



Housing NWCT

A Regional Housing Needs Assessment



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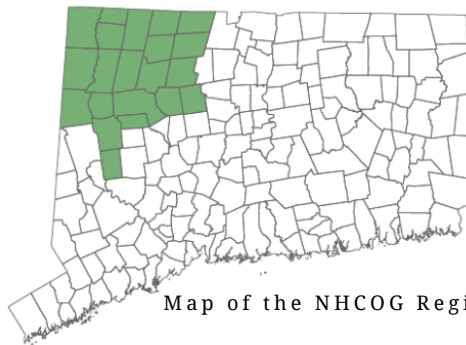
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Introduction

The limited availability of housing options available in our town, especially for young adults, young families, and seniors that would like to "downsize" is no secret. But there is a **renewed sense of urgency** in many towns partly brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and an influx of new residents. In many towns there are essentially no available rental options and a much smaller inventory of available homes for purchase. Home sale prices, which were already fairly high, are even higher now in most of our towns due to limited inventory.



Map of the NHCOC Region

The **waiting lists** for being offered an apartment in one of our region's affordable housing developments were already long even before the pandemic. Now eligible applicants for these units are being told they might have to wait between 1-5 years before an apartment becomes available. What do they do in the meantime? Many are forced to leave the town where they have lived for many years or where their children or parents live.

There is also an **economic impact** to our region's lack of housing diversity and limited affordable housing options for those who live or work here. Having so many housing cost-burdened households means that these households don't have enough left over at the end of the month to spend at local small businesses like shops and restaurants. Employers in the region including healthcare providers, banks, grocery stores, and manufacturers are telling us that high housing prices and limited rental housing stock make it difficult to attract and retain new employees and to replace those who are retiring.

Many of our towns are currently in the process of developing municipal housing plans to **better define the housing needs for current and future residents and workers** and developing strategies to address them. This Regional Housing Needs Assessment provides an analysis of housing needs related data for the 21 towns in the Northwest Hills Council of Governments region and allows them to compare their housing stock to neighboring towns within the region. The last part of this report provides an overview of what many of our towns are already doing to address their housing needs. **The solutions to our housing needs are also not secrets.** In many towns we are already employing some of them but we need to better support them and scale them up to rise to this challenge. Finally, there is an appendix with links to many additional sources of information.

“Our housing systems are experiencing the toughest challenges that we've seen in more than a generation.”

Dr. Tiffany Manuel



Quotes from employers in the region about the urgency to meet housing needs

"As the largest employer in the greater Torrington area, and with our employees predominantly living where they work, access to affordable housing is essential to attracting and retaining talent. The medical field is growing, and our organization in particular has expanded its scope of services and workforce in recent years. We constantly assess for actual and potential barriers to us achieving our goals and ambitions, and we have come to appreciate the multiple factors involved in a candidate's decision to accept a position with us or not. Among those factors, especially for those who need to relocate, is the affordability of living in the area, with housing expenses being the most significant"– **Brian Mattiello , Charlotte Hungerford Hospital**

"Affordable housing is crucial to the future of our region, and critical to building an equitable, inclusive creative economy and reversing the trends in our aging population. The Warner needs young creative entrepreneurs and families to grow our education and performing arts programming, volunteer and work for us. Affordable housing would bring much needed diversity to our region, making our creative work better and driving the economy forward. High cost of living forces our employees into longer commutes and makes employee retention difficult."– **Rufus de Rham, Executive Director, Warner Theatre**

"The cost of housing is a significant factor in the hiring and retention of employees, particularly younger employees. I believe there is a definite advantage for our staff, for our company, and for our communities to have our employees live locally. Customers enjoy seeing familiar faces working in their local branches. Employees who have shorter commutes are often more involved in their communities. The availability of affordable housing is critical to our ability to attract and retain qualified staff."– **Salisbury Bank – Rick Cantele**

"Schools are the heart of the community. The employees who can serve the community they live in only make the heart of the community beat stronger. Region 12 Schools want our employees to have roots in the towns. Our towns are beautiful, kind, and caring. Our children benefit from our school system. It would be wonderful if staff within the school system could benefit from living within the towns. The family connections, community involvement, and stability are created by employees living in the community they serve. We hope to see affordable housing so our staff can truly be part of the community they serve."–**Megan Bennett, Superintendent, Regional School District 12**

"The high cost of local housing has forced many of my employees to commute from 1½ to 2 hours each day. This makes it difficult for me to attract and retain the people I need to continue to grow my business... Many of my employees struggle to find the reasonable rental housing they need in order to see if the job and our community are a good fit for them and as they build up their financial resources for potential home ownership."
Visionary Computer – David Maffucci

What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is commonly defined as housing that **costs less than 30% of a household's annual income**. Housing units are considered affordable if total costs—rent, utilities, mortgage payment, real estate taxes, fees, and other costs associated with living in the unit—are less than 30 percent of a household's income. Most State affordable housing programs focus on serving households earning 80% of the area median income (AMI) or less. The table here shows 80% of the area median income for Litchfield County.

	Household Size				
	1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people
80% of AMI (2020)	\$57,456	\$65,664	\$73,872	\$82,080	\$88,646

In addition, to qualify for the State's Affordable Housing Appeals List the housing must also be assisted and/or **monitored in some way to ensure that the home remains affordable** to the household.



Photo: Bonney Brook, Cornwall

Why doesn't "naturally occurring" affordable housing count?

Many people ask why smaller or older homes that are sold or rented at what could be considered affordable prices are not included on the State's Affordable Housing Appeals list. The basic reason is that no one is monitoring the transaction to make sure that the household's that rent or purchase those homes meet the income limits or that the rent/mortgage stays affordable to them. Many homes sold at "affordable" prices are older and need significant repairs and/or have high heating or maintenance costs which make them unaffordable. Also, there is nothing to prevent households with higher incomes from renting or purchasing these lower priced units leaving fewer units for residents and workers who earn below those income limits.



How much affordable housing do we need?

18,456 households earn below 80% of the area median income in our region's 21 towns according to HUD's Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data

10,568 households are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs in our 21-towns and are considered "housing cost burdened".

3,357 units of affordable housing currently exist in our 21-towns according to the State's affordable housing appeals list (2020).

3,498 units is the estimated current need for additional affordable housing in our 21-town region according to a study done by David Kinsey, PhD, FAICP in August 2020. This represents the number that is needed to house only the most cost burdened households in our region- those who spend more than 50% of their income on housing costs.

1,520 households are on waiting lists (Nov. 2020) in our 21-towns. These households are often waiting 2-5 years to be offered an affordable apartment. Approximately 345 of these households are seniors. This is almost certainly an under count of the households who need affordable housing as some affordable housing developments simply do not add more people to the waiting list once it gets to a certain size due to lack of turnover and many people are unaware of the affordable rental housing options in their towns.

No matter how you look at it, there is a substantial need for additional affordable housing options in our 21-towns. The rate at which affordable housing is currently created in our towns cannot keep up with the need from those who live and work in our region. Between 2010-2020, non-profits and housing authorities in our region created 89 units of affordable rental housing in 7 towns- less than 9 units per year. At this pace of development it would take us 170 yrs to create new affordable apartments for the 1,520 households currently on our waiting lists.

Affordable Housing can celebrate the rural nature of our small towns.

Affordable housing in Northwest Connecticut does not have to mean large developments or a change in the rural nature of our towns.

Retaining the rural environments of our small towns is incredibly important to all of us who live here. Proposals for affordable housing must follow all health and safety standards including meeting well and on-site septic regulations. They also must be scaled appropriately for the town and the neighborhood. Though appropriate scale is a relative term and there will be much debate in each town as to what is appropriate, many of our towns benefit from having local non-profit housing organizations with volunteers from the town working to meet these needs who are sensitive to appropriate scale for their town. As available, developable land is scarce and multiple unit developments are more cost effective and competitive for State funding resources, many affordable developments in our smaller towns are between 10 and 28 units. Recently developed examples include:

- Kent's Stuart Farm Apartments**- 13 units of rental housing in 3 buildings including a renovated farm house
- Cornwall's Bonney Brook**- 10 units of rental housing for seniors in Cornwall Bridge



Kent South Commons

–**Norfolk's Town Center** – 12 units of rental housing in 4 renovated buildings in the town's center.

–**Salisbury's Sarum Village**- 24 total units of multi-family rental in 7 buildings

We can and already do create housing options in our towns that are affordable that do not detract from our towns' rural character. There are currently over 600 affordable rental units and 70 affordable homeownership units in our region's small towns. Most of these very few residents see or know about except the people who live there. To see photos of some of these developments, many of which have been there for decades, visit the Northwest Connecticut Regional Housing Council website at www.nwcthousing.org.

Cost-Burdened Households

10,568 households in NWCT are housing cost-burdened.

Households are considered “housing cost burdened” if they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. **10,568 households in our 21-towns are housing cost burdened.** When household spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs they have less to spend on healthcare, childcare, transportation, as well as other discretionary spending that supports our local businesses.

Cost-burdened households within the NHCOCG Region

	Percent	#
Barkhamsted	29.30%	269
Burlington	23.70%	600
Canaan	35.17%	102
Colebrook	20.11%	76
Cornwall	44.26%	158
Goshen	29.19%	174
Hartland	31.97%	147
Harwinton	36.32%	409
Kent	49.39%	366
Litchfield	35.15%	832
Morris	42.43%	258
New Hartford	30.79%	564
Norfolk	52.74%	250
North Canaan	36.62%	438
Roxbury	47.58%	285
Salisbury	46.79%	511
Sharon	49.50%	174
Torrington	37.49%	4,064
Warren	32.46%	110
Washington	33.06%	323
Winchester	38.11%	458
TOTAL		10,568

Source: 2015-2019 ACS

Existing Affordable Housing

3,357 units of affordable housing exist in our region.

The CT Department of Housing is required by State Statute 8-30g to publish an Affordable Housing Appeals List once a year. This list provides the percentage of affordable units in each municipality. This is calculated by taking the number of housing units that qualify as affordable according to C.G.S. Section 8-30g and dividing it by the total number of housing units in the town.

If less than 10% of the town’s housing stock is affordable and a municipal commission denies an application for a development that includes affordable housing, it is open to an appeal of that decision under the 8-30g statute. If the municipality can show that their denial was necessary to protect health and safety it will be upheld.

Developers cannot use the appeals procedure in municipalities where 10% of total housing units are affordable according to the definition in C.G.S. Section 8-30g.

2020 Affordable Housing Appeals List							
Town	Total # of housing units-2010 Census	2020 Gov Assisted	2020 Tenant Rental Assistance	2020 Single Family CHFA/USD A Mortgages	2020 Deed Restricted Units	2020 Total Assisted Units	2020 Percent Affordable
Barkhamsted	1,589	0	6	23	0	29	1.83%
Burlington	3,389	27	0	47	0	74	2.18%
Canaan	779	1	4	5	1	11	1.41%
Colebrook	722	0	1	7	1	9	1.25%
Cornwall	1,007	28	2	6	0	36	3.57%
Goshen	1,664	1	1	5	0	7	0.42%
Hartland	856	2	0	8	0	10	1.17%
Harwinton	2,282	22	5	36	5	68	2.98%
Kent	1,665	58	4	5	0	67	4.02%
Litchfield	3,975	140	2	28	19	189	4.75%
Morris	1,314	20	4	8	0	32	2.44%
New Hartford	2,923	12	4	55	15	86	2.94%
North Canaan	1,587	148	0	14	0	162	10.21%
Norfolk	967	21	2	5	0	28	2.90%
Roxbury	1,167	19	0	5	0	24	2.06%
Salisbury	2,593	24	2	2	14	42	1.62%
Sharon	1,775	32	1	3	0	36	2.03%
Torrington	16,761	908	322	547	17	1,794	10.70%
Warren	811	0	0	1	0	1	0.12%
Washington	2,124	14	2	4	23	43	2.02%
Winchester	5,613	350	167	92	0	609	10.85%
TOTAL	55,563	1,827	529	906	95	3,357	6.04%

Source: [DOH Affordable Housing Appeals List](#)

Existing Housing Stock

The vast majority of the housing stock in the region is single family with 3+ bedrooms.

The table here highlights the towns in which 80% or more of the town’s housing stock is just one type of home- single family detached housing. This compares to the countywide average of 73% and the statewide average of 59%. This type of housing that makes up more than 80% of the housing stock in most of our towns is the most expensive type to build, own, and maintain.

Housing Stock - Percentage Single Family Percentage 3+ bedrooms

Town	% Single Family, Detached	% 3 or more bedrooms
Barkhamsted	95%	84%
Burlington	93%	89%
Canaan/FV	94%	67%
Colebrook	91%	62%
Cornwall	93%	69%
Goshen	96%	76%
Harwinton	97%	81%
Hartland	97%	78%
Kent	78%	61%
Litchfield	79%	68%
Morris	90%	64%
Norfolk	80%	66%
New Hartford	88%	70%
North Canaan	67%	53%
Salisbury	83%	81%
Sharon	90%	71%
Roxbury	94%	75%
Torrington	52%	53%
Warren	97%	75%
Washington	87%	70%
Winchester	59%	61%

Source: 2018 ACS 5-yr estimates

In addition to the fact that most housing in our towns is single family detached, a majority of these homes also have 3 or more bedrooms. Again, these larger sized homes are typically more expensive than a home with one or two bedrooms. In towns where a majority of households do not have children, and a growing proportion of households are over 65 yrs old, more housing options with less than 3 bedrooms would be good to have. We often refer to these smaller sized homes as “downsizing” options but they can also work well for young adults and young families that don’t need or can’t afford a 3+ bedroom home.

Home Sale Prices

Home sale prices have been rising.

Over the last five years median home sales prices have risen in all but one town in our 21-town region. In Washington they rose by \$380,000 but the average change of all 21 towns was an increase of \$115,000.

The average sales prices in 2020 were higher than the median sales prices in every town. This likely means that there are some very high priced homes in many of the towns pulling the average higher than the median.

Local realtors have reported that many of the homes sold at or below the median price for each town are older and need a substantial investment in upgrades and/or repairs making them less affordable than they appear from the sticker price.

Median Home Sale Prices Change over Time
2020 Average Sales Price

City/Town	Median Sales Price 2016	Average Sales Price 2020	Change (2016-2020)	Average Sales Price 2020
Barkhamsted	\$250,000	\$280,000	\$30,000	\$299,678
Burlington	\$300,500	\$350,000	\$49,500	\$367,581
Canaan	\$135,000	\$257,500	\$122,500	\$352,530
Colebrook	\$213,000	\$329,000	\$116,000	\$355,442
Cornwall	\$298,000	\$547,500	\$249,500	\$718,029
Goshen	\$313,750	\$447,500	\$133,750	\$527,794
Hartland	\$260,000	\$253,000	-\$7,000	\$261,744
Harwinton	\$256,000	\$275,000	\$19,000	\$312,289
Kent	\$345,000	\$368,750	\$23,750	\$612,925
Litchfield	\$300,000	\$355,000	\$55,000	\$531,062
Morris	\$292,500	\$379,900	\$87,400	\$456,381
New Hartford	\$230,000	\$290,000	\$60,000	\$310,585
Norfolk	\$166,000	\$365,000	\$199,000	\$549,696
North Canaan	\$159,000	\$175,000	\$16,000	\$205,309
Roxbury	\$550,000	\$730,000	\$180,000	\$993,036
Salisbury	\$425,000	\$646,000	\$221,000	\$912,600
Sharon	\$332,500	\$475,000	\$142,500	\$960,953
Torrington	\$118,500	\$159,900	\$41,400	\$188,336
Warren	\$340,000	\$607,500	\$267,500	\$1,024,135
Washington	\$460,000	\$840,000	\$380,000	\$1,181,772
Winchester	\$145,000	\$178,000	\$33,000	\$254,295

Data Source: SmartMLS

Access to Ownership

Access to home ownership is limited.

New homeownership is often delayed by high housing costs, limited diversity in housing type, and student loan debt.

If your household earned the Litchfield County median household income for a renter of \$41,000, \$500 in monthly student loan or car debt, and a \$5,000 down payment, you'd be able to afford a home costing \$115,500.

There is a gap in every town, many extremely large, between what a renter household in Litchfield County could afford and the median priced home in 2020. From a \$44,000 gap in Torrington to a \$724,500 gap in Washington.

New homeownership is often delayed by high housing costs, limited diversity in housing type (too many big houses), and student loan debt. This is one reason for the growing percentage of households that are renting rather than owning their homes. Limited rental options in our towns make it difficult for a household to live here while they pay off student loan debt and search for a home within their budget.

Median Sales Price of Home vs. Affordable by Renter Household

City/Town	Median Sales Price 2020	Gap for Median Renter Household
Barkhamsted	\$280,000	\$164,500
Burlington	\$350,000	\$234,500
Canaan	\$257,500	\$142,000
Colebrook	\$329,000	\$213,500
Cornwall	\$547,500	\$432,000
Goshen	\$447,500	\$332,000
Hartland	\$253,000	\$137,500
Harwinton	\$275,000	\$159,500
Kent	\$368,750	\$253,250
Litchfield	\$355,000	\$239,500
Morris	\$379,900	\$264,400
New Hartford	\$290,000	\$174,500
Norfolk	\$365,000	\$249,500
North Canaan	\$175,000	\$59,500
Roxbury	\$730,000	\$614,500
Salisbury	\$646,000	\$530,500
Sharon	\$475,000	\$359,500
Torrington	\$159,900	\$44,400
Warren	\$607,500	\$492,000
Washington	\$840,000	\$724,500
Winchester	\$178,000	\$62,500

Data Source: SmartMLS

Rental Availability

Rental housing availability is limited.

Across Connecticut almost a third of households rent. This is the highest percentage of renting households in a generation. Part of the reason for this is the cost of housing, college debt burden, and lack of appropriately sized homes as discussed previously.

Many towns in our region have a significantly lower percentage of households that rent than the statewide (30%) or countywide average (19%). This likely indicates that rental housing options are limited in those towns.

Many of the rental housing options that do exist in our towns are also expensive again partly due to the fact that many of them are single family homes with 3 or more bedrooms. This leads to almost half of renter households being housing cost burdened.

45% (7,619 households) of Litchfield County renters spend an unaffordable amount of their household income on housing costs (more than 30%). Almost half of those renter households (22% or 3,692 households) are actually paying more than half of their household income on housing costs.

The growing use of platforms like AirBnB has meant an increase in short term rental of homes that used to be rented year around or for longer time periods. The **increase in short term rentals** in our towns has further limited rental housing options for full time residents and increased rental housing costs.

In Litchfield County almost half (46%) of young adults, ages 19-34, live in a parent's home. Statewide 41% of young adults are living at home with their parents. This is almost 10 percentage points higher than it was 10 years ago. This is due, in part to the lack of rental and/or first-time homebuyer options that young adults can afford.

Percentage of Households Renter Occupied in the NHCOC Region

City/Town	Percentage of renter households
Statewide	30%
Litchfield County	19%
Barkhamsted	8%
Burlington	5%
Canaan	9%
Colebrook	8%
Cornwall	10%
Goshen	3%
Hartland	6%
Harwinton	2%
Kent	17%
Litchfield	18%
Morris	10%
New Hartford	11%
Norfolk	14%
North Canaan	28%
Roxbury	13%
Salisbury	16%
Sharon	17%
Torrington	29%
Warren	7%
Washington	12%
Winchester	28%

Data Source: 2018 ACS 5-year Estimate

Seasonal Housing

Seasonal/weekend homes limit year-round options in some towns within our region.

Many of the towns in our region also have a relatively high number of housing units that are second homes used “seasonally, occasionally, or recreationally” as the Census bureau terms it. We often refer to these as **weekend homes**. The Census bureau categorizes all these units as “vacant” which is why many of our towns appear to have high vacancy rates. The table here shows the number of vacant homes and the subset of those “vacant” homes that are actually used “seasonally or occasionally”.

In nine of our towns, more than 20% of the total housing stock is used seasonally or occasionally. This means that these units are not available for occupancy by year-round residents. Demand for weekend homes can also push housing prices up and put them out of reach for residents earning their incomes in Litchfield County rather than New York City for example.

During the COVID-19 pandemic many towns have seen their weekend homes used more year-round. We also know that many weekend residents eventually become year-round residents when they retire. In any case, these occasional use homes do have an impact on the housing stock in our region.

Total Housing Units vs Vacant/Seasonal Units

	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS	VACANT HOUSING UNITS	SEASONAL/OCCASIONAL USE HOUSING UNITS	% SEASONAL
Connecticut	1,512,305	144,931	29,855	2%
Litchfield County	88,428	14,166	7,211	8%
Barkhamsted	1,463	99	7	0%
Burlington	3,579	212	54	2%
Canaan	711	180	157	22%
Colebrook	806	218	151	19%
Cornwall	1042	471	401	38%
Goshen	1,500	405	371	25%
Hartland	857	75	36	4%
Harwinton	2,252	315	168	7%
Kent	1,447	309	257	18%
Litchfield	4,184	710	444	11%
Morris	1319	453	326	25%
New Hartford	2,892	294	243	8%
Norfolk	958	279	216	23%
North Canaan	1651	293	22	1%
Roxbury	1168	280	185	16%
Salisbury	2859	1184	843	29%
Sharon	1893	597	391	21%
Torrington	14459	2333	531	4%
Warren	837	268	225	27%
Washington	2262	868	674	30%
Winchester	5547	988	305	5%

Data Source: 2018 ACS 5-year Estimate

4 Key Take-Away Points Regional Housing Needs

We need more housing options that are not single family detached homes. This could include attached single family homes (such as townhouses), duplexes or 2-family homes, and multi-family homes (3+ housing units).

We need smaller sized housing options with less than three (3) bedrooms and these housing units should be accessible with a first floor bedroom.

We need more rental housing options in most of our towns- especially those with less than 19% of their housing stock currently renter occupied.

We need more affordable homes both rental and ownership- 10,568 households in our 21-towns are housing cost burdened.

5 Strategies our Towns Are Employing to Meet Housing Needs

Developing & implementing their town affordable housing plan

Nine NHCOC towns are currently developing a municipal affordable housing plan and the Town of Salisbury adopted one in 2018. According to State Statute 8-30j each town must have such a plan by July 2022 and update it every 5 years. Grant assistance from the CT Dept. of Housing have played a critical role is helping our towns meet this requirement.

Continuing to raise awareness about what residents can do to help if they wish

This would include donating land or funding to their local housing organization or Habitat chapter, creating an accessory apartment, volunteering on a housing board/commission, or attending Planning & Zoning Commission meetings to support projects or zoning revisions that provide housing options in their town.

Participating in the NWCT Regional Housing Council

Our region has one of the oldest and longest running housing councils in the state. The Council is made up of representatives from each town's local housing organization who meet quarterly to report upon and gain valuable information for their town-specific planning and housing development. Together we are also able to advocate for the State resources and assistance our towns need to help address their housing challenges.

Supporting their local non-profit housing organizations or helping to facilitate the creation of one

13 of our 21 towns have one or more local housing organizations that own, maintain, and develop affordable rental or homeownership opportunities. These include housing trusts, housing authorities, Habitat for Humanity chapters, and other housing focused non-profits. For a list of local housing organizations in the region and link to their websites visit www.nwcthousing.org

Learning from each other though NHCOC Forums

Many towns Planning, Zoning, and other land use members are attending continuing education and training courses provided by COG and others to **learn from each other** on how they are addressing housing challenges and employing zoning strategies to enable more housing opportunities.

Housing NWCT Appendix

- [FAQS on Affordable Housing Plans](#)
- [3-part Housing Webinar Hosted by NHCOG](#)
- [Short Film Showing Affordable Housing in NWCT](#)
- [Housing Data Sources](#)
- [Regional Housing Council](#)
- [NHCOG Housing Webpages](#)

Housing Webinars for NWCT Small Towns

How is affordable housing funded in NWCT's small towns?

Guest presenter: David Berto, President, Housing Enterprises

How much affordable housing do we need? What is our town's "fair share"?

Guest presenter: Sam Giffin, Policy and Data Analyst, Open Communities Alliance

Why do our town's housing not meet the needs of seniors and young people?

Guest presenter: Sean Ghio, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities

Three-part housing webinar can be accessed via [NHCOG's YouTube Channel](#)