3.0 Virginia Today - Community Profile

The community profile section provides a summary of background information and relevant demographic and economic information based on available data including 2010 Census. The analysis of this data is important to understanding historical conditions and future development and growth potential for the City of Virginia.

3.1 Community History

Virginia's history began with mining explorations. The Village of Virginia was incorporated in 1892, with the origin of the name reportedly being from Alfred R. Humphreys, an early mining leader, naming the city after his wife, Virginia. It is also said that Virginia was a name fitting the abundance of virgin forest of great White and Norway Pine. In 1890, settlers first came to Virginia, lured by the uncovering of iron deposits. It officially became the first city on the Iron Range in 1895.

Fires destroyed what was Virginia several times including 1893 and 1900. After the fire of 1900, all commercial buildings erected in the downtown business district thereafter were required to be of brick, stone or concrete.

The City of Virginia is often referred to the "Queen City". In the 1920's, Virgina was ranked the 5th largest city in Minnesota, with mining activity reaching an all- time heigh. Virginia was the "hub" of the Range and was labeled "The Queen City of the Iron Range."

In 1964, the Taconite Amendment passed. The Taconite industry became a major provider of employment in the area until the early 1980's when the Mining industry experienced a downslide due to the economy. Their labor force was cut by nearly half.

The late 90s and early 2000 saw Virginia partnering with neighboring communities on several Industrial parks and recreational facilities.

(source: City of website, http://www.mn.us/history/index.php)

3.2 Regional Context

The City of Virginia lies in Northeastern Minnesota, in the center of St. Louis County and on the rich Mesabi Iron Range. Virginia is approximately 65 miles north of Duluth and is included in the Duluth Metropolitan Statistical Area. There are several nearby Arrowhead Region communities all within ten miles, including: Aurora, Biwabik, Buhl, Eveleth, Gilbert, and Mountain Iron. The Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan area is about 200 miles south, or three hours by car.

Virginia is also situated at the southern edge of the massive 3 million acre Superior National Forest, a third of which is the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and which also borders on Canada's Quetico Provincial Park. Highways 169 and 53 are major access routes to these popular canoe and recreation areas.

Figure 3-1 – State-wide Location Map

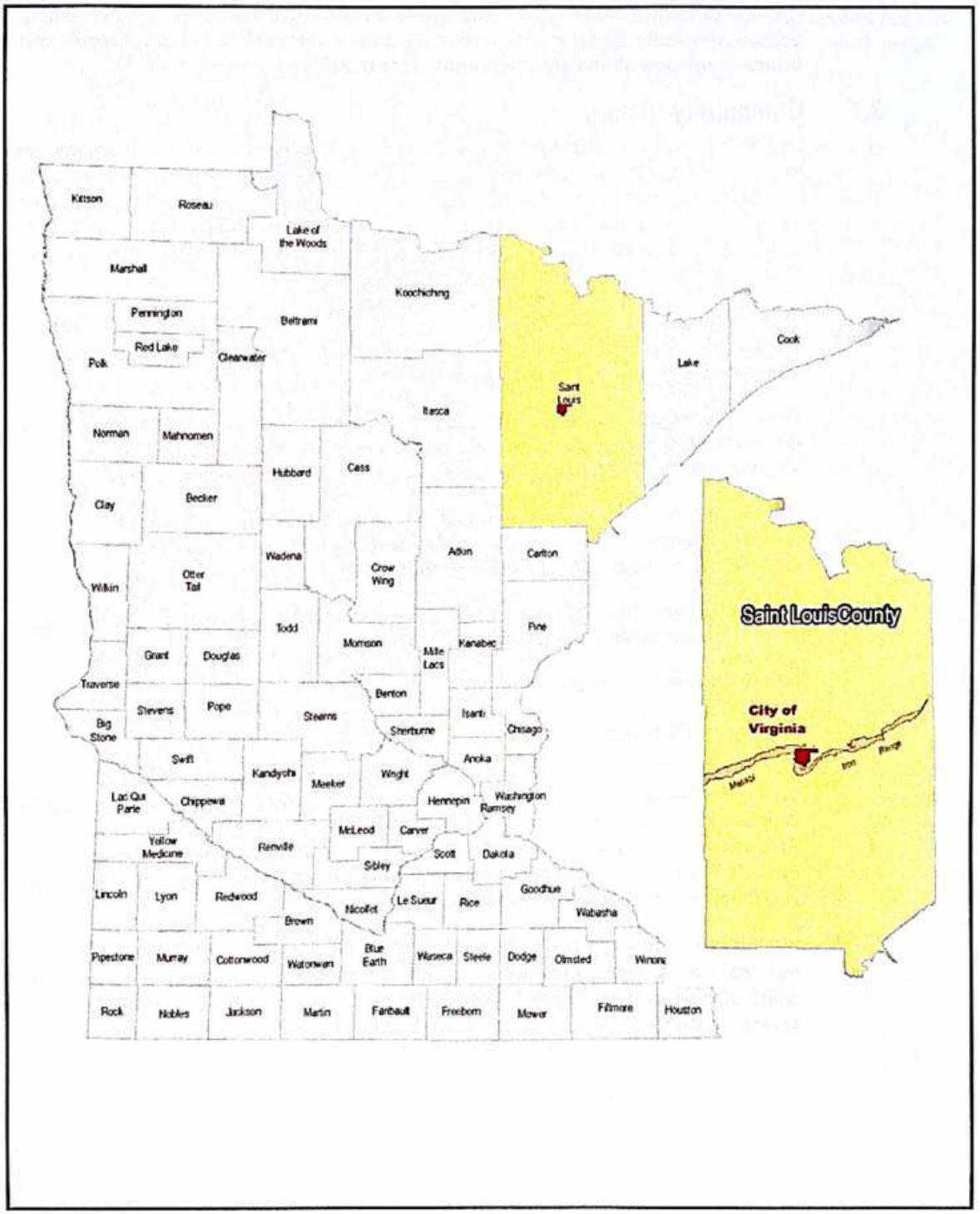
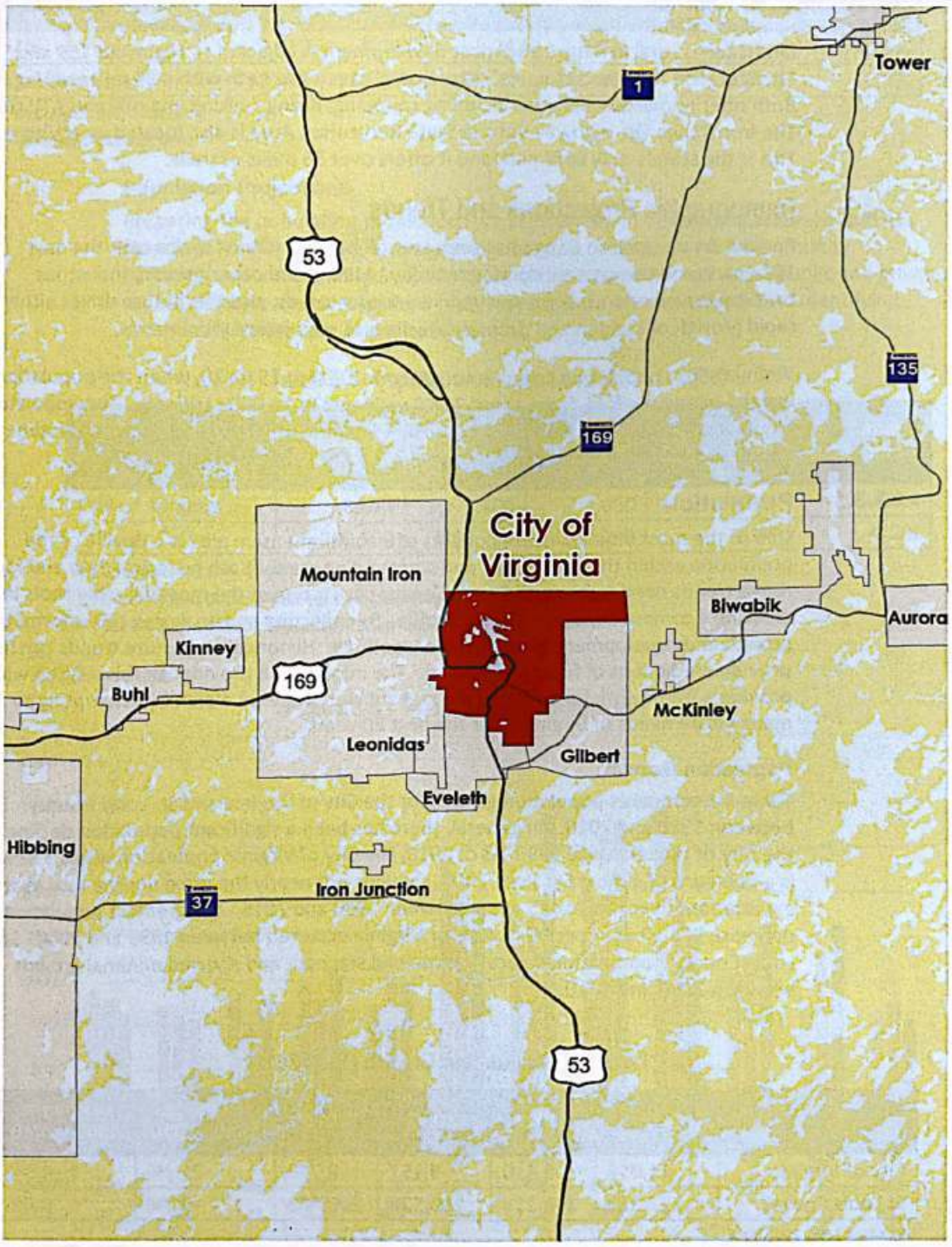


Figure 3-2 – Regional Location Map



The landscape of Virginia is dominated by the mining history of Minnesota's Iron Range. Virginia falls within the Mesabi Range which is the largest of the four iron deposits that compose the Iron Range. The land was originally covered by Mixed Hardwoods and Pines, along with Aspens. The area is also dotted with conifer bogs and swamps. The landscape is rural in nature and most development is adjacent to Highways 169 and 53. The Sturgeon River and Cloquet Valley State Forests are each within 15 miles of Virginia. Both offer numerous activities including canoeing, hiking / biking and off road ATV trails. The Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle State Recreation Area is also located near Virginia. This is the state's only OHV park and it offers over 36 miles of trails.

3.3 Demographic Projections and Trends

Population on the Iron Range has seen several boom and bust cycles over the past 100 years, and this pattern continues today. Mining and other primary industries continue to experience large swings in workforce needs, and this in turn drives either rapid growth or sudden and dramatic declines in population.

Virginia's first population boom occurred from 1900 to 1910/20, when the population expand nearly fivefold, from about 3,000 residents to 14,000 residents. The population plateaued at around 12,000 to 14,000 residents from 1920 to 1960, after which time the population has experienced a downward trend at varying rates.

3.3.1 Population

One of the most important components of a comprehensive plan is a profile of the population within the community and surrounding areas. Both historical data and long-range trends need to be considered. Census data is one of the most valuable tools in creating a community demographic profile. By collecting and analyzing this information, growth and development trends can be identified. Historical and future trends can help provide predictions of future conditions. The information provided in this section will provide a framework for updating the current comprehensive plan by attempting to meet future needs of Virginia over the next 20 years.

Population Growth

Table 3.1 compares population growth for the City of Virginia and St. Louis County between 1980 and 2010. In general, there has been a significant population decline in the City of Virginia since 1990. As of 2010, the City of Virginia population was 8,712 which is a decrease of almost 5% since 2000, showing not nearly the rapid decline rate as was experienced over the last 25 years between 1990 and 2015. The greatest population decrease in a 10-year period (7.4%) for Virginia occurred between 1990 and 2000. St. Louis County's population basically remained stagnant and showed minimal growth between 2000 and 2010.

Table 3-1- Population Growth (1980-2010)

	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change 1980 - 2010	% Change 2000 - 2010
City of Virginia	11,056	9,410	9,157	8,712	-21.2%	-4.9%
St Louis County	222,229	198,213	200,528	200,563	-9.7%	0.0%

US Census 1990, 2000,2010

Table 3-2 - Population Growth (1990 – 2014)

	1990	2000	2010	2014	% Change 1990 - 2014	% Change 2010 - 2014
City of Virgina	9,410	9,157	8,712	8,671	-7.9%	-0.5%
St Louis County	198,213	200,528	200,226	200,563	1.0%	-0.2%

US Census 1990, 2000,2010

US Census ACS 2014, DP03

Population Projections

Preparing the population projections is a critical step in developing accurate land use forecasts. Understanding future population growth patterns for a community, particularly when combined with land utilization estimates, can assist public and private sector planners and developers in determining infrastructure needs and identifying community investment opportunities.

Table 3-3- Population Projections (2015 – 2030)

	2014(1)	2020 (2,3)	2030(2,3)	% Change 2014 - 2020	% Change 2020 - 2030
City of Virginia	8,671	8,400	8,000	-3.1%	-4.8%
St Louis County	200,563	200,794	200,299	0.1%	-0.2%

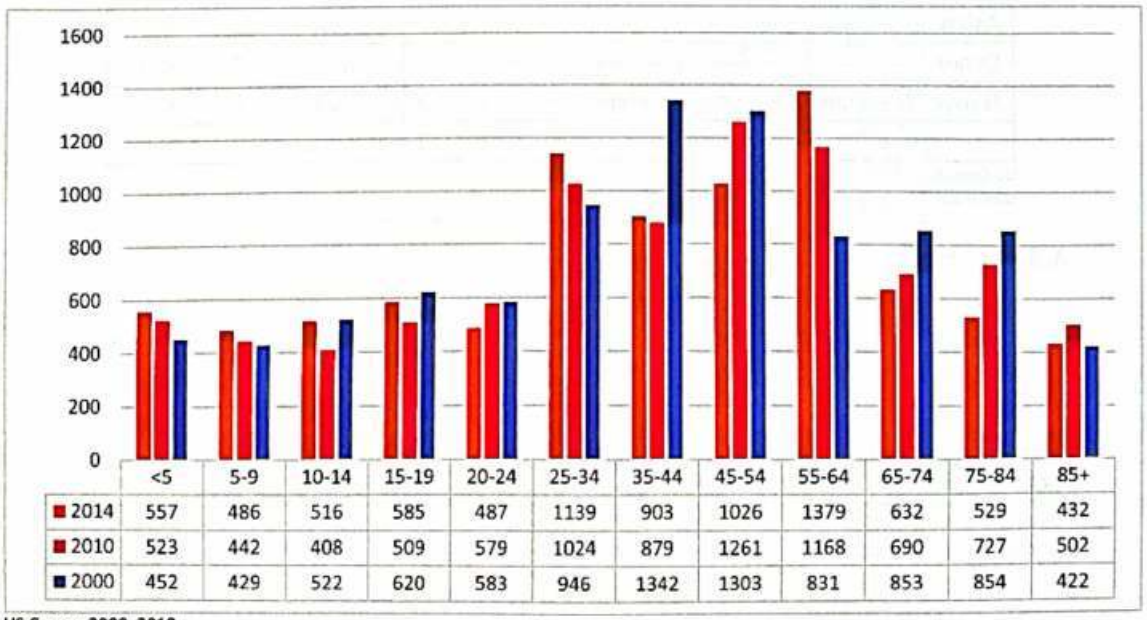
(1) US Census ACS 2014, DP03

(2) County Project is from Minnesota State Demographers office

(3) City Projection is Linear Regression Analysis based on 1990-2014 Data

3.3.2 Age

Figure 3-3 – Age Range of Population



	<5	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
2014	557	486	516	585	487	1139	903	1026	1379	632	529	432
2010	523	442	408	509	579	1024	879	1261	1168	690	727	502
2000	452	429	522	620	583	946	1342	1303	831	853	854	422

US Census 2000, 2010

3.3.3 Composition (Race, Education)

Figure 3-4 – 2014 Race Composition

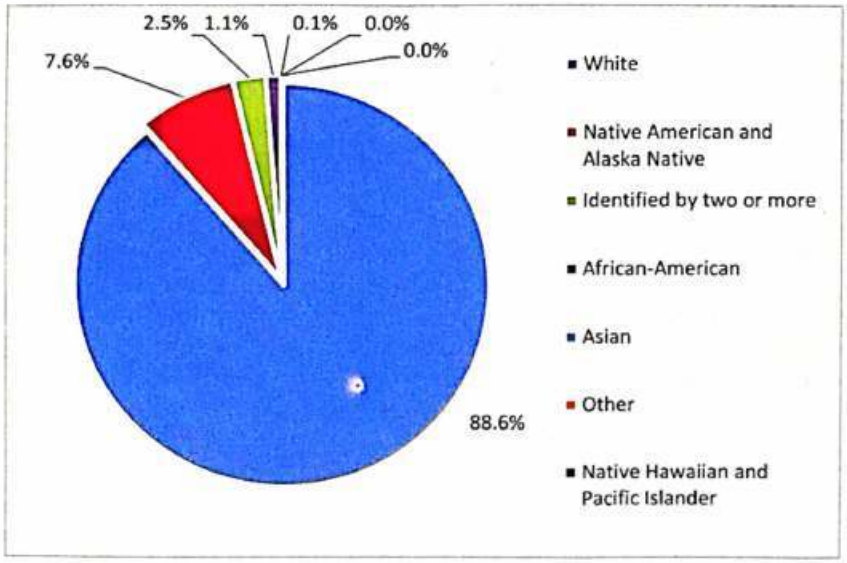


Table 3-4- Race

	2010		2014	
White	7987	91.7%	7686	88.6%
Native American and Alaska Native	264	3.0%	662	7.6%
Identified by two or more	252	2.9%	217	2.5%
African-American	136	1.6%	95	1.1%
Asian	46	0.5%	11	0.1%
Other	25	0.3%	0	0.0%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	2	0.0%	0	0.0%
	8712	100.0%	8671	100.0%

US Census 2010
US Census ACS 2014

3.3.4 Households/Housing Units

Table 3-5- Household Growth, 1990 – 2014

	1990	2000	2010	2014	% Change 1990 - 2014	% Change 2010 - 2014
City of Virginia	4,338	4,333	4,242	4,088	-5.8%	-3.6%
St Louis County	78,901	82,619	84,783	85,033	7.8%	0.3%

US Census 1990, 2000,2010
US Census ACS 2014, S1101

Table 3-6- Household Projections, 2015 - 2030

	2014	2020	2030	% Change 2014 - 2020	% Change 2020 - 2030
City of Virginia	4,088	4,100	4,000	0.3%	-2.4%
St Louis County	85,033	87,100	89,700	2.4%	3.0%

US Census ACS 2014, S1101

(3) City Projection is Linear Regression Analysis based on 1990-2014 Data

Table 3-7 - Occupied vs. Vacant Housing Units

	2000	2010	2014
Total Units	4,692	4,610	4,665
Occupied	4,333	4,028	4,088
Vacant	359	582	577
Vacancy Rate	8%	13%	12%

US Census, 2000,2010 ACS 2014 DP04

Table 3-8 – Owner-Occupied vs. Rental Housing Units

	2000	2010	2014
Total Occupied Units	4,333	4,028	4,088
Owner-Occupied	2,673	2,357	2,464
Renter-Occupied	1,660	1,671	1,624

US Census, 2000,2010 ACS 2014 DP04

Table 3-9 - Units in Structure

Total Housing Units in Structure	Estimate	Percent
1-unit	3,040	65.2%
2-unit	402	8.6%
3 or 4 units	258	5.5%
5 to 9 units	113	2.4%
10 to 19 units	110	2.4%
20 or more units	686	14.7%
Mobile home	56	1.2%
Boat, RV, van etc	0	0.0%

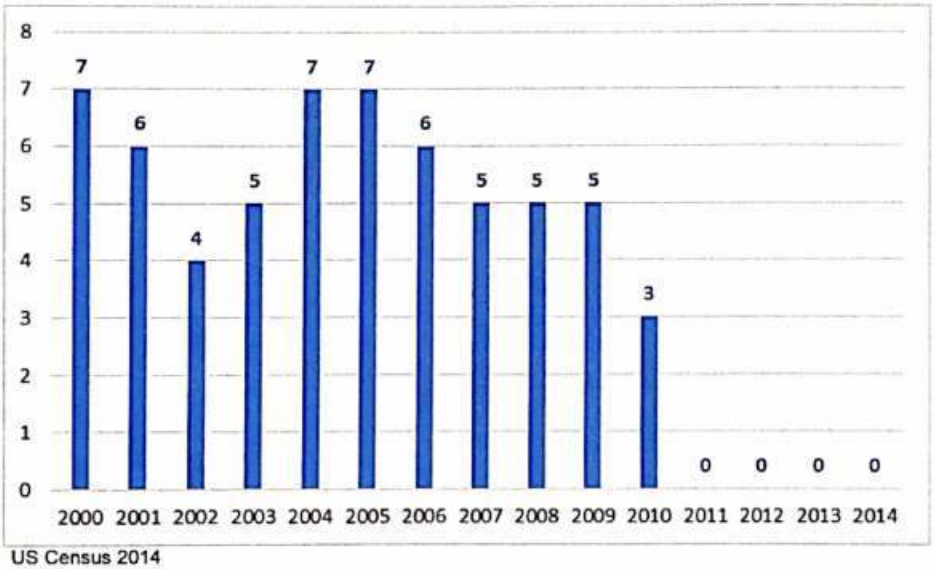
US Census, 2010 ACS 2014 DP04

Table 3-10 - Construction Year of Housing Units

Year Built	Estimate	Percent
Total Housing Units	4,665	100.0%
2010 or later	0	0.0%
2000 to 2009	273	5.9%
1990 to 1999	240	5.1%
1980 to 1989	253	5.4%
1970 to 1979	431	9.2%
1960 to 1969	446	9.6%
1950 to 1959	920	19.7%
1940 to 1949	596	12.8%
1939 or earlier	1,506	32.3%

US Census, 2010 ACS 2014 DP04

Figure 3-5 – Building Permits



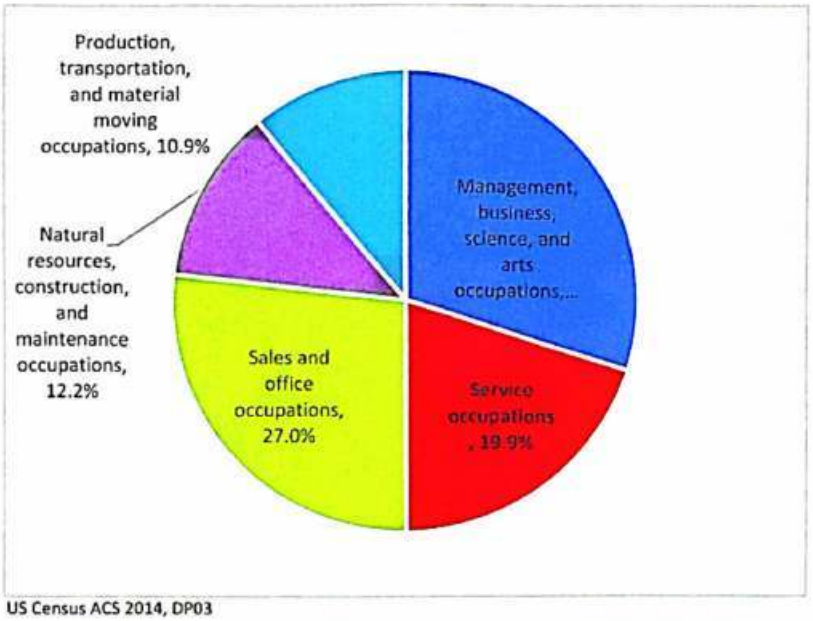
US Census 2014

3.3.5 Employment

Table 3-11- Update Title

Occupation	
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	29.9%
Service occupations	19.9%
Sales and office occupations	27.0%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	12.2%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	10.9%
US Census ACS 2014, DP03	100%

Figure 3-6 – Employment by Occupation



US Census ACS 2014, DP03

4.4 Goals and Policies

Comprehensive Plan goals establish long-range aims for the city and are intended to serve a guides for the Comprehensive Plan. They represent general statements that identify community aspirations or desired conditions. Policies describe actions aimed at achieving each of the Plan Element's goals. Policies will be developed following the review and refinement of Plan Element Goals.

Goal 1. Maintain an official Land Use Plan that embodies principles of smart growth in identifying the most appropriate locations for development and redevelopment.

Policies:

a. Prepare and adopt a Land Use Plan that designates land use areas and guides development to appropriate areas in order to ensure desirable land use patterns and minimize conflicts.

Goal 2. Maintain controlled and orderly growth consistent with its Land Use Plan, Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Policies:

a. Work to retain attractive, historic buildings within the community.

b. Adhere to specific site design restrictions for properties that are environmentally sensitive or have high visibility.

c. Ensure community gateways are welcoming and attractive.

Goal 3. Preserve and strengthen Virginia's identity and sense of place through the use of traditional block patterns, urban design, site and building design and maintenance practices.

Policies:

a. Work to retain attractive, historic buildings within the community, especially in the historic Downtown.

b. Work to improve the attractiveness of primary gateways and highway and roadway corridors within, especially Highway 53, 2nd Ave corridor, and Chestnut Street.

c. Strengthen land development regulations to establish specific site design requirements for properties that are environmentally sensitive or have high visibility.

d. Work to assure roadway widths are adequate for the type of development served, but not wider than necessary to assure proper scale, reduction of hard surfacing and reduced costs to the city and developers.

e. Review non-conforming uses for adherence to city policies. Enforce regulations that apply to non-conforming uses and review of effectiveness.

f. Adhere to standards that assure proper screening and landscaping of unsightly site uses including surface parking lots.

g. Promote redevelopment and infill when feasible to leverage existing infrastructure investments and strengthen neighborhood vitality and cohesion.

Goal 4. Coordinate community growth with mining companies to ensure land use compatibility.

Policies:

a. Encourage compatible infill residential redevelopment throughout existing neighborhoods to address blight, increase housing choice and improve tax base.

b. Encourage compatible mixed use and mixed-income infill redevelopment to enhance neighborhood completeness, promote economic development and strengthen sustainability and resiliency.

Goal 5. Support the economic and social viability of Virginia's historic Downtown.

Policies:

a. Retain and attract an appropriate mix of retail/service business activity and housing opportunities in Downtown.

b. Continue to respect and leverage the close proximity of Bailey and Silver Lake through use of innovative stormwater management techniques, access to open space and nature.

c. Continue to enhance and maintain downtown-specific pedestrian, cycling and vehicular infrastructure appropriate to Downtown's unique and historic stature as Virginia's premier social and cultural district.

d. Encourage and support innovative housing opportunities in the Downtown area.

e. Promote adequate customer parking for the Downtown with additional concentration on maintenance and improvement of parking facilities.

f. Continue to encourage the use of Federal, State, local, and other financial resources to fund and or incentivize Downtown reinvestment and maintenance of Downtown enhancements.

Goal 6. Practice smart growth planning principles and practices at all levels of government.

Policies:

a. Provide smart growth education and training opportunities for elected officials, Planning Commissioners, and staff.

b. Support smart growth education activities for community members by arranging training and seminars through organizations such as the MN American Planning Association, the League of MN Cities, Smart Growth America and the MN Chapter of the Urban Land Institute.

5.0 Housing



5.1 Introduction

Housing plays a critical role in defining a person's quality of life. From a new resident or visitor's perspective, it provides a visual indicator of the community's character, including prosperity and vitality. From a City's perspective, housing is typically the largest user of land and City services and provides a significant base for local taxes. Having a clear understanding of current housing conditions along with current and future population projections will assist as it strives to meet the needs of current and future residents.

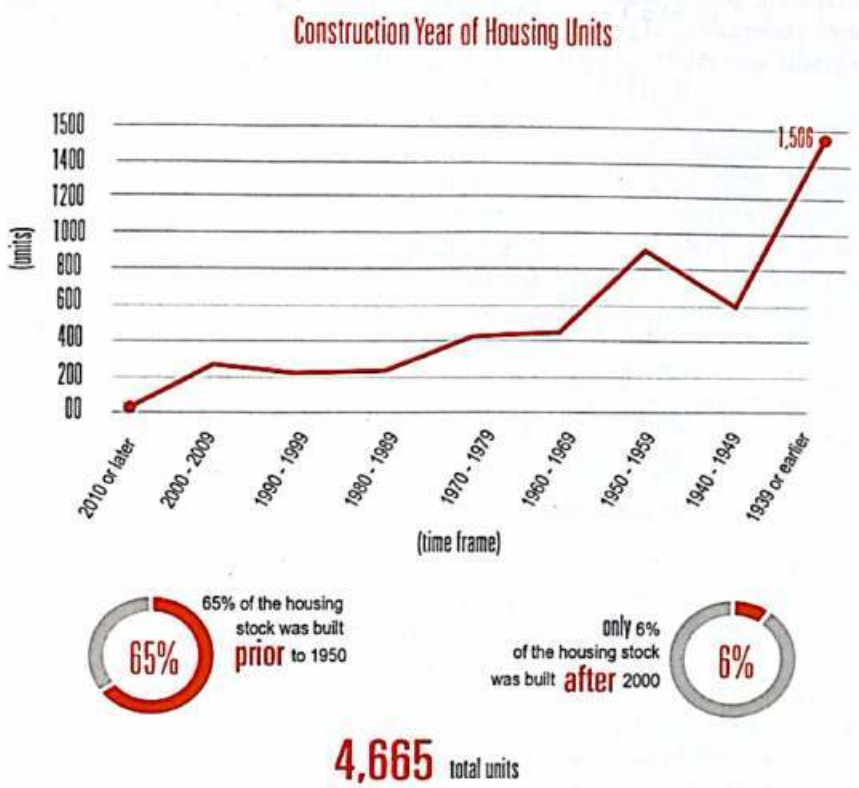




Virginia provides a variety of housing types from traditional, single family homes to modern midrise, multifamily buildings.

5.2 Existing Conditions

Residential uses occupy approximately 1,440 acres of Virginia's developed land area. Nearly half of Virginia's housing units were built prior to 1940 and over two-thirds of homes were built before 1960. Also, according to CPAC and resident input, many older properties have not been adequately maintained. The age of the housing stock has an impact on overall housing condition since maintenance and efficiency demands increase with age. All housing units are served by public water and sewer. Despite several programs and extended efforts over multiple decades, Virginia continues to address the issues of aging and deteriorating housing stock. In addition, a continual shrinking overall population, tends to limit the pace of replacement housing and neighborhood expansion. Over the past sixteen years, residential building activity has occurred in the area of N.4th and N. 3rd Avenue West as well as to the south of HWY 53 along Bourgin Road.



US Census 2010, ACS 2014

Of Virginia's 4,665 dwellings, approximately 60 % are owner occupied and 40% are renter occupied. By comparison Cloquet's 5,235 dwellings are 69% owner occupied and 31% renter occupied, while nearby Eveleth's 1,942 dwellings show a 56% to 44% mixture of owner to renter occupied.

The rental vacancy rate is the fraction of homes for rent that are not occupied. In 2014 the rental vacancy rate for Virginia was 5.79% according to Census ACS data. Over the past decade vacancy rates in Virginia have fluctuated from 8% to 6 %. A healthy rental market typically maintains a vacancy rate of about 5%, which is known to promote competitive rental rates, provide consumer choice, and allow for turnover. As of 2014, median rental rates in Virginia were approximately $1,116 a month as compared with the national median rent rate of $934.

Using median household income data for Virginia, one can calculate the fraction of income the median household would use to pay rent at the median monthly gross rent rate. For Virginia, median monthly gross rent as a fraction of median household income was 20.63% in 2014 according to the ACS.

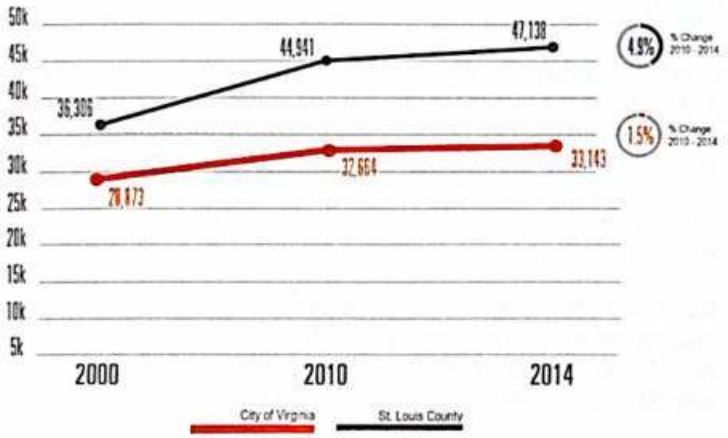
Table 5-1 – Number Dwelling Units per Residential Structure

Units in Structure		
Total Housing Units in Structure	Estimate	%
1-unit	3,040	65.2
2-unit	402	8.6
3 or 4 units	258	5.5
5-9 units	113	2.4
10-19 units	110	5.5
20 or more units	686	14.7
Mobile home	56	1.2

US Census 2010, ACS 2014,

While median household incomes for Virginia residents has risen over the past fourteen years, they continue to lag behind those of St. Louis County which has seen an increase of nearly 5% in the past four years. Household income levels directly impact the amount of money families can spend on housing. Increasing the City's household median incomes can have multiple positive impacts on its housing market. As more families have more income to spend on housing, they are more apt to invest in upkeep and improvements, raising housing values. Housing developers are also drawn to communities with rising incomes and are more likely to invest in building new housing products which improves overall housing conditions and strengthens the local economy.

Table 5-2 – Household Median Income



US Census 2010, ACS 2014

5.3 Future Needs

With Virginia's population set to decline, a slow-growing median household income, and an existing housing market with a slightly elevated vacancy rate, there is not likely going to be a strong push for significant housing growth. In fact, since 2010, the US Census has not recorded any new construction of housing units. Households are projected to decline

through 2030 by approximately 2.4 percent. With the pertinent demographic projections provided, it is likely the City will have the quantity of housing units necessary. However – the quality of housing that is available may not be suitable to attract new buyers or accommodate move-up housing.

Virginia's rental housing properties appear to be relatively undocumented, as there is not licensing or formal registry of rental operators. This lack of accountability contributes to low levels of maintenance and some of the blighted conditions seen in Virginia's housing stock. The City passed a new property maintenance code effective 2017 which will help in process of identifying condition expectations and citing noncompliant properties. Improving or rehabbing residential properties is a community-driven vision that many residents and business owners would like to achieve.

Continuing to encourage the construction of mixed-use facilities, revitalization of the historic downtown and strengthening existing neighborhoods should help to encourage younger and older residents alike to consider making housing investments in the City.

5.4 Goals and Policies

Goal 1. Achieve a diverse and balanced supply of market rate and affordable life cycle housing.

Policies:

a. Encourage the development of a variety of housing types, densities, and styles at price ranges for all income levels and ages to meet current and future community needs.

b. Plan new residential areas as complete neighborhoods with a range of housing types, densities and price points.

c. Support development of new and renovated affordable housing.

d. Work collaboratively with industry and business to identify and provide safe, decent and affordable housing to meet the needs of their workforces.

e. Engage the Development Community, including realtors, builders, lenders and landlords to provide code-compliant, attractive and affordable housing that meets the diverse needs of the community.

Goal 2. Strengthen and support Virginia's existing neighborhoods.

Policies:

a. Update land development codes to include provisions for the development of compact, walkable, neighborhoods with a mix of residential building types, and sizes.

b. Protect neighborhoods from incompatible land uses through effective land use and zoning and building codes.

c. Improve transportation connections, particularly bicycle paths/routes and pedestrian facilities, between and within existing neighborhoods and other parts of the City and region.

d. Preserve historic homes and culturally important community features - both built and natural - in existing neighborhoods.

e. Encourage and support the maintenance and rehabilitation of older housing stock.

Goal 3. Achieve a consistent level of code compliant, quality housing stock throughout the city of Virginia.

Policies:

a. Continue to evaluate the condition of existing housing stock to address code violations and eliminate blight.

b. Continue to explore funding programs for blight reduction.

c. Expand and accelerate programs to rehabilitate and/or demolish blighted residential properties.

Goal 4. Establish housing stock that is energy efficient and resilient.

Policies:

a. Encourage resilient housing construction design, renovations, and management that maximizes lifecycle cost effective energy efficiency and minimizes exposure to climate risks.

b. The plan shall identify existing housing conditions and plan for future housing rehab, redevelopment, and new housing.



Examples of traditional multi-family homes incorporating modern construction methods and amenities.