

This section provides an overview of housing in Cornwall. Planning for housing is one of the most important aspects of a town plan. A community's plans for its housing needs can have a direct impact on local public services and facilities, economy, transportation, and the conservation of natural resources. A safe, adequate home is a fundamental need of every Vermonter. Housing is basic to survival; it offers shelter from extreme elements and serves as a center for personal and family life. In order to thrive and prosper Cornwall residents must have adequate, affordable and safe places in which to live.

INVENTORY

Current and Historic Housing

Cornwall has approximately 585 housing units according to the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019¹, an increase of more than 109 percent, or 306 units, over the past fifty years. A housing unit is a house, apartment, mobile home, or group of rooms occupied as separate residence. A large majority of the town's housing units consist of year-round dwellings. However, the growth in housing units over the last decade appears to be largely due to an increase in the number of seasonal or occasional use homes and rental units. An estimated 79 units were classified as seasonal, recreational or occasional use units in the 2015-2019 ACS data,² a dramatic increase from an estimated 28 in 2010. During this period, rental housing also increased by 31 units.³ The number of year-round owner-occupied units actually decreased slightly during this time.⁴ In recent years, there has been a noticeable uptick in the use of Cornwall homes for short-term rental housing. This relatively new use is not currently addressed in the Town's zoning regulations.

	Total Units	Year-round Units		Seasonal Units		Year-round Units							
		#	%	#	%	Occupied		Vacant		Year-round Occupied Units			
						#	%	#	%	Owner	Renter		
1970	279	256	91.8%	23	8.2%	248	96.9%	8	3.1%	196	79.0%	52	21.0%
1980	341	340	99.7%	1	0.3%	324	95.3%	16	4.7%	271	83.6%	53	16.4%
1990	416	414	99.5%	2	0.5%	387	93.5%	27	6.5%	317	81.9%	70	18.1%
2000	464	448	96.6%	16	3.4%	427	95.3%	21	4.7%	362	84.8%	65	15.2%
2010	517	489	94.6%	28	5.4%	468	95.7%	21	4.3%	387	82.7%	81	17.3%
2019	585	497	84.5%	79	15.9%	470	94.6%	27	5.4%	385	77.4%	112	22.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau⁵

Figure 8: Housing Units in Cornwall 1970-2019

Cornwall has 470 households with an average size of 2.36 people according to the 2015-2019 ACS data.⁶ The number of households has increased substantially in the last five decades from 248 in 1970, while the average household size has declined from 3.63 people in 1970. Over the last fifty years, Cornwall has seen a significant reduction in average household size while at the same time there has been a significant growth in average home

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019.

² <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/housing-units>

³ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/housing-units>

⁴ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/housing-units>

⁵ For 2019 data: <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/housing-units>; <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/vacant-homes>; <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/rental-housing-costs/vacancy-rate>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019.

size throughout Addison County.⁷ Of the 470 households, 361 consist of homeowners and 109 consist of renters.⁸ Despite the steadily increasing percentage of renters, Cornwall's renter population (23%) is smaller than statewide (29%).⁹

Cornwall averaged a homeowner vacancy rate of 6.2 percent and a rental vacancy rate of 2.7 percent during the period 2015-2019.¹⁰ A vacancy rate below five percent is considered low, according to the Vermont Department of Conservation and Housing. Throughout the 2000s, there has been a shortage of housing in northwestern Vermont, particularly workforce and affordable housing. The housing shortage has been sharpest in Chittenden County, but also has been noticeable in Addison County. The Town's Grand List for 2021 included 513 dwellings, 96% of which were classified as either a residence on less than six acres (R1) or a residence on 6 acres or more (R2). The remaining 18 properties were designated as mobile homes.¹¹ Owners of 353 (68.8%) of the dwellings filed a Vermont Homestead Declaration stating that the dwelling was their primary residence.

Approximately 30 percent of Cornwall's housing was built before 1940, and roughly 25 percent has been built since 2000.¹² Four affordable housing units were built in Cornwall in 2012, as a Habitat for Humanity project. This was the first project of its kind in the area.

Housing Costs

The median price of homes sold in Cornwall in 2019 was \$393,000,¹³ which is approximately \$140,000 greater than the median home price was in 2010. It is also approximately \$150,000 greater than the median price of homes sold both throughout Addison County and the State of Vermont.¹⁴ Cornwall has the highest ratio of home prices to county incomes of any town in Addison County, with a ratio exceeding 5.0.¹⁵ Cornwall's Grand List indicates that the median price of homes sold in 2021 in the Town has risen further to \$406,000. The median assessed home value for all Cornwall was \$346,000 in 2021 and the average was \$423,000.

The State definition of affordable housing is based on what a household earning 80 percent of the county median family income could afford, while spending 30 percent or less of their gross income on housing (i.e., mortgage/rent, taxes, insurance and utilities). The 2015-2019 Addison County median family income (MFI) was \$68,825.¹⁶ A household earning 80 percent of the Addison County MFI would have an annual income of \$55,060¹⁷ and could afford to spend about \$1,376¹⁸ a month on housing. Median monthly owner costs in Cornwall were \$1,856 according to the 2015-19 ACS data.¹⁹ Based on median household incomes, 30 percent of Cornwall home owners spent 30 percent or more of their monthly incomes on housing costs.²⁰ This is 10 percentage points lower than the comparable data from 2009, but slightly higher than the 2015-19 statewide number of 27%. Nearly 40% of renters

⁷ ACRPR Draft Population and Housing Chapter, p. 23.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019.

⁹ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/population-household/households-by-tenure>.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019;

<https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-stock/vacant-homes>;

<https://www.housingdata.org/profile/rental-housing-costs/vacancy-rate>.

¹¹ Note the Town Lister data does not include statistics on apartments.

¹² Town of Cornwall Grand List, Last Updated January 24, 2022.

¹³ ACRPR Draft Population and Housing Chapter, p. 28.

¹⁴ ACRPR Draft Population and Housing Chapter, p. 27.

¹⁵ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/homeownership-costs/home-price-affordability>.

¹⁶ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/snapshot>.

¹⁷ 80% * \$68,825

¹⁸ 30% * \$68,825

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019.

²⁰ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/homeownership-costs/homeowner-cost-burden>.

in Cornwall spent 30 percent or more of their monthly incomes on housing costs in 2015-19, as compared to 75 percent in 2009.²¹ This compares to 51 percent of statewide renters in 2015-19.²² Median rent in Cornwall for 2015-19 was \$1,155, whereas the Statewide median was \$985.²³

Future Need for Housing

The future need for housing in Cornwall will continue to be driven by several factors including change in population, change in household size, change in the characteristics of households, homeowner finances, the cost of permitting and construction, the uses of existing units and the character and composition of the existing housing stock in town.

As the demographics of the population change, there may also be shifts in the type of housing Cornwall's residents want. Over the past 20 years, many of the homes constructed in Cornwall have been significantly larger and located further out in the rural areas than many of the older homes in town. In time, these houses become difficult for elderly residents to maintain and may be located too far from needed services. Options for single-family homes, including condominiums, town houses, apartments and adaptive re-use should continue to be explored to determine if they could be accommodated in certain areas of Cornwall in a manner that is compatible with the community's character.

In order to maintain a demographically balanced community, Cornwall needs to attract (and retain) younger residents as well older residents. Currently, most of the children growing up in Cornwall leave the community after high school. While most parents want their children to continue with their education or start their careers, many hope that they will ultimately be able to return to the area to find jobs, own homes and start their own families. This is currently very difficult for most of Cornwall's young people, as there is a shortage of housing in Cornwall that is safe, affordable and suitable for young individuals and families.

The Town should encourage the development of additional workforce and affordable housing that meets the strong demand for safe and affordable housing that is right-sized both for younger individuals and families, as well as older residents with limited means. The latest generation of workforce, affordable and mixed income housing is based on good planning, minimal impact and recreating the neighborhood design of New England villages. Construction of new housing options, including rental housing, consistent with these good development practices should be a priority to make it possible for young people, as well as elderly residents, to live in Cornwall. The 2012 Habitat for Humanity project, which includes four new housing units on DeLong Road, is a good example of implementing these goals and should continue to be encouraged for the future.

²¹ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/rental-housing-costs/renter-cost-burden>.

²² <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/rental-housing-costs/renter-cost-burden>.

²³ <https://www.housingdata.org/profile/rental-housing-costs/median-gross-rent>.