Housing

7

INTRODUCTION

The Housing element establishes an approach to the provision of a variety of quality, affordable, sustainable, and balanced housing opportunities and neighborhoods in the City of Sun Prairie. Housing, in addition to being a personal necessity, is an important part of defining the character of a community. Housing needs and expectations change throughout one's life. The degree to which those housing needs are met contributes significantly to a community's quality of life. For some, renting is more desirable, while others prefer homeownership. A home is often the single largest purchase one will make, with home equity being the largest single source of household wealth for most Americans. Whether renting or owning, the quality, quantity and affordability of housing are important for the long-term viability of the city.

Volume 1 of this plan element includes a summary of the existing characteristics of the City's housing stock. Although the existing quality and quantity of housing stock may serve the needs of current residents, Volume 2 provides strategies for the City to continue to maintain and improve upon the quality of its' current stock, while creating new housing opportunities to meet the needs of future residents.

The goals, objectives, policies and recommendations in this chapter are based on the issues identified by the public, background information of existing conditions presented in Volume 1, and data related to past trends and projections regarding future needs. An understanding of the benefits and deficiencies in the existing system is needed to guide the management and provision of housing resources in Sun Prairie.

PUBLIC INPUT

STEERING COMMITTEE ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

At the beginning of the planning process, the Steering Committee completed a SWOT exercise to identify perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the community. This exercise helped to identify some of the issues to be addressed in the plan.

The Steering Committee identified the school system having trouble keeping up with growth, a high rate of growth in general, and the high cost of housing as the primary weaknesses relating to housing. The Committee also identified the decay of older housing, the development of too many apartments versus single-family homes, and the inability to keep up with rapid population growth as the primary threats related to housing. Strengths identified as part of this exercise included an excellent housing stock and affordable elderly housing, while mixed-use growth was seen as an opportunity.

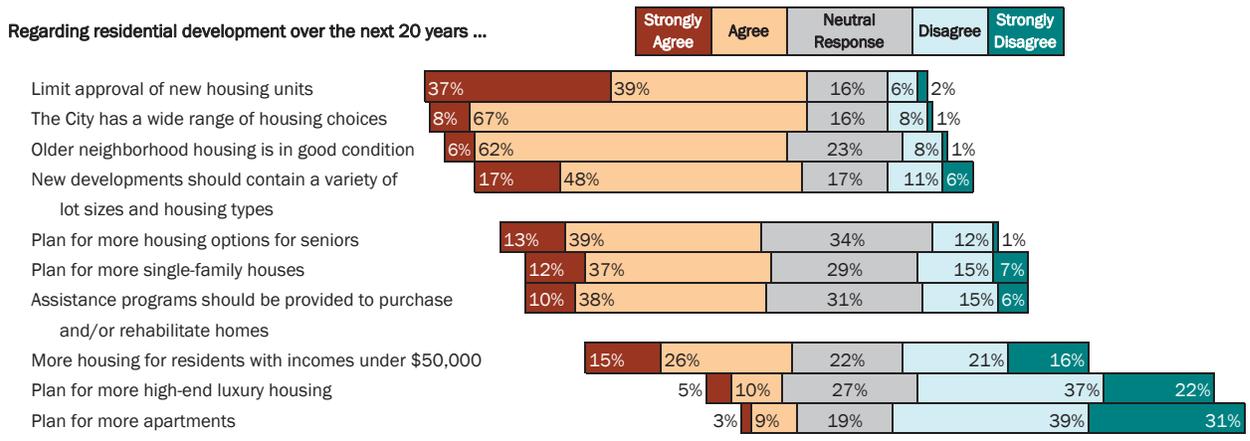### HOUSEHOLD SURVEY/OPEN HOUSE

Other opportunities for public input regarding housing resources included a household survey, open house workshops, and a number of subcommittee meetings of the Steering Committee that focused on housing issues.

The City's recent rate of growth ranked as a primary concern among residents who completed the household survey as part of this comprehensive planning project. Coupled with the concern about growth was the desire by approximately 75% of survey respondents to limit approval of new housing construction. Approximately 70% of respondents also thought that less emphasis should be placed on apartments.

Figure 7-1 graphically depicts the household survey responses specifically related to housing. The topic areas have been arranged by the strength of the response (e.g. 76% strongly agreed or agreed that approval of new housing units should be limited, 75% strongly agreed or agreed that the City has a wide range of housing choices, 68% strongly agreed or agreed that older neighborhood housing is in good condition, etc.).

Responses to open-ended survey questions reinforced the results shown in Figure 7-1, with many comments expressing concern over the high rate of growth and recent increase in numbers of new apartment units. Full results from the various methods of public input are located in the appendices.

FIGURE 7-1
PUBLIC SURVEY HOUSING RESULTS

Regarding residential development over the next 20 years ...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral Response	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Limit approval of new housing units	37%	39%	16%	6%	2%
The City has a wide range of housing choices	8%	67%	16%	8%	1%
Older neighborhood housing is in good condition	6%	62%	23%	8%	1%
New developments should contain a variety of lot sizes and housing types	17%	48%	17%	11%	6%
Plan for more housing options for seniors	13%	39%	34%	12%	1%
Plan for more single-family houses	12%	37%	29%	15%	7%
Assistance programs should be provided to purchase and/or rehabilitate homes	10%	38%	31%	15%	6%
More housing for residents with incomes under $50,000	15%	26%	22%	21%	16%
Plan for more high-end luxury housing	5%	10%	27%	37%	22%
Plan for more apartments	3%	9%	19%	39%	31%

Source: 2008 Household Survey

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

During the preparation of this plan the United States experienced an extreme downturn in the economy, due in large part to issues associated with the housing, banking and finance industries. Sun Prairie, like most of Dane County, experienced a significant decline in both new single-family and multi-family housing starts during this recent period. The length of the current economic slowdown is unknown at this point, however, the short-term rate of growth in the City has definitely slowed when compared to the unprecedented growth that the City experienced between 2000 and 2006. Sun Prairie is still projected to grow to 40,000 people before the year 2030 and these new residents will need a place to live. The major housing issues that were identified during this planning process tended to relate to three general areas:

RATE OF GROWTH

The City has experienced a high rate of growth since the adoption of the City's previous Master Plan in 2000. Many residents, through various opportunities for public input during the preparation of this plan, have expressed a desire to either slow the rate of the City's recent growth or at least keep residential growth in balance with commercial development.

HOUSING TYPE

An increase in the number of multi-family units is a part the City's recent growth. Recommendations for higher density development on the City's west side and downtown were created through the adoption of the Westside Neighborhood Plan and the Business District Revitalization Plan. Implementation of these plans have brought more multi-family developments, both owner and renter-occupied, into Sun Prairie. Issues associated primarily with the increase in renter-occupied multi-family housing developments have been the catalyst to reevaluate the overall mix of housing types in the City.

Additionally, the City is expected to experience a significant increase in residents who will be age 65 and older by the year 2030. While the City has recently experienced an increase in residential developments targeted toward older adults, will the mix of new and existing housing stock be sufficient to meet this increasing population?

One possible solution to help address the needs of a variety of the changing demographics is through the adherence to the principles of universal design. Universal design refers to the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. A universally designed home is built to incorporate the changing needs, due to age or physical ability, of an individual over time. Building housing units using universal design features is not currently mandated by state building codes and may have additional cost considerations. However, the long-term benefits of providing this type of housing design to a wide range of users may outweigh the short- term costs. Therefore, to what extent should the City encourage this type of housing design?

HOUSING QUALITY

Housing quality, primarily associated with multi-family housing, is another identified issue. Survey respondents cited maintenance and cleanliness as the two most frequently mentioned topics for desirable neighborhood characteristics. Other participants in this planning process identified the design, maintenance, and upkeep of some multi-family developments that needed attention. The degree to which design standards exist, are adopted, or are adhered to was also identified as a means of addressing longer-term improvements to the City's multi-family housing stock. For the most part, the quality of older single-family homes are acceptable to Sun Prairie residents as evidenced by a majority of survey respondents agreeing that houses within older neighborhoods are generally in good condition.

The following issues were identified to help create goals and objectives that address current and future housing needs.

1   Population projections indicate that the number of residents over the age of 65 will increase sharply (309% between 2000 to 2030). To what extent will the City's housing stock be able to accommodate an aging population?

2   How can the City address the real and perceived issues associated with multi-family housing?

   a. Should the City enforce stronger design and quality standards for multi-family developments?

   b. What can be done to ensure that landlords and management companies be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of multi-family developments?

3   Should the City use an architectural review committee or other group to review multi-family design standards?

4   Should the City adopt target ratios of single-family verses multi-family housing, and if so, how will those ratios be enforced?

5   The City has recently adopted a nuisance and property maintenance ordinance. To what extent should the City prioritize enforcing this ordinance?

6   To what extent should the Community Development Authority be involved in housing rehabilitation projects?

   a. When/how should older multi-family development sites be upgraded or rehabilitated?

7   The character of some older residential neighborhoods is being compromised by the expansion of some commercial and institutional uses. To what extent should maintaining the integrity of older neighborhoods be prioritized over the expansion of certain uses?

8   The decay of older housing stock was identified as a possible threat related to housing. To what extent should the City be involved in creating or promoting programs for the maintenance of older housing stock?

9   Should the City continue to encourage/require residential designs where garages aren't the dominant feature of the streetscape?

10   To what extent should higher design/building standards be implemented as a means of regulating growth?

GOAL 1

Provide a variety of quality and affordable housing opportunities in Sun Prairie

OBJECTIVES

1 Encourage the design and construction of mixed-residential neighborhoods that provide a range of housing types, densities and costs.

2 Encourage the design and construction of residential neighborhoods that are well served by sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and designated bicycle routes.

3 Plan for a variety of housing types, costs and locations in the City to provide opportunities for persons of all income levels, age groups, and for those with special needs.

4 Encourage housing design, including multi-family developments, that is attractive and accommodating for older adults (i.e. consists of single-level dwellings and is adaptable for use by a senior population, even if the initial occupancy is not intended to be for older adults). The percentage of residents above age 65 is expected to increase over 300% between 2000 and 2030 - new multi-family developments are encouraged to take into consideration the projected increase.

5 Focus higher-density residential development in mixed-use redevelopment projects within City tax incremental financing (TIF) districts and other targeted redevelopment areas, rather than at the edge in new growth areas.

6 Encourage the availability of land for development or redevelopment of housing for persons needing entry-level single-family detached homes during the detailed neighborhood design process.

GOAL 2

Manage growth in a manner that balances residential, commercial and other uses

OBJECTIVES

1 Work with the Sun Prairie Area School District to monitor the impacts of residential growth on the school system.

2 Manage residential growth in a manner that achieves an appropriate occupancy/vacancy rate.

3 Strive for economic development and job growth within the community to achieve a balance and keep up with residential growth.

4 Improve design standards for new commercial and multi-family development as a means of managing growth.

5 Strive to achieve a detached single-family housing rate of 65%.

GOAL 3

Maintain and enhance the quality of Sun Prairie homes and neighborhoods

OBJECTIVES

1   Prohibit incompatible land uses (e.g. high traffic generators, noisy or unaesthetic uses) from being located in close proximity to residential neighborhoods.

2   Provide sufficient buffering between residential neighborhoods and nonresidential uses when appropriate, while ensuring adequate pedestrian access.

3   Enforce property maintenance and nuisance codes to maintain neighborhood quality and prevent blight.

4   Promote neighborhood identity in both existing neighborhoods and new residential development by encouraging the creation of neighborhood associations.

5   Maintain the architectural character and integrity of existing neighborhoods.

6   Ensure that multi-family residential developments are appropriately maintained and improved to enhance their appearance, property values, neighborhood character, and safety.

GOAL 4

Encourage housing stock within Sun Prairie that contributes toward a more sustainable and vibrant community

OBJECTIVES

1   Provide quality housing opportunities for a variety of household types.

2   Encourage new homes that incorporate a high degree of energy efficiency.

3   Maintain or remodel existing housing stock as a means to help minimize land and material consumption.

4   Encourage home building (single-family and multi-family) that incorporates a higher environmental standard (e.g. LEED, Green Built Home, etc.).

POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policies and recommendations provide the framework for more specific actions related to the quantity, quality and affordability of housing stock within the City. The emphasis in the plan is to guide growth in a manner that recognizes the housing needs of residents of different ages, abilities and income levels, while maintaining high-quality neighborhoods and a desirable community character. The recommendations found here take into consideration the recommendations in other plan chapters, so that new development does not create a demand that cannot be met.

The following policies and recommendations include actions the City, and in some situations other agencies or organizations, should take to implement the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. The reader should refer to more detailed downtown redevelopment plans and neighborhood plans for more information about some of these recommendations.

1   Encourage the provision of a full-range of quality housing opportunities in the City of Sun Prairie.

2   Residential development shall be guided to areas of the City that have convenient and economical access to municipal services and facilities, shopping areas, parks and open spaces.

3   The City encourages the preservation of architecturally, historically, and culturally significant sites, buildings, structures and neighborhoods in the City and its environs. Consider creating an historic preservation commission or similar group to identify and protect historic homes and residential neighborhoods.

4   High-density residential development shall be located within a convenient and safe walking distance of schools, parks, transit stops, commercial areas, and other neighborhood destinations to the greatest degree possible.

5   Existing residential areas shall be adequately buffered from new or expanding non-residential uses through the use of zoning set backs, vegetative screening, berms, fences, and/or walls.

6   Continue existing policies of recapturing costs associated with new residential development, such as traffic impacts and parks and open space needs.

7   Consider a landlord licensing and/or rental inspection program to provide better oversight and monitoring of housing quality and maintenance.

8   Evaluate the effectiveness of property maintenance and nuisance codes on an on-going basis. Amend as necessary to help maintain neighborhood quality and prevent blight.

9   Promote state and local programs that help residents rehabilitate or maintain their homes.

10   Adopt stronger design and quality standards for commercial and multi-family developments.

11   Encourage housing developments for older adults to be located near a range of facilities and services.

12   Promote quality neighborhood development that includes an appropriate mix of uses by requiring the adoption of detailed neighborhood plans prior to development approvals, unless detailed land use plans are adopted as a component of this plan. Detached, single-family housing within planned neighborhoods is recommended to comprise at least 65% of the total number of residential units, exclusive of redevelopment sites.

13   Work to develop reliable methods of monitoring housing vacancy rates and evaluate the information when considering future residential development.

14   Consider amending the City's ordinances to allow accessory dwelling units by conditional use permit, with appropriate standards, for the purpose of increasing housing choice, increasing density, accommodating different household types and increasing affordability.

15   An increasing percentage of new, non-single-family housing units should be built to incorporate elements of universal design (e.g. at grade entryways, lever handles, rocker light switches, wider doorways/hallways, discreet grab bars, etc).

16   Encourage the use of low-flow fixtures and energy efficient lighting, appliances, and HVAC through public education and incentives.

17   Continue to encourage energy audits through Sun Prairie Water and Light and Wisconsin Public Power Inc. for individuals to improve energy efficiency and reduce costs.

18   Promote housing affordability through measures such as, smaller lot sizes, revisiting certain public improvement requirements, appropriately planned and located attached and multiple-family housing, and continued participation in county and state housing programs.

19   Continue to require residential designs where garages are not the dominant feature of the streetscape.