

2020

# Annual



Wooster Building Standards Division

# Letter from the Chief Building Official



As 2021 begins, I am dreaming about my favorite restaurant or vacationing with my family. Unfortunately, the world is still sheltering in place, working from home, washing hands and disinfecting everything trying to keep away from the virus. Some have not been so lucky. Infection rates and deaths are not going down fast enough. No one knows when normal life will come back.

The adaptability and resiliency displayed by our staff as they persisted and even thrived in the toughest of circumstances has been admirable. This year confirmed the immense value of the online transition made in previous years as we had no disruption in service. The investment in virtual capabilities also produced lasting reductions in operation costs and timelines and positioned us for long term success.

It's important because building codes protect us from disasters like fires, earthquakes, and yes, even pandemics. Consider HVAC safety. What we breathe indoors can be on average 3 1/2 times more toxic than what is typically outside because of poor ventilation, off-gassing of chemicals, mold, and even viruses. The time spent in buildings impact illness, absenteeism, productivity, student test scores, and maybe even our lives.

Ensuring building safety defines our purpose and we are committed to it. Staff works daily to ensure building safety, whether it's Residential, Commercial, or Industrial buildings.

Thank you for reading our 2020 annual report and I sincerely hope it helps you better understand our purpose and commitment to the 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

# 1,341

Permits issued

Down 9% from last year

# 2,996

Construction Inspections

Down 6% from last year

# \$66,715,835

Value of construction in Wooster in 2020

Down 26% from last year's nearly \$91 million

# 15

New Single Family Homes built

Up 36% from last year

# 1,265

Property Maintenance and  
Zoning Code Inspections  
No change from last year

## Activity Summary

- **1,341 permits** This is down 9% from last year and breaks a trend of the last three years being the highest permit numbers in the last 20 years. Although down, 2020 numbers are impressive given the circumstances.
- **4,261 Total Inspections** We performed 2,996 construction inspections, down 6% mirroring the permit numbers. Amazingly, many of these were virtual inspections. We conducted 1,265 property maintenance/zoning inspections.
- **The total value of permitted construction was nearly \$67 million.** This was 26% less than last year. This breaks the trend of the last 4 years being some of the highest on record.
- In 2020, we **collected \$260,677 in fees**, down 26% from 2019 again breaking an upward trend over the previous 4 years.
- **15 new single-family houses** were approved, and this is up 36% from last year. This is analyzed further in the report.

## The top 7 projects by value of construction

1. New 52 Unit Apartment Complex	\$7,542,692
2. Rea and Associates New office building	\$4,709,518
3. Daisy Warehouse/Cooler Addition	\$3,803,000
4. Gojo Automation Rooms	\$1,834,800
5. 55,000 SF Warehouse Akron Rd.	\$1,795,138
6. CAB 21,000 SF Warehouse/Office	\$1,629,360
7. Wooster Community Hospital Pharmacy	<u>\$787,775</u>
<b>Total represents 1/3 of all construction</b>	<b>\$22,101,483</b>

## City of Wooster Building Standards Division Significant 2020 Accomplishments

- **Virtual Building Code Inspections.** During 2017, we began using a new cloud based real time program for applications, inspection requests, permits, receipts, and other requests. Notably, inspections are requested and scheduled online. This had a positive impact on customer service during the pandemic. In 2020, we added the VIP – Virtual Inspection Program. Adhering to industry standards, we conducted many virtual inspections ensuring the safety of our customers, citizens, and employees.
- **Increased Property Maintenance Enforcement.** Also, in 2020, the Building Standards and Planning and Zoning Divisions reorganized and 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 the Backflow Program duties to the Utilities Division, we were able to increase code enforcement without adding personnel by having 1 ½ FTE work exclusively on Property Maintenance and Zoning Code enforcement.
- **Other Accomplishments in 2020:** We hired and trained a new Property Maintenance Inspector. We retrained other inspectors who became certified for residential building code enforcement. The Division managed city hall facilities. The Chief Building Official represented the City as a member of the Housing Coalition and worked on the homelessness ad hoc subcommittee and represented the mayor as a board member of Community Action Wayne/Medina. The division also managed the new Residential Waste Contract with Kimble and all of the City's off-street parking lots and expanded the City's downtown dumpster program.

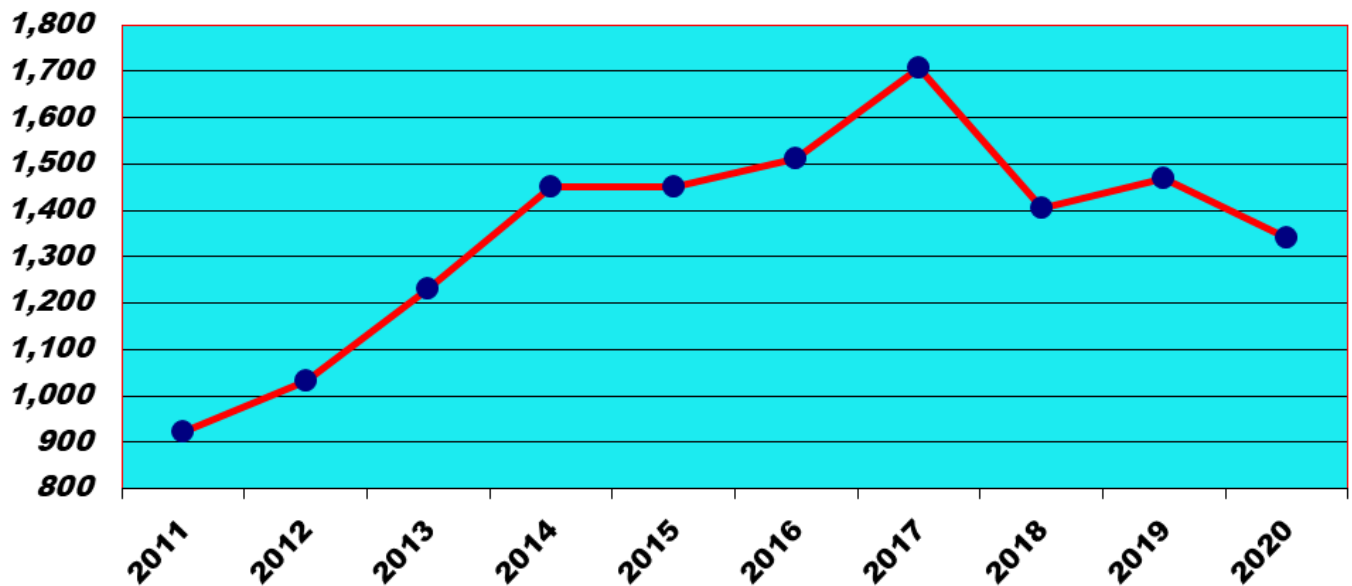
## 2019 Permit Activity Down 9%

This activity had been trending up for nearly 10 years.

In 2020, 1,341 permits were issued, down 9% from last year but still a significant number. This trend had been moving upward since 2011, with 2012 topping 1,000 permits for the first time.

Inspections were down 6% from last year with 2,996 construction inspections conducted. Generally, this parallels the number of permits issued.

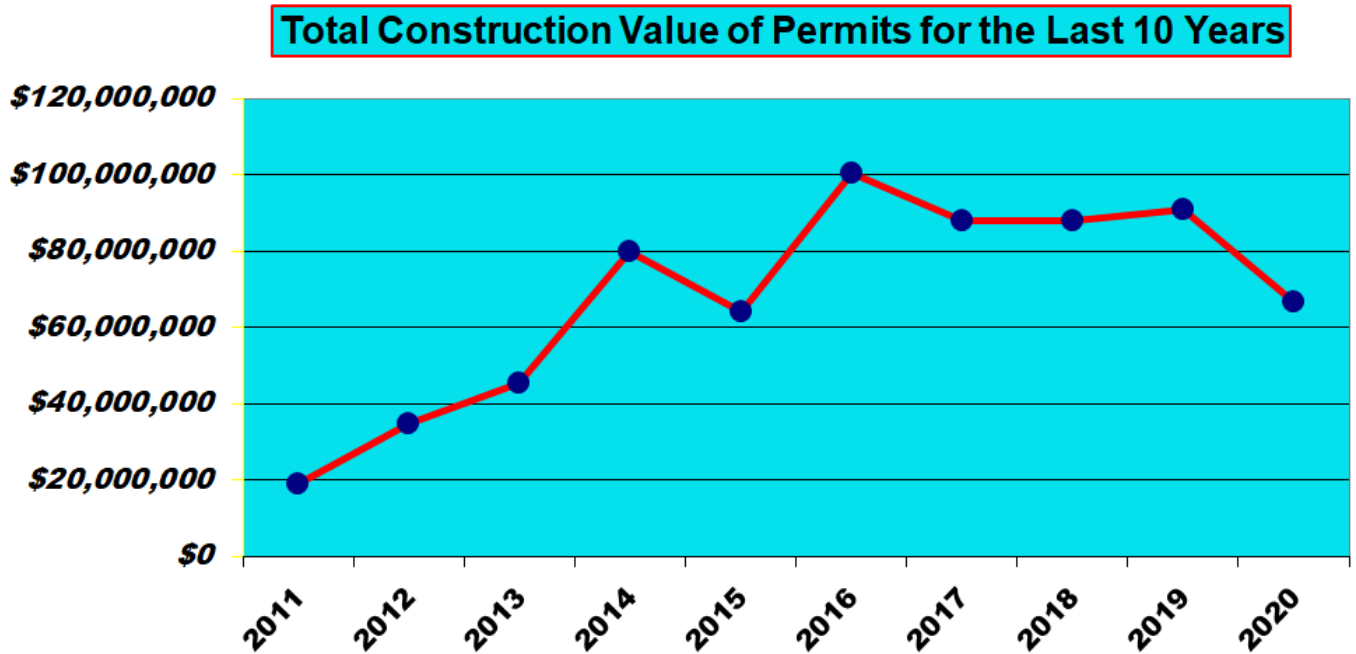
**Number of Permits Issued Last 10 Years**



During 2020, the Division reviewed and issued 1,341 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 six years before 2020 were record highs for permits with 2017 the highest number on record.

## 2020 Value of Construction

In 2020, the total value of construction was nearly \$67 million. Although solid, this was down 26% over last year which represented the second highest year ever.

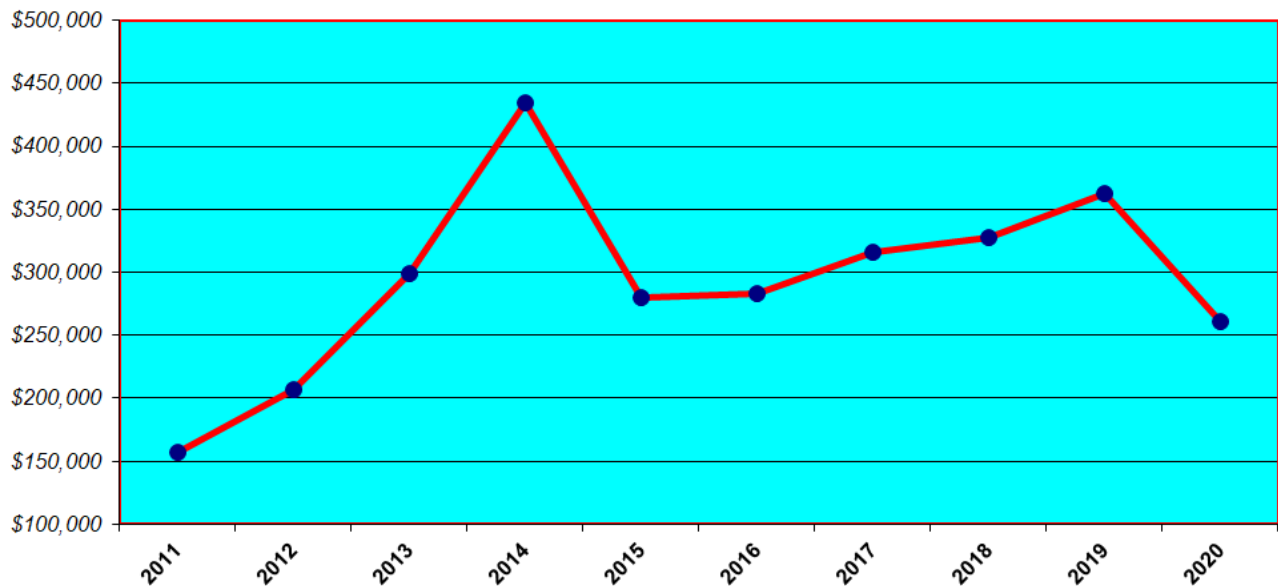


Over the last 20 years, construction in the City of Wooster has certainly had its ups and downs. Before 2001, construction values remained fairly constant in the \$30 - \$40 million range. The years between 2001 through 2007 saw construction activity levels peak in the City with 2005 seeing nearly double the norm with \$90 million in value. The housing crisis and the following years 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 at \$91 million. 2020's \$67 million still represents a significant amount of construction activity.

## 2020 Fee Collection Down 26% Breaking a 5 year Upward Trend.

In 2020, we collected \$260,677 in fees, down 26% from 2019 as this mirrors construction activity. Previous years fee collection was up despite the fact that permit fees were lowered approximately 15% during 2017. Fees were lowered due to the efficiencies of the new cloud permitting process. We target fees to represent about 50% of budget expenses in line with our revenue policy and this will be closely monitored in 2021.

Permit Fees Collected in the Last 10 Years

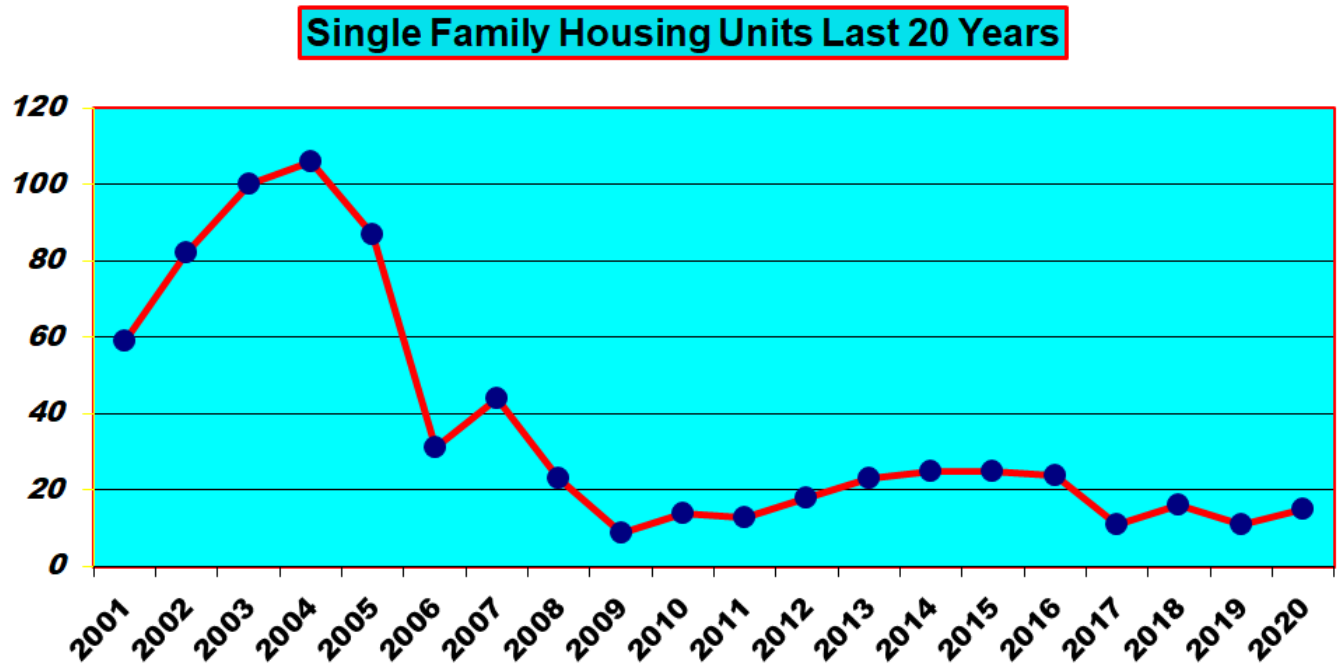


The general mix of fees is 50% user fees and 50% general fund. This mix is part of a revenue policy developed by the Division and Administration and is reviewed periodically. The policy reflects the view that fees from permits should not subsidize code enforcement and other non-development activity and this burden should be placed on the community as a whole. An increase in code enforcement activity and abatement funds such as demolition bring this percentage down, as fees are not collected for such actions. As these activities increase, adjustments to the target may be necessary.



## 2020 Single-Family Housing Starts up from 2019

In 2020, 15 new houses were approved, up 36% 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 not breaking 20 houses since.



Housing averaged 64 new dwellings for each of the ten years from 1999 – 2007. Housing unit growth 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, since then housing starts have not reached 20 units. In these years very few new subdivisions have been brought to the City for development. Only two residential subdivisions developed in the last several years: Tartan Ridge and Crooked Creek.

At the same time that residential and retail construction slowed, other commercial and industrial construction increased rapidly with many new large warehouse and manufacturing facilities developing, expanding or remodeling. Also, medical and skilled nursing facilities developed, expanded or remodeled.

# 2020 Property Maintenance Code Enforcement

## Activity Summary

Code enforcement is some of the most challenging work we do. But it is important and satisfying because it protects public health and safety, safeguards relationships between neighbors, beautifies our neighborhoods, and preserves property values.

- We performed nearly **1,265 property maintenance and planning and zoning code inspections during 2020.**
- We issued 622 **Code violations.** 89% were closed. They were closed because the owner complied, the City abated the violation, or we prosecuted the case in court.
- 50% of the violations were for high grass and weeds, excess rubbish and garbage, and unlicensed or inoperable vehicles.
- Seven houses were **demolished** either by the City or by order. We have averaged 7 houses per year for the last 10 years although 2019 only saw two houses demolished.

## 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 flood prone areas, flood damage risks are properly managed.

During 2020, the division conducted several floodplain reviews and assisted property owners determine the base flood elevation of their properties. Only one floodplain permit was issued for work on an industrial property. Additionally, properties on Bauer Rd. in the floodplain were acquired with the intent of demolishing them and returning it to a natural area to receive floodwaters.

## 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 City Policy

**Status:** Partially completed/ongoing

**Goal Two:** 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.

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

**Status:** Substantially completed

## 2021 Goal Setting and Action Planning

**Goal One:** Complete update of Chapter 1351 of the Codified Ordinances. This Housing Code Enforcement chapter needs an update and a new code adopted.

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

**Goal Three:** Construct a new Downtown Waste Collection site for customers in the SW part of downtown.

***“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 2021.”***

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 Residential Building Inspector
Mark Wilson	Building and Zoning Inspector Property Maintenance Inspector
Jeff Mills	Property Maintenance Inspector Zoning Inspector

Respectfully submitted by:

Tim Monea, CBO  
Building Standards Division Manager