

Aubri Drake

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Community Analysis

### The Town of Portland, Connecticut

Portland is home to 9,340 residents (Library Statistics Program, 2005). Of those residents, 7% are under 5 years old, 8% are between 5-9 years of age, and 6.7% are between 10-14 years of age. Seventy-five percent of the town's population is 18 years of age or older. The average age of a resident is 39 years old. Ninety-five percent of the town's residents recognize as Caucasian; 2.4%, African-American; 2%, Latino; 1.3%, two or more races; 0.5%, Asian; 0.5%, other race; 0.2%, Native American/Alaska native (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The majority of the population lives in a multi-member household with relatives (71.4%). Children reside in 35.5% of all households. Given the sheer number of family households and homes with children, family is one of the main focuses for this town. Most people own their own homes at 77.7% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Most people have their high school diplomas (88%) and many have either college credits or a bachelor's degree (38%). Adults in the town are most likely married (62%). Those who lived in the town in 1995 are most likely still living in the same location (64%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Ninety-six percent of the population is native born; the most common region of birth for those foreign born is Europe (54%). Most households speak only English (92%). The three most common ancestries identified with are Italian (23%), Irish (21%), and English (15%). The town's median household income is approximately

\$63,000, while median family income is approximately \$73,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The median household income is \$21,000 more a year than the Connecticut state average (Profile for Portland, CT, 2000). Seventy-eight percent of the population live in a single-family home, with only 22% of residents living in multi-family homes (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Seventy-one percent of owner-occupied houses were worth between \$100,000-200,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

The town's history primarily revolves around the brownstone quarries and ship building yards that were once the primary sources of employment. These two focal points fueled the town's expansion with both buildings and people. Work was readily available and drew immigrants from Europe (Portland in Brief, 2008). After many decades of steady work in the quarries, better, cheaper construction materials became available and the market for brownstone dropped away. The final death knell for the quarries was the flooding of the Connecticut River in 1936, which filled all the brownstone quarries with water. After this event, the town's residents had to find other ways to support their families. The town transitioned to a more family and civic focused community (Portland in Brief, 2008). Portland does have two museums: Connecticut Cellar Savers Fire Museum, which promotes fire history and the preservation of fire apparatus (Connecticut Cellar Savers Fire Museum, 2010), and the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, which seeks to preserve and educate others about the town's history (McDougall, 2010).

Portland schools are divided into five different locations: Valley View (PK-2nd), Gildersleeve (3rd-4th), Brownstone Intermediate (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>), Portland Middle (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>), and Portland High (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>). The schools participate in the Greater Hartford Regional School Open Choice program which allows students to attend magnet and technical schools throughout the state of

Connecticut (Portland Public, 2011). There is also First Church Nursery School which provides a pre-K program.

Some organizations in town include Boy Scouts, Exchange Club, Little League Baseball, Sea Scouts, Grange, and Fife and Drum Corp (Clubs & Organizations, 2008). There are six places of worship in Portland: First Congregational Church, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Middletown-Portland Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Portland United Methodist Church, Zion Lutheran Church, and Trinity Church (Churches, 2008).

The Portland Youth Services (PYS) provide many programs, which is very impressive considering the size of the town. Portland Youth Services has four employees and focuses on positive youth development, juvenile justice, mental health services, child welfare, parent education, and community outreach. They provide before and after school programs, a youth action council, summer youth programs, a counseling and resource center, and an early childhood council. They are partnered with the Portland Police Department in a diversion program and the town's Juvenile Review Board. They provide individual and family counseling, either at the office or in-home, and crisis intervention (Youth Services, 2011).

Portland also has an active Parks and Recreation department. They provide everything from Little League baseball to youth basketball, Zumba to trips to see UConn basketball (Parks & Recreation, 2011). Portland also has a Senior Vitality Center which provides activities, trips, and meals to the town's senior citizens (Senior Vitality Center, 2011). There are two food pantries available to those living in Portland: the Ecumenical Food Pantry and Portland Food Bank (Social Services, 2008). An energy assistance program is available to Portland residents through Community Renewal Team (CRT) stationed in Middletown (CEAP, 2011).

The format of government in Portland is similar to that of most small towns in Connecticut. The First Selectman is the town's chief executive, with the Board of Selectmen guiding the town's fiscal management. Town meetings are used to debate special issues and a yearly referendum is held to approve the town's budget. The primary source of income for the town is property taxes (Town Government, 2008).

As of December 2009, the number of Portland residents with library cards was 4,328, which is 46% of the town's population (Library Statistics Program, 2005, Nocek, 2009). The library collected approximately \$7,000 in 2009 for fees and fines. In 2009, the library received 66% less funding from the town's budget than the previous year (Nocek, 2009). Their budget was cut by another 25% in 2010 but is being increased by 3% for 2011 (Town Budget, 2011). This drastically affected the library's ability to update its collection and provide services. However, with state funding, the library was able to add an online audio book service in 2009 and it was well received (Nocek, 2009). The demand for computers, especially word processing and internet, has drastically increased, perhaps because of the dip in the economy (Nocek, 2009).

The library collaborates with the Early Childhood Council, Youth Services, Parks and Recreation, and the Portland Library Council. The library's involvement with the Library Council involves meeting regularly with the town's school media specialists and doing joint projects together (Nocek, 2009).

Portland Library has a materials collection of 84,781 items. Children's materials make up 34% of the library's total circulation. They have 12 librarians, 6 with MLS degrees. Their hours are the same, summer or winter. There is also a Friends of the Library association that runs a used book store. During the 2008-2009 fiscal year: 155,819 items were checked out; computers used for the internet 12,023 times; 5,710 reference questions were resolved; more than 300

children and 142 teens participated in the 2009 summer reading program; 1,057 civic meetings were hosted at the library; 264 library programs were run during the year with 5,134 patrons in attendance; library museum passes were checked out 782 times throughout the year; approximately \$8,000 in grants were given to the library during the 2008-2009 fiscal year (Portland Library Annual Report, 2009).

In many ways, Portland embodies the spirit of all small towns in Connecticut: rough, hard labor built it, drawing many hopeful people across the ocean wanting to make a new life. When the industrial age ended, people had to find new occupations and create a new way of living. Many small towns didn't make the transition well; Portland, however, survived and seems to be thriving. Family and local interests are a major focus of the town, which is advantageous to the library, as many people are actively involved with its maintenance and growth. Most people in town own their own homes and have families. The average citizen of Portland is a 39-year-old married Caucasian who identifies with their Italian ancestry who owns their home and has some college education.

Given the statistics, the town seems rather homogeneous. There is little diversity in the town. This leads me to think that perhaps those who are different, whether it is ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, will be singled out more than they might be in a more diverse town. This potential issue should be something that the local librarians identify before it becomes a problem. Local people who are not used to more diverse points of view may struggle with accepting opposing viewpoints in their library. Library policy should be put in place to protect freedom of speech and prevent censorship, to help make sure the library is not caught unawares. Also, the school media specialists should be aware of these dynamics when selecting books; not that it will change what they purchase but that they are prepared for potential parental unrest.

The lack of diversity in the town could lead to bullying surrounding individuals with differences; perhaps the town's library, schools, and youth services could get together to raise awareness in parents and children.

I believe Portland Library has done an excellent job with the limited resources they have. In my experience, it is not common for the local library to be closely collaborating with the town's school media specialists. It was refreshing to see that Portland has a close relationship with the public schools, the early childhood council, and youth services. In my opinion, libraries are a hub for the community and that means they need to be involved with as many facets of the community as possible.

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