Anchorage neighborhoods

Diverse areas reflect broader trends in Alaska's largest city

By SAM TAPPEN

In the early 20th century, young Anchorage occupied little more than the coastal region between Ship Creek and Chester Creek, with a few dirt roads leaving town. Eventually, what started in 1915 as a construction camp for the Alaska Railroad on the banks of Ship Creek blossomed into Alaska's largest city.

By 1980, the city had filled much of the Anchorage Bowl and spread north to Chugiak and south to Girdwood. That year, the decennial census used census tracts to divide Anchorage into areas still recognizable to residents today. (See the "naming the neighborhoods" sidebar on page 7.)

In the September 2013 issue of *Trends*, we examined how those familiar areas had changed since 1980 and discussed their implications for the city's future. With new data from the U.S. Census Bureau, we revisited those 29 neighborhoods this year and found that over the last decade, many of Anchorage's long-term trends leveled out or reversed.

Home building slowed, for example, and population growth gave way to loss in Anchorage as it did in much of Alaska through recent state and pandemic-linked recessions. Other trends continued over the past decade, such as an increasingly diverse and older population.

Anchorage neighborhood populations over time

Area	Census April 1980	Census April 1990	Census April 2000	Census April 2010	Census April 2020	Estimate July 2023
Chugiak	5,330	8,387	9,307	10,995	10,865	10,923
Eagle River	7,528	16,937	20,610	23,987	25,118	26,135
Fort Richardson	8,157	7,979	5,470	8,000	6,730	6,764
Elmendorf AFB	9,189	7,118	6,626	5,937	4,592	4,561
Government Hill	1,707	1,732	1,948	1,988	2,124	1,939
Mountain View	5,505	5,566	6,727	7,747	7,044	6,921
Northeast Anchorage	9,428	11,600	13,710	16,762	17,976	18,332
Russian Jack	7,649	8,780	10,488	11,730	11,573	11,134
Merrill Field Vicinity	5,195	6,355	7,157	8,047	8,248	8,043
West Fairview	2,972	3,153	3,404	4,131	3,942	4,239
Downtown Anchorage Core	1,131	818	1,458	940	1,657	1,902
Bootleggers Cove/Westchester	3,766	3,736	3,907	3,718	3,749	3,722
Turnagain	3,363	3,278	3,255	3,059	3,227	3,146
Fireweed	4,682	4,878	5,083	5,224	5,096	5,008
Rogers Park/Tudor Area	5,581	5,264	5,275	5,104	5,165	5,099
University/Airport Heights	7,691	7,649	8,334	8,316	8,015	8,257
Muldoon/Baxter	16,616	20,783	23,251	24,103	23,994	23,504
Campbell Park Area	5,260	6,828	8,243	10,444	9,751	9,558
Midtown	3,115	3,895	4,181	4,194	3,873	3,702
Spenard	3,201	3,238	3,423	3,748	3,315	3,215
Woodland Park/Spenard	3,703	3,498	3,761	3,787	3,686	3,615
East Turnagain/Fish Creek	4,008	6,990	7,923	8,013	7,673	7,491
Airport/Jewel Lake	11,113	15,612	18,626	21,152	21,253	21,048
Northwood	3,339	2,922	2,917	3,299	3,039	2,980
Arctic	4,951	7,722	9,245	10,229	9,875	9,475
Abbott Loop Area	3,501	10,271	13,872	16,930	17,215	17,009
Campbell Lake/Oceanview	12,654	17,234	21,309	25,327	25,340	24,942
Hillside	13,220	22,755	28,682	32,345	34,609	34,633
Girdwood/Turnagain Arm	876	1,360	2,091	2,570	2,503	2,356
Anchorage	174,431	226,338	260,283	291,826	291,247	289,653
Alaska	401,851	550,043	626,932	710,231	733,391	736,812

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

City's population decreased between the last two censuses

The table above shows neighborhood populations during each decennial census since 1980 plus our recent estimates. While Anchorage grew by about 117,000 from 1980 to 2020, seven neighborhoods

Notes: These areas are based on census tracts and groups of census tracts that make up the Municipality of Anchorage. The names are not official and are not based on Census Bureau geography. The areas should not be confused with Anchorage Community Councils.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Anchorage neighborhoods' demographics in the 2020 Census

	Age			Race							Ethnicity
Area	Under 18	18 to 64	65+	White	Black	Native	Asian	Hawaiian/ Pacific Isl	Other	2+ races	Hispanic/ Latino
Chugiak	25%	61%	14%	77%	1%	5%	2%	0%	2%	13%	6%
Eagle River	27%	63%	10%	76%	2%	4%	3%	0%	2%	13%	8%
Fort Richardson	25%	73%	2%	64%	12%	3%	4%	1%	6%	11%	18%
Elmendorf AFB	25%	74%	1%	66%	10%	1%	5%	1%	5%	12%	17%
Government Hill	21%	68%	12%	48%	7%	8%	8%	6%	5%	17%	11%
Mountain View	30%	62%	9%	25%	13%	15%	10%	15%	6%	17%	13%
Northeast Anchorage	27%	63%	10%	37%	10%	11%	15%	6%	4%	16%	11%
Russian Jack	26%	64%	10%	35%	8%	12%	16%	8%	6%	15%	12%
Merrill Field Vicinity	25%	63%	12%	30%	12%	15%	12%	10%	7%	13%	14%
West Fairview	13%	75%	12%	49%	8%	15%	7%	6%	4%	12%	9%
Downtown Anchorage Core	7%	84%	9%	51%	8%	20%	5%	2%	3%	11%	8%
Bootleggers Cove/Westchester	13%	62%	25%	80%	2%	4%	4%	1%	2%	9%	4%
Turnagain	21%	56%	23%	79%	1%	2%	4%	2%	2%	11%	5%
Fireweed	18%	70%	12%	46%	8%	11%	10%	7%	4%	14%	10%
Rogers Park/Tudor Area	18%	61%	21%	65%	4%	7%	7%	2%	3%	12%	6%
University/Airport Heights	20%	66%	14%	55%	6%	11%	8%	4%	2%	14%	8%
Muldoon/Baxter	24%	62%	15%	52%	7%	9%	9%	4%	3%	16%	8%
Campbell Park Area	20%	69%	11%	45%	5%	11%	15%	4%	5%	15%	11%
Midtown	18%	71%	11%	38%	7%	13%	18%	6%	4%	14%	12%
Spenard	21%	66%	13%	39%	6%	14%	15%	6%	7%	14%	13%
Woodland Park/Spenard	17%	70%	12%	54%	4%	10%	10%	5%	3%	15%	7%
East Turnagain/Fish Creek	21%	65%	14%	56%	3%	9%	14%	3%	3%	13%	8%
Airport/Jewel Lake	24%	64%	12%	57%	3%	8%	11%	3%	3%	15%	7%
Northwood	19%	66%	15%	56%	3%	9%	13%	3%	3%	14%	7%
Arctic	21%	67%	12%	53%	4%	8%	10%	4%	4%	16%	10%
Abbott Loop Area	24%	66%	10%	51%	4%	9%	15%	3%	4%	15%	9%
Campbell Lake/Oceanview	24%	62%	13%	59%	3%	7%	11%	2%	4%	14%	10%
Hillside	24%	61%	15%	71%	2%	5%	7%	1%	2%	12%	7%
Girdwood/Turnagain Arm	19%	69%	12%	87%	0%	2%	2%	0%	1%	8%	5%
Anchorage	23%	64%	12%	56%	5%	8%	9%	3%	3%	14%	9%
Alaska	24%	63%	13%	59%	3%	15%	6%	2%	2%	12%	7%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

shrank. Five of those, clustered between the downtown and midtown areas, have nearly the same number of residents today as in 1980.

The Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base neighborhoods lost 17 and 50 percent of their populations in those four decades, continuing long-run declines since peak staffing earlier in the Cold War. (See the next page for more about the military bases.)

Unsurprisingly, the neighborhoods that grew the most were relatively undeveloped before 1980 and contained ample space for greenfield housing developments. The Eagle River, Airport/Jewel Lake, Abbott Loop Area, Campbell Lake/Oceanview, and Hillside neighborhoods each added more than 10,000 people over the last four decades. Hillside topped the list at 21,000, or 162 percent growth.

Since 1950, each succeeding decennial census

counted an additional 30,000 to 50,000 residents in Anchorage. That ended in 2020 with the first decade loss since the first census in 1920. While the decline was small (-579), over half of the neighborhoods recorded net losses.

The decade decline was steepest in the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson neighborhoods, or JBER, which lost 2,615 residents (-19 percent). The only neighborhood to grow as much as the military installations declined between 2010 and 2020 was the Downtown Anchorage Core, whose population jumped 76 percent.

Although Anchorage continued to add people through natural increase over that decade, or births minus deaths, that net gain of a little more than 28,000 was canceled out by the city's net migration loss (-29,000).

Our estimates show that since 2020, Anchorage's

About Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson

Anchorage's two military installations, Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base, have contributed significantly to the city's economy and population since construction began northeast of town in 1940. The U.S. Army operated the newly built Fort Richardson through World War II, then transferred the entire property to the U.S. Air Force after its establishment as a separate military branch in 1947. The facility became Elmendorf Air Force Base, and construction began on a new Army post to the east. Fort Richardson was completed in 1951.

The two facilities developed independently, adding training facilities, hangars, utilities, barracks, and housing as their missions evolved. In 2010, they were realigned under a single leadership structure and renamed Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, or JBER. This article keeps the two geographies separate, however, to stay consistent with the 1980 census tracts.

While the joint base contributes to Anchorage's population changes and its residents consume goods and services, JBER's economic influences differ. Its growth, decline, demographics, housing stock, pay structures, and even consumer prices are determined by military staffing needs and the national defense budget. These factors are key in comparisons with other Anchorage neighborhoods, and data for the Fort Richardson and Elmendorf neighborhoods often yield outlier statistics.

Naming the neighborhoods

The U.S. Census Bureau uses geographies called census tracts to enumerate data within a city or census-designated place. Census tracts typically contain a few thousand people and are not associated with a local government. The bureau divides these areas if their population exceeds 8,000 or merges them if their populations fall below 1,200.

By 1980, the Municipality of Anchorage had spread from its initial planned site, which is downtown today, to the edges of its current boundaries. The 1980 Census included 29 census tracts: smaller tracts for the densely populated downtown/midtown areas and larger tracts for the more dispersed Chugiak/Eagle River and southside/Turnagain Arm. As of the 2020 Census, this had more than doubled, to 61 tracts.

This article aggregates recently released census data into the 1980 census tract boundaries to look at how these diverse areas compare and have changed through the decades. We assigned familiar names and refer to them here as neighborhoods.

In some cases, these neighborhood names match those of the Anchorage Community Councils, the 37 areas that make up Anchorage's Federation of Community Councils. In most cases, though, the geographies do not match.

population has continued to decrease and the decline has steepened. Twenty-one of the 29 neighborhoods lost population from 2020 to 2023, with the largest losses in Government Hill (-8.7 percent), Girdwood/Turnagain Arm (-5.9 percent), Midtown (-4.4 percent), and Arctic (-4.1 percent). Only Downtown Anchorage Core and adjacent West Fairview have grown by more than 2 percent a year since 2020.

As of 2023, the city's net out-migration was far exceeding natural increase.

Anchorage has gotten older but is still under the U.S. median; neighborhoods vary widely

Anchorage's median age was 35.2 in 2020, up from 32.9 in the previous decade. That roughly matched Alaska as a whole in 2020 but was younger than the national median of 38.8 years.

The city was particularly young in 1980 at just 26.3, as it was the logistical hub during the rapid development of the Prudhoe Bay oilfield and Trans-Alaska Pipeline System in the 1970s. More than 70,000 people worked on the $8 billion pipeline, and many were young workers who eventually settled in Anchorage.

The table on the previous page shows the age distribution for each neighborhood in 2020. Bootleggers Cove/Westchester and Turnagain, which date back to Anchorage's earliest decades as an incorporated city,

contained about twice the average share of people 65 and older. On the other end of the spectrum, the Fort Richardson and Elmendorf AFB neighborhoods had almost no senior citizens. The military neighborhoods also had a higher-than-average share of children, although not as high as Eagle River, Mountain View, Northeast Anchorage, and Russian Jack.

Downtown Anchorage Core, with its dense commercial and retail development, is in a category of its own. This neighborhood had 84 percent working-age adults and few children or seniors.

10 areas no longer majority White, and multiracial share grew

Anchorage is a racially diverse city even by national standards, and some of its neighborhoods are among the most diverse in the country. That wasn't always the case, though.

In 1980, Anchorage was 85 percent White, and no other race represented more than 5 percent. As of 2020, the White share had dropped to 56 percent and the shares for all other races besides Black and the "other" category had risen well above the national average.

The percentage of multiracial residents more than doubled in the 20 years after the category was added, to 14 percent.

Anchorage is home to more Alaska Natives than any other U.S. city: more than 20,000 in 2020. In percent terms, though, Natives represent just 8 percent of the population compared to 15 percent statewide.

Individual neighborhoods' racial representation varies greatly. The White percentage ranges from 87 percent in Girdwood/Turnagain Arm to just 25 percent in Mountain View. The latter received national attention after the 2010 Census when a University of Alaska Anchorage sociology professor named it the

Income, poverty levels in Anchorage neighborhoods, 2018 to 2022

Area	Households	More than $50k	More than $75k	More than $100k	Poverty
Chugiak	3,526	86%	70%	59%	11%
Eagle River	9,410	84%	76%	67%	5%
Fort Richardson	1,685	65%	47%	36%	12%
Elmendorf AFB	1,338	78%	48%	22%	5%
Government Hill	935	51%	37%	26%	20%
Mountain View	2,604	47%	27%	14%	36%
Northeast Anchorage	6,748	67%	44%	31%	16%
Russian Jack	4,024	66%	47%	27%	13%
Merrill Field Vicinity	2,990	64%	42%	33%	14%
West Fairview	1,701	52%	35%	30%	9%
Downtown Anchorage Core	495	53%	40%	23%	25%
Bootleggers Cove/Westchester	1,852	82%	75%	63%	5%
Turnagain	1,299	86%	77%	71%	2%
Fireweed	2,410	76%	50%	28%	6%
Rogers Park/Tudor Area	1,841	82%	72%	54%	6%
University/Airport Heights	3,095	79%	58%	39%	7%
Muldoon/Baxter	9,011	80%	64%	44%	7%
Campbell Park Area	3,645	76%	56%	39%	10%
Midtown	1,602	55%	43%	32%	13%
Spenard	1,609	59%	44%	28%	25%
Woodland Park/Spenard	1,598	64%	56%	34%	14%
East Turnagain/Fish Creek	3,117	82%	66%	45%	6%
Airport/Jewel Lake	7,754	81%	72%	60%	6%
Northwood	1,210	79%	59%	44%	9%
Arctic	4,231	71%	57%	43%	6%
Abbott Loop Area	5,542	82%	68%	53%	6%
Campbell Lake/Oceanview	8,669	85%	76%	57%	5%
Hillside	12,143	84%	75%	64%	4%
Girdwood/Turnagain Arm	1,050	75%	56%	53%	10%
Anchorage	107,134	77%	62%	48%	9%
Alaska	264,376	73%	57%	43%	10%

Notes: Incomes are in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars. Poverty thresholds are set by the U.S. Census Bureau and vary by family size and composition.
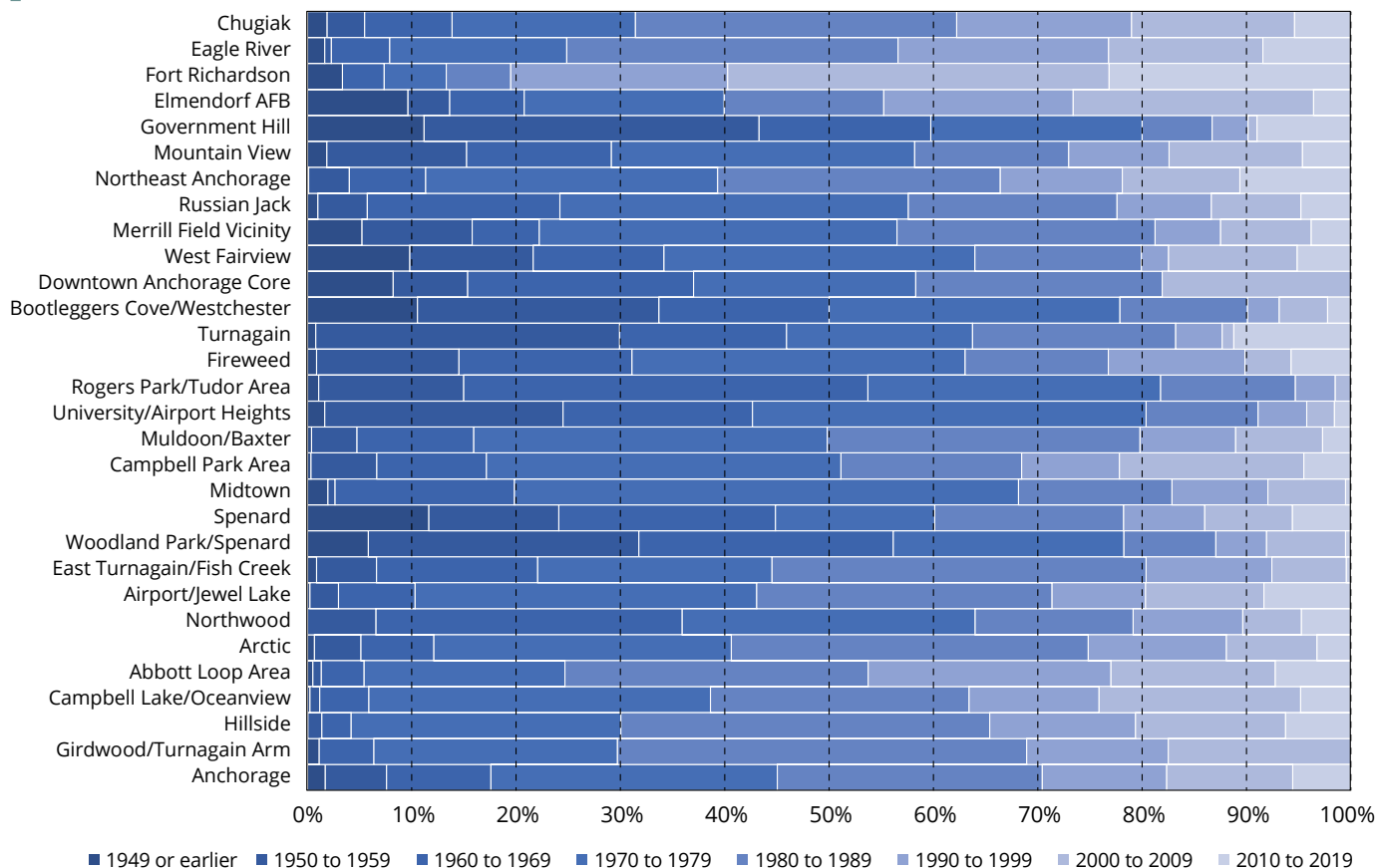
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

most diverse census tract in the U.S. He noted that Mountain View had a uniquely high number of racial and ethnic groups, with no one group substantially outnumbering another.

This holds today, though to a lesser degree. All major races and ethnicities in Mountain View are within 15 percentage points of the White percentage. In addition to Mountain View, nine other neighborhoods are not predominantly White.

The neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of Hispanics/Latinos are Fort Richardson and Elmendorf AFB. Because the base's population is transient and largely from outside Alaska, their Hispanic and Latino shares resemble the national average.

The age of Anchorage's housing stock, by neighborhood

Legend: ■ 1949 or earlier ■ 1950 to 1959 ■ 1960 to 1969 ■ 1970 to 1979 ■ 1980 to 1989 ■ 1990 to 1999 ■ 2000 to 2009 ■ 2010 to 2019

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Income levels vary considerably by neighborhood in Anchorage

Anchorage's median household income is high at just under $100,000, meaning that half of the city's 107,134 households earn less than that in a year and half earn more.

Anchorage's household income is about $9,000 above the statewide median and $21,000 higher than the U.S. It's also about $25,000 higher than a decade ago, not accounting for inflation.

The table on the previous page shows that 10 of the 29 neighborhoods have at least 50 percent of households earning $100,000 or more a year. The highest are Turnagain (71 percent), Eagle River (67 percent), Hillside (64 percent), and Bootleggers Cove/Westchester (63 percent).

The lowest-earning neighborhoods by that standard — less than half of households earning at least $100,000 a year — are Mountain View (14

percent), Elmendorf Air Force Base (22 percent), and Downtown Anchorage Core (23 percent).

While Anchorage is a high-earning city, it is also high-cost. Although federal poverty standards don't take area costs into account, the percentages living below the poverty line, as shown in the same table, add some context to the income levels in Anchorage's neighborhoods. U.S. poverty thresholds are based on a range of factors besides income, including the size of the household, the age of the householder, and the number of children.

Housing stock has aged with new construction slowing

In general, the oldest homes are concentrated near downtown with newer housing spreading out to the extremities. (See the chart above.)

Fort Richardson has the newest homes, with 81 percent built between 1990 and 2019, while 95

Median monthly housing costs by Anchorage area, 2011 and 2022
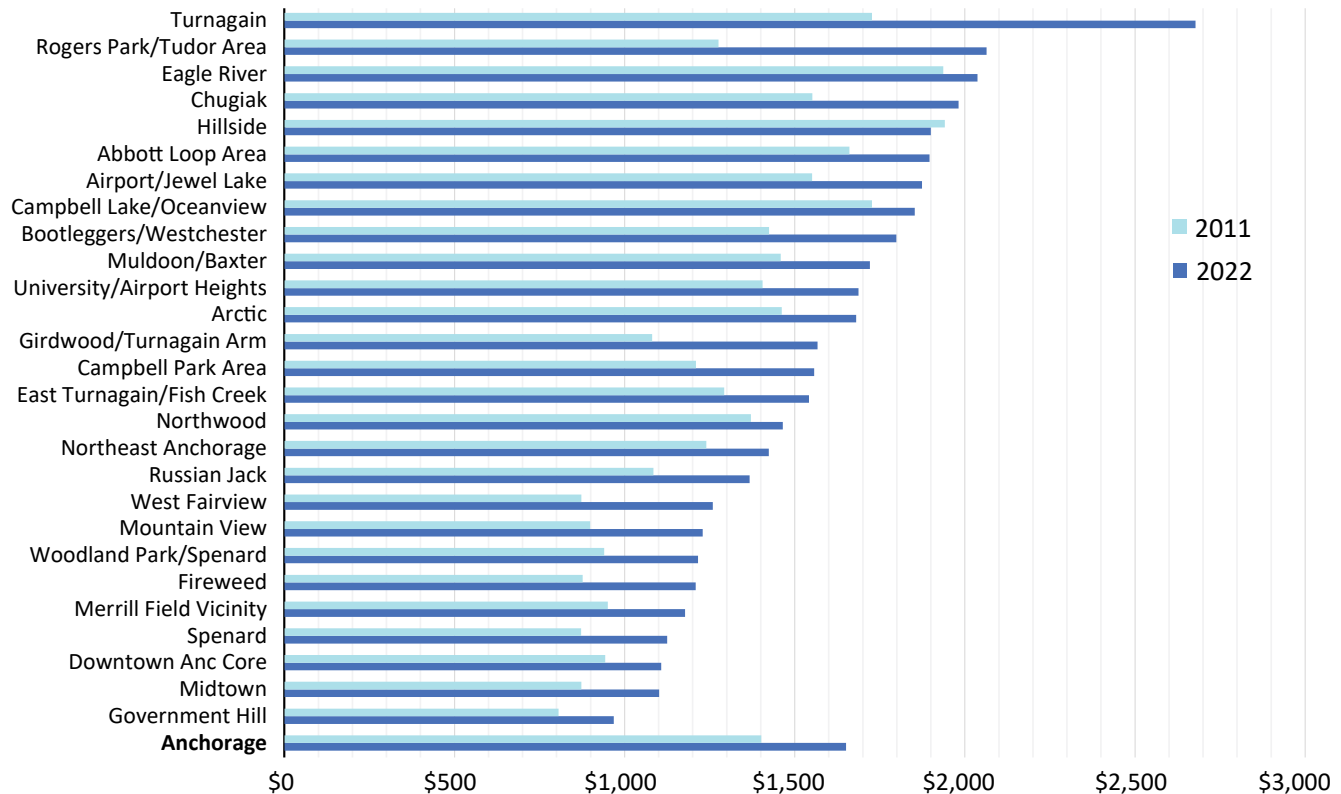
Notes: Costs are inflation-adjusted to 2011 and 2022 dollars. Housing costs for the military neighborhoods were not reported in all periods.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Surveys for 2007-2011 and 2018-2022

percent of the Rogers Park/Tudor Area stock was built before 1990.

Fifty-three percent of Anchorage homes were built in the 1970s and 1980s, at an average of 31,000 per decade. In the three decades that followed, the city added just 14,000, 14,000, and 7,000 housing units, making the city's housing drastically older than it was in 1980.

Aside from the military neighborhoods, no area is keeping pace with past construction. For 24 of the 29 neighborhoods, 2010-2019 was their lowest decade in the last five for new housing. In the current decade, through 2022, Anchorage added just 120 new homes.

Analysts and policymakers have been discussing Anchorage's ongoing housing shortage for more than a decade. In 2010, a municipality housing market analysis estimated that through 2030, 21,500 new units would be needed to keep up with demand. As of 2022, only 6,730 units had been built, which if annualized reflects about half the yearly target rate.

Median monthly housing costs

High incomes and high housing costs typically go hand in hand, as the exhibit above shows. Turnagain's median total housing costs — nearly everything a renter or homeowner would spend in a month for housing — are highest at $2,677. That was about $500 more than the next-costliest neighborhood and $1,700 more than the lowest (Government Hill).

The city's monthly median of $1,650 is well above the statewide ($1,443) and U.S. ($1,276) measures.

Anchorage's housing costs have risen 18 percent from the last decade ($1,401), although that varied by area. The biggest cost increases were in Rogers Park/Tudor Area (62 percent), Turnagain (55 percent), and Girdwood/Turnagain Arm (45 percent). Neighborhoods with the smallest housing cost increases were Northwood (7 percent), Eagle River (5 percent), and Hillside (-2 percent).

Sam Tappen is an economist in Anchorage. Reach him at (907) 269--4861 or sam.tappen@alaska.gov.