

## **Rockland: Seniors will drive county population rise**

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Rockland is growing, and graying. In the next 10 years, the county is projected to grow to 320,000, an increase of more than 8 percent. The numbers, which were released Tuesday by the Planning Department, are part of three-year, \$50,000 joint study with Cornell University 's Program on Applied Demographics that was partially funded through the New York Metropolitan Council.

The number of seniors 65 and older is expected to increase 33 percent in the next decade, from 36,400 to 48,000. The 36,400 are projected to increase 64 percent between 2005 and 2035, to nearly 60,000 seniors.

At the same time, the number of young people under 18 years old is expected to grow to 86,000 by 2020, or about 5 percent. By 2035 that number is projected to be 98,000, when the county's total population is projected to hit 343,000.

"It's a pretty significant trend," said Michael D'Angelo, a research coordinator for the county Planning Department. "The question is what does it mean for services and planning?"

D'Angelo said the county's population growth was driven by steady birth rates and not immigration.

The growth of Rockland 's senior population is a long-term trend and was not a surprise, D'Angelo said.

In both the 1990 and 2010 census, Rockland was counted as having the fastest-growing senior population in the state.

As the county tries to care for its aging population, issues such as senior housing and transportation will likely grow in importance,

said Harriet Cornell, D-Clarkstown, chairwoman of the Rockland County Legislature.

"What's interesting is that our senior population is growing across all spectrums as opposed to one place," Cornell said. "Our seniors are working longer and volunteering more. They are a significant part of the county's demographic and purchasing power, and we want to keep them here."

Cornell said the county is expected to release a report on senior quality of life as part of the "Project Tomorrow: Aging in Place" study that was begun in 2008.

D'Angelo said the numbers are based on households, local building records and consultation with state and regional demographic experts, land-use and transportation planners and a panel of local real estate and economic development experts.

The department's numbers are not associated with the 2010 census, but are used in other calculations, such as local income, and can affect the county's qualifications for federal aid.

For the past four years, the Planning Department has successfully argued that the Census Bureau has underreported the county's population.

D'Angelo said the Planning Department's new numbers would likely be used in conjunction with the 2010 census.

"The projections data will serve as a vital tool in the future planning for Rockland's municipalities, as well as in the county's own planning efforts," County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef said in a statement. "This valuable data will also enable Rockland's service agencies and organizations to better plan for future service needs."

The data are available on the county's website at [www.rocklandgov.com](http://www.rocklandgov.com).

The Planning Department is expected to release more detailed data about the county in September.