



More people leave Staten Island than arrive for the first time in decades

Deborah Young/Staten Island Advance By **Deborah Young/Staten Island Advance**

on March 15, 2013 at 9:02 AM, updated March 15, 2013 at 9:03 AM

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Housing tracts, town homes, new roads, more traffic, less elbow room.

The stunning rate of population growth on Staten Island in recent decades may have reached its end, or at least hit the pause button.

Census figures released Thursday show the borough -- for years one of the fastest growing counties in New York state -- actually lost population between 2011 and 2012, albeit by an insignificant dip of 219.

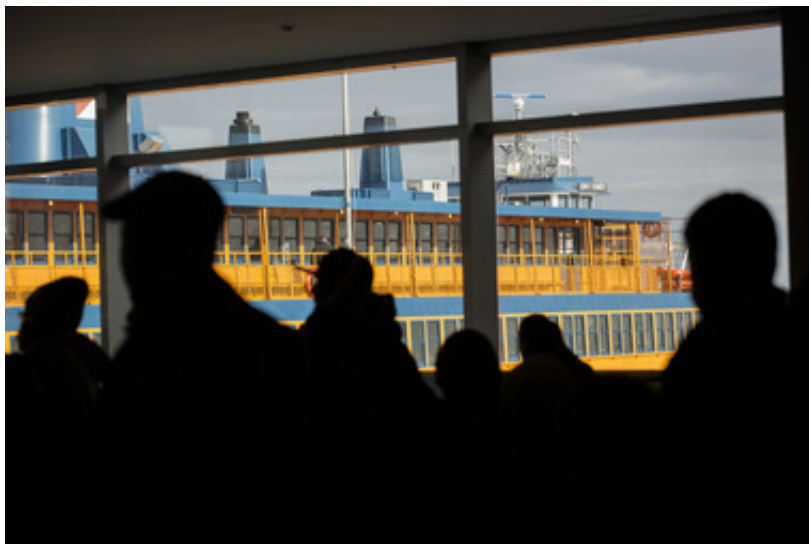
Still, as the rest of the city added residents over the past two years at a pace not seen in decades (2 percent growth), the 470,728 people the Census said were living here in 2012 represented only a slight nudge up (0.4 percent) from the 2010 Census.

At the root of the slowdown: More people left the borough in the two years between 2010 and 2012 -- with nearly 5,000 packing up and heading out -- than in the eight years between 2000 and 2008, when a total of 4,500 moved.

And international immigration to the borough slowed, so it did not make up for the outflow as it has in years past.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there is some moderation in growth," said Jonathan Peters, a professor at the College of Staten Island who watches demographic trends and shifts.

But he cautioned the numbers released as part of the Census 2012 population estimates are based on statistical sampling of public records, and in years past the counts have been different, often higher, than the decennial tally intended to be exact.



Census figures released Thursday show Staten Island -- for years one of the fastest growing counties in New York state -- actually lost population between 2011 and 2012, albeit by an insignificant dip of 219.

Associated Press

He said the population growth in the borough of the Bronx, for example, over the past two years, was likely driven by the robust, affordable rental market in that borough.

"To come to Staten Island, you are probably going to be a home buyer, and you are probably going to want to have a car," said Peters, noting those factors put limits on the type of person who would move here during a tepid economic period.

He said the relatively large exodus may also be attributed to the fact that many borough residents settled here in the 1960s, when they were in their 30s and starting to raise families. Now they're senior citizens, and they're selling their homes and moving to planned retirement communities in New Jersey and other areas.

Borough President James Molinaro said he suspected the borough's actual population is higher than the census estimate. Government outreach in the wake of Hurricane Sandy made it clear to him that the borough has large pockets of immigrants who are not here legally and not filling out Census forms.

With the announcement that Staten Island's growth rate since 2010 pales compared to the rest of the city, Molinaro boiled it down to a trio of reasons: zoning changes, the economy, and the 2006 revocation of the tax abatement for new home purchases.

Zoning changes: Molinaro says zoning changes have made a big difference in an obvious way. To use one example, developers can no longer squeeze 51 houses into three-acre Frankenplots with no thought given to parking and back yards. Now that same space of land can only get about 19 houses.

The economy: Despite positive signs, the borough has been challenged by the difficult economy, Molinaro said. The borough's unemployment rate, for example, was 8.9 percent in January -- below the city and state average, but above the nationwide rate of 8.5 percent.

Tax abatement: It was the height of the building bubble in 2006, when lawmakers decided to rescind the tax-abatement program that was especially popular among Staten Island homebuyers. Homeowners were provided full exemption of property tax for two years, and then it was gradually phased in until the eighth year. Critics said the plan contributed to overdevelopment.

The mayor's office also attributed the citywide gains to a continued surplus of births over deaths, a product of life expectancy gains. The city's largest gain took place in Brooklyn, where the population jumped by 2.4 percent, to a total of 2.5 million. Elsewhere, Manhattan grew 2.1 percent to 1.585 million; Queens grew 1.9 percent to 2.272 million and the Bronx jumped 1.7 percent to 1.408 million.

Advance Assistant Managing Editor Ken Paulsen contributed to this report.