



# HOUSING ELEMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

## OVERVIEW

The *Housing* element of the East Longmeadow Master Plan provides an overview of housing conditions and issues facing the Town of East Longmeadow and its residents.

With this chapter being an update to the Town’s Master Plan, and incorporating its commonalities to other Town goals and policies, successful housing policies and outcomes can:

- Consider pattern of residential development in determining what types of housing stock is needed and where it might best be constructed and concentrated in the future;
- Assess the local and regional area to determine how future market forces may influence the development and affordability of housing in the community.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The high cost of housing and lack of affordable or attractive options for households is a reality, as Massachusetts Governor Baker has identified a crisis on the affordability of housing and lack thereof. The supply and cost of housing play a major role in who gets to live in town. Communities, through their policies, can influence and play a role on who lives in town – East Longmeadow is no exception. Sometimes zoning can limit the development of housing for a variety of different housing types, likely resulting in a homogeneous population. Residents have said they want the balance of housing types to be available to many different income levels and for many different ages and households; finding that balance is the challenge, adopting the regulations and exploring the non-regulatory ways to achieve these housing goals.

## HOUSING STOCK

The size of the housing stock in East Longmeadow has grown consistently through time, although since the Great Recession at a smaller rate than between 2000 and 2010. The number of vacancies decreased dramatically between 2010 and 2017.

### HOUSING STOCK

	2000		2010		2017	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Occupied Units	5,248	97.8%	4,984	85.2%	5,978	97.1%
Vacant Units	115	2.2%	255	14.8%	176	2.9%
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>5,363</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,851</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6,154</b>	<b>100%</b>

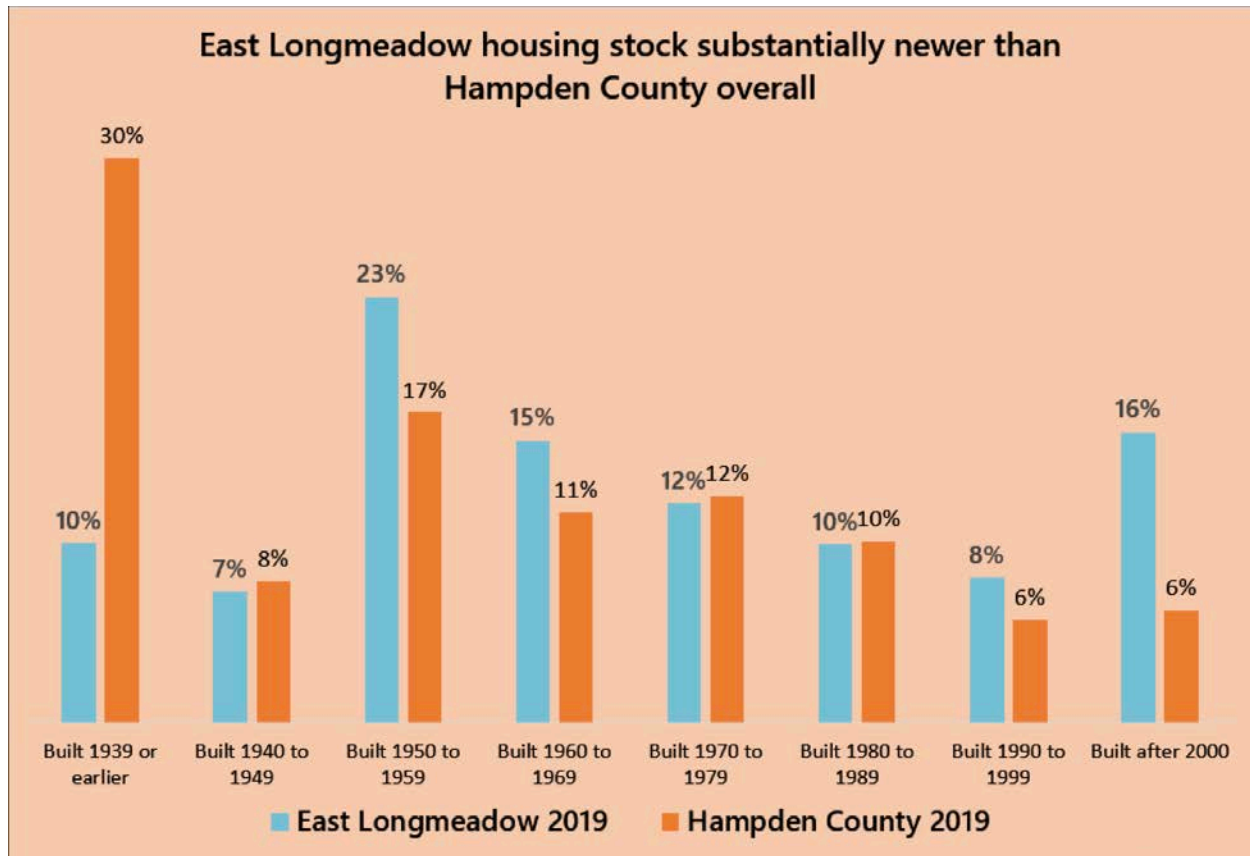
Source: ACS 2013-2017, "Vacancy Status," B25004 & "Selected Housing Characteristics," DP04.

## AGE OF HOUSING

According to the Donahue Institute, the distribution of housing units by age is important for at least three reasons. First, a housing stock with few units built since 2000 indicates that housing supply is growing slowly. Demand can remain stable or increase and this would result in housing price increases. Second, older housing units can be more expensive to occupy, due to higher heating and maintenance costs. Third, certain federal housing programs, such as Community Development

Block Grants, track the percent of housing units by age, and in particular, the percent built before 1939.

In East Longmeadow, 10 percent of housing units are in buildings built before 1939. Construction since 2000 accounts for 16 percent of units. Compared to the rest of Hampden County, East Longmeadow’s housing stock is substantially newer than the rest of Hampden County.



Source: US Census

### BUILDING PERMITS

Owners or builders file building permits when they initiate any type of major construction or demolition in East Longmeadow. Permits for activities such as new construction, renovations, and demolitions are good indicators of the housing market in East Longmeadow. Single family construction in East Longmeadow in the past ten years has been consistent with the highest number of homes built in 2013 with 57. 2019 and 2018 represented the lowest amount of residential units built in the past ten years, although even in the middle of a pandemic in 2020, the number has returned to near the median value of the last ten years.



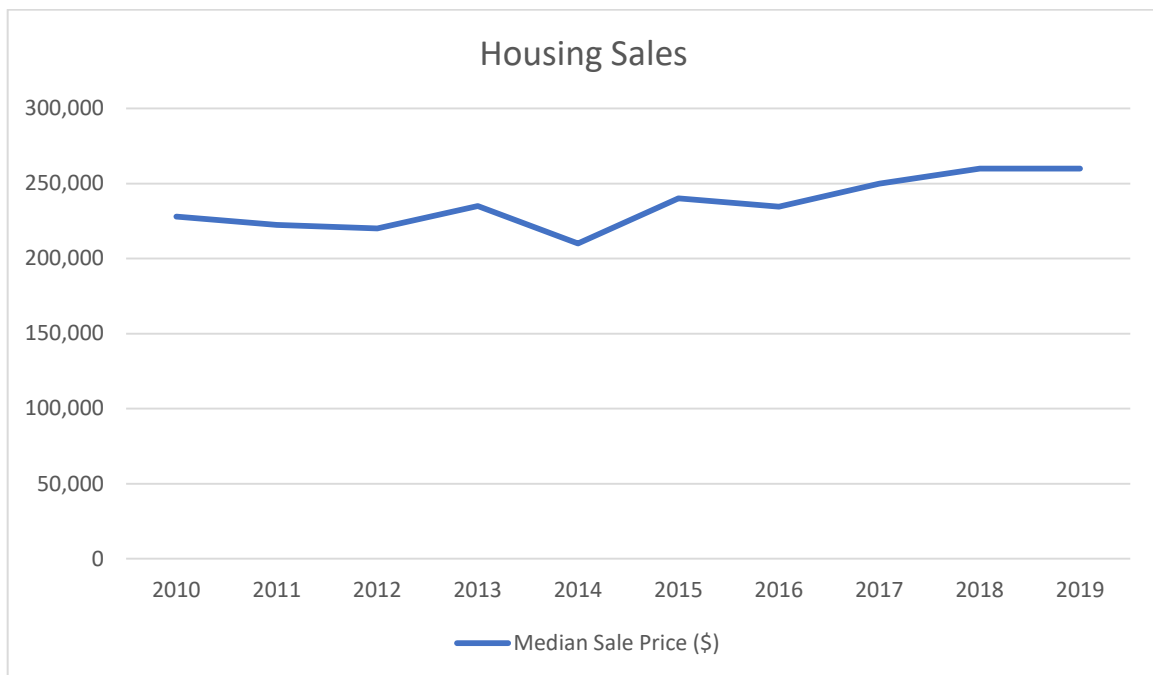
Year	Single Family Construction	Residential Condo (All 55+ units)	Total Residential Units
2020	27	5	32
2019	10	6	16
2018	12	5	17
2017	28	4	32
2016	31	0	31
2015	27	5	32
2014	32	10	42
2013	53	4	57
2012	36	9	45
2011	20	6	26
2010	38	9	47

### HOUSING TENURE

According to estimates from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 82.2 percent of the occupied housing units in East Longmeadow are ownership units, while 17.8 percent are rental units. This is equal to about 4,899 ownership units, and 1,058 rental units.

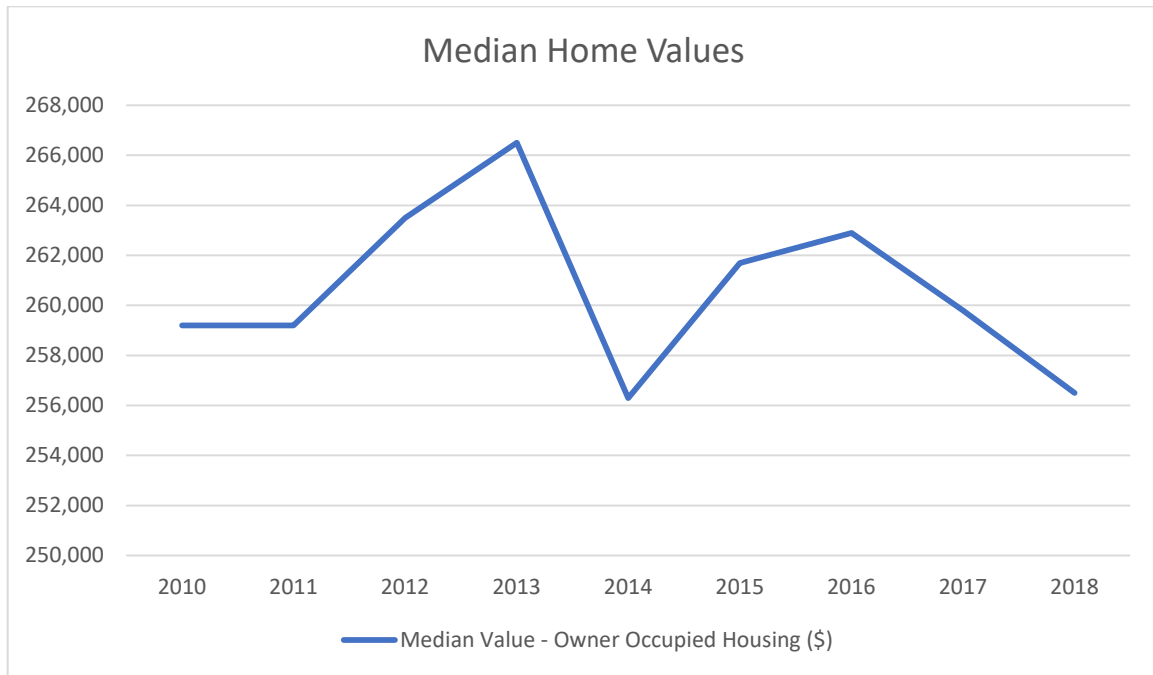
### HOUSING SALES

Median home sales price has seen a notable increase from \$210,000 in 2015 to \$260,000 in 2019.



## HOME VALUES AND RENTS

Despite the increase in median sales prices, home values have fluctuated since 2010, with a decline in median value of homes from 2016-2018. This does not necessarily suggest a general decline in home values.



## SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY

As of November 2019, there were 452 units, or 7.44 percent of the year-round housing stock in East Longmeadow determined to be “affordable” as defined under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B.

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *Population and Household Growth*

Based on the projected population and household growth in East Longmeadow, proactive planning is essential for accommodating new growth while maintaining the characteristics and qualities that make East Longmeadow great place to live and work. Population growth is to be around 11.5 percent between 2010 and 2030. This growth can affect transportation, public infrastructure, housing, and town services, like schools in which its planning is usually focused on residential growth.

Changes in population and households are not all bad. The growing number of residents between the ages of 35 and 54 years old are helping to support the local economy and fill the homes on the market. This generates sales and property taxes that are reinvested back into the community. While homeowners and renters in this age group do contribute substantially to the vitality of the



community, they also rely on town services such as schools, recreation facilities, and the library. The Town needs to plan for the changing demographics and the shifts in age groups to continue to provide a high quality of life for its residents. Like many other communities, seniors are likely to present challenges to the town of East Longmeadow. Seniors have unique needs and often require increased service provisions. Transportation services, grocery delivery, and programming to maintain social interconnectedness are all important pieces in maintaining the general health and well-being of seniors.

East Longmeadow needs to carefully consider future residential growth scenarios with its current zoning. As more low-density housing is built, the proportion of open space will decrease, and the burden on local finances will increase. As the American Farmland Trust has found through its Cost of Community Services studies (<https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/cost-of-community-services-studies-making-the-case-for-conservation/>):

*“...although working agriculture and open space lands may generate less revenue than residential, commercial or industrial property, they require less public infrastructure and fewer community services. Cost of Community Services studies from 25 states show that, on average, the median cost per dollar of revenue raised to provide public services for commercial and industrial lands was \$0.30, for working and open space lands was \$0.37, and for residential lands was \$1.16.”*

### ***Housing Affordability***

Chapter 40B authorizes a housing agency or developer to obtain a single comprehensive permit for the construction of subsidized low or moderate-income housing if less than 10% of its total year-round housing in the community is subsidized low or moderate-income housing. Because East Longmeadow is below this threshold, it is *vulnerable* to a Comprehensive Permit application. A Comprehensive Permit puts local permitting in the hands of the Zoning Board of Appeal.

One of the primary purposes of M.G.L Chapter 40B is to assure that no city or town shouldered a disproportionate amount of low- and moderate-income housing in any region of the state. To this end, a 10 percent statutory minimum was established as an indicator that suburbs and small towns were providing their “fair share” of affordable housing. East Longmeadow does not currently meet this statutory minimum, and a need for more affordable housing choices can further be seen in the increased share of household incomes going toward housing costs.

More than 50 percent of survey takers responded that the town should work immediately or within the next 1-2 years on varying selection and price of homes so life-long residents and working people can afford to stay in East Longmeadow. Some free responses to this question included similar sentiments like more affordable options for life-long residents to retire with a garage and no more large homes occupying large property areas at high values.

### ***Housing Choice Types***

Housing can be a controversial subject in most towns. It has been shared that there have been challenges in trying to get policies passed through Town Meeting in the past, and Town Council currently with regards to housing and providing increased access to various types. Opinions about housing, taxes, taxing the town's infrastructure, and loss of open space often led to many land use policy decisions and sometimes at the expense of sound planning and social fairness. Lack of housing options including smaller, rental, accessible, and affordable units can create barriers for



residents in various stages of life to thrive in East Longmeadow and achieve greater socioeconomic diversity in the population.

It is an important policy question for East Longmeadow whether or not the local regulations and zoning provide for a good balance of housing opportunities or create barriers to fair and affordable housing.

### ***Coronavirus Pandemic***

East Longmeadow is in a different place than it was in January 2020. Retailers, restaurants and many businesses in the Commonwealth closed for many weeks, sometimes reverting to online shopping once it was safe to do so. Virtual learning was commonplace the last quarter of the 2019-2020 School Year. Many service-based businesses have acclimated to telecommuting or a hybrid work environment, drawing attention to whether many of these service-based businesses may still need to keep their office spaces. New norms, like social distancing and mask-wearing is commonplace in restaurants and retailers. The Town and its economy will have these norms to weather as the world navigates a post-pandemic life, as more begin to get vaccinated.

While the pandemic cannot determine the Town's long-term economic health, its influence will be present in the coming years as revenues, municipal and school services are discussed to address how COVID-19 has changed the traditional workplace possibly for good, possibly resulting in a change of household. Moreover, for the time being, the Town's ability to navigate these initiatives explored in this plan may be tested, as the work will involve all aspects of municipal government. Perhaps this Master Plan element update is the key to guide the Town's growth as it examines its future – opportunities for jobs and amenities for current and future residents.

### ***Inclusionary Housing***

The town's Inclusionary Housing policy is found in its Mixed-Use Village District Zoning Bylaw, which limits those who would match income limits to live in those future developed properties. As housing values begin to rise in East Longmeadow, the need for affordable housing becomes more pressing for all income levels, individuals and families of all ages. A town-wide inclusionary housing zoning bylaw can be explored.

### ***Community Resilience***

A resilient community, not only one that bounces back after a hardship or disaster, is one that also is able to provide a wide range of housing types that accommodate all stages in a person's lifecycle. This is an ongoing conversation around housing that should continue to be explored, particularly with a variety of housing types to accommodate many different income levels and that are built sustainably and in the context of climate risk. New home building and design can be strategic and cost-effective policies that will lead to more energy efficient homes. Exploration of design guidelines is an opportunity to take advantage of this conversation.

