



RICE | KINDER
INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH

Building Better Cities.

Taking Stock

Housing Trends in the Houston Area



Taking Stock

Housing Trends in the Houston Area

April 2017

Authored by:

Kelsey Walker

Staff Researcher

Contact:

Kyle Shelton

Director of Strategic Partnerships

kyle.k.shelton@rice.edu

About the Kinder Institute

The mission of the Kinder Institute is to:

- Advance the understanding of the most important issues facing Houston and other leading urban centers through rigorous research, policy analysis and public outreach
- Collaborate with civic leaders to implement promising solutions to these critical urban issues



RICE | KINDER
INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH

Rice University
Kinder Institute for Urban Research
6100 Main St.
Houston, TX 77005
713-348-4132
kinder.rice.edu

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Houston area confronts major demographic change and sustained population growth coupled with increasing economic inequality and quickly shifting development patterns. Providing a range of housing options that satisfy the preferences, needs and price points of all residents in this context is a major challenge.

This report provides essential baseline information for answering that challenge by documenting the array of residential buildings available in Harris County today and tracking trends in how this pool has changed in terms of age, type and location over the past decade. An accompanying interactive map — www.takingstockhouston.com — allows users to explore this data and zoom into particular areas of interest.

This analysis of housing options and recent trends captures the diversity of the Houston area's housing stock. It helps us assess how recent residential construction meets consumer preferences and needs and how housing developers have both driven and adjusted to those demands. It also illuminates emerging gaps in the housing stock.

The data presented below highlights shifts caused by densification and redevelopment. With the return of multi-family and single-family detached homebuilding to longstanding neighborhoods in Houston's Inner Loop and the urbanization of many suburban areas, surveying existing forms of density is particularly valuable for understanding the combinations and configurations of buildings that can support large densities of people moving forward. Densification and redevelopment have implications for housing costs in the older neighborhoods where new homes are built and raise questions about how to provide affordable and safe housing for all.

Background.

This report builds upon the Kinder Institute's *Houston In Flux* report and accompanying interactive map that documents demolition and construction trends in Harris County (www.HoustonInFlux.com). It also connects to the recently released report on the Houston and Harris County Housing Conversation (www.HoustonHousingResearch.com). Together these reports provide an increasingly clear picture of the state of development in Houston and contribute to an ongoing discussion about how to best house all city and county residents.

Methodology.

This report uses data from the Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD) to examine the age, type and location of Harris County's current residential buildings. Comparing data from 2007 and 2016 allows for an assessments of how the region's residential building stock has grown and matured since the peak of the national housing bubble. The report uses American Community Survey estimates and HCAD data to examine the composition of both the population and the housing stock in Houston's densest communities.

Findings.

- More than 97 percent of Harris County's housing stock is either single-family detached homes (61 percent) or larger multi-family properties with five or more units (37 percent).
- The supply of larger multi-family properties and single-family attached homes (townhomes) is growing faster than the stock of single-family detached homes.
- The three types of housing built in large quantities since 1985 — single-family detached homes, larger multi-family properties and single-family attached homes — all cluster in the neighborhoods west and immediately east of Main Street inside Loop 610. The return of single-family detached homebuilding to the Inner Loop is unprecedented.
- Houston's stock of duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes, built primarily before World War II, is dwindling.
- Gulfton and Westwood, both located between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 in southwestern Houston, are by far the densest communities in Harris County. Large multi-family properties built between 1960 and 1984 account for 93 percent of housing in each community.
- Pecan Park, Mid-West and Montrose, also among the county's five densest communities, achieve comparable levels of population density through wildly different configurations of building types. While large multi-family structures account for most of the housing in Montrose and Mid-West, single-family detached homes supply a majority of the units in Pecan Park.

Future Reports.

Taking Stock precedes a future report that will delve into the connection between residential building stock changes and socio-demographic transitions within neighborhoods.

INTRODUCTION

In Houston and Harris County, housing plays a critical role in both the lives of individuals and the success of the region. For residents, housing options are a key element of daily life, connected to everything from employment to personal safety. For the region, the provision of housing is both an economic driver for businesses and an important aspect of quality of life. Providing adequate, safe and affordable housing for a range of residents — and integrating this effort with other development priorities — is a major challenge for the region. It requires the concerted and coordinated effort of elected officials, public agencies, private developers, nonprofit organizations and residents.

A variety of actors in Houston and Harris County have been working to address this challenge for years, and there is currently a great deal of momentum around the subject. The Kinder Institute is committed to supporting this work by pursuing data and research that provides foundational knowledge about the state of housing in the region.

This report describes the type, age and geographic distribution of housing units in Harris County today. Comparing data from 2016 and 2007 sheds light on the salient trends of the past decade, showing how and where the housing stock in the county is changing. Patterns in building age highlight the areas where new homes replace older ones as well as the places where residential buildings are likely in poorer condition or soon to be replaced.

The data, maps and analyses also capture how redevelopment, gentrification and densification play out across the region. These processes are especially apparent in central city neighborhoods experiencing rapid turnover of residential buildings. They raise important questions about the tension between preserving affordability in redeveloping communities and providing a variety of housing types that respond to market demand throughout the region. Redevelopment also raises questions about density. This report illustrates how density takes several forms in Houston communities, all of which the county should consider as older neighborhoods redevelop to accommodate a larger population.

The data for this report is available via an online interactive map at www.takingstockhouston.com.

HOUSING STOCK AND INTERWOVEN FORCES

This straightforward look at Harris County's housing stock sheds light on three interwoven forces: population growth, consumer preferences and the need to make housing affordable to all residents.

Demographic growth and the residential building stock are intimately connected, because with a growing population comes increased demand of housing. Harris County gained more than 730,000 new residents between 2006 and 2015 — an increase of 19 percent. The number of

FIGURE 1a. Supply and Demand for Housing

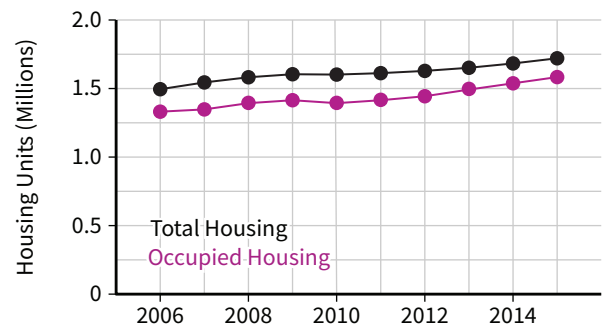
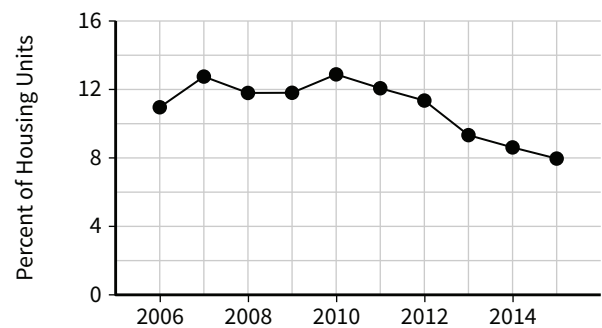


FIGURE 1b. Vacancy



Source: American Community Survey

occupied housing units likewise grew by 19.2 percent over the 10 year period, increasing by more than a quarter of a million units.

As growth occurs residential stock must keep up or housing markets tighten. Given Harris County's reputation as an affordable location, it should come as no surprise that the county's supply of housing grew markedly over the past decade as well. Indeed, the development of new housing units outpaced population growth at the tail end of the national housing bubble. Between 2006 and 2010, the total number of housing units grew faster than the number of occupied units (Figure 1a), and the share of housing units going vacant increased from 11 percent in 2006 to 12.9 percent in 2010 (Figure 1b). However, since 2010, population growth has eclipsed the production of housing in Harris County. The result is a tighter market, with only 8 percent of all units vacant in 2015. Though the countywide vacancy rate is lower today than at any point in the past 10 years, the completion of several large multi-family properties and the recent economic slowdown in Houston may increase the share of available housing in the near future, especially for renters at the upper end of the market.

A result of slowed housing production is higher prices for all types of housing across the county. This reality complicates Houston's reputation as an affordable city. In 2007, the median price for a home in Harris County was \$121,000. That number dropped to \$100,000 in 2012 but

has since grown to nearly \$141,000 in 2017¹. Similar price increases are found throughout the county with the most dramatic jumps occurring in popular areas and those undergoing rapid redevelopment. While the median home price is lower than in many other metros, the significant jump in price hits especially hard for low-income buyers and renters.

Though higher property values benefit the people who already own a home, a tightening market hurts renters and residents looking to buy a home. As such, higher prices exacerbate Harris County's ongoing struggle to produce housing that all of its residents can afford. Indeed, households with extremely low incomes have a more difficult time finding housing in Houston than in other parts of the country. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates that for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in the Houston metropolitan area, there are only 18 affordable and available units — fewer than in any of the 50 largest metros except Las Vegas and Los Angeles.² The limited number of affordable units results in a huge number of households — nearly 215,000 — in Harris County spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing, an unsustainable amount for almost any family.³

Older, smaller single-family homes, duplexes and four-plexes — all options that tend to be more affordable — are declining. This trend tightens the already small pool of affordable units and deepens the deficit of units accessible to low-income households. The new units coming on-line, especially single-family attached and large multi-family properties built in and around Houston's Loop 610, are at the high-end of the market and inaccessible lower income families.

New units in Houston's Inner Loop fetch such high prices because they are historically underproduced types of housing for which there is high demand. The Kinder Houston Area Survey tracks residential preferences and reveals that Harris County residents are split on the type of place they want to call home. Consistently, one half of Harris County residents say they want to live in a “single-family residential area,” while the other half would prefer “an area with a mix of developments, including homes, shops, and restaurants” (Figure 2a). Likewise, when survey respondents are asked to choose between “a single-family home with a big yard, where you would need to drive almost everywhere you want to go” and “a smaller home in a more urbanized area, within walking distance of shops and workplaces,” about half of Harris County residents opt for each type of residence (Figure 2b). While Houston's ample supply of single-family subdivisions

FIGURE 2a. Survey responses: A single-family residential area or an area with homes, shops and restaurants?”

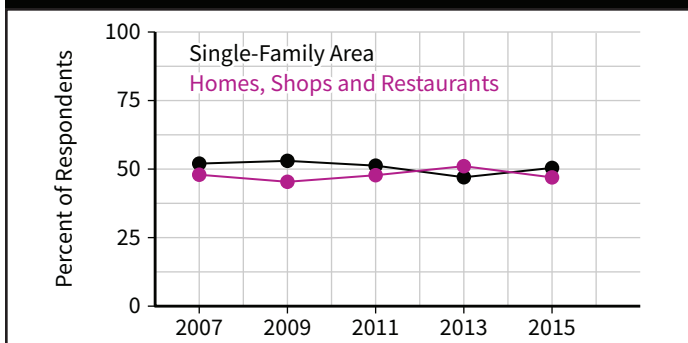
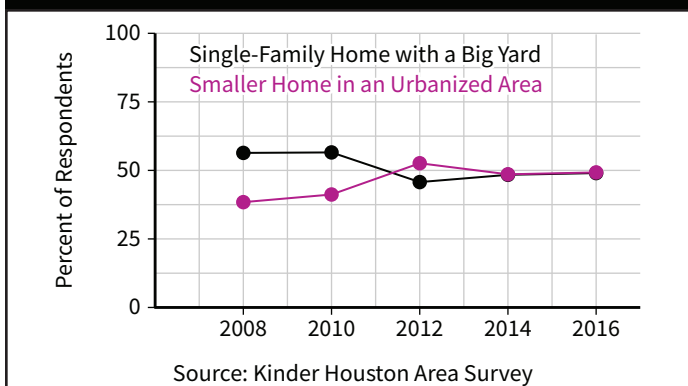


FIGURE 2b. Survey responses: A single-family home with a big yard or a smaller home in a more urbanized area?”



satisfies one segment of the population, the much smaller supply of homes and apartments in urbanized areas makes for high prices in these places. Households with higher incomes are relocating into the new homes and apartments built in Houston's urbanized Inner Loop.

Accommodating the preferences of higher-income residents often comes at the expense of lower-income residents' needs. Public agencies and governments will continue to face pressure to ensure that market demands do not completely override the preferences and concerns of residents already living in communities that are experiencing rapid redevelopment.

The interwoven forces of population growth, housing affordability and housing preference are evident in the close analysis of Harris County's housing stock. Framing housing trends in terms of these three connected pressures makes it clear that the age, type and location of units are not isolated from other issues. Documenting how and where residential building stock is changing provides an essential foundation for building up our understanding of these interrelated processes.

1. Median House value for Harris County, Zillow.

2. Andrew Aurand et al., *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, (Washington, DC: National Low Income Housing Coalition. 2017).

3. US Census Bureau Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy Database, Harris County, 2009-2013.

HARRIS COUNTY'S HOUSING SUPPLY

Type of Structure.

This report classifies housing into four types of structures:

- **Single-family detached homes** are freestanding residences designed for one household. Standalone accessory dwelling units like garage apartments are classified as single-family detached housing in our analysis.
- **Multi-family properties with five or more units** include garden apartments; low-rise, mid-rise and highrise apartment complexes; and condominiums of similar shapes and sizes.
- **Single-family attached homes** are designed for one family and share a common wall with the homes on adjoining properties. Townhomes fall in this category.
- **Multi-family properties** with fewer than five units include duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes.

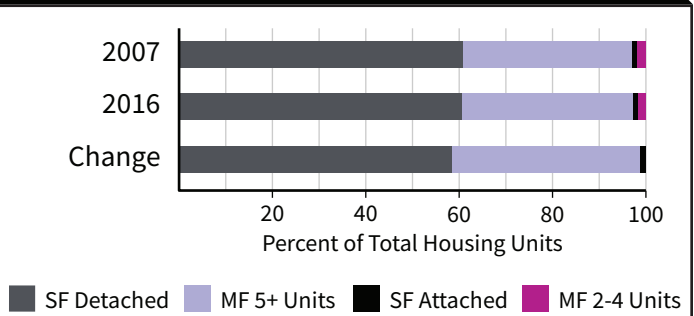
Although all types of structures can be owner- or renter-occupied, single-family buildings tend to attract homeowners, while multi-family properties cater to renters.

Single-family detached homes and multi-family properties with five or more units are the bread and butter of Harris County's housing supply. These two types of structures comprise 97 percent of the county's residential units in 2016 as in 2007. More than a million single-family detached homes account for 61 percent of the 2016 housing stock (Figure 3a) and spread ubiquitously throughout the county (Figure 4). Multi-family properties, meanwhile, amount to 619,000 units and 37 percent of all housing. In contrast to single-family homes, multi-family structures with five or more units concentrate heavily in certain areas. In the southwestern sector of the county, in particular, multi-family properties occupy large swaths of land between Loop 610 and Beltway 8.

Single-family attached homes and smaller multi-family properties each account for less than 2 percent of the housing supply. The stock of single-family attached homes in 2016 amounts to 20,000 units, or 1.2 percent of the housing supply. While these structures are difficult to discern among the single-family detached homes and multi-family units displayed in Figure 4, we see in Figures 6 and 9 that attached homes concentrate outside Loop 610 in the southwestern sector of the county and within the Inner Loop. Duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes — and other apartments and condominiums with less than five units — account for 26,000 units and 1.5 percent of the entire housing supply. These dwellings cluster within the Inner Loop (Figures 6 and 10).

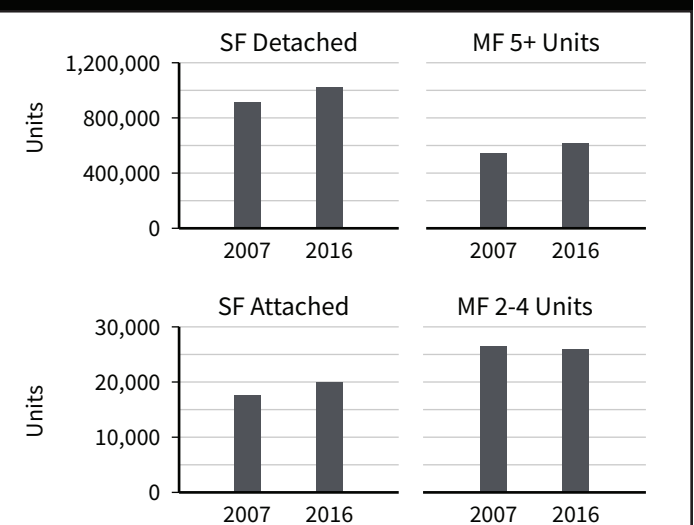
While single-family detached homes supply far more units than any other type of structure, large multi-family properties and single-family attached homes are starting to assume a more prominent role in the county's residential building stock. Multi-family properties with five or

FIGURE 3a. Breakdown of Housing Units by Type



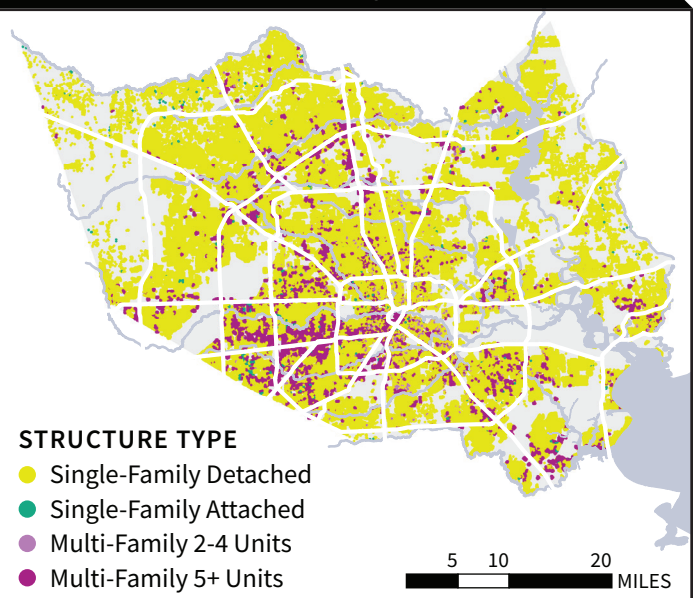
Source: Kinder Institute Tabulations of Harris County Appraisal District data

FIGURE 3b. Volume of Housing Units by Type



Source: Kinder Institute Tabulations of Harris County Appraisal District data

FIGURE 4. Location of Housing Units by Type



more units account for 40 percent of the growth in the housing supply over the past decade, a disproportionate share given that they comprise only between 36 and 37 percent of the residential units in both 2007 and 2016. Harris County acquired 76,000 multi-family units over this 10 year period, an increase of 14 percent (Figure 3b). Single-family attached homes also proliferated over the past decade, though they still account for a very small share of the county's housing. The supply of attached homes grew by 13.7 percent over the past decade, providing 2,400 more units in 2016 than in 2007. The proliferation of townhomes attracts a great deal of attention in Inner Loop neighborhoods, where many longtime residents regard this type of structure as a sure sign of gentrification and displacement.

The stock of single-family detached homes grew at a slower rate of 12.2 percent, but increased by an impressive 110,000 homes over the past decade. While single-family detached homes continue to grow in number, their contribution to the overall housing supply is gradually diminishing.

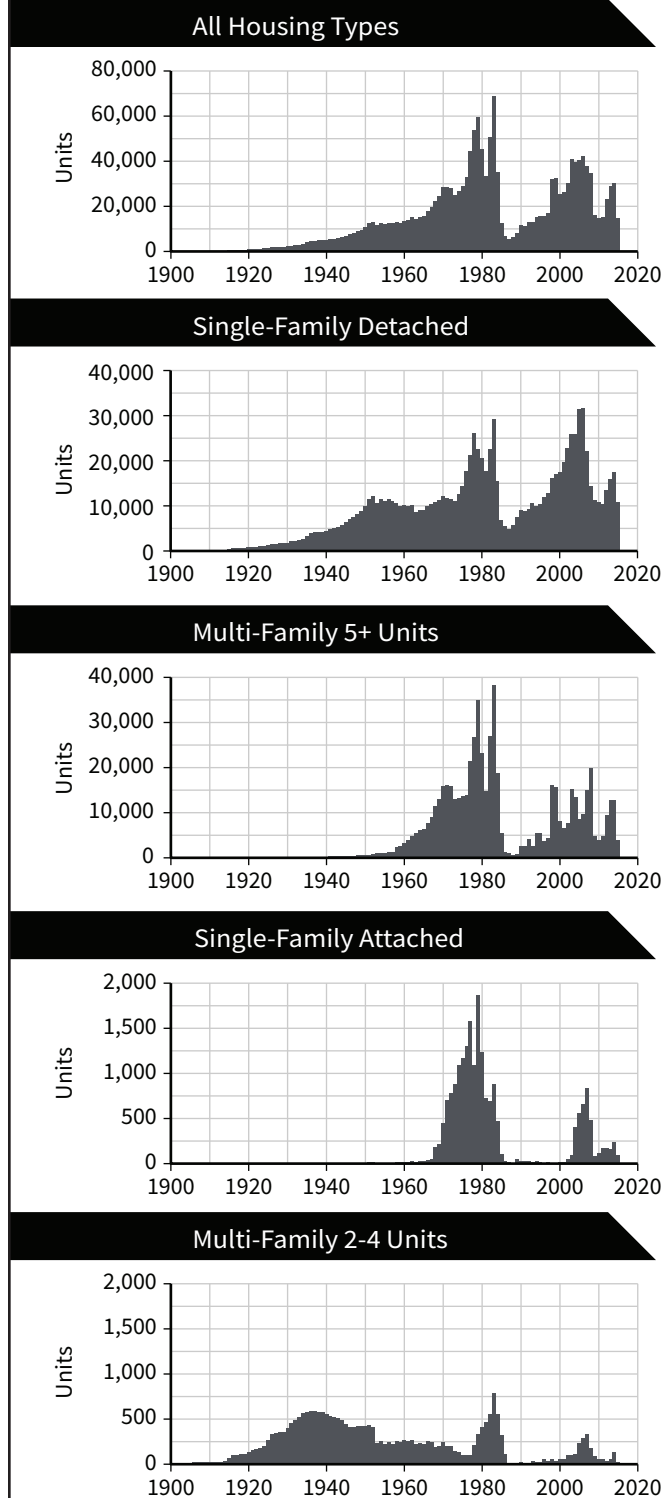
In contrast to the other types of residential structures, Houston's stock of multi-family properties with fewer than five units is dwindling. The county lost 489 units in duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes between 2007 and 2016, indicating that these structures are demolished at a faster rate than they are built.

Age of Building.

Figure 5 shows the age distribution of the housing units in Harris County today. The histograms help illustrate how Houston's residential building stock evolved over several building cycles:

- **Before 1945.** Prior to World War II, homebuilding in Houston consists primarily of detached single-family homes. Multi-family duplexes and fourplexes intermingle with single-family dwellings in neighborhoods built around streetcar lines.
- **1945 to 1959.** Single-family detached homes — the emblem of the American dream — proliferate after World War II as developers build master-planned communities and Levittowns along new, federally-funded highways. Duplexes and fourplexes taper off, less necessary in the age of automobiles and post-war affluence.
- **1960 to 1984.** Houston begins to build multi-family housing in earnest around 1960. The stock of single-family detached homes continues to grow and the single-family attached home — a novel form of housing for Houston — appears in the 1970s. Duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes experience a brief resurgence in the late 1970s and early 1980s as well. Residential construction of all types booms as Houston benefits from the high oil prices that cripple the rest of the nation's economy. Homebuilding screeches to a halt in 1984 and 1985 when falling oil prices send Houston's econ-

FIGURE 5. Age of Housing Units



Bars between 1900 and 1950 are 10-year moving averages. HCAD data for older buildings lists far more structures built in years that are multiples of ten (e.g. 1930, 1940) than in intervening years (e.g. 1931-1939). The bars between 1951 and 1975 are 5-year moving averages for similar reasons. HCAD records do not exhibit these discrepancies for buildings after 1975.

Source: Kinder Institute Tabulations of Harris County Appraisal District data

omy reeling. The stark contrast between the volume of homes and apartments built between 1977 and 1983 and the dearth of developments from 1985 and 1990 reminds us just how quickly and dramatically fortunes changed in Houston in the 1980s.

- **1985 to today.** Construction gradually picks up as Houston's economy recovers in tandem with the national economic growth of the 1990s and continues to increase in the new millennium, peaking in 2006. Residential development drops off between 2007 and

2009 as the national housing bubble collapses and the global financial crisis ensues. However, homebuilding resumes in 2012 as Houston recovers faster than most metropolitan areas from the economic downturn.

Figure 6 shows hot spots — or statistically significant clusters — of housing in structures dating from each era. We now discuss each type of structure in turn.

FIGURE 6. Hot Spots of Housing Units from Four Building Eras

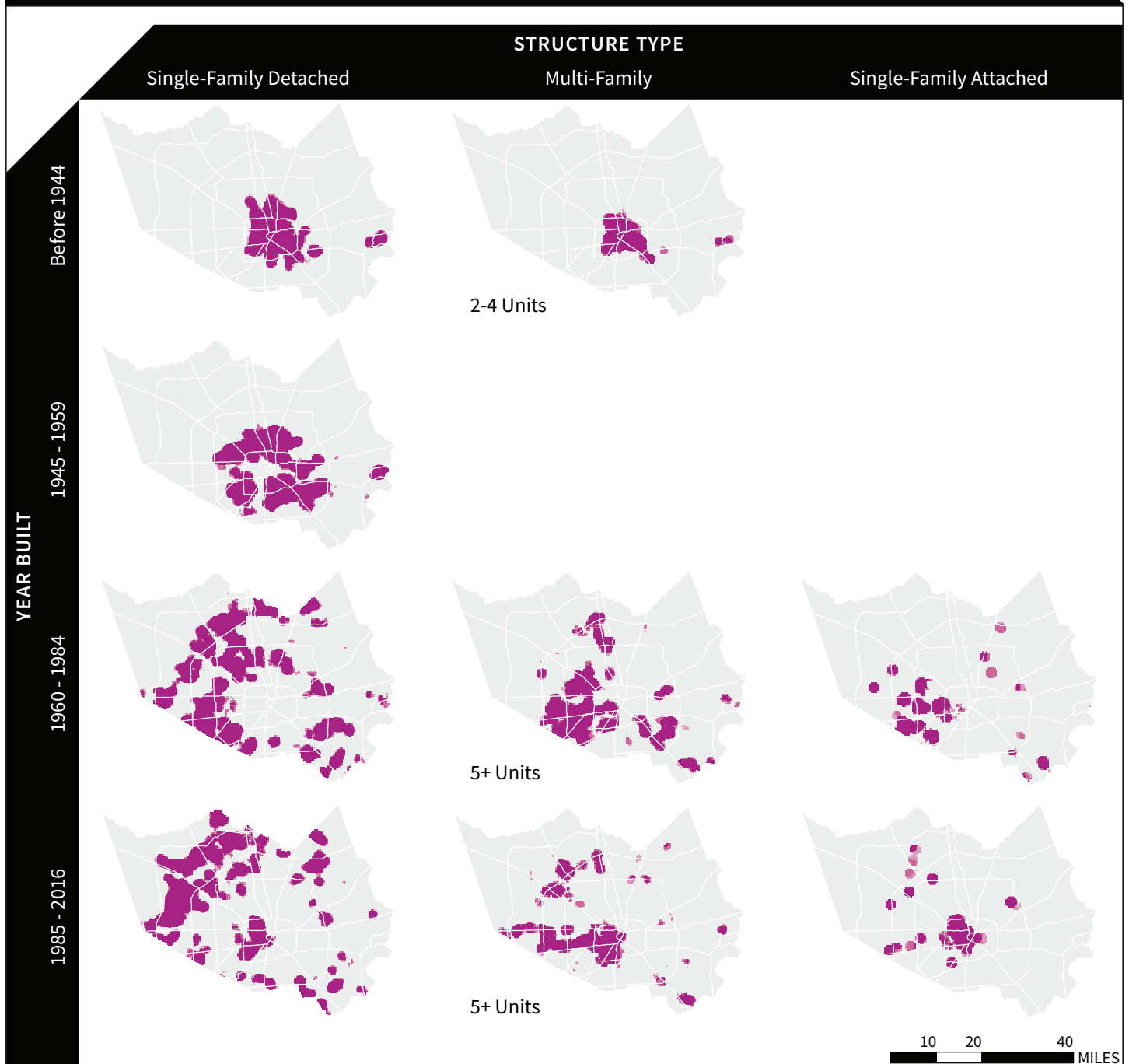
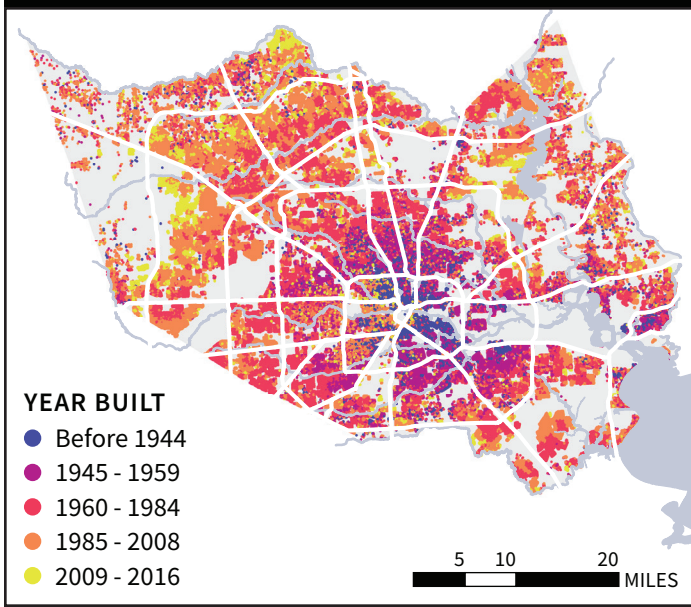
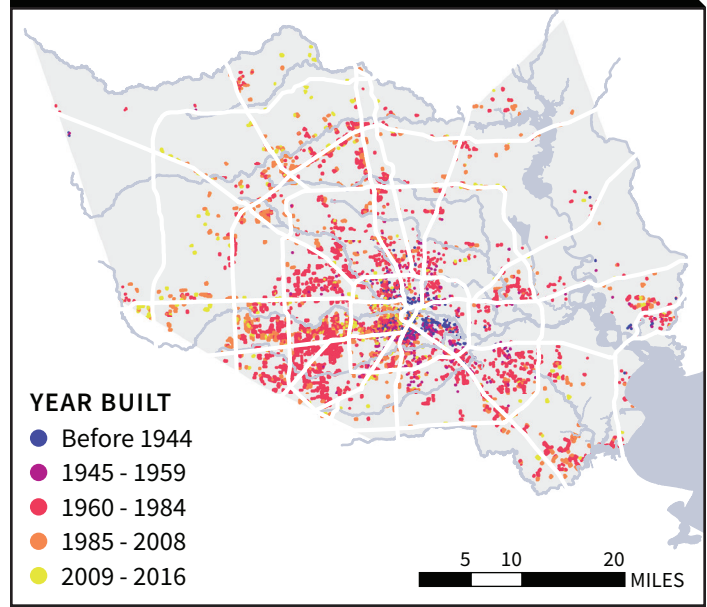


FIGURE 7. Single-Family Detached Homes**FIGURE 8. Multi-Family Properties with 5+ Units**

Single-family detached homes.

Harris County's oldest single-family detached homes lay near Houston's historic center. Dwellings dating from **before 1945** cluster throughout the Inner Loop; in the Independence Heights, Eastex/Jensen, Acres Homes and Trinity Gardens neighborhoods immediately north of Loop 610; and in the southern communities of Golfcrest, Park Place and Sunnyside. Baytown and Pasadena also contain some of the county's oldest homes.

Detached homes march steadily outward in subsequent waves of development. Single-family dwellings built between **1945 and 1959** cluster in the neighborhoods on either side of Loop 610, forming a ring around Houston's Downtown. Post-war homes concentrate in the Bellaire, Sharpstown, Braeswood and Meyerland communities in the southwest; Spring Branch in the west; Oak Forest, Acres Homes, Independence Heights, Northline, Eastex/Jensen and Trinity Gardens in the north; and Galena Park and Pasadena in the east and southeast.

Homes built between **1960 and 1984** form an even larger ring around Downtown Houston. They flank Beltway 8, State Highway 6 and Farm-to-Market Road 1960, as well as Harris County's borders with Fort Bend County in the southwest and Montgomery County in the north. Homes cluster in Alief and surrounding neighborhoods near Fort Bend; the western communities of Memorial, Briar Forest, Katy and Bear Creek; the Champions and Cypress Creek areas to the northwest; Aldine, Spring and Kingwood in the north; Cloverleaf in the east; and Deer Park, Pasadena, Clear Lake, Ellington and Friendswood in the southeast.

As in previous cycles of development, single-family homebuilding **since 1985** follows investments in peripheral transportation infrastructure. In the northwestern sector

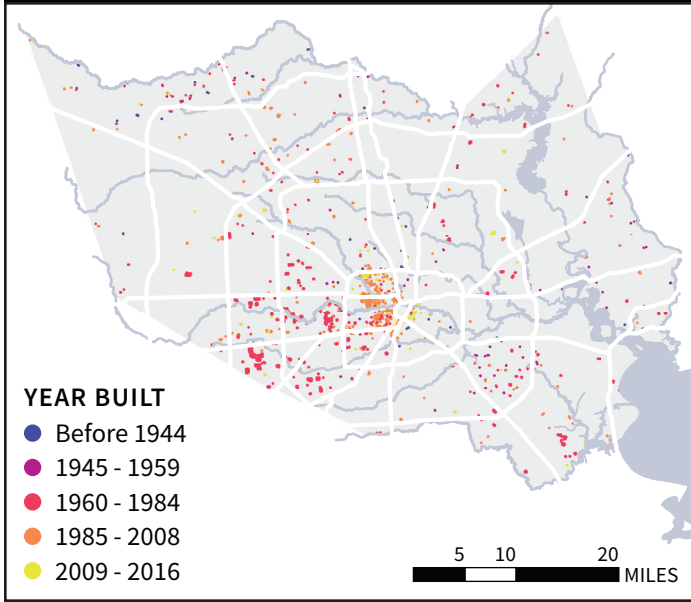
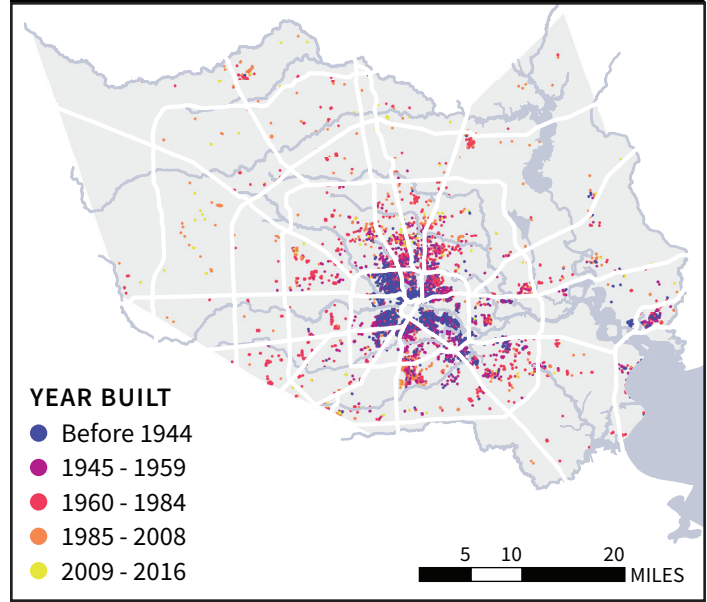
of the county, new residential subdivisions fan out between State Highway 6, Farm-to-Market Road 1960 and the Grand Parkway, Houston's newest and outermost highway loop. Homes in these greenfield developments presumably appeal to the half of Harris County residents who prefer "a single-family home with a big yard, where you would need to drive almost everywhere you want to go."

Other detached homes built since 1985 cater to the half of residents who want "a home in a more urbanized area, within walking distance of shops and workplaces." Single-family detached homes from the most recent wave of development also cluster in the Heights, Washington Avenue, Fourth Ward, Montrose, West University and Upper Kirby neighborhoods west of Main Street in the Inner Loop as well as the Uptown district just west of Loop 610. This return of single-family detached homes to the urban core is unprecedented.

Although large multi-family properties and townhomes are currently growing faster than Houston's stock of single-family detached homes, the wave of single-family homebuilding since 1985 is significant for the region. The 446,000 single-family detached homes built since 1985 dwarf the 366,000 built in the quarter century between 1960 and 1984.

Multi-family properties with 5 or more units.

The development of multi-family properties in Houston began in earnest in 1960. Much of the multi-family units built between **1960 and 1984** lay outside of the Inner Loop. Apartments from this era fill large swaths of land in the neighborhoods of Gulfton, Westwood, Sharpstown and Mid-West, all of which lay between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 in the southwestern sector of the county. Multi-family housing from this period also clusters in Spring Branch

FIGURE 9. Single-Family Attached Homes**FIGURE 10. Multi-Family Buildings with 2-4 Units**

between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 in the northwest; in the Montrose, Upper Kirby, Braeswood and Astrodome areas in the western part of the Inner Loop; outside Beltway 8 in the southwestern community of Alief; in the Greenspoint neighborhood along Interstate 45 in the north; and in Golfcrest, Pecan Park, Pasadena and Clear Lake in the southeast.

These aging apartments, now quite affordable and close to 40 years old, play an important role in the Houston area. “In the absence of a national housing policy, where vouchers constitute the largest portion of low-income housing subsidies, this housing is, in many ways, the new de facto public housing,” University of Houston’s Susan Rogers writes⁴.

The development of large apartments and condominiums continues today. Multi-family properties built **since 1985** cluster in western half of the Inner Loop and extend west towards Fort Bend County along Westpark Tollway and Interstate 10. Multi-family units also cluster along Beltway 8 in the northwest sector of the county. While multi-family units are currently growing faster than any other housing type, the current wave of multi-family development pales in comparison to that of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Today, the county has about 376,000 multi-family units built in the quarter century between 1960 and 1984 but only 227,000 built since 1985.

Single-family attached homes.

Like large multi-family properties, single-family attached homes dating from **1960 to 1984** cluster outside of Loop 610 in the southwestern sector of the county. Townhomes constructed **since 1985**, meanwhile, cluster in the

neighborhoods west and immediate east of Main Street inside Loop 610. New single-family detached homes and multi-family properties also cluster in these much older neighborhoods, meaning that these communities simultaneously experience an influx of all three types of housing produced by Houston developers in large quantities today.

Multi-family properties with 2-4 units.

Unlike other types of structures, multi-family properties with fewer than five units date primarily from before World War II and are largely absent from more recent cycles of development. The duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes built **before 1945** intermingle with single-family homes in residential neighborhoods initially built for working- and middle-class families near Downtown Houston, along the Ship Channel and in Baytown. The gradual disappearance of old, centrally-located duplexes and fourplexes — which tend to house renters and cost less than new apartments — suggests that the new development inside the Inner Loop comes at the expense of naturally affordable options in these areas.

In the current building cycle, we witness an unprecedented return of single-family and multi-family homebuilding in the neighborhoods west and immediately east of Main Street in Loop 610. These areas, comprised mostly of single-family detached homes, duplexes and fourplexes at the close of World War II, are acquainted with some degree of redevelopment. Apartments and condominiums came to the Montrose, Upper Kirby and Astrodome areas during the previous building cycle between 1960 and 1984. But the resurgence of single-family detached homebuilding and the proliferation of townhomes in the city’s oldest residential neighborhoods is an entirely new phenomenon.

4. Susan Rogers. "The [Beautiful] Projects: Contradiction and Complexity." *Cite 94* (2014): 17.

HARRIS COUNTY'S DENSEST COMMUNITIES

Sustained population growth, demand for homes in urbanized areas and a shrinking supply of undeveloped land create an impetus to densify. Discussions and plans surrounding future densification can benefit from a clear picture of the Houston area's existing density: the places that support high levels of population density, the people who live in these communities and the built form of these environments. This section identifies Houston's five most densely populated communities — shown in Figure 11 — and examines their composition in terms of both residential units and residents themselves⁵.

Gulfton and **Westwood** are by far the two densest communities in Harris County. The neighborhoods house 14,600 and 12,400 people per square mile, respectively — levels of population density higher than the City of Chicago's 11,900 people per square mile and comparable to the City of Boston's 13,300 residents per square mile. The two neighborhoods resemble one another in several respects. Both are situated near freeway interchanges between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 in the southwestern quadrant of the county: Gulfton lies southwest of the I-69 and Loop 610 interchange (immediately south of Houston's Uptown district), and Westwood sits just northeast of the intersection of I-69 and Beltway 8. Both neighborhoods have greater percentages of Hispanic residents, foreign-born residents and residents living in poverty than does the Harris County (Figures 15 and 16).

In both neighborhoods, large apartment complexes developed between 1960 and 1984 comprise 93 percent of the housing supply (Figures 12 and 13). Though transit runs frequently and apartment courtyards house vibrant social spheres, Gulfton and Westwood defy the conventional image of urban density. Apartment complexes occupy superblocks that sit apart from businesses and other land uses in the area (Figure 13); these are hardly the walkable, tightly-integrated mixed-use places we so often imagine dense environments to be.

The apartment complexes in Gulfton attracted primarily young professionals shortly after they were constructed. In 1980 the Gulfton population was overwhelmingly white, and it transformed over several decades into the community we see today (Figure 14). Gulfton's transition reminds us that buildings can take on new and sometimes unexpected lives as they age. Today's luxury apartments may well house much less affluent communities in the future.

Pecan Park, **Mid-West** and **Montrose** are Harris County's densest communities after Gulfton and Westwood. Each of these neighborhoods houses between 9,500 and 10,000

FIGURE 11. Densely Populated Communities

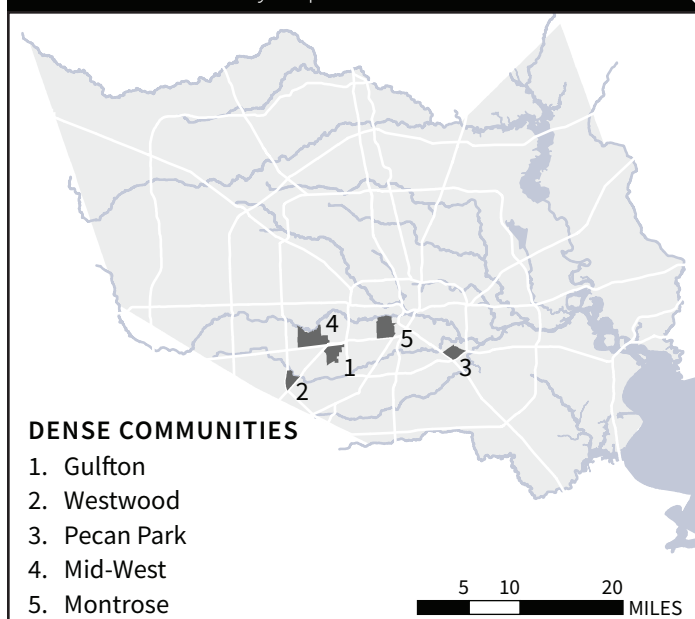
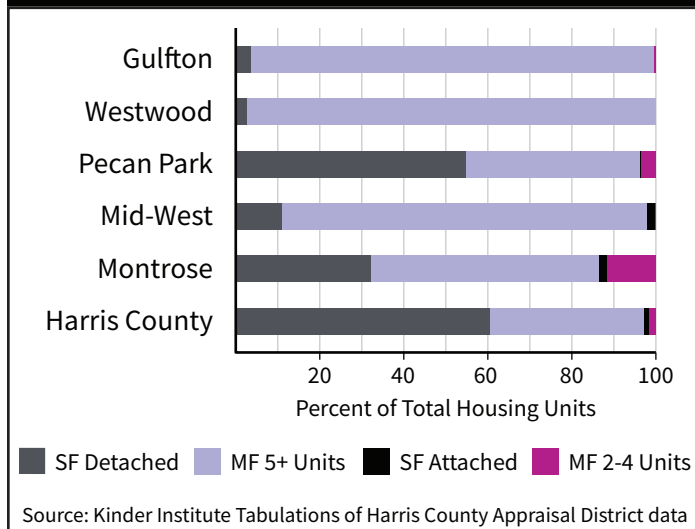


FIGURE 12. Breakdown of Housing Units by Type in Dense Communities



people per square mile. Despite comparable population densities, the three neighborhoods vary considerably in terms of both population and building stock. We discuss each of these communities in turn.

Located in the southeast corner of Houston's Loop 610, the **Pecan Park** community is more than 90 percent Hispanic, with nearly half of residents born outside of the United States. Though a smaller fraction of residents live below the poverty line in Pecan Park than in Gulfton and West-

⁵ In identifying and analyzing the densest communities in the county, we consider the Kinder Institute's Community Tabulation Areas (CTAs) as the geographic unit of analysis. CTAs are geographic areas developed by Kinder Institute researchers and vetted by community stakeholders that approximate City of Houston Super Neighborhoods but build off of 2010 census tracts and extend past the City limits to cover all of Harris County.

FIGURE 13. Type and Age of Housing Units in Dense Communities



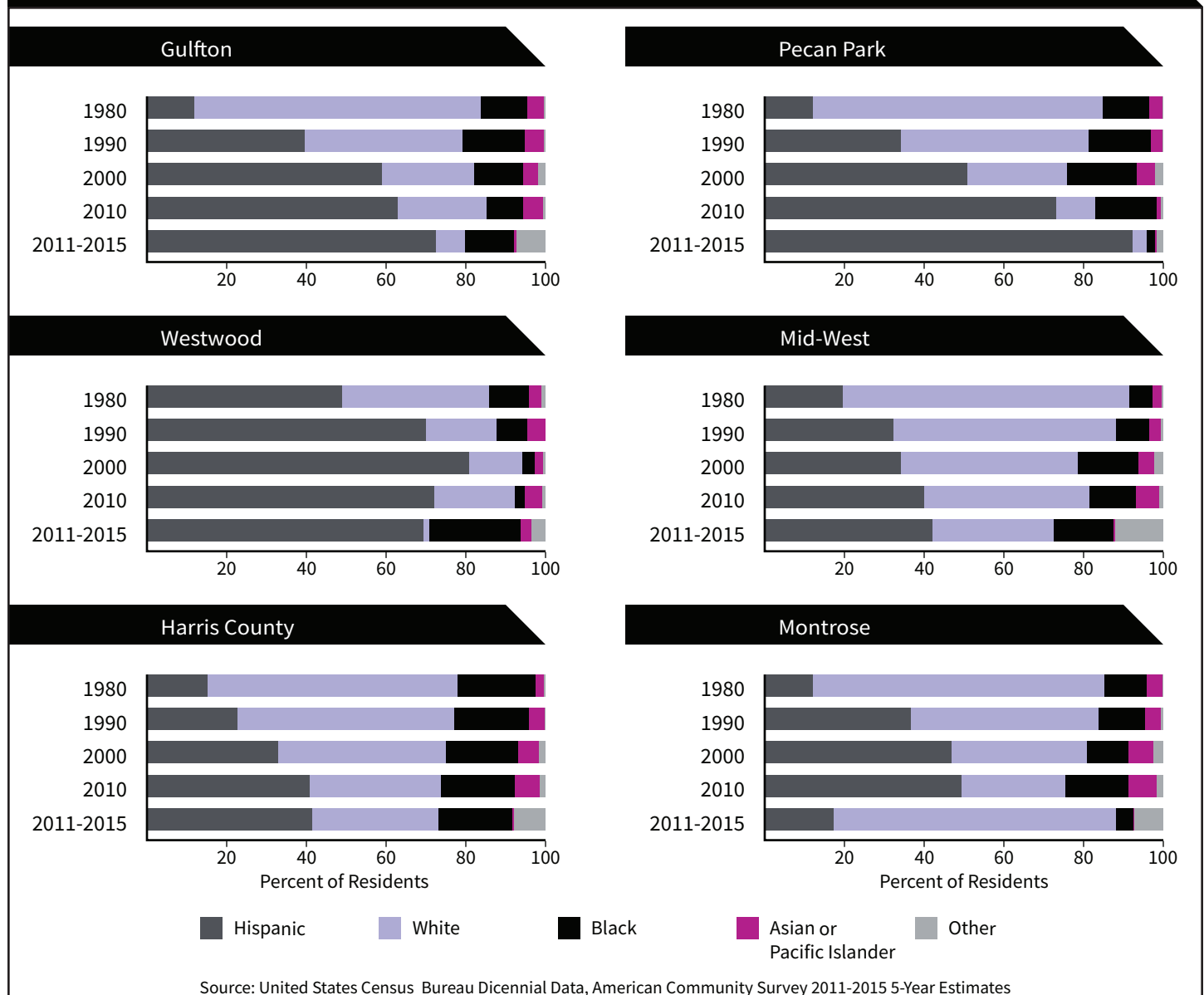
wood, the community's poverty rate of 28 percent remains markedly higher than the countywide rate of 18 percent. In stark contrast to Gulfton and Westwood, a majority of housing units in Pecan Park are single-family detached homes, the vast majority of which were built prior to 1960. Indeed, single-family detached homes account for 55 percent of all housing units in the community, only 6 percent less than the share of housing that single family detached homes comprise countywide.

Like Gulfton and Westwood, the **Mid-West** community lays between Loop 610 and Beltway 8 in southwest Houston. It sits immediately north of Westpark Tollway and west of the Uptown district, kitty-corner to Gulfton. In terms of race and ethnicity, Mid-West residents resemble the population of Harris County as a whole. Mid-West is a minority-majority neighborhood in which Hispanics comprise

the plurality of the population, and whites account for about 30 percent of the population. As in the other densest communities, foreign-born residents and families living in poverty comprise a larger share of the Mid-West population than they do of the Harris County population.

Mid-West's residential building stock resembles that of nearby Gulfton and Westwood. Large multi-family properties make up 87 percent the local housing stock. Of the 21,000 multi-family units in the neighborhood, 80 percent date from the quarter century between 1960 and 1984. Single-family homes and new multi-family properties assume more important roles in Mid-West than in either Gulfton or Westwood, however. Multi-family units built since 1985 and single-family detached homes from all eras account for 17 and 11 percent of the housing stock, respectively.

FIGURE 14. Racial and Ethnic Composition of Dense Communities, 1980 - 2015



The **Montrose** neighborhood lays on the west side of the Inner Loop, nestled between four of Houston’s major job centers: Downtown Houston, Greenway Plaza, Texas Medical Center and Uptown. Demographically, the community stands out from the county’s four other densest neighborhoods. Montrose has a larger percentage of white residents, a smaller fraction of foreign-born residents and a smaller share of residents living in poverty than does the county as whole.

The neighborhood has multi-family and single-family dwellings from all of the major cycles of development. Large-multifamily structures supply 55 percent of the housing units in the area, while single-family detached homes account for just under a third of residential units. Though the community was originally developed prior to World War II, more than half of the single family detached homes in the community were constructed after 1985. Large multi-family properties built since 1985 account for roughly half of the neighborhoods multi-family housing supply as well, with the remainder built primarily in the

1950s and 1960s. Duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes — 90 percent of which were constructed in the 1930s and 1940s — contribute 11 percent of the housing units. Perhaps most striking about Montrose is not the diversity of building types and ages but the granularity of the residential patterns in the neighborhood. Townhomes, duplexes and quadplexes — and to a lesser extent larger apartments — are interspersed among single family detached homes just as new residential developments intermingle with much older homes.

CONCLUSION

Trends in Harris County’s housing stock over the past decade reflect the demand for new residential development in close-in neighborhoods. Redevelopment in these neighborhoods has a paradoxical relationship with affordability. In theory, increasing the volume and variety of housing options in urbanized areas in tandem with demand is critical to stabilizing the cost of living in such places throughout the region in the long run. However, this long-term regional outcome is at odds with the immediate impact of new homebuilding in the communities where it occurs. New developments — whether townhomes, detached homes or large multi-family properties — are generally unaffordable to lower-income residents and the preferences of new residents often override those of people already living in transitioning neighborhoods. If and when older homes are torn down to make way for new developments, neighborhoods lose some of their more affordable residential options. This is especially apparent with the dwindling stock of duplexes and fourplexes. It is also a pressing issue for the large multi-family properties built in the 1960s and 1970s, many of which are likely to be replaced in the near future. The deficit of affordable rental units appears poised to increase if demolitions befall the massive amount of multi-family properties constructed between 1960 and 1984. Even without demolitions, new developments can raise the cost of living for existing residents through increased property taxes.

Given the growing population and the demand for urbanized areas, the pressure to densify and build anew in existing neighborhoods is unlikely to fade away. If current trends continue, multi-family properties and single-family attached homes will assume more prominent roles in the housing stock moving forward. In redeveloping neighborhoods, density will materialize in new forms. Already, wildly different combinations of building types support high levels of population density in county's densest neighborhoods. Surely, new configurations will emerge as redevelopment ripples outward.

