

FIRELANDS REGION, OHIO Housing Needs Assessment

A Housing Needs Assessment is a comprehensive analysis that serves as a valuable resource for developers/investors, area stakeholders and local governments to support the development of affordable and accessible housing. The report evaluates current demographic, economic and housing supply conditions and projected trends to assess both challenges and opportunities that exist in the market. To that end, the Housing Needs Assessment completed for the Firelands Region of Ohio considered the following:

- Demographic Characteristics and Trends
- Economic Conditions and Initiatives
- Existing Housing Supply Costs, Performance, Conditions and Features
- Various Other Housing Factors (commuting/migration patterns, transportation analysis, development opportunities, development costs and government regulations, identification of potential development/investment partners, cost of living analysis, university/college overview, and special needs populations)
- Input from the Community (Surveys of Stakeholders, Employers and Residents/Commuters)

Based on these metrics, we were able to identify housing needs by affordability and tenure (rental vs. ownership) and provide recommendations on possible ways to address local housing issues.

The Firelands Region has an Overall Housing Gap of 10,428 Units for Rental and For-Sale Product at a Variety of Affordability Levels - It is projected that the county has a five-year **rental** housing gap of 4,166 units and a **for-sale** housing gap of 6,262 units.

Overall Housing Gaps				
Area	Rental		For-Sale	
	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap
Erie County	1,637	39.3%	2,734	43.7%
Huron County	1,699	40.8%	2,094	33.4%
Ottawa County	830	19.9%	1,434	22.9%
Firelands Region	4,166	100.0%	6,262	100.0%

The Firelands Region's largest rental gap is in Huron County with a gap of 1,699 units (representing 40.8% of the region's overall gap), followed closely by Erie County's gap of 1,637 units (representing 39.3% of the region's gap). Ottawa County has a rental housing gap of 830 units (representing 19.9% of the region's overall gap). The largest gaps within these counties are primarily for rental units targeting households with incomes of up to 80% of Area Median Household Income, which generally have rents under \$1,700. Despite the large need for more affordable rentals, all three markets also have noteworthy gaps for higher-end rentals, particularly within Erie and Huron counties. Without the notable addition of new rental product, the area will not meet the housing needs of its current residents or the growing and changing housing needs of the market.

The largest for-sale housing gap is within Erie County, with a gap of 2,734 units (representing 43.7% of the overall region's gap). Huron County has a for-sale housing gap of 2,094 units (representing 33.4% of the overall region's gap) and Ottawa County has a gap of 1,434 for-sale housing units (representing 22.9% of the overall region's gap). While all home price segments and affordability levels have some level of need, it appears some of the greatest gaps within the three counties are for product generally priced between \$197,000 and \$283,000, which generally serves households earning between 81% and 100% of Area Median Household Income. Although this segment has relatively large gaps, there are still notable gaps for housing that is affordable to lower income households, including first-time homebuyers, as well as for high-end product priced well over \$300,000. The limited inventory of for-sale product limits opportunities for renters seeking to enter the homebuyer market, homebuyers coming from outside the region or seniors seeking to downsize. The region will miss out on various growth opportunities and be unable to meet the needs of its current residents without additional housing.

Action Plan Recommendations

We developed an outline for a recommended Action Plan that can serve as a framework to organize priorities, goals and strategies that address the housing needs of the region. It is important to point out that not all of the items listed need to be implemented for the region to be successful. Ultimately, the region will need to develop its own priorities and plans that fit its goals, align with budgetary limitations, and correspond to regional needs.

Goal Setting & Planning

- Set realistic/attainable short-term housing goals, outline long-term objectives and monitor progress.
- Develop community-/neighborhood-specific and regional-level housing plans.
- Develop next-steps plans.

Capacity Building

- Consider capacity building through organizational efforts and/or hiring professionals to spearhead housing efforts.

Marketing and Outreach

- Market the Fireland Region's housing needs and development opportunities to potential residential development partners.
- Develop strategies to attract people that currently commute into the Firelands Region to *live* in the region.
- Consider developing a centralized housing resource center.

Development and Preservation Tools

- Implement/modify policies to encourage or support the development of new residential units, with possible emphasis on affordable workforce housing and senior-oriented housing.
- Support efforts to develop residential units along or near public transportation corridors and/or within walkable downtowns/communities to accommodate the housing needs of seniors and to appeal to younger households.
- Preservation of existing affordable housing alternatives and increasing rental opportunities for Housing Choice Voucher holders should be areas of focus.
- Consider evaluating approaches to regulating/managing vacation rentals.

Additional Action Plan details are provided in the Executive Summary.