

Rural Housing Market Analysis

Seneca County, Ohio



Prepared For:

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I. Executive Summary

It is DDA's opinion that there has been a significant housing shortage in Seneca County over the past decade and a market exists to support 65 to 85 for-sale newly constructed housing units annually countywide in the next few years.

We anticipate that the more rural areas of the county, specifically townships and villages, have the opportunity to accommodate 55% to 65% of the countywide market potential or 35 to 55 new for-sale housing units annually. Additional support is possible for townships with a city annexation scenario.

Seneca County has some of the most affordable housing in the region, due in large part to, a significant share of dated housing stock combined with limited housing construction. Seneca County has been a preferred place of residence for many households as many continue to reside in the county and commute to work outside the county. However, without the modern housing stock for existing homeowners and higher-income renters, a higher-than-typical share of residents leave the county to find preferred housing. This housing shortage has resulted in limited household growth that is one-fourth the growth occurring in the surrounding counties.

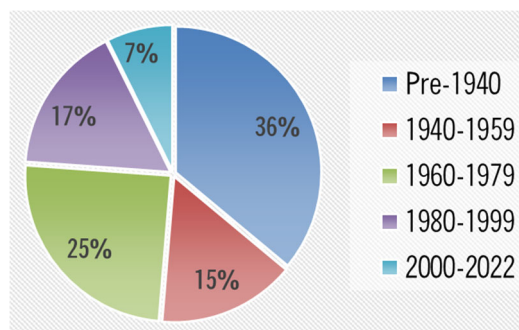
The following summarizes key findings and conclusions contained within the market analysis.

Loss of housing stock and decline in vacant housing units from 2010 to 2020.

- The total housing count in Seneca County remained relatively unchanged, with an 0.8% decline amounting in 188 less housing units. The decline represents demolition, uninhabitable units, and mobile homes relocated outside of the county.
- The vacancy rate over the past decade's decline by 1.7 percentage points to 8.0%. But more telling is that in 2020, only an estimated 35% of the vacant housing units were available for rent or sale, down from 41.5% in 2010 (Source: 2020 American Community Survey).

Aging Housing Stock

- Seneca County has the highest share of pre-war housing in the multi-county region at 36% and the lowest share of housing built since 2000 (7%). The high share of older housing stock in Seneca County contribute to many compartmentalized floor plans and three-plus bedroom homes with only one bathroom.



Sources: American Community Survey and Census Building Permits Survey

Permits

- In 2021, there were 41 single-family permits, the highest in the county in the past decade. In 2005, there were 82 single-family permits issued. From 2000 to 2003, single-family permits ranged from 138 to 187.
- Seneca County ranks the second lowest housing permits and home listings to total households, indicating there are fewer modern housing options for households in Seneca County than 15 of the other 16 counties in Northwest Ohio.

Internal mobility

- The share of estimated Seneca County residents moving each year is at the same rate as others in the region, whether or not the type of housing they prefer is available in Seneca County. With such limited housing, the result is high shares of persons moving to another home outside the county.
- The employment base in Seneca County increased by 5.5% from 2010 to 2019. During this same period, county resident employment only increased by 0.7%, with nearly an additional 600 employees living outside the county commuting into Seneca County for work. The largest share of workers commuting to Seneca County reside in Hancock and Sandusky Counties.

Household Growth

- Household growth in Seneca County over the past decade increased by 243 households or 1.1%: 3.5 times less than the combined household growth in the six surrounding counties (3.8%) and 4.5 times Ohio (4.5%).

Home Sales and Household Incomes

- In 2022, there were 112 home sales above \$200,000, slightly less than one-fifth the overall sales in Seneca County. Home sales in the townships represented one-third of the county's sales and had a substantially higher median sale price than homes recently sold in cities and villages.
- Two-thirds (67.0%) of homes priced over \$200,000 were sold in Seneca County's townships.
- Seneca County had the third lowest average home list price in Northwest Ohio at \$115,743 and based on owner incomes in the county ranks third overall in terms of affordable listing prices.
- Local realtors cited they don't have enough houses to sell, and new homes would sell immediately, especially in the mid-level priced homes of \$200,000 to \$300,000 and the higher-price points of \$300,000 to \$400,000.
- Realtors indicated many of their buyers prefer their homes to be proximate to the Tiffin area.

Considerations for Rental Housing

Given the propensity for homeownership in the rural areas of Seneca County, for-sale housing was the focus of the analysis. Depending on the proximity to Tiffin and Fostoria, DDA believes market-rate rental housing development may also be possible in the township areas.

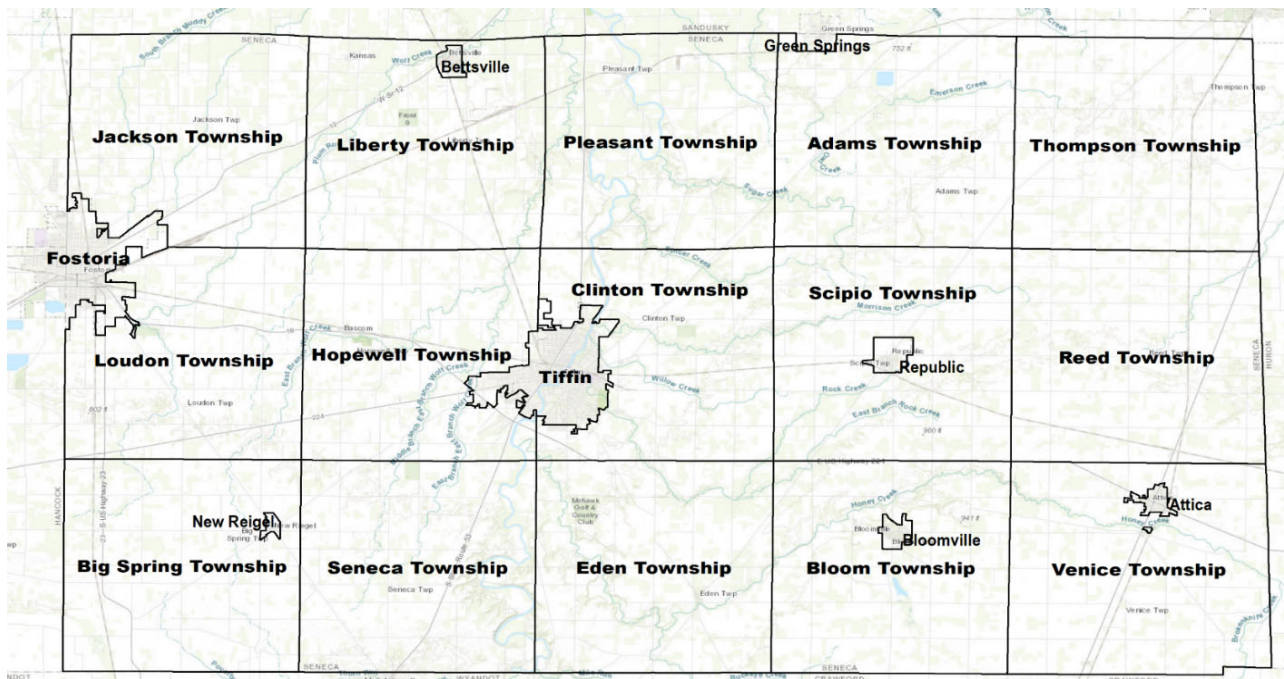
Two rental housing studies completed in 2019 cite near-term market support for 200+ units in the Tiffin and Fostoria areas.

- 200 to 260 units in the Tiffin area (*Housing Opportunity Analysis - Tiffin Area*, 2019, DDA)
- 246 units in the Fostoria area (*Citywide Multifamily Rental Needs Assessment* 2019, Danter & Associates)

There have been no significant changes in housing, households, or total employees in Seneca County since 2019, and the findings in both reports likely remain appropriate. Additionally, DDA updated rental housing in the Tiffin area in the fourth quarter of 2022 and the rental housing market remains strong.

II. Introduction

The purpose of this housing report is to assess housing potential in rural areas of Seneca County. Seneca County is predominantly a rural county with a population density of 99.9, meaning 100 persons per square mile. The U.S. Census Bureau defines nonmetropolitan rural areas as open countryside with population densities less than 500 people per square mile and places with fewer than 2,500 people. The population density of all the cities and villages (considered by the Census as a “place”) is higher than 500 persons per square mile, however, population of the villages are well below 2,500. Seneca County’s townships have population densities well below 500. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, the townships and villages are considered the rural areas of Seneca County.



Note: Fostoria and Green Springs Village cross county lines. Census Designated Places (CDP) data are encompassed within each respective township.

Uses, Applications and Assumptions

Although this report represents the best available effort to identify the current market status and future market trends, it is important to note that most markets are continually affected by demographic, economic and developmental changes.

This study represents a compilation of data gathered from various sources. Data provided includes the properties surveyed, local records searches, interviews with local officials, real estate professionals and major employers plus researched secondary demographic material. Although we judge these sources to be reliable, it is impossible to authenticate all data. The analyst does not guarantee the data and assumes no liability for any errors in fact, analysis or judgment.

The conclusions contained in this report are based on the best judgments of the analysts; we make no guarantees or assurances that the projections or conclusions will be realized as stated.

III. Housing Market Conditions

From 2010 to 2020, the total housing count in Seneca County remained relatively unchanged, with an 0.8% decline amounting in 188 less housing units. The decline represents demolition, uninhabitable units, and mobile homes relocated outside of the county.

Housing counts in each municipality in Seneca County in descending order of change between 2010 and 2020 follow.

Seneca County Area	Total Housing Units		Change in Housing Stock	
	2010	2020	Unit Change	% Change
Green Springs Village*	520	541	20	3.8%
Clinton Township	1,680	1,713	33	2.0%
Big Spring Township	687	698	11	1.6%
City of Tiffin	8,007	8,127	120	1.5%
Hopewell Township	1,138	1,148	10	0.9%
New Riegel Village	116	117	1	0.9%
Eden Township	787	786	-1	-0.1%
Adams Township	522	519	-3	-0.6%
Scipio Township	704	699	-5	-0.7%
Entire Seneca County	24,122	23,934	-188	-0.8%
Thompson Township	573	568	-5	-0.9%
Seneca Township	602	595	-7	-1.2%
Republic Village	245	241	-3	-1.2%
Pleasant Township	649	637	-12	-1.8%
Venice Township	788	770	-18	-2.3%
Attica Village	428	418	-10	-2.3%
Loudon Township	957	934	-23	-2.4%
Bloom Township	722	704	-18	-2.5%
Liberty Township	906	883	-23	-2.5%
City of Fostoria*	6,225	6,026	-199	-3.2%
Bettsville Village	318	305	-13	-4.1%
Bloomville Village	382	366	-16	-4.2%
Reed Township	351	336	-15	-4.3%
Jackson Township	622	588	-34	-5.5%

Sources: 2010 and 2020 Census

*Community is partially within Seneca County corporate limits.

In Seneca County, only six of the 23 municipalities showed an increase in housing units. The City of Tiffin and two adjacent townships, Hopewell and Clinton, represent 83.6% of the housing additions in the county, albeit just 163 units.



Housing Occupancy

Census Date	Housing Units	Occupied	Vacant	Vacancy Rate
2010				
Seneca County	24,122	21,774	2,348	9.7%
Cities/Villages	12,434	10,946	1,488	12.0%
Townships	11,688	10,828	860	7.4%
2020				
Seneca County	23,934	22,017	1,917	8.0%
Cities/Villages	12,360	11,188	1,172	9.5%
Townships	11,574	10,829	745	6.4%

Sources: 2010 and 2020 Census

The vacancy rate over the past decade declined by 1.7 percentage points. But more telling is that in 2020 only an estimated 35% of the vacant housing units were available for rent or sale, down from 41.5% in 2010 (Source: 2020 American Community Survey). Therefore, the estimated market vacancy has declined from 4.0% in 2010 to 2.9% in 2020. A healthy housing market has a 5% vacancy rate to allow for mobility in the county as household dynamics change.

According to ESRI, Incorporated, slightly more than one-fourth of the occupied housing in the county are occupied by renter households.

Census Date	Owner Households (2022)		Renter Households (2022)		Total HHs (2022)
	Own	Share	Rent	Share	
Seneca County	16,042	73.2%	5,882	26.8%	21,924
Cities/Villages	8,557	66.1%	4,382	33.9%	12,939
Townships	7,485	83.3%	1,500	16.7%	8,985

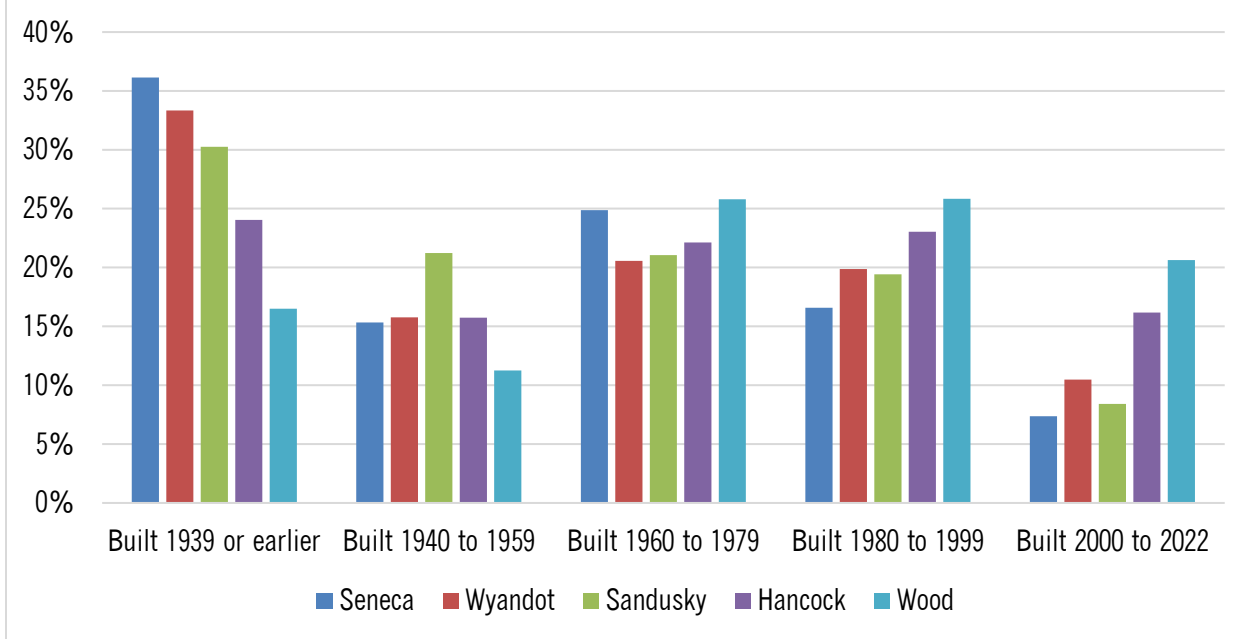
Approximately 3 of 4 renter households reside in housing in Tiffin, Fostoria, and outlying villages. The more rural township areas of the county are dominated by homeowner-occupied housing.

Housing Age

The highest share of employees commuting into Seneca County reside in Sandusky, Hancock, Wood, and Wyandot Counties (Source: Census' Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics).

Seneca County has the highest share of pre-war housing in the multi-county region at 36% and the lowest share of housing built since 2000 (7%). A comparison of housing stock in Seneca County with the top four counties of residence for local employees follows.

Year Housing Built as Share of Housing Stock

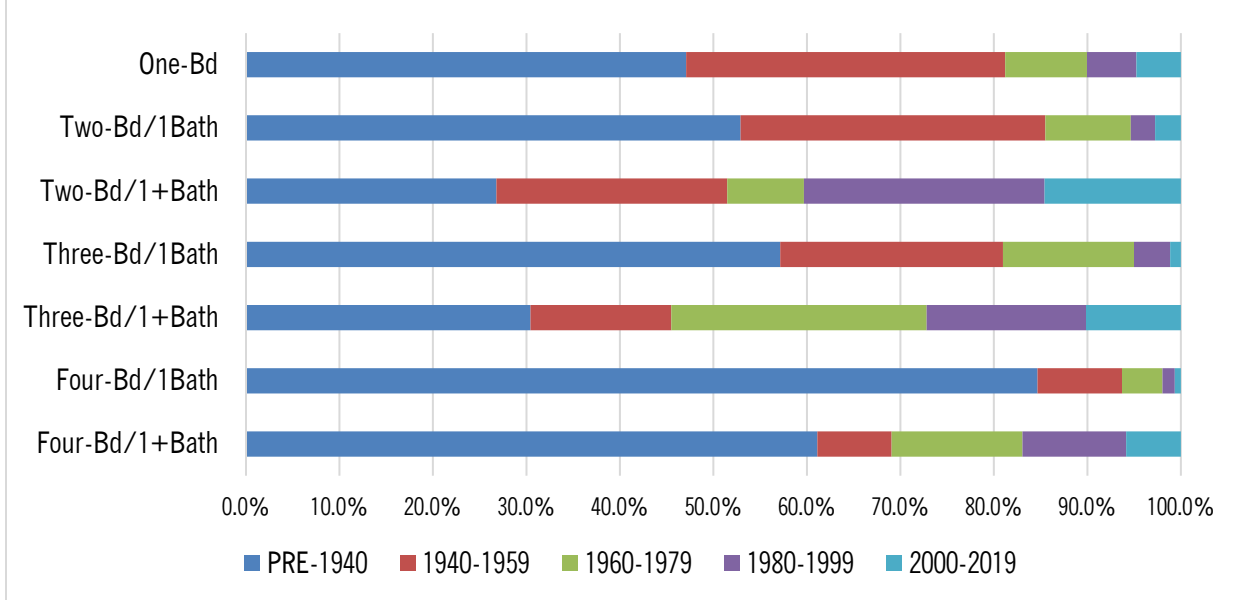


Sources: 2021 5-Year ACS and Census Building Permit Survey

Note: While the adjacent counties of Crawford and Huron Counties have older housing stock, they were not included in the comparison due to lower counts of their residents working in Seneca County.

The high share of older housing stock in Seneca County contribute to many compartmentalized floor plans and three-plus bedroom homes with only one bathroom, as shown below.

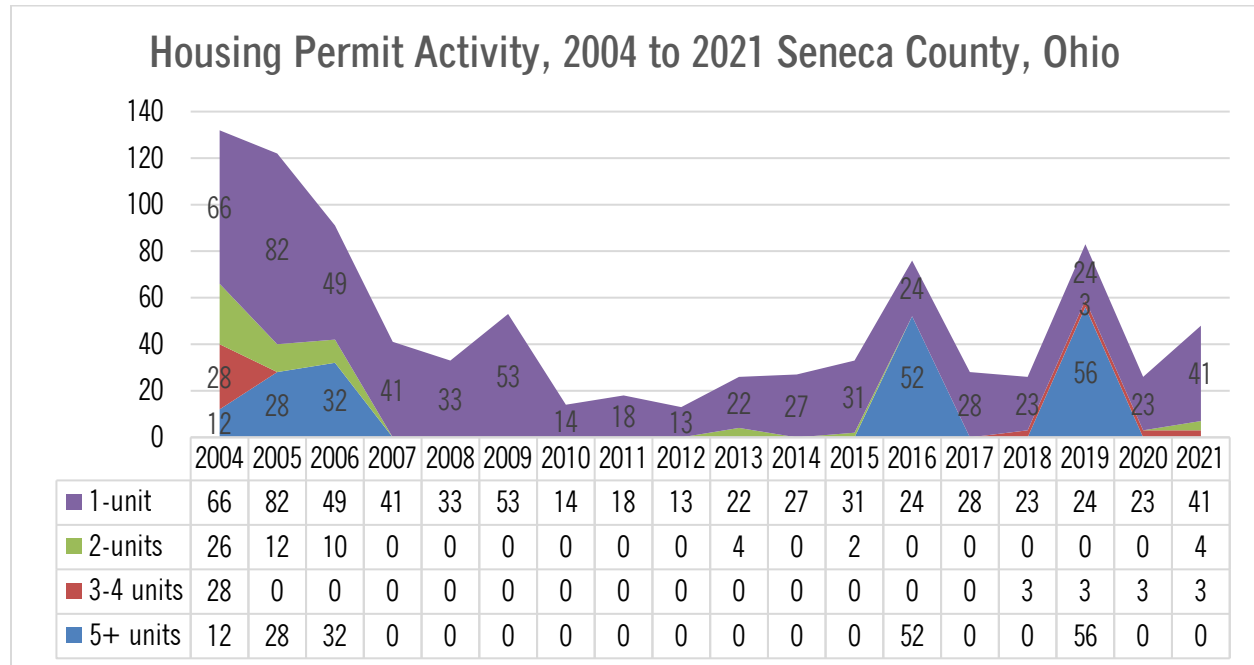
Single-Family Housing by Decades and Type



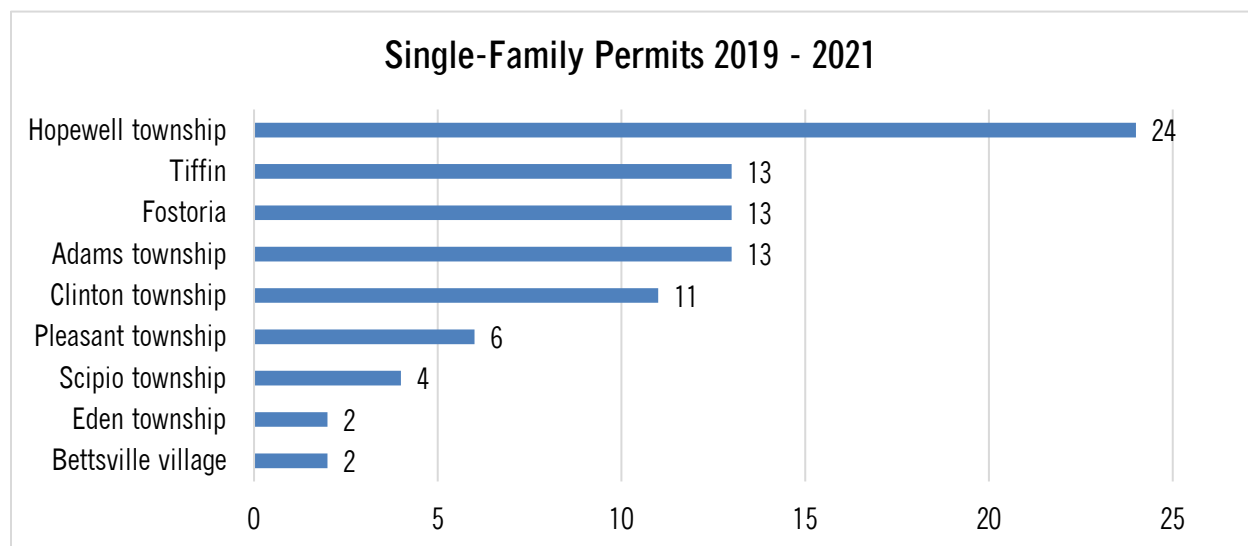
Source: Seneca County Auditor

Building Permit Activity

Single-family building permit activity plummeted in Seneca since the housing boom of the early 2000s mirroring the nationwide housing trend. In 2021, there were 41 single-family permits, the highest in the county in the past decade. In 2005, there were 82 single-family permits issued. From 2000 to 2003, single-family permits ranged from 138 to 187 (years not shown below).



There were four notable years with an appreciable amount of multifamily development (5+ units): 2005, 2006, 2016, and 2019. Most of the multifamily development was in Tiffin with the remaining in Fostoria. Over the past few years, single-family permit activity has been highest in Hopewell Township, followed by Tiffin, Fostoria, Adams, and Clinton Townships.



Source: Census Building Permits Survey

2022 Home Sales

In 2022, there were 112 home sales above \$200,000, slightly less than one-fifth the overall sales in Seneca County. Home sales in the townships, represented one-third of the county's sales and had a substantially higher median sale price than homes recently sold in cities and villages.

Sale Price	County	Townships	City/Villages
Less than \$50,000	59	11	48
\$50,000-\$74,999	68	16	52
\$75,000-\$99,999	64	17	47
\$100,000-\$124,999	80	17	63
\$125,000-\$149,999	87	15	72
\$150,000-\$174,999	81	24	57
\$175,000-\$199,999	44	24	20
\$200,000-\$224,999	26	11	15
\$225,000-\$249,999	17	13	4
\$250,000-\$274,000	24	17	7
\$275,000-\$299,999	19	14	5
\$300,000-\$324,999	11	8	3
\$325,000-\$349,999	3	3	0
\$350,000-\$374,999	6	5	1
\$375,000-\$399,999	3	2	1
\$400,000 and Higher	3	2	1
Total	595	199	396
Median Sale Price	\$132,000	\$174,000	\$120,000
\$200,000 and Higher	112	75	37

Source: Seneca County Auditor

Note: some newly constructed housing built since 2020 are not yet recorded as home sale prices by the county auditor.

Two-thirds (67.0%) of homes priced over \$200,000 were sold in Seneca County's townships.

Regional Home Listing Activity Comparison

For context, DDA compared Seneca County home listing activity with the following 16 counties in the Northwest Ohio region.

- Allen
- Crawford
- Defiance
- Fulton
- Hancock
- Hardin
- Henry
- Lucas
- Ottawa
- Paulding
- Putnam
- Sandusky
- Van Wert
- Williams
- Wood
- Wyandot

Seneca County ranks the second lowest in ratios of housing permits and home listings to total households, indicating there are fewer modern housing options for households in Seneca County than 15 of the other 16 counties in Northwest Ohio.

NW Ohio County	2020 Household (HH) Count	Average Annual Permits 2019-2021	Ratio of Permits to HH Count	Average Active Listings 2019-2021	Ratio of Listings Per HH Count
Crawford	18,069	7	0.04%	69	0.38%
Seneca	22,017	29	0.13%	60	0.27%
Hardin	11,638	19	0.16%	45	0.39%
Williams	15,262	27	0.17%	62	0.40%
Henry	11,262	22	0.20%	32	0.29%
Sandusky	24,444	48	0.20%	76	0.31%
Wyandot	9,084	19	0.21%	28	0.31%
Fulton	16,801	39	0.23%	53	0.32%
Lucas	181,899	415	0.23%	770	0.42%
Defiance	15,482	41	0.26%	53	0.34%
Van Wert	11,589	30	0.26%	46	0.40%
Allen	40,935	111	0.27%	189	0.46%
Putnam	12,976	47	0.36%	31	0.24%
Hancock	31,107	114	0.37%	125	0.40%
Paulding	7,590	32	0.42%	27	0.36%
Wood	53,202	279	0.52%	177	0.33%
Ottawa	17,748	136	0.76%	169	0.95%

Seneca County had the third lowest average home listing price in Northwest Ohio at \$115,743 and based on owner incomes in the county rank third overall in terms of affordable listing prices.

NW Ohio County	Avg Listing 2019-2022	Price Rank	Median Owner HH Income (2021)	Ratio Listing/Income
Paulding	\$112,516	2	\$67,484	1.667
Crawford	\$100,438	1	\$60,131	1.670
Seneca	\$115,743	3	\$66,561	1.739
Van Wert	\$131,862	6	\$69,666	1.893
Putnam	\$151,647	12	\$79,890	1.898
Sandusky	\$136,671	7	\$70,145	1.948
Defiance	\$143,070	11	\$73,307	1.952
Henry	\$141,192	9	\$72,049	1.960
Lucas	\$142,381	10	\$72,350	1.968
Hardin	\$123,690	4	\$62,247	1.987
Allen	\$139,973	8	\$70,021	1.999
Williams	\$128,179	5	\$62,794	2.041
Wyandot	\$155,683	13	\$70,908	2.196
Fulton	\$177,652	14	\$72,627	2.446
Hancock	\$222,559	15	\$77,271	2.880
Wood	\$259,363	16	\$85,737	3.025
Ottawa	\$316,400	17	\$76,549	4.133

The median days a listing was on the market from 2019 through 2021 is 48 in Seneca County, 6th lowest in the region with Hancock County leading the region in shortest days on the market at 41.5.

Home Listings – Seneca County (source: Realtor.com)

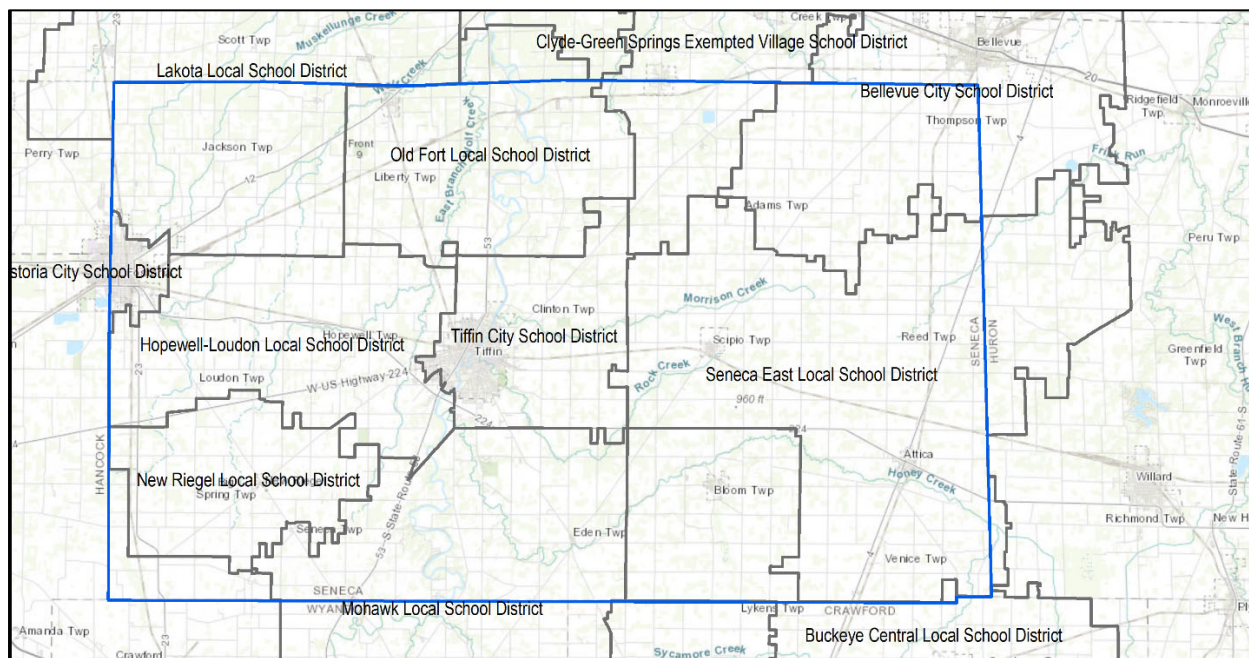
A review of homes listed for sale on Realtor.com in January 2023, shows there only are a few available homes priced above \$175,000 and a general lack of modern housing options. Following is a point-in-time summary of home listings on Realtor.com:

- 79 listings
 - 61 homes priced below \$175,000.
 - 14 homes priced \$175,000 - \$300,000; six are contingent in contract.
 - 4 homes priced above \$300,000; three are contingent in contract.
- All homes listed are more than 20 years old.

April 6, 2023, Realtor.com had a total of only nine homes priced above \$200,000, with three pending or contingent in contract. The average home age of the available homes is 72.5 years.

School Ratings (GreatSchools.org)

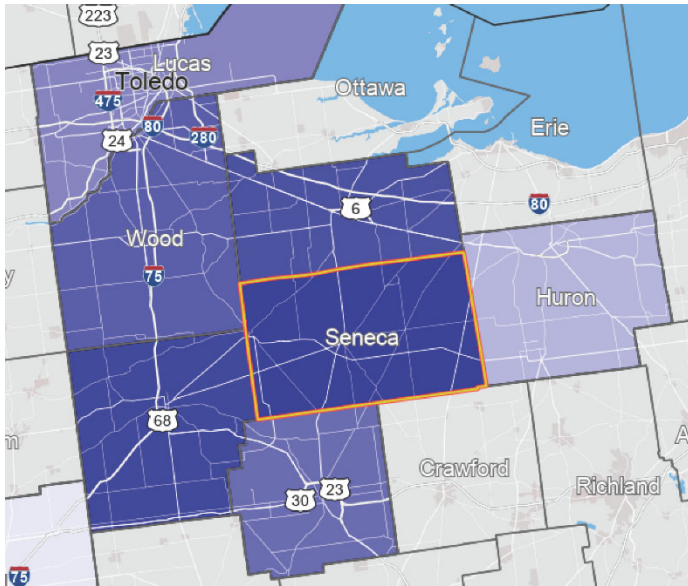
Realtor.com partners with GreatSchools.org, a nonprofit organization, rates schools on a variety of factors. Two schools in Seneca County have public school ratings of eight and nine, Hopewell-Louden Local High School and Green Springs Elementary School, respectively. eight other public schools in Seneca County had ratings of seven: Old Fort Elementary; Seneca East Junior and High Schools; New Riegel High School; Noble Elementary School (Tiffin); Hopewell-Louden Local Elementary school; Mohawk Elementary School; and Lakota Elementary School. The remaining schools, except two charter schools in Tiffin and the Junior/High School in Fostoria, have five to six ratings which the organization considers average. The private schools in Tiffin and Fostoria were not rated. A school district reference map is below.



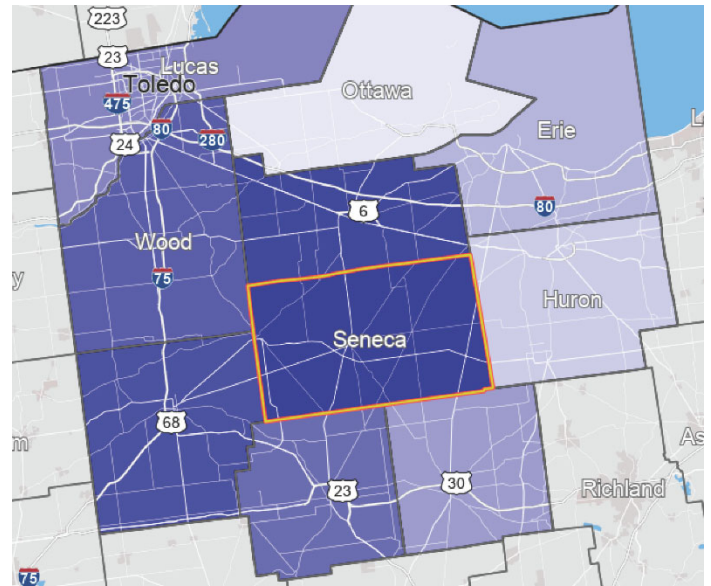
IV. Employee and Household Demand

Resident/Employee Mobility

According to the Census' Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, the top four counties that Seneca County residents commute to work outside the county are Hancock, Sandusky, Wood, and Wyandot County. Similarly, these also are the top four counties where local workers reside and commute into Seneca County for work.



Work Destination Report, Thematic Map



Home Destination Report, Thematic Map

A comparison of county mobility among Seneca County and the top four counties shows that Seneca County has the lowest share of persons who move within the same county.

County	Population	Movers (%)	Move within Same County	Share move within same county
Wood	125,317	12,568 (10.0%)	12,568	58.6%
Hancock	75,606	12,185 (16.1%)	6,639	54.5%
Sandusky	59,135	6,589 (11.1%)	3,734	56.7%
Seneca	54,513	7,233 (13.3%)	3,721	51.4%
Wyandot	21,523	1,260 (5.9%)	1,260	62.7%

The share of estimated Seneca County residents moving each year is at the same rate as others in the region, whether or not the type of housing they prefer is available in Seneca County. With such limited housing, the result is high shares of persons moving to another home outside the county. Under a scenario that Seneca County retains 55% of its residents that are moving, an additional 257 persons would live in the county. Considering the average family has 2.4 persons, there would be a retention of 107 households.

LEHD data indicates, as of 2019, more people live and work in Seneca County than the other counties (53.7% versus 33.0% to 47.2%). The employment base in Seneca County increased by 5.5% from 2010 to 2019. During this same period, county resident employment only increased by

only 0.7%, with nearly an additional 600 employees living outside the county commuting into Seneca County for work.

Employment has remained stable in Seneca County and the 2021 unemployment rate is relatively low among all counties and continues to decline in most months of 2022 (2022 year-end data is not available).

County	Employees of Seneca County Businesses		Seneca County Residents Who Are Employed Anywhere		2021 Unemployment Rate
	2010	2021	2010	2021	
Wood	55,365	66,989	61,828	66,238	4.3%
Hancock	40,143	44,140	36,822	39,311	4.1%
Sandusky	25,411	24,786	29,663	28,788	5.2%
Seneca	18,563	18,574	25,974	25,509	4.7%
Wyandot	7,738	9,419	10,837	12,363	3.5%

Seneca County leads the area with more residents that work, regardless of location, than total employees that work for businesses based in the county. This is an indication that Seneca is viewed as a preferred place of residence.

Household Growth

Household growth in Seneca County over the past decade increased by 243 households or 1.1%: 3.5 times less than the combined household growth in the six surrounding counties (3.8%) and 4.5 times Ohio (4.5%). At a 4% 10-year household growth, Seneca County would increase by 880 households or 88 annually. Four of Seneca County's fifteen townships had household growth from 2010 to 2020: Clinton, Eden, Hopewell, and Liberty.

Area	2010 Census	2020 Census	# Change	% Change
Seneca County	21,774	22,017	243	1.1%
Cities/Village*	10,946	11,183	237	2.2%
Townships	10,828	10,834	6	0.1%
<i>Adams</i>	489	482	(7)	-1.4%
<i>Big Spring</i>	653	652	(1)	-0.2%
<i>Bloom</i>	672	653	(19)	-2.8%
<i>Clinton</i>	1,576	1,639	63	4.0%
<i>Eden</i>	729	740	11	1.5%
<i>Hopewell</i>	1,081	1,103	22	2.0%
<i>Jackson</i>	561	545	(16)	-2.9%
<i>Liberty</i>	822	832	10	1.2%
<i>Loudon</i>	867	862	(5)	-0.6%
<i>Pleasant</i>	613	598	(15)	-2.4%
<i>Reed</i>	316	294	(22)	-7.0%
<i>Scipio</i>	655	655	0	0.0%
<i>Seneca</i>	568	566	(2)	-0.4%
<i>Thompson</i>	527	519	(8)	-1.5%
<i>Venice</i>	699	694	(5)	-0.7%

Household Income

The median household incomes in the townships are \$10,000 higher than the countywide median household income. Furthermore, nearly half the township residents have incomes above \$75,000 and can support the cost of a newly constructed home. Countywide, the share of households earning above \$75,000 is 39.4%, 7.7 percentage points below the township share (47.1%).

Annual Household Income	Seneca County (2022)		Townships* (2022)	
	Total Households	Share of Households	Total Households	Share of Households
<\$15,000	1,814	7.5%	549	5.1%
\$15,000-\$24,999	1,824	7.5%	578	5.4%
\$25,000-\$34,999	2,271	9.3%	875	8.1%
\$35,000-\$49,999	3,372	13.9%	1,433	13.3%
\$50,000-\$74,999	5,494	22.6%	2,258	21.0%
\$75,000-\$99,999	3,918	16.1%	2,096	19.5%
\$100,000-\$149,999	3,815	15.7%	1,979	18.4%
\$150,000-\$199,999	1,207	5.0%	713	6.6%
\$200,000+	624	2.6%	284	2.6%
Total	24,339	100.0%	10,765	100.0%
Median	\$60,478		\$70,250	

Source: ESRI, Incorporated

*The household counts of five villages are included in township.

In 2022, there were 112 annual home sales above \$200,000. There are 9,564 households with incomes of \$75,000 and higher and generally can afford these home sale prices. The ratio of home sales to income-appropriate households is 1.2%, this is considered a very low rate. At conservative rates of 2.0% to 2.5%, there would be 79 to 127 more home sales of \$200,000 and higher.

Household Sizes

The average household sizes in Seneca County are largest in the township areas of Seneca County. The lower average household size in cities and villages are attributable, in large part, to a much higher share of single-person household renters.

Area	Average Household Size
Seneca County	2.39
Cities/Villages	2.28*
Townships	2.40 (Clinton) – 2.60 (Loudon)

*2020 Census, includes portions of Fostoria and Green Springs outside of Seneca County.