

Population and Housing

Introduction

Changes in population and housing characteristics impact land use and land use decisions, whether it be household sizes, an increase or decrease in school age children, or an aging population. Population is the overall make up of a community and housing is a large part of the built fabric of the town. Both contribute to the character of the community, impact public services, and influence surrounding land uses. This chapter of the Master Plan examines Littleton's key population and housing trends over time and provides guidance on significant demographic and housing issues the town faces and should proactively plan for.

Though Littleton's population growth has been relatively limited in recent decades, the town is attracting new activity, young families, and is further establishing its role as a regional center for shopping, healthcare, and entertainment. The first half of this chapter will provide insight on the existing conditions related to population and demographics, highlighting significant changes over time.

The second half of the chapter provides information on the changing dynamics of Littleton's housing supply and residential real estate market. An overview is presented about total housing growth, changes in housing mix in terms of the types of housing units constructed, and housing costs.

Population

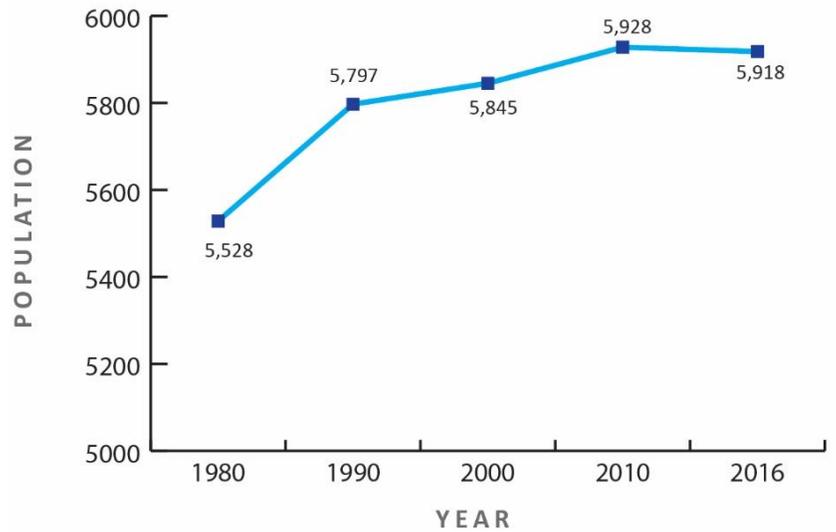
Population Trends

A population changes due to in-migration (people moving into town) and out-migration (people moving out of town). Population growth or decline is also influenced by the amount of births and deaths that occur in a community. Over the years, Littleton has established itself as an attractive place to live with access to many outdoor recreation opportunities, a vibrant downtown, and a variety of services. The in-migration of new residents to Littleton may occur for reasons such as job opportunities, retirement, and the attractiveness of living in a regional center. Typically, in the North Country, there is also a loss of population of young adults who seek employment or educational opportunities elsewhere. Figure X shows population trends from 1980 to 2016 as recorded by NH's Office of Strategic Initiatives and the US Census. Since 2010, the population has been declining slightly, but has remained stable overall. It's important to note that population estimates by the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives and US Census data have not been the most accurate source of population data based on the way the data is generated and that Littleton's true population may be higher than Census estimates.



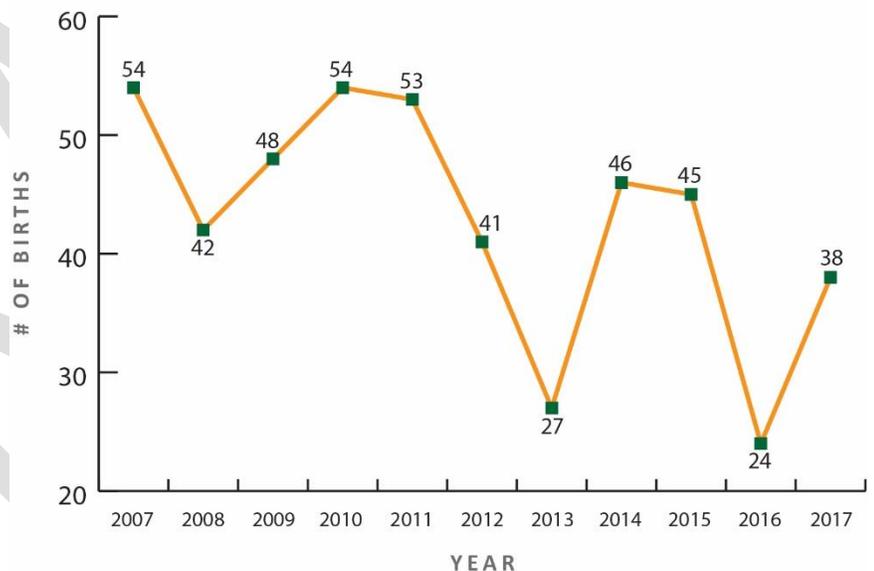
Additionally, Littleton receives a significant increase of traffic during the day as it attracts people from the region for work and access to grocery stores, pharmacies, and social services. Some estimates of Littleton’s daytime population range from 12,000 to 15,000 people, and even larger numbers are possible at key times during the year. This increase in daytime population is influenced by the fact that more than 34,000 people live within a thirty-minute drive of Littleton according to the US Census.

FIGURE X: POPULATION TRENDS



The number of births that occur in a community provide insight on whether population growth is due to the expansion of local families, and how much is due to an influx of new residents. There have been 472 births from Littleton residents during 2007-2017, averaging 47.2 births per year. The median number of births is 45. Despite this, the population has only marginally changed between 2010 and 2016, indicating that out-migration of children to other areas of the state, region, or country is still occurring. From 1999-2000, there were 788 births that occurred in Littleton, about 40% more than occurred from 2007-2017.

FIGURE X: BIRTHS IN LITTLETON



Age

Age is an important factor in defining the character of a community and its economy. New Hampshire communities have seen a steady increase in median age over time, largely due to the aging of the baby boomer generation. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), Littleton’s median age has decreased from 44.1 years old in 2010 to 43.3 years old in 2016. The median age in NH and Grafton County as of 2016 is 42.4 years old.

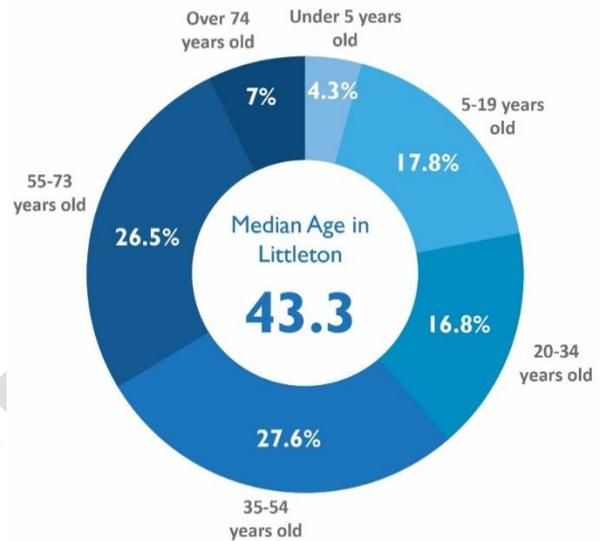
According to the U.S. Census, the 2000 Census was the first time in the history of the Census that the 65 and over population did not grow faster than the total population. The explanation for this is that the relatively low birth rates in the late 1920s and early 1930s meant that fewer people reached their 65th birthday in time for the 2000 Census. The 2004 Master Plan stated that this trend was expected to be reversed when the baby boomers reach age 65 starting in 2011. Since 2000, the percentage of people

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over the age of 65 has increased from 14.5% to 18.2% in 2016. The implications of an aging population include access to elderly services from the community, smaller housing units, and assisted care facilities.

It's in a community's best interest to have a population that includes a wider distribution of ages, especially those between 20 and 65 years old, resulting in a steady workforce, job opportunities, and a healthy local economy and school system. In Littleton, 70.9% of the population is now between 20-74 years old. See Figure X for the distribution of ages in Littleton as of the 2016 American Community Survey.

FIGURE X: AGE DISTRIBUTION



School Enrollment

Decreasing school enrollment is a nationwide issue in Rural America. School enrollment numbers for grades K-12 in the Littleton School District have declined somewhat steadily in recent years. Since 2008, enrollment has decreased by 16.8%. Projections for future school enrollment numbers, provided by the Littleton School Administration Unit, indicate this decrease will continue over the next ten years. Attracting and retaining young families will be an important issue to address for the future of Littleton if the community wishes to maintain a diversity of residents.

FIGURE X: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT NUMBERS K-12 2008-2018

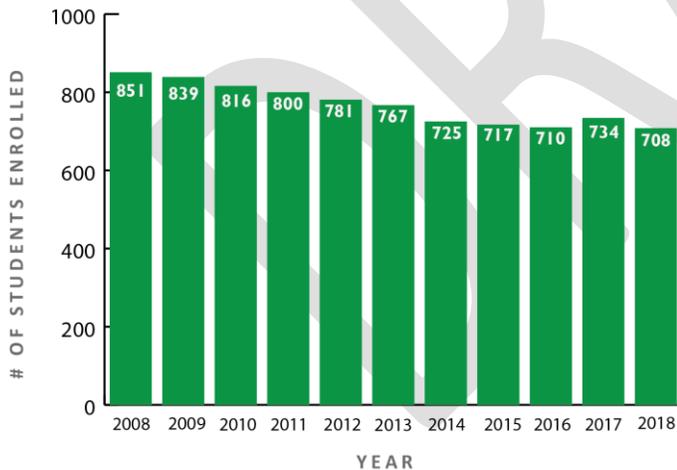
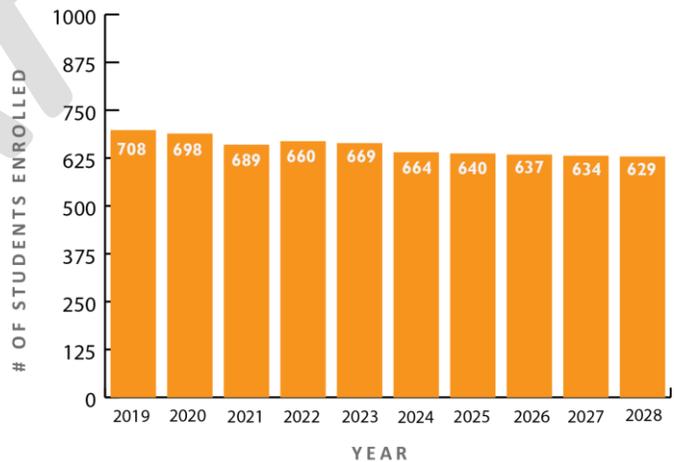


FIGURE X: SCHOOL ENROLLMENT NUMBERS K-12 PROJECTIONS FOR 2019-2028



Employment and Income

Steady employment and income are important contributors to good health and high quality of life. In Littleton, 68% of individuals are considered to be part of the labor force. The unemployment rate as of



August 2018 in Littleton was 2.4%, a decrease from the unemployment rate in 2010 which was 5.1%. This shows that the job market and local economy have strengthened since the 2008 financial crisis.

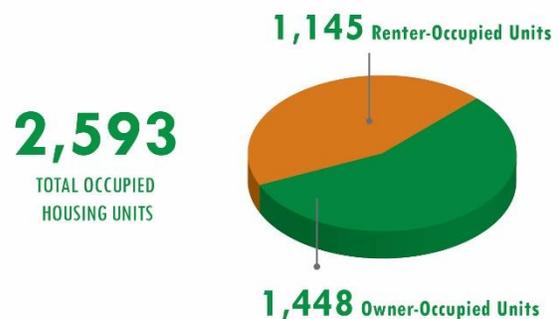
Littleton experienced a much larger increase in median household income from 1990 to 2000 than the county, state, or nation. It appears that this large increase in median household income may have been partly due to the increasing number of upper income retirees that decided to reside in Littleton and/or an increase in the number of two-income families. Since 2000, the median household income in Littleton has been decreasing. In 2000, the median household income was \$49,915. In 2010, this income decreased to \$44,769 and in 2016, the median household income decreased again to \$39,553. The median household income for New Hampshire is \$68,485, about \$28,932 more than Littleton’s.

Land Use Implications	Potential Actions
Littleton’s aging population may place a different demand on town services in the future.	The Town of Littleton should be aware of the services that will be required by a larger elderly population. This will include transportation, housing, access to healthcare, and other programs.
Littleton continues to be a stable community with very slow population growth. There is also a growing need for housing units that meet the needs of smaller households and the elderly such as senior housing facilities, accessory units, cottage style units, and nursing homes.	Ensure that Littleton’s regulations provide opportunities to create and track a diverse mix of housing unit types that can accommodate the changing composition of Littleton’s households.
Littleton’s schools will be impacted in the future by decreasing enrollment and rising per capita costs of education if the current trends continue.	Work with the School Board to better incorporate school properties into community life. With decreasing enrollment, the school buildings may be able to meet some of the needs of the community by providing space for programs and services that would otherwise be housed elsewhere with additional costs.

Housing

Much of a community’s health, wealth, and overall well-being is linked to the accessibility of diverse housing options for community members. Additionally, residential development also influences public expenditures on schools, parks, utilities, and other public services and amenities. New Hampshire’s housing environment is currently being influenced by economic and demographic shifts: younger residents are delaying homeownership and a large percentage of them are choosing mobility over homeownership; seniors are the fastest growing segment of the housing market; availability of rental units is challenging throughout much of New Hampshire, while costs remain high for many individuals and families; and land use regulations are not geared toward current market needs. Listed below are key housing trends observed in Littleton.

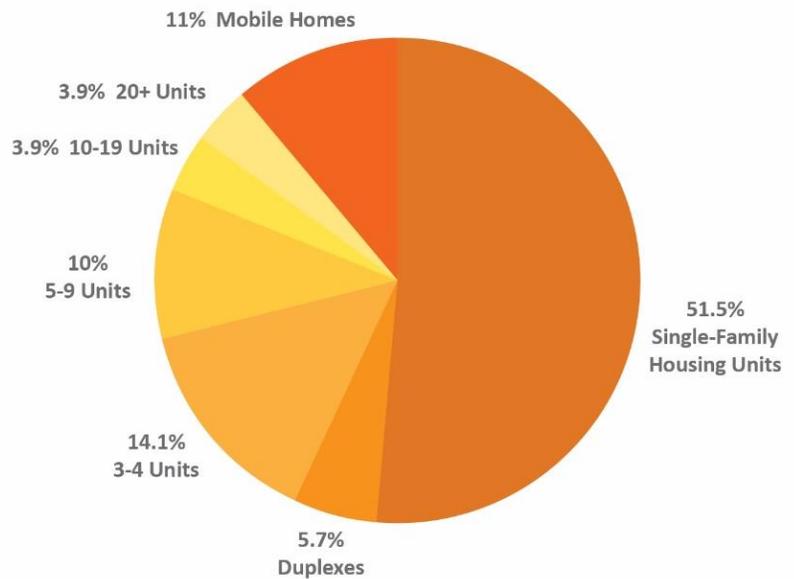
FIGURE X: RENTALS VS. NON-RENTALS



Housing Supply

According to the 2016 ACS, there are a total of 2,985 housing units in Littleton, an increase from 2,859 units in 2010. There are approximately 2,593 occupied housing units in town, of which 55.8% are occupied by homeowners, while 44.2% are occupied by renters. The remaining 384 housing units are categorized as vacant/seasonal and constitute 13.4% of the town’s housing supply. The average household size of owner-occupied units is 2.46 people, whereas the average household size of renter-occupied units is 1.97 people. According to the 2010 US Census, 166 housing units or 42% of the vacant housing units in Littleton were for seasonal occupants. These units make up 5% of the housing stock in Littleton. This is an increase from the 93 seasonal housing units recorded in the 2000 census. Most of the housing units in town are single-family detached units (approximately 51.5%). About 27.5% of the housing stock consists of multi-family housing units. Figure X shows the types and quantity of housing units in Littleton according to the ACS however it is important to state that single family conversions do not require a permit or approval in Littleton. As a result it is anticipated that many single family units have been converted to duplexes and multi-family units over time. This is both a planning and a life safety concern.

FIGURE X: HOUSING UNITS BY TYPE



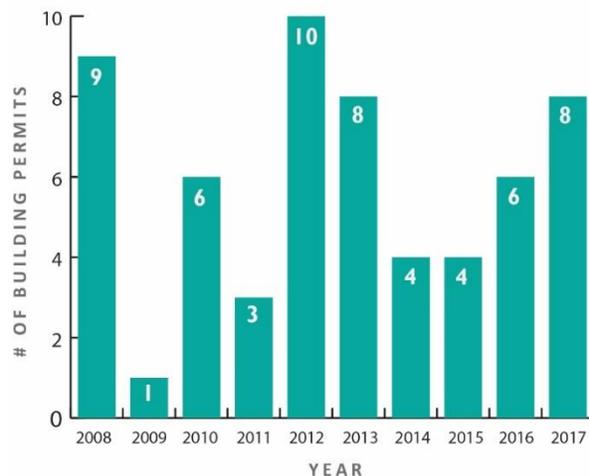
The age of housing stock can also provide some insight into the condition, quality, and safety of the housing units in town. Older units may have been constructed to standards, from the perspective of building codes and life safety requirements, that may not be as demanding especially in regard to multi-family units. Additionally, dwelling units built before the early 1970s may have lead present from building materials used during this time, which pose a risk to children’s health.

Approximately 35% of the housing stock was built in 1939 or earlier, 7% of the housing stock was built from 1940-1959, and 17% of the housing stock was built in 1990 or later. Since 2000, 10% of Littleton’s existing housing stock was constructed.

Building Permit History

According to the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives, between 1990 and 2000, 195 residential building permits were issued for new dwelling units in Littleton. The number of permits issued remained

FIGURE X: BUILDING PERMIT HISTORY



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relatively constant at about twenty permits annually until 1998 and 1999 when it spiked to more than thirty permits per year. In 2009, Littleton saw an increase in multi-family development, and total of 51 multi-family units were created. However, the average number of building permits issued per year has dropped to less than 10 over the last decade.

Year	Assessed Value of New Residential Structures	Building Permits Issued & Built
2008	\$1,156,000	9 issued / 7 built
2009	\$1,346,500	11 issued / 10 built
2010	\$1,284,600	6 issued / 4 built
2011	\$785,000	3 issued / 3 built
2012	\$1,359,900	9 issued / 7 built
2013	\$1,377,900	9 issued / 8 built
2014	\$1,730,500	9 issued / 8 built
2015	\$791,500	4 issued / 4 built
2016	\$1,213,800	7 issued / 6 built
2017	\$1,522,200	8 issued / 8 built (2 are still unfinished)

Housing Costs

According to the 2016 ACS, the median value of owner-occupied housing units in Littleton was \$164,400, a \$69,300 increase from the median value recorded in the 2000 census. The median value of owner-occupied housing units in Grafton County is \$214,100 while New Hampshire's is \$239,700. On average, Littleton is still more affordable than the county or state.

The median household income for homeowners in Littleton is \$39,553, while the median household income for renters is \$30,015. For homeowners this number decreased from \$47,500 in 2000 and for renters increased from \$17,480. The median gross monthly rent in Littleton is \$599 as of the 2016 American Community Survey, however current advertised rentals are typically between \$700-\$1,000. This number has increased from \$428 recorded in the 2000 census. The median monthly gross rent in Grafton County is \$892 and in New Hampshire \$1,021.

According to the American Community Survey, the number of single-person households in Littleton has risen annually since 2011. This may be associated with the lower than average median household income number reported for Littleton.

Year	Total Households	Single-Person Households
2017	2,661	~1050 households
2016	2,593	~959 households
2015	2,584	~930 households
2014	2,613	~862 households
2013	2,608	~886 households
2012	2,609	~757 households
2011	2,547	~713 households

Affordable Housing

Affordability is generally defined as dwelling units for those households whose annual income is less than 80% of their county median income; and whose housing costs are no more than 30% of gross household income including rent or mortgage payments, utilities, taxes, and insurance.

According to the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority's 2018 Directory of Assisted Housing there are 262 rent-assisted housing units in Littleton. This equals 8% of Littleton's housing supply. Littleton is fortunate to have another partner organization, AHEAD Inc., working within its borders. AHEAD is a regional non-profit community development organization dedicated to providing housing and economic opportunities to families of limited means in Northern NH.

Land Use Implications	Potential Actions
Area businesses depend on housing that their workers can afford.	Continue to allow accessory units in owner-occupied single-family homes and within accessory buildings throughout town. Encourage the redevelopment of downtown properties to incorporate a mix of uses including a variety of housing types and costs.
The creation of accessory units in single-family homes provide opportunities for affordable rentals. However, these conversions do not require a permit or approval through a planning board process. As a result there are parking and life safety concerns and the community has no way of tracking the creation of these new units.	The Community should research alternatives for monitoring and permitting the creation of new residential units. This could be accomplished through a permit or other regulatory process.
Housing located within the downtown area can reduce some of the transportation costs for residents by providing transportation options and employment opportunities nearby.	Work with developers to minimize the costs of living through quality housing design, energy efficient construction, and proximity to transportation and employment options.
Littleton’s older building stock presents risks to families and children due to presence of lead in building materials used prior to the early 1970s.	Support the creation of a lead safety education campaign to communicate risks to Littleton families.

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