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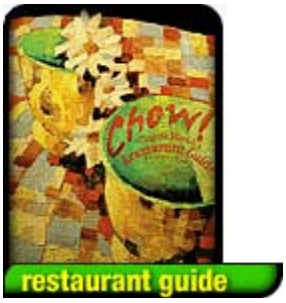

Ye Old Sprawling Honky Town

Census reflects decades of poor planning, discrimination.

by Alan Pittman

Eugene is sprawling outward, leaving behind a shrunken core with few children and minorities, according to a *Eugene Weekly* analysis of Census 2000 results.

Old

It's hard to imagine a community without kids. When they go next door to play, they link neighbors together. In their games and schools, they mix class and race. For the sake of their children, adults come together to make a safer, better place to live. Children's laughter lights the streets and parks. Like a runny nose, their humanity infects a community.

Eugene's heart is losing its youth.

In the last decade, the city's older neighborhoods lost children in droves. The campus neighborhood was the hardest hit. The area from Kincaid east to Fairmont and south to 18th lost 80 percent of its kids. In 1990, some 895 children played in the neighborhood, now only 182 call it home. The area has gone from one child for every four adults to one for every 20.

Just south, the Fairmont neighborhood lost a quarter of its children. The Friendly neighborhood was similarly Pied Pipered. Between Amazon Parkway and Jefferson Street, almost a third of the children are gone. From Jefferson over to Chambers, one-fifth left.

There weren't a lot of kids living in the West university and downtown neighborhoods 10 years ago, but now there are nearly none. The two areas lost more than half their children. There's now just one kid for every 30 adults in the center of Eugene.

All of Eugene's older neighborhoods south of the river from Chambers Street to Fairmont have lost children. In an area spanning from Chambers Street to Fairmont Boulevard and from the river to the south hills, almost a quarter of the children disappeared. The area lost 2,218 kids, enough to fill South Eugene High School.

While the kid population dwindled in older neighborhoods, it boomed in the region's rapidly expanding subdivisions on the sprawling edge of town. The number of kids in a Bethel neighborhood framed by Barger and Beltline increased by 47 percent or 479 children. In far east Springfield, kids living south of the McKenzie Highway jumped 60 percent or 386 children.

New development along the river north of Valley River Center saw that region's kids increase by 56 percent or 386 children. New housing developments south of the Gateway Mall along I-5 to Highway 126 saw kids jump by a third with another 371 children.

Overall, the suburban growth outpaced the loss in the older neighborhoods. Eugene's kid population increased 17 percent in the 1990s, Springfield's 16 percent. That's still below the increase of the adult population in Eugene of 24 percent and Springfield of 19 percent. As a share of the population, kids dropped one percentage point in the two cities.

The fading echoes of the baby boom generation may explain some of why proportionately, there are fewer kids. Portland's demographics have taken a similar, older shift. Even in Eugene's rapidly expanding areas, the growth in the number of children did not keep pace with the growth in the number of adults. In far southeast Springfield, kids increased 60 percent, but adults increased 73 percent. Even in booming Bethel, kids trailed 4 percentage points behind grown-ups.

Development interests have blamed the city's environmental regulations for making housing too expensive for families. But Springfield, with its more developer-friendly reputation, also saw its share of kids decline. Also, the rapidly kid-growing Bethel and north Eugene regions of the city have the same development regulations as the older sections of town.

Springfield, with its cheaper housing, does have a higher concentration of kids than Eugene -- 27 percent versus 20 percent. But it's been that way for a long time. In 1990 Springfield was 28 percent kids to Eugene's 21 percent.

The UO may be a big factor in Eugene's lower kid share. Students are less likely to have children, and the relatively high cost of real estate and student housing makes it expensive for families to live near campus. While Springfield's share of kids under 5 years old is 3 percent higher than Eugene's, Eugene's share of 20- to 24-year-olds is 4 percent higher than in Springfield.

Corvallis, also home to a big university, is only 18 percent kids compared to Eugene's 20 percent.

The shrinking kid count in Eugene's older core neighborhoods is due to aging families, says Dennis Urso, a researcher for the 4J School District. "The folks who bought houses or live there, their kids have grown up and gone to college," he says.

Eventually, the older people may move out and sell to younger families with kids again, Urso says. "You've got a 10, 20-year cycle."

Urso says the process could take another decade or more. "It's going to be happening one home at a time," he says.

In some popular neighborhoods where housing prices have inflated, the kids may never return, Urso says. "You've got neighborhoods in Eugene where families with 5 and 6 year old kids can't afford a house," he says. Families may chose to buy a larger new house in a subdivision in Bethel rather than spend $170,000 to buy and fix up an older home in south Eugene, he says.

Still, there are a lot of homes in places like the Amazon Valley and Ferry Street Bridge area that would be affordable for families that want to live in the city when the older residents sell, he says.

The number of kids has been dropping in Eugene since 1969, when the local baby boom peaked. In 1969, Eugene had about 22,000 students according to a 4J report. Today, there are 18,389. That 16 percent drop in students occurred at the same time Eugene's overall population increased 81 percent.

While 4J has been shrinking, the Bethel School district serving the growing Northwest edge of the city has been building new schools to accommodate more students.

While Bethel builds schools, 4J is closing them. This year the district closed Bailey Hill and Whiteaker elementary schools with more school closures in the central city likely in coming years. Urso predicts that the district will continue losing 100 to 150 students a year as families age. Central city schools are vulnerable to closure and any new schools will likely be built on the northern edges of town, Urso says. "The only growth I see is at our fringe schools."

But after 4J closes a school, families may never want to move back to the neighborhood. "The school closing situation has been devastating to the central area of Eugene," says John Porter, Eugene's planning director from 1966 to 1982.

Some of the biggest losses in kids have occurred in neighborhoods where 4J closed elementary schools. The neighborhoods surrounding the closed and closing Lincoln, Condon, Dunn, Willard and Laurel Hill elementary schools have all lost busloads of children.

Sprawling

Eugene is sprawling on the edge while shrinking in the core. That's just the opposite of the compact urban growth city plans and policies have called for overthe last decade.

Bulldozing farmland to make room for new subdivisions has meant double digit growth on the northern and western edge of the urban growth boundary while Eugene's oldest neighborhoods in the central city have actually lost population.

Housing developments off Delta Highway north of Valley River Center have nearly doubled the population of that area. North of Beltline along I-5, the population increased 45 percent. The far northwest corner of Eugene grew by 58 percent. The Bethel neighborhood west of Beltline and south of Barger grew by 50 percent. Tracts of new student apartments near Autzen stadium increased the population of that area by 85 percent.

Springfield showed a similar pattern of growth. The southern and far western edges of the city along the growth boundary grew by 46 percent.

The edge development wasn't compact. The west university neighborhood has the highest density in the city. It's seven times more dense than the sprawling subdivisions in south Bethel. But south Bethel jumped 50 percent in population over the decade, while the West University neighborhood shrank 7 percent.

Meanwhile, as kids moved out and new housing went to the edge, the core of Eugene has lost residents. The campus neighborhood between Kincaid and Fairmount dropped 11 percent. The west campus neighborhood dropped 7 percent. The population of the small downtown neighborhood increased 20 percent with several new apartment buildings going in. But the Fairmount neighborhood south of 19th Avenue lost 7 percent of its population. The Friendly neighborhood lost 4 percent. The south university and Amazon neighborhoods dropped 1 percent. Farther south between Willamette and Amazon Creek, the population dropped 5 percent.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. City plans and policies have long called for compact urban growth.

In 1995, as public concern about the bulldozers clearing land for new sprawling subdivisions increased, the Eugene City Council launched a $400,000 Growth Management Study (GMS) to address the problem.

The 18-month GMS identified the negative environmental, traffic congestion, scenic, economic and quality of life impacts of urban sprawl. A massive citizen survey indicated that citizens overwhelmingly opposed such sprawl.

But a city staff and City Council dominated by pro-growth interests dragged its feet when it came to adopting tough new regulations to control growth. Finally, in 1998, the council adopted a list of growth management policies. The list includes promoting increased density in the city core rather than sprawling subdivisions on the edge. But the policies remain largely unimplemented.

A Land Use Code Update project that addressed some of the sprawl problems took years to complete and has yet to be enforced.

The city continues to subsidize sprawl with new roads, sewers and other infrastructure. A GMS policy, overwhelmingly supported in citizen surveys, called for Eugene to increase its systems development charges for developers to capture the full cost of growth. But Eugene's SDCs are now among the lowest in Oregon. Salem charges twice as much as Eugene and West Linn charges three times as much, according to a recent city study.

A city committee has been studying SDCs for two years without increasing any of the development fees.

"Our SDCs are way low and our process is going at a snail's pace," says Eben Fodor, a local planning consultant and a founder of the citizen group Friends of Eugene. "By the time they raise anything, we're going to be old and gray."

Fodor says higher SDCs could be a valuable tool for the city to promote denser development. Currently the city is subsidizing edge development with expensive road, sewer and other infrastructure. The "massive highway and freeway projects are essentially investments in sprawl," he says.

Fodor points to a study done for the city showing that people living on the edge of town drive four to five times more than people living in the core neighborhoods. But the city's transportation SDC for a new house is the same no matter where it's built. The city should charge four to five times more for the edge development as the core house, making living near the city center more attractive, Fodor says.

The city could make exemptions from SDCs to promote desirable growth, says Fodor. For example, exemptions could go to low-income housing, in-fill development that increases density and housing in nodes with easy access to public transportation.

A new schools SDC for sprawling areas could also help bring more kids to the core neighborhoods plagued by school closures, Fodor says. Such an SDC would require a change in state law. Alternatives to Growth Oregon is pushing such a bill in the legislature and may use the initiative process if development interests block the reform, Fodor says.

Honky Town

Eugene is one of the very whitest, least diverse cities in the nation.

Among large cities (population 100,000 or more), Eugene ranks in the top 10 percent of those with the fewest minorities -- number 18 out of 249.

In Eugene, 88 percent of residents are entirely white. About 92 percent say they're white or at least part white.

Springfield is even less diverse than Eugene -- 90 percent white. Salem is more diverse (83 percent white). Portland is 78 percent white, but the city tops another list. Oregon's largest city is the least diverse major city (more than 500,000 population) in the nation.

Eugene's relative paleness is driven largely by its almost entire absence of the large urban population of African Americans that characterizes many American cities.

Only 1 percent of Eugene's population is black. Compare that to 11 percent in Los Angeles, 61 in Atlanta, 8 in Seattle and 11 in Tacoma.

Eugene's Hispanic population of 5 percent is getting closer to the norm in other cities, as is the Asian population (4.6 percent) and Native American population (2.3 percent).

Only two neighborhoods in the entire Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area are more than 2 percent black. An area of west Eugene near West 11th and Bailey Hill Road is 2.5 percent black, downtown is 2.2 percent. In 33 of 52 census tracts, there's less than 1 percent African Americans. In eight, there's less than one-half percent.

In one north Springfield tract above Highway 126, there are 2,567 residents, only three black. In another area of Springfield west of 42nd Street and off Main Street there are 6,368 residents, and only 11 African Americans.

In Eugene, a section of Bethel between the railroad tracks and Crocker Road has 4,059 residents with only 12 African Americans.

In south Eugene between Willamette Street and Lorane Highway, seven African Americans live among a population of 2,053. In all the new neighborhoods outside Beltline stretching from West 11th to I-5, there are almost 29,000 residents, but only 228 African Americans.

Eugene's Hispanic population is concentrated in Whiteaker, where it reaches 16 percent. There's also a growing population of Hispanics in southeast Springfield. In most of the rest of Eugene there's just a smattering of Latinos. In North Eugene above Beltline there are only 181 living among 3,000 people.

Eugene's Asian population is concentrated in neighborhoods near the

UO, with few living elsewhere.

Discrimination kept Eugene white, according to Chuck Dalton, a past president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Dalton points to Oregon's 150-year history of racism.

The Oregon Fair Housing Council documented that racist history in a Eugene exhibit three years ago. Just after winning statehood, the Oregon Legislature passed a series of exclusion laws barring blacks from entering the state. Oregon's first Constitution banned African Americans from the state. In 1850 the government started giving free land to white settlers only, not to minorities. Chinese workers brought into the state in the 1850s were banned from owning land. Chinese Americans weren't granted citizenship rights until 1943.

In the 1920s, the Oregon Ku Klux Klan was the largest chapter west of the Rocky Mountains and was a powerful force in the state Legislature. Realty boards forbade members from selling property to minorities. In 1945 the *Social Work Journal* declared Portland the most discriminatory city north of the Mason Dixon Line.

Eugene itself also has a racist past. In 1952, after being evicted from the north side of the Ferry Street Bridge to make room for a larger bridge, most African Americans in Eugene lived in a segregated neighborhood on West 11th, Peggy Nagae writes in the Eugene City Club book, *Eugene 1945-2000*. The swampy area had no running water, sewer or septic system. An official with the Portland Urban League called the situation "disgraceful and horrible" and said Eugene's record of discrimination was "among the worst in the state."

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