Growth sputters in Oconee's cities

Census data shows robust growth in Pickens' incorporated areas

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SENECA — According to US Census data, Oconee County's population is rising at a rate of 8 percent, but incorporated cities and towns are not fueling that growth.

Population estimates released this week by the Census show that population growth in Oconee's cities and towns is either stagnant or dwindling.

Case in point: Walhalla's population as of the Census' July 1, 2009 estimate was 3,503, or down almost 8 percent from the 2000 count of 3,801 city residents.

Westminster also lost ground. Its population last year was 2,658, which is down 3 percent from the 2,743 residents counted in 2000.

Growth in Seneca, Oconee's largest city, was up just 2.4 percent to 7,832 last year from a count of 7,652 inhabitants in 2000.

Salem's population grew by six residents last year to 132, or a 4.7 increase from the official count in 2000.

West Union, Oconee's only other incorporated municipality, saw its population increase 1 percent from 297 in 2000 to 300 last year.

The July 1, 2009 estimate is the last one to be issued by the US Census using the 2000 census results as its base. The next series of estimates to begin in 2012 will be based on the 2010 Census.

A census is required every 10 years in the United States.

Unlike Oconee's cities, Pickens County municipalities grew at a more robust pace.

Leading the way is Central, which had a population estimate last year of 4,079, or an increase of 15.8 percent from its 2000 count of 3,522.

Easley with a count of 20,540 last year, was right behind with a 15.7 percent increase.

Clemson's population was estimated to be 13,002 last year, or a spike of almost 9 percent from the 2000 tally of 11,939.

In the past, Walhalla and Westminster officials have questioned the Census estimates showing a loss of population within city limits. They say that utility accounts have remained stable or grown.

The Census allows for challenges to their estimates, but neither Walhalla nor Westminster has done so.

Last year's Census estimate is derived from a housing unit estimate that is multiplied both by the 2000 occupancy rate, and then by the 2000 persons per household.

The federal government will use the official 2010 Census count in determining how to designate about $400 billion in public funding annually.

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POPULATION CHANGES

City; County; July 2009 pop.; April 2000 pop.; % change
Salem; Oconee; 132; 126; +4.7
Seneca; Oconee; 7,832; 7,652; +2.4
Walhalla; Oconee; 3,503; 3,801; -7.8
Westminster; Oconee; 2,658; 2,743; -3.0
West Union; Oconee; 300; 297; +1.0
Central; Pickens; 4,079; 3,522; +15.8
Clemson; Pickens; 13,002; 11,939; +8.9
Easley; Pickens; 20,540; 17,754; +15.7
Liberty; Pickens; 3,070; 3,009; +2.0
Pickens; Pickens; 3,036; 3,012; +0.8
Six Mile; Pickens; 585; 553; +5.7