



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Councilors

From: Rich Olson, City Manager
Angela Cole, Assistant to the City Manager

Date: January 6, 2016

Re: Discussion/Information - Elizabeth City Population Estimates and Changes

BACKGROUND:

During the November 9 and 23, 2015 Regular Meetings of the City Council, there was discussion of current population estimates and the loss of city population. Councilors voiced their concern over the reported decline in 2015 residents within the city limits and Pasquotank County. In response to this discussion, Councilmember Stimatz requested staff to report back to the body with a population update.

ANALYSIS:

Every year the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) reports to each municipality their Preliminary Municipal Population Estimates. The annual report is received in August of every year documenting July 1 Certified Population Estimates for the previous year. The City of Elizabeth City receives its total population calculation for municipal jurisdiction in both Pasquotank and Camden Counties. OSBM has certified the following Elizabeth City population estimates for years 2011 through 2014:

Year	Elizabeth City Population (Camden Co.)	Elizabeth City Population (Pasquotank Co.)	Pasquotank County Population
2011	45	18,562	40,330
2012	44	18,468	40,139
2013	45	17,972	39,429
2014	45	17,899	39,691

Similarly, officials with Elizabeth City State University have provided City staff with the following enrollment data for years 2011 through 2014:

Year	Fall Enrollment
2011	2,930
2012	2,878
2013	2,421
2014	1,867

Based on the reported information, overall Pasquotank County, Elizabeth City, and the University have all realized a reduction in number – population and enrollment. However, there has been some debate whether student enrollment is or should be included in city and county population calculations. Staff was asked to get clarification on this question. According to OSBM State Demographer Jennifer Song, student population *is* considered in the population estimates. Student population is added in two ways: the first is the direct count, and this only includes group quarters (i.e., those living in dorms). For 2013 this was 1,249 and in 2014 it was 1,075. Those students not living in on-campus dorms are considered part of the household population – so they are estimated using our standard methods and not directly removable from those estimates. This is the second counting method.

Ms. Song also adds that, municipal and county estimates will be calculated differently. For a county, household population is based on two methods – one that adjusts Census estimates for more current group quarters counts and a second, regression model, based on births, school enrollments and auto/truck registrations. The municipal model starts with the 2010 Census data and then uses a combination of county growth rates, past trends and housing data to derive a current population estimate. So, in short, students are counted, but they are not explicitly counted except for those living in dorms. Those living in apartments or houses are treated as part of the general population.

Ms. Song concludes her response to City staff by saying, “Looking at the data [OSBM has] on dormitory populations and [University] total enrollment figures, it would appear that at least a significant portion of the decline in Pasquotank County and Elizabeth City could be attributed to lower enrollment at ECSU. I, unfortunately, do not have a way to provide you an exact figure other than the change of -174 for the dorm population [from 2013 to 2014].”

With this response, staff concludes that because college student (i.e. transient) population is factored into local and county population in two different ways, to simply exclude student numbers so as to calculate “true” net population change and extrapolate population trends is incorrect. Moreover, a raw comparison of population municipal-to-county is not accurate either because one is an estimate based on most-recent census data (municipal), whereas annual county population estimates *can be* calculated using census data, but not necessarily so.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

For discussion and informational purposes only.