

CHAPTER 5 - HOUSING & GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Williston's population growth and change was documented in Chapter 2. As the town's population has grown, that growth has expressed itself in the growth of the town's housing supply. Table 5.A shows how that growth has translated into an increasing number of housing units over the past 50 years.

Table 5.A – Housing Units in Williston, Chittenden County and Vermont, 1960-2010

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Williston	400	908	1,284	1,874	3,036	3,652
- annual change	--	12.7%	4.1%	4.6%	6.2%	2.0%
- share of county housing	1.8%	3.0%	3.1%	3.6%	5.2%	5.5%
- share of county growth	--	6.2%	3.5%	5.5%	17.2%	9.0%
Chittenden County	22,467	30,668	41,339	52,095	58,864	65,722
- annual change	--	3.7%	3.5%	2.6%	1.3%	1.2%
Vermont	136,307	165,068	223,199	271,214	294,382	322,539
- annual change	--	2.1%	3.5%	2.2%	0.9%	1.0%

Source: Bureau of the Census

The decade between 2000 and 2010 saw a continuation of strong growth in the number of new housing units built in Williston; with 616 new houses built during that time period. This resulted in an average annualized rate of growth of approximately 2% each year. In contrast, the housing supply in Chittenden County as a whole averaged 1.2% per year, and the state of Vermont had an average annual growth rate of just 1.0% per year. The additional housing units built in Williston accounted for approximately 9% of the county's growth, and Williston now accounts for approximately 5.5% of the housing units in Chittenden County, up from 3.6% in 1990. While housing growth remained strong, this was significantly less than the 1,162 house build between 1990 and 2000.

The addition of 616 new housing units between 2000 and 2010 did not completely satisfy the demand for housing in Williston. The Census found that Williston had a vacancy rate of only 3.9%, compared to 5.9% vacancy for Chittenden County which had the lowest county-wide vacancy rate in Vermont in 2010. In contrast, a healthy real estate market normally has a vacancy rate of four to five percent. It should also be noted that this low vacancy rate was measured during a recessionary period when vacancy rates might be expected to rise as people delayed the formation of new households during times of economic stress.

Table 5.B Housing Occupancy and Vacancy Rates, 2010.

	Population	Housing Units			
		Total	Occupied	Vacant	% Vacant
Williston	8,698	3,652	3,514	138	3.8%
Chittenden County	156,545	65,722	61,827	3,895	5.9%
Vermont	625,741	322,539	256,442	66,097	20.5%

Source: Bureau of the Census

This element of the plan addresses the dilemma of a rapidly changing community.

- Growth has at times exceeded the town's ability to provide services. Sewage treatment capacity would have been exhausted without the recent treatment plant expansion, and available sewer treatment capacity is still limited. The town's schools currently have enough space for current enrollment levels, but until 2009 had to rely on portable classrooms. The town recently built two major public safety buildings, is improving highways, and extending sidewalks, all in an effort to catch up with growth. Fiscal realities, as well as a desire to maintain the community values stated in this plan, have led Williston to adopt the residential growth management system described in this chapter.

At the same time, the town recognizes that regulatory restraints on building contribute to the cost of housing. In 2009, the median household income in Chittenden County was approximately \$51,219, allowing the median household to reasonably purchase a home costing no more than about \$175,000, assuming a \$14,000 down payment. The median sale price of homes in Chittenden County in 2009 was approximately \$200,600. The small gap in housing affordability for the median family was rapidly magnified for those earning less. A household earning 80% of the median income can afford a home costing about \$182,000. The median price of a newly constructed home in Vermont was \$290,000 in 2010. A home buyer would need an income of \$86,000 and down payment and closing costs of \$24,000 to afford this home. In addition, recent local surveys have reported that the rental market in the Burlington area is extremely tight, with a vacancy rate of roughly 2%, a number found in only the tightest of housing markets. The shortage of affordable and workforce housing in Williston is described in Objective 5.2.

Two objectives are adopted here. Each addresses one horn of the dilemma Williston faces in trying to limit the pace of growth while encouraging diverse, affordable housing.

Objective 5.1 - Residential Growth Management. This objective provides the policy basis for Williston's residential growth management system, as it was recently revised. It also calls for minor improvements in the subdivision evaluation criteria.

Objective 5.2 – Housing Opportunities. This objective calls for the town, within the limitations of the residential growth management system, to promote a variety of types of housing, including dwellings that are affordable for Williston's residents and workforce.

5.1 Residential Growth Management - The Town of Williston will limit the rate of new residential development to a rate at which adequate public facilities and services can be provided. In setting its residential growth target, the town will also consider the impacts of housing development on the environment and on the character of the community and its neighborhoods.

Williston first established a residential growth management policy in 1990. The policies adopted here incorporate what has been learned in the administration of the current growth management system, which was adopted in 2005, then incorporated into the 2006 town plan. This plan supports the continued implementation of the current system designed to be implemented through the end of FY 2015. A new growth management system will be needed by the start of FY 2016, or July 1 2015, when the current system expires.

5.1.1 Link the Residential Growth Target with the Allocation of Capacity in the Sewage Treatment Plant. The DRB's power to approve dwelling units within the sewer service area (see Map 7 – Sewer Service Area) is now limited to the number of units for which capacity in the sewage treatment plant is available. 200,000 gallons per day were added to the plant's capacity in 2005. This makes it possible to sustain the residential growth target set in 5.1.2 and a modest level of industrial and commercial development through the end of FY 2015.

5.1.2. Set the Residential Growth Target at 80 Units Each Year. This plan continues the residential growth target of 80 new dwellings per year that was first established in 1998. Given the long term demographic trends and fiscal realities, the town's infrastructure, including the sewerage system, emergency services, transportation infrastructure, and schools can realistically absorb only this number of new dwellings each year, along with some modest commercial and industrial development.

5.1.3 Assign Portions of the Growth Target Consistent with Other Goals of this Plan. In order to ensure the realization of the goals of the town's Growth Center, 56 of the 80 dwelling units permitted each year are now assigned to the zoning districts in the town's Growth Center, MUCZD, MURZD, and TCZD. A dozen units are assigned to the remainder of the sewer service area which includes the Village Zoning District and the Residential Zoning District. The remaining twelve units are assigned to the Agriculture Rural/Residential Zoning District. There are three exceptions to these assignments. First, units that are not requested in one of the zoning districts outside of the Growth Center may be used in the zoning districts in the Growth Center. Second, as provided by Policy 3.6.2, proposed subdivisions in ARZD that meet certain criteria may compete for units that would ordinarily be assigned to the more intense zoning districts. The subdivision evaluation criteria have been revised to set separate criteria appropriate for each area.

5.1.4 Adopt More Specific Growth Management Criteria. Competition among subdivisions had been governed by six general criteria adopted into the subdivision regulations in 1998. More specific criteria that are tailored to each area identified in Policy 5.1.3 were adopted in 2005. They anticipate many objectives of this comprehensive plan, providing incentives for housing diversity and affordability, the provision of neighborhood parks, energy conservation, and open space conservation. These criteria will be reviewed and refined following adoption of this plan.

5.1.5 Provide for Small Residential Developments. Smaller residential subdivisions cannot compete successfully with larger developments under the revised subdivision evaluation criteria. Rather than sacrificing implementation of the town's goals to protect small landowners, the revised regulations allow up to four dwelling units per year to be allocated to small subdivisions outside the competitive review.

5.1.6 Encourage Higher Density Residential Development in the Town's Approved Growth Center. Consistent with the land use objectives of this plan (see Policy 3.1), the residential growth management system promotes housing development as part of mixed use development in the town's Growth Center near Taft Corners. The remaining development potential in the town's Growth Center is on large parcels and requires substantial infrastructure to achieve the town's long term goals. They include:

- ensuring that there is a reasonable mix of single versus multiple family dwellings over time using the subdivision evaluation criteria rather than an arbitrary annual cap.

5.1.7 Require Master Plans for Proposed Subdivisions. Because only a limited number of residential zoning permits are available every year, regardless of parcel size, Williston's residential growth target has created an inadvertent incentive for the piecemeal development of larger parcels. The town's development regulations promote access management, neighborhood connectivity, stormwater management, open space conservation, and other objectives of this plan by requiring that subdivision review begin with a pre-application for the owner's entire contiguous holdings.

5.1.8 Develop a New Growth Management System. The Selectboard will appoint a task force to examine the availability of additional sewerage treatment capacity for the purpose of making recommendations concerning a residential growth management allocation program to take effect in FY 2016. The task force shall examine how allocation is assigned in terms of allocation areas and to ensure an equitable system of allocation across projects. A new allocation system should address ways in which smaller projects might be considered for growth management allocation, as well as ensuring that there is some allocation available for potential projects throughout the life span of the allocation system.

5.2 Housing Opportunities - The Town of Williston will use its residential growth management system to encourage the provision of a range of housing choices, including choices among different locations and densities of dwellings, and housing that is affordable for residents and the workforce. The town will also explore other means of promoting the provision of more diverse, more affordable housing.

A frequent topic of conversation over the past few years has been the high costs of housing in Williston and the difficulty in building new housing that can be considered affordable to people with incomes at or below the median income for households in the region. The 2000 Census found that more than 85% of Williston's housing stock consisted of detached and attached single-family dwellings, including mobile homes. Only about 10% of the town's dwellings had more than two units. Only 15% were rentals. The overall comparison – between a median income of \$60,473 and a median home costing \$252,000 appeared in the introduction to this chapter. The list of incomes by occupation appears in Appendix E, which provides basic data about housing in Williston.

The 2006 *Town Plan* included a number of objectives aimed at encouraging a wider range of housing types in Williston as well as incentives for increasing the number of housing units in new developments considered affordable by households with incomes at or below the regional income. This plan continues to support the development of a wide range of housing types in Williston, with incentives for building housing for households with low and moderate incomes.

5.2.1 Use the Residential Growth Management System to Encourage Provision of Affordable Housing. Williston has offered an incentive for affordable housing as part of its residential growth management system for several years. The subdivision evaluation criteria now encourage perpetually affordable housing that is integrated into neighborhoods, rather than isolated in "projects" and couple the allocation of housing units and sewage treatment plant capacity. The sewer allocation ordinance has also been changed to allow the Selectboard to set aside plant capacity specifically for affordable housing. The town's development regulations encourage the development of affordable housing in the Growth Center by including it as one of the design elements in the zoning districts in the Growth Center, and through the use of incentives. The planning commission will continue to monitor the building of workforce and affordable housing over the life of the town plan as part of the periodic reports on growth trends and developments in the town.

5.2.2 Consider Using Inclusionary Zoning to Guarantee Provision of Affordable Housing in Appropriate Locations. There is still debate about whether the incentive for affordable housing described in Policy 5.2.1 will be effective. This policy provides a basis for the adoption of inclusionary zoning if it is determined that the incentive in the residential growth management system is not strong enough.

5.2.3 Continue to Encourage Housing Choice in the Residential Growth Management System. While permit records and recent project approvals indicate that the housing mix is shifting to

include more multiple-family dwellings and more potential rentals, housing variety will continue to be a separate criterion in the subdivision review criteria proposed.

5.2.4 *Lands Owned by the Town for Affordable Housing Potential.* The town will evaluate lands it owns to determine which, if any, might be suitable sites for the development of affordable housing. The town may work with not-for-profit or for-profit developers to prepare specific plans for affordable housing projects.

5.2.5 *Encourage Adaptive Reuse of Industrial and Commercial Buildings for Affordable Housing Use.* A decline in the demand for land for traditional industrial uses in Williston resulting in a number of under-utilized properties that have access to existing town infrastructure and services such as transportation, and municipal water and sewer services. The town will consider adding provisions to its development regulations to allow for the conversion of existing industrial and commercial buildings into affordable housing where appropriate.

5.2.6 *Explore Additional Affordable Housing Programs.* The town will continue to explore a wide variety of additional affordable housing programs and be prepared to incorporate those that might prove effective into an updated plan, the bylaws, and the budget. The town will also cooperate, as appropriate, with not-for-profit groups seeking to create affordable housing in Williston.