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COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Vernon is the largest city in the North Okanagan, and growing! Our path forward begins with understanding the community context.



MACKAY RESERVOIR

2. COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Vernon's population is continuing to grow and change. A balanced and sustainable approach to managing growth and development will ensure the city remains a place where everyone can live, work, play, and move around.

This Chapter provides contextual information on the opportunities and constraints ([2.1](#)), population profile and projections ([2.2](#)), and the housing profiles and projections ([2.3](#)) that informed the policies and objectives in this Official Community Plan (OCP).

The City will continually monitor and review this OCP every five years to ensure that growth and development remain aligned with Vernonites' evolving priorities and needs to 2045.

2.1 Opportunities and Constraints

Vernon's growth is shaped by geographic constraints including Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries, lakes, steep hillsides, and major transportation corridors such as Highway 97 and Highway 6. As part of the Regional District of North Okanagan, Vernon shares services and planning responsibilities with Coldstream, Electoral Areas B and C, and agencies like Greater Vernon Water and Greater Vernon Diversion and Disposal Facility.

The city functions as a regional commercial and service hub with a diverse economic base spanning retail, healthcare, light industry, and tourism. Vernon Jubilee Hospital is an anchor employer that provides social and economic benefits that serve Vernon and the region as a whole, while the close proximity of Okanagan College and University of British Columbia Okanagan attract students and those pursuing higher education.

Vernon and the larger region are defined by a strong recreation culture, extensive trail networks including opportunities to expand the Okanagan Rail Trail, and natural features that attract tourism such as Ellison, Kalamalka Lake, and Silver Star Provincial Parks. Tourism is further supported by the Kelowna International Airport, located a 30 minute drive to the south.

Infrastructure systems such as water, wastewater, agricultural irrigation, and roads play a critical role in determining development capacity and sequencing. Past development decisions that have extended infrastructure to satellite hillside neighbourhoods have created long term challenges for infrastructure cost and maintenance, however, there is still significant amounts of development potential in these areas.

Together, these factors shape Vernon's opportunities and challenges as it plans for future growth.

2.2 Population Profile and Projections

Vernon’s population has been growing for decades, a trend that is projected to continue. The proportion of seniors is increasing and there are fewer young people, consistent with trends seen in communities across Canada. At the same time, the number of households is increasing, although most are single- or two-person households. Household incomes are slightly below the provincial median, but comparable to that of similarly sized cities in British Columbia.

2.2.1 A growing population

Vernon’s population is still growing. Almost 45,000 people call Vernon home (2021), more than twice as many as in 1981. Since 2011, Vernon has experienced a 17% increase in population.

Vernon’s population will continue to grow. By 2041, Vernon is projected to have more than 62,000 residents. Growth is expected to increase at an average rate of 1.9% each year to 2031 and then 1.5% each year to 2041 ([Table 2.1](#)).

Most of the growth in the wider Vernon area is in Vernon. The area population increased more than 15% between 2011 and 2021, to 66,810 people. While more than 22,000 people live in Vernon’s neighbouring communities, 72% of the area’s population lives in the city (2021) ([Table 2.2](#)).

Table 2.1: City of Vernon Population Growth, 1981–2041

Year	Population	10 Year Growth Rate
1981	20,500	-
1991	24,112	17%
2001	33,542	39%
2011	38,150	13%
2021	44,519	17%
2031	53,739 ⁺	19% ⁺
2041	62,366 ⁺	15% ⁺

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population.

⁺Note: Forecasted growth, [Vernon Housing Needs Report](#). The exceptional 1991-2001 increase is due to the City’s 1993 boundary extension to include Okanagan Landing.

Table 2.2: Wider Vernon Area Population Growth, 2011-2021

Jurisdiction	Population		Share of Neighbouring Area Growth
	2011	2021	
City of Vernon	38,150	44,519	72%
District of Coldstream	10,314	11,171	10%
RDNO Electoral Areas B and C	6,918	7,785	10%
OKIB Reserve No. 1 and No. 6	2,673	3,335	8%
Wider Vernon area total	58,055	66,810	100%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2011 and 2021.

2.2.2 An aging population

Vernon’s population is aging. The median age is 49 years (2021), higher than in 2006 (when it was 45 years). The province-wide median age is 44 years.

The proportion of seniors is growing and the proportion of young people under 19 years is decreasing (Figure 2.1), consistent with trends seen in communities across Canada.



Figure 2.1 Population by age group, 2006–2021.

2.2.3 A large working population

More than half of Vernon’s population is employed. Over 20,000 people (56% of the population) are in the labour force (2021).

Most of the working population (61%) is employed in one of four sectors: administration and professional services (18%), retail trade (17%), health care (15%), and construction (10%) ([Figure 2.2](#)).

The share of Vernon’s working age population, generally between ages 20 and 69, has remained largely the same since 2006 ([Figure 2.1](#)).

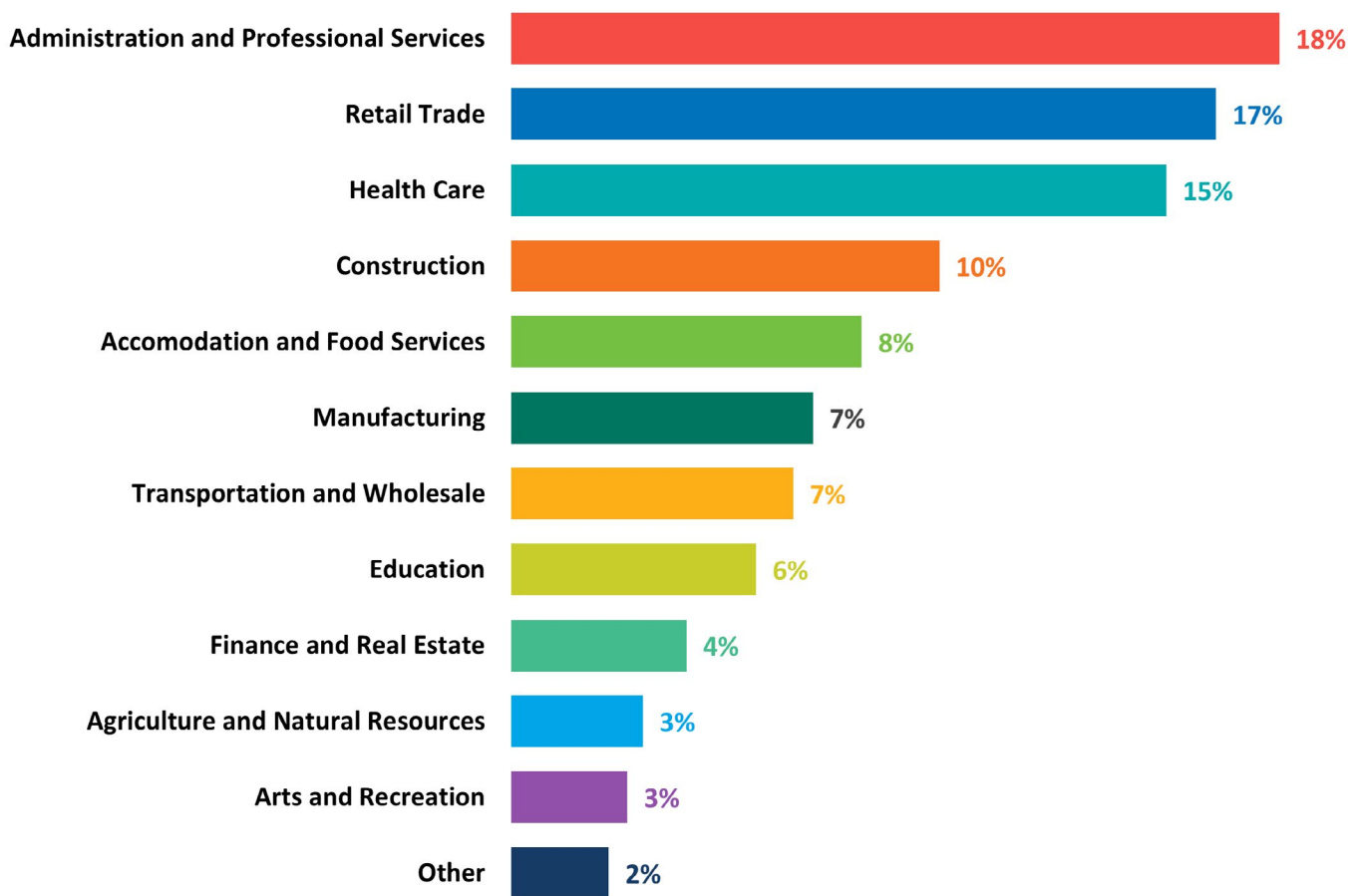


Figure 2.2 Workforce by sector, 2021.

2.2.4 An increase in households

Vernon has almost 20,000 households. Between 2006 and 2021, the city welcomed 4,100 new households, and almost half of these were formed since 2016.

Most households are small, with either two people (39%) or singles (33%). Households with three people or more make up just over one-quarter of households in the city. Household sizes have remained largely consistent since 2006, although the share of one- and two-person households increased slightly ([Figure 2.3](#)).

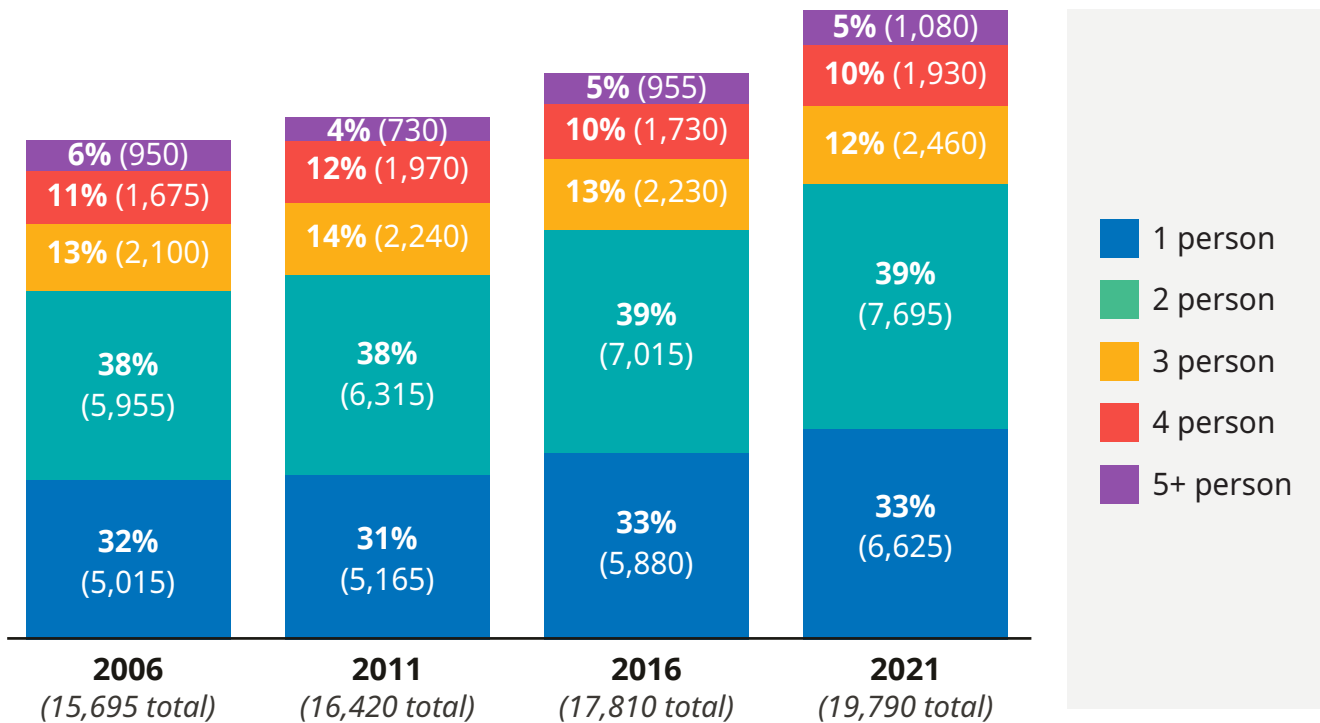


Figure 2.3 Households by size, 2006–2021.

2.2.5 Comparable household incomes

The household median income in Vernon was **\$73,500 in 2020**, lower than the provincial median of \$85,000 ([Figure 2.4](#)).

Homeowner households had higher median incomes at \$89,000, and renter households were lower at \$50,800. However, between 2016 and 2021, renter household income increased by 39%, outpacing that of homeowner households (increasing by 22%). (Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2006, 2011, 2016, and 2021.)

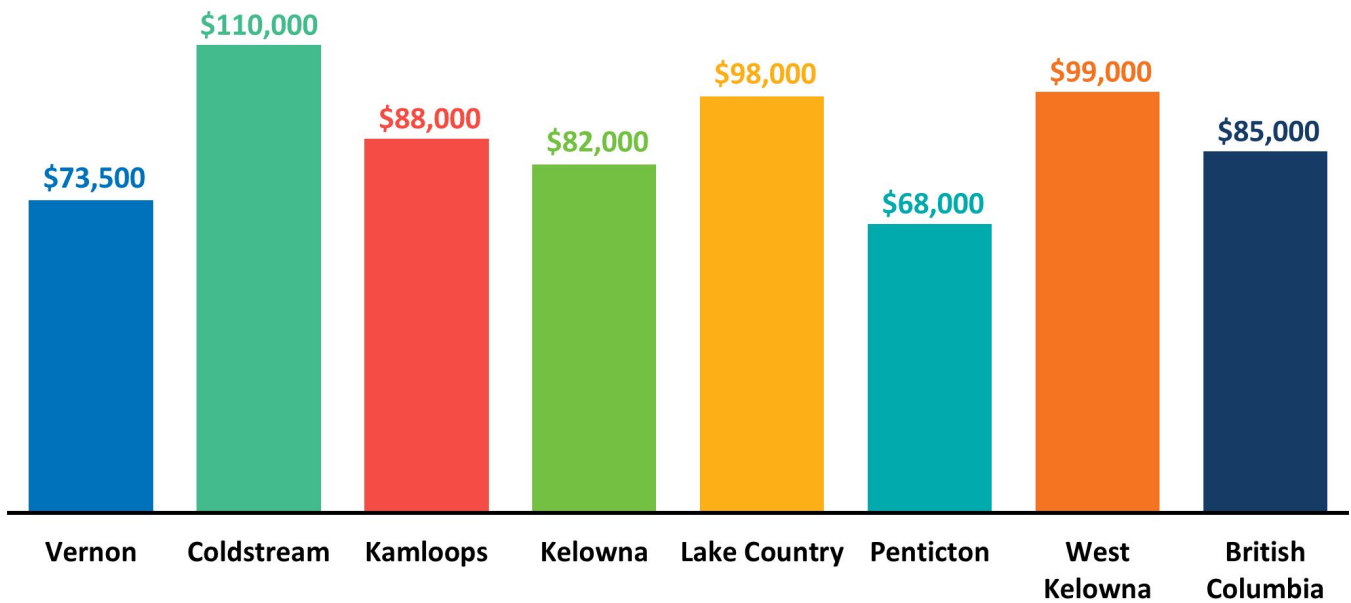


Figure 2.4 Median household incomes by jurisdiction, 2020.

2.3 Housing Profiles and Projections

Vernon needs more housing, affordable at a variety of income levels, to accommodate the growing and changing population ([Chapter 2.2](#)). Two-thirds of all housing units in Vernon are owned, rental vacancy rates are low, and rents have increased to an unsustainable level for many residents. With a growing population, aging housing stock, and limited new development, the demand for a range of housing types, forms, and tenures is only growing.

This Plan integrates the findings and strategic directions provided by Vernon's [Housing Action Plan](#) and [Housing Needs Report](#); addresses the federal government's goals to increase Canada's housing supply (see Canada's Housing Plan, 2024); and provides guidance to achieve the 5,933 housing units needed over the next decade, as identified in the Housing Needs Report.

2.3.1 A tight rental market

Vernonites are having difficulty securing suitable, affordable, and attainable housing.

Vernon’s rental vacancy rate has remained below 2% since 2014. Rents increased 72% in this time. In the next decade, there is a need for a variety of rental options, including market and non-market housing, and deep subsidy and supportive housing to meet community needs (Figure 2.5).

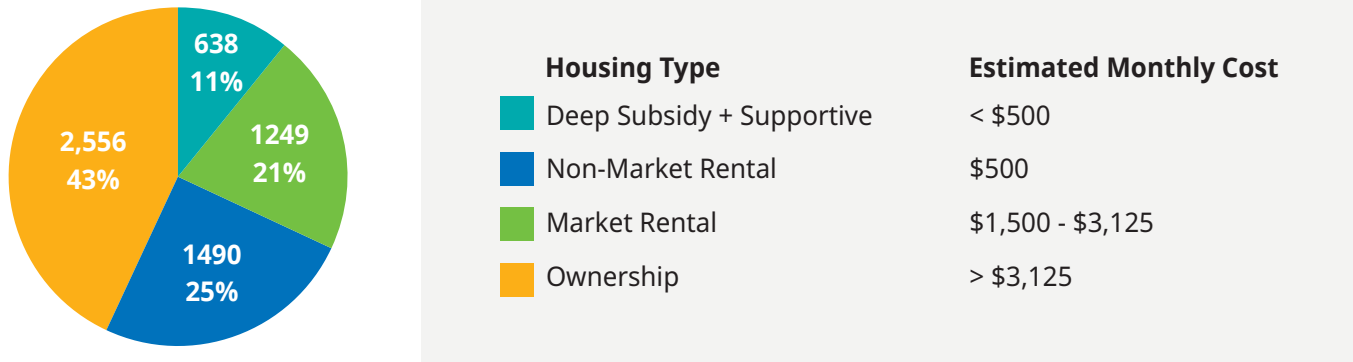


Figure 2.5 Ten-year housing needs by type.

2.3.2 A need for more housing

There are almost 20,000 housing units in Vernon (2021). Single detached and duplexes make up more than half of the housing stock (Figure 2.6). Two-thirds of the city’s existing housing stock is owned (Figure 2.7).

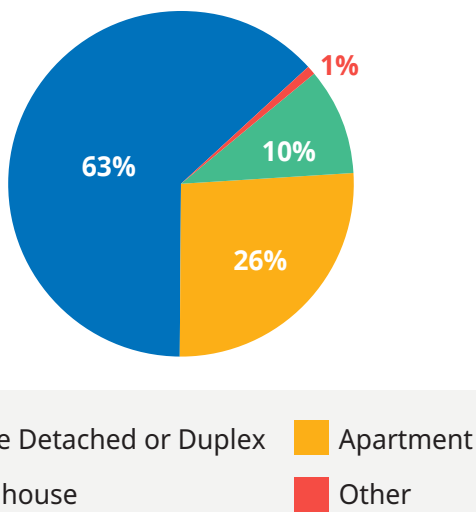


Figure 2.6 Housing by built form, 2021.

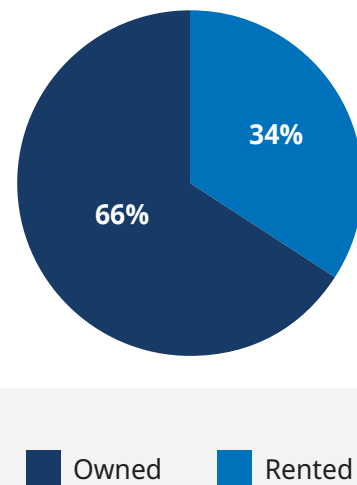


Figure 2.7 Housing by tenure, 2021.

Only 12% of Vernon’s 5,590 existing rental units are affordable (e.g. less than 30% of the median renter income). With a rental vacancy rate of only 0.7%, Vernon is facing a severe shortage in rental housing, far below the 3% benchmark set by Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation for a healthy rental market.

Vernon needs almost 6,000 (5,993) new housing units to 2031 and more than 11,000 (11,484) new housing units in total to 2041 ([Figure 2.8](#)).

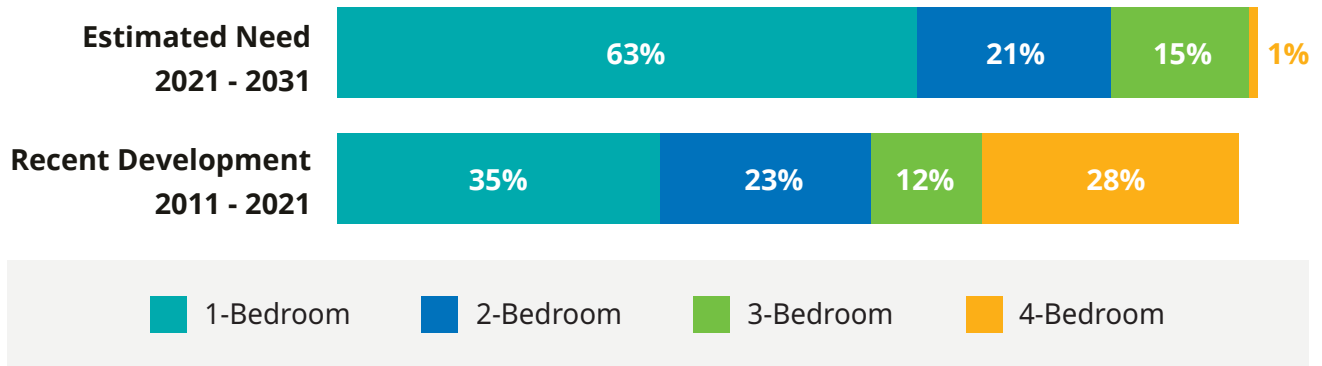


Figure 2.8 Housing need versus recent development by bedroom type.



Alexis Park

2.3.3 Meeting the demand

The demand for housing in Vernon will be affected by the growing population in the Central Okanagan region. As housing costs to the south increase, people will look for more affordable options further north. To be prepared for this increase in housing demand, the City has identified (1) short-term priority actions to 2030 and (2) ongoing long-term actions to be implemented over the 20-year span of this OCP.

2.3.3.1 Short-term priorities

In the next five years, Vernon needs to build more housing, faster, and expand the types, forms, and tenures that are attainable and affordable. There is a growing need for inclusive and equitable housing options that can accommodate different life stages, household types and sizes. In particular, there is a need for more purpose-built rental housing which offers a secure and long-term housing option for households who cannot or chose not to own their homes (Figure 2.9). Purpose-built rentals provide greater housing security than secondary rentals, where owners may chose to convert the rental unit for their own purposes.

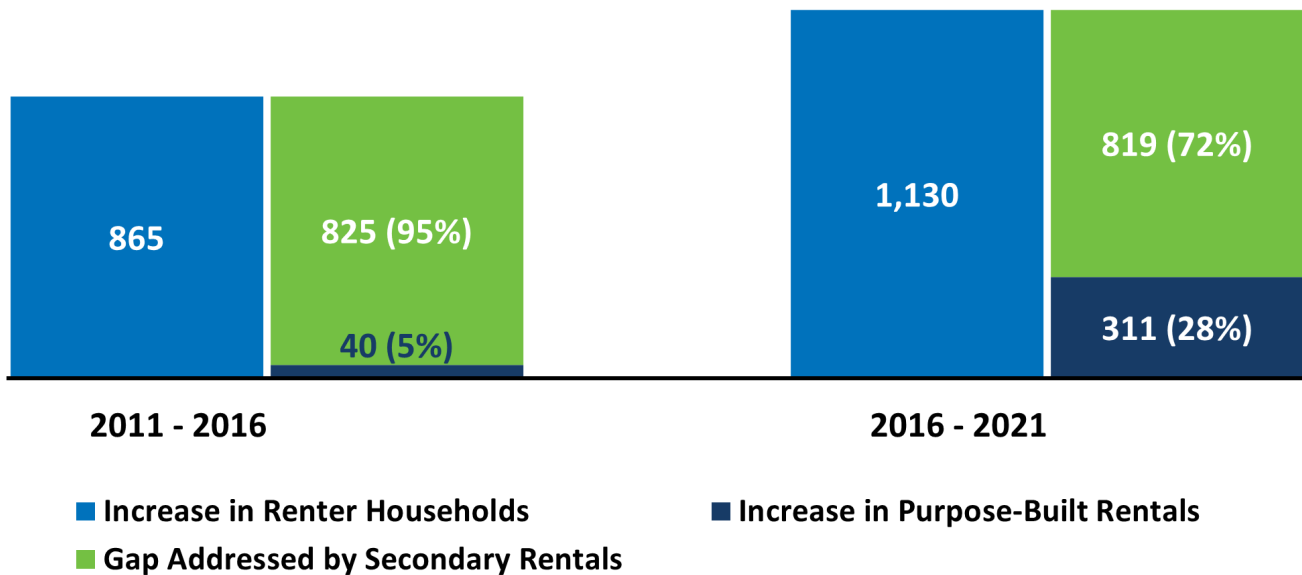


Figure 2.9 Increase in renter households versus rental housing stock, 2011–2021.

Gentle density is an approach to increasing density in existing neighbourhoods by building smaller, more affordable homes in a way that is compatible with the existing neighbourhood.

To ensure Vernon remains a place where everyone can live, work, and play, the City will encourage an increase in:

- Apartment and condominium units, needed for both the ownership and rental markets
- **Gentle density** units, such as secondary suites and infill housing (e.g. duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes)
- Purpose-built rental units, such as apartments, townhouses, and carriage houses
- Entry-level home ownership options, such as small lot subdivisions, mobile homes, and condominiums.

See [Chapter 4.1](#) and [Chapter 5](#).

2.3.3.2 Long-term priorities

Over the next 20 years, Vernon needs to increase and diversify the supply of housing. More housing, in the right places, that is suitable for seniors, working age residents, youth, newcomers, and low-income households, can help to address this challenge. Introducing a broader range of housing forms and tenures, such as apartments, condominiums, and **gentle density** units, and ensuring it is located near transit, shopping, parks, recreation, and other services and amenities, can help to address these needs.

To ensure Vernon remains a place where everyone can live, work, and play, the City will encourage an increase in the availability of:

- Housing options for small households looking to downsize in retirement or enter the housing market as first-time homeowners
- Transitional, supportive, and social housing options located throughout the city
- Mixed-use developments, with commercial opportunities on the ground floor and residential units above, in the Urban and Village Centres and along **major streets** ([Map 4.1](#)) in Urban Neighbourhoods.

Mixed-use developments can address community housing needs, support the local economy, and create more jobs. By encouraging the community to grow upwards rather than outwards, densification can be promoted within the valley floor and limit sprawl, while protecting the hillsides and **environmentally sensitive areas**.



Downtown Bus Exchange