Estimating Halifax's Secondary Rental Market

Halifax's rental market is often discussed through the lens of purpose-built apartments. That is understandable since purpose-built rental buildings are visible, regularly surveyed, and central to measures such as vacancy rates and average rents. They are not, however, the whole rental market. A meaningful share of rental housing sits outside the conventional purpose-built universe, including rented houses, basement apartments, secondary suites, shared accommodations, and small-landlord properties.

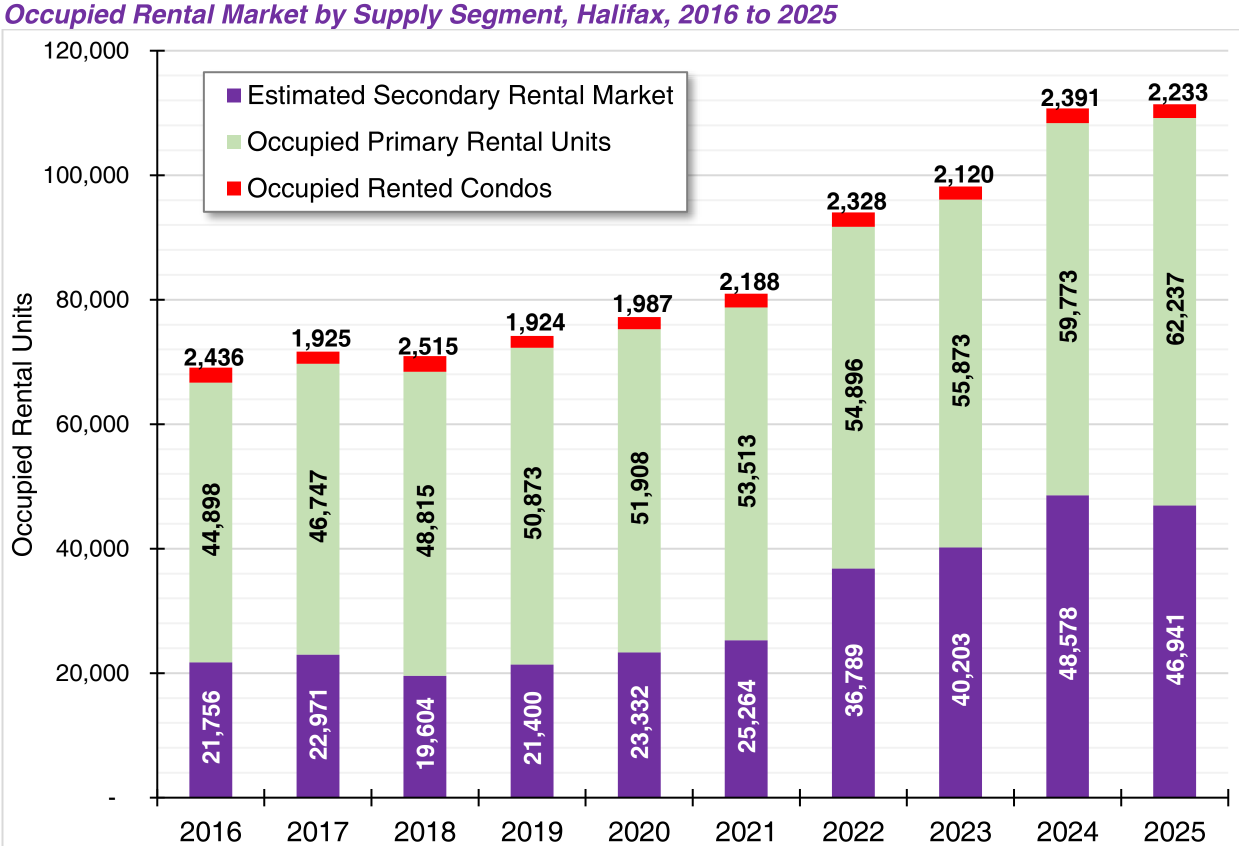
To better understand the scale of that broader market, we developed a rough estimate of Halifax's secondary rental market. We started with the number of renters identified in the Labour Force Survey public-use microdata file. Since the LFS is a labour market survey rather than a housing census, we benchmarked the LFS-based renter estimate to Census renter-household counts. We then subtracted occupied primary rental units and occupied rented condominiums using CMHC data. The remainder provides a rough estimate of the secondary rental market.

Estimated Secondary Rental Market =

Census-Benchmarked LFS Renters – (Occupied Primary Rental Units + Occupied Rented Condos)

This is not a perfect measure of physical rental units. It is a rough estimate based on renter counts and market universe data. But it is useful because it gives scale to a part of the rental system that is often harder to see.

Occupied Rental Market by Supply Segment, Halifax, 2016 to 2025



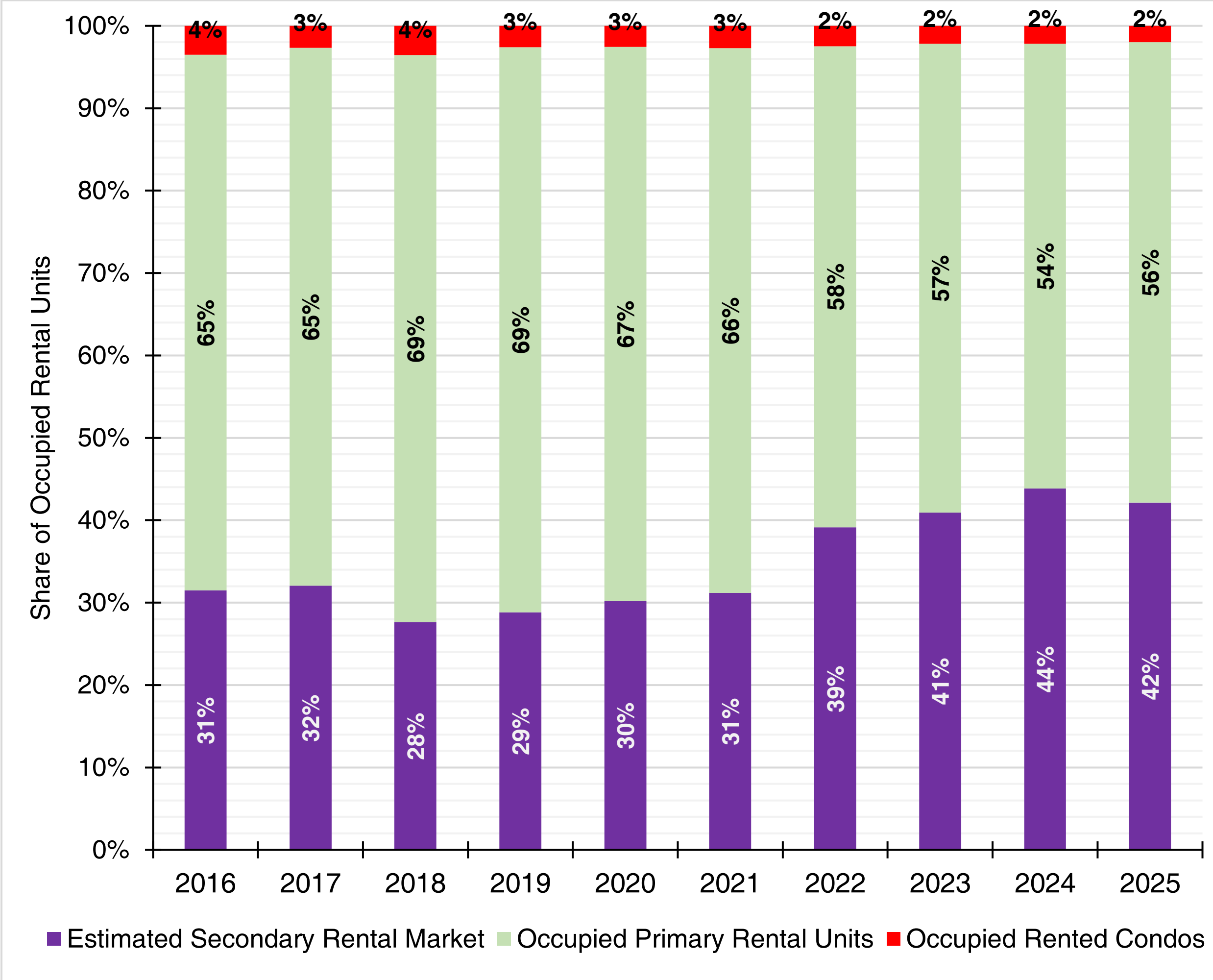
Source: Statistics Canada, LFS April 2026; CMHC; TDP EIU.

Note: The 2020 estimate for the secondary rental market is interpolated between 2019 and 2021 due to an anomalous pandemic-year residual in the LFS-based estimate.

Using this approach, Halifax's occupied rental market is estimated at roughly 69,100 units in 2016. Of that total, occupied primary rental units accounted for about 44,900, occupied rented condominiums accounted for about 2,400, and the estimated secondary rental market accounted for roughly 21,800.

By 2025, the estimated occupied rental market had grown to about 111,400. Occupied primary rental units reached roughly 62,200, occupied rented condominiums stood at about 2,200, and the estimated secondary rental market reached about 46,900.

Share of Occupied Rental Market by Supply Segment, Halifax, 2016 to 2025



Source: Statistics Canada, LFS April 2026; CMHC; TDP EIU.
Note: The 2020 estimate for the secondary rental market is interpolated between 2019 and 2021 due to an anomalous pandemic-year residual in the LFS-based estimate.

Purpose-built rentals remain the largest component of Halifax's occupied rental market, accounting for about 56% of the total, while rented condominiums accounted for about 2%. But the secondary rental market has become much more significant. Its share increased from about 31% in 2016 to about 42% in 2025, after reaching 44% in 2024.

From a demand perspective, this means that rental pressure cannot be understood through the purpose-built apartment market alone. Vacancy rates in the primary rental universe remain essential, but they describe only part of the market where renters are housed. A growing share of renter demand appears to be accommodated through secondary forms of rental housing.

From a supply perspective, the secondary market adds capacity through a different channel than purpose-built construction. New apartment buildings require land, approvals, financing, construction labour, and long development timelines. Secondary rental supply can emerge when homeowners rent out part of a property, when investors lease houses or condos, when small landlords convert existing space, or when dwellings are used more intensively. That makes the secondary market an important complement to formal rental construction, particularly when demand is growing quickly.

Looking ahead, Halifax's rental outlook will depend on both parts of the market. According to our estimation, the occupied rental market has grown to 116,931 by March 2026, of which, approximately 50,000 are secondary units.