

HOUSING

Richmond is a great place to call “home.” We boast strong public schools, committed local businesses, and an array of town-sponsored events each month. Because it is desirable, it has become difficult to secure—and remain in—a reasonably affordable home in Richmond.

Before the 2018 Town Plan was implemented, Richmond—like most towns in Vermont—struggled to provide adequate levels of reasonably affordable housing for our residents. And in 2020, housing affordability and availability challenges reached crisis levels across Vermont and within Richmond. That year, the housing vacancy rate fell to 1% in Chittenden County, and more than 50% of Richmond residents identified as “cost burdened” or “severely cost burdened.” To the extent those rates have changed since 2020, it is likely because lower income residents were unable to sustain further increases to their housing costs. In May 2025, the median home sale cost in Richmond was \$395,000, which marks a 92% increase in median home sale price in just 5 years.

While Richmond’s housing challenges are real, they are not particularly unique to Richmond, nor are they new. These challenges have been brewing across Vermont for decades. Like many rural Vermont towns, Richmond’s housing stock is aging. Most of our homes were built between 1960 and 2000. New home construction in Richmond dropped significantly in the 1990s and 2000s, and construction has remained slow for decades. Additionally, most Richmond homes constructed in the last 2 decades have largely been single family detached homes. In 2023, Richmond’s housing stock consisted of: 1,216 single family detached homes; 55 single family attached homes; 387 units of housing within a multifamily dwelling (2–9-unit buildings) and 140 mobile home units. Only 32 of Richmond’s homes are “permanently affordable” apartments. *See Appendix at xx for data on these points.*

We have known since at least our 2018 Town Plan that diverse housing is essential for community sustainability, workforce development, vibrancy and minimization of personal stressors. And while Richmond is committed to creating more diverse and affordable housing, that task is not simple nor is it achievable solely through municipal action. However, local action is crucial. And in the last several years, Richmond’s Planning Commission and Selectboard have taken significant steps to create conditions to facilitate the development of more diverse, affordable housing in our town.

In 2020, the Richmond Selectboard formed a Housing Committee as a response to an Action Item in our 2018 Plan. The Housing Committee was tasked with gathering and analyzing demographic data; generating housing policy recommendations; advising the Selectboard, Planning Commission and others on housing-related issues, and educating the community on these issues. In 2022 the Housing Committee engaged Planning

Consultant Brandy Saxton to create a report entitled “Town of Richmond Zoning for Affordable Housing” in collaboration with residents, town staff, and the Housing and Planning Committees. See, Appendix at xxx for a link to the full report. This report made policy and regulatory recommendations and concluded that more community outreach and education would be necessary to implement many of the recommendations. The Goals and Action Items in this section were developed by Richmond Housing Committee.

Additionally, Richmond’s Planning Commission has amended several zoning regulations to allow for the construction of more diverse, and potentially more affordable, housing in our town. The Richmond Zoning Regulations now allow for the construction of accessory dwellings and small multi-family residences on lots that allow single family dwellings within the municipal water and sewer service area, and the mandatory minimums for lot size acreage and parking spots have been reduced. Additionally, the Planning Commission has developed a program to provide regulatory benefits for affordable housing development. See, *Appendix x for list of zoning ordinance updates between 2023-2025*. Many of these changes were encouraged by two pieces of state legislation passed to balance the competing needs of expeditious housing development and the continued preservation of our natural environment.

Act 47, the Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone Act (2023), (The HOME Act) aims to increase housing development and address the affordability crisis. To address affordability, the HOME Act created several new programs related to rental assistance and homeowner affordability for middle income homes. The HOME Act also included municipal regulatory reforms focused on creating housing opportunities within proximity to the village centers. Richmond’s Planning Commission has incorporated most of the regulatory changes required by this law into our Zoning Regulations after holding public hearings on these changes.

The HOME Act also requires regional planning bodies to assign a “housing target” range to each Vermont town, a target that represents the number of housing units each town should commit to building by 2050. These targets were created through careful methodology that considers each town’s landscape, existing water and sewer infrastructure, size and location. Richmond’s assigned target range is between 8 and 24 new homes each year. Richmond has averaged 9 new homes each year, for the past several years. **The Housing Committee recommends that Richmond aspire to reach the middle target number of 16 new units each year, which would add 404 new homes to our housing stock by 2050.**

Importantly, Act 181(2024), clarifies that the targeted residential development must be “compact development” or “smart growth.” This requires that nearly all residential growth take place in existing village centers, downtowns, and the immediate surrounding areas deemed “future growth areas” or “village areas” by towns—as this will avoid disrupting the rural, agricultural and forested countryside. An additional program developed by Act 181 and adopted by the Richmond Selectboard allows new housing projects of less than 50 dwelling units in the central village area to be designated as “Tier 1B” and exempt from Act 250 oversight. This will reduce the cost of development and hopefully encourage new “smart growth” housing.

The Goals and Actions outlined below, suggest how these targets are to be achieved over the life of this plan. Additionally, the Brandy Saxton report and the Housing Committee's "Strategic Housing Plan," provide additional strategies that can be employed to facilitate the creation of more affordable and diverse housing options in Richmond. See, Appendix xx for the "Strategic Housing Plan."

Goal 1: Strive to achieve the municipal housing targets established by the HOME Act and create diverse, resilient, and quality housing options for residents and potential residents from all walks of life throughout the Town.

Actions:

1. When updating zoning regulations, identify further opportunities for development of a variety of housing types, for example, allowing mixed residential and commercial use, higher unit density, or unique accessory housing in certain identified districts
Owner: Planning Commission / Housing Committee
2. Support discussions that consider infrastructure investment for the development of new/improved housing stock, such as extending the water/wastewater infrastructure for the development and long-term viability of housing.
Owner: Planning Commission/Housing Committee
3. Continue to support the growth and mission of the Richmond Housing Committee and their strategic recommendations as they identify needs to pursue Richmond's housing goals. Empower discussion and execution of the "Strategic Housing Plan."
Owner: Planning Commission/ Housing Committee
4. Encourage concentrated residential development in areas identified for growth as recommended in the Future Land Use Maps through paths such as ADUs, multi-family housing, and an increase in the allowable building height.
Owner: Planning Commission/ Housing Committee
5. Streamline the development review and permitting process and develop clearer guidelines for approving new housing units.

Goal 2: Support the creation of housing that is more affordable and attainable for low- and moderate-income households.

Draft 8.28 MCOR + VC

Actions:

1. Create policies that encourage affordable housing development in accordance with and extend beyond state mandates, such as from the HOME Act.
2. Continue to support the existence of the mobile home park through open dialogue with residents and the park owner. Support additional affordable housing development in the park.
3. Work with and support the work of the Richmond Racial Equity group to engage with underserved communities to understand and support housing needs.
4. Create a climate that is more accepting of affordable housing as a path to creating a more resilient community that supports our businesses, schools, and future growth, through building relationships with and educating homeowners, landowners, business owners, for-profit housing developers and town representatives.
5. Create a housing trust fund to support eligible projects or land acquisitions. The fund can be funded from such sources as donations, registration fees, small budget allocations or other mechanisms to be determined.
6. Partner with non-profit affordable housing developers such as Habitat for Humanity, Champlain Housing Trust Fund, or Cathedral Square to support the development of future community projects.
7. Where possible, pursue planning or implementation grants for the creation of affordable housing through the Department of Housing & Community Development, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and other sources.

Goal 3: Educate Richmond residents about the availability of State and Federal funding programs that assist homeowners and renters with improving housing suitability and affordability, including programs focused on rehabilitating old homes; weatherizing units; and altering the number of units in a home.

Actions

1. At least annually, generate informational documents for Richmond residents about state or federal programs that provide financial assistance or tax benefits for home improvements or alterations.

Owner: Housing Committee

Draft 8.28 MCOR + VC

2. When applicable, organize community educational events with invited guests from relevant government and non-governmental agencies about new or existing financial assistance programs for homeowners, landlords, renters, and developers. Examples of relevant agencies include Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Department of Housing and Community Development.

Owner: Housing Committee