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Three townships in Macomb among state's top population gainers

By Norb Franz, The Macomb Daily

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To someone residing outside Macomb Township, a quick glance of new population figures might falsely leave the impression that miles of property were annexed from a neighboring community.

According to [estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau](#), the township experienced a net increase of 5,799 residents from 2010 to 2014. That's the most of any community in Michigan and five more than Grand Rapids in terms of growth.

It's no surprise to Macomb Township Supervisor Janet Dunn.

Dunn credits the post-Great Recession resurgence of new residential housing in the township on the quality of the four local school districts, "affordable" home prices, low tax rates and its parks and recreation center and programs as the top reasons for continued local growth.

In 2010, Macomb Township had 79,660 residents. In 2014 -- the last year with population estimates provided by the Census Bureau in between its once-every-10-years national counts -- the township was home to 85,459 people.

"We have consistently led the state of Michigan in new home building permits," Dunn said. "In fact, Macomb County had 1,808 building permits last year. Macomb Township had 455 of those permits. So 25 percent of what's happening in the county is happening in the township."

Dunn expects her community to continue to be a leader in population gains for at least the next few years. Approximately 15 single-family subdivisions are in some stage of development. Construction is ongoing in about six of those subdivisions and the remainder at a various stages of preliminary review and development.

Macomb Township is not alone among municipalities in Macomb County in terms of significant population gains.

Neighboring Shelby Township, with 76,859 residents, has 3,029 more people than it had in 2010. That's the 5th highest increase in people in the state.

Clinton Township added 2,278 people over the past five years, rounding out the state's Top 10 in growth. The influx helped Clinton retain its rank as the largest township in Michigan. Perhaps more notably, Clinton Township leaped Flint in 2014 to become the 7th-most populated community in the state with current population standing at 99,084.

One sign of the township's growth is the expected construction of Kensington Church, a large non-denominational church. Non-denominational churches tend to locate in areas experiencing significant population growth.

Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel coined the phrase "Make Macomb Your Home" and thousands have indeed done that across the county. None of the cities, townships or villages in the county experienced population drops by the end of the 2010-2014 period.

"I'm not surprised," said Steve Cassin, director of the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development.

"There is a good quality of life – a quality of life where you can buy affordable housing. Prices are a little cheaper here than our western county neighbors," he said.

When Cassin and his staff receive calls daily from businesses looking to buy buildings or lease space, they point out the county's population provides a robust labor pool.

"They may have to do some training (of new hires) but at least the population base is there," he said.

Cassin pointed out that the growth leaders Clinton, Macomb and Shelby township have major roads that residents use for direct access to communities to the west like Auburn Hills and others where their jobs may be located, or to reach Interstate 94 for those who work in Detroit.

More people results in more patrons for stores, restaurants and other business.

Higher population generates more traffic and increased demand for wider roads to accommodate more vehicles.

"There's always challenges with infrastructure," Cassin acknowledged. But the county planning boss added that having considerable traffic is a positive sign of housing construction and other economic growth that is more desirable than lack of traffic symptomatic of declining population or unemployment.

"Roads are definitely a concern," Dunn said.

On Romeo Plank, for example, northbound traffic often crawls where the road narrows to one lane approaching 22 Mile Road in non-rush hours and weekends. At the same time, southbound motorists heading to that intersection – under consideration by county road officials for the next roundabout in the county – may be backed up for nearly a mile.

More building permits, more construction and more property assessments and tax bills in her township means an increased workload for township employees, the supervisor said.

On a downward note, the number of housing permits issued in Macomb County during the first four months of 2015, excluding rentals, has dropped 23.7 percent from the same period last year. In Oakland County, the decrease is 9.5 percent.

As the suburban fringe pushes further north in Macomb County, officials hope home builders will consider opportunities to build units in the cities in the southern half of the county that are nearly fully developed. Vacant lots scattered across Warren, Roseville and Eastpointe provide a chance to construct new houses that could be sold at a lower price than identical homes in the northern half of Macomb, Cassin said.

Overall, Michigan's population has barely changed over first half of the current decade, rising just one-third of 1 percent. But within the Great Lake State, some areas had explosive growth and others had continuing declines.

Southeastern Michigan experienced a significant portion of the growth. Much of the upward population change in Michigan occurred in the center part of the Lower Peninsula, stretching from Macomb County through the Grand Rapids metropolitan region, said Eric Guthrie, a state demographer.

“Many of the areas in Wayne County are still recording population losses over the period,” he said.

Detroit recorded a net loss of 30,945 residents during the past five years — a 4.35 percent drop.

Also of note in Michigan, the city of Saginaw fell below 50,000 residents for the first time since prior to 1910.

URL: <http://www.macombdaily.com/special-news-reports/20150601/three-townships-in-macomb-among-states-top-population-gainers>

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