HEALTHY AND VIBRANT NEIGHBORHOODS

Creating and Maintaining Healthy and Vibrant Neighborhoods

HOUSING

Maryland Heights is a city of subdivisions and neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are essential components of the physical and social character of the City, providing a variety of housing choices in density, style, and price. Some neighborhoods also include commercial or institutional uses, in varying quantities, providing goods and services to residents, and potentially to the larger community. These uses, in combination with such things as parks, open spaces, mature trees, and religious and other institutions, represent community assets that establish the distinctive identity of each subdivision and neighborhood.

While diverse and well-maintained, much of the housing in Maryland Heights does not meet the expectations of current homebuyers. The National Association of Realtors reports on the characteristics of homes purchased. Those purchased, compared to characteristics of a typical Maryland Heights home are shown in the following table:
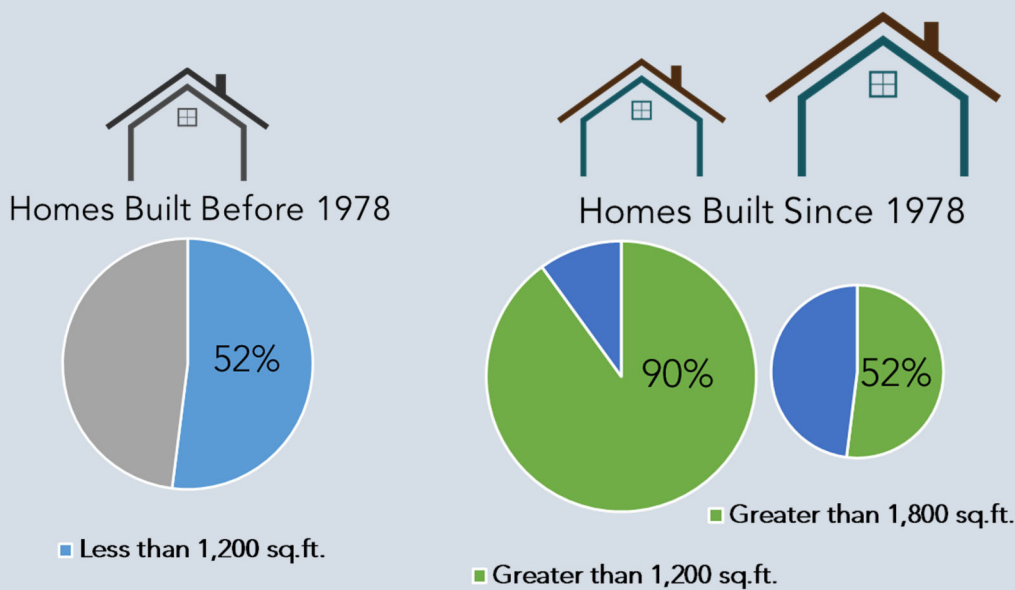
	Typical Home Purchased[1]	Maryland Heights Housing
Age	23 years	40 years
Bedrooms	Three	Three
Bathrooms	Two	Two
Square Feet	1,900	1,357

[1] 2020 data.

HOUSING

A substantial majority (over 70%) of the City's single-family housing stock was built after World War II, with most of the homes being constructed between 1945 and 1978. While likely not a direct result of the postwar housing boom, housing development likely boomed in this area due to newly accessible and inexpensive land. Many homes are 1,200 square feet or smaller, limiting the number of homes available that feature one or two additional bedrooms and bathrooms. This gap pushes growing families out of the Maryland Heights community and into the newer suburbs. While the homes in the City are often well-maintained, they no longer satisfy the preferences of many homebuyers in the current housing market.

Homes Built Before 1978

52%

■ Less than 1,200 sq.ft.

Homes Built Since 1978

90%   52%

■ Greater than 1,800 sq.ft.

■ Greater than 1,200 sq.ft.

Approximately 52% of homes built before 1978 are less than 1,200 square feet in gross floor area. Of these older homes, approximately 51% have fewer than two full bathrooms. In contrast, 90% of the homes built in Maryland Heights since 1978 are greater than 1,200 square feet in gross floor area (total living space on all floors) and 52% of them are greater than 1,800 square feet. Further, over 99% of the homes built since 1978 have at least two full bathrooms.

HOUSING

While one challenge is to sustain the integrity of existing neighborhoods, another is to address future housing needs. Having a diverse housing stock including new and old, big and small, is critical to offer a choice and to provide for the individual needs of all households, regardless of household composition or economic stature.

Besides price and location, another consideration is the design of neighborhoods. Much of the residential development pattern characterized in Maryland Heights is typical of mid- to late- 20th century suburban development. New housing needs to reflect growing demand for neighborhood-style patterns that are once again integrated to the existing fabric of the community. This new development should be located near other uses for ease of access, accessible to local services, offering transportation options, and preserving resources through innovative subdivision design (such as clustering homes, low impact design, and green infrastructure).

GOAL: ENCOURAGE QUALITY HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS THAT INCLUDE A HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC REALM.

OBJECTIVES:

- *Support residential uses within mixed-use developments.*

- *Provide a range of housing options for all stages of life.*

- *Develop a diverse housing stock in form and price range.*

- *Interconnect residential subdivisions where possible and feasible.*

- *Encourage the development of functional common ground areas.*

- *Consider residential land use categories and regulations that reflect distinct neighborhood patterns rather than a "one size fits all" approach.*

ACTIONS

The following actions may be undertaken to implement the objectives of this goal:

⇒ Consider amendments to the Zoning Code to reflect the unique character of specific neighborhoods where applicable.

⇒ Develop and prioritize a list of improvements to public spaces, including streets and landscaping, which can serve to enhance neighborhood visual character.

⇒ Require streetscape treatments in new developments.

⇒ Continue support for "Tree City USA" designation.

TREE CITY USA®

GOAL: ENCOURAGE QUALITY HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS THAT INCLUDE A HIGH QUALITY PUBLIC REALM.

Housing is an integral part of Maryland Heights' present and future. It is one of the largest components of the existing land use and is an important community asset. A healthy mix of housing stock is important to retain existing residents and to attract new residents. Studying housing conditions in Maryland Heights provides a basis for understanding existing housing options and types, promoting modernization of the housing stock, maintaining affordability, and supporting attractive neighborhoods. Good quality, sustainable housing development has the following characteristics:

Accessible and Adaptable
There should be ease of access and circulation for all residents, including people with limited mobility, enabling them to move as freely as possible within and through the development, to gain access to buildings and to use the services and amenities provided. Future homes should be designed to be capable of adaptation to meet changing needs of residents during the course of their lifetime.

Affordable
The scheme should be capable of being built, managed, and maintained at reasonable cost, with consideration of the nature of the development.

Architecturally Appropriate
The development should provide a pleasant living environment, which is aesthetically pleasing and human in scale. For new construction, the design should understand and respond appropriately to its context as to enhance the greater community.

Durable
The best available construction techniques should be used, and key elements of construction should have a long service life avoiding the need for untimely repair or replacement.

Efficient
Dwellings should be designed and oriented to conserve energy, use land efficiently, and minimize strain on public infrastructure. Their location should be convenient to transportation, services, and amenities.

Safe, Secure, and Healthy
Neighborhoods should be safe and healthy places to live. It should be possible for pedestrians and cyclists to move within and through the area with reasonable ease and in safety. Providing for automobile circulation should not compromise these goals.

Objective: Support residential uses within mixed-use developments.

As Maryland Heights begins to incorporate mixed-use into what historically has been a suburban residential land use pattern, it is important to consider how this type of development fits within the city. Successful mixed-use projects can be created on many scales and in many locations including in an individual building, a series of buildings grouped together, or as a predominant new "greenfield" development. Whatever the scale, there must be a readily identifiable mix of functions which work well together.[2] Further, the effect must be more than just an aesthetic one.

Aventura
at
Maryland Oaks

[2] Types of mixed-use development are discussed in the Land Use and Development Strategies chapter.

Objective: Support residential uses within mixed-use developments.

Mixed-use development can contribute to a variety of objectives, including providing a variety of housing options, revitalized town centers, and more sustainable suburban environments. The benefits of mixed-use include:

- *CREATING A LOCAL SENSE OF PLACE.* Mixed-use areas can create a vibrant sense of place and community. This can be not just on a city-wide scale, but it can also be a tool that helps to differentiate neighborhoods and create a sense of identity. They also can provide increased opportunities for neighbors to meet and interact. They further can provide a wider variety in the types of environments to be found in the City, adding interest and diversity.

- *CREATING AREAS THAT ARE ACTIVE THROUGHOUT THE DAY.* A mix of uses eliminates the problems of residential areas that are largely unpopulated during the day, and commercial areas that are desolate after business hours. Mixed-use areas have populations and activities that take place throughout the day, making them more vibrant and safe.

- *INCREASING HOUSING OPTIONS FOR DIVERSE household types.* Mixed-use areas often have higher density housing types, such as apartments and townhouses, close to amenities and add to the variety of housing options available within the City. This is especially important to meet the needs of the City's increasingly diverse population.

- *REDUCING AUTO DEPENDENCE.* Mixed-use areas provide a variety of services and activities within a walkable distance of housing, allowing residents to conduct more of their daily activities without depending on automobiles. Reduced auto dependence especially provides greater independence for seniors and children who can be marginalized simply because they cannot drive.

- *INCREASING TRAVEL OPTIONS.* Mixed-use areas, if well designed, can comfortably support pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile traffic.

Mixed-use projects can work in a variety of settings throughout the City. However, careful consideration must be given to the character of the area and surrounding land uses. Future mixed-use development in Maryland Heights will be reviewed to ensure proper compatibility of uses, and location and context, density, pedestrian orientation, connectivity internally and externally, and quality of public spaces.

Objective: Provide a range of housing options for all stages of life.

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Objective: Develop a diverse housing stock in form and price range.

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Housing diversity refers to the range of housing options available to current and prospective residents of Maryland Heights. Much of the single-family housing in Maryland Heights fails to provide the space or amenities preferred by growing families, making it difficult to retain residents and attract new ones. Similarly, multi-family housing is mostly limited to garden-style apartments although more modern urban-style apartments with parking garages and substantial amenities are beginning to be constructed. The City is also lacking in independent senior living options. Offering a diverse mix of housing, in cost, type of unit, and neighborhood setting is important to meet the needs and preferences of current and future residents.

Closely related to housing diversity is housing affordability. While the St. Louis region overall ranks well in housing affordability compared to other regions, there tends to be a shortage in suburban municipalities where new residential construction typically consists of large, detached single-family units offered at prices out of reach for low to moderate income families.

Housing diversity is also related to housing accessibility. Universal design is an important consideration for the elderly as well as for other individuals with disabilities. New construction housing should include some number of homes that meet the standards, at a minimum, for "visitability" or ideally be fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, for seniors who prefer to age-in-place, accessibility modifications to the home may increase the ability of these residents to stay in their neighborhoods longer and delay the move to more communal housing, such as an assisted living facility.

Objective: Develop a diverse housing stock in form and price range.

Creating a range of housing types for all stages of life provides a variety of advantages:

- *Economic Development.* Providing a range of housing choices is vitally important to the long-term growth of Maryland Heights. A diversity of housing choices appeals to the increasing diversity of the City - from young adults, to growing families, to long-time residents who want to age in place. Further, housing that is affordable to the workforce is critical to the local economy, and directly impacts the ability of employers to recruit and retain staff. Businesses, the hospitality industry, retailers, school districts, universities, and local governments that employ workers at moderate-income levels will benefit from more diverse housing choices.

- *Sustaining Families.* Diverse, affordable housing is critically important to the health and well-being of children and families as they grow.

- *Commuting and Traffic.* The shortage of diverse housing may cause families to locate in outlying areas, requiring lengthy commutes to and from their jobs. Transportation costs and traffic congestion can be reduced when diverse housing options, close to employment centers, are provided.

- *Accommodating our Aging Population.* The growing population of seniors living longer, healthier lives, suggests that demands for diverse housing options will increase. Housing that addresses the spectrum of income levels and lifestyle choices or limitations will allow seniors to remain in Maryland Heights.

*It is **important to note** that housing diversity can be achieved through a multi-directional approach that includes both new development and rehabilitation.*

Objective: Interconnect residential subdivisions where possible and feasible.

The City of Maryland Heights seeks to create a transportation network that will establish safe, continuous corridors throughout the community that promote outdoor recreation, facilitate non-motorized transportation, and highlight the natural and open space resources of the community. A walkway and bikeway network should complement the City's parks system and serve to make Maryland Heights a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Opportunities are encouraged to identify and promote bicycle and pedestrian access for residents and visitors throughout the existing suburban network, and new development as it arises. These opportunities should seek to connect the local & regional trail system, schools, bus stops, employment, shopping, parks, and cultural amenities.

Frequently, the layout of typical subdivision streets makes distances much longer than they need to be. Long neighborhood block lengths and cul-de-sacs further contribute to this problem. When feasible, neighborhoods should be designed with short block lengths, numerous three and four-way intersections, and minimal dead-ends or cul-de-sacs. A network of streets, sidewalks, bicycle lanes and paths in which all parts are well-connected to each other reduces the distance individuals have to travel, allows for the use of more local streets rather than major roadways, and provides a greater choice of routes.
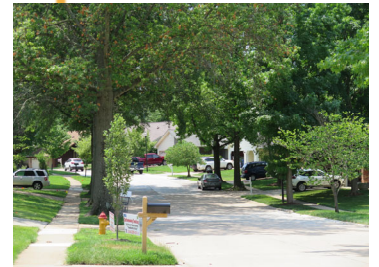
Objective: Encourage the development of functional common ground areas.

Common ground is the land set aside for open space, including storm water, retention lakes, ponds, or recreational use for the owners of lots in a subdivision, conveyed in trust for the benefit, use, and enjoyment of the lot owners. Playgrounds and parks can be in common ground areas in private subdivisions. Portions of a homeowner's annual and special assessments are typically allocated for the maintenance and upkeep of the common ground.

In the past, typical common ground in a subdivision was not accessible to residents and served primarily as a catchment for stormwater. Future residential developments will be encouraged to use the common ground as an amenity for residents, including facilities such as playgrounds, opportunities for exercise, or public gathering spaces.

Objective: Consider residential land use categories and regulations that reflect distinct neighborhood patterns rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

The Zoning Code employs a broad-brush approach to residential zoning. While it includes six zoning districts based on minimum lot area ("R-1" through "R-6"), it does not address the unique character of some neighborhoods. The Planning Commission could consider amendments to add specificity, but this would likely require the establishment of new zoning classifications and the rezoning of neighborhoods.

GOAL: PROMOTE, PRESERVE, AND ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF THE SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL AREAS OF THE CITY.

Objectives:

- *Ensure that infill development is compatible with the established neighborhood.*

- *Encourage additions and renovations to existing homes.*

- *Ensure that properties are maintained through proactive code enforcement.*

ACTIONS

The following actions may be undertaken to implement the objectives of this goal:

⇒ Require infill development to be consistent with or complement the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

⇒ Consider Zoning Code amendments to further facilitate additions or renovations to existing homes.

⇒ Monitor housing conditions, supply, and trends.

⇒ Educate the community about code requirements related to housing.

GOAL: Promote, preserve, and enhance the character of the single-family residential areas of the City.

Maryland Heights' future as a community is inextricably tied to its housing conditions. Housing is central to almost any discussion about City affairs, no matter whether the focus is on economic development opportunities or simply the ability to walk from one neighborhood to another. Further, the amount of maintenance performed on housing and property can impact neighborhood appearance and create a lasting impression. Well-maintained homes and properties are indicative of a promising future. Appearance can also be correlated to community pride in ownership, perception, property values, maintenance costs, and quality of life.

Objective: Ensure that infill development is compatible with the established neighborhood.

The City of Maryland Heights does not have a great deal of land available for large-scale infill development. Any significant residential infill development would likely require a land developer to assemble contiguous parcels of land. The Zoning Code allows for a flexible approach to development, known as a Planned District, on sites over two acres in area. This process grants the developer additional flexibility in unit types, density, and design while allowing the City to craft site-specific conditions and parameters. The process also requires public hearings which are particularly beneficial in an infill setting.

By absorbing some growth in existing neighborhoods, infill can provide for efficient use of land, infrastructure, services, and can improve quality of life in older, more established communities. Infill can enhance the character, viability, and function of existing neighborhoods, and these benefits are evident in many Maryland Heights neighborhoods. A successful infill strategy maintains or restores spatial continuity to streetscapes, strengthens neighborhoods, and introduces compatible uses that complement existing community attributes and needs. Infill can inject new life into communities and help neighborhoods become more connected and sociable places, and ultimately increase property values, without altering their overall character.
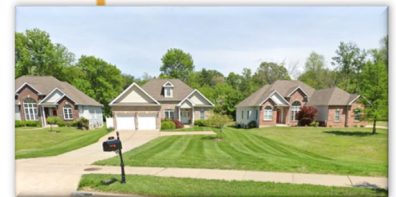
Objective: Encourage additions and renovations to existing homes.

In some cases, homes that are functionally obsolete (e.g. do not meet current trends in housing needs) or have become too small for a growing family can benefit from remodeling or an addition. In 2009, students from Washington University completed a class project to identify remodeling ideas and plans for a typical home in a Maryland Heights neighborhood. Their work suggested different schemes, ranging from small remodels to large expansions, which could be explored depending on the desires and budget of the homeowner. The City could consider expanding their work by working enlisting architects and contractors to develop other plans. Some of the primary alterations suggested were:

- Creating a formal entrance without encroaching on the living room
- Reorganizing the kitchen to create a more open floor plan
- Rearranging the garage to create a dining area

- Add closet space
- Add master bathroom
- Add bedroom
- Expand/add garage
- Utilize basement space
- Create "exterior living"

Objective: Encourage additions and renovations to existing homes.

The City Council has established a strategic goal to encourage housing options for residents in all stages of life. One objective intended to achieve this goal is to evaluate the Zoning Code to determine whether additional flexibility can be provided while maintaining and improving neighborhood character. In 2014, the Zoning Code was amended to eliminate residential lot coverage limitations. They had previously been capped at 25% which precluded additions to existing homes on smaller lots. The minimum setbacks are now the only zoning requirements that dictate the extent of development on each lot. Any further amendments should be carefully considered to ensure that they do not disrupt neighborhood character in an attempt to maximize the developable area of the lot. For example, if front yard setbacks (which are as little as twenty feet) are to be lessened, the impact on the streetscape and overall feel of the neighborhood should be considered. Such analyses are often subjective. Depending on the point of view, a front porch might be appropriate closer to the roadway but a garage might not.

Objective: Ensure that properties are maintained through proactive code enforcement.

The role of code enforcement is to sustain safe, healthy living and working conditions for residents and businesses of the City. Code Enforcement Officers have a very visible role in the community from the standpoint that the decisions they make and how effectively they perform their duties can have a major impact on the property values and image of the City. Code Enforcement Officers support and enhance property values through effective enforcement of property standards, while working to keep aging buildings, homes, and properties from deteriorating and detracting from neighborhood character or, worse, negatively impacting health and safety. Every community faces struggles with vacant buildings, trash, tall grass and weeds, and inoperable vehicles. Studies have shown that communities that have areas of blight and deteriorated properties may eventually see an increase in the amount of crime and a significant decrease in property values.

Objective: Ensure that properties are maintained through proactive code enforcement.

Effective code enforcement initiatives seek to achieve voluntary compliance as a means of avoiding other punitive methods of enforcement, while still accomplishing what is best for the City in terms of public health and safety. It can be, and often is, a very arduous and intensive task. The City has chosen a proactive approach to code enforcement. This involves addressing issues that may become code enforcement cases or complaints before they escalate to a point of mandated abatement or referral to the court system. This can be achieved by implementing many different techniques, but the primary means to achieving a more proactive code enforcement approach is through education. Educating the community about what the ordinance and code requirements and standards are is one of the best ways that communities and code enforcement officers can prevent violations from occurring or reoccurring. Education should be the first step to providing effective and proactive code enforcement and will generally garner more favorable results on behalf of the property owner and the City as a whole.

The professionalism and approach of the Code Enforcement Officer could shape community notion of local government and municipal experience. Building relationships and knowledge of the community is integral to a proactive and professional code enforcement approach.