ECONOMIC REVIEW

Trends in Housing Units: MetroWest

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This article examines housing units in the MetroWest region using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), highlighting recent trends in housing units, tenure, and rent. The data in this article is collected from the ACS 5-year estimates in the years 2009 to 2013 and 2019 to 2023. The MetroWest region (MW) is comprised of nine communities: Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Natick, Sherborn, Sudbury, Southborough, and Wayland.

Figure 1 represents the distribution of total housing units, expressed as percentages, across the nine communities of the MetroWest region. There was a total of 81,926 units in MetroWest in 2023. Framingham had the largest percentage out of the communities with 34.7% followed by Natick with 19.4%. Framingham and Natick's combined units represented more than half of the total housing units with 54.1% of all units in MW. Sherborn had the lowest percentage at 1.9%.

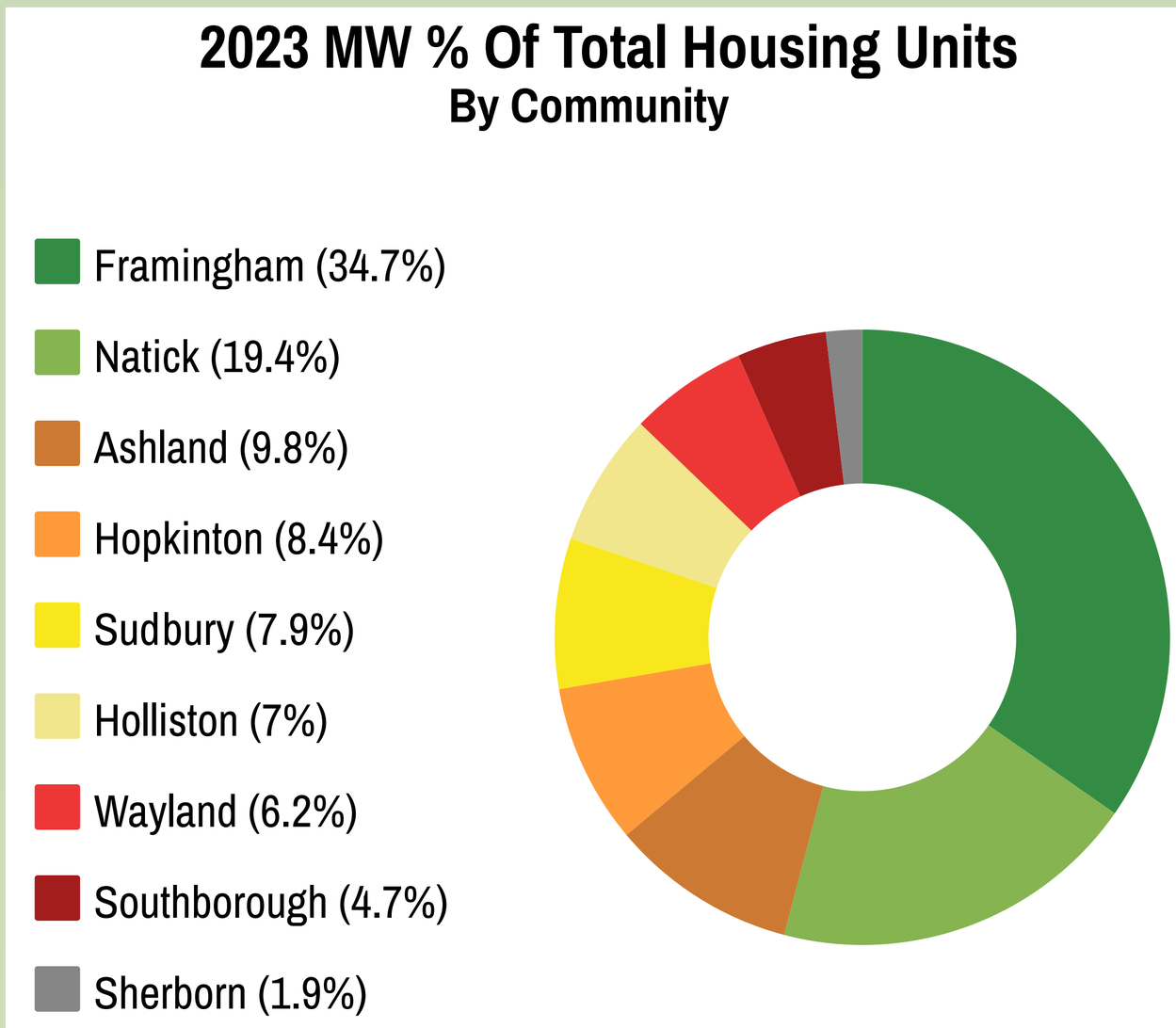

Figure 1

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage change in total housing units between 2013 and 2023, an important indicator of whether a community's housing supply has expanded or contracted over the past decade. This data includes both occupied and unoccupied units. Every community experienced an increase except Wayland, which had a decrease of 4.2%. Wayland may have had a decrease due to demolition, consolidation of units, or zoning changes. Looking at the increases, Hopkinton had the highest increase at 33.6%. Framingham experienced the smallest increase, with only a 3.4% rise in units. The MetroWest region experienced a 9.2% increase in total number of units, while Massachusetts experienced a 7.3% increase.

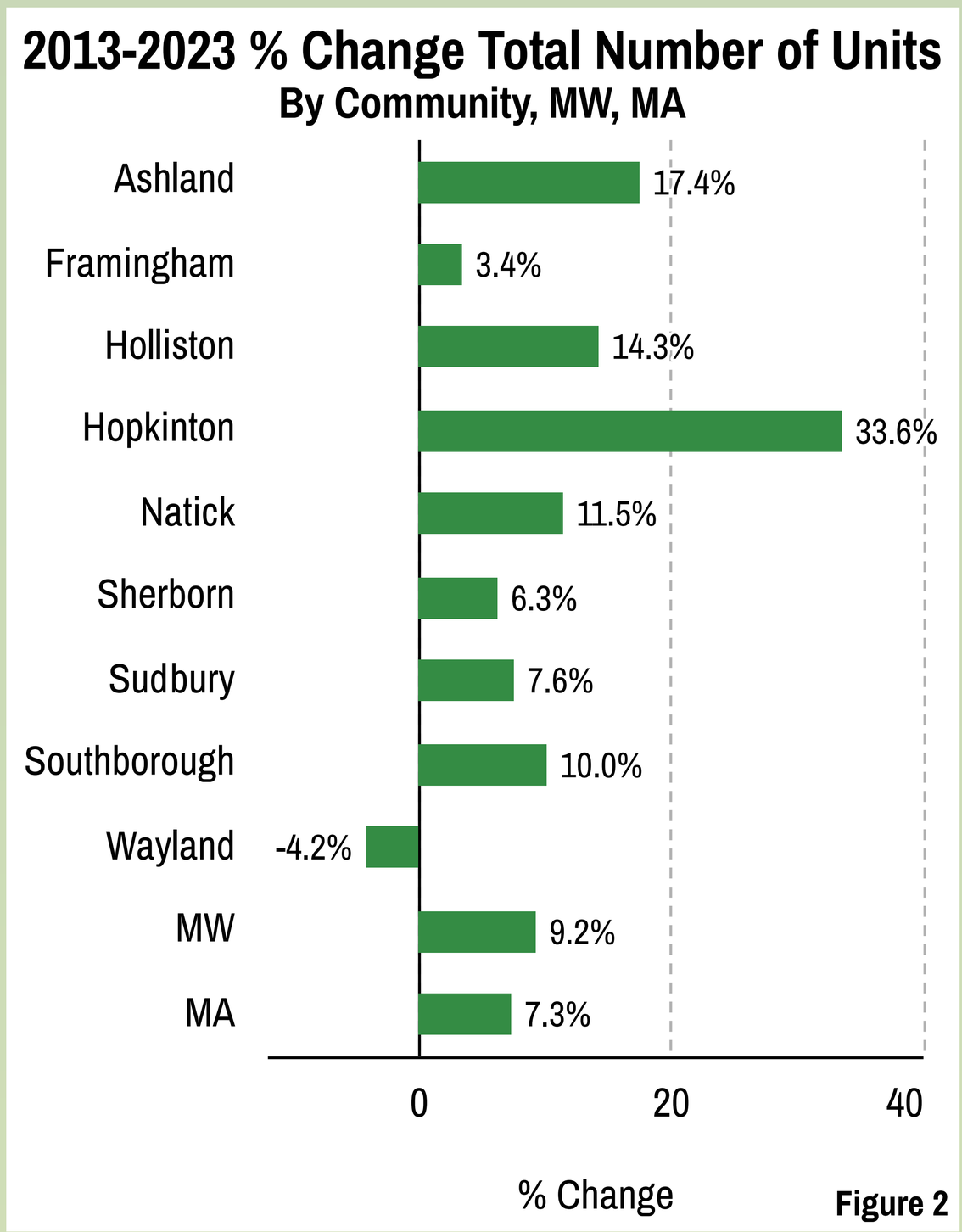

Figure 2

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS)

Figure 3 shows the percent of renter-occupied units in each community in 2023. Massachusetts had a higher rate of renter-occupied units at 37.4% in 2023 compared to MW at 28.6%. In MW, Framingham had the highest percent of renters at 45.2%, followed by Natick with the second-highest percent of renters at 32.5% in 2023. On the other hand, Wayland and Sudbury had the lowest percent of renter-occupied units with 9.6% and 9.8% respectively. From this figure we can see the majority of units in the MetroWest communities are owner-occupied rather than renter-occupied.

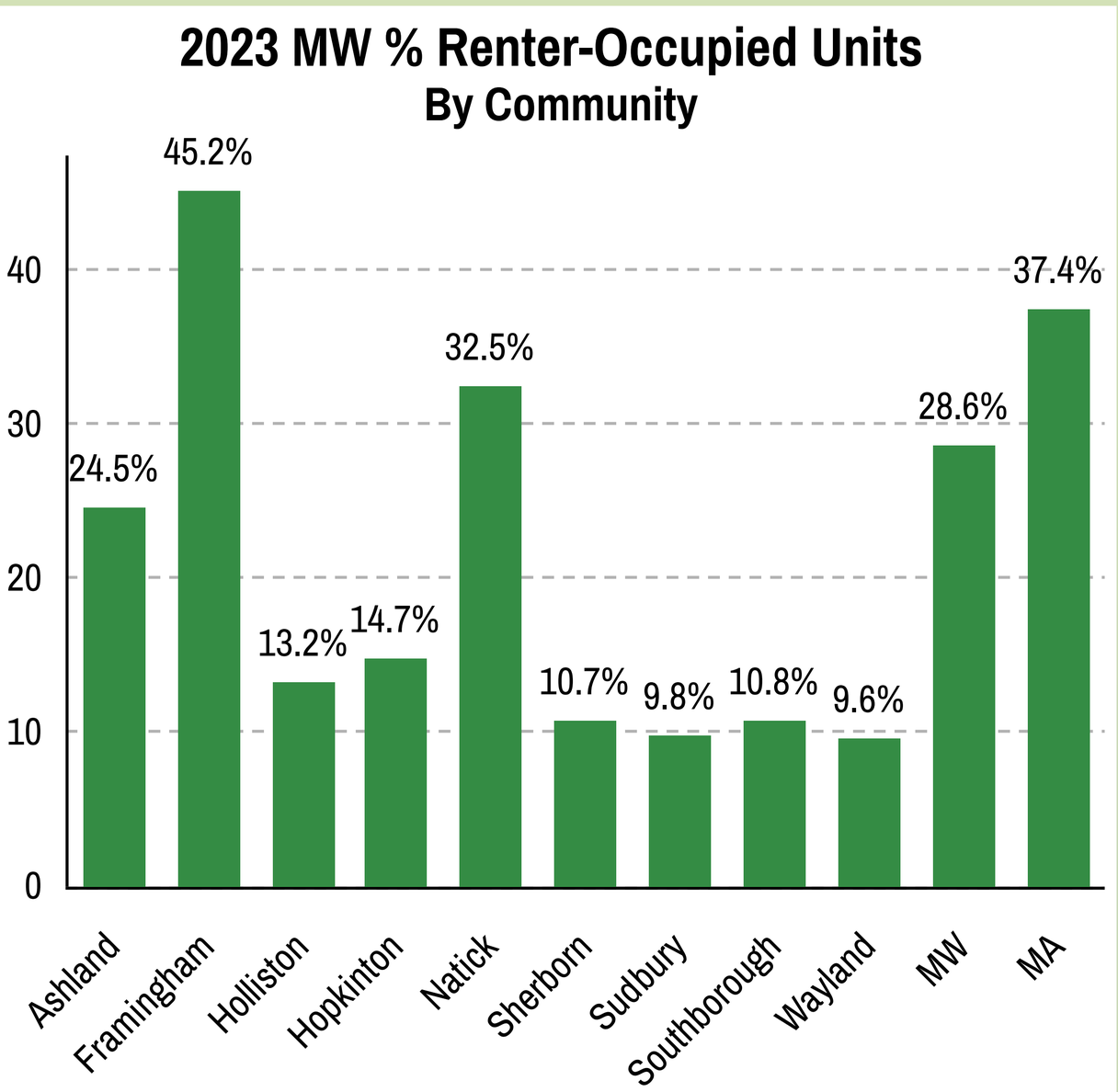

Figure 3

Figure 4 shows the median gross monthly rent by community. Gross rent is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey as the amount of rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (if these are paid by the renter). This data is in nominal dollars, implying they are not adjusted for inflation. Every community experienced an increase in median gross rent from 2013 to 2023. Median gross rent in Massachusetts was $1,687 in 2023, an increase of about $600 from 2013. In MetroWest, Ashland, Hopkinton, Sherborn, and Southborough had the four highest gross rents at over $2,300 in 2023. Framingham, Holliston, and Natick had median rents over $1,500 as well in 2023. Sudbury and Wayland were the only communities with median rent under $1,500 in 2023.

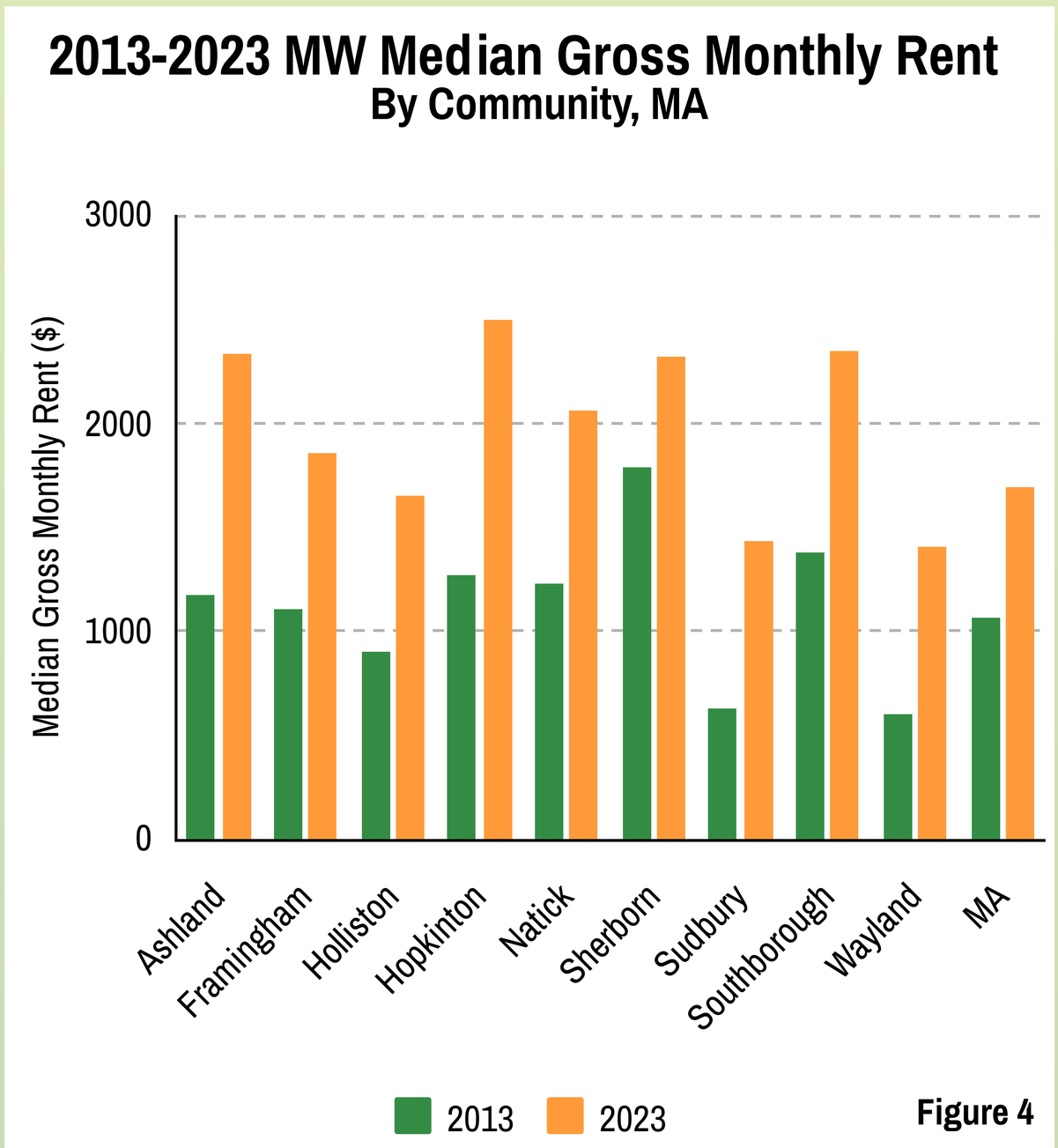

Figure 4

In conclusion between 2013 to 2023, the communities in the MetroWest region have experienced an increase in total number of units by 9.2%. in 2023, renter-occupied units make up 28.6% of all units in MetroWest, a smaller percentage than the state of 37.4%. Median gross rent has significantly increased in all communities with Wayland showing the largest increase of 132%.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS)