

CHAPTER THREE

POPULATION

This chapter describes the demographics of Grass Valley and the Planning Area, in the context of Nevada County and the western slope of the Sierra foothills.

CURRENT POPULATION

According to the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit (DOF), the City of Grass Valley had a resident population of 9,475 on January 1, 1998 (the most recent estimate available to date). Nevada County's population for the same date was estimated at 88,800.

A June, 1998 population estimate (Grass Valley City Staff, Draft #2, 1997 Sphere of Influence Plan Update), placed the City population at 9,639. This estimate was based upon the Department of Finance January 1, 1998 estimate of 9,475, plus annexations which occurred during the first six months of 1998. The City estimate is thought to be reasonable. However, for consistency with the universally recognized DOF estimate, the 9,475 figure will be used as the City 1998 population throughout the General Plan Update. If available in time for inclusion in the Update, the DOF's January 1, 1999 estimate will be substituted as "current".

RECENT AND HISTORIC TRENDS

Grass Valley has experienced numerous population "ups and downs" over its 150 years of existence (100 years as an incorporated municipality), all related to local economic conditions. For Grass Valley's first 100 years, the vicissitudes of gold mining largely determined the ebb and flow of population. It is said that a 1980 population of 6,687 enabled Grass Valley to reach historic population levels achieved in the 19th century.

The 1970s witnessed a substantial leap in City population, from 5,149 (1970) to 6,687 (1980), a 30.1% increase. The 1980s amplified the dramatic growth of the '70s. Fueled largely by "quality of life" in-migration of urbanites (the vast majority from the San Francisco Bay area, the Los Angeles area, and Sacramento), Grass Valley's population took another huge leap. The decade witnessed a 35.1% increase, as the population climbed to 9,048 in 1990 – an average annual increase of 236 new residents.

Through the 1990s, Grass Valley has experienced relatively modest growth, contrasted with the '70s and '80s. From a 1990 population of 9,048 (1990 Census of Population, STF 1), the population has crept up just 4.7% in approximately seven years (to the estimated 9,475 on 1/1/98), or about 60 residents per year. Contributing factors have been the slowdown in in-migration, a persistent recession until 1996, with economic cutbacks locally, and internal demographics (declining birth rate, aging population).

Despite the twenty years of rapid growth from 1970 to 1990, Grass Valley’s share of the total Nevada County population steadily declined. This is due primarily to very rapid population growth in unincorporated portions of the County, including the unincorporated Grass Valley area. In 1970, Grass Valley was home to 20.6% of Nevada County’s residents — nearly one in five. By 1980, Grass Valley was home to just 12.5% of the County’s population. In 1990, the City’s share had further declined to 11.5%, and by early 1998 barely one in ten Nevada County residents (10.7%, based on 1/1/98 estimate) lived in the City.

Table 3-1 provides population trends and current estimates for Grass Valley and Nevada County, including Grass Valley’s share of total County population.

**TABLE 3-1
POPULATION BY AREA, 1970-1998**

Area	1970	1980	1990	1998
Grass Valley	5,419	6,697	9,048	9,475
Nevada County	26,346	51,645	78,510	88,800
Grass Valley as % of County	20.6%	12.5%	11.5%	10.7%

Sources: Census of Population (1970, 1980, 1990); California Dept. of Finance, 10/98 (1998 estimates).

ANNEXATIONS

City population increases over time are partially attributable to annexations. Annexation contributes to population “growth” somewhat artificially, as residents of unincorporated areas become part of the City immediately upon annexation. A corresponding decrease occurs in the population of the unincorporated area being annexed, resulting in no net increase for the region (sphere of influence, planning area) as a whole. No attempt has been made here to identify population increases attributable to annexation over time. The Grass Valley City limits increased from two square miles, or 1280 acres in 1972 (1972 Grass Valley General Plan) to 1,878 acres, or about 2.9 square miles in 1982 (1982 Grass Valley General Plan) to 2,430 acres, roughly 3.8 square miles, in 1998 (Quad Knopf GIS measurement), accounting for some of the population increase in the 20-year period.

Table 3-2 shows the estimated area of the City of Grass Valley at the time of each of the three most recent General Plan Updates, including the 1998-1999 Update.

**TABLE 3-2
GRASS VALLEY LAND AREA, 1972, 1982, 1998**

Year	Land Area	
	Acres	Sq. Miles
1972	1,240	1.9
1982	1,878	2.9
1998	2,430	3.8

Sources: Grass Valley General Plans, 1972 and 1982;
1997 Sphere of Influence Study

PERIPHERAL AREA POPULATION **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE AND PLANNING AREA**

The Planning Area for the 1998-1999 Grass Valley General Plan Update comprises 9,740 acres, and the current Sphere of Influence 9,570 acres. The current Sphere of Influence has a population estimated at 16,170 (Grass Valley City Staff). Despite its larger size, the Planning Area is believed to have a smaller population – the Planning Area takes in the Airpark and Loma Rica Industrial Park (not in Sphere of Influence), but omits the Starbright Acres residential area southwest of town.

For purposes of the General Plan Update, the Planning Area population is estimated at 16,000, subject to refinement with the introduction of more reliable data. Thus the unincorporated Planning Area has an estimated population of 6,525 (derived estimate, Quad Knopf).

Table 3-3 provides 1998 population estimates for the City of Grass Valley, the current Sphere of Influence, and the Planning Area designated for the 1998-1999 General Plan Update.

TABLE 3-3
ESTIMATED 1998 POPULATION

Area	1998 Est. Population
City of Grass Valley	9,475
Unincorp. Sphere of Influence (excl. City)	6,695
Unincorp. Planning Area (excl. City)	6,525

Sources: 1997 Sphere of Influence Plan Update, June, 1998;
California Dept. of Finance; Quad Knopf Planning Area estimate

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

One factor stands out among others in an analysis of Grass Valley's demographics: the preponderance of elderly in the City population. This one factor is the key to understanding numerous other variables, all likely to influence plans and programs in the coming decades: single persons households; ratio of multi-family to single-family housing; ratio of rental to owner-occupied housing, and others.

As used here, the term "elderly" means persons age 65 and over, a definition employed by the Census Bureau. The 1990 Census reported 2,130 Grass Valley residents over 65, of the total population of 9,048. This represents 23.5% of the population, considerably higher than the United States as a whole (12.5%), the State of California (10.7%) or Nevada County (18.1%) for the same year.

Age group proportions in any population profile are particularly noteworthy for planning purposes, because certain aberrations do not change quickly, even in a smaller geographic unit

such as a small city (which is more subject to dramatic change than larger units, such as states or nations). To illustrate this point, Grass Valley’s percentage of elderly population has changed little over recent decades: 22.3% in 1970 and 24.1% in 1980.

A closer look at the 65+ population in 1990 reveals that persons age 75+ outnumbered those 65-74, 1,200 to 930, resulting in part from the steady in-migration of retirement-aged persons in the 1970’s and 1980’s, adding to the already relatively large elderly population.

At the other end of the population spectrum, Grass Valley’s population under the age of 18 in 1990 numbered 2,007, or 22.2% of the City total. The proportion of younger persons (under 18 generally defined as a “dependent” population group) was lower in 1990 than the United States (25.7%), the State of California (27.6%), and Nevada County as a whole (25.2%). Reinforcing the impression of a relatively low proportion of youth are reports of declining school attendance among elementary and middle schools in the Grass Valley/Nevada City area.

Table 3-4 shows Grass Valley’s 1970, 1980, and 1990 populations and percentage shares, by selected age groups.

**TABLE 3-4
1970-1990 GRASS VALLEY POPULATIONS BY AGE GROUP**

Age Group	1970 Pop.	%	1980 Pop.	%	1990 Pop.	%
0-18	1,551	28.6	1,517	22.7	2,007	22.2
19-64	2,661	49.1	3,567	53.2	4,911	54.3
65+	1,207	22.3	1,613	24.1	2,130	23.5
Total	5,419	100.0	6,697	100.0	9,048	100.0

Sources: Grass Valley Housing Element, 1993 (1979 and 1980 data)
1990 Census, STF 3 (1990 data)

HOUSEHOLDS AND HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Closely linked to age composition is household size. The numbers and sizes of households are important planning indicators, with particular implications for housing (demand, type, size, and other housing characteristics).

The Bureau of the Census defines three types of households: single-person households (one person living alone); family households (2 or more people related by kinship); and non-family households (2 or more people, none of whom is related by kinship). Grass Valley’s household population in 1990 was 8,840 persons, residing in 4,174 households. An additional 208 persons resided in group quarters, and thus did not reside in households, by definition, and were not counted in the household population (1990 Census, STF 3A).

Grass Valley’s average household size in 1990 was a very low 2.12. This stands in contrast to the State of California (2.79) and Nevada County (2.51) for the same year. As with age composition, household size changes only slowly over time. Consequently, Grass Valley will

likely have a significantly lower-than-average household size for years to come. Table 3-5 shows Grass Valley's household size for 1980 and 1990 as contrasted with Nevada County and Nevada City. The average household size is currently estimated at 2.05 (Dept. of Finance 1998).

The percentage of single-person households in Grass Valley far exceeds the average. In 1990, 38.3% of the City's households were single-person. For the same year, the United States figure was 24.6%, the State of California 23.4%, and Nevada County a low 20.8%. Thus, in 1990 Grass Valley was home to 24.9% of all single-person households in Nevada County (1,590 of 6,393), although the City's share of total County population was only 11.9%.

**TABLE 3-5
GRASS VALLEY AND NEVADA COUNTY HOUSEHOLD SIZE
1980 AND 1990**

Jurisdiction	Ave. Household Size	
	1980	1990
Grass Valley	2.13	2.12
Nevada City	2.51	2.51

Source: 1980 Census of Population; 1990 Census of Population, STF 3A

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

In 1992, Grass Valley commissioned Menkin/Lucero and Associates to prepare population projections for the City's sewer district and Sphere of Influence (Menkin/Lucero, Sewer District Sphere of Influence Projection Analysis 1990 to 2020, January 27, 1993).

The projections developed at that time continue to be used for planning and public facility purposes. Despite slight differences in geographical boundaries of various key entities for (City of Grass Valley, Sphere of Influence, Planning Area), the area for which projections were made was the 1992 Sphere of Influence (including the city limits), roughly equivalent to the current Sphere of Influence in terms of extent and area.

Because no more current or reliable projections have been made subsequently, the 1993 projections are being used in the General Plan Update.

The Menkin/Lucero study reported, in its Summary of Findings:

1. The 1993 population of 15,220 persons is projected to increase to a range of 23,300 to 28, 690 persons by the Year 2020.
2. The medium of probable population projection for the Year 2020 is 24,530.
3. The range of projections is considerably below the existing General Plan Sphere buildout of 37,905 persons.
4. New housing construction from 1990 to 2020 is projected (to range from) 3,450 units to 5,500 units.

5. In 1993 Sphere residents are generally members of the baby boom generation or are retirees.
6. By the Year 2020 retirees 65 years and older will be the largest single population group, with 27.1% of the total.

The portions of projected population inside and outside of the City limits depends, of course, on annexations prior to 2020. The buildout population of 1996 City boundaries was estimated at “approximately 12,000” (1997 Sphere of Influence Plan Update, page 8).

Table 3-6 below shows the medium range population projections for the Grass Valley Sphere of Influence in five-year increments, from 1990 to the Year 2020.

**TABLE 3-6
POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 1990-2020 (PROBABLE TREND)
GRASS VALLEY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**

YEAR	PROJECTED POPULATION
1990	14,516
1995	15,689
2000	17,549
2005	19,411
2010	21,203
2015	22,924
2020	24,534

Source: Menkin/Lucero & Associates, Sewer District Sphere of Influence Population and Housing Projection Analysis 1990 to 2020 for the City of Grass Valley

ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 3-7 provides a summary of demographic data from the 1990 Census, Summary Tape File 3.

**TABLE 3-7
SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC DATA 1990 CENSUS
GRASS VALLEY**

Population	9,048
Male	3,995
Female	5,053
Families	2,317
Households	4,174
Population in Households	8,840
Population in Group Quarters (not in Households)	208
<i>Age: Universe is total population</i>	
Under 1 year	103
1 and 2 years	278
3 and 4 years	280
5 years	108
6 years	108
7 to 9 years	330
10 and 11 years	283
12 and 13 years	244
14 years	79
15 years	63
16 years	83
17 years	95
18 years	61
19 years	152
20 years	100
21 years	140
22 to 24 years	403
25 to 29 years	722
30 to 34 years	633
35 to 39 years	668
40 to 44 years	663
45 to 49 years	391
50 to 54 years	302
55 to 59 years	269
60 to 64 years	163
65 to 69 years	538
70 to 74 years	392
75 to 79 years	447
80 to 84 years	390
85 years and older	363