

## Madison ranked 81st largest U.S. city

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If you heard chants of “We’re No. 81! We’re No. 81!” ringing through Madison on Wednesday, they might have been a reference to the Census Bureau’s latest ranking of the United States’ biggest cities.

OK, the latest population estimates from the census, good as of July 1, 2009, don’t contain much in the way of earth-shattering revelations. But they do show a city that has consistently grown by about 2,000 to 3,000 people every year since the last formal head count in 2000.

“I think the way to have growth is the way we’re doing it,” said City Council President Pro Tem Lauren Cnare, District 3. “Slow and steady.”

At an estimated 235,626 residents, Madison is 81st on the census’s list of the 276 cities with populations of more than 100,000. It comes right before Norfolk, Va., and right after Orlando, Fla.

That’s the same rank as in 2008, but one notch higher than where it was in 2006 and 2007 and two notches above where it was in 2004 and 2005.

Council president Mark Clear, District 19, said “more people means more of everything. Some of the things are good and some of them are challenging.”

Clear said Madison has just about maxed out the property available for green field housing development, and new growth is likely to be infill projects like the Hilldale development.

From a city services standpoint, denser infill development means more efficient delivery of city services, he said.

Cnare said challenges Madison will face with a growing population include traffic, how to incorporate greater cultural diversity and maintaining quality schools.

Sean Robbins, executive vice president of the regional economic development group Thrive said “it’s critical that the urban core of the greater Madison region continues to attract new residents. Along with an increasing property tax base, it’s this kind of growth that makes possible a diverse labor pool, quality schools, parks for our kids and city services — all of which build up towards a competitive regional economy.”