



# HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority

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March 2022

Funded by: Virginia Housing



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# EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE

## Overview

In recent years, it has been realized that the Town of Marion has significant housing issues. The primary issue is a shortage of housing, as well as substandard housing in need of rehabilitation. To compound these challenges, Emory & Henry College has been expanding their programs which has added additional pressure to the housing situation, and very little new construction has been added.

To meet these challenges, the Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority (MRHA) and Town of Marion wants to both improve the existing substandard housing and identify strategies to incorporate additional housing in the community. The first step in addressing these housing challenges is to conduct an assessment of properties in the Town to understand current conditions of homes.

This Housing Needs Assessment demonstrates the existing condition of housing in the Town to help understand the types, tenure, and price of housing most needed in the community. The scope of this work included an inventory of all existing housing stock, an analysis of the Town's socioeconomic and demographic trends, exploration of potential sites primed for housing redevelopment, and discussion of opportunities and challenges for housing in the Town of Marion. The aim of this study is to help inform future policy and development to meet housing needs.

Successful revitalization strategies build upon the positive assets of towns and address the challenges of healthy growth. With revitalization efforts underway in Marion, there is a need to explore complementary housing opportunities, especially to attract potential new employers to the area. This is a chance to turn the creative energy that has been spent on economic development into housing development.

*This project was made possible through the generous funding of Virginia Housing.*



# ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section provides an overview of the socioeconomic and demographic trends for the Town of Marion.

## Summary

- The data tells us that while the demand for new housing is rising, the population of Marion is slowly declining.
- The average median income is significantly lower than national averages, indicating a need for affordable housing.
- Unemployment rates in Smyth County are fairly typical for Virginia.
- The Town has an aging population and smaller-than-average household sizes.
- Many housing units (~65%) in Marion are single-family, detached homes.

## Socioeconomic Trends



5,555

Population (2020)



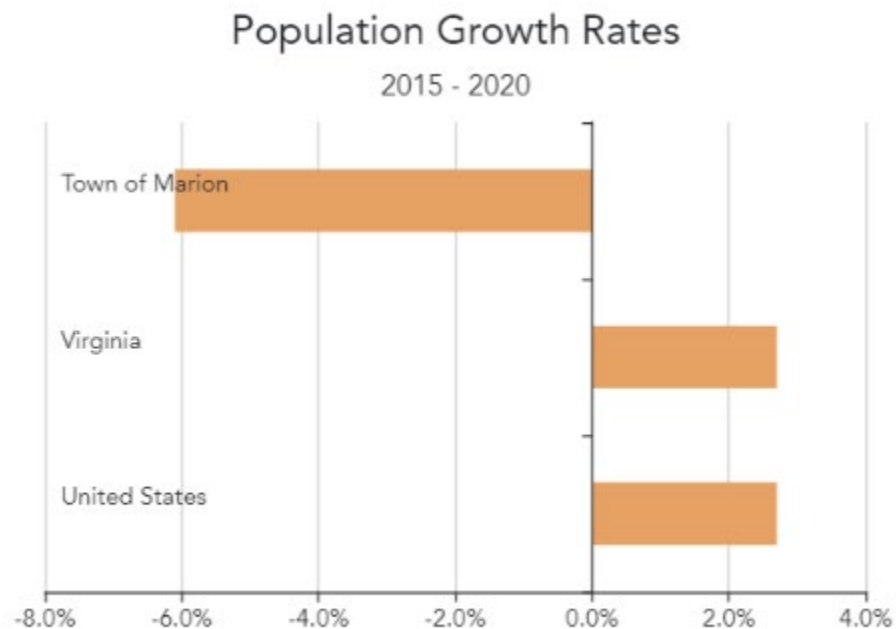
\$22,254

Median Individual  
Income (2019)

## POPULATION TRENDS

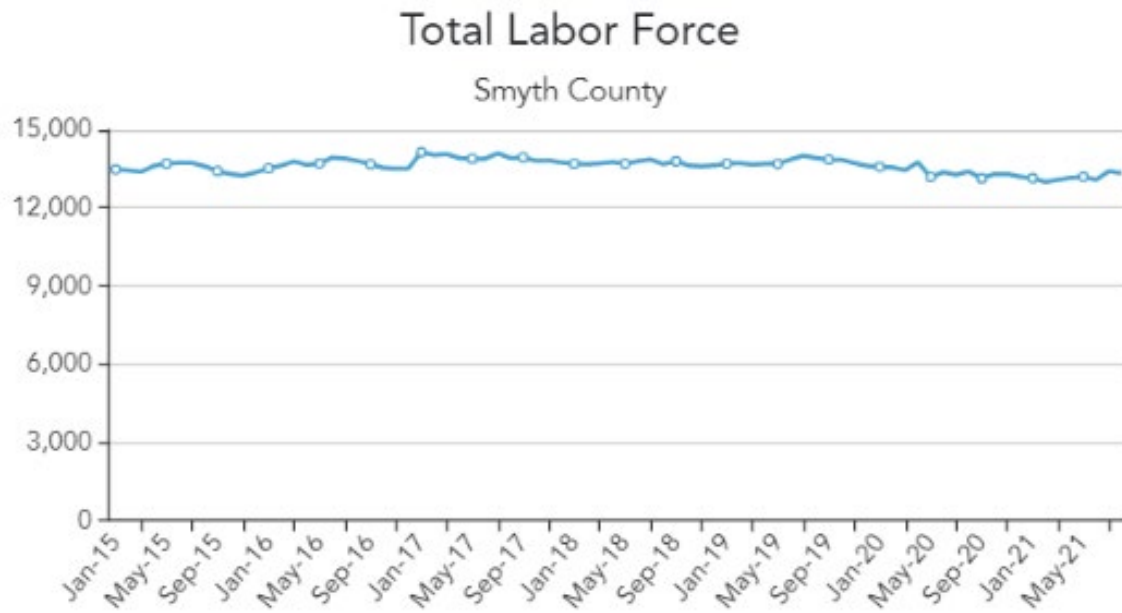
In recent years, the Town of Marion's population has steadily declined.

Date	Town of Marion
2010	5973
2011	5944
2012	5901
2013	5888
2014	5850
2015	5914
2016	5819
2017	5676
2018	5637
2019	5576
2020	5555

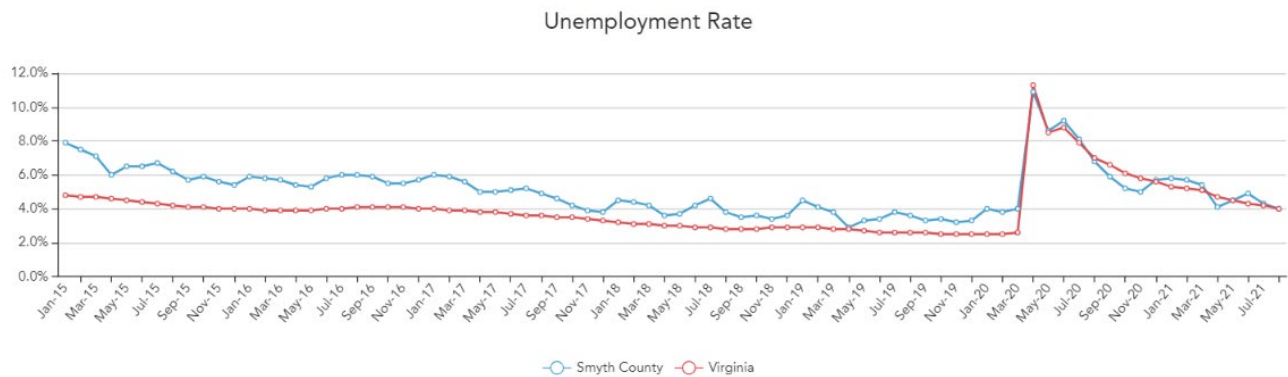


*(Above) Population Growth Rates Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*

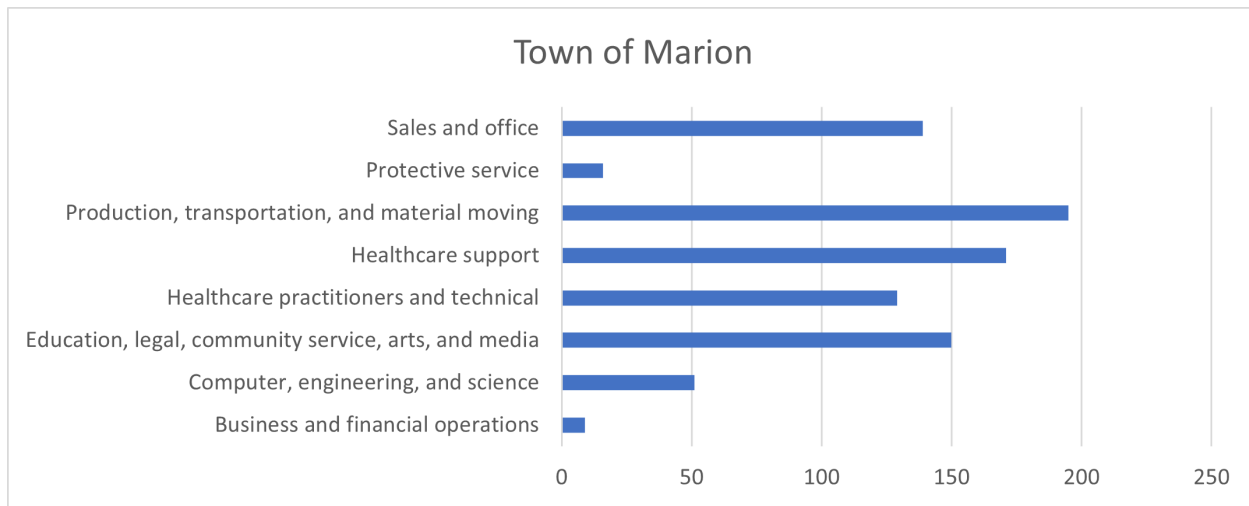
## JOB TRENDS



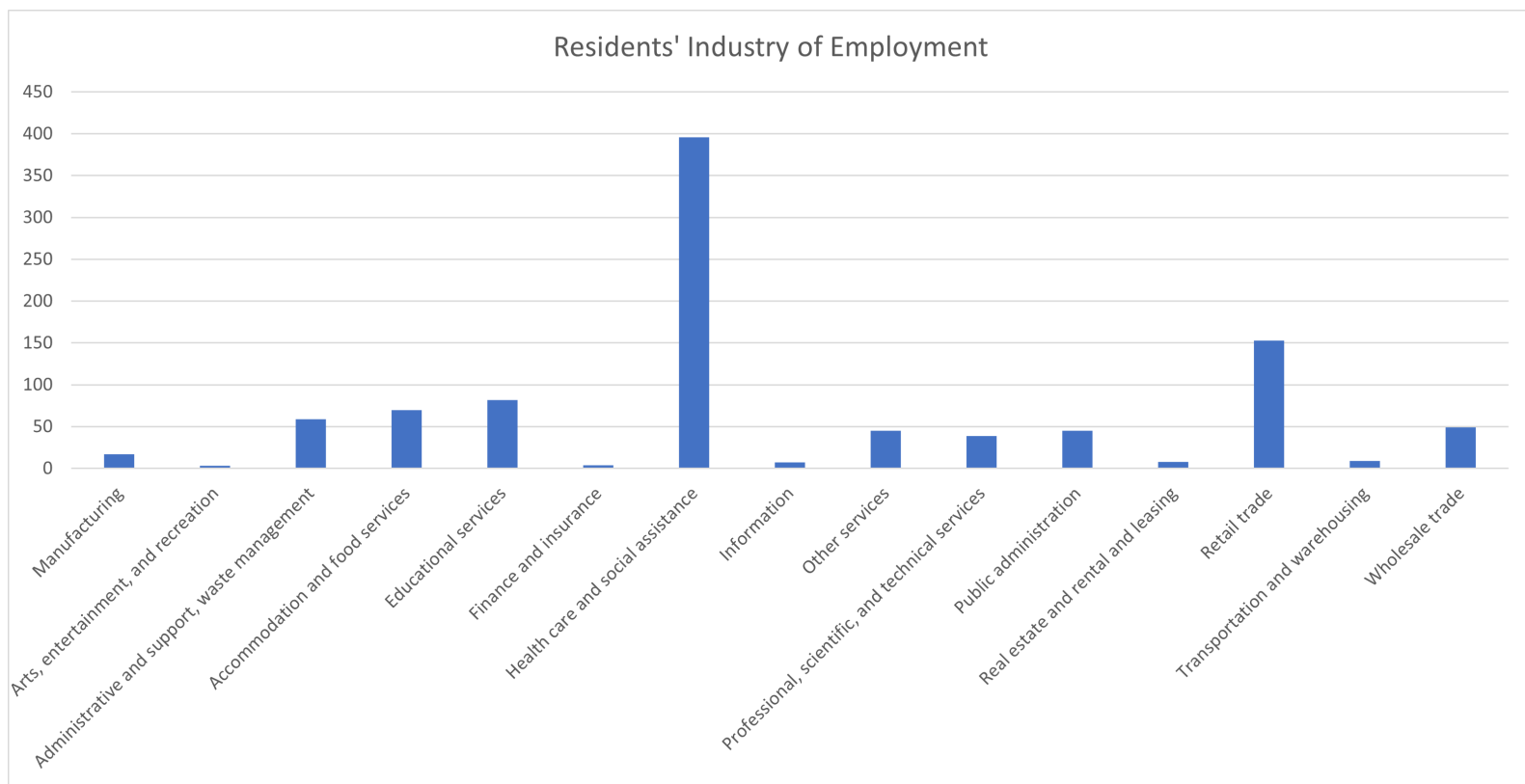
(Above) Total Labor Force Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department



(Above) Unemployment Rates Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department



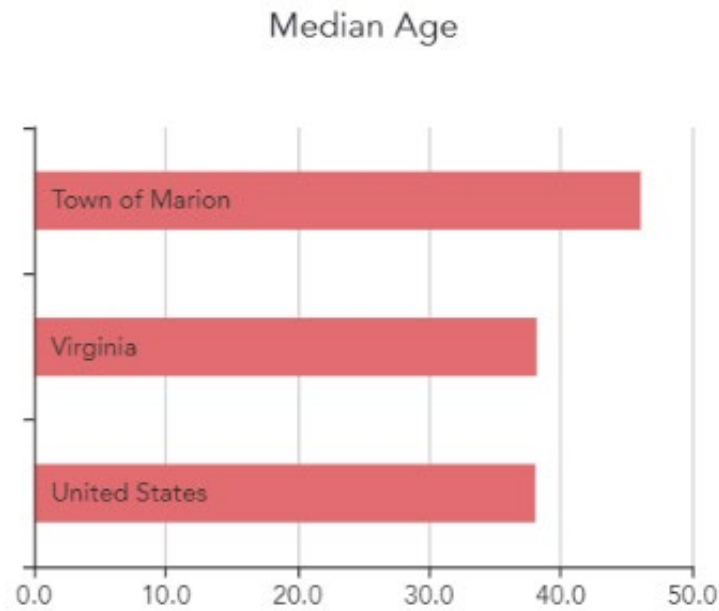
*(Above) Residents' Occupation Graph, data provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*



*(Above) Residents' Industry of Employment Graph, data provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*

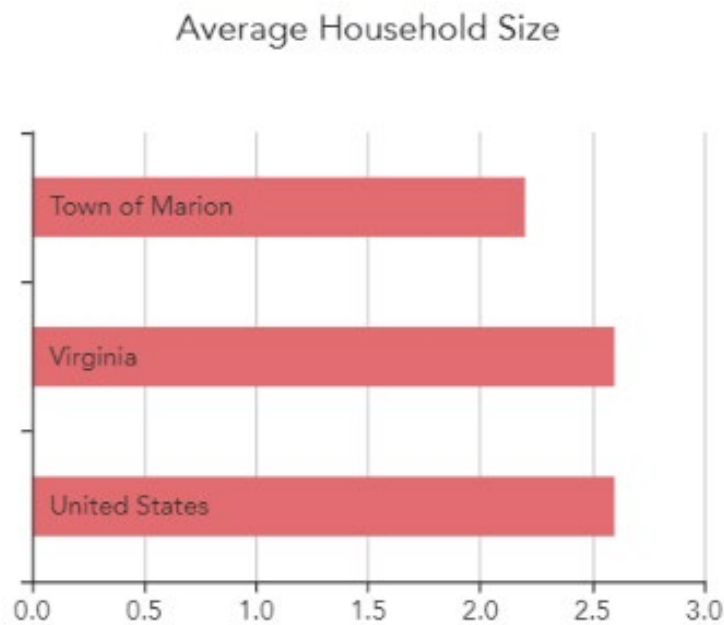
## Demographic Trends

### POPULATION BY AGE



*(Above) Median Age Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*

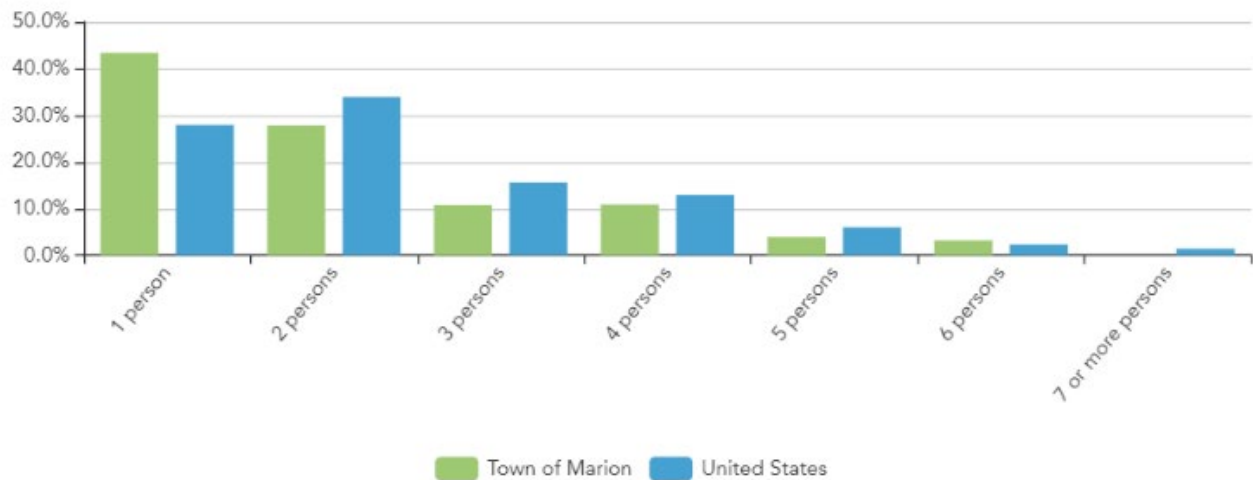
### AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE



*(Above) Average Household Size Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*



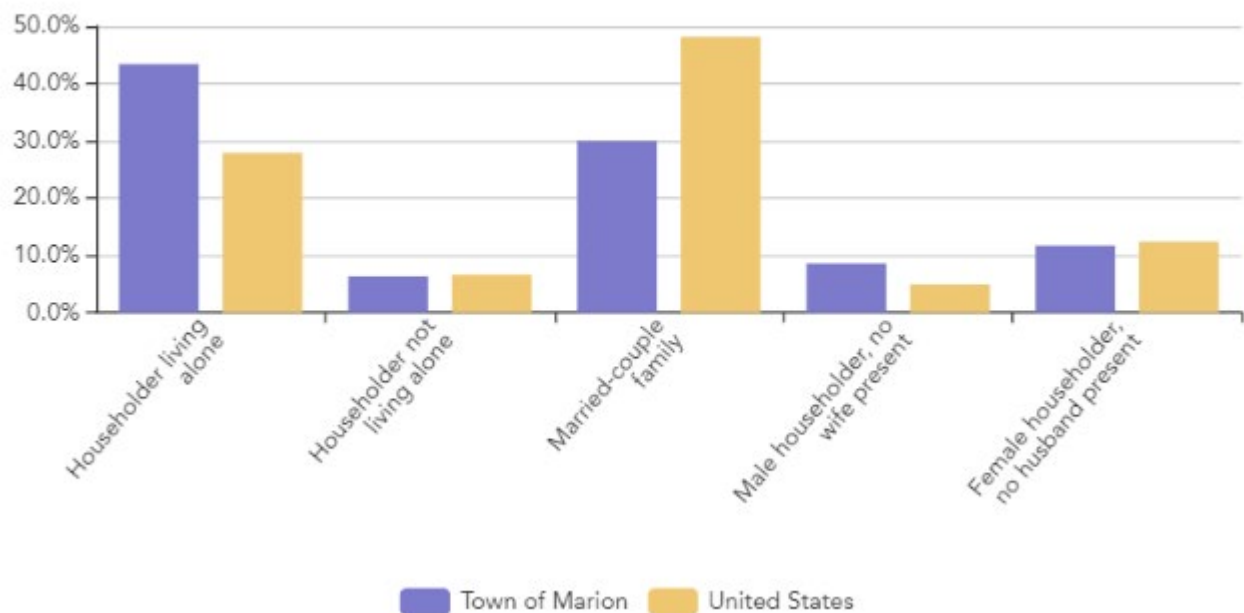
## Household Size Distribution



(Above) Household Size Distribution Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department

## HOUSEHOLD BY TYPE

### Household Type



(Above) Household Type Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department

# ANALYSIS OF EXISTING HOUSING SUPPLY

## Key Findings from the Data

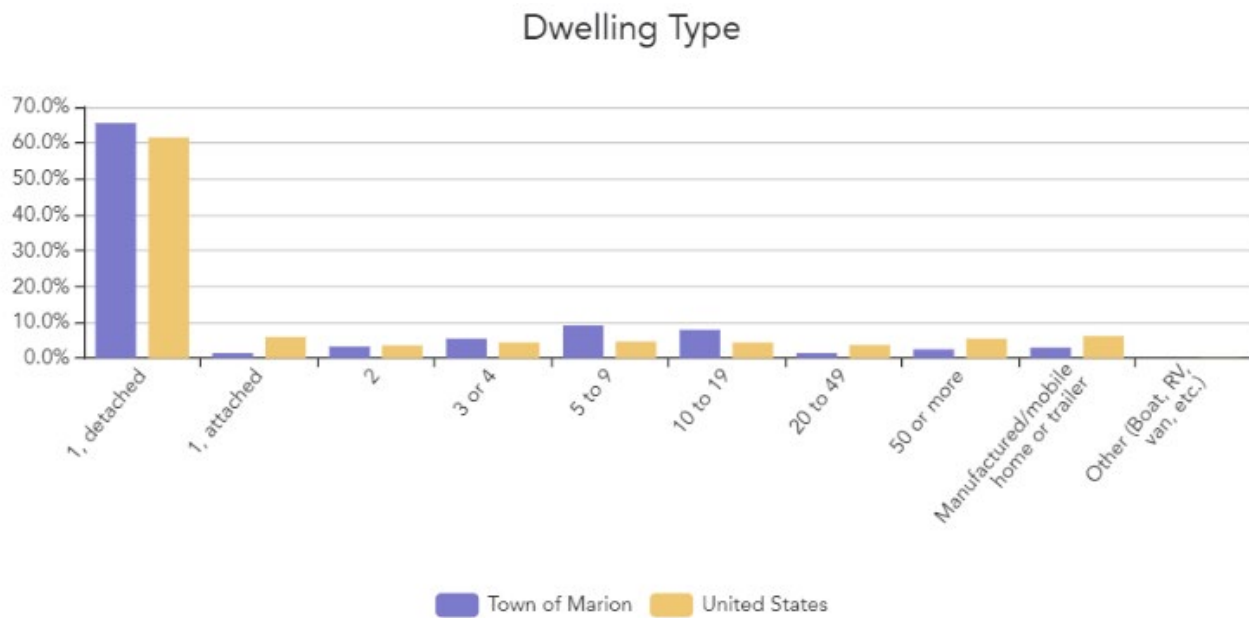
2,733 Housing Units  
In the Town of Marion



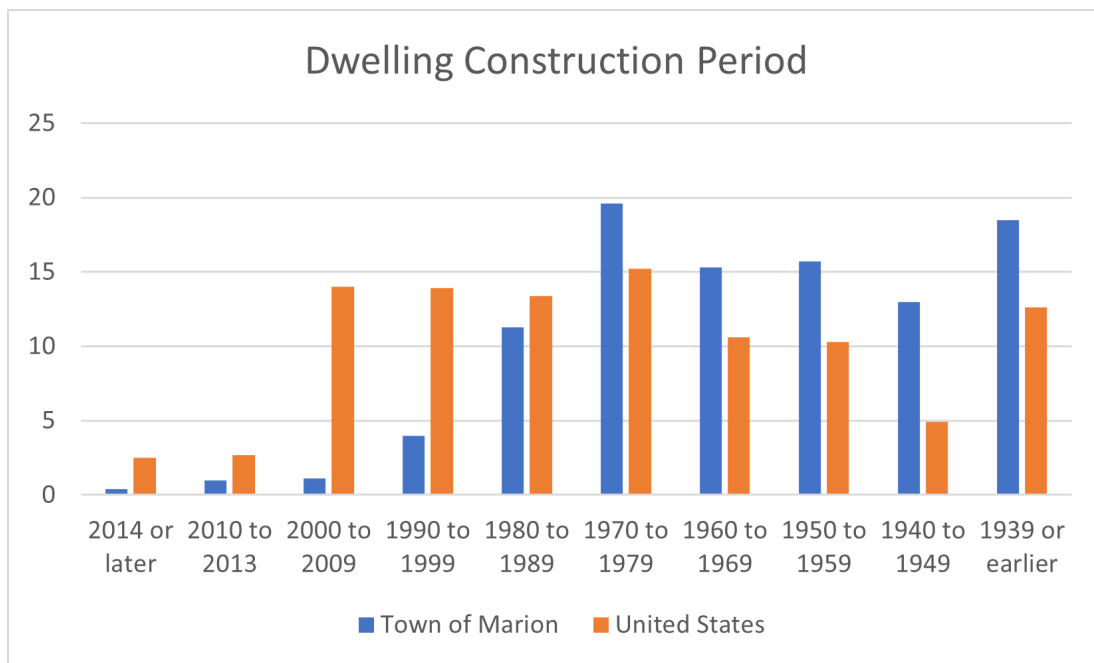
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Housing summary for zip code 24354 (includes but not limited to the Town of Marion)

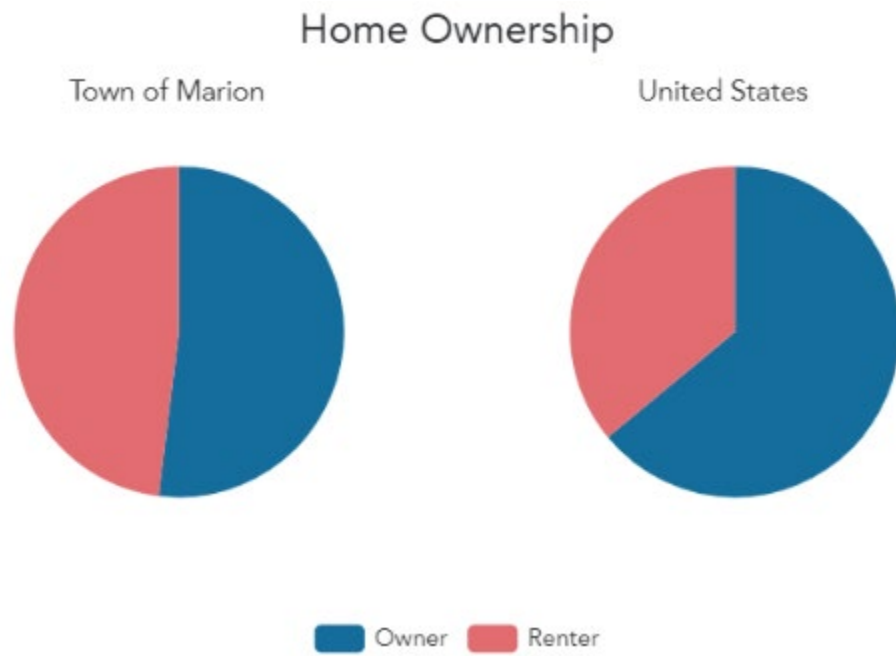
Description	Amount
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.6%
Housing Units	6,913
Median House Value	\$97,3000
Median Monthly Rent	\$618
Occupied Housing Units	5,838
% Occupied Housing Units	84.4%
Rental Vacancy Rate	6.3%
Vacant Housing Units	1,075
% Vacant Housing Units	15.6%



(Above) Dwelling Type Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department



(Above) Dwelling Construction Period Graph, data provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department



*(Above) Home Ownership Rates Graph, provided by Marion's Community & Economic Development Department*

## Hybrid Survey Analysis

A windshield survey is an informal survey where a professional drives around the project area and records their observations. This data provides invaluable background and context to identify trends for a Housing Needs Assessment. Because the scope of this study included all housing units in the Town of Marion (almost 3,000), the Project Team deployed a hybrid approach using recent Google Earth technology, supplemented by windshield survey verification as needed.

The Project Team first identified any housing units that should be assessed in person due to recent changes in the neighborhood, rehabilitation projects, and any new construction that may not be reflected in a Google Earth search. Then, the Project Team identified sections of Town that did not have Google Earth street views available. On two separate visits, the in-person windshield surveys of these properties were conducted, accounting for approximately a quarter of the Town's housing units. The remaining sites were assessed via Google Earth.

The following criteria were used to classify the condition of all housing units:

**Quality Determination** - After deficient structural components are classified as primary, mechanical or secondary, they shall be assessed for the degree of quality as follows:

**Poor** - Residence is badly deteriorated, sinking, leaning, non-operative or nonfunctional, or unsafe to an extent requiring partial or complete replacement. In some cases, house may also be vacant/not occupied.

*Units that are determined to be severely substandard to a degree requiring clearance or buildings which have three or more critical deficiencies that cannot be repaired to a standard condition for less than a reasonable amount. Residence is badly deteriorated, sinking, leaning, non-operative or nonfunctional, or unsafe to an extent requiring partial or complete replacement.*

**Moderate** - Residence is moderately deteriorated and in need of partial repair or replacement.

*Housing units that have one or more major structural defects, but can still be repaired for a reasonable amount. The degree of substandard is either moderate or severe according to the number of major defects.*

**Good** - Residence is in need of minimal repair or replacement.

*Housing units that have less than three major defects and can be reasonably restored to a standard condition.*

**Excellent** - Residence needs no more than normal maintenance.

*Housing units that are in standard condition, have no major structural defects, have adequate plumbing facilities, and their appearance does not create a blighting influence. This condition requires no more than observable, normal maintenance; dwelling units which have no deficiencies, or only slight observable deficiencies.*

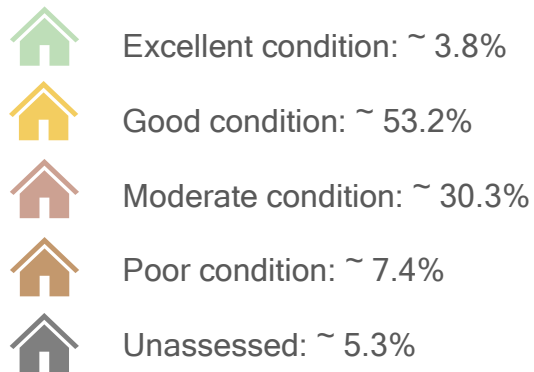
**Unassessed** - Residence was unable to be assessed adequately, due to either street view limitations, road conditions, private driveways, etc.

**Exterior structural components** - Upon structure inspection various components were categorized as primary, mechanical or secondary as follows:

- Primary Components - Foundation, exterior wall structures, roof structures, floor structures, columns.
- Mechanical Components - Windows and doors, plumbing, heating, electrical, wells and septic systems.
- Secondary Components - Siding material, roofing material, porches and exterior stairs and railings, chimneys.

## Summary of Windshield Survey

The majority of houses assessed in the project area were either in good or moderate condition. The concentration of housing in 'poor' condition were in the southern part of Marion. Below is the breakdown of conditions, followed by maps of the project area. The raw data and a high-resolution map are included as an Appendix to this document. This assessment highlighted, in particular, areas of Town where substandard housing is concentrated, as well as opportunity sites for future development.



## Age Analysis

Most homes (~53%) in the town of Marion were built between 1950 and 1979. Since 1980, there have been very few new homes built.

Year Built	% of Housing Units
Before 1900	~1%
1900-1909	~3%
1910-1919	~1%
1920-1929	~5%
1930-1939	~6%
1940-1949	~12%
1950-1959	~20%
1960-1969	~13%
1970-1979	~20%
1980-1989	~8%
1990-1999	~3%
2000-2009	~1%
2010-2019	<0%
Unknown	~4%

The analysis on the next page shows the breakdown of exterior housing conditions by year built. Unsurprisingly, this data indicates that newer homes are generally in better condition. However, it can also be determined that historic homes (notably those built before 1920) have been relatively well maintained despite their age. Likewise, the highest percentage of homes considered to be in 'poor' condition were built between 1920 and 1949, or have unknown built dates.

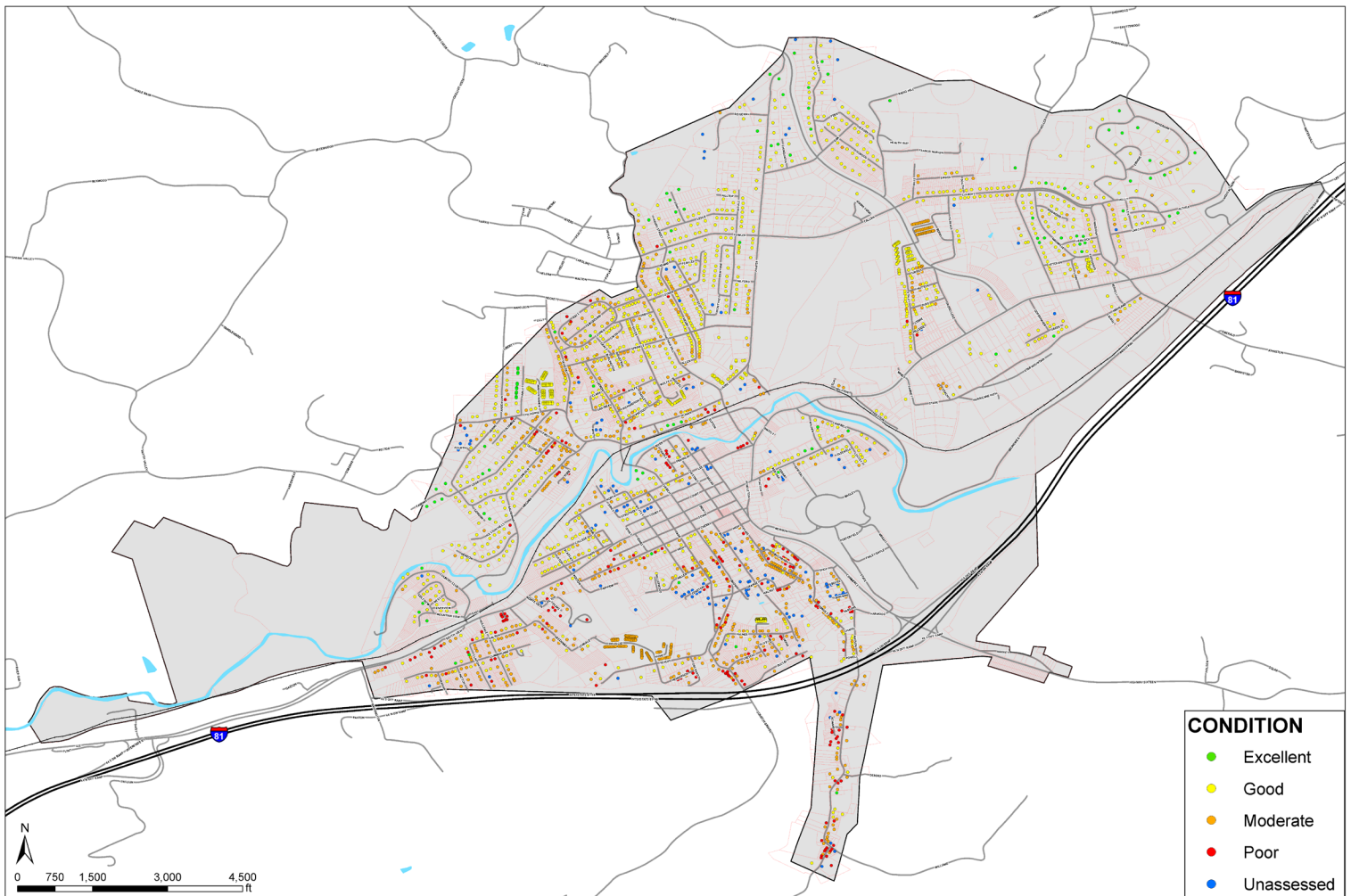


Year Built	# of Units	Exterior Condition	Count	Percentage
Before 1900	29	Excellent	0	0%
		Good	16	55%
		Moderate	9	31%
		Poor	1	3%
		Unassessed	3	10%
1900-1909	74	Excellent	0	0%
		Good	20	27%
		Moderate	34	46%
		Poor	10	14%
		Unassessed	10	14%
1910-1919	29	Excellent	1	3%
		Good	9	31%
		Moderate	14	48%
		Poor	2	7%
		Unassessed	3	10%
1920-1929	139	Excellent	0	0%
		Good	39	28%
		Moderate	63	45%
		Poor	27	19%
		Unassessed	10	7%
1930-1939	163	Excellent	2	1%
		Good	70	43%
		Moderate	55	34%
		Poor	24	15%
		Unassessed	12	7%
1940-1949	312	Excellent	0	0%
		Good	117	38%
		Moderate	135	43%
		Poor	39	13%
		Unassessed	21	7%
1950-1959	524	Excellent	9	2%
		Good	309	59%
		Moderate	155	30%
		Poor	25	5%
		Unassessed	26	5%
1960-1969	344	Excellent	9	3%
		Good	240	70%
		Moderate	68	20%
		Poor	14	4%
		Unassessed	13	4%
1970-1979	524	Excellent	8	2%
		Good	315	60%

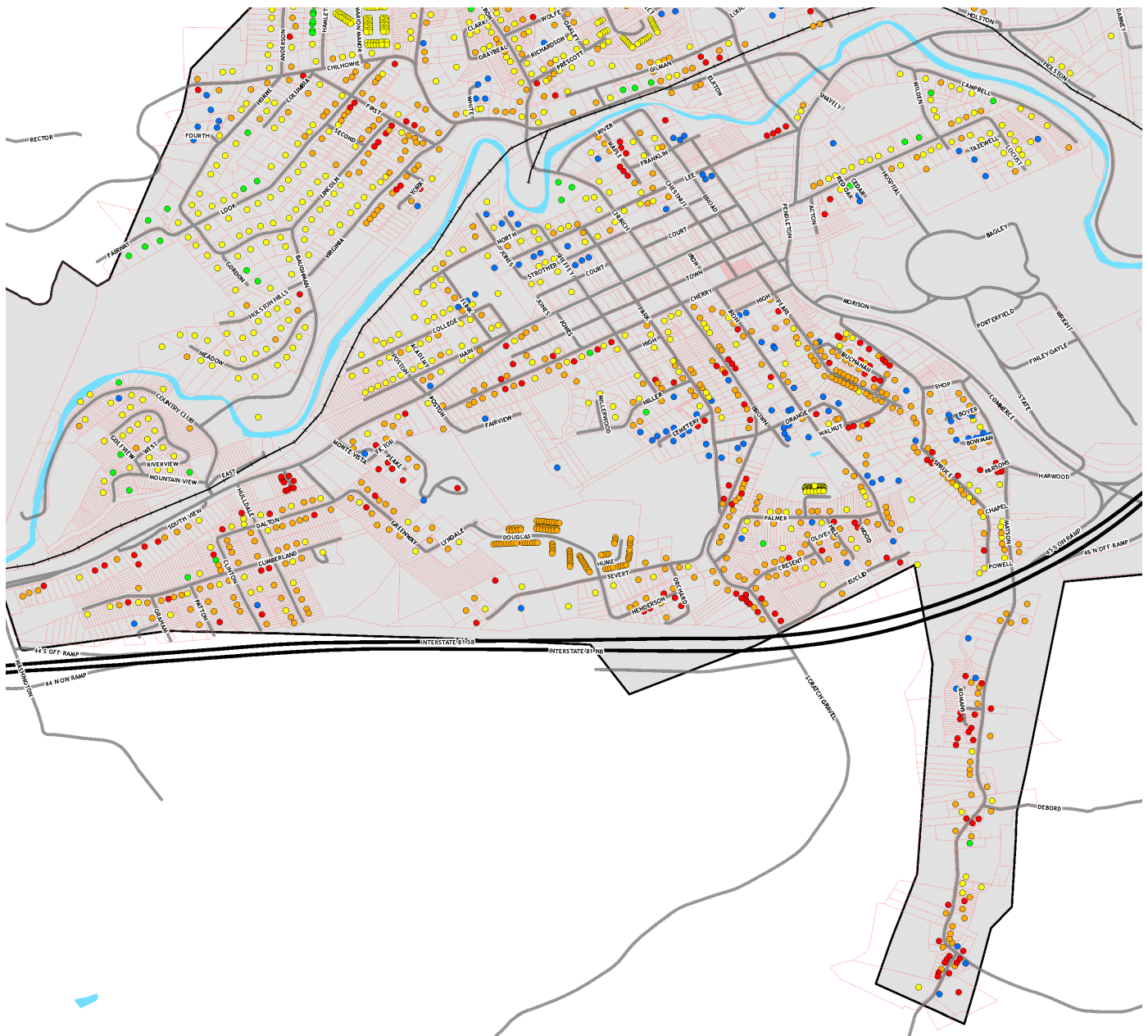
\*Data from Emsi Q4 2021 Datasets, US Census American Community Survey 2019, Social Explorer Datasets\*

		Moderate	183	35%
		Poor	6	1%
		Unassessed	12	2%
1980-1989	208	Excellent	27	13%
		Good	154	74%
		Moderate	21	10%
		Poor	0	0%
		Unassessed	6	3%
1990-1999	81	Excellent	15	19%
		Good	54	67%
		Moderate	5	6%
		Poor	0	0%
		Unassessed	7	9%
2000-2009	30	Excellent	19	63%
		Good	10	33%
		Moderate	1	3%
		Poor	0	0%
		Unassessed	0	0%
2010-2019	12	Excellent	8	67%
		Good	3	25%
		Moderate	1	8%
		Poor	0	0%
		Unassessed	0	0%
Unknown	102	Excellent	1	1%
		Good	38	37%
		Moderate	48	47%
		Poor	45	44%
		Unassessed	18	18%

## Maps



*(Above) Overview map of the Town of Marion showing housing conditions*



(Above) Enlargement of south section of Town

CONDITION	
<span style="color: green;">●</span>	Excellent
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	Good
<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	Moderate
<span style="color: red;">●</span>	Poor
<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	Unassessed



CONDITION	
<span style="color: green;">●</span>	Excellent
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	Good
<span style="color: orange;">●</span>	Moderate
<span style="color: red;">●</span>	Poor
<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	Unassessed

*(Above) Enlargement of northwest section of Town*





# DETERMINATION OF SUPPLY GAPS

## Focus Group Findings

The Project Team met with a focus group that consisted of local housing experts and community leaders to learn about housing challenges, needs, and desires in the Town of Marion. The focus group participants shared that there is an astounding 1,000+ housing unit shortage in the town and county. This housing shortage is due to a number of challenges - including Emory & Henry College's expansion, lack of new construction, substandard housing, and a general high demand for housing despite the relatively low housing inventory.

The current housing market is extremely tight, with houses selling over market price despite needing to be renovated. In virtually every strata of housing - from Section 8 housing to \$750,000 or more homes - there is a need/shortage. In nearby Wythe County, new manufacturing facilities will soon bring over 2,500 jobs to the area, adding even more pressure to surrounding communities.

The focus group also highlighted the fact that lack of housing and adequate supporting infrastructure are major barriers to retaining residents in Marion. As such, the Town is losing residents to Abingdon and other surrounding communities. The group expressed a need to identify properties that have the most potential for housing development. Historically, such sites have been owned by a handful of wealthy families with no plans for selling. There also exists spot blight in traditional middle-income neighborhoods which can be a challenge to address, as these often influence surrounding property values.

In terms of housing needs and desires, it is clear that the needs are across the spectrum. In particular, housing for students, short-term residents, and those on the upper end of the affordability market are needed. There is also a desire for mixed-use development, more rental opportunities, and transient housing.

## Significant Takeaways

This study highlighted a number of significant findings, including housing demand, desires, and areas well suited for future development.

**Increasing Demand** - Like many areas in Virginia, the demand for housing has increased - with a lack of inventory to meet the demands. In the Town of Marion, housing pressures are exacerbated by the expansion of Emory & Henry, new employers/jobs coming to the area, and rise of remote workers. The low vacancy rates in Marion supports this trend.

**Rental Preferences** - Providing opportunities for more rental housing is a major priority for the Town and MRHA. In particular, rental housing for students and the workforce is highly desirable.

**Concentration of Substandard Housing** - There is a relative concentration of substandard housing in the Town of Marion. The majority of housing units in 'poor' condition are located in the south part of Town, indicating a need to address blight particularly in these areas.

**Affordability** - The median individual income in the region is significantly below the national average - indicating a noteworthy need for low-income, affordable, and market-rate housing in Marion.

**Aging Population** - The median age in the Town of Marion is higher than Virginia and national averages, indicating a need to provide more housing for the elderly, as well as explore initiatives to encourage youth to move to Marion.

**Need for Incentives** - New construction in the Town has been virtually nonexistent in recent years, which is a major barrier to growth. Incentives should be explored to help attract builders, developers, etc. These may include waiving fees, performance-based tax incentives, and expediting the permitting process when possible.

**Diversity of Housing Types** - According to the data, approximate 65% of housing in the Town are detached, single-family homes. This indicates a relative diversity of housing types. This trend should be continued to encourage affordability and accessibility to all citizens.

**Opportunities for Mixed-Use** - Mixed-use development provides a blend of uses including housing, commercial, institutional, etc. In Marion, there are multiple opportunities for mixed-use development.

**Connectivity and Community** - Marion is a special place with a strong sense of community. With close access to community amenities and walkability in Town, new developments should continue to foster this sense of community and resilience by providing connection to downtown when feasible, necessary community amenities, and a sense of place.

\*Data from Emsi Q4 2021 Datasets, US Census American Community Survey 2019, Social Explorer Datasets\*



# ANALYSIS OF IMPEDIMENTS

## Impediments

Some impediments for housing in Marion and the general region are described below.

**Housing Shortage/Increasing Demand** - There is an extreme housing shortage in the Town of Marion and Smyth County (upwards of 1,000 housing units). This is a multi-prong challenge due to expansion of the local college, new jobs in the region, and general increasing demand for housing. This demand will be best met through a combination of new residential construction and rehabilitation/renovation of existing housing units in need of repair/modernization.

**Substandard Housing Stock** - In certain parts of Marion, substandard housing exists that creates blight within neighborhoods. Substandard housing is in need of remedial repairs and general improvements.

**Lack of New Construction** - As evidenced by the data, there has been a significant lack of new construction in the Town of Marion in recent years, despite the growing demand for housing. This is in part due to a lack of developers, builders, and contractors, and rising costs for labor and building materials.

**Low Home Values** - In general, home values in Marion are lower than both Virginia and national averages. The same home can sell for significantly higher in neighboring communities. While this can be a benefit in some senses, it is also an indication of blight and resulting low property values.

**Inadequate Infrastructure** - In parts of the Town, existing infrastructure may be inadequate to support large-scale housing developments. This should be examined in closer detail when exploring future development possibilities.

**Decreasing Population** - Despite the rise in demand for housing, the population of Marion has been steadily decreasing in recent years. More investment in housing and amenities will help to retain residents and attract new ones.

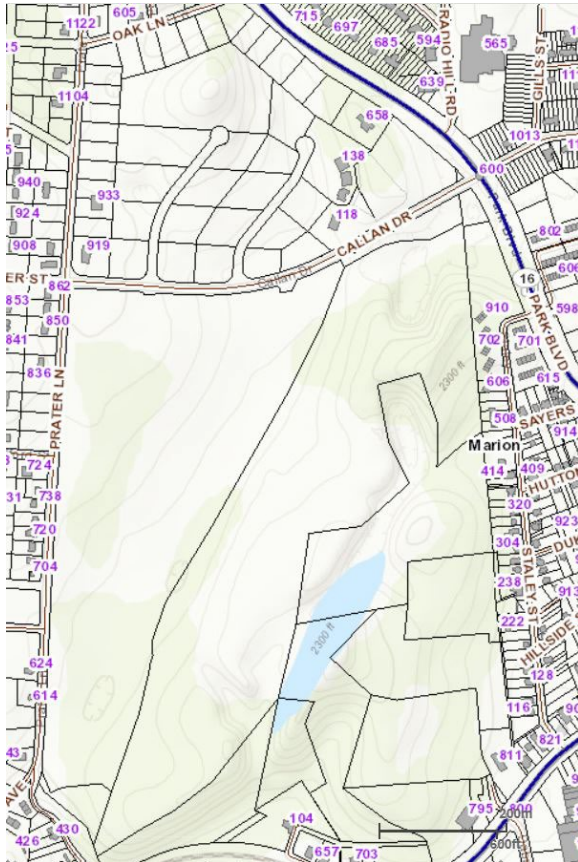
**Downtown Parking** - Downtown living is highly sought after in Marion; in fact, the apartments downtown are all full with waiting lists. However, parking has become an issue for those living downtown. Future parking needs assessments/plans should be explored to adequately support downtown housing.

**Budget Restrictions** - New housing projects - from planning to construction - require adequate budgets. For the Town of Marion and the Marion Redevelopment and Housing Authority, budgets can be an impediment to new housing projects. As such, funding sources and grant opportunities should be explored.

# EXPLORATION OF OPPORTUNITY SITES

## Opportunity Sites

The following are sites that illustrate unique opportunities for future development that include housing.



**Callan Drive properties** - Adjacent to Emory & Henry College of School of Health Sciences sits multiple, undeveloped tracts of land that are intersected by Callan Drive.

These properties conjoin to form the largest undeveloped area within Town limits, and yet are nearby existing utility lines. Approximately one-third (~85 acres) of this area is owned by the Town, signaling an opportunity to collaborate with adjacent landowners to explore housing opportunities on these properties. In particular, housing on this site could be well-suited to serve the needs of Emory & Henry students, given the close proximity to campus. With the incorporation of a walking/biking trail, this land could also be connected to downtown.

*(Left) Map View of Opportunity Site Area*

**BAUD properties** - Project BAUD: Blighted, Abandoned, Underutilized, and Dilapidated Properties, is an initiative already established by the Town of Marion. As this study confirms, blight is a challenge in Marion, and can often lower values of adjacent properties. Housing units in 'poor' condition are typically concentrated in the southern part of Marion but can be found virtually everywhere. Removing blight allows more room for adequate, safe housing for all citizens - while also providing more opportunities for mixed-use development, green spaces, and other incentives for growth.