



What is a Housing Needs Assessment?

The vitality of a community depends on its ability to support people at all stages of their lives. Creating the opportunity for workers, students, people with disabilities, young families, older adults, and individuals at different income levels to obtain appropriate housing improves a city or town's community and economic prosperity.

Municipalities utilize periodic housing needs assessments to monitor socio-economic factors impacting the current housing market and identify specific types of housing developments a municipality needs to foster to serve the demographics of today and in the future.

A Housing Needs Assessment is primarily data-driven, relying on planners to aggregate and examine a vast body of regional and local demographic trends to analyze and forecast the population requiring different types of housing options and compare those trends to the current and future housing stock.

An up-to-date Housing Needs Assessment also serves as an initial step for a community to begin developing a Housing Action Plan, or a similar Housing Production Plan, to identify a municipality's opportunities, capacity, limitations, housing goals, and strategies to meet the needs of the community. A Housing Needs Assessment can also inform or supplement a municipality's Master Plan.

Municipalities can use various complementary housing planning tools to ensure that their policies and actions are strategically aligned to support economic growth.

A Housing Needs Assessment also serves as an important document that can strengthen pursuits of federal, state, and private funding for projects by demonstrating providing evidence of steps taken by the municipality to understand its population and demands for housing.

A Housing Needs Assessment Analyzes:

- Demographic Profile
- Poverty and Homelessness
- Employment and Income
- Affordable Housing Supply
- Rental Unit Stock
- Rental Cost
- Owner Housing Conditions
- Homes For Sale
- Home Values
- Seasonal Housing
- Affordability of Home Ownership
- Senior Housing Needs
- Special Housing

And Provides:

- Localized Understanding of the Housing Market to Inform Action Plans
- Future Housing Forecast
- Increased Funding Opportunities

BRPC PROGRAM

Community Planning Program
berkshireplanning.org/programs

Why Perform a Housing Needs Assessment?

A comprehensive housing needs assessment is a required component of both a Housing Action Plan and a Housing Production Plan, which communities implement to ensure housing developments are consistent with the municipalities' strategies and direct capital investment.

Several funding sources are available to assist in financing affordable housing projects, but high demand creates a competitive process. Towns with a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment and a Housing Action Plan or Housing Production Plan are in a better position for success and developers are more likely to invest in communities with a clear directive and vision.

The Commonwealth encourages municipalities to adopt and regularly update a Master Plan, which develops a long-range vision for the municipality's future and prioritizes actionable steps a community can take to achieve those goals. Municipalities base the required housing component of a Master Plan on the Housing Needs Assessment.

Housing impacts nearly every aspect of community development and the needs, demographics, and market are constantly changing. Communities that frequently update their Housing Needs Assessment have a much closer understanding of vulnerabilities and can take proactive steps to ensure the community is resilient to significant shifts in the housing dynamics.

A data-driven understanding of the housing needs of a community is particularly important for economic development because both existing and prospective employers rely on a community's ability to provide workers with safe and affordable housing options.

Key Questions to Answer:

- Who can afford to live in various parts of the community?
- Are older adults moving out because they cannot find appropriate accommodations?
- Can young people just entering the workforce afford housing near their employers?
- Does the current housing stock support local economic growth?
- Are members of our community living in poor conditions?
- Is there an appropriate balance between seasonal homes and year-round residences?
- How easy is it for someone to adjust their housing situation if faced with life-changing circumstances?
- What state and federal programs are available to encourage the development of housing options?
- How can a community identify, plan, and encourage a specific type of housing development in appropriate areas?

Berkshire County

Quick Facts:

- **49%** of people living in Berkshire County are paying more than **30% of their salary toward housing**.
- There are **60,984 housing units** in Berkshire County.
- **70.1%** of housing units are owner-occupied.
- The **median home value is \$232,900**.
- The median **rent is \$943**.
- In 2020, towns issued **157 building permits for new housing**.
- **59%** of existing housing is more than 50 years old.
- Workers earn a median of **\$48,078**.
- Only 1,501 new housing units were built **in the last decade**.
- Only 4.6% of vacant land is **serviced by utilities**.

What People Are Saying:

- Only 44% of home-buying survey respondents reported finding an affordable home **within 6 months**.
- **5%** of survey respondents are living in homes they cannot afford.
- **32%** of respondents reported that current housing does not or only in part meet their needs.