

Feature Story



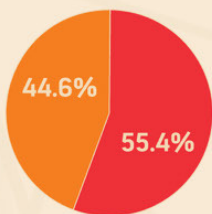
Kentucky Cities See a **POPULATION BOOM**

by Michele Hill, KLC Governmental Affairs Communications Specialist, and Joseph Coleman, KLC Research and Federal Relations Manager

Don't be surprised if you see a lot of "sold" signs in your city's residential neighborhoods. Annual population estimates released this year from the U.S. Census Bureau show cities are booming. In fact, the population of Kentucky's cities is increasing at a much faster rate than rural areas in the state. For cities that are seeing explosive growth, the trend brings its own set of unique challenges.

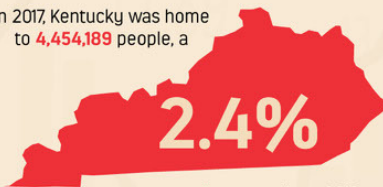
City vs. Unincorporated Population in Kentucky

Unincorporated Cities



State Population Growth

In 2017, Kentucky was home to 4,454,189 people, a



Georgetown Population



The census data shows the City of Georgetown is the fastest-growing large community in the state. It reported a population of a little more than 29,000 in 2010, but that ballooned to 33,660 in 2017. Georgetown Mayor Tom Prather believes people are choosing cities for connection, safety and a sense of belonging. "Some might think those are quaint, old-fashioned ideas, but I think those are quite real," he said.

Sitting in his office in City Hall along a busy stretch of downtown Georgetown, Mayor Prather talked about the danger of growing too quickly. "We can't become a city without a soul." He fears losing the community feel that makes Georgetown appealing to folks looking to live in the central Kentucky area. "You have to plan carefully," he warned. "During a period of rapid growth, you have to demand quality."

It's a test a lot of cities are now facing. In the past year, Kentucky cities grew by 13,377 people while unincorporated areas in the state only added 4,699 people. Demographers believe this trend has been happening for a while. From 2010 to 2017, the population of Kentucky cities swelled by nearly 4 percent while the unincorporated population saw less than a 1 percent addition.

The state's overall population continues to climb. In 2017, Kentucky was home to 4,454,189 people, a 2.4 percent increase since 2010. Louisville Metro, which includes 83 incorporated suburban cities, has increased by about 29,000 people since 2010, while Lexington has added just over 25,000. Bowling Green, Georgetown and Richmond all continue to see strong growth patterns.

Eight of Kentucky's 10 largest cities reported larger populations from 2016 to 2017. In Georgetown, close to 1,000 people moved in during that one-year time span. Mayor Prather acknowledged the city has a lot of things going for it, from the Toyota manufacturing plant to a strong infrastructure of nearby interstates and rail, plus a large and diverse labor market. He said the city is not just growing in population but also in impact. "While we may be Kentucky's seventh-largest city in terms of population, I suspect we rank significantly higher in terms of economic impact."

Making sure the city continues to expand while also holding on to its heritage and culture is something the mayor considers a joint endeavor. "It's the only way you can make sense out of the growth," he advised. "At some point in time, we're going to leave office, or this building period will be coming to an end, and we'd like to be proud of what we presided over."


He is pleased with the steps Georgetown has already taken. "We're trying to do better with processes, less seat-of-the-pants and more sophisticated management." The city now has a snow plan and has put progressive policing policies in place, such as an Angel Program that targets drug addiction. He admitted, "Just trying to be a productive, well-functioning city in 2018 is a different challenge than it was a few years ago."

Senate Majority Floor Leader Damon Thayer (R-Georgetown) represents Georgetown. He also calls it home. "It's a great place to live," he

declared. He is one of the many Kentuckians who moved into the city. He pointed out the state's population is on the move. "What most people don't realize is a majority of people live in a city," he remarked. For him and his children, Thayer said it was the right move. "That ended up being one of the best decisions I've ever made."

Mayor Prather is looking to keep Georgetown's expansion going in the right direction while also preparing to jump the next hurdle. He's hoping to raise Georgetown's profile within the region. "I want our contributions within the region to be proportional," he stated. He expects that to be instrumental as the city continues to grow and move up the chart of the state's largest cities.

Although the 2017 population estimates were just released, cities are starting to focus on the 2020 decennial census. The federal government will use population data from the nationwide endeavor to allocate hundreds of billions of dollars related to public transportation, road construction, economic development, educational programs and much more.

Local governments are encouraged to form complete count committees to help increase response rates from traditionally undercounted groups. These committees typically include representatives from community organizations, faith-based institutions, business associations, educational systems and other groups of targeted audiences. 

For more information, visit census.gov and search "complete count committees."

Make Sure Your City Is Counted

Coming in Spring 2019

The Kentucky League of Cities is gearing up to once again conduct a city census, and it is important that your city is included. Please look for it at the first of the year. The comprehensive survey is vital to ensuring cities have the latest data on everything from taxes and organization to communication and ordinances. The information is key to protecting and promoting city interests in the General Assembly as well as providing key research services to our member city officials.

More information will be coming in the months ahead, but please put it on your calendar. We are counting on 100 percent participation in the spring of 2019!