

V. HOUSING

A. INTRODUCTION

Standard housing units provide, among other things, shelter, one of man's basic needs. Housing becomes a problem when man is not able to secure that housing which satisfies this need. Many groups and individuals, for a host of reasons, are confronted with a myriad of housing and housing-related problems. The most prevalent and crucial problems, and those on which the most attention is centered, are related to too many substandard dwelling units and an inadequate supply of standard units to meet the demand and needs of the general population, at prices affordable by the general population.

A number of reports have indicated a correlation between the occupancy of substandard dwelling units and the occurrence of other problems (immoral and antisocial behavior, physical and mental diseases, poverty, etc.). Substandard dwelling units, whether occupied or vacant, are a problem. Entire communities, those within which such units exist and those adjacent thereto, can be negatively impacted by the problems associated with the existence and occupancy of less than standard dwelling units. All levels of government should do all that is possible to insure that decent housing and suitable living environments are made accessible to all citizens.

B. HOUSING INVENTORY

EXHIBIT V-A SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA HOUSING STOCK							
	Single Family		Mobile Home		Multi-Family		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
1980 Housing Stock	5,649	90.4	407	6.5	195	3.1	6,251
1990 Housing Stock	5,416	82.6	909	13.9	235	3.6	6,560
2000 Housing Stock	5,858	76.8	1,526	20.0	243	3.2	7,627

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, and Southampton County Planning and Zoning Department.

It should be noted that these figures are generated from building permits obtained and thus do not take into account units lost to fire or other disaster or replacements of units (primarily mobile homes) previously counted. Additional general housing characteristics for Southampton County are presented in EXHIBIT V-B.

EXHIBIT V-B SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA GENERAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS, 1990	
	1990
TOTAL HOUSING UNITS:	6,560
Year-Round Housing Units	6,009
Vacant (Includes Seasonal and Migratory)	551
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS:	
Lacking Complete Kitchen Facilities	430
Lacking Complete Plumbing Facilities	704
SOURCE OF WATER:	
Public System or Private Company	2,581
Individual Drilled Well	2,664
Individual Dug Well	1,226
Some Other Source	89
SEWAGE DISPOSAL:	
Public Sewer	1,109
Septic Tank/Drainfield	4,794
Other Means	657
YEAR-ROUND HOUSING UNITS:	
1 Unit	5,416
2 Units	57
3 or More Units	178
Mobile Home, Trailer, or Other	909
OWNER-OCCUPIED UNITS	4,298
Percent Owner-Occupied	71.5%
RENTER OCCUPIED UNITS	1,711
VACANT HOUSING UNITS	
Held for Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use	551

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing*.

C. DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING

There are approximately 394,000 acres or 600.3 square miles of land in Southampton County. Less than five percent of the County's lands are utilized for residential purposes. Most residential development is concentrated in towns, village centers, adjacent to the City of Franklin, and as strip development along the County's roads and highways.

In 1990, there were 6,560 total housing units in Southampton County; 6,009 units were occupied. Single-family structures have been the dominant housing type in Virginia and in Southampton County. Multi-family residential development has not been very prevalent in the County. The number of mobile homes -- single-wides and double-wides -- in the County is increasing. There were a total of 909 mobile homes in the County 1990. Since 1993 alone, 617 class A and class B mobile homes have been added, making the total in excess of 1,525.

D. DISTRIBUTION OF RENTAL HOUSING

Of the 6,009 housing units occupied by the total population of Southampton County in 1990, 4,298 were owner-occupied. The median gross monthly rent in the County in 1990 was \$265.00.

E. BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED

Since 1996, Southampton County has seen a relatively constant level of building activity. As EXHIBIT V-C indicates manufactured and mobile homes (single-wide and double-wide) have accounted for 373 (54.8%) of the permits issued for new structures. Site built dwellings (single family and multi-family) accounted for 250 (36.7%) of the permits issued.

EXHIBIT V-C SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA BUILDING PERMIT ACTIVITY, 1996-1999						
YEAR	MODULAR & SITE BUILT	CLASS A & B MOBILE HOMES	DUPLEXES	COMMERCIAL	INDUSTRIAL	TOTAL
1996	62	91	1	10	4	168
1997	48	95	0	8	1	152
1998	85	101	4	14	1	205
1999	55	86	3	11	1	156
TOTALS	250	373	8	43	7	681

Source: Southampton County Administrator's Office.

F. HOUSING CONDITIONS

In 1990, the median value of specified owner-occupied homes was \$56,300.

Most people know that inflation has a large impact on home purchase and home ownership costs. In many places, site values, labor costs, construction material costs, maintenance and repair costs, mortgage interest payments, property taxes, and poverty insurance costs have increased. Inflation does not, however, completely explain the increased values. More amenities were attached to the typical house in many places. Census data shows that the mean number of rooms for houses in the County in 1990 was 5.8. It is known that a larger number of homes in the County had complete plumbing facilities in 1990 than in 1980. The increased number of rooms and more complete plumbing facilities added to the value of homes in the County. Of the year-round housing units in the County in 1990, 551 or 8.4% were vacant.

G. PLUMBING CONDITIONS

There are a number of variables which can indicate that a dwelling unit is substandard. It is

common practice to use “lacking complete plumbing facilities” to approximate the number of substandard units. The potential fallacy of this method relates to the fact that a unit may have all plumbing facilities but still be substandard. The problem with this method would appear to be potentially more acute in a rural area such as Southampton County, in which such a larger percentage of the houses are not served by public water and sewer facilities.

The 1990 Census indicated that of the 6,560 housing units of the County, 5,856 (89.3%) had complete plumbing facilities. The majority of housing units without complete plumbing facilities are those which are renter occupied and they account for 67 percent (471 units).

H. AGE OF HOUSING

Since 1990, when there were 6,560 housing units in the County, 1,067 units have been added to the County’s stock, making the total 7,627. Of this total, 2,393 (31%) have been built since 1980, meaning nearly 70% of the housing stock is more than twenty years old.

I. CROWDING CONDITIONS

Of the 6,560 housing units in the County in 1990, 8.4% (551) were vacant. The average household size was less than 3 persons. Though proportion-wise the quality of the housing stock did improve, there may be many families living in houses that are not suited to their needs. The County should seek to promote refurbishment of older homes throughout the County as an alternative to manufactured housing, an ancillary benefit being preservation of some outstanding architectural specimens.

J. MOBILE HOME/MANUFACTURED HOME DEVELOPMENT

An increasing number of mobile homes continue to serve as housing units for County residents. Accounting for over 20% of all housing in Southampton County, the mobile home cannot be ignored as a low-cost, affordable housing option. The County should continue to regulate carefully the placement and construction of these homes to ensure quality and compatibility with more traditional housing units.

K. CONCLUSIONS

Southampton County has a diverse population base thus the need for different housing types. The need for rental housing and for housing for low to moderate income groups and the elderly is a major area that should be addressed by future development. The predominant form of housing available in Southampton County is the single family detached dwelling unit. A serious issue facing the County is the gap that exists between what is or can be built, and what many of the elderly, lower income residents and newly formed families are able to afford. The cost of the aforementioned single family detached dwelling is usually too high for most people falling into these groups.

The County should seek to encourage flexibility in housing types in areas suitable for concentration of the population base. The County is currently enacting a rehabilitation program in conjunction with the Boykins – Branchville – Newsoms regional water and sewer project. Monies will be available to improve the indoor plumbing and sanitation facilities of substandard housing in the project area. The County should also work with the STOP organization in its efforts to improve the housing stock of Southampton County.

Residential development should be concentrated in and around the corporate towns and along the corridor between Hunterdale and Sedley. This is not to say that residences in the rural areas should be totally prohibited. They should be carefully planned so as not to cause dense development and future conflicts with farming. The practice of placing houses along county roads on closely spaced lots is one that is desirable to many but can be very harmful to farming through the loss of good farmland and also undesirable due to the visual impact it can have on the rural setting.

The building of new homes in Southampton County has been on a slow steady pace over the past few years. And this coupled with the Boykins/Branchville/Newsoms Regional Water and Sewer project could project a positive outlook on the upgrading of the housing stock of Southampton County.

As stated in the 1989 Comprehensive Plan, the rehabilitation of existing homes should be encouraged, and this effort can be aided by the Regional Project and subsequent rehab programs that may be a spin-off of that project.

New housing should continue to be encouraged in the areas designated as residential developments by the General Land Use Plan. The “double-wide” manufactured home has been viewed by many as an alternative to the stick built home. With product improvements within this industry many of these manufactured homes are approaching the quality of a conventional stick built or modular home. As mentioned in the 1989 Plan, the “single-wide” mobile home is not up to the same level as the “double-wide” and thus the placement of such units should be closely monitored. Once again the State legislators have stepped in and taken away a local land use tool (Special Use Exception) by requiring that manufactured homes less than nineteen feet (single-wides) in width be allowed just as conventional stick built homes of the same nature are. Southampton County is currently studying this change and considering possible responses to regain some of the land use control that has been stripped. Accordingly, the development standards of mobile home parks have been upgraded to provide for nicer developments of this nature.

The dual goals of eliminating substandard housing and providing safe housing for all County residents can be achieved through the cooperation and individual actions of citizens and local organizations. Citizens and local organizations can advocate and assist in improving housing by supporting needed financial and technical implementation and self-help programs. The Comprehensive Plan should provide support for preserving existing residential areas and providing increased housing opportunities.

Preservation requires maintenance of sound structures. Local civic groups can help by sponsoring fix-up/clean-up campaigns and by recruiting volunteers to assist the aged,

infirm, and low-income citizens repair their houses.

Preservation can also be embraced by the Building Code Enforcement Program. Effective Building Code administration can help insure that new construction is of good quality. The Building Code can also be applied to existing buildings, with the objectives of identifying and correcting existing deficiencies at an early time and removing dilapidated structures.

Quality community services must be maintained in the older residential areas. Land use must be protected so that these areas remain attractive for living, and incompatible land uses should not be permitted.

Deficiencies in housing will have to be met through new construction, which can provide safe and sanitary housing for all County residents at a price compatible with the resident's income.

Land use decisions which encourage a variety of housing types and costs are needed. Developers and builders should be afforded the opportunity to expand the County's housing inventory. The County can assist in this by being receptive to and working with the developers.

Part of the future housing needs of the County can be met by using special types of housing, most notably manufactured homes. Manufactured homes take advantage of offsite construction methods to keep the cost of construction down. Since they are constructed elsewhere and moved onto the site, very little time is needed to go from a vacant lot to a unit ready for occupancy. The County should be prepared to accommodate this type of housing by planning for its development and by insuring that it and other special housing types will be developed as an asset to the County. When properly handled, manufactured homes can help the County meet its need for new replacement housing at affordable prices.