Division of Technology Services

State of Utah
Utah Geospatial Resource Center

Information & Communications Technology

Using Data to Solve Housing Affordability - Utah's Housing Metric Dashboard

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Utah is pioneering a data-driven response to a generational housing affordability crisis through the Utah Housing Metrics Dashboard. With Utah Governor Spencer Cox's mandate of 150,000 new housing units, including 35,000 starter homes, by 2028, the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB), the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (GPI), and the Utah Geospatial Resource Center (UGRC) collaborated to create a transparent, central hub for housing data. Utilizing ArcGIS Experience Builder, the dashboard tracks quarterly progress on housing supply, market trends, and cost-burdened residents across all 29 Utah counties. By standardizing data from various jurisdictions and identifying infrastructure bottlenecks like water and sewer capacity, the tool has shifted the state's housing debate from a disagreement over facts to a focus on actionable policy solutions.

IDEA

Problem or opportunity addressed

Like much of the United States, Utah has a housing affordability crisis. Policy makers at the state and local levels are working to ensure access to safe, affordable, and stable housing. The housing policy space includes a broad range of stakeholders from the private, public, non-profit, and general public sectors. Utah's *Housing Metric Dashboard* helps move from debate to solutions. The dashboard, built with GIS technology, offers multiple views that reveal different dimensions of the housing challenge:

- **Market Overview** shows housing production trends and how supply matches demand across counties and municipalities.
- **Cost Burdened Renters** maps households spending more than 30 percent of income on rent—revealing where rental affordability creates the greatest pressure.
- **Cost Burdened Owners** tracks homeowners struggling with mortgage costs, highlighting areas where homeownership has become unsustainable.
- **New Utah First Homes** monitors progress toward the state's goal of adding starter homes, showing quarterly production numbers by location.
- **Housing Supply** displays entitled units, permits issued, and construction in progress—revealing where development is active and where it's stalled.
- **Share Priced Out** compares area median income to housing costs, showing which communities have lost affordability and by how much.

Why it matters

Utah faces multiple constraints that make every housing decision critical.

- **Generational Wealth Gap -** In Utah, the average homeowner holds $400,000 in wealth compared to just $11,000 for the average renter, creating a significant barrier for those born after 1990 whose wages have not kept pace with housing costs. (Federal Reserve Data)
- **Geographic Constraints -** Utah's population is largely concentrated in a 150-mile corridor bounded by mountains and surrounded by federal land. More than 64% of the land in Utah is owned by the federal government.

- **Consequences of Inaction -** Utah has a unique boomerang effect—about 25 percent of people moving to Utah were born there, a higher share than any other state. Rising costs threaten to price out these returning residents.

What makes it different

The Utah Housing Dashboard replaces anecdotal data with quarterly, standardized data from every county. Unlike many dashboards that hide missing information, it clearly identifies data gaps to drive local action to improve reporting. It also tracks not only new construction permits but also naturally occurring affordable housing (older properties with lower rents) and the specific impact of development fees on project margins.

What makes it universal

In 2024, housing affordability topped state policy agendas across the United States. Housing affordability has reached critical lows, with 65% of households priced out of new median-priced homes as of May 2026, driven by high interest rates and median home prices, according to NAHB data.

IMPLEMENTATION

Roadmap

The dashboard was driven by Utah Governor Spencer Cox, who made housing affordability a signature issue of his administration. It fits into a 30-year long-range planning strategy that overlays housing goals with infrastructure (water, sewer, power) and transportation investments. It is updated on a quarterly cycle to track progress toward Governor Cox's 150,000-unit goal. Success is measured by closing the affordability gap and the successful permitting of 35,000 starter homes by 2028.

Who was involved

Collaboration was key to the creation of the dashboard. The project is steered by a cross-disciplinary team including the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB), the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (GPI), and the Utah Geospatial Resource Center (UGRC).

- The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget's (GOPB) mission is to drive the best investment and use of Utah's resources by providing fiscal, economic, policy, and planning expertise.
- The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, part of the David Eccles School of Business at the University of Utah, prepares economic, demographic, and public policy research that helps Utah prosper. The Gardner Institute is Utah's preeminent public policy institute and a vital gathering place for policy leadership and thoughtful discourse.
- The Utah Geospatial Resource Center (UGRC) is the state's map technology coordination office. UGRC facilitates and encourages the effective use of geospatial

information, infrastructure and technology through data aggregation, consultation, and custom development.

Utah's housing response succeeds because multiple players cooperate around shared data. UGRC serves as the central hub, standardizing information from 29 counties so state planners, local officials, and developers work from the same foundation.

How we did it

The team leveraged GIS experts at UGRC and utilized the combined expertise of state planners at GOPB, and research fellows at GPI to create the dashboard.

The solution was implemented using ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS Online for data management, with the public-facing interface built in ArcGIS Experience Builder.

IMPACT

What the project made better

Before the project, debates often stalled on the accuracy of housing numbers. Now there is a policy focus, and stakeholders discuss solutions and not the facts. The data revealed that the primary bottleneck for new housing is often regional infrastructure capacity rather than just local zoning. The state has begun identifying underutilized public land, such as a 2.7-acre UDOT parcel in Salt Lake City, and using it specifically for affordable housing.

How we know

Quantitative Metrics - As of the latest reporting, the state has permitted 36,783 units, including 5,801 starter homes.

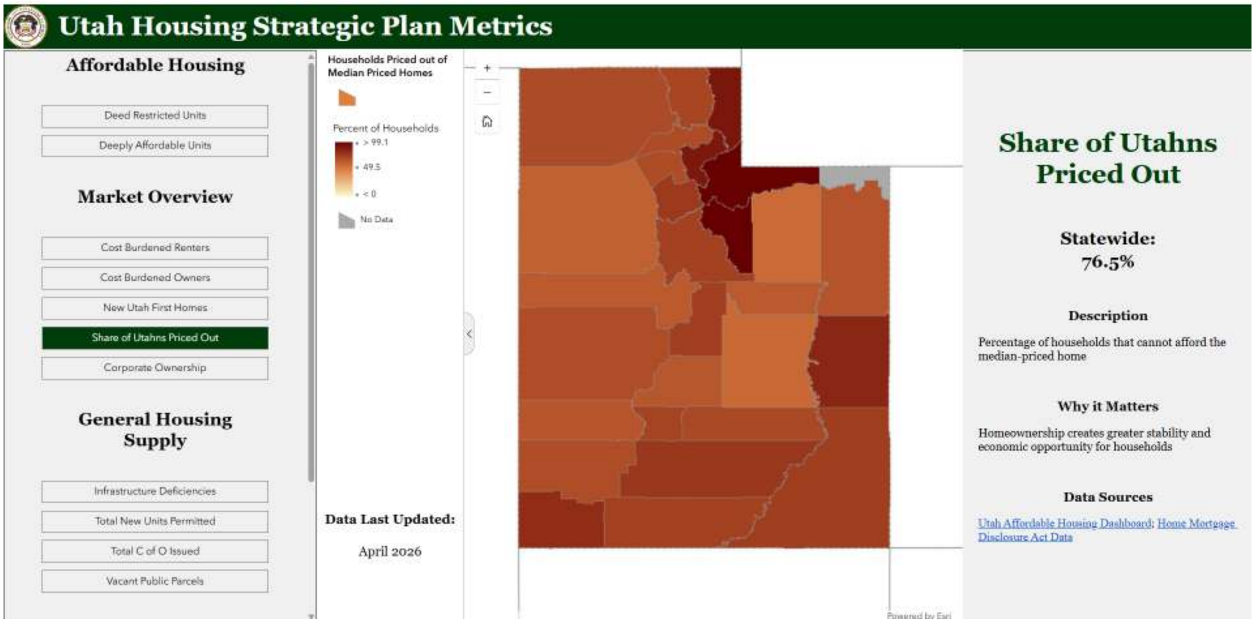
Usage and ROI: The dashboard tracks the "Share Priced Out" across every municipality, allowing for the precise targeting of state assistance programs to the most cost-burdened areas.

Efficiency: Cities have begun using the dashboard to identify delays and streamline their own local permitting processes.

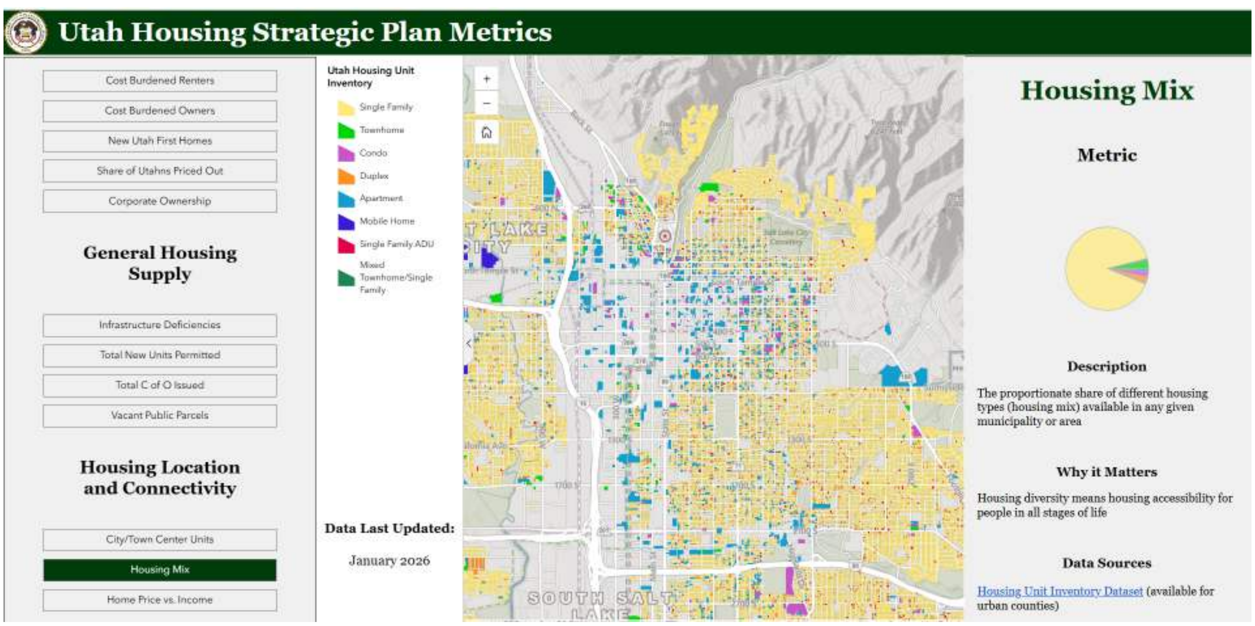
What now

UGRC will continue to manage the data pipeline, with GPI providing ongoing economic research and GOPB integrating the data into the state's 30-year infrastructure plan. The project is worthy of ongoing investment because it provides the only statewide, real-time mechanism to ensure that the next generation of Utahns can afford to stay in the state and build home equity.

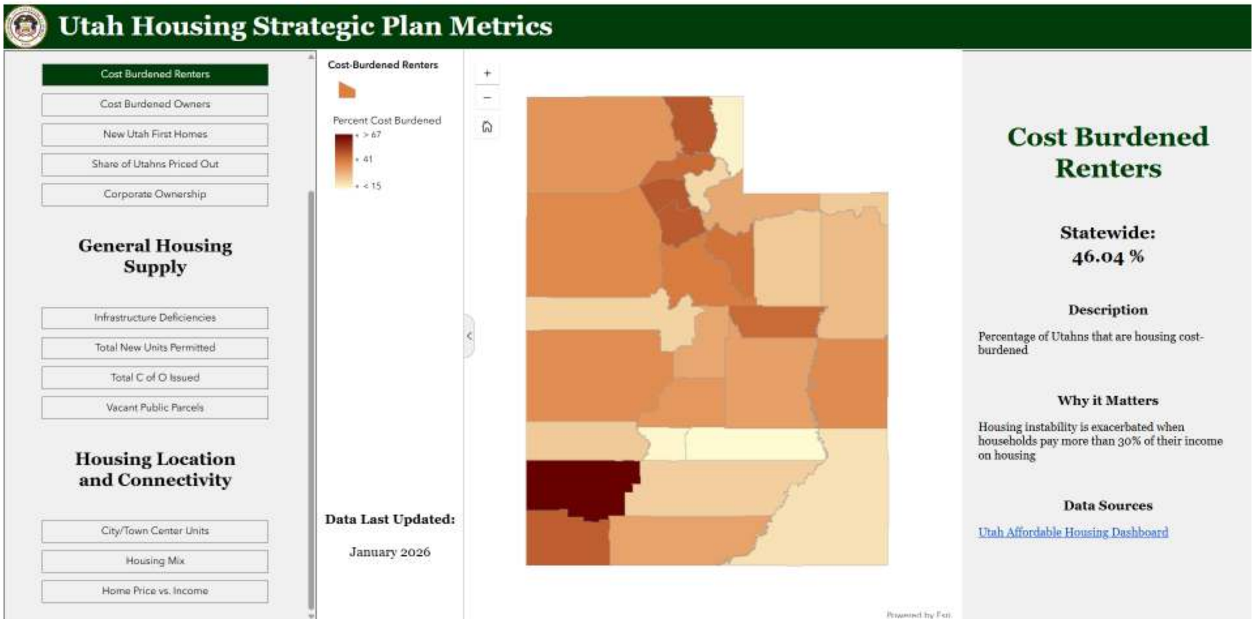
UGRC is working with GOPB, the Utah League of Cities and Towns and the Utah Association of Counties to identify all the publicly owned land in the state. Once the parcels have been identified, they can be assessed for suitability for future housing to ease the affordability crisis.



The "Share Priced Out" view compares area median income to housing costs across every Utah county—revealing in stark red tones where homeownership has moved beyond reach for most households. (https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/blog/utah-data-driven-housing-affordability)



The dashboard's Housing Mix view makes housing diversity visible across every municipality—replacing anecdotal data with precise information about what exists and what's missing. (https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/blog/utah-data-driven-housing-affordability)



Cost-burdened renters—households spending more than 30 percent of income on rent—cluster in darker counties on this dashboard view, helping policymakers target assistance programs where financial pressure is greatest. (https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/blog/utah-data-driven-housing-affordability)