



## CHAPTER 4

### Existing Conditions, Trends, and Projections

#### Demographics

To plan for the future of Beech Mountain, it is critical to know about the Town's population. First and foremost is the straightforward question of growth. How much growth will the Town see? How many people will we have to accommodate? But other questions about our population also carry great weight. What kinds of people make Beech Mountain their home or vacation destination? What kind of housing, recreation, and employment choices do they make? It is important to understand who our population is and how their characteristics will change over the coming decades. The answers to questions such as these will set the background for our Town's plans for the future.

More than just a mechanism to support planning for growth, demographics are also important to consider because many of the decisions that the Town makes, consciously or unconsciously, can make a drastic impact on the level of growth that the town will see in the future. It is important to remember that other scenarios than those presented are possible. By planning to increase density the town could experience levels of growth even greater than in the build-out scenario. By concentrating that density in specific locations and modifying land

use controls to allow for compact development, such density could theoretically be achieved without compromising open spaces and environmental characteristics. On the other hand, the Town could drastically limit growth by imposing more severe land usage restrictions and regulations as an alternative means to protecting the town's character and environment.

## Current Population Statistics

### Baseline Figures

The figures below provide a snapshot of basic and critical current population figures for Beech Mountain:

**322** - Number of full-time residents (2017 US Census Population Estimates prepared by the North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management)

Approximately **5179** - Estimated number of seasonal or second home residents (Beech Mtn. est. based on 2.24 persons per housing unit)

**2312** - Number of Housing Units (2010 US Census plus Town Building records)

- For seasonal, recreational, occasional use: **2074**
- Full time occupied: **154**

**5422** - Number of Parcels of Land (2018 Avery and Watauga County Tax Data)



## Demographic Projections for Beech Mountain

As a vacation resort community, Beech Mountain has relatively few full-time residents. But full-time residents only portray a fraction of the picture of Beech Mountain's true population. Beech Mountain's unique situation as a resort community demands that demographic trends for Beech Mountain be analyzed in different ways and that different factors be taken into account. Because Census figures focus on year-round residents, analyzing housing and building trends is one method of accounting for the fact that the majority of homes on Beech Mountain are second homes or vacation homes.

For purposes of forecasting growth, two factors are focused upon in this analysis:

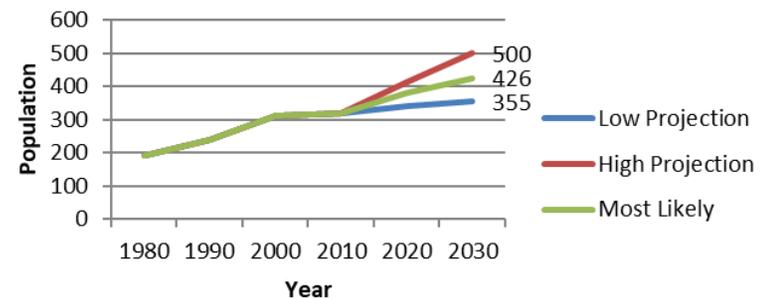
- Population and its contributing factors
- Construction trends

## Projected Growth Scenario

This scenario forecasts as closely as possible the growth that Beech Mountain will encounter over the coming decades. It takes into account current growth rates and projects them into the future. The following charts illustrate that *Beech Mountain will likely have approximately 425 full time and nearly 7000 part time residents by 2030.*

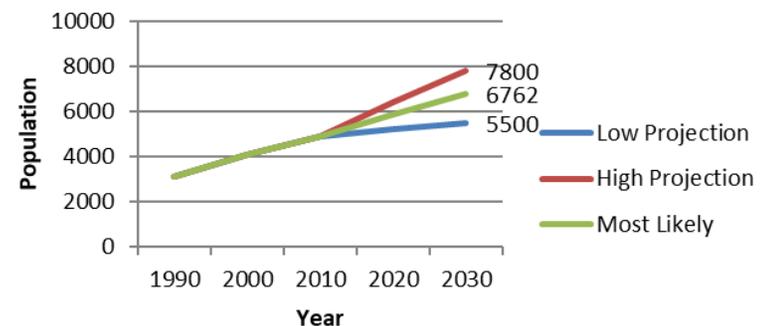
### Town of Beech Mountain, Projected Full Time Resident Population Growth

Source: Census 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010 Summary File 1, prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau (<http://factfinder.census.gov>); Projections by Town of Beech Mtn. based on a linear trend line a



### Town of Beech Mountain, Projected Seasonal Resident Population Growth

Source: Estimated by Town of Beech Mtn. based on current figure of 2.24 persons per housing unit and a linear trend of housing units per decade



Many factors were considered in developing these estimates, and these considerations will likely determine whether the actual population change over this period errs towards high-growth or low-growth projection. Considerations support a conclusion that steady, robust growth will resume in Beech Mountain in the future include:

- Retirement age baby boomers (people born between 1946-1964). Much of the land and housing in Beech Mountain is owned by people who are planning to one day “retire to the mountains”
- Rise in number of independently wealthy individuals
- Advent of internet and telecommuting allows individuals to live where they desire, rather than being tied to a work location
- Continued growth in nearby major cities (Charlotte, Piedmont Triad, Tri- Cities, Triangle) and in the State of North Carolina as a whole
- Land and Housing competitively priced for the High Country area of North Carolina

However, there are several factors and trends that will serve to limit Beech Mountain’s population growth in the future, including:

- The baby boomer generation has already peaked. The average baby boomer has passed retirement age.
- The national and global economic slowdown that began in 2008 has severely curtailed growth in the near term.
- Aging of current population. The age structure of Beech Mountain’s residents is very top-heavy, meaning there is a disproportionate number of individuals at the high end of the age spectrum, without a sufficient number of persons in younger age categories to replace them.

One of the largest factors to consider in this analysis is the long-term impact of the current economic recession. Although recent figures

show a sharp decline in the construction of new homes, it is reasonable to predict that the overall growth trend will continue in the future. Even with the recent downturn in the economy and its related impacts on construction, the decade of 2000-2010 taken as a whole echoed the pattern of growth that the Town has experienced since its inception. The first chart below illustrates the sharp curtain in construction at the latter half of the 2000’s, but the second chart documents the overall high and consistent level of development that has occurred here over the last 40 years.

