



# HOUSING

## GOAL

Ensure diverse housing options that are affordable, accessible, and safe are available to meet a full range of life situations.

## Sustainability Goal

Develop and implement a policy framework that ensures the development of homes and neighborhoods that are affordable, accessible, environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout their life cycle: from siting to design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation, and demolition.

## Community Engagement

Meaningful community engagement is key to the Town's ethic of governance. To foster an inclusive planning process, the Town should ensure that all community members feel welcome and empowered to participate. This can be achieved by providing a wide range of convenient opportunities, providing transparent and responsive communication, and applying innovative engagement methods. In addition, there are a number of standing committees and working groups that advise staff and Town Council on housing topics such as the Blacksburg Housing and Community Development Advisory Board, the Historic or Design Review Board, the New River Valley Aging in Place Leadership Team, and the New River Valley Agency on Aging. Community members are also encouraged to attend and share their priorities and concerns at Planning Commission and Town Council public hearings when housing topics are being discussed.

## OVERVIEW

This chapter's housing elements include **housing studies, housing challenges, meeting housing needs, the residential rental inspection program, emerging and continuing housing trends, and housing and community development.**

## HOUSING STUDIES

### NRV Regional + Local Housing Study

The 2021 NRV Regional + Local Housing Study notes three important trends impacting the Town of Blacksburg's housing market. All data in this section is from this study, unless otherwise noted.

*Blacksburg has a low supply of homes for sale.* The median days on market, or the number of days a home is listed on the Multiple Listing Service before it sells, have decreased nearly 93% over the last 5 years, to 3 days in 2019. Blacksburg's market vacancy rate is 1%, while a healthy housing market has between 2-7%.

*Housing prices in Blacksburg have seen a significant increase.* The median sales price has risen 37% from 2007 to 2019. This creates an advantageous environment for already established homeowners and investors. However, first time homebuyers or those households earning less than the area median family income of \$97,216 face tough competition when trying to purchase a home in Blacksburg.

*There are very few affordable rental options for low to median income earners, due to the increasing demand for off-campus student rental apartments.* In 2017, 55% of jobs in Blacksburg paid salaries lower than \$40,000 a year. Moreover, the median wage of the top 10 occupations within the 24060 zip code was \$29,300 in 2017, allowing \$733 for housing costs, at 30% of monthly wages. This was well below the 2017 median monthly gross rent of \$1,033.

Blacksburg is one of the most location efficient places to live for very low income households in the New River Valley because of its proximity to jobs and transportation options. It is also the location where income-restricted housing is most needed due to intense housing demand.

Data Snapshot	2019
Median Family Income	\$97,216
Median Sales Price All Home Types	\$268,751
Median Sales Price New Construction	\$435,000
Median Value of Owner Occupied Homes	\$298,400
Median Monthly Owner Costs	\$1,836
Median Monthly Gross Rent	\$1,107

Sources: 2019 Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates; Virginia Center for Housing Research tabulation of NRV Association of REALTORS' Multiple Listing Service data

**2015 Downtown Housing Study**

In 2015, a Downtown Housing Study was performed to investigate and explore site context, marketability opportunities and constraints, socio-economic trends and characteristics, the performance of peer cities, competitive supply, and demand and market segmentation of different housing options in or near the downtown area. These analyses result in conclusions about future resident characteristics, the products that they will demand, and the likely market performance and rate at which the different types of dwelling units can be absorbed by the market. The outcome of the Downtown Housing Study reinforced anecdotal information about underserved market segments. The study particularly verified that there is a market for young professional housing in the Downtown area but also noted a bigger Town-wide issue of the demand for new undergraduate student housing driving up perceived land values and making development of non-student housing challenging. Key recommendations from the study include targeting young professionals, better aligning the regulatory and policy framework with desired outcomes, identifying locations for full-block development and Downtown expansion, continuing to collaborate with Virginia Tech where interests are aligned, and

undertaking a joint plan with Virginia Tech to accommodate future growth of the university and increased enrollment. For more information, visit [www.blacksburg.gov/downtownhousingstudy](http://www.blacksburg.gov/downtownhousingstudy).

## HOUSING CHALLENGES

In the Comprehensive Plan Survey, respondents considered the cost of housing to be the top challenge (with almost 60% of responses) the community will face as it continues to grow and change. Approximately 41% of respondents wanted more affordable housing options in Blacksburg over the next ten years. More affordable and appropriate housing is needed in the Town of Blacksburg, both of which are described in greater detail below.

Housing affordability is a growing problem for many residents of Blacksburg. Many people cannot rent or purchase a home affordably and may have to sacrifice other necessities like food, medical care, or educational enrichment for children. Further, individuals and families that struggle to afford housing may accept substandard housing that can impact the health and well-being of the occupants and can contribute to neglect and deterioration of the community's housing stock over time. Aging adults on fixed incomes who can no longer address household maintenance on their own and who cannot afford to pay a professional to do maintenance work may let their homes decline. Renters who struggle to afford housing may also accept substandard conditions from their landlords in exchange for lower rents.

The high sale prices of homes often require down payments far exceeding what many young families can afford. Those working in lower-paying or entry level jobs are likely to experience difficulty in affording to buy or rent in the Town. The gap in housing affordability can affect the ability of employers to attract and retain employees who are crucial to the health and safety of the community as well as to the area's economic growth and prosperity such as nurses and teachers.

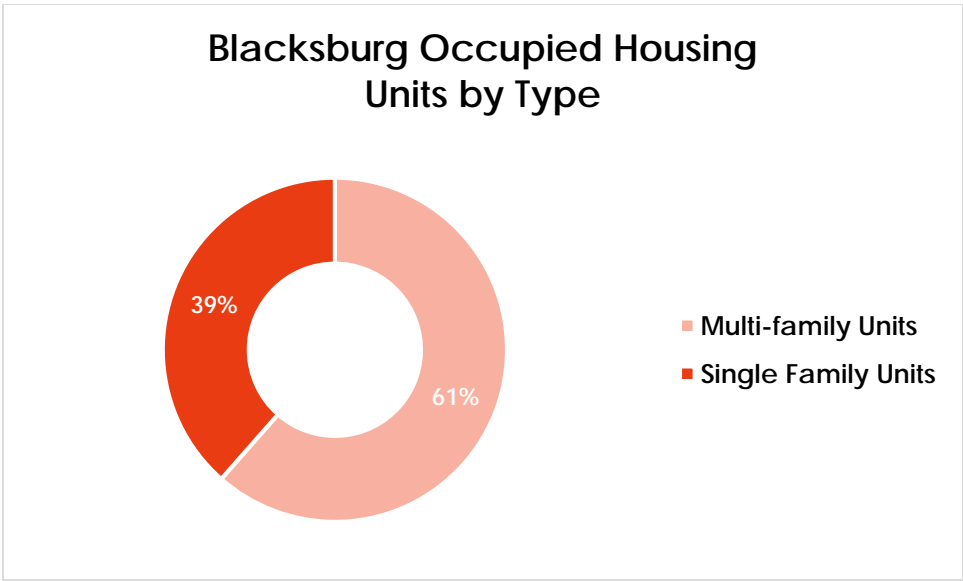
Appropriate housing means housing that is suitable for a range of life situations. For example, appropriate housing might be different for a single parent with two school-age children, a two-income couple without children, a person with both dependent children and a dependent parent, or a couple near retirement with grown children. Housing for residents who wish to age in place can also be a particular challenge.

### Intersecting Chapters: Housing, Transportation, & Land Use

"...a growing number of people earn too much to qualify for housing subsidies but not enough to afford a home or an apartment within a reasonable distance of their jobs."

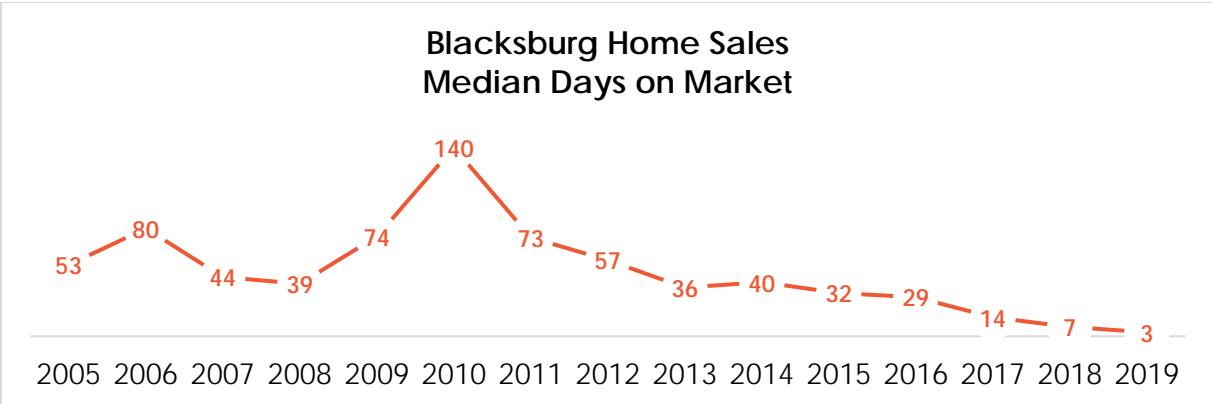
"When residents can afford to live near their jobs (a concept known as the "jobs-housing balance"), the community's roadways are likely to be less congested. Public transit systems will be under less pressure to transport people ever-increasing distances."

Source: American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. "Inclusionary Housing." QuickNotes No. 7. December 2006.



Source: 2019 Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates

Blacksburg’s housing market is dominated by multi-family housing and converted single-family rental houses for undergraduate students. Multi-family housing, including townhouse units, makes up over 60% of the housing stock in Town (2019 Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates). The remaining market for single-family houses is oriented toward higher-end, expensive housing, leaving few options for affordable starter homes or modest options for older adults looking to downsize. On average, real estate in Blacksburg is often priced higher than elsewhere in the New River Valley, largely due to demand to be located close to Virginia Tech and the Corporate Research Center as well as the amenities that the Town offers. Many groups, such as young professionals, young families, married students, and graduate/professional students are forced to find housing in surrounding localities and commute into Blacksburg. The market is also challenging for retirees who wish to downsize while continuing to live in Blacksburg. In addition to rising home values, another challenge in the Blacksburg market is a limited supply of housing. Since 2010, Blacksburg has seen a significant drop in the median number of days a home is on the market, falling to 3 days in 2019.



Source: Virginia Center for Housing Research tabulation of NRV Association of REALTORS’ Multiple Listing Service data

Enrollment at Virginia Tech has been increasing in the past several years with larger incoming undergraduate classes. Further growth is expected in terms of students and faculty but not all of the growth will occur on the Blacksburg campus. The Virginia Tech Campus Master Plan discusses ways

that it will reimagine Virginia Tech's operations throughout its Virginia locations in Blacksburg, Roanoke, and Northern Virginia. It seeks to develop facilities for interdisciplinary collaboration and industry partnerships; strategies for using current spaces efficiently; and solutions to house students, faculty, and researchers. The Town will be impacted by implementation of the new campus plan and seeks to collaborate with the University to meet all of the different housing needs that will come from resulting changes to the campus.

Undergraduates enrolled at the Blacksburg campus, which number just over 29,000 (2019 Virginia Tech), comprise the largest university-related population in need of housing. The availability of on-campus housing for undergraduate students has remained mostly constant, with approximately 9,000 students housed on-campus. Of the remaining undergraduate student population, most live in Blacksburg while others reside in Christiansburg, Montgomery County, or surrounding communities. The result is a large number of students inundating the local housing market each year, sometimes adversely impacting historically owner-occupied neighborhoods, particularly in lower-income areas, which have traditionally housed the service-sector workforce of the community. Lifestyle conflicts between students and non-students, particularly in neighborhoods immediately surrounding University areas, can create tension. Student demand for off-campus housing also has elevated the cost of available rental property and land values, eliminating much of the affordable housing stock in Town. Other Town concerns regarding off-campus student housing and rental properties include poor property maintenance, absentee landlords and over-occupancy in dwellings. These are persistent challenges in certain areas of the Town, contributing to deteriorating housing and property conditions, especially noticeable in the Blacksburg Historic District. Demand for off-campus housing also increases demands for and stresses on parking, streets, and utilities.

There are homes and condominiums in the Town that have been purchased or constructed specifically for use as second homes or game day accommodations. These homes are vacant the majority of time and do not contribute to the vibrancy of the neighborhood and economic vitality of the Town. This trend has been increasing in the Downtown. In some neighborhoods near the Downtown, there is a mixture of residential buildings ranging from single-family homes, student-oriented duplexes and small apartment buildings. At times, new or infill development proposals emerge that, while technically meeting legal requirements, may not fit within the context of the community's older and historic neighborhoods. When infill opportunities arise, it is important that the Town carefully weigh how the new proposed development will meet the needs of residents, complement the neighborhood, help reduce disparities within the community, and address the demand for new housing options for a changing, growing community. When there is new development, the Town encourages that it integrates well with scale and context of the surrounding area. The Town developed the [Residential Infill Development Guidelines](#) to address site design issues through a context sensitive lens. The Guidelines are discussed in greater detail in the [Land Use](#) chapter.

## **MEETING HOUSING NEEDS**

The Town of Blacksburg seeks to be responsive to changing demographics, and therefore should continually evaluate and update the policy framework needed to support emerging housing needs and housing choices that appeal to residents of all ages and abilities. There are a number of market segments based on lifestyle, age, ability, and/or income for which there is not a sufficient inventory of

suitable homes. Calling attention to the diverse housing needs, various publications have identified Blacksburg as a top place to raise children, retire, and live in a college town.

## **Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing means housing that is affordable for the full spectrum of people that live or work in the Town. Housing programs in the United States have long measured housing affordability in terms of percentage of income. In the 1940s, the maximum affordable rent for federally subsidized housing was set at 20 percent of income, which rose to 25 percent of income in 1969 and 30 percent of income in 1981. Over time, the 30 percent threshold also became the standard for owner-occupied housing, and it remains the indicator of affordability for housing in the United States. Keeping gross housing costs including utilities (water, sewer, electricity, and heating) below 30 percent of income is intended to ensure that households have enough money to pay for other nondiscretionary costs. Therefore, policymakers consider households who spend more than 30 percent of income on housing costs to be housing cost burdened.

Accurately understanding housing cost burdens is essential to determining the scope of housing needs and ensuring that people can afford other nondiscretionary costs. Housing costs reflect more than just the price of housing units alone; these costs also account for neighborhood school quality, public safety, and access to jobs and amenities. Housing that seems affordable based on cost alone may be far from employment centers increasing the percentage of income a household dedicates to transportation, making it unaffordable. A household may also choose a low-quality housing unit to reduce housing costs. As a result, the conventional measure of affordable housing may underestimate the number of households who are cost burdened.

Housing programs assess whether housing is affordable by comparing a household's income to a percentage of the area median income (AMI). AMI is the midpoint of a region's income distribution – about half of households in a region earn more than the median and about half earn less than the median. Households earning less than 80% of the AMI are considered low income by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Very low income households are defined by HUD as earning less than 50% of the AMI and extremely low income households as earning less than 30% of the AMI. Moderate income households are often defined as earning 80%-120% of the AMI. Once incomes exceed 120% of the AMI, the housing market generally meets the needs of households at those income levels and house subsidies are not needed. Therefore, Blacksburg will focus its efforts on meeting the housing needs of extremely low income to moderate income households (less than 30% of AMI up to 120% of AMI).

Below is a chart that shows the 2020 area median income for Blacksburg based on household size as well as the percent of AMI that defines the different income levels (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

Blacksburg 2020 Maximum Income Levels					
Household Size	1 person	2 person	3 person	4 person	5 person
Extremely low income (less than 30% of AMI)	\$17,400	\$19,850	\$22,350	\$26,200	\$30,680
Very low income (less than 50% of AMI)	\$28,950	\$33,100	\$37,250	\$41,350	\$44,700
Low income (less than 80% of AMI)	\$46,350	\$52,950	\$59,550	\$66,150	\$71,450
Moderate income (less than 120% of AMI)	\$69,480	\$79,440	\$89,400	\$99,240	\$107,280

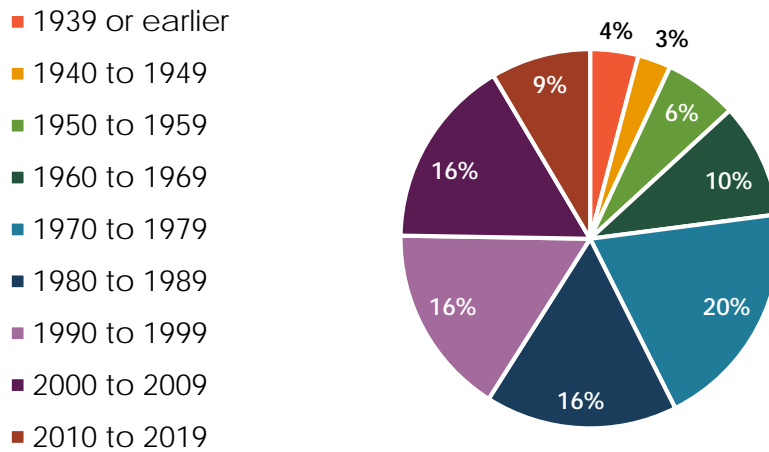
Providing affordable housing cannot be achieved by the Town alone. It requires collaboration between the private, non-profit and public sectors. In order to meet its objectives for providing a sufficient number of affordable housing units, the Town will need access to federal, state and local housing assistance programs, commitments from developers, along with other public and private efforts to create and maintain affordable housing.

Affordable, appropriate and safe housing benefits the individuals who live and work here and the community at large. Workers who live in Town benefit local businesses through their patronage, reduce traffic congestion caused by long commutes, and contribute to Blacksburg’s diversity and vitality. As an area of opportunity and an employment center for the region, Blacksburg has a responsibility to provide its share of affordable housing. Providing a greater diversity of affordable housing options in Town also helps to maintain the rural character of the surrounding New River Valley.

**Energy Efficiency**

The age of the housing stock in Blacksburg varies quite a bit, with some of the oldest homes in the community dating back to the early 1800s. Prior to the mid-1970s, there were no minimum building standards for energy efficiency. Approximately 41% of Blacksburg’s housing stock was built prior to 1980 and as a result, most of these older homes and apartments in the community are quite costly to heat and cool.

## Percent of Housing Units Built in Blacksburg by Decade



Source: 2019 Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates

In general, it is the older housing stock that tends to be more affordably priced for lower-income renters and homebuyers. Even when their monthly rent or mortgage payments are relatively low, these residents often face very high utility bills, particularly in winter and summer, which can create an additional and often unanticipated housing cost burden. According to the NRV Livability Regional Energy Plan, it is estimated that nationally low income households, those making between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per year, spend nearly 10% of their income on residential energy. Addressing housing affordability for economically vulnerable populations will also require policies and programs to help improve residential building efficiency, particularly for the community's older housing units.



## **Senior Housing**

In 2016, Blacksburg was ranked by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the top places to retire. Blacksburg has also been noted as a desirable location for active adults, retirees and seniors because of the amenities associated with Virginia Tech, the lower cost of living compared with many major metropolitan areas, and the mild climate. However, there is a lack of supportive services and affordable and accessible housing options for this growing population segment and this should be addressed through policies and programs to increase supply of this housing type. Living accommodations that employ universal design standards and which accommodate the full range of living accommodations with the entrance, kitchen, living room, laundry facilities, bedroom and bathroom all located on a single level are desirable because they address the needs of a variety of ages and physical abilities. Smaller single-floor housing options allow older adults to “age in place”; otherwise, substantial and costly renovations and modifications may have to be made within existing homes. Housing options of this type also are suitable for people who wish to downsize from a single-family home. Smaller single-floor, universally designed housing options may be grouped together in an age-restricted community or intermingled throughout neighborhoods. Either way, it is ideal from an aging-in-place perspective if these housing options are located near public transportation and commercial services, expanding options for older adults who are no longer comfortable or able to drive themselves. As the population continues to age, additional nursing home facilities that provide all levels of medical care will be needed in the New River Valley. To serve retiring and older adults, government and non-profit social service programs and medical services will need to be expanded.

## **Housing for People with Special Needs**

Populations with special needs have a particularly difficult time finding affordable and appropriate housing due to disability or other life circumstances. According to the U.S. Census, 6% of the Blacksburg population are living with a disability (2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimate). Disabilities include hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and potential impediments to independent living. National housing survey data indicates that many people with disabilities need some form of modification to make their homes accessible. The majority need grab bars and ramps, which cost relatively little to greatly improve people’s lives. According to the National Council on Disability’s State of Housing Report, about 11% of the U.S. population has some level of chemical sensitivity that is likely to require housing that is free of disabling environmental triggers. These

## **Universal Design**

“Universal Design (UD) can be defined as the process of creating buildings, products, and environments that are usable by people of all ages and physical capabilities, making it possible for all to have access to and fully enjoy their homes, neighborhoods, work places, and other community destinations.”

“...the cost of adding UD features to new construction is minimal, especially if such features are built into the design from the beginning. And the best practices of universal design make universal elements—wider doorways, reinforced bathroom walls (should grab bars need to be added at a later date), no-step entrances, open floor plans—seamless and unnoticeable. These barrier-free features open the door, physically and figuratively, to all people; such homes have lasting value as structures that accommodate all stages and circumstances of life, including childhood, injury, illness, and aging.”

Source: American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. “Universal Design.” QuickNotes No. 28. October 2010.

triggers include tobacco smoke, auto exhaust, perfume, insecticide, new carpet, chlorine, and many others.

Housing needs also relate to addressing homelessness or those at-risk of losing their home. In the New River Valley, the 2019 annual Point in Time Count indicated there were 73 homeless people, 24 of whom were children. The top three reasons for homelessness were: (1) domestic violence, (2) eviction, (3) previous prison record. Project HOPE, a program addressing homelessness administered by William and Mary, also provides data for children and youth that experience homelessness. During the 2018-2019 school year, there were 54 students in the Blacksburg strand of Montgomery County Public Schools that experienced homelessness including those without a permanent address, in transitional shelter, or using a temporary address. These data points around homelessness show the difficulty in counting people who are homeless or at-risk of being homeless and subsequently the challenges of reducing homelessness. The New River Valley Housing Partnership, a coalition of service providers, works to address homelessness in communities in the NRV. These partners are able to keep the number of people who are without shelter at a bare minimum, and their current focus is on developing permanent housing solutions to prevent chronic homelessness.

#### ***Graduate Students, Professional Students, and Married Student Housing***

It is anticipated that as Virginia Tech grows, there will be an increase in graduate and professional students and research staff to help reach the University's goal of becoming a top national research institution. Thus, there are increasing numbers of graduate students, international graduate students, professional students, and post doctorate researchers living and working in Blacksburg. These groups have different housing needs than undergraduate students. They may have spouses working in the community and young children. Additionally, there are no married student housing options currently provided by Virginia Tech on-campus. The University is considering providing housing to meet the needs of these specific types of students. Often, these students are looking for the same locations and amenities that are desired by young professionals and young families. The Town supports Virginia Tech's efforts to ensure that housing the growing University population is a shared responsibility.

#### ***Young Professional and Young Family Housing***

Increasingly, Virginia Tech graduates desire to remain and work in the New River Valley after graduation. Blacksburg also attracts other young professionals. As employment opportunities in the region increase for young professionals, and, in particular, in the Corporate Research Center, the unmet housing market demand for affordable living opportunities in and around Downtown will also increase. Young professionals often desire affordable housing options for rent or purchase based upon their starting salaries that provide easy multi-modal access to work, as well as convenient access to restaurants and retail. Young professionals have different housing needs than the undergraduate population and often do not wish to live in undergraduate-oriented housing.



*Affordable housing for a young family through Blacksburg's Affordable Housing Program*

Families are often interested in convenient access to schools in the form of single-family homes with yards or multi-family options with access to parks and recreational areas. Many young families, married students, and graduate/professional students are choosing to live in Christiansburg and other surrounding localities where they can find affordable housing options. They commute into Blacksburg, which does not support Blacksburg's sustainability commitment. In 2014, Blacksburg was ranked the #4 happiest place in America by *Movoto*, an online real estate brokerage, in part because of its homeownership rate. However, housing options to rent and purchase starter homes must be available to attract and retain young families in Blacksburg.

## **RESIDENTIAL RENTAL INSPECTION PROGRAM**

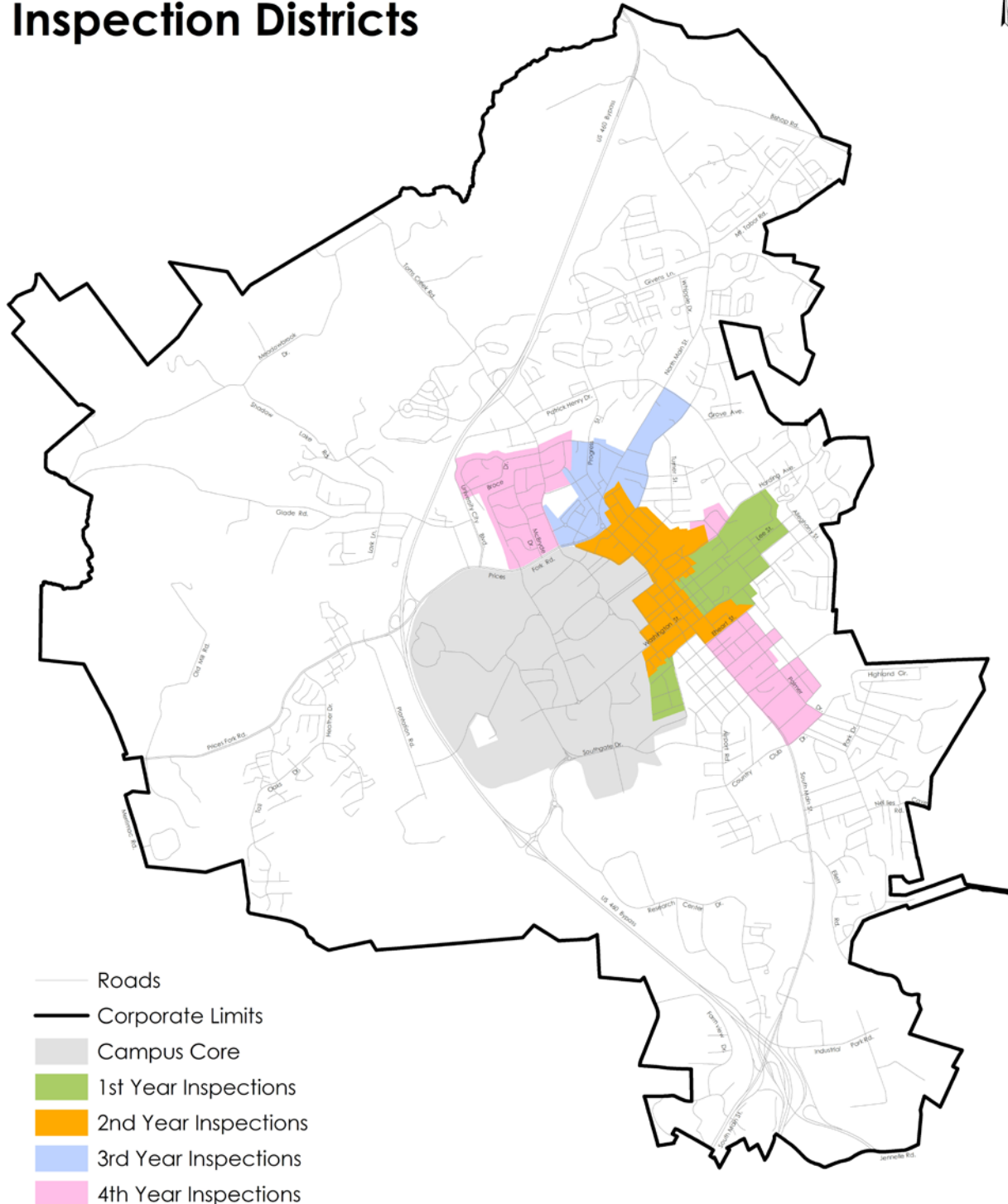
Proper maintenance of a dwelling unit or the property should not depend on whether it is tenant- or owner-occupied. The degradation of one property within a neighborhood can cause a domino effect as adjacent owners and tenants become less inclined to invest their time and money toward the upkeep of their properties.

To maintain safe, decent, and sanitary living conditions for tenants, mostly students, living in older neighborhoods located close to campus, the Town has an established Residential Rental Inspection Program. The Rental Permitting Inspection Districts were established according to Virginia Code regulations based on specific geography combined with age of housing, percentage of rental units, and condition of the units. The objectives of this Program include:

- Protect the public health, safety, and welfare of occupants by improving substandard, unsafe housing
- Enforce the Property Maintenance Code
- Provide for regular inspections of rental properties in the Program
- Improve landlord awareness of occupancy limits set forth in the Town Zoning Ordinance
- Maintain tenant/landlord responsibility to the neighborhood upon conversion of a property to rental use
- Maintain an up-to-date database for contact information on rental properties.

Property that is rented for residential purposes in the Residential Rental Inspection Program areas is inspected by the Town on a rotating, four-year schedule. The rental inspection district areas are depicted on the map on the next page. The Town also responds to requests for inspection for rental units outside of the district.

# Rental Permitting Inspection Districts



Town of Blacksburg  
Engineering & GIS  
April 27, 2021  
Map Not to Scale

## EMERGING AND CONTINUING HOUSING TRENDS

National demographic trends including the growth of single-person households and the aging population contribute to an increasing demand for a wide variety of housing choices such as homestay rentals, accessory dwelling units, and tiny homes. Local governments need to be able to respond to these different types of housing and determine policies and regulations related to these topics that fit within the context of the community.

### Green Building

Residential buildings are responsible for a large share of the energy, electricity, water, and materials consumed each year in the community. Increasingly, homebuyers and renters are seeking housing options that are more environmentally responsible and resource-efficient. Many are motivated by a desire to live with a lighter environmental footprint, choosing design elements and materials that require fewer resources and create less waste and pollution during the construction phase. In many cases, the up-front costs to build a home “above code” for energy and water efficiency will more than pay for themselves over the life of the dwelling, due to the substantially lower monthly utility bills. A home that is located close to key destinations or where alternative transportation modes are available can also be a big factor in reducing the environmental impact and vehicle emissions associated with household daily trips. The Town is investigating incentives that could persuade homebuilders and multifamily housing developers to voluntarily adopt green building design standards for new construction, substantial renovation, and redevelopment. Other aspects of sustainable development practices are further detailed in the [Land Use chapter](#).



*Grissom Lane Senior Housing, built to net zero energy standards meaning each home produces as much or more energy than it uses*

## Short Term Rentals

Homestay is the rental of residential property, or a portion of it, to guests for short term stay. Often homeowners use web-based platforms such as Airbnb, Craigslist or HomeAway for advertising and booking of this type of short term or transient rental. The Town allows registered homestay rentals for owner-occupied housing for both single room rental as well as whole unit rental subject to regulations regarding items including safety, occupancy, and maximum rental frequency.

## Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

According to the American Planning Association's (APA) QuickNotes for Accessory Dwelling Units, "ADUs are small, self-contained living units that typically have their own kitchen, bedroom(s), and bathroom space." The accessory apartment is also

sometimes referred to as a granny flat, in-law apartment, basement apartment, garage apartment or carriage house. Many communities, including Blacksburg, are now allowing accessory apartments as a way to make homes more affordable for both the owner and the renter, to give more options for aging-in-place, and to provide more variety in housing types in the community. The Town allows attached accessory apartments for owner-occupied homes in single-family zoning districts and is looking at creating a detached option. There are other standards in the program that relate to length of owner residency, size of apartment, number of occupants, and safety. The program regulations help address potential lifestyle conflicts and integrate the unit as part of the existing neighborhood fabric.

## Tiny Homes

Tiny houses are typically defined as any single-family dwelling with 400 square feet or less of floor area. According to the APA's QuickNotes Making Space for Tiny Houses, while many localities have regulations that present obstacles for tiny homes, advocates note the relative benefits related to housing affordability and environmental sustainability when compared with standard housing sizes. Within the Town, tiny homes that are not built upon a permanent foundation are categorized and regulated as recreational vehicles (RVs), which cannot be used as a residence. Currently, to use a tiny home as a residence in Town requires placement on a permanent foundation with access to utilities.

In addition to these existing and emerging trends, in the future, there may be many different configurations of how people choose to live together. These configurations may not fit within existing policies and regulations. The Town may see more interest in co-housing or intentional communities, preferences for multi-generational housing options, or more older adults wishing to live together. The Town will need to be proactive and thoughtful in preparing regulatory strategies that fit within the context of the community.

## Short Term Rentals

"Home sharing and vacation rental services are growing trends that show no sign of slowing down."

"...new online services that facilitate short-term rentals have led to a rapid proliferation of home sharing as an alternative to more traditional visitor lodging arrangements in communities across the country...Because home sharing has the potential to change the character of established residential areas, many communities are taking a closer look at how best to accommodate the demand for new types of lodging without undermining goals related to housing, land use, or transportation."

Source: American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. "Regulating Short-Term Rentals." QuickNotes No. 56. June 2015.

## HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Blacksburg's Housing and Community Development staff provides a variety of services to further housing opportunities in Blacksburg and the New River Valley as a whole. Ongoing activities include:

- Work with development partners to create affordable housing.
- Help develop and implement policies to increase affordable housing.
- Administer Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and work with community partners to support affordable housing, community development, and public services.
- Serve as the Lead Entity to the New River Valley HOME Consortium, a regional consortium that receives funds from HUD for affordable housing. Through the HOME Consortium, Town staff provides technical assistance to projects and communities throughout the NRV.
- Provide oversight for the New River Valley TimeBank. One of the goals of the TimeBank is to help older adults who need support to age in place.
- Support community initiatives including serving on the New River Valley Aging in Place Leadership Team and Livability Initiative Leadership Team.

Over the last 15 years there have been many successes in the Town and the programs listed above have changed the lives of many residents in Blacksburg and the New River Valley as detailed below:

- 67 homes built or rehabilitated in Blacksburg for low and moderate income households
- 62 homes in Blacksburg received emergency and/or minor home repairs
- 6 homes in Blacksburg provided with ramps to increase accessibility through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity and the Community Foundation of the NRV
- 329 affordable homes built or rehabilitated in other communities of the NRV through the NRV HOME Consortium
- Over \$35 million of funds leveraged in the NRV to support affordable housing
- Funding and project management for the redevelopment of Market Square Park
- Funding for eight commercial façade improvements (including Cabo Fish Taco, Cellar, and Chipotle)
- Establishment of the NRV TimeBank with 85 members joining in the first year
- Funding provided to Valley Interfaith Childcare Center for subsidized childcare for 338 low income children
- Funding provided to Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley to shelter 322 women and children suffering from domestic abuse

- Funding provided to New River Community Action to prevent homelessness for 223 people
- Funding provided to Literacy Volunteers to help 256 people with reading proficiency
- Funding provided the Mental Health Association to assist 54 people
- Funding provided to Blue Ridge Independent Living Center to increase accessibility for 8 households
- Assisted Rainbow Riders Childcare Center with their creation of a new subsidized childcare center



# HOUSING

## Objectives and Policies

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### HOUSING CHALLENGES

- H.1. Conserve stable neighborhoods and encourage rehabilitation and other initiatives that will help to revitalize and promote the stability of older neighborhoods.
  - H.1.1. Improve and maintain existing housing and neighborhood quality by upgrading substandard housing and improving physical community facilities (e.g., streets, sidewalks, lighting, pocket parks) in existing neighborhoods.
  - H.1.2. Continue to provide grants or subsidized loans with deed restrictions for low and moderate-income households to upgrade owner occupied homes.
  - H.1.3. Maintain housing quality in existing neighborhoods and preserve neighborhood stability through proactive enforcement of nuisance and property management laws including the Residential Rental Inspection Program.
  - H.1.4. Facilitate improvement and maintenance of existing neighborhoods by initiating community development programs incorporating affordable housing, including universally designed units.
  - H.1.5. Retain existing below market rental housing through acquisition, rehabilitation assistance and other subsidies.
  - H.1.6. Facilitate the retention of existing manufactured housing communities as a means of preserving some of the most affordable housing in the Town.

### MEETING HOUSING NEEDS

- H.2. Through the development review and decision-making processes, ensure a wide range of housing choices that are integrated and balanced across the Town.
  - H.2.1. Encourage mixed-use and mixed-income housing developments throughout the Town's neighborhoods.
  - H.2.2. Link housing options, transportation, and employment opportunities when making land use decisions.
  - H.2.3. Encourage housing development where increased density is desirable and strive to connect those areas to employment opportunities, transit routes and commercial services.
  - H.2.4. Review and revise the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance standards, such as minimum lot size, maximum density, and lot configuration, to allow for a wider range of housing options, discourage game-day residences, and increase affordability.
  - H.2.5. Promote environmentally sustainable patterns of development.
  - H.2.6. Promote redevelopment and infill development that supports bicycle and pedestrian-oriented infrastructure and robust public transportation to better connect residents to jobs and commercial activity.
  - H.2.7. Through public outreach efforts, provide information about the benefits of/opportunities for patterns of urban living, such as more efficient land use, shared public space, smaller and more energy efficient units, walkability.

- H.2.8. Improve access for lower-income households to adult learning and employment opportunities, job training, healthy food sources, and public amenities, such as parks and recreational facilities, shopping destinations, and libraries with the goals of reducing family isolation, deconcentrating poverty, and enhancing neighborhood and school health and economic mobility.
- H.3. Provide a range of affordable, energy efficient, and appropriate housing options based on the income levels of the people that live and work in the Town.
  - H.3.1. Develop a five year measurable target for the number of affordable housing units to be provided in the following year to signify the commitment of the Town and its residents to provide affordable housing.
  - H.3.2. Every five years, inventory the number of affordable housing units meeting the range of income levels and work to preserve the affordability of these units.
  - H.3.3. Work with partners to maximize financing mechanisms available for homebuyers and renters through Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) or other applicable entities.
  - H.3.4. Create a Housing Trust Fund (HTF) to accept contributions from a range of public and private sources to fund housing units up to 120% of AMI.
  - H.3.5. Establish a dedicated source of funding for the HTF.
  - H.3.6. Revise Accessory Apartment Ordinance as needed to encourage increased use, including providing a detached apartment option. Explore the potential of developing a construction financing loan pool for low and moderate income households interested in developing an accessory apartment.
  - H.3.7. Seek enabling authority to establish an Affordable Dwelling Unit Ordinance (separate from the Accessory Apartment Ordinance) which would allow an increase in density in exchange for the development and dedication of affordable housing units. For student housing developments, cash contributions to a Town Housing Trust Fund could be accepted.
  - H.3.8. Work with owners to ensure ongoing participation in the HUD program providing affordable rental housing through project-based housing vouchers as this is the most affordable housing for low income people.
  - H.3.9. Encourage affordable and appropriate housing in mixed-use developments.
  - H.3.10. Adhere to a strict affordable housing preservation policy in which any affordable units that are removed as a part of a redevelopment should be replaced in the new development.
  - H.3.11. Encourage affordable and appropriate housing as a development option for infill sites, particularly in commercial areas and near employment concentrations.
  - H.3.12. Give priority for the use of Town and other government-owned buildings and land as opportunities for the provision of affordable housing.
  - H.3.13. Promote and facilitate innovative site design and construction techniques, as well as encourage the use of manufactured housing and manufactured housing components, when aimed at providing affordable and appropriate housing.
  - H.3.14. Promote and facilitate the use of high durability materials in construction to reduce overall maintenance costs, ensuring that housing remains affordable.

- H.3.15. Explore the creation of a landlord risk reduction fund, using Charlottesville’s as an example, to encourage private market landlords to provide affordable rental units through the Housing Choice Voucher program. Work with local partners to increase landlord recruitment and education about Housing Choice Vouchers and other housing assistance programs.
  - H.3.16. Waive development fees for residential developments that include a minimum of 15% (of total housing units) on-site affordable housing units.
  - H.3.17. Continue supporting Low Income Housing Tax Credit proposals for the creation of affordable rental units.
  - H.3.18. Continue to use various tools such as deed restrictions and deed covenants to provide more long-term affordability of housing units
  - H.3.19. Develop a Community Land Trust to keep homes permanently affordable to income eligible households.
  - H.3.20. Evaluate the merits of establishing property tax deferral programs to encourage the preservation or development of affordable rental housing as well as lessening financial burdens for homebuyers earning less than 30% of the area median income.
  - H.3.21. Continue and expand reduced water and sewer connection fees for affordable housing developments targeting people at 80% and below the area median income.
  - H.3.22. Review residential zoning ordinances to find opportunities to reduce the cost of residential development such as smaller lot sizes and reduced parking requirements.
- H.4. Provide a range of housing options to support aging in place and aging in community.
- H.4.1. Pursue Age Friendly Certification through AARP, a priority of the NRV Aging in Place Leadership Team.
  - H.4.2. Continue to support the New River Valley TimeBank as a means of providing reciprocal support services to help people age in place.
  - H.4.3. Universal design features should be included in all new and retrofitted housing.
  - H.4.4. Encourage the development of small homes and innovative planned residential communities.
  - H.4.5. Encourage alternative eldercare settings to the currently available nursing home and assisted living options.
  - H.4.6. Give high priority to housing that is affordable to lower income elders earning less than 50% of the area median income.
  - H.4.7. Continue to support the Housing Resiliency Grant Program for residents to: (1) improve energy efficiency, (2) improve accessibility to and within the home, and (3) obtain minor repairs to substandard housing conditions to safeguard against imminent danger to human life, health or safety.
- H.5. Provide housing available to special populations, including people with physical and mental disabilities, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and elderly residents with low incomes.

- H.5.1. Promote fair housing laws and nondiscriminatory practices in the sale and rental of housing to all community members.
  - H.5.2. Prioritize multifamily housing for the elderly and people with disabilities that is conveniently located to public transportation and community services.
  - H.5.3. Encourage the creation of accessible housing units or units that can be easily modified for use by people with disabilities.
  - H.5.4. Explore ways to increase the availability of special needs housing.
  - H.5.5. Continue to support organizations that assist residents with services that include housing assistance for those experiencing domestic violence and homeless assistance programs.
  - H.5.6. Engage local organizations working with special needs populations to determine current housing needs and options.
  - H.5.7. Support education about special needs housing.
- H.6. Provide a range of housing types for young families, young professionals, and graduate students.
- H.6.1. Promote the benefits of small homes and innovative planned residential communities.
  - H.6.2. Encourage housing for young professionals in the downtown area.
  - H.6.3. New and retrofitted houses should include universal design features.
  - H.6.4. In partnership with Virginia Tech and the Virginia Tech Foundation, consider creating a low interest loan programs for first time homebuyers earning up to 120% of the area median income.

## **EMERGING AND CONTINUING HOUSING TRENDS**

- H.7. Update policies and regulations to address emerging housing trends in a manner that fits within the community context.
- H.8. Incentivize “beyond the code” sustainable design and building standards to address household affordability, energy, and resource conservation.
- H.8.1. Investigate and offer economically persuasive incentives to homebuilders and multifamily housing developers to build an EarthCraft or LEED third-party certified standard for sustainable design standards and high energy-efficiency.
  - H.8.2. Explore options for homeowners to reduce the up-front cost for energy efficiency home evaluations and upgrades.
  - H.8.3. Promote the advantages of an energy assessment as part of the home buying process.
  - H.8.4. Create low and no-cost resources that homeowners and renters can utilize to identify simple energy efficiency upgrades.
  - H.8.5. Publicize the advantages of energy-efficient rental properties to renters and multifamily developers alike: improved resident comfort and health, reduced monthly utility bills, and changing customer expectations.

- H.8.6. Provide economically persuasive incentives for homebuilders and developers to maximize future renewable solar energy potential when making site and home design decisions (i.e., building orientation, roof slope, framing, geometry, tree selection and siting, conduit placement).
- H.8.7. Investigate and offer economically persuasive incentives for multifamily housing complexes to pursue energy efficiency evaluations and upgrades of older apartment buildings.