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Residential Real Estate

North Carolina's fastest-growing city blows Raleigh, Charlotte out of the water



Image: Dewitt Carolinas

The waterfront in downtown Wilmington.

DEWITT CAROLINAS



By [David Purtell](#) – Digital Editor, Triangle Business Journal
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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Wilmington ranks among top 10 fastest-growing U.S. metro areas.
- Wilmington's population grew 13% between 2020 and 2024.
- Coastal North Carolina attracts retirees, young professionals and families.

If you're looking for the North Carolina city where growth is on fire, you don't need to [worry about Raleigh or Charlotte](#).

When it comes to the fastest-growing metro in the state, the coast is where you want to look. Wilmington is among the top 10 metro areas for population growth between 2020 and 2024, according to new numbers out of the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). The city in New Hanover County grew by more than 13 percent over the period.

That is a higher rate than Raleigh at 10 percent and Charlotte at 8 percent. And it's a reflection of the coastal region's rapid ascent as a destination spot and economic engine. Retirees, young professionals and families [are flocking to the coast](#), particularly the wider Wilmington area, and [companies are taking notice](#).

The three-county region of Pender, New Hanover and Brunswick is now a thriving hub of [residential construction](#) and commercial investments with no signs of a slowdown ahead – barring [a global economic crunch, of course](#).

The Wilmington metro, which includes Leland, had a population of 480,522 in 2024, up from around 425,000 in 2020 when the pandemic set off a [wave of migration across the country](#). Many people on the move ended up on the North Carolina coast, which [saw incredible growth in wealth](#) based on federal tax data.

In the Census data, another notable city in the state was Burlington, which grew by more than 6.6 percent over the four-year span to 183,000 people – about the same size as Cary. That was a slightly higher rate than the Durham-Chapel Hill metro.

Ahead of Wilmington on the list is Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, with a nearly 17 percent growth rate. Metros in Florida dominate the top 10, including the top spot, which went to retirement destination The Villages. The area had a nearly 19 percent growth rate and a population of around 155,000.