

2024 West Piedmont Planning District Commission

HOUSING STUDY

Housing Study Sections



Introduction

WPPDC Regional Analysis

Pittsylvania County & City of Danville

Franklin County

Henry County & City of Martinsville

Patrick County

Prepared by the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech, HousingForward Virginia, and the West Piedmont Planning District Commission for West Piedmont Planning District Commission Member Localities: Franklin County, Henry County, Patrick County, Pittsylvania County, City of Danville, City of Martinsville and the Town of Rocky Mount

Introduction

About the Study

West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) undertook this housing study in partnership with the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech (VCHR) and HousingForward Virginia (HFV). PDCs serve member local governments within their region and build regional approaches to issues like economic development, transportation, and legislative priorities. The West Piedmont Planning District's member localities are: Franklin, Henry, Patrick, and Pittsylvania Counties; the Cities of Danville and Martinsville; and the Town of Rocky Mount. Each member locality identified housing as a concern in their jurisdiction and with the opportunities offered through Virginia Housing, elected to conduct a regional housing study.

This summary version offers high-level information and conclusions. Details regarding data, analysis, conclusions and proposed solutions can be found in the full, technical study report.

Study Scope

Phase 1: Needs Assessment, Market Analysis, Training

VCHR assessed county, city and town trends in the context of the region to identify jurisdiction-specific challenges and opportunities. As a part of the study, VCHR trained WPPDC staff to compile publicly available housing data, assess its reliability, and interpret the data in the context of the region and individual localities.

Phase 2: Analysis of Barriers & Community Outreach

WPPDC staff coordinated listening sessions for VCHR and HFV to learn about housing market conditions and challenges from local staff and stakeholders. VCHR and HFV met with staff from each county and city as well as a number of Town representatives. Staff and stakeholders described each jurisdiction, its housing stock, housing challenges and potential opportunities.

Local representatives identified specific issues affecting their communities, which helped to guide the analysis. These issues included workforce housing; housing equity, aging and substandard housing stock and opportunities for rehabilitation; options for aging in place; the availability of housing affordable to residents at diverse income levels, and; gaps in the availability of housing. VCHR conducted interviews to fill gaps from the initial listening sessions. These conversations focused on building and development, vulnerable populations, and the key geographies not addressed in the listening sessions.

Phase 3: Strategy Development

HFV reviewed the information developed by VCHR's Needs Assessment and Market Analysis work to compile a tailored menu of housing policies and strategies associated with the needs highlighted in preliminary data analysis drafts and goals discussed by staff and stakeholders.

WPPDC, HFV and VCHR convened meetings with each jurisdiction to review housing needs and understand the best practice policies that would address those needs. With jurisdiction input, HFV created tailored solutions for each jurisdiction and provided additional detail for the policies selected by the jurisdictions. Brief descriptions of solutions are included in this summary version of the study. Solutions in the full, technical report have greater details, including responsible actors and their roles, implementation steps, funding requirements, possible funding sources, and relevant best practices.

WPPDC Regional Analysis

240,482

Region's population

Population

The West Piedmont PDC Region includes the counties of Franklin, Henry, Patrick, and Pittsylvania, the Cities of Danville, and Martinsville. The region's population is 240,482 and comprises 99,190 households. Most of the region's households (76%) live within the four counties.

99,190

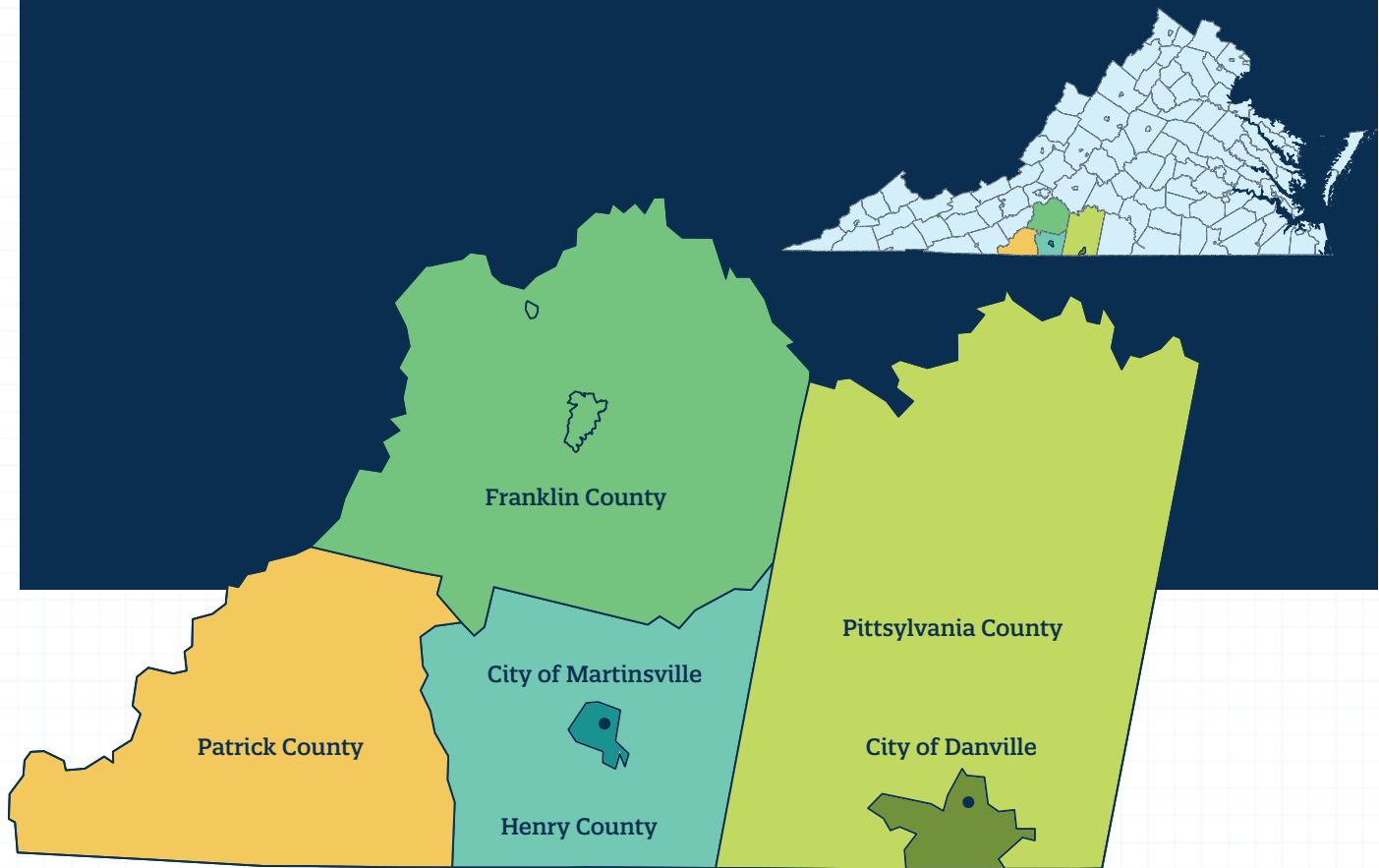
households

76%

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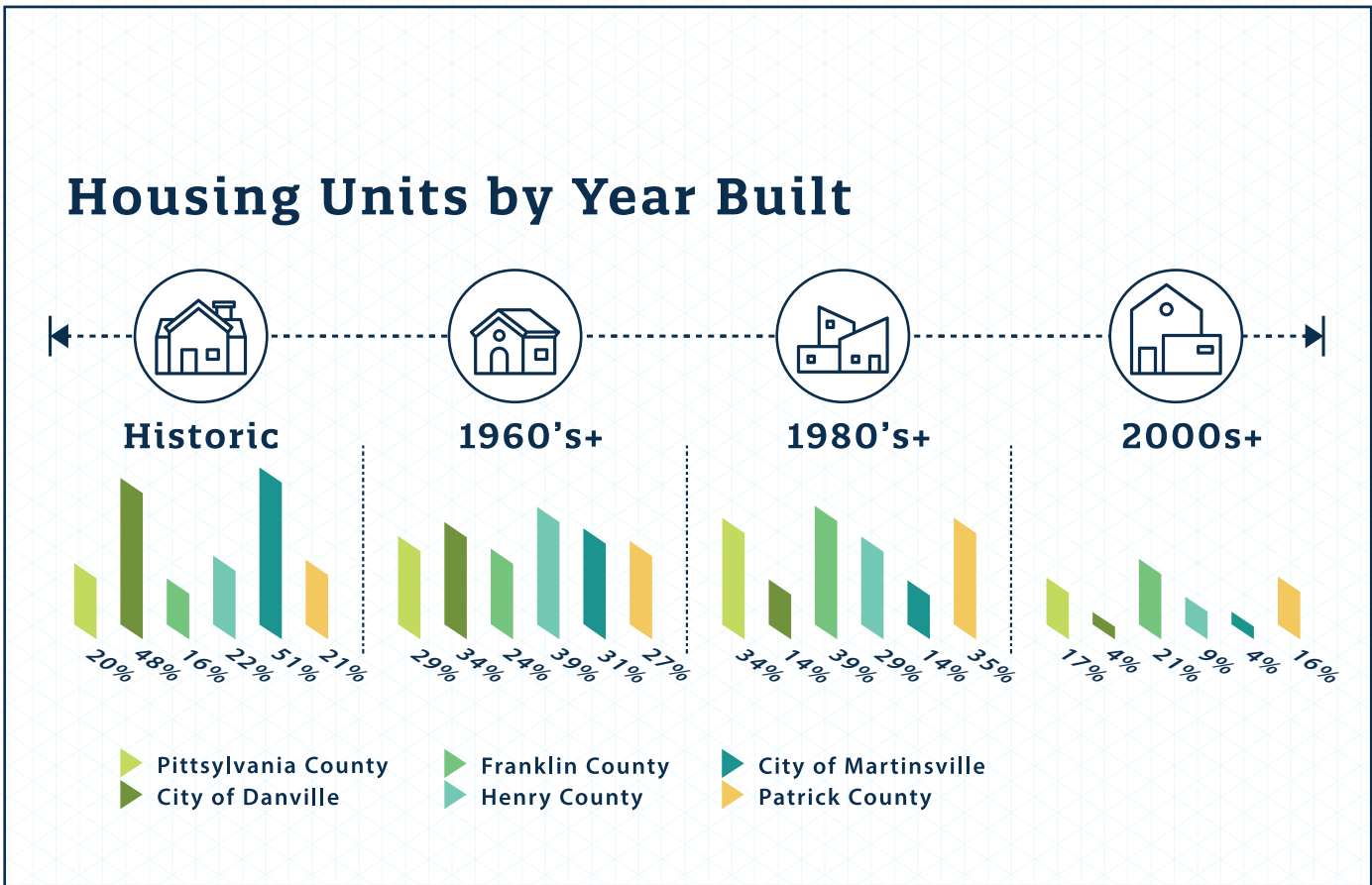
Regionwide Housing Challenges

The submarkets throughout the region have many commonalities and similar housing challenges that lend themselves to regional initiatives and approaches to housing solutions.



Housing Conditions

Local government staff and stakeholders throughout the region identified the conditions of housing as a challenge for both existing and prospective residents. The energy performance, maintenance costs, and upgrade costs of a housing unit depend greatly on the age of the unit. Older units usually cost more to heat and cool and require more maintenance and upgrades to retain their full market value. Homes built in the 40s and 50s benefit from solid construction of that era, and typically have had up to two “upgrades” in their history. Housing built in the 1960s is often less well located and has higher transportation costs. Many homes built between 1960s and 1980s have not had any major upgrades since their original construction and may need upgrades soon to remain competitive in their housing markets.



Source: VCHR tabulation of 2021 ACS 5-year Estimates

Danville and Martinsville have the oldest stock in the region, with almost half of the cities’ housing built prior to 1960. The region’s counties have housing that is more evenly distributed across decades prior to 2000. Franklin County, which has the highest demand market in the region, has seen the most housing development since 2000.

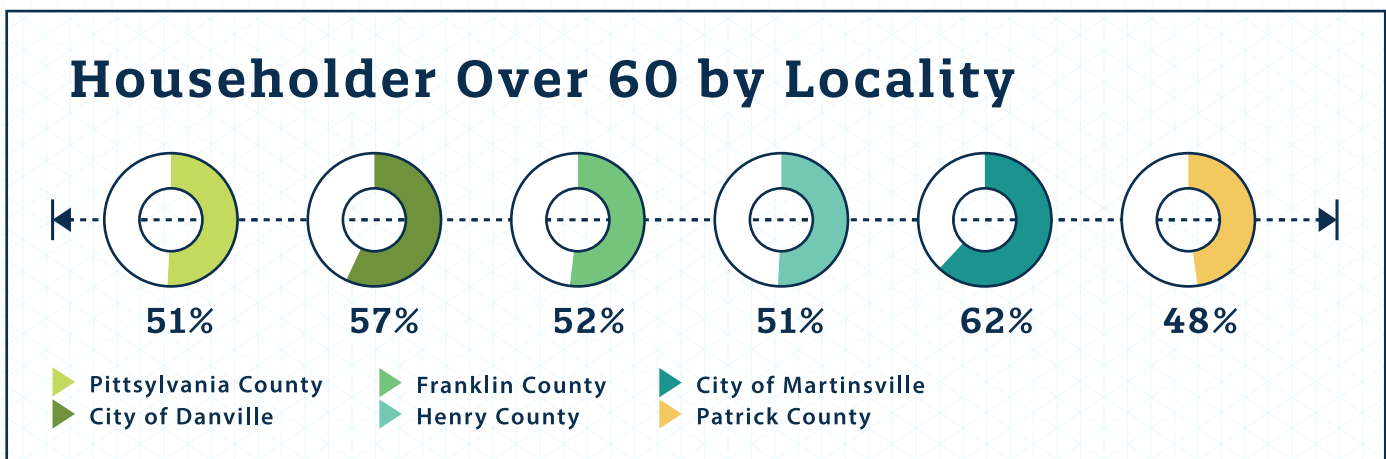
Shifting Needs and Preferences

Households in the WPPDC are smaller today. Young families struggle to find affordable starter homes and 60 and older people are seeking conveniences that support aging.

Buyers are looking for homes that do not require major renovations. Renters prefer larger floorplans with higher-end amenities. Younger buyers and renters are looking for smaller single-family homes.

Despite preferences, many households encounter financial obstacles. Local governments can incentivize development of smaller-scale housing. Adding smaller multifamily or attached units may increase the number of affordable, high-quality units in the market without subsidy. Well-designed multifamily developments can offer conveniences to help move renters and buyers away from single family units.

Older homebuyers, 60 and over, gravitate toward suburban and small town living as well as resort living. Almost half of households in the WPPDC region are led by individuals that are 60 and over.



Source: 2021 ACS 5-year Estimates

Workforce Housing

Low wage workers in common occupations throughout the region face housing challenges. Households with only one worker can have difficulty finding affordable housing. Most of the region's working households are single earner.

In Danville, except for registered nurses, no workers in the top ten occupations can afford the median rent as a single earner. Some experienced workers in the top ten occupations can afford median rent. However, homeownership is still out of reach.

Affordable housing throughout the region is not available for food service workers and cashiers, even ones with a higher experience level and sharing housing costs with another worker. Some occupations like personal care aids in Danville and Pittsylvania County and security workers in Patrick County will find it difficult to find affordable housing at any experience level. These occupations may not be able to afford purchasing a home if they are sharing costs with another worker in the same occupation.

Many of the workers that are unable to find affordable housing fill important roles in the community. Housing insecurity forces them to make decisions that adversely affect their and their family's health and future.



Registered nurses can afford housing, even as single earner



Affordable housing is not available for food service workers & cashiers



Even experienced security workers find it difficult to find affordable housing

Housing Insecurities



In the WPPDC region around 24% of households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Of those households 21,300 have incomes of less than 80 percent of the Area Median Income. These households will often have to make choices between housing and other necessities like food, clothing, transportation, and medical care. Quite often they live with the fear of losing their housing and may experience homelessness.

Renters are more likely to be affected by increasing housing costs than homeowners. Homeowners generally have a fixed mortgage payment; renters typically are subject to annual rent increases and more likely to experience housing cost-burden at a higher rate than homeowners. **Homeowners can become cost burdened due to economic hardships** such as job loss, maintenance costs, death of a family member or fixed incomes that do not keep up rising costs of taxes, utilities, and insurance.

Cost-burdened Households by Tenure

11,446 Renter Households

8,932 Households Owning with a Mortgage

3,683 Households Owning Free and Clear

Source: 2021 ACS 5-year Estimates

Homelessness



It is estimated that over 10,000 households in the WPPDC region are at risk of homelessness, which is roughly 10% of total households in the region, 5,750 renter households, and 4,400 owner households.

10% At Risk of Homelessness

Literal homelessness is difficult to accurately count in suburban, exurban, and rural contexts. The WPPDC region has limited services for households that experience homelessness. Often unsheltered people will move between the homes of friends and family or squat in unused buildings or camp. The 2023 Point-in-time count in the WPPDC region identified **more than 100 people experiencing literal homelessness**. The number of school-aged children experiencing homelessness are often a better indicator of homelessness challenges in these contexts. In the 2020-2021 school year **at least 221 students** in the WPPDC Region were identified as experiencing homelessness.



Designate West Piedmont Planning District Commission as the region's land bank.

Property vacancies and blight are consistent issues among nearly all localities in the region. Population decline and disinvestment were early factors that contributed to property abandonment

and neglect. Real estate speculation now plays a major role in current property conditions.

As a land bank, WPPDC would be able to acquire, manage and develop, and redevelop abandoned properties. These properties could then be returned to productive use. Land banks can be used to acquire neighboring lots or hold land responsibly until market conditions improve, more often land banks attempt to quickly acquire and dispose of property to meet community goals.

Land banks are able to receive properties directly from localities, avoiding a competitive bidding process. They can also acquire properties on the private market. In addition, land banks in Virginia are exempt from real estate taxes, which better allows them to focus resources on improving and maintaining properties.



Coordinate home repair and rehabilitation programs at the regional level to maximize reach and impact.

This strategy involves partnering with local and regional offices, banks, and service providers to create accessible pathways for property owners to tap into home improvement resources, such as those offered by DHCD, SERCAP, and USDA Rural Development. By strategically aligning program waitlists and the eligible uses for funds, resources can be distributed more efficiently and effectively.

Further enhancing this strategy, recruiting community ambassadors will be key to expanding awareness and building trust within local communities. These ambassadors can play a crucial role in informing residents about available programs and resources. Additionally, developing a robust applicant pipeline will enable a more targeted approach to addressing housing needs.

By implementing a system to “triage” applications, priority can be given to those with the highest needs, ensuring that the most critical cases receive timely attention and resources. This comprehensive approach aims to streamline efforts, avoiding duplication and ensuring that home repair and rehabilitation programs reach those most in need.