

Data and Trends Highlights

Aiken County is a total of 1,073 square miles (or 686,772 acres), making the county the fourth largest in the State of South Carolina in terms of land area.

Population: In the year 2000, the total population of Aiken County was 142,552. There was an increase of over 21,600 new residents between 1990 and 2000. In that decade, Aiken County grew by 18 percent, which was faster than the State of South Carolina and the Nation. The population is projected to increase to over 155,000 residents by the year 2008. The population of Aiken County is also becoming older. In 2000, 1 out of 8 people was 65 and over, versus 1 out of 10 in 1980. In 2000, 78 percent of residents aged 25 and older had finished high school and 20 percent had a college degree. These figures were lower than the State and the Nation.

Households and Housing Units: A household includes all the persons who live in a housing unit. A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a mobile home, a group of rooms, or a single room. In 2000, there were a total of 55,587 households in the County. The growth in households between 1990 and 2000 was nearly 24 percent. This means that the number of households is increasing faster than the population, which grew by only 18 percent.

Between the years 2000 and 2008, the number of households is projected to increase by over 7,800. Based on this projected number, the County will need more than 7,800 available housing units to accommodate these households. In the year 2000, there were 61,987 housing units in the County. Nearly 90 percent of these were occupied. In 2000, 67 percent of homes were single family detached, 10 percent were part of a multi-unit building, and 23 percent were mobile homes.

The Economy

The county has a number of economic strengths. There are a number of local economic development agencies working cooperatively. The county is part of the larger Aiken-Augusta metropolitan area. There is a growing population and labor force. High-tech research and development is present. There is a low cost of business because of low taxes as well as low wage rates. There is infrastructure capacity to accommodate growth. There is limited regulatory control. There is a high quality of life.

At the same time, there are a number of economic issues that should be recognized. The county has a dependence on manufacturing and SRS. In fact, manufacturing accounts for 40 percent of jobs in the county. Not all areas of the county have shared in its overall prosperity. The amount and type of development taking place may be expensive and difficult to serve with infrastructure and public services. There has been a loss of agricultural resources. The labor force is not growing as fast as the population.

Fiscal Conditions (Aiken County Government's structure, income, and expenditures)

The County has a number of fiscal strengths. It has a diversified revenue base including property taxes, local sales tax, fees, permits, intergovernmental grants. The new 1% sales tax has helped fund projects like parks, libraries, roads, and economic development for the county and cities and towns in the county. It has a low tax rate compared to similar counties in the state. Property values in the county are increasing which helps support the County's fiscal base. Aiken County government appears to be in excellent fiscal health, with a declining debt load, a growing tax base, and an A1 bond rating. Technology is helping the County work more efficiently and has reduced staffing requirements, particularly for administration functions.

In addition to these positive indicators, there are a number of fiscal issues that deserve attention. The county is growing and developing, but the costs of this growth to the County in terms of services and infrastructure have not been quantified. There is a growing senior population with different needs for government services such as health care or EMS. Although the County has been able to increase efficiency in some areas, hiring and salary constraints may impact the County's ability to deliver services effectively. At the same time, there are a growing number of mandates the County must comply with. The County also has to be aware of keeping up with capital facilities, equipment, and maintenance. The large geographic area of the County and the dispersed population influences the cost of delivering public services.