

Downtown Gaining Residents, While People Are Leaving The South Side, South Suburbs In Droves

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News

Last week, the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) released its annual [population and housing unit estimates](#). For the third straight year, the Chicago area led the nation in population loss. Cook County's population dropped from 5.23 million people to 5.21 million.

What the Census data does not show is where the population loss is being felt the most, and the areas of Cook County that are gaining residents.



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A view of downtown from Old Town

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning [drilled deeper](#) into the numbers and found that, compared to other major metropolitan areas, the greater Chicago area is the only major metropolitan area in the U.S. showing a significant population decrease.

The population loss is attributable to multiple demographic factors. Declining birth rates, an aging population and delayed marriages are slowing down natural population growth. Meanwhile, the area is seeing an increase in outmigration, which dovetails with the area's unemployment rate, which has yet to return to pre-recession levels.



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Demographic and public policy consultant Rob Paral

Demographic analyst and public policy consultant Rob Paral said there are fewer immigrants across the country, and a reduction in immigration to the Chicago area in particular is contributing to the area's population decline.

Residents are leaving the area for better economic opportunities. Paral said most of the Chicago area's population loss comes from black residents leaving economically disinvested South Side and south suburban neighborhoods.

"Blacks are concerned about policy issues like school closures, crime and policing. What we're seeing is a reverse migration to southern areas of the country," Paral said.

The Chicago area's loss is benefiting other areas of the country, primarily southern and western metropolitan areas. The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metropolitan area gained 146,000 people last year, spurred by a growing economy and more job opportunities. Census Bureau demographer Molly Cromwell said historically, Dallas attracts large numbers of international and domestic migration, while other metros rely on international migration and natural increase for growth.

Chicago's reverse migration will only add to the tax burdens in South Side neighborhoods and the south suburbs. With fewer people paying in, there are concerns the budget shortfalls will fall more heavily on the remaining companies and residents, and property assessments and economic incentives have become hot button issues.



Chuck Sudo/Bisnow

NKF Executive Managing Director Geoff Kasselmann

The numbers are also showing distinct generational and economic patterns. CMAP's analysis indicates the area's slow economic growth is leading to a loss of lower-income residents, while a flood of higher wage earners are moving to the area.

The number of people in the Chicago area earning less than \$25K annually decreased by 30,000 for native-born residents, and 80,000 for immigrants. Meanwhile, more than 300,000 native-born people and 80,000 immigrants earning \$75K or more have moved to the area.

NKF Executive Managing Director Geoff Kasselmann said the loss of lower income residents is a very interesting statistic that not a lot of people have keyed in on. Housing affordability is a problem that could exacerbate.

Paral said the downtown is still bucking the overall population trends in the area. As older, white residents are leaving the area, younger people are moving downtown to offset the loss, drawn by the economic engine downtown has become.

"Job growth for millennials has been disproportionately downtown. They don't want to live in

the suburbs," Paral said.

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