

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the housing needs of the Firelands Region of Ohio (includes Erie, Huron and Ottawa counties) and to recommend priorities and strategies to address such housing needs. To that end, we have conducted a comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment that 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 and input, we were able to identify housing needs by affordability and tenure (rental vs. ownership). Using these findings, we developed an outline of strategies that should be considered for implementation by the community. This Executive Summary provides key findings and recommended strategies. Detailed data analysis is presented within the individual sections of this Housing Needs Assessment.

Geographic Study Areas

This report focuses on the Primary Study Area (PSA), which consists of the Firelands Region of north central Ohio and includes the counties of Erie, Huron and Ottawa, and multiple submarkets within the counties. The following table summarizes the various market areas included in this report.

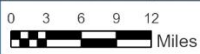
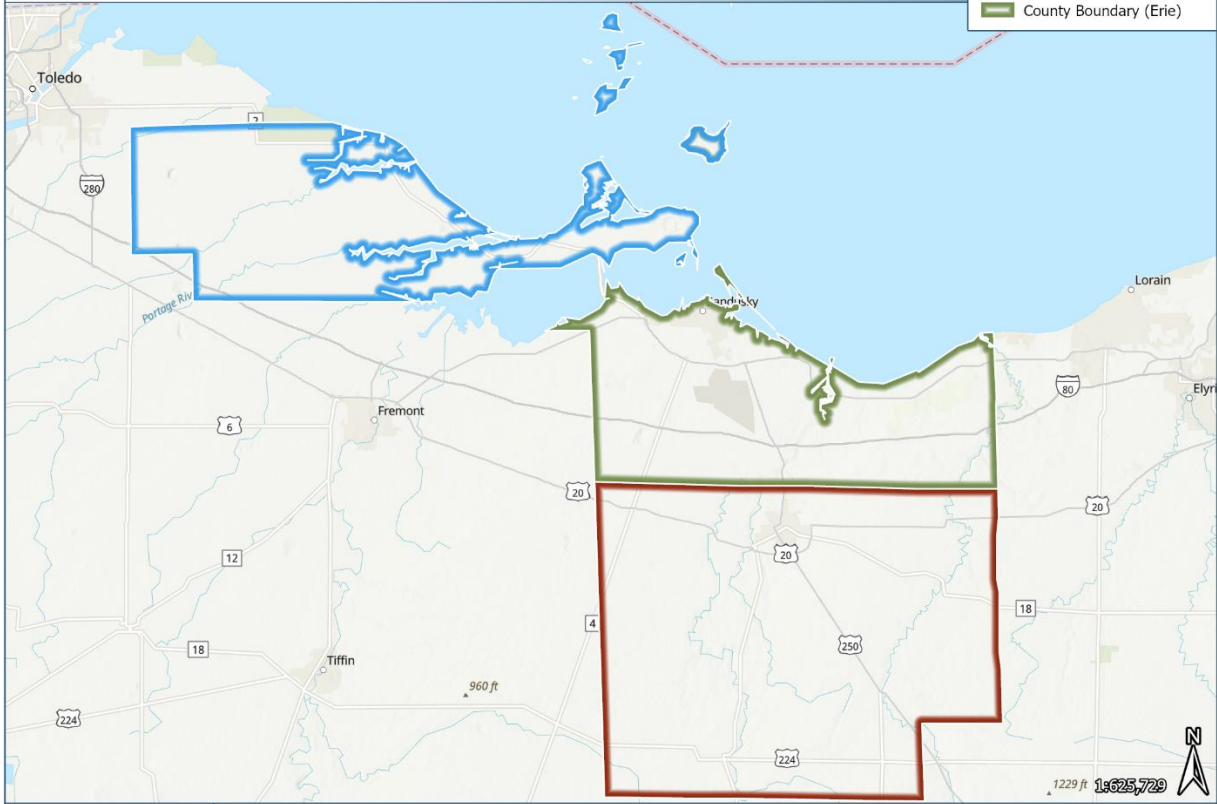
Firelands Region Study Areas	
Study Area	Description
Primary Study Area (PSA)	Firelands Region (Counties of Erie, Huron & Ottawa)
Secondary Study Areas and Submarkets	Erie County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erie North • Erie East • Erie West
	Huron County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huron North • Huron South
	Ottawa County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ottawa East (Includes Kelley’s Island) • Ottawa West

A map of the PSA (Firelands Region) and its counties is provided on the following page. Maps of individual submarkets are provided in Section III.



Primary Study Area
Firelands Region, OH

- County Boundary (Ottawa)
- County Boundary (Huron)
- County Boundary (Erie)



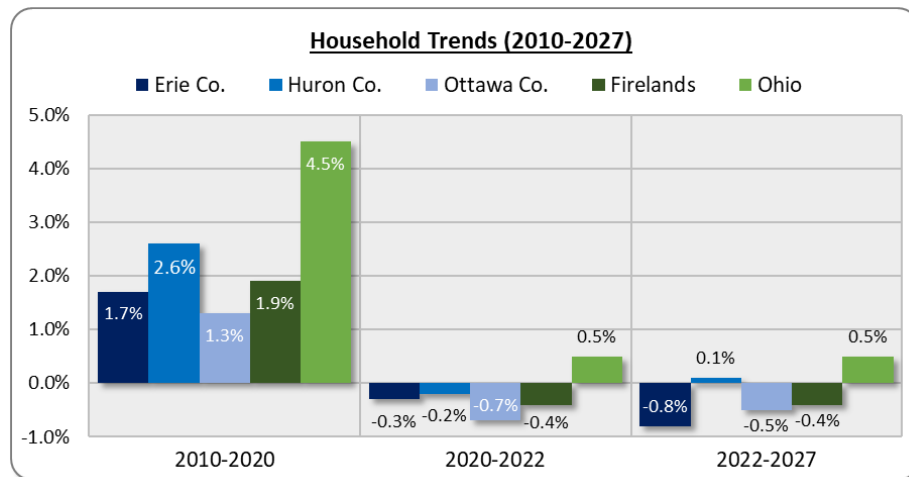
Esri, CGIAR, USGS, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS
Additional Source(s): Bowen National Research

Demographics

Overall household growth in the PSA was positive between 2010 and 2020 but is projected to decline slightly through 2027. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of households within the PSA (Firelands Region) increased by 1,350 (1.9%). This represents a smaller rate of increase compared to the state of Ohio (4.5%) during this time period. In 2022, there is an estimated total of 73,251 households in the PSA, which represents a slight decrease of 0.4% in the number of households compared to 2020. Between 2022 and 2027, the number of households in the PSA is projected to decrease by 303 (0.4%), at which time the estimated total number of households in the PSA will be 72,948. The projected decrease in households for the PSA over the next five years contrasts the 0.5% increase in households for the state during this time period. While the numbers of households in most of the submarkets are expected to either remain unchanged or experience slight declines through 2027, all submarkets have demographic shifts during this time that will impact housing needs.

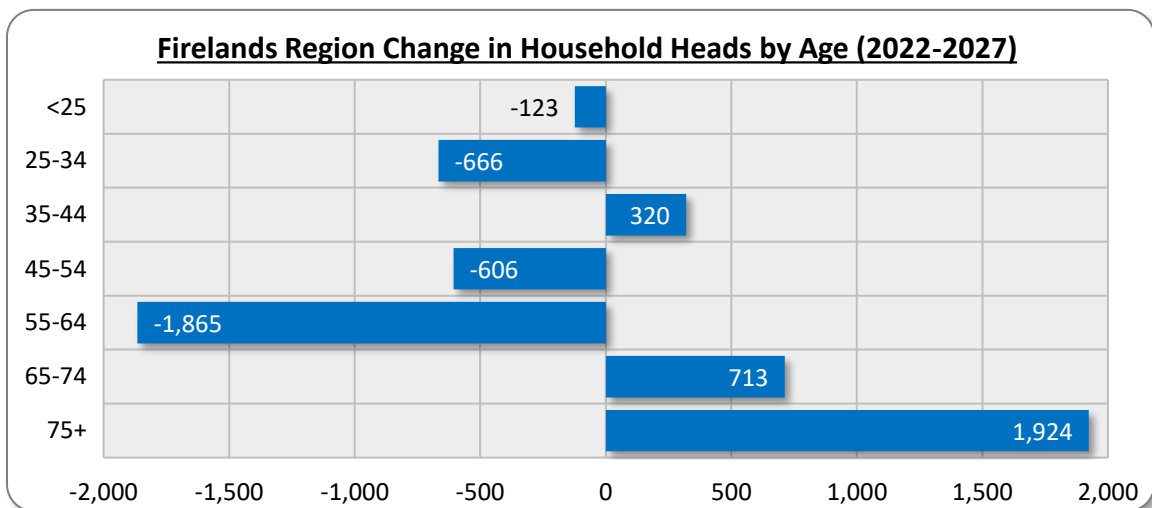
	Total Households									
	2010 Census	2020 Census	Change 2010-2020		2022 Estimated	Change 2020-2022		2027 Projected	Change 2022-2027	
			Number	Percent		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Erie North	15,882	15,999	117	0.7%	15,948	-51	-0.3%	15,825	-123	-0.8%
Erie East	11,123	11,444	321	2.9%	11,382	-62	-0.5%	11,269	-113	-1.0%
Erie West	4,683	4,778	95	2.0%	4,792	14	0.3%	4,784	-8	-0.2%
Erie County	31,688	32,221	533	1.7%	32,121	-100	-0.3%	31,879	-242	-0.8%
Huron North	15,044	15,608	564	3.7%	15,584	-24	-0.2%	15,609	25	0.2%
Huron South	7,776	7,798	22	0.3%	7,780	-18	-0.2%	7,787	7	0.1%
Huron County	22,820	23,406	586	2.6%	23,364	-42	-0.2%	23,396	32	0.1%
Ottawa East	8,116	8,267	151	1.9%	8,230	-37	-0.4%	8,207	-23	-0.3%
Ottawa West	9,540	9,620	80	0.8%	9,536	-84	-0.9%	9,466	-70	-0.7%
Ottawa County	17,657	17,887	230	1.3%	17,766	-121	-0.7%	17,673	-93	-0.5%
Firelands Region	72,164	73,514	1,350	1.9%	73,251	-263	-0.4%	72,948	-303	-0.4%
Ohio	4,603,431	4,808,766	205,335	4.5%	4,831,456	22,690	0.5%	4,856,138	24,682	0.5%

Source: 2010, 2020 Census; ESRI; Urban Decision Group; Bowen National Research



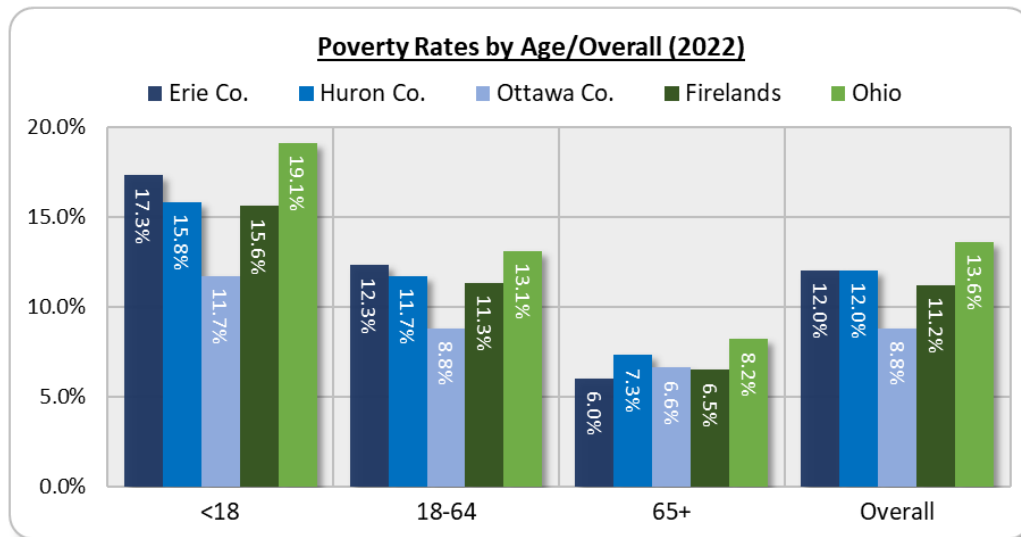
The PSA has a large and growing base of senior households that is expected to experience significant growth over the next several years, while smaller but notable growth is also projected for older millennials households. In 2022, household heads between the ages of 55 and 64 within the PSA (Firelands Region) comprise the largest share of all households in the PSA (21.1%). Household heads between the ages of 65 and 74 (19.4%) and those between the ages of 45 and 54 (15.9%) comprise the next largest shares of the total households in the PSA. As such, senior households (age 55 and older) constitute well over half (54.9%) of all households within the PSA, which is a larger share than the state (49.1%). Between 2022 and 2027, projections indicate significant household growth in the PSA among household heads ages 75 and older (18.3%). Households between the ages of 65 and 74 (5.0%) and 35 and 44 (3.1%) are also projected to experience moderate growth. All other age cohorts are projected to experience declines (between 5.2% and 12.1%) during this time period. As such, it is likely that demand for senior-oriented housing in the region will increase over the next five years.

Within the three counties of the PSA, Ottawa County has the largest share of household heads ages 55 and older (60.1%). Erie County has the second largest share of senior households (55.6%), followed by Huron County (49.8%). Conversely, Huron County has the largest share of households under the age of 35 (17.6%), followed by Erie County (15.2%) and Ottawa County (12.4%). Household heads between the ages of 25 and 44 years comprise 30.1% of all households in Huron County, which represents the largest share of such households among the three counties in the PSA. Between 2022 and 2027, all household growth within the three counties is projected to occur among the age cohorts of 35 to 44 years and 65 years and older. The most significant growth will occur among households ages 75 and older, with the largest percentage increase of 19.2% occurring in Huron County. Erie County will experience the second largest growth (18.3%) within this age cohort, followed by Ottawa County (17.3%).



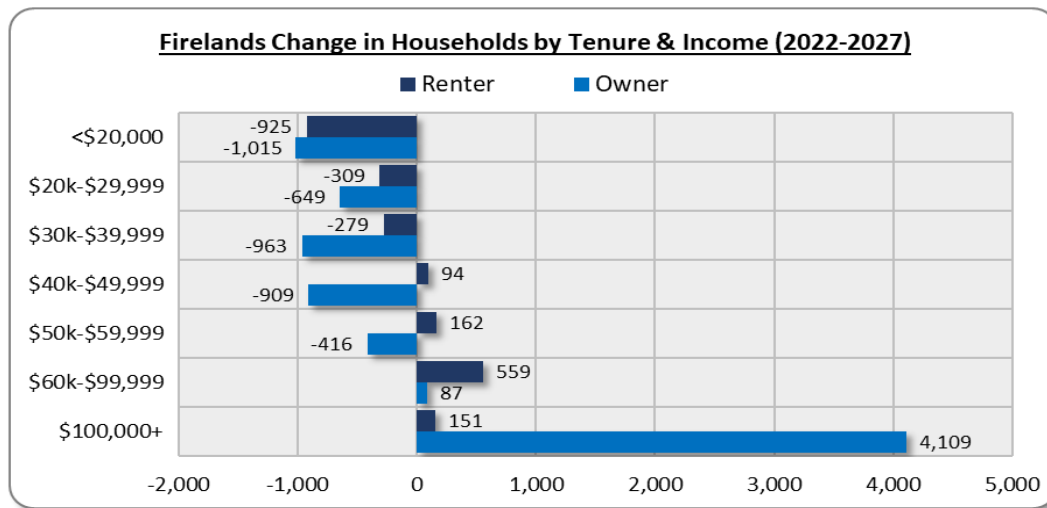
While the PSA has a lower poverty rate among its overall population compared with the state, over 19,000 people in the region live in poverty. Approximately 11.2% of the population in the PSA (Firelands Region) suffers from poverty, which reflects a lower poverty rate than the state (13.6%) overall. Among the three age cohorts considered in this analysis, people less than 18 years of age have the highest poverty rate (15.6%) in the PSA, which reflects a lower rate for this cohort than the corresponding rate for the state (19.1%). Adults, ages 18 to 64 years, have the second highest poverty rate (11.3%) in the PSA, which is also lower than the rate for the state (13.1%). Those age 65 and older have the lowest poverty rate among the three age cohorts in the PSA (6.5%) and also have a poverty rate below that of the state (8.2%). Overall, the data suggests that the population of the PSA is less affected by poverty, regardless of age, than the state. Regardless, 19,162 individuals live in poverty in the Firelands Region, and as such, affordable housing should continue to be a consideration for future housing developments in the region. It should be pointed out that based on the survey of area multifamily rentals, all surveyed Tax Credit rentals and most government-subsidized rentals in the PSA are occupied and most have wait lists. This poses a significant obstacle for persons living in poverty that are seeking affordable rental alternatives.

Among the three counties in the region, Erie County and Huron County have the highest overall poverty rates (12.0% each), while Ottawa County has the lowest overall poverty rate (8.8%). All three counties have rates below the rate for the state (13.6%). Overall, Erie County has the largest population (8,739) living below poverty level, followed by Huron County (6,898). A total of 3,525 people in Ottawa County live in poverty.



Most renter and owner household growth in the PSA is projected to occur among moderate- and higher-income households, while lower income households (earning less than \$30,000 annually) will continue to comprise relatively large shares of area households. In 2022, *renter* households earning less than \$30,000 annually comprise nearly two-fifths of renter households in the PSA, while those earning between \$30,000 and \$59,999 (34.2%) and \$60,000 or more (25.6%) comprise comparably smaller shares. Between 2022 and 2027, all renter household income cohorts earning \$40,000 or more in the PSA are projected to increase, while all income cohorts earning less than \$40,000 are projected to decline. The largest increase in the region over the next five years is projected among those earning between \$60,000 and \$99,999 (16.4%). In 2022, over three-fifths (62.9%) of *owner* households in the PSA (Firelands Region) earn \$60,000 or more annually, which represents a slightly smaller share compared to the state (64.4%). Nearly one-fourth (24.3%) of owner households in the PSA earn between \$30,000 and \$59,999, and the remaining 12.7% earn less than \$30,000. As such, the overall distribution of owner households by income in the PSA is very comparable to that within the state. Between 2022 and 2027, owner households earning \$100,000 or more annually are projected to increase by 22.0%, while households earning between \$60,000 and \$99,999 are projected to experience a very moderate increase of 0.6%. All income cohorts of owner households in the PSA earning less than \$60,000 are projected to decline over the next five years, with the largest decrease of 33.2% projected in the income cohort of \$10,000 to \$19,999. The distribution and projected growth of renter households by income are very similar between the three subject counties. The details of households by income and tenure (renters and owners) are provided in Section IV of this report, starting on page 46.

Based on these findings, it appears that growth among moderate- and higher-income households will drive demand for more market-rate housing alternatives, while the large bases of lower income renter and owner households and limited availability of housing product will contribute to the ongoing need for affordable housing alternatives.



Additional demographic data and analysis are included in Section IV of this report.

Economy & Workforce

Key economic metrics in the Firelands Region have been positive or stable over the past decade and each of the three subject counties have essentially returned to pre-COVID levels, contributing to the area's demographic growth and ongoing housing demand. Excluding the COVID-influenced economic characteristics of 2020, most of the key economic trends of the Firelands Region economy have been positive since 2012, with the employment base generally growing and the unemployment rate declining or remaining stable in most of the past 11 years. While total employment in each county still remains slightly below the respective 2019 levels, the PSA counties have recovered to within 98.6% (Ottawa County), 98.9% (Erie County), and 99.8% (Huron County) of the total 2019 employment, which represent recovery rates above that for the state of Ohio (98.2%).

Due to the prevalence of tourism-influenced jobs (e.g., accommodations & food service and retail trade), the market is likely more vulnerable to economic volatility. The labor force within the PSA (Firelands Region) is based primarily in five sectors: Accommodation & Food Services (21.6%), Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (10.8%), Retail Trade (10.5%), Health Care & Social Assistance (10.4%), and Manufacturing (10.1%). Combined, these five job sectors represent over three-fifths (63.4%) of the PSA employment base. This represents a greater concentration of employment within the top five sectors compared to the top five sectors in the state (56.7%). Areas with a heavy concentration of employment within a limited number of industries can be more vulnerable to economic downturns with greater fluctuations in unemployment rates and total employment. While Health Care & Social Assistance (10.4%) is one of the largest sectors by employment in the PSA, and is generally less susceptible to economic fluctuations, the other four top sectors in the PSA can be more likely influenced by economic declines. It is important to point out that some of the region's largest employment sectors are associated with jobs that align with the tourism industry, which plays an important role in the area. Many jobs associated with the tourism sector are service industry positions which typically pay lower wages. The prevalence of such jobs drives the demand for more affordable housing alternatives.

Many of the most common occupations in the market do not pay adequate wages that enable people to afford typical housing offered in the market. Median blue-collar salaries in Erie County range from \$21,190 to \$63,315, while white-collar jobs, such as those related to professional positions, management, and medicine, have an average salary of \$66,959. Within Huron County, blue-collar median salaries range from \$24,716 to \$55,375, while white-collar salaries average \$56,607. White-collar professions in Ottawa County have the highest average salary (\$73,804) of the three PSA counties, while blue-collar occupations in the county have the widest range of median salaries (\$19,483 to \$73,804). Overall, average median wages in Huron County (\$45,650) are the lowest among the three PSA counties, averaging 14.4% less than the state (\$53,307). Wages in Erie County, which has the second highest average median wages (\$50,990) in the PSA, average 4.3% less than the state. Ottawa County, which has average median wages 4.4% higher than the state, is the only

county in the PSA with average median wages (\$55,647) higher than those for the state. Within Erie and Huron counties, occupations related to food preparation and serving have the lowest median wages (\$21,190 and \$24,716, respectively), while personal care and service occupations in Ottawa County have the lowest median wage (\$19,483).

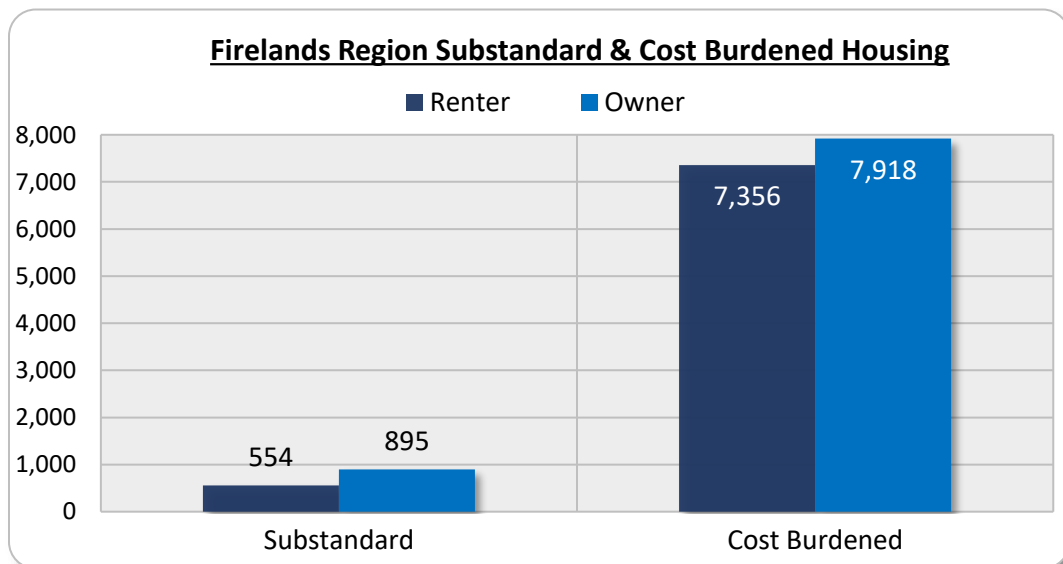
As shown on page V-8 of this report, a number of occupations within the sales, food preparation, healthcare, and building/grounds maintenance sectors cannot reasonably afford the Fair Market Rent (FMR) of \$756 at their respective median wages. When the lower quartile of wage earners is considered, the FMR of \$756 is unaffordable to many more occupations in the PSA, which includes occupations within the office and administrative support, transportation, and manufacturing sectors. While this FMR is affordable to a majority of the workers earning median wages or above within these common occupations, the data illustrates that affordability is likely an issue for the lowest wage earners in a variety of occupational sectors in the PSA. An examination of the maximum affordable purchase price reveals that a vast majority of the occupations within the PSA cannot afford the typical for-sale home priced at \$170,000 or above at their respective median wages. Among the occupations with the necessary median wage to afford a typical home in the PSA, most occupations likely require some type of post-secondary degree or specialized certification in connection with their employment. Despite the higher median wages of these occupations, the lower quartile of earners within many of these occupations cannot afford the typical for-sale home in the PSA. It is important to understand that the listed wages represent the income of individuals, not households. As such, households with multiple income sources likely have a significantly higher level of affordability. Conversely, it is also important to note that the FMR and median home prices used as the basis of affordability are the lowest among the three counties of the region. Regardless, this illustrates the difficulty that many single-income households within the most common occupations of the region likely have in locating affordable housing.

Public and private sector investment have been positive, with significant investment planned that will contribute to the expanding economy and ongoing housing demand. With hundreds of millions of dollars in both private and public sector investment planned or underway within the Firelands Region, a large number of new jobs are expected to be created over the next few years. While some of these may be filled by regional residents, it is likely that many of these jobs will be filled by non-residents. It is anticipated many of these non-residents represent potential support for additional housing within the subject market. A list of notable economic investments within the region is provided starting on page V-20.

Additional economic data and analysis is included in Section V of this report.

Housing Supply

Nearly 1,450 occupied housing units in the PSA are considered “substandard,” while 15,274 occupied housing units are housing “cost burdened.” For the purposes of this analysis, substandard housing is considered overcrowded (1.01+ persons per room) or lacks complete indoor kitchens or bathroom plumbing. Based on American Community Survey 2020 estimates, over 600 occupied housing units are overcrowded and nearly 800 units lack complete kitchens or plumbing facilities within the PSA. The largest number (570) of substandard housing units are within Erie County, representing nearly 40% of all substandard housing in the PSA. As a result, it is clear that many households are living in housing conditions that are considered to be below modern-day housing standards and/or unaffordable to many households. Cost burdened households pay over 30% of income toward housing costs, while Severe Cost Burdened households pay over 50% of income toward housing costs. Nearly two-fifths (37.2%) of renter households in the PSA are cost burdened, while 15.0% of owner households are cost burdened. Moreover, one-fifth (19.1%) of renter households in the PSA are severe housing cost burdened (paying over 50% of income toward housing). Overall, the PSA has an estimated 7,356 renter households and 7,918 owner households that are housing cost burdened. Of the renter households, approximately 3,783 are severe cost burdened while 3,229 owner households are severe cost burdened. Renter cost burdened households are most frequent in Erie County (39.0% renter cost burdened share), while owner cost burdened households are most frequent in Huron County (16.0% owner cost burdened share). As such, affordable housing alternatives should be part of future housing solutions. Housing policies and strategies for the PSA should include efforts to remedy such housing quality and affordability issues.

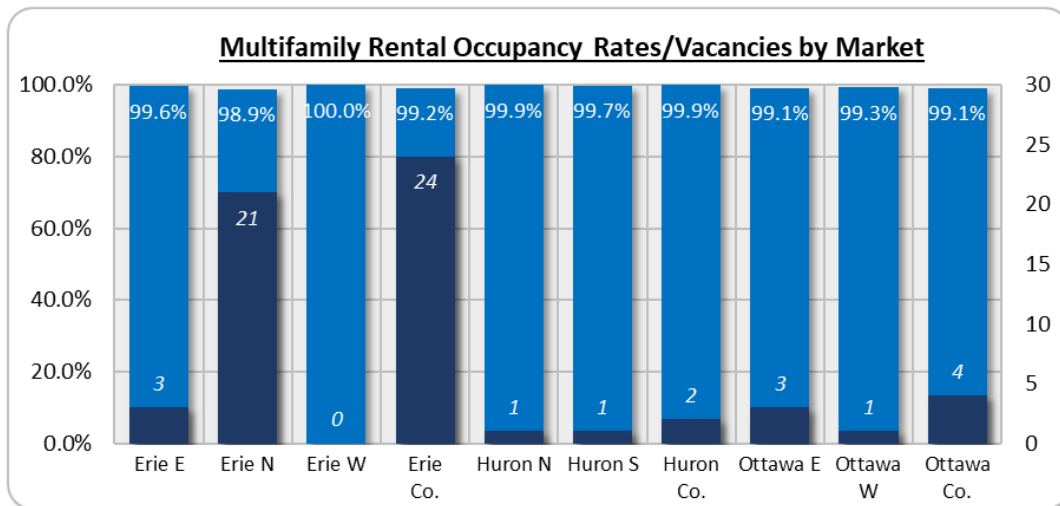


There is limited available inventory among multifamily rentals and pent-up demand for housing serving lower-income renter households. A total of 83 multifamily apartment properties containing 4,697 units were surveyed within the Firelands Region. Of these projects, 40 (48.2%) were in Erie County, 28 (33.7%) were in Huron County, and 15 (18.1%) were in Ottawa County. The surveyed rentals within the PSA have a combined occupancy rate of 99.4%, an extremely high rate for multifamily rental housing. Typically, healthy, well-balanced markets have rental housing occupancy rates generally between 94% and 96%. As such, the PSA’s multifamily rental market is operating at an exceedingly high occupancy level, and vacancies in the overall county are very limited, with only 30 vacancies identified in the entire region during the survey. There does not appear to be many vacancies, regardless of the program type (e.g., market-rate, Tax Credit, government subsidized or some combination of these program types), in the three PSA counties. All three counties have overall occupancy rates that exceed 99%, with Huron County having the highest occupancy rate (99.9%) and only two vacancies. While Erie County has the greatest number of total vacancies with 24, it should be noted that this county also has the largest number of total surveyed units (2,848), which results in the second highest occupancy rate (99.2%) among the three counties. It is also noteworthy that all of the vacancies within Erie County are among market-rate properties as there are no vacancies in the Tax Credit or government-subsidized properties within the county. In total, there are only two vacancies in the entirety of the PSA within government-subsidized projects and no vacancies among Tax Credit projects, which suggests that affordable housing options are in extremely high demand in the Firelands Region. This illustrates that, regardless of program type, demand for multifamily rental housing is exceptionally high in the PSA. The lack of available multifamily rental housing represents a development opportunity for such product.

Multifamily Supply by Product Type				
Project Type	Projects Surveyed	Total Units	Vacant Units	Occupancy Rate
Erie County				
Market-Rate	27	2,201	24	98.9%
Market-Rate/Tax Credit	1	18	0	100.0%
Tax Credit	2	80	0	100.0%
Tax Credit/Government-Subsidized	1	100	0	100.0%
Market-Rate/Tax Credit/Government-Subsidized	1	117	0	100.0%
Government-Subsidized	8	332	0	100.0%
Total	40	2,848	24	99.2%
Huron County				
Market-Rate	13	793	1	99.9%
Tax Credit	2	100	0	100.0%
Tax Credit/Government-Subsidized	3	144	0	100.0%
Government-Subsidized	10	356	1	99.7%
Total	28	1,393	2	99.9%
Ottawa County				
Market-Rate	5	113	3	97.3%
Tax Credit	1	40	0	100.0%
Tax Credit/Government-Subsidized	1	50	0	100.0%
Government-Subsidized	8	253	1	99.6%
Total	15	456	4	99.1%

The limited vacancies among the multifamily supply appears to span each submarket within each county and among all program types, particularly affordable rentals (Tax Credit and government subsidized). The occupancy rate within each county of the PSA (Firelands Region) exceeds 99%. This likely indicates a housing shortage among multifamily rentals within the entirety of the PSA. The lowest occupancy rate among the individual submarkets in the PSA is within the Erie North Submarket (98.9%), yet this is still considered to be an extremely high occupancy rate. As such, it appears that demand is very strong in each of the submarkets and counties of the PSA, with no weaknesses in any particular submarket. The Erie West Submarket is currently fully occupied with no vacancies, and six other submarkets have three or fewer vacancies. As shown in the table below, there are very few vacant units within the individual submarkets, regardless of the program type. With only 30 vacant units identified among the 4,697 apartment units included in the survey, the PSA has a very small base of available multifamily rental alternatives from which prospective renters can choose.

Overall Market Performance by Program Type by Area										
Data Set	Erie East	Erie North	Erie West	Erie County	Huron North	Huron South	Huron County	Ottawa East	Ottawa West	Ottawa County
Market-Rate										
Projects	7	19	3	29	10	3	13	5	0	5
Total Units	693	1,326	201	2,220	649	144	793	113	0	113
Vacant Units	3	21	0	24	1	0	1	3	0	3
Occupancy Rate	99.6%	98.4%	100.0%	98.9%	99.8%	100.0%	99.9%	97.3%	-	97.3%
Tax Credit (Non-Subsidized)										
Projects	1	3	0	4	2	0	2	1	0	1
Total Units	43	144	0	187	100	0	100	40	0	40
Vacant Units	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Occupancy Rate	100.0%	100.0%	-	100.0%	100.0%	-	100.0%	100.0%	-	100.0%
Government Subsidized										
Projects	1	9	0	10	7	6	13	4	5	9
Total Units	26	415	0	441	272	228	500	165	138	303
Vacant Units	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Occupancy Rate	100.0%	100.0%	-	100.0%	100.0%	99.6%	99.8%	100.0%	99.3%	99.7%



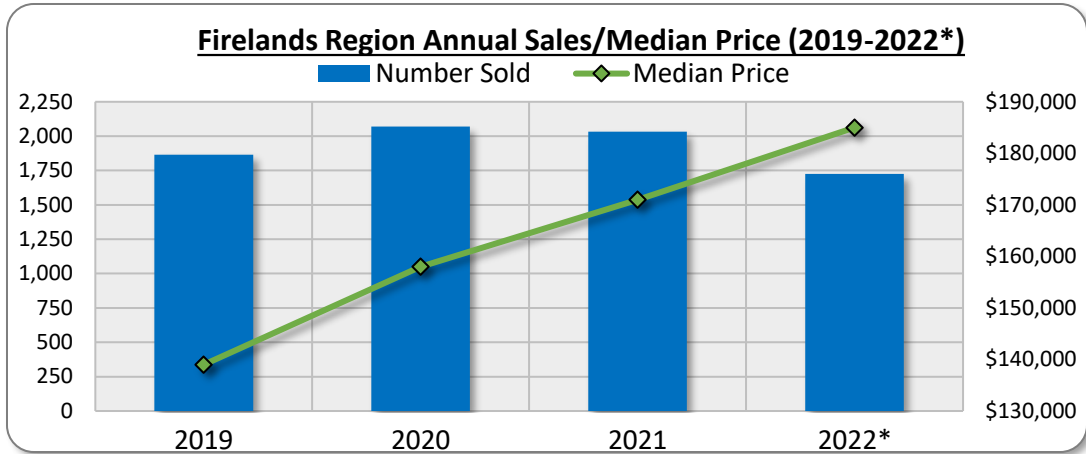
Regardless of program type, significant wait lists for multifamily rentals are maintained in the region, which indicates a very strong level of pent-up demand for multifamily rental housing in the PSA. Of the 83 properties surveyed within the PSA, 51 (61.4%) maintain wait lists. Among the market-rate projects (MRR), 44.4% maintain wait lists, which total 425 households. Over three-fourths (76.9%) of government-subsidized projects (GSS) maintain wait lists, totaling 165 households with an estimated length of wait time ranging from six to 36 months. All five Tax Credit projects (TAX) maintain wait lists, which total 100 households and a noted wait time for one property of approximately six months. Among the mixed-income properties containing Tax Credit and government-subsidized units (TGS), all properties maintain wait lists, totaling 119 households. While the only surveyed mixed-income market-rate and Tax Credit property (MRT) did not maintain a wait list, the mixed-income property consisting of market-rate, Tax Credit, and government-subsidized units (TMG) maintains a wait list of 11 households.

The market has an unusually high number of multifamily projects currently operating under HUD contracts that are scheduled to expire within the next three years that pose a risk to the local housing market if the contracts are not renewed. A total of 21 properties in the Firelands Region operate as subsidized projects under current HUD contracts. Because these contracts have a designated renewal date, it is important to understand if these projects are at risk of an expiring contract in the near future that could result in the reduction of affordable rental housing stock. While all HUD supported projects are subject to annual appropriations by the federal government, it appears that 14 projects in the Firelands Region have overall renewal dates within the next three years and are at *potential* risk of losing their government assistance in the near future. This is a relatively high number properties with pending HUD contract expiration dates in the near future. Given the high occupancy rates and wait lists among the market's surveyed subsidized properties, it will be important for the area's low-income residents that the projects with pending expiring HUD contracts be preserved in order to continue to house some of the market's most economically vulnerable residents.

While there are nearly 1,800 people waiting for a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), over a third (nearly 900) HCV holders in the region are unable to use their voucher. A Housing Choice Voucher is issued by a local housing authority to assist eligible lower income residents by subsidizing a portion of their monthly rent payment. According to local housing authority representatives for the three subject counties in the region, there are approximately 2,496 Housing Choice Vouchers issued within the housing authority's jurisdiction. The wait lists for such vouchers have 1,783 households, reflective of the significant pent-up demand for housing assistance. Despite the number of HCVs issued, it was also revealed by housing authority representatives that approximately 874 issued vouchers are currently going unused, representing over one-third of voucher recipients. According to local sources, voucher holders cannot locate quality housing that is income-appropriate and offers the number of bedrooms needed. Future housing plans should consider exploring ways to increase voucher use and acceptance.

While vacation rentals & seasonal/recreational housing represent a large segment of the regional housing stock, particularly in the lake front counties, the number of such units is steadily increasing and has a growing influence on the local housing market. Based on American Community Survey data in 2021, an estimated 9,180 units or nearly one-third (32.2%) of the total housing units in Ottawa County were classified as seasonal/recreational. Erie County had the second largest number (3,113) and share (8.1%) of such units, followed by Huron County (127, 0.5%). From 2011 to 2021, the number of seasonal/recreational units in Ottawa County increased by 12.8%, or 1,039 housing units. Within Erie County during this time period, seasonal/recreational units increased by 23.0%, or 583 units. Between 2011 and 2021, the share of such units in Erie County increased from 6.7% to 8.1%. It is also noteworthy that the shares of seasonal/recreational units compared to the total vacant units in 2021 in Ottawa County (86.5%) and Erie County (49.9%) are exceptionally high. Given the fact that the number of seasonal/recreational units have outpaced the increase in overall housing units within Erie and Ottawa counties, it is clear that seasonal/recreational units have absorbed some of the housing inventory available for permanent occupancy. Overall, the preceding data suggests that seasonal/recreational properties have become an increasingly significant share of the housing market in Erie County and Ottawa County since 2011. Additionally, any level of permanent housing shortages that may exist in the markets are likely, at least in part, the result of the absorption of some permanent residences to accommodate increased demand for short-term rentals and second homes in the area.

While home sales activity in the PSA appears to have slowed in 2022, the region's median sale price increased in each of the past three years and increased by 33.1% since 2019 – The volume of home sales within the PSA (Firelands Region) increased by 11.0% between 2019 and 2020, but declined in each of the past two years, likely due to a lack of supply in the housing market (both existing homes for sale and new construction) coupled with the significant increase in mortgage interest rates that started in 2022. Meanwhile, the median sale price for the overall region increased in each of the past three years, with an overall increase of \$46,000 between 2019 and 2022, representing an increase of 33.1% (approximately 11.0% annually). Of the three counties in the region, Ottawa County experienced the largest increase in median sale price (\$88,000, 51.2%) since 2019. While not at the same degree, home prices of product sold over the past four years within Erie County increased by \$47,000 (34.8%) and Huron County had an increase of \$31,645 (25.7%). The rapid escalation of home prices is likely making homebuying a greater challenge for many area households, particularly lower-income households.



Overall, there is a relatively limited amount of for-sale housing available for purchase in the PSA, and while a notable portion of available housing is affordable to lower-income households, these homes are generally over 70 years old and likely have additional costs associated with repairs or improvements that many households cannot afford. A total of 217 housing units were identified within the PSA (Firelands Region) that were listed as *available* for purchase as of January 2023. Based on the local historical sales trends of a monthly absorption rate of 160 homes, the region’s 217 homes listed as available for purchase represent approximately 1.4 months of supply. Typically, healthy and well-balanced markets have an available supply that should take about four to six months to absorb (if no other units are added to the market). The PSA’s inventory is considered low and indicates limited available supply. When comparing the 217 available units with the overall inventory of 54,667 owner-occupied units, the PSA has a vacancy/availability rate of 0.4%, which is well below the normal range of 2.0% to 3.0% for a well-balanced for-sale/owner-occupied market and reflective of a shortage of for-sale supply. To further highlight housing availability in the PSA, we have conducted a more refined analysis of available supply by price point.

The following table summarizes the distribution of available for-sale residential units by *price point* for the PSA (Firelands Region):

Available For-Sale Housing by Price (As of January 27, 2023)			
List Price	Number Available	Percent of Supply	Average Days on Market
Erie County			
Up to \$99,999	15	21.1%	134
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16	22.5%	77
\$150,000 to \$199,999	9	12.7%	61
\$200,000 to \$249,999	6	8.5%	50
\$250,000 to \$299,999	6	8.5%	59
\$300,000+	19	26.8%	79
Total	71	100.0%	84

Source: Realtor.com & Bowen National Research

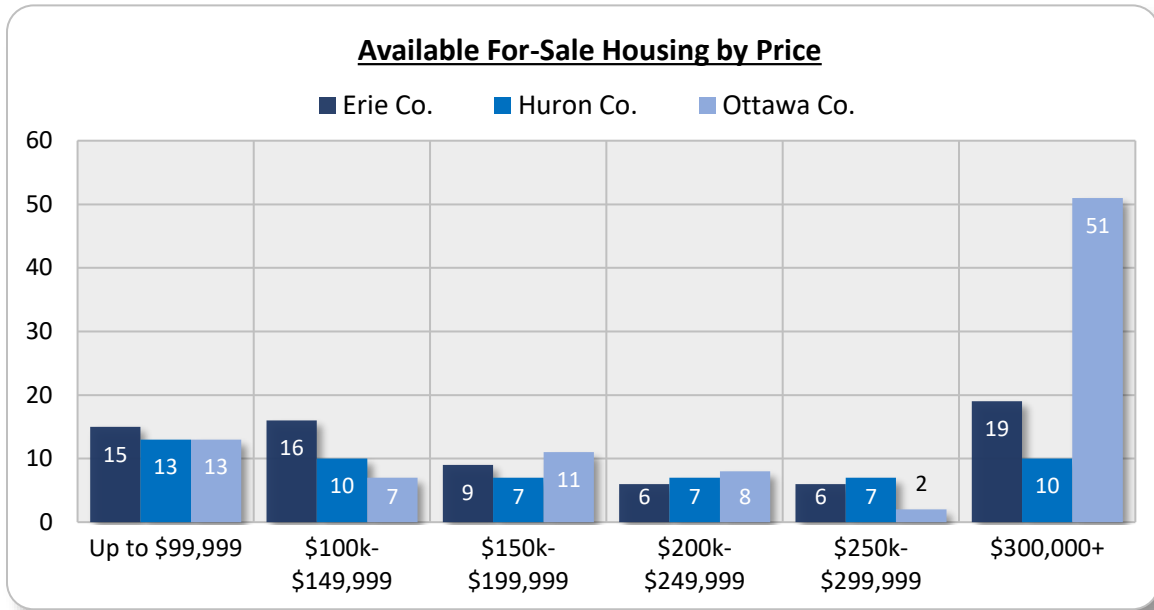
Available For-Sale Housing by Price (As of January 27, 2023)			
List Price	Number Available	Percent of Supply	Average Days on Market
Huron County			
Up to \$99,999	13	24.1%	93
\$100,000 to \$149,999	10	18.5%	53
\$150,000 to \$199,999	7	13.0%	79
\$200,000 to \$249,999	7	13.0%	94
\$250,000 to \$299,999	7	13.0%	60
\$300,000+	10	18.5%	110
Total	54	100.0%	83
Ottawa County			
Up to \$99,999	13	14.1%	90
\$100,000 to \$149,999	7	7.6%	53
\$150,000 to \$199,999	11	12.0%	53
\$200,000 to \$249,999	8	8.7%	58
\$250,000 to \$299,999	2	2.2%	37
\$300,000+	51	55.4%	143
Total	92	100.0%	108
Firelands Region (PSA)			
Up to \$99,999	41	18.9%	99
\$100,000 to \$149,999	33	15.2%	102
\$150,000 to \$199,999	27	12.4%	72
\$200,000 to \$249,999	21	9.7%	64
\$250,000 to \$299,999	15	6.9%	89
\$300,000+	80	36.9%	105
Total	217	100.0%	94

Source: Realtor.com & Bowen National Research

The largest share (36.9%) of available housing units in the PSA is priced at \$300,000 or above. These higher-priced homes have been on the market for an average of 105 days, which is slightly above the overall average of 94 days for homes at all price points in the PSA. Among the three counties in the Firelands Region, Ottawa County has the largest number of these higher-priced homes available for sale. Note that homes priced above \$300,000 in Ottawa County are on the market for an average of 143 days. It appears many of these homes may be targeting vacation and/or second-home buyers.

The Firelands Region also has a notable share (34.1%) of available homes priced below \$150,000. These housing units are primarily older single-family homes that typically have only one bathroom and a large portion of these homes were built prior to 1950. Therefore, given the age of much of the lower priced available supply, it is likely that much of this product is lower quality and requires substantial investment to repair, weatherize and modernize such product. There appears to be a region-wide shortage of homes priced between \$200,000 and \$300,000, a price point typically in demand by middle-class households. Available housing units between \$200,000 and \$300,000 only accounted for 16.6% of all available housing units in the PSA. In most cases, the average number of days on market for homes within this price range was below the overall PSA average of 94 days, reflective of the high level of demand for such product.

The distribution of available homes in the PSA by *price point* is illustrated in the following graph:



The region has more than 200 sites that can potentially support residential development. A total of 239 properties were identified as potential sites for residential development within the Firelands Region. Most of these properties were vacant or undeveloped parcels of land that could potentially support residential development, though some sites consisted of existing structures that could be repurposed into housing. Of these properties, a total of 58 properties are comprised of two or more acres, while the remaining 181 smaller properties are comprised of less than two acres. The 58 larger properties represent approximately 1,100 total acres of land. Note that 22 of the 58 larger identified properties consist of over 10 acres of land each, providing the ability to develop larger residential projects that may include a single-family home subdivision or multifamily housing. The 181 additional properties (parcels of less than two acres) represent a combined land area of 97.64 acres, which represents approximately 8% of the total acreage identified as part of this survey. Note that many of these smaller properties represent infill development opportunities for single-family homes or smaller multifamily buildings in the Firelands Region. While numerous factors influence the development potential of a particular site, such as proximity to community services, access to public utilities, zoning or flood plain designation, and site marketability and surrounding land uses, the feasibility of each site is beyond the scope of this study. Details of the 58 largest sites are included on pages VII-41 and 42 of this report. Based on this analysis, it appears there is a sufficient number of potential housing development sites within the PSA (Firelands Region) to support an increase of residential development. These sites should be leveraged to support local housing efforts.

Community Input

To gain information, perspective and insight about the Fireland Region’s housing issues and the factors influencing housing decisions by its residents, developers and others, Bowen National Research conducted targeted surveys of three specific groups: Stakeholders, Employers, and Residents/Commuters. In total, nearly 650 survey responses were received from a broad cross section of the community. The following is a summary of **key** responses from the three surveys conducted by our firm. It should be noted that some responses required respondents to provide a level or degree of response. In such cases, we provided a weighted score that is denoted by an asterisk. Lastly, it should be noted that the following table only summarizes the more notable findings and only those of the overall Firelands Region. All responses, including those from the individual counties, are provided in Section IX.

Summary of Stakeholder Survey Results Firelands Region, Ohio		
Category	Top Needs / Issues	Consensus
Housing Needs by Price Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For-Sale Housing (Less than \$150,000) Rental Housing (\$500-\$999/month) Rental Housing (Less than \$500/month) 	85.3* 82.4* 80.9*
Housing Needs by Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-Income Workforce (<\$30k) Moderate Income Workforce (\$30k-\$60k) 	94.1* 94.1*
Housing Needs by Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Two-Story Single-Family Homes Ranch Homes/Single Floor Plan Units 	79.4* 77.9*
Housing Issues Experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent Affordability Limited Availability 	88.2% 82.4%
Priority by Construction Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repair/Renovation/Revitalization of Existing Housing 	77.9*
Common Residential Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of Labor/Materials Development Costs Cost of Infrastructure 	82.4% 76.5% 64.7%
Best Options to Reduce Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration Between Public and Private Sectors Educate Public on Importance of Diff. Types of Housing Build Consensus Among Communities/Advocates Educate Public on Importance of Housing 	64.7% 47.1% 41.2% 41.2%
Areas of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop New Housing Improve Public Transportation Renovate/Repurpose Buildings for Housing 	70.6% 41.2% 41.2%
Renter Assistance Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credit Repair Assistance Housing Placement Service 	52.9% 52.9%
Homeowner/Buyer Assistance Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property Maintenance Education Home Repair Assistance 	82.4% 70.6%
Housing Types for Special Needs Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Permanent Supportive Housing</i> ranked as the highest need for all three special needs populations Persons with a Disability Persons with a Mental Illness Persons with Substance Abuse/Addiction 	56.3* 75.0* 75.0*

*Denotes weighted score

Summary of Employer Survey Results Firelands Region, Ohio		
Category	Top Needs / Issues	Consensus
Housing Issues for Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of Available Housing Unaffordable Rental Housing Unaffordable For-Sale Housing 	45.2% 42.9% 35.7%
Impacts for Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty Attracting Employees Difficulty Retaining Employees Unable to Grow/Expand Business 	35.9% 28.2% 20.5%
Effects of Adequate Housing Supply for Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much More or Somewhat More Likely to Hire New Employees Additional Employees Hired 	52.3% 120 to 140
Current Employer Provided Housing Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do Not Currently Provide Housing Assistance to Employees Provide Some Type of Housing Assistance to Employees 	80.0% 20.0%
Housing Assistance Program Consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Housing Relocation Services/Assistance Housing Relocation Reimbursement Rental Security Deposit Assistance 	20.5% 13.6% 11.4%
Housing Programs or Policy Importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Housing Development/Redevelopment Renter Assistance Homebuyer Assistance 	56.3* 47.6* 46.3*
Employee Housing Needs by Product Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entry Level/Workforce For-Sale Housing (Below \$200,000) Affordable Rental Housing (Under \$750/Month) Moderate Market-Rate Rental Housing (\$750-\$1,250/Month) 	72.7% 70.5% 52.3%
Employee Housing Needs by Product Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single-Family Homes (Owner) Single Family Homes (Rental) Multifamily Apartments 	86.4% 59.1% 29.6%

*Denotes weighted score

Summary of Resident/Commuter Survey Results Firelands Region, Ohio		
Category	Top Needs / Issues	Consensus
Housing Issues Experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost Burdened (30% or more of income toward housing cost) Credit score not high enough for a lease/mortgage Did not have sufficient deposit/down payment 	24.3% 8.0% 7.6%
Housing Market Rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good, No Issues Fair, Some Issues Poor, Many Issues No Opinion 	4.0% 42.5% 47.7% 5.8%
Difficulty Locating Suitable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very Difficult Somewhat Difficult Not Difficult 	59.2% 36.5% 4.3%
Issues Negatively Impacting Housing Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Prices/Rents Not Enough Housing/Rental Options (Few Vacancies) Mismatch Between Jobs/Wages and Housing Costs Housing Being Converted to Short-Term/Vacation Rentals 	72.1% 45.5% 25.1% 24.6%
Housing Types Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rental Housing (\$500-\$1,000/Month) For-Sale Housing (\$100,000-\$200,000) For-Sale Housing (Less than \$100,000) 	68.9% 48.3% 47.3%
Housing Styles Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apartments Modern Move-In Ready Single-Family Homes Ranch Homes/Single Floor Plan Units 	65.3* 64.7* 61.2*
Non-Resident Interest in Relocating to Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-Resident Respondents Willing to Relocate 	45.0%

*Denotes a weighted score

Key findings illustrated the general consensus from *all* surveyed groups that housing affordability and availability were the greatest housing challenges the area experienced. Most respondents indicated that housing with rents of less than \$1,000 and home prices less than \$200,000 were most needed. Some of the most commonly cited housing-related issues include rent and purchase affordability, the lack of down payment or security deposit, and credit scores. The consensus among respondents indicated local employers are also being impacted by housing, most notably by creating a difficulty in attracting employees. More than half of employer respondents indicated they would be at least somewhat likely to hire more employees if adequate housing were available. Most stakeholders believed that priorities should be placed on providing homebuyer property maintenance education, home repair assistance, renter credit repair assistance, and housing placement services. The most common barriers to residential development cited by stakeholders included cost of labor/materials, development costs, and cost of infrastructure. Meanwhile most common solutions to reducing barriers to development include collaboration between various parties and educating the public on various housing issues. Additional results of the various community surveys are in Section IX: Community Input Results and Analysis.

Housing Gap Estimates

The PSA 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 Firelands Region has a five-year **rental** housing gap of 4,166 units and a **for-sale** housing gap of 6,262 units. While there are housing gaps among all affordability levels of both rental and for-sale product, the rental housing gap is distributed most heavily among the lower priced product (rents of \$1,430 or less) and the for-sale housing gap is primarily for product priced at \$197,000 or higher. Details of this analysis, including our methodology and assumptions, are included in Section VIII.

The following table summarizes the approximate rental housing gap within each county in the PSA (Firelands Region) over the next five years.

Overall Rental Housing Gaps		
Area	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap
Erie County	1,637	39.3%
Huron County	1,699	40.8%
Ottawa County	830	19.9%
Firelands Region	4,166	100.0%

Overall, there is a housing gap of 4,166 rental units in the region over the five-year projection period. 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 following table summarizes the approximate for-sale housing gap within each county in the PSA (Firelands Region) over the next five years.

Overall For-Sale Housing Gaps		
Area	Housing Gap (Units)	Share of Region's Gap
Erie County	2,734	43.7%
Huron County	2,094	33.4%
Ottawa County	1,434	22.9%
Firelands Region	6,262	100.0%

The overall for-sale housing gap in the PSA (Firelands Region) is for approximately 6,262 units over the five-year projection period. 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 also 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 various growth opportunities and be unable to meet the needs of its current residents without additional housing.

The preceding estimates are based on current government policies and incentives, recent and projected demographic trends, current and anticipated economic trends, and available and planned residential units. Numerous factors impact a market's ability to support new housing product. This is particularly true of individual housing projects or units. Certain design elements, pricing structures, target market segments (e.g., seniors, workforce, families, etc.), product quality and location all influence the actual number of units that can be supported. Demand estimates could exceed those shown in the preceding table if the community changes policies or offers incentives to encourage people to move into the market or for developers to develop new housing product.

Recommended Housing Strategies

The following summarizes key strategies that should be considered to address housing issues and needs of the market. These strategies do not need to be done concurrently, nor do all strategies need implemented to create an impact. Instead, the following housing strategies should be used as a guide by the local government, stakeholders, developers and residents to help inform housing decisions.

Set realistic/attainable short-term housing goals, outline long-term objectives and monitor progress. Using the housing needs estimates and recommendations provided in this report as a guide, each county should set realistic short-term (two to three years) housing development goals along with long-term (five years or longer) objectives to support housing. Short-term goals should be focused on establishing an Action Plan that outlines priorities for the county, such as broad housing policies, initiatives, and incentives that support the preservation and development of residential units. The findings and recommendations included in this report should serve as a guide for developing an Action Plan. Long-term objectives should include establishing a goal for the number of housing units that should be built or repaired and broadly outline the types of housing that should be considered, such as rentals and for-sale housing, as well as possible geographical locations (e.g., within walkable communities, along public transit corridors, selected neighborhoods, municipalities, townships, etc.). The goals should also broadly outline affordability (e.g., income levels) objectives and market segments (e.g., families, seniors, and disabled) that should be served. From such goals, interested parties should periodically collect key metrics (e.g., vacancy rates, changes in rents/prices, reassess cost burdened and overcrowded housing, evaluate housing cost increases relative to income/wage growth, etc.) so that they can monitor progress and adjust efforts to support stated goals.

Develop community-/neighborhood-specific and regional-level housing plans. As shown throughout this report, the selected submarkets and each county in the Firelands Region each have some unique demographic characteristics and trends, along with different housing characteristics and challenges. Efforts should be made to develop specific housing plans for each targeted submarket as well as for individual communities and downtown areas. It is also clear from this report that the each of the three counties have many similar attributes and challenges, along with an interdependence with each respective county. It will be important that the county governments work together with other municipalities and townships to address mutual housing issues whenever possible. This may be in the form of joint grant applications, agreements over infrastructure, holding joint strategic housing planning sessions and/or work groups, supporting capacity building through the pairing of city-county resources, and increasing the impact of development incentives through the use of complementary policy tools. Additional discussion and examples of such strategies can be found on the Local Housing Solutions website at: www.Localhousingsolutions.org

Consider capacity building through organizational efforts and/or hiring professionals to spearhead housing efforts. A critical element to achieving housing goals is to have a person or organization with the capacity to take the lead on local housing efforts. This may involve community leaders and local housing advocates creating a more permanent volunteer-based housing coalition or a more formal HOME consortium that involves joint efforts of local governments. The coalition would serve as the entity that would investigate and discuss housing issues and devise possible solutions and advise local government on possible housing initiatives, while the HOME consortium would be collaboration between local governments that would be eligible to apply for federal HOME Program funding and develop a regional approach for housing (See: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/2426/establishing-and-managing-a-successful-home-consortium/>). It could also involve hiring/retaining a housing specialist that would be responsible for facilitating housing initiatives on a regular basis. This can be an individual already working for a local municipal or county government, or someone that works for a nonprofit group, the regional housing authority, or other housing advocacy group, or it can be a newly retained housing specialist with knowledge and experience in housing.

Develop strategies to attract people that currently commute into the Firelands Region to live in the region. As shown in the Personal Mobility portion of Section VII of this report, there are 68,264 persons employed within the Firelands Region, of which 33,996 commute into the region for work but do not live there. These 33,996 non-residents account for one-half (49.8%) of the people employed in the region and represent a notable base of potential support for future residential development. While the socioeconomic profile of these in-commuters consists of a variety of people, most are between the ages of 30 and 54 years and earn \$3,333 or more per month (\$40,000 or more annually). Over 20% of the in-commuters have typical commutes of 25 or more miles and may represent the most likely commuters to consider moving to the Firelands Region. As shown in Section IX: Community Input (starting on page IX-20), 45% of non-county residents indicated they would consider a move to the Firelands Region. While the sample size of the non-resident survey was small, the 45% share expressing interest in moving to the subject region is in line with numerous surveys Bowen National Research has conducted of non-resident commuters. As a result, it is anticipated that as additional housing is added to the PSA (Fireland Region), the area will have a greater probability of attracting these commuters as permanent residents. Area stakeholders should support efforts to develop product that will appeal to commuters and help to promote the benefits of living in the Firelands Region, such as the overall cost of living, affordability of housing, higher education attainment, lower poverty rates, overall quality of life and numerous other attributes and assets the area has to offer. Housing product preferences of residents and commuters are provided on pages IX-27 and 28.

Market the Fireland Region's housing needs and development opportunities to potential residential development partners. The Firelands Region has many assets and attributes that can be promoted, including various quality of life attributes (e.g., lower cost of living, recreational opportunities, etc.), residential development potential for several thousand housing units, and more than 50 possible developable sites. As shown starting on page VII-71, over 40 organizations were identified that represent potential development partners for the subject region. Local stakeholders should attempt to market the region to the residential developers (both for-profit and nonprofit), real estate investors, lending institutions, housing advocacy groups and others active in the region and state. Marketing of the community through trade publications, direct solicitation or public venues (e.g., housing and economic conferences) should be considered. The promotion of market data (including this Housing Needs Assessment), development opportunities, housing programs and incentives should be the focus of such efforts.

Consider developing a centralized housing resource center. While housing information for the subject region can be found through a variety of organizations and online sources, there does not appear to be a single online housing source for the region or for any of the three individual counties. The development of an online resource center should be considered that includes or directs people to development and housing resources (potential sites, building and zoning information, incentives, housing data, Housing Choice Vouchers, housing placement or counseling services, etc.) that can help both developers and residents.

Implement/modify policies to encourage or support the development of new residential units, with possible emphasis on affordable workforce housing and senior-oriented housing. As shown in this report, there appears to be very few available rental units that are affordable to households earning less than 80% of Area Median Household Income (household income of up to around \$60,000 for a family of four) within the region and relatively long wait lists for such housing. Meanwhile, although over one-third (34.1%) of the homes *available* to purchase in the region are priced under \$150,000 and could be affordable to many lower-income households, most of these homes are well over 70 years old and likely require additional financial resources for repairs, modernization and weatherization that many low-income households cannot afford. In an effort to support the development and preservation of more affordable housing alternatives, local governments should consider supporting projects being developed/preserved with affordable housing development programs (e.g., Tax Credit and HUD programs), providing pre-development financial assistance, waiving or lowering government permitting/development fees, implementing inclusionary zoning (requiring market-rate developers to include some affordable housing units), supporting a Housing Trust Fund, or supporting/expanding the three counties' existing land banks and their Community Housing Impact and Preservation (CHIP) Programs. Code compliance/enforcement efforts should continue to be an integral part of the region's efforts to ensure housing is brought up to code and maintained at expected standards. For properties that are not targets for local land bank acquisition, the region may also want to consider the removal of liens or reduction of fines on abandoned/vacant properties to encourage residential

transactions of such properties, increasing the likelihood that such housing would be remedied or removed. Ultimately, housing initiatives should focus on those programs that support low-income households (seniors and families), workforce households, and first-time homebuyers. Additional housing is needed in order to have a healthy housing market, which will ultimately contribute to the local economy, quality of life and overall prosperity of the Firelands Region.

Preservation of existing affordable housing alternatives and increasing rental opportunities for Housing Choice Voucher holders should be areas of focus.

Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are issued by local housing authorities to very low-income households (those earning up to 50% of Area Median Household Income) that help to subsidize rents that tenants pay. Within the Firelands Region, there are nearly 1,800 households waiting for a Housing Choice Voucher, illustrating the pent-up demand for this type of direct government housing assistance. It is reported that over a third (nearly 900) HCV holders in the region are unable to use their voucher. According to local sources, the inability of HCV holders to use their vouchers is most often attributed to the inability of voucher holders to find *available* housing units whose owners accept such vouchers or due to the fact that the units that they do locate do not meet their household's specific needs (e.g., bedroom type, location, etc.). Area housing advocates should consider developing a strategy to increase the opportunities for voucher holders to find housing that will accept the vouchers. This can be done through increasing housing inventory, educating landlords on the process and benefits of the HCV program, providing enhanced resources for voucher holders to find rental alternatives, and incentivizing landlords to accept vouchers. Additionally, 14 of the 21 multifamily projects in the region that operate under HUD contracts have expiration dates between late-2022 and mid-2024. Given the lack of available government-subsidized housing in the market and the long wait lists for such units, it is critical that such housing is preserved. Local housing advocates should consider reaching out to owners of properties with upcoming expiring contracts (see page VI-23 for full list) to see if there is a role for local housing advocates to play in the preservation of such 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.

The demographic analysis of the Firelands Region revealed that the region's base of younger households (between the ages of 25 and 34) is diminishing while the base of seniors (ages 65 and older) is increasing. Although many factors contribute to households by age characteristics and trends, factors such as housing product type, location and design aspects play roles in housing decisions made by certain household age cohorts. The development of multifamily housing near public transit routes and/or within walkable downtowns or neighborhoods often serves to attract younger households and support the needs of senior households. As part of this study, we evaluated the availability of public transit service, local drive times, and the walkability of selected communities and downtowns within the subject counties. Based on this review, it would appear that walkable or accessible areas in or near the downtown areas such

as Sandusky, Norwalk, Bellevue, Port Clinton, and to a lesser degree, Vermilion, Willard, Oak Harbor and Huron, all serve as potential areas which may be conducive to supporting multifamily rentals and condominium for-sale product. Additionally, there are several corridors (e.g., Grand Army of the Republic Highway, also known as U.S. Highway 6 and Milan Road, also known as U.S. Highway 250) in Sandusky that are well served by public transportation and numerous community services and may be conducive to supporting new housing. Local stakeholders should consider these various areas for potential residential development.

Consideration should be given to evaluating approaches to regulating/managing vacation rentals. Seasonal/recreational rentals, aka “vacation rentals” make up significant portions of the local housing stock in the two northern-most counties within the Firelands Region (Erie and Ottawa counties) and pose challenges to the overall permanent housing supply that is encountering availability and affordability issues. However, given that such rentals play an important role within the tourism industry that contributes significantly to the subject region’s economy, it will be important that local stakeholders find a balance between addressing local housing issues and being supportive of a housing segment that contributes to the local economy. There is no single solution to addressing the impact vacation rentals have on a market, as differences between communities (e.g., the level of influence vacation rentals have on a market, the housing priorities and goals of local communities, the influences and interests of local property owners, etc.) will ultimately dictate the directions that individual communities may take. While state legislation may guide limitations of vacation rentals in Ohio, local communities may still have decisions to make on how they treat this unique housing segment. Potential approaches could include, for example, vacation rental registrations, placing a limit on the number of vacation licenses issued, requiring home safety inspections, having local agent requirements, allowing exemptions during certain events or time periods, or implementing zoning modifications that limit vacation rentals in specific zoning districts (e.g., maximum number of occupants per dwelling unit, minimum number of parking spaces provided, etc.). Some possible examples of local level initiatives to consider include those implemented in:

- Sandusky, Ohio (https://www.cityofsandusky.com/departments/code_compliance/transient_rental.php)
- New Buffalo, Michigan (<https://cityofnewbuffalo.org/departments/short-term-rentals/>)
- Holland, Michigan (<https://www.cityofholland.com/848/Rental-Certification-Licensing-Guide>)
- Charlevoix, Michigan (<https://www.cityofcharlevoix.org/427/Short-Term-Rentals>)
- North Royalton, Ohio (https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/northroyalton/latest/noroyal_oh/0-0-0-67297)

Communities may also want to consider an outright ban on vacation rentals by reviewing policies in places like Park Township, Michigan (https://parktownship.org/our_offices/short_term_rentals.php). A community like Steamboat Springs, Colorado used the combination of a partial ban on vacation rentals within selected zoning districts (<https://www.steamboatsprings.net/1361/Rules-Regulations>) along with passing a publicly approved ballot initiative for a short-term rental housing tax to raise revenues to help support affordable housing initiatives (<https://steamboatsprings.net/119/Municipal-Tax>). While communities may ultimately put certain vacation rental requirements in place, they may want to consider establishing a pilot program of various approaches to better evaluate their selected methods before making more permanent decisions on how to address the vacation rental market.

Develop next-steps plans. Using the findings and recommendations of this report, local stakeholders should begin to prioritize housing objectives and refine housing strategies that best fit the overarching goals of the region and its communities. Input from stakeholders and residents should be solicited. From these efforts a specific Action Plan could be put together with measurable goals and a timeline to follow.