

# Housing

## Population and Housing

### Demographic Profile

7,800 Residents

3,365 Households

Average household size 2.29

25% Families with children

23% Over age 65

29% Living alone

19% Minority

11% Have disability

### Housing Profile

64% owner-occupied

55% multifamily or attached

89,500 median value

8.4% Subsidized Housing

### Housing Needs:

- Approximately 148 affordable units by 2020
- Units affordable to incomes below 50% of the median
- Rehabilitation/ Redevelopment of older housing structures
- Modest market-rate housing for seniors, individuals, and families

## Introduction

Ayer values its unique combination of diversity, historic character, and quality of life. However, these assets may be impacted by changes that are coming on the horizon. Situated on the edge of the metropolitan economic region, Ayer's housing market presents challenges in terms of supporting continued diversity in its housing supply that accommodates various types of households. In addition, Ayer housing is increasingly becoming unaffordable. At the same time, much of Ayer's less expensive housing stock is aged and in varied states of disrepair. Preserving housing and socioeconomic diversity in Ayer through new development and the improvement of existing neighborhoods is consistent with protecting the town's distinctive character and values.

Although settled earlier, much of Ayer was originally built around the railroad in the 1840s and Ayer's industrial base attracted new residents who worked in the railroad switching yards, foundries, and tanneries. The establishment of Fort Devens in 1917 brought a wave of housing development to serve military personnel and their families. These operations served to introduce a mobile and relatively diverse population to Ayer. As a result, the town offers a wide range of homes, especially around the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

Today, Ayer is in the midst of another transformation. The westward push of people from Metro-Boston seeking reasonably priced housing and a small-town quality of life is stimulating a new surge of housing development and a shift in population characteristics. Ayer's access to the MBTA commuter rail and proximity to Routes 2, I-495 and I-290 make Ayer desirable for workers commuting to employment anywhere throughout Central and Eastern Massachusetts. More recent housing development in Ayer has primarily been focused in outlying areas outside of downtown, typically producing single-family homes on larger lots. However, as developable land becomes increasingly more scarce; modest single-family housing that supports aging in place and townhouse development is becoming more favored by local developers.

## Housing Goals:

1. Continue developing local capacity to plan, develop and manage housing units that meet local needs.
2. Increase variety of housing opportunities for Ayer residents.
3. Encourage housing development that is sustainable, affordable, and serves all members of the population.
4. Work to preserve the affordability and diversity of Ayer's existing housing stock.



## Demographic Profile

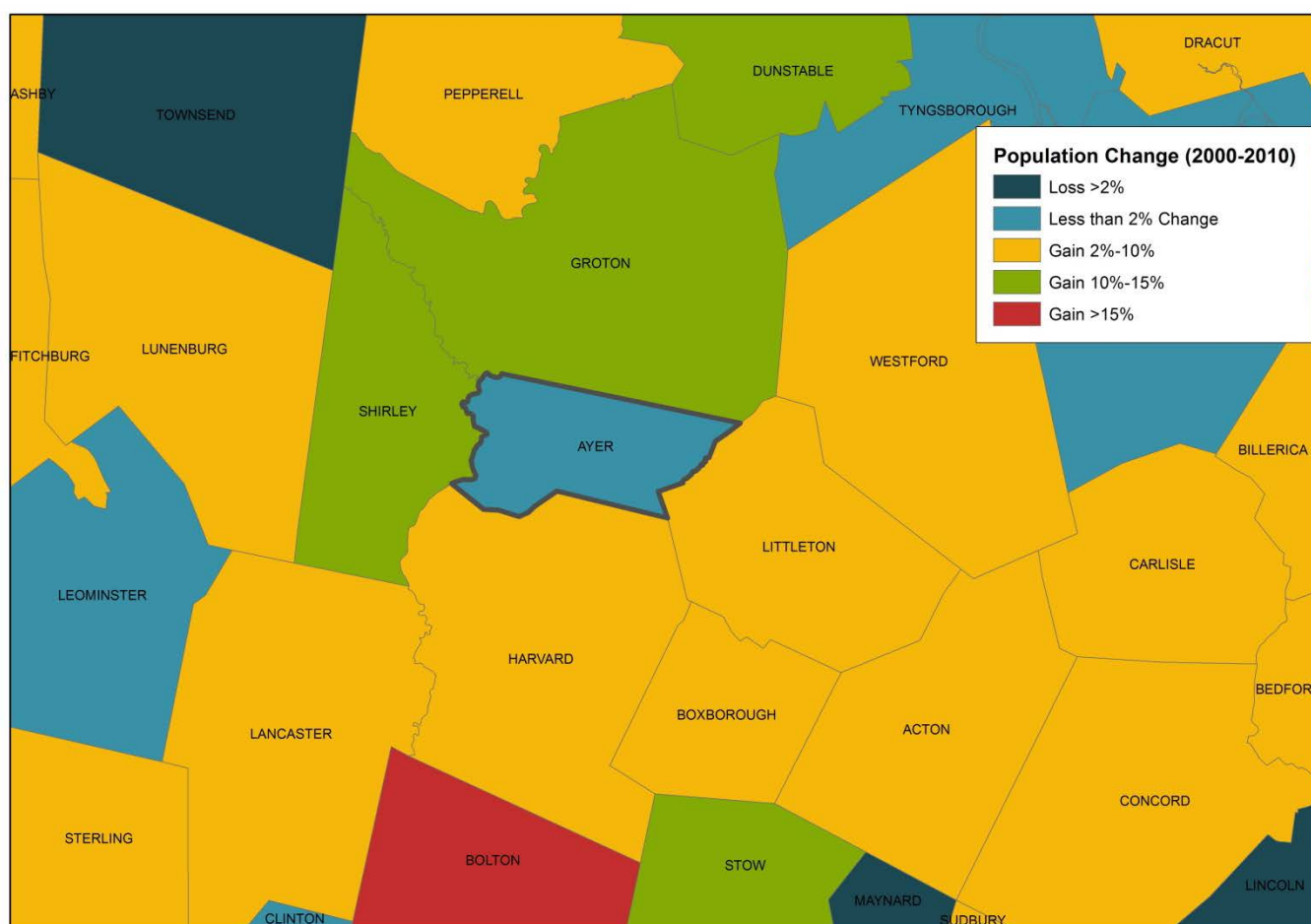
Ayer experienced slow population growth over recent decades, following the 1996 closure of Fort Devens, but growth has accelerated in the past five years due to new development and increased housing demand. Ayer has a population of approximately 7,800 residents.<sup>1</sup> Ayer is comparable in population size to neighboring communities of Harvard, Littleton, and Shirley.

**Table H-1: Regional Growth Comparison**

	1990	2000	2010	2015*	Act. Change 2000-2010	Est. Change 2010-2015
<b>Ayer</b>	<b>6,871</b>	<b>7,287</b>	<b>7,427</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Groton	7,511	9,547	10,646	11,120	12%	4%
Littleton	7,051	8,184	8,924	9,359	9%	5%
Harvard	12,329	5,981	6,520	6,567	9%	1%
Shirley	6,118	6,373	7,211	7,436	13%	3%
Clinton	13,222	13,435	13,606	13,727	1%	1%
Hudson	17,233	18,113	19,063	19,602	5%	3%
Maynard	10,325	10,433	10,106	10,459	-3%	3%
Pepperell	10,098	11,142	11,497	11,953	3%	4%

Source: US Census 1990-2010, \*ACS Estimates 2011-2015

**Map H-1 – Actual Population Change in North Central Massachusetts Region (2000-2010)**



Data Source: MassGIS, US Census 2000, 2010

Map Source: Community Opportunities Group, Inc. 2017

<sup>1</sup> ACS DP03 (2011-2015)

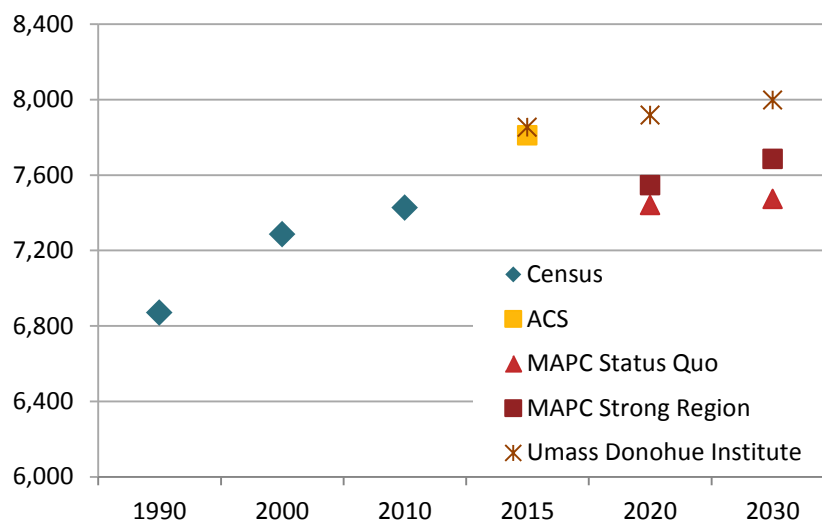


## Population Projections

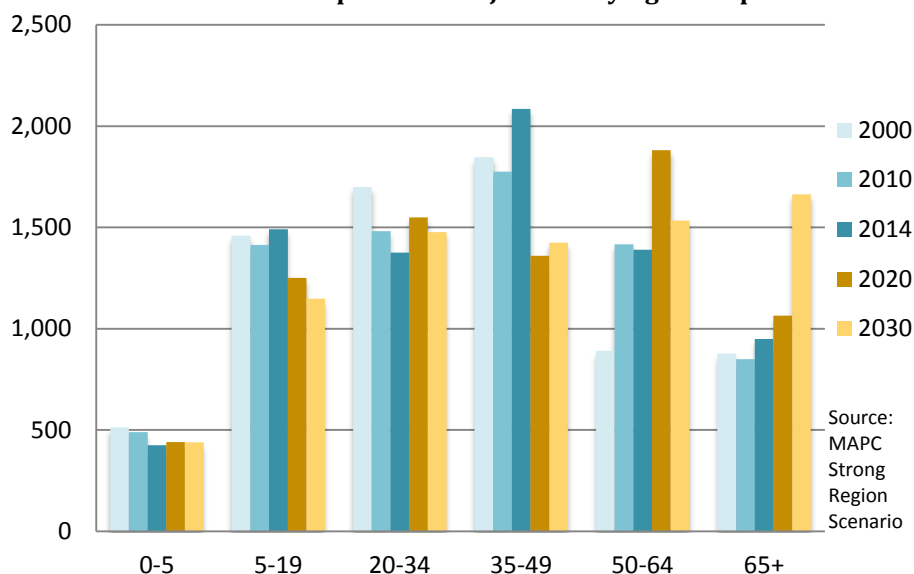
Population projections for the region have been developed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and UMass/ Donohue Institute. MAPC population forecasts include two scenarios. The “Status Quo” scenario projects that recent development trends will continue into the future, while the “Strong Region” scenario anticipates that local, regional, and state-wide policy changes and investments will result in a higher level of growth. MAPC projections show level population or continued slow growth over the coming decades. The Donohue

Institute by contrast projected acceleration in population growth between 2010 and 2015, which more closely reflects what has occurred over this period, with a more moderate rate of growth over the coming decades. While total population growth is expected to increase slowly, it will not increase uniformly across all age groups.

**Chart H-1: Population Projections**



**Chart H-2: Population Projections by Age Group**



Between 2000 and 2015, most growth in Ayer has occurred among adults ages 35-49, while the number of young adults (ages 20-34) has declined. The proportion of children and seniors has been relatively stable. MAPC projects that the highest rates of growth over the coming decades will be among older adults and seniors, however recent trends suggest that the town is attracting more families and working age residents; opposite the trend for much of the region.

Moving forward, it will be critical for the town to monitor demographic shifts to ensure that new housing development supports the needs of its residents. Housing that is suitable both for aging residents as well as younger residents seeking starter and transition homes, and housing options that are affordable for Ayer’s workforce and low and moderate-income households will be necessary for maintaining Ayer’s diversity and character.



## Social Characteristics

ACS estimates that 660 households in Ayer include people with disabilities, who comprise 11 percent of the town's population. Disabilities include hearing or vision impairment, cognitive or ambulatory difficulty, and difficulty with self-care or independent living. Thirty-three percent (33%) of individuals over the age of 65 have one or more disabilities, compared with 8 percent (8%) of younger residents.

Half of Ayer residents age 25 and over have graduated high school and/or have some college education but have not earned a degree. Forty-four percent (44%) have received an associate's degree or higher level of education. Completion of bachelor's and graduate degrees is slightly lower in Ayer than the state overall.

Ayer prides itself on the racial and ethnic diversity of its residents. Ayer's minority population constitutes almost one-fifth of its total population, an increase since the Census in 2000. The largest minority groups include African-Americans and people with Hispanic ethnicity, each comprising 6 percent (6%) of Ayer's population. About one in ten Ayer residents were born outside of the United States, and 13 percent (13%) of residents speak a language other than English at home.

Ayer's population is relatively diverse compared with neighboring communities of Groton, Littleton, and Harvard. Ayer's social characteristics are similar to Shirley. Groton, Littleton and Harvard have a higher proportion of college graduates than Ayer, while Shirley's is lower. The age profile of Ayer residents is also comparable to neighboring communities, although the median age is slightly lower.

**Table H-2: Social Characteristics**

Disability Status				
	Total Population	With a Disability	% w/ Disability	MA % w/ Disability
Population	7,797	859	11%	12%
Under 18 years	1,574	130	8%	-
18 to 64 years	5296	424	8%	-
65 years & over	927	305	33%	14%
Educational Attainment, Population Age 25 and Over				
			Ayer	MA
Less than high school graduate			5%	10%
High school graduate or equivalent			30%	25%
Some college, no degree			20%	16%
Associate's degree			8%	8%
Bachelor's degree			21%	23%
Graduate or professional degree			15%	18%
Race, Ethnicity and National Origin				
			2000	2010
White alone, not Hispanic			84%	81%
Black or African American			6%	6%
Asian			3%	4%
Other race			3%	4%
Hispanic, any race			5%	6%
			2000	2015
Born in MA			65%	66%
Born in elsewhere in US			23%	24%
Foreign Born			10%	10%
Foreign Language Spoken at Home			13%	13%

Source: Census 2000, 2010, ACS 2011-2015

**Table H-3: Social Characteristics Regional Comparison**

	Ayer	Groton	Littleton	Harvard	Shirley	Hudson	Maynard	Pepperell
2015 Population	<b>7,810</b>	11,120	9,359	6,567	7,435	19,602	10,459	11,953
Racial or ethnic minority	<b>19%</b>	6%	8%	13%	20%	11%	10%	5%
Born outside of US	<b>10%</b>	8%	9%	10%	10%	16%	12%	4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	<b>36%</b>	67%	56%	63%	24%	37%	50%	37%
Median age	<b>40.0</b>	44.4	44.5	45.5	43.1	43.3	42.2	42.8
Under age 20	<b>26%</b>	31%	28%	25%	20%	25%	24%	28%
Over age 65	<b>11%</b>	10%	14%	10%	9%	14%	13%	10%

Source: US Census 2000, ACS 2011-2015



## Household Characteristics

Households in Ayer are slightly smaller than those in neighboring community, in large part because Ayer has fewer families with children that are under 18 years of age. About 43 percent (43%) of individuals living alone in Ayer are age 65 and over. The proportion of households with children decreased from 32 percent (32%) in 2000 to an estimated 25 percent (25%) in 2015, while the proportion of households with seniors over the age of 65 increased from 19 percent (19%) in 2000 to 23 percent (23%) in 2015.

**Table H-4: Household Composition in Ayer and the Region**

	Households	Average Household Size	Families	Nonfamily Households	Individuals Living Alone	With Children under 18	With Seniors over 65
<b>Ayer</b>	<b>3,365</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Groton	3,992	2.76	81%	19%	15%	40%	26%
Littleton	3,446	2.67	73%	27%	23%	34%	26%
Harvard	1,868	2.91	82%	18%	11%	44%	29%
Shirley	2,331	2.41	66%	34%	27%	35%	27%
Clinton	5,644	2.43	59%	41%	34%	27%	24%
Hudson	7,638	2.56	69%	31%	25%	30%	32%
Maynard	4,284	2.44	60%	40%	33%	28%	27%
Pepperell	4,247	2.81	74%	26%	20%	39%	25%

Source: ACS 2011-2015

The 2010 Census counted 259 Ayer residents living in group quarters, all of whom were described as living in “non-institutional facilities.” Of those residing in group quarters, 44 were children under the age of 18, 212 were between the ages of 18 and 65, and 3 were over the age of 65.

There is substantial income disparity within Ayer and among towns in the surrounding region. **The median income for senior households is less than half the median for all households, while families have considerably higher incomes than nonfamilies** (many of whom are young adults or individuals living alone rather than two-income earning households). Ayer’s median income climbed by more than 30 percent between 2009 and 2015, outpacing all neighboring communities in the region. To some extent, this shift in demographics is likely related to new housing constructed in Ayer during this time period attracting more affluent households; consequently, maintaining housing diversity will be essential to maintaining social and economic diversity in Ayer.

**Table H-5: Median Household Incomes**

	Median Household Income	Median Family Income	Median Nonfamily Income	Income Senior Households	Change in Household Income since 2009
<b>Ayer</b>	<b>74,659</b>	<b>92,399</b>	<b>52,018</b>	<b>36,768</b>	<b>34%</b>
Groton	116,642	135,444	43,173	39,375	-1%
Littleton	111,680	130,450	55,875	44,141	13%
Harvard	126,061	140,365	67,014	91,250	-9%
Shirley	67,896	79,708	32,134	44,453	-6%
Clinton	62,805	76,189	39,713	31,156	7%
Hudson	75,985	96,213	39,799	43,156	3%
Maynard	88,333	114,350	40,158	41,745	14%
Pepperell	80,524	91,305	41,117	33,281	-9%

Source: ACS 2011-2015, ACS 2005-2009

\*ACS data is missing for several towns for 2011-2015. Median income for seniors is reported for 2010-2014.



Household income generally increases with the age of householders, peaking between ages 45-64 years. While working-age households in Ayer tend to have higher incomes than the state overall, Ayer has a higher proportion of households headed by younger middle-aged adults who are earlier in their careers and have generally not yet

reached their peak income earning potential. Senior households, which represent one in five Ayer households, have median household incomes that are less than half that of working age adults. This is not an unusual situation as senior households are more likely to be comprised of retired and fixed-income individuals. This may however, decrease the ability of seniors to afford and maintain their housing; particularly if significant repairs or maintenance is needed.

**Table H-6: Household Income by Age of Householder**

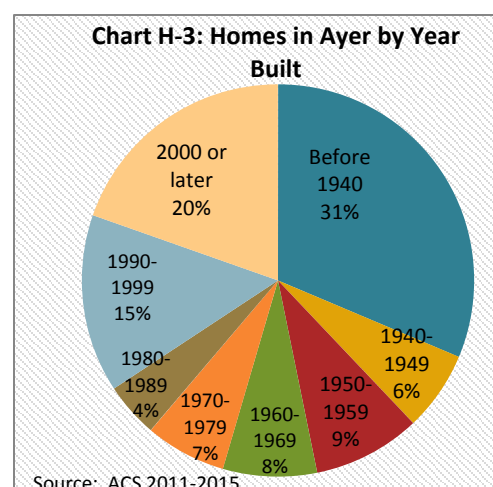
	Ayer		Massachusetts	
	Households	Median Income	Households	Median Income
15 to 24 years	2.0%	\$44,792	2.9%	\$30,397
25 to 44 years	41.4%	\$78,314	32.4%	\$76,699
45 to 64 years	34.7%	\$87,788	41.4%	\$84,099
65 years and over	21.8%	\$36,768	23.4%	\$39,550

Source: ACS S1903 (2011-2015)

## Housing

### Housing Stock

By most recent estimates there are approximately 3,600 dwelling units in Ayer.<sup>2</sup> The Decennial Census in 2010 counted 3,440 year round housing units, reflecting an estimated increase of approximately 160 units. About half of Ayer's housing stock dates from the mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, while 30 percent was built earlier than 1940, and 20 percent built after 2000. The decade of construction, particularly for houses built in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century or later, provides an indication of the condition of the structures and the quality of materials that may have been used in construction. For example, lead paint which was banned for residential use in 1978, is not a concern for houses constructed after 1980, but may be present in structures built prior to this time. About 60 percent of Ayer's housing was built prior to 1980 and may contain lead paint and be unsafe for households with small children to inhabit. The decades in which the greatest amount of housing construction occurred were the 1990s and early 2000s, following the end of the sewer moratorium in 2003. Between 2000 and 2007, the town permitted the construction of 434 single-family homes and 591 multifamily units. After 2007, the rate of construction slowed considerably during the recession with an average of 16 single-family units per year and just a few small-scale multifamily developments having been constructed since 2008.<sup>3</sup> **It is anticipated modest attached and detached single-family development and small scale multi-family infill development will continue to increase in upcoming years as efficient land use patterns, municipal fiscal sustainability, and controlling housing costs will be paramount concerns in housing development.**

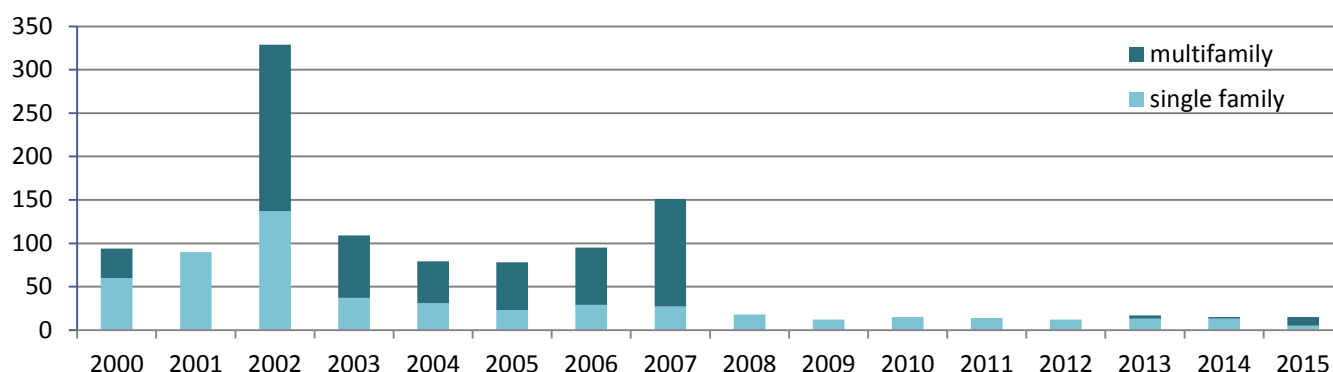


<sup>2</sup> ACS DP04 (2011-2015)

<sup>3</sup> US Census Building Permit Data

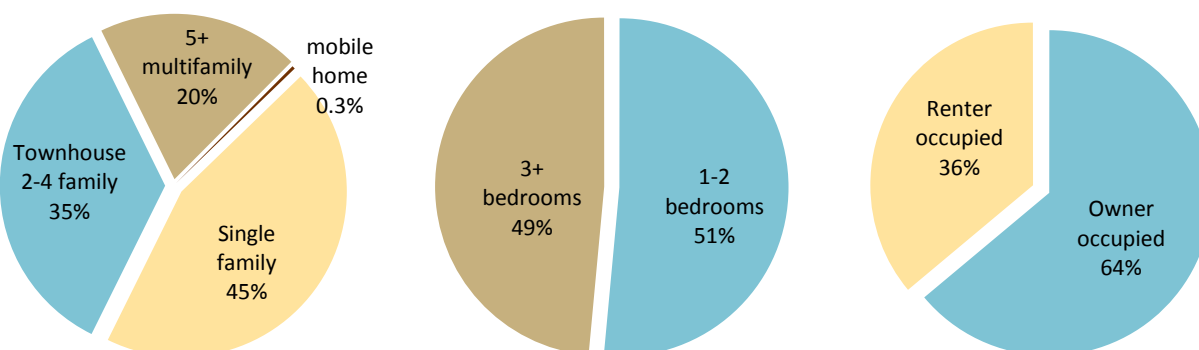




**Chart H-4: Building Permits Issued for Residential Construction, 2000-2011**

Source: US Census, Building Permit Data (2000-2015)

Ayer offers fairly diverse housing options. Single-family homes, while dominant in many communities, comprise less than half of the town's housing stock. About 35 percent (35%) of Ayer's housing units are in attached townhouse and small-scale multifamily structures, while 20 percent (20%) are in multifamily structures with 5 or more units. Nearly two-thirds of the housing is owner-occupied. Roughly half of Ayer's housing inventory includes units with 3 or more bedrooms (37 percent are 3-bedroom, 12 percent have 4+ bedrooms), while the other half are studio, one and two-bedroom units (16 percent and 35 percent respectively).<sup>4</sup>

**Chart H-5: Characteristics of Ayer Housing Inventory**

Source: ACS 2011-2015

According to the Town's Assessor, there are 2,524 residential lots in Ayer. About 63 percent (63%) of residential lots are single-family parcels, although only 45% of actual housing units are single-family houses. An additional 22 percent of lots are condominiums, and 16 percent are 2-3 family, multifamily, or other housing types containing more than one housing unit on a single lot. A variety of housing types were built prior to 1920, including 2-3 family, small-scale multi-family, and mixed use housing. However, following the completion of Devenscrest in the 1930s, the preferred type of housing development throughout the Post-War period shifted to single-family housing, which tends to consume more land while providing fewer housing units. Most of the town's condominium and large-scale housing development has been constructed within the past four decades and includes newer developments such as Pingry Hill, the Willows, and Olde Towne Village, as well as older developments such as Zodiac Village, constructed in 1970.

<sup>4</sup> ACS DP04 (2011-2015)

**Table H-7: Residential Properties**

Use/Year Built	Parcels	Average Lot Acres	Average Value	Average Living Area (s.f.)	Value per S.F.
<b>Single-family</b>	<b>1,586</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>\$297,646</b>	<b>1,679</b>	<b>184</b>
before 1900	129	0.36	\$222,344	1,605	142
1900-1919	121	0.34	\$247,302	1,762	149
1920-1939	81	0.41	\$262,094	1,734	161
1940-1949	280	0.43	\$224,558	1,362	175
1950-1959	182	0.66	\$242,116	1,347	189
1960-1979	81	0.60	\$259,812	1,391	194
1980-1999	410	0.77	\$340,297	1,792	198
after 2000	302	0.86	\$412,991	2,081	203
<b>Condominiums</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>\$198,380</b>	<b>1,268</b>	<b>152</b>
before 1960	24		\$125,900	1,129	112
1960-1979	152		\$121,029	971	124
1980-1999	139		\$172,468	1,100	157
after 2000	229		\$273,047	1,582	172
Other Residential	Parcels	Median Year Built	Average Value	Value per Square Foot	
Two Family	211	1911	\$213,809		106
Three Family	49	1901	\$234,355		91
Multi-family Apartments (4-8 Units)	62	1906	\$320,098		89
Multifamily Apartments (8+Units)	9	N/A	\$2,848,633		91
Multiple Houses on Single Lot	27	1911	\$405,048		106
Mobile Home	8	1976	\$273,200		158
Mixed-Use (Residential/Commercial)	23	1924	\$332,261		129
Specialized/Subsidized Housing <sup>5</sup>	5	1989	\$3,102,760		101

Source: Vision Governmental Solutions, Town of Ayer Assessor's Database, FY2017

As indicated by property value and unit size, the quality of housing in Ayer is related to its age. The average value of newer property is significantly higher than older properties of all housing types. For single-family homes, the average value per square foot directly correlates with the age of the property. Small-scale multifamily and mixed use properties, which are primarily in older structures, are generally low in value, averaging less than \$100,000 per unit.

Rehabilitation of older multifamily structures would help to meet housing needs, encourage reinvestment, and preserve historic character.

The average size living space for single-family homes built prior to 1939 was about 1,700 square feet. During the Post-War period and through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, new houses were smaller, with average sizes around 1,400 square feet. Sizes have increased substantially in recent decades, with an average of 2,000 square feet for houses built after 2000. Yard size has also increased; houses built prior to 1950 typically had lot sizes of less than 0.50 acres, while those built since 1980 average more than 0.8 acres.

Condominiums are also increasing in size. While units in structures built in the 1960s and 70s averaged in size well below 1,000 square feet, more recently constructed condos average around 1,500 square feet. Over 85 percent of condominium units have two bedrooms, while 14 percent have 3 or more bedrooms.

<sup>5</sup> Includes public housing, nursing homes, assisted living, mobile homes, and nonprofit-owned housing





Over the past 15 years, home-ownership rates have increased in Ayer by 8 percent and the number of housing units occupied by homeowners has increased by nearly 500 units. During the same period of time, the number of rental units decreased. The loss of rental units generally occurs when buildings are converted to condominiums, properties are redeveloped, or rental housing is demolished. The loss of rental housing in

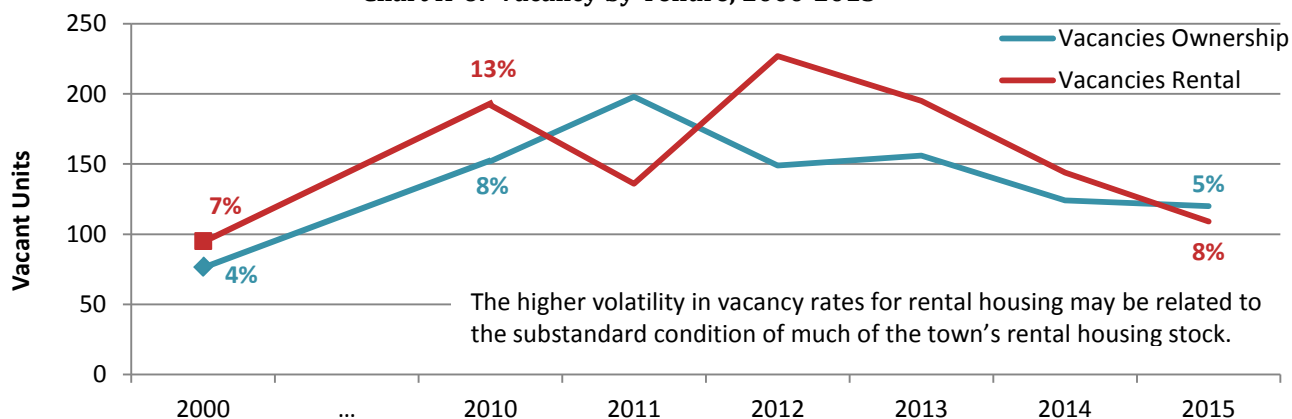
Ayer is concerning because it means that the housing stock is becoming less diverse. Rental homes fulfill the needs of many families. For some, especially low- and moderate- income households in high- cost markets or those who have recently lost a home to foreclosure, rental homes are the most financially realistic option. Other people rent to reduce maintenance costs and responsibilities or because they expect to move frequently. For others, affordable rental housing is an important stepping stone that allows them to accumulate savings and prepare for homeownership. A mix of rental and ownership housing is critical to meeting the needs of a variety of households.

**Table H-8: Housing Tenure, 2000 and 2010**

	2000	2000 %	2010	2010 %	2015	2015 %
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	<b>3,154</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,462</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,594</b>	<b>-</b>
Occupied Units	2,982	95%	3,118	90%	3,365	94%
Owner-Occupied	1,661	56%	1,861	60%	2,151	64%
Renter-Occupied	1,321	44%	1,257	40%	1,214	36%
Vacant Units	172	5%	344	10%	229	6%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

**Chart H-6: Vacancy by Tenure, 2000-2015**



Source: Census 2000, 2010; ACS 2011-2015

## Affordable Housing Inventory

**Table H-9: Affordable Housing Inventory Needs**

	2010	2020
Total Housing Units	3,440	3,760*
Required Affordable Units	344	367
Existing Affordable Units	290	219
<b>Shortage (Units)</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>148</b>

\*Note: ACS estimated 3,600 housing units in Ayer in 2015, 3,760 assumes even growth in housing units from 2010-2020.

affordable. The last decennial census in 2010 recorded a total of 3,440 housing units in Ayer, meaning the Town of Ayer must have 344 affordable housing units in order to be in compliance with the law. In 2020, when the next decennial census is released, Ayer's target will increase to an estimated 367 units.

Under a state law which went into effect in 1969, all communities are encouraged to provide housing that is required to remain affordable to lower income households. The units are restricted so that only an income eligible household may purchase or rent an affordable housing unit. The law requires that ten percent of the total number of year-round housing units, as reported in the most recent decennial census, must be



The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) maintains a list of the deed-restricted affordable units in each city and town, known as the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). **Table H-10** reports Ayer's SHI as of July, 2017. There are 180 listed rental units and 26 affordable homeownership units, for a total of 206 units. Recently, an additional 11 units were added to the SHI at The Willows, which is not yet reflected on the current inventory. In addition, DHCD lists 84 units that were assisted through a housing rehabilitation program; however, these units do not meet the current criteria for inclusion on the SHI and therefore do not count towards the Town's inventory, although they will continue to be listed on the Town's SHI by DHCD until the final deed restriction expires in 2023. **The majority of Ayer's affordable housing units are reserved for people over the age of 55.** The Ayer Housing Authority properties, Nashoba Park Assisted Living, and Autumn Ridge Farms have a combined total of 158 affordable units that have additional age restrictions. The remaining 24 rental units and 24 ownership units are available to households regardless of age provided that they are income qualified.

**Table H-10: Subsidized Housing Inventory Properties in Ayer**

Housing Development	Address	Type	Units	Affordability Expires
Silas Nutting Grove Apts	Pond St.	Rental	61	Perp
Pleasant Street School	62 Pleasant St.	Rental	22	2059
Housing Authority	Isaac's Ln./Pond St.	Rental	11	Perp
Nashoba Park / Assisted Living	Winthrop Ave.	Rental	73	2035
DDS Group Homes	Confidential	Rental	0	n/a
The Spaulding Building	25 Main St.	Rental	7	2036
Fletcher Building	49 Main St.	Rental	4	2026
Woodland Village	68 East Main St.	Ownership	3	2031
Habitat for Humanity	Forest St.	Ownership	1	Perp
Estates at Harvard Hills	Bates St. & Auman St.	Ownership	12	Perp.
Chandler Place	West Street	Ownership	2	2054
Autumn Ridge Farms	Groton Rd.	Ownership	2	Perp
The Willows	Willow Road	Ownership	6	Perp
Habitat for Humanity	76 Central Ave	Ownership	2	Perp
Housing Rehab Program*	Various sites		84	2017-2023*
<b>Total Units Listed on SHI</b>			<b>290</b>	<b>8.4%</b>

\*\*The subsidy program through which these 84 units were originally created, does not meet current SHI requirements and these units can no longer be counted toward the Town's SHI. An updated inventory reflecting this policy change has not yet been issued by DHCD, but an updated inventory would reflect 84 units lost, and 11 additional affordable units at the Willows (for a total of 17 units) and 2 Habitat for Humanity units, for an overall inventory of 219 units, representing 6.4% of housing units (as of 2010).

Source: DHCD SHI (Last updated August, 2017)

The SHI includes affordable units in mixed income developments that were permitted using Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permits, including the Estates at Harvard Hills and the Willows. Within these developments, 25 percent of the total number of units are deed restricted for affordability to low- and moderate-income households, while the remaining 75 percent of units were sold at market rate. The Woodland Village condominium development was built in 2000 under a TIF agreement, wherein 3 out of 11 total units were to be deed restricted affordable units. Due to these developments being home ownership projects, only the deed restricted affordable units counted towards the Town's SHI. Rental projects developed under a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit, allow all units within the project to be counted towards the Town's SHI, even though only a portion of the units will actually carry deed restriction. In order to meet the Town's affordable housing obligation, pursuing the development of rental projects will advance the Town's goals more quickly than home ownership projects.



## Ayer Housing Authority

The Ayer Housing Authority owns two properties: Silas Nutting Grove Apartments and Isaac's Lane. Silas Nutting Grove includes 54 apartments and 7 units of congregate housing. Isaac's Lane offers 6 duplexes with the ability to house up to 12 families. The Pleasant Street School was developed by the Ayer Elderly Housing Partnership in 2007 as a historic preservation/adaptive reuse project using Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds along with other funding sources, and is overseen by the Ayer Housing Authority. The housing authority has a waiting list of 348 applicants for units in their properties. There are vacancies in the congregate housing units at Silas Nutting Grove, where individuals must meet certain eligibility criteria including interviews and doctor certifications.

## Community Preservation Act (CPA) and Tax Increment Finance (TIF)

In 2011, The Town contributed CPA funds to assist in the rehabilitation of the historic Fletcher building on Main Street which resulted in the creation of 4 affordable housing units. The funds also supported the development of one homeownership units by Habitat for Humanity in 2004. In 2016, two additional units were constructed by Habitat for Humanity on Central Ave with CPA funds. These units are not yet reflected in the SHI. The historic Spaulding Building, also located in downtown Ayer on Main Street, was rehabilitated in 2004 using a TIF agreement.

## Rental Housing Vouchers

Some households in Ayer receive housing subsidies through various state and federal voucher programs, which are not counted on the Subsidized Housing Inventory. RCAP Solutions, Inc., a non-profit based in Worcester, administers [redacted] Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers which may be utilized in any rental property where a landlord agrees to participate. An estimated [redacted] households in Ayer are using housing choice vouchers to help assist with monthly rental costs. There may also be people residing in Ayer using housing vouchers that are administered by other agencies such as outside housing authorities. HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Approximately 10 Ayer veterans are utilizing vouchers and may be living in Ayer or surrounding communities.

## Regional Housing Comparison

**Table H-11: Housing Characteristics in Ayer and Region**

	Total housing units	Owner-occupied Units	Detached Single-family Homes	5 Unit + Multifamily	Median Value	% Affordable (SHI)
<b>Ayer</b>	<b>3,594</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>\$289,500</b>	<b>8.4%<sup>6</sup></b>
Groton	4,243	86%	83%	5%	\$430,000	5.4%
Littleton	3,691	83%	84%	7%	\$392,900	12.5%
Harvard	1,939	92%	93%	3%	\$522,900	5.5%
Shirley	2,462	68%	59%	8%	\$308,700	2.5%
Clinton	6,211	54%	40%	21%	\$241,200	8.6%
Hudson	7,947	76%	58%	16%	\$296,600	11.5%
Maynard	4,544	69%	62%	12%	\$334,000	8.3%
Pepperell	4,451	77%	72%	8%	\$310,800	3.0%

Source: ACS DP04 (2011-2015), DHCD SHI (Last Updated December, 2014)

<sup>6</sup> The figures shown in the comparison table do not account for corrections to the SHI where some units may have been omitted or some listed are not actually eligible for inclusion. As noted above, the actual number of SHI-eligible housing units in Ayer puts the town at 6.4%.

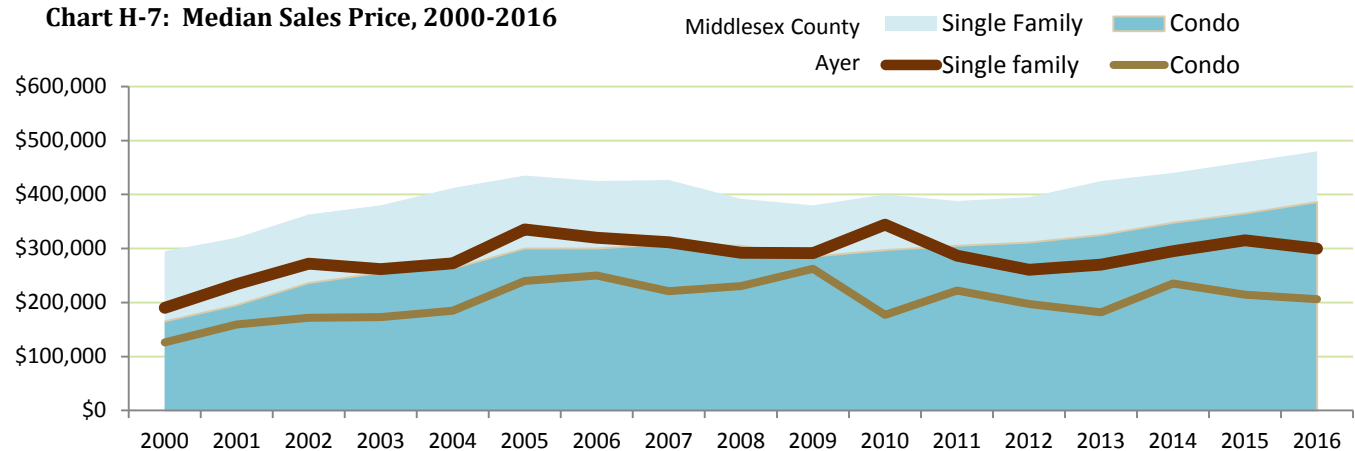


Ayer's housing inventory is relatively diverse in comparison to surrounding towns, with Ayer having a higher proportion of rental units and more varied types of housing structures. With median home values below \$300,000, Ayer is also more affordable than its neighbors. Ayer has a larger share of affordable units than Groton, Harvard, or Shirley. The composition of Ayer's housing supply is more comparable to Clinton, Hudson, or Maynard. Among comparison communities, only Littleton and Hudson have met the 10 percent SHI target.

## Housing Market Trends

As demonstrated in the table above, housing costs in Ayer are on the low end compared with the rest of Middlesex County. Ayer's housing prices have fluctuated over the past fifteen years reflecting overall housing market conditions in the region, although the prices in Ayer have remained relatively flat in the past five years. The median sales price for single-family homes peaked at \$343,000 in 2010, and has since hovered around \$300,000. For condominiums, the median price peaked as high as \$263,000 in 2009, but currently remains closer to \$200,000. For homebuyers in Middlesex County, Ayer's home prices present an opportunity to obtain more substantial housing for affordable prices, as Ayer's single-family home values are less than the median cost for condominiums throughout the rest of the county. Ayer's condominium prices are almost 50 percent of the median condo price throughout the region.

**Chart H-7: Median Sales Price, 2000-2016**



Source: The Warren Group/Banker & Tradesman

The median price for a single-family home in 2016 was \$480,000 for Middlesex County, which is approximately the price that a homebuyer earning at least the median household income can afford. First-time homebuyers, who are likely to earn less and have a smaller amount to contribute toward a down payment may have a more difficult time finding single-family homes they can afford; however, the median sales price for condominiums in Ayer was just over \$200,000, which may be more within reach for homebuyers earning \$50,000 per year.

As shown in **Table H-12**, a survey of rental units advertised in July, 2017, shows between 10-15 current available listings. Some larger developments such as Zodiac Village Apartments, Littleton Lyne Apartments, and Old Towne Village advertise rental costs for their units, although they currently have no vacancies. Few of the apartment listings in the region have 3 or more bedrooms (none in Ayer), while a handful indicate they are for single rooms in shared units.



**Table H-12: Survey of Advertised Rents in Ayer and Surrounding Towns**

		1 BR	2 BR	3 BR
Ayer (39 listings)	Range Average	\$740-\$1,625 \$1,169	\$800-\$2,495 \$1,389	-
Hudson and Maynard (19 listings)		\$800-\$1,749 \$1,375	\$1,500-\$2,300 \$1,804	\$1,000-\$1,850 \$1,600
Littleton, Groton, Shirley, and Pepperell (15 listings)		\$700-\$1,995 \$1,325	\$1,250-\$2,468 \$2,034	\$1,378-\$2,395 \$1,945

Source: COG, data collected on July 26, 2017 from rental listing sites, including Craigslist, Trulia, Apartments.com, Zumper, Hotpads, and rental property management websites

While sales and advertised rent prices reflect the cost for people seeking housing today, ACS estimates median housing values and median rent based on a sample of all units in the community. The ACS estimate for median gross monthly rent in Ayer from 2011-2015 was \$924, which includes affordable units along with market rate units.

Since 2000, the median income of Ayer homeowners has risen faster than the median home values, perhaps reflecting that middle income homebuyers in the region are being attracted by Ayer's relatively affordable housing prices. The median income for renter households, on the other hand, is significantly lower than homeowners and has increased little since 2000, despite rents increasing by 43 percent.

**Table H-13: Change in Median Housing Costs and Median Income**

	2000	2015	Change 2000-2015	% Change
Median Value Owner-Occupied Units	\$171,000	\$289,500	\$118,500	69%
Median Household Income (Owners)	\$62,181	\$105,765	\$43,584	70%
Median Gross Rent	\$646	\$924	\$278	43%
Median Household Income (Renters)	\$35,417	\$40,385	\$4,968	14%

Source: Census 2000, ACS 2011-2015

Ayer is part of the Boston/Cambridge/Quincy Fair Market Rent (FMR) region. According to HUD, the 2017 median income for all households in the region is \$103,400. This defines the Area Median Income (AMI), which is the basis for determining affordability thresholds for subsidized housing.<sup>7</sup> The median income for homeowners in Ayer is comparable to the AMI, while the median income for Ayer renters is significantly lower and within the range that would be considered **very low income** by HUD standards.

**Table H-14: HUD Income Limits, FY17 (Area Median Income = \$103,400)**

Household Size	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person
Extremely Low Income (30% AMI)	21,700	24,800	27,900	31,000	33,500	36,000	41,320
Very Low Income (50% AMI)	36,200	42,400	46,550	51,700	55,850	60,000	68,250
Low Income (70% AMI)	54,750	62,550	70,350	78,150	84,450	90,700	103,200

Source: HUD, FY2017

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 40B requires affordable units to be affordable to households earning 80% of Area Median Income. In practice, many subsidizing agencies establish income thresholds for affordable units based on the HUD Income Limits for Low Income households, shown in Table H-13.



Approximately 63 percent of Ayer's housing is valued in the \$200,000 - \$400,000 range, which is affordable to households earning \$50,000-\$100,000. Approximately one third of households fall into this income range. Another one third of households earn below \$50,000, and 15 percent of households earn less than \$25,000. Homeownership is largely out of reach for those households. In addition, market rate rental housing may also be beyond the means of those households putting them at greater risk for housing insecurity and/or homelessness.

**Table H-15: Housing Demand and Supply by Income Threshold**

Income	Households (ACS)	% of all Households	Affordable Purchase Price*	Housing Units	% of Housing
<\$25,000	535	15%	\$100,000	67	3%
\$25,000-\$49,999	548	16%	\$100,000 - \$200,000	483	23%
\$50,000-\$74,999	629	19%	\$200,000 - \$300,000	744	35%
\$75,000-\$99,999	431	13%	\$300,000 - \$400,000	591	28%
\$100,000-\$149,999	996	30%	\$400,000 - \$500,000	218	10%
>\$150,000	609	18%	>\$500,000	27	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,586</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>2,130</b>	

Sources: ACS 2011-2015, COG; Assessor 2017

\* Assumes mortgage + property tax + insurance payment = 30% of monthly income with 10-15% down payment, 4% interest rate, and estimated tax and insurance.

When property taxes, insurance, and utilities are included, housing costs have also increased for those who own homes and are not seeking new housing. Ayer's average single-family tax bill increased by nearly 50 percent between 2006 and 2016, while statewide the average tax bill increased by 43 percent over the same period. In 2016, the latest year for which ranking is available, Ayer placed 210 out of 337 communities statewide in terms of having the highest tax bill. Tax bills are a function of both the local residential tax rate and the value of the property. In surrounding communities such as Littleton and Harvard, the average single-family tax bills are significantly higher than those in Ayer

due to a higher valuation of residential property, although the tax rates are relatively similar. Moreover, while Ayer's single-family tax bills are lower than those in most neighboring communities, with the exception of Shirley, Ayer also derives significantly more of its tax levy from commercial taxes. Commercial taxes traditionally offset the burden of residents paying for municipal services and facilities. However, the ability of the commercial base to offset tax burdens is becoming more limited as the Town has been facing reductions in state aid and other revenues. In order for the Town to remain fiscally healthy, residents will increasingly need to shoulder the costs of Town operations.

**Table H-16: Average Single-family Tax Bills, 2005-2015**

Fiscal Year	Ayer	Rank	State
2006	\$2,741	232	\$3,801
2011	\$3,293	234	\$4,573
2016	\$4,089	210	\$5,419
Change 2006-2016	49%		43%

There is a growing unmet need for modest housing alternatives, such as townhouses, small single-family houses, and inexpensive studio apartments or private room rentals within housing units.





## Housing Cost Burden

Households are considered to be **cost-burdened** if they spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent or homeownership costs. Those who have housing costs that exceed 50 percent of their income are considered to be **severely cost burdened**. According to this metric, as of 2015, a third of Ayer households are cost-burdened. The largest group of cost-burdened households is renters with incomes below \$50,000, who constitute nearly 60 percent of all renter households. More than half of homeowners with incomes below \$75,000 are also paying more than they can afford for housing.

**Table H-17: Housing Cost Burden by Income**

<u>Renters</u> Household Income	Total Households	Pay 30-50% of Income	Pay more than 50% of Income	Total Cost-burdened Renters	Total % Cost Burdened
Less than \$50,000	713	284	249	533	75%
\$50,000-\$74,999	225	64	0	64	28%
\$75,000 or more	276	0	0	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,214</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>49%</b>
<u>Homeowners</u> Household Income	Total Households	Pay 30-50% of Income	Pay more than 50% of Income	Total Cost-burdened Homeowners	Total % Cost Burdened
Less than \$50,000	341	41	170	211	62%
\$50,000-\$74,999	405	198	12	210	52%
\$75,000-\$99,999	239	69	0	69	29%
\$100,000 or more	1,166	27	0	27	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,151</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>24%</b>

Source: ACS 2011-2015

About half of renter households across all age groups are cost-burdened, however the issue is most acute for young adults ages 25-34. Amongst homeowners, seniors are most likely to be cost-burdened.

**Table H-18: Housing Cost Burden by Age of Householder**

Age of Householder	Renter households	% Cost Burdened	Owner households	% Cost Burdened
Under 25 years	34	32%	33	0%
25-34 years	309	53%	376	13%
35-64 years	679	48%	1,130	25%
65+ years	192	49%	479	34%

Source: ACS 2011-2015

## Homelessness

Homelessness or housing insecurity is a persistent concern in Ayer. In addition to people who are without a permanent place to live, there are many residents who are not stably housed because they live in substandard housing units that lack heat, electricity, and/or kitchen facilities, or who are housed but are unable to care for themselves. Out of roughly 100 people in Ayer who face housing insecurity, approximately 40 percent are unsheltered – that is, they sleep on the street or in encampments – while the remaining may be doubled up in housing units, live in local hotels, live in houses that lack basic facilities, or have other conditions that put them at risk of homelessness.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Pastor Stephen Wells, August 2, 2017. There is no official count of homeless people in Ayer. Our Father's House in Fitchburg is the closest social service agency that participates in the "Point in Time" count, a national tally of



Ayer has numerous resources – public and private– that serve people experiencing homelessness. Two homeless shelters located in Devens provide temporary housing and support services for victims of domestic violence and for veterans. There are also programs offering nutritional assistance, clothing, and social services to people with housing instability. These programs often help connect those in need with transitional or permanent housing programs or assistance with moving into one of two private (unsubsidized) motor lodges in Ayer that serve as de facto transitional housing sites. The Town of Ayer also manages a Community Development Block Grant funded housing rehabilitation program to improve the condition of housing for income-eligible homeowners.

### Homelessness Resources

- Transitions at Devens is a program through Fitchburg-based Our Father’s House, Inc., which provides temporary housing for women and their children who are experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence. There are 13 apartments at Devens, with additional scattered-site apartments located in Fitchburg and Leominster. The emergency shelter receives funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development. Clients who move out of the program on their own receive rent assistance from the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and the state's HomeBASE program.
- Our Father’s House also provides street outreach to the homeless in Ayer.
- Veterans Inc. operates a 36 unit transitional housing facility in Devens that provides temporary housing (up to two years) for veterans.
- The Veteran’s Office in Ayer administers Chapter 115 benefits for low income veterans and helps to connect veterans with VASH or other housing resources.
- Nutritional assistance is offered by food pantries, Loaves and Fishes, and faith-based programs such as New Hope and God’s Kitchen, which provide emergency aid as well as meals or pantry. Volunteers and staff at these programs help to connect patrons with housing or other services in the region.
- Two private motels each have about 10 units that mostly house transitioning or long-term residents, including families.

There are more resources to assist with homelessness in the surrounding region, particularly in larger communities such as Fitchburg. With support from a network of service providers, families, elderly, or veterans are typically able to be placed within transitional or permanent housing. In Ayer, the most vulnerable population for experiencing chronic homelessness is adults with substance abuse and/or mental health problems. There is a shortage of housing within Ayer or surrounding towns that can serve the long term needs of these residents.

### Housing Needs

Ayer’s housing diversity and historic character are elements that help attract new residents, particularly in the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown that are well served by transit. Ayer’s housing offers real diversity in that there is a wide mix of housing types (single-family, apartments, duplexes, townhouses, etc.) and a supply of housing for both rental and ownership. This is critical in being able to serve

**Affordable housing development should target household income thresholds at 50% AMI or lower. Of the 1,100 cost-burdened households living in Ayer, the majority earn less than \$50,000 per year.**

homeless people observed on a single day each year coordinated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), however Ayer is not included in the region covered by their count.



different types of households – seniors, families with children, young adults, single person households, multigenerational families, and so on. Contrary to the enclave approach that is taken in many communities, it is to Ayer's benefit to have something for everyone – it allows people of all kinds to live and establish roots in Ayer and keep it the funky, real, and authentic place that it has always been. A diverse population helps support the local economy by providing both labor and patronage, it improves the sense of community found within Ayer's neighborhoods, and it sustains local government by supplying the human capital and energy to provide the services and facilities that give Ayer its high quality of life.

While Ayer currently has an inventory of market rate housing that is sold or rented at a relatively lower cost than other areas in the region, the availability of modestly priced housing cannot be assured in a growing and increasingly competitive real estate market. As previously mentioned, Chapter 40B establishes a goal that communities should have at least 10 percent of their housing units deed restricted to ensure affordability for low-income households. By 2020, it is estimated that Ayer will need an additional 148 units of affordable housing that is eligible for inclusion on the SHI. The Town has a strong commitment to providing housing and is advancing inclusionary zoning efforts requiring that a percentage of units within new housing developments be reserved as affordable housing units as part of the new zoning bylaw. The adoption of a Chapter 40R Smart Growth District, also requiring affordable housing, could also help expand opportunities for the creation of affordably priced housing.

However, price is not the only component of housing needs. Other needs stem from the condition of Ayer's aging housing stock. Many older homes are in poor condition and require extensive repairs. For some owners, these repairs can represent a significant financial hardship that renders such repairs infeasible. To help with this issue, the Town administers a housing rehabilitation program funded with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that allows for the rehabilitation of homes owned by income-eligible applicants; in the average two-year period, approximately five homes are rehabilitated through this program. Regulatory incentives provided through zoning as well as the establishment of a uniform process for the enforcement of building and health codes may also help incentivize rehabilitation of Ayer's housing stock.

### **What types of housing are most needed?**

- Affordable housing restricted to extremely-low and low-income households.
- Homeless services geared toward single men and single parents.
- Affordable and market rate housing appropriate for seniors (i.e. single story floor plans, laundry in unit, modest size, limited upkeep and maintenance).
- Expand housing rehabilitation services.
- Rental units with 3+ bedrooms that is appropriate for families with children and multigenerational households.



## Formative Issues

Assets and Opportunities	Challenges and Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Changing Demands.</b> While new housing development has mainly focused on large single-family houses on large lots, there is an increasing demand for modestly-sized single-family, townhouse, or multifamily units in walkable neighborhoods with access to the commuter rail, commercial, and recreational amenities. As an amenity rich community with limited remaining land or fiscal resources to dedicate to sprawling development, Ayer is better suited for compact residential development.</li> <li>• <b>Changing Demographics.</b> Ayer is attracting higher income homebuyers, typically residents who commute for work. An influx of working age residents with higher incomes can have a positive impact on the condition of privately owned housing; however, great care must be taken to ensure Ayer's longtime residents are not displaced by increased housing costs.</li> <li>• <b>Senior Housing.</b> As the Baby-Boom generation ages, the proportion of Ayer residents over the age of 65 is expected to climb. Ayer has excellent senior services through the Council on Aging, a framework to administer subsidized senior housing through the Housing Authority, and the presence of the hospital and availability of nursing care provide a continuum of care all within Ayer.</li> <li>• <b>Downtown Housing.</b> Ayer's traditional Main Street and Downtown area are well served by transportation and supported by retail, dining, and entertainment options, which make it an ideal place to live. Increasing residential density downtown and in the immediate surrounding neighborhoods will help support Ayer's small, locally owned, downtown businesses and enhance the vibrancy of the district. Adopting a Ch.40R Smart Growth District will ensure that affordable housing is created and that any growth preserves Ayer's socioeconomic diversity while providing new housing options for coming generations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Maintaining affordability.</b> Housing in Ayer is becoming increasingly expensive, particularly for people who work in Ayer and/or long-time residents. Both affordable housing and more modest market rate housing are needed to maintain affordability.</li> <li>• <b>Blighted Properties.</b> Much of Ayer's older rental housing stock is undervalued, indicating neglect and disrepair. The cost of bringing these units up to code and a state of good repair may not be economical in Ayer's housing market without incentive or subsidy.</li> <li>• <b>Homelessness.</b> The lack of affordable and modestly-priced housing is leading to an increase in homelessness among all types of households, including families. There are insufficient resources in Ayer to serve the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness, in particular chronically homeless individuals.</li> <li>• <b>Local Capacity.</b> Effectively addressing housing issues requires a strong commitment of resources from the Town with respect to staffing, funding, and leadership. Affordable housing is particularly complex due to funding challenges and regulatory compliance requirements. Developing additional capacity to oversee Ayer's existing affordable housing (excluding Housing Authority units) and to seek and promote new opportunities to create affordable housing will be necessary in maintaining affordability and diversity in Ayer.</li> <li>• <b>Regulatory Constraints.</b> Ayer's subdivision and zoning regulations do not currently encourage the type of development that is most needed or sought after. Large minimum lot sizes and wide roadway requirements drive up development costs and necessitate the construction of larger homes to offset costs. Smaller and more compact developments that are walkable and have access to services and amenities must be incentivized in local regulations.</li> </ul>



## Goals and Strategies

Goal H-1	Develop local capacity to plan, develop and manage housing units that meet local needs.
Strategy H-1.1	Form Housing Committee to maintain an inventory of Ayer's affordable housing options and administration to determine if it is meeting the needs and goals of Ayer's residents today.
Strategy H-1.2	Formally coordinate meetings between the Housing Committee, COA, Housing Authority, Community & Economic Development Department, Planning Board, and Community Preservation Committee staff and committee chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss housing issues and opportunities to ensure information is being transmitted throughout Town Hall.
Strategy H-1.3	Increase the availability of information regarding housing assistance and request agency brochures to keep in Town Hall and links on the Town's website. (MassHousing loan programs, Section 8 application, private bank loans available to Low/Mod income households, etc.) Utilize the Town's social media to advertise new opportunities.
Strategy H-1.4	Track affordable developments listed on the SHI and proactively address expiring restrictions.

Goal H-2	Increase housing opportunities for Ayer residents.
Strategy H-2.1	Work with the Planning Board to provide education on housing needs, particularly with respect to the types of housing needed, to ensure that new development is appropriately designed for and reviewed by the Town of Ayer.
Strategy H-2.2	Inventory affordable housing opportunities, both existing and in the development pipeline, and distribute between COA, HA, C&ED, CPC to increase local awareness of housing opportunities.
Strategy H-2.3	Promote and advertise the Housing Rehab program to increase awareness.
Strategy H-2.4	Coordinate with Caza Manor and the Ayer Motor Lodge (currently providing most homelessness services) and local nonprofits to formalize and improve emergency housing.
Strategy H-2.5	Identify town owned property and/or affordable properties (market rate) to convert into affordable housing as Local Initiative Projects.

Goal H-3	Encourage housing development that is sustainable, affordable, and serves all members of Ayer's population.
Strategy H-3.1	Strengthen site plan review process and standards to ensure that new development will adequately serve its residents. Waivers for sidewalks and other design standards should be discouraged. Board level review should encourage floor plans for 3+ br family apartments, starter homes, and housing appropriate for seniors.
Strategy H-3.2	Adopt a Chapter 40R Smart Growth Zoning District around Downtown to encourage redevelopment that will generate additional housing units, including affordable units.
Strategy H-3.3	Increase infill development opportunities in existing residential areas to minimize the destruction of critical environmental habitats and drinking water supply areas. Incentives could include zoning amendments that allow for compact neighborhoods, minimum lot size reductions, shared driveway waivers, and accessory dwelling units.
Strategy H-3.4	Update subdivision bylaws to remove sections that encourage inefficient housing development (remove excessive roadway widths, ban cul-de-sacs and other roads that do not connect, mandate sidewalks, etc.).



