



The Quality of Life Report

A Foundation for Policy Development
Tulsa City Council / 2014-16 Term

GOOD News –

- While our overall population growth has been modest, our Hispanic and Latino population has more than doubled since 2000.
- The city of Tulsa is a larger segment of the total metro area than the median of our peer cities (but that percentage is shrinking).
- Tulsa has considerably higher employment rates, and lower unemployment rates, than the median of our peer cities
- Tulsa has lower costs of living (but also lower wages) than the median of our peer cities.
- After a jump in 2010, Tulsa area bankruptcy filings are beginning to decline.
- While the rate of growth slowed in 2014, our sales tax revenues have fully recovered from the steep drop in 2009-10.
- Both nationally and locally, property and violent crime rates have declined substantially since the early 1990s.
- We have the second shortest travel time to work of our peer cities.
- We are seeing a slowly improving weighted average pavement condition on Tulsa streets.
- Tulsa's air traffic (both passengers and cargo) is beginning to rebound, but very slowly.
- The amount of freight carried through the Port of Catoosa continues to grow.
- We saw higher growth in the *value* of new single family building permits (but slower growth in the *number* of single-family permits) than the median of our peer cities.
- We have lower housing costs and lower rents than the median of our peer cities. Consequently, we have a lower percentage of residents paying 35% or more of their income on rent.
- Oklahoma has a much higher percentage of 4-year-olds attending state-funded pre-school than all but one other state and the District of Columbia.
- Tulsa has slightly more park land per capita (but fewer park *units* per capita) than the median of our peer cities.
- There have been no reported underground injections of toxic chemicals in Tulsa County since 2008. We have also seen a 33% reduction in total reported toxic air emissions since 2008.
- We recycled as much last year alone as we did in the eleven years from FY01 through FY11.
- We have slightly higher rates of volunteerism than the median of our peer cities.
- Tulsans give more of their income to charity than any of our peer cities.

BAD News –

- We have seen much slower population growth over the last 13 years than the median of our peer cities; we are also growing at a much slower rate than either our suburbs or Oklahoma City.
- We have a much lower population density than the median of our peer cities.
- There is a much lower percentage of “Young Professionals” in Tulsa than in the median of our peer cities.
- We have smaller nominal and per capita metro area GDP than the median of our peer cities (but it is growing faster than most).
- We have lower average wages than the median of our peer cities (but also lower costs of living).
- We have higher rates of families with income living in poverty than the median of our peer cities, especially families with small children headed by single mothers.
- While overall crime is declining, we have higher property and violent crime rates than the median of our peer cities, particularly homicide and burglary rates.
- We have a larger share of commuters who drive alone than the median of our peer cities.
- We have very low transit usage (and expenditures), compared to the median of our peer cities.
- There were fewer new homes built in Tulsa in 2013 than in our peer cities, particularly multi-family units.
- There has been slower growth in the *number* of single-family building permits than in our peer cities (but higher growth in the *value* of new single family permits).
- Tulsa has a larger percentage of vacant housing units than the median of our peer cities, especially in north Tulsa.
- The median value of owner-occupied housing units in Tulsa is less than the median of our peer cities.
- The decline in single-family home construction from 2006-11 was severe (though still not as steep as it was during the oil bust of the 1980s).
- There was a slowing of metro area home sales in 2014.
- There was a spike in foreclosures in 2013.
- There has been a significant increase in the percentage of homes sold for a loss in Tulsa since 2012.
- We have a smaller percentage of college educated residents than the median of our peer cities.
- We have higher student-teacher ratios and lower expenditures per pupil than the median of our peer cities.
- We have higher obesity and smoking rates than the median of our peer cities, and lower rates of exercise.
- We have a higher percentage of children and adults without health insurance than the median of our peer cities.
- We have less park land as a percent of total land area than the median of our peer cities.
- We have fewer park units per capita (but slightly more park *land* per capita) than the median of our peer cities.

- We have a slightly smaller percentage of residents with walkable access to public parks than the median of our peer cities.
- We have worse air quality than our peer cities (though we met revised federal standards for ground level ozone in 2014).
- We have seen a 26% increase in surface water discharges of toxic chemicals in Tulsa County since 2008.

STRAY Observations –

- The number of Hispanic and Latino residents in Tulsa has grown to nearly 15% of the city's overall population, up from 2.6% in 1990.
- We have slightly more Hispanic and Latino residents than the median of our peer cities, but our overall racial and ethnic profile is pretty squarely in the middle of our peer cities.
- Tulsa has a slightly higher median age than the median of our peer cities. Our 55-64 age cohort is growing rapidly, as it is nationally.
- We also have a higher percentage of children (<18) than the median of our peer cities.
- There has been a big shift over the last 15 years, away from grocery purchases and toward dining out.
- There is a remarkably close correlation between metro area employment and City of Tulsa sales tax revenue.
- In recent years, there has also been an observable correlation between Tulsa area unemployment rates and property crimes, though recent crime rate reductions have occurred in spite of a spike in unemployment.
- Since 2001, there has been a wide disconnect between actual crime rates and public perceptions of crime.
- The nature of our fire service changed dramatically in 1992. Today, fire calls comprise only 3.6% of all TFD responses. Emergency medical runs are now 61% of all TFD responses. At the same time, EMSA transports have nearly doubled in the last 10 years.
- Among our peer cities, there tends to be an inverse relationship between population density and obesity. The more densely developed cities tend to have the lowest rates of obesity.