

New census data show housing surge on Austin's outskirts

More than one-third of owner-occupied homes in Hutto were built between 2005 and 2009.

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New U.S. Census Bureau data illustrate a transformation under way on Austin's fringes: a surge in home construction that has reshaped once-sleepy farming communities like Hutto, Manor and Kyle into sprawling bedroom communities.

The conclusions aren't surprising, but the data, collected between 2005 and 2009, confirm recent housing trends and depict growth in Central Texas in dramatic strokes.

This picture emerges from the more than 11 billion bits of information released Tuesday by the Census Bureau that offer exhaustive details about how Americans live, from how they get to work to how much money they make to what language they speak at home.

Austin-area housing growth had its biggest impact along Interstate 35 north and south of the city and along the Texas 130 toll road. Median home values in those areas are less expensive than in Austin and areas to the west of Austin, the census data show.

In Hutto, more than one-third of all owner-occupied homes were built between 2005 and 2009, followed by Manor, at nearly 30 percent. One-quarter of all owner-occupied homes in Bee Cave were built between 2005 and 2009. In Kyle, about 1 out of every 5 owner-occupied homes were built in the second half of the past decade.

Because those are smaller cities, the percentages are more dramatic than for larger areas such as Austin, where just under 5 percent of homes were built between 2005 and 2009.

Before 2005, there was "little to no development" in Hutto, according to Mark Sprague, director of business development at Mission Mortgage. "So when you have a small number, any growth shows," Sprague said.

In 2005 and 2006, "you suddenly had 14 builders and numerous developments with entry-level homes close to employment centers," including Samsung and Dell Inc. "As the economy stalled, so did entry-level sales locally, including Hutto."

Still, there are several housing developments now under construction in Hutto.

Bee Cave and Lakeway saw tremendous growth mainly due to their proximity to Lake Travis and the highly rated Lake Travis school district, Sprague said. However, Sprague noted that sales "have slowed dramatically" in the past 20 months or so because of an oversupply of lots and homes.

But a new hospital under construction in Lakeway that could bring 3,000 employees in the first phase "is a game changer," Sprague said, and will spur more growth.

The new data isn't from the 2010 census — state populations from the census will be released next week, and more data is due out next year — and it isn't designed to show change since 2000.

Instead, it is from the first-ever five-year set of American Community Survey estimates from January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2009. The survey samples about 3 million addresses each year.

Among other highlights from Tuesday's data:

- **Families made up 52 percent of the 304,000 households in Austin. Most of the nonfamily households were people living alone.**
- **Twenty percent of people living in Austin were foreign-born. Among people at least 5 years old, 34 percent spoke a language other than English at home.**
- **Eighty-four percent of people age 25 and older in Austin had at least graduated from high school. Sixteen percent were dropouts.**
- **The leading industries in Austin were educational services, health care and social assistance.**
- **Seventy-two percent of Austin workers drove to their jobs alone. Twelve percent carpooled, and 5 percent used public transportation.**
- **The median household income was \$50,236.**
- **Eighteen percent of all Austinites lived in poverty. Thirteen percent of families were in poverty.**
- **The median age in Austin was 30.7 years. Thirty-two percent of the population was younger than 18, and 7 percent was 65 and older.**
- **Non-Hispanic whites account for 49.8 percent of Austin's population. Hispanics — at 34.6 percent — made up the next biggest share.**
- **The median monthly housing costs in Austin were \$1,622 for owners with mortgages and \$860 for renters.**

The federal government distributes more than \$400 billion dollars to states and communities based on census data, including the American Community Survey. Public officials, nonprofits and other organizations use the survey estimates to help them make decisions in their communities, such as where to build new schools and hospitals and emergency services.

The Census Bureau has produced one-year American Community Survey estimates every year since 2005 for areas with populations of 65,000 or more.

The survey replaces the old census long form discarded after the 2000 census and makes more detailed socioeconomic data available more than once every decade.

City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson said the information released Tuesday is valuable because it provides census tract-level data for the first time since 2000.

Still, Robinson said, its usefulness could be limited.

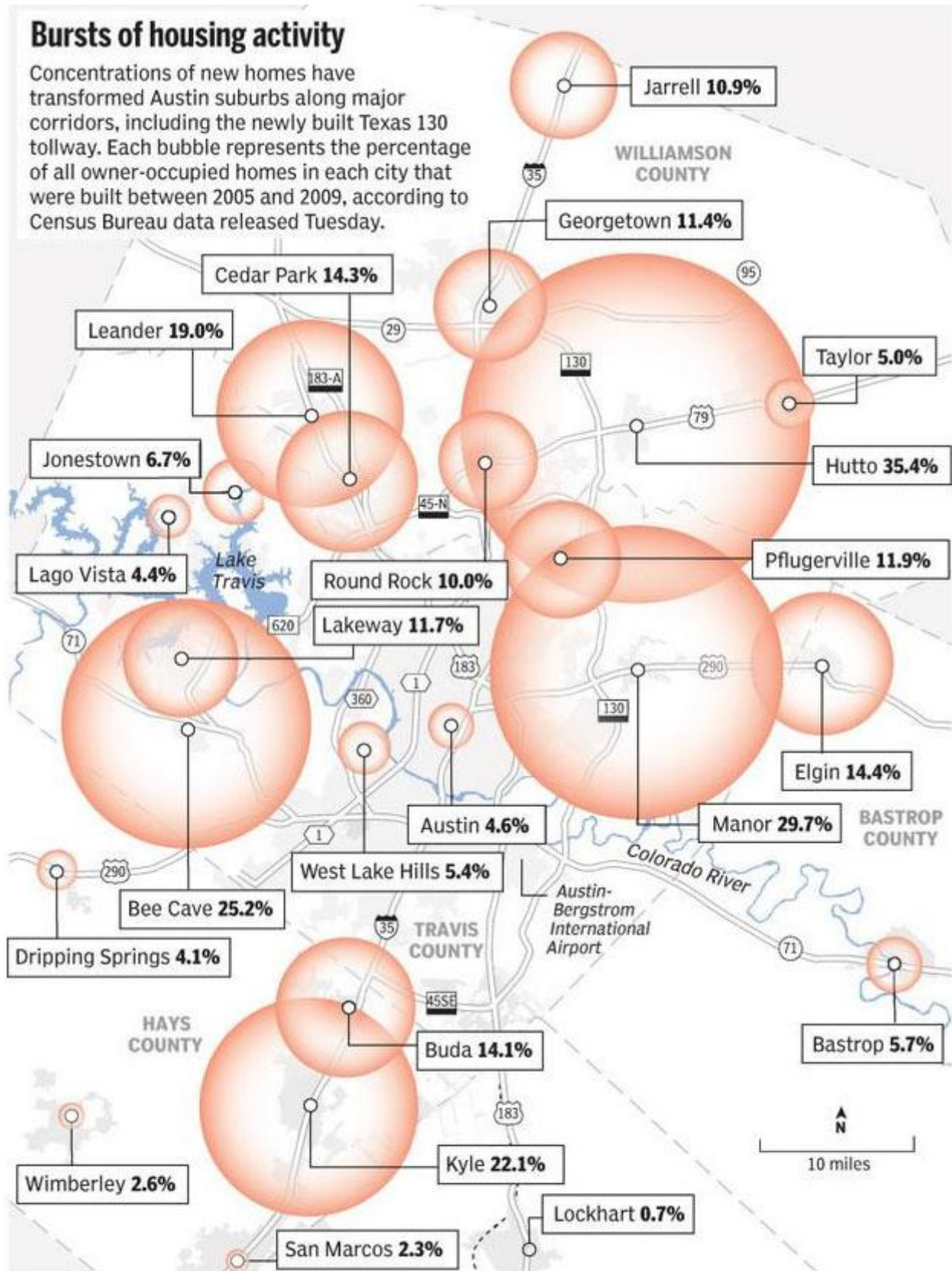
For example, like the Census Bureau, he noted that the five-year data span a period that included an economic boom and a recession. The Census Bureau said the five-year estimates describe average characteristics over the five-year period.

The census said it will release a new set of five-year estimates every year.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin

Bursts of housing activity

Concentrations of new homes have transformed Austin suburbs along major corridors, including the newly built Texas 130 tollway. Each bubble represents the percentage of all owner-occupied homes in each city that were built between 2005 and 2009, according to Census Bureau data released Tuesday.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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