

1.28.2019

## LEN-MP—2.4 STEERING COMMITTEE DATA PACKET

### OVERVIEW

The 1999 Master Plan for the Town of Lenox identified four overarching issues as potential impediments preventing the Town from achieving its vision, which was to:

*“Guide the development, enhancement, and conservation of the Town to create a more diverse yet tightly woven community that pridefully sustains its rich cultural base and excellent amenities as it meets the economic and social needs of present and future generation.”—Page 61.*

Those four issues were:

- Housing Affordability;
- Income Trends;
- Suburbanization; and
- Aging Population.

Additionally, the 1999 Master Plan described several strategies for combating the above issues, for instance:

*“Establish a Town policy to actively promote an increased level of affordable housing for all ages and needs. Support regulatory methods and promote programs to counter market pressures.”—Page 61.*

Because it is wise to look back before looking ahead, included herein are visual representations of data that demonstrate the existing conditions in Lenox regarding housing affordability, income trends, suburbanization, and aging of the Town’s population. Also included herein, are descriptions of the challenges and goals pertaining to each of the above issues.

Please read on, examine the represented data, and think about how that which is presented on the page aligns with your experiences and assumptions.

Thank you.



## LEN-MP—2.4 STEERING COMMITTEE DATA PACKET

### HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

According to the Town’s 1999 Master Plan:

*“In Lenox, like most parts of the United States, there is a housing affordability problem, particularly for those living on limited incomes”—Page 57.*

The housing affordability problem was evidenced by the median sale home prices in Lenox that were 1.6x that for the entire county, as well as median contract rent which was 1.2x higher in Lenox than the county as a whole. The authors of the Master Plan attributed the higher cost of housing in Lenox to housing quality, as well as supply and demand—or rather demand exceeding supply. The authors further reason that seasonal occupancy contributes to the Town’s housing affordability problem:

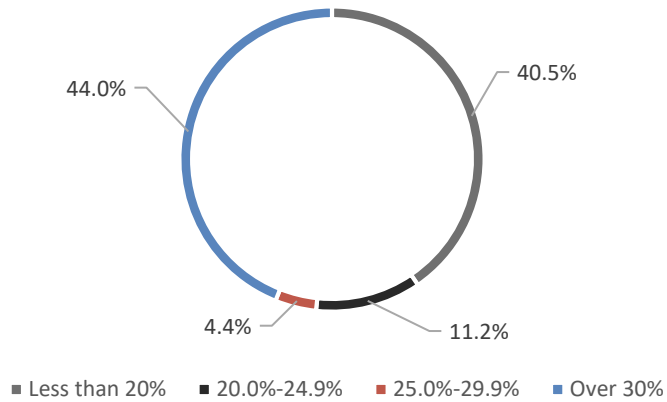
*“Lenox’s desirability as a mecca for second homeowners and retirees benefits the Town fiscal situation tremendously. However, this situation also drives up the cost of housing for young families, singles, and retirees of modest means.”—Page 59.*

The Master Plan set the goal for housing in Lenox as follows:

*“An appropriate increased level of affordable housing for singles, young families, and moderate income retirees is available within town boundaries, preferably in or near the pedestrian services and amenities of the Villages.”—Page 58.*

The 1999 Master Plan not only identified housing affordability as an issue in the Town of Lenox, it also illustrated several strategies to rectify it. It has been nearly twenty years since the Master Plan was written. As such, it is important to monitor progress made over the last two decades. The data represented on the following pages is informative as to the current state of housing affordability in the Town of Lenox.

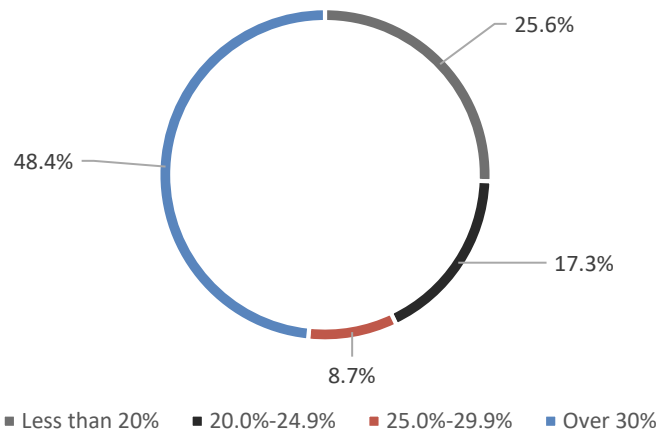
### Housing Affordability in Lenox Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income, 2010



US Census ACS 2006-2010

The charts above and below illustrate the percentage of renters in Lenox who were housing cost burdened in the years 2010 and 2015, respectively. A renter is considered housing cost burdened when the sum of their monthly contract rent and utilities exceeds thirty percent of their monthly income.

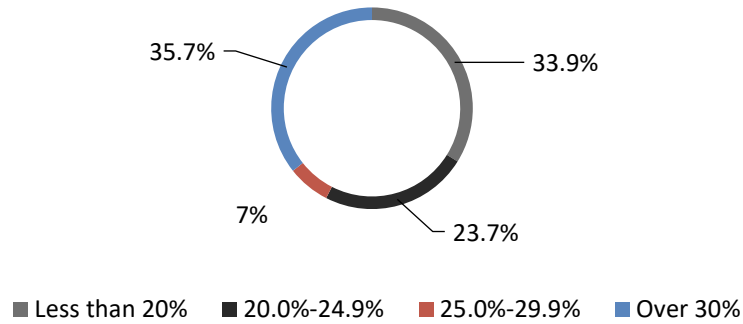
### Housing Affordability in Lenox Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income, 2015



US Census ACS 2010-2014

To compare with Berkshire County: 49.6% of county renters were housing cost burdened in 2010 while 51% were in 2015.

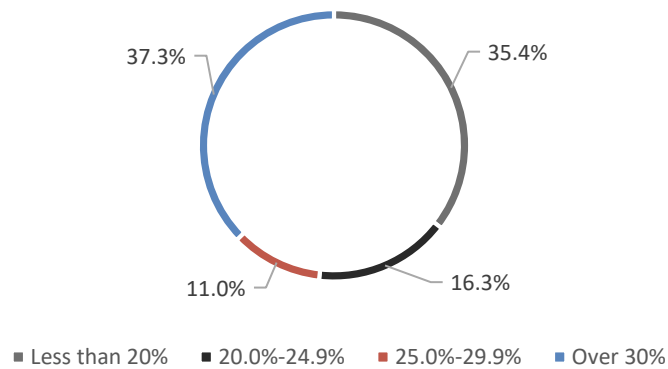
### Housing Affordability in Lenox Ownership Costs (with mortgage) as a Percentage of Income, 2010



US Census ACS 2006-2010

The charts above and below illustrate the percentage of Lenox homeowners with a mortgage who were housing cost burdened in 2010 and 2015, respectively.

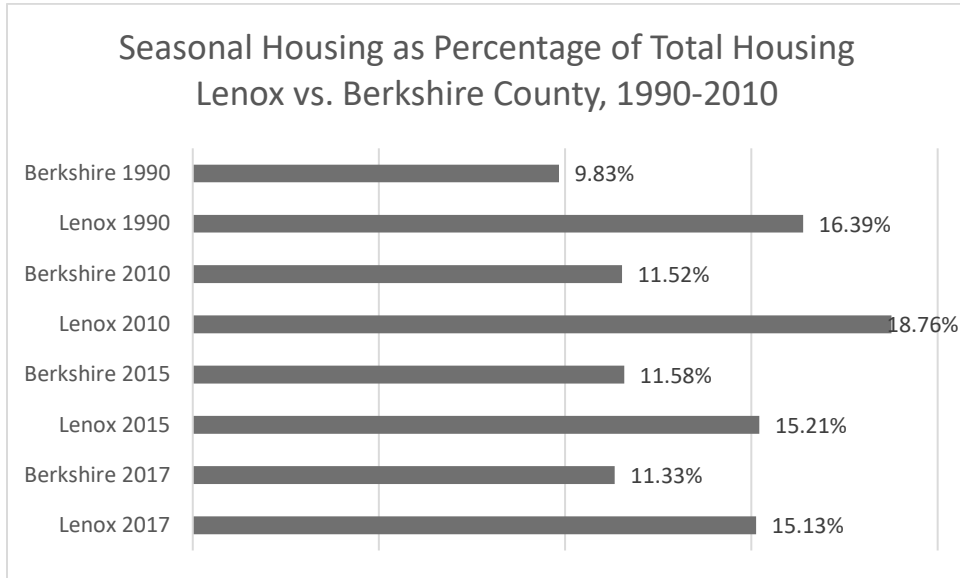
### Housing Affordability in Lenox Ownership Costs (with mortgage) as a Percentage of Income, 2015



US Census ACS 2010-2014

To compare with Berkshire County: 38.2% of county homeowners with a mortgage were housing cost burdened in 2010 while 32.7% were in 2015.

Two theories as to the high cost of housing in the Town that were raised in the 1999 Master Plan was the amount of seasonal housing and Lenox’s position as a “mecca” for retirees. The authors theorized that high demand for seasonal housing and for year-round housing from retirees causes a disequilibrium between supply and demand, which in turn causes housing prices to rise.



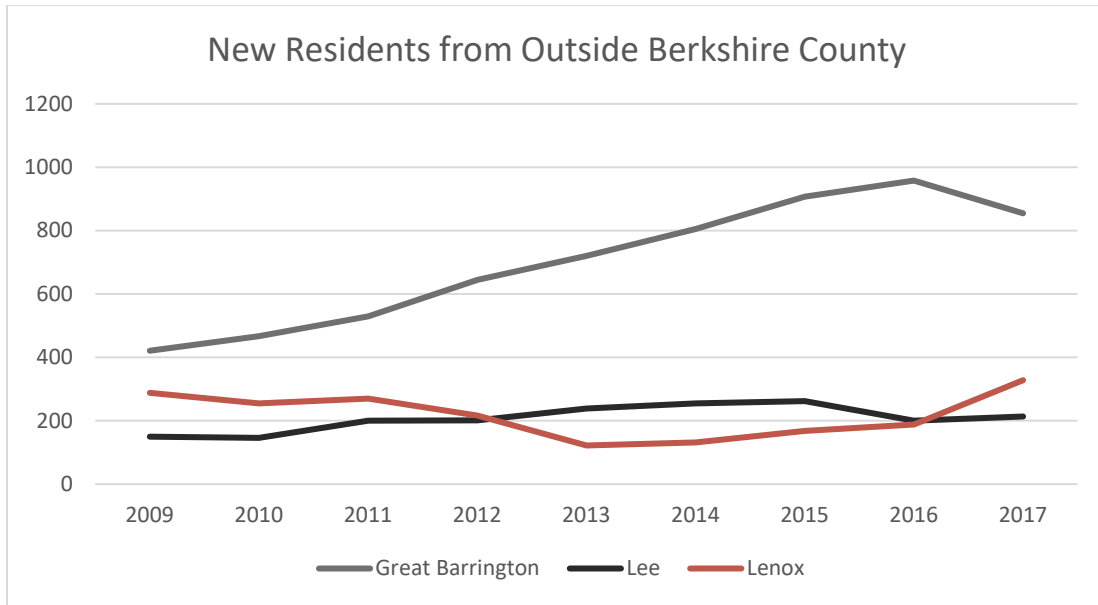
1990 US Census; 2010 US Census; US Census ACS 2010-2014; US Census ACS 2013-2017

The chart above illustrates seasonal housing as a percentage of total housing in both Lenox and Berkshire County, as a whole, in the years 1990, 2010, 2015, and 2017.

In 1990 the total number of housing units in the Town of Lenox was 2,410, of which 395 (16.39%) were used for seasonal housing; countywide there 68,928 total housing units in 1990, 7,811 of which were used seasonally. Since 1990, the percentage of housing units used seasonally has declined slightly in Lenox from just over sixteen 16.39 percent to 15.13 percent while the figure has increased slightly countywide from 9.83 percent to 11.33 percent. The slight decline in the Town’s seasonal housing rate might be attributable to seasonal residents converting to full-time residents.

While the Town has seen a slight decline since 2010 in the percentage of housing stock used seasonally, it remains higher than other regional destinations, including Great Barrington, Lee, and Williamstown, which had seasonal housing rates of ten percent, eleven percent, and eight percent, respectively, in 2017. Seasonal housing rates are a reasonable indicator of housing availability and housing affordability.

The chart on the following page illustrates trends in the Town regarding new residents from outside Berkshire County. The chart also compares those in Lenox to trends seen in nearby Lee and Great Barrington.



*US Census ACS 2005-2017*

Each point on the chart represents a total of new residents from outside Berkshire County who moved into the Town over the previous five year period (e.g: the Lenox total for 2012 (200) represents the sum of new residents from the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012).





## LEN-MP—2.4 STEERING COMMITTEE DATA PACKET

### INCOME TRENDS

According to the Town's 1999 Master Plan:

*"Lenox is a community with a high quality standard, and as such its demographics will continue to generally gravitate toward a higher income, higher age population. Market and fiscal factors have accelerated the changing demographic composition. The main issue is simply whether the community will make special effort to redirect, and compensate for, some of the market forces that are changing the community composition."*—Page 18.

Market factors to which the authors attributed the Town's income trend are the cost of housing, the form of new residential quarters, and "the emergence of a wealthier segment of seniors" (p. 46-47). The 1999 Master Plan goes on to note that:

*"[M]any households with one or more persons working in Lenox, earning up to 80% or more of the area income, cannot access or afford safe and suitable rental housing in town. These same families and individuals are also unable to purchase such housing in Lenox."*—Page 59.

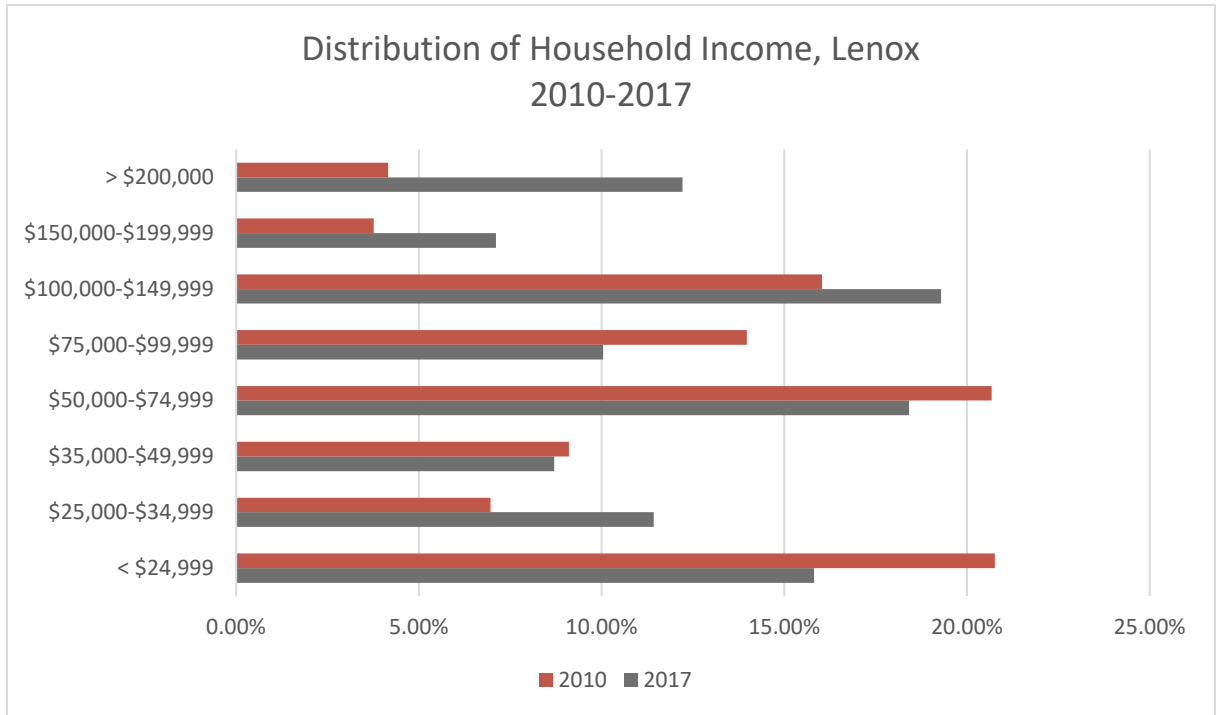
Essentially, the authors of the 1999 Master Plan reasoned that income trends exacerbate housing affordability issues and housing affordability issues reinforce income trends. This creates a cycle in which median and lower earning families are priced out of the local housing market and relocate elsewhere. The goal set by the Master Plan regarding population and demographics was to:

*"Strive to find a balance between social diversity, economic prosperity, and environmental and aesthetic protection."*—Page 17.

The recommended strategies for achieving the above goal were neither extensively detailed nor particularly prescriptive. Strategies were:

*"Actions in the public domain should continue to account for the needs and rights of all members of the community."*

*Increase publicized opportunities for people to participate positively; continually build the base of residents willing to interact in the community and to further community betterment.”—Page 18.*



*US Census ACS 2006-2010, 2010-2014, 2013-2017*

The chart above illustrates the distribution of household income across brackets in the Town of Lenox in 2010 and 2017. From 2010 to 2017, the percentage of the Town’s population in the three brackets over \$100,000 has risen dramatically. Similarly, the percentage of population in the \$25,000-\$34,999 bracket has risen sharply. The Town’s share of middle-earning households, however, has declined.

## LEN-MP—2.4 STEERING COMMITTEE DATA PACKET

### SUBURBANIZATION

Much of the development in the Town of Lenox that occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century did so away from the Town’s village centers. Moreover, much of that development was sprawl. According to the Town’s 1999 Master Plan:

*“The dominant pattern of suburban sprawl contains environmental, social, and economic deficiencies including:*

- 1. It results in an inefficient consumption of land that degrades natural environments and habitats.*
- 2. Land uses are separated and for the most part inaccessible from each other except by car which severely reduces community interaction and has negative impacts on the environment (this was highlighted at the Community Visioning Meeting).*
- 3. It requires a never-ending expensive investment in infrastructure and results in inefficient or ineffective service provision.*
- 4. Buildings are often set far back from the streets so that spatial definition is lost and the design is so commonplace that there is no sense of place.*
- 5. Housing is strictly segregated into large groups of equal cost, hindering socioeconomic diversity.”—Page 64.*

The goal set by the 1999 Master Plan regarding sprawl was to:

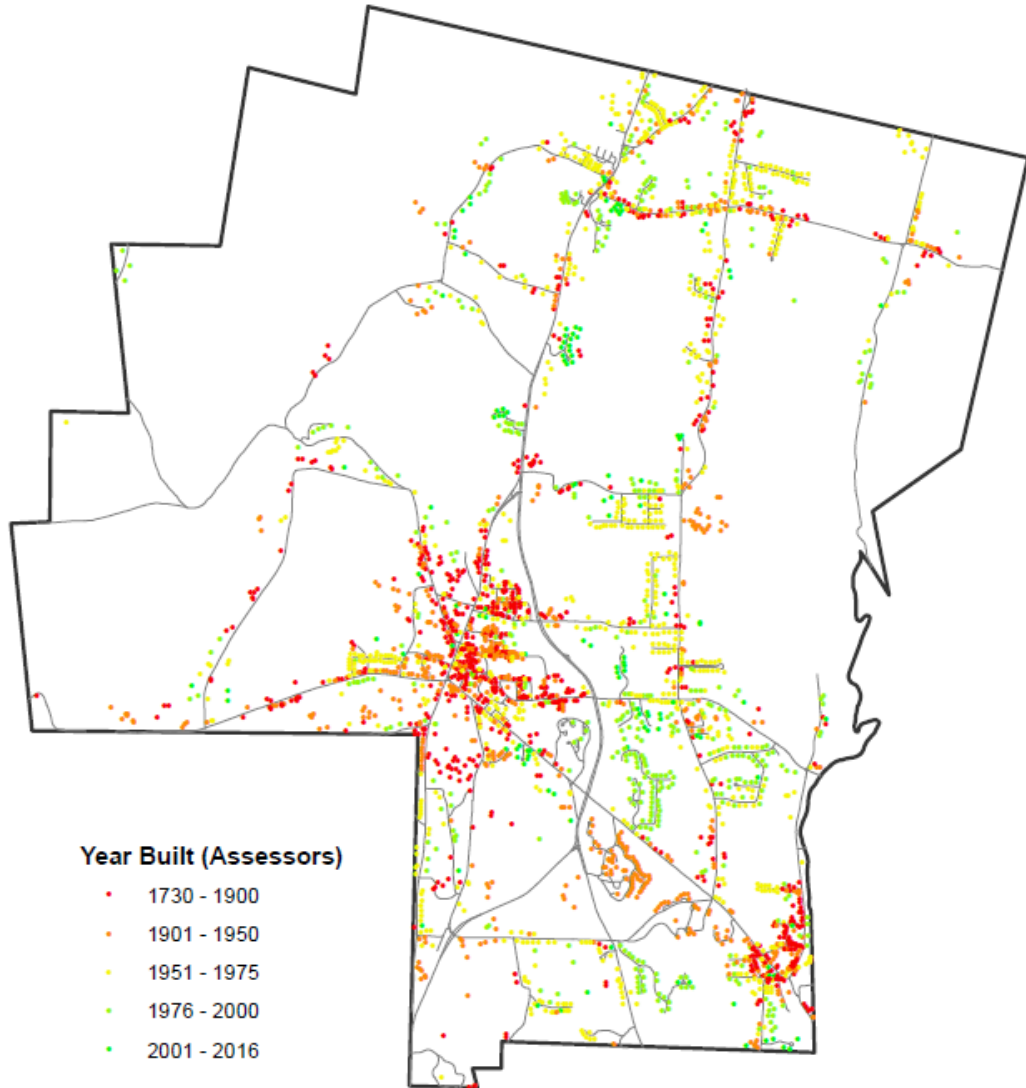
*“Promote forms of residential development that include a variety of housing types, connected by an expanding network of sidewalks, trails, and open spaces that will encourage greater interaction between residents as members of the community.”—Page 64.*

The 1999 Master Plan enumerated a number of strategies by which the Town could prevent suburban sprawl. The strategies involved encouraging:

- Walkability;
- Design standards for new developments;
- Apartment housing in/near village centers for mixed incomes and ages;
- Mixed-use developments;
- Improving connections between parks;
- Zoning changes that will allow for more alternative housing options;

The development map on the following page illustrates how development in Lenox has occurred.

## Development Pattern



## LEN-MP—2.4 STEERING COMMITTEE DATA PACKET

### AGING POPULATION.

According to the 1999 Master Plan:

*“The median population age has continued to rise in the last decade due to a combination of factors.”—Page 16.*

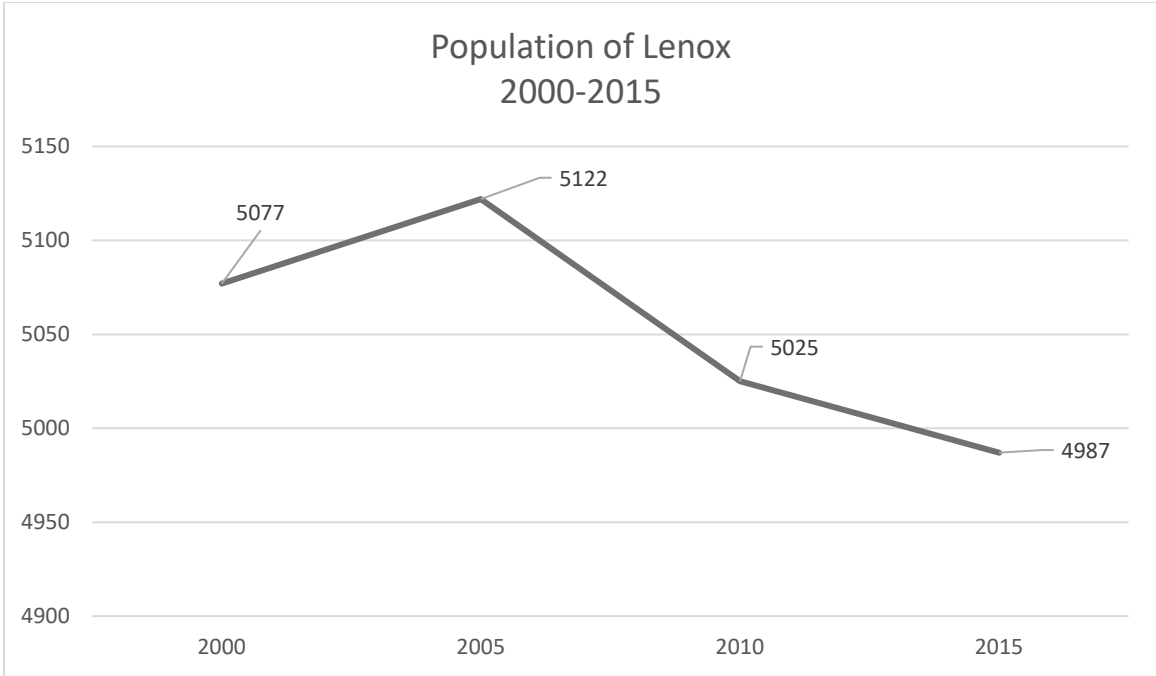
The authors of the Master Plan attribute causation to such factors as:

- Declining birth rate;
- Extended life span;
- Recently relocated retirees;
- Out-migration of college-age adults;
- Out-migration of young professionals (p. 16).

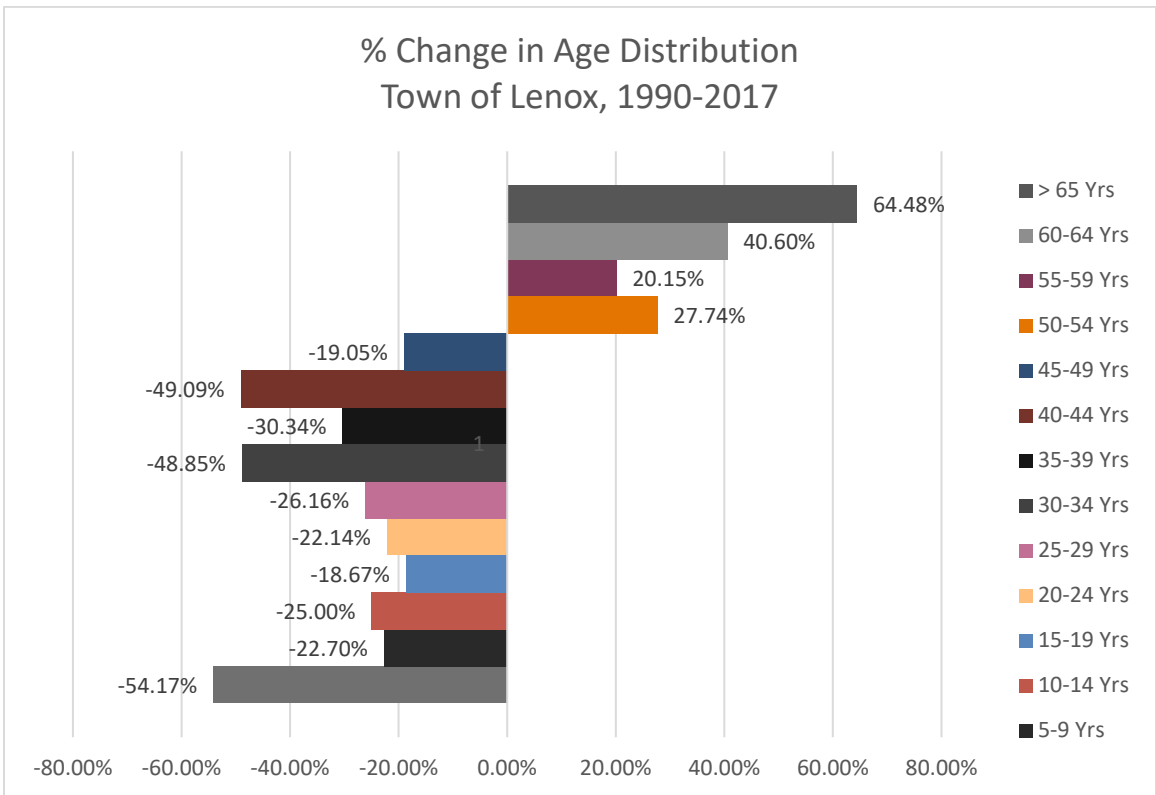
The authors also attribute the Town’s aging population to the high cost of housing, and subsequent loss of moderate- to lower-earning families. Many of the goals and strategies related to the Town’s aging population were described in the housing chapter of the Master Plan. One goal included was:

*“To encourage developers to include a mix of housing types within developments in order to ensure that at least some new housing is affordable to young working families.”—Page 10, (A Summary of Goals & Future Strategies).*

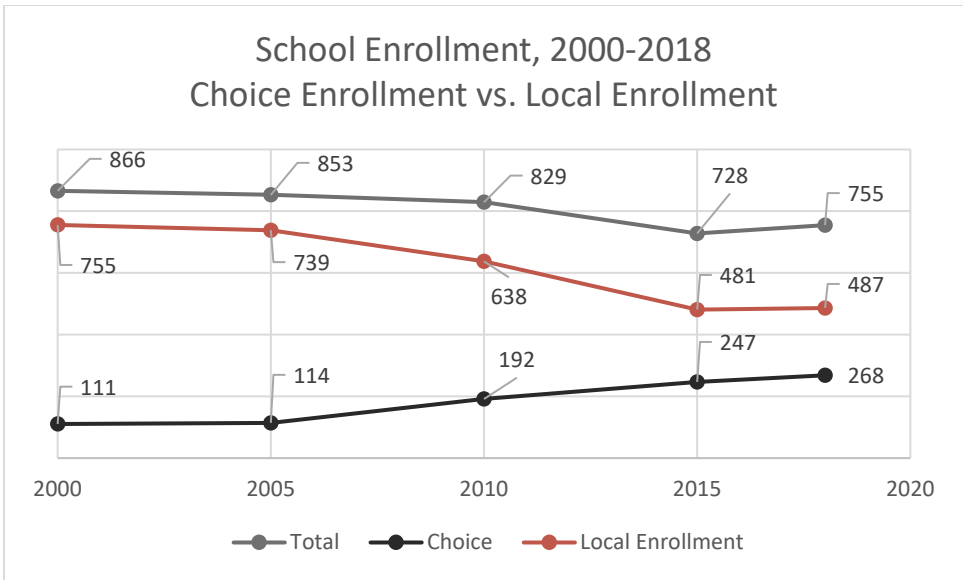
The data on the following pages illustrates how age demographics have changed in the years since the 1999 Master Plan was published.



The Town's population has remained fairly stable, declining by only 2% since 2000.



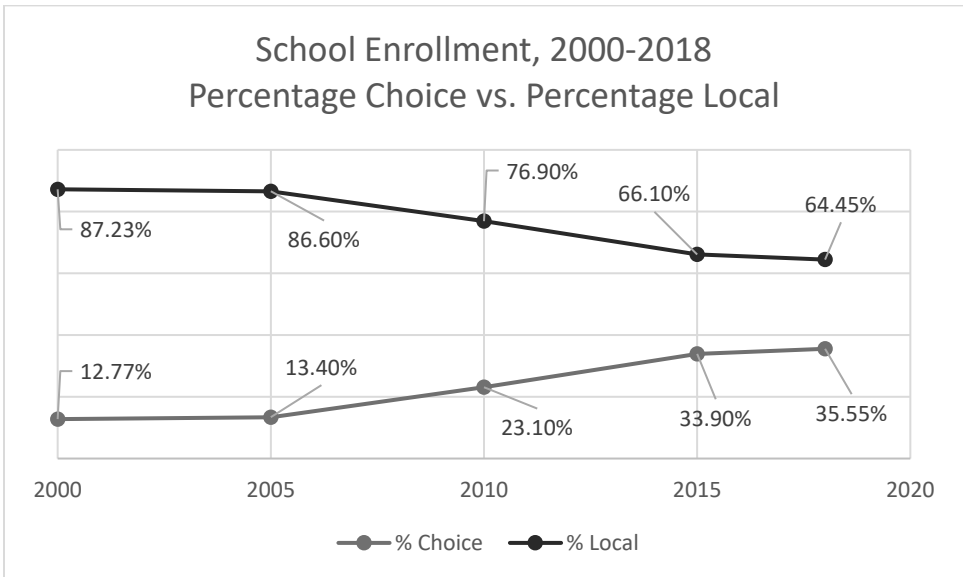
While the total population has remained stable, it has aged dramatically since 1990. By 2017, there were 64.48 percent more seniors in Lenox 29.65 percent fewer school aged children.



Source: DESE, 2018.

The decline of school aged children in the Town of Lenox has impacted school enrollment. The chart above illustrates total, choice, and local enrollments from 2000-2018. The number of choice students has risen while local enrollment has declined.

The chart below compares percentage of school enrollment by choice and local students from 2000-2018.



Source: DESE, 2018.