

response to the request for proposals for  
**zoning for affordable housing study**

Submitted to the Town of Richmond  
22 February 2021

**PLACE SENSE**  
Brandy Saxton, AICP



22 February 2021

Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner  
Town of Richmond  
PO Box 285  
Underhill, Vermont 05477

I am pleased to submit this response to the Town of Richmond's Request for Proposals for the Zoning for Affordable Housing project.

My planning practice has specialized in working with communities in Vermont since 2005, assisting municipalities with drafting plans, land use regulations and design guidelines. These projects have included a variety of public engagement strategies such as surveys (print and digital), visioning sessions, neighborhood meetings, focus groups, walking tours, placemapping, open houses and design charrettes. More information on the breadth of my project experience is available online at [www.PlaceSense.com](http://www.PlaceSense.com).

For the past decade, housing has been a "hot button" issue in most of the planning and bylaw projects I have worked on. In Montpelier, the issue was opposition to zoning changes allowing single-family homes in some downtown neighborhoods to be converted into two or three unit buildings. In Norwich, it was housing affordability. In Barre City and Bellows Falls, it was neighborhood stabilization and improved housing quality. In East Montpelier, it was encouraging new village housing while grappling with natural hazards and limited infrastructure. Many communities share Richmond's goal of diversifying their housing stock, and expanding the supply of senior housing, affordable and workforce housing, and smaller homes.

I have just completed a Housing Study for the Town of Underhill that is very similar in scope to your project. I conducted an on-line housing survey in Underhill that built upon a more general town plan survey the community had conducted about six months prior. The survey revealed some community sentiments that surprised Planning Commission members such as residents who had lived in town less than 10 years being far less supportive of any additional housing being built in town than those residents who had lived in town for many years. It showed a preference for owner-occupied single-family homes on large lots amongst the majority of respondents. The Underhill Planning Commission intends to use this snapshot of resident's perceptions and concerns to help guide their next phase of work. The final report included a series of recommendations to address housing issues in Underhill from zoning changes to infrastructure provision and creation of an affordable housing fund.

I have drafted the enclosed scope of work assuming that for at least the first half of this year, all meetings will remain virtual. The community meetings and presentations to be held later may be able to be in-person if the COVID-19 emergency order is revised or rescinded. I look forward to your consideration of my response and to working with you and the Housing Committee on this project. Feel free to contact me with any questions or to request further information.

Thank You,



Brandy Saxton, AICP

# SCOPE OF WORK AND PROPOSED SCHEDULE

## TASKS

APRIL

— **Project Administration.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner to complete project contracting and confirm the project schedule.

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee for a kick-off meeting (HC Meeting #1). This meeting will provide an opportunity for Housing Committee members to share their goals for the project and perspectives on housing issues more generally in Richmond with the consultant.

It is my understanding from the RFP that the Housing Committee has been working to compile demographic and housing data to be shared with the consultant. Key findings from that data will be discussed during the kick-off meeting.

In advance of the meeting, the consultant will provide the Housing Committee with draft questions for a Community Housing Survey. The survey will gauge residents' (1) level of support for additional housing in Richmond, (2) attitude toward and perceptions of affordable housing, and (3) concerns about creation of housing both in their neighborhood and in the town more broadly. The Housing Committee will be able to use the survey results to inform its future approach and strategy and to guide future public education efforts. Survey questions and distribution methods will be discussed during the meeting.

MAY

— **Community Survey.** The consultant will finalize the survey questions for an online survey to be hosted on Survey Monkey. The town will be responsible for advertising the availability of the online survey and encouraging resident participation through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc. Based on experience with online surveys in recent years, the consultant recommends leaving the survey up for 4-6 weeks with weekly messaging reminding people they can participate and explaining why their input is being sought. With this approach, online surveys have been significantly out-performing mail-based surveys in Vermont communities.

The consultant recommends the Housing Committee pay particular attention to communicating with renters in Richmond as their perspective will be valuable and renters as a group typically have lower response rates to this type of community survey than homeowners. If there are other groups in Richmond that the Housing Committee is concerned will not participate in an online survey, the consultant can also provide a print version of the survey. It would be the town's responsibility to distribute and collect paper surveys and to enter the results into Survey Monkey manually.

**Deliverables:** Online Community Survey on Survey Monkey with paper version provided upon request

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #2). The purpose of this meeting will be for the Housing Committee to finalize and approve public distribution of the survey. It will also provide an opportunity for the Housing Committee to develop invitation lists for interviews and focus groups, and review the proposed discussion questions.

## TASKS

JUNE

— **Interviews.** The consultant will conduct phone interviews with up to six developers, builders and landlords in Richmond to hear their perspective on housing issues in the community with a particular focus on the extent to which the town’s regulations and development review processes are affecting creation of housing units generally and affordable housing in particular. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a summary of each interview.

The consultant will prepare a list of interview questions to be distributed to interviewees in advance. The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner to contact potential interviewees, schedule phone interviews and distribute the questions. The RFP requested that the scope of work include reaching out to local developers. I am also recommending including landlords with multi-unit properties.

**Deliverables:** Written summaries of each interview

— **Focus Groups.** The consultant will facilitate up to three focus groups via Zoom. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with notes from each focus group meeting.

The consultant will work with the Housing Committee to select groups to speak with that would broaden the perspective on the community’s housing situation and identify potential participants. Based on experience, my recommendation is to plan for groups of 5-9 people. Potential topics/groups include seniors and other residents with specialized housing needs, parents with young children (hopefully capturing some renters in that group), homeowners who have created an accessory dwelling, mobile home park residents, etc.

**Deliverables:** Written notes from each focus group meeting

— **Infrastructure Assessment.** This task is not included in the RFP, but it would be a valuable step prior to drafting zoning changes that will likely include recommendations for increased densities in some areas of town. Water and sewer infrastructure is essential for creation of higher-density and affordable housing.

The consultant recommends that the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee collect the information necessary to: (1) estimate the available capacity of the water and wastewater systems serving Richmond’s village center, including any constraints imposed by the Lake Champlain TMDL or other state regulations that could trigger upgrades to fully use permitted capacity; and (2) accurately map the area served (based on hook-up addresses) if this information is not currently available and (3) assess the geographic constraints on extending those systems beyond the area currently served (terrain requiring pump stations or additional storage tanks, highway or river crossings, etc.).

JULY

— **Community Survey.** The consultant will compile and analyze the survey results. As appropriate, survey responses will be broken down by demographic groups and geographic areas. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written report presenting the survey results and highlighting key findings.

**Deliverables:** Survey results report

## TASKS

AUGUST

**Community Meeting 1.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee to organize and facilitate a Zoom-based community meeting. The meeting agenda would include summarizing the findings of the Housing Committee’s demographic/housing analysis, information learned through the interviews and focus groups, and the results of community survey. The meeting would also provide an opportunity for Richmond residents to share their concerns and preferences related to housing and the town’s regulations/permitting and development review processes.

The town will be responsible for advertising the meeting through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc. The consultant and Town Planner will coordinate “hosting” the online meeting to ensure orderly participation. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written summary of public comments and questions following the meeting.

**Deliverables:** Written meeting notes

**Zoning Review.** The consultant will prepare a technical memo reviewing Richmond’s adopted Zoning Regulations against the housing goals of the Town Plan, statutory requirements and limitations (including Act 174 provisions that became effective last October), state recommendations as presented in Zoning for Great Neighborhoods, eligibility requirements for the state’s Neighborhood Development Area program, housing needs as documented by the prior work of the Richmond Housing Committee, and information collected through the public engagement process to-date (survey, interviews, focus groups, community meeting).

The technical memo will identify approaches to improve the effectiveness of the Zoning Regulations to further the community’s objectives related to housing supply and affordability.

**Deliverables:** Technical memo

SEPTEMBER

**Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #3). At this meeting, the consultant will present the technical memo reviewing Richmond’s adopted Zoning Regulations. The Housing Committee will agree upon a zoning reform framework, selecting elements and approaches described in the technical memo for further development as proposed zoning amendments.

**Draft Zoning Amendments.** The consultant will prepare the proposed zoning amendments as outlined in the zoning reform framework. The first draft will be annotated to provide context for the proposed changes and facilitate Housing Committee discussion. The first draft of the amendments will be distributed to the Housing Committee for review and discussion.

**Deliverables:** Draft zoning amendments for Housing Committee review and comment

## TASKS

OCTOBER

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #4) to review and discuss the draft zoning amendments. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to organize and prepare for the second community meeting.

— **Revise Zoning Amendments.** The consultant will revise the draft zoning amendments based on feedback from Housing Committee members. Once revised, the draft zoning amendments will be provided to the Richmond Town Planner for public distribution in advance of the second community meeting.

**Deliverables:** Draft zoning amendments for public review and comment

NOVEMBER

— **Community Meeting 2.** The consultant will work with the Richmond Town Planner and the Housing Committee to organize and facilitate a Zoom-based community meeting. The meeting agenda would include presenting the findings of the zoning review and the draft zoning amendments prepared in response. The town will be responsible for advertising the meeting through regularly used channels such as the town website, listserve/email groups, social media, etc.

The consultant and Richmond Town Planner will jointly facilitate discussion of the proposed zoning amendments, taking comments and answering questions from attendees. The consultant will provide the Housing Committee with a written summary of public comments and questions following the meeting.

**Deliverables:** Written meeting notes

— **Recommended Changes.** The consultant will prepare a memo for the Housing Committee outlining any recommended changes to the proposed zoning amendments and discussion points for the next meeting based on public input from the second community meeting.

**Deliverables:** Memo outlining recommended changes

DECEMBER

— **Housing Committee Meeting.** The consultant will meet virtually with the Richmond Housing Committee (HC Meeting #5) to review and discuss final changes to the draft zoning amendments. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to organize and prepare for the Planning Commission and Selectboard presentations.

— **Final Report.** The consultant will prepare a final report incorporating the information collected through community outreach (survey, interviews, focus groups, meetings), the technical memo, the zoning reform framework and the final recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will provide the Richmond Town Planner with a PDF of the final report for distribution to the Housing Committee, Planning Commission and Selectboard, as well as for posting on the town website.

**Deliverables:** Final Zoning for Affordable Housing Report in PDF format

## TASKS

JANUARY

— **Planning Commission Presentation.** The consultant will present the final report of the Zoning for Affordable Housing project with a focus on the recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will facilitate a discussion between the Planning Commission, Housing Committee and town residents in attendance regarding the report’s findings and recommendations.

Deliverables: Presentation

— **Selectboard Presentation.** The consultant will present the final report of the Zoning for Affordable Housing project with a focus on the recommended zoning amendments. The consultant will facilitate a discussion between the Selectboard, Housing Committee and town residents in attendance regarding the report’s findings and recommendations.

Deliverables: Presentation

## PROJECT BUDGET

TASKS	HOURS	FEE
Project Administration	12	\$1,200
Housing Committee Meetings	20	\$2,000
Zoning Review	32	\$3,200
Technical Memo	16	\$1,600
Zoning Amendments	48	\$4,800
Final Report	8	\$800
Community Survey	40	\$4,000
Interviews	12	\$1,200
Focus Groups	12	\$1,200
Community Meetings	8	\$800
Presentations	8	\$800
Consultant Fee:	<i>216 hours @ \$100/hr</i>	\$21,600
Direct Expenses:		\$400
<b>Total Project Cost:</b>		<b>\$22,000</b>



## QUALIFICATIONS

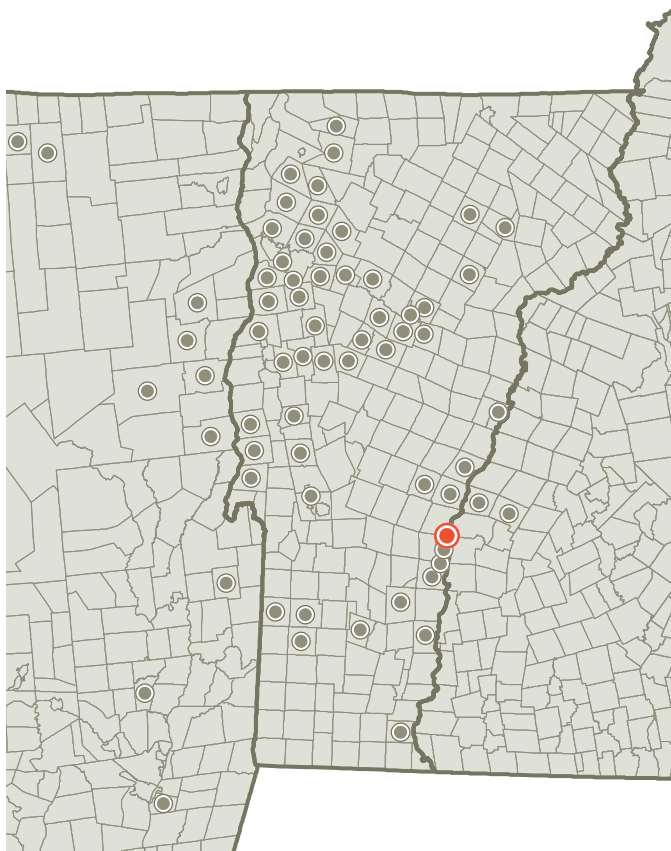
### PLACESENSE

#### Profile

PlaceSense specializes in community planning and design. Established in 2005 by Brandy Saxton, AICP, PlaceSense is a sole-proprietorship that works with municipal, nonprofit and private sector clients around northern New England and New York to create attractive public places that encourage a sense of community, enhance natural features and promote economic vitality. In addition to preparing municipal plans and land use regulations, PlaceSense has been involved in the planning of village centers and downtown master plans, growth center planning, main street improvements, waterfront revitalization programs, design guidelines, and landscape and trail designs.

PlaceSense recognizes that public engagement and support is key to successful community planning and design projects. Brandy Saxton has experience with a variety of public participation methods, including surveys, interactive planning workshops, interviews with key stakeholders and officials, focus group discussions, and visualization techniques. Her deliverable products are always visually interesting, easy-to-read and user-friendly.

As a small firm, PlaceSense provides timely and personal service for clients at competitive rates. Brandy Saxton is working on a limited number of projects at any given time, which allows her to focus on each client's needs and work within their schedule. With low administrative and overhead costs, PlaceSense provides high-quality professional services at more competitive rates than larger firms.



PlaceSense works primarily with rural communities and small towns, but has experience providing consulting services for larger municipalities and private sector clients as well. As her firm's name suggests, Brandy Saxton recognizes that a sense of place is an essential component of community vitality and quality of life. She believes that the planning and design process should build upon the community's character and resources.

Plans and reports produced by PlaceSense are more than boiler-plate documents; they incorporate local information and address local issues in a manner that reflects the character of their community.

## Services

- Town/Comprehensive Planning
- Land Use Regulations and Design Guidelines
- Master Planning and Conceptual Design
- Complete Streets and Streetscape Design
- Recreation and Trail Planning
- Public Participation and Planning Workshops
- Opinion Surveys and Focus Groups
- GIS Mapping and Build-Out Analysis
- Economic and Demographic Analysis
- Cost of Community Services Analysis
- Capital Improvement Programs
- Grant Writing and Administration

## BRANDY SAXTON, AICP

### Profile



Brandy Saxton is a land use planner with experience in community and regional planning, preparing land use regulations and design guidelines, GIS mapping and analysis, demographic research and statistical analysis, and authoring grant applications. She excels at engaging project stakeholders and the public at large in the planning process resulting in projects with achievable objectives and feasible implementation measures. With an eye for detail, organizational abilities and inherent design sense, she maintains a high level of quality and service for clients.

Brandy is a member of the American Planning Association and its Northern New England chapter (NNECAPA). She has received professional certification through the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and stays abreast of current planning practices and innovative concepts through ongoing professional development.

Brandy was recognized as Planner of the Year in 2020 by both the Vermont Planners' Association and NNECAPA. As a lifelong resident of small towns in northern New York and Vermont, she is well aware of the issues facing rural communities and the qualities that make small towns special places to live, work and visit.

### Experience

- 2005 to present. Owner, PlaceSense
- 2000 to 2005. Senior Planner, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Middlebury, Vermont
- 1999 to 2000. Assistant, New York State Rural Development Council, Syracuse, New York
- 1998. Intern, Essex County Empire Zone, Port Henry, New York

### Education

- 2000. Master of Public Administration, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University
- 2000. Master of Landscape Architecture, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry
- 1996. Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Anthropology, State University of New York Potsdam College

## Skills

**Land Use and Community Planning.** Ms. Saxton has experience with land use planning from the regional to neighborhood level. She has prepared comprehensive/town plans for New York, New Hampshire and Vermont municipalities. She is familiar with state planning initiatives such as New York's Waterfront Revitalization Program, Vermont's Growth Center Program and New Hampshire's Innovative Land Use Controls, which promote smart growth planning principles. Ms. Saxton, with her background in landscape architecture, is also able to prepare physical plans, and has a particular interest in downtown/village/hamlet design.

**Land Use Regulations and Design Guidelines.** Ms. Saxton has drafted land use regulations (zoning bylaws, subdivision ordinances, site plan review laws, unified development codes and design guidelines) for municipalities in New York, New Hampshire and Vermont. She is familiar with the statutory and other legal requirements in states around northern New England and New York. Ms. Saxton recognizes the importance of public involvement in the drafting of regulations and strives to ensure that the resulting laws are easy to understand and administer, which is particularly important in small communities without professional staff. Ms. Saxton incorporates illustrations into many of the regulations she prepares.

**Economic Analysis and Growth Projections.** Ms. Saxton is familiar with various methodologies and data sources for undertaking demographic and economic analyses. She has prepared population, housing and employment growth projections at the regional and municipal level. She is also capable of projecting demand for facilities or services associated with growth such as school enrollment/space needs, water/sewer infrastructure, and commercial floor space.

**GIS Mapping and Build-Out Analysis.** Ms. Saxton provides GIS services using ESRI ArcGIS software and other more generally available applications such as Google Earth/Maps. She incorporates GIS into the planning process, using tools like viewshed analyses, development suitability analyses and build-out analyses. She uses both CommunityViz and the Community Build-Out Analysis plug-ins for ArcGIS.

**Grants and Project Management.** Ms. Saxton has written grants for a variety of government programs, as well as private foundations. She has served as grant administrator and/or project manager for a number of projects and is familiar with the reporting requirements typical of grant-funded projects.

## UNDERHILL HOUSING STUDY

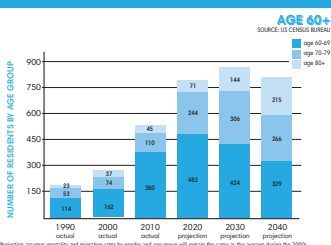
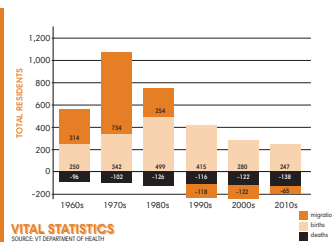
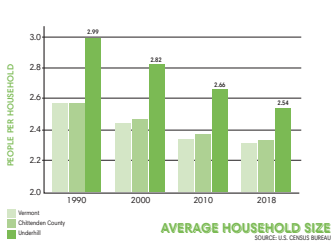
PlaceSense completed a housing needs assessment for the Town of Underhill. The 2020 Town Plan called for housing that is affordable to residents at all income levels while maintaining rural character. The Housing Study gathered information to help Underhill understand the need for affordable housing in the community and offered recommendations on how to address the identified need for affordable housing. The scope of work included preparing demographic and housing profiles of the community, analyzing the existing development pattern and opportunity for residential growth, and a community housing survey.

**Contact:** Andrew Strniste Town of Underhill, (802) 899-4434 x6, astrniste@underhillvt.gov



Housing Type	Percentage
Single-family, large lot	63%
Small homes / cottages	39%
Single-family cluster w/ open space	33%
Single-family, small lot	29%
Accessory apartments	21%
Duplexes	17%
Manufactured/modular homes	14%
Multi-family, 3-4 unit	9%
Multi-family, 5+ unit	2%

**APPROPRIATE HOUSING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD**  
2020 TOWN HOUSING SURVEY | 304 RESPONSES



**“by 2030 all baby boomers will be age 65 or older and most households will consist of 1 or 2 people**

Baby boomers arrived in Underhill starting in the late-1960s. In the 1970s, people moving into town accounted for 75% of the population growth. The boomers started families. In the 1980s, natural increase (births minus deaths) accounted for 60% of the town's population growth. As those children grew up and moved away, average household size began declining. Currently, about 60% of households in Underhill consist of 1 or 2 people. During the past 20 years, the increase in number of residents has been less than the amount of natural increase – meaning that more people have been moving out of Underhill than have been moving in. The 2020 Housing Survey results indicate that most boomers hope to “age in place” and remain in their current home as long as feasible.

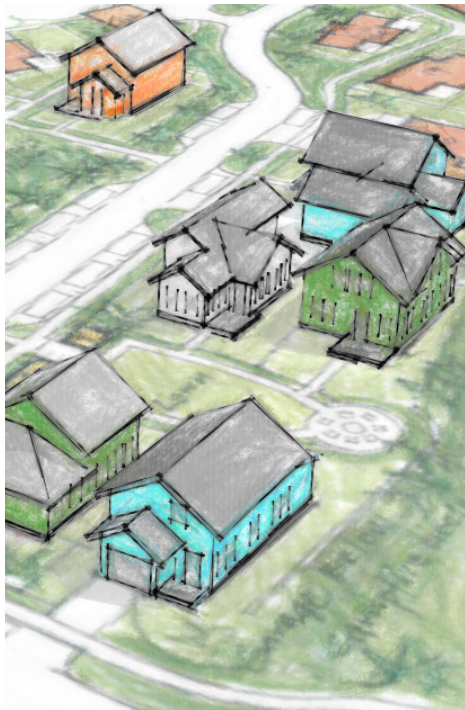
**APPROPRIATE HOUSING SOMEWHERE IN UNDERHILL**  
2020 TOWN HOUSING SURVEY | 304 RESPONSES

Housing Type	Percentage
Single-family, large lot	66%
Small homes / cottages	57%
Single-family cluster w/ open space	53%
Single-family, small lot	50%
Accessory apartments	38%
Duplexes	39%
Manufactured/modular homes	27%
Multi-family, 3-4 unit	31%
Multi-family, 5+ unit	12%

## SOUTH BURLINGTON AFFORDABLE HOUSING REPORT

PlaceSense was part of the consultant team that prepared the Path to Affordability: South Burlington Affordable Housing Report. The project included a detailed analysis of existing demographic, housing and real estate market data, as well as a series of focus group meetings to document the existing supply and need for affordable housing in the city. The final report included a series of recommended strategies including a university overlay district to address the conversion of existing single-family homes to student rental housing.

**Contact:** Paul Conner, City of South Burlington, (802) 846-4106, pconner@s Burlington.com



THE PATH TO AFFORDABILITY  
SOUTH BURLINGTON 2013 AFFORDABLE HOUSING REPORT



MAP 4 | DWELLINGS IN MULTI-UNIT BUILDINGS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL HOUSING UNITS

As the maps indicate, condominiums and multi-unit residential structures are concentrated within particular areas of the city.

TABLE 3 | DWELLINGS BY DATE BUILT

Date Built	# of DUs	% of DUs
BEF 1950	291	4%
1950s	968	15%
1960s	999	15%
1970s	849	13%
1980s	1,553	24%
1990s	576	9%
AFT 2000	1,269	20%

**Housing Units by Date Built.** This analysis has found that only 4% of dwellings (not including apartments in multi-unit buildings) were built prior to 1950 and 53% have been built since 1980.

Map 5 shows the average date of housing construction in each neighborhood.

TABLE 4 | MEDIAN SIZE BY DATE BUILT

Date Built	DUs w/ Land	Condos
BEF 1950	1,511 sf	
1950s	1,240 sf	
1960s	1,391 sf	988 sf
1970s	1,794 sf	1,189 sf
1980s	2,113 sf	1,234 sf
1990s	2,240 sf	1,939 sf
AFT 2000	2,720 sf	1,584 sf

The Assessor's data lists the original date of construction for each dwelling, but the date of any major improvements or additions is not available.

**Housing Units by Size.** While more than half the homes in the city are smaller than 1,500 square feet, the size of dwellings has been increasing in recent decades. The average size of a residence built today is essentially twice that of a home built in the 1950s or '60s.

TABLE 5 | DWELLINGS BY MEDIAN SIZE

Median Size (Sq. Ft.)	# of DUs	% of DUs
<1,200	2,077	32%
1,200-1,500	1,454	22%
1,500-1,800	941	14%
1,800-2,400	1,081	17%
2,400-3,000	619	10%
>3,000	333	5%

Tables 6 through 8 present additional statistics related to housing unit size and Map 6 shows the average size of housing by neighborhood.

## MANCHESTER LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

PlaceSense completed a comprehensive revision of the Town of Manchester’s land use and development ordinance. The project commenced with a series of public meetings and walking tours to highlight and discuss the land use and development issues to be addressed in the regulations. It resulted in a new zoning map, zoning districts, densities, dimensional standards and allowed uses intended to implement the town’s vision for fostering a vibrant, mixed-use downtown and providing opportunities for workforce and affordable housing in a community with a strong second home market and tourism sector.

**Contact:** Janet Hurley, Town of Manchester, (802) 362-1313 x 3 j.hurley@manchester-vt.gov

