



Steven Vance

[Follow](#)

Student of cities. Topics: transportation, land use, and housing. Tweets: @stevevance, @bikechiguide, @chibuildings, part of @streetsblogCHI

Apr 9 · 2 min read

The number of 2-4 flat buildings in Cook County is at an historic low

The shrinkage slowed, however, from 2015 to 2016

The Chicago Cityscape mission statement has included the phrase “We emphasize development near transit of affordable housing” on our *About* page since 2015. (By the way, we turned four years old this month.)

We frequently post on social media the individual building permits which indicate the **loss of small apartment buildings** (mostly 2- and 3-flats) through deconversions to single-family houses, and teardowns (demolitions frequently replaced by single-family houses).



A nearly identical graystone attached to this one in Humboldt Park was demolished. Photo by Gabriel X. Michael

We've also shared maps and analysis showing where the Chicago zoning map bans those same small apartment buildings. For example, significant portions of the walkable area around CTA 'L' stations (up to 51 percent, depending on the line and station) ban apartment buildings.

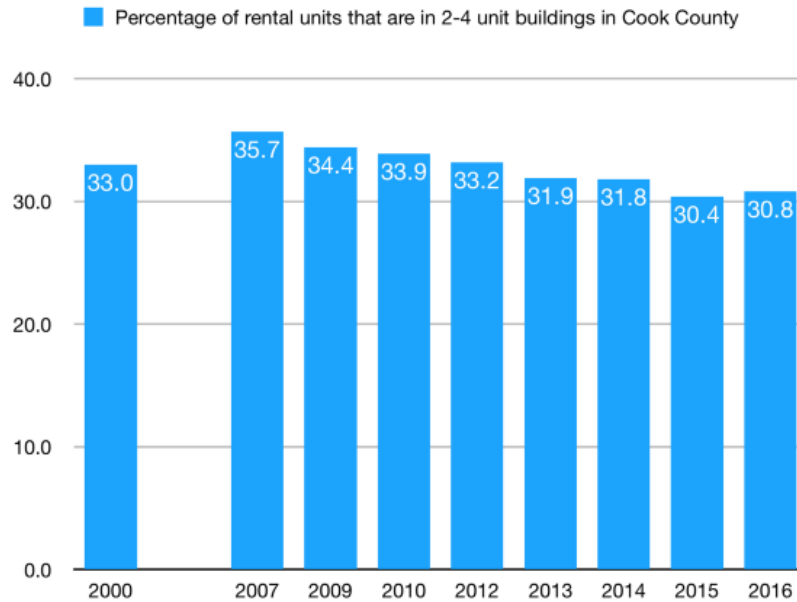
The Institute of Housing Studies released its "State of Rental Housing in Cook County" report for 2018 last week. It analyzes data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey for 2016.

Here's what IHS had to say about the loss of 2-4 flats:

Despite a slight increase in the number of rental units in two-to-four unit buildings [in Cook County] between 2015 and 2016, the overall number and share of total rental units in two-to-four unit buildings remains significantly below historic levels.

Between 2013 and 2016, the number of rental units in two-to-four unit buildings [in Cook County] dropped by 6,832 units or 2.4 percent and is the only building type to see declines in units during this period.

IHS is sure to note the "importance of two-to-four unit buildings to Cook County's stock of affordable rental housing" in a 2012 report. At the time, a majority of apartment units in low- and moderate-income areas of Cook County were in 2-4 unit buildings. Many of these buildings were "destabilized" by being part of a foreclosure filing.



The share of rental units that are in 2-4 unit buildings in Cook County is lower in 2016 than at any time from 2000 to 2016. Data from Institute of Housing Studies, with additional years 2009 and 2010 included. Source is American Community Survey 5-year estimates; year 2000 is from the decennial Census.

We cannot track current or real-time permitted construction and demolition projects by the unit count, in Chicago, because the city doesn't post these numbers on its data portal, where we obtain building permit data.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, on the other hand, posts new construction permits by grouped unit count on a slightly delayed monthly basis, for all municipalities. However, it has too few groupings to track buildings that have 6 units, which is another common apartment building size in Chicago. It also doesn't track demolished units.

