

Housing Element and Fair Share Plan



July 9, 2025

Prepared by:



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2025 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

Vernon Township Sussex County, New Jersey

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JULY 9, 2025

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Vernon Township Fourth Round (2025-2035) Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Community Overview

Vernon Township is located in the northeastern corner of Sussex County and encompasses approximately 44,769 acres. The Township is situated in the geographic province of ridges and valleys, including the Hamburg, Wawayanda, and Pochuck Mountains. The municipality is also a regional tourist destination and is the home of the only ski resort in New Jersey – Mountain Creek. Other area attractions include the Mountain Creek Water Park and the Crystal Springs Resort's Minerals Hotel and Elements Spa. There are several unincorporated lakes and/or residential communities throughout the Township, as follows:

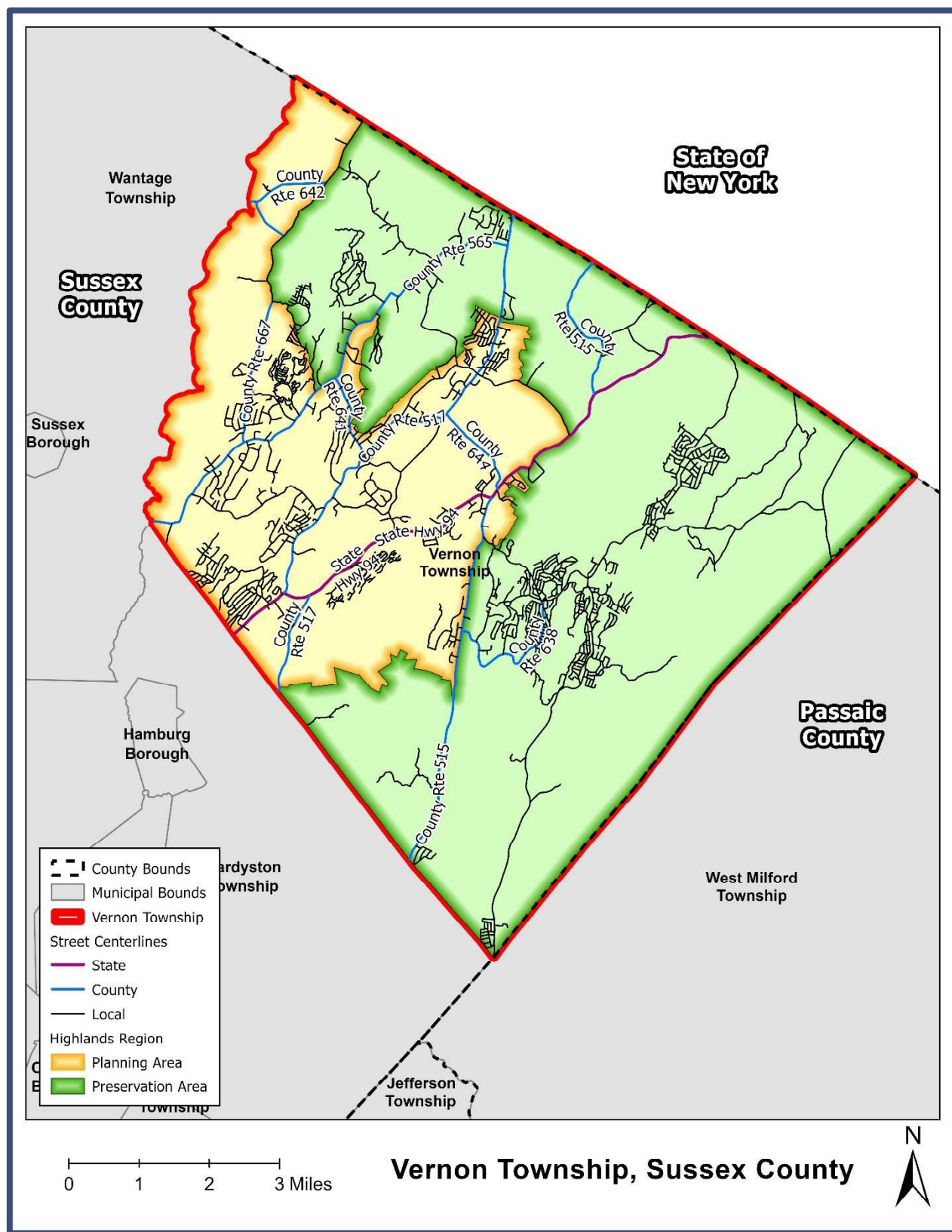
Barry Lakes	Kampe P.O.	Owens
Canistear Reservoir	Lake Conway	Pleasant Valley Lake
Cedar Ridge	Lake Panorama	Prices Switch
Cliffwood Lake	Lake Pochung	Scenic Lake
DeKays	Lake Wanda	Vernon Village "Town Center"
Glenwood	Lake Wallkill	Vernon Valley "The Valley"
Great Gorge	Lake Wildwood	Vernon Valley Lake
High Breeze	Maple Grange	Wawayanda
Highland Lakes	McAfee	Wawayanda Lake
Independence Corners	Mud Pond	

The Township is surrounded by two Sussex County municipalities: Wantage Township to the west and Hardyston Township to the south. Vernon also borders West Milford in Passaic County to the east and Warwick Township in New York State to the north.

The Township is located within the Highlands Region with 34.5 percent (15,464 acres) within the Planning Area and 65.5 percent within the Preservation Area. Preservation Area conformance was approved by the Highlands Council on May 17, 2012. Additionally, the Township is located within several New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) Planning Areas. The Vernon Town Center is specifically within Planning Area 4 (PA 4), the Rural Planning Area, Planning Area 5 (PA 5), the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area, and the Park Planning Area (PPA). Vernon's Town Center was designated by the State Planning Commission in 2003. The Township received Plan Endorsement and extension of the Center Designation from the State Planning Commission for the Planning Area portion of the municipality on August 24, 2021.

Vernon Township Fourth Round (2025-2035) Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

Figure 1. Context Map



Vernon Township Fourth Round (2025-2035) Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

1.2 Relationship to Other Plans

Vernon Township Master Plan

The Township adopted a comprehensive Master Plan in 1995, with an amendment in 2003. An updated Land Use Element, Historic Preservation Element and Recycling Element were adopted in July 2010, with Reexamination Reports prepared in 2012, 2013, and 2022. The following goals and objectives which are of particular relevance to this Housing Element and Fair Share Plan are as follows:

1. To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community.
 - a. Upgrade zoning in appropriate areas in order to protect ground water quality, steep slopes and scenic vistas.
 - b. Create new land use categories and apply zoning techniques that permit development of land while preserving environmentally sensitive areas.
 - c. Recognize and protect the Appalachian Trail through cluster or density zoning techniques.
 - d. Maintain low density zoning in that area adjacent to the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge.
 - e. Avoid location of intensive land use areas in wetland and buffer areas.
2. To preserve the existing residential neighborhoods and Lake communities.
 - a. Review the residential zoning standards governing the Lake communities in order to avoid unnecessary variances.
 - b. Maintain the current zoning standards of existing residential areas outside of lake communities.
 - c. Provide for new residential growth at densities sensitive to water quality and environmental constraints.
3. To ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected level of intensity of development.
 - a. Residential development, other than single-family, should be served by utilities.
4. To provide for Vernon Township's Affordable Housing obligation.
 - a. Rehabilitate existing substandard housing with State or Federal funds.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan (2001)

At the time of the preparation of this Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (HEFSP), the update to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) is expected to be completed in late 2025. The last update to the SDRP was adopted in 2001 and identified several goals and objectives for housing, specifically as they relate to the PA 4, Rural Planning Area, PA 5, Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area, and the PPA, Parking Planning Area. These goals, objectives, and policies, which in part guide the preparation of this HEFSP, are as follows:

1. **Housing:** Provide for a full range of housing choices primarily in Centers at appropriate densities to accommodate projected growth. Ensure that housing in general – and in particular affordable, senior citizen, special needs and family housing – is developed with access to a range of commercial, cultural, educational, recreational, health and

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transportation services and facilities. Focus multi-family and higher-density, single-family housing in Centers. Any housing in the Environs should be planned and located to maintain or enhance the cultural and scenic qualities and with minimum impacts on environmental resources.

2. **Natural Resource Conservation:** Protect and preserve large, contiguous tracts and corridors of recreation, forest or other open space land that protects natural systems and sensitive natural resources, including endangered species, ground and surface water resources, wetland systems, natural landscapes of exceptional value, critical slope areas, scenic vistas and other significant environmentally sensitive features.
3. **Redevelopment:** Encourage environmentally appropriate redevelopment in existing Centers and existing developed areas that have the potential to become Centers or in ways that support Center-based development to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs. Redevelop with intensities sufficient to support transit, a range of uses broad enough to encourage activity beyond the traditional workday, efficient use of infrastructure, and physical design features that enhance public safety, encourage pedestrian activity and reduce dependency on the automobile to attract growth otherwise planned for the Environs.
4. **Public Facilities and Services:** Phase and program for construction as part of a dedicated capital improvement budget or as part of a public/private development agreement the extension or establishment of public facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, to establish adequate levels of capital facilities and services to support Centers; to protect large contiguous areas of environmentally sensitive features and other open spaces; to protect public investments in open space preservation programs; and to minimize conflicts between Centers and the Environs. Encourage private investments and facilitate public/private partnerships to provide adequate facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, in Centers. Make community wastewater treatment a feasible and cost-effective alternative.
5. **Intergovernmental Coordination:** Coordinate efforts of state agencies, county and municipal governments to ensure that state and local policies and programs support environmental protection by examining the effects of financial institution lending practices, government regulation, taxation and other governmental policies and programs.

Highlands Regional Master Plan

The Highlands Regional Master Plan was adopted in 2008 in response to the Highlands Water Policy and Planning Protection Act (N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq.) of 2004. This RMP has been updated several times, in 2018, 2019, and 2024. Two-thirds of the Township is situated within the Preservation Area where conformance with the RMP is mandatory, and the remaining third falls within the planning Area, where conformance is optional.

The Highlands Council adopted, "RMP Addendum 2024-3: Highlands Affordable Housing Guidelines" on July 18, 2024, which established standards for identifying locations for affordable housing and availability of land and resources in the region. This guidance was used as part of the preparation of this HEFSP. This HEFSP also supports the RMP's Housing and Community Facilities Goal 60: "Market rate and affordable housing sufficient to meet the needs of the Highlands Region within the context of economic, social, and environmental considerations and constraints."

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Sussex County Comprehensive Plan

The Sussex County Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) was adopted in 2005 to provide guidance of the County's development in a sustainable manner. This HEFSP is consistent with the following goals and policy objectives outlined in the 2005 Sussex County SGP:

1. Minimize sprawl through incentives for density transfer and focus development into designated growth areas (centers); and
2. Expand the range of housing opportunities through judicious planning of service infrastructure.

Surrounding Municipalities' Master Plans

Hardyston Township, Sussex County

Vernon shares its southern border with the Township of Hardyston (approximately 8 miles). Several local roads connect these municipalities, including Scenic Lake Road, Hamburg McAfee Road / New Jersey State Highway (NJSH) Route 94, County Road 517, and Vernon Stockholm Road / County Road 515. Given that portions of the Highlands Preservation Area encompass this area of both municipalities, strategic land use planning of this section is vital. Hardyston's 2003 Master Plan was last amended in 2016; this HEFSP does not significantly impact this or other notable features of Hardyston.

Wantage Township, Sussex County

Vernon Township shares just under 7 miles of its western border with the Township of Wantage. The Wallkill River acts as a border between these two municipalities and there are several local roads that connect the municipalities such as Glenwood Road / County Road 565, and Owens Station Road / County Road 642. This HEFSP does not significantly impact Wantage Township or its Master Plan, which was last reexamined in 2023.

West Milford Township, Passaic County

Just over 9 miles of Vernon's eastern border is shared with West Milford Township and the municipalities are connected via Canistear Road and Warwick Turnpike. The Highlands Preservation Area encompasses this area of both municipalities therefore, strategic land use planning of this section is vital. The recommendations set forth in this HEFSP do not negatively impact West Milford, its planning efforts, or its Master Plan, which was last reexamined in 2023.

1.3 History of Affordable Housing

Overview

The New Jersey Supreme Court, in Mount Laurel I (1975) and Mount Laurel II (1983) required all New Jersey municipalities to take affirmative actions toward providing their "fair share" of the region's need for affordable housing for low- and moderate-income people. In response to the Mount Laurel II decision, the New Jersey Legislature adopted the Fair Housing Act (FHA) in 1985. This act created the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) to assess the statewide need for affordable housing, allocate that need on a municipal fair share basis, and review and approve municipal housing plans aimed at implementing the local fair share obligation. Subsequently, the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) was amended to require a housing element as a mandatory element of the municipal master plan. According to the MLUL, "a municipality's housing element shall be designed to achieve the goal of access to affordable housing to meet present and prospective housing needs, with particular attention to low- and moderate-income housing (52: 27D-310)."

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COAH adopted its Third Round Rules in December 2004. On January 25, 2007, the Appellate Division issued a decision on an appeal of COAH's Third Round regulations. COAH was precluded from issuing Third Round Substantive Certifications until new rules for the Third Round were revised and adopted. Subsequent to the Appellate Division ruling, the Highlands Council adopted the Highlands Regional Master Plan ("RMP") on July 17, 2008. The RMP provides the basis to determine the capacity of the Highlands Region to accommodate appropriate economic growth while ensuring the sustainability of the resources in the region. On September 5, 2008, Governor Corzine issued Executive Order 114, which addressed implementation of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and the need for coordination between the Highlands Council and the COAH. On November 12, 2008, COAH granted an extension from the December 31, 2008 petition deadline to December 8, 2009 for any Highlands municipality under COAH's jurisdiction, based on certain conditions.

On October 8, 2010, the Appellate Division invalidated COAH's Rules in In re Adoption of N.J.A.C. 5:96 & 5:97 by the New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing, 416 N.J. Super. 462 (App. Div. 2010). The decision stated, among other things, that growth share methodology was invalid, and directed COAH to adopt rules utilizing methodologies similar to those used in the First and Second Round Rules. On September 26, 2013 the Supreme Court affirmed the Appellate Division's 2010 decision and remanded COAH to undertake new rulemaking based on COAH's prior round rules and methodologies. COAH failed to formally adopt amended Third Round Rules.

In a 2015 decision known as Mount Laurel IV, the New Jersey Supreme Court divested COAH of jurisdiction of affordable housing, resulting in the process being left to the trial court system. This ruling dissolved the substantive certification process, turning instead to a judicial determination wherein a municipality files for a declaratory judgment action to certify that their Housing Element and Fair Share Plan has satisfied their Third Round obligation. At the same time, the Court appointed "Mount Laurel" judges for each of the State's judicial vicinages.

In 2024, New Jersey Legislature passed into law amendments to the Fair Housing Act (N.J.S.A. 52:27D-304.1 et seq. via NJ A4/S50) ("Amended FHA" or "P.L. 2024, c.2") that abolished and replaced COAH with the Affordable Housing Dispute Resolution Program ("the Program"), and set forth new methodology for the calculations of a municipality's affordable housing obligations for the Fourth Round and beyond. Subsequent to the adoption of the Amended FHA, the Highlands Council adopted an amendment to the RMP¹ governing the potential location of affordable housing and availability of land and resources in the region.

Vernon Township

Vernon Township is in Affordable Housing Region 1, which includes Bergen, Hudson, Passaic, and Sussex Counties. The Township adopted a revised Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (HEFSP) in June 2009 and the most recent HEFSP was adopted in January 2011. The 2009 HEFSP addressed the Township's cumulative 1987-1999 affordable housing obligations.

Second Round

The Township of Vernon received its Substantive Certification from COAH for the First and Second Rounds on December 15, 2004. The Township's pre-credited obligation was 131 units, consisting of 71 rehabilitation units and 60 new construction units. The Township completed Regional Contribution Agreements for a total credit of 54 units. A SCARC group home with three (3)

¹ New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council, RMP Addendum 2024-3: Highlands Affordable Housing Guidelines, adopted via Resolution 2024-24 on July 18, 2024.

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bedrooms was constructed in the Township, which provided three (3) credits and three (3) rental bonuses. The Township completed 25 rehabilitation units in the prior round and has completed seven (7) rehabilitation units since.

Third Round

COAH adopted its Third Round Regulations on December 20, 2004, requiring Vernon Township to petition for Third Round substantive certification in order to remain under COAH's jurisdiction. Vernon Township petitioned for COAH for Third Round certification in late 2005. The petition included an updated Housing Element and Fair Share Plan adopted by the Vernon Planning Board in December 2005. On January 25, 2007, the Appellate Division issued a decision on an appeal of COAH's Third Round regulations, which required COAH to revise its Third Round rules. As a result, Vernon's petition for substantive certification was put on hold during the rule making process. On May 6, 2008, COAH adopted new Third Round rules, which became effective on June 2, 2008. At the same time, COAH proposed amendments to those rules. Those amendments were published in the New Jersey Register on June 16, 2008. The amendments were adopted on September 22, 2008, with an additional amendment proposed on the same day. The amended rules were then adopted on October 20, 2008. As a result of the newly adopted Third Round substantive rules, communities petitioning to COAH for Third Round substantive certification were required to submit updated Housing Elements and Fair Share Plans that met the new rules by December 31, 2008.

On July 17, 2008, Governor Corzine signed a comprehensive affordable housing reform bill into law, P.L.2008, c.46, which included amendments to the Fair Housing Act. Also known as A-500, the amendments have been noted to be some of the most sweeping housing reform in New Jersey since the passage of the Fair Housing Act. These amendments were also required to be considered and included in all new Housing Elements and implemented by municipalities. On September 5, 2008, Governor Corzine issued Executive Order 114, which addressed implementation of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and the need for coordination between the Highlands Council and the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). In order to facilitate the coordination, the Executive Order required COAH and the Highlands Council to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to lay the groundwork for coordination on substantive certification in Highlands communities.

Accordingly, on October 29, 2008, COAH approved an MOU with the Highlands Council, which the Highlands Council approved on October 30, 2008. The MOU addressed a range of issues related to substantive certification that the Highlands Council was implementing through the Plan Conformance Process and COAH was implementing through the Substantive Certification process. (This MOU was later struck down in the courts in 2014).

On November 12, 2008, COAH granted an extension from the December 31, 2008 petition deadline to December 8, 2009 for any Highlands municipality under COAH's jurisdiction that had, before December 31, 2008: 1) submitted a duly adopted Notice of Intent in accordance with the Highlands Council Plan Conformance Guidelines; and 2) submitted a duly adopted resolution notifying COAH of its intent to petition COAH no later than December 8, 2009. Vernon submitted both the Notice of Intent and Resolution in conformance with COAH's requirements and was granted an extension to submit its petition for substantive certification on or before December 8, 2009. The extension was again granted by COAH to allow municipalities until June 8, 2010 to file their revised petitions. Unfortunately, Vernon was unable to meet the June 8, 2010 deadline. The Township was released from COAH's jurisdiction in July 2010. The Township revised its Housing Element and Fair Share Plan pursuant to the Round 3 Regulations in place and adopted the

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revised plan in January 2011. The Township submitted a petition to COAH for substantive certification on June 9, 2011, which was deemed completed by COAH on May 8, 2012. The Township issued notice to petition to COAH on May 21, 2012 and did not receive any objections.

Vernon's latest Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, dated January 2011, included a Third Round obligation for 389 new construction units and 31 rehabilitation units. The Township proposed to continue its rehabilitation program to address the 31 rehabilitation units. Since that time, seven (7) units have been completed. For new construction, the Township proposed an inclusionary zone in the Town Center to provide for 97 units and included development approvals already granted for 27 units.

On September 26, 2013 the Supreme Court affirmed the Appellate Division's 2010 decision and remanded to COAH to undertake new rulemaking based on COAH's prior round rules and methodologies. COAH failed to formally adopt amended Third Round Rules. The Supreme Court on March 10, 2015 ordered the following:

1. The Fair Housing Act's exhaustion of administrative remedies requirements is dissolved and the Courts may resume their role as the forum of first resort for evaluating municipal compliance with Mount Laurel obligations.
2. The effective date of the Order was June 8, 2015.
3. Municipalities that were under COAH's administrative review were permitted to file declaratory judgement actions with the Court by July 8, 2015.

Vernon Township did not file with the Court by the July 8, 2015 deadline and remains on the sidelines with respect to affordable housing compliance. The Township has taken affirmative steps by preparing an inclusionary component of its Town Center Redevelopment Plan, which requires any housing development that results in a density of more than six (6) units per acres and a total of six (6) units or more must provide a 20 percent set-aside for affordable housing. Additionally, as a part of the PIA for Center Designation, the Township has agreed to update its Housing Element and Fair Share Plan to current standards.

Fourth Round

On March 20, 2024, Governor Murphy signed into law Bill A4/S50 (P.L. 2024, c.2), which set forth the rules and regulations governing the Fourth Round (2025-2035) of affordable housing obligations in New Jersey. This law abolished COAH and shifted implementation of the Fair Housing Act to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), creating the Affordable Housing Dispute Resolution Program (the Program).

On October 18, 2024, the DCA prepared and submitted a non-binding report ("DCA Report")² on the Fourth Round affordable housing fair share obligations for all municipalities within the State of New Jersey. The DCA indicated that Vernon Township's Fourth Round Present Need/Rehabilitation Obligation is 33 units and the Prospective Need is 274 units. The FHA, as amended by P.L. 2024, c.2, ("Amended FHA") explicitly stated the DCA's numbers are non-binding. In response, Vernon Township's staff and professionals conducted a site-by-site analysis to confirm the developability of lands identified as such by the DCA. This resulted in a decrease of lands which are "vacant and developable" and a subsequent decrease to the Prospective Need Obligation to 194 units.

² NJ DCA, Affordable Housing Obligations for 2025-2035 (Fourth Round): Methodology and Background, October 2024.

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On January 27, 2025, pursuant to P.L.2024, c.2, the Township Council adopted Resolution #25-49, committing to its fair share obligation for the Fourth Round (2025-2035). This Resolution set forth the following obligations (not including any durational or vacant adjustments):

Table 1. Vernon Township Fourth Round Obligations

Fourth Round Rehabilitation/Present Need Obligation (pursuant to P.L. 2024, c.2 ³)	33
Fourth Round (2025-2035) Prospective Need Obligation (pursuant to Land Capacity Review ⁴)	194

An objection to the proposed obligation was filed by the New Jersey Builder's Association; however, following a settlement meeting and session with the Dispute Resolution Program, Vernon's prospective need obligation proposal was upheld by the Superior Court at 194 units. The final decision on the Township's obligation was issued on May 6, 2025, 36 days after the March 31, 2025 statutory deadline. Accordingly, the Township petitioned for a grace period to adopt and endorse the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan due to, "circumstances beyond the control of the municipality" pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:27D-313. The June 4, 2025 decision from the Superior Court allowed an extension to July 30, 2025 for the Township to adopt and endorse the Fourth Round HEFSP.

Timeline of Affordable Housing

August 10, 2004	Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act becomes effective, greatly diminishing the Township's availability to provide realistic opportunities for new development of affordable housing
December 15, 2004	Vernon Township receives its Substantive Certification from COAH for the First and Second Rounds
December 20, 2004	COAH adopts Third Round Rules
December 2005	Vernon Township petitions COAH for Third Round substantive certification. The petition includes an updated HEFSP adopted in December 2005
January 25, 2007	Appellate Division issued a decision requiring COAH revise Third Round Rules
July 17, 2008	Highlands Regional Master Plan adopted by the Highlands Council
September 5, 2008	Governor Corzine issues Executive Order 114, addressing the need for coordination between the Highlands Council and COAH
November 12, 2008	COAH grants extension to December 31, 2008 deadline to December 8, 2009 for any Highlands municipality
June 2009	Vernon Township adopts a revised Housing Element and Fair Share Plan addressing the Township's obligations for the years 1987 through 1999

³ David N. Kinsey, PhD, PP, FAICP, New Jersey Low and Moderate Income Housing Obligations for 1999-2025 Calculated Using the NJ COAH Prior Round (1987-1999) Methodology, May 2016.

⁴ Review of Land Capacity Factor and Prospective Need Obligation Prepared for Vernon Township, Sussex County, J. Caldwell & Associates, LLC, date January 23, 2025.

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- October 8, 2010** Appellate Division invalidates COAH's Rules – growth share methodology is invalid; COAH must adopt rules utilizing methodologies similar to those used in the First and Second Round Rules.
- July 2010** Vernon Township is released from COAH's jurisdiction
- January 2011** Most recent HEFSP for Vernon Township is adopted
- June 9, 2011** Vernon Township submits a petition to COAH for substantive certification. COAH deems the petition complete on May 8, 2012
- September 26, 2013** Supreme Court affirms October 2010 decision, remands COAH to undertake new rulemaking based on Prior Round Rules and Methodologies
- March 10, 2015** Supreme Court divests COAH of jurisdiction of affordable housing and municipalities must file declaratory judgment actions with the Court by July 8, 2015
- July 2015** Vernon Township misses the deadline to file for declaratory judgement and remains non-compliant in respect to affordable housing
- March 20, 2024** Governor Murphy signs Bill A4/S50 (P.L. 2024, c.2), which sets forth the rules for the Fourth Round of affordable housing in New Jersey and creates the Affordable Housing Dispute Resolution Program
- October 18, 2024** The NJ Department of Community Affairs publishes non-binding present and prospective need obligations
- January 27, 2025** Vernon Township adopts Resolution #25-49 adopting Fourth Round affordable housing obligations
- January 29, 2025** The Township files a Complaint for Declaratory Judgment in Superior Court seeking Certification of compliance with the Fair Housing Act, Docket No. SSX-L-000067-25
- May 6, 2025** *Decision and Order Fixing Municipal Obligations for "Present Need" and "Prospective Need" for the Fourth Round Housing Cycle* was issued by the Superior Court confirming Township Resolution #25-49 proposed affordable housing obligations
- June 4, 2025** *Decision and Order Granting in Part Motion to Extend Deadline for Adoption of Housing Element and Fair Share Plan* was issued by the Superior Court allowing a 30-day "grace period," until July 30, 2025, for the Township to adopt and endorse the Fourth Round HEFSP, due to circumstances beyond the control of the municipality. Specifically, the May 6th decision date which was issued after the statutory deadline of March 31, 2025.
- July 9, 2025** The Vernon Township Land Use board adopts the Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.

1.4 Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this Housing Element and Fair Share Plan is to provide a realistic opportunity to address the housing needs of Vernon residents across all income levels. This plan proposes multiple opportunities to develop a variety of housing types to meet these needs, which can be integrated into the existing land use pattern and character of the Township. This Plan has been prepared to meet the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL), Fair Housing Act (FHA), the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP), and Bill A4/S50 (P.L. 2024, c.2).

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This HEFSP supports the following goals of the Township's Master Plan, and re-affirmed in subsequent Reexamination Reports.

1. To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community.
 - a. Upgrade zoning in appropriate areas in order to protect ground water quality, steep slopes and scenic vistas.
 - b. Create new land use categories and apply zoning techniques that permit development of land while preserving environmentally sensitive areas.
 - c. Recognize and protect the Appalachian Trail through cluster or density zoning techniques.
 - d. Maintain low density zoning in that area adjacent to the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge.
 - e. Avoid location of intensive land use areas in wetland and buffer areas.
2. To preserve the existing residential neighborhoods and Lake communities.
 - a. Review the residential zoning standards governing the Lake communities in order to avoid unnecessary variances/
 - b. Maintain the current zoning standards of existing residential area outside of lake communities.
 - c. Provide for new residential growth at densities sensitive to water quality and environmental constraints.
3. To ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected level of intensity of development.
 - a. Residential development, other than single-family, should be served by utilities.
4. To provide for Vernon Township's Affordable Housing obligation.
 - a. Rehabilitate existing substandard housing with State or Federal funds.

1.5 Contents of the Plan

Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S. § 52:27D-310) and the Fair Housing Act (P.L. 1985, c.222) require that the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan include the following:

- a. An inventory of the municipality's housing stock by age, condition, purchase or rental value, occupancy characteristics, and type, including the number of units affordable to low- and moderate-income households and substandard housing capable of being rehabilitated, and in conducting this inventory the municipality shall have access, on a confidential basis for the sole purpose of conducting the inventory, to all necessary property tax assessment records and information in the assessor's office, including but not limited to the property record cards;
- b. A projection of the municipality's housing stock, including the probable future construction of low- and moderate-income housing, for the next ten years, taking into account, but not necessarily limited to, construction permits issued, approvals of applications for development and probable residential development of lands;

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- c. An analysis of the municipality's demographic characteristics, including but not necessarily limited to, household size, income level, and age;
- d. An analysis of the existing and probable future employment characteristics of the municipality;
- e. A determination of the municipality's present and prospective fair share for low- and moderate-income housing and its capacity to accommodate its present and prospective housing needs, including its fair share for low- and moderate-income housing, as established pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2024, c.2 (C.52:27D-304.1);
- f. A consideration of the lands that are most appropriate for construction of low- and moderate-income housing and of the existing structures most appropriate for conversion to, or rehabilitation for, low- and moderate-income housing, including a consideration of lands of developers who have expressed a commitment to provide low- and moderate-income housing;
- g. An analysis of the extent to which municipal ordinances and other local factors advance or detract from the goal of preserving multigenerational family continuity as expressed in the recommendations of the Multigenerational Family Housing Continuity Commission, adopted pursuant to paragraph (1) of subsection f. of section 1 of P.L. 2021, c. 273 (C.52:27D-329.20);
- h. For a municipality located within the jurisdiction of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council, established pursuant to section 4 of P.L. 2004, c. 120 (C.13:20-4), an analysis of compliance of the housing element with the Highlands Regional Master Plan of lands in the Highlands Preservation Area, and lands in the Highlands Planning Area for Highlands-conforming municipalities. This analysis shall include consideration of the municipality's most recent Highlands Municipal Build Out Report, consideration of opportunities for redevelopment of existing developed lands into inclusionary or 100 percent affordable housing, or both, and opportunities for 100 percent affordable housing in both the Highlands Planning Area and Highlands Preservation Area that are consistent with the Highlands regional master plan; and
- i. An analysis of consistency with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, including water, wastewater, stormwater, and multi-modal transportation based on guidance and technical assistance from the State Planning Commission.

2. Demographic Characteristics

2.1 Population

Population Change, 1990-2020

The Township of Vernon encompasses a total land area of approximately 70 square miles (44,769 acres) and had a population of 22,358 people according to the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census, which translates to a population density of about 319.9 people per square mile. This section analyzes population changes in Vernon Township, Sussex County, and the State of New Jersey over the 30-year period from 1990 to 2020. The data reflects Decennial population counts reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Township experienced significant growth during 1990 to 2000, with the population increasing from 21,211 to 24,686. This represents a 16.4% increase, the highest growth rate in any decade

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observed for Vernon. A reversal occurred during this decade, as the population declined to 23,686; a 3% decrease. This marked the beginning of a downward trend in local population growth. The decline continued into the next decade, with the population falling to 22,358; a 6.6% decrease. This was a sharper decline compared to the previous decade, suggesting a continuing trend of outmigration or population stagnation.

Similar to Vernon, Sussex County saw positive growth from 1990 to 2000 (10%) and from 2000 to 2010 (4%). Conversely, it experienced a slight population decrease of 3% from 2010 to 2020. However, New Jersey's overall population steadily increased across all three decades. This contrasts with the Township's and County's declines in the last two decades, suggesting localized factors across affecting population change.

In summary, Vernon Township showed a strong growth in the 1990s but has experienced a consistent population decline since 2000. While Sussex County began to show signs of decline after 2010, New Jersey as a whole continued to grow steadily. This trend may indicate shifting regional preferences, economic factors, or changes in housing and employment opportunities in Vernon Township and Sussex County.

Table 2. Population Change, 1990 - 2020

	1990	% Change	2000	% Change	2010	% Change	2020
Vernon Township	21,211	+16.4%	24,686	-3.0%	23,943	-6.6%	22,358
Sussex County	130,943	+10%	144,166	+4%	149,265	-3%	144,221
New Jersey	7,730,188	+9%	8,414,347	+4%	8,791,894	+6%	9,288,994

Sources:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). POPULATION AND HOUSING UNITS: 1990 TO 2010; AND AREA MEASUREMENTS AND DENSITY: 2010.
U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). PROFILE OF GENERAL POPULATION AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS. *Decennial Census, Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics, Table DP1.*

Age

Between 2000 and 2020, Vernon Township experienced notable shifts in its age demographics. The total population declined from 24,686 in 2000 to 22,358 in 2020, reflecting an overall decrease of 9.6%. One of the most significant trends during this period is the steady decline in the number of children and young residents. The population of children under 5 years dropped by 20.6%, while those in the 5 to 9 and 10 to 14 age groups saw even sharper declines of 48.2% and 40.6% respectively. These changes suggest a reduction in the number of young families in the area, potentially due to lower birth rates, housing affordability challenges, or migration to other regions.

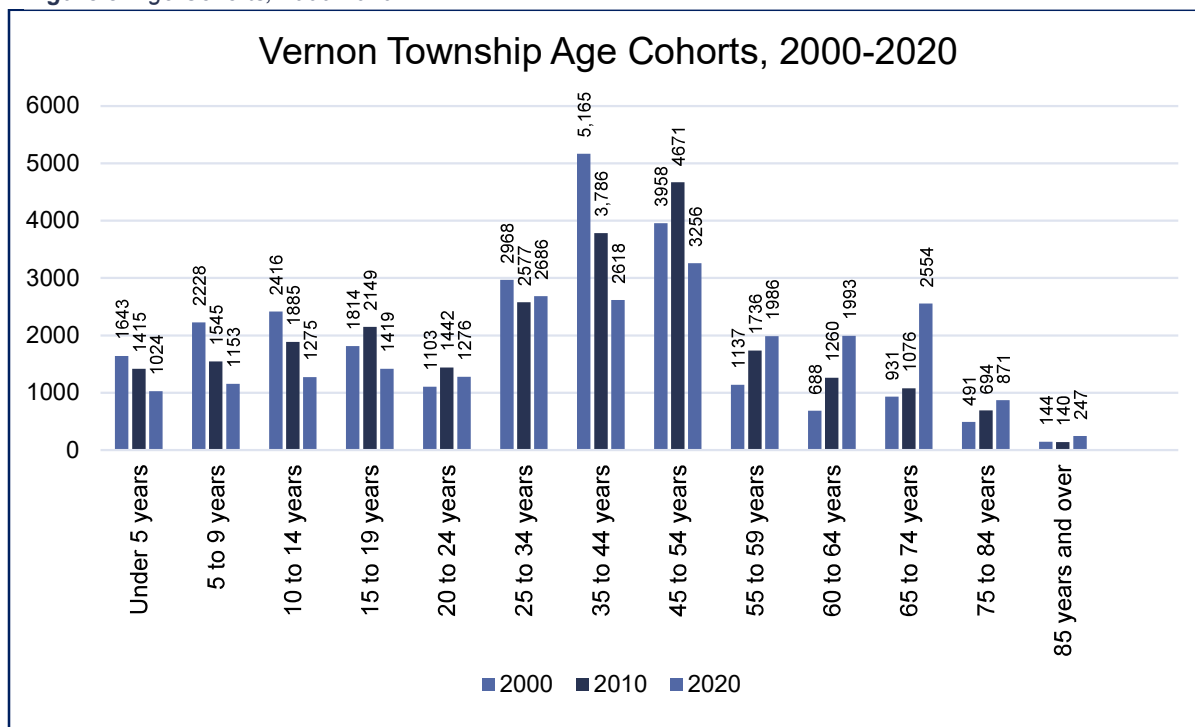
Similarly, middle-aged working adults, particularly those aged 35 to 44 saw a sharp population decline of nearly 50% over the last two decades. This suggests that Vernon may be losing mid-career professionals and families, which could have long-term effects on the local labor force and community involvement. In contrast, the 25 to 34 age group experienced modest growth, increasing by 24.2%, and the 55 to 64 age groups grew significantly, with the 60 to 64 group nearly doubling in size. These shifts indicate that while some younger adults may be staying or moving into the Township, a large portion of the community is aging in place.

The most substantial growth occurred among older adults. The 65 to 74 age group increased by 11.4%, and those aged 75 to 84 rose by 3.9%. This trend highlights Vernon Township's aging population and signals a growing need for services catering to seniors, such as healthcare,

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transportation, and accessible housing. Overall, the data suggests that Vernon is evolving into an older, more retirement-aged community.

Figure 3. Age Cohorts, 2000-2020



Households

Between 2000 and 2020, Vernon Township experienced a noticeable shift toward smaller household sizes, a trend that mirrors patterns observed in Sussex County and across the state of New Jersey. In Vernon, the proportion of 1-person households rose steadily from 16.3% in 2000 to 22% in 2020. Similarly, 2-person households increased from 29.2% to 35.8% during the same period, making them the most common household type by 2020. In contrast, 4-or-more-person households declined significantly, dropping from 36.3% in 2000 to just 24.2% in 2020. This reduction reflects a decline in larger family households and may be tied to aging populations, fewer children per family, or fewer multigenerational living arrangements.

At the county level, Sussex County showed similar changes. The share of 1-person households rose from 18.9% in 2000 to 23.3% in 2020, while 2-person households increased from 31% to 35.1%. Meanwhile, the proportion of 4-or-more-person households decreased from 31.7% to 24.3%. These trends were consistent with statewide figures, where 1-person households represented 25.6% of all households in 2020, and 2-person households made up 30%. Across New Jersey, 3-person and 4-or-more-person households both declined slightly over the two decades.

Overall, the data shows that households across Vernon Township, Sussex County, and New Jersey are becoming smaller. This shift highlights the growing prevalence of single-person and couple-based living arrangements, driven by aging residents, lifestyle changes, and potentially rising housing costs. These patterns may have long-term implications for housing design, community planning, and the types of services in demand.

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Table 3. Household Size, 2000-2020

Household Size	2000	%	2010	%	2020	%
Total Households (Vernon)	8,368	100%	8,622	100%	8,612	100%
1-person household	1,362	16.3%	1,635	19.0%	1,892	22.0%
2-person household	2,447	29.2%	2,665	30.9%	3,079	35.8%
3-person household	1,519	18.2%	1,764	20.5%	1,560	18.1%
4-or-more-person household	3,040	36.3%	2,558	29.7%	2,081	24.2%
Total Households (County)	50,831	100%	54,752	100%	55,915	100%
1-person household	9,595	18.9%	11,482	21.0%	13,056	23.3%
2-person household	15,742	31.0%	17,807	32.5%	19,604	35.1%
3-person household	9,361	18.4%	10,100	18.4%	9,690	17.3%
4-or-more-person household	16,133	31.7%	15,363	28.1%	13,565	24.3%
Total Households (State)	3,064,645	100%	3,214,360	100%	3,426,102	100%
1-person household	751,353	24.5%	811,221	25.2%	876,661	25.6%
2-person household	927,354	30.3%	957,682	29.8%	1,026,368	30.0%
3-person household	531,987	17.4%	558,029	17.4%	592,617	17.3%
4-or-more-person household	853,951	27.9%	887,428	27.6%	930,456	27.2%

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). HOUSEHOLD SIZE. *Decennial Census, DEC Summary File 1, Table H016.*

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). HOUSEHOLD SIZE. *Decennial Census, DEC Summary File 1, Table H13.*

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). HOUSEHOLD SIZE. *Decennial Census, Demographic and Housing Characteristics, Table H9.*

Income

Between 1999 and 2020, Vernon experienced significant upward shifts in household income levels. The percentage of households earning less than \$25,000 steadily declined from 10.9% in 1999 to 7.3% in 2020. This indicates a decreasing proportion of low-income households over time. Additionally, middle-income brackets saw a decline where households earning between \$25,000 and \$74,999 made up 46.7% of the population in 1999, but dropped to 27% by 2020. The largest decrease occurred in the \$50,000 to \$74,999 category, which fell from 25.7% in 1999 to 16.5% in 2020. This drop suggests that many former middle-income households may have shifted into higher income brackets. Households earning \$100,000 or more increased significantly. In 1999, only 14.8% of households earned between \$100,000 and \$149,999; by 2020, that share rose to 21.2%. Similarly, the percentage of households earning between \$150,000 and \$199,999 grew from 3.4% to 16.2%, and those earning \$200,000 or more jumped from 2.2% to 11.1% over the same period.

Vernon's median household income rose from \$67,566 in 1999 to \$97,400 in 2020, an increase of nearly 44% in inflation-adjusted dollars. This figure consistently outpaced both Sussex County and New Jersey overall. In 2020, Sussex County's median was \$96,222, slightly below Vernon's, while New Jersey's median was notably lower at \$85,245.

From 1999 to 2020, the Township experienced strong upward income mobility, with a clear reduction in lower- and middle-income households and a significant increase in high-income earners. Vernon's median income now surpasses both the county and state averages, reflecting a growing, economically stable, and increasingly affluent community. These trends suggest rising standards of living but may also point to a growing attention to affordability, economic diversity, and access to housing and services across income levels.

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Table 4. Income in the Past 12 Months, 2000 - 2020

Household Income	Percent of Households		
	1999	2010	2020
Total Households	8,386	8,719	8,478
Less than \$10,000	2.7%	1.9%	2.3%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	2.8%	1.4%	0.9%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	5.4%	4.6%	4.1%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	6.3%	6.0%	3.0%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	14.7%	10.2%	7.5%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	25.7%	22.4%	16.5%
\$75,000 to \$99,000	22%	18.8%	17.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	14.8%	23.6%	21.2%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3.4%	6.1%	16.2%
\$200,000 or more	2.2%	5.0%	11.1%
Vernon Median Household Income	\$67,566	\$81,129	\$97,400
Sussex County Median Household Income	\$65,266	\$84,115	\$96,222
New Jersey Median Household Income	\$55,146	\$67,681	\$85,245

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). PROFILE OF SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS: 2000. Decennial Census, *DEC Summary File 4 Demographic Profile, Table DP3*.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2010 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS). American Community Survey, *ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1901*.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2020 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS). American Community Survey, *ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1901*.

2.2 Employment Characteristics

Workforce

In 2020, the Township had a total population of 18,535 residents aged 16 years and older. Of this population, 70.3% (13,039 individuals) were part of the labor force.⁵ The civilian labor force also totaled 13,039, indicating that there were no active-duty military members reported in the community. Among those in the labor force, 12,290 people were employed, representing 66.3% of the working-age population. Meanwhile, 749 individuals were unemployed, accounting for 4% of the population aged 16 and older, resulting in a local unemployment rate of 5.7%. Additionally, 29.7% of the population (5,496 individuals), were not in the labor force, which typically includes retirees, students, and other not seeking employment.

Table 5. Employment Status, 2020

Employment Status	Estimate	%
Population 16 years and older	18,535	
In labor force	13,039	70.3%
Civilian labor force	13,039	70.3%
Employed	12,290	66.3%
Unemployed	749	4.0%
Armed Forces	0	0.0%
Not in labor force	5,496	29.7%
Unemployment rate (Vernon)	5.7%	
Unemployment rate (County)	5.3%	
Unemployment rate (State)	5.8%	

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS. American Community Survey, *ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP03*.

When comparing Vernon's unemployment rate to regional and State benchmarks, it falls between the County and State levels. Sussex County's unemployment rate was slightly lower at 5.3%,

⁵ According to the United States Census Bureau Glossary, "The labor force includes all people classified in the civilian labor force, plus members of the U.S. Armed Forces (people on active duty with the United States Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard). The civilian labor force consists of people classified as employed or unemployed."

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while New Jersey reported a slightly higher rate of 5.8%. This suggests that Vernon Township's local labor market was relatively stable and closely aligned with broader employment conditions, both regionally and statewide, during 2020.

Commuting Characteristics

In 2020, the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates reported that Vernon had 11,691 residents aged 16 and over. Of these, 11,539 individuals commuted to work rather than working from home. The vast majority (86.8%) used a car, truck or van as their primary means for transportation with 80.3% driving alone and 6.5% carpooling. A small portion of commuters used public transportation (6.2%), while very few traveled by bicycle (0.4%) or by taxi, motorcycle, or other means (1.04%). Notably, there were no workers who reported walking to work, reflecting the Township's car-dependent layout.

When examining the location of employment, most residents (88.6%) worked within New Jersey, though only 42.6% worked within Sussex County. A significant portion (46%) commuted outside of the County, and 11.4% worked outside the State entirely, indicating a strong trend of regional commuting beyond local boundaries.

Commute times in Vernon were relatively long, with a mean travel time of 43.9 minutes. Over one-third of commuters (34.1%) traveled 60 minutes or more to reach work, and an additional 17.1% had commutes ranging from 45 to 59 minutes. Only a small percentage (16.44%) had commutes under 20 minutes. These figures suggest that Vernon is primarily a commuter community, where many residents travel considerable distances (often outside of the County or the State) for employment. This commuting pattern emphasizes the importance of regional transportation infrastructure and the potential need for local job creation to reduce long-distance travel burdens.

Table 6. Commuting Characteristics, 2020

Commuting Characteristics	Estimate
Workers 16 years and over	11,691
Did not work from home	11,539
Means of transportation to work	
Car, truck, or van	86.8%
Drove alone	80.3%
Carpooled	6.5%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	6.2%
Walked	0.0%
Bicycle	0.4%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	1.04%
Place of work	
Worked in state of residence	88.6%
Worked in county of residence	42.6%
Worked outside county of residence	46.0%
Worked outside state of residence	11.4%
Travel time to work	
Less than 10 minutes	7.7%
10 to 14 minutes	8.7%
15 to 19 minutes	7.7%
20 to 24 minutes	4.1%
25 to 29 minutes	1.6%
30 to 34 minutes	9.4%
35 to 44 minutes	9.7%
45 to 59 minutes	17.1%
60 or more minutes	34.1%
Mean Travel time to work (minutes)	43.9

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). COMMUTING CHARACTERISTICS BY SEX. *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0801.*

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Employment by Industry

Vernon Township had a civilian employed population of 12,290 individuals aged 16 years and over in 2020. The largest share of employment was concentrated in the educational services, health care and social assistance sector, which employed 2,668 residents and accounted for 21.7% of the workforce. This was followed by the professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services sector, which employed 1,741 individuals (14.2%). These two sectors alone represented over one-third of all civilian employment in the Township, indicating a strong base in both education/healthcare and professional services.

Other notable industries included retail trade (10.8%), manufacturing (10.4%), and construction (9.5%), which together reflect a balance of both service-oriented and hands-on labor employment. The finance insurance, real estate, and rental/leasing sector, along with arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation/food services, each accounted for 7.6% of employment, suggesting moderate engagement in both financial and hospitality-related work.

Smaller employment shares were found in sectors such as other services except public administration (5.2%), transportation and warehousing, and utilities (4.4%), and public administration (3.8%). The lowest levels of employment were seen in wholesale trade (2.2%), information (2%), and agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining, which made up just 0.7% of the workforce.

Overall, Vernon's employment landscape in 2020 was diverse, with an emphasis on education, healthcare, and professional services. The spread across various industry sectors reflects a mixed economy with both white-collar and blue-collar opportunities, while the minimal agricultural employment aligns with Township's large residential and suburban character.

Table 7. Industries of Employment, 2020

Industry	Estimate	%
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	12,290	
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	2,668	21.7%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1,741	14.2%
Retail trade	1,329	10.8%
Manufacturing	1,281	10.4%
Construction	1,168	9.5%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	936	7.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	930	7.6%
Other services, except public administration	633	5.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	535	4.4%
Public administration	470	3.8%
Wholesale trade	269	2.2%
Information	245	2.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	85	0.7%

Source:
U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). SELECTED ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS. *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP03.*

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3. Housing Characteristics

3.1 Inventory of Housing Stock

Housing Occupancy and Tenure

In 2020, the U.S. Decennial Census reported a total of 10,538 housing units in Vernon Township, in which 8,612 (81.7%) were occupied. The Township had a relatively high housing vacancy rate of 18.3%, with a homeowner vacancy rate of 2.9% and a rental vacancy rate of 8.3%. These figures suggest a strong preference for homeownership among residents, as well as a notable amount of unoccupied housing stock, particularly in rental properties.

Compared to boarder geographic areas, Vernon's vacancy rates were significantly higher. In Sussex County overall, the vacancy rate was 10%, with a homeowner vacancy rate of 2.2% and a rental vacancy rate of 6.8%. Vernon also had a lower percentage of owner-occupied housing (70.8%) than the county average (72.9%), and a considerably lower share of renter-occupied housing of 10.8% compared to 16.3% in the county. At the state level, New Jersey had an even lower total vacancy rate of 8.9%, with 91.1% of housing units occupied. The State's renter-occupied share was much higher at 35.3%, indicating a more balanced mix of rental and owner-occupied housing statewide.

Table 8. Housing Occupancy and Tenure, 2020

Housing Occupancy and Tenure	Estimate	%
Vernon		
Total housing units	10,538	100%
Occupied housing units	8,612	81.7%
Owner-occupied	7,460	70.8%
Renter-occupied	1,152	10.9%
Vacant housing units	1,926	18.3%
Homeowner vacancy rate	2.9%	
Rental vacancy rate	8.3%	
Sussex County		
Total housing units	62,709	100%
Occupied housing units	55,915	89.2%
Owner-occupied	45,705	72.9%
Renter-occupied	10,210	16.3%
Vacant housing units	6,794	10.8%
Homeowner vacancy rate	2.2%	
Rental vacancy rate	6.8%	
New Jersey		
Total housing units	3,761,229	100%
Occupied housing units	3,426,102	91.1%
Owner-occupied	2,098,500	55.8%
Renter-occupied	1,327,602	35.3%
Vacant housing units	335,127	8.9%
Homeowner vacancy rate	1.5%	
Rental vacancy rate	5.7%	

Source:

United States Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census, *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics, DP1.*

These comparisons highlight Vernon Township's strong homeownership trend and relatively limited rental housing stock. However, the elevated vacancy rates especially among rental units may point to challenges in the rental market, such as affordability, housing condition, or demand. Addressing these issues could help ensure a more balanced and accessible housing landscape for all residents.

Vacancy Status

Vernon Township reported a total of 1,926 vacant housing units in 2020, representing 18.3% of all housing units in the municipality. The majority of these vacancies (1,289 units or 12.2%) were designated for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, indicating the Township's role as a secondary home or vacation destination. This high proportion of seasonal housing significantly contributes to Vernon's overall vacancy rate.

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Other types of vacancies were relatively minimal. Units listed “for sale only” accounted for 2.1% of total housing, while “other vacant” units also made up 2.1%. Furthermore, the “other vacant” category includes a variety of situations,⁶ as follows:

1. The owner does not want to rent or sell;
2. The owner is elderly and living in a nursing home or with family members;
3. The unit is being held by the settlement of an estate;
4. The unit is being renovated; or
5. The unit is being foreclosed.

Homes that were “rented but not occupied” and those “sold but not occupied” represent only 0.2% and 0.6% respectively. Just 1% of housing units were available for rent, suggesting limited availability in the local rental market.

Overall, Vernon Township’s vacancy profile highlights a unique dynamic shape by its seasonal housing stock. The data suggests that the elevated vacancy rate is not primarily driven by long-term unoccupied units or lack of demand, but rather by the area’s popularity as a location for part-time or vacation homes. This characteristic has implications for local services, housing affordability, and community engagement, especially in off-peak seasons when part-time residents are less likely to be present.

Units In Structure

Vernon Township had a total of 10,705 housing units, which is dominated by single-family detached homes (8,264 units or 77.2%) of all housing. This reflects the Township’s suburban and rural character, where low-density residential development is more frequent. In contrast, single-unit attached homes made up a much smaller share at 3.6%, and multi-family housing was limited. Structures with 2 units represented 1.3%, 3 or 4 units made up 1.3%, and 5 to 9 units accounted for 8.6% - the largest share among multi-unit housing types. Larger apartment buildings were rare, with only 0.5% of housing units located in structures with 20 or more units, and 0.3% in 10-to-19-unit buildings.

Table 9. Vacancy Housing Unit Type, 2020

Vacancy Status	Count	%
Total vacant units	1,926	18.3%
For rent	106	1.0%
Rented, not occupied	20	0.2%
For sale only	224	2.1%
Sold, not occupied	63	0.6%
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	1,289	12.2%
Other vacant	224	2.1%

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). PROFILE OF GENERAL POPULATION AND HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS. Decennial Census, DEC Demographic Profile, Table DP1.

Table 10. Units In Structure, 2020

Units In Structure	Estimate	%
Total housing units	10,705	100%
1-unit, detached	8,264	77.2%
1-unit, attached	382	3.6%
2-units	136	1.3%
3 or 4 units	125	1.2%
5 to 9 units	918	8.6%
10 to 19 units	325	3.0%
20 or more	58	0.5%
Mobile home	497	4.6%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	0.0%

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). UNITS IN STRUCTURE. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B25024.

⁶ Kresin, M. “Other” Vacant Housing Units: An Analysis from the Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey.” U.S. Census Bureau, Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/qtr113/PAA-poster.pdf>

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Additionally, mobile homes represented a notable 4.6% (497 units) of the housing stock, indicating the presence of more affordable housing options or housing with recreational or seasonal use. No housing units were classified as boats, RVs, vans, or other similar categories. Overall, Vernon Township's housing structure is characterized by low-density, predominantly detached single-family homes, with limited higher-density or multi-family residential development. This composition supports a car-dependent, homeowner-oriented community but may limit housing diversity and affordability, especially for renters or those seeking smaller or more compact living arrangements.

Year Structure Built

The Township of Vernon had a total of 107,705 housing units, with the majority of its housing stock built between 1970 and 1989. Specifically, 26.5% of homes were constructed between 1970 and 1979, and 24.1% between 1980 and 1989, accounting for more than half (50.6%) of all housing in the Township. This indicates that much of Vernon's residential development occurred during those two decades, reflecting a period of rapid suburban growth.

Older housing also makes up a substantial portion of Vernon's housing inventory. Approximately 15.6% of homes were built between 1960 and 1969, and 8.8% from 1950 to 1959. Homes built prior to 1940 still account for a combined 10.5% of the stock, with 4.5% constructed between 1949 and 6% built in 1939 or earlier. These older homes may require more maintenance and updates but also contribute to the area's historical character.

Newer construction has been relatively limited. Only 0.5% of homes were built in 2014 or later, and less than 6% were built since 2000. This trend suggests that residential development has slowed considerably in recent decades. The limited supply of newer homes may impact housing availability, affordability, and modernization efforts, especially as older units age and require reinvestment. Planning for housing rehabilitation opportunities for new construction may be necessary to maintain a balance and sustainable housing stock in the future.

3.2 Costs and Value

There are numerous methods by which to view the value of Vernon Township's housing stock. The ACS provided counts for the following items: Selected Monthly Owner Costs (SMOC), the values of owner-occupied and renter-occupied units, and mortgage characteristics.

Table 11. Age/Year Structure Built

Year Structure Built	Estimate	%
Total	10,705	100%
Built 2014 or later	50	0.5%
Built 2010 to 2013	85	0.8%
Built 2000 to 2009	516	4.8%
Built 1990 to 1999	902	8.4%
Built 1980 to 1989	2,583	24.1%
Built 1970 to 1979	2,842	26.5%
Built 1960 to 1969	1,665	15.6%
Built 1950 to 1959	940	8.8%
Built 1940 to 1949	477	4.5%
Built 1939 or earlier	645	6.0%

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). SELECTED HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP04.

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Selected Monthly Owner Costs

SMOC is a figure which consists of all costs associated with homeownership.⁷ In 2020, the ACS reported that the median SMOC for all housing units with a mortgage in Vernon was \$1,882, which was significantly lower than both Sussex County's (\$2,236) and New Jersey's (\$2,476) median. Among the 5,613 housing units with a mortgage in Vernon, the largest share of households (33.9%) paid between \$1,500 and \$1,999 monthly. Additionally, 18.9% paid between \$2,000 and \$2,499, and 12.4% each paid between \$2,500 and \$2,999 or \$3,000 or more. A smaller share, (18.8%) paid between \$1,000 and \$1,499, while only a 2.7% paid below \$1,000 monthly. This distribution suggests that while Vernon is generally more affordable than the County and State overall, housing costs are still concentrated in the mid-to-upper range of affordability.

Table 12. Selected Monthly Owner Costs (SMOC), 2020

SMOC	Count (Vernon)	%	Count (County)	%	Count (State)	%
Housing units with a mortgage	5,613	100%	32,078	100%	1,382,654	100%
Less than \$500	11	0.2%	38	0.1%	2,772	0.2%
\$500 to \$999	192	3.4%	691	2.2%	34,504	2.5%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	1,055	18.8%	4,195	13.1%	138,116	10.0%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	1,904	33.9%	7,702	24.0%	253,824	18.4%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	1,061	18.9%	7,236	22.6%	275,392	19.9%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	695	12.4%	5,269	16.4%	231,946	16.8%
\$3,000 or more	695	12.4%	6,947	21.7%	446,100	32.3%
Median	\$1,882		\$2,236		\$2,476	
Housing units without a mortgage	1,910	100%	13,210	100%	711,773	100%
Less than \$250	64	3.4%	257	1.9%	14,747	2.1%
\$250 to \$399	62	3.2%	253	1.9%	18,836	2.6%
\$400 to \$599	97	5.1%	1,012	7.7%	48,655	6.8%
\$600 to \$799	538	28.2%	2,698	20.4%	96,262	13.5%
\$800 to \$999	497	26.0%	3,207	24.3%	136,283	19.1%
\$1,000 or more	652	34.1%	5,783	43.8%	396,990	55.8%
Median	\$900		\$950		\$1,062	

Source:

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). SELECTED HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP04.

For housing units without a mortgage, Vernon's median month owner cost was \$900, slightly below the County and State medians of \$950. Out of 1,910 such households in Vernon, the largest portion (34.1%) reported paying \$1,000 or more per month, followed by 28.2% who paid between \$600 and \$799, and 26% who paid \$800 to \$999. A relatively small percentage paid less than \$600 monthly. These figures reflect substantial monthly housing costs.

All in all, while Vernon Township's SMOC are generally lower than those at the County and State levels, a considerable number of households still experience relatively high housing expenses, particularly among those with mortgages. This trend suggests a need to monitor housing affordability, especially for middle-income homeowners and those living on fixed incomes.

⁷ According to the United States Census Bureau Glossary, "Selected monthly owner costs are calculated from the sum of payment for mortgages, real estate taxes, various insurances, utilities, fuels, mobile home costs, and condominium fees. Listing the items separately improves accuracy and provides additional detail."

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Value

The ACS reported 7,523 owner-occupied housing units in 2020 and a median home value of \$238,000. The majority of these homes (42.9%) were valued between \$200,000 and \$299,999, and another 23.2% were valued between \$300,000 and \$499,999. Homes valued between \$150,000 and \$199,999 accounted for 15.8% of owner-occupied units, while only a small percentage (3.1%) were worth less than \$50,000. Less than 0.1% of homes were valued at \$1,000,000 or more, reflecting a housing market that is moderately priced compared to many areas in New Jersey.

Among the 876 occupied rental units, over half of renters (52.3%) paid between \$1,000 and \$1,499 per month, an additional 26.3% paid \$1,500 to \$1,999, indicating a concentration of rent costs in the mid to upper range. Only 6.8% of renters paid less than \$1,000, and very small portion (0.5%) paid between \$2,500 and \$2,999. The median gross rent in Vernon was \$1,381, which aligns with regional averages but may still pose affordability challenges for lower-income residents. Additionally, 79 rental households reported paying no rent which could include units provided as part of employment arrangements or housing assistance programs.

Overall, the Township's housing values and rents suggest a market that is accessible for many middle-income homeowners but less so for those with lower incomes. While the majority of home values are within the \$200,000 to \$300,000 range, the rental market is relatively expensive, with few options under \$1,000 per month. These figures emphasize the importance of maintaining housing affordability and expanding rental opportunities for a broader range of household incomes.

3.3 Housing Units Capable of Being Rehabilitated

In 2020, Vernon Township had 8,478 occupied housing units, the vast majority of which were reported to be in good physical condition. According to ACS data, none of the occupied units lacked complete plumbing facilities, and only 10 units (0.1%) were reported as lacking complete kitchen facilities. Additionally, 77 units (0.9%) had no telephone service available, which may reflect a shift toward exclusive cell phone use rather than a sign of inadequate housing infrastructure.

Table 13. Value of Occupied Units, 2020

Value of Occupied Units	Estimate	%
Owner-occupied units	7,523	100%
Less than \$50,000	231	3.1%
\$50,000 to \$99,000	255	3.4%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	574	7.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1,185	15.8%
\$200,00 to \$299,999	3,224	42.9%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	1,749	23.2%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	296	3.9%
\$1,000,000 or more	9	0.1%
Median	238,000	
Occupied Units Paying Rent	876	100%
Less than \$500	0	0.0%
\$500 to \$999	60	6.8%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	458	52.3%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	230	26.3%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	108	12.3%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	4	0.5%
\$3,000 or more	16	1.8%
Median	1,381	
No rent paid	79	9.0%

Source:
U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). SELECTED HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP04.

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These low percentages suggest that housing in the Township is generally well-maintained and that very few units are in need of basic rehabilitation. The near-universal availability of essential facilities such as plumbing and kitchens indicates strong housing quality standards throughout the community. While there may be ongoing needs for updates due to the age of the housing stock, the data suggests that serious housing deficiencies are minimal and not a widespread concern for most residents.

Table 14. Housing In Need of Rehabilitation, 2020

Facilities	Estimate	%
Vernon		
Occupied housing units	8,478	100%
Lacking complete plumbing facilities	0	0.0%
Lacking complete kitchen facilities	10	0.1%
No telephone service available	77	0.9%
Sussex County		
Occupied housing units	54,166	100%
Lacking complete plumbing facilities	60	0.1%
Lacking complete kitchen facilities	174	0.3%
No telephone service available	523	1.0%

Source:

United States Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates. *Data Profiles, Table DP04.*

3.4 Projection of Housing Stock

Housing Units Certified

Since 2004, Vernon Township certified 356 housing units, split evenly between 178 single- and two-family dwellings and 179 mixed-use units. Most development occurred before 2007, with 212 units certified in 2006 alone, including all mixed-use units. Since then, new construction has been minimal, averaging just a few units per year, with no units certified in 2024 to date. This trend reflects a significant slowdown in residential development over the past 15+ years.

Table 15. Housing Units Certified, 2004 - 2024

	1&2 Family	Multi	Mixed-use	Total
2004	27	0	0	27
2005	40	0	0	40
2006	34	0	178	212
2007	28	0	0	28
2008	11	0	0	11
2009	4	0	0	4
2010	2	0	0	2
2011	3	0	0	3
2012	4	0	0	4
2013	1	0	0	1
2014	1	0	0	1
2015	1	0	0	1
2016	2	0	0	2
2017	2	0	0	2
2018	0	0	0	0
2019	2	0	0	2
2020	2	0	0	2
2021	4	0	0	4
2022	6	0	0	6
2023	4	0	0	4
Sept 2024 YTD	0	0	0	0
Total	178	0	178	356

Source:

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, *Housing Units Certified, 2000 – 2024.*

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Land Use Board Approvals

The Land Use Board of Vernon Township approved several residential projects in 2023, 2024 and 2025 that may not yet be reflected in the DCA's certificate of occupancy reporting as follows:

1. A 55-unit multi-family development was approved in 2013; however, extensions of time for the approval were granted in 2019 and 2023. The development is on Theta Drive within the Vernon Town Center Zone and consists of age-restricted one-bedroom rental units.⁸ The project is currently under construction.
2. Two (2) detached single-family dwellings were approved along the shores of Pleasant Valley Lake situated and within the PLC, Private Lake Community Residential Zone.⁹
3. Three (3) residential dwelling rental units were approved in the Vernon Town Center Zone as part of a mixed-use development.¹⁰
4. A 27-unit multi-family development was approved on Omega Drive within the Vernon Town Center Zone, consisting of 21 market rate units and six (6) affordable units.¹¹

Lands Available for New Construction and Redevelopment

Vernon Township has focused future development efforts in the Township into a two-square-mile area known as the "Town Center". The area is a Designated Center by the State Planning Commission and is located within the Highlands Designated Planning Area of the Township. The vast majority of new development will occur within Vernon's Town Center. A large section of the Town Center was also designated an Area in Need of Redevelopment in 2018. A Town Center Redevelopment Plan was adopted for the Town Center Area in 2021. The area is almost entirely located within the Vernon Municipal Utility Authority (VMUA) sewer service area and public water service is available in many locations from Veolia Water. While additional water capacity is needed, utilities are expected to be expanded within this area to provide service to development.

The potential for large-scale new development outside of the Town Center and outside of the existing sewer service area are limited due to environmental constraints, the Highlands Preservation Area restrictions and a lack of public water and sewer availability. There is a sewer service area around the Legends Hotel and Golf Course facility. A redevelopment plan is in place for this property that would provide for redevelopment of the hotel and potential development of resort housing.

Due to Vernon's environmental sensitivity and lack of sewer and water infrastructure, with the exception of the Legends Hotel area outside of the Town Center, Township efforts should be focused on identifying key opportunities for Highlands Redevelopment Area Designations and seeking Highland Exemptions and Waivers where practical. The municipality should also continue to support the rehabilitation of the existing housing stock for affordable housing opportunities.

⁸ Block 403, Lots 4, 5, and 6.

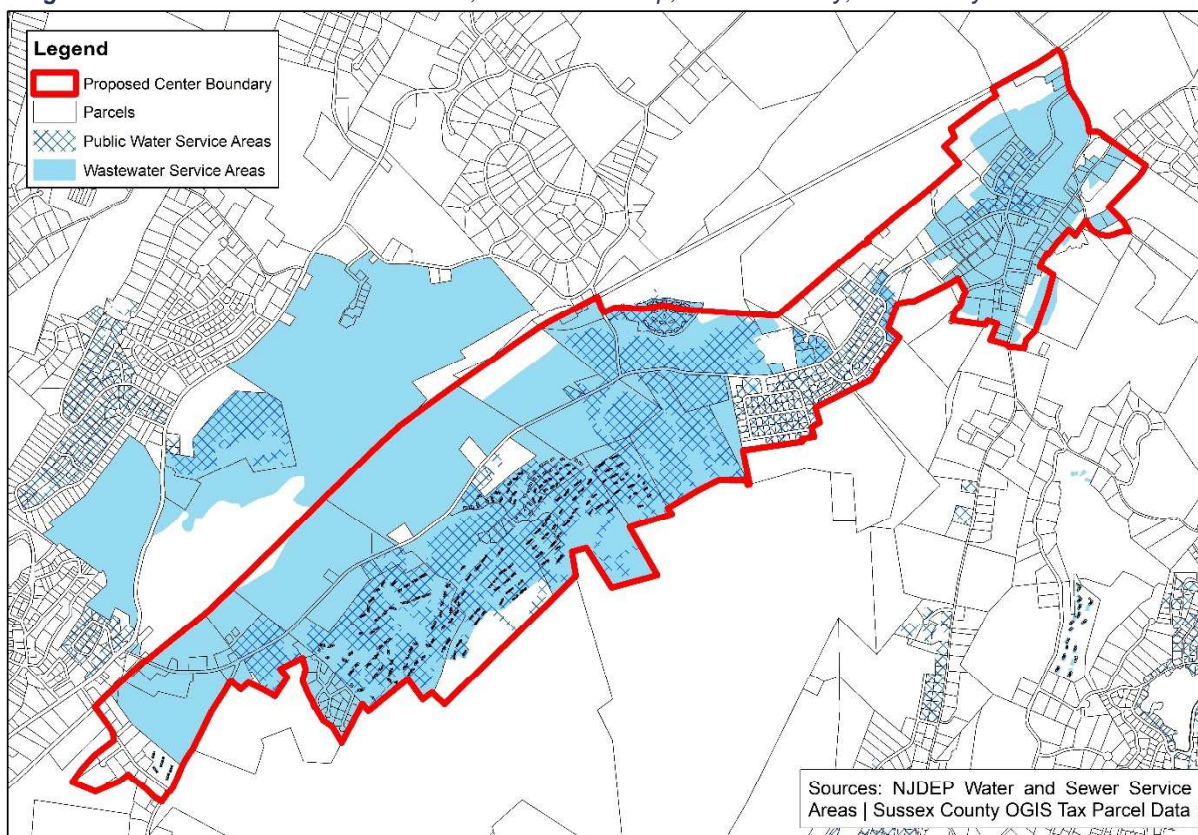
⁹ Block 592, Lots 69, 70, and 71 (Proposed Lots 69.01 and 70.01).

¹⁰ Block 381, Lots 1 and 11.

¹¹ Block 402, Lots 2 & 3

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Figure 4. Water and Sewer Service Areas, Vernon Township, Sussex County, New Jersey



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Residential Zones

The development of future housing stock is influenced by many factors, including availability of necessary infrastructure, such as sewer and water, zoning regulations, and environmental resource constraints.

Vernon Township is situated in both the Highlands Preservation and Planning Areas under the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. Similarly, the New Jersey SDRP identifies the Township within Planning Area 4 (PA 4), the Rural Planning Area, Planning Area 5 (PA 5), the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area, and the Park Planning Area (PPA). Of Vernon's 44,769 acres, approximately 26,391 acres (58.9%) are preserved and are comprised of local, state, private, and non-profit open space. Due to the high environmental constraints in the Township, new construction is not a possibility without a Highlands exemption or waivers such as a Highlands Redevelopment Area Designation. Additionally, the Township has sewer infrastructure constraints.

R-1, Single-Family Residential District

The R-1 Zone is primarily designated to promote low-density residential development requiring a minimum lot size of 5 acres to preserve the suburban character of the community by ensuring that residential development aligns with the existing neighborhood aesthetics and infrastructure capacities. Permitted residential principal uses include

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community residences for the developmentally disabled, single-family detached dwellings and cluster development.¹²

R-2, Single-Family Residential District

The R-2 Zone is intended to accommodate single-family detached dwellings, community residences for the developmentally disabled, and cluster development on three-acre lots, balancing residential development with the preservation of the Township's suburban character. This district aims to provide residential neighborhoods that offer a sense of community while maintaining adequate open space and ensuring compatibility with surrounding land uses.

R-3, Single-Family Residential District

The R-3 Zone is designed to accommodate single-family detached dwellings, community residences for the developmentally disabled, and cluster development on 30,000-square-foot (0.68 acre) lots. This district seeks to provide residential neighborhoods that offer a sense of community while maintaining adequate open space and ensuring compatibility with the surrounding land.

R-4, Single-Family Residential District

The R-4 Zone is intended to support low-density residential development including community residences for the developmentally disabled, single-family detached dwellings, cluster development, multi-family age-restricted housing, and planned adult community¹³ developments on 10,000-square-foot lots (0.22 acre) lots. This zoning district is primarily designed for single-family detached homes, offering a quiet and spacious living environment consistent with surrounding neighborhoods.

PLC, Private Lake Community Residential District

The PLC Zone is designed to preserve and enhance the unique character of residential communities centered around private lakes. This zoning district aims to maintain the environmental integrity of these area while accommodating residential uses that complement the natural landscape and recreational opportunities associated with lake living. Permitted residential uses consist of single-family dwellings, planned adult communities, and private lake communities.¹⁴ The PLC Zone's regulations are crafted to ensure that development is compatible with the lake ecosystem, to prevent overcrowding and to maintain the aesthetic of the community.

¹² Chapter 330, Article II of the Vernon Township Land Development ordinance defines, Cluster Development as development design technique that concentrates buildings on a part of the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, common open space, and preservation of environmentally sensitive features.

¹³ Chapter 330, Article II of the Vernon Township Land Development ordinance defines Planned Adult Community, as a residential community provided for permanent residents aged 55 years or over in which the residential property and the residential-related open space, recreational facilities and common area are all owned by a mutual nonprofit corporation or corporations established pursuant to the laws of the State of New Jersey and also governed by Section 213 of Title 11 of the National Housing Act (or provisions of a substantially similar or comparable nature) or by individuals, condominium associations or other entities, all of which shall have rules and regulations controlling the development, operation and maintenance in conformance with this chapter.

¹⁴ Chapter 330, Article II of the Vernon Township Land Development ordinance defines Private Lake Community, as a community of one or more neighborhoods within an identifiable area surrounding one or more lakes, sharing a common residential and social purpose pursuant to a charter, bylaws and other regulations, and in which the rights to the use of the lake(s) and other common areas are exclusive to member residents and their invitees, and which is controlled and managed by a community association.

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PLLC, Private Leasehold Lake Community¹⁵

The purpose of the PLLC Zone is to establish specific regulations for structures in unsubdivided lake communities such as Lake Pochung and Laurel Lake. The primary objective of this district is to address the unique characteristics and planning needs of these communities, where properties are often held under leasehold arrangements rather than traditional fee-simple ownership. Permitted residential principal uses include single-family detached dwellings and private lake communities.

TC, Town Center Zone

It is the purpose of the TC District to create a mixed-use Town Center in the Township of Vernon which provides for commercial and residential uses in a development pattern and with design guidelines that promote a pedestrian scale center that reinforces the unique sense of place of Vernon. Residential permitted principal uses consist of multi-family apartments and condominiums, and live/work units where first-floor commercial and second-, or upper-floor residential space is allowed. Where six (6) or more residential units are created at six (6) or more units per acre, a 20 percent set-aside for affordable housing is required.

CR, Commercial Recreation

The CR Zone is intended to accommodate and promote recreational and resort-related commercial activities that leverage the Township's natural landscapes and tourism potential. This zoning district aims to support businesses and facilities that provide recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors, contributing to the local economy and enhancing Vernon's reputation as a recreational destination. Although single-family detached dwellings are not, a principal permitted use within the district, it is however, considered a permitted conditional use.

151-161 NJSH Route 94 Redevelopment Plan (Golf Course Village Zone)

The purpose of the Golf Course Village Zone is to provide for a primarily residential village development comprised of townhouses, small lot single family, stacked townhouses and some limited commercial. The Zone allows for up to 100 townhouses and 150 single-family residences. There is a 20% set-aside requirement for any residential development in the zone.

P, Public Land

The P Zone is designated to encompass areas owned any utilized by governmental or public entities for the benefit of the community. This zoning classification ensures that public lands are preserved and used in ways that serve the general welfare, providing spaces for governmental operations, public services, recreation, and cultural enrichment. Single-family detached residential dwellings are a permitted principal use within the district.

¹⁵ Chapter 330, Article II of the Vernon Township Land Development ordinance defines Private Leasehold Lake Community, as a community in which the land is not in fee-simple ownership in connection with a structure (for example, the Lake Pochung and Laurel Lake communities). Such uses may include existing single-family detached homes, clubhouses, and public and private recreational facilities.

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Multigenerational Housing

P.L. 2021, c. 273 established the Multigenerational Family Housing Continuity Commission (the Commission) and assigned the Commission the responsibility of preparing and adopting, "...recommendations on how State government, local government, community organizations, private entities, and community members may most effectively advance the goal of enabling senior citizens to reside at the homes of their extended families, thereby preserving and enhancing multigenerational family continuity, through the modification of State and local laws and policies in the areas of housing, land use planning, parking and streetscape planning, and other relevant areas" (N.J.S.A. 52:27D-329.20f[1]). Municipalities are now required to provide an analysis of the extent to which local ordinances advance or detract from these recommendations. At the time this Housing Element and Fair Share Plan is being prepared, no such recommendations have been published by the Commission. The Township should consider opportunities to provide for multigenerational housing, particularly in the single-family residential zones.

4. Fair Share Plan

4.1 Plan Purpose and Goals

The Fair Share Plan will describe specific projects, programs, strategies and funding sources to meet the Vernon Township's affordable housing obligation while also complying with the Fourth Round Regulations, Fair Housing Act, and the Dispute Resolution Program Directive #14-24. The overriding goal of this Fair Share Plan is to present a framework for the Township to provide for its fair share of the present and prospective regional need for low- and moderate-income housing for the Fourth Round period of 2025 through 2035.

4.2 Determination of Housing Need

On January 27, 2025, pursuant to P.L.2024, c.2, the Township Council adopted Resolution #25-49, committing to its fair share obligation for the Fourth Round (2025-2035). This Resolution set forth the following obligations (not including any durational or vacant adjustments):

Table 16. Fourth Round Obligation

Fourth Round Rehabilitation/Present Need Obligation (pursuant to P.L. 2024, c.2 ¹⁶)	33
Fourth Round (2025-2035) Prospective Need Obligation (pursuant to Land Capacity Review ¹⁷)	194

An objection to the proposed obligation was filed by the New Jersey Builder's Association; however, following a settlement meeting and session with the Dispute Resolution Program, Vernon's prospective need obligation proposal was upheld by the Superior Court at 194 units.

¹⁶ David N. Kinsey, PhD, PP, FAICP, New Jersey Low and Moderate Income Housing Obligations for 1999-2025 Calculated Using the NJ COAH Prior Round (1987-1999) Methodology, May 2016.

¹⁷ Review of Land Capacity Factor and Prospective Need Obligation Prepared for Vernon Township, Sussex County, J. Caldwell & Associates, LLC, date January 23, 2025.

Vernon Township Fourth Round (2025-2035) Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

Prior Round Obligation (1987-1999)

The Township of Vernon received its Substantive Certification from COAH for Rounds 1 and 2 on December 15, 2004. The Township's met its 60-unit Prior Round obligation through two mechanisms, the Regional Contribution Agreement (RCA) and a group home development. The Township completed Regional Contribution Agreements for a total of 54 units. A Sussex County ARC group home with 3 bedrooms was constructed in the Township which provided 3 credits and 3 bonuses. The Prior Round is met.

Table 17. Prior Round Credits

Mechanism	Project Name	Credits
Special Needs Housing	Sussex County ARC	3 credits+ 3 rental bonuses
Regional Contribution Agreement	Ridgefield Borough	20
Regional Contribution Agreement	Ogdensburg Borough	20
Regional Contribution Agreement	Passaic City	14
Total		60 credits

Third Round Obligation (1999-2025)

The Township of Vernon received its Substantive Certification from COAH for Rounds 1 and 2 on December 15, 2004. The Township's last adopted Housing Element and Fair Share Plan was from 2011 and superseded a 2009 Round Three Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. Following 2011, the Township did not submit a revised Housing Element and Fair Share Plan to the Superior Court for certification. According to the report, "Statewide and Municipal Obligations Under Jacobson Opinion," prepared by Econsult Solutions, dated March 28, 2018, the Township had a Prior Round obligation of 60 units, a Present Need obligation of 37 units and a Prospective and Gap Present Need of 396 units for Round Three. The Third Round obligation is met through two inclusionary zones and one development approval as outlined below.

TC, Town Center Inclusionary Redevelopment Zone

It is the purpose of the TC District to create a mixed-use Town Center in the Township of Vernon which provides for commercial and residential uses in a development pattern and with design guidelines that promote a pedestrian scale center that reinforces the unique sense of place of Vernon. Residential permitted principal uses consist of multi-family apartments and condominiums, and live/work units where first floor commercial and second, or upper floor residential space is allowed. Where six (6) or more residential units are created at six (6) or more units per acre, a 20 percent set-aside for affordable housing is required. The Zoning is flexible and permits buildings up to four (4) stories in height. The total zone covers 306 acres, with a presumed density of eight (8) du/acre for half of the zone, up to 165 affordable for sale units could be created. With a presumed density of 15 du/acre for the remaining half of the zone, 309 rental units could be created. The total potential estimated affordable development based on this inclusionary zone is 474 units. Of the 165 for sale units, 120 will apply to the Third Round and 45 will apply to the Fourth Round. Of the 309 rental units, 121 will apply to the Third Round and 188 will apply to the Fourth Round.

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151-161 NJSH Route 94 Redevelopment Plan (Golf Course Village Zone)

The purpose of the Golf Course Village Zone is to provide for a primarily residential village development comprised of townhouses, small lot single family, stacked townhouses and some limited commercial. The Zone allows for up to 100 townhouses and 150 single-family residences. There is a 20% set-aside requirement for any residential development in the zone. With a development of 250 units, 50 units of for sale affordable would be developed.

Red Hands LLC, Multi-Family Development Approval, Block 402, Lots 2 & 3

Red Hands, LLC, Block 402, Lots 2 and 3, comprises a 0.75 acre in the Town Center. The two lots were granted a development approval for a multi-family development consisting of a 27-unit multi-family building with 6 affordable units.

Table 18. Third Round Fair Share Plan

Summary of Third Round Fair Share Plan Township of Vernon, Sussex County				
Project Name	Type	Units	Bonuses	Total Credits
Third Round Obligation 396 units				
Town Center Zone	Family Rental	121	93	334
	Family for Sale	120		
Village Golf Course Zone	Family For Sale	50	0	50
Red Hands LLC	Family Rental	6	6	12
Total				396
Third Round Fair Share Plan Total				396
Third Round Obligation				396
Maximum Bonus – 25% (99 units)				99
Maximum Senior – 25% (99 units)				0
Minimum Family Housing – 50% (198 units)				396
Minimum Rental – 25% (99 units)				127
Minimum Family Rental – 50% of Rental (50 units)				127
Rehabilitation				
Municipal Rehabilitation Program	Rehabilitations	37		37
Third Round Rehabilitation/Present Need Total				37

Fourth Round Obligation

On January 27, 2025, pursuant to P.L.2024, c.2, the Township Council adopted Resolution #25-49, committing to its fair share obligation for the Fourth Round (2025-2035) of a present need of obligation of **44 units** and prospective need obligation of **194 units**. An objection to the proposed obligation was filed by the New Jersey Builder's Association; however, following a settlement meeting and session with the Dispute Resolution Program, Vernon's prospective need obligation proposal was upheld by the Superior Court.

Vernon Township Fourth Round (2025-2035) Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

4.3 Proposed Mechanisms

Rehabilitation Program

The Township of Vernon proposes to address its rehabilitation obligation of 44 units through a municipal rehabilitation program. According to N.J.A.C. 5:93-5.2, the purpose of a rehabilitation program is to rehabilitate substandard housing units occupied by low- and moderate-income households. A substandard housing unit is defined as a unit with health and safety code violations that require the repair or replacement of a major system, including weatherization, a roof, plumbing, heating, electricity, sanitary plumbing (including septic systems) and/or a load-bearing structural system. Upon rehabilitation, housing deficiencies must be corrected and the house must be brought up to code standard. Vernon has a municipal rehabilitation program in place that initially utilized a Small Cities Grant to fund the rehabilitation of several housing units. The Township will utilize any recaptured funds from this program and/or from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to fund the Township' rehabilitation program.

TC, Town Center Inclusionary Redevelopment Zone

It is the purpose of the TC District to create a mixed-use Town Center in the Township of Vernon which provides for commercial and residential uses in a development pattern and with design guidelines that promote a pedestrian scale center that reinforces the unique sense of place of Vernon. Residential permitted principal uses consist of multi-family apartments and condominiums, and live/work units where first-floor commercial and second-, or upper-floor residential space is allowed. Where six (6) or more residential units are created at six (6) or more units per acre, a 20 percent set-aside for affordable housing is required. The Zoning is flexible and permits buildings up to four (4) stories in height. The total zone covers 306 acres, with a presumed density of eight (8) du/acre for half of the zone, up to 165 affordable for sale units could be created. With a presumed density of 15 du/acre for the remaining half of the zone, 309 rental units could be created. The total potential estimated affordable development based on this inclusionary zone is 474 units. Of the 165 for sale units, 120 will apply to the Third Round and 45 will apply to the Fourth Round. Of the 309 rental units, 121 will apply to the Third Round and 188 will apply to the Fourth Round.

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Summary Table

The table below summarizes the proposed mechanisms to address the Fourth Round Obligation for the Township of Vernon.

Table 19. Summary of Fourth Round Fair Share Plan

Summary of Fourth Round Fair Share Plan Township of Vernon, Sussex County				
Project Name	Type	Units	Bonuses	Total Credits
Fourth Round Obligation 194 units				
Town Center Zone	Family Rental	188	*	233
	Family for Sale	45		
Total Completed				233
Third Round Fair Share Plan Total				233
Third Round Obligation				194
Maximum Bonus – 25% (48 units)				48*
Maximum Senior – 25% (58 units)				0
Minimum Family Housing – 50% (97 units)				233
Minimum Rental – 25% (49 units)				188
Minimum Family Rental – 50% of Rental (25 units)				188
Rehabilitation				
Municipal Rehabilitation Program	Completed Rehabilitations	44		44
Fourth Round Rehabilitation/Present Need Total				44

*Bonuses may apply as units are completed up to the maximum permitted.