

The study area has always been and will remain primarily a residential neighborhood. Residences make up just over 80 percent of the principal structures in the study area. Even with the widening of 12th St./ Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and the building of the St. Elizabeth Medical Center Covington and the new commercial activity these projects are expected to bring, the study area will continue to be predominantly residential. With this being the case, it is very important that attention be paid to the housing situation. It is the intention of this study to make recommendations that will improve the housing stock in the area and make it more appealing to a broad group of people.

The exterior-only building condition survey found 1,090 houses (90 percent) in good condition or needing only minor repairs; 18 structures (1 percent) considered dilapidated or with substantial deterioration; and 97 structures (9 percent) with moderate deterioration. This was an exterior survey only and the interior conditions could change a structure's condition category. The 18 structures considered either dilapidated or substantially deteriorated should be considered prime structures for demolition. Because the interior condition is unknown, the 97 structures with moderate deterioration should be inspected further to assess the overall structural integrity of the building.

INFILL

Building new housing in older neighborhoods on existing lots, known as infill development, is a common way to improve and broaden the appeal of an inner city neighborhood. New housing can provide the type of living space that is currently in demand, such as condos for empty nesters wanting to move into the city, apartments for young families and individuals, and large homes for more mature families. Usually inner city neighborhoods have large numbers of vacant lots and easily condemned substandard housing to provide space for new housing. However, this study area is rather different. There are few vacant lots available for building and few existing homes are in such poor shape they should be condemned rather than rehabilitated. There are approximately two dozen vacant lots that could be built upon as shown in Map 6.1. Of these about half are owned by neighboring property owners and used as side or back yards making it unlikely they would be available for development. Some of the remaining lots are small and irregular in shape. This leaves only a handful of lots suitable and possibly available for development. With this information at hand a developer should look at acquiring adjoining parcels of land where vacant lots and substandard houses are located. The size of the house should also be considered; a small one story house in moderate condition may be suitable for demolition if its lot can become part of a larger parcel of land for infill development.

CRIME

Safety is one of the most important aspects of a neighborhood's appeal. If a neighborhood is not perceived to be safe then few people will want to live there. This lowers the value of the neighborhood's homes, and leads to an increase in the number of low-cost rentals. Residents of the community have a perception that crime has grown worse over the years. Currently it is not possible to break down the crime data for just the study area. According to the Covington Police Department the northeast section of the study area has had some crime problems in the past. To counter this the police department has made some of the streets

in that area one-way to make it more difficult for motorized traffic to move quickly in and out of that area. The residents of the northeast section of the study area are split in their opinions on the level of crime. Some think crime is still as bad as it ever was and others think it has decreased. The police think crime in the area has decreased to some extent because the number of calls to that area has decreased.



Recently renovated house on Russell Street

There are some things residents can do to reduce crime in the area. Currently there is a Neighborhood Watch program which asks for people to be outside watching their street and reporting anything that looks suspicious. Residents do not have to belong to the program to perform this basic preventive measure. Criminals are less likely to break the law when people are able to see them. Getting to know your neighbors and the entire community also helps reduce crime. Residents that know their neighbors schedules, vacation plans, friends, and family can more easily detect suspicious activity. The best way to learn about a community is to join the neighborhood association. This will enable residents to get to know one another quickly and help with projects and programs focused on improving the neighborhood. Finally the city police department is starting Citizens on Patrol program. This program calls for groups of residents to patrol

their neighborhood and report suspicious activity, code violations, check on commercial businesses, and residents when requested. With these programs and activities residents can increase the level of comfort in their neighborhood.



House in poor condition

HOMEOWNERSHIP

Foreclosures

Based on discussions with neighborhood representatives, home foreclosures are a primary concern for both the Friends of Peasenburg Neighborhood Association and the Westside Action Coalition. The study area's large percentage of low-income residents and the predominance of single-family housing stock make the study area a prime location for mortgage foreclosures. Foreclosures are occurring within the area but the total number is not known. To help with the foreclosure problem this study recommends the formation of programs to raise awareness, and provide education on sound financial decision making.

Rentals

Many local residents throughout the study area cited an apparent increase in the number of rentals leading to a deterioration of the housing stock as a major problem. The primary cause of this was the big move to the suburbs in the post-war years and the resulting decline in desirability of living in the area. This drove housing prices down and made the housing attractive for rentals. The best way to increase homeownership in a declining neighborhood is to improve the desirability of living in the area. The increase in market demand will increase the value of the housing. The new medical clinic, the widening of 12th Street/Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and the additional commercial development these projects will create will accomplish this to some degree. Improving the existing housing stock and beautification of the area are two more ways to improve the desirability of the area and attract people to purchase homes.

At this time the area is considered low income. The average household income in the study area is \$28,600, compared to the entire city of Covington at \$30,735, the county at \$43,906, and the national average is \$43,162. The development projects slated for the area and the additional development expected to ensue could bring gentrification. This is a process where home values rise so high the current low-income renters can no longer afford to live in the area. This outcome may be both good and bad for the city of Covington. Causing the low-income residents to move is an added hardship for them, and usually these residents move to other low-income areas, thereby concentrating the poor in one area again. On the other hand, the increase in taxes and improved residential environment are what city officials want from such developments. There are programs that can help offset the negative aspects of this situation. Two are already in place: assistance for low-income residents to purchase homes and funds to help homeowners make needed repairs on their homes. Another program that can help this situation is to provide incentives for developers to build affordable housing in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase Local Awareness of and Advocate for Relevant Issues

- Educate the community on sound homeownership practices to help residents avoid untenable situation.
- Disseminate information on homeownership to residents via newsletter.
- Host an annual home-buying workshop with the Center for Great Neighborhoods (CGN). Housing Opportunities of Northern Kentucky (HONK), local banks and savings and loans, and real estate agencies.
- Organize classes to teach the importance of good home and yard maintenance.

Increase Number of Homeowners

- The City of Covington should establish a Housing Fair (Covington held several in the past) with the City, Realtors, rehabbers, schools, neighbors, banks, etc. on site. This could be combined with house tours such as Rehabarama.
- Educate Realtors and developers about the area. Realtors should know what is happening in the area and the investments being made in the area in order to encourage people to move into the area.
- Hold a Rehabarama in the area. This could showcase newly renovated homes or businesses and could be expanded to include projects currently under renovation.
- Increase participation in existing homeownership programs
 - City of Covington – Homebuyer Assistance
 - HONK – lease to own program, builds and renovates homes
 - CGN – builds and renovates homes, works with banks and city programs for homeownership
 - The two neighborhood associations

(Peaseltown and Westside), act as a connector/recruiter for the City of Covington's, HONK's, and CGN's programs.

- A few people in each neighborhood association should become trained on the details of the various homeownership programs. The knowledgeable neighborhood association members should discuss the homeownership programs with interested residents and help determine if they are eligible. If the person seems eligible, the neighborhood association's member can arrange to take them to the appropriate place with the necessary documentation.
- Each neighborhood association should advertise these programs in its newsletter, placing brochures in public places, and by making one-to-one contact with other residents.
- **Employer Assisted Housing Programs.** An employer in the area helps eligible employees purchase a home in a specific area close to its business locations. This program can be setup in different ways:
 - The employer can provide low-interest loans, no-interest loans, forgivable loans, match funds in a special account, grants, or free home buyer education. Usually an employer works with a lending institution to help setup the program.
 - The advantages for the employer are: less turnover, more loyal employees, less absenteeism, public recognition, and monetary savings.
 - The benefits for the employees: more financially stable, increase feeling of belonging, less commuter time, lower fuel costs, mass transit could be easier to use, and walking could be an option in some cases.

The City of Covington offers home loans to income eligible residents. Currently the amounts are \$5,000 for residents, \$6,000 for certified teachers and administrators, and St. Elizabeth Health System employees, and \$7,000 for City of

Covington employees. Payment on these loans is deferred, but is due upon the sale, transfer, refinance or vacating of the property. The loan becomes a grant if the owner occupies the home for 15 years from the date of purchase.



Rehabilitation of home within the Study Area

- The neighborhood associations should consider creating a limited liability company (LLC) to purchase and refurbish structures.
 - Team with a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO), such as HONK or CGN to access funds and expertise in housing redevelopment.
 - Pool money to purchase houses.
 - Use CDBG and HOME money to fix up houses.
 - Sell one house and use the profits to purchase another one.

Improve Existing Housing Stock

- Assist residents in learning about and using the home improvement programs currently available. Both the City of Covington and Housing Opportunities of Northern Kentucky (HONK) have home improvement programs. To enhance their effectiveness the neighborhood associations could help local residents become aware and receive funds from the programs

- Create a Tool Library. This would be a collection of hand tools and possibly power tools available for residents to borrow.
- Create a group of people that can help with home repairs. HONK has volunteers working on their homes. This program could be expanded to include all the homes in the study area.
- Targeted Code Enforcement
 - Neighborhood associations could work with the code Enforcement Department by identifying blocks or parts of a block for a very thorough inspection.
 - Those that qualify and need repairs to their homes can apply to the programs mentioned above.
 - To help get the repairs made in a timely fashion cancel the fine if the repairs are completed within a prescribed time.
- Annual inspections of rental properties.
 - Covington has such an ordinance and is in the process of updating it, determining the necessary fees and hiring more inspectors.
- Create workshops to teach local residents how to make basic home repairs and use hand and power tools.

Crime Prevention

- Neighborhood Watch programs are already in place in the study area.
- Citizens-On-Patrol is a new program the police department is working to have in every Covington neighborhood. This program has groups of residents walking around their neighborhoods checking for anything unusual, code violations, and suspicious people. When issues are discovered the appropriate department is contacted.

Linden Gateway Neighborhood Enhancement Program *

The city should consider creating a program to improve the appearance of the study area and make it more attractive to potential residents. This program should be timed to show some results when the medical center is completed and be fully realized when the widening of 12th Street/Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. is completed.

The program could target code enforcement, landscaping/beautification, street and sidewalk improvements, and enhance police service where needs are known to exist. The program should focus first on the worst and most visible problems in the area. After this the streets should be prioritized for beautification and blocks, or parts of blocks, identified for targeted code enforcement.

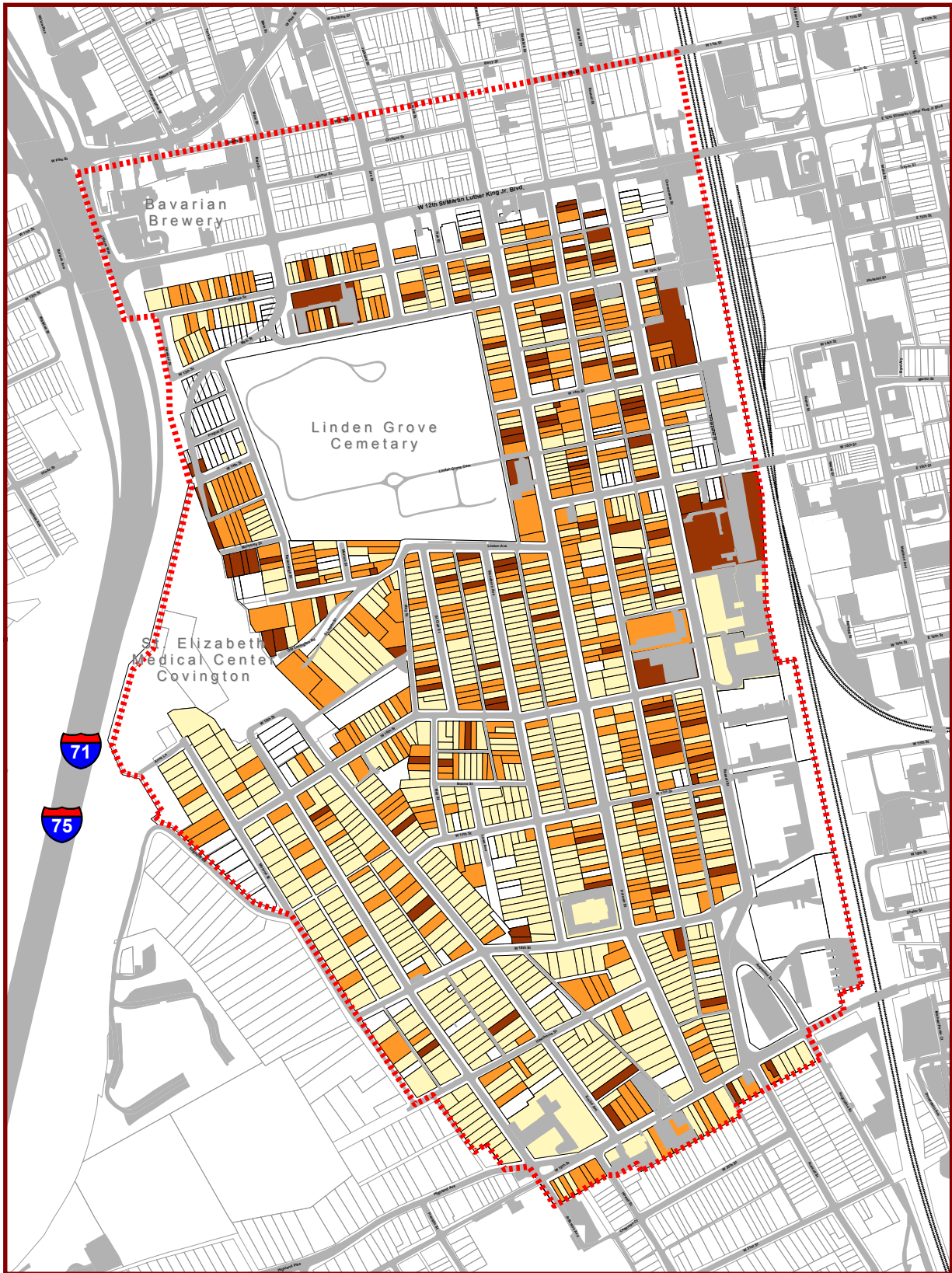
The city should partner with the Center for Great Neighborhoods and both neighborhood associations to assist with this project. Other groups and agencies that could be of assistance are the Northern Kentucky Urban and Community Forestry Council, Kenton County Extension Service Master Gardener Program, local public and private schools, and local businesses.

The city should play a prominent role in establishing this program, setting up the relationships between the city departments and the other agencies, and initiating this first project, but it is the neighborhood associations that will sustain it. Once started the neighborhood associations will need to work closely with the city and other agencies to continue the program.

This could be an outgrowth of the Code Enforcement Response Team (CERT) that the City of Covington already has in place.

*This is almost identical to the program being used in Cincinnati which has been called the best program of its kind in the nation by *Neighborhoods USA*.

Map 6.1 - Vacancy



Linden Gateway Small Area Study



City of Covington
NKAPC

