

# Core Metrics

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# 1.

## Regional Context and Demographics

We start the 2023 *Greater Boston Housing Report Card* by looking at the people who have been lucky enough to find housing in the region, and how that's changed over time. Those who have found housing live in one of the most vibrant and dynamic regions in the country. All too often, however, many who want to enjoy and add to the region's assets are frustrated by prohibitively high housing costs. This forces many to stretch their household budgets thin, crowd into substandard housing, or move out of the area entirely.

The analysis in this section relies heavily on population data for 2022, a year when the region was recovering from the pandemic, though with some way left to go. After some unique population shifts during the height of the pandemic in 2020, the region experienced two consecutive years of population loss in 2021 and 2022. These losses were an acceleration of trends seen pre-pandemic, as domestic outmigrants of all education and income levels had already begun leaving the region. In the past, these declines have been offset somewhat by international migration to Greater Boston, but even though the number of international migrants doubled between 2021 and 2022, it was not enough to fully offset the loss of longer-standing residents to other parts of the country. Indeed, these are individuals who could have been contributing to the social vibrancy and economic dynamism of our region, benefiting us all. But instead, they are strengthening communities elsewhere.

Other multi-decade trends appear to be continuing. While many of our communities continue to grow more racially diverse, for instance, the region's higher-income suburbs lag its cities. Black and Latino population increases remain concentrated in only a few communities.

Key findings from this section include:

- After steady increases, Greater Boston's population declined two years in a row.
- International migration to the region continues to help offset losses from people moving away.
- Domestic out-migration from Greater Boston has increased.
- Greater Boston continues to grow more racially and ethnically diverse.
- Greater Boston remains segregated by race and income.



## After steady increases, Greater Boston’s population declined two years in a row.

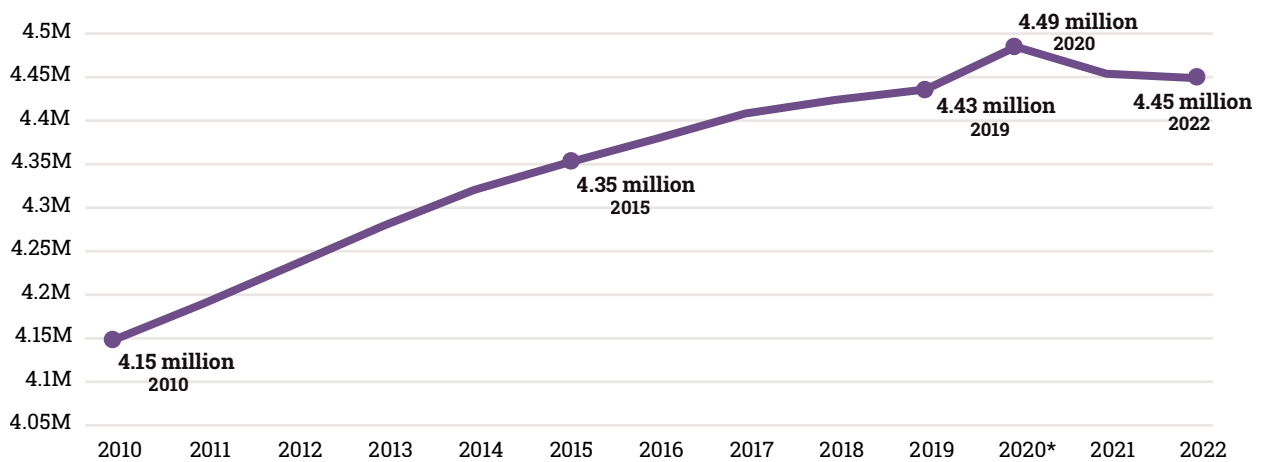
After significant growth through 2020, Greater Boston’s population has now declined for two consecutive years, losing just over 36,000 residents from 2020 to 2022 (roughly 1 percent) (Figure 2). The region’s population dropped a bit

more in 2021, with the continued decline in 2022 mitigated somewhat by an uptick in immigration and an increase in births.

FIGURE 2

### Population of Greater Boston

Five-county definition of Greater Boston, including Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Plymouth



\* Population estimates restart each census year (in 2010 and 2020), and thus should not be viewed as a continuation of the previous 10 year estimates.

Source: 2010–2022 Minor Civil Division Population Estimates, UMass Donahue Institute

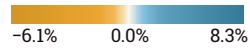
Figure 3 shows how these population changes played out across the region. Between July 2020 and July 2022, most municipalities north and west of Boston saw population declines, while Boston saw the greatest loss, of around 21,000 (3.1 percent). It should be noted that city officials in Boston think 2020 Census counts, and by extension 2021 and 2022 estimates, exaggerated the city’s population losses. And while the city has succeeded in challenging the Census Bureau—adding another 6,500 residents to the 2020 count—population estimates will reflect this addition starting in 2024, but do not do so here.

Where some municipalities have seen growth in the last two years, it has largely been concentrated in towns far from the metro core, where housing prices have tended to be lower.<sup>2</sup> Plymouth is worth highlighting here, growing by 3,251 residents (5.3 percent) between 2020 and 2022. Among municipalities in the urban core, Medford experienced the greatest increases over the last two years, growing by nearly 5,000 residents (8.3 percent). See the online data supplement for more town level data on population change.

FIGURE 3

### Population Change by City/Town, 2020-2022

Percent change in population.

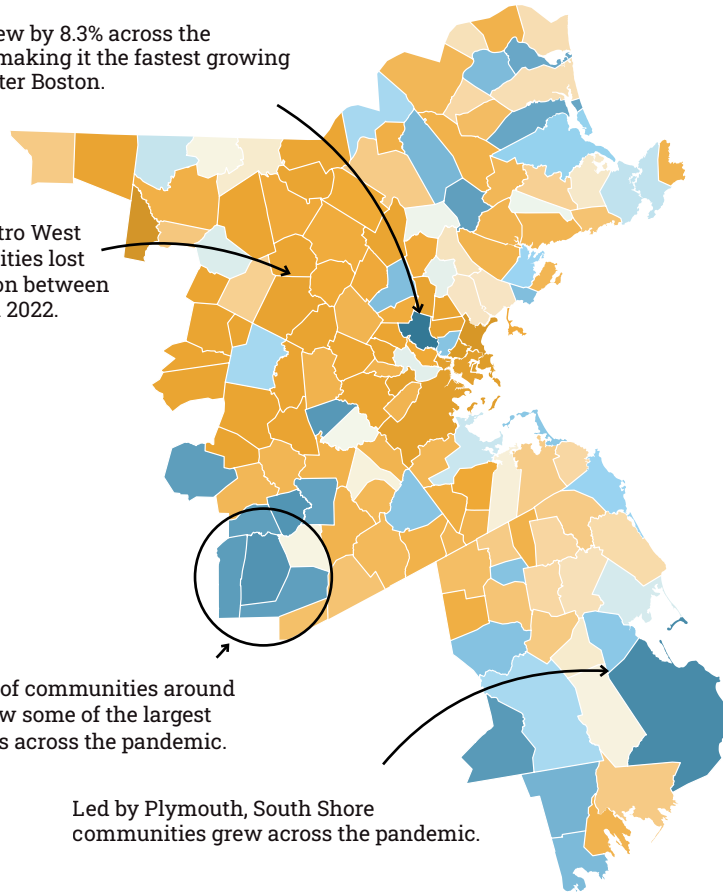


Medford grew by 8.3% across the pandemic, making it the fastest growing city in Greater Boston.

Most Metro West communities lost population between 2020 and 2022.

The cluster of communities around Franklin saw some of the largest growth rates across the pandemic.

Led by Plymouth, South Shore communities grew across the pandemic.



Map: Boston Indicators • Source: 2020-2022 Minor Civil Division Population Estimates, UMass Donahue Institute.

## International migration to the region continues to help offset losses from people moving away.

If not for prior increases in international migration, Greater Boston would have started losing population well before the onset of the pandemic. For years, immigrants from abroad have helped offset the loss of longer-standing residents due to declining birth rates, deaths, and decisions to move to other parts of the state or country. The pandemic disrupted this pattern considerably, as can be seen the graph below, which presents data from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program. Net domestic and international migration slowed significantly in 2020, and while domestic out-migration picked back up in 2021 (likely due to work-from-home policies during the pandemic and fewer residents moving in),<sup>3</sup> increases in international migration

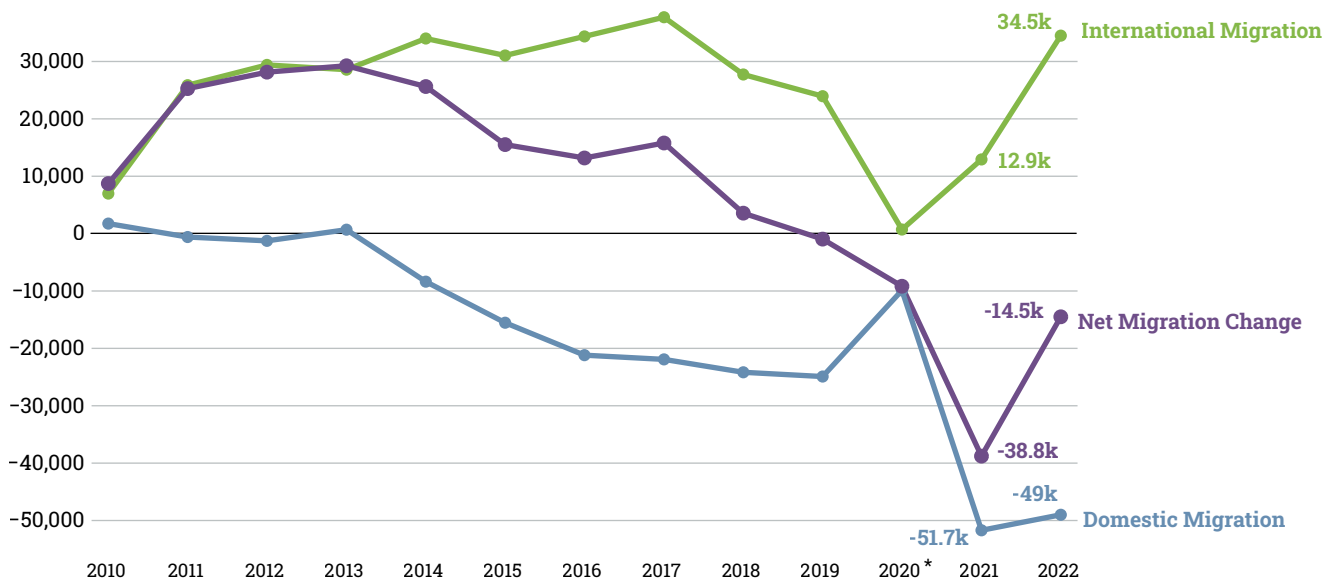
only partially mitigated these losses (Figure 4). Also likely contributing to these declines is the region's ongoing housing crisis, prompting some residents to move to states with cheaper housing, such as New Hampshire, Florida, or North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

In 2022 however, the net number of new international migrants settling in Greater Boston more than doubled, likely including a surge of refugees who are making use of the state's shelter system.<sup>5</sup> And with fewer residents leaving the region, the net population loss is much lower than in 2021.

FIGURE 4

### International migration to Greater Boston has picked up over the past two years, while moves out to other parts of the US have accelerated.

Net migration to Greater Boston.



Note: Population estimates restart each census year (in 2010 and 2020), and thus should not be viewed as a continuation of the previous 10 year estimates. Five-county definition includes Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Plymouth Counties.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Estimates of the Components of Resident Population Change for Counties

## Domestic out-migration from Greater Boston increased.

In recent years the number of people leaving the region has transformed, growing from a stream to a river. The gap between those moving to the region and those leaving the region is the highest it's been in years, resulting in a net population loss of just over 53,000 residents in 2021 (**Figure 5**). These trends likely gain momentum from the ballooning cost of housing in Greater Boston, as residents increasingly fail to find housing at their price point. The surge in out-migration in 2021 may also be capturing additional residents leaving due to pandemic-related causes like the increase in remote work.

It is not any one demographic group that is leaving Greater Boston, either. Working-age residents of every income level have been leaving at roughly similar rates, though there was a sharp separation in 2021. This broader movement away from high-housing-cost areas is evident elsewhere as well—such as in California, which is likewise losing residents of all income levels.<sup>6</sup> **Figure 6** details this movement in Greater Boston and reveals a particularly large drop in

higher-income residents between 2019 and 2021 (2020 is excluded here due to data limitations). As of 2021, lower-income residents have lower net migration numbers than either middle- or higher-income individuals, although the trend is still net negative.

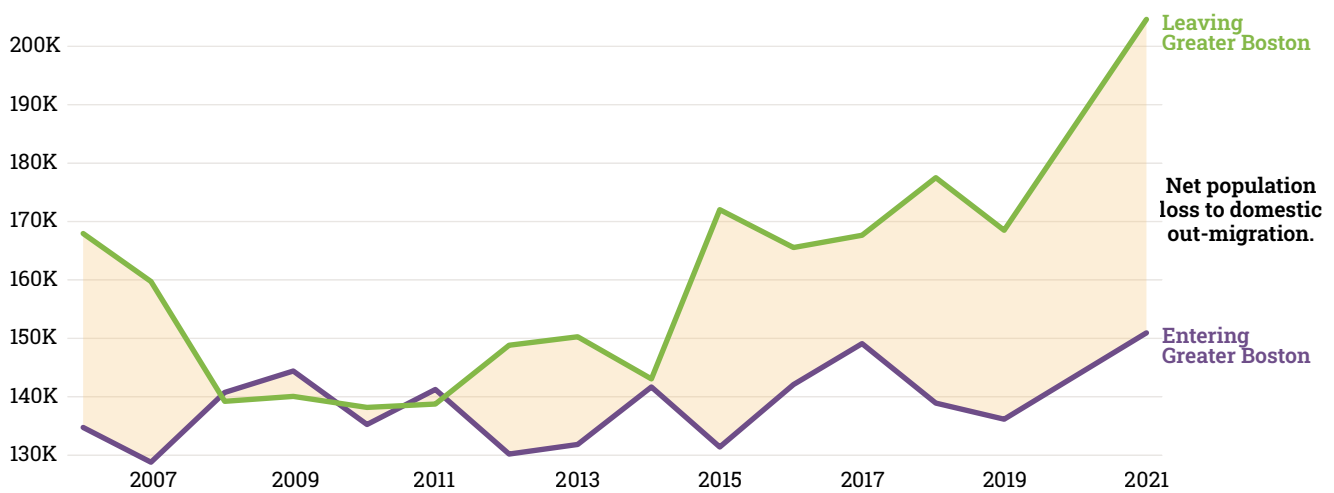
Greater Boston is also losing population at all education levels, despite the region's status as a research and technology hub (**Figure 7**). Indeed, while colleges here educate tens of thousands of students annually, there are far more students graduating than jobs available, even within the region's growing tech industries.<sup>7</sup> Retaining these new graduates as they look for a job has unfortunately become even more difficult thanks to Greater Boston's extraordinarily expensive housing market.

But the region isn't just losing college graduates. We've also lost residents without college degrees at similar rates over the past few years.

FIGURE 5

### The number of people leaving the region has increased significantly since 2011.

Total number of domestic migrants leaving and entering Greater Boston. 2006-2021.



Note: Due to data limitations, Greater Boston here includes the counties of Worcester, Bristol, Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Plymouth. Data from 2020 is excluded due to its experimental nature.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2006-2021 1-Yr American Community Survey IPUMS, University of Minnesota.

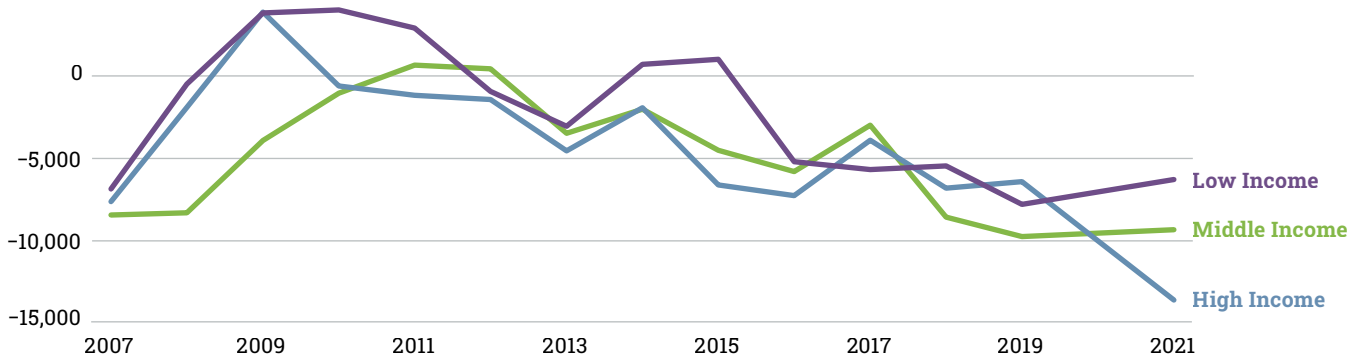
It is important to note that the sample sizes this migration analysis relies upon are relatively small, especially as the aggregate number of people who move each year has declined.<sup>8</sup> Due to these small sample sizes, we pool two

years of data for each point in the two graphs above. Rather than looking at the specific numbers in the above graphs, it is most helpful to focus on the broader trends across years.

FIGURE 6

**Greater Boston is losing residents of all income levels.**

Rolling 2-year average of net domestic migrants by income level, ages 18-64. Greater Boston.



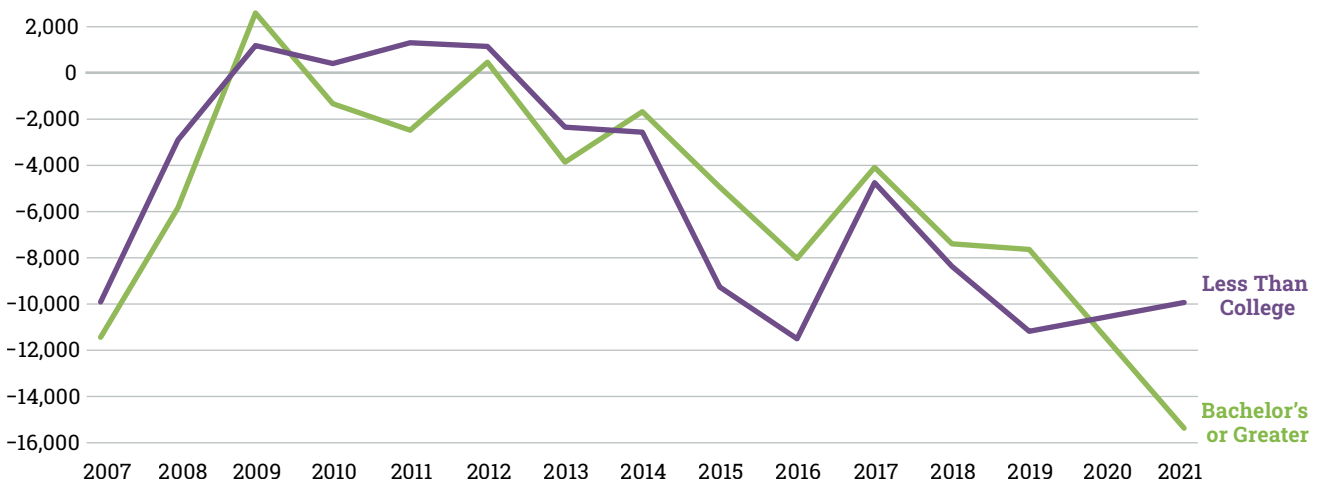
Note: Greater Boston here includes Worcester, Bristol, Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk, Plymouth and Norfolk Counties. Low Income includes individuals making under 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$55,500 for a family of four in 2022), middle income as those making between 200 and 500 percent, and high income as those making more than 500 percent of the poverty level (more than \$138,750 for a family of four in 2022). We are excluding 2020 1-yr data due to its experimental nature. 2021 data is averaged instead with 2019.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2006-2021 1-Yr American Community Survey IPUMS, University of Minnesota

FIGURE 7

**Greater Boston has been losing both college and non-college educated residents for a decade.**

Rolling 2-year average of net domestic migrants by educational attainment, ages 24-64. Greater Boston.



Note: Greater Boston here includes Worcester, Bristol, Middlesex, Essex, Suffolk, Plymouth and Norfolk Counties. We are excluding 2020 1-yr data due to its experimental nature. 2021 data is averaged instead with 2019.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2006-2021 1-Yr American Community Survey IPUMS, University of Minnesota

## Greater Boston continues to grow more racially and ethnically diverse.

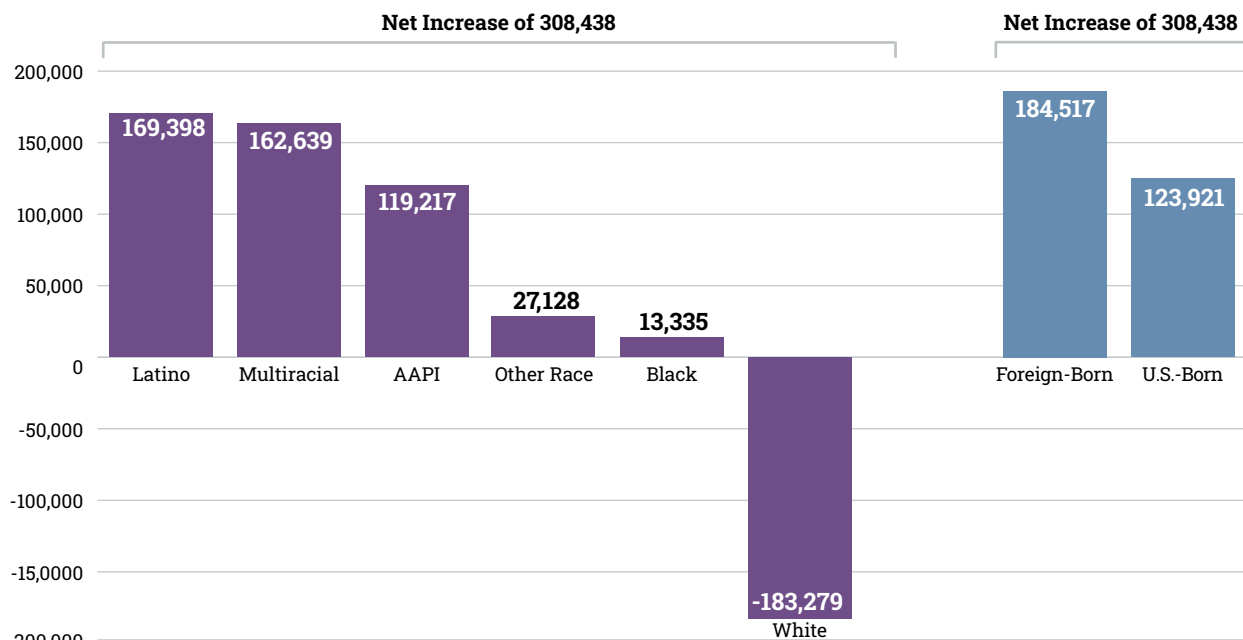
For much of the 20th century, Greater Boston was overwhelmingly White, with small pockets of Black, Asian, Latino, and Native American residents. Following the opening of federal immigration policy in 1965, paired with the increasing diversity and vibrancy of our local economy, Greater Boston has steadily become more racially and ethnically diverse, especially in recent years. Most new arrivals to the region now hail from countries in Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa. **Figure 8** looks at net population change between 2010 and 2021, breaking these trends out by race on the left, and nativity on the right. Strong population growth among Latino and Asian residents has helped to offset declines in our region’s White population, a decline largely the result of falling native-born birth rates and out-migration to other parts of the country.

We’ve also seen large increases in the number of people with multiple racial backgrounds. As we show in our 2021 report *Multiracial in Greater Boston: The Leading Edge of Demographic Change*,<sup>9</sup> much of this increase is very real, with more families forming across racial lines. Some of this increase, however, is an artifact of back-end Census Bureau coding practices, which assign certain people (mostly Latinos) “Some Other Race” as a second race, even though these respondents themselves don’t identify as multiracial. See *We’re Reporting Census Data All Wrong*<sup>10</sup> for more detail.

Though growth among populations of color has been significant, it is not distributed equally across the region, reflecting exclusionary housing production patterns discussed elsewhere in this report. **Figure 9** details this, showing population growth between 2010 and 2020 by

FIGURE 8

### Greater Boston’s population growth is driven by immigrants of color. Net population change. Greater Boston. 2010-2021.

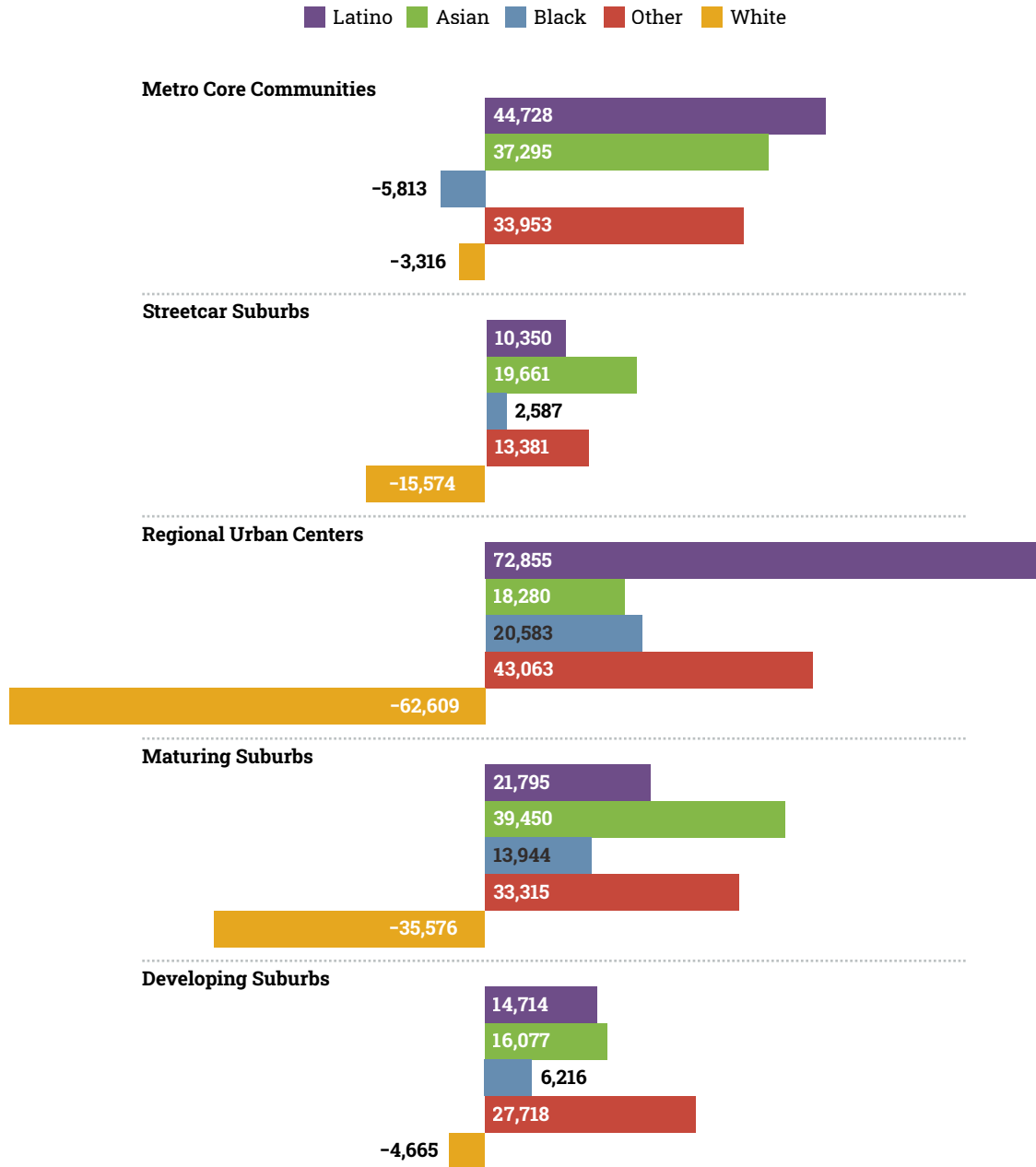


Note: “other” includes “Some Other Race Alone” and American Indian/Alaska Native. Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI, White and Black are non-Hispanic.) Multiracial should be interpreted with caution due to changes in the Census Bureau’s coding practices in 2020 that result in people who don’t identify as multiracial being included in this category.  
Source: 2010 Census, 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), 2021 ACS 1-Year

FIGURE 9

### Population Growth by Race and Community Type

Greater Boston, 2010-2020.



Note: White, Black, and Asian groups are single race alone, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race. Other here includes: Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Native and American Indian, Some Other Race Alone and Two or More Races. In addition, a Census Bureau practice of assigning "Some Other Race" to respondents who write-in Latino-seeming countries of origin is leading to inflated "Other" totals starting in 2020.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2010, 2020 U.S. Census.

community type. Note that we are using 2020 Census data here, as that is the most current dataset available at the level of detail we need for town-by-town analysis.

Out of any group, the Latino population in Regional Urban Centers—cities that often feature thriving immigrant communities—grew the most, increasing by nearly 73,000 residents. The White population in these cities also saw the greatest decline, down by nearly 63,000 residents.

Another way to measure racial diversity involves using a measure called a “diversity index,” which calculates the probability of randomly selecting two people out of a broader population who differ from each other in race or ethnicity. This analysis (**Figure 10**) shows that diversity in all community types has increased in the past decade, but there’s still a wide range in absolute levels for 2020. In Metro Core Communities, someone might have a 71 percent chance of selecting two people at random from different racial or ethnic groups, quite a high probability. Suburban community types continue to lag considerably, however, with none reaching above 50 percent.

FIGURE 10

**All community types have gotten more racially diverse, although the suburbs continue to lag.**

Diversity Index, which calculates the odds that two randomly selected people differ by race or ethnicity.

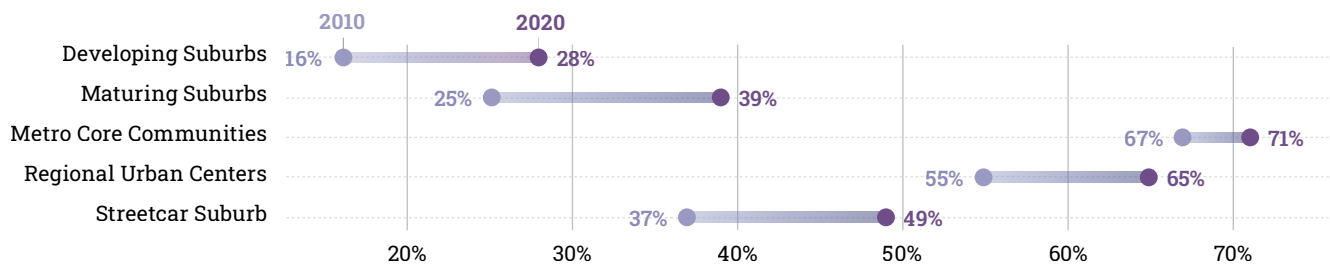


Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2010, 2020 U.S. Census.

## Greater Boston remains segregated by race and income.

Greater Boston's history is fraught with racially discriminatory housing and lending policies, including redlining and race-based restrictive covenants, all of which have contributed to segregation by race and class. While housing discrimination based on race was outlawed in 1968, restrictive zoning policies persist to this day, maintaining the region's racial and economic divisions.

According to 2020 Census data, Boston ranks 24th for racial segregation<sup>11</sup> among all large metropolitan areas, falling into the "high segregation" category. Zooming out to the state level, more than 60 percent of Massachusetts' Black population resides in just 10 cities, with 52 percent in Boston, Brockton, Worcester, Springfield, and Randolph.

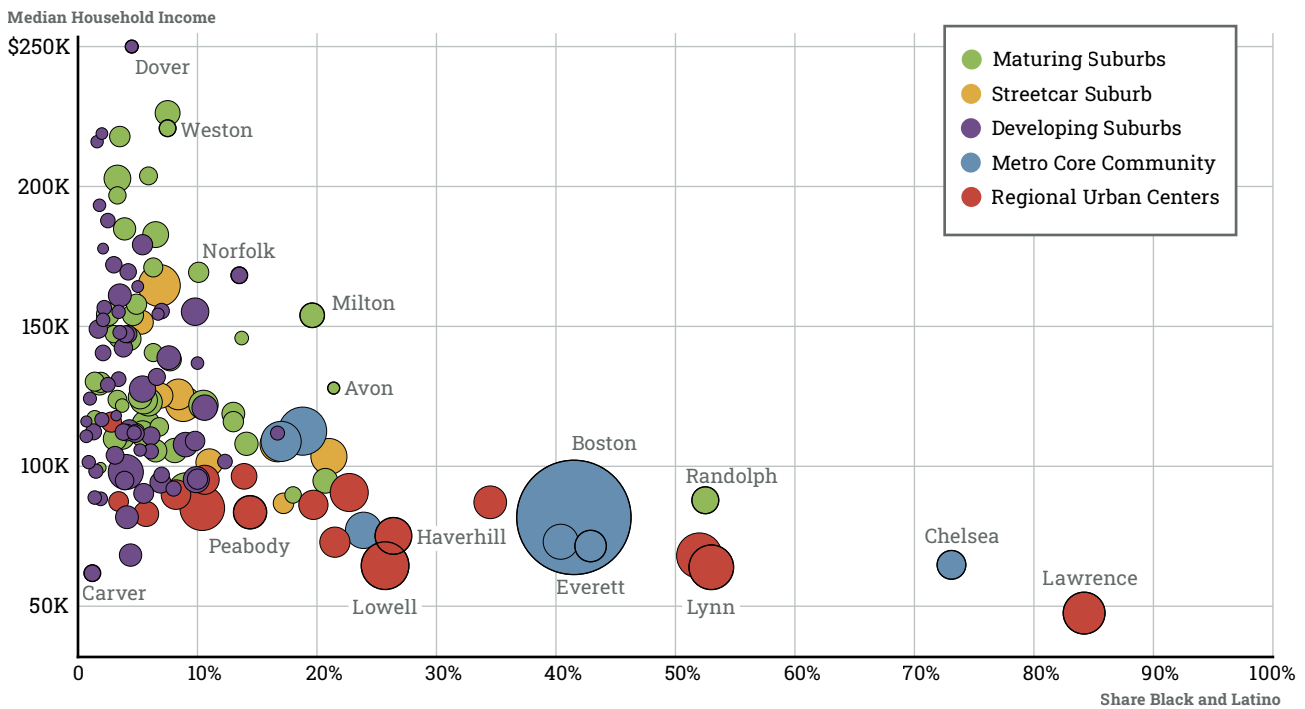
Just 10 cities are home to over half the state's Latino population.

**Figure 11** looks at the concentration of Black and Latino residents in a small number of lower-income cities and towns. In Lawrence, where the median household income is \$47,500, Black, and Latino residents make up 84 percent of the population. In contrast, the highest-income town of Dover has a combined Black and Latino population of less than 5 percent. Strikingly, there are no towns in the upper right-hand corner of this scatterplot, meaning that there's not a single municipality in Greater Boston that has even moderately high incomes paired with a moderately large Black and Latino population share.

FIGURE 11

### Cities and towns with higher shares of Black and Latino residents have lower median household incomes.

Median household income and share of municipal population that is Black or Latino. Relative population size indicated by bubble size. 2021.



Note: Black population is single race alone, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race. The ACS records median household income only up to \$250,000 (top-coded). Median household incomes that exceed this value are assigned \$250,000 in the data.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2017-2021 5-Yr ACS

## 2. Supply

A healthy housing market relies upon having enough housing to meet the needs of all families who hope to live in our region. This includes the availability of a diverse range of housing types—everything from large single-family homes to dense apartment complexes, from triple-deckers to small single-room occupancy units. Housing diversity ensures that people can enter the market at different price points, and that all households find units that match their needs, whether they are young adults, growing families, or elders looking to downsize. A housing stock that can meet the demands of all residents typically also consists of greater housing density near transit stops, near job centers, near walkable downtowns, and near the best public schools.

Because new housing construction is a multi-year process, this Supply section looks at both the most recent data we have on emerging post-pandemic construction trends and longer-term trends across a few decades. We also explore data challenges with the sources we rely upon for measuring new housing construction, building on what we've learned over the course of researching previous *Greater Boston Housing Report Cards*.

Key findings from this section include:

- Metro Core Communities have permitted more new housing construction than other community types.
- Massachusetts lags other states in housing production.
- Progress has been mixed on meeting varied housing production goals.
- Vacancy rates, especially for rentals, remain extremely low in Greater Boston.
- Construction costs rose sharply after the onset of the pandemic and remain high.
- The Building Permit Survey is a useful data source but has major shortcomings.

## Metro Core Communities have permitted more new housing construction than other community types.

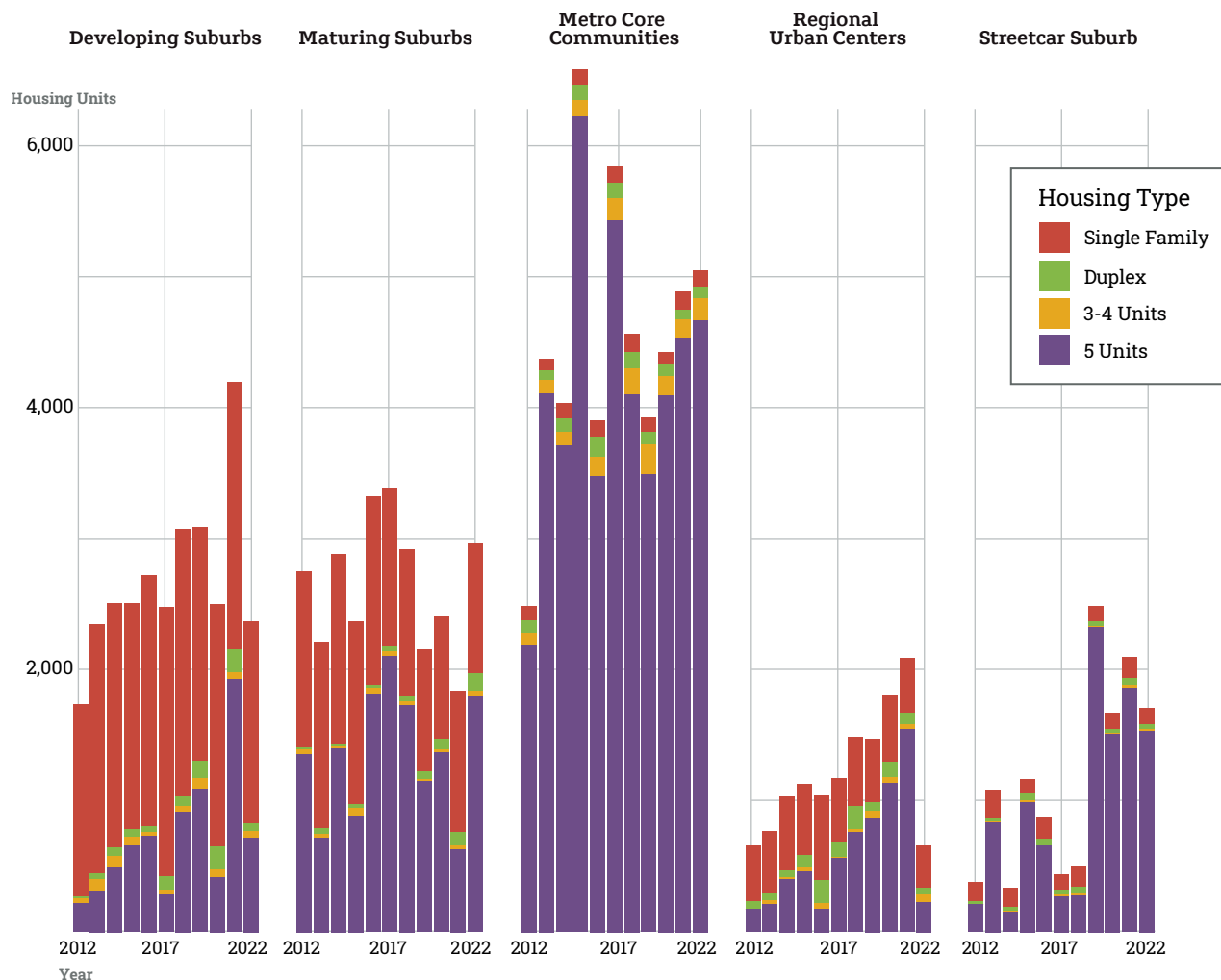
Permits for new housing construction generally increased regionwide over the past decade, with Metro Core Communities permitting far more than other community types (Figure 12). While starting from a smaller base, Regional Urban Centers saw steady increases until 2022 when permitting fell off significantly. Permitting was more varied across suburban community types, with Streetcar

Suburbs permitting the least. Overall, multifamily units also comprise an increasing share of newly permitted units across most community types. Given the population growth that the region has experienced, this seems to be a necessary trend. It's notable that developing suburbs are still primarily building single-family homes, despite the urgent need for more housing. It is important to note,

FIGURE 12

### Units Permitted Over Time by Community Type and Structure Type

Greater Boston, 2012-2022.



Source: U.S. Census Building Permit Survey

though, the issuance of multifamily permits can often precede completion of a project by many years. Given rising construction costs, it's possible that multifamily housing production could slow considerably in coming years.

Next, we show the 10 municipalities in Greater Boston that have permitted the most new housing during the years 2018-22, according to the Census Bureau's Building Permits Survey (**Table 1**). We cluster five years' worth of data because housing permit data can be lumpy, especially in smaller towns, where a large development may get permitted one year with little else permitted in a subsequent year.

Plymouth is unusual among the top performers in that it permits mostly single-family housing, though in more recent years Plymouth has increased multifamily housing permitting as well.

**Table 2** looks at the number of newly permitted units as a percentage of 2017 housing stock (where 2017 housing stock is estimated from the ACS 2013-17 5-year survey), in order to adjust for city size. This approach privileges smaller suburban towns, which start from a lower base, but it is helpful for isolating which suburbs have permitted the most new housing in recent years. By this metric, Boston ranks 21 out of 147 municipalities in Greater Boston. See the online data supplement for more town level data on housing production.

TABLE 1

### Municipalities that Permitted the Most New Units, 2018-2022

	City/Town	Community Type	Single Family 2018-22	Multifamily 2018-22	Total Units 2018-22	Single Family 2013-17	Multifamily 2013-17	Total Units 2013-17	Change in Total Permitted Units
1	Boston	Metro Core Communities	216	17,358	17,574	238	18,552	18,790	-1,216
2	Medford	Streetcar Suburb	21	5,542	5,563	18	36	54	5,509
3	Plymouth	Developing Suburbs	2,016	1,297	3,313	1,426	11	1,437	1,876
4	Cambridge	Metro Core Communities	182	2,877	3,059	150	2,164	2,314	745
5	Weymouth	Maturing Suburbs	122	1,445	1,567	268	774	1,042	525
6	Franklin	Developing Suburbs	437	988	1,425	174	44	218	1,207
7	Quincy	Regional Urban Centers	75	1,043	1,118	59	606	665	453
8	Everett	Metro Core Communities	5	857	862	63	1,198	1,261	-399
9	Woburn	Regional Urban Centers	221	603	824	172	28	200	624
10	Framingham	Regional Urban Centers	220	578	798	310	666	976	-178

Source: Census Bureau Building Permit Survey

TABLE 2

**Municipalities that Permitted the Most New Units, 2018-2022,  
as a Percentage of Their Initial 2017 Housing Stock**

	City/Town	Community Type	Single Family 2018-22	Multifamily 2018-22	Total Units 2018-22	Single Family 2013-17	Multifamily 2013-17	Total Units 2013-17	Change in Total Permitted Units	% Increase in Stock
1	Medford	Streetcar Suburb	21	5,542	5,563	18	36	54	5,509	24%
2	Plymouth	Developing Suburbs	2,016	1,297	3,313	1,426	11	1,437	1,876	12%
3	Franklin	Developing Suburbs	437	988	1,425	174	44	218	1,207	12%
4	Millis	Developing Suburbs	331	64	395	81	4	85	310	12%
5	Hopkinton	Developing Suburbs	627	4	631	545	296	841	-210	11%
6	North Reading	Maturing Suburbs	69	462	531	114	0	114	417	9%
7	Lakeville	Developing Suburbs	367	0	367	136	0	136	231	8%
8	Maynard	Maturing Suburbs	23	354	377	73	35	108	269	8%
9	Walpole	Developing Suburbs	126	590	716	179	8	187	529	8%
10	Wellesley	Maturing Suburbs	239	437	676	370	0	370	306	7%

Source: Census Bureau Building Permit Survey

## Massachusetts lags other states in housing production.

The best approach for tracking new housing construction at the municipal level is by using counts of new housing permit issuances. Permits are issued prior to actual construction, so permit issuances are an imperfect proxy, and we discuss the limitations of this approach at the end of this section.

According to Building Permit Survey estimates from the Census Bureau, Greater Boston's housing production has been relatively consistent over the past decade, even experiencing some modest growth. Nonetheless, this level of production remains far below historic levels, as we show in **Figure 13**, produced by our colleagues at the Massachusetts Housing Partnership.<sup>12</sup> Restrictive land use regulations contribute to the state's limited ability to replicate higher levels of housing production seen in decades past.

Another useful way to analyze this data on building permits is to compare Massachusetts to other states. Even with modest permitting increases over the past 10 years, Massachusetts ranks near the very bottom of states in housing permits issued per capita, as of 2022 (**Figure 14**). The national rate for 2022 was 5 units per thousand residents and Massachusetts came in at exactly half this rate for 2022 (2.5 units per thousand).

FIGURE 13

### Recent housing production growth leaves Massachusetts far below historic levels.

New housing units permitted annually in Massachusetts, 1960-present.  
Census Building Permit Survey.

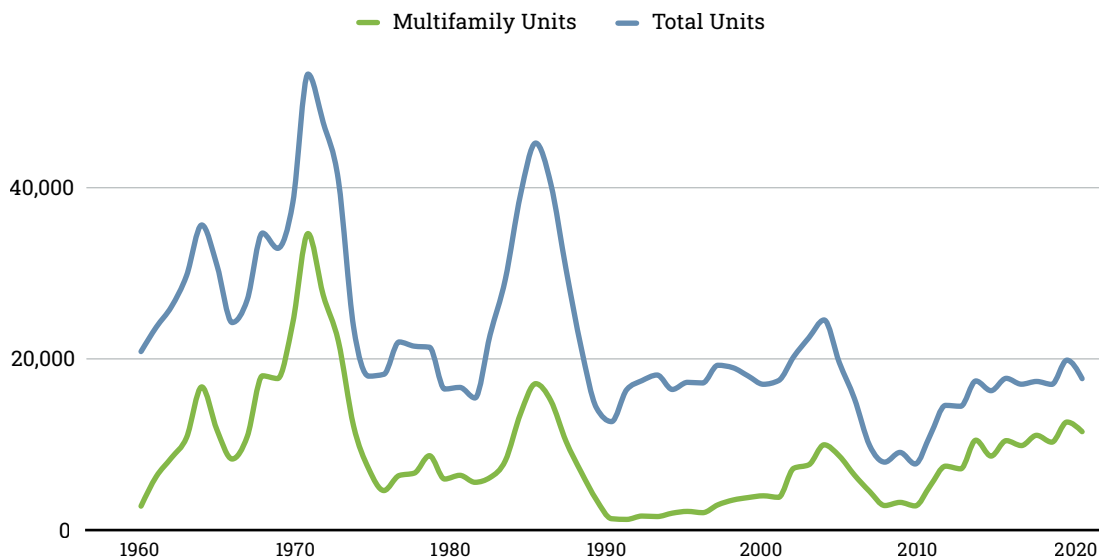


Chart: Reproduced version of graph appearing in Massachusetts Housing Partnership 2023 Building Momentum Report  
Source: U.S. Census Building Permit Survey

FIGURE 14

**Most states build substantially more housing per capita than Massachusetts.**

Housing permits per 1,000 residents by state, 2022.

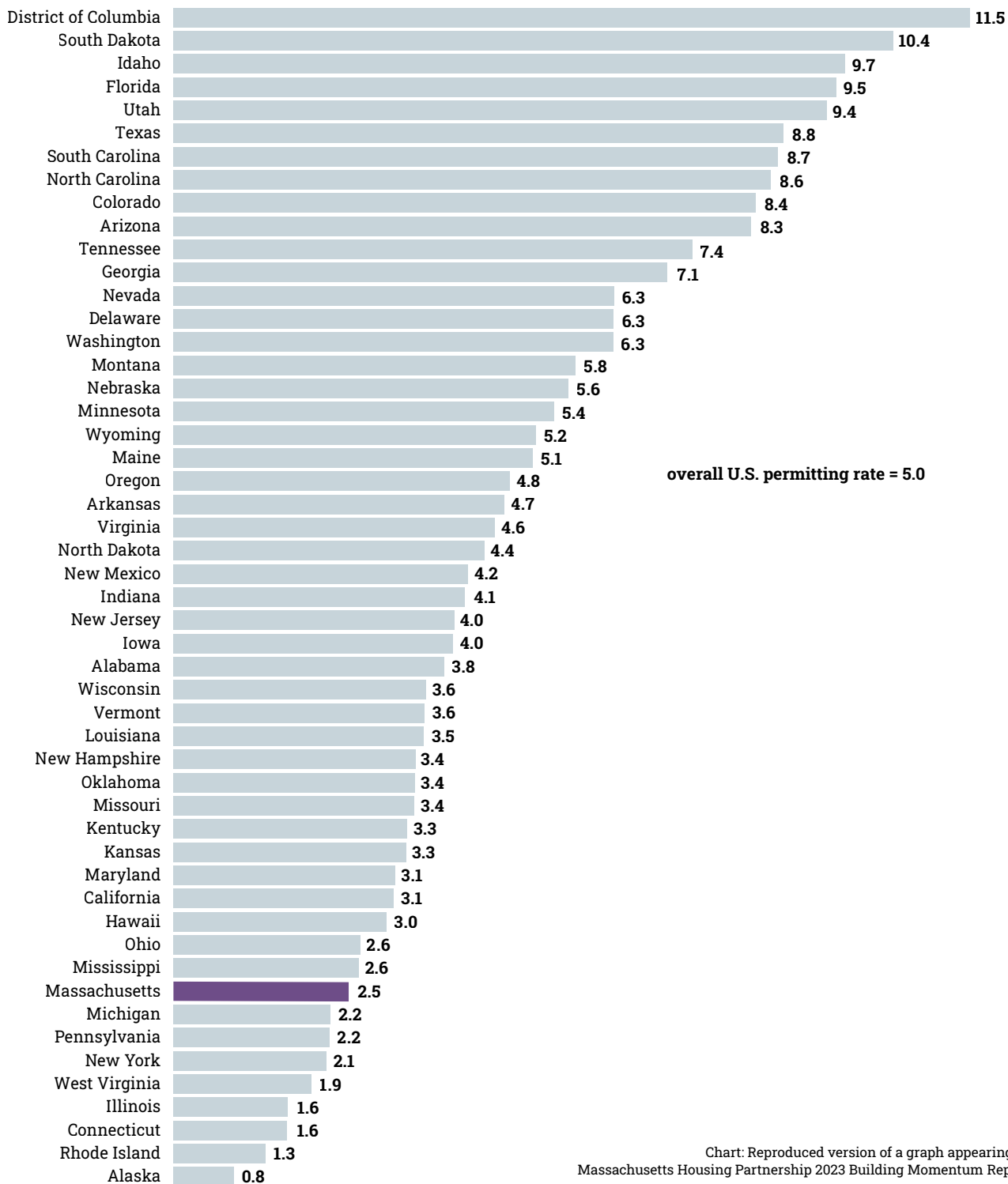


Chart: Reproduced version of a graph appearing in Massachusetts Housing Partnership 2023 Building Momentum Report.

Source: U.S. Census Building Permit Survey, U.S. Census Bureau Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico

## Progress has been mixed on meeting varied housing production goals.

Over the years, policy leaders have adopted a few different housing production goals that vary in their level of ambition. Perhaps the most ambitious of these is the Metro Mayors Coalition’s goal. This coalition of 15 municipalities in the urban core area announced in 2015 its goal to produce 185,000 new housing units by 2030. This is a higher end goal, as it’s based on meeting housing demand that would arise in a high economic growth scenario for these communities, where new workers would move to the area for employment. Building Permit Survey data suggest that the coalition is behind the pace of housing production needed to achieve this shared goal, with a deficit of 43,262 units as of 2022 (Figure 15).

Another housing production goal was announced in 2018 by the Baker administration. Former Governor Charlie Baker aimed for 135,000 new housing units by 2025. The state remains largely on track to achieving this far more modest goal, which, if met, would not actually satisfy all of the state’s unmet housing demand. Meeting the Baker administration’s goal requires that all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth permit a collective 16,875 units per

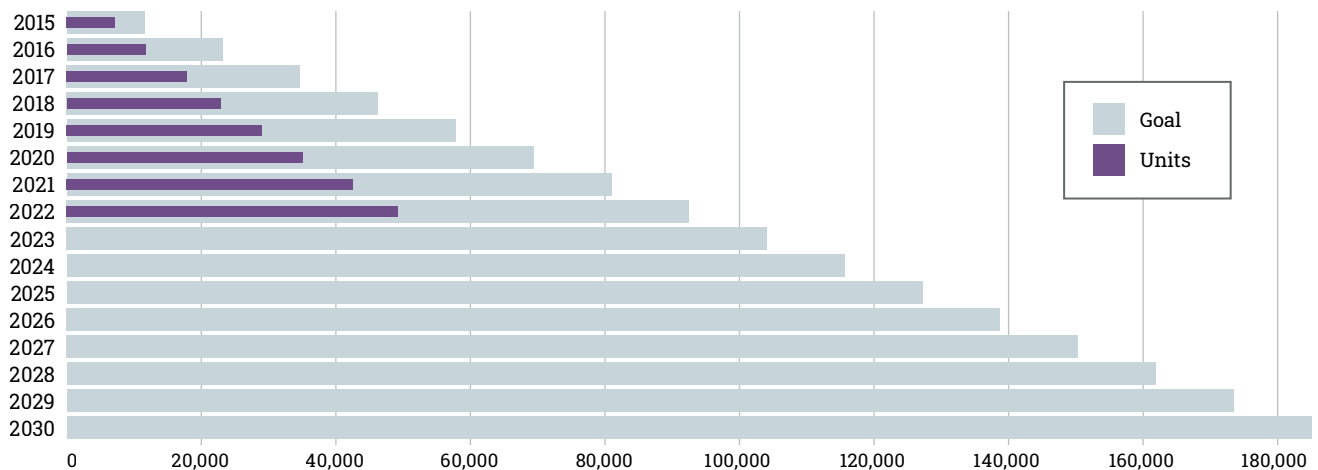
year—only about 4,500 units more than the 15 cities and towns in the Metro Mayors Coalition seek to permit on their own. The state is on pace to meet this goal, but largely because it is far less ambitious.

In October 2023, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) released new housing need projections which are likely to become the projections most referenced by advocates and policymakers, including the Healey administration. MAPC constructs these estimates by building on UMass Donahue Institute’s population growth projections and making assumptions about how this population will allocate itself into households and demand housing given available supply. Finally, MAPC targets a healthy vacancy rate for the housing market, and estimates how many units would be needed to achieve that target. Given these inputs, MAPC estimates that roughly 386,000 units would need to be created statewide by 2050, or 200,000 by 2030. MAPC also has these estimates at the local level, with 298,000 needed across the five-county Greater Boston region by 2050, or 154,000 by 2030.

FIGURE 15

### The Metro Mayors Coalition is not on pace to meet its ambitious 2030 production goal.

The Metro Mayors Coalition (composed of 15 municipalities\*) has set a housing production goal of 185,000 new housing units between 2015 and 2030.



Notes: The Metro Mayors Coalition housing production goal applies to 15 communities: Arlington, Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Newton, Quincy, Revere, Somerville, and Winthrop.  
Source: Census Bureau Building Permit Survey

**Vacancy rates, especially for rentals, remain extremely low.**

Homeowner and rental vacancy rates remain stubbornly low in Greater Boston compared to the 10 largest metro areas in the U.S. Between 2020 and 2022 homeowner vacancies have increased a bit, but they remain below 1 percent (Figure 16). Rental vacancies, however, continued to decline in 2022 (Figure 17). Sharply falling rental vacancies and rising homeowner vacancy rates may reflect broader forces at play during this inflationary period. As rising mortgage rates increase monthly mortgage costs for new homebuyers, many of those would-be homebuyers instead remain renters, gobbling up the supply of rental units and driving down the rate of rental vacancies.

Experts sometimes benchmark these vacancy rates against a measure of the “stable” or “natural” vacancy rate.<sup>13,14</sup> The stable vacancy rate acknowledges that even in a case where supply meets demand, there will be some level of vacancies due to frictions in the market. Generally, a vacancy rate

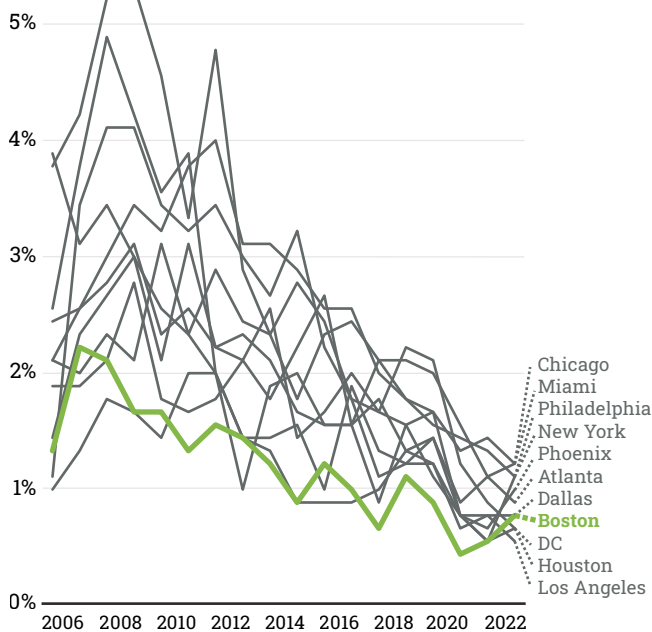
above the stable rate will favor homebuyers or renters who search for housing, and a lower vacancy rate will favor sellers or landlords. Therefore, one cause of recent housing price increases is the lack of rental and for sale units on the market at any given point in time. A higher vacancy rate in our region would allow for more opportunities for homebuyers and renters to find housing options that suit their needs in terms of location, unit size, price point, or other characteristics.

Another useful measure of housing market dynamism involves looking at how long homes sit listed on the market before reaching a sale agreement. Listings for homes in the Boston MSA in August 2023 lasted only slightly longer (37 days) than they did in August 2022 (35 days) or August 2021 (31 days).

FIGURE 16

**Homeowner vacancy rates increased in 2022, but remain below 1 percent.**

Homeowner vacancy rates in the ten largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

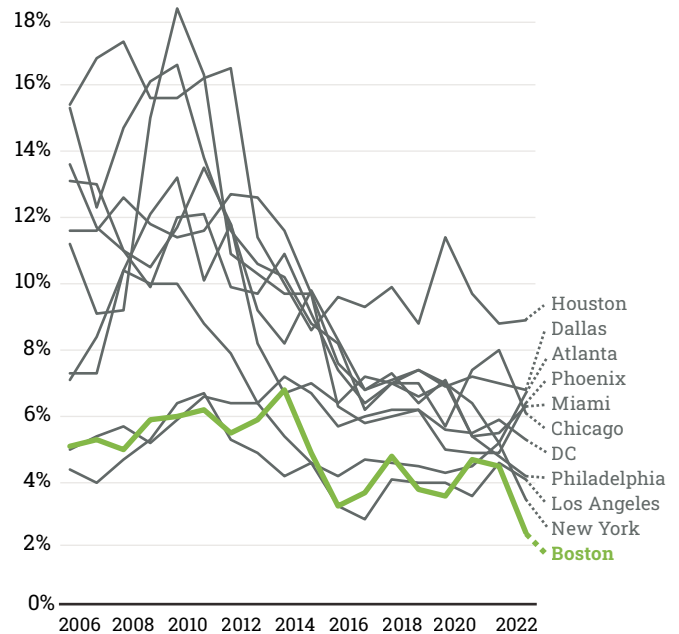


Source: Census Bureau CPS/Housing Vacancy Survey

FIGURE 17

**Rental vacancy rates in the Boston area decreased further in 2022.**

Rental vacancy rates for the 10 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas.



Source: Census Bureau CPS/Housing Vacancy Survey

## Progress has been mixed on meeting varied housing production goals.

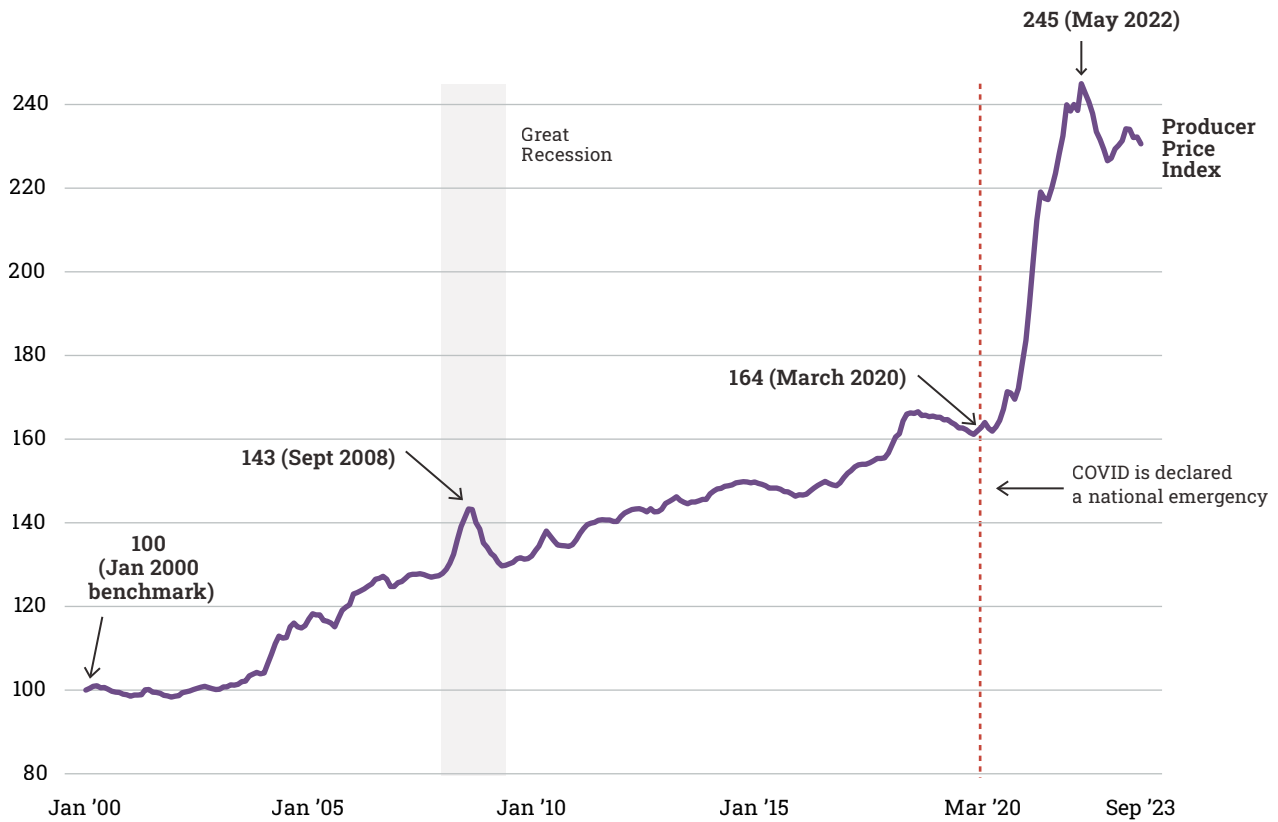
Nationally, the cost of construction materials rose sharply after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (**Figure 18**). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, construction costs hit their peak in May 2022. Since then, growth has slowed, but costs have plateaued at just below these record

highs. As construction costs go up, fewer new projects will be financially viable, and we might see developers of existing projects take a longer time to construct properties as they run into financing challenges.

FIGURE 18

### Construction costs have increased by almost 50 percent since the onset of the COVID pandemic.

Producer Price Index for Construction Materials in the U.S., January 2000 = 100.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Producer Price Index

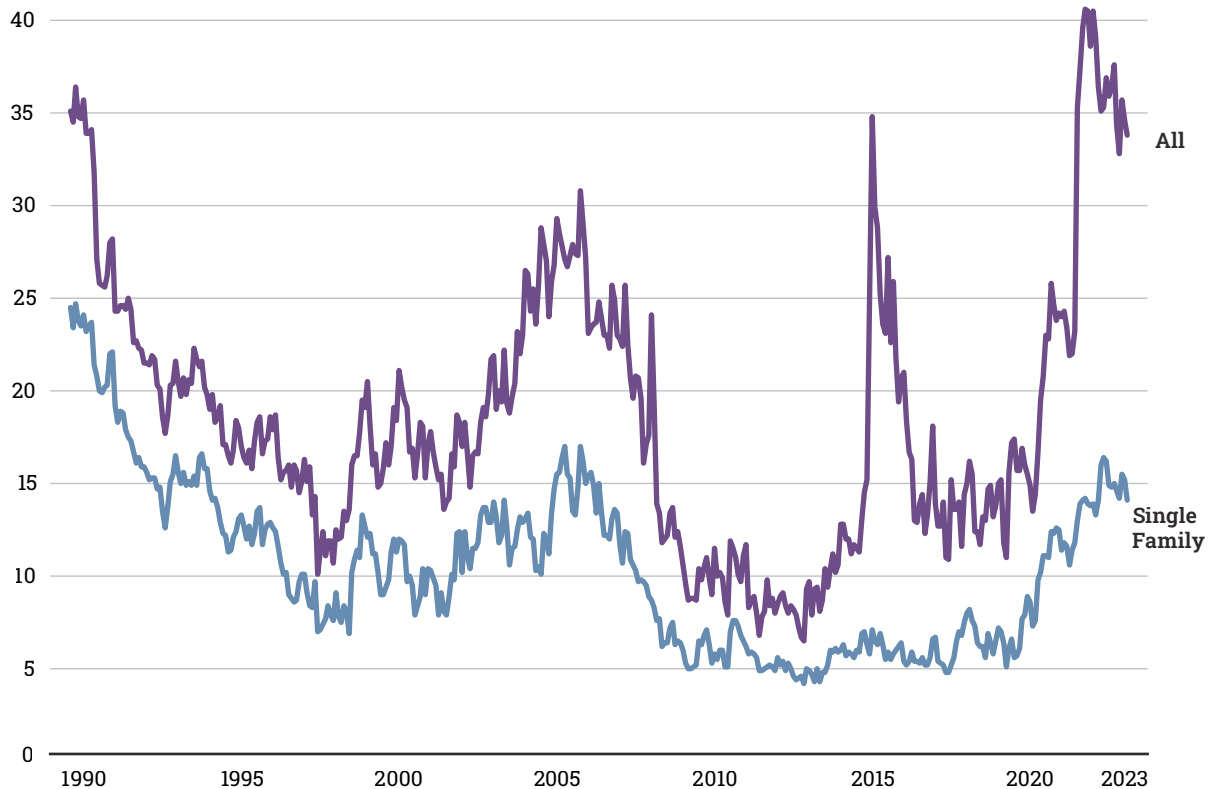
Indeed, data do show lengthening timelines for residential construction. The number of residential units that are in the construction pipeline is growing, and evidence suggests that this is due to lengthened construction timelines. The number of residential units in the Northeast region that are authorized, but for which construction has not yet started, are at historic highs (Figure 19). One local housing administrator also shared with the research team that their municipality’s agency has seen recent increases in the number of permits that are stuck in the “ready-to-issue” phase. These are permits that

the municipality is ready to approve, but is waiting for the project developer to pay the permitting fee to issue the permit. Recently, more developers are taking longer to pay that final fee, indicating that developers are experiencing unanticipated delays in the project. If there are many of these “ready-to-issue” but not yet authorized permits in the pipeline, the graph below may actually underestimate the extent to which housing production has slowed. Especially in the case of multifamily units, projects take time to build, so the full effects of these types of slowdowns on the housing stock have yet to be seen.

FIGURE 19

**Residential units authorized but not started have reached historically high levels.**

Monthly counts of authorized residential units in the Northeast region for which construction has not yet started, January 1990-July 2023.



Source: U.S. Census Survey of Construction

## The Building Permit Survey is a useful resource but has major shortcomings.

Most analyses of new housing production at the municipal level rely on data from the Census Bureau’s **Building Permit Survey (BPS)**. BPS is an annual survey that provides estimates of new privately-owned<sup>15</sup> housing units permitted as well as the type of housing and the value of these units (in our context, we can think of a jurisdiction as a municipality). The Census gathers these estimates through a voluntary survey that asks municipalities to report their permitting activity at least once each year.

Ultimately, though, despite being the most suitable source for the town-by-town analyses we present in the *Greater Boston Housing Report Card*, BPS serves only as proxy for actual housing construction and has some significant flaws. After release of the *Greater Boston Housing Report Card* in previous years, local leaders have noted large discrepancies in housing permit data that we’ve presented, where BPS estimates do not reflect the reality of housing production in their municipalities. To help put this data into broader context, we conclude this section on supply with a more detailed discussion of these data nuances and limitations.

First, let’s detail some limitations of the Building Permit Survey data:

**UNDERREPORTING OF PERMITS:** The reliability of what the Census Bureau reports out depends upon the quality of data submitted in the first place, and it’s clear that many municipalities report their data inconsistently. A 2018 study conducted as a part of the state’s Housing Choice Initiative found that among the 69 communities submitting data to be considered for the state’s special Housing Choice designation, BPS undercounted new housing units by about 14 percent on average between 2013 and 2017.<sup>16</sup> Since the study, the Housing Choice Program has led an effort to educate local officials on how to properly report permitting activity to the state and to improve review of the data that municipalities submit to University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute during the reporting process.

In cases where a municipality does not report its permit issuances, census statisticians impute the missing data, often by assuming the current year’s estimates will be equal to estimates in the most recent year in which a municipality *did* report. Imputation may be the best option when data is missing, but with the prevalence of non-reporting in the Greater Boston area, we see great discrepancies between reported and imputed data. From 1990 to 2022, at least 14 percent of permitted units BPS counts in Greater Boston are imputed counts from missing observations. For 11 municipalities in Greater Boston, that number is over 50 percent.<sup>17</sup>

To demonstrate this, we chose one municipality from Greater Boston as a case study, which we have anonymized for the sake of illustration. **Table 3** shows reported BPS estimates between 2018 and 2022 along with the actual numbers reported from the municipality. In this case, the municipality only reported permitted units in 2019, but over the past five years, BPS has reported that it has permitted three times as many units as it actually reported, due to this imputation procedure. This discrepancy does not necessarily mean the municipality has *not* permitted new housing

TABLE 3

### Imputed BPS estimates and reported numbers of permitted units have major discrepancies.

BPS estimates and municipal report of total units permitted 2018-22 in a selected case study municipality

Survey Year	Units Reported by Municipality to Census Bureau	Official BPS Estimate
2018	19	19
2019	1,780	1,780
2020	0	1,199
2021	0	1,667
2022	0	898

Source: U.S. Census Building Permit Survey

units in years 2020 to 2022, but absent regular reporting by that community we have no way of knowing for certain.

#### **UNCOUNTED PERMITS OR DOUBLE COUNTED**

**PERMITS:** Reported data also may contain inaccuracies. First, although multifamily housing is intended for residential use, multifamily housing permits are categorized as commercial permits. This quirk can lead to some error in municipal reporting if authorities fail to include those commercial permits in their counts of newly permitted residential units, meaning survey responses would undercount permitted units. Second, double counting may inadvertently occur. If a building permit is issued but no units are ultimately built, a count of building permits may include units that are never actually constructed. This case would be more typical for a single-family home rather than for a multifamily structure. Due to the higher costs associated with multifamily structures, once a structure has reached the point in the process at which it is issued a permit, it typically is ultimately constructed.

#### **GROSS VERSUS NET NEW HOUSING SUPPLY:**

Building Permit Survey estimates are intended to represent the gross number of new units permitted in each municipality, ignoring whether existing housing was torn down to build those new units.<sup>18</sup> This is slightly different from estimating the *net* change in number of housing units, which is more often the concern of housing researchers like us. This distinction is most relevant in suburban areas where it's common to tear down old single-family homes and build larger, more expensive ones in their place. This type of housing construction shows up as new permitting under the BPS, but doesn't actually represent any net new housing.

**LIMITED TYPOLOGIES REPORTED IN BPS:**<sup>19</sup> BPS reports only a few categories of housing types: single-family units, units in duplexes, units in three- to four-unit structures, and units in structures with five or more units. Having this simple approach helps mitigate the risk of inaccurate reporting, but it also limits the detail available to researchers and policymakers. For instance, BPS data lumps together detached homes and attached townhouse homes into the single-family category. Furthermore, instructions are unclear as to how municipalities should report accessory dwelling units. Finally, three- and four-unit structures are grouped together in a single classification, and all structures with five or more units are lumped together in a single category.

### 3. Prices

A year ago, when we released the *2022 Greater Boston Housing Report Card*, the housing market appeared to be at a point of inflection. Inflation was near multi-year highs and mortgage rates had more than doubled in less than a year; it looked like we might be headed into a housing market correction with declining prices. This has not happened. Though consumer inflation has cooled off considerably, mortgage rates remain high. The for-sale market has slowed. High mortgage rates have resulted in fewer homes going on the market for sale. And with this reduced inventory of homes for purchase, actual sale prices have continued to tick up. Increases in home prices and mortgage rates have pushed would-be homebuyers out of the market, further crowding the rental market and driving up rental prices. With the exception of a quick dip in rental prices for a few months after the onset of the pandemic, rents have risen continually for several years, continuing into mid-2023.

If there is good news, it is that the pace of inflationary pressure in the housing market shows early signs of slowing. Home sale and rental prices continue to climb in much of the region, but that ascent has slowed from its most extreme pace, and in some places, home values have even come down slightly in 2023 compared to 2022. On the bright side of this picture, the economy hasn't entered recession, but the harsh reality is that renters and potential new homeowners have found almost no relief. Most troubling, these trends have exacerbated an already difficult situation for lower income residents in search of affordable housing options.

Key findings from this section include:

- Mortgage rates have shot up in the past two years.
- Home prices have slowed their climb but continue to rise. Home sales have fallen throughout much of the region.
- Home values continue to rise overall across all community types.
- Rents and home values remain elevated, although rates of increase have slowed.
- Boston continues to have among the most expensive rents in the nation.
- Black and Latino families remain far less likely than White or Asian families to own homes in Greater Boston.

## Mortgage rates have shot up in the past two years.

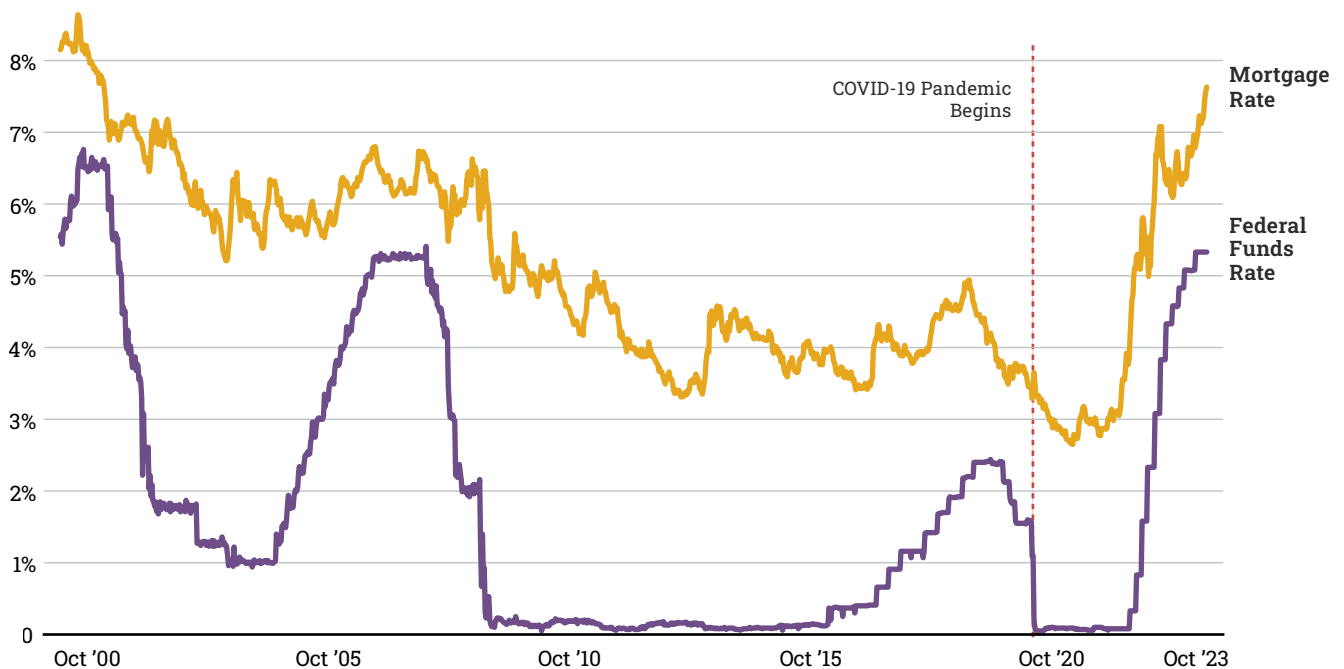
The sale price of a home is only one factor contributing to the expense of owning a home. A second major factor is the interest rate on the home loan acquired to make the purchase. Here we show the average interest rate for a 30-year fixed rate mortgage back to 2000, showing that rates more than doubled from a relative low point of 2.98 in July 2021 to a high of above 7 percent in late 2022. This kind of sudden and rapid ascent in mortgage rates hasn't been seen since the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 20** shows the federal funds rate, demonstrating how fluctuations in mortgage interest rates in the last five to seven years have largely coincided with changes in the interest rate targeted by the Federal Reserve. Near the onset of COVID, the Fed lowered the federal funds rate near zero in order to counteract the contractionary economic impact of the pandemic. In early 2022, however, the Fed began to pursue a policy that *encouraged* contraction and the federal funds rate began its climb. In line with the continuous increase in the federal funds rate (and the rise of inflation more generally), mortgage rates climbed dramatically.

FIGURE 20

### Mortgage interest rates remain elevated, following increases in the federal funds rate.

30-Year Fixed Rate Mortgage Average and Federal Funds Rate. Weekly. United States.



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

**Home prices have slowed their climb but continue to rise.  
Home sales have fallen throughout much of the region.**

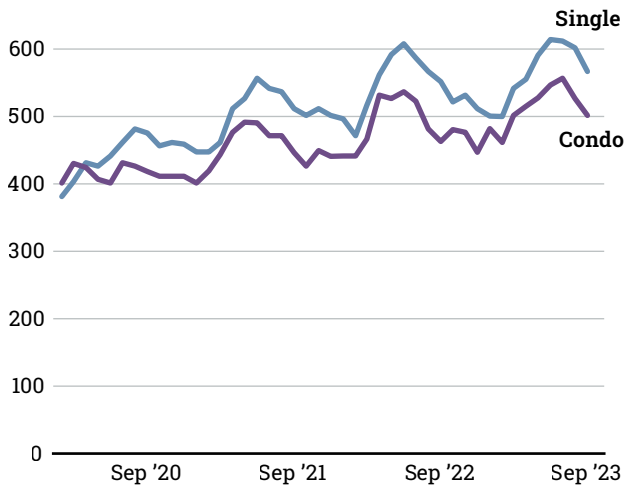
Here we focus just on units that have been sold over the past few years. First, using statewide data from the Warren Group, we see that despite small dips in August of 2023, both single-family and condo sale prices are up somewhat over the past year, continuing their upward trend of the past three years (Figure 21).

The data in Figure 22 focus on price changes for single-family home sales over just the past year. On aggregate, prices increased regionwide, but with some obvious variation town by town. Please see the online data supplement for specific values at the town level.

FIGURE 21

**Sale prices have risen over the past three years.**

Median sale price in Massachusetts by property type. Monthly, Sep 2020-Sep 2023.

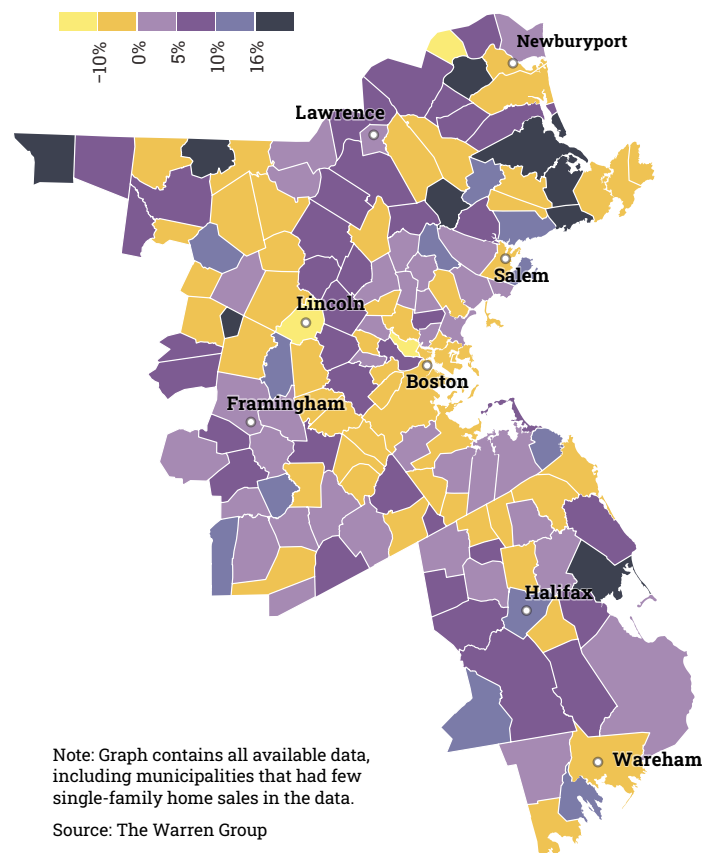


Source: The Warren Group

FIGURE 22

**Single-family home prices remain elevated in many places regionwide.**

Percent change in year-to-date median sale price for single-family homes from September 2022 to September 2023.



Note: Graph contains all available data, including municipalities that had few single-family home sales in the data.

Source: The Warren Group

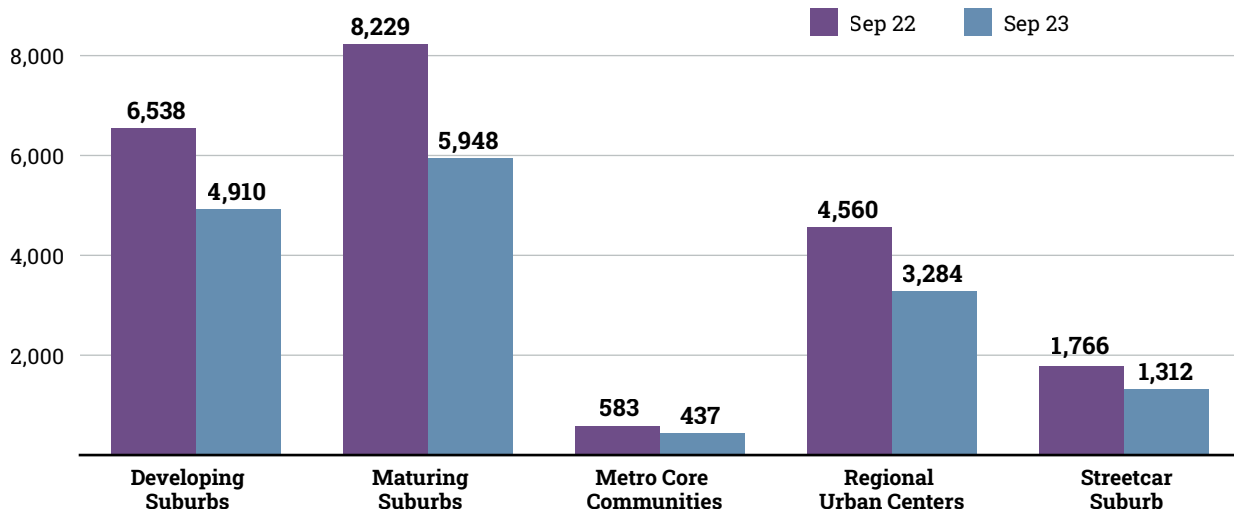
As we noted in the Supply section, a factor driving continued price increases despite rising mortgage interest rates is the decline in the total number of homes going up for sale. **Figure 23** shows that the total number of single-family homes sold has decreased across all community types over the past year. Condominium sales exhibit the same pattern, with sales falling across all community types

from August 2022 to 2023. Rising interest rates don't only increase the cost of homebuying for first-time homebuyers but also for people looking to sell their current home and buy another, making existing homeowners less likely to consider moving and freeing up some much-needed housing stock. See the online data supplement for more town level data on median single family sale prices.

FIGURE 23

**Sales of single-family homes have fallen across all community types.**

Number of sales of single-family homes by community type, September 2022 and September 2023.



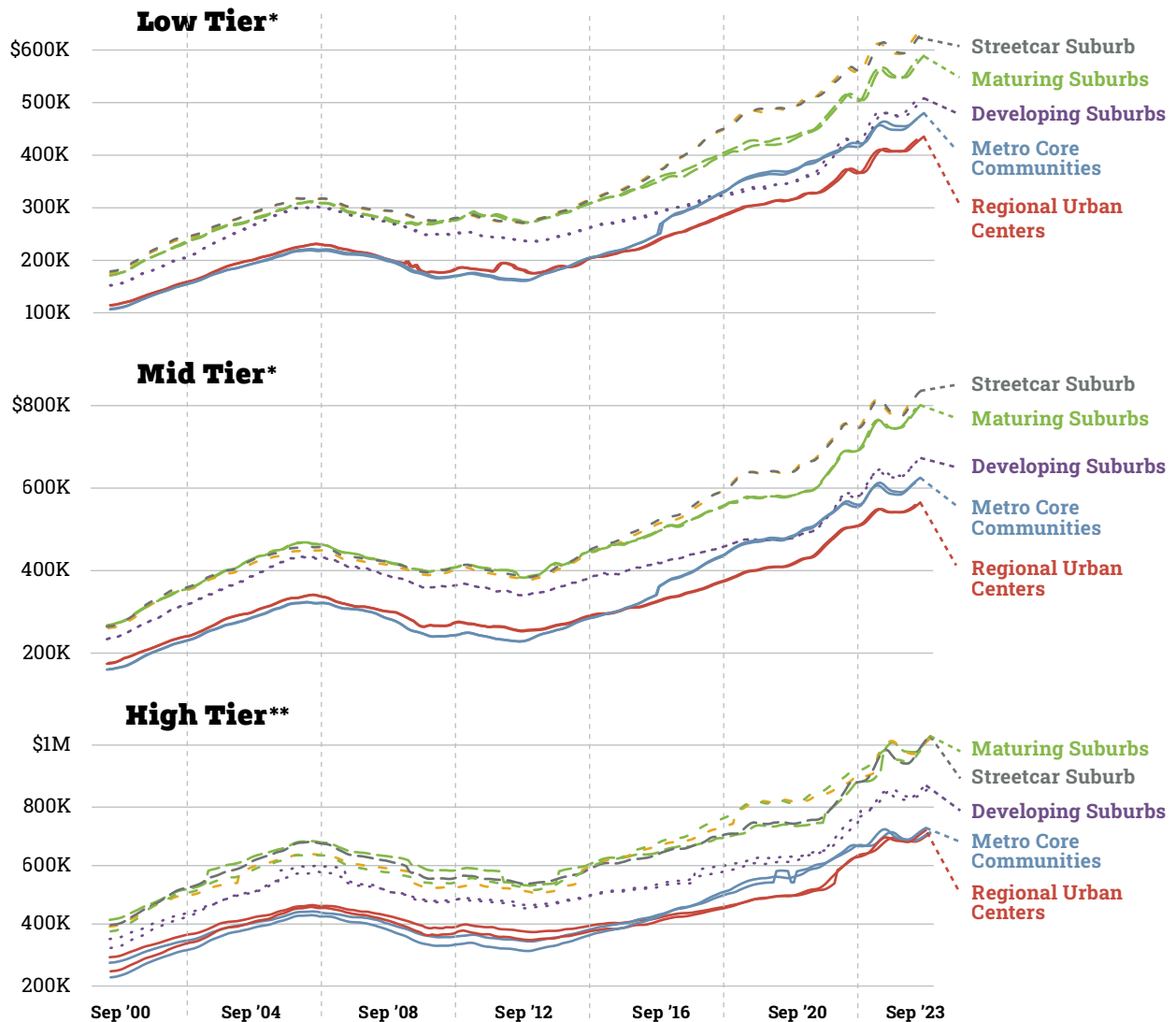
Source: The Warren Group

## Home values continue to rise overall across all community types.

Here we focus on estimated value of all homes rather than sale prices of homes that are sold. We show changes in the value of a typical low-, mid-, and high-tier home in each community type (Figure 24), where each tier refers to a third of the value distribution. Some of the differences in home values across community types will be due to the different

housing typologies present and other characteristics of the housing in each type of community. Trends are similar across all three tiers and community types, though especially for low- and mid-tier homes. Prices in Streetcar Suburbs and Metro Core Communities appear to be growing faster than in other community types.

FIGURE 24



\* Note: Zillow does not have data for Boxborough or North Reading.

\*\* Notes: 1. The value for high-tier Metro Core Community Homes (\$739) is surprisingly low because there are just 7 values for MCC high-tier home values—sub \$700k for Revere, Everett, and Chelsea, and \$1.2m + for Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. Malden (\$739k) is right in the middle, thus the median is \$739k. 2. Zillow does not have data for Boxborough or North Reading.

Source: Zillow ZHVI

## Rents and home values remain elevated, although rates of increase have slowed.

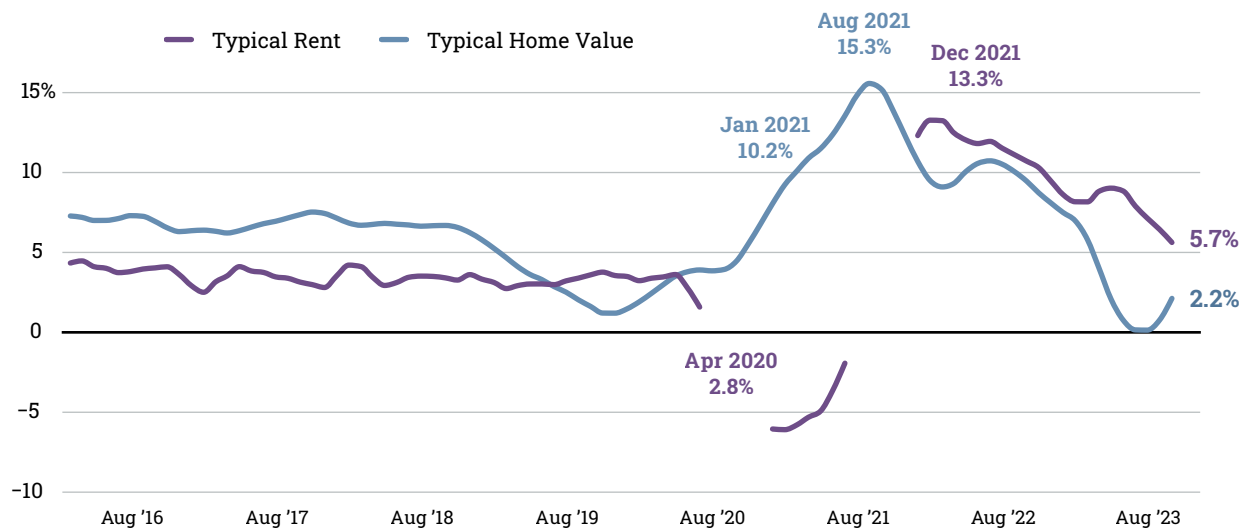
To assess growth in rent and home values in the Boston MSA, we make use of Zillow’s Home Value Index (ZHVI) and Zillow’s Observed Rent Index (ZORI), which estimate typical rents and home values for the Boston metropolitan area. From these data, we calculate year-over-year increases, presented in **Figure 25**. Zillow’s August 2021 estimate, for example, indicates how much greater average home values were in August 2021 compared to August 2020. Even with incomplete data, our analysis this year tells a story that was

not fully developed a year ago. Home value growth has been slowing since late 2021 following its astounding peak of 15 percent growth in August 2021. And while Zillow’s rent data features some gaps in spring and fall 2020, we do see that rent growth peaked in November 2021 and the rate of growth has generally slowed since then. It’s important to stress, however, that both of these lines remain above 0, meaning that rents and home values continue to increase, just at somewhat slower rates than in 2021 and 2022.

FIGURE 25

### Post-COVID rents and home prices have slowed their increases, but mostly haven’t yet turned to decreases.

Annual percent change in Zillow Home Value Index for a typical home and Zillow Observed Rent Index for a typical unit. Boston MSA.



Note: Modeled after Joint Center for Housing Studies' chart in their 2022 America's Rental Housing report. Percent change reflects year-to-date percent increases for each calendar month. ZORI has missing values for Boston May-October 2020 and May-October 2021.

Source: Zillow ZHVI

## Boston continues to have among the most expensive rents in the nation.

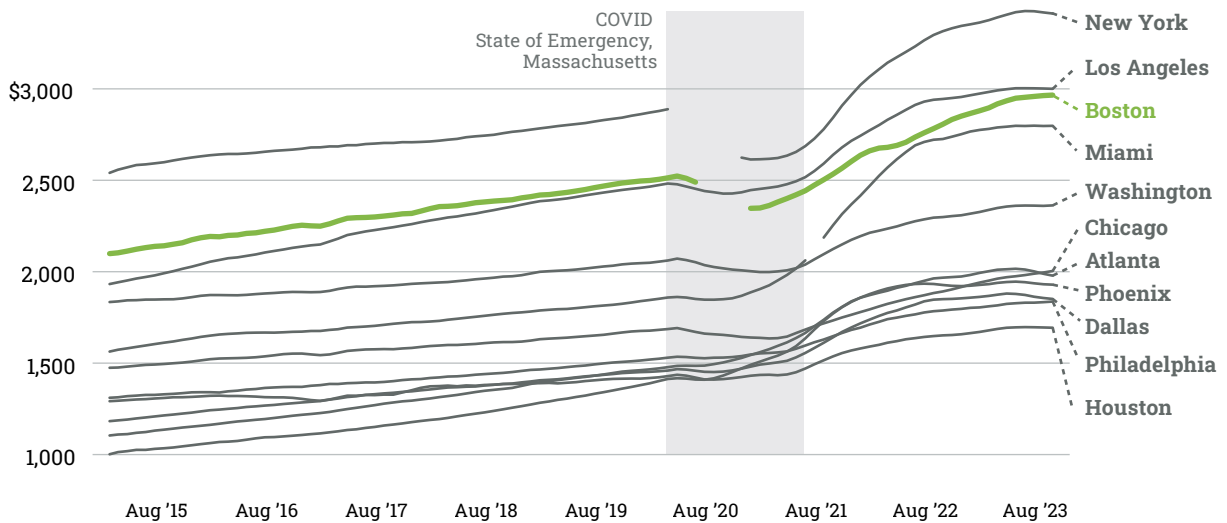
Since 2022, rents have continued their surge locally, and Boston has nearly overtaken even Los Angeles when it comes to typical rent prices, as estimated by Zillow's Observed Rent Index (**Figure 26**). This puts Boston as the third most expensive rental market among the 11 most populous MSAs in the nation, behind New York City and just behind Los Angeles. Among the 50 most populous MSAs, Boston ranks fourth, behind New York, LA, San Francisco, and San Jose.

Next, we look at how rents have changed at the more local level within Greater Boston across three different time periods—from March 2020 (capturing roughly the height of the pandemic) to September 2022 (capturing two years of recovery from the pandemic) and September 2023 (capturing a much more recent moment in time) (**Figure 27**). We see that rents have increased across the board in all ZIP Codes available in Zillow's data, with rents in at least one Boston neighborhood exceeding \$4,000 a month. Regional Urban Centers continue to have the lowest prevailing rents, but even these neighborhoods now have typical rents exceeding \$2,500 a month, as of September 2023.

FIGURE 26

### Among the 11 largest MSAs in the nation, Boston has the 3rd highest average rent.

Zillow Observed Rent Index (Smoothed) All Homes Plus Multifamily Time Series data for the 11 largest metro areas, according to 2022 Census estimates. Overall rents, regardless of bedroom numbers.



Note: ZORI is missing June-October 2020 estimates for Boston, March-September 2020 estimates for New York, and June 2021 estimates for Miami. Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index

FIGURE 27

### Rent changes throughout the pandemic.

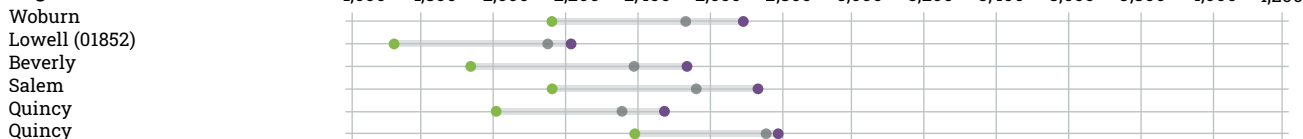
Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI) in Greater Boston by ZIP Code. ZORI has limited coverage in Greater Boston, all available ZIP Codes in the region are represented.

● Mar 2020 ● Sept 2022 ● Sept 2023

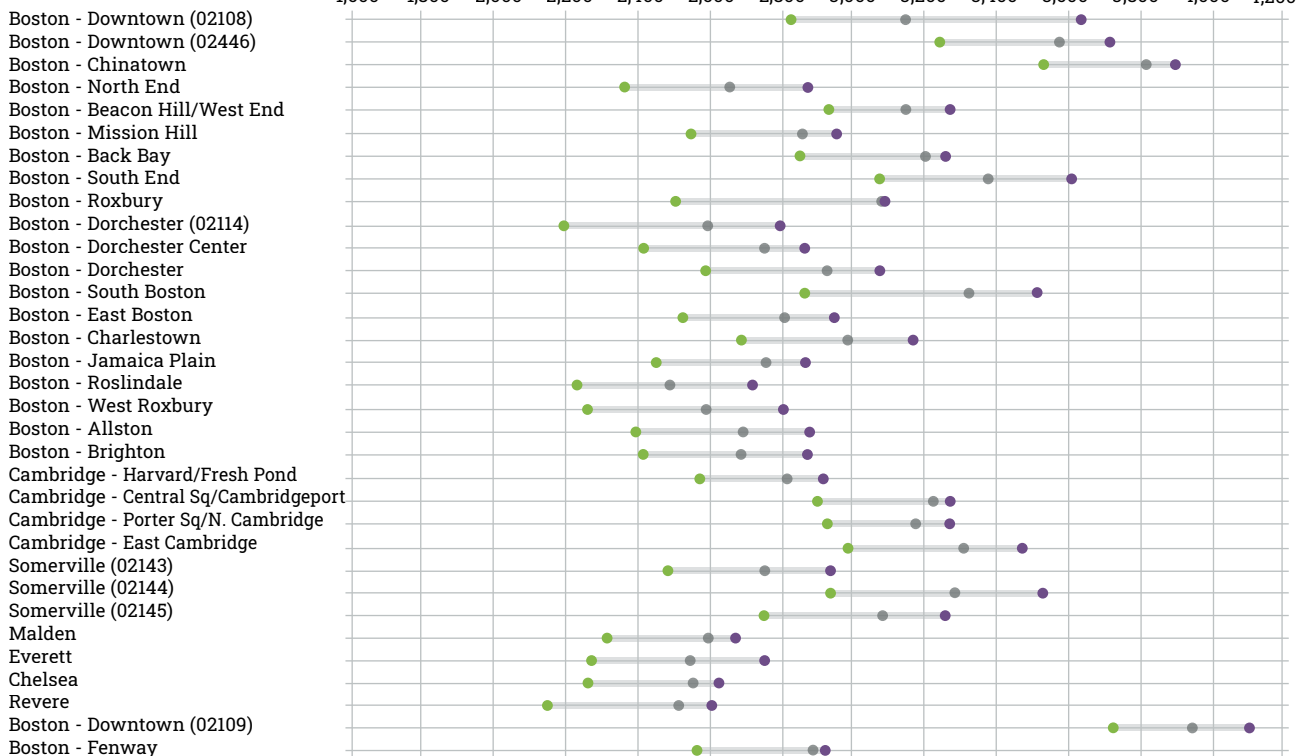
#### Maturing Suburbs



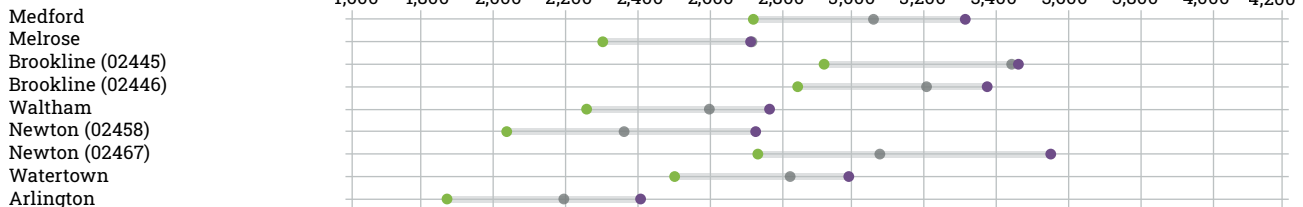
#### Regional Urban Centers



#### Metro Core Communities



#### Streetcar Suburb



Source: Zillow Observed Rent Index

## Black and Latino families remain far less likely than White or Asian families to own homes in Greater Boston.

When it comes to purchasing a home, price fluctuations have not altered the longer-term geography of homebuying in Greater Boston, with the racial distribution of home purchases closely mirroring existing patterns of residential segregation. The share of home loans going to Black or Latino families in each municipality in 2022 (Figure 28) is remarkably similar to estimates from 2020. Over 70 percent of first-lien home purchase loans in Lawrence went to Black or Latino homebuyers in 2022, 56 percent in Brockton, and 48 percent in Randolph. These towns are outliers around the

region, as in much of suburbia, fewer than 5 percent of home loans went to Black or Latino borrowers. More town-level information on this metric is available in the online data supplement.

Regional Urban Centers continue to lead in terms of diversity of homebuyers, with more than 23 percent of home loans in these areas originated for Black or Latino borrowers in 2022, compared to about 15 percent of home loans in Metro Core Communities and between 4 and 7 percent for suburban community types (Figure 29).

Who owns their home varies greatly by race and ethnicity, with Black and Latino families far more likely to rent than own (Figure 30). Regionwide, 65 percent of Black residents and 70 percent of Latino residents are renters, compared to just 33 percent of White residents and 46 percent of Asian residents. These disparities exist across all community types, although gaps vary in size. In Streetcar Suburbs, the homeownership rate for White residents is about double that of Black and Latino residents. This pattern of racial disparity in homeownership has largely persisted unchanged in the last decade, as shown across the 2013-17 and 2017-21 5-year ACS data sets.

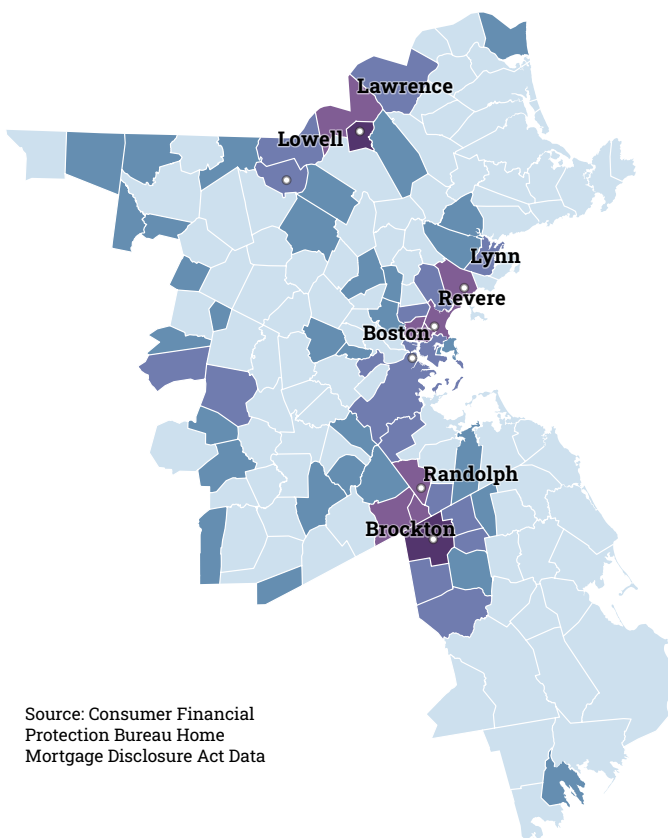
Disparities in homeownership are both an important source and manifestation of the racial wealth gap. For low- and moderate-income American families, home equity is typically the largest store of wealth. It's important to note, however, that when Black and low-income families can buy homes, it has historically been a less powerful wealth generator for them, due to factors like racial disparities in home assessments and predatory lending practices. But homeownership is still a powerful tool for wealth building, especially given federal tax benefits to wealth generated through homeownership.

FIGURE 28

### Share of home loans going to Black or Latino families.

Share of all first-lien home-purchase loans for owner-occupied homes that went to Black or Latino adults by city and town. 2022.

0-5% 5-10% 10-25% 25-50% 50%

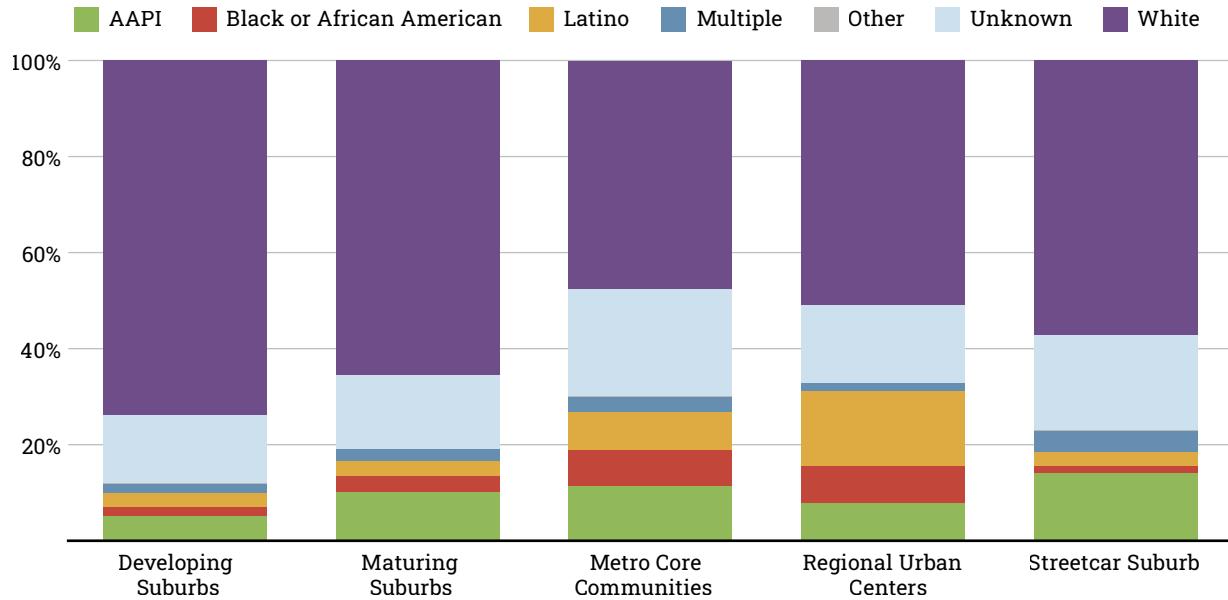


Source: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data

FIGURE 29

### Regional Urban Centers have more diverse homebuyers than other community types.

Demographics of first-lien home-purchase loans originated by community type for owner-occupied homes in 2022.

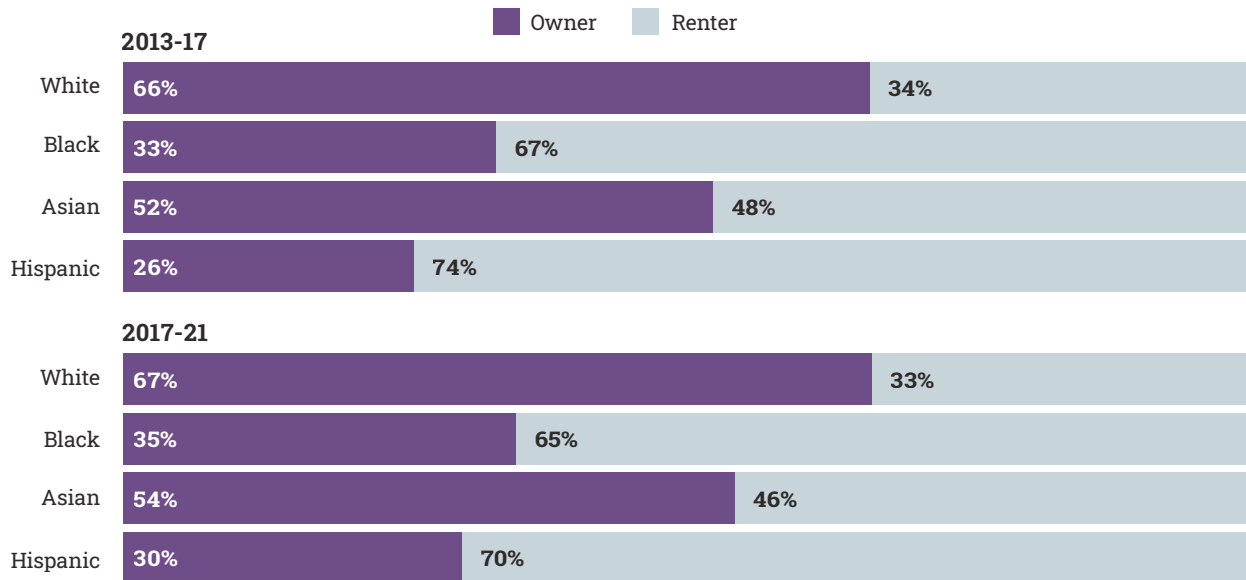


Source: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data

FIGURE 30

### Black and Latino residents are more likely to be renters than are White or Asian residents.

Tenure by race or ethnicity of householder. Greater Boston, ACS Surveys 2013-17 and 2017-21.



Source: 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, accessed via MAPC DataCommon

## 4. **Affordability**

The comparison of housing costs relative to income is what researchers think of as “affordability.” While housing costs can be higher in one region than another, so long as incomes are also higher, this may not necessarily lead to a housing affordability problem. Here we use a common approach for analyzing “housing affordability,” which considers a household “cost burdened” if it spends more than 30 percent of its income on housing costs.

What we find in this section is that the region’s affordability crisis shows no sign of abating. More than half of Greater Boston’s renters in 2022 were cost burdened, with increases felt across all income groups.

Key findings from this section include:

- 👉 The number of cost burdened renter households grew substantially in the last two years, leading to a record high.
- 👉 The majority of Greater Boston renter households making less than \$75,000 are cost burdened.
- 👉 More than half of renters and a quarter of homeowners in Greater Boston are cost burdened.
- 👉 Housing cost burden is widespread throughout Greater Boston, but not evenly concentrated.

**The number of cost burdened renter households grew substantially in the last two years, leading to a record high.**

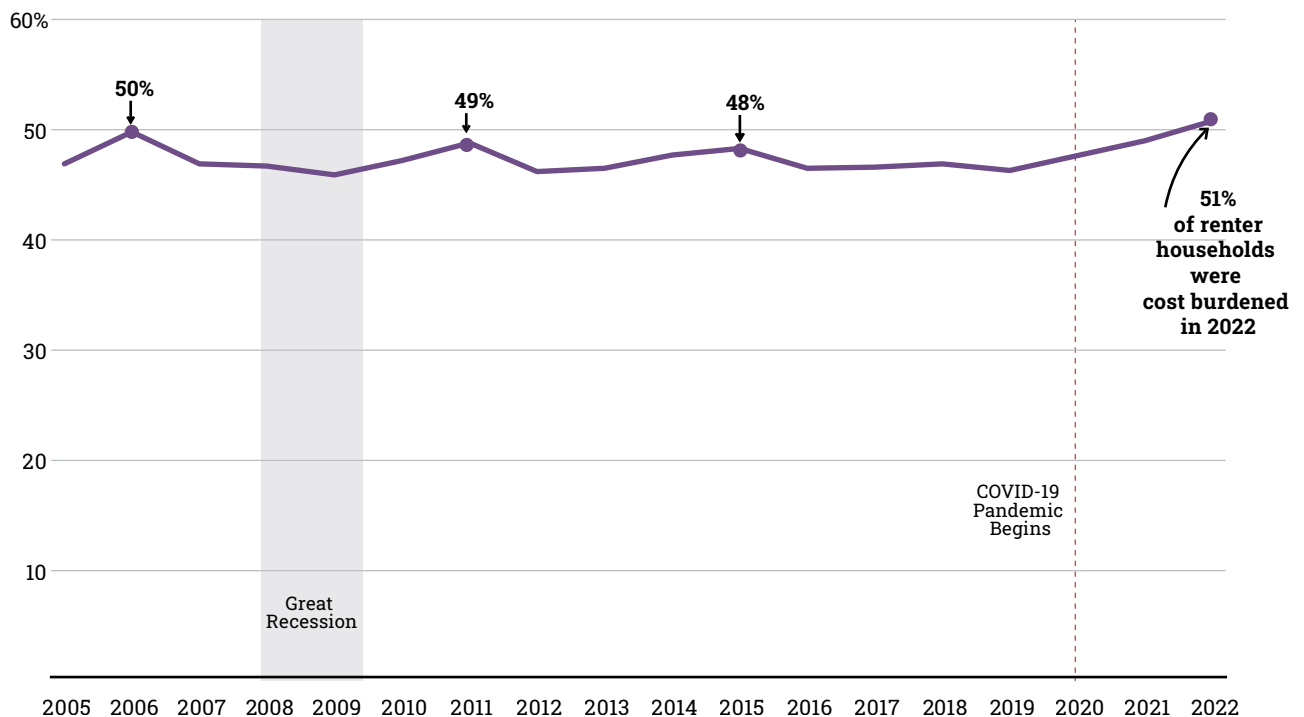
For the first time in almost two decades, more renter households—51 percent—are cost burdened than not (Figure 31). The sudden economic shock of the pandemic precipitated this increase, resulting in a 2.6 percentage point jump in the share of these households between 2019 and 2021, and an additional 1.8 points between 2021 and 2022. Coming during the COVID-19 crisis, these increases meant that there was much less room for other essentials in many household budgets.

Unfortunately, because of data collection issues in 2020 (i.e., the height of the pandemic), we cannot reliably calculate the one-year share of cost burdened rental households for 2020, though it may well have been significant. Indeed, it's possible the share of cost burdened renters in 2021 may have in fact *declined* from 2020.<sup>21</sup> Yet the pandemic disrupted data collection from that survey so completely that those results cannot be compared to previous or following years. Even still, the growth we record through 2022 is the largest sustained increase in more than a decade. Town level data on renter cost burden is available in the online data supplement.

FIGURE 31

**More renter households are cost burdened now than at any point in the last 17 years.**

Share of renter households paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Greater Boston.



Note: We exclude 2020 1-yr data here due to pandemic data limitations.

Source: 2005-2022 1-Yr American Community Survey

## The majority of Greater Boston renter households making less than \$75,000 are cost burdened.

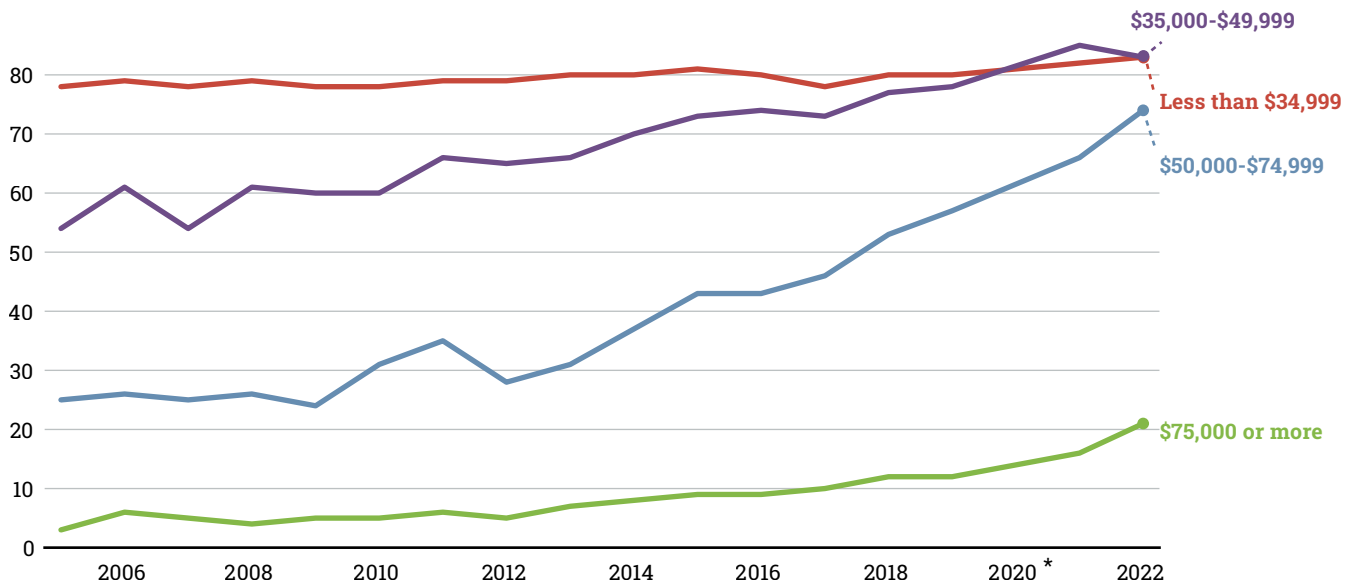
When we further break out renters by income, we find large and steady increases in cost burden across nearly all groups over the last two decades (Figure 32). This growth has been especially concerning in the last couple of years. Between 2019 and 2022 (excluding 2020 due to pandemic data limitations), the share of renters making between \$35,000 and \$49,999 who are cost burdened increased 5 percentage

points, while the share of cost burdened renters making between \$50,000 and \$74,999 increased a stunning 17 percentage points. Higher-income renters haven't escaped the steady growth in housing costs either. Just over one-fifth were cost burdened in 2022—an increase of 9 percentage points from 2019.

FIGURE 32

### Housing cost burden has increased for all income groups, especially lower-income groups.

Share of renter households paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent, by income group. Greater Boston.



Note: Note: 2020 1-Yr data excluded here due to pandemic data-gathering limitations.

Source: 2005-2022 American Community Survey.

## Around half of renters and a quarter of homeowners in Greater Boston are cost burdened.

As of 2022, about half of renter households in Greater Boston are cost burdened (Figure 33, showing a slightly lower rate than Figure 31 above due to dataset difference). And while homeowners fare better than renters, 25 percent of homeowners still have trouble meeting regular household expenses. Yet these burdens do not fall equally across racial or ethnic lines. Cost burden rates for White and Asian renters are a bit below 50 percent, while cost burden rates for Black and Latino households are at 55 and 57 percent, respectively.

Especially for renters, the lack of affordable housing can force significant tradeoffs. To stay in the region, families may choose to crowd into substandard housing or move further away from the urban core or save less for college and retirement.

For many households, homeownership is a source of stability. While homeowners may have large mortgages, monthly payments are usually locked in for the life of the loan, a useful hedge against future inflation. Only one in four homeowners in Greater Boston spends more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs (Figure 34). Still, there remain significant racial disparities, as around a third of Black and Latino homeowners are housing cost burdened, and almost one in five Black homeowners severely so.

It's important to note Figure 34 only looks at those who've been able to purchase a home at all. Decades of state and federal policies have privileged White homeownership<sup>22</sup> such that 67 percent of White households own their own homes, as compared to 35 and 30 percent of Black and Latino households, respectively.<sup>23</sup>

FIGURE 33

### Renters of all racial groups are significantly housing cost burdened.

Share of renter households by race paying 30-50% of income on rent, and share paying more than 50% of income on rent. Greater Boston. 2022.

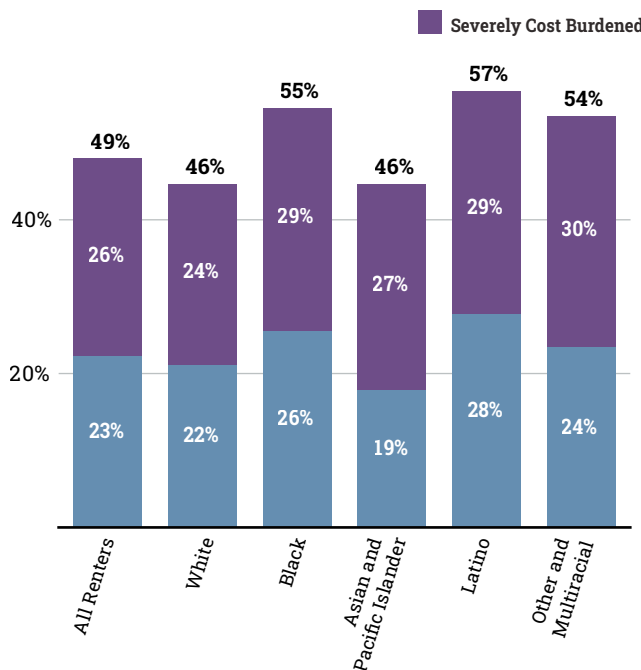
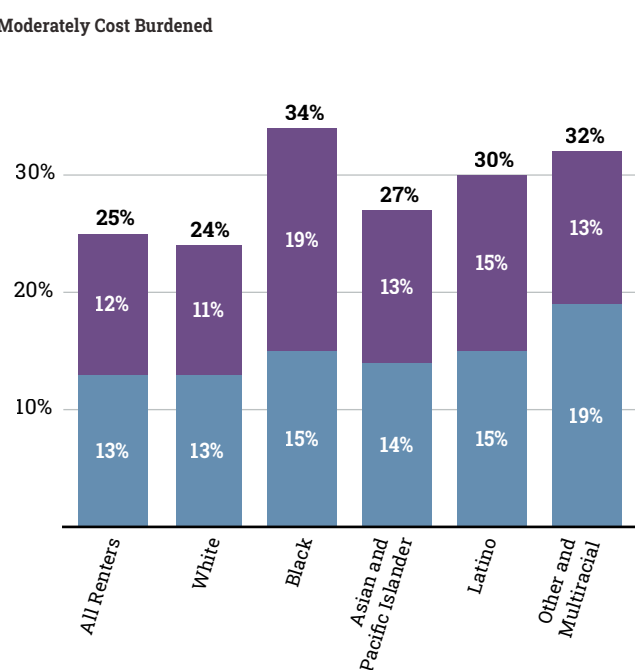


FIGURE 34

### Black and Latino homeowners are more cost burdened than other groups.

Share of owners by race paying 30-50% of income on housing costs, and share paying more than 50% of income on housing costs. Greater Boston. 2022.



Note: White, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander are all single-race alone, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race. Other includes American Indian and Alaskan Native, Some Other Race Alone, and Multiracial non-Latino households.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2022 1-Yr American Community Survey

**Housing cost burden is widespread throughout Greater Boston, but not evenly concentrated.**

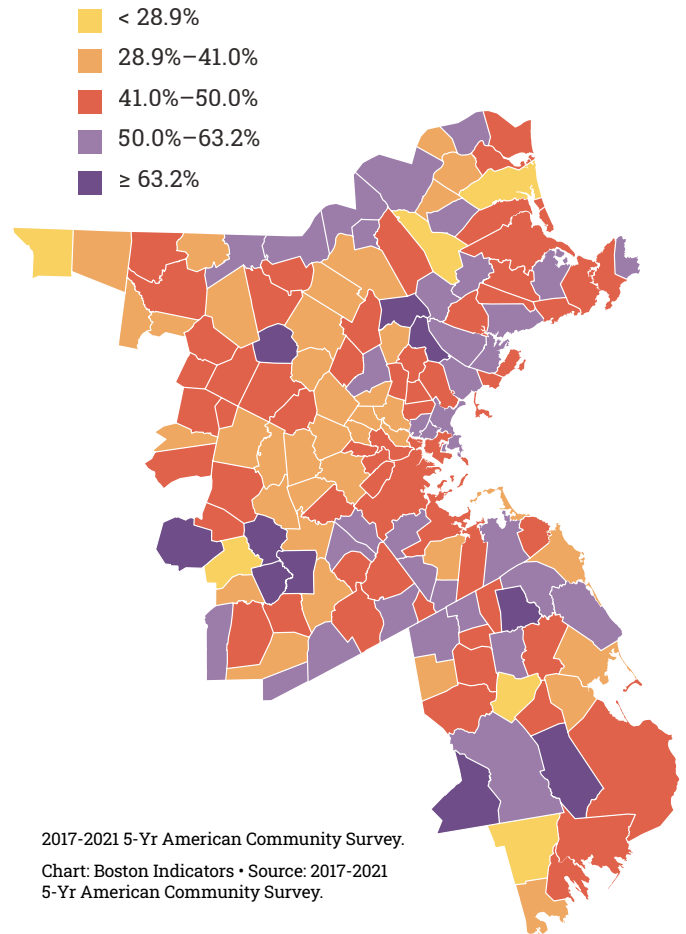
Though cost burden comparisons by race and income groups are useful, it is also important to place these challenges in a geographic context.

**Figure 35** makes clear the scale of Greater Boston’s housing crisis. Towns with lower levels of cost burdened renters tend to be wealthier suburbs west of the city—towns like Wellesley, Weston, and Sudbury. Due in part to exclusionary zoning policies, these communities tend to have higher incomes and fewer rental units as a share of their overall housing market. By contrast, rental cost burdens tend to be higher in the immediate urban core—like Boston, Chelsea, and Everett—as well as in communities north and south of Boston—in places like Lawrence, Lynn, and Brockton.

FIGURE 35

**Renter cost burdens are generally higher north and south of Boston.**

Share of renter households by race who are cost burdened (paying more than 30% of their income on rent). Greater Boston. 2021.



## 5. Instability

People deserve not only safe and affordable housing, but also stability, allowing them to live in one home for many years without having their lives uprooted by the need to move to a new home. With stability comes longer-term community ties and a more concrete sense of “home.” And while housing supply, prices and availability are all key components of a functioning housing market, these metrics can miss what it’s like for families on the verge of losing their homes. In this section then, we look at a collection of measures that paint a picture of who lacks stable housing and where they live throughout Greater Boston. In addition to data that look at eviction filing rates, foreclosures and counts of those experiencing homelessness, we have added two additional measures of instability this year. The first assesses the state’s shelter caseloads through to July 2023, as these have increased significantly with the large numbers of international migrants arriving here, fleeing oppression abroad. The second focuses on the number of people living in overcrowded homes, which has also been increasing.

Key findings from this section include:

- Due to an influx of international migrants, the number of families in the emergency shelter system has risen dramatically in the past year.
- Black and Latino residents are much more likely to experience housing instability.
- More renters are living in overcrowded housing now than a decade ago.
- As pandemic-era rental supports phase out, eviction filings have increased.
- Foreclosure petitions have grown year over year.

**Due to an influx of international migrants, the number of families in the emergency shelter system has risen dramatically in the past year.**

It's true that factors like substance abuse and poverty are correlated with homelessness at the individual level, but the main reason why Greater Boston has higher homelessness as a region is that housing costs are out of reach for too many. Many other parts of the country have similar rates of substance abuse, and often far higher rates of poverty. But they still have much less homelessness because there is some low-cost housing available. It's important to note that Massachusetts is a "Right to Shelter" state for families with children experiencing homelessness, meaning that most families without permanent housing are at least living temporarily in shelter paid for by the state, rather than resorting to living on the street or in their cars.

The challenge of family homelessness in Greater Boston was exacerbated in the past year, as we've seen an uptick in international migrants arriving from abroad (as has been

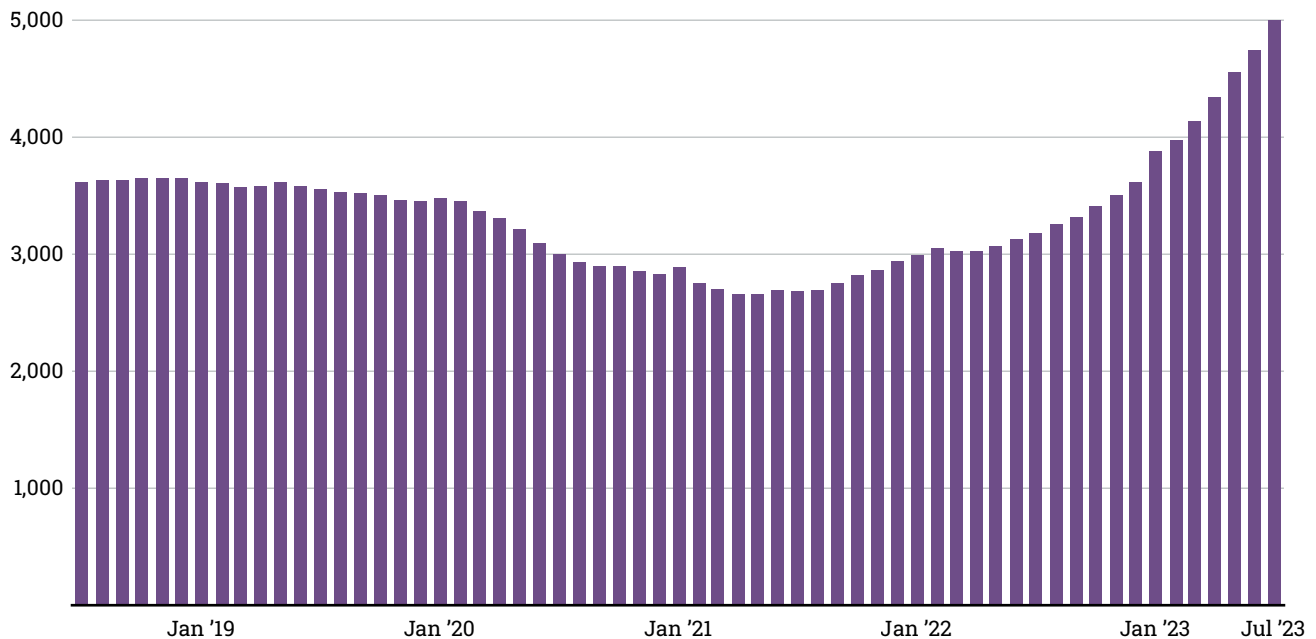
the case in many other U.S. cities). Many of these families are waiting on work permits and lack stable housing. This trend largely began in the fall of 2022, and as of fall 2023, about half of the current family shelter caseload is made up of new arrivals from abroad.<sup>24</sup>

Serving the new residents is a patchwork of hospitals, hotels and nonprofits across the state, but these resources are stretched thin caring for more households than they were ever designed for.<sup>25</sup> Current demands on Massachusetts' emergency shelter system are the biggest since the "Right to Shelter" law was passed in 1983, prompting Governor Healey to declare that as of November 2023, the state will "cap" placement in the system at 7,500 families, or 24,000 individuals.<sup>26</sup> She argues that is all the system can accommodate with existing funding and service providers. Once capped, new shelter-seekers will be added to a waitlist, with

FIGURE 36

**Use of the state's emergency assistance system increased dramatically in 2023.**

Number of families in emergency assistance shelters and hotels/motels. Massachusetts. July 2018-July 2023.



priority given to families facing health and safety risks. Healey also asked the federal government to expedite work permit applications so that new arrivals can begin working sooner, and find stable housing outside the shelter system.<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, the best resource for tracking the number of unhoused individuals and families over time—rather than just caseloads—does not yet reach into 2023. Every year, Greater Boston’s Continuums of Care—municipal or regional plans that include a variety of support services and housing to address homelessness—count all unhoused individuals in shelters and on the street and report those

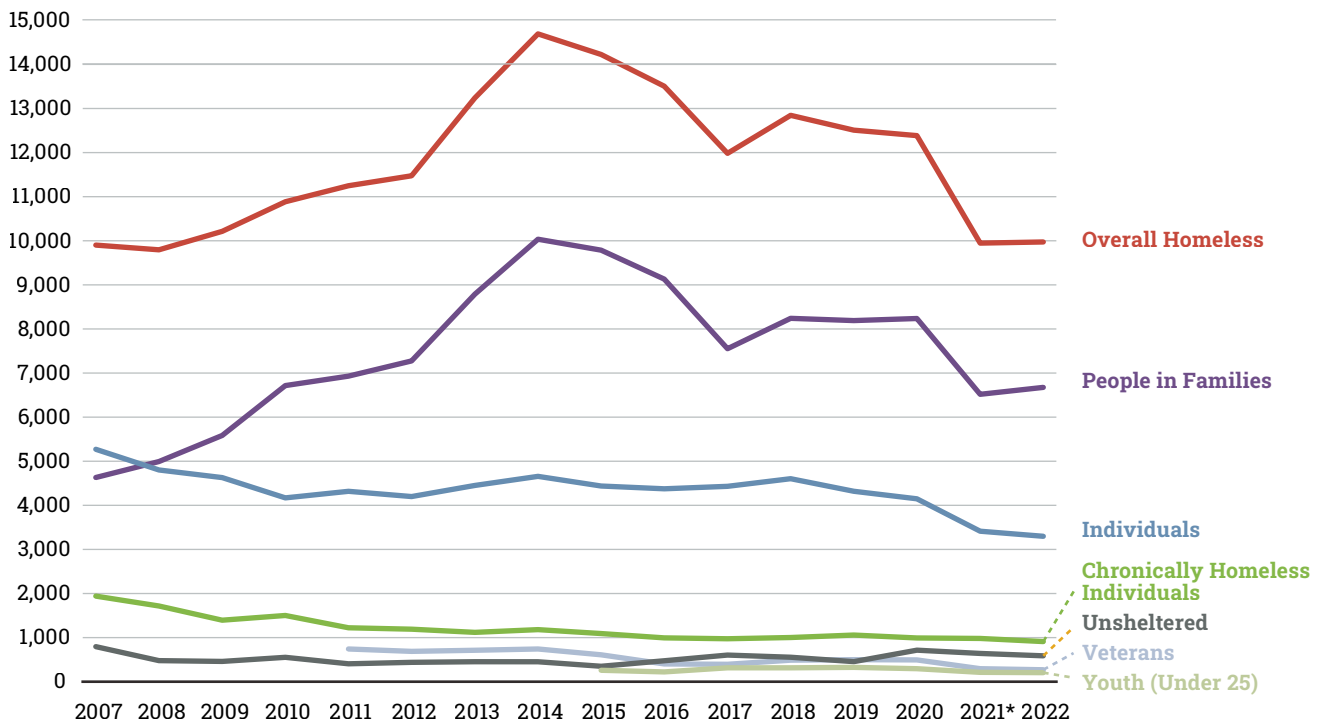
numbers to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for inclusion in regular reports to Congress.

**Figure 37** comes from these counts, and though not totally up to date, it does provide a useful look at our overall distribution of unhoused residents. In Greater Boston, most of these residents are in families, with individuals making up much smaller shares. This contrasts with national figures, where about three-quarters of all homeless are individuals, and the share of family homelessness has been declining since 2012.<sup>28</sup>

FIGURE 37

**People in families make up most of the region's unhoused population.**

Point-in-time counts of homeless populations. 2007-2022. Greater Boston.



Note: Two of Greater Boston’s Continuums of Care performed only partial counts in 2021, potentially leading to lower counts overall. Some groups are not mutually exclusive. Chronically Homeless Individuals could include veterans, for instance.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: Annual Homeless Assessment, HUD Point-In-Time counts.

## Black and Latino residents are much more likely to experience housing instability.

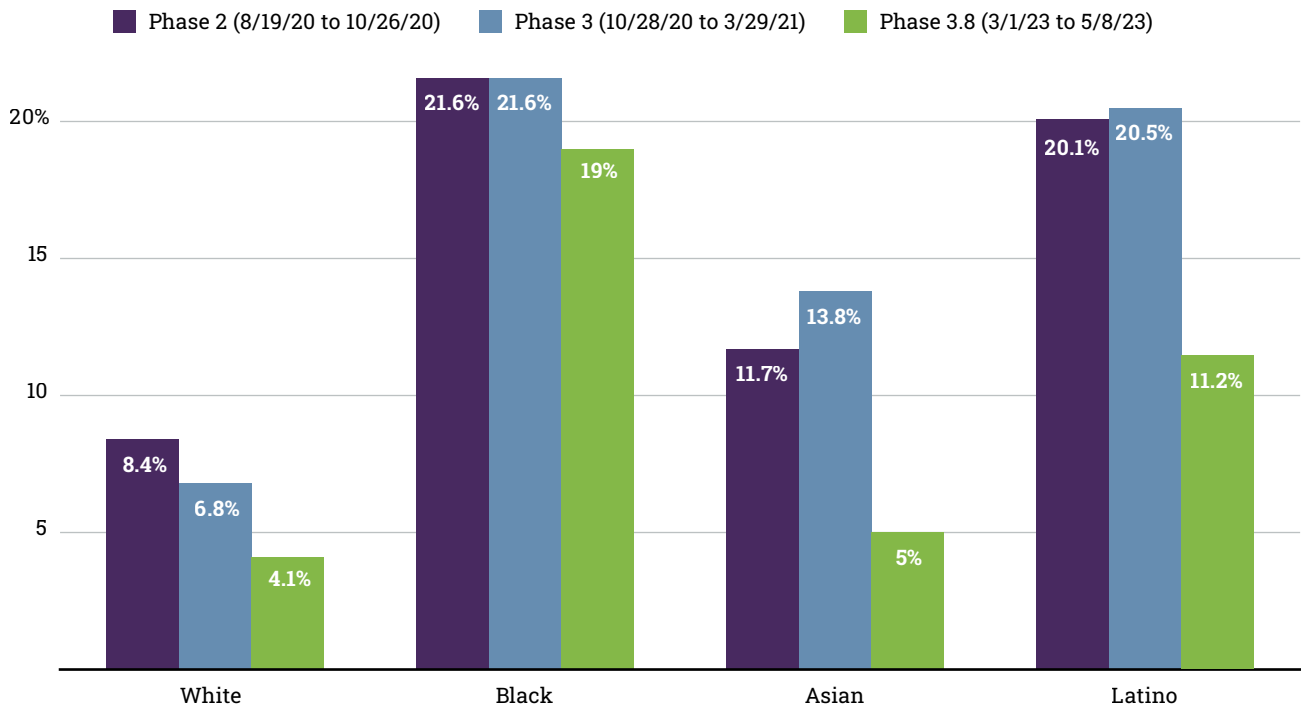
Data on housing instability are hard to come by; housing instability comes in so many forms, often invisible to those outside of a family. Fortunately, early in the pandemic, the Census Bureau recognized that we needed some better real-time data to help target supports, so it created the novel Census Household Pulse Survey, which is an ongoing survey that asks a range of related questions around economic security, including whether households have missed any housing-related payments over the previous month.

From late 2020 through to 2021 (Phases 2 and 3), the Pulse Survey revealed large racial disparities on this question, with roughly a fifth of Black and Latino households missing housing payments (**Figure 38**). The most recent data, covering March to May of 2023, suggest that while there have been declines across all racial groups, reflecting the economic recovery, large disparities across racial groups remain. White households continue to be the least likely to have missed housing payments in Greater Boston, and Black households—at about five times the rate of White households—the most.

FIGURE 38

### Despite improvement in 2023, Black and Latino residents are still missing housing payments at significantly higher rates.

Share of households that have missed a mortgage or rent payment in the last month. Boston Metropolitan Statistical Area.



Note: White, Black and Asian are single-race only, non-Latino. Latino can be of any race.  
 Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: Census Household Pulse Survey

## More renters are living in overcrowded housing now than a decade ago.

Another measure of housing instability is residential overcrowding, where more than one person per room lives in a housing unit. For households that find it difficult to stay in the region due to lack of affordable housing, crowding more people into a given home offers one strategy for stretching resources further. But overcrowding has other costs. Overcrowded homes were more likely to have higher rates of COVID transmission early in the pandemic,<sup>29</sup> in addition to a range of other stresses placed on people living together in proximity.<sup>30</sup>

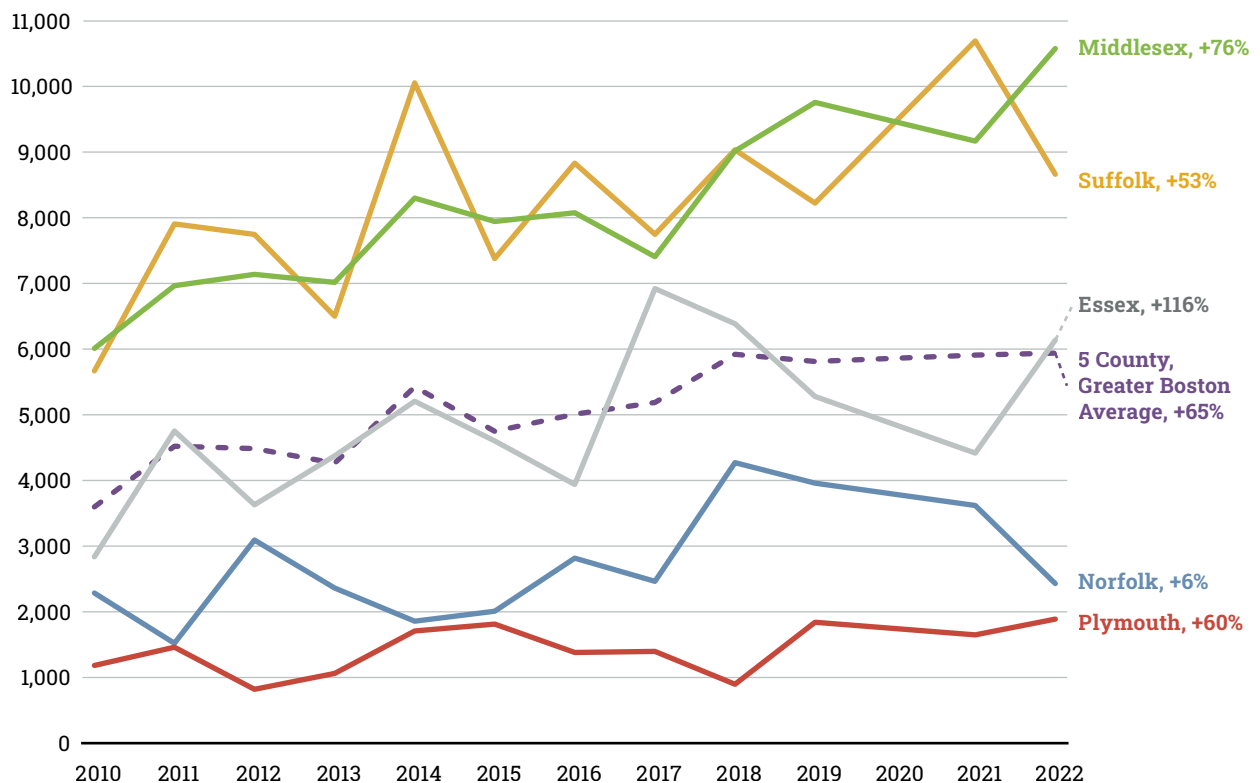
Unfortunately, while we know that overcrowding has increased regionwide in the last decade, measuring this

increase at the city/town level is difficult due to small sample sizes in the American Community Survey. In **Figure 39** we look at counties, finding that in Middlesex County, the number of overcrowded households has grown by 76 percent since 2010, to just over 10,500 households in 2022. Within the urban core—Suffolk County, in particular—the number of overcrowded households increased by half, from around 5,600 in 2010 to over 8,600 in 2022. Counties with fewer rental households also have less overcrowding, but even in places like Plymouth and Essex, we’ve seen the number of overcrowded households increase since 2010. On average, overcrowding increased by 65 percent from 2010 to 2022.

FIGURE 39

### The number of overcrowded households has increased, especially in the urban core.

Renter-occupied housing units with more than one occupant per room. Greater Boston counties.



Note: 2020 excluded due to data limitations.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2010-2021 1-Yr American Community Survey

## As pandemic-era rental supports phase out, evictions filings have increased.

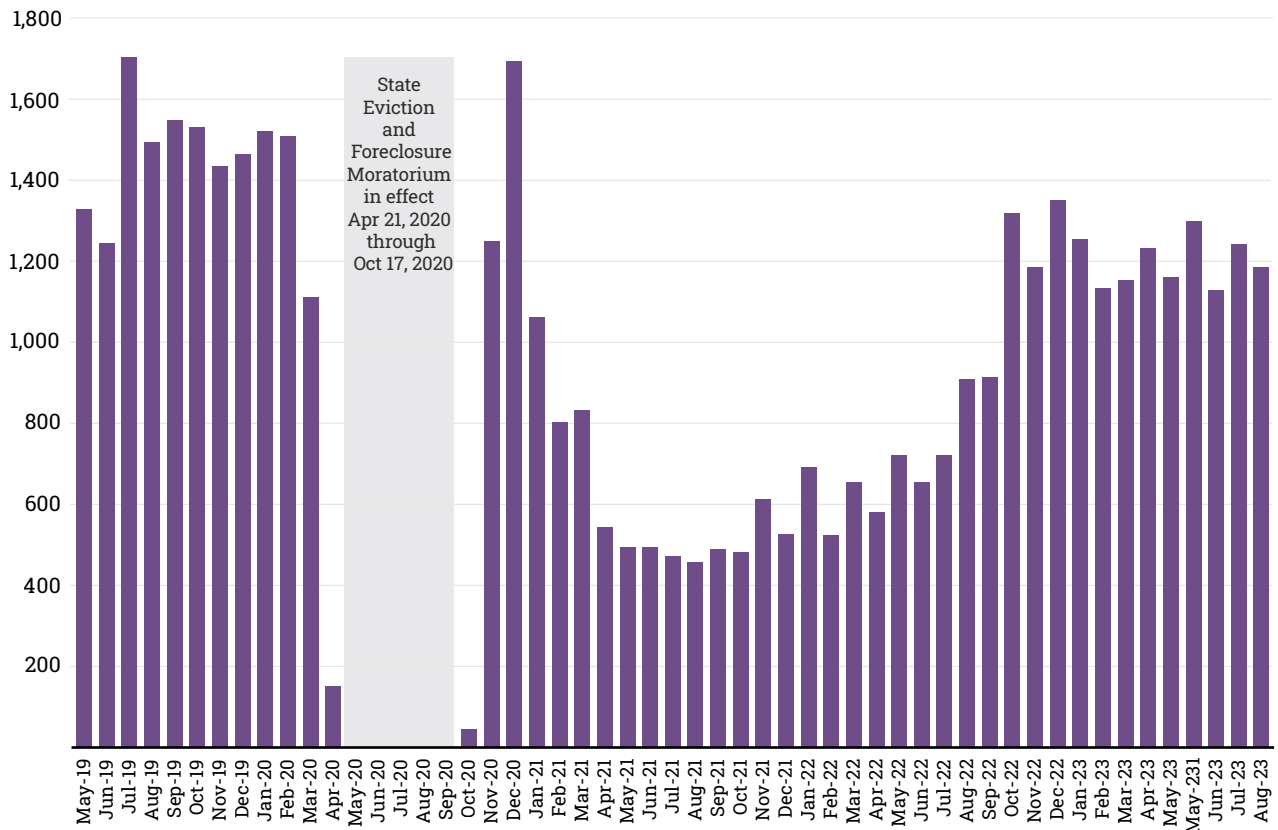
By 2023, much of the pandemic-era federal funding for rental supports and eviction prevention has been spent or returned to pre-pandemic levels. While federal funding was at its height, for instance, per household funding for programs like Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) was increased and eligibility rules were relaxed. But RAFT has returned to being largely a state-funded program and has narrower eligibility rules once again.<sup>31</sup>

As a result of these changes, the number of households receiving “summary process” eviction filings for non-payment of rent increased notably in 2023, almost reaching pre-pandemic levels (**Figure 40**). While these filings are not themselves evictions, they are a part of the eviction process where landlords file paperwork with a court to enforce a rental agreement. Though only a few summary process filings result in move-outs, the stresses

FIGURE 40

### Eviction filings have increased since the end of the moratorium, and are just below pre-pandemic norms.

Landlords filing for eviction for non-payment of rent only. Greater Boston.



Note: These data do not represent executed evictions, nor do they include evictions filed for reasons other than non-payment of rent. The federal moratorium on evictions was struck down in late August 2021.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: Massachusetts Trial Court

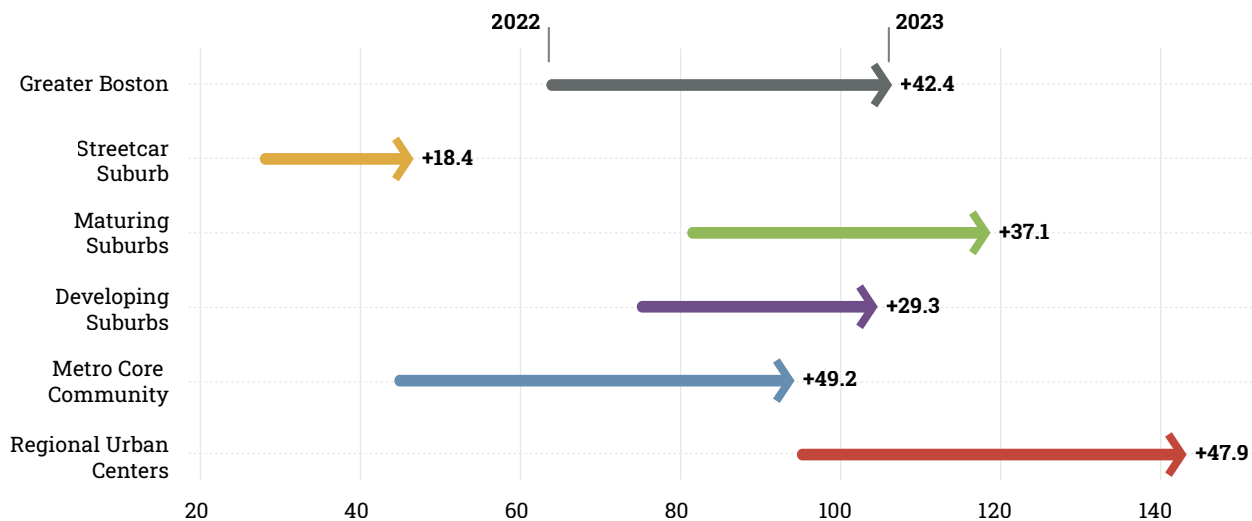
that these filings put on families are significant, and therefore serve as an additional indicator of “housing instability.”

While there has been a lot of great work done over the last year to try to rein in evictions, there are still areas where more can be done; we do not have to return to programs and policies that have failed us in the past. In March, for instance, a pandemic-era program that prevented evictions so long as a tenant was applying for rental aid expired and was not renewed by the legislature.<sup>32</sup> Despite this loss, we can still take forward with us lessons learned from across

the pandemic to help stabilize housing for the region’s neediest residents. A community type analysis, as in **Figure 41**, is a useful way of identifying which communities—such as Regional Urban Centers—might benefit most from such interventions. Without this additional support, eviction filings may continue to increase, leaving more families with nowhere to go given a shelter system at capacity. Town level data on eviction filings are available in the online data appendix.

FIGURE 41

**Eviction rates are up across all community types in Greater Boston.**  
Change in eviction rate per 10,000 renter households. Jan-June, 2022 and 2023.



Note: 2023 (2022) eviction rates are calculated as a fraction of 2021 (2020) housing units per ACS 5-year estimates.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: 2016-2020, 2017-2021 5-Yr American Community Survey. Massachusetts Trial Court

## Foreclosure petitions have grown year over year.

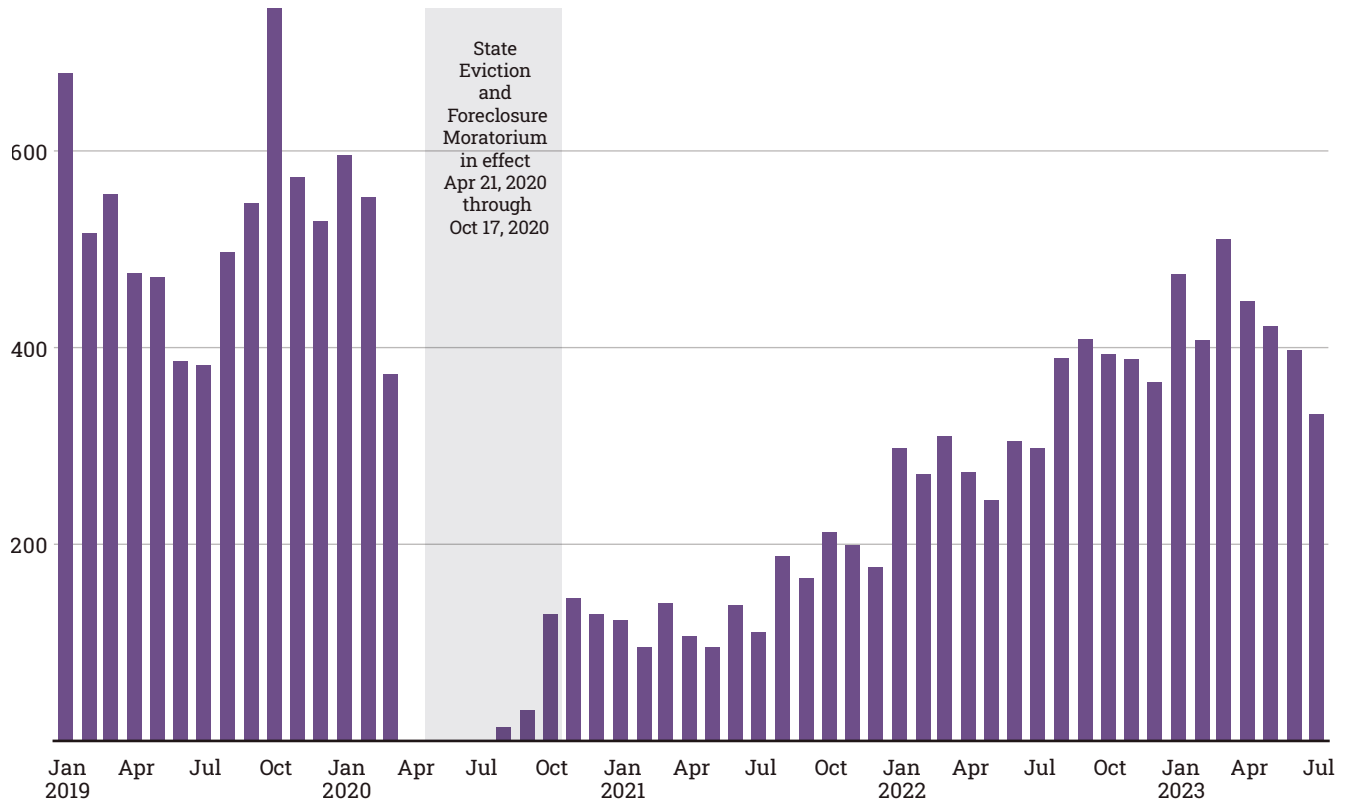
Though owning a home is often a stable investment for households, homeowners can still experience housing instability. It is for this reason that the state enacted an eviction *and* foreclosure moratorium in the early months of the pandemic, with similar though less comprehensive efforts at the federal level. The statewide moratorium brought petitions to start a foreclosure process close to zero, but petitions began to increase again as the moratorium

ended (**Figure 42**). Even as these have increased post-pandemic, the absolute number of petitions remains relatively low—even when accounting for pre-pandemic levels. Compared to the early 2000s, mortgage lending protections implemented following the Great Recession have helped many more households retain their homes, even if they experience financial difficulties or other crises like we saw during the pandemic.

FIGURE 42

### Foreclosure petition filings have grown over the last two years, but largely remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Petitions to foreclose, by month. Massachusetts.



Note: the Federal foreclosure moratorium was extended for federally insured loans through the end of September, 2021.

Chart: Boston Indicators • Source: MHP and the Warren Group

## 6. Subsidized Housing

Due to our regional housing shortage and the resulting pressure on prices, the price of most market-rate housing is out of reach for many of our region's lower-income residents. And even if we made dramatic progress in moderating market-rate housing costs, common circumstances like unemployment, under-employment, disability, or old age would lead many families to need public support to pay for decent housing. One way government attempts to address this affordability crisis is through a variety of subsidized housing mechanisms, which provide housing at below-market prices to individuals who qualify based on their income, assets, and other factors.<sup>33</sup>

Data on subsidized housing in Massachusetts are notoriously scattered, incomplete, and sometimes downright inaccurate. But rather than let perfect be the enemy of the good, in this brief section we present a high-level look at the data that do exist to help start a conversation (please see the Special Topic section of the 2022 *Greater Boston Housing Report Card* for a more detailed analysis of our region's subsidized housing ecosystem than we provide in this shorter section).

Specifically, we present data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition's National Housing Preservation Database (NHPD), and the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), produced by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). It's worth noting that better data collection is under way by Housing Navigator Massachusetts, a nonprofit that has created a new one-stop-shop website for families seeking the latest information on available subsidized housing units statewide. Through the process of creating the informational website for home-seekers, Housing Navigator has created an invaluable dataset for researchers on subsidized housing in Massachusetts, which it aims to make public in some form in the next year. Once available the data will allow researchers to go beyond crude counts of subsidized housing units to include more granular information on things like bedroom count, what income level the unit is available to, which units feature age restrictions, and which give preference to existing residents of that town. If feasible, we hope to include analysis of this Housing Navigator dataset in future Report Cards.

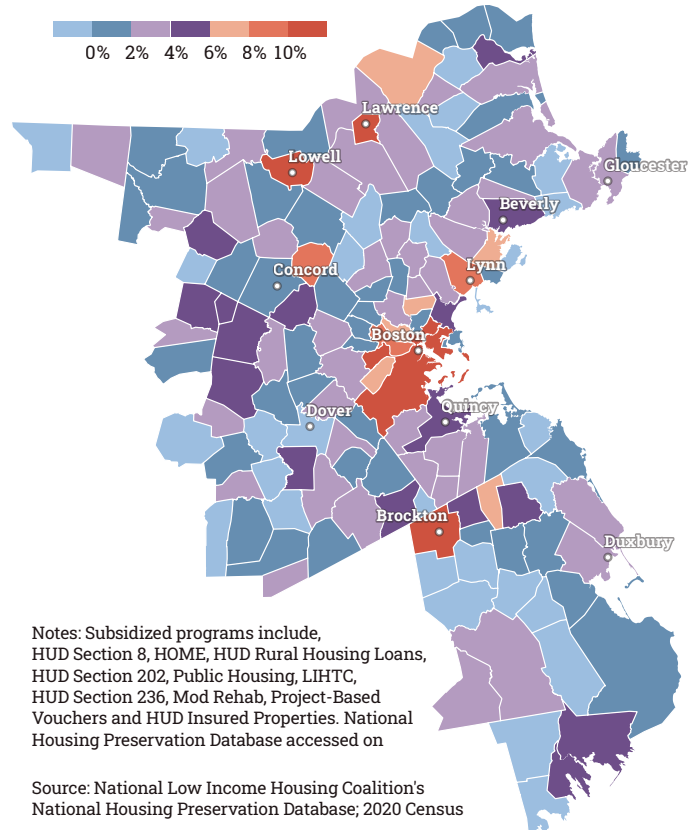
**Metro Core Communities and Regional Urban Centers appear to have incorporated more subsidized housing than higher-income suburbs.**

Here we present estimates of subsidized housing provision at the municipal level, offering a sense of which communities have been most proactive in incorporating subsidized housing supports for lower-income families. Both data sources capture a majority of subsidized housing in the region, but each systematically misses important categories. Therefore, these should be interpreted as suggesting gaps that merit further investigation as better data become available.

In **Figure 43**, we use data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition's National Housing Preservation Database (NHPD) that aggregates many HUD datasets to provide a property and subsidy-level databases of properties subsidized by the federal government, including public housing units, LIHTC-supported units, and Section 8 Project-Based Assistance Units.<sup>34</sup> NHPD data do not include many housing units subsidized by the state, such as the approximately 27,000 state-aided public housing units in Greater Boston. Here, we present the most recent data available on the NHPD website, last refreshed in September 2023.

Data from NHPD show that subsidized housing units make up a much greater share of all housing units in Metro Core Communities and Regional Urban Centers than in other community types. Almost 15 percent of housing units in Metro Core Communities are subsidized, compared to about 2 percent of units in all suburban community types. While communities like Brockton, Lawrence, Lowell, and Lynn have significant shares (over 10 percent each), Boston leads by far in terms of how much subsidized housing it has added to its stock. In fact, according to an analysis by the Mayor's Office of Housing, the City of Boston may have done more to welcome and develop subsidized housing than any major city in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

**FIGURE 43**  
**Federally subsidized units as a share of all housing units (National Housing Preservation Database)**  
 Active federally assisted units as a share of all housing units by city and town.



In **Figure 44**, we analyze the state’s Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). The SHI attempts to capture all subsidized housing in each municipality for the purpose of the state’s 40B statute (which allows projects with affordable units to be approved under flexible rules if less than 10 percent of the town’s housing stock is subsidized). SHI is broader than the NHPD data set since it includes units developed with federal and state subsidies, units created through Comprehensive Permits (40B), units funded by Massachusetts housing funding programs, and intentional “local actions” (such as inclusionary zoning) that lead to the creation, preservation, or rehabilitation of affordable housing.<sup>36</sup> SHI also includes housing like group homes for people with developmental disabilities.

Since market-rate units in many buildings with affordable units also get counted as “subsidized” for SHI purposes, the SHI often represents a large overestimate of actual subsidized housing. There are different rules for adding market rate units to the SHI calculation depending on tenure, but for rental developments, the market rate units are included if at least 25 percent of units are occupied by households earning under 80 percent of the area median income (AMI), or at least 20 percent of units are occupied by households earning under 50 percent of AMI.<sup>37</sup> For instance, if a building with 50 units contained only 13 subsidized units (which would be typical for a 40B development of that size), all 50 units would be counted in the SHI. Likely as a result, affordable housing counts in many cities and towns appear much higher under the SHI than they do when looking at NHPD data. Nonetheless, there are still many cities and towns that fail to meet the 10 percent threshold.

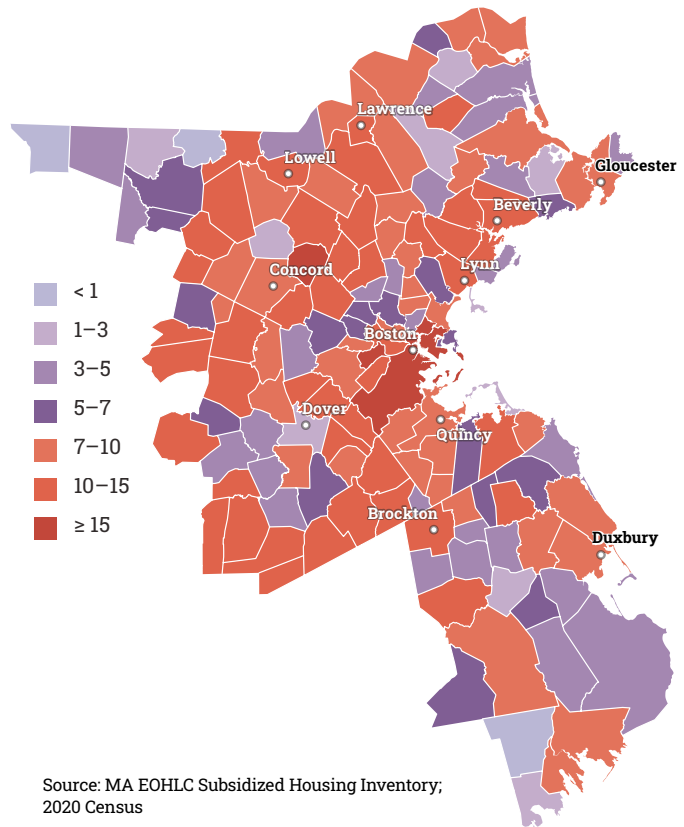
Finally, another quirk of the SHI’s reporting of subsidized housing units as a percentage of housing stock lies in the fact that housing stock estimates rely on the decennial census, which means that they are not updated concurrently with the SHI. While published estimates for 2020 computed subsidized housing units as a percentage of 2010’s housing stock, newer 2023 estimates compute subsidized housing units as a percentage of 2020’s housing stock. With the total housing stock increasing somewhat between 2010 and 2020 in many communities, the 2023 SHI estimate for most municipalities shows a decrease, as increases to subsidized housing didn’t keep up with

increases in total housing stock. The median municipality in Greater Boston fell almost 0.4 percentage points on this metric, and these declines led 10 municipalities in Greater Boston (Acton, Cohasset, Concord, Haverhill, Holbrook, Malden, Natick, Randolph, Reading, Salisbury,) to fall below the 10 percent threshold required for a municipality to have the authority to reject a 40B permit application without appeal. On the other hand, three municipalities in the region shifted above the 10 percent threshold within the past three years (Peabody, Wenham, Wilmington).

FIGURE 44

**Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) units as a share of total units.**

Subsidized units according to MA Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities as a share of total housing units by city and town. 2023.



Source: MA EOHLC Subsidized Housing Inventory; 2020 Census

**In the past 12 years, SHI changes have varied widely by municipality.**

Increasing the supply of market-rate and subsidized housing is a critical priority for addressing our region's housing crisis. In **Table 4**, we compare 2023 SHI estimates with those from 2011. EOHLC's subsidized housing is updated every three years; we compare 2011 to 2023 estimates in order to compare estimates that have occurred most immediately following an update of decennial census

total housing unit estimates. We see large differences in the way subsidized housing stock has grown (or shrunk) at the municipal level in the past 12 years. Many, although not all, of the largest swings are in smaller municipalities where modest changes in aggregate totals can have a greater effect on percent change.

TABLE 4

**Top 10 and bottom 10 SHI percent changes from 2011 to 2023.**

Subsidized housing stock 2011 and 2023 per MA Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Subsidized Housing Inventory.

Municipality	SHI% 2011	SHI% 2023	Percentage Point Change
Boxborough	1.16	11.35	10.19
Bridgewater	2.58	10.79	8.21
Hopkinton	3.3	10.99	7.69
Plainville	5.46	13.11	7.65
Wrentham	4.29	11.63	7.34
Sudbury	4.75	11.88	7.13
Westford	4.84	11.97	7.13
Medway	4.93	11.43	6.5
Cohasset	3.14	9.45	6.31
Wellesley	5.3	10.68	5.38
Pembroke	9.73	8.87	-0.86
Malden	10.5	9.37	-1.13
Weymouth	7.85	6.44	-1.41
Salem	12.37	10.21	-2.16
Cambridge	15.24	12.9	-2.34
Winthrop	7.78	5.43	-2.35
Ayer	8.52	5.97	-2.55
Revere	9.66	7.06	-2.6
Stoughton	13.86	11.06	-2.8
Everett	7.81	4.51	-3.3

Source: Source: MA EOHLC Subsidized Housing Inventory, Accessed via MAPC Datacommon

## 7.

# State Policy Round-Up

To put a closer eye on efforts to address our region's housing crisis, we are adding a *state* level policy round-up to this year's Report Card. Here we focus on state policy because individual municipal-level reforms have not been sufficient for addressing our shared needs at scale. This round-up provides summaries of select policy developments that have occurred in recent years, and of proposals that are actively being considered but have not yet passed. Finally, because a variety of new state-level housing reforms have emerged elsewhere in the country, we end with a brief discussion of some that could inspire us here in Massachusetts.

There has been progress at the state level in recent years, including passage of the MBTA Communities upzoning law, as well as a host of COVID-related policies, including an eviction moratorium, dramatically expanded rental supports, and innovations like MassDREAMS, a down-payment assistance program which was funded through the use of temporary funding provided by the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Up until October, however, our scan found few big ideas on the active agenda.

For most of her first year in office, Governor Healey's housing work focused on supporting local governments to comply with the MBTA Communities law and designing an administrative reorganization to create a new Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Then in mid-October, a few days prior to our finalizing this report, Governor Healey and the new Secretary of Housing Ed Augustus released the administration's Housing Bond Bill, which proposes large new housing investments paired with a range of zoning reform and other proposals that signal a greater level of attention to addressing our state's growing housing crisis. This coming legislative session could prove especially important as legislative leaders consider the varied proposals that the Governor has now put on the table.

## APPROVED IN MASSACHUSETTS

### MBTA Communities

To help address our regional housing shortage, Massachusetts adopted Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities in 2021, requiring 177 cities and towns served by the MBTA to adopt at least one zoning district of “reasonable size” near public transportation where multifamily housing could be built. In 2022, the Department of Housing and Community Development issued detailed compliance guidelines. Communities with rapid transit access have until the end of this year to submit final plans to the state, and other community types have until the end of either 2024 or 2025. A community officially achieves compliance when its new zoning plan is submitted to the state and certified by the state as complying with MBTA Communities guidelines.

This law set new expectations of individual municipalities to contribute toward our shared regional housing needs, and some initially balked at having to comply, but state leaders have made clear that compliance is not optional. Attorney General Andrea Campbell issued an advisory stating that compliance with the law “is not only mandatory, it’s an essential tool for the Commonwealth to address its housing crisis along with our climate and transportation goals,” and in August 2023, the state announced that towns that fail to abide by the law could become ineligible for 13 state grant programs.<sup>38</sup>

After this initial wave of local concern, it appears that the vast majority of MBTA communities will in fact comply. Lexington<sup>39</sup> was the first town to change its zoning laws in response to the guidelines, with many others actively<sup>40</sup> working on plans of their own. A couple of others are still resisting, with Holden, for instance, being sued<sup>41</sup> for defying the law by refusing to submit a compliance action plan.

### Stretch Code Update: Promoting Energy Efficient Buildings

Cities and towns in Massachusetts can choose one of three energy efficiency codes for constructing residential and commercial buildings. There’s a Base Code that complies with 2018’s international standards; a Stretch Code that went into effect in 2023 that blends 2021 international standards with state standards; and a Specialized Code

that raises the bar for energy efficiency even higher. State officials say that low-rise residential buildings with electric heating and cooling systems should be cheaper to build and maintain than low-rise buildings that run on fossil fuels. However, a study released this summer by the Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Massachusetts says the new standards will raise housing costs. Nonetheless, as of January, some 300 cities and towns have opted for the mid-level Stretch Code, and as of late October, 24 municipalities, including Watertown, Worcester and Wellesley, have opted in to the stricter Specialized Code.

### Funding Increases for HomeBASE and RAFT

Recognizing the instability that could result from the end of the state’s eviction moratorium and the phasing down of ARPA-funded rental supports, the state legislature doubled funding for HomeBASE from \$25.9 million in FY 2022 to \$56.9 million in FY 2023. HomeBASE provides financial assistance and stabilization services to either prevent families from becoming homeless in the first place or help them quickly re-establish stable housing. Over the same period, the state also dramatically increased funding for Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) from \$22 million to \$100 million. RAFT provides temporary financial support to families who are at risk of facing homelessness. These funding increases are timely, especially during a time when the state’s emergency shelter system is at capacity and struggling to serve the needs of unhoused or housing-unstable families.

## PROPOSED/PENDING IN MASSACHUSETTS

### Housing Bond Bill

The Housing Bond Bill, updated every five years, authorizes investment in a variety of housing programs and initiatives and is one of the state’s most important pieces of housing legislation. In October 2023 the Healey-Driscoll administration filed its first housing bond bill, which featured \$4.1 billion worth of investment as well as several notable proposed policy changes. Healey’s proposal differs greatly from the most recent \$1.8 billion bond bill the Baker administration approved in 2018, both in dollar value and in the scope of its policy proposals.

Noteworthy policy proposals include a local option real estate transfer tax to fund local affordable housing development, legalization of accessory dwelling units by right in all single-family zoning districts statewide, and a new mechanism for tenants with eviction records to petition the court to seal their records in certain cases. Additionally, the bill provides funding for state-funded public housing and increases the budget for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

**An Act to Promote YIMBY (S. 858 & H.1379)**

YIMBY—or Yes in My Back Yard—is a movement to encourage new housing construction and is a reaction to longstanding NIMBYism, local not-in-my-backyard attitudes that have been influential enough to hinder or even prevent housing development in Massachusetts towns. In 2023 a coalition of YIMBY advocates worked with state legislators to introduce , which includes the following key elements:

- Legalizing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as of right statewide
- Expanding on the MBTA Communities upzoning law by requiring multifamily zoning, and removing parking mandates around public transportation and other suitable locations statewide
- Creating a streamlined process for turning vacant land and commercial properties into multifamily housing
- Allowing communities to adopt inclusionary zoning ordinances by a simple majority vote
- Restricting the ability of municipalities to adopt septic regulations that limit housing development
- Prioritizing the disposition of state-owned land for affordable housing construction. The bill also proposes a statewide goal of 427,000 new housing units by 2040, including 85,400 income-restricted units. The Legislature’s Joint Committee on Housing hosted a hearing on the bill in July of 2023, but it has not yet moved further in the legislative process.



YIMBY—or Yes in My Back Yard—is a movement to encourage new housing construction.”

**A Capital Investment Plan with an Eye on Housing**

Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll have adopted a five-year, \$14 billion Capital Investment Plan to address transportation, climate change, and housing production. The plan includes several housing investments, including the creation of the new HousingWorks program, a tool for supporting “housing development, preservation, and rehabilitation.” HousingWorks would combine and expand on existing programs to support the building of transit-oriented and climate-resilient affordable housing. The Healey administration wants to enable construction of “up to 300 new affordable housing units each year.” The Plan also includes funding for public housing reinvestment and existing state-level funds, such as the Housing Innovations Fund and Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

**An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (S.888 & H.1351)**

The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) currently provides support to more than 10,000 households with low and moderate incomes. But as a recent report explains, that is just a small share of the estimated 585,000 individuals and families who could be eligible for the program. Currently, MRVP is funded as a line item in the state budget and thus subject to potential changes each budget cycle. This legislation would codify the program in state law while simultaneously reducing the share of their income that participating households must pay toward rent,

requiring safety inspections, providing greater support to agencies administering the program, and improving data collection—policy changes that would align the MRVP more closely with the federal Section 8 program.

Versions of the bill have been introduced since 2018. The Legislature's Joint Committee on Housing hosted a hearing on the bill in September of 2023.

### **An Act to Guarantee a Tenant's First Right of Refusal (S.880 & H.1350)**

The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) is enabling legislation that would allow cities and towns to guarantee tenants the opportunity to purchase the multifamily residential property in which they reside if the owner decides to sell the property. The goal of TOPA is to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing and prevent tenant displacement that can occur when a building is sold. Small landlords are exempt from TOPA as are below-market sales to immediate family members of the property owner. TOPA is modeled after policy in Washington, D.C. Versions of this bill have been filed in the Massachusetts House and Senate since 2019.

### **An Act to Establish an Office of Fair Housing and Fair Housing Trust Fund (H.1377 & S.866)**

A bill to establish an Office of Fair Housing was heard by the Joint Committee on Housing on September 27. This legislation<sup>42</sup> would establish an office within the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities that would work to prevent housing discrimination in all its forms, including in lending, home sales, tenant selection, and other aspects of the housing market. More recently, Governor Healey included a proposal to form this office in her October 18 filing of the housing bond bill. Separately, at the municipal level, the City of Boston in 2021 enacted its Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) zoning amendment, which requires developers of proposed large residential developments to assess their project's impact on marginalized communities and take proactive steps to mitigate harmful effects, such as adding affordability measures, building units with more bedrooms, and translating marketing materials into multiple languages. Boston was the first major city to include fair housing in its

zoning code and community organizers hope to expand AFFH zoning into other municipalities to help operationalize the AFFH clause of the Federal Fair Housing Act. A state-level Office of Fair Housing within EOHLC would provide central capacity to oversee statewide adoption and implementation of fair housing policies such as Boston's.

### **Rent Control**

As rents increase, there's been a growing policy debate around the efficacy of re-implementing rent control (or "stabilization") in certain Massachusetts communities. Boston has filed a home-rule petition with the state legislature asking for authority to implement local rent control plans, and Somerville has expressed intent to follow suit. To date, the state legislature has not acted on Boston's petition. A group of advocates is in the process of trying to get a state ballot question approved, which would give municipalities the authority to adopt local rent control plans in the future without state approval.

## **APPROVED REFORMS IN OTHER STATES**

With housing affordability worsening in much of the country, a few state legislatures have stepped up to take a more assertive role in shaping housing policy. Below are short descriptions of some interesting examples from the last year or two, each of which could provide inspiration for us in Massachusetts.

### **Vermont HOME Law**

In June 2023, Vermont's legislature passed a sweeping zoning reform bill that effectively eliminated single-family zoning. The HOME law allows duplexes in all single-family residential zones and three- and four-plexes in places that already have water and sewer services. The bill also reduces minimum parking requirements, places new limits on local appeals that can be used to slow or block affordable housing development, and allows developers to build up to 25 new housing units in special designated areas without going through the state's established Act 250 review process.



With housing affordability worsening in much of the country, a few state legislatures have stepped up to take a more assertive role in shaping housing policy.”

### Montana Zoning Reform

Montana garnered national attention in May 2023 when it passed a slate of zoning, land use, and building code reform bills<sup>43</sup> aimed at making it easier to build new homes. The bills passed with bipartisan support in the state legislature, leading some to dub the housing reforms the “Montana Miracle.” Included in the reforms are Senate Bill (SB) 245 and 323, which effectively abolish single-family zoning and allow for multifamily and mixed-use development in commercial zones in cities with more than 5,000 residents. SB 528 allows ADUs to be built wherever a single-family detached home can be built, without the owner-occupancy or off-street parking requirements that are attached to many Massachusetts’ local ADU laws. SB 382 requires cities and towns to develop housing production plans to accommodate projected population growth as well as adopt strategies that encourage housing development.

### California Zoning Reforms

Over the past several years, California, the state with arguably the worst housing affordability crisis, finally started taking legislative action to help ease the state’s housing shortage, passing more than 100 laws since 2017.<sup>44</sup> The state effectively abolished single-family zoning when it passed Senate Bill 9 (SB 9) in 2021, which allows homeowners to split their lots or convert homes to duplexes. Since then, the state has passed a whole host of bills to make it easier to construct accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and to make multifamily residential projects more financially feasible. In 2022, California passed SB 6 and SB 2097 that preempted local zoning to allow residential

projects to be built on commercially zoned lots and to prohibit local governments from requiring parking near certain transit stops.

### Florida Live Local Act

In July 2023, Florida’s “Live Local Act” (SB102) was officially signed into law.<sup>45</sup> In addition to providing extra funding for statewide affordable housing programs and establishing a new down payment assistance program for income-qualifying first-time homebuyers, it makes it easier for commercial properties to be converted to residential housing units. The bill allows for the conversion of commercial structures into multifamily housing and allows for the construction of new multifamily units in commercial and industrial zones if the project contains the required number of affordable units. The law also loosens height and density restrictions. The bill was not without controversy, however, as it includes provisions like a ban on local rent control laws.