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## Charlotte in 2026?

Gaze into the chamber's crystal ball

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Charlotte is a growing city now, but in 20 years it truly could be a bustling metropolis of 1 million residents.

The Charlotte Chamber foresees 100,000 people living in the center city and 4.2 million in the metro region in 2026.

Charlotte is expected to have nearly twice as many Fortune 500 firms, more than twice as many people over 50, almost double the number of public school pupils and triple the amount of office space.

"Charlotte 2026 -- that is The Next Big Thing," said Tony Crumbley, the chamber's vice president of research.

He compiled statistics for the look into the future mainly by analyzing trends over the years in Atlanta, a Southeastern sister city whose growth many experts believe Charlotte is tracking.

Check out some of the other numbers we've highlighted from his projections on this page.

Chamber President Bob Morgan asked Crumbley to predict what Charlotte might look like in 20 years, and Morgan has been sharing the statistics with groups around the city since January.

Charlotte 2026 also will be the theme of this year's chamber annual meeting Dec. 6 at the Charlotte Convention Center.

To complement Crumbley's statistics, the staff commissioned a freelance photo-illustration team to come up with an image of what the uptown skyline might look like in 20 years.

It appears on this page, too.

Morgan said people generally do find his futuristic presentation engaging, but more importantly, he noted, the chamber is sharing its projections early enough for decision makers to help shape the future.

"What are we doing today to invest in this community 10 and 20 years down the road?" Morgan asked. "That is the fundamental question."

The statistic that hit him between the eyes: "That metro area of 4.2 million, which looks a lot like Atlanta does today," he said. "That's a wake-up call."

Mark Vitner, Wachovia Corp.'s senior economist, said, "We are well on our way. By my calculations, the 11-county Charlotte area is adding about 1,200 people a week."

Atlanta's metro area totals about 4.9 million today and is expected to reach more than 5.6 million by 2015 based on census projections.

Its annual population growth rate over the past 20 years has been much faster than Charlotte's, which indicates our 2026 metro area population could be closer to 3.5 million than 4.2 million, Vitner said.

Still, he believes Charlotte is one of the nation's most attractive metropolitan areas. "Its inland location is probably a huge plus as businesses and residents begin to shy away from the higher property prices and insurance costs of the coastal areas," Vitner said.

"My hunch is that we will see Charlotte move dramatically higher in the various places rated measures once word begins to spread about all the new developments taking place."

Morgan said some audiences are skeptical when they hear that the uptown population will hit 100,000 in 20 years while savvy developers often say the overall growth statistics might be too conservative.

#### Does This City Look Familiar?

This is what Charlotte's skyline might look like in 2026, courtesy of a creative team commissioned by the chamber: art director Demetre Gionis, illustrator Ralph Voltz and photographer Keith Parsley.

They used Parsley's photo of the existing skyline, shot from near Bank of America Stadium; reviewed renderings of some announced buildings and added lots of imagination.

The flying Jetsons-like vehicles were added to give the image a futuristic appearance, not because he really expects to see them in 2026, Voltz said.

Otherwise, he said, people unfamiliar with Charlotte might not realize the illustration depicts the skyline 20 years from now.

The illustrator's interpretation of the planned 46-story Wachovia tower on South Tryon is at the far right, and the 210 Trade condo tower is shown between a pair of science fiction-inspired skyscraper projects in the center.

Voltz, who illustrates science fiction book covers, also spiced up the skyline with some other buildings to add artistic design and balance to the image.

Where did the ideas come from?

"Ralph and I got on online and looked some buildings and some movies -- 'I, Robot' was one of them -- to see what was out there," Gionis said.

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2026

## POPULATION

City of Charlotte	632,760	1 million
Downtown	10,000	100,000
Mecklenburg County	829,976	1.5 million
Metro area	1.5 million	4.2 million
Over age 50 (Mecklenburg)	194,425	450,000

## COMMUTING TO MECKLENBURG

Daily commuters	146,160	450,000
Average travel time	26 minutes	34 minutes

## RACE &amp; ETHNICITY

White	69%	55%
Black	23%	33%
Latino*	7%	20%
Other	8%	12%

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mecklenburg	148	275
Enrollment	123,000	225,000

## FORTUNE 500 HEADQUARTERS

Mecklenburg	8	14
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## REAL ESTATE

Office space	40 million sq. feet	115 million sq. feet
Industrial space	125 million sq. feet	250 million sq. feet

\* Latino ethnicity can be included under the white, black or other racial categories.

SOURCE: Charlotte Chamber, with statistics based on census data, file information and trend projections.



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