

# Chapter 8 - Housing



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## Housing

### A. Housing Growth

The County's housing supply increased from 150,222 to an estimated 164,827 units between 2000 and 2010. This gain of 14,605 units represents an increase of 9.7%. While this rate reflects a modest increase, it appears as though the level of activity reached a plateau during the last two decades (Table 8.1). This plateau appears to be continuing and following economic trends. According to the Census, both the 1980's and 1990's experienced 12% rates of increase in the number of housing units, which is a notable reduction from the 19% gain between 1970 and 1979. The slowdown in housing unit growth continued between 2000 and 2010 with a modest 9.7% gain. This numerical change between 2000 and 2010 is similar to the numerical change that occurred between 1980 and 1990.

**Table 8.1**  
**Housing Units, Berks County: 1970-2010**

	<u>County Total</u>	<u>Numerical Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
1970	101,027	-----	-----
1980	119,934	18,907	18.7%
1990	134,482	14,548	12.1%
2000	150,222	15,740	11.7%
2010	164,827	14,605	9.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

### B. Housing Type

Table 8.2 illustrates the housing growth since 2000. These residential construction figures are based on information received from the Berks County Assessment Office. These units are added to the tax rolls when construction is complete and a municipality issues their occupancy permit. The peak year for residential construction activity during this period was 2001 when 2,787 new housing units were completed and occupied. The low year was 2010 in which only 539 new units were completed and occupied.

The bulk of the County's existing housing stock, as reported by the 2009 Census, was composed of single-family detached (89,312 units) and attached homes (38,205 units). There were 27,946 multi-unit structures, and 6,094 mobile homes were also reported. Since 2000, the most predominate construction type has been the single-family detached unit, as 70% (12,229 units) of all the new units in the County from 2000-2010 were of this type. Additionally, 1,016 townhouses (5.8%), 987 semi-detached units (5.6%), 1,251 mobile homes (7.1%), and 2,692 apartment units (15.4%) were added.

**Table 8.2**  
**Residential Construction, Berks County: 2000 - 2010**  
**Berks County**

Year	No. of Single Family	No. of Semi- Detached	No. of Town- Houses	No. of Apart. Units	No. of Manuf. Homes	Demolitions	Net Total Units
2000	1,563	131	95	224	160	31	2,142
2001	1,570	128	159	799	131	33	2,754
2002	1,537	159	105	129	117	36	2,011
2003	1,568	86	71	351	124	90	2,110
2004	1,359	66	110	157	134	78	1,748
2005	1,081	49	82	245	124	42	1,539
2006	1,293	50	87	313	111	87	1,767
2007	900	106	109	35	112	103	1,159
2008	627	87	98	250	105	84	1,083
2009	386	81	49	156	67	73	666
2010	345	44	51	33	66	65	474
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,229</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>1,016</b>	<b>2,692</b>	<b>1,251</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>17,453</b>

Source: Berks County Assessment Office

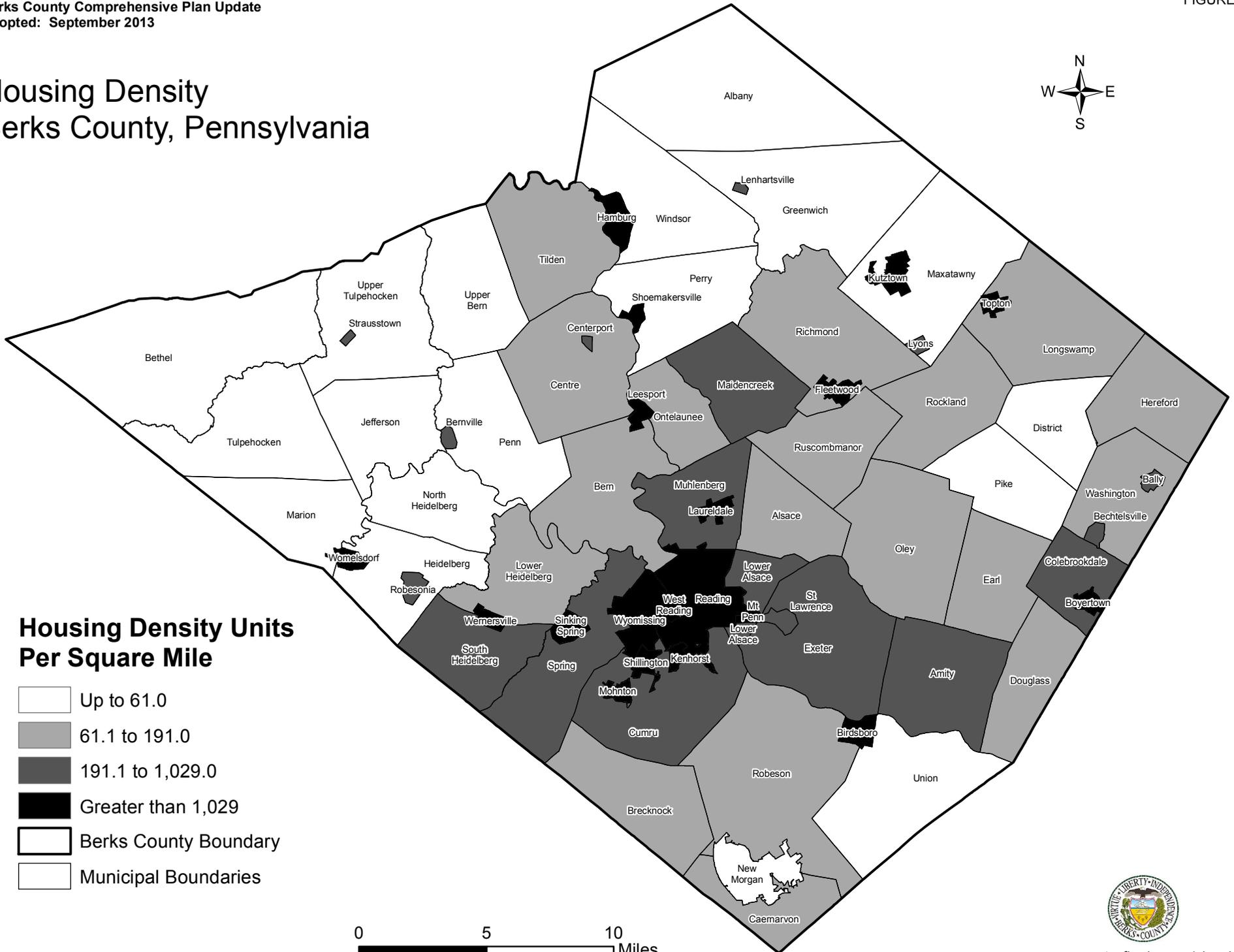
### C. Housing Density

Urban development extends along the major highways, away from the City of Reading into surrounding municipalities. The northern and western sections of the County continue to have the lowest housing densities. Most of the municipalities in these areas have densities of less than 50 dwelling units per square mile. These figures reflect the predominance of agriculture in the area, and the existence of the Blue Mountain range. The overall County housing density, according to the 2010 Census, was approximately 191 du/square mile. This is an increase from the 1990 Census which was 174 du/square mile. All boroughs in the County, except for New Morgan Borough, have housing densities higher than those of the townships, as portrayed on the Housing Density Map (Figure 8.1).

### D. Housing Tenure and Vacancy

Tenure is an occupancy characteristic of housing units and is probably one of the most important individual housing characteristics. The term "tenure" is used by the Census to distinguish between "owner-occupied" and "renter-occupied" units. A marked decrease in renter-occupied housing stock in the County developed between 1970 and 1990 (Table 8.3). And, between 1990 and 2000, renter-occupied housing became stagnant. The percentage of housing units occupied by renters declined from 28.0% in 1970 to 26.1% in 1990. In 2000, the percentage of rental housing units remained at 26.1%, but showed a marked increase in 2010. According to the 2010 Census, the number of occupied housing units in Berks County was 154,365 units, of which 110,653 (71.7%) were owner-occupied residences and 43,703 (28.3%) were renter-occupied units. There was a higher concentration of owner-occupied units in the townships where owner-occupancy rates over 80% were common. The City of Reading (57.6%) and Kutztown Borough (53.6%) had the highest percentage of rental units in the County. The high percentage of rental

# Housing Density Berks County, Pennsylvania





units in Kutztown is largely due to the Kutztown University student population located within the Borough.

According to the 2010 Census, there were 10,471 vacant housing units in Berks County. This amounts to an overall vacancy rate of 6.4%. The homeowner vacancy rate for the County was 1.7%, and the rental vacancy rate was 7.5%.

**Table 8.3**  
**Housing Tenure, Berks County: 1970-2010**

Tenure	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Occupied Units	97,523	114,544	127,649	141,570	154,356
Owner-Occupied	70,236	82,856	94,336	104,719	110,653
% of Occupied Units	72.0	72.3	73.9	73.9	71.7
Renter-Occupied	27,287	31,688	33,313	36,851	43,703
% of Occupied Units	28.0	27.7	26.1	26.1	28.3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

### **E. Residential Subdivisions**

Endorsed subdivision plans reflect general development interest and do not necessarily represent actual construction of housing units. However, this data yields information concerning near-term construction trends, the size and extent of development, as well as the type of housing. When a subdivision plan has been approved and recorded, there is a high degree of likelihood it will be built. However, this may take a period of several years to implement.

Table 8.4 summarizes endorsed residential subdivision plans over the past 15 years to 2009 in Berks County. The total number of dwelling units proposed in the plans fluctuated annually through the period, with a high of 2,646 units proposed in 1996 and low of 545 units proposed in 2000. While the predominant form of development has been the single-family detached units, an increase in semi-detached, townhouse and apartment units was noted. The average acreage per dwelling unit fluctuated through the period; however, it generally decreased throughout the period with the exception of 2000. This reflects an overall reduction in proposed lot size that corresponds to the increase of attached units.

**Table 8.4**  
**Residential Subdivision Plans, Berks County: 1995-2009**

Number of New Housing Units By Type

Year	Single Family	Semi-Detached	Townhouse	Apartment	Mobile Home	Residential Units	Total Residential Acreage	Total Average Acres/D.U.
1995	1,265	190	228	100	112	1,895	3,385	1.79
1996	1,800	240	255	301	50	2,646	3,637	1.37
1997	1,658	132	27	242	140	2,199	3,821	1.74
1998	1,766	143	202	158	5	2,274	3,643	1.60
1999	1,339	426	140	100	310	2,315	2,494	1.08
2000	442	38	57	8	0	545	2,728	5.01
2001	850	141	56	0	0	1,047	1,319	1.26
2002	887	48	189	392	215	1,731	1,574	0.91
2003	1,396	42	145	98	1	1,682	1,971	1.17
2004	1,266	10	10	145	302	1,733	1,672	0.96
2005	1,413	242	570	366	5	2,596	2,035	0.78
2006	1,245	54	317	330	1	1,947	1,773	0.91
2007	420	82	121	260	0	883	1,179	1.33
2008	184	34	125	738	0	1,081	813	0.75
2009	121	22	52	370	63	628	474	0.75

Source: Berks County Planning Commission Annual Subdivision Reports

### F. Housing Programs

The majority of federal housing programs are administered either by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the Department of Agriculture. HUD and FSA administer a wide range of housing programs and provide direct and indirect housing assistance through their broad range of single and multi-family housing programs.

The Reading Housing Authority and the Berks County Housing Authority administer local public housing programs for low-income, elderly and handicapped persons. The majority of public housing in Berks County is located in the City of Reading and is operated by the Reading Housing Authority, including such developments as: Oakbrook Homes, Glenside Homes, and several high-rise apartments for the elderly. The Berks County Housing Authority manages smaller developments outside the City. According to the 2000 Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Plan, there were a total of 4,251 housing units in Berks County.

Housing is at the core of the lives of the residents of the City of Reading and to the City's tax base. Like many of the Commonwealth's cities of the third class, the City's housing stock faces many issues, such as aging properties, high renter-occupancy, multiple unit dwellings, and a higher than average vacant and/or abandoned units. These issues create problems for the City with registering and inspecting the rental unit properties while making sure the dwellings meet building codes. Aging properties require continual maintenance and repairs which in some areas of the City have not occurred. Vacancy and abandoned properties create problems with blight and is often times linked with crime. The *City of Reading's Act 47 Recovery Plan* states that

‘A city that cannot afford to provide basic public services will not attract new or retain current residents-nor will a City whose services are inefficient or duplicative-and result in a higher tax rate than necessary.’ The *Recovery Plan* has laid out initiatives to help address the housing issues.

The use of Berks County Community Development office funds attempts to address blight and the over-supply of housing through selective demolition of blighted properties. One example of this is the buttonwood gateway neighborhood where many properties have been demolished in an effort to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and increase the opportunity for economic revitalization.



## Housing Policies

### Housing Goal:

To provide every household with the opportunity for affordable, healthful, and diverse housing choices in locations compatible with the land use policies of this Plan.

### a. Housing Supply

#### Goal:

To provide an adequate supply of dwelling units to meet present and projected population.

#### Policies:

- (1) The County encourages municipalities to provide a variety of housing types to accommodate residents as their housing needs change.
- (2) The County encourages the rehabilitation of structurally sound houses and demolition of dilapidated structures.
- (3) The County supports an emphasis on total neighborhood improvement with adequate parking, recreation facilities, landscaping, and other amenities.
- (4) The County supports building neighborhood partnership teams between the municipality, neighborhood residents, institutions, and local businesses to sponsor improvement programs.
- (5) The County encourages efforts to increase home ownership opportunities in existing neighborhoods.
- (6) The County supports implementation of programs that help first-time home buyers and low and moderate income residents to repair their homes.
- (7) The County endorses a level of new construction that satisfies market demand.
- (8) The County promotes adaptive reuse of obsolete buildings for dwelling purposes.
- (9) The County encourages municipalities to provide a variety of housing types to accommodate residents as their housing needs change.

### b. Housing Location

#### Goal:

To provide a variety of housing locations within areas containing community facilities and services as well as adequate access to public transportation.

#### Policies:

- (1) The County encourages the construction of new housing units in Growth Areas identified in the Land Use Plan, where public transportation and a variety of community facilities, jobs, and services are available.
- (2) The County encourages zoning provisions that integrate a variety of housing types, civic uses, and small-scale, low-volume commercial uses.
- (3) The County discourages residential development of sensitive environmental areas, such as floodplains, steep slopes, and wetlands. Residential units should be constructed on the portion of the site with the least amount of environmental constraints.
- (4) The County supports limited growth in rural areas, as determined by site constraints and the level of municipal services.

- (5) The County encourages zoning provisions that favor open space (cluster) design techniques, traditional neighborhood design, neo-traditional village, planned residential development, performance zoning, and innovative lotting arrangements in order to minimize the impact of development on the natural environment, create usable open space, and provide for the greatest variety of housing types and densities.

### c. Choice of Housing Types

#### Goal:

To provide a variety of housing types and densities using innovative development patterns and design techniques.

#### Policies:

- (1) The County supports zoning regulations that have flexible provisions to allow for a mixture of housing types and densities.
- (2) The County encourages land within Growth Areas to be zoned for medium and high-density residential development, which will support public facilities and services.
- (3) The County encourages residential neighborhoods to be cohesive and have a sense of place that promotes social interaction.
- (4) The County encourages builders to construct a greater variety of housing types that appeal to various age groups.

### d. Housing Affordability

#### Goal:

To provide a variety of affordable housing opportunities to households of all income levels throughout the County.

Affordable housing – housing where the occupant is paying no more than 30% of gross income for gross housing costs, including utility costs.

#### Policies:

- (1) The County encourages municipalities and developers to provide housing that is affordable to low and moderate income households.
- (2) The County encourages affordable housing for low and moderate-income households to be located where public transportation is available or could be extended.
- (3) The County encourages municipalities to provide density bonuses and developer incentives for the construction of affordable housing units.

### e. Housing Standards

#### Goal:

To require that existing housing and new construction meet minimum health and safety standards.

#### Policies:

- (1) The County encourages new and existing structures to conform with the minimum standards found in the Uniform Construction Code.
- (2) The County endorses the construction of energy-efficient dwelling units.

- (3) The County endorses the use of water conservation plumbing fixtures.
- (4) The County encourages municipalities to adopt regulations for existing dwellings located in the 1% annual chance floodplain to be properly flood-proofed, and have adequate flood insurance coverage.
- (5) The County encourages the use of building codes and design standards to make structures more earthquake resistant.

#### **f. Housing for Special Needs Population**

##### **Goal:**

To provide a diverse range of housing opportunities for special needs populations.

##### **Policies:**

- (1) The County encourages municipalities to adopt development regulations that foster alternative housing options, such as accessory apartments, elder cottage housing opportunities (ECHO) housing, retirement communities, condominiums, full care facilities, group homes, single room occupancy residences, and shelters.
- (2) The County supports fair housing laws that prohibit discrimination in sale or rental of housing due to race, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability.
- (3) The County recommends that housing for special needs populations be located in proximity to public transportation, shopping, jobs, medical facilities, and other services.

