



DATA BRIEF

VACANT HOUSING UNITS IN DETROIT

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Over the past 15 years, one of Detroit's defining challenges has been the scale of vacancy. After the region's economic downturn in the first decade of this century, followed by the mortgage and tax foreclosure crisis, vacancy grew across the city and touched every neighborhood. Since then, substantial efforts to eliminate blight, reduce vacancy, and return units to productive use have sharply reduced the number of vacant units. Even so, vacancy remains a significant challenge in many parts of Detroit.

This brief analyzes American Community Survey (ACS) data and examines insights from recently added tables that enable a deeper exploration of changes in housing vacancy and current vacancy patterns in the city. This analysis shows that over the past decade there has been a consistent decline in the number of vacant units. Additionally, it shows that a substantial number of vacant units that are in the process of returning to the market.

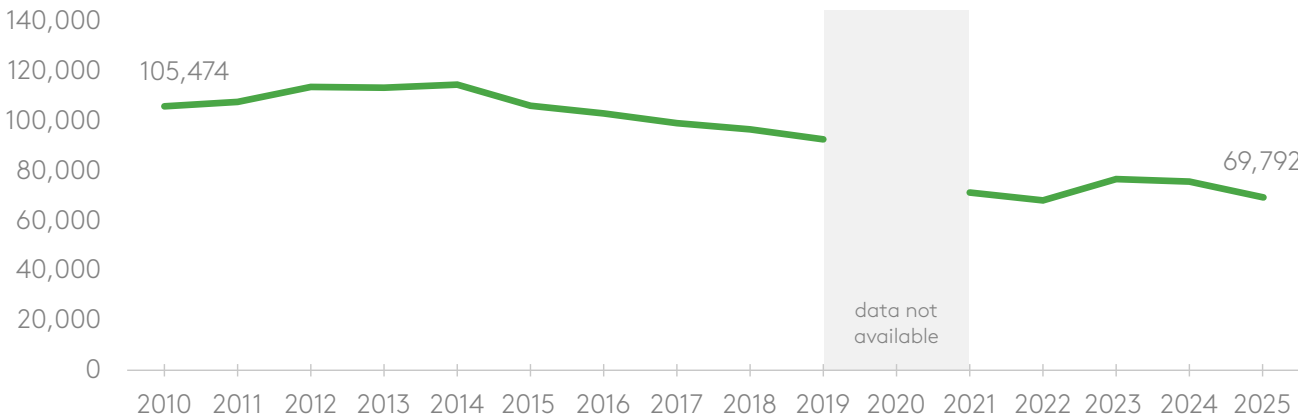
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Vacant housing units are declining

American Community Survey data show that after rising in the wake of the Great Recession, the number of vacant housing units has generally declined. Housing vacancies peaked in 2014 at 114,468 units, and has since declined to 69,792 in 2025.

Since peaking in 2014, the number of vacant housing units has steadily declined.
Vacant housing units in Detroit, 2010-25

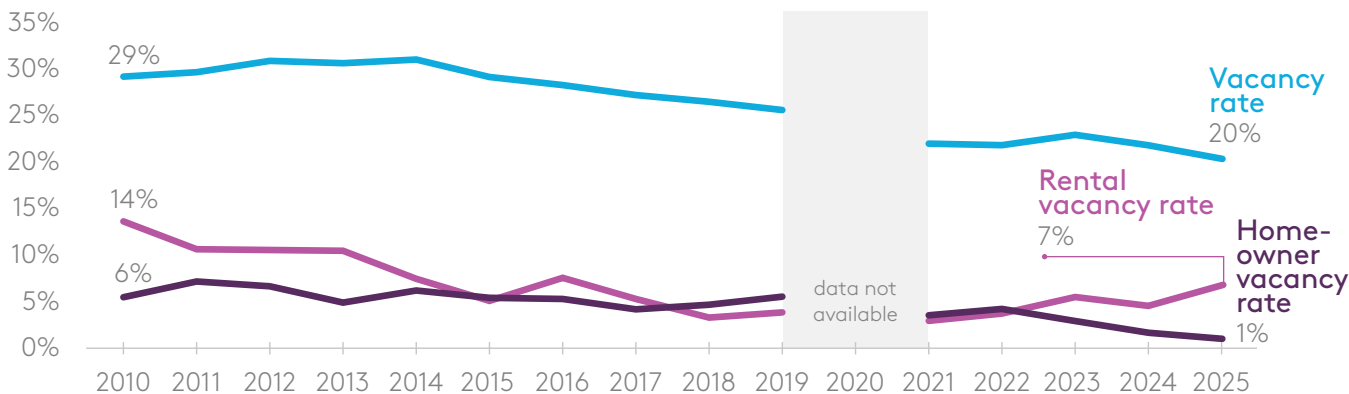


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2010-25

The vacancy rate also continues to decline

The vacancy rate—the share of all housing units that are vacant—follows a similar pattern, declining from a peak of 31% in 2014 to 20% in 2025. This remains more than double the national vacancy rate of 9.6% and is the highest vacancy rate among the 50 largest U.S. cities by population.

Since 2014 there has been a steady decline in the vacancy rate.
Vacancy rates in Detroit, 2010-25



Source: Detroit Future City analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2010-25

Homeowner and rental vacancy rates are relatively low

Vacant housing units can be broken out by rental, for sale, for seasonal/recreational/occasional use, for migrant workers, and other. The homeowner and rental vacancy rates in Detroit have remained much lower than the overall vacancy rate. In 2025, the rental vacancy rate was 6.9%, and the homeowner vacancy rate was 1.1%, levels that are in line with the nation as a whole.

Detroit also has a small number of vacant units for seasonal use. In 2025, there were 566 such units, a decline from a number that has remained fairly consistent over the last decade at around 1,000. There are not enough vacant units identified for migrant workers to allow for reliable vacancy estimates.

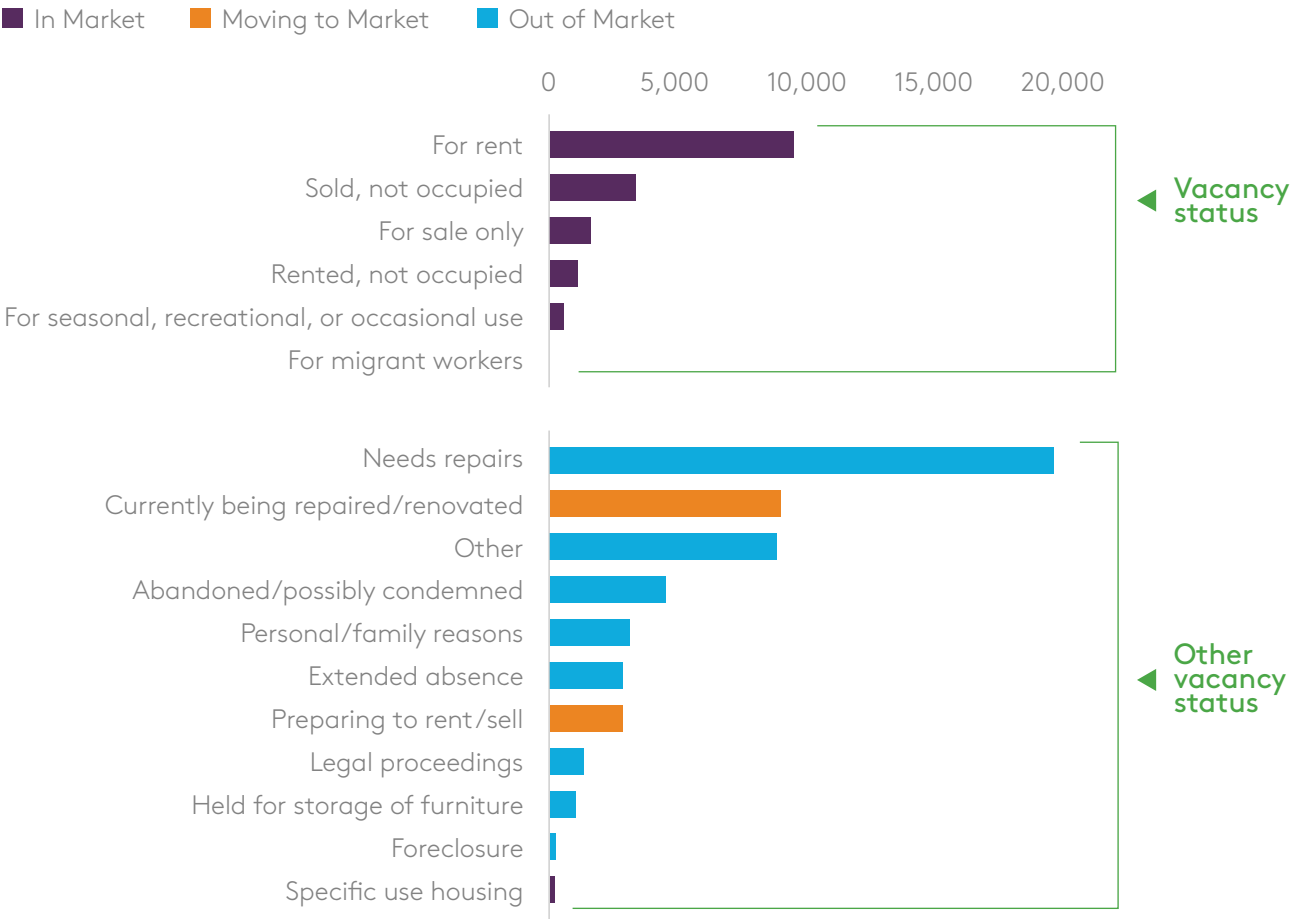


Understanding the "others"

Beyond the vacancy categories that describe units in the housing market, there is a group of units that does not fit any of those categories, known as "other." These units have often been described as being synonymous with abandonment. In Detroit, "other" is the largest category of vacant units, totaling 53,648 units. This group represents a substantial share of the city's vacant units, rising from 63% in 2010 and then ranging between 75% and 81% over the last decade.

Beginning in 2021, the ACS introduced a new table, "other vacancy status," that has expanded our understanding of this group of vacant units and gives a more detailed look at vacancy in general. With this new level of detail, we now know that only about 4,529, or 8% of the city's vacant units, are classified as abandoned—a number that has declined by 57% since 2021. Another group that may be similar in appearance to units classified as abandoned are units that are identified as "need repairs." These account for 19,584 units, or 37%, of Detroit's other vacant units.

The added detail shows units returning to the market.
Vacancy status and other vacancy status in Detroit, 2025

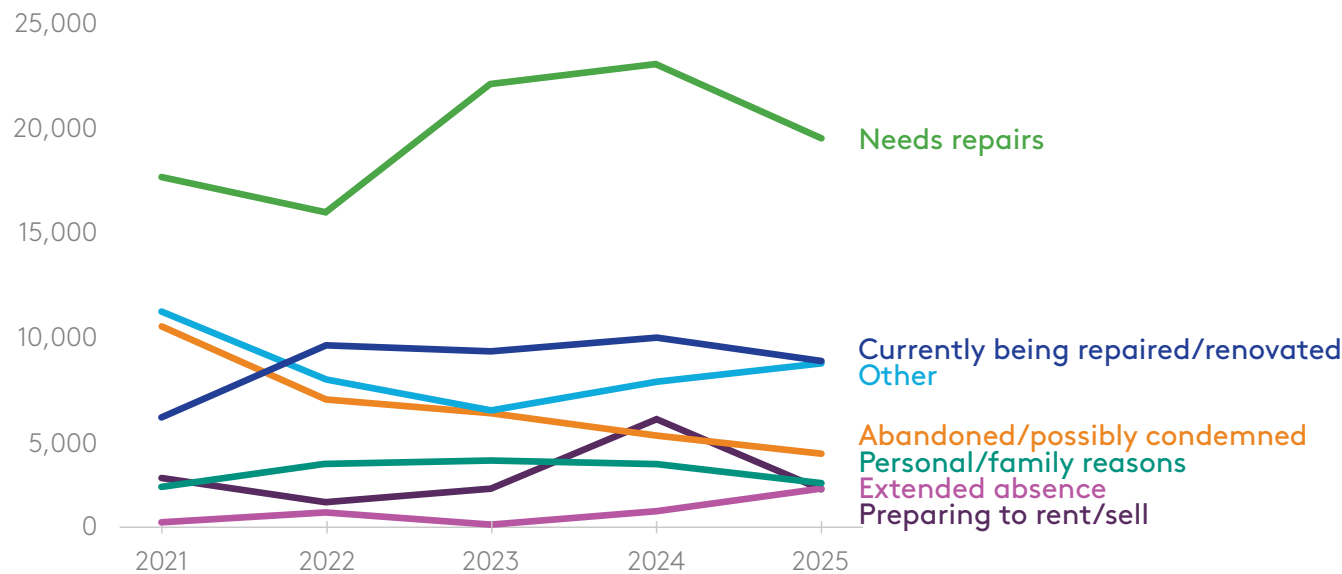


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2025

There are two groups that appear to be making their way back to the market, the 8,986 units that are vacant because they are currently being repaired and the 2,855 units that are being prepared to rent or sell. The number of units currently being repaired rose between 2021 and 2024 by 3,763, or 60%, before remaining statistically the same in 2025, indicating an overall increase in renovation activity in the city.

There has been an increase in units being repaired and a slight decrease in those being prepared to rent or sell.

Other vacant housing units, 2021-25



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-year estimates, 2021-25

Conclusion

Since peaking at more than 114,000 vacant units in 2014, Detroit has made steady progress in reducing vacancy; the number of vacant units has decreased by 39%. The fact that both homeowner and rental vacancy rates have fallen back in line with national levels is another positive sign.

The additional insights provided by the "other vacancy status" table provides another reason for optimism. We now know that many of these units are making their way back toward the housing market, with growing numbers being renovated or prepared for sale or rent. However, there are still a large number of vacant units in need of repairs, underscoring the continued need for renovation and repair funding to return viable properties to the market.