

### III. Land Use Trends in Pennsylvania



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Executive Order 1999-1 on land use requires the Center to report annually to the Governor on land use trends in Pennsylvania. In the first *Annual Report* issued in January 2000, the Center responded by providing analyses of 38 land use indicators.

The first *Annual Report* included two trends, Land Cover and Developed Land, based on preliminary 1997 land use data issued by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the US Department of Agriculture. NRCS released corrected data in January 2001 showing that for the period between 1992 and 1997, developed land in Pennsylvania had increased 545,100 acres rather than the 1.1 million acres previously reported. The Center will submit an addendum to this report with the two trends revised to reflect the corrected data in March 2001.

It is unlikely that the analysis for any other given indicator has substantively or quantifiably changed this year. Moreover, the data for some of the land use indicators is collected every 5 to 10 years. Therefore, the Center is not updating the 38 land use indicators for the second *Annual Report*. The previous *Land Use Trends* report is incorporated by reference and is available for review on-line at <http://www.dced.state.pa.us>, select the Governor's Center for Local Government Services icon, then select land use reports. The *Land Use Trends* report is an appendix to the Center's first *Annual Report*.

The Center adds a new trend – **Rent Affordability by Low-income Families**, to this year's annual report. Housing affordability or rent affordability for low income families is an important element in the comprehensive planning process. This analysis was completed with the help of PHFA and DCED's Office of Community Development.

#### Rent Affordability

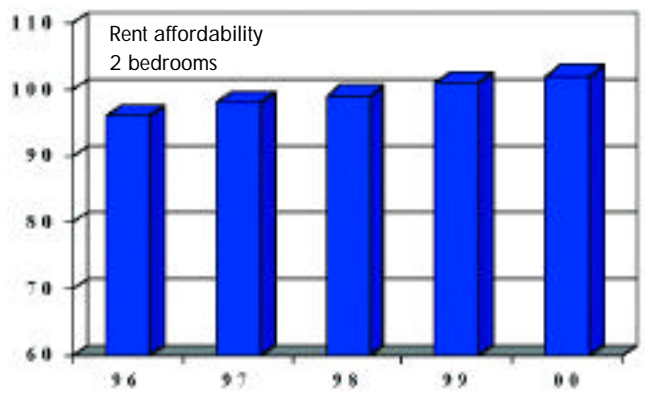
The rent affordability index illustrates the affordability of two-bedroom rental accommodations in Pennsylvania (Figure 4). The index is based on fair market rents and median household income calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Fair market rents are defined by HUD as the amount needed to rent privately owned, decent, safe, sanitary and modest rental housing. The rent affordability index compares the fair market rent to the standard amount of income (30%) a low-income household should devote to housing. We define a low-income household as one earning 50% of HUD's median household income, the threshold HUD uses to distinguish between very-low income and low-income households. An index of 100 indicates that a low-income household can just afford the fair market rent. An index of 120 indicates that a low-income household can afford rents at 120% of the fair market rent. While this trend suggests that typical renters can afford their housing costs, these are just averages. There are very low-income households and persons with disabilities who pay much higher, unaffordable,

proportions of their income for their housing.

Rent affordability is good in Pennsylvania, and it continues to improve. In 2000, Pennsylvania's index of 104 was well above the 1996 figure of 96. The improvement in the index reflects the fact that incomes have been growing faster than rents over the period. The current index means that, on average, a low-income family in Pennsylvania could afford to rent a two bedroom apartment 4% higher than the fair market rent. Affordability does vary by region, however (Figure 5). It is the lowest in northeastern and southeastern counties such as Monroe County, which is impacted by higher prices in nearby New Jersey. Affordability is the highest in the south central and extreme northwestern counties such as Franklin County where there is less demand for housing. ■

Figure 4

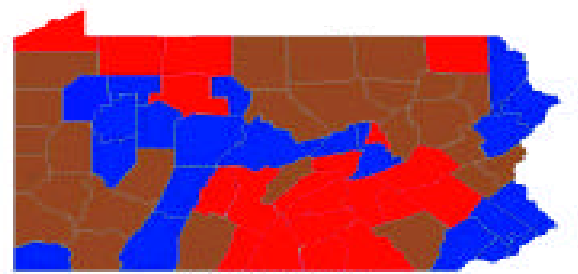
Rent Affordability Index for Low-Income Households



Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development, Economy.com

Figure 5

Rent Affordability %, 2000



- Above Average Rent Affordability (Index: 110 - 129)
- Moderate Rent Affordability (Index: 100 - 109)
- Below Average Rent Affordability (Index: 88 - 99)

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development, Economy.com