

# HOUSING ELEMENT

06



# HOUSING

## Introduction

The Housing Element of Plan 2040 is an inventory and assessment of the community's housing stock as well as a discussion of housing issues and associated needs within unincorporated Chatham County and the city of Savannah. This chapter identifies major housing challenges, outlines current housing strategies and programs, determines future housing needs, and sets out goals and objectives for meeting these needs and managing housing development in the future.

The range of housing issues addressed in this element include the demand for various housing types, housing affordability, housing resilience to changing climatic conditions, homelessness, special needs housing, and Savannah's historic housing inventory. The Housing Element also outlines current housing strategies and programs and highlights the need for coordination of housing policies at the local, state, and federal levels in order to ensure that every resident has a safe and decent place to live within a satisfactory environment.

# THE STATE OF HOUSING

## Housing Occupancy

As more people have moved into the Chatham County area, the number of housing units has increased along with the population.

In unincorporated Chatham County, there are an estimated 40,000 housing units according to the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, with an occupancy rate of over 90% and a vacancy rate of 9%. In the city of Savannah, there are an estimated 62,000 housing units, 85.5% of which are occupied while 14.5% are vacant. The percentage of occupied and vacant housing units has remained consistent since the year 2000.

As shown in Figure 6.1, the number of housing units in unincorporated Chatham has been consistently increasing since 2010, while the number of housing units in the city of Savannah has remained roughly the same.

## Number of Housing Units, 2010–2018

	2010	2014	2018
Unincorporated Chatham	36,149	38,128	40,159
City of Savannah	62,303	61,753	62,236

Figure 6.1–Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah

U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## 3-Year Housing Market Demand Forecast

	Sales Units	Rental Units
Savannah HMA	Total Demand	3,875
	Under Construction	950

Figure 6.2–Market Demand, Savannah HMA

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2019



# FOUR MAJOR HOUSING PROBLEMS

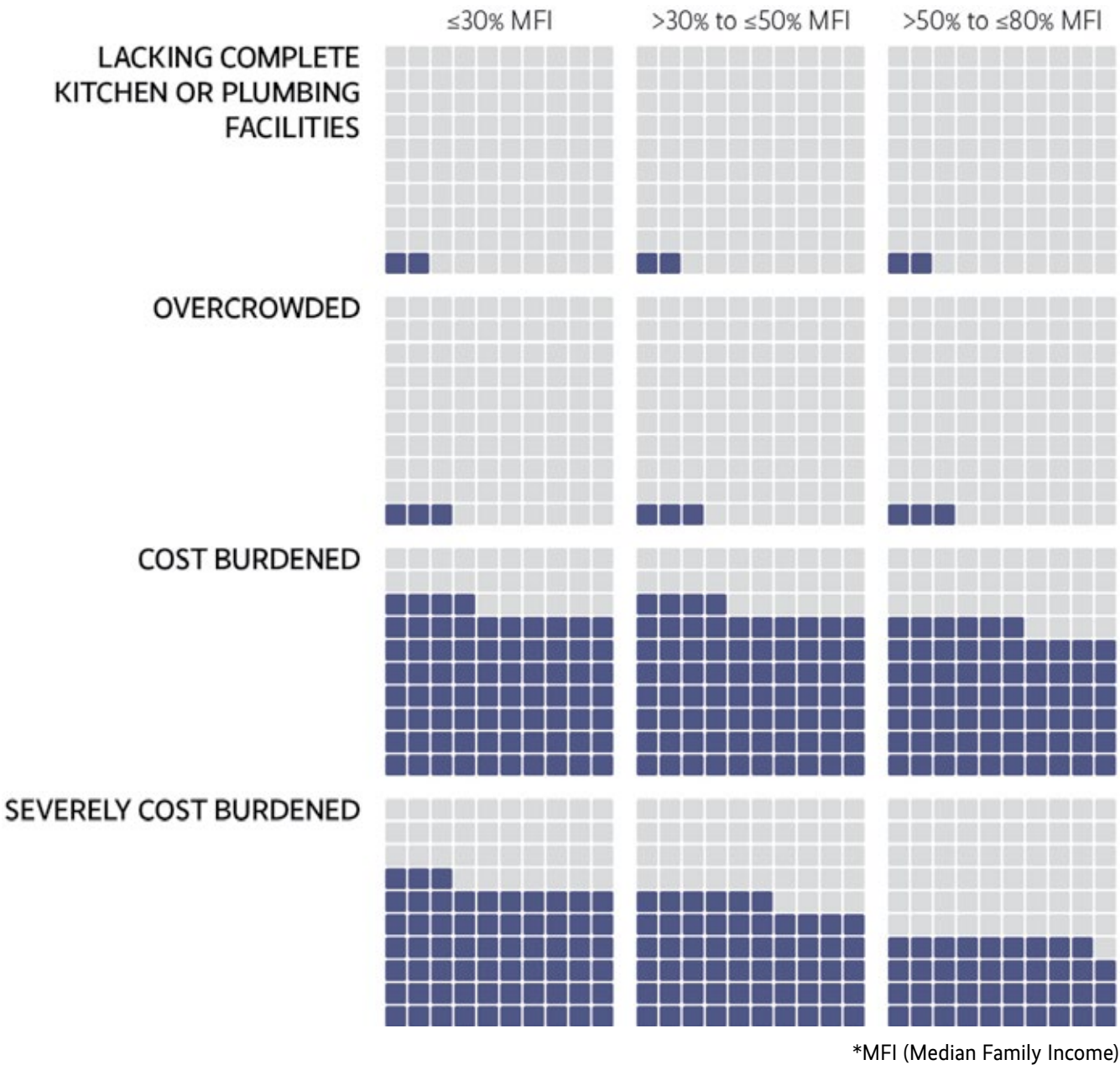


Figure 6.3—Four Major Housing Problems, Chatham County  
 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

### Vacancy Rates

According to the 2018 5-year ACS, rental vacancy was much higher than homeowner vacancy in both unincorporated Chatham and the city of Savannah. Vacancy rates can be indicative of housing availability and affordability. For example, rental vacancy rates could indicate a lack of affordable rental units in the area. It is necessary to reduce vacancy, as vacant homes are at a higher risk of dilapidation.

As demonstrated in Figure 6.4, the vacancy rate has been decreasing for both homeowner and rental units since 2010.

### Vacancy Rates, 2010–2018

	2010	2014	2018
Homeowner	5.5%	3.5%	3.2%
Rental	10.4%	8.0%	7.2%

Figure 6.4–Housing Vacancy, City of Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

### Housing Occupancy, 2018

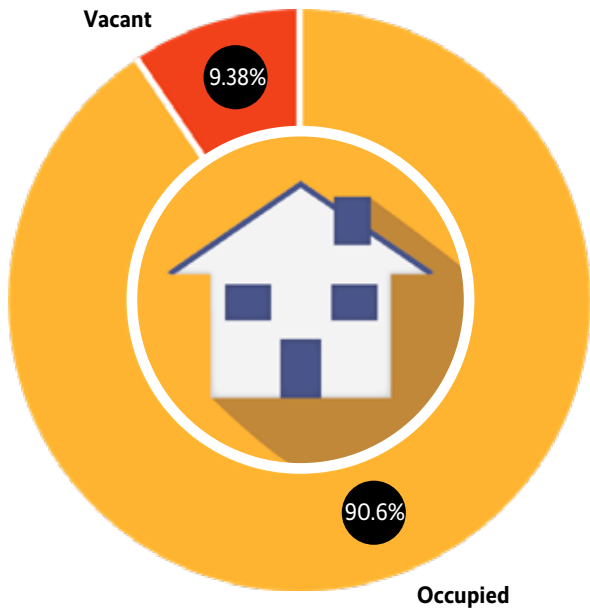


Figure 6.5–Housing Occupancy, Unincorporated Chatham  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

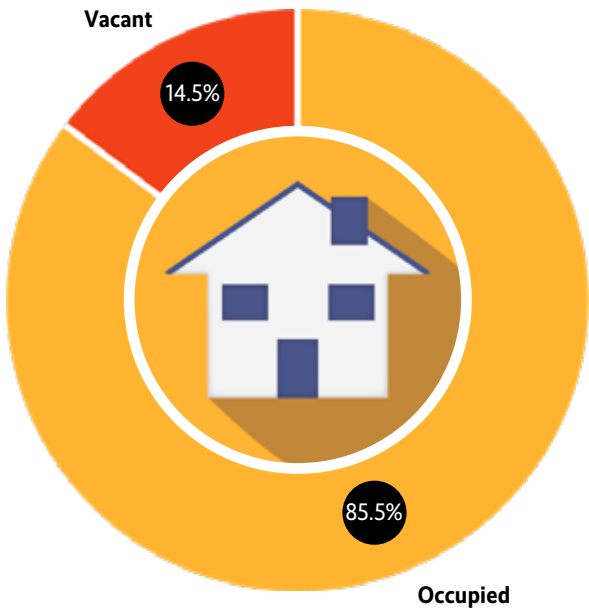


Figure 6.6–Housing Occupancy, City of Savannah



### Plan 2040 Survey

The MPC's Plan 2040 survey asked in your opinion, "Do we need more, less or about the same of the following housing types?"

- Single-family
- Townhouses
- Apartments
- Duplexes
- Accessory dwelling units
- Mobile homes
- Transitional housing
- Nursing or retirement homes

Forty-four percent (44%) of the respondents felt that there needed to be more single-family housing, with only 13% of respondents selecting more apartment housing.

A full copy of the survey and the results can be found in the Plan 2040 Appendix.



## Housing Types

Maintaining a mix of housing types is one of the most important housing strategies. It helps to boost a socially and economically diverse community by providing viable housing options for residents across the full spectrum of personal needs, preference, and economic buying power.

The majority of houses in the county are single-family detached homes. This is similar for both unincorporated Chatham County, in which approximately 72% of housing is single-family detached, and to a lesser extent, the city of Savannah, in which 56.8% of housing is single-family detached. In both jurisdictions, there are varying amounts of other forms of housing, such as attached single-family, multi-family, mobile homes, and liveaboard boats.

Two primary factors influence the different types of housing units built in unincorporated Chatham County: zoning, which specifies the types and density of units developers are permitted to build, and market demand, which dictates the types of housing units people want to buy. Currently, the vast majority of residential areas in unincorporated Chatham and Savannah are zoned for single-family, detached housing.

The future market demand for specific types of units will depend upon the future demographic changes, wants, and needs of the various population groups. Additionally, speculation is a housing market driver, as real-estate investors can create fluctuations in home prices and demands by guessing on the future value of certain homes based on their investments.

As shown in Figure 6.7, while the majority of houses are single-family in unincorporated Chatham and the city of Savannah, there is a higher variety of housing available in the city of Savannah compared with unincorporated Chatham County.

*In unincorporated Chatham County, almost 72% of all housing is single-family detached, while in the city of Savannah only 57% is single-family detached*  
—American Community Survey, 2018



## Housing Types, 2014–2018

Housing Type	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM		CITY OF SAVANNAH	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
1-unit, detached	28,783	71.67	35,381	56.85
1-unit, attached	1,577	3.93	3,483	5.60
2 units	322	0.80	4,343	6.98
3 or 4 units	1,011	2.52	5,528	8.88
5 to 9 units	2,114	5.26	4,806	7.72
10 to 19 units	2,362	5.88	3,169	5.09
20 or more units	1,759	4.38	4,453	7.16
Mobile home	2,213	5.51	1,042	1.67
Boat, RV, Van, etc.	18	0.41	31	0.05
Total	40,159	100%	62,236	100%

Figure 6.7–Housing Types, Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Age of Housing

In unincorporated Chatham County, the majority of people live in a house built between 1990 and 1999. In contrast, the age of housing units in the city of Savannah varies more widely, with considerably more people living in older housing compared with residents of unincorporated Chatham County. For example, a large number of residents in Savannah live in housing built before 1940 (17%) while just 2% of residents in unincorporated Chatham live in housing that old.

The age of Savannah's housing stock reflects the area's early development and commitment to preserving historic homes. According to the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) data, around 47% of housing in unincorporated Chatham and 76% of housing in the city of Savannah are over the age of 30. Homes that are more than 30 years old are generally at the greatest risk of being substandard and/or subject to deterioration associated with improper maintenance and repair.

The highest rehabilitation need usually occurs in communities with a concentration of the following characteristics: an older housing stock; non-subsidized rental housing; and low-income households. All of these characteristics could apply to the city of Savannah at one point in time.

Generally speaking, the majority of units that are 50 years old or older are concentrated in Savannah's various historic neighborhoods (see additional discussion in the Historic Resources Element).

*Around 47% of housing in unincorporated Chatham and 76% of housing in the city of Savannah are over the age of 30  
—American Community Survey, 2018*



## Year Housing Structure Built, 2014–2018

Year Built	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM		CITY OF SAVANNAH	
	Number	%	Number	%
Built 2014 or later	514	1.28	1,045	1.68
Built 2010 to 2013	1,231	3.07	2,337	3.76
Built 2000 to 2009	9,670	24.08	6,931	11.14
Built 1990 to 1999	9,840	24.50	4,489	7.21
Built 1980 to 1989	8,323	20.73	6,074	9.76
Built 1970 to 1979	5,588	13.91	8,059	12.95
Built 1960 to 1969	2,063	5.14	8,261	13.27
Built 1950 to 1959	1,683	4.19	9,120	14.65
Built 1940 to 1949	385	0.96	5,325	8.65
Built 1939 or Earlier	862	2.15	10,595	17.02
Total	40,159	100%	62,236	100%

Figure 6.8—Age of Housing Structure, Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



## Housing Tenure

In unincorporated Chatham County, 68% of all households are owner-occupied. This is a substantially higher prevalence of owner occupancy than in the city of Savannah (44%). Over the last 30 years, owner occupancy rates countywide, as well as in the city of Savannah, and unincorporated areas have remained fairly stable, with slight decreases over time. Prior to the year 2000, the majority of homes in Savannah were owner-occupied, and now that trend has essentially flipped with more homes and units being rented than owned.

The construction of numerous apartment complexes during the 1980s pushed the percentage of renter-occupied units up with the renter-occupancy rate steadily increasing ever since. Figure 6.9 summarizes housing occupancy in unincorporated Chatham County and the city of Savannah.

## Housing Tenure, 2010–2018

	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM		
	2010	2014	2018
Owner-Occupied	74.20%	70.79%	68.34%
Renter-Occupied	25.80%	29.21%	31.66%

	CITY OF SAVANNAH		
	2010	2014	2018
Owner-Occupied	47.43%	45.01%	43.89%
Renter-Occupied	52.57%	54.99%	56.11%

Figure 6.9–Housing Tenure, Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Housing Tenure, 2014–2018

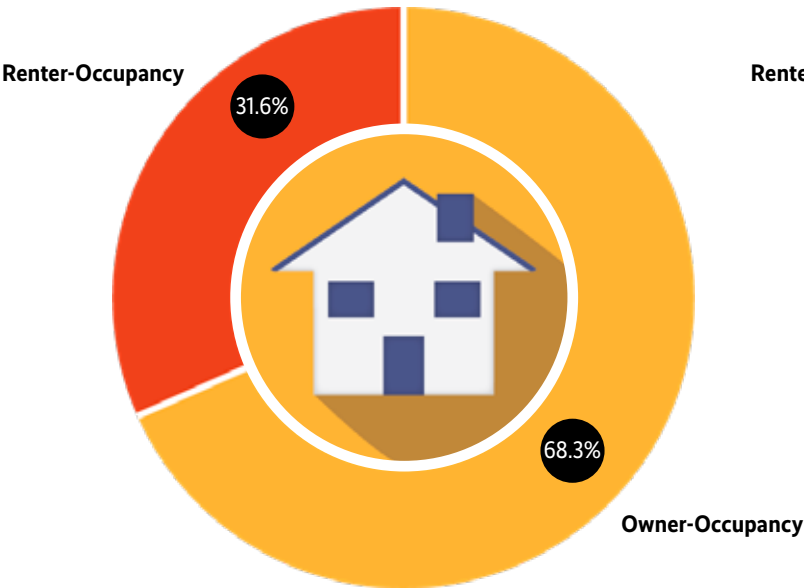


Figure 6.10–Housing Tenure, Unincorporated Chatham  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

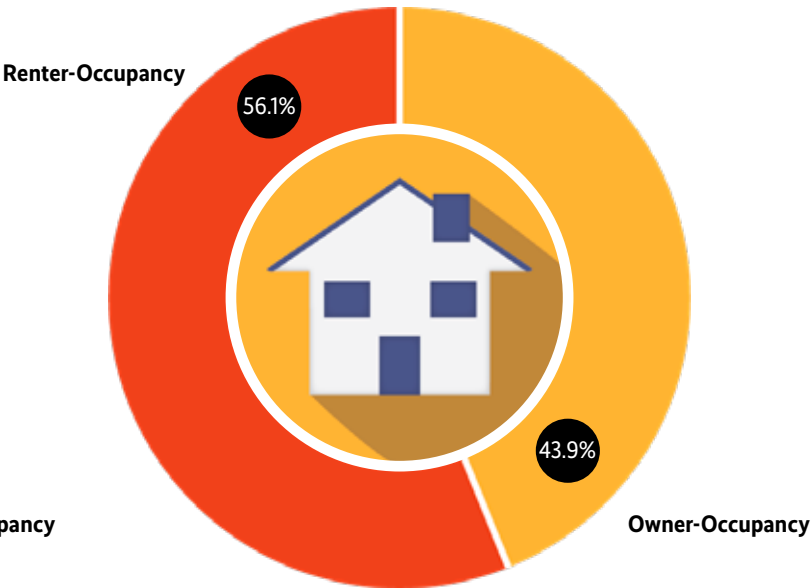


Figure 6.11–Housing Tenure, City of Savannah

## Households by Income Distribution and Tenure

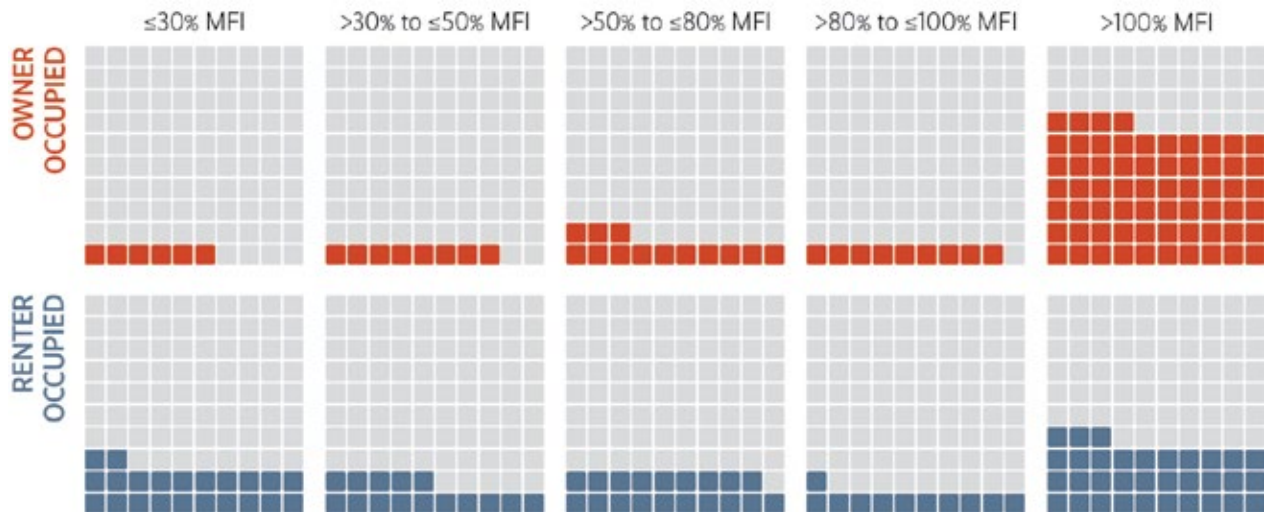


Figure 6.12–Housing Income & Tenure Distribution, Chatham County  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

## Households with at least 1 of the 4 housing problems

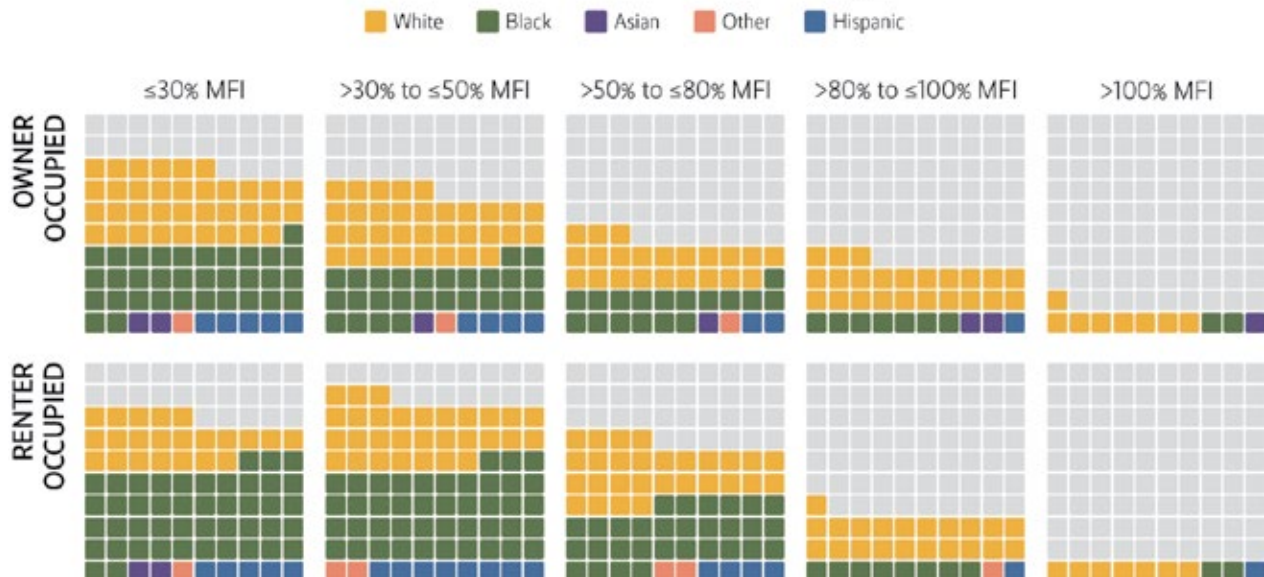


Figure 6.13–Housing Income & Tenure Distribution, Chatham County  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

## Housing Values

Overall, home values have been steadily increasing in both unincorporated Chatham County and the city of Savannah alike for the past two decades. In 2000, 27% of homes in unincorporated Chatham County had a value between \$50,000 to \$99,999; the percentage of housing stock in this range has since dropped dramatically, to less than 6%. As of 2018, the majority of homes in unincorporated Chatham County are now valued between \$200,000 to \$299,999, as shown in Figure 6.14.

### Home Values, 2000–2018

	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$50,000	292	1.51	1,154	4.63
\$50,000 to \$99,999	5,198	27.12	1,414	5.69
\$100,000 to \$149,999	5,123	26.73	3,430	13.79
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2,810	14.66	4,078	16.40
\$200,000 to \$299,999	2,603	13.58	5,501	22.12
\$300,000 to \$499,999	2,099	10.95	5,138	20.66
\$500,000 to \$999,999	882	4.60	3,466	13.94
\$1,000,000 or More	162	0.85	690	2.77
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,169</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24,871</b>	<b>100%</b>

	CITY OF SAVANNAH			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$50,000	4,177	17.79	1,513	6.48
\$50,000 to \$99,999	12,698	54.09	5,024	21.52
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3,928	16.73	4,964	21.3
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1,240	5.28	4,462	19.11
\$200,000 to \$299,999	737	3.14	4,089	17.51
\$300,000 to \$499,999	457	1.95	2,232	9.56
\$500,000 to \$999,999	185	0.79	815	3.46
\$1,000,000 or More	53	0.23	247	1.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,475</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>23,346</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 6.14–Housing Values, Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

In Savannah, the majority of houses (54%) were valued between \$50,000 to \$99,999; that percentage has since decreased to 21.5% of housing units. Median home values increased 93% since the year 2000, from a median of \$78,500 to \$151,500.

The increase in home values is incredibly beneficial as it increases the wealth of homeowners. However, there are some drawbacks. For example, as home values increase, those trying to buy a home, especially first-time home buyers, may not be able to afford the ever-increasing pricing of housing. Additionally, as rent is simultaneously rising, many people may not be able to afford to buy or rent a home.

*Median home values in the city of Savannah have increased 93% since the year 2000 —American Community Survey, 2018*



## Monthly Mortgage

In unincorporated Chatham, close to one-third of the population pays \$1,000 to \$1,499 in monthly mortgage payments, while another third pay \$2,000 or more. Monthly mortgage costs have generally been increasing since 2000.

The median monthly mortgage in the city of Savannah has continually increased over the last two decades, rising 51% since 2000, from \$867 per month to \$1,312 per month.

## Monthly Rent

Monthly rent in unincorporated Chatham has changed over time, with more people paying higher rent costs since 2000. The majority of renters in Savannah currently pay \$1,000 to \$1,499 in monthly rent.

*Median gross rent is \$977 in the city of Savannah, representing a 73% increase since 2000*

*—American Community Survey, 2018*



## Monthly Mortgage Costs, 2000–2018

	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$500	232	1.61	58	0.36
\$500 to \$999	5,275	36.67	2,197	13.46
\$1,000 to \$1,499	4,816	33.47	5,170	31.67
\$1,500 to \$1,999	2,010	13.97	3,837	23.51
\$2,000 or More	2,054	14.28	5,062	31.00
Total	14,387	100%	16,324	100%

	CITY OF SAVANNAH			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$500	1,543	10.20	3,856	20.59
\$500 to \$999	8,020	53.02	3,672	19.60
\$1,000 to \$1,499	4,035	26.68	5,382	28.74
\$1,500 to \$1,999	1,032	6.83	3,571	19.07
\$2,000 or More	495	3.27	2,248	12.00
Total	15,125	100%	18,729	100%

Figure 6.15—Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Monthly Rent Costs, 2000–2018

	UNINCORPORATED CHATHAM			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$500	958	14.13	580	5.29
\$500 to \$999	4,676	68.96	3,150	28.71
\$1,000 to \$1,499	579	8.54	5,153	46.96
\$1,500 to More	568	8.38	2,090	19.05
Total	6,781	100%	10,973	100%

	CITY OF SAVANNAH			
	2000		2014–2018	
	Number of Units	%	Number of Units	%
Less than \$500	9,494	39.00	3,067	10.81
\$500 to \$999	13,582	55.80	11,945	42.12
\$1,000 to \$1,499	832	3.43	10,481	36.96
\$1,500 to More	431	1.77	2,867	10.11
Total	24,339	100%	28,360	100%

Figure 6.16—Unincorporated Chatham & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



# AGE & HOUSING DEMAND

## Aging

A major factor in estimating the need for various housing types available is the age distribution of the population. Age is a major factor in housing choice because populations within a given age group tend to share various characteristics. Individuals in their early twenties are more likely to rent an apartment than buy a house because younger residents tend to have fewer financial resources than an older population, and they also tend to move more often.

Individuals and families in their working years are likely to choose to live in single-family homes because they tend to have more capital and are likely to be raising children. People who are retired may opt for a simpler lifestyle, which may involve selling their single-family home and moving into a townhouse, garden apartment, or other type of multi-family unit or a smaller single-family home or an ADU associated with a single-family home. Not everyone wants or needs to live in multi-family. An area's age distribution, along with its wealth and cultural characteristics, is therefore a major factor in determining that area's demand for various types of housing units.

The aging of the overall population is a nationwide trend as the "Baby Boomer" generation approaches retirement and the generation of the "Baby Bust" that follows it is significantly smaller. In the U.S., some also called "Generation Xers" the "baby bust" generation because of the drop in the birth rate following the baby boom. This nationwide aging trend will be even more pronounced in the South, which continues to be a retirement destination.

The local effect in Chatham County will likely be even more pronounced because of its desirable coastal location, warmer climate, and the close proximity to resorts and retirement communities.

As shown in Figure 6.19 Chatham County's population is projected to grow significantly over the next 10 years with the largest population gain being seen in the older age groups. The effect will be increasingly pronounced among the oldest age groups, with the number of 45 to 54-year-olds, projected to increase 5.8% from the 2010 counts, 55 to 64-year-olds increasing 18.1%, and individuals who are over 65 increasing by over 70%. Younger age groups, by contrast, are projected to experience either very modest growth or slight reductions from current and previous levels.

As people grow older many find it advantageous to relocate from single-family homes to multi-family dwellings, making it likely that an increase in demand for multi-family units will accompany the larger aging population. The future demand for multi-family units will also continue to rise because of the projected increase in the population of college students.

Although Chatham County's total year-round population of young adults living within the county is projected to decrease slightly by the year 2030, it is expected that the population of college students residing in Chatham County part of the year will increase as the county's major institutions of higher learning continue to expand and attract students from outside the county. This trend also supports the finding that the market could support more multi-family units within Chatham County.

### Households containing at least one child age 6 or younger

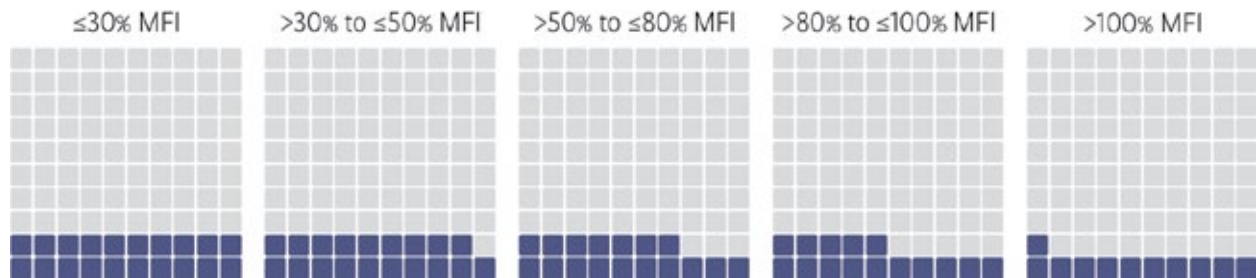


Figure 6.17–Households with Children Age 6 or Younger, by Median Family Income (MFI), Chatham County

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

### Households containing at least one person age 62-74 and 75 or older

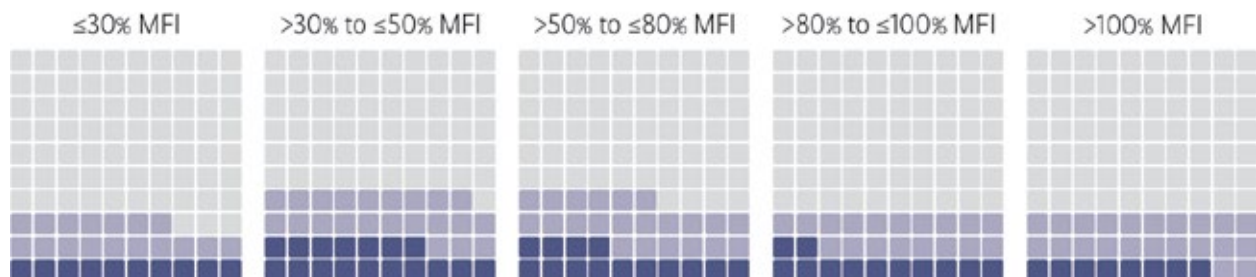


Figure 6.18–Elderly Households, by Median Family Income (MFI), Chatham County

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

## Projected Age Distribution, 2010–2030

Age	2010	2020	2030	%Chge. 2010-2030
Under 5	18,334	17,948	18,443	0.6%
5 to 14	31,751	33,172	36,654	15.4%
15 to 24	45,223	41,611	45,311	0.2%
25 to 34	40,557	46,267	41,995	3.5%
35 to 44	32,571	36,867	39,133	20.1%
45 to 54	34,782	33,244	38,304	10.1%
55 to 64	29,435	35,606	33,964	15.4%
65 and Over	33,218	45,835	61,720	85.8%

Figure 6.19–Chatham County Population Projections by Age Cohort

U.S. Census Bureau: 2010 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates & Georgia Office of Planning and Budget



# COST-BURDEN

## Housing Costs

As discussed earlier in this element, home values, monthly mortgage payments, and monthly rent have been increasing in both unincorporated Chatham and the city of Savannah. The issue of cost-burden must be closely monitored.

As shown in Figures 6.20 and Figure 6.21, the percentage of people cost burdened by housing payments increased around 2010 but has since declined over the past decade. This pattern is true for both renters and homeowners in unincorporated Chatham and the city of Savannah. Still, the percentage of people cost burdened has still not returned to its lowest levels.

The cost-burden for renters has been consistently higher than cost-burden for homeowners, especially in Savannah where cost-burden spiked to 61% before falling to 55% according to the 2018 5-year ACS.

### COST-BURDENED

Cost-burdened families are those “who pay more than 30% of their income for housing” and “may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.” Severe rent burden is defined as paying more than 50% of one’s income on rent.

—HUD

*Cost-burden for renters has been consistently higher than cost-burden for homeowners, especially in Savannah*  
—American Community Survey, 2018

## Rent Cost-Burden, 2000–2018

Year	Unincorporated Chatham	City of Savannah
2000	40.04%	52.93%
2010	51.62%	61.13%
2014	50.03%	59.80%
2018	42.77%	55.39%

Figure 6.20–Rent Cost-Burden

U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Mortgage Cost-Burden, 2000–2018

Year	Unincorporated Chatham	City of Savannah
2000	20.08%	26.57%
2010	38.13%	42.76%
2014	34.94%	41.24%
2018	27.32%	33.53%

Figure 6.21–Mortgage Cost-Burden

U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



### AFFORDABLE HOUSING DIFFICULTY

In summary, being able to afford housing for many in both unincorporated Chatham and Savannah becomes difficult when:

- Rents/mortgages exceed \$400 monthly per working adult household member.
- Households earn less than \$50,000 annually or \$24 hourly full-time.
- Households rely on \$7.25 minimum wage jobs and have to work 90 to 140 hours weekly.
- Housing is located away from places of employment or public transit—adding to costs.

Because cost burden has been such a persistent issue, strategies must be developed and deployed to increase the affordable housing stock.



# AFFORDABLE HOUSING

## Affordable Housing

The definition of affordable housing is often assumed to refer to low-income housing. However, in this document, “Affordable Housing” and “Low Income Housing” are two different categories, with an affordable housing referring to people who make a moderate income (police officers, teachers, social workers) and low income referring to people who live below the poverty line.

Projecting the future demand for affordable housing is challenging because the affordable housing market is dependent upon economic conditions, which are difficult to forecast. Affordable housing is also a relative issue; all housing is “affordable” to somebody. There is no one solution to making housing affordable to everyone; however, a possible tool from a regulatory standpoint is to require new housing developments to provide a range of housing types and sizes in various locations to help ensure a diverse housing stock and maximize housing choices for every individual.

The City of Savannah’s Housing and Neighborhood Services Department and partners have been working on this issue for years. In August 2020 Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, established the Housing Savannah Task Force, with the mission “to assess local housing needs and opportunities, and develop a comprehensive plan to improve housing availability, accessibility and affordability for everyone.”

The Task Force defined affordable housing as: “Housing in good condition that can typically be rented or purchased without households paying more than 30% of gross income or fair market rents.”

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUND

The Savannah Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) was established by resolution of the Mayor and Alderman of the City of Savannah on November 11, 2011. The Fund was established to serve as a:

“Complementary finance tool allowing for maximum flexibility and local control, leveraging private and other investment, attract investors, fund construction and rehabilitation of housing, provide technical assistance to and provide capacity building for local developers, and provide a revolving loan fund.”

—City of Savannah



The Housing Savannah Task Force created several recommendations to increase the affordable housing stock in the city. The recommendations included:

- Increase Community Wide Awareness, Support and Education for Housing Savannah
- Increase & Sustain Housing Improvement, Development, Purchase and Retention Activity to Benefit 15,000 Households by 2032
- Increase & Sustain Investments for Housing Improvement, Development, Purchase and Retention to \$100M+ Annually by 2032
- Increase the Capacity and/or Number of Housing Partners
- Support Local, State & Federal Housing Friendly Policy and Legislation



#### SOME BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Utility companies prefer unpaved areas to save money and reduce disruptions when utilities must be repaired and therefore resist proposals to reduce the width of rights-of-way and setbacks
- Emergency responders prefer wide streets and large setbacks for convenient access for fire trucks and ambulances
- Some traffic engineers insist that wide streets and clear rights-of-way reduce accidents
- Local government officials prefer larger setbacks along major roads to reduce acquisition costs when road widening becomes necessary
- Zoning laws favor single-family, detached housing, which tend to be more expensive than multi-family housing
- Low incomes, high housing costs, and local investments in the Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) to close the gap between the two

*Housing is generally not affordable to residents who make less than \$23 per hour, working 40 hours a week*

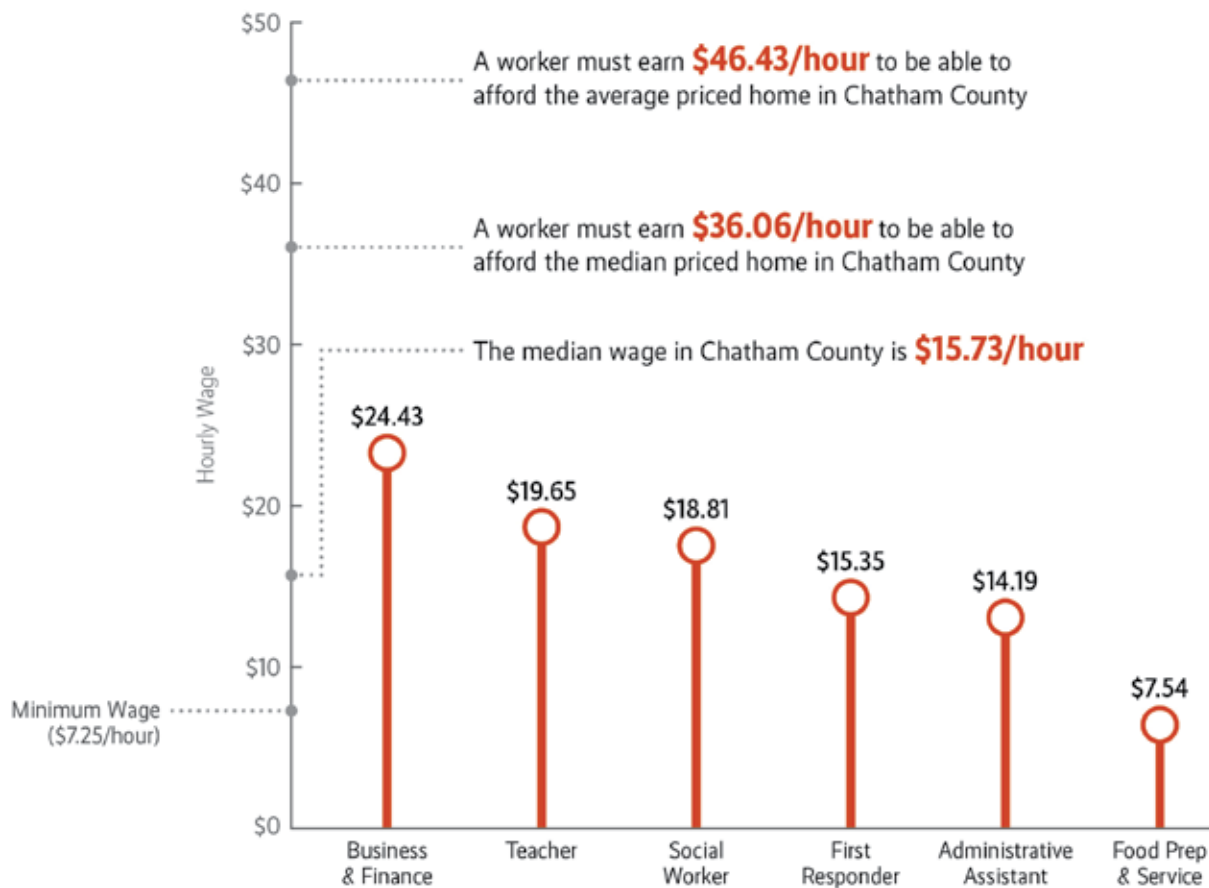


## Housing Affordability

The availability and affordability of housing in Chatham County affects the entire community and is connected to nearly every other element of Plan 2040. The local economy, transportation systems, land use, quality of life, and the natural environment are all impacted when a housing market does not meet the needs of area residents. In Chatham County, rising housing costs are outpacing increases in median household income and many residents are left unable to afford a home (a home is considered affordable if a household spends no more than 30% of its income on housing expenses).

Housing affordability disproportionately impacts low income residents in the county, as does the availability of affordable homes. A home is considered available for households of a specific income group if the home is currently vacant or is occupied by a household at or below that income group threshold. Coupled together, the shortage of affordable and available housing is a particularly acute issue for the lowest-income families in our community.

## Who Can Afford to Buy a Home in Chatham County?



In Chatham County, the median sales price of a single family home in May 2021 was \$265,000 and the average sales price was \$343,088.

These calculations assume a 5% down payment on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage at 3.5% interest, with 1.29% annual property taxes, \$1,500 (median) or \$1,800 (average) annual homeowners insurance, 1% Private Mortgage Insurance, & a 36% debt-to-income ratio.

Figure 6.22–Housing Affordability, Chatham County

U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Georgia Association of Realtors

## Gentrification

An additional important factor in affordable housing is gentrification. Gentrification refers to the process of higher income people moving into a low-income area, leading to the displacement of long-time established residents due to increased cost of living. There are multiple areas within Chatham County that are experiencing gentrification, such as downtown Savannah. While gentrification is often thought of as synonymous with displacement, there are ways to prevent established residents from being pushed out. Strategies to reduce the displacement of poorer residents include providing tax breaks for longtime residents or home buyer programs for local renters. This way, these residents will not have to keep up with rising property taxes and rent. This is especially important for senior and disabled residents, who are often on a fixed income.

*For every 100 extremely low income renter households in Chatham County, there are only 28 affordable and available housing units.*  
—Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy, 2017



## Availability of Affordable Homes, 2017

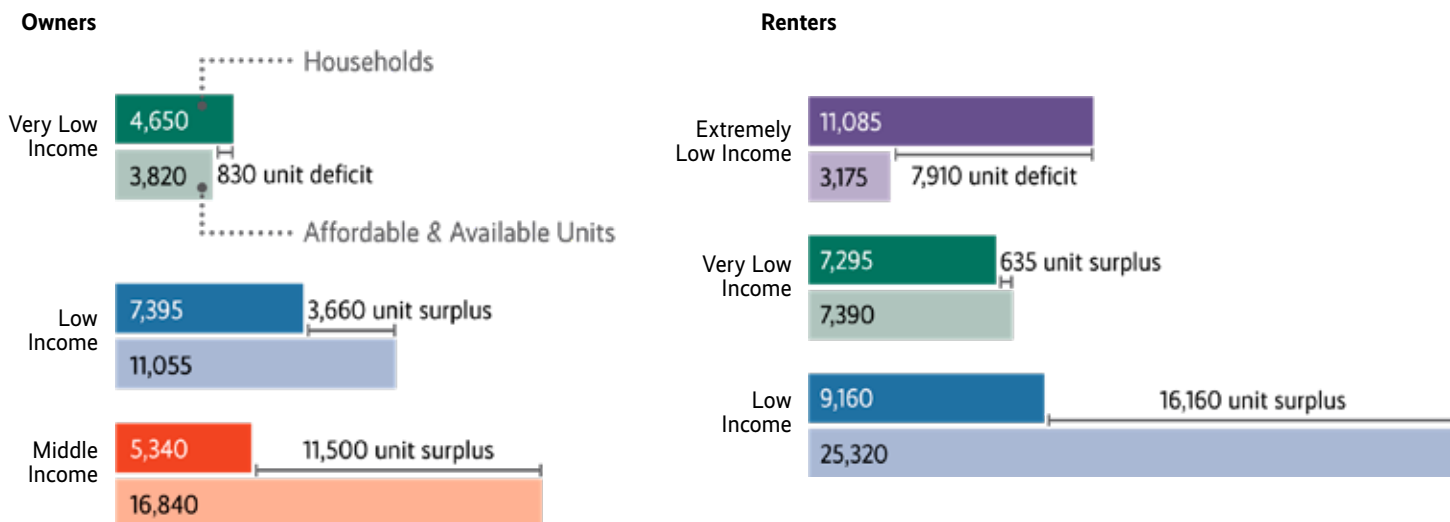


Figure 6.23—Affordable & Available Housing Units, Chatham County  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: 2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

# NEWZO

## City of Savannah's Zoning Ordinance (NewZO)

After the adoption of the city of Savannah's New Zoning Ordinance (NewZO) on September 1, 2019, there were several notable changes specific to housing in Savannah. One major change reflected in NewZO was the reduction of the minimum lot size requirements in single family residential areas. This not only opened new opportunities for constructing smaller and more affordable housing, it also allowed previously nonconforming, existing houses on smaller lots to now be conforming. For example, many existing residential lots within the Historic District were small and nonconforming under the previous zoning code, with lot sizes under 6,000 square feet. With the adoption of NewZO, lot sizes are now permitted to be small as 4,000 to 5,000 square feet, allowing smaller homes to conform and legally fit within the size and character of the neighborhood.

NewZO also instituted reforms to Savannah's off-street parking regulations providing more predictable standards for many uses and more flexibility in meeting those requirements. Recognizing that minimum parking requirements are a significant component of residential affordability, NewZO reduced parking minimums to one space per unit, regardless of size. This, in turn, encouraged alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, and public transportation. Additionally, lessening space dedicated to parking surfaces, promotes reduced housing costs for many new developments and redevelopments.

Some additional key revisions in NewZO that positively affect housing development and other interrelated processes include:

- Reduced and simplified the range of zoning districts into a handful of higher-level groupings for business, residential, office-institutional, downtown, historic residential, historic commercial, and conservation
- Created dedicated districts for downtown and historic neighborhoods to better reflect their unique situations
- Dramatically simplified, rationalized, and updated the zoning map
- Allowed mixed-use by right in commercial districts
- Updated development standards to better accommodate existing development patterns
- Encouraged better urban design with specific standards for parking lots, lot coverage and lot frontage, among others
- Reduced parking requirements where reasonable and provided more flexibility in meeting those requirements through off-site, shared, bicycle or other forms of parking
- Reduced the number of variance and rezoning requests
- Improved procedural clarity for all zoning and variance actions
- Made all requirements easier to understand, implement and enforce

# HOUSING STRATEGIES & PROGRAMS

## Housing Strategies

Currently, there are conversations locally and nationally, on the topic of housing affordability. The smaller units that are now allowed tend to be less expensive than larger housing units. NewZO is a great step in the right direction in terms of allowing for smaller, and thus less expensive housing.

Affordable housing is a complex topic, as housing affordability and needs differ among all people. Therefore, a variety of strategies are needed to address the diverse needs of local residents. One example of innovative ideas with affordable housing is the Tiny House Project, which houses veterans in permanent, affordable homes.

There is also innovation in the language of affordable housing, to make distinctions in the type of housing needed. For example, the definition of affordable housing can differ, with some defining it as housing affordable to low-income residents, while others define it as affordable to the general population. Terms like "missing middle" (which will be discussed in detail later in the element) and "workforce housing" demonstrates how people of a variety of income levels struggle to secure affordable housing. These language distinctions reflect the variety of housing and strategies that must be implemented to increase the affordable housing stock.



## Housing & Neighborhood Services

Savannah's Housing and Neighborhood Services Department (HNSD) identified housing costs, expendable funds, and a lack of affordable housing as some of the main causes of cost burden. In response to this, several programs were instituted within the city of Savannah to ease the cost burden that many residents face.

- » Down Payment Assistance—This program provides down payment assistance to qualified low-and moderate-income households purchasing a home for the first time

Established in 2011, the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF), leverages donations from banks, businesses, nonprofits, and the local government to provide loans and down payment assistance for home buyers. Additionally, the SAHF finances house construction and repairs, thereby investing in the economic development of the city. Under SAHF, the Employer Assisted Home Purchase Program was created, in which employees of the City of Savannah, Memorial Health Hospital, and St. Joseph/Candler Hospital can receive down payment assistance.

- » Rental Property Repair and Development —This program provides assistance to investors-owners to rehabilitate rental units for occupancy by low-income households

The Community Housing Services Agency (CHSA) also funds a rental property repair program, in which landlords can receive loans to repair their properties and then rent them to residents who make 80% or less than the median income.

- » Abandoned Property Redevelopment —This program funds the construction or reconstruction of new homes for low- and moderate-income households occupying severely deteriorated units

The CHSA, the City of Savannah, and Housing Authority of Savannah (HAS) have supported multiple low income housing tax credit and bond issues that have resulted in the renovation and construction of an average of 200 rental dwellings annually since 2000.

An important affordable housing program was implemented in 2020 to target vacant structures for redevelopment. This “1K-in-10” Abandoned Property Acquisition and Redevelopment initiative is funded by a portion of Savannah’s Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST).

This program will aid in increasing the housing stock through the allocation of \$10 million for the purchase of 1,000 dilapidated and abandoned/vacant residential properties. Some acquired structures will be renovated while others will be demolished to make way for the construction of new homes that will be made available for rent or purchase by those in need of affordable housing. While increasing the housing stock, it will also improve the neighborhood.

- Ordinances—Policy is the foundation that can ultimately lead to an increase in the supply of housing at a wider range of price-points thereby making more housing more affordable to a wider range of potential buyers

Policies and ordinances such as zoning ordinances can often be helpful in facilitating an increase in the number of affordable housing units. The City of Savannah’s New Zoning Ordinance (NewZO) adopted in 2019 led to changes that permit smaller lots for residential single-family homes than previously allowed, thereby permitting residents to build smaller, often more affordable homes in certain areas. Carriage houses, garage apartments and other types of secondary structures can also provide vital income to homeowners and increase density in neighborhoods that have experienced population loss.

These recent changes within NewZO also provide new flexibility for developers and property owners to construct accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also known as carriage houses, garage apartments, and mother-in-law suites, in certain areas of the city. ADUs are a secondary house or apartment that shares the building lot of a larger, primary house. The flexible spaces are a viable option for housing, especially when considering space for aging family members, young adults, students, or someone in need of less space than a typical single-family home offers.

Because low-income, special needs, and elderly populations often have a higher reliance on public transportation than other sectors of the population, zoning ordinances should encourage affordable housing units in walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods with convenient access to reliable public transit. Additionally, a walkable development pattern can reduce dependency on automobiles making the provision of mass transit more effective and feasible for special needs populations who either cannot afford a vehicle or are physically unable to drive.

The HNSD and partners have supported and implemented strategies identified by the 2008 Affordable Housing & Regulatory Reform Task Force. They expect to do the same for strategies and action items identified in the 2021 Housing Savannah Task Force report. Resolving Savannah's housing affordability challenges will require increased incomes, decreased housing costs, funding the gap between the two or, more likely, a combination of the three.



#### SAVANNAH GARDENS

The redevelopment of Strathmore Estates Apartments into Savannah Gardens began in 2007 after being acquired by local non-profit housing organization CHSA Development, Inc. Before its redevelopment, the community experienced a steep decline in residents, with an eventual occupancy rate of only 37%. Due to high vacancy rates, dilapidation of the structures also became a prominent issue along with crime. The neighborhood was essentially fading as more people moved away due to the declining environment.

The redevelopment project aimed to bring life back to the neighborhood by offering quality affordable housing, greenspace and other amenities in the creation of a mixed-use, mixed-income community. By the time Savannah Gardens is complete, it will include approximately 625 dwellings — 525 apartments and 100 single family homes sold to first time buyers. The occupancy rate for the apartments is about 98% and the single family houses are attractive to first time buyers seeking affordable homes.



## Missing Middle Housing

The term "missing middle" describes a range of housing types between single-detached houses and apartment buildings that have gone "missing" from many of our cities. The referenced housing types are compatible in scale with single-family homes yet are denser and can fit seamlessly into existing residential neighborhoods. They can include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, rowhouses, townhouses, cottages, ADUs, and studios. While the missing middle refers to a range of housing types, the popularity of the term has grown alongside the housing challenges facing middle-income households. Increasingly, middle income households throughout Chatham County are experiencing difficulty finding housing that suits their needs and budgets. Accordingly, the term "missing middle" is used to describe the lack of available and affordable housing options for middle-income households, both in the ownership and private rental sectors. In fact, much housing that falls under the category of "missing middle" is unaffordable to households across the income spectrum.

*While the majority of housing in both unincorporated Chatham and the city of Savannah is single-family and detached, some "missing middle" housing exists in both jurisdictions. Currently, a little over 7% of housing in unincorporated Chatham and 11% of housing in Savannah, falls into the "missing middle" housing category.*

As discussed earlier, both cost-burden and affordable housing are issues in the area. Investing in more missing middle housing has the potential to reduce housing costs as these units tend to be smaller than the traditional single family residence.

Savannah's 2019 New Zoning Ordinance (NewZO) has created an opportunity to create more "Missing Middle" housing. The updated ordinance promotes accessory dwelling units (ADUs), in certain zoning districts that exhibit a historic pattern of these uses and in other areas where lot sizes can easily accommodate the additional density. Another quintessential form of missing middle housing that is now permitted in certain areas is live-work housing in which residents can live above a commercial business. This encourages mixed-use development where two different types of land uses are existing in the same space.



## Micro Apartments

As stated in the previous section, smaller housing has a tendency to cost less, making micro apartments a viable option for increasing the affordable housing stock. Micro apartments are a form of housing that tend to be under 350 square feet. For reference, many studio apartments in the Chatham area are 600 square feet. Because micro apartments are so small, a much larger number of them can be built. Additionally, rental costs for these apartments tend to be less expensive. This housing can help young professionals have access to housing they can afford on their own, near major job sectors within the area.

## Extended Stay Hotels

Extended stay hotels offer flexible way to have longer term lodging for business trips, vacations, and more. However, they can also highlight a lack of affordable housing, as many residents throughout the country use them as a permanent living space when there is no inexpensive housing available in the area. While no Savannah specific data exists, there is a possibility that some residents may use these hotels for housing because they cannot afford or get approved for any other form of housing. Living in a hotel also offers less protection for the residents, as they can be more easily expelled for a lack of money.

### WORK FORCE HOUSING

Workforce Housing is housing affordable to households earning between 60 and 120% of area median income (AMI). Workforce housing targets middle-income workers which includes professions such as police officers, firefighters, teachers, healthcare workers, and retail workers.

—Urban Land Institute (ULI)

### SCAD SERVE

SCAD has made a commitment to the City of Savannah as part of their SCAD Serve Initiative, to help close the gap on affordable housing options in the city. Slated for Spring 2021, SCAD will convert historic Pulaski House, a three story residence hall, into a 22 workforce housing units. Students, alumni, and faculty from the School of Building Arts will contribute to this SCAD SERVE assignment focused on shelter.



# SAVANNAH'S PUBLIC HOUSING

## Housing Authority of Savannah

According to the Housing Authority of Savannah (HAS) there are eight public housing complexes within the city of Savannah that serve all populations including the elderly, disabled, and low income. HAS functions as a developer and landlord of housing programs for Savannah's low-income residents as well as provides leadership and advocates for public housing, sets policies, and ensures operation within the law. With such a significant portion of Savannah living in poverty (22.9%), publicly funded housing is critical to ensure residents have safe and secure housing.

According to HAS, all of its public housing developments are situated in convenient areas, near public transportation, schools, and shopping centers. In addition to public housing, HAS offers rental assistance for housing, contributing to the creation of mixed-income communities such as Sustainable Fellwood.

HAS created a five-year plan with goals of making several improvements for public housing options. For example, over 300 mixed income units are planned for construction within the next 10 years in the Savannah East Gateway Area along the Wheaton Street corridor between East Broad Street and the Truman Parkway. HAS plans to subsidize 94 of the units and will continue to provide more housing and rental assistance options for low-income residents. This is a part of a larger plan to deconcentrate poverty, by bringing higher income public housing households into lower income communities and vice versa. There are also plans for those public housing communities over 20 years old will be updated in accordance with HAS's FY 2020–2024 Capital Fund Program Five Year Plan.

The city of Savannah has had a persistently high unemployment rate for years, with 23% of residents currently living below the poverty level. With such a high level of poverty, a variety of housing strategies must be employed, including offering a higher variety of housing that is also affordable. Programs such as Section 8 could be a pertinent tool in offering that housing variety while also ensuring that poverty is not concentrated into one area.

In addition to providing affordable housing, a variety of programs support HAS in providing and maintaining (as in, repairing housing units and ensuring that they are in good quality) dwelling units. For example, the Housing Choice Voucher Program (also known as Section 8) provides low income, elderly, and disabled residents the opportunity to choose housing in the private market, expanding options in available housing. This is necessary as the public housing community method of providing low income housing is not always the best or singular way to address affordable housing. Other methods can be beneficial, as they reduce the concentration of poverty and increase the affordable housing stock.

Because the county has a persistently high poverty rate, there is a need for increased public housing. Such housing, in the form of a public housing complex or through the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, must be placed in an area near economic and educational opportunities. That way, low-income people will have greater access to jobs and economic opportunities.



### **PUBLIC HOUSING**

Public housing was established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Public housing comes in all sizes and types, from scattered single-family houses to high rise apartments for elderly families.

—HUD



# HOMELESSNESS

## Chatham Savannah Authority

In 2019, the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless (CSAH) identified 678 chronically homeless individuals. This one-night count primarily captures those individuals living in homeless camps, on the streets, and in emergency shelters.

This count does not include the more than 800 students enrolled in the Savannah Chatham Public School System who are experiencing homelessness. CSAH was founded by the State of Georgia and acts as the coordinating and leadership body for homeless services in Chatham County. Through its Continuum of Care (CoC) program and partnerships, the organization served 4,641 individuals in 2018. A CoC is a U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) nationally funded program that seeks to improve services for homeless people by coordinating funding, housing, and service programs.

Homelessness not only impacts individual men and women, but also entire families, and children. Within Chatham County, many homeless persons take refuge in one of the 35 unregulated camps in the area, while others sleep in motels, in their cars, or “couch surf” to avoid sleeping outside. While emergency homeless shelters are helpful in shielding individuals and families from exposure, the CSAH recognizes that it is not the only method needed to help people. The CSAH’s Continuum of Care Five Year Plan CoC (2020-2025) sets out to serve the diverse needs of the homeless population.

There are five goals identified within the CoC that will be focused on through the year 2025:

- **Goal 1:** Homelessness Prevention through Enhancing the Crisis System - In this method, providing chronically homeless individuals with permanent supportive housing is helpful. For non-chronic homeless individuals, establishing an eviction prevention fund can prevent homelessness in the first place
- **Goal 2:** Create, grow, and maintain affordable housing for at risk households
- **Goal 3:** Youth Homelessness—the Savannah Chatham County Public School System identified 1,001 homeless students in 2017. Because of this, the CSAH seeks to develop programs and services for youth who experience homelessness to prevent them from becoming the next generation of homeless adults
- **Goal 4:** Improve the sanitation and public health issues in the County’s unregulated camps
- **Goal 5:** Cross-System Integration and Redesign—Create a healthy, efficient, and cost-effective nonprofit service system for the homeless population



1 out of 17

Homeless People in Chatham County are Veterans

### WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

In Georgia, a person is considered homeless if they do not have access to traditional or permanent housing that is safe, sanitary, decent, and affordable. Individuals and families who are living on the streets or in homeless camps, shelters, motels, or their vehicles are all considered homeless.

### TINY HOUSE PROJECT

In November of 2019, CSAH formally completed the Tiny House Project community, called the Cove at Dundee, a permanent supportive housing community housing serving 71 homeless veterans; it is the first of its kind in Georgia. The community is in phase 2 of development, hoping to add 24 more permanent homes in 2021 for United States military veterans, with plans for two clubhouses for laundry, community meetings, with access to classes and supportive services, a tiny medical clinic, and gardens in the future.

## Homelessness by the Numbers



# 678

### HOMELESS

The number of chronically homeless individuals identified in Chatham County during the 2019 point-in-time count



# 800

### STUDENTS

The number of public school students experiencing homelessness



# 4,641

### USING RESOURCES

The number of homeless individuals (unduplicated) served by the Continuum of Care partners in 2018



# 280

### VETERANS

The number of homeless veterans living in Chatham County



# 35

### UNREGULATED CAMPS

The number of unregulated homeless camps that are currently active within Chatham County



# SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING

## Special Needs Housing

Individuals 75 years and older tend to have higher rates of disabilities, and as the senior population in Chatham County and Savannah continues to rise, the need for more housing that disabled individuals can comfortably live in will also increase. This requires housing with wider hallways, wide doors, handrails, and ramps for wheelchair access, while other disabled residents, such as individuals with cognitive difficulties, may require long-term residential care.

Both Chatham County and Savannah have an array of services to help its residents. For example, domestic violence shelters offer safe and private housing for victims of intimate partner violence and their families. Additionally, rehabilitation centers for individuals recovering from drug addiction and mental illness, residential facilities for people with developmental disabilities, and transitional housing for homeless families and individuals are also available. Further, a number of agencies provide subsidized or affordable housing for older adults as well as hospice residences for patients with terminal illness.

*Around 16% of the population in Savannah has a disability*

*—American Community Survey, 2018*

### WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

A disability is defined as one of six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty.

—CDC

*Almost 7% of Savannah residents have a difficulty living independently*

*—American Community Survey, 2018*



”

”

Although not all-inclusive, Figure 6.24 below displays the percentage of residents within Chatham County and Savannah with a disability as defined by the American Community Survey (2018) that may have special housing needs.

## Disabled by Age Group, 2014–2018

	Chatham	Savannah
Age	%	
Under 5 Years	2.9	2.3
5 to 17 Years	6.6	8.1
18 to 34 Years	8.7	10.4
35 to 64 Years	16.9	19
65 to 74 Years	22.2	27
75 Years and Over	58.3	59.8

Figure 6.24–Percent Disability by Age, Chatham County & Savannah  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Disability Type, 2018

	Chatham
Disability Type	%
Hearing Difficulty	4
Vision Difficulty	2.6
Cognitive Difficulty	6.5
Ambulatory Difficulty	8.6
Self-Care Difficulty	2.4
Independent Living Difficulty	6.3

Figure 6.25–Percent Disability Type, Chatham County  
U.S. Census Bureau: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



### THE PHOENIX HOUSE

Through Union Mission, the Phoenix House is a 10-bed housing program for people living with HIV/AIDS that also offers short-term rental and utility assistance. Residents work with a case manager to develop an Individualized Service Plan that will guide them into independent living. Services include HIV/AIDS healthcare assessment and treatment, peer education, resource coordination, support groups, and substance abuse treatment.



### SAVANNAH CENTER FOR BLIND & LOW VISION

Today Savannah CBLV provides service in the home or in its center promoting independence and dignity for people with vision loss throughout coastal Georgia.

Savannah Center for Blind and Low Vision opens its doors to anyone with visual impairment and currently serves over 200 students each year.

# RESILIENCE & HOUSING

## Resiliency Planning

Resiliency planning is a way to reduce indirect vulnerabilities by improving the long-term conditions that can leave communities exposed to hazards. There are six core sectors around which communities can plan for resiliency.

These are:

- Community
- Economic
- Health and Social
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Watersheds and Natural Resources

These six sectors are broad lenses through which a community can examine the impacts, identify stresses, or weaken their ability to respond, and strategically plan to address these upsets. Integration of activities across each sector is key to developing a resilient community. These sectors are interdependent, yet many strategies are likely to have a cross-sector impact. With the rise in extreme weather events, many communities are looking for ways to prepare for disasters that accompany the changing climate. New studies, regulations, and design practices are helping to address current and future needs.

Additionally, low-income communities are often disproportionately affected by weather- and climate-related disasters, as they are often located in low-lying areas that are vulnerable to flooding. Resilient design can offer solutions to dangerous disruptions while alleviating long-term costs.

Emergency preparedness also builds pathways to make a difference not only for the built environment but also for residents within vulnerable communities.

Much of Chatham County is a flat coastal plain, making it susceptible to flooding, especially during the springtime and hurricane season. As the impact of climate changes compound and grow, not only will flooding issues worsen but higher temperatures will most likely continue to threaten residents and vulnerable populations during the hot summer months.

To alleviate these threats, it is recommended that any new housing developments, most notably affordable housing developments, be built outside of flood zones and with an elevated, more sustainable design in mind. It is essential that residents living in high-impact flood zones understand how to protect themselves and their homes during rainy and hurricane seasons.

Lastly, the further people live from their jobs, schools, and services, the longer they spend commuting in cars, which creates more greenhouse gas emissions. When people have affordable options for housing close to where they work, they can spend less time commuting and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, building affordable places to live in close proximity to public transit options is an effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

# HISTORIC HOUSING INVENTORY

## Historic & Cultural Resources

The greatest numbers of identified historic resources in the city of Savannah are located within neighborhoods that are listed on, or are eligible for National Register of Historic Places listing.

Ninety-two percent of these resources are residential structures. These pedestrian-oriented, urban residential neighborhoods offer numerous advantages for rehabilitation such as established shade trees, paved streets, sidewalks, water and sewer, trash pick-up and public transportation. It makes more economic sense to maintain and upgrade older neighborhoods than to further expand suburban construction, which places new demands on transportation and other infrastructure systems.

Savannah's historic housing stock provides opportunities for a variety of housing types. The quality of materials, craftsmanship, and detail would be prohibitively expensive to duplicate today. Listing on the National Register qualifies these houses for various federal and local rehabilitation tax incentive programs.

Historic preservation is a pertinent tool in increasing affordable housing, as newer housing units tend to be more expensive. It can also involve creative solutions, such as adapting and reforming a historic, non-housing structure, into inexpensive housing. This subject is explained in greater detail in the Quality of Life element under Historic & Cultural Resources. Repairing and repurposing historic housing is one of the many necessary strategies to increase the affordable housing stock, and thus should receive more research and backing.

### ARE YOU LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

In the Quality of Life Element of Plan 2040, you can find more information about advantages and challenges facing historic neighborhoods on page 346



# DILAPIDATION & HOUSING

## Dilapidated Housing

Dilapidation refers to a structure in a state of disrepair. As stated earlier in this element, a significant portion of housing is 30 years old or older. This puts these structures at a greater risk of deterioration and eventual dilapidation. Vacant properties are also at an increased risk of becoming dilapidated.

The Chatham County / City of Savannah Land Bank Authority (LBA) is tasked with acquiring vacant properties that can be renovated or developed with new housing. The LBA sells or otherwise makes acquired properties available to parties who are able and willing to improve the properties with results that include new quality affordable housing and improved neighborhoods, property values, and quality of life. The 1K-in-10 program, as discussed earlier in the element, is one of the programs currently supporting the effort to reduce dilapidated and vacant housing in the area.

In 2019, there were an estimated 4,286 vacant dwellings in the area. Because of their vacancy, these structures are at a higher risk of dilapidation. According to a 2020 document the City of Savannah created in collaboration with Georgia Tech, the City has three methods to address dilapidation:

- Non acquisition-based: improve and assist in the retention of affordable housing. This is to ensure that affordable housing can be maintained, to prevent dilapidation
- Acquisition-based: obtain abandoned properties and return them to productive societal use. This method directly addresses existing dilapidated housing
- Post-acquisition: focused on housing affordability and stable tenure. This method ensures that housing is affordable enough to remain occupied, and thus maintained



According to a document by the City's Housing & Neighborhood Services Department, the 1K-in-10 program currently has two strategies when acquiring properties: a single property strategy and a multiple property strategy.

- Single Property Strategy: Facilitates the acquisition and/or redevelopment of a single, dilapidated, abandoned, property located within a block of housing that, for the most part, is in otherwise good condition anywhere within the city
- Multiple Property Strategy: Facilitates the acquisition and/or redevelopment of multiple dilapidated, abandoned properties located near one another within a portion of a neighborhood with the expectation that such investment here will pave the way for future redevelopment in other parts of the neighborhood

Acquiring properties through eminent domain is considered a last resort. Properties acquired this way will be transferred to the Land Bank Authority. The heirs of the property will be given the first opportunity to acquire the property if they have the intention to renovate it or construct new housing.

Considering the number of sub-standard units and some of the older traditional neighborhoods that are in danger of more gentrification and further demise, the eradication of blight should be at the forefront of the city and the county's focus moving forward.



#### LAND BANK

The Chatham County/City of Savannah Land Bank Authority was created to acquire vacant, abandoned, tax delinquent properties in the county and city to assist in the return of the properties to a productive use.



# RACIAL EQUITY & LEADERSHIP TASK FORCE

*Savannah's REAL Taskforce; REPORT TO SAPELO FOUNDATION; June 2021*

## REAL Taskforce

The Racial Equity and Leadership (REAL) Savannah Taskforce was a new advisory body formed in 2020 to address structural racial inequities in Savannah. The taskforce is led by Savannah's former mayor, Dr. Otis Samuel Johnson, and has a mandate from Savannah's current mayor, Van Johnson II, to complete an action plan that the city government can help resource and implement.

## Housing

While Savannah is still majority black, several areas of the city- downtown, midtown, Thomas Square, etc., have shifted over the last two decades. Race is one factor; place is the other. Savannah's African American population has only decreased by 1.5% since 2010, but if you look more closely at the census tract level, there's a story- not just about race, but about racial and economic segregation. For example, between 2000 and 2010, census tract 114, just south of Forsyth Park, lost half its black population- almost 800 residents, and added 500 white residents. Next to it is census tract 113, which lost about 600 black residents and gained almost 7,000 white residents during the same period. A demographic shift of this proportion did not result from natural migration, or even from wealthier white buyers displacing poorer black residents. This is the result of state abdication, prolonged disinvestment that left many black communities in a state of arrested development only to be "revitalized" by a private market that further privileges white wealth. This story was lifted up in every committee in our time together. It weaves every issue area of the REAL Taskforce into a cohesive narrative, that the fate of the city is inextricable to the deliberative expansion of opportunity for its black residents.

The committee identified the following underlying drivers of racial disparities in Savannah's housing market:

- Multi-generational income and wealth disparities between races in Savannah's population
- An exceedingly inflated housing market, pressured by a steadily growing population, particularly in the middle to upper-middle income range
- A housing shortage, caused by the aging and abandonment of existing properties, coupled with the rising cost of labor and materials
- Discrimination and structural barriers in the mortgage industry
- Multi-generational loss of land and poverty, particularly among African Americans, resulting in a disparity in knowledge and comfort with the home buying process

The following REAL Taskforce data supports these determinants of Savannah's racial home affordability gap:

- Those earning 120% or less than the area median income in Savannah are cost-burdened, meaning that they spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing. It is believed that the vast majority of this segment of the population are people of color
- Home values in Savannah have increased by 7.3% over the past year and are forecast to rise another 10.1% in the next 12 months
- Savannah has the second highest cost of rent in Georgia, leaving 55% of renters spending more than 30% of their household income on rent and utilities

*Savannah's REAL Taskforce; REPORT TO SAPELO FOUNDATION; June 2021*

- Over the past 10 years, the Savannah metropolitan area has added nearly 100,000 new residents. In the next five years, the city of Savannah is forecast to add about 6,000 new residents to its current population of 145,500
- There are over 9,000 families on the waiting list for affordable housing at the Housing Authority of Savannah, 76% of which earn less than \$12,500. The waiting list has been closed since 2013
- African Americans account for 55% of Savannah but 96% of Housing Authority of Savannah tenants
- There are over 2,600 properties in Savannah that are currently unlivable and in need of repair and rehabilitation. Property owners find that deflated property values in low-wealth communities prevent home repair loans
- The legacies of redlining and other segregating forces have limited Black borrowers' access to traditional credit and exposed them disproportionately to predatory lending sources
- 21.9% of the home ownership gap can be explained by differences in FICO score distribution between black and white Americans
- In 2019, 62% of mortgage applications submitted by Black residents of Chatham County were denied, compared to only 26% denied to white applicants. Only 1,160 Black households applied for mortgages, compared to 4,882 submitted by white households
- The rate of land ownership among African Americans has steadily declined since it peaked in 1910 through systematic stealing, loss of title, denial of federal aid and prohibitive laws

- In Savannah, 71% of white residents are homeowners and 48.8% of Black residents are homeowners
- A recent Northwestern University study found that racial gaps in mortgage loan denial in the U.S. have only declined slightly in the last 30–40 years. An MIT study calculated that the annual difference of \$743 in mortgage interest payments, \$550 in mortgage insurance premiums and \$390 in property taxes between Black and white borrowers, when invested over 30 years results in lost retirement savings of \$67,320 for Black homeowners

These compounding challenges were summarized by the following problem statement:

In Savannah, wages are not keeping up with the increasing cost of housing, demand for housing is outpacing affordability and the racial makeup of home ownership does not reflect the racial makeup of our city.

By scanning the city's existing landscape of resources and a series of discussions about realistic alternatives to the status quo, the committee explored the following strategies to ameliorate the core problem. Each strategy can be implemented alone or with other strategies.

1. The implementation of racial equity metrics in current housing programs in Savannah
2. The expansion of existing home ownership programs at Housing Authority of Savannah (HAS)
3. Creation of a joint Chatham County & City of Savannah online developer's toolkit
4. Incorporate density bonuses into the City zoning code in areas already slated for substantial growth by the City of Savannah



# HOUSING GOALS

## GOAL 1

*Improve neighborhood stability where all residents, regardless of income, can occupy, maintain, and improve their homes without undue financial hardship*

Dilapidated and abandoned properties, structures, and lots negatively impact neighborhoods and residents including quality of life, marketability and property values. They encourage disinvestment and criminal behavior that can lead to gentrification. Existing homeowners and other property owners are unable to secure financing to improve property. The conditions help strip value and generational wealth from existing property owners who maintain their property in good condition. They make attracting new homebuyers, renters, and investment difficult.

Modest and low incomes of some homeowners and renters add to the difficulty of maintaining and improving property. Many elderly homeowners living on fixed incomes find it difficult to afford home improvement loans. Many renters with low income find it difficult to afford rents that are required to cover the debt service associated with renovated or new rental housing.

These challenges are sometimes compounded as neighborhood marketability and values begin to increase—leading to gentrification. Striking a delicate balance that results in socio-economic diversity, rather than wholesale gentrification, could be beneficial to existing neighborhood property owners and residents as well as new members of the neighborhood.

### Objectives:

- Maintain, improve, construct, and development quality affordable housing in existing neighborhoods
- Enforce housing and property maintenance codes
- Renovate or redevelopment blighted, abandoned, properties with new affordable housing
- Provide affordable home repair, construction, development, and purchase options
- Prevent wholesale gentrification as neighborhood conditions and marketability improve



## GOAL 2

*Increase supportive housing for special needs populations, such as individuals who are homeless, mentally ill, disabled, and residents in drug recovery*

Shelter is a basic human need, but for too many it is not a need that it is being met. For those in the most vulnerable communities such as people with drug addiction, mental illness, chronic health conditions, or disabilities, having a safe, stable home is fundamental to ensuring adequate treatment and recovery. In many instances these individuals are also struggling with long-term poverty and may experience periods of homelessness, interrupting treatment and constraining recovery efforts creating a vicious cycle that causes them to spiral further into poverty and poor health.

Providing supportive housing for special needs populations is a key component to breaking the cycle, reducing incarcerations and the use of emergency services by vulnerable individuals, and assisting in their becoming active members of the community.

### Objectives:

- Support local, state and federal policy and legislation benefitting those with special housing needs including those that help prevent housing discrimination
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for special needs populations and that help prevent housing discrimination
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain affordable housing for special needs populations



## GOAL 3

### *Increase affordable housing stock*

The cost of housing has increased disproportionately to wages, resulting in a lack of affordable housing options for renters and potential homeowners alike. The absence of sufficient affordable housing negatively impacts the entire community, not only those struggling to find housing or to pay for their current housing. Insufficient affordable housing affects employers in recruiting and retaining employees, impacts the economy through a decrease in discretionary spending, increases social costs associated with evictions and public assistance, reduces the health of citizens who cannot afford to access preventative health services, and overall, decreases the quality of life of many in the community.

Working to increase the supply of quality housing that is affordable to all persons, but especially to those with modest and low incomes, is critical. The Housing Savannah Task Force estimates that in 2021, Savannah households most likely in need of quality housing they can afford are those making less than \$50,000 annually. Too often, affordable housing is associated with only the very lowest income members of a community.

### **Objectives:**

- Develop public policy/legislation, ordinances, zoning and subdivision regulations, building designs, and construction methods/materials that help reduce housing costs without sacrificing quality and that facilitate increasing affordable housing availability
- Acquire property necessary to provide additional affordable housing in existing neighborhoods, near public transportation, and near employment centers, and to help limit gentrification
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for the homeless, renters, homeowners, and homebuyers
- Sustain and increase participation in the 9% and 4% low income housing tax credit program, and in the issuance of Housing Authority of Savannah bonds, for the renovation and/or development of affordable rental housing
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain additional affordable housing

## GOAL 4

### *Decrease homelessness*

Homeless describes a person lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence. Poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, and lack of affordable housing are common causes of homelessness. Once homeless, factors such as the lack of access to proper healthcare, sanitation, jobs, and educational opportunities can make it difficult to overcome homelessness. With assistance, however, many homeless persons can become active members of their communities again.

Implementing prevention programs aimed at providing affordable housing, improving access to proper mental health and healthcare services, and providing financial safety nets for those without one are key to efficiently and effectively decreasing homelessness. Interventions to prevent homelessness are more cost effective than addressing issues after someone is already homeless.

### **Objectives:**

- Support local, state and federal policy and legislation benefitting the homeless and those in need of transitional housing
- Provide eviction and foreclosure prevention assistance to those in danger of losing their home and becoming homeless
- Develop new and innovative approaches and models for housing the homeless and those in transition out of homelessness
- Significantly increase and expand local investments in the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund and additional leveraged investments for the retention, improvement, construction, and development of affordable housing for the homeless and those in need of transitional housing
- Increase partnerships and capacity of those needed to produce and maintain affordable housing for the homeless and those in need of transitional housing

