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City of West Palm Beach

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Community Background Report

City of West Palm Beach

Boundaries

North: L-39 Canal

South: Broward County Line

West: Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge

East: Florida Turnpike

Community Type: Municipality

History

The City of West Palm Beach is the oldest city in Palm Beach County and the most populous of the Palm Beaches. It occupies 58.2 square miles of land near the Atlantic Coast. The city is located 70.5 miles north of Miami and 19 miles south of Jupiter.¹

The history of the city began in 1880 when Irving Henry of North Carolina purchased 130 acres of land for \$1.00 per acre under the Homestead Act. Captain O.S. Porter later bought the land and resold it to Henry Flagler for \$35,000. West Palm Beach was established when Henry Flagler moved his railroad and hotel employees west of Lake Worth. The new community served as the home of Flagler's workers as well as the ending point of the East Coast Railroad. The town was incorporated on November 5, 1894, when 78 residents met at the jail/police station and decided to officially create the Town of West Palm Beach. Originally called "Westpalmbeach", the name was later split into three words. Residents elected W.L. Torbert the first Town Marshall.¹

The population of the City of West Palm Beach boomed during the early part of the 20th century. From 1920 to 1927 the population quadrupled. Despite the tremendous growth, the economy of the area declined due to two major hurricanes, speculation, and the delay of building materials transported by train or ship. By 1935 property values in the city fell below their 1920 value. During World War II, West Palm Beach and other Florida cities served as sites for military training centers and air bases, including Morrison Field, the modern-day Palm Beach International Airport. During the postwar era, West Palm Beach went through a period of sustained growth due to investments by the military during the war and the influx of veterans. From 1935 to 1962 the city's property value increased by 800% to \$147.5 million. A second boom began in the 1950s, resulting in the transformation of West Palm Beach from a small town to a metropolis by the 1970s. From 1990 to 2000 the population grew by an additional 23%.²

Since 1988 the City of West Palm Beach has been involved in historic preservation, evidenced by the adoption of a Historic Preservation Ordinance and participation in the Florida Certified Local Government Program. In 1991 Old Northwood was designated as the city's first historic district and three years later was placed on the National Registry of Historical Places.³ Beautification efforts continue to be a priority for the City of West Palm Beach. On November 16, 2009 the newly renovated Dick Wilson-designed West Palm Beach Golf Club reopened, with golfing legend Arnold Palmer in attendance to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his victory at the West Palm Beach Open Invitational.⁴

Community Dynamics

The West Palm Beach Community Redevelopment Agency is actively involved in improving the quality of life for residents of Northwood and Pleasant City, as well as the Downtown District. Projects in the Northwood/Pleasant City Community Redevelopment District include the development of an “industrial corridor” on Windsor Avenue, a streetscape plan for Currie Corridor and the creation of “the Village” in the Northwood Business District. Projects in the Downtown/City Center Community Redevelopment District include the creation of the mixed- use Industrial Chic District.⁵

West Palm Beach’s Downtown Development Authority has worked to define Downtown West Palm Beach as a community famous for international dining, shopping, entertainment and a growing residential community. There are two distinctive districts in Downtown West Palm Beach—Clematis Street and CityPlace. Historic Clematis Street offers an eclectic mix of restaurants and shops, and a large residential district. CityPlace is a mixed-use project inspired by Italian architecture, with more than 80 shops, 20 restaurants, a large movie theater, and a 1920s church adapted to serve as a multi-purpose cultural center. The Downtown Development Authority is committed to developing and enhancing the downtown in a responsible, environmentally sustainable way, providing information about recycling opportunities and teaching residents and visitors how to become more environmentally conscious.⁶

Demographic Highlights⁷

The population of West Palm Beach has been increasing, and is projected to continue increasing.

Between 2000 and 2009 the population of West Palm Beach increased by 15%, reaching 95,147. It is projected to increase another 6% by 2014.

Most residents of West Palm Beach are White, but the city is more heterogeneous than other municipalities in Palm Beach County.

In 2009 60% of residents of West Palm Beach classified themselves as White, as compared to 77% in all of Palm Beach County. 29% of residents of West Palm Beach classified themselves as Black, and 2% as Asian. 19% classified themselves as Hispanic.

The White population of West Palm Beach is projected to decrease slightly.

It is projected that by 2014 residents who identify themselves as White will make up 58% of the population in West Palm Beach (as opposed to 60% in 2009), and the population of residents who identify themselves as Black and Hispanic will rise slightly.

Most residents of West Palm Beach speak English and are native-born US citizens.

In 2009 75% of residents of West Palm Beach spoke English and 77% were native-born US citizens. Spanish was the second most common language (14%).

The median household income of residents of West Palm Beach is slightly lower than in Palm Beach County.

In 2009 the median household income of residents in West Palm Beach was \$54,210, compared to \$62,114 in Palm Beach County. The household income per capita (\$30,560) and the average household income (\$73,762) were also lower in West Palm Beach than in Palm Beach County (\$38,763 and \$91,726, respectively).

The percentage of households in West Palm Beach with an income of less than \$15,000 is slightly higher than in Palm Beach County.

In 2009 13% of households in West Palm Beach reported an annual income of less than \$15,000, as opposed to 10% in Palm Beach County.

Nearly 1/3 of residents of West Palm Beach have a college degree.

In 2009 27% of West Palm Beach's residents had a college degree. 10% of residents had a graduate degree.

Transportation Trends⁸

The tables below illustrate projected transportation trends in the City of West Palm Beach:

Average household transportation costs:

2009: City, \$8,225.09/County, \$9,162.52

2014: City, \$10,066.40/County, \$11,276.10

Average household transportation costs for public transportation:

2009: City, \$484.42/County, \$607.69

2014: City, \$616.32/County, \$783.55

Forecasted travel time to work for the employed population, 2014:

Work at home: City, 3 percent/County, 5 percent

Less than 15 minutes: City, 20 percent/County, 20 percent

15-29 minutes: City, 39 percent /County, 37 percent

30-59 minutes: City, 29 percent /County, 31 percent

60+ minutes: City, 9 percent /County, 7 percent

Forecasted means of transportation to work for employed individuals, 2014:
Car, Truck, Van to Work: City, 92 percent / County, 92 percent
Public Transportation to Work: City, 2 percent / County, 1 percent
Other Transportation to Work: City, 3 percent / County, 2 percent

Forecasted number of vehicles per household, 2014:
No vehicles: City, 9 percent / County, 6 percent
1 vehicle: City, 41 percent / County, 41 percent
2 vehicles: City, 39 percent / County, 42 percent
3 vehicles: City, 9 percent / County, 9 percent
4+ vehicles: City, 2 percent / County, 2 percent

Special Events

Clematis by Night—The Division of Community Events at the West Palm Beach Mayor’s Office organizes this outdoor event every Thursday from 6 to 9 pm on Centennial Square, at the end of Clematis Street in Downtown West Palm Beach. The event draws thousands of folks from all walks of life and features the area's best rock, r&b, reggae, blues, soul, swing and Latin music. For more information, call the Division of Community Events at (561)822-1515 or visit <http://www.clematisbynight.net/index.php> .

Latin Fest—Organized by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Palm Beach County, this event takes place in October and celebrates Hispanic culture with music, food and fun for all. For more information visit <http://www.pbhchamber.com/> or call (561)832-1986.

Palm Beach International Boat Show—Hundreds of new and pre-owned boats are docked along Lake Worth Lagoon in downtown West Palm Beach for this event. Nautical accessories and apparel are also available. For more information call (561)233-3000 or visit <http://www.palmbeachfl.com/events/lifestyle-collector-shows/palm-beach-boat-show> .

Sunfest—Founded in 1982, SunFest is Florida's largest waterfront music and art festival. Held annually in downtown West Palm Beach the first week in May, SunFest attracts more than 270,000 visitors. For more information visit <http://sunfest.com/sunfest-info.php> .

Buckler’s Holiday Craft Fair—At the South Florida Fairgrounds near West Palm Beach, this holiday show features one-of-a-kind gold / silver jewelry, home accessories, pet accessories, homemade fudge and more. For more information call (386) 860-0092, or visit <http://www.bucklercraftfair.com/west-palm.php> .

Business Landscape

Among West Palm Beach's largest employers are Florida Crystals (1,900 employees), Pratt and Whitney Rocketdyne (1,200 employees), Sikorsky Aircraft (880 employees) and Palm Beach Newspapers (585 employees).⁹ Similar to the county, most employment in the City of West Palm Beach is based in the service and retail industries.¹⁰

Several hospitals are located in West Palm Beach. Good Samaritan Medical Center, home of the Cardiac and Vascular Institute, and Columbia Hospital, which houses a Breast Care Center, are two examples of the diverse health care facilities serving the West Palm Beach area.

Two airports are located within the city boundaries, North County Airport and Palm Beach International Airport (PBI). North County Airport has 1,832 acres of land of which 1,100 acres are dedicated to environmental preservation. Palm Beach International Airport is the county's largest airport with 25 aircraft gates and a 560,000 square foot terminal.¹¹ The city is also less than 40 miles from two other airports, Park Airport in Lantana and Glades Airport in Pahokee. In addition to its proximity to four airports, the City of West Palm Beach is connected to major transit in South Florida via two Tri-rail stations in the city, the West Palm Beach Station and the Mangonia Park Station. The city is also served by an Amtrak station.

Sources

¹ City of West Palm Beach. History of the City of West Palm Beach. <http://www.cityofwpb.com/history/history.htm>

² Castello Cities Network. A brief history of West Palm Beach. <http://www.westpalmbeach.com/history.html>

³ West Palm Beach and Historic Preservation. http://www.cityofwpb.com/hist_pres/hp_wpbhpp.htm

⁴ West Palm Beach Golf Courses. (2009, October 23). *West Palm Beach Municipal Golf Course Re-Opens Ceremony, open to the public, honors Arnold Palmer*. http://www.jcdsportsgroup.com/west_palm_beach/

⁵ The City of West Palm Beach. (2009). *Parks and Recreation – It Starts in Parks*. <http://www.wpb.org/park/parks.php>

⁶ West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority. <http://www.westpalmbeachdda.com/>

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this section downloaded from <http://www.simplymap.com>

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this section downloaded from <http://www.simplymap.com>

⁹ Palm Beach County Business Development Board. Top Employers in Palm Beach County. <http://www.bdb.org> .

¹⁰ SimplyMap. www.simplymap.com

¹¹ Palm Beach International Airport. (2009). *Department of Aviation – General Aviation Overview*. www.pbia.org/ga