

SOLON COMMUNITY PROFILE

This report holds a statistical profile for the town of Solon and its people. As such, this chapter has a great deal of numerical information about the community. Data like this will often confirm intuitions about what is happening within the community, and it can present early signs of new patterns and trends before their impact becomes apparent.

Demographic data is incredibly valuable and greatly affects future decisions, particularly nearly every decision made on the municipal level. For example, the amount of money from taxes the town needs to generate is affected by things like services the town offers for its senior citizens, the size of the school system and expected future enrollment, waste management services, and the quantity of recreational amenities provided. The level of services the town needs for senior citizens can be assumed using demographic data, just as the school system size will be affected by total family households in the area.

Solon is undeniably evolving, and the population is changing. Innovative ideas and strategies will be needed to accommodate the changing population. The information supplied here will be used throughout the plan. Future changes are also discussed. Growth projections are necessary in planning all aspects of the future.

****Note: Throughout this document, the population number varies between 978 and 919. This is because the population of 978 was taken from the 2020 Decennial U.S. Census, while the population of 919 was taken from the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) which is an estimate. Unfortunately, not all data is available from the 2020 Decennial Census, requiring reference to ACS data in certain areas and tables. In other instances, further information was extrapolated (by the U.S. Census Bureau) using ACS data. This is also true of some 2000 and 2010 data. To change between population data sources and recalculate would render the information inaccurate. It is important to understand this, because it could be construed as a mistake, and it is not. These discrepancies have been annotated wherever possible.

Historical Population Trends

Over the course of its existence, Solon has experienced population fluctuation, similar to its neighbors and the State. Economic and cultural factors have influenced population changes as displayed in Table 1 and graphed in Figure 1.

TABLE 1: POPULATION CHANGE: 1840 TO 2020

Year	Population	Year	Population
1840	1,139	1940	773
1850	1,419	1950	746
1860	1,345	1960	669
1870	1,176	1970	712
1880	1,013	1980	827
1890	977	1990	916
1900	996	2000	940
1910	1,034	2010	1,097
1920	1,054	2020	978
1930	852	2023	919

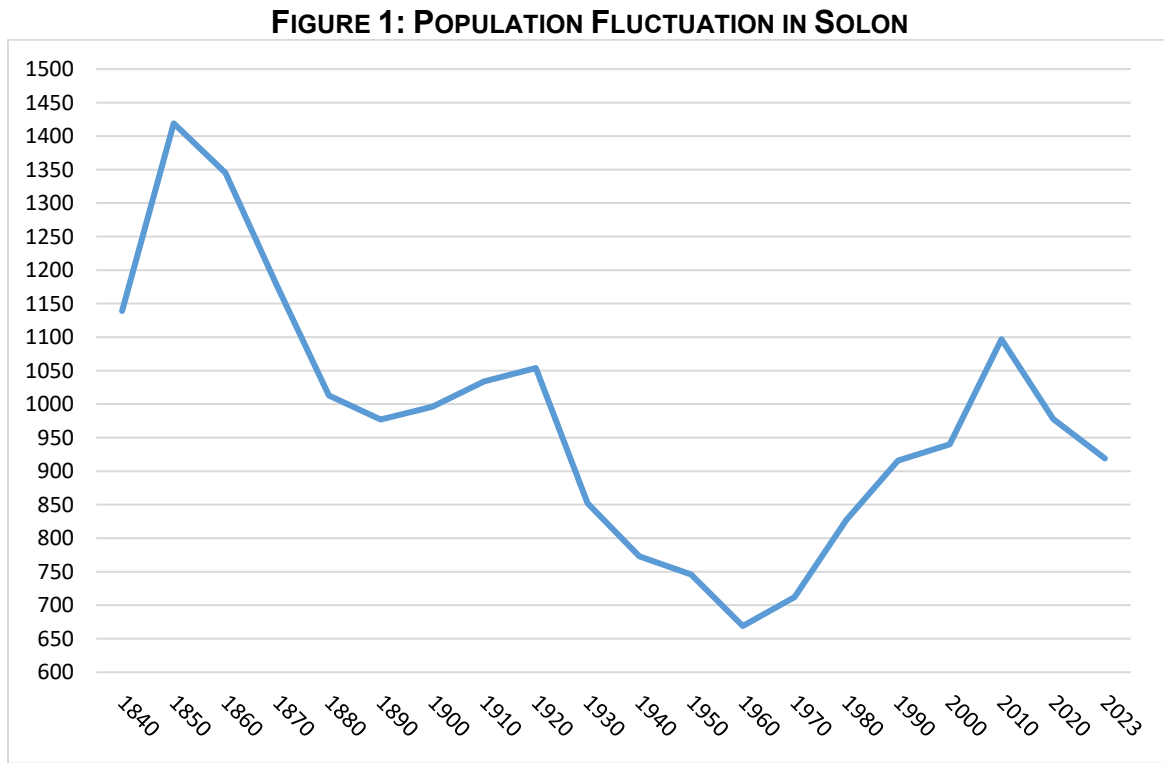
Source: United State Census and ACS

Table 1 Highlights:

- 1840-1860 is considered the “high water mark” number for the population in many of central Maine’s rural towns.
- 1860s- Westward expansion resulted in population decline.
- 1900- The Industrial Revolution around this time resulted in a brief population increase, until the 1920s.
- 1925- Significant fire in Solon. 19 buildings were lost, many of which were mills or other businesses, including the corn shop’s principal building. This was also the era of the Great Depression. The railroad was starting to see the effects of decreased passenger traffic.
- 1930s- Wyman Dam project completed which resulted in a loss of jobs and a population decline.
- 1960s- Solon’s lowest population. The town was still recovering from the fire that destroyed many of the businesses. Around this time the railroad closed, as did the corn shop along the railroad. The lack of employment caused a huge population decline.
- 1970- Solon’s population increased for the first time in decades, which coincided with increased dependence on the automobile and increased infrastructure to support it. The result of this was that people did not have to live in the immediate area in which they worked, causing the suburban boom that is still going on today.
- 2000- Kennebec Lumber opened, resulting in more jobs and a subsequent population increase. Counteracting that, Solon Manufacturing, which had been on the decline since the late 1990s, closed, resulting in a loss of jobs in the area.

- 2010- the population continued to rebound. The town's population in 2010 was the highest it had been in decades.
- 2020- the population declined due to an aging population, smaller family sizes with fewer people having kids, and fewer people moving to the area.
- 2023- Solon's population is still larger than it was between 1920s – 2000, though few young people stay in the area. There is an increase in people retiring and moving to Solon.

These trends can be more easily seen in Figure 1, below.



Source: United State Census and ACS

Additional Census or American Community Survey information can help with long-term planning for Solon. Important trends to consider are increasing median age and decreasing average household size, detailed in the table below. Except in college towns, this can be an indication of more single person households, which tend to be elderly folks living alone.

TABLE 2: MEDIAN AGE AND AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE TRENDS

	2000	2010	2015	2020	2023
Median Age (years)	41.9	44	49.7	54.2	46.8
Average Household Size	2.35	2.43	2.24	2.3	2.3
Average Family Size	2.8	2.91	2.69	2.82	2.83

Source: U.S Census Bureau and American Community Survey

Table 2 Highlights:

- Solon's median age has been increasing steadily since 2020.
- The town's average household size has hovered around 2.3 with a minor decrease in 2015.
- Aside from a slight decrease in 2015, the average family size has remained stable.

The ACS defines average household size as the number of people living in one place, who may or may not be related. This contrasts with average family size, which is defined as people living in one location who are related to one another.

Smaller average household size is a national trend, reflecting social changes like smaller families, lower birth rates, and independent elderly living. What this equates to is that fewer people per household necessitates more houses just to sustain the current population numbers.

This data is imperative when considering the population and housing demands for the future. For example, if the number of people in each household decreases, the community will require not only more houses, but a housing stock made up of smaller houses to accommodate smaller families and one and two person households.

Table 3 below shows a broader picture of Solon's demographics.

TABLE 3: POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

General Population Characteristics	2000	2010	2020	2023
Total Population	940	1,097	843	919
Male Population	490	542	441	457
Female Population	450	555	402	462
Median Age	41.9	44	54.2	46.8
Total Households	396	452	364	396
Family Households	256	305	213	240
Married Couple Family Households	203	230	194	218
Nonfamily Households*	140	147	57	36
Nonfamily Households Living Alone	103	113	39	64
Households with children (under 18)	137	129	62	85
Single-Person Household 65 years +	34	17	42	157
Average Household Size	2.35	2.43	2.3	2.3

Source: U.S Census Bureau and American Community Survey

*The U.S. Census Bureau defines Nonfamily Household as consisting of a householder living alone (a one-person household) or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related.

Table 3 Highlights;

- The male and female ratio of Solon's population changed minimally between 2000 and 2023.
- Nonfamily households decreased by 74 percent between 2000 and 2023.
- Nonfamily households living alone decreased by almost 38 percent.
- Households with children under 18 decreased by almost 38 percent. This is likely the tail end of the baby boom generation's children.
- Single person household 65+ years old increased 362 percent.

Components of Population Change:

There are many factors that contribute to population changes besides birth rate, migration, and death rate. Some of these factors include economic development, education, quality of life, urbanism, changes in job availability, and many more. Some of these, although not relevant to Solon, may be factors for why people moved from their original locations to Solon.

Population fluctuation is part of a town's history. These changes are never solely a case of emigration; there are various contributing factors for people to move to a new home. Population change in a community is a result of both natural change and migration. Natural change is the difference between deaths and births in the community over a period. Migration accounts for people moving in and moving out. Net migration is population change not explained by births and deaths.

Major trends that affect a town's population are increasing median age, smaller household sizes, and decreasing population, all of which has occurred in Solon to varying degrees.

However, population trends can be combated in several ways. Solon has plenty of available land and is a short drive from Skowhegan, Fairfield, Waterville, and other larger towns for either employment or entertainment. Access to water and other outdoor recreational activities are abundant both in Solon and in neighboring towns. While the rate of natural change cannot be impacted by town policy, the rate of migration can be affected by managing land use controls, promoting economic sectors that fit the character of the town, and offering public services that town residents want and need.

As detailed more completely in the Recreation chapter of this Plan, Solon is perfectly situated at the threshold of the North Maine Woods, offering unique opportunities for outdoor recreation within a short drive of amenities associated with larger towns.

TABLE 4: AGE TRENDS 2000 TO 2020

	2000	2010	2020	20-Year Change
Population	940	1,097	843	-97 (-10%)
Median Age	41.9	44	54.2	12 (29%)
Under 5 years old	46	38	20	-26 (-57%)
5 - 19 years old	191	228	115	-76 (-41%)
18 years, and older	729	871	734	5 (0.7%)
20 - 24 years old	38	42	16	-22 (-58%)
25 - 44 years old	256	278	150	-106 (-41%)
45 - 54 years old	168	180	151	-17 (-10%)
55 - 59 years old	63	144	53	-10 (-16%)
60 - 64 years old	47	65	67	20 (43%)
65 years and older	131	122	271	140 (107%)

Source: 2000, 2010, 2020 Census & ACS

Table 4 Highlights:

- In this 20-year period, the median age increased 29 percent.
- The number of children under 5 years of age decreased by more than half or 57 percent.
- The age categories of 5-19 years old and 25-44 years old both decreased by 41 percent.
- The age categories of 60-64 years old and 65 and older both increased. Those 60-64 years of age increased by 43 percent and 65 years old and older increased by 107 percent. This is likely due to the amount of retired folks moving into Solon.

The statistics from this table confirm that Solon's population is getting older and there are fewer young people. The decrease in "family-aged adults" or the 18-44 age category, will mean that there will continue to be fewer children.

In 2010 the 60-65 age bracket was beginning to show the effects of the baby boom generation- those born between 1945 and 1965. By 2020, many of those individuals are now in the 65 or older age category, supported by the significant increase in this data. This will have short-term implications for housing, health care, elder care, transportation, recreation, and other services.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the baby boom generation significantly increased the school enrollment numbers, then in the 1980s and 1990s they had quite an effect on the housing market, now in the 2020s they will have an indelible effect on housing, elder care, and health care.

Seasonal Population:

All population data above refers to year-round residents. Solon also has a significant seasonal population — camp owners/renters, short-term visitors, day-trippers, and summer-camp guests.

Most seasonal activity revolves around rural camps, campsites or cabins, and use of the town's ATV and snowmobile trail network. Popular seasonal areas include Wentworth Pond (aka Ironbound Pond), Pine Cone Acres cabins, and Evergreens Campground.

Over the past decade, many seasonal homes — especially around Ironbound Pond after electricity was extended there — have been converted into year-round residences. That has attracted more full-time residents (often from out of state), raising property values and property tax revenue. While this boosts the town's finances, it also can price out families with long-held camps and adds burdens such as increased traffic, road maintenance needs, and pressure to pave rural access roads.

More recently, some buyers have been skipping traditional cabins and instead placing RVs on vacant rural lots — a concerning trend because these lots often lack proper sewage or sanitary provisions.

At the same time, some property owners have closed off previous public access to trails, and several ATV/snowmobile routes have been shut down — often due to increased disrespectful behavior, riders using roads to reach stores, and local frustration with trail misuse.

Seasonal visitors remain economically important. They support local businesses, contribute significantly to the tax base, and generally use few municipal services, especially schools. Tourist traffic on the Route 201 corridor also benefits Solon; travelers passing through typically require no town services but provide valuable patronage to local stores and other establishments.

According to 2023 ACS data, Solon has 593 housing units: 396 occupied year-round, 142 classified as seasonal or occasional use, and 55 listed for sale, rent, or otherwise vacant. The 142 seasonal homes alone represent just under 36 % of all homes. Assuming at least two people per seasonal home, that adds roughly 284 people during peak season — nearly 31% of the year-round population. That surge explains why the seasonal population so strongly influences the town, sometimes creating crowding, more traffic, and heavier use of local businesses and resources.

Services:

Solon is not a service center in the region. Skowhegan and Madison are the primary nearby service centers, followed by Bingham. Solon does, however, have a major employer that increases the daytime population. Kennebec Lumber Company's headquarters is located on Main Street in Solon. Kennebec Lumber Co., detailed more thoroughly in the Local Economy chapter, has five other facilities in New Hampshire.

Most of Kennebec Lumber Co.'s employees who work in the Solon facility are not Solon residents, which increases the town's daytime population. Supporting this population requires minimal from the town, as employees usually use Route 201, which is owned and maintained by the state. They frequent local stores around lunchtime, which is beneficial to Solon's economy.

School Enrollment Data:

School enrollment data is detailed more thoroughly in the Public Facilities and Services chapter of this Plan. Solon is part of Regional School Unit (RSU) 74, which encompasses the towns of Solon, Anson/North Anson, Embden, and New Portland. The data presented in the table below reflects only public-school enrollment- it does not include children who are homeschooled. That information is provided in the Public Facilities and Services chapter.

TABLE 5: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT DATA

County/Town	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	10 Year Average
Solon	153	146	145	144	142	129	124	131	134	145	139.3
Bingham	120	126	112	109	113	104	111	124	115	104	113.8
Athens	151	152	155	165	153	139	140	145	150	142	149.2
Brighton	9	11	14	12	9	10	7	6	5	6	8.9
Cornville	183	196	209	226	220	215	191	180	181	174	197.5
Madison	656	636	653	634	626	590	607	628	591	584	620.5
Embden	108	107	108	99	98	92	95	96	102	93	99.8
Anson	341	334	332	340	334	312	324	329	330	330	330.6
Somerset County	7,672	7,590	7,536	7,479	7,378	6,885	6,863	6,937	6,881	6,673	7,189.4

Source: Maine Department of Education, Student Enrollment Data

Table 5 Highlights:

- While Solon's student enrollment fluctuated in this 10-year period, the 2025 enrollment is almost the same as it was in 2016.
- Nearly every school in the neighboring towns saw a decrease in enrollment during the pandemic. Covid could have affected student enrollment, overall- in other words some of the students who were taken out of public schools during the pandemic may have remained in homeschooling.
- Student enrollment has decreased in this time for every neighboring town and for Somerset County, which corresponds to the trend of increasing median age and smaller household sizes.
- There is a trend of overall decreasing student enrollment.

The combination of increasing housing prices, the median age range in Maine, and the decreasing family sizes all contribute to the reduced school enrollment.

While declining enrollment does not directly raise overall school costs, it increases per-student spending by spreading fixed expenses such as facility maintenance and administration across fewer students. At the same time, reduced enrollment lowers revenue, forcing difficult budget decisions such as staff reductions or potential school closures. Because many districts cannot quickly scale back fixed costs, the result is a higher cost per student. Factors that contribute to increased per-students costs include:

- Fixed costs stay constant as enrollment falls
- Funding declines with fewer students
- Staffing rules and pay trends limit cost cuts
- Course offerings reduced in smaller schools
- School closures add costs and disruptions

Currently, many of the class sizes have been reduced to around 10 students per class. For the reasons listed above, it would be beneficial if class sizes were increased. Solon should prepare for future years of decreased school enrollment, as this trend appears to be regional. Decreased school enrollment will affect everything from school bus routes, teaching jobs, school buildings, teaching styles, and the quality of education provided.

In addition to declining enrollment, the schools are facing significant behavioral challenges. The number of students with special needs requiring additional support has increased, as has the frequency of behavioral incidents. While many of these behaviors are connected to unmet special needs, limited resources force staff to respond reactively to disruptions rather than providing the proactive support these students require.

Although no new school buildings are needed, there is a clear need for expanded services and additional support staff to better assist both teachers and students.

Population Projections:

Population projections are mathematical extrapolations of past trends, such as population fluctuation, age distribution, household size, and more. For this reason, they can be influenced by unexpected, outside factors. Projections are useful for planning for future growth, but they are not precise.

The Office of the State Economist publishes population projections, estimating Solon's population to be 844 people by the year 2042, 17 years from now. This is a decrease of around eight percent of Solon's current population of 919 individuals. This projection by the Maine State Economist is from 2023.

This projection is based partially on the increasing median age of the residents and other observable trends. It is imperative to bear in mind that this is just a projection based on past trends and data. But since the COVID pandemic, climate change, and the influx of refugees, trends and projections are anything but reliable. Regardless of accuracy and potential variables, this projection provides a rough population estimate for planning purposes for the future.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the smaller the average household size becomes, the more houses necessary to house the same number of people. The estimate assumes that household size has continued the decades-long trend, going from 2.43 in 2010 to 2.3 in 2020. That trend appears to be slowing, but even if it levels out at 2.19 in 2042, additional housing may be needed to accommodate the same population.

And, due to Solon's ideal location as a bedroom community for Skowhegan, Waterville, Fairfield and other more populated areas, if more housing were available, it would undoubtedly be filled. This will be covered further in the Housing chapter.

The rate of housing development is an effective way to estimate population growth, but it is also an effective way to manage it. Local policies can affect the rate of housing growth through their influence on the cost of development or land use restrictions, which in turn, affects population growth. Growth in population and households increases the demand for public services and commercial development. Unless specifically designed for senior citizens, each new household must have one or more jobs to support it. Younger, larger households will generate school children. Nearly all households require added waste management and road maintenance costs. All these factors must be considered when projecting population growth.

Hypothetically, if the average household size were to continue to decline by another 5 percent in conjunction with the State Economist's population projection, the average household size would be around 2.19 people per household by 2042.

Solon's current housing stock is 593 total housing units, of which approximately 142 are seasonal homes, meaning roughly 451 houses are available for year-round habitation.

Table 6 below shows different scenarios using the population projection from the State Economist's Office, the current average household size, and the hypothetical decrease in average household size of 5 percent.

TABLE 6: POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND HOUSING NEEDS

	Population	Total Current Housing Units (Minus Seasonal)	Average Household Size	# of Houses Needed	Deficit?
Current	919	451	2.3	396	N/A
State Economist's Population Projection	844	451	2.3	367	No, surplus of 84 houses
State Economist's Population Projection with Decreased Average Household Size	844	451	2.19	385	No, surplus of 66 houses

Based on 2023 ACS data

Based on Table 6, Solon would not need additional housing to accommodate its residents for the population projected by the State Economist with the current average household size, or if the average household size continues to shrink by 5 percent. Solon has sufficient housing stock to accommodate either scenario with this population projection. This data is not; however, a reflection of the considerable housing shortage the state is already experiencing. Housing details will be covered more thoroughly in the Housing chapter.

The most likely scenario for Solon is minimal population change and a continuing need for additional housing stock. These projections do not take into account the age of the population or the age of the new residents moving in. As detailed throughout this chapter and this Plan, Solon's median age has been increasing for years. And there has been a trend in retired people moving to Solon. The most pressing need will likely be for elderly housing options and services for that population demographic. With fewer school-aged children and declining school enrollment, the town needs to stay vigilant about the changing needs of its population.

It is important that Solon pays attention to annual changes in housing development and other local and regional indicators. The town should continue to monitor the rate of new construction and the type of homes that are being built and should continue to discuss the implications and address them through policy changes, as necessary.

Population Demographic Trends

The implications of Solon's population demographic trends are as follows:

Housing

- Though less pronounced in rural areas like Solon, there is a statewide housing shortage. Solon's smaller household sizes mean more housing numbers are required to accommodate the same sized population.
- As Solon's population increases in age, the type of housing needed will change, with an emphasis on the need for 55 and older housing options, smaller houses, elderly housing, and housing on one level.

Schools

- Due to a decrease in student enrollment, there is no need for additional school buildings; however, there is a growing and substantial need for more school services, such as help with students with special needs.
- There has been an increase in students with behavioral issues related to special needs and the focus has been on addressing behavioral issues rather than the special needs aspect. This has caused resources to be spread thin.
- Currently, the class sizes have shrunk to about 10 students per class. For a number of reasons, it would be beneficial if student enrollment increased and class sizes were larger again.

Municipal Services

- The increased number of residents living in the rural parts of Solon has led to increased expectations for road maintenance, street lighting, sidewalks, paving, and more.
- The people living in the more built-up part of town frequently ask for the addition of municipal water and sewer.

Analysis:

- While Solon's population has fluctuated, it has been increasing steadily since the early 1960s.
- The median age of Solon's residents peaked around 2020, then began to decline to around 46.8 as of 2023.
- The average household size has stayed relatively stable since 2020, as has the average family size.
- Both increasing median age and decreasing average household sizes are national trends.
- Aligning with this trend, there has been a sharp increase in single person households where the householder is 65 years of age or older. These individuals are the tail-end of the baby boom generation.
- The most obvious age trends observed in Solon are fewer young people and more people over 60 years of age.
- Solon has a large seasonal population with around 36 percent of its housing stock as seasonal use homes.
- The global pandemic caused a sharp decline in school enrollment between 2020 and 2022; after which time it has been rebounding slowly.
- Solon is part of RSU 74, along with Anson, Embden, and New Portland.
- The Maine State Economist predicts Solon will have a population of around 844 people by the year 2042.