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Report projects Warren County growth to ramp up

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Construction crews continue work on the new homes being built in the S on Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. According to a new Population Projection Re Center, Warren County's population is expected grow to more than 200,0 county. (Grace Ramey/photo@bdailynews.com)

Grace Ramey

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Warren County's already-steep growth curve is about to go nearly perpendicular.

A new report from the Louisville-based Kentucky State Data Center said the county's population will swell to more than 200,000 over the next three decades, leapfrogging it into a spot as the state's third-largest county.

KSDC's Population Projection Report uses data on births, deaths and net migration to forecast future populations for all 120 Kentucky counties.

Based on that forecast, Warren County will be a primary reason why the state's population is projected to grow by 6.2% (4,505,836 to 4,785,233) from 2020 to 2050.

Perhaps the biggest outlier in the projections that show 75 of the 120 counties declining in population, Warren County is predicted to add 74,743 residents from 2020 to 2050, reaching 209,297 residents and

surpassing both Kenton and Boone counties to become the state's third-most populous county.

In raw numbers, Warren County's projected growth is second only to Fayette County's 75,649 and its 55.6% gain trails only Scott County's 79.5% growth rate.

Headly numbers, but they're nearly business-as-usual for local business and government leaders already accustomed to the county's rapid growth.

"It really confirms what we've suspected all along," said Ben Peterson, executive director of the City-County Planning Commission of Warren County. "We typically beat those population projections."

Peterson has seen years of fast-paced residential and commercial growth, resulting in the county's population jumping from 113,792 in 2010 to 134,554 in 2020, but he said recent events have ratcheted up that expansion.

Japan-based Envision AESC will break ground this month on a 3 million-square-foot electric-vehicle battery plant in the Kentucky Transpark that's expected to employ 2,000 people and accelerate the county's growth.

"That changes the game a bit and makes it more challenging," Peterson said of the battery plant.

While the Envision AESC announcement was a game-changer, Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon sees the projected population growth in the KSDC study as just more of what he has seen during nearly three decades of leading the county government.

"This study reflects our recent historic annual growth," Buchanon said in a text message. "We've known for some time that our trajectory was placing us as the fastest-growing county in the commonwealth."

Buchanon points to the county's geographic location and the presence of Western Kentucky University and

Interstate 65 as reasons for the growth.

“Our university town environment and local arts and entertainment all create excitement that attracts young people,” he said, “and the quality of our city and county education systems attract young families.”

KSDC Director Matt Ruther agrees with Buchanon, saying: “That’s the kind of growth we’ve seen in Bowling Green and Warren County. Our projections generally continue the trend you’ve seen in the past.”

Ruther said Warren County’s numbers reflect a trend of growing metropolitan areas and shrinking rural counties.



“Almost all the growth is projected for the metro areas,” he said.

“Bowling Green stands out because it’s smaller at the present time than Lexington and Louisville, but all those areas are growing.”

Jefferson County is projected in the study to add 55,241 residents between 2020 and 2050, bringing the state’s biggest county to a population of 838,210.

Among the other biggest growth areas are Scott County, which is essentially part of the Lexington metro area, and Boone County, part of the Cincinnati metro region.

Counties projected to lose population are primarily those in the eastern part of the state that have long depended on coal mining to fuel the local economies.

Warren County’s projected growth translates to a boost for the 10-county Barren River region, which climbs from a population of 312,062 to 399,036 in the study.

Along with Warren County, Barren River region counties Allen, Barren, Hart, Monroe and Simpson are all expected to expand, with Simpson County projected to grow by a healthy 32.5%.

The other regional counties – Butler, Edmonson, Logan and Metcalfe – are projected to have slight declines in population.

Barren River Area Development District Executive Director Eric Sexton said the agency is working to ensure that the region maintains the momentum that has made it what he calls “one of the top in the commonwealth for population growth.”

“Local communities are receiving updates, additions and other infrastructure projects to help foster and support the growth,” Sexton said.

The KSDC study is good news for Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce President Ron Bunch, whose economic development efforts have helped fuel much of the growth.

“As you look at the data, a large driver of our growth is economic growth,” Bunch said. “In a country where there’s a shortage of workers, growth in population gives our employers confidence that they’ll have workers.”

Bunch and Peterson said local officials are working to ensure that the expected growth doesn’t overwhelm the region’s infrastructure.

Already, the Tennessee Valley Authority and Warren Rural Electric Cooperative Corp. are working on improvements to electric transmission capacity at the Transpark to accommodate Envision AESC.

“There are issues that come with growth,” Bunch said. “We want to make sure we don’t have bottlenecks with transportation or utilities.”

– More information about the population projection report can be found at the [ksdc.louisville.edu](https://www.ksdc.louisville.edu) website.

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