

CHAPTER FIVE

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

Grass Valley’s Housing Element was updated in 1993, and remains the most comprehensive source of housing information to date (Connerly and Associates 1993). This Chapter draws heavily from the Housing Element, as well as the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF3. Minor discrepancies exist between data presented here and that found in the Housing Element. The reason for such discrepancies is the reliance of the Housing Element on earlier data from the 1990 Census (including STF1), data subsequently superceded by data sources used in this Chapter.

HOUSING STOCK

According to the 1990 Census, Grass Valley contained 4,385 housing units, 11.8% of Nevada County’s total housing stock. Occupied housing units totaled 4,148, vacant units 237.

The most common type of dwelling in Grass Valley is the single family home, which accounted for 2,350 units (53.6% of the City housing stock) in 1990. This represents a declining share of the housing stock since 1980, when single family units comprised 61.2% of the City total.

Multi-family structures (those containing two or more units) made up 40.6% of the 1990 City's housing stock. Thus Grass Valley, with about 12% of Nevada County’s total housing stock, accounted for 54% of the County's multi-family units in 1990.

Housing units by type in 1990 are shown in Table 5-1.

TABLE 5-1 HOUSING UNITS BY TYPE – 1990							
Area	Total	Single-Family		Multi-Family		Mobile Homes	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Grass Valley	4,385	2,350	53.6%	1,782	40.6%	253	5.8%
Nevada County	37,352	30,560	81.8%	3,299	8.8%	3,493	9.4%

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF3.

To update the estimated housing stock, City of Grass Valley administrative records were analyzed and tabulated. Table 5-2, below, shows the results of the administrative records research, combined with 1990 Census data, resulting in a September, 1998 housing stock estimate. Note that demolitions since 1992 are not included in the estimate – net added includes known demolitions, gross added does not include demolitions. Consequently, the October, 1998 estimate is admittedly high, pending inclusion of demolition data. The category “under way”

includes units for which building permits had been issued as of September, 1998, but final inspections had not been performed. For purposes of this set of estimates, this category is assumed to be joining the housing stock in calendar year 1998.

**TABLE 5-2
HOUSING STOCK ESTIMATE, SEPTEMBER, 1998**

	Total	Single Family	Multi-family	Mobile Home
1990 Census	4,385	2,350	1,782	253
Net Added, 1990	40	40	-0-	-0-
Net Added, 1991	30	13	17	-0-
Gross Added, 1992-1998	248	206	42	unk
Underway	105	25	80	unk
10/98 estimate	4,808	2,634	1,921	253

Sources: 1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF3; 1993 Grass Valley Housing Element; Hausrath Economics Group compilations.

HOUSING TENURE

A notable feature of Grass Valley’s housing “picture” is the dominant role of rental housing.

The City’s homeownership rate (percentage of occupied housing units owner-occupied) fell from 48% in 1980 to 41% in 1990. By contrast, the balance of Nevada County (exclusive of Grass Valley, but including Nevada City and Truckee) had a 1990 homeownership rate of nearly 80%. A further comparison shows that 55.6% of California's households were homeowners in 1990. This proportion has changed little over the past 40 years, yet is still below the national average and has been since 1950.

Further illustrating the role of rental housing in Grass Valley is the City’s share of all rental housing in Nevada County. Though Grass Valley’s housing stock accounted for just 13.5% of all County housing in 1990, it represented 31% of all rental housing. An obvious explanation for this phenomenon is the necessity for apartment complexes and similar high density residential developments to locate where municipal infrastructure is available – notably within the limited urban service areas of Grass Valley and other municipalities.

Despite the high proportion of rental housing, however, demand may be outstripping supply. According to the 1993 Grass Valley Housing Element, vacancy rates (see below) indicate a strong need for additional rental housing units in the City.

Table 5-3 shows 1990 housing tenure data for Grass Valley and Nevada County.

**TABLE 5-3
HOUSING TENURE, 1990
GRASS VALLEY AND NEVADA COUNTY**

Tenure	Grass Valley		Balance of County		Nevada Co. Total	
	#		%		#	
Owner Occ.	1,708	41.2	21,178	79.6	22,886	74.4
Renter Occ.	2,440	58.8	5,432	20.4	7,872	25.6
Total Occupied	4,148	100.0	26,610	100.0	30,758	100.0

Source: 1990 Census of Population & Housing, STF3.

AGE OF HOUSING

A significant share of housing in Grass Valley was built before 1940, 37%, and is therefore more than 50 years old. There was substantial construction activity in the decade between 1970 and 1980, when 1,002 units were built. The median year built is 1967. Many older single-family units are converted for use as rental units and show the highest vacancy rate.

Utilizing the data presented in Table 5-2, above, an estimate of the current age of housing in Grass Valley was made. As shown in Table 5-4, below, just over one half (51.7%) of the estimated 1998 housing stock was constructed since 1970. Conversely, the other one half (48.3%) built prior to 1970 is over or approaching 30 years old, the typical “mortgage life span”, beyond which major repairs or rehabilitation may be anticipated. And, in keeping with Grass Valley’s historic character, nearly three out of ten housing units was constructed before 1940, pre-dating World War II.

Table 5-4 clearly illustrates the housing and population boom of the 1980s, approximated by that of the 1970s. Also clear from Table 5-4 is the relatively flat growth of the 1990s, a reversion to housing growth levels of the 1960s and earlier.

**TABLE 5-4
AGE OF HOUSING IN GRASS VALLEY**

Year Built	Age in 1998	No. of Units	% of Total
1990-1998	less than 9 years	423	8.8
1980-1989	9-18 years	1,166	24.3
1970-1979	19-28 years	893	18.6
1960-1969	29-38 years	381	7.9
1950-1959	39-48 years	307	6.4
1940-1949	49-58 years	281	6.0
1939 and earlier	more than 59 years	1,357	29.1

Year Built	Age in 1998	No. of Units	% of Total
Total Housing Stock		4,808 (est)	100.0

Source: 1990 Census of Population & Housing, STF3.

VACANCY RATES

In 1980, Grass Valley had a high overall vacancy rate of 9.8%, or 333 units of 3,370. By 1990 the City had an overall vacancy rate of 5.2%, a significantly lower rate than a decade earlier. Most housing analysts consider 5-6% normal vacancy rate for rental housing and 2% as an adequate vacancy rate for owner-occupied housing.

In 1980 the rental vacancy rate was 9.5%, dropping to 2.2% in 1990. The 1980 homeowner vacancy rate was 4.3%, while in 1990 it was only 1%. Thus, within a decade both rental and homeowner vacancy rates went from being rather high to much lower than optimal, as reported in the 1993 Housing Element.

The highest vacancy rate is in housing units built before 1940 and in new homes, perhaps accentuating the need for rehabilitation of some of the older dwelling units (Grass Valley Housing Element 1993).

VALUE AND RENT

The value in 1990 of owner-occupied units in Grass Valley was generally lower than those in the County as well as those state-wide. The city-wide median value (i.e., the value above and below which lie 50% of all owner-occupied unit values) in 1990 was \$115,600. The County-wide median value was \$195,000.

The median gross rent in Grass Valley generally was lower than rents paid County-wide and lower than rent paid state-wide. The median contract rent paid in Grass Valley was \$427 per month. The median contract rent paid in Nevada County was \$489 per month.

The 1990 Census revealed that 60% of all households in Grass Valley were low-income, 20% moderate-income and 20% above moderate income. Low income includes the very low income and low income category. The County had 39% in the low-income range, 21% moderate-income and 40% in the above-moderate income range. It is evident that Grass Valley has a substantially larger low-income population (Grass Valley Housing Element 1993).

OVERCROWDING

The incidence of overcrowding in Grass Valley (3.2%) was slightly below the rate for Nevada County (3.7%) and significantly below the rate for California (12.3%), as shown in Table 5-4. Overcrowding is defined by the Census Bureau as 1.01 or more persons per room. The 1990 census data indicated that 131 units, or 3.1% of Grass Valley's 4,148 occupied housing units, were overcrowded. In 1980 the total number of units with overcrowded conditions was 114, or 3.7% of all households. Although there has been a slight increase in overcrowded units, the

proportion of overcrowded units decreased 0.6 percentage points over ten years. Overcrowding was more prevalent in rental housing than in owner-occupied housing.

TABLE 5-4 OVERCROWDED STATUS BY AREA – 1990			
Area	Occupied Units	Overcrowded Units	% Overcrowded
Grass Valley	4,148	131	3.2
Nevada County	30,7058	1,132	3.7
California	10,381,206	1,275,377	12.3

Source: California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit, 1998.

HOUSEHOLDS

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Population) Grass Valley has a very high percentage of single-person occupied housing units. According to the 1990 Census, 38% of occupied housing units were single-person households, 33% two-person households, and the remaining 29% includes 3 or more persons per housing unit. This phenomenon is largely due to the large number of single female households, especially in the 65 and older age group.

The effect of a relatively low average household size, combined with a large percentage of single and two persons households, is to create a demand for 1) more housing units than one would expect for the same population, 2) smaller housing units, and 3) a larger-than-normal proportion of rental units.

HOUSING CONDITIONS

A 1991 City of Grass Valley housing condition survey included 343 single and multi-residential housing units, all located within the city's older neighborhoods. The majority of units (200 or 58.3%) surveyed were categorized as "sound". In general, the number of houses needing rehabilitation was low. However, a large number of housing units will need care and intensive maintenance in years to come, due to the age of the structures (Grass Valley Housing Element 1993). Current City housing rehabilitation programs reflect this concern.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS

According to the 1993 Housing Element, housing needs in the City of Grass Valley include either rehabilitation or replacement of existing units and construction of new housing, particularly for the elderly and for lower income households.

The special needs of the elderly are an important concern since they are likely to be on fixed incomes. Besides this major concern, the elderly maintain special needs related to housing construction and location. The elderly often require ramps, handrails, lower cupboards and counters, etc., to allow greater access and mobility. They may also need special security devices for their homes to allow greater self-protection. The elderly have special locational needs,

including access to medical and shopping services and public transit. In some instances the elderly prefer to stay in their own dwellings rather than relocate to a retirement community, and may need assistance in making home repairs.

Sixty percent of the 65 and older population own their homes, compared to only 41% of all households. In Grass Valley, older adults are much more likely to be homeowners than the general population.