

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## EDITORIAL

# Plan the future today

## Ready or not, central Ohio will see population boom by 2050

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Central Ohio is the only area of the state that's forecast for significant growth over the next several decades. But with projections that the region will add half a million people by 2050 comes the need to prepare for and capitalize on it.

Insight2050 is a collaborative project of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, the Urban Land Institute Columbus and the Columbus 2020 economic-development group, which seeks to provide some guidance for the public and private sectors. The study done for those groups by Calthorpe Associates, a California urban-design and planning firm, predicts a very different central Ohio a few decades down the road. Among the key findings in the draft report that's posted on the MORPC site and currently open for public comments at [www.morpc.org/Insight2050](http://www.morpc.org/Insight2050):

- Single-person households are expected to account for more than half of the total growth by 2050.
- The number of residents older than 65 is predicted to more than double.
- Racial and ethnic minorities are expected to account for a majority of the region's growth.

The purpose of the report is not to simply outline these demographic trends, but to help the region respond to them in a smart way. These changes should affect decisions on zoning, tax policy and economic development. The study's backers stress that they don't aim to be prescriptive in telling local governments what they should be doing, but they have been talking to many groups and officials about the need to be aware of coming changes.

"Ultimately, you hope municipalities will be using it for their own planning," said Alex Fischer, chairman of the Columbus 2020 board, of the study earlier this year.

And that doesn't mean simply making cosmetic changes. Said Peter Calthorpe, founder of the firm that produced the study: "The type of development must make sense. Nobody wants to live in a townhouse without a town."

For this reason, planners urge more-dense, mixed-use development rather than the type of outward sprawl that's come along with the market-driven boom in single-family housing development in recent decades. Suburbs such as Dublin already are planning for higher-density development in response to future needs and goals. Terry Foegler, director of strategic initiatives and special projects for the city of Dublin, is supportive of the Insight2050 study.

Shifts in demographics and housing trends would lead to other changes, too. These would include transportation shifts that could result in significant cost savings on road construction: The most urban, population-dense scenario modeled by the study would require no new road construction to accommodate growth.

The history of predicting what the future will look like often looks pretty silly in hindsight; if rosy predictions in the 1950s and 1960s held true today, we all would have flying cars and personal robots. This, however, is not pie-in-the-sky, but a serious study based on documented trends, demographics and research. On the cusp of growth that will transform the region, planners today are in a position to make the future look brighter a few decades down the road. They would be wise to take Insight2050's findings into account.

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