

CHAPTER 5 - HOUSING & GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Williston’s population growth and change over the past 50+ years is documented in Chapter 2. As the town’s population has grown, so too has the number of dwellings in Williston. Going back to 1960, the number of new dwellings in Williston has grown steadily each decade, increasing from 400 in 1960 to over 3,600 in 2010.

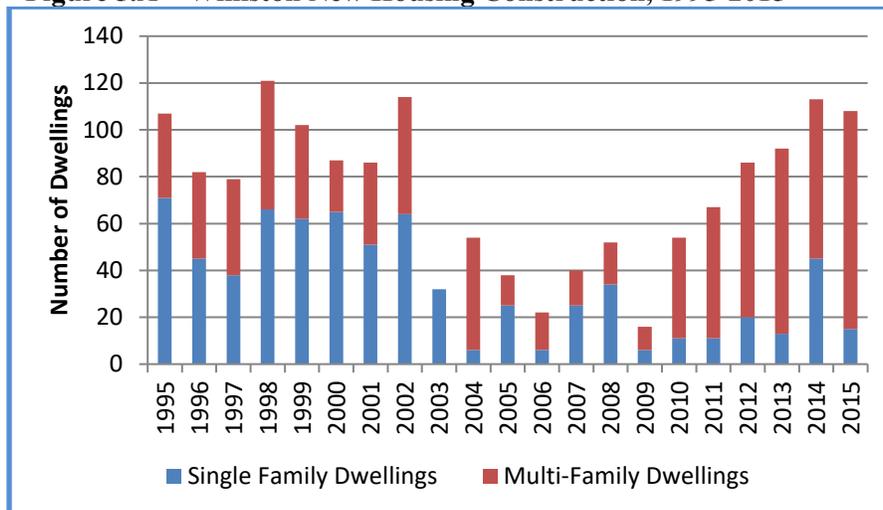
Table 5.A – Housing Units in Williston, Chittenden County and Vermont, 1960-2010

	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 Decennial Census, 1960-2010

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 houses built between 1990 and 2000. More recently, the town has added approximately 700 new dwellings over the last decade, an indicator of continued demand for new housing (see Figure 5.A).

Figure 5.A – Williston New Housing Construction, 1995-2015



Source: Town of Williston Planning and Zoning

The addition of almost 700 new housing units in Williston between 2005 and 2015 did not completely satisfy the demand for housing in Williston. The Census found that Williston had a vacancy rate of only 1.3% including camps and vacation homes, compared to 5.1% vacancy for Chittenden County which had the lowest county-wide vacancy rate in Vermont in 2014. 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, 2014.

	Population	Housing Units			
		Total	Occupied	Vacant	% Vacant
Williston	9,215	3,786	3,736	50	1.30%
Chittenden County	160,531	66,482	63,086	3,396	5.10%
Vermont	626,565	324,332	257,252	67,080	20.70%

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey

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, and managing the pace of growth continues to be a challenge for the town. Sewage treatment capacity has previously been in short supply and would have been exhausted without the recent treatment plant expansion, and available sewer treatment capacity while better is still limited. The town’s schools currently have enough space for current enrollment levels, alleviating one significant limiting factor in the town’s capacity to serve new growth. The town recently built two major public safety buildings, a new public works garage, 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.
- Williston must also plan for an older and aging population. As described in Chapter 2, the population of Williston and the region is aging, and people of retirement age and older are expected to grow significantly for the foreseeable future. Older residents will require housing that is located close to services, a safe walkable, bikeable infrastructure and easy access to public transportation. New housing units will need to be designed to provide shelter for smaller households, with options for one-story living. Consider requiring Universal Access Design (UAD) for certain buildings and/or as one of the incentive options for Planned Unit Development density bonuses. UAD helps make buildings/spaces that can be accessed and by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

At the same time, the town recognizes that regulatory restraints on building contribute to the cost of housing. In 2004, 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 2004 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 tight housing market limits people's options in finding housing, and has been cited as a major limiting factor in businesses attracting workers. To help address this need, in June 2016, the Champlain Housing Trust, Housing Vermont, and the CCRPC are currently undergoing a coordinated campaign to increase the housing supply in Chittenden County. This campaign is called Building Homes Together, and it calls for the construction of 3,500 new homes in Chittenden County over the next 5 years. This is an ambitious goal and one that will not be met without the participation of one of the region's fastest growing communities and key employment locations – Williston.

The shortage of affordable and workforce housing in Williston is described in Objective 5.2.

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

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 – Expand 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 a wide range of Williston's residents and its workforce.

5.1 - Residential Growth Management - The Town of Williston will limit and manage 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, as well as encouraging and supporting the provision of housing affordable to people from a wide range of income groups.

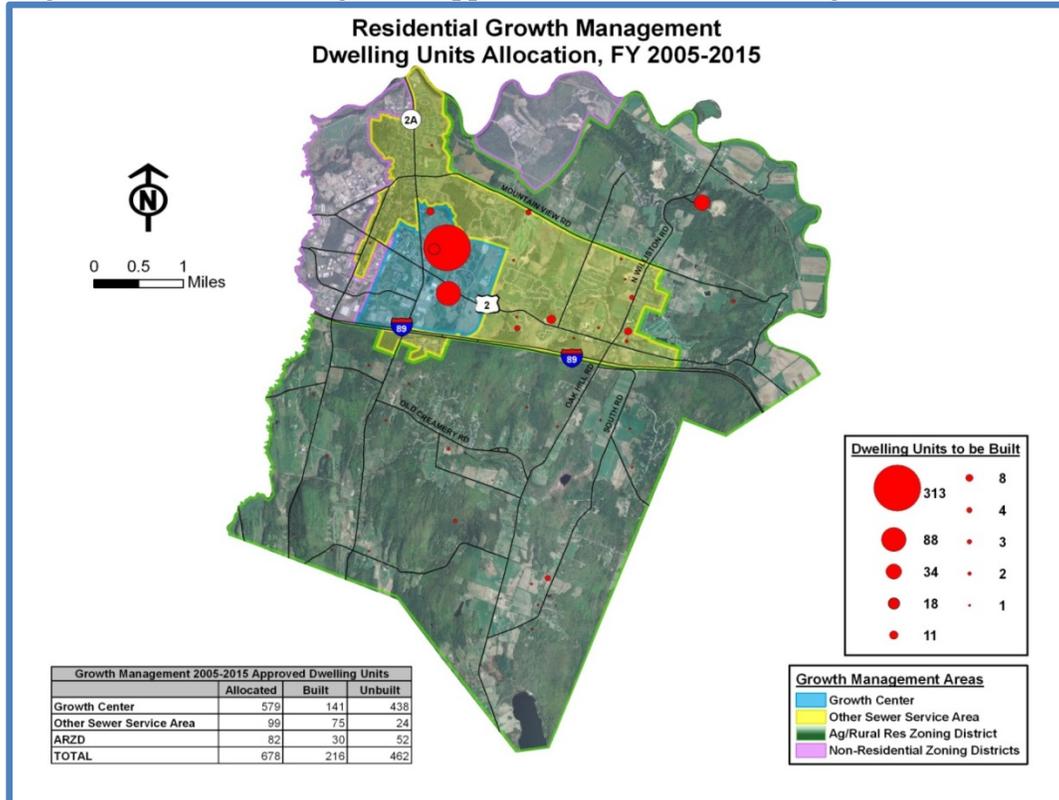
Williston first established a residential growth management policy in 1990. The policies adopted here incorporate what has been learned in the administration of the current growth management system, which was adopted in 2015, as called for in the 2011-2016 Comprehensive Plan. This plan supports the continued implementation of the current system designed to be implemented through the end of FY 2025. The current growth management allocation system will further encourage the provision of affordable housing.

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. 50,000 gallons per day were added to the plant's capacity from 2011-2015. This makes it possible to sustain the residential growth target set in 5.1.2 for the foreseeable future, while continuing to make wastewater treatment capacity available for future industrial and commercial development through the end of FY 2025

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 additional industrial development. Experience has shown when the number of new dwelling exceeds this range by very much, the town

has had difficulty in providing the necessary public infrastructure and services in a timely fashion to keep up with the demands of growth.

Figure 5.B – New Dwelling Units Approved Under Growth Management, 2005-2015



Source: Town of Williston Planning and Zoning

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, and these were amended in the town’s current growth management system in 2015. They anticipate many objectives of this comprehensive plan, providing incentives for housing diversity and affordability, the provision of neighborhood parks, energy conservation, expanding the town’s trail system, and open space conservation. Experience implementing these criteria has also suggested further review and

refinement of these criteria is warranted. Reviewing and further refining these criteria should be a top priority for the planning commission following the adoption of the town 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
- providing suitable housing opportunities for the town's aging population

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.

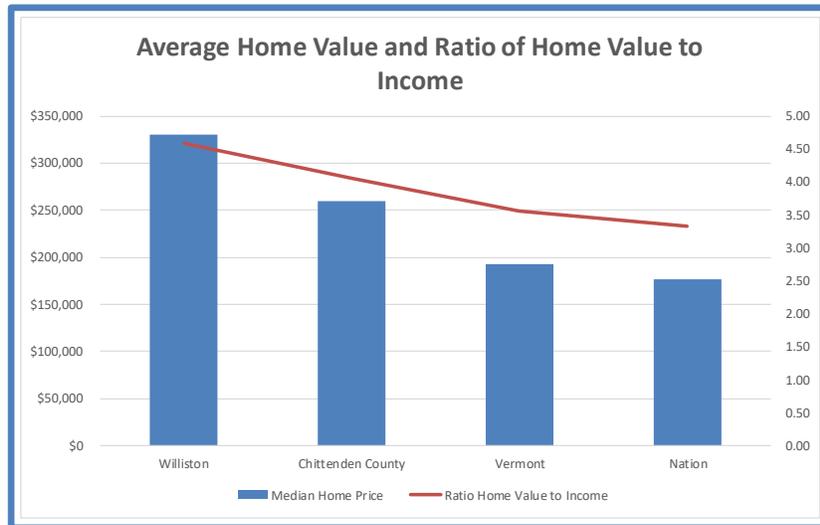
5.1.8 Implement and Refine the Growth Management System. The Town developed a new growth management system designed to run from FY 2016 through FY 2025, replacing the previous 10-year allocation system. The current growth management system is based on continued availability of adequate sewer capacity to support additional housing development, the ability of the town to provide necessary infrastructure such as transportation facilities, police and fire protection, and sufficient classroom space, and a desire to direct the majority of new housing into the town's designated growth center as discussed in Chapter 3 Land Use. At the same time, the town recognizes that the current system is very complicated, and often times places major constraints on proposed housing developments. Many of the development ideas embedded within the incentives of the current growth management system are either already addressed or could be addressed more readily in the town's *Unified Development Bylaw Standards*. A top priority within this plan is a serious examination and re-assessment of the town's growth management system. This examination will consider how the town's existing development regulations might be modified to address the town's development goals more simply, with the aim of streamlining the approval process for new residential developments that address all of the town's goals.

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 D, which provides basic data about housing in Williston.

The 2016-2024 *Town Plan* includes 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.

Figure 5.C – Housing Cost and Income Ratio



Source: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

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. In addition, the current growth management system reserves 25% of all of the potentially available allocation solely for new dwelling designated to be perpetually affordable to households with incomes at 100% of the regional median income or less. The town should also consider modifying the growth management system to either exempt perpetually affordable housing units, or offer additional incentives for the development of perpetually affordable housing. 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. Past and present town policies encouraging the development of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people have relied upon incentives to housing developers. Inclusionary zoning policies encourage the building of affordable housing units by requiring housing developers to build a minimum percentage of the housing units within a proposed development at a price point that is affordable to low- or moderate-income residents. There is still debate about whether the incentive for affordable housing described in Policy 5.2.1 will be effective or whether additional policy measures will be required to obtain additional affordable housing units in Williston. 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 resulted 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.

5.2.7 Implement the Recommendation of the Affordable Housing Task Force. The Selectboard created a task force to discuss ways in which the town could support the development on additional affordable housing in Williston. The task force's report and recommendations are contained in Appendix D. Some of the recommendations of the task force have already been implemented, such as establishing housing targets of affordability. The town should continue to implement the recommendations of the task force and should explore the adoption of additional incentives to build additional affordable housing.

5.2.8 Create and Implement a Housing Trust Fund. A key recommendation of the Affordable Housing Task Force was the establishment of a Housing Trust Fund that could be used to provide financial support to affordable housing developments and programs. The town is currently studying how such a trust fund might work and how the town might be able to utilize it. The town should continue to pursue the creation of a housing trust fund and fully explore the creation and implementation of a trust fund.