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Sociology 201

Essay #2

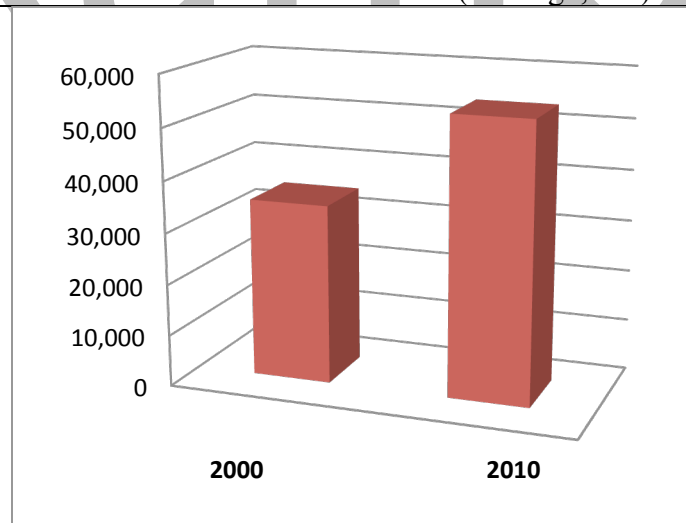
1 November 2013

Durango, CO and the Accessory Housing Debate

Bayfield, Colorado has a population of 2,333 according to the 2010 census and is my hometown. The slightly larger town of Durango is approximately twenty miles away and has a population of 16,887. Due to the lack of information about Bayfield the research includes Bayfield and Durango. Although Colorado is normally a swing state, Durango and the surrounding area is mostly Democratic. The economy of Durango is based off of tourism which includes the Durango-Silverton Railroad. Durango is known to be a historic and beautiful town which contributes to the tourism that lasts all year long. In the summer tourists come to walk Main Street, go hiking, fishing, hunting, kayaking, or enjoy various other outdoor activities. In the winter the main tourist attraction is skiing or snowboarding at Durango Mountain Resort. Furthermore, Fort Lewis College is located in Durango which also helps to bring money into the town. Durango has multiple schools for preschool through high school and then Fort Lewis College while Bayfield only has one preschool, one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school ("Profile"). In this essay I analyze median income, unemployment rates, the number of existing housing units-vacant and occupied-, and the total population growth over the last decade- including the percent change of white and Hispanic/ Latino people. All of these factors play a significant role in the living conditions of the residents of Durango and Bayfield; thus, explaining the demand for accessory dwelling units.

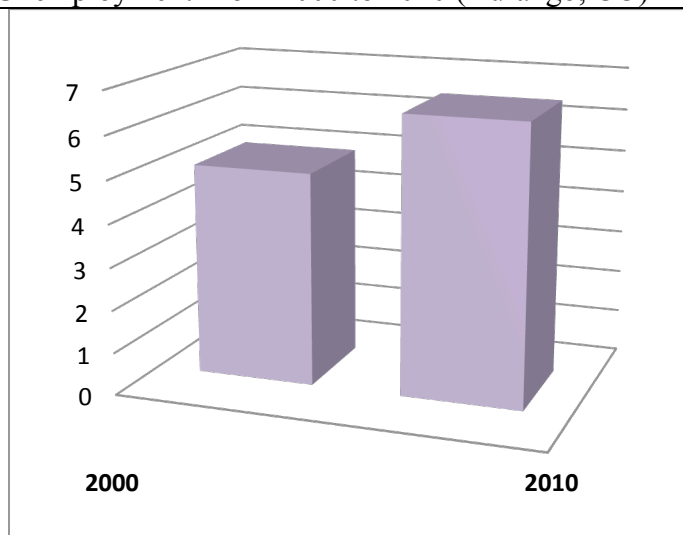
Durango is an expensive place to live and is not becoming any cheaper as the population grows. In fact, the cost of buying a home has grown exponentially over the last decade. A majority of the residents in Durango have multiple jobs in order to just survive. As seen in Figure 1, the median income has risen from approximately 35,000 in 2000 to 53,000 in 2010. However, the increase in median income has not been enough to combat the increased cost of living. Furthermore, the unemployment rate has risen from 2000 to 2010. As shown in Figure 2, According to the US census, about five percent of the residents in Durango were unemployed in 2000. This number rose to slightly over six percent in the following decade. Interviewee number two noted that due to the lack of jobs and the high cost of housing the number of transients has increased (Interviewee two). If the general public can point out that the increase in the cost of living paired with the rise in unemployment is leading to social issues it is definitely time for a change (“Profile”).

Figure 1: Median Income in Dollars From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

Figure 2: Percent of Unemployment From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

One way to alleviate the problem of housing and also of the growing population is to allow accessory dwelling units to be built in Durango. Accessory dwelling units would create affordable housing options that never existed before and would allow homeowners to make some extra money. In addition, ADUs encourage affordable housing without government funding. According to interviewee number three, the “lack of jobs is forcing inexperienced and younger people to rely on social programs including welfare, food banks, and the soup kitchen (Interviewee three). If the dependency upon the government for basic needs, such as food and shelter, can be reduced by ADUs then ADUs serve as a great benefit to the community. Besides the economic advantages there are also environmental advantages. Smaller dwellings promote dense development thus reducing carbon emissions. The building of the new homes helps to stimulate the economy by providing local construction jobs (Meaden). Moreover, according to interviewee number four ADUs have many other benefits including: allowing more people the

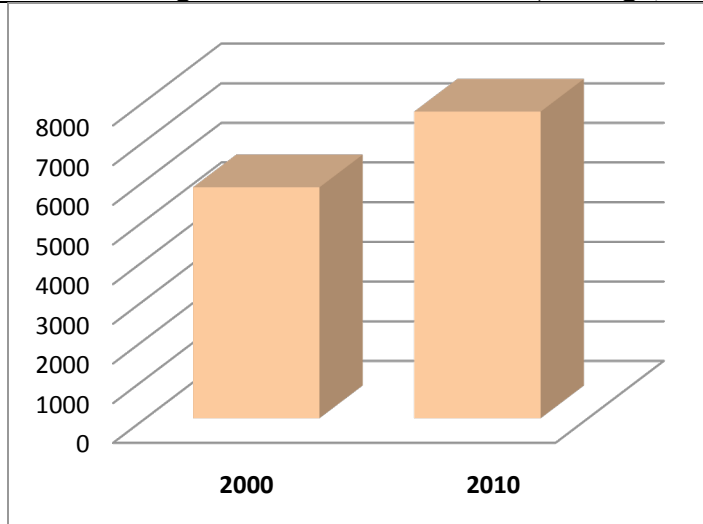
chance to live in a nice neighborhood that is close to the downtown part of Durango, the ability to rent month to month to accommodate those that may not be able to find a job and wish to move, and allowing renters to have less responsibility for home maintenance (Interviewee four).

However, while there are obvious benefits to accessory housing units there are also downsides and concerns. A reoccurring concern is that allowing more homes to be built will turn downtown Durango into a slum. Along with this concern, are concerns that the ADU proposal will result in “more people, more crowding, less privacy, more cars, and neighborhoods less desirable to most single-family homeowners” as stated by Lee Evans (Evans). Interviewee one agrees with Evans in the aspect that more people in a small area is not a desirable outcome (Interviewee one).

According to interviewee number one, the influx of people will create more traffic and noise. Therefore, the rate of disturbance will skyrocket. In like manner, interviewee one predicts that the property value for a house next to an ADU will decrease significantly. Along with this concern is the concern that renters do not care as much as homeowners about appearance and the renters will, therefore; make the ADU look trashy expediting the decrease in surrounding property values (Interviewee one). As shown by Figure 3, the total number of housing units in Durango has increased from 2000 to 2010. This is to be expected because the population of Durango has also increased over the last decade. However, a surprising fact is that the percentage of occupied housing units has decreased over this same time period. (The percent decrease can be seen in Figure 4.) Since the percentage of occupied housing units has decreased, the percentage of unoccupied housing units has increased over the last decade (as seen in Figure 5). This can be explained by the simple fact that many retired people own homes in the Durango

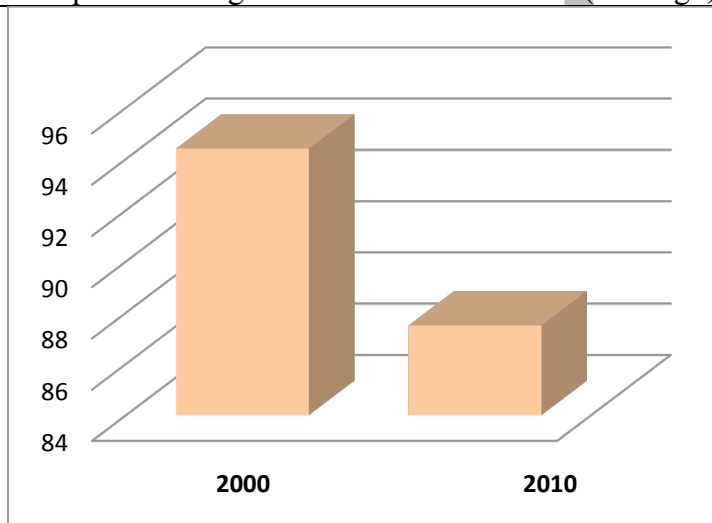
area but do not use these homes as their permanent residency but rather as a vacation home (“Profile”).

Figure 3: Total Number of Housing Units From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



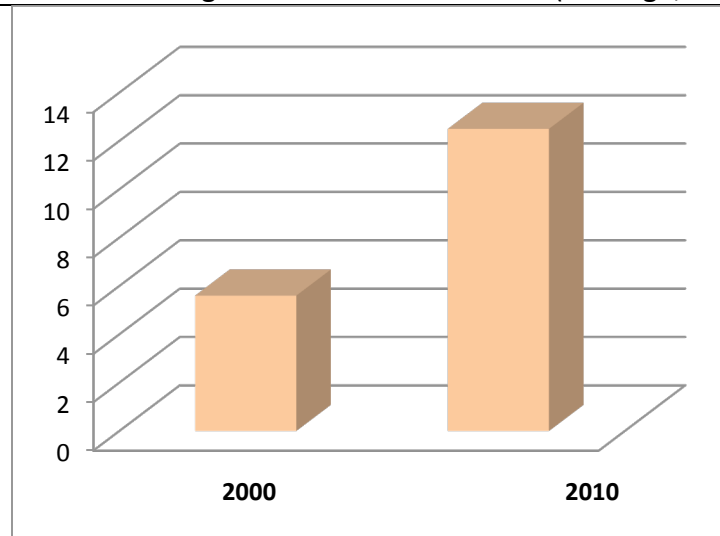
Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

Figure 4: Percent of Occupied Housing Units From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

Figure 5: Percent of Vacant Housing Units From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

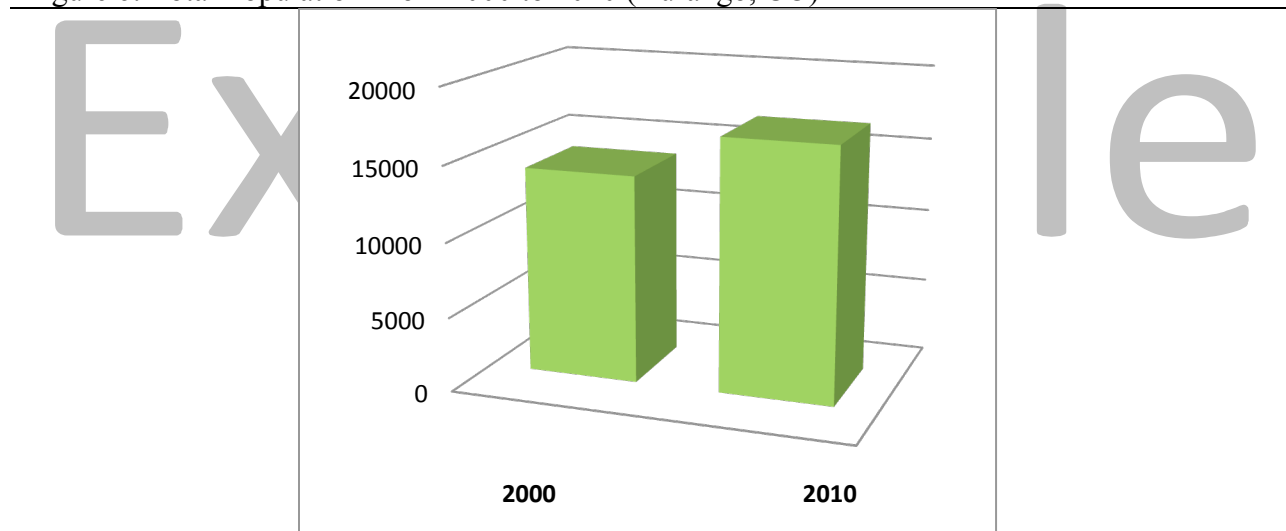
Example

Regulations are being created in order to solve some of the disagreement that has stemmed from the accessory dwelling units debate. The Durango City Council's job is to set policy "according to a series of values and visions it has laid out for the community." The council's commitment is "to offer great facilities and services" to the residents and visitors. Another part of their commitment is to promote "sustainable economic viability" and to "steward our community's resources." Those who are advocating for ADUs argue that the mission statement for the city council promotes ADUs due to the fact that accessory dwelling units offer different services to the community than are available now while also helping economically and environmentally. However, those against ADUs say that ADUs would compromise the value of privacy and neighborhood character which are also concerns for the city council (Graham).

Eventually, the City Council will have to decide how to balance out the pros with the cons and come to a sound conclusion.

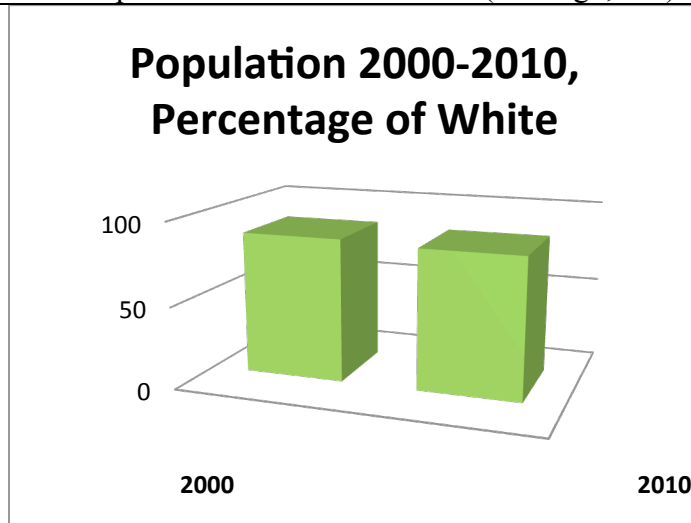
Often, the question is asked if the demand for ADUs has risen as a result of an increase in minorities moving to Durango. As shown by Figure 6, the total population for Durango increased from 2000 to 2010 by about 3,000. The population increase is not enormous but it is a significant increase. On a smaller scale, Figure 7 shows that the percentage of white people decreased by approximately two percent from 2000 to 2010. To make up for the two percent of the white population lost, the Hispanic or Latino population increased by about two percent over the same time period as seen in Figure 8 (“Profile”).

Figure 6: Total Population From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

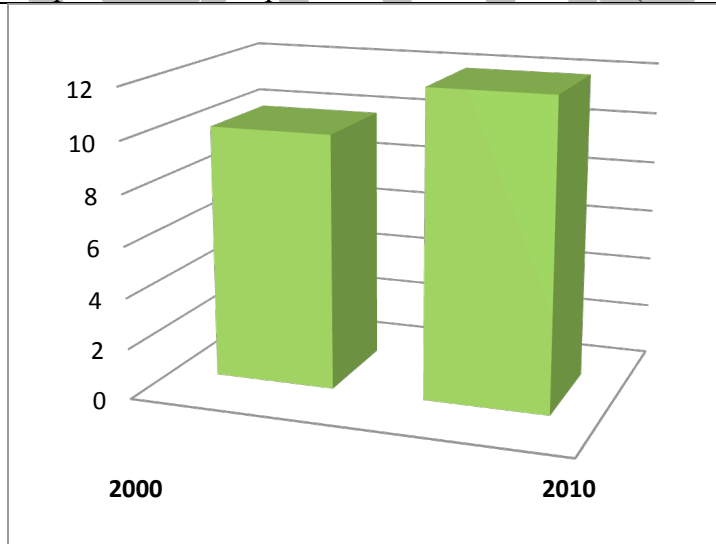
Figure 7: Percent of White Population From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

Example

Figure 8: Percent of Hispanic/ Latino Population From 2000 to 2010 (Durango, CO)



Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010

In conclusion, the cost of living is steadily increasing in Bayfield and Durango forcing more and more people to come out of retirement to find jobs, look for better jobs, or look for additional jobs. The percent of unemployment has risen over the past decade along with the median income. However, the median income has not risen enough to help all levels of stratification within society. The total population for Durango has increased over the last decade as well as the percent of Hispanic or Latino residents. However, the percentage of white residents has decreased. The shift in the economy has raised several social issues with housing being the largest issue. Currently Durango is struggling with the issue of accessory housing units. These types of homes are in demand due to the economy; although some residents of Durango argue that additional accessory housing units should not be built. The topic is certainly stirring up some trouble as the debate gains publicity. The immediate benefits of ADUs are that affordable housing would become available and also that homeowners could make some extra money. On the other hand, the immediate downsides to ADUs are that the noise and the amount of crime would increase as the population became denser. Parking also seems to be a major concern when dealing with a denser population. Based off of the research that has been done in Durango, Co I suggest that there be a minimum size that a lot must be in order to have an accessory housing unit built. In addition, a certain number of units should be allowed with a first come first serve basis for homeowners to get approved for building a unit.

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