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Connecticut Cities Rallying

State's Urban Areas Post Population Gains for the First Time in 60 Years

By SHELLY BANJO

Reversing a decades-long trend toward suburban sprawl, people are starting to flock to Connecticut's cities.

The new urban dwellers are being lured by the same factors that created cities in the first place: better transportation and proximity to jobs.

Suburban Sprawl Reverses

Connecticut cities that saw the largest increase in housing units between 2000 and 2010

CITY	POPULATION IN 2010	POP. CHANGE FROM 2000	INCREASE IN HOUSING UNITS SINCE 2000
1. Stamford	122,643	▲ 4.7%	3,256
2. Bridgeport	144,229	▲ 3.4	2,645
3. Danbury	80,893	▲ 8.1	2,635
4. Norwich	40,493	▲ 12.1	2,059
5. New Haven	129,779	▲ 5.0	2,026
6. Southington	43,069	▲ 8.4	1,890
7. Manchester	58,241	▲ 6.4	1,740
8. Norwalk	85,603	▲ 3.2	1,662
9. Hamden	60,960	▲ 7.1	1,650
10. Wallingford	45,135	▲ 4.9	1,639

Source: Census Bureau

All of the state's largest cities posted population gains between 2000 and 2010 for the first time in 60 years, according to a recent analysis of the latest Census count by the Regional Plan Association, an urban research group.

The population grew by nearly 5% in both New Haven and Stamford and by 3.4% in Bridgeport, the first gain that city has seen since 1950. The state's capital, Hartford, grew by 2.6% over the past decade. Hartford has posted growth in only one other census since 1960. It lost more than a tenth of its residents between 1990 and 2000.

In total, Connecticut's five largest cities gained close to 23,000 residents, fueling about 13% of the state's growth.

Connecticut is part of a national shift. Urban areas with more than 50,000 people grew 10.8%, compared with 5.9% growth in areas

with between 10,000 and 50,000 people.

In New Jersey, four out of the five biggest cities grew from 2000 to 2010. Jersey City and Elizabeth saw their populations increase by more than 3%, while Newark and Edison grew by 1.3% and 2.3%, respectively. Paterson's population decreased by 2%.

When George Pradhan was laid off from his investment-banking job in New York City in 2008, he said the big city's noise and crowds started to wear on him. A year later, he took a job as a marketing consultant in Wilton, Conn., but decided he didn't want to relocate that deep in the suburbs.

Downtown Stamford, a 45-minute train ride from Grand Central Station, provided him with a happy medium. He signed a \$2,500-a-month lease on a 600-square-foot apartment in a new development called Park Square West.

"Stamford is a yuppie heaven. You have your night life and restaurants downtown but you're 10 minutes away from places to go kayaking," says Mr. Pradhan, 25 years old. "Plus the living standards here are insanely high for the price we pay while still living downtown."

Housing growth has concentrated in Connecticut's larger cities where large businesses have been moving from New York in search of cheaper rents. Royal Bank of Scotland and Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide have both made that move during the past year. "The growing financial services sector here is attracting an influx of 20- and 30-somethings looking for urban environments," says [Paul Jacobs](#), an executive vice president at real estate firm CB Richard Ellis.

Since 2000, Stamford has added 3,200 housing units, the most of any city or town in the state, according to the Regional Plan Association. Part of that jump can be attributed to a number of new luxury developments that have opened downtown in the past few years, including the 34-story Trump Parc and Park Square West.

In addition, cities and towns with Amtrak or commuter-rail stations received 34% of the state's overall population growth. They attracted 33% of the state's new housing, about twice their growth share experienced between 1990 and 2000, the report showed.

To be sure, the areas with the fastest growth rates continue to be smaller towns such as Oxford and Mansfield, each of which saw its population grow by nearly 30% from 2000 to 2010. But planners say it's the growth of cities that will really have an impact on the state.

"Scattered development in small towns doesn't have the same impact as growth in the cities," says [Amanda Kennedy](#), a planner at the Regional Plan Association. "Adding a couple thousand people in cities is creating demand for shops, restaurants and trains downtown."

Write to Shelly Banjo at shelly.banjo@wsj.com

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