West Liberty Submarket Analysis

A Supplemental Document to the Muscatine County Housing Market Analysis



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Jodi Royal-Goodwin
Community Development Director
City of Muscatine

Brad Bark
Mayor
City of Muscatine

Jeff Horne
City Administrator
City of Wilton

Kenneth Brooks
Executive Director
WeLead

Charla Schafer
Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine

Danny Chick
Muscatine County Board of Supervisors

Nathan Mather
Muscatine County Board of Supervisors

Jeff Sorensen
Muscatine County Board of Supervisors

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Muscatine Center for Social Action

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Introduction

About Atlas Community Studios

Atlas Community Studios ("Atlas") is a small, women and minority-owned firm fueled by creative problem-solvers and capacity-builders committed to advancing the economic prosperity of communities across the country. Leveraging more than 45 years of combined experience spanning both the public and private sectors, the Atlas team specializes in project implementation and the pre-development work needed to be implementation-ready, including research, planning, funding strategies, grant writing, and advocacy. The team's portfolio of work includes 70 action-oriented strategies and technical assistance provided in communities across 29 states.

Purpose of this Submarket Housing Analysis

This submarket housing market analysis for the City of West Liberty, IA was completed in partnership with Muscatine County, the cities of Muscatine, West Liberty, Wilton, and Atlas Community Studios. The purpose of this submarket study is to analyze existing quantitative and qualitative data related to the housing market in the City of West Liberty and identify current challenges and barriers. The key trends identified in this analysis should assist the City of West Liberty with implementing policies and programs to improve existing housing conditions for local and future residents.

The data included in this report is specific to the City of West Liberty and their local housing market, and how it compares to surrounding communities and the county. This report is meant to be a supplemental piece to the larger Muscatine County Housing Market Analysis report, which includes the final strategic recommendations pertinent to Muscatine County and the cities of Muscatine, West Liberty, and Wilton.

Executive Summary

Population Key Trends & Challenges

Over more than two decades, the City of West Liberty has witnessed significant growth across the board. The population has grown nearly 15% since 2000, MHI nearly doubled since 2010, and the workforce experienced a 15% increase in jobs over 10 years. Despite having lower educational attainment rates compared to surrounding communities, West Liberty boasts the highest labor force participation rates and employment rates, showcasing the community's resilience amidst economic fluctuations in the late 2000s and early 2020s.

Housing Key Trends & Challenges

West Liberty's supply and demand has shifted from building owner units and absorbing vacant units in the 2000s to constructing few rental units and adding a significant amount of vacant units in the 2010s, most likely in the aftermath of the 2008 market crash. **Both low-income homeowners and renters (those earning less than $35,000) are severely struggling with current housing costs, with cost-burdened rates above 90%**. However, the data demonstrates that higher-income earners for homeowners and renters are occupying lower-cost units, due to a lack of supply. The widening gap in appropriately priced housing for all segments of households adds to these existing difficulties, creating an overarching sense of frustration among both current homeowners and renters.



Future Housing for West Liberty

West Liberty is unique in being the youngest of the comparison communities and home to larger households, and not seen as drastic shifts in population like Muscatine and Wilton in terms of age. West Liberty's lowest income households (homeowners and renters) are severely struggling, and are in need of more affordable units to offset extreme rates of being cost-burdened. In addition, West LIberty needs to achieve a more balanced distribution of housing units relative to their occupants. The current situation, where higher-income households occupy lower-cost units, exacerbates constraints and competition for lower-income households with limited options. **It is imperative to introduce additional housing units across various income brackets throughout the community to expand choices and enhance overall housing quality**.

Part 1

Population Key Trends & Challenges

Reviewing demographic and population trends is crucial for assessing housing needs as it provides valuable insights into shifts in the composition and size of the population. Understanding demographic trends, such as changes in age, income levels, household sizes, and cultural diversity, enables policymakers, planners, and developers to anticipate future housing demands more accurately. For instance, an aging population may require more accessible and age-friendly housing options, while an influx of young professionals may necessitate affordable and flexible rental units. By staying aware of ever-changing demographic trends, communities can tailor their housing strategies and investments to meet the evolving needs of their residents effectively.



City of West Liberty Demographics

According to the latest data from the American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2022), the City of West Liberty is home to a population of 3,821, with an average age of 33.5, the youngest of the comparison communities. The predominant age groups fall between those under 14 and 34 years old, representing approximately 54.2% of the total population, while those aged 55 and above make up about 22.1%. West Liberty is a minority-majority community with 56.5% of its population being a minority, slightly up from 55.8% in 2010. The majority of the population is Hispanic/Latino, which saw a slight dip in population between 2010 and 2022. However, Some Other Race and Black or African Americans experienced the most substantial growth among all racial and ethnic groups, as illustrated in **FIGURE 1.1** below.

FIGURE 1.1 POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Race/Ethnicity	Total Number	Total Percentage	% Change Since 2010
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0%	-0.5%
Asian	18	0.5%	-0.2%
Black or African American	122	3.2%	+2.8%
Hispanic/Latino	1,945	50.9%	-0.4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0%	0%
Some Other Race	45	1.2%	+1.2%
Two or More Races	30	0.8%	-1.9%
White	1,661	43.4%	+0.8%
Total	**3,821**	**100%**	**+4.2%**

Data is derived from the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.



West Liberty has a majority male population, an average household size of 2.9, and a total of 1,315 households. Roughly 39% of households are four-person households, with the next highest being one-person households, at 26%. More than two-thirds are considered family households, typically meaning two or more people are related in some way versus nonfamily households, which would be equivalent to two friends who are roommates.

SENIORS
12.7%

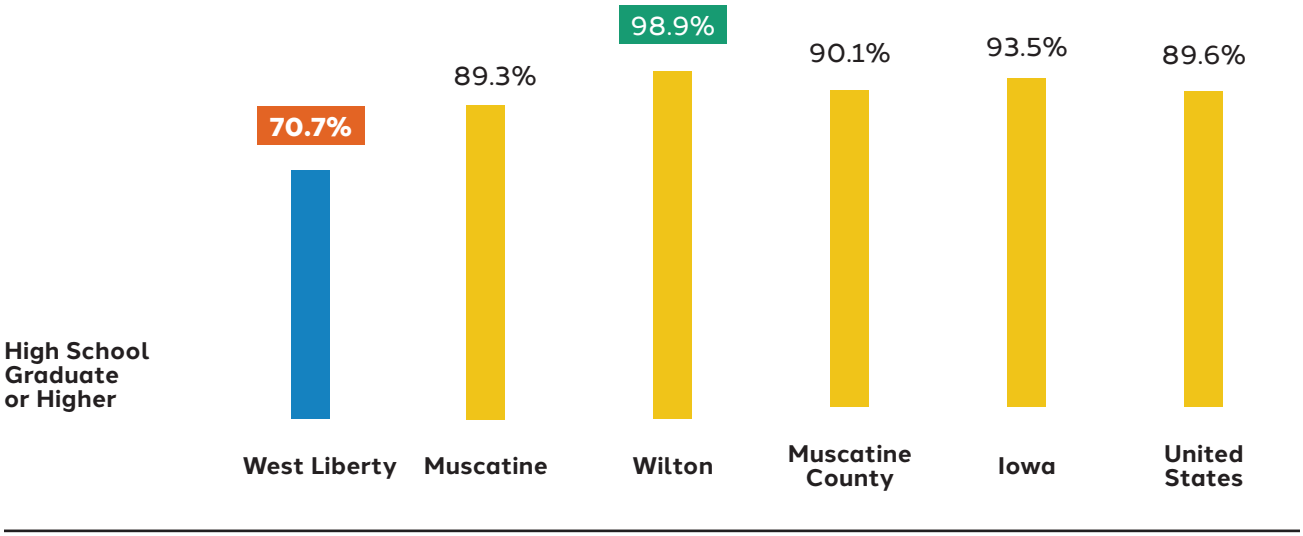
DISABLED
11.5%

VETERANS
2.8%

FOREIGN-BORN
20.3%

FIGURE 1.2 and **FIGURE 1.3** provide insights into West Liberty's position regarding educational attainment, poverty, and median household income (MHI). As of 2022, the City has a high school diploma attainment rate of 70.7%, with only 12% holding a bachelor's degree or higher, marking the lowest rates among comparable communities. However, despite these lower education levels and a lower MHI, West Liberty maintains the second-lowest poverty rate among its counterparts and remains competitive within the region.

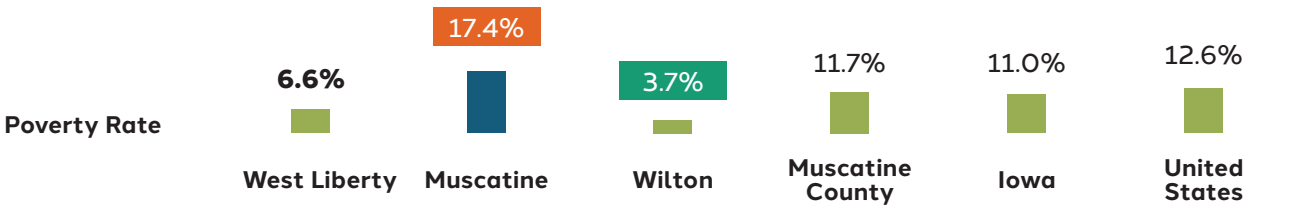
FIGURE 1.2 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



	West Liberty	Muscatine	Wilton	Muscatine County	Iowa	United States
Bachelor's+	12.0%	21.4%	33.8%	23.2%	32.3%	35.7%

Data is derived from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

FIGURE 1.3 POVERTY & INCOME



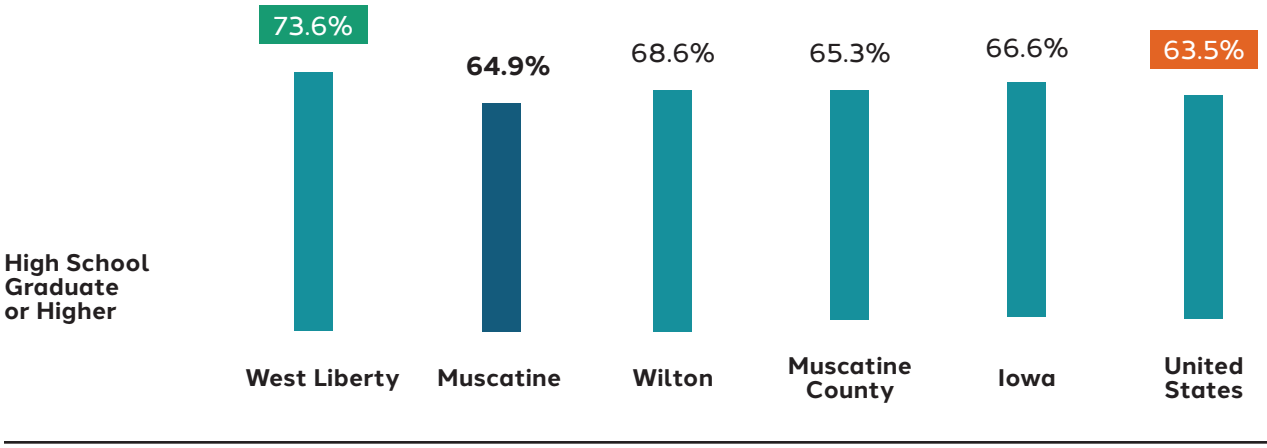
	West Liberty	Muscatine	Wilton	Muscatine County	Iowa	United States
MHI	$63,910	$58,474	$69,094	$67,427	$69,588	$74,755

Despite having the second-lowest MHI at $63,910, West Liberty experienced a significant shift in income distribution in the last decade. The largest group of income earners falls within the $50,000 – $74,999 per year bracket, comprising 30.3% of the population. This group has remained the largest income bracket over the years and increased by over 50% since 2010.

Currently, West Liberty boasts a labor force participation rate of 73.6%, holding the highest rate of the comparison communities, the State of Iowa, and the U.S. A similar pattern emerges regarding employment to population ratio, with West Liberty ranking at the top among the comparison geographies. Although its unemployment rate is the second highest in the region, on par with the national average, it does not pose a significant cause for alarm, suggesting a stable economic landscape overall.

Data is derived from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

FIGURE 1.4 LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION (16 YEARS AND OVER)



	West Liberty	Muscatine	Wilton	Muscatine County	Iowa	United States
Employment/ Population Ratio	70.5%	61.8%	68.6%	62.7%	64.5%	60.3%
Unemployment	4.2%	4.3%	0%	3.5%	2.9%	4.3%

Predictably, the Manufacturing industry reigns as West Liberty's predominant industry, home to West Liberty Foods. This sector employs more than half of the local workforce and boasts one of the highest average annual wages among the top 10 industries. Additionally, over the past decade, the industry witnessed a significant increase of nearly 29% in jobs, paralleling trends observed in other leading sectors within the community. Notably, half of the leading industries witnessed double-digit growth, with Other Services (excluding Public Administration) taking the lead at 150%, closely followed by Public Administration at 85%. Notably, West Liberty Foods contributed the highest job

Data is derived from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
**Data indicates this percentage is zero, despite the margin of error. This is most likely due to the size of Wilton and potentially inaccuracy in the data collected.*

additions, and with potential relocation and plans for a larger facility just outside West Liberty, further job additions are anticipated over the next 5-10 years.

FIGURE 1.5 TOP 10 INDUSTRIES BY EMPLOYEES

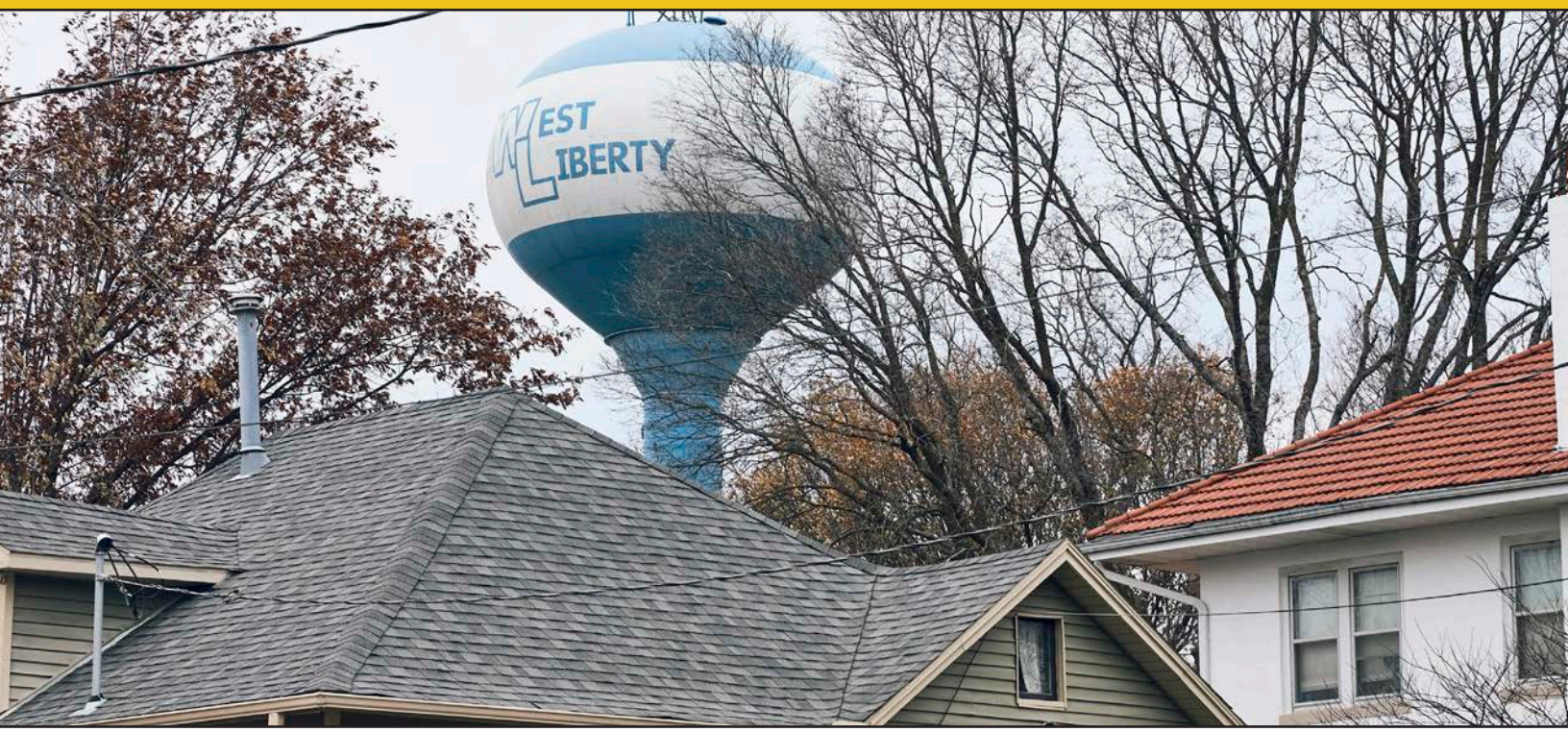
Industry	2013 Jobs	2023 Jobs	Change (#)	Change (%)	Avg. Ann. Wage
Manufacturing	869	1,118	+249	+28.6%	$78,475
Educational Services	197	172	-25	-12.7%	$44,092
Healthcare & Social Assistance	149	164	+15	+10.1%	$44,427
Public Administration	40	74	+34	+85%	$51,505
Administrative & Support, etc.	64	60	-4	-6.3%	$44,616
Retail Trade	90	59	-31	-34.4%	$32,537
Other Services (except Public Admin)	18	45	+27	+150%	$33,276
Construction	42	42	0	0%	$54,855
Wholesale Trade	52	41	-11	-21.1%	$78,671
Accommodation & Food Services	32	36	+4	+12.5%	$17,740
Total	**1,676**	**1,923**	**+247**	**+14.7%**	**$59,987**

These general demographic indicators play a pivotal role in shaping a household's ability to secure housing. Factors such as income, educational attainment, and age significantly influence housing access and affordability. Higher incomes generally afford individuals and families greater flexibility in choosing housing options, while educational attainment often correlates with increased earning potential. Additionally, age can impact housing needs,

Per JobsEQ: These values are found in industry data and are computed by dividing the sum of total wages for the last four quarters by the average of employment for the same four quarters.
Total Jobs calculated from 2013Q2 to 2023Q2

with younger populations often seeking entry-level homes and older demographics opting for downsizing or age-appropriate housing. Moreover, demographic trends, such as population growth or decline, contribute to shifts in housing demand and supply, further impacting overall housing dynamics within a community or region. **Analyzing these demographic indicators provides essential insights for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to address housing needs effectively**.





Part 2

Housing Key Trends & Challenges

Understanding key housing trends and challenges is essential as they offer valuable insight into the dynamics of the housing market and the broader community. By identifying trends such as housing affordability, supply shortages, demographic shifts, and changes in housing preferences, policymakers, developers, and community leaders can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing their neighbors. By staying informed about key housing trends, stakeholders can proactively respond to the evolving needs of their communities and ensure access to safe, affordable, and suitable housing for all residents.

Homeowners & Renters of All Incomes are Experiencing Frustration with the Current Market

The data presented in this report has depicted the evolving landscape of homeowner versus renter households and the market's attempt to adapt to these changing needs. However, **these shifts have brought to light an imbalance in housing affordability relative to household income, resulting in higher-income households residing in more affordable units and further intensifying market constraints overall**. **FIGURE 2.1** provides a clearer breakdown of the percentage of monthly housing costs to equivalent household income. For example, owner-occupied units priced under $800 per month constitute roughly 45% of the market. To adhere to the 30% affordability threshold, a household would need an income of less than $35,000 per year. However, this income range only accounts for 17.7% of households. A similar pattern emerges for units priced between $800 and $1,999 per month, constituting a slightly larger portion of the market at 52.6%. However, the corresponding household income ($35,000 – $74,999) only accounts for 29.3% of households. In an ideal world, households would live in units that are right-priced for their income level; however, that is not the reality. The disparity arises possibly because quality lower priced units are likely already occupied by long-time homeowners (**of which 42% of homeowners don't currently have a mortgage**) in addition to higher income households being able to purchase the remaining more desirable units, and leaving less quality units for first-time home buyers and/or lower income households.

FIGURE 2.1 HOUSING COSTS VS. EQUIVALENT INCOME

Monthly Housing Costs	Owner-Occupied Units (%)	Equivalent Household Income	Renter-occupied Units (%)	Equivalent Household Income
Less than $800	44.5%	$0 – $34,999 (17.7%)	42.8%	$0 – $34,999 (29.5%)
$800 – $1,999	52.6%	$35,000 – $74,999 (29.3%)	53%	$35,000 – $74,999 (60.8%)
More than $2,000	2.9%	$75,000+ (53.2%)	4.2%	$75,000+ (9.6%)

Somewhat similar trends are observed in the relationship between renter monthly housing costs and equivalent household income. However, **West Liberty is unique in the sense that despite there being a surplus of lower priced rental units relative to income, the lowest of income groups is still severely cost-burdened (97%)**. One reason for this could be that 39% of West Liberty households are four-person households, and would likely require more square footage than a one or two-person household. Although this specific data does not break down by owner vs. renter, of the total housing units in West Liberty, less than 10% have four bedrooms, meaning larger households are likely living in smaller units yet still paying a higher cost (more than the $800/month they can "afford"). West Liberty has a younger demographic and 51% majority Latino, many households are likely multi-generational, meaning grandparents, parents, and children are all living under one roof. Many traditional housing units are not constructed to accommodate these types of households and additional data collection is required to determine the extent of the need for units such as these. However, lower-income homeowners and renters are severely struggling to find, obtain, and maintain truly affordable housing in West Liberty.

Percentages do not total to 100% due to units identified as "No cash rent"

Overall, West Liberty is experiencing an imbalance of right-priced units to household income. The chart below shows what type of unit is available based on household income. One can see that the largest group of households (399) are those earning between $50,000 and $74,999 per year. To avoid being cost-burdened, these households could purchase a home between $150,000 and $199,999 or pay between $1,500 and $1,999/month in rent. According to the latest data from the American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2022), there are 221 owner-occupied units valued between $150,000 and $199,999, and 27 renter-occupied units priced at less than $$1,500 and $1,999/month. By subtracting the number of units from the number of households, a surplus or deficit can be identified for each income bracket. For this income range, a deficit of 151 units exists.

FIGURE 2.2 AVAILABLE AFFORDABLE UNITS

Income Range	# of Households	Affordable Range for Owner Units	# of Units	Affordable Range for Renter Units	# of Units	Total Units	Balance
$0 – $34,999	283	$0 – $99,999	271	$0 – $799	182	453	+170
$35,000 – $49,999	120	$100,000 – $149,999	124	$800 – $1,499	199	323	+203
$50,000 – $74,999	399	$150,000 – $199,999	221	$1,500 – $1,999	27	248	-151
$75,000 – $99,999	157	$200,000 – $299,999	245	$2,000 – $2,499	14	259	+102
$100,000 – $149,999	279	$300,000 – $499,999	22	$2,500 – $2,999	0	22	-257
$150,000+	77	$500,000+	6	$3,000+	4	10	-66
	1,315		**889**		**426**	**1,315**	

** The # of Units available for renters does not exactly align with the price range for renter units, this is merely meant to provide additional context of the number of units below, at, or near what certain household incomes could potentially afford with what the Census provides*



According to **FIGURE 2.2** on the previous page, there is a clear surplus among lower priced units, and a deficit among higher priced units. It is important to note that this is one piece to the larger, more complex housing puzzle. **Just because there appears to be a surplus of lower priced units does not mean that supply is truly meeting demand**. Feedback from the Community Engagement phase highlights that a large barrier for homeowners and renters across the board is quality. Both homeowners and renters expressed concern about the quality of lower priced units, noting that significant updates and renovations are needed for these units in order to meet modern expectations. Homeowners don't necessarily have (or want to spend) the funds to support these types of renovations, while renters can find more modern units in surrounding counties for slightly higher price points. Overall, **lower-income homeowners and renters are struggling the most to find, obtain, and maintain truly affordable housing in West Liberty. However, there is still demand across all incomes, despite the high-level imbalance displayed here**. The following sections will dive deeper into those surplus and deficits based on homeowners vs renters.

"Affordability" Threshold May Differ from Reality

Atlas wishes to emphasize that the conventional metric for affordability might not accurately capture the challenges individuals encounter in their search for affordable housing. While the standard practice deems housing affordable if total expenses (rent/mortgage plus utilities) equate to less than 30% of a household's gross income, this threshold may not reflect the reality when considering a household's net income—affected by individual variations in taxes and deductions.



West Liberty's MHI
$63,910 = $4,916/month *(gross)*



Housing Affordability Threshold (30%)
$1,639/month

However, when you factor in taxes and benefits, monthly take home pay reduces even more.

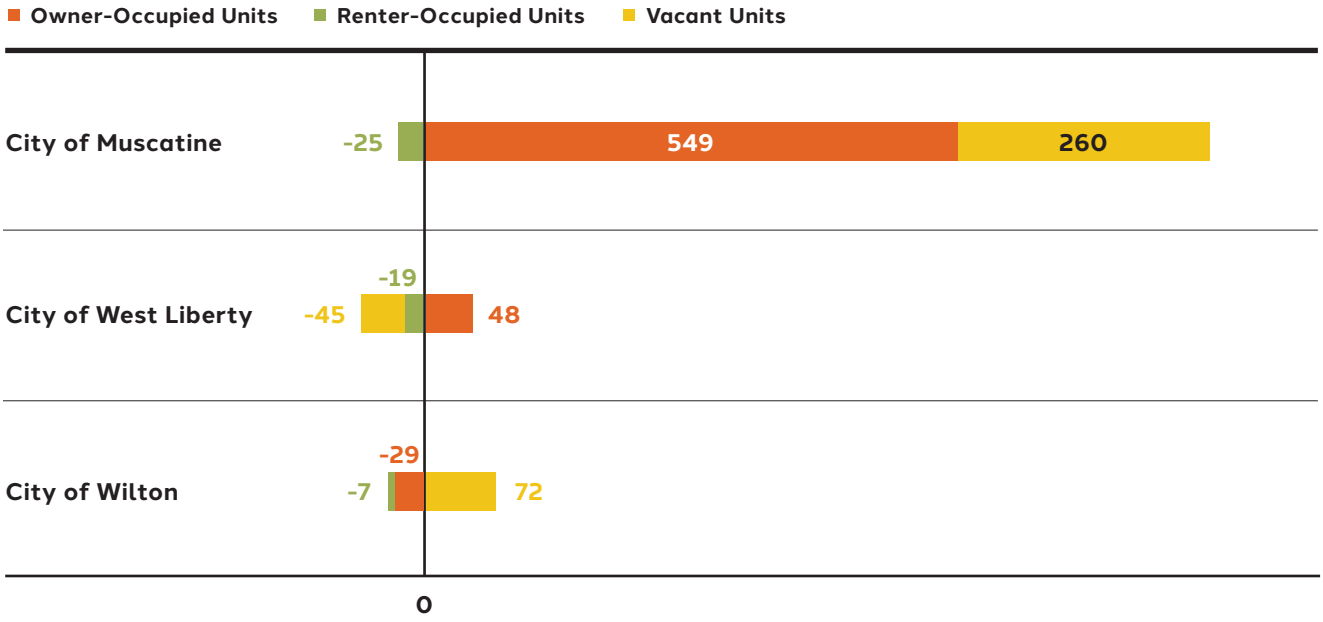
$4,916/month – Taxes ($1,026) – Benefits ($454) = $3,436/month

The initial 30% threshold, originally amounting to $1,639/month, in practical terms translates to **48%** of the household's net income. Moreover, this calculation neglects factors like student loans, childcare, or credit card debt, placing additional strain on a household's financial capacity to save, buy a home, or embark on family plans. **Consequently, West Liberty must be mindful of this reality when assessing housing needs, as solely constructing housing at the affordability threshold could elevate the number of cost-burdened households, potentially deepening existing inequalities**.

Supply & Demand: 2000 to 2010

FIGURE 2.3 highlights the market changes from 2000 to 2010 in West Liberty, as well as a comparison to Muscatine and Wilton. During this period, West Liberty's overall housing stock shrunk. Upon closer examination, the data provides insights into the shift between owner and renter-occupied units over the 10 years. Of the housing units in West Liberty, 48 were designated as owner-occupied, while 19 renter-occupied units were lost. Despite a few new units being added to the overall housing stock, West Liberty did absorb some existing vacant units (45), which reduced their vacancy rate to 4.9% by the end of the 2000s.

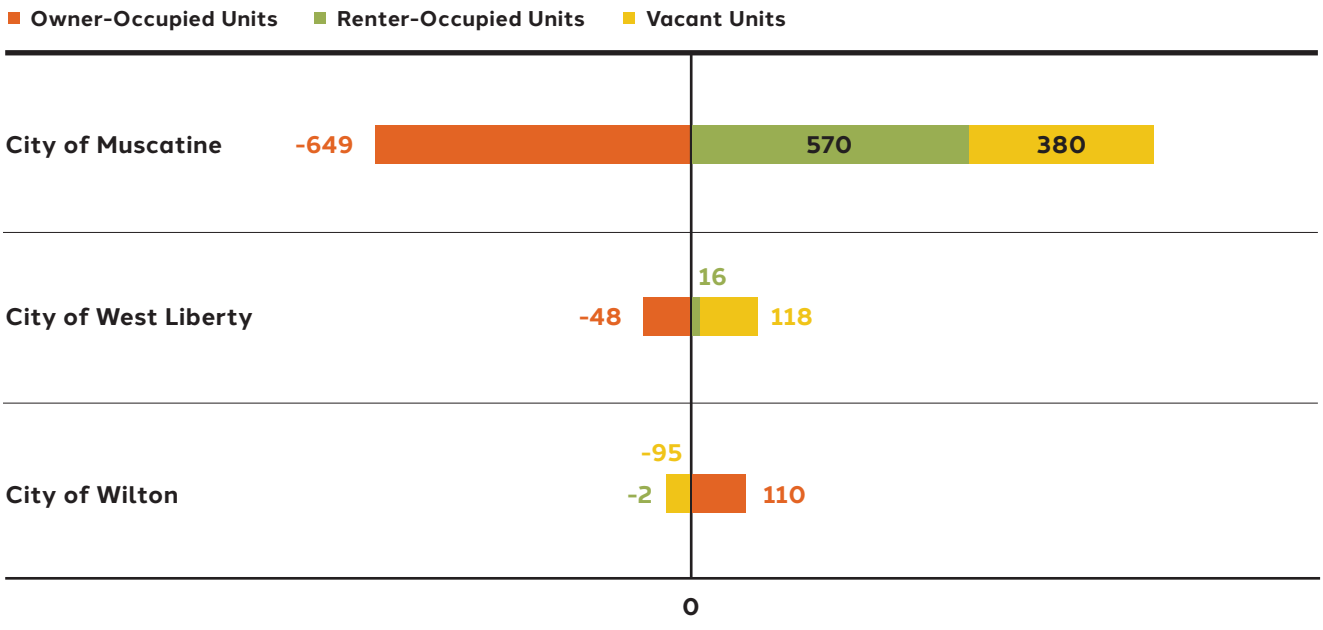
FIGURE 2.3 CHANGES IN HOUSING MARKET (2000–2010)



Supply & Demand: 2010 to 2020

FIGURE 2.4 illustrates the market transformation from 2010 to 2020. The lingering effects of the housing market crash persisted throughout the 2010s, few new units were built, and there was a continuous rise in vacancies in the region. Over this period, West Liberty witnessed the addition of 16 new renter units while losing 48 owner units, and adding 118 vacant homes, signaling a notable market shift. Vacancies surged, again, by 50%, surpassing 100 units and constituting over 10% of the total housing stock. As the 2010s drew to a close, West Liberty witnessed a slight decline in its homeownership rate to 69.1%, marking a 2.2% decrease, alongside a persistent increase in vacancies and a tightening supply. These factors would prove pivotal in shaping the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the housing market, not just within West Liberty but nationwide, exacerbating the ongoing housing crisis experienced by communities across the U.S. today.

FIGURE 2.4 CHANGES IN HOUSING MARKET (2010–2020)





Homeowners in West Liberty

Over the past three decades, the City of West Liberty has consistently maintained a majority of owner-occupied households, boasting a current owner-occupancy rate of 67.6%, as of 2022. Housing affordability is commonly defined by adhering to the principle of not surpassing a 3:1 ratio of debt to income, ensuring that housing costs (including utilities) remain below 30% of a household's income. By these standards, West Liberty emerges as the most expensive for homeowners, particularly when compared to neighboring communities and the county. West Liberty ranks in the middle in terms of median home value (MHV) and median monthly housing costs when that comparison is expanded to the State of Iowa and the U.S. Despite West Liberty being the most expensive community, overall, the region would still be considered affordable. The modest ratio of median home value (MHV) to median household income (MHI) further demonstrates the region's affordability. This ratio signifies that a homeowner in West Liberty only needs to earn twice the income to afford an average home, in contrast to the nationwide standard that demands three times the income.

In contrast to the general population data discussed in Part I, it becomes evident that **homeowners in West Liberty have experienced more favorable financial conditions regarding income and housing costs**. Currently, homeowners in West

Industry Standard vs. Local Standard

The industry standard for affordability is 3:1 and is applied across the U.S. However, in the Midwest, where housing costs are generally cheaper than the East or West coasts, that standard is closer to a 2:1 ratio *(as demonstrated in Figure 2.5)*.

Liberty earn approximately 24% more income than the general West Liberty MHI ($63,910), and only pay roughly half of the recommended housing cost percentage, providing a significant financial buffer against recent inflation and overall increases in the cost of living. Two key factors likely contribute to the lower housing costs for existing homeowners: 1) the age of buildings; and 2) interest rates. Nearly 61% of owner-occupied units were constructed before 1979, indicating that more homes were built during a period of more affordable housing. While new homes come with higher costs, the limited number of owner units (16%) built after 2000 has helped keep that MHV lower due to the lack of new builds. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated easier access to funds, with mortgage rates dropping as low as three percent. In 2023, rates increased approximately 2.5 times, reaching as high as 7.5%. According to 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) data, roughly 22.4% of households moved between 2018 and 2020. That number shrunk to just 3.1% of households that moved in 2021 or later. **This means significantly more households likely secured low-interest rates before 2021, contributing to the ability to keep their monthly housing costs relatively low**.

FIGURE 2.5 OWNER FINANCIAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

	MHI	MHV	Median Monthly Housing Costs	Ratio	Owner Occupancy
West Liberty, IA	$79,440	$157,600	$995	2.0	67.6%
Muscatine, IA	$73,409	$131,900	$935	1.8	69.3%
Wilton, IA	$77,176	$141,500	$921	1.9	72.2%
Muscatine County	$83,143	$159,000	$975	1.9	75.4%
Iowa	$86,339	$181,600	$1,042	2.1	71.5%
United States	$93,531	$281,900	$1,282	3.0	64.8%

Data is derived from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Median Household Income (MHI) in the Past 12 Months (2022 inflation-adjusted dollars)



To accept the appearance of affordability at face value is a disservice to the people in these communities who are genuinely grappling with the challenges of securing suitable and reasonably priced housing. A different narrative unfolds for a significant portion of West Liberty residents, specifically the more than 20% of owner households who earn less than the homeowner MHI of $79,440. Overall, roughly 20.1% of all owner households are cost-burdened in West Liberty, meaning they spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing expenses. Among these cost-burdened owner households, 82% earn less than $35,000 per year. With the recent spike in housing prices and the overall cost of living, there has been a notable shift in the distribution of homeowners across income brackets. The proportion of homeowners earning less than $75,000 annually has substantially decreased, dropping from nearly 84.9% in 2000 to 46.9% today, as illustrated in **FIGURE 2.6** on the following page. However, owner households earning $75,000 or more are growing, specifically those earning $100,000 or more, as these income brackets have seen staggering increases since 2000. **Owning a home has become increasingly expensive, and is quickly pricing low and moderate-income earners out of the market**.

FIGURE 2.6 HOMEOWNER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ($0 – $74,999)

Household Income	$0 – $34,999	$35,000 – $49,999	$50,000 – $74,999
Things to Keep in Mind	Roughly 93% of these households are cost-burdened yet have the highest number of surplus units. It is likely that this income bracket includes individuals living on a fixed income e.g. Social Security or disability, and current housing costs (property tax, insurance, etc.) exceed that affordability threshold. This income bracket also has the highest amount of surplus units. It's possible that units in this price range are dilapidated/ blighted units due to lack of maintenance over time, especially if occupants are on fixed incomes.	In the last decade, this income bracket shrunk severely, which also reduced the amount of cost-burdened households to zero. They are now the smallest percentage of homeowners in West Liberty. There is a surplus of units in this income range, which are likely being absorbed by higher-income earners.	These households have low rates of cost-burdened homeowners, but are likely struggling to upsize (if desired) due to current market conditions, limited supply, and competition from higher income households.
% of Owner Households	2000: 34.0% · 2010: 22.7% · 2022: 17.6%	2000: 20.5% · 2010: 20.3% · 2022: 3.5%	2000: 30.4% · 2010: 27.8% · 2022: 25.8%
Range of Affordable Unit Value	$0 – $102,000	$103,000 –$146,000	$147,000 – $219,000
# of Households in 2022	157	31	229
Units Affordable to Income Range in 2022	$0 – $99,999: 271	$100,000 – $149,999: 124	$150,000 – $199,999: 221
Deficit / Surplus of Affordable Units to Matched Income 2022	+114	+93	–8
# of Cost Burdened Households	146	0	33

Data is derived from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Maximum Affordable Unit Value calculation: Maximum income x 30% / 12 = maximum monthly payment.
The Units Affodable calculation is meant to provide additional context of the number of units below, at, or near what certain household incomes could potentially afford.

FIGURE 2.6 HOMEOWNER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ($75,000 – $150,000+)

Household Income	$75,000 – $99,999	$100,000 – $149,999	$150,000+
Things to Keep in Mind	These households are likely in a similar situation as the income bracket below them. These households were able to purchase a quality home, but are likely stuck due to market conditions. Units priced between $200,000 and $299,999 are in demand per resident feedback, despite there being a surplus of units.	Although these homeowners have the greatest purchasing power, there is limited choice due to lack of new builds at these equivalent price points. This lack of choice has likely required these households to compete with those earning less than $100,000, and absorbing more affordable units. Another point to keep in mind is that even though these homeowners can purchase a $300,000+ home, doesn't mean they all necessarily will. Factors, such as current interest rates, may deter these current homeowners from making the jump. Other major costs like daycare, student loans, etc. also can eat up a household's budget, and reduce the likelihood of higher income households taking on a larger mortgage. On the flip side, those who are on fixed incomes (retirees) but saved comfortably might not be willing to give up their low cost of living from purchasing a home decades prior.	
% of Owner Households	2000: 9.7% 2010: 22.2% 2022: 15.0%	2000: 3.8% 2010: 6.4% 2022: 29.5%	2000: 1.6% 2010: 0.7% 2022: 8.7%
Range of Affordable Unit Value	$220,000 – $292,000	$293,000 – $438,000	$438,000+
# of Households in 2022	133	262	77
Units Affordable to Income Range in 2022	$200,000 – $299,999: 245	$300,000 – $499,999: 22	$500,000+: 6
Deficit / Surplus of Affordable Units to Matched Income 2022	+112	–240	–71
# of Cost Burdened Households	0	N/A	N/A

Data is derived from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Maximum Affordable Unit Value calculation: Maximum income x 30% / 12 = maximum monthly payment.
The Units Affodable calculation is meant to provide additional context of the number of units below, at, or near what certain household incomes could potentially afford.



Renters in West Liberty

As of 2022, more than 30% of households rent in West Liberty. While homeowners have reaped the benefits of affordability, **renters face considerable financial strain and are in a less advantageous position**. Renters earn approximately 78% of West Liberty's MHI ($63,910), and only 63% of what West Liberty homeowners earn ($79,440), highlighting a substantial financial disparity between these two groups. Furthermore, within the region, **West Liberty ranks the most expensive among the comparison geographies minus the U.S**., in terms of median monthly housing costs. Applying the same affordability threshold, current median monthly housing costs are below the limit of renters' budgets before becoming cost-burdened, of which 33.3% of renter households are. This situation leaves renters with more options, but the affordability lens is not reflective of the lowest-income renters who severely suffer from rising housing costs.

FIGURE 2.7 RENTER FINANCIAL HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

	MHI	Median Monthly Housing Costs	Max Affordability	Renter Occupancy
West Liberty, IA	$49,821	$961	$1,245	32.4%
Muscatine, IA	$34,881	$935	$872	30.7%
Wilton, IA	$57,188	$781	$1,429	27.8%
Muscatine County	$39,697	$936	$992	24.6%
Iowa	$40,464	$914	$1,012	28.5%
United States	$48,844	$1,268	$1,221	35.2%

Data is derived from the 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Median Household Income (MHI) in the Past 12 Months (2022 inflation-adjusted dollars)
Maximum Affordable Unit Value calculation: Maximum income x 30% / 12 = maximum monthly payment.

Feedback gathered during the Community Engagement phase identified some residents' willingness to commute from the Iowa City area, where the average monthly housing cost is $1,048/, due to access to higher quality amenities, activities, and events, even if housing is more expensive. Although West Liberty is somewhat lower than Iowa City, there is a somewhat notable difference in the age of rental housing stock between the two communities. Approximately 27.3% of Iowa City's renter-occupied units were constructed in 2000 or later, in contrast to only 16.2% of West Liberty's rental units. This implies that although housing costs are lower in West Liberty, the units are somewhat older and may not align with the expectations of contemporary renters, including updated appliances and fixtures.

As illustrated in **FIGURE 2.8** on the following pages, the disparity among renters persists when examined through the lens of income brackets. Despite significant increases in incomes over the past two decades, this hasn't necessarily balanced the escalating housing costs that renters are currently grappling with (West Liberty's average monthly rent has increased more than 40% since 2010, when it was $673). The lowest income earners continue to represent the second largest proportion of renters, with more than 96% of them being cost-burdened. Although there is still a small surplus of units for low-income renters, this high cost-burdened percentage is likely occurring due to the diminishing availability of units priced at less than $500 per month, experiencing a 55% decrease since 2010. As a result, these households are compelled to pay for housing that exceeds their financial means. In a similar trend to homeowners in West Liberty, the percentage of higher-income earners has grown over the past 20 years, but the production of equivalently priced units has not kept pace. The scarcity of units relative to higher income earners likely led these households to absorb some of the surplus among units priced below $1,499.

FIGURE 2.8 RENTER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ($0 – $49,999)

Household Income	$0 –$19,999	$20,000 – $34,999	$0 – $34,999	$35,000 – $49,999
Things to Keep in Mind	Roughly 96% of these households are cost-burdened and have a deficit in affordable units. It is likely that this income bracket includes individuals living on a fixed income and current housing costs exceed that affordability threshold. It is also possible that these lower-priced units lacked quality and have become dilapidated due to lack of maintenance over time.	Unfortunately, all of these households are cost-burdened. Similar to the lowest income earners, it is likely that some of these households are on fixed incomes and are challenged to afford rising housing costs along with any maintenance or upgrades needed, which could be why there's still a significant surplus of units, as many could be deteriorating over time.	Overall, these renter households have reduced by more than half. Despite a surplus in units, 98% of households are cost-burdened.	This group of renters hasn't shifted significantly over time in terms of households, yet experiences the largest surplus in units in West Liberty.
% of Renter Households	2000: 32.3% · 2010: 38.2% · 2022: 17.6%	2000: 36.8% · 2010: 38.5% · 2022: 11.9%	2000: 69.1% · 2010: 76.7% · 2022: 29.5%	2000: 18.9% · 2010: 9.7% · 2022: 20.9%
Range of Affordable Gross Rent	Less than $500	$500 –$874	$0 – $874	$875 – $1,249
# of Households in 2022	75	51	126	89
Units Affordable to Income Range in 2022	Less than $500: 49	$500 – $799: 133	$0 – $799: 182	$800 – $1,499: 199
Deficit / Surplus of Affordable Units to Matched Income 2022	-26	+82	+56	+110
# of Cost Burdened Households	72	51	123	19

Data is derived from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Maximum Affordable Unit Value calculation: Maximum income x 30% / 12 = maximum monthly payment.
The Units Affodable calculation is meant to provide additional context of the number of units below, at, or near what certain household incomes could potentially afford.

FIGURE 2.8 RENTER HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ($50,000 – $150,000+)

Household Income	$50,000 – $74,999	$75,000 – $99,999	$100,000 – $149,999	+$150,000
Things to Keep in Mind	This income bracket experienced the largest increase since 2000 (+39.9%) but still sees a deficit in units relative to income. Although a few renter units were built throughout the 2010s, it did not keep pace with the growth in households.	These top income earners have increased significantly since 2000. Currently, none of these households are cost-burdened which allows them to afford any rental in West Liberty. However, there are few units available relative to their income, which reflects a limited choice and most likely means these households are paying lower housing costs due to a surplus in lower-priced units.		
% of Renter Households	2000: 11.1% 2010: 0% 2022: 39.9%	2000: 0% 2010: 8.5% 2022: 5.6%	2000: 0.8% 2010: 5.0% 2022: 4.0%	2000: 0% 2010: 0% 2022: 0%
Range of Affordable Gross Rent	$1,250 – $1,874	$1,875 – $2,499	$2,500 – $3,749	$3,750+
# of Households in 2022	170	24	17	0
Units Affordable to Income Range in 2022	$1,500 – $1,999: 27	$2,000 – $2,499: 14	$2,500 – $2,999: 0	$3,000+:4
Deficit / Surplus of Affordable Units to Matched Income 2022	–143	–10	–17	+4
# of Cost Burdened Households	0	0	N/A	N/A

Data is derived from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Maximum Affordable Unit Value calculation: Maximum income x 30% / 12 = maximum monthly payment.
The Units Affodable calculation is meant to provide additional context of the number of units below, at, or near what certain household incomes could potentially afford.



According to the latest data from the American Community Survey 5-year Estimates (2022), West Liberty has a 15.1% vacancy rate for renters, demonstrating a disconnect between supply and demand, possibly due to expectations of contemporary renters that are not reflected in the existing rental stock. Wilton has not built any new rentals since 2014, and built a majority of rental units in the early 2000s, meaning current rentals could be dated.

As demonstrated, renters have not experienced an as favorable market as homeowners. Roughly 96% of renters are lower-income households and cost-burdened, which requires a closer look at data regarding subsidized units. To qualify for subsidized housing, a family or individual has to earn at or less than the designated income limits, identified as the Median Family Income (MFI), which is typically derived from the Area Median Income (AMI).



The 2023 Median Family Income (MFI) for Muscatine County is $83,500 for a four-person household. **FIGURE 2.9** demonstrates the qualifying incomes for Muscatine County based on household size:

FIGURE 2.9 SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INCOME LIMITS

30% MFI (extremely low income)	
1 person HH: $17,700	3 person HH: $24,860
2 person HH: $20,200	4 person HH: $30,000
50% MFI (very low income)	
1 person HH: $29,500	3 person HH: $37,900
2 person HH: $33,700	4 person HH: $42,100
80% MFI (low income)	
1 person HH: $47,150	3 person HH: $60,650
2 person HH: $53,900	4 person HH: $67,350

Unfortunately, there is not enough data collected by HUD to provide an accurate picture of West Liberty's subsidized housing stock. However, to provide some context, according to HUD, as of 2023, there are 825 subsidized units available, and are at a 95% occupancy rate in Muscatine County. The average household income of those living in subsidized housing is $15,833 per year, which falls in the lowest income bracket, where there is a significant deficit of units available. Additionally, **eligible households wait an average of 17 months on the waiting list for an available unit**, indicating a severe lack of availability and most likely forcing these households to pay significantly more for housing. Muscatine County is not alone in this issue, the State of Iowa also has a significant deficit in affordable rental units for very low and extremely low-income households. **The makeup of a household living in subsidized housing is as follows:**



FEMALE W/ CHILD



25–49 YEARS OLD



DISABLED

MFI is only calculated on a county-level basis
Data for Figure 2.9 is derived from the HUD website

Housing Stock Characteristics

The maps on the following pages utilize GIS software to illustrate the diverse make up of the housing stock in West Liberty by the following characteristics:

- Residential Parcels by Housing Type
- Single-Family Residential Homes by Year Built
- Single-Family Residential Homes by Total Assessed Value
- Single-Family Residential Homes by Condition

Information was sourced from the Muscatine County Assessor.



RESIDENTIAL PARCELS BY HOUSING TYPE

The vast majority of residential parcels in West Liberty are single-family detached homes shown in black in **FIGURE 2.10**. However, there is some distribution of multi-family units throughout the community, with a large concentration at the core of West Liberty.

- West Liberty City Limits
- Multi-Family Residential
  75 (7.4%)
- Single-Family Residential
  939 (92.6%)

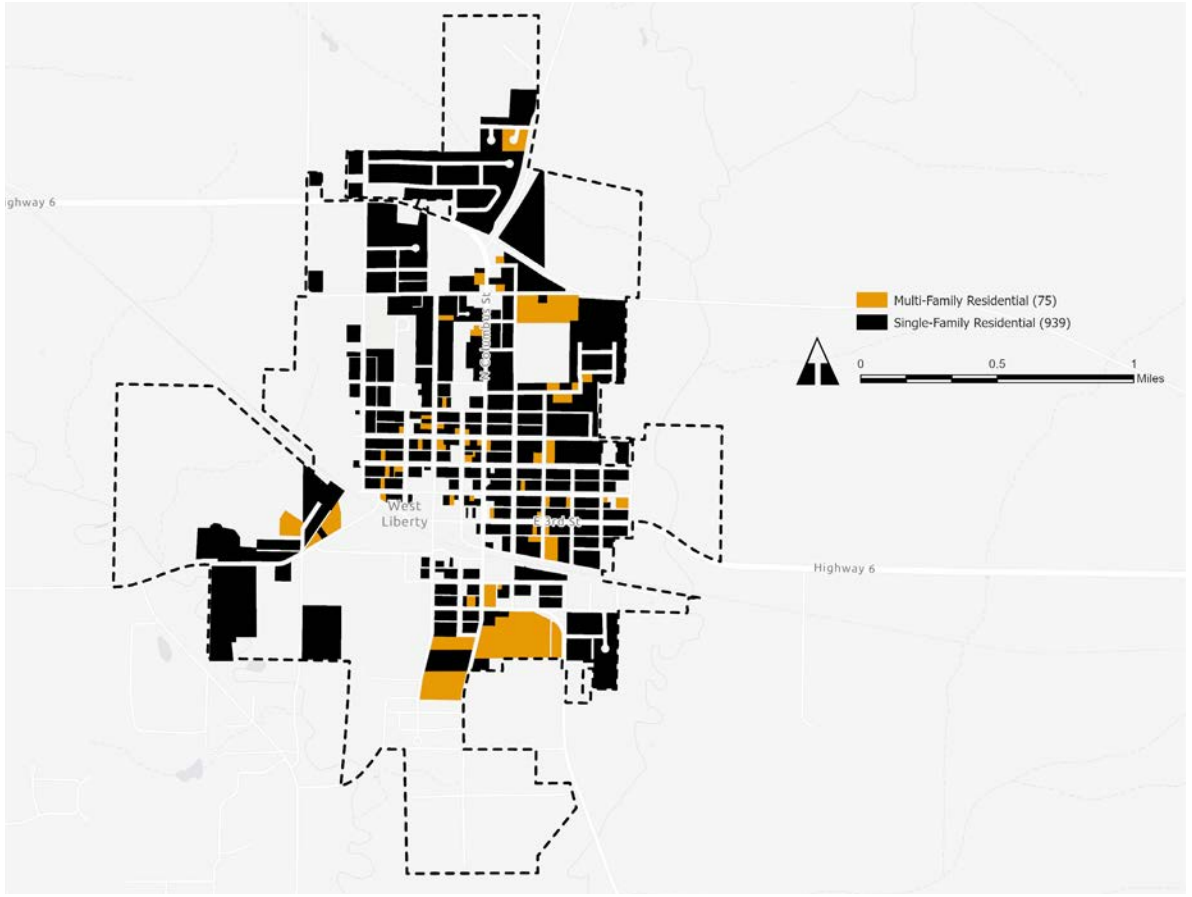


FIGURE 2.10 **WEST LIBERTY RESIDENTIAL PARCELS BY HOUSING TYPE**

FIGURE 2.11 demonstrates that older single-family homes are concentrated at the core of West Liberty, while most modern housing has been built on the outer edges. This map also shows the disparity between older and newer housing, with only about 12.2% of existing single-family homes being built since 2000.

West Liberty City Limits

≤1979
688 (79.7%)

1980 –1999
71 (8.2%)

2000 – 2019
103 (11.9%)

2020 – 2024
2 (0.2%)

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY YEAR BUILT

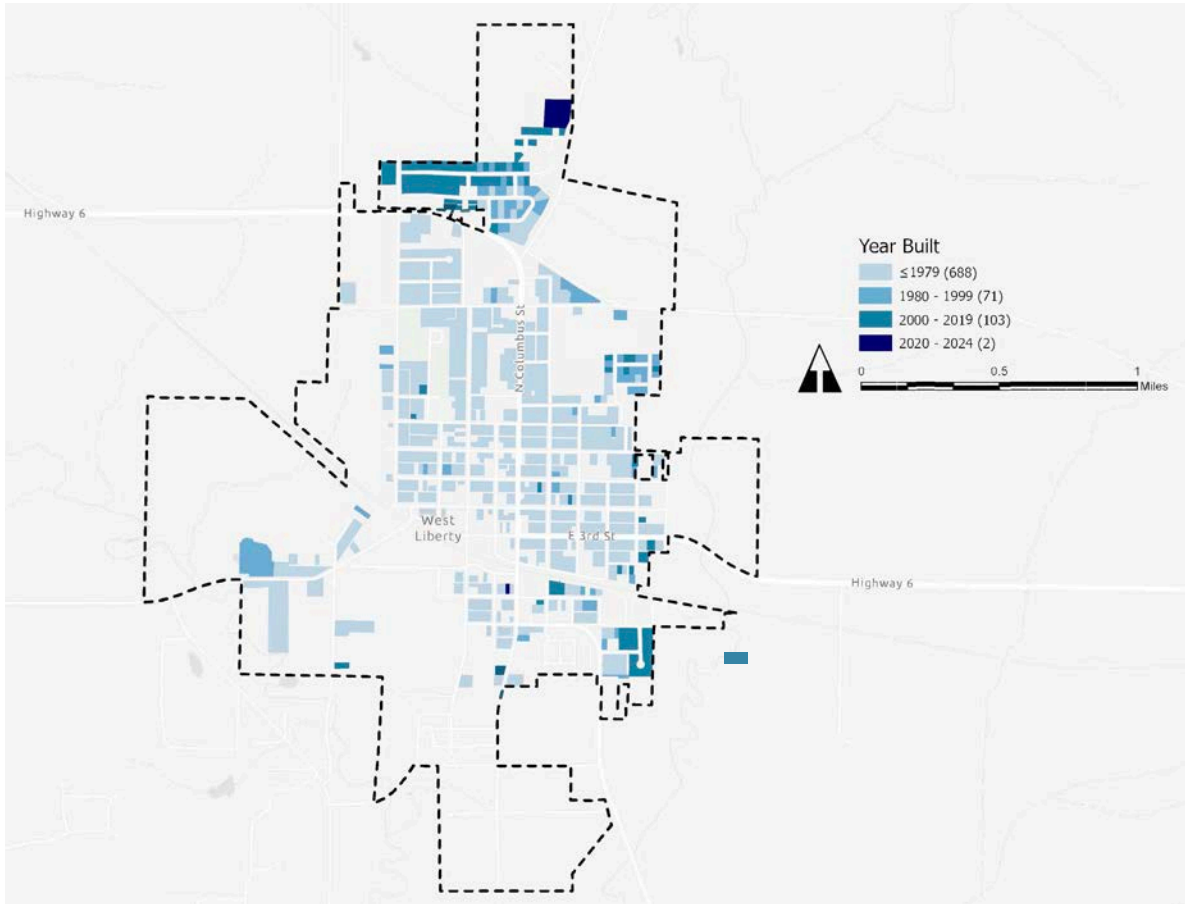


FIGURE 2.11 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY YEAR BUILT

FIGURE 2.12 shows the range of home values in West Liberty. Unlike Muscatine and Wilton, West Liberty doesn't have as much of a geographic concentration for lower or higher priced homes. Instead, homes of varying price points are scattered throughout the community, fostering a balanced distribution rather than clustering in specific pockets. The largest percentage of single-family homes are priced between $101,000 and $200,000, followed by those that are between $201,000 and $300,000.

West Liberty City Limits

≤$100K
108 (11.6%)

$101K – 200K
526 (56.6%)

$201K – 300K
237 (25.5%)

>$300K
59 (6.3%)

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE

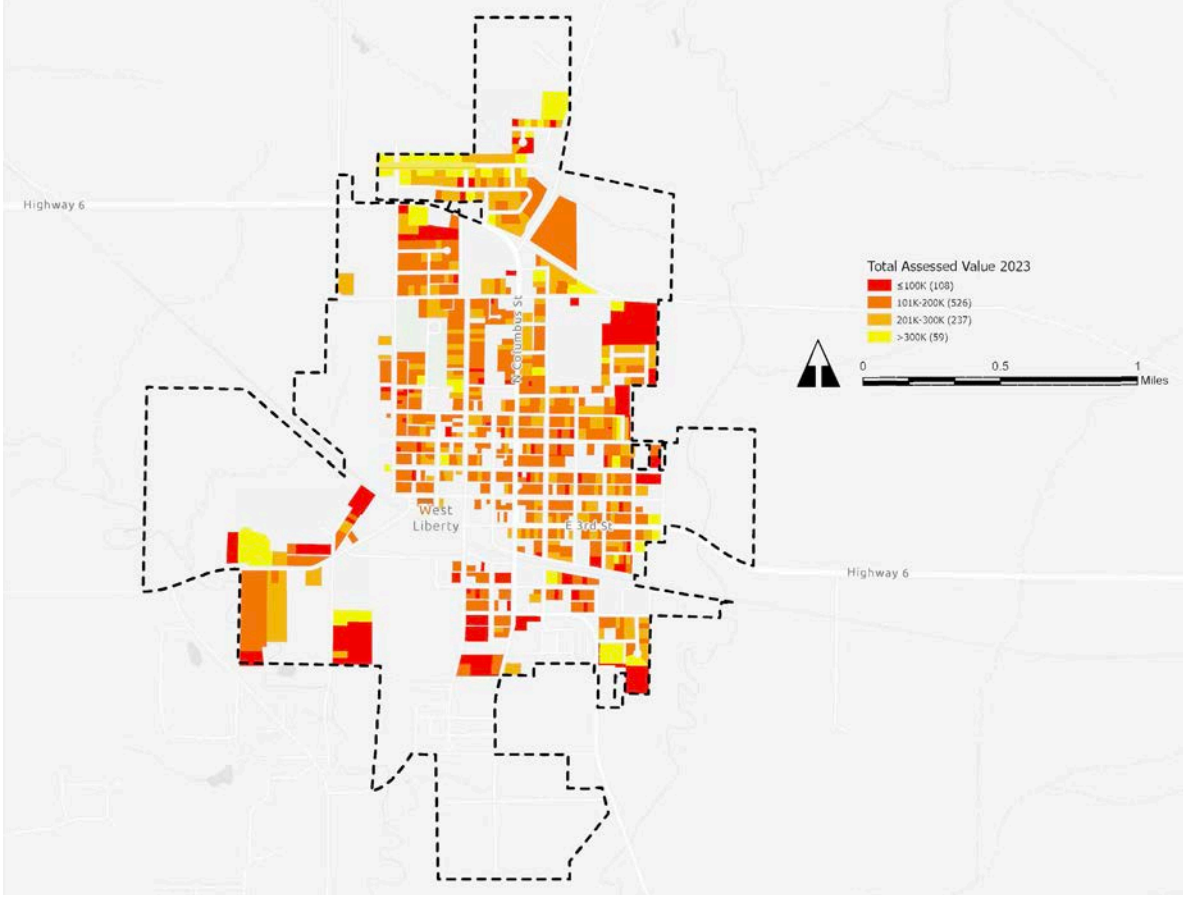


FIGURE 2.12 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE

FIGURE 2.13 breaks down single-family homes by condition, as determined by the Muscatine County Assessor's Office. A large majority of homes are categorized as Above Normal conditions, while 3% of homes are considered Below Normal or worse. Although this is a low percentage, that still equates to roughly 26 homes that most likely need renovations, updates, etc., especially those that are Poor or Very Poor, where blight is the likely culprit.

West Liberty City Limits

Above Normal
618 (96.0%)

Below Normal
18 (2.8%)

Poor
6 (0.9%)

Very Poor
2 (0.3%)

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY CONDITION

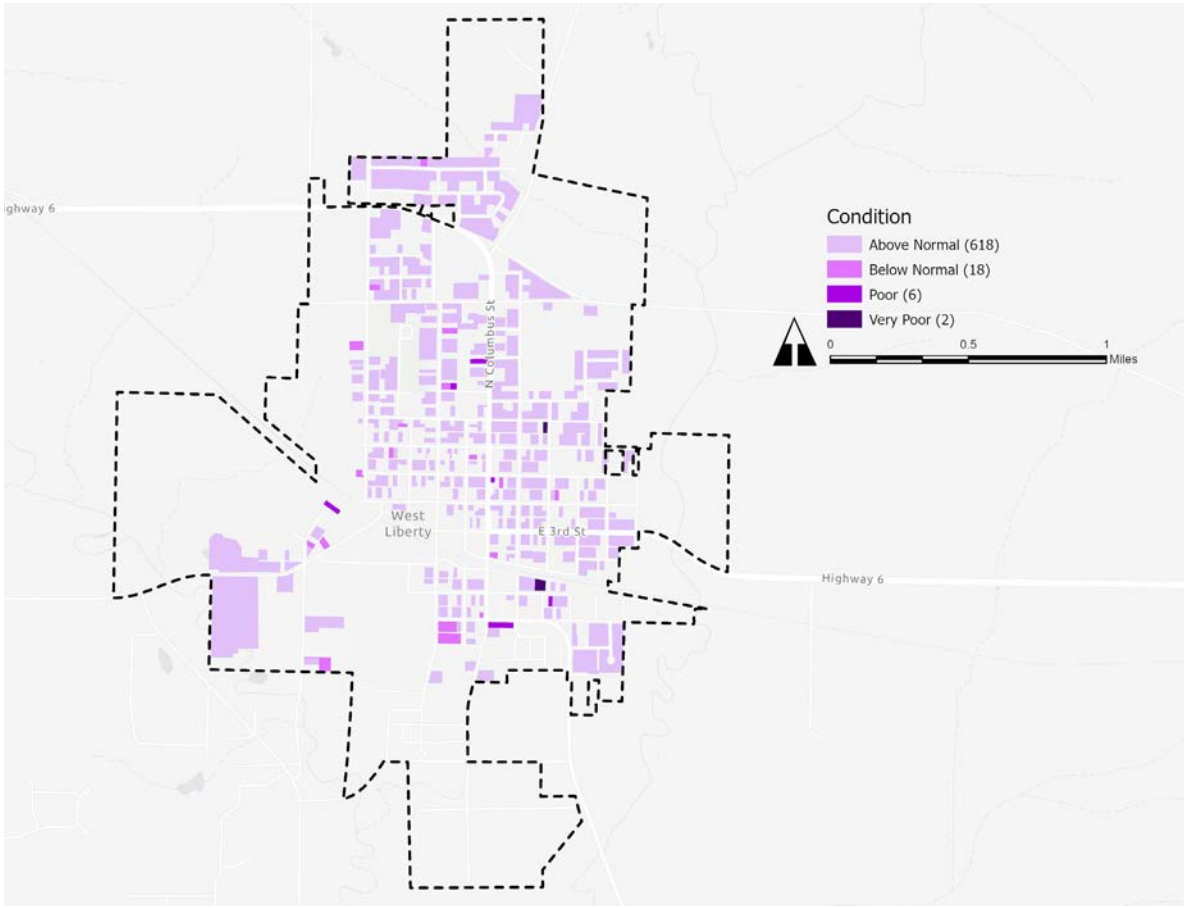
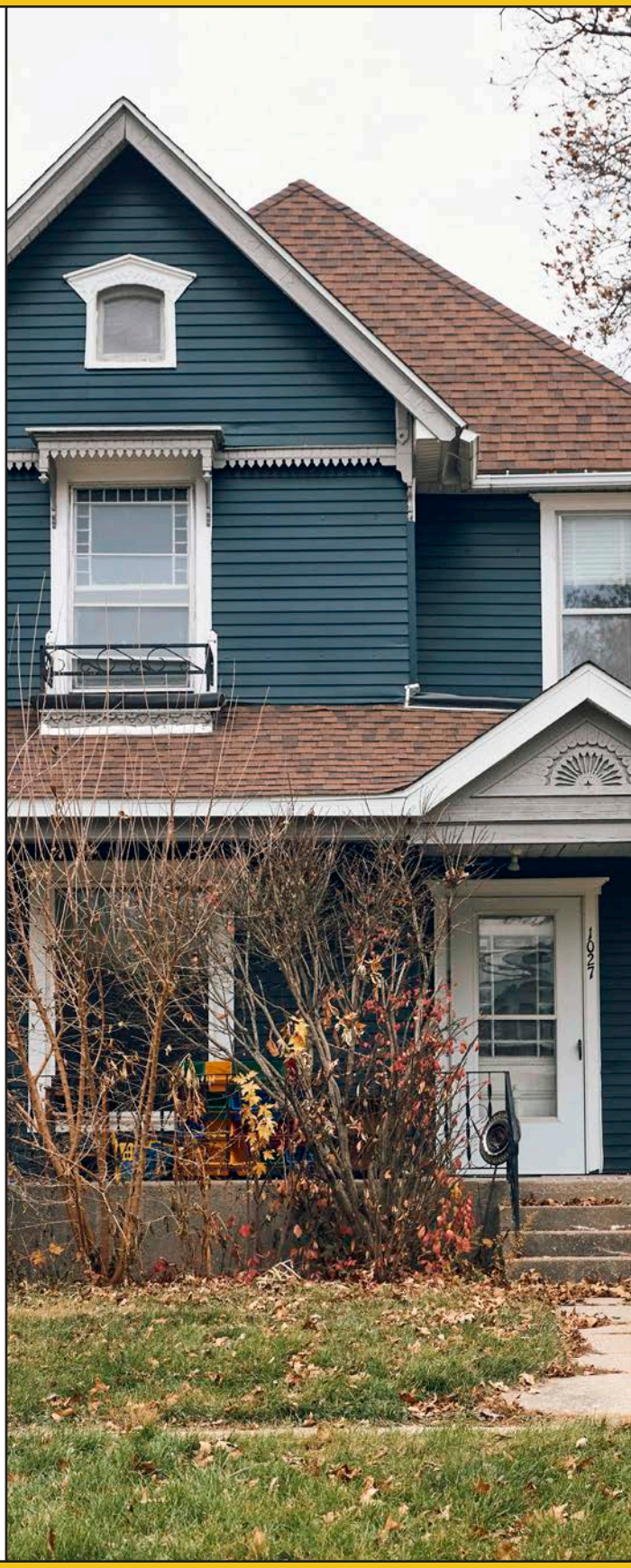


FIGURE 2.13 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL HOMES BY CONDITION

Part 3

Future Housing for West Liberty

In the coming decades, housing will undergo profound changes due to demographic shifts, technological advancements, sustainability concerns, and economic factors. An aging population and changing household structures will reshape preferences, while technology and remote work will impact location choices and the demand for flexible spaces. Sustainability will drive eco-friendly housing solutions, and economic conditions will shape affordability and homeownership trends. These interconnected factors indicate a future housing landscape focused on innovation, sustainability, and adaptability to meet evolving societal needs.





How Housing Must Meet the Needs of Changing Demographics

To anticipate future housing demand, it is crucial to examine the demographic shifts that West Liberty has undergone in the last two decades. Factors such as people relocating, deciding on whether to pursue homeownership, selling their homes, or downsizing to single-story rentals all contribute significantly to shaping the trajectory of future housing needs. The median age in West Liberty is 33.5, the youngest among comparison communities, the State of Iowa, and the U.S. **FIGURE 3.1** (next page) illustrates the evolution of each age cohort over time, revealing a consistent decline in younger populations and a corresponding rise in aging populations between 2000 and 2022.

FIGURE 3.1 AGE COHORTS (HISTORICAL & PROJECTED)

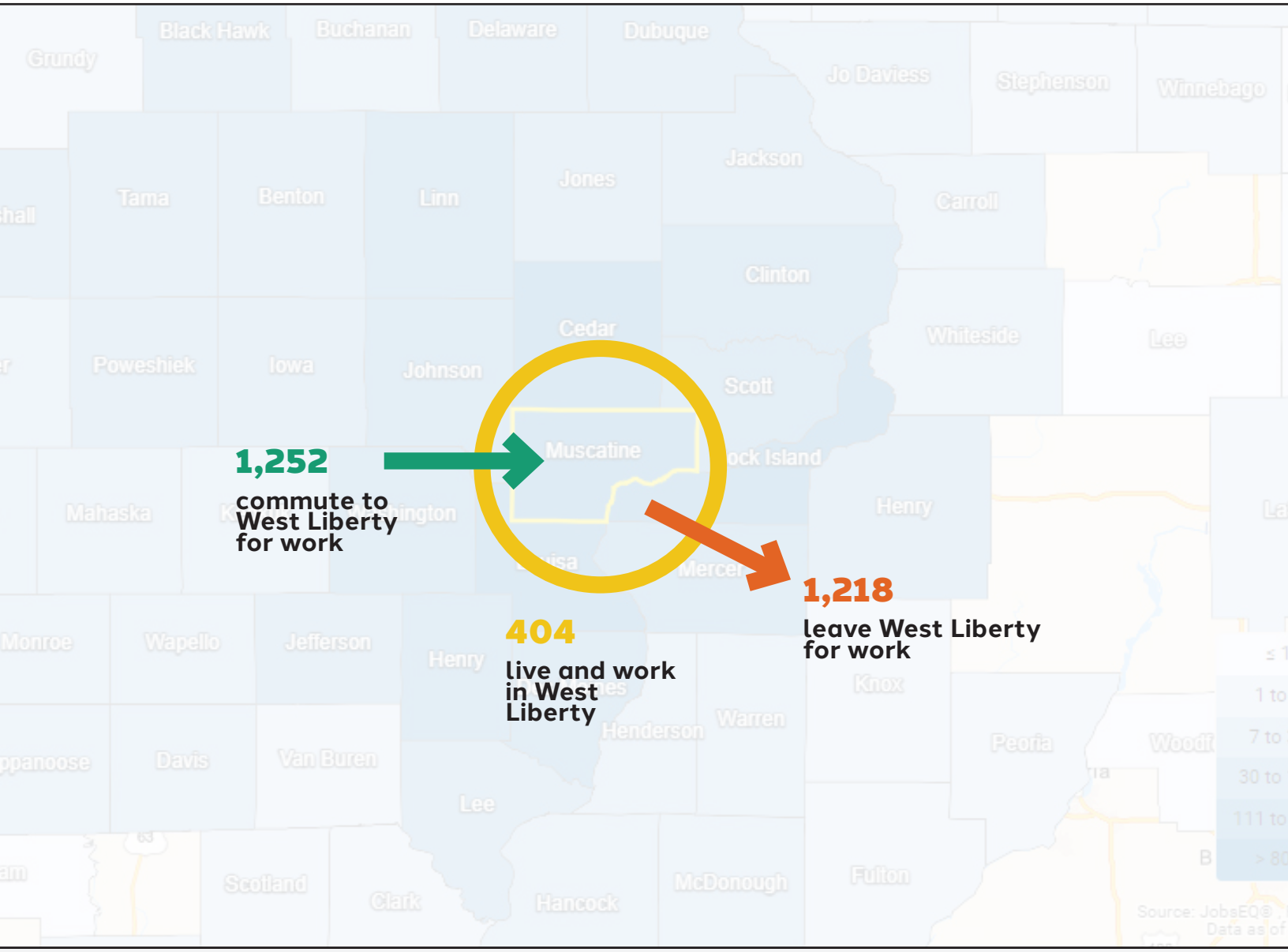
Age Totals	2000	2010	2022	Historical Change (2000 – 2022)	2030	2040	Projected Change (2022 – 2040)
	WEST LIBERTY, IOWA				MUSCATINE COUNTY, IOWA		
Total Population	3,330	3,736	3,812	+491	42,970	43,185	+0.5%
Age 14 & Under	24.5%	25.2%	19.7%	-4.8%	19.5%	20.1%	0%
Age 15 – 24	15.1%	13.8%	16.1%	+1.0%	11.7%	10.5%	-2.1%
Age 25 – 34	14.8%	14.2%	18.4%	+3.6%	11.9%	12.6%	+0.3%
Age 35 – 44	15.5%	13.3%	13.3%	-2.2%	12.9%	12.1%	-0.3%
Age 45 – 54	8.9%	12.7%	10.3%	+1.4%	11.7%	12.6%	+0.4%
Age 55 – 59	3.7%	5.0%	4.1%	+0.4%	5.5%	5.8%	-0.4%
Age 60 – 64	2.8%	3.7%	5.3%	+2.5%	5.6%	5.3%	-1.9%
Age 65 – 74	6.4%	4.8%	7.5%	+1.1%	11.3%	9.6%	-0.9%
Age 75 – 84	5.2%	4.1%	3.4%	-1.8%	7.8%	8.6%	+4.0%
Age 85+	3.1%	3.0%	1.8%	-1.3%	2.2%	2.7%	+0.7%

Data is derived from the 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2022 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.
Data projections are only available by county and are derived from an annual report created by Woods & Poole Economics for the State of Iowa State Data Center.



The data is unavailable for anticipated population growth in West Liberty; however, **West Liberty saw a 12.2% increase between 2000 – 2010, and a 2.0% increase between 2010 – 2022, averaging a 7.1% population increase over 20+ years**. If we apply that average up to 2040, that would increase the total population by 270 people per decade. **The changes in age demographics in West Liberty do not necessarily align with county projections from the State Data Center of Iowa, which suggest a gradual continuation of declining younger populations and increasing aging populations**. However, minimal population growth is anticipated in the county, with a slight decrease by 2030, followed by a subsequent rebound by 2040. Although households are anticipated to get older with time, their size is expected to stay roughly the same. The current average household size in Muscatine County is 2.5 and has only decreased slightly since 1990, from 2.7. Projections from the State Data Center of Iowa show that it will only slightly decline to 2.4 by 2040.

Additionally, West Liberty has an opportunity to attract employees who are working in the community, but do not live there. More than 1,200 people commute to West Liberty for work from surrounding areas and counties. There has been a consistent inflow of the labor market from outside of the community, indicating a future opportunity to retain those employees by providing appropriate and affordable housing, especially for younger generations.



Per JobsEQ, **FIGURE 3.2** highlights the top five occupations of employees that are commuting to West Liberty for work, but do not live within city limits. The chart below breaks down each occupation's income levels, and equivalent housing cost estimates relative to that income. This provides important insight into what these potential households could afford and what housing price points West Liberty needs to offer in order to attract them.

FIGURE 3.2 TOP OCCUPATIONS FOR COMMUTERS – INCOME & HOUSING COSTS

Occupation	Entry Level	Median	Experienced	Purchase Price	Rental Price
Production Occupations	$35,500	$46,900	$55,500	< $100,000	≤ $888/ month
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	$27,900	$49,800	$63,200	< $100,000	≤ $698/ month
LIfe, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	$41,400	$63,700	$85,100	< $150,000	≤ $1,035/ month
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	$38,900	$57,400	$69,700	< $100,000	≤ $973/ month
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	$45,400	$67,500	$86,100	< $150,000	≤ $1,135/ month

These maximum price ranges represent what an entry-level employee could afford (by applying the 30% threshold). Atlas is starting with entry-level pay based on discussions with major employers in the county, and how many of the new hires they've had would fall under this category. By assessing the housing expenses relevant to entry-level employees, this approach ensures that housing remains more accessible across all income levels, as opposed to being relative to earnings of average or seasoned employees, who typically command higher salaries (as demonstrated in the chart)

The Future for Owner Households in West Liberty

Part II of this study outlined existing gaps in the market for owner-occupied households, demonstrating higher income earners are occupying units that are significantly lower than the cost-burdened threshold. These households could likely consist of higher-income earners who were able to purchase a home when the market was more favorable to those entering homeownership with lower purchase prices and interest rates. It is also possible, **given that West Liberty is a majority Latino community, that homes are being passed down from generation to generation.** Since it is typical of Latino households to consist of multiple generations, the same home purchased by grandparents could be deeded to their children, and then their children's children over time. This could be an explanation for why 42% of existing owner-occupied units are mortgage-free in West Liberty. Scenarios like these can create a more stagnant housing environment, even though units might be changing owners. **Additionally, 93% of homeowners who earn less than $35,000 are cost-burdened**. Despite owning their home, they are still struggling to make payments, which could be due to a fixed income and rising property taxes and/or insurance.

This type of housing environment requires communities to be more proactive at tackling existing barriers, rather than just sit back and let the market sort itself out over time. **Different housing types across all price ranges need to be added to the existing housing stock** in order to allow for more movement. Despite some of the hard data demonstrating need at the highest of incomes, Iowans are accustomed to housing costs that mimic a 2:1 ratio versus a 3:1 ratio at the national level, as shown by so many high income households living significantly below their (relative) means.

With higher interest rates and increased construction costs, adding housing that is appropriate for all income levels will require a more strategic and hands-on approach. First, it is always important to look at what currently exists for housing, and how that could be improved and put back into productive reuse. It is proven that vacant or blighted properties have an impact on public health, individual wealth, and community fiscal stability, per the Center for Community Progress. However, according to Muscatine County Assessor data, West Liberty only has 26 units categorized as Below Normal, Poor or Very Poor condition. Although Atlas encourages communities to enhance its existing housing stock, redeveloping 26 units would not meet the existing need for housing.

Therefore, **it is evident that new construction will need to happen in order to meet current and future supply and demand needs**. West Liberty is the youngest of the three communities, with more than 50% of the population under 35, and has proximity to larger micropolitan areas. This means that a **priority should be set to build homes for first-time home buyers**. This allows West Liberty to also diversify its housing stock and build more missing middle housing options like smaller footprint homes requiring less maintenance (which has proven beneficial for both older and younger generations) or condominiums and townhomes that don't come with as high of a single-family price tag. **An additional type of home that might be popular in West Liberty are homes built to house multi-generational families, where separate living quarters are integrated into the design of the home**. Not only would this cater to a specific demographic, but it could help keep living costs down with having two households living in one housing unit. Overall, collaborative efforts among West Liberty and its collaborative partners are imperative to enhance the housing stock, most likely by constructing new ones that cater to a broad range of income levels.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Less than $50,000

Currently, 77% of homeowners in this income bracket are cost-burdened, despite a surplus in units affordable to this income. **Becoming homeowners would be extremely difficult and likely unattainable for the lowest of incomes**.

For those earning closer to $50,000, achieving homeownership still poses a considerable challenge despite an existing surplus, as homes within an appropriate price range would likely necessitate extensive renovations and/or upgrades, surpassing the financial capacity of these households.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$50,000 – $74,999

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$75,000 – $99,999

These households are likely to experience ongoing frustration due to limited choices in a stagnant market, constrained by the availability of existing houses and competing with higher incomes. Existing homeowners in this income range are expected to stay put until market conditions evolve significantly, while prospective first-time buyers may find themselves compelled to rent until a sufficient number of current homeowners are compelled to sell.

Alternatively, if policymakers aim to enhance homeownership opportunities in this income bracket, collaboration with the private sector to provide subsidies for new construction becomes essential to keep costs between $150,000 and $2500,000.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$100,000 – $149,999

These households are not as constrained to the existing housing stock and could afford new construction homes.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$150,000+

These households will have the greatest ability and access to buy or build in the current market.

The Future for Renter Households in West Liberty

Part II of this study highlighted that current renters are severely disadvantaged when compared to owner households. Roughly 96% of renters in West Liberty are lower income households and cost-burdened, with West Liberty having the highest average rental costs compared to the surrounding area and the State of Iowa. **The lack of affordability is mainly a challenge for those earning less than $35,000 per year, which includes entry-level workers in the top occupations that are commuting to West Liberty**. At the other end of the spectrum is a lack of options for those that are earning higher incomes. Due to homeownership being less attainable currently, more households are renting for longer periods. However, in general, renters expressed frustration with limited options and the quality of those options, and some stated they preferred to commute due to the availability of newer rentals in other surrounding counties. Should West Liberty want to attract and retain more households that are renting (especially those commuting), it needs to **add new rental units priced across the spectrum**. However, **the priority should be to reduce the percentage of cost-burdened renter households, which will likely require the addition of subsidized units**. Due to the majority of these lower income renters being cost-burdened, West Liberty could explore the option of establishing permanent affordable housing, which would maintain affordable units for low and moderate-income individuals or families in perpetuity.

West Liberty could meet the needs at both ends of the income spectrum by building **mixed-income developments**, where there is diversity in the types of units and price points offered within a building or housing development. This provides an avenue to meet a demonstrated need of appropriately priced units across the board,



while also increasing the housing stock with quality units. Mixed-income developments would also be representative of West Liberty's current balanced distribution of housing, where lower and higher assessed value units are scattered throughout the community rather than clustering in specific pockets (refer to **FIGURE 2.12** for context).

Many policymakers and elected officials assume that aspiring to homeownership is every household's end goal, and yes, that is widely true in a state like Iowa where living costs are cheaper than across the country. However, **the landscape of housing affordability, attainability, and need has evolved (more quickly in recent years), and the importance of providing right-priced rental units cannot be overstated**. It is important to remember that current renters are anticipated future homeowners, and if they are constantly burdened by high rental costs, that limits their ability to move towards homeownership in the future, something that has become increasingly more expensive. While homeownership remains a goal for many, **offering a variety of rental options is vital to ensuring housing accessibility and meeting the diverse needs of households**.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$0 – $19,999

This income bracket is the most cost-burdened of renters and has the most limited choice due to a significant deficit in the number of units under $500/month. There is a deficit in units, leaving 96% of households cost-burdened.

The construction of additional units needed to meet existing demand would need significant subsidization and incentives.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$20,000 – $34,000

These households also struggle with current housing costs, with **100% of households in this income bracket are cost-burdened**, despite having a surplus of units priced under $800/month.

Efforts to reduce the significant cost-burden these households face is important, whether that be the addition of new or converted right-priced units. Quality may be an underlying issue here too where these households have to pay higher rent for more quality housing.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$35,000 – $49,999

These households still struggle with housing costs despite only 21.3% of households being cost-burdened. The surplus within this bracket is likely serving all other incomes that are unable to find appropriate housing.

This income bracket resides on the threshold where households can either still qualify or become ineligible for subsidized housing resources, depending on the size of the household. It represents a delicate balance where individuals may no longer access certain resources but are still significantly constrained when covering the costs of market-rate units.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$50,000 – $74,999

The percentage of households in this income bracket has skyrocketed since 2010 and is now the largest group of renters today. They have a significant choice in what type of rental unit they can afford. However, there are limited options due to a lack of units priced accordingly.

It is likely that this renter group has increased over the years due to the inability to enter homeownership. Economic hardship and market instability are likely contributing factors.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$75,000+

These households can afford any type of rental unit in West Liberty, yet have few units to choose from in their respective price ranges.

Although the number of these households have increased over time, they still only represent 9% of the renter market. Mixed-income developments could include some luxury, market-rate units to cater to this income bracket, but these could be added incrementally so as not to flood the market.

Conclusion

This sub-market analysis provides valuable insights into the current challenges and opportunities West Liberty is facing. By understanding the dynamics of the housing market, communities can better address the diverse needs of residents and plan for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Specific recommendations for how to address challenges and anticipate future needs in West Liberty are available as part of the Muscatine County Housing Market Analysis.

Moving forward, key stakeholders must continue to collaborate across sectors, leverage available resources, and implement innovative strategies to ensure that everyone in West Liberty has access to safe, affordable, and quality housing. Together, we can work towards building a stronger and more resilient community for generations to come.



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