

9. Housing

Consistent with Connecticut’s stated growth principle to “*Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs,*” North Stonington’s vision as it relates to housing emphasizes the importance of housing for all ages and income. Residents also envision current and future housing patterns that will reflect the rural atmosphere, contribute to the small town spirit, and help further the Town’s economic development goals. The following statements result from an analysis of current conditions and trends and community opinion.

- **Residents support the expansion of housing choices.**
- **There is a need for more housing choices –North Stonington is overinvested in single family houses, leaving few opportunities for those who need or desire other housing options (primarily for elderly citizens and younger residents).**
- **Housing prices grew at a much greater pace than income, creating a gap in what is affordable to new homebuyers.**
- **North Stonington severely lags in creating state-qualified affordable housing.**

9.1 Planning Context and Implications

Demographic trends not only indicate that Connecticut’s population is aging, and household size shrinking, but also of note is the equally large number of young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 associated with the “millennial generation.” These members outnumber the “baby boom” generation and have vastly different needs and desires, thus creating additional planning challenges for many communities who seek to provide for their aging residents while also attracting and retaining younger ones. Mobility is a new trend for younger people who will go to where the work is and where housing is “affordable.”

Change in Income Compared to Change in Sales Price, North Stonington			
	2000	2010	% Change 2000-2010
Town Median Household Income	\$61,733	\$75,162	22%
State Median Household Income	\$53,935	\$65,686	22%
Housing Value	\$159,400	\$241,000	51%
Median Sales Price SFH	\$166,000	\$220,950	33%

Figure 15 - Sources: US Census and The Warren Group.

In the past decade, the percentage change in housing value and median sales price has outpaced household income as indicated in Figure 15. The median sales price for a single-family house in North Stonington has further increased to \$263,000 in 2012. If income growth continues to lag behind growth in sales prices, it might become much more difficult for residents to remain in Town if they need to or chose to move into a new unit. Furthermore, an analysis of wages for jobs in North Stonington indicates that North Stonington’s housing stock is not affordable to local workers; even in two-worker households.

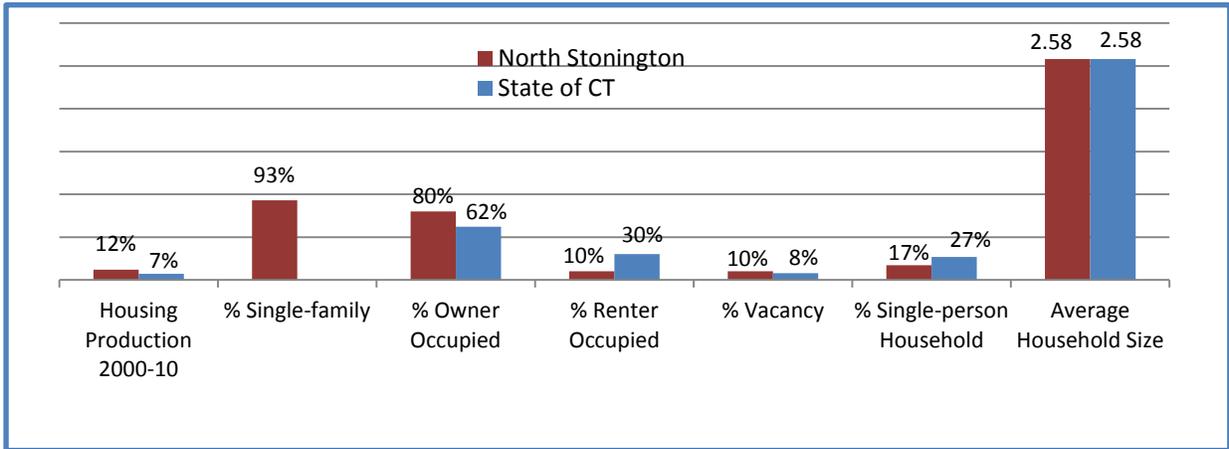


Figure 16 - Sources: US Census and The Warren Group

North Stonington’s housing stock might be another reason for the migration of younger and older adults from town. 93% of the “housing portfolio” is comprised of single family housing units of which 80% are owner occupied, leaving few alternatives to owning a single family house in North Stonington – alternatives that might be important for young adults, empty nesters, and seniors. The housing stock is attractive to families, which may explain the continued in-migration of families with children.

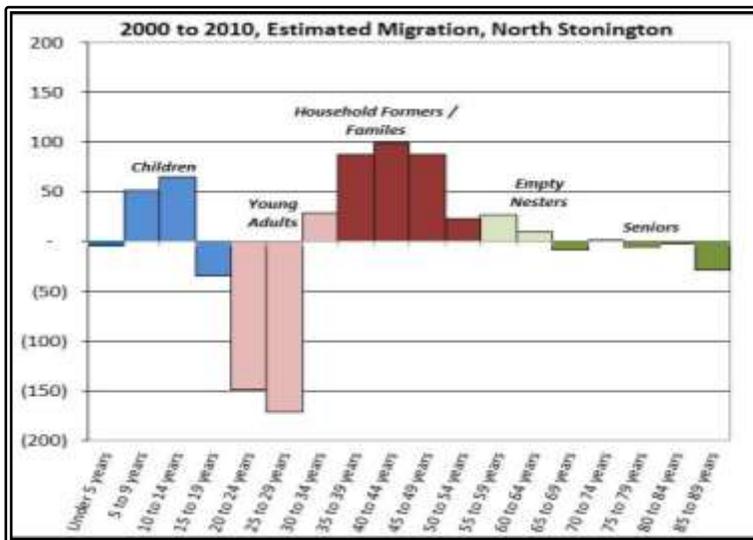


Figure 17 - Sources: US Census, CT Department of Public Health and Planimetrics.



Example of Multi-family Housing (above) and Single-family (below)



9.2 Housing and Economic Development

Comprising nearly 80% of the town’s Grand List, housing is an important source of revenue for the town. The availability of workforce housing is also essential to sustain any future commercial growth as it has been shown to increase employment (and spending) by giving employers a competitive advantage because of their subsequent ability to attract and retain workers. **Encouraging workforce housing in or near the existing commercial and industrial zones would increase the town’s attractiveness for new commercial growth.**

9.3 Affordable Housing

As a tool to expand housing choice, the state currently has a controversial law on its books that **requires** 10% of the existing housing in a town to be “affordable” (meaning a household earning less than 60-80% of the median income must spend no more than 30% of its income on total housing costs)⁴. Because of

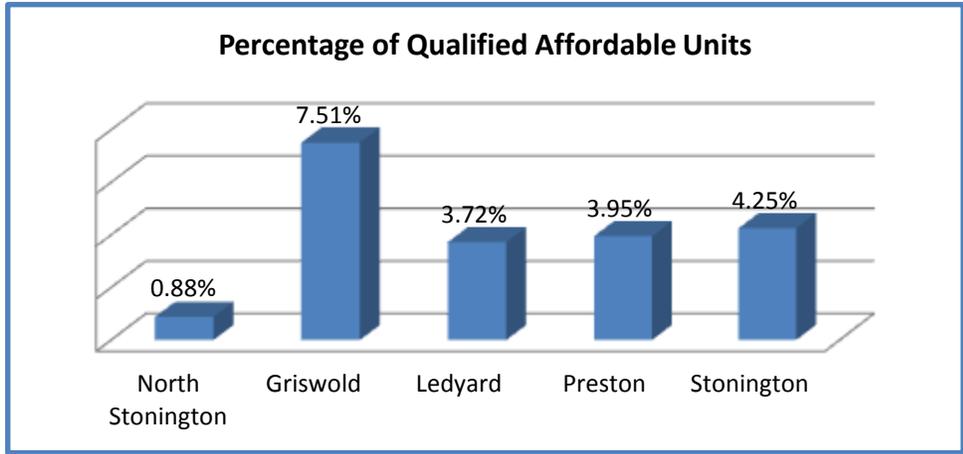


Figure 18 – Sources: CT Department of Community and Economic Development and US Census.

its history as a working class town, North Stonington probably has a lot of units that would meet that criteria, however the *state also requires* that the home either be deed-restricted; bought with a CHFA loan; or subsidized by the government (i.e. funded by HOME or

Community Development Grant money) to be counted as “affordable.” If a municipality has less than the required 10%, a developer can propose a housing project without following local zoning regulations such as dimensional requirements, setbacks, buffers, density or building character/design. There are very few ways for a town to legally deny such an application and towns are rarely successful in defeating this type of development. Currently, North Stonington only has 18 qualified units – or less than 1% of the required 10%. Because of our very low percentage, North Stonington is extremely vulnerable to state mandated development (as are many rural towns).

I want to see an increase in the amount and type of housing....	
...so my elderly parents/grandparents don't have to leave town when they retire.	35.10%
...so my kids can live here when they get out of school.	29.40%
... so we have more kids in our schools.	19.80%
... to make NS a more vibrant community.	36.60%
... so our teachers, firemen, and service employees (etc.) can live in town.	41.40%
OR...We have enough Housing choice and quantity in town.	39.30%

Figure 19 - Source: 2013 Community Survey

With 80% of North Stonington residents owning their own homes, the town is clearly affordable. The units however, do not count in the eyes of the state because they are not deed restricted or subsidized. Rural communities typically have limited access to utilities, transportation, and an employment center thus complicating the development of certain types of housing that could raise their percentages, but there are other alternatives to explore such as smaller multi-family units, senior housing, a community designed housing project that is consistent with community character and values, or creating an

⁴ See Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 126, Section 8-30g

incentive program to deed restrict existing units. (See the 2012 Housing Plan for a more detailed discussion on housing strategies.)

In an effort to expand housing choice and increase the town's percentage of qualified affordable units, the North Stonington Affordable Housing Committee recently applied for and was awarded a State Housing Grant to develop an incentive housing zone which would allow for residential and mixed-use developments with a minimum of 20% affordable units. Additionally, the Planning and Zoning Commission recently approved an 18-unit subdivision which contained six *qualified affordable* units. An 84 unit affordable housing project along Route 2 (Meadow Court) received initial local and state approvals, and now is before the Water Pollution Control Authority for their approval. If they receive final approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the units are built, the town would have enough affordable units to qualify it for a four year moratorium from state mandated (8-30g) housing developments.

Another point that was emphasized during the public input meetings was that "affordable housing" simply means housing available in a price range whereby the total housing costs are less than 30% of a person's income. Many teachers, firemen, EMTs, town-employees, and hospitality workers would qualify for this type of housing. Another misconception is that all people who qualify for affordable housing require additional services or a larger investment in transportation than the town can afford. The fact is not all people who qualify for affordable housing require transportation services or other public assistance. Most teachers, firemen, town hall employees, and even seniors drive and are fully functioning members of the community. Having affordable units in town will not necessarily mean a drain on town resources to provide services.

9.4 Livability and Sustainability Through Expanded Housing Choice

The whole issue of "housing" and "housing choice" is intertwined with many other planning issues such as economic development, vibrancy and quality of life. Vibrant, livable communities are those that recognize the need for housing opportunities and lifestyle amenities for all demographics. North Stonington must be proactive in order to expand housing choice to meet the needs of a changing demographic and market in a manner that not only protects the character and quality of life, but actually supports and promotes its community values. For North Stonington, it is not so much that residents are opposed to expanding housing choice; it is more an issue of design, scale, and location. Survey results showed little to no support for large multi-family units, but there was support for smaller 3-5 unit buildings as well as larger senior housing facilities provided they were well designed and attractively landscaped or screened. Other means identified to expand housing choice identified were: the introduction of mixed use development in select areas; home



Example of mixed-use (residential above commercial)



Example of small-scale multifamily unit

conversions; farm worker housing; and conservation subdivisions. Though one third of North Stonington residents live in the higher density Kingswood-Meadow Wood and Cedar Ridge developments, there was little support for allowing this type of development to be built in the future.

9.5 Maintain Overall Densities While Allowing Additional Housing Opportunities

Residential growth trends, as informed by changing markets and demographics, include more rental units, smaller more customized houses, multi-generational designs, and an array of choices for seniors. Rural communities such as North Stonington may not be in favor of a more “urbanized suburbia” that can accommodate the needs of people of all ages, ethnicity, and income, but planning limited areas that *are* suitable for new and innovative residential development can effectively draw inappropriate development away from rural areas and resources that contribute to our character. Planned focused growth allows the town to attract and retain younger residents, ensuring a more vibrant, sustainable community in the future.



Conservation subdivision in North Kingstown, RI (North Kingstown Green).

9.6 Summary

Consistent with the principles identified in the *2012 Housing Plan* (and included below), North Stonington’s housing strategies will concentrate on: building its capacity to implement housing initiatives; maintaining overall densities while still allowing additional housing opportunities; striving to maximize the potential of existing housing units to meet housing needs; pursuing community-initiated housing projects; and encouraging the private sector to create housing choices.

New housing opportunities should:

1. Enhance our community:

- Reflect our rural character.
- Provide a mix of ages and income levels with opportunities for families, our work force, young adults and seniors.
- Support and promote our agricultural and small town values.

2. Be well-planned:

- Be of a type, size and style that is appropriate in our community.
- Give deference to small scale projects.
- Be of high quality design.
- Be supported by on-site water and septic.

3. Be located in appropriate places:

- Areas for village style housing might work in certain areas along the western end of Route 2, certain areas along 184, and near I-95. Mixed use could work in these same areas.

