

CHAPTER 8: HOUSING

BACKGROUND

The country, the state, and the region are all facing a significant housing crisis that was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic that began in 2020. Costs associated with housing development have increased significantly and very little new housing has been built in the region for many years. This impacts the region in many ways including increased costs passed on to homeowners and renters, a lack of available housing, and employers who have difficulty attracting new employees.

An adequate supply of year-round housing that offers varieties of housing size, cost, and location is essential to the economic and social health of every town in the region. Communities benefit when employees are able to live close to their workplace, young adults can afford to buy or rent in their hometowns, and elderly residents are able to remain in the community where they have family, friends, and history. Recent demographic trends are shifting in the region's housing needs. For example, household size has decreased and aging residents may seek to downsize to smaller homes with access to services. These trends coupled with the lack of housing development is raising concerns regarding the availability of smaller, affordable homes. While the specific needs and dynamics vary from one part of the region to another based on economics, location, and demographics, there is a common need for adequate and affordable housing.

New housing and infill development should be located near community centers. Housing developed in existing centers is less costly because existing infrastructure for roads and utilities is in place. Services which provide a greater social and economic benefit to the community are also available. At the same time, some new housing will be developed in more rural areas as land availability, affordability, and residential preference may affect development opportunities.

Towns should identify areas for compact development and facilitate the kinds of densities needed to reduce per unit costs. This is especially critical since costs have increased significantly due to the COVID pandemic and inflation. Locating these areas near public services will improve affordability for residents and reduce municipal costs for services. Proper provision for adequate and safe water supply and sewage disposal will be integral to this development. Due to limited financial resources at the town level, it is essential that there is appropriate State and/or Federal funding to support community infrastructure to meet these needs. At the same time, implementing regulatory strategies that reduce development costs can help restrain per unit costs as well.

A major barrier to allowing for increased density is the availability of public sewer and water infrastructure. The WRC will seek funding to complete a village water and wastewater needs assessment and wastewater feasibility plan

to identify current barriers to development.

HOUSING AND HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

The total number of housing units in the region has remained relatively stable from 2010 to 2020. The table below provides a summary of the region's housing units in 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020. By 2020, the number of owner-occupied units and rental units increased, while the number of seasonal units decreased slightly. Although some seasonal homes may have been converted to permanent homes during the pandemic, the overall numbers have stagnated.

The overall number of housing units has decreased for many reasons, including as a result of homes that were destroyed by fire or flooding during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 (for example, Melrose Terrace Apartment in Brattleboro), and older homes deteriorating significantly. The number of new homes built in the region during this 10-year period was not enough to make up for those lost. This loss of homes is a significant concern and contributes to our current regional housing crisis. The decrease in the housing stock is even more significant since the region's population increased by 3.9% from 2010 to 2020.¹

WINDHAM REGION HOUSING UNITS, 1990-2020

Unit Type	1990		2000		2010		2020	
	Housing Units	PCT	Housing Units	PCT	Housing Units	PCT	Housing Units	PCT
Owner Occupied	11,004	38.9%	13,213	44.3%	13,915	42.6%	15,006	48.1%
Renter Occupied	6,031	21.3%	6,116	20.5%	6,360	19.5%	6,802	21.8%
Seasonal	9,318	32.9%	9,290	31.1%	10,916	33.4%	9,396	30.1%
Total	28,314		29,846		32,638		31,204	
Pct Change from Previous Decade			+ 5.4%		+ 9.4%		-4.40%	

Source: 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

¹ 2010 and 2020 Census, U.S. Census Bureau

The rental vacancy rate for Windham County was 3.4 percent in 2021, which is down significantly from 8.4 percent in 2010.² Very low vacancy rates are a concern because it means that housing may not be available for people looking to move to the region and those who already live in the region and would like to change their housing situation. This is also a concern for employers because new employees may not be able to find housing.

The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Labor presented Housing Deficit Data and Demographic Trends on December 15, 2023. They broke the data out by county and partial counties. For example, Windham County was separated into Windham South and Windsor South/Windham North. Based on this information, the vacancy rates for homeownership are even smaller than for rentals. Established target vacancy rates for a healthy market are 3% for ownership and 5% for rentals.

VACANCY RATES (SEASONALLY ADJUSTED)

Location	Owned Vacancies	Owned Vacancy Rate	Rental Vacancies	Rental Vacancy Rate
Windham South	130	1.17%	155	3.41%
Windsor South & Windham North	107	1.03%	254	6.83%
Vermont Total	1,962	1.12%	2,419	4.14%

Source: 2021 U.S. Census Bureau ACS Estimates

The state also looked at the unit deficit compared to average annual housing production (last five years). These figures are a snapshot in time and do not account for future needs. It also doesn't account for housing lost, which is estimated at 2,000 – 3,000 units/year (due to disrepair, flooding, etc.). The deficit to production factors are higher in Windham County than the state overall.

UNIT DEFICIT VS CURRENT ANNUAL PRODUCTION

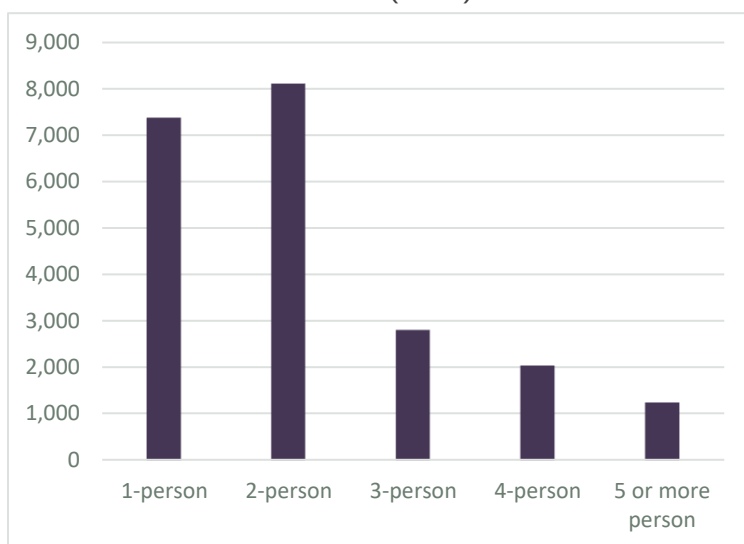
Location	Unit Deficit	Average Annual Production	Deficit to Production Factor
Windham South	440	100	4.2
Windsor South & Windham North	280	60	4.5
Vermont Total	6,740	2,110	3.2

² Rental Vacancy Rate Chart, www.housingdata.org

Another factor that has contributed to the housing crisis is that the number of people per household has decreased significantly over the years. Many of the older homes in the region were built to accommodate much larger families. The table to the right shows that most households in the region today consist of one or two individuals. This means that the types of housing in the region may not meet the needs of families today that might prefer smaller units.

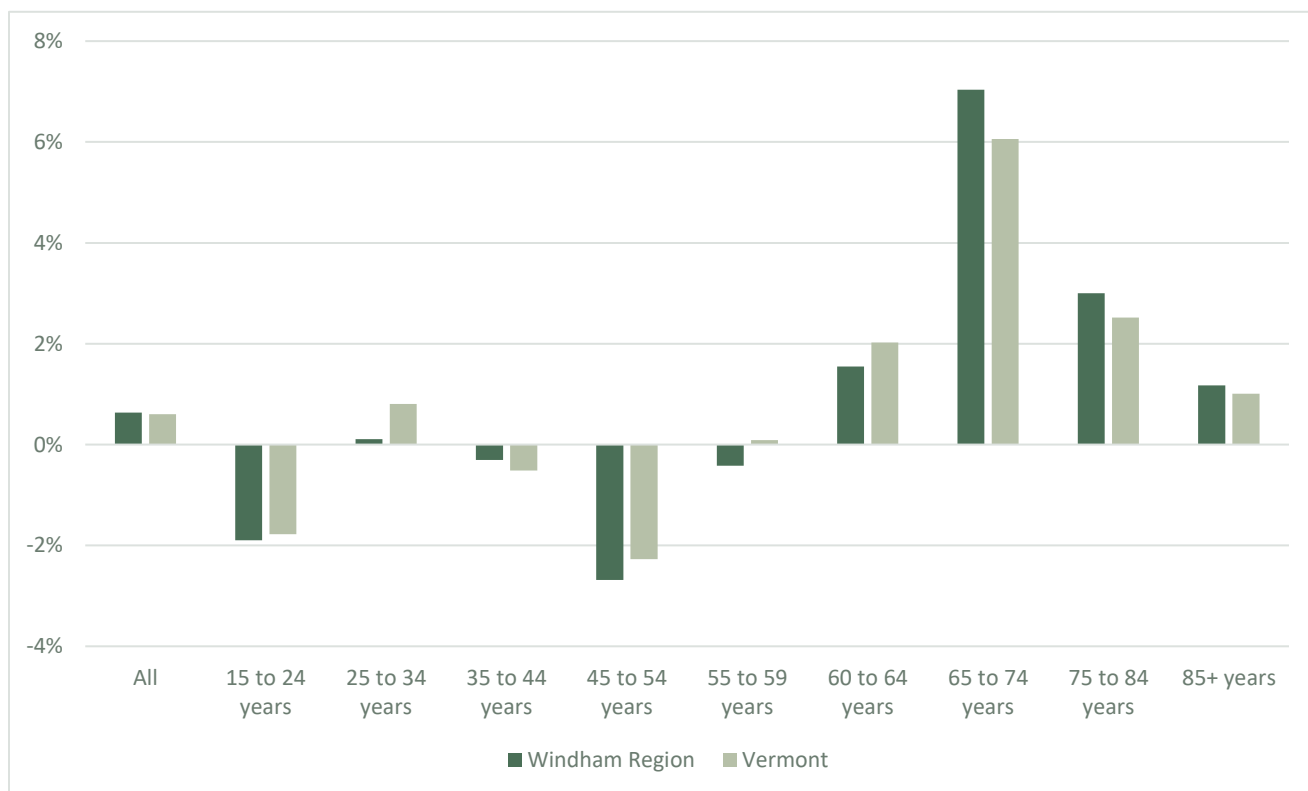
The region's aging population is another factor that affects housing needs. As can be seen in the chart below, households in the Windham Region are aging at a faster rate than the state overall. This trend will only increase as the population continues to age in the next 10 to 20 years. The region's aging population will impact not

WINDHAM REGION TENURE BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE (2020)



only the type of housing needed, but home maintenance and accessibility needs for these residents.

HOUSEHOLD GROWTH RATE BY AGE OF HOUSEHOLDER, 2010 - 2020



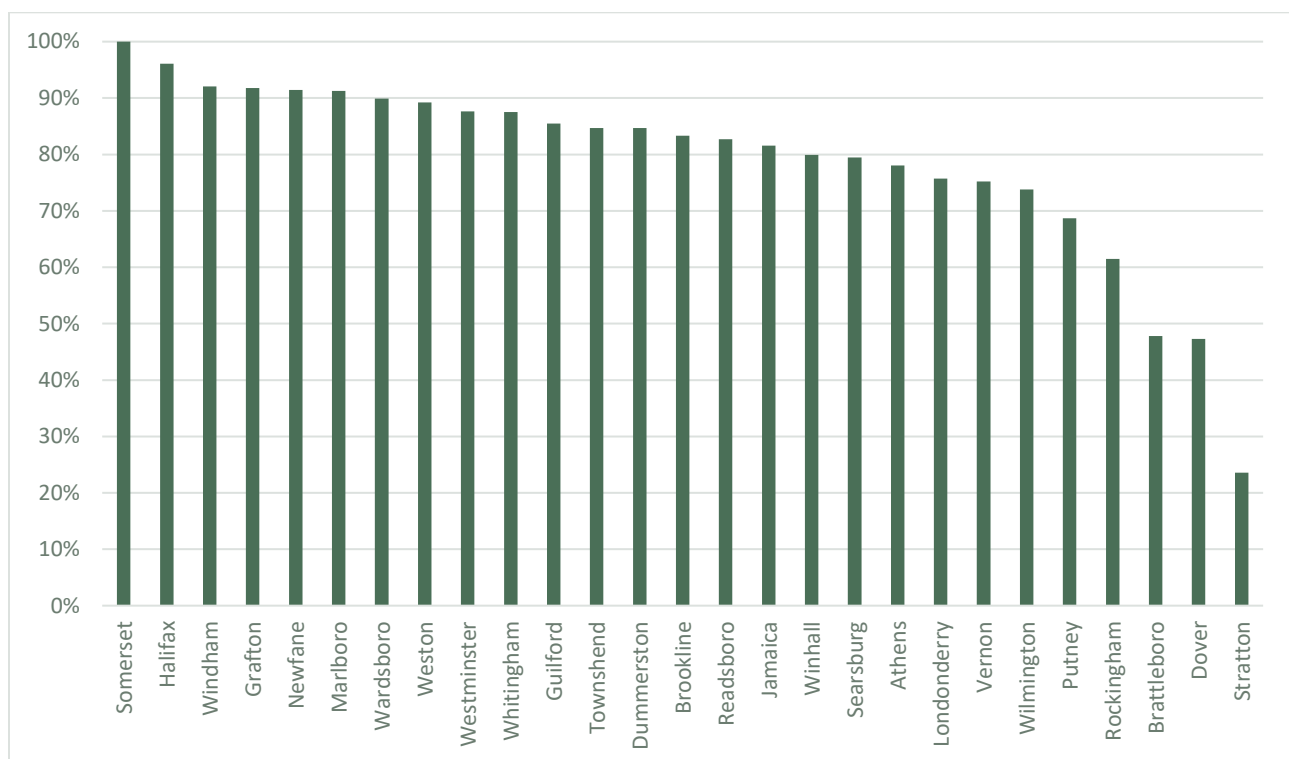
Source: 2010 and 2020, U.S. Census Bureau

TYPES OF HOUSING

SINGLE-UNIT DETACHED HOMES

Single-unit detached homes continue to be the predominant form of housing in the region. Illustrating this fact, the chart below shows that the vast majority of the region's towns have more than 70 percent of their housing units in single-unit detached homes, except for the regional centers of Brattleboro and Rockingham and the resort towns of Stratton and Dover, which have a high number of condominiums. There has not been a noticeable change in the percentage of single-unit detached homes in each town from 2010 to 2021. The lack of a variety in housing options contributes to the housing crisis because there are not enough smaller homes to meet the needs of today's smaller households and aging population. Smaller units are often accommodated in multi-family structures.

SINGLE-UNIT DETACHED HOMES AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL HOUSING STOCK IN EACH TOWN (2021)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-year Estimates

MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

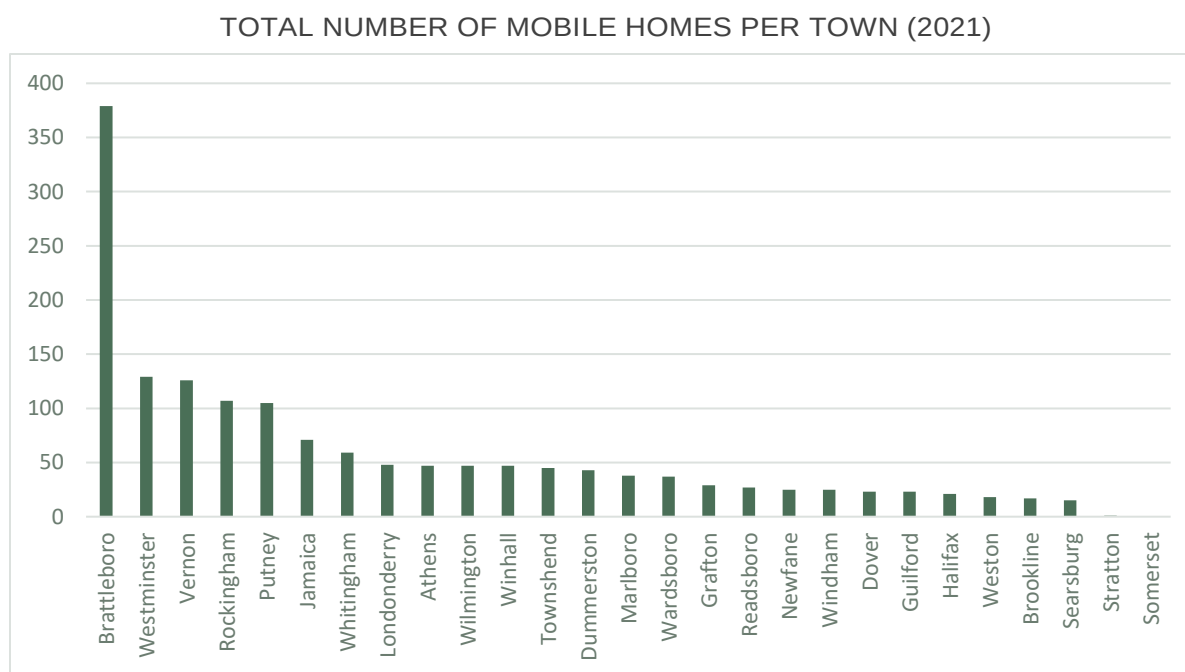
Multi-unit housing in the Windham Region can be found in a mix of different structure types. Some are found in two, three, and four family home in downtowns and village centers. The majority of units in large multi-unit structures (housing five or more units) are found in Brattleboro (1,464 units), Dover (418 units), Stratton (522 units) and Rockingham (249 units).

There has been very little construction of new multi-unit housing located outside of Brattleboro and Bellows Falls. New multifamily development in Brattleboro includes the DeWitt Block (19 units) developed by M&S Development, the Snow Block (23 units) developed by Windham Windsor Housing Trust, and Red Clover Commons (55 units), developed by the Brattleboro Housing Authority and designed to replace Melrose Terrace units lost to Tropical Storm Irene. In June 2023, Windham Windsor Housing Trust welcomed new residents to the Garage (27 units) in Bellows Falls. Many of these new developments have been supported with brownfields funding from the WRC.

While these new units have been a great step towards addressing housing needs in the region, the need for additional smaller units remains significant. The state's Housing Incentive Program has provided local property owners with funding to rehabilitate or create new units in multifamily homes. Many communities have also taken steps to facilitate the development of Accessory Dwelling Units or ADUs. These units that are smaller and secondary to primary residences and may be provided in existing structures, basements or garages, or new detached structures.

MOBILE HOME HOUSING

Mobile homes and mobile home parks continue to be one alternative to high cost housing in the region. As can be seen in the chart below Brattleboro has a significant majority of mobile homes in the region, followed by Putney, Rockingham, Vernon and Westminster.



Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-year Estimates

Mobile home parks can achieve unit densities that reduce costs, however community sewer and water, whether public or private, are essential for a park's viability. The costs involved in building and maintaining such infrastructure make mobile home park ownership unattractive as a business investment. Additionally, these parks

are often located in floodplains or other marginal parcel locations to save costs. This issue was highlighted when many mobile home parks throughout the state were damaged by flooding in Tropical Storm Irene and during the July 2023 floods. TriPark in Brattleboro recently revealed plans to move additional units out of the floodplain with significant funding provided by the state and federal governments.

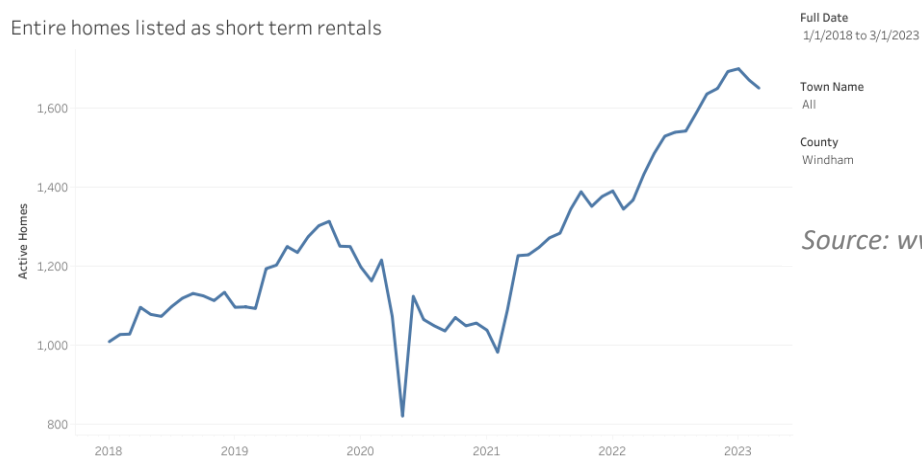
SEASONAL HOUSING AND SHORT-TERM RENTALS

Seasonal housing and Short-Term Rentals (STRs) impact the amount and costs of housing available to permanent year-round residents. Tourism and outdoor recreation are a critical part of the region's economy and seasonal dwellings and STRs for visitors are part of that mix, along with traditional resort lodging and hotels and motels. Providing the right balance of housing that is affordable to year-round residents and seasonal housing and lodging options for visitors is a challenge.

In Windham County, seasonal dwellings make up 32% of all homes. Communities in the Deerfield Valley, our resort towns, have the most seasonal housing. Dover is listed as number two in the state for the total number of second homes, followed by Wilmington at #6, Stratton at #7 and Winhall at #8. In these same communities, the percentage of total homes that are seasonal is also high: Dover 80%, Wilmington 62%, Stratton 92%, and Winhall 83%. During the COVID pandemic, some seasonal homeowners relocated to Vermont and lived in their second homes. Others looking to move away from urban centers purchased homes that may or may not become permanent residences. This influx of out of state buyers is one factor contributing to an increase in housing costs in the region and is especially impacting year-round residents and employees in resort communities.

STRs in their current form are a relatively new phenomenon, although there have always been vacation rentals in resort communities. Airbnb and other STR platforms have now made marketing these units much easier for homeowners. This trend began several years ago, but increased significantly since the COVID pandemic, as can be seen below. This trend has also impacted the amount and cost of housing available to permanent residents.

NUMBER OF ENTIRE HOMES LISTED AS SHORT-TERM RENTALS
WINDHAM COUNTY (2018-2023)



People make homes available as STRs for many different reasons. For some it is strictly a business, but others may use it as a way to afford their housing or as a way to stay in the region. There are multiple ways that communities can begin to address this issue if it is a concern, including registering STR owners/operators, regulating the number of STR units, or requiring fees to address impacts. Communities must balance their ability to provide accommodations for visitors with the need for also ensuring affordable housing to year-round residents.

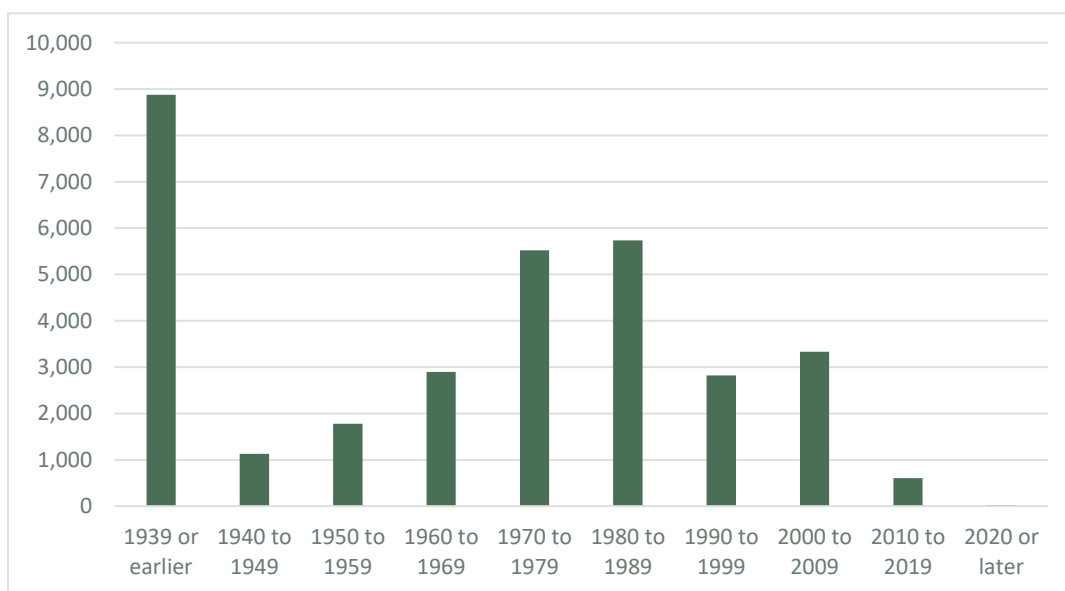
AGE OF HOUSING

Almost one-third of the region's housing was constructed prior to 1940, as can be seen in the chart below. While older housing units can add to the historic character of a community, they also can present a challenge to property owners. Common problems in older housing include out dated electrical wiring, poor energy efficiency, aging septic systems, and the possibility of lead-based paint, a health issue particularly in homes with small children. Additionally, potential home-buyers may be wary of purchasing a home requiring significant investment in cosmetic and system upgrades.



Older Home, Grafton

NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS BY YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT
WINDHAM REGION



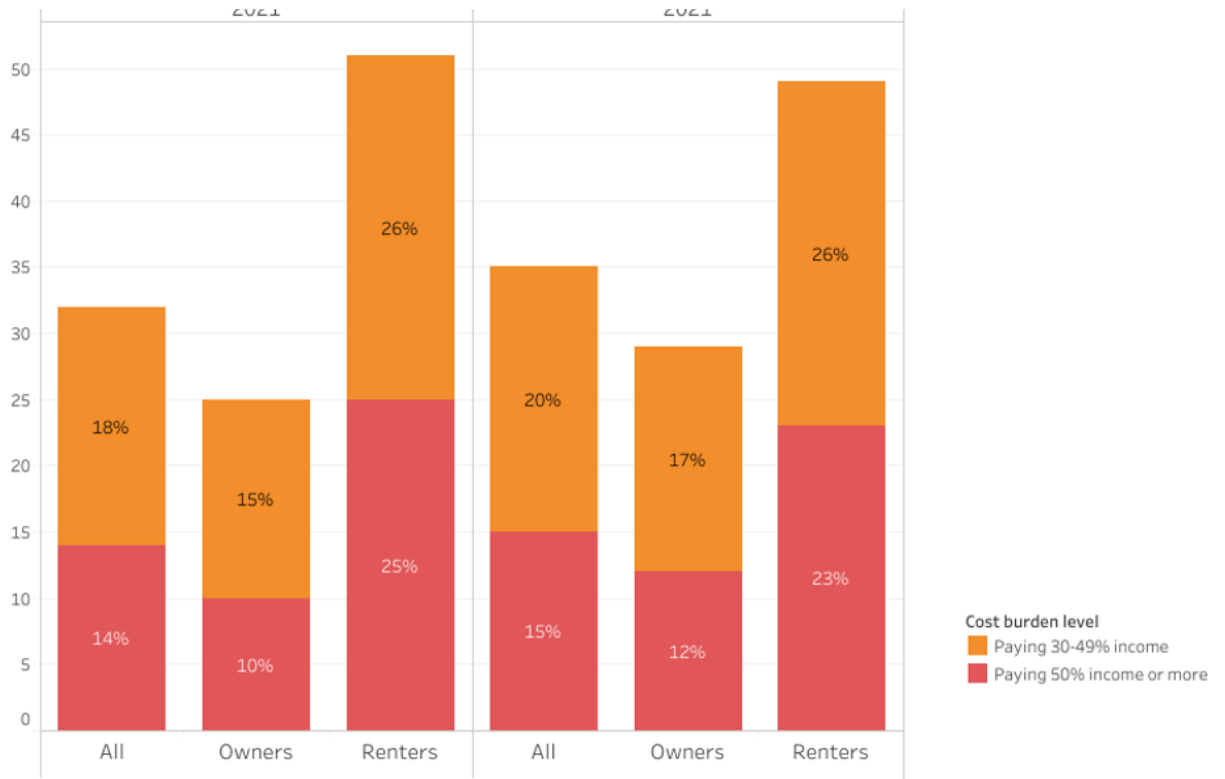
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-year Estimates

The age of the housing supply in the region also means that many existing structures were built without a building code in place. Therefore, ensuring safe housing in the Windham Region includes making life safety improvements where necessary. These improvements include ensuring appropriate egress, fire and smoke separation, fire and smoke detection, and fire suppression systems. Encouraging these systems is a way to save lives and structures, especially historic landmarks. Also, many older homes may have outdated heating systems and insulation, which makes them less energy efficient than newer homes. Weatherization improvements, such as upgraded heating systems, air sealing, and additional insulation, can reduce energy costs while retaining the existing housing stock. There are several programs that can help with home weatherization, one of which is the Home Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) through the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity. The WAP provides no-cost, whole-home energy to income-eligible residents to reduce energy cost and consumption. Funding assistance opportunities like the WAP can help make the existing housing stock more resilient to the changing climate.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability refers to the ability of all residents within a community to find housing that matches their level of income. Traditionally, housing is considered affordable when a household spends no more than 30 percent of its gross income on housing. As can be seen in the chart below, Windham County falls slightly behind the state overall in terms of housing affordability, with 35% of Windham County households considered cost burdened compared to 32% statewide. Cost burdened means that a household pays more than the accepted 30% of their income on housing. Renters struggle with affordability at a higher rate than home owners. In 2021, 26% of renters in Windham County were considered cost burdened, paying 30-49% of their income on housing, and 23% are considered extremely cost burdened, paying more than 50% of their income on housing. This is a significant issue since households may not have enough income to afford other necessities including food, clothing, transportation and medical care. It may also put them at a higher risk of housing instability. This data shows a clear need to provide more housing units that are accessible to a greater range of incomes. The percentage of residents who are cost-burdened indicates that there is a lack of options for those who need affordable housing. The Regional Housing Target section below provides additional discussion on the types of housing units that are needed to address the concern regarding housing affordability.

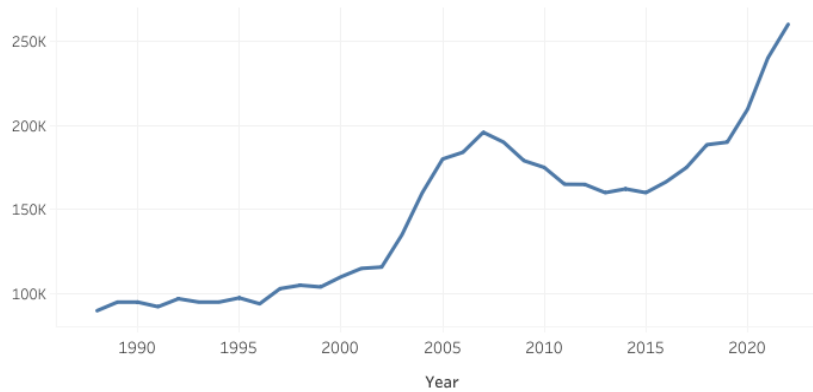
HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSING COSTS AS PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Source: www.housingdata.org

Housing costs have increased significantly since the last Regional Plan update when housing costs were still in decline. Home ownership costs began rising in 2015 after declining from 2007, as a result of the subprime mortgage “housing crisis.” In 2022, the median home price in Windham County was \$260,000, which is an increase of 62% since 2015. There are many factors that have contributed to this including the disruptions of the COVID pandemic, which increased construction costs and competition to purchase homes as people were moving out of urban centers.

MEDIAN HOME SALE PRICE FOR WINDHAM COUNTY

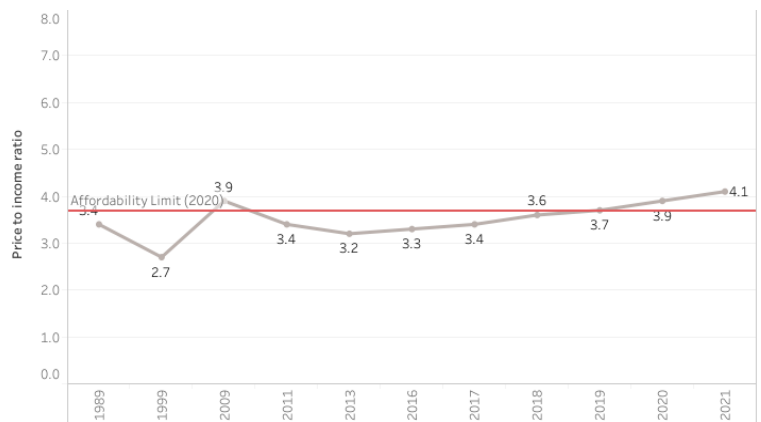


Source: www.housingdata.org

Wage increases have not kept pace with the increase of home prices. The chart ~~to the right~~below shows the 2020 affordability limit for Windham County in red and the actual price to income ratio in grey, which has been above the affordability limit since 2019. This ratio is based on Windham County's median non-vacation home price compared to the county's median household income. The "Affordability Limit" is the price-to-income ratio when it takes 30% of a household's income to cover housing costs.

The median gross rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Windham County was \$947 per month in 2021.³ This is approximately a 21 percent increase in monthly rent from 2011. As of 2023, an annual income of \$37,800 was needed for a one-bedroom apartment to be affordable and \$46,000 for a two-bedroom apartment.⁴ In 2021, 31% of Windham County residents had an annual income below \$35,000.

RATIO OF WINDHAM COUNTY HOME PRICES TO INCOME



Source: www.housingdata.org

In the Windham Region, housing that is maintained at a price level that is affordable to a variety of income levels is addressed through a number of local and regional programs. Windham and Windsor Housing Trust (WWHT) and Brattleboro Housing Partnerships develop and manage affordable housing that serves low and moderate income

³ www.housingdata.org

⁴ www.housingdata.org

residents. WWHT provides loan funding for low and moderate income homeowners to maintain safe and affordable housing. They also provide grants to property owners to rehabilitate rental units and to develop new accessory dwelling units.

Housing subsidies come primarily from State and Federal programs. The largest federal housing subsidy, in terms of dollars, is the mortgage interest deduction. However, the mortgage interest deduction does not benefit low-income households or renter households. There are State and Federal programs specifically targeted at low and moderate income households. These include Housing Choice Vouchers, as well as the Vermont Community Development Program, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development programs.

Related to housing affordability is homelessness, which continues to be a significant issue in the Windham Region. Although homelessness may have increased during the COVID pandemic due increasing housing costs and decreasing vacancies, housing was made available in the form of hotel rooms during the pandemic. The pandemic era housing program is ending, however, and it is yet to be seen how this will play out. Housing providers and homeless advocates are working with hotel residents to match them with housing but some individuals will end up back in shelters and other may be left out altogether. The primary shelter provider in the region is Groundworks, which operates two shelters in Brattleboro, as well as a drop-in center and a food shelf. Our Place Drop in Center also provides services to those experiencing homelessness in Bellows Falls.



Another program created to help unlock more housing opportunities is the Community and Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP), which was established in 2025. CHIP is a statewide tax increment financing tool designed to help Vermont communities create more housing opportunities by investing in critical public infrastructure. Towns may benefit from exploring opportunities to utilize CHIP financing to support investments in necessary public infrastructure to encourage housing development in their communities. Infrastructure costs are often a substantial percentage of the overall cost of developing housing and CHIP can help defray some of these costs to make developments more affordable.

MUNICIPAL HOUSING TARGETS

In accordance with the Vermont HOME Act (2023) and Act 181 (2024), WRC has disaggregated the region's total 2030 and 2050 housing targets to the municipal level. Municipal plans should recommend a program for public and private action to address housing targets identified by WRC. The purpose of this analysis is to set a quantifiable goal for the region to provide much-needed housing in the context of Vermont's housing shortage.

Statewide and regional housing production targets were provided by the Vermont Housing and Finance Agency (VHFA) as part of a Statewide Housing Needs Assessment (SHNA). The SHNA provides a comprehensive overview of housing data in Windham County and the State of Vermont. See this report for additional technical information.

The SHNA provides housing targets for 2030 and 2050. For each target year, the SHNA establishes both an upper and lower housing target based on different population projection methods and underlying assumptions. The state-level housing target figures were then distributed proportionally to regions based on the number of households in each RPC region in 2020.

Below are the Windham Region's 2030 and 2050 housing targets:

Total Additional Home Targets			
2030		2050	
Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
2,571	3,730	7,993	15,635

WRC then disaggregated the targets to all 27 towns in the region using a weighted mix of factors influential in determining areas that can support new housing. These factors include town population, existing housing stock, and the existence and extent of wastewater and drinking water infrastructure. Analytical adjustments were also made to account for highly rural towns with limited capacity to support new housing. The full municipal housing target disaggregation methodology is included as Appendix E.

WRC's housing targets are intended to serve as a broad tool for municipal and regional planning. Towns are not required to meet a given 2030 or 2050 housing target, nor are they responsible for constructing this housing themselves.

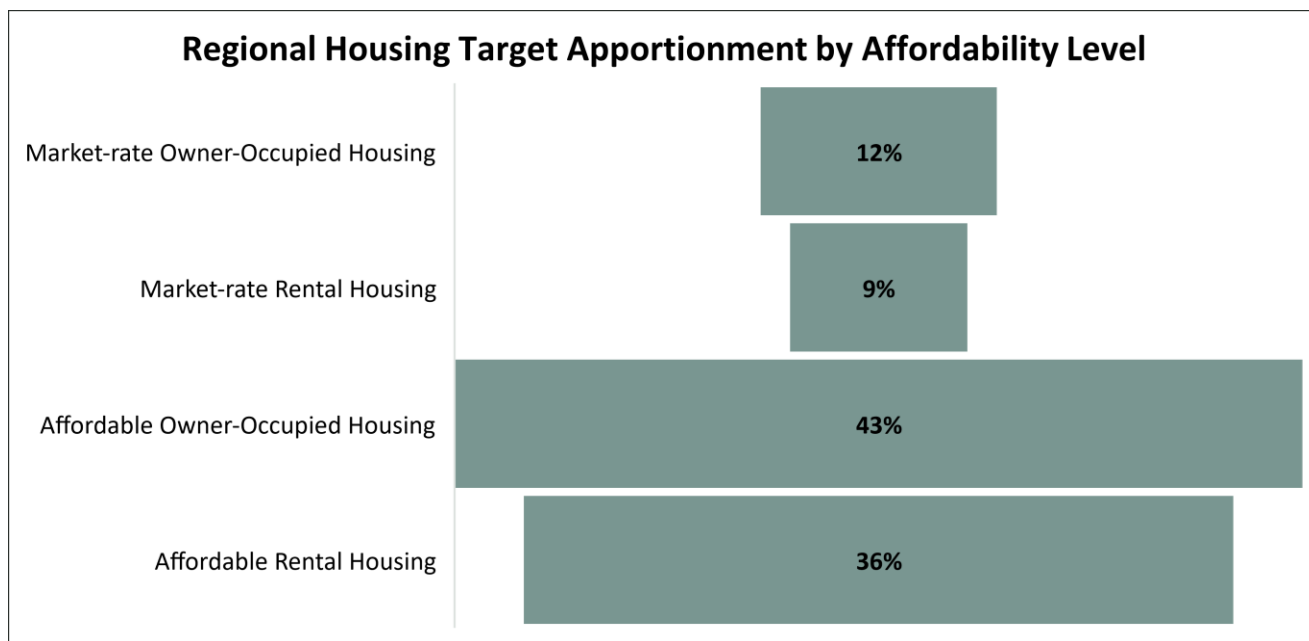
WRC Municipal Housing Targets				
	2030		2050	
<u>Town</u>	<u>Units (Lower)</u>	<u>Units (Upper)</u>	<u>Units (Lower)</u>	<u>Units (Upper)</u>
Athens	3	5	11	21
Brattleboro	748	1,085	2,325	4,547
Brookline	5	7	15	29
Dover	110	159	342	668
Dummerston	71	103	220	430
Grafton	25	37	79	154
Guilford	94	137	294	574
Halifax	7	10	22	43
Jamaica	39	56	120	235
Londonderry	73	105	226	442
Marlboro	51	75	160	313
Newfane	64	93	198	388
Putney	149	216	462	904
Readsboro	54	79	169	330
Rockingham	374	542	1,162	2,274
Searsburg	1	2	3	7
Somerset	0	0	0	0
Stratton	36	52	112	220
Townshend	49	71	151	296
Vernon	80	116	249	487
Wardsboro	33	48	102	199
Westminster	127	184	394	771
Weston	24	35	75	147
Whitingham	90	131	281	550
Wilmington	182	264	566	1,107
Windham	17	25	54	106
Winhall	64	93	199	389
TOTAL:	2,571	3,729	7,992	15,632

REGIONAL HOUSING TARGET APPORTIONMENT & HOUSING STOCK GAPS

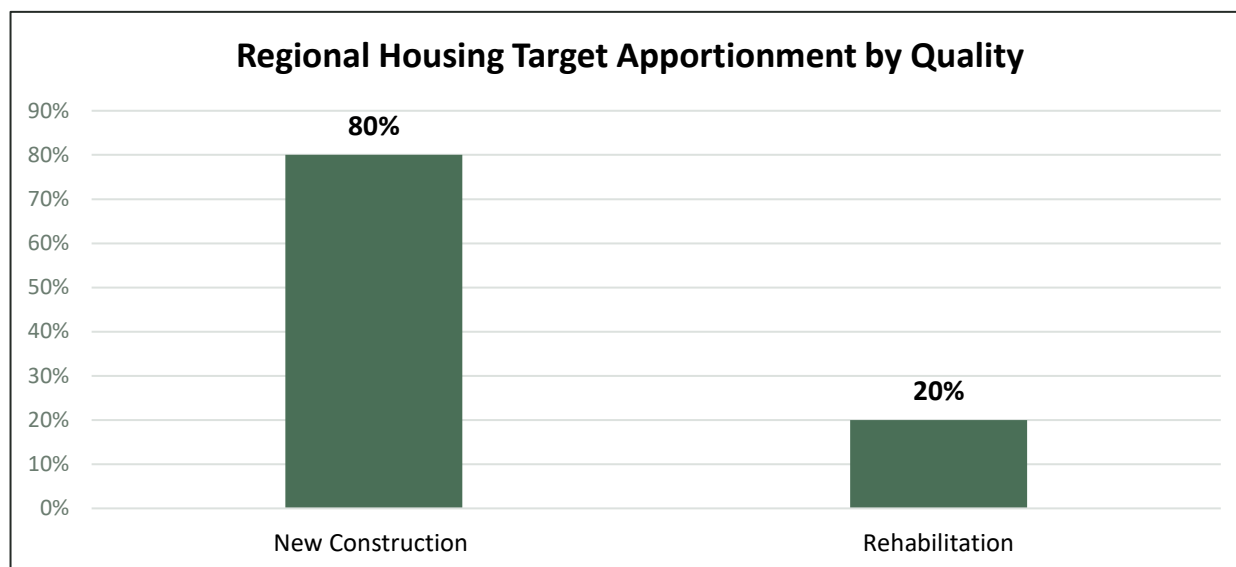
In addition to developing municipal housing targets, WRC is responsible for conducting an analysis to further subdivide its regional housing target in accordance with HOME Act requirements. This analysis breaks out the regional housing target figure with respect to various housing stock characteristics, including:

1. Affordability
2. Quality (new vs. rehabilitation)
3. Unit size or type
4. Geography

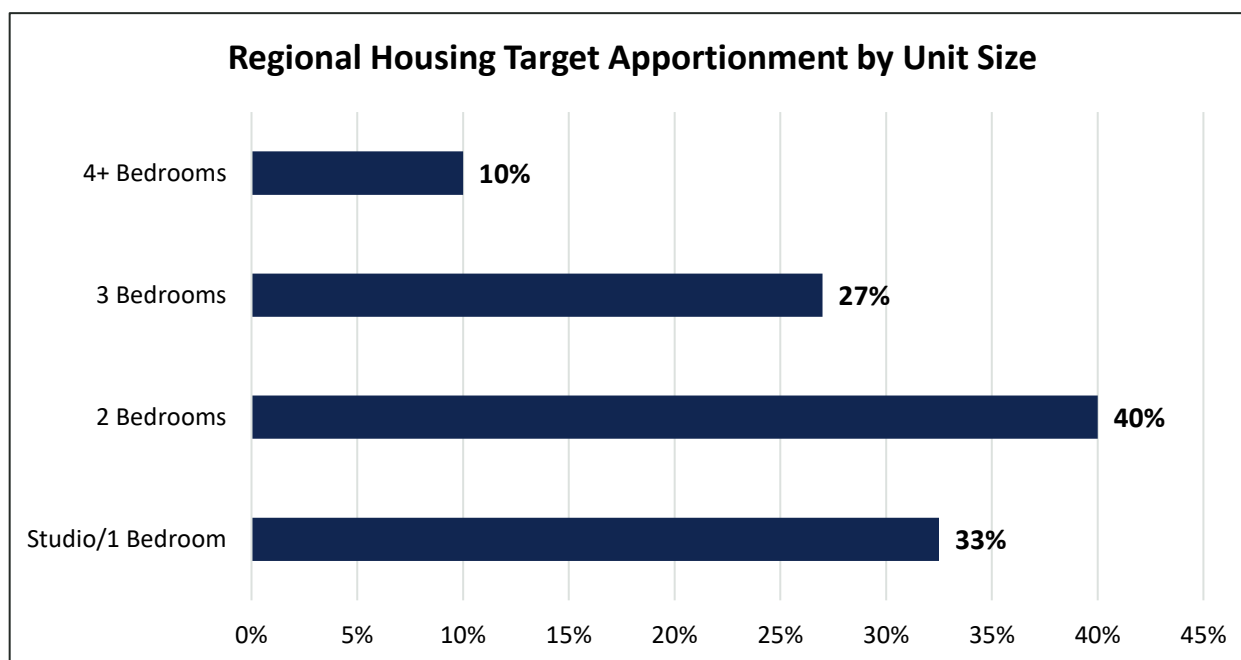
The purpose of this effort is to broadly identify gaps in the region’s housing stock and inform policies and strategies that support new housing in the areas where it is needed most. As with the municipal housing target analysis, the following analyses are provided to support data-driven planning and do not dictate how or where new housing will be built in the region. Several broad gaps appear in our regional housing stock data, including a shortage of smaller units, limited affordable housing options, and the need for increased infill development. Category-specific regional housing target distributions are provided below.



In the Windham Region, there is a documented gap between the distribution of household incomes and the current supply of units affordable at those income levels, as identified in the SHNA and Census cost-burden data. The trends indicate an acute shortage of affordable owner and renter-occupied housing despite the considerable populations in demand. The chart above shows the recommended breakdown between market-rate and affordable owner-occupied and rental units to meet the regional housing targets. For this analysis, WRC used the state’s definition of affordable housing: housing that costs less than 30% of the household income of renters making at or below 80% area median income (AMI), and owners making at or below 120% AMI. According to the SHNA, AMI for Windham County is \$65,473 as of 2022.

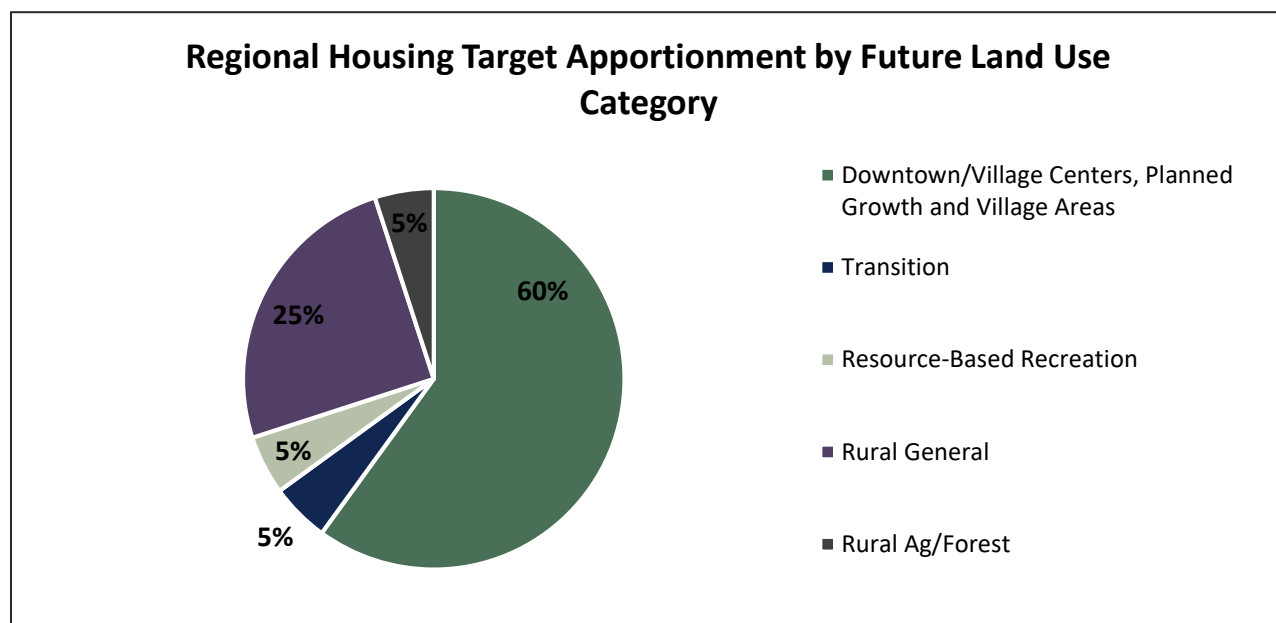


To address the housing quality criteria, WRC considered rehabilitation of existing structures versus new construction to meet the regional targets. Examples of rehabilitation would include converting an existing single-family dwelling into multiple dwelling units or making improvements to an existing vacant home so it is habitable. The regional split between building rehabilitation (80%) and new construction (20%) reflects the sizeable reinvestment needed in the region's aging housing stock (58% of occupied housing units built before 1980) and the considerable ramp-up in new-unit production necessary to meet SHNA demand forecasts.



There is a considerable mismatch between the size of units in demand in the Windham Region and the units available. As the regional population ages and average household sizes decrease, an increase in studios, 1-bedroom, and 2-bedroom units will be essential to meet need, as the chart above shows. At the same time, dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms are also needed to meet the needs of families with children.

WRC supports allocating a substantial majority of the regional housing target to the Downtown Centers, Village Centers, Planned Growth Areas, and Village Areas shown on the Regional Future Land Use Map, while recognizing that growth will continue in rural areas. Encouraging the majority of new housing development in denser land-use areas promotes housing near infrastructure and services, supports regional and state planning goals, and maintains Vermont's historic settlement pattern while meeting 21st-century needs.



WRC analyzed the amount of land area designated as Downtown Center, Village Center, Planned Growth Area, or Village Area to verify at least 60% of the regional housing target could be developed in these areas. There is a total of 7,789 acres of land within these four future land use categories. Sixty percent of the regional targets would be between 4,795 units using the low target to 9,381 units using the high target. On average, this would come out to a density of approximately 0.6 to 1.2 units per acre across the total land area. Given that much of this area is supported by water and wastewater infrastructure, reaching these targets should be achievable.

HOUSING TRENDS FOR THE REGION

This chapter has shown several characteristic trends for housing throughout the region, and those trends will impact residents' ability to find suitable, affordable housing in this region in the future. Although single-family homes may continue to be the preferred type of housing in the region, providing a mix of housing options will help meet the needs of various households and income levels, while attracting younger populations and allowing older populations to age in place. The decrease of overall household size is also a significant factor in determining the right mix of housing types for a community. Some examples of new and creative approaches that create smaller footprint homes from other regions in New England are shown in the images below.



Tiny Home Development, Dover, NH



Townhouses, Dover, NH

The region's villages and downtown centers can provide many desired amenities and make it easier to access transit and other needs. Building new housing at higher densities and providing infill development opportunities in villages and downtowns is one way to begin to address the high costs of new housing development. Communities can prepare for new housing by updating their land use regulations to accommodate higher densities, promote adaptive reuse of historic structures, and even reduce parking requirements which impact housing costs. Other costs, including the costs of materials and labor, are beyond the control of communities. Additional information on tools towns can use can be found in the Land Use Section.

CONVERSION OF BROWNFIELDS TO HOUSING STOCK

Sites located within town and village centers are often complicated by the presence or potential presence of contamination, also known as a brownfield site. The Windham Region Brownfields Reuse Initiative has funding available to assess potential contamination on specific sites, develop remediation plans as needed, and complete cleanup actions. Programs at both the Federal and State level can also provide funding for cleanup. Where brownfield sites are appropriate locations for mixed housing and commercial services, it may be well worth the investment.

Brownfields site in the Windham Region have been cleanup and redeveloped for affordable housing by Windham Windsor Housing Trust and others. Examples include the Garage in Bellows Falls and Red Clover Commons in Brattleboro, both pictured below.



Red Clover Commons, Brattleboro



The Garage, Bellows Falls

Communities can prepare for new development, including an increase of density in existing homes that add new units, by planning for the development of water and/or wastewater infrastructure. In many of our smaller towns, the lack of sewer and water infrastructure is a significant limitation to creating new affordable housing (see also the Community Utilities, Facilities, and Services Section). Londonderry, Grafton, and Jamaica are investigating the development of new soil-based wastewater systems for their village centers.

Wilmington, Dover, Putney, Londonderry and Brattleboro all have Housing Committees and, except Putney, have developed housing needs assessments to explore what they can do as a community. Some towns may even consider development of a new town center, such as Vernon who developed new Village Center Concept Plan. A proposal for up to 300 new units at the Winston Prouty Campus in Brattleboro also has the potential to significantly address the region's needs.



Source: SE Group, 2019 – Vernon Village Center Concept Plan

Since 2020, the Southeastern Vermont Housing Coalition has taken on the role of regional convener for all organizations interested and involved in housing throughout the Windham Region. The Coalition has monthly meetings that address various issues and concerns related to housing including landlord groups, affordable housing organizations, homeless advocates, state agencies and municipalities. This group will continue to lead and facilitate the discussion around housing and to support efforts to increase housing for everyone, especially those who need it most.

HOUSING POLICIES

1. Promote and support an increase in the number of homes available and the diversity of housing stock (types of units, and rental and home ownership opportunities) within the region. This includes offering safe, adequate, accessible (universal design) and affordable housing to meet the needs of all residents across the entire income spectrum. This policy is urgent and of high regional priority.
2. New housing should be developed in a manner that maintains the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside. Support growth in and around existing centers to promote walkability and social connectivity. All new development should strive to have minimal impact on natural resources, open space, floodplains, fluvial erosion hazard zones, and important agricultural and forest

lands.

3. New housing of all types and infill housing should be encouraged throughout the region in all towns. Towns are encouraged to consider town plan language, zoning bylaw provisions, and infrastructure investments and maintenance to support the housing and settlement patterns they envision to meet the needs of residents in all stages of life, and in a manner that is flood adaptive and resilient. ~~and especially where public wastewater and water infrastructure are in place and can support the density needed to promote more affordable development, including multi-family housing designed to meet the needs of the region's changing population (smaller households).~~ Alternative housing opportunities such as condominiums, homesharing, co-housing, housing cooperatives and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) should also be encouraged.
4. Promote the implementation of innovative planning, design, and construction techniques that minimize the long-term cost and energy consumption of housing, including locating housing convenient to community centers, in proximity to public transit routes, in a compact development arrangement, and employing energy efficient construction techniques. Encourage reuse of vacant or underutilized properties, including strip commercial development, for residential use.
5. Support the work of communities addressing infrastructure needs and regulatory reform that is needed to make it easier to build new and denser housing where it works best in compact centers. Provide assistance, as needed and when funding is available, to update bylaws and plan for community water and wastewater projects.
6. Provide financial support to assess and clean up brownfield sites that will be redeveloped for new housing. This should be a top priority for the Windham Region Brownfields Reuse Initiative.
7. Support the work of public and nonprofit agencies, including housing trusts, who plan for and finance affordable housing.
8. Promote the rehabilitation and maintenance of the existing housing stock and multifamily properties, as well as expanding the number of units where appropriate.
9. Support affordable housing projects and encourage waiving of fees, use of tax credits and property tax abatement and assistance with public grants and other sources of funding.
10. Support organizations that provide shelter and support for all residents including those experiencing homelessness.
11. Pursue investigation of the impact of Short Term Rentals on the regional housing market to better understand their impact. Support the management of Short Term Rentals by towns.

~~12. Facilitate opportunities for housing that is affordable to the region's workforce. When appropriate, Major Act 250 applications for Proposed developments that will create fifty or more new full-time equivalent positions should examine whether shall provide evidence that there is existing available and affordable housing stock for the new employees within a reasonable commuting distance thirty-mile commuter shed. If housing that meets this requirement is not available, the development should be encouraged to shall include affordable housing opportunities within the project or within close proximity. or a mitigation payment to be used for affordable housing in the Windham Region.~~

~~13.~~12. When reviewing the housing element in town plans, WRC will look for consideration of (not in ranked order):

- a. Consistency with future land use goals
- b. Aging in place
- c. Accessible, safe housing
- d. Low-income housing for all communities
- e. Workforce housing
- f. Fair housing that advances diversity, equity and inclusion
- g. Energy efficiency
- h. Connection to public transit routes or safe bicycling or walking connections to services
- i. Planning for wastewater and water infrastructure to support compact settlement, housing development, and community vitality.