

A (Brief) Tale of Four Cities

Outside of Portland and its suburbs, Oregon contains four “second tier” urban enclaves; Eugene-Springfield, Salem-Keizer, Medford-Ashland, and Bend. These four cities exhibit many geographic, economic, and demographic similarities as well as notable differences. This community snapshot explores a number of these characteristics through an examination of recently released Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) data¹.

The Places

Bend – Boom Town:

Located near the center of the state, on the eastern edge of the Cascade Range where the high desert begins, Bend is arguably Oregon’s most scenic city. It is also Oregon’s fastest growing city over the past two decades and was the sixth fastest growing city in the United States in 2005. Not incorporated until 1905, in 1990 Bend had a population of 20,469 people and was Oregon’s 14th largest city. By 2007 Bend’s population was up to 77,780 and it was now Oregon’s 7th largest city, just below Beaverton and edging out Medford. Much of Bend’s growth has been attributed to so called “amenity migrants” seeking the enhanced quality of life available in sunny central Oregon. Those migrants, many with income sources that are not reliant on local conditions, have created a boom in construction jobs and other services to support the newcomers. With the nearby Mt Bachelor Ski Area and numerous destination golf resorts surrounding it, Bend has a national reputation as an active playground. Bend has the highest household and per capita income of the four cities profiled as well as the highest median house value.

Medford – Ashland – Arts Town:

Just north of the California border, in the Bear Creek - Rogue River Valley, lies the Medford-Ashland metropolitan area. Though not quite as fast growing as Bend, the Rogue Valley has seen significant in-migration, largely as a result of its proximity to California and its own set of amenities. Warmer and drier than the damp Willamette Valley, the historic Rogue Valley boasts scenic views of Cascade and Siskiyou peaks, Southern Oregon University, a nearby ski hill at Mt Ashland, and world class performing arts in Ashland’s Shakespeare Theater and Jacksonville’s Britt Music Festivals. The total population for the urbanized area of Medford-Ashland was 140,676 in 2006.

Salem-Keizer – Capitol City:

Oregon’s capitol city region, Salem-Keizer is quickly becoming part of the greater Portland metropolitan area. Among the four cities profiled, it is the most effected by recent dramatic changes in ethnicity in Oregon (and the West in general) with a surging Hispanic population. The cities of Salem and Eugene have battled for the distinction of being Oregon’s second largest for many years, with Eugene taking over this honor in 2007. The Salem-Keizer urbanized area had a population of 225,188 in 2006.

Eugene-Springfield – College Town:

Home of the University of Oregon, Eugene-Springfield is Oregon’s second largest metropolitan area. It has seen relatively slow growth since the 1990’s after losing population for much of the 1980’s timber downturn (which followed a population boom during the 1970’s). Eugene-Springfield does not have the attractive setting and climate of Bend (or even Medford-Ashland), but it has seen its economy diversify away from timber products since the 1980’s and has benefited from growth in the University, medical services, and nearby manufacturing activities. In 2006 the Eugene-Springfield urban area was home to an estimated 236,543 people.

¹ Corvallis and Albany are relatively close in population to this group of four cities, but nether meets the threshold population of 65,000 to be included in the ACS profiles.

Summary of Selected ACS Characteristics for 2006:

	<i>BEND</i>	<i>MEDFORD- ASHLAND</i>	<i>EUGENE- SPRINGFIELD</i>	<i>SALEM- KEIZER</i>
Total urban area population in 2000	57,525	128,780	224,049	207,229
Total urban area population in 2006	74,002	140,676	236,543	225,188
Average annual growth rate 2000-2006	4.77%	1.54%	0.93%	1.44%
Individual / Household Characteristics				
Median age or residents (years)	35.2	36.7	35.2	34.6
Total households	30,979	58,507	97,531	82,505
Average household size	2.37	2.38	2.32	2.62
Average family size	2.88	3.02	2.9	3.2
Median household income (dollars)	\$50,115	\$39,549	\$40,592	\$44,884
Per capita income (dollars)	\$25,797	\$22,372	\$21,993	\$20,543
Housing Characteristics				
Owner-occupied	61.9%	58.8%	54.9%	61.1%
Renter-occupied	38.1%	41.2%	45.1%	38.9%
Homeowner vacancy rate	1.8%	2.1%	1.1%	1.9%
Rental vacancy rate	8.7%	3.7%	2.0%	7.5%
Average household size of owner-occupied unit	2.47	2.46	2.52	2.66
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	2.21	2.26	2.07	2.56
Median House Value (dollars)	\$343,500	\$268,000	\$200,100	\$182,400
Median Monthly Mortgage Cost (dollars)	\$1,470	\$1,353	\$1,267	\$1,368
Median Monthly Rent (dollars)	\$825	\$728	\$697	\$632
Racial / Ethnic Characteristics				
White	96.1%	95.1%	89.8%	87.5%
Black or African American	1.0%	1.4%	1.8%	2.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.3%	3.1%	3.2%	4.8%
Asian	1.4%	2.0%	5.0%	3.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	N	N	0.6%	0.4%
Some other race	1.3%	1.7%	3.6%	4.9%
Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	4.4%	9.6%	7.2%	18.3%
Educational Attainment				
Less than 9th grade	2.2%	4.6%	3.8%	7.5%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	5.7%	7.0%	6.9%	8.3%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	25.8%	27.9%	24.2%	25.6%
Some college, no degree	24.5%	28.0%	26.4%	25.5%
Associate's degree	11.7%	6.8%	8.2%	9.0%
Bachelor's degree	21.2%	17.3%	17.6%	16.1%
Graduate or professional degree	8.9%	8.4%	12.9%	7.9%