

2020 Census: Weld, Larimer among Colorado's fastest-growing counties, added 135K residents

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Weld and Larimer counties were among the three fastest-growing metro areas in one of the nation's fastest-growing states over the last decade, according to 2020 data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

It's no surprise to anyone who lives in Northern Colorado that Weld County's population grew by more than 30% in a decade, adding 76,186 residents to bring its population to 328,981.

Larimer County's 20% growth rate was third behind Douglas County — tiny Mineral County in southern Colorado grew faster but has fewer than 1,000 people in the entire county — boosting its population by 59,435 residents.



Larimer is still the most populous county in Northern Colorado with 359,066 residents, although Weld is expected to overtake its western neighbor within as little as 10 years, state demographer Elizabeth Garner predicted in 2018.

A Coloradoan analysis of projected growth in Northern Colorado shows Weld's population outpacing Larimer's by the end of the decade.

Windsor, Timnath, Wellington see exponential growth

Census data also confirms what most who live or work here already know: As Fort Collins gets built out and becomes more expensive, people are flocking to smaller area towns like Timnath, Wellington and Windsor.

All have been awash with new home construction, and Windsor and Wellington come with less expensive home prices than Fort Collins where the median home price topped \$525,000 in July.

Fort Collins' population grew nearly 18% from 143,986 to 169,810 in the last decade, while Loveland's population rose 14.2%, up to 76,378, according to the data.

Timnath, Wellington and Windsor saw exponential growth over the decade with tiny Timnath growing from 625 residents in 2010 to 6,487 in 2020 as the town approved major subdivisions and attracted retail behemoths Costco and Walmart.

Timnath Mayor Mark Soukup said the number was a little higher than anticipated but not out of line.

"Gone is the day of saying Fort Collins is an island, that Wellington is an island, Timnath is an island and Loveland is an island. We are all Northern Colorado," Soukup said.

More on the 2020 Census:[See a larger map and more information on the 2020 Census data here](#)

Fort Collins is largely built out with few large developable parcels still available, he said. "Timnath is across the highway, so those developers came in and developed in Timnath."

The town that just a few years ago was a small farming community has ample developable land, but even that will run out within the next two to three decades, Soukup said. Locked in by intergovernmental agreements with neighboring Windsor, Wellington, Severance and Fort Collins, Timnath "only has one piece of ground that will be Timnath. We can't grow any more," he said.

"We think when we are totally filled up, it would leave us with 25,000 to 30,000 residents," growth that is expected to top out in the next 20 to 25 years. After that, development will switch to infill projects and the growth rate will slow, Soukup said.

Fort Collins development:[Montava plans town center, working farm in first phases of 4,000-home Fort Collins project](#)

Town Manager Aaron Adams said Timnath is growing because it is a "high quality of life community ... where people really want to be. It's a regional pull for the greater Northern Colorado. People do give it a second look and often do choose it because of those things."

Tract of Windsor area saw largest population growth in Larimer County

Larimer County's largest growth spurt of the past decade — 143.8% — occurred in a census tract including Windsor's Highland Meadows/Steeplechase/Crossroads areas, running south through Centerra in Loveland.

Census data lists Windsor's population at 32,716, although town economic development director Stacy Miller puts its headcount closer to 40,000.

"We've issued so many single-family home permits," she said. Martin Lind's RainDance subdivision has built out faster than anticipated and new subdivisions are coming online. Through July, the town has issued 717 permits for new single-family homes, more than all of last year, with more than 7,000 available lots, according to town reports.

Part of the reason for Windsor's growth is the availability of developable land, she said.

"We have the capacity to grow to 100,000 and our comprehensive plan designates areas for development, although some areas have developed more rapidly than anticipated," Miller said.

The town still has 7,000 acres of commercial land in town, including 300 acres across from the Budweiser Events Center, she said.

"The fact that Northern Colorado is growing is not a surprise to us," said Troy McWhinney, co-founder of Loveland-based McWhinney, the developer of the 3,000-acre Centerra.

"We believe the northern Front Range will continue to grow," McWhinney said. "We live in one of the most beautiful parts of the U.S. Other people know that and the area is very attractive to families and businesses."

City of Wellington nearly doubled

Wellington's population nearly doubled from 6,289 to 11,047 between census data releases, driven in part by the town's historically lower housing prices that evaporated this decade with higher construction and water costs. The town's median home sales price through June was \$415,474; a year ago that figure was still less than \$370,000.

The second driver for Wellington's growth is the quality of life in a smaller community, said Cody Bird, the town's planning director.

"I hear a lot of residents say that's what they're looking for," Bird said. "We have a lot of Fort Collins folks move to Wellington for the smaller quality of life."

Wellington is also a younger community, again partially due to housing prices, the quality of schools and availability of parks, he said.

Wellington issues between 100 and 150 residential building permits per year but in 2020 issued 272. Because of constraints on its water treatment plant, the town is restricting permits to 100 to 110 for the next three years, which will slow its growth rate.

Town administrator Patti Garcia believes the quality of life will trump housing prices. "People are looking for that quality of life and sometimes there's no price on that," she said.

Growing pains: [Wellington water issues frustrate residents; town asks for patience](#)

Weld leads in diversity, demographic changes shown in Northern Colorado population

As Northern Colorado's population increased, it became a little less homogenous.

Larimer and Weld counties followed a national trend that shows the white population is aging and has fallen to its smallest share of the population on record in most of the U.S., although it rose in much of the south.

Weld's Hispanic or Latino population rose 37.4% and now makes up nearly 30% of the county's population. Residents identifying as two or more races grew to nearly 14% of the county's population, which remains 70.5% white.

Larimer County is 82.4% white, down from 2010 when more than 90% of the population identified as white.

From 2010 to 2020, the percentage of Larimer County residents who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino rose from 10.6% to 12.4%. Those who self-identified as two or more races totaled 9.4% of the population in 2020 figures.

The Black population accounts for 1.1% of county residents, up from 0.8% in 2010, while the Asian population increased from 1.9% to 2.4%

Census data was compiled last year either through mail-in forms or with the help of census takers who went door to door. The start of the 2020 Census count coincided with the spread of COVID-19 last year, forcing the Census Bureau to delay operations and extend the count's schedule.

Because the census data is tied to where people were on April 1, 2020, the numbers do not reflect the nearly 620,000 people in the U.S. — 527 in Larimer County — who died from the coronavirus. Nor do they reflect the large number of people who relocated to Larimer County as their jobs became more portable during the pandemic.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Fastest-growing Colorado counties

1. Weld County: +30.1%
2. Douglas County: +25.4%
3. Mineral County: +21.5%*
4. Larimer County: +19.8%
5. Adams County: +17.7%
6. El Paso County: +17.4%
7. Arapahoe County: +14.5%

*Mineral County is one of the most rural counties in Colorado with 865 people, up from 712 in 2010.

Source: 2020 Census

Larimer County community growth

2020 population (% increase)

Colorado: 5,773,714 (14.8%)

Larimer County: 359,066 (19.8%)

Fort Collins: 169,810 (17.9%)

Loveland: 76,378 (14.2%)

Windsor: 32,716 (75.5%)

Timnath: 6,487 (937.9%)

Wellington: 11,047 (75.7%)

Source: 2020 Census

Pat Ferrier is a senior reporter covering business, health care and growth issues in Northern Colorado. Contact her at patferrier@coloradoan.com. Please support her work and that of other Coloradoan journalists by purchasing a subscription today.