



3. Housing

3.1 Introduction

As a significant percentage of the Town's land area, housing is the most prevalent land use in Merrimack; its cost and availability are critical components in the range of elements that together define the character of the community. While the housing stock (supply) today serves the needs of many of its citizens, market changes have made it difficult for certain segments of the community to afford housing costs. The housing goal is to provide choices for people and therefore, diversity in housing type and price is a significant aspect of this Plan.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the population and household changes that have been occurring in Merrimack. It also looks at how the Town's demographics compare to those of the region, which includes neighboring New Hampshire cities and towns. The following section discusses the type of housing that is available in Merrimack and includes an analysis of housing affordability, as well as key housing issues that have been identified during the public outreach process.

3.2 Housing Goals

Housing in Merrimack should be available to households of all kinds and residents of all income levels. Merrimack should strive to:

- Encourage high-quality housing in attractive neighborhoods through development of innovative land use controls, regulations and programs, such as incentive bonuses to encourage features in site plans/New Hampshire Revised Statutes (RSA).
- Maintain the Town of Merrimack's compliance in meeting the housing affordability goals pursuant to the Workforce Housing Law.
- Ensure that housing choices are available to meet the needs of current and future generations in Merrimack.

3.3 Population and Demographic Profile

Merrimack's population has grown dramatically since 1970, when the population was 8,595. It grew by 79 percent to 15,406 in 1980 and another 44 percent to 22,156 in 1990. The rate of growth since then has leveled off somewhat, showing an increase of only a few hundred between the 2000 and 2010 Census. According to 2010 U.S. Census data, the population is 25,494. While the Town's growth rate was somewhat parallel to the county and the state rate of growth between 1990 and 2000, the Town only experienced a slight rate of growth as shown in the 2010 Census. [Table 3-1](#) shows Merrimack's population growth from 1950 through 2010 as compared with Hillsborough County and New Hampshire.

Table 3-1: Population Over Time

Year	Merrimack	% Change	Hillsborough County	% Change	New Hampshire	% Change
1950	1,908	-	161,525	-	533,200	-
1960	2,989	57%	178,161	10%	606,900	14%
1970	8,595	188%	223,941	26%	737,579	22%
1980	15,406	79%	276,608	24%	920,475	25%
1990	22,156	44%	336,073	21%	1,109,252	21%
2000	25,119	13%	380,841	13%	1,235,786	11%
2010	25,494	1%	400,721	5%	1,316,470	7%

Source: US Census 1970-2010

Compared to its neighbors on average and like much of Southern New Hampshire, Merrimack grew more rapidly in the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's, but more slowly since the 2000 Census as shown in [Table 3-2](#). Merrimack's growth during that period may be attributed in part to the availability of a large number of new housing units. The Town's school system (several schools were built in the 1960's) and accessibility to major highways for commuting purposes also make the Town an attractive community. Rapid growth continued in part of the region and the highest growth rates in the last ten years (20 percent or greater) were in Amherst, Bedford, and Hollis. In contrast, the population in Nashua actually dropped by 0.1 percent in the 2010 Census.

Table 3-2: Population Comparisons for Merrimack and Abutting Communities

Municipality	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Merrimack	8,595	15,406	22,156	25,119	25,494
Nashua	55,820	67,865	79,662	86,605	86,494
Bedford	5,859	9,481	12,563	18,274	21,859
Amherst	4,605	8,243	9,068	10,769	13,264
Litchfield	1,420	4,150	5,516	7,360	7,932
Hollis	2,616	4,679	5,705	7,015	8,777

Source: US Census 1970-2010, CLRSear.ch.com

With a total land mass of 33.55 square miles, Merrimack's current population density is 760 people per square mile.¹ This is a slight 1 percent increase in density since 2000 (749 people per square mile) and 1990 (660 people per square mile).²

The Town's elderly population cohort – people 65 years old and up – are the fastest growing segment of the population, having increased significantly in the last ten years. There were 1,601 (or 6 percent of the population) 65 years of age or older in 2000. The 2010 Census shows 2,638 people 65 or older, which represents a 65 percent increase in the last ten years. Slightly more than 10 percent of Merrimack's residents are now over 65 years old. Among the other more populous cohorts, the 55 to 64 age group also grew rapidly since 2000 (a 50 percent increase). The median age of the Merrimack population has been steadily increasing, from 36 in 2000 to 39.5 in 2010 and it is expected to continue to rise to at least 40 years of age in 2015. This information suggests that Merrimack's population is getting older and will continue along that trend, which will affect the type of housing the Town will need. It is consistent with national and regional trends, and also reflects the aging of the Baby Boomers.

In contrast, the number of children under age 5 dropped from 1,731 to 1,368 – a reduction of 21 percent and the number of school-age children (5 – 19 years of age) decreased by 12 percent. This follows a national trend for smaller families because parents are having fewer children, an increase in single-parent households, more childless households, and the general postponement of families having children until later in life. This data is reflected in the School District's projections for future school enrollment, as discussed in Chapter 8 - Community Facilities and Services. In fact, all age groups showed a decrease in population except the elderly population. The slight reduction in the 20 – 34 year old cohort may be indicative of relocation of younger wage earners and families to other areas where jobs and/or affordable housing are available.

¹ US Census 2010; density based on NH GIS land data

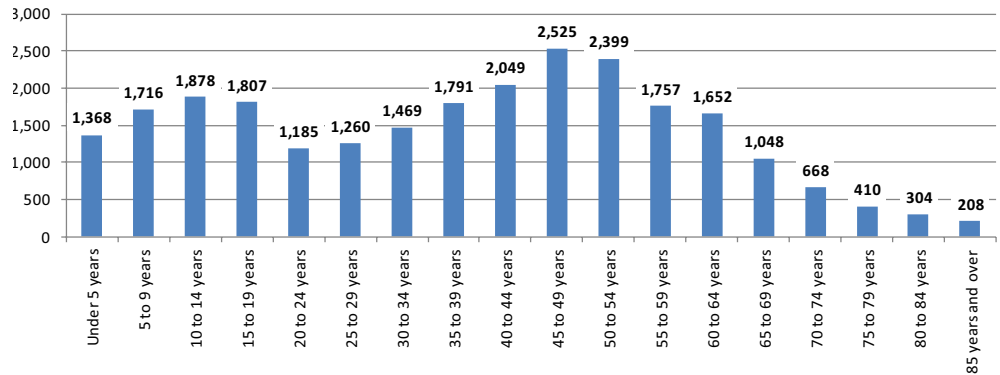
² US Census 2000 and 2010

Table 3-3 compares the age distribution in Merrimack between 2000 and 2010, while **Figure 3-1** shows a more detailed age distribution for the Town from the 2010 Census.

Table 3-3: Age Distribution, 2000– 2010

Year	People under 5 (% of population)	People 5-19/ School Age (% of population)	People 20-34 (% of population)	People 35-54 (% of population)	People 55-64 (% of population)	People over 65 (% of population)
2000	1,731 (7%)	6,110 (24%)	4,219 (17%)	9,183 (37%)	2,275 (9%)	1,601 (6%)
2010	1,368 (5%)	5,401 (21%)	3,914 (15%)	8,764 (34%)	3,409 (13%)	2,638 (10%)

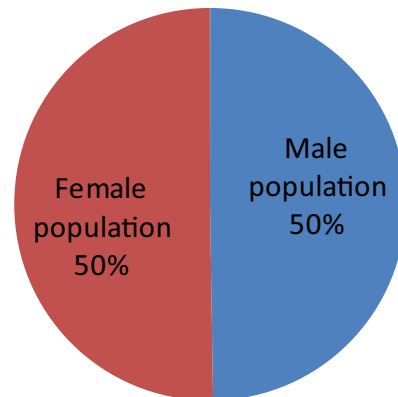
Figure 3-1: Distribution of Population by Age, 2010



Source: US Census 2010

In terms of gender, Merrimack's population is evenly distributed between men (50 percent) and women (50 percent).³

Figure 3-2: Distribution of Population by Gender



The Town is also largely homogeneous, with approximately 95 percent of the population identifying as White alone as shown in **Table 3-4**.⁴ Approximately two percent is Asian and just under one percent of the population is African American, with the remaining 1.6 percent being two or more races.

³ US Census 2010.

⁴ US Census 2010.

Table 3-4: Population Comparison by Race

	Total Merrimack		18 years and over	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population				
Total population	25,494	100	19,237	100
Race				
One race	25,090	98.4	19,058	99.1
White	24,230	95	18,445	95.9
Black or African American	192	0.8	151	0.8
American Indian and Alaska Native	46	0.2	35	0.2
Asian	499	2	349	1.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	4	0	4	0
Some Other Race	119	0.5	74	0.4
Two or More Races	404	1.6	179	0.9

Source: 2010 US Census

3.4 Households

Merrimack had 9,503 households in 2010 compared to 8,832 in 2000, which was an 8 percent increase, as shown in [Table 3-5](#). Family households comprise 75 percent of all Merrimack households. Of the family households, 83 percent are married couples and 45 percent have children less than 18 years of age, which represents a slight decrease from the 2000 Census.⁵

Table 3-5: Household Changes by Type

	2000	2010	Percent Change 2000-2010
Total Households	8,832	9,503	8%
Family Households	6,982	7,150	2%
Married couple family	6,019	5,951	-1%
Households with children <18	3,703	3,230	-13%
Non-family households	1,850	2,353	27%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010; CLRSearch.com

5 Please note the following definitions for households from CLRSearch: **Family Household:** A family household is a household maintained by a householder who is in a family, and includes any unrelated people (unrelated subfamily members and/or secondary individuals) who may be residing there. **Married Family Household:** A married family household consists of a married householder and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption. **Other Family Household:** Another family household consists of a householder and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth or adoption. These households may have a Male Householder with No Wife Present and/or Female Householder with No Husband Present. **Non-Family Household:** A non-family household consists of a householder living alone (a one-person household) or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related.

Census data confirms that Merrimack's average household size was 2.67 persons in 2010, as compared with 2.84 in 2000. Household size was as high as 3.9 in 1970. Again, this is consistent with a trend found throughout the country and reflects that more families are having fewer or no children, and that many people are delaying the start of having children until later in life. Merrimack's average household size is higher when compared to Hillsborough County (2.53) and the state of New Hampshire (2.46).⁶

Figure 3-3 below shows the distribution of household size in Merrimack according to the 2010 Census data. More than a third of the households are two person households and more than half are households with one or two people.

Figure 3-3: 2010 Size of Households

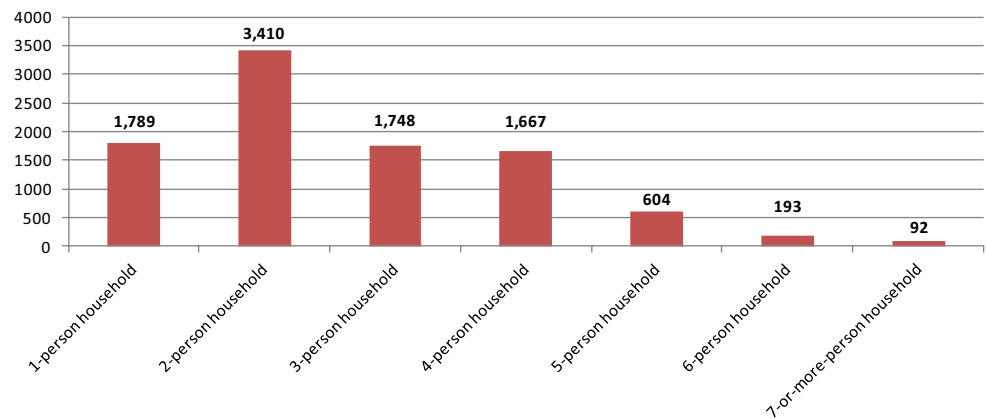
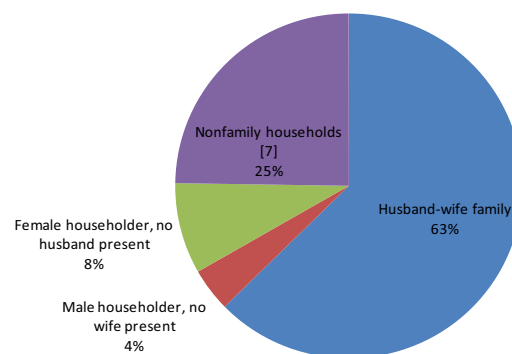


Figure 3-4 and **Table 3-6** provide additional detail about the breakdown of household types in Merrimack. Approximately three-quarters of all Merrimack households are considered to be family households, and 63 percent are husband-wife families. Single person head of household families are found in about 12 percent of all households, with two-thirds of them (8 percent) with a female head of household. Children under 18 years of age can be found in 34 percent of all households. Twenty percent of all households have people over 65 years residing in the home, and 28 percent of them (6 percent of the total households) have only one person over 65 years living in the home.

Figure 3-4: 2010 Households by Type



6 US Census 2010

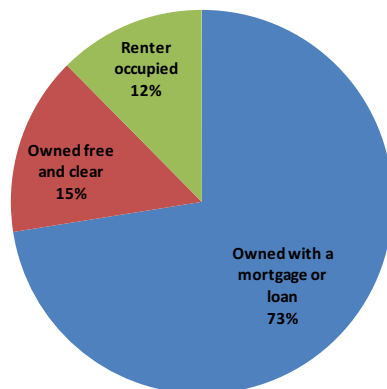
Table 3-6: Detailed Breakdown of Household by Type

Household Type	Number	Percentage
Family Households	7,150	75.2
With own children under 18 years	3,250	34.2
Husband-wife family	5,951	62.6
With own children under 18 years	2,604	27.4
Male householder, no wife present	387	4.1
With own children under 18 years	193	2
Female householder, no husband present	812	8.5
With own children under 18 years	453	4.8
Nonfamily households	2,353	24.8
Householder living alone	1,789	18.8
Male	805	8.5
Over 65 years	130	1.4
Female	984	10.4
Over 65 years	408	4.3
Households with children under 18 years	3,489	36.7
Households with individuals over 65 years	1,901	20

Source: US Census 2010

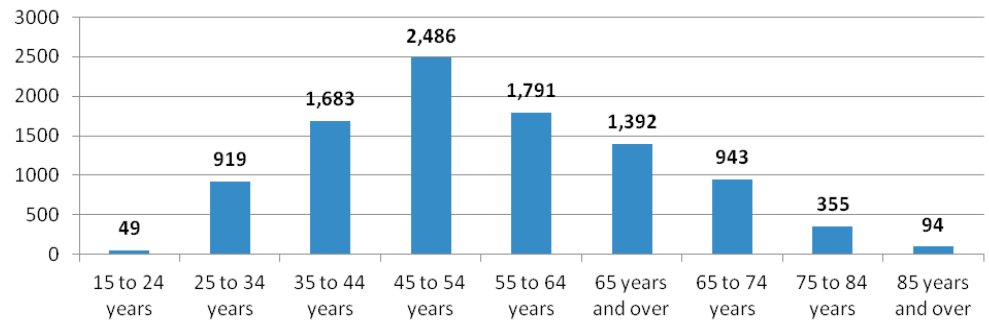
The following tables and charts summarize household data for both owner-occupied and rental dwelling units in Merrimack. **Figure 3-5** shows that of all the occupied housing units, 73 percent are owned by someone who is paying down a mortgage or loan for the home, while 15 percent are owned free and clear. The remaining 12 percent are rental units.

Figure 3-6 shows the distribution of householder age for owner occupied units. Thirty percent of the owners are in the 45 – 54 age bracket. Significantly, one third of all owner occupied units are owned by people 65 years old and over. Similarly, **Figure 3-7** shows the data for rental units. The majority of renters (42 percent) are between 25 and 44 years old. Almost 39 percent of all renters are over 65 years old.

Figure 3-5: Occupied Housing Units by Tenure

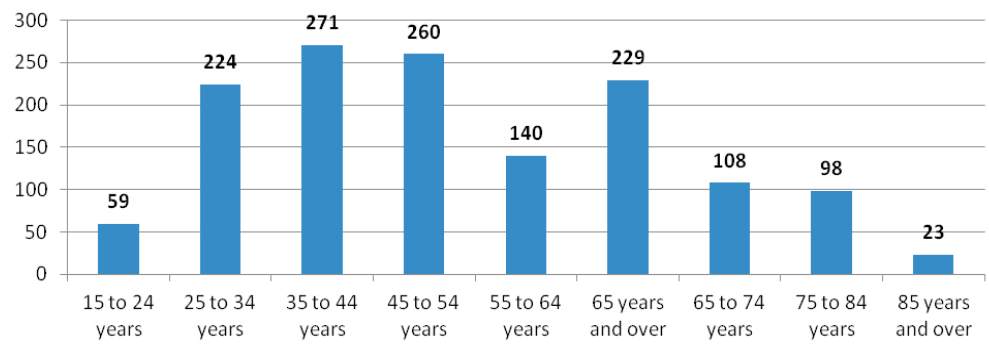
Source: US Census 2010

Figure 3-6: Age of Householder: Owner Occupied Housing Units



Source: US Census 2010

Figure 3-7: Age of Householder: Renter Occupied Housing Units



Source: US Census 2010

3.5 Housing Conditions

Household growth is a major driver of housing demand in a community. As the number of households in Merrimack increased between 2000 and 2010, so has the number of housing units. As shown in [Table 3-7](#), there were 9,818 housing units in Merrimack in 2010, with 97 percent (9,503 units) being occupied. There is very little (less than 1 percent) seasonal housing in Merrimack.

Table 3-7: Change in Housing Units (2000-2010)

Housing Units	2000	2010	# Change	% Change
Occupied	8,882	9,503	641	7%
Vacant	130	315	185	142%
Total	9,013	9,818	805	9%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

Table 3-8 shows the vacancy rate comparison between 2000 and 2010. Although the number of vacant units is relatively small, (approximately 6 percent of all units in Hillsborough County and 16 percent in the state of New Hampshire are vacant), the increase since 2000 is fairly dramatic, possibly one result of the 2008 recession.

Table 3-8: Housing Vacancy

	2000	2010
Vacant units	130	315
Total housing units	9,013	9,818
Vacancy rate	1%	3%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

Of the 9,503 occupied housing units in Merrimack, approximately 88 percent were owner-occupied in 2010. This equals 8,320 units, which is a 9 percent increase from 2000, as shown in **Table 3-9**. However, the number of renter-occupied units decreased by 8 percent during the same 10-year period, from 1,281 in 2000 to 1,183 in 2010. This may reflect a trend toward conversion of rental to ownership units during this time period.

Table 3-9: Housing Tenure

Occupied Housing Units	2000	2010	% change
Owner Occupied	7,601	8,320	9%
Renter Occupied	1,281	1,183	-8%

Source: US Census 2000 and 2010

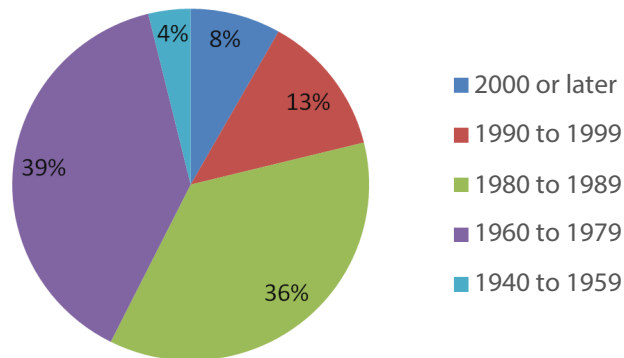
In terms of housing type, Merrimack is predominantly home to single-family dwellings (72 percent), which is similar to the percentage in 2000.⁷ The remainder of the units are two-family dwellings such as duplexes or multi-family housing developments.



⁷ Current Estimates and Trends in New Hampshire's Housing Supply Update: 2009; State of New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning; October 2010

The housing stock in Merrimack is relatively new. A large portion of the Town's housing stock (75 percent) was built between 1960 and 1989, as shown in **Figure 3-8**. The 1990's showed another major increase in housing production, which has slowed somewhat since 2000, in part because of the recent economic downturn.

Figure 3-8: Age of Housing Stock



3.6 Housing Market

3.6.1 Home Sales Prices and Rental Costs

The sales prices of homes in Merrimack have grown considerably over the last decade, which is an indication that the values of owner occupied housing in the community have remained strong. As illustrated in **Table 3-10**, the median sale price for all homes increased by 57 percent over ten years from approximately \$140,000 in 2000 to \$220,000 in 2010⁸. This represents an average annual growth rate of almost 6 percent. That said, it should be noted that during the first few months of 2011, the median price dropped to \$185,000 due to the continued fallout in the housing market associated with the 2008 recession (the median price before the recession was \$245,000). A comparison between new and existing homes is difficult due to a small sample size for new home sales in Merrimack during this time period. This increase is similar to Hillsborough County where the median sales price grew by 50 percent overall with annual growth of 5 percent (\$150,000 in 2000 to \$225,000 in 2010). County-wide prices peaked at \$265,000 before the recession.⁹

⁸ Note that the median price actually peaked at \$255,000 in 2005, which represents an 82 percent increase in five years or an annual increase of 16 percent. Similarly, the median price in Hillsborough County peaked in 2007 at \$265,000.

⁹ New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

Table 3-10: Median Home Prices in Merrimack and Hillsborough County – 2000-2011

Year	Merrimack Home Median Price	Hillsborough County Median Home Price	Merrimack Condominium Median Price	Hillsborough County Median Condominium Price
2000	\$139,900	\$149,900	\$102,900	\$105,000
2001	\$172,000	\$172,000	\$130,000	\$123,000
2002	\$191,000	\$203,700	\$149,900	\$150,000
2003	\$206,900	\$225,000	\$165,000	\$169,900
2004	\$240,000	\$249,900	\$185,153	\$185,000
2005	\$255,000	\$263,900	\$193,000	\$191,933
2006	\$239,900	\$262,000	\$179,900	\$189,000
2007	\$244,900	\$265,000	\$186,200	\$197,500
2008	\$225,000	\$244,900	\$175,000	\$189,900
2009	\$205,000	\$218,500	\$156,000	\$168,000
2010	\$220,000	\$224,900	\$157,000	\$175,000
2011	\$214,000	\$210,533	\$152,000	\$169,000

Source: New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority

Sale prices of condominiums in Merrimack generally grew during this ten year period, although there was considerable fluctuation over the years, ranging from \$103,000 in 2000 to \$193,000 in 2005 (the median in 2010 was \$157,000). Data for Hillsborough County shows a generally higher median price, which peaked at \$197,500 before the start of the recession and is \$175,000 in 2010.¹⁰

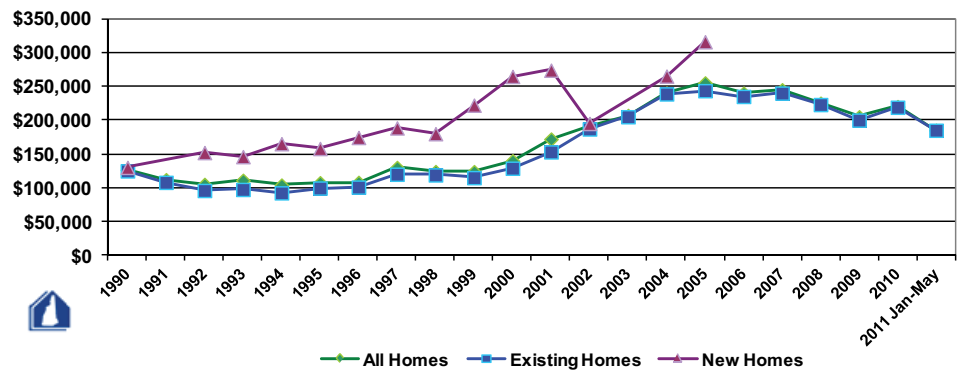
Median home prices in the towns surrounding Merrimack in 2010 were higher except in Nashua where the median price was comparable.



¹⁰ Ibid.

Figure 3-9 tracks the median home price trends for Merrimack from 1990 through early 2011.

Figure 3-9: Median Home Price Trends in Merrimack 1990-2011



Source: New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority

Note: Data with a small sample size of less than 50 are considered not valid. As a result, 2006 through 2011 new homes data are not displayed in the graph.

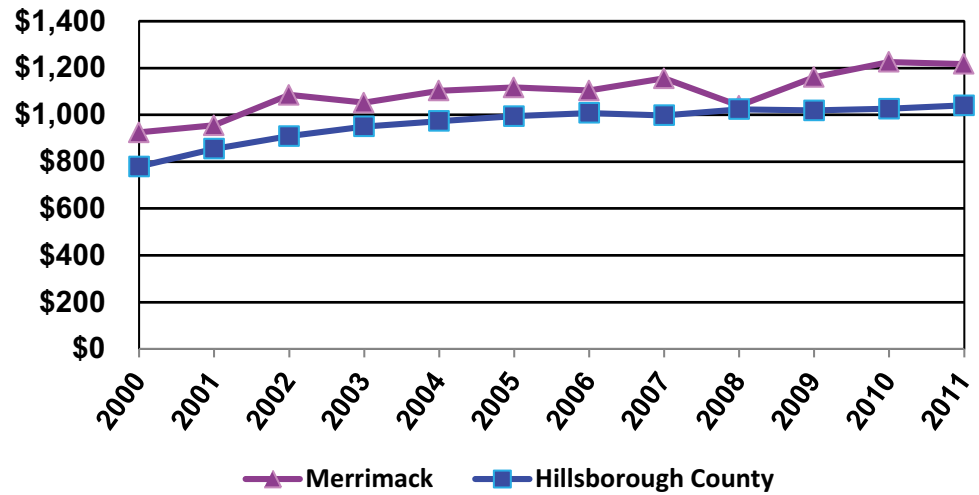
Median rental costs for apartments in Merrimack have increased steadily since 2000 from \$925 per month to \$1,217 in 2011. This translates into a 32 percent increase over the last 11 years, or 3 percent a year. These costs represent all rental units combined in terms of the number of bedrooms. The median rental costs for Hillsborough County were generally lower during the same time period, ranging from \$779 per month in 2000 to \$1,026 in 2011, which also corresponds to a 32 percent increase, or 3 percent annually. These rental costs are summarized in Table 3-11 and Figure 3-10.¹¹

Table 3-11: Median Rental Costs in Merrimack and Hillsborough County (all units) 2000-2011

Year	Merrimack Median Rental Costs	Hillsborough County Median Rental Costs
2000	\$925	\$779
2001	\$955	\$855
2002	\$1,085	\$909
2003	\$1,052	\$950
2004	\$1,103	\$973
2005	\$1,117	\$994
2006	\$1,104	\$1,008
2007	\$1,156	\$998
2008	\$1,039	\$1,024
2009	\$1,161	\$1,019
2010	\$1,226	\$1,026
2011	\$1,217	\$1,040

Source: New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority

11 New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

Figure 3-10: Median Rental Costs in and Hillsborough County, 2000 – 2011

3.6.2 Housing Affordability

As the information in the preceding section illustrates, the cost to purchase a home or rent an apartment in Merrimack has risen substantially over the past decade. Renting an apartment in Merrimack remains higher than the Hillsborough County as a whole, however, buying a home is more affordable in Merrimack than the Hillsborough County. Ensuring that there is adequate affordable housing over the long-term has continued to be an issue of concern in Merrimack, as well as the region and the southern tier of New Hampshire for the better part of two decades. Housing affordability is a concern from both a social and an economic perspective. If households are required to pay a large portion of their incomes for housing it could result in a shortage of funds for other critical needs, such as food, health care, heating, etc. Furthermore, if inadequate affordable housing is available it can adversely affect the area's businesses and public agencies by reducing the supply of workers required to fill a variety of needed job skills.



The magnitude of this issue caused the New Hampshire Legislature to enact new legislation in 2008 requiring all communities to support the creation of workforce housing through their land use regulations. New Hampshire RSA 674:59, Workforce Housing Opportunities, states the following:

“...ordinances and regulations shall provide reasonable and realistic opportunities for the development of workforce housing, including multifamily housing. In order to provide such opportunities, lot size and overall density requirements for workforce housing shall be reasonable. A municipality that adopts land use ordinances and regulations shall allow workforce housing to be located in a majority, but not necessarily all, of the land area that is zoned to permit residential uses with the municipality.”

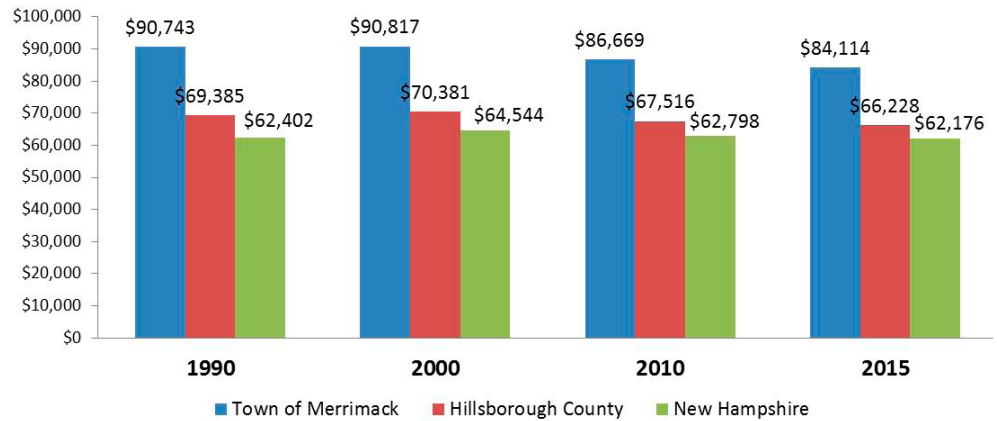
As further noted in the statute, workforce housing is defined based on affordability limits that consider income levels not solely within Merrimack, but within the region as a whole. It states that for-sale workforce housing must be affordable to a household with an income of no more than 100 percent of the median income for a 4-person household for the metropolitan area or county in which the housing is located. It is also defined as rental housing that is affordable to a household with an income of no more than 60 percent of the median income for a 3-person household.¹² The income affordability guidelines require that no more than 30 percent of household income be required to support rent and utility costs, or the combined cost of mortgage, property taxes, and insurance, in the case of owner occupied housing.

3.7 Housing Needs Assessment

A housing needs assessment examines the overall demographic profile of Merrimack, along with the household income of the population and housing costs to determine how the Town can best meet its needs for providing a diverse and affordable housing stock for its citizens. Based upon the information provided above, the needs assessment includes several major findings related to Merrimack’s population and housing needs. These findings are described below:

- Merrimack median household income for 2010 was \$86,669. For Hillsborough County, the 2010 median household income was \$67,516 and it was \$62,798 throughout New Hampshire. **Figure 3-11** presents the median household income for Merrimack, Hillsborough County, and New Hampshire adjusting to 2010 dollars to account for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. When accounting for standard consumer price inflation on goods such as food, housing, and transportation, real household income has been steadily dropping from \$90,817 in 2000 to \$86,669 in 2010. The 2015 projections show that the trend toward lower median household income is expected to continue in Merrimack, Hillsborough County, and New Hampshire. Median household income in Merrimack is projected to fall to \$84,114 in 2015 as shown on **Figure 3-11**.

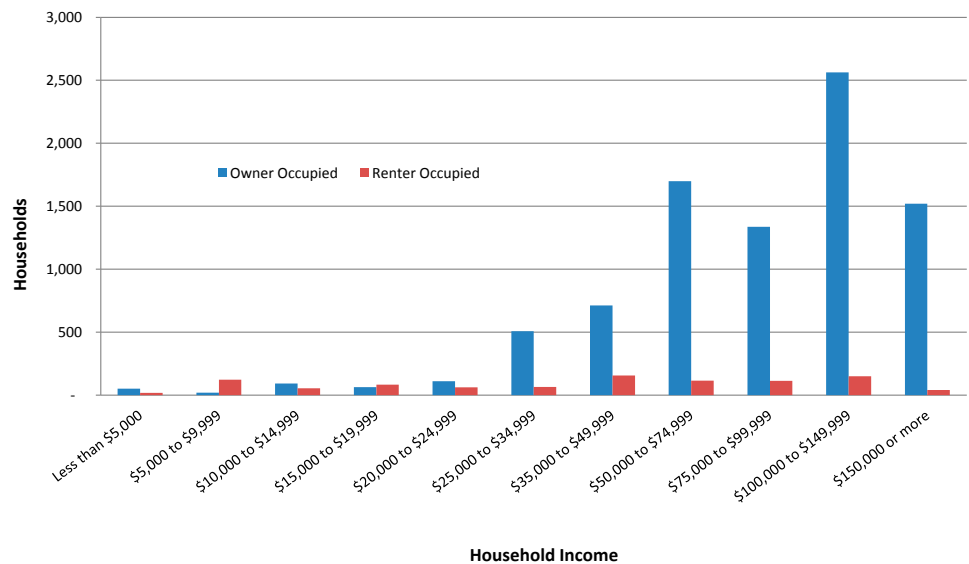
12 Refers to income guidelines published annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Figure 3-11: Merrimack Median Household Income in Merrimack 1990-2015


Source: US Census 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015 projection.

Note: Income adjusted using Northeast CPI-U (Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers) 2010 dollars.

Figure 3-12 illustrates the distribution of median household income for renter and owner occupied housing in Merrimack.

Figure 3-12: 2011 Household Income Distribution for Renter and Owner Occupied Housing


- As described above, for housing to be affordable as defined by the workforce housing statute, for-sale housing must be affordable to households earning at or below 100 percent of area median income. For rental housing, the standard is 60 percent of area median income. For the purposes of determining affordability pursuant to the workforce housing law, area median income for Merrimack is based upon the Nashua HUD Metro Fair Market Rents Area (HFMA).
- According to 2012 figures from HUD, the 100 percent of area median income for a family of four in the Nashua HMFA is \$94,000, which will be the target number for determining affordability of for-sale housing units. For rental housing, 60 percent of the area median

income is \$50,070 adjusted for a family of three.¹³

- New Hampshire Housing estimates that the affordable purchase price for a home in Merrimack is \$295,000 and the estimated affordable rent is \$1,250 per month. The estimated affordable purchase price assumes that no more than 30 percent of household income is spent for housing after a 5 percent down payment, a 30 year mortgage at a 4.81 percent interest rate, private mortgage insurance, taxes and homeowners insurance. The estimated affordable rent is based upon an expenditure of no more than 30 percent of household income that includes the monthly rental cost and utilities.
- Based upon those figures and the current median home price of \$220,000 and the median monthly rent cost of \$1,217, there is no housing affordability gap in Merrimack at this time.
- In 2009, 71.3 percent of the homes units sold were priced at or below, the estimated affordable purchase price. In 2011, 60.1 percent of the two-bedroom dwelling units were rented at the estimated affordable rental cost. These figures are for the Nashua HFMA, not just Merrimack.
- Given that median household income is projected to drop slightly over the next few years and the expectation that housing prices will recover, it is still important to look for ways to ensure that the housing stock remains diverse and affordable into the future in order to avoid an affordability gap. The recession resulted in a disruption of housing prices, but this has created an opportunity for the Town to foster housing affordability in the future by proactively employing the strategies described below that help to diversify the housing stock. If housing prices continued to rise at the pre-recession rate and if household income stayed steady, there would likely have been an affordability gap.
- Demographically, Merrimack is a growing community. As is true for many communities in NH and around the country, the growth is more heavily weighted towards the older population segments. Additional options for housing the growing elder population should be considered. Merrimack is also a community of predominantly family households, and Merrimack's housing stock is predominantly single-family dwellings. Merrimack has infrastructure issues that present a challenge to denser development (sewer and water), but also has areas of town where both town sewer and water are available.

3.8 Housing Recommendations

While there may not be any identifiable housing affordability gap based upon the housing needs assessment, it is important for Merrimack to create new opportunities to diversify and preserve its existing housing stock. The following recommendations are made to establish housing policies that achieve the housing goals set forth in this Plan.

13 New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority 2011 Workforce Housing Purchase and Rent Limits, RSA 674:58 – 6. [\[http://www.nhhfa.org/rl_docs/WrkfrchHsngPurchaseAndRentLimits_current.pdf\]](http://www.nhhfa.org/rl_docs/WrkfrchHsngPurchaseAndRentLimits_current.pdf). Accessed August 2012.

In order to strengthen the Town's commitment to housing diversity and affordability, it should establish a Housing Commission that can advocate for the development of affordable workforce housing. A Commission can act as a resource to other Town boards and commissions on issues that arise relating to housing. It is not a regulatory body. However, a Housing Commission can also receive gifts of money or property to create an affordable housing fund. It can acquire and dispose of real property interests, subject to Town approval, in order to preserve or enhance housing affordability.

Consider establishing

H-1 Establish a Housing Commission that can advocate for the development of affordable workforce housing. A Commission can act as a resource to other Town boards and commissions on issues that arise relating to housing. It is not a regulatory body. However, a Housing Commission can also receive gifts of money or property to create an affordable housing fund. It can acquire and dispose of real property interests, subject to Town approval, in order to preserve or enhance housing affordability.

Goal 1: Encourage high-quality housing in attractive neighborhoods through development of innovative land use controls, regulations and programs, such as incentive bonuses to encourage features in site plans/New Hampshire Revised Statutes (RSA).

- H-2 Encourage more mixed-use and infill development where appropriate along the Daniel Webster Highway corridor. This encourages the reuse of vacant or underdeveloped parcels and can allow for development at higher densities where the infrastructure can support it. Mixed-use development helps to diversify the housing stock by creating dwelling units that tend to be smaller and more affordable, either as rental or for-sale units.
- H-3 Allow for smaller lot sizes in selected areas where water and sewer infrastructure is available.
- H-4 Utilize substandard lots in certain areas by allowing subdivision of a lot into two lots – one with reduced area and width requirements. These new smaller lots could be developed with a goal of providing an alternative means for reducing housing costs.
- H-5 Revise the zoning ordinance to encourage the development of more duplex and townhouse dwellings.

Goal 2: Maintain the Town of Merrimack's compliance in meeting the housing affordability goals pursuant to the Workforce Housing Law.

- H-6 Consider adopting an Inclusionary Zoning ordinance. Many communities have enacted inclusionary zoning to designate a certain percentage of new housing units as affordable units that meet the requirements of the Workforce Housing Law. Setting aside a certain percentage of units as affordable would be done on a voluntary basis by developers if incentives are provided such as density bonuses, relief from specific dimensional regulations, or the exemption from paying certain fees, for example.
- H-7 Consider revisions to the zoning regulations to allow for accessory apartments to make them more viable housing options, especially for senior citizen households. Do not

restrict accessory units to only family members and consider them as a by-right use rather than requiring a special permit. However, owner-occupancy of either the principal or the accessory unit can be one way in which to ensure greater neighborhood stability.

H-8 Inventory town-owned land and tax title property to identify potential parcels for use as affordable housing sites, which can be developed/rehabilitated by the Town or private developers.

H-9 Prepare a detailed and updated housing needs assessment that allows the Town to realistically achieve the creation of new affordable units to meet the needs of current and future Merrimack residents. This will be important given the changing demographics of the Town, especially the increasing population over 65 years of age, and the housing market that is still in a state of flux in the aftermath of the housing collapse during the recent recession. An emphasis should be placed on establishing housing for senior citizens, including assisted living facilities, and creating entry level housing opportunities for younger residents. This effort should be coordinated by the Merrimack Housing Commission, if established.

Goal 3: Ensure that housing choices are available to meet the needs of current and future generations in Merrimack.

H-10 Continue to look for ways to meet the needs of the growing elderly population. The Town currently has a couple of housing developments for senior citizens, although they are for market rate units. Others have been proposed but did not proceed because of market conditions. One option that is gaining more attraction around the country is for so-called senior cottage housing that provides for small single-family housing units clustered around a common building and other amenities.

H-11 Create incentives for open space residential development to enhance protection of open space while providing for a more diverse range of housing types. Construction costs can be reduced through lower infrastructure expenditures and lower maintenance costs by clustering dwelling units as a means to preserving larger contiguous open space resources.