Chapter 8: Housing
Housing Vision

A COUNTY WITH A DIVERSE HOUSING STOCK THAT STRATEGICALLY PROVIDES A SUFFICIENT SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE, QUALITY HOUSING THAT ATTRACTS NEW RESIDENTS, WHILE ALSO ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF BOTH THE YOUNGER AND AGING POPULATIONS.

Introduction

Housing choice, affordability, and availability are a few of the most important factors to retaining existing and appealing to new residents. It also plays a vital role in the overall livability of an area because when a resident chooses to live and buy a home in a given location it represents one of the biggest investments they can make in a community’s future.

Housing encompasses the different types, patterns, and uses of structures in which people choose to live. Overall, the topic is integrated and connected to almost every other chapter in this plan. Housing influences traffic patterns, walkability, distribution of utilities/infrastructure, stormwater management, urbanization, and it also drives commercial growth, tax base distribution, the construction industry, institutional demand, and overall population growth. This chapter explores Boone County’s existing housing stock, housing affordability, and its future residential needs.

Some of the organizations and agencies that focus on housing in Boone County are municipalities, Belvidere Relators Association, Boone County Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, Keen Age Center, and Growth Dimensions.

Existing Housing Stock

Historically, Boone County’s housing stock was predominantly made up of small single-family farmsteads scattered throughout unincorporated agricultural areas and smaller lot, higher density housing units in Belvidere. Much of that is still true today. Almost all smaller and higher density housing units are still located in the City of Belvidere and the unincorporated areas of the county are still mostly small single-family farmsteads. However, a new form of residential development has also emerged over the past thirty years, medium (0.5-1 acre) and large lot (1+ acre) residential subdivisions. This type of development has dominated the urban fringes of various municipalities and in general the western and central sections of the county since 1990. In part, its led to owner-occupied single-family homes being the principal type of residential development in Boone County. Today, there are nearly 20,000 total housing units in the county, 81% are owner-occupied and 83% are single-family residences, both much higher than the overall state at 66% owner-occupied and 66% single-family.

During the county’s housing boom in the 1990s and 2000s, the number of new housing starts dramatically increased. Nearly half of the county’s current housing stock was built during that time period. However, the Great Recession abruptly ended the boom and subsequently the tremendous residential development demand. This dramatic market change resulted in an abundance of vacant platted residential parcels within subdivisions scattered throughout Boone County. In fact, there have been no new residential subdivisions built anywhere in the county since 2009.

Figure 8.1 Owner vs. Renter Occupied Housing

Figure 8.2 Total Housing Units
FIGURE 8.3 HOUSING UNITS BY TYPE

SINGLE FAMILY: 83%
MULTI-FAMILY: 11%
MOBILE HOME OR OTHER: 6%

FIGURE 8.4 YEAR HOUSING UNIT WAS BUILT

PRE 1939: 18%
1940-1989: 36%
1990-1999: 22%
2000-2009: 23%
2010-2015: 0.4%

FIGURE 8.5 NEW HOUSING STARTS 1990-2017

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<td>Belvidere</td>
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Current Housing Situation and Affordability

The housing market in Boone County is yet to fully recover from the Great Recession, and most likely will never reach the height it previously had. Additionally, the sprawling nature of medium and large lot subdivisions scattered throughout the county has left several overarching issues in its wake: increased automobile dependency, a decentralized tax base, an over reliance on private well and septic systems, and a significant growth in urbanized area. Though these concerns are not unique to Boone County, many other rural and suburban areas are now experiencing similar problems due to the type and scale of residential development that occurred during the housing boom.

There are now two different generations taking center stage in the Boone County housing market, Millennials (age 18-35) and Baby Boomers (age 60+). Combined, these two groups make up nearly 40% of the county’s overall population. In general, Millennials are an age cohort that has different preferences from previous generations. Specifically, many individuals are waiting longer to get married and have children, resulting in many of them favoring apartments, townhomes, or duplexes until later in life. In turn, this has contributed to driving down demand for new family-oriented medium and large lot single-family homes. In addition, the Baby Boomer generation, as it ages, is becoming increasingly reliant on assisted living facilities, senior-oriented housing, and generally smaller, denser housing types. Together, these two groups and their choices have played a part in the slow housing recovery experienced in Boone County because of the dominance of only one available housing type.

Boone County has traditionally been a very affordable area to live, especially in terms of housing costs. Today, that is still true. The median monthly renter cost is only $722 per month and the median monthly homeowner costs is only $1,423. Those figures are both nearly $200 less per month than the state’s averages. However, the combination of historic growth patterns, the housing boom, the Great Recession, a long economic recovery, shifting demographics, and increasing poverty have led to changes in housing affordability over the past ten years. Together, these changes have put many residents in a difficult financial situation where they are now considered a cost burdened household, meaning that they spend over 30% of their total income on housing costs. Today, over a third of all Boone County homeowners and nearly 40% of all renters are considered cost burdened in the county.

One of the weaknesses of the past twenty years, identified through the planning process, was that the majority of new residential development in Boone County did not include affordable housing. In addition, when residents were asked about what is the most important future housing priority for the county, their consensus was availability of affordable, safe, and clean housing options. Due to the hard economic situation felt by almost every resident during and after the Great Recession, these subjects were actively brought up and discussed throughout the process.

Over the next decade, there are multiple approaches that the county and municipalities can take to retain and improve the affordability of housing county-wide. First, is the adoption of inclusionary zoning ordinances. These ordinances require that a share of new construction be affordable for people with low to moderate incomes, rather than exclusively market-rate housing. Second, the diversification of housing types is critically important to allowing a mix of people with different socio-economic backgrounds to live within a given area. Ultimately, this method is market-driven, but can be further promoted and prioritized by local agencies in Boone County moving forward. Finally, in order to help the people that need affordable housing the most; it’s particularly important to better coordinate efforts, leverage resources, and increase overall communication with local and regional agencies and HUD. This can be done through maximizing the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) and Veterans Assisted Supportive Housing program participants, finding opportunities to leverage Low Income Housing Tax Credits to construct or rehab affordable housing, helping to establish a Regional Housing Initiative, and utilizing the streamlined processes afforded through the Moving To Work designation given to the Winnebago County Housing Authority. In sum, each approach offers opportunities for different organizations and government entities throughout Boone County to be involved in retaining and improving the affordability of housing.
Future Needs

As generational preferences transform, demographics shift, the economy changes, and the housing market fluctuates, the traditional medium and large lot subdivisions of the past thirty years should no longer be the only new housing type implemented. It is critically important for the continued viability and livability of Boone County to diversify the available housing stock and prioritize infill residential development over the next decade.

During the public participation phase, over 200 total residents of all ages took part in an activity that ranked which housing types they preferred and would want to live in over the next decade. The results were a collection of different residential development forms including: traditional farmsteads, conservation-oriented subdivisions, multifamily duplexes, senior housing, 1 acre lots, and ½ acre lots. The needs of the community have not only changed, but they are also diversified. In addition, in order to retain future generations and accommodate the existing population in the future, it’s imperative to provide alternative housing choices around the county.

Residential infill development is the most productive way to leverage the existing housing conditions in Boone County. There are 750 acres of vacant platted residential parcels in unincorporated Boone County alone and a plethora within incorporated areas. A prioritized effort to develop these parcels is the most effective way to utilize existing infrastructure, service future demand, create more livable communities, reduce sprawl, and increase the residential tax base. In order for infill development to be most productive it should also take the form of and complement the existing character of its surroundings in order to enhance the neighborhoods and home values county-wide.

Any new residential development should take into consideration the following key attributes:

- Promote development within close proximity of other compatible uses, to aid in reducing the cost of services to County residents, and to manage and preserve the County’s resources and rural character.
- Expand the housing stock for all income levels and promote affordable housing.
- Encourage high-quality housing with good design, solid construction, and that maximizes energy efficiency.
- Support the use of cluster housing and conservation design techniques to preserve open space and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Locate any new senior-oriented housing or assisted living facilities in areas accessible to commercial, recreational, medical, and other necessary facilities and services.
- Prioritize and incentivize infill development.
- Encourage mixed-use development.
- Diversify the housing stock to meet the needs of future and existing populations.
- Promote residential growth in areas that can make utility connections to existing municipal services.

Housing plays a critical role in a successful future for Boone County. Currently, the county consists of both vibrant rural and urban components, but a careful consideration of the issues and opportunities discussed in this chapter will lead to a well-planned and highly livable community in the future.
Housing Goals, Objectives, & Strategies

Goal 8.1 Prepare for and accommodate to changing long-term population housing needs.

**OBJECTIVES**

a. Maintain overall housing affordability.

b. Meet the future housing needs of an increasingly aging population.

c. Meet the housing needs of younger and more diverse populations.

**STRATEGIES**

Advocate for mixed income housing to be included in new residential development.

Repurpose underutilized housing to better accommodate alternative housing options for a variety of residents.

Attract new multi-family affordable housing options and advocate for the adoption of inclusionary zoning ordinances.

Encourage repairing and updating dilapidated housing.

Prioritize senior-friendly housing and assisted living facilities to accommodate Boone County’s aging population.

Prioritize walkability, interconnected land uses, and age-friendly design in future residential growth.

Allow all populations to use and access services.

Expand the variety of housing types and options available.

Match future residential growth areas with existing community assets to tie social, economic, and transportation fabric together.

Foster new connections between local developers, realtors, property managers, the Housing Authority, and HUD.
Chapter 8 Sources

Text

Figures
5. City of Belvidere and Boone County Building Department, 2018.