

5. HOUSING

The availability and quality of housing are important determinants of a community's quality of life. A priority of this plan is to ensure the availability of high quality and energy efficient housing to all segments of the community.

5.1 Existing Conditions

Housing Profile

The 2010 Census data was not available for the 2011 Town Plan update. Efforts were made to obtain interim data, where possible. However, the 2000 census data was relied upon in various sections of this chapter. In 2000, census data indicated there were 7170 dwelling units in the Town of Essex, an increase of 13.6 percent (860 dwellings) since 1990. Research done in conjunction with the 2010 Essex Economic Development and Vision Plan indicates that from 2000 to 2009, Essex added nearly 700 new households, increasing the total from more than 7,000 to more than 7,700. This continued to reflect a slowing since the decades of the 1970's and 1980's when the Town experienced an increase of 57.8 percent (1,764 dwellings) and 31 percent (1,493 dwellings), respectively. Housing count data through 2000 for the Town of Essex are shown in Table 5-1 and Figure 5-1.

Town-generated information suggests that the Essex housing stock has grown by 3.4 percent since the 2000 US Census. From 2000 through 2004, 242 building permits were issued in the Town outside the Village. In the same time period, 136 building permits were issued in the Village.

Trends in housing growth have been similar to those described for population. Prior to 1960, most new housing in the Town occurred in the Village. Between 1960 and 1980, most new development occurred in the area outside of the Village. Between 1980 and 1990, the two areas of the Town experienced roughly similar amounts of residential development. After 1990, most new development again occurred in the area outside of the Village. Updated figures for trends in housing growth are contained in the 2008 Essex Open Space Plan and are included in Chapter 11, Land Use and Development. It is anticipated that the Town outside of the Village will continue to receive a greater share of new housing as the Village nears build-out.

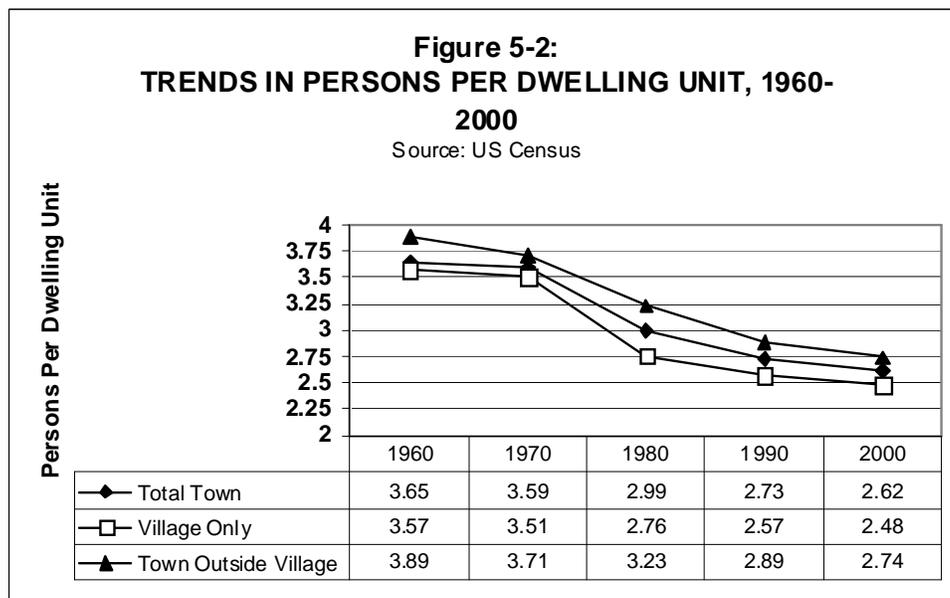
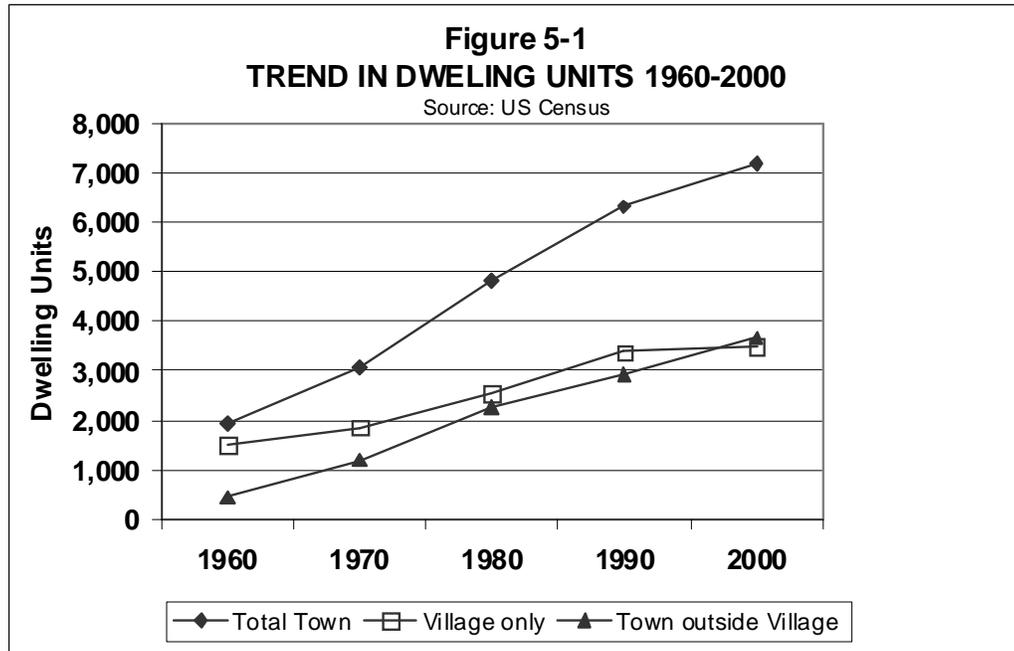
Since 1960, housing in the total Town increased from about 8.7 percent of the county housing stock to about 12.2 percent. From 1990 to 2000, the share of housing in the Village dropped from 6.5 to 5.9 percent, indicating that housing in the Town outside the Village accounted for an increasing share of the county's housing stock.

Table 5-1 COMPARISON OF TOTAL HOUSING UNITS: 1960-2000						
	YEAR					Average Housing Units Per Year 1990-2000
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	
Essex Town	450	1,196	2,279	2,935	3,669	73.4
Essex Jct. Village	1,494	1,857	2,544	3,375	3,501	12.6
Both Village and Town	1,944	3,053	4,826	6,310	7,170	86.0
Colchester						
Colchester	652	3,088	4,566	5,922	6,727	80.5
South Burlington						
South Burlington	273	2,879	3,972	5,437	6,498	106.1
Williston						
Williston	400	908	1,284	1,874	3,036	116.2
Chittenden Co.						
Chittenden Co.	22,464	30,664	41,339	52,095	58,864	676.9
Vermont						
Vermont	136,307	165,063	223,198	271,214	294,382	2316.8
PERCENT OF CHITTENDEN COUNTY						
Both Essex Village and Town	8.65	9.96	11.67	12.11	12.18	-
Colchester	2.90	10.07	11.05	11.37	11.43	-
South Burlington	1.22	9.39	9.61	10.44	11.04	-
Williston	1.78	2.96	3.11	3.60	5.16	-
Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau						

Research done for the 2010 Essex Economic Development and Vision Plan indicate that Essex added households at a rate of 1.1 percent from 2000 to 2009, greater than that of surrounding Chittenden County (0.9 percent and the State of Vermont (0.8 percent).

As in the Village, available land in the Town outside the Village is becoming scarcer. One likely result is a decrease in construction of single-family homes and an increase in multi-family housing. This direction in new housing would continue recent trends of declining household size. Figure 5-2 shows that the average number of persons per dwelling unit for the total Town declined from 3.65 in 1960 to 2.62 in 2000. The pattern is similar for dwellings in the Village and in the Town outside the Village, although the average persons per dwelling unit is smaller in the Village. The decrease in the number of persons per dwelling unit is consistent with the increase in the proportion of dwellings in multiple unit structures which has occurred in recent decades. It is likely that these

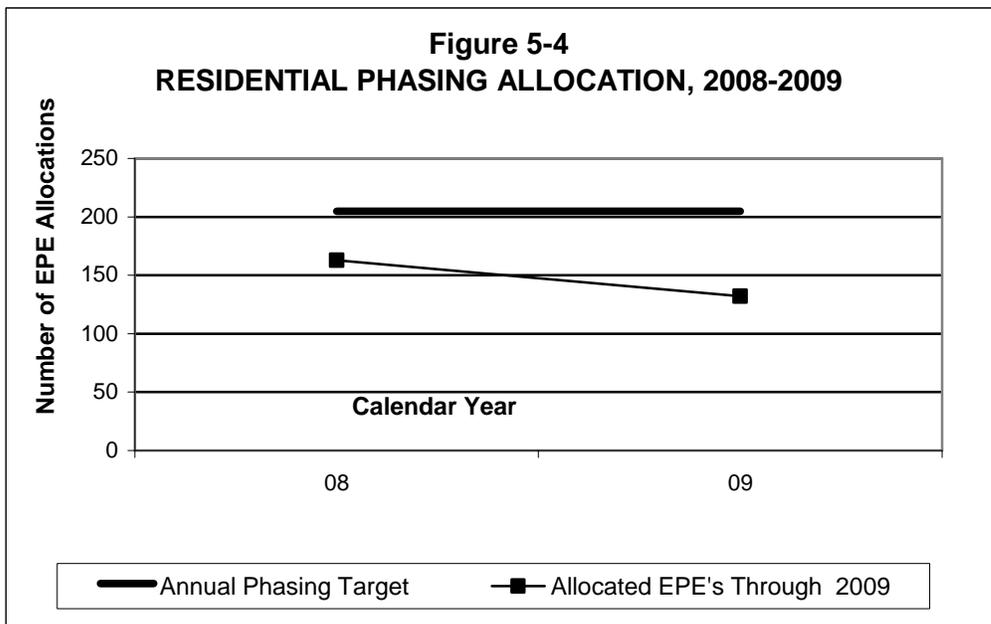
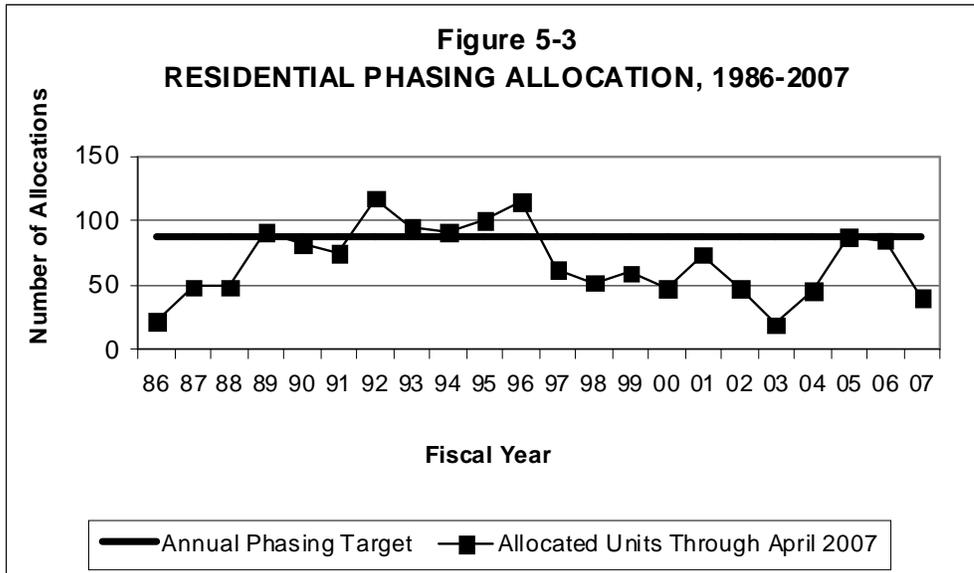
trends have continued since 1990, but the incompatibility of housing and population data sources makes it difficult to evaluate current persons per dwelling unit sizes.



Residential Development Phasing

The Town phases its residential developments by establishing the number of units which can be built annually. In 2008, the Town approved a Residential Development Phasing policy with an aim for growth not to exceed 205 people per year. The number of people per year is derived from an Estimated Population Equivalent (EPE) based on one person per bedroom.

Prior to the current phasing policy, the policy in existence ~~that~~ had a target (ceiling) of 88 average annual dwelling units. Figure 5-3 illustrates the extent to which the total number of approved units has remained under the previous annual phasing limit. Figure 5-4 illustrates, under the current phasing policy, how the number has continued to remain under the phasing limit.



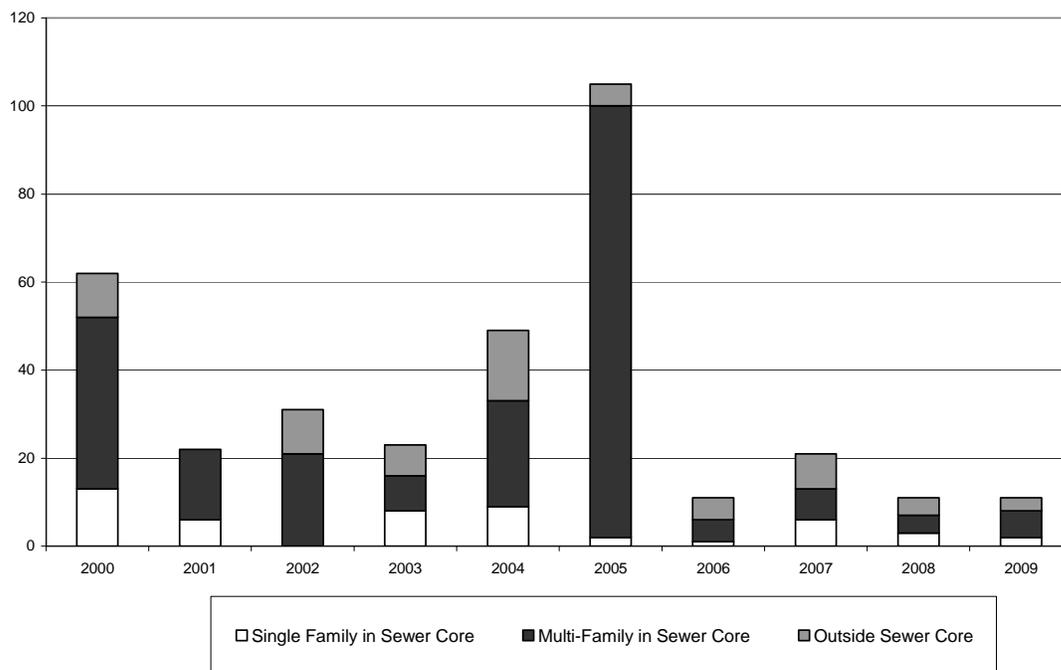
Source: Community Development Department

The Town’s Residential Development Phasing Policy also encourages certain housing locations and types. One goal is that phasing allocations shall attempt to achieve at least 80 percent of housing growth on municipal sewer. In pursuit of that goal, a maximum of 20

units for any single project per year may be approved within the Sewer Core area while only five units for any single project per year may be approved outside that area.

Annual building permits in the Town outside the Village have been tracked according to residential phasing. Figure 5-5 indicates the number and percentage of building permits issued for single-family and multi-family units inside and outside of the sewer core.

**Figure 5-5
Zoning Permits In and Outside the Sewer Core**



Source: Community Development Department

Housing Forecasts

In Chapter 2 it was shown that expected population growth for the entire Town of Essex would range between 264 and 323 persons per year, and that 70 percent of that would probably occur in the Town outside the Village. Based on the 2000 average of 2.76 persons per dwelling unit for the Town outside of the Village, this range corresponds to between 67.7 and 82.5 new dwellings per year in the Town outside of the Village. However, persons per dwelling unit will vary, due both to changing demographics throughout the area and to the type of housing that is built in Essex.

Single-family homes comprised 91 percent of all dwellings in Essex in 1967. Yet recent construction has been quite different. Of 242 building permits issued from 2000 through 2004 for new homes in the Town outside the Village, 62 percent were for condominiums/townhouses. With smaller land parcels remaining within the sewer core, the trend toward dwelling units with fewer people per unit is likely to continue. Thus, the

Town's residential phasing policy must be refined to adjust the annual total dwelling unit maximum based on the size and type of units being constructed.

The Town plans its housing policies with population targets and land use goals in mind. The majority, 80 percent or more, of new housing should be located within the sewer core area. With limited available land, higher densities and taller buildings will help achieve a pattern of compact development. Finally, the overall growth rate should be similar to recent historic patterns so that the Town's ability to provide services at a reasonable cost will not be overburdened.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a major issue in Vermont and across the nation. The Town of Essex created an Affordable Housing Task Force in cooperation with the Village of Essex Junction. The findings and recommendations of this committee were presented in great detail in *Report of the Essex/Essex Junction Affordable Housing Task Force*, March 1990.

The work of the Affordable Housing Task Force in 1990 has not been updated in more than 20 years and the Task Force is no longer active. The Town should take steps to appoint a new ad-hoc housing task force to address housing of all types and for all income levels, including affordable housing as defined in the Zoning Regulations.

In 2004 the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission released recommendations from its Housing Targets Task Force which contained recommended housing targets for all Chittenden County communities. The targets have not been updated at the time of this plan update. While the Town of Essex has raised questions about the methodology used in that analysis, it is useful to note that the recommended target for all of the Town of Essex (1,170 units in ten years) is within four percent of the number of units needed to accommodate the projected town wide growth set forth in Chapter 2 of 264-323 persons per year, assuming the town-wide average persons per dwelling unit from 2000 as set forth in Figure 5-2. If the 70/30 split between Town and Village suggested in Chapter 2 is applied to the recommended town-wide housing targets, the target for the Town outside of the Village would be 819 units, or an average of 81.9 per year during the ten year period. This target is lower than the Town's current phasing limit, and generally consistent with the growth rate set forth in Chapter 2.

The report of the Affordable Housing Task Force also recommended that each town aim to achieve 10 percent of its total housing target as affordable housing, and another 10 percent as moderate income housing (i.e. affordable to households having incomes between 80 percent and 120 percent of the SMA's median household income).

The Zoning Regulations were amended in 2008 to increase the density bonuses to allow for affordable housing projects as Planned Unit Development-Residential (PUD-R) in various zoning districts throughout Town.

It is recommended that the proposed ad hoc housing task force consider this information, along with all other available input, as it works to develop a housing policy and strategy for the Town.

5.2 Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 5.1: Address the housing needs of Essex's projected low and moderate income and senior population.

Objective 5.1.1: Appoint an ad-hoc housing task force to gather appropriate information, assess need, develop target goals, and prepare and make recommendation to the Selectboard for all types of housing and for all income levels including affordable and senior housing. Designate a staff person to assist the efforts of the Task Force. The Task Force may consider, among others, specific approaches described under other goals and objectives in this Chapter to achieve desired housing objectives.

Strategy 5.1.1.1: Review all available data describing housing in Essex.

Strategy 5.1.1.2: Review approaches taken or recommended in other communities.

Strategy 5.1.1.3: Establish long-term (i.e. 5 year and 10 year) targets for construction of new housing of various degrees of affordability, including affordable housing as defined above.

Strategy 5.1.1.4: Inventory publicly owned lands and other vacant parcels to determine their feasibility as sites for affordable housing.

Strategy 5.1.1.5: Maintain an inventory of the existing housing stock. Update information on the amount, type and cost of housing being constructed to assist in monitoring progress towards affordable housing targets.

Strategy 5.1.1.6: Develop recommendations for meeting the specified housing targets, which may include but are not limited to the recommendations below.

Objective 5.1.2: Preserve the existing stock of affordable housing.

Strategy 5.1.2.1: Work with a land trust or other housing entity to acquire existing affordable properties that might be sold and priced out of the affordable range.

Strategy 5.1.2.2: Consider tax stabilization for rental units having long-term affordability restrictions.

Objective 5.1.3: Adopt zoning regulations and related policies that will encourage development of new affordable housing in Essex.

Strategy 5.1.3.1: Encourage development of energy efficient affordable housing in mixed income residential neighborhoods.

Strategy 5.1.3.2: Consider use of expedited phasing, sewer allocations, improved sewer access within the core, reduction or waiver of impact fees, inclusionary zoning, and/or more flexible development standards if needed to bring about affordable housing.

Objective 5.1.4: Allocate public and private resources and promote programs to assist the development of housing of all types and for all income levels including affordable and senior housing.

Strategy 5.1.4.1: Provide incentives such as density bonuses or shared infrastructure costs to encourage and allow builders to develop affordable housing. Request regional and state participation in these efforts.

Strategy 5.1.4.2: Remain an active partner to private or non-profit housing developers seeking available tax credits.

Objective 5.1.5: Contribute to regional efforts addressing homelessness.

Goal 5.2: Encourage a reasonable diversity of housing types and choices between rental and ownership in a variety of locations suitable for residential development and convenient to employment centers, shopping facilities, schools and public transportation.

Objective 5.2.1: Encourage a mixture of housing suitable for all income levels.

Strategy 5.2.1.1: Provide incentives for affordable housing as in Goal 1, but allow opportunities for new housing that will serve moderate and higher income levels.

Strategy 5.2.1.2: Encourage diversity of housing types within the same residential neighborhood or development, perhaps through revised planned development provisions.

Strategy 5.2.1.3: Investigate ways to increase available residential density in Mixed Use and High Density districts. Consider use of standards other than density per acre for multi-unit buildings to encourage greater unit density.

Strategy 5.2.1.4: Encourage mixed uses with housing integrated into existing and new commercial districts.

Strategy 5.2.1.5: Increase flexibility in the use of “accessory apartments.” Allow a property to qualify if the owner lives in either the larger or smaller apartment.

Objective 5.2.2: Preserve the existing stock of rental housing.

Objective 5.2.3: Encourage the location of housing at suitable locations adjacent to commercial centers where employment and public transportation exists.

Strategy 5.2.3.1: Continue encouragement of residential units as part of commercial projects in districts such as MXD, MXD-C, R-B and CTR where they already are permitted.

Strategy 5.2.3.2: Encourage an appropriate mix of residential and commercial uses.

Goal 5.3: Encourage housing development of designs and in locations that promote and enhance existing neighborhood centers and preserve the Town’s more rural areas and character.

Objective 5.3.1: Promote higher density cluster development in and around the Town Center, Susie Wilson Road and portions of Essex Center.

Strategy 5.3.1.1: As in strategies for affordable housing, investigate the promotion of standards other than density per acre for multi-unit buildings in order to encourage greater unit density.

Objective 5.3.2: Establish a target of at least 80 percent of new housing development to take place within designated growth areas as opposed to more rural areas.

Strategy 5.3.2.1: Continue to use zoning and subdivision regulations to encourage development within the Town’s designated sewer service boundary. Modest adjustments to the boundary line may be considered as long as a clear division between growth areas and rural areas is maintained.

Strategy 5.3.2.2: If sewer capacity becomes available for reallocation, the first priority should be the support of higher residential densities within the sewer core.

Objective 5.3.3: Residential areas should be connected via trails, sidewalks and roads to facilitate a sense of community and movement between neighborhoods, schools, shopping and workplaces.

Objective 5.3.4: Continue to adopt zoning and subdivision regulations and related policies to preserve the Town's more rural areas and character.

Strategy 5.3.4.1: Provide incentives for use of Planned Unit Development Residential (PUD-Rs) when land is subdivided. Establish building sites that will provide compatibility with rural character and will protect all significant features as shown on Map 17.

Strategy 5.3.4.2: Preserve historic buildings. Encourage additional uses in barns to help preserve those structures.

Goal 5.4: Promote sufficient housing to meet the specific needs of Essex's elderly population.

Objective 5.4.1: Encourage provision of elderly housing to serve the needs of senior citizens of all income levels.

Strategy 5.4.1.1: Continue to encourage development of a variety of housing types to satisfy diverse needs – such as single-level homes for independent seniors, housing units equipped for handicap access or designated to allow future adaptation to handicap use, and multi-level care facilities.

Objective 5.4.2: Adopt zoning regulations and related policies that will encourage development of new elderly housing.

Strategy 5.4.2.1: Encourage the development of accessory apartments to enable elders to remain in their homes or to reside in family members' homes.

Strategy 5.4.2.2: Reduce parking requirements to reflect actual demand in elderly housing projects.

Objective 5.4.3: Pursue policies that will enhance housing affordability for elderly residents.

Goal 5.5: Promote construction/renovation of housing that is energy-efficient, uses renewable sources of energy, and outputs a minimal carbon footprint.

Objective 5.5.1: Encourage property developers/owners to strive for energy-efficient housing construction and renovation.