

# Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

## Chapter 2. Demographic Background

This chapter is intended to provide background on the conditions and trends that affect the pattern of growth in Stearns County. Therefore, unlike the other chapters in this plan, it does not include specific policy recommendations. It focuses on four primary areas of growth or change:

- Population trends
- Households
- Housing
- Income

Regional differences among the different parts of Stearns County, grouped into five township-city “clusters,” are also discussed.

A detailed discussion of the Stearns County economy is included in Chapter 7, Economic Development Plan.

### Population Trends

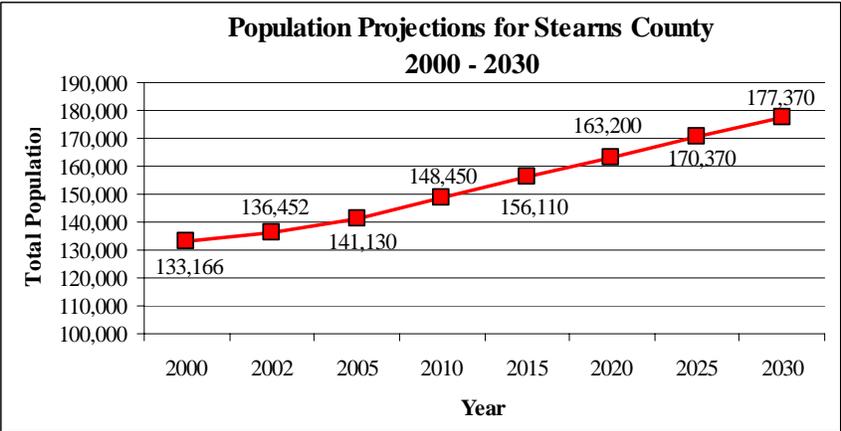
Stearns County is often defined as part of a “growth corridor” in Minnesota extending from the Brainerd area through the Twin Cities to Rochester. Reflecting this status, the population of Stearns County grew at a significantly higher rate (7.1%) than the state average (4.3%) for the five years from 2000 to 2005. According to the Office of the Minnesota State Demographer, the total population of Stearns County grew from 133,166 in 2000 to an estimated 141,130 in 2005, exceeding earlier projections of growth by 12%. The estimated 2006 population of 144,443 represents a 2.3% increase over 2005.

The goals and policies in this comprehensive plan have as a foundation an expected 2030 County population of 177,370 as shown in Figure 2.1. This represents a 33% increase in population from 2000, a slightly higher rate of growth than the previous three decades. Population in the St. Cloud metropolitan area, portions of which are outside Stearns County, is also projected to increase by 33% (167,392 to 222,600) from 2000 to 2030.

It should be noted that the estimated 2005 County population of 141,130 would translate to a 25.6% increase in population through 2030. The State Demographer’s 2007 population projections suggest a 34.9% increase from 2005 through 2035. It appears that growth is continuing at a steady pace through the current decade. Use of natural resources and demand for housing, employment, transportation, and public services are all directly affected by increases in population.

# Demographic Background

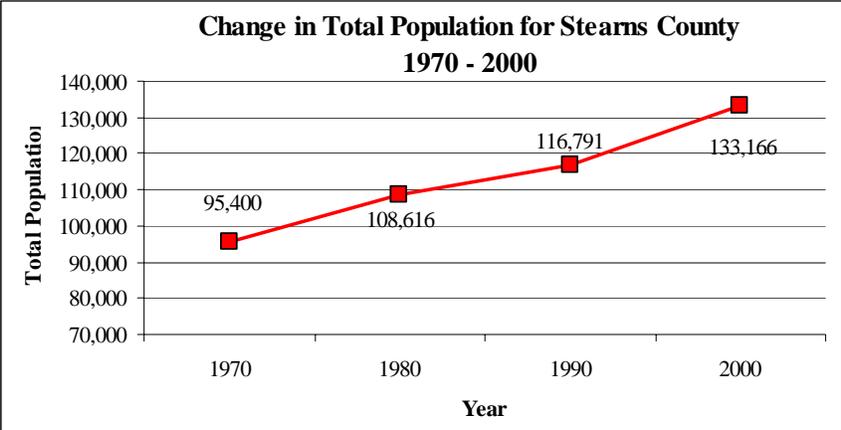
**Figure 2.1. Population projections for Stearns County, 2000-2030**



*Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center*

Figure 2.2 shows the historical trend in total population in Stearns County. From 1970 to 2000, total county population rose steadily from 95,400 to 133,166, with an average yearly increase of 1,259 people. Figure 2.3 portrays a decade-by-decade comparison of Stearns County, Minnesota, and U.S. population growth. During the 1970s and 1980s, Stearns County outpaced the state with steady population growth, while in the 1990s the County reflected the state and national growth rates.

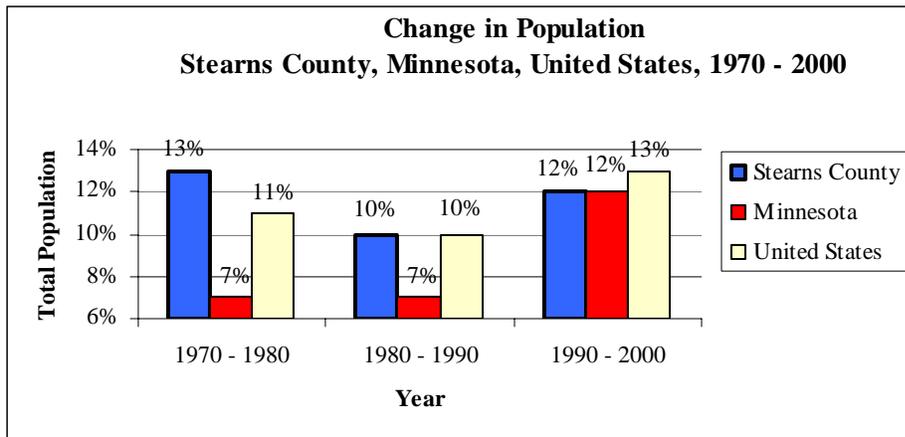
**Figure 2.2. Change in total population for Stearns County, 1970-2000**



*Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center*

# Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

**Figure 2.3. Change in population, Stearns County compared to Minnesota and U.S., 1970-2000**



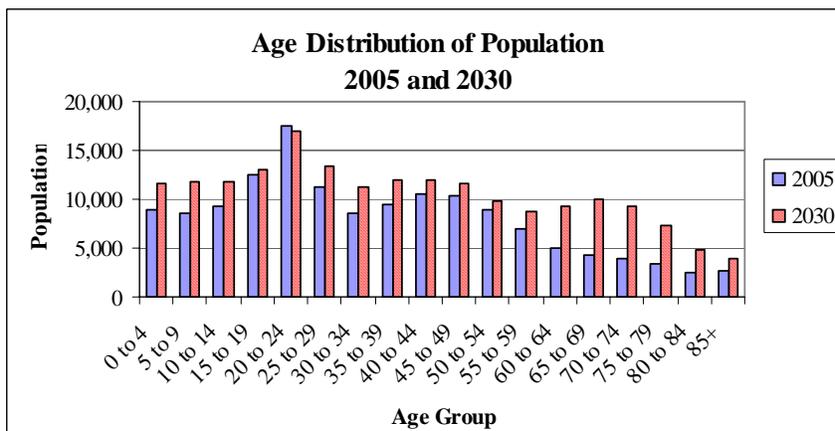
Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

For the last two decades, two age groups in Stearns County grew at a faster rate than other age groups. The largest percentage increases have occurred in the 25 to 29 age group and the 60+ age group. This reflects an in-migration of young adults and continuing residence of retirees. The net effect was that the County’s median age crept upward, although not as much as the state as a whole.

The high growth in the older (60+) age cohorts is expected to continue into the future. Figure 2.4 shows the projected dramatic increase in residents 60 years or older by 2030.

The aging of the population is expected to have impacts throughout Stearns County, both in the metropolitan area and in the non-metro and rural areas. Rural areas will likely continue to see the most rapid aging trend, as economic growth will likely continue to be more rapid in the metro area. However, all communities are expected to see the median age rise. The aging trend will have consequences for development markets, transportation needs, and for the County’s economic base.

**Figure 2.4. Age distribution of population for Stearns County, 2005 and 2030 projections**



## Demographic Background

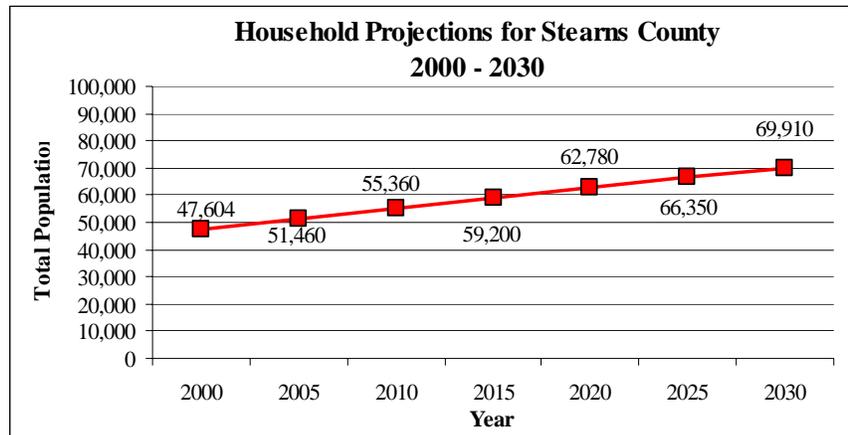
While Stearns County remains predominately white, the upward trend in non-white population that began in the 1980s continues. As of 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that about 1.5% of the population was black; 1.9% Asian, and 1.7% Hispanic (of any race). In 1990, by contrast, 0.3% of the population was black, 0.7% Asian, and 0.4% Hispanic. The primary geographic area for non-white population growth (from both birth rates and in-migration) is the St. Cloud metro area. However, even rural communities will see a growth in non-white population, consistent with the trends in other Minnesota communities.

### Households

The number of households in Stearns County is connected to both the total population and the average household size. A household is defined as an occupied housing unit. Housing units may exceed households because of vacancy rates. While the total population in Stearns County is projected to increase 33% by 2030, the number of households is projected to increase by 47%. Between 2000 and 2030 the number of households in Stearns County is expected to increase from 47,604 households in 2000 to 69,910 households in 2030 (See Figure 2.5).

The higher percentage increase in the number of households, relative to the increase in population, is due to decreasing average household size. From 1980 to 2000, the average household size in Stearns County decreased more than 6%, from 3.11 persons per household to 2.64 persons per household. The trend toward smaller households is forecast to continue through 2030, when the average household will be approximately 2.5 persons. This trend will be more pronounced away from the metropolitan area, where the aging of the population will result in a greater number of single person households and childless family households.

**Figure 2.5. Household projections for Stearns County, 2000-2030**



*Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center*

# Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

**Figure 2.6. Households and persons per household in Stearns County, 1970-2000**

	1970	1980	1990	2000	Change 1990-2000	
					Actual	Percent
Households	--	32,113	39,776	47,604	7,828	19.68
Persons Per Household	--	3.11	2.81	2.64	-0.17	-6.14

*Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center*

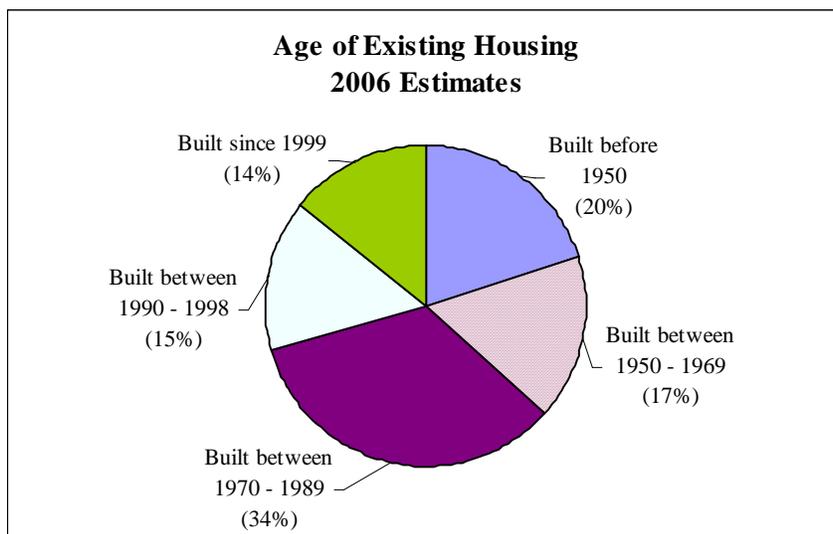
## Housing

In 2006, the estimated total number of housing units in Stearns County, including units in multiple-family dwellings, was 55,593 units. Over 62% (34,933 units) of the County’s housing stock is located in the three communities of St. Cloud, Sartell and Waite Park. Nearly 82% of total housing units are located within incorporated cities, the balance of less than 10,000, or 18%, being located in townships.

The housing stock is predominately single family homes built since 1970. As shown in Figure 2.7, 34% of housing units were constructed in the two decades from 1970 to 1989. Over 63% (35,190) of the existing housing units have been built since 1970.

While 73% of housing units in Stearns County are in single family detached structures, nearly 20% of housing units are in multiple-family structures with 3 or more units – and half that (10% of total units) in structures with 20 or more units (see Figure 2.8).

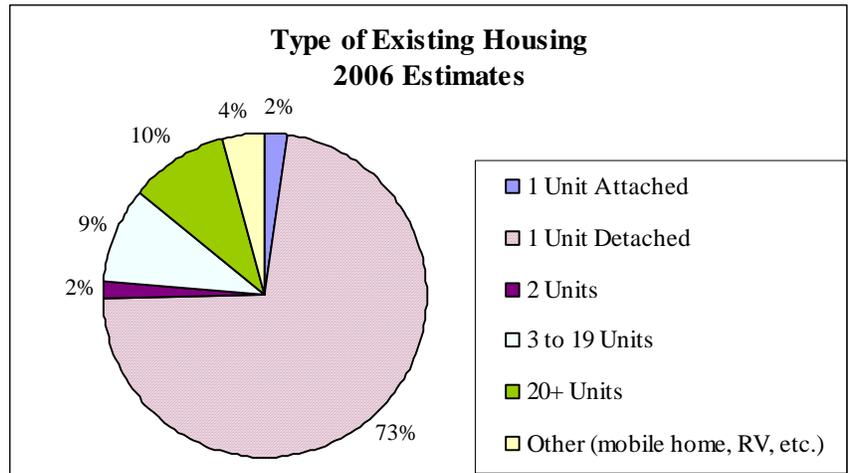
**Figure 2.7. Age of existing housing in Stearns County, 2006 estimates**



*Source: Claritas and URS Corporation*

## Demographic Background

**Figure 2.8. Type of existing housing units in Stearns County, 2006 estimates**



*Source: Claritas and URS Corporation*

### Income

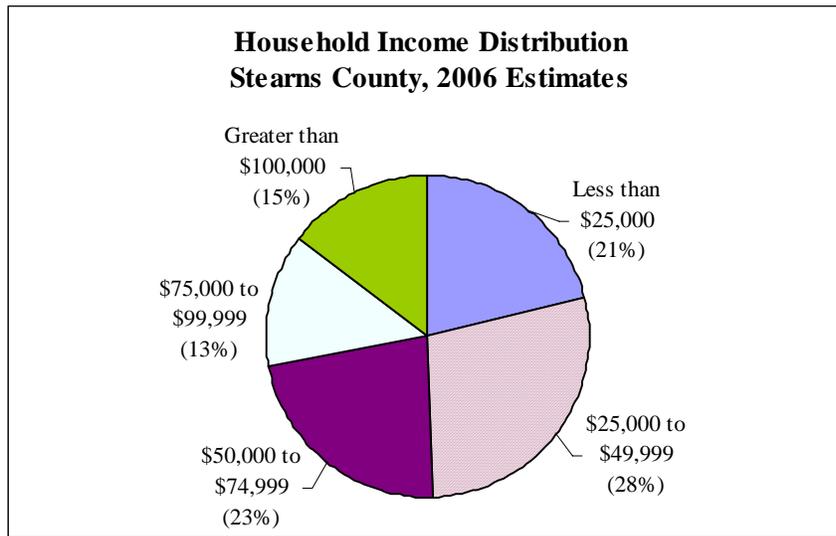
Based on the 2000 Census, in 1999 Stearns County had a median household income of \$42,426, and a median family income of \$51,553. These data place Stearns County lower than the comparable median figures for the State of Minnesota, but above the median figures for the United States. Stearns County is in the top quarter of Minnesota counties for median income.

By 2006, the median income for households had increased to \$50,600 (estimates by Claritas). However, median household income is actually increasing at a slightly slower rate than inflation over the last seven years, meaning that household income is declining in real terms. The decline in real income is a trend that has been seen across the nation since 2000.

The median income statistics, being lower than the statewide median income for both households and families, are also reflected in the County's poverty rate. According to the 2000 Census, 8.7% (11,037 persons) of the population in Stearns County lived in poverty, exceeding the 7.9% poverty rate for the State of Minnesota in 2000.

# Stearns County Comprehensive Plan

**Figure 2.9. Household income distribution for Stearns County, 2006 estimates**



Source: Claritas and URS Corporation

## Regional Demographic Trends

Stearns County’s size – 1,394 square miles – and its 54-mile length from east to west make it a diverse county with a wide variety of communities and environments. For the purpose of public outreach for the Comprehensive Plan, townships and cities within the County were grouped into five clusters, as shown below and in Figure 2.10. (The metro-area cities of St. Cloud and Waite Park were not included in these groupings.)

Cluster	Cities	Townships
1 – Northwest	Freeport, Greenwald, Meire Grove, Melrose, New Munich, St. Rosa Sauk Centre	Ashley, Getty, Grove, Millwood, Oak, Melrose, Raymond, Sauk Centre
2 – Northeast	Albany, Avon, Holdingford, St. Anthony, Sartell, St. Joseph, St. Stephen	Albany, Avon, Brockway, Collegeville, Holding, Krain, LeSauk, St. Joseph, St. Wendel
3 – Southwest	Belgrade, Brooten, Elrosa, Lake Henry, Roscoe, St. Martin, Spring Hill	Crow Lake, Crow River, Lake George, Lake Henry, North Fork, St. Martin, Spring Hill, Zion
4 – South Central	Cold Spring, Eden Valley, Paynesville, Richmond, Rockville	Eden Lake, Farming, Munson, Paynesville, Wakefield
5 – Southeast	Kimball, St. Augusta	Fair Haven, Luxemburg, Lynden, Maine Prairie

## Demographic Background

A brief summary of population and household trends during the 1990-2004 period within each cluster indicates some of the differences among them.

**Cluster 1 – Northwest.** Most housing and population growth is occurring within and around the larger cities along the I-94 corridor, particularly Sauk Centre and Melrose. The smaller cities and most townships show slightly declining populations but relatively stable numbers of households. The agricultural economy remains strong in this area.

**Cluster 2 – Northeast.** Substantial growth is occurring within both cities and townships at the edge of the Metro area, and along both the Mississippi River corridor and the I-94 corridor, including the cities of Sartell, St. Joseph and Avon, and Brockway and Collegeville townships. Other townships remained fairly stable or lost population as land area was annexed by adjacent cities. The wooded landscape and the scenic resources of the Avon Hills continue to attract residents.

**Cluster 3 – Southwest.** This area of the County is dominated by agriculture, largely row and vegetable crops, and shows a pattern of declining population and household numbers. Most townships and cities have small populations, and residents of the area are concerned with maintaining viable communities.

**Cluster 4 – South Central.** This area includes the recreational amenities of the Sauk River Chain of Lakes, as well as urban centers along MN Highway 23, including Paynesville, Richmond and Cold Spring. Most cities and townships are experiencing increases in population and households.

**Cluster 5 – Southeast.** This area is affected by the presence of the Mississippi and Clearwater rivers and by development pressure along the I-94 corridor. Most townships and the City of Kimball are experiencing modest growth in household numbers, and some are seeing population growth as well.

**Stearns County Comprehensive Plan**

INSERT FIGURE 2.10

## Demographic Background

Page left blank intentionally