CHAPTER 4
Housing

Housing is a basic need. Furthermore, housing creates neighborhoods and community. The two, housing and neighborhoods, are intertwined. Good neighborhoods exist and thrive in the context of quality housing and the civic pride of residents.

This plan is intended to guide the City of Buena Vista in maintaining and enhancing its housing stock. Housing is primarily a private system that is influenced by factors beyond which local government plays a part. However, the City plays a role in housing and neighborhoods through the following:

- Education
- Traffic
- Public Safety
- Community Facilities/Recreation
- Taxation
- Zoning

The housing element of the Comprehensive Plan examines housing characteristics and trends. This will provide the background for evaluating implementation strategies necessary to achieve the City's housing goals. Much of the housing data comes from the 2010 Census and the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (ACS).

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLAN ELEMENTS

Historic Resources: Historic buildings such as office buildings, stores, schools, warehouses or homes can be modified, where appropriate, for affordable housing and mixed use opportunities.

Natural Resources and Infrastructure & Utilities. Housing is not just an economic or social issue but an environmental one as well. While making housing more energy- and resource-efficient can increase up-front capital costs, these measures have been shown to dramatically lower lifetime operation and maintenance costs, making housing more affordable in the long run.

Economy. A community's housing policies can have significant impact on economic development efforts. Housing costs should be consistent with prevailing wages, and low levels of housing availability can diminish the ability of local businesses to retain or expand a productive work force.

<u>Infrastructure & Utilities</u>. The amount and location of housing directly affect the pressures on public infrastructure such as roads, water and wastewater systems and electric utilities.

HOUSING PROFILE

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan discusses housing structures and who lives in them. Related information is included concerning housing age, condition, value, and overall affordability. The housing unit, however, is the building block of a neighborhood. Most neighborhoods are difficult to define geographically, but people relate to an area they call their neighborhood. The City of Buena Vista's neighborhoods are identified broadly in Map 4.1.

The distribution of the City's population, housing units, and households is shown in Map 4.2. According to Census 2010, Buena Vista has 2,936 housing units. In 2000, the number of housing units was 2,716. This is an increase of 220 units or 8.1 percent. During this same time, the population grew by 301 persons or 4.7 percent.
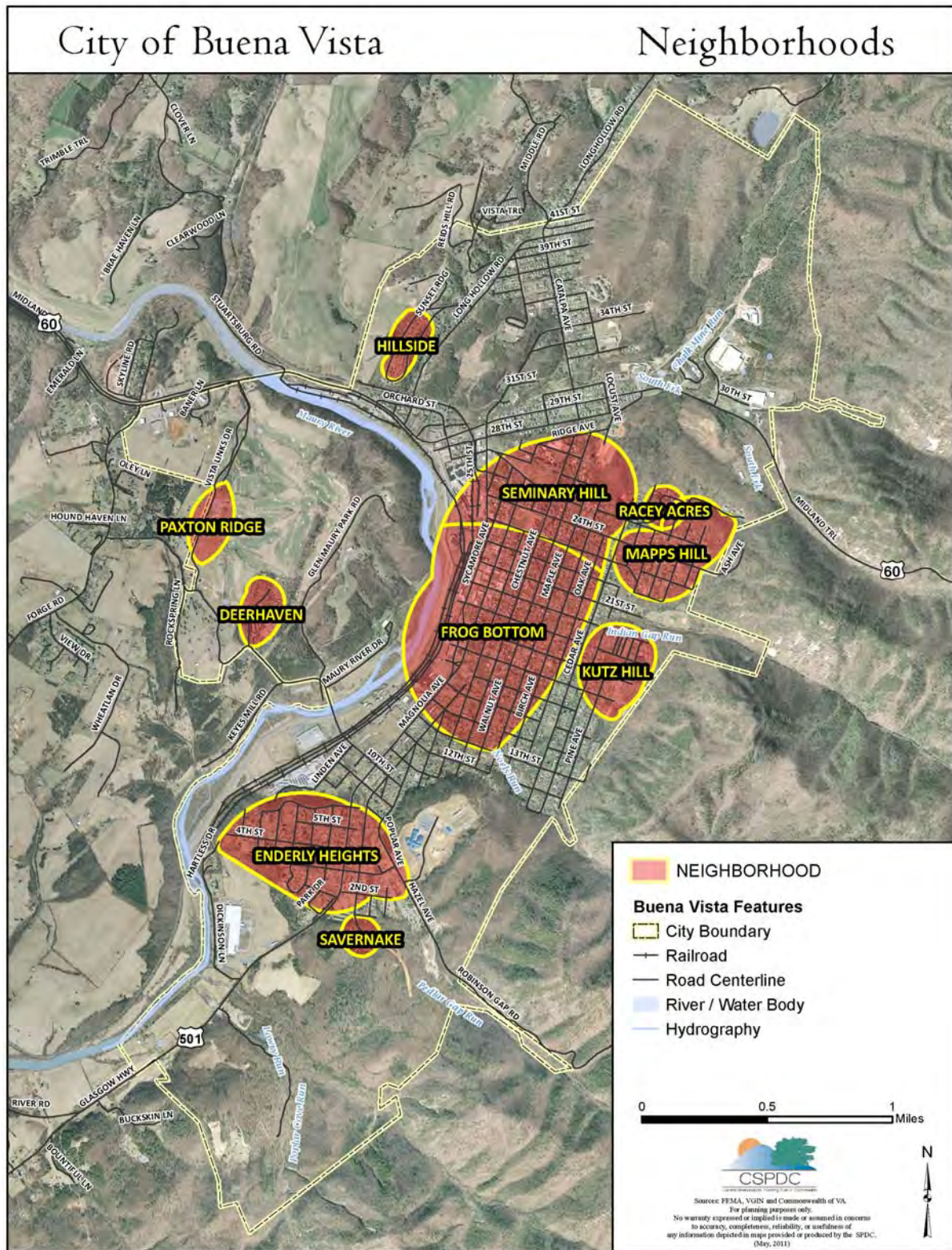
Structural Characteristics

The housing stock of Buena Vista is overwhelmingly comprised of single-family detached housing units as shown in Table 4.1. Furthermore, it has a higher percentage of single-family detached units than its neighboring localities and Virginia.

Table 4.1
Units in Structure
Percent of Total Housing Units

	Buena Vista (%)	Lexington (%)	Rockbridge (%)	Virginia (%)
1-unit, detached	82.8	62.2	80.1	62.6
1-unit, attached	0.4	3.0	0.1	10.1
2 units	1.6	8.6	1.6	1.7
3 or 4 units	2.9	2.7	0.9	2.8
5-9 units	0.0	10.3	2.3	4.7
10-19 units	2.7	1.7	1.7	5.9
20+ units	4.0	9.4	0.5	6.2
Mobile home	5.6	2.2	12.9	5.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Map 4.1

Map 4.2

City of Buena Vista   2010 Population and Housing

Population: 1427
Housing Units: 616
Households: 539

1

Population: 732
Housing Units: 285
Households: 270

2

Population: 1392
Housing Units: 426
Households: 381

5

Population: 847
Housing Units: 415
Households: 350

3

Population: 1094
Housing Units: 636
Households: 576

4

Population: 1158
Housing Units: 558
Households: 487

6

Buena Vista Boundary
US Census Block Group
Road Centerline
Railroad
River / Water Body
Hydrography

0   0.5   1 Miles

N

CSPDC

Source: US Census Bureau, VGIN and Commonwealth of VA.
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No warranty expressed or implied is made or assumed in concern
to accuracy, completeness, reliability, or usefulness of
any information depicted in maps provided or produced by the SPDC.
(August, 2011)

Annual building permit data provides a picture of residential construction activity. Over the last decade, most residential construction continues to be single-family detached units. However, as shown in Figure 4.1, construction activity in 2006 and 2007 included multi-unit structures. For multi-unit structures, the data indicates the number of units permitted rather than the number of buildings. The data also reflects the decline in the housing market; there were only four residential building permits in 2009.

Figure 4.1
Annual Residential Building Permits by Structure
Buena Vista 1999-2009
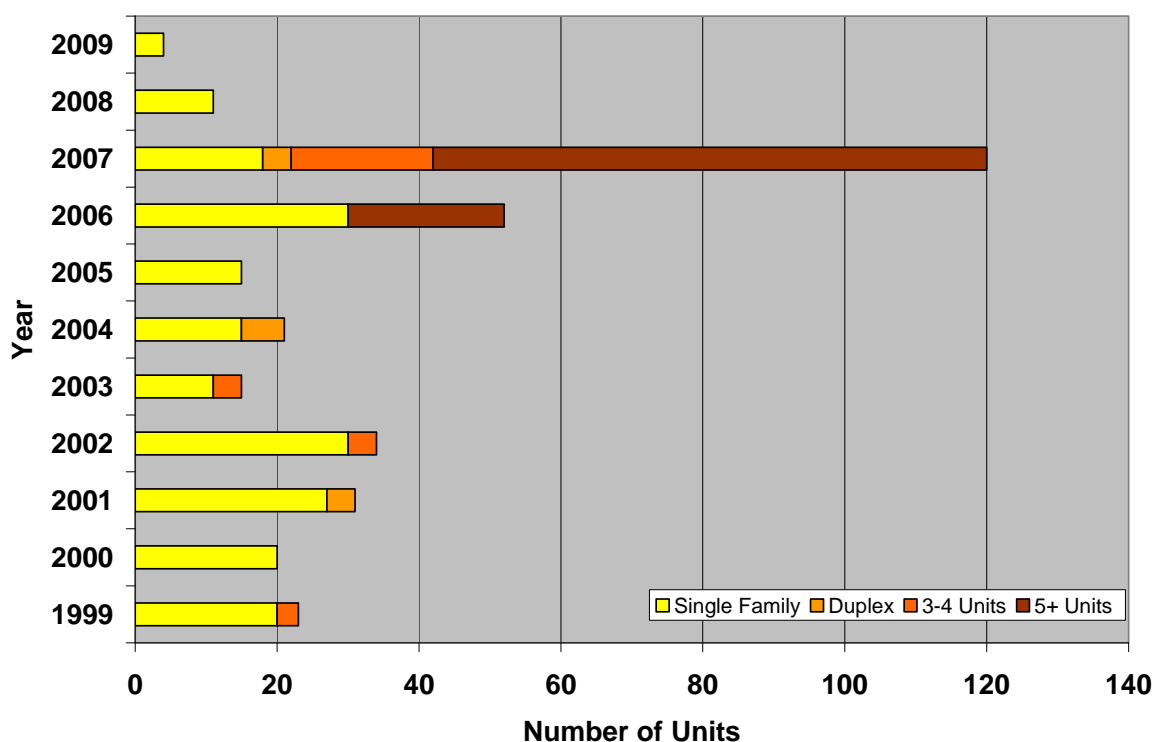
Source: Weldon Cooper Center
Note: Data excludes permits issued for mobile homes, garages and other out-buildings, additions and renovations, and commercial construction.

Buena Vista has an older housing stock. The median year built is 1964 (2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). The oldest housing in the City, not surprisingly, is located in downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. Housing in Block Group 5 has a median year of 1948. The northern portion of the City, Block Group 1, has newer construction with a median year of 1975 (See Map 4.3).

Map 4.3
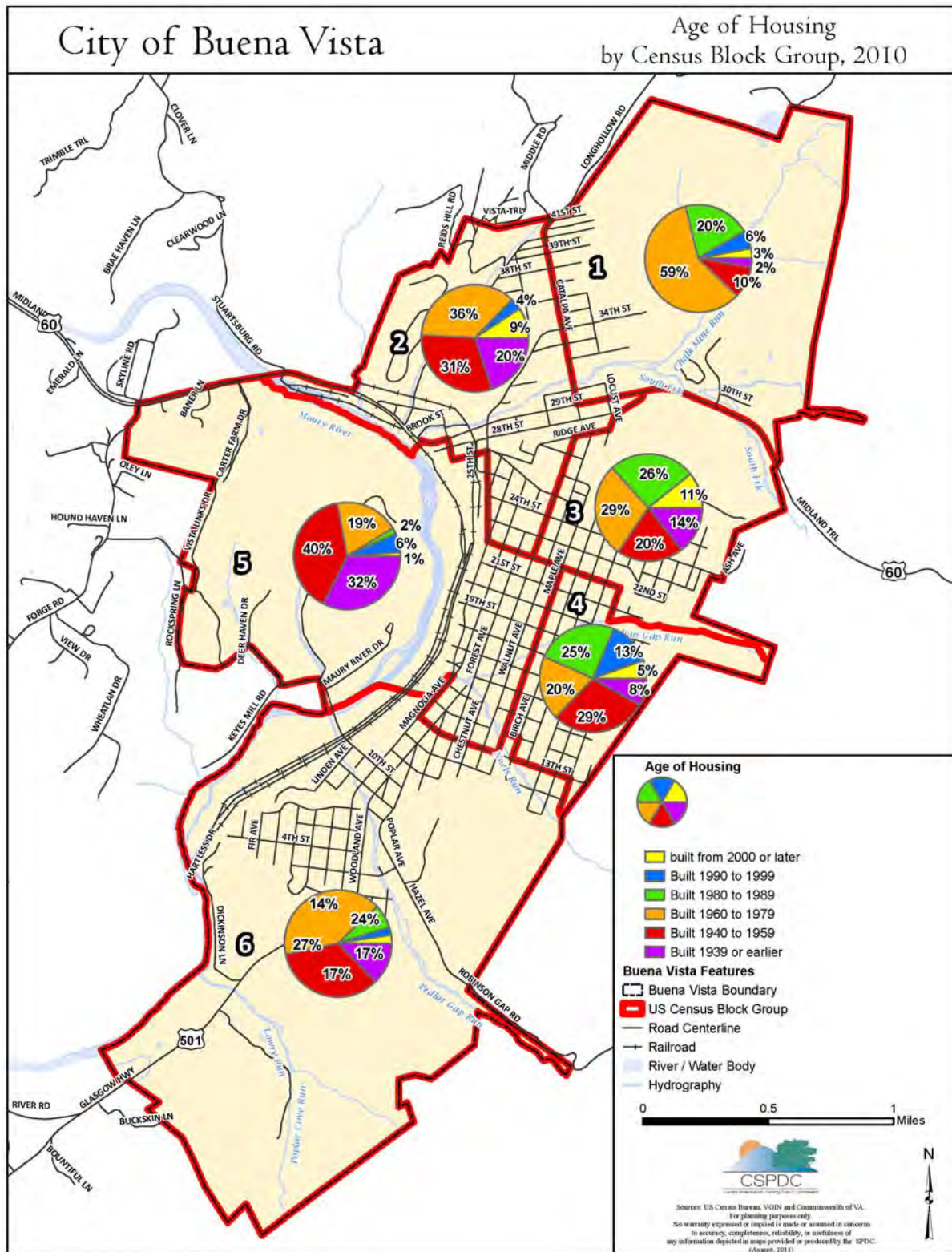
Approximately half of the housing units in Buena Vista were built from 1950 to 1979. About 15 percent were built during or before 1939. Once a home reaches thirty years in age, maintenance and major component replacement is more likely and desired features in modern housing may be missing. In Buena Vista, only about 1 in 5 homes is less than 30 years old. How the aging of housing is addressed contributes to either neighborhood vitality or decline. The physical condition of housing contributes to a neighborhood being an attractive place to live and it increases housing values. Furthermore, because a good share of Buena Vista's housing stock was built prior to 1940, there are opportunities for the preservation of historic structures.

Household Characteristics

A household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence. A household may be a single family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated persons who share living arrangements.

The number of households in Buena Vista increased between 1990 and 2010 by 8.3 percent while the population grew by only 3.8 percent. Over this same time, the number of persons per household decreased although the number of persons per household increased very slightly between 2000 and 2010. Persons per household is calculated by dividing the number of persons in households by the number of households. Furthermore, there were changes in the type of households.

The U.S. Census Bureau distinguishes two types of householders, a family householder and a nonfamily householder. A family household is a householder living with one or more people related to him or her by birth, marriage, or adoption. A nonfamily householder is a householder living alone or with nonrelatives only. As seen in Table 4.2, the number of nonfamily households increased between 1990 and 2010 from about one in four in 1990 to about one in three in 2010.

Table 4.2
Households, 1990-2010
Buena Vista

	1990	2000	2010	Number Change 1990-2010	Percent Change 1990-2010 (%)
Total Households	2,404	2,547	2,603	199	8.3
Family Households	1,779	1,749	1,726	-53	-3.0
Percent of Total	74.0	68.7	66.3	-7.7	--
Nonfamily Households	625	798	877	252	40.3
Percent of Total	26.0	31.3	33.7	7.7	--
Persons in Households	6,087	6,058	6,250	163	2.7
Persons per Household	2.53	2.38	2.40	-0.13	-5.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Census

Occupancy Characteristics

All occupied housing units are classified as either owner occupied or renter occupied. Map 4.4 shows this by Census Block Group. The percentage of owner-occupied units jumped between 1970 and 1980 from 67.6 percent to 75.7 percent. Homeownership increased at the same time that many homes were being constructed in Buena Vista. The total number of housing units increased by over 400 units during the 1970s. Table 4.3 shows the steady decline in homeownership since 1970.

Table 4.3
Owner/Renter Occupied Housing Units
Buena Vista, 1980-2010

	1980		1990		2000		2010	
	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)	Number	Percent (%)
Total Housing Units	2,406	100.0	2,494	100.0	2,716	100.0	2,936	100.0
Occupied Units	2,268	94.3	2,404	96.4	2,547	93.8	2,603	88.7
Owner Occupied	1,717	75.7	1,736	72.2	1,800	70.7	1,720	66.1
Renter Occupied	551	24.3	668	27.8	747	29.3	883	33.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000

There was a sharp decline in the number of owner occupied units in Buena Vista between 2000 and 2010. Neighboring localities as well as Virginia also experienced a decline, but it was not as great as Buena Vista's (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4
Owner Occupied Housing Units (%)
1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Buena Vista	75.7	72.2	70.7	66.1
Lexington	56.3	54.9	54.9	52.1
Rockbridge	76.1	74.9	77.7	75.0
Virginia	65.6	66.3	68.1	67.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010

Unoccupied housing units are considered vacant. According to Census 2010, 333 housing units were vacant and 2,603 were occupied. Map 4.5 shows the number and percentage of occupied and vacant housing by Census Block Group.

Vacancy status is determined by the terms under which the unit may be occupied, e.g., for rent, for sale, or for seasonal use only. The homeowner vacancy rate and rental vacancy rates are shown in Tables 4.5 and 4.6. There were significant increases between the 2000 Census and the 2010 Census.

Table 4.5
Homeowner Vacancy Rates (%)
1980-2010

|	1980	1990	2000	2010
Buena Vista	1.4	0.9	1.4	4.1
Lexington	1.7	0.9	2.1	4.2
Rockbridge	1.5	1.2	1.7	2.7
Virginia	3.5	2.1	1.5	2.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010
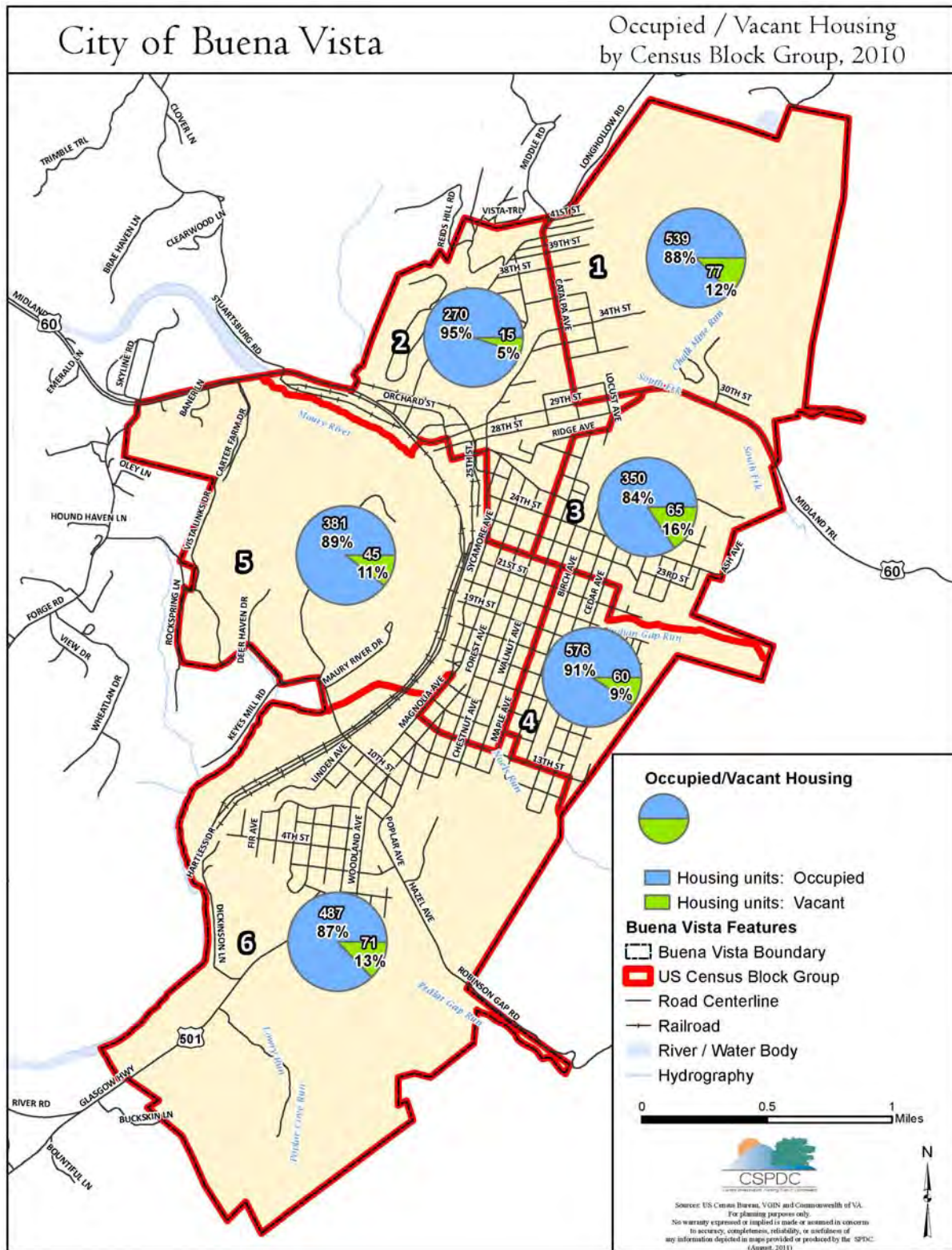
Table 4.6
Rental Vacancy Rates (%)
1980-2010

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Buena Vista	10.0	3.2	4.4	12.5
Lexington	9.0	3.5	3.6	10.5
Rockbridge	1.5	3.6	8.3	8.7
Virginia	3.5	8.1	5.2	7.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010

Map 4.4
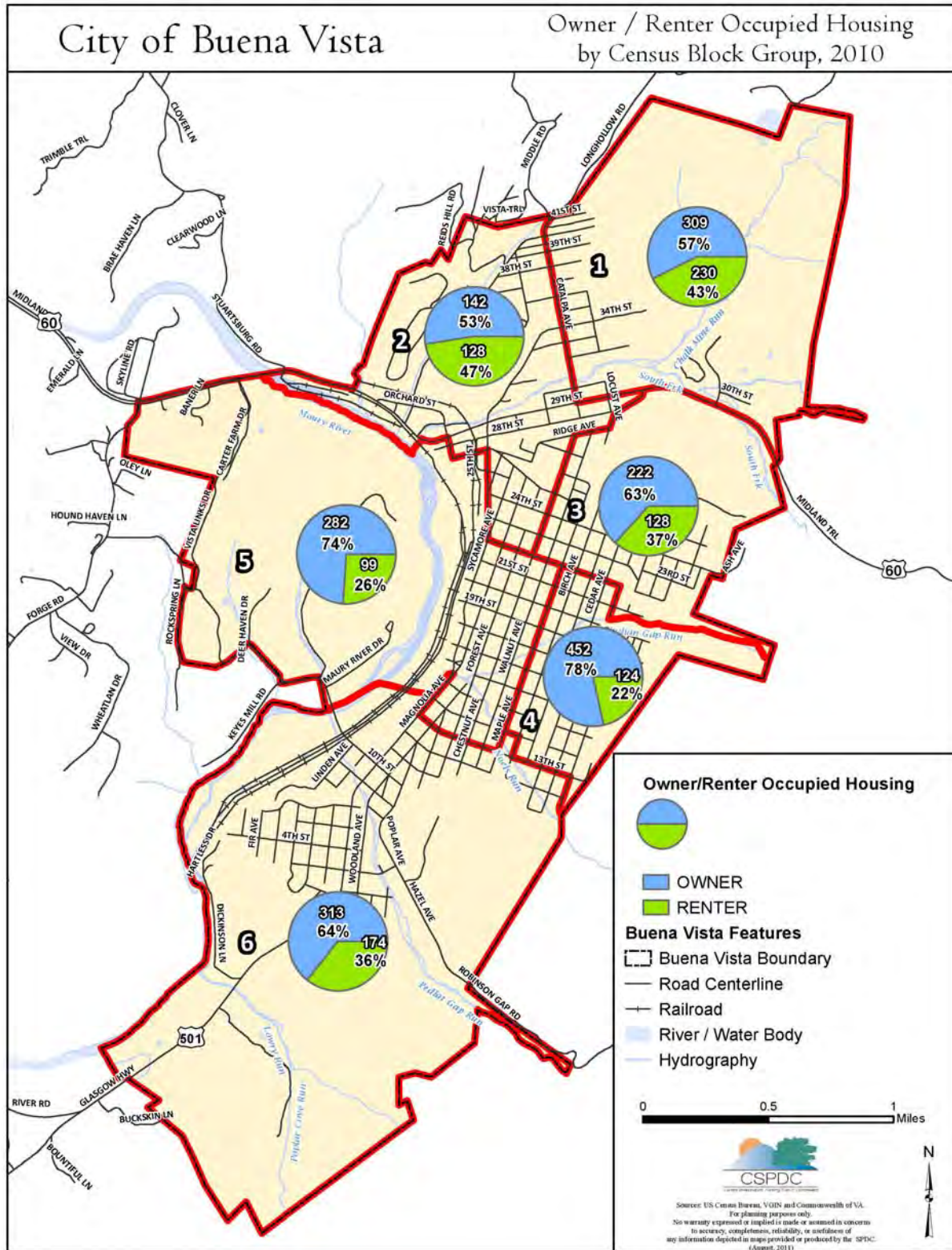
Map 4.5

Financial Characteristics

Housing value is the estimate of how much a property would sell for if it were for sale. The median value of owner-occupied housing by Census Block is shown on Map 4.6. This includes only 1-family houses on less than 10 acres and without a business or medical office on the property. This does not include mobile homes.

The highest housing values in Buena Vista are located in Block Group 3 which includes Racy Acres and Mapps Hill. The area with the lowest housing values is Block Group 1 which includes part of the Seminary Hill neighborhood as well as undeveloped land. According to the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, the median value of owner-occupied units in Buena Vista was $126,000. For comparison, the median value in Rockbridge County and Lexington were $179,100 and $245,600, respectively.
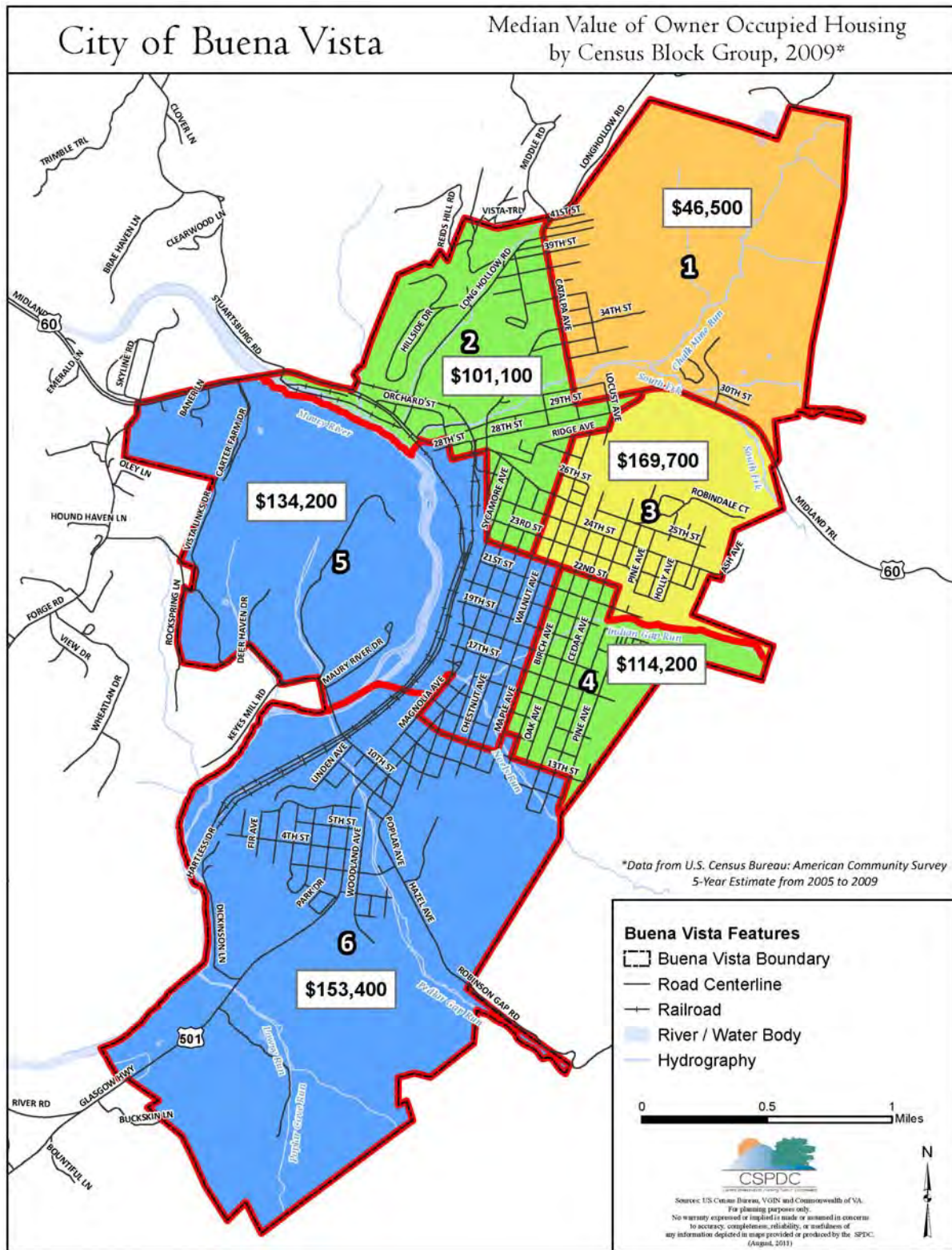
Table 4.7
Value, Owner-Occupied Units
Buena Vista

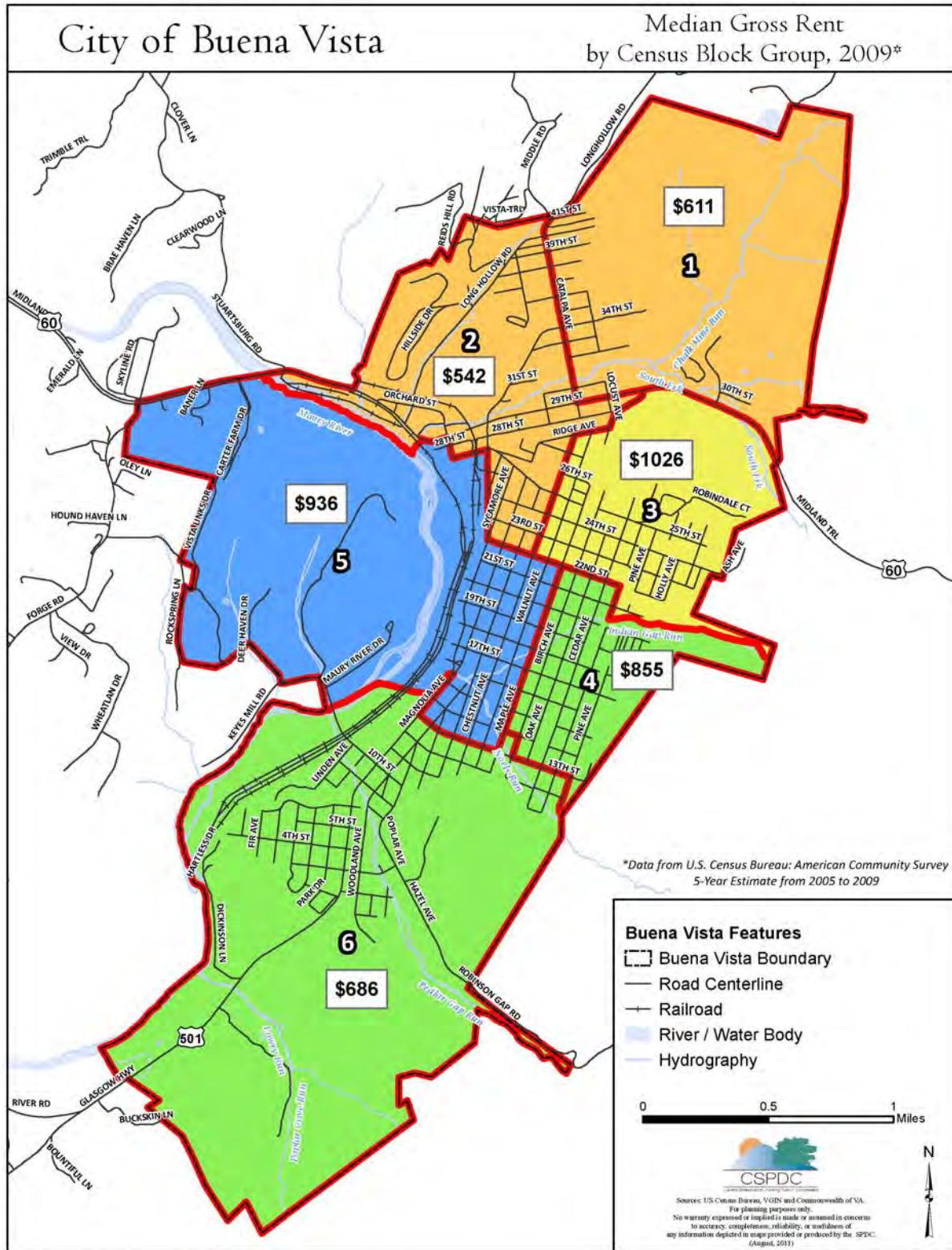| Value	Number	Percent (%)
Less than $50,000	123	7.3
$50,000 to $99,999	435	25.8
$100,000 to $149,999	579	34.3
$150,000 to $199,999	283	16.8
$200,000 to $299,999	188	11.1
$300,000 to $499,999	38	2.3
$500,000 to $999,999	42	2.5
$1,000,000 or more	0	0.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

As mentioned above, nearly 34 percent of housing units in Buena Vista are renter occupied. For occupied units paying rent, the median gross rent is $693. Gross rent is the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (electricity, gas, and water and sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.). Map 4.7 shows median gross rent by Census Block Group. Block Group 1 at the north end of the City has the lowest rents. This area also had the lowest housing values. Conversely, Block Group 3 of the City had the highest gross rents and housing values. Contract rent by Block Group is shown on Map 4.8.

Map 4.6

Map 4.7

City of Buena Vista

Median Gross Rent by Census Block Group, 2009*

*Data from U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate from 2005 to 2009

Buena Vista Features
- Buena Vista Boundary
- Road Centerline
- Railroad
- River / Water Body
- Hydrography
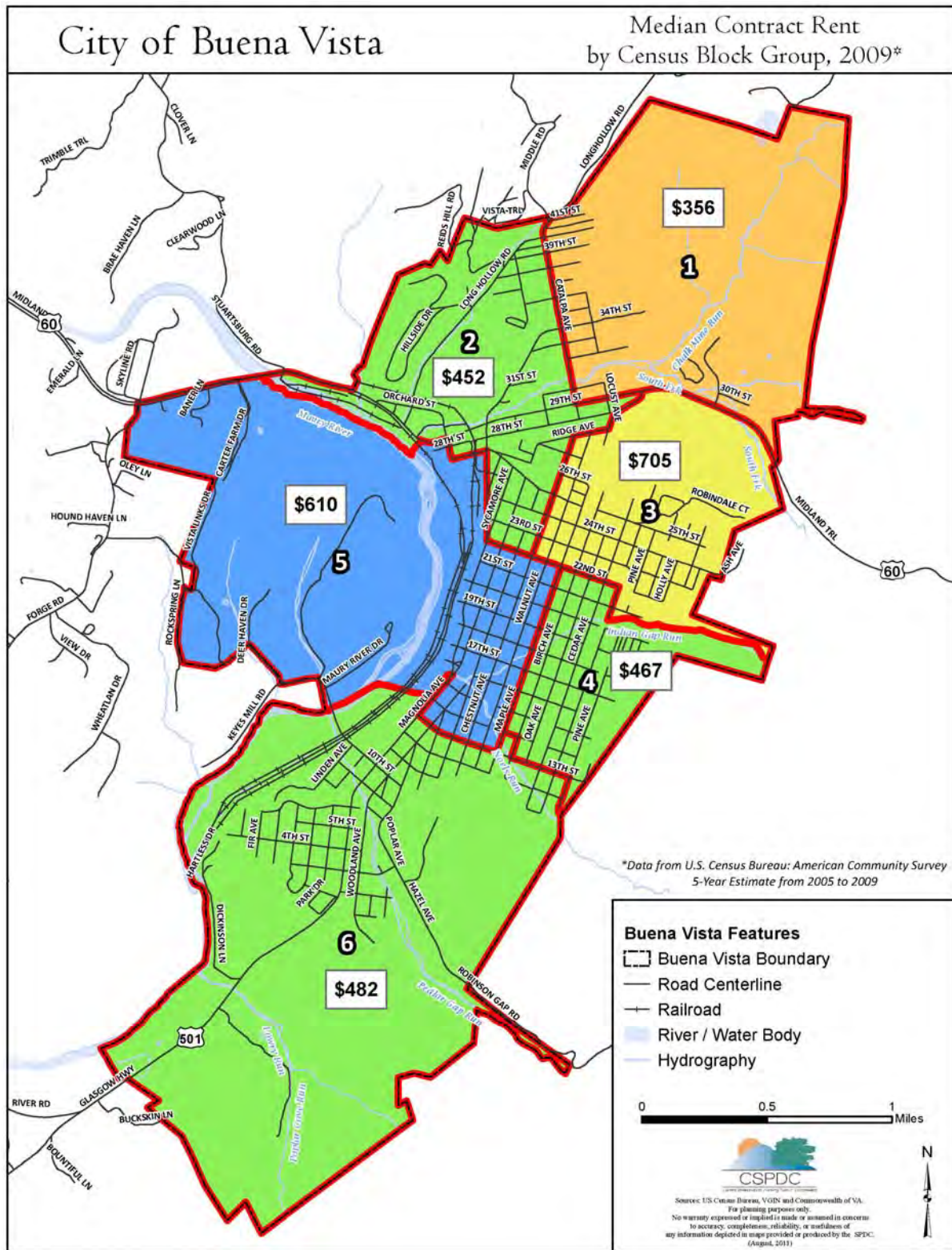
Map 4.8

Affordability

Monthly owner costs are the sum of payments for mortgages, real estate taxes, insurance on the property, utilities and fuels. The 2005-2009 American Community Survey estimated that 50.4 percent of those living in owner-occupied housing units had a mortgage. Their median monthly costs were $1,123. Those without a mortgage had median monthly owner costs of $373. The median gross rent, as reported by the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, was $693. Median monthly costs for owners and renters are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8
Median Monthly Costs

	Owner Costs with Mortgage		Gross Rent	
	2000 Census	2005-2009 ACS	2000 Census	2005-2009 ACS
Buena Vista	$680	$1,123	$403	$693
Lexington	982	1,391	434	686
Rockbridge	780	1,207	442	591
Virginia	1,144	1,668	650	931

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census and 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Besides housing values and rents, it is important to look at costs and the percentage of income that is devoted to housing costs. Housing expenditures that exceed 30 percent of household income have historically been viewed as an indicator of a housing affordability problem. If expenditures exceed 30 percent, the household is considered to be "cost burdened." Tables 4.9 – 4.11 reflect the cost burden for both owners and renters.

Table 4.9
Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income
Housing Units with a Mortgage
Buena Vista

Value	Number	Percent (%)
Less than 20.0 percent	369	43.4
20.0 to 24.9 percent	217	25.5
25.0 to 29.9 percent	50	5.9
30.0 to 34.9 percent	110	12.9
35.0 percent or more	104	12.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 4.10
Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income
Housing Units without a Mortgage
Buena Vista

Value	Number	Percent (%)
Less than 10.0 percent	319	38.1
10.0 to 14.9 percent	143	17.1
15.0 to 19.9 percent	98	11.7
20.0 to 24.9 percent	39	4.7
25.0 to 29.9 percent	30	3.6
30.0 to 34.9 percent	38	4.5
35.0 percent or more	171	20.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 4.11
Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income
Occupied Units Paying Rent
Buena Vista

Value	Number	Percent (%)
Less than 15.0 percent	83	9.2
15.0 to 19.9 percent	236	26.1
20.0 to 24.9 percent	109	12.1
25.0 to 29.9 percent	26	2.9
30.0 to 34.9 percent	26	2.9
35.0 percent or more	424	46.9
Not computed	100	--

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Residence

About 1 in 7 householders moved into their unit prior to 1970. The greatest number of householders, however, moved into their unit during the second half of the 2000s. Of the 692 households that moved into their unit in 2005 or later, 472 were renter-occupied and 220 were owner-occupied. Of those that moved during the last year, most came from a different locality in Virginia (2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates).

Table 4.12
Year Householder Moved into Unit
Occupied Housing Units
Buena Vista

Value	Number	Percent (%)
Moved in 2005 or later	692	25.7
2000 to 2004	483	17.9
1990 to 1999	456	16.9
1980 to 1989	400	14.9
1970 to 1979	258	9.6
1969 or earlier	403	15.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

LAND USE IMPLICATIONS

Land Use Links

It makes sense to consider the links between housing locations and daily activities such as jobs, recreation, shopping, and education. Connectivity between these should be promoted to improve transportation options for residents of all ages and incomes, provide recreation opportunities, and reduce pollution. Interconnecting residential areas to amenities and daily needs is particularly important for those that choose or are unable to drive such as older and disabled residents and Southern Virginia University (SVU) students.

Because the City of Buena Vista is based on a grid street network, roadway connectivity is high. However, sidewalks are not provided consistently and other obstacles such as traffic crossings may limit pedestrian and bicycle connections between housing and schools, shopping, and recreation.

Housing Growth Potential

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the number of housing units has increased by 220 units or 8.1 percent between 2000 and 2010. The population during this same time increased by 301 persons (4.7 percent) and 56 households (2.2 percent). Under healthy growth conditions, more homes are built than households are created to live in them.

The slow population growth pattern for Buena Vista is not anticipated to change. According to projections by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), the population of Buena Vista is expected to grow only slightly over the next 20 years. However, the VEC projection does not reflect anticipated increased student enrollment and staffing needs at Southern Virginia University. The need for new housing in Buena Vista will be dependent on the University's growth or other activities that interrupt historical trends.

Three areas have been identified for residential growth. The first is the Hill Top District which has remaining lots for residential development. The other two areas include (1) the northern end of the City and (2) the southern end of the City. Each of these two areas consists of approximately 450 acres of undeveloped land. The northern area presently is not served by public sewer and water. Both areas are envisioned to be mixed-use development (See Future Land Use, Map 9.1). The challenge to developing these areas, even for residential use, is the topography. Because there are limited opportunities for new subdivision development in the City, appropriate infill and redevelopment are central housing and neighborhood strategies.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Ordinances. During the past three years, the Buena Vista City Council has attempted to address housing deterioration and blight through the introduction of a Code Enforcement ordinance and a Rental Property ordinance. Both establish standards equivalent to those in the International Property Maintenance Code published by the International Code Council. The adoption of these ordinances put into place language that permits a greater emphasis on providing a safe and sanitary living environment for all residents.

Green Forest Neighborhood. In June 2009, the City requested CDBG Planning Grant assistance from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development for rehabilitation activities intended to assist low and moderate income households in the Green Forest Neighborhood. The Green Forest Neighborhood is primarily located along East Midland Trail (U.S. Route 60) and bordered by Brook Street to the east and Orchard Street to the south. The neighborhood includes approximately 41 homes. The neighborhood location is on the primary western entrance corridor to the City. In many ways, the neighborhood presents the first impression of Buena Vista.

The purpose of the CDBG Planning Grant was to identify housing and other infrastructure needs within the project area. Additionally, residents were to be surveyed to confirm needs and income status. The initial steps of a public meeting, housing assessment, infrastructure assessment, and neighborhood survey were completed as required. The project is currently on hold.

Housing

Hill Top-Glen Maury Park Master Plan. Completed in 2002, the Hill Top-Glen Maury Park Master Plan was a vision for Glen Maury Park, a mixed-used development, and a residential area of single-family homes. The zoning ordinance was amended in 2003 to add regulations for the Hill Top District. The regulations were intended to create a pedestrian-scaled neighborhood with a focus on building design elements.

SUMMARY OF TRENDS

This housing analysis has identified the following trends:

- Buena Vista has an older housing stock.

- The number of housing units increased at a greater rate than the population and number of households.

- Over a quarter of housing units are occupied by householders that moved in during 2005 or later.

- The percentage of renters is increasing.

- Neighborhoods need improved walkability to community services.

- Infill and redevelopment are central to housing and neighborhood planning.

Housing
STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

Goal 1: Housing

The City of Buena Vista's neighborhoods will be stable and diverse, providing a wide range of housing options, linking residents to a variety of land uses which meet the needs of the community.

To achieve this goal, the following critical success factors must be accomplished:
- Promote attractive neighborhoods.
- Form strong relationships with neighborhoods.
- Build on assets and stabilize existing neighborhoods.
- Provide housing choice within neighborhoods.
- Provide connectivity.
- Promote mixed uses.
- Establish systems capable of recognizing neighborhood decline and disinvestment.

		Priority	**Responsibility**
5A	Organize community forums to address housing strategies and opportunities and education.	L	Community Development
5B	Involve community members to help develop neighborhood plans.	M	City-wide
5C	Market local neighborhood improvement success stories and communicate techniques.	On Going	Community Development
5D	Promote street tree plantings, community gardens, and similar public landscape features.	L	Planning, Parks & Rec, Public Works
5E	Provide a range of incentives to create high quality and affordable housing such as reasonable density increases, development fee waivers, time-limited property tax abatements, expedited development reviews, and other focused incentives.	H	Community Development, Planning
5F	Develop a neighborhood planning process.	H	Community Development
5G	Identify older and abandoned structures in need of preservation, stabilization, repair, or demolition.	H	Planning
5H	Continue to develop public and private partnerships in providing low and moderate-income housing.	H	Community Development
5I	Identify appropriate locations for compatible infill housing that would replace vacant or underutilized sites in existing neighborhoods.	H	Planning
5J	Develop a water policy and plan that ensures that adequate water quality, pressure, and quantity are provided.	H	Public Works
5K	Enforce property codes.	H	Planning

Housing

		Priority	Responsibility
5L	Streamline codes to allow maintenance and upgrades with a minimum of permits and regulations.	M	Planning
5M	Annually review and update the existing property maintenance code and enforcement policies and practice evaluate their impacts on neighborhood stabilization and needs.	On Going	Planning
5N	Explore the use of zoning overlay districts to strengthen the integrity of historic neighborhoods.	M	Planning
5O	Develop incentives to encourage investment in older homes, particularly historic homes.	H	Economic Development
5P	Facilitate the development of new downtown housing.	L	Economic Development, Planning
5Q	Favor housing projects that cut long-term costs by incorporating sustainable design elements.	L	Planning
5R	Support residential weatherization, maintenance, and rehabilitations programs.	H	Economic Development
5S	Encourage the location of sidewalks along roadways.	H	Planning
5T	Promote and comprehensively plan for walkways, bikeways, and open spaces that link to and between neighborhoods, schools, shopping and other amenities.	H	Economic Development, Planning, Parks & Rec
5U	Plan with various stakeholder to coordinate the future locations of public facilities such as schools, libraries, and services.	M	Economic Development, Planning, City Council
5V	Provide representation on the Rockbridge Poverty Commission	M	Economic Development
5W	Communicate with SVU to anticipate student, staff and faculty housing needs.	On Going	Economic Development
5X	Review and update the mixed use component of the Hill Top-Glen Maury Park Master Plan.	H	Planning, Economic Development

High (H) = Years 1-5
Medium (M) = Years 5-7
Low (L) = Years 7-10
On Going = Strategies with zero to minimal costs associated with implementation. These strategies may be completed at any time throughout the life of the plan.