

**MAPPING THE MARKET:**  
**The Prevalence  
of Small and  
Medium Multifamily  
Properties in  
Chicago**

December 2024





## Acknowledgments

Mapping the Market provides an overview of the characteristics and prevalence of small and medium multifamily (SMMF) properties with 2 to 49 units and this housing stock’s importance to housing affordability in Chicago. We thank the many partners locally in Chicago and nationally who have continued to advance this conversation, including members of the [Chicago Flats Initiative](#) and its conveners, NHS Chicago and Communities United.

This research was made possible through the generous support of the Polk Bros. Foundation. Unless otherwise stated, the views and opinions expressed in the report are solely those of the report’s authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Polk Bros. Foundation, or its affiliates.

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# Key Findings

**Small and medium multifamily (SMMF) properties have a strong presence in Chicago.**

- Half of all renter and owner households live in SMMF properties.
- The majority of SMMF homes are concentrated in properties with less than 10 units, and half of all SMMF homes are in 2-to-4-unit properties.

**The majority of the SMMF stock present today in Chicago was built many decades ago, and the pace of new construction of SMMF properties is waning.**

- Half of all SMMF homes citywide were built before 1940.
- Nearly 80 percent of Chicago's SMMF housing stock are in properties that are at least 50 years old.
- Two-to-four-unit properties were the only property type that saw a decline in units since 2010, even as the total housing supply in Chicago grew modestly.

**SMMF properties are crucial in many of Chicago's communities of color, where two-to-four-unit buildings and mid-sized multifamily properties with 5 to 49 units are the most common housing types.**

- Two-to-four-unit properties represent more than half of residential properties and housing stock in westside neighborhoods that include East and West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, South Lawndale (Little Village), and Lower West Side (Pilsen).
- Communities where 5-to-49-unit properties provide the largest share of units include southside neighborhoods such as Washington Park, South Shore, and Chatham.

**SMMF properties are an important housing source for renters, households of color, and multigenerational households.**

- 71.4 percent of households living in SMMF units rent their homes.
- Black- and Hispanic-headed households are the most likely to live in SMMF properties, and 75.2 percent of households living in 2-to-4-unit properties are headed by a person of color.
- 30.3 percent of multigenerational households live in 2-to-4-unit properties.

**SMMF properties are the backbone to the city's affordable housing supply.**

- SMMF properties provide the largest number and an outsized share of homes affordable to Chicago's low-income renters and families at or below 80 percent of Chicago's area median income (AMI).
- Smaller SMMF properties under 10 units have deeper levels of affordability. Two-to-four-unit properties have the greatest number of rents affordable to very low-income households at or below 50% AMI.
- Nearly all SMMF properties have no federal project-level subsidies to protect these properties from affordability loss.





## Introduction

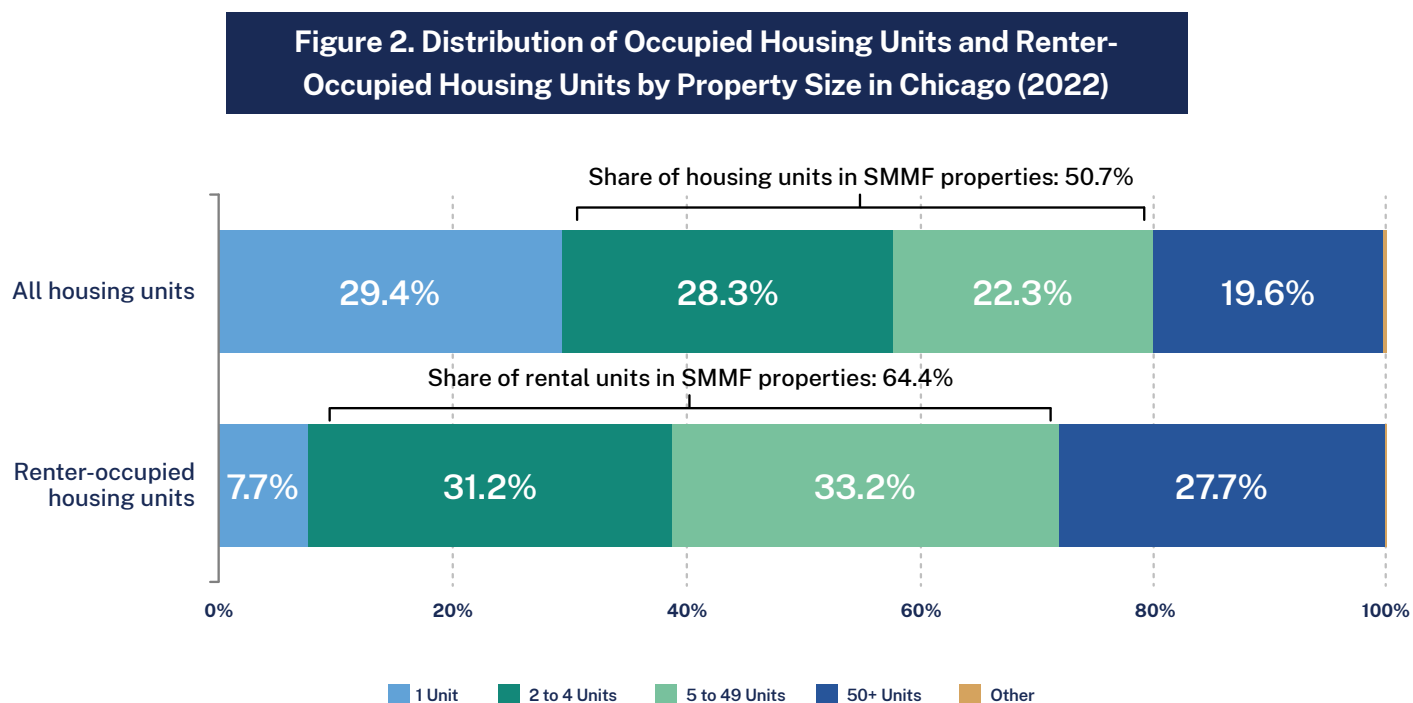
**Small and medium multifamily properties (SMMF), consisting of buildings with 2 to 49 units, are the backbone of Chicago's housing supply.** These properties are a ubiquitous housing type that can be found in all 77 neighborhoods across the city and include a range of building sizes, types, and styles. These include two-, three-, and four-flats; courtyard and midrise apartment buildings; and industrial or commercial properties converted to residential uses (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Small and Medium Multifamily Property Types across Chicago**



It follows that SMMF properties provide a significant number of homes to Chicago residents. According to data from the U.S. Census and the Cook County Assessor, SMMF properties account for half of all occupied housing units (Figure 2) and represent a third of all residential properties in Chicago.

SMMF properties are a critical source of housing for Chicago renters. Roughly two-thirds (64.4 percent) of Chicago's occupied rental housing units are found in SMMF properties, twice the share of rentals found in large multifamily buildings with 50 or more units (27.7 percent) (Figure 2).



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units  
Note: Other includes mobile homes, boats, RVs, and vans

SMMF properties are a critical source of housing to Chicago residents and play an important role in the city's housing supply. Given the significant prevalence of SMMF properties, it is important for local stakeholders and policymakers to understand the characteristics of this housing stock and how it contributes to the local housing market.

In this brief, we seek to answer these key questions:

1. **Property:** What are key characteristics of Chicago's SMMF housing stock?
2. **Place:** Where are SMMF properties concentrated in Chicago?
3. **People:** Who lives in SMMF properties?
4. **Affordability:** How do SMMF properties contribute to Chicago's affordable housing landscape?

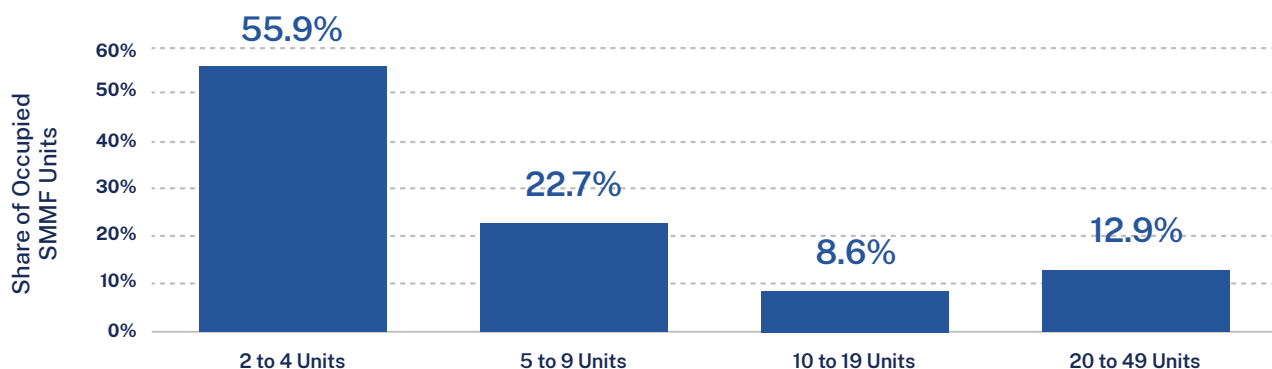




## What Are the Characteristics of Small and Medium Multifamily Properties?

The majority of Chicago's small and medium multifamily (SMMF) housing stock is concentrated in properties that contain under 10 units. Buildings under 10 units comprise nearly 80 percent of all units in SMMF properties (Figure 3). Specifically, 2-to-4-unit properties represent a substantial portion of housing in Chicago, accounting for more than half of all units in SMMF properties and over a quarter of the City's total housing stock, at 28.3 percent (Figure 2, 3).

**Figure 3: Distribution of Housing Units in Small and Medium Multifamily Properties in Chicago (2022)**

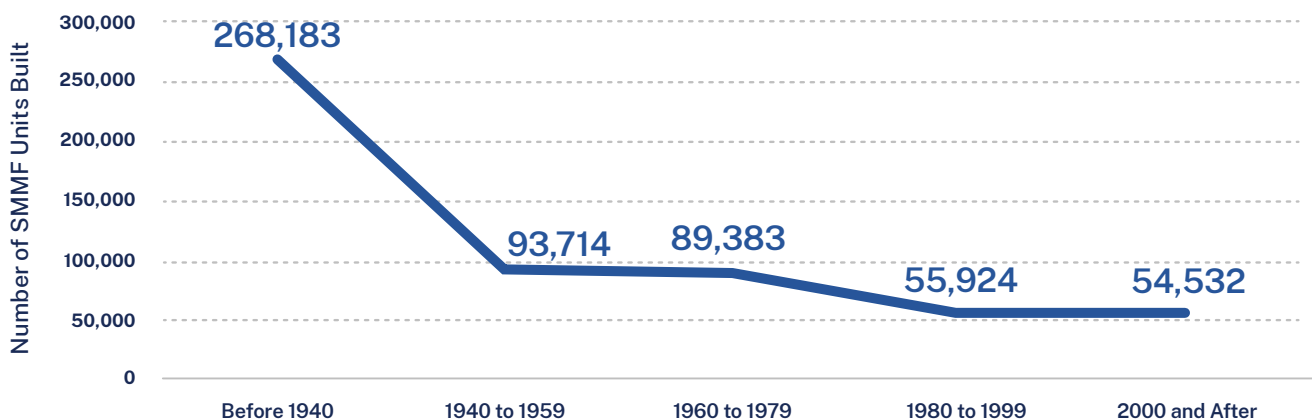


Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units

**Half of SMMF units in Chicago were built before 1940.** Newly built SMMF accounts for a relatively small share of the overall SMMF stock currently found in Chicago, with less than 10 percent of the existing SMMF units constructed since 2000. Conversely, roughly 80 percent of Chicago’s SMMF properties predate 1980, with almost half built before World War II (Figure 4). Considering 2-to-4-unit properties comprised 38 percent of all new units built before 1940, that share has fallen to 15 percent since 2020. In today’s housing market, the city’s new housing supply is driven by larger properties with 50 or more units (Figure 5).

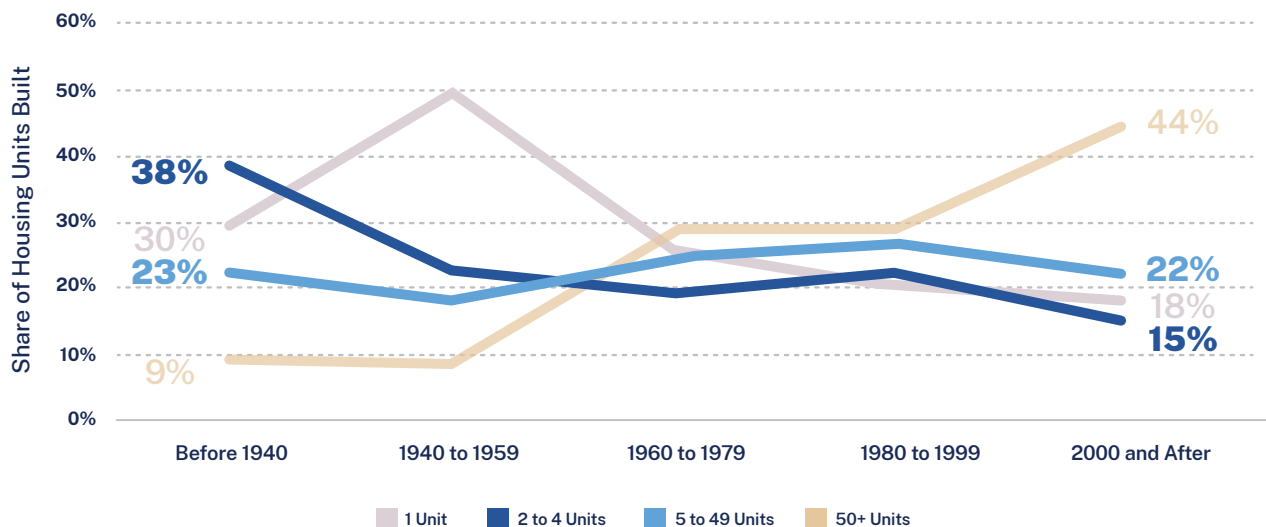
Without continued property investment, the residents who live in these aging properties may experience poor living conditions while property owners grapple with deferred maintenance challenges. As SMMF properties continue to age, preserving the existing affordable rentals in these properties becomes even more pressing.

**Figure 4: Number of Small and Medium Multifamily Units Built by Decade in Chicago**



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units

**Figure 5: Share of Housing Units Built by Property Size and Decade in Chicago**

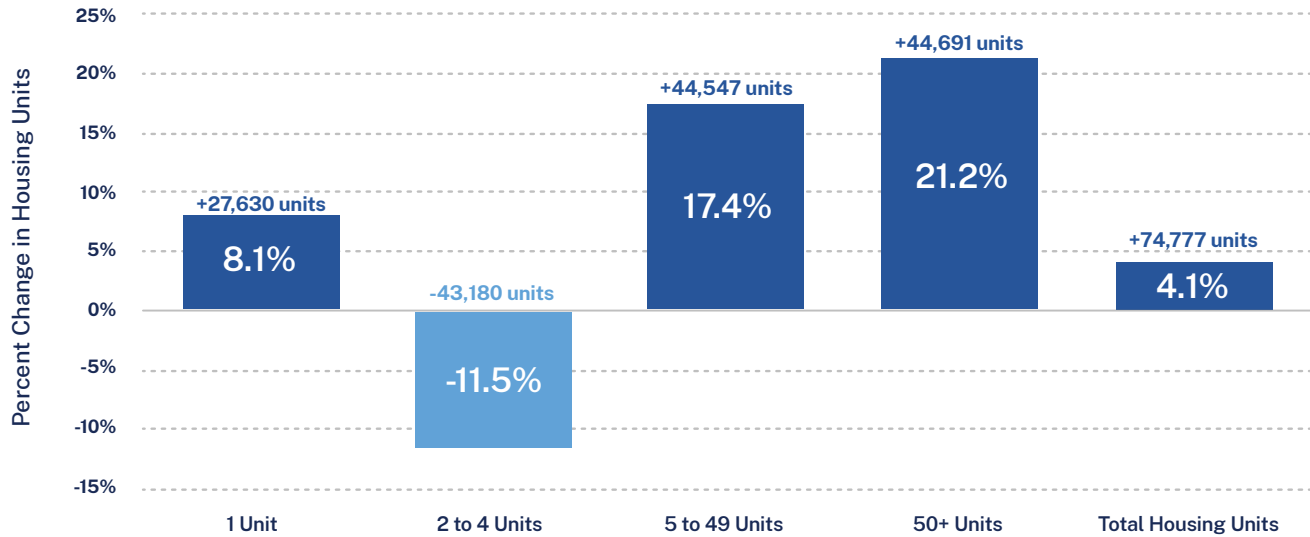


Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units



In the City of Chicago, the number of units in 2-to-4-unit properties has significantly declined since 2010. Over the last decade, 2-to-4-unit properties were the only property type in Chicago that saw a decline in the number of units since 2010. Units in 2-to-4-unit properties declined by 11.5 percent, a total of approximately 43,180 units, while units in 5-to-49-unit properties grew by 17.4 percent, a total of 44,540 units (Figure 6). Research from the [Institute for Housing Studies](#) suggests that 2-to-4-unit properties may be declining due to conversions to single-family homes in higher-cost markets and demolition in lower-cost markets.

**Figure 6: Percent Change in Housing Units by Property Size in Chicago (2010-2022)**

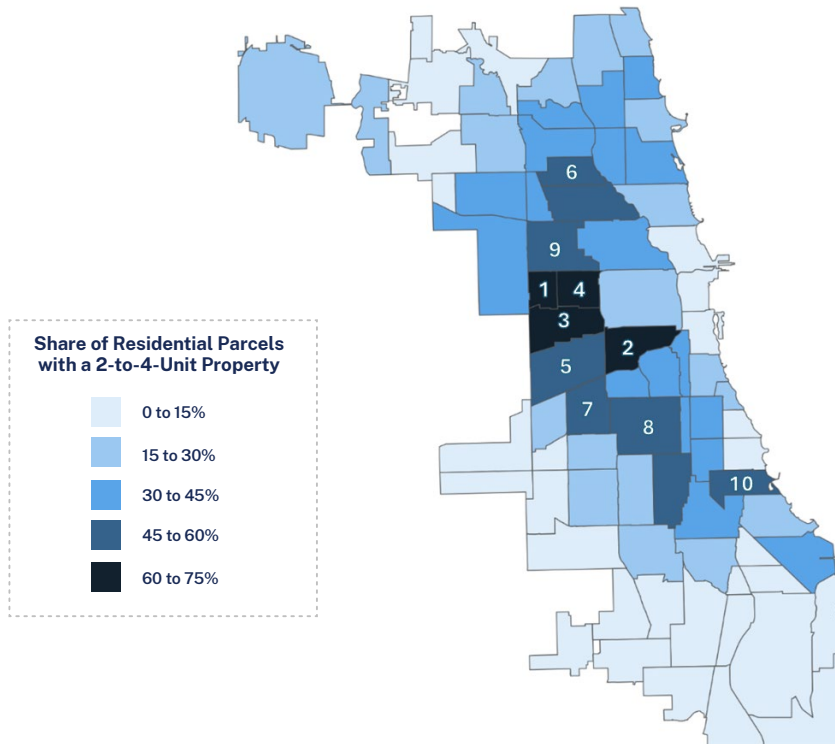


Source: 2010-2022 ACS 1-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units  
 Note: Other includes mobile homes, boats, RVs, and vans

# Where Are Small and Medium Multifamily Properties Located?

Two-to-four-unit properties comprise a significant share of the residential built environment and the housing supply in communities of color. Chicago community areas where 2-to-4-unit properties comprise more than half of the residential building stock are concentrated in the city’s west side: East and West Garfield Park, North and South Lawndale (also known as Little Village) and Lower West Side (also known as Pilsen) (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Top Ten Community Areas with the Highest Concentration of 2-to-4-Unit Properties (2023)**

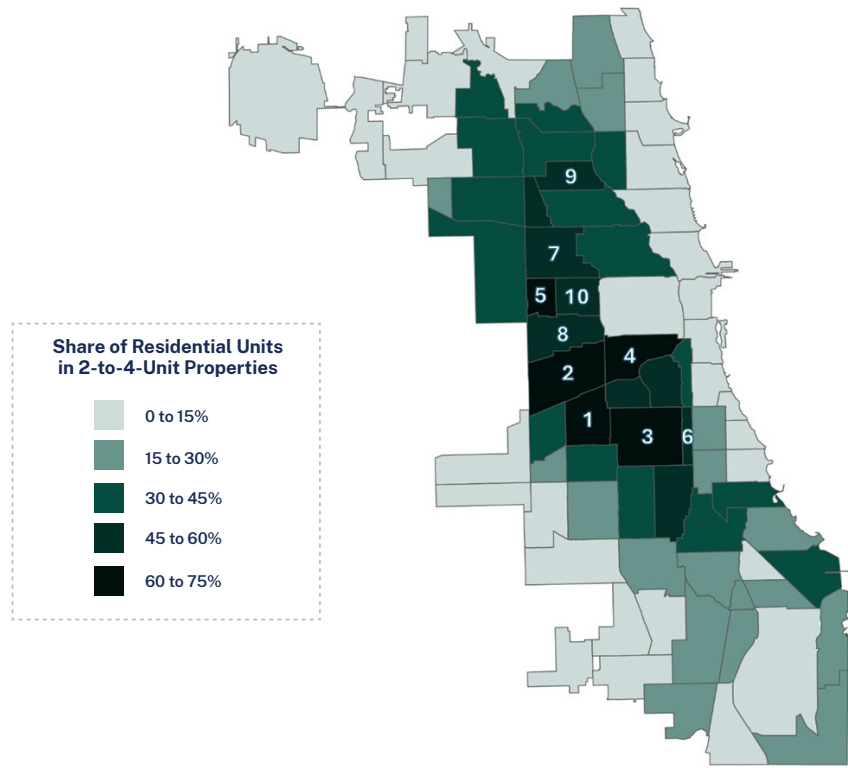


Chicago Community Area (CCA)	# of Parcels with 2-to-4s	2-to-4-Unit Parcels as a Share of All Residential Parcels	% of BIPOC residents in CCA	Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group in CCA
1. West Garfield Park	1,683	68.9%	97.3%	Black or African American
2. Lower West Side	2,858	64.5%	76.0%	Hispanic or Latino
3. North Lawndale	2,971	62.4%	93.5%	Black or African American
4. East Garfield Park	1,665	60.6%	91.7%	Black or African American
5. South Lawndale	4,564	58.9%	94.2%	Hispanic or Latino
6. Avondale	3,318	55.7%	58.2%	Hispanic or Latino
7. Brighton Park	3,676	53.1%	91.8%	Hispanic or Latino
8. New City	3,498	52.0%	89.1%	Hispanic or Latino
9. Humboldt Park	4,256	51.8%	86.6%	Hispanic or Latino
10. Woodlawn	1,417	50.1%	84.5%	Black or African American
City of Chicago	112,881	25.5%		

Source: 2023 Cook County Assessor’s Office. Note: The share of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents include all nonwhite residents, not just the predominant racial or ethnic group in each community area

Nine of the ten community areas where 2-to-4-unit properties supply more than half of the housing stock are neighborhoods where over three quarters of residents are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Community Areas with the Highest Concentration of Units in 2-to-4-Unit Properties (2023)**



Chicago Community Area (CCA)	# of Units in 2-to-4s	Units in 2-to-4-Unit Properties as a Share of All Residential Units	% of BIPOC residents in CCA	Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group in CCA
1. Brighton Park	8,278	68.9%	91.8%	Hispanic or Latino
2. South Lawndale	10,788	68.7%	94.2%	Hispanic or Latino
3. New City	8,478	66.0%	89.1%	Hispanic or Latino
4. Lower West Side	7,460	61.7%	76.0%	Hispanic or Latino
5. West Garfield Park	3,913	60.6%	97.3%	Black or African American
6. Fuller Park	490	57.8%	95.6%	Black or African American
7. Humboldt Park	9,982	57.2%	86.6%	Hispanic or Latino
8. North Lawndale	7,354	56.3%	93.5%	Black or African American
9. Avondale	7,851	56.3%	58.2%	Hispanic or Latino
10. East Garfield Park	3,990	55.3%	91.7%	Black or African American
City of Chicago	274,183	28.4%		

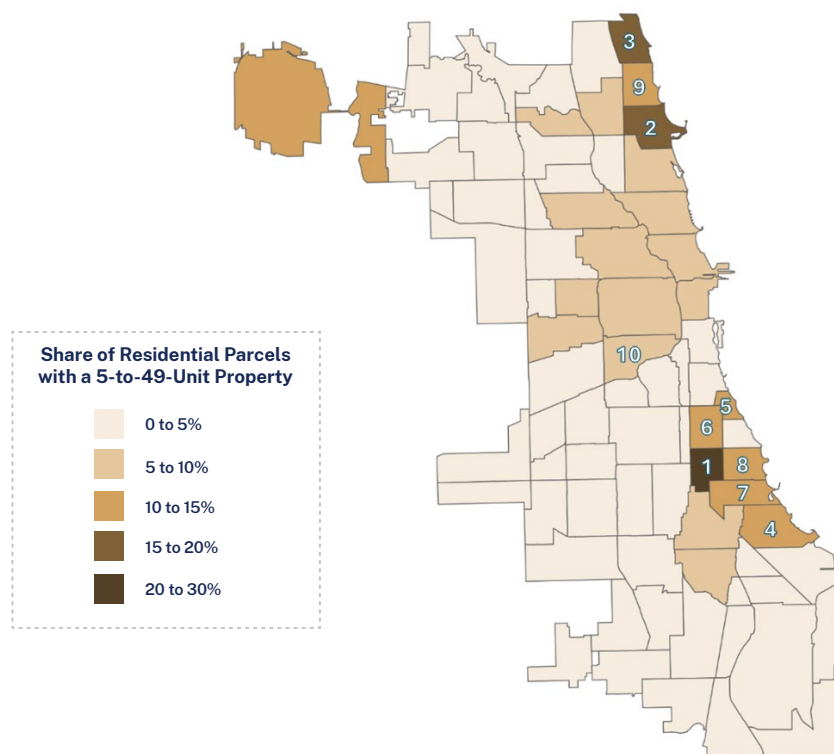
Source: 2023 Cook County Assessor's Office



### Denser properties with 5 to 49 units are concentrated in Chicago's south side and northern lakefront communities.

On the south side, Washington Park includes the highest concentration of 5-to-49-unit properties, comprising 28 percent of the community area's residential parcels. These properties also contribute more than half—53 percent—of the community's housing supply, the most of any Chicago community area (Figure 10). Other south side communities with a significant presence of these mid-sized properties include Oakland, Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore. In particular, South Shore has the largest number of mid-sized multifamily properties, with roughly 818 properties (Figure 9). On the City's north side, adjacent lakefront community areas that include Uptown, Edgewater, and Rogers Park also include a significant presence of mid-size multifamily properties (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Top Ten Community Areas with the Highest Concentration of 5-to-49-Unit Properties (2023)**

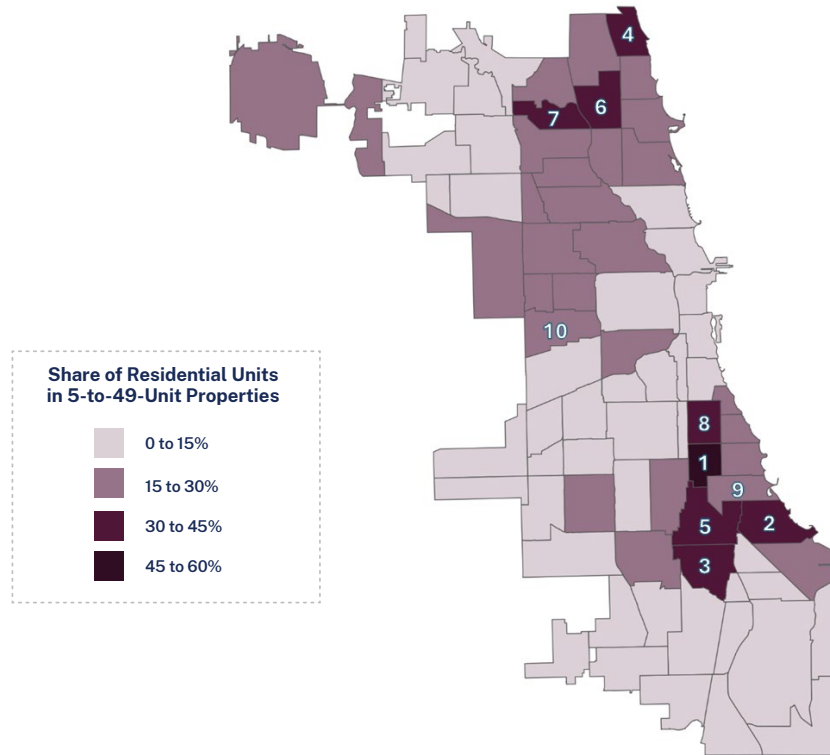


Chicago Community Area (CCA)	# of Parcels with 5-to-49s	5-to-49-Unit Parcels as a Share of All Residential Parcels	% of BIPOC residents in CCA	Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group in CCA
1. Washington Park	230	28.1%	95.1%	Black or African American
2. Uptown	468	16.8%	43.1%	white
3. Rogers Park	539	15.7%	47.8%	white
4. South Shore	818	13.1%	96.0%	Black or African American
5. Oakland	66	12.5%	93.2%	Black or African American
6. Grand Boulevard	306	12.4%	91.4%	Black or African American
7. Woodlawn	333	11.8%	84.5%	Black or African American
8. Hyde Park	218	11.8%	47.7%	white
9. Edgewater	454	10.8%	41.3%	white
10. Lower West Side	407	9.2%	76.0%	Hispanic or Latino
City of Chicago	16,525	3.7%		

Source: 2023 Cook County Assessor's Office

Homes in 5-to-49-unit properties also make up 30 to 40 percent of the housing stock in Albany Park and Lincoln Square on Chicago's northwest side and Greater Grand Crossing and Chatham on Chicago's south side, signifying that these properties make a substantial contribution to the overall housing stock of neighborhoods with largely single-family homes and 2-to-4-unit properties (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Community Areas with the Highest Concentration of Units in 5-to-49-Unit Properties (2023)**

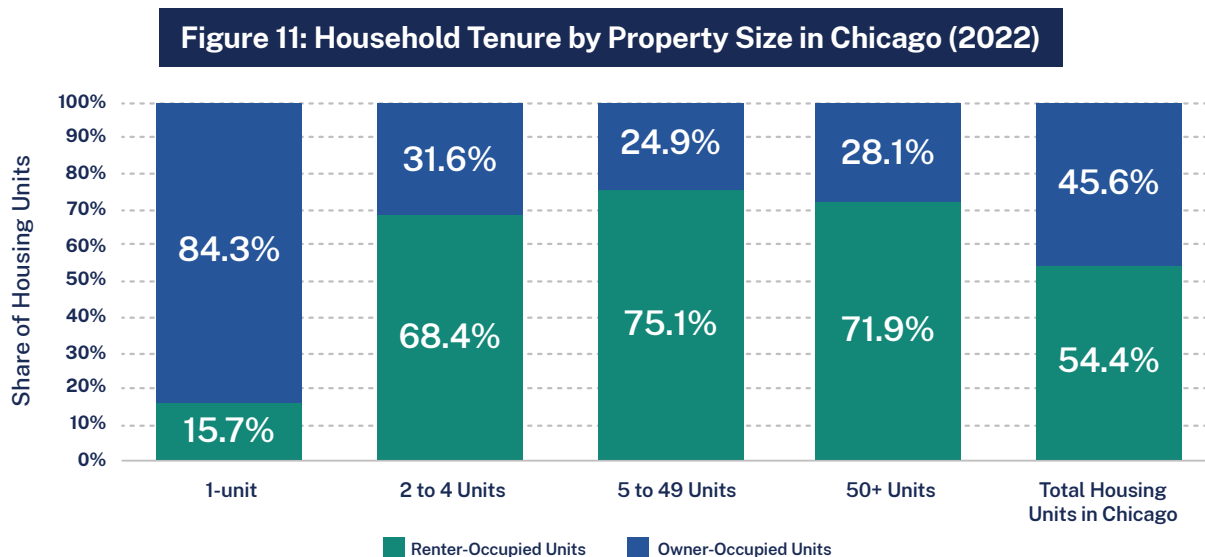


Chicago Community Area (CCA)	# of Units in 5-to-49s	Units in 5-to-49-Unit Properties as a Share of All Residential Units	% of BIPOC residents in CCA	Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group in CCA
1. Washington Park	2,740	53.6%	95.1%	Black or African American
2. South Shore	11,843	42.0%	96.0%	Black or African American
3. Chatham	6,037	40.2%	97.1%	Black or African American
4. Rogers Park	10,390	39.3%	47.8%	white
5. Greater Grand Crossing	4,507	34.1%	97.4%	Black or African American
6. Lincoln Square	6,470	32.8%	33.6%	white
7. Albany Park	5,116	30.8%	63.3%	Hispanic
8. Grand Boulevard	3,340	30.5%	91.4%	Black or African American
9. Woodlawn	3,324	29.1%	84.5%	Black or African American
10. North Lawndale	3,534	27.1%	93.5%	Black or African American
City of Chicago	187,465	16.4%		

Source: 2023 Cook County Assessor's Office

# Who Lives in Small and Medium Multifamily Properties?

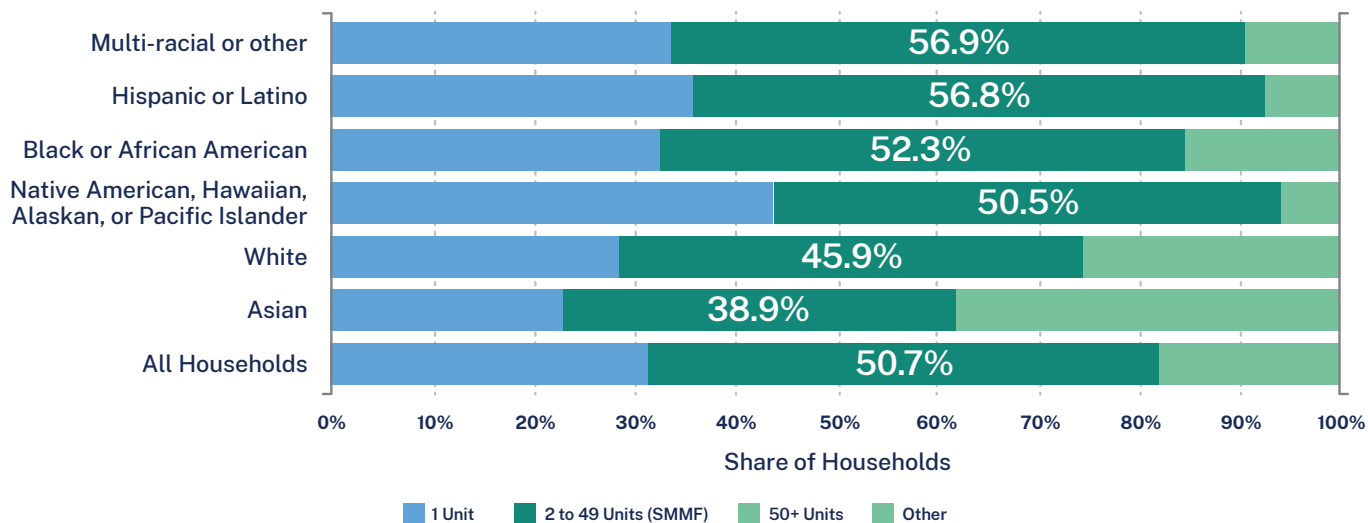
Chicago's small and medium multifamily (SMMF) properties are predominantly home to renters. Roughly 68.4 percent of households in 2-to-4-unit properties and 75.1 percent of households in 5-to-49-unit properties are renters. Two-to-four-unit properties contain a higher share of owners, at 31.6 percent, compared to roughly 25 percent of 5-to-49-unit condominiums, cooperatives, and other multifamily properties (Figure 11).



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units.

**SMMF properties are a critical source of housing for Chicago's residents of color.** Households headed by a person of color are more likely to live in SMMF properties compared to the city's overall population. Nearly 57 percent of Hispanic or Latino headed households, 52.3 percent of Black headed households, and 57 percent of multi-racial headed households reside in SMMF properties, while the citywide proportion of all households living in SMMF properties is 50.7 percent (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Share of Households by Race and Ethnicity of Head of Household Living in Small and Medium Multifamily Properties in Chicago (2022)**

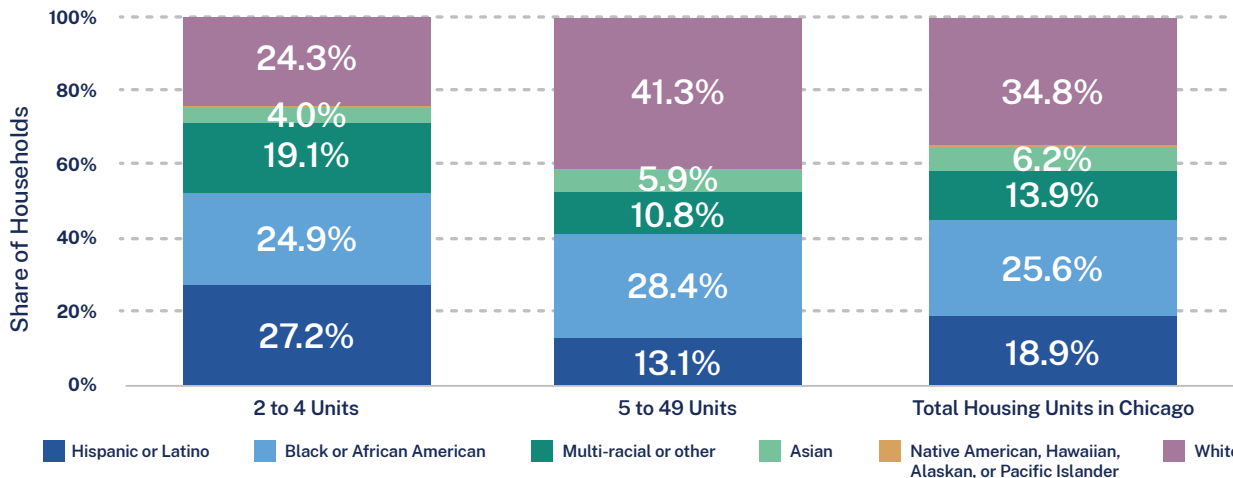


Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units. Note: 'Head of Household' refers to the first respondent in a household's survey response.



In Chicago, a majority of households living in SMMF are headed by a person of color. Roughly 75 percent of households in 2-to-4-unit properties and 58.2 percent of households living in 5-to-49-unit properties are headed by a person of color (Figure 13).

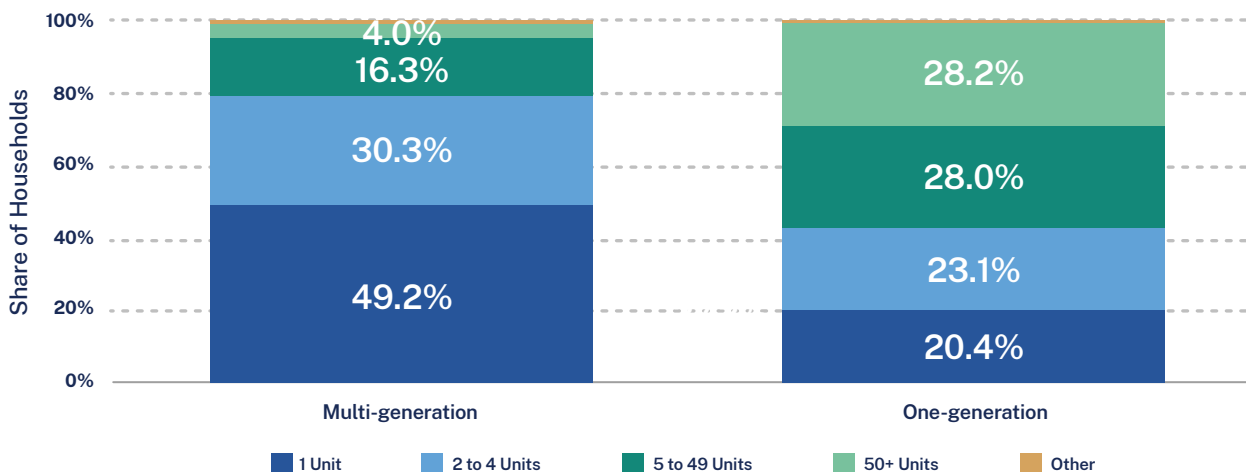
**Figure 13: Distribution of Households Living in Small and Medium Multifamily Properties by Head of Household Race and Ethnicity in Chicago (2022)**



Source: 2018-2022 ACS 5-year Estimates. Universe: Occupied Housing Units. Note: The “Hispanic or Latino” category above includes respondents who identify as having Hispanic or Latino origins and a racial background that may include Black or African American, white, Asian, Native American, multi-racial, and so forth. All other racial categories include respondents who identify as non-Hispanic Black or African American, non-Hispanic white, Non-Hispanic Asian, and so forth.

Two-to-four-unit properties are an important housing source for multigenerational households. Nearly 80 percent of multigenerational households in Chicago live in either a single-family home (49.2%) or 2-to-4-unit property (30.3%). A very small proportion of multigenerational families live in large multifamily properties, which are one of the most prevalent housing types for single generation households (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Distribution of Multigenerational Households Living in SMMF Units in Chicago (2022)**



Source: Enterprise estimates based on 2018-2022 5 Year PUMS. Universe: Occupied Housing Units.



## How Do Small and Medium Multifamily Properties Contribute to Affordability?

Housing affordability is defined as having housing costs that do not exceed 30 percent of a household's gross annual income. See Table 1 for annual income limits for specific area median income (AMI) groups in the Chicago area and the related monthly affordable housing costs, defined as rent and utilities, for different household sizes.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Annual Income Limits and Affordable Monthly Rents by Area Median Income Levels in the Chicago Region (2024)**

Geography	Income Groups by AMI Levels	Household Size							
		One-person household		Two-person household		Three-person household		Four-person household	
		Annual income	Maximum monthly affordable rent	Annual income	Maximum monthly affordable rent	Annual income	Maximum monthly affordable rent	Annual income	Maximum monthly affordable rent
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL HUD Metro FMR Area	30% AMI	\$23,550	\$589	\$26,910	\$673	\$30,270	\$757	\$33,630	\$841
	50% AMI	\$47,100	\$1,178	\$53,305	\$1,333	\$60,540	\$1,514	\$67,260	\$1,682
	80% AMI	\$62,800	\$1,570	\$71,800	\$1,795	\$80,750	\$2,019	\$89,700	\$2,243
	100% AMI	\$78,500	\$1,963	\$89,700	\$2,243	\$100,900	\$2,523	\$112,100	\$2,803

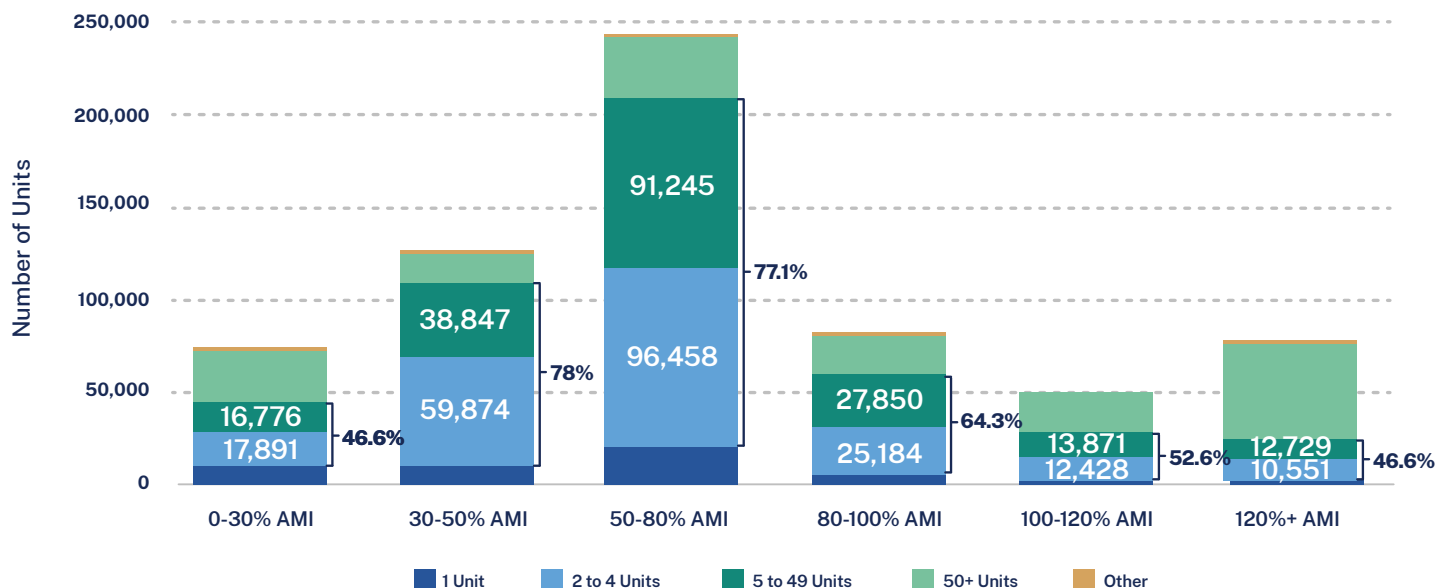
Source: Enterprise estimates based on HUD's FY 2024 Income Limits Summary.

<sup>1</sup> A renter household of four earning Chicago's median family income of \$112,100 in 2024 would be considered cost burdened if they pay more than \$2,243 per month in rent and utilities. [Click here](#) for more detail on the median family income calculations for the Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL HUD Metro FMR Area. The HUD Metro Fair Market Rate (FMR) Area includes Cook County, DuPage County, Kane County, Lake County, McHenry County, and Will County. Monthly affordable housing costs for renters include rent and utilities.

**Small and medium multifamily (SMMF) properties provide a critical source of housing affordable to lower-income renter households.** About three-quarters (or 286,424) of rental units in SMMF properties offer rents that are affordable to households earning between 30-50% (very low-income) and 50-80% of AMI (low-income)<sup>2</sup> (Figure 15, Table 2).

SMMF properties contribute the largest number of rental homes affordable to low-income households earning between 50-80% AMI, roughly 187,704 units. Two-to-four-unit properties provide deeper levels of affordability to very low-income households earning between 30-50% AMI and make up half of all the units in Chicago affordable to this income group. Two-to-four-unit properties also make up a quarter of all the units in Chicago affordable to extremely low-income households earning 30% AMI or below (Figure 15, Table 2).

**Figure 15: Number and Share of Rental Units Affordable to Each AMI Level by Building Size in Chicago (2022)**



Source: Enterprise estimates based on 2018-2022 5 Year PUMS, 2022 HUD Income Limits, and the Missouri Data Center PUMA to County Crosswalk.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis uses the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) [AMI income limits](#). Households with an annual gross income at or below 30% of the Chicago region’s area median income (AMI) are described as “extremely low-income”, Households between 30-50% AMI are described as “very low-income”, and households with incomes between 50-80% AMI are described as “low-income”.



**Table 2: Number SMMF Units Affordable to Extremely Low-Income (<30% AMI), Very Low-Income (30-50% AMI), and Low-Income (50-80% AMI) Chicago Renter Households**

Property Size	# of units affordable to <30% AMI	% of units affordable to <30% AMI	# of units affordable to 30-50% AMI	% of units affordable to 30-50% AMI	# of units affordable to 50-80% AMI	% of units affordable to 50-80% AMI	Total affordable units by property size
2 to 4 Units	17,891	24.1%	59,874	47.3%	96,458	39.6%	174,224
5 to 9 Units	7,263	9.8%	22,162	17.5%	48,871	20.1%	78,296
10 to 19 Units	3,192	4.3%	7,790	6.2%	17,322	7.1%	28,304
20 to 49 Units	6,321	8.5%	8,895	7.0%	25,052	10.3%	40,269
<b>SMMF (2 to 49 Units)</b>	<b>34,667</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>98,721</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>187,704</b>	<b>77.1%</b>	<b>321,092</b>
1 Unit	10,712	14.4%	11,183	8.8%	21,428	8.8%	43,323
50+ Units	28,666	38.5%	15,708	12.4%	33,986	14.0%	78,360
Other	321	0.4%	929	0.7%	323	0.1%	1,573
<b>Total rental units by AMI</b>	<b>74,366</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>126,542</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>243,441</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>444,348</b>

Source: Enterprise estimates based on 2018-2022 5 Year PUMS, 2022 HUD Income Limits, and the Missouri Data Center PUMA to County Crosswalk. Universe: Occupied and Vacant Rental Housing Units.

# Preserving Chicago's Small and Medium Multifamily Stock

Small and medium multifamily (SMMF) properties, buildings with 2 to 49 units, are vital to Chicago's housing supply. Preserving this rental stock can help address the city's housing shortage, enhance housing affordability, and provide housing options as families grow and change.

SMMF properties provide half of all homes for Chicago residents and are a prevalent source of housing in the city's communities of color. Specifically, 2-to-4-unit properties are crucial to Chicago's housing ecosystem, providing deeper affordability for many residents of color. However, the supply of homes in 2-to-4-unit properties is declining, resulting in a significant loss of rental units affordable to low-income residents. Other property types have remained stable or grown in the past decade, but do not provide the same levels of deep affordability.

Importantly, while SMMF properties account for a large share of homes affordable to low- and very low-income renters, the vast majority of affordable units in SMMF properties receive no federal project-based subsidies but are affordable likely due to factors such as age, location, and ownership.<sup>3</sup> As such, the affordability of units in SMMF properties may be vulnerable to loss when property investments are made, market conditions shift, or properties change ownership.

While Chicago's SMMF housing stock reflects [national trends](#), further research is needed to understand the specific challenges faced by SMMF owners and the conditions of aging properties, as well as to explore preservation strategies tailored to the city's diverse neighborhoods.

- The affordable housing field should support existing owner-operators and build the capacity of buyers who seek to preserve the affordability of SMMF properties, also referred to as 'mission-aligned' buyers, to implement localized and market-aligned strategies for SMMF preservation that balances property investment with continued affordability for residents.
- Elected officials in Chicago and Cook County should equip mission-aligned buyers with adequate [financial resources](#) to compete with profit-driven actors. Public funders should create or set aside funding from more permanent revenue streams to support SMMF preservation, including resources to bolster sustainable operations among existing SMMF owner-operators.
- Public sector agencies should leverage existing program and policy administration to collect and publish more information on SMMF property characteristics, resident needs, and rents to help practitioners make data-informed decisions and better prioritize existing resources.
- Private funders should provide accessible, flexible, and fast acting capital geared towards smaller properties so mission-aligned buyers can quickly acquire and rehabilitate SMMF properties.

<sup>3</sup> An, B. Y., Bostic, R. W., Jakabovics, A., Orlando, A. W., & Rodnyansky, S. (2020). Small and medium multifamily housing: affordability and availability. *Housing Studies*, 37(7), 1274–1297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1842339>



## About Enterprise Community Partners

Enterprise is a national nonprofit that exists to make a good home possible for the millions of families without one. We support community development organizations on the ground, aggregate and invest capital for impact, advance housing policy at every level of government, and build and manage communities ourselves. Since 1982, we have invested \$72 billion and created 1 million homes across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands – all to make home and community places of pride, power and belonging. Join us at [enterprisecommunity.org](https://www.enterprisecommunity.org).