

5.0 HOUSING

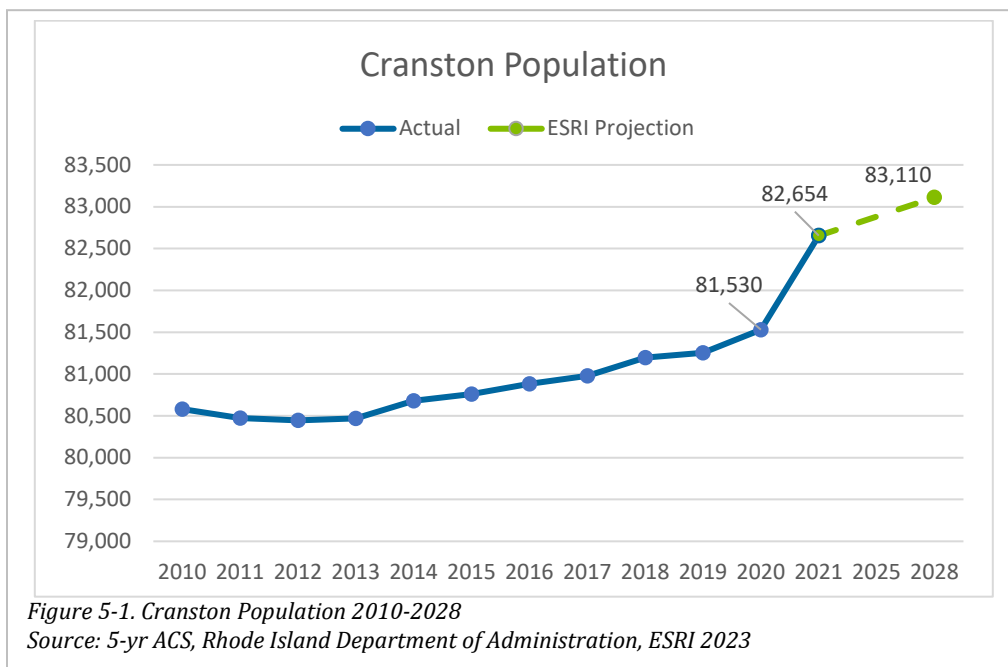
5.1 Introduction

Housing is one of the most fundamental topics in a Comprehensive Plan as it is one of the essential elements of everyday life. A municipality’s demographic and housing characteristics are deeply intertwined: the housing stock available can influence who is interested in living there and who can afford to. The existing demographics and demographic trends influence housing demand and the market response. Cranston’s population and housing traits are no different; the evolution of the City’s population over time in addition to local, state, and federal policy, have shaped the housing landscape, and likewise, the housing stock has shaped the population.

This Element includes a discussion of the existing conditions related to housing in Cranston. For comparison, demographic information for Providence County and Rhode Island is also provided. Of note, this data covers only one year of post 2020 COVID-19 pandemic trends so it is difficult to say at the time this was written the exact impacts and lasting effects of the pandemic on Cranston.

5.2 Existing Conditions

According to the US Census, Cranston’s population was 82,654 in 2021. Since 2010, the population in Cranston has been slowly rising, growing by almost 2,000 residents over the past 10 years. Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) projections predict that the population to continue to increase to an estimated 83,110 residents in 2028 (see Figure 5.1). It is expected that the future population increase in Cranston will translate into greater housing demand in the upcoming decade.



5.2.1 Population by Age

Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2 describe population by age. The current population of Cranston is distributed relatively evenly across Census-defined age groups. The exception to this is the lower proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old, compared to the county and state. There was a decrease of 1,521 residents aged 18- to 24-year-olds between 2016 and 2021 in Cranston.

Additionally, Cranston has a higher proportion of older adults (32%) in the 55+ year old range compared to both the county (28%) and the state (31%), increasing by 28% from 2016 to 2021. The median age in Cranston is 40, compared to 37.5 for Providence County. Alongside an increase in older adults, Cranston has also seen an increase in the share of residents under 18 (+2%), 25 to 34 years (+17%) and 35 to 44 years (+1%). Only Cranston had an increase in the age cohorts under 18 and 35 to 44 years when compared to the county and the state. Coupled, these age trends highlight the growing share of the population that is either a Millennial (hitting prime home-buying age), a family with children, or a Baby Boomer (typically seeking to downsize). Both trends signal shifts in housing demand.

Table 5.1 – Population Age Composition						
	Cranston		Providence County		Rhode Island	
	2021	2016-2021 % Change	2021	2016-2021 % Change	2021	2016-2021 % Change
Under 18	21%	2%	21%	-2%	19%	-6%
18 to 24	8%	-15%	11%	-9%	10%	-5%
25 to 34	14%	17%	15%	18%	14%	18%
35 to 44	14%	1%	13%	-3%	12%	-8%
45 to 54	12%	-26%	13%	-8%	13%	-12%
55 to 64	16%	28%	13%	25%	14%	22%
65+	16%	13%	15%	19%	17%	25%

Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

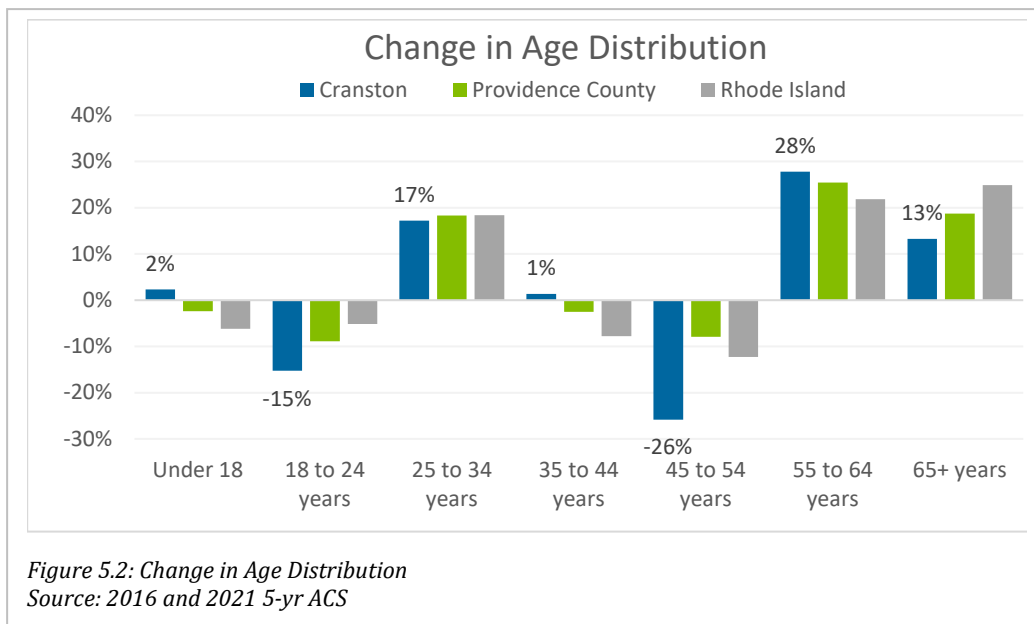
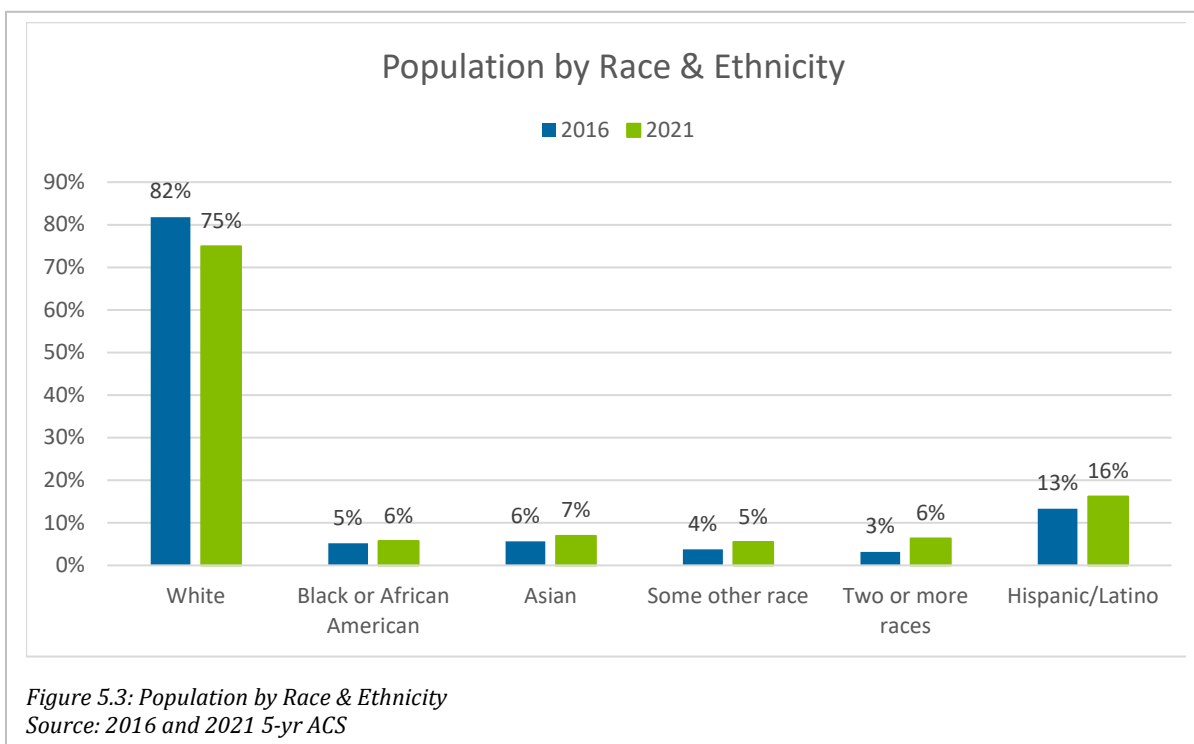


Figure 5.2: Change in Age Distribution
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

5.2.2 Race & Ethnicity

Cranston’s population is predominantly White; 75% of the population who identify as one race are White and non-Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 5.3). Black or African American residents represent 6% of Cranston’s population, while 7% of Cranston’s residents identify as Asian. Cranston has grown more racially diverse since 2016, with increases in all non-White racial groups by 6%. Residents who identify as Hispanic or Latino comprise 16% of residents. Since these are identified as ethnicities in the Census data, not races, residents may have chosen to identify with one specific race as well as an ethnicity, therefore the percentages in Figure 5.3 do not add up to 100%.

Using the proportion of people of color as a measure of diversity, Cranston is less diverse than Providence County overall. About 32% of Providence County residents identify as such, compared to 25% of Cranston residents. The demographic composition of Cranston’s population is important, as the discussion of housing affordability is intertwined with the makeup of the population. As many minority groups have historically had lower incomes and lower homeownership rates (according to US Census data), the demographic makeup of Cranston’s population is important to the discussion of housing affordability.



5.2.3 Household Income

Table 5-2 summarizes the change in household income from 2016-2021 and Figure 5.4 illustrates the median household income in Cranston. The median household income in Cranston in 2021 was \$77,145 which was an increase of over \$15,000 since 2016. This figure is higher than Providence County’s median income of \$65,797 and the statewide median of \$74,489. The percentage of households earning less than \$75,000 a year in Cranston dropped significantly over the past decade. In 2016, the income range that contained the highest percentage of households was \$25,000 to \$49,999, comprising 22% of all households in the city. However, the number households in this income range also declined the most with 1,330 fewer households (-20%). This could be related to

lower income households moving out of Cranston, or some of these households earned more money in 2021 compared to ten years prior. Within Cranston, households with a household income of over \$200,000 have increased by 1,333 households or 99% since 2016. In 2021, the largest proportion of Cranston residents (20%) have a household income of \$100,000-\$149,999.

Household Income	Cranston	Providence County	Rhode Island
Less than \$25,000	-11%	-21%	-20%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	-20%	-12%	-14%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	-11%	2%	-4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	9%	16%	10%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	30%	42%	29%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	48%	49%	46%
\$200,000+	99%	74%	71%

Source: 2016 and 2021 5yr-ACS

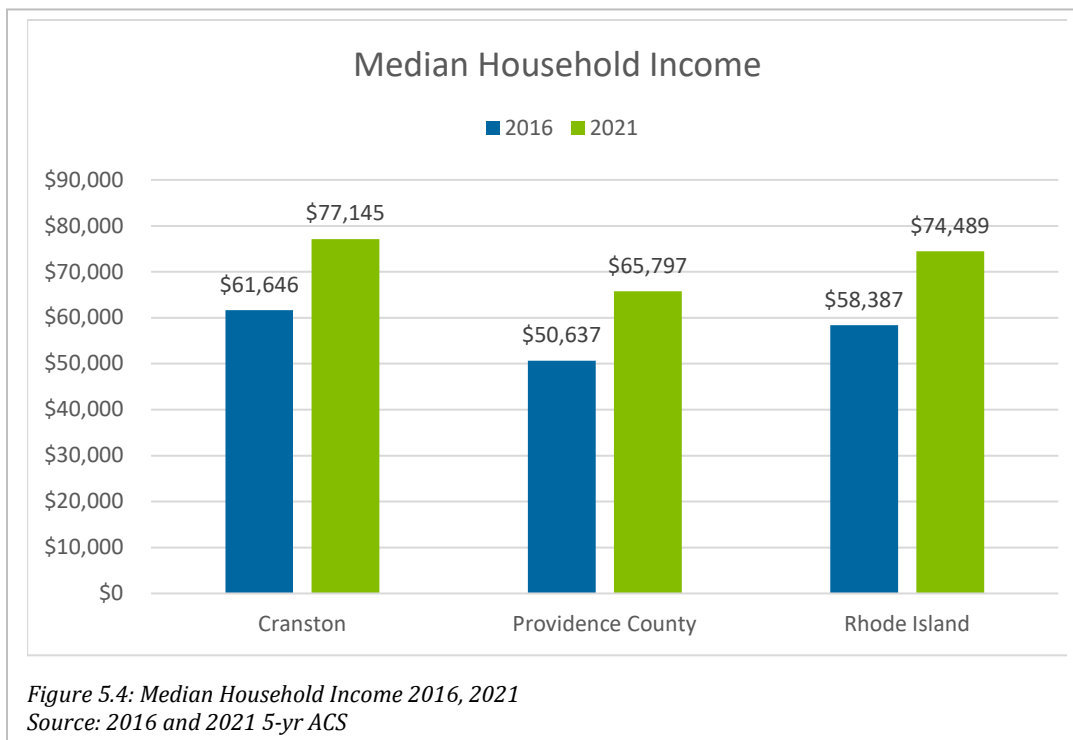


Figure 5.4: Median Household Income 2016, 2021
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

5.3 Household Characteristics

Changes in household types can have a significant impact on housing in a community. As of 2021, Cranston had 31,917 households. From 2012 to 2021, Cranston’s population grew by 2.2%. Over this same period, the number of households increased by 1,476 or 4.8%. A higher growth rate in households than in the population suggests an increased demand for housing and smaller households. As is shown in Table 5.3 below, there was a growth of nearly 1,000 single person households while family sized households continued to increase as well. This growth may not

correlate directly with building permit data as some of these households may be occupying previously vacant housing units, and not newly built units.

5.3.1 Household Composition

While the total composition in Cranston has not shifted drastically, the number of nonfamily householders not living alone had the highest percentage change of 33.7%, with an increase of 518 householders not living alone. Most of the growth in this household type came from householders between the ages of 15 to 34 years old (993 householders). Two other types of households grew during that period: Married-couple families (+4%) and non-family householders living alone (+8%). Most of this growth for householders living alone came from householders between the ages of 35 to 64 years old (712 householders). The most significant decrease lies in male single householders with children (-18%).

Households by Type	Cranston					Rhode Island		
	2016	2016 % of Total	2021	2021 % of Total	Change, 2016-2021	2016 % of Total	2021 % of Total	Change, 2016-2021
Total	30,441		31,917		4.8%	410,240	414,730	4.0%
Family Households	19,482	64.0%	14,449	61.6%	0.8%	62.5%	62.0%	3.3%
<i>Married-Couple</i>	13,902	45.7%	14,499	45.4%	4.3%	44.0%	44.4%	5.1%
<i>Other family</i>	5,580	18.3%	5,147	16.1%	-7.8%	18.6%	17.6%	-1.4%
Non-family Households	10,959	36.0%	12,271	38.4%	12.0%	37.5%	38.0%	5.4%
<i>Living alone</i>	9,424	31.0%	10,218	32.0%	8.4%	30.4%	30.5%	4.2%
<i>Not living alone</i>	1,535	5.0%	2,053	6.4%	33.7%	7.0%	7.5%	10.6%
Average household size	2.69		2.64		-1.9%	2.62	2.61	-0.4%

Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

Household composition in Cranston has shifted towards a higher percentage of married couples and nonfamily householders both living alone and not alone. Younger residents in Cranston have a growing need for roommates, while most householders living alone are older Millennials or Gen X¹. This informs a demand for smaller housing units due to high housing costs and the shortcoming of affordable housing options for Millennials and Gen X.

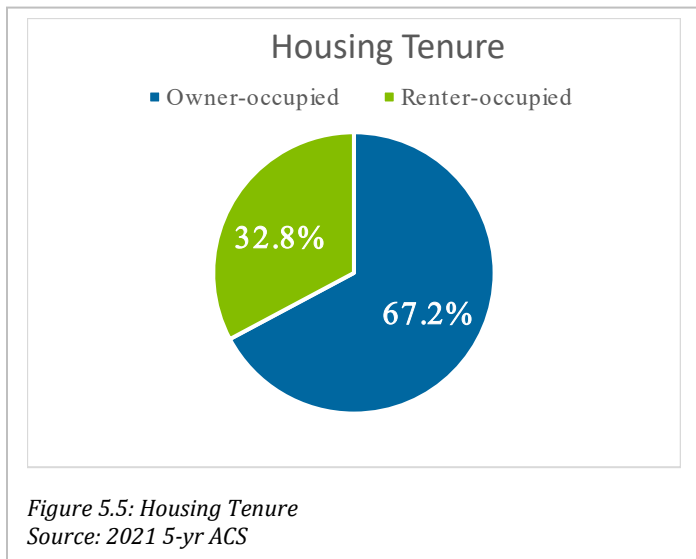
Household size reflects the demand for types of housing, as smaller households can reflect shifts in affordability, housing costs, and housing availability. The average household size for owner households in Cranston has decreased from 2.69 to 2.64, which can be attributed to the increases in single-person households. For renter households, the average household size decreased from 2.18 to 2.13, which can be linked to decreases in larger renter households. The rise of smaller households may indicate a rising need for housing tailored to individuals and couples.

¹ Millennials are those born between 1981 and 1996. Generation X are those born between 1965 and 1980.

5.3.2 Overall Housing Tenure

Based on 2021 ACS 5-year estimates, Cranston's households are split into 67.2% owner households (21,454 households) and 32.8% renter households (10,463 households). Compared to the 2016 ACS-5-year estimate of 65.9% owner households and 34.1% renter households, the composition of Cranston's housing tenure has not shifted significantly. Owner-occupied households increased by 1,394 households, while renter-occupied households only increased by 92 households.

As household composition in Cranston has shifted towards a higher percentage of non-family households and a slightly smaller average household size, across tenure the percentage of owner-occupied households increased slightly. This is similar to both Providence County and Rhode Island.



5.3.3 Household Tenure by Size and Age

Across household size and tenure, Cranston has seen a significant increase in 4-person renter households (21% or 186 households), with some growth in 2-person (+93 households) and 3-person (+72 households) renter households. Owner-households had the largest growth in 1-person households, which is in line with the increase in householders living alone and owning their homes. The only decrease for owner-households was seen in 4-person households (-746 households). The decrease in 4-person owner households may be related to older children moving out of the home.

Renters in Cranston tend to skew younger which is similar to trends seen nationwide, with the largest proportion of renter householders ages 25 to 34, while the largest proportion of owner householders are 65+. Figure 5.7 shows the age of householders by housing tenure (tenure refers to owner or renter households) illustrating the age difference between owners and renters in Cranston.

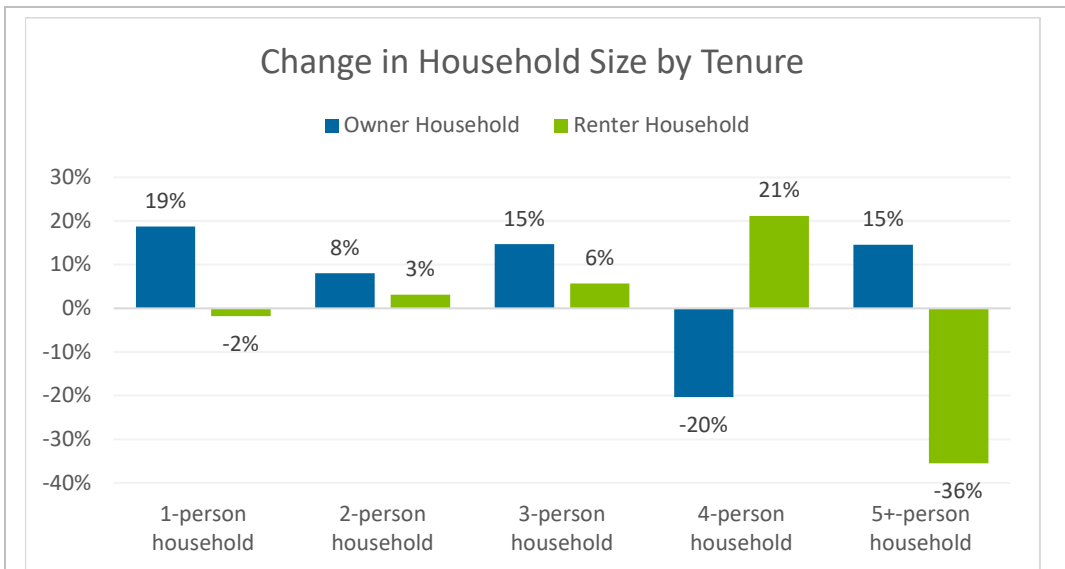


Figure 5.6: Change in Household Size by Tenure
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

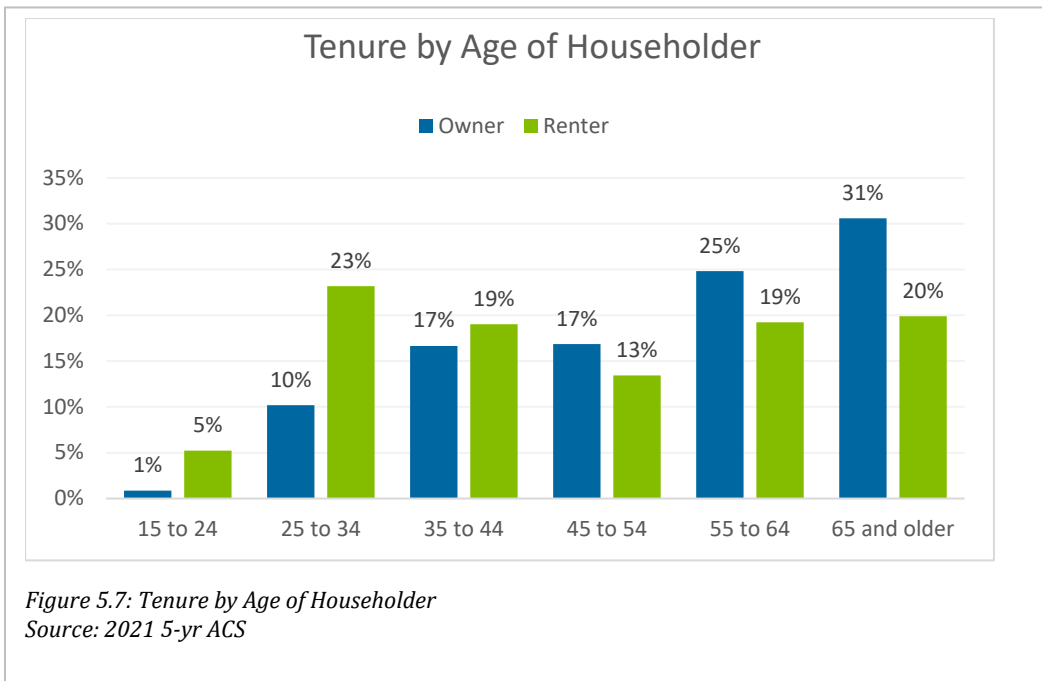


Figure 5.7: Tenure by Age of Householder
Source: 2021 5-yr ACS

5.4 Housing Stock

In addition to understanding the change in households and housing tenure in Cranston, it is also important to understand how the actual housing stock has changed over time. With an ever-tightening housing market and added competition for a limited stock of housing units, aligning housing supply with demand becomes important to try to balance housing within the local market. Layering on the complexities of the pandemic and its impact on housing prices and availability has created a sense of urgency both locally and regionally for addressing housing issues.

Cranston saw an increase in the total number of housing units between 2016 and 2021 from 32,716 to 33,648 units. The 2.8% increase in total housing units is below both the county and state growth (5% and 4% respectively). The number of single-family homes increased by 6.6% during this time to just over 22,000 units, going from 61.4% of the total housing stock to consisting of 65.6% of the total housing stock. This accounts for about 90% of all growth in housing between 2016 and 2021.

One-unit attached structures increased by 56.6% or 360 units and is the most significant housing structure typology growth. Additionally, 20–49-unit structures increased by 11% or 124 units. The total number of 20-49 units is small, so any increase has a larger percentage increase, not necessarily a large increase in quantity. The largest decrease in total households was seen in multi-family housing, with housing in 5–9-unit buildings decreasing by 33%².

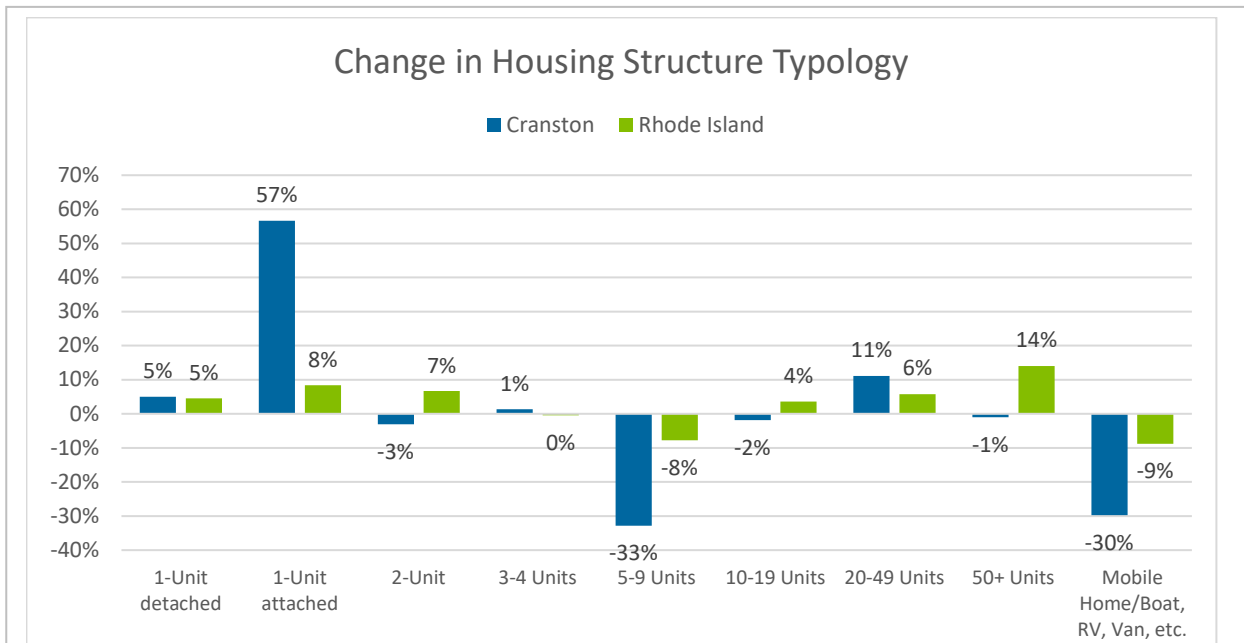


Figure 5.8: Change in Housing Structure Typology
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

	Cranston		Rhode Island	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Units in Structure				
Total Housing Units	33,648	100%	265,713	100%
1-unit, detached	21,072	62.6%	265,713	55.2%
1-unit, attached	996	3.0%	16,857	3.5%
2 units	4,340	12.9%	55,312	11.5%
3 or 4 units	2,356	7.0%	57,809	12.0%

² The ACS provides an estimate of housing units across typologies for Cranston and while useful for evaluating trends, these data may not exactly align with the number of housing units or types of housing in the city today. All ACS data has a margin of error to account for this being a Census estimate.

	Cranston		Rhode Island	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
5 to 9 units	745	2.2%	21,930	4.6%
10 to 19 units	1,168	3.5%	17,577	3.7%
20 or more units	2,872	8.5%	41,443	8.6%
Mobile Home	99	0.3%	4,394	0.9%
Boat, RV, Van, etc.	0	0.0%	133	0.0%

Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

5.4.1 Tenure by Units in Structure

Looking at the composition of units in owner-occupied structures, the majority (85%) of owner-occupied units are single-family structures with another 3% spread across 1-unit attached (e.g., row house, townhouse). This distribution suggests a prevalent preference for standalone homes among homeowners, possibly indicating a preference for more space, privacy, or a detached living arrangement. There are about 1,000 owner-occupied units spread across two-unit structures, or larger multi-family condominiums. Conversely, the renter-occupied housing stock is spread across several different residential structure types with 61% of all renter units in structures with fewer than five units and 39% in structures greater than five units. The overall growth in units in 20–49-unit structures is driven by renter-occupied units. However, single-unit attached units had the most significant proportional increase for renter-occupied units, by 53% or an increase of 95 units, becoming a more popular choice for renters. Two-unit structures are the largest category for renter-occupied units but have decreased since 2016, losing 131 units. This decrease might be attributed to a change in renter preferences, as there seems to be a growing demand for single-family homes to better meet the needs of renter households with families.

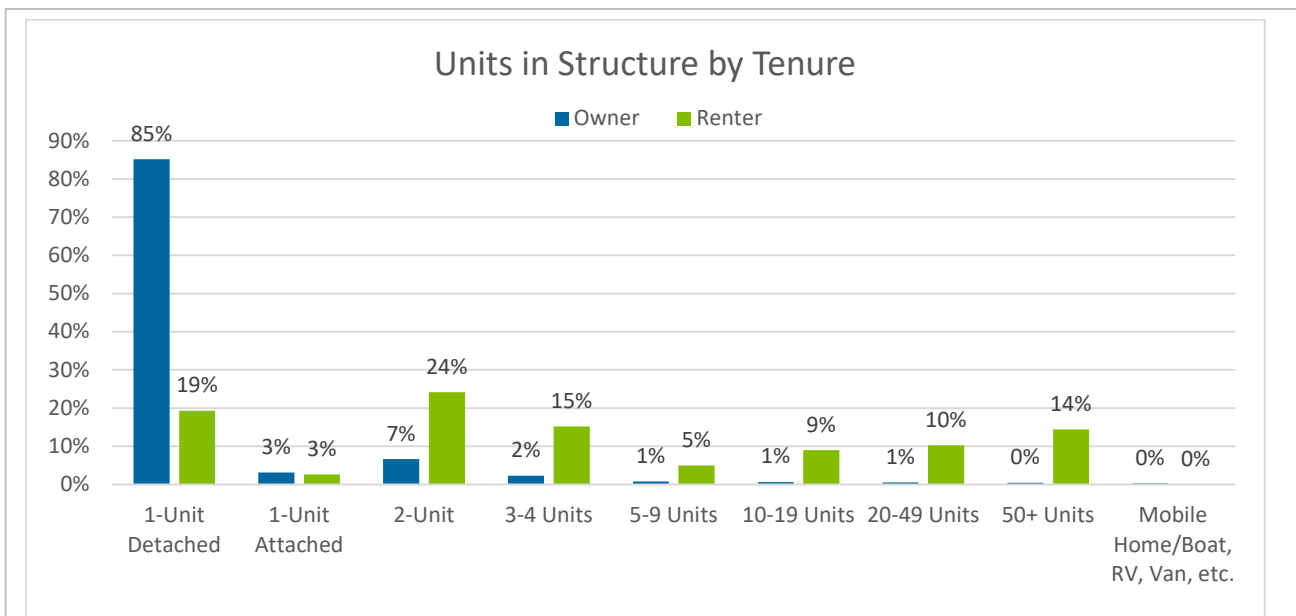
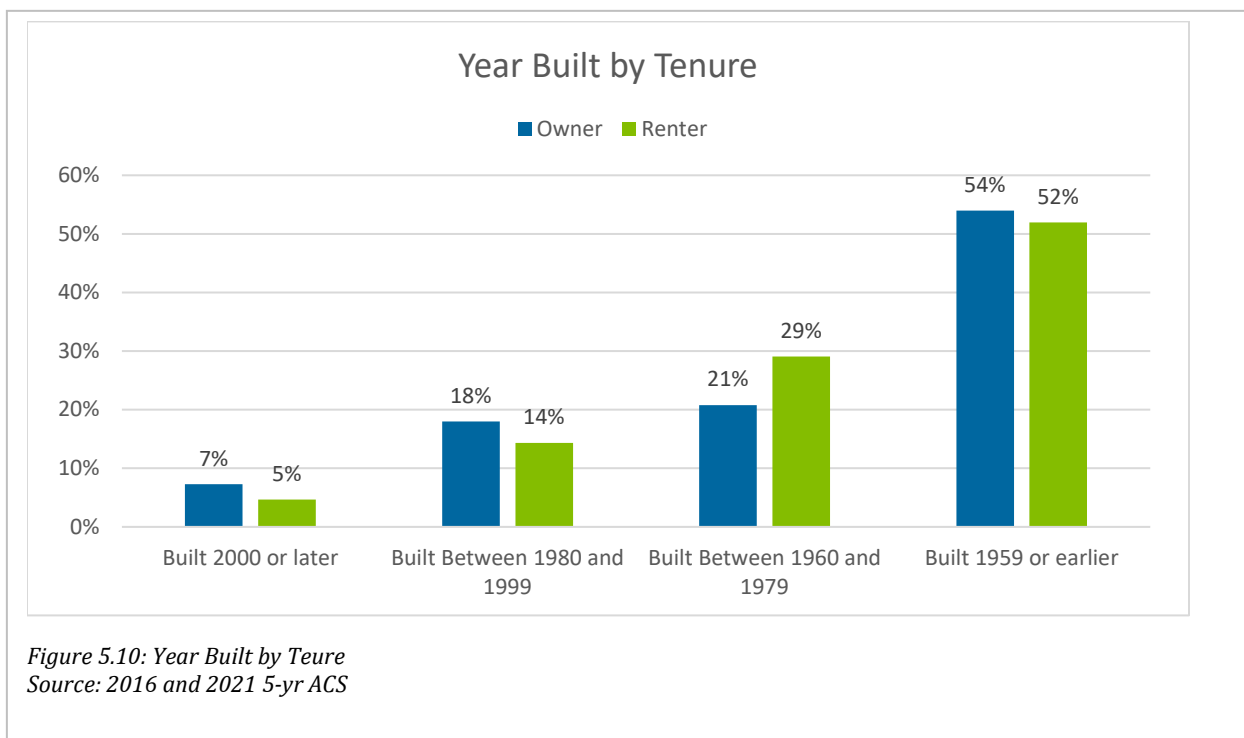


Figure 5.9: Units in Structure by Tenure
Source: 2021 5-yr ACS

5.4.2 Age of Housing Stock

The median year that a housing unit was built in Cranston is 1958, which is slightly older than Rhode Island's median year built of 1960. Most renter-occupied housing was built prior to 1979 (81%), compared to only 5% or 487 units built in 2000 or later. The prevalence of older rental housing stock poses challenges due to potential deferred maintenance issues and outdated layouts, diminishing the overall appeal of these units for present-day renters. Aging infrastructure may require significant investment for upkeep and modernization. Similarly, most owner-occupied housing units were built prior to 1979 (75%). However, there are more owner-occupied housing units built in 2000 or later, with 1,560 units built, about three times as many as renter-occupied units.



5.4.3 Occupancy & Tenure

The Census records vacant units in a few different ways to comprise the total vacancy count for a particular geography. Housing vacancies are captured in four different categories by the Census, which includes: vacant available, vacant unavailable, seasonal, and vacant other.

- Vacant available refers to unoccupied units that are currently for sale or for rent.
- Vacant unavailable refers to off-market for sale and for rent units.
- Seasonal and recreational refer to housing units that are not occupied year-round such as second homes, summer cottages or lake houses, etc.
- Vacant other refers to units that are not available for rent or sale and are off the market for different reasons. These include undergoing substantial rehab, uninhabitable units, or foreclosure, among others.

Understanding housing vacancy is important because it allows the quantification of a portion of the housing stock that might otherwise be available to year-round renters and owners but for the fact that it is categorized as vacant. It is also important to note that maintaining a healthy level of vacant

units is important to allow households the ability to find other housing that may be more suitable for their needs.

Of the 33,648 total units in the City, 95% were occupied; this is an increase of about two percentage points since 2016, though the total number of occupied units increased from 30,441 to 31,917. Cranston has seen its vacancy rate drop from 7% to 5%. Lowering vacancy rates may be attributed to the general lack of new housing construction, particularly rental units, which coupled with rising prices and changes in demand have led to consistently low vacancy rates. The challenges in construction during the pandemic, marked by increased costs and disruptions, have further impeded efforts to construct new housing.

As of 2021, the percentage of vacant available units decreased significantly from 4% to 1% or by 909 units. Slightly over half of all vacant housing units in Cranston were classified as “other vacant”, which describes properties that are involved in legal proceedings, foreclosures, currently under repair/renovation, abandoned, or vacant for personal reasons (including preparing to rent or sell or undecided). The low proportion of vacant units underscores the tightness in the housing supply within Cranston.

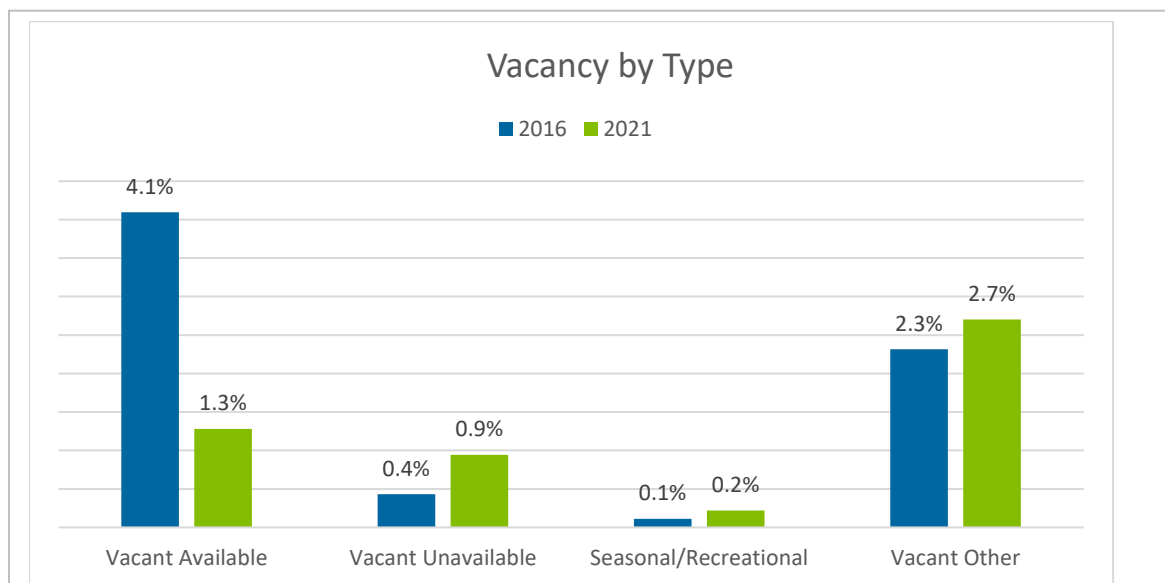


Figure 5.11: Vacancy by Type
 Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

5.5 Housing Market Dynamics

As the state of Rhode Island continues to experience and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting preferences are likely to impact Cranston’s housing market. The housing market dynamics in Cranston are marked by an overall increase in housing prices, reflecting the evolving preferences and demands of residents amid the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As in many other major metropolitan areas and regions influenced by these changes, demand for more space followed stay-at-home orders and the ability and necessity to work remotely for many workers.

5.5.1 Home Values

As of 2021, Cranston’s median owner-occupied home value is \$275,400 which is higher than Providence County (\$266,700) by about \$9,000 but lower than Rhode Island (\$292,600) by about \$17,000. Median home value has increased in Cranston by almost 13%, Approximately 60% of Cranston’s owner-occupied housing stock is valued at or above \$250,000. Over the past decade the number of homes valued at \$250,000+ has increased by 83%, The most significant growth occurred for homes valued between \$250,000 and \$499,999 which increased by 4,907 homes. Homes valued above \$500,000 increased by 999 homes or 143%.

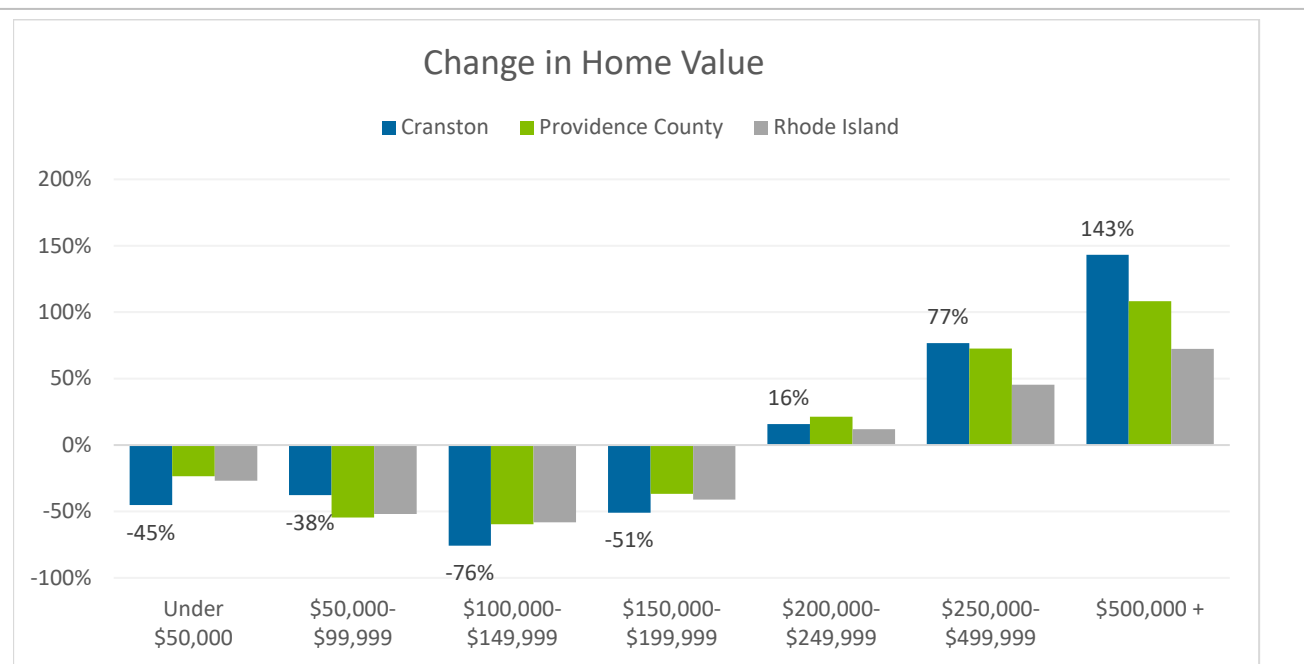
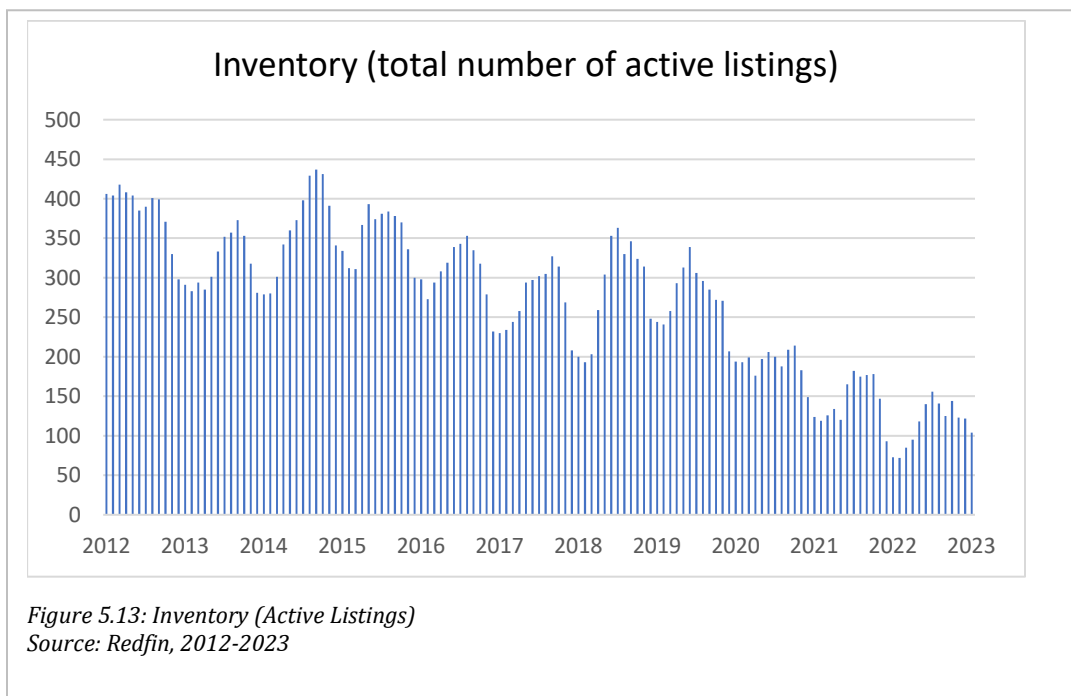


Figure 5.12: Change in Home Value
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

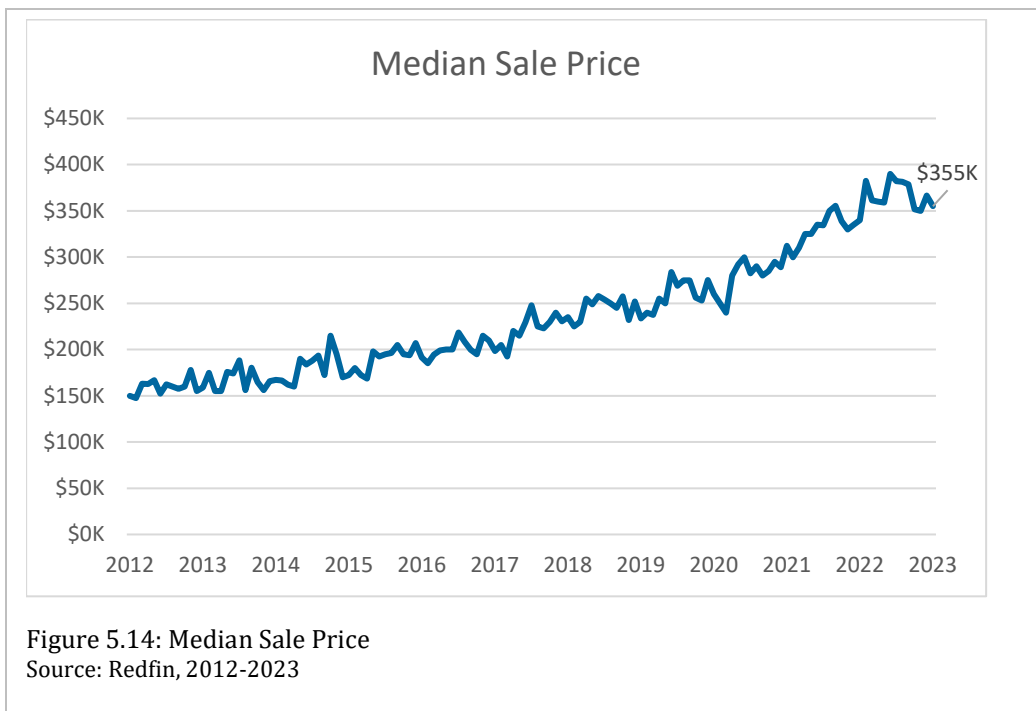
5.5.2 Home Sale Prices

Based on housing market data from Redfin, a real estate brokerage and analytics firm, the median home sale price of all homes in Cranston rose from \$159,000 in 2013 to \$355,000 in 2023. This is a \$196,000 increase (123%) over a ten-year period. This is slightly lower than the median price increase in Rhode Island (+\$235,000 or 135%) and Providence County (+\$232,000 or 162%). The substantial increase underscores a discrepancy when compared to Cranston’s median income increase of \$18,703 over the same period. Cranston’s median sale prices continued to increase to a peak in May 2023 at \$411,000.

Over this same period, median days on market decreased from 75 days in 2013 to 43 days in 2023, with houses selling quicker in the past three years than the previous ten years. Additionally, Redfin’s inventory (total number of active listings) has decreased through the past decade, with an average of less than 100 active listings in 2022. As inventory decreases, prices increase because of demand. Decreased inventory and low vacancy underscores the challenges in housing affordability and availability within the city, contributing to a broader issue of constrained supply and rising demand.



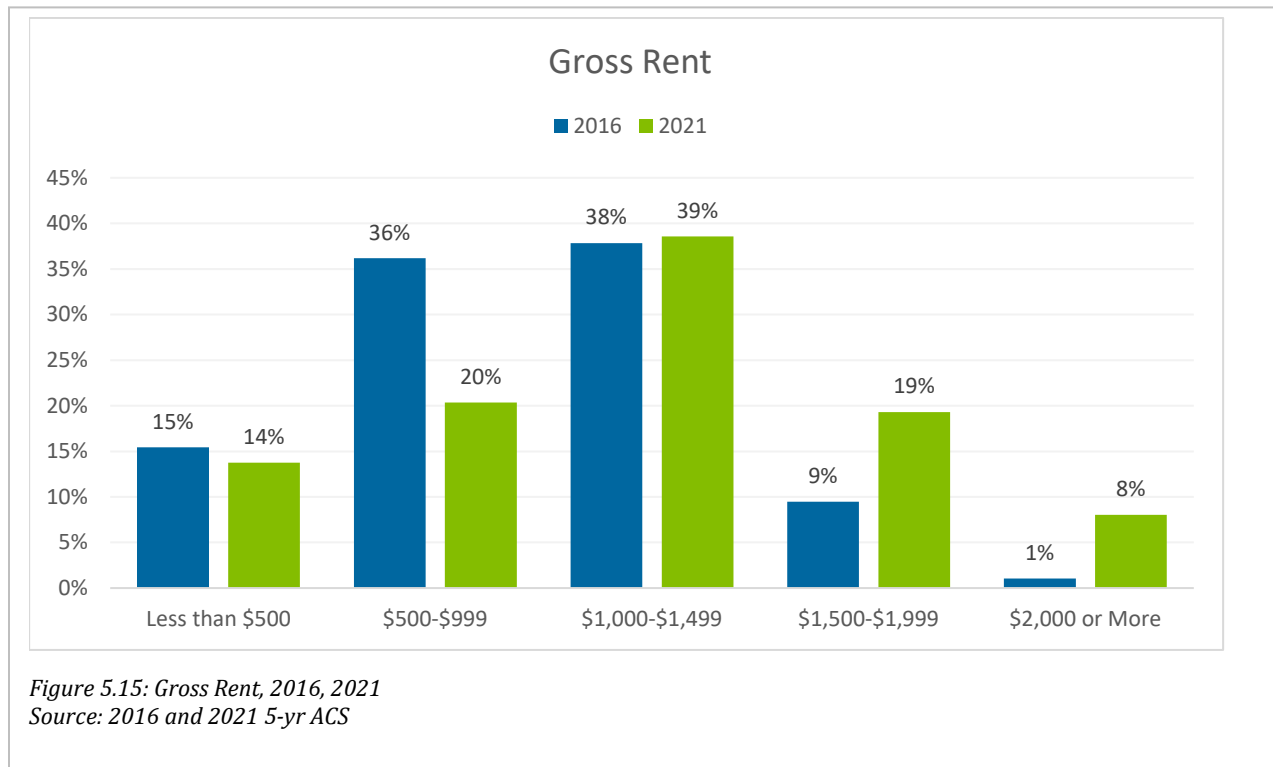
The current market dynamics make Cranston’s housing market very competitive. According to Redfin as of September 2023, homes in Cranston sell in about 14 days, with a median sale price of \$415,000. Cranston’s median home sale price in 2023 (\$355,000) is below both Providence County (\$382,500) and Rhode Island (\$412,900). However, home prices in 2023 were up 10% compared to 2022, with 65% of homes sold above list price. Another challenge facing home buyers today are higher interest rates, which make it more difficult to afford the same priced home today compared to a year ago.



5.5.3 Median Gross Rent

Gross rent is a measure of the monthly agreed-upon rent plus an estimate of monthly utility costs and fuels if they are paid by the tenant. This measure captures the true cost of renting a unit if utilities are not included in the monthly payment. It should be noted that ACS measures of gross rent include all rented units in Cranston, not just those that are recently listed on the market, which is why ACS gross rent estimates do not reach as high as recently listed rental units. What is important about gross rent estimates is that they provide a good indicator of how rents are trending across the entirety of the City's rental stock.

Over the past decade, the distribution of gross rents in Cranston has increased in the price ranges above \$1,000 a month and has decreased in the price ranges below. Rental housing units priced between \$1,500 and \$1,999 increased the most by 1,004 units. This trend signals increasing rents across the City’s rental market, meaning lower-income households are more likely to face cost burdening (spending greater than 30% of income on rent) or are being priced out of the City.



Cranston’s median gross rent from the 2021 5-year ACS is \$1,185, which is higher than both Providence County (\$1,062) and Rhode Island (\$1,097). This could be due to the lower number of rental units in Cranston and low availability. As of October 2023, according to Zumper and Zillow, there were 69 units listed by online rental websites. Asking rents ranged from approximately \$1,100 per month for smaller 1-bedroom units to \$2,600 for 3-bedroom units across the market. These offerings were found across a variety of unit types including townhouses and duplexes, single-family homes, and apartments. According to Zumper, two-bedroom apartments are the most common to be listed for sale. As of August 2023, 2-bedroom apartments are listed for a median rent of \$1,898.

Unit Size	Median Rent
Studio	\$1,000
1-Bedroom	\$1,493
2-Bedroom	\$1,898
3-Bedroom	\$2,225
4-Bedroom+	\$4,000

Source: Zumper, August 2023

5.5.4 Housing Affordability

Cranston's housing market is influenced by several factors, some of which are within and some beyond the City's control. Cranston's proximity to the City of Providence provides a source of jobs for Cranston residents, but also affects its housing dynamics. The continued growth of rents and the rapid increase in home prices appears to have caused affordability challenges for many Cranston residents.

According to RI Housing's 2023 Fact Book, the annual income needed to affordably purchase a median priced home in Cranston is \$118,356. Additionally, the annual income needed to affordably rent a 2-bedroom apartment is \$78,422. The number of households below HUD 80% area median income is 12,590 households which is 40% of all households in the city.

One common measure of housing affordability is referred to as *housing cost burden*. Cost burdening data measures the number of households spending more than 30% of their household income on housing costs. In Cranston, 35% of all homeowners spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs. This is a slight decrease from 2016 when 37% of homeowners were considered cost burdened. Renters face even greater challenges. The latest ACS shows that 49% of all renter households in Cranston are housing cost-burdened, equating to approximately 4,800 households. The proportion of renters who are housing cost-burdened has dropped since 2016, with the total number of such renter households decreasing by about 20 households. The number of cost burdened owner households has decreased as well, from 32% in 2016 to 30%.

Though it is typical nationwide to see a higher percentage of renter households experiencing cost burdening compared to owner households, there are still affordability concerns for these households in Cranston.

	Number of Households	Percent of Total
Cost Burdened Households	11,144	35%

Source: 2021 5-yr ACS

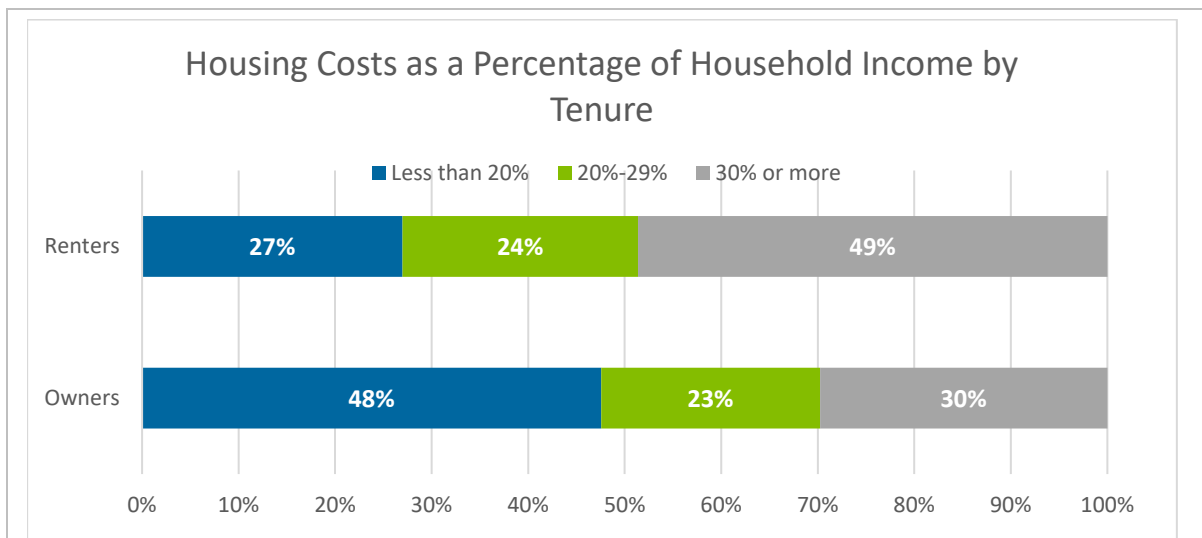


Figure 5.16: Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income by Tenure
Source: 2021 5-yr ACS

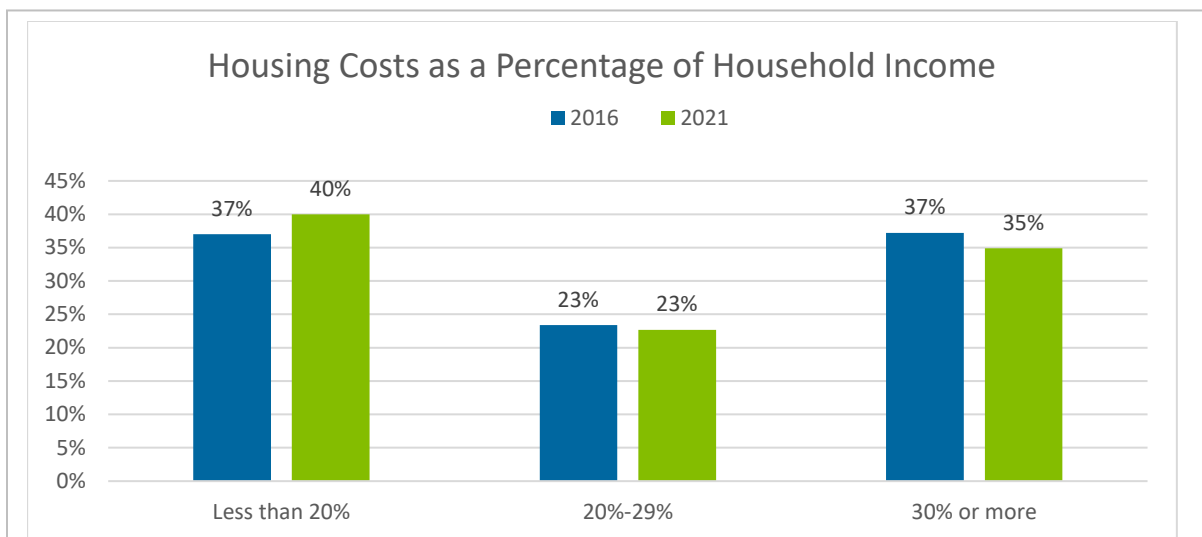


Figure 5.17: Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income
Source: 2016 and 2021 5-yr ACS

Severe housing problems can be any of the following: the housing unit lacks complete kitchen facilities, the housing unit lacks complete plumbing facilities, the household is overcrowded, and if the household is cost burdened. Low-income households and renter households are more likely to have one severe housing problem, with 72% of extremely low-income households and 62% of very low-income households having at least one housing problem. Renters, comprising 41% of households affected by at least one housing problem, are disproportionately affected compared to the 8% of homeowners facing similar issues. These trends are fueled by economic challenges and limited

affordable housing options. The consequences of severe housing problems are wide-ranging, impacting health, community well-being, and economic stability.

Income Category	Households with at Least One Housing Problem	Total Households	Percent of Households
Extremely low-income (<= 30% HAMFI)*	3,080	4,265	72%
Very low-income (>30% to <=50% HAMFI)	2,660	3,365	62%
Low Income (>50% to <=80% HAMFI)	2,445	5,035	57%
Low & middle-income (>80% to <=100% HAMFI)	650	3,235	15%
Total	10,115	31,360	32%

Source: CHAS** 2016-2020

*Household Area Median Family Income **Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy

Income Category	Households with at Least 1 Housing Problem	Total Households	Percent of Households
Renters			
Extremely low-income (<= 30% HAMFI)	1,600	2,520	63%
Very low-income (>30% to <=50% HAMFI)	1,335	1,630	82%
Low Income (>50% to <=80% HAMFI)	895	1,960	46%
Low & middle-income (>80% to <=100% HAMFI)	70	965	7%
Total	4,175	10,135	41%
Owners			
Extremely low-income (<= 30% HAMFI)	1,480	1,745	85%
Very low-income (>30% to <=50% HAMFI)	1,325	1,735	76%
Low Income (>50% to <=80% HAMFI)	1,550	3,075	50%
Low & middle-income (>80% to <=100% HAMFI)	580	2,270	26%
Total	5,940	12,400	8%

Source: CHAS 2016-2020

The Low- & Moderate-Income Housing Act (LMIH) (RIGL 45-53) requires municipalities to maintain 10% of their year-round housing stock as affordable housing (for Cranston, it is an aspirational goal,

as the City meets the State required affordable housing mark as discussed below). Based on data provided by RI Housing, as of 2022, 5.3% of the total housing units in Cranston are low-median income housing that count towards the 10% goal. There are 1,806 units of long-term affordable homes in Cranston. About 74% of these units are designated for the elderly population, 11% for families, and 14% for special needs residents. No units were added between 2022 and 2023, with a decrease of 7 units from 2022 to 2023. To hit 10%, Cranston needs to add 1,487 LMIH units.

Cranston meets RIGL 45-53-3(5)(i)

(i) Low- or moderate-income housing exists which is: (A) In the case of an urban city or town which has at least 5,000 occupied year-round rental units and the units, as reported in the latest decennial census of the city or town, comprise twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the year-round housing units, and is in excess of fifteen percent (15%) of the total occupied year-round rental units; or (B) In the case of all other cities or towns, is in excess of ten percent (10%) of the year-round housing units reported in the census.

According to the 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, 10,463 units (or 32.8%) of *all units* are renter-occupied. Furthermore, according to the 2020 Decennial Census, total housing units for the City equal 34,182. The City currently maintains 1,806 units or 17.8% of all total occupied year-round rental units. Thus, the City currently meets the State requirement for low- and moderate-income housing under RIGL §45-53-3(5)(i).

Ensuring an adequate supply of LMIH units in Cranston is crucial for providing essential housing options for a diverse range of residents, including the elderly, families, and residents with special needs. Fostering socioeconomic diversity and affordability within Cranston ensures residents aren't priced out of the City.

Table 5.10- Low & Moderate Income Housing						
Community	Low-Medium Income Housing %	Total Units	LMIH Units	Elderly	Family	Special Needs
City of Cranston	5.3%	32,935	1,806	1,348	205	253

Source: RI Housing, 2023

5.6 Current Measures

Cranston offers various housing assistance programs to income-eligible residents through the CDBG program to improve their homes, address code violations, and support first-time homebuyers. These programs aim to enhance housing conditions and make homeownership more accessible.

For homeowners, Cranston provides low-interest or interest free loans to income eligible homeowners to assist in making repairs and improvements to their homes and to correct code violations. Typical improvements include roofs, vinyl siding, windows, doors, and gutters. The Housing Rehabilitation Loan program offers a 0% deferred or a 2% interest loan with a 15-year payback, depending on the applicant's household income.

Additionally, the Department of Community Development provides two programs for first-time, income-eligible homebuyers in Cranston. For both programs, the buyer must live in the purchased property for five years after the assistance is provided (closing date).

- Closing Cost Assistance Program: Assists with closing fees, offering a grant of up to \$3,000.

- **Down Payment Assistance Program:** This program matches 50% of the required down payment, not exceeding \$5,000. This cannot be combined with the Closing Cost Assistance Program.

Cranston is one of the four AARP Age-Friendly Communities in Rhode Island, agreeing upon “livability criteria”. OneCranston Health Equity Zone (HEZ), one of Rhode Island's 15 HEZs, is a resident-led initiative supported by the Rhode Island Department of Health and managed by the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP). HEZ works to enhance health access by addressing barriers like poverty, discrimination, and limited access to education, housing, safe environments, and healthcare, with a particular focus on physical health, trauma, and youth opportunity.

5.7 Issues and Opportunities

5.7.1 *Issues*

In Cranston, there has been a shift in the age composition of the population, with more Millennials entering prime home-buying age and an increase in older adults seeking to downsize. These age trends are impacting the type of housing demand in the City, and the housing stock will need to adapt to accommodate the changing needs of these demographic groups.

The median year of construction for housing units in Cranston is 1958, indicating that a significant portion of the housing stock is older. Aging housing can present challenges such as maintenance and energy efficiency issues, potentially reducing the number of safe and well-maintained units available in the City.

The last five years saw record growth in home prices and sales volumes, as well as increases in gross rent. About 35% of all homeowners are cost-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing costs. Affordability concerns are especially pronounced for renters, with 49% experiencing cost burdening, making this a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

Cranston has experienced an increase in home values, with a significant proportion of owner-occupied homes valued at or above \$250,000. This presents an opportunity for homeowners to build equity and for the City to continue attracting residents interested in investing in their homes. Rising house prices can also contribute to the displacement of lower-income residents, as the cost of living rises.

5.7.2 *Opportunities*

The population and number of households in Cranston has steadily grown, with projections indicating further increases. This presents an opportunity for the city to capitalize on the growing demand for housing, potentially by creating housing for all age groups and incomes.

While much of the housing stock consists of single-family homes, there is also growth in large structures containing 20–49 units. Diversifying the housing stock with more multi-unit buildings could provide opportunities for various housing options, including affordable housing, which can help address affordability concerns.

The City lacks inclusionary zoning, which means there is no requirement for developers to include affordable housing in new developments. However, since May 2022 the Cranston City Plan Commission has generally followed an inclusionary affordable housing policy when it comes to new apartment projects. When feasible, the City Plan Commission required new apartment projects to have at least 15% percent of their units to be “affordable” under state law. Cranston can continue this flexible policy. In the alternative, Cranston can work towards the establishment and enforcement of an inclusionary zoning ordinance. Recent changes to the inclusionary zoning law require that a

minimum of 15% (as of January 1, 2025) of units in an inclusionary zoning project must be designated as affordable housing and maintained as such for at least thirty years. The City will need to evaluate if the new requirements are appropriately applicable in all areas of the City. This endeavor can be fortified through the implementation of enforceable land leases and deed restrictions, overseen jointly by the municipality and the state of Rhode Island, ensuring enduring affordability.

The City may also look to infill development, where appropriate, to mirror housing types within existing neighborhoods if the density matches the existing neighborhood.

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