

IN THE CENSUS BUREAU'S 2025 CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW HOUSING SURVEY, THE NORTHEAST STANDS OUT AS BUCKING NATIONAL TRENDS

On July 1, the U.S. Census Bureau released [the results](#) of their 2025 Characteristics of New Housing Survey (“CHARS”). It's been a tumultuous few years for home building, with COVID-era work disruptions quickly followed by [rampant inflation](#) and [rising tariffs](#) on raw materials.

With [high interest rates](#) and [tight supply](#) threatening affordability for buyers, many home builders have started building smaller homes. The median square footage of a new single-family home sold in the U.S. [declined for the third year in a row](#) in 2025, to 2,194 square feet. Over the same period, it inched up in the Northeast, to a nation-leading 2,568 square feet.

CHARS doesn't publish data at the state level, but it does publish data by region—Northeast, South, Midwest, and West. One takeaway from the 2025 data is that the Northeast's new housing stock stands out from the rest—not just in terms of size, but also affordability, amenities, and other attributes.

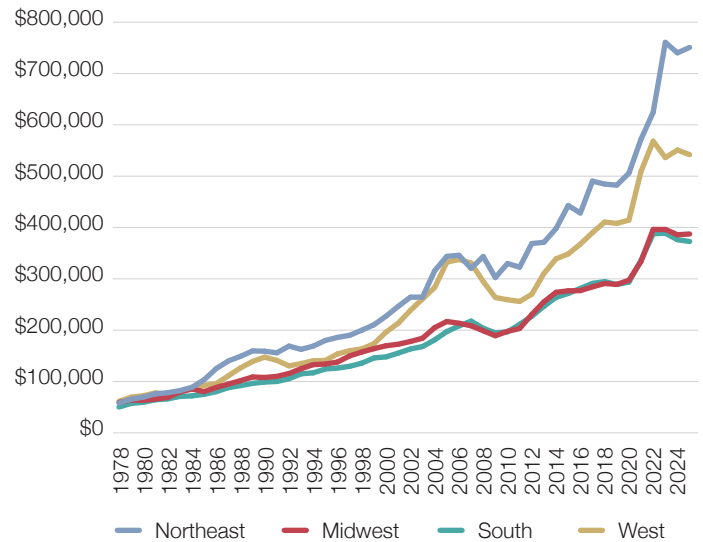
The median sale price of a new single-family home sold in the Northeast [exceeded \\$750,000](#) in 2025, a relatively modest jump of 1.4 percent from 2024. But prices in the South and West saw outright declines, and in the Midwest they grew by just 0.4 percent. As recently as 2007, sales prices of new homes were higher in the West than in the Northeast. In 2025, they were 39 percent higher in the Northeast (see Figure 1).

The National Association of Home Builders estimated that, in March 2026, regulation accounted for \$131,734 of the price of a typical new single-family home, up from \$65,224 in 2011 and equivalent to 26.4 percent of the national average new home price.

[Source: [NAHB](#)]

FACT OF THE MONTH

Figure 1: Median Home Price of a New Single-Family Home Sold by Census Region, 1978–2025



The 2025 CHARS data also show that, for the first time on record, electricity was [the primary heating source](#) for more than 50 percent of new single-family homes sold in the U.S. The South has had majority-electric new homes every year since 2008. The West has gone from 15 percent of new homes using electric heating in 2020 to 44 percent using it in 2025. But in the Northeast, 91 percent of new homes sold in 2025 used gas heating, and the share of new homes with electric heating declined from 10 percent in 2024 to 8 percent in 2025.

New homes in the Northeast are also less likely than those in other regions to contain certain amenities. For example, 19 percent of new single-family homes sold in the Northeast in 2025 had [no deck, porch, or patio](#), compared to just 7 percent nationwide. New homes in the Northeast were also less likely to have [a two-car garage](#), [central air conditioning](#), and [connection to a public sewer](#). Meanwhile, new homes in the Northeast were [more likely than the national average to have a partial or finished basement](#), an [open foyer with two or more stories](#), and [a fireplace](#).

Lastly, the CHARS data allow for comparisons of overall production volumes over time. No region of the country [completed more new homes](#) in 2025 than it did in 2005 and 2006. The dropoff in production is particularly notable [for single-family homes](#), with the Northeast and Midwest completing about half of the single-family homes in 2025 that they did in 2005. Over the same period, the number of multifamily units completed [more than doubled](#) in the Northeast and grew by at least 30 percent in every other region.

MASSACHUSETTS SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT BLOCKS RENT CONTROL PETITION FROM APPEARING ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT

In August 2025, a coalition of tenant advocacy organizations [filed an initiative petition](#) with the state Attorney General's Office to try and re-legalize rent control in Massachusetts. But after the state's Supreme Judicial Court [deemed the petition language unconstitutional](#) last month, those tenant advocates will have to wait until at least 2028 for rent control to appear on the ballot.

The petition would have capped the rate of residential rent increases in most Massachusetts apartments at the rate of general inflation or 5 percent per year, whichever is lower. If enacted, it would have been [the strictest statewide rent control policy](#) in the country. Rent control has been banned in Massachusetts since [a 1994 ballot referendum](#), which ended the practice in Boston and Cambridge. In years prior, Brookline, Lynn, and Somerville [also had rent control policies](#).

The reinstatement of rent control was widely opposed among [the real estate industry](#) and [elected leaders](#), including Governor Maura Healey and a coalition of gateway city mayors. By contrast, the rent control petition was immensely popular with the public, with some polls finding that more respondents supported than opposed it [by a margin of 50 percentage points](#). Housing for Massachusetts, an opposition campaign organized by several real estate trade associations, vowed to [raise tens of millions of dollars](#) to eat into that margin and ultimately stop the petition at the ballot.

[In May](#), encouraged by lawmakers who would ultimately be responsible for implementing the petition, rent control proponents [floated a compromise proposal](#). The compromise would allow municipalities to opt into capping rent growth, and the caps would exceed inflation by 5 percentage points in most cases. Some members of the real estate industry joined in the negotiations, while many others insisted that any form of rent control was [beyond the pale](#).

On June 16, NAIOP Massachusetts, perhaps the most powerful commercial real estate lobbying group in the state, trotted out [its own compromise proposal](#), with expanded exemptions for newly constructed buildings and a requirement that localities re-authorize rent control policies every 10 years.

Housing for Massachusetts also [funded a lawsuit](#) brought by a series of landlords alleging that the rent control petition violated Article 48 of the Massachusetts Constitution. The petition [exempts](#) "dwelling units in facilities operated solely for religious purposes," and Article 48 [prohibits](#)

ballot questions that "relate to religion, religious practices or religious institutions." On June 23, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court [adopted this argument](#) in its decision to keep the rent control petition off the ballot.

Meanwhile, tenant advocacy groups [have already suggested](#) they would resurface a rent control proposal in 2028, which may be an even more friendly political environment for proponents. Homeowners are much more likely to vote than renters in general, but nationally, the gap in voter turnout between homeowners and renters [tends to be narrower](#) in presidential election years than in midterm years. And while, as of this writing, Zillow describes Massachusetts' rental market as [cooler](#) than [the national average](#), that could change after several years of [underwhelming permitting numbers](#) for new homes.

Massachusetts voters are likely to have to reckon with rent control at some point. For now, the Supreme Judicial Court has kicked the can down the road.



Policymaking in [the environmentalist space] still rarely touches on where we build homes and how that affects the communities we live in and ultimately how it affects the environmental outcomes. Solar batteries [and] electric buildings...are wonderful. But why is it still difficult for me to find a home close to a grocery store?"

[Ben Holland](#), Senior Manager
World Resource Institute

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

RECENT OP-ED

[Available MA Homes Don't Meet Homeowners' Needs](#)

[Banker & Tradesman](#)

COMING SOON

Upcoming issues of *The House Call* will include segments on:

- A comparison of production outcomes with the state's housing goals
- An end-of-session Beacon Hill recap
- And more!