

6. Neighborhoods and Housing

Neighborhoods and housing are integral to a place's quality of life. Strong neighborhoods with desirable housing is vital to serve current and new residents support economic growth, and define community character. Care for homes leads to stronger neighborhoods, and strong neighborhoods make for a more cohesive and engaged community. This chapter identifies ways to strengthen Morgantown's neighborhoods and provide a range of desirable housing.

A. Goal

Attractive, well-maintained neighborhoods that offer a broad mix of desirable housing options and convenient access to services and amenities.

B. Key Findings

This section summarizes key points raised during the public meetings and found from the technical analysis conducted for Crossroads. The objectives and strategies outlined later in the chapter are shaped by these ideas.

Public Input

The following themes highlight the most commonly expressed ideas from small group discussions and surveys conducted during the public meetings.

Offer homes at affordable prices. By West Virginia standards, housing in Morgantown area is not very affordable, which is an obstacle for some demographics. Higher housing prices make it difficult for younger residents to buy a house, which some people fear will lead to a shortage of talent or skilled labor. Employers must offer higher wages to attract people to move into the area partly due to housing costs. Also, many people commute from nearby counties, where homes are more affordable, contributing to the region's traffic challenges but not paying city taxes.

Improve but preserve existing neighborhoods. Stable single-family neighborhoods should be maintained and protected from incompatible

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West Virginia Code Compliance

This chapter addresses the following topics required for a Comprehensive Plan in Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code:

- Housing

uses, while redevelopment at higher densities should be encouraged in blighted areas close to the University, downtown and major employers.

Make neighborhoods walkable and connected. The option to walk, ride a bike, or take public transportation from home to a nearby place like a grocery store, school or park was important to many respondents. Sidewalks do not exist in many neighborhoods or are incomplete or in poor condition. Street lighting is also inadequate in many neighborhoods, which further deters walkability and appearance. Higher density, walkable neighborhoods that are close to services and amenities are increasingly desired by two major demographics: young professionals and empty-nesters.

Students strongly affect some neighborhoods. Even if houses are in compliance with property maintenance and zoning codes, noise and other nuisances from students impact several of the city's neighborhoods. Some residents feel that student areas should be clearly delineated to protect neighborhoods from those impacts.

There are several impediments identified by residents to fair housing in Morgantown. A survey conducted in 2010 by BBC Research and Consulting found discrimination against Morgantown's low income and disabled residents regarding available housing. Respondents reported several barriers to fair housing, which included:

- Can only find affordable housing in certain areas;
- Limited supply of affordable housing to purchase;
- Limited supply of affordable housing to rent;
- Cannot find housing in good condition to rent;
- Limited knowledge and/or understanding among residents about fair housing rights;
- Limited knowledge and/or understanding among landlords and property managers about fair housing rights and obligations.

Existing Conditions and Trends

The following themes were distilled from the technical analysis of the existing conditions and trends and represent the most important points.

Older housing stock. Over 50 percent of residential structures in Morgantown were built before 1960, whereas only about 30 percent of those in the county are that old. 1,487 residences in Morgantown (12.4 percent) were built since the year 2000. In the county, there are over 8,075

homes that age (comprising about 19 percent of the housing stock). While some of this older housing is well-maintained and located in desirable areas, much is obsolete, particularly in areas with higher concentrations of student residents. Redevelopment of these buildings will be a major aspect of the city's future housing market.

Redevelopment of functionally obsolete buildings will be a major aspect of the city's future housing market.

Morgantown's home values consistently higher than county and state values. The median home value in Morgantown (\$176,700) is 15 percent higher than the county median and 85 percent above the state's median value. It is very close to the national median of \$179,900.

Somewhat limited range of home values in Morgantown. There is a smaller percentage of low-value homes (under \$100,000) in Morgantown than compared to the county, state and nation. Morgantown has a larger proportion of high-value homes (over \$500,000) than the state average, but relatively less than compared to the county and nation. Seventy-five percent of the housing stock is concentrated between \$100,000 and \$300,000, whereas county, state, and national values are more evenly disbursed across the spectrum of values.

Morgantown's housing market is skewed toward WVU students. Eighty percent of WVU's student body lives off-campus, and those students make up two-thirds of Monongalia County's renters. Few of the new housing developments in Morgantown since 2000 have been single-family homes or buildings with two to five units. The City of Morgantown issued building permits for 1,185 housing units between 2000 and 2010. Of these, 80 percent were for developments with five or more units, which are mostly occupied as student rentals. These developments are also built with amenities like gyms and pools, which are also targeted toward students and drive rent prices higher.

Renters dominate the housing scene in Morgantown. The presence of the university is again evident seeing that only 37 percent of Morgantown's occupied units were owner-occupied. In contrast, the average rates of owner occupied housing in the U.S. and West Virginia are 65.4 percent and 74.6 percent, respectively.

Permitting for multi-family housing construction significantly outpaced permitting for single-family homes in the 2000s. Multi-family construction permitting for buildings with five units or more outpaced smaller multi-family development. This type of residential construction

averaged 81 permits per year over the decade (2000-2010) and climbed to 291 permits issued in 2010. Single-family permitting was much lower through the decade with an annual high in 2006 of 32 permits and a low in 2010 of 16 permits. In recent years, the multi-family developments have been very large, many comprising hundreds of new dwellings per project.

Demand within the rental market is expected to be greatest for two bedroom units. From 2011 to 2014, there is an anticipated demand for 630 two bedroom units, compared to 420 one bedrooms and 350 three or more bedrooms. Nearly half the demand for two bedrooms should be for units whose gross price is between \$850 and \$1,049 per month.

Balanced sales housing market in the Morgantown Housing Market Area. In 2011, there were 58,950 housing units in the Morgantown Housing Market Area which is all of Monongalia and Preston Counties. Between 2011 and 2014, demand is expected for 2,900 new housing units, 1,500 of which would be sales units and the remainder for rentals. Most of the demand for sales units should be fulfilled through some of the area's 3,700 vacant units (1.7 percent vacancy rate) reentering the market; only 10 sales units were under construction as of July 2011. The demand should be highest for homes priced between \$125,000 and \$175,000.

WVU has partnered with the city to promote neighborhood rejuvenation. Campus Neighborhoods Revitalization Corporation (CNRC) is a partnership between WVU and the City of Morgantown focused on the physical conditions in predominantly student neighborhoods.

C. Objectives and Strategies

Outlined below are five objectives and 21 strategies to support the Neighborhoods and Housing element. The objectives indicate a specific policy direction, while the strategies are detailed actions necessary to initiate or complete an objective such as a program, policy or a project.

Objective 1. Preserve integrity of existing neighborhoods, particularly single-family areas while encouraging compatible infill development.

- NH 1.1 Research available programs and funding to support renovation of existing rental or single-family home-owner properties.
- NH 1.2 Pursue zoning map amendments where appropriate to address potential zoning conflicts in residential areas both to preserve existing residential areas where appropriate or promote infill and redevelopment (See Areas for Future Study in Appendix A).
- NH 1.3 Evaluate zoning to ensure that it promotes rehabilitation or adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and context-sensitive construction of dwelling units on infill lots.
- NH 1.4 Evaluate residential zoning classifications to determine whether permitted or conditional uses and other standards yield desirable development (particularly the residential types permitted within R1, R1A, R2, and R3 districts).
- NH 1.5 Continue to monitor and respond to housing market trends that may lead to studentification of stable, less transient single-family neighborhoods.

Objective 2. Improve conditions in neighborhoods surrounding Downtown and WVU

- NH 2.1 Adopt zoning updates proposed in the Sunnyside Up neighborhood plan.
- NH 2.2 Form a task force to involve students in property maintenance and neighborhood issues.
- NH 2.3 Conduct a semi-annual student-led neighborhood cleanup day.
- NH 2.4 Expand partnerships with WVU to invest in revitalization efforts in targeted neighborhoods.

Objective 3. Improve the safety and appearance of all neighborhoods.

- NH 3.1 Require adequate and attractive street lighting to be incorporated as part of all new multi-family residential development, major subdivisions created for residential and/or mixed-use developments, and planned unit developments.

COMMUNITY PRIORITY

NH 3.2 Prioritize in the City's Capital Improvement Plan strategic, adequate, and attractive street lighting enhancements.

Objective 4. Promote the development of a broad range of housing types and prices.

NH 4.1 Provide incentives to developers to encourage development of alternative housing types (i.e. higher density, live-work, mixed-use) in designated growth areas.

NH 4.2 Provide incentives to developers to make development more desirable to build moderately-priced housing.

NH 4.3 Require residential development projects of a certain scale to include housing options with a range of price-points.

NH 4.4 Develop a plan (in collaboration with WVU) to address increased demand for affordable student housing resulting from higher price-points of newly constructed developments

Objective 5. Support housing assistance programs and ensure compliance with Fair Housing policies.

NH 5.1 Contribute to an internet-based regional registry of rental property owners or management companies where tenants can rate their experiences and share those experiences with others.

NH 5.2 Conduct annual campaigns to educate property managers about the Fair Housing Act and housing discrimination.

NH 5.3 Enhance plans review, approval, and permitting processes to ensure compliance with the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

NH 5.4 Provide public education of various Federal, State, County and local financial assistance programs for first time home-buyers.

NH 5.5 Provide homebuyer and seller education seminars and publications.

NH 5.6 Provide incentives to encourage the development of affordable senior housing and assisted living developments within mixed-use and multi-family zoning districts.