

# EXPLORING JEFFERSON COUNTY'S CHANGING HOUSING LANDSCAPE

This paper analyzes key trends in housing availability, shifting demographics, occupancy patterns and rising costs in Jefferson County. Understanding these trends is crucial for developing effective strategies to address the current housing challenges.

## Household Demographics

### Household Growth

Between 2012 and 2022, Jefferson County experienced a notable 9.53 percent increase in the number of households, growing from 32,360 to 35,443. This surge suggests a vibrant and expanding community, which is great news for employers in the county, but also demonstrates a need for more housing options.

### Changing Household Sizes

A recent report by the Wisconsin Policy Forum revealed a significant trend where households are getting smaller in the state, and Jefferson County mirrors this trend. Average household size in the county has decreased from 2.38 to 2.18 since 2012 for all types of housing. For renters specifically, the average household size has decreased to 1.92, indicating a preference for more compact living arrangements.



### Diverse Household Compositions

While two-person households remained relatively steady from 2012 to 2022 (36 percent and 36.9 percent, respectively), households with three or more people decreased from 19.25 percent to 16.55 percent.

One noteworthy aspect is the increase in individuals living alone, reaching 29.9 percent in 2022, up from 25.5 percent in 2012. Among renters, this household composition is even more pronounced, with 47.2 percent living alone.

## Housing Unit Dynamics

### Housing Unit Growth

The number of housing units in Jefferson County increased 4.69 percent from 2012-2022, reaching 36,888 in 2022. This increase falls short of the nearly 10 percent growth in households over the same period, indicating an insufficient supply to meet growing demand.

### Single vs. Multi-Unit Structures

More than 76 percent of the housing units in the county are one-unit structures, demonstrating a continued prevalence of single-family homes. Nearly six percent of housing structures have two to four units, and more than 14 percent have five or more units. Mobile homes make up approximately three percent of housing structures in the county.

### Age of Existing Housing Stock

A significant 59.6 percent of structures were built before 1980, with 24.5 percent dating back to before 1940. This highlights the need for ongoing maintenance and potential renovations to ensure the longevity of the county's housing stock.

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### Bedroom Distribution

A majority of existing structures (67.2 percent) in the county have two or three bedrooms. A quarter of the county's housing units have four or more bedrooms. The ongoing decline of the average household size creates a mismatch between the types of housing available and what's needed to meet shifting demographics and preferences.

## Occupancy Trends

### Ownership vs. Renting

Ownership has become more prevalent in the county, with owner-occupied housing increasing from 71.7 percent to 74.3 percent since 2012. Renter-occupied housing has seen a decrease from 28.3 percent to 25.7 percent.

### Vacancy Rates

Vacancy rates for both homeowners and renters have also decreased, indicating a tighter and more dynamic housing market. The 2022 vacancy rate for owner-occupied homes was a mere .4 percent, while the vacancy rate for rental units was 3.2 percent. Typically, a healthy housing market will see a vacancy rate of about 6 percent.

### Rising Housing Costs

In 2022, the median housing cost for homeowners was \$1,710, while median rent was \$1,015. This median rent for the county was higher than the state average of \$992. The data reveals that 38.3 percent of renters spend 30 percent

or more on housing each month, highlighting potential affordability challenges. On the homeowners' side, 25.4 percent face a similar cost burden. These figures emphasize the importance of addressing housing affordability in the county.

## Conclusion

Jefferson County's evolving household and housing landscape reflects the broader shifts occurring in communities across the country. Meeting the diverse needs of residents requires proactive strategies, including the development of housing that is affordable to the county's workforce, renovation initiatives and the promotion of housing diversity. Addressing these challenges will not only ensure a thriving community but also contribute to the broader economic well-being of Jefferson County.