

Housing bust halts growing suburbs

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY

The recession and housing collapse have halted four decades of double-digit growth for nearly half of the nation's biggest rapidly expanding suburbs.

Twenty-four of the 53 cities of 100,000 or more that grew by at least 10% every decade since 1970 lost population in the last two years.

Fifteen are likely to end the decade with less than a 10% gain in population, largely because of recent losses. Among them: [Bellevue](#), Wash., near [Seattle](#); [Coral Springs](#), Fla., near [Fort Lauderdale](#); Fullerton, Calif., near Los Angeles; and Lakewood, Colo., near Denver.

"They will drop out of boomburb status," says Robert Lang, professor of sociology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "Some boomburbs have gone bust; some are still thriving."

Lang coined the term "boomburb" to describe suburbs that grew from sleepy hamlets to major cities. Most are in the Sun Belt. Many of these suburbs now have more people than old, traditional cities in the Northeast and Midwest. Peoria, Ariz., population 168,341, is much larger than its namesake Peoria, Ill., population 113,811.

"This may signal a real shift in the American landscape where suburbs can no longer assume to be gaining on traditional cities," Lang says.

"Places that have done the worst are places where basically real estate was the economic engine," says Ed McMahan, senior research fellow at the [Urban Land Institute](#), a non-profit group that promotes sustainable development.

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Bedroom communities now must rethink their future and become "a little less sprawly, a little more village-like with clustered development, denser housing," Lang says. "The irony is that if they want to keep growing, they must grow as cities, which is diametrically opposite of how they got so big in the first place."

Population has declined since 2006 in Irving, Texas, but the city is prepared for healthy growth as soon as a light-rail line to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport is completed. "Eventually, you have to shift your focus to not just booming growth but redevelopment," Mayor Herbert Gears says. "That (rail) line is what's given us the opportunity to create an urban center."

Condominiums, apartments and retail are planned along the transit line. The city projects a 240,000 population by 2015, an 11% jump.

Growth in Henderson, Nev., near Las Vegas, has slowed but not stopped. "With the slowdown we've seen, it gives us an opportunity to take a breath," says city spokesman Bud Cranor. Henderson is focused on creating "green" jobs and a more sustainable urban environment, he says.

Moreno Valley, Calif., is growing despite the foreclosure crisis. The city created 971 jobs in the past year and six distribution and light-manufacturing businesses opened, says [Barry Foster](#), economic development director. "We create jobs so they don't have to commute," he says.

The 2010 Census will reveal whether new bedroom communities are emerging at the far edges of metropolitan areas or if growth will occur in older boomburbs that transform into more urbanized centers. "This could signal a transition to a new more urban America," Lang says.