

## HOUSING

### Introduction

In the area of housing, Easton has focused on the need for new units based on population/demographic shifts, affordability and the provision of safe, decent housing for all of its residents. The data below supports the community's progress in these areas. The fact that population has remained relatively stable has not deterred the development of new, single family homes and other housing.

### Changes in Housing Stock

<b>Changes in Total Housing Stock</b>				
	<b>Total Housing Units</b>		<b>% Change</b>	<b># Change</b>
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>1990-2010</b>	<b>1990-2010</b>
<b>Easton</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>36</b>
Fort Fairfield	1,614	1,602	-0.7%	-12
Mars Hill	691	687	-0.6%	-4
Presque Isle	4,345	4,019	-7.5%	-326
Westfield	229	175	-23.6%	-54
Aroostook County	33,638	30,672	-8.8%	-2,966
State of Maine	550,431	551,125	0.1%	694

Source: US Census 1990 and 2010

According to the 2010 US Census, there were 596 housing units in Easton, approximately 6.4% (36 units) more than in 1990. This gain of housing is significantly higher than all of the surrounding communities, Aroostook County, and Maine. This is due, in part, to new home construction associated with the Amish moving to area as well as several new housing units begin constructed near the Presque Isle townline.

There has been subdivision activity in Easton which has proven to be popular with residents. In the mid-1990's, the Town approved a 14 lot subdivision off of Perry Drive of which there are currently 2 vacant lots. A second 14 lot subdivision was also created on Duncan Drive which has 3 vacant lots. In 2013, the Town approved a 7 lot (Moose Meadow) subdivision which is an extension of the Duncan Drive project created earlier. These subdivisions are town owned and have proven to be popular with those wishing to move to Easton. Easton's selectmen have made the decision to front funds for the purchase of the property and the construction of infrastructure (roads). As lots are sold, those funds are returned to the community with the goal of the taxpayers not paying for subdivision development. The town is actively marketing these subdivisions in local newspapers.

There have also been 2 smaller private subdivision created in Easton, one (1) located on the Henderson Road and the other on the Fuller Road. The town recently acquired the Fuller Road subdivision and may be working on a plan to sell those lots. Plans may include combining the lots into larger, more salable lots.

There are two mobile home parks in Town which are considered to be in very good to excellent condition. The owners of these parks have taken great pride in maintaining their property and these parks have provided an affordable housing option for those looking to locate to Easton.

### Selected Characteristics of Housing Units, 2010

	Total Housing Units		Occupied Housing Units		Vacant Housing Units		Home owner Vacancy Rate	Rental Vacancy Rate	Year-round		Seasonal	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	%	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Easton</b>	<b>596</b>		<b>536</b>	<b>89.9</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Fort Fairfield	1,674		1,494	89.2	180	10.8	2.9	6.1	1,634	98	40	2.4
Mars Hill	<b>687</b>		<b>614</b>	<b>89.4</b>	73	<b>10.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3.2</b>
Presque Isle	4,608		4,201	91.2	407	8.8	2	8.5	4,540	99	68	1.8
Westfield	240		216	90	24	10	1.1	0.0	231	96	9	3.8
Aroostook County	39,482		30,672	77.7	8,810	22.3	4	8.1	34,083	86	5,399	13.7
State of Maine	714,270		551,125	77.2	163,145	22.8	2.3	7.5	595,960	83	118,310	16.4

Source: 2010 US Census

Nearly all of Easton’s housing stock is year-round (97%), which is essentially unchanged since 1990. This percentage is considerably higher than that of the County (86%). Owner occupied units represent the vast majority of the housing stock (74.8%). In 2010, Easton had a vacancy rate of 1.7% for homeowners and 3.5% for renters.

The following table indicated the type of units located in Easton. Single units make up almost 69 percent of the housing stock in town followed by mobile homes. The make-up is similar to that of Maine.

UNITS IN STRUCTURE	United States		Maine		Easton	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total housing units	131,034,946	131,034,946	718,914	718,914	565	565
1-unit, detached	80,819,811	61.70%	500,069	69.60%	389	68.80%
1-unit, attached	7,557,233	5.80%	15,912	2.20%	0	0.00%
2 units	5,023,110	3.80%	37,541	5.20%	10	1.80%
3 or 4 units	5,827,372	4.40%	39,306	5.50%	31	5.50%
5 to 9 units	6,290,644	4.80%	28,512	4.00%	14	2.50%
10 to 19 units	5,900,165	4.50%	12,197	1.70%	0	0.00%
20 or more units	10,869,077	8.30%	21,058	2.90%	3	0.50%
Mobile home	8,638,762	6.60%	64,122	8.90%	118	20.90%

Source: American Fact Finder 2013.

### Age and Condition of Housing

Housing Conditions, 2010					
	Total Dwelling Units	Lack Complete Plumbing		Lack Complete Kitchen	
		#	%	#	%
Easton	596	0	0.0%	0	0.00
Fort Fairfield	1,602	15	0.9%	20	0.01
Mars Hill	631	5	0.8%	0	0.00
Presque Isle	4,019	19	0.5%	23	0.01
Westfield	175	0	0.0%	7	0.04
Aroostook County	30,672	243	0.8%	159	0.01
State of Maine	551,125	4,915	0.9%	4,890	0.01

Source: 2010 Census

The 2010 Census provided limited information about housing condition. According to the Census, all housing units in Easton has complete plumbing facilities, which was comparable to the County as a whole in 2010. All housing units in Easton also had complete kitchen facilities and telephone services in 2010.

In 2013, an Easton resident completed an inventory of housing units and apartments using tax records and personal knowledge of the community. The following table shows at total of 613 housing units, mobile homes, apartments, and camps in Easton as of December 16, 2013.

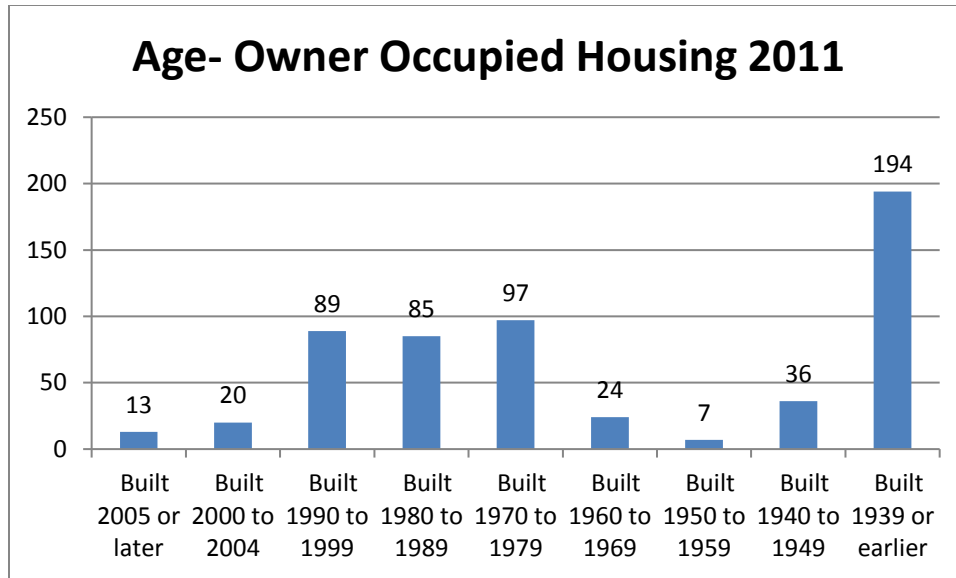
<b>Year Built</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
1880 or before	28	4.57
1881-1899	22	3.59
1900-1919	64	10.44
1920-1939	79	12.89
1940-1959	62	10.11
1960-1979	130	21.21
1980-1999	110	17.94
2000-2009	68	11.09
2010-Present	50	8.16
<b>Total</b>	<b>613</b>	

Source: Town of Easton 2013

Other housing information is derived from the US Census. The following table shows the age of housing units in Easton in 2011. The US decennial census no longer collects this information so American Fact Finder (US Census Bureau) 5 year estimates 2007-2011 are used. Utilizing these estimates results in a difference in the number of housing units (less than) when compared to the actual count of housing units completed for the 2010 Census.

<b>Housing - Age of Home by Tenure, 2011</b>				
	<b>Easton</b>		<b>Aroostook County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>#</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	565	100	30,672	551,125
<b>OWNER OCCUPIED</b>			22,116	402,907
<b>Built 2005 or later</b>	13	2.3	408	13,266
<b>Built 2000 to 2004</b>	20	3.5	867	29,036
<b>Built 1990 to 1999</b>	89	15.8	2,108	57,429
<b>Built 1980 to 1989</b>	85	15.0	2,440	64,584
<b>Built 1970 to 1979</b>	97	17.2	3,957	59,968
<b>Built 1960 to 1969</b>	24	4.2	2,019	29,963
<b>Built 1950 to 1959</b>	7	1.2	2,455	30,388
<b>Built 1940 to 1949</b>	36	6.4	2,005	19,509
<b>Built 1939 or earlier</b>	194	34.3	5,857	98,768

Source: American Fact Finder Survey 5 Year Estimates 2007-2011



Source: American Fact Finder Survey 5 Year Estimates 2007-2011

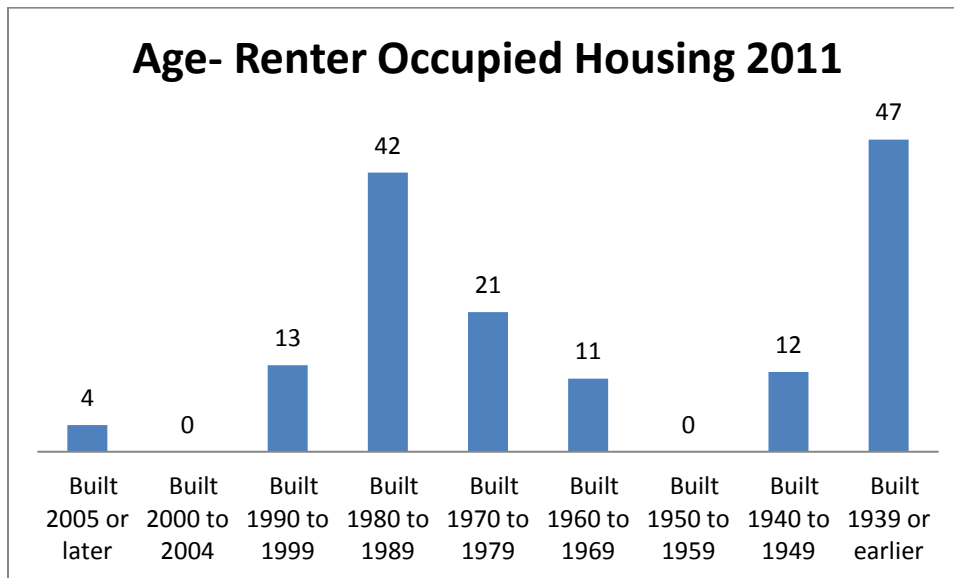
Easton’s housing stock is not as old as Aroostook County’s with nearly half (48%) being constructed between 1970 and 1999. This may be an indication that the housing stock was constructed under some standard construction guideline and are more energy efficient than older homes. Approximately 46.1 percent of Easton’s owner occupied homes were built before 1969. While age is not an indication of housing condition, town officials should be watchful that as the housing stock ages (and the town’s population), house maintenance may become an issue. As an older population, on a fixed income, finds it increasingly difficult to maintain their homes, housing conditions could deteriorate.

Over fifty-three percent of Easton’s rentals were built before 1970 while 31 percent were constructed before 1939.

#### Rental Unit Age by Tenure. 2011

Age	Easton		Aroostook County	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>RENTER OCCUPIED</b>	150	100	8,556	148,218
<b>Built 2005 or later</b>	4	2.7	89	3,375
<b>Built 2000 to 2004</b>	0	0.0	154	6,026
<b>Built 1990 to 1999</b>	13	8.7	581	12,633
<b>Built 1980 to 1989</b>	42	28.0	1,560	19,858
<b>Built 1970 to 1979</b>	21	14.0	1,429	22,752
<b>Built 1960 to 1969</b>	11	7.3	685	10,958
<b>Built 1950 to 1959</b>	0	0.0	991	11,226
<b>Built 1940 to 1949</b>	12	8.0	604	8,172
<b>Built 1939 or earlier</b>	47	31.3	2,463	53,218

Source: American Fact Finder Survey 5 Year Estimates 2007-2011



Source: American Fact Finder Survey 5 Year Estimates 2007-2011

### Housing Affordability

According to the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) data, the current homeowner housing market is marginally affordable for those households that have or exceed Easton’s median income. Easton’s median household income in 2010 was \$35,750 and the median home sale price of \$95,250.

Easton specific housing affordability information is often not collected at the State or Federal level. The Maine State Housing Authority publishes affordability indexes for communities completing comprehensive plans. The affordability index is the ratio of Home Price Affordable at Median Income to Median Home Price. An index of less than 1 means the area is generally unaffordable – i.e., a household earning area median income could not cover the payment on a median priced home (30 year mortgage, taxes and insurance) using no more than 28% of gross income. According to the MSHA, in 2011 the Affordability Index for Easton was 1.14, Aroostook County was 1.42, and Maine was 0.97. These figures indicate that Easton and Aroostook County are generally affordable while Maine is increasingly not affordable for those earning the median income. However, MSHA notes that the median home selling price has increased over 75% in the last 9 years (2002-2011) in the Presque Isle Labor Market area (Easton is a part of) while median incomes have only increased by 25%.

<b>Housing Affordability</b>				
	<b>Affordable at Median Income</b>	<b>Income Needed for Median Price</b>	<b>Median Sale Price</b>	<b>Average 2Bdr Rent with Utilities</b>
<b>Easton</b>	<b>109,035</b>	<b>29,508</b>	<b>95,250</b>	<b>600</b>
<b>Aroostook County</b>	101,305	27,810	80,000	594
<b>State of Maine</b>	137,198	61,568	185,900	847

Source: Maine State Housing Authority, 2013

The Maine Real Estate Network indicates, as of November 2013, there were six (6) homes for sale in Easton. Asking prices ranged from \$64,995 to \$350,000 with a median price of \$124,632. All of the homes currently for sale are single family residential. The Maine Real Estate Network lists all housing units listed by realtors but does not list those that are for sale by owner. While there are an adequate number of homes in Easton that have an affordable purchase price, the Town is concerned about the cost of ongoing operation for many residents. Smaller, more tightly constructed homes will reduce the cost of heating during the long winter season and make the household more affordable for their residents.

### **Rental Affordability**

Rental information is also available (at the Labor Market Area level) from the MSHA. The affordability index is the ratio of 2-Bedroom Rent Affordable at Median Renter Income to Average 2-Bedroom Rent. An index of less than 1 means the area is generally unaffordable – i.e., a renter household earning area median renter income could not cover the cost of an average 2-bedroom apartment (including utilities) using no more than 30% of gross income.

According to MSHA, rental affordability in the Presque Isle Labor Market area is another story. In 2009, renter median income in the LMA was \$23,557 and the average rent for a 2 bedroom apartment was \$600. Over half of the LMA’s households (55.3%) were unable to afford the average 2-bedroom rent in 2009. While the median income of renters in the LMA increased by 9.6% between 2000 and 2009, the average rent for a 2-bedroom rental increased 38.1%.

### **Subsidized Housing Units**

The Maine State Housing Authority also keeps information on subsidized housing in each community. According to MSHA, there were 2 subsidized housing units in Easton, West Ridge Manor and Windermere Apartments. West Ridge Manor provides housing for the elderly and those with disabilities while Windermere Apartments provided family housing. There is a significant waiting list for the West Ridge Manor and town officials are concerned that the needs are not being met for eligible residents wishing to locate there. There may be the need for the construction of additional units at the Manor. Town officials and others are looking for potential funding sources, such as the USDA to construct new units. Also Manor management is considering the need to develop a capital needs assessment for that facility.

Rent at West Ridge Manor and Windermere Apartments is based on the renter's income.

The following table shows the number and type of subsidized housing units in Easton as of 2011. According to municipal officials, there are units located on the West Ridge Road, Osgood Road, Ladner Road, Houlton Road, and the Fuller Road. In total, there are 40 housing units in Easton that are subsidized in some fashion.

<b>Subsidized Housing Units, 2011</b>			
	<b>Easton</b>	<b>Aroostook County</b>	<b>Maine</b>
<b>Disabled Units</b>	0	56	460
<b>Family Units</b>	20	650	11,517
<b>Housing Choice Vouchers</b>	0	886	11,369
<b>Senior Units</b>	20	1,406	14,073
<b>Special Needs Units</b>		47	1,846
<b>Total</b>	40	3,045	39,265

Source: Maine State Housing Authority, 2013

## **Housing Quality**

In the area of housing quality the goal is to ensure safe and decent housing for all residents of the community. Housing quality factors include, age and quality of existing homes, the number of dangerous/abandoned homes and the need for standards for new units. It has been well over 20 years since Easton has operated a publically funded, single or multi-family residential rehabilitation program. The number of occupied, substandard homes has not been determined. All housing is a community resource and quality housing encourages people to live in Easton. This, in turn, helps establish a local labor force for business and economic growth. However, town officials continually work with the Aroostook County Action Program's (ACAP) weatherization program which purchases and installs all types of energy conservation materials (within guidelines) for income-eligible homeowners and tenants. Town officials are also working with ACAP's central heating improvement program (CHIP) which provides up to \$3000 in heating system improvements (such as cleaning, tuning, evaluation, burner retrofit, repair, replacement and conversion) to program and income-eligible households.

Town officials are also in the beginning stages of looking at the building of affordable energy efficient homes on one or two of the lots in the town owned subdivision. Conceivably these homes may be single floor ranch style homes build on a slab. Heating systems could potentially be a LP gas heating system. The intent would be to provide safe and efficient housing for those that would qualify for these types of programs.

A second potential opportunity is to develop a housing program similar to that of Fort Fairfield. The town could potentially acquire housing units that are in disrepair, fix and modernize, and then sell those on the open market. Funds obtained through the sale of these properties would then be used to purchase additional properties.



Easton has made strides in eliminating vacant, deteriorated housing through the acquisition/demolition of homes and through enforcement of the law pertaining to dangerous buildings. The cost of demolition is more expensive than ever and may range from \$15,000 - \$25,000. This often deters owners from dealing with the problem. A 2013 evaluation of dangerous residential structures identified 8 homes that should be removed. Four of those homes were razed as a training exercise for the Fire Department and the remaining four will be removed in the near future. The Board of Selectmen has the final authority to take action under the dangerous buildings law.

Housing age can be considered an indicator of housing quality but as stated previously, is not always reliable. Many older homes in Easton are better maintained than some newer homes. The American Community Survey 5-year update for 2011 reports owner occupied housing for Easton by housing tenure (age). The town should complete a town-wide housing quality assessment to determine the extent of substandard homes. After this, a housing assistance program could help them address this issue.

Easton is not required to enforce the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code (MUBEC). The State law that created MUBEC became effective December 1, 2010 and consists of residential and commercial building, existing building and energy conservation codes developed by the International Code Council and adapted to Maine. In addition, MUBEC includes standards related to ventilation for indoor air quality, energy efficiency and radon control options. Town officials may wish to consider adopting MUBEC which could help improve housing quality over time though most new construction probably meets these codes and may meet some of the standards.

### **Housing Analysis**

Affordable housing is not a significant problem in Easton. It appears that there are an ample number of safe affordable housing units in Town; however the stock is getting old. Over 76 percent of the current housing stock was built before the 1980 and nearly 49 percent was constructed prior to 1959, according to the 2000 US Census. Over the past 5 years mostly single-family detached units have been constructed. There was an expressed need for rental apartments. The Town has been actively involved in efforts to rehabilitate the deteriorating condition of the housing stock over the years. These housing rehabilitation efforts will also enhance Easton' ability to market itself to future potential businesses and industries, which is critical to the Town's economic revitalization and future job creation. The Town should continue to improve housing conditions for its residents wherever possible by actively pursuing federal and state grants for housing rehabilitation.

Municipal officials will also, as part of this comprehensive planning process, review the Town's need for a zoning ordinance and land use regulation to ensure it is compatible with its current economic development goals. The zoning of land use ordinance should be developed that protects existing residential land uses, while discouraging incompatible land use encroachment into established neighborhoods, all-the-while providing safe and sanitary housing for present and future residents.

Town officials should work with the owners of the two mobile home parks to assist with the upgrade of the infrastructure. Town officials may be able to work with the owners in some form of compromise to remove dilapidated mobile homes or units in unsuitable locations in return for assistance in upgrades. This would increase the “value of the existing lots within the park and remove potential environmental impacts to water quality.

The town should monitor the development of housing and its potential impacts on the availability of municipal services. Strip development along Routes 1-A, 10, Conant Road can reduce the perceived rural character of the community, increase the need and cost of transportation improvements, and facilitate the need for unplanned capital expenditures. New development will be coming to Town as will more economic opportunities. Proper use of existing and proposed regulations by the CEO, Planning Board, and Board of Appeals will assure that new development will fit into the community and become a valuable asset, not a liability. Good planning means good development and this will in turn reduce demands upon the community’s limited resources in the future.

There is a general perception that the housing stock in some areas of Easton “looks old” especially along the Station Road. Town officials will begin to seek funding to assist homeowners with the rehabilitation of those homes. Town officials will also work and partner with other agencies with weatherization and heating assistance programs.

There are few homes for sale (6 at the time of the writing of this section) in the range of \$80K to \$140K available and there are few house lots. Should a new or existing business expand and attract new residents to the community, there are some residential lots available. Town officials are also looking expanding residential subdivisions in the area located between Duncan Drive, Station Road, and Perry Drive.

## HOUSING

### Goals, Policies, and Strategies

#### State Goal

Encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens

#### Local Goal

Ensure an adequate supply of affordable, safe and decent housing for all ages and income levels in the community.

#### POLICY

Monitor new residential development, sale of single family homes and vacancy rates for indications that affordability is at risk.

Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe
Continue to market, expand, and develop residential subdivisions within the Growth Areas. Purchase or acquire land as it becomes available adjacent to existing town owned subdivisions for future expansion	Planning Board and Town Officials	2016 and annually
The Planning Board will develop a free residential building permit system to understand the location and types of housing units constructed in Town.	Planning Board	2016
Develop a housing rehabilitation program on tax acquired homes, repairs and rehabilitated the structure, and then places them up for sales. Funds from sales would go towards the rehabilitation of additional homes or the purchase of additional land for subdivisions.	Planning Board and Town Officials	2016-18
Town officials will apply for Community Development Block Grant Housing Assistance funds for development and expansion of multi-family units.	Town Officials.	2016 and on-going
Encourage developers of multi-family units to dedicate a minimum of one and up to 10% of units as affordable.	Planning Board	On-going
Town officials will annually contact Aroostook County Action Program for information on the availability of rental voucher/assistance and monitor trends.	Town Officials	On-going
Town officials will notify local Realtors and Banks regarding the availability of lots located in the town owned subdivisions	Town Officials,	On-going
Construct affordable, energy efficient home(s) in town owned subdivision for sale as desired.	Town Officials	On-going

**POLICY**

Encourage the maintenance, sale, and occupancy of vacant housing units.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Apply for a CDBG-Planning Grant to complete a local housing assessment that identifies unsafe homes for possible demolition and targets others for rehabilitation investment.	Town Officials	2017
Apply for CDBG-Housing Assistance funds as indicated by the housing assessment.	Town Officials	2018
Review the need for additional senior housing in Easton.	Planning Board	2018
Support applications that seek funds for the construction of additional senior housing at the various developments in Easton.	Town Officials.	2016 and on-going
Develop a local housing assistance program to benefit low/moderate income homeowners.	Town Officials	2018
Continue to market the Grange Apartments, Osgood Farm Apartments, and Windermere Apartments as units become available.	Town Officials	On-going

**POLICY**

Eliminate all abandoned/dangerous residential structures from community.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Have code enforcement officer and health inspector rate the risk of each structure to public safety.	Code Enforcement and Health Inspector	2016 and annually
Use the local housing assessment to create a target list of structures.	Planning Board	2016 and annually
Send annual notices to property owners when properties violate Dangerous Building Law. Take legal action when justified by risk level.	Planning Board and Town Officials	On-going
Work with the Easton Fire Department, MaineDEP, and others to remove abandoned and dangerous structures	Fire Dept. and Town Officials.	2016 and on-going