



Local government leaders sounding alarms over housing shortages spreading across Michigan

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This report presents the views of Michigan's local government leaders on local housing issues, including housing capacity and condition in their community, and awareness of various state-level housing programs available to local communities. These findings are based on statewide surveys of local government leaders in the spring 2023 wave of the Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS), with comparisons from the fall 2017 wave.

The Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) is an ongoing census survey of all 1,856 general purpose local governments in Michigan conducted since 2009 by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP). Respondents for the Spring 2023 wave of the MPPS include county administrators, board chairs, and clerks; city mayors, managers, and clerks; village presidents, managers, and clerks; and township supervisors, managers, and clerks from 1,307 jurisdictions across the state.



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Key Findings

- Statewide, 41% of Michigan local officials report a shortage of single-family housing options in their community, up sharply from 23% who said the same in 2017. In addition, 46% say they have too little multi-family housing, also up significantly from 30% six years ago.
 - » In 2017, concerns over lack of single-family housing were particularly high among officials from “mostly urban” communities. Now, these concerns have increased and spread among local leaders of all kinds, from those in rural (40%) and mostly rural (44%) communities, to those from mostly urban (37%) and urban (41%) jurisdictions.
 - » Regionally, officials from cities, villages, and townships in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) are the most likely to express concern about insufficient single-family housing (59%) and multi-family housing (61%) in their jurisdictions.
- A majority (54%) of local officials statewide say their jurisdiction has too little entry-level housing, a large jump from the 34% who said the same in 2017. In addition, 42% report a shortage in mid-range housing (up from 28% in 2017), while 28% say they have too little high-end housing supply (only slightly higher than the 25% who said so in 2017).
- Today, 40% believe their community lacks sufficient affordable housing, compared with 27% who believe it has enough such supply.
 - » A majority (52%) of local leaders from both the U.P. and the Northern Lower Peninsula say their communities currently lack sufficient affordable housing.
- Over half (51%) of local leaders from Michigan cities, villages and townships report housing stock that is out-of-date, and 53% say their housing stock suffers from blight. These assessments are essentially unchanged from 2017.
- When asked whether their local government has policies or zoning requirements that hinder new construction or housing renovation in the community, just 13% statewide agree, while 47% disagree.
- Meanwhile, concerns about an insufficient regional construction workforce to meet demand have risen sharply over the past six years. Just 24% of local leaders say they currently have a sufficient regional construction workforce to meet demand for new or renovated housing, compared 40% who said the same in 2017.

Background

Michigan has not been immune to concerning national trends in the housing sector. The COVID-19 pandemic created sudden demand for housing in rural, suburban, and smaller urban areas at a time when the existing housing inventory was already facing a historic shortage, leading to soaring home prices.¹ Supply chain disruptions in construction materials and rising interest rates have complicated potential solutions. As a result, by some estimates Michigan's housing stock is almost 16,000 homes short of demand² and the cost of for-sale homes has increased by 84% over the last decade.³ Notably, the Grand Rapids Metro Area now has the 5th lowest current housing supply out of 100 metro areas in the United States.⁴

Michigan renters are facing similar challenges, with limited supply leading to soaring rental prices. Recent data suggest rental prices in Michigan climbed by more than 8% in 2022 after similar increases in the prior two years.⁵ Michigan now ranks 28th in the nation for rental affordability, according to data reported by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, which calculates that a Michigan resident earning minimum wage needs to work 68 hours weekly to afford a market rate one-bedroom rental.⁶

These challenges have the potential to disrupt Michigan's current economic development strategy. Looking to attract new industry and business, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation has engaged in a national campaign highlighting the state as an ideal location for numerous industries, including emergent technology companies in the electric vehicle and semiconductor industries.⁷ Yet Michigan businesses are already communicating to state officials that they are hindered by limited housing options for workers and are calling on state and federal subsidies as a remedy.⁸

State officials are working to respond to these concerns. For example, at the end of 2022, the Michigan Legislature passed a series of bills to expand incentives to build more affordable housing across the state.⁹ More recently, tens of millions of dollars have been allocated to housing programs as part of the State's 2024 fiscal year budget.¹⁰ And in August 2023, the Michigan Strategic Fund awarded millions more in funding for a number of rental and workforce housing programs in Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Allegan, Ottawa, and Kent counties.¹¹ Specific short-term goals outlined in Michigan's first Statewide Housing Plan include building or rehabilitating 75,000 housing units within the next five years.¹²

In addition to spearheading the Statewide Housing Plan, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) provides financial and technical assistance through public and private partnerships to create and preserve affordable housing in communities across the urban-rural spectrum. The Neighborhood Enhancement Program provides small grants up to \$75,000 to non-profits and local governments for projects such as homeowner repairs and accessibility upgrades. The Missing Middle Housing Program provides grant funding for the construction or rehabilitation of rental or for-sale homes intended for residents with incomes between 60% and 120% of the area median income. Furthermore, the Housing Opportunities Promoting Energy-Efficiency (MI-HOPE) program is supporting non-profits and local governments with \$25 million in available funding to be spent on energy efficiency upgrades in homes.¹³

To get a sense of how local government leaders view the issues surrounding housing in their communities, the Spring 2023 Michigan Public Policy Survey (MPPS) asked local officials both about the current supply and condition of their local community's housing stock, the role their own local government might have in improving housing conditions, and their familiarity with state programs to support local communities' housing needs. (Note: to avoid double counting issues at the community level, most of the findings in this report present responses from city, village, and township officials while excluding those from county officials who would otherwise be reporting on the same communities within their counties.)

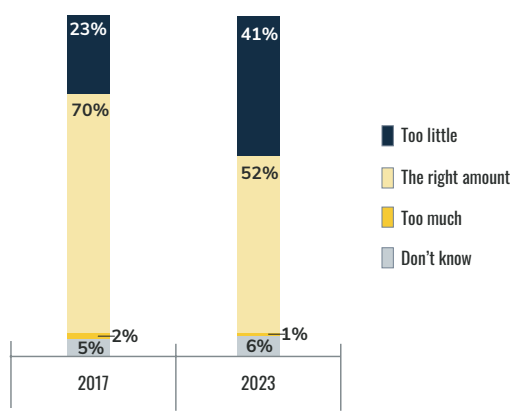
A sharp increase in concerns of insufficient single-family housing

In both 2017 and 2023, the MPPS asked local officials whether their jurisdiction had sufficient supply to meet local demand for a variety of housing types, starting with single-family housing. As shown in *Figure 1a*, among Michigan township, village, and city officials statewide, 41% currently report their jurisdiction has “too little” single-family housing, up significantly from 23% who said the same just six years earlier. Meanwhile, in 2023, just over half (52%) think they have “the right amount” of single-family housing, down from 70% who felt this way in 2017.

In 2017, concerns over lack of single-family housing were particularly high among officials from “mostly urban” communities. Now, these concerns have increased and spread among local leaders from all types of places, from those in rural (40%) and mostly rural (44%) communities, to those from mostly urban (37%) and urban (41%) jurisdictions (see *Figure 1b*).

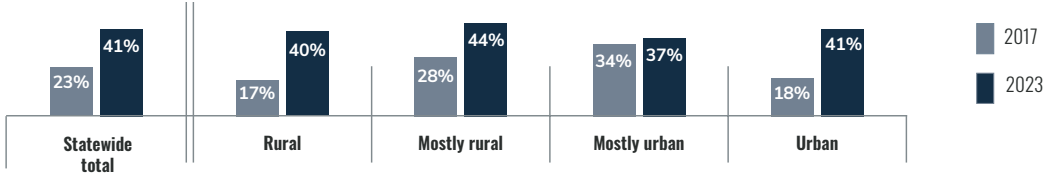
However, there are significant differences by region, with 59% of local leaders from the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) saying their jurisdiction has too little single-family housing stock, compared with 32% from the East Central Lower Peninsula and 31% in Southeast Michigan (see *Figure 1c*). Still, concerns about insufficient single-family housing have risen substantially in every region of the state since 2017.

Figure 1a
Local officials’ assessments of supply of single-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023



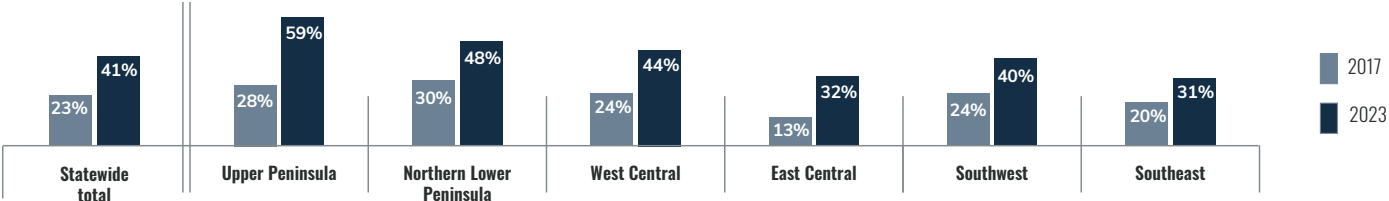
Note: calculations exclude county responses

Figure 1b
Percentage reporting too little single-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023, by urban-rural self-identification



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Figure 1c
Percentage reporting too little single-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023, by region



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Widespread concerns over lack of multi-family housing as well

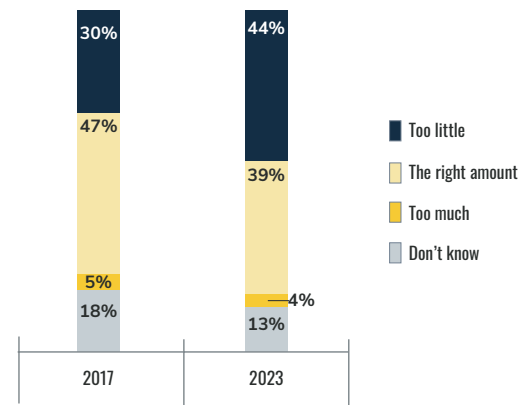
Concerns over insufficient multi-family housing have also increased over the past six years, with 46% of local leaders currently reporting the problem, compared with 30% in 2017 (see *Figure 2a*). Meanwhile, the percentage who believe their community has the right amount of multi-family housing has dropped from 47% to 39% in 2023. Few (4%) say their jurisdiction has too much multi-family housing, while 13% are unsure as of 2023.

Again, these assessments are found among local leaders from communities across the rural-urban spectrum. In rural jurisdictions, 43% say they have too little multi-family housing, up from 25% in 2017 (see *Figure 2b*). Similarly, 48% of leaders from urban jurisdictions report too little multi-family housing, up from 33% six years ago. While local leaders from mostly urban cities, villages, and townships are the least likely to say they have too little multi-family housing, nonetheless 37% report the problem today, up from 34% in 2017.

As with regional differences regarding insufficient single-family housing, officials from cities, villages, and townships in the U.P. are again the most likely to express concern about insufficient multi-family housing, with 61% saying their community has too little, more than double the 29% who felt this way six years earlier (see *Figure 2c*).

Figure 2a

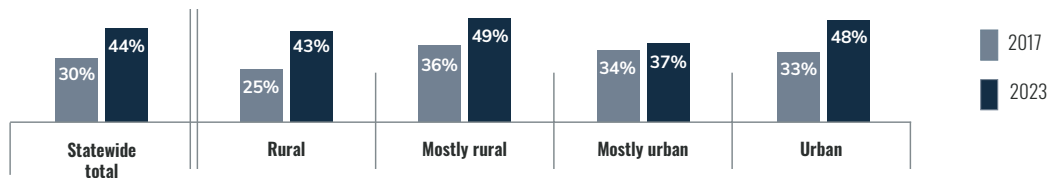
Local officials' assessments of supply of multi-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Figure 2b

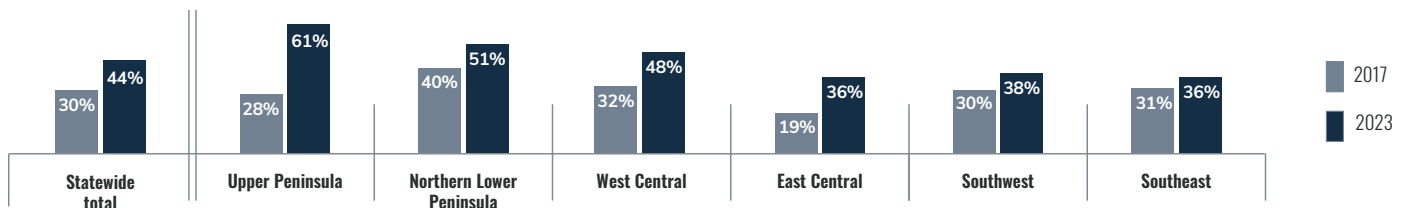
Percentage reporting too little multi-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023, by urban-rural self-identification



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Figure 2c

Percentage reporting too little multi-family housing in their jurisdiction, 2017 vs. 2023, by region

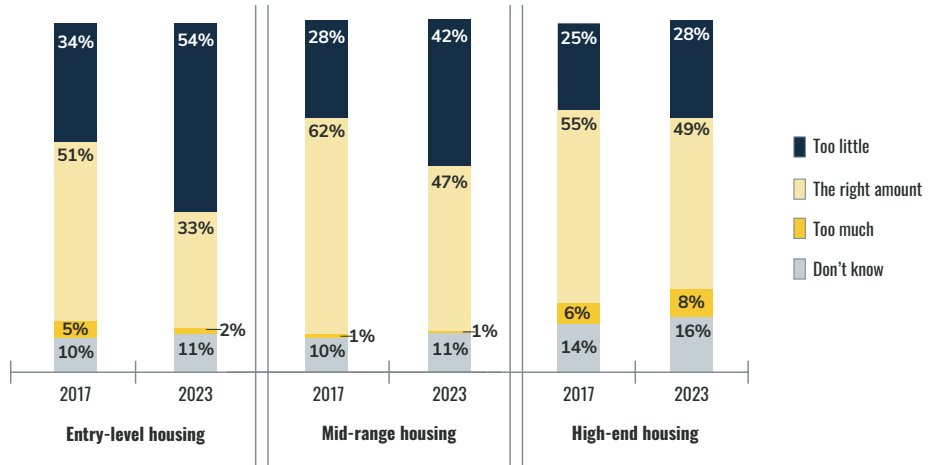


Note: calculations exclude county responses

Most Michigan local leaders say their jurisdiction has a shortage of entry-level housing

When it comes to the local housing supply in different market price segments, local officials are most likely to report shortages in entry-level housing, and these reports have increased sharply in a short period of time. Over half (54%) of city, village, and township officials statewide say their jurisdiction has too little entry-level housing, a large jump from the 34% who said the same in 2017 (see *Figure 3a*). Meanwhile, 42% report a shortage in mid-range housing (up significantly from 28% in 2017), and 28% say they have too little high-end housing supply (only slightly higher than the 25% who said the same in 2017). Statewide, very few believe they have too much housing in any of these segments.

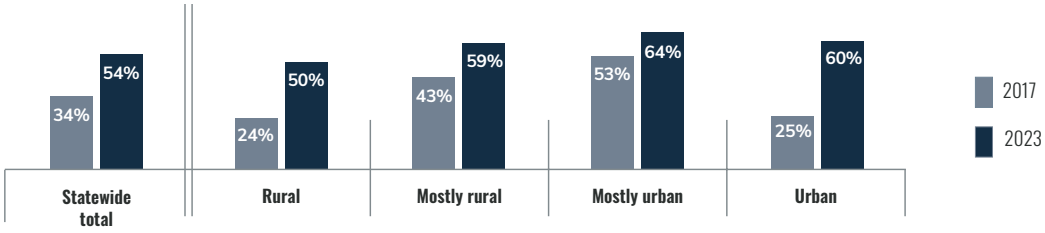
Figure 3a
Local officials' assessments of their jurisdiction's supply in housing market segments, 2017 vs. 2023



Note: calculations exclude county responses

In 2017, just a quarter of local leaders from both rural and urban communities said their communities had too little entry-level housing, but by 2023 those percentages have more than doubled. Currently, local leaders in mostly urban jurisdictions (64%) are the most likely to report too little entry-level housing, followed closely by officials from fully urban (60%) and mostly rural (59%) jurisdictions (see *Figure 3b*). Rural leaders are the least likely to report too little entry-level housing, though the problem is still reported by half of these jurisdictions (50%). However, 14% of rural local leaders are unsure, compared with just 4-7% from the other types of communities (not shown).

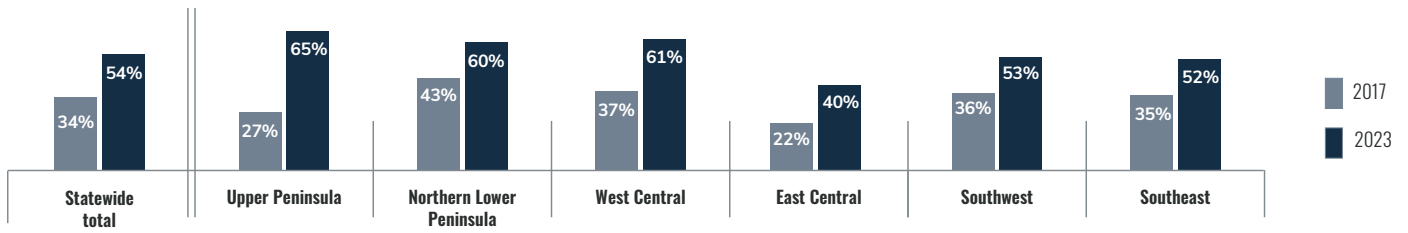
Figure 3b
Local officials' assessments of shortages in entry-level housing, 2017 vs. 2023, by urban-rural self-identification



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Once again by region—as with single- and multi-family housing—leaders from the U.P. are the most likely to sound the alarm about insufficient entry-level housing, with nearly two-thirds (65%) reporting the problem, more than twice the percentage from 2017 (see *Figure 3c*). Particularly high percentages of local officials from the West Central region (61%) and Northern Lower Peninsula (60%) also report shortages in their communities' entry-level housing. The East Central region is the only area where fewer than half (40%) report too little entry-level housing in their community.

Figure 3c
Local officials' assessments of shortages in entry-level housing, 2017 vs. 2023, by region



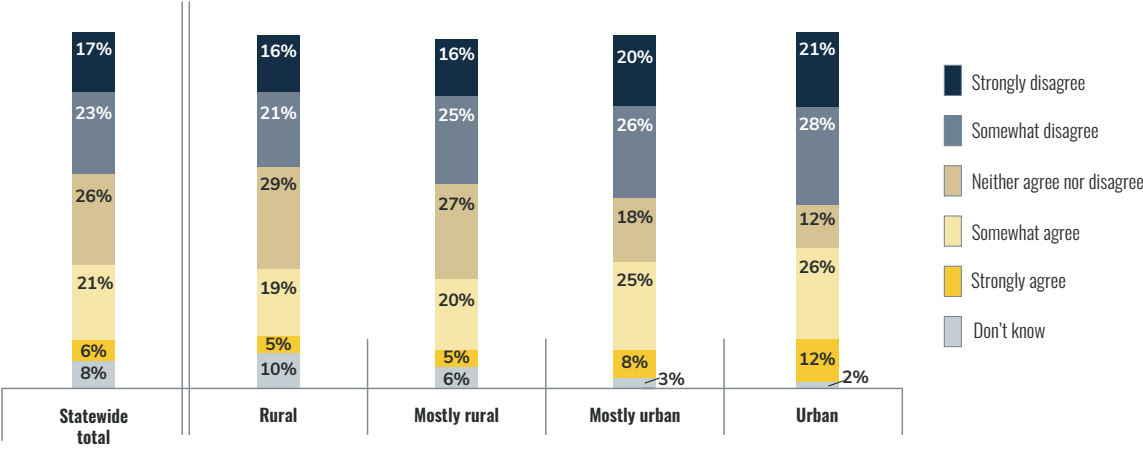
Note: calculations exclude county responses

Just over a quarter of jurisdictions statewide report sufficient affordable housing

As shown in *Figure 4a*, 40% of city, village, and township leaders in 2023 either somewhat disagree (23%) or strongly disagree (17%) that their community has sufficient affordable housing, while 27% either somewhat agree (21%) or strongly agree (6%) the community has what’s needed. Though there are some differences across the urban-rural spectrum, concerns outweigh confidence in each type of community.

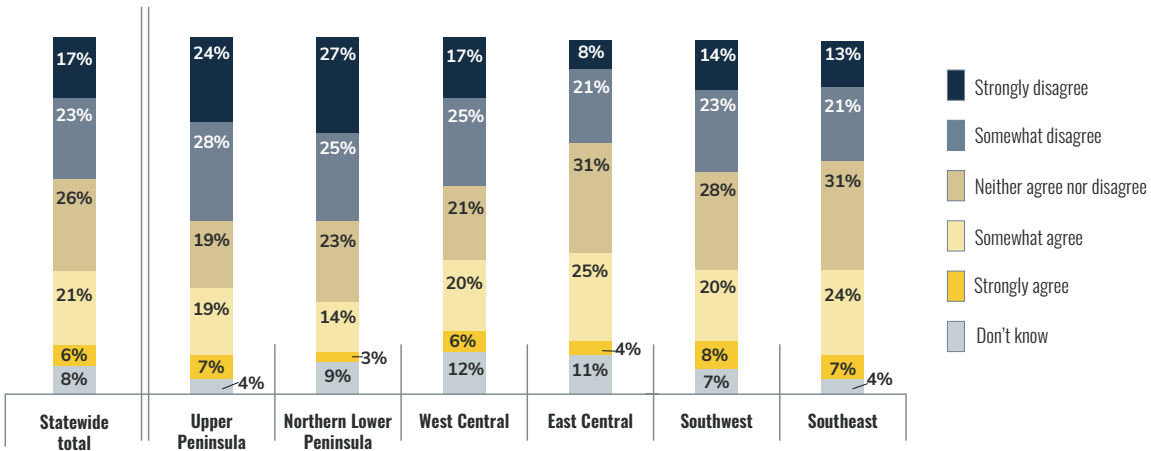
Looking regionally, a majority (52%) of local leaders from both the U.P. and the Northern Lower Peninsula say their communities currently lack sufficient affordable housing (see *Figure 4b*). Again, concerns outweigh confidence in each region, except in the East Central Lower Peninsula where they are evenly balanced.

Figure 4a
Local officials’ assessments of whether their jurisdiction has sufficient affordable housing, 2023, by urban-rural self-identification



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Figure 4b
Local officials’ assessments of whether their jurisdiction has sufficient affordable housing, 2023, by region

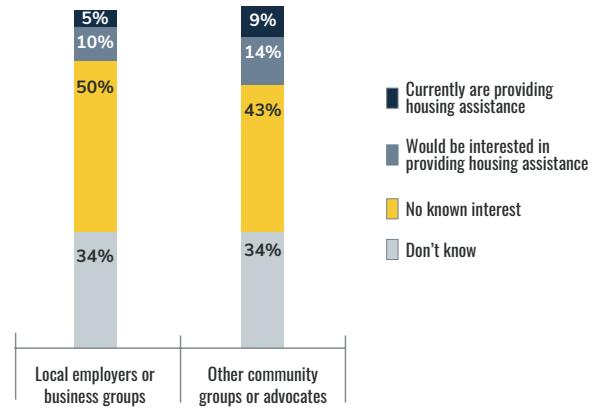


Note: calculations exclude county responses

Few communities have local employers or organizations that are assisting with housing challenges

When asked whether there are organizations in their community interested in helping develop affordable housing or in subsidizing workforce housing, just 5% of local leaders statewide identify local employers or business groups and just 9% point to other community groups or advocates currently doing so (see *Figure 5*). Another 10-14% say there are local businesses or community groups who might be interested in providing housing assistance but are not currently doing so. Meanwhile, most local leaders either don't believe there is any such local interest in providing housing assistance or are unsure.

Figure 5
Percentage of jurisdictions with local employers or other community groups interested in helping develop affordable housing in community or subsidizing housing for the local workforce, 2023



Note: calculations exclude county responses

Concerns over housing blight and out-of-date stock persist, while concerns over insufficient construction workforce increase

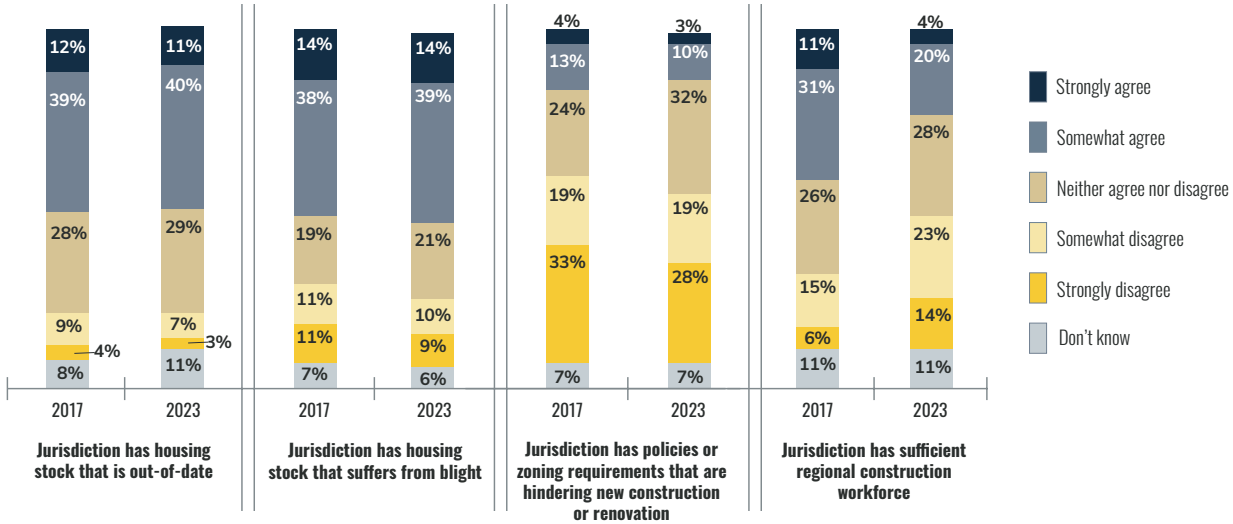
The MPPS also looked at several other challenges to local housing markets. First, local leaders were asked about the condition of the existing local housing stock. Currently, 51% of local officials either somewhat agree (40%) or strongly agree (11%) their jurisdiction has housing stock that is out-of-date, while just 10% disagree (see *Figure 6*). These assessments are essentially unchanged from statewide reports in 2017. The exception is among officials from urban communities (not shown) who are currently much more concerned about out-of-date housing stock (71% in 2023 vs. 56% in 2017).

Similarly, over half (53%) statewide also agree their jurisdiction has housing stock that suffers from blight, while 22% disagree, with little change from six years ago.

Next, the MPPS asked local leaders whether their jurisdiction has policies or zoning requirements (for example, utility connection fees, minimum lot sizes, required landscaping, etc.) that may hinder new construction or renovation. Overall, just 13% agree their jurisdiction has such policies, down slightly from 17% in 2017 (see *Figure 6*). Officials from mostly urban jurisdictions (10%) are the least likely to report having such policies, while those from fully urban areas (19%) are the most likely to say so.

Meanwhile, concerns about the regional construction workforce have risen substantially over the past six years. In 2017, 42% of local leaders statewide said they had a sufficient regional construction workforce to meet demand for new or renovated housing, compared with just 24% today. Currently, local officials from urban jurisdictions are more likely to report a construction workforce shortage compared with those from rural places (48% vs. 36%). By region, officials from the Northern Lower Peninsula (57%) are the most likely to report an insufficient workforce today.

Figure 6
Local officials' assessments of other local housing challenges, 2017 vs. 2023



Note: calculations exclude county responses

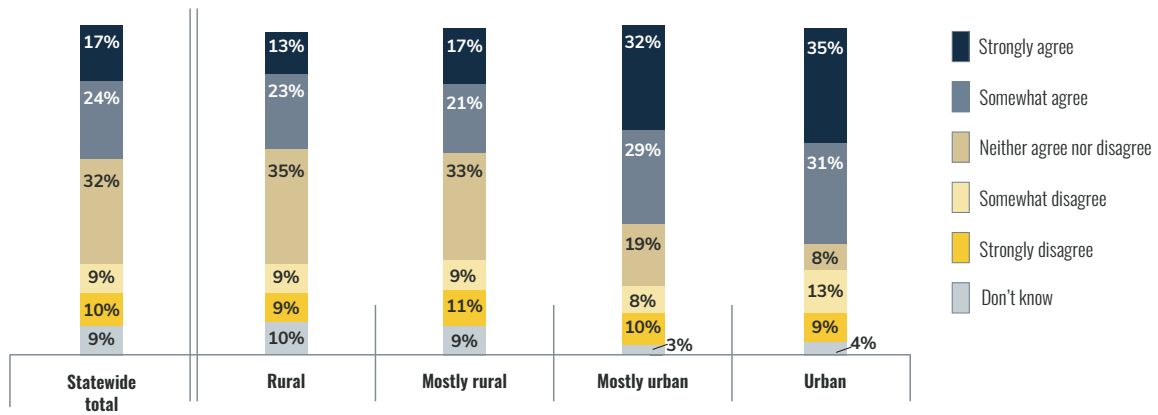
Local governments in urban and mostly urban areas are more likely to have discussed housing issues

While local leaders from across the urban-rural spectrum report concerns about housing challenges, those from mostly urban (61%) and fully urban (66%) jurisdictions are more likely to report their local governments have discussed housing issues within the past 12 months, compared to 46% of rural leaders and 38% of those from mostly rural places (see *Figure 7a*). This is not surprising, as urban jurisdictions tend to be larger and are more likely to provide a wider range of public services, while many fully rural jurisdictions have very few employees and they may have very little current role in housing-related services or in planning or zoning for community housing.¹⁴ The fact that nearly 40% of fully rural jurisdictions have discussed housing in the last year may be a sign of how widespread housing challenges have become, statewide.

Along similar lines, officials from cities and counties are the most likely to report their governments have discussed housing issues in the past 12 months, including 40% of city officials who *strongly* agree with the statement (see *Figure 7b*).

Figure 7a

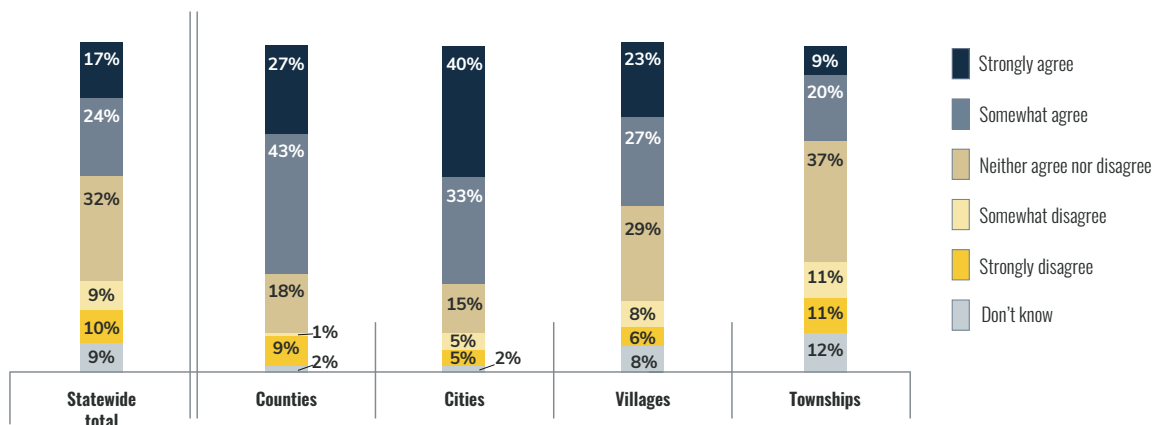
Percentage of jurisdictions that have discussed issues related to housing within the past 12 months, 2023, by urban-rural self-identification



Note: calculations include counties

Figure 7b

Percentage of jurisdictions that have discussed issues related to housing within the past 12 months, 2023, by jurisdiction type



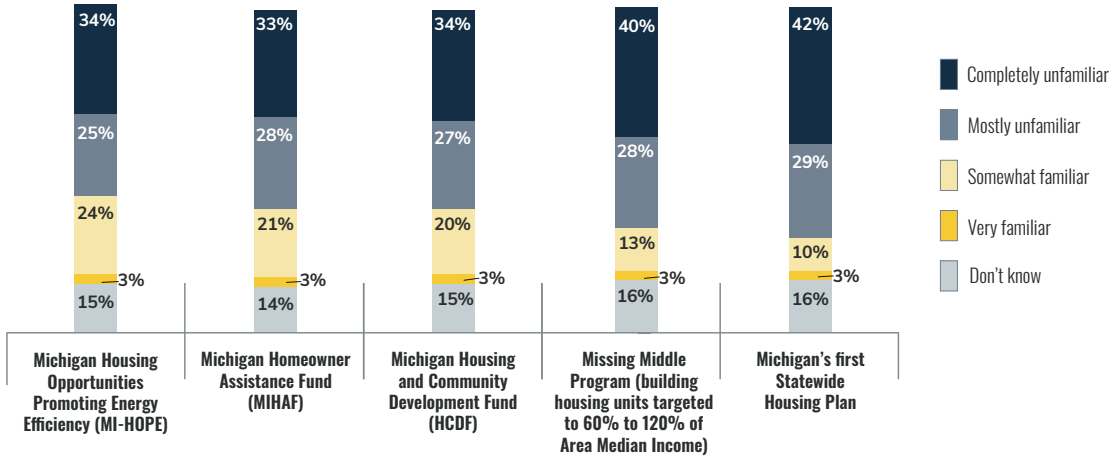
Note: calculations include counties

A majority of local leaders report being unfamiliar with State housing programs

Despite the housing challenges facing jurisdictions statewide, a majority of local leaders are unfamiliar with several housing programs administered by the State of Michigan. Again, this is very likely driven by the large number of small, rural local governments that provide few services in the first place. The MPPS surveyed leaders regarding five state housing programs and finds that, among local leaders statewide, 27% or fewer are familiar with any of the five, while another 14-16% are unsure (see *Figure 8*). For example, a third of local leaders (33%) report being completely unfamiliar with the Michigan Homeowner Assistance Fund (MIHAF), which was established in 2021 under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to provide funds to homeowners to mitigate financial hardships associated with the COVID pandemic, while 42% are completely unfamiliar with the Michigan Statewide Housing Plan introduced by the state government in 2022.

However, there are significant differences among officials from different jurisdiction types. County and city leaders are much more likely to be familiar with each of these programs than are those from townships and villages. For example, nearly half of county (48%) and city (46%) leaders are familiar with MI-HOPE, and a majority (56%) of county officials are familiar with the HCDF. Meanwhile, 35% of county leaders and 29% of city leaders are at least somewhat familiar with the new Statewide Housing Plan, compared with 12% of village leaders and 8% of township leaders.

Figure 8
Local officials' familiarity with State housing programs, 2023



Note: calculations include counties

Conclusion

Like much of the country, Michigan is experiencing housing shortages. When the MPPS last studied the issue in 2017, housing was a growing concern for local leaders, particularly at the county level. However, at that time, more local officials across the state reported their jurisdiction currently had “the right amount” of housing supply than too much or too little. Unfortunately, concerns have grown significantly since 2017. And the growing problems are reported commonly, regardless of community type, from the most rural to the most urban places across Michigan.

Relatively few local officials statewide (14%) believe that their jurisdictions’ policies are hindering new residential construction or renovation in the community. However, despite growing concerns regarding housing supply across the state, only 41% of local leaders report that their jurisdictions have discussed housing issues in the past 12 months. Meanwhile, relatively few local leaders are familiar with a range of housing-related programs offered by the State, which may present an opportunity to expand local outreach and efforts.

As national and statewide housing costs increase alongside other inflationary pressures, addressing local housing shortages is crucial to support local economic and community development programs, to grow the local workforce by drawing new owners and renters to the state and by creating new construction jobs, and to increase local government revenue.



Notes

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Survey Background and Methodology

The MPPS is an ongoing survey program, interviewing the leaders of Michigan's 1,856 units of general purpose local government, conducted by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan in partnership with the Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Townships Association, and Michigan Association of Counties. Surveys are conducted each spring (and prior to 2018, were also conducted each fall). The program has covered a wide range of policy topics and includes longitudinal tracking data on "core" fiscal, budgetary and operational policy questions and designed to build-up a multi-year time-series.

In the Spring 2023 iteration, surveys were sent by the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) via the internet and hardcopy to top elected and appointed officials (including county administrators and board chairs; city mayors, managers and clerks; village presidents, clerks, and managers; and township supervisors, clerks, and managers) from all 83 counties, 280 cities, 253 villages, and 1,240 townships in the state of Michigan.

The Spring 2023 wave was conducted from February 6 – April 17, 2023. A total of 1,307 jurisdictions in the Spring 2023 wave returned valid surveys (70 counties, 217 cities, 174 villages, and 846 townships), resulting in a 70% response rate by unit. The margin of error for the survey for the survey as a whole is +/- 1.47%. Missing responses are not included in the tabulations, unless otherwise specified. Some report figures may not add to 100% due to rounding within response categories.

Detailed tables of the data analyzed in this report broken down several ways—by jurisdiction type (county, city, township, or village); by population size of the respondent's community, by the region of the respondent's jurisdiction; and by self-identified rural, mostly rural, mostly urban, or urban categories—will be available online at the MPPS homepage: closup.umich.edu/michigan-public-policy-survey

The survey responses presented here are those of local Michigan officials, while further analysis represents the views of the authors. Neither necessarily reflects the views of the University of Michigan, or of other partners in the MPPS.



Previous MPPS reports

- MPPS Policy Brief: Michigan local government leaders' views on their employee unions: few changes in relationships or impacts as Right-to-Work comes and goes (July 2023)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Challenges for Michigan local governments with ARPA spending continue, particularly in project costs and procurement (June 2023)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Most Michigan local officials believe their government workforce reflects their community, less so in urban areas (June 2023)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Despite two-year trend of improvement, most Michigan local officials continue to say the state is on the wrong track (May 2023)
- Michigan local leaders report widespread support for community recycling programs (March 2023)
- Michigan local government leaders report increased problems with workforce recruitment, retention, and other issues (February 2023)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Michigan local government officials' assessments of workforce wages and benefits (January 2023)
- Michigan local leaders report near-term improvements in fiscal health, especially in large jurisdictions, yet long-term concerns increase (December 2022)
- Michigan local leaders' concerns about U.S. democracy at state and federal levels ease somewhat, but remain grim (November 2022)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Local government officials give mixed reviews to Michigan's new approach to redistricting (October 2022)
- Michigan local government leaders say civic relationships and civil discourse remain healthy, despite worsening national politics (October 2022)
- Michigan local government leaders remain confident about their election security and administration, though concerns about disinformation increase (September 2022)
- MPPS Policy Brief: Statewide survey finds a majority of Michigan local governments experiencing harassment or other abuse (September 2022)
- MPPS Policy Brief: A survey of Michigan local government leaders on American Rescue Plan Act funding and uses (July 2022)
- Local leaders' pessimism about Michigan's direction continues, but eases slightly from last year (July 2022)
- Internet presence among Michigan local governments: websites, online services, and experience with virtual meetings (May 2022)
- Michigan local leaders' views on recycling: current challenges and opportunities for improvement (April 2022)
- Recycling Issues, Policies, and Practices among Michigan Local Governments (March 2022)
- Michigan local leaders report little change in the tone of civic discourse in their communities, but are concerned about local impacts of increasingly hostile national partisan politics (January 2022)
- Michigan local government officials report improved fiscal health after a year of COVID-19, but not yet back to pre-pandemic levels (December 2021)
- Michigan local officials' assessments of American democracy at the state and federal levels decline sharply (November 2021)
- The lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Michigan communities and local governments (October 2021)
- Michigan local governments report fewer economic challenges one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and describe efforts to support local businesses (September 2021)
- Local leaders' views on Michigan's initial COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Spring 2021 (August 2021)
- Local leaders' concerns about Michigan's direction spike, while evaluations of state leaders sink over the past year (July 2021)
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The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP), housed at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, conducts and supports applied policy research designed to inform state, local, and urban policy issues. Through integrated research, teaching, and outreach involving academic researchers, students, policymakers and practitioners, CLOSUP seeks to foster understanding of today's state and local policy problems, and to find effective solutions to those problems.

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