

**The City of Spruce Grove  
Municipal Census  
2014 Demographic Report**



**July 2014**

The City of Spruce Grove – Municipal Census  
2014 Demographic Report

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**1. Background**

Accurate population data and demographic information are vital for the City’s strategic planning, operations and service provision. The data gathered through the census has an impact on provincial funding allocations and improves our ability to plan for growth and manage programs and services. The *Municipal Government Act* provides the authority for municipalities to conduct a census, and Policy 6,029CM guides the frequency and administration of each census. The last successful municipal census was conducted in 2010, and the last federal census took place in 2011. In addition to the direction provided in our official policy, it is advantageous to conduct a census frequently after a population reaches 20,000 since there are financial incentives in terms of available funding to a municipality reporting incremental population increases.

The primary objective of the 2014 municipal census was to provide a reliable population count. In addition to the count, staff gathered data on age and sex of residents, as well as on the type of dwelling units in the City. The count began on April 1, 2014 and concluded on May 22, 2014. This year, residents had the option of providing a response online, by telephone or via door-to-door enumeration. This year, 39.8% of Spruce Grove households elected to respond to the census via the online portal. Administration expects that as time goes by, this percentage will continue to increase.

All of the information discussed in this report is taken from the 2014 census or from previous municipal censuses. Any data that refers to the Province of Alberta or Canada as a whole was taken from the 2011 Federal Census. The response rate for this census was 99.8%. A total of 11,205 households and 12,978 properties were counted for a population of 29,526. There were no notable concerns with the data quality.

**2. Enumeration Areas**

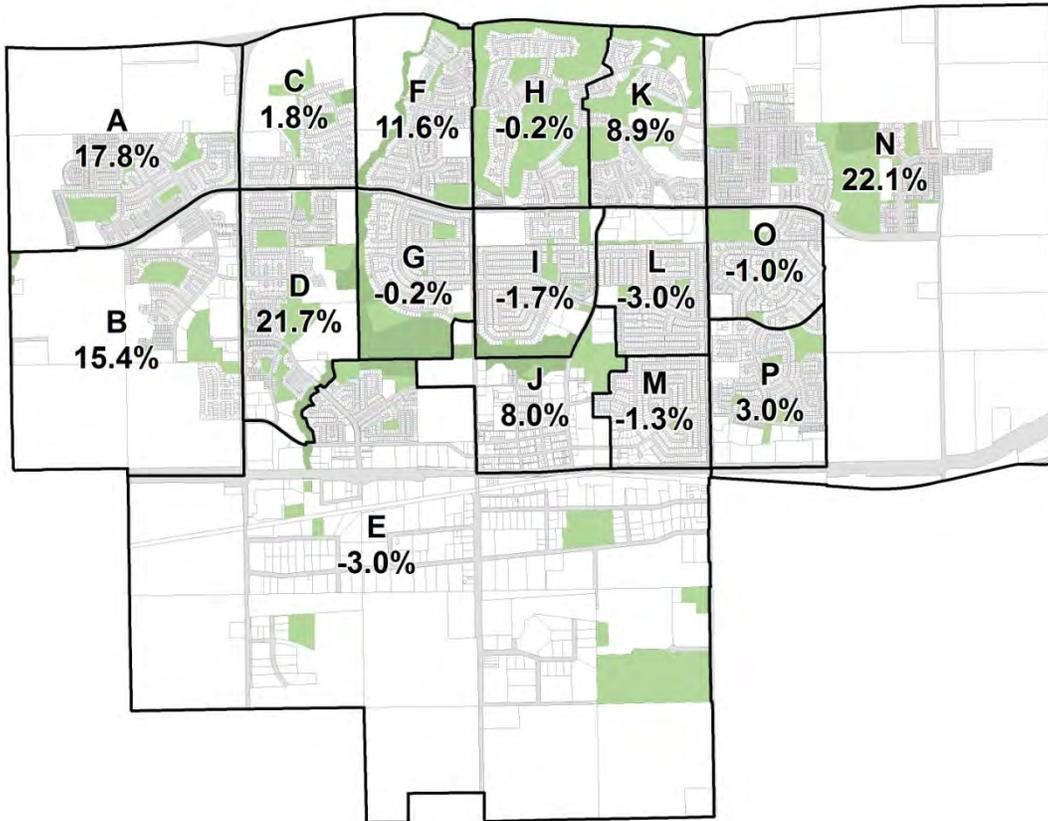
Census enumeration areas in 2014 had the same boundaries as in previous censuses. There are sixteen enumeration areas, divided in order to group one or two neighborhoods together. In the future, as development continues, some areas (B, D and N) will probably be further divided within their current boundaries. Keeping the boundaries the same will allow for comparison between neighborhood areas over time. The accompanying map and table show where the enumeration areas are, and list which neighborhoods are contained within each area.

Table 1: List of Enumeration Areas

A	Harvest Ridge	I	Woodhaven, Woodside
B	Spruce Ridge, Legacy Park	J	City Centre
C	Deer Park	K	Hilldowns, Linkside
D	Heatherglen, McLaughlin	L	Brookwood
E	Westgrove, Mobile City Estates	M	Broxton Park
F	Aspenglen, Jesperdale	N	Spruce Village, Kenton, Greenbury, Prescott
G	Millgrove	O	Grove Meadows
H	Stoneshire, Linkside	P	Lakewood

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Figure 1: Map of Growth in Enumeration Areas



As we can see from the above map, there are several areas that are expanding rapidly where extensive development is taking place. In some older areas, a small population decrease is occurring and some neighborhoods have lost up to 3% of their population. Since none of the City's neighborhoods are experiencing a decrease in the number of dwellings, the shrinking population numbers are likely related to changes in the family cycle, whereby residences formerly providing a home for 2 or more family members become home to fewer people as children leave home, for example. The aging and elderly segment of our population who may require assisted living apart from their spouses or those who are widowed could provide another explanation.

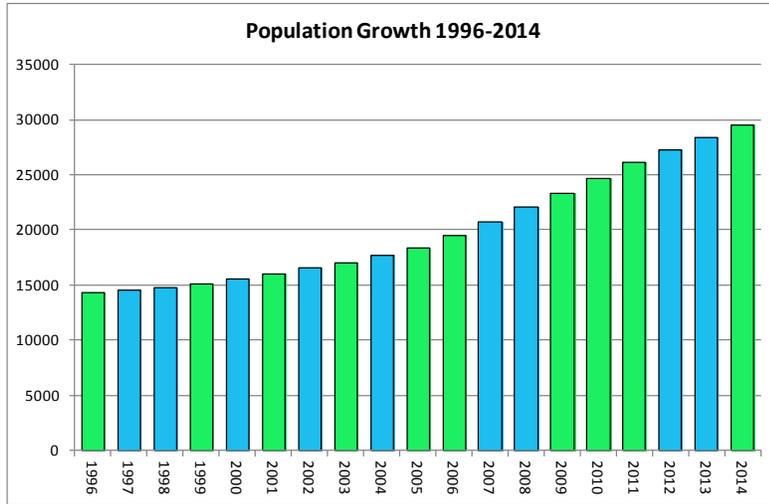
### 3. Population Growth

The population of Spruce Grove is now 29,526, an increase of 4.3% annually since the 2011 Federal Census. This figure is nearly exactly double the population count for 1999, which was 15,069. Looking back just ten years to 2005, the city has witnessed tremendous growth, with an average annual growth rate of 5.4% for the decade between 2005 and 2014. Another indicator of growth is the increase in the number of residential properties, which rose to 12,978 from 10,446 in 2010, representing an increase of 19.5%. The bar graph at left shows the population increase since 1996,

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where the years an official census count was done are indicated in green; the blue bars indicate an estimated population for a more accurate visual representation of the City's growth.

Figure 2: Population Growth



The City of Spruce Grove's annual growth has been more than robust in the past decade, reaching rates of population increase as high as 6.5%. As we have observed from previous census counts, Spruce Grove has become a desirable community for families to move to within the Capital Region. A good quality of life and close proximity to major employment areas are attractive to people looking for

a place to raise a family. We will also see later that the City has a significant amount of land that is either ready for construction or already under development, combined with a very low vacancy rate for the existing housing stock, indicating that our population growth is unlikely to slow in the near future. The City must continue to plan diligently for the impacts of this growth in terms of providing infrastructure, services and programs for our residents.

#### 4. Population Distribution

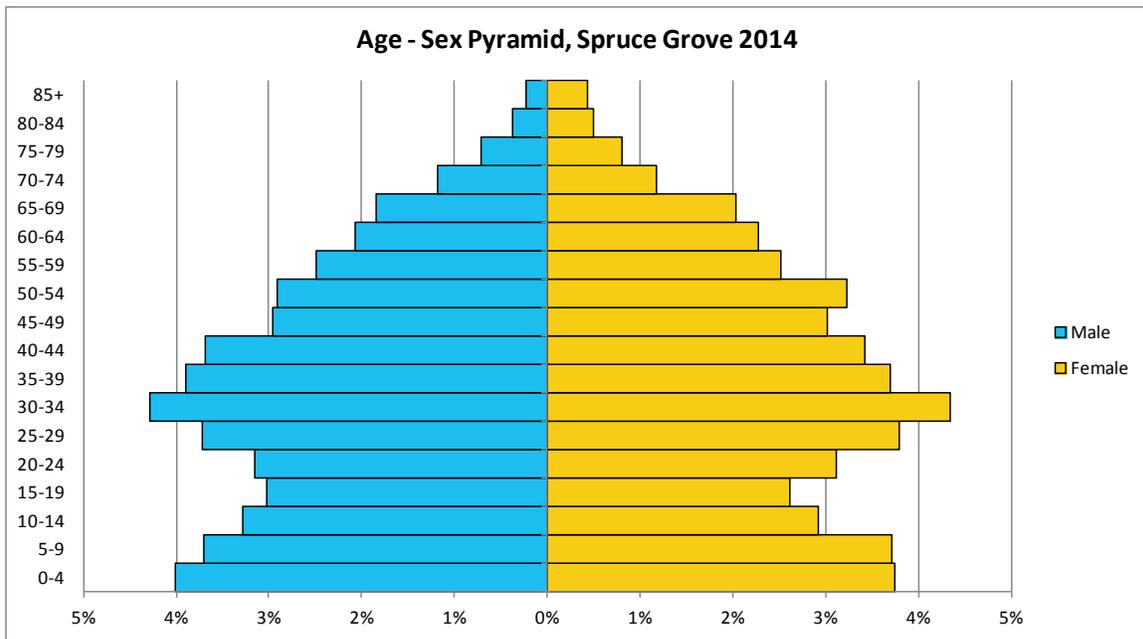
The age-sex pyramid illustrates the population of Spruce Grove broken down to show the distribution of males and females by age group. Spruce Grove remains a family oriented community; the graph reflects this through its shape which shows peaks in the populations for adults from ages 25 to 44 and for children, particularly under age 10. For large populations in North America, the Baby Boom age cohorts (born between 1946 and 1966; aged 48 to 68) have been the most defining, but Spruce Grove's population does not reflect their typical dominance, which confirms the importance of parent-child families for the community.

One might recall that as recently as 2005 the Baby Boom generation was a defining feature of the population of Spruce Grove, but the shift toward families has been persistent over the past decade. The population for Alberta as a whole mirrors this family orientation, with an additional bulge representing the Baby Boom that is not present in Spruce Grove's population. It is likely that the economic opportunities in Alberta, rooted in resource extraction and with high demand for physical labor and technically skilled workers, have played a role in attracting a relatively young population. Communities such as Spruce Grove that have a high, family focused quality of life have attracted higher numbers of these young workers who settle in the area to raise families.

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Through the analysis of the data collected through the census enumeration, there are some gaps in the information displayed in the age-sex pyramid. Of the population counted, there were 1268 people who declined to provide information on their age or sex, and therefore they are not represented in the graphic, although they are counted overall. Anecdotally, a review of the data suggests that while gaps exist in every age cohort and both genders, we could make an inference that the information for children is the least complete. A typical example of this occurs in a 4-person household, where there is one male and one female, each in the 30-34 age cohorts. The other two people in the household are not reported. While we cannot make the leap to assume that the other members of the household are children and report that as part of the data, it is also a logical assumption.

Figure 3: Age-Sex Pyramid



The following table also provides information on how significant age cohorts have changed over time in Spruce Grove. We can see again that the percentage of pre-school aged children in the population has risen significantly since 2005 (again, with a hypothesis of under-reporting in the 2014 enumeration). At the same time, the 30-34 cohort has increased steadily and the 55-59 age group has declined at an even greater rate than the 30-34 increase. While this is a select sample of the data, it provides a good overview of the way Spruce Grove is changing over time.

Table 2: Select Populations by Age

% of Population by Age	2005	2010	2014
<b>0-4</b>	5.86	8.22	7.75
<b>30-34</b>	7.49	8.13	8.63
<b>55-59</b>	6.53	5.34	5.01

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As part of the regular census analysis, Administration provides information on the dependency ratios for Spruce Grove. A dependency ratio measures the working aged population against the dependents in a population, or those who are not in the labor force (i.e. youths under age 15 and seniors over age 65). This is a rough indication of the economic “burden” of a population. While the ratio might not provide much information now, watching it evolve over time may be useful for programming decisions in the future. The rates below are expressed as the number of dependents for every 1000 workers. In order to provide further context, here are some examples of total dependency ratios for countries around the world (worldbank.org, 2012 ratios):

- Ethiopia – 880
- Japan – 600
- Canada – 450
- Singapore – 360

Table 3: Dependency Ratios

<b>Spruce Grove Dependency Ratios</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2014</b>
Youth Dependency Ratio	313	334
Old Age Dependency Ratio	119	146
Total Dependency Ratio	433	480

It is worth noting that through much of the developed, western world, the old age dependency is the higher of the two ratios. We have all heard about the upcoming rise in the old age dependency ratio due to the aging of the Baby Boom generation. There are fears that the dependency will create an undue burden on working aged people who will need to support the pensions and medical expenses caused by this large age cohort. In addition, we are likely to see other programs emerge in the coming years to address the societal changes caused by having such a large group of elderly people in areas of public transportation and housing, for example. Examining the ratios for Spruce Grove, we can see that the reverse is true, and the youth dependency is more than double the old age dependency, although as recently as 2010 the youth dependency was triple the old age dependency, which may be attributed to under-reporting of children during enumeration. We may find that the needs of our community are very different in the future than the needs for Canada as a whole as far as services and programs.

**5. Households**

In the 2014 census, there are two different terms we use to describe a lot subdivided for housing development. The first term is “property,” which refers to any lot, and may or may not be developed. A property may have a vacant or occupied dwelling located on it, but it may also be in the middle of construction, or may simply be undeveloped. The second term is “household,” and is used to describe an existing dwelling unit combined with the people who live in that unit. Households are generally used to describe families, though of course people who share the same home are not always family, so the association between household and family should be explored cautiously.

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The household size in the City of Spruce Grove is a count of the number of people living in each dwelling unit. In 2010, the average household size was 2.59 people per dwelling unit. However, in 2014 this has increased slightly to 2.7 people per dwelling. In the 2011 Canadian census, the average household size for Alberta was 2.4 and it was 2.5 for all of Canada. The increase in the average between 2010 and 2014 can likely be attributed to the large population of families in Spruce Grove. In general, the averages for household size across the community probably relate to the increased mix of housing types within the community. The graph below showing household sizes by enumeration area corroborates that theory since the larger averages occur in neighborhoods that are primarily single detached dwellings with a limited mix of medium and high density, such as Deer Park (Area C) and Lakewood (Area P). The areas with the lowest household sizes are those with a greater mix of housing types, such as City Centre (Area J) and Spruce Ridge (Area B). In the future, we may also see the yet undeveloped neighborhood of Greenbury with a lower average, due to its unique mix of housing, although this neighborhood (Area N) is currently combined with 3 other neighborhoods in its enumeration area, making this information difficult to extract.

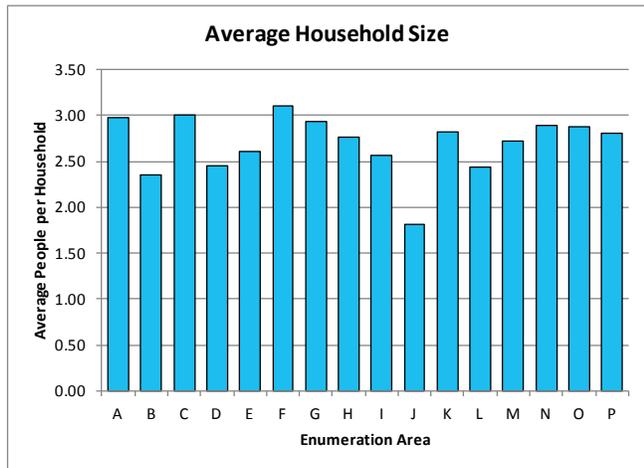


Figure 4: Average Household Size

The next graph has a comparison between the percentage of the population counted in each enumeration area, and the percentage of dwelling units. In general, the neighborhoods that show a higher percentage of households than people have greater diversity in the types of housing available. This includes Spruce Ridge, City Centre and Westgrove/Mobile City Estates (areas B, J and E respectively).

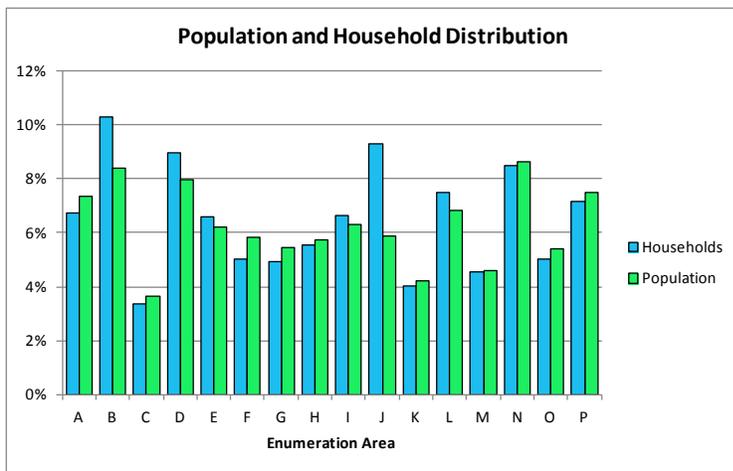


Figure 5: Population and Household Distribution

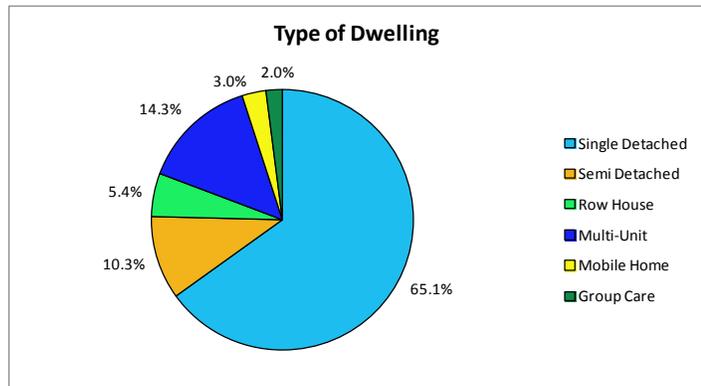
Those neighborhoods with proportionately more people than households are more homogeneous in terms of housing stock, including Aspenglen, Lakewood and Greystone (areas F, P and O).

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## 6. Property Status

Part of the enumeration process in 2014 was to collect information on the type of dwelling unit at each property in Spruce Grove. While the City technically has this information available, it is not in a database that allows us to query the composition of our housing stock. Through the enumeration and a careful verification of the data, the pie chart shown provides an excellent snapshot of the City’s dwellings. In order to make better use of this data moving forward, Administration hopes the information will be used to create a layer in the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS), and during the next census data will be automatically populated for this field, except where a dwelling has not been verified. A lack of verification would indicate either a new dwelling or that a dwelling was not verified through previous enumerations. Ideally, this data will be populated into the system in the future through the building permit or occupancy process.

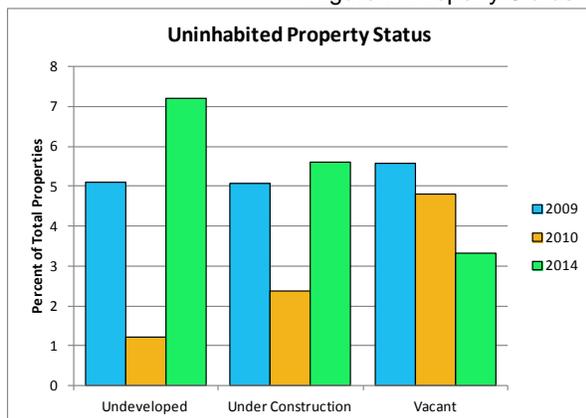
Figure 6: Dwelling Type



We can see that, as expected, single detached dwellings make up two-thirds of the City’s housing. As Spruce Grove continues to see very high numbers of permits for new dwellings, it will be interesting to see how or if the dwelling units in the community diversify in the years ahead.

The final graph shows the status of uninhabited properties within the community. There are three categories: undeveloped, under construction and vacant. The first category, undeveloped, refers to properties that are subdivided and have a civic address, but do not have any housing developed on them. Properties listed as under construction are those that are in the process of being built, and do not yet have occupancy certificates issued that would allow for residents to move in. Finally, vacant refers not to a traditional vacancy rate, but rather the number of existing homes that do not have anybody living in them, likely due to a lag in time between people moving out of a home and new residents moving in.

Figure 7: Property Status



To complement this data, some additional context on construction in 2014 from January to the end of April was obtained from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC; *Housing Now*, May 2014) and the City’s own building permit statistics. In the period from January 1 to April 30, 69 building permits for single detached dwellings have been obtained, 104 single detached dwellings have completed construction, and 88 single

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detached dwellings have been absorbed (purchased and now have residents living there). This information, combined with the high percentage of properties that are undeveloped or under construction according to our census may indicate that the residential housing market is becoming speculative, as we saw in 2007 and 2008. The smaller than expected population gain is also indicative of the possibility that increased speculation could be underway.

### **7. Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

Conducting a municipal census is a complex and resource intensive process. It is essential to continually refine the process each time to enhance data quality and improve participation. The 2014 municipal census was very successful, with a 99.8% participation rate and a high degree of confidence in the data collected. Once again, the hiring of a designated Census Coordinator was key in ensuring that adequate oversight was provided for the enumeration staff and that quality control of the data was consistent. Some of the issues that were experienced this year provide opportunities to improve our enumeration process and further refine the data collection.

A new requirement from the Province in 2014 was for each municipality to verify the data collected through a reverse records check. Either 10% of the population or 1000 households were required for verification, which was accomplished by collecting phone numbers on a voluntary basis. Difficulty with this method arose for two reasons. First, the residents who did provide their phone numbers often did not answer the phone or respond to the request for information from the City. Second, there was no option for those responding online to provide a phone contact, which meant that none of the responses provided via the web could be verified for accuracy. The second issue will be rectified in future enumerations through software changes, although the problem with getting people to answer phone inquiries in an era of call display and unsolicited phone calls may be more difficult to solve.

In the future, City Administration should be able to make some changes to allow for more efficient enumeration of the population. Some of the enumeration areas, particularly Area B (Spruce Ridge, Legacy Park), Area D (Heatherglen, McLaughlin) and Area N (Kenton, Spruce Village, Greenbury, Prescott) will need to be divided into smaller areas in order to better manage the enumeration. The enumeration areas have been designed with future growth in mind so that they can be split into smaller pieces, and with some areas having over 1000 dwelling units, the next census is likely the time to make those divisions. In addition to splitting areas, the City will look at adding dwelling type information to our GIS as described in the previous section, in order to allow that information to carry over for each census. The dwelling type would then be verified, rather than entered from scratch each time.

By understanding the composition of the population that the City of Spruce Grove serves, administration can carry out the vision of being a place where people choose to live, raise a family and grow a business. The census allows us to take stock of our objectives and goals for the community and compare our strategic priorities to what is

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happening on the ground. The analysis of the 2014 census has drawn out some interesting trends that should be monitored and updated in future census reports.

We have seen that young families form the largest group in the population, and our focus should be on how to serve those people through the municipal services and programs offered. For example, we have started to see the ripple effect of having such a large pre-school cohort in 2010. Four years later, the growth of this age group is having a significant impact on schools and spurring the City to examine our policies on municipal reserve land. However, we should not lose sight of other age groups, including seniors who have unique needs and the empty nesters of the Baby Boom generation, both of which are also increasing in population within Spruce Grove. In fact, we should examine ways to retain the disposable income that is a common trait of Boomers in our community by providing services and housing that is attractive. A more diverse housing supply is one way that we can accommodate residents throughout their family- and life-cycle. These are just a few of the trends that must be noted as we move forward.