

## C. Community Profile

Dedham is a historic suburban town located in Norfolk County in the southern portion of the Boston metropolitan area. The Town is bordered by Needham on the west, Boston on the north and northeast, Canton on the east, and Westwood on the south.

Due to its location immediately south of Boston, Dedham has become more urbanized, but still contains remnants of its agricultural and mill town heritage. The Town's historic development patterns evolved around its waterways with the Charles River and Mother Brook providing a means of transportation and a source of power for mills and factories. More recently, recreational use of these waterways has become an important contribution to Dedham's quality of life and is increasing as water quality improves and access is enhanced. Dedham has retained much of its natural beauty and many open lands due in large part to the significant private institutional holdings in the Town, such as Ursuline Convent, and Northeastern University.



### Natural Features

Dedham has a number of landscape features that define the character of the Town. The most striking and prevalent include Dedham's waterways, which impacted historic development and provide biological, recreational, and economic benefits to the Town today. These waterways also provide important links between Dedham and other communities in eastern Massachusetts. Additionally, Wilson Mountain is a dominant landscape feature, providing scenic views of the Town from its peak with long range views of forested hillsides in the surrounding lowlands. Open landscapes are also an important feature in Dedham, ranging from manicured institutional greens to recreational fields and a private golf course. These open landscapes provide a counterpoint to both the forested and built environment, giving a sense of rhythm and relief.

### Climate

As would be expected for any Massachusetts community, Dedham has a relatively mild but highly variable climate with four distinct seasons. Temperatures over the course of a four-season cycle usually range more than 100 degrees F. This phenomenon sets the stage for recreational demands that are very diverse over the course of the year, and often seasonal in nature. Seasons that tend to bring colder or otherwise unpleasant weather also create higher demand for indoor recreational facilities.

The regional climatic influences in Massachusetts vary across the Commonwealth based on a municipality's proximity to relatively mild ocean waters, its average elevation, and the type of terrain. These modifying factors divide the State into three climate divisions—western, central,

and coastal—with Dedham technically in the coastal division. Closer proximity to the ocean leads to even more dramatic variation in weather when compared with Massachusetts’ communities that are farther inland. Coastal storms and a recurring “thaw/freeze cycle” create harsh conditions for athletic fields and equipment. Annual rainfall amounts can reach as high as 60 inches, with spring being the wettest season. Coupled with melting snow and residents anxious to get outside in the warmer weather, this time of year can be particularly challenging for recreational facilities.

## Vegetation

The native vegetation around Dedham is a reflection of its ties to its waterways. Much of Dedham is considered to be at or near buildout capacity with most of its land devoted to housing, business, and transportation. However there is a unique rustic character to Dedham, typified by its dense tree-lined streets and riparian areas that are punctuated by private or public parks and open space.

Vegetative communities within Dedham include the following:

**Riparian Areas:** Riparian areas are the lands adjacent to, and/or interacting with, rivers and streams. Healthy riparian areas generally include trees, shrubs, and groundcovers that provide shade and stabilize banks. Vegetation is usually hydrophilic in nature, thriving in wet conditions.

**Wetlands:** Wetlands are areas of land whose soils are saturated with moisture either permanently or seasonally. They include marshes, swamps and bogs and often lie within floodplains. Dedham contains more than 1,200 acres of wetlands which is equal to 18% of its total land area. The Fowl Meadow is the largest contiguous wetland area in the Neponset River Basin and is one of the most significant wetland areas in the metropolitan Boston region.

**Central and Transitional Hardwood Forests:** Dedham’s woodland vegetation is typical of eastern Massachusetts. In the moderately to well-drained upland areas, many of which support second and third growth forests, the predominant tree species are oak, maple, hickory, grey birch, beech, poplar, white pine, and hemlock. White birch, ground juniper, cedar and spruce can also be found.



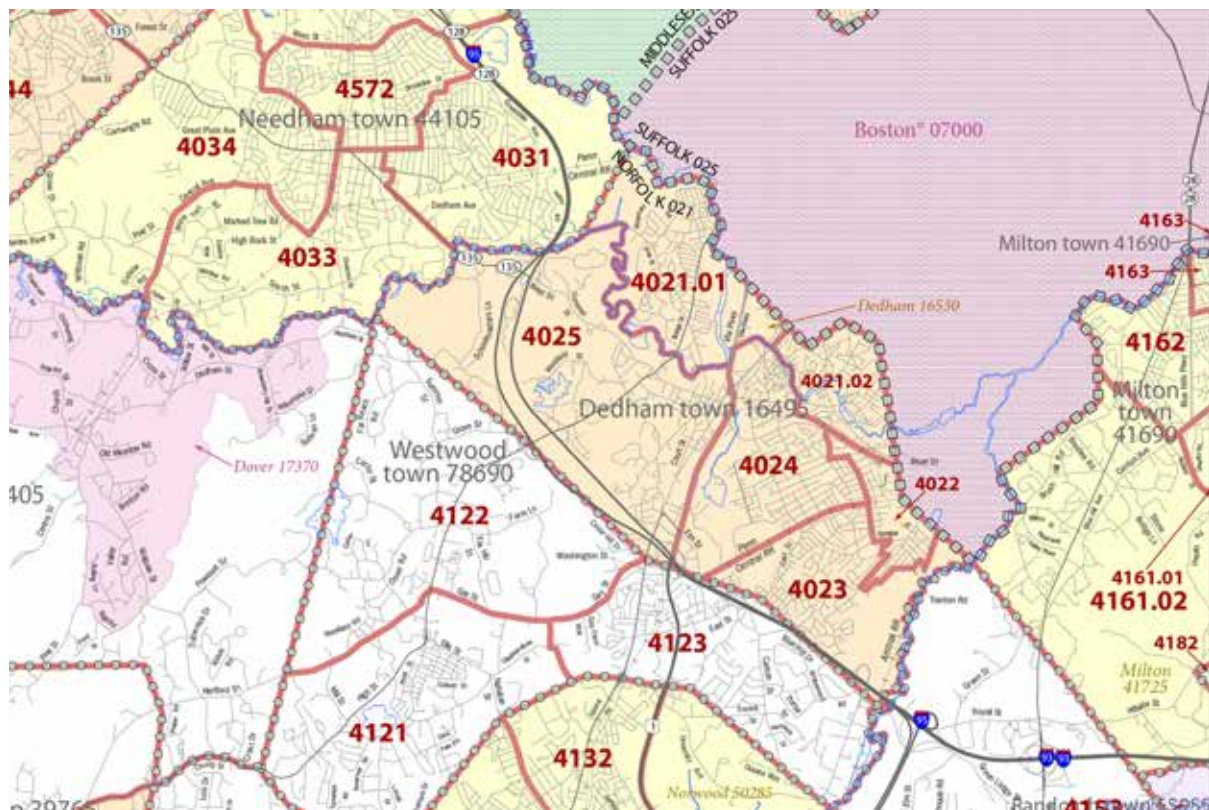
## Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of Dedham are important to note since they influence recreational interests and participation. As population changes, it creates new demand for park and recreation services or programming. Factors such as age, employment, income, and cultural preferences play a role in determining recreational interests. These factors may affect an individual's level of participation, as well as his or her ability and desire for active recreation.

Note: Some of the demographic data presented in this section is organized by Census Tracts. Figure 1 can be used as a reference for this information. The “Census Tract” is an area roughly equivalent to a neighborhood established by the Bureau of Census for analyzing populations. They generally encompass a population between 2,500 to 8,000 people. The Census Bureau describes them as “relatively permanent”, but they do change over time.

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Figure 1: Census Tracts in Dedham



Source: Town of Dedham

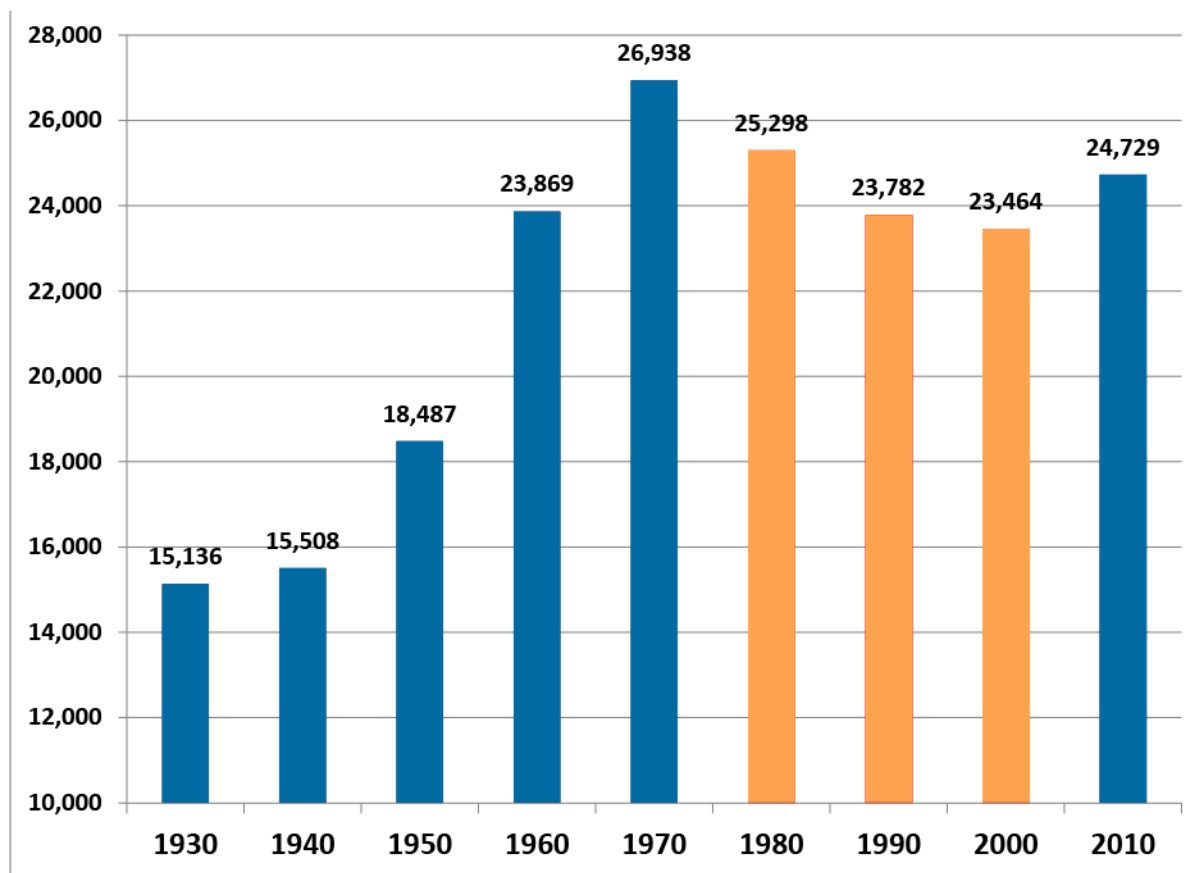
## Activity in the Community

Residents in Dedham are generally more active (35%) compared with national measures (31%) and, not surprisingly, local incidence of residents being overweight or obese is slightly lower compared to the rest of the country (23% compared to 28%). Dedham and Massachusetts residents are also afforded more recreation opportunities with 50% of the population of Massachusetts living within 1/2 mile of public access to recreational open space.

## General Population

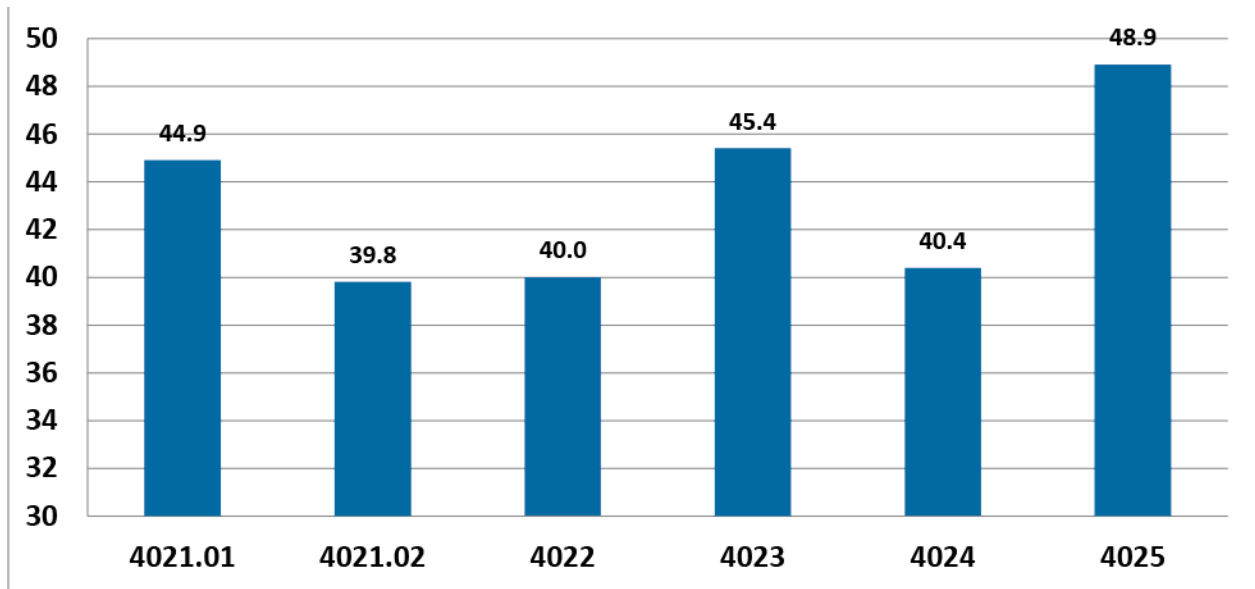
The Town of Dedham is a suburb directly South of Boston. Like most of the Boston metropolitan area, Dedham has seen a steady decline in population since the 1970s (Figure 2), although it is worth noting a modest increase did occur between 2000 and 2010. It is also worth noting that the geographic distribution of the median age varies by almost 10 years across different neighborhoods (Figure 3). When compared with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole, population growth in Dedham far outpaced the state average up to 1970. However, during the more recent population decline (1970 – 2000), the state as a whole showed a steady increase. The more recent modest increase in Dedham is more in line with statewide data (Figure 4). When compared with County data, Dedham’s population growth has generally been in-line with the County as a whole. However, Dedham’s population decline between 1970 and 2000 contrasted with the County increase of 7.5% during that period (Figure 5).

**Figure 2. Population Growth in Dedham, 1930 – 2010.**



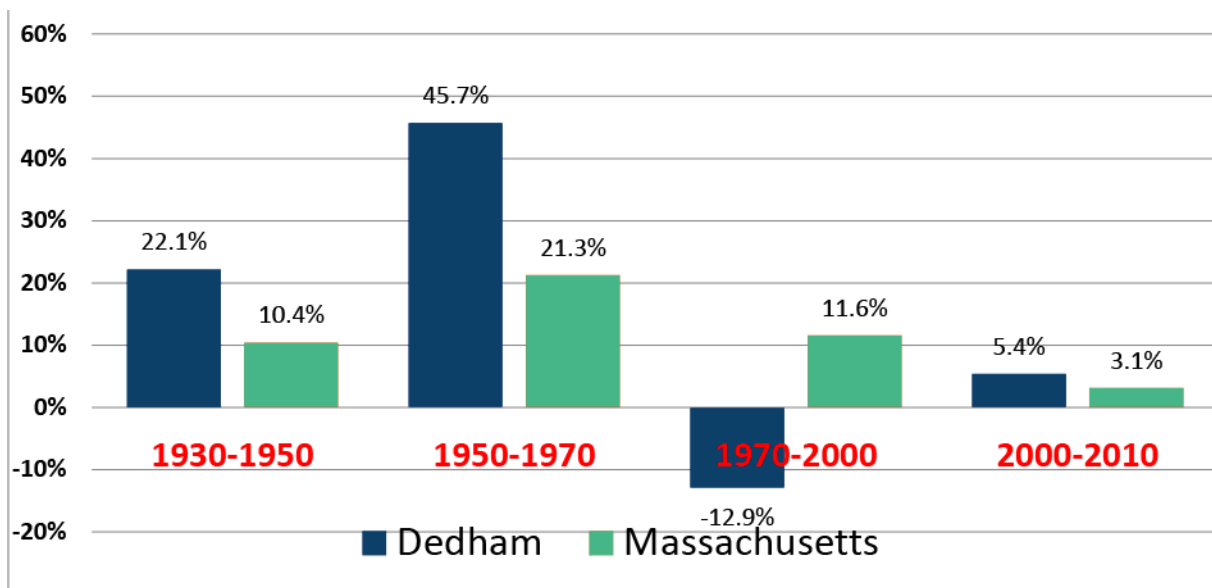
Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American Factfinder

**Figure 3. Median Age of Population in 2010 by Census Tract.**



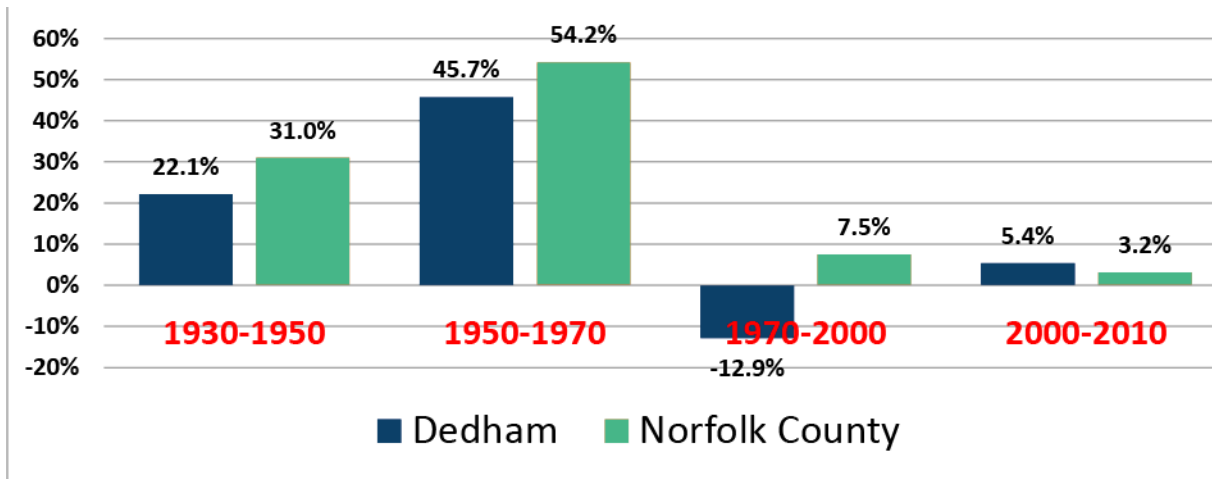
Source: USA.com Census Tract data for the Town of Dedham. Reference Figure 1 for census tract locations.

**Figure 4. Population Growth: Dedham vs. Massachusetts**



Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American Factfinder

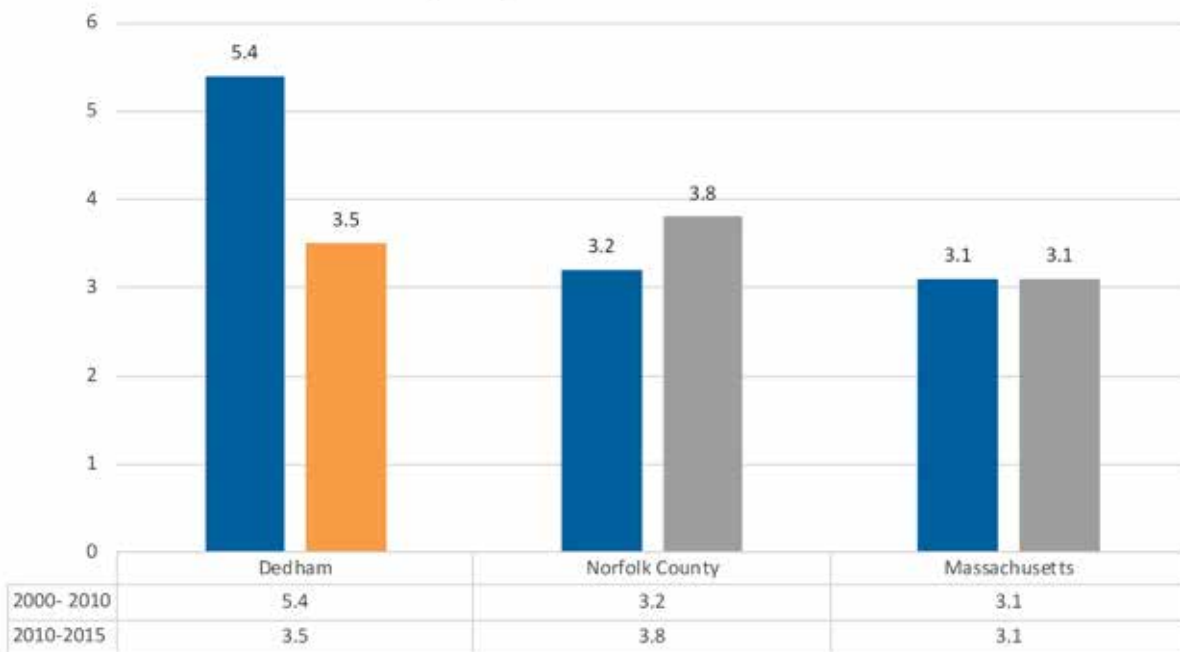
**Figure 5. Population Growth: Dedham vs. Norfolk County**



Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American Factfinder

Figure 6 shows the most recent population estimates for Dedham, the County, and the Commonwealth based on the 2010 and 2015 U.S. Census. For the most recent estimates (2015), all three show modest and comparable population increases.

**Figure 6. Population Growth in Dedham, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts Reported for 2000-2010 and 2010-2015.**



Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American FactFinder

## Age Groups

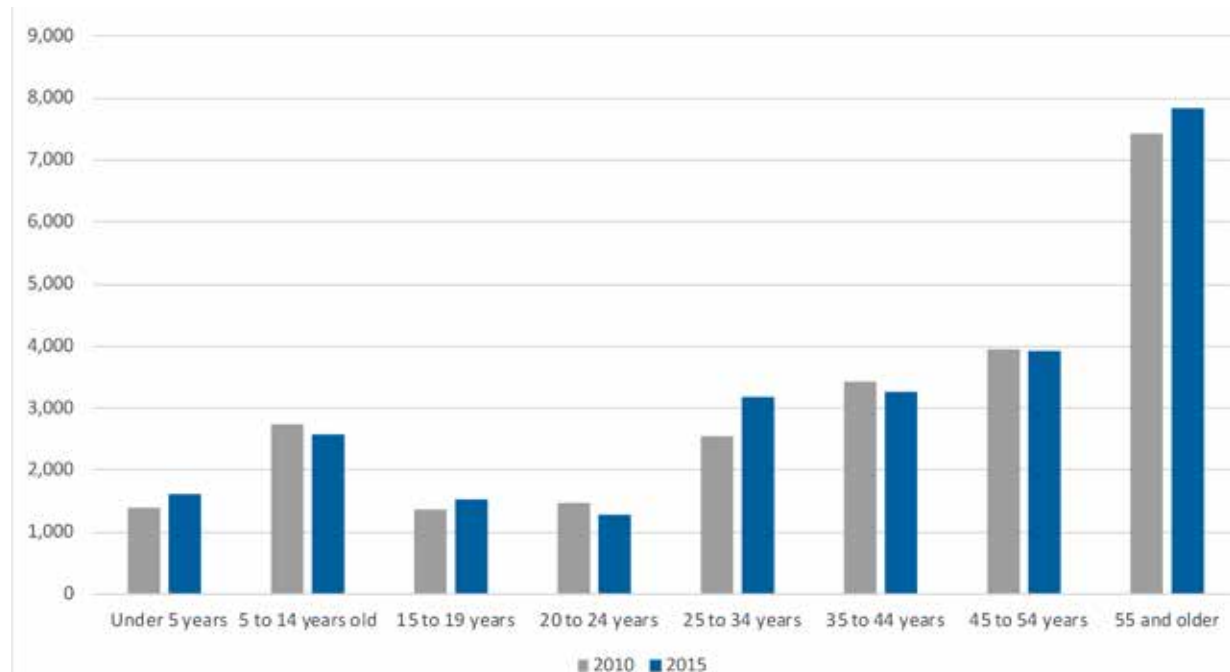
As with most communities, median age is on the rise. The Town's largest population group is comprised of those over age 55, representing 30.1% of the population in 2015. This differs from Norfolk County, where the largest "20 year" population block is 35 to 55 year olds (28%).

When planning for recreation, the following breakdown is used to separate the population into age-sensitive user groups .

- **Under 5 years:** This group represents users of preschool and tot programs, playgrounds and are often users of walking paths with parents. These individuals are the future participants in youth activities.
- **5 to 14 years:** This group represents current youth program participants.
- **15 to 24 years:** This group represents teen/young adult program participants moving out of the youth programs and into adult programs. Members of this age group are often seasonal employment seekers.
- **25 to 34 years:** This group represents involvement in adult programs with characteristics of beginning long-term relationships and establishing families.
- **35 to 54 years:** This group represents users of a wide range of adult programs and park facilities. Their characteristics extend from having children using preschool and youth programs to becoming empty nesters.
- **55 years plus:** This group represents users of older adult programs exhibiting the characteristics of approaching retirement or already retired and typically enjoying grandchildren. This group generally also ranges from very healthy, active seniors to more physically inactive seniors.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of these age groups in Dedham for the years 2010 and 2015. While the greatest single increase is shown in the 25 – 34 age group, the over population of residents 55 years or older is still far larger than any group and shows an increase.

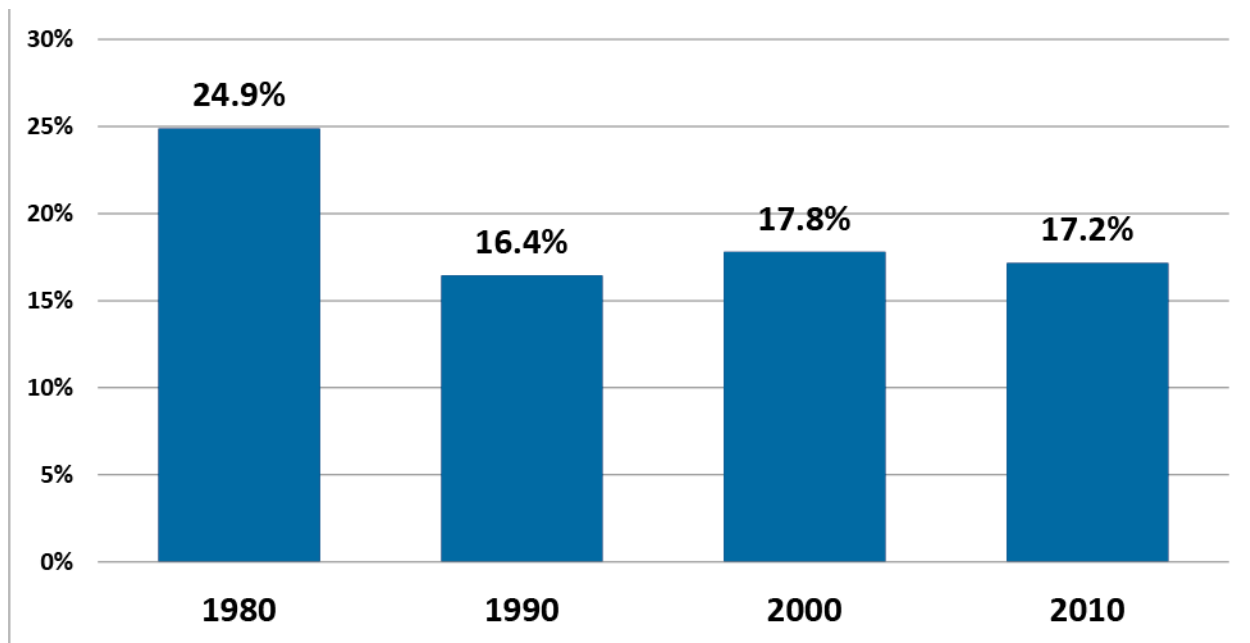
**Figure 7. Dedham Population by Age Group 2010 and 2015**



Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American FactFinder

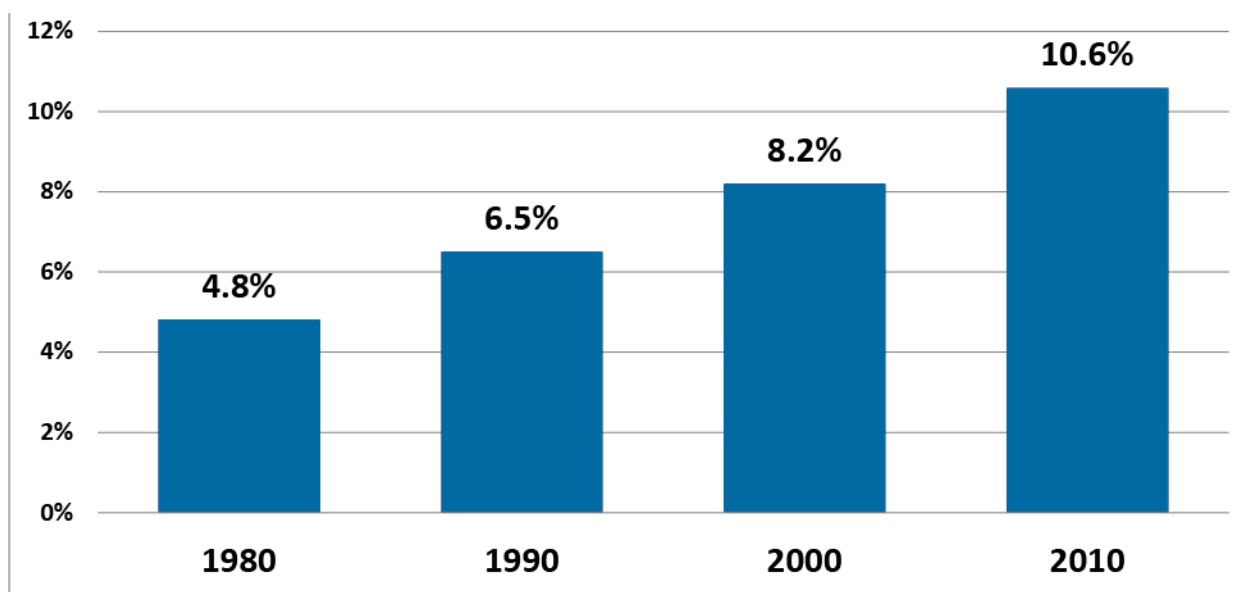
Between 1980 and 2000, Dedham's 5 – 19 year old cohort has remained fairly consistent as a percentage of the population (Figure 8), while the percentage of residents who are 75 years and older has more than doubled during the same period (Figure 9).

**Figure 8. Residents Age 5-19 as a Percentage of Dedham's Population, 1980-2000**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980 - 2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

**Figure 9. Residents Age 75 and Over as a Percentage of Dedham's Population, 1980-2000**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980 - 2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

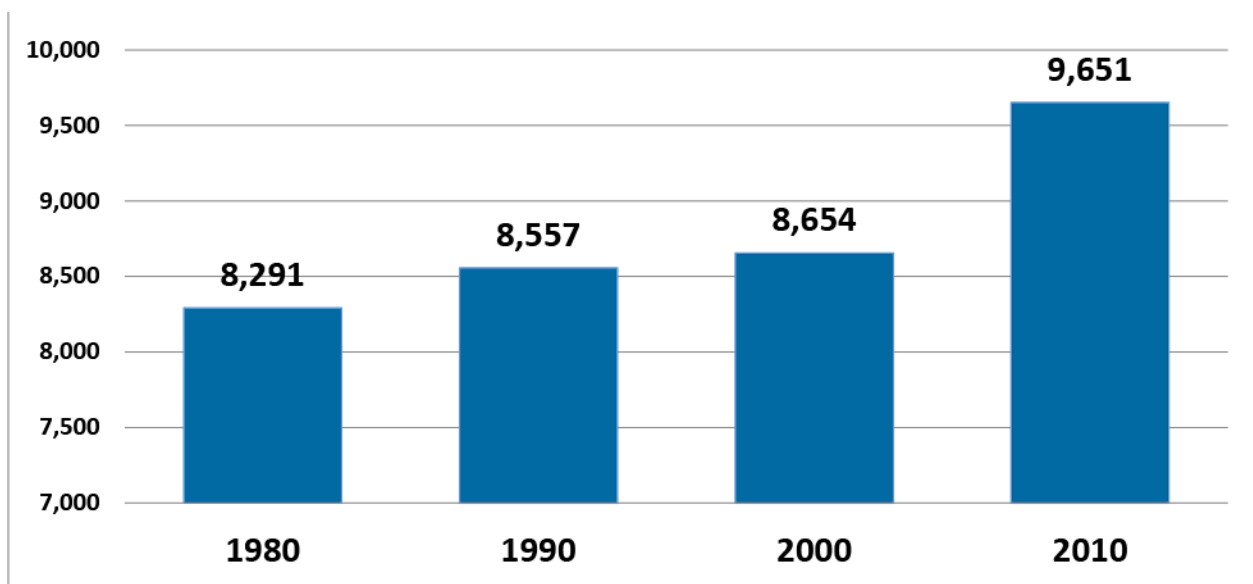




### Household Numbers and Composition

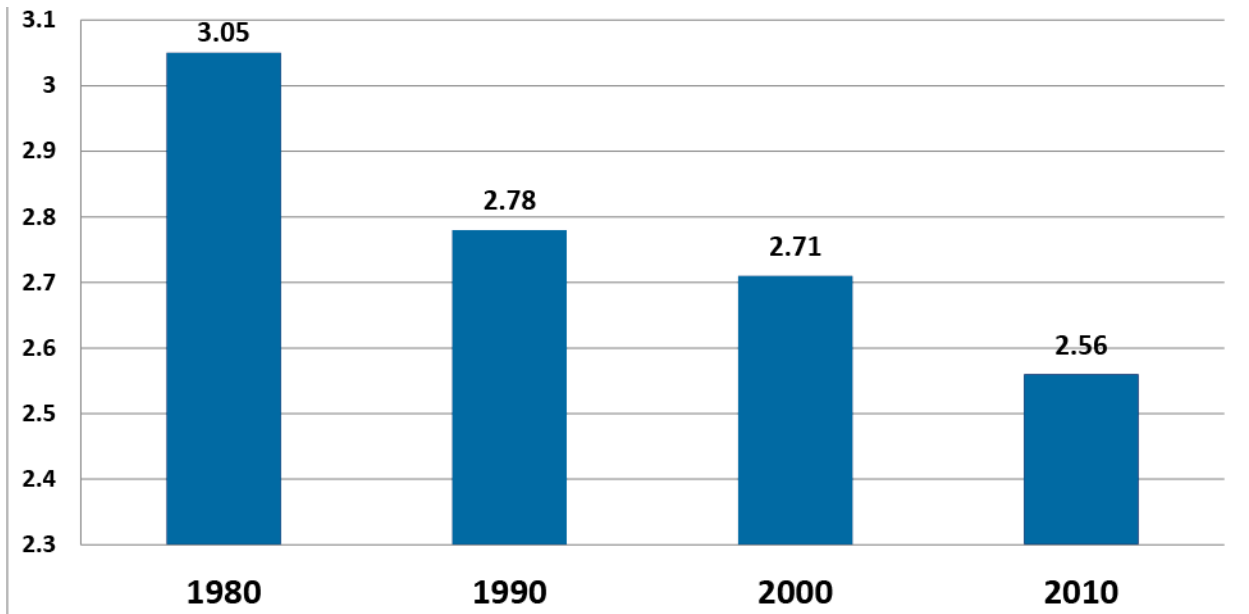
When considering household data in the context of recreational demands there are several important pieces of data to consider. Dedham's household information tells a specific story about rising needs for both programming and facilities. First, the number of households has continued to increase in Dedham, even when population declined between 1970 and 2000 (Figure 10). This information illustrates two important trends. First, increases in the number of homes developed over these past decades has consumed more land and increased the size of neighborhoods. As more land is developed, new households may find themselves farther away from recreational amenities. Second, if households are increasing in number, but population is decreasing, this suggests that the number of people in each household (i.e., "household size") is decreasing. The data in Figures 11 and 12 show this to be true. Studies from groups like the Aspen Institute show that where there are fewer siblings on average, there will be higher demand for recreational opportunities away from home.

**Figure 10. Number of Households in Dedham, 1980 – 2010**



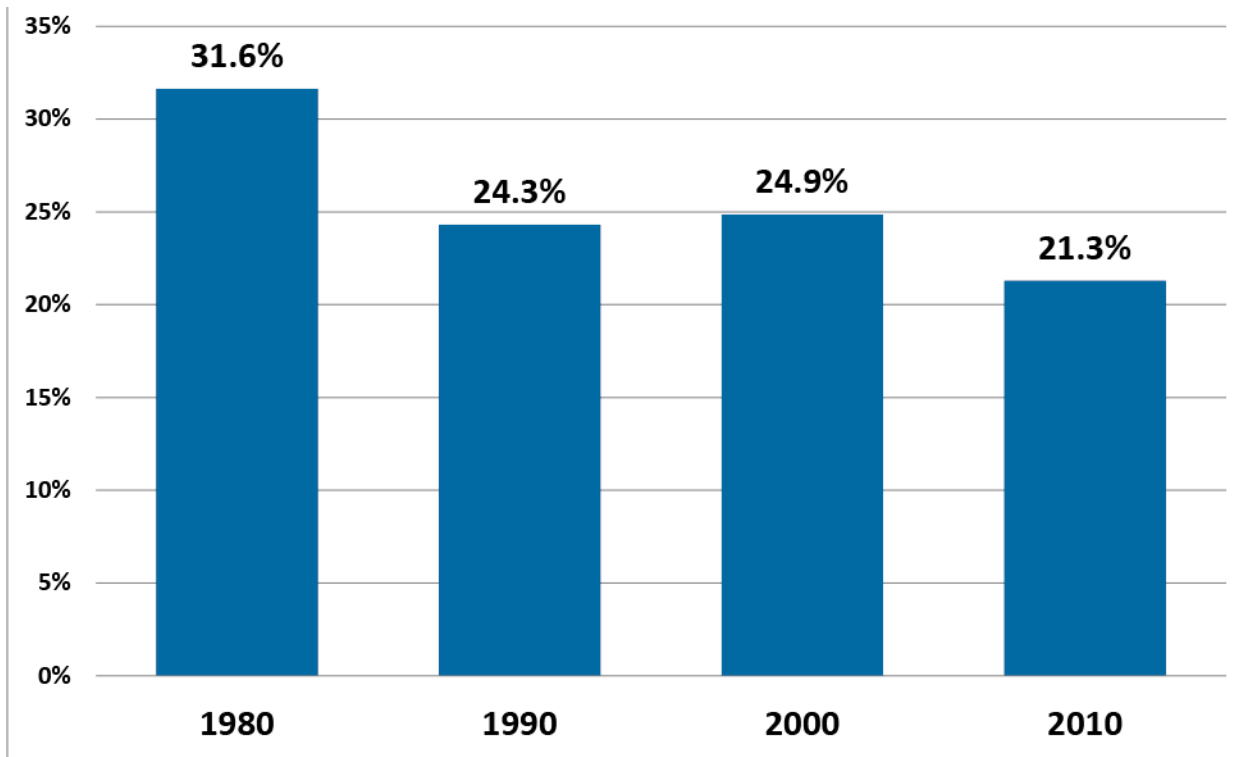
Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980 - 2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

**Figure 11. Average Household Size in Dedham, 1980 – 2010**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980 - 2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

**Figure 12. Married-Couple Families with Children as a Percentage of Dedham Households, 1980 – 2010**

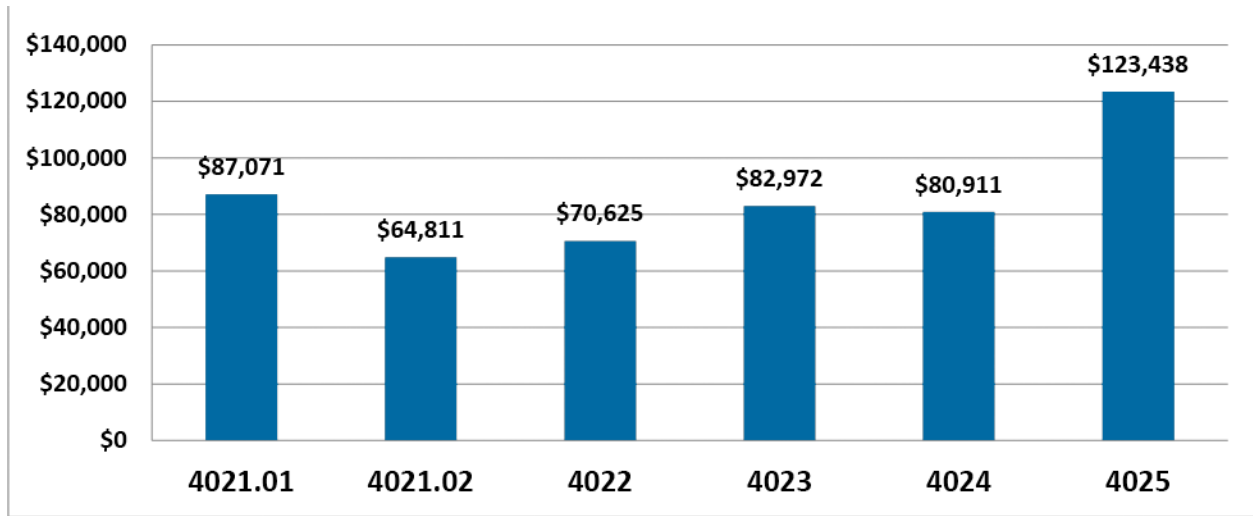


Source: U.S. Decennial Census (1980 - 2000); American Community Survey (2006-2010)

Household income in Dedham closely mirrors both values and trends in Norfolk County over time. Figure 13 shows median income levels from 2010 to 2015 for Dedham, the County and

Massachusetts. As expected, median household incomes in Dedham (and Norfolk County) are significantly higher than the state due primarily to its proximity to Boston.

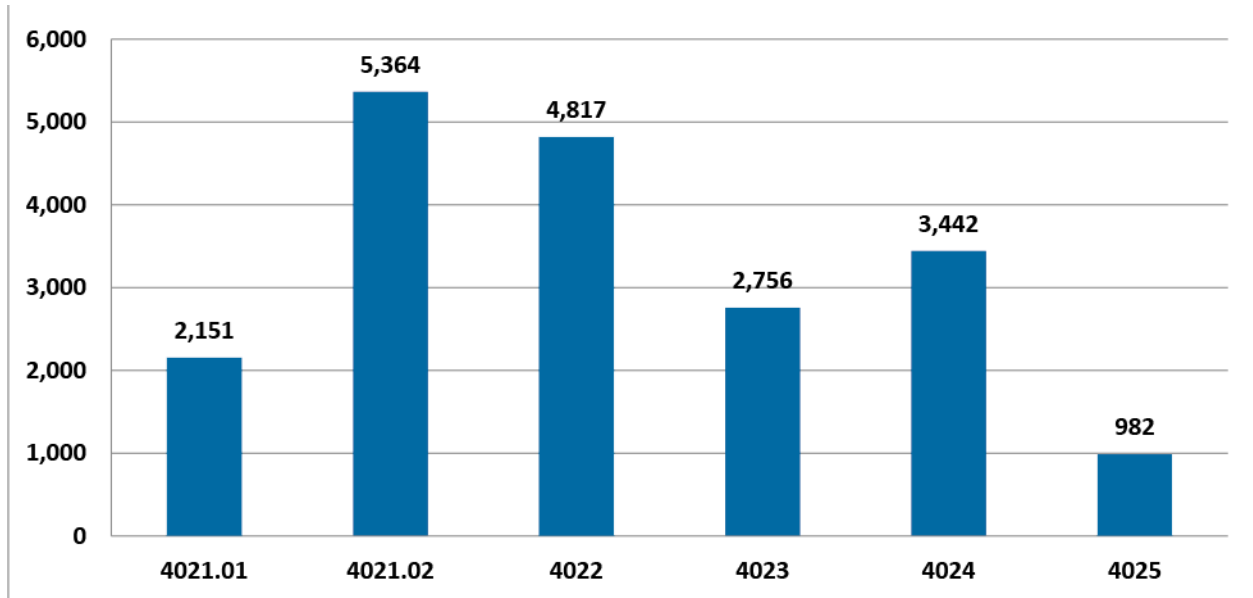
**Figure 13. Household Median Income for Dedham, Norfolk County, and Massachusetts (2010 – 2015)**



Source: State Data Center, MISER and U.S. Census American FactFinder. Reference Figure 1 for census tract locations.

Another interesting way to look at households in Dedham is geographic distribution of population location (density) and income. Figure 14 shows population density in different Census Tracts and Figure 15 shows median income in the same areas. When compared with Figure 3 (Age by Census Tract), these three data sets show that older, wealthier households tend to own property in areas of the community that are less densely developed.

**Figure 14. Population Density (persons/square mile) in Dedham by Census Tract (2010)**



Source: USA.com Census Tract data for the Town of Deham. Reference Figure 1 for census tract locations.