

Municipality of the District of St. Mary's Municipal Housing Needs Report

2023

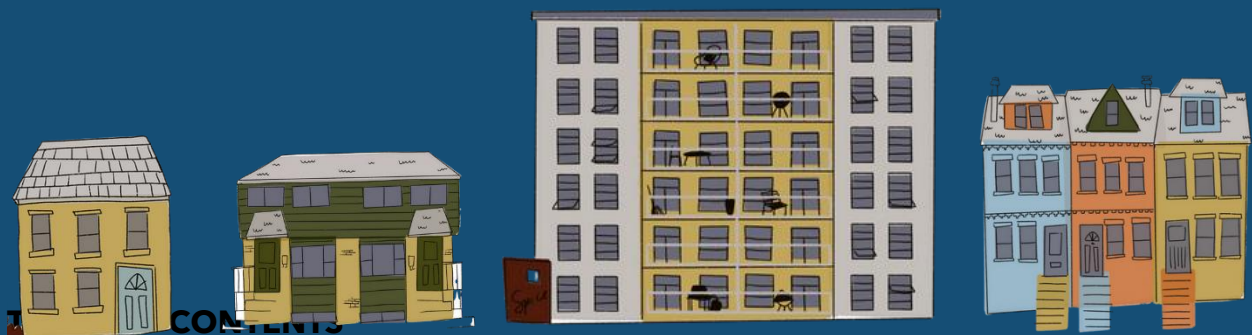


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1 Introduction

The purpose of a housing needs assessment is to understand the current and anticipated housing conditions across a given geography, in the case of this and accompanying reports, the conditions across the province of Nova Scotia and its municipalities. Generally, this work strengthens the ability of local stakeholders and governments to:

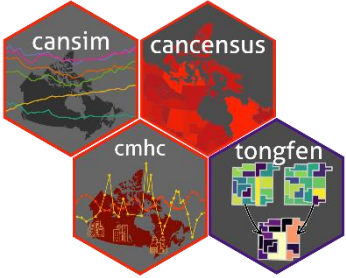
- Identify current and future housing needs and
- Identify existing and projected gaps in housing supply

Empowering municipalities and the province to become effective partners in housing provision requires reliable data to identify the stock necessary to meet current and future needs and how to drive related policy and investment. The insights generated by a needs assessment can help to inform ongoing land use and social planning initiatives at the local level, as well as provide hard evidence in support of advocacy to more senior levels of government.

The goal of this municipal report is to share appropriate, available, and accurate data to municipal governments so that they further understand their current housing situation and what they might anticipate. It is important to note that the same data methodologies and calculations are applied across each municipality, based on available data. This means that reports cannot consider all the nuanced conditions of individual communities that would be known best by municipal staff, stakeholders, and residents.

The report should be considered a form of base knowledge, intended for local review and discussion. Municipalities should use local information to provide additional context and information for discussion and decision-making as they see fit. For more details about methodologies, provincial trends, and definitions, please refer to the **Provincial Report**.

Note that all data references the municipality unless noted otherwise.



2 Key Findings

Housing shortage

As of the end of 2022, there was a gap between housing demand and the available supply of about 60 units, including both market and non-market housing. It is estimated to increase to 70 units by 2027.

Using current construction trends (based on historical permitting data from Statistics Canada), 15 new units are estimated to be introduced into the market annually over the next 5 years, leaving a surplus of 5 units by 2027.

While the relationship between supply and demand in the municipality may indicate an eventual housing surplus, market conditions among other nearby municipalities and Nova Scotia overall may continue to have an impact on local house prices. Furthermore, there is a regional shift in demand from seniors, which may lead to the municipality needing to meet the needs of this expanding demographic.

Population

Over the last 5 years, the population of St. Mary's decreased by 3%, compared to the provincial growth rate of 5%. The municipality grew across one of the defined age cohorts between 2016 and 2021, with strong growth among 85+ year olds. This follows the provincial trend of aging populations. This has led to an increased demand for smaller dwellings among older populations, owing perhaps, to downsizing after retirement.

Finance and Treasury Board (FTB) estimates suggests that the 2022 total population was 2,170, with a projected increase of 1% between 2022 and 2027. Senior populations should increase during that time, with decreases mostly occurring among non-senior populations.

The change in population between 2027 to 2032 may return to overall decline. Even with growth in senior populations, significant losses among other age cohorts may lead to a total loss of 5%. This demonstrates a long-term need to meet the needs of an expanding senior age group.

Households

Between 2016 and 2021, there was an overall marginal (<1%) increase in households, with tenures split between 90% owners and 10% renters. Non-census families (i.e., single persons or roommate households) have seen the largest increase - 24% since 2016. Households in St. Mary's are also getting smaller - Total 1-person households increased 35%. Interestingly, there was a 69% rise in 4-person households between Census periods.

Estimates suggests total households reached 1,050 in 2022, with a potential decrease of 1% from 2022 to 2027 (10 total). Household losses should predominantly occur among older working professional led households (45- to 64-year-olds). The greatest rate of growth should be among senior-led households.

Non-market housing

As of January 2023, the District of St. Mary's had a public-housing inventory of 20 units, of which all were senior-specific.

Short-term rentals (STRs)

About 1% of the municipality's housing inventory may have been used as a short-term commercial rental in 2021 (the last full year of data). This means that upwards of 19 units might have been removed from the long-term market in 2022, though it is uncertain exactly how many would have been long-term rentals or purchased for permanent occupancy if not used as a STR.

Shelter costs

The average rents reported by the Property Valuation Services Corporation (PVSC) was \$539 in 2021. This is a decrease of 13% from 2018. There has been a 0.4% increase in units of all sizes between 2018 and 2021. St Mary's vacancy rate has gone from 6.5% to 6.3% between 2018 and 2021, falling above the healthy vacancy range of 3% to 5% reported by PVSC across Nova Scotia.

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Survey Respondents from the Municipality
of the District of St. Mary's

Top Housing Challenges:

1. I am not experiencing any challenges with finding affordable housing
2. Finding housing at a price I can afford
3. Finding housing that is in good condition and not requiring repairs
4. Finding housing that is close to essential services and amenities (for example, groceries)
5. Finding housing that is suitable for my family situation (for example, the number of bedrooms matches family size)

If there were no limitation on housing, top choices would be:

1. House (single detached, duplex, mobile home)
2. Apartment (rental)
3. Condominium
4. I am already in housing that is suitable to my needs
5. Government-owned Public Housing

60%

of respondents have considered leaving
their community due to housing issues



Municipality's public survey responses

Median municipality home prices increased significantly between 2019 and 2022. The rapid rise in prices is a combination of increased demand and low interest rates (until recently).

Affordability

In the municipality, affordability has fallen since 2016. At least 47% of all couples, 55% of all lone-parent households, and 92% of all single person households earned below the estimated income required to afford the 2022 median sale price of a local dwelling. For rentals, at least 18% of **renting** lone-parents and 55% of **renting** single persons earned below the estimated income required to afford the 2021 average local rents.

Housing need

When a household lives in a dwelling that requires more than 30% of its before-tax household income, is overcrowded, and needs major repairs - and no alternative exists - it is in Core Housing Need. In 2021, about 11% (115 total) of the municipality's households lived in Core Housing Need. Need is particularly prevalent among:

- 25% of renter households (25);
- 56% of lone-parent households (25); and
- 19% of single persons / roommate households (75)

Generally, the number of people in and rates of Core Housing Need across segments has decreased since 2016 (even while affordability for many categories). However, comparing 2021 to 2016 rates (particularly for affordability) is difficult given the influence of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) on incomes. Overall, the municipality reported a higher rate of core housing need than that of Nova Scotia (10%).

3 Housing Supply

3.1 Market Housing

As of the 2021 Census, there were 1,538 private dwellings across the District of St. Mary's, 68% of which were occupied by usual residents (those who live in St. Mary's

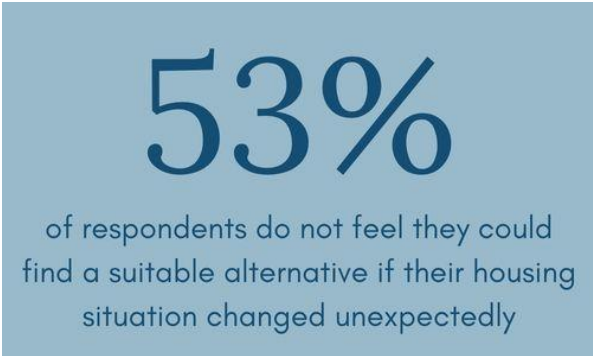
permanently). In other words, 32% of the dwelling inventory is not categorized as being used for permanent tenancy. For instance, many may be used as recreational properties like cottages, whether owned by Nova Scotia residents, residents from other provinces, or foreign residents. Some of the dwellings may also be considered unoccupied. Unfortunately, specific data about the remaining 32% is not available.

For those dwellings occupied by usual residents, Table 3-1 summarizes the totals and distribution by structure type for St. Mary’s. The greatest share of the current supply is currently held by single-detached homes at 90%

Table 3-1: Total & Share of Dwellings Occupied by a Usual Resident by Structure Type

Total	Single-detached	Semi-detached	Row house	Duplex apt	Apt (< 5 storeys)	Apt (5+ storeys)	Movable	Other
1,045	940	5	0	5	25	0	75	0
100%	90%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	7%	0%

Source: 2021 Census



Municipality’s public survey responses

3.1.1 Construction Activity

The pace of construction is represented by the annual total units permitted, units started, and units completed - these are separate but related phases of the same unit construction process. A permit signifies the anticipated future housing to be built, a start reflects how many permits led to a shovel in the ground, and a completion represents how many units were actually added to the occupiable supply. Construction takes time and its pace varies depending on the building type. Consequently, the number of units permitted in one year cannot be directly linked to starts or completions in another. The **Provincial Report** offers a detailed explanation of each element.

Permit activity refers to the total units permitted by a municipality. Table 3-2 shows the number units permitted, started, and completed in the District of St. Mary’s between 2010 to 2022 (note that 2022 data reflects an extrapolated September 2022 total).

Table 3-2: Permit Activity by Dwelling Type

Units permitted							
	2010	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022*
Total	9	8	16	16	24	15	19
Single	4	5	10	10	16	13	16
Semi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Row	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Apartment	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Other	5	3	5	6	8	2	1

* 2022 data extrapolated from September 2022 data to end of year 2022.

Source: Statistics Canada Custom CSD Tables 34-10-0001, 34-10-0066

Table 3-3 summarizes the change in unit size and tenure between the 2016 and 2021 Censuses. The distribution of new units shows what sizes are most occupied by renter and owner households. These Census results indicate that the owner and renter occupied supply has not changed between Census years. Note that totals for dwellings may not equate the exact total due to Statistics Canada's random rounding.

Table 3-3: Change in Units by Size & Tenure between Census Periods

	Total	Studio / 1-bedroom	2-bedroom	3+ bedroom
Owned dwellings				
Owned (2016) - 90% of total HHs	945	50	295	590
Owned (2021) - 90% of total HHs	945	75	265	605
Change in units	0	25	-30	15
Share of change	100%	36%	43%	21%
Rented dwellings				
Rented (2016) - 10% of total HHs	100	35	10	55
Rented (2021) - 10% of total HHs	100	30	20	55
Change in units	0	-5	10	0
Share of change	100%	33%	67%	0%

Source: Statistics Canada Tables 98-400-X2016220 & 98-10-0240

Between 2016 and 2021, total dwellings (not only occupied by a usual resident) decreased from 1,667 to 1,538 - a 129-unit decrease. During the same time, there was no change in total dwellings that were permanently occupied. While not an exact relationship, these concurrent trends suggest that the loss of dwellings over the five years could have mostly been due to a combination of demolitions, more dwellings

being deemed uninhabitable, or an increase in the number of homes considered to be seasonal (i.e., they are not fit for year-round habitation, like three-season cottages).

Table 3-4: Change in Total Dwellings versus Dwellings Occupied by Usual Residents

Dwellings	2016	2021	% change
Total dwellings (a)	1,667	1,538	-8%
Dwelling occupied by a usual resident (b)	1,045	1,045	0%
Share (b / a)	63%	68%	

Source: Statistics Canada 2016 & 2021 Census

3.1.2 Housing Accelerator Fund Considerations

The Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) is a program introduced by the Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation (CMHC) with the objective to bolster the housing supply at an accelerated pace. Local governments within Canada - including First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments who have delegated authority over land use planning and development approvals - are eligible to apply to the HAF. Interested municipalities can find the HAF’s pre-application reference material [here](#). Note that a Housing Needs Assessment (such as this one) is required as part of a complete application (though not needed immediately for the initial submission).

An applicant is required to provide two projections to CMHC. The applicant must calculate their own projections based on reasonable assumptions and data sources, including Statistics Canada and/or its own administrative data. There is no prescribed formula; however, projections should be based on a three-year period ending September 1, 2026. The two projections are:

- The total permitted housing units projected without program funding.
- The total number of permitted housing units projected with program funding. This second projection is known as the “housing supply growth target.”

The data shared in this overall section can be used to inform local decisions related to projected permits by September 2026. For additional guidance, Table 3-5 summarizes the growth by unit type (more closely defined with HAF application requirements) and tenure between 2016 and 2021.

CMHC does not prescribe a formula for projections, leaving this decision up to the municipality who would know best about on-the-ground construction activity (not only by the numbers but also through discussions with local builders/developers).

A simple example includes using most recent permitting data (the five-year average between 2017 and 2021), applying the historical shares of new construction between 2016 and 2021, and comparing the potential units permitted to the estimated total demand over the three years (based on Housing Shortage data - Section 4). The results,

shown in Table 3-6, are for discussion purposes and not a prescribed logic - the municipality can form its own approach based on other data provided and internal resources.

Table 3-5: Unit Change by Estimated HAF Dwelling Type & Tenure, 2016 & 2021 Census

	Total	Single ^a	Missing middle ^b	Multi-unit ^c
Total dwellings				
Total (2016)	1,045	930	110	0
Total (2021)	1,045	950	100	0
Change in units	0	20	-10	0
Share of change	100%	67%	33%	0%
Owned dwellings				
Owned (2016)	945	860	80	0
Owned (2021)	945	870	80	0
Change in units	0	10	0	0
Share of change	100%	100%	0%	0%
Rented dwellings				
Rented (2016)	100	70	30	0
Rented (2021)	100	80	20	0
Change in units	0	10	-10	0
Share of change	100%	50%	50%	0%

a Single means single-detached homes, which are buildings containing 1 dwelling unit, which is completely separated on all sides from any other dwelling or structure.

b Missing middle refers to ground-oriented housing types that exist between single-detached and mid-rise apartments. This includes garden suites, secondary suites, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, row houses, courtyard housing, low-rise apartments (less than 4 storeys). Note that this definition for low-rise does not match the Statistics Canada cut off less than 5 storeys.

c Multi-unit refers to apartments that are 4-or-more storeys. The HAF further defines these by whether they are in close proximity to rapid transit or not, which is not possible to summarize based on the data available.

Source: Statistics Canada Tables 98-400-X2016220 & 98-10-0240

Note that the final column provides the straight-lined shortage anticipated by the end of the HAF. This may not represent the total possible intervention by the HAF, as this depends on the choices made by the municipality. Rather, it highlights the total shortage the HAF can help reduce. Furthermore, values are rounded to the nearest 5.

Table 3-6: Example of Simple HAF Permit Projection

	Historical share of new housing	Possible annual units permitted	Estimated 3-year units permitted ^a	Estimated 3-year unit demand ^a	Gap that HAF can help reduce
Total	100%	15	45 (A)	60 (B)	15
Single	67%	10	30	40	10
Missing middle	33%	5	15	20	5
Multi-unit	0%	0	0	0	0

Relationship between units permitted and shortage	
C: Estimated September 2023 housing stock: ^b	1,565
Projected permitted unit growth over 3 years without HAF (A / C x 100):	2.9%
Projected permitted unit growth over 3 years needed to meet demand (B / C x 100):	3.8%
% increase in units permitted to meet shortage (B / A - 1) x 100:	33%

Relationship between units permitted and HAF requirements (rounded up to nearest 5)	
D: Estimated September 2023 housing stock: ^b	1,565
E: Projected annual units permitted (based on '16-'21 average - see Table 3-2)	15
Required units permitted over 3 years to meet minimum 1.1% average annual growth rate ^c (D x 1.1% x 3 years)	55
Required additional units permitted over 3 years to meet minimum 10% increase ^d over historical average (E x 10% x 3 years)	5

^a Units permitted between September 2023 and September 2026; 3-year unit demand includes 2022 shortage

^b 2021 Census (Statistics Canada) + 2021 permits + 2021 permits x 2/3 (September 2023 estimate)

^c Average annual units permitted (min. 1.1%) = Total number of units permitted with HAF support / 3 years / Total dwelling stock (results rounded up to nearest 5)

^d Increase in units permitted (min. 10%) = (Projected average housing supply growth rate with HAF) / Projected average housing supply growth rate without HAF - 1 (results rounded up to nearest 5)

"[St. Mary's does not] necessarily have capacity to plan for infrastructure development. There's always a hesitation to take on something as large as housing. There is need for more framework and designated financial support. There's a fear of downloading and a huge lack of communication and coordination between provinces and municipalities."

3.2 Non-Market Housing

3.2.1 Public Housing

Of the 11,200 total inventory of publicly owned dwelling units (as administered by the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Authority), 20 are located in the District of St. Mary's - all units were senior-specific and 1-bedroom units.

About 45% of St. Mary's' public housing tenants have lived in public housing for more than 5-years, with most having lived there between 1- and 5-years.

Table 3-7: Public Housing Inventory, January 2023

		Total	Family	Senior
Total unit inventory		20	0	20
Inventory by unit size	Studio	0	0	0
	1-bedroom	20	0	20
	2-bedroom	0	0	0
	3+ bedroom	0	0	0
	Not reported	0	0	0
Inventory by dwelling type	Single family	0	0	0
	Row	20	0	20
	Apartment	0	0	0
	Not reported	0	0	0
Length of tenure in public housing	Less than 1 year	6%	-	6%
	1 to 5 years	50%	-	50%
	5 to 10 years	28%	-	28%
	10+ years	17%	-	17%
Household income	Median income (mth)	\$1,820	-	\$1,820
	Median income (ann)	\$21,840	-	\$21,840

Source: Derived from Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing data

3.2.2 Rent Supplements

As of March 2023, 10 households across the Guysborough Census Division (no data is specifically available for the District of St. Mary's) were receiving rent supplement support, equivalent to 22 total people. About 40% were families, 20% were seniors, and 40/28% were classified as non-elderly households. Table 3-8 further details the percentage share of rent supplements that served a specific vulnerable population.

Table 3-8: Rent Supplement Demographics, Guysborough Census Division, March 2023

	Total	Family	Senior	Non-elderly
Total rent supplements	10	4	2	4
People benefiting	22	16	2	4
Average HH size	2.2	4.0	1.0	1.0
Average dependents	1.0	2.5	0.0	0.0
Share of supplements serving a vulnerable group:				
Indigenous person(s)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Person(s) w/ a disability	20%	25%	0%	25%
At risk of homelessness	40%	50%	0%	50%
Homeless	0%	0%	0%	0%
Newcomer(s)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mental health / addictions	10%	0%	0%	25%
Racialized person(s)	10%	25%	0%	0%
Veteran(s)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Fleeing domestic violence	0%	0%	0%	0%
Young adults	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Derived from Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing data

3.2.3 Non-Profit & Co-operative Housing and Shelters

Formal datasets related to third-party affordable housing organizations and their unit inventories are limited. The **Provincial Report** offers some discussion about what shelters exist provincially, with some detail by Economic Region.

"[St. Mary's has] no shelters, no transitional housing, no supportive housing, and very little rental stock."

3.3 Short-Term Rentals (STRs)

Between 2018 and 2022, there has been an increase of 23 dwellings used as short-term rentals. In 2022, 82% were entire homes or apartments, of which 19 were potentially¹ "commercial" units - meaning they were available or reserved more than half of the year.

¹Noted as "potentially" since 2022 data is only up to September.

If 2021 commercial units are compared to the 2021 dwelling stock (1,538 - as per the Census), about 1% of the municipality's housing inventory may have been used as a short-term commercial rental.

Table 3-9: Short-Term Rental Activity & Inventory

	Data by year				Percent change		
	2018	2020	2021	2022	'18-'20	'20-'22	18-'22**
Total unique STRs	15	29	39	38	+93%	+31%	+153%
Entire home/apt	13	25	31	31	+92%	+24%	+138%
Hotel room	0	0	0	0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Private room	2	4	6	5	+100%	+25%	+150%
Shared room	0	0	2	2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Avg annual revenue	\$3,425	\$2,613	\$2,268	\$3,202	-24%	+23%	-7%
Total market ('000s)	\$51	\$76	\$88	\$122	+47%	+61%	+137%
Commercial STRs*	10	12	15	19	+20%	+58%	+90%

* A commercial STR is one that was listed as available and/or has been reserved more than 50% of the days in a calendar year.

** 2022 data reflects as of September 2022. Commercial STRs use 9 months for their calculations versus a full year.

Source: derived from AirDNA data

4 Housing Shortage

Based on demographic modeling results (see **Provincial Report** for details), the municipality’s potential housing shortage (as of the end of 2022) may be 60 units. Note that this estimate represents the sum of all units, be they rented or owned in terms of their tenure, or market or non-market housing.

Figure 4.1 offers a summary of the trajectory of the housing shortage over the next decade under a base population growth scenario provided by Nova Scotia’s Department of Finance and Treasury Board.

In five years, the municipality may have a total dwelling demand (existing shortfall plus anticipated demand) of about 70 units, which could decrease to 55 by 2032.

Based on the recent pace of construction, supply could outpace anticipated demand. About 15 new units could be completed annually over the next decade, based on assumptions using historical data trends. That leaves a potential surplus of 5 units in 2027. Note that status quo construction follows the method used in the provincial report, being average historical permits adjusted by 5% to account for permit withdrawals or cancellations. Results are rounded to the nearest 5.²

Figure 4.1: Anticipated Unit Gap based on Total Units Required and Estimated Completions, Demographic Model Results

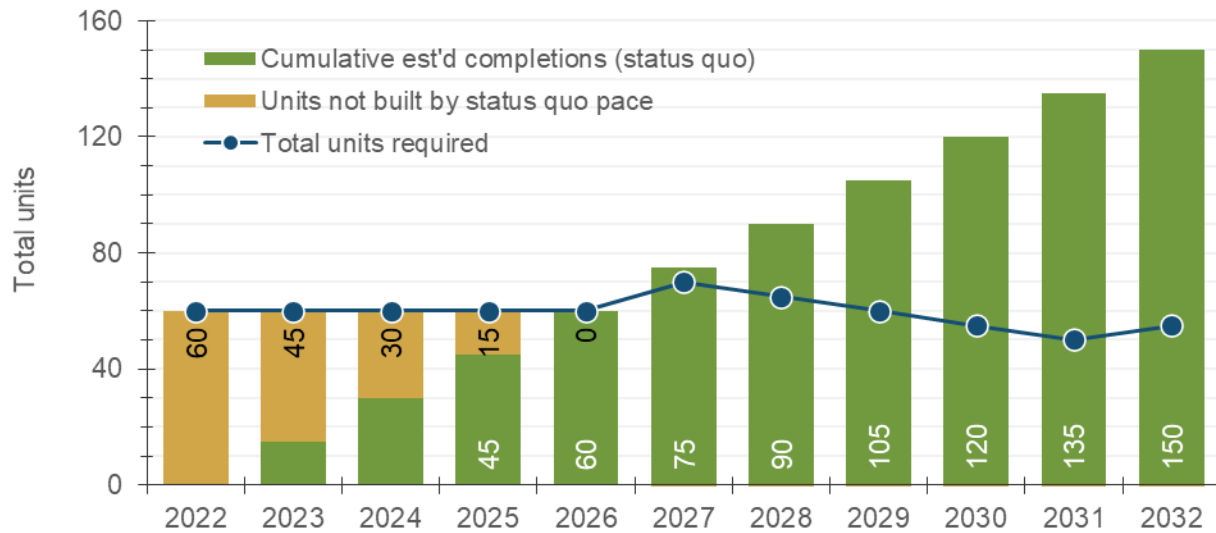


Table 4-1 summarizes possible guides for constructing unit sizes over the next half-decade. As previously described, about 70 new units may be needed to meet demand

² All municipalities use the same approach for consistency. However, for smaller municipalities, the combination of fewer units permitted and rounding practices can under or over represent anticipated construction activity. As such, greater attention should be directed to the projected demand, instead of anticipated supply, which can be later cross-reference with internal municipal data.

by 2027. Based on historical preferences of household sizes relative to household types,³ about 30% could be studio/1-bedroom dwellings (20 units), 40% 2-bedroom dwellings (30), and 30% 3+ bedroom dwellings (20). This includes the existing unit shortfall.

Table 4-1: Estimated Current & Anticipated Unit Shortfall by Unit Size, 2022-2027

	Total	Studio + 1-bedroom	2-bedroom	3+ bedroom
A: Current shortfall (end of 2022)	60	20	25	20
B: Anticipated demand by 2027	10	5	5	5
C: Total units required by 2027 (A + B)	70	20	30	20
D: Anticipated 5-year supply (status quo pace*)	75	25	30	20

* The distribution of supply is based on household preferences, not actual anticipated build out.

"[St. Mary's has] a nursing home and a hospital that offer well paying jobs. We have two doctors but not a lot of places for folks to live in to take those opportunities."

³ In this case, unit sizes reflect the preference for unit size, not the historical distribution of unit sizes in the existing inventory. Briefly, historical distributions of household sizes by household family types are used to estimate required bedrooms. The estimated share of unit sizes is then distributed into forecasted demand calculations. More explanation about how preference distributes can be found in the Housing Shortage section of the Provincial report.

5 Housing Affordability



Municipality’s public survey responses

5.1 Homeownership

Housing is becoming more expensive. This is not simply a claim for observing the appreciation of property as a commodity but also as an increase relative to other periods, levels of income, and availability.

5.1.1 Market Activity

Median sale prices across Nova Scotia have seen increases since 2016, with significant increases since 2019. St. Mary’s median sale price increased from \$78,500 to \$235,000 between 2016 and 2022. This represents a 199% increase in median sale price. Note that the significant difference may reflect annual sample sizes for residential sales.

Table 5-1: Median Sale Prices by Dwelling Type & Select Years

	Price				Percent Change		
	2010	2016	2019	2022	'10-'16	'16-'19	'19-'22
Total	\$75,750	\$78,500	\$47,900	\$235,000	+4%	-39%	+391%
Single	\$75,750	\$75,000	\$49,900	\$254,000	-1%	-33%	+409%

Source: NSAR MLS®

5.1.2 Homeownership Affordability

Table 5-2 details the percentage share of households, separated by household types, that could afford a home based on their respective income levels versus the median sale prices from 2022, however, in Municipality of District of St. Mary’s, the reported data was only available for single detached dwelling. The affordability threshold is the same used by Statistics Canada and CMHC - 30% of before-tax household income spent on shelter costs. Shelter cost calculations include the direct and in direct costs related to shelter. More detail is provided in the **Provincial Report**. Note that income bracket distributions are based on Census Division data.⁴

⁴ Since Census Division data is used, readers will notice estimate similarities between municipalities belonging to the same Census Division.

Lone parents and single persons are least likely to have income levels necessary to afford to own a home. Single-detached homes appear to be the only form available for sale locally (based on 2022 sales data), but about 55% of lone-parent households and 92% of single-persons fall below the income levels necessary to afford the median single-detached local home.

Table 5-2: Estimate of Sales Affordability by Income Level (All Households)

		2022 median sale price:			\$254,000
		% of HHs below income level			Single Detached Dwelling
Income level	Attainable sales price	Couples	Lone parents	Single persons	
\$60,000	\$179,500	32%	47%	85%	no
\$65,000	\$194,500	36%	47%	88%	no
\$70,000	\$209,500	42%	47%	88%	no
\$75,000	\$224,000	47%	55%	89%	no
\$80,000	\$239,000	50%	55%	92%	no
\$85,000	\$254,000	54%	55%	92%	yes
\$90,000	\$269,000	56%	55%	92%	yes
\$95,000	\$284,000	60%	55%	92%	yes
\$100,000	\$299,000	64%	55%	92%	yes
\$105,000	\$314,000	67%	55%	92%	yes
\$110,000	\$329,000	69%	55%	92%	yes
\$115,000	\$344,000	72%	55%	92%	yes
\$120,000	\$359,000	74%	55%	92%	yes

Homeownership	Total Dwellings	Single Detached Dwelling
Est'd income needed to buy median home	\$78,600	\$85,000
% of total households below income	65%	71%

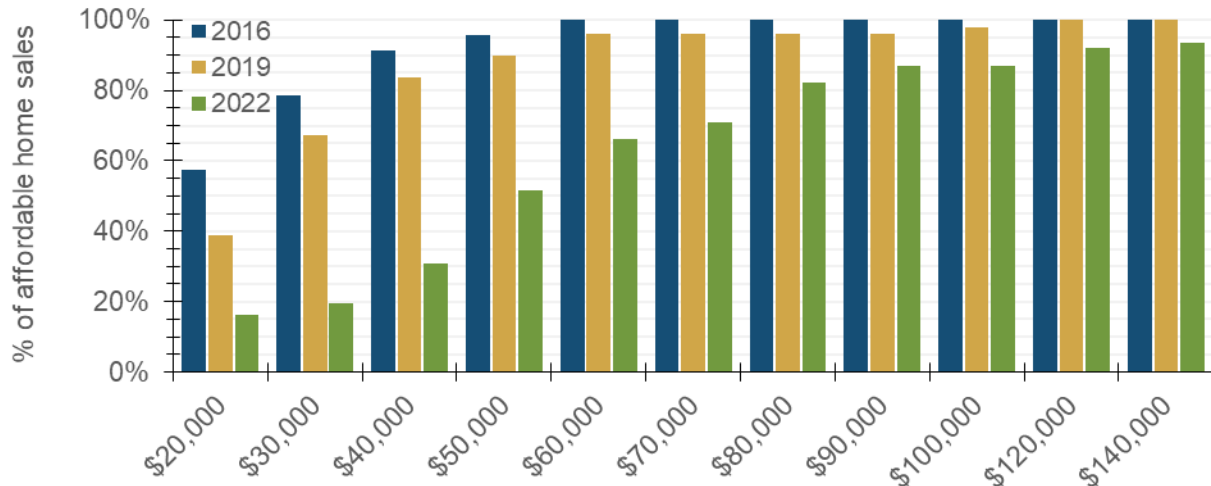
Source: derived from Statistics Canada tables (see Provincial Report), Bank of Canada, NSAR MLS®

About 65% of all local households earned an income below what would be needed (around \$78,600) to purchase the median home in 2022. This highlights the importance of housing interventions to address the shortage identified above in order to reduce typical housing prices to reasonably affordable levels.

Figure 5.1 presents the levels of affordability for respective household income levels for 2016, 2019, and 2022. It illustrates the percentage of home sales in each year that would be affordable (30% of household income) at a given income level.

While there were already signs of decreasing affordability from 2016 to 2019, the municipality suffered a significant shock from 2019 to 2022. For instance, a \$70,000 income could afford 96% of home sales in 2019. In 2022, this fell to 66%.

Figure 5.1: Estimated % of Households that Can / Cannot Afford Typical Sale Prices, Guysborough Census Division



Source: Derived from Statistics Canada Custom Census 2021 Tables, Bank of Canada, NSAR MLS®

5.2 Rental Market

5.2.1 Market Activity

Table 4-3 reports the rental data for St. Mary's (based on rents across the Guysborough area). The overall average rent in 2021, per PVSC data, was \$539. This is a decrease of 13% from 2018. There has been a 0.4% increase in all unit sizes from 2018 to 2021.

Table 5-3: Average Rents by Unit Size and Select Years

	Price				Percent Change		
	2018	2019	2020	2021	'18-'19	19-'20	20-'21
Total	\$617	\$536	\$536	\$539	-13%	0%	+0%
Studio	\$483	\$483	\$483	\$485	0%	0%	+0%
1-bed	\$536	\$536	\$536	\$539	0%	0%	+0%
2-bed	\$617	\$617	\$617	\$619	0%	0%	+0%
3+bed	\$724	\$724	\$724	\$727	0%	0%	+0%
Vacancy	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%	6.3%			

Source: PVSC Custom Tables

St. Mary's vacancy rate has gone from 6.5% to 6.3% between 2018 and 2021. Despite a declining vacancy rate, this falls above the healthy vacancy range of 3% to 5%, based on PVSC data. In 2021, rental housing made up about 10% of the occupied dwelling stock, which had not changed since 2016. Coupled with a fixed permanently occupied dwelling inventory, this suggests that there is no increased local pressure to rent - in other words, homeownership continues to face greater demand and price pressures.

5.2.2 Rental Affordability

Table 5-4 details the percentage share of **renter** households, divided by household type and income levels, that can afford 2021 average rent for various unit types. As with ownership, lone-parent and single person households face the highest income barrier to affordability. About 18% of lone-parent households and 40% of single person fall below the income level required to afford the average rent for a studio unit in 2021.

Table 5-4: Estimated Rent Affordability by Income Level (Renter Households)

		2021 average rent:			\$485	\$539	\$619	\$727
		% of HHs below income level			Studio	1-bed	2-bed	3+ bed
Income level	Attainable rent	Couples	Lone parents	Single persons				
\$20,000	\$330	0%	0%	11%	no	no	no	no
\$25,000	\$420	0%	18%	40%	no	no	no	no
\$30,000	\$500	0%	18%	55%	yes	no	no	no
\$35,000	\$590	0%	18%	62%	yes	yes	no	no
\$40,000	\$670	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	no
\$45,000	\$750	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$50,000	\$840	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$55,000	\$920	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$60,000	\$1,000	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$65,000	\$1,090	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$70,000	\$1,170	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$75,000	\$1,260	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
\$80,000	\$1,340	0%	18%	68%	yes	yes	yes	yes
Renting				Average	Studio	1-bed	2-bed	3+ bed
Est'd income needed to rent average unit				\$32,200	\$28,900	\$32,200	\$37,000	\$43,400
% of renter households below income				37%	27%	37%	46%	53%

Source: derived from Statistics Canada Custom Census 2021 tables, CMHC Rental Market Survey

It should be noted that the affordability reported is based on the ability to afford the rent for the entire unit, not split between tenants. Furthermore, the affordability threshold is the same used by Statistics Canada and CMHC - 30% of before-tax household income spent on shelter costs. Shelter cost calculations include the direct and indirect costs related to shelter. More detail is provided in the **Provincial Report**. Approximately 37% of local renter households earned an income below what would be needed (about \$32,200) to afford the average rental unit. Readers will notice that the financial barriers to own appear to be significantly higher than to rent. While this may be the case, it is important to recognize the data source impacts to this discussion.

Sales data for homeownership only considers asking prices, not the existing mortgages held by homeowners at the same time. Rental data includes both asking and occupied rents, meaning that the rents reported underrepresent what households would pay changing units.

6 Housing Need

Three housing indicators are used to evaluate housing need: adequacy (housing condition), suitability (enough space), and affordability. Core housing need is a specific condition of housing where a household falls under one of the aforementioned indicators and cannot find reasonable housing without spending 30% or more of their before-tax income. Deep unaffordability (also known as “severe” unaffordability) is when a household is spending 50% or more of their before-tax income on housing.

Generally, housing indicators and Core Housing Need data demonstrate the number and share of households particularly impacted by precarious living conditions. These are the households that increased supply or non-market interventions would positively impact most, as many might not have the means or supports to escape these conditions without intervention.

6.1 Housing Need by Tenure & Indigenous Identity

Table 6-1 shows the share of households currently living in conditions that meet the three housing criteria, separated by tenure and Indigenous identity. Note that no data is available for suitability.

In St. Mary's, overall households living in unaffordable dwellings decreased by 26% between 2016 and 2021. Those living in inadequate dwellings increased by 42% between 2016 and 2021. Notwithstanding a 38% decrease between Census periods, 25% of all renter households lived in unaffordable dwellings as of 2021.

Table 6-1: Housing Need Criteria by Tenure & Indigenous Identity, 2021

		Total	Owner	Renter	Indigenous
Total Households:		1,040	945	100	70
Households living in inadequate conditions	Total households	135	115	25	15
	Change since 2016	+42%	+35%	-	-
	Share of households	13%	12%	25%	21%
Households living in unaffordable conditions	Total households	85	60	25	-
	Change since 2016	-26%	-14%	-38%	-
	Share of households	8%	6%	25%	-

Source: Statistics Canada Custom Census 2016 & 2021 Tables

Table 6-2 shows the municipality’s households currently meeting the conditions of Core Housing Need and those in deep unaffordability, as well as the changes in those categories between 2016 and 2021. Since 2016, there has been a 10% increase in

overall Core Housing Need, with an increase among owner households and a decrease among renter households. About 11% of St. Mary's household lived in core need.

Since 2016 there has been an overall decrease of 20% to households living in deep unaffordability, but 2% of all households remain in these conditions.

Table 6-2: Core Housing Need & Deep Unaffordability by Tenure & Indigenous Identity, 2021

		Total	Owner	Renter	Indigenous
Total Households:		1,040	945	100	70
Households living in Core Housing Need	Total households	115	90	25	-
	Change since 2016	10%	38%	-38%	-
	Share of households	11%	10%	25%	-
Households living in deep unaffordability	Total households	20	-	-	-
	Change since 2016	-20%	-	-	-
	Share of households	2%	-	-	-

Source: Statistics Canada Custom Census 2016 & 2021 Tables

6.2 Housing Need by Household Type

Table 6-3 and Table 6-4 present information related to housing indicators and Core Housing Need, respectively, by household type.

Generally, renter and single person / roommate households experience similar issues when it comes to housing. About 15% of single person / roommate households faced financial challenges related to shelter in 2021.

Couples with children also faced housing challenges, reporting the second highest rate of inadequacy (11%) and the second highest rate of unaffordability (5%).

Table 6-3: Housing Need Criteria by Household Type, 2021

		Couple w/o child(ren)	Couple w/ child(ren)	Lone parent	Single / roommates
Total Households:		365	200	45	405
Households living in inadequate conditions	Total households	40	20	-	60
	<i>Change since 2016</i>	+14%	-20%	-	+71%
	Share of households	11%	10%	-	15%
Households living in unaffordable conditions	Total households	20	-	-	60
	<i>Change since 2016</i>	-20%	-	-	-14%
	Share of households	5%	-	-	15%

Source: Statistics Canada Custom Census 2016 & 2021 Tables

Since 2016, single persons / roommate households living in Core Housing Need increased 7%, reaching a 19% share of all related households in 2021. Lone parents reported the most prevalent core need (56%), with no change between census periods.

Table 6-4: Core Housing Need by Household Type, 2021

		Couple w/o child(ren)	Couple w/ child(ren)	Lone parent	Single / roommates
Total Households:		365	200	45	405
Households living in Core Housing Need	Total households	20	0	25	75
	<i>Change since 2016</i>	0%	-	-	+7%
	Share of households	5%	0%	56%	19%

Source: Statistics Canada Custom Census 2016 & 2021 Tables

7 Demographic Profile

7.1 Population

7.1.1 Current Population

Between 2016 and 2021, the population of St. Mary's decreased by 3%, compared to the provincial growth rate of 5%. Table 7-1 below illustrates the municipality's population change compared to provincial changes.

The municipality grew across one of the defined age cohorts between 2016 and 2021, with strong growth among 85+ year olds. This follows the provincial trend of aging populations. This has led to an influx of demand to the municipality among older populations looking for smaller dwellings, owing, perhaps, to downsizing after retirement.

Table 7-1: Total Population by Age Cohort (2021) & Five-Year Percent Change

		0 to 14	15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
Nova Scotia	Total	136,710	106,185	234,180	276,990	192,285	23,035	969,380
	Share	14%	11%	24%	29%	20%	2%	100%
	5yr %Δ	+2%	-1%	+9%	-2%	+19%	+6%	+5%

		0 to 14	15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
Municipality of the District of St. Mary's	Total	230	165	300	740	130	80	2,160
	Share	11%	8%	14%	34%	6%	4%	100%
	5yr %Δ	-8%	-11%	-15%	-2%	-24%	+14%	-3%

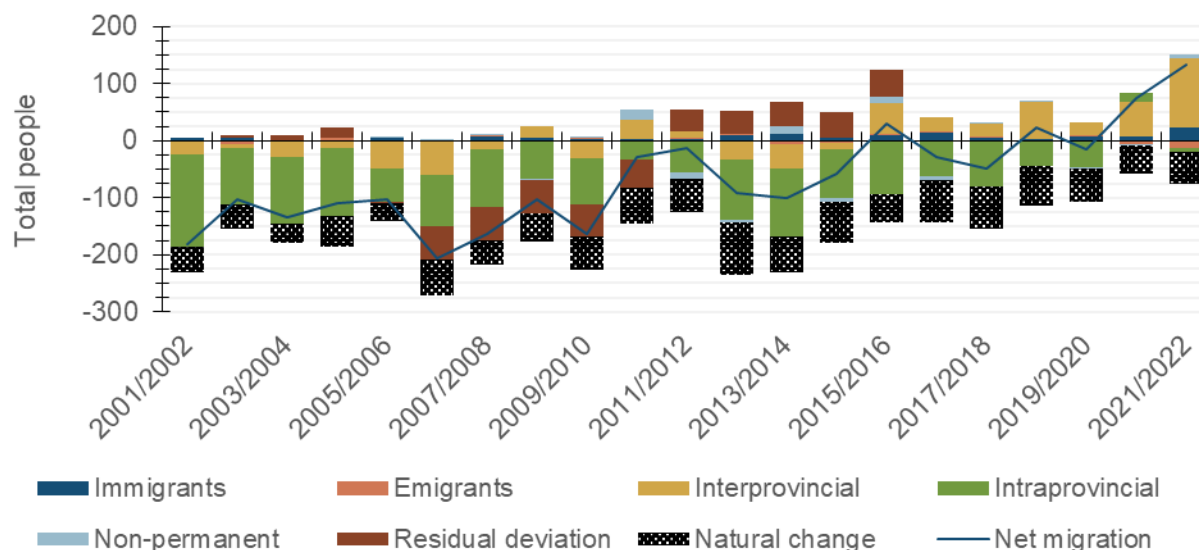
Source: Statistics Canada Census 2016 and 2021

7.1.2 Migration

Shown in Figure 7.1 is the net-migration for the **entire** Guysborough Census Division (data is not available at the municipal level - the entire Census Division includes all related urban and rural municipalities) between 2001/02 and 2021/22, inclusive of totals for intra-provincial and international migration, as well as emigration.

Between 2016 and 2021, the Guysborough Census Division's net-migration steadily increased to a two-decade high in 2021/2022 with a total of 132 newcomers. Not all newcomers will move to one place and could distribute across the region.

Figure 7.1: Historical Components of Migration, Guysborough Census Division



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0140

7.1.3 Anticipated Population

The municipality’s anticipated population is derived from applying the historical share of local total populations by age cohort to the regional projections by age cohort produced by the Department of Finance & Treasury Board (FTB) in February 2023. In other words, results assume that the municipality will represent the same share of the region’s population over the projection horizon.⁵ This does not consider nuanced population changes by community.

Estimates suggest that the 2022 total population was 2,170, with a projected increase of 1% between 2022 and 2027. Senior populations should increase during that time, with decreases mostly occurring among non-senior populations.

⁵ Since a municipality represents the same share of its region (i.e., Census Division) over time for projections (population and households), similar rates of growth will exist for each of the municipalities within the region. Therefore, readers reviewing multiple reports may notice a likeness between them.

Table 7-2: Anticipated Total Population by Age Cohort and Five-Year Percent Change

		0 to 14	15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
2027	Total	275	160	310	640	685	115	2,185
	Share	13%	7%	14%	29%	31%	5%	100%
	5yr %Δ	+12%	-3%	+0%	-11%	+6%	+35%	+1%

		0 to 14	15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
2032	Total	250	135	275	575	690	145	2,070
	Share	12%	7%	13%	28%	33%	7%	100%
	5yr %Δ	-9%	-16%	-11%	-10%	+1%	+26%	-5%

Source: derived from Department of Finance & Treasury Board February 2023

The change in population between 2027 to 2032 may return to overall decline. Even with growth in senior populations, significant losses among other age cohorts may lead to a total loss of 5%. This demonstrates a long-term need to meet the needs of an expanding senior age group.

7.2 Households

7.2.1 Current Households

Table 7-3 illustrates the various characteristics of households in St. Mary's. The tables show tenure splits for maintainer by age cohort, household types, and household sizes respectively, as well as the 5-year percent change in those populations. For households in which multiple incomes are present, the first name listed on a census questionnaire is taken to be the primary maintainer.

“Seniors are stuck in larger homes they can’t afford because they can’t find smaller places to move to.”

Between 2016 and 2021, there was an overall marginal (<1%) increase in households, with tenures split into 90% owners and 10% renters in 2021.

Non-census families (i.e., single persons or roommate households) have seen the largest increase – 24% since 2016. Households in St. Mary's are also getting smaller – Total 1-person households increased 35%. Interestingly, there was a 69% rise in 4--person households between Census periods.

The primary household maintainer is the person within a household who pays the rent, mortgage, taxes, or other major expenses for the dwelling.

Table 7-3: Households by Tenure & Characteristics (2021) & Five-Year Percent Change

		15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
Household Maintainer Age	Total	15	170	400	390	70	1,045
	Owner	-	90%	95%	93%	100%	90%
	Renter	-	10%	5%	8%	0%	10%
	5yr %Δ	-25%	0%	-11%	+8%	+56%	+0%

		Couple w/o Child	Couple w/ Child	Lone Parent	Non-census*	Other**	Total
Household Type	Total	365	200	45	410	20	1,045
	Owner	96%	93%	100%	86%	100%	90%
	Renter	4%	7%	0%	14%	0%	10%
	5yr %Δ	-18%	+21%	-40%	+24%	-33%	+0%

		1-person	2-person	3-person	4-person	5+ person	Total
Household Size	Total	405	395	100	110	30	1,045
	Owner	86%	96%	100%	86%	100%	90%
	Renter	14%	4%	0%	14%	0%	10%
	5yr %Δ	+35%	-23%	0%	+69%	-45%	+0%

* Non-census means single persons or persons living with a roommate

** Other households are one-census-family households with additional persons or multiple-family households

Source: Statistics Canada Custom Census 2016 & 2021 Tables

Note that the percent change of households can increase faster than population (or even if there is population decline). As residents age, their likelihood of forming or leading a household increase. For instance, a child growing up and moving out of their family home turns one household into two. This can also occur if there is notable growth among smaller household sizes.

7.2.2 Anticipated Households

A similar apportionment as for the anticipated population is performed for anticipated households. Note that anticipated households are a major input to housing demand calculations, but do not equate exactly to demand. Housing demand projections incorporated adjustments to reflect total dwellings (not only those occupied by a usual resident which projections would solely consider).

Estimates suggest that total 2022 households reached 1,050, with a potential decrease of 1% from 2022 to 2027 (10 total). Household losses should predominantly occur among older working professional-led households (45- to 64-year-olds). The greatest rate of growth should be among senior-led households.

Similar magnitudes of decline may continue from 2027 to 2032. Senior-led households (particularly those with a maintainer aged 85+) should remain the cohort with greatest relative growth. From 2022 to 2032, about 65 new senior-led households might choose to live in the municipality, again reinforcing the need for senior appropriate or generally accessible housing over the foreseeable future.

Table 7-4: Anticipated Households by Maintainer Age and Five-Year Percent Change

		15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
2027	Total	15	175	345	405	100	1,040
	Share	1%	17%	33%	39%	10%	100%
	5yr %Δ	+0%	+0%	-12%	+3%	+33%	-1%

		15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 84	85+	Total
2032	Total	15	160	310	400	135	1,020
	Share	1%	16%	30%	39%	13%	100%
	5yr %Δ	+0%	-9%	-10%	-1%	+35%	-2%

Source: derived from Statistics Canada 2016 Census, Department of Finance & Treasury Board February 2023

8 Conclusion

The above information provides context for St. Mary's' housing conditions. Recent increases in demand have resulted in higher-than-expected local housing prices.

The current estimated unit shortage for St. Mary's is 60. Demand, which includes the shortage, is estimated to increase to 70 by 2027. Using current construction trends (based on historical permitting data from Statistics Canada), 15 new units are estimated to be introduced into the market annually over the next 5 years, leaving a surplus of 5 units by 2027.

While the relationship between supply and demand in the municipality may indicate an eventual housing surplus, market conditions among other nearby municipalities and Nova Scotia overall may continue to have an impact on local house prices. Furthermore, there is a regional shift in demand from seniors, which may lead to the municipality needing to meet the needs of this expanding demographic.