

# The Brunswick Workforce Housing Study

The Brunswick Workforce Housing Study was completed and released July 2007. This study was completed by the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill. You can access the full study at [WWW.BHO2020.ORG](http://WWW.BHO2020.ORG)

## Acknowledgments

Many people and organizations made important contributions to this report. We want to thank the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations (NCACDC) for their leadership and demonstrated courage and commitment to this undertaking.

NCACDC not only embraced the challenge of a diminishing supply of workforce housing in the coastal community of Brunswick County, they also invested the financial resources necessary to begin the rigorous process of addressing the issue through the commissioning of this report. We would be remiss if we did not also recognize the vision of NCACDC's staff in conceiving this project, as well as their valuable feedback provided throughout. President/CEO Susan Perry Cole, Vice President/COO Brigitte Rasberry, and consultant Thyron Williams deserve particular mention. We also want to acknowledge Countywide Community Development Corporation, for bringing this issue to the attention of all involved and for organizing several community meetings to gain resident input on the need for workforce housing in the county. Resea Willis, Countywide's Program Director, deserves particular recognition for her community organizing work.

We also want to thank the many Brunswick County leaders who took time to share their ideas on the need for workforce housing and what could be done to expand workforce-housing opportunities in the county.

Finally, we want to thank several people who contributed to the production of this report. Stephen Whitlow did the graphic design, Jordan McMillen produced the maps and Debra Hill provided proof reading services.

## Executive Summary

Brunswick County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state and the nation. Such rapid growth brings many benefits to an area, but it may also lead to a variety of problems including a shortage of housing that can be afforded by essential workers such as teachers, law enforcement officers, and county and municipal employees. The lack of such workforce housing has a variety of negative impacts including difficulty in recruiting and retaining employees, and longer commuting times that result in increased traffic congestion and more air pollution. This report provides an assessment of the need for workforce housing in Brunswick County. It relies on data from a variety of sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, interviews with county leaders, and citizen comments at public meetings. This report also provides an inventory of tools and techniques for expanding workforce-housing opportunities and offers specific recommendations for expanding workforce housing in Brunswick County.

### *Population and Income Trends*

- Between 2000 and 2005 the number of households in Brunswick County increased by almost 10,000, from 30,438 to 40,090. By 2015 projections indicate that there will be another 10,000 households in the county, bringing the total to 50,231 households.
- The median household income in the county increased from \$35,888 in 2000 to \$36,946 in 2005, an average annual growth rate of 0.6 percent. During this period, the number of households with incomes below 80 percent of

# The Brunswick Workforce Housing Study

the area median income increased from 12,933 to 19,594.

- Between 2000 and 2005 average wages in the county for all occupations increased from \$26,260 to \$29,692, an average annual growth rate of 2.5 percent. Wages for entry-level teachers, police and sheriff's officers, practical nurses, and many other essential workers were well below this average.

## *Housing Trends*

- Between 2000 and 2005 a stunning 47,500 new housing units were approved for construction in the county and 13,216 new units were actually built including 9,700 conventional single-family homes, 2,400 mobile homes, and 1,020 multifamily units.
- As of 2005 Brunswick County had over twice the percentage of mobile homes and less than half the percentage of multi-family units compared with the state as a whole.
- Between 2000 and 2005 the homeownership rate dropped from 69.7 percent to 61.8 percent, mostly due to a large increase in the number of mobile homes that are being rented.
- The median value of all owner-occupied housing units increased at an average annual rate of 7.9 percent between 2000 and 2005. The median housing value in 2005 was \$139,100.
- The median gross rent for all renter-occupied housing units increased at an average annual rate of 5.3 percent between 2000 and 2005. The median gross rent in 2005 was \$694.
- The number of households paying more than 50 percent of their incomes for housing increased from about 3,153 in 2000 to 5,149 in 2005. If current trends continue by 2015 there will be 7,246 households paying more than 50

percent of their incomes for housing. In 2005 almost 4,000 households with incomes between \$20,000 and \$50,000 reported paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing.

Interviews with representatives of major public, private, and nonprofit organizations in the county indicate widespread recognition of the need to expand workforce-housing opportunities in the county. Homes that sell for less than \$200,000 and rental units—including town homes and apartments—were said to be in particular demand. When asked about the impacts of the shortage of workforce housing, the most frequent responses were difficulty in recruiting and retaining employees and the loss of young people who could not afford housing in the county. The major barriers to providing more workforce housing were said to be the rapid increase in land, construction and infrastructure costs, and a lack of interest among developers in building workforce housing.

## Recommendations

If Brunswick County is to remain a place that is home to a wide range of working families, concerted action to increase the supply of workforce housing is needed and needed now before the county is largely built out. This action must involve county and municipal governments, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses working together to create an environment and community vision that encourages and supports the development of workforce housing.

### *Brunswick County and municipal officials should:*

- Increase the amount of land that is zoned for small-lot and multi-family housing development;

# The Brunswick Workforce Housing Study

- Consider adopting inclusionary zoning programs that would require developers to provide workforce-housing units in return for density bonuses;
- Capitalize a workforce housing trust fund with local sources such as general tax revenues, general obligation bonds, and real estate transfer taxes;
- Expand staff capacities to collaborate with both for-profit and nonprofit developers in the production of workforce housing;
- Consider making unused publicly owned land available for the development of workforce housing; and
- Support the creation of a formal workforce housing coalition in the county.

## *Major employers should:*

- Develop employer-assisted housing programs that assists their lower wage employees purchase homes;
- Participate in and financially support a new workforce housing coalition in the county.

## *Nonprofit housing organizations should:*

- Expand their capacities to develop new workforce housing;
- Collaborate with larger nonprofit housing developers and coalitions outside the county;
- Participate in a new workforce housing coalition in the county; and
- Expand housing counseling and credit counseling programs to prepare more families for homeownership.

## *Local financial institutions should:*

- Expand their marketing of workforce home loan products; and
- Participate in and financially support a new workforce housing coalition in the county.

Acting on these recommendations will help maintain a vibrant economy, reduce traffic congestion and commuting costs, and provide opportunities for teachers, law enforcement officers, service workers, fisherman, and other working families to continue to live in Brunswick County.

## *Our Mission:*

Brunswick Housing Opportunities (BHO) seeks to initiate, cultivate, enhance and preserve an atmosphere in which decent, safe and innovative housing is created, acquired and maintained for all residents in Brunswick County.