



CHAPTER 2: GROWTH, CHANGE, AND DEMOGRAPHICS

WORKING DRAFT (9/8/23)

This document is presented in its current form as a preliminary draft for informational purposes only. It is intended to provide an overview of the proposed content and the direction of the Comprehensive Plan. Please note that this draft is subject to further editing, revisions, and updates.

A public meeting is scheduled for September 23rd, during which community feedback will be solicited and considered. Following this meeting, the document will undergo additional refinement based on the input received. This refinement process may include the incorporation of photos, graphics, and other visual elements to enhance clarity and understanding.

As a result, the information contained in this draft may evolve, and new content may be added or modified to accurately reflect the goals, aspirations, and needs of the community. We encourage all stakeholders to provide comments, either in written form or at the Public Workshop, as your input will play a vital role in shaping the final version of the Comprehensive Plan.

We appreciate your understanding of the dynamic nature of this planning process and your active participation in creating a comprehensive plan that best serves the interests of our community.

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GROWTH, CHANGE, AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Examining demographics and socioeconomics helps tell the story of where the Island has been, who lives and works here today, and where trends point to for the future. The data used in this analysis comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and represents the most current and reliable data available. To supplement the analysis, this chapter uses the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), which consists of 5-year estimates. This was the most up-to-date reporting period as this plan was written.

While the main function of the decennial census is to provide counts of people for the purpose of congressional apportionment, the primary purpose of the ACS is to measure the changing social and economic characteristics of the U.S. population such as age, education, housing, etc. The ACS surveys a sample of the population each year, while the decennial censuses are counts that represent a “snapshot” of the demographics at that time. While the ACS can produce reliable estimates for larger areas or aggregated groups, its sample sizes may not be sufficient for drawing accurate conclusions about smaller communities such as Shelter Island. For this reason, the 2020 decennial census was used when ACS data was determined to have a high margin of error.

It’s important to note that the seasonal population can fluctuate and may not be accurately reflected in official census data, which typically captures the year-round population. Other data sources (i.e. from Suffolk County, utility companies, and the local government) can be used to better understand seasonal population trends and issues.



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

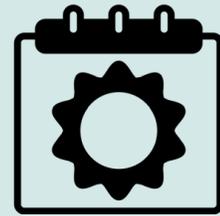
Shelter Island's year-round population has grown.

Shelter Island's full-time population was 3,253 in 2020. The population has grown 46% since 2000. While the rate has consistently outpaced growth in the County as a whole, it has been consistent with other East End seasonal communities such as Southampton and East Hampton.



Shelter Island experiences a significant population boom during the summer months.

Due to its popularity as a holiday destination, many of its residences are second homes or vacation rentals. Hard data with precise figures of the non-permanent population is not readily available. However, Suffolk County has estimated the summer population to be 12,111, 68% of which is seasonal.



Shelter Island is a seasonal community, but remote and hybrid work environments may create long-term shifts in residency.

Prior to 2017, seasonal residents swelled the Town's population by threefold or more, but since that time, Shelter Island has seen growth in its year-round population and a corresponding decreasing share of seasonal residents. This trend likely reflects an influx of residents during the pandemic and should be closely monitored to determine whether it continues with the greater ability for people to work remotely at least part of the time.



The Town's population is getting older, and Shelter Island appears to be attracting more singles and empty nesters.

Both Shelter Island and Suffolk County have experienced a steady, gradual decline in the percentage of family households, family households with married couples, and households with children under 18 years of age. The number of residents living alone has increased. As Baby Boomers in the full-time population continue



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

to live on the Island, aging into more fragile age groups, and new residents are also older, the demand for senior-friendly community systems and senior services and supports will increase.

Shelter Island has become more diverse.

While the population today is 85% white, non-Hispanic, the percentage of Hispanic residents has grown substantially — from 4.9% in 2010 to 8.9% in 2020. This trend is shown in school enrollment, suggesting that much of the increasing diversity is occurring among the Town’s year-round families.



Household income has grown, but poverty has increased significantly.

Shelter Island’s income levels have steadily risen, even as the county and state saw median household income decline during the Great Recession. Although Islanders have become wealthier on average, there was a dramatic increase in the poverty rate between 2010 (1.7%) and 2021 (12.4%). This trend is evident in the school district, which has experienced a substantial increase in economically disadvantaged students since 2010, suggesting income disparities in the year-round family population.



School enrollment continues to fall.

Despite a brief uptick during the pandemic, the long-term trend of a shrinking school-age population appears to be continuing. This will likely have impacts on the level and type of community facilities and services required.



DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Shelter Island’s population dynamics are complex, reflecting the seasonality of some residents and the impact of recent regional shifts in employment due to the pandemic. As has been the case historically, the Island is a popular vacation destination, and many homes are second homes or vacation rentals. Year-round residents can include working-age people with families, who may have generational roots on the Island and may work on- or off-island. Other year-round residents are retirees who either worked and retired locally or visited for years before settling on the Island full time, or people who can work remotely. Some part-time resident owners spend a month or more on the Island during the summer, others may spend many months and weekends throughout the year, and “snowbirds” live in warm regions during the winters, but summer on the Island. Many “summer people” are families with multi-generational ownership, and it is not uncommon for summer residents to become year-round residents later in life.

The population also includes renters by the year, month, or season and shorter-term visitors who stay in hotels, inns, B & B’s, and short-term rentals. This non-resident, seasonal, and visitor population is typically much larger than the year-round population.

In 2020, the complexity of this demographic picture increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more people spending the winter on Shelter Island, while pandemic restrictions temporarily reduced the number of visitors during the summer. The timing of these factors relative to the 2020 Census makes a complete picture of ongoing demographic trends on the Island difficult. This chapter uses data from the 2020 Census as

well as the most current (2021) data available from the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates, supplemented by additional seasonal population data from Suffolk County, in order to form as accurate depiction as possible. In addition, given that Shelter Island’s small year-round population may reduce the reliability of the ACS estimates, other data sources (e.g. school enrollments, voter registration, and Assessor’s data) are used where appropriate to increase accuracy.

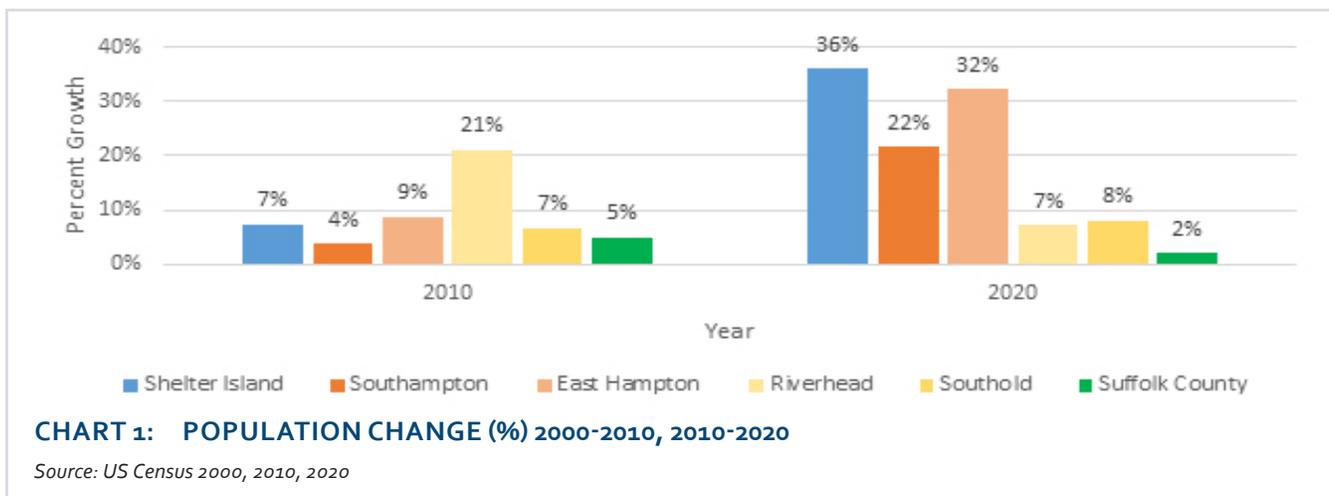
FULL TIME POPULATION

According to the 2020 census, Shelter Island’s full-time population is 3,253 people, up 46% since 2000, with most of that growth coming since 2010. As shown below, population growth in Shelter Island has consistently outpaced growth in the County overall but has generally been on par with peer seasonal communities such as Southampton and East Hampton. The significant percentage increases seen in these places likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as either seasonal Shelter Island residents or residents of New York City relocated to the Island on a more permanent basis with the ability to work from home. It is difficult to know how long-term this trend is, but early indications are that remote work will continue in some fashion for the foreseeable future – likely in a hybrid environment – which may continue to swell Shelter Island’s year-round population for years to come but perhaps not at the same high levels.

Year	Shelter Island	Southampton	East Hampton	Riverhead	Southold	Suffolk County
2000	2,228	54,712	19,719	27,680	20,599	1,419,369
2010	2,392 7.4%	56,791 4%	21,457 9%	33,506 21%	21,968 7%	1,493,350 5.2%
2020	3,253 36%	69,036 22%	28,385 32%	35,902 7%	23,732 8%	1,525,920 2.22%

TABLE 1: POPULATION CHANGE OVER TIME

Source: US Census 2000, 2010, 2020



PART-TIME POPULATION

Shelter Island experiences a significant population boom during the summer months due to its popularity as a vacation destination; many residences are second homes or rentals. The influx of people leads to a bustling atmosphere and an increase in tourism-related business, such as restaurants, hotels, and recreational services.

This non-resident, seasonal, and visitor population is typically much larger than the year-round population. While it can be challenging to determine precise figures of the non-permanent population, the Suffolk County

Department of Economic Development and Planning has compiled data that sheds light on recent changes in the Town’s seasonal population. Since 2010, Shelter Island’s seasonal population has increased by about 4%, but is down from a high of nearly 9,000 additional residents during the 2013-2017 period, as the number of seasonal homes decreased by over 10%. This may reflect the conversion of seasonal homes to permanent residents during the pandemic. In addition, the number of lodging rooms has declined since 2010, reducing that short-population.

	2010-14	2013-17	2017-2021
Seasonal Homes	1,699	1,927	1,724
Estimated Population in Seasonal Homes	6,796	7,708	6,896
Estimated Seasonal Guests of Year-Round Residents	532	598	892
Lodging Rooms	207	174	174
Estimated Population in Lodging	770	662	662
Total Seasonal Population	8,098	8,968	8,450
Year-Round Population	2,669	2,643	3,661
TOTAL POPULATION	10,767	11,611	12,111
Percent Seasonal	75%	77%	68%

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED CHANGE IN SHELTER ISLAND SEASONAL POPULATION, 2010-2021

Source: Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning, 2023, based on ACS Five-Year Estimates

HOUSEHOLDS

The census bureau divides households into “family households” and “non-family households,” depending on the relationship between residents living under the same roof.

- Family household: A family is defined as group of two people or more (one of whom is the “householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together. A family household is therefore a household maintained by a householder who is in a family and can include any unrelated people who may be residing there. The number of family households is equal to the number of families in a given geography.
- Non-family household: A householder living alone (a one-person household) or household where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related.

Since 2000, both Shelter Island and Suffolk County have experienced a steady, gradual decline in the percentage of family households, family households with married couples, and households with children under 18 years of age, with a corresponding increase in non-family households, households living alone, and households with people 65 and older.

	2000	2010	2021
Total Households	996	1,128	1,783

TABLE 3: SHELTER ISLAND HOUSEHOLDS

Source: US Census (2000, 2010), ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

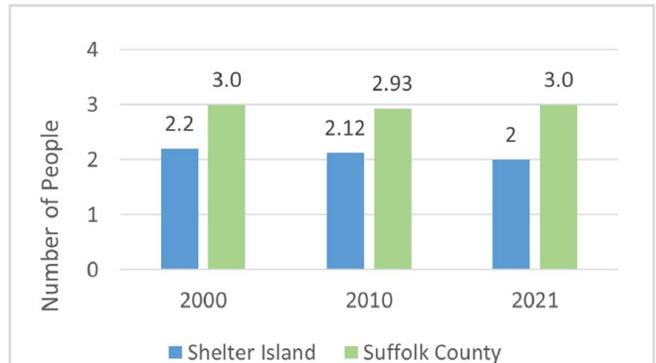


CHART 3: AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Source: US Census (2000, 2010)*, ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

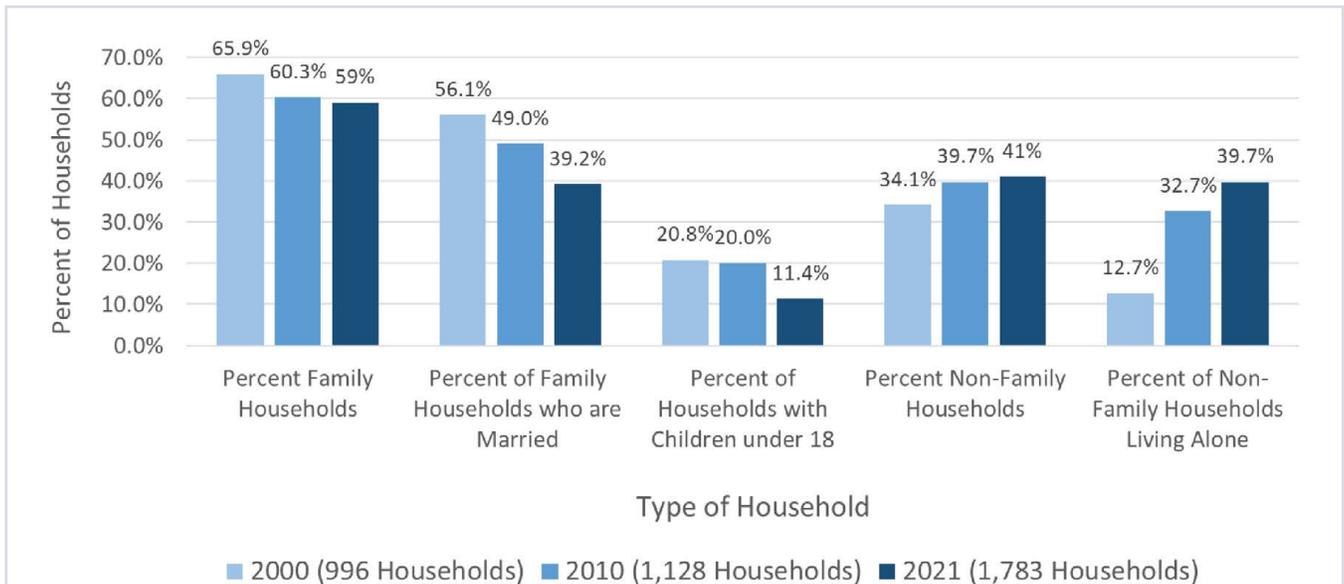


CHART 2: CHANGE IN HOUSEHOLD TYPE OVER TIME

Source: US Census (2000, 2010), ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

However, Shelter Island appears to be experiencing these trends at a significantly greater rate. The Town in particular has seen significant growth in the number of non-family households living alone—with more than twice the share of people living alone in 2021 than lived alone in 2000. In addition, the number of households with children under 18 years of age dropped by nearly 10% between 2010 and 2021, falling from 20% of households to about 11% of households, a trend that is also reflected in declining school enrollment, which is also discussed in Chapter 9. At the same time, the number of households with residents 65 and older increased from 28% of the population in 2010 to 36 percent of the population in 2020. These factors have led to a continued decrease in the average household size on Shelter Island, from 2.2 in 2000 to 2.12 in 2010 and 2.0 in 2021, which is much lower than the County’s averages. The County’s average household size has also remained stable at around 3.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Shelter Island has a predominantly white, non-Hispanic population, with 84.4% of residents identifying as white in the 2020 Census. While non-white racial and ethnic groups have historically and continue to represent a small percentage of the population, Shelter Island has seen a significant increase in the number of residents who identify as two or more races and/or Hispanic in the last 10-20 years.

Since 2000, the Hispanic population grew from 2% of the population (53 people) in 2000 to 8.9% of the population (289 people) in 2020. This change in the population is consistent with trends in Suffolk County as a whole, which may be attributed to factors such as immigration, higher birth rates, and internal migration. However, Suffolk County saw a more significant rise in the Hispanic population, which increased from 10.5% to 21.8% of the population between 2000 and 2020.

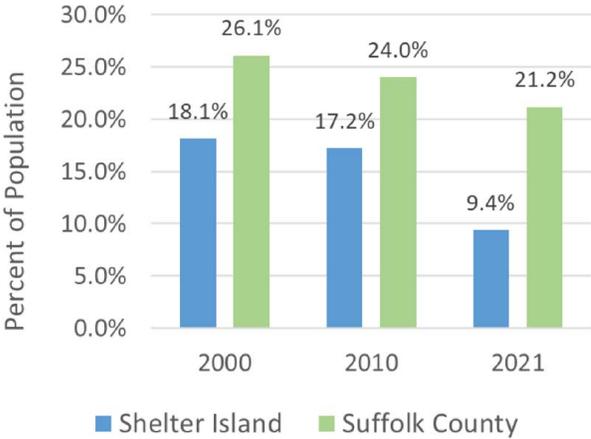


CHART 4: POPULATION UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

Source: US Census (2000, 2010)*, ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

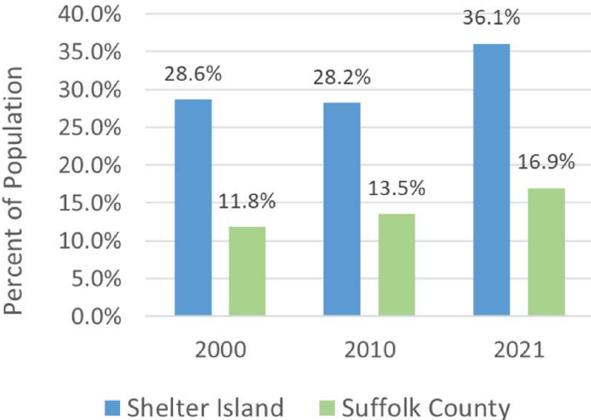


CHART 5: POPULATION OVER 65 YEARS OF AGE

Source: US Census (2000, 2010)*, ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

Racial and Ethnic Status	2000 (Population: 2,228)	2010 (Population: 2,392)	2020 (Population: 3,253)
Hispanic	2.8%	4.9%	8.9%
White	94.9%	91.9%	84.4%
African American or Black	0.0%	1.1%	0.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Asian	0.2%	0.4%	1.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
Two or More Races	1.9%	1.4%	3.5%

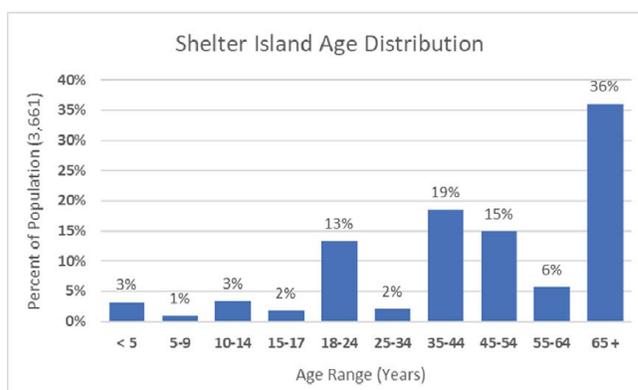
TABLE 4: RACIAL COMPOSITION – PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION (2000, 2010, 2020)

Source: US Census (2000, 2010, 2020)

AGE COMPOSITION

As of 2021, the median age in Shelter Island is 51.3 years of age, much higher than the Suffolk County median of 41.7 years, as well as that for New York State (39.2) and for the United States overall (38.4).

Shelter Island’s year-round population shows trends in age characteristics that are consistent with other affluent communities: a relatively high median age; fewer people in the younger adult cohorts who are establishing careers and families (Aged 18-34 =15%); and a high percentage of the population over age 55 (42%).



INCOME

In 2021, Shelter Island’s median household income (in 2021 inflation-adjusted dollars) was \$100,094 – exceeding the state (\$74,314) and national (\$69,021) averages, but lower than the Suffolk County median household income of \$113,683. Unlike the other jurisdictions – which experienced slight declines in median household income from 2000-2010 before turning to modest growth through 2021 – Shelter Island saw growth throughout the period, with the latter half median increasing by over 10%.

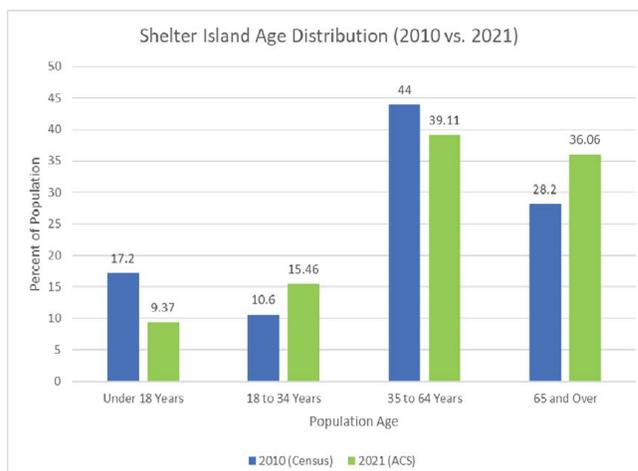


CHART 6: SHELTER ISLAND AGE DISTRIBUTION

Source: 2021 ACS 5Y Estimate, 2010 Census

Chart 8 shows the number of households in a spectrum of income tiers. Between 2011 and 2021, there was a significant increase in households in the highest income tiers. There was also an increase in the number and share of households earning less than median income.

While median household income has gradually risen over time, Shelter Island’s poverty rate – measured by calculating the ratio of income to poverty level – has risen significantly between 2010 and 2021. In 2021, the Town’s poverty rate surpassed the county’s level, approaching the state and national averages.

As shown in the following section, the increased proportion of residents experiencing poverty in Shelter Island is also reflected in New York State public school enrollment data, which, as discussed below, shows a steady climb in the number of pre-K-12 students at an economic disadvantage in Shelter Island since 2011.

It should also be noted that the Census Bureau measures poverty by income level, and this income level does not vary geographically; the federal poverty threshold for a family of four is \$26,200, regardless of location. In high-cost locations like the greater New York region, many households may not fall below the federal poverty level but nonetheless experience significant income constraints. In December 2022, the Suffolk County Legislature’s Welfare to Work Commission released a report noting that, due to the high cost of living and recent high inflation rates, the true definition of poverty on Long Island should be \$55,000 for a family of four.

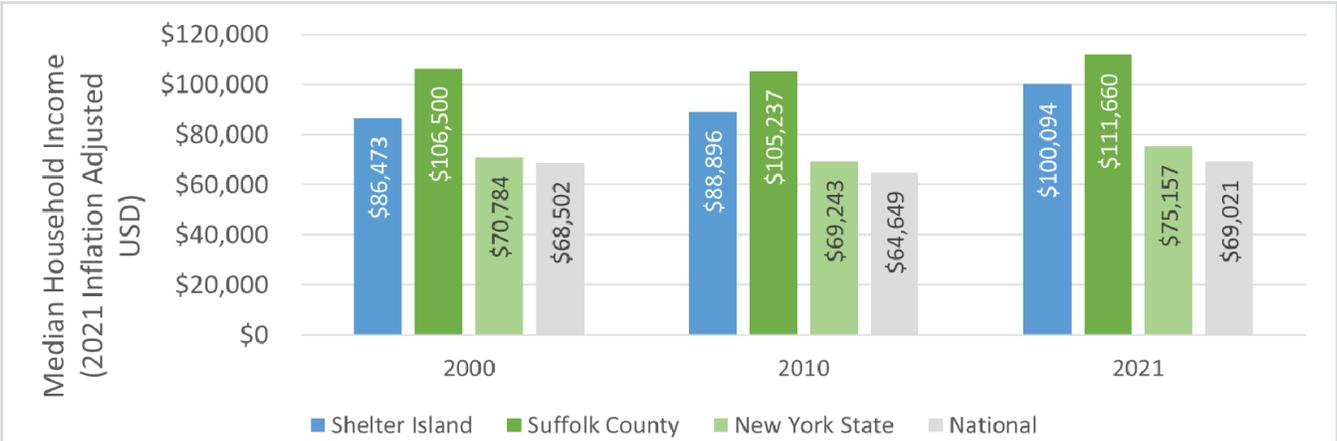


CHART 7: CHANGE IN MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (2000-2021)

Sources: US Census (2000), ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

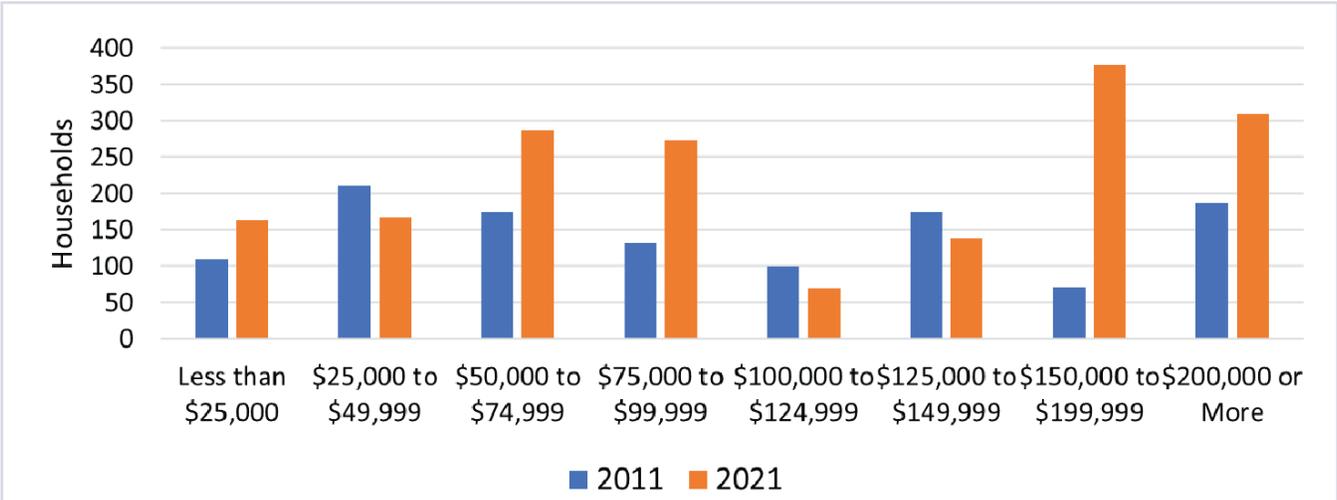


CHART 8: HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME CATEGORIES

Sources: US Census (2000), ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

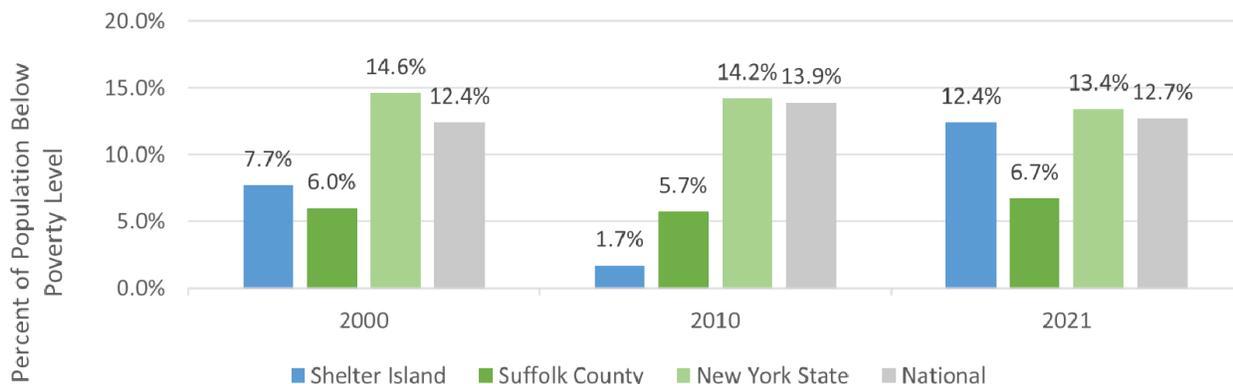


CHART 9: POVERTY RATE (2000, 2010, 2021)

Sources: US Census (2000), ACS 5Y Estimates (2010, 2021)

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Pre-K-12 Education

Consistent with its broader population trends of fewer households with children, more householders living alone, and aging residents, Shelter Island has seen a steady decline in its school enrollment in the past 10 years. The exception was the 2020-2021 school year,

which saw a slight increase in enrollment, possibly reflecting families who relocated to Shelter Island during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similar to broader population trends in the region, Shelter Island’s school population is becoming more diverse. In 2021-22 (the most recent year for which data are available), 24% of K-12 students identified as Hispanic, compared with 12% in 2013-14. During the same time period, the percentage of students identified as English-language learners increased from 3% to 8%.

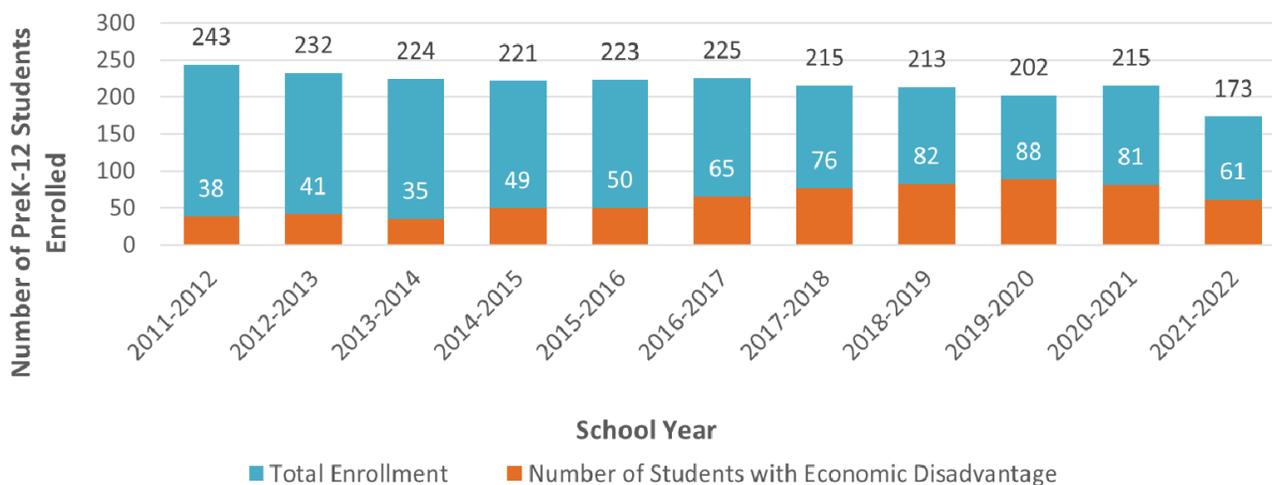


CHART 10: SHARE OF SHELTER ISLAND PRE-K-12 STUDENTS WITH ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Source: NYS Department of Education School Enrollment Data (2011-2022)

Within the past decade, the percentage of economically disadvantaged K-12 students in the Shelter Island school district has grown, from 16% in the 2013-14 school year to as high as 40% in 2020-21, declining to 35% in the 2021-22 school year.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Shelter Island has long been a highly educated community. More than half of its residents over 25 years old are estimated to have completed college (having earned Bachelor’s degrees)—with half of those who have graduated from college having gone on to complete a Master’s degree or higher (e.g. professional school degree, doctorate degree). The number of residents who have earned Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees increased from 44% to 61% of the population between 2010 and 2020. The portion of the adult population (25 years and over) who have not completed high school decreased slightly over the same period.

Shelter Island’s high levels of educational attainment are particularly noteworthy in comparison to the Suffolk County data, pictured below.

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