

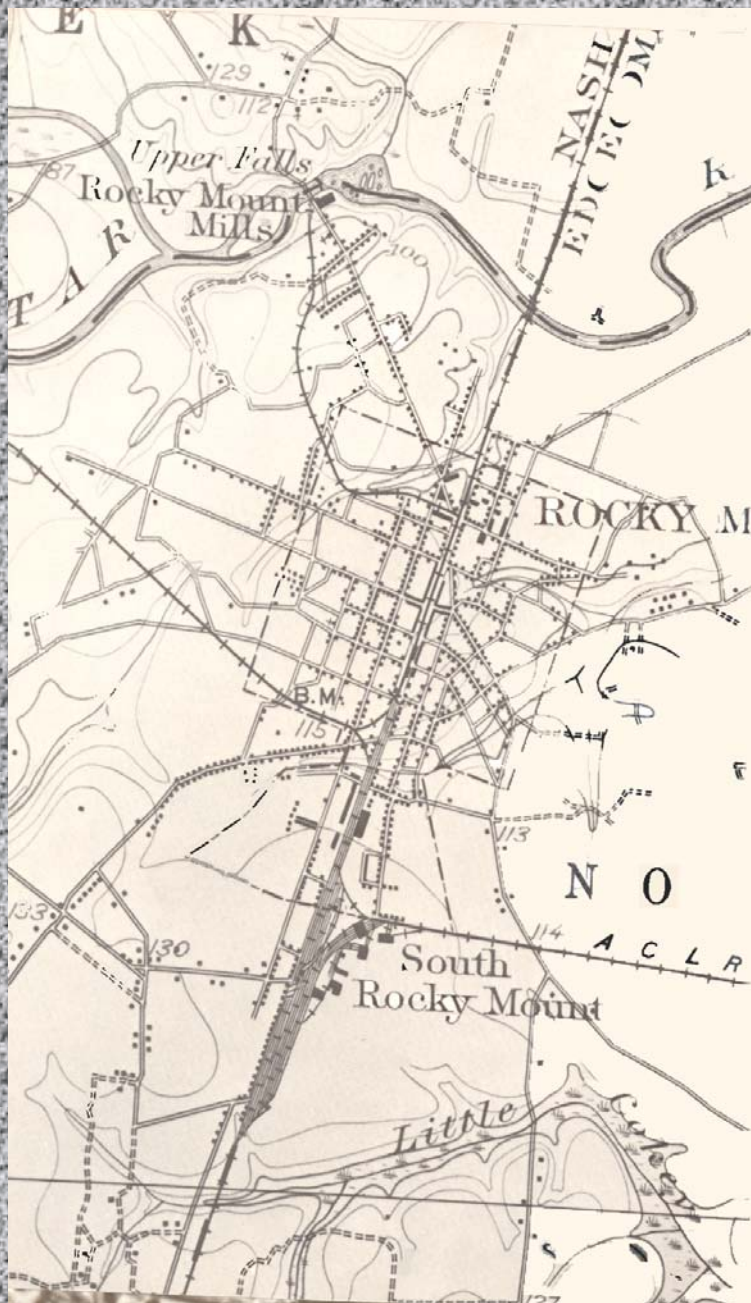
DEMOGRAPHICS HISTORY AND STUDY AREA

In order to prepare a Comprehensive Plan suitable for the future of the Rocky Mount area, it is important to understand the factors that shaped this community.

This chapter describes the relationship between Rocky Mount and its geographical neighbors, the history of the City and the demographic characteristics that define this area. These factors have in many ways affected the current development conditions in Rocky Mount, and provide a baseline to help understand the planning issues facing the City.

Forecasts of future population are also presented, since any plans for the community must take into account the anticipated population base and its growth rate. The following topics are covered in this section:

- General Characteristics of Rocky Mount and the Study Area
- Population Trends and Forecasts

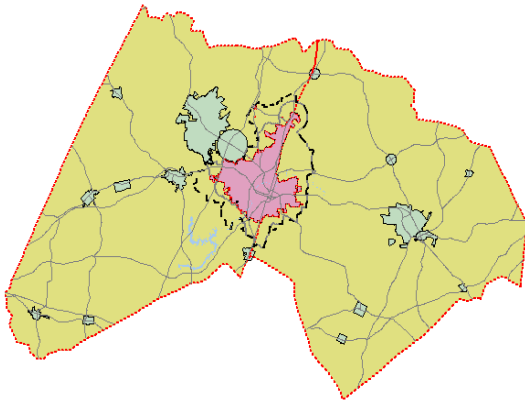


USGS Topographical Map 1902



I. PHYSICAL FEATURES AND HISTORY

This plan will focus on the issues within the Study Area, which is comprised of the corporate limits of Rocky Mount, adjacent properties in the Rocky Mount Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) and properties beyond the ETJ that are likely to be impacted by future growth. Although the Study Area contains approximately 70 square miles, only land within the ETJ is entirely under the City's jurisdiction for planning and land use control. The corporate limits contain 36.75 square miles, which is a little more than 1/2 of the ETJ area. The corporate limits and the boundary of the Study Area are shown on Map 3-3.



Map 3-1: Study Area in Nash & Edgecombe Counties

A. LOCATION

The City of Rocky Mount is located on the western fringe of the Coastal Plain in northeastern North Carolina. The western two-thirds of the City lies within Nash County, while the eastern one-third of the City is found in Edgecombe County. Rocky Mount is also located near the geographic center of Region L, which encompasses 2,707 square miles and includes the five counties of Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson. Rocky Mount is the largest municipality in Region L, the fifth largest in the North Carolina Coastal Plain, and the fifteenth largest in the state.

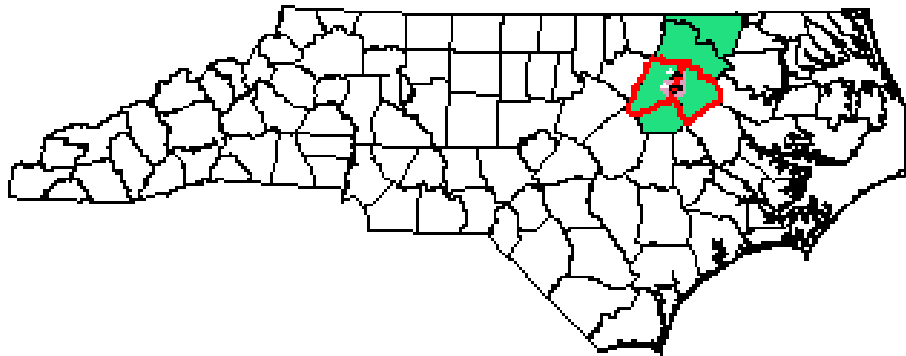
B. DISTINGUISHING PHYSICAL FEATURES

The most significant physical feature in the Study Area is the Tar River. The topography of the Study Area is gently sloping with shallow elevation changes that cause the Tar River to flow through the Study Area in a northeasterly direction, forming a green corridor that bisects it. Rocky Mount is located on the fall line of the Tar River, and approximately 40% of the City is located south and east of the river. Several tributaries and swamps irrigate this area, including: Stony Creek, Compass Creek, Maple Creek, Hornbeam Branch, Goose Branch, Grape Branch, Beech Branch, Cowlick Branch, and Cokey Swamp. The Tar River Reservoir is located southwest of the City and contributes to the municipal water supply as well as provides a large recreational area that has been the focus of recent residential development. (Refer to Map 9-1)

C. NEIGHBORING MUNICIPALITIES

Within the Study Area there are several municipalities that have a significant impact on planning in Rocky Mount. Four small municipalities are adjacent to the extraterritorial jurisdiction of Rocky Mount. Sharpsburg to the south, Red Oak to the west, Dortches to the northwest, and Whitakers, to the north of the City's ETJ boundary.

Nashville, the county seat for Nash County, is located west of Rocky Mount. It has captured much of the recent residential growth in the area and will possibly share common jurisdictional boundaries with the City in the near future.



Map 3-2: Rocky Mount and Region L

Wilson, the county seat for Wilson County, and Tarboro, the county seat for Edgecombe County, are two other neighboring municipalities whose future growth and development will impact planning in Rocky Mount. However, due to current rates and direction of their growth, they are not expected to reach the City's jurisdictional boundaries anytime in the foreseeable future.

Table 3-1 lists the populations and rate of population change from 1990-2000 for Rocky Mount and each of these neighboring municipalities. All of these communities generally enhance the economy of Rocky Mount. They provide a market for goods and services sold in the City and employment opportunities for some Rocky Mount residents. Additionally, they are becoming bedroom communities for a number of commuters who work in Rocky Mount.

D. City History

During its 134 years, Rocky Mount has seen many changes in its physical character. Today, the City has a population of 55,893 dwarfing the initial 300 people living in the town when it was first incorporated in 1867. Land use has also increased significantly from the original one square mile area to 36.75 square miles as of April 2000.



Tuscarora Indians hunted and settled the area of "rocky mounds" along the Piedmont boundary at the Great Falls of the Tar River. The name "Rocky Mount" is attributed to a large granite outcropping on the north side of the falls. It was first used as a name for this

area when a post office was established at the Falls on March 22, 1816. Two years later, in 1818, the state's second cotton mill was built at the Falls, and from that origin, a mill town emerged.

Southeast of the mill town a second settlement formed around the freight platforms of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, which was established in 1840. The establishment of a rail depot to serve agricultural and textile business directed growth of Rocky Mount from the Falls to the railroad. The business center migrated east as businesses not dependent on the waterpower at the falls moved to the vicinity of the depot. This railroad development initiated a shift in general activity from the Falls in Edgecombe County to the depot in Nash County. In 1871, the tracks of the railroad became the official boundary line between the two counties.

In July 1863, a Civil War battle lasting only one day destroyed the cotton mill, railroad bridge, trestles, depot, and related buildings. The railroad bridge was rebuilt in short order and the mills restored by 1865.

The village around the Rocky Mount depot was incorporated as a town on February 19, 1867. This new town consisted of an area of one square mile with approximately 300 residents. It did not include the nearby village inhabited by employees of Rocky Mount Mills. This area was incorporated in 1893, but merged into the town limits of Rocky Mount in 1927.

In the late 1800's, the tobacco market and the railroad were the major sources of economic growth in Rocky Mount. Established in the late 1880's the tobacco market became one of the world's leading markets by the turn of the century.

In 1874, the town became a relay station for the Wilmington and Weldon railroad, which produced an immediate increase in railroad employment. The result was a significant increase in the town's population. Construction began in

Table 3-1: 1990 and 2000 Population of Nash and Edgecombe County Municipalities

	1990 Population	2000 Population	Population Change	% Change
Rocky Mount	49,961	55,893	5,932	11.87%
Wilson	36,930	44,405	7,475	20.24%
Tarboro	11,037	11,138	101	0.91%
Nashville	3,617	4,309	692	19.13%
Sharpsburg	1,713	2,421	708	41.33%
Dortches	840	809	-31	-3.69%
Red Oak ¹	280	2,723	2,443	872.50%
Whitakers	860	799	-61	-7.09%

Source: 1990 and 2000 US Censuses of Population and Housing

¹ 1996 annexation added 2,263 people to the population of Red Oak; adjusted growth rate is 64.28%

1892 on the "Emerson Shops", a vast complex of railroad maintenance shops that was completed in 1893. These shops continue to be a major landmark on the Rocky Mount landscape.

Substantial growth occurred during the first decade of the 1900's, a period of boom and prosperity for Rocky Mount. From 1900 to 1910, the population exploded from 2,937 to 8,051, an increase of 274%. During that same decade on February 28, 1907, a charter was issued by the state legislature raising Rocky Mount to the status of City.

As Rocky Mount entered the mid-20th century, the City was affected by the national shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy. In the late 1940's, the railroad began a program of expansion of its system to the south and west that dictated the removal of a portion of the large shop complex from Rocky Mount. The reduction in the shop complex caused the emigration of a significant number of families affiliated with the railroad. Despite that loss, Rocky Mount began to develop a diversified industrial and business economy.

In 1956, US 301 Bypass, a two-lane bypass around the City, was opened. It was expanded to a four-lane divided highway in 1965. While the bypass promoted travel and encouraged the development of motels and regional shopping centers in its vicinity, it also contributed to the decline of downtown retail businesses.

The importance of highways to this area was reinforced with the construction of I-95 (a major north-south interstate) in 1978, and US 64 Bypass (a major east-west route) in 1983. Both of these controlled access highways have promoted additional business and industrial development in the area by providing fast and convenient access to suppliers and other markets.

By 1960, Rocky Mount boasted a ranking as the world's largest bright leaf tobacco market. It was also at this time that the local economy showed its first signs of diversification. One boost to Rocky Mount's growth was the construction of North Carolina Wesleyan College, which opened for enrollment in 1960. The establishment of the college and the construction of the area's major highways have both been significant contributors in the expansion of the City's economic base.

On May 5, 1961, the first Hardee's hamburger restaurant opened and changed the economic face of the region. The fledgling franchise established its corporate headquarters in Rocky Mount, where it remained for over 30 years. In 1999, a corporate merger with the Carl Jr.'s Corporation of California coupled with significant flood damage to the local corporate facilities resulted in relocation of the company's headquarters to California.

Changes in the global and national economies over the last four decades have affected the Rocky Mount economy. Although remnants of textile mills and tobacco production facilities are still evident in Rocky Mount, the local economy has become much more diversified. The range of eco-

omic activity in Rocky Mount now includes pharmaceuticals, plastics, furniture, synthetic fibers and steel cable. However, many of these existing facilities are 25 to 30 years old and may not be suitable for modernization. One of the challenges over the next decade will be to create a community that attracts new business while supporting existing companies.

In addition to aging facilities, the recent slowdown in the economy is making it difficult for many of these manufacturing enterprises to remain competitive. Moreover, the impact of the severe flood damage caused by Hurricane Floyd is also contributing to economic difficulties in the Study Area.

On September 15, 1999, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd, the City of Rocky Mount experienced unprecedented devastation as the Tar River and its tributary streams swelled and overflowed their banks, submerging over eight square miles of land, or more than 20% of the entire land within the City. The devastation from flooding crossed all boundaries: economic, racial, political, and social. Flooding occurred along major thoroughfares and employment corridors, shutting down businesses, industries and support services that provide the economic infrastructure of the City and cutting off transportation options for rescue efforts. The City's three main cultural facilities and most recreational facilities were completely destroyed. Homes within and beyond the 100-year floodplain were flooded above the first floor level. Rescues were made by boat in neighborhoods where rapidly rising water stranded people on roofs and in trees.

Nearly three years after the flood, Rocky Mount continues to recover but has made tremendous progress. Nearly 500 property owners have had their homes purchased under the City's Hazard Mitigation Program. This property will now be converted to green space. A new tobacco processing facility, Universal Leaf, is under construction nearby, a Cultural Arts Complex is being planned to replace cultural arts facilities damaged by the flood, and the cooperation between diverse groups during the flood crisis has fostered relationships that can be the basis for unified efforts to address many issues. If Rocky Mount takes this spirit of cooperation into the future, the City has much hope for effectively meeting the challenges that lie ahead.



II. POPULATION TRENDS AND FORECASTS

A. Population

Accurate data about the population of an area is critical to making good planning decisions. Determining the right size, quantity and location of infrastructure elements such as streets and highways, schools, parks, and sewer facilities depends on having good projections of future population growth and distribution early in the planning stages.

The population characteristics that provide important information about the Study Area include the size of the population, population growth rates, and population composition by sex, age and race. The general population of the Study Area is 62,674 people at the time of printing. This translates into a density of 1.15 people for acre which is indicative of the significant amount of undeveloped land within the Together Tomorrow Study Area. Since the Study Area boundary was not a recognized division for collection of Census data, population data for the MSA will be used to compare specific changes in the growth and composition of the population of Rocky Mount with that of Edgecombe and Nash counties, the state and the nation. The Rocky Mount MSA is defined as the area encompassing all of Nash and Edgecombe Counties.

1. Growth (1900 - 2000)

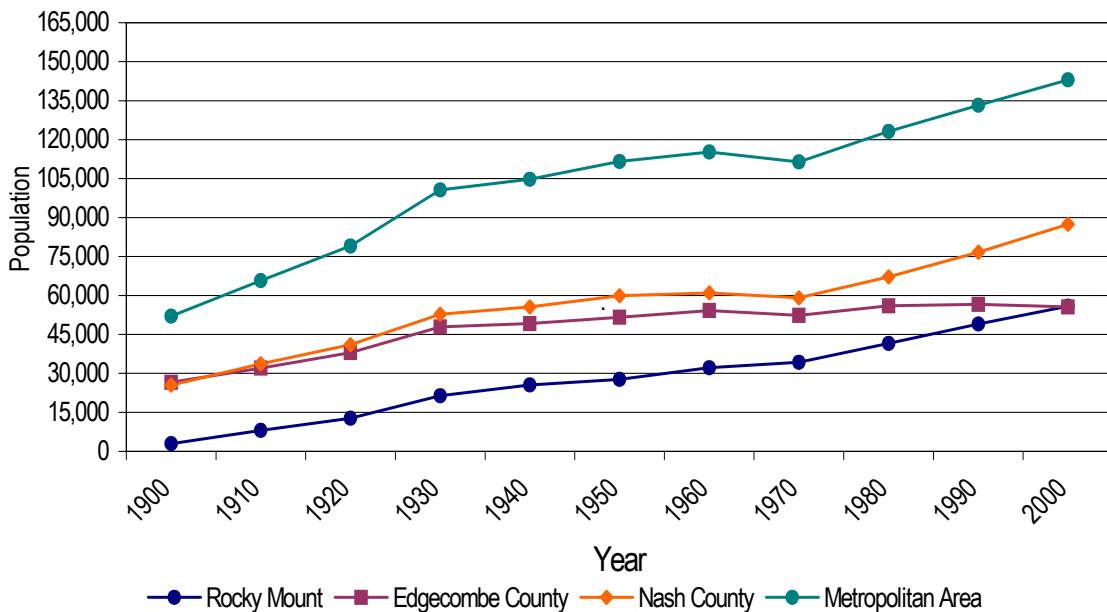
The 20th century brought many changes to the nation as well as the Study Area. Figure 3-1 displays historic census data for Rocky Mount, Nash, and Edgecombe Counties from 1900 to 2000. Past trends show that Rocky Mount's population steadily increased, adding 52,956 people in the last century. The growth rate of Nash County parallels that of Rocky Mount, while growth in Edgecombe County has been more sluggish and even declined in the last decade (much of which might be attributable to people being displaced by the flood).

Table 3-2 provides further detail regarding how the growth rate of the Study Area compares not only to that of surrounding counties, but also to the state and nation. While each entity grew over the past century, the population of Rocky Mount increased much greater than the population of either Nash or Edgecombe County, the state or the nation. This phenomenal growth might be an indication of the shift in Rocky Mount's role as a rural town to a regional urban center.

2. Gender

The gender composition of the population has not significantly changed over the last decade. In 1990, 45% of the population was male and 55% was female. According to the figures from Census 2000, the percentage of males and females within the Rocky Mount population is now 46% and 54% respectively. Table 3-3 shows that these figures are comparable with the adjacent counties, but indicates a

Figure 3-1: Study Area Population 1900 - 2000



Source: 1900—2000 US Censuses of Population and Housing

Table 3-2: Historical Population Trends (1900—2000)

Year	Rocky Mount	Edgecombe County	Nash County	Metropolitan Statistical Area ¹	North Carolina	United States
1900	2,937	26,591	25,478	52,069	1,893,810	75,994,575
1910	8,051	32,010	33,727	65,737	2,206,287	91,972,266
1920	12,742	37,995	41,061	79,056	2,559,123	105,710,620
1930	21,412	47,894	52,782	100,676	3,170,276	122,775,046
1940	25,568	49,162	55,608	104,770	3,571,623	132,164,569
1950	27,697	51,634	59,919	111,553	4,061,929	151,325,798
1960	32,147	54,226	61,002	115,228	4,556,155	179,232,175
1970	34,284	52,341	59,122	111,463	5,084,411	203,302,031
1980	41,526	55,988	67,153	123,141	5,880,095	226,542,203
1990	48,997	56,558	76,677	133,235	6,628,637	248,709,873
2000	55,893	55,606	87,420	143,026	8,049,313	281,421,906
Change	52,956	29,015	61,942	90,957	6,155,503	205,427,331
% Change	1803%	109%	243%	175%	325%	270%
1990-2000 Rate	14.07%	-1.68%	14.01%	7.35%	21.43%	13.15%

¹MSA is defined as Nash and Edgecombe Counties
 Source: 1900—2000 US Censuses of Population and Housing

Table 3-3: Gender Composition of the Population

	Male				Female			
	Number		Percent		Number		Percent	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Rocky Mount	22,193	25,710	45%	46%	26,804	30,183	55%	54%
Edgecombe County	25,845	25,846	46%	46%	30,713	29,760	54%	54%
Nash County	36,382	42,061	47%	48%	40,295	45,359	53%	52%
MSA	62,227	67,907	47%	47%	71,008	75,119	53%	53%
North Carolina	3,214,290	3,942,695	48%	49%	3,414,347	4,106,618	52%	51%

Source: 1990 and 2000 US Censuses of Population and Housing



slightly higher ratio of females to males than that reported for North Carolina.

3. Race

In contrast to gender composition, racial composition in the City has significantly changed over the last decade. The 1990 US Census indicated that the City's population was nearly evenly divided between white and non-white residents. Data from Census 2000 indicates, that over the past ten years, the percentage of Rocky Mount's population classified as white decreased from 49.6% to 40.9%, while the percentage classified as non-white increased from 50% to 58.8% of the entire City population. Although the shift between the white and non-white components of the population is significant, the ethnic composition of the non-white sector is equally noteworthy. Blacks comprise about 92.3% of those classified as non-white in Rocky Mount, with persons of Asian, Hispanic, or American Indian descent accounting for the remaining share of the non-white population.

The racial composition of Edgecombe County is similar to that of Rocky Mount, with 40.1% of the population classified as white and 59.3% identified as non-white. The racial mix of Nash County more closely resembles the state, with nearly 61.9% of the population identified as white and 37.1% as non-white. Census figures indicate 72.1% of North Carolina's population is classified as white and 26.6% as non-white. According to Census population data, recent changes in racial composition are part of a 30 year trend. Figure 3-2 shows that, since 1970 the ratio of white to black populations has nearly reversed. Furthermore, the 2000 Census data reveals an increase of persons catego-

rized as neither white or non-white. This can be attributed to the rise in the number of persons of Asian or Hispanic decent.

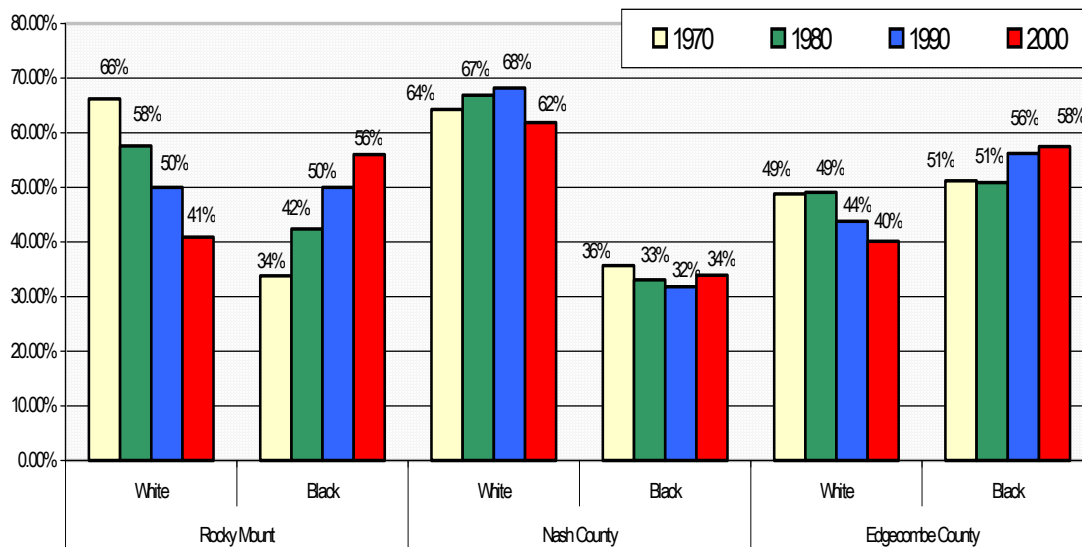
4. Age

Age composition is similar to that of race in that there have been significant shifts over the age groups that comprise the population. Figure 3-3 shows the age distribution of Rocky Mount's 2000 population. Twenty-seven percent of the population is under the age of 17, 29.17% is between the ages of 35 and 54 (Baby Boomers), and 13.01% is over the age of 65. As Figure 3-3 indicates, over the past 20 years, the people between 5 and 17 years of age have always been the larger component of the population, followed by those between the ages of 25 and 34. While the 5 to 17 group remained that largest single group in 2000, those between 45 and 54 increased the most over the past two decades, followed by those between 35 and 44, and those over 65.

This information is important to know because demands for many community facilities and services, such as schools and recreation and health care facilities, are based on the size of different age segments of the population.

Rocky Mount's age distribution is nearly identical to those of Edgecombe and Nash counties and the state. Figure 3-4 compares the age distributions of Rocky Mount's population with those of Edgecombe and Nash counties and the state.

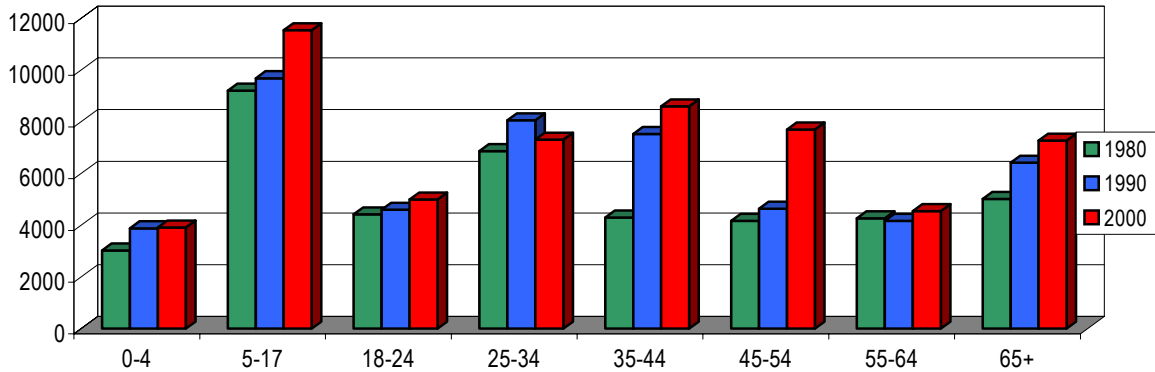
Figure 3-2 - Change in White and African American Populations, 1970-2000



Note: Hispanic origin is considered an ethnic not racial descriptor; Counts for other races listed include Hispanic people
Source: 2000 US Census of Population and Housing

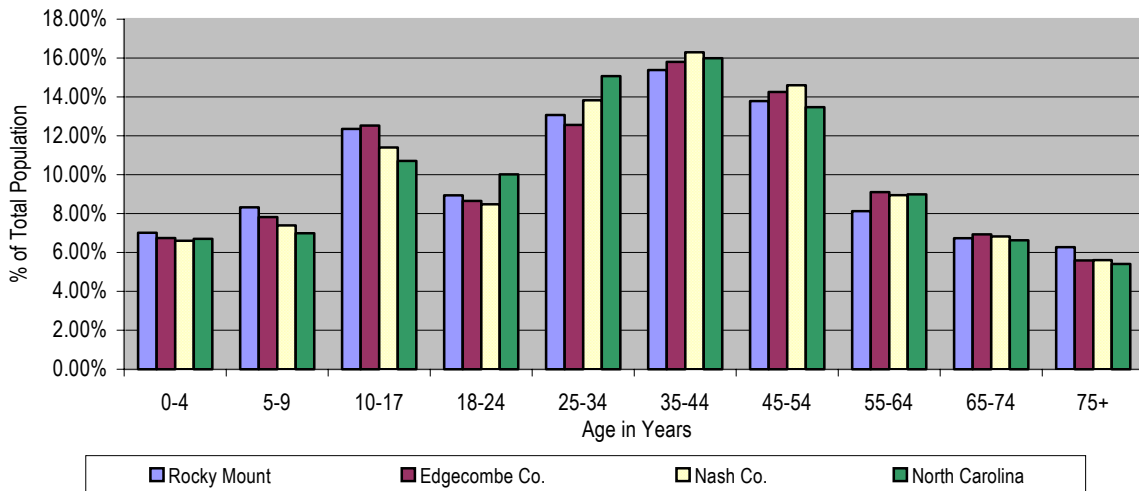


Figure 3-3: Rocky Mount Population by Age 1980—2000



Source: 1990 and 2000 US Census of Population and Housing

Figure 3-4: Comparison of Study Area Populations by Age - 2000



Source: 2000 US Census

In all instances, the number of “Young Seniors” - those between 65 and 74 actually decreased while the number of people over the age of 75 increased.

The youngest age category, 0-4 years, declined slightly in all instances, while the next group, those between ages 5-9, increased slightly. In Rocky Mount and North Carolina, the number of children between 10 and 17 showed a slight increase. This same group declined in both Nash and Edgecombe Counties.

The median age in Rocky Mount in 2000 was 35.2 years—nearly identical to the 35.3 years reported for North Carolina. Similarly, the median ages reported for Nash County, 36.5 and Edgecombe County, 36.2, are

nearly identical, although about a year older than that reported for the City and the State. Between 1980 and 1990, Rocky Mount’s median age increased by 2.4 years, and increased even more (3.9 years) between 1990 and 2000. This trend is expected to continue to rise in the future as the population continues to age. The implications of an aging population are a greater demand for medical care, in-home services, institutional care, and housing for the elderly.

In Table 3-4, the trends in aging of the area and state populations begins to emerge as data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses are compared. In 1990, the largest component of the total population, for all entities shown, in comprised of people between the ages of 25 and 34.

Table 3-4: City, County and State Population By Age (1990—2000)

Age	Rocky Mount		Edgecombe County		Nash County		North Carolina	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
0-4	7.92%	7.01%	7.53%	6.75%	6.86%	6.60%	6.92%	6.70%
5-9	7.55%	8.32%	7.62%	7.82%	6.90%	7.39%	6.63%	6.99%
10-17	12.23%	12.35%	13.17%	12.53%	11.77%	11.40%	10.67%	10.71%
18-24	9.39%	8.94%	9.66%	8.65%	9.79%	8.48%	11.78%	10.02%
25-34	16.46%	13.07%	16.12%	12.56%	16.66%	13.38%	17.26%	15.07%
35-44	15.37%	15.38%	15.15%	15.81%	16.12%	16.29%	15.20%	15.99%
45-54	9.47%	13.79%	9.79%	14.26%	10.57%	14.59%	10.54%	13.48%
55-64	8.51%	8.13%	8.68%	9.11%	8.92%	8.94%	8.85%	8.99%
65-74	7.88%	6.74%	7.47%	6.93%	7.59%	6.83%	7.29%	6.63%
75+	5.23%	6.27%	4.80%	5.59%	4.82%	5.61%	4.85%	5.41%
Median Age	31.3	35.2	32.61	36.2	33.75	36.5	32.96	35.3

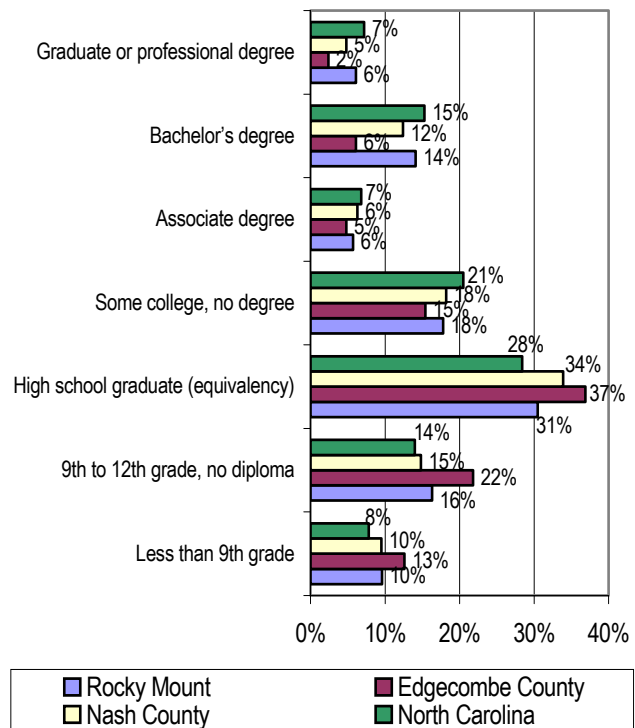
Source: 2000 US Census of Population and Housing

However, by 2000, the largest age group had shifted upon one age group, to include those between the ages of 35 and 44. This was also true across all entities reported, and reflects the impact of the Baby Boom generation as it ages. During this period, the two categories representing those 65 and over increased only slightly from 12.8% in 1990 to 13% in 2000.

5. Education

Figure 3-5 compares educational attainment in Rocky Mount with that in Edgecombe County, Nash County and North Carolina. The data show that 26% of Rocky Mount's population over the age of 25 lacks a high school diploma. Of the 74% with at least a high school diploma, 26% have obtained an associate's degree or greater according to the 2000 Census. Rocky Mount's educational attainment figures are nearly identical to those of the state. Edgecombe County has a larger percentage of high school graduates than Rocky Mount, Nash County or the state but fewer people pursuing education beyond high school. Nash County is similar to Edgecombe County in that it has a slightly higher number of high school graduates than Rocky Mount and the state. In contrast to Edgecombe County, however, the proportion of Nash County residents with education beyond high school is comparable to the proportion for Rocky Mount and the state.

Figure 3-5: A Comparison of Educational Attainment



Source: 2000 US Census of Population and Housing

B. Population Change

Population projection refers to estimates of future population levels. It indicates population changes that might occur based on assumptions inherent in the projection method and data. Since each projection method has its own strengths and weaknesses, analysts typically develop more than one set of projections, each based on a different set of assumptions.

1. Forecasts (2000-2025)

When providing population projections, demographers often provide high, moderate and low estimates. A review of population projections from 2000 to 2025 for Rocky Mount yielded a high population projection of 103,332; a moderate projection of 95,866; and a low projection of 87,904. Since the moderate projection of a population of 95,866 in 2025 is close to the 35% growth in Rocky Mount's population over the past 20 years, the moderate projection, which is based on an exponential growth rate, is used.

Figure 3-6 shows the projected population increases in the Study Area from 2000 to 2025 using the high, moderate and low population projection models. Based on the current population of the Study Area of 62,674, the moderate population projection model forecasts a net population increase of more than 33,000 by 2025. Based on the current, average household size of 2.55 people, this increase in population in Rocky Mount could create a demand for 13,016 new dwelling units by 2025. The gross density at which these homes are built will have an impact on the need for available land in the future that is suitable for residential development.

Based on historical population growth patterns, most of the new growth in the MSA is expected in the Nash County portion of the Study Area. However, projections for Edgecombe County might be skewed by the fact that many peo-

ple were displaced from the county in the recent flood. Monitoring the number of people that move back into Edgecombe County in the next few years and updating population projections based on that data could yield higher population projections for the county and the Rocky Mount MSA.

2. Population Shifting

According to US Census figures, the City's population has become more urban. The US Census Bureau defines an urban population as "all persons living in urbanized areas (50,000 or more persons) and all persons living in places of 2,500 or more outside of urbanized areas". US Census figures show that in 1990, 48.6% of Nash County's population and 49.9 percent of Edgecombe County's population were considered urban. By 2000, the percentage had increased to 59% and 58% respectively, eight to nine points higher than the proportion of North Carolina's population that is urban. This trend of a growing urban population is likely to result in a need for improvements in infrastructure, such as roads, sewer and water systems, etc. to accommodate a larger and more densely populated Study Area.

Figure 3-6: Projected Population Growth for the Rocky Mount Study Area

Source: 2000 US Census, Coastal Plains Consulting

