



# **Town of Coventry**

## **DRAFT 6/7/22**

### Housing Affordability Plan

[Insert Town Reviewing Authority here]

Adopted [insert date here]

**Completed in Partnership with**

Town of Coventry Planning and Zoning Commission

Coventry Housing Affordability Sub-Committee

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## Community Values Statement

The Town of Coventry is a Town with a rich historic past that possesses significant natural and cultural resources, farmland, open space, and recreational water resources.

Coventry embraces a diverse and inclusive housing stock that provides affordable homeownership opportunities, quality rental options, and housing choices for all household types, income levels, and life stages. It is Coventry's intention to support housing diversity that will allow young people to live in the community where they grew up, enable seniors to remain within the community where they have resided, and provides housing opportunities that strengthen Coventry's economic base as well as that of the region. Coventry is fortunate to have begun cultivating a well-balanced housing stock, but a proactive approach to the satisfaction of all current and future residents is necessary for a sustainable future.

The community must work together to preserve and improve the housing stock to meet its present and future needs. Continued efforts to increase housing affordability will ensure that existing residents can continue to live in the community as they move through different life stages and lifestyles. An inclusive housing stock that provides a range of housing options to current and future residents will allow a diversity of households to benefit from Coventry's many assets. Future housing development should continue to align with the unique characteristics of each zoning district and in accordance with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Coventry prides itself on its excellent quality of life for all residents, responsive town services, and broad access to open space, recreational, and cultural opportunities. These assets, combined with a diverse and accessible housing stock that meets all of the resident's needs, will continue to support our community vitality.

## **Introduction**

The Town of Coventry has developed this Affordable Housing Plan, which identifies strategies to grow the number of affordable housing units over the next five years in a manner that aligns with community values. This plan is intended to satisfy the statutory requirements under CGS Section 8-30j. Affordable Housing Plans must be updated every five years per state statute.

### **What is Affordable Housing?**

In CGS Section 8-30g, the State defines Affordable Housing as housing that costs 30% or less of household income for households making less than 80% of state or Area Median Income (AMI), whichever is lower. As of 2021, a family of four making less than \$79,900 per year or an individual making less than \$55,950 per year could qualify for affordable housing in Coventry. Income limits are updated on an annual basis by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). According to data from the HUD, about 26% of Coventry households make less than 80% of Area Median Income and may be eligible for affordable housing programs.

Affordable housing, as the State defines it, typically only includes protected units that are reserved for low-income households through deed restrictions or through governmental assistance programs such as housing vouchers or subsidized mortgages. According to 2021 data published by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), 247 or 4.7% of Coventry's total housing units were protected affordable units. Coventry also has naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) units. While these units may be affordable to low-income households today, they may not be affordable in the future if rents or home sale prices increase.

A common myth around affordable housing is that it consists only of higher density apartments. This is not true. Affordable housing can be like any other type of housing and comes in many forms, shapes and sizes ranging from single-family homes to duplexes and from townhomes to apartments. It can be privately owned or rented. It can house seniors, families with children, single individuals, or persons with disabilities. It can also come in a range of architectural styles making it virtually indistinguishable from other housing types. While some affordable housing units are owned and managed by public entities, like the Coventry Housing Authority, most are privately owned and managed.

### **Why is Affordable Housing Important?**

Affordable housing provides many benefits to the community. Growing the number of affordable housing units would allow those with roots in the community to continue living here, regardless of their economic status. Affordable and diverse housing choices would allow young adults to move back to the community, in which they grew up. Seniors would be able to remain in the community after they retire and have opportunities to downsize, should they choose. Households



that experience a loss of income due to economic circumstances, disability, divorce, or loss of a spouse, will not be displaced from the community, due to the inability to pay for housing. Workers in essential jobs such as teachers, grocery store workers, home health aides, childcare workers, restaurant workers, and first responders would have an opportunity to live where they work. Affordable housing can also support businesses by providing housing choices for entry level workers, medical residents, and lower wage workers at major employers.

## **Past Planning Efforts**

### **Senior Housing Alternatives Study Committee (SHASC)**

In October 2021, SHASC and the Coventry Land Use Department completed and released a report that focused on the specific needs of senior citizens relative to housing affordability. The Report provides a comprehensive analysis on the matter and includes an overview of the topic, market trends, consideration of local senior housing needs based upon a community survey, project considerations, and a series of recommendations for the town to follow. This Report will help to inform the development of the Housing Affordability Plan.

### **Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)**

In June 2020, the Coventry Planning and Zoning Commission adopted a revised Plan of Conservation and Development (effective: July 2020). The Plan was prepared by a subcommittee of the Commission and Land Use Staff. The subcommittee and Staff performed a careful analysis of housing issues in the community. This included: demographic data, housing market trends, community preferences derived from public forums and a community survey to develop a series of policies and recommendations that are to be administered by various community stakeholders. The Plan serves as the backbone for municipal decision making and clearly supports the development of affordable housing units in Coventry as well as other initiatives to assist in diversifying the housing choices available to Coventry's citizens.

### **Incentive Housing Zone (IHZ)**

In 2011, Coventry received a grant from the State of CT Department of Housing to conduct a housing needs assessment, market study – housing plan, analysis of potential sites to support higher density housing in order to create Zoning Regulations and associated Design Guidelines for an IHZ. The analysis was very helpful for the Town to understand the need for affordable housing units that could be incorporated into Coventry's housing stock. It also provided a useful template of potential Zoning mechanisms to support this type of housing. The Regulations and Guidelines were not ultimately adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission at that time, due to concerns that the State required housing densities were too high and they were not appropriate for the community. However, the draft Design Guidelines provide clear and effective guidance on

how a potential project could be constructed. This includes site layout, architectural styling, stormwater management, and site infrastructure to ensure that a proposed project would harmonize with the surrounding vicinity.

### Plan Development Process

This Affordable Housing Plan for Coventry was developed over a five month period and provided opportunities for community participation. A project website was launched through ArcGIS StoryMap to engage and educate residents of Coventry on different types of affordable housing, share project updates, and solicit feedback through online surveys.

A community survey ran from February to March 2022 and gathered input from 133 residents (1% of the population) of Coventry on community values and housing needs. The key findings of the survey were:

- 37% of respondents were not aware of any affordable housing in Coventry today
- 29% of respondents know someone struggling with housing costs
- The top characteristics that make Coventry a great place to live were identified as the rural character, small-town feel, the lake, quality of schools, open space, proximity to nature and location.
- 54% of respondents believe that seniors need more housing options in Coventry.
- 49% responded that low-income households need additional housing options.
- 46% believe that individual or single households need housing options.
- 79% of respondents answered that there is enough housing for young families.
- 77% of respondents answered that there is about the right amount of housing choices for people who work in Town.



Full survey results can be found in *Appendix A*.

A public workshop was held on March 31, 2022, which presented the housing needs assessment, community survey results, case studies and potential strategies. Participants were asked to provide input on potential strategies for their community. Participants showed support for a range of strategies through live polling exercises and a question and answer session.

## **Introduction to Coventry**

Coventry is a rural town of 12,235 residents located in Tolland County.

As of the 2019 American Community Survey, Coventry has 5,273 households with a median household income of \$93,619. Coventry is known for Coventry Lake and as the birthplace of Nathan Hale. The Town is also in close proximity to the UConn Storrs campus.

The existing land use pattern of Coventry essentially reflects the Town's rural character. Most of the Town's 24,505 acres is still undeveloped as shown in the data below. The majority of undeveloped land is forest followed by farms, open space and public/private clubs.

Although forests and farmlands still dominate the land area of Coventry, there are small, but substantially developed areas throughout the Town. This is most evident in the area around Lake Wangumbaug, including Coventry Village along Main Street. The Village is Coventry's traditional "downtown." It is home to many of the Town's retail businesses, as well as some public and other institutions.

Approximately one-quarter of the Town's population lives around Lake Wangumbaug and a smaller community at Pine Lake Shores on Eagleville Lake. Most homeowners in this area are members of associations that own and maintain some of the roads, beaches, and other community facilities. Homes in the area were typically built as seasonal vacation cottages, but were subsequently converted to year-round dwellings. The density of development is relatively high, with many houses on lots of 5,000 square feet or less.

There is a smaller concentration of commercial and institutional uses in northern Coventry, around the intersection of Main Street (Route 31S) and the Boston Turnpike (Route 44). The area contains several small shopping centers, free-standing commercial buildings, a school, a church, and a fire station. Smaller clusters of commercial uses are located at the intersection of Daly Road and Main Street; along the Boston Turnpike near the Bolton town line and near the intersection of Boston Turnpike, Bread & Milk Street (Route 31) and Swamp Road, the latter two of which have near term plan for growth.

Residential development, aside from the Lake area, is generally distributed throughout the Town. There are many newer residential subdivisions spread throughout the Town, reflecting recent growth, and respecting the open space subdivision regulations.

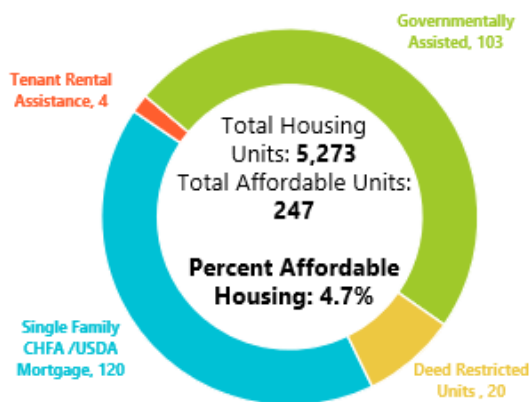


## Affordable Housing in Coventry

### Protected Units

As of 2021, 247, or 4.7% of Coventry's total housing units are protected affordable units. This includes 103 governmentally assisted units, 4 units receiving tenant rental assistance, 120 USDA or CHFA mortgages, and 20 deed restricted units.

**Affordable Housing Units in Coventry,  
by Type: 2021**



*Source: DECD Affordable Housing Appeals List, 2021*

Since 2002, Coventry has lost a number of affordable housing units. Coventry had over 6.8% of their housing stock as protected affordable housing units in 2002. Due to the increase in the overall number of market-rate units and a loss of protected affordable units, the overall percentage has decreased in the past 20 years. The different types of affordable housing in Coventry today are described in the sections below.

### Coventry Housing Authority

The Coventry Housing Authority provides decent, safe, and sanitary low-income housing for seniors and the disabled. The Housing Authority currently administers a total of 80 apartments on its 20-acre site at 1630 Main Street. Of these 80 apartments, 40 are Project Based Section 8 HUD funded (Orchard Hill Estates I) and 40 are State Elderly (Orchard Hill Estates II). Each facility has 4 accessible units.



### **Housing Vouchers**

Since the Town has project-based Section 8 housing through the Housing Authority, the only Section 8 vouchers in the Town are currently provided by the Mansfield Housing Authority. Due to the low number of vouchers in Town, the Mansfield Housing Authority has taken on the task of processing them.

### **Connecticut Housing Finance Authority Programs**

The Connecticut Housing Financing Authority (CHFA) is a self-funded, quasi-public organization. Its mission is to alleviate the shortage of housing for low- to moderate-income families and persons in the state and, when appropriate, to promote or maintain the economic development of the state through employer-assisted housing efforts. Mortgages through CHFA are available for first time homebuyers purchasing homes that are within the CHFA Sales Price Limits who have a gross income that is within the Income Limits. Over the last 5 years, CHFA mortgages were used by 47 households to purchase homes in Coventry.

### **Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing**

Naturally occurring housing on the open market may be affordable to low-income households. It is sometimes referred to as Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH). This housing has no deed restriction or subsidy, but still costs a low-income household no more than 30% of their income. However, low-income households must compete with other more affluent households to occupy these units. As prices rise, the affordability of these units may disappear.

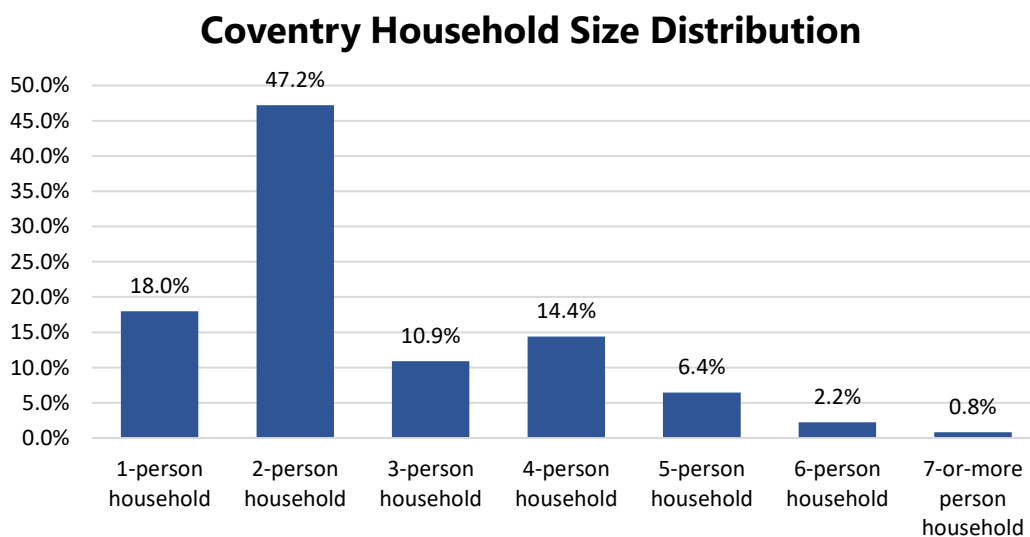
Most of the Town's existing supply of NOAHs are found around the Coventry Lake area. Typically, residences in this area have maintained a price range between \$170,000 and \$200,000 (there has been a significant price increase during recent times associated with the pandemic).

## Housing Needs Assessment

This section presents a summary of the key findings from the Housing Needs Assessment. For the complete Housing Needs Assessment, please see *Appendix B*.

### Demographics

- Coventry's population increased rapidly since the 1960s to 2010 reaching a high of 12,435.
- After 2010, the Town's population saw a slight decline for the first time to 12,235 in 2020.
- The Connecticut Data Center projects that by 2040, Coventry's population will continue to decline to 10,605 residents.
- When looking at age distribution, Coventry has seen an increase in school-age children as well as in adults ages 35 to 54, indicating that the number of families is increasing.
- There have been decreases in the number of older adults (age 55 and up), but the overall share of senior residents has still been growing over time, reaching 20.3% in 2019.
- The median age in 2019 was 43.1.
- Coventry has seen a shift towards smaller households. Currently, the average household size in Coventry is 2.6.
- 62% of all households are married-couple families.
- In 2019, 65.2% of Coventry households are made up of one or two people.

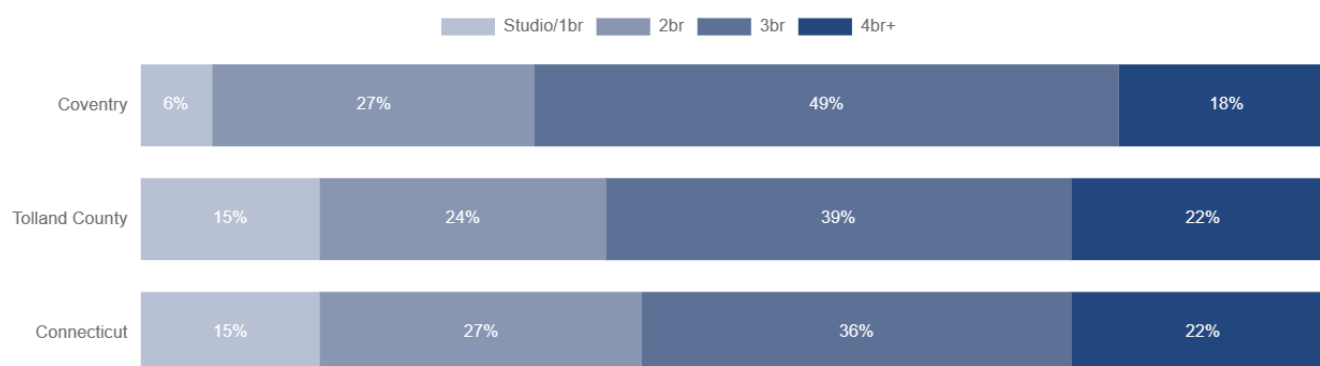


Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B11016

## Housing Stock

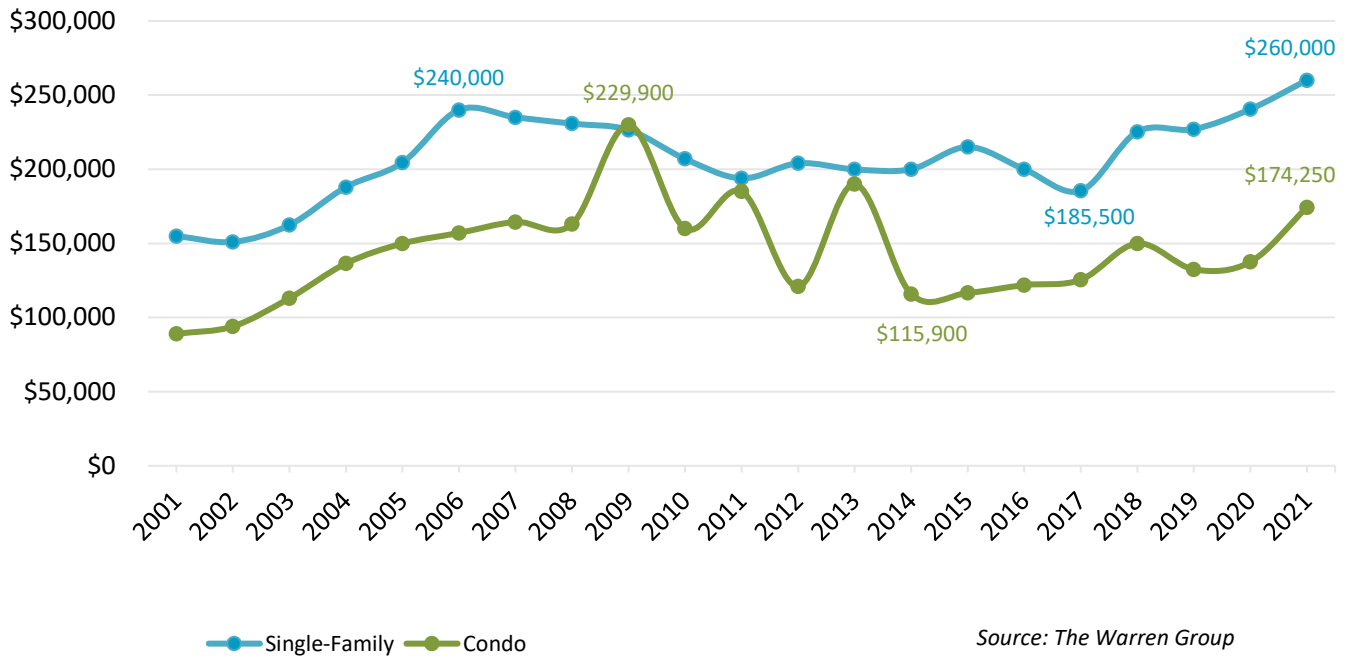
- Only 10% of occupied units in Coventry are renter-occupied compared to 26% in Tolland County.
- 92% of Coventry's dwelling units are single-family detached which is a much higher percentage than that of Tolland County (69%) and the State of Connecticut (59%).
- All types of multi-family dwellings make up 7% of the total housing stock with the most common type being 5-to-9-unit apartment buildings
- 1% of residents live in mobile homes
- The number of studio and one-bedroom units in Coventry is lower than County and State averages.
- The number of 3-bedroom units is substantially larger than the County and State averages and represents 49% of all units in Coventry.
- Home values in Coventry show some "naturally" affordability but may still exceed affordability levels for lower income residents. Nearly 68% of homes are valued under \$299,999 with 33.4% under \$199,999.
- The median sale price for single-family homes has been increasing steadily since 2017 and is now an all-time high of \$260,000.
- Rents in Coventry are also more naturally affordable. Rent prices under \$2,000 per month account for 97% of rental units and 32% are less than \$999.

## Distribution of Housing Units, by Number of Bedrooms



Source: American Community Survey 2018, 5-year estimates, Table B25041  
 Visualization created by [CTData Collaborative](#)

### Town of Coventry Median Home Sale Price: 2001 to 2021





## Housing Need

### How Many Coventry Families Need Affordable Housing?



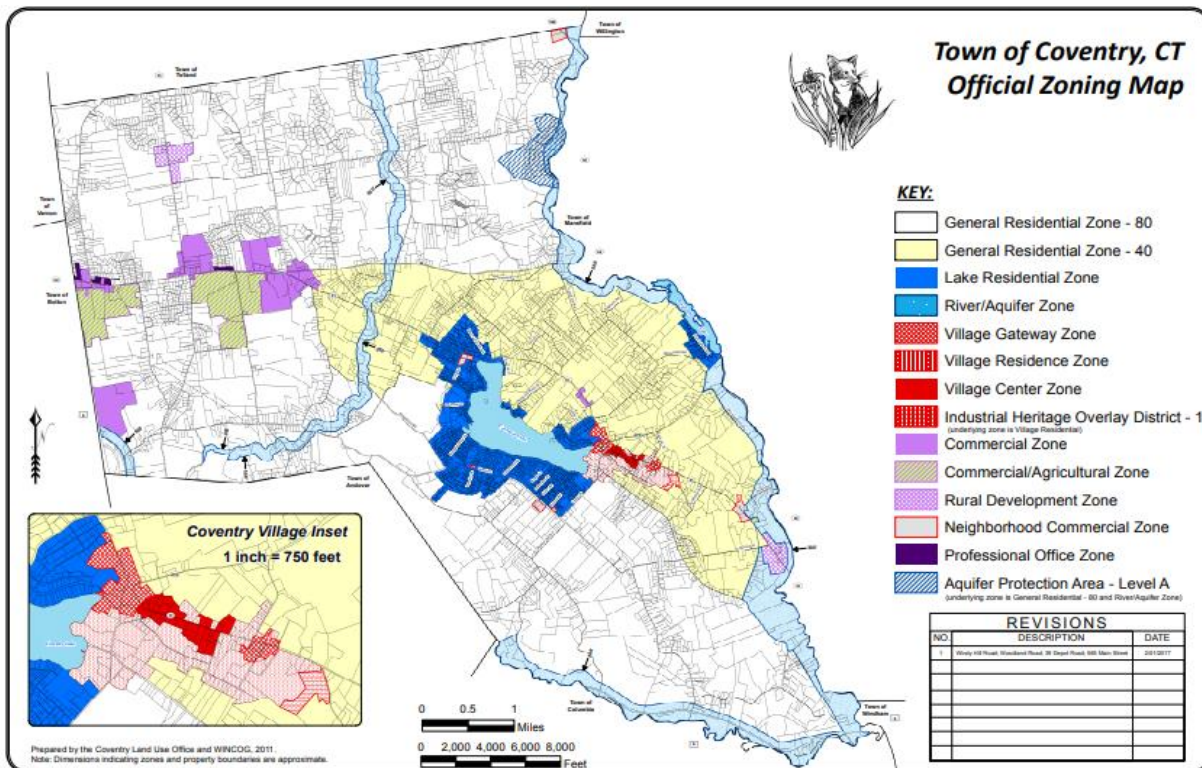
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Comprehensive Housing Affordability Survey (CHAS): 2014-2018

- There are **1,185** households in Coventry (**25%** of total) who meet the definition of low income (earning less than 80% of Area Median Income).
- Cost burdened households spend greater than 30% of their income on housing and may have difficulty affording other necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care. Seniors and renters making less 80% of AMI are disproportionately cost burdened compared to the total population.
- A housing gap analysis was performed comparing the supply of “naturally occurring” affordable housing to local demand. The gap analysis indicated that Coventry would benefit from more owner and rental options for all low-income households but particularly for individuals living alone, seniors and young people.
- The Town’s smaller household sizes indicates that smaller sized multi-family housing units (1 or 2 bedrooms) could benefit this group.

## Land Use & Zoning Assessment

This section presents a summary of the key findings from the Planning and Zoning Review. For more details, please see *Appendix B*.

- Coventry has several residential zoning districts that permit a variety of housing types.
- Zoning regulations include provisions for Open Space Subdivisions, Designed Apartments/Condominium Developments, and in-law and farm labor units
- New regulations are being developed for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

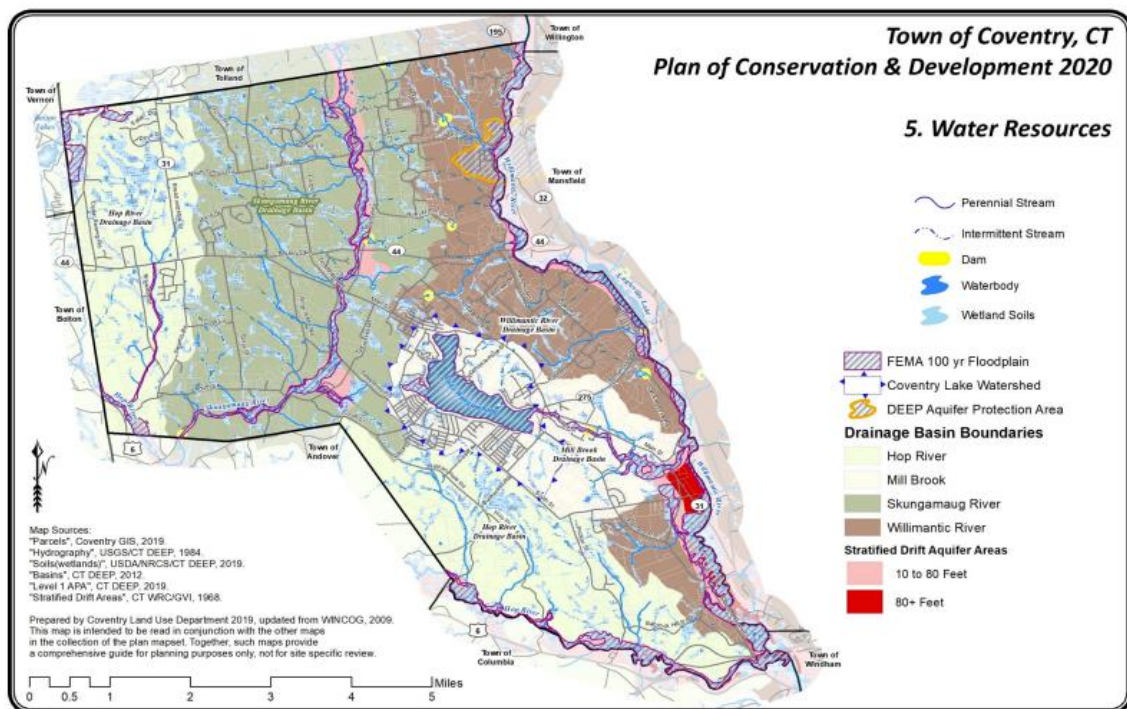


Source: Coventry Planning Department



## Town of Coventry Housing Affordability Plan

- There is a limited public sewer system within the Coventry Lake Basin. There are about 1,000 properties in the service area.
- Future sewer service areas anticipated in the facility plan include:
  - Upper Oak Grove
  - Cheney Lane
  - Hemlock Point
  - Waterfront Heights
  - Developed areas on the eastern side of Lake Wangumbaug



Source: Coventry POCD

## Objectives, Strategies and Action Steps

### 1. **Encourage and promote “Middle Housing” typologies, particularly cottage clusters**

“Middle Housing” is a concept promoting a form of multi-family unit design that is compatible in scale and form with single-family homes. This type of housing is usually 1.5 to 0.5 stories in height and includes two-family units (duplexes), three-family units; fourplex units and cottage courts. These types of units are particularly beneficial near amenities and in walkable neighborhoods and areas.

#### **Action Steps:**

**1.1** Coventry Town Staff in conjunction with the Planning and Zoning Commission should further study the middle housing concept and its various typologies. Areas to be targeted should be closest to amenities and Town center. The conversion of existing single-family houses where appropriate should also be considered as well as the provision of some middle housing typologies that could be developed by right in some districts.

**1.2** At the completion of the study, the Planning and Zoning Commission should pursue any appropriate middle housing Zoning Regulation amendments.

**1.3** The Planning and Zoning Commission should also consider whether middle housing units are to be naturally affordable and/or market-driven units or combined with other strategies to encourage deed-restricted affordable units.

### 2. **Promote housing opportunities through a Housing Overlay Zone**

Specific areas of the Town could be targeted for affordable housing through a Housing Overlay Zone (HOZ) or several different HOZs. The HOZs would offer potential developers flexibility in developing more housing through incentives such as: density bonuses, increased heights, lower parking requirements, and by-right or administrative project approvals. This would allow housing in locations that currently are not zoned for residential uses.

#### **Action Steps:**

**2.1** Coventry Town Staff in coordination with the Planning and Zoning Commission should study Housing Overlay Zones in more detail which will include: identifying geographic area(s) best suited for HOZs; select percentage of affordable units required for projects to qualify for overlay zone incentives and at what rates; and develop a package of incentives which could be given to qualifying projects based on desired project elements.

**2.2** Following identification of HOZs areas and other associated items in Action Step 2.1, the Planning and Zoning Commission will seek input from the community to determine best options to move forward.



**2.3** At the completion of the HOZ study and community input, any recommended Zoning Regulation amendments should be considered by the Commission.

### **3. Consider strategies for Inclusionary Zoning regulations including a Housing Trust Fund**

Inclusionary zoning policies are a wide range of strategies that provide for the inclusion of a share of affordable housing units within new market-rate developments. While there are many components of inclusionary zoning policies, municipalities have the ability to shape their policy to best meet their specific needs. A Housing Trust Fund is usually connected with inclusionary zoning regulations for a possible payment-in-lieu option

#### **Action Steps:**

**3.1** Coventry Town Staff in conjunction with the Planning and Zoning Commission should further study Inclusionary Zoning and an associated Housing Trust Fund. Specific items to be studied included: determining if a voluntary or mandatory program is desired, determining if a specifically targeted area or town-wide policy is desired, evaluating percentage of affordable units and income levels to be established to match existing need in Town, determining types of incentives for a developer (density bonuses and/or other zoning relief) when including affordable housing, considering a payment-in-lieu option in conjunction with the establishment of a Housing Trust Fund, and determining the Town's capabilities in administering an Housing Trust Fund or whether another entity would administer the Fund.

**3.2** At the completion of the Inclusionary Zoning study, any recommended Zoning Regulation amendments should be considered by the Commission.

### **4. Promote financial incentives to encourage development of affordable housing**

In many municipalities, it can be difficult to finance and develop lower-cost housing. In addition to changing regulations to lower the barriers to development, towns can use additional financial incentives to encourage the creation of affordable housing such as tax abatements, tax exemptions, tax increment financing (TIF) or waivers of development fees.

#### **Action Steps:**

**4.1** The Town should establish a committee to explore different options based on input from stakeholders including Town Council, finance department, tax assessor, Town Planner, and others.

**4.2** The committee should consider the following items: the size of benefit and the duration for which it will be available depending on type of activity the Town hopes to encourage, assess likely impact to property tax receipts in near term and over time, review recent data on housing needs to determine where needs are greatest and work closely with tax assessor to

model likely impact of different approaches, and consider program coverage, eligibility, program monitoring & program administration.

**4.3** The committee should prepare a final report which will lay out the best approaches for the Town to pursue related to financial incentives to encourage further development of affordable housing.

**5. Work with the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to promote first-time homebuyer options in Coventry and educational outreach opportunities.**

The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) is a self-funded, quasi-public organization. Its mission is to alleviate the shortage of the housing for low- to moderate- income families and persons in the state, and when appropriate, to promote or maintain the economic development of Connecticut through employer assisted housing efforts. Mortgages through the CHFA are available for first-time homebuyers.

**Action Steps:**

**5.1** Coventry Town staff will share information with realtors for potential homebuyers to consider and encourage CHFA mortgages.

**5.2** The Town could host or advertise CHFA homebuyer and real estate agent education classes that are supplied by CHFA.

**5.3** the Town should investigate partnering with a non-profit and/ or with other towns to locally provide a CHFA housing counselor. The investigate should include discussion with CRCOG staff and how they can be of assistance in coordinating discussions at the regional level and between towns.

**6. Strengthen the Town's capacity to further Affordable Housing**

Implementation of the recommendations of this Plan may require resources and an additional level of Town and/or staff oversight.

**Action Steps:**

**6.1 Establish a Housing Committee** – The Town should consider establishing a Housing Committee or an Affordable Housing Committee. The Housing Committee could be a Planning & Zoning Commission sub-committee. This Committee can help oversee the implementation of this Plan as well as future updates. The Housing Committee could also serve in an advisory capacity to other boards and commissions and provide recommendations to the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Town Council.

## **6.2 Provide adequate staffing and skill sets to administer affordable housing programs**

The initiatives in this Plan may require additional administration and oversight from knowledgeable staff. The Town should evaluate its ability to properly oversee and administer the affordable housing initiatives outlined in this Plan. Additional expertise in housing program administration, finance, and real estate could be provided through the training of current staff, new hires, consultants, or regional services through or coordinated by CRCOG.

## **6.3 Provide Affordable Housing Training to staff and members of land use boards**

State statutes pertaining to affordable housing are likely to change over the coming years. Providing regular training to staff and members of land use boards and commissions will ensure that they are educated on statutory requirements and understand affordable housing best practices as they evolve.

## **6.4 Incorporate the Affordable Housing Plan into the Plan of Conservation and Development**

The Planning Commission should ensure that the Affordable Housing Plan is incorporated into the housing recommendations section of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) when it is next updated.

## **6.5 Implement Coventry's Affordable Housing Plan**

The recommendations of this Plan represent a starting point and guideline for potential future changes to Town Zoning Regulations and policies. As required by CGS Section 8-30j, this plan will be updated every 5 years.

## **6.6 Partner with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) on the 'Community Conversation' initiative**

The Town of Coventry is partnering with CREC to facilitate a 'Community Conversations' initiative. This effort is in the process of being planned and is expected to be implemented later in 2022 and into 2023/2024. One of the main goals of the initiative is to dispel misconceptions on race, equity, and diversity by offering a forum that is safe and respectful to share experiences. It is believed that this effort can serve as a possible forum to discuss housing affordability issues. Coordination with the stakeholders involved in facilitating this forum will occur to determine the feasibility of such conversations by Town Staff.