

To: Diane Barnes, Town Manager, North Yarmouth

From: Kristina Egan, Executive Director, Greater Portland Council of Governments

Date: May 2, 2024

Re: Impacts of Residential Development in North Yarmouth

Introduction

North Yarmouth sought GPCOG's help to gain insights into recent community growth. To develop this memo, we reviewed Census data in conjunction with town-specific information such as building permits, school enrollment figures, and tax rates. Our goal with this memo is to provide town leadership with a better understanding of the extent and impact of growth in North Yarmouth over the last decade as well as some suggested policy options for how to mitigate any negative impacts.

KEY FINDINGS

- **North Yarmouth is growing faster than some of its neighbors, but at a level consistent with past decades.** In the last decade, the town added approximately 230 homes and 550 residents. Despite its smaller size, in the last decade North Yarmouth has experienced net population and housing growth at a slightly higher pace than its more sizeable neighbors. From a historical standpoint, however, the current level of growth is consistent.
- **North Yarmouth has a high proportion of single-family homes.** Currently, single-family homes make up 92% of the town's housing stock, representing one of the highest proportions among non-island communities in Cumberland County. Single-family homes typically require additional services and infrastructure from towns compared to other types of housing.
- **Just under half of residential development occurred in the rural areas.** Forty-seven percent of new building permits issued in the last decade were in the Farm Forest zone, which continues the trend in North Yarmouth of losing undisturbed natural areas.
- **Since 2019, the Village zones have experienced an uptick in development.** Housing development in the Village zones increased substantially since 2019, but new development in the Village zones predominantly consisted of single-family homes built on relatively large lots.
- **North Yarmouth's tax rate has increased.** While the factors that influence tax rates are numerous and complex, the town's predominant development pattern of single-family homes on large lots may be a contributor.

How much is North Yarmouth growing?

POPULATION

Despite its smaller size, North Yarmouth is experiencing population and housing growth at a slightly higher pace to that of its more sizeable neighbors, except for Cumberland. In absolute numbers, over the past decade, the community has welcomed approximately 546 people – comparable to that of Gray and Yarmouth. Proximity to Portland, coastal access, and highway connections are consistent geographic factors shared by the fastest growing communities north of Portland.

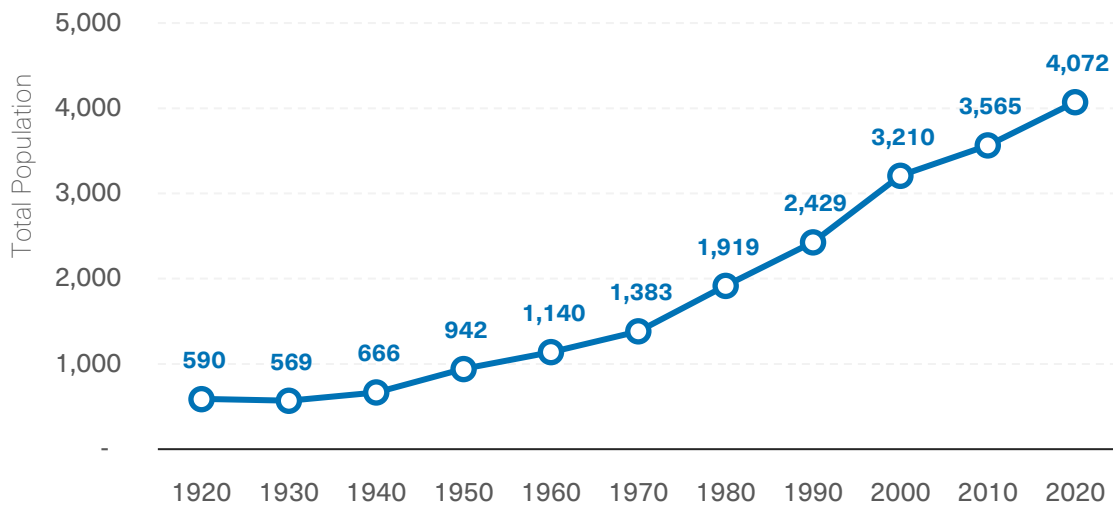
TABLE 1: Total Population, 2012-2022

Town	2012	2022	Net Change	% Change
Pownal	1,457	1,600	143	10%
New Gloucester	5,533	5,705	172	3%
Gray	7,747	8,284	537	7%
North Yarmouth	3,560	4,106	546	15%
Yarmouth	8,390	8,984	594	7%
Freeport	7,946	8,700	754	9%
Cumberland	7,236	8,443	1,207	17%
Falmouth	11,233	12,504	1,271	11%
Cumberland County	282,143	303,357	21,214	8%

Table sorted by Net Change / Source: 2012 ACS 5-yr estimate; 2022 5-yr estimate

From a historical standpoint, however, the current amount of growth is consistent. Dating back to 1970, North Yarmouth has grown at a steady rate averaging about 500 people per decade. Over the past fifty years, the town experienced the most substantial surge in population between 1990 and 2000 when it added 781 new residents.

FIGURE 1: North Yarmouth's Historic Population Growth, 1920-2020



Source: Decennial Census 1920-2020

HOUSING

The town’s housing inventory has kept pace with its population growth. Over the last decade, approximately 232 housing units were added to accommodate the town’s expanding population. This increase in housing aligns with the growth patterns observed in North Yarmouth’s neighboring towns.

TABLE 2: Total Housing Units, 2012-2022

Town	2012	2022	Net Change	% Change
Yarmouth	3,584	3,482	-102	-3%
Pownal	657	649	-8	-1%
New Gloucester	2,125	2,259	134	6%
Freeport	3,779	4,003	224	6%
North Yarmouth	1,392	1,624	232	17%
Cumberland	2,811	3,120	309	11%
Falmouth	4,872	5,240	368	8%
Gray	3,628	4,437	809	22%
Cumberland County	138,445	149,869	11,424	8%

Table sorted by Net Change

Source: 2012 ACS 5-yr estimate; 2022 5-yr estimate

What type of development has occurred?

BUILDING TYPES

The predominant residential building type in North Yarmouth is single-family homes. According to the most recent Census estimates, single-family homes make up 92% of the town's housing stock, representing one of the highest rates among communities in Cumberland County. The only other non-island communities with a higher percentage of single-family homes in the County are Cape Elizabeth (93%) and Raymond (95%).

While the Census data provides an overview of housing trends, the town's building permit database, maintained by the code enforcement office, offers more detailed insights into the specific locations and types of development occurring within the community.

Between 2013 and 2022, North Yarmouth's code enforcement office approved 314 residential building permits, mostly for single-family homes, with a small fraction allocated to accessory dwelling units and apartments. From 2019 onward, there has been a noticeable increase in development activity.

FIGURE 2: North Yarmouth Residential Building Permits by Type, 2013-2023

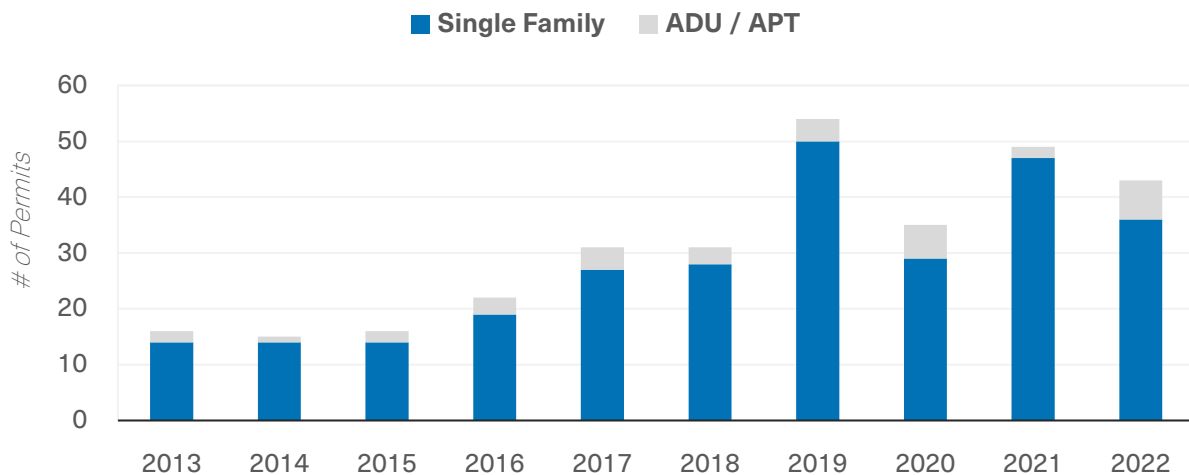


TABLE 3: North Yarmouth Residential Building Permits by Type, 2013-2022

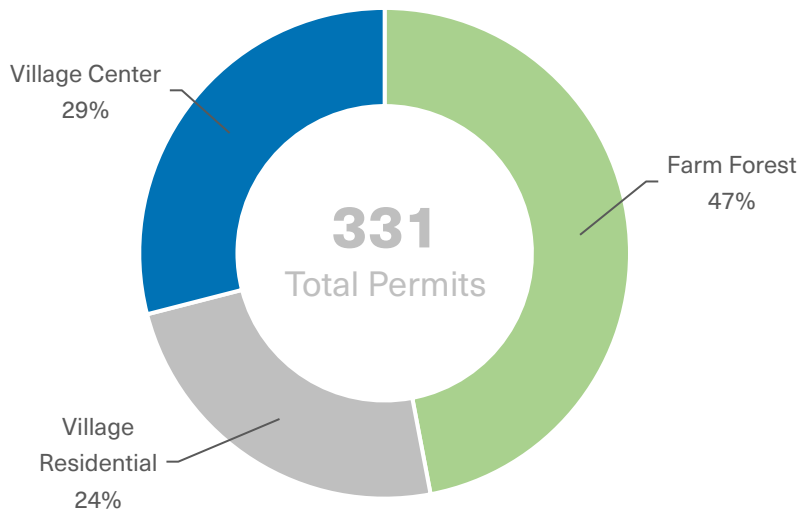
Type	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Single-Family	14	14	14	19	27	28	50	29	47	36
Accessory Dwelling Unit	2	1	2	3	4	1	3	5	2	1
Apartment	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>43</i>

Where has development occurred?

ZONING DISTRICTS

In the last ten years, most new residential development has occurred in the town's rural areas. The town has three distinct zoning districts to manage new growth and development: Farm Forest, Village Residential, and Village Center. Mapping building permits in conjunction with zoning reveals that nearly half of all new permits were granted in the Farm Forest zone, while the remaining half were almost evenly distributed between the Village Residential and Village Center zones.

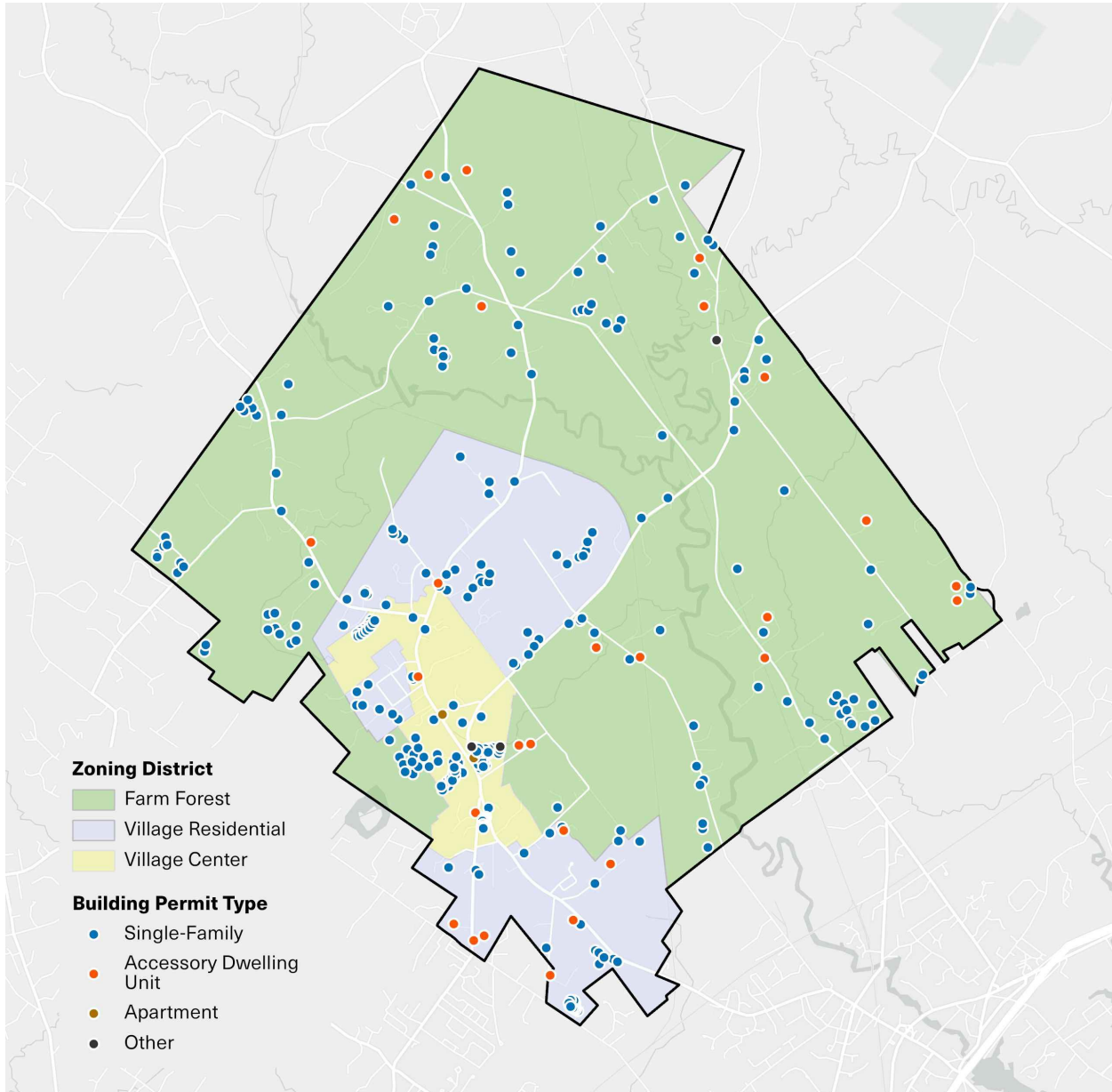
FIGURE 3: Building Permits by Zoning District, 2013-2023*



**Includes 2023 building permits through August 2023.*

North Yarmouth's 2018 comprehensive plan proposed a significant change in zoning to guide new growth where residents would like to see a mixed-use village. Simultaneously, the plan proposed strong standards in the rural areas to discourage suburban sprawl and preserve the town's rural character. As the plan states, "development is desired where land has already been developed and where public services and facilities including public water and municipal/community buildings can most efficiently and cost effectively be provided." In alignment with the overarching vision of the comprehensive plan, the town approved a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for the Village area in 2019.

FIGURE 4: Building Permits by Zoning District and Type, 2013-2023*

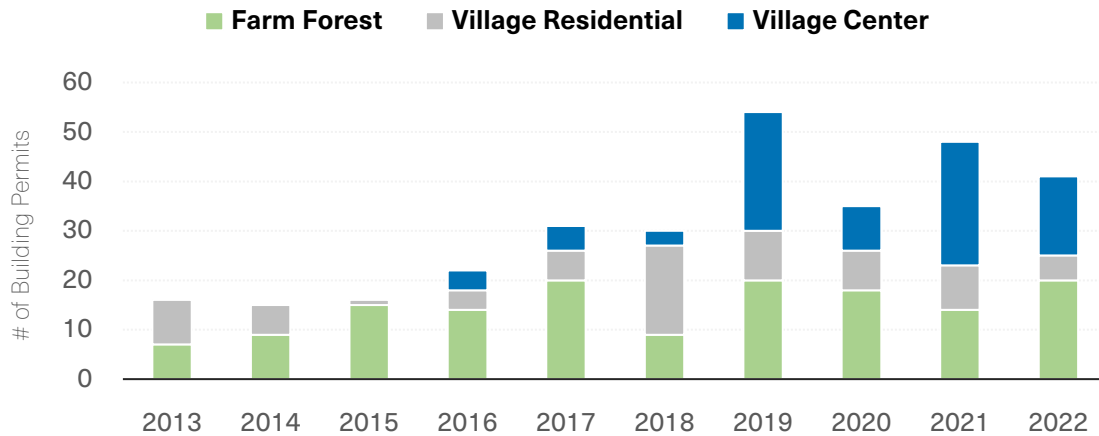


**Includes 2023 building permits through August 2023.*

The map above shows the distribution of building permits issued in North Yarmouth by zoning district and permit type. Building permits are dispersed broadly across the Farm Forest zone, while a cluster-style development pattern is evident in the Village Center and Village Residential zones.

In many respects, the town's current zoning has been successful in attracting new development to the village area, but development has continued in the town's rural areas. While development in the Village Center has increased substantially since 2016, demand for new permits in the Farm Forest zone shows no sign of slowing down.

FIGURE 4: Annual Building Permits by Zoning District, 2013-2022



How is the town's population changing?

AGE

Notably, North Yarmouth stands out as having one of the highest median ages in Cumberland County, yet it also experienced the second highest increase in school enrollment of all communities in the county.

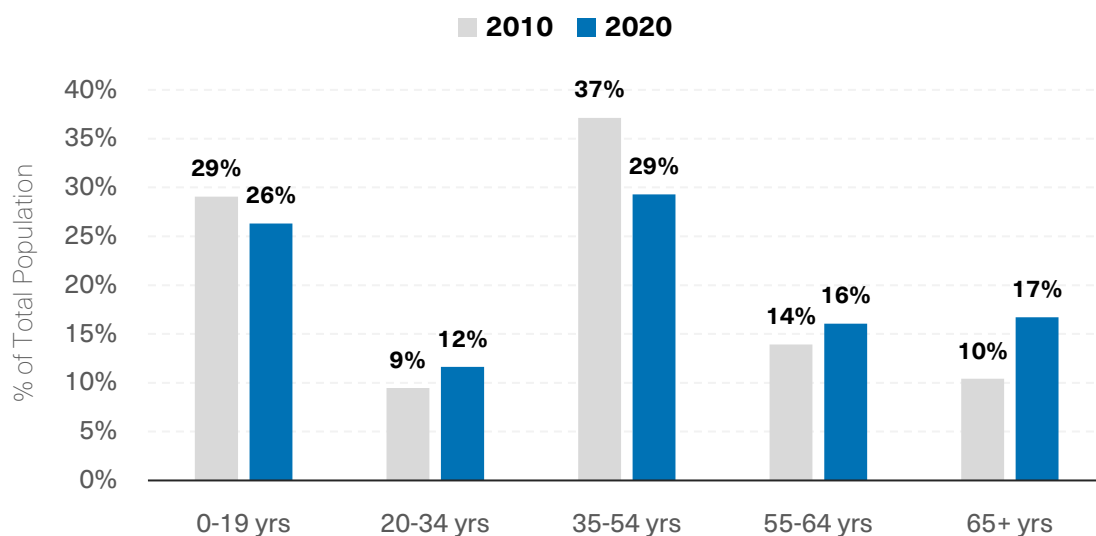
TABLE 4: Median Age Comparison

Geographies	Median Age (yrs)
Cumberland	40.6
Yarmouth	41.3
Cumberland County	42.1
Gray	42.1
Pownal	43.5
New Gloucester	43.7
Maine	44.8
Freeport	47.5
Falmouth	47.7
North Yarmouth	47.8

Source: 2022 ACS 5-yr estimate

Between 2010 and 2020, the population share of older adults, particularly those aged 65 and older, increased considerably.

FIGURE 5: North Yarmouth Population by Age, 2010-2020

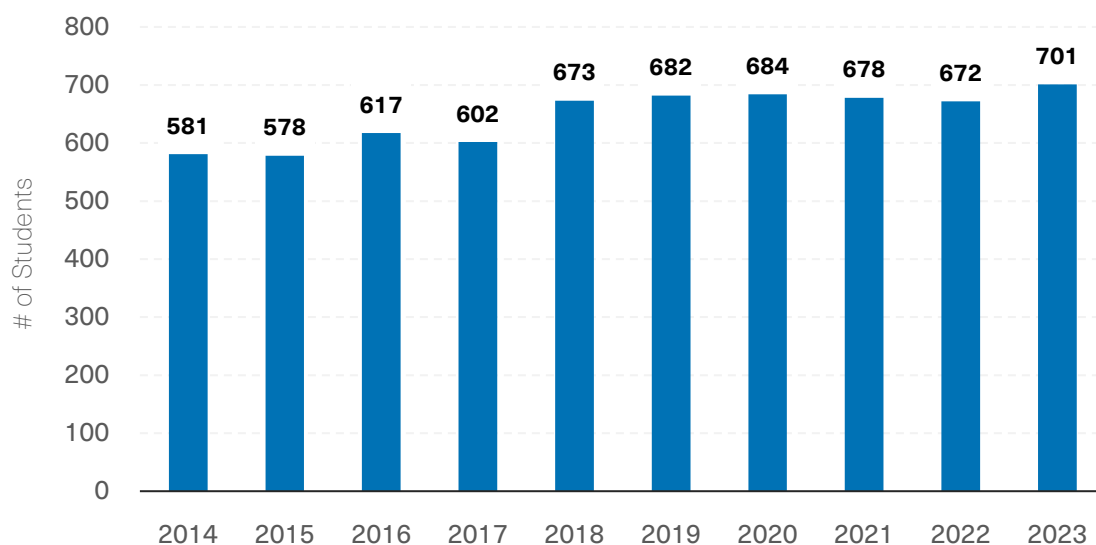


Source: Decennial Census 2010-2020

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Despite the increasing population share of older adults, which suggests an aging population, North Yarmouth has also experienced a significant rise in public school enrollment, adding 120 new students between 2014 and 2023. Among all communities in Cumberland County, only Yarmouth surpassed North Yarmouth in this regard.

FIGURE 6: North Yarmouth Public School Enrollment, 2014-2023



Source: MaineGov

Does not include pre-k, private, or home school data

TABLE 5: Public School Enrollment by Town, 2014-2023

Town	2014	2023	Net Change	% Change
Falmouth	2,104	1,976	-128	-6%
New Gloucester	927	842	-85	-9%
Gray	1,132	1,058	-74	-7%
Cumberland County	39,189	37,809	-51	-5%
Pownal	207	222	15	7%
Cumberland	1,452	1,481	29	2%
Freeport	1,134	1,237	103	9%
North Yarmouth	581	701	120	21%
Yarmouth	1,442	1,643	201	14%

Table sorted by Net Change / Source: Maine.gov

The increase in school enrollment suggests that, while North Yarmouth's population is aging in terms of percentage share, as the town grows, it is attracting enough young families to boost the raw numbers of students in its schools. This phenomenon of age distribution versus raw totals highlights the complexity of understanding demographic changes.

RACE

From a race and ethnicity perspective, North Yarmouth has seen a modest increase in diversity, but remains a predominantly white demographic. In 2010 the town's population was reported as 97% white, while the latest Census estimate indicates a shift to approximately 93% white.

What are the impacts of growth in North Yarmouth?

Population and housing growth in a small rural community can bring positive change as well as challenges. The following section highlights some key data that policymakers can use to inform ways for the town to shape growth and development to maximize benefits and minimize impacts for North Yarmouth residents.

LAND USE

While the emergence of new residential development in the Village Center is the most visible change over the last decade, what is less visible is the significant loss of open space to large lot single family homes in rural areas of town. As mentioned earlier, nearly half of all granted permits were in the Farm Forest zone.

Examining property lot sizes associated with each building permit offers a spatial perspective of the extent of open space that has been developed. Excluding accessory dwelling units, which are situated on developed lots, the average lot size for building permits issued in the Farm Forest zone between 2013 and 2022 was 5.75 acres. In contrast, permits issued in the Village Residential and Village Center zones featured smaller average lot sizes, respectively measuring 4.29 and 1.21 acres, although still substantial for a village setting (for reference, one acre is about 90% of a football field, 16 tennis courts, or nine basketball courts). The cumulative impact is that approximately 759 acres of Farm Forest zone land underwent development, compared to 296 acres in the Village Residential zone and 100 acres in the Village Center zone.

TABLE 6: Land Use Impacts of Development, 2013-2022

Zone	# of Permits	Avg. Lot Size (Acres)	Total (Acres)
Village Center	83	1.21	100
Village Residential	69	4.29	296
Farm Forest	132	5.75	759

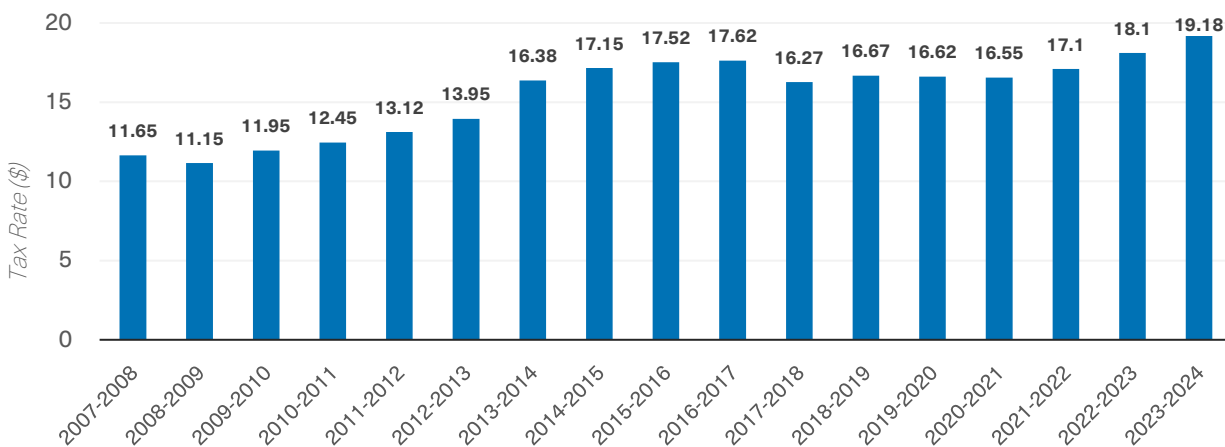
Data does not include accessory dwelling units.

Of course, most houses occupy only a small portion of land, but the proliferation of single-family homes on four- and five-acre lots limits land used as woodlots, agriculture, parks, and conservation. For this reason, the town might consider actions to preserve valuable land and/or increasing the minimum lot size in the Farm Forest zone (with maximum standards for areas of disturbance) and decreasing the minimum lot size in the Village Residential zone.

TAXES

Tax rates in North Yarmouth have increased considerably, from \$11.65 per thousand in home value in 2007-2008 to \$19.18 in 2023-2024. While the factors that influence tax rates are numerous and complex, it is hard to overlook the connection between the increase in tax rates, the town's recent growth, and the high percentage of single-family housing.

TABLE 6: North Yarmouth Tax Rates



The predominance of single-family housing in North Yarmouth may offer a partial explanation for the recent increase in tax rates (and school enrollment). Single-family homes often attract families with school-age children due to factors such as space, privacy, and access to good schools. While the presence of children and young families is undoubtedly beneficial, it does carry financial implications, particularly concerning school budgets, which typically constitute a significant portion of a community's expenditures. In this way, the influx of young families with school-aged children can impact tax rates.

In addition to school system impacts, single-family housing typically requires additional services and infrastructure from towns compared to other types of housing for several reasons:

- **Road maintenance:** Single-family homes are often spread out over a large area, resulting in more roads that need to be built, maintained, and repaired by the town. This includes paving, snow plowing, and street cleaning.
- **Utilities:** Single-family homes require individual connections to utilities such as water and electricity. This involves installing and maintaining utility lines, meters, and infrastructure to ensure reliable service to each home.
- **Emergency services:** Fire and police departments may need to travel greater distances to travel to emergencies in neighborhoods with single-family homes.
- **Residential services:** Bus, trash, and recycling services are typically more expensive due to the dispersed nature of single-family homes.

If the cost of providing these services exceeds the additional revenue generated from property taxes, it can put upward pressure on tax rates for all residents. Upon request, GPCOG has conducted fiscal impact studies for some communities in the region to better understand the impact of various development scenarios. While estimates vary from community to community, for the Town of Freeport our modeling found that a typical single-family home has a net fiscal impact of -\$3,257 on the town budget – in other words, the average single-family home does not pay enough property taxes to cover the services it requires. By contrast, a dense single-family home (like the Scarborough Downs Apartments) has a net fiscal impact of \$48, a 30-unit multifamily apartment has a net impact of \$32,708, and a 60-unit multifamily apartment has a net impact of \$43,799. Ultimately, the nature of who lives in multifamily apartments – fewer families with children – puts less demand on schools and other public services than dispersed single-family housing.

HOUSING AVAILABILITY & AFFORDABILITY

Although North Yarmouth is growing and adding housing at a steady rate, state (and national) housing pressures are extreme.¹ There are numerous factors to explain the housing crisis, but its root cause lies in the historic underproduction of homes during the Great Recession. This trend was further compounded by material and labor scarcities during the pandemic, which coincided with an influx of residents to Maine largely driven by the new opportunities presented with remote work. The lack of housing supply, coupled with increasing demand, is driving prices upward.

A common metric used to gauge housing affordability is gross rent or owner housing costs relative to income. Households spending 30% or more of their income on rent or housing costs are deemed cost burdened. In North Yarmouth, the percentage households facing this burden generally aligns with neighboring communities and sits on the lower end for renting and the higher end for homeownership. Nonetheless, almost one in five residents are cost burdened in North Yarmouth.

¹ [State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study](#). October 2023. Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.

TABLE 7: Proportion of Residents Paying Excessive Housing Costs

Town	Gross rent 30% or more of income	Owner housing costs 30% or more of income
Cumberland	60%	18%
Falmouth	36%	21%
Freeport	46%	16%
Gray	33%	23%
New Gloucester	13%	17%
North Yarmouth	24%	23%
Pownal	59%	23%
Yarmouth	50%	29%
Cumberland County	43%	22%

Source: 2022 ACS 5-yr estimate

The region is experiencing a housing shortage that makes it difficult for many people to obtain reasonably priced housing. To address these mounting pressures and promote greater affordability, North Yarmouth can employ a variety of tools. These include implementing incentive programs (such as tax breaks and subsidies), zoning policies (like inclusionary zoning and density bonuses), public-private partnerships for development, and tenant protection programs like community land trusts.²

TRANSPORTATION

Increased vehicle traffic is a common concern associated with growth. [MaineDOT's traffic data viewer](#) provides annual average daily traffic (AADT) counts throughout the state, which describes the average number of cars that travel a given road each day over a year. GPCOG selected the following representative locations.

TABLE 8: MaineDOT Traffic Counts

Location	2013	2022	% Change
New Gloucester Rd @ Mill Rd/North Rd	1,810	2,015	11%
N. Yarmouth Memorial Hwy @ Sligo Rd	1,900	2,170	14%
New Gloucester Rd @ Gray Rd	3,517	3,623	3%
Cumberland Rd (Rt 9) south of Walnut Hill Rd (Rt 115)	4,780	4,210	-12%
Walnut Hill Rd (Rt 115) @ Split Rock Rd	3,470	3,420	-1%
Walnut Hill Rd (Rt 115) @ Stone Post Ln	8,390	7,420	-12%

² GPCOG's new website, www.greatmaineneighborhoods.org, is a valuable resource to learn more about the many policy, zoning, financing, and infrastructure tools that are available.

There has been a marginal increase in traffic volume in North Yarmouth suggesting that the rate of development in North Yarmouth has not contributed to a substantial increase in vehicle traffic.

Policy Ideas

The following are general policy approaches the town may wish to consider to mitigate the impacts of future growth:

- ❑ **Continue to encourage mixed-use development in the Village areas:** If the community wishes to maintain the appeal of its country character and preserve its natural, historical, agricultural, and cultural resources (as expressed in the 2018 comprehensive plan), it should continue to strengthen and enforce land use regulations in the Farm Forest zone and promote new development in the Village Center and Village Residential zones. If recent development in the Village zones does not align with the community's vision, the town could pause and reassess existing ordinances and regulations.
- ❑ **Preserve rural character by conserving lands:** A critical complement to encouraging development in places that are already served by infrastructure is to intentionally preserve the natural areas of North Yarmouth to maintain the town's rural character. North Yarmouth can continue to work with the Maine Farmland Trust and Royal River Conservation Trust to protect these lands and minimize the spread of suburban sprawl.
- ❑ **Expand housing choices:** Promote a broader range of housing options, especially in the Village zones, such as multifamily buildings, town homes, senior housing, and accessory dwelling units, to enhance housing diversity and affordability.
- ❑ **Explore zoning amendments:** Evaluate the pros and cons of increasing the minimum lot size in the Farm Forest zone (currently 3-acres) as a strategy for preserving natural areas and working lands.
- ❑ **Encourage commercial development in Village areas:** In the last decade, residential development has been the predominant development type in the Village zones. More small-scale businesses tailored to community needs would create a stronger balance between commercial and residential aspects.
- ❑ **Improve walking and biking facilities in Village zones:** A primary benefit of living in a village area is the ability to walk or bike to nearby destinations. Continue to improve walking and biking facilities in these zones. In addition to improving quality of life, providing adequate walking and biking facilities can reduce vehicle traffic.
- ❑ **Street design:** Promote traffic calming measures to slow traffic and increase safety and accessibility in the Village Center.

Conclusion

Since 1970, North Yarmouth has experienced steady growth of around 500 people per decade. Notably, the past decade has witnessed an increased pace of development in the Village zones, particularly since 2019. If current trends continue, the town will continue to grow. Shaping this growth will help to mitigate the negative impacts of it. Guiding new development to the Village zones, encouraging more diversity in housing types, and adding a stronger mix of uses in the Village Center are effective strategies to enhance the community, alleviate development pressures in the Farm Forest zone, and safeguard the town's agricultural land, natural habitats, and open spaces.