Oak Hill Neighborhood
Revitalization
Implementation Plan

SECOND DRAFT

Prepared For
The City of Cedar Rapids

Prepared by
Krista Ehm
Renee Lorence
Carrie Marsh
Christine Ralston
Malynne Simeon
Angela Stover

May 2008
Field Problems in Planning

Department of Urban & Regional Planning
University of Iowa
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our clients at the City of Cedar Rapids Department of Development for supervising our project and for supplying us with the data needed to complete our project. Thank you for all of your support and assistance and for trusting us to accomplish this project. We would also like to thank the Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood Association for allowing us to attend various meetings and contributing to our project. Similarly, we appreciate all of the Oak Hill residents who contributed information for our report. Thank you Metro High School for allowing us to speak to your students and Jane Boyd Community Center for permitting us to use your facilities. Finally, we would like to recognize Dr. Heather MacDonald, Associate Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, for providing insight and guidance as our advisor for this project.
# Table of Contents

## iii Acknowledgment

## vi Executive Summary
- Purpose
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations

## 1 Introduction
- Purpose
- Planning Process
- Sections of Document
- History of City & Neighborhood
- Maxfield Research Inc. Draft Report

## 7 Current Condition
- Community Profile & Demographic
- Housing Condition Survey
- Public Participation

## 13 Findings
- Traffic & Circulation
- Services & Amenities
- Image & Appearance
- Land Use
- Housing & Investment

## 29 Goals, Strategies, & Action Steps

## 49 Recapitulation

## 51 Timeline of Action Steps

## 53 Appendix

## 55 Endnotes

## 56 Annotated Bibliography
# List of Tables & Illustrations

## Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xi</td>
<td>Study Area Map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Current Condition Survey Map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Traffic and Circulation Map</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Table 1: Housing Condition Survey Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Table 2: Percent of housing stock built during specific years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

Purpose of Project

The Oak Hill Neighborhood Revitalization Plan examines the Oak Hill Neighborhood study area as defined by the City of Cedar Rapids Department of Development. This revitalization plan suggests recommendations to address several problems in the study area including:

- The deteriorating conditions of neighborhood homes
- The increase in the number of vacant lots and underutilized land
- A lack of safe and convenient pedestrian paths
- Insufficient connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods
- A need for additional social services

Methodology

Our analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data. Our data includes:

- An inventory of exterior housing conditions and vacant lots
- Results from two neighborhood forums to gather information from residents and stakeholders in adjoining neighborhoods
• Information gathered by attending multiple Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood Association meetings
• Informative interviews with city officials
• Focus group with the Oak Hill Action Team
• Information from a Cedar Rapids City Council Meeting
• Analysis of traffic patterns and demographic data

Findings
Based on our research, we have concluded that the following substantive topics should be addressed in the revitalization of the study area.

Resources and Constraints
Perceived crime and a negative view of the neighborhood exist in Cedar Rapids; however, most crime takes place in the downtown portion of the neighborhood beat (Community Meeting with Police Officer).

Traffic and Connectivity
Although traffic and connectivity are not the primary concerns of neighborhood residents, these issues present a challenge for the neighborhood. In particular, the neighborhood is somewhat isolated from nearby areas with substantial investment, such as Czech Village and downtown. Roads, blocks of deteriorated buildings, and vacant lots create a barrier to potential investment.

Services and Amenities
There are many services and amenities currently in and around the study area such as parks, Metro High School, and senior assisted living homes, all of which have the potential to be highly marketable. However, there is great interest from residents to have a grocery store, gas station, coffee shop, and to reopen an elementary school.
**Image and Appearance**

The neighborhood has narrow rights-of-way and many mature trees. Currently, vacant lots detract from the image of the area; however, they also offer opportunity for growth and the inclusion of good design. Although deteriorated housing detracts from the overall image of the area, 9th St. SE has several homes to which major exterior improvements have been made.

**Land Use**

Vacant lots are fairly well maintained, but could be used in various ways in the interim while waiting to develop more infill housing. There is currently a community-led initiative to create a community garden on at least one vacant lot in the study area.

**Housing and Investment**

The City is actively engaged in developing new single-family homes on vacant lots. The nation-wide housing crisis has slowed down home sales in Cedar Rapids and therefore the city will only help with funding of new homes in the area if there is a committed buyer. Current homeowners would benefit from low-interest loan programs to help maintain their homes.
Recommendations

Based on our findings, the following recommendations are suggested for the revitalization of the Oak Hill Neighborhood:

- Continue to seek out homeowners and developers to invest in infill homes
- Support renovations of single family homes in the neighborhood through various funding programs
- Encourage short- and medium-term uses for vacant lots
- Upgrade sidewalks, alley ways, and roads to promote safety, functionality, and a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood
- Support business development in the Oak Hill-Jackson neighborhood
- Utilize the neighborhood association, Metro High School, and local businesses to support community-minded efforts such as community gardens, litter pickup, and home maintenance for the elderly.
The Oak Hill Neighborhood Revitalization project aims to do several things. The study area, a portion of the Oak Hill Neighborhood, is located south of downtown Cedar Rapids. It is an irregularly-shaped area bounded by Ninth Avenue SE, Tenth Street SE, Twelfth Avenue SE, Sixth Street SE, Eleventh Avenue SE, and Fifth Street SE.
Introduction

Oak Hill Neighborhood Revitalization Implementation Plan

Purpose

The purpose of our project is to make recommendations regarding several issues of importance to the City of Cedar Rapids with regard to the study area, located in the Oak Hill Neighborhood. These issues include:

- Deterioration of homes
- Vacant lots and underutilized land
- Lack of safe and convenient pedestrian paths
- Inadequate connectivity with surrounding neighborhoods
- Need for additional services

The Oak Hill Neighborhood Association created a neighborhood plan in 2000; however, this plan was not fully implemented. This plan considers elements of the first plan, resident input, and City priorities in making its recommendations.
Planning Process

The first step in the planning process was to analyze the current condition of the study area. We conducted an on-site housing condition survey and recorded information about the condition of the streets, sidewalks, and vacant lots. Our visits to the area also examined the existing businesses and services nearby. We used Census 2000 data to obtain information about the residents of the area. Another important source of information was the monthly Oak Hill Neighborhood Association meetings, which members of our group attended regularly.

In addition to site visits and discussions with residents, we read case studies from other cities and performed additional research on strategies for revitalizing neighborhoods. Individual members of the group focused on different aspects of the revitalization plan: traffic and connectivity, services and amenities, image and appearance, land use, and housing and investment. This research allowed us to form clear ideas for potential action steps for the neighborhood revitalization process.

The neighborhood had already completed a planning process in 2000, which resulted in the Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan. A dozen or so potential projects were identified in that plan, but little progress has been made on implementing them. In order to reevaluate those projects, which had already been identified as priorities by neighborhood residents, we conducted two public forums at the Jane Boyd Community Center. The second forum was held because poor weather conditions resulted in low attendance at the first forum. This second forum was publicized via television, an announcement in the Oak Hill neighborhood newsletter, and individual postcards sent to every residence within the study area. The purpose of these forums was to prioritize projects and to brainstorm action steps for their success, as well as to identify potential challenges to implementation.
Additionally, we convened a focus group of finance and real estate professionals at City Hall. The Oak Hill Action Team (OHAT) was formed by the City to assist in developing strategies for new housing. Topics of discussion included financial incentives, City and neighborhood housing strategies, and barriers to investment. This meeting increased our awareness of successful revitalization strategies and informed us of the business climate.

Throughout the planning process, we have discussed our ideas with Jennifer Pratt, Planner at the City of Cedar Rapids, as well as our faculty advisor, Dr. Heather MacDonald.

Sections of Document

This document begins with a brief history of Cedar Rapids and the Oak Hill neighborhood. This section also details the history of the planning process in the neighborhood. We then provide an overview of the current condition of the study area. The next section of the document is dedicated to our findings with respect to the following elements:

- Traffic and Connectivity
- Services and Amenities
- Image and Appearance
- Land Use
- Housing and Investment

Finally, the remainder of the document consists of our goals, recommendations, and proposed action steps for the study area regarding the above-mentioned elements.
History of Cedar Rapids & the Oak Hill Neighborhood

The Oak Hill neighborhood is among Cedar Rapids’ oldest neighborhoods. This near-downtown neighborhood was developed by Czech and Slovak immigrants and has historically been inhabited by Cedar Rapidians working in nearby industries. By providing several hundred jobs, the T.M. Sinclair Packing Company and railroad companies such as Chicago and Northwestern facilitated the growth of this immigrant community in the late nineteenth century. Simple single-story homes for these workers were built on small lots throughout the expanding neighborhood.

Taylor School and St. Wenceslaus Bohemian Catholic Church were two establishments that exemplified the ethnic diversity of the neighborhood in its early years. Czech, Irish, African-American, Greek, Lebanese, Slovak and Scandinavian children were among those attending Taylor School. Although the workers and their families in the neighborhood developed a strong sense of community through the development of these institutions and of the neighborhood commercial district, they also faced significant economic hardship. Teacher and social worker Jane Boyd taught English classes and developed work programs in the neighborhood to help residents cope with these obstacles.

The Great Depression had a profound impact on the City of Cedar Rapids and on the Oak Hill neighborhood as area industries closed their doors and the unemployment rate rose dramatically. The neighborhood eventually recovered from this difficult time along with the rest of the country. Oak Hill continued to be populated by a diverse group of industrial workers into the second half of the century.

The neighborhood underwent substantial changes following the demolition of 31 percent of its housing stock in the late 1960s due to anticipated industrial and hospital expansions. The expansions did not take place, which resulted in both a decrease in population and a high percentage of vacant land. According to the 1990 Census as
cited in the 2000 Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan, the neighborhood lost approximately half its population in the twenty-year period from 1970 to 1990. The loss of housing and population, along with the aging of the remaining housing stock, led neighborhood residents and City officials to recognize the need for a neighborhood revitalization plan.

The 1979 Oak Hill Neighborhood Improvement Plan included housing stock survey results and strategies for rehabilitation. Following the development of this plan, the Cedar Rapids Department of Development and neighborhood residents worked to improve housing conditions to restore neighborhood vitality and economic viability. Despite these efforts, the need for neighborhood revitalization continued over the next 20 years and resulted in the creation of an updated Oak Hill Plan.

The 2000 Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan is more comprehensive than the 1979 plan and includes a substantial amount of input from neighborhood residents. An Image Preference Survey was conducted and a charrette was held to help residents and other Oak Hill stakeholders express their ideas for the neighborhood and reach a consensus regarding future goals. Many goals described in this plan continue to be priorities for neighborhood residents, Development staff, and City officials.

Unfortunately, the vision outlined in the 2000 Plan has not become a reality due to financial and other obstacles. The Cedar Rapids Department of Development is updating surveys of the area, working with neighborhood residents and stakeholders, gathering input from various consultant groups, and preparing to move forward with Oak Hill revitalization projects.
Maxfield Research Inc. Draft Report

Maxfield Research Inc., based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, recently completed a draft analysis of Cedar Rapids' downtown neighborhoods, including Oak Hill. The City requested the study in order to gain a better insight into the strengths, weaknesses, and possible opportunities in downtown Cedar Rapids neighborhoods, specifically in terms of increasing and improving housing. The study also addresses the role of neighborhood amenities in supporting housing development and upkeep. Although the study is in the draft phase, it supports many of the recommendations that have been noted by city planners and neighborhood residents.
**Current Condition**

**Community Profile & Economic & Demographic Trends**

The Oak Hill neighborhood population has declined dramatically over the past forty years. This decline in population and the concurrent decline in industrial and commercial areas in and around Oak Hill have resulted in neighborhood demographic changes. Changes in resident characteristics include age and economic status.

The elderly population in the Oak Hill neighborhood has increased significantly relative to other age groups. The majority of older residents are long-term residents and many have called Oak Hill home for decades. As the population of the neighborhood and the state of Iowa continues to age, an increase in services for this group has been identified as a need. Due to the loss of housing and subsequent loss of families with children in the neighborhood, there is no longer an elementary school in Oak Hill, which may be an obstacle to attracting new residents to the neighborhood. The elementary school for the study area is Grant Wood elementary.

The neighborhood continues to be one of the most diverse in the City. The proportion of minority residents is substantially higher than most other Cedar Rapids
neighborhoods. Fortunately, most neighborhood residents view diversity as an important asset and hope Oak Hill continues to be diverse as the population changes over time. According to residents, there is a strong sense of community in the neighborhood despite individual differences.

Oak Hill has been home primarily to working class families since its initial development. Residents continue to have low household incomes; however, the median family income has decreased significantly over the last forty years. The study area is located within Census Tract 27. According to the 2000 Census, the Tract’s 1999 median household income was $15,110—less than half that of Cedar Rapids. Concurrent rises in unemployment and poverty rates have negatively impacted the neighborhood and served as a significant barrier to neighborhood revitalization and investment by both residents and others in the community. This change also has had negative effects on the Oak Hill image and the housing market. For example, neighborhood residents note that many Cedar Rapidians consider the Oak Hill neighborhood to be a high-crime area. This is the case in spite of evidence that directly contradicts this perception.

**Housing Condition Survey Results**

During the fall of 2007, we conducted a housing condition survey for the study area in order to have a comprehensive picture of current housing, road and sidewalk conditions. We rated the condition of 142 parcels, of which 112 were houses and 30 vacant lots. The housing condition survey evaluated each structure’s roof and chimney, siding and exterior, windows and doors, foundation, and yard. The adjoining road and sidewalk of each parcel were also rated based on their condition, such as presence of debris or cracks in the pavement. Vacant lots were given an overall rating based on plant growth, surface grading, and overall appearance. The results of the survey are shown on a block-by-block basis, in order to protect privacy, on a map on the following page. These results incorporate the average housing condition on each block with the condition scores of any vacant lots on the same block. Conditions may vary greatly from house to house within some blocks.
Each parcel and structure was rated from one to four. A parcel and structure that demonstrated excellent or well kept condition was given a rating of one. A parcel and structure that demonstrated generally good condition was given a rating of two. Parcels or structures that had some defects or needed some maintenance were given a rating of three, or fair condition. Homes and lots with serious defects or in poor condition were given a rating of four. Elements of the structure, such as roof and chimney or foundation, which could not be seen during the survey, were noted.

Results

In general, housing condition is fairly good, although there is a wide range between homes in excellent condition and those which are in poor condition. Of the characteristics evaluated, roofs were rated in the poorest average condition, with a score of 2.30. Yards were the category which was best maintained, with an average condition score of 1.87. Overall, houses scored an average of 2.05, equivalent to good condition. The median of the average home condition score is 2.00, indicating that a fairly equal number of houses fall on either side of the mean, or that there are an equal number of homes which are in good to excellent condition as there are in fair to poor condition.

We found that vacant lots are also in good condition; again, there is a range of conditions from poor to excellent. The vacant lots scored a poorer condition than the parcels with housing, with an average score of 2.33, which indicates an overall condition between good and fair. The median score of the vacant lots was 2.00, which
suggests a positively skewed distribution of conditions, or that there are a few lots in poor condition but more of the lots are in excellent to good condition.

There are several areas of concern regarding housing conditions, in particular the south side of the study area, between 5th St SE and 6th St SE. These two blocks also contains quite a few vacant lots and poorly rated road conditions. The north east block of the study area contains houses which range from excellent to poor condition, so that the overall fair rating is not necessarily reflective of individual parcels.

Public Participation Results

A good deal of our research involved speaking with neighborhood residents and other stakeholders to obtain their ideas and preferences. In order to facilitate this, we conducted two public forums. The first was held February 18, 2008 at the Jane Boyd Community Center in conjunction with the Oak Hill Neighborhood Association Meeting. This meeting was originally scheduled for the previous Monday, but was rescheduled due to inclement weather. Unfortunately, snowy weather impacted this meeting as well and twelve people attended. Enthusiastic participation favored bringing a grocery store to the neighborhood. Concerns were also voiced about the lack of implementation of the recommendations of the Oak Hill Neighborhood 2000 Plan.

Due to weather, a second public forum was held March 12, 2008. This forum was slightly better attended, with many new participants who had not previously voiced their ideas. The sixteen participants included diverse interests, such as several long-time residents, a City park representative, and Jane Boyd Community House staff members. These participants identified housing as their top priority, with infill housing ranking slightly above housing rehabilitation assistance. A grocery store and improvement of street lighting were also identified as important. Brainstorming and group discussions revealed that health promotion, good design, and financial assistance are important considerations in implementing the housing projects. It also
became apparent that there is a "sense of community" among residents. Qualities such as the churches, Metro High School, a diverse population, and the unique location are valued aspects of the neighborhood. Multiple participants mentioned sustainable and environmentally innovative practices as a way to improve the neighborhood for existing and future residents. These practices could occur through housing design, community gardens, or renewable energy production. Participants also cited several barriers to development in the area. The location in the floodplain, lack of elementary school, lack of investment and low property values were all discussed as challenges. Also, poor infrastructure and negative perceptions of the neighborhood were identified as issues that need to be addressed.

At the conclusion of the second public forum, a short individual survey was conducted. Participants identified a grocery store as the most needed service or retail, with 13 out of 17 respondents. A coffee shop, gas station, restaurant/bar, and bakery were also cited with 4-6 positive responses. Additional suggestions included a bank and a small business incubator. Survey respondents currently shop at HyVee (10 out of 13) and Walmart or Target (6 total) for their goods. The majority travel to these destinations by car, with an average of 2 non-work trips a day. Respondents also often use a multi-modal travel method going to work and non-work locations, with travel by car, bike, and walk about equally split and use of bus being slightly less. Most respondents never use public transit (10 out of 12) and half are not sure if public transit connects them to places that they need to go. Recreational trails are used much more frequently, with eight out of 12 respondents using them at least once a month. One respondent mentioned safety of the trail as a concern. The river, downtown, Cargill, and the nature center were mentioned as potential trail destinations. Respondents indicated that they would most likely attend neighborhood activities such as a community service day and a block party/ cookout. Although this survey does not have a sufficient number of responses to draw conclusions for all the residents of the study area, it does support our findings and recommendations drawn from other sources.
The housing condition survey was conducted during the fall of 2007. The survey evaluated each structure's roof and chimney, exterior siding, windows and doors, foundation, and yard. It also surveyed roads and sidewalks of adjacent parcels. There were 142 parcels and 30 vacant lots.
Findings

This section reports our findings for each of the elements upon which the study focuses. These elements include traffic and connectivity, services and amenities, image and appearance, land use, and housing and investment.

Traffic and Connectivity

Connectivity

The primary mode of transport for area residents is the automobile; however, many residents also use a combined mode of transportation. This frequently includes walking and biking, and to a lesser extent the city bus system. Public transportation is not a frequently chosen option for most neighborhood residents. Public transportation, both generally and in the City of Cedar Rapids specifically, suffers from negative perceptions and low ridership. This issue is being addressed by the City Transportation Department, which recently completed a study on some of the barriers to promoting public transit. The Department reported a 16% increase in ridership in the last year. This is believed to be largely due to the increase in fuel prices. As fuel prices are expected to remain high, it is logical to expect that use of City buses will increase somewhat within the neighborhood. Currently, most residents reach major
shopping areas such as Wal-Mart and the Collins Road area by car. The nearest
grocery store, Hy-Vee on 1st Avenue NE, is approximately one mile away.

Although the study area is only six blocks from downtown Cedar Rapids, high levels of
traffic on certain roads effectively create a barrier from the downtown area. The
connection to the historic Czech Village across the river is also hampered by noisy
traffic and unpleasant streetscapes.

Connectivity is as much a social issue as an actual infrastructure problem. As much of
the population of the area ages, or new elderly residents move into the area, it will be
increasingly important to reduce isolation. One way to accomplish this is by providing
additional transportation options, such as a private or public mini-bus or an improved
City bus system. Additionally, attracting businesses to the neighborhood and
improving sidewalks will increase local choices.

*Sidewalk*

Well-maintained streets are typically patched, resurfaced, and swept. Sidewalks, like
streets, need to be maintained; yet, often sidewalks are ignored. Poorly-maintained
sidewalks can be dangerous and threaten the safety of pedestrians. The Housing
Condition Survey identified poorly-maintained sidewalks throughout the study area.
The Traffic and Connectivity Map identifies the location of poorly maintained sidewalks.
The survey also identified other issues such as:

- Poor quality sidewalk surface (i.e. broken or uneven concrete)
- Obstacles blocking sidewalk (overhanging shrubs or branches)
- Missing sections of sidewalk (gaps in sections of sidewalk system)

Sidewalks are located in public rights-of-way; however, like many other cities, the City
of Cedar Rapids assigns maintenance responsibility to homeowners over the sidewalk
that is adjacent to their property. Homeowner responsibilities include leaf and other debris removal and snow removal during the winter.

**Streetscape**

Well-designed walking environments are enhanced by urban design elements such as streetscape furniture. This can include benches, bike racks, and pedestrian lighting. Additionally, street trees are an important part of the urban design element. The combination of street trees, sidewalks, and streetscape furniture forms the streetscape. The streetscape is an important part of the neighborhood for improving safety. It also helps create an aesthetically pleasing area.

The study area lacks many urban design elements such as pedestrian lighting, landscaping, and traffic calming devices. Residents have identified their concern for the neighborhood’s inadequate lighting. As mentioned in the previous section, sidewalks are poorly maintained. Trees located near the sidewalk have caused many of the sidewalks to crack. These uneven sidewalks pose an obstacle for pedestrians.

Fortunately, the Oak Hill neighborhood has a number of mature trees that line the street. Because street trees are an important part of the walking environment, the neighborhood has the potential to become a vibrant, well-designed, and attractive location.

The Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) Program initial public improvements plan currently identifies a number of locations for alley paving, sidewalk and curb/gutter repair, street lighting improvements, and street reconstruction. HAND has identified 6th Street SE as a main reconstruction project.

**Traffic**

There are several areas of traffic concern. Heavy truck traffic along 12th Avenue SE and 6th Street SE are frequently mentioned as problems for neighborhood residents.
Findings  Traffic & Connectivity

Narrow roadways within the neighborhood act to slow traffic but also create a hazard at some points because parked cars block a clean line of vision for observing pedestrians and other cars. Another related issue regarding roadways is City maintenance. Potholes are found in several locations in the study area (see map for road conditions). In general, traffic issues are not identified by residents as the highest priority for the neighborhood at this time.

Parking

Parking has become a growing concern among Oak Hill neighborhood residents. One particular problem is the increased off-site parking on streets adjacent to Mercy Hospital. Employees and patients of Mercy Hospital typically park in the on-site provided parking lot; however, as the parking lot fills up during peak periods, more cars are parked along 9th Avenue SE and 9th Street SE.

The lack of landscaping around parking lots is another issue the neighborhood faces. Providing appropriate parking lot landscaping improves views of the neighborhood. Residents have also stressed their concern about excessive amounts of front yard debris and junk cars on specific properties. The map on the next page identifies other parking issues in the study area.
The Transportation and Circulation map identifies the neighborhood's issues and challenges. The issues the residents are concerned with are parking, traffic, road and sidewalk conditions, connectivity, and lack of streetscape enhancements.

Legend:
- Study Area
- High Volume of Traffic
- Problematic Road
- Problematic Sidewalk
- Problematic Intersections
- Brick Paving
- Sidewalk/Trail
- Parking Problem
- Proposed Streetscape Improvements

Surrounding Area

Oak Hill Neighborhood  Revitalization Implementation Plan
Services and Amenities

Parks

Although not present within the confines of the study area, quite a few services and amenities exist in the surrounding neighborhood. This area is very family-oriented, which is a key amenity for the community in general. Various parks within and near Oak Hill benefit the community. These parks contribute to the growth of families and the neighborhood by providing picnic areas, soccer fields, volleyball courts, playgrounds, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and other uses.

Service Providers

Neighborhood forum participants identified various neighborhood services that function as amenities. These include Metro High School, senior assisted living homes, Bender Pool, and OPTIONS. The Jane Boyd Community Center is another important neighborhood amenity. Jane Boyd is privately-run, centrally-located, and provides a number of community services to Oak Hill residents. The Center offers programs and services for family and youth, senior congregate meals, and a free medical clinic, amongst other services. Neighborhood residents can also use Jane Boyd as a community social center.

Oak Hill is also interested in attracting more diverse services and amenities to the neighborhood. Residents identified the following as priorities: coffee shop, gas station, elementary school, and grocery store. The primary focus is on attracting a full-service grocery store to the neighborhood; however, there is also strong interest among several residents to consider reopening the neighborhood elementary school.

At the second forum, several participants indicated an interest in a neighborhood elementary school. This interest is also expressed in the Oak Hill Neighborhood 2000 Plan. The 2000 Plan states that the presence of an elementary school will “have a
unifying effect on Oak Hill and a positive impact on single family home construction in the neighborhood.” Reopening the elementary school may also encourage more residents to move into the neighborhood as well as contribute to the sense of community of Oak Hill.

**Grocery Store**

Currently there is no full-service grocery store in the Oak Hill neighborhood. Residents travel to other stores throughout the City, such as Hy-Vee and Wal-Mart. The lack of a grocery store is a primary concern of Oak Hill residents. Cedar Rapids has previously helped to keep a grocery store in a largely residential neighborhood. In the Wellington Heights and Mound View neighborhoods, the Hy-Vee grocery store was old and in need of repair. In the early 2000s, the city provided tax increment financing (TIF) with an up-front payment in order to help Hy-Vee cover the costs of property acquisition, landscaping, and façade improvements. This example differs greatly from Oak Hill since the grocery store was already established; however, this situation serves as an example of the City’s previous efforts to provide grocery services to a neighborhood.

There has already been some progress by local residents on the effort to attract a grocery to the study area. Kalona Organics has agreed to sell organic dairy products to residents beginning within the next three to six months. Kalona Organics has also agreed to provide the refrigerated coolers as needed. This will serve as a small grocery store until a larger full-service grocery is attracted to the area.

**General Amenities**

Other general characteristics and land uses benefit the neighborhood. The various lands uses could make Oak Hill a marketable neighborhood if investors take the opportunity to invest and create an area of growth, development, and sense of place. Community Forum participants also identified other positive attributes such as walkability, safety, tranquility, diversity, longevity, and community pride.
Although the neighborhood possesses these amenities, there are additional services and amenities that neighborhood residents desire and need. As mentioned above, the primary concern in this category is the lack of a grocery store within an easily walkable distance of the study area.

Image and Appearance

Improving the image and appearance of the Oak Hill study area is an important factor in revitalizing the neighborhood. This element has several components: creating a well-planned and aesthetically appealing design for the neighborhood, creating a marketable image for current and prospective business owners, and enhancing Cedar Rapids residents’ perceptions of the Oak Hill study area.

Positive Attributes

The goals and concerns of Oak Hill residents, obtained from the two public forums, were given great weight in formulating our recommendations. The perception of crime in the neighborhood is a particular concern to neighborhood residents. Crime data show that most of the crime occurring in the Oak Hill-Jackson neighborhood happens at nearby downtown bars. The rest of the neighborhood sees very little criminal activity. Regardless, the perception of criminal activity is a problem for the neighborhood’s image. To counter this perception, positive elements of the study area should be emphasized. Important positive aspects of the Oak Hill neighborhood include its:

- Safety
- Affordability
- Walkability
- Proximity to schools, workplaces, parks, museums, and restaurants
- Neighborly attitudes
Areas of Improvement

Even with these positive elements, there is room for improvement with respect to Oak Hill's image and appearance. The study area lacks features that make common areas inviting, such as garbage cans and benches. Additionally, the housing condition survey revealed that property maintenance is lacking in parts of the study area. These issues must be addressed in order to improve greater Cedar Rapids' perception of Oak Hill.

Another important issue to neighborhood residents is attracting new commercial activity to the study area. The most desirable new business for local residents, a grocery store, is discussed in the previous section of this report; however, drawing any new business activity is dependent on creating a marketable image to attract potential business owners.

Land Use

Vacant Lots

Vacant lot redevelopment is a priority with the City and residents, as everyone recognizes the need for housing investment. There are a total of 57 vacant lots in the study area with 48 owned by the City. The percentage of vacant land is high when compared to other areas of Cedar Rapids. The Housing Condition Survey includes the condition of vacant lots. The majority of vacant lots are fairly well maintained, although there is a public perception that the City could do more to maintain the lots. Most vacant lots are flat, but some have mounds of dirt or holes. Although some lots contain one or more mature trees, most are just grass and/or dirt. The narrowest lots are 30 feet wide, but there are wider lots as well. There are also adjoining vacant lots, which present a wider range of options for future development. In the short- to medium-term this land represents an opportunity. However, the current amount of vacant land represents a challenge to creating positive perceptions about the
neighborhood, attracting housing investment, and having sufficient population to support local businesses.

The participants from the second community forum commented that vacant lots were a concern to them for various reasons:

- Lowers investment in the neighborhood
- Lowers property values
- Gives undesired wild animals places to live
- City lots are not maintained as well as residents desire

The residents from the two community forums suggested their preferred uses for the vacant lots with a focus on sustainability, interim development, and investment:

- Build houses
- Community gardens
- Courtyard(s)
- Landscaping (for prospective homes)
- New homes should maintain mixed income of neighborhood
- Commercial garden with produce donated or possibly sold
- Lighting and sidewalks must also be maintained in tandem to vacant lot development
- Mixed commercial and housing units on busier streets

The City owns the majority of vacant lots. The City maintains the lots but various levels of upkeep suggest certain lots are visited more often or are additionally cared for by neighbors.

The study area does not contain any parks, playgrounds, or gardens. The Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood Association has secured funding and is actively pursing the
creation of one or more community gardens on vacant lots, which in turn will reduce the City’s upkeep responsibilities. The Association also plans to use the community garden for educational purposes. This movement demonstrates the community’s active involvement in the area and should be viewed as an important asset.

Vacant lots have been addressed in various ways throughout the United States. Bringing Buildings Back, a recent book by the National Housing Institute, addresses the need to redevelop lots with interim uses along with potential uses beyond houses and buildings. The book suggests:

- Lot stabilization (i.e. mowing, clearing snow)
- Sitting areas and mini-parks
- Playgrounds and tot lots
- Parks
- Community commons
- Community gardens

Case Studies

Community gardens have been tested in various locations throughout the U.S. The following describes some of these communities.

The City of Minneapolis, MN has dealt with vacant lots in a few key ways. The City actively encourages the building of single family housing on vacant lots (City of Minneapolis, 2008). The greater Twin Cities region also has an active and engaged community garden group, which supports the utilization of vacant lots for community gardens to order to: reduce municipal costs, increase property values, create green space, provide food to families, prevent crime, and create cultural and educational opportunities (Garden Works, 2008).
The City of Baltimore has had a major drop in population and resulting in abandonment of properties. Their suggestions reflect this change. Vacant lots should:

- Be developed at a density that the city needs
- Provide job training either in the development of the properties or in building of a job training center
- Be creative in finding funds such as including historical rehabilitation funds, low-income redevelopment, and other regional and national funds

Library gardens programs have been implemented in several cities throughout the Country where vacant lots are near libraries. Charlottesville, VA, New York City (multiple branches), NY, and Barrington, IL are all examples of cities that took empty lots adjoining libraries and made them into ‘reading gardens’ (Kuzyk, 2007). Although none of the vacant lots in the Oak Hill neighborhood adjoin a library, the case study is applicable because it stresses the importance of 1) working with local gardening groups to plant and maintain an area, and 2) the possibility of using the lot for teaching horticulture or gardening.

There are a variety of vacant lot uses that have succeeded in the U.S. Therefore, it is recommended that the City address lots in short- and medium-term phases. The goals that the community members and the City seek are consistent with strategies other cities have implemented to address vacant lots. A key to the success of projects in the Oak Hill neighborhood, as demonstrated in other cities, is the presence of active community members dedicated to working and volunteering in the neighborhood.

*Environmental Issues*

A number of Oak Hill residents are innovators and strong supporters of environmentally sustainable practices. Such activities include recycling, urban gardens, alternative energy, home heating conservation practices, and use of soy as a petroleum substitute. Several of the Oak Hill residents strongly support environmental
sustainability as a theme for neighborhood revitalization. Many options provide environmental benefits; however, the Oak Hill neighborhood requires the most efficient use of limited funds. Energy savings is an important consideration for many residents; therefore, most neighborhood residents will welcome practices that lead to cost savings as well as environmental conservation. Also, the near downtown location becomes an advantage as commuters seek to travel shorter distances to work and save on fuel costs.

Housing and Investment

Housing remains an important concern in the Oak Hill study area. The housing stock is aging and in need of rehabilitation. Table 1 shows the age distribution of Oak Hill-Jackson’s housing stock.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Built</th>
<th>Percent of Stock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 or later</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1959</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1939</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The City would like to see reinvestment in the Oak Hill neighborhood to reestablish the residential neighborhood. However, low incomes across the study area are a significant barrier to housing reinvestment. The study area is in census tract 27, and the 2000 Census reports the 1999 median household income of that census tract as $15,110. Further, Maxfield Research Inc. estimated the median household income in 2007 to be $16,455. Maxfield’s data is estimated by Claritas, Inc. and revised based on their own household estimates and projections based on local data. This financial constraint will require the City to provide assistance – both financial and technical – if housing rehabilitation is to become reality.

*Table 2: Percent of housing stock built during specific years*

*Source: An Analysis of Downtown Urban Neighborhoods in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Draft, Maxfield Research Inc., 2007*
The City currently uses CDBG and HOME Funds for home rehabilitation. There is currently no City-funded program to help with home rehabilitation. One possible idea that has worked in Iowa City is the Targeted Area Rehabilitation Program (TARP). This program allows low and medium income families to receive a low interest loan for interior and exterior repairs and home improvement. The funding is authorized by City Council and provided through the issuance of guaranteed bonds. The income guidelines are set by the City and, therefore, can potentially serve a larger number of residents than CDGB funds. Because the money is invested in the City itself by increasing the tax base, the City and residents would gain from such a program.

In addition to federal CDBG and HOME funds, there is another option for housing rehabilitation funding. The Iowa Finance Authority operates the OurHome Rehabilitation program. This program provides low-interest loan funds to eligible entities for single-family home rehabilitation.

The rebuilding of homes is an important step in revitalizing this neighborhood and has been considered by the City for years. The City has created a system of funding to help lower the cost of building in this neighborhood. The local housing market is struggling currently since it has one of the highest foreclosure rates in Iowa. Due to these circumstances, the City has agreed to continue to support additional funding of homes in the neighborhood; however, each home must have a committed purchaser prior to home construction. Although this has dramatically altered the original plans, members of City Council felt it was a necessary change due to the potential negative effects of vacant new homes.

Because housing has been a citywide concern in Cedar Rapids, the City hired a consultant to assess the situation. Maxfield Research Inc.'s findings apply to the entire Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood. Maxfield Research Inc.'s suggestions include improving homes in the area through upkeep of zoning regulations and working with property owners to address maintenance issues. The study notes that out of the five
neighborhoods researched, the Oak Hill-Jackson neighborhood has had the largest number of demolitions between 2000 and 2006 with a total of 31. The research also notes that the area's strengths include its proximity to downtown, the closeness to museums and the New Bohemian area, and the fact that the Oak Hill-Jackson neighborhood contains the largest pieces of developable land in the central part of the city.

In addition to building houses, encouraging new businesses in the neighborhood is another potential investment strategy. Properties considered appropriate for businesses include vacant buildings along 12th Avenue SE.
The following section lists the recommended goals, strategies and action steps. They are designed to guide the implementation process for the vision and priorities which were originally identified by the Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan (2000) and further reiterated during the course of this study. In previous sections of this document, issues that are of concern to residents, business owners, and other interested participants were identified. The action steps are intended to address these concerns and provide a framework for the City to organize its efforts with the help of neighborhood residents and other local resource organizations. The action steps are categorized by the recommended timeframe as either short-term (less than five years) or medium-term (five to fifteen years). Of course, the medium-term timeframe does not suggest that these actions cannot take place in less than five years, but rather that the financial, planning, or practical concerns will dictate that they likely will take longer to accomplish.

**Goal 1** Create a physical environment that encourages walking.
This goal focuses on making the neighborhood a pleasant place for residents and visitors to walk. This will help connect residents to their neighborhood, to each other, and to nearby destinations. Promotion of a clean, safe, and aesthetically appealing street environment encourages pride in the area and attracts investment. Achievement of this goal will reduce local dependence on the automobile and its associated costs. It also aims to shift perceptions in a positive manner. Through increased activity on the street, the sense of safety is also increased. Improving the health of residents by providing recreation and alternative travel opportunities is an additional positive outcome of this goal.

**Strategy 1** Improve the sidewalks throughout the neighborhood and develop the streetscape on main arterial roads.

It is important to create a safe and accessible network of sidewalks and bikeways. Poor sidewalk condition currently detracts from the neighborhood environment and limits choices for walking, play and social interaction. Additionally, the sidewalk is the main foundation for the streetscape. The streetscape is part of the infrastructure and amenities, located mainly within the road right-of-way, which relates to the non-motorized modes of transportation (such as walking and biking) of various users.

**Action Steps**

**Short-term**

1. Improve sidewalks in the neighborhood, ensuring no gaps or broken sidewalks.

2. Make pedestrian access improvements that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for sidewalks and curb cuts in the neighborhood.
Medium-term

1. Use traffic calming devices (i.e. brick paving and speed bumps) for busy arterial streets such as 12th Avenue SE.

2. Enhance arterial streets with streetscape improvements such as banners, planters, trees, street furniture, bus shelters, trash bins, and lighting.

Strategy 2 Increase safety for pedestrians and drivers.

Providing a safe environment for residents in the neighborhood is a high priority. Brighter, pedestrian-friendly lighting is needed to improve the safety and welfare of neighborhood residents. Speeding cars and line-of-sight blockage increase the likelihood that pedestrians will be injured. This is of special concern for children or people with limited mobility. While the responsibility for pedestrian incidents is shared by drivers and pedestrians, it is important to reduce the potential for conflict wherever possible.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Provide pedestrian lighting to help deter crime.

2. Improve signage and safety of crosswalks at problematic intersections (see Traffic and Circulation map).

Strategy 3 Encourage parking improvements that are convenient, safe, and aesthetically pleasing.

The on- and off-street parking is a particular concern of neighborhood residents, especially that which is located adjacent to Mercy Hospital on 9th Avenue SE and 9th Street SE. The ability to provide adequate parking supply for
patrons is necessary; however, the current parking lot is insufficient and not aesthetically pleasing. In particular, landscaping is insufficient.

**Action Steps**

**Short-term**

1. Limit parking to one side of the street at the area of 9th Avenue SE and 9th Street SE.

**Medium-term**

1. Develop a new parking garage to serve Mercy hospital patrons and other commercial or social service users.

2. Establish the landscape in and around parking lots.

**Goal 2 Integrate the neighborhood with the rest of the city.**

This goal addresses the need for the neighborhood to be better connected to other areas of the City. Currently, vacant lots, roads with high traffic volume, and deteriorated housing serve as physical barriers between the Oak Hill study area and other nearby areas which have attracted greater investment.

**Strategy 1 Improve access to public transportation and alternative means of transportation.**

Although cars are a primary mode of transport for many residents, age and income limitations may prevent many people from using an automobile. Other residents may choose alternative modes of transportation for cost savings, physical exercise, environmental concerns, or simple preference. Public transportation can serve to connect people to primary shopping and work
locations. Biking and walking allow residents of all ages and incomes to arrive at nearby destinations and increase the perception of the area as a lively neighborhood. Recreational trails provide a healthy and leisurely activity for residents.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Work with the City Transportation Department to analyze bus service from the neighborhood to shopping areas and investigate the need for new routes.

2. Partner with nearby facilities such as Jane Boyd, Bender Pool, OPTIONS, and Irving Point Assisted Living to establish a weekly mini-shuttle service.

3. Start a walking club for downtown workers.

4. Co-host a neighborhood bicycle promotion day with the Linn County Trails Association, the Iowa Bicycle Coalition or another bicycle advocacy group.

Strategy 2 Complement and share in the economic development and tourism attraction of nearby areas.

Several locations near the study area are sites for entertainment, art exhibitions, educational centers, and historical resources. They also serve as economic draws for visitors from within and outside of the City. Drawing upon the visitors to other areas would increase the viability of commercial activity in the study area. This could add value and desirable services to the neighborhood, as discussed in the Services and Amenities section of this report.
Action Steps

Short-term

1. Partner with nearby museums such as the African American Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa, and the Cedar Rapids Art Museum to promote physical improvements in the study area and encourage residents to be involved through volunteer programs or other learning opportunities.

2. Focus visual improvements such as landscaping toward the south of 12th Avenue SE around the existing neighborhood plaque.

Goal 3 Encourage businesses and services that would be assets to the neighborhood

The neighborhood lacks many businesses and services that would improve the quality of life of residents. Not only would the addition of these businesses contribute to economic gains in the community, it would further create a sense of place. These businesses and services will also serve as a revitalization strategy, attracting additional residents and encouraging current residents to stay.

Strategy 1 Attract a full service grocery store that will provide quality food, personal items, and other necessities available within a short drive or walking distance to residents

A full-service grocery store is one of the top priorities of Oak Hill neighborhood residents. The grocery will also provide convenient access to quality nutrition for the children and families living in the study area.
Action Steps

Short-term

1. Encourage the neighborhood’s collaboration with Kalona Organics to provide organic dairy products to residents and serve as a small grocery store in the interim period until a full-service grocery locates in the area.

2. Promote more advertising for Kalona Organics

Medium-term

1. Contact Aldi’s or a similar store to explore interest in a potential franchise.

2. Encourage residents to collaborate with area food suppliers (i.e. Quaker Oats) for food donations for the small grocery or to create a food co-op until a full-service grocery is available.

Strategy 2  Attract businesses to the neighborhood by highlighting the neighborhood’s assets

The neighborhood has very few businesses and has no businesses that help residents meet their daily needs. The City could be proactive and market the neighborhood as business-friendly in order to attract new business investment. The study area has a number of assets including its location in the Enterprise Zone and various constituencies such as Metro High School, Mercy Hospital, and Options, that make it attractive, supportive, and complementary to businesses. Additionally, a business that locates in the study area could employ Metro High School students in addition to neighborhood residents, decreasing payroll costs while giving students the opportunity to apply their consumer education, finance, math, or businesses courses in a practical setting.
Action Steps

Short-term

1. Encourage partnership between Metro High School and potential vendors to initiate and operate business as part of school curriculum

2. Perform simple improvements such as paint, landscape, and façade maintenance to make abandoned buildings look attractive to passers-by and potential buyers/investors

Medium-term

1. Attract business investment by promoting the current Enterprise zone in the neighborhood

2. Encourage reuse of the abandoned gas station located on 12th Avenue SE and 7th Street SE

3. Work with property owners to actively market commercial opportunities in the neighborhood to the development community

Goal 4 Develop a stronger relationship with Oak Hill residents and the Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood Association.

Several residents perceive that they are often left out of the planning process. In order to revitalize the Oak Hill neighborhood and increase resident involvement in this process, it would be helpful for the City of Cedar Rapids Development Department to improve communication with the Oak Hill residents.

Strategy 1 Establish a regular meeting time between City staff and neighborhood
residents to provide updates on the redevelopment process

Establishing a regular meeting time between City staff and neighborhood residents is a great way to improve communication between residents and the City. This will further develop and improve upon the relationship between the two resulting in more collaboration and cooperation in revitalization efforts.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Continue to attend Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood Association meetings and follow up on residents' questions, concerns, and suggestions.

2. Present a bi-annual update at the Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood Association meeting to discuss the progress or road blocks encountered during the revitalization efforts.

3. Extend invitations to relevant City or Development Department events to Oak Hill residents to develop a stronger relationship and awareness to what is occurring in and around the Oak Hill Neighborhood.

Medium-term

1. Invite Oak Hill residents to join any relevant City of Cedar Rapids citizen commissions/committees.

2. Designate a small pool of funding for neighborhood-initiated projects, and provide technical assistance where needed.

Goal 5 Encourage well-planned and aesthetically appealing design.

The neighborhood faces a number of image and appearance challenges, such
as lack of property maintenance and few new business activities. Bringing high quality design to buildings, streets, and other public spaces can help attract greater investment to the neighborhood.

**Strategy 1** Visually enhance the major transportation corridors.

Enhancing the major transportation corridor is an important approach to revitalizing the neighborhood. Creating an appealing neighborhood through improved streetscaping enhances the neighborhood's identity.

**Action Step**

**Short-term**

1. Improve streetscape (i.e. banners, planters, garbage bins) along 10th Street SE and 12th Avenue SE.

**Strategy 2** Improve neighborhood appearance through proactive property maintenance and elimination of litter.

Property maintenance and elimination of litter are needed to maintain the character of the neighborhood. Property maintenance problems were a concern among residents who attended the forums. This can be an issue in both owner- and renter-occupied housing in the neighborhood. Acceptable neighborhood standards and enforcement are needed.

**Action Steps**

**Short-term**

1. Encourage residents to organize and participate in neighborhood clean-up events.
Medium-term

1. Establish a recognition program for best improved or maintained property or block.

2. Actively encourage residents to maintain sidewalks free of debris.

3. Provide property maintenance tips, standards, and dos and don’ts in the neighborhood newsletter.

4. Encourage residents to complete minor repairs and maintain home exteriors (i.e. repaint siding and window trims).

5. Eliminate dilapidated and/or boarded up structures.

Strategy 3 Establish a program to assist seniors and residents with disabilities with property maintenance and up-keep.

One way for residents to show they care about their neighborhood is through a cooperative and friendly community work day event aimed to assist seniors and residents with disabilities. Organizing a clean-up event in the neighborhood is a fun and rewarding experience.

Action Step

Short-term

1. Work with local organizations (churches, schools and volunteer groups) to assist seniors and residents with disabilities with property maintenance.

Goal 6 Improve other City residents' impressions of the study area.

Many people in the Cedar Rapids community have negative perceptions of the neighborhood. In order to achieve many of the goals set forth in this plan, it is imperative to improve the way in which others within the City view the study
Goals, Strategies, & Action Step

area.

**Strategy 1** Further develop existing neighborhood assets such as safety, sense of community, and diversity.

Though the Oak Hill neighborhood has a reputation for high crime rates, this perception is not accurate, as discussed in the Findings section. Oak Hill residents cited their neighborly atmosphere and sense of community as an asset at the neighborhood forums. Building on these strengths will further improve the image, appearance, and sense of place in the study area.

**Action Steps**

*Short term*

1. Coordinate with local businesses and organizations to organize new community events in the neighborhood.

*Medium-term*

1. Improve marketing for neighborhood events through better use of website, cable television, newsletters, newspapers, radio, and participating businesses.

**Strategy 2** Maintain and promote the neighborhood as an area that strongly supports the arts.

The City has an interest in promoting the arts in the study area. Promoting the arts will benefit neighborhood residents through cultural opportunities and improving the built environment. Further, it will help improve City residents’ overall impression of the neighborhood.
**Action Steps**

*Short-term*

1. Continue to support Community Arts Committee.

2. Seek opportunities for the inclusion and establishment of public art at key locations.

**Goal 7** Choose environmentally sustainable practices when possible.

This goal draws upon existing leadership by local residents and new technologies in order to implement environmentally sustainable programs. Sustainable practices should also include elements of equity, economy and education. These may be applied to streetscape improvements, private landscaping, vacant lots, existing homes, and new homes in the Oak Hill neighborhood.

**Strategy 1** Promote education and awareness of environmental issues.

One basic but fundamental step to achieving this goal is educating residents and increasing awareness of environmental issues on a local level. Although the rising energy and fuel costs may be enough motivation for some, it is important to maintain a long-term view of environmental issues and alternatives to help solve them. Projects should be attainable at the local level with the use of local labor, local materials, and companies based in the region, whenever possible.
Goals, Strategies, & Action Steps

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Create a lending library of tools and information.

2. Dedicate staff time to promoting existing funding and technical assistance programs such as home heating and cooling efficiency programs.

Medium-term

1. Designate the study area as a place of focus for environmental activities.

2. Assist with organization of environmental education sessions through collaboration with such groups as the Indian Creek Nature Center, Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood Association, Metro High School, and other organizations.

Strategy 2  Implement environmentally sustainable practices in housing design.

New homes should be built utilizing energy saving techniques, designs and appliances. Energy saving options usually involve some additional initial investment but result in long term savings.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Enforce stormwater and soil management laws for new construction.

2. Encourage all new construction to utilize passive solar design.

3. Require new construction to install energy efficient appliances.
Medium-term

1. Pursue funding and technical support programs for solar and wind energy devices.

2. Assist with a community-based project and apply for funding from The Solid Waste Alternatives Program (SWAP).

3. Contact local representatives of the U.S Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service for assistance with the development of stormwater management techniques such as rain gardens and rain barrels.

**Strategy 3** Implement constructive uses of vacant lots in the interim.

This strategy is important as it transforms existing vacant lots from a detriment to an important asset for the neighborhood, even before the construction of infill housing. Research has shown that the use of vacant city lots for gardens, parks, or other public green space uses have multiple benefits for the residents in addition to raising property values. Rather than choosing a chemical or petroleum intensive management program, the City should aim to contribute to the idea of the study area as an "eco-friendly" area.

**Action Steps**

**Short-term**

1. Maintain vacant lots through mowing, snow removal, and litter pick-up.

2. Support the development of community gardens through temporary leasing of selected lots.

3. Encourage construction of a playground or tot-lot through a public-private partnership with local businesses or organizations.
4. Develop a naturalized lot (with benches and native plants) on vacant lands near the corner of 9th Ave SE and 9th St SE.

**Goal 8 Upgrade overall housing quality in the area through infill and rehabilitation**

Housing is an important element of revitalizing the Oak Hill neighborhood. Since it is a primarily residential area, this part of the implementation plan affects all other parts. The City should upgrade housing quality through new infill construction and rehabilitation of existing homes. This dual approach may be designed to provide options for a variety of income levels and sizes of households.

**Strategy 1 Encourage housing rehabilitation by current owners by increasing homeowners’ access to rehabilitation funding information**

At the second community forum, residents from the area expressed an interest in rehabilitating and improving their properties. If the City provides funding information for homeowners, they will likely feel more encouraged to follow through with home improvement ideas.

**Action Steps**

**Short-term**

1. Provide instruction regarding how to access information about available rehabilitation funds

2. Provide regularly updated information regarding local, state, and federal sources of rehabilitation funds via yearly printed newsletters and online resources.
Medium-term

1. Designate a city employee to be a contact person for residents’ questions regarding housing rehabilitation funds

Strategy 2 Create a housing rehabilitation grant/loan pool

Although funding options are available from other levels of government, competition for those funds can be fierce. Creating a City-run grant/loan pool demonstrates the priority that Cedar Rapids places on housing rehabilitation in older neighborhoods and guarantees that Cedar Rapids’ homeowners will have access to some rehabilitation subsidies.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Look to Maxfield Associates, Inc.’s recent report to determine the extent of need for housing rehabilitation funds

Medium-term

1. Write guidelines and priorities for fund awards

2. Apply for funding from Iowa Finance Authority’s OurHome Rehabilitation Program

3. Advertise and implement program

Strategy 3 Attract new homebuyers to the study area by developing infill housing on vacant lots.

The substantial number of city-owned vacant lots adversely affects both current property owners, through lowered home values, and the City, through lost tax revenues. Encouraging infill housing will raise tax revenues and offer an ideally
located neighborhood to new residents. Rehabilitation and infill development of homes should be utilized as a way to attract positive news coverage and advertising for the neighborhood. Although the housing market has slowed in Cedar Rapids and throughout the nation, the City should continue its efforts to promote infill development and attract new homebuyers to the study area.

Action Steps

Short-term

1. Market neighborhood to a wide variety of potential homebuyers, including current neighborhood residents (renters) and commuters who work for nearby employers

2. Utilize newspapers and television to show neighborhood improvements and progress such as new ‘green’ homes or community gardens

3. Hold open houses for new homes

Medium-term

1. Include additional vacant lots in the new construction plan
Recapitulation

The short- and medium-term goals expressed in this document will take years to implement; however, small and incremental steps, when accumulated, could greatly improve the quality of life and attractiveness of the Oak Hill study area. Although steps have been laid out as short- and medium-term, it is expected that some goals will take place before others. Funding that is dependent on city monies or private investment is subject to economic changes, therefore it is important to take a multi-faceted approach. City officials, businesses, and community residents will need to work collaboratively in order to see positive change.

Even inexpensive efforts can be recognized for their positive change by members of the greater community. Some possible steps for 2008 include establishing community gardens, cleaning sidewalks and streets, organizing community activities such as litter pick up and flower plantings with Metro High School students and the neighborhood association, and holding open houses of renovated or newly-built homes. The City plans to complete sidewalk and alley improvements in the summer of 2008, therefore other low-cost activities such as front yard beautification and a program to help senior citizens with home repairs would help to create a tangible sense of progress. Although change can be slow and challenging, the neighborhood’s positive attributes and
committed community members and city staff can help to make Oak Hill a great place to call home.
**TIMELINE OF ACTION STEPS**
The timeline represents the beginning of implementation. Unless otherwise noted, action items are carried out throughout the next fifteen years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>On Going</th>
<th>0 – 4 Year</th>
<th>5 – 15 Year</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 1: Create a physical environment that encourages walking</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Improve sidewalks, ensuring that no gaps or broken sidewalks appear</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Make pedestrian access improvements that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for sidewalks and curb cuts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Use traffic calming devices for busy arterial streets such as 12th Avenue SE</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Enhance arterial streets with streetscape improvements</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Provide pedestrian lighting to help deter crime</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Limit parking to one side of street at 9th Ave SE and 9th St SE area</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Develop a new parking garage to serve Mercy hospital patrons and other commercial or social service users</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Mercy Hospital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 2: Integrate the neighborhood with rest of city</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Work with the City Transportation Department to analyze bus service from the neighborhood to shopping areas and recommend new routes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City Transportation Department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Partner with nearby facilities such as Jane Boyd, OPTIONS, and Senior Assisted Living to establish a weekly mini-shuttle service</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Start walking club for downtown workers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 3: Encourage businesses and services that would be assets to neighborhood</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Encourage residents to collaborate with area food suppliers for donations at small service grocery until full-service grocery is available</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids Oak Hill Neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Encourage partnership with Metro High School to initiate/operate business</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Make more awareness of current Enterprise Zone in neighborhood</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Perform simple improvements such as paint, landscape, and façade maintenance to make abandoned buildings look attractive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>City of Cedar Rapids Oak Hill Neighborhood Cedar Rapids School District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 4: Develop stronger relationship with Oak Hill residents and Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Continue to attend Neighborhood Association meetings and follow up on resident’s questions, concerns, and suggestions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Present bi-annual update at Neighborhood Association meeting to discuss progress or other issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Invite residents to join any relevant City citizen commissions/committees</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 5: Encourage well-planned and aesthetically appealing design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Encourage residents to organize and participate in clean-up events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Establish recognition program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Provide property maintenance tips, standards, and dos and don’ts in neighborhood newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Work with local organizations to assist seniors with property maintenance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 6: Improve other City residents’ impressions of study area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Coordinate with local businesses and organizations to organize new community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Improve marketing for neighborhood events through website, cable tv, newsletter, newspaper, and participating business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Seek opportunities for inclusion/establishment of public art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 7: Choose environmentally sustainable practices when possible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Designate study area as place of focus for environmental activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Encourage all new construction to utilize passive solar design, stormwater, soil management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Pursue funding and technical support programs for solar energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Support development of community gardens through temporary leasing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 8: Upgrade overall housing quality in area through infill and rehabilitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Provide instruction regarding how to access information about available rehab funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Provide regularly updated information regarding local, state, and federal sources of rehabilitation funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Determine extent of need for housing rehab funds and funding source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Apply for funding from IFA’s OurHome Rehab Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Market neighborhood to potential homebuyers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

Individual Survey

Oak Hill Neighborhood

Community Forum

Jane Boyd Community Center

Wednesday, March 12, 2008 6:00 P.M.

1. Circle your top three choices for services or stores that you, or people in your home, would use (at least once a month) if they were located in the neighborhood.

   Daycare  Ethnic food store
   Preschool  Gas station
   Teen center  Bike shop
   Movie rental store  Job training
   Book or music store  Internet café
   Clothing retail  Coffee shop
   Grocery store  Bar/restaurant
   Natural foods store  Other retail
   Bakery  Other

2. What neighborhood activity would you most likely attend?

   Block party/cookout  Community service day
   Historical celebration  Gardening demonstration
   Athletic event  Other


3. How do you usually get to work? (Please circle)

   Car    Bicycle    Bus    Walk    combination of two

4. How many non-work trips do you make in a day? ______________________

5. How do you usually get to non-work locations?

   Car    Bicycle    Bus    Walk    combination of two

6. Where do you usually shop for food?

7. Where do you usually shop for other goods?

8. How frequently do you and/or your family members use public transit?

   Once a day    2 - 5 times a week    Once a week    Once a month    Never

9. Do buses connect your home to places visited daily such as work locations or school?

   Yes    No    Not sure

10. How often does your household use the recreational biking and walking trails in Cedar Rapids (in appropriate weather)?

    Once a day    2 - 5 times a week    Once a week    Once a month    Never

11. Would you be likely to use a recreational trail in your neighborhood?

    Yes    No    Not sure

11.a. If yes, where should it be located and where would you like it to go?

12. How would you like to be informed about activities in your neighborhood? (Circle all that apply)

    Newsletter    Email    Neighborhood Meetings    Other____________________

Other suggestions or comments that you have:

Thank you for your comments!
ENDNOTES


Focus Group with Oak Hill Action Task Team, Cedar Rapids City Hall, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. February 21, 2008.


Public Forums held at the Jane Boyd Community Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. February 18, 2008 and March 12, 2008.

ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

General Information
This book addresses how to write planning information so that the general public can understand your ideas and points. There are sections on substitute words, avoiding jargon and substituting simpler words. This book will most likely help us in clarifying our ideas in a form that is more likely to be understood by everyone involved.

Vacant Lands
A survey of 200 cities results in findings of recognizing that vacant land is perceived as having a negative impact on communities. Typical and innovative solutions are discussed most of which address non-publicly owned properties.


This article talks briefly about how some cities are rebuilding their neighborhoods to help attract more people. Many cities have experienced a decrease in population during the 1980's but due to reinvent ideas and initiatives, cities are seeing a new shift in population. Planners and local community groups are working together to bring residents back into the neighborhood. They are using different marketing techniques, green infrastructure initiatives, demolition, broad-scale urban land assembly, eminent domain, and urban homesteading to turn cities around. Examples of "weak-market" cities that have initiated some changes are Buffalo New York, Detroit Michigan, Youngstown Ohio and Washington D.C.

Transportation
It provides basic information on various planning and design concepts, and offers extensive references to help implement them.


Housing and Investment
This study was printed as a special issue of Shelterforce. It discusses the factors that have caused and contributed to homelessness and unaffordable housing and that this lack of affordable housing affects many segments of society. The researchers stress community-based initiatives to preserve affordable housing. They provide six case studies as examples of successful initiatives to save subsidized and affordable housing in inner cities and identify the elements that made them a success. The study also discusses long-term sustainability of resident and community-owned affordable housing and notes that a common theme among the case studies is the presence of leaders committed to using inventive approaches to saving the housing stock.


This is the field problem that a group did last year for Moline. This article has some information that may be helpful in terms of identifying ways to solve issues. The section on 'Lessons from Other Cities' may be helpful with funding ideas for housing.


The Syracuse Neighborhood Initiative outlines the City’s efforts to revitalize Syracuse’s neighborhoods. The Initiative has four goals: 1) to allow neighborhoods to successfully compete for investment, 2) to improve quality of life, 3) to strengthen the community, and 4) to build community assets. The Initiative is divided into three phases. The first phase involved prioritizing projects, selectively demolishing vacant structures, and acquiring targeted structure for demolition or rehabilitation. The second phase involved securing funding for the projects in the first phase. The third phase involves a participatory planning process for four Syracuse neighborhoods which is being led by community stakeholders.


This article deals with the challenges of rehabilitation and infill development. It may be helpful to us in giving ideas of funding source possibilities.


This article in Shelterforce posits that outside assistance from public and private institutions, government agencies, and financing sources is not sufficient to revitalize a neighborhood. Its thesis is that neighborhoods must be rebuilt from within the community. It discusses that potential setbacks in this approach may come from communities themselves which believe that they must focus on their weaknesses in order to get assistance from outside sources. It argues that communities must actually focus on their strengths as a geographical community, as individual citizens, and as a group of organized residents to revitalize neighborhoods.


There are a few important points from this article. These are sections that may be
useful: cleaning up neighborhoods, creating a positive image, promoting revitalization efforts, finding economic niches, and improving city services to area.

Suchman, Diane R., "Developing Infill Housing in Inner-City Neighborhoods Opportunities and Strategies," Urban Land Institute, 1997. This provides helpful information about urban infill development in the context of physical, economic, political and social dynamics. It explains the reasons to promote infill development and the types of infill development there are. It explains the process of assessing the housing market for infill development. Once a market analysis is done, the process of site selection is conducted. The book identifies the importance of good site selection for certain types of development. It highlights the importance of finding the appropriate location for specific infill projects. It further explains community involvement options, regulatory processes, and design options that should be considered for infill development. The book also describes infill project examples from different cities across the U.S.

Public Involvement
This article demonstrates the importance for youth involvement with community development. Youth involvement with the community development process can improve "local well-being" and have positive influence on the community and other youth. I like this article because of the research done and the findings presented. Maybe useful in our potential "forum" with students.

This article focus more on planning for a school to be place in a location and involving the community with that process. Although not much useful for the Oak Hill project because there is no school being planned for, this article shares some insight as for involving people who will make use of the community that they live in. This article also mentions how the planning process could be incorporated into staff development and lessen plans, which may be a useful suggestion to the City and Metro High School as a way to keep the students involved with the neighborhood revitalization.