



Affordable Housing Plan

Town of Vernon

Planning & Zoning
Commission

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INTRODUCTION





Impetus

Effective July 24, 2017 The Connecticut General Statutes, Title 8 Chapter 126a, Section 8-30j requires every municipality in the State to prepare and adopt an Affordable Housing Plan once every five years. For inaugural plans, municipalities have until July 2022 to adopt an Affordable Housing Plan. The Plan must specify how the Town of Vernon intends to increase affordable opportunities within the community.

The Plan of Conservation & Development and the Affordable Housing Plan are companion local policy documents

Definition

Affordable Housing is generally defined as housing (rental or owner-occupied) which costs less than 30% of the gross income of a household earning 80% or less of the area median income (ami). Paying more than 30% of housing costs like mortgage, rent, insurance, utilities, means that a household is cost-burdened, making it potentially difficult to afford other necessities such as food, medical care, clothing, and transportation. This calculation is adjusted annually and by household size:

Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford Metro FY 2021 AMI=\$104,300 80% of AMI			
			
1 person \$58760	2 person \$65950	3 Person \$74160	4 Person \$82320

Monthly Housing Costs (Rent/Mortgage plus Utilities) at 30% for Select Households	
1 Person	\$1442
2 Person	\$1648
3 Person	\$1854
4 Person	\$2058

PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT (POCD)

An updated POCD, the Town's aspirational policy document intended to help guide development, open space preservation, and other local initiatives, was adopted in November of 2021. Housing Policy, with specific goals, objectives, strategies, and implementation measures, is a point of prioritization. Goal 4 of the Quality of Life Theme:

Maintain a diverse housing stock that supports all people of all ages, income levels, life stages, and backgrounds.

Objectives include:

- Provide a diversity of housing for all
- Promote a range of residential densities and housing types (all types as below)
- Grow sustainable, efficient, and accessible housing choices
- Increase the number of affordable units



A critical Implementation measure is to complete an Town wide Affordable Housing Plan.

HOUSING & DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

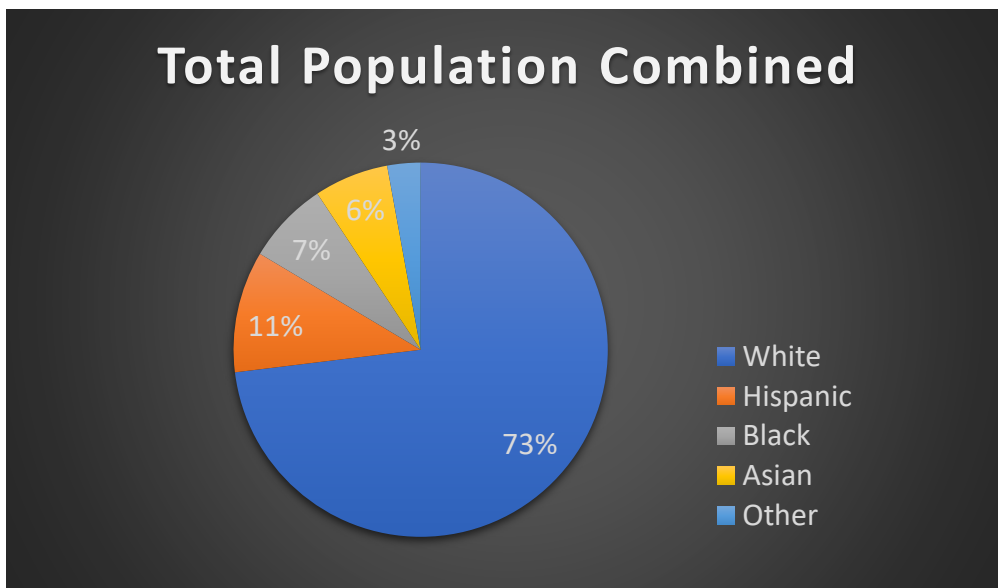
Housing Characteristics in Vernon

- 14,761 units (13,918 occupied, 843 vacant)
- 47% of the units are rented; 52% are owner occupied.
- 51% single family units; 49% consists of 2 or more units.
- *Estimated 2339 units are designated as “affordable,” or 16.83% (based on new 2020 State data).*
- Median House price: \$207,600; Median Rent: \$1058

The pursuit of affordable housing is a hallmark of Connecticut State planning law. The Affordable Housing Appeals Act (Connecticut General Statute 8-30g) sets a goal of 10% of all units in a municipality meet the definition of affordable. According to the Connecticut Department of Housing, Vernon maintains over 16% affordable units.

Population & Income Characteristics

- 2020 Total Population-30,215 (3% growth from 2010)
- Median Household Income-\$64,587
- 9.5% in poverty
- 4.4% unemployment
- Please see the POCD for additional data sets



VERNON HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Vernon Housing Authority (VHA) plays an important role in local affordable housing options, serving the housing needs the Town for over 60 years. The Housing Authority provides multiple subsidized programs for community members including the Section 8 Voucher Program, Public Housing locations and projects, Congregate care, and other housing resources for Vernon residents.

During the POCD data collection phase, the VHA provided a great deal of information related to their operations, illustrating how immense the demand is in Vernon for affordable housing opportunities. For their public housing availability, the VHA reported 100% occupancy (June 2020) with over 500 applicants on the waiting list. For the voucher program, there were over 4,000 applicants on the Housing Voucher Program waitlist.

Select/Estimated Affordable Units and Voucher Availability In the Town of Vernon	
VHA Properties	323
Housing Choice Voucher (Federal)	317
State of CT Housing Voucher (State)	666
CT Rental Assistance	485
Project Based Vouchers	54
Private Developer Subsidized or LITEC Units	384

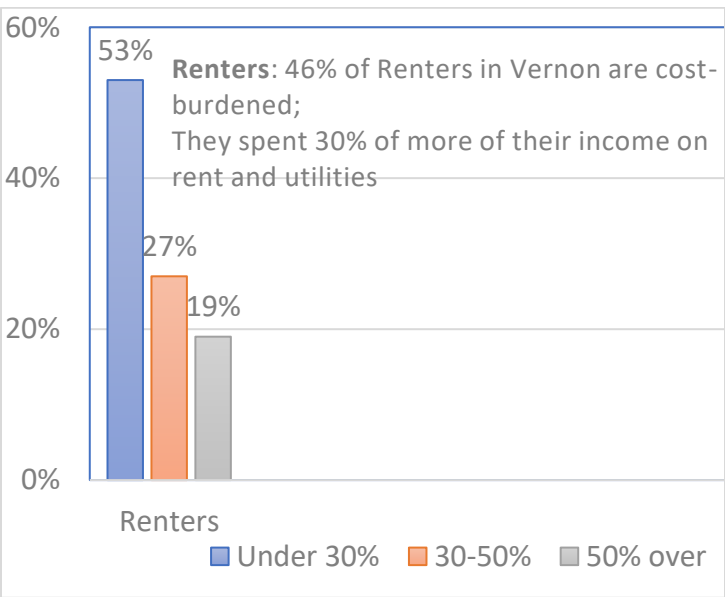
Other Below-Market Options

In Vernon, there are approximately 384 affordable residential units under private apartment ownership in projects such as Loom City Lofts, Old Talcott Mill, and Park West Apartments. These projects typically include Federal Low-income Housing Tax Credits to the owners for the provision of affordable units, in whole or in part of multi-family developments.

ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING BURDEN & GAP

Cost Burdened Households

36% of ALL households in Vernon spend more than 30% of the household income on housing and related costs. 46% of renters and 28% of homeowners fit this category. Renters demand for affordable units is the most significant, identifiable gap.



2021 Government Assisted Units
1509

2021 Rental Assistance Units
470

2021 Deed Restricted Units
12

Waitlists

The waitlist numbers for both the Housing Authority Voucher program and private sector subsidized units (anecdotally) in the thousands represents a clear deficit in the supply of affordable units. Demand outpaces the supply by multitudes.

ASSESSMENT OF BARRIERS

The availability of new affordable units may be constricted by a number of local factors.

1. **Market demand a limited land Zoned for multi-family units.** The Vernon housing marketplace is robust in terms of market-rate multi-family development. Recent demand has brought the Town several hundred new multi-family units in such developments as Trail Run and The Lofts. Market rate demand and market rate financing appear to often hedge ahead of subsidized development. Vernon is also limited in the total undeveloped acres for multi-family development. Although the recent POCD provides support for new multi-family development, existing zoning is quite limited.
2. **Opposition to projects.** Particularly higher density projects of any style, public opposition during the public process can be challenging for owners, developments, and applicants. While many of the public concerns for multi-family projects or subdivisions are quite legitimate (traffic, design, architectural, stormwater runoff, etc...), the process can be tinged with irrational, unreasonable, or other subjective biases. This raises the development costs for the project and dissuades potential investors.
3. **Aging Housing Stock.** Over 54% of Vernon's housing stock was constructed before 1970; 20% before 1950. An aging housing stock increases the costs on homeownership, first-time home buyers, and investors. Repair costs, energy efficiencies, roofs, foundations, and other major systems increase costs and presents a true barrier to affordability.
4. **Funding and Financing.** The VHA spends a great majority of its capital reserves on repair and maintenance. There currently is little opportunity to expand the total number of units they manage. Additional public investment could initiate new units based on current demand.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

Provide a diversity of housing and housing types for all ages and income levels and expand affordable housing opportunities.

- a. Review and Update Zoning Requirements to permit accessory dwelling units, in a manner best suited for the Town.
- b. To encourage a mixed-income approach to housing, evaluate a community inclusionary requirement for a certain percentage of affordable units within every new market-rate development.
- c. Expand Landlord education and outreach to encourage, maintain, and/or require all units achieve minimum quality and good repair standards.
- d. Consider a long-term approach to enhanced housing inspections.
- e. Support the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority mortgage programs to expand home ownership opportunities.
- f. Increase the number of affordable units offered by the Vernon Housing Authority.
- g. Identify opportunities for live-work housing units in the Rockville Historic District, in support of the Arts district initiation.