Mythbusters

Addressing Pushback and Building Buy-In

Kevin Chu

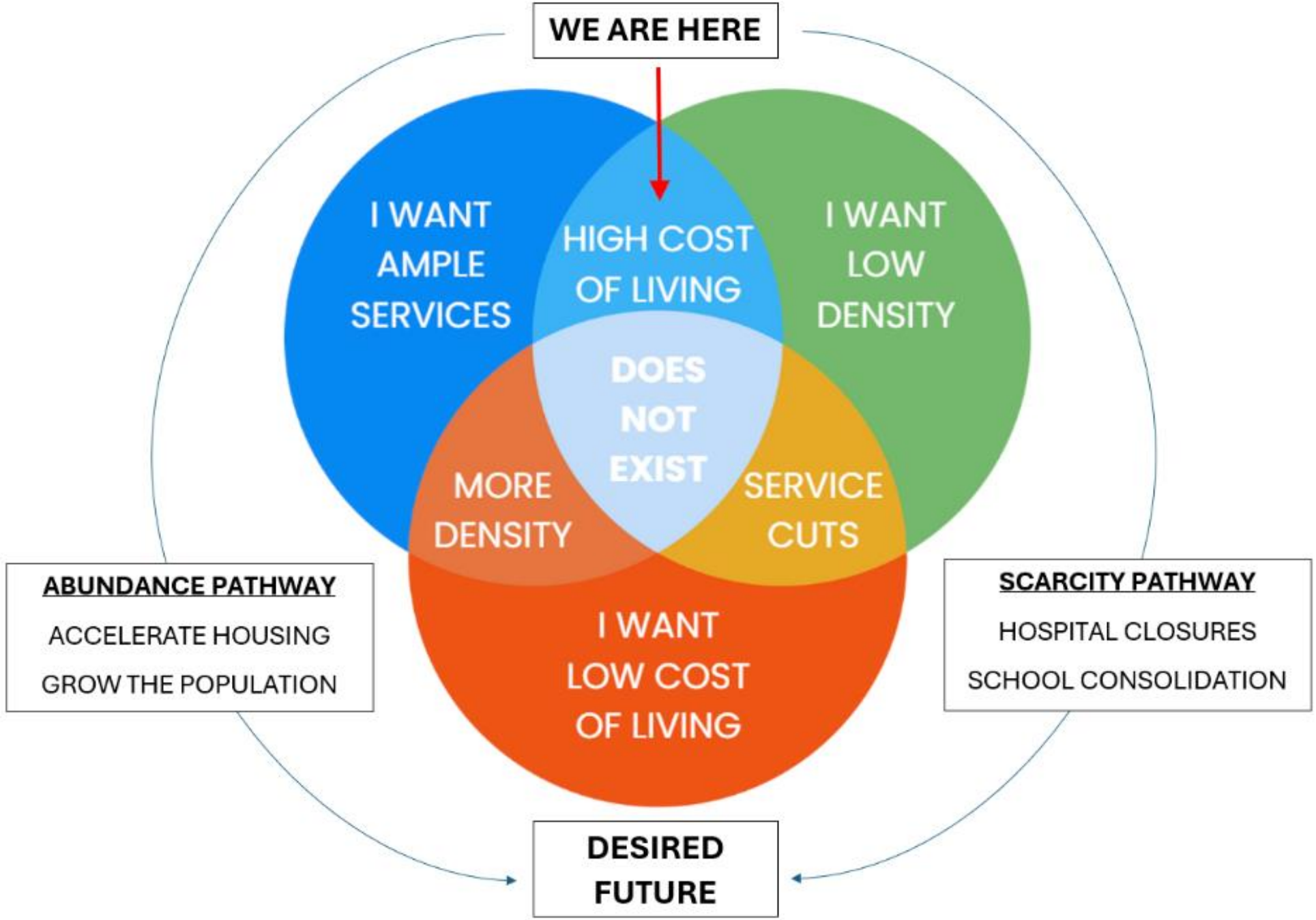
Executive Director

Vermont Futures Project

VERMONT CHAMBER of Commerce

VERMONT ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Towards Affordability and Abundance


WE ARE HERE
I WANT AMPLE SERVICES
HIGH COST OF LIVING
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ABUNDANCE PATHWAY
ACCELERATE HOUSING
GROW THE POPULATION
SCARCITY PATHWAY
HOSPITAL CLOSURES
SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION
DESIRED FUTURE

Connecting the dots

Symptoms

Workforce, housing, healthcare, education, childcare, affordability, sustainability, equity, economic opportunity, etc.

Root Causes

People and Places (demographics and housing scarcity)


802,000 by 2035

VERMONTER POLL RESULTS

Are you supportive of growing Vermont's population size to strengthen its workforce?

Our work contributes to the increasing recognition and support for growing Vermont's working-age population.

Response	2022	2025	Change
Yes	48.7%	**60.2%**	11.5%
No	38.5%	**20.8%**	−17.7%
Unsure	12.8%	**19.0%**	6.2%

Table: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Vermonter Poll - UVM Center for Rural Studies • Created with Datawrapper

MYTH

There aren’t enough jobs in Vermont for people who are here, let alone newcomers.

2:1 Ratio

There are **2 open jobs** for every **1 job seeker** in Vermont.

Ratio of Job Seekers to Job Openings in Vermont

At the start of the last decade, there were nearly two job seekers for every one job opening. This ratio has steadily shifted and is now inverted meaning there is about one job seeker for every two open jobs. Demographics have influenced this drastic shift with far fewer young people entering the workforce compared with the number of people retiring.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2012	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.5	1.8
2013	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.5	1.4
2014	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.1
2015	0.9	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.9	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8
2016	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8
2017	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
2018	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
2019	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
2020	0.4	0.5	0.6	4.2	2.7	2.2	2.8	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0
2021	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
2022	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4
2023	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
2024	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.8
2025	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.5							

The 2020 anomaly was caused by pandemic shut downs that left many people unemployed. Data are seasonally adjusted.

Table: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

MYTH

If we train and retain more homegrown talent, we don’t need to attract out-of-staters.

Vermont Age Distribution from 2000

At the turn of the century, Vermont had a high proportion of prime working-age adults relative to the number of children and elderly. There were significantly more children compared to today.

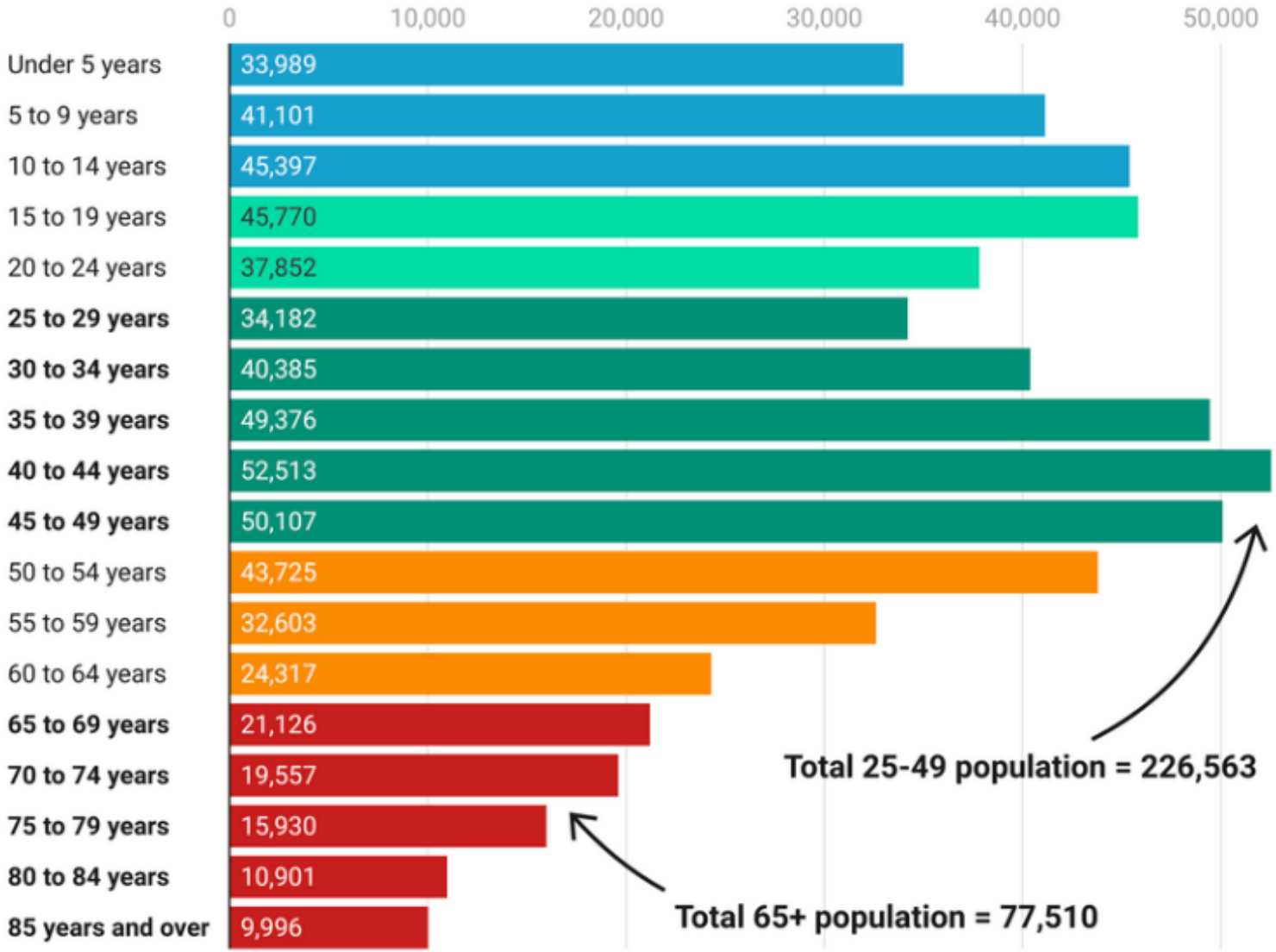
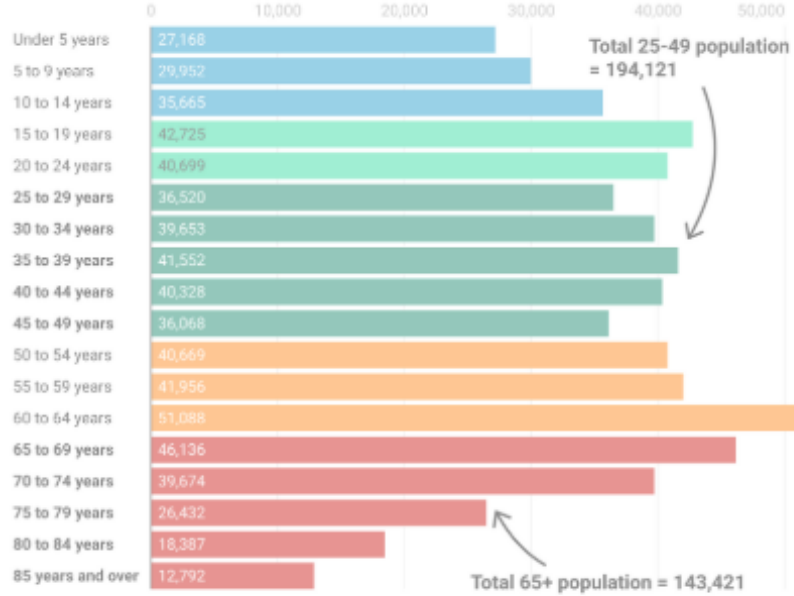


Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Vermont Age Distribution from 2023

Today, Vermont's prime working-age population is much smaller relative to the number of children and elderly. The fertility rate is too low to grow the future workforce and tax base.



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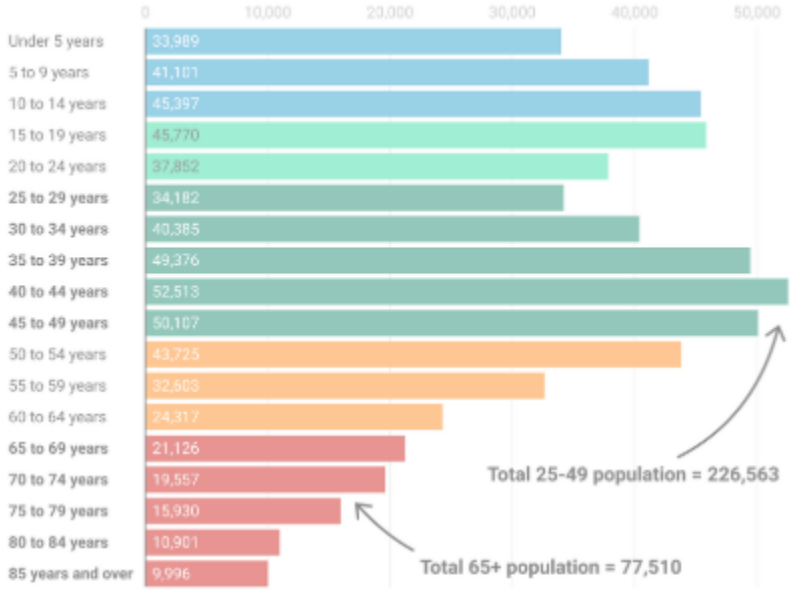

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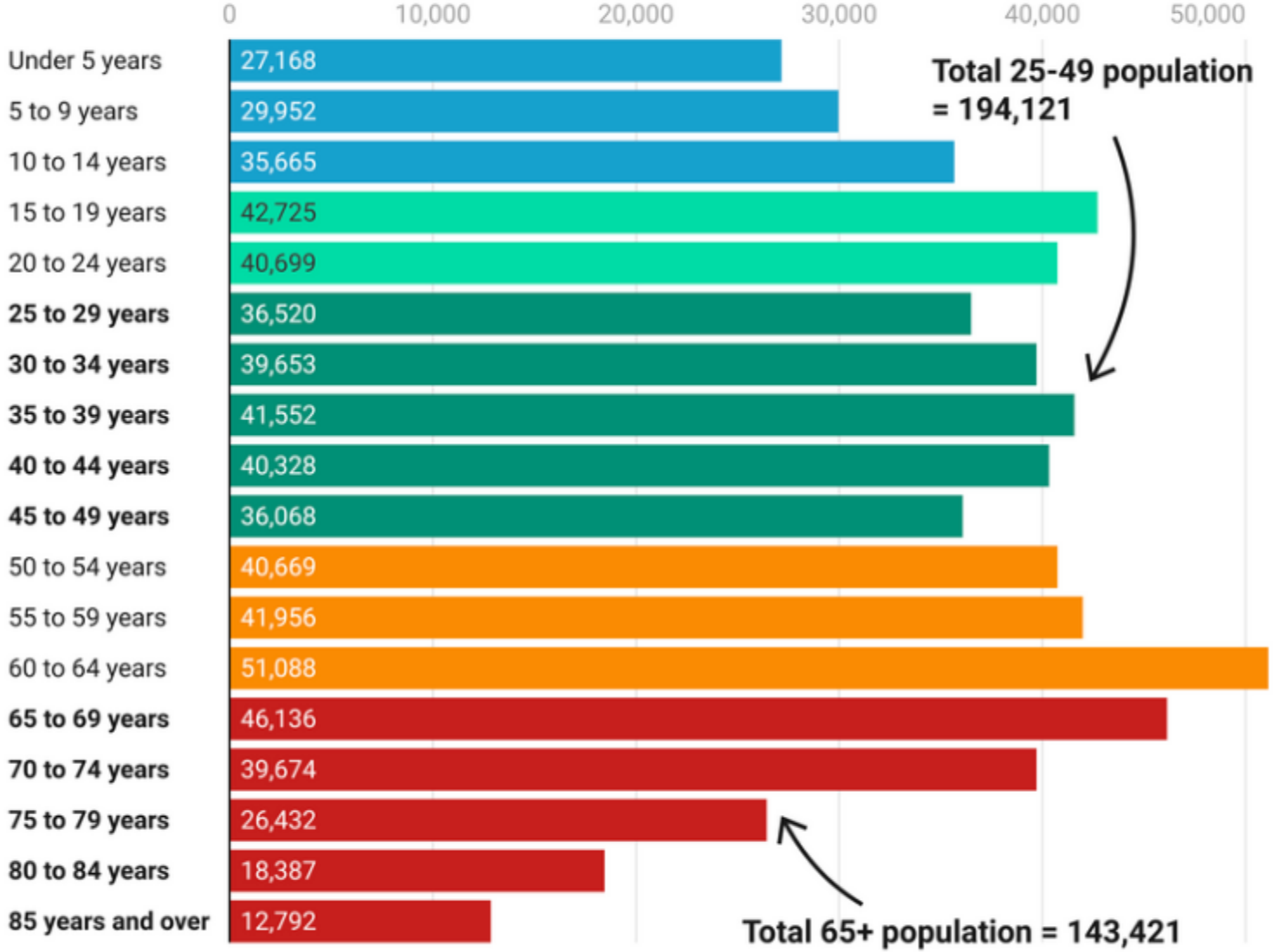
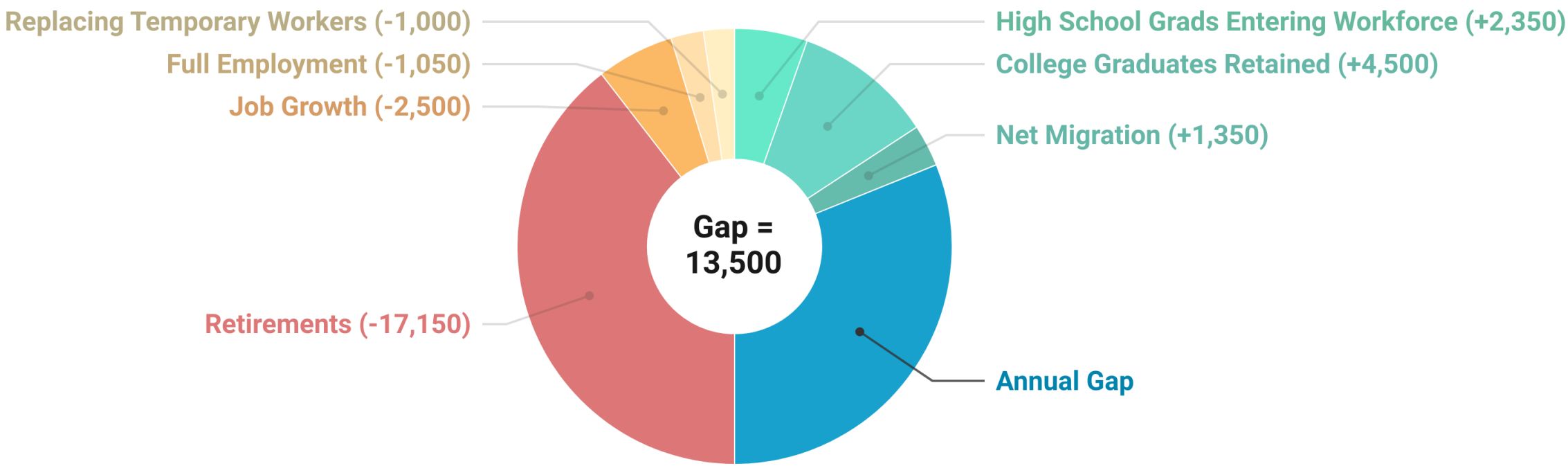


Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Vermont's Workforce Supply and Demand



Demand calculated by combining Vermont Department of Labor long-term occupational projections for workforce exits and job growth, increasing labor force participation to sustain full employment, and estimates of temporary and seasonal employees filling workforce gaps. Supply calculated by combining retention data of high school and college graduates along with rolling average of net migration combining pre- and post-pandemic net migration data.

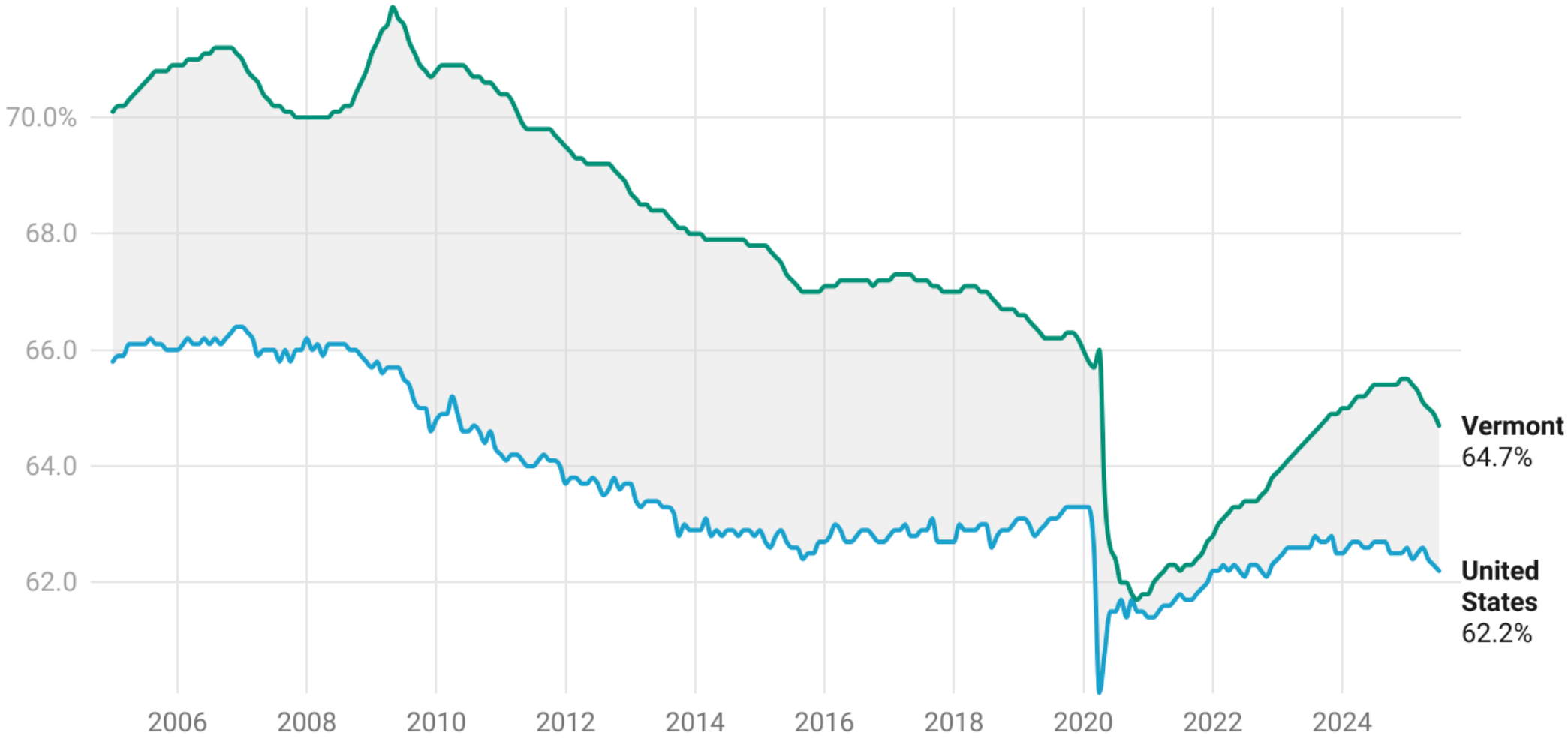
Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Created with Datawrapper

MYTH

Vermont doesn’t need more people. Our problem is there are too many people here that don’t want to work.

Labor Force Participation Rate - VT vs. US

Vermont has historically had a much higher labor force participation rate compared to the national rate. This outperformance continues to persist despite demographic pressures.

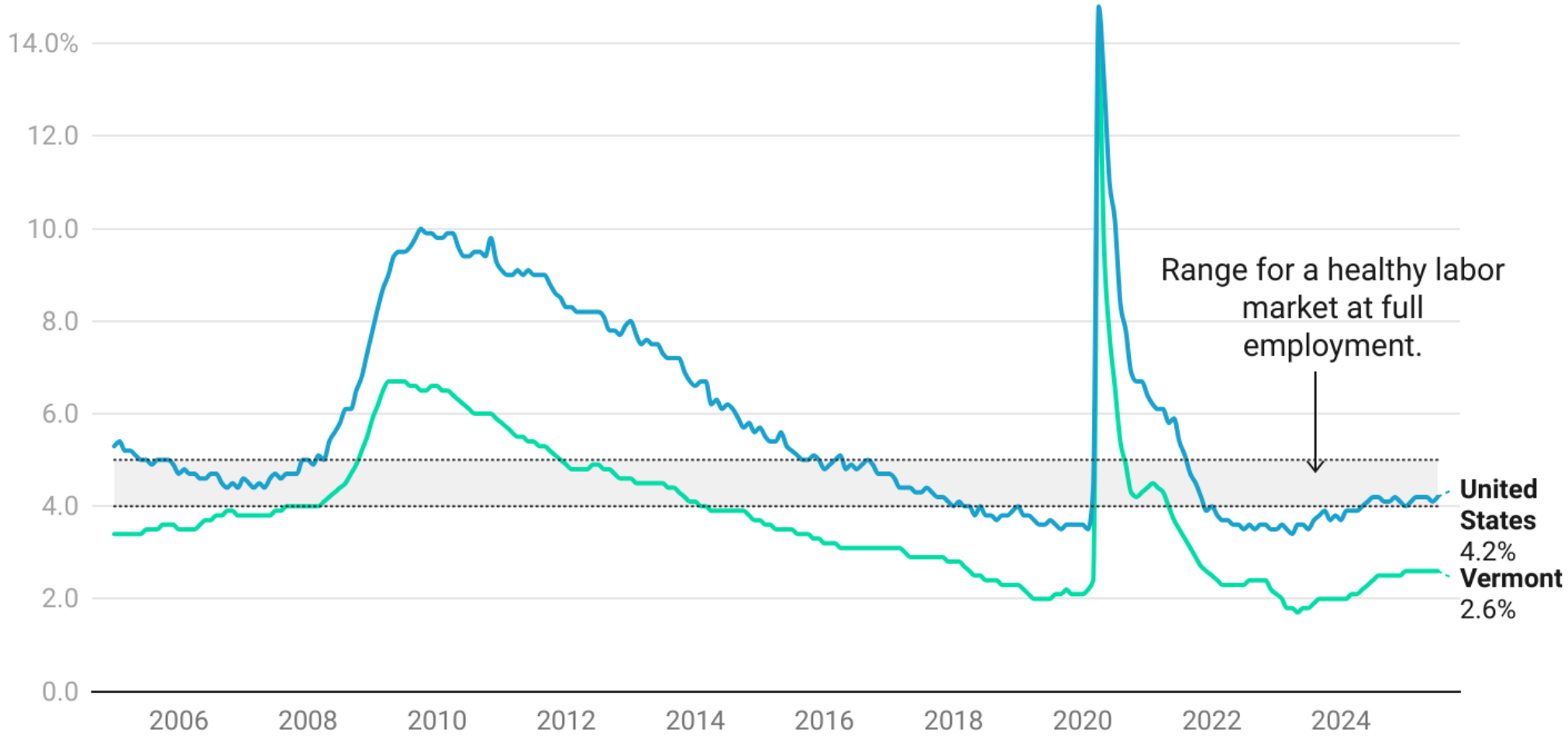


Last updated 9/15/2025

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

Unemployment Rate

Even prior to the pandemic, Vermont's unemployment rates have been below what many economists consider to be full employment of 4-5%. Potential consequences of unemployment being too low are increased inflation and lower productivity.

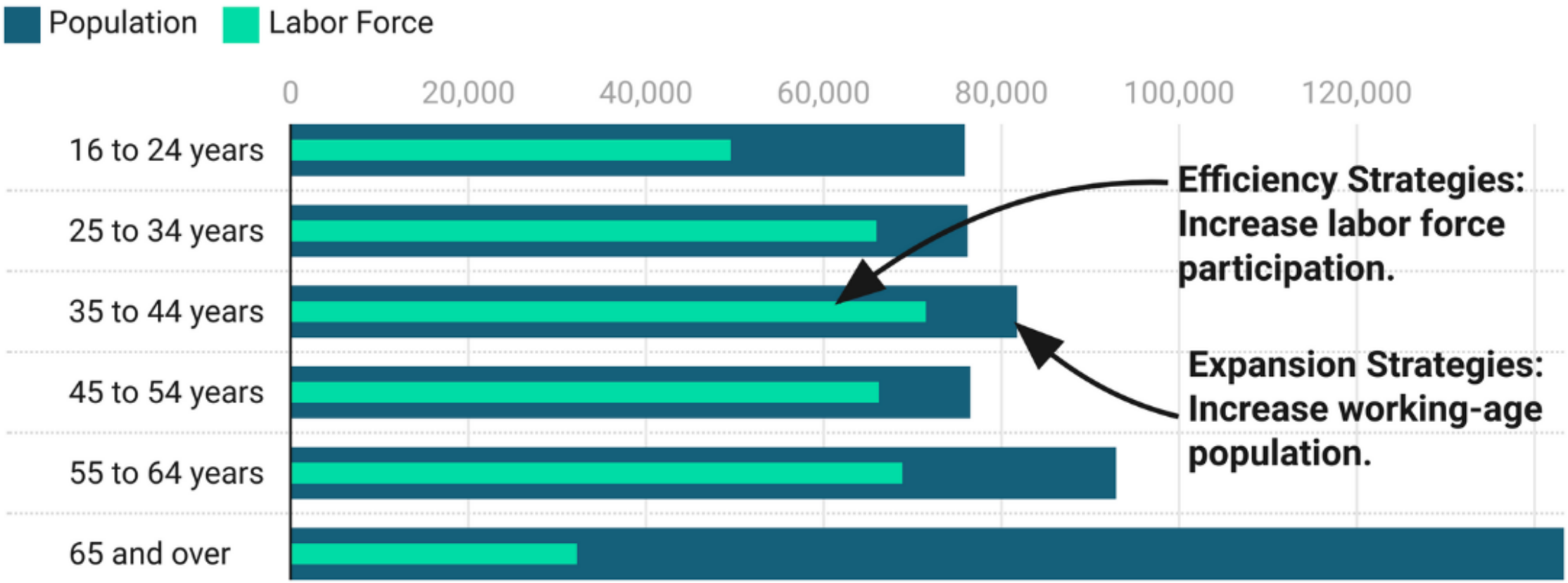


Last updated 9/15/2025

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

2023 Vermont Labor Force and Population by Age

Most prime working-age Vermonters are in the labor force. Reducing barriers or increasing incentives to work can get some people back into the labor force, but intentional long-term efforts to grow the working-age population are also needed to close the workforce gap.



Prime working-age adults are defined as people between the ages of 25 and 54.

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Connecting the dots

Symptoms

Workforce, housing, healthcare, education, childcare, affordability, sustainability, equity, economic opportunity, etc.

Root Causes

People and Places (demographics and housing scarcity)

VERMONTER POLL RESULTS

Are you supportive of creating new housing to increase the population in...?

Local, regional, and state level support for housing has surged in recent years while uncertainty has declined.
Our work contributes to shifting public sentiment on housing at all scales. **Data-informed education makes a difference.**

	Response	2023	2025	Change
Vermont	Yes	60.0%	**73.4%**	13.4%
	No	20.3%	**12.9%**	-7.4%
	Unsure	19.7%	**13.7%**	-6.0%
Your Town	Yes	57.2%	**65.9%**	8.7%
	No	24.6%	**19.2%**	-5.4%
	Unsure	18.2%	**14.8%**	-3.4%
Your Neighborhood	Yes	46.3%	**50.5%**	4.2%
	No	31.0%	**31.9%**	0.9%
	Unsure	22.7%	**17.6%**	-5.1%

Table: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Vermonter Poll - UVM Center for Rural Studies • Created with Datawrapper

MYTH

Population and housing growth is going to turn Vermont into New Jersey while ruining our rural character and small-town feel.

Vermont's population density is currently 70 people/sq. mi. **New Jersey is almost 1,300**.

Growing to **802,000** would put Vermont at **87 people/sq. mi.**

MYTH

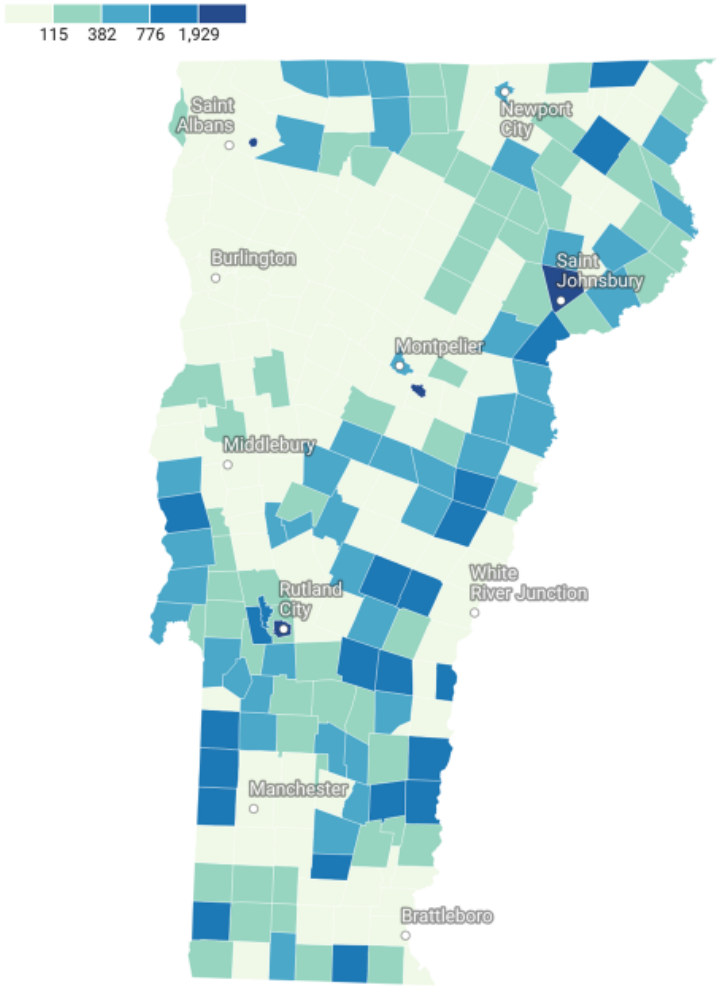
Vermont doesn’t have the “carrying capacity” for more people. It’ll overburden the state and increase costs.

ESTIMATED LATENT CAPACITY = HISTORICAL POPULATION PEAK – CURRENT POPULATION

County	Latent Capacity
Addison	4427
Bennington	4688
Caledonia	6577
Chittenden	34
Essex	5556
Franklin	4922
Grand Isle	157
Lamoille	286
Orange	6901
Orleans	3792
Rutland	13033
Washington	4656
Windham	6963
Windsor	9615
Grand Total	**71607**

Vermont's Existing Capacity for Growth

Many towns around Vermont have depopulated meaning the current population is lower than the historical peak. Recent growth has clustered in and around Chittenden County. Rural revitalization can be part of Vermont's population growth strategy to fill the latent capacity in our communities. In total, Vermont's estimated latent capacity is over 70,000.



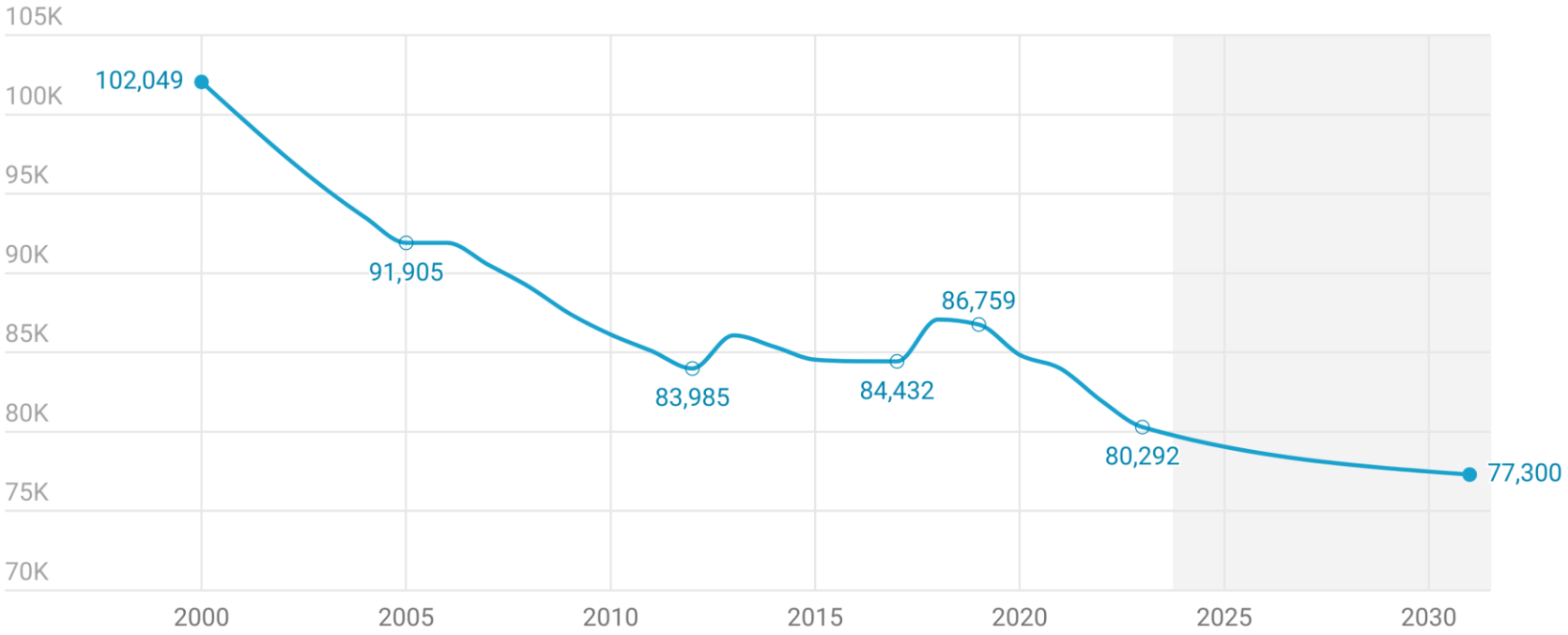
Estimated Latent Capacity = Historical Population Peak - Current Population using Census data from 1791 to 2020. A value of 0 does not mean there is no capacity to grow - it highlights where growth is occurring.

Map: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Vermont Center for Geographic Information • Created with Datawrapper

Enrollment has dropped by over 20,000 in the past 20 years. There's capacity for more children in our schools.

Vermont Total Public School Enrollment

Vermont has the lowest fertility rate of any state in the country. School enrollment is expected to continue declining, meaning higher per-pupil costs, unless Vermont attracts young families to the state.

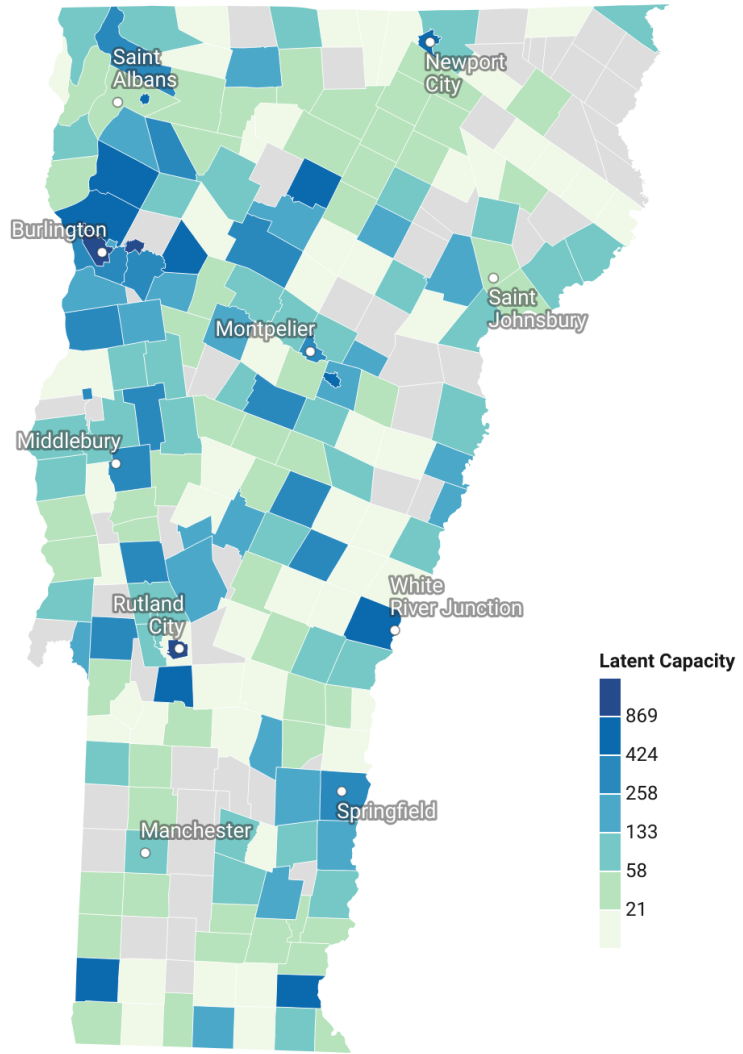


Gray shaded area represents enrollment projections from the National Center for Education Statistics. (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/PES/current_tables.asp)

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Vermont Agency of Education • Created with Datawrapper

Enrollment Latent Capacity 2004 to 2023

There are over 20,000 fewer students enrolled in Vermont's public schools today compared to two decades ago. This is the result of low fertility rates, an aging population, and inadequate housing growth to enable new families to move to Vermont. Communities with schools that have latent capacity are a good starting point for promoting growth.



Gray shaded towns on this map either do not have schools in them, or the enrollment numbers were allocated to an adjacent town based on school districts. Further research is needed to clarify the data in cases of school closures, consolidation, or municipal reorganizations as in the case of the Essex-Westford School District.

Map: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Vermont Agency of Education • Created with Datawrapper

MYTH

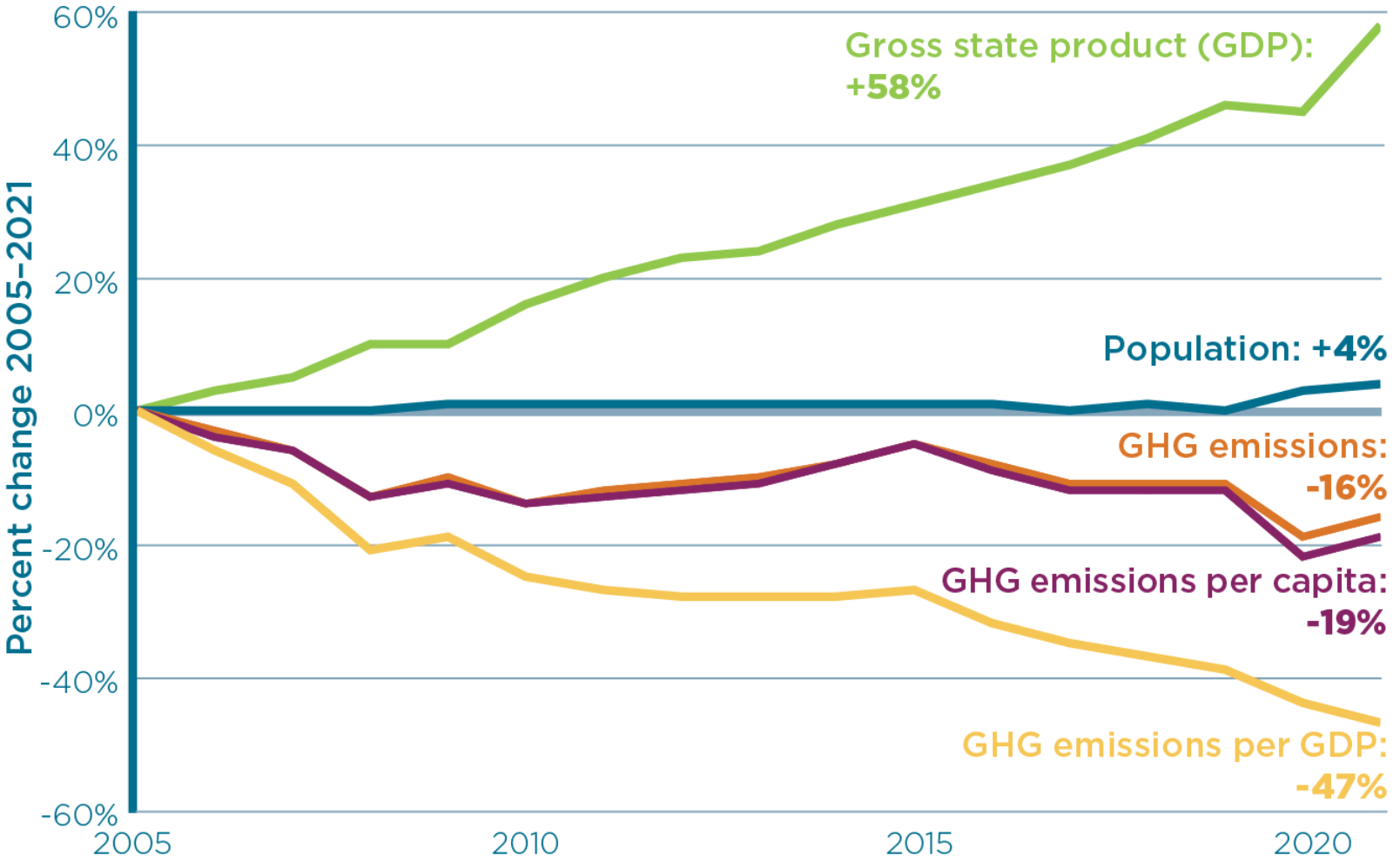
Growth and development are a threat to Vermont's environment and beauty.

In the late 1800's, only about **20%** of Vermont's land was covered by forest.

Today, forests cover nearly **80%** of Vermont's land.

Growing the economy and reducing our emissions impact on climate change have been happening simultaneously.

Percent change in VT GHG emissions, population, and GDP, 2005–2021

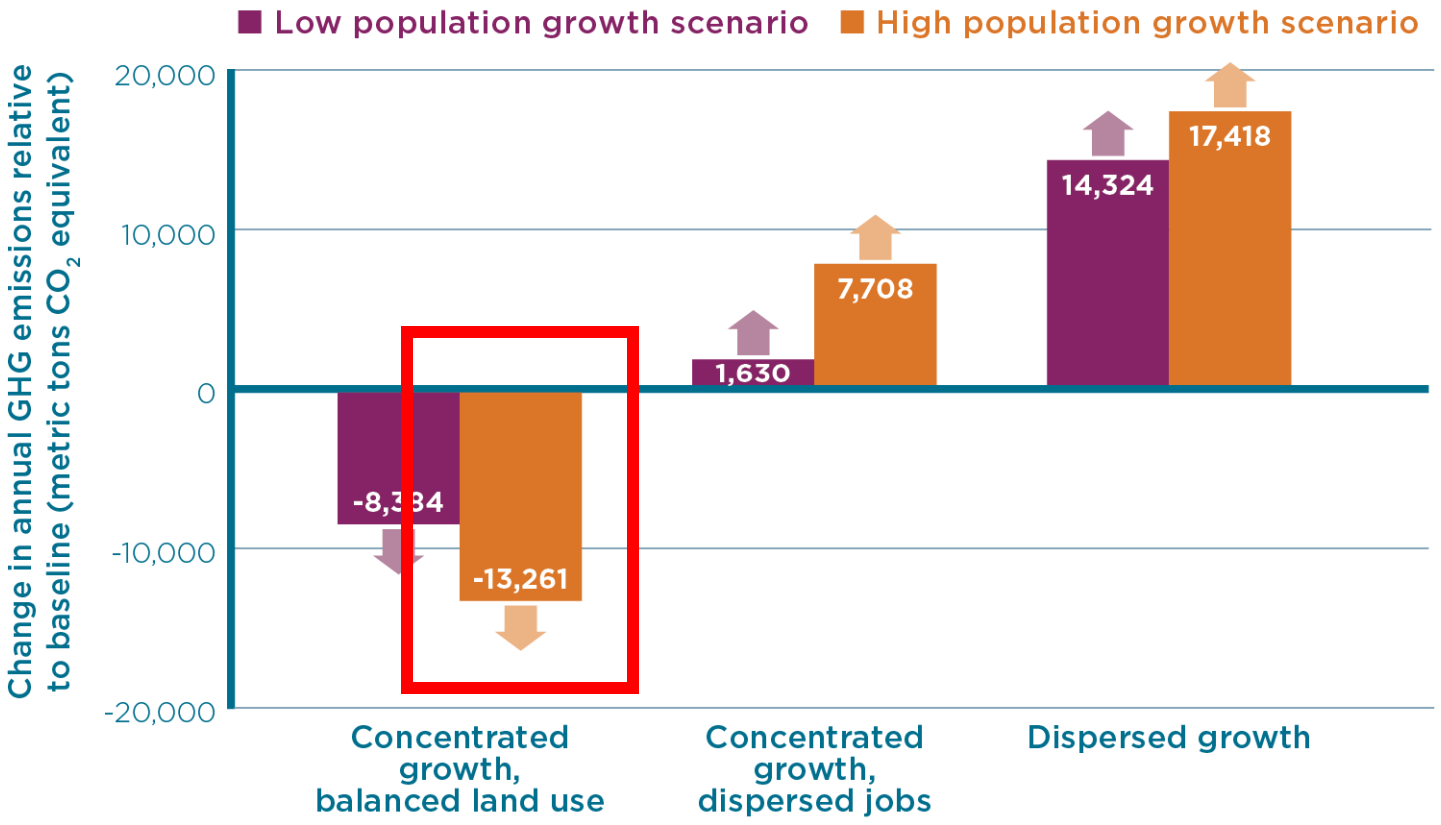


Sources: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, "Vermont Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast: 1990-2021," 2024; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2024.

ENERGY ACTION NETWORK

High population growth (13%) using smart growth principles lowers greenhouse gas emissions more than any other development scenario in AoT growth models.

Estimated annual GHG emissions impacts of different development scenarios in Vermont by 2050



Source: RSG and VHB, prepared for the Vermont Agency of Transportation, "Vermont Smart Growth, VMT, and GHG Research Project Report," 2024.

ENERGY ACTION NETWORK

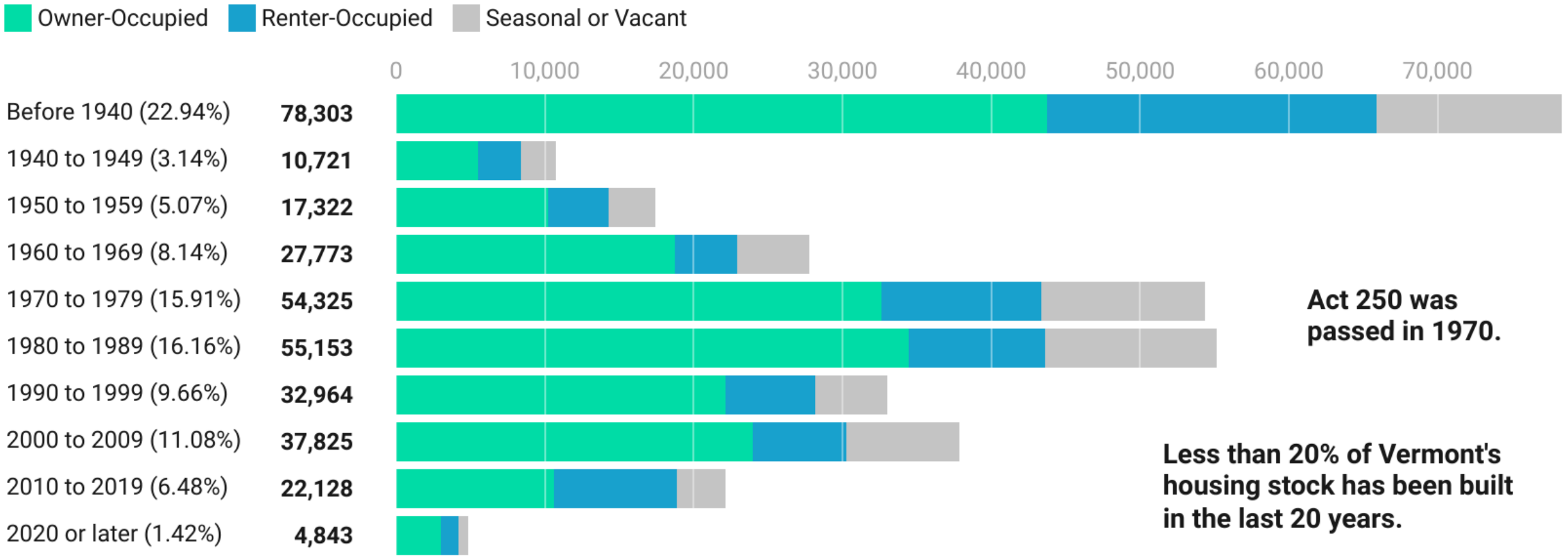
Notes: The low growth scenario assumes a 3% population increase by 2050, and the high growth scenario assumes a 13% increase. In the "Concentrated growth, balanced land use" scenario, future development is modeled on places in VT that exemplify smart growth practices today. In the "Concentrated growth, dispersed jobs" scenario, future residential development is concentrated in already dense areas while job growth is allocated to lower density areas. In the "Dispersed growth" scenario, low-density development occurs across all developable land in VT, regardless of existing infrastructure and community designations.

MYTH

Vermont’s population isn’t growing so we don’t need more homes. Building new housing will increase costs for Vermonters while benefiting developers and out-of-staters.

Estimated Housing Units by Year Structure Built

Vermont has some of the oldest housing stock in the country. About a quarter of homes were built before 1940. Rates of housing construction were healthy in the 1970s and 1980s relative to the needs of the population at the time. Vermont's current housing shortage is the result of decades of decelerating housing construction.

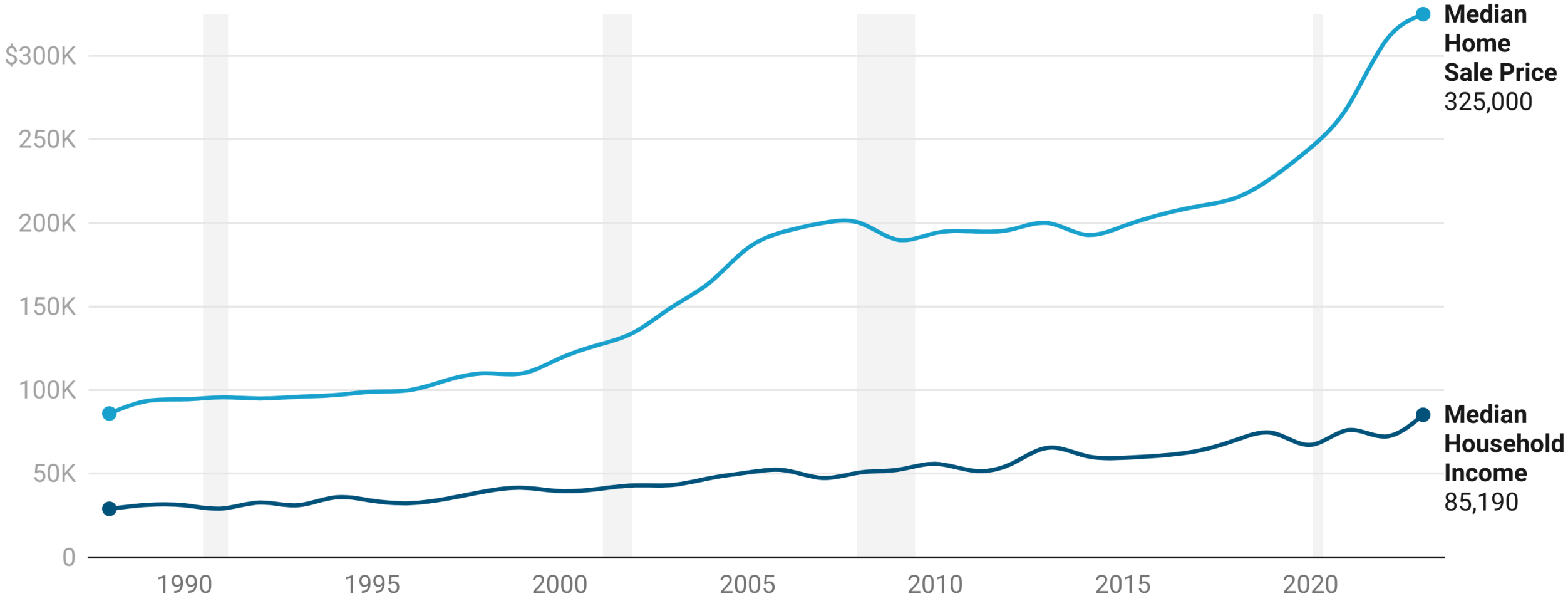


Seasonal data calculated by subtracting owner- and renter-occupied estimates in US Census Bureau 2023 1-year ACS estimates table B25036 from total units estimates in table B25034.

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Vermont Housing Affordability

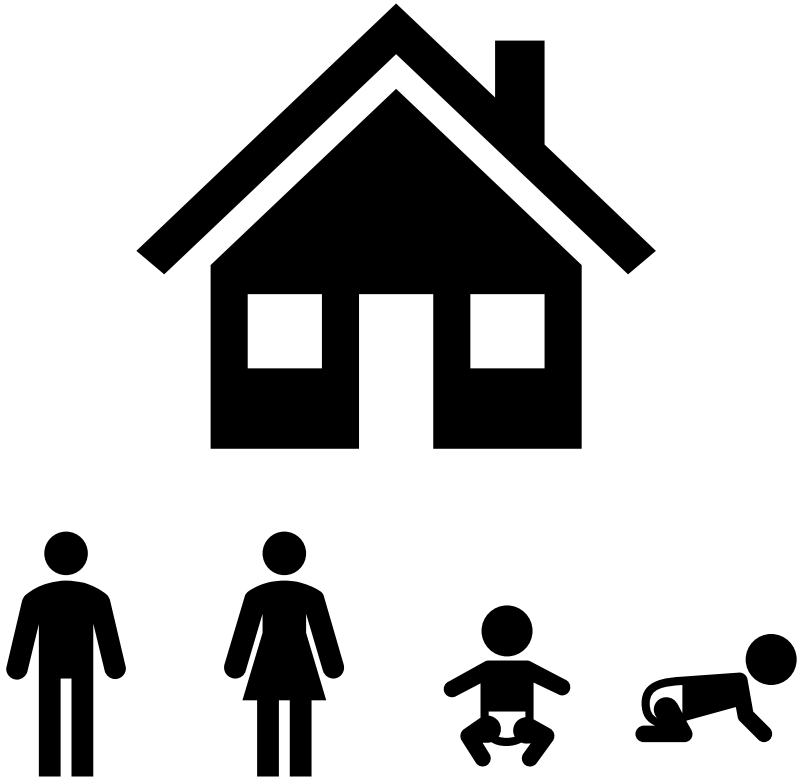
In 1988, the income-to-price ratio was 2.97. In 2023, the ratio was 3.82

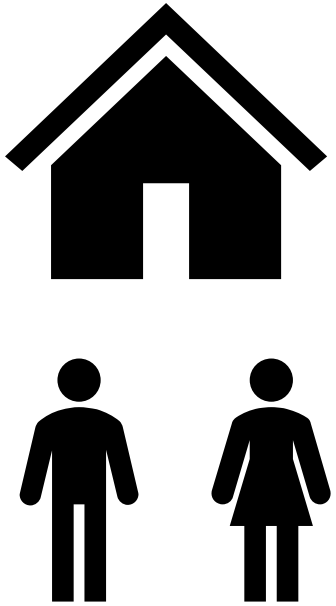


Shaded gray columns represent recessions.

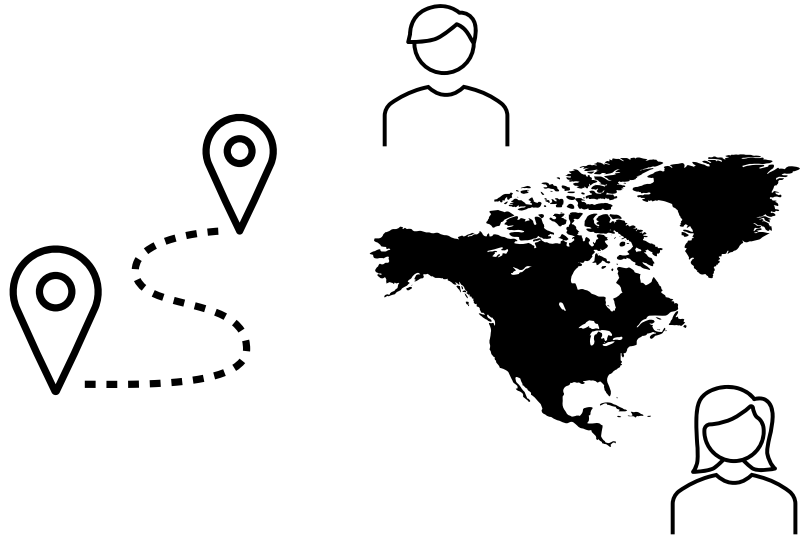
Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: VT Dept. of Taxes and US Census Bureau via Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. • Created with Datawrapper

1970 Median household size was 3.21





2023 Median household size is 2.30

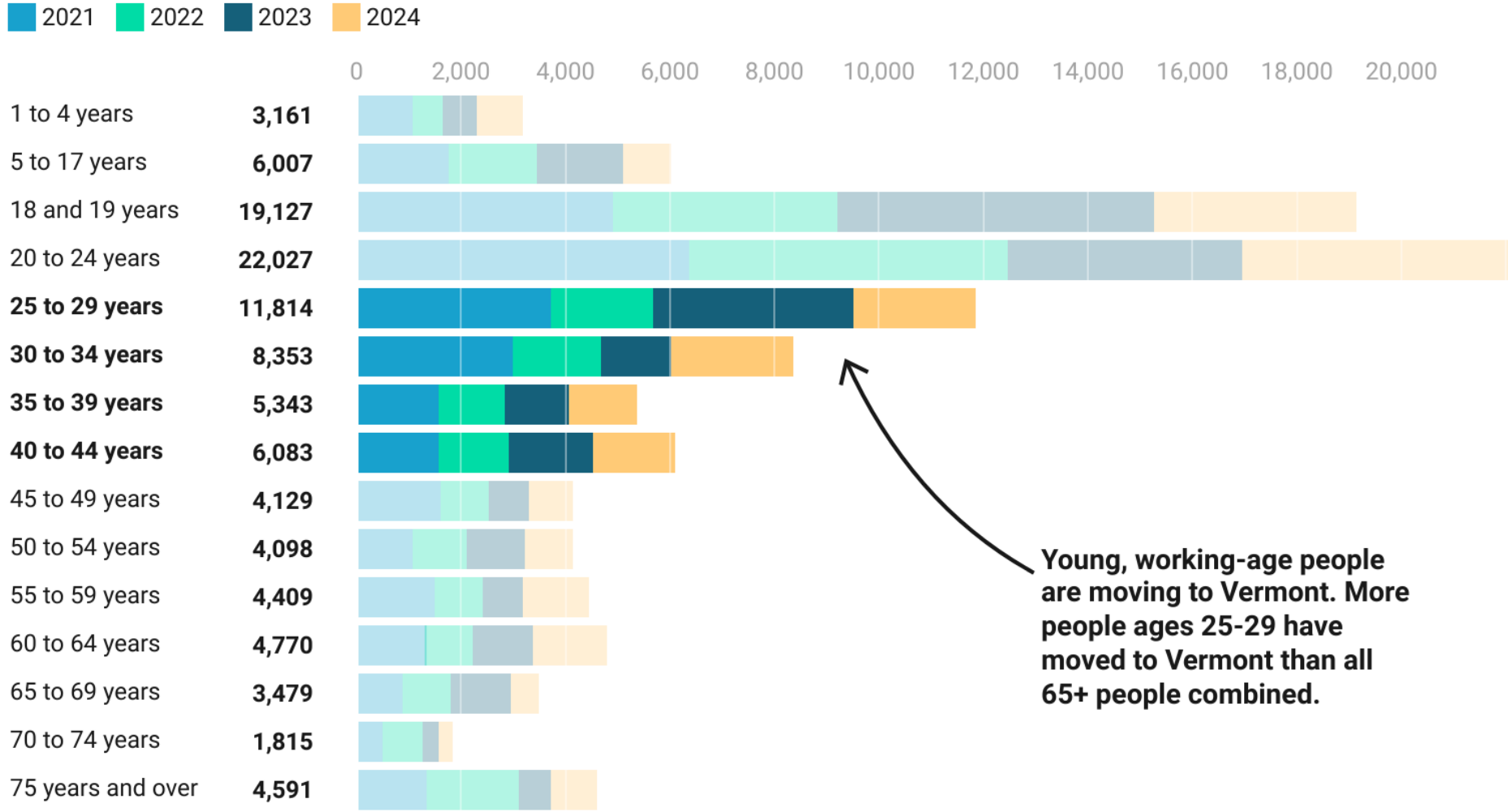


MYTH

We can’t grow our working-age population because young people don’t want to move here.

Cumulative Inbound Migration to Vermont from 2021 to 2024 by Age

Even when excluding college-aged cohorts (18-24) who are often a transitory segment of the population, younger working-age families have led the way for inbound migration to Vermont over the past three years.



This chart only examines inbound domestic migration by age, not net migration. It does not account for outbound migration of Vermonters to other states. Total inbound domestic migration from 2021-2023 totaled 84,703. The total outbound domestic migration during that period was 77,964. Net migration was 6,739. Outbound migration census data by age could not be found for this analysis. Last updated 9/15/2025.

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

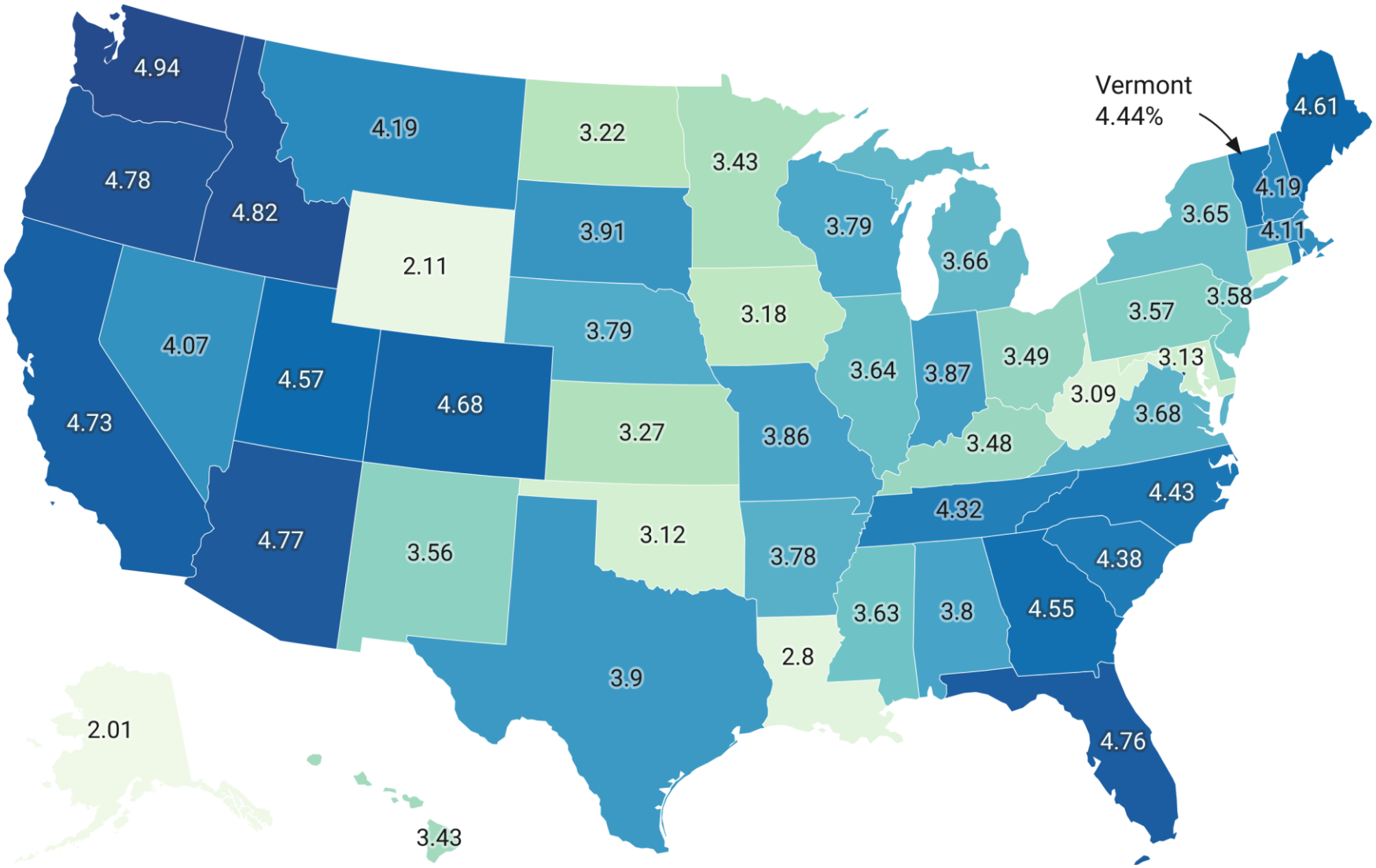
MYTH

We can't attract and retain people because wages in Vermont are not competitive enough.

Vermont ranked **17th in the country in 2023** for median household income. Over the past decade we've had the **12th fastest rate of income growth**.

Rate of Median Household Income Growth 2013 to 2023

Average annual rate of growth in median household income across the United States was 3.07% between 2013 to 2023. Vermont ranked 12th among all states and the District of Columbia during that decade with an annual growth rate of 4.44%. In 2023, Vermont's median household income reached $81,211 which is the 17th highest among all states.



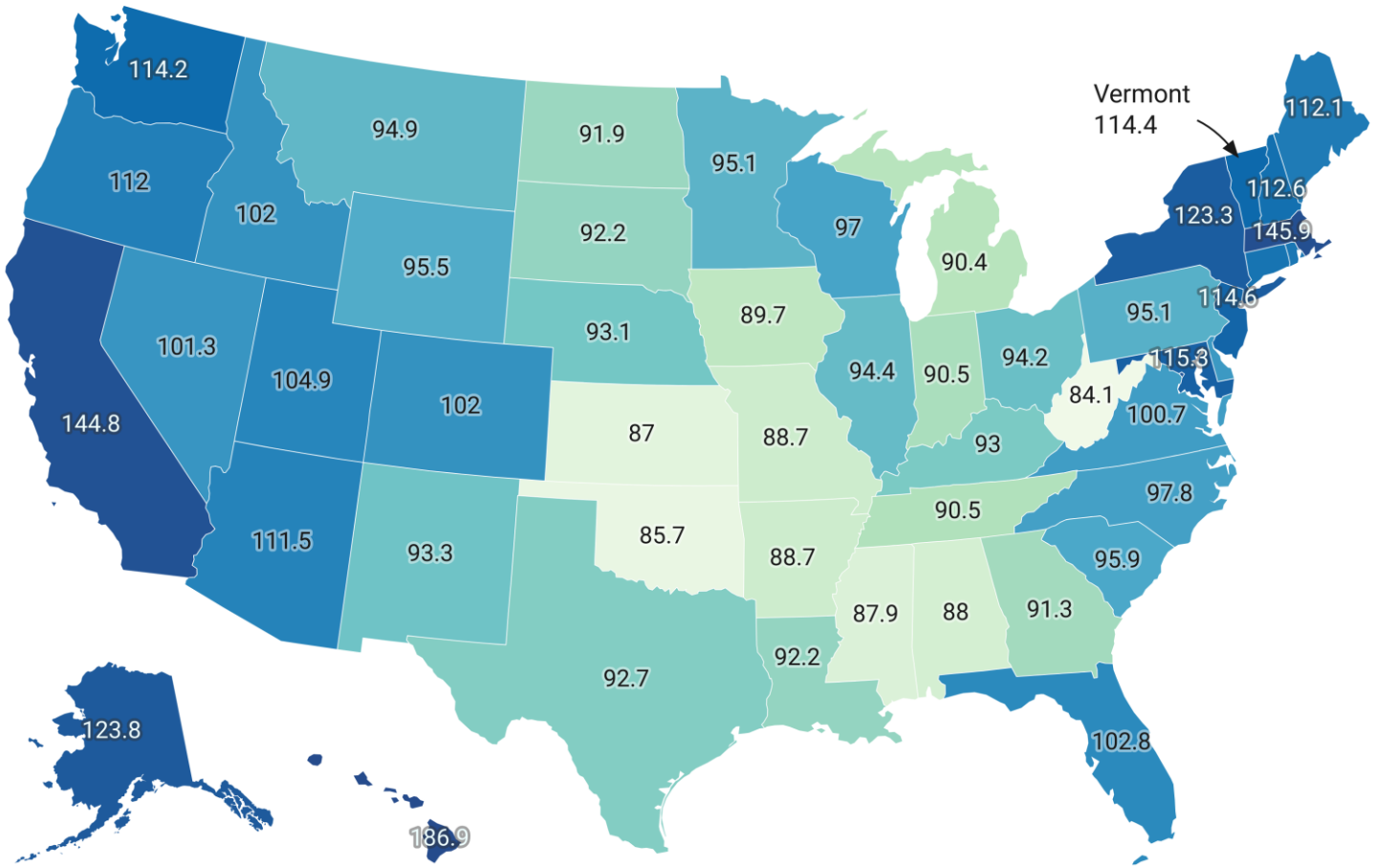
Map: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

There are two sides to the affordability equation. Vermont ranked **43rd in 2024 for cost of living.**

2024 Cost of Living Index

Vermont was ranked 43rd overall in terms of cost of living in 2024 with an overall score of 114.4. Only New Jersey, Maryland, New York, Alaska, California, District of Columbia Massachusetts, and Hawaii had higher costs of living.

Vermont's component scores are as follows:
Groceries = 106.2, Housing = 129.7, Utilities = 112.6, Transporation = 95.8, Health = 111.4, Miscellaneous = 111.1



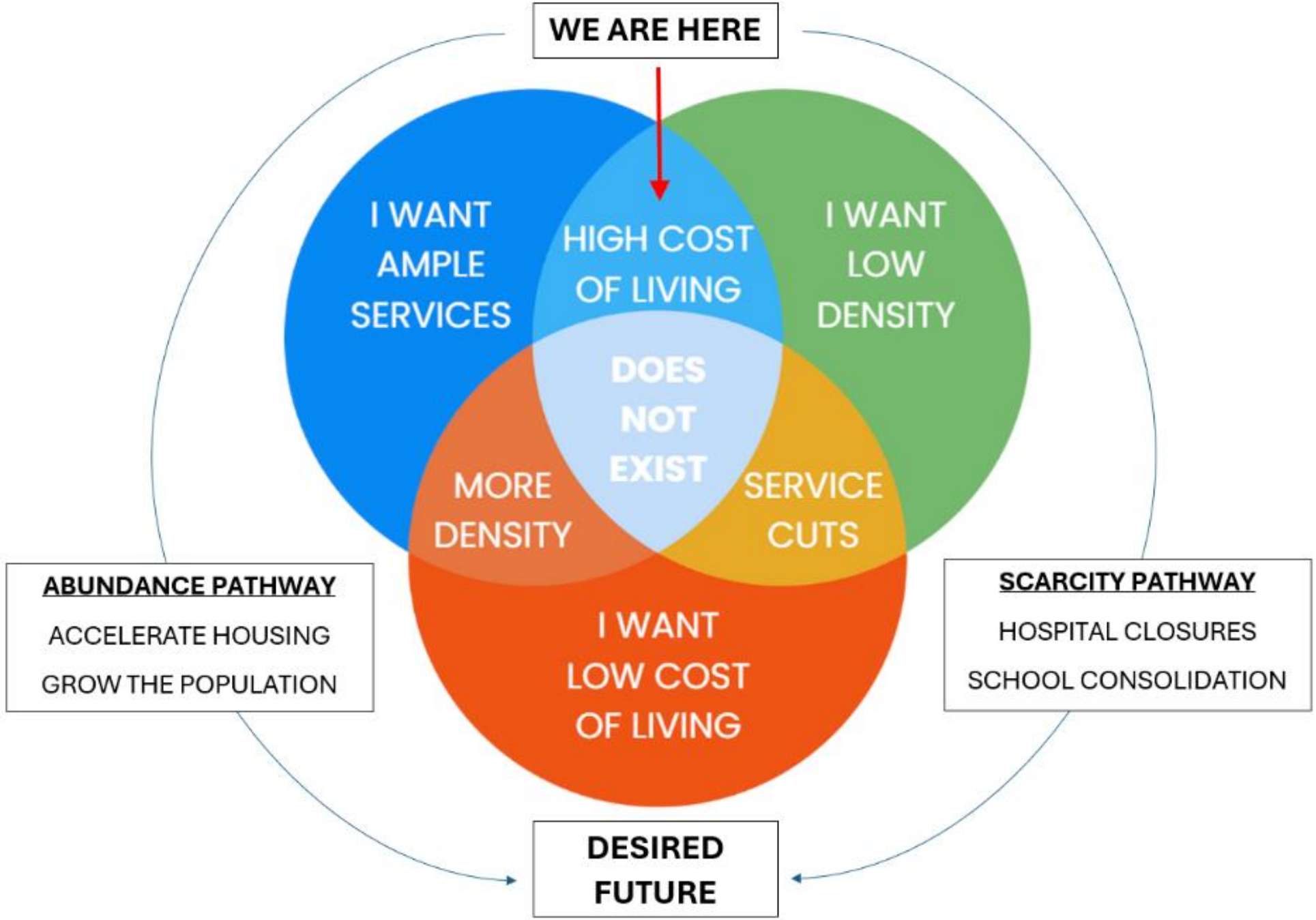
The index is benchmarked to a score of 100 which represents the United States average. Scores higher than the benchmark indicate higher cost of living; scores below the benchmark indicate lower cost of living.

Last updated February 17, 2025

Map: Vermont Futures Project • Source: Council for Community & Economic Research (C2ER). • Created with Datawrapper

VERMONT ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Towards Affordability and Abundance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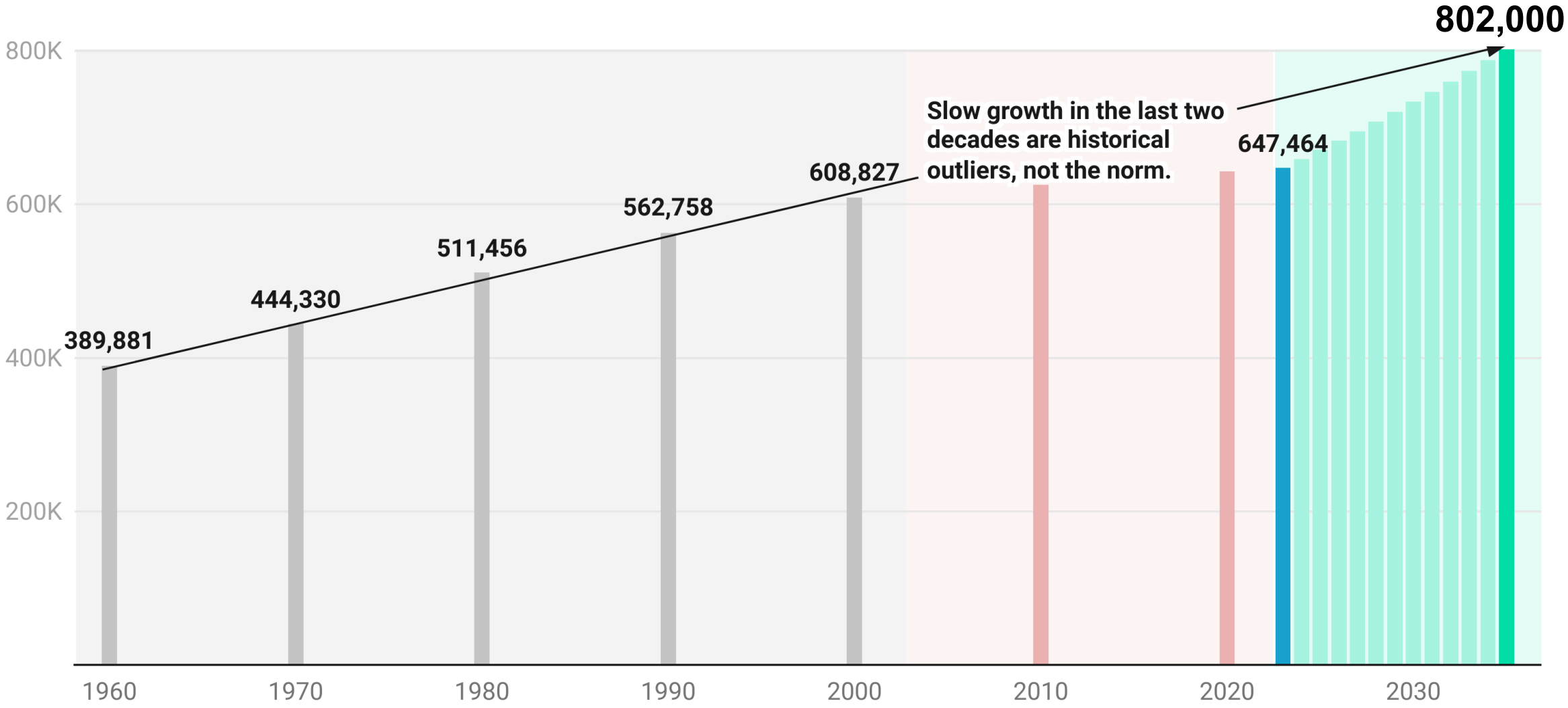
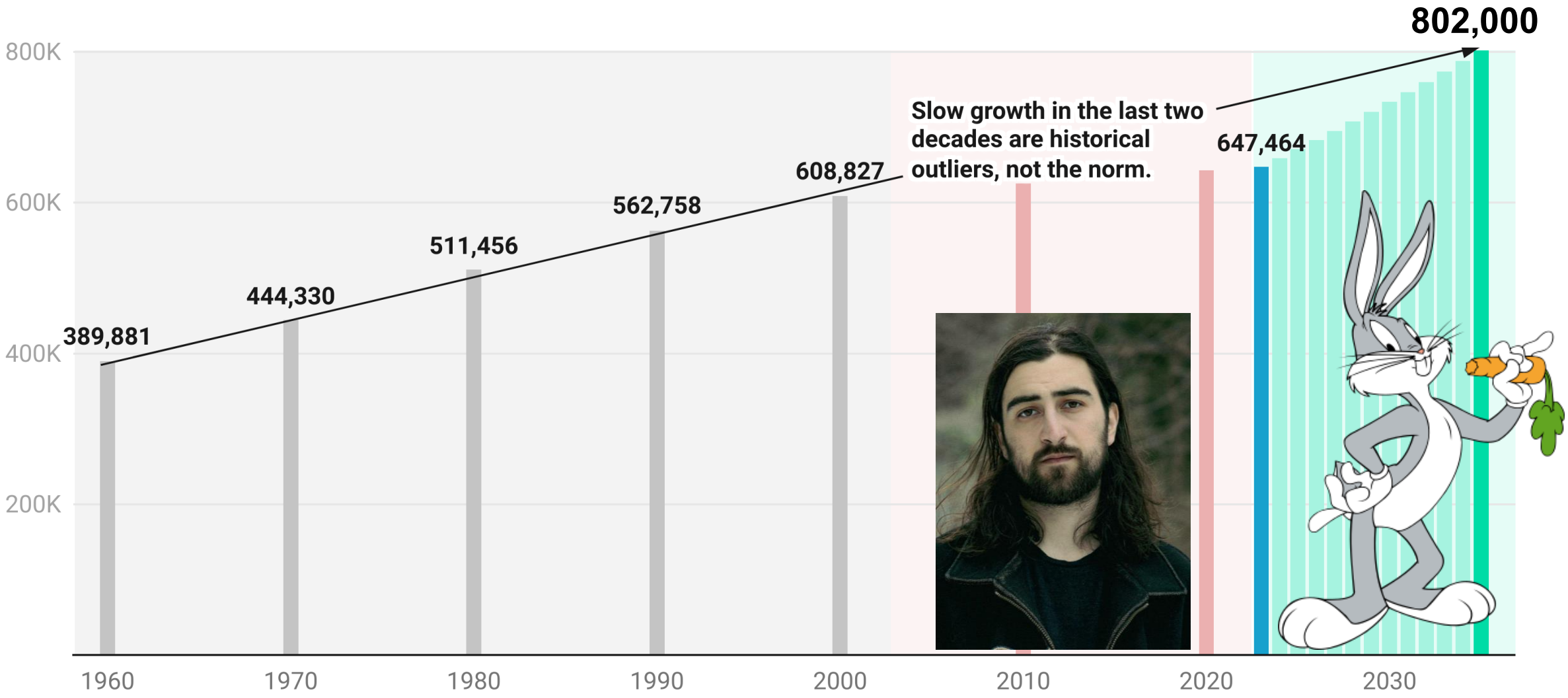
Getting Back on Track: Growing to Address Demographic Pressures



Gray and red columns are historic decennial census data. Blue column is 2023 US Census American Community Survey estimates. Green columns represent future growth needed to close Vermont's projected workforce gap over the coming decade.

Chart: Vermont Futures Project • Source: US Census Bureau • Created with Datawrapper

Getting Back on Track: Growing to Address Demographic Pressures



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