

Springfield population drops, but losses slow

The city of Springfield likely lost 246 residents last year, the largest one-year population drop the city has seen in five years.

Revised population estimates going back to the 2010 Census show the city has lost 1.5 percent of its population — about 930 people — over that period, according to Census Bureau data released today.

But that's an improvement and a significant stemming of population loss from the 2000s when the city declined by more than 4,700 people.

"If you look at the rates of decline, they've slowed," said Horton Hobbs, vice president of economic development for the Chamber of Greater Springfield.

A lot of population movement is happening within the region, he said, meaning workers are still available for local employers.

The downward trend still concerns city and county leaders.

"In order to attract jobs, a community has to show some signs of growing," Clark County Commissioner John Detrick said.

He sees a shift in demographics as partially to blame. An aging population is dying or retiring to other states and young people are having fewer children, plus they aren't sticking around to have those children in Springfield.

Detrick hopes that recent successes in attracting and retaining jobs, including Navistar's agreement with GM that's expected to add 300 jobs, will slow the population decline further.

The city sees the challenge as two-fold, Mayor Warren Copeland said, "one is employment and the other is education."

"In order to attract people, families, to this community, we have to prove to them and demonstrate that we have an education system that is capable of providing a great means of education," Hobbs said.

It's unrealistic to expect that the problem is going to rebound overnight, he said.

"We've set our sights from an education, from a workforce development, from an economic development perspective on the long-term horizon," Hobbs said. "So what we do today you might not see the fruits of for another five, maybe 10 years. But we have to take those steps now to stem off the losses that we've had and strategically plan our way forward."

The fastest growing counties in Ohio since 2010 are Delaware (10.8 percent growth), Franklin (7.6 percent) and Warren (5.4 percent). The counties with the fastest shrinking populations are Carroll (3.6 percent reduction), Jefferson (3.4 percent) and Crawford (3.4 percent).

Champaign County's population has shrunk by 2.8 percent since 2010, ranking it 12th in terms of declining population. Clark County has lost 1.7 percent of its population since 2010, according to census data.

"Most of our population loss is in the city," Detrick said. He's concerned about an uptick in violent crimes in the city possibly driving people away.

Deandre Carey agrees. Her son Xamari is one of the newest residents of Springfield, born Tuesday at Springfield Regional Medical Center.

She doesn't plan on staying in the city because she believes there's a lack of jobs and safe activities for her sons.

"After this year, when he gets a little older, I'll probably be leaving because I want my sons to go to a better school and I want them to be able to do kids programs and be able to have different places to go and have fun instead of being out on the streets and getting with the wrong people," Carey said.

The Census Bureau recalculates its estimates each year, which is why the numbers released this week differ from those previously reported for past years.

For example in 2014, the News-Sun reported that Springfield was the 11th worst city in the nation for population decline — losing 2.1 percent of its population from 2010 to 2013. But according to the updated numbers, the population decline for that time period was likely closer to less than 1 percent.

Springfield may still have been among the worst, as other cities like Youngstown also have

seen their numbers adjusted upwards (from a 2.7 percent decline to 2.2 percent).

The Springfield News-Sun digs into important stories that affect jobs and the economy in Clark and Champaign counties, including recent coverage of local unemployment rates and tax breaks for local businesses.