
Introduction

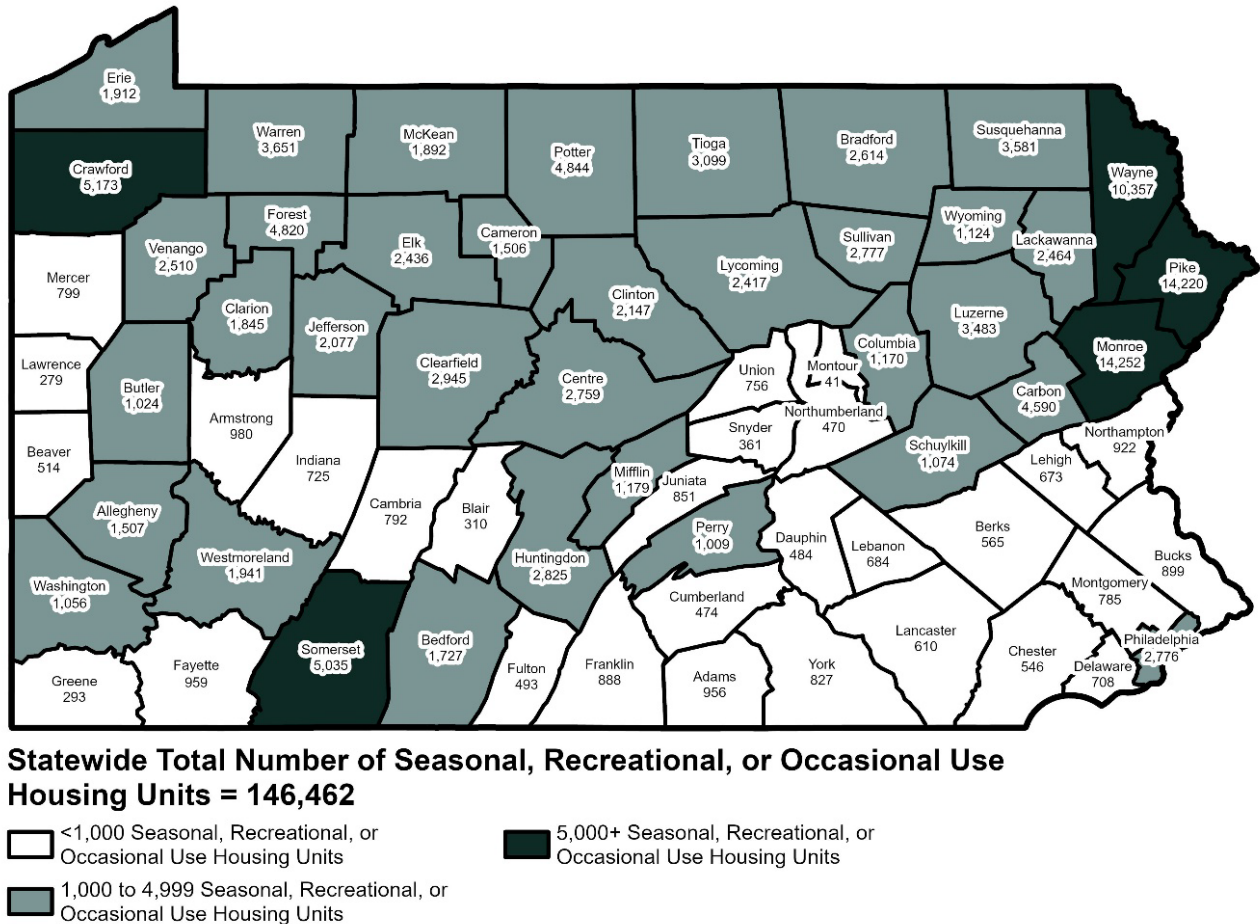
In 2023, it was estimated that almost 122,000 housing units in rural Pennsylvania were reported as being for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This figure includes hunting cabins, vacation homes, and other secondary dwellings separate from the owner's primary residence. These housing units represented 10 percent of the total housing units in rural municipalities across the Commonwealth. This fact sheet examines these units in more detail to determine their impact on rural communities.

Key Findings

- In 2023, there were nearly 146,500 seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units throughout Pennsylvania, but 122,000 (83 percent) were located in rural municipalities.
- Monroe (14,300 units), Pike (14,200 units), and Wayne (10,400 units) counties had the largest number of seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units in 2023. Most of those were concentrated in Tobyhanna Township (3,900 units) and Coolbaugh Township (3,000 units), both in Monroe County.
- Seasonal housing units comprised approximately 10 percent of total housing units in rural municipalities but only 1 percent of total housing units in urban municipalities.
- Since 2014, the number of seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units declined in rural and urban Pennsylvania. However, the decline is notably stronger in rural municipalities (-16 percent) than urban ones (-9 percent).
- Although the northeastern part of the Commonwealth had the highest aggregate number of seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units in 2023, 79 municipalities, which were primarily located in the rural northwest and central regions, had at least half of their housing units reported as seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units.
- Seasonal, recreational, or occasional use units are classified as a form of “vacant” housing units. While the majority of vacant housing units in rural municipalities are vacant due to the property being utilized for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, this was not the case for urban municipalities, which showed that half of the vacant properties were due to mostly temporary personal or legal reasons, like being in the midst of a sales transaction.
- Vacant housing in rural Pennsylvania is inherently unique because these properties are often well-established seasonal or secondary homes for non-residents, limiting the ability to utilize these properties to address localized housing shortages.

In 2023, there were nearly 146,500 seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units in Pennsylvania, representing 3 percent of households statewide. Figure 1 displays the number of these housing units by county. Seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units were predominately in rural counties, led by Monroe (14,300 units), Pike (14,200 units), and Wayne (10,400 units).

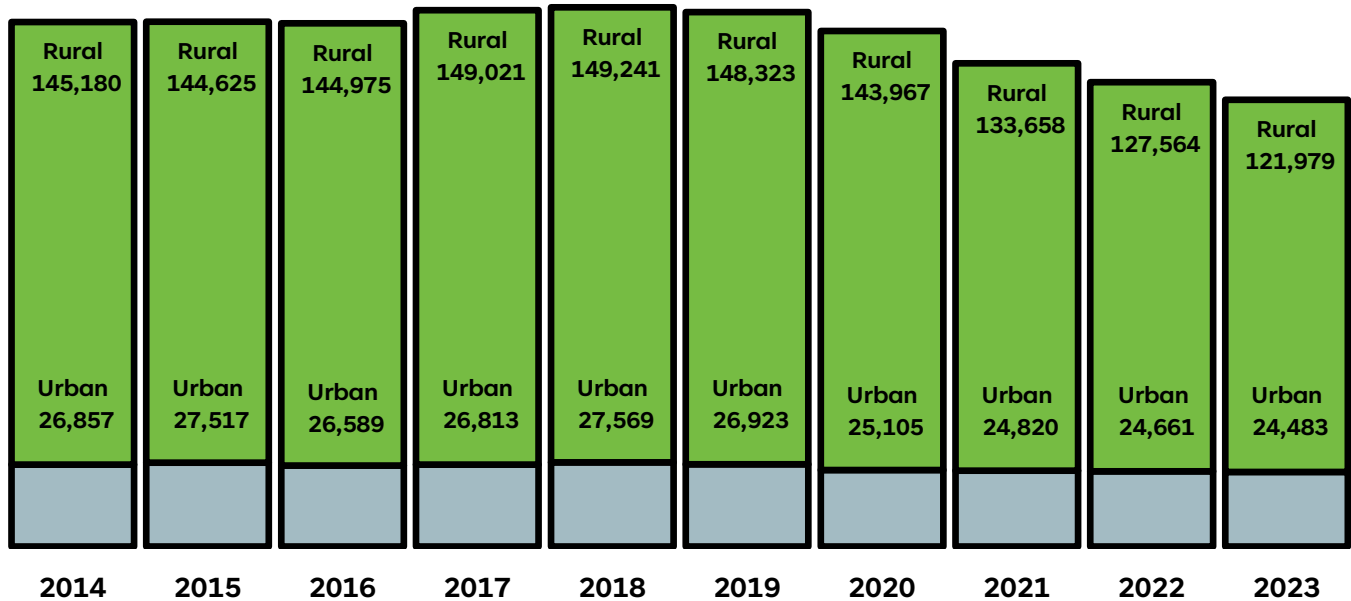
Figure 1: Number of Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use Housing Units by County, 2023



Data Source: 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

At the municipal level in 2023, 83 percent of seasonal housing units were located in rural municipalities, compared to 17 percent of urban municipalities. Figure 2 tracks the number of seasonal housing units in rural and urban municipalities over the past decade of available data. The number of seasonal housing units in urban municipalities has remained relatively constant over time. However, since 2018, the number of seasonal housing units began to decline in rural municipalities at around 4 percent each year. Since 2014, there were 23,200 fewer seasonal housing units in rural Pennsylvania (-16 percent), compared to the latest data for 2023.

Figure 2: Number of Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use Housing Units, 2014 to 2023, Rural PA Municipalities v. Urban PA Municipalities



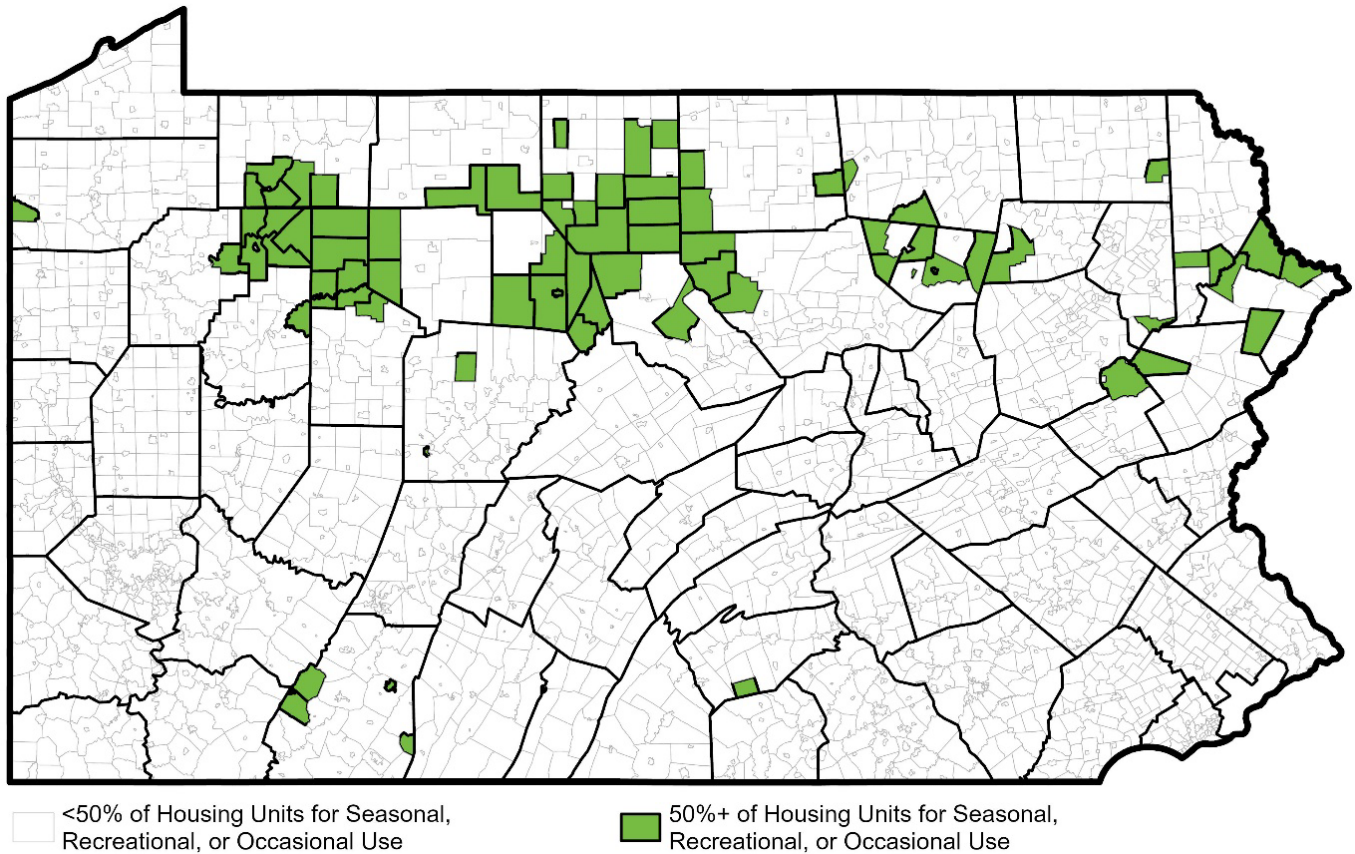
Data Source: 2014 to 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

“Destination” Municipalities

For many rural municipalities, housing units that are vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use reasons comprise a substantial share of their total housing stock. Figure 3 highlights 79 municipalities where at least half of housing units were reported as being for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use in 2023. For ease of comparison, this fact sheet refers to these municipalities as “destination municipalities.”¹ Two of these municipalities were geographically located in urban counties (Cooke Township in Cumberland County and Clifton Township in Lackawanna County). However, all these municipalities were classified as rural based on the Center’s definition (see Appendix) and, according to the most recent 2020 Decennial Census, had populations of less than 10,000 residents. Destination municipalities were located in 26 counties, and combined, cover approximately 3,700 square land miles, or about 10 percent of the land in rural Pennsylvania. Interestingly, all the municipalities in Forest County except one (Tionesta Borough) were classified as destination municipalities. For more detailed data and information on these destination municipalities, please see the Appendix.

¹ See Appendix for the complete list of destination municipalities.

Figure 3: Municipalities Where at Least 50 Percent of Housing Units Were for Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use, 2023

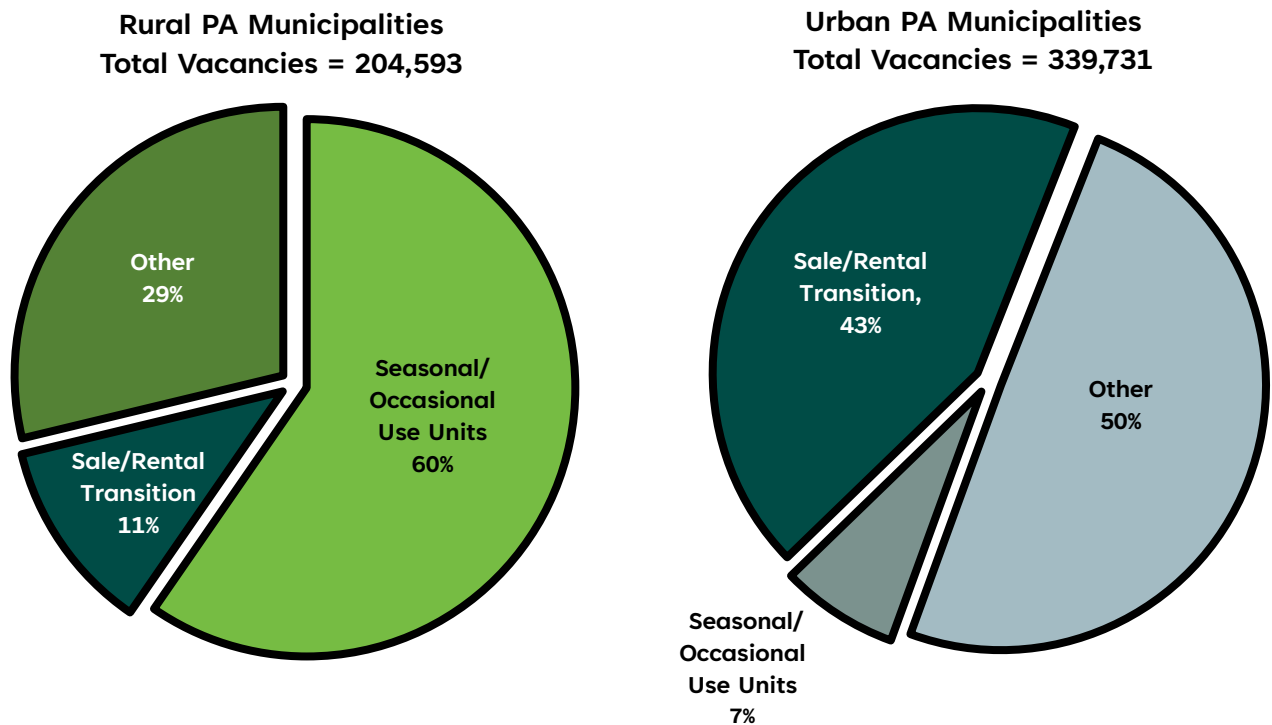


Data Source: 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

Other Reasons for Housing Vacancies

In addition to seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units, the U.S. Census Bureau collects information ascertaining the reason for a housing unit to be vacant at the time the survey is collected. Figure 6 displays these reasons for vacant housing units in rural municipalities and urban municipalities. While the majority of vacant housing units in rural municipalities are vacant due to the property being utilized for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use (122,000 units; 60 percent), urban municipalities showed that half of the vacant properties were vacant due to reasons that fall into the “Other” category (168,400 units; 50 percent). The U.S. Census Bureau does not further categorize this “Other” category; however, some examples of these vacancies might simply be that the property is under foreclosure, in need of major repairs, or abandoned/condemned. For a full list of vacancy reasons that fall into the “Other” category, see the Appendix.

**Figure 6: Reasons for Housing Unit Vacancies, 2023,
Rural PA Municipalities v. Urban PA Municipalities**



Data Source: 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

The data suggest that housing vacancies due to properties being for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use are prevalent in rural Pennsylvania. Figure 7 is a map that displays the percentage, or share, of housing units in each county that were reported as being for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use in 2023. The smallest population counties tended to have the highest share of their housing stock for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, led by Forest (69 percent), Sullivan (50 percent), Potter (39 percent), and Cameron (38 percent) counties.

Importantly, no urban county had an above-average share of their housing units for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, despite most vacant housing units being located in urban areas. This further emphasizes that a high percentage of seasonal, recreational, or occasional use housing units is unique to rural Pennsylvania.

Statewide Share of Housing Units For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use = 2.5%

Legend:

- At or Below Statewide Share
- Above Statewide Share, 10%+ of Housing Units
- Above Statewide Share, <10% of Housing Units

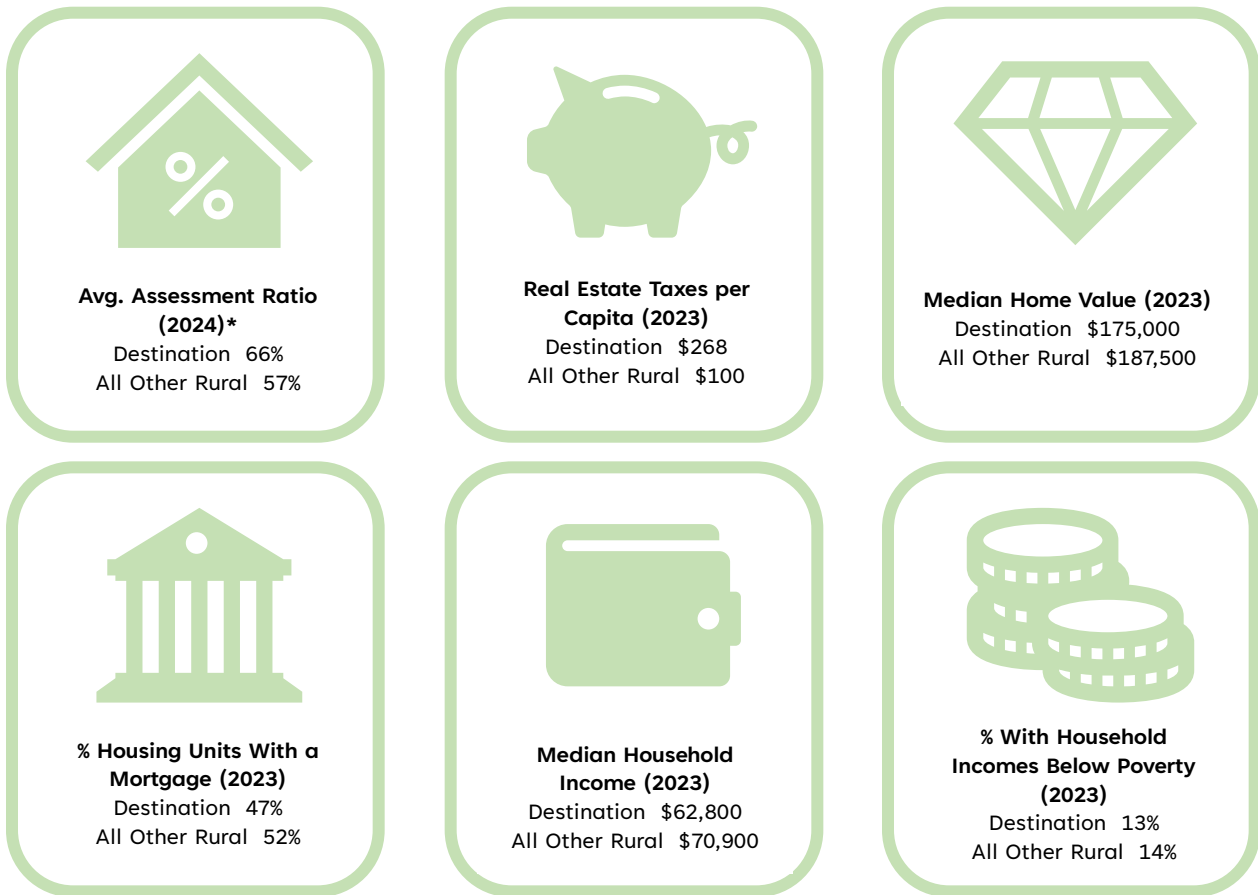
County	Percentage
Adams	2.2%
Allegheny	0.2%
Armstrong	3.0%
Beaver	0.6%
Bedford	7.3%
Berks	0.3%
Bucks	0.4%
Blair	0.6%
Butler	1.2%
Cambria	1.2%
Carbon	13.4%
Cecil	0.2%
Chesapeake	0.2%
Chester	0.3%
Clearfield	7.7%
Clinton	11.5%
Columbia	3.9%
Crawford	12.3%
Cumberland	0.4%
Delaware	0.3%
Dauphin	0.4%
Erie	1.6%
Franklin	1.3%
Fayette	1.5%
Fulton	6.9%
Forest	69.2%
Harrisburg	0.2%
Huntingdon	13.5%
Indiana	1.9%
Juniata	8.1%
Jefferson	9.4%
Lancaster	0.3%
Lebanon	1.1%
Lehigh	0.4%
Luzerne	2.3%
Lackawanna	2.5%
Lycoming	4.6%
McKean	9.7%
Monroe	17.9%
Montgomery	0.2%
Montour	0.5%
Morgan	0.2%
Nantuxet	0.2%
Northampton	0.7%
Northumberland	1.1%
Perry	5.0%
Pike	35.6%
Potter	39.1%
Pottsville	0.2%
Rising Sun	0.2%
Schuylkill	1.6%
Snyder	2.3%
Somerset	13.3%
Susquehanna	16.8%
Sullivan	49.6%
Tioga	14.4%
Union	4.7%
Washington	1.1%
Wayne	32.3%
Westmoreland	1.2%
York	0.4%
Warren	16.9%
Wyoming	8.7%
Zelienople	0.2%

As seen in Figure 6 and Figure 7, housing unit vacancies in urban municipalities are for the most part due to temporary or legal circumstances, meaning these units could potentially be more readily available to address housing shortages. However, vacant units in rural municipalities are less able to be repurposed in this manner because many are established seasonal or secondary homes.

As policymakers and rural communities are grappling with issues related to housing quality and availability, vacant housing units remain a key part of the discussion. There are over 250,000 vacant housing units in rural Pennsylvania, and 122,000 of those (60 percent) are seasonal, recreational, or occasional use properties, some of which may not be owned by residents within those areas. While blight, legal delays, and personal family situations are the most common reasons for properties to be vacant in urban areas, rural communities face longer-term housing availability issues due to the majority of vacant properties being owned by someone who does not reside there year-round. These factors need to be considered in order for government policies to effectively address housing shortages in rural Pennsylvania.

Appendix

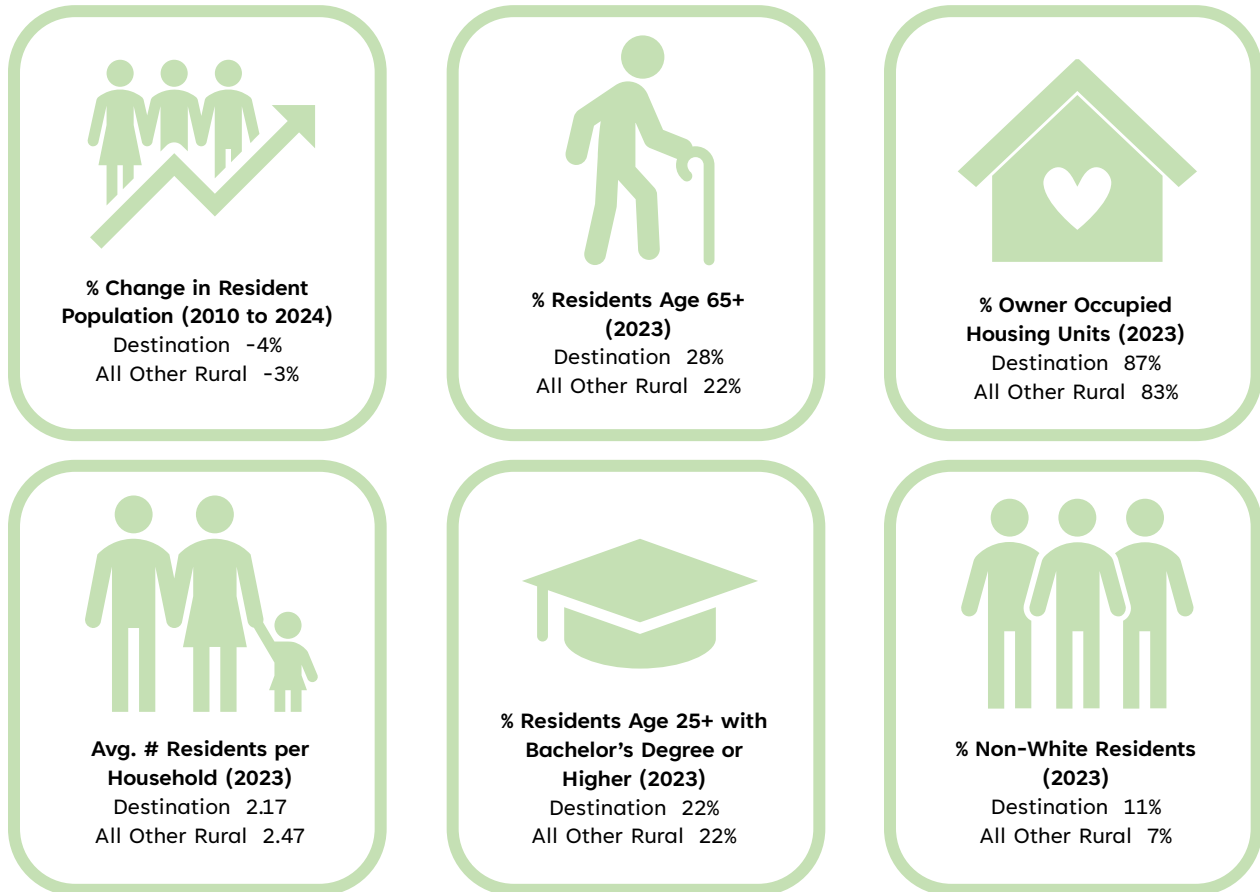
Appendix 1: Financial Characteristics of Destination Municipalities v. All Other Rural Municipalities in Pennsylvania



Note: Destination municipalities have at least 50 percent of their housing units reported as vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use purposes. Average Assessment Ratio is the total assessed values of properties (based on official appraisal) in the municipality divided by the total market values (based on the local housing market). A low assessment ratio indicates property taxes are paid to the municipality at a lower rate.

Data Sources: State Tax Equalization Board; Municipal Annual Financial Reports, Pennsylvania Department of Economic Development; 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

Appendix 2: Demographic Characteristics of Destination Municipalities v. All Other Rural Municipalities in Pennsylvania



Note: Destination municipalities have at least 50 percent of their housing units reported as vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use purposes.

Data Sources: 2010 to 2024 Population and Housing Unit Estimates and 2023 5-Year Average, American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

Definitions

Rural and Urban: The Center for Rural Pennsylvania's definition of rural and urban is based on population density. Population density is calculated by dividing the total population of a specific area by the total number of square land miles of that area. According to the 2020 Census, the population of Pennsylvania is 13,002,700, and the number of square miles of land in Pennsylvania is 44,742. Therefore, the population density is 291 people per square mile. A county or municipality is rural when the number of people per square mile in the county or municipality is fewer than 291, or the municipality is in a rural county and has fewer than 2,500 residents. All other counties or municipalities are considered urban.

Vacant Housing Unit: A housing unit is considered vacant if no one is living in it at the time the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey is distributed and collected from the household, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. In addition, a vacant unit may be one that is entirely occupied by persons who have a usual residence elsewhere. New units not yet occupied are classified as vacant housing units if construction has reached a point where all exterior windows and doors are installed and final usable floors are in place. Vacant units are excluded if they are exposed to the elements, that is, if the roof, walls, windows, or doors no longer protect the interior from the elements, or if there is positive evidence (such as a sign on the house or block) that the unit is to be demolished or is condemned. Also excluded are quarters being used entirely for nonresidential purposes, such as a store or an office, or quarters used for the storage of business supplies or inventory, machinery, or agricultural products. Vacant sleeping rooms in lodging houses, transient accommodations, barracks, and other quarters not defined as housing units are not included in the statistics in this report.

Vacant Units for Sale/Rental Transition: This group includes (1) vacant units offered for rent and those offered both for rent and sale, (2) units for rent or sale, and (3) year-round vacant units that have been rented or sold, but the new renters or owners have not moved in as of the day the survey was distributed and collected.

Seasonal/Occasional Use Vacant Units: This group includes (1) units held for weekends or occasional use throughout the year, (2) units that are temporarily occupied at the time of the distribution and collection of the survey by persons who usually live elsewhere, (3) recreational or time-shared units if they are not for-rent or for-sale at the time of the survey distribution and collection, and (4) housing units that are intended for occupancy only during certain seasons of the year and are found primarily in resort areas.

Destination Municipalities: Municipality where at least 50 percent of housing units are vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Below is the list of 79 rural Pennsylvania municipalities classified as destination municipalities (sorted by alphabetical order of the county where the municipality is located):

Municipality	County	% Housing Units Seasonal
Armenia Township	Bradford County	65%
Overton Township	Bradford County	57%
Driftwood Borough	Cameron County	70%
Gibson Township	Cameron County	78%
Grove Township	Cameron County	91%
Lumber Township	Cameron County	75%
Kidder Township	Carbon County	61%
Millcreek Township	Clarion County	54%
New Washington Borough	Clearfield County	59%
Pine Township	Clearfield County	66%
East Keating Township	Clinton County	95%

Municipality	County	% Housing Units Seasonal
Grugan Township	Clinton County	72%
Leidy Township	Clinton County	80%
West Keating Township	Clinton County	94%
North Shenango Township	Crawford County	61%
Cooke Township	Cumberland County	65%
Benezette Township	Elk County	86%
Highland Township	Elk County	61%
Millstone Township	Elk County	76%
Spring Creek Township	Elk County	78%
Barnett Township	Forest County	73%
Green Township	Forest County	80%
Harmony Township	Forest County	66%
Hickory Township	Forest County	74%
Howe Township	Forest County	86%
Jenks Township	Forest County	56%
Kingsley Township	Forest County	87%
Tionesta Township	Forest County	63%
Valley-Hi Borough	Fulton County	95%
Barnett Township	Jefferson County	56%
Heath Township	Jefferson County	83%
Polk Township	Jefferson County	58%
Clifton Township	Lackawanna County	56%
Brown Township	Lycoming County	84%
Cummings Township	Lycoming County	54%
McHenry Township	Lycoming County	84%
Norwich Township	McKean County	55%
Sergeant Township	McKean County	71%
Tobyhanna Township	Monroe County	52%
Lackawaxen Township	Pike County	53%
Palmyra Township	Pike County	61%
Porter Township	Pike County	68%
Shohola Township	Pike County	56%
Abbott Township	Potter County	79%
Clara Township	Potter County	58%
Hector Township	Potter County	51%
Keating Township	Potter County	70%
Portage Township	Potter County	64%
Stewardson Township	Potter County	89%
Summit Township	Potter County	70%
Sylvania Township	Potter County	84%
Ulysses Township	Potter County	56%
West Branch Township	Potter County	73%

Municipality	County	% Housing Units Seasonal
Wharton Township	Potter County	91%
Fairhope Township	Somerset County	59%
Indian Lake Borough	Somerset County	71%
Jefferson Township	Somerset County	68%
Middlecreek Township	Somerset County	74%
Seven Springs Borough	Somerset County	74%
Colley Township	Sullivan County	62%
Eagles Mere Borough	Sullivan County	83%
Forks Township	Sullivan County	58%
Fox Township	Sullivan County	71%
Hillsgrove Township	Sullivan County	58%
Laporte Borough	Sullivan County	58%
Laporte Township	Sullivan County	57%
Herrick Township	Susquehanna County	56%
Elk Township	Tioga County	88%
Gaines Township	Tioga County	56%
Ward Township	Tioga County	68%
President Township	Venango County	57%
Cherry Grove Township	Warren County	67%
Deerfield Township	Warren County	73%
Limestone Township	Warren County	81%
Triumph Township	Warren County	68%
Watson Township	Warren County	66%
Lake Township	Wayne County	53%
Paupack Township	Wayne County	59%
Forkston Township	Wyoming County	52%

Other Reasons for Vacancies: The full list of potential reasons for housing unit vacancies categorized as “Other” could include:

- Foreclosure.
- Personal/family reasons, such as units where the owner does not want to rent or sell, owner is deciding what to do with the unit, owner is keeping the unit for family use, owner is staying with family, or owner is in assisted living or other type of care situation.
- Legal proceedings or disputes.
- Preparing to rent or sell the unit.
- Unit held for storage of household furniture.
- Unit needs repairs or is currently being repaired/renovated.
- Specific-use housing units, such as military housing, employee/corporate housing, transient quarters, units held by a church, student housing (dorms and school-sponsored housing), model home/apartment, or guest house.

- Extended absences by occupants, such as the owner being on extended work or military assignment, temporarily out of the country, or in jail or another type of detention situation.
- Units that are said to be demolished or condemned, but there was no positive evidence at the time of the distribution and collection of the survey, such as a sign, notice, or mark on the house to indicate the unit is to be demolished or condemned.
- Write-in response or simply do not know why the unit is vacant.

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