

How Communities Assess Housing Needs

Cities and towns throughout the country conduct “housing needs assessments” to determine the need for affordable housing. With parental permission, go online or visit a public library to look at a current housing needs assessment for your town, city, county, or state.

Looking at a housing needs assessment will give you a better understanding of the need for rental housing, affordable homes, senior housing, and special-needs housing in your community. A housing needs assessment also helps to identify issues that may need to be addressed such as urban blight or foreclosure.

In this way, cities determine whether proposed development projects meet the community’s needs and should be high priority. A housing needs assessment is a first step in planning how, when, and where to address local housing issues so that priorities can be set, resources identified, and strategies chosen.

City planners and interested groups might ask the following questions:

- Who can afford to live in this community?
- Does our community provide quality housing to a wide range of residents?
- Can our children afford to remain in, or return to, the community as they start their own careers and households?
- Can those people who provide essential services to the community—such as firefighters, law enforcement officers, healthcare workers, and others—afford to live here?
- Do people with special needs have adequate housing options?
- Are there substandard, overcrowded, or other undesirable living conditions that should be addressed?
- Do our elderly residents have adequate housing for remaining in the community as they age?
- Do we provide the type of housing that promotes local job growth?
- Are there significant local housing trends such as an increase in absentee landlords, mortgage foreclosures, increasing housing prices, or decreasing home values?

“Needs” categories you may want to research include affordable rental housing, home ownership, senior housing, and special-needs housing.