

Executive Summary

Barriers to Housing – Survey Report

Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
July 2019

Purpose

To engage stakeholders in the [Zoning for Great Neighborhoods](#) project and identify top housing barriers to address when developing the guidance on incremental updates to municipal regulations.

Method

WHEN: Survey issued between June 26 - July 9.

WHO: Targeted at people with a stake in how housing development works in Vermont.

HOW: Survey link emailed through professional email networks of planners, developers, realtors, and non-profit housing organizations. Requested forwarding.

WHAT: Informal survey to hear from people with a knowledge of Vermont's housing and development issues.

Results

Who were the Respondents?

- 212 people completed the survey
- 87 people responded with optional written comments indicating a high degree of interest in the subject.
- Responses were well distributed between people representing public and private interests.
- About 1/4 of respondents work for organizations representing all of Vermont, and 1/2 represent the Northwest and Central Vermont (great Burlington-Montpelier area) suggesting interest in responding was highest in the areas with most housing needs.
- Half of respondents work in municipalities with populations above 5,000 and 25% work statewide, with fewer numbers representing small town views.

What were their Responses?

- Using their own words to describe the housing types most needed in Vermont, respondents indicated that a wider range of diverse housing options are needed in walkable places, especially smaller, efficient units, both for rental and purchase.
- The high costs of construction and land availability were identified as the primary factors preventing those housing needs from being met.
- Municipal land use regulations were ranked the fourth factor preventing housing needs from being met, below people resisting change in their neighborhoods.
- Developers ranked municipal land use regulations as the second primary factor preventing housing needs from being met, while municipal officials and planners ranked it below several other factors.
- Planners ranked the complexity of regulations significantly lower than respondents as a whole.
- Optional comments from respondents included concerns about state and local permitting processes, suggestions for better approaches to permitting, other types of housing options, need for public infrastructure investments to support housing, concerns about neighborhood stability, and reminders about the housing concerns in rural Vermont being different from those in economically vital areas.

See [supporting charts and graphs](#) and [comments provided by responders](#).

Conclusions

The need to build or upgrade more housing units to meet the demand for a wide variety of homes in walkable places is widely acknowledged. All sectors agree that the high cost of labor, construction materials and land, as well as the availability of land, are the primary factors preventing Vermont's housing market from meeting the demand.

Municipal regulations, especially requirements restricting densities and the costs and the delays from permit appeals are considered significant barriers by developers. Planners and municipal officials consider local regulations less of a factor in addressing housing needs, but they generally agree with developers about the aspects of municipal regulation that create barriers.

DHCD will apply these conclusions in the following ways as a part of the Zoning for Great Neighborhoods project:

- In communicating the need for updates to zoning regulations, refer to other factors that affect housing supply, such as high construction costs, to create context.
- Local land use regulations can be a factor in decreasing the availability and efficient use of land in walkable places and is one of the few factors that citizens have the power to change. DHCD will encourage municipalities to further update regulations, making more housing options possible.
- The guidance DHCD produces will encourage municipalities to address the following barriers identified in the survey (as well as others):
 - Redefine density limits to create more opportunities for homes in walkable places
 - Clarify expectations about development to reduce appeals
 - Reduce the complexity of permitting systems
 - Reduce requirements for on-site parking
 - Allow a wider range of dwelling types/uses
- DHCD will develop a package of related policy recommendations to support training, education, and implementation of the guidance.

Please use these informal survey results to spark discussion about housing needs in communities and the local solutions that are possible.

DHCD welcomes your suggestions on ways to help more communities become housing-ready.

Please feel free to contact [Faith Ingulsrud](#) with your suggestions, questions about the survey or the [Zoning for Great Neighborhoods](#) project.