districts. The criteria used to determine peer communities include

socioeconomic status as determined by

- median family income
- percentage of children with at least one parent with a bachelor's degree of higher, and,
- percentage of children's parents holding jobs in executive, managerial or professional occupations;

indicators of need, as reflected in

- percentage of children living with a single parent or non-family household,

- school-age children receiving Aid To Families with Dependent Children as a percentage of total enrollment, and
- percentage of children whose families speak a language other than English at home; and

enrollment.

On this basis the state’s school districts are divided into nine Education Reference Groups or ERGs.

Southington’s ERG (ERG D) is comprised of 20 communities, that is, nineteen other communities with which Southington can be compared based on the indicators above. These communities are (in alphabetical order with 2000 population figures):

| Table 3-2 Education Reference Group D | | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| TOWN | POPULATION | TOWN | POPULATION |
| Berlin | 18,215 | North Branford | 13,906 |
| Branford | 28,683 | North Haven | 23,035 |
| Clinton | 13,094 | Old Saybrook | 10,367 |
| Colchester | 14,551 | Rocky Hill | 17,966 |
| Columbia | 4,971 | Shelton | 38,101 |
| East Hampton | 13,352 | Southington | 39,728 |
| East Lyme | 18,118 | Tolland | 13,146 |
| Hamden | 56,913 | Watertown | 21,661 |
| New Milford | 27,121 | Wethersfield | 26,271 |
| Newington | 29,306 | Windsor | 28,237 |

As can be seen, the populations of these communities range from a low of 4,971 to a high of 56,913. Southington is the second largest town in the ERG, followed by Shelton, Newington and Windsor. Shelton and Windsor have been selected as peer towns for comparison purposes.

The summaries on Tables 3-3 and 3-4 indicate that Southington maintains a strong socioeconomic position among its peer communities. It has a low percentage of

children under age 5 living in poverty and ranks well in median income, per capita taxes and median home sales. Two indicators where Southington ranks lower, however, are in the related categories of employment growth and percentage of the grand list in commercial/industrial uses. Southington ranks above average within its ERG on per pupil expenditures at the elementary school level but below average in secondary school expenditures.

THE STATE

Recent state-wide studies have found that development in Connecticut has become highly decentralized, a phenomenon also known as sprawl. This manifests itself in traffic congestion, disinvestment in cities and poorer urbanized towns, pollution and loss of agricultural land and open space. All of these affect quality of life, which in turn impact a community's and the state's economic vitality and competitive position.

**Table 3-3
Peer Town Comparisons: ERG D**

| | SOUTHINGTON | SHELTON | WINDSOR |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Children Under 5 | 2,399 | 2,347 | 1,692 |
| % in Poverty | 3.0% | 4.1% | 5.4% |
| Children Under 18 | 9,470 | 8,972 | 6,955 |
| Preschool Attendance | 87.3% | 84.5% | 82.9% |
| First Language Not English | 10.3% | 14.7% | 12.9% |
| Husky Total | 1,036 | 981 | 1,253 |
| Births | 457 | 418 | 323 |
| Per Pupil Expenditures (2004) | | | |
| Elementary | \$9,501.64 | \$8,064.33 | \$11,165.81 |
| Secondary | \$8,763.24 | \$11,935.35 | \$10,632.63 |
| ERG Average | | | |
| Elementary | | | \$9,235.69 |
| Secondary | | | \$10,091.64 |

Source: Connecticut State Department of Education

**Table 3-4
Peer Town Comparisons: General Economic Characteristics**

| | SOUTHINGTON | GROTON | SHELTON | WALLINGFORD | WINDSOR | PLAINVILLE |
|---|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Median Income | \$65,037 | \$49,490 | \$72,980 | \$62,543 | \$69,179 | \$51,867 |
| Per Capita Tax (2002) | \$1,568 | \$1,140 | \$1,710 | \$1,676 | \$1,920 | \$1,597 |
| Median Home Sales (2003) | \$191,400 | \$181,750 | \$280,000 | \$190,000 | \$175,000 | \$144,900 |
| Indebtedness as % Expenditures* | 45.7% | 24.6% | 37.0% | 23.6% | 71.2% | 31.8% |
| Employment Growth (1992 - 2001) | -0.7% | -1.5% | 4.1% | 1.5% | 0.7% | 1.6% |
| Equalized Net Grand List (2001)(in 000's) | \$3,698.5 | \$3,891.3 | \$4,575.1 | \$4,391.1 | \$3,108.2 | \$1,514.5 |
| % Grand List Comm/Ind (2001) | 14.0% | 24.2% | 16.8% | 20.2% | 22.6% | 21.1% |

* Total debt in town divided by total expenditures in town for the same year.

Source: CERC Town Profiles 2004: Data for 2004 unless otherwise noted

Using public data sources, the areas of fiscal capability, service needs and costs for services and infrastructure were looked at in detail for all the Towns in the State in a report entitled “Connecticut Metropatterns.” Municipalities were grouped using the following characteristics:

- property tax base per household (2000) and growth in property tax base per household (1995-2000) to measure fiscal capability;
- the percentage of elementary students eligible for free lunches (2000) to measure service “needs;”
- population growth (1990-2000) and population density (2000) to evaluate per person costs for services and infrastructure.

This classification system revealed that a diversity of fiscal and social conditions going beyond the simplistic “poor cities/affluent suburbs” categories exists in Connecticut. After analysis, clusters of six different community types were identified: Central Cities (4 communities), Stressed (12 communities), At-Risk (43 communities), Fringe-

Developing (31 communities), Bedroom-Developing (57 communities) and Affluent communities (22 communities). Communities by classification are summarized in Appendix B.

Southington is one of the 57 communities categorized as Bedroom-Developing, meaning “fast-growing communities of mostly low-density residential development.” These are the areas in which nearly one-half of the land that was developed in the State in the 1980s and 1990s was located, with resultant loss of open space and increases in traffic. On average the property tax bases in these types of communities are above the state average but growing slower. This classification contains the largest number of communities (representing 24% of the state’s population) of the six categories and includes several of Southington’s neighbors: Wolcott, Cheshire, Berlin and Farmington.

