Understanding Housing in Forest County

Housing indicators to support informed discussion and decision-making.





COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY QUESTION

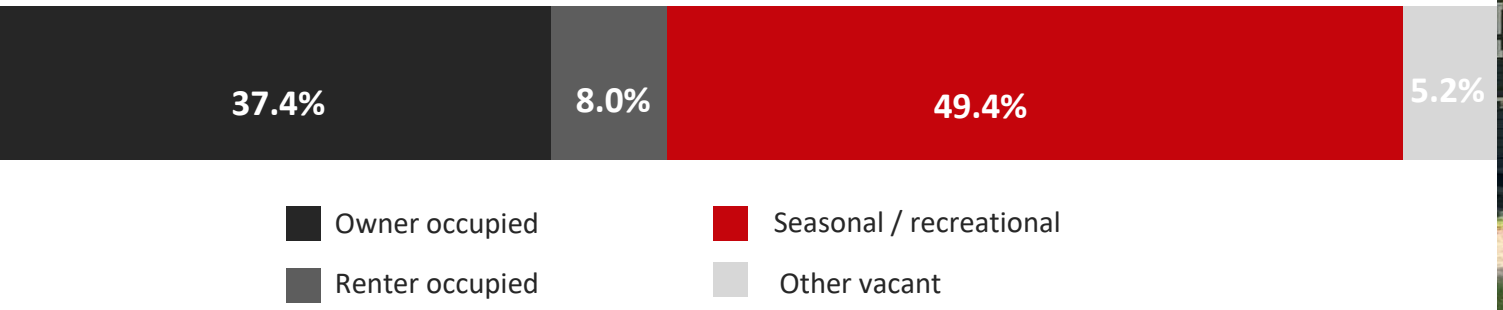
What should Forest County and its community partners do to expand affordable housing for current and future residents?

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

Nearly Half of Forest County Housing Is Seasonal

49.4%

of housing units are seasonal, recreational, or occasional-use.





Why this matters

The total number of housing units does not reflect how much housing is available to year-round residents.

What does the amount of seasonal housing mean for year-round residents?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019–2023 five-year estimates; Northwoods Housing 2025 (Matt Kures).

Forest County Housing Stock

Built Before 1950

More than 16% of housing in Forest County was built before 1950.

That rate is higher in Argonne, Blackwell, Ross and Wabeno (~1 in 5) and Laona (~1 in 4)

Much of Forest County's housing was built decades ago.

What this may mean

An older housing stock may raise questions about **condition, maintenance, rehabilitation, accessibility, and energy efficiency.**



How well does Forest County's existing housing stock meet the needs of residents today?

Source: NCWRPC, Grow North Region Housing Study (2021)

Households Grew More Than Twice as Much as Population

2010-2024

+2.2% Population

versus

+5.6% Households

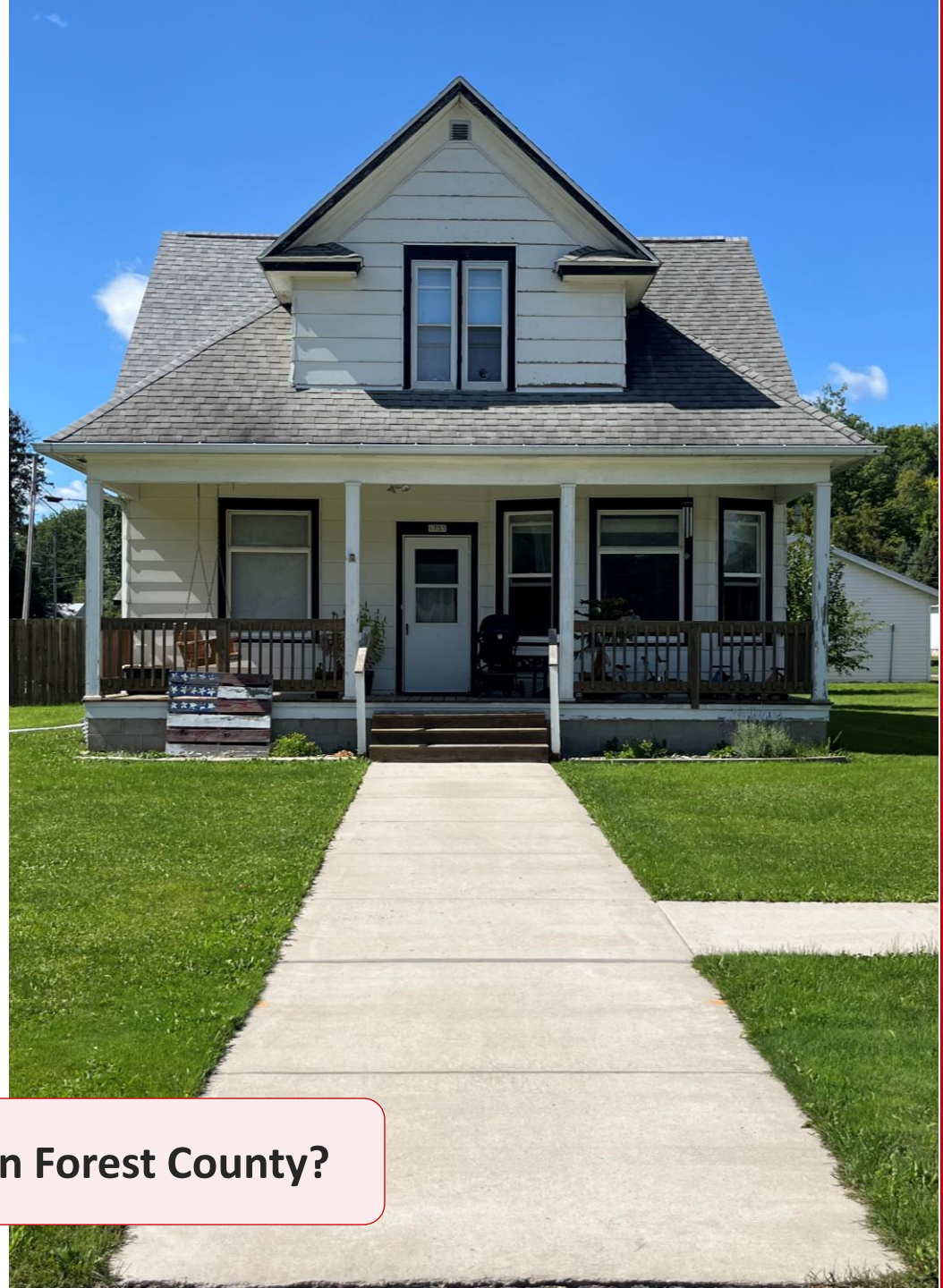
Average household size has declined

2.39 (2000) → **2.33** (2010) → **2.29** (2019–2023)

Why it matters

Housing demand is shaped by the number of households, not population alone. More households can mean demand for more homes even when population changes relatively little.

What might these changes in households mean for housing in Forest County?



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and author's calculations; Northwoods Housing 2025.

Home Prices Increased Faster Than Household Income

2018–2023, inflation-adjusted

+22.6%

Median home sale price

versus

+8.0%

Median household income

Why it matters

When home prices increase faster than household income, buying a home can become more difficult for some households.

What might this trend mean for housing affordability in Forest County?



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Northwoods Housing 2025.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Some Forest County Households Spend a Large Share of Income on Housing

For Forest County, using 2019–2023 estimates:

23.5%

of renter households are cost burdened

28.9%

of homeowner households with a mortgage are cost burdened

What does "cost burdened" mean?

Spending 30% or more of household income on housing costs.

Why it matters

Cost burden can leave households with less income available for other needs.

What might these numbers tell us about housing affordability in Forest County?

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Northwoods Housing 2025.

Forest County Housing Market

Homes are entering the market, but are they the homes residents need?

109	**$190,000**	**130 days**
Residential sales	Median sale price	Average time on market

196 new residential listings were reported during the same period.



If homes are on the market, what is preventing them from meeting the needs of year-round residents?

Greater Northwoods MLS | Jan.–Aug. 2026

Workforce and Affordability

What can a local wage support?

$810 / WEEK
Average private-sector weekly wage
Forest County, Q4 2025

≈ $42,120 / YEAR*
Annualized equivalent

≈ $1,053 / MONTH
30% housing-cost benchmark



What housing is attainable for Forest County's workforce?



Sources: Wisconsin DWD, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Q4 2025; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Annualized equivalent calculated as $810 × 52. Housing costs above 30% of income are commonly used to identify housing cost burden.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

What Can Forest County Households Afford?

Illustrative household incomes based on local wages and occupations

Household 1

Teacher + County Highway Employee
Teacher: $57,560
Highway Employee: $45,594

Household Income = $103,154*

Affordable Monthly Housing Cost (30%): = **$2,579**

Household 2

Single-income household

Teacher: $57,560

Household Income = $57,560

Affordable Monthly Housing Cost (30%): **$1,439**

Household 3

Casino Employee + Private-Sector Worker

Casino Cook ($17/hour): $35,360
Private-Sector Worker: $42,120
Household Income: $77,480*

Affordable Monthly Housing Cost (30%): **$1,937**

If these households can afford housing, what might still prevent them from finding a suitable home in Forest County?

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Laona School District, (2026); median calculated from reported teacher salaries; Forest County Wage Analysis by Carlson Dettmann (2025) The $17/hour figure is from an online job listing (2026). Figures assume employees work 40 hours per week, 52 weeks annually.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

How Interest Rates Affect Housing Affordability

Same $190,000 home | 10% down | 30-year mortgage

Purchase Price: $190,000
Down Payment: (10%): $19,000
Mortgage Amount: $171,000

Mortgage interest rate (30-year fixed rate)	Monthly mortgage payment
2021 average: 2.96%	**$717**
Illustrative rate: 5.00%	**$918**
2026 rate: 7.32%	**$1,175**

The same $190,000 home costs approximately $458 more per month at 7.32% interest than at 2.96% (2021), which is an increase of nearly $5,500 per year.

Illustrative rates; principal and interest only. Excludes property taxes, insurance, private mortgage insurance (PMI), and maintenance. Freddie Mac, Primary Mortgage Market Survey (October 22, 2026)

What We Still Need to Understand

WHO?	**Which households are having the greatest difficulty finding housing?**
WHAT?	**Rental, ownership, starter homes, senior housing, apartments—or something else?**
AT WHAT PRICE?	**What price points are attainable for different Forest County households?**
WHAT'S IN THE WAY?	**What barriers are making it difficult to meet housing needs—construction costs, land, infrastructure, financing, contractor capacity, or something else?**

What additional information do we need to make informed housing decisions?

Housing Takes Many Partners

No single organization can meet Forest County's housing needs alone.

County Government	**Planning • coordination • programs**
Cities, Towns & Villages	**Land use • zoning • infrastructure**
Tribal Governments & Housing Organizations	**Housing programs • development • housing services**
Developers, Builders & Property Owners	**Build • renovate • manage housing**
Employers	**Workforce needs • partnerships**
Nonprofits & Housing Organizations	**Assistance • rehabilitation • services**
State & Federal Partners	**Funding • financing • technical assistance**

Different partners have different tools, resources and responsibilities.

What Kind of Housing Does Forest County Actually Need?

Starter homes	**Rental housing**	**Senior housing**
Workforce housing	**Apartments**	**Modest single-family homes**

The data do not tell us which solution to choose.

They help us determine which questions we need to answer before choosing a solution.

Primary Data Sources

U.S. Census Bureau — ACS & OnTheMap/LODES 2023
Wisconsin REALTORS® Association
Greater Northwoods Multiple Listing Service (MLS)
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Forest County Comprehensive Plan 2024–2044 – North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC)
Wisconsin DWD, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Q4 2025
Freddie Mac, Primary Mortgage Market Survey (October 22, 2026)
Forest County Wage Analysis by Carlson Dettmann (2025)
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2026)
NCWRPC, Grow North Region Housing Study (2021)

Local & Extension Sources
Northwoods Housing Summit 2025 — UW–Madison Extension, Matt Kures

