

HOUSING INVENTORY

INTRODUCTION

The characteristics of a community's housing stock provide a great deal of insight into its history, its economy, its changing needs, and its values. This is particularly true of older urban communities like Fitchburg, where the age, type and density of housing reveal a great deal about the city's past and present.

AGE OF HOUSING STOCK

According to 1990 U.S. Census data, 52.5% of Fitchburg's housing stock was built prior to 1940. This is significantly higher than the statewide (38.8%) and county (37.4%) averages and appears to reflect the historic development of housing in the inner city around the turn of the century, as well as the relative lack of growth in housing since that time. This is further supported by census data indicating that only 28.1% of the City's housing has been built since 1960, compared to 42.3% for Worcester County as a whole. As has been well documented in "The City and The River" and other historic texts describing Fitchburg's past, the growth in river and rail related industries during the late 19th and early 20th century resulted in a corresponding demand for housing which was affordable to working class families and within walking distance to employment, schools and other essential needs, as the automobile was not yet available as a

means of transportation. To satisfy this demand, developers, and in some cases, mill owners attempting to attract workers, built much of the multifamily rental housing stock which still predominates today in the neighborhoods surrounding the Nashua River. According to the 1990 Census, only 34.4% of Fitchburg's 16,665 housing units were single family homes, compared to 55.7% for Worcester County and 53.4% for Massachusetts.

The relative lack of new housing development since 1940 can be attributed in large part to the decline of those industries which spurred the city's initial growth and to shifts in the commercial economy toward highway accessible locations. No longer affording workers the advantages of access to work and essential shopping, the more densely built inner city housing stock has gradually become a less attractive choice in favor of newly constructed, suburban and rural single family housing, which offer larger lots and home sizes. Public safety is also cited as a reason for housing choice in suburban and rural areas by those home buyers who hold the common perception that crime rates are higher in urban areas.

HIGH PERCENTAGE OF RENTAL HOUSING

Citywide, 1990 Census data indicates that the number of renter occupied units (7,948, or 51.7%) is slightly higher than those of owner occupied units (7,415, or 48.3%). Compared to the county (61.3%) and state (59.3%) totals, Fitchburg has a low rate of owner occupancy. The ratio of renter to owner occupied units in

Fitchburg has historically been very high and is consistent with the lower median income and higher poverty rates in the city. It is also reflective of the city's blue collar history, when most of this housing was built, as mill workers created a large demand for rental housing development in the late 19th century.



Recent housing growth in Fitchburg has mostly been single family homes.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Since the 1990 Census, there have been a number of changes in Fitchburg's housing stock. The increasing cost and density in the high growth areas around I-495, such as Framingham and Littleton, has pushed housing development further west into the North Central Massachusetts region. Approximately 300 occupancy permits have been issued since 1990 for new single family homes in Fitchburg, the vast majority of which are owner occupied. During the same period, nearly the same number of housing units have been demolished by public and private sources. Virtually all of these demolished units were from multifamily structures built before 1940. Only 16 units of new multifamily housing have received occupancy permits since the Census. If these trends continue, the number of owner occupied housing units in the city will soon exceed the number of rental units for the first time in its history.

**Occupancy Permits since the 1990 Census:
October, 1997**

	New	Rehab	Total
Single Family	298	8	306
Condominium	18*	6*	24*
Two Family	5	6	11
Three of More Family	1	9	10

*Units allowed by each condominium permit varies widely.

As the map “New Single Family Homes” indicates, the homes

which constitute the majority of the new housing development in Fitchburg have mostly been built around the periphery of the city, in subdivision developments off of arterial streets such as Rollstone, Rindge, and Ashby State Roads. The majority of the new duplexes and condominiums have also been constructed in these outlying areas. At the same time, housing demolition has been taking place almost exclusively in Fitchburg’s inner city neighborhoods.

HOUSING CHALLENGES FACING THE INNER CITY

NONCONFORMING LOTS

The city’s central neighborhoods are faced with many issues which are common to older urban communities. As Fitchburg’s central neighborhoods were developed prior to the adoption of its first zoning ordinance in 1945, few of the lots in these areas meet the city’s current lot area requirement. A large number also fail to meet building setback and frontage requirements which are currently in effect. The data indicates that 67.1% of the properties in the Residence B zoning district and 81.9% of those in Residence C do not conform to the minimum lot sizes for those zones. The majority of the homes in the neighborhoods are constructed on lots ranging from approximately 2000 to 6000 square feet - well below the current minimum lot requirement of 10,000 square feet. Any new construction or substantial renovation on a nonconforming lot requires a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals, placing an

increased burden on improvements in those areas most in need of redevelopment.

LIMITED ACCESS TO REHABILITATION FINANCING

Access to financing is limited for those who wish to improve properties in these areas, as many financial institutions are unwilling to provide for the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of multifamily rental properties in low income neighborhoods.

In 1993, the Office of the Planning Coordinator conducted a market survey with rental property owners and area banks which confirmed both the need for and lack of access to such financing. In a meeting held at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the survey, representatives from the local and regional banking cited their unwillingness to lend to this market as a result of poor investment decisions made in the mid 1980's when property values became artificially inflated and the resultant increase in foreclosures severely impacted a number of institutions. Although market conditions have improved since that time, access to financing remains limited, a condition which exacerbates problems of physical and economic decline in these neighborhoods.



Fitchburg's image gets a boost from housing rehabilitation.



LEAD PAINT

In a related problem, City officials estimate that up to 65% of the housing units in the older neighborhoods contain lead paint. This represents both a substantial health risk for children and a liability concern for property owners. As the cost of deleading typically ranges from \$2000 to \$10,000 per unit and does not add commensurately to property values, it is often beyond the budget of small landlords and lower income homeowners who face problems of limited equity in their properties and a lack of access to financing.

VACANCY RATES

Exacerbating these concerns are increases in vacancy and transiency rates which have occurred in the older neighborhoods since the 1990 census. At the time of the census the vacancy rates in the census tracts representing the areas typically known as lower Cleghorn and the College neighborhood, were 8.5% and 13.3% respectively, as compared with a city wide vacancy rate of 7.8%. Yet, by 1993, when the Planning Office survey of rental property owners was conducted, there were indications that the average vacancy rates in these two lower income neighborhoods had climbed as high as 25%. Although there is only anecdotal information available to explain the possible reasons for this increase, many see it as indicative of neighborhood flight by tenants of moderate income who were in a position to take advantage of the reduction in the cost of overall housing by either moving to more desirable locations or by purchasing new homes.

TRANSIENCY RATES

Transiency rates in the city are more difficult to quantify; however, it is widely believed that transiency, particularly among lower income and renter populations, has increased greatly over the past 20 years in the city. There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence from rental property owners regarding tenant families who used to live in the same rental unit for generations while working in one of Fitchburg's inner city manufacturing plants, such as the Anwelt Shoe factory, Simonds Saw and Steel, and the various paper and woolen mills, which were all located within walking distance of these neighborhoods. As these employment centers moved or ceased operation, an increase in transiency was a natural outcome.

In recent years, however, transiency has apparently increased even further among renters. This assertion is supported by public school enrollment statistics which reveal that, in spite of a drop-out rate of 3%, a full 30% of the students who start school in September of each year is replaced by the end of the school year in June. The increase in transiency, particularly among low income renters, is often cited as a key factor in the reduced profitability and value of rental property. Combined with high vacancy rates, the costs associated with short term, or transient tenancies, are seen as leading causes of increases in tax delinquency, deferred property maintenance and, ultimately, abandonment of rental properties in the older neighborhoods.

NEGATIVE IMAGE

Many perceive Fitchburg as having high crime, poor schools, and related problems which are typically linked in the public mind with inner city urban life. In addition, although utility deregulation will soon become a reality, there is a lingering perception that utility rates in Fitchburg are among the highest in the nation. This perception is likely to have a greater effect on prospective new business expansion in the city but may also impact choice of residence. The visual impact of the City's aged infrastructure, particularly its streets, sidewalks, lighting and fencing, especially in older neighborhoods and entryways to the City, contribute to a perception that Fitchburg is in a state of decline.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The relatively advanced age of the city's housing stock presents both a challenge and an opportunity; a challenge in the sense that a high number of properties are in need of costly rehabilitation at a time when limited property values have restricted access to rehabilitation financing; an opportunity in the sense that the preservation of many of these properties, particularly those which are notable for their history and architecture, may hold one key to enhancing the value and appeal of the community as a whole, as has occurred in a number of older urban cities in the northeast.

VALUE AND AFFORDABILITY OF OWNERSHIP HOUSING

DECLINE IN VALUES

Residential values decreased significantly in Fitchburg between 1990 and 1996. While there was a similar trend in residential values throughout the Northern Worcester County Region, prices dropped more sharply in Fitchburg than in Leominster, Gardner or Worcester County as a whole. The chart below illustrates both the fall in prices and the leveling off of this decline around 1992. It also indicates that the cities of Leominster and Worcester experienced a rise in prices after 1995 while prices in Fitchburg and Gardner remained level.

Median Home Sale Price

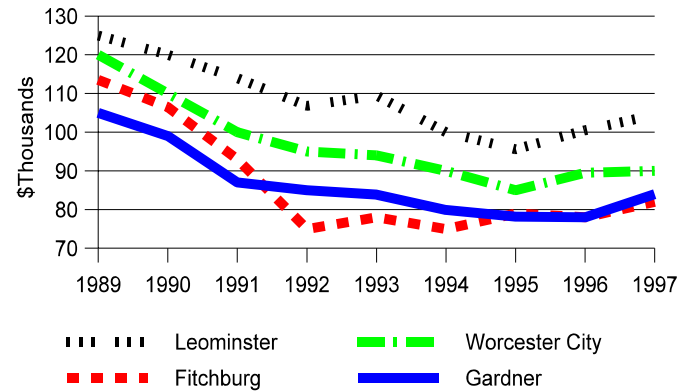


Figure 1

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

"Affordable Housing" is commonly defined both publicly and by the banking industry as housing which costs no more than 30% of a household's gross annual income. According to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) the median household income in 1996 for the Fitchburg/Leominster area was \$45,500. Such a family could afford a monthly housing cost of \$1,137.00, enough to purchase a home well in excess of \$100,000.

During 1996, a total of 472 residential properties were sold in Fitchburg with a median sales price of \$78,000 (Banker and Tradesman). A buyer who purchases a home for \$78,800 and puts down 10% of the purchase price, receives a 7.5% mortgage interest rate, and pays \$200 per month in taxes and insurance will have a monthly housing cost (principal, interest, taxes and insurance) of approximately \$672. Thus, for the majority of households in the Fitchburg/ Leominster area, the median price of a home in Fitchburg (\$78,000) is very affordable. Housing prices are significantly lower in Fitchburg than in its neighboring communities. The median sales price of residential properties in surrounding towns and cities for 1996 are provided in Figure 2.

NUMBER OF RESIDENTIAL SALES

The demand for housing in Fitchburg may also be observed in the number of residential sales as compared to those of other Northern Worcester County cities. According to Banker &

1996 Home Sale Prices

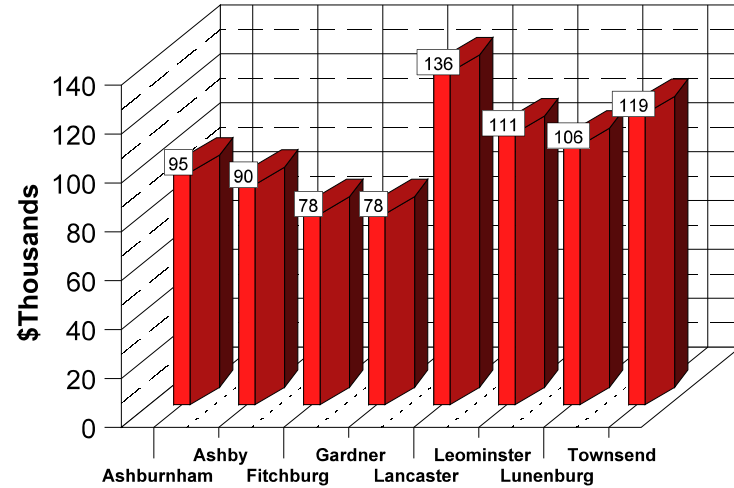


Figure 2

Tradesman the total number of residential sales between 1989 and 1997 in Fitchburg was significantly lower than the total for Leominster, but higher than that of Gardner. A substantial decrease of sales occurred in Fitchburg and Leominster between 1989 and 1991, coinciding with the national recession. Both cities have seen strong recoveries in home sales since 1991. The decline in home sales in Gardner during the recession was much

less significant than those in Fitchburg and Leominster, as was the increase between 1991 and 1995. Since 1995, however, Gardner has seen a steady increase in home sales. These trends demonstrate that the demand for housing is moving westward through the Montachusett region. The fact that Fitchburg consistently has lower home sales than Leominster, despite their comparable size and location, is likely the result of the low demand for housing in Fitchburg’s inner city. Demand for housing elsewhere in Fitchburg is much stronger, as is demonstrated by the location of new homes receiving occupancy permits.

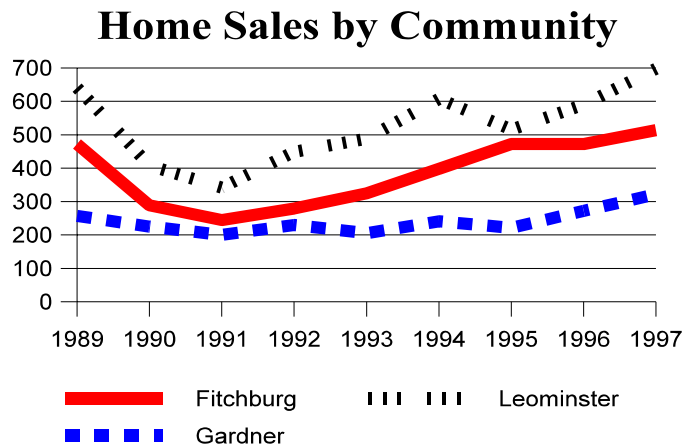


Figure 3

FUTURE HOUSING DEMAND AND DEVELOPMENT

THE DEMAND FOR HOUSING

Two trends can be expected to have major impacts on housing demands in Fitchburg. The aging of the “baby boom” generation will produce a growing demand for elderly housing. Increasingly, retirement age couples are returning to cities which they left when they had children. Cities still provide greater convenience, especially for those who do not drive, and a sense of community which is difficult to achieve in an automobile-centered suburb. As demonstrated in the Demographics section of this document, Fitchburg has a large and growing percentage of older people. Housing occupied by couples older than child-rearing age is typically a net gain for the municipal budget, as the property taxes paid by these residents, who do not require schooling, will typically be higher than costs of providing municipal services. The facilities required by these new residents will vary from smaller, single family homes for working couples whose children have left home, to retirement communities, to assisted living facilities. Of great concern to these potential residents, however, is public safety and appearance. In spite of the relative affordability of its housing, the public perception of Fitchburg must improve if the city is to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Another important trend is the westward migration of the state’s employment centers. The demand for quality single family

homes which resulted in the development of the city's new subdivisions is expected to increase as Fitchburg becomes a shorter commute from large numbers of jobs. While the demand for more industrial and commercial space has yet to reach the immediate area, economic growth along Route 2 and I-190 is expected to further increase the demand for housing in Fitchburg for moderate-to-high income families. A significant percentage of new housing development in Fitchburg is located close to Route 2, according to statistics obtained on occupancy permits for new homes provided between April of 1990 to October of 1997. Most home buyers and developers consider convenient highway access to be beneficial, and seek out properties close to the highway.

This preference discourages development in much of Fitchburg, especially in the central neighborhoods. However, as the Stoneybrook and Candlewood Park subdivisions illustrate, this factor alone does not always dictate housing choice. Rural areas of northern Fitchburg are as much as a 20 minute drive away from Route 2, yet substantial development is occurring in those areas. Many new home buyers prefer living in rural areas, and are willing to sacrifice convenience to do so. As northern Fitchburg offers both affordability and rural character, development in this area may continue to increase.

AVAILABLE LAND FOR NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

According to a Build Out Analysis generated by the Office of the Planning Coordinator's Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the City has a wealth of undeveloped land which could support future development. The figures in the following chart represent a conservative estimate of potential buildable lots, given current zoning. Even this conservative estimate reveals that Fitchburg has a great potential for future housing development.

RESULTS OF RESIDENTIAL BUILDOUT ANALYSIS

Census Tract	Approximate Location of Census Tract	Current Lots	Additional Lots	Total Lots at Buildout	% Built Out
7101	South-east Fitchburg, east of the River, to Lunenburg Street	932	84	1016	91.7%
7102	South-Central Fitchburg	1919	1792	3711	51.7%
7103	West Fitchburg	968	1657	2625	36.9%
7104	Upper Cleghorn	697	108	805	86.6%
7105	Lower Cleghorn	632	119	751	84.2%
7106	The South Side	1689	517	2206	76.6%
7107	Downtown, from Lower Main Street to Academy Street	200	38	238	84.0%
7108	The College Neighborhood, Intown north of Academy Street	1067	586	1653	64.5%
7109	Fitchburg State College	5	11	16	31.3%
7110	South of Pearl Street, North of Lunenburg Street	752	151	903	83.3%
7111	Northern Fitchburg	1382	3895	5277	26.2%
Total		10,243	8958	19,201	53.3%

MUNICIPAL COSTS OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

Residential development typically costs a city more than it yields in compensatory property taxes. Schooling for children is the most expensive municipal service provided, but other costs can be substantial as well. A residential development which includes new streets, for example, requires the city to plow those streets in

the winter, repair them as needed, maintain sewer and water lines, and otherwise absorb the costs associated with new infrastructure. Added to these costs are other considerations such as the loss of open space and the urbanization or suburbanization of neighborhoods which had been primarily rural in character. However, the residential development which has occurred in

Fitchburg over the last several years, and which is expected to increase in the near future, has had positive effects as well. The most obvious is an increase in the percentage of city residents with moderate-to-high incomes. The money they spend supports existing businesses, encourages new businesses to locate here, and generally aids the city's economic development. Young families and older couples, those most likely to buy single family homes, also have a positive influence on the city by providing stability and taking an interest in civic affairs, such as the quality of schooling. The presence of a large body of skilled professionals may influence business to start or move here.

One way to take advantage of the positive effects of new development while minimizing costs is to encourage redevelopment of existing homes and neighborhoods. The rehabilitation of vacant housing or construction of new housing in established neighborhoods, does not require the installation of new infrastructure, saving the municipal costs associated with maintenance. In addition, accommodating new school children in an existing bus route is less expensive than extending the route, or implementing a new one. The introduction of quality single family housing into the inner city also promotes stability and raises property values. As many of these neighborhoods contain high numbers of low-income residents, the construction of housing for middle income buyers would benefit inner city businesses, including those in the Intown area.

FITCHBURG'S USE OF FEDERAL AND STATE HOUSING FUNDS

The intent of this section is to provide accurate information on the strategies adopted by the City of Fitchburg in addressing its housing needs through available federal and state resources. Appendix C provides detailed information regarding the City's use of federal and state housing programs from 1993 through April of 1996. It should be noted that this information covers only those housing activities directly carried out or funded by the City. It does not include activities conducted by private, non-profit, or other entities over whom there is no municipal control, other than through enforcement of zoning and permitting requirements. No funds received, administered, or allocated by the City are used or have been used to provide rental subsidies for low income or special needs housing. Rental subsidies in Fitchburg are provided through a combination of local and regional housing authorities and through non-profit and for-profit housing developers and agencies. These agencies and developers generally receive funding for subsidized housing directly from a variety of available state and federal funding sources.

The City's housing investment strategies have historically been directed toward the following goals: improved safety and appearance of its older neighborhoods, stabilization of real estate values and improvement of overall living conditions for its

residents. To achieve these goals, the City's housing investment strategy in recent years has focused on several objectives;

- To encourage owner occupancy and first time homeownership in primarily renter occupied neighborhoods, thus increasing the number of families with a personal stake in the neighborhood's future.
- To prioritize landscaping and facade improvements in a manner which will increase real estate values and remove barriers to private investment.
- To board and/or demolish abandoned and unsafe properties which spread blight and serve as a stimulus for increased neighborhood crime and disinvestment.

These objectives are consistent with a larger investment strategy adopted by the City to improve the quality of life in its inner city neighborhoods. This larger strategy includes the provision of funds for various public infrastructure improvements such as sidewalk and street reconstruction, park and playground improvements, aggressive code enforcement efforts, and an increase in neighborhood police patrols. The recent lower Main Street/College Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, which calls for a variety of public and private investments in both housing and community development, is an example of the type of comprehensive investment strategy being employed to stabilize

the City's older neighborhoods.

Financing for rental property rehabilitation in these neighborhoods has been minimal in recent years. Those properties which have been assisted with the use of CDBG program funding have generally been subjected to the following requirements:

- The owner must have a minimum 10% cash equity ownership in the property.
- The owner must demonstrate a positive record in rental property management.
- The owner must privately financing at least 75% of the total project costs.

The specific housing programs¹ currently implemented by the City are described below:

- Homeowner Rehabilitation Program - for existing owner occupants

¹All programs listed are administered through the Fitchburg Office of the Planning Coordinator and are funded by the public and private sources listed in Appendix: HOUSING.

- Housing Ownership Opportunity Program (HOOP) - for first time homeowners
- Rental Rehabilitation Program/Project Rejuvenate - for rental property owners
- Demolition of Abandoned and Unsafe Properties
- Boarding and Sealing of Abandoned Properties

DEMOLITION AS A COMPONENT OF MUNICIPAL HOUSING STRATEGY

From 1980 through 1990 when the housing market was very strong across the state, virtually no city funding was utilized (or needed) to demolish abandoned and unsafe housing. Since this period, the city has expended millions (in federal and state grants) to demolish such properties. From 1992 through the first half of 1997, the city demolished 236 units of housing, the majority of which were large multifamily rental properties abandoned by their owners. Not included in these figures are privately funded demolitions, which also increased during this period according to the Building Department, which issues permits for such demolitions. Demolition has reduced density in the city's densest areas, removed health and safety hazards, improved the areas' appearance, and increased neighborhood stability. However, the issue of what happens to

these lots after demolition remains unresolved. While vacant lots represent an improvement over abandoned buildings, overgrown and litter strewn lots still contribute to urban blight. A number of future possible uses for demolition lots have been suggested. Neighborhood organizations have proposed the development of playgrounds and community gardens. Others have proposed new single family housing and/or use by abutting rental properties to create off street parking for tenants. While there is a consensus that such amenities would improve the quality of life in these neighborhoods, a number of obstacles currently prevent their realization:

- The cost of constructing and maintaining new playgrounds appears unrealistic at a time when the city is fiscally challenged to properly care for existing playgrounds. In addition, the majority of lots in question are too small for playground use.
- As referenced in the section on Housing Challenges Facing The City, virtually all demolition lots fail to conform to current zoning requirements for new housing construction. This factor, combined with low market values has virtually precluded any new housing development in these neighborhoods.
- The majority of demolition lots remain in private ownership and are thus not available for these proposed

re-uses. While most are in the process of being taken by the City for non payment of taxes, this process often takes several years to complete.

HOUSING NEEDS OF SPECIAL POPULATION GROUPS

LOW INCOME RENTERS

More than one quarter (25%) of the total households identified in the 1990 census are considered low income with income below 51% of the Median Family Income (MFI). Close to 60% of these households are extremely low income, with income below 30% of the MFI. The majority of the low income renter households report a severe cost burden, that is, greater than 50% of their gross monthly income is used to pay rent. Thus, while rental costs are lower in Fitchburg than in many other areas of the State, they remain expensive for a significant portion of the local population.

OVERCROWDING

Interviews with human services agencies suggest significantly more overcrowding than indicated by Census data. Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare staff estimate that 12% of low-income households in the city are doubled up, while the Montachusett Opportunity Council estimates that 50% of

households requesting emergency rental assistance are doubled up. For several reasons, it is not surprising that the Census would undercount such households. First, doubling up is often viewed as temporary and therefore might not be reported on the Census form. In addition overcrowding is often a lease violation. Tenants are unlikely to report the presence of additional household members if they fear it will result in eviction.

PUBLIC HOUSING

The Fitchburg Housing Authority owns and manages 668 units of state and federally funded housing. Of this housing 457 units are for the elderly; 36 units are for special needs populations; and 175 units are for families. In addition, the Housing Authority also administers 326 state and federal rental subsidies and vouchers. Currently the Housing Authority reports that there are 42 households waiting for elderly housing and 315 households waiting for family housing. The Housing Authority also reports 531 households on their waiting list for Section 8 rental subsidy assistance. The demand for this program is so great that the Housing Authority has been unable to accept any new applications since June of 1996.

PRIVATE HOUSING DEVELOPED WITH PUBLIC SUBSIDIES

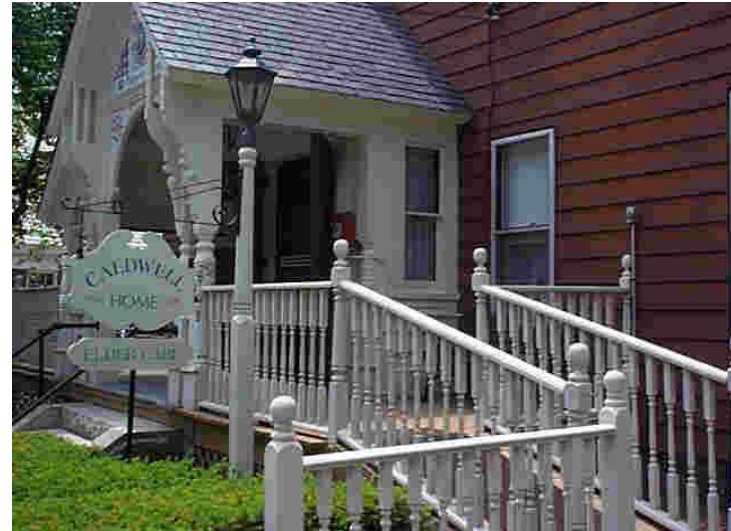
There are seven multifamily residential properties in Fitchburg which were developed by private corporations which received public assistance. In return the corporations entered into contracts guaranteeing that a percentage of the housing units

would remain affordable to low income households for a period of time. Over time these contracts will expire and it is uncertain whether the cost of housing at these properties will remain affordable. Two properties have contracts which will be expiring in the year 2000: Hotel Raymond on Day Street which contains 73 units of affordable rental housing; and Meadowbrook Village at 1 Meadowbrook Lane which includes 227 units of rental housing of which 35 are reserved for low income households. The remainder of the properties have contracts which will be expiring between 2011 and 2019.

HOUSING NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY

The 1990 U.S. Census reports that 6,329 (15.5%) of Fitchburg's residents are 65 years of age or older. The City has a higher percentage of elders than the statewide average of 13.6%. The local population of elders has been growing. A comparison with the 1980 U.S. Census, at which time elders over 65 years of age represented 14.3% of the total population, indicates that this figure has increased by 651 persons.

Elderly homeowners often have difficulty in keeping up with the financial burdens of maintaining their home. The 1990 Census reports that 65% of elderly homeowners have housing costs which exceed 30% of their household income. There is a need to help elders to remain in their homes if they so choose. Such assistance may include financial assistance with home improvements (including handicap accessibility) as well as the provision of supportive services from home health aides.



The demand for elderly housing is expected to increase.

Elderly renters often find it difficult to keep up with housing costs. While their retirement income usually remains fixed, their rental and utilities costs may continue to rise. The Fitchburg Housing Authority reports that there does not currently appear to be a large unmet demand for publicly subsidized elderly housing. However, demographic projections indicate that the elderly population will continue to grow and this may result in a greater demand for affordable rental housing suitable for elders.

HOMELESS NEEDS

A survey of the sheltered and unsheltered homeless population in Fitchburg and Leominster was conducted by staff of the Fitchburg and Leominster Planning Departments for the period of November 24th through November 30, 1994. Information was obtained from the area's homeless services providers: Valiton Shelter for homeless adults, the only "wet" shelter in the City; Our Father's House shelter for homeless adults and transitional program for adults in recovery; Women's Resources Shelter for battered women and their children and LUK shelters and transitional housing program for youth.

According to Our Father's House, the only program in the area to specifically serve homeless individuals, 803 persons were turned away from their shelter due to lack of space. Information is not available as to where or whether these people ultimately did find shelter. Of those 803 individuals, 57% appeared to have substance abuse and/or mental illness issues. Unless these problems are addressed they face a continued threat of

homelessness. According to statistics submitted by the three homeless service providers, the racial breakdown of individuals served in 1994 was 71% Caucasian, 14% African American, 14% Latino and 1% Asian.

FAMILIES WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) reports that there are 44,207 adults with serious, long term psychiatric disabilities statewide. Of the 22,000 individuals served by DMH, 9,000 (41%) require residential treatment programs. DMH prevalence statistics indicate that over 600 persons in Fitchburg and Leominster have serious long term psychiatric disabilities.

There are presently 25 people on the waiting list for supportive housing "in place" - the current jargon for those becoming more frail and needing assistance, but remaining in public and private housing developments rather than entering nursing homes.

The FHA reports that the average age of elderly tenants is 80 years old. Many of these elders could remain in their apartments with appropriate services, yet are not currently receiving them. One reason is that Medicaid, the primary source of support for nursing home care for elders, no longer pays for that care unless the person is medically in need of skilled nursing or rehabilitative services and/or is a victim of Alzheimer's Disease. Many of these elderly now remain in their homes or apartments, despite the need for assistance in managing their day to day activities.

PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) reports that 340 adults with mental retardation or developmental disabilities currently reside and are receiving services in Fitchburg and Leominster. DMR expects the number of persons with developmental disabilities or retardation to remain constant over the next five years. DMR also reports that 55 adults with mental retardation are currently in need of supportive housing in the two cities.

PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Two state agencies currently target their services to people with physical disabilities. The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is the agency which provides vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to all adults with disabilities in the state. Eligibility criteria for these programs require that the individual has a disability which substantially prevents employment and that the individual's employability is likely to increase with the services. The current caseload of MRC is 750 cases although they could not distinguish between Fitchburg and Leominster cases.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) maintains a register of persons in every city and town who are blind. In 1992, the MCB register identified 461 individuals who are blind in the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster.

The Center for Independent Living and Working which promotes independent living for individuals with physical disabilities reports a caseload of 100 persons in Fitchburg/Leominster.

PERSONS WITH AIDS AND HIV

According to the CARE Services Project, the only program in the area to provide housing services to individuals with HIV and AIDS, 108 individuals from Fitchburg and Leominster sought services in 1994. While these people are currently housed, they are typically living in sub-standard conditions, are on some form of public assistance and a high percentage have substance abuse and mental illness problems. Posing a particular challenge to the local housing services are the children who face the threat of homelessness when a parent with AIDS dies.

HOUSING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

QUALITY OF LIFE

Improve the quality of life in Fitchburg's established neighborhoods.

- Invest available resources to increase the value of inner city housing.
- Identify and address barriers to investment in inner city housing.
- Amend Zoning and other regulatory requirements which create barriers to investment in inner city housing and which act to encourage multifamily housing in areas which lack owner occupied housing.

INNER CITY BLIGHT

Eliminate Inner City Blight

- Address problem of housing deterioration and abandonment.
- Increase the role of housing in downtown revitalization
- Increase property values in the neighborhood area surrounding the downtown.
- Increase the number of residents who are likely to patronize local shops.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preserve Fitchburg's historically valuable housing

- Promote an appreciation of the unique historic qualities of Fitchburg's older neighborhoods among city residents and

the public at large.

- Encourage the use of existing programs and resources to promote historically sensitive housing rehabilitation.

DIVERSITY OF NEEDS

Meet the diverse housing needs of all of Fitchburg's residents.

- Strive to maintain a balance of safe, attractive and affordable housing for all age and economic groups.
- Discourage the creation of new special needs and subsidized housing which would add to the disproportionate share of such housing in Fitchburg versus surrounding communities.
- Encourage new residential development where appropriate.
- Identify areas with access to existing water, sanitary sewer, and other infrastructure improvements as well as those areas designated for infrastructure expansion.
- Identify areas for potential development according to the Build Out Analysis which do not conflict with areas identified as critical for the preservation of open space and recreation.
- Discourage development in specific locations where wetlands, drainage, topography, and watershed protection concerns exist.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to provide federal and state financing incentives for the rehabilitation of existing owner occupied one to four family properties located in the inner city.
- Continue to provide federal and state mortgage financing for first time home buyers located in the inner city.
- Encourage exterior and landscaping improvements wherever possible as part of public and private rehabilitation financing.
- Promote the reuse of lots made vacant by demolitions to provide for the following uses where appropriate:
 1. The development of new single family homes.
 2. The development of adequate off-street parking for abutting structures.
 3. The development of appropriate recreational or open space uses, in the event continuous maintenance of these uses can be provided.
- Amend Zoning for Residence B and Residence C districts to reduce minimum lot size requirements for single family construction and add additional lot size requirements for multifamily construction.
- Amend Zoning/Permitting requirements to encourage development of infill city lots in a manner which is consistent with the existing neighborhood scale. Consider site plan review as a mechanism for implementation.
- Amend Zoning classification from non-conforming to conforming for existing properties in all residential districts to eliminate special permit requirements.
- Encourage neighborhood programs and activities which involve participation of residents and instill neighborhood pride.
- Continue City's use of public funds for the demolition of abandoned, dangerous and blighted properties.
- Maintain efforts to identify and address deteriorating buildings before they are abandoned.
- Encourage the private market to develop residential uses in upper floors along Main Street.
- Target housing revitalization efforts in historic downtown neighborhood areas.
- Update Fitchburg's Historic Preservation Plan to identify existing resources and encourage their preservation.
- Provide additional public financing incentives to property

owners who agree to conduct historically sensitive rehabilitation of their properties.

- Assist owners of historic properties to apply for inclusion on the federal and state historic registers, and to utilize available historic tax credits.
- Encourage the creation of historic districts.
- Encourage housing development and programs which will retain and service Fitchburg's elderly population and meet the anticipated future demand for this type of housing.
- Support the rehabilitation of existing properties and the provision of appropriate housing services for existing residents of Fitchburg.
- Utilize available city information resources to develop guides and maps which identify environmentally sensitive areas and potential areas of growth. Provide this information to the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, other government officials and prospective developers for their use as a planning tool.