Housing — Quick Glance (Election Lens)

Portsmouth Municipal Election — November 4, 2025
Updated: 2025-10-03 • Est. read: 1–2 min

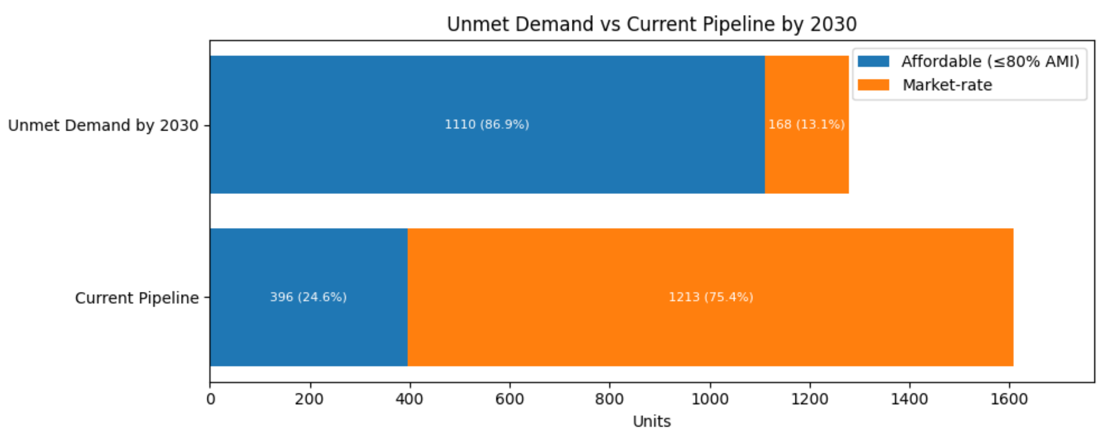
> **For election basics (how the mayor is selected and how many council seats are on the ballot), see** **Election Basics****.**

What this election determines for housing

The incoming Council will set early priorities for zoning, permitting and funding that affect housing. The new Mayor—who is the top vote-getter in the council race—also decides whether to continue, re-charter or replace the Blue Ribbon Housing Committee. These decisions will shape the housing agenda for the next two years, including directing staff to draft ordinance options and scheduling public hearings.

The issue in one glance

A 2022 study by **RKG Associates for the Portsmouth Housing Authority** estimated that Portsmouth needs about **2,800 rental homes by 2030**, most of which must be affordable to households earning up to 80 % of the area median income (AMI). The existing pipeline totals roughly **1,609 rental units**—about **1,213 market-rate** and **396 income-restricted**—leaving a significant shortfall. Vacancy rates remain extremely low and prices have risen sharply since 2019. **Figures reflect a pipeline and need snapshot as of 2025-10-03**.



Remaining unmet vs pipeline comparison bar charts

*Caption: A pair of horizontal bars comparing unmet rental demand and the current pipeline. The top bar shows that **1,110** permanently affordable units (87 %) and **168** market-rate units (13 %) remain to be built. The bottom bar shows that the existing pipeline is almost the reverse: **396** permanently affordable units (24.5 %) versus **1,213** market-rate units (75.5 %).*

Key drivers

- **Supply–demand gap:** Persistent demand and slow housing production have pushed vacancy rates down and costs up.
- **Cost stack:** High land, construction and financing costs make it difficult to produce new homes at affordable price points.
- **Income mismatch:** Median rents and sale prices outpace income growth, leaving 36 % of renters and 23 % of owners cost-burdened.
- **Zoning and process:** Where and what can be built depends on zoning; lengthy approvals add time and risk.
- **Funding bottlenecks:** Limited local/state funds and scarce federal tax credits restrict income-restricted development.

Key terms

- **Area Median Income (AMI):** The midpoint of household incomes in the region; used to set affordability thresholds.
- **Pipeline:** Homes under consideration from initial concept through permitting, construction and occupancy.

Sources

- **Portsmouth Housing Market Study (2022, RKG for Portsmouth Housing Authority)** — vacancy and cost-burden data.
- **Portsmouth Housing updates and pipeline database** — need and pipeline figures.
- **New Hampshire legislation:** HB 577 (ADUs), HB 631 (multifamily in commercial zones), SB 284 (parking reform).
- **Portsmouth city council agendas and Master Plan materials.**

For more detail and context, see the Housing Backgrounder.