



Building Safety In Wooster

2019 Annual Report

City of Wooster Building Standards Division

“I know building codes are the community’s best way of protecting our health, safety and general welfare as they relate to construction of homes, offices, schools, stores, manufacturing facilities, and entertainment venues like this County Fair event center. This understanding motivates our staff to work day in and day out to keep the public safe.”

Tim Monea, Chief Building Official

Letter from the Chief Building Official

Buildings serve primary societal needs – shelter from weather, security, living space, privacy, and a place to comfortably live and work. In fact, the federal government estimates Americans spend on average nearly 90 percent of their time indoors.

You can see why communities need building codes to protect from disasters like fires, earthquakes, windstorms and other extreme events. Codes also ensure structural integrity, electrical system safety, and plumbing system safety. In addition building codes assure accessibility, practical energy efficiency, and adequate means of egress.

Consider just one area for a moment, HVAC system safety. What we breathe indoors can be on average two to five times more toxic than what is typically outside because of poor ventilation, off-gassing of chemicals, mold, etc. Because of this, buildings where we spend our time impact such things as illness and absenteeism, productivity, and test scores among students. Building safety permeates our daily lives.

Ensuring building safety defines our purpose and we are committed to it. We are staffed by 6 extremely qualified personnel dedicated to building safety, whether it's Residential, Commercial, or Industrial buildings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading our 2019 annual report. I sincerely hope that you will find it informative and that it allows you to gain an understanding of our purpose and responsibilities to our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tim Monea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tim Monea, CBO
Building Standards Manager

\$645,024,882

Value of construction in Wooster the last 10 years

14,000

Permits Issued in the last 10 years

32,000

Inspections the last 10 years

1,470

Permits issued in 2019

3,800

Inspections made in 2019

\$90,877,404

Value of construction in Wooster in 2019

2019 Plan Review, Permitting, and Inspection

Activity Summary

The Division maintains certification as a State Certified Building Department with Certified personnel. As such, the Division deals directly with private architects, developers, contractors, property owners and others in carrying out the mission to protect the public. In 2019, this work included performing 220 plan reviews, issuing over 1,470 permits and conducting 3,300 construction inspections and another 1,200 existing property inspections. The Division used cloud based software for real time online access for all of the applications, approvals, inspections, payments, and documents.

- **1,470 permits** were issued, up 3% from last year and continuing a trend of the last three years being the highest permit numbers in the last 20 years. This trend began moving upward since 2011, with 2012 topping 1,000 permits for the first time.
- **3,300 construction inspections** were performed, up nearly 4% from last year. The inspections mirror the number of permits issued.
- The total value of permitted **construction was nearly \$91 million**. This is \$3 million more than last year and continues this trend over the last 6 years with the last 4 years being some of the highest on record.
- In 2019, we collected **\$362,608 in fees**, up 14% from 2018 which continues an upward trend over the last 4 years.
- **11 new single-family houses** were approved, and this is down 35% from last year. This is analyzed further in the report.

City of Wooster Building Standards Division Significant 2019 Accomplishments

- **Software Improvements.** We went “live” with a new cloud based real time application, permitting and tracking program on January 1, **2017** and we began functioning as a “paperless” office. In **2018**, we implemented several improvements to the process. Most notably, we enhanced the way inspections are requested and scheduled online. This has had a big impact on customer service as it was made easier and more precise. Applications, inspection requests, permits, receipts, reports, and other documents continue to be accessed online. During **2019** we improved the Property Maintenance Violation tracking using the software by completely redeveloping and simplifying the process.
- **Property Maintenance enforcement.** Also, in 2019, the Building Standards and Planning and Zoning Divisions changed the way we enforced the property maintenance code and the planning and zoning code. Due to economies gained by moving to an online system and moving some duties to other divisions, we were able to train all 4 inspectors on code enforcement. We revamped the software applications to allow for consistency across users and we utilized the City’s part-time assistant law director for code enforcement prosecution. We expect this to pay big dividends as we go forward into 2020.
- **Other Accomplishments in 2019:** Hired and trained a new Property Maintenance Inspector. Transitioned the City’s backflow tracking and monitoring program from the Building Standards Division to the Utilities Division, expanded the City’s downtown dumpster program, represented the City as a member of the Housing Coalition and worked on the homelessness ad hoc subcommittee, represented the mayor as a board member of Community Action Wayne/Medina, and managed city hall facilities.
- **Major Construction Projects Permitted in 2019:** Western Reserve Mutual Casualty Co. constructed a new 4 story 85,000 SF office building, The College of Wooster renovation of Andrews Hall and continued renovation of the PEC building, A new 4 story Holiday Inn Express, The Wayne County Fair Event Center, Akron Childrens Hospital new 15,000 SF medical office building, Buckeye Corrugated 17,000 SF expansion, Marc’s renovation of the former Kmart building, Hobby Lobby alteration of the former Elder Beerman building, and the Farm Credit renovation.

2019 Property Maintenance Code Enforcement

Activity Summary

Code enforcement is some of the most challenging work we do. It is undeniably difficult with imperfect results. But it is important work and can be satisfying because it not only protects public health and safety but also safeguards relationships between neighbors, beautifies our neighborhoods, and preserves property values.

- We performed nearly **1,200 property maintenance and planning and zoning code inspections during 2019.**
- We identified **nearly 700 Code violations.** 75% were property maintenance code violations and 25% were planning and zoning code violations.
- 60% of the violations were for high grass and weeds, excess rubbish and garbage, and unlicensed or inoperable vehicles.
- Two houses were **demolished** either by the City or by order. This was the lowest number in recent years and we expect the number to increase during 2020 as we have averaged 7 houses/year for the last 10 years.

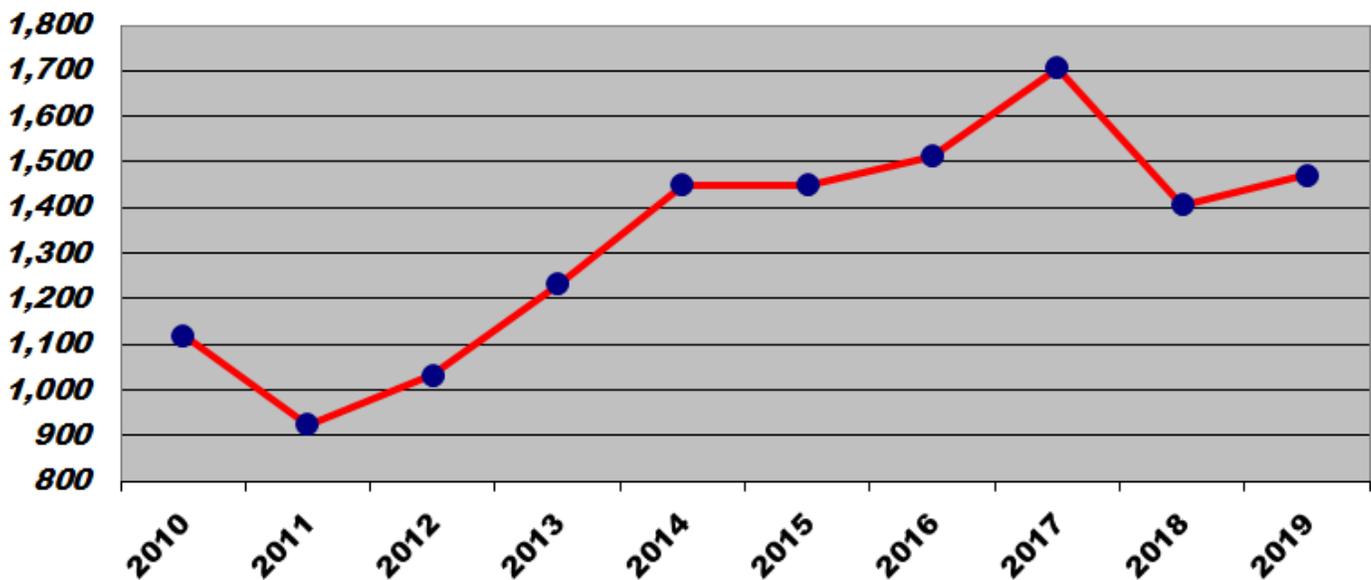
2019 PERMIT ACTIVITY

This activity has been trending up for nearly 10 years

In 2019, 1,470 permits were issued, up 3% from last year. This trend has been moving upward since 2011, with 2012 topping 1,000 permits for the first time.

Inspections were also up 4% with 3,300 inspections conducted. This parallels the number of permits issued.

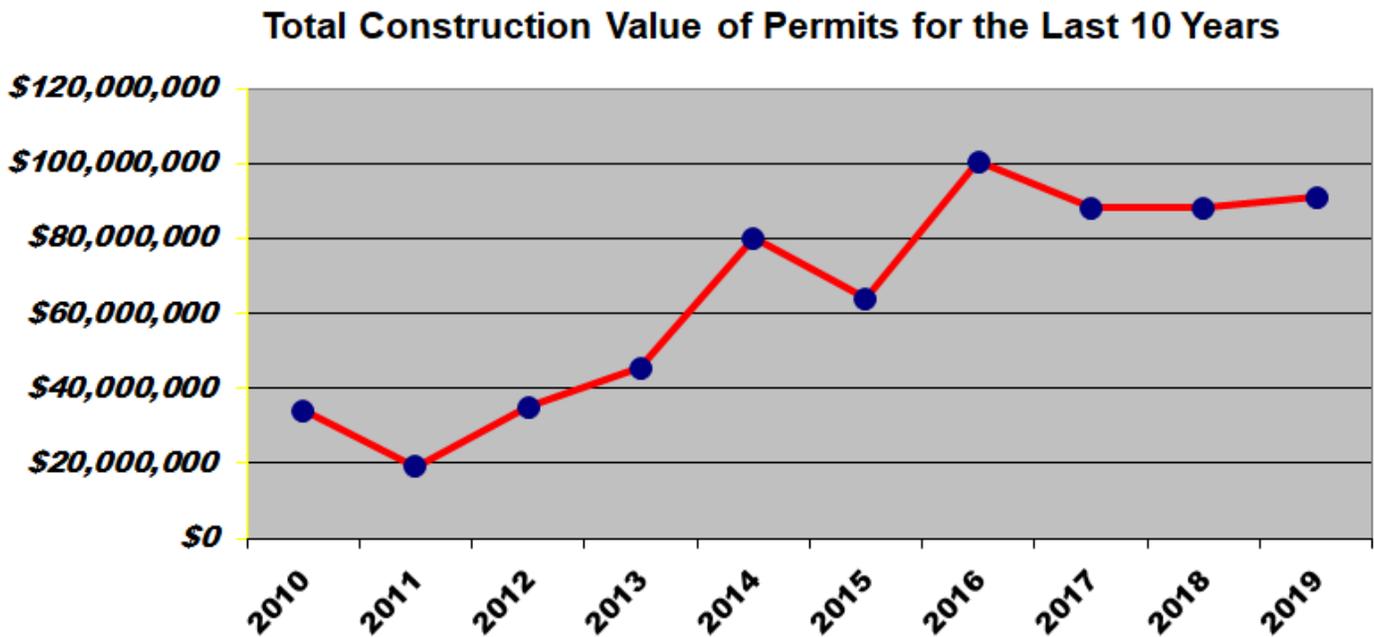
Number of Permits Issued Last 10 Years



During 2019, the Division reviewed and issued 1,470 permits. These permits include residential and commercial building, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and fire sprinkler and alarm permits. Also included in the figures are residential zoning permits (the division issues residential zoning permits). The last six years were record highs for permit issuance with 2017 the highest number on record.

2019 VALUE OF CONSTRUCTION SECOND HIGHEST YEAR ON RECORD

In 2019, the total value of construction was nearly \$91 million. This was up slightly over last year and not too far off of 2016's all-time high of \$100 million. \$91 million represents the second highest year ever.

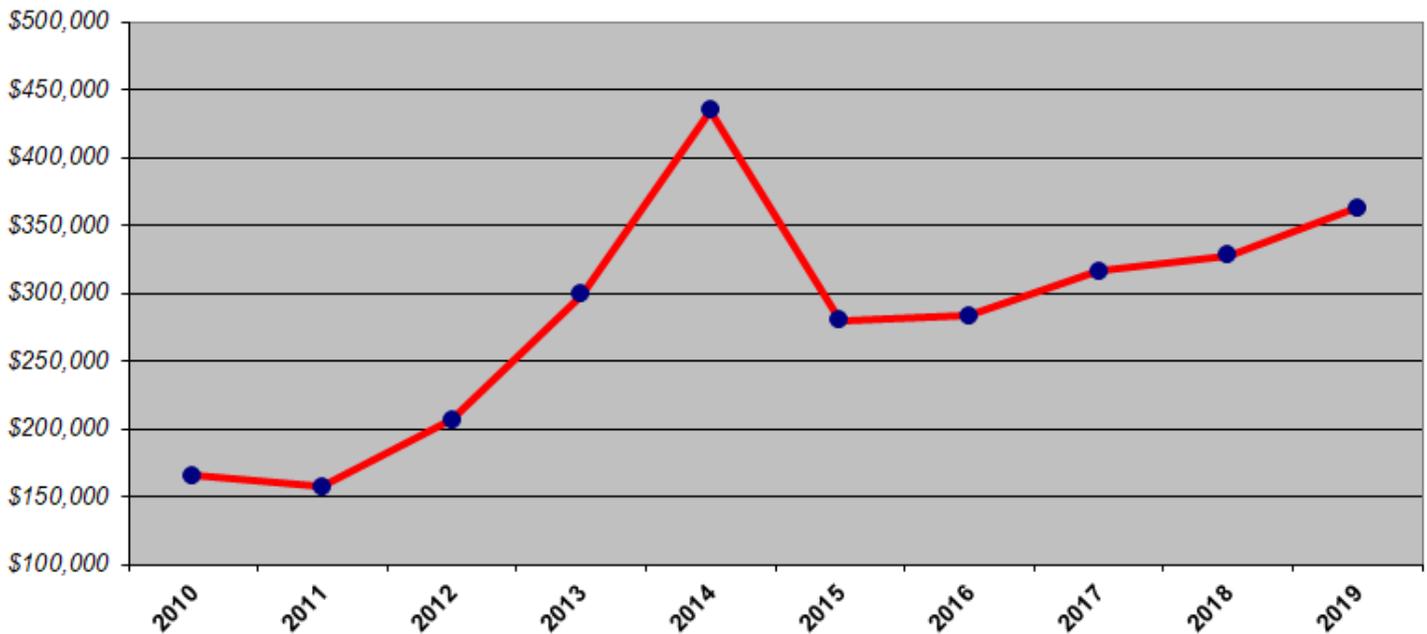


Over the years, construction in the City of Wooster has certainly had its ups and downs. Before 2001, construction values remained fairly constant in the \$30 - \$40 million range. The years between 2001 through 2007 saw construction activity levels peak in the City with 2005 seeing nearly double the norm with \$90 million in value. The housing crisis and few years after that represented the low point. The last four years were very high (4 of the top 5 years ever) and **2016 we issued building permits on construction valued at \$100 million – a new all-time high. 2019 was the second highest year on record.**

2019 FEE COLLECTION CONTINUES 4 YEAR UPWARD TREND

In 2019, we collected \$362,608 in fees, up 14% from 2018. This represents an upward trend for the last 5 years. The increase is despite the fact that permit fees were lowered approximately 15% during 2017 due to the efficiencies of the new cloud permitting process. Fees represent about 50% of budget expenses in line with our *revenue policy*.

Permit Fees Collected in the Last 10 Years



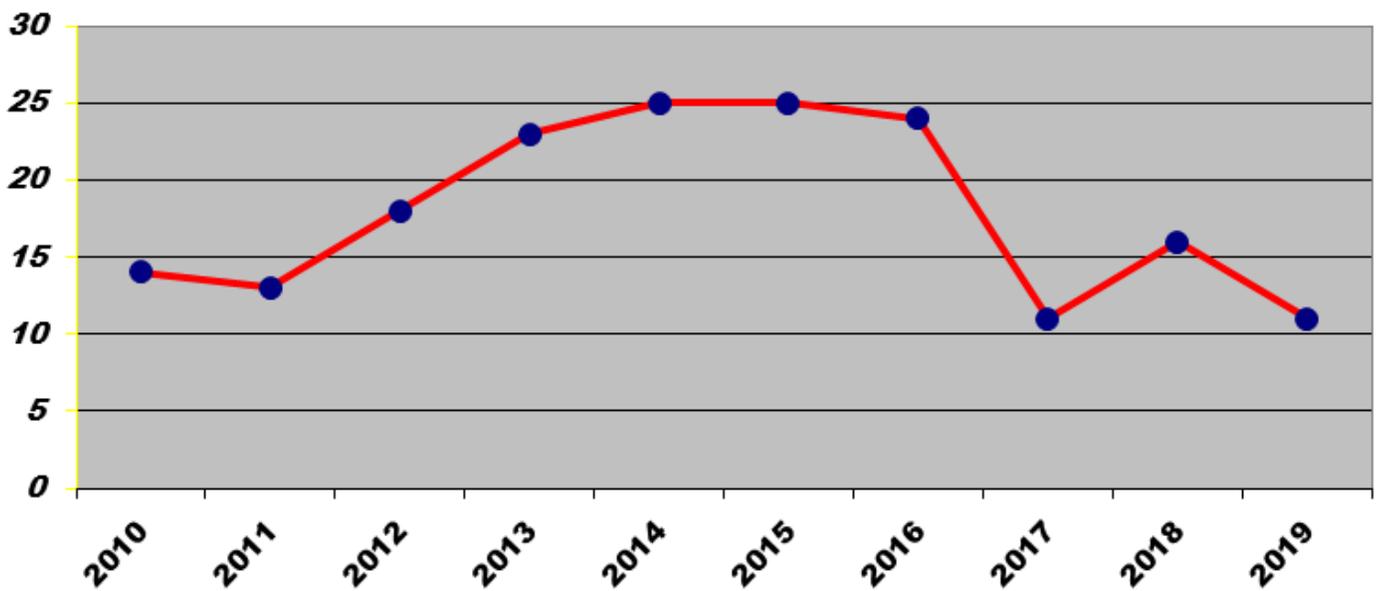
The general mix of fees is 50% user fees and 50% general fund. This mix is part of a revenue policy developed by the Division and Administration and is reviewed periodically. The policy reflects the view that fees from permits should not subsidize code enforcement and other non-development activity and this burden should be placed on the community as a whole.

In 2019 fees accounted for about half of the operating budget. Additional funds approved by Council to perform added demolitions and property maintenance abatement actions bring the percentage down, as fees are not collected for such actions.

2019 SINGLE FAMILY HOUSING STARTS DOWN FROM 2018.

In 2019, 11 new houses were approved, down 35% from last year. The years 2011 – 2016 saw 20 – 25 houses built each year before it dipped to a low 11 houses in 2017 and again last year.

Single Family Housing Units



Housing averaged 64 new dwellings for the each of the ten years from 1999 – 2007. Housing unit growth has paralleled the growth of the North End of the City as new subdivisions were built out at the same time as the North End developed. For the years 2012 – 2016, Wooster averaged 23 new single-family houses. However, 2017 and 2019 saw this dip to 11 houses.

In recent years, very few new subdivisions have been brought to the City for development. Only two residential subdivisions have developed in the last several years: Tartan Ridge and Crooked Creek. These, along with the Reserve at Deer Creek and the Meadows, have most of the available lots. **There is evidence of a pent-up demand or shortage of new single-family housing.**

The top 10 projects in 2019 represent about ½ of the total value of construction for the year.

1.	Benden Dr.	Western Reserve	22,000,000
2.	1307 N. Bever St.	COW Andrews Hall Renovation	5,800,000
3.	128 Riffle Rd.	Holiday Inn Express	4,500,000
4.	199 Vanover St.	WC Fair Event Center	2,502,000
5.	3807 Friendsville Rd.	Akron Children's Hospital	2,000,000
6.	3350 Long Rd.	Buckeye Corrugated Expansion	1,700,000
7.	1267 Beall Ave	COW PEC Phase II Renovation	1,625,000
8.	1799 Portage Rd.	Marc's Discount Drug Renovation	1,450,000
9.	4095 Burbank Rd.	Hobby Lobby Renovation	1,450,000
10.	382 W. Liberty St.	Farm Credit Renovation	1,287,000

Floodplain Administration

Flooding has been a notorious cause of damage and life loss in the United States, with an average annual damage cost of \$6 billion and loss of 140 people. Floods can occur due to heavy rain, snowmelt, or a body of water overflowing, among other causes. The people and places affected by flooding are located in what is referred to as the floodplain.

Since standard homeowners insurance doesn't cover flooding, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) offers flood insurance to homeowners, renters, and business owners if their community participates in the program. Participating communities agree to enforce and adopt ordinances that meet FEMA requirements to reduce the risk of flooding. In the spring of 2007, the City began participating in the National Flood Insurance Program with the adoption of the Flood Damage Reduction Ordinances. As if on cue, the City experienced a 100-year flood event in 2009 and another in 2010.

Projects in the floodplain are required to build to higher standards including dry-flood proofing, raising the elevation of the lowest floor or other flood resistant methods. By limiting activity in these areas, flood damage risks are properly managed.

During 2019, the division conducted floodplain reviews and issued assisted property owners determine the base flood elevation of their properties.

City of Wooster Building Standards Division

2019 Goal Setting and Action Planning

Goal One: Complete update of Chapter 13 of the Codified Ordinances. This Building Code chapter needs a comprehensive update.

Status: Partially completed / ongoing

Goal Two: Review the fee policy and fee structure for permits.

Status: Completed with a recommended fee increase for 2020.

Goal Three: Expand the downtown waste collection program and eliminate non-compliant dumpsters from the district.

Status: Partially completed / ongoing. New facilities and customers were added but fee structure needs improved and another facility added.

2020 Goal Setting and Action Planning

Goal One: Increase fees for both building standards applications and the City's downtown waste collection program. Work out fee structures and formulas consistent with policy.

Goal Two: Expand the City's downtown waste collection program facilities by adding another site for dumpsters.

Goal Three: Work for a smooth transition to a new waste and recycling contractor as we manage the contract.

“The City of Wooster Building Standards Division staff is well trained, experienced, and committed to our mission of protecting the public and we are ready for the challenges of 2020.”

Tim Monea Chief Building Official
Floodplain Administrator

Carla Jessie Administrative Assistant
Building Standards Division
Planning and Zoning Division

Kim Fahrni Electrical Inspector
Commercial Building Inspector

Scott Davis Plumbing and HVAC Inspector
Backflow Valve Program Coordinator

Mark Nussbaum Building Inspector
Zoning Inspector

Mark Wilson Property Maintenance Inspector
Zoning Inspector

Respectfully submitted by:

Tim Monea, CBO
Building Standards Division Manager