CHAPTER V

B

THE BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON MINI-PLAN ON

HOUSING

A PLAN FOR THOSE AT HOME IN THE CITY

BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON

HOUSING: A PLAN FOR THOSE AT HOME IN THE CITY

B

The housing chapter or **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON MINI-PLAN ON HOUSING** addresses the needs of homeowners, landlords, renters, policy makers, public agencies, investors, and developers, alike - all people affected by Binghamton's housing stock and housing market. Recommendations encompass strategies for maintaining the City's aging housing stock, opportunities to diversify housing typologies to bring beautiful buildings back to life and better serve certain market segments, and tactics to preserve affordability and the integrity of neighborhoods.

Houses in the West Side

NEIGHBORHOODS

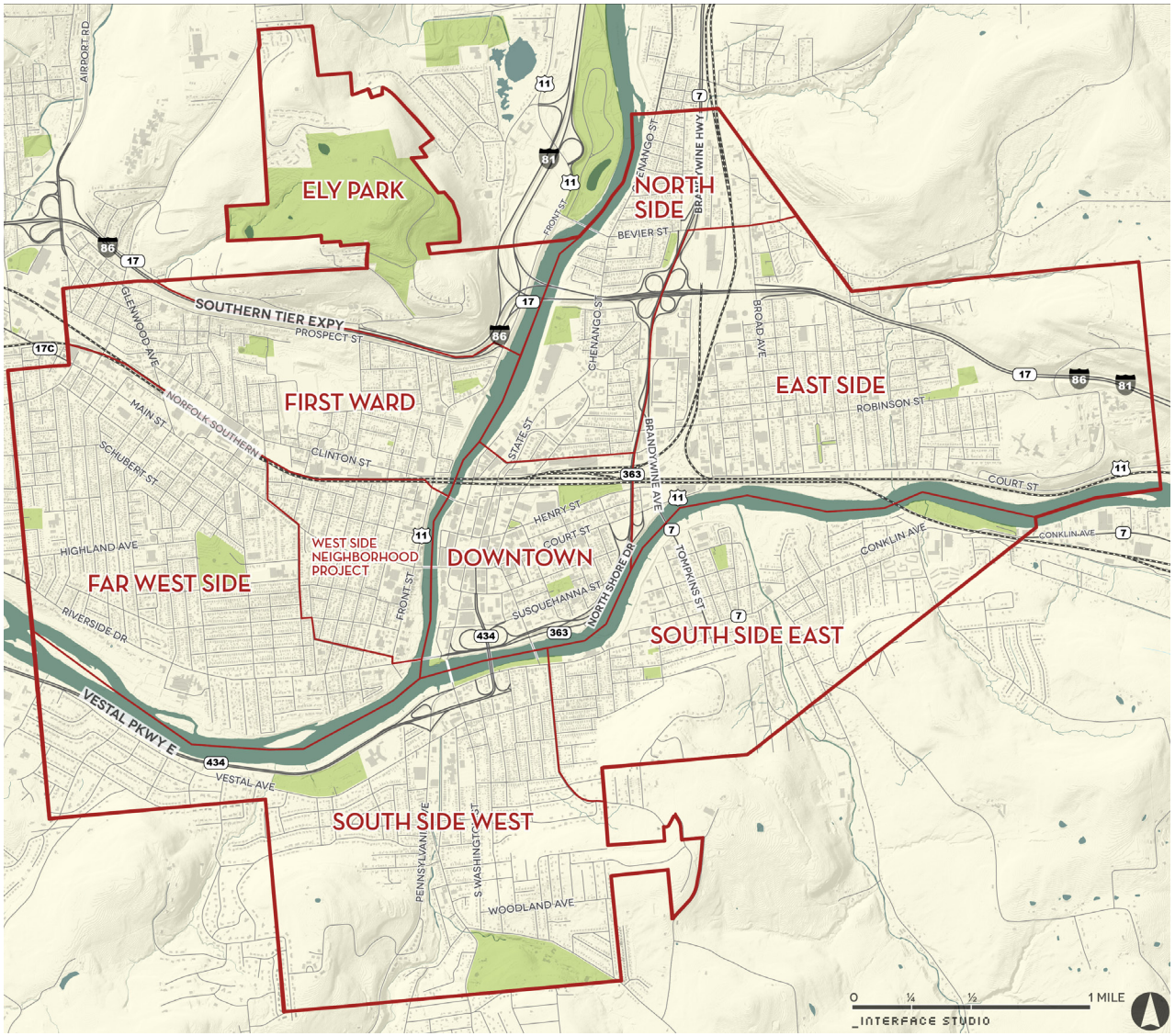


FIGURE 24: Neighborhoods - MAP

EXISTING CONDITIONS

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC TRENDS

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Changes in the demographic characteristics in Binghamton, Broome County, and the Binghamton MSA have influenced residential development patterns and demand for housing in the City of Binghamton. The City"s population was stable during the period from 2000 to 2010, but projections in the American Community Survey (ACS) and by ESRI indicate additional declines from 2010 to 2012/13. While the City added 63 households from the 2000 to 2010 Census, both data sources show decline since 2010, and ESRI projects additional decline through 2018. If actual losses are consistent with projections, household growth in the City and the broader region will not be a factor that drives demand for new housing units.

Household size has also decreased since the 1990s, consistent with national trends. The average household size in Binghamton was 2.18 persons in 2010, compared with a national average of 2.59. More than 70 percent of the City's households had one or two people, which indicates greater demand for smaller housing units. Conversely, Broome County and the MSA had higher percentages of larger families which, in turn, indicates greater demand for three-bedroom or larger residential units in those areas not located in the City.

In 2013, the estimated median age of persons who live in the City is 36.0 years, which is lower than the median age for persons who live in Broome County (40.7 years) and in the MSA (41.2 years). Two age-related demographic trends are projected for Binghamton that may affect demand for housing. The percentage Binghamton's population that is 65 and older is lower than it is in Broome County and the MSA; however, that percentage is projected to increase from 2010 to 2018, consistent with the aging of the Baby Boom generation and in line with the national trend. Another major trend that may affect demand for housing is a likely increase in the number of young people 18 to 24 years old, resulting from a corresponding increase in the number of Binghamton University students who reside in the City. The latter demographic trend may continue, or may even accelerate, as a result of actual growth in the number of rental housing units available to students in the City and by anticipated growth in the overall number of students enrolled annually at Binghamton University.

FOR MORE ON DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS, SEE OVERVIEW ON PAGE 12.

ECONOMIC TRENDS

Economic conditions have a strong influence on the demand for housing because household growth generally occurs as a result of job growth. Household growth, in turn, results in demand for additional housing units. Moreover, households with stable employment in jobs with positive prospects are more likely to be comfortable making investments in new housing units. Finally, increases in income will generate "trade-up" demand for newer, larger, more expensive housing units.

A critical statistic influencing current and prospective demand for housing is the total employment in the MSA, which continued on a downward trajectory between mid-2008 and 2012. Most economic reports indicate that job losses in the Binghamton MSA have been adversely affecting housing demand. One positive economic factor in the MSA is the presence of Binghamton University, which is the region's largest employer. The economy in

QUALITY OF LIFE CONSIDERATIONS

Broome County and the City of Binghamton is expected to continue benefitting from the University's growth and the development of the Southern Tier High-Technology Incubator in Binghamton.

The City itself benefits from a concentration of jobs especially in the health, education and government sectors. However, 80% of all workers who held primary jobs in Binghamton during 2011 lived outside of the City, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census database, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics OnTheMap. From the perspective of housing demand, Binghamton is not deriving all of the benefits workers could provide if they also lived in the City. Enticing higher percentages of these workers - and especially younger workers who often find city living attractive -- would result in improvements in the City's housing market, including higher demand for both rental and for-sale housing units.

In addition to economic and employment considerations, factors related to quality of life are major influences on the performance of housing markets. Two factors, schools and the perception and/or reality of crime and safety issues, are particularly relevant, and there are issues with both in the City of Binghamton. Stakeholders reported that the City's schools do not compete well with suburban districts, most notably Vestal, when families have school-age children. Data related to crime and safety show that the City is not as safe as the Binghamton MSA, which was ranked fifth of mid-sized metros by Sperling's **BEST PLACES** during 2011. Issues with crime and safety - whether real or perceived - were cited by seniors who participated in stakeholder groups as a deterrent to Downtown housing. Enhancing the quality of schools is an important consideration in the City's competitive standing within the region; addressing issues associated with crime and safety is another key factor in retaining and attracting households to live in the City, especially older empty-nesters and senior households.

The Binghamton MSA achieves good rankings on a number of other competitive quality of life and location factors. Moody's Economy.com places both the cost of living and the cost of doing business in the MSA below the U.S. with the cost of living at 88% and the cost of business at 90%. The U.S. is 100%. Other strengths include the presence of a concentration of high-tech workers in the MSA, the City's role as a regional healthcare center with increasing payrolls, a revitalizing Downtown, and access to nature in the surrounding area.

HOUSING STOCK AND INVENTORY

Binghamton has a large stock of older housing units, including many historic homes that are unique and neighborhoods that have been preserved very well over the years. However, the housing stock is aging and even units that have been maintained well may be lacking the features and amenities characteristic of newer housing units. Examples include homes with more than one bath and modern heating and cooling systems. Less than one percent of the City's housing stock was built in 2000 or more recently, while more than three-quarters - 78% - were built before 1960, including 51% built before 1940.

Vacancy issues and associated problems with the ongoing maintenance of housing units are of major concern because the number of occupied housing units declined between 1990 and 2010. The pattern is projected to continue through 2018. This increase in the total number of vacant residential units includes many units classified as "Other Vacant Units," which usually means they are not habitable because they are in deteriorated or substandard condition. The number of owner-occupied housing units also declined from 1990 to 2010, although ESRI projects an increase in the number and percentage of owner-occupied units between 2013 and 2018.

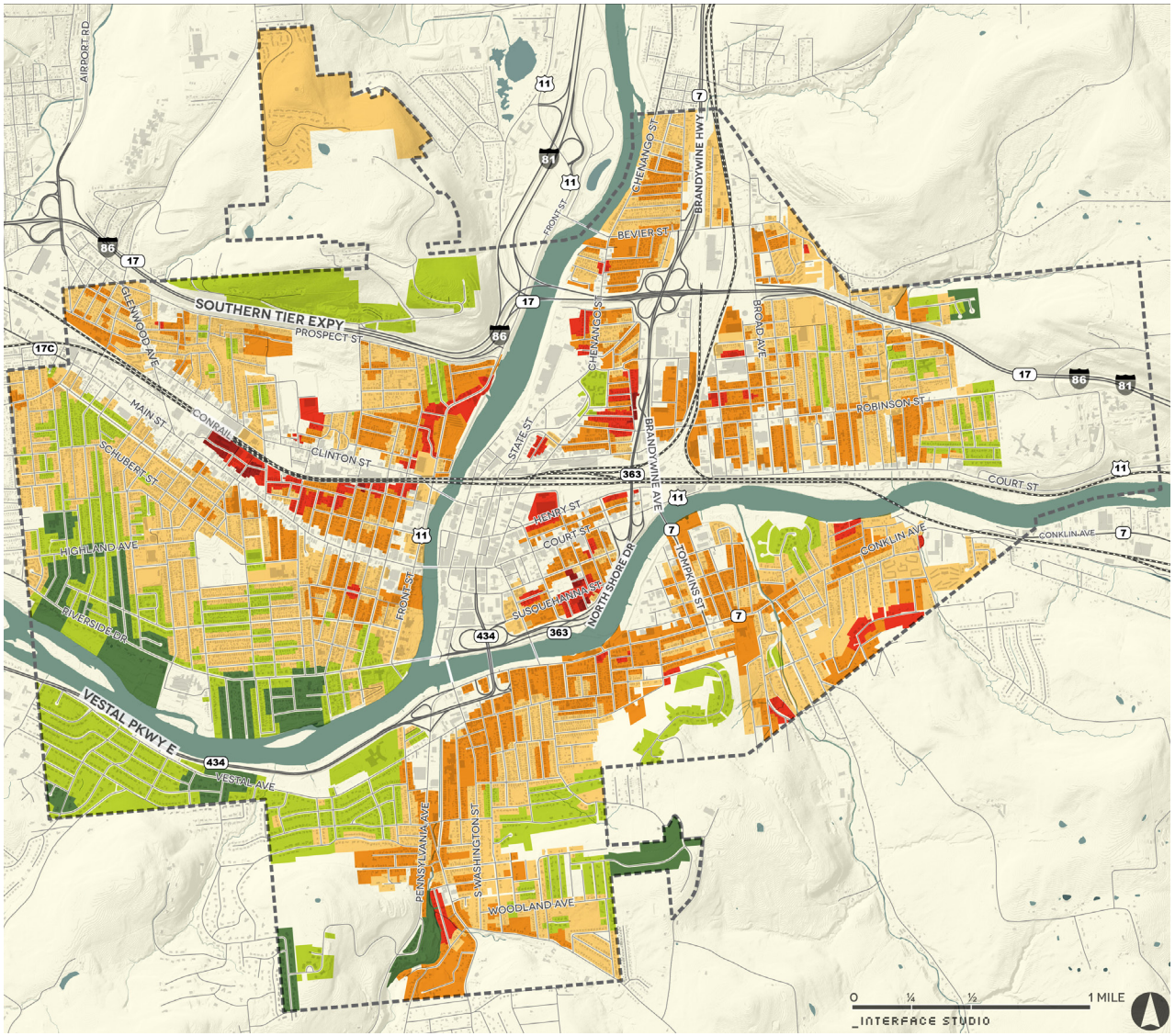
Housing conditions in Binghamton differ dramatically.

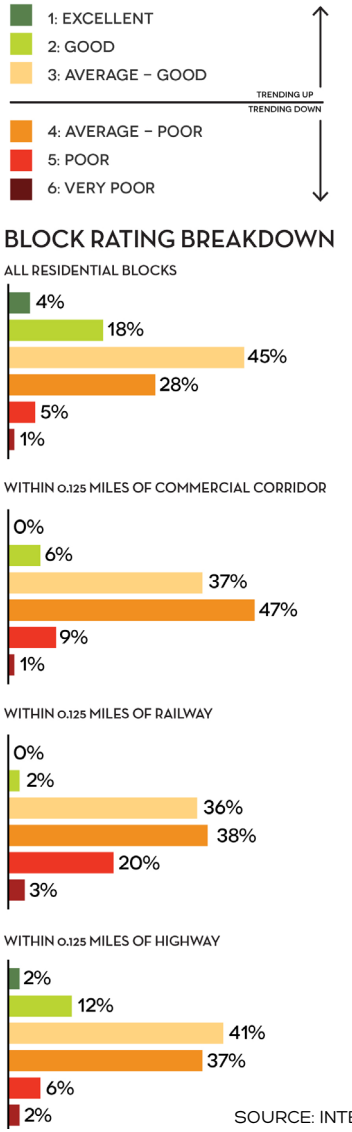
Interface Studio conducted a block-by-block survey of the residential areas in the City. The purpose of the survey was to gauge the overall health and condition of each block in order to gain an understanding of housing conditions in the City and their locational variations. The survey considered such factors as vacancy, housing conditions, property maintenance, infrastructure, functional obsolescence, and the public realm, such as sidewalk and yard conditions. Each block was assigned a rating to indicate its general trend on a scale from Excellent to Very Poor. About two-thirds of the City's residential blocks are trending up, with many blocks exhibiting average-good conditions. The highest rated residential blocks are located on the far West Side, along Riverside Drive and the western side of South Side West. The lowest rated residential blocks tend to be located near major infrastructure such as rail and highways, close to commercial corridors, and in the floodplain.

River and creek flooding in 2006 and 2011 had a major impact on homes in Binghamton. Over 2,000 parcels suffered damage in the 2011 flood, of which 22% were considered majorly damaged. FEMA's new floodplain map and a reform of the National Flood Insurance Program with higher flood insurance rates will greatly influence how and where housing is concentrated in the future.

Housing conditions affect the market value of housing, as well as sales prices, housing occupancy and vacancy. Therefore, the data gathered during the survey are a very useful starting point for the design and targeting of programs to rehabilitate and upgrade existing residential units and also to make decisions about blocks where infill housing might be a viable approach to strengthen neighborhoods. For example, an infill housing program targeted for blocks with existing homes in excellent or good condition would be more likely to be successful than a similar program in blocks with existing homes in average - poor or poor condition.

RESIDENTIAL BLOCK RATING





SOURCE: INTERFACE STUDIO FIELD SURVEY

FIGURE 25: Residential Block Rating - MAP

EXCELLENT

GOOD

AVERAGE-GOOD

AVERAGE-POOR

POOR

VERY POOR

The survey criteria included factors such as vacancy, housing conditions, property maintenance, infrastructure and the public realm.

HOUSING DEMAND

Demand for housing units is typically generated by one or more of the following conditions:

- Increases in the number of households either through new household formation or the in-migration of additional households
- The need to replace deteriorated or functionally obsolete housing units
- Changes in the age and income profiles of households and the resulting demand for housing different in size, style, pricing, and tenure

Since the number of households in Binghamton is not expected to increase through at least 2018, household growth is not a driver of demand for housing units. Therefore, it is especially important to look to other potential drivers of demand. There is some demand for new housing units generated by the need to replace older, obsolete housing units. However, the need is not overly robust with five year replacement demand estimated to be a total of 380 units for owners and renters combined. Some new for-sale housing development is recommended so that the City will have housing choices available for households wanting to live in Binghamton. Tabulations of households by income and age cohort and lifestyle data indicate the likelihood that there will be some gaps in the City's housing supply in the next five or more years. There will be less demand for housing units suitable for families with young children - barring major in-migration. Since household sizes also are trending downward, demand will be higher for housing units to accommodate smaller families, especially singles and households with two people.

Three main household types are likely to be the dominant drivers of housing demand: students, young professionals, and seniors. The first household type, students, currently live in the West Side Neighborhood Project (WSNP) area, Far West Side, and in Downtown Binghamton, and have been a major force in the revitalization of Downtown. The primary motivations driving decisions by students are the proximity to Downtown entertainment venues including bars and restaurants, and the availability of housing units offered for-rent to students at varying price points, including student-only rentals priced on a per-bed basis. As a group, the buying power of students, including direct expenditures and indirect or "spin-off" benefits, is very beneficial for the local economy.

The limited housing options in the City for younger professionals indicates that an emphasis on providing additional employment opportunities in the City and the broader region could increase housing demand by retaining young adults in Binghamton and attracting new residents in younger age cohorts. LEHD data presented previously show that large numbers of young households working in the City are living in suburban areas outside Binghamton. While young professionals in other urban areas have shown a preference for Downtown living, Binghamton does not have a stock of rental units with features and amenities to appeal to these households. New units - whether new construction or conversions of buildings from other uses - are marketed to students. There are very few rental units for young professionals seeking similar features and amenities including interesting buildings, state-of-the-art cable and internet, modern kitchens and baths, and attractive common areas. Increased opportunities for these households to live in Binghamton clearly are needed, and estimated demand indicates that there is likely market support.

Finally, increases in the number of people 65 and older will result in added demand for smaller housing units and housing to accommodate middle- and higher-income seniors who are no longer able to cope with stairs and home maintenance responsibilities. In addition to the projected household demand measured by growth in the number of senior units, the waiting lists for attractive, senior units for middle-income seniors provides additional evidence that this type of housing is needed in the City. Senior housing in multifamily structures designed for independent living facilitates provision of management and maintenance services and oversight of frail seniors who may require medical assistance.

HOME SALES:
2011–2013

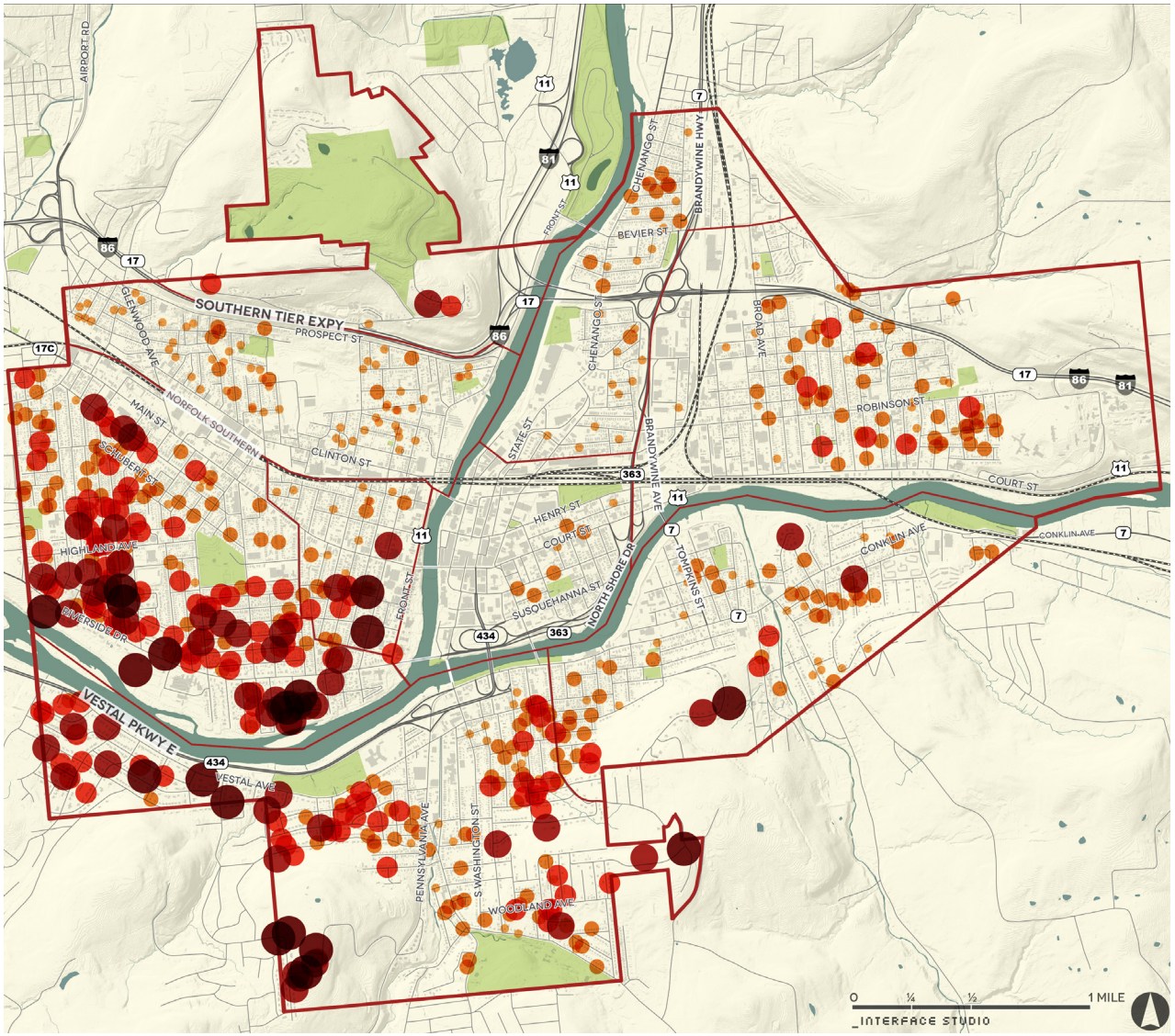


FIGURE 26: Home Sales: 2011-2013 - MAP

HOUSING SUPPLY

HOME SALES AND PRICE TRENDS

One of the often-cited advantages of the Binghamton MSA as a positive quality of life consideration is the affordability of the housing stock in comparison with other metropolitan areas in New York. In Binghamton, the median sales price in the second quarter of 2013 was $109,300, a decline from 2011 sale prices. Sales of distressed properties, including foreclosed homes, have adversely affected prices in Binghamton. However, a positive trend is a decline of 50% in foreclosure filings from October 2012 to October 2013. The market for sales of existing homes continues to be weak in the City and the broader metropolitan area, a situation the National Association of Realtors attributes to ongoing job losses and poor economic growth.

SOURCE: WIN2 DATA BY CORELOGIC

- $3,000 – $66,400
- $66,401 – $115,000
- $115,001 – $187,500
- $187,501– $293,000
- $293,001 – $500,000
- NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARIES

HOME SALES:
2011

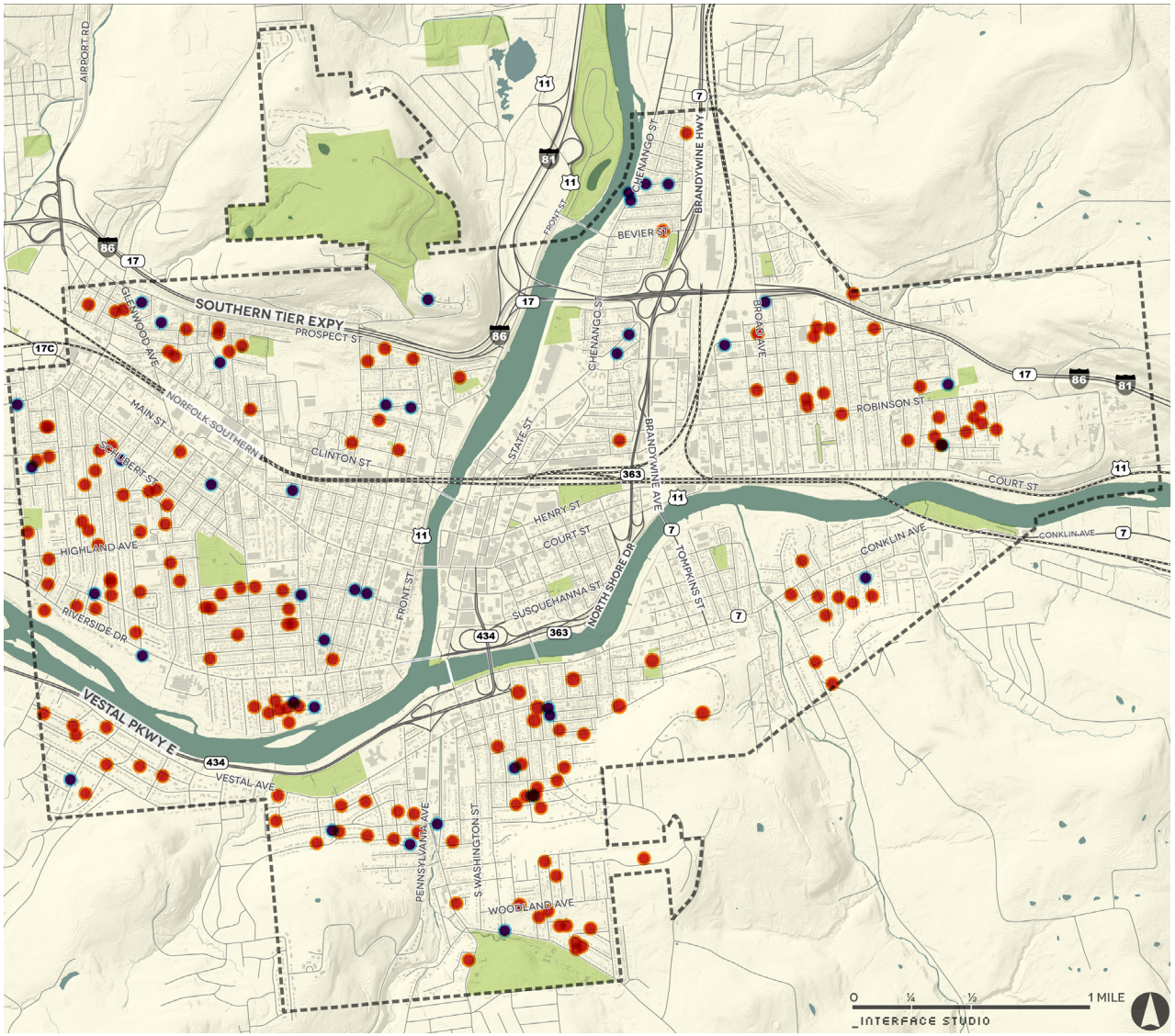


FIGURE 27: Home Sales: 2011 - MAP

Data on home sales during the period from January 2011 through October 2013 provide insight about the number of homes sold in Binghamton, sales prices, and neighborhood locations. Also relevant are the number and location of homes sold to owner-occupants as opposed to those sold to investors offering them for-rent. Of the 606 sales recorded between 2011 and 2013, 339 homes (56%) were sold to owner-occupants, and the remaining homes were sold to owners not occupying the homes. Overall, the Far West Side and South Side West commanded the highest median sales prices and the largest number of sales. The percentage of sales to owner-occupants was highest in the South Side West, East Side, and First Ward neighborhoods.

SOURCE: WIN2 DATA BY CORELOGIC

OWNER OCCUPANCY

NON – OWNER OCCUPANCY

HOME SALES:
2012

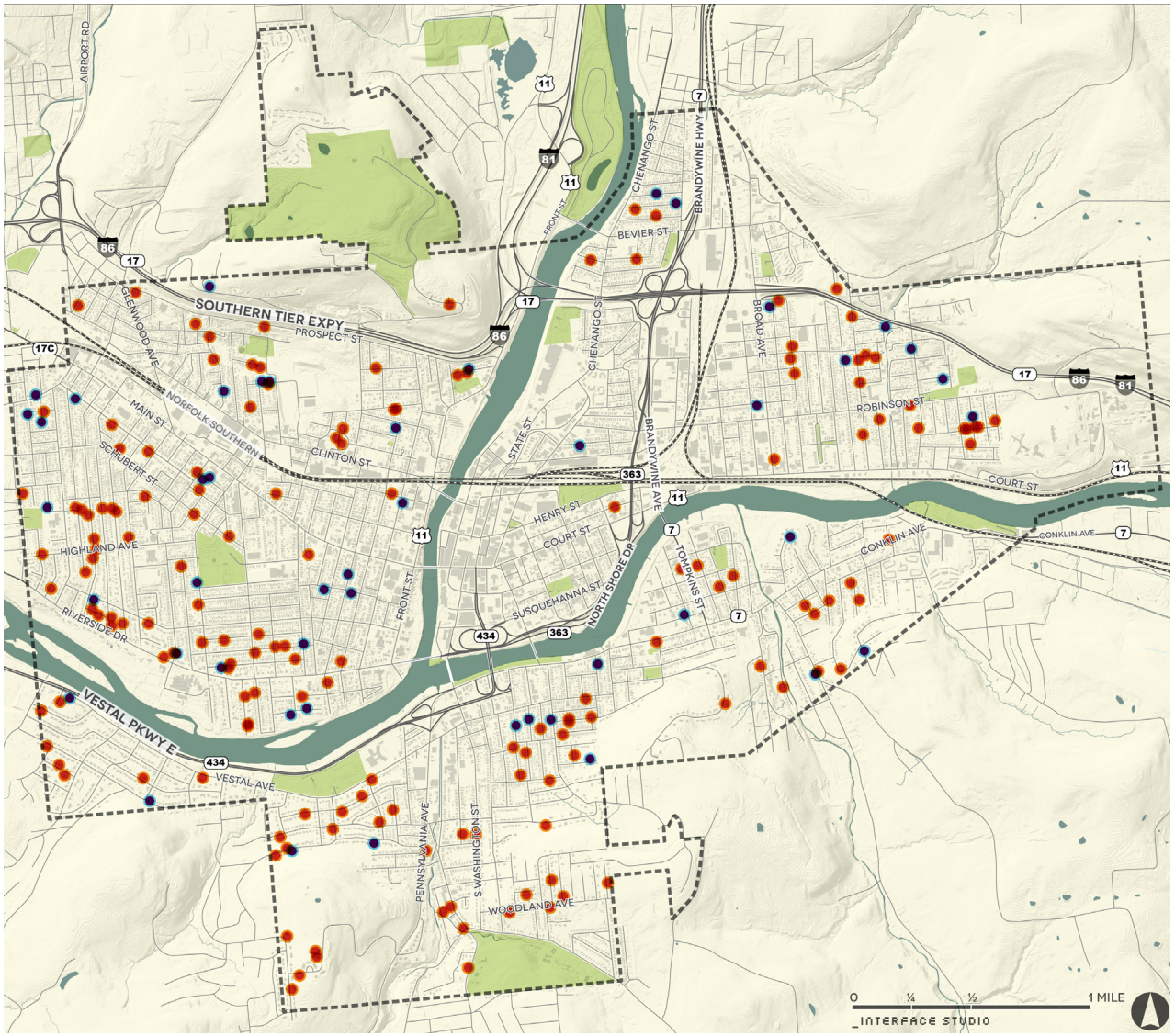


FIGURE 28: Home Sales: 2012 - MAP

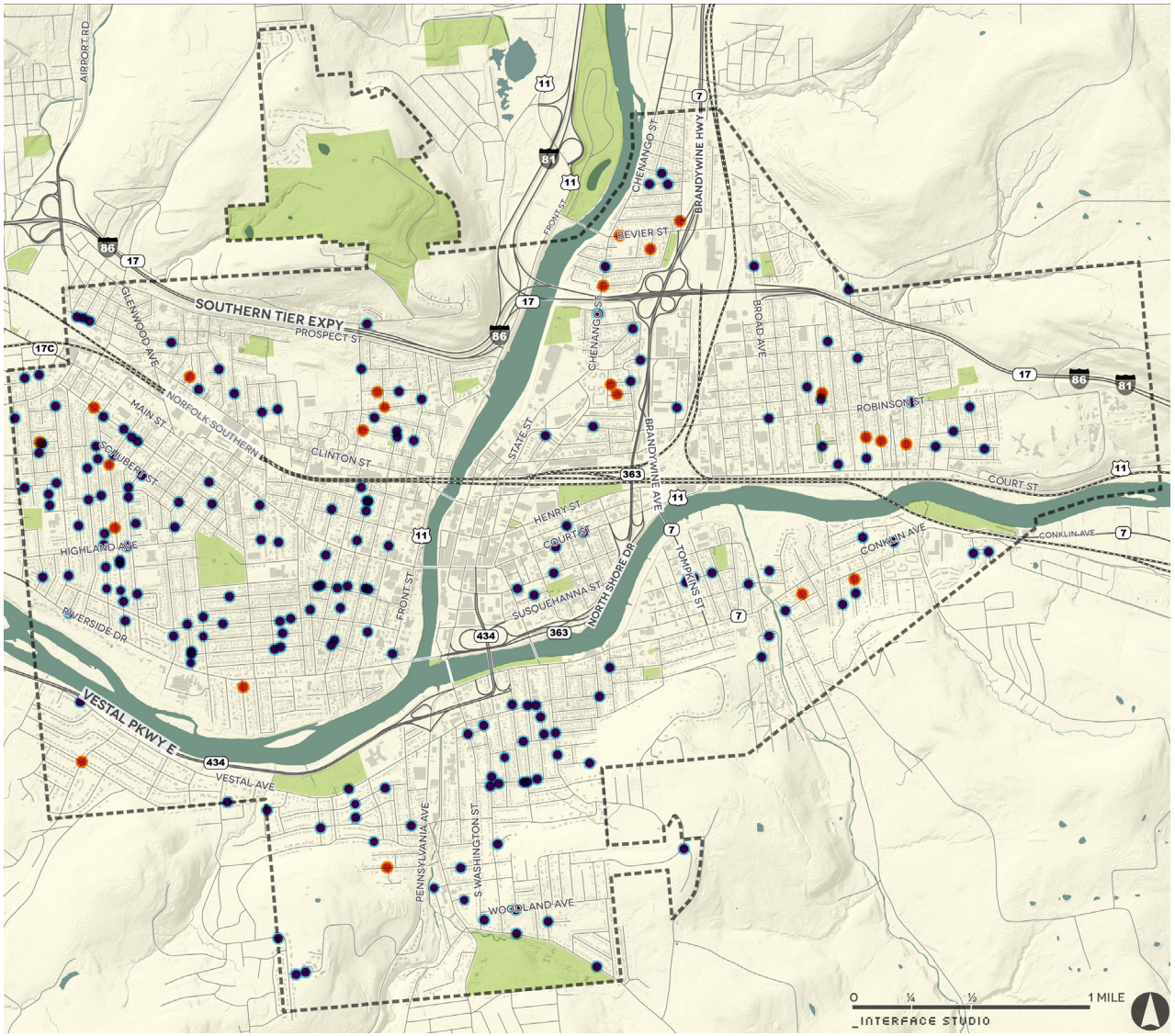
Examining the same data to show sales to owner-occupants versus non-owner occupants on a year-by-year basis reveals a dramatic reversal between 2011 and 2013 from mostly sales to owner occupants (82% in 2011) to mostly sales to non-owner occupants (89% in 2013). In 2013, a growing number of sales can be seen in the WSNP neighborhood, the east side of Downtown, and the North Side. Of all sales to non-owner occupants during 2013, 44% of the purchasers had addresses outside the City of Binghamton. The high number and percentage of 2013 sales to non-owner occupants may be a result of an easing of financial requirements for investors, the general trend in U.S. housing markets of additional investor purchases of homes that are offered for-rent, or the anticipation of higher demand for student housing because of increases in enrollment at Binghamton University.

SOURCE: WIN2 DATA BY CORELOGIC

OWNER OCCUPANCY

NON – OWNER OCCUPANCY

HOME SALES:
2013



SOURCE: WIN2 DATA BY CORELOGIC

OWNER OCCUPANCY

NON – OWNER OCCUPANCY

FIGURE 29: Home Sales: 2013 - MAP

RENTAL HOUSING

Rental housing is generally concentrated in the WSNP neighborhood, Downtown, Ely Park, and along Main Street. Monthly gross rents for market-rate rental units in Binghamton and nearby areas are very affordable in comparison with rents in major northeastern cities. Aside from the new construction of student housing complexes, market-rate multi-family rental properties in Binghamton are older, with most constructed between 1965 and the 1980s. There was a clear pattern of high occupancy rates at the multi-family properties surveyed and several had waiting lists. Rents at larger market-rate multifamily complexes are low. The highest priced two-bedroom units in Binghamton and within a 10-mile radius had asking rents below $1,200 per month. While this is an advantage for renters and also contributes to the high occupancy levels reported, the current rent levels are too low for new multifamily residential construction to be financially feasible without some form of financial assistance. Financial feasibility and related cost issues no doubt have been constraints in the development of new multifamily rental complexes. The exception is new student housing with higher per-bed monthly rentals that can generate sufficient rental income to be financially viable. However, even these properties typically have some assistance in the form of special financing or Historic Preservation Tax Credits.

Only one market-rate senior rental property having no tax credits or subsidies was identified in the City. The property is Good Shepherd Fairview Home, which is located on Fairview Avenue in the East Side Neighborhood. Participants at a stakeholder meeting that focused on seniors noted that options for seniors are limited. Waiting lists are long for affordable independent living properties that have subsidies and tax credits, and there is a shortage of nursing homes.

Several assisted housing programs in Binghamton provide ongoing subsidies that enable residents to pay gross rents (including utilities) that are based on 30% of income. These include public housing, Project-Based Section 8, Section 202 Elderly and Handicapped Housing, Homeless Housing Assistance, and Housing Choice Vouchers. The inventory is estimated to include 1,491 assisted units including 634 units for families/general occupancy and 857 units for occupancy by seniors, disabled persons, and handicapped persons. A survey of managers indicated that occupancy is generally high and most properties have waiting lists that are used to fill vacancies.

Student rentals are generally concentrated in the WSNP neighborhood, the Far West Side and Downtown. Based on a rough estimate of housing supply and the estimate of Binghamton University students living off-campus, the number of beds available in these properties is more than adequate to accommodate all students wanting to live in the City and projected future increases in enrollment at Binghamton University.

• PLEASE REFER TO THE FULL BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON HOUSING STUDY (UNDER SEPARATE COVER) FOR A MORE DETAILED HOUSING REPORT.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Binghamton's neighborhoods offer a range of choices from urban apartment living to almost rural, secluded environments. The affordability of housing makes Binghamton attractive to prospective buyers and renters but at the same time, places constraints on new residential construction because rents higher than are now typical in the City are required to support today's construction costs. There are, however, opportunities to improve the condition of housing and neighborhoods in the City for existing residents, and to attract a broader range of residents.

The recommendations in this chapter address one or more of the following objectives:

- Eliminate residential blight, and maintain quality housing and attractive neighborhoods to foster pride and quality of life
- Revitalize neighborhoods through balanced housing development throughout the City
- Encourage student housing where it will best benefit the surrounding community and City as a whole
- Develop diverse and distinctive housing options to attract various types of households to live in and help grow in the City

COMMUNITY VOICE

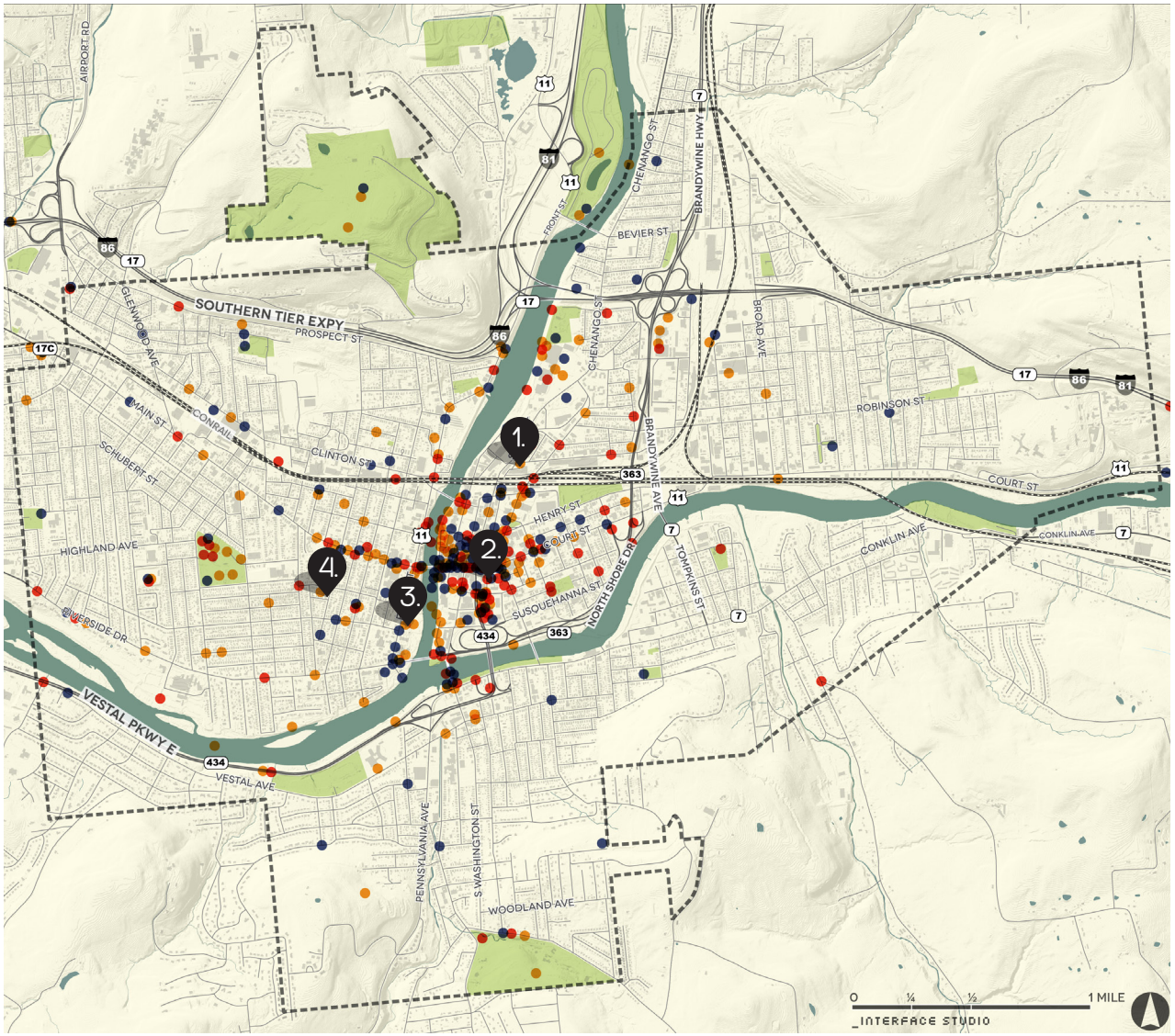
BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON asked YOU for your thoughts and ideas, concerns and priorities related to housing.

Your ideas for the **COLLABORATIVE MAP** addressed the need to improve the quality of housing for better neighborhoods, create affordable housing for populations in need, and think creatively to offer more housing options:

- "Would love to see Depot Street and train station continue loft development, restaurant or bar"
- "Enforce property codes to maintain/improve appearance of neighborhoods. Provide assistance to low income families to fix places."
- "Less vacant buildings; more quality, affordable rental housing, more trees!"
- "More housing for elderly, disabled, and low-income"
- "Downtown living should be for people wanting to downsize & retire - not just students"

COLLABORATIVE MAP

IDEAS. INSIGHTS. BARRIERS



1. "WOULD LOVE TO SEE DEPOT STREET AND TRAIN STATION CONTINUE LOFT DEVELOPMENT, RESTAURANT OR BAR"

2. "DOWNTOWN LIVING SHOULD BE FOR PEOPLE WANTING TO DOWNSIZE & RETIRE - NOT JUST STUDENTS"

3. "REDEVELOP OLD NURSING HOME ON FRONT STREET FOR HIGH END RESIDENTIAL USE FOR AGING POPULATION"

4. "ENFORCE PROPERTY CODES TO MAINTAIN/ IMPROVE APPEARANCE OF NEIGHBORHOODS. PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO LOW INCOME FAMILIES TO FIX PLACES"

- IDEA
- INSIGHT
- BARRIER

FIGURE 30: Collaborative Map Comments

POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE

Your **POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE** describe a vision for a City with a distinctive look and strong neighborhoods:

"ABSENTEE LANDLORDS FOR STUDENT HOUSING & LOW INCOME HAVE IMPROVED THEIR BUILDINGS AND OLD VACANT DECAYED BUILDINGS ARE GONE."

"THE CITIZENS ARE INVOLVED AND TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS."

"A MIX OF MODERN STYLE & HISTORIC PRESERVATION."

"IT IS A VERY CLEAN CITY WITH WELL-MAINTAINED HOMES. I HAVE NOT SEEN A SINGLE NEGLECTED BUILDING OR BOARDED UP DWELLING."

"THE ARCHITECTURE IS UNIQUE, VARIES, AND MAJESTIC."

"THE FRAT HOUSES ARE GORGEOUS ALL OF OUR NEIGHBORS LOVE EACH OTHER."

"THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS BUYING HOMES AND MAKING A REAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY."

When **5TH GRADERS** in the Binghamton City School District imagined their **DREAM NEIGHBORHOOD**, they imagined beautiful and harmonious neighborhoods:

I WANT THE PERFECT NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WOULD HAVE EVERYTHING NICE. IT WOULD HAVE NICE PEOPLE, FLOWER BEDS, AND MOWED LAWNS. IT WOULD BE PERFECT. PEOPLE WOULD BE VERY NICE. THEY WOULD NEVER GET IN FIGHTS. THEY WOULD ALWAYS CLEAN THEIR YARDS. THE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE KIDS THAT WOULD BE MY BEST FRIENDS. SOME OF THE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE CANDY HOUSES.

EVERYBODY'S HOUSES AND YARDS WOULD BE SPOTLESS AND NOT ONE PIECE OF LITTER ANYWHERE. THERE WOULD ALSO BE GARBAGE CAN ON MY STREET SO NOBODY WOULD LITTER. THIS IS MY PERFECT NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE WAY I WOULD WANT IT TO BE SO NOBODY FEELS DISGUSTED WHEN THEY SEE IT.

BIG IDEAS

Your **BIG IDEAS** inform the recommendations for improving housing in Binghamton:

Images from the "Photo Suggestion Booth"

CITYWIDE SURVEY

And your responses on the **CITYWIDE SURVEY** showed an appreciation for the affordability of housing and access to amenities, but felt that the types of housing available could be improved:

58% Like your house or apartment
51% Like your access to amenities
48% Like the affordability of housing
18% Dislike the types of housing available

HOUSING GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The recommendations that comprise **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON'S MINI-PLAN ON HOUSING** [a plan for those at home in the city] are organized into five goal areas, each titled by a key housing goal:

01

PRESERVE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

02

EXPAND HOUSING CHOICE IN BINGHAMTON

03

MANAGE THE QUALITY OF RENTAL AND STUDENT HOUSING

04

REVITALIZE DOWNTOWN WITH A MIX OF HOUSING OPTIONS

05

MARKET BINGHAMTON HOUSING TO ATTRACT DIVERSE RESIDENTS

Taken together, the Housing Goals and their related objectives and strategies support the following themes of **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON'S** vision for the future of our City:

- **RESILIENT & SUSTAINABLE** - homes and neighborhoods that are resilient in the face of changing weather patterns and that will be preserved for future generations
- **PROUD** - empowered citizens active in effecting positive change who take pride in their homes, their neighborhoods and their City
- **ALIVE** - neighborhoods invigorated by engaged residents whose efforts reinforce quality of life and attract others who choose to make Binghamton their home

FOR FULL VISION STATEMENT, SEE PAGE 40.

GOAL:

01

PRESERVE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

Binghamton's neighborhoods are well-established, walkable, and centered around services and amenities. By investing in existing housing and reducing blight in residential areas, the City will be ensuring the long-term strength of its neighborhoods and in turn supporting economic development. The following housing recommendations support Goal 1:

1.1

IDENTIFY TARGET AREAS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD STABILIZATION AND HOUSING REVITALIZATION THAT BUILDS ON STRENGTHS

Rehabilitate houses in areas targeted for stabilization

A high percentage of Binghamton's housing stock is old, and many units are in need of rehabilitation. Based on the survey of residential block conditions and perceptions of the City garnered through discussions with stakeholders, a strategic approach to neighborhood stabilization and revitalization was developed. Neighborhoods targeted for stabilization are those which were given block condition ratings of average but which have the potential to slip if efforts are not made to position them for long-term viability. Among other areas, the City should target specific streets and areas in the WSNP neighborhood and along Main Street. Other areas to be targeted include the First Ward, the North Side, the East Side south of Robinson Street, South Side West near the hospital and commercial areas, and South Side East.

NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGY

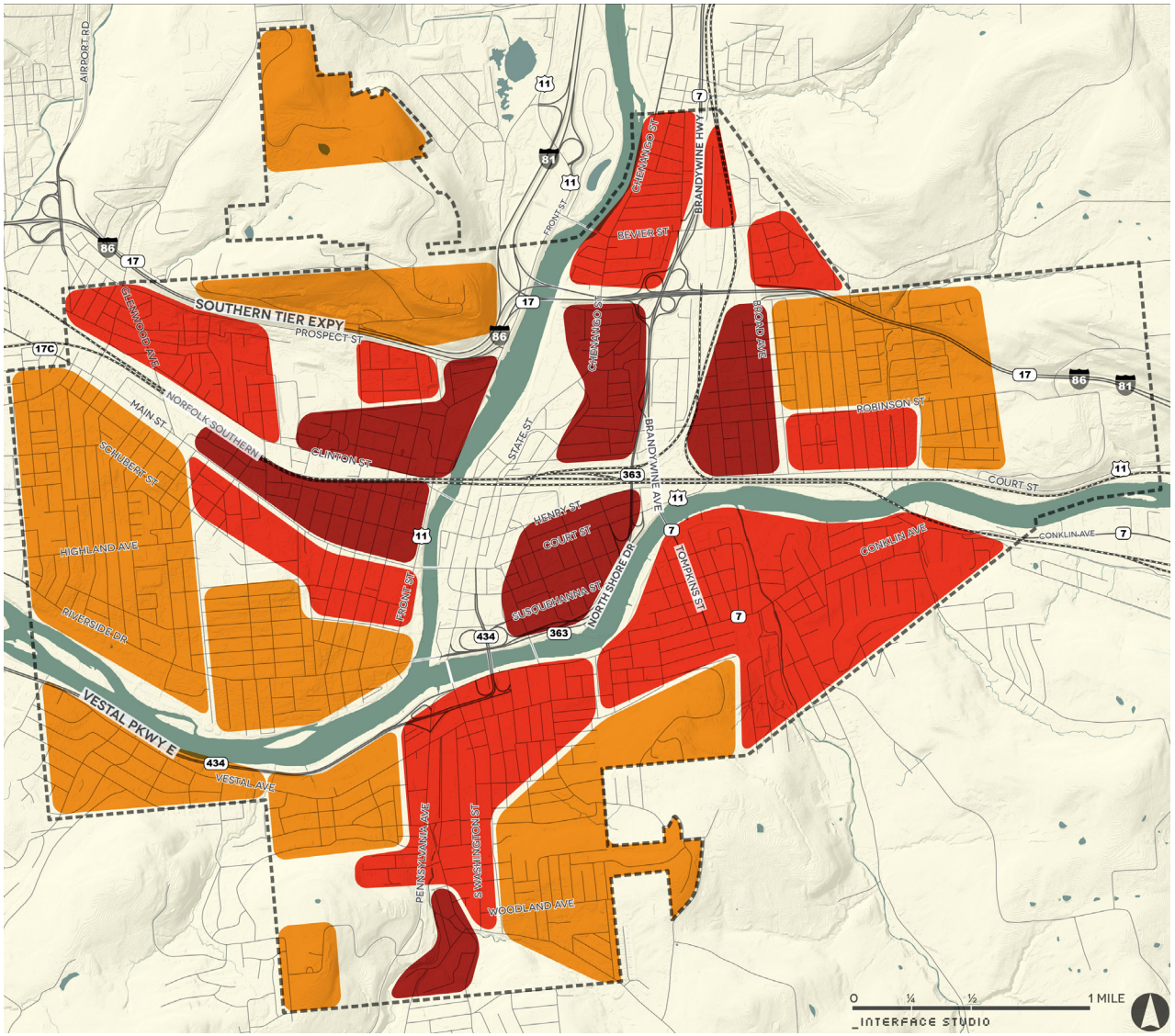


FIGURE 31: Neighborhood Strategy - MAP

For those areas that have the greatest challenges, whether due to crime, vacancy and deterioration, or flooding, it is recommended that a strategy of renewal be applied that combines rehabilitation with re-envisioning and redevelopment that may include other uses such as open spaces for areas within the floodplain or job-generating businesses and industries around highway and rail infrastructure. New Federal flood insurance requirements mean that homes in the floodplain will be required to pay higher flood insurance premiums or elevate their homes to comply with new floodplain standards. More detailed recommendations regarding flood control and helping residents reduce the impact of flooding on their homes can be found in the Infrastructure chapter of the plan.

To fund rehabilitation efforts, the City should utilize short public dollars to leverage private funds. Other cities, such as Pittsburgh, have worked with local lending institutions to establish a revolving loan fund to provide rehabilitation loans for owner-occupied homes at favorable interest rates. Multifamily properties might be eligible as long as one unit was owner-occupied.

- MAINTAIN
- STABILIZE
- RENEW

1.2
ENCOURAGE HISTORIC PRESERVATION TO MAINTAIN NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Binghamton is fortunate to have maintained a number of historic properties, among them many homes. These buildings are an important part of the City's urban fabric and are what sets it apart from newer surrounding communities. Renewed interest in living in urban cores such as Binghamton is often linked to a desire for unique housing stock that leads to distinctive neighborhood characteristics. The City currently has four historic districts: Abel Bennett Tract, the Rail Terminal, State and Henry Streets, and Court Street. Property owners throughout the City, and in these districts in particular, should be encouraged to rehabilitate historic properties so that they contribute to the character of the neighborhood. The City's Design Guidelines for Historic Properties offer important information for those working with historic properties. As historic preservation is a complicated and expensive process, the City can help minimize the hurdles involved by working with the Commission on Architecture and Urban Design (CAUD) to streamline the review and approvals process, help property owners access financial incentives such as Historic Preservation Tax Credits and New Market Tax Credits, and consider donations of easements for historic preservation.

Buildings in the Rail Terminal Historic District

Historic Home in the West Side

1.3

WORK WITH THE BINGHAMTON HOUSING AUTHORITY, PRIVATE DEVELOPERS/OWNERS, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS TO PRESERVE AND EXPAND QUALITY AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

Demand for affordable housing is strong and growth is projected in the number of extremely low income households 65 and older. This underscores the continued need for the City and a range of potential partners to ensure the availability of quality affordable rental housing for families, seniors, and special needs populations. Depending on the type and location of housing, potential partners would include non-profit and for-profit developers, community development corporations, City CHDOs, and social service agencies focused on providing housing for special needs populations. Community Building Recommendation 2.1 also discusses the need to develop supportive housing.

Much of the existing stock of public housing and housing with project-based Section 8 subsidies is older and in need of upgrading. Although funding programs are highly competitive, it would be useful to pursue assistance programs to renovate older subsidized housing reported to be in poor or deteriorating condition. One such program would be the preservation provisions of the LIHTC program, which can assist with modernization. For senior properties in need of renovations, the funding can be used to convert efficiencies to larger residential units. HUD also has worked with property owners to convert a component of units in a subsidized senior property to assisted living.

For public housing and projects with project based Section 8 subsidies, the HUD Choice program is another opportunity that local officials may want to pursue to improve public housing as part of a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation. The HUD Choice program offers planning and implementation grants. The focus is on housing, people, and neighborhoods and not just the reconstruction of a subsidized housing project. This approach could be considered for the Saratoga Apartments and surrounding neighborhood in South Side East, based on the high poverty level in the area and a housing strategy of stabilization. The Woodburn Court II development Downtown might also be considered as it is constantly under the threat of flooding. Also see Housing Recommendation 4.5

1.4
ASSIST RESIDENTS IN NEED (LOW-INCOME, SENIORS) WITH MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

Most of the housing stock in Binghamton is aging, and the number of homes in poor condition increased between 2000 and 2010. In order to prevent these homes from deteriorating and negatively impacting the lives of their residents and neighbors, the City can help with assistance programs for maintenance and repairs that bring houses up to code and improve overall block and neighborhood conditions. The City has one program in place to assist owners of single-family homes with repairs up to $25,000 (or higher to address lead issues). Additional rehabilitation programs might expand on this initiative to include single-family attached and smaller multifamily homes when an owner occupies a unit.

These programs include as eligible rehabilitation costs in addition to code violations and energy improvements, addressing conditions critical to the viability of a structure such as roof repairs, porch reconstruction, exterior finishes (paint or siding); foundation maintenance and repair; structural reinforcement; and basement repairs. In Baltimore, the Capable Project (Community Aging in Place, Advancing Better Living for Elders), with funding from the National Institutes of Health and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, is assisting seniors with home repairs and modifications that will help them stay in their homes and remain independent. Action Housing in Pittsburgh has a similar program to assist seniors.

Aging housing stock in need of maintenance

1.5

PARTNER WITH LOCAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TO EXPLORE MECHANISMS THAT ASSIST ELDERLY HOMEOWNERS SEEKING TO AGE IN PLACE IN THEIR HOMES

Many seniors lack the means to make the repairs or modifications necessary to remain in their homes though they have roots in their neighborhood and would like to stay. Their ability to age in place is an important stabilizing factor for a neighborhood. One solution to consider is the creation of a community land trust, a non-profit tool that is complementary to municipal land banks. Municipal Land Banks (MLB), like the Broome County Land Bank Corporation, are public or quasi-public corporations that take ownership of land temporarily to clear title and assemble land, and prepare and position land for redevelopment, at which time the land is conveyed to a private owner. Community Land Trusts (CLTs), in contrast, are private, nonprofit corporations created and controlled by community members and City representatives who sit on the CLT Board and non-profit entities; CLTs can exist as a program of an existing non-profit or as a standalone non-profit. CLTs hold land in perpetuity for different community-serving purposes, such as affordable housing. Buildings on the land (existing or newly constructed) are sold to (or retained by) homeowners, small businesses, or other nonprofits who gain exclusive use of the underlying land through a long-term ground lease. The lease includes restrictions on the use and resale of the buildings upon the land, enabling the CLT to ensure that the property serves a community need, such as affordable homeownership, over time.

In this case, elderly homeowners could donate their property (the land and the home upon the land) to the land trust but continue to live on it through a "life estate." In exchange for the property, the land trust would handle maintenance of the property during that period. This arrangement would help seniors stay in their homes and also preserve housing and the integrity of the neighborhood as people age out by preventing land from being sold off to speculators who might convert the homes to rental properties. Upon death, or when the elderly homeowners are ready to sell, the land trust would help them sell the home to another family or individual that meets the objectives of the trust (in this case, preserving affordable housing options for seniors or families); the land trust would retain ownership of the land, thereby ensuring that the home retains its affordability and single-family use. Though CLTs are nonprofit entities, owners continue to pay property tax to the City, as the land is not exempt.

1.6

CONSIDER WORKING WITH ONE OR MORE FHA-APPROVED LENDING INSTITUTIONS TO DEFINE THE PARAMETERS OF A BINGHAMTON HOUSING ACQUISITION AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM USING FHA 203(K) MORTGAGE INSURANCE FOR LOANS

Many lenders have successfully used the Section 203(k) program in partnership with state and local housing agencies and non-profit organizations to rehabilitate properties, often combining the mortgage insurance with other financial resources. Section 203(k) can be used by prospective purchasers to purchase and rehabilitate homes bought out of foreclosure. Under Section 203(k), the mortgage amount on a one- to four-family home is based on the projected value of the property after rehabilitation, meaning that a borrower does not have to obtain interim financing until the rehabilitation has been completed. Down-payments are low - 3.5%. The mortgage has a long-term fixed or adjustable rate and covers the cost of both acquisition and rehabilitation of the property. Major rehabilitation is not required; Section 203(k) can be used when purchasers are proposing minor renovations. The property must be a primary residence; investors are excluded. Although lenders are insured by FHA against losses, the program is staff-intensive, and many larger lenders are reluctant to use it. Smaller regional and community banks are more active in the program. Non-profit organizations can be eligible borrowers under 203(k), and can use the program to acquire and rehabilitate foreclosed properties including HUD- and City-owned properties.

Homes in Need of Repair

1.7

DEVELOP "FIX TO OWN" PROGRAM FOR CITY-OWNED PROPERTIES TO TRANSITION TO OWNER-OCCUPIED PROPERTIES

A "Fix to Own" program would allow renters of City-owned properties to become owners by investing their money and sweat equity to improve the properties over time. Such a program would improve the condition of the property and its impact on the neighborhood, and increase the level of homeownership, which has been linked to higher levels of maintenance, more social stability, and higher home values. The previously referenced Section 203(k) program might be used to help prospective purchasers to finance acquisition and rehabilitation.

This should work in tandem with the existing "$1 Healthy Homes Initiative" which sells city owned properties for $1 to which the new owners are eligible for $100,000 in Restore NY funding to help improve the property. Given that the State has ended the Restore NY Program, the City should look to the Broome County Land Bank to help continue these housing initiatives. Like the successful $1 Healthy Homes Initiative, priority should be given to owner occupants over investors.

Vacant Home in the North Side

GOAL:

02

EXPAND HOUSING CHOICE IN BINGHAMTON

Over three-quarters of Binghamton's housing stock is over 50 years old, and less than one percent of the housing stock has been built since the beginning of 2000. Binghamton needs to refresh its housing offerings to compete successfully with its neighbors and plan for changing demographic characteristics. The following housing recommendations support Goal 2:

2.1

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SITES FOR NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT (FOR-SALE, FOR-RENT, SENIOR)

Different strategies for new housing development should be based on location and target populations. Considerations for developing for-sale, rental and senior housing include whether the available land is an infill site or larger development site, its location in the City and proximity to services and transportation, and the desired characteristics of the target population. New for-sale units that are added in the City could be on infill sites in existing neighborhoods, especially when property values can be maintained or enhanced by providing new units with features and amenities that are comparable to suburban alternatives. Examples would be the development of low density single-family homes in the Far West Side, South Side West and East, and Ely Park neighborhoods. These are stable neighborhoods that can benefit from initiatives to enhance their competitiveness.

The Charles Street Business Park, Greater Binghamton Health Center and Binghamton Plaza are large development sites that have the potential to offer a mix of uses that includes some housing (see Land Use & Zoning Recommendation 1.3). Over the long term, residents of neighborhoods in the First Ward and East Side that are threatened by flooding could have the opportunity to relocate to housing outside of the floodplain but still within their original neighborhoods -- most notably Charles Street Business Park for the First Ward and Greater Binghamton Health Center for the East Side. Binghamton Plaza, part of the North

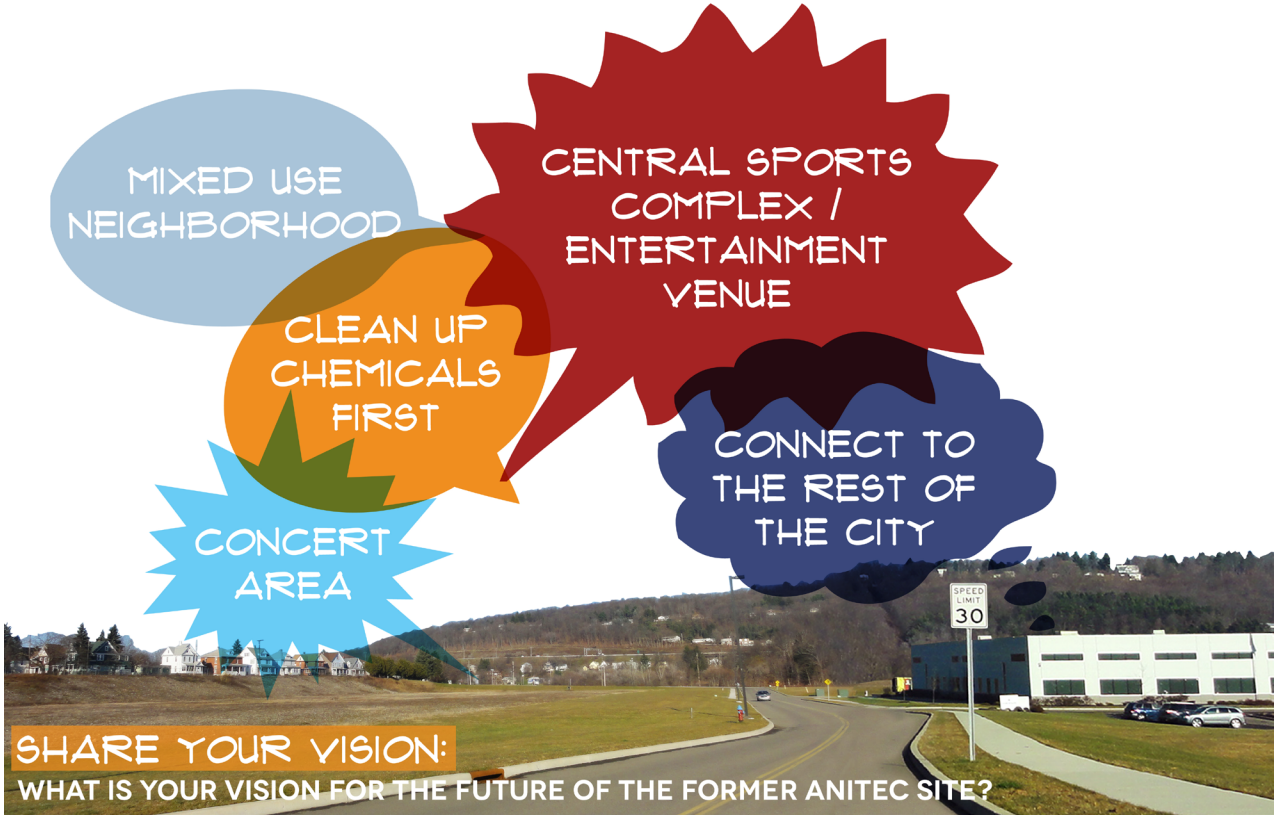


FIGURE 32: "BIG IDEA" Comments - Charles Street Business Park

Chenango BOA, has potential as a larger scale mixed-use residential and retail development that could tap into development assistance programs. HR&A's 2013 market analysis also recommends a long-term strategy of a senior housing development.

Demand for additional housing for seniors at several different income levels is evident from the tabulations of households by income band and age. Moreover, the low vacancies and long waiting lists for more modern senior housing with deep subsidies and LIHTCs and the general lack of alternatives for higher income seniors all indicate that Binghamton's supply of housing for seniors should be increased. An objective should be to work with one or more private developers to identify potential sites for which funding applications are appropriate. Based on the long waiting list at East Hills Senior Housing and the appropriateness of its income targeting, a good first step would be to pursue a LIHTC development for seniors.

Assuming that a potential site in Binghamton can be identified for an assisted living or nursing home development, there is apparent market support for this type of development because of the projected increases in the number of seniors 75 and older. Since these developments are staff-intensive, they also are a good source of additional jobs. A cooperative working relationship with one or both of the City's hospitals would be beneficial, as would a location near a medical center.

"PROMOTE AREA FOR A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY – WE HAVE ALL THE AMENITIES – CULTURAL, MEDICAL, EDUCATIONAL, RECREATIONAL, ENTERTAINMENT."

Source: Binghamton Resident Comment

Left to right: Greater Binghamton Health Center, Binghamton Plaza, East Hills Senior Housing

2.2

WORK WITH BROOME COUNTY LAND BANK TO ASSEMBLE REDEVELOPMENT SITES FOR NEW FOR-SALE HOUSING UNITS

As documented in the **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON HOUSING STUDY**, the housing market is expected to improve overall. The main constraint for housing development, however, is the availability of land suitable for new homes. The City should work with the Broome County Land Bank to assemble sites for the development of new for-sale housing units. The Broome County Land Bank provides a vehicle for taking a coordinated, long-term approach to bringing distressed, vacant and underutilized land back into productive use, and doing so at a scale that can effect lasting change. The Greater Syracuse Land Bank, representatives of which spoke at a **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON** Community Discussion, presents a good model for Binghamton moving forward.

Vacant and distressed properties can be assembled through the County Land Bank.

2.3

REQUIRE ENERGY EFFICIENCY, GREEN BUILDING PRACTICES, AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED PROJECTS

New publicly-funded projects should incorporate energy efficiency and green building practices to decrease their environmental footprint and improve the environmental quality of life in the City. Today, greener living is no longer an exception but the rule. This recommendation will help the City meet the goals outlined in its Energy and Climate Action Plan and also ensure lower utility costs for residents. Universal design principles result in products and environments that are usable by everyone, regardless of age or physical ability. By incorporating these design principles into public projects, the City will send a powerful message of support for all of its residents; public projects also will be a model for private developments.

2.4 DEVELOP NEW MARKET-RATE RENTAL HOUSING FOR GENERAL OCCUPANCY

Since the City has no new rental housing developments for general occupancy, consider identifying a site for this type of development. As the market for general occupancy is not as strong as the student rental market, the City should welcome developments that include a small increment of affordable units (up to 20%), which can help bridge financing gaps and improve project feasibility. Studies increasingly show that affordable family housing is best provided in properties with a mix of incomes. For example, in other cities, developers have successfully incorporated a component of housing units for households with incomes below 50% of the median in new and substantially rehabilitated properties that include market-rate housing. Special financing programs that can be tapped for mixed-income housing also can help in creating financially feasible projects.

2.5 DEVELOP AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND MIXED INCOME DEVELOPMENTS ADJACENT TO SERVICES AND TRANSPORTATION

Binghamton has a shortage of affordable housing; occupancy is generally high at assisted rental properties and most have wait lists for future vacancies. The City should work with for-profit and non-profit developers to ensure that applications for additional affordable housing and affordable units in mixed-income developments are submitted to New York State Homes and Community Renewal each year. Since transportation costs associated with owning a car are high and residents seeking affordable housing may not be able to afford a car, it is important that new developments are sited in areas that have good access to services and public transportation.

Metro Plaza Apartments in downtown Binghamton

GOAL:

03

MANAGE THE QUALITY OF RENTAL AND STUDENT HOUSING

Binghamton has a large supply of market-rate rental housing and student housing in older, existing structures. Rental housing is found throughout the City's neighborhoods, but concentrated in the WSNP target area, Downtown, and the North Side. These same areas also have relatively high levels of vacancy for reasons that include the decline in the number of households in Binghamton, the condition of the housing stock, and recent additions to the student rental inventory. To protect the integrity of all the City's neighborhoods, quality rental housing must be maintained.

Student housing has been a central discussion topic over the past few years. The influx of students into Downtown and portions of the West Side have brought many benefits. Students have helped to breathe new life into Downtown by providing a market for restaurants and services, and their expenditures in Binghamton have bolstered the City's economy. Moreover, the influx of students has also provided a means by which to repurpose older homes that, for years, had limited market potential.

But as in other cities with large amounts of student housing, there are also challenges. While many landlords are responsible and maintain their student housing portfolios, others do not. Without proper code enforcement, these properties can deteriorate to the point where there are few options for their reuse. Similarly, while many students are good neighbors, others are not and this causes tensions with nearby homeowners. Another central concern is the conversion of larger, older homes into multiple apartment units which diminishes their integrity and value. These challenges must be addressed to maximize the positive benefits associated with student housing.

As other cities have learned, there is no one solution to managing rental housing. Many actions are required simultaneously including better code enforcement, outreach to landlords/investors, incentives to encourage rehabilitation and a proactive approach to encouraging new student housing developments in areas that can provide the best return on investment and benefits to the surrounding community. The following housing recommendations support Goal 3:

Rental housing on the West Side

3.1

DEVISE A NEW URBAN VILLAGE/MIXED USE ZONING CLASSIFICATION TO LEGALIZE AND BETTER REGULATE RENTAL HOUSING WHILE ALSO MANAGING EXTERNALITIES

Reinvestment opportunities on the east side of downtown Binghamton

Establishment of a new zoning classification, an Urban Village/Mixed Use Zone, where rental and student housing is an allowable use will be a positive step toward regulating rental housing and promoting safety, maintenance, and quality of life. The past practice of enforcement when complaints have been filed has not been useful in establishing effective controls on investments by landlords wanting to rent units to students and the preservation of housing in established neighborhoods of homeowners. Shared rentals in these neighborhoods is not legal under the current residential zoning; spot enforcement is not a viable long-term solution. The legislation that establishes this new zoning classification should build on prior debates and analyses in connection with an Urban Village Overlay District while also enabling local officials and organizations to establish positive requirements for this new classification to address such matters as allowable commercial uses, parking, setbacks, occupancy standards, and others related to the intensity of use associated with student housing. Fees associated with rental registration should generate additional revenue to help cover added costs associated with inspections of properties. The clear identification of areas where student housing is permitted, along with registrations and inspections should result in better maintenance and upkeep of properties by property managers and investor-owners.

It is recommended that the new Urban Village/Mixed Use Zone be considered for the areas currently under the existing Urban Village District Overlay, as well as the east side of Downtown on both sides of Court Street and the northern section of the South Side along Conklin and Vestal Avenues. All of these locations are served by the Off-Campus College Transport (OCCT) bus connecting students to the BU campus; consideration of direct BC Transit service might provide an additional incentive. The east side of Downtown Binghamton, which is in need of reinvestment, could benefit greatly from reinvestment incentives to enhance the revitalization of Downtown while also alleviating student housing market pressure in the Downtown core and West Side neighborhoods that are not within the Urban Village District Overlay. The South Side is very close to Downtown and also has its own commercial corridors around the hospital, Washington Street, and Conklin Avenue. While housing conditions in the South Side are generally average to good, the targeted area just south of Downtown could benefit from focused investment in housing, including student housing, to shore up conditions and strengthen the South Side as a whole.

RENTAL HOUSING ZONES

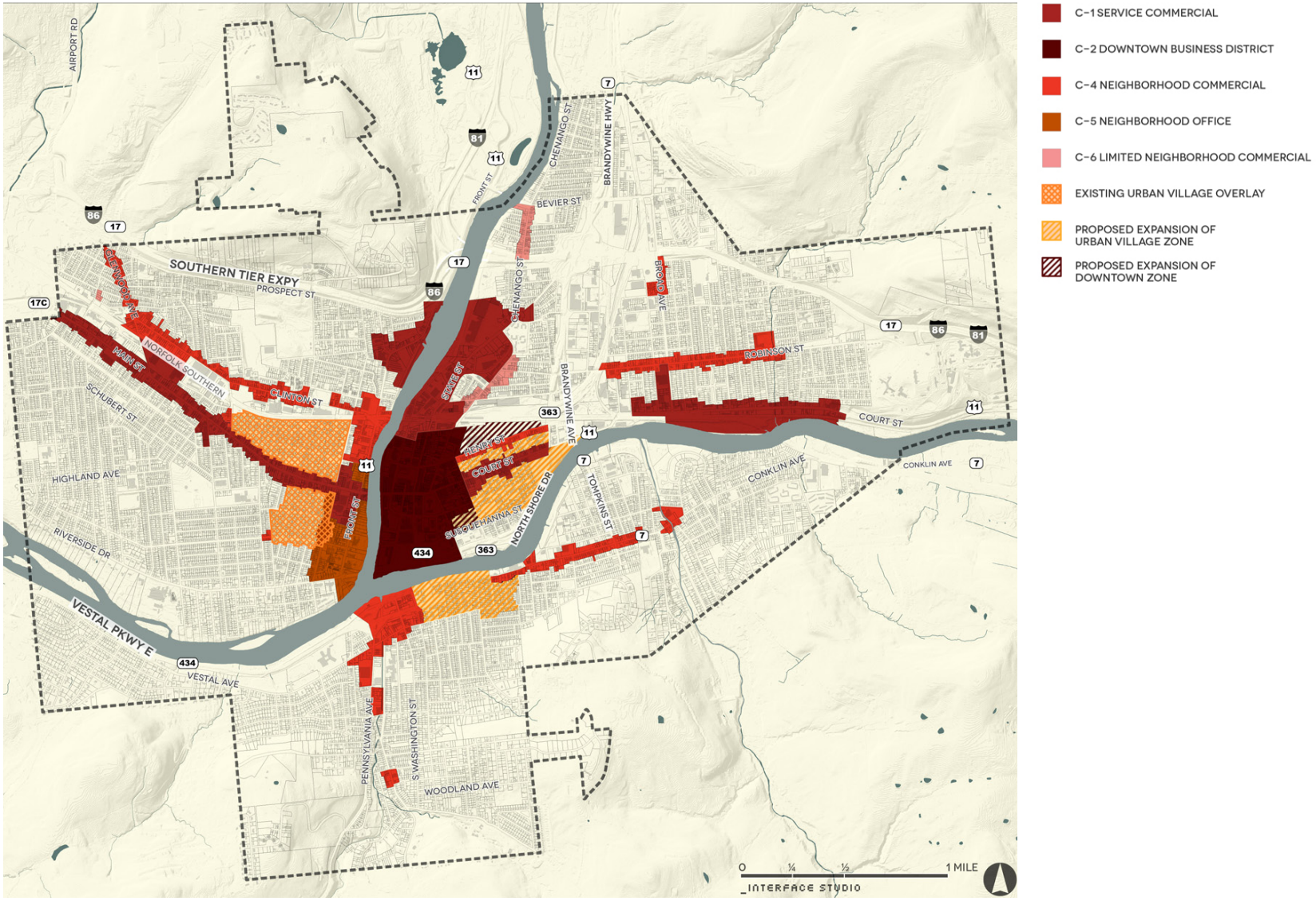


FIGURE 33: Rental Housing Zones - MAP

3.2 IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITY SITES AND INCENTIVES FOR NEW STUDENT HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Student housing is permitted in all areas zoned for commercial use and in areas that may be in the proposed Urban Village/Mixed Use zone. In addition to the east side of Downtown, Main Street is recommended as an opportunity site for the development of student housing. This area is zoned commercial which permits student housing, and it is served by the OCCT bus. Offering direct service to the University via BC Transit could provide another incentive for student housing to be located along Main Street. The proposed new zoning for Main Street along with incentives to design places attractive to students could have an enormous impact on transforming this corridor. Directing the development of student housing to this area will help to relieve pressure on Downtown and spread the positive impacts of revitalization brought about by students choosing to live in the City. In concert with this effort to direct new student housing development and legalize and better regulate existing student rentals, the City should also explore the creation of development standards such as density limitations or limiting the number of permits per year for multi-family projects involving dwelling units with more than four bedrooms per unit.

3.3 STRENGTHEN CODE ENFORCEMENT AND FOLLOW UP TO IMPROVE RENTAL PROPERTIES

Improving the quality of housing is an important objective for the City of Binghamton, as well as Broome County. The recently completed Broome County Comprehensive Plan supports grant applications for renovating substandard housing with a focus on urban centers such as Binghamton. The City recently enacted legislation that requires all residential rental units throughout the entire city, regardless of size and with the exception of two-family, owner-occupied structures, to be registered. A fee is required to complete registration. Rental units subject to registration will be inspected, at least once every three years, as allowed by municipal resources, and with penalties for non-compliance. This Rental Registration Program will improve housing conditions and help ensure that all residential rental properties are safer, more habitable and more consistently compliant with NY State Code and related local municipal regulations. In combination with the proposed Urban Village/Mixed Use zone, the Rental Registration program should make it easier for the City to proactively manage housing issues. Additional means of adjudicating criminal cases, such as a "housing court," may be another means by which code enforcement services could be improved throughout the City. Current limitations on judicial resources, combined with high demand for court services, can impair the length of time required to adjudicate individual court cases. When or where code violations have an impact on health and safety, it is especially important for adjudication to occur in a timely fashion.

3.4 WORK WITH THE BINGHAMTON HOUSING AUTHORITY TO ENSURE THAT PROPERTIES LEASED TO FAMILIES WITH HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS HAVE BEEN INSPECTED AND ARE IN COMPLIANCE

HUD regulations mandate inspections of units leased by households with Housing Choice Vouchers. If the units have been inspected by BHA, the City should consider accepting a copy of the HUD inspection form in lieu of conducting a separate inspection. Similar rules should be applicable for the City's Emergency Solutions Grant program. The City should continue working with the DSS, by coordinating their Rental Registration and public housing subsidy programs, to the extent legally feasible. Housing data that is a matter of public record and which has been obtained through the Rental Registration program or the triennial inspection program should be made available to DSS, as needed to support existing housing regulations, such as the Spiegel Act, that link code compliance and enforcement with subsidy payment programs.

3.5 ENCOURAGE LANDLORDS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR PROPERTIES

The City can complement its code enforcement measures by working with landlord associations to assist landlords working to improve their properties. The City could create incentives for landlords to reinvest in properties to help them upgrade obsolete, deteriorated rental housing. For example, the Baltimore City Lead Abatement Project provides money to property owners to renovate residential or rental properties so that units are lead safe. Some cities have employed Good Landlord Programs to promote quality, crime-free rental housing by training landlords about how to register their property, how to screen tenants, how to evict problem tenants, how to maintain buildings to city code, and how to prepare for Rental Registration inspections. Another alternative would be to work with investors to offer units for-rent to households with Housing Choice Vouchers, and possibly provide Project-Based Vouchers to encourage owners to improve the condition of housing units and provide enhanced maintenance on an ongoing basis. A counseling program to assist low-income households to understand their responsibilities as tenants would help to alleviate some of the reported reluctance to leasing units to households with vouchers. To the extent that similar programs are operating in Broome County, a cooperative effort between City and County officials to coordinate initiatives should be pursued.

3.6

DEVELOP INCENTIVES FOR CONVERSION OF OBSOLETE RENTAL HOUSING TO OWNER-OCCUPIED (MULTI-FAMILY/SINGLE-FAMILY) HOUSING

Allowing limited commercial uses such as professional offices is an incentive that could help with converting larger homes to owner-occupied housing.

Converting obsolete rental housing - structures with code violations and long-term vacant structures - to owner-occupied housing is a challenge for cities and requires a creative response. Incentives to help offset some of these costs will encourage developers and homebuyers to take on the challenge. One alternative might be to work with a HUD-approved Section 203(k) consultant to explore use of the program to market units to prospective owner-occupants (see Recommendation 1.6). Another option might be to offer special financing for owner-occupants. Pittsburgh's Friendship neighborhood offers a successful example of collaboration between the Friendship Development Associates, a local community development corporation, and the City's Urban Redevelopment Authority to encourage rehabilitation of larger single-family homes with low- and no-interest loans when the property's owner occupies a unit. In other cities, large employers or institutions such as hospitals and universities have employee-assisted housing programs like down payment assistance that encourage employees to buy homes and live closer to their work.

Owners of some of the larger rental properties in Binghamton might benefit from this type of incentive especially when combined with Rental Registration and the required triennial inspection. In this case, special financing could be available to developers/investor owners interested in undertaking the conversion, such that the incentive is for the developer rather than the buyer. The National Development Council and the International Economic Development Council offer training programs for municipal officials about how to develop appropriate incentive packages.

Another possibility would be to offer added flexibility in allowable uses of larger residential properties. Aside from properties in the C5-Neighborhood Office District along Front Street and in the WSNP target area and R3 zones, the use of property for purposes such as professional offices is not allowed under current zoning regulations, without prior approval of a variance issued by the Zoning Board of Appeals. This process can be long and expensive and thereby make successful adaptive reuse that much more difficult. The City could develop incentives to make this process easier in areas outside C5 and R3 zoning, such as allowing a home office on the ground floor of a home when the owner is living upstairs (see Land Use and Zoning Recommendation 2.4 as well).

GOAL:

04

REVITALIZE DOWNTOWN WITH A MIX OF HOUSING OPTIONS

The influx of students Downtown has sparked a revitalization that has positioned Downtown Binghamton for its next stage of redevelopment. New businesses and activities have enlivened the streets and set in motion a change in perception about Downtown that will make it easier to market to a broad range of residents. Other cities have experienced a renewed interest in living Downtown on the part of young professionals, singles, couples without children, and empty-nesters. Binghamton should be able to capitalize on this trend, given the revitalization that has already occurred, the sizeable employment base Downtown, and the stock of historic structures that might be converted to provide interesting housing choices for these demographics in addition to students. The following recommendations support Goal 4:

Historic buildings help define the character of Downtown Binghamton

4.1

ENCOURAGE HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND REUSE TO PROVIDE UNIQUE, ATTRACTIVE HOUSING OPTIONS

Other cities have attracted young professionals with higher incomes to Downtown rental properties in rehabilitated historic buildings by working with private developers to convert buildings from other uses. Some of this activity already is occurring in Binghamton, but more is needed. Local officials can work with developers to tap financing sources and special programs such as Historic Preservation and New Markets Tax Credits, and other financing mechanisms might generate higher levels of Downtown redevelopment. These types of housing appeal initially to young professionals, but as revitalization takes hold and Downtown develops an identity, the momentum can incorporate additional rehabilitation and infill development, and likely attract older households. As the momentum builds and pricing increases, the next phase should be construction of new housing offered for-rent and also for-sale.

4.2

ENCOURAGE MARKET RATE HOUSING WITH A VARIETY OF UNIT PLANS FOR RESIDENTS SEEKING DOWNTOWN AMENITIES

Downtown Binghamton needs a stock of housing that is suitable for occupancy by households of varying ages and with incomes at different levels. Market-rate residential properties in the City and within a ten-mile radius have very low - or no vacancies. There is solid evidence of household demand in the City based on tabulations of households by income band and age cohort. The City presently has two properties Downtown that have been developed exclusively for students. Rents are quoted on a per-bed basis, and the properties have a wide range of features and amenities appealing to students. Other building owners and developers are now proposing conversions and rehabilitations with unit plans targeted toward students - such as units containing five to seven or more bedrooms.

While some properties designed specifically for students are appropriate, recent conversions in Downtown Binghamton have been primarily targeted for occupancy by groups of students to the exclusion of other types of households. Owners run the risk of having vacant properties if the student market becomes saturated. Similarly, the result for the City is a lack of housing for other types of households who may be interested in living Downtown, and who did express interest during the Blueprint Binghamton planning process. Housing should be able to accommodate a variety of users over the long-term, and the City should encourage building owners and developers to consider projects that are attractive to a wide range of occupants. While young households - students and young professionals - are the first to move Downtown, empty nesters and seniors should follow as perceptions change.

4.3 DEVELOP MODERATE-INCOME SENIOR HOUSING NEAR AMENITIES

The senior population at virtually all income levels is growing, as is the number of more affluent older households in the City overall. Downtown Binghamton has several subsidized senior properties, but there are no properties for moderate-income or higher income empty-nesters or senior households. While Downtown Binghamton presently lacks one key amenity, a grocery, there are numerous entertainment and recreational venues and special events, restaurants, shops, and a health club that make the City an interesting place. These amenities make Downtown Binghamton an attractive location for a new senior housing property for moderate- and higher-income households, possibly one offering different levels of service. There are several underutilized parcels that might be sites for this type of housing, including the surface parking lot across from the Doubletree Hotel and the former nursing home site on Front Street, just across the river from Downtown.

4.4 CONSIDER PARKING MAXIMUMS OR LOWER PARKING MINIMUMS FOR NEW HOUSING CONSTRUCTION DOWNTOWN

The advantages of Downtown living - walkability, street life, thriving businesses - are diminished by the dominance of surface parking lots that create gaps in activity. This makes walking unpleasant and creates a cycle; fewer people on the street make it feel inactive and unsafe, leading people to resort to driving which fuels a demand for more parking and creating ever bigger gaps in the urban fabric that makes Downtown interesting in the first place. One way to break this cycle is to introduce parking maximums rather than minimums or lower parking minimums for new housing. Benefits of this strategy include preventing developers from building excessive lots, allowing for the redevelopment of parking lots, improved pedestrian experience and safety Downtown, and reducing the heat island effect and stormwater runoff generated from the large expanses of impermeable parking lot surfaces. This proposal along with the potential of shared parking on existing lots, should be carefully evaluated in the upcoming Downtown parking study to be commissioned by the City and no action should be taken until the completion of the proposed Downtown parking study (see Transportation Recommendation 2.1).

4.5

APPLY FOR A CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE PLANNING GRANT FOR WOODBURN COURT II

Choice Neighborhoods is a HUD program that supports the development of plans to transform distressed public and/or HUD-assisted housing and bring about improvements in neighborhood assets through public and private investments. North Shore and Woodburn Court I and II residents had to be evacuated from the properties in the 2006 and 2011 floods. While the Binghamton Housing Authority's North Shore Towers and Village, and adjacent subsidized rentals at the Woodburn Court I high-rise have received a four million dollar grant for flood proofing, the low-rise Woodburn Court II development remains wholly in the floodplain and vulnerable to repeat flood damage and therefore a good candidate for the grant program. A Choice planning grant would enable the Housing Authority, in partnership with other public and private organizations, to develop plans for redevelopment or alternative uses in a delineated Choice neighborhood that would encompass Woodburn Court II and surrounding properties. Since the High-Technology Incubator is located nearby, it might be possible to involve Binghamton University, which is likely to enhance the competitive standing of a Binghamton application.

Former nursing home on Front Street

Woodburn Court I

Woodburn Court II

GOAL:

05

MARKET BINGHAMTON HOUSING TO ATTRACT DIVERSE RESIDENTS

The recommendations described thus far aim to produce high quality housing stock that can serve different types of households and contribute to safe and attractive neighborhoods. The recommendations under this final objective connect residents and potential residents to the advantages of living in Binghamton. The following housing recommendations support Goal 5:

5.1

DEVELOP BRANDING STRATEGY FOR DIFFERENT TARGET POPULATIONS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Each neighborhood has distinctive characteristics that are attractive to different segments of the population. The activity, density and housing stock Downtown is appealing to the student population but may also fit the preferences of other populations such as young professionals and empty nesters. A family with children, on the other hand, may prefer more space and a yard or proximity to good schools and parks. Hospital workers may be enticed by neighborhoods close to work. First time buyers may be enticed by the affordable Victorian fixer uppers found north of Main Street. A branding and marketing strategy can be developed for each neighborhood to highlight defining characteristics and reach out to prospective new residents. Police and real estate agents must be a part of both defining a neighborhood brand and getting the word out to potential renters and buyers. Space should also be dedicated for each district on the City's website. The **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON HOUSING STUDY** provides information about lifestyles in each Binghamton neighborhood, together with summary information about the characteristics of each lifestyle. The data are from the ESRI Tapestry system that divides households based on factors that include demographic, socioeconomic, residential, and consumer shopping and leisure time preferences. The characteristics used to describe the different lifestyles speak to household preferences that can be incorporated into marketing materials appealing to households in these lifestyles.

Binghamton has varied and distinctive neighborhoods and housing types.

5.2 WORK WITH INSTITUTIONS TO OFFER EMPLOYEE INCENTIVES TO LIVE IN BINGHAMTON

Several major employers are located in Binghamton, however, 80% of workers with primary jobs in Binghamton live outside the City. Binghamton could benefit greatly if some of these workers moved into the City, and workers would enjoy a shorter commute and have a bigger stake in the community where they work. The City and the Binghamton Homeownership Academy could work with employers to create an employer-assisted incentive program for employees to live where they work by offering grants to help with down payments. As in other cities, the benefits to institutions include having employees living nearby and not subject to commuting problems, improved safety, and reduced parking demand. All of these save money over time.

5.3 EXPAND BINGHAMTON HOMEOWNERSHIP ACADEMY (BHOA) SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Binghamton Homeownership Academy (BHOA) partners with local and regional agencies to connect prospective homebuyers and existing homeowners to local, state and federal resources that help to defray the costs associated with purchasing and rehabilitating a home. Through its partners, the BHOA offers homeownership programs, including classes, down payment assistance, grants for rehabilitation and repairs, foreclosure prevention, and financial management assistance. To support homeownership in the City, the BHOA should actively seek to expand its services and partnerships and engage in an active outreach campaign to provide information about available programs to active neighborhood assemblies, local institutions, realtors, and developers.

WANT TO KEEP READING?

BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON HAS 7 MAIN CHAPTERS

A ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

B HOUSING

C TRANSPORTATION

D INFRASTRUCTURE

E ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE

F LAND USE & ZONING

G COMMUNITY BUILDING