



The Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2021

Pandemic Housing Policy: From Progress to Permanence

June 2021

COVID-19 was a great revealer of economic inequality and vulnerability.

Economic Inequality and Cost Burden

Housing cost burden by race and class

Trends in wages and unemployment

Disproportionate impact of COVID-19

Housing Stability

Missed housing payments during the pandemic

Evictions and foreclosures during the pandemic

Housing Supply and Sustainability

Insufficient production

Impacts of low inventory and surges in demand

Changes in home prices and rents across the region

Economic crisis disproportionately impacted communities of color and low income families.

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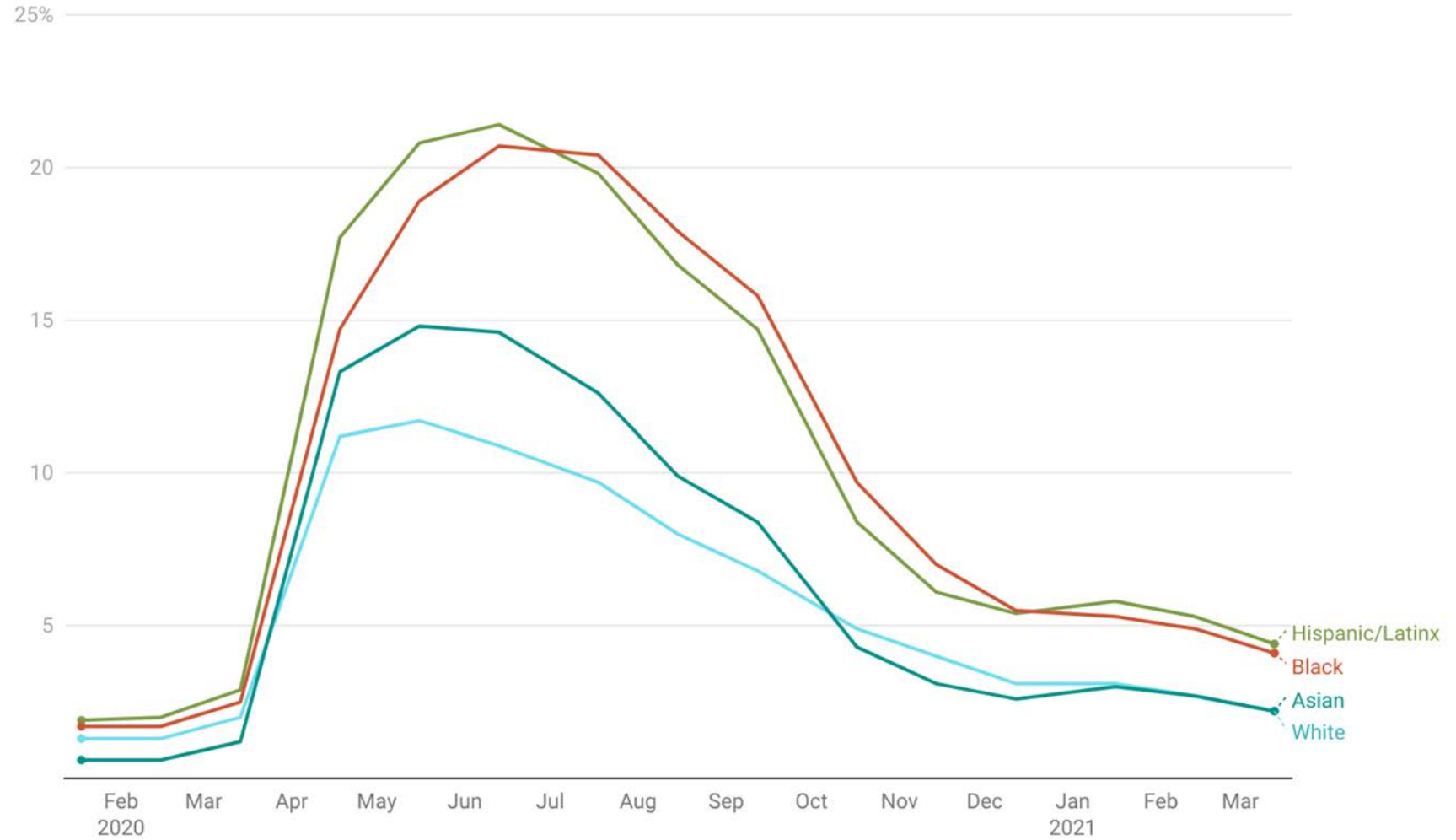
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Black and Hispanic/Latinx workers were the most burdened by unemployment during the pandemic.

Unemployment Insurance Claimants as Percent of Labor Force, by Race/Ethnicity



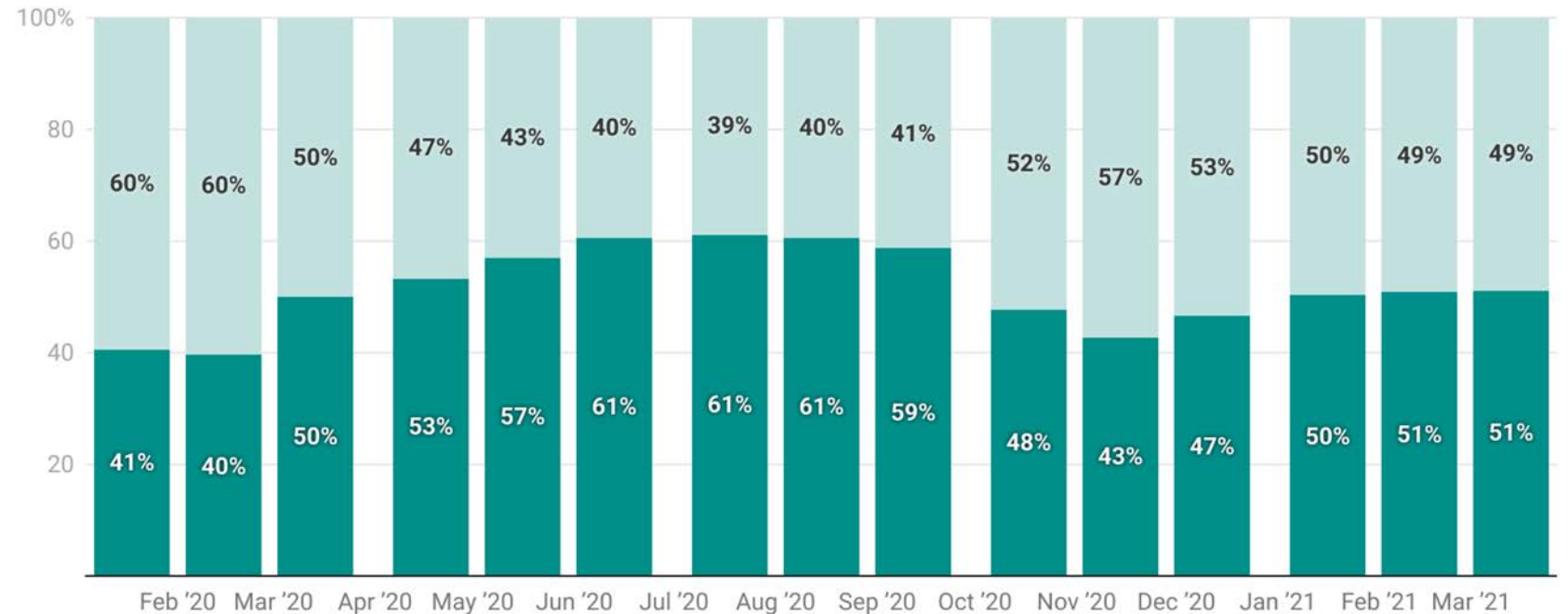
Source: MA Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development, Unemployment Insurance Claimant Profiles • Created with Datawrapper

Lower-wage workers (especially service workers) comprised a larger share of unemployment claimants during the pandemic.

Percentage of Unemployment Insurance Claimants that are Low-Wage Workers Defined as workers earning \leq \$700/week

January 2020 to March 2021

Low Wage Non Low Wage



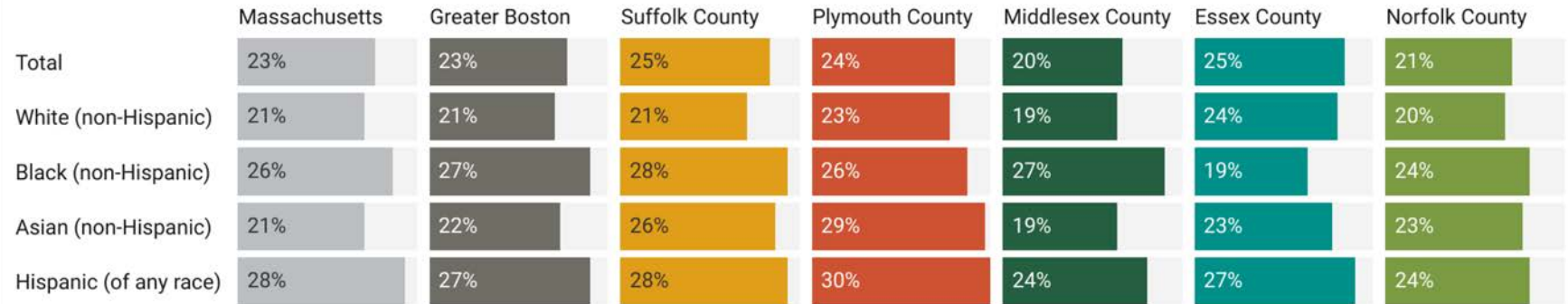
Note: Low wage workers are defined as having earned \$700 a week or less, for particular the job lost, prior to claiming Unemployment Insurance

Source: MA Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development, Unemployment Insurance Claimant Profiles • Created with Datawrapper

Across the region, Black and Hispanic/Latinx renters, as well as low-income renters are more likely to be cost burdened than white or upper income renters.

Severely Cost-Burdened Renters by Race/Ethnicity

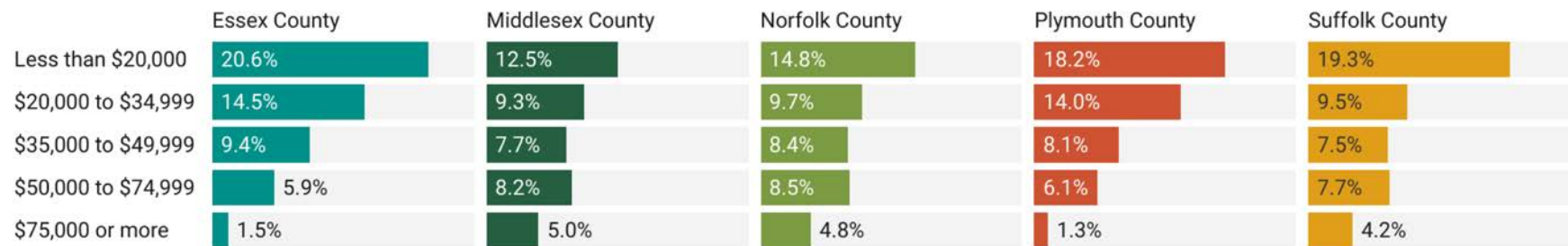
Severe cost burden = spending 50% or more of income on housing costs. Figures represent within-group share of cost-burdened households.



Source: HUD Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data 2013-2017 • Created with Datawrapper

Cost-Burdened Renters by Household Income

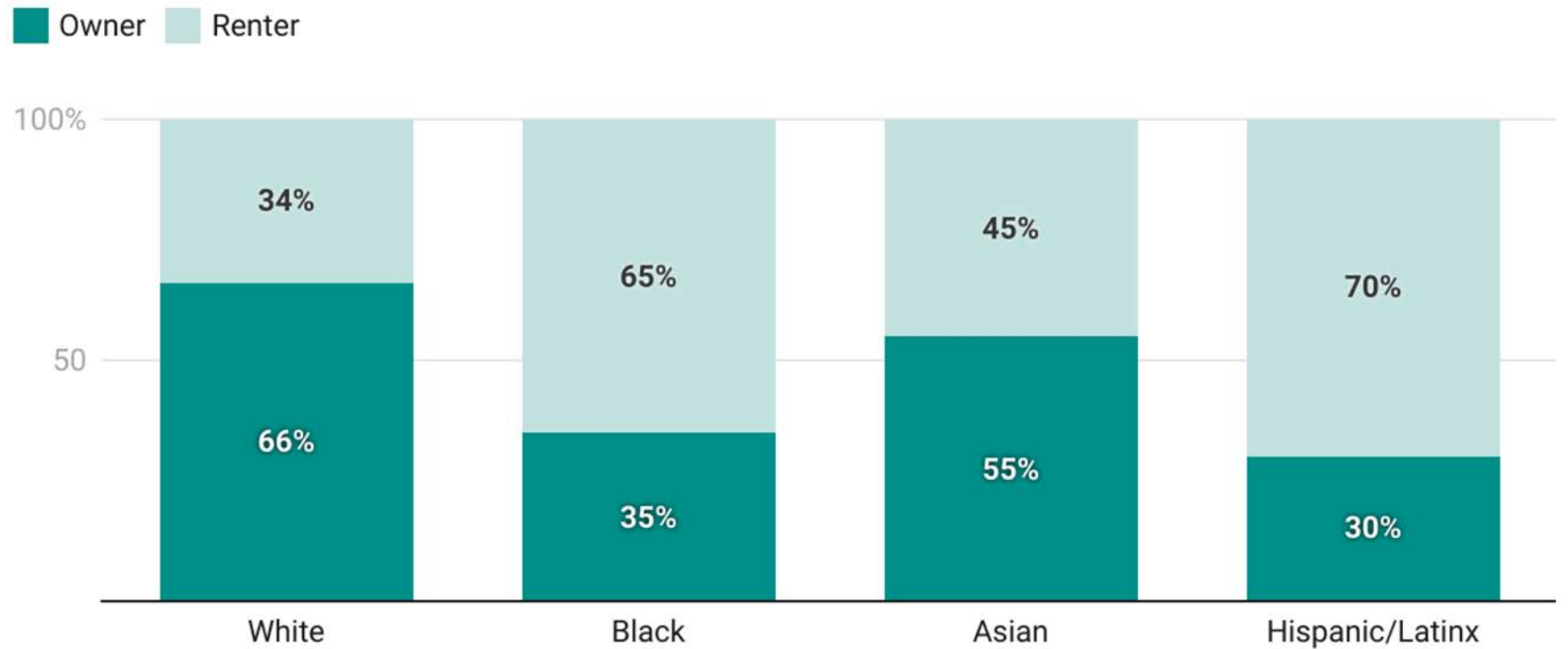
Cost burden = spending 30% or more of income on housing costs. Figures represent share of all renters.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates • Created with Datawrapper

The majority of Black and Hispanic/Latinx households are renters, while the majority of white households are homeowners.

Homeownership in Greater Boston by Race/Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019 ACS 1-Year Estimates • Created with Datawrapper

Policy Recommendations:

Economic Inequality and Cost Burden

Expand direct household income assistance and move toward a universal basic income.

- Direct income supports can be deployed relatively quickly and allow recipients a great deal of discretion and flexibility in how these funds are used.

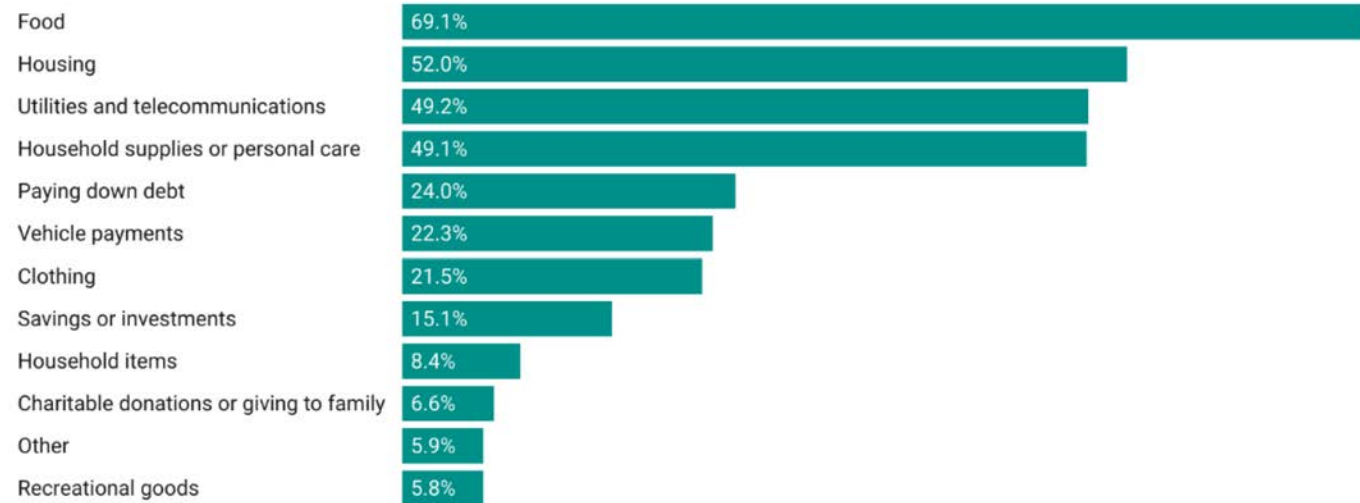
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Over half of Boston area households spent large portions of their stimulus check on housing, second only to recipients' use of it for food.



Data reflect spending in summer 2020.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Policy Recommendations:

Economic Inequality and Cost Burden

Expand direct household income assistance and move toward a universal basic income.

- Direct income supports can be deployed relatively quickly and allow recipients a great deal of discretion and flexibility in how these funds are used.

Expand the use of housing vouchers to guarantee housing affordability for all who need it.

- Rental assistance vouchers can ensure housing stability during times of crisis. These vouchers allow for periodic income redeterminations, where a change in income is met with a change in subsidy support.

A combination of state and federal responses is critical to maintaining housing stability.

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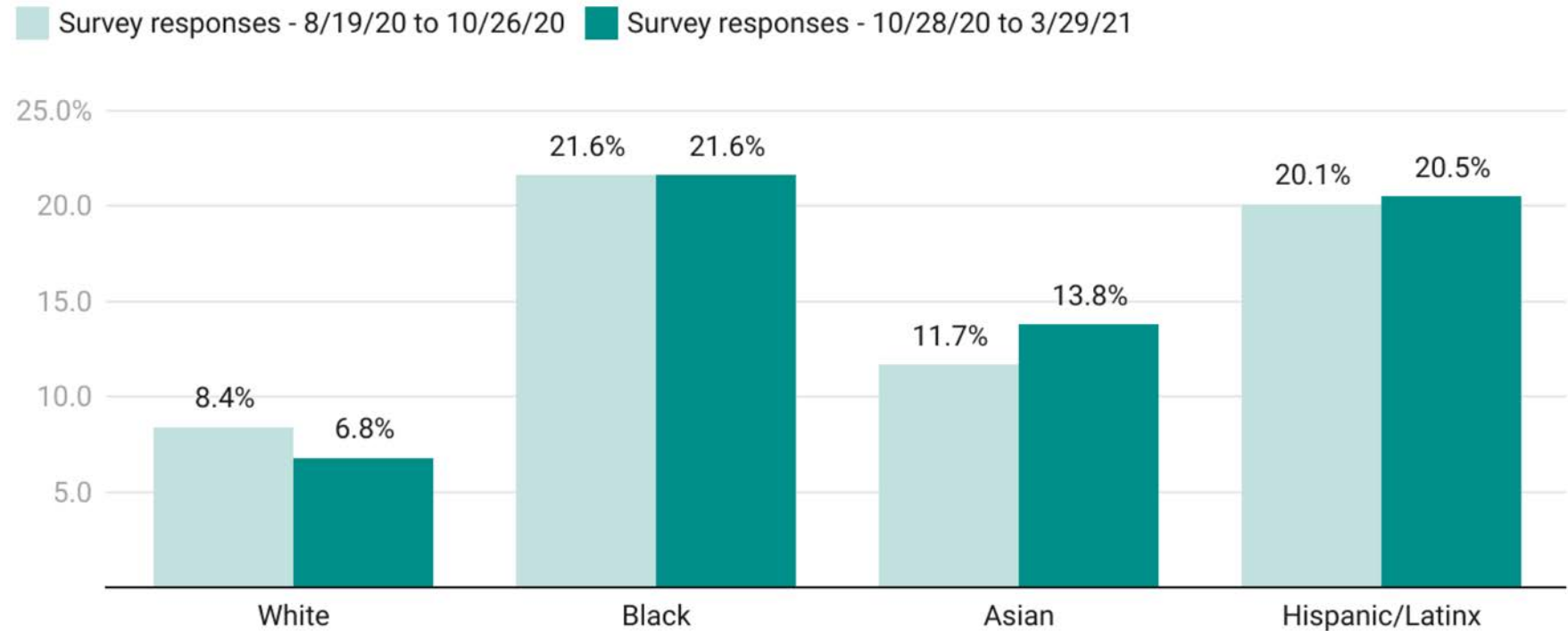
Insufficient production

Impacts of low inventory and surges in demand

Changes in home prices and rents across the region

White and Asian households are less likely to have missed a housing payment than Black or Hispanic/Latinx households.

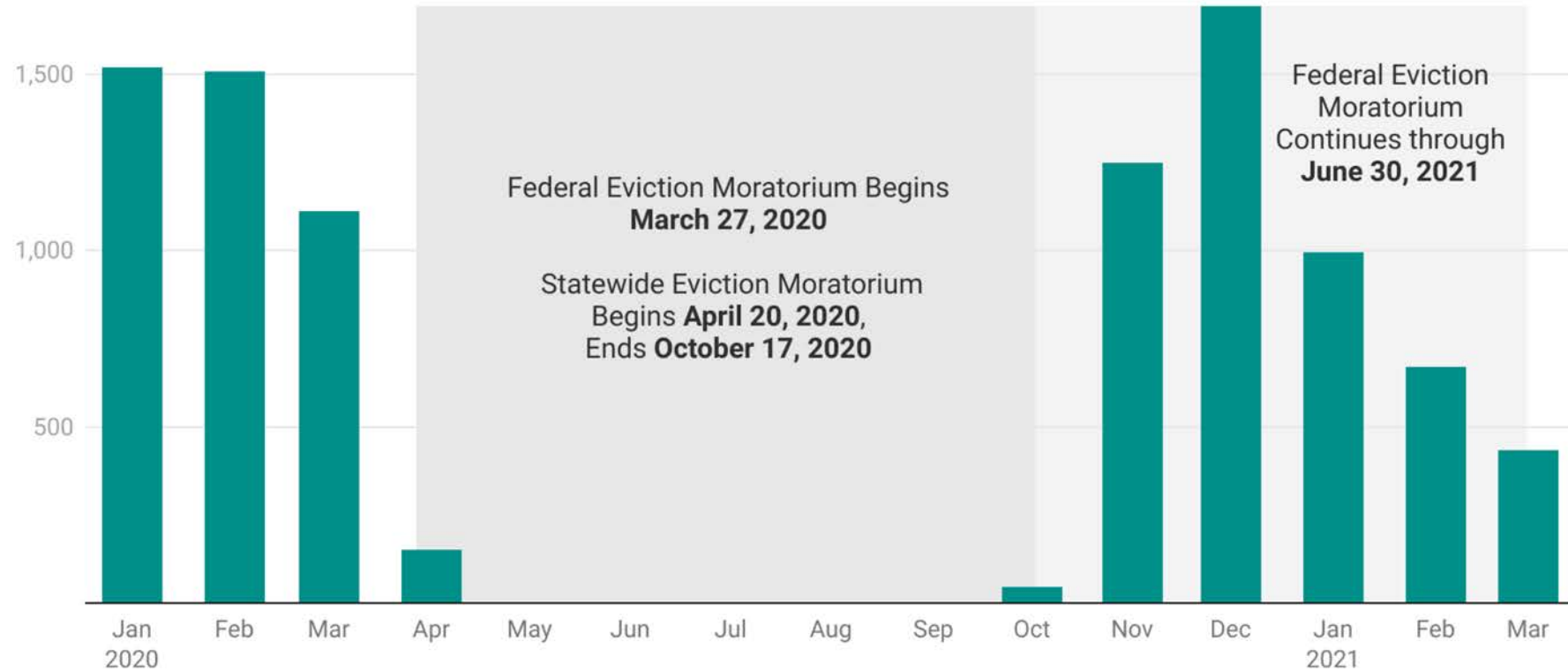
Percent of Boston MSA Residents Who Missed a Rental or Mortgage Payment



Source: Census Household Pulse Survey • Created with Datawrapper

During the moratorium, eviction filings for non-payment of rent were reduced to zero, followed by an uptick in late 2020.

Monthly Eviction Filings in Greater Boston, January 2020 – March 2021

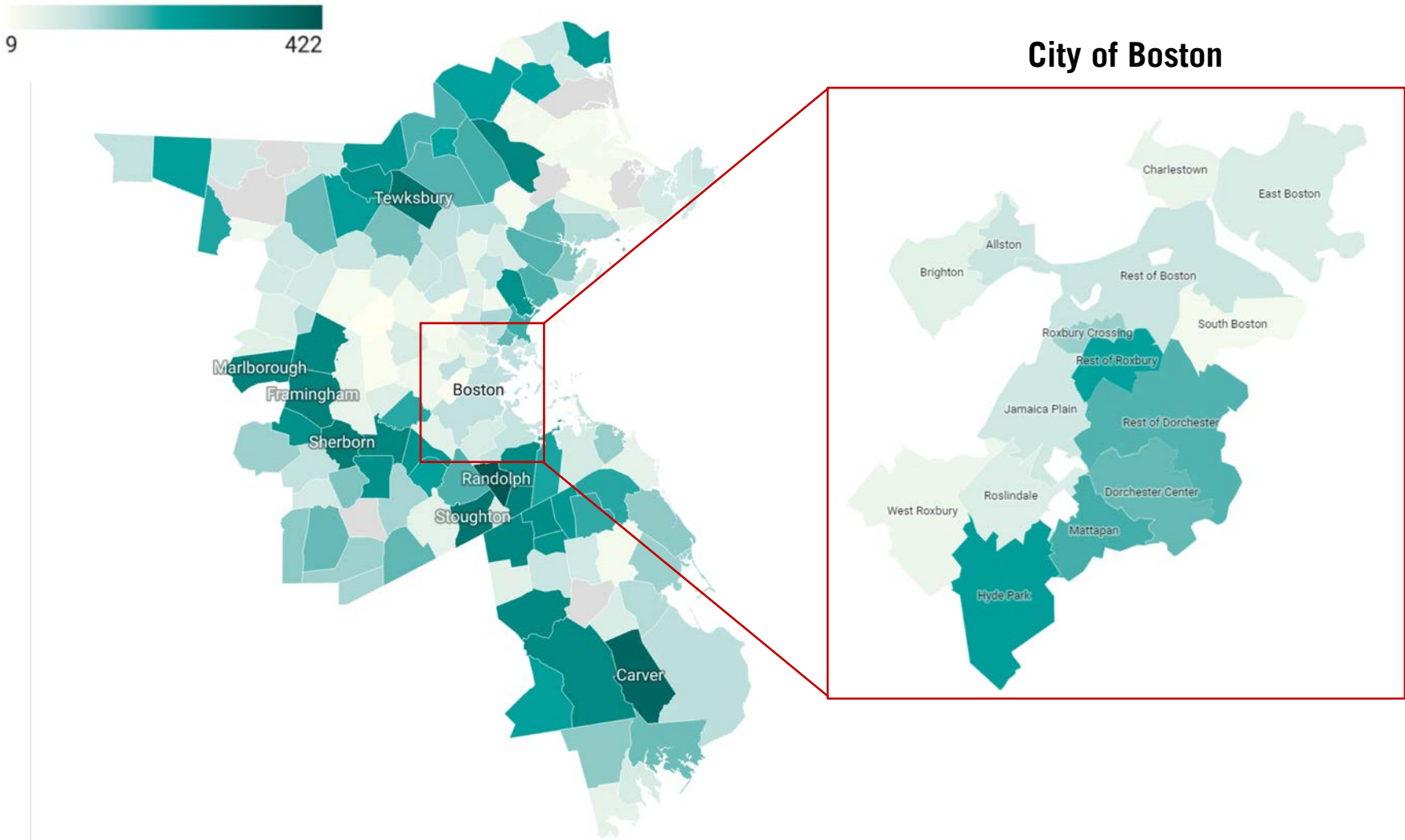


Data reflect total residential cases filed, not executed evictions or forced move-outs.

Source: MA Trial Court • Created with Datawrapper

Eviction Filings per 10,000 Renter-Occupied Units in Greater Boston, January 2020 – March 2021

Despite the robust programmatic supports to prevent evictions, some communities continue to have higher eviction filing rates than others.



The City of Boston and the top eight municipalities are labeled. Eviction rates may be high in some places due to their small rental stock.
Map: UMass Donahue Institute • Source: MA Trial Court, U.S. Census Bureau 2015-2019 ACS 5 Year Estimates • Created with Datawrapper

Policy Recommendations: *Housing Stability*

Continue to fund RAFT and other rental assistance programs at high levels

- Residents who are undocumented, looking for help with mortgage payments, not living in subsidized affordable housing, or earning slightly higher than AMI still benefit from access to the RAFT and ERMA programs.

Continue to disburse federal funds dedicated to housing stability as efficiently as possible.

- While in some cases these programs are still being developed, state government should work to message to residents that new funds are available and how to apply.

Codify the application process and delivery channels permanently for rental assistance.

- Expanded delivery channels might disappear as federal funds wane, but the goal of reaching tenants and landlords where they are should be built into the system.

Continue new court procedures centered on eviction prevention, while improving transparency and resource alignment.

- The combination of ERA funds, an eviction moratorium and court support has kept eviction filings in Greater Boston far below national averages and stabilized many families.

Create new upstream interventions to provide resources earlier in the eviction process.

- The state and its housing stability partners must continue to focus on giving people helpful information at the first possibility of risk and providing support before eviction starts.

Conduct better data collection for local rental assistance efforts.

- Information and coordination of local programs will become increasingly important as additional state and federal funds flood the housing stability system.

The pandemic amplifies the need to establish a healthy housing market with adequate supply in smart and sustainable locations.

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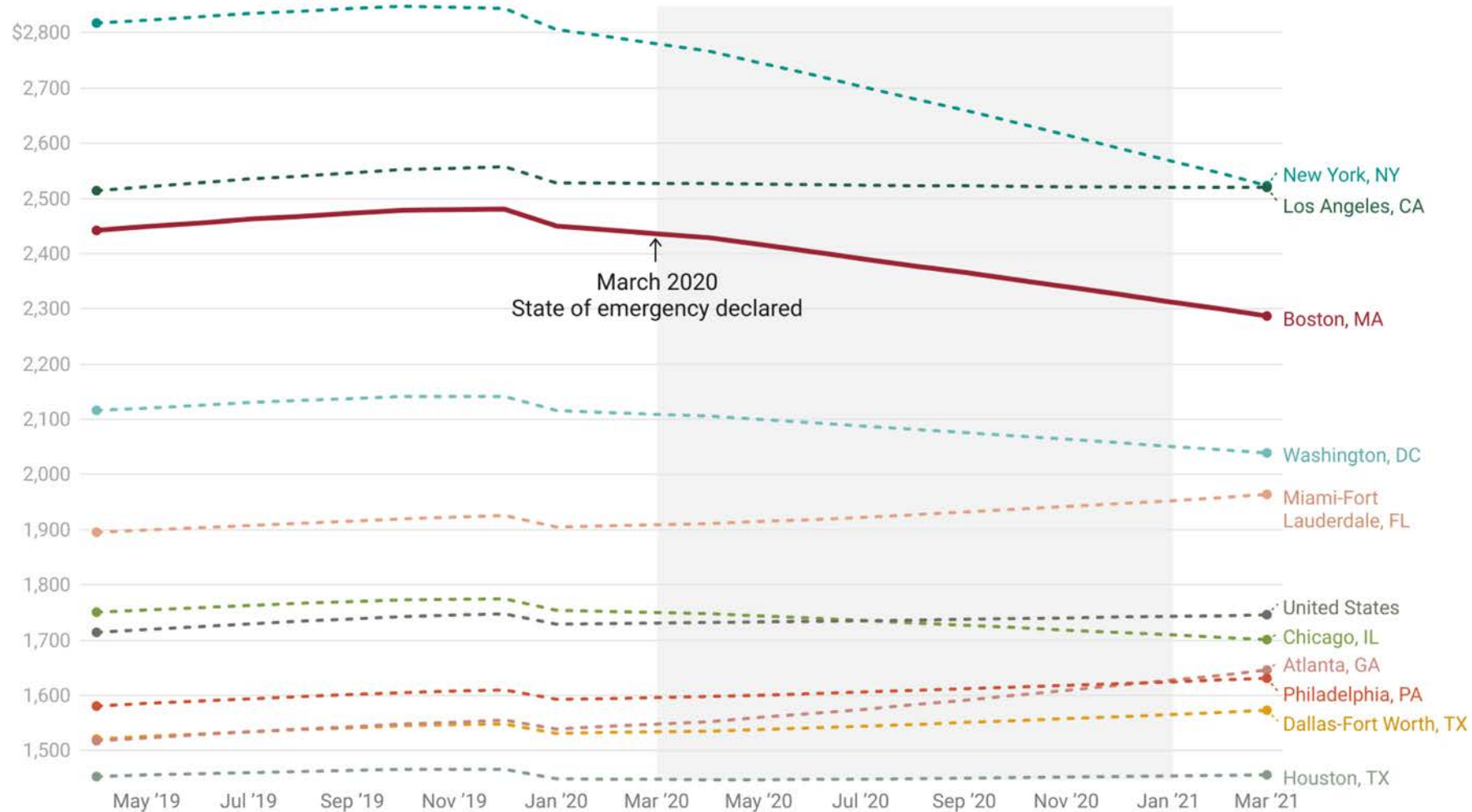
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Changes in home prices and rents across the region

Compared with the 10 largest MSAs, Greater Boston saw sharp rent decreases since the start of the pandemic, second only to New York.

Zillow Observed Rent Index in 10 largest MSAs (adjusted to 2020 dollars)



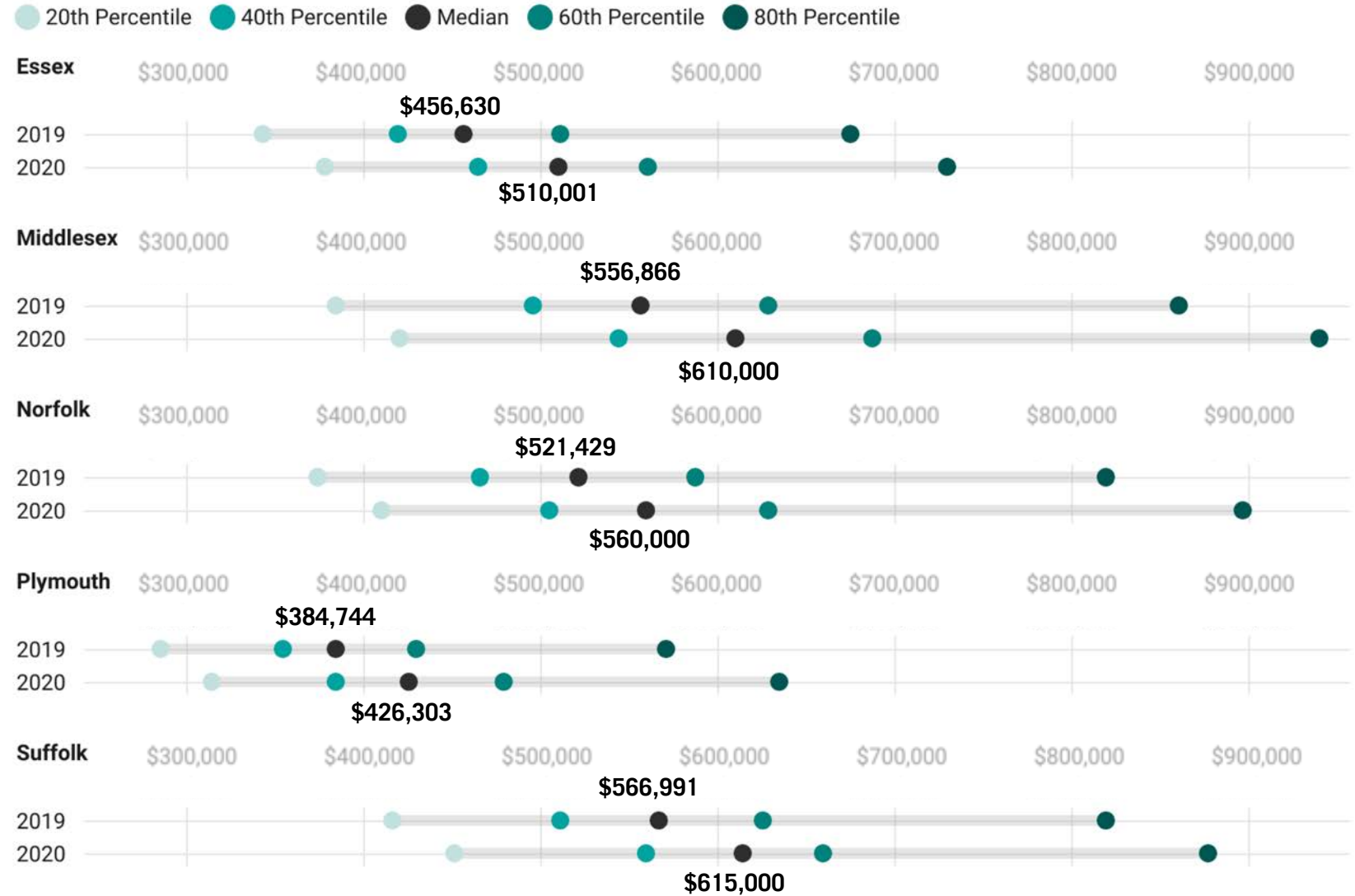
Rental prices have been inflation-adjusted to 2020 dollars.

Chart: UMass Donahue Institute • Source: Zillow Research, Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI) • Created with Datawrapper

By 2019, home sale prices in Greater Boston were among the highest in the nation.

In 2020, these prices shot up due to constrained supply and pent-up demand.

Single-Family Home Price Distribution, 2019-2020

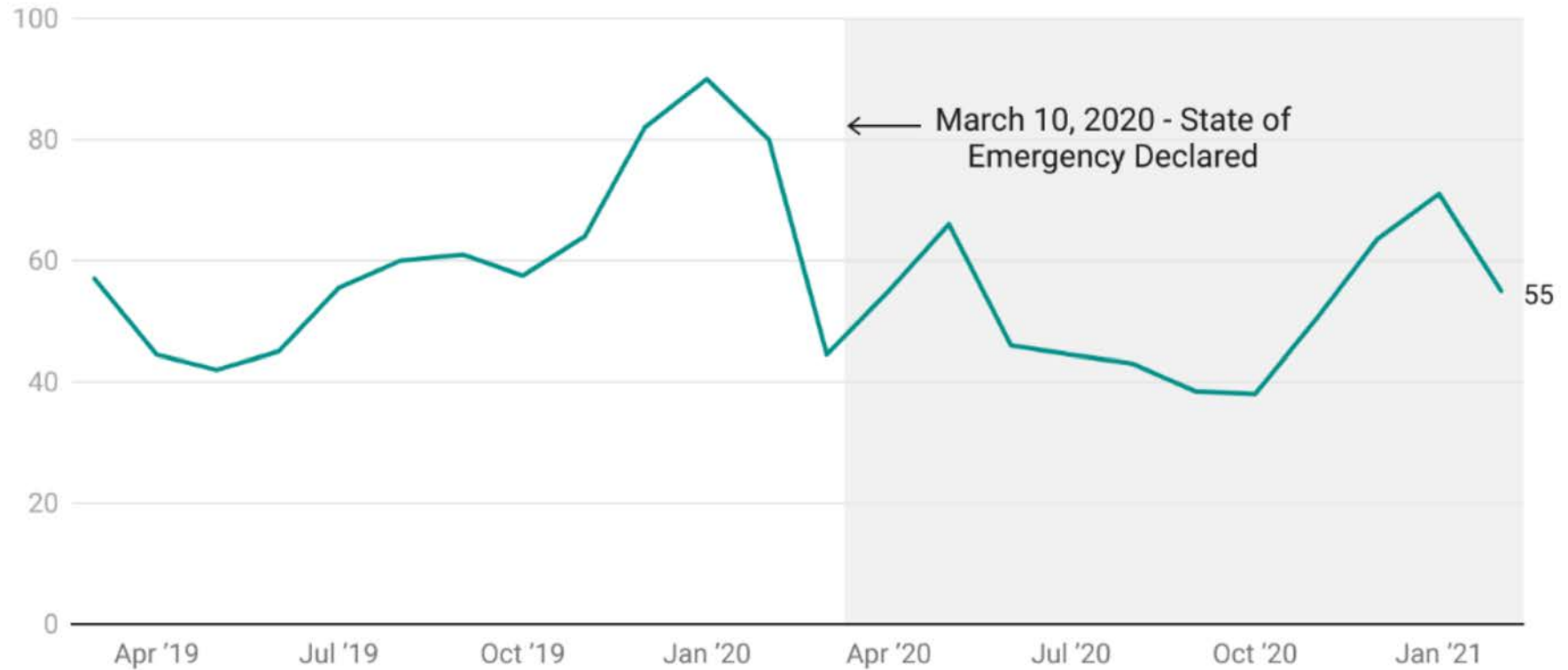


Source: The Warren Group • Created with Datawrapper

A surge in demand, combined with a lack of inventory, caused decline in the median market listing duration during the pandemic.

Median Market Listing Duration

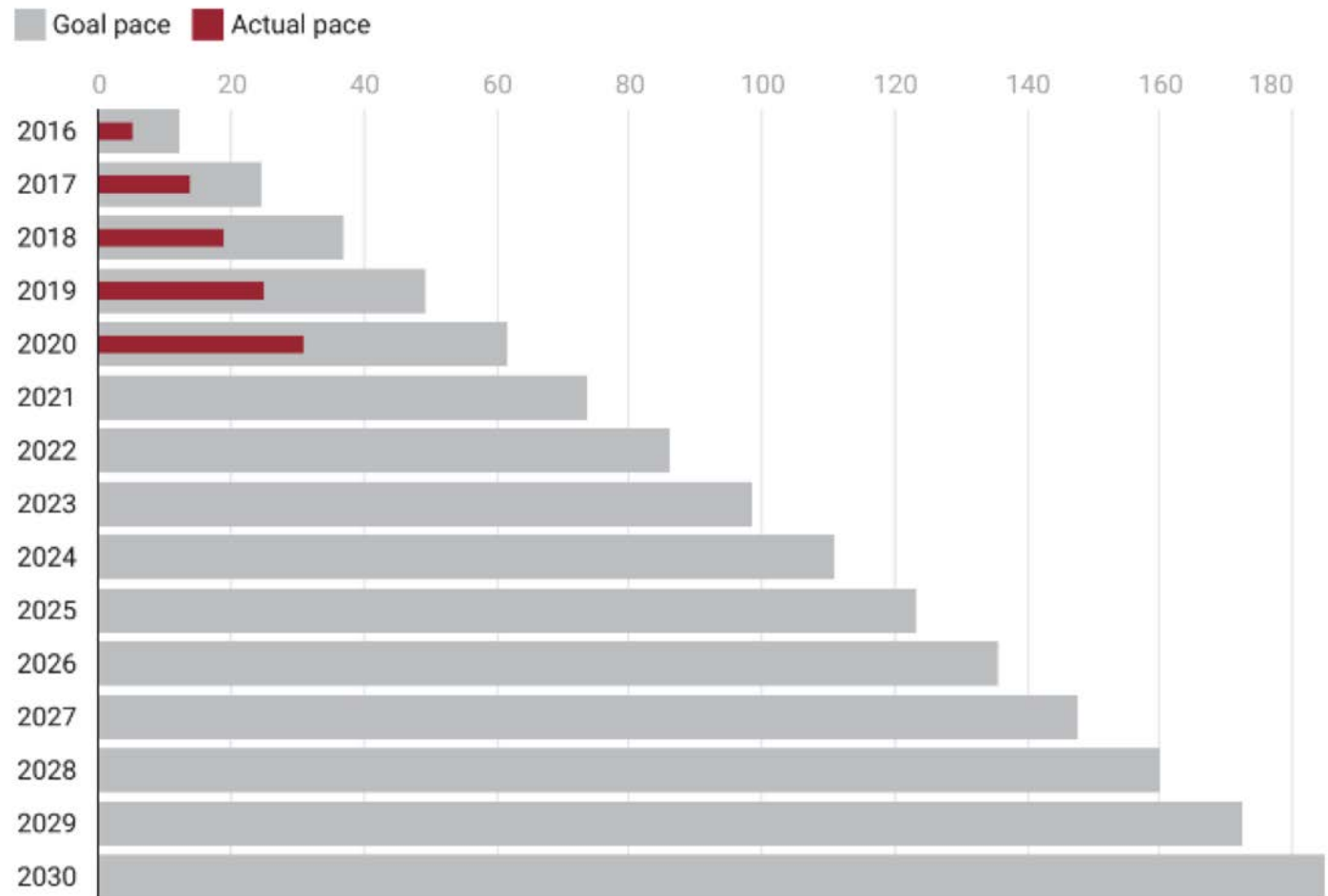
Number of days on the market



Source: Realtor.com • Created with Datawrapper

Metro Mayors Coalition communities are well behind pace of ambitious 2030 production goal.

The Metro Mayors Coalition (comprised of 15 municipalities*) has set a housing production goal of 185,000 new housing units between 2016 and 2030.



*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: MAPC; U.S. Census Bureau Building Permit Survey • Created with Datawrapper

Policy Recommendations:

Housing Supply and Sustainability

Build on recent zoning reforms.

- Allow multifamily housing development by right, create more opportunities for adaptive use, empower regional planning, and embrace sustainable development.

Improve the quality and frequency of transit service.

- Rather than defending against service cuts and coping with a decaying system, attention should be turned toward a broader and more comprehensive vision of the region's transit system.

Advance housing equity.

- Allow sufficient housing supply to meet demand, actively confront housing discrimination, eliminate exclusionary zoning, ensure that every city, town and neighborhood is permitting a fair share of new housing, and target affordable housing resources to those with the greatest need.

Experiment with building techniques and strategies that could reduce housing production costs.

- Evaluate the cost-saving potential of modular housing construction, continue to pilot the use of LEAN construction techniques, support the continued market-testing of micro units and other alternative product types to serve more households at a lower cost

Looking ahead

Existing economic inequalities have been exacerbated by the resulting economic downturn.

- Particularly for renters already stretched thin by high housing costs. These challenges fall heavily on lower income residents and Hispanic/Latinx and Black families.

Peoples' lives have been turned upside down by the crisis.

- Housing production lagged. Home prices skyrocketed. Rental markets were disrupted. Yet instability from evictions, foreclosures and homelessness were mitigated by a vigorous policy response at federal, state and local levels.

Policy interventions have been innovative and hard-hitting, backed with sizeable monetary resources, and made an important impact.

- Policy interventions during the pandemic provide a roadmap for future proactive attempts to create more stability and resilience in the housing market.

Interactive data tool

Municipality	Rank	Percent Rental, 2015-2019	Percent Multifamily, 2015-2019	Median Rent, 2020*	Median Sale Price, 2020*	Subsidized Housing Percentage, 2020
Abington	1	25.2%	35.1%	\$1,233	\$356,394	9.9%
Acton	2	25.4%	30.2%	\$1,466	\$546,741	10.5%
Amesbury	3	28.5%	37.8%	\$1,209	\$356,394	10.0%
Andover	4	18.2%	24.2%	\$1,629	\$577,116	13.4%
Arlington	5	39.6%	55.9%	\$1,750	\$774,550	5.7%
Ashby	6	7.2%	3.6%	\$1,113	\$270,333	0.0%
Ashland	7	16.8%	25.4%	\$1,471	\$430,306	6.3%
Avon	8	23.0%	19.1%	\$1,240	\$364,494	4.3%
Ayer	9	35.9%	39.9%	\$1,109	\$308,808	7.4%
Bedford	10	25.2%	25.4%	\$1,880	\$718,863	18.5%
Bellingham	11	17.1%	17.4%	\$1,280	\$323,894	12.6%
Belmont	12	34.0%	45.5%	\$2,025	\$971,984	6.5%
Beverly	13	37.7%	46.9%	\$1,297	\$455,618	11.8%
Billerica	14	19.0%	21.6%	\$1,545	\$452,074	11.5%
Boston	15	59.5%	81.6%	\$1,638	\$690,514	20.6%
Boxborough	16	29.9%	41.5%	\$1,179	\$392,337	12.9%
Boxford	17	2.3%	7.8%	\$880	\$658,064	1.4%
Braintree	18	25.9%	34.2%	\$1,539	\$489,030	9.6%
Bridgewater	19	27.1%	27.5%	\$1,615	\$374,619	11.4%
Brockton	20	42.3%	49.5%	\$1,124	\$311,845	13.0%
Brookline	21	48.1%	76.1%	\$2,294	\$1,035,658	10.2%
Burlington	22	24.7%	30.3%	\$1,982	\$566,991	13.5%
Cambridge	23	58.8%	85.5%	\$2,246	\$809,481	14.8%
Canton	24	22.7%	31.4%	\$1,777	\$475,867	12.6%
Carlisle	25	5.0%	4.6%	\$1,138	\$884,405	3.4%
Carver	26	8.3%	3.6%	\$1,466	\$339,182	3.1%
Chelmsford	27	15.3%	23.1%	\$1,529	\$404,993	9.8%
Chelsea	28	70.7%	88.0%	\$1,435	\$475,361	19.2%
GREATER BOSTON		37.1%	47.3%	\$1,553	\$491,561	11.3%

* 2019 data inflation adjusted to 2020 \$

Note: Click on column headers to sort.

No median rent data were available for Topsfield or Wenham in 2019.

Sources: 2015-2019 American Community Survey, 2019 Warren Group, 2020 Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development

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