INVENTORY
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Chapter A

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

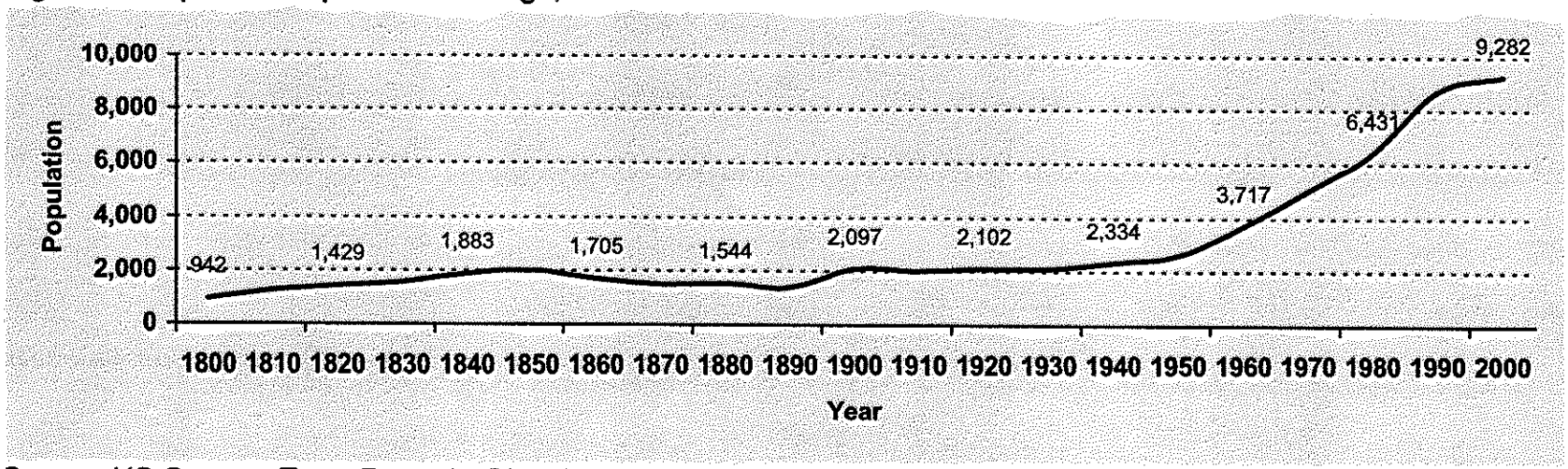
Communities change. Change is easy to recognize when it is fast or large in scale. Change is more difficult to detect when it is subtle. Both types of change can have lasting impacts on a community. A community must understand the trends creating change so that adequate facilities and services can be provided to residents.

This chapter provides a statistical profile of Topsham's population and demographics and discusses the major trends that could affect future services and facilities.

Population Growth, 1800 - 1990

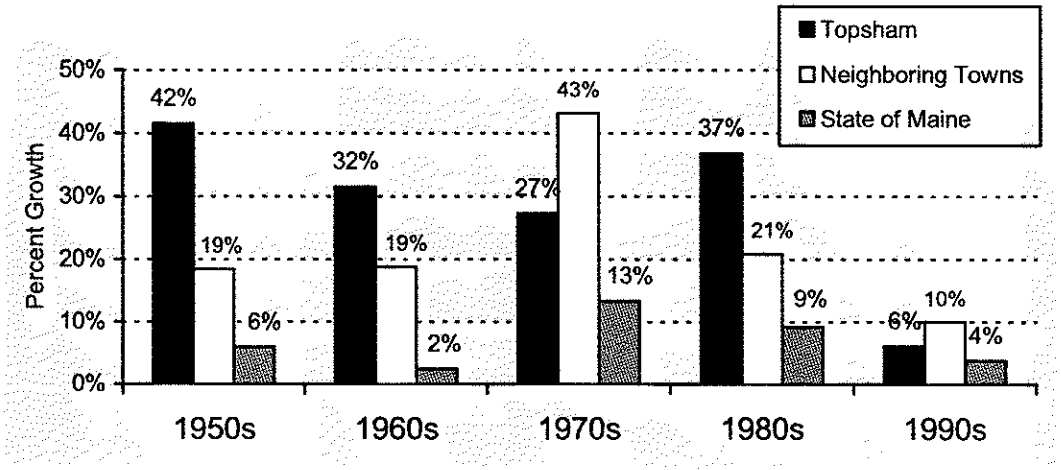
Topsham's population tripled between 1800 and 1950. Intermittent booms and busts in the town's farming, logging, and manufacturing industries led to a 1950 population of 2,600 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Topsham Population Change, 1800 - 2000



Source: US Census, Town Records, Planning Decisions

Figure 2. Population Growth by Decade, 1950 – 2000



Source: US Census; Town Records; Planning Decisions, Inc.

This intermittent pattern of growth changed in the 1950s. A new era of rapid growth was founded on both maturing employment centers (for example Brunswick Naval Air Station, Bath Iron Works, and L.L. Bean) and improved access between employment centers and rural areas on the growing road network and the popularity of the automobile.

In the 1950s, Topsham's population grew by 42% (Figure 2). In the 1960s it grew by 32%. And in the 1970s and 1980s it grew by 27% and 37%, respectively. The consistency and longevity of this rate of growth outpaced the state as a whole and generally outpaced the average growth rates in Bowdoinham, Bowdoin, Lisbon, and Brunswick during this time period1.

Table 1. Estimated Population, 2000

1990 Year round housing units	**3,224**
(+) estimated new yr-round units, '90 – '00	410
(=) estimated year round housing units, '00	3,634
(X) occupancy rate, '00	96%
(=) estimated year-round households, '00	3,489
(X) persons per household	2.62
(=) estimated year round population	9,141
(+) group quarters population	141
(=) Total estimated population, 2000	**9,282**

Source: US Census; Topsham; Planning Decisions

Population Growth, 1990 - 2003

Not until the 1990s did Topsham's rate of growth moderate. Topsham's population is estimated to have reached 9,282 residents by 2000 – a growth rate of 6% in the 1990s2 (Table 1). The addition of 410 year-round

[1] Analysis averages the rates of growth for each town in each decade to ensure that significant population changes in smaller towns were not overwhelmed by insignificant changes in larger towns.

[2] The 2000 US Census reports a net increase of 336 housing units versus town records which report a net increase of 410 housing units (419 building permits minus a factor for conversions and demolitions). Given this more robust housing unit growth, Planning Decisions estimates Topsham's 2000 population to have been 9,282.

Table 2. Population Growth, 1950 – 2000

	1950	% Change	1990	% Change	2000
Bowdoin	638	246%	2,207	23.6%	2,727
Bowdoinham	1,039	111%	2,192	19.2%	2,612
Topsham	**2,626**	**233%**	**8,746**	**6.1%**	**9,282**
Maine	913,774	34%	1,227,928	3.8%	1,274,923
Brunswick	10,966	91%	20,906	1.3%	21,172
Lisbon	4,318	119%	9,457	-4.0%	9,077

Source: US Census, Planning Decisions, Inc.

housing units (422 permits for new units minus a factor for conversions and demolitions) and an occupancy rate of 96% increased the number of households to 3,634. Tempering this increase was a decline in the number of persons per household from 2.80 persons to 2.62 persons. The group quarters population increased slightly to 141 persons.

Topsham's growth rate moderated for three reasons. First, several of the region's major employers downsized in the 1990s, most notably Bath Iron Works and the Brunswick Naval Air Station. Losing these regional jobs suppressed the amount of regional demand for housing. Second, the recession of the early 1990s severely suppressed growth throughout Maine for the first half of the 1990s. It wasn't until 1995 that most communities started growing again. And finally, Topsham's demographics suggest that many of the young families that moved into the community in the 1970s and 1980s have matured and children have left home.

Topsham grew moderately in the 1990s when compared with surrounding communities (Table 2). The smaller communities of Bowdoin and Bowdoinham grew faster, while the larger communities of Brunswick and Lisbon grew slower.

In the three years since the Census was conducted, Topsham's population is estimated to have increased another 349 residents to 9,631 (Table 3). Using the same formula, the addition of more households is moderated by a decrease in the number of persons per household. The group quarters population is estimated to have remained stable.

Population Projections, 2003 - 2015

Projections for the future are difficult in the best circumstances. Trends in the national economy, changes in the regional housing market, and even local policy decisions can affect population growth rates.

Based on available information and existing trends, the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee projects Topsham's population will increase from an estimated 9,282 residents in 2000 to 10,702 residents in 2015. This projection is based on:

Table 3. Estimated Population, 2003

2000 Year round housing units	**3,634**
(+) estimated new yr-round units, '00 – '03	150
(=) estimated year round housing units, '03	3,784
(X) estimated occupancy rate, '03	96%
(=) estimated year-round households, '03	3,633
(X) estimated persons per household	2.61
(=) estimated year round population	9,481
(+) estimated group quarters population	150
(=) Total estimated population, 2003	**9,631**

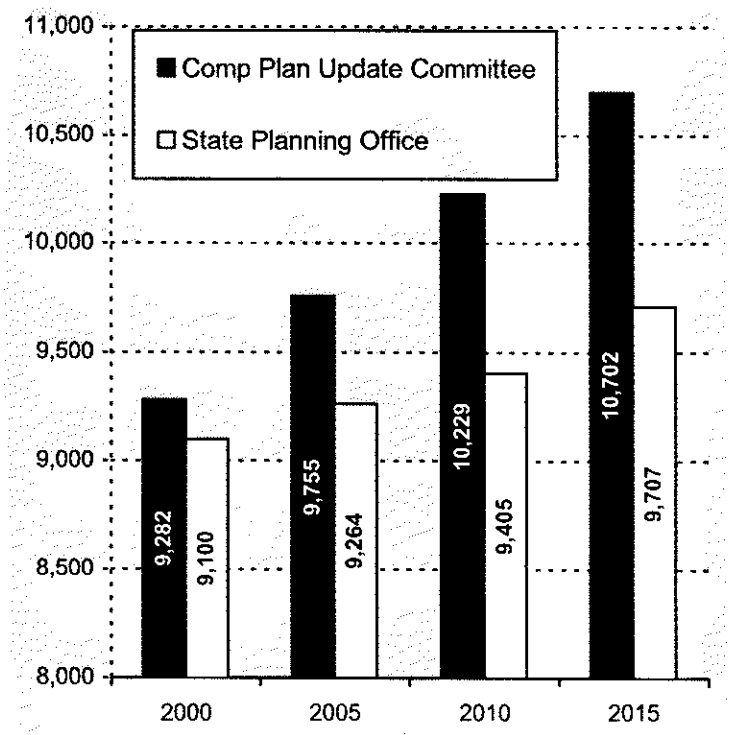
Source: US Census; Topsham; Planning Decisions

- Moderate housing unit growth will continue through 2015. The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee projects a moderating regional housing market (from current high levels) will be more than offset by Topsham's location as an accessible community to jobs in Portland, Augusta, and Lewiston. In addition, Topsham's growing role as a regional service center could attract a range of services and businesses, which could increase local employment and therefore housing pressure. Therefore, the CPUC estimates that housing growth will continue at a rate of 55 units per year through 2015.

- Occupancy rates will remain high at the current 96% - a reasonable level for a community with a mix of owner-occupied housing units and a stable regional economy.

- The average number of persons per household will continue to decrease from the current 2.61 persons per household to 2.45 persons per household. The attractiveness of Topsham as a community for younger families will tend to hold this number up, while a national trend towards smaller households and the attractiveness of senior living developments in the area, like the Highlands retirement community, will tend to push this number down.

Figure 3. Population Projections, 2000 – 2015



Source: Maine State Planning; Planning Decisions

- The group quarters population (principally assisted-living and adult-care facilities) is projected to increase from 150 to 250.

The discrepancy between the projections made by the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee (10,702 residents in 2015) and those done by the State Planning Office (9,707 by 2015) is due to the basis on which each projection was made. The State Planning Office projections are based on the survival rate of age cohorts as reported by the US Census between 1990 and 2000. The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee projections are based on local records, regional housing trends, and local demographic characteristics.

Household Change

Household sizes have decreased nationwide for the last 40 years for several reasons; a trend towards single-person and smaller households in the Baby Boom generation, the increased longevity of seniors, an increase in divorce rates, and the trend for younger couples to wait longer before starting families.

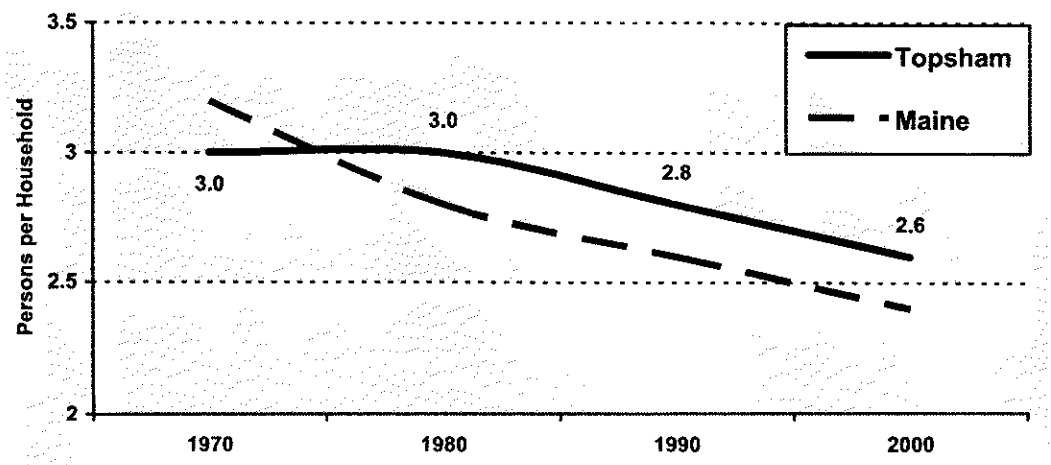
Following this trend, the average Topsham household size has decreased from 3.0 persons to 2.6 persons (Figure 4) between 1970 and 2000. This decrease is smaller than the decrease recorded for the state as a whole, in part due to Topsham's attractiveness as a community for younger families.

Planning Decisions projects this trend will continue through 2015 when the average Topsham household will have 2.45 persons per household.

These seemingly small changes in the average household size can have large impacts on the community. For example, assume no new housing units are built for ten years and the average number of persons per household decreases by 0.2 (the same decrease as recorded in Topsham between 1990 and 2000). In a community Topsham's size, this translates into a decline of roughly 700 residents. Therefore, to make up for those 'lost' residents, an additional 270 occupied housing units would have to be added to the town's housing stock.

Because of this, seemingly small population changes can mask significantly larger amounts of change in a

Figure 4. Persons per Household, 1970 - 2000



Source: US Census

community's demographic composition and housing unit growth.

Age Distribution

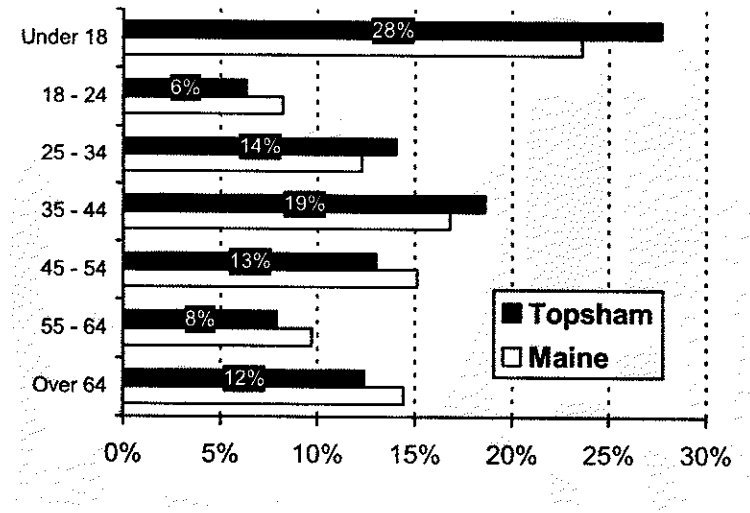
In 2000, the median age for Topsham residents was 36.3 years. More than one-quarter of the town's residents were under 18 years, and another 20% were between 18 and 34 (Figure 5). The baby boom generation, those born between 1945 and 1964, had become mature adults in 2000 – nearly one-third of the town's residents were between 35 and 54 years. Residents older than 64 accounted for 12% of the population.

Compared with the state, Topsham is a young town. The median age of Topsham's residents is 2 years younger than that of the state as a whole. The town's younger populations are relatively larger than the state's and its older populations are relatively smaller (Figure 5).

Even though Topsham is a relatively young town, it is getting older. In 1990, Topsham's median age was 31.5, nearly 5 years younger than it was in 2000. All of its younger age groups were relatively smaller in 2000 than they were in 1990, and all of the older age groups were larger in 2000 than they were in 1990 (Figure 6).

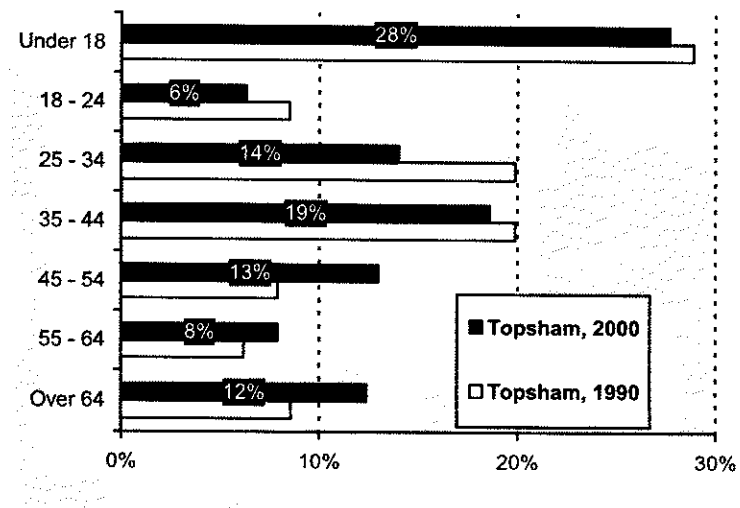
This aging population is part of a national trend that is driven by several factors, including the aging Baby Boom generation (notice two changes between 1990 and 2000: those between 25 and 34; and those between 45 and 54). These changes show the baby boom generation moving through the age profile. Also affecting the town's population are younger families choosing to wait longer before having children and increased life expectancies.

Figure 5. Topsham Age, 2000



Source: US Census

Figure 6. Topsham Age, 1990 – 2000



Source: US Census

In the future, the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee projects a distinct aging of the population. Three factors will drive this trend.

First, the community's relatively low cost of housing, accessibility, efficient level of town services, and presence of the Air Station Annex will attract younger families with children. However, increasing housing prices and demographic trends towards smaller households will likely decrease – or at least hold steady – the number of children in the community in the future.

Second, demographic trends towards an older population will affect the entire community, especially as the baby boom generation ages and reaches the retirement age.

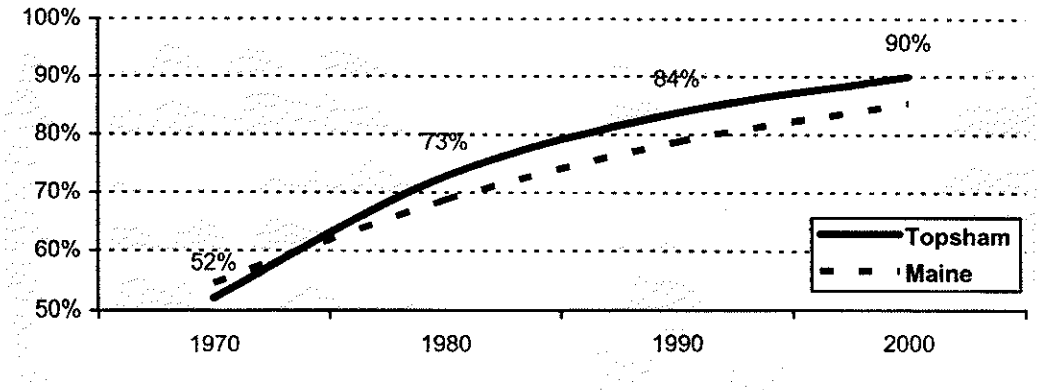
Finally, an older demographic are being attracted to the elderly-services in the region and the accessibility to cities, rural areas, and the coast (e.g. the Highlands). As this population becomes more prominent in town, their demands on local services and facilities (especially health services and recreation facilities) will increase.

Education Attainment

Topsham residents are increasingly better educated. In 2000, nine out of ten residents had at least a high school diploma (or equivalent), up from 52% in 1970 (Figure 7). This is slightly higher than the average for the state as a whole.

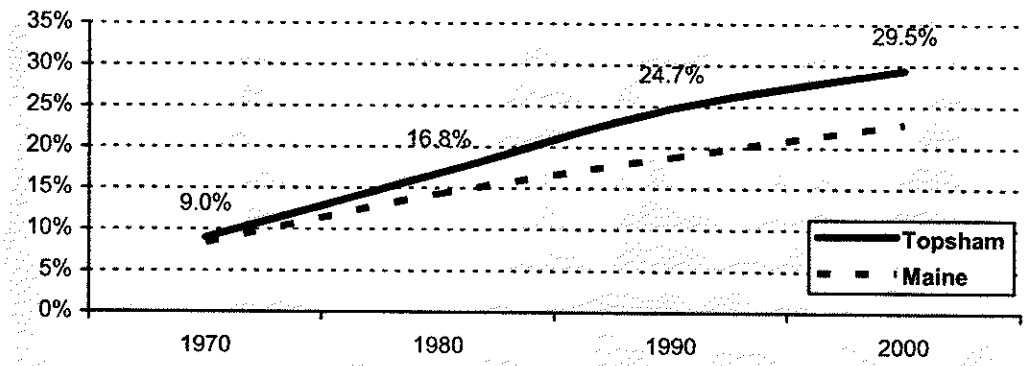
A more significant increase is the number of residents with at least a Bachelors degree. In 2000, three in ten residents had at least a Bachelors degree while only at one in ten in 1970 (Figure 8). In addition, the growth rate in this demographic is significantly higher than the state as a whole.

Figure 7. Residents with a High School Diploma or Equivalent



Source: US Census

Figure 8. Residents with at least a Bachelors Degree



Source: US Census

The national trend towards a higher level of formal education will continue into the future, especially as Topsham becomes increasingly interwoven in an economy that demands formal and specialized training. This suggests that Topsham's population has changed significantly in recent decades and is likely to continue to change with respect to educational attainment. This may influence citizens' expectations for municipal services, especially in the area of public schools.

Occupational Characteristics

More than one-third of Topsham's employed residents work in managerial or professional occupations (Table 4) and another quarter work in sales. Traditionally blue-collar jobs – construction, extraction, maintenance, production, and transportation – account for another quarter of the jobs. The remaining 17% work in service professions.

Comparisons with Topsham's historic occupational profile are difficult because the US Census changed the categories of occupations in the 1990s. Generally speaking, Topsham residents are becoming more white-collar and service oriented. This follows a national trend as more and more of the traditional manufacturing jobs have left the region and have been replaced by service-oriented jobs.

Compared with the state as a whole, Topsham residents are more likely to have managerial and professional occupations and less likely to have production and transportation occupations.

Table 4. Occupational Profile, 2000

	Topsham	Maine
Managerial and Professional	35.7	31.5
Service	17.2	15.3
Sales	23.6	25.9
Farming, Forestry, Fishing	0.2	1.7
Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance	11.1	10.3
Production, Transportation	12.2	15.3

Source: US Census

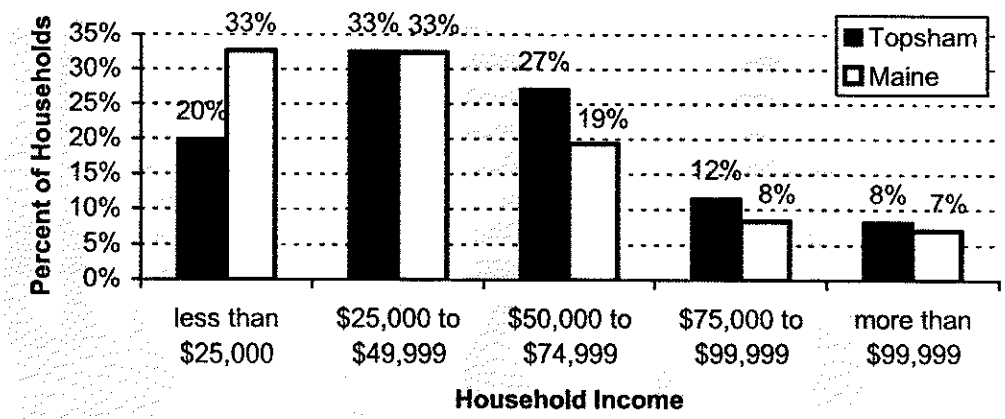
Household Income

In 1999 (the year in which the US Census tracks income data), Topsham's median household income was $47,682. Twenty percent of the households earned less than $25,000 and nearly one-third earned between $25,000 and $50,000 (Figure 9). Roughly half of the households earned more than $50,000.

Topsham households have higher incomes than the state as a whole. Topsham's median income in 1999 was $10,000 higher than the state's median of $37,240. In addition, significantly fewer Topsham households earned less than $25,000 per year (Figure 9).

Topsham households earned more in 1999 than they did in 1989. Median household incomes increased from $34,287 to $47,682. After adjusting for inflation (using the Consumer Price Index All-Urban by the US Dept of Labor), this is an increase of 5.5%. During this same period of time, the median income for Maine rose 1.4% after inflation.

Figure 9. Household Income, 2000



Source: US Census

Issues and Implications

1. Topsham's moderate 7% growth rate in the 1990s was as low as it has been in five decades, and is a growth rate that is projected to continue in the near future. The Town should consider what this future level of growth means for its current facilities and services.

2. Smaller household sizes and a growing population have created a demand for housing that is disproportionate with the town's population growth rate.

3. Topsham's median age is increasing. This increase is the result of natural trends, but it is also the result of the region's attractiveness as an adult living center. As the town's population ages, the demand for services, especially in recreation, will change.

4. Topsham's location at the intersection of Routes 95, 1, and 196 makes it ideal for both commuters and employers. If the level of movement of people into and out of Topsham increases in the future, this could significantly impact the infrastructure, services, and facilities provided by the town.

5. Topsham's household income estimates suggest that the number of households with higher incomes is increasing while the number of households with lower income levels is decreasing. Growing incomes can change residents' expectations for the town's facilities and services.

6. While town's household population is diverse (education levels, occupations, income levels) this is becoming less so. The Town should consider whether it should work to maintain this diversity in the future.