

News

Alameda, Contra Costa counties among fastest growing in state

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The most recent figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show the Bay Area's population is increasing — and it's increasing quickly, pushing home prices up and sending many renters scrambling for an affordable place to live.

The populations of San Francisco and the East Bay, especially around Oakland and Hayward, grew by more than 50,000 people between 2014 and last year, according to the bureau.

Only the Los Angeles, Long Beach, Riverside and San Bernardino areas experienced similar growth in California.

The San Jose area added about 22,500 people between 2014 and last year, according to the numbers released Thursday.

"It's really not surprising at all," said Rufus Jeffris of the Bay Area Council, a business-sponsored, public policy advocacy organization for the nine-county Bay Area. "The Bay Area is still a desirable place to live, despite the high cost of living. There's great weather, good schools. There's lots of reasons why people want to live here."

Alameda County saw the second-highest population growth in the state between July 1, 2014, and the same period last year, rising by 1.6 percent, according to the bureau. Contra Costa County was the fifth-highest in the state, growing at 1.4 percent.

Nancy Moore, a realtor with Pacific Union in Oakland's Montclair district, said the East Bay's hot real estate market reflects the growing population.

At least 80 percent of her listings in the upscale neighborhood and in the Berkeley hills get multiple offers, said Moore, a realtor for 20 years.

"It could even be higher," she said. "It's certainly the highest that I have ever seen since I've been in the business."

The data released Thursday also shows the East Bay's skyrocketing population has been part of a trend that stretches back to at least 2010.

Between 2010 and 2015, Alameda County's population grew by a staggering 127,954 people, or 8.5 percent.

The numbers in Contra Costa County grew by 77,548, or 7.4 percent, while San Mateo County's population grew by 46,637, or 6.5 percent.

In Santa Clara County, the number of people jumped 136,372, or 7.7 percent. The population also rose during the same period for San Mateo County by 46,637, or 6.5 percent.

The latest data comes as communities throughout the Bay Area are wrestling with ways to provide housing opportunities for people, and to prevent longtime residents from getting squeezed out.

“There’s not a lot of housing inventory,” Moore said. “I think that’s playing a big part in what’s driving things.”

About 30 percent of those she encounters wanting to purchase homes in the East Bay are coming from San Francisco, she said.

Jeffris, whose organization represents more than 275 of the region’s biggest employers, said he believes most people arriving from outside the Bay Area are searching for good jobs.

“The economy here is growing,” he said. “We are also seeing jobs available across a lot of sectors, such as in tech and the hospitality industry.”

Creating more opportunities to allow in-law or “granny” units in existing Bay Area homes and building high-density housing near transit hubs could help ease the crisis caused by the growing population, Jeffris said.

“Just building more market-rate housing is not going to solve the problem, especially for folks at the lower-income level,” said Charlotte Rosen of East Bay Housing Organizations, a housing advocacy coalition in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

There is about a 95,000-unit shortfall in affordable housing in the two counties as a result of the climbing population and overall real estate market, Rosen said.

Alameda County supervisors are currently considering placing a \$500 million affordable housing bond before the county’s voters in November as a way to help address the problem.

Earlier this month, residents of Richmond launched a petition drive to put rent control on the ballot to prevent longtime residents from being displaced due to the booming market, while renters in Alameda are pushing for a similar measure, despite city officials having recently adopted legislation to give tenants greater protections.

Yolo County had the fastest growing population in the state between 2014 and last year at 1.8 percent, according to the Census Bureau. The figures also show Los Angeles County remains the nation’s most populous county with 10.2 million people.

The numbers released Thursday are based on annual population estimates for each of the nation’s counties, county equivalents and other data gathered since the 2010 Census and up to July 1, 2015.