

New Fairfield

Draft March 2022

Annex to the 2022 Western Connecticut Regional Affordable Housing Plan

Town History Relating to Affordable Housing

At present, New Fairfield exempts affordable housing developments from open space subdivision standards. Our current Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is from 2014 and is about to undergo the required ten-year revision. We will use that opportunity to more definitively address how to increase affordable housing. The following provisions are in the 2014 POCD:

1. GOAL: Assess the impacts of changing household composition and diversification.
 - With changing household composition (fewer families with children and more single-person households) comes an increasing demand for different housing types, including smaller units. The Town should reexamine its zoning regulations to find ways to encourage the development of starter homes, attached units and other housing types to meeting the diverse housing needs of the population.
 - The Town Center and the Candlewood Corners should be studied as the potential locations for more diverse housing types as part of mixed-use development. The primary objective for these areas should remain as tax base growth and economic development, however.

STATUS: New Fairfield zoning regulations are out of date. We have recently accumulated the funding to begin the process of updating them next Fiscal Year, including provisions related affordable housing. It should be noted that there is not much undeveloped property in the Center of Town or Candlewood Corners for dedicated affordable housing.

2. GOAL: Ensure that a variety of housing types be available to reflect the needs and desires of all residents.
 - The Town should ensure that both “affordable” and moderate-priced market rate housing are part of its multi-pronged approach to enhancing housing affordability.
 - The Town should investigate developing a payment in lieu of affordable housing program, with collected funds being used to help finance and support affordable housing activities
 - The Town should pursue a variety of funding sources at both the state and federal levels to develop affordable housing or to leverage additional public, non-profit and private sector funds to complete the financing for affordable housing developments.
 - The Town should explore the potential of developing a limited equity housing program in conjunction with a local non-profit organization.
 - The Town should inform property owners of the option to deed-restrict their accessory apartments as affordable housing units so that they are counted in the State’s affordable housing list.

STATUS: We have not made significant progress on these goals, largely because of lack of staffing to focus on them. We understand some of the above are no longer applicable.

We are focused on addressing the affordable housing issue and making up for lost time. The Board of Selectmen recently established the Housing Opportunities Committee reflecting the diversity of interests of New Fairfield residents and named seven community leaders to the Committee. The mandate for the Committee includes the following:

- Review the health of the current housing stock in New Fairfield in relation to the needs of New Fairfield residents and draft a plan that explores how to create housing stock that reflects affordability and other needs of its residents.
- Initiate and execute a process to engage the community to be proactive on housing opportunities, including, but not limited to:
 - Holding public forums concerning housing in New Fairfield to communicate and solicit information and suggestions on affordable housing opportunities,
 - Making available information on the need for such housing and possible approaches.
- Produce an annual report, starting one year from establishment of the Committee, addressed to the Planning Commission, the Zoning Commission, and the Board of Selectmen. The report will provide recommendations for concrete steps the Town can take to encourage the development of a broader range of housing opportunities that fit the needs of residents. The Committee may also make interim recommendations as required. The recommendations shall address recommended changes to town ordinances and steps that can be taken working with faith organizations, housing trusts, local developers, lending institutions, and others to increase the availability of affordable housing.

Community Values Statement

The Town of New Fairfield has a beautiful exurban environment with predominantly single-family housing on larger lots and relatively little commercial activity. New Fairfield has a strong commitment to the excellence of its schools and a strong sense of community. New Fairfield's location on Candlewood Lake and Ball Pond combined with other open spaces are one of its greatest assets. These resources provide recreational opportunities and serve conservation purposes.

While New Fairfield will remain a community of predominantly single-family homes on large lots, the Town recognizes the need to provide more variation in its housing stock. Diversifying New Fairfield's housing stock can potentially allow young people to live in the community where they grew up, allow seniors to downsize within their community, and provide housing opportunities for firemen, teachers, and others who serve or work in New Fairfield.

The Town envisions a vibrant center of town, allowing residents to meet more of their needs locally, while enhancing opportunities for community interaction. The public realm is intended to include well-designed parks and green spaces, a connected sidewalk network with links to the proposed multi-use trail alongside Margerie Reservoir. Future development will complement historic development patterns and structures, creating an attractive and cohesive environment that fosters inclusion and diversity.

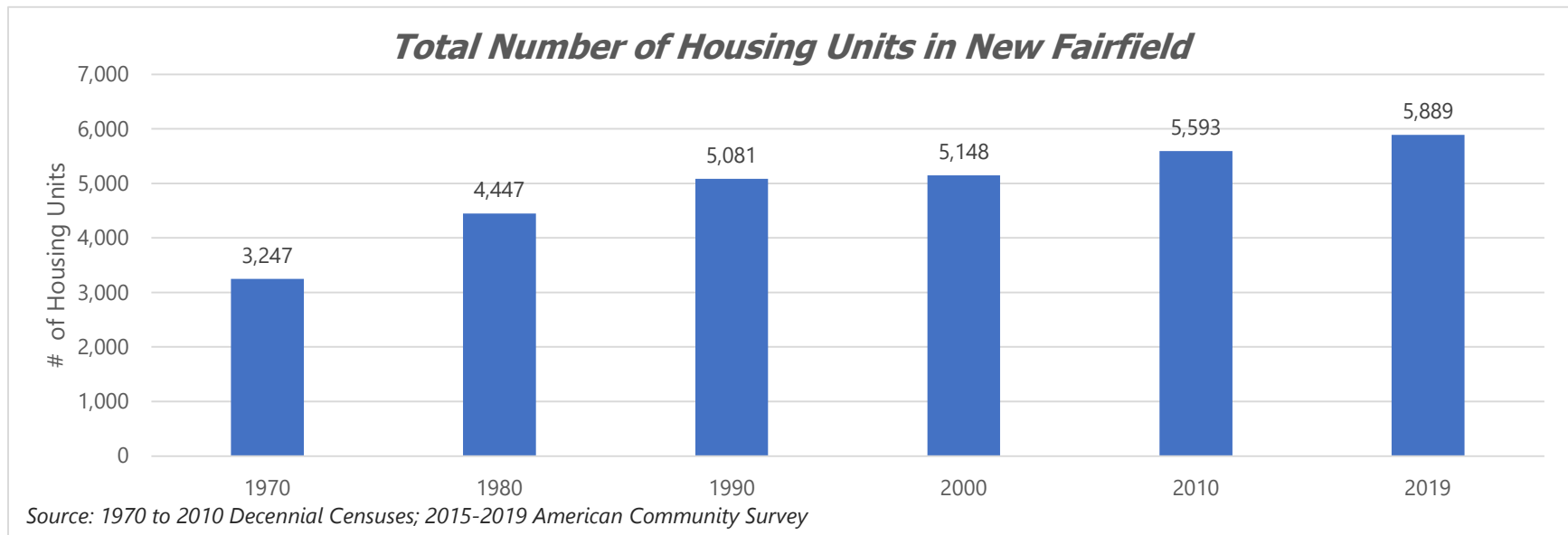
Housing Market Trends

Progress Towards 10% Affordable Housing (C.G.S. 8-30g):

There are 85 affordable housing units in New Fairfield as of 2020, with the vast majority qualifying for affordable housing using federal and state low-interest mortgage programs.

YEAR	GOVERNMENTALLY ASSISTED UNITS	TENANT RENTAL ASSISTANCE	CHFA/USDA MORTGAGES	DEED RESTRICTED	TOTAL ASSISTED	CENSUS HOUSING UNITS	PERCENT AFFORDABLE
2002	3	-	73	4	80	5,148	1.55%
2005	0	-	20	4	24	5,148	0.47%
2010	0	-	23	13	36	5,148	0.70%
2015	0	1	38	13	52	5,593	0.93%
2020	0	1	67	17	85	5,593	1.52%

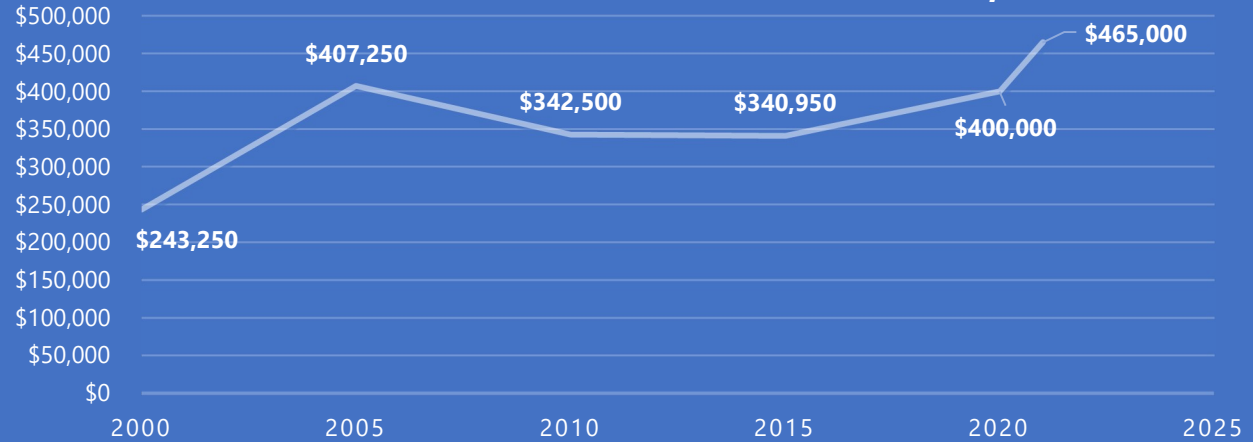
CT DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING, AFFORDABLE HOUSING APPEALS LISTS



The overall number of housing units sharply increased in the late 1970s and 1980s, equating to 56 percent growth in the housing stock over the twenty-year period. Since the 1990s, housing construction slowed in New Fairfield, with only 808 units built in the last 30 years.

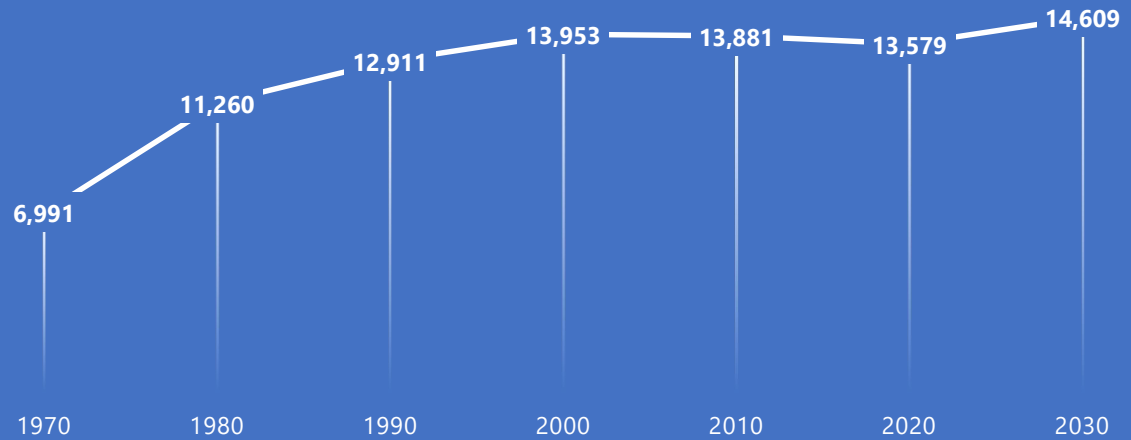
The median single family housing prices before the 2008 Great Recession were at a high of \$407,250. Afterwards, prices fell to \$342,500 and remained relatively constant until the 2020 COVID pandemic caused housing prices to surge to just beyond pre-recession process to \$465,000.

MEDIAN SINGLE FAMILY HOUSING PRICES IN NEW FAIRFIELD FROM 2000 TO JULY 31, 2021



Source: Warren Group, 2021.

NEW FAIRFIELD POPULATION WITH 2030 PROJECTION



Source: 1970 to 2020 Decennial Censuses, NYMTC, WestCOG analysis

Housing Needs

There are 1,347 or 27.1% cost burdened households in New Fairfield (shown in red below), according to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey. 55.5% of renters are cost burdened, while only 25.1% of owners are cost burdened.

MONTHLY HOUSING COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	Occupied housing units	%	Owner-occupied housing units	%	Renter-occupied housing units	%
Less than \$20,000	161	3.2%	111	2.4%	50	15.2%
Less than 20 percent	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
20 to 29 percent	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
30 percent or more	161	3.2%	111	2.4%	50	15.2%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	358	7.2%	326	7.0%	32	9.7%
Less than 20 percent	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
20 to 29 percent	99	2.0%	99	2.1%	0	0.0%
30 percent or more	259	5.2%	227	4.9%	32	9.7%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	241	4.8%	217	4.7%	24	7.3%
Less than 20 percent	41	0.8%	41	0.9%	0	0.0%
20 to 29 percent	43	0.9%	34	0.7%	9	2.7%
30 percent or more	157	3.2%	142	3.1%	15	4.5%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	735	14.8%	638	13.7%	97	29.4%
Less than 20 percent	170	3.4%	170	3.7%	0	0.0%
20 to 29 percent	178	3.6%	132	2.8%	46	13.9%
30 percent or more	387	7.8%	336	7.2%	51	15.5%
\$75,000 or more	3,435	69.1%	3,330	71.8%	105	31.8%
Less than 20 percent	1,789	36.0%	1,755	37.8%	34	10.3%
20 to 29 percent	1,263	25.4%	1,227	26.4%	36	10.9%
30 percent or more	383	7.7%	348	7.5%	35	10.6%
Zero or negative income	19	0.4%	19	0.4%	0	0.0%
No cash rent	22	0.4%	(X)	(X)	22	6.7%

There are various thresholds a household or individual needs to meet to qualify for affordable housing, depending on the program. For example, C.G.S. 8-30G (set-aside development program) is one of the least restrictive programs and requires prospective tenants to be low-income (i.e., make 80 percent or less of the state median income) and be cost-burdened. There were 964 households as of 2019 in New Fairfield that meet these criteria – accounting for 17 percent of households in need of affordable housing. This indicates that the need for affordable housing exceeds the statutory requirements of 559 units.

Discussion

The New Fairfield Housing Trust was established in the mid-teens with the goal of providing affordable housing in New Fairfield. A project the Trust proposed on town-owned land did not come to fruition because of neighborhood opposition and questions about the environmental viability of the location. New Fairfield does not presently have a sewage system and relies entirely on septic systems. This limits options for location of housing developments of any size. Additionally, property in the center of town, where our POCD says affordable housing should be located, is in limited supply and privately owned.

Strategies

The Board of Selectmen recognizes the need to take action now to remedy the unmet need for affordable housing. Because of our small size, we do not have a professional planner on town staff to help guide us on this need and are therefore picking up this effort later than desirable. And, we have a history of opposition to affordable housing that we will have to contend with.

Accordingly, we have recently established a Housing Opportunities Committee of seven members representing a cross-section of community interests (including the New Fairfield Housing Trust) and political affiliations to address the affordable housing issue. The Committee will make recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commissions and the Board of Selectmen on steps to take to encourage the development of affordable housing. One possible approach is to start with small developments, including expanding the use of accessory apartments. We will also explore USDA and CHFA mortgage programs for single family homes that may be a good fit for New Fairfield.

Additionally, the Committee will also make recommendations concerning additional town funding needed to improve our understanding of what is possible and where, given the lack of sewers and available land in the center of town.

Town government will work cooperatively with developers who may express an interest in building affordable housing to determine the best location and design. The upcoming redraft of the Plan of Conservation and Development and the review and update of our zoning regulations will provide us with opportunities to encourage the development of affordable housing. We recognize the need and are putting in place the mechanisms that will allow us to take concrete action.