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DOWNTOWN

Census data: Downtown population soared 46 percent

Posted by Matt Rocheleau April 6, 2011 11:00 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Downtown Boston saw by far the highest population growth rate over the past decade among city neighborhoods, jumping 46.4 percent, according to Census data recently released by the city.

NEIGHBORHOOD NUMBERS

Select a neighborhood below from the dropdown to see a breakdown of Census statistics.

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Between 2000-2010, Downtown's population, including Chinatown and the Leather District, grew to 16,298 residents, triple the rate of the next closest neighborhood, according to figures the Boston Redevelopment Authority compiled from US Census data. The neighborhood's total population exceeds only two other neighborhoods – Beacon Hill at 13,103 and the North End at 10,131.

The Downtown neighborhood, increasingly home to residents who favor living in the middle of the city, grew across every Census-measured demographic, including: a 70-percent jump in white residents; a 52.5-percent rise in Hispanics/Latinos; a 41.6-percent increase in Black/African American residents; and a 16.4-percent increase in Asians. At 30.6 percent, it remains the highest density of Asian residents in Boston.

White residents comprised 47.2 percent of Downtown Boston a decade ago, but last year the segment became a clear majority, climbing to a 54.8 representation.

Boston's population grew by 4.8 percent in the past decade to hit 617,594. The Hub remained a "majority-minority" city as 53 percent of residents are of a non-white race/ethnicity.

In Boston, 47 percent of residents are white, 22.3 percent are Black/African American, 17.5 percent are Hispanic/Latino, and 8.8 percent are Asian.

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percent over decade

West Roxbury's minority populations boomed from 2000

While Boston gained over 41,000 people age 18 years and older, the city lost around 13,000

youth residents under 18. The 11-percent drop was among the most notable statistics for research director at Boston think-tank MassINC Benjamin Forman.

"There's no question that family households have been replaced by people without kids," he said, adding that a trend of fleeing families can often be a sign of gentrification.

The ratio of total residents 18 years or older grew in all but five neighborhoods; Downtown it grew from 91 to 93.4 percent. Citywide, that ratio grew from 80 to 83 percent.

The total number of housing units Downtown surged over the past 10 years by 63.2 percent to 7,881. The growth pushed Downtown from the fewest number of housing units in 2000 to the second-fewest number of units as it surpassed the North End's 6,728 total last year. However, the housing vacancy rate Downtown, already at a citywide high 9 percent a decade ago, saw the highest growth rate nearly doubling through 2010 to 16.2 percent.

Citywide, housing grew by around 25,000 units, or 8 percent, however, vacancies also rose by 60 percent. Around 5 percent of Boston homes were empty in 2000; in 2010, around 7.25 percent of housing was vacant.

Boston's neighborhoods have no officially-defined boundaries, according to the BRA. In order to sort census data by neighborhood, the city department said it used a combination of ZIP codes and zoning boundaries to define each neighborhood's borders.

While the neighborhoods the city has mapped out for census number crunching by-and-large match how most perceive Boston's configuration, the city acknowledged some may dispute how the BRA has defined where neighborhoods begin and end.

"Everyone has their own definition of 'their' neighborhood -- the best part about Boston is there is such pride in the question -- and therefore there are no official boundaries because if there were, we'd have 617,594 different opinions," said spokeswoman Susan Elsbree.

The department plans to release additional maps and is also fielding individual requests to have data provided based on customized neighborhood boundaries.

To simplify city data analyzed for this report, Boston.com grouped, as follows, smaller neighborhoods and districts into other, larger areas creating a total of 18 city subsections: Beacon Hill includes the West End; Downtown includes Chinatown and the Leather District; Roxbury includes Mission Hill and the Longwood Medical Area; South Boston includes the South Boston Waterfront; and the South End includes Bay Village. The Harbor Islands -- with a combined population of 640 and 535 residents during the 2000 and 2010 census, respectively -- were not used in this analysis.

However, raw data is still available here for each smaller neighborhood, district and islands that the BRA defined.

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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