Chapter 13: Caledonia County

Table of Contents

Household Growth and Projected Needs 174
Housing Stock 175
Seasonal Homes 176
Short-Term Rentals 176
Characteristics of Housing Stock 178
Manufactured Homes and Mobile Home Parks 179
Household Demographics 180
Homeownership Market 182
Rental Housing Market 185
Subsidized Rental Housing 187
Households With Housing Problems 188
Potential Housing Quality Issues 188
Overcrowding 189
Cost Burden 190
Homelessness 191
Recent Studies 193

Table of Figures

Figure 13-1 Projected Caledonia County year-round household demand, 2025 and 2029 174
Figure 13-2 Projected year-round homes needed by tenure, 2025-2029 174
Figure 13-3 Caledonia County housing stock, 2022 175
Figure 13-4: Caledonia County home types by town 175
Figure 13-5 Seasonal homes by county, 2022 176
Figure 13-6 Homes used as short-term rentals by county, Oct. 2023 176
Figure 13-7: Caledonia County short-term rental homes 177
Figure 13-8 Seasonal homes and short-term rentals by town 177
Figure 13-9: Caledonia County owner homes types 178
Figure 13-10: Caledonia County renter homes types 178
Figure 13-11: Year built for Caledonia County homes 178
Figure 13-12 Household size, 2022 179
Figure 13-13 Homes (number of bedrooms), 2022 179
Figure 13-14 Caledonia County mobile home parks 179
Figure 13-15 Households by age of householder, 2022 180
Figure 13-16 Households by race and tenure, 2010-2022 180
Figure 13-17 Household income relative to Area Median Income (AMI) 181
Figure 13-18 Number of households by income by tenure, 2022 181
Figure 13-19: Median home prices 182
Figure 13-20 Median primary home sale price by county, 2023 182
Figure 13-21 Number of primary home sales in Caledonia County, 1988-2023 183
Figure 13-22: Median days on market 183
Figure 13-23: Homeowner vacancy rates 184
Figure 13-24 Ratio of median home sale price to county median household income, 2022 184
Figure 13-25: Fair market rent for a 2-Bedroom Apartment 185
Figure 13-26: Median gross rent by county, 2022 185
Figure 13-27: Rental vacancy rates, 2022 186
Figure 13-28 Median home sale price to median renter income ratio, 2022 186
Figure 13-29 Rental housing with project-based assistance in Vermont by county, 2024 187
Figure 13-30: Caledonia County households with housing problems, by income group* 188
Figure 13-31 Occupied households with potential housing quality issues, 2022 189
Figure 13-32: Cost burden among Caledonia County households compared to statewide cost burden 190
Figure 13-33: People experiencing homelessness served by the Northeast Kingdom Continua of Care 191
Figure 13-34: Number of people experiencing homelessness by local Continua of Care (CoCs) 191
Figure 13-35 Households experiencing homelessness and shelter availability 192

Household Growth and Projected Needs

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of households living in Caledonia County year-round increased at an average annual rate of 0.1% to 12,654. By 2029, a projected 14,082-15,105 households will live in the county.

Figure 13-1 Projected Caledonia County year-round household demand, 2025 and 2029

Year-round households	2010	2020	2025 (projected)		2029 (projected)	
			Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total households	12,553	12,654	13,773	14,082	14,344	15,105
Owner households	9,233	9,271	10,627	10,866	10,614	11,178
Renter households	3,320	3,383	3,146	3,217	3,730	3,928

Source: 2010 and 2010 Decennial Census, 2025 and 2029 projected based on Census Bureau American Community Survey estimates and statewide 2016-2019 average annual growth of 1% ("Lower") and 1.8% in 2019-2022 ("Higher).

Since 2020, demand to live in Vermont has increased while the supply of new homes has not kept pace. To accommodate demand to live in the county and meet other housing market needs such as normalizing the vacancy rate, Caledonia County is likely to need a projected 1,117-1,676 additional homes between 2025 and 2029.

Figure 13-2 Projected year-round homes needed by tenure, 2025-2029

Additional homes needed	Pre-pandemic growth (Lower)	Pandemic-era growth (Upper)
Owner homes	220	678
Renter homes	897	998
Total additional homes needed	1,117	1,676

Source: VHFA analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data (Building Permits, Housing Completions, American Community Survey estimates, Population and Housing Unit Estimates and Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey) and the Vermont 2023 Point-In-Time Count of those Experiencing Homelessness. "Pre-pandemic demand" assumes resuming trends that occurred in 2016-2019. "Pandemic-era demand" assumes continuation of trends that occurred in 2019-2022 Assumes a target vacancy rate of 5% for rental and 2% for owner homes and annual housing destruction rate of 0.15%.

Housing Stock

Caledonia County's housing stock consists of 16,037 year-round and seasonal homes. The county has a greater proportion of year-round homeowners (63%) than the state (59%) and a lesser proportion of year-round rental homes. Caledonia County represents 5% of the state's total housing stock.

Figure 13-3 Caledonia County housing stock, 2022

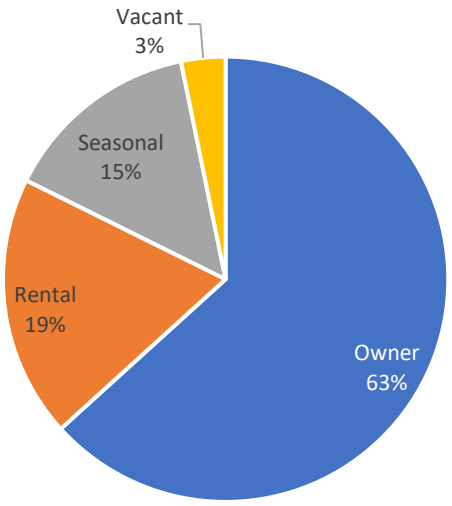


Figure 13-4: Caledonia County home types by town

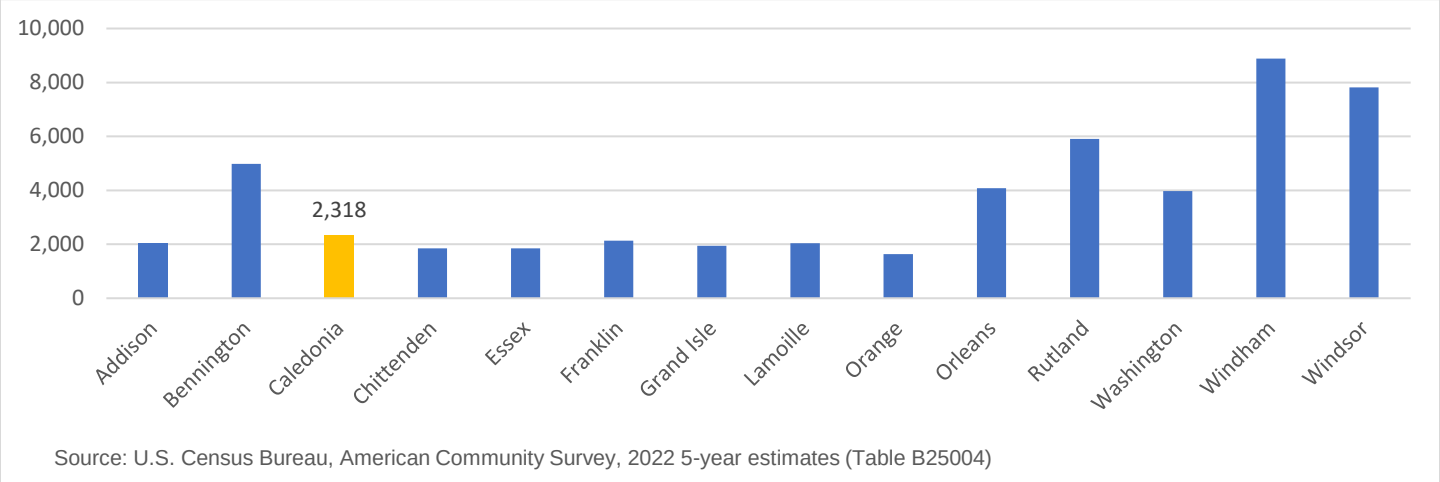
Location	Owner homes	% Owner	Renter homes	% Renter	Seasonal homes	% Seasonal	Vacant homes	% Vacant	Total homes	% of county homes
Caledonia County	10,147	63%	3,056	19%	2,318	14%	516	3%	16,037	100%
Barnet	511	57%	101	11%	241	27%	42	5%	895	6%
Burke	494	52%	105	11%	296	31%	55	6%	950	6%
Danville	826	64%	178	14%	273	21%	11	1%	1,288	8%
Groton	420	61%	47	7%	194	28%	30	4%	691	4%
Hardwick	1,021	68%	310	21%	125	8%	52	3%	1,508	9%
Kirby	257	87%	30	10%	9	3%	0	0%	296	2%
Lyndon	1,844	75%	506	21%	77	3%	25	1%	2,452	15%
Newark	211	38%	30	5%	295	53%	23	4%	559	3%
Peacham	308	56%	61	11%	173	31%	10	2%	552	3%
Ryegate	396	64%	80	13%	117	19%	27	4%	620	4%
Sheffield	234	64%	43	12%	58	16%	30	8%	365	2%
St. Johnsbury	2,050	57%	1,425	40%	32	1%	65	2%	3,572	22%
Stannard	86	71%	1	1%	18	15%	16	13%	121	1%
Sutton	302	64%	32	7%	131	28%	10	2%	475	3%
Walden	398	61%	41	6%	164	25%	46	7%	649	4%
Waterford	521	82%	22	4%	30	5%	62	10%	635	4%
Wheelock	268	66%	44	11%	85	21%	12	3%	409	3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25003, B25004) from housingdata.org.

Seasonal Homes

The latest estimates show that 15% of Vermont's homes are "seasonal, occasional use, or vacation homes", giving the state the second highest rate in the nation. In 2022, there were an estimated 2,318 seasonal or occasional use homes in Caledonia County, making up 14% of all homes in the county.

Figure 13-5 Seasonal homes by county, 2022

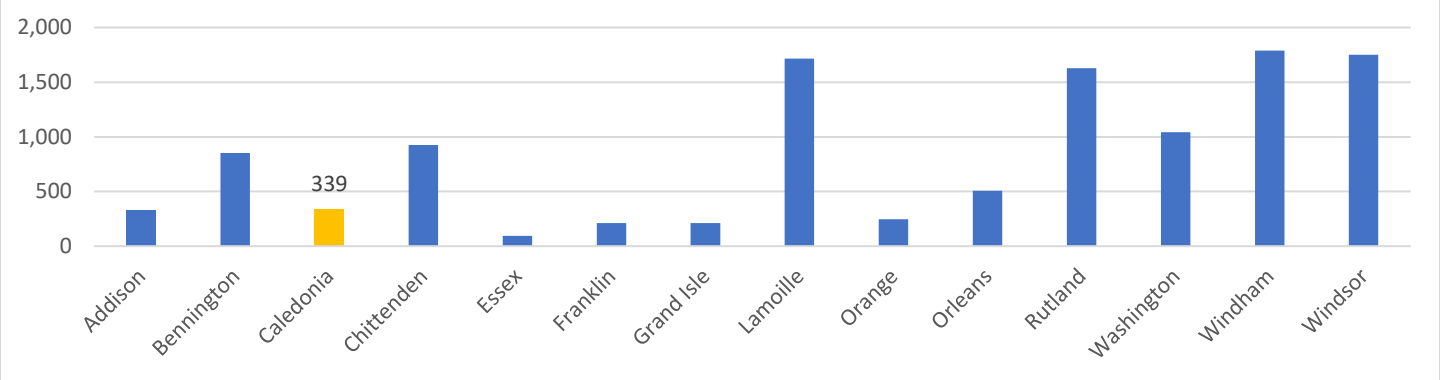


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022 5-year estimates (Table B25004)

Short-Term Rentals

The number of short-term rentals statewide has risen dramatically in the last ten years. In 2015, fewer than 1,000 homes were listed monthly as short-term rentals; as of September 2023, more than 11,747 homes are being listed. The growth in the short-term rental market has not been equal across the state, however. Counties in southern Vermont or counties that feature one of the state's larger resort towns have the highest share of STRs and have seen the greatest growth.

Figure 13-6 Homes used as short-term rentals by county, Oct. 2023

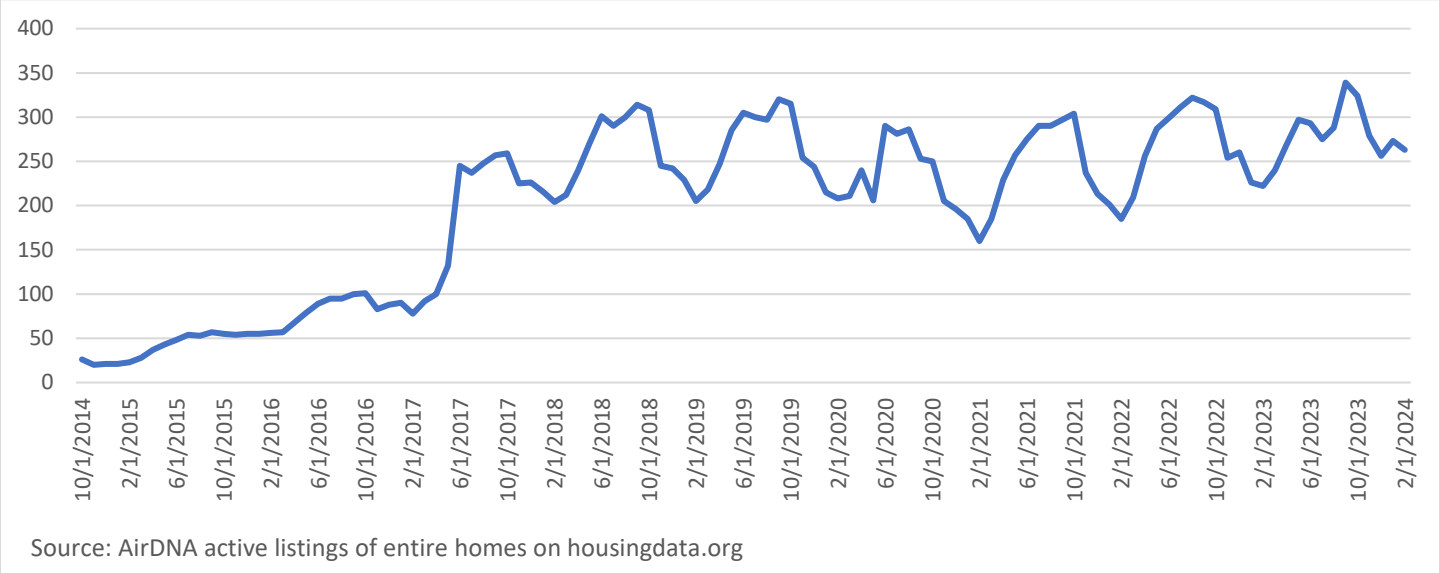


Source: Analysis of AirDNA short term rental data from housingdata.org

Caledonia County, however, has seen relatively modest growth in the STR market. In 2023, 339 homes were listed as STRs, representing less than 2% of the county's total housing stock, below the statewide rate of 4%.

Burke had the greatest portion of their housing stock dedicated to Short-term Rentals at 18.6% and contained half of the STRs in the county.

Figure 13-7: Caledonia County short-term rental homes



Source: AirDNA active listings of entire homes on housingdata.org

Figure 13-8 Seasonal homes and short-term rentals by town

Location	Seasonal homes (2022)	Seasonal homes relative to total housing stock	Short-term rentals (active Oct. 2023)	Short-term rental to total housing stock	Total housing stock
Caledonia County	2,318	14%	339	2.10%	16,037
Barnet	241	27%	11	1.20%	895
Burke	296	31%	177	18.60%	950
Danville	273	21%	20	1.60%	1,288
Groton	194	28%	6	0.90%	691
Hardwick	125	8%	22	1.50%	1,508
Kirby	9	3%	0	0.00%	296
Lyndon	77	3%	48	2.00%	2,452
Newark	295	53%	0	0.00%	559
Peacham	173	31%	6	1.10%	552
Ryegate	117	19%	10	1.60%	620
Sheffield	58	16%	3	0.80%	365
St. Johnsbury	32	1%	31	0.90%	3,572
Stannard	18	15%	0	0.00%	121
Sutton	131	28%	5	1.10%	475
Walden	164	25%	0	0.00%	649
Waterford	30	5%	0	0.00%	635
Wheelock	85	21%	0	0.00%	409

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 and AirDNA on housingdata.org

Characteristics of Housing Stock

The types of homes that make up the housing stock in Caledonia County are similar to the state as a whole. Caledonia County's stock consists primarily of single-family detached homes. 74% of the combined stock of owner and renter year-round homes are single-family detached homes, even greater than the proportion statewide (67%).

Figure 13-9: Caledonia County owner homes types

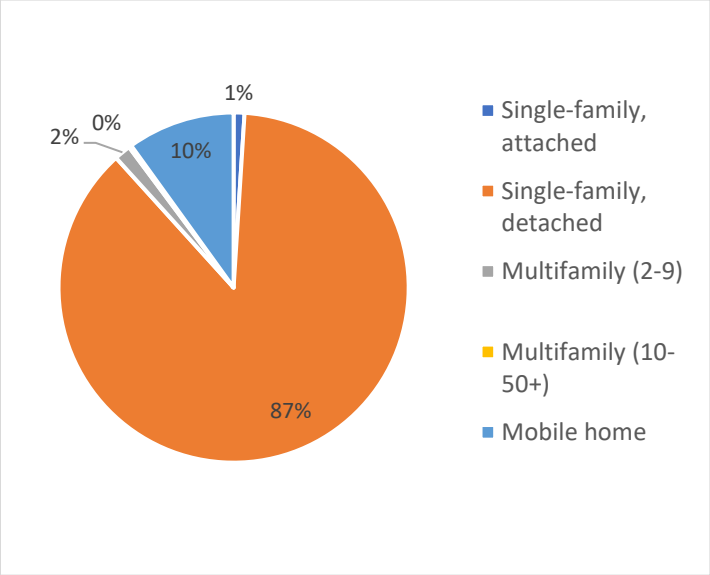
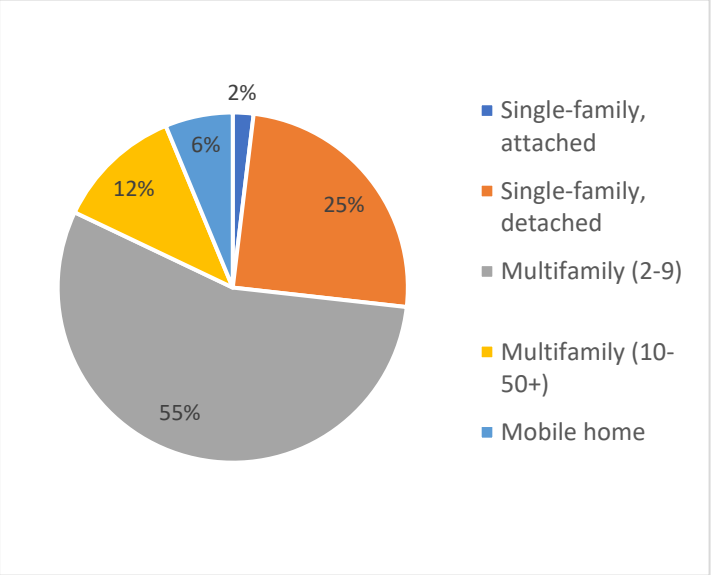


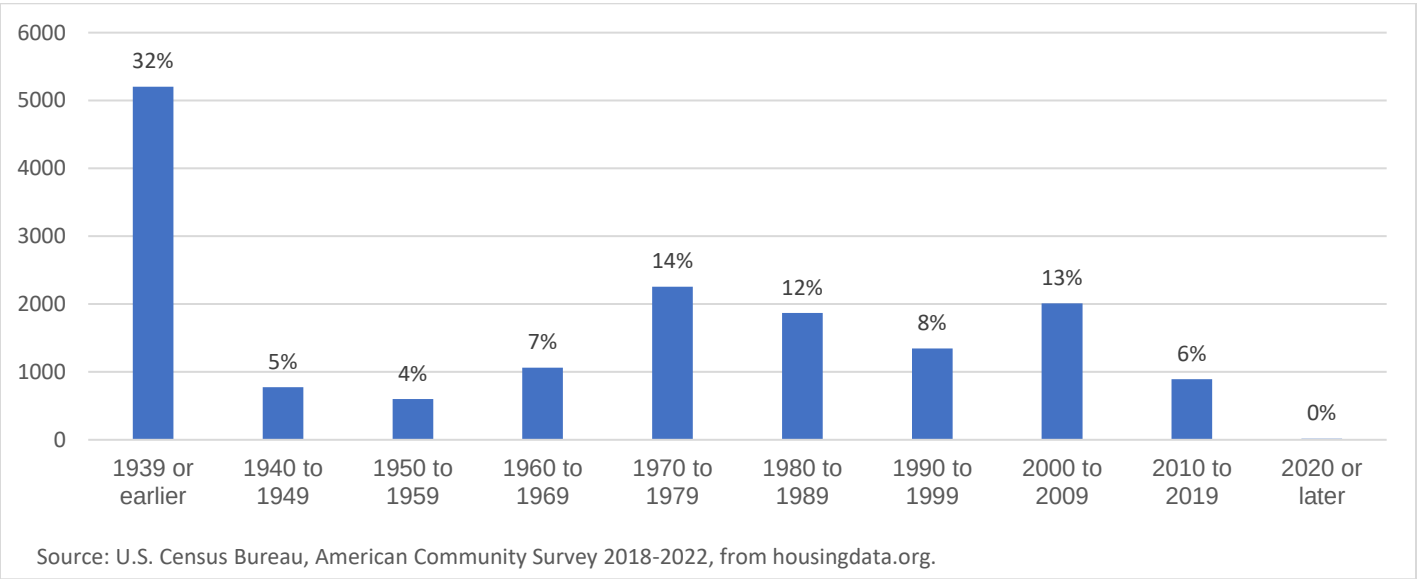
Figure 13-10: Caledonia County renter homes types



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022, from housingdata.org.

Of all homes in Caledonia County, an estimated 32% were built prior to 1940-slightly more than the statewide average of 25%. The median Caledonia County home was built in 1972. Although not necessarily indicative of housing quality problems, an older home is likely to elevate home maintenance and heating costs for its occupant.

Figure 13-11: Year built for Caledonia County homes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022, from housingdata.org.

In Vermont, the average household size has decreased over the past 30 years, down from 2.57 people per household in 1990 to 2.27 people per household in 2020. This decline has created a mismatch between the number of people per household and the number of bedrooms in Vermont homes. This difference is most pronounced in owner-occupied housing where large homes of 3+ bedrooms (74% of owner homes) outnumber of large households of 3+ people (32% of owner households). The difference in household size and number of bedrooms is not as pronounced within the renter housing market.

The mismatch is present in Caledonia County as well, where large homes (60% of the county's year-round homes) far outnumber large households (31% of the county's year-round households). Conversely, single person households (31% of the county's year-round households) outnumber small homes of 0-1 bedrooms (14% of the county's year-round homes).

Figure 13-12 Household size, 2022

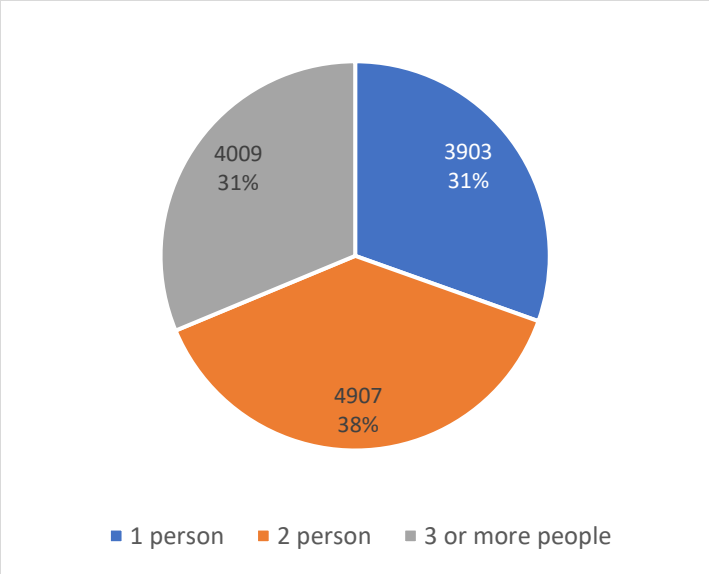
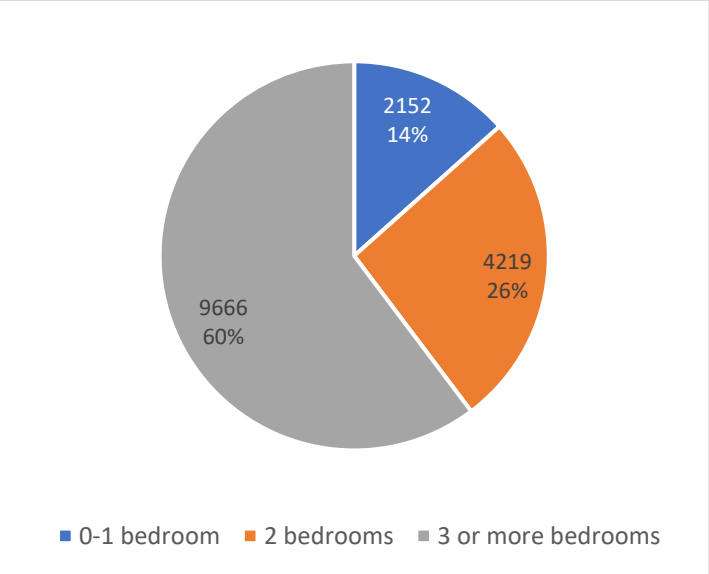


Figure 13-13 Homes (number of bedrooms), 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2022 from housingdata.org.

Manufactured Homes and Mobile Home Parks

There are approximately 1,390 manufactured homes in Caledonia County. These include homes used by year-round homeowners and renters as well as homes used seasonally or occasionally and vacant. Manufactured homes make up 9% of the county housing stock, more than the state average rate of 5%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey.

Some manufactured homes in Caledonia County are located in manufactured home communities, also known as mobile home parks. Caledonia County has 12 mobile home parks with 355 lots. As of November 2023, there were 34 vacant lots in the county, resulting in a 9.6% park vacancy rate. One park has lots situated within a floodway.

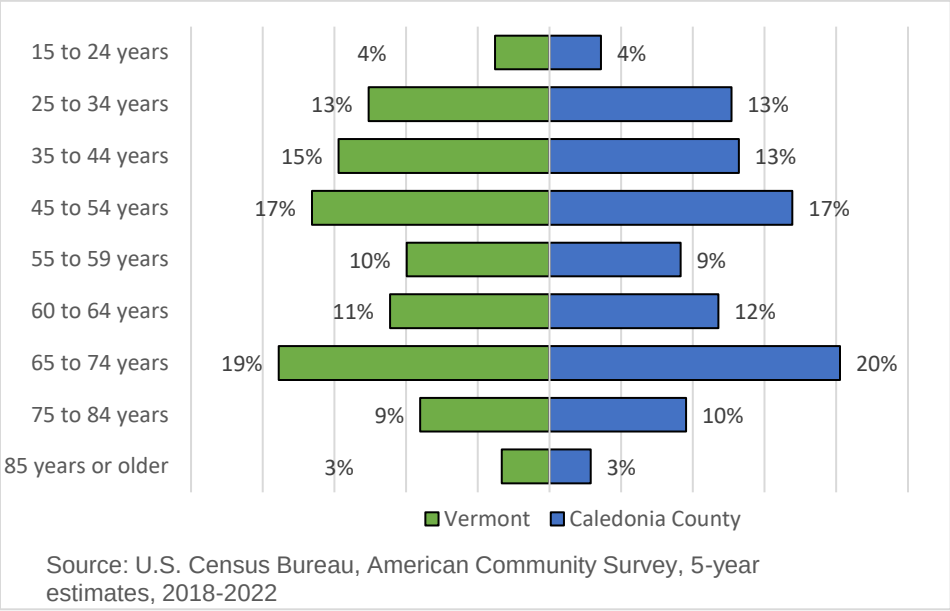
Figure 13-14 Caledonia County mobile home parks

Park Ownership type	Parks	Lots
For Profit	10	301
Non-profit	2	73
Cooperative	0	0
All Rental (for profit)	0	0
Total	12	374
Median lot rent		$350
Source: Vermont Mobile Home Park Registry		

Household Demographics

The distribution of Caledonia County households by age is very similar to the state as a whole. An estimated 33% of all year-round households are headed by someone aged 65 or older and households headed by someone under 35 years old make up 17% of the county's residents.

Figure 13-15 Households by age of householder, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Age of head of household	Households
15 to 24 years	461
25 to 34 years	1626
35 to 44 years	1692
45 to 54 years	2172
55 to 59 years	1173
60 to 64 years	1509
65 to 74 years	2597
75 to 84 years	1221
85 years or older	368
Total	12,819

The vast majority of household heads living in the county identify as white alone, but the number identifying as people of color has risen since 2010.

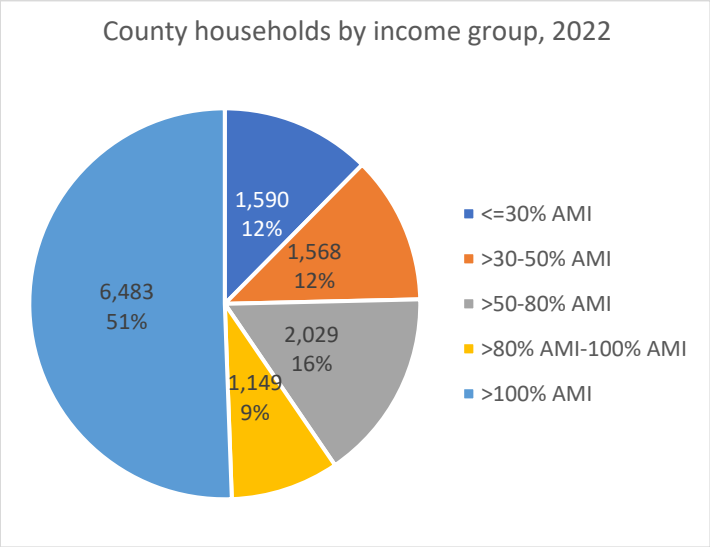
Figure 13-16 Households by race and tenure, 2010-2022

Caledonia County	All households			Owner households			Renter households		
	2010	**2020**	**2022***	**2010**	**2020**	**2022***	**2010**	**2020**	**2022***
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	50	55	n/a	27	32	n/a	23	23	n/a
Asian alone	40	72	n/a	18	40	n/a	22	32	n/a
Black or African American alone	30	59	n/a	11	23	n/a	19	36	n/a
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	-	4	n/a	-	3	n/a	-	1	n/a
Some Other Race alone	27	78	n/a	15	53	n/a	12	25	n/a
Two or More Races	148	567	264	82	351	178	66	216	86
White alone	12,258	11,819	12,363	9,080	8,769	9,609	3,178	3,050	2,754
Grand Total	12,553	12,654	12,819	9,233	9,271	9,891	3,320	3,383	2,928

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census and American Community Survey 2018-2022 (Table B25003A-G) from housingdata.org. *Note: Estimates for small groups are not available ("n/a") for 2022 because they are based on samples with large margins of error.

The estimated median household income in Caledonia County was $62,964 in 2022. An estimated 24% of the households in Caledonia have very low incomes of less than 50% AMI.

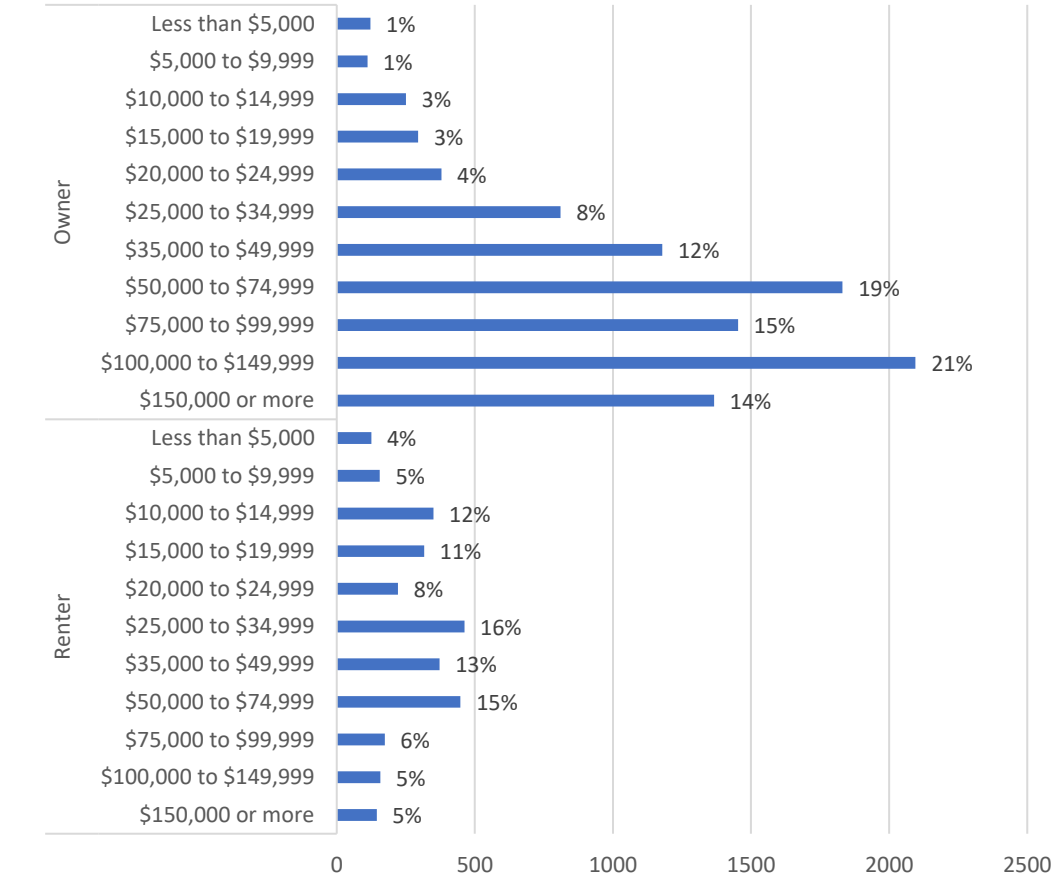
Figure 13-17 Household income relative to Area Median Income (AMI)



Income group threshold	Income
30% AMI	$18,889
50% AMI	$31,482
80% AMI	$51,155
Area Median Income (100%)	$62,964
Owner household median	$74,498
Renter household median	$31,614

Source: Based on U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 from housingdata.org

Figure 13-18 Number of households by income by tenure, 2022

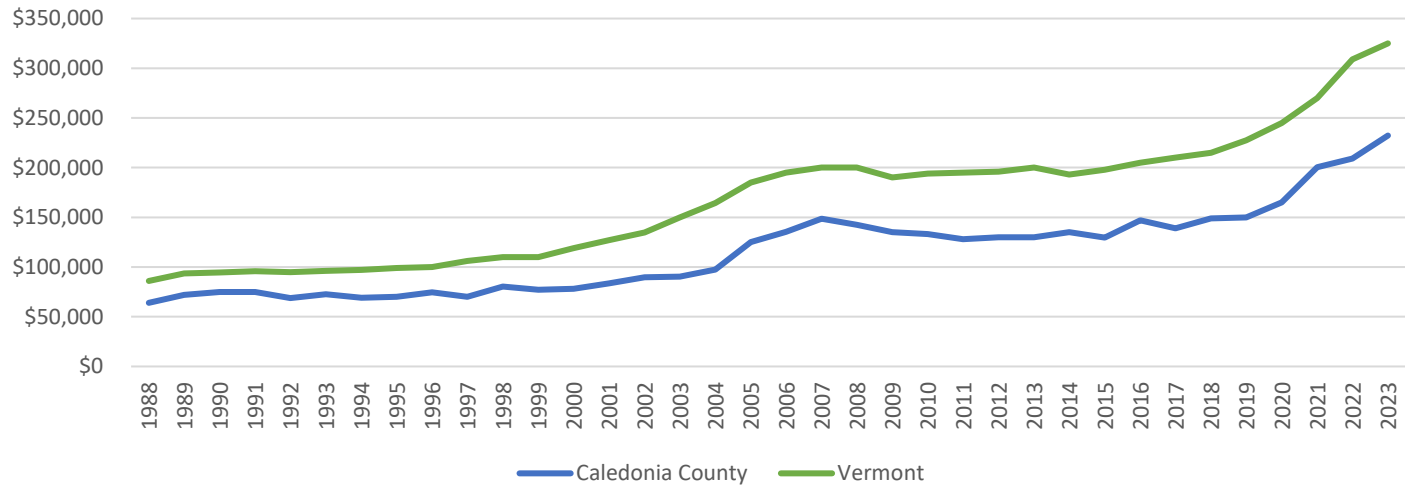


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Homeownership Market

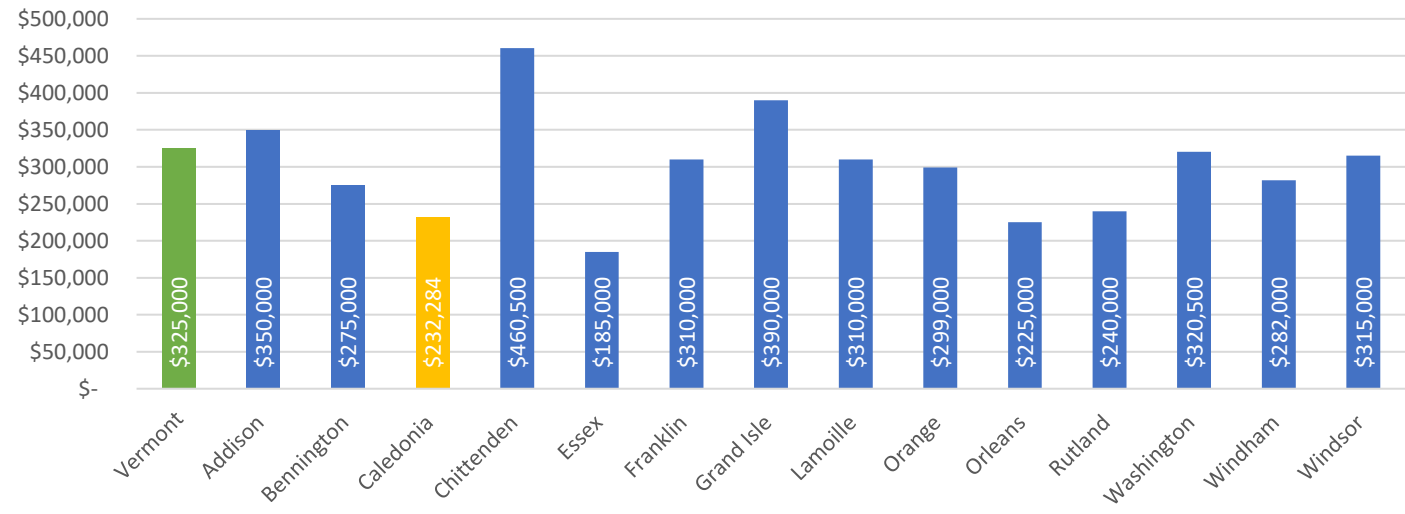
There are approximately 10,000 homeowner households in Caledonia County. Like the statewide rate, 73% of the county's households are homeowners. The median home price in the county in 2023 was about $232,000, while the state median was $325,000. This continues a trend in which no county in Vermont has seen a decline in annual median home sale price since 2019.

Figure 13-19: Median home prices



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

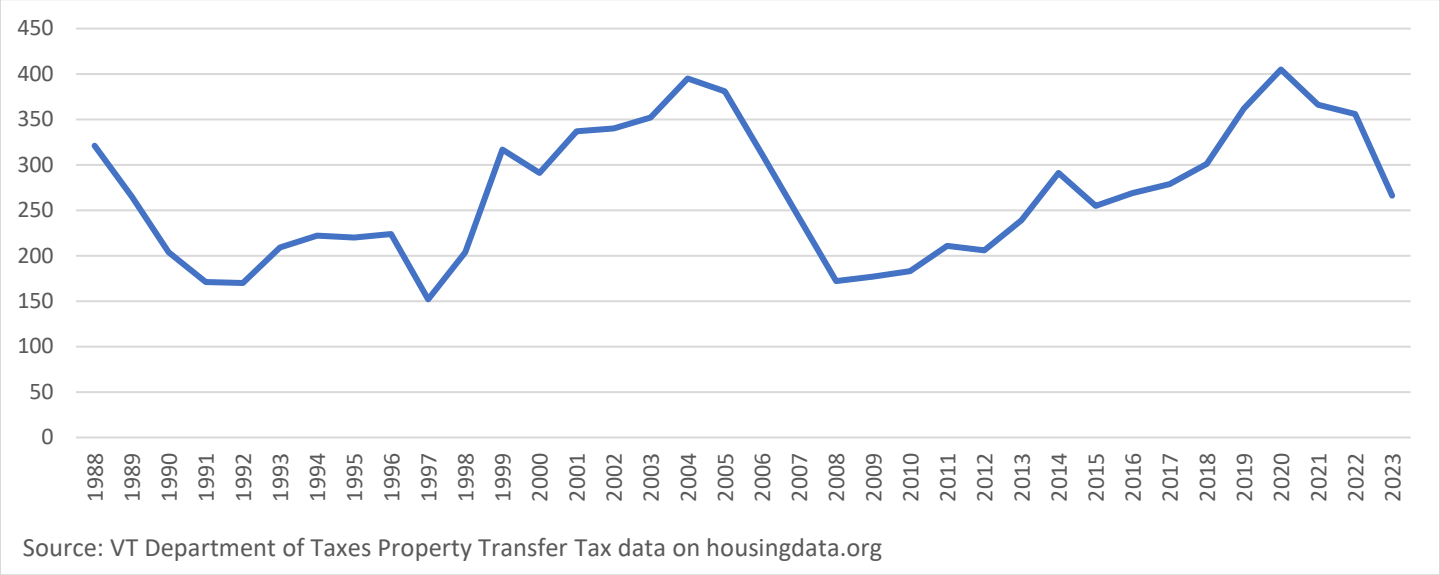
Figure 13-20 Median primary home sale price by county, 2023



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

In 2023, there were 266 primary homes sales in Caledonia County. The annual total number of homes sold in the county peaked in 2020 when 405 homes were sold. This reflects the statewide increase in primary home sales experienced in 2020 and 2021. The decline in sales in 2021-2023 suggests that rising prices and interest rates, as well as constrained supply of for sale homes, may be slowing down the home sale market.

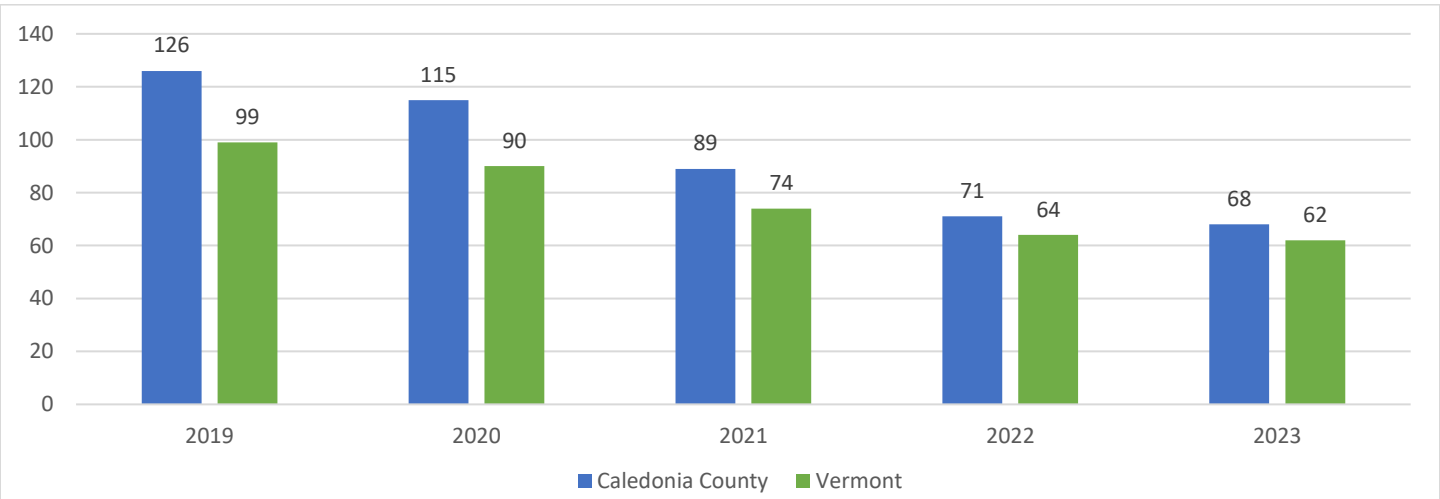
Figure 13-21 Number of primary home sales in Caledonia County, 1988-2023



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

The median days on the market for a Caledonia County home dropped to 68 days in 2023 from 126 days in 2019. Homes in the county stay on the market slightly longer than the Vermont median of 62 days. On average, homes in the county are on the market for approximately two fewer months than in 2019. The short time on the market is an all-time low in Vermont and another indication of the high demand for homes.

Figure 13-22: Median days on market

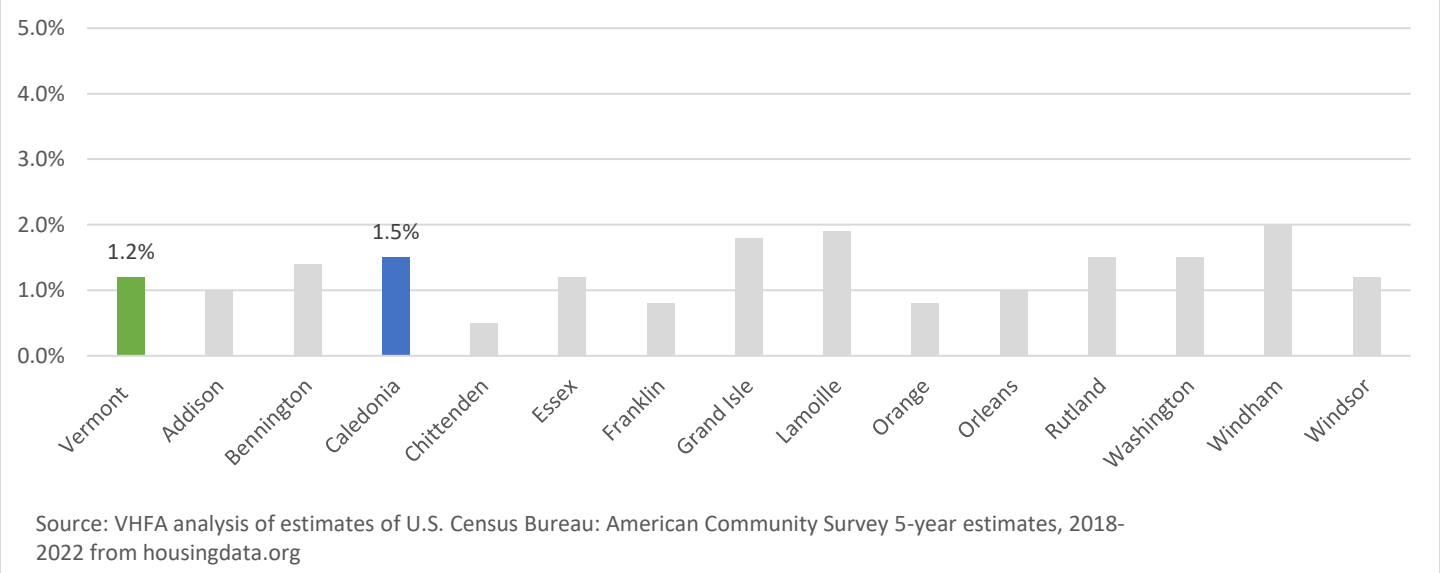


Source: Vermont Property Transfer Tax (PTT) records

The homeowner vacancy rate is the number of homes on the market compared to the total number of homes used or intended for homeowner households. Vermont's homeowner vacancy rate is estimated at 1.2%, below the 2.0% rate considered indicative of a healthy housing market. When the vacancy rate falls below the healthy rate, it can be difficult for homebuyers to find homes to purchase due to limited availability and puts upward pressure on sales prices.

Vacancy rates vary between Vermont counties, with some counties falling in the healthy market range and others far below. The homeowner vacancy rate in Caledonia County (1.5%) is similar to the statewide rate and lower than the healthy market range.

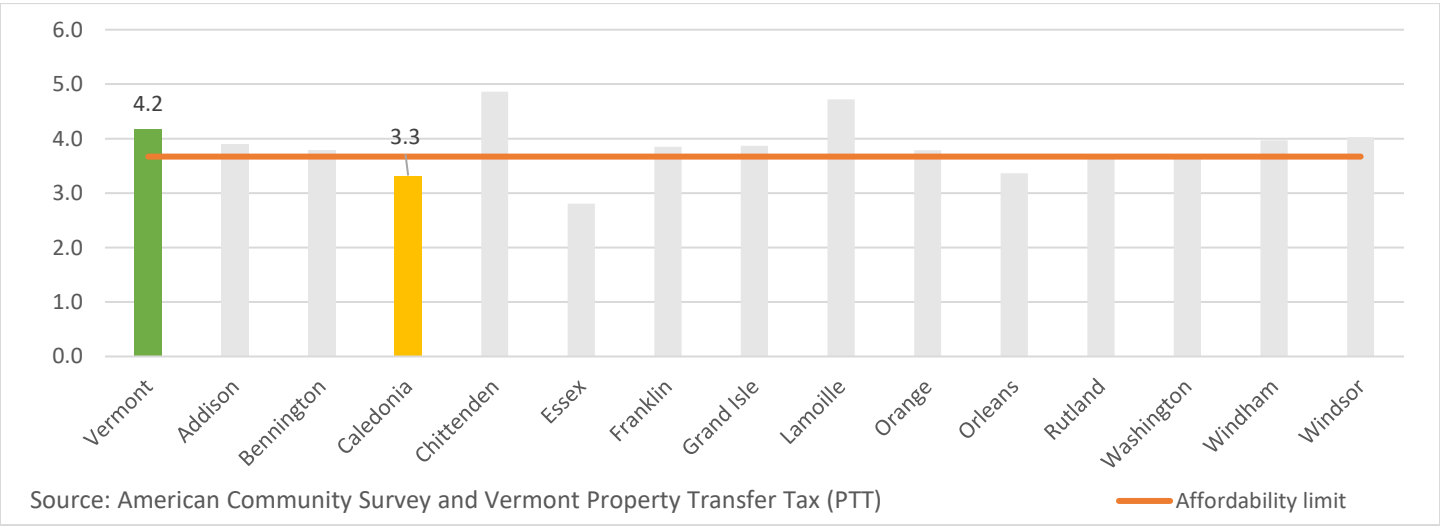
Figure 13-23: Homeowner vacancy rates



Source: VHFA analysis of estimates of U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 from housingdata.org

Homes are more affordable in Caledonia County, on average, than in most Vermont counties. In 2022, the ratio of county home prices to median county household income was 3.3. When exceeding a factor of 3.67, households on average are paying more than 30% of their annual income towards housing costs and are thus considered cost burdened. 23% of owner-occupied households in Caledonia County are cost-burdened.

Figure 13-24 Ratio of median home sale price to county median household income, 2022

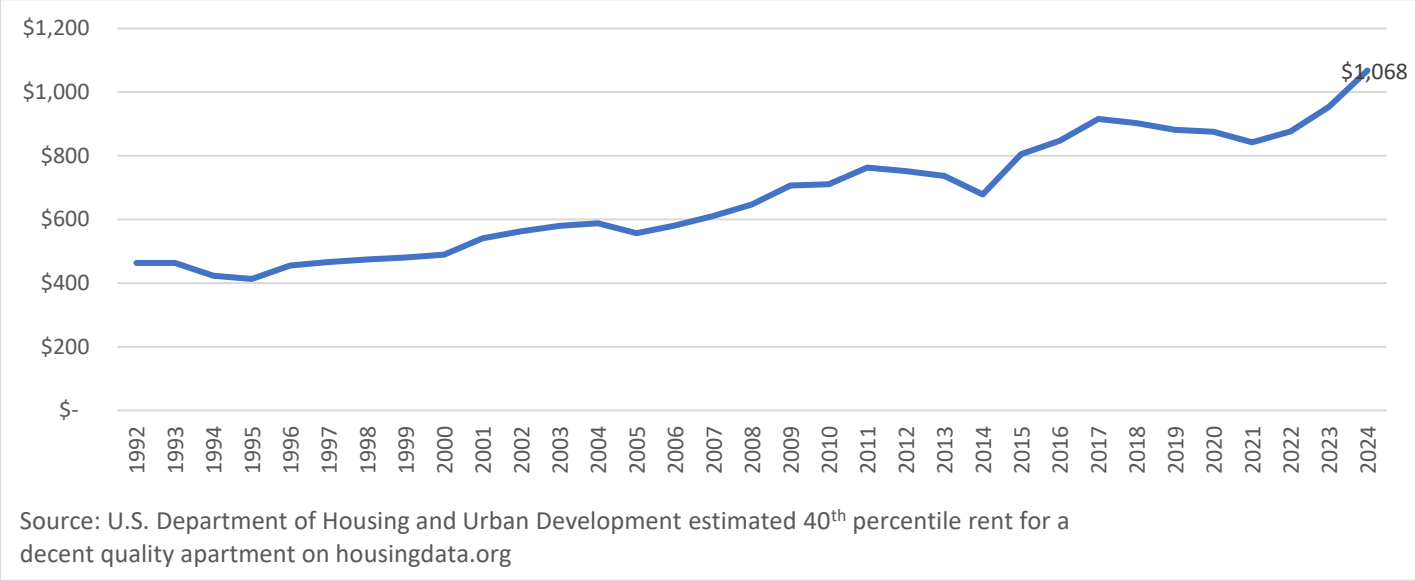


Source: American Community Survey and Vermont Property Transfer Tax (PTT)

Rental Housing Market

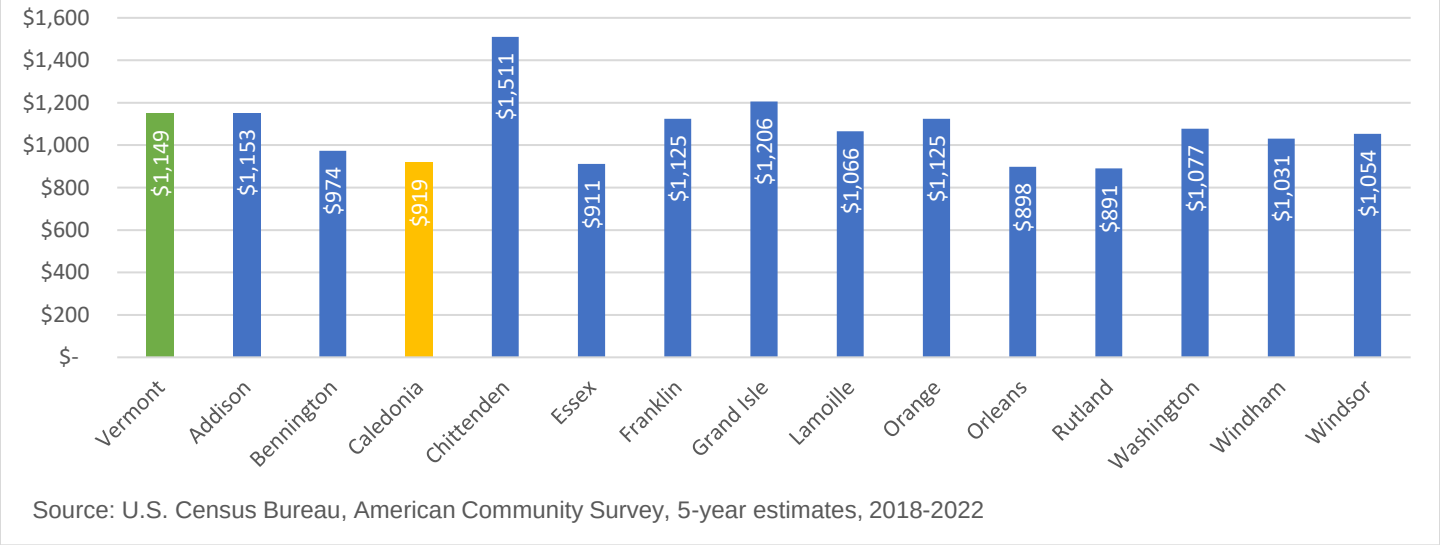
According to HUD, monthly rent for a safe, decent apartment in Vermont counties in 2024 is 25-35% higher than it was 5 years ago.[4] The fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Caledonia County was set at $1,068 in 2024. The median rent in Caledonia County of $919 was less than the $1,149 statewide median gross rent in 2022.

Figure 13-25: Fair market rent for a 2-Bedroom Apartment



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated 40th percentile rent for a decent quality apartment on housingdata.org

Figure 13-26: Median gross rent by county, 2022

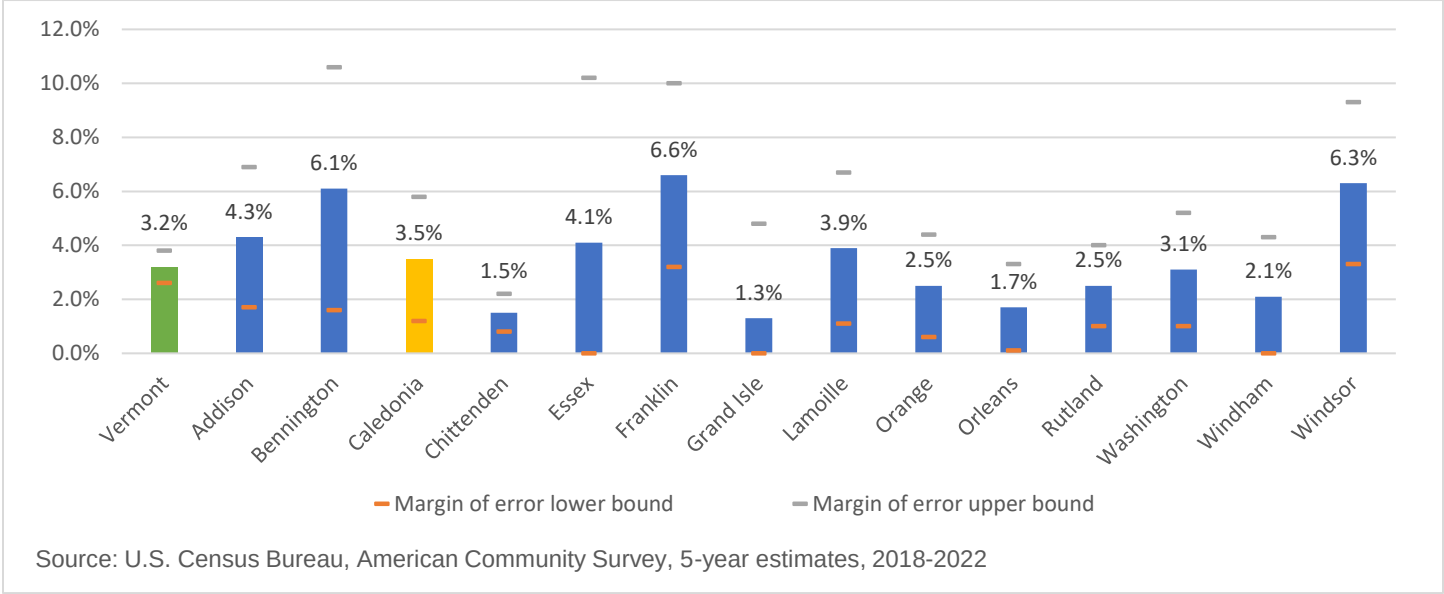


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

[4] U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Fair Market and 50th Percentile Rents. 2024

The renter vacancy rate is the number of homes for rent compared to the total number of homes used or intended for renter households. According to the most recent estimates available, Vermont's rental vacancy rate is 3.2%. This is somewhat lower than what experts consider to be a healthy vacancy rate, which is typically around 4 to 6%. Below that rate, renters can have difficulty finding an affordable home, putting upward pressure on prices. The estimated rental vacancy rate in Caledonia County of 3.5% is similar to the statewide average. Both state and county vacancy rates have declined in the last ten years.

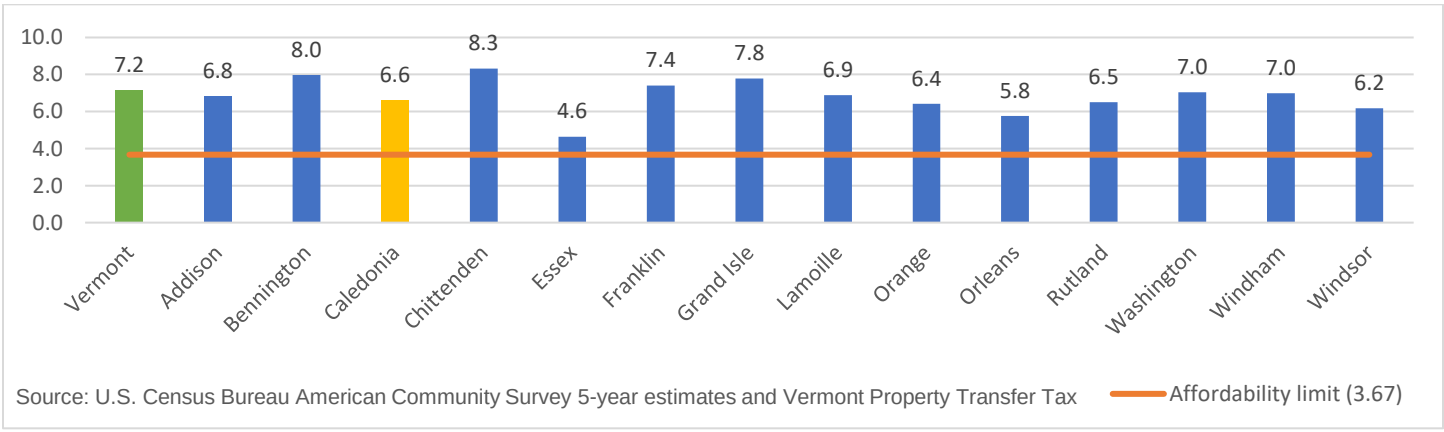
Figure 13-27: Rental vacancy rates, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Across the state, the median home sale price was 7.2 times the median renter household income in 2022. For housing to be considered affordable, housing costs should not exceed a factor of 3.67, where only 30% of income is dedicated to housing costs. Given the mismatch in this ratio, the median renter household would have difficulty affording a median primary home statewide and in Caledonia County.

Figure 13-28 Median home sale price to median renter income ratio, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates and Vermont Property Transfer Tax

Subsidized Rental Housing

Vermont has 14,670 rental apartments in 541 apartment complexes that were built through federal and state government programs. Together, these homes comprise 19% of the state's rental homes.

Affordable housing is generally defined as housing where the occupant is paying less than 30% of their income towards housing costs. To create affordable housing, the federal government directs funding through various channels, including state governments, non-profit or private housing developers, Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) or other housing agencies. Public subsidies for affordable housing largely fall in two categories; (1) funding for the construction and rehabilitation of housing, or (2) funding to provide rental assistance to tenants. Often, apartments created with public development funding are paired with rental assistance funding to ensure affordability for low-income tenants

Figure 13-29 Rental housing with project-based assistance in Vermont by county, 2024

County	Total occupied rental homes	Apartments in buildings developed with public funding	% of all rental homes	Apartments with monthly project based rental assistance	% of all rental homes
Addison County	3,183	507	16%	279	9%
Bennington County	4,222	836	20%	400	9%
Caledonia County	3,056	528	17%	231	8%
Chittenden County	26,034	5,302	20%	1,929	7%
Essex County	468	100	21%	70	15%
Franklin County	4,604	787	17%	498	11%
Grand Isle County	315	99	31%	37	12%
Lamoille County	3,150	396	13%	189	6%
Orange County	2,317	430	19%	223	10%
Orleans County	2,398	335	14%	187	8%
Rutland County	7,304	1,371	19%	880	12%
Washington County	7,247	1,311	18%	903	12%
Windham County	5,655	1,417	25%	707	13%
Windsor County	6,309	1,251	20%	749	12%
Statewide	76,262	14,670	19%	7,282	10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates and Directory of Affordable Rental Housing on housingdata.org

In Caledonia County, there are 528 apartments in buildings that were built with public development subsidies. These apartments account for 17% of the county rental housing stock. Among those apartments, 231 are connected to a source of project based rental assistance, such that tenants pay no more than 30% of their gross income towards housing costs, with the rental assistance administrating agency covering the remaining rent balance directly.

Because Caledonia County does not have an associated Public Housing Authority to administer certain federal housing programs or locally disperse Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, this is done by Vermont State Housing Authority.

Households With Housing Problems

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) receives custom tabulations from the Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS). These data, known as the "CHAS" data (Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy), demonstrate the extent of housing problems and housing needs, particularly for low income households. The CHAS identifies four housing problems:

1. Home lacks complete plumbing,

2. Home lacks complete kitchen,

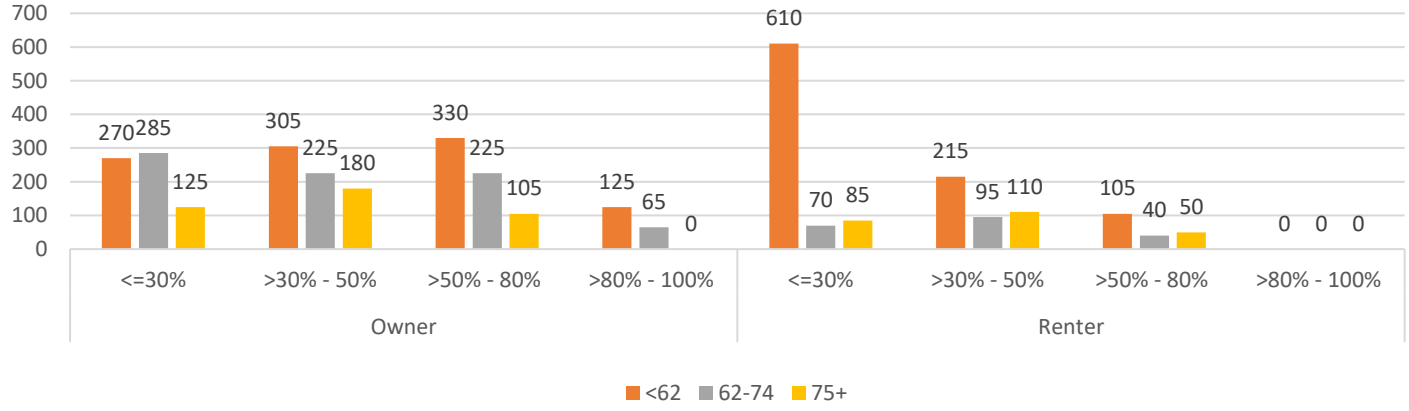
3. Household is overcrowded, or

4. Household is cost burdened (paying more than 30% of income towards housing)

An estimated 83,180 households in Vermont (about 33% of the households in the state) have at least 1 housing problem. Among these potential issues, cost burden is the most prevalent, accounting for at least 95% of the households with one or more housing problem.

The single largest demographic group in Caledonia County experiencing housing problems is renters with household incomes of less than 30% of the area median who are younger than 62. According to HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy estimates, 610 of these households had at least one of the following housing problems: housing costs of 30% or more of income, lack of kitchen or plumbing facilities, and overcrowding.

Figure 13-30: Caledonia County households with housing problems, by income group*



*Income groups are based on a household's income relative to the area median income.
Source: HUD CHAS estimates 2020 from housingdata.org

Potential Housing Quality Issues

The Census Bureau offers only minimal estimates of the extent to which Vermont's housing stock conforms to basic quality standards:

- 2,321 occupied housing units, or 0.6% of Vermont's housing stock lack complete kitchen facilities.
- 1,322 occupied housing units, or 0.4% of Vermont's housing stock lack complete plumbing facilities.
- 498 occupied housing units, or 0.3% of Vermont's housing stock are unheated and 510 use coal as a main heating source.
- 4,230 occupied homes, or 2% of the housing stock, are overcrowded
- 4,600 occupied mobile homes were built before 1979 when federal quality standards were enacted

However, the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for the American Community Survey (ACS) allows for multi-factor analysis, making it possible to review combined criteria that signal possible housing quality issues. Households were flagged with potential quality issues if they had any of the following criteria:

- The heating fuel type was coal, or the home lacked a heat source.
- The housing unit lacked complete kitchen facilities.
- The housing unit lacked complete plumbing facilities.
- The housing unit was a mobile home built before 1979.
- The housing unit was a rental unit built before 1939 with rent less than $500 per month.
- The housing unit was an owner home with an estimated property value of $75,000 or less (excluding mobile homes or RVs/vans/boats).

Based on analysis of Census Bureau PUMS 2022 data, there are at least 19,637 Vermont households living in homes with potentially serious housing quality issues. This accounts for about 7% of the occupied housing stock. This estimate almost certainly undercounts the total number of households with housing problems because many issues such as poor sanitary conditions, inadequate weatherization and poor interior air quality would not necessarily be reflected in the criteria above.

PUMS data is not available at the county level, instead grouping counties geographically. Caledonia County is classified as part of the Northern Vermont PUMs region and represents 20% of the housing stock in the region. If the distribution of housing quality issues is equal across the region, there are likely approximately 1,030 owner occupied and 191 renter occupied homes in County with these indicators.

Figure 13-31 Occupied households with potential housing quality issues, 2022

Region	Owner households	Renter households	Occupied without payment of rent	Total households
Northern Vermont (Caledonia, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille & Orleans Counties)	5,151	953	526	6,630
Statewide	14,101	4,517	1,055	19,673
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS), 5-year estimates, 2018-2022				

This analysis does not account for vacant units – an additional 600 homes in the county are considered “other vacant” by the U.S. Census Bureau. Homes can fall into this category for many reasons, including homes that are under renovation or homes held vacant for personal reasons by the owner. However, since this category can also include foreclosed or abandoned homes, it is often used as an indicator of area housing stock decline.

Overcrowding

About 4,200 (or 2%) of Vermont households live in overcrowded homes. Such homes are defined as those with fewer rooms than household members. For example, a one-bedroom home with a living room and kitchen has 3 rooms. Thus, it would be considered overcrowded if the household had 4 members. Studies have reported a direct association between crowding and adverse health outcomes, such as infectious disease and mental health problems.

In Vermont, renter households experience overcrowding at over three times the rate of homeowners, with 3.4% of renter households overcrowded versus just under 1% of owner households.

There are an estimated 134 households in Caledonia County that are considered overcrowded. Of those households, 114 are owner-occupied and 20 are renter-occupied. Among all overcrowding in Caledonia County, an estimated 36 households are considered severely overcrowded.

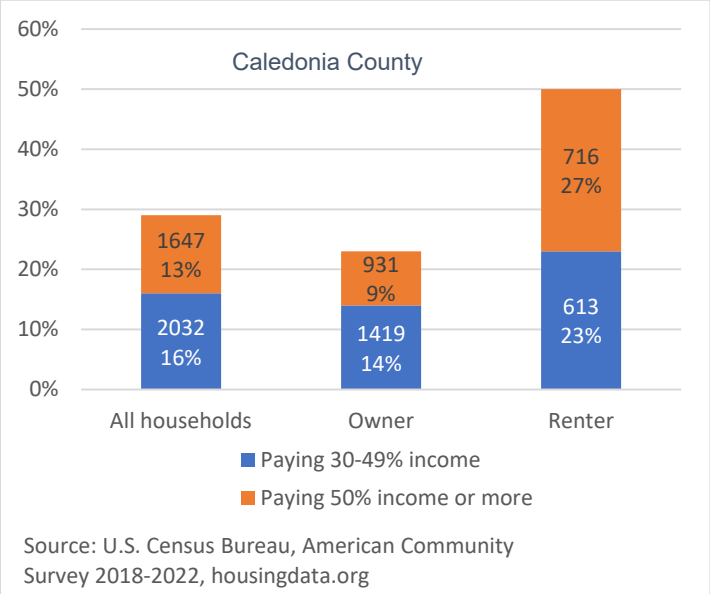
Cost Burden

When a household's housing expenses consume less than 30% of their monthly income, their housing is considered "affordable" because there is likely to be enough income remaining to afford other necessities. When housing costs consume more than 30% of household income, the household is considered "cost burdened." When cost burdened, households are less likely to have enough income remaining for other living expenses which can lead to housing instability. When housing costs exceed 50% of household income, the household is considered to be "severely cost burdened."

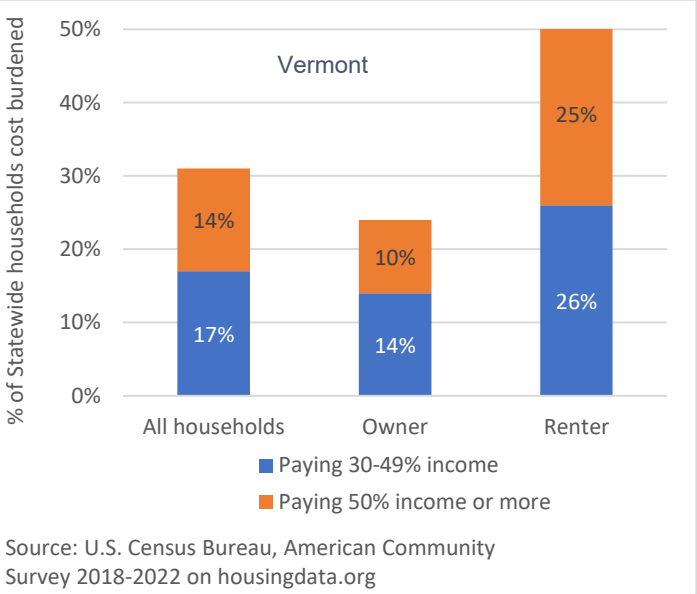
Approximately 31% of all households in Vermont are cost burdened (about 82,000 households), of which 36,000 households, 14% of all households, are severely cost burdened. In Vermont, the total number of cost burdened owner-occupied households (about 48,000) is greater than the number of cost burdened renter households (about 34,000 households), but the percentage of all owner households that are cost burdened (24% of owner households) is significantly lower than the percentage of renter households cost burdened (51% of renter households). 10% of Vermont's homeowners (about 20,000 households) and 26% of Vermont's renter households (about 17,000 households) are "severely cost burdened."

The proportion of households that are cost-burdened is slightly less in Caledonia County than the state as a whole (29%). Owner (23%) and renter (50%) cost burden in Caledonia County were both slightly lower than the state. Approximately 1,647 households are severely cost-burdened in Caledonia County and may be at risk of housing instability.

Figure 13-32: Cost burden among Caledonia County households compared to statewide cost burden



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022, housingdata.org



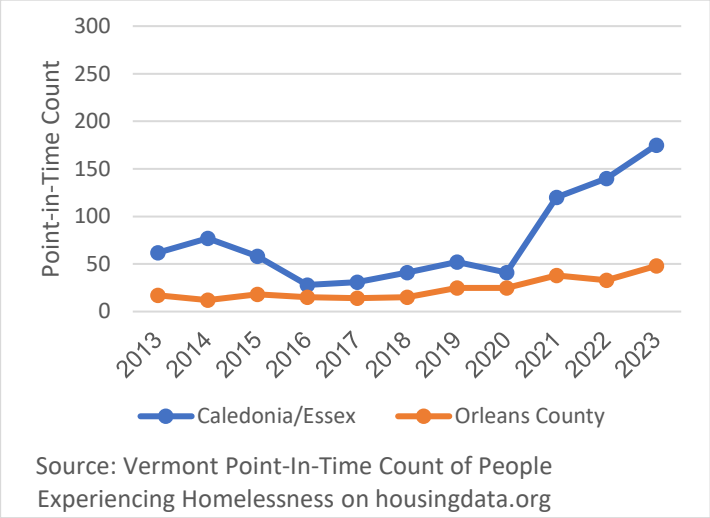
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 on housingdata.org

Homelessness

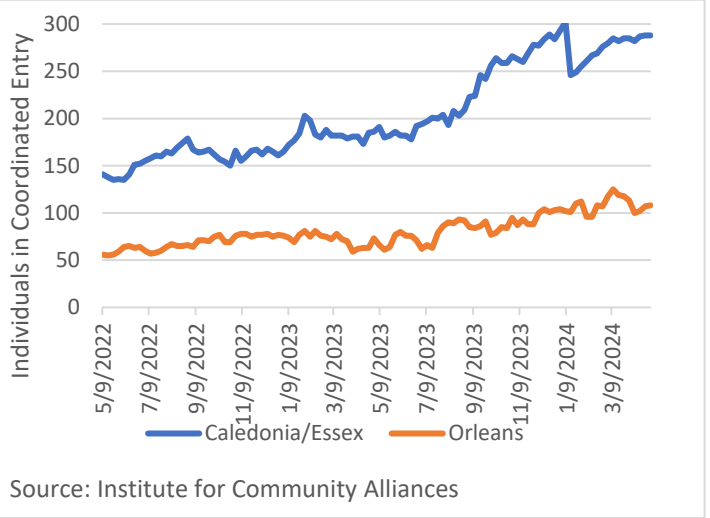
Homelessness services in the Northeast Kingdom are divided between two local Continua of Care (CoC): the Caledonia/Essex CoC and the Orleans CoC. The Caledonia-Essex Continuum of Care contains all towns in Caledonia County excluding Hardwick and Stannard, the Essex County towns of Concord, East Haven, Granby, Guildhall, Lunenburg, and Victory, as well as the Orange County towns of Newbury and Topsham. The Orleans CoC covers all of Orleans County (except for Craftsbury and Greensboro) and the remaining Northeast Kingdom towns.

During the most recent 2023 Point-In-Time count, 175 people in 98 households were experiencing homelessness in the Caledonia/Essex CoC. This represents the highest total in the county since the PIT count began. Vermont's Coordinated Entry Dashboard provides the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a weekly basis who are accessing services from Vermont's housing support agencies. During the last week in January 2024, 255 people in the Caledonia/Essex CoC area received support through this area's continuum of care.

Figure 13-33: Number of people experiencing homelessness served by the Northeast Kingdom Continua of Care



Source: Vermont Point-In-Time Count of People Experiencing Homelessness on housingdata.org



Source: Institute for Community Alliances

Figure 13-34: Number of people experiencing homelessness by local Continua of Care (CoCs)

Local Housing Coalition (CoC)	Number of individuals experiencing homelessness during Point-in-Time 2023	Number of individuals served by CoC during week of Jan. 29, 2024
Addison CoC	78	118
Bennington CoC	312	244
Caledonia & Essex CoC	175	255
Chittenden CoC	758	826
Franklin & Grand Isle CoC	134	242
Lamoille CoC	74	223
Orange & Windsor N CoC	188	347
Orleans CoC	48	112
Rutland CoC	654	502
Washington CoC	446	963
Windham S CoC	329	412
Windsor S & Windham N CoC	99	276
Vermont	3,295	4,408
Source: Vermont Point-in-Time Count 2023 and Vermont Coordinated Entry Dashboard		

Figure 13-35 Households experiencing homelessness and shelter availability

Local Housing Coalition (CoC)	Total Households (Point-in-Time 2023)	Households with at least one adult and child (Point-in-Time 2023)	Emergency shelter household capacity	Permanent Units with supportive services
Addison CoC	59	9	62	8
Bennington CoC	201	43	30	3
Caledonia & Essex CoC	98	26	31	29
Chittenden CoC	553	82	178	264
Franklin & Grand Isle CoC	103	9	23	6
Lamoille CoC	53	6	19	7
Orange & Windsor North CoC	132	13	0	4
Orleans CoC	25	6	4	3
Rutland CoC	425	80	19	26
Washington CoC	320	43	92	27
Windham South CoC	229	34	46	27
Windsor South & Windham North CoC	58	15	35	20
Vermont	2,256	366	539	424

Source: Vermont Point-in-Time Count, Vermont Dept. for Children and Families "GA Emergency Housing and Shelters" Presentation to the VT House Human Services and General & Housing Committees, Feb. 8, 2024 and Vermont Housing Data Website https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-programs/features-eligibility

Although most residents experiencing homelessness have been sheltered by the General Assistance program since 2020, there is also permanent emergency and transitional housing in place. Northeast Kingdom Community Action operates 32 beds across Lyndonville and St. Johnsbury. Also in St. Johnsbury, the Umbrella program operates 18 beds dedicated to victims of domestic violence, and Northeast Kingdom Youth Services has a 10-bed transitional housing program for people aged 16 to 21. The majority of Vermonters experiencing homelessness in 2021-2023 have been housed in temporary motel rooms through the General Assistance Emergency Housing program.

Recent Studies

In April 2023, Doug Kennedy Advisors completed for Rural Edge Housing and Community Development a housing needs assessment for Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties titled "Regional Housing Study and Needs Assessment." The report identifies the following major findings regarding the region's housing needs:

Housing Stock

- Overall, the region's housing increased at a faster pace than Vermont's housing stock. It is also apparent that housing development in Orleans County accounted for most of this increase.
- Rental units account for a relatively small segment of occupied units in the study region. This reflects the region's generally rural nature and the prevalence of single family owner units in rural settings.
- Seasonal housing is a significant factor in Vermont, where 16.5 percent of total housing stock is used on a seasonal or occasional basis. The impact of vacation housing is even more pronounced in the study region, where 23.9 percent of total housing stock is used seasonally.
- Only 34 percent of the region's rental units are in small (Studio/One Bedroom) configurations.
- After reaching a low point in 2017, regional residential permits increased significantly through 2021, when 300+ permits were granted. Orleans County accounted for the great majority of new housing activity in recent years; 70 percent of all permits granted between 2015 and 2021 were located in Orleans County.
- St. Johnsbury/Lyndon combined account for 42 percent of the region's subsidized-affordable housing stock. RuralEdge is the region's primary supplier and manager of housing targeted to very low to moderate income households.

Housing Stock – Financial and Market Characteristics

- Median values for the region's owned housing stock fall well below Vermont norms. Overall, the regional median value ($170,339) is 29 percent below the statewide median ($240,600). Study region owners pay an average of 26 percent of their household income toward mortgage costs.
- Regional rents are 25 percent lower than Vermont levels. The average study region renter pays 34 percent of their household income toward rental costs. 35 percent of the region's renters pay more than 40 percent of household income toward rental costs.
- Rental vacancy rates have trended downward since 2009 at the regional and national levels. Given low rental vacancies, it is not surprising that the number of publicly listed rentals is extremely low.
- As of early 2023, there were 2,142 households on the waitlists for subsidized/affordable rental units in the region, a factor more than 3.5 households per unit. If these units were to average a 10 percent turnover rate the theoretical waiting period for the last household on the waitlist would be approximately 35 years! Clearly, demand far outstrips availability.
- An upswing in the regional for-sale market started in 2017, and was followed by strong market increases in 2020 and 2021. It appears that market totals for 2022 declined from the 2021 peak, both because of limited availability (number of listings) and increases in mortgage rates.

Housing Issues

- Housing professionals interviewed in the course of study work agreed that the regional housing shortage is not limited to one or two market components. Rather, there is a need for housing in every market segment, ranging from deeply subsidized rentals to the for-sale market for moderate income households. Moreover, the current shortage affects households in all age groups. While emphasizing the breadth of the issue, virtually all contacts noted the 'missing middle.' Contacts also noted that:
  - The most acute demand in the rental market appears to be among younger households – aged 20 to 30 years;
  - Vermont and regional demographics are resulting in major imbalances, both in the housing market and throughout the economy. In particular, rapid growth among households in upper age brackets far outweighs the rate of growth among younger households.

Housing Supply and Demand

- An analysis of the regional rental market for households with incomes up to 120 percent of the median indicated that the regional housing need over the next five years is 4,000+/- units. This is not an immediate need, as only 750+/- of the households in the targeted segment will be seeking new housing on an annual basis.
- Senior households will increase in numbers at all income levels. Growth in the number of senior households will be the dominant demographic trend in the study region.
- The analysis points to acute need for housing targeted to very low and low income housing, with a particular emphasis on young persons.
- Notably, the analysis also points to a need for true market rate rentals, as these units are in short supply.
- The region's housing development infrastructure is insufficient for the task at hand. Every regional contact pointed to a lack of building contractors with the wherewithal to take on housing development projects. For some, this situation is a product of slow growth and lack of emphasis on trades education. As several contacts noted, 'a well trained and experienced tradesperson in the region can make a far more than adequate living, yet relatively few young people are choosing to go in that direction.' There is clearly no short-term solution for this situation; however, regional leaders should look to the educational system and forge new partnerships to re-generate regional development infrastructure.
- While there are acute stress points in the housing supply and demand market, it is apparent that there is housing need at virtually all price levels. Moreover, the existing housing stock is poorly matched to an aging population dominated by small households. Housing stock efforts should be focused on both new development and revitalization of housing stock that is not attuned to market needs.
- The study region's small, more remote towns will continue to be attractive to residents seeking a truly rural lifestyle, households that seek the most affordable sources of housing and vacation home owners. However, these communities are unlikely to be the favored residence for in-migrants and local households reaching senior/retired status. These two market segments will prefer a lifestyle that includes open space, but seek locations that make it easy to shop, find services and entertainment. As such, the region's urban centers, and the communities that surround these urban centers are most likely to experience growth in coming years.

Chapter 15: Essex County

Table of Contents

Household Growth and Projected Needs 218
Housing Stock 219
Seasonal Homes 220
Short-Term Rentals 220
Characteristics of Housing Stock 222
Manufactured Homes and Mobile Home Parks 223
Household Demographics 224
Homeownership Market 226
Rental Housing Market 229
Subsidized Rental Housing 231
Households With Housing Problems 232
Potential Housing Quality Issues 232
Overcrowding 233
Cost Burden 234
Homelessness 235
Recent Studies 237

Table of Figures

Figure 15-1 Projected Essex County year-round household demand, 2025 and 2029 218
Figure 15-2 Projected year-round homes needed by tenure, 2025-2029 218
Figure 15-3: Essex County home types by town 219
Figure 15-4 Essex County housing stock, 2022 219
Figure 15-5 Seasonal homes by county, 2022 220
Figure 15-6 Homes used as short-term rentals by county, Oct. 2023 220
Figure 11-15-7: Essex County short-term rental homes 221
Figure 15-8 Seasonal homes and short-term rentals by town 221
Figure 15-9: Essex County owner homes types 222
Figure 15-10: Essex County renter homes types 222
Figure 15-11: Year built for Essex County homes 222
Figure 15-12 Household size, 2022 223
Figure 15-13 Homes by number of bedrooms, 2022 223
Figure 15-14 Essex County mobile home parks 223
Figure 15-15 Households by age of householder, 2022 224
Figure 15-16 Households by race and tenure, 2010-2022 224
Figure 15-17 Household income relative to Area Median Income (AMI) 225
Figure 15-18 Number of households by income by tenure, 2022 225
Figure 15-19: Median home prices 226
Figure 15-20 Median primary home sale price by county, 2023 226
Figure 15-21 Number of primary home sales in Essex County, 1988-202 227
Figure 15-22: Median days on market 227
Figure 15-23: Homeowner vacancy rates 228
Figure 15-24 Ratio of median home sale price to county median household income, 2022 228
Figure 15-25: Fair market rent for a 2-Bedroom Apartment 229
Figure 15-26: Median gross rent by county, 2022 229
Figure 15-27: Rental vacancy rates, 2022 230
Figure 15-28 Median home sale price to median renter income ratio, 2022 230
Figure 15-29 Rental housing with project-based assistance in Vermont by county, 2024 231
Figure 15-30: Essex County households with housing problems, by income group* 232
Figure 15-31 Occupied households with potential housing quality issues, 2022 233
Figure 15-32: Cost burden among Essex County households compared to statewide cost burden 234
Figure 15-33: People experiencing homelessness served by the Northeast Kingdom Continua of Care 235
Figure 15-34: Number of people experiencing homelessness by local Continua of Care (CoCs) 235
Figure 15-35 Households experiencing homelessness and shelter availability 236

Household Growth and Projected Needs

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of households living in Essex County year-round decreased at an average rate of 0.4% per year to 2,695. By 2029, a projected 2,984-3,143 households will live in the county.

Figure 15-1 Projected Essex County year-round household demand, 2025 and 2029

Year-round households	2010	2020	2025 (projected)		2029 (projected)	
			Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Total households	2,818	2,695	2,939	3,005	2,984	3,143
Owner households	2,260	2,158	2,458	2,513	2,426	2,555
Renter households	558	537	480	491	558	587

Source: 2010 and 2010 Decennial Census, 2025 and 2029 projected based on Census Bureau American Community Survey estimates and statewide 2016-2019 average annual growth of 1% ("Lower") and 1.8% in 2019-2022 ("Higher).

Since 2020, demand to live in Vermont has increased while the supply of new homes has not kept pace. To accommodate demand to live in the county and meet other housing market needs such as normalizing the vacancy rate, Essex County is likely to need a projected 153-268 additional homes between 2025 and 2029.

Figure 15-2 Projected year-round homes needed by tenure, 2025-2029

Additional homes needed	Pre-pandemic growth (Lower)	Pandemic-era growth (Upper)
Owner homes	44	126
Renter homes	109	142
Total additional homes needed	153	268

Source: VHFA analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data (Building Permits, Housing Completions, American Community Survey estimates, Population and Housing Unit Estimates and Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey) and the Vermont 2023 Point-In-Time Count of those Experiencing Homelessness. "Pre-pandemic demand" assumes resuming trends that occurred in 2016-2019. "Pandemic-era demand" assumes continuation of trends that occurred in 2019-2022 Assumes a target vacancy rate of 5% for rental and 2% for owner homes and annual housing destruction rate of 0.15%.

Housing Stock

Essex County's housing stock consists of 4,905 year-round and seasonal homes. The county has a greater proportion of seasonal homes (38%) than the state (15%) and a lesser proportion of year-round owner and rental homes. Essex County is the smallest county in the state and represents 1% of the state's housing stock.

Figure 15-4 Essex County housing stock, 2022

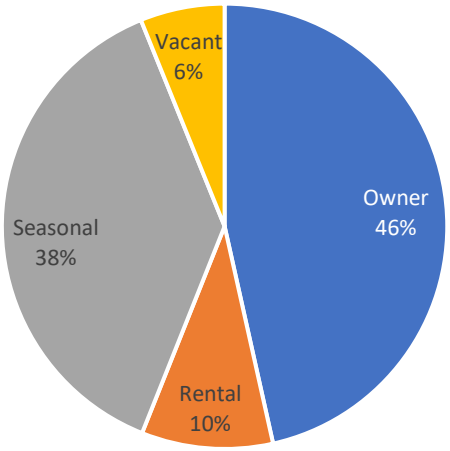


Figure 15-3: Essex County home types by town

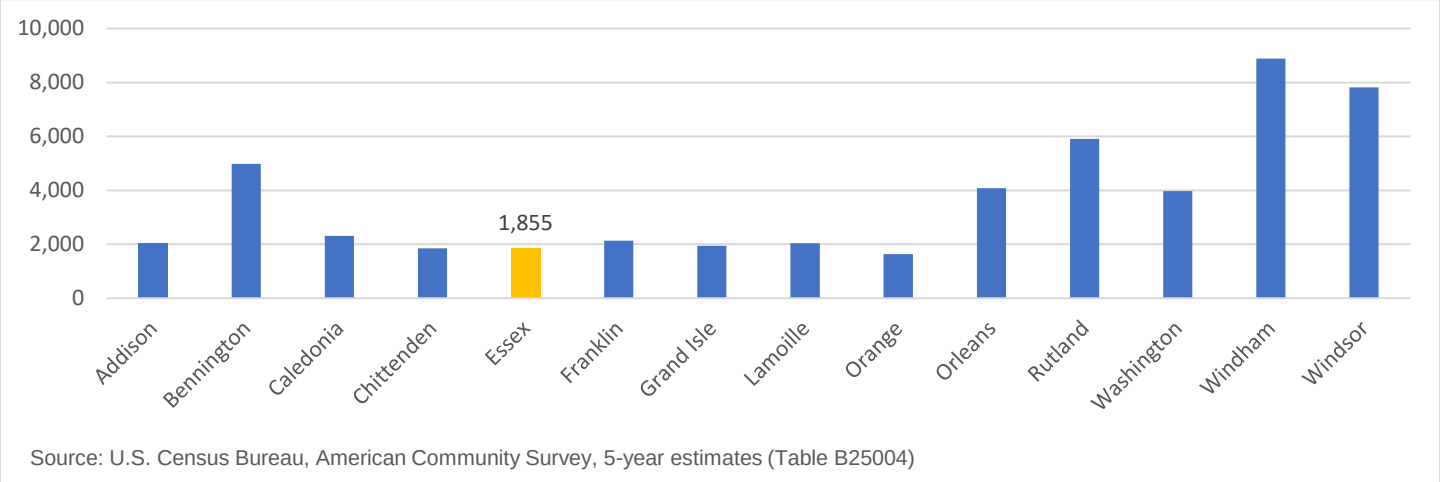
Location	Owner homes	% Owner	Renter homes	% Renter	Seasonal homes	% Seasonal	Vacant homes	% Vacant	Total homes	% of county total homes
Essex County	2,281	47%	468	10%	1,855	38%	301	6%	4,905	1%
Averill	0	0%	0	0%	263	97%	9	3%	272	6%
Averys Gore	0		0		0		0		0	0%
Bloomfield	110	46%	24	10%	97	41%	6	3%	237	5%
Brighton	330	34%	211	22%	333	34%	99	10%	973	20%
Brunswick	38	41%	5	5%	47	51%	2	2%	92	2%
Canaan	313	57%	38	7%	163	30%	37	7%	551	11%
Concord	429	60%	55	8%	216	30%	19	3%	719	15%
East Haven	123	58%	9	4%	58	27%	23	11%	213	4%
Ferdinand	46	75%	0	0%	15	25%	0	0%	61	1%
Granby	25	30%	5	6%	54	64%	0	0%	84	2%
Guildhall	157	74%	3	1%	41	19%	11	5%	212	4%
Lemington	45	57%	1	1%	22	28%	11	14%	79	2%
Lewis	0		0		0		0		0	0%
Lunenburg	465	60%	95	12%	156	20%	61	8%	777	16%
Maidstone	117	35%	2	1%	204	61%	10	3%	333	7%
Norton	62	31%	11	6%	122	61%	5	3%	200	4%
Victory	21	24%	9	10%	51	57%	8	9%	89	2%
Warners Grant	0		0		0		0		0	0%
Warrens Gore	0	0%	0	0%	13	100%	0	0%	13	0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 (Table B25003, B25004) from housingdata.org.

Seasonal Homes

The latest estimates show that 15% of Vermont's homes are "seasonal, occasional use, or vacation homes", giving the state the second highest rate in the nation. In 2022, there were an estimated 1,855 seasonal or occasional use homes in Essex County, making up 38% of all homes in the county.

Figure 15-5 Seasonal homes by county, 2022

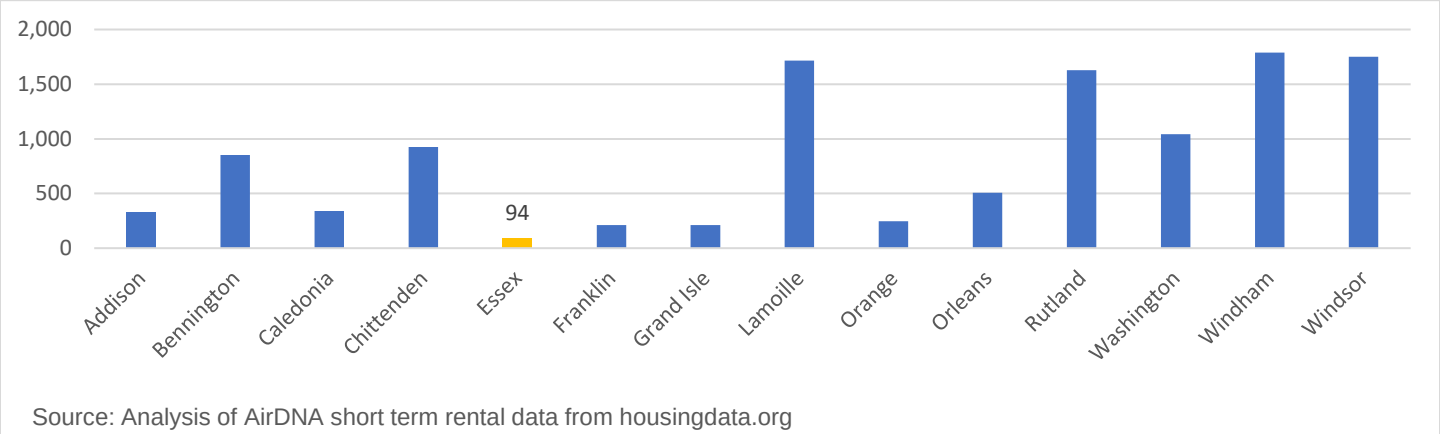


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (Table B25004)

Short-Term Rentals

The number of short-term rentals statewide has risen dramatically in the last ten years. In 2015, fewer than 1,000 homes were listed monthly as short-term rentals; as of September 2023, more than 11,747 homes are being listed. The growth in the short-term rental market has not been equal across the state, however. Counties in southern Vermont or counties that feature one of the state's larger resort towns have the highest share of STRs and have seen the greatest growth.

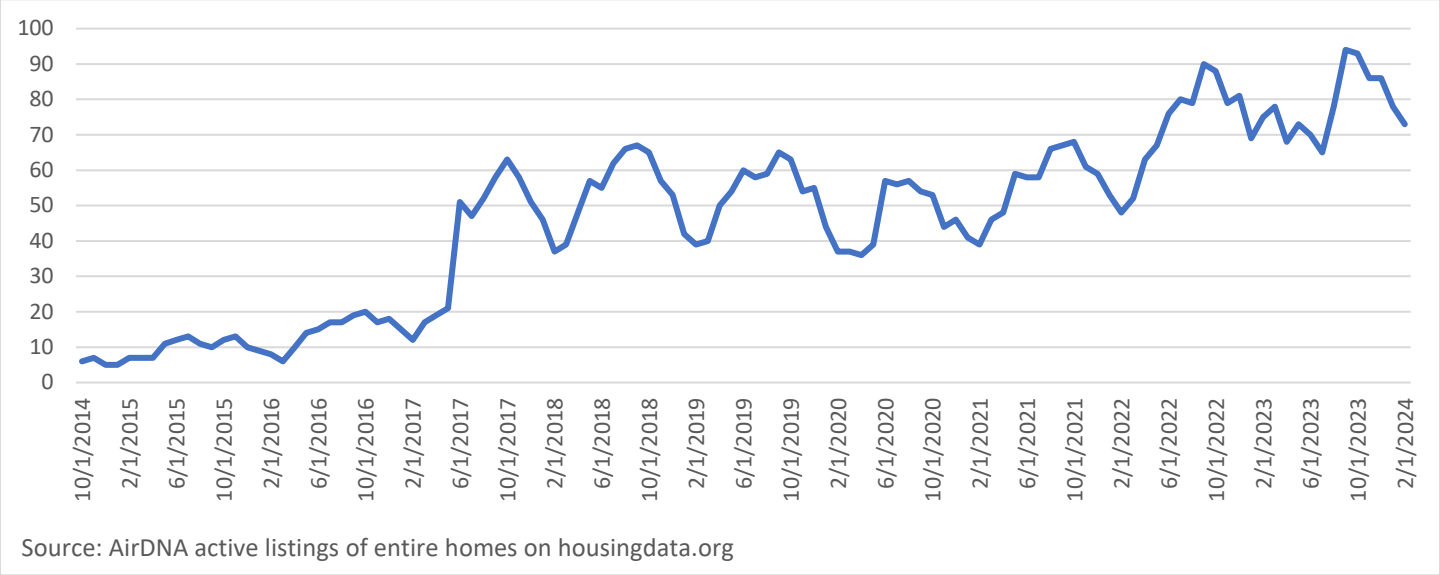
Figure 15-6 Homes used as short-term rentals by county, Oct. 2023



Source: Analysis of AirDNA short term rental data from housingdata.org

Essex County, however, has seen relatively modest growth in the STR market. In 2023, 94 homes were listed as STRs, representing about 2% of the county's total housing stock, below the statewide rate of 4%.

Figure 11-15-7: Essex County short-term rental homes



Source: AirDNA active listings of entire homes on housingdata.org

Figure 15-8 Seasonal homes and short-term rentals by town

Location	Seasonal homes	Seasonal homes relative to total housing stock	Short-term rentals (active Oct. 2023)	Short-term rental to total housing stock	Total housing stock
Essex County	**1,855**	**38%**	**94**	**1.9%**	**4,905**
Averill	263	97%	0	0.0%	272
Bloomfield	97	41%	0	0.0%	237
Brighton	333	34%	34	3.5%	973
Brunswick	47	51%	0	0.0%	92
Canaan	163	30%	10	1.8%	551
Concord	216	30%	20	2.8%	719
East Haven	58	27%	6	2.8%	213
Ferdinand	15	25%	0	0.0%	61
Granby	54	64%	0	0.0%	84
Guildhall	41	19%	16	7.5%	212
Lemington	22	28%	0	0.0%	79
Lunenburg	156	20%	6	0.8%	777
Maidstone	204	61%	0	0.0%	333
Norton	122	61%	2	1.0%	200
Victory	51	57%	0	0.0%	89
Warrens Gore	13	100%	0	0.0%	13

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 estimates and AirDNA active listings of entire homes on housingdata.org

Characteristics of Housing Stock

The types of homes that make up the housing stock in Essex County are similar to the state as a whole. Essex County's stock consists primarily of single-family detached homes. 84% of the combined year-round owner and renter housing stock are single-family detached homes, even greater than the proportion statewide (67%).

Figure 15-9: Essex County owner homes types

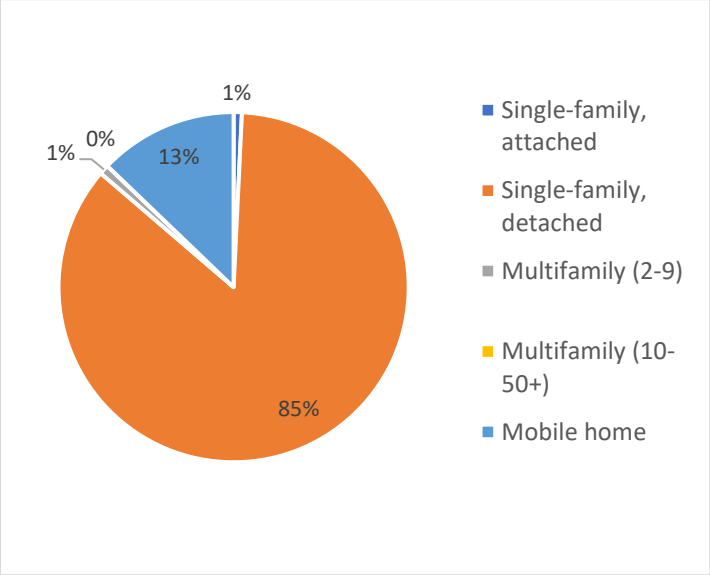
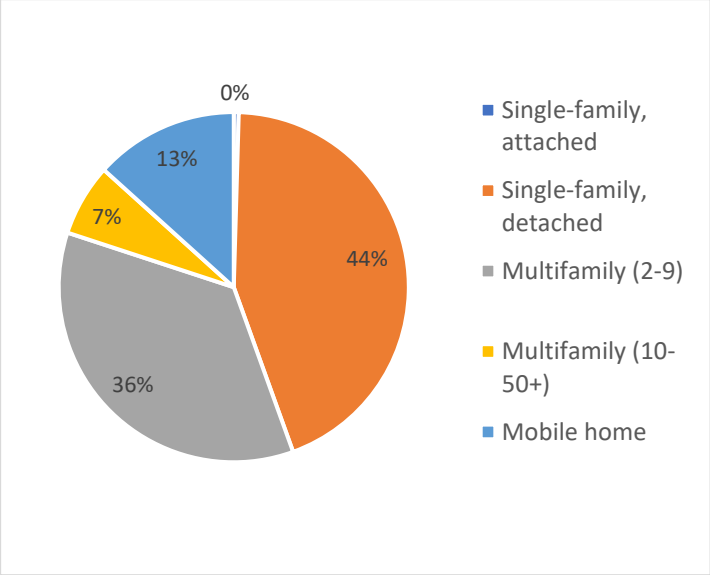


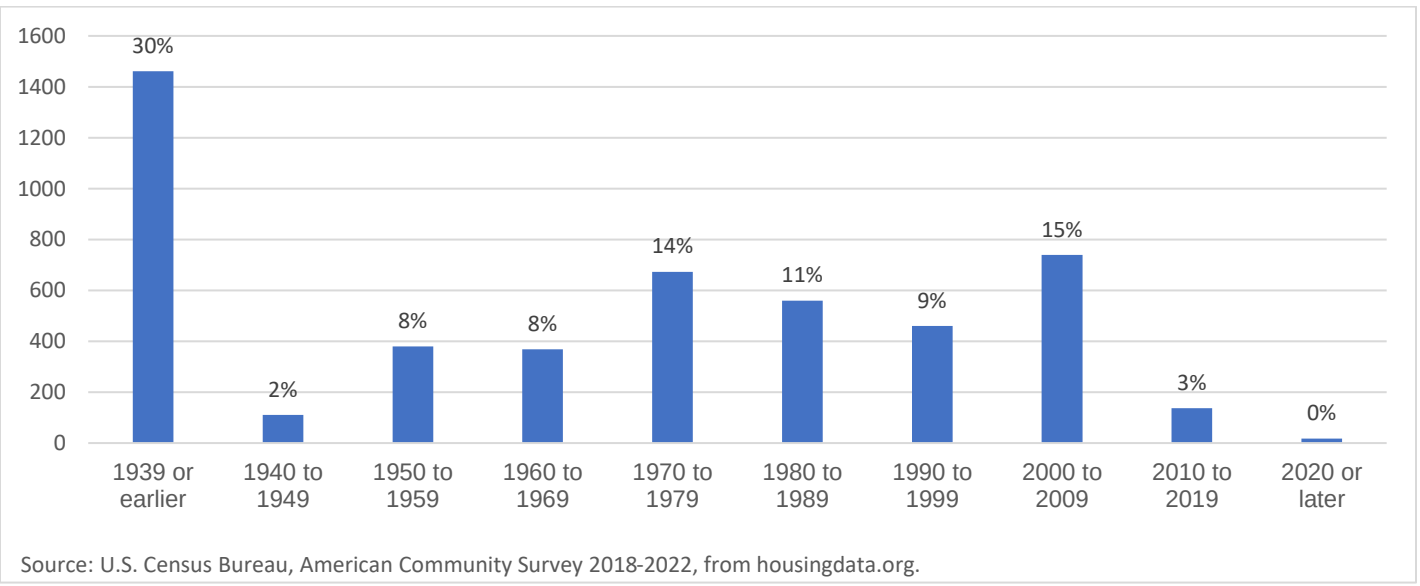
Figure 15-10: Essex County renter homes types



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2022 from housingdata.org.

Of all homes in Essex County, an estimated 30% were built prior to 1940-slightly more than the statewide average of 25%. The median home in the county was built in 1972. Although not necessarily indicative of housing quality problems, an older home is likely to elevate home maintenance and heating costs for its occupant.

Figure 15-11: Year built for Essex County homes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022, from housingdata.org.

In Vermont, the average household size has decreased over the past 30 years, down from 2.57 people per household in 1990 to 2.27 people per household in 2020. This decline has created a mismatch between the number of people per household and the number of bedrooms in Vermont homes. This difference is most pronounced in owner-occupied housing where large homes of 3+ bedrooms (74% of owner homes) outnumber of large households of 3+ people (32% of owner households). The difference in household size and number of bedrooms is not as pronounced within the renter housing market.

The mismatch is present in Essex County as well, where large homes (51% of the county's year-round homes) far outnumber large households (26% of the county's year-round households). Conversely, single person households (31% of the county's year-round households) outnumber small homes of 0-1 bedrooms (21% of the county's year-round homes).

Figure 15-12 Household size, 2022

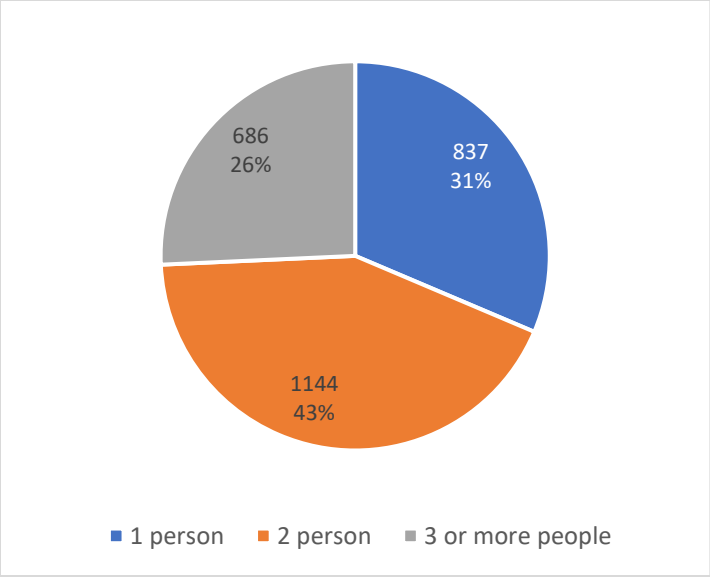
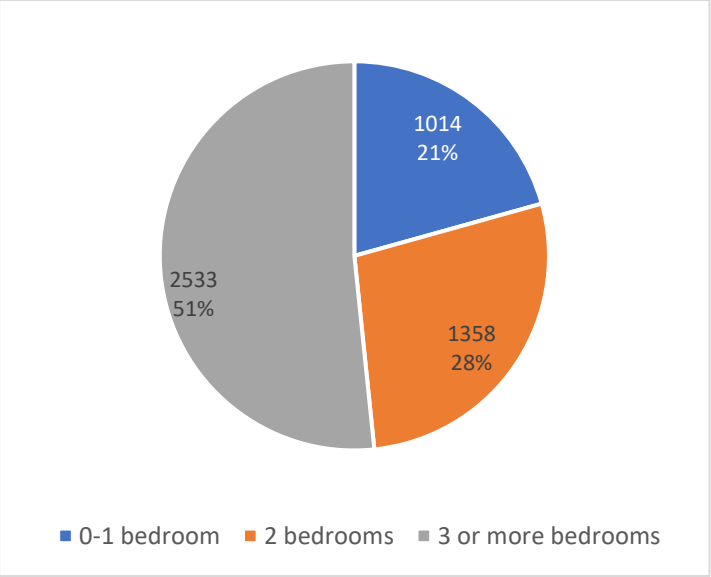


Figure 15-13 Homes by number of bedrooms, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2022 from housingdata.org.

Manufactured Homes and Mobile Home Parks

There are approximately 475 manufactured homes in Essex County. These include homes used by year-round homeowners and renters as well as homes used seasonally or occasionally and vacant. Manufactured homes make up 10% of the county housing stock, more than the state average rate of 5%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey.

A small portion of manufactured homes in Essex County are located in manufactured home communities, also known as mobile home parks. Essex County has 2 mobile home parks with 42 lots. As of November 2023, there were 6 vacant lots in the county, resulting in a 14.3% park vacancy rate. One of the two parks is within the 100-year floodplain.

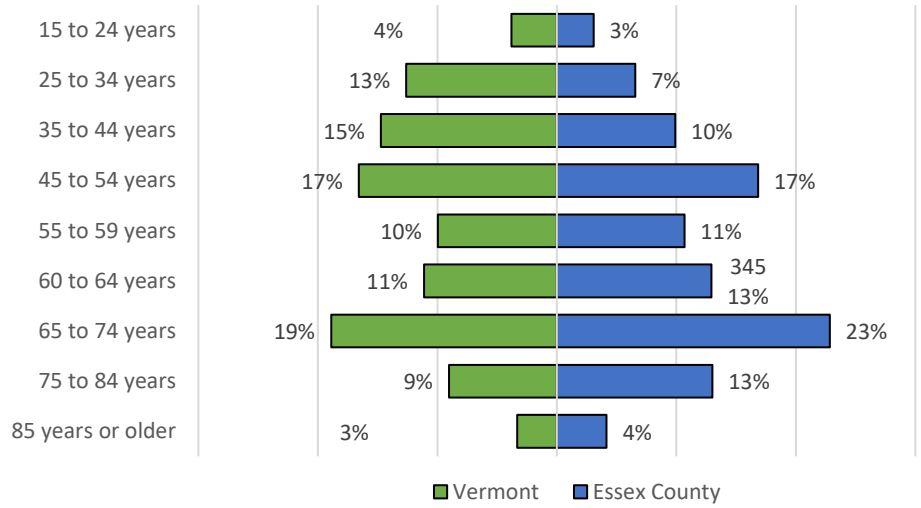
Figure 15-14 Essex County mobile home parks

Park Ownership type	Parks	Lots
For Profit	2	42
Non-profit	0	0
Cooperative	0	0
All Rental (for profit)	0	0
Total	2	42
Median lot rent		$330
Source: Vermont Mobile Home Park Registry		

Household Demographics

Essex County households are more likely to be headed by someone aged 65 or older (37% of all year-round households) than the statewide average rate of 31%. Similarly, households headed by someone under 35 years old make up only 10% of the county's residents, compared to 17% statewide.

Figure 15-15 Households by age of householder, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Age range	Households
15 to 24 years	82
25 to 34 years	175
35 to 44 years	264
45 to 54 years	449
55 to 59 years	285
60 to 64 years	345
65 to 74 years	609
75 to 84 years	347
85 years or older	111
Total	2,667

The vast majority of household heads living in the county identify as white alone, but the number of those identifying as two or more races increased since 2010 while the number identifying as white alone decreased.

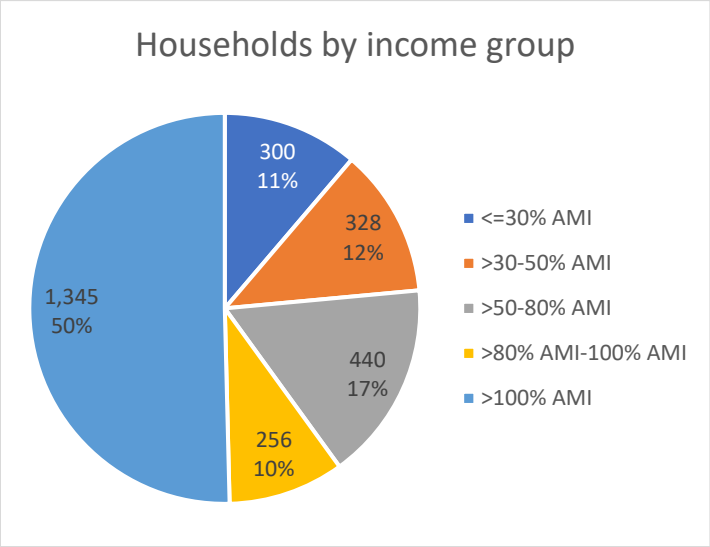
Figure 15-16 Households by race and tenure, 2010-2022

Essex County	All households			Owner households			Renter households		
	2010	**2020**	**2022***	**2010**	**2020**	**2022***	**2010**	**2020**	**2022***
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	14	11	n/a	11	10	n/a	3	1	n/a
Asian alone	3	3	n/a	2	2	n/a	1	1	n/a
Black or African American alone	5	8	n/a	3	6	n/a	2	2	n/a
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	-	3	n/a	-	2	n/a	-	1	n/a
Some Other Race alone	2	6	n/a	-	4	n/a	2	2	n/a
Two or More Races	29	110	114	12	78	89	17	32	25
White alone	2,765	2,554	2,538	2,232	2,056	2,127	533	498	411
Grand Total	2,818	2,695	2,667	2,260	2,158	2,231	558	537	436

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census and American Community Survey 2018-2022 estimates (Table B25003A-G) from www.housingdata.org. *Note: Estimates for small groups not available ("n/a") for 2022 because they are based on samples with large margins of error.

The estimated median household income in Essex County was $55,247 in 2022. About 23% of the county's households had very low incomes of less than 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

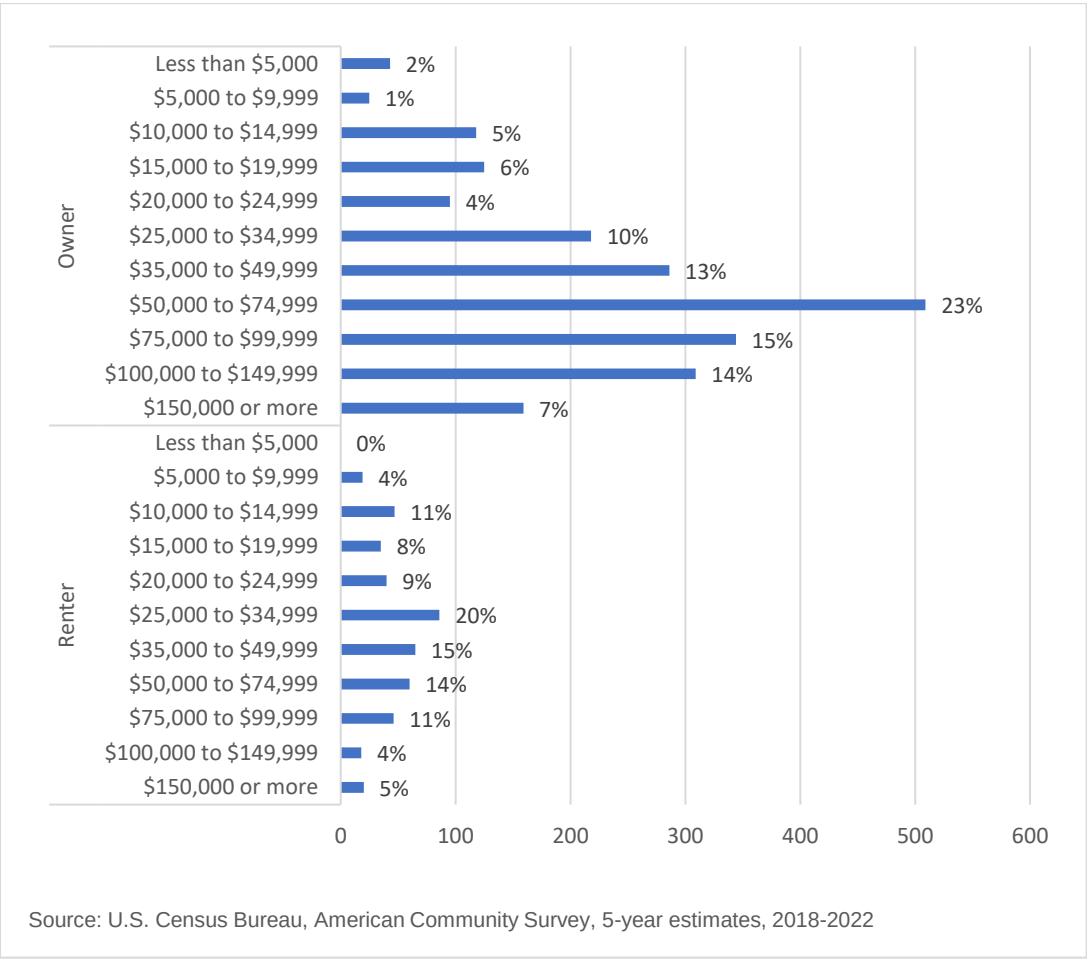
Figure 15-17 Household income relative to Area Median Income (AMI)



Income group threshold	
30% AMI	$16,574
50% AMI	$27,624
80% AMI	$44,198
Area Median Income (100%)	$55,247
Owner household median	$57,305
Renter household median	$33,393

Source: Based on U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 from housingdata.org

Figure 15-18 Number of households by income by tenure, 2022



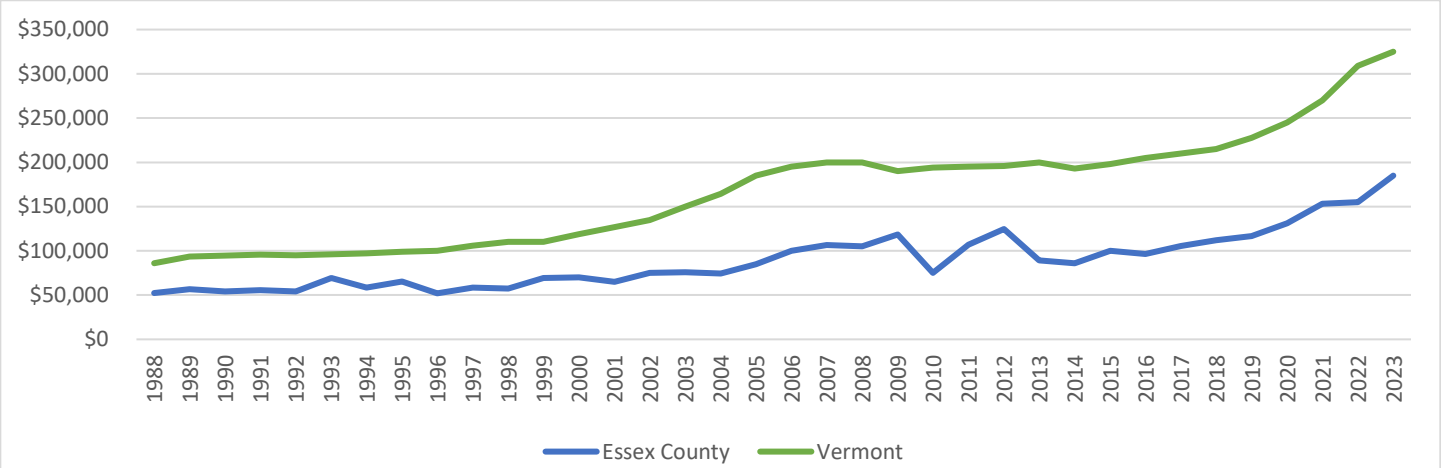
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Homeownership Market

There are approximately 2,000 owner households in Essex County. An estimated 84% of the county's households own their homes, compared to 73% statewide. The median home price in the county in 2023 was $185,000 while the state median was $325,000. Although the county's median price is lower than any other in the state, 2023 continues a trend in which no county in Vermont has seen a decline in annual median home sale price since 2019.

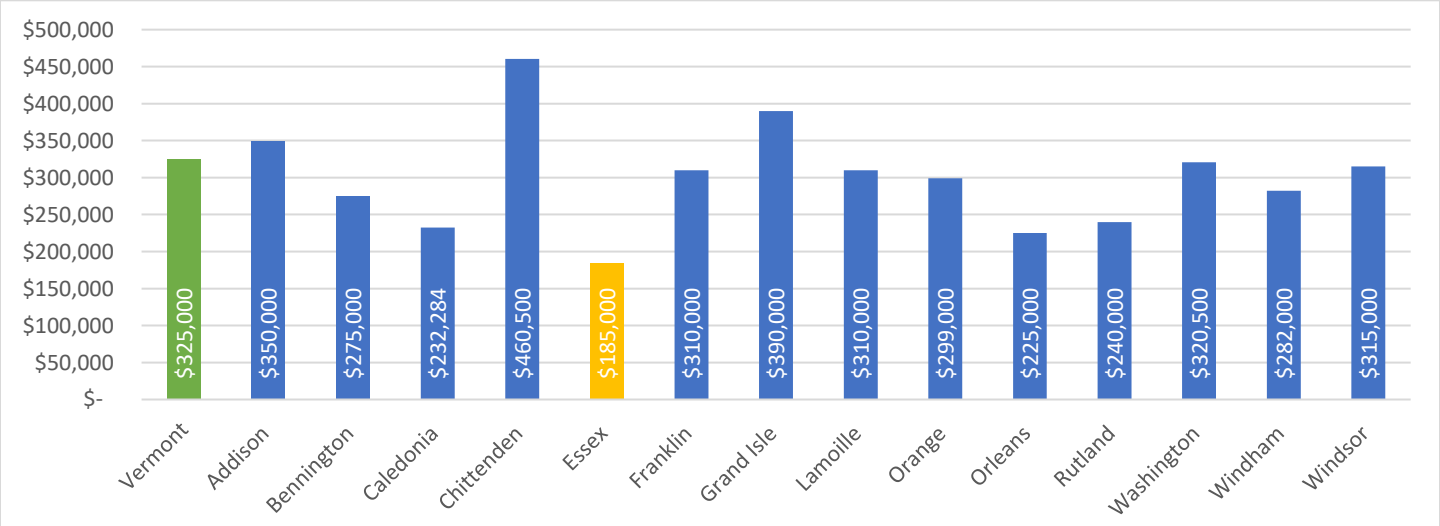
Essex County has the most affordable homeownership stock in Vermont. The median home price of $145,000 is 2.8 times the median household income, which allows the possibility for homeowners to spend less than 30% of their income on housing costs. As of 2022, 84% of households were homeowners. However, Essex is an extremely rural county with relatively few jobs, thus residents of the county face the second longest commutes by county after only Grand Isle. Access to goods and services is limited and the added household cost of car ownership is a necessity in the area.

Figure 15-19: Median home prices



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

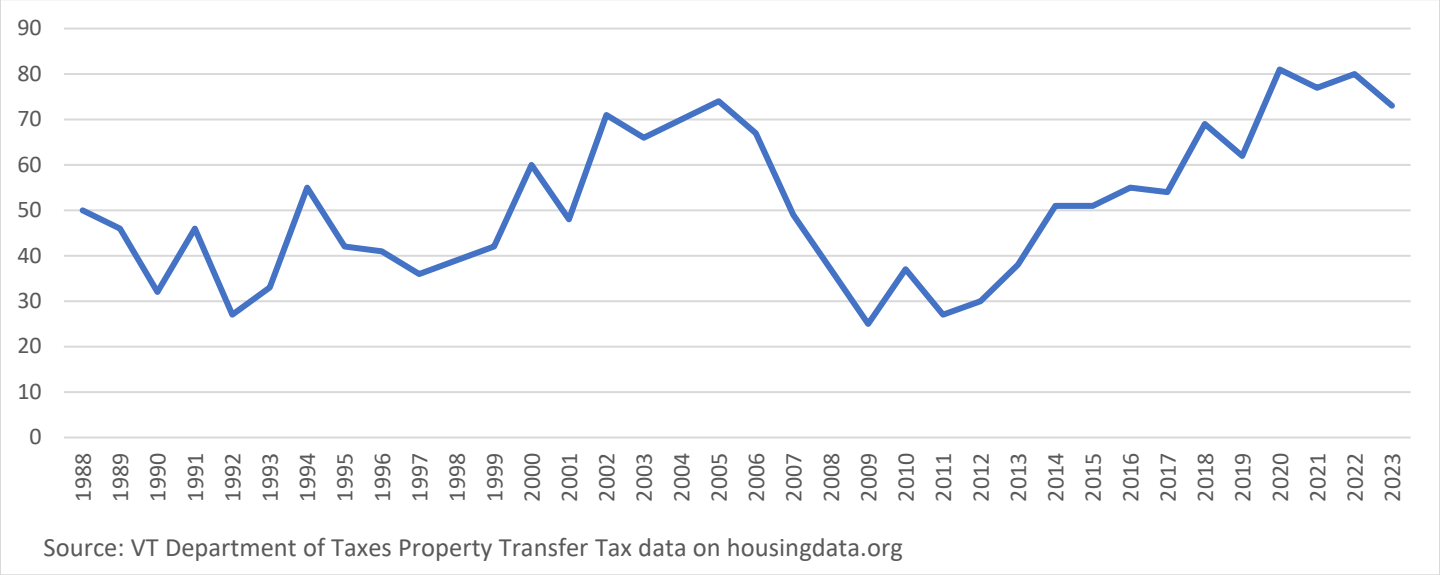
Figure 15-20 Median primary home sale price by county, 2023



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

In 2023, there were 73 primary homes sales in Essex County. The annual total number of homes sold in the county peaked in 2020 when 81 homes were sold. This reflects the statewide increase in primary home sales experienced in 2020 and 2021. The decline in sales in 2021-2023 suggests that rising prices and interest rates, as well as constrained supply of for sale homes, may be slowing down the home sale market.

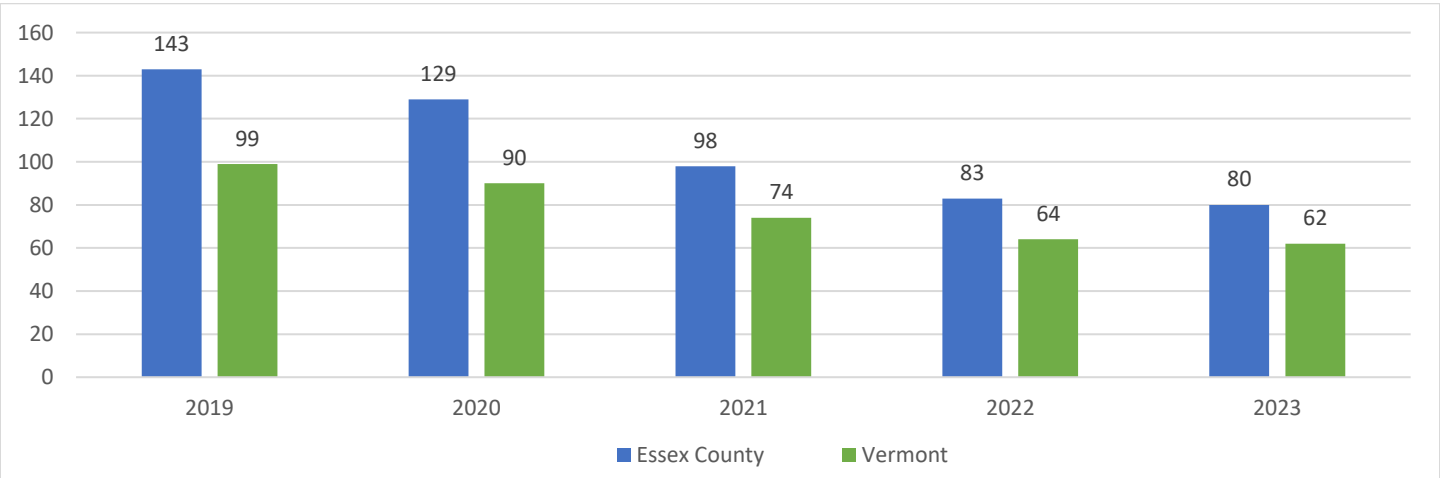
Figure 15-21 Number of primary home sales in Essex County, 1988-202



Source: VT Department of Taxes Property Transfer Tax data on housingdata.org

The median days on the market for an Essex County home dropped to 80 days in 2023 from 143 days in 2019. Homes in the county stay on the market slightly longer than the Vermont median of 62 days. On average, homes in the county are on the market for approximately two fewer months than in 2019. The short time on the market is an all-time low in Vermont and another indication of the high demand for homes.

Figure 15-22: Median days on market

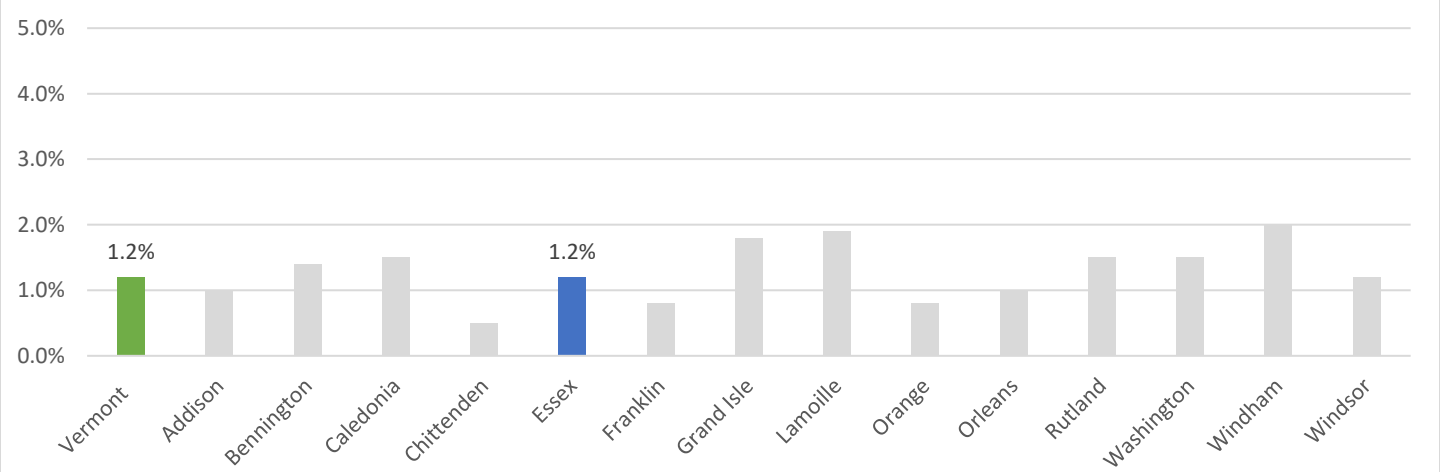


Source: Vermont Property Transfer Tax (PTT) records

The homeowner vacancy rate is the number of homes on the market compared to the total number of homes used or intended for homeowner households. Vermont's homeowner vacancy rate is estimated at 1.2%, below the 2.0% rate considered indicative of a healthy housing market. When the vacancy rate falls below the healthy rate, it can be difficult for homebuyers to find homes to purchase due to limited availability and puts upward pressure on sales prices.

Vacancy rates vary between Vermont counties, with some counties falling in the healthy market range and others far below. The homeowner vacancy rate in Essex County (1.2%) mirrors the statewide rate but is lower than the healthy market range.

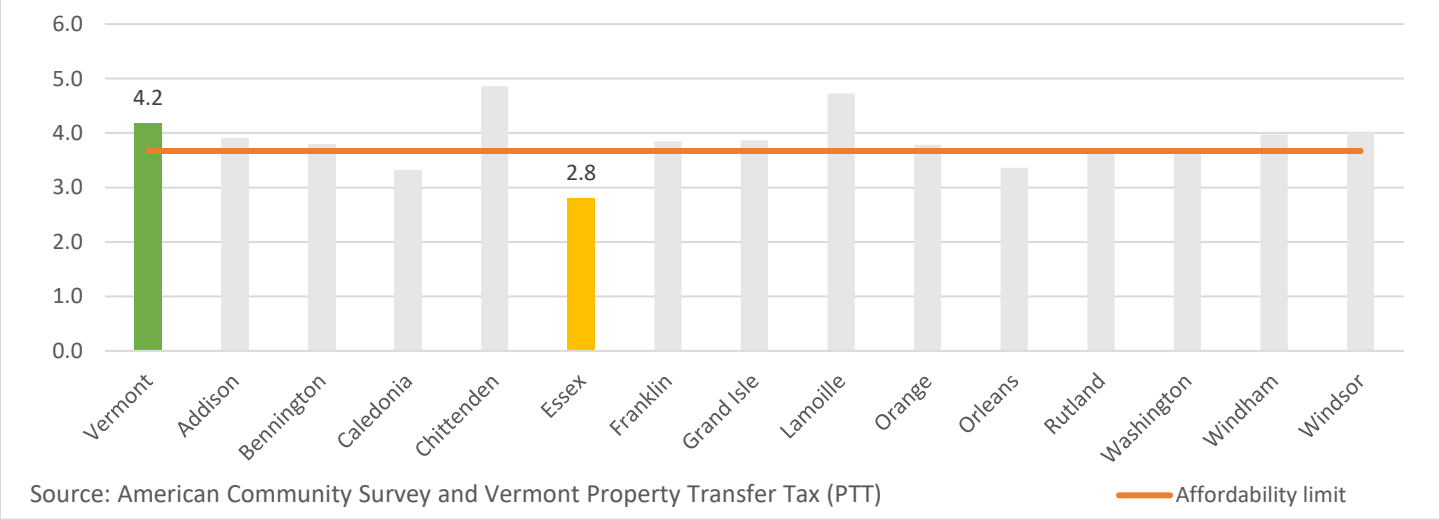
Figure 15-23: Homeowner vacancy rates



Source: VHFA analysis of estimates of U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2018-2022 from housingdata.org

Homes are more affordable in Essex County, on average, than in most Vermont counties. In 2022, the ratio of county home prices to median county household income was 2.8. When exceeding a factor of 3.67, households on average are paying more than 30% of their annual income towards housing costs and are thus considered cost burdened. An estimated 29% of owner-occupied households in Essex County are cost-burdened.

Figure 15-24 Ratio of median home sale price to county median household income, 2022

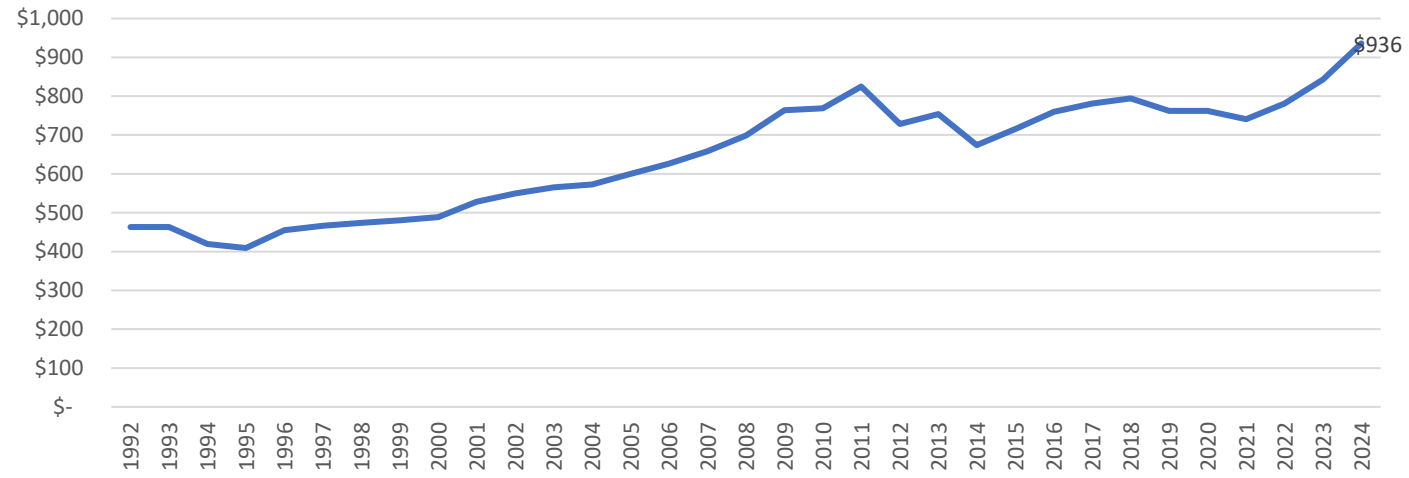


Source: American Community Survey and Vermont Property Transfer Tax (PTT)

Rental Housing Market

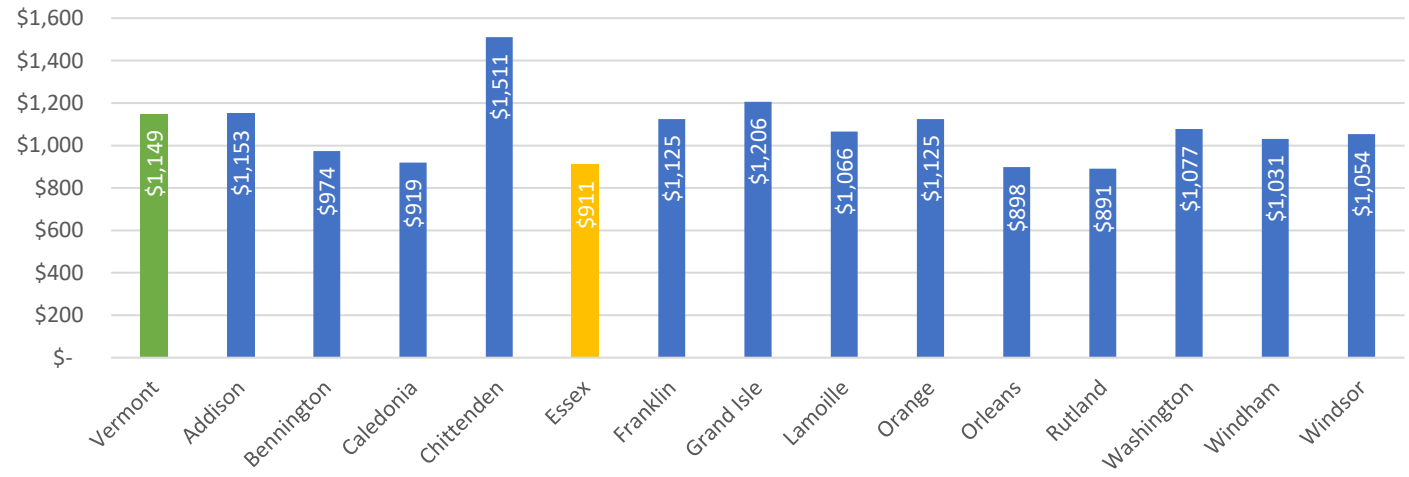
According to HUD, monthly rent for a safe, decent apartment in Vermont counties in 2024 is 25-35% higher than it was 5 years ago.[7] The fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in Essex County was set at $936 in 2024. The median rent in Essex County of $911 was less than the $1,149 statewide median gross rent in 2022.

Figure 15-25: Fair market rent for a 2-Bedroom Apartment



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated 40th percentile rent for a decent quality apartment on housingdata.org

Figure 15-26: Median gross rent by county, 2022

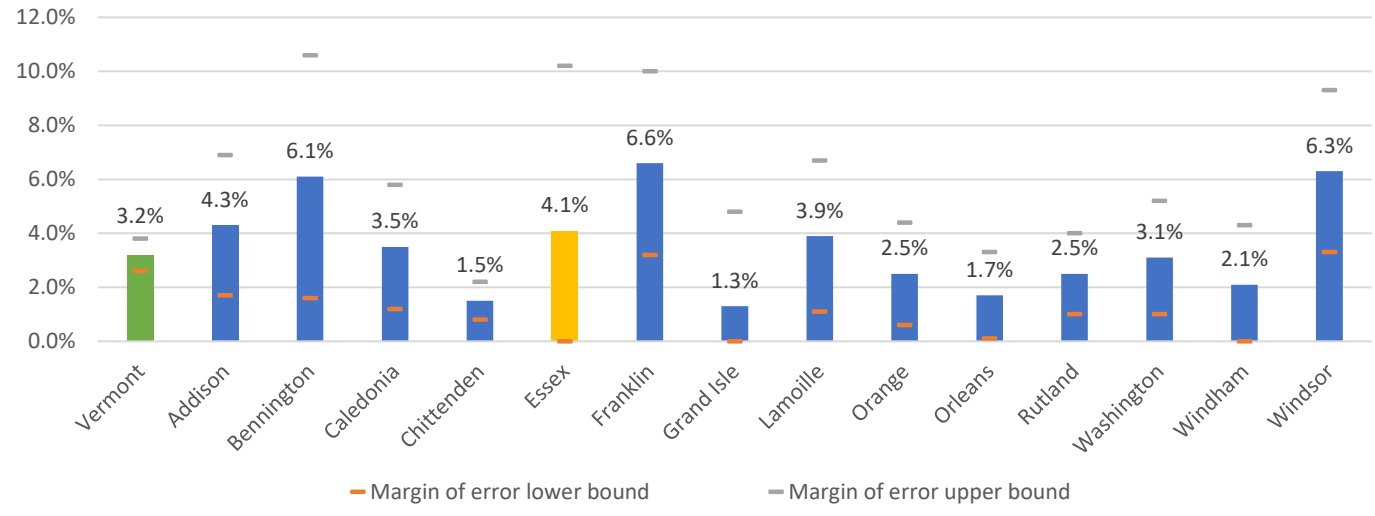


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

[7] U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, HUD Fair Market and 50th Percentile Rents. 2024

The renter vacancy rate is the number of homes for rent compared to the total number of homes used or intended for renter households. According to the most recent estimates available, Vermont's rental vacancy rate is 3.2%. This is somewhat lower than what experts consider to be a healthy vacancy rate, which is typically around 4 to 6%. Below that rate, renters can have difficulty finding an affordable home, putting upward pressure on prices. Essex County had a rental vacancy rate of 4.1% in 2022 – greater than the statewide rate, but a larger margin of error. Both state and county vacancy rates have declined in the last ten years.

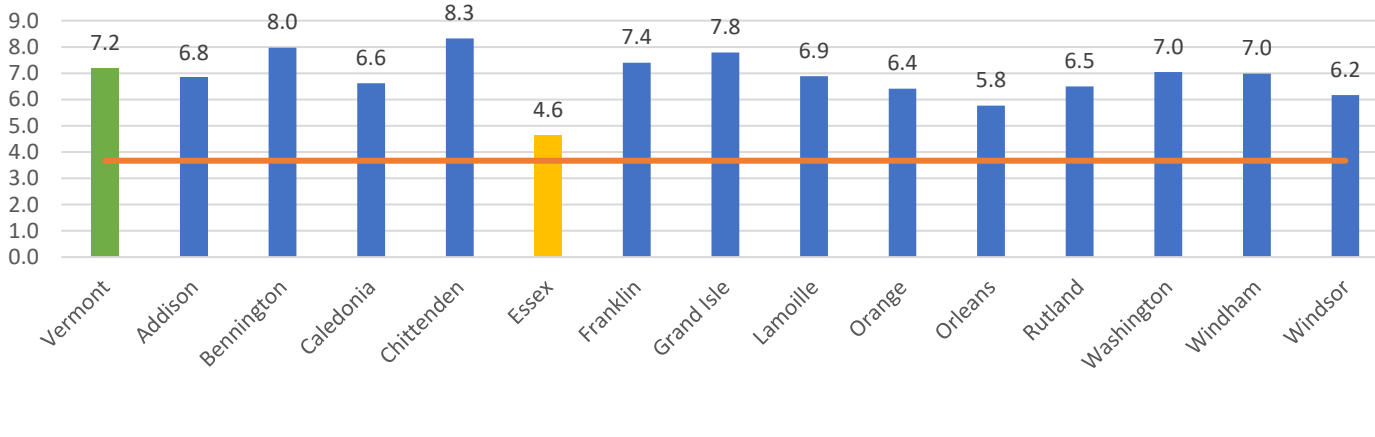
Figure 15-27: Rental vacancy rates, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2018-2022

Across the state, the median home sale price was 7.2 times the median renter household income in 2022. For housing to be considered affordable, housing costs should not exceed a factor of 3.67, where only 30% of income is dedicated to housing costs. Given the mismatch in this ratio, the median renter household would have difficulty affording a median primary home statewide and in Essex County.

Figure 15-28 Median home sale price to median renter income ratio, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates and Vermont Property Transfer Tax

Subsidized Rental Housing

Vermont has 14,670 rental apartments in 541 apartment complexes that were built through federal and state government programs. Together, these homes comprise 19% of the state's rental homes.

Affordable housing is generally defined as housing where the occupant is paying less than 30% of their income towards housing costs. To create affordable housing, the federal government directs funding through various channels, including state governments, non-profit or private housing developers, Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) or other housing agencies. Public subsidies for affordable housing largely fall in two categories; (1) funding for the construction and rehabilitation of housing, or (2) funding to provide rental assistance to tenants. Often, apartments created with public development funding are paired with rental assistance funding to ensure affordability for low-income tenants

Figure 15-29 Rental housing with project-based assistance in Vermont by county, 2024

County	Total occupied rental homes	Apartments in buildings developed with public funding	% of all rental homes	Apartments with monthly project based rental assistance	% of all rental homes
Addison County	3,183	507	16%	279	9%
Bennington County	4,222	836	20%	400	9%
Caledonia County	3,056	528	17%	231	8%
Chittenden County	26,034	5,302	20%	1,929	7%
Essex County	468	100	21%	70	15%
Franklin County	4,604	787	17%	498	11%
Grand Isle County	315	99	31%	37	12%
Lamoille County	3,150	396	13%	189	6%
Orange County	2,317	430	19%	223	10%
Orleans County	2,398	335	14%	187	8%
Rutland County	7,304	1,371	19%	880	12%
Washington County	7,247	1,311	18%	903	12%
Windham County	5,655	1,417	25%	707	13%
Windsor County	6,309	1,251	20%	749	12%
Statewide	76,262	14,670	19%	7,282	10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year estimates and Directory of Affordable Rental Housing on housingdata.org

In Essex County, there are 100 apartments in buildings that were built with public development subsidies. These apartments account for 21% of the county rental housing stock. Among those apartments, 70 are connected to a source of project based rental assistance, such that tenants pay no more than 30% of their gross income towards housing costs, with the rental assistance administrating agency covering the remaining rent balance directly.

Because Essex County does not have an associated Public Housing Authority to administer certain federal housing programs or locally disperse Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, this is done by Vermont State Housing Authority.

Households With Housing Problems

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) receives custom tabulations from the Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS). These data, known as the "CHAS" data (Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy), demonstrate the extent of housing problems and housing needs, particularly for low income households. The CHAS identifies four housing problems:

1. Home lacks complete plumbing,

2. Home lacks complete kitchen,

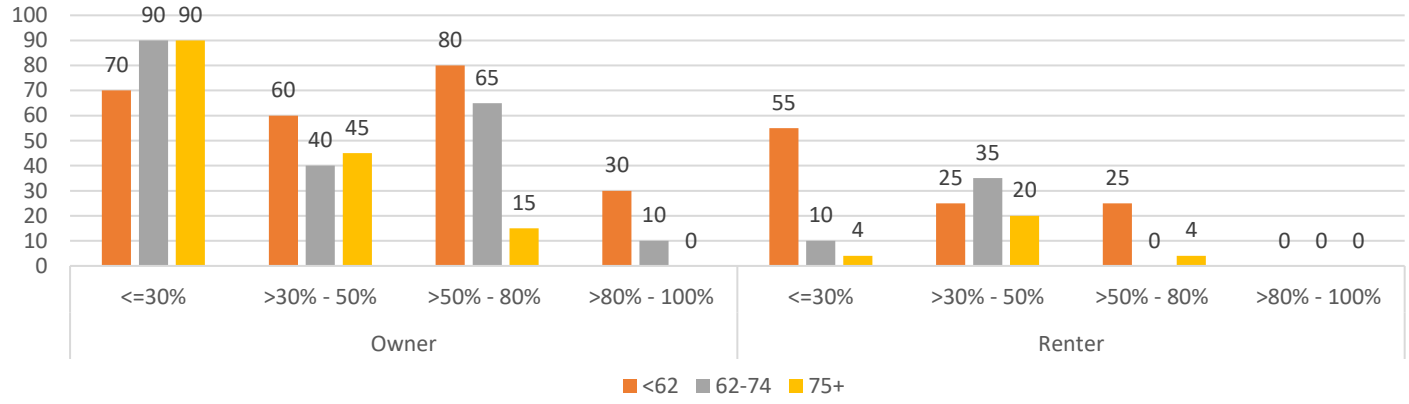
3. Household is overcrowded, or

4. Household is cost burdened (paying more than 30% of income towards housing)

An estimated 83,180 households in Vermont (about 33% of the households in the state) have at least 1 housing problem. Among these potential issues, cost burden is the most prevalent, accounting for at least 95% of the households with one or more housing problem.

The single largest demographic group in Essex County experiencing housing problems is homeowners with household incomes of less than 30% of the area median who are aged 62 and older. According to HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy estimates, 180 of these households had at least one of the following housing problems: housing costs of 30% or more of income, lack of kitchen or plumbing facilities, and overcrowding.

Figure 15-30: Essex County households with housing problems, by income group*



*Income groups are based on a household's income relative to the area median income.
Source: HUD CHAS estimates 2020 from housingdata.org

Potential Housing Quality Issues

The Census Bureau offers only minimal estimates of the extent to which Vermont's housing stock conforms to basic quality standards:

- 2,321 occupied housing units, or 0.6% of Vermont's housing stock lack complete kitchen facilities.
- 1,322 occupied housing units, or 0.4% of Vermont's housing stock lack complete plumbing facilities.
- 498 occupied housing units, or 0.3% of Vermont's housing stock are unheated and 510 use coal as a main heating source.
- 4,230 occupied homes, or 2% of the housing stock, are overcrowded
- 4,600 occupied mobile homes were built before 1979 when federal quality standards were enacted

However, the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) for the American Community Survey (ACS) allows for multi-factor analysis, making it possible to review combined criteria that signal possible housing quality issues. Households were flagged with potential quality issues if they had any of the following criteria:

- The heating fuel type was coal, or the home lacked a heat source.
- The housing unit lacked complete kitchen facilities.
- The housing unit lacked complete plumbing facilities.
- The housing unit was a mobile home built before 1979.
- The housing unit was a rental unit built before 1939 with rent less than $500 per month.
- The housing unit was an owner home with an estimated property value of $75,000 or less (excluding mobile homes or RVs/vans/boats).

Based on analysis of Census Bureau PUMS 2022 data, there are at least 19,637 Vermont households living in homes with potentially serious housing quality issues. This accounts for about 7% of the occupied housing stock. This estimate almost certainly undercounts the total number of households with housing problems because many issues such as poor sanitary conditions, inadequate weatherization and poor interior air quality would not necessarily be reflected in the criteria above.

PUMS data is not available at the county level, instead grouping counties geographically. Essex County is classified as part of the Northern Vermont PUMs region and represents 6% of the housing stock in the region. If the distribution of housing quality issues is equal across the region, there are likely approximately 309 owner occupied and 57 renter occupied homes in County with these indicators.

Figure 15-31 Occupied households with potential housing quality issues, 2022

Region	Owner households	Renter households	Occupied without payment of rent	Total households
Northern Vermont (Caledonia, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille & Orleans Counties)	5,151	953	526	6,630
Statewide	14,101	4,517	1,055	19,673
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS), 5-year estimates, 2018-2022				

This analysis does not account for vacant units – an additional 301 homes in the county are considered “other vacant” by the U.S. Census Bureau. Homes can fall into this category for many reasons, including homes that are under renovation or homes held vacant for personal reasons by the owner. However, since this category can also include foreclosed or abandoned homes, it is often used as an indicator of area housing stock decline.

Overcrowding

About 4,200 (or 2%) of Vermont households live in overcrowded homes. Such homes are defined as those with fewer rooms than household members. For example, a one-bedroom home with a living room and kitchen has 3 rooms. Thus, it would be considered overcrowded if the household had 4 members. Studies have reported a direct association between crowding and adverse health outcomes, such as infectious disease and mental health problems.

In Vermont, renter households experience overcrowding at over three times the rate of homeowners, with 3.4% of renter households overcrowded versus just under 1% of owner households.

There are an estimated 81 households in Essex County that are considered overcrowded. Of those households, 40 are owner-occupied and 41 are renter-occupied. Among all overcrowding in Essex County, an estimated 51 households are considered severely overcrowded.

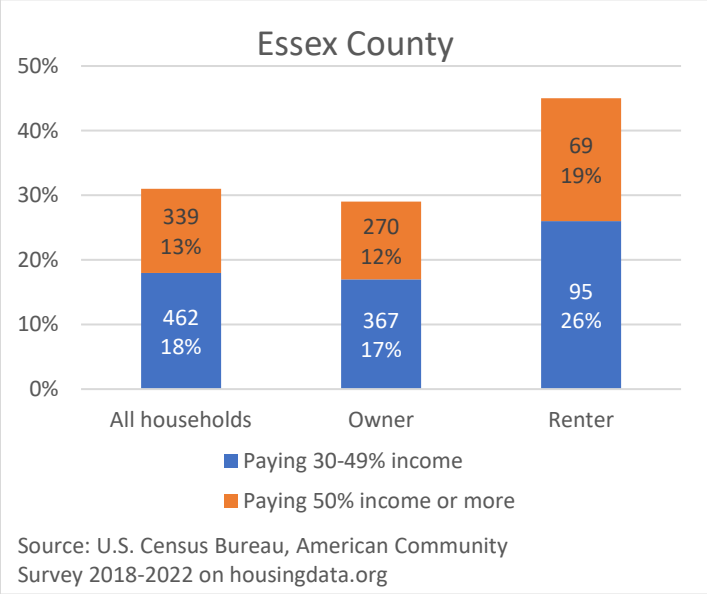
Cost Burden

When a household's housing expenses consume less than 30% of their monthly income, their housing is considered "affordable" because there is likely to be enough income remaining to afford other necessities. When housing costs consume more than 30% of household income, the household is considered "cost burdened." When cost burdened, households are less likely to have enough income remaining for other living expenses which can lead to housing instability. When housing costs exceed 50% of household income, the household is considered to be "severely cost burdened."

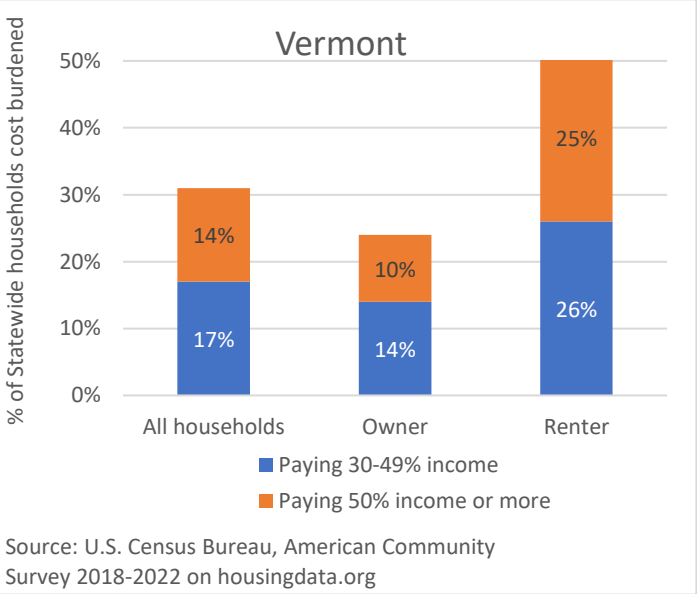
Approximately 31% of all households in Vermont are cost burdened (about 82,000 households), of which 36,000 households, 14% of all households, are severely cost burdened. In Vermont, the total number of cost burdened owner-occupied households (about 48,000) is greater than the number of cost burdened renter households (about 34,000 households), but the percentage of all owner households that are cost burdened (24% of owner households) is significantly lower than the percentage of renter households cost burdened (51% of renter households). 10% of Vermont's homeowners (about 20,000 households) and 26% of Vermont's renter households (about 17,000 households) are "severely cost burdened."

The proportion of owner households that are cost-burdened is greater in Essex County than the state as a whole, but renter cost burden is lesser than the state. Approximately 339 households are severely cost-burdened in Essex County and may be at risk of housing instability.

Figure 15-32: Cost burden among Essex County households compared to statewide cost burden



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 on housingdata.org



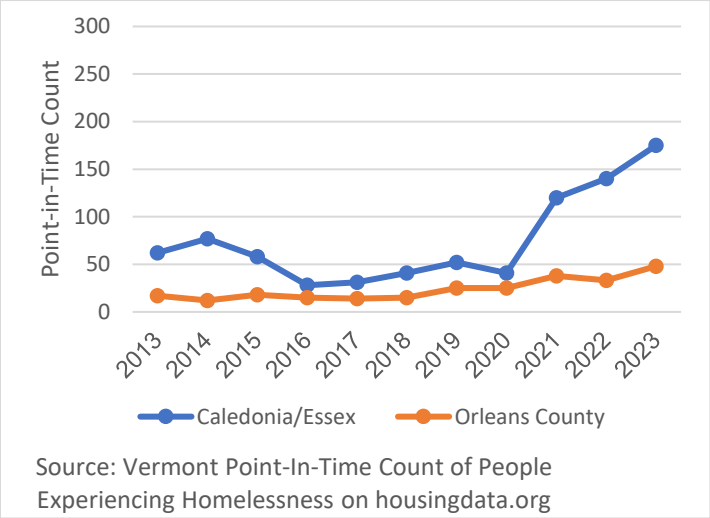
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018-2022 on housingdata.org

Homelessness

Homelessness services in the Northeast Kingdom are divided between two local Continua of Care (CoC); the Caledonia/Essex CoC and the Orleans CoC. Essex County is divided between the Caledonia and Orleans Continua of Care. The Caledonia-Essex Continuum of Care contains all towns in Caledonia County excluding Hardwick and Stannard, the Essex County towns of Concord, East Haven, Granby, Guildhall, Lunenburg, and Victory, as well as the Orange County towns of Newbury and Topsham. The Orleans CoC covers all of Orleans County except for Craftsbury and Greensboro, and the remaining Northeast Kingdom towns.

During the most recent 2023 Point-In-Time count, 175 people in 98 households were experiencing homelessness in the Caledonia/Essex Coc. This represents the highest total in the county since the PIT count began. Vermont's Coordinated Entry Dashboard provides the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a weekly basis who are accessing services from Vermont's housing support agencies. During the last week in January 2024, 255 people in the Caledonia/Essex CoC area received support through this area's continuum of care.

Figure 15-33: Number of people experiencing homelessness served by the Northeast Kingdom Continua of Care



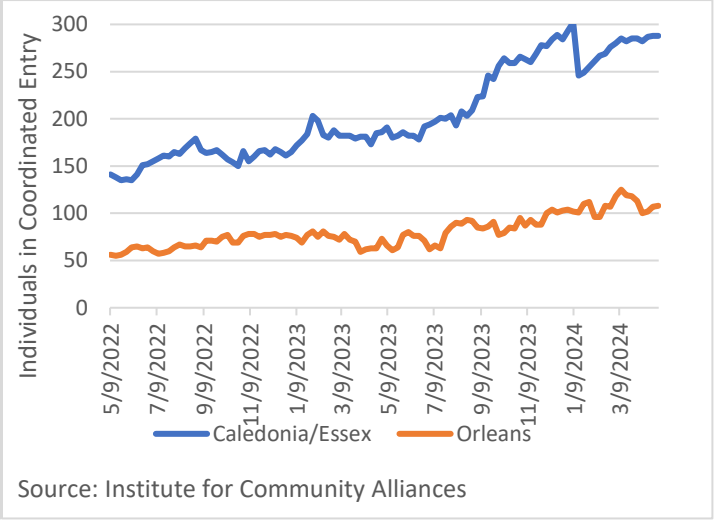


Figure 15-34: Number of people experiencing homelessness by local Continua of Care (CoCs)

Local Housing Coalition (CoC)	Number of individuals experiencing homelessness during Point-in-Time 2023	Number of individuals served by CoC during week of Jan. 29, 2024
Addison CoC	78	118
Bennington CoC	312	244
Caledonia & Essex CoC	175	255
Chittenden CoC	758	826
Franklin & Grand Isle CoC	134	242
Lamoille CoC	74	223
Orange & Windsor N CoC	188	347
Orleans CoC	48	112
Rutland CoC	654	502
Washington CoC	446	963
Windham S CoC	329	412
Windsor S & Windham N CoC	99	276
Vermont	3,295	4,408
Source: Vermont Point-in-Time Count 2023 and Vermont Coordinated Entry Dashboard		

Figure 15-35 Households experiencing homelessness and shelter availability

Local Housing Coalition (CoC)	Total Households (Point-in-Time 2023)	Households with at least one adult and child (Point-in-Time 2023)	Emergency shelter household capacity	Permanent Units with supportive services
Addison CoC	59	9	62	8
Bennington CoC	201	43	30	3
Caledonia & Essex CoC	98	26	31	29
Chittenden CoC	553	82	178	264
Franklin & Grand Isle CoC	103	9	23	6
Lamoille CoC	53	6	19	7
Orange & Windsor North CoC	132	13	0	4
Orleans CoC	25	6	4	3
Rutland CoC	425	80	19	26
Washington CoC	320	43	92	27
Windham South CoC	229	34	46	27
Windsor South & Windham North CoC	58	15	35	20
Vermont	2,256	366	539	424

Source: Vermont Point-in-Time Count, Vermont Dept. for Children and Families "GA Emergency Housing and Shelters" Presentation to the VT House Human Services and General & Housing Committees, Feb. 8, 2024 and Vermont Housing Data Website https://www.housingdata.org/profile/housing-programs/features-eligibility

Although people experiencing homelessness in the area are able to connect with services in centers such as Island Pond, there is no emergency or transitional housing in the county, and the nearest shelters would be found in St. Johnsbury in Caledonia County. The majority of Vermonters experiencing homelessness in 2021-2023 have been housed in temporary motel rooms through the General Assistance Emergency Housing program.

Recent Studies

In April 2023, Doug Kennedy Advisors completed for Rural Edge Housing and Community Development a housing needs assessment for Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties titled "Regional Housing Study and Needs Assessment." The report identifies the following major findings regarding the region's housing needs:

Housing Stock

- Overall, the region's housing increased at a faster pace than Vermont's housing stock. It is also apparent that housing development in Orleans County accounted for most of this increase.
- Rental units account for a relatively small segment of occupied units in the study region. This reflects the region's generally rural nature and the prevalence of single family owner units in rural settings.
- Seasonal housing is a significant factor in Vermont, where 16.5 percent of total housing stock is used on a seasonal or occasional basis. The impact of vacation housing is even more pronounced in the study region, where 23.9 percent of total housing stock is used seasonally.
- Only 34 percent of the region's rental units are in small (Studio/One Bedroom) configurations.
- After reaching a low point in 2017, regional residential permits increased significantly through 2021, when 300+ permits were granted. Orleans County accounted for the great majority of new housing activity in recent years; 70 percent of all permits granted between 2015 and 2021 were located in Orleans County.
- St. Johnsbury/Lyndon combined account for 42 percent of the region's subsidized-affordable housing stock. RuralEdge is the region's primary supplier and manager of housing targeted to very low to moderate income households.

Housing Stock – Financial and Market Characteristics

- Median values for the region's owned housing stock fall well below Vermont norms. Overall, the regional median value ($170,339) is 29 percent below the statewide median ($240,600). Study region owners pay an average of 26 percent of their household income toward mortgage costs.
- Regional rents are 25 percent lower than Vermont levels. The average study region renter pays 34 percent of their household income toward rental costs. 35 percent of the region's renters pay more than 40 percent of household income toward rental costs.
- Rental vacancy rates have trended downward since 2009 at the regional and national levels. Given low rental vacancies, it is not surprising that the number of publicly listed rentals is extremely low.
- As of early 2023, there were 2,142 households on the waitlists for subsidized/affordable rental units in the region, a factor more than 3.5 households per unit. If these units were to average a 10 percent turnover rate the theoretical waiting period for the last household on the waitlist would be approximately 35 years! Clearly, demand far outstrips availability.
- An upswing in the regional for-sale market started in 2017, and was followed by strong market increases in 2020 and 2021. It appears that market totals for 2022 declined from the 2021 peak, both because of limited availability (number of listings) and increases in mortgage rates.

Housing Issues

- Housing professionals interviewed in the course of study work agreed that the regional housing shortage is not limited to one or two market components. Rather, there is a need for housing in every market segment, ranging from deeply subsidized rentals to the for-sale market for moderate income households. Moreover, the current shortage affects households in all age groups. While emphasizing the breadth of the issue, virtually all contacts noted the 'missing middle.' Contacts also noted that:
  - The most acute demand in the rental market appears to be among younger households – aged 20 to 30 years;
  - Vermont and regional demographics are resulting in major imbalances, both in the housing market and throughout the economy. In particular, rapid growth among households in upper age brackets far outweighs the rate of growth among younger households.

Housing Supply and Demand

- An analysis of the regional rental market for households with incomes up to 120 percent of the median indicated that the regional housing need over the next five years is 4,000+/- units. This is not an immediate need, as only 750+/- of the households in the targeted segment will be seeking new housing on an annual basis.
- Senior households will increase in numbers at all income levels. Growth in the number of senior households will be the dominant demographic trend in the study region.
- The analysis points to acute need for housing targeted to very low and low income housing, with a particular emphasis on young persons.
- Notably, the analysis also points to a need for true market rate rentals, as these units are in short supply.
- The region's housing development infrastructure is insufficient for the task at hand. Every regional contact pointed to a lack of building contractors with the wherewithal to take on housing development projects. For some, this situation is a product of slow growth and lack of emphasis on trades education. As several contacts noted, 'a well trained and experienced tradesperson in the region can make a far more than adequate living, yet relatively few young people are choosing to go in that direction.' There is clearly no short-term solution for this situation; however, regional leaders should look to the educational system and forge new partnerships to re-generate regional development infrastructure.
- While there are acute stress points in the housing supply and demand market, it is apparent that there is housing need at virtually all price levels. Moreover, the existing housing stock is poorly matched to an aging population dominated by small households. Housing stock efforts should be focused on both new development and revitalization of housing stock that is not attuned to market needs.
- The study region's small, more remote towns will continue to be attractive to residents seeking a truly rural lifestyle, households that seek the most affordable sources of housing and vacation home owners. However, these communities are unlikely to be the favored residence for in-migrants and local households reaching senior/retired status. These two market segments will prefer a lifestyle that includes open space, but seek locations that make it easy to shop, find services and entertainment. As such, the region's urban centers, and the communities that surround these urban centers are most likely to experience growth in coming years.