



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

GREG ZEBROWSKI  
Chair

STEVEN GLICKMAN  
Vice Chair

PAMELA PEARSON  
Treasurer

BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP  
Executive Director

## Lehigh Valley Continues Steady Population Growth

The Lehigh Valley added nearly 1,700 new residents in 2019 to bring the total population to 674,232, continuing the kind of steady growth that few other regions in Pennsylvania have enjoyed.

However, those estimates by the U. S. Census Bureau, show the region has gained 27,371 people since the 2010 Census. That average gain of roughly 3,000 new residents a year – while still robust – sets the 2010-2020 decade on pace to log the slowest growth since the 1970s.

“Population growth fluctuations are often cyclical, so it’s not surprising that we had a slowdown right after a decade in which growth was higher than normal, particularly when you consider the decade started with a recession that halted most home building,” said Jill Seitz, LVPC Senior Community Planner.

Overall, the region’s growth since 2010 has been, at 4.2%, more than five times the growth of Pennsylvania statewide, but the 2010s represented a slowing after an overheated 2000s in which a record average of 6,800 new residents moved in each year for a total gain of 68,076 residents. That prompted the building of more than 3,000 new homes regionwide during several years in that decade. However, that ended when the housing bubble burst in December of 2007, setting off a deep recession that brought home building in the Lehigh Valley to a near halt, until 2013. Just 1,047 new homes were approved in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

The Lehigh Valley has had remarkably steady growth since World War II, logging an average of about 4,000 new residents a year each decade, with the exception of two decades: That huge housing bubble bulge between 2000 and 2010, and the 1970s, when growth dipped to about 2,800 a year. That decade was marked by double-digit inflation, a recession and thousands of layoffs at Bethlehem Steel.

This past decade was much closer to the 1970s.

“Growth is still growth, and that’s not happening in every community across Pennsylvania,” Seitz said. “Compared to most regions, Lehigh Valley’s growth is very consistent.”

It should be noted that the most recent U.S. Census number is an estimate, using the 2010 Census as a base. The once-every-decade count is happening right now, and the new official number will be delivered next year. That will be based on an actual head count that ultimately will determine what funding the region gets for education, healthcare, social services, roads and bridges and more, for the next ten years.