

2 Population & Housing

“Good planning is essential for increasing housing options, boosting affordability, and unlocking opportunity.”

- American Planning Association

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 community's 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 out-migration of young adults who seek employment or educational opportunities elsewhere is a common trend.

Figure 2.1 shows population trends from 1980 to 2017 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.

DAYTIME POPULATION

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

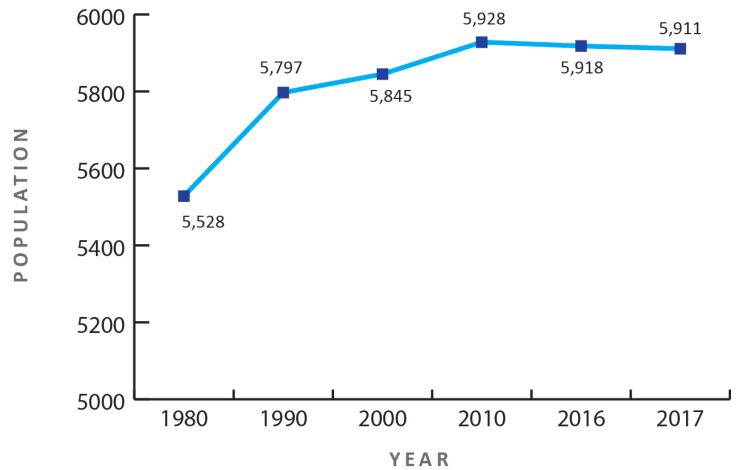


Figure 2.1: Population Trends from 1980-2017

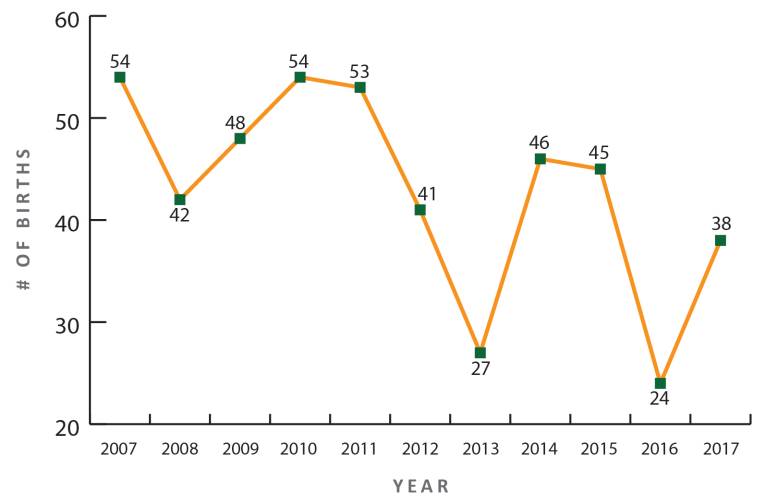


Figure 2.2: Births in Littleton from 2007-2017

Source: Littleton Town Report

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).

BIRTHS

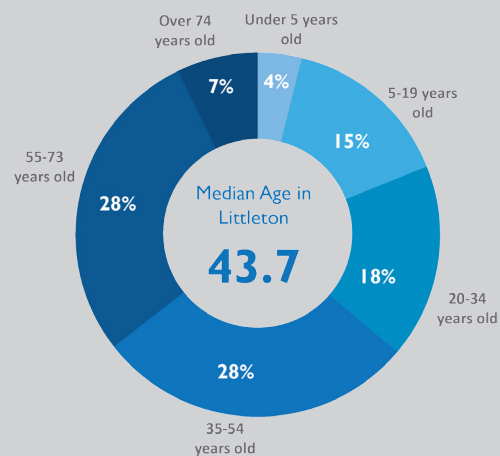
The number of births that occur in a community provide insight on whether population growth is due to the expansion of local families, and how much is due to an influx of new residents. There have been 472 births from Littleton residents during 2007-2017, **averaging 47.2 births per year.** The median number of births is 45. Despite

Age

Age is an important factor in defining the character of a community and its economy. Many New Hampshire communities have seen a steady increase in median age over time, largely due to the aging of the baby boomer generation. However, Littleton has a fairly diverse population in terms of age, and has seen an influx of younger people into the community in recent years. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), Littleton’s median age has decreased slightly from 44.1 years old in 2010 to 43.7 years old in 2017. The median age in NH and Grafton County as of 2017 is 42.9 years old.

Since 2000, the percentage of people 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 the pie chart below for the distribution of ages in Littleton as of the 2016 American Community Survey.



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, which is about 40% more than occurred from 2007-2017.

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 (see Figure 2.3).

Since 2008, school 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. These are depicted in Figure 2.4 on the following page. 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.

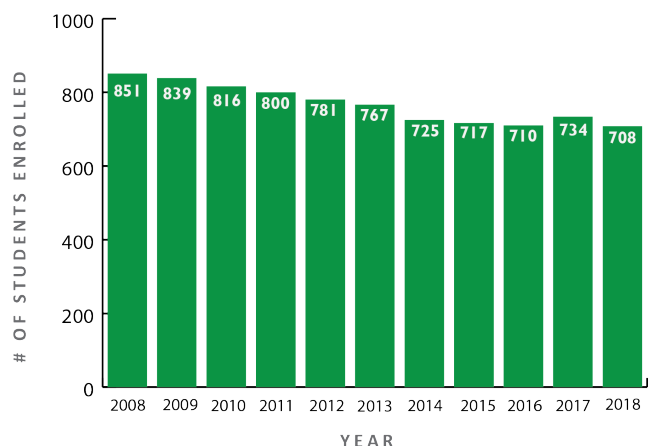


Figure 2.3: Historic School Enrollment Numbers from 2008-2018
Source: Littleton School Administrative Unit

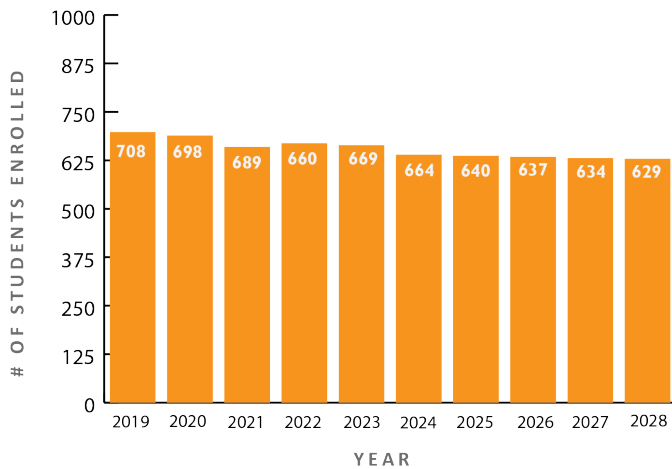


Figure 2.4: School Enrollment Projection Numbers from 2019-2028
Source: Littleton School Administrative Unit

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.

From 1990 to 2000, Littleton experienced a much larger increase in median household income 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 2017, the median household income decreased again to \$39,490. The median household income for New Hampshire is \$71,305 and is \$61,036 for Grafton County.

HOUSING

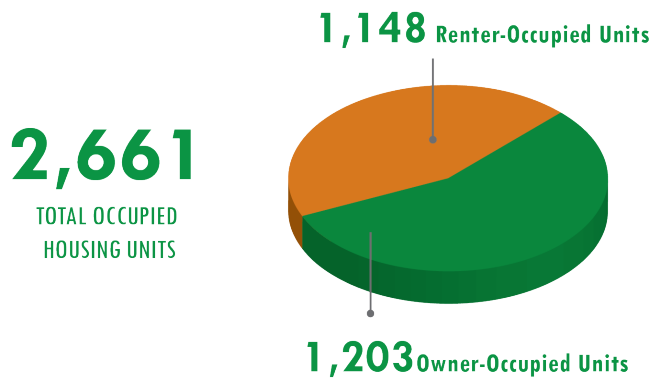
Much of a community's health, wealth, and overall well-being is linked to the **accessibility of diverse housing options** for community members. Additionally, residential development also influences public expenditures on schools, parks, utilities, and other public services and amenities.

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. There is 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. Listed in this section below are key housing trends observed in Littleton.

Housing Supply

According to the 2017 ACS, **there are a total of 3,129 housing units in Littleton**, an increase from 2,859 units in 2010. There are approximately 2,661 occupied housing units in town, of which **55% are occupied by homeowners, while 45% are occupied by renters**. The remaining 468 housing units are categorized as vacant/seasonal and constitute 15% of the town's housing supply. The average household size of owner-occupied units is 2.45 people, whereas the average household size of renter-occupied units is 2 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.

As of 2017, most of the housing units in town are single-family detached units (approximately 54%). About 34% of the housing stock consists of multi-family housing units. Figure 2.5 shows the types and quantity of housing units in Littleton according to the ACS. However, it's 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.

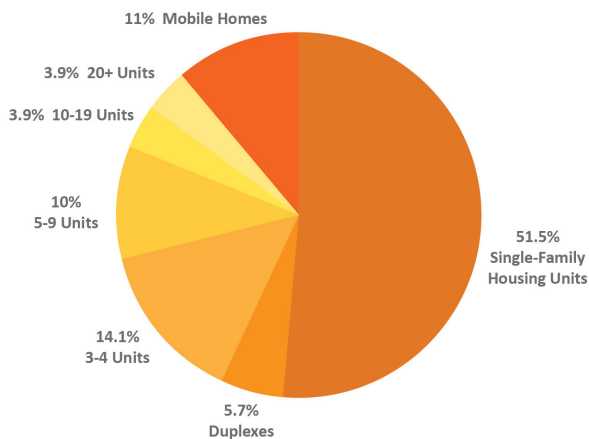


Figure 2.5: Housing Units by Type

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. As of 2017, 39% of the housing stock was built in 1939 or earlier, 30% of the housing stock was built from 1940-1980, and 11% of the housing stock was built in 2000 or later.

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 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 a 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.

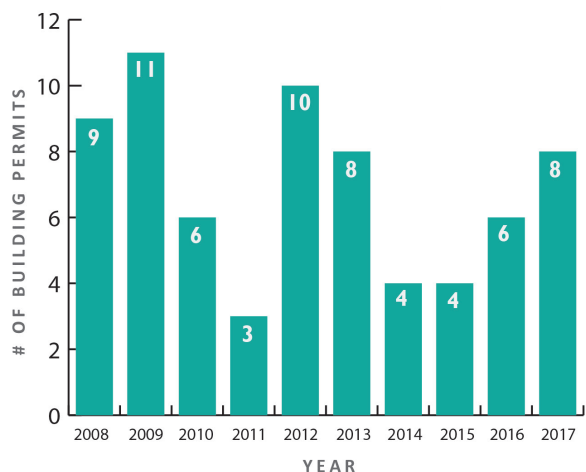


Figure 2.6: Building Permit History
Source: Town of Littleton

Housing Costs

According to the 2017 ACS, ***the median value of owner-occupied housing units in Littleton was \$160,900***, a \$65,800 increase from the median value recorded in the 2000 census. The median value of owner-occupied housing units in Grafton County is \$215,600 while New Hampshire's is \$244,900. On average, Littleton is still more affordable than the county or state.

The median household income for homeowners in Littleton is \$59,408, while the median household income for renters is \$32,151. For homeowners, this number increased from \$47,500 in 2000 and for renters increased from \$17,480. The median gross monthly rent in Littleton is \$645 as of the 2017 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 \$904 and in New Hampshire \$1,052.

ASSESSED VALUES OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS

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

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.

OF SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS

Year	Total Households	Single-Person Households
2011	2,547	~743 households
2012	2,609	~757 households
2013	2,608	~886 households
2014	2,613	~862 households
2015	2,584	~930 households
2016	2,593	~959 households
2017	2,661	~1050 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.