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Area's population growth beats Va.'s

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James City and Suffolk lead the way locally with increases of 29.4% and 28.6%, respectively.

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By JON CAWLEY | 247-4635
February 1, 2009

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New population figures released by a [University of Virginia](#) think tank show flat increases for the state in general — but pockets of significant growth in parts of [Hampton Roads](#) and Northern [Virginia](#).

The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service issued the demographic report. The figures show that even though Virginia's estimated population has climbed to about 7.8 million, the state isn't gaining residents as fast as it was earlier this decade.

Between 2000 and 2005, the state's average annual growth rate was about 1.2 percent, but it has been less than 1 percent for the past two years, said Qian Cai, a Weldon Cooper Center spokeswoman.

Cai said the demographic figures were used by state officials to help determine how money was allocated to localities in such areas as education, training and sheriff's salaries.

Much of the state has seen little, if any, growth in recent years. But pockets of Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia have seen significant increases. Loudon County topped the scale with a population growth estimate of 69.6 percent since 2000's census.

According to the report, [James City County](#), and Suffolk showed the largest regional growth since 2000 — increases of 29.4 percent and 28.6 percent, respectively. Increases of 15.6 percent in [Isle of Wight](#), 14.6 percent in York County and 11.3 percent in Williamsburg meant they also fared better than most state localities.

Doug Powell, James City's assistant county administrator, said he

thought that its growth could be attributed to such factors as convenient location, cost of living, and recreational and educational opportunities.

York County Administrator James O. McReynolds cited similar contributing factors but also said, "It does seem that as cities are getting built out, there has been more growth in the counties."

[Newport News](#), [Gloucester](#), Virginia Beach, [Pogooson](#) and [Norfolk](#) fell more in line with the rest of the state, with population increases between 0.2 percent and 3.8 percent.

But some localities fell below the break-even mark. Mathews and Middlesex, with aging populations, dropped in their numbers 5.4 percent and 5.1 percent, respectively. Also losing people were two of Hampton Roads' urban areas: Hampton, with an estimated population loss of 1.5 percent, and Portsmouth, estimated to have 2.9 percent fewer people than in 2000.

Hampton officials didn't comment on the city's declining population. But City Manager Jesse Wallace noted several initiatives under way expected to bolster the numbers.

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"Hampton currently has six neighborhood master plans that call for new residential development, and we believe these developments will have a positive effect on the next census report population figures," Wallace said in an e-mail. "Hampton also has new development projects on the horizon that will offer the types of amenities that will attract new residents to Hampton, such as the Peninsula Town Center, which will feature more than one million square feet of retail, residential and office space."

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Even though the study doesn't delve into specific reasons behind the population figures, Cai said it was thought that the recession and slumping housing market were root causes.

"We believe that with the economy slowing down and every place laying off and not hiring, there are not a lot of opportunities out there," Cai said. "On top of that, those that would move are concerned about selling their house and possibly having to pay two mortgages."

Despite the challenges, Cai said, Virginia is maintaining its position as the country's 12th-largest state and is probably doing better than most others in maintaining its status as a "population attracter."

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