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# West side surpasses East Valley in growth

Jon Kamman

The Arizona Republic

Jun. 28, 2006 12:00 AM

The West Valley clearly has overtaken the eastern part of Maricopa County as the supergrowth region of the Valley, mid-decade census figures show.

Growth in the eastern suburbs of Phoenix was far from anemic, but a greater number of people flocked to west-side communities at a pace that pushed the area's population 50 percent higher in just 5 1/2 years.

The survey, conducted only in Maricopa County, is an official update of population figures from 2000. It will be the basis for distribution of about \$1.7 billion in state funds annually over the next five years.

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A city's share of that fortune rises or falls depending on its population change relative to other cities. A municipality receives \$300 to \$400 a year per capita.

West Valley officials, delighted to have confirmation that they deserve a much larger share of state revenue, heaved a figurative "I told ya so," given evidence that they are growing even faster than otherwise estimated by state and federal agencies.

"This tells us how many people we have to watch out for," said Joan Shafer, mayor of Surprise, which nearly tripled in population to more than 88,000.

"It tells us how many police and fire employees we need," Shafer added. Even the latest population figure, dated Sept. 1, probably is 2,000 shy of today's population, she said.

East-side communities added nearly 215,000 people since 2000, but in the West Valley,

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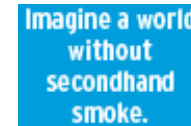
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where the total population is only half as large, cities added 218,000.

In Phoenix, 1,475,834 residents were counted, an increase of about 155,000, or nearly 12 percent, from 2000.

On the county level, the growth of more than 628,000 to a total of 3,700,516 was about as expected, Deputy Budget Director Christopher Bradley said.

The 20.5 percent growth rate is evidence of a strong economy, Bradley said, but strains the county to provide more services.

The county's share of state revenue will be about \$490 million in the coming fiscal year.

Five of 10 cities to the west of Phoenix doubled, tripled or, in the case of El Mirage, more than quadrupled in population.

"West Valley cities are growing so fast, we all share the need for improved transportation," El Mirage City Manager BJ Cornwall said. "We'll be able to use the funds to revamp our roads in need, like Dysart."

Buckeye, three times its population in 2000, had been looking for a count several thousand higher than the final figure of nearly 25,000, spokesman Bob Bushner said.

The other hypergrowth cities in the West Valley were Goodyear, at 144 percent, and Youngtown, with 105 percent growth.

Meanwhile, to the east, Queen Creek was the only community in that league. The city, which extends into Pinal County, exploded with nearly threefold growth, to about 16,000, in the portion within Maricopa County.

Queen Creek Council member Jon Wootten said he wasn't shocked by the astronomical increase and thinks it is even understated.

Patrick Flynn, a financial consultant for the town, said town officials believe they are at or above 20,000 based on numbers provided by the postal authorities.

Gilbert, Chandler and Mesa ended up with official counts below previous estimates.

Hardest hit was Gilbert, where the count was almost 5,000 lower than earlier estimates.

The town, having grown 58 percent, to 173,000 people, remains one of the five fastest-growing large communities in the country.

"It's still a little lower than what we think Gilbert is, but I think it's a number that we can live with," Town Manager George Pettit said.

Pettit said the town took a conservative approach in crafting next year's budget to avoid any major surprises. The town received about \$22 million in state-shared revenues for 2005-06, and Pettit said \$35 million is expected in 2006-07.

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Chandler planner Hank Pluster said he thinks the official figure, just below 231,000, is too low. The state's estimates had been about 1,000 higher, and the city's own calculation was about 8,000 higher.

Pluster said it is uncertain how much, if anything, Chandler stands to lose in revenue.

Mesa also came in about 4,000 below estimates, but that represented less than 1 percent of the city's total population, which topped 448,000.

Mesa solidified its spot as the nation's 40th-largest city after officials pointed out that census surveyors had missed thousands of housing units in preliminary figures.

Up to \$6 million in additional state-shared revenue was on the line, a source of funds vital to Mesa because it does not rely on a property tax to balance budgets.

"I'm pleased with the final numbers, given where we started from," said Jim Huling, assistant to Mesa's city manager.

Although many of the annual estimates from the Census Bureau and state Department of Economic Security come close to the survey's findings, improving the reliability of the estimates at an affordable cost has long vexed demographers.

"DES does what it can with the data available, but that's fairly limited," said Tom Rex, an Arizona State University business and economy researcher. "The problem is, no one is out there counting the people, because that would be too expensive."

Gov. Janet Napolitano appointed a task force this year to look into ways accuracy could be improved without undue expense.

Rex said overestimates commonly occur because they rely heavily on housing data.

The Valley has many empty homes because of real estate speculation and because the owners live elsewhere and use them only as second homes.

**Republic reporters Matt Benson, Lynh Bui, Edythe Jensen, Justin Juozapavicius, David Madrid, Dianna Nanez, Lisa Nicita and Mike Walbert contributed to this article.**

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## Your comments

In response to Nate8475...ever since the California Gold Rush of the 1850's, tall tales have been spun in the West, and they continue today with wild exaggerations about the Valley's growth. I suppose a significant part of it is just civic pride. Another part is, no doubt, people have seen the desert transformed rapidly into housing developments and strip malls.

I have had visitors come to bigger and older cities like Chicago, natives of Phoenix, and remark how backward Phoenix is, though, with a cowboy mentality still present. They and I look forward to the influx of outsiders who can sweep it away. Even though I like Phoenix and bought a home in the West Valley, I can see the exaggerations for what they are, hype.

But let's get back to the point...it's true the quality of life has been affected by the chaotic sprawl, leaving large patches of land undeveloped. The air is dirtier, the commutes longer, etc.

But you know, the Valley has lost one of its most competitive draws, affordable housing. With prices as expensive as the Chicago area, how will companies attract workers who can afford them, when the wage scale, for instance, is lower than Chicago?

Don't count on uninterrupted growth when 1 of every 3 dollars in the Valley has been generated by the housing industry, but the runup in prices has now generated a glut of homes for sale now bigger than metro LA. (George4658, June 28, 2006 08:43PM)

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In response to George4658's posting.... Chicago may have 9 million people, but it is quickly losing it's population. We just bumped Philadelphia from the fifth to sixth largest city in America. With the stunning pace of growth, Phoenix could very well end up being bigger than the Windy City in 10 to 15 years. (Nate8475, June 28, 2006 07:30PM)

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Mind boggling 3.7 million? I live in the Chicago area with over 9 million, so one's perspective can be narrow in smaller areas. And I am one of the folks who has a second home in the West Valley that sits empty alot like others. Just glad we bought before real estate prices went out of control! I'm not gloating about the appreciation because my concern is for my children and others who will be forced to live in something smaller and far more expensive! (George4658, June 28, 2006 06:39PM)

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I agree with Nate8475. I have lived here most of my life, and I am

tired of feeling like I am being pushed out of my house. I remember a time when housing prices were low, freeways weren't jam packed at 6 am, the drought wasn't an issue, and we didn't have the "big brown cloud" surfacing at 7 am. I want the old days back, but that's not likely ever going to happen. The investors have driven up property values to the point where a lot of people can't afford to buy now, and they're encouraging putting housing developments on every square mile of our sacred desert- 10-15 years from now, there won't be any desert left and I am petrified the price of city water is going to triple (just like gas) because of a severe shortage. I wouldn't shed a tear if no more building permits were to be issued anywhere- if we quit throwing up houses on every available square mile, people will be more hesitant on moving here if housing wasn't so readily available. Is there anyone in our state senate who has addressed these concerns? Is anything going to be done about it? (Kris2570, June 28, 2006 03:45PM)

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Hello I am in Buckeye, Arizona where the growth is booming but the market has severely slowed down. I have horse property or investment, 4.25 IRRIGATED Acres with a 2100 sq. foot custom home, wooden @#\$%& throughout, 18 inch tile tile throughout, cut berber carpet in bedrooms, knotty pine throughout home, jacuzzi tub in the huge master bedroom vaulted ceilings. 3 bedrooms, 2 full baths. Full covered back porch, this home is in EXCELLENT condition built in 1999. Our acreage is surrounded by a 4 rail white pipe fence with 3 separate pastures. We have over 40 trees including citrus and fruit, grape vines. We also have a tack/utility shed that is 12 x 24 almost new, mare motel and round pen. This property can also be split into 1 acre parcels. This is a country cottage paradise. We started out asking \$949,000 and now down to \$875,000. We are accepting offers and have to move business, relocation. This is a guaranteed investment or just a beautiful way to live. Our home alone is worth about \$325,000 or more. Irrigated acres are selling for \$175,000 on up around in the surrounding area. If anyone can help or interested this is a STEAL. please email DMGRNACRES@AOL.COM if interested. FSBO NO ADDED COMMISSION!!! (1989, June 28, 2006 01:19PM)

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Sounds like a great opportunity for entrepreneurs! I can foresee new charter and private schools. Private hospitals exist in other big cities. Why not here? I can also foresee private express bus companies since the express bus route ends at 79th Avenue today. (Tim5185, June 28, 2006 09:31AM)

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With a mind boggling 3.7 million people living in the Valley, I am

more worried about our quality of life. Our hospitals and schools are jam packed as it is, our freeways and streets are clogged in rush hour grid lock, and the air we breathe is a yellowish smog.

It is sad in this day that local politicians only see dollar signs in their eyes since more population means more revenue for their towns. When and where do we draw the line? (Nate8475, June 28, 2006 08:44AM)

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