Who Is Tulsa?

A Closer Look at a Changing City, County, and Metro Area

Summary:

- ***Profound change***
  The Tulsa area, like most cities, counties, and metro areas in America, is experiencing *profound* demographic, economic, and social changes whose influence will be significantly felt for decades to come.

- ***Roots of change***
  These changes largely are rooted in:
  - aging of the population
  - shifts in fertility rates
  - growing income inequality
  - greater racial and ethnic diversity, especially among the young
  - high level of unbalanced population distribution, especially children
  - insufficient skilled workforce
  - demands of universal education/training success
  - technology's effect on employment
  - ongoing challenge of enough livable wage jobs for low skilled workers

  All of these factors are influencing the future of the U.S. as well as the rest of the world.

- ***Historic influence***
  The impact of these factors and changes will reshape everything about the Tulsa area--our culture, economy, politics, sense of community, social order, and overall well-being.

- ***Lack of awareness***
  Most area residents, including civic and political leaders, largely are unaware of these changes and have little or no recognition of the profound and long-term nature of their influence.

- ***Lack of attention and understanding of the huge risk***
  This broad based lack of attention and understanding is possibly the most serious challenge to the future. We cannot prepare for or improve what we ignore and do not understand.

- ***Reality check on the predicament and opportunities***
  Effectively gauging and assuring the health of our future requires a heightened awareness and understanding of the realities and possible opportunities ahead, founded not in optimism or pessimism, but in realism.

- ***Serious conversation on not business as usual***
  Urgently needed is a serious conversation that charts the Tulsa area's future based not only on our past and current successes, but also on our key threats or challenges to new opportunities ahead. Workforce and prospective job opportunities should be a focal point of the conversation.

The Tulsa area is:

- ***Not growing as a City and as a County—and the metro area is growing only slightly (less than 1% a year)…*** Hispanic growth, especially among children, is the major factor affecting most all aspects of population change.

- ***Moving towards a majority minority (race and ethnicity) status…*** This is happening among those under age 18 first, and then in the total population. The under 5 population is already majority minority for the City and County, and the metro area is almost there.

- ***Experiencing dramatic uneven population distribution…*** The north and west portions of the county are losing population, while the population is growing in the east, south, and far northeast.

- ***Rapidly aging…*** By 2030 at least 20% of people in Tulsa County will be over age 65, compared to 13% currently--slightly ahead of the U.S.

- ***Separating through population concentrations by age, income and ethnicity…***
  - In many south Tulsa census tracts, 25-35% of people are over 60 years old and live in very expensive houses.
  - Tens of thousands of low income Hispanic and other minority children live in east and near north census tracts.

- ***Relying on a public education system that has difficulty describing its progress…*** As is the case in many states and communities throughout the country, Tulsa area school districts have difficulty meaningfully describing their levels of success in graduating students from high school. Some improvement on definitions and a tracking system are occurring, but much work is still needed.

- ***Facing a dramatically different workforce…*** The workforce is smaller, older, and much more racially and ethnically diverse. Shrinkage will include more workers over age 70

within the next twenty years. 25% of the workforce between ages 25-44 will be Hispanic, while only 8% of Hispanics over 25 years of age have four years of college.

- ***Not innovating its way to a stronger future…*** Oklahoma, including Tulsa, is not a national innovation leader, according to comparable state data on development of patents.

- ***Growing in high unequal income distribution…*** Oklahoma ranks 16th nationally in the ratio of average household income for the richest 20% of households to the poorest 20% of households, 2008-2010. Tulsa County and especially the City of Tulsa have ratios higher than both the state and the nation.

- ***Increasing in poor/low income families and households…*** In Tulsa County, just over half of children under 6, and 26% of persons over 65, live in low income households (under 185% of poverty), and this older group is projected to grow significantly in the next 20-30 years.

- ***Facing continued growth in low income/low educated families…*** Two thirds of births are paid for by Medicaid. 21% of births are to mothers with less than a high school education, and almost 60% to mothers with high school education or less.

- ***Not linking together important data that will determine the future population and workforce…*** This includes data on population and location, births, early reading and other education progress, high school and career tech graduates, first generation college/post secondary going student population, students not graduating high school, and post-secondary enrollment and completion.

- ***Continuing to be affected by being Oklahoma…*** Oklahoma is ranked nationally #2 in incarcerations, #2 in persons with mental illness, #13 in suicides, #15 in income inequality, and #3 in lowest dollars per pupil spent on elementary and secondary education, and more of the same.

- ***Not alone in sharing these profound challenges…*** Many cities and counties face similar circumstances.

- ***Not having a serious, deep and open conversation about its future…*** The necessary conversation will require developing a meaningful, sustained response to the unrelenting and profound changes underway--and as time ebbs away.

Primary sources of data include US Census, and Oklahoma Departments of Health, Education, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and Commerce.

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16 East 16th Street, Suite 202
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74119
918-585-5551

www.csctulsa.org