

CSU Center of Community Planning and Development
Oberlin Comprehensive Housing Study
Steering Committee Meeting #1
May 19, 2016
5:30-7:30 pm, Oberlin Public Library
Notes 7-19-16

Meeting Notes

These notes are provided as a summary of key issues addressed during the meeting, and general direction of committee input. They do not represent word-for-word statements of committee members, and members are not identified.

Attendees:

- Kirby Date, Center of Community Planning and Development, CSU
- Kathy Hexter, Director, Center for Community Planning and Development, CSU
- Carrie Handy, Planning Director
- Peter Crowley, Oberlin Planning Commission member
- Centrilla Scott
- Alan Mitchell, Zion CDC
- John McMann, Lorain MHA
- Linda Blanchette, Lorain County Community Development
- Steve Kamrass, Sereth Builders
- Steve Varelmann, Architect
- Larry Funk, North Shore Properties
- Liz Shultz, Heritage Society
- Colt Ossoff, CSU student

Several residents and other community members were also present in the audience.

Board Notes

Overall Issues Related to Housing in Oberlin:

- **Cost of repairs and housing maintenance.** There are not enough funds to support residents who have trouble affording the maintenance cost on their homes. Weatherization is an important component of needed repairs. CHP Grants are helping to keep Elderly residents in their homes, covering repairs mostly. There is a \$35,000 limit (per home?) If money is too late, property is too deteriorated, then it is listed beyond repair by code enforcement. Zoning and housing code changes could have an affect on overall affordability of housing.
- **Need for modernization of existing homes.** New housing buyers may not want to do rehab – there are almost no new homes in Oberlin -- all are older and need modernizing. Rehabilitation contractors face very limited opportunities for lines of credit.

- **New home development is risky.** There is some demand for new homes, but sales velocity is slow; developers must be careful, speculation not a good idea and can be risky. Incentives are needed to encourage construction of new homes that meet the market.
- **Home sizes and types are a factor in sales.** There is a need for smaller homes and universal design. People want 1500-2200 square feet (?verify); code does not allow smaller homes. Alternative housing such as cooperative housing, container housing and tiny homes could also be attractive. Seniors might find cooperative living a good option.
- **Buyers available are a factor in sales.** There are few buyers in the mid-range (\$130K-\$200K), the typical family sized home, which many homes in Oberlin fall into. Economic Development and job creation is needed to bring new mid-range buyers in to the City.
- **Lack of affordable assisted living in the City.** This is especially important that residents cannot find acceptable housing as they age. Kendal at Oberlin is the only real option and it is high end. Many residents must move out as they age out of their longtime residential housing.
- **Need for code enforcement.** Housing quality problems related to absentee landlords and lack of accountability have been longtime issues – property maintenance, bed bug infestations, illegal drug use and sales, hornets nests, etc. The City has now hired a Code Enforcement Officer. An inspection methodology and code review are needed. For some apartment complexes, the ownership is not clear, so enforceability is affected. The City used to do point-of-sale inspections, but do not currently have a program – will this be reinstated with the Code Enforcement Officer?
- **A rental registry would be useful.** The City does not require rental registry currently; such a policy would help with landlord/resident accountability, basic health and safety provisions, and emergency notification.
- **Student housing is difficult to do, but demand is shrinking.** There are regulatory barriers to producing income (what are these?). (Is there enough demand, given the steady student population of the College?) The College has recently built more dorms and on-campus housing along with off-campus coops they own – only 350 students (of 2900) are now allowed to live off-campus, compared to 1000 in the past. This has resulted in an excess of former student housing in single family homes that were chopped up to accommodate them – now families are renting the chopped up homes. Former student residences would need to be rehabbed in order to be suitable for sale to single-family buyers.
- **Quality/ Availability of multi-family (rental?) housing is limited.** There is nothing new in the City; the latest were built in the 1970's. The City does not have a zoning district to support it. Vacancy is extremely low in what does exist. Green Acres was proposed to address this need; would have provided 56 units of apartments, 6 units of townhomes. ‘
- **Need for short term rentals.** Codes need to allow people to rent out units short term for visiting faculty, others related to the college and other local employers.

- **Transportation is a factor in home sales.** True walkability is desirable but public transportation is limited to home dial-a-ride twice a week for seniors/disabled, through an agreement with Lorain County Transit. Oberlin College provides limited shuttle service to airports, etc for students, families and faculty. The larger areas available for development are not in walkable areas to the downtown.
- **Many residences are owned by the College.** College Properties is a taxable entity that owns them. (It would be good to clarify who is living in them now and what other uses they may be serving.)
- **Green Living is important to residents and could be an asset.** However, current policy may not support this concept to the extent that it could, and home renovation is needed. Model homes have been built that demonstrate the opportunities.
- **The City is becoming less attractive to employees of Oberlin College.** Fewer faculty live here than in the past; many younger faculty live in Cleveland (attracted to urban life).

Oberlin Community Assets

These could be primary draws for attracting new residents.

- Excellent schools.
- Small community character. The City is self-contained, very local, there is a feeling of knowing everyone, neighbors keep an eye on the kids
- Rich culture and amenities nearby via the College
- Bike friendly/ and more walkable than many communities
- Excellent recreation opportunities
- Good services and medical care for Seniors
- Community commitment to “Green Living”
- Tappan Square is an attractive center of community activity.
- Historic charm of architecture and community scale give the feeling of stability.
- Note that “perceived” “repellants” include “goofy students, liberalism, race, intellectuals”.

Questions to be explored and discussed:

- What are the effects of the real estate/ local (income) taxes on community affordability?
- How can we facilitate environmentally advanced design?
- Address concerns about race/class and access to affordable housing that meets everyone’s needs. How could this best be done? Are there residential concentrations of race and class within the city? Are there town-gown divisions that are reflected in housing opportunity?
- What are the opportunities for encouraging infill?
- What is the status of water/electricity delinquencies, and what does that tell us about affordability of housing costs?
- How have demographics shifted since last housing survey? (when was that done?)
- Identify and interview community organizations working on housing issues.
- Where do people who work here live? What type of housing would be desired by people who work in Oberlin but, live elsewhere (talk to employers e.g. FAA)?

Should Oberlin College provide options for faculty and other employees to encourage them to live in the City? What are the barriers or outside attractors for those who do not live in the City?

- Renters. How long do people stay in housing – rentals? Do renters become owners?
- What is the housing demand by: type, price points, rent/own, household size?
- What are different models of housing ownership that could be explored? i.e. co-ops, alternative ownership and management models. Check out Housing First in Salt Lake City.
- How are Oberlin's Zoning and Building Codes: do they permit what there's demand for? For example, PUD policies are seen as too restrictive.
- What's going on in surrounding communities? What amenities do they have? What are potential buyers looking for? How do income/property taxes compare? (what would be the best comparable communities?)
- Transportation. What are the possibilities for bus routes to connect neighborhoods: North-South/East-West? Would a bus loop help to make City more attractive to residents? What would that look like/cost?
- What are Oberlin's attractors and repellants? It is "Not like every place else"
- What is the status of mortgages, foreclosures and vacancies, demolitions. How many homes are underwater? Do vacancies/demolition provide the opportunity for infill?
- What is the status of student housing, absentee landlords? What are opportunities to address student impact on quality of life near student housing (within residential neighborhoods, as well as adjacent to student housing?)
- What programs for tax abatement (such as the City of Lorain's 15-year tax abatement) and other incentives might encourage people to build, buy and renovate here?
- Interview local employers regarding their perception of their employees' needs and housing issues.
- Are City codes and policies, such as for air quality and PUDs, unfriendly for development – how can we incentivize vs disincent? Could form based codes be useful?
- What would be good strategies for the City's use of funds to enhance housing?
- What is the status of schools and enrollment in the City? Are potential consolidations/downsizing likely to impact housing attractiveness/affordability?

End/KD