

#1 in Population — Wilmington, NC — ALEX Intelligence 2026

Wilmington Leads NC in Population

120,805 residents — ALEX Intelligence 2026

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THE DATA

120,805

Population (2024)

Wilmington is the largest city in the Cape Fear region by population.

This figure, drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2024, underscores a structural shift: growth is increasingly concentrated in the urban core. The city's population exceeds that of its nearest peers by more than 30,000—more than double Leland's, the second-largest city. This dominance is not just demographic; it reflects a consolidation of economic activity, infrastructure investment, and housing supply in the central urban zone.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2024 • ALEX Intelligence computation
<https://alex-companies.com/data/2026-10-03-wilmington-population-place-mkt>



01

Core Growth, Not Sprawl

Wilmington's population lead is not a result of suburban expansion but of sustained urban reinvestment. The city's population advantage over Leland (29,607) and Murraysville (16,339) suggests that the market is no longer expanding outward through low-density development. This core-first model favors high-density, mixed-use developments and preserves land for long-term resilience.



02

The Cost of Dominance

While population concentration signals vitality, it also raises structural risks. A city with 120,805 residents absorbing the majority of regional growth faces strain on public services, transportation, and housing affordability. The lack of balanced growth across the broader Cape Fear region—where neighboring cities like Oak Island (9,030) and Hampstead (9,292) remain significantly smaller—suggests a bifurcated development model. This could lead to long-term inequities in infrastructure access and economic opportunity, especially if growth is not matched by coordinated regional planning.

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