

Every ten years, the decennial census works to count every person in the United States.

The first local data from the 2020 Census, the “Redistricting Data File,” is now available. It provides counts of housing units, households, and population, as well as a drilldown into race groups. This dataset is available for any level of geography, including census blocks (which can be as small as city street blocks). Metropolitan Council has republished the data for cities and townships, tracts, block groups and blocks in the region. Data products include downloadable tables, downloadable GIS files, and online webmap visualizations. Visit [metro council.org/census2020/](https://metro council.org/census2020/)

Subsequent data files from the 2020 Census will be released in 2022. The “Demographic and Housing Characteristics” file will provide detailed age breakdowns, data on the family (or nonfamily) relationships between people living together, and cross tabulations of these characteristics with race, sex, and homeownership.

### ACCURACY OF THE 2020 CENSUS

Because of its level of reporting detail, the decennial census is considered the “gold standard” of demographic data. Still, there are always count questions or discrepancies following the decennial census; we expect many this cycle.

The leading causes of inaccuracies and errors are:

- Residential addresses or group quarters facilities missed by the Census’s master address file, or otherwise not mailed or visited by Census Bureau.
- Geolocation errors, where residential addresses or group quarters facilities are mis-assigned to the wrong census blocks.
- Political boundaries errors, where Census Bureau used erroneous boundary lines, causing census blocks to be mis-assigned to the wrong city, township, etc.
- Undercounts (or overcounts) due to Census Bureau’s own processes of filling-in or imputing population and characteristics for the one-quarter of residential addresses that did not directly participate in the decennial census.
- Undercounts (or overcounts) due to respondents’ errors – for example, respondents’ failures to list some household members.
- Finally, “Disclosure Avoidance System” distortions introduced to the summary results tables in order to frustrate the personal identifiability of population characteristics.

If the first three types of errors can be detected and substantiated, state and local governments can engage the Census Bureau, through the Bureau’s Count Question Resolution (CQR) program, to request corrections. There is no remedy for the fourth, fifth and sixth issues.

The [Count Question Resolution \(CQR\) program](#) will operate from January 2022 to June 2023. In our experience, detecting and substantiating political boundaries errors is fairly straightforward. However, Census Bureau imposes a much higher burden of proof regarding missed (and thus uncounted) residential addresses or group quarters facilities. Metropolitan Council staff will offer training and technical assistance to local governments during the same January 2022 to June 2023 period.

At the end of the CQR process, in Fall 2023, Census Bureau will issue a database of population and housing counts corrections, for all census tracts, cities and townships that are affected. Those final corrections will be incorporated into “population base datasets” that the federal government and states use to allocate funds and other resources. (Unfortunately, final corrections from CQR will not be available in time for redistricting uses.)

## WHAT MET COUNCIL DOES WITH 2020 CENSUS DATA?

At the Metropolitan Council, the 2020 Census data on population and households serve as a “base dataset” – that is, the starting point – for population estimation and future forecasting.

- *Previous year population estimates.* For years between decennial censuses, we prepare annual estimates of housing and population. A continuous tracking of new construction and other housing stock changes is added to the “base dataset” to estimate each community’s annual housing stock. Occupancy rates, average household sizes, and other measures are used to complete the estimation of population.
- *Local forecasts.* We prepare community and zone-level forecasts of future population through a separate work program. Our local forecast allocation uses a real estate economics model; with submodels that handle real estate supply, real estate prices projection, and location choice. The results are informed by starting-point conditions, including households counts and population composition as indicated by the decennial census. The accuracy of the decennial census counts thus has long-range implications.

## REPLACEMENT OF 2020 FORECAST DATAPPOINTS WITH 2020 CENSUS

Metropolitan Council approved the current set of local forecasts several years ago, with the *Thrive MSP 2040* regional plan. Local governments have since then included these forecasts in comprehensive plan updates. Council staff will prepare the next major, regionwide update of all local forecasts in 2023. That update will use the 2020 Census as a “base dataset” and will forecast households and population for 2030, 2040, and 2050.

Local governments can request that the 2020 data points be updated early in the Council’s current local forecast set -- but there is no expectation or requirement to do this. Local governments may want the early update if the 2020 Census counts are substantially discrepant from the current, approved forecast’s 2020 numbers.

A separate information sheet outlines the process of [How To Request a Forecast Change](#). All of the expectations outlined in that sheet continue to apply. Additionally, the Council may consider the upward or downward revision of 2020 numbers as contingent on also revising 2030 and 2040 numbers. Local governments can discuss the forecast revision with the Council’s [sector representatives](#) ahead of a formal request.

November 2021