

Young and Living Alone

By Will Craig and Jeff Matson

More than one-quarter (28%) of Minnesota households consist of a single person. This is slightly above the national rate of 27%. For Minnesota, this meant more than 584,000 households in 2010. These numbers do not include people living in institutional settings like dorms, prisons, or nursing homes. These are people living in their own homes or apartments.

The number of one-person households has been relatively steady in recent years, but has not always been this high. In 1940 less than 8% of U.S. households consisted of a single person.¹ That number grew to 13% in 1960, 23% in 1980, and 26% in 2000. Social Security and better health gave older people without a spouse more freedom to live on their own. Younger people are more likely to live on their own because of later marriages and higher divorce rates than in previous years. A relatively strong economy gives individuals the freedom to live alone if they want to.

Amazingly, two-thirds (66%) of these people are under 65 years old. The old way of thinking had an older person, usually a widow or retired school teacher dominating the one-person households. Now it is mostly young people. To be sure, a large percentage of those more than 65 years old live alone (44%), but they are greatly outnumbered by the number of younger one-person households. In the Twin Cities, older people make up only 29.3% of the one-person households (Table 1).

We focused on the seven-county Metropolitan area because the concentration of young one-person household is highest. Overall, 20% of Twin City households are occupied by a single person under age 65. Hennepin and Ramsey counties have the highest rates in the state: 24% and 23%, respectively. Only two other counties have 20% or more—Cook County with 23% and St. Louis County with 20%.

¹ L. A. Jacobsen, M. Mather, and G. DuPuis. 2012. "Household change in the United States," Population Bulletin, 67,1 (2012), Population Reference Bureau..

Metro-wide, there are more than 300,000 one-person households. The largest age group is 35–64 years representing over half the total (Table 1). Nearly 60% of the two older age groups own their own homes, twice the rate of those aged 15–34, where the majority (69.7%) are renters.

These under-65-year-old one-person households behave differently than other, more traditional households in that age group and from over-65-year-old households. They are less likely to

be involved in community affairs and they demand a different set of goods and services. Maps showing the distribution of those households explain many of the mysteries of locations of bars and restaurants, along with declining enrollment and the closing of K–12 schools.

The first map shows the distribution of one-person households under age 65. One dot represents 30 households (Figure 1). It is easy to see a concentration of these younger, one-person households in Minneapolis and St. Paul,

Table 1: Age and Tenure of One-person Households in the Seven-county Twin City Metropolitan Area, 2010

	Age 15–34	Age 35–64	Age 65+	TOTAL
Owner Occupied	19,535	96,002	55,704	171,241
<i>Percent owner</i>	30.3%	59.5%	59.7%	
Renter Occupied	44,907	65,260	37,622	147,789
<i>Percent renter</i>	69.7%	40.5%	40.3%	
TOTAL	64,442	161,262	93,326	319,030
<i>Percent</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
<i>Age Percent</i>	20.2%	50.5%	29.3%	100.0%

(Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Table H18)

Table 2: Metro Area Cities with More Than 4,000 One-person Households Under age 65, 2010

City	One-person Households aged under 65 years
Minneapolis	54,115
St. Paul	30,402
Bloomington	7,152
St. Louis Park	6,629
Plymouth	5,286
Eagan	5,121
Burnsville	4,761
Eden Prairie	4,529
Brooklyn Park	4,359
Minnetonka	4,220

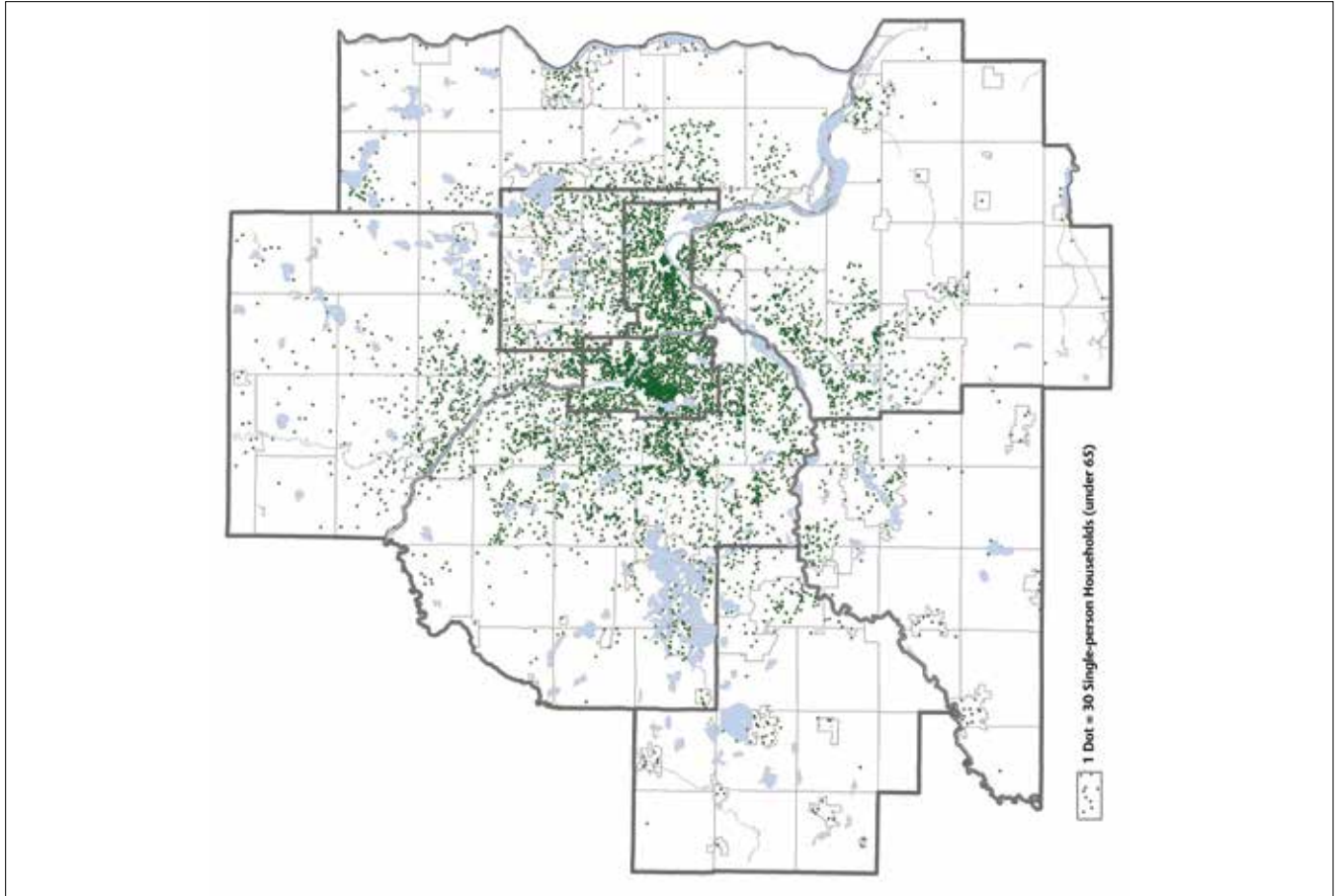
(Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Table P25)

Table 3: Metro Area Cities with Concentrations of 25% or More of Younger One-person households, 2010

City	Percent One-person Householders under 65 years
Excelsior	36%
Hilltop	36%
Minneapolis	33%
Spring Park	32%
Hopkins	32%
Lauderdale	32%
St. Louis Park	30%
St. Paul	27%
Coates	27%

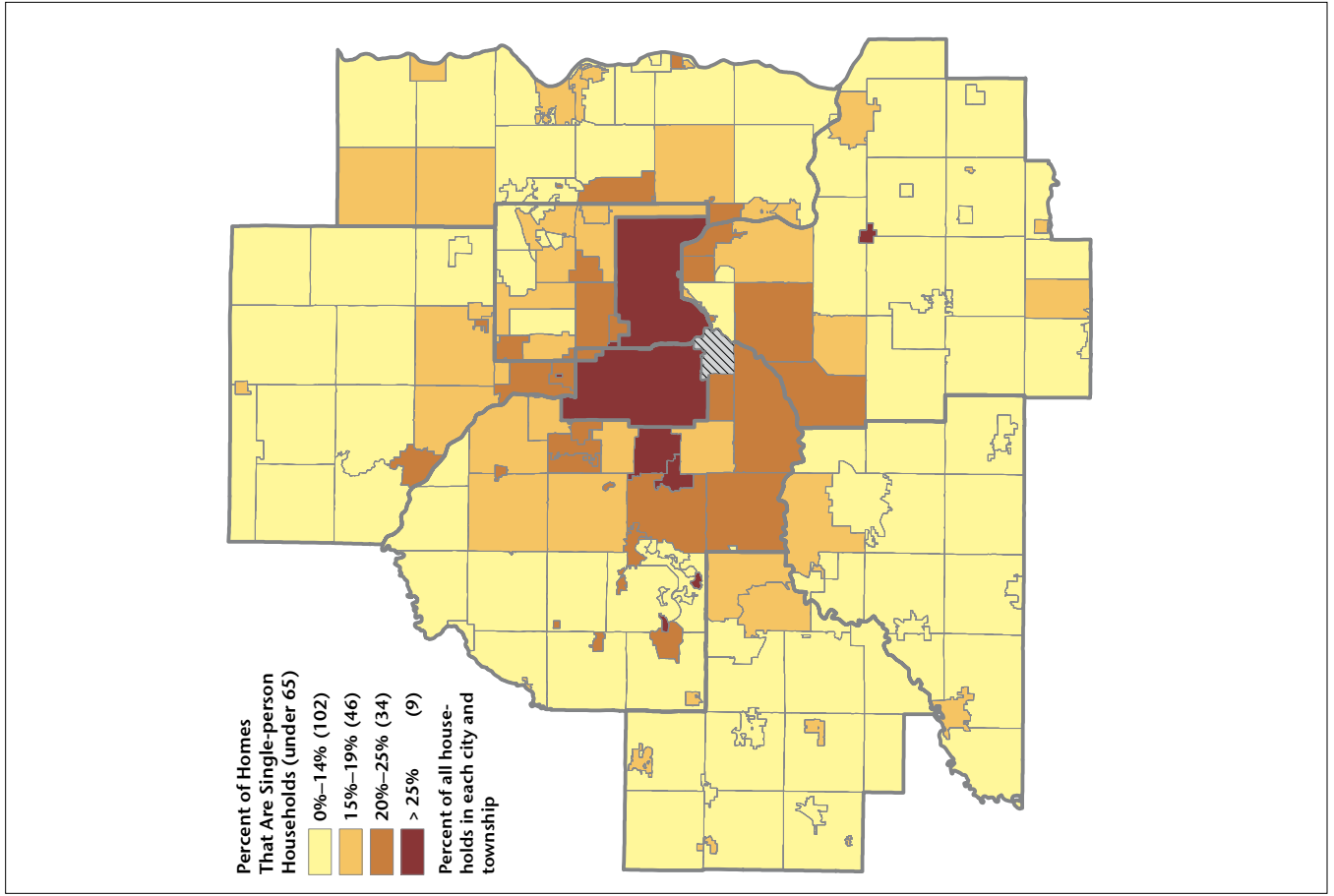
(Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1, Table P25)

Figure 1. Location of One-person Households Under Age 65 Across the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, 2010



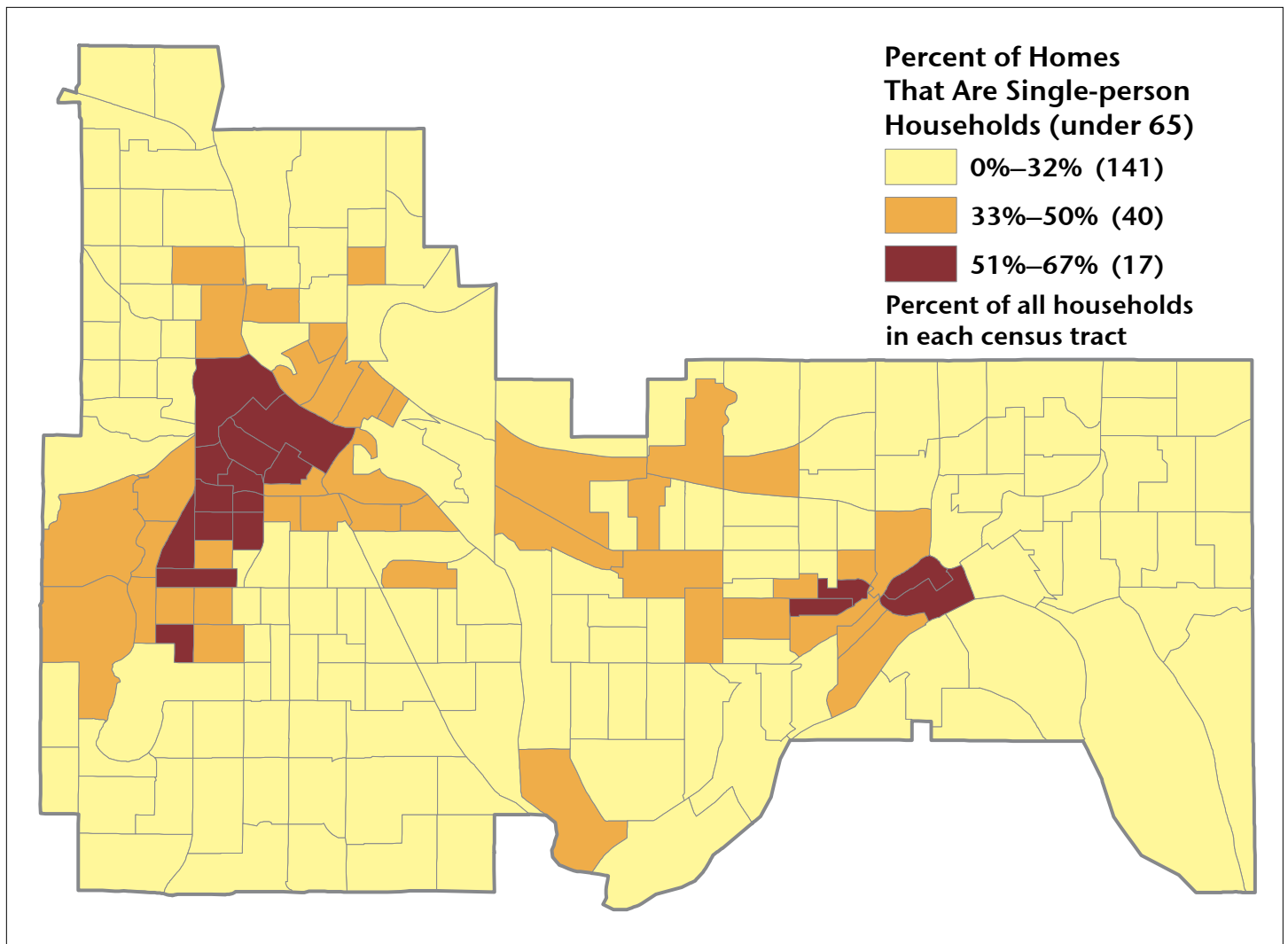
Source: 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Table P25

Figure 2. Title: Concentration of One-person Households Under Age 65 Across the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, 2010



Source: 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Table P25

Figure 3. Concentration of One-person Households Under Age 65 within Minneapolis and St. Paul, 2010



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Source: 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Table P25

but they are scattered widely across all of the heavily built-up area.

The largest populations of younger one-person households are in the two central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, but large numbers are scattered across inner- and out-ring suburbs (Table 2).

Another way of looking at the concentration of one-person younger households is to look at the percentage they represent of the total number of households (Figure 2). In Minneapolis, St. Paul, and a handful of other cities, 25% or more of the households are occupied by a single person under age 65 (Table 3). Each provides housing that is conducive to one-person occupancy; i.e., smaller homes, apartments, townhouses or, in the case of Hilltop, manufactured homes. Suburbs and smaller cities across the Metro area also have relatively high rates of younger

one-person households. Rural areas have low rates.

Some of the greatest concentrations of young one-person households are in Minneapolis and St. Paul. They include students living in new apartment complexes around the University of Minnesota and young professionals living in the two downtowns (Figure 3).

Within Minneapolis, the highest concentration stretches out from downtown to the Uptown area. Nearly one-third (30.7%) of the one-person households are occupied by individuals under age 35, much higher than the metro rate of 20.2%. In St. Paul, the highest concentrations are in downtown and nearby Cathedral Hill, with slightly lower concentrations running west along Grand Avenue, then up toward University Avenue and the University of Minnesota.

In both places, high-density housing and many commercial areas were built during the streetcar era, but rising demand is leading to new apartments, condominiums, and commercial establishments. These concentrations are self-sustaining and intensifying. They attract more young singles and more businesses. A cluster of single people provide support for shopping and entertainment opportunities. The cycle is circular and ensures vital communities with ongoing growth potential.

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