

Section 5: Concluding Observations

This reports outlines some of the population changes occurring outside of Ohio's villages and cities. For a variety of reasons, ranging from availability of data to reliance on other contrasts such as rural versus urban, analysis of township demographic, social and economic change is not common. The data and analysis summarized in this report reveal that townships are home to over 34% of the State of Ohio's population, and that this proportion as well as the total number of township residents has been steadily growing since at least 1960. This report's analysis also reveals that there is great diversity within the state in terms of the number of residents within a township, the rates of growth across the last forty years, and the population density of townships. Spatial representation of some of these changes show that townships experiencing losses and/or having low population density are generally located in the northwestern, southern and eastern portions of the state. The townships with the most residents, the fastest population growth rates, and the highest density are primarily located around the largest urban areas (Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus) or near the I-71 corridor linking them together.

These descriptive, spatial and historic population trends raise a number of important policy and community questions that require further consideration.

- The increased interest in land-use and farmland preservation issues in the state of Ohio are clearly justified based on the population growth patterns identified in this report. One challenge, if current population growth patterns persist, is the need for townships and counties further from the urban edge to take land-use and farmland issues seriously. Between 1960s and 2000, the population density of townships even further away from the urban edge have steadily increased. This requires that not only those areas immediately adjacent to an urban area examine land-use issues, but areas much further away must do so also.
- An issue of local government capacity that must also be noted. Ohio's townships are growing and the capacity of local government to manage some of this growth in a fashion that preserves the rural character and meets the service needs of new residents is a question that requires additional research. Many of the larger townships have strong local capacity, but many townships likely do not have the same capacity, despite an increasing demand for planning or service provision.
- Relative to cities and villages, townships are an increasingly important settlement area. The pattern of steady township growth, despite annexation of township land and people by municipalities is quite remarkable. Regional efforts to plan and manage growth are increasingly going to have to include townships in these efforts, as a growing and substantial portion of the regional populations are located in townships.
- The pattern of township population growth in proximity to urban areas raises some interesting questions about why Ohioans are choosing to settle in townships versus cities and villages. There is a need to move beyond the simple population data analyzed in this report and understand the individual preferences and local policies that are resulting in township population growth.
- Another social question pertains to the emergence of community in townships. Much community research and policy work relates to incorporated places with the township areas surrounding the village or city often being lumped in with the incorporated place as part of the same community. The pattern of more Ohioans choosing to live in townships coupled with the increased density of these townships raises questions about what is the community in these areas and is it appropriate to link the unincorporated open spaces of

an area with the nearby village or city. This question is an important one, because for townships or any type of community to collectively address local issues and problems there may be a need for a shared sense of place and related social organizational capacity to bring people together to act. Research identifying what the primary social organizations in townships, besides township government, is needed. A related question is simply whether citizens in townships know one another and do they have the capacity to come together and address collective problems or work for community improvement. Often incorporated places have local service organizations or business organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, that provide leadership in local improvement efforts. What are the equivalents in townships and what might be done to develop these equivalents?