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## What's the Population of East Lansing? <sup>[1]</sup>

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**By:**

Alice Dreger



As I talk with people about the work of East Lansing Info, I'm often asked, "What is the population of East Lansing?" I've always repeated what I've heard around town, namely that there are about 48,500 people living in the City of East Lansing when MSU is in session, and about 20,000 are "permanent" (non-student) residents.

With the income tax and associated property tax questions <sup>[2]</sup> coming up on the November ballot, now seems like a good time to find out the real answers. So, we asked City and MSU staff to help us out with the numbers.

**The population of East Lansing:**

According to Tim Dempsey, Deputy City Manager for East Lansing, the 2016 estimate for the East Lansing population is 48,870. That would include people living on-campus, which MSU Vice President Vennie Gore estimates at about 16,200 people this academic year (2017-2018).

Without a current census, we have to estimate how many of the approximately 49,000 people living in East Lansing are "permanent" residents. By "permanent" residents we mean those people who are here for some reason other than attending MSU as students.

Dempsey says, "It's reasonable to conclude that just over 60% of residents are non-permanent." Dempsey explains, "This conclusion is based on the 2010 Census data where 30,000 of our residents were between the ages of 18-24."

That would put the City of East Lansing's permanent population at about 19,500.

### **The number of households in East Lansing:**

According to Dempsey, in the 2010 U.S. census count, East Lansing had 4,811 family households and 9,963 non-family households. So, the number of student households appears to outnumber the number of non-student households by about two to one in East Lansing.

Dempsey says that the 2010 U.S. census showed the following break-down of people in terms of their living arrangements:

- 11,457 in owner-occupied housing
- 21,427 in renter-occupied housing
- 15,701 in group quarters (dorms, frats/sororities, co-ops)

According to David Lee, East Lansing's Tax Assessor, for Fiscal Year 2017, "there were about 5,100 parcels in the City for which a principal residence exemption was claimed. That figure would include a small number of vacant residential parcels adjacent to a primary residence. It would also include some parcels where the owner is occupying part of the property and renting the rest (e.g., an owner-occupied duplex). But the figure of 5,100 parcels is a pretty solid estimate for the number of single-family, owner-occupied homes in the City."

### **Taxable properties in East Lansing:**

According to Lee, in 2017 the total tax base of the City came to about \$983 million in taxable value. That figure breaks down as follows:

- owner-occupied housing tax base: about \$443 million (45%)
- rental housing tax base: about \$128 million (13%)
- other tax base (commercial real estate, industrial real estate, and "personal" business property): about \$412 million (42%)

?Personal property? in this case refers to such things as computers, display racks, furniture, machinery, etc., owned by East Lansing-based businesses and taxed by the City. (Read more. [3])

About one-fifth of the City of East Lansing's land is occupied by Michigan State University, which pays no taxes because it is a non-profit, tax-exempt institution.

### **The bottom line:**

East Lansing's population is about 48,870. Of that number, about 19,600 (40%) are permanent residents.

Homeowners pay about 45% of East Lansing taxes, and local businesses, including landlords, pay about 55%.

**Note:** After this was published, Mayor Mark Meadows noted that the census is supposed to count college students at their college residences, which is confirmed by the Pew Research Center [4], so this article was amended to reflect the assumption that those living on MSU's campus count in the total population numbers for "the City of East Lansing."

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[3] <https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/148/Business-Personal-Property-Tax>

[4] <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/03/15/college-students-count-in-the-census-but-where/>

[5] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/askeli>

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