

Winthrop Community Profile

This is a statistical profile for the town of Winthrop and its people. It has a great deal of numerical information about the community. Data like this will often confirm intuitions about what is happening within the community. More importantly, it can show early signs of new patterns and trends before their impacts become apparent.

Demographic statistical data of a particular place, like Winthrop, are incredibly valuable and greatly affect future decisions on the municipal level. For example, the amount of tax revenue needed is affected by issues such as town services for senior citizens, the school system and expected future enrollment, waste management services, and the quantity of recreational amenities provided. The level of services the town needs to provide for senior citizens can be assumed using demographic data, just as the school system size will be affected by total family households in the area.

Winthrop is evolving, and innovative ideas and strategies will be needed to accommodate the growing and changing population. The information supplied in this chapter will be used throughout the plan and will provide insight about changes in the community as well as future changes. Growth projections will help in planning for housing and public service demands that are expected over the next couple of decades. This information is expounded upon further in this Chapter.

****Note: You may notice that the population number varies between 6,121 and 6,005. This is because the 6,005 is from the American Community Survey (ACS) and is an estimate. It has been used in certain charts because the data was calculated based on this number from the ACS. To change the population and recalculate the data would render it inaccurate. Likewise, the 2020 U.S. Census data shows that Winthrop has 3,297 housing units, with 2,646 occupied, and 651 vacant. The ACS data shows Winthrop as having 2,556 occupied housing units and 722 vacant for a total of 3,278. Table 2 highlights these important differences.

It is important to understand this because it could be construed as a mistake, and it is not. These discrepancies have been annotated in several places.

To make it easier to understand, data from the U.S. Census will be in green text, and ACS data will be in blue text if not otherwise annotated.

Historical Population Trends:

“Population” is usually the principal criteria people use in measuring the size and vitality of a town. The current population is often used as a yardstick for the town’s role in the region, expected level of public services, and much more.

Over the course of its existence, Winthrop has experienced a rise and fall in population, representative of its neighbors and the State. Many economic and cultural factors have influenced population changes as displayed in Table 1 and depicted on Figure 1.

TABLE 1: POPULATION CHANGE: 1850 TO 2020

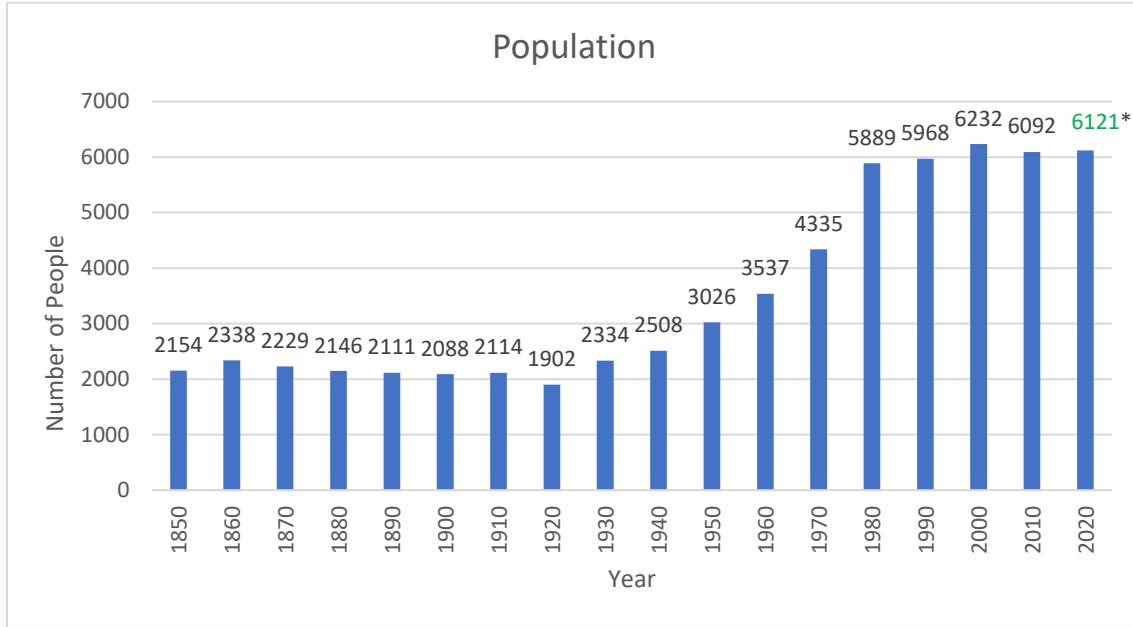
Year	Population	Year	Population
1850	2,154	1940	2,508
1860	2,338	1950	3,026
1870	2,229	1960	3,537
1880	2,146	1970	4,335
1890	2,111	1980	5,889
1900	2,088	1990	5,968
1910	2,114	2000	6,232
1920	1,902	2010	6,092
1930	2,334	2020	6,121

Source: *United States Census*

Following the Civil War, and lasting until the early 20th Century, virtually all of Maine lost population. This was the era of westward expansion, when many people relocated to the West. Winthrop lost less than most towns, because of the other trend – the industrial revolution. Winthrop was one of a few towns in the area with sufficient energy and infrastructure to attract large industry, which drew residents in from surrounding farm towns.

The data in Table 1 shows Winthrop’s population bottomed out in 1920 but began to show steep gains after that. This is probably consistent with the mills drawing new workers to town. Population took off for a while in the 1960’s and 1970’s, as Winthrop also assumed a role as suburban community for Augusta. The abrupt halt in the upward population increases between 1980 and 1990 likely coincided with mill cutbacks.

FIGURE 1: 170 YEARS OF POPULATION CHANGE IN WINTHROP



Source: United State Census
*U.S. Census Population Data

Figure 1 shows the same data as Table 1, but in graph form to display the rapid population increase from 1920 to about 1980.

The 2020 Census shows Winthrop has 3,297 total housing units, 2,646 occupied units, and 651 vacant units. In contrast, the 2020 ACS shows Winthrop as having 3,278 total housing units, 2,556 occupied units, and 722 vacant units. Table 2 below highlights the disparities between the 2020 Census data and the 2020 ACS data for clarification purposes.

Table 2: Differences in 2020 Census vs. 2020 ACS Data Compared to 2010 Census Data

	2020 Census Data	2020 ACS Data	2010 Census Data	Percent Change 2020 Census Vs. 2010 Census
Population	6,121	6,005	6,149	-28 -0.46%
Total Housing Units	3,297	3,278	3,295	2 0.06%
Occupied Housing Units	2,646	2,556	2,598	48 1.85%
Vacant Housing Units	651	722	697	-46 -6.60%
Households	N/A	2,556	2,506	50* 1.99%

Source: 2010, 2020 Census, & 2020 ACS

*Data comparison of 2020 ACS vs. 2010 Census

In comparing 2010 and 2020 U.S. Census data, Table 2 shows an increase of only two houses for total housing units, but an increase of 48 occupied housing units, which coincides with the decrease in vacant houses in that time. The U.S. Census defines “vacant housing unit” as a housing unit in which no one is living at the time of the interview, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. In addition, a vacant unit may be one which is entirely occupied by persons who have a residence elsewhere -- in other words, a seasonal residence.

The number of households appears to have increased between 2010 and 2020; however, the 2020 household data is from the ACS and is an estimate.

Additional Census or American Community Survey data can paint a broader picture to help with long-term planning for Winthrop. One such example is decreasing household size. This trend is observable throughout Maine and has far-reaching implications on many aspects of a community, such as school enrollment.

Table 3 on the following page shows a breakdown of population characteristics over the past two Census reports.

TABLE 3: POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS: 2010 - 2020

General Population Characteristics	2000	2010*	2020*	Difference & Percent Change (2010 – 2020)
Total Population	6,232	6,149	6,121	-28 -0.45 %
Male Population	3,085	2,891	3,044	153 5.29 %
Female Population	3,147	3,258	2,961	-297 -9.12 %
Median Age	41.9	43.2	42.8	-0.4 -0.93 %
Total Households	2,495	2,506	2,556	50 2.00 %
Family Households	1,740	1,822	1,546	-276 -15.15 %
Married Couple Family Households	1,397	1,501	1,230	-271 -18.05 %
Nonfamily Households	755	684	1,010	326 47.66 %
Nonfamily Households Living Alone	586	616	451	-165 -26.79 %
Households with children (under 18)	817	751	644	-107 -14.25 %
Single-Person Household 65 years +	228	231	274	43 18.61 %
Average Household Size	2.42	2.39	2.31	-0.08 -3.35 %

Source: 2000 Census- unless otherwise noted

*2010 & 2020 Data from American Community Survey

Components of Population Change:

Between 2010 and 2020, the town's population decreased by 28 persons. However, this is not solely a case of "emigration." Population change in a community is a result of both natural change and migration. Natural change is the difference between deaths and births in the community over a period of time. Migration accounts for people moving in and moving out. Net migration is population change not explained by births and deaths.

Natural change is an indicator of trends within the population. A positive number (more births than deaths) suggests not only a lot of babies but a lot of young families. A negative number (more deaths than births) hints at a more elderly population. Elderly populations tend to be larger in high-amenity communities like Winthrop. Between 2000 and 2010, Winthrop's population decreased by 33 people. Between 2010 and 2020, the population decreased again by 28 people. This is indicative that Winthrop is home to an increasingly older population – as is the entire state of Maine which has a median age of 44.8. The 2020 ACS data reflects that the median age in Winthrop has stayed relatively stable, going from 43.2 in 2010 to 42.8 in 2020. When compared to the United States, which has a median age of 38.3, Maine is one of the most elderly states in the nation, and Winthrop is no different.

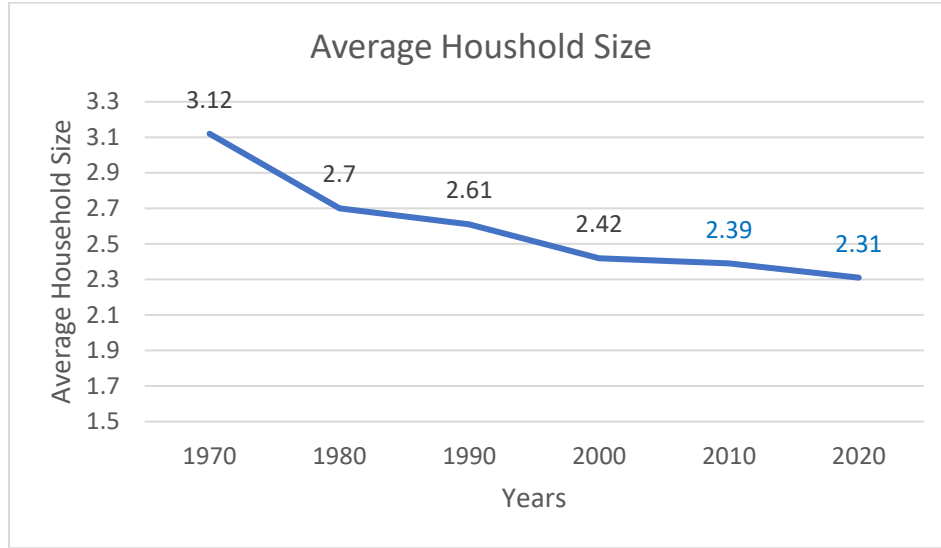
Migration is calculated as the difference between overall population change and natural change. People choose to move into or out of a community based on many factors, such as availability of employment, housing costs, and quality of life.

Several statistical points in Table 3 are indicative of shrinking household sizes, besides the average household size. One indicator is that single-person households over 65 years of age increased by 18.6 percent in a 10-year period. Another indicator is that the number of households with children under 18 decreased by 18.7 percent in the last 10 years. The decrease of average household size by 3.35 percent in the last 10 years by itself is not significant, but when coupled with this other data, it is suggestive of the aging population and fewer children in the community.

The ACS defines household size as the number of people living in one place, who may or may not be related. This contrasts with average family size, which was 3.15 in 2020; average family size is defined as people living in one location who are related to one another.

While the average household size did not decrease that much from 2010 to 2020, it is still significant when compared to previous decades (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: 1970 – 2020 AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE



Source: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 Census
2010 & 2020 ACS

Decreasing household size is a trend seen nationally, reflecting social changes like smaller families, lower birth rates, and elderly independent living. What this equates to is a need for more houses just to sustain the current population, reduced school enrollment, increased demand for senior services, and a need for specific housing types to accommodate single people living alone, both elderly and young.

This type of data is imperative when considering the population and housing demands for the future. If the number of people in each household continues to decrease as projected, the community will require not only more houses, but a housing stock made up of smaller houses.

However, population trends can be combated in several ways. Winthrop has plenty of available land and is a short drive to Augusta and Lewiston for either employment or entertainment. Water access and other outdoor recreational activities are abundant both in Winthrop and in neighboring towns. While the rate of natural change cannot be impacted with town policy, the rate of migration can be affected by managing land use controls, promoting economic sectors that fit the character of the town, and offering public services that town residents want and need.

TABLE 4: AGE TRENDS 2000 TO 2020

	2010 % Of Total	2020 % Of Total	10-Year Change
Population	6,149	6,005	-144 (-2.3%)
Median Age	43.2	42.8	-0.4 (-0.9%)
Under 5 years old	272 (4.4%)	362 (6.0%)	90 (33.1%)
5 - 19 years old	1,210 (19.7%)	943 (15.7%)	-267 (-22.1%)
18 years and older	4,817 (78.3%)	4,717 (78.6%)	-100 (-2.1%)
20 - 24 years old	252 (4.1%)	272 (4.5%)	20 (7.9%)
25 - 44 years old	1,526 (2.8%)	1,551 (25.9%)	25 (1.6%)
45 - 54 years old	961 (15.6%)	859 (14.3%)	-102 (-10.6%)
55 - 59 years old	553 (9.0%)	295 (4.9%)	-258 (-46.7%)
60 - 64 years old	466 (7.6%)	427 (7.1%)	-39 (-8.4%)
65 years and older	909 (14.8%)	1,296 (21.6%)	387 (42.6%)

SOURCE: 2010 & 2020 ACS

Some important population changes and trend takeaways from the data analysis in this Table 4:

- The number of individuals between the ages of 5-19 years old decreased by 22.1 percent, a sizable decline.
- Adults that fall roughly into “family-age” category were broken into two separate categories by the ACS:
 - Age category 20-24 increased by 7.9 percent
 - Age category 25-44 increased by 1.6 percent
- Both “family-age adults” age brackets have been relatively steady over the last ten years.
- The “mature adult” age brackets (45 to 54, 55 to 59, & 60 to 64) all saw varying decreases.
 - Age category 45-54 decreased by 10.6 percent
 - Age category 55-59 decreased by 46.7 percent

- Age category 60-64 decreased by 8.4 percent
- In 2010, the 65 and older age category was beginning to show the outliers in the baby boom generation (persons born generally between 1945 and 1965). This age category has been steadily increasing and the real impact will begin this decade. Since 2010, this age category increased 42.6 percent or 387 individuals. This is the largest change documented in this time period.
- As younger baby boomers continue to age, the number in this age category will rise. This will have short-term implications for housing, health care, transportation, recreation, and other services.
- This was the group that put enormous strain on the school systems in the 1960's and 1970's, and on the housing market in the 1980's and 1990's; now they are about to put the same strain on senior housing and health care services.

Seasonal Population:

All population data cited above refers to year-round residents. Winthrop also has a significant seasonal population that includes camp owners/renters, visitors, day-trippers, and people staying at the summer camps.

Planning, particularly for public roads and services, cannot be done on the basis of overall population alone. Just as roads must be designed for the peak hour of use, other public services must be sized for the population peaks.

Because of the attraction of the lakes, Winthrop has been a traditional center of seasonal activity. As of 2020, according to the ACS, the town had 465 housing units listed as seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. At the height of the season, if 90 percent of these homes are occupied with an average of four occupants each, that is approximately 1,674 additional people in Winthrop. An additional 1,674 people is an increase of 27 percent over the full-time population in town. But some of the camps and seasonal houses may be owned by Winthrop residents, so they cannot be counted toward the seasonal population. Unfortunately, the Census does not include this data.

This data does not consider hotels, short-term rentals, or other overnight accommodations. These undoubtedly increase the seasonal population; however, their statistics are more difficult to track and not easily estimated. The town also benefits from a significant daytrip population because of its many attractions. Daytrip attractions include restaurants, the boat launch, various waterbodies, the downtown area, Winthrop's 4th of July event, and Mt. Pisgah.

Winthrop also sees a rise in population from those staying at seasonal homes on neighboring lakes and ponds in other towns. These visitors come to shop, dine or travel through. These seasonal residents are similar to day-trippers coming to visit Winthrop, as their patronizing Winthrop's wide variety of amenities results in small population increases at times.

In addition, the town hosts the YMCA resident camp on Cobbosseecontee Lake and Camp Mechawana on Lower Narrows Pond. Including campers and staff, approximately 500 individuals stay there for seven weeks during the summer.

Seasonal population and day tourism provide a significant benefit to the town. Encouraging more tourism and recreational activity is one of the town's objectives. The aging of the Baby Boom generation may, at the same time, increase the leisure time and disposable income of prospective seasonal visitors and make existing seasonal facilities more attractive as permanent residences. Conversion of seasonal homes has not been a major phenomenon in Winthrop, with no permits issued in the past seven years. However, conversion from seasonal to year-round is likely to be occurring, it just may not be adequately tracked.

With the seasonal population contributing to an additional 27 percent of the full-time population, this fluctuation does have significant impact on the town, such as seasonal crowding, increased traffic, and increased demand on commercial establishments. However, the financial benefits the town sees from the seasonal population far outweigh any inconveniences of a temporarily larger population in the area.

Service Center Impacts:

As a small service center, Winthrop can be expected to see some impacts from a larger daytime population. However, the population flux is overwhelmed by the much larger service centers of Augusta and Lewiston. Winthrop's "service center" status consists of its commercial sector, with a regional supermarket, health services, and an active downtown. No additional accommodation is necessary to deal with this fluctuation in daytime populations.

School Enrollment Data:

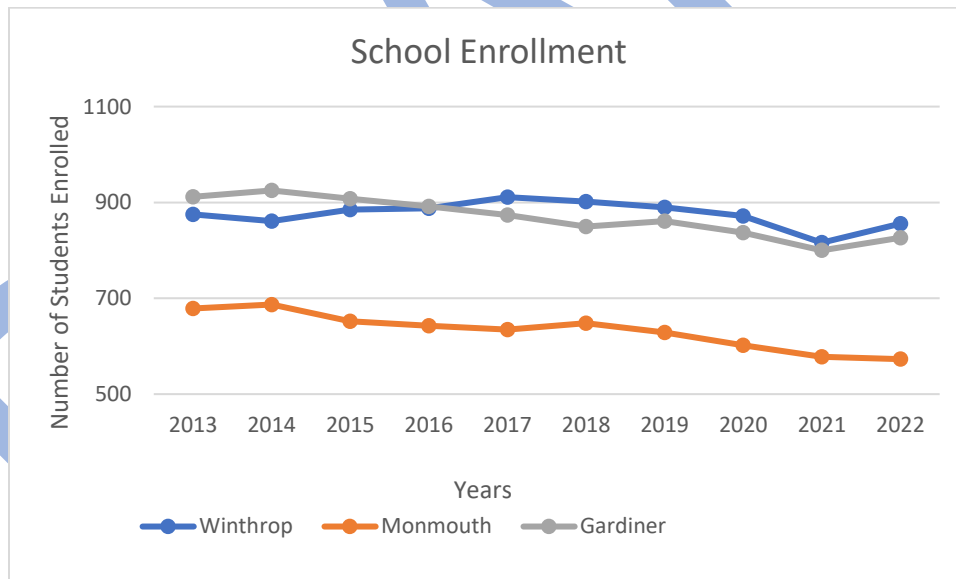
School enrollment is negatively correlated with the increasing population age and the reduced number of younger generations in Winthrop: as the number of school-aged children drops, so does annual school enrollment.

TABLE 5: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT DATA

County/Town	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	10 Year Average
Winthrop	875	861	885	888	911	902	890	872	816	856	875.60
Monmouth	679	687	652	643	635	648	629	602	578	573	632.60
Gardiner	912	925	908	892	874	850	861	837	800	826	868.50
Augusta	2224	2167	2160	2209	2202	2268	2232	2277	2196	2170	2210.50
Kennebec County	17327	17221	16965	16957	16798	16891	16790	16621	15843	16140	NA

Source: Maine Department of Education, Student Enrollment Data

FIGURE 3: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT GRAPHED



Source: Maine Department of Education, Student Enrollment Data

From Table 5 and Figure 3, a trend is apparent for school enrollment in the region. In the past several years there has been a steady decline in school enrollment, not only for Winthrop, but also for surrounding towns and Kennebec County. But, according to 2022 data, there has been a slight uptick in school enrollment.

The combination of increasing housing prices, increasing median age, and decreasing family sizes all contribute to the reduced school enrollment in the past several years. This trend has been progressing for nearly 10 years, depending on datasets. Towns will undoubtedly be affected by this trend and planning strategies should be discussed to prevent negative impacts. Decreased school enrollment affects everything from school bus routes, teaching jobs, school buildings, teaching styles, and the quality of education provided. However, due to unforeseeable changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, many towns are seeing changes in their school enrollment that were previously unexpected. This data has yet to be collected or analyzed.

Regional Perspective:

Winthrop's development pattern is not at all unusual for Kennebec County. All the towns in this area prospered as farm towns during the 1800's, went into decline during westward expansion and the urbanization period of the late-19th and early 20th centuries, and began to grow again as suburbs and green spaces. The region's largest growth period was in the 1970's and 1980's, and growth has slowed since.

In Table 6, the trend of small average family sizes and an older median age are observable for Kennebec County and Maine compared to the United States. These are both high impact population trends that are clearly on a larger scale than just at the town level.

TABLE 6: COUNTRY, STATE, COUNTY, TOWN STATISTICS

Town/ County/ State/ Country	Population Change		% Change	Average Family Size**	Median Age
	2010	2020		2020	2020
Winthrop	6,149	6,121	-0.46%	2.96	42.8
Kennebec County	122,151	123,642	1.2%	2.9	44.1
Maine	1,328,361	1,362,359	2.6%	2.9	44.8
United States	234.6 million	331.4 million	7.4%	3.15	38.2

Source: 2010 U.S. Census

*Source: 2020 ACS

**Average Family Size is defined differently than the Average Household Size by the ACS. Household refers to those living together, related or not. Family refers to those who are living together and are related.

Traditionally, an older median age and reduced family size are indicative of more rural, owner-occupied household trends. Compared with Maine, Winthrop is certainly not an outlier in median age or average family size.

Population Projections and Impacts:

Historic population and demographic trends are interesting, but their true value is in preparing for the future. Population projections provide the short and easy answer. These are mathematical extrapolations of past population growth and factors such as age distribution and household size.

The Maine Office of the State Economist publishes a projection to the year 2038 (prepared in 2018 and based on U.S. Census data). This agency estimates Winthrop's population will be 5,930 by 2038, a decrease of 3.12 percent or 191 residents from the current population in a 16-year period. This is based partially on the advancing age of the residents and the overall observable trend, not necessarily a reflection of the popularity of the town.

The Kennebec Valley Council of Government (KVCOG) also does population projections. It estimates a 2030 population of about 6,200, an increase of 79 people (prepared in 2018). This estimate is based on information from the tax assessor as well as U.S. Census information.

Notice that one of these projections calls for a decline, the other calls for a slight population increase. How accurate are projections? Projections are not a crystal ball; they are based on assumptions of trends from the recent past. And with the recent phenomenon of the global pandemic, these projections will likely not be very accurate.

Further, projections for a town the size of Winthrop are rarely accurate. For example, the population grew by 36 percent in the 1970's then only grew 1.3 percent in the 1980's. Major factors driving (and controlling) population growth are the availability of housing and economic conditions.

The baseline scenario for Winthrop is no population change. However, "no population change" does not mean "no growth". Even if Winthrop's population does not change by 2030, the components of the population will most assuredly be different. Currently, the trend with the greatest impact on growth is declining average household size. This "no population change" scenario includes the assumption that the decreasing household size will eventually plateau, and average age will continue to increase for some time based on the baby boom generation.

Winthrop's average household size decreased by 0.42 people in the 1970's, 0.09 in the 1980's, 0.19 in the 1990's, 0.03 in the 2000's, and 0.08 from 2010 to 2020. Assuming that household size will decrease another 5 percent between 2020 and 2030, this would result in an average future household size of 2.19.

With Winthrop's current population of 6,121, and an average household size of 2.31, town residents occupy 2,646 housing units (2020 Census). If that same population in 2030 had an average household size of 2.19, they would need 2,795 housing units. Based on the

2020 Census data, Winthrop can accommodate this population with its current housing stock of 3,297 and will not need additional housing.

When considering the State Economist's population projection of 5,930 and applying the same principle of dividing the population by average household size (using 2.19) the result would be 2,708 households by 2038. Again, 2,708 housing units does not require the construction of new homes. Hypothetically, if the average household size did not decrease by 5 percent and stayed roughly the same as it is now (2.31), the projected population by the State Economist's Office of 5,930 would require 2,567 housing units in 2038, which is still within the scope of Winthrop's existing housing stock.

Under the State Economist's projection, there would no longer be a need for between approximately 589 and 730 housing units already in existence in Winthrop. And this figure does not take into consideration that new houses will undoubtedly still be built.

Economically, this scenario of Winthrop's population shrinking to this degree seems quite unlikely, as Winthrop is at the edge of Augusta and in close proximity to Lewiston, Auburn, and Waterville, and sees a lot of spillover demand.

Under KVCOG's population projection of 6,200 residents by 2030, if a 5 percent decrease in average household size is assumed (2.19), that population would need 2,831 houses to accommodate the smaller, average household size with this slightly larger population. If the existing average household size (2.31) is assumed with KVCOG's projected population, 2,684 houses would be occupied. In either scenario, Winthrop's current total housing units can accommodate this population projection and household size. In fact, it would negate the need for between 466 and 613 existing housing units in an eight-year period.

But for perspective, when considering Winthrop's current population of 6,121 and current average household size of 2.31, an estimated 2,650 housing units are needed based on dividing the population by the average household size. That leaves 641 housing units currently vacant. The number of vacant units on the 2020 Census is 651. Based on the Census definition of vacant, these housing units may be seasonal and not fit for year-round habitation.

If the results of all four scenarios are averaged, the approximate number of housing units no longer needed would be about 600. This is on par with the number of current vacant housing units.

One problem brought on by possible lack of need for new housing is difficulty reaching the planning goal of 10-percent affordable housing (as defined in the Housing chapter) out of all new houses built. It is unlikely that new residential construction will stop, but if five new houses a year were built, then roughly two would need to be affordable.

The rate of housing development is a good way to estimate population growth, but it is also a good way to manage it. Local policies can affect the rate of housing growth through

their influence on the cost of development or land use restrictions. Winthrop has relatively low land development costs now, so it would be difficult to accelerate growth this way.

Trends can be managed, to a certain extent, to produce desired results. For example, if the local economy or housing market changes, that in turn affects how the community grows and changes, too. Municipal regulation and policy can have an influence on the size and types of new houses constructed, which in turn will drive population demographics. Neighborhoods with large lots tend to add to building costs and require expensive homes to be built. Many times, these homes are 3-, 4-, or 5-bedroom residences, suitable for large families with young children. At the other extreme, housing units can be designed exclusively for senior populations with 1- and 2-person households. This type of development would more closely match the demand for housing in Winthrop but would not add as much to the growth potential of the town.

Growth in population and households increases the demand for public services and commercial development. Unless specifically designed for senior citizens, each new household must have one or more jobs to support it. Younger, larger households will generate schoolchildren. Nearly all households require added waste management and road maintenance costs. All these factors must be considered when projecting population growth.

While some towns can use municipal policies to impact population change, it requires a need and consensus to take strong action, which Winthrop may not have. It is important, however, that the community pay attention to annual changes in housing development and other local and regional indicators. The town should continue to monitor the rate of new construction and the type of homes that are being built and should continue to discuss these implications and address them through policy changes.

It is important to bear several factors in mind when considering population estimates. Simple population projections like the ones described above are rarely accurate. They work for small towns with predictable conditions. With the COVID-19 pandemic, these are unprecedented times. Towns are experiencing unpredictable changes and scenarios related to COVID-19. The projections detailed in this section are unlikely scenarios, based on a variety of factors, such as the size of Winthrop's population, the town's ideal location, and the changes brought on by the pandemic.

Analysis and Trends:

The most obvious trends detailed throughout this section are the increasing median age of Winthrop's population and the decreasing average household size. The ideal housing units to accommodate these demographic trends would be smaller, one- or two-bedroom units.

These trends have other implications as well, such as decreased school enrollment, an increased need for multifamily housing-style structures, increased public services, and senior transportation, just to name a few.

Another emerging, recent trend is multigenerational housing. This living situation was born out of necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic and became the new normal, as it seems to be mutually beneficial to all involved. Multigenerational homes are those that include parents living with their adult children and grandchildren, for example. This is beneficial for the parents of the young children, as the grandparents can supply childcare, and it is beneficial for the grandparents as they also have access to help when needed. This situation has proven financially beneficial for all parties.

The services required to accommodate multigenerational housing would be somewhat similar to those mentioned above. Promoting multigenerational housing through relaxed regulations for accessory dwelling units is one way the town can provide appropriate housing for the aging population. In fact, in 2022 the state enacted new legislation mandating that municipalities amend their ordinances to allow for these housing options starting in 2024.

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