6.0 HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

6.1 OVERVIEW

One broad area of consensus that emerged from the community input leading to the Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement was the desire to preserve and enhance Greensboro's quality of life and livability. Among the factors identified as key to achieving this goal is the need to ensure the stability and livability of neighborhoods throughout the City. Consistent with the principles articulated in the Vision Statement, livable neighborhoods should meet:

The basic needs of residents for a safe, clean environment; a varied stock of quality, affordable housing; and convenient access to community services, facilities, and amenities.

Although the City of Greensboro has a well established track record of over 20 years of neighborhood planning efforts, maintaining the standards of livability in existing neighborhoods and achieving them in new ones is becoming increasingly difficult (and increasingly critical) as the City continues to grow. As described in Section 3.1 (Current Trends) and the Land Use Element (Chapter 4.0), most new development is occurring away from "Urban Greensboro" in areas at the city/county fringe where vacant land is readily available. Further exacerbating this trend, many existing planning policies and regulations are perceived as favoring a continued pattern of sprawling, low-density development. As a result, some of the older commercial corridors and neighborhoods around the urban core are experiencing physical changes that could reduce their viability.

On the positive side, various City initiatives already in place seek to alter these trends in the directions set by the Vision Statement. The policies and strategies described in this element are designed to complement, support, and/or strengthen these initiatives and to facilitate their implementation.

6.2 GOALS AND POLICIES

> **GOAL**
> **Meet the needs of present and future Greensboro citizens for a choice of decent, affordable housing in stable, livable neighborhoods that offer security, quality of life, and the necessary array of services and facilities.**

POLICIES

> **6A. Implement a comprehensive neighborhood conservation and improvement program**

6A.1 Using the recommendations of the *Neighborhood Planning and Service Delivery Report* as a foundation, implement a **Neighborhood Planning Initiative** to promote the conservation and enhancement of existing neighborhoods in a comprehensive, coordinated manner. Specific strategies may include, but are not limited to:

- Developing and implementing an ongoing process for planning with and providing support services (e.g., transportation, police, and code enforcement) to neighborhoods
- Designating neighborhoods with an established character that is potentially threatened by change as "neighborhood conservation areas"
- Identifying and prioritizing infrastructure and public facility improvements
- Identifying infill development sites and compatible redevelopment opportunities that would strengthen existing neighborhoods
- Instituting regulatory changes and design standards to protect and enhance specific neighborhood character elements (e.g., special overlay districts)
- Encouraging neighborhood identity initiatives (e.g., neighborhood identification signage, community events, etc.)
- Other initiatives identified in the *Neighborhood Planning & Service Delivery Report*

Narrative:

The City's 1997 Strategic Plan called for the development and implementation of a **Neighborhood Planning Initiative**. As a first step, the *Neighborhood Planning and Service Delivery Report* (NPSD) was completed in 2000 by a team of employees representing a variety of City departments. One of the key findings of the report was that Greensboro has traditionally had a rather fragmented approach to dealing with neighborhoods, which has resulted in poor interagency coordination, duplication of efforts, and frustration and confusion on the part of citizens.

In addition to providing a comprehensive assessment of the City's current working relationship with neighborhoods, the NPSD identified the key requirements for establishing a successful program. A series of short- (24-month trial period) and long-term (5-year) actions were recommended to implement the proposed program. The short-term, recommended first-phase actions included:

- Reaching internal resolution (department heads and City Manager's office) on the optimum organizational structure, staff, and resources for the NPSD program
- Creating a "Neighborhood Advisory Committee" (NAC), to be responsible for, among other things, establishing the criteria and process for selecting neighborhoods to be planned
- Creating a "Neighborhood Planning Team," which will lead the neighborhood planning efforts
- Sponsoring a "Neighborhood Summit" to educate the public and officially launch the NPSD initiative
- Begin preparing a limited number of pilot or test neighborhood plans

The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has successfully undertaken various neighborhood planning and development projects over the past twenty-plus years, including nine ongoing neighborhood work programs.[1] The City should continue to move towards the implementation of the comprehensive, coordinated approach outlined in the NPSD Report.

6A.2 Continue to support the application of HOPE VI program principles and other similar revitalization initiatives to reduce concentrations of poverty and promote **mixed-income neighborhoods**.

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[1] These include Arlington Park, East Market Street, Eastside Park, Gorrell, Ole Asheboro, Phillips/Lombardy, Rosewood, Southside, and the new Willow Oaks community.

Narrative:

A key to the success of HOPE VI's synergistic approach is strong, effective partnerships between public and private entities that share a commitment to enhancing existing neighborhoods, encouraging economic development, and creating housing opportunities for households of all income levels. The City of Greensboro has limited experience with the promotion of mixed-income, mixed-use community revitalization. One recent example is the new **Willow Oaks mixed-income community** (formerly Morningside

Proposed Streetscape for Willow Oaks Neighborhood
Courtesy of Duany Plater-Zyberg & Co. 2002

Homes), currently underway in the southeast side of Greensboro. Over $50 million was leveraged in commitments from the City, private investment, and other sources to augment a $23 million HOPE VI grant awarded by HUD to the Greensboro Housing Authority for this initiative. The City has also played a key role in sponsoring the Southside development effort southeast of the downtown area. This traditionally designed, mixed-use revitalization project is demonstrating the viability of mixing a variety of housing and business uses.

Greensboro should continue to explore strategies, incentives, and opportunities for community revitalization. The City should also continue to encourage the active involvement of private developers and non-profit organizations in providing quality, compatible infill and/or rehabilitated housing in existing neighborhoods. Further, to promote active partnerships that contribute to the development of mixed-income communities of choice, the City should as an additional neighborhood revitalization tool foster the development of neighborhood-based organizations such as **community development corporations**. This type of organization creates opportunities for residents to be actively involved in making their own neighborhoods better places to live and work. This will require seed money, technical assistance, and a willingness to partner in new and creative ways.

6A.3 Create an ongoing **housing and neighborhood condition** monitoring strategy.

Narrative:

The City of Greensboro last conducted a housing condition survey over two decades ago. The need to establish a consistent, ongoing **monitoring strategy** to guide conservation, rehabilitation, and demolition efforts is underscored by the fact that approximately 55 percent of the housing stock in the City is now at least 40 years old. Further, the *2000-2004 Greensboro/ Guilford/High Point/Burlington/Alamance (GHPBA) Consolidated Plan for Housing Activities* (Consolidated Plan) indicates that, despite the relative success of the City's

rehabilitation programs, the amount of housing deemed unfit for habitation[2] continues to be a significant problem. Moreover, units categorized as unfit for habitation constitute a large share of the City's affordable housing stock. Some potential components of a housing condition monitoring program could include:

- Using the City's code enforcement program and GIS system to create and update, at agreed-upon intervals (e.g., 5 years), a database of information necessary to monitor housing conditions by neighborhood
- Conducting the citywide survey of housing conditions at intervals no greater than the established update of the City's Comprehensive Plan or Consolidated Plan. More detailed or frequent surveys may be conducted in specific areas as the need arises

While the implementation of a city-wide, periodic surveying and monitoring mechanism is likely to require the allocation of additional resources, short-term opportunities could be explored as a way to initiate the effort until such a mechanism becomes feasible. These opportunities could include grant-funded project collaborations with higher education institutions (e.g., UNCG, Greensboro College, and NCA&TSU), or with non-profit organizations (e.g., the Greensboro Housing Coalition and Housing Greensboro) to begin conducting **housing condition surveys** in select areas. Neighborhood associations should also be encouraged to participate in the surveying efforts and should be kept informed of the results and their impact in maintaining housing quality.

Housing condition is only one of a number of indicators of the health of neighborhoods that the City should consider in implementing a monitoring strategy. The City should pursue creating a **comprehensive indicators system** to track neighborhood and housing trends over time. Such a system would include, in addition to housing condition, indicators such as changes in property values, development activity, tenure, etc.

6A.4 Implement measures to protect Greensboro's **neighborhoods from potential negative impacts** of development, redevelopment, and/or public projects that are inconsistent with the neighborhoods' livability, architectural, or historical character, and reinvestment potential. Such measures could include, but need not be limited to:

- Supportive policy, zoning, and regulatory decisions, including protection against incompatible commercial encroachments into residential neighborhoods
- Review and modification of code provisions to address conflicts of use, scale, and intensity
- Review and modification of public facility and transportation policies and practices inconsistent with this objective

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[2] Housing units deemed unfit for habitation are estimated to constitute about 5 percent of the total housing stock.

- Consideration of the potential impacts of public projects, or projects for which the City will accept public improvements, including consideration of alternative design submittals

Narrative:

The term **infill** refers to new development occurring on vacant or underutilized parcels located within areas that are otherwise developed and served by existing infrastructure. Infill development can add diversity and strengthen the vitality of a neighborhood. As described in the Land Use Policies for Reinvestment/Infill/Redevelopment (Section 4.4.1), the City of Greensboro advocates infill and redevelopment as a tool to achieve neighborhood revitalization, expand housing choices, and diminish pressure for greenfield development. Revitalization corridors and areas shown on the Growth Strategies Map (Figure 4-3) are priority locations for such forms of development. Nevertheless, it is important that revitalization objectives be balanced with the need for **neighborhood conservation**. Infill development is

Vacant lot before infill

Rendering after infill

not inherently "good" simply because it is infill and may, in fact, adversely affect the fabric of a neighborhood if the project is not compatible with its context. Rather, the successful infill project is one that complements and supports the character and appearance of the neighborhood that surrounds it (see Land Use Policy 4A.1). Therefore, the intent of Policy 6A.4 is not to discourage infill projects, or to preclude a variety of land uses or building types within neighborhoods. Rather, these measures seek to ensure that infill projects meet standards of compatibility and quality that protect and support the integrity and character of established neighborhoods.

> **6B. Implement an expanded program to maintain the City's housing stock, eliminate substandard housing, and meet needs for affordable housing**

6B.1 Initiate a program to **reclaim or eliminate boarded up and/or long vacant units**, substandard housing, and blighting influences on neighborhoods, including encouraging owner occupancy as a way to promote home maintenance and rehabilitation

6B.2 Explore strategies to promote rehabilitation of historic houses and buildings whose contribution to neighborhood character may be compromised by inappropriate alterations or by deterioration, e.g.:

- Strategically targeting code enforcement efforts
- Making available a broader menu of rehabilitation options
- Creating streamlined procedures for negotiating with property owners who, deliberately or not, exercise "demolition by neglect" practices.

Narrative:

The systematic assessment of the condition of Greensboro's housing units, described in Policy 6A.3 above, will allow resources to be targeted to reduce the amount of substandard housing, discourage boarded-up buildings, and extend the life of the existing housing stock. Revitalization areas shown on the Growth Strategies Map (Figure 4-3) should be priority locations for such actions. It is equally important that housing

Before

programs be integrated into a strategy for assessing and improving the **overall health of neighborhoods** (see Policy 6A.1). One potential model for such a strategy is found in the City of Houston's "Neighborhoods to Standards" initiative, which among other things, was designed to "upgrade" neighborhoods by bringing in essential city services. Other potential approaches that could help to improve housing and neighborhood conditions include:

After

- Continue to survey homeowners receiving housing rehabilitation assistance, after completion of the rehabilitation, to evaluate the quality of the work, and to determine satisfaction with the program
- Develop criteria for prioritizing demolition and/or rehabilitation assistance to areas where large concentrations of substandard housing units are found through housing condition surveys
- Aggressively pursue removal of abandoned vehicles and cleanup of accumulations of trash and debris in residential yards and on vacant lots

6B.3 Improve **maintenance of existing housing stock**, through the implementation of strategies such as:

- Strengthening minimum code standards to the maximum permitted by law
- Comprehensive and stringent minimum code enforcement efforts
- Education and support of tenants and landlords (particularly in relation to landlord/tenant laws as they govern the rental of residential property)
- Investigating the feasibility of implementing a rental unit certification and inspection program
- Expanding rental and owner rehabilitation programs

Narrative:

A variety of approaches, ranging from regulation and enforcement to financial assistance, can be used to help maintain existing housing stock in good condition. City code enforcement could be strengthened and made more proactive, which would require commitment of additional staff resources. More aggressive enforcement of existing statutes governing fines for violations could contribute funding for this effort. Education and outreach to landlords and tenants regarding their rights and responsibilities under the law would contribute to maintaining rental housing stock in good condition. Housing rehabilitation programs also have an important role to play in maintaining and improving Greensboro's existing housing stock (see Policies 6B.1 and 2).

One approach that is not currently used in Greensboro is **rental unit certification for units with a history of substandard code violations**. When used in conjunction with an inspections program, this approach is an effective means of encouraging responsible management, ensuring maintenance and proper use of rental units, preventing deterioration of the units, assuring renters that licensed rental units meet minimum housing standards, and protecting landlords from unfounded claims by renters. Certification requirements could also help protect the character and stability of neighborhoods where conversion of single-family homes to rental housing is a possibility. One drawback of such programs is the need for significant commitment of staff resources by the City to conduct the inspections. While immediate implementation of rental licensing and inspections is not recommended, the City should explore the experience of communities such as Mankato, MN, Elgin, IL, and Ocean City and Cumberland, MD that operate successful programs as possible models.

6B.4 Establish a mechanism to create, maintain, and **provide information on rental and "for sale units"** affordable to those earning 80% or less of the median income

Narrative:

In the fourth quarter of 2000, the Housing Opportunity Index (HOI)[3] for the Greensboro/Winston-Salem/High Point metro area was approximately 73 percent (*City of Greensboro City Data Book*, August 2001, Table 6-11). The HOI is computed by the National Association of HomeBuilders. The same local source information used to calculate this index could serve as a starting point for constructing a citywide **database of available affordable housing units**. In addition, if adopted, the rental unit licensing program described in Policy 6B.3 could also contribute key information concerning the stock of rental housing units.

The City of Greensboro will continue to take a leadership role in promoting a diversity of housing resources and in disseminating information about them through ongoing buyer education and similar programs. In addition, the City will work with the Greensboro Housing Authority, non-profit, and private affordable housing providers to assemble and organize this information in a manner that is readily and widely available to those households that can most benefit from it.

6B.5 Increase initiatives to address the needs of **citizens most in need of housing and support services**, including the homeless, near homeless, low-income rental dwellers, and special populations. Efforts should address the need for expanded shelter options, transitional housing, assistance for families and individuals threatened with homelessness, and supportive services.

6B.6 Increase existing **dedicated funding sources** for expanded housing programs

Narrative:

During the past 12 years, Greensboro has generated a large supply of low-cost homes by providing land and financing to nonprofit housing developers, including Habitat for Humanity, Homeowners Model Experiment, Project Homestead, Gate City Community Development Corporation, and other private development groups. As a result of the high share of new homes for sale under $80,000 (21.4 percent in 1999, according to the *Consolidated Plan*), Greensboro's HOI compares

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[3] The HOI represents the percentage of homes that was affordable by households earning the area's 2000 median family income of $51,000.

favorably to those achieved by other Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in the Triad Region, as well as in the South Region in general.[4]

The City's supply of affordable rental units, resulting from collaborations with both non-profit and for profit entities, is also strong, although fewer local resources have been channeled to this market segment. Despite these efforts however, the average apartment rental rates in Greensboro continue to be somewhat higher than those for comparable units in other municipalities in the Triad Region.

The City's Nussbaum Housing Partnership Revolving Fund has been key to Greensboro's success as a co-producer of affordable housing. This fund currently earmarks one cent of the City's tax rate for housing. To meet the ongoing affordable housing needs in the community, **additional funding sources** must be identified to further expand the resources and mechanisms available to the development community. These non-traditional funding sources could include secondary market lenders, foundations and other philanthropic organizations, and a variety of bonding sources.

6C. Promote the diversification of new housing stock to meet the needs of all citizens for suitable, affordable housing

6C.1 Apply **flexible, variable density bonuses** for the incorporation of housing of various types and price ranges in suitable locations:

- Potential transit corridors
- Mixed-use centers
- Pedestrian-oriented developments
- Housing for special populations (student housing near campus)
- Affordable housing

6C.2 Revise residential districts to encourage **mixed housing types** within developments (single-family, townhouses, multi-family; products such as accessory apartments, live/work units). Consolidate and simplify zoning districts to allow a range of housing types.

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[4] The South Region comprises 61 MSAs including all or portions of the states of AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA, IN, KY, MA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV.

6C.3 Consider ways to provide more affordable housing in large-scale developments. Possible approaches include, but are not limited to:

- Incentive provisions (i.e., density bonuses for provision of affordable units)
- Specification of a maximum size for a percentage of the units
- Large-scale developments with housing mixes that include more affordable types (e.g., apartments, townhouses)

Narrative:
Gradual changes in the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of Greensboro's population, as well as the corresponding changes in housing needs, highlight the importance of encouraging **diversity** in the production of **new housing**. To achieve the objective of compact, cost-efficient housing developments at locations appropriate to accommodate diverse groups, some barriers remain to be removed. Large parts of Greensboro are currently zoned at relatively low density. Rezoning of large tracts to higher density often generates public opposition. Communities across the country have addressed this problem through options ranging from modified zoning and development standards that provide density incentives and/or flexible land use mixes, to disincentives for suburban, greenfield development.

While Greensboro has had reasonable success in providing a broad range of housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households, a shortage of available, appropriately zoned land is driving housing prices up. Private builders have also moved upmarket. Current market trends indicate a steady upward shift in house sales prices that is making it more difficult for **middle income households** in particular to be able to buy a home. According to the *Consolidated Plan*, as of 1999 the percentage of sales above $200,000 was 38.1 percent, up from 33 percent in 1998, 30 percent in 1997, and 28.5 percent in 1996. From 1998 to 1999 the median sale price of a new home increased by nearly $15,000 or 10.6 percent. A similar appreciation is evident in median resale home prices, which increased 33 percent between 1996 and 1999.

In addition to affordability issues, there is increasing demand for housing to accommodate persons (empty nesters, the elderly, young single professionals, etc.) that do not meet the traditional household profile of a family with children. A variety of regulatory approaches should be explored to meet these needs, beginning with regulatory changes to encourage a **mixing of housing types and sizes** within new developments. A large-scale development,

for example, could include separate areas for single-family lots, townhouses, and multi-family units.

Mixed housing types in Reedy Fork Development

Regulatory approaches to diversifying the housing mix should be based upon incentives or other forms of tradeoffs. For example, some communities in North Carolina have limits on the size of a certain percentage of the units in developments in certain districts to make them affordable and suitable for smaller households. This approach might be explored for application in Greensboro in conjunction with offsetting density incentives.