

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

FEBRUARY 2017

destination
WINDSOR HEIGHTS





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ADOPTED FEBRUARY 20, 2017

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NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT



NEIGHBORHOOD ENHANCEMENT

We will enhance the quality of our neighborhoods by investing time, energy and money into our houses, our infrastructure, and our sense of community.





WHY

Windsor Heights has long been a great environment for people and families of all ages, providing quality, affordable homes in safe, pleasant neighborhoods. We are fortunate to have a mix of many long-time residents, along with a steady stream of newcomers. The housing stock has been, and continues to be, a big draw for our community.

However, many of our houses were built in the 1950s and 60s, and as a result, a large portion of our homes and neighborhood infrastructure are starting to show their age all at once. We need to get ahead of this trend and make sure that we take the proper steps to enhance the quality of our neighborhoods, before it becomes an issue.

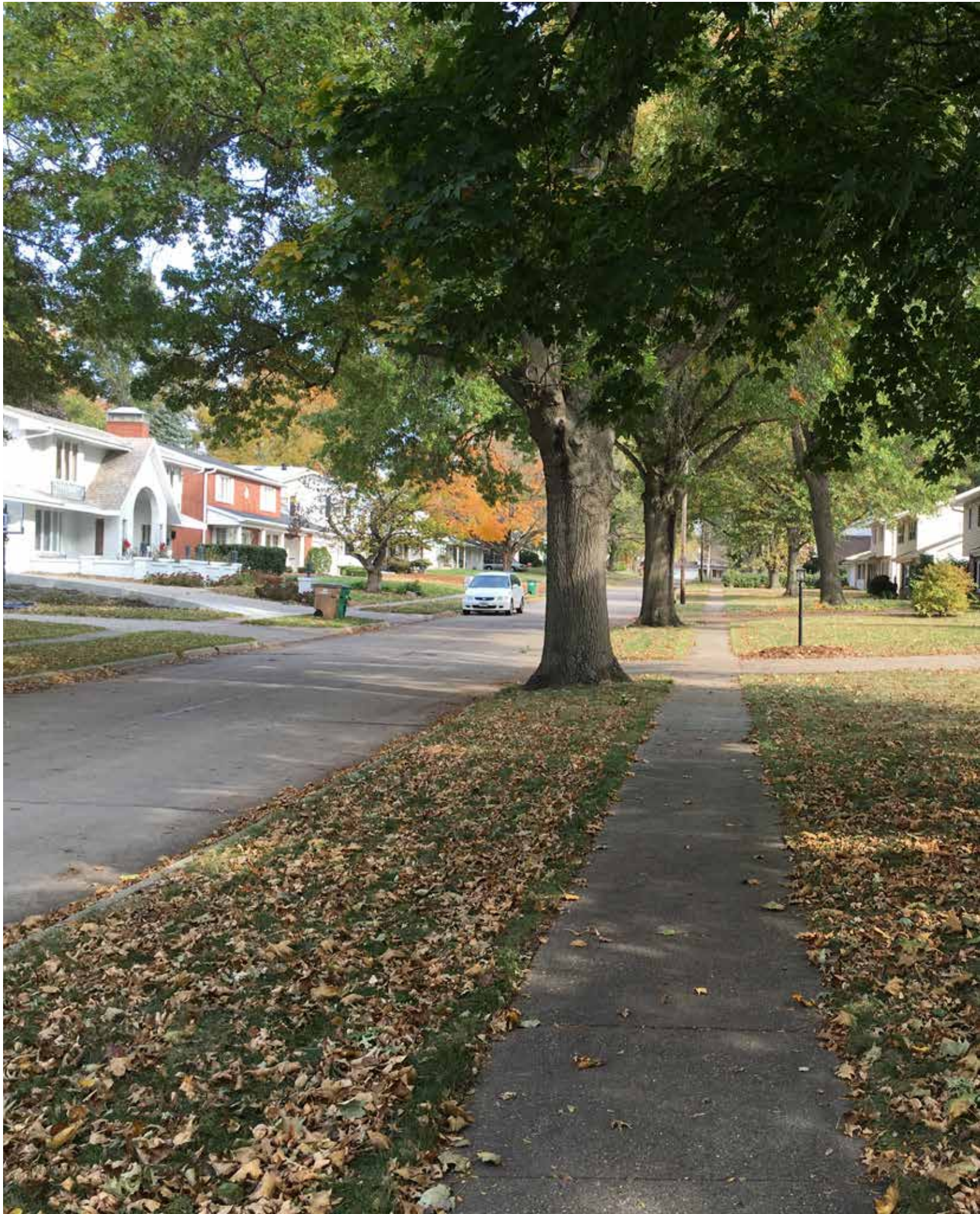
OUR VISION

We envision neighborhoods with a diverse mix of people of all ages and backgrounds. We see kids playing, riding their bikes, and visiting the neighborhood park. We stop and talk with our neighbors, and celebrate with them at annual neighborhood events. All of the houses are well maintained, since support is readily available to homeowners who need it. Mixed in with our single-family homes we have several additional housing options that blend in seamlessly with the neighborhood—a row of townhouses, a condo building, a duplex or two. The streets, sidewalks and other infrastructure are in top condition and receive regular maintenance. Windsor Heights is known for its safe, vibrant, high-quality neighborhoods.

OUR GOALS

1. Maintain the quality of our housing stock.
2. Promote “aging in place.”*
3. Celebrate neighborhood character.
4. Make improvements to streets and other infrastructure to enhance neighborhood quality.
5. Broaden the mix of housing to appeal to a wide range of people at all stages of life.

** “Aging in place” refers to making sure that our homes and our neighborhoods are adapted to older adults, allowing them to stay in their homes or in their neighborhoods as they age. This may include having new housing options, beyond single-family homes, that are suited for older adults.*





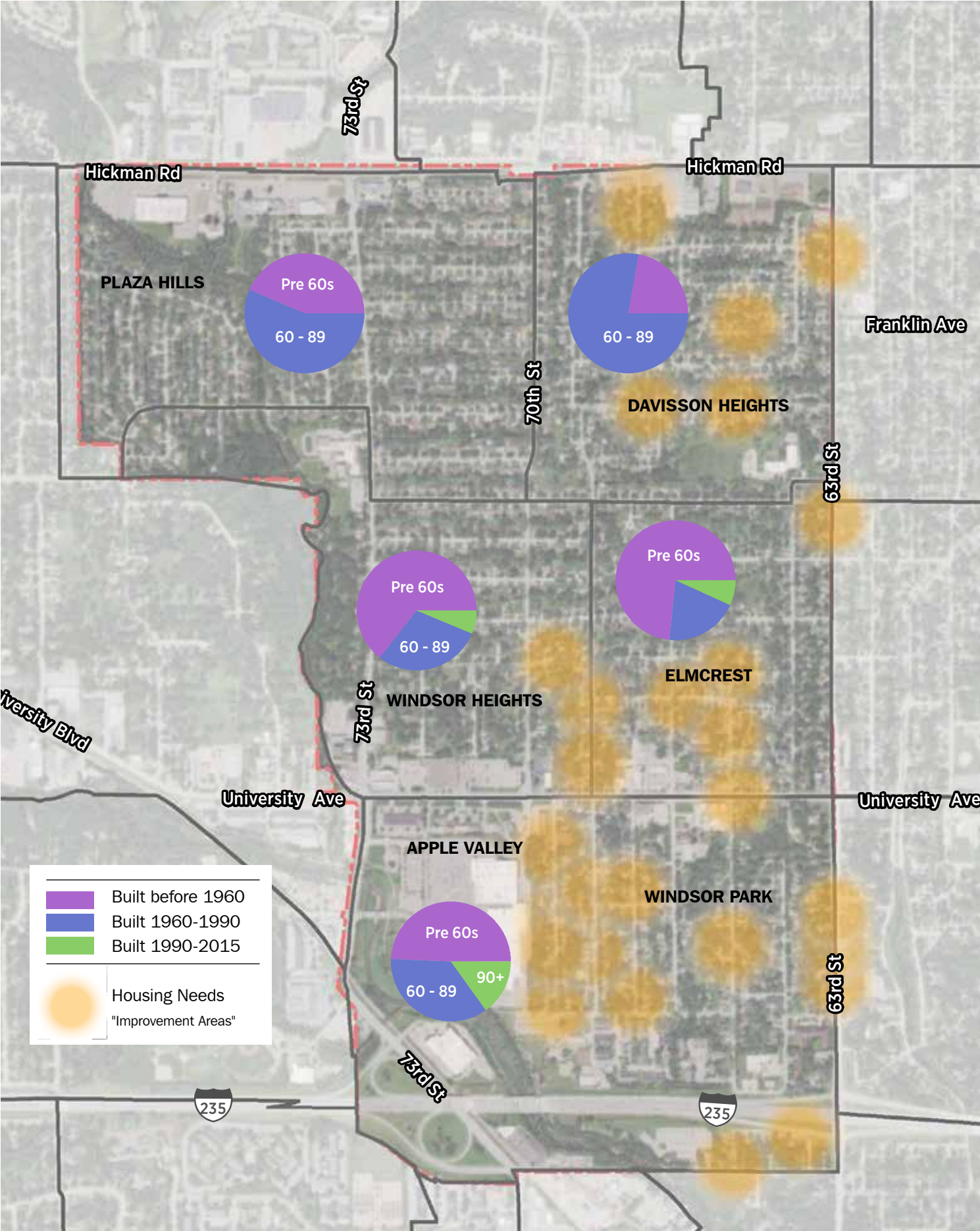
OUR NEIGHBORHOODS TODAY

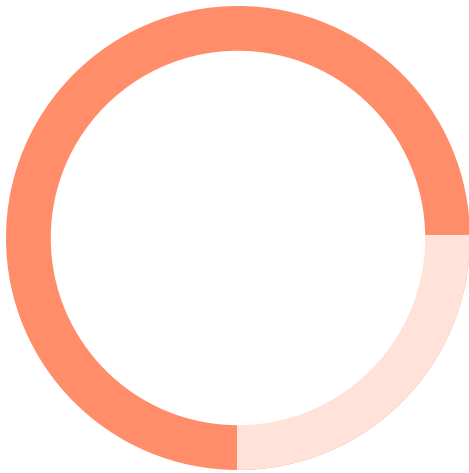
Neighborhoods at a Glance:

- *Small Average Household Size:* 2.24 Persons
- *Good balance of renters and owners:* 25% of housing units are rentals and 75% are owner-occupied.
- *Affordable houses:* The median home value of \$167,600 was the lowest among the neighboring suburbs (Urbandale, West Des Moines, Clive) as of 2010.
- *Aging houses:* 56% of our homes were built in the 1950s and 1960s, so many are reaching a point at which updates are needed (if they have not already been done).
- *Many long-term residents:* About 1/3 of Windsor Heights homeowners have lived in their current residence for 20 years or more.
- *Influx of new (young) residents:* Although Windsor Heights' population has remained fairly steady, it has had a 3% rate of migration into the community. The 25 to 34-year age group grew the most between the 2000 and 2010 census.*
- *Limited Housing Variety:* 77% of the housing units in Windsor Heights are single-family homes (compared to 65% in Des Moines and 47% in West Des Moines). A few recent developments have added townhouses and condos, but more may be needed to serve the diverse needs of our community and keep our neighborhoods full.

**For consistency, all of the above numbers are taken from the 2010 census. Since Windsor Heights has relatively little population growth, these statistics likely hold true as of the writing of this plan, six years later.*

FIGURE 1.1: HOUSING YEAR BUILT/CONDITION





**Survey says...
fix the streets!**

Windsor Heights residents say that street upgrades are one of their top priorities for the community, according to a city survey. The condition of our residential streets can have a big impact on the perception of the quality of a neighborhood.

Housing Quality – Areas to Monitor:

A visual survey looked at the exterior condition of homes throughout the city. While limited in its depth, this cursory survey identified a number of homes that appear to be due for maintenance and upgrades in order to match the quality of the rest of the community. These homes influence the perception of the surrounding neighborhood and the general "improvement areas" are identified on Figure 1.1. A few areas of town, particularly south of University Avenue, had several such houses within close proximity. As a community, we may want to provide extra attention to these areas to help stabilize neighborhood quality. These perceptions were confirmed through the public engagement process.



OUR NEIGHBORHOODS TOMORROW — AN ACTION PLAN

Preserving our neighborhoods must be a joint effort between residents, homeowners, the city, and local organizations and businesses. Each group has a different role to play. We have identified a variety of recommended actions below.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Support new housing options within existing neighborhoods by:

- *Working with developers to identify appropriate sites*
- *Reviewing city codes to ensure there are no barriers to constructing alternative housing types*

Windsor Heights has many single-family homes, but few other options. New housing types could include duplexes, four-plexes, condos, townhouses, and mixed-use buildings with housing above retail. Single-family style homes that offer condo ownership would also offer a new option, especially for seniors who may welcome the convenience of a condo association that covers maintenance and yard work.

Because Windsor Heights is landlocked, it can be difficult for a developer to assemble enough property to do a new housing project. The city can assist with this complex process.

City codes can sometimes unintentionally (or intentionally) make it difficult to build housing that is not a standard single-family home. As part of its planned update to the zoning code, Windsor Heights should identify and remove unnecessary barriers of this kind.

It is important that new housing developments maintain compatibility with their surroundings, in terms of scale and style. Larger projects should include plans for how to handle increased traffic, noise or light, to avoid adverse effects on existing neighborhoods.

One strategy, many benefits:

The above strategy addresses a range of challenges and opportunities for our community:

- Aging residents may find that they want an alternative option to a single-family home. They may be looking for a living space that is smaller, requires less maintenance or does not have stairs.

- By working with developers to identify promising sites and remove unnecessary regulatory barriers, we help lower their risk, thereby improving our chances of attracting high-quality development interests.
- Providing a variety of living options helps to attract a variety of residents, which not only contributes to a vibrant and interesting community, but can also help stabilize a neighborhood over time. (To give one example of why this is true: neighborhoods that have families of all the same age create a challenge for the local elementary school, which has to deal with sudden changes in enrollment as a large group of similar-aged children moves through the system).

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 2:

Create city-sponsored incentives, loans, grants or tax abatements for home improvements and/or educate homeowners about third-party programs from other sources.

The city could establish a program that would provide financial incentives to homeowners for home upgrades. This would require an annual budget allocation and would be overseen by a city staff person and/or a housing commission. The program can be targeted in several different ways, depending on the areas of greatest need:

- Target certain areas of town.
- Target lower-income and/or older residents
- Target certain types of home improvements, such as universal design, energy savings, stormwater management facilities, etc.

As a complement to a city program (or an alternative), the city can help

educate homeowners on third-party funding sources or in-kind services that are already available to them for home improvements. For example, the Iowa Finance Authority has a diverse range of programs for homeowners (and potential homeowners)

available across the state of Iowa. The Neighborhood Finance Corporation, based in Des Moines, offers limited grant opportunities for homeowners in Windsor Heights.



WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Organize volunteer efforts that improve the neighborhood and bring neighbors together.

This could include:

- A neighborhood clean-up.
- A volunteer program to help neighbors who need assistance with home and yard work.
- Celebratory events such as block parties or a fun run.

ACTION 2:

Consider creating a resident volunteer association to organize community improvement projects and serve as a liaison between residents and city officials.

A resident association can organize the types of events mentioned before and can provide a way for residents and city officials to communicate better. The group can help convey neighborhood needs to the city and keep residents up-to-date on any actions that would affect their property.

The resident association can serve a role similar to that of a neighborhood association in other communities. A single resident association can take advantage of our small size as an asset, since it could feasibly represent the diverse interests of the community, while the unified effort would allow residents to garner sufficient power and leadership to be most effective. Having multiple associations is unnecessary for Windsor Heights and could create division of effort and resources.



Map of University Heights, Cleveland, Ohio

Legend:

- Residential: Single-Family (Yellow)
- Residential: Multi-Family (Brown)
- Commercial (Red)
- Park (Green)
- School (Blue)
- Public/Government (Dark Blue)
- Civic (Light Blue)

Streets:

North-South: NW 80th St, NW 78th St, NW 75th St, NW 73rd St, NW 71st St, NW 69th St, NW 67th St, NW 65th St, NW 63rd St.

East-West: Hickman Rd, Frontage Rd, Wilshire Blvd, Sunrise Blvd, El Rancho Ave, Franklin Ave, Jefferson Ave, Bellaire Ave, Reite Ave, Colby Ave, Forest Ct, Elmcrest Dr, School St, Crocker St, Center St.

Neighborhoods: Plaza Hills, Davisson Heights, Windsor Heights, Elmcrest, Windsor Park, Apple Valley.

Other Features: University Ave, University Blvd, University Dr, University St, University Pl, University Ct, University Ln, University Way, University Ave, University Dr, University St, University Pl, University Ct, University Ln, University Way.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Attract new businesses to Windsor Heights and support strategic redevelopment along key corridors.





WHY

Windsor Heights' opportunity for growth rests with making the most of the existing property in the community through redevelopment. Maximizing the development yield for existing properties will support the community's tax base, while providing jobs and services in the community that otherwise exist in the surrounding communities. Our city is already a hub for large retailers like Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee, and we have a number of smaller niche retailers along University Avenue and Hickman Road. We want to retain these businesses and create opportunities for new ones. This is important as ~91% of the respondents to a public survey indicated that "Windsor Heights needs to do a better job creating a supportive business climate."

OUR VISION

- Developers compete for the opportunity to develop in Windsor Heights.
- We have a mix of big and small retail to serve both local and regional customers.
- Windsor Heights is known for its ability to put together solid economic development packages that meet the needs of developers, businesses and residents.

OUR GOALS

1. Attract new business to Windsor Heights.
2. Support strategic redevelopment along key corridors, including University Avenue, Hickman Road, 73rd Street, and 63rd Street.
3. Create a supportive business climate.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT — AN ACTION PLAN

Establishing partnerships between the city and business community is critical to success. The collaboration leads to mutual benefits experienced by everyone in the community. The strategies in this section intend to stimulate interest and discussion, yet be flexible enough to adapt to proposals that were not considered at the time of writing this plan.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Work with developers to support and coordinate redevelopment of important commercial and mixed-use sites.

Both the city and developer want the same thing – a successful project. Windsor Heights should continue to take an active role in coordinating development efforts, and, where possible, manage deals that are mutually beneficial to all. This may require the city to acquire and assemble property to assist prospective developers who would otherwise not be able to undertake the project on their own.

ACTION 2:

Create a streetscape plan for University Avenue and 73rd Street.

Enhancements to the image of Windsor Heights' key corridors attracts interest from patrons and businesses alike. Landscaping, street furniture, art, and new lighting are all elements that add character to the area. Throughout all of Windsor Heights' corridors, there should be features that subtly connect back into a unifying idea.

ACTION 3:

Help market Windsor Heights to prospective businesses and developers.

Vacancies and underused properties present an opportunity for new tenants and development. Windsor Heights should actively seek out new business tenants and developers, helping them understand the city's unique position in the market.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 4:

Provide incentives for upgrades to commercial properties.

Windsor Heights should consider providing incentives to commercial property owners who update and upgrade their facilities to remain competitive in the Metro’s market-place. Also, developers who exceed the minimum requirements for new projects may need assistance to ensure success. Any incentives to be considered for projects should occur prior to the development review process.

ACTION 5:

Improve communication and transparency with businesses and developers.

Regular stakeholder review of development projects builds trust. Regular feedback provides opportunities for people to understand the project’s purpose, goals, emerging concept, and ultimately the proposed concept. This feedback allows stakeholders to understand how their input influences the outcome. Most importantly, understanding why the project is important and how the project benefits the

community will improve collaborative discussion.

For new construction, the diagram below shows the development review process for Windsor Heights. Projects seeking incentives or possible changes to a master plan or regulation (including variance) should be discussed between city staff and the developer early in the process.

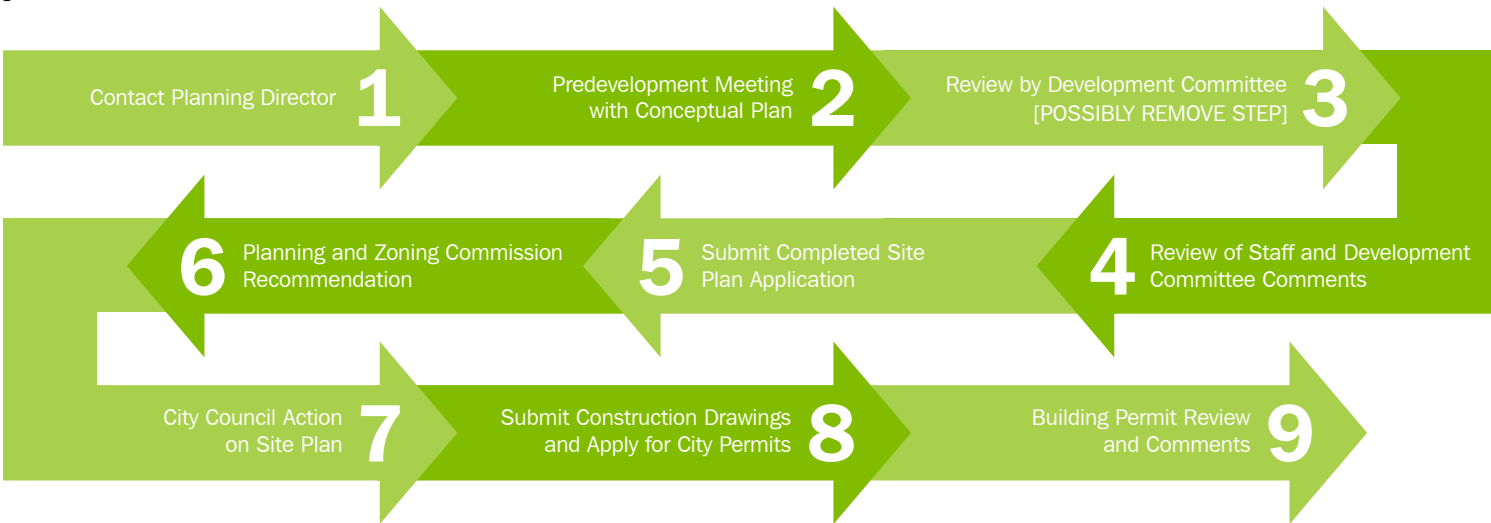


FIGURE 2.1: Windsor Heights Approval Process (2016)

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 6:

Develop an economic development plan that incorporates recommendations of this plan, neighborhood and corridor plans and sets in motion a strategy for implementation.

- Create a development policy that distinguishes the process of plan approval, development cost sharing and business incentives. To the extent possible, create clearly defined standards to be met to achieve incentives.
- Develop and codify the process required to achieve plan approval. Keep it simple and straight forward based upon the codes applicable to the situation.

REMOVE COMPLEXITY

The City has a series of processes designed to check proposals against their codes. Some of these processes are simple, such as permits to construct a single-family home. Others are more complex. The key to encouraging development is to have a clear path for a developer or business to follow. Developers and businesses need to understand their costs, in many cases prior to investing in property, buildings and/or detailed plans. As much as we can lay out the ground rules in advance, the more transparent and predictable we can make the requirements and the process, the more we will be able to attract investment and re-investment. This aids in improving upon our tax base and creating jobs for our residents. Under this scenario, the city desires have been codified in the zoning, subdivision and building codes and the Planning and Zoning Commission reviews and approves these developments following a recommendation from staff.

REDUCE RISK

Today, the City continues to assemble projects by working with property owners and developers, builders and/or businesses. In many cases the city has no control over any of the elements necessary to complete the deal. An economic development plan and clear city commitments to partnering in projects will expand the interest among the development community and potentially create desirable results. This can also reduce or eliminate the city taking on the risky role of a developer.

CREATE ECONOMIC PLAN

The city, working with the Chamber and the development community, should create an economic development plan generated from a combination of market analysis, the physical development plans that have been created, a fiscal analysis of capital projects and incentives, and the city's desired outcome.

continued...



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

That plan should define the target markets for different areas of the community, the physical development styles and the level of involvement that the city will take on to encourage those things to happen.

INCENTIVES

The city's financial incentives would be matched to the targets and might come in two forms. The first would be cost sharing of infrastructure improvements. An example: In an area where the plan calls for some infrastructure improvement, perhaps protected bike lanes, turning lanes or a public plaza, the city might cost-share in their construction based upon the public benefit versus infrastructure impacts. These would be cost sharing agreements. The eligible items would be defined and the level of support from the city would be clarified up front. The staff

and developer would know what is eligible and what the cost-sharing dollar amount would be. These funds could come from the Capital Projects account or from Tax Increment Financing.

The second set of incentives would be economic development incentives. These would be direct aid to the developer/builder/business and may be funded by Tax Increment from the project. The policy would define the eligibility of the business type and size, the use of the funds and timing of payments. These would all be specifically set to encourage uses that the Council deems desirable to meeting the plan's goals. These incentives would be limited by policy but may include an exception that allows certain business proposals, based upon the type or size, to be negotiated directly with the Council.

ROLES OF PLAN PRACTICE

This plan and policy is the responsibility of the City Council to prepare, approve, and keep updated. City staff would use this plan and policy when they negotiate with developers and businesses. The plan and policy create the eligibility, cost sharing and incentive amounts the Council has authorized for these types of projects. The initial sensitive conversations can occur and the developer or business prospect can get a clear idea of what they will be required to do and what participation the city would have prior to making a large investment in plans, sites or buildings. If an investment decision is made, development agreements are drafted for approval by the City Council.

continued...



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE LOCALS CAN DO

Residents of the community can play a significant role in the design and adoption of development processes and development incentives. Although many residents find it frustrating to appear before a public body to comment on a specific development project, it is more often an issue with the timing of the input. The right time is when processes, zoning classifications, codes and standards are being adopted. It is more difficult to understand what might happen at this stage but this generally is the only opportunity to influence what might happen around you. Once the zoning and development regulations are in place, it is very difficult for a city not to approve a complying development plan. There are exceptions that usually are processes and proposals that require a public hearing; then an opportunity might exist to influence the decision makers.

ACTION 1:

Developers

- Consider the goals of this comprehensive plan when deciding how to develop or redevelop a site in Windsor Heights. Seek input from the city early on in the process.
- Participate in the planning and code development process.
- Recruit businesses that you enjoy to become a part of the “destination” that is Windsor Heights.

ACTION 2:

Businesses and Residents

- Work together through an organization such as the Chamber of Commerce to promote initiatives and projects that enhance the business environment.
- Residents are consumers. Many of us work, shop and seek entertainment in other communities. When we find a restaurant or a retail store that we like, we need to comment to the manager that they should consider being a part of the positive changes happening in Windsor Heights.

WHAT THE CITY AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN DO TOGETHER

*The following strategies are
public-private partnerships that
can improve the economic health
and environment for doing
business in Windsor Heights.*

UNIVERSITY AVENUE CORRIDOR

University Avenue is the principal route through central Windsor Heights.

The appearance and function of this corridor provides the strongest impression to residents and visitors alike.

Continuing improvements to this corridor is a high priority for Windsor Heights.

University Avenue Streetscape

University Avenue's future streetscape should be unified. The bookends of the project start and begin at the intersections of 63rd and 73rd Streets. These intersections represent the gateways to the heart of the city, and should receive considerable investment. For the 10 blocks of streetscape, elements that appear in the town center should emerge throughout the district and at the bookends. University Avenue's future streetscape should seek to calm the speed of traffic and celebrate the culture of community through art and architecture.

Existing Streetscape Taxonomy

- *Development Character.* The two blocks from 63rd Street to 65th Street are residential, then the street transitions for two blocks to the Town Center. From 67th Street to 70th Street, development transitions back to residential. West of 70th Street, the development character becomes more auto-oriented and fronted by surface parking.

- *Lighting.* Lighting is primarily provided by cobrahead fixtures supplemented by pedestrian ornamental lighting. Ornamental lighting consists of traditional twin downlight fixtures with gooseneck arms. These are located primarily in the Town Center but also along Hy-Vee's building. Residential areas have globe lights.
- *Landscaping.* Low-lying landscaping is prominent in the Town Center area. Street trees are present along the corridor, mostly behind the sidewalk.
- *Walls and Railings.* The parking areas at Town Center and RE/MAX building have brick masonry columns connected by a knee wall. The Town Center wall includes railing. Retaining walls west of the 63rd Street consist of wall blocks.
- *Parking.* Parking is mostly off-street with the exception of the parallel parking on the northside of the 6500 block.



UNIVERSITY AVENUE CORRIDOR



Recommended Streetscape Changes

- Resurface street.
- Upgrade and replace cobrahead fixtures. Include pedestrian lighting for entire corridor. Limit light pollution to preserve dark skies.
- Establish consistent landscaping throughout the corridor to provide green infrastructure to intercept stormwater from the street.
- Establish consistent hardscape throughout corridor (masonry columns, railings, etc.)
- Dedicate spaces for public art. Commission public art for spaces.
- Improve crosswalks.
- Establish gateway feature at the southeast corner of 73rd Street and University Avenue and the southwest corner of 63rd and University Avenue. Elements of the gateway feature should reappear at key intersections along the corridor.

University Avenue Street Section

In 2016, the city retained Alta Planning & Design to explore a concept to implement the city's Complete

Streets Policy. The concept considers a section that reduces the street from four lanes to three lanes with a protected bicycle lane and on-street parking. Additional study is necessary to test this concept and alternatives. The public's reaction to the current concept is mixed. If the concept were to advance, then the city needs to communicate how different audiences gain by the project's implementation to ensure more support.

- What do the businesses gain?
- What do residents gain?
- What does the community gain?
- What do visitors gain?

UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S WESTERN GATEWAY

Apple Valley includes the properties south of University Avenue to Walnut Creek and between 73rd Street and 70th Street. Colby Interests owns and manages the property. The comprehensive plan recognizes that the city is landlocked and therefore growth opportunities focus on redevelopment possibilities led by private developers.

The following concepts are advisory in nature and are intended to stimulate discussion and maximize return on real estate, while enhancing the project's sense of place.

Development Opportunities

- *Possible Apple Valley Shopping Center Redevelopment.* Apple Valley Shopping Center, located at the southeast corner of 73rd Street and University Avenue, was once considered for redevelopment in 2015 and will likely remain a candidate for redevelopment in the future. The developer is updating the exterior/interior and seeking new tenants. Improvements are anticipated to last 20 to 50 years. This plan acknowledges that the site has been and remains a candidate for future redevelopment, and suggests the following in the event that a new proposal would be submitted for its redevelopment.
 - Ensure project is walkable and connected to surrounding businesses.
 - Buildings have a presence along the street. The present setback is appropriate, yet the proposed redevelopment can be tighter to the street with additional parking available in the interior of the site.
- Buildings with exposure to University Avenue and 73rd Street are attractive and convey the quality and values of both the development and community. The intersection is a key gateway to the city.
- *Possible Wal-Mart Outlot Development.* Developing outlots is common practice at the fringe of big-box developments like Wal-Mart. Several opportunities exist and should be permitted. Connecting the outlots with a continuous promenade improves connectivity and marketability of these sites.
- *Possible Trail Hub.* The Trail Hub Study, completed in 2015, identified the former SEARS building as a preferred site. The project may include services supporting bicyclists (shops, maintenance stands, showers, storage, etc.) and possibly a café.
- *Possible DART Transit Station.* Redevelopment of the Apple Valley area may establish a need to create a DART transit station. The



UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S WESTERN GATEWAY

station was once proposed as part of the 2015 redevelopment plan, and should still be considered.

Circulation Opportunities

- University Avenue and 73rd Street Enhancements.* The crossroads of University Avenue and 73rd Street is a key intersection that connects two of Windsor Heights' commercial corridors. Visitors arriving to the intersection should sense that they have reached the city's main corridor that will lead them to the town center. Art, landscaping and lighting are all features that help create a sense of arrival. At the time of this writing, the Clive Greenbelt Master Plan is also under development. This plan is expected to call for a Greenbelt Gateway in this same vicinity. The potential for a collaborative effort with the City of Clive to significantly enhance the aesthetic, information, and pedestrian/cycling access features of this intersection should be pursued.
- Possible connection between Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee.* The possible redevelopment of Apple Valley Shopping Center presents an opportunity to establish a connection between Wal-Mart and Hy-Vee. This connection would create a more direct route between two of Windsor Heights' major businesses. However, the connection would create a smaller lot for redevelopment on the east side of the proposed alignment. If the bank to the east were incorporated in the redevelopment plan, it would make this connection more possible. Yet, the bank is a healthy tenant in its present location.
- Possible Private Promenade.* The private street that provides internal circulation for Wal-Mart and its outlots could receive subtle enhancements, including a continuous sidewalk, marked crosswalks, lighting, additional landscaping, and graphics. These enhancements draw the motorists along the main spine of movement and reestablishes the connection to possible outlot development.
- Buffalo Road Enhancements.* Buffalo Road is the gateway to Wal-Mart and its commercial outlots. Improving the arrival to the shopping center will enrich the user experience and provide a greater sense of place. Adding vertical features like art and lighting strengthen the presence of the entrance, while landscaping the landings and upgrading the chain link fence along the bridge will improve the overall appearance.
- Creek and Trail Improvements.* The Greenbelt Trail should connect to Wal-Mart, its outlying businesses, and Apple Valley Shopping Center. A small extension from the trail that aligns with the frontage of Wal-Mart provides convenient access. If the former SEARS building becomes the city's Trail Hub, then a trail segment should extend to the site.

Walnut Creek is very visible at Buffalo Road and restoration and landscaping enhancements will improve the aesthetic asset of this unique natural resource.



FIGURE 2.2: UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S WESTERN GATEWAY POSSIBILITIES



UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S EASTERN GATEWAY

The gateway into the heart of Windsor Heights from the east begins at University Avenue and 63rd Street.

During this planning process, the Windsor Presbyterian Church indicated its interest in seeing their property to the south redevelop for a more productive use. Planners and private developers discussed several options for the site, including residential, retail, office and mixed-use development. The preferred option was creating a multi-family project that could be built in stages and connect to the neighborhood to the west in the event that those properties were redeveloped, as well. Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show how designers tested the redevelopment concept by sketching a possible layout of the project for senior housing or mixed age/income.

- *Transitional Residential.* The comprehensive plan recognizes that the homes along University Avenue have a limited market for resale as residential, and the current zoning allows for redevelopment of individual properties for commercial use. The Transitional Residential designation provides for these properties to remain as single-family uses until such time that a redevelopment plan can be proposed for a minimum one-half acre assembled site. Redevelopment may consist of multi-family housing or mixed use.
- *Multi-family Development.* The concept shows two multi-family buildings. Both scenarios consider placing a structure that is perched on a hill, overlooking the metro to the east. The project could, and probably should, be taller to increase the development yield. Development should target 18 to 24 units per acre.
- *Office Development.* The configuration of the concepts show a possible office (low-intensity).
- *University Avenue and 63rd Street Enhancements.* The crossroads of University Avenue at 63rd Street marks the arrival to the city, much like at Hickman Road and 63rd Street. The southwest corner provides an opportunity to create welcome signage built into the hill. The design should reinforce the character and quality of the community, while acting as a gateway to downtown Windsor Heights by calming traffic through street design changes.

UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S EASTERN GATEWAY



FIGURE 2.3: EAST GATEWAY REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIO 1
The concept shows a tiered, multi-story building with a tower as the main project. An attached structure to the south conveys how the project could be developed in phases and connect to the larger building. Townhouses near the rear of the site offer an additional development opportunity. Both scenarios show the entrance drive at the western edge to allow for a possible connection to the "transitional residential."



FIGURE 2.4: EAST GATEWAY REDEVELOPMENT SCENARIO 2
The concept shows two multi-family buildings and an office building. A four-story multi-family building, perched on the hill, and looking over the neighborhood to the east, could have 20 units per floor or a total of ~80 units. A three-story building, tucked into the site, is surrounded by green space and could have 14 units per floor or a total of ~42 units. Combined, the project includes 110 to 120 development units with parking available on the lower level. The project could, and probably should, be taller to increase the development yield.

UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S EASTERN GATEWAY

- *Neighborhood Park and Pathways.* At the terminus of 64th Street is a proposed park that can be accessed from the neighborhood to the south and the proposed multi-family project at 63rd Street and University Avenue. The park could later be redeveloped as part of a larger redevelopment plan for the homes fronting University Avenue.

Transitional Residential

Transitional Residential allows for single-family dwellings, yet recognizes the market demand for these properties to redevelop for commercial use under current zoning (University Avenue Mixed-Use). Transitional Residential intends to protect the integrity of the neighborhood block by preventing unmanaged encroachment of non-residential uses and limiting negative effects.

- The “transitional” component allows for dwellings to become professional and low-intensity businesses, while retaining the building’s residential character. However, if the entire block of properties is controlled by a single developer, then the entire block can be redeveloped. In other words, the intent of the

district is to prevent four of the five contiguous homes to be redeveloped, leaving a single home isolated and surrounded by unlike uses and character. Redevelopment plans should be a minimum of one-half acre.

- Once all properties are available for redevelopment, a master plan should be developed to show mixed use, relationship of uses and buffering, setbacks, site access, and shared parking.

Zoning is the tool that makes the future land use map a reality. The future land use map calls for a variety of uses, ranging from commercial to transitional residential to the town center. The University Avenue Corridor Mixed-Use (UC) zoning district is meant to allow a range of land uses while recognizing the mixed-use character of University Avenue. Amendments to the zoning code can help enhance the character of the UC district, particularly the areas from 69th Street to 67th Street, and 65th Street to 63rd Street identified as Transitional Residential.

Development along the University Avenue should not be piecemealed together one property at a time. Block-

size commercial development is preferred with limited front yard parking and driveway access on University Avenue. Large-scale development often provides opportunities for more land use types and adequate site area to buffer adjacent residential uses. In addition, there are many quality single-family homes contributing to the character of the corridor that should be allowed to remain until the market for large-scale commercial development emerges.

The zoning code currently allows bulk regulations in the UC zoning district to be changed by the Planning Commission based on recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan provides details on the preferred type of development. A recommended additional step is to add explicit standards for the UC district in the zoning code reflecting the goals of the Plan. This makes the objectives clear to developers and property owners and also does not subject the Planning Commission to inconsistent interpretation of the Plan.

Implementing Transitional Residential

Revise the zoning code for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use map.

UNIVERSITY AVENUE'S EASTERN GATEWAY

ACTION GOALS:

Encourage block-size commercial development along University Avenue, while preserving the character of existing residential uses. Steps to action:

- In Transitional Residential, increase the minimum lot area for commercial uses in the UC district from 5,000 square feet to 25,000 square feet. Development can be phased. Parking, access and circulation, setbacks, and overall character should be defined in the redevelopment plan.
- Allow the minimum lot area for residential uses in the UC district to remain at 5,000 square feet to prevent creating non-conforming lots for current residential uses.

Encourage quality development that reflects the mixed-use character envisioned for the University Avenue Corridor. Steps to action:

- Allow the downtown residential land use in the UC district as a permitted or conditional use to allow development of upper floor for residential uses.



FIGURE 2.5: EAST GATEWAY — TRANSITIONAL RESIDENTIAL

Transitional Residential protects the current use of the property, yet recognizes the potential demand for redevelopment as an alternative use. The intent of the district is to give security to homeowners that their neighboring property is not redeveloped for a use that would influence the enjoyment of their property.

- Require parking lots fronting University Avenue to not be larger than two rows and/or one drive aisle. Additional parking areas shall be located in the rear or side yard.

Create a welcome feature on the southwest corner of University Avenue and 63rd Street. Steps to action:

- Allow setback reductions for

parcels with steep slopes that impede quality development on the lot. For example, for slopes greater than 25% on any side of the parcel, the setback on the opposing side can be reduced up to five feet, provided all bufferyard landscaping and/or screening required adjacent to residential uses is still met.

HICKMAN ROAD CORRIDOR

Hickman Road, US Highway 6, is the northern boundary of Windsor Heights and is where the city shares boundaries with Urbandale, Des Moines, and Clive. The principal streets that intersect with Hickman Road and draw people into Windsor Heights are 73rd Street, 70th Street, and 63rd Street.

New development has emerged along the corridor in the last decade and primarily in Windsor Heights, including outlot development at Sherwood Forest and Immanuel Pathways. More recently, a QuikTrip was announced at 63rd Street.

Hickman Road Streetscape

The City of Windsor Heights, in association with Confluence, prepared a streetscape master plan for Hickman Road. The purpose of the study was to guide public investment to stimulate a private market reaction by strengthening the identity of the corridor. The study was limited to improvements for the southern portion of the road within Windsor Heights' jurisdiction. Improvements include lighting, landscaping, and a continuous sidewalk. The design of the gateway elements has antecedents to features located at Colby Park. Some of the improvements have been executed near 63rd Street.

Recommended Streetscape Initiatives

- Complete Phases 1 and 2 of the Streetscape Master Plan. Phase 1 includes 63rd Street to StorageMart. Phase 2 includes Walnut Creek to Canterbury Road.
- Complete the sidewalk.

Development Opportunities

The concepts presented in this plan are intended to stimulate interest and discussion in the possible development of areas near Hickman Road.

- *6500 Block.* The vacant land between StorageMart and the new medical clinic is a challenging site for development because of its proximity to the storage units, visibility from the street, and depth of the lots. The development concept shows a scenario where commercial uses front Hickman Road with parking available in the interior of the lot. Mixed-use development, multi-family housing and a pocket park support the rest of the site. The concept improves circulation by extending the parking from the already proposed multi-family project to the west and connecting to a large parking area. Two multi-family projects are proposed for the site and have similar footprints as the previously proposed structure. One of the structures could be adapted to have first floor offices with apartments above. A pocket park, shared with all of the multi-family projects, provides needed outdoor space for the tenants. The bungalow retail along Hickman

HICKMAN ROAD CORRIDOR

Source: Confluence



FIGURE 2.6: HICKMAN ROAD CONCEPT SCENARIO



FIGURE 2.7: 6500 BLOCK PROPERTY CONCEPT SCENARIO

Road continues the setback established by StorageMart, providing visibility to the street and a degree of buffer between the street and residential uses. Pedestrian pathways connect the retail to the medical clinic and multi-family projects. This concept is strictly for stimulating discussion and maximizing the development return on the site, while establishing a small neighborhood for the already proposed multi-family housing project.

- *Possible Walnut Creek Development.* Adjacent to Walnut Creek is a large surface parking lot serving

the Department of Natural Resources and other tenants. This segment of property could be redeveloped for a low-intensity use. Its proximity to Hickman Road, regional trail system, and natural separation from the residences by the creek lend itself to be a higher and better use than a surface parking lot. Also, the site could be redeveloped to help manage stormwater runoff into the creek.

- *Sherwood Forest Outlot.* The vacant lot at 73rd Street is a candidate for redevelopment as commercial use. Some of the parking area could be redeveloped for satellite

commercial uses.

- *Sherwood Forest Trailhead and Park.* Behind Sherwood Forest Shopping Center is an access point for the regional trail system, albeit a beaten path. Redesigning the park with more continuous open space and a hard surface trail will improve the function and use of the park. The park is largely intended to manage runoff during rain events, as water is diverted into the space by surrounding development, causing the area to remain damp afterwards.

73RD STREET CORRIDOR

Development along 73rd Street is primarily auto-oriented and provides a key connection to Interstate 235. Walnut Creek should welcome people from the interstate and guide them to the heart of the city — University Avenue .

The appearance and function of 73rd Street need significant improvement. The corridor is a key gateway that reflects the city's investment in itself. The lack of sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and general maintenance does not reflect the quality expected in the city. Figure 2.8 shows key recommendations for the 73rd Street corridor include:

- *Streetscape Enhancements.* The design should have a relationship to Windsor Heights' commercial corridors — University Avenue and Hickman Road. Reinforcing the city's design strengthens the community's image and brand. Trees, landscaping, street lighting and public art should be part of the streetscape design. The bend of 73rd Street is a highly visible area for motorists traveling north and south, and presents an opportunity for public art and design.
- *Mobility.* The corridor should have safe accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians, in addition to vehicles.
 - The city should continue the sidewalk from West Des Moines (8th and Center Street) to Buffalo Road. Challenges to implementation include crossing railroad tracks, bridging a tributary, and coordinating efforts among numerous agencies (Iowa DOT, City of West Des Moines, 3E, and railroad).
 - Intersection at Buffalo Road can become a minor gateway
 - Intersection at University Avenue includes an at-grade trail crossing. This intersection should be adapted to improve the visibility and safety for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- *Development.* Projects should be connected and share access to 73rd Street. This plan does not recommend any redevelopment sites. However, the storage area off of Center Street could transition to open space.
- *Creek and Trail Enhancements.* Colby Park can be extended along the creek upstream to the proposed trail hub (old SEARS building). Restoration of the creek should stabilize the shoreline, offer natural play features, and improve overall appearance. Adding bridges over Walnut Creek would improve connectivity.

73RD STREET CORRIDOR



FIGURE 2.8: 73RD STREET CORRIDOR POSSIBILITIES

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Future Land Use

*Map classifies parcels
for their recommended
future use.*

The following land use categories appear in Windsor Heights.

- *Low-Density Residential.* Residential uses with densities below 4 units per acre. This corresponds to single-family development. In addition, duplex or low-density townhouses with densities up to 8 units per acre may occur.
- *High-Density Residential.* Residential uses with densities above 8 units per acre. This corresponds to multi-family development.
- *Transitional Residential.* Transitional Residential allows for single-family dwellings, yet recognizes the market demand for these properties to redevelop for commercial/mixed-use under current zoning (University Avenue Mixed Use). Transitional Residential intends to protect the integrity of the neighborhood block by requiring a minimum redevelopment size of one-half acre.
- *Mixed Use.* This area encourages combinations of limited commercial, office, and residential uses.
- *Town Center.* The area surrounding 66th Street and University Avenue.
- *Commercial.* Commercial and office uses that are typically more auto-oriented.
- *Civic Use.* These areas include religious buildings, public facilities, schools and other public and semi-public uses.
- *Parks and Recreation.* Spaces for recreation, play, and conservation.



COMMUNICATION &
TRANSPARENCY

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

Enhance relationships within the community to build trust and capacity for development, innovation and overall quality of life.





WHY

Effective communication in Windsor Heights leads directly to that down-home, small-town-friendly sensibility that sets this community apart from much of the rest of the metro. Unfortunately, recent events involving communications around sidewalk expansions, bike lanes, and proposed development projects have led to disjointed relations among city leadership, some members of the business community and some residents. At the same time, Windsor Heights is an exceptionally energized community. People show up in healthy numbers to public meetings and fully participate. They often bring ideas and enthusiasm to the table for new approaches even as they express concerns. A community this involved will ultimately prove valuable to Windsor Heights' future but this means solid communication strategies are particularly important here. Lines of communication must be fully open with easy access to decision-makers and ample opportunities for the business community and the public to weigh in early on new initiatives. Outreach will also matter as — even in this community — many caring residents and business people have busy lives and little time to set aside for traditional public meetings.

OUR VISION

- The city employs useful avenues for communicating with businesses and residents.
- Project concerns are raised early and handled openly.
- Community goals are achieved through productive collaborations of city leadership, staff, residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

OUR GOALS

1. Improve relationship and communication between the city and the business community.
2. Improve communication between the city and the general public.

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY — AN ACTION PLAN

Learning from past experiences speaks to the need for letting the public know about projects and ideas before they advance to a critical point. Currently, there are insufficient paths for routine communication. Special events communication is equally challenged. As the city works to fulfill staffing needs for day-to-day functions, it will make sense to address communications needs.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Work with a contractor or through incoming staff to develop a communications plan for the city. The plan should consider:

- Routine public/resident communications mechanisms that reach wide-ranging demographics and can be readily accessed by the public, acknowledging the value of electronic and social media, more traditional broadcast/print media, and the visibility inherent in Windsor Heights' commercial district.
- Methods for ongoing business/developer and other community stakeholder communications.
- Bringing back the popular "meetings in the street" series, where council meetings were held in the neighborhoods.
- Methods for introducing new ideas to residents and businesses, e.g., seeking input at the early concept stage, experimenting with "pop-up" practices to demonstrate impacts of proposals and gather feedback.

ACTION 2:

Secure (through hire or contracting) expertise in public communications and sufficient support resources for implementation of the plan.

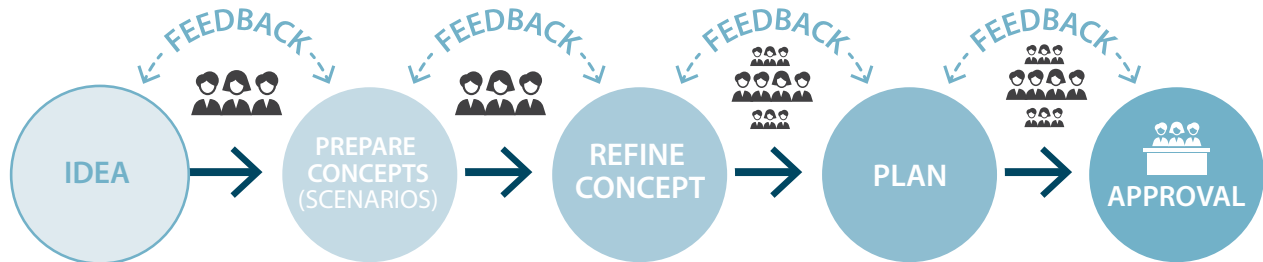
ACTION 3:

Work with the Windsor Heights Chamber of Commerce to develop communications methods and build improved relationships with the business community.

ACTION 4:

Seek early input from local businesses on city projects (through focus groups, roundtables, interviews, etc.); similarly, expand the role/use of citizen task forces and boards/commissions to assist with early resident communications and outreach.

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY — AN ACTION PLAN



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 5:

Streamline the development review procedure. Also see Chapter 2: Economic Development.

- Hold early development review meetings between staff and developers.
- Create a checklist for developers.
- Reduce the number of steps in the process.

ACTION 6:

Share the goals and content of this comprehensive plan with residents, building from the valuable public engagement process that has been used in this plan's development.

ACTION 7:

Work with businesses and residents early in the process for updates to the city's zoning code.



COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Developers call to action

Participate in assisting the city with a streamlined development review process while recognizing the critical need for the city to establish a transparent and open process.

ACTION 2:

Businesses call to action

Work together through an organization such as the Chamber of Commerce, to assist in the development of easy-to-access and easy-to-produce communications tools.

ACTION 3:

Everyone's call to action

Work together in the development of the city's communications plan.



WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 4:

As the communications plan is implemented, take advantage of the tools and continue to participate as early in the process as possible.

ACTION 5:

Volunteer for city commissions, boards, or committees to improve understanding of the city's challenges and support advancement of important civic work.

ACTION 6:

Support the city through “spreading the word” of opportunities for civic engagement or special events.



COMPLETE STREETS

COMPLETE STREETS

Streets should accommodate all choices of transportation for moving about the city.





WHY

Streets are Windsor Heights' largest public space, and should be designed in a way that reflects the pride that residents feel in the community. Streets provide the first impression for many visitors and have a daily impact on how residents view their community. Well-maintained street , landscaping, street furniture, public art, green boulevards, and other attractive features should be considered an investment in community character and a tool to attract customers and development.

Streets should be safe and accommodate walkers, bikers, and bus riders, as well as drivers. The physical design of streets influences the behaviors and safety of all users. Wide, multi-lane streets encourage speeding and should be calmed through design. Multi-modal features include: sidewalks, bike lanes, bike pavement markings, bike signage, transit stops, and traffic calming. Local streets should have sidewalks, at a minimum on one side of the street. Arterial and collector streets should have sidewalks on both sides. Logical pathways should lead to the DART transit stop at Buffalo Road near Wal-Mart.

OUR VISION

- We can readily get to destinations without a car, and we choose to do so.
- More children walk to school.
- We are recognized in the Metro as a leader in walkable communities, making us attractive to an influx of new residents while enhancing active living for our current residents.

OUR GOALS

1. Provide safe and pleasant streets that allow travel by car, foot, or bicycle.
2. Create a connected sidewalk network, especially along arterial roads, schools, parks, trails, and retail.
3. Embrace an expansive view of "walkability" that includes creating a pleasant walking environment (e.g. providing shade and good street-side aesthetics) and encouraging mixed-use development (so that homes are within walking distance to other daily destinations).
4. Calm the speed of traffic through the community.

COMPLETE STREETS — AN ACTION PLAN

Ensuring strong communication with residents and businesses is key to advancing the goals and vision for Complete Streets. Past proposals following the city's adoption of the complete streets policy have been received by the public with some hesitation. Underpinning their concern is understanding why the application is relevant and how the change will benefit them.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Implement the city's Complete Streets policy.

Windsor Heights adopted a Complete Streets policy in 2015. This commitment to providing mobility for all considers transportation options for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

In 2016, the city explored the possible application of the complete streets policy to University Avenue. The concept includes a protected bicycle lane and special treatments at intersections to improve safety and mobility. Improving University Avenue is just as much of an economic development strategy as it is correcting access and circulation. Strategies for improving University Avenue are covered in more detail in Chapter 2: Economic Development. University Avenue deserves its own subarea study.



Resolution No. 15-0749 states the purpose as:

*"The purpose of the **Complete Streets Policy** is to use an interdisciplinary approach to incorporate the needs of all users into the design, construction, and maintenance of public and private transportation infrastructure within Windsor Heights where feasible and fiscally viable. This Complete Streets Policy establishes guiding principles and practices to assist in the creation of an equitable, balanced, and effective transportation system that encourages walking, bicycling, and transit use, to improve health, economic vitality, and reduce adverse environmental impacts, while simultaneously promoting safety for all Users of Streets."*

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO



GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPLETE STREET POLICY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Source: Des Moines MPO



FIGURE 4.1: COMPLETE STREETS CONCEPT

Complete Streets are designed to serve users of all ages and abilities, including: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. The overall goal of Complete Streets is to preserve and enhance scenic, aesthetic, historical, and environmental resources while improving or maintaining safety, mobility, and infrastructure conditions.

It is the intent of the Complete Streets Policy that the design and construction of all street projects should include Complete Streets Elements as feasibility and funding allows, including, but not limited to:

Public Plans adopted by the City of Windsor Heights, which may be independent or part of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, DART, State of Iowa, and other transportation partners;

Development-related ordinances and resolutions, including (Land development Codes and Subdivision Regulations,) among others, that are adopted or passed by the City of Windsor Heights.

Complete Streets Elements should be considered within the balance of mode and context of the community, including but not limited to: environmental sensitivity; costs; budgets; demand; probable use; space and area requirements and limitations; and legal requirements and limitations. Not all Complete Streets Elements are required to make a street complete and/or feasible at all locations or times.

It is the intent of the City of Windsor Heights to recognize that street projects are limited in scope by available

funding resources. Fiscal responsibility should be used when considering Complete Streets Elements.

It is the intent of the City of Windsor Heights to incorporate the Complete Streets principles into appropriate public strategic plans, standards, relevant ordinances, practices and policies, and appropriate subsequent updates. The Complete Streets principles, where applicable and appropriate, may also be incorporated into plans, manuals, rules, practices, policies, training, procedures, regulations, and programs.

It is the goal of the City of Windsor Heights to foster a partnership with the State of Iowa, Polk County, area school districts, citizens, businesses, neighboring communities, and neighborhoods in consideration of functional facilities and accommodations in furtherance of this Complete Streets Policy and the continuation of such facilities and accommodations beyond the jurisdiction of the City of Windsor Heights.

The City of Windsor Heights recognizes that Complete Streets may be achieved through elements incorporated into a single Street Project, or incrementally through a series of improvements, in order to create a network of facilities that promotes connectivity to destinations.

The City of Windsor Heights will consider all appropriate possible funding sources to plan and implement the Complete Streets Policy and shall direct staff to investigate grants that may be available to make the realization of Complete Streets economically feasible.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 2:

Build new sidewalks on priority routes.

Windsor Heights should create a balanced transportation system that meets the needs of both the motorist and the pedestrian by establishing a Sidewalk Improvement Program (SIP), a subset of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The program should provide safe pedestrian access for all residents. The SIP should work to establish a fine-grained complete network of sidewalks that can be easily accessed from any residence in the city, be ADA compliant, well-repaired and maintained, and void of gaps.

Priorities for the program should include:

- Major corridors, including Hickman Road, 63rd Street, and 73rd Street
- Accessible routes to schools and the city's park and trail system.

- Linkages along arterial streets that provide a safe area for everyone.
- Install missing ramps at intersections. Although ramps have been installed at a number of intersections around the city, many locations are still too difficult to maneuver a wheelchair or stroller.

Figure 4.2 identifies existing sidewalks and gaps. A complete network of sidewalks will provide continuity between neighborhoods, business clusters, and schools. Current interruptions in the system discourage walking altogether or force the pedestrian to use the street or beat a path adjacent to the street.

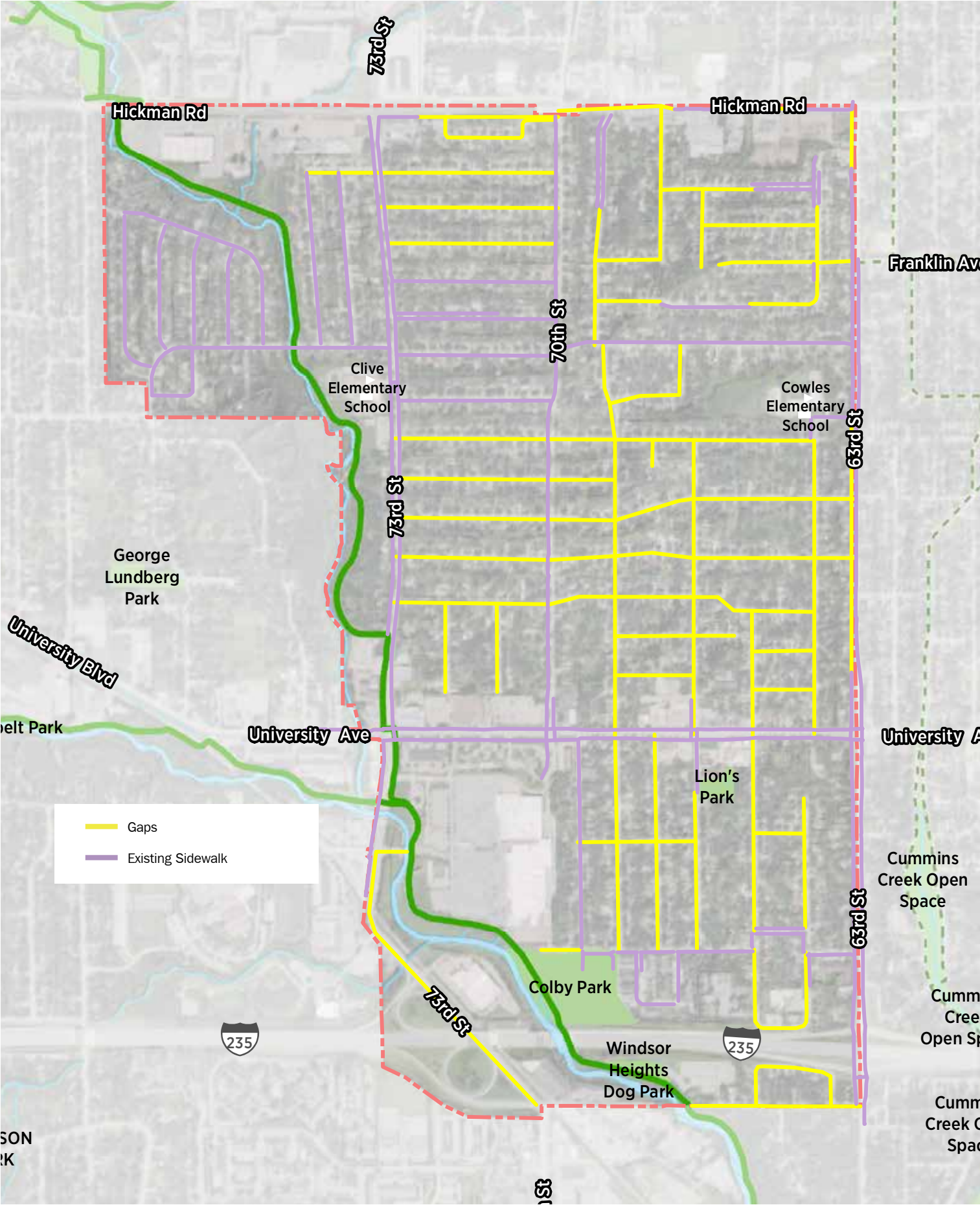
The city should prioritize and phase the construction of sidewalks. In 2016, the Des Moines Area MPO prepared a strategy for completing all of the gaps in the overall sidewalk system by phases. Overall, the program prioritizes completing gaps along major streets and connections to schools, parks, and



business clusters. This initial strategy can be refined to gradually implement the concept and consider temporary or “tactical urbanism” strategies.

The city should establish a regular budget to assist property owners in replacing sidewalk sections, particularly near schools, parks, business areas, and at all crossings.

FIGURE 4.2: WALKABILITY GAPS





WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 3:

Consider adjustments to the zoning code that would require pedestrian-friendly design in certain areas of town (e.g. minimal setbacks, accessible front doors, parking maximums, parking lot screening).

The zoning code provides language to accommodate pedestrian-friendly environments such as accessibility to buildings, visibility at vehicle access points, and landscaping buffers along public right-of-ways. However, standards are often vague. The exception is the Hickman Corridor Overlay District which goes into detail on vehicle access point locations, sidewalk design, and building placement. Updates to the zoning code are recommended to enhance and make pedestrian oriented standards clear:

- Adopt the comprehensive parking lot design, landscaping, and sidewalk/pedestrian elements listed in the Hickman Overlay Corridor District for all commercial districts.
- Clarify that access to a PUD (Planned Unit Development) district must include both vehicular and pedestrian routes such as trails and sidewalks.
- Expand upon the parking lot design standards to require pedestrian walkways to building entrances within the interior of large parking lots.
- Clarify that parking of personal and recreational vehicles cannot encroach on public sidewalks. Currently the code states that vehicles cannot encroach on the public right of way. While sidewalks are located in the public right-of-way, clarification reinforces the objective and makes the standard clear for property owners who often don't know where their property lines are.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 4:

Use “green” traffic calming devices.

Traffic along major corridors and neighborhood streets speeds through the community, creating an environment that is unfavorable for pedestrians. Windsor Heights’ primary method of calming traffic is through deterrents — more often citations for speeding. This plan considers using subtle methods for slowing traffic by adding “green” to the street.

The city should require street trees along major streets for calming traffic and encourage street trees in residential areas. Trees transform a street’s appearance and offer strong public benefits with a limited outlay of funds. Street trees visually separate vehicles and pedestrian pathways, provide shade for pedestrians, slow traffic, add color and help the city breathe, while improving the appearance of the neighborhood. Development, including residential, commercial, and civic, shares a common and unifying thread — their green infrastructure. Trees,

shrubs and grasses create the invisible fabric that hems the landscape, establishing a more beautiful and people-friendly neighborhood. Green infrastructure throughout the neighborhood promotes a sense of place, fosters social interactions and subtly calms the neighborhood. In essence, embracing green infrastructure reinforces the relationship between people & nature and buildings & nature. Creating a neighborhood that celebrates its green infrastructure involves the partnership of private and public property owners.

Having a canopy of trees is desirable for all neighborhood streets. As a first priority, planting trees along major collectors will have significant influence on the perception of the adjacent neighborhood by both residents and visitors. Also, creating a pleasant approach to schools and parks will encourage parents to select Windsor Heights as their new neighborhood as they are prospecting houses to raise their children.



For select areas, the city could retrofit streets as shared streets (or *woonerfs*, which originates in the Netherlands). These streets are low-speed, shared spaces for people driving, walking, and bicycling. 64th Street is a possible candidate for redesigning as shared street.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 5:

Improve safety for pedestrians.

- *Promote new destinations in town that people will want to walk to – everyday goods and services, restaurants. Designing and installing a thoughtful directional signage system would welcome travelers to the community and lead people to all of the great destinations that Windsor Heights has to offer. Implementation of the system can start small, directing people to and from the Town Center, Colby Park, and the trail.*
- *Consider adjustments to zoning codes that would require more pedestrian-friendly design in certain areas:*
 - Could create a zoning overlay that requires: Minimal setbacks, accessible front-doors, parking maximums, parking lot screening



FIGURE 4.3: RETROFIT FOR IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AT 73RD AND UNIVERSITY

- *Improve trail and its connections. The trail is a significant amenity. Lighting the trail and painting generous crosswalk markings at University Avenue and 73rd Street will alert the motorist to trail users.*
 - Painting the trail and modifying the curb cut along 73rd Street near A to Z Rental Center and 1-800-Flowers will help define the trail path along the street.
- Adding crossing signs on College Street near the trail access will increase safety and awareness for the pedestrian.
- Any redevelopment of properties west of 73rd Street and north/south of University Avenue should reserve an easement near the creek for a possible realigned trail path that would connect to the Clive Greenbelt Trail.

continued...

COMPLETE STREETS — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 5 (...continued):



Hickman Road



University Avenue

- *Update traffic signals with safety improvements.* Traffic signals without countdown timers and audio signals should be upgraded. Crosswalks should be painted to clearly indicate the pedestrian walk zone. Cross streets to major roads should have bump-outs. Crosswalks along University Avenue should have generous striping to increase awareness for pedestrians. Where possible, bump-outs should be placed on University Avenue to decrease the walking distance for pedestrians, increase their visibility, and compel the motorist to slow down.
- *Improve street lighting.* Street lighting for Windsor Heights should be functional, while reinforcing the character of the community. Lighting along the city's civic corridors have various styles. Fixtures at Hickman Road and 63rd Street establish a

continued...



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 5 (...continued):

desirable function and appearance that can be replicated throughout Hickman Road, University Avenue and 73rd Street. Possible streetscape improvements to University Avenue should consider pedestrian lighting, particularly near the Town Center.

- *Lighting for neighborhood streets should be converted to LED to reduce cost of maintenance and use.* These lights cast light towards the street and limit ambient light spilling onto private property and restore dark skies.
- *Improve sidewalk conditions.* Windsor Heights should conduct a detailed inventory of their sidewalk system, identifying conditions and gaps. Map 4.2 identifies the gaps for walkability. This map should be updated to include all accessibility concerns, particularly at crossings. Sidewalks less than four

(4) feet wide or that have tripping hazards should be considered for replacement.

- *Establish a uniform width for new sidewalks.* Windsor Heights has several locations where sidewalks are too narrow for wheelchairs and people to walk side-by-side. New sidewalks should be 5-feet wide (minimum 4-feet) in residential areas. Commercial sidewalks should be a minimum of 8-feet. These widths are consistent with the city's current ordinance.



WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Let the city know about trouble spots for vehicle conflicts and poor conditions, or where there is a lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle routes.

Report trouble spots to City Hall. Often issues are unknown and need to be brought to the attention of administrators. They will program strategies for improving trouble spots, which may include studying the warrant for new traffic control devices.

Figure 4.5 identifies street conditions in 2016. Streets in "very poor" and "poor" conditions deserve improvement.

ACTION 2:

As a motorist, be aware of non-motorized travel on our streets and share the road.

Share-the-road signs and bicycle sharrow symbols alert the motorist to the possible presence of bicyclists. Add bicycle racks near businesses.

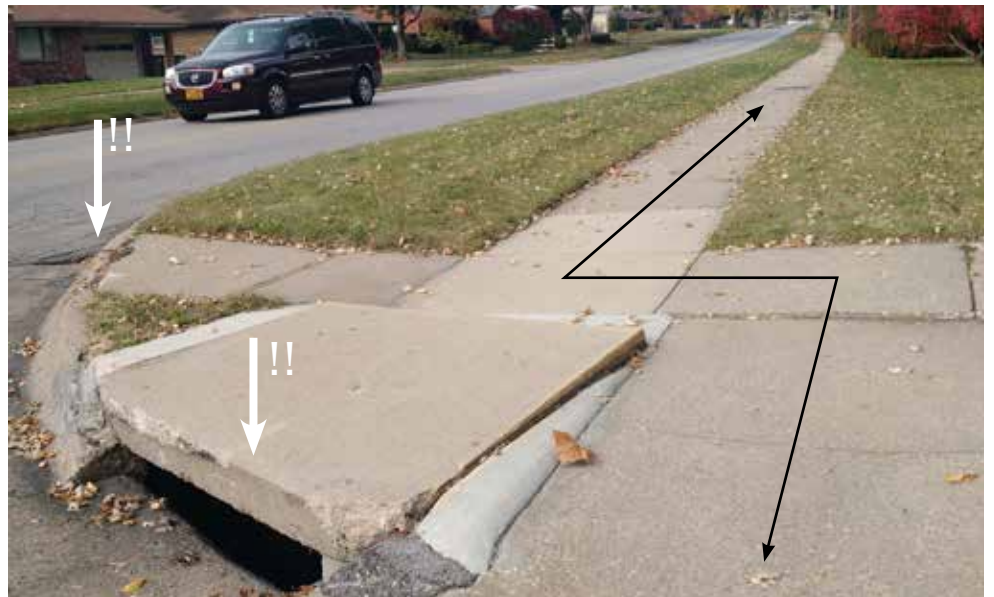


FIGURE 4.4: WALKABILITY TROUBLE SPOT DEMONSTRATION

FIGURE 4.5: STREET CONDITIONS, 2016

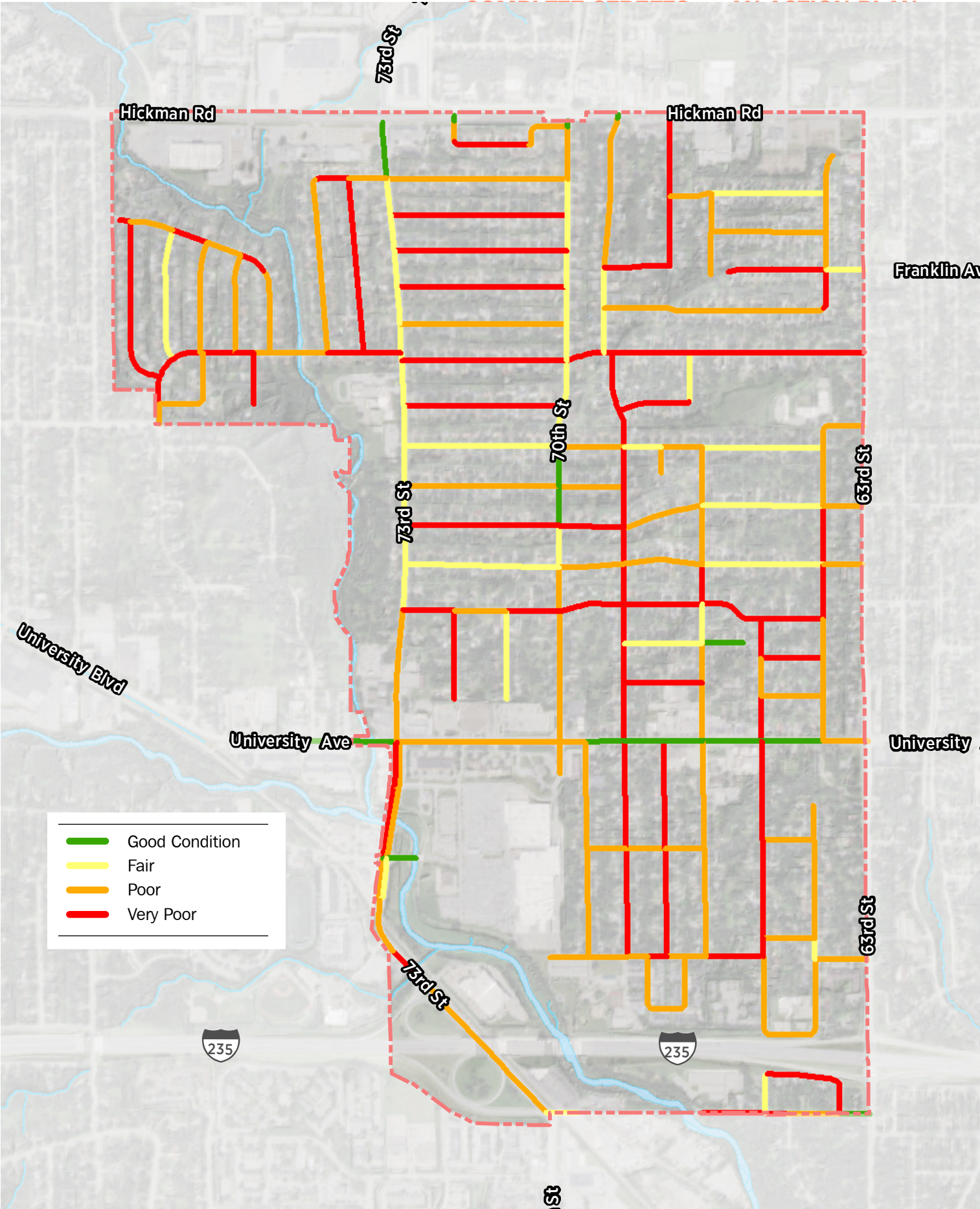


FIGURE 4.6: STREET FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

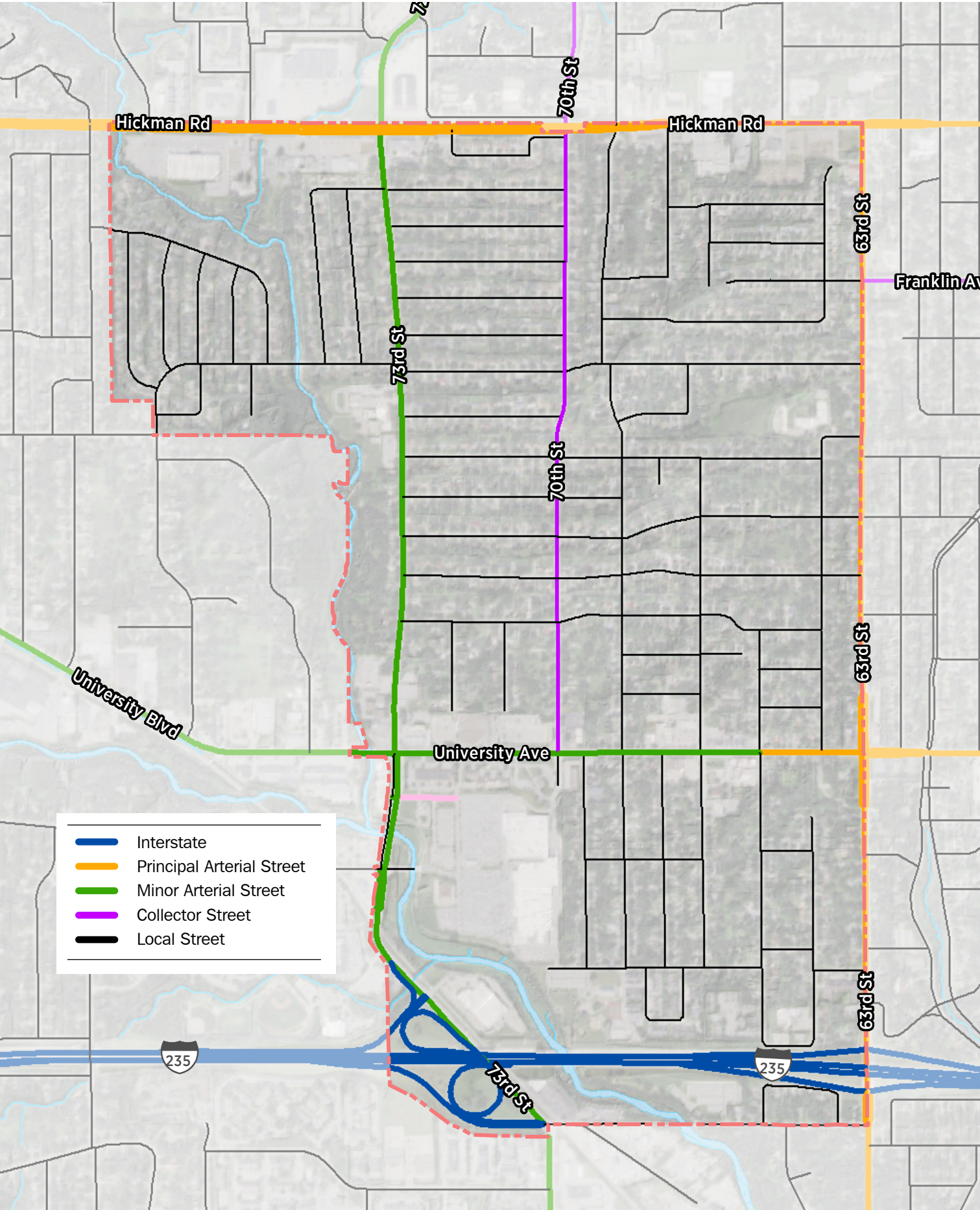


FIGURE 4.7: NEAR-TERM PROJECT PRIORITIES (EXCLUDES WALKABILITY)



IMPROVING AMENITIES

IMPROVING AMENITIES

Specifically, this chapter looks at Windsor Heights’ park facilities coupled with the opportunities and challenges the community faces as a “downstream” Walnut Creek community.





WHY

Without connections to a healthy natural environment and recreational features, communities lose their luster. They fail to thrive. The parks, trails, waterways, greenways and gathering spaces are essential for the public's physical, social and emotional health. These are the features that promote active living, provide places to meet, greet and build community, as well as spaces to get away from the hectic pace of urban life. Communities void of these amenities, or struggling to maintain such features, send signals of decline.

Increasingly, residents — and their potential employers — look to communities that actively promote vibrant natural resources, active living, and social connections. In short, these quality of life amenities directly deliver on public health and are essential for economic vitality as well. Windsor Heights needs regional partnerships to make this vision happen, but the city is already at the table by virtue of its own regional amenities and willingness to partner on projects.

OUR VISION

- A fully connected and signed park and trail system bustling with activity, including expanded use of Lion's Park.
- Walnut Creek enriching recreational opportunities for Windsor Heights residents and visitors.
- Recreational opportunities available for all ages.
- Improved access to nature and recreation, particularly north of University Avenue and at Walnut Creek in Colby Park.

OUR GOALS

1. Update parks and facilities, expanding park land when possible.
2. Improve connections between trails and neighborhoods.
3. Enhance Walnut Creek for improved water quality/quantity outcomes, streambank protection and increased access.

IMPROVING AMENITIES — AN ACTION PLAN

Enhancing existing amenities or converting Walnut Creek into an amenity, will require successful partnerships with everyone. Windsor Heights' position in the heart of the metro affords residents relatively easy access to a host of valuable features in neighboring communities. At the same time, the city offers much in return with Colby Park, the Dog Park, and plans for a regional trail hub.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Develop improvements to Colby Park and access to Walnut Creek.

Expanding Colby Park to 73rd Street and adding features for people of all ages to explore nature and Walnut Creek will afford new opportunities for enriching programs.

The regional park maintains a footprint within the floodplain, is well-used for its size, and already has a minimal amount of general flex space — so there are few opportunities for improvements based on physical changes. Yet families tell us the park's day-to-day appeal is largely to their younger children. They seek programs that help fit the needs of older youth. Nature, science/conservation, arts, and/or adventure programs show potential. Restoring the shoreline and adding play features encourage people of all ages to access Walnut Creek (which is also a recommendation in the Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Plan), grows opportunities for programs with appeal: “bioblitzes,” creepy crawlers hunts, exploration-adventures, outdoor skills-building

programs (learn-to-fish, bird, paddle), community service, plant/animal/bug identification, “green arts” programs (combining art and nature), and citizen science (water testing or invasive species removal).

Incorporating some of these more advanced programs will broaden the park's overall appeal to Windsor Heights residents and strengthen the

continued...



FIGURE 5.1: POSSIBLE COLBY PARK / WALNUT CREEK ENHANCEMENTS



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1 (...continued):

appeal of Windsor Heights to families in various life stages (not just the youngest of families). The Walnut Creek access can enrich these program offerings by getting more mature children into the stream and having those “wilder” nature experiences that are so highly valued.

Note: These can be programs Windsor Heights offers, but they do not need to be programs Windsor Heights directly executes. Partnerships can be pursued with schools, scouting groups and:

- Polk County Conservation
- Metro Arts Alliance (GreenArts)
- Blank Park Zoo
- Science Center of Iowa
- Central Iowa Paddlers
- Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR)
- Audubon Society
- Walnut Creek Watershed Coalition
- Izaak Walton League
- Iowa DNR
- And more.

These and other organizations already provide programs and opportunities. Walnut Creek Watershed Coalition currently provides clean-ups and other

Colby Park-based events. The IDNR’s Water Trails program provides basic and advanced paddling training and IRR’s River Rascals targets mid-

continued...



IMPROVING AMENITIES — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1 (...continued):

dle-schoolers for paddling education. IDNR's IOWATER program trains volunteer water quality monitors. Polk County Conservation's naturalists have a long list of program offerings and often seek popular venues to provide additional program access to the public. When the Colby Park site (particularly with a Walnut Creek access) is offered as a venue and coupled with some basic city (or private sector) support, rich programming opportunities can result.

About the access to Walnut Creek.

Any access located in the vicinity of Colby Park will need to be flood-resilient and leverage its adjacency to the trail as well as the park. Public art might be fitting here as well as accesses that take advantage of natural materials. While we speak above of gaining access for older youth, any number of audiences will likely be able to take advantage of a thoughtfully developed access. Access for wading and carry-in

for paddlers/tubers is envisioned as part of the MPO's plan along with providing fishing opportunities. Handicap accessibility should be provided. At

the same time, some element of the access can remain a bit rugged to accommodate the spirit of adventure that sparks the imagination of youth.





WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 2:

Increase use of Lion's Park; improve its visibility and features.

Perhaps due to the dominance of Colby Park, Lion's Park is one of Windsor Heights' most under-used resources. Increasing use of the park depends on:

ally provide an opportunity for healthy public engagement (see Chapter 3: Communications & Transparency).

- Programming and associated promotion of the park
- Improved wayfinding/signage
- Park facilities assessment, updated plan and implementation

The city's current communications effort under-represents Lion's Park. On the Parks and Recreation web page, for example, the park is simply listed with an address and small photo. Featured amenities or prompts for use are not included. Colby Park earns a description and elsewhere on the website it is heavily promoted due to its available rental facilities (community center and amphitheater). An upgrade of Lion's Park is warranted. The development of the plans for upgrade would addition-





IMPROVING AMENITIES — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 3:

Look for park growth opportunities.

If the facilities of neighboring communities were not so close at hand and accessible, Windsor Heights would likely fall short in meeting community park needs. Even so, a case can be made that access to park facilities south of Hickman Road and north of University Avenue could use some improvement. No specific city-reserved park facilities occur in this northern section of the community. The city needs to continue to explore opportunities for pocket/neighborhood park(s) or other nature-based play sites in this area.

At the same time, the city has a formal arrangement with the schools to access outdoor facilities for the enjoyment of Windsor Heights residents. This provides two facilities to help address this park land need:

- Cowles Elementary, 6401 College, featuring soccer field and open space
- Clive Elementary, 1600 73rd, with playground and picnic equipment and directly accessible by trail

City-supported enhancements to both of these facilities may be warranted if partnerships with the schools are sufficiently robust and enduring. Clive Elementary in particular offers meaningful opportunities to create a park-like setting with its proximity to the trail, Walnut Creek, associated foot bridge, some open flex space and its proximity to Clive's Greenbelt Trail, making the city of Clive a potential additional partner in enhancing this space for public access.

ACTION 4:

Direct people to the dog park.

The dog park is an exceptionally popular feature of the Windsor Heights park system but its relatively remote location requires exceptional attention paid to the way-finding signage used to connect the public to the facility.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 5:

Secure community garden spaces.

While community garden options might emerge outside of the park system, the likely first place/space for community garden development is within parks. This may prove an opportunity for an update of Lion's Park, an additional partnership with the schools, or it may end up appropriate as a small high ground footprint in Colby Park. Other nooks, crannies or potential future pocket parks might also emerge as community garden sites. Community gardens provide social connections, access to healthy local foods, exceptional community aesthetics and meaningful volunteer opportunities. This plan recommends associating the community gardens siting and support in partnership with Polk County Public Health, Eat Greater Des Moines or similar organizations combating food insecurity and promoting healthy eating.

ACTION 6:

Advance trail hub.

The city has been involved in the study of a location for a future trails hub to serve the active residents of Windsor Heights and trail users. If study results confirm expected economic and public health outcomes, this could lead to a signature project for the community that could potentially generate region-

al support. At the time of this writing, it appears the abandoned SEARS location (southwest of Wal-Mart) is a nearly ideal location, but the economic viability/affordability of this site (acquisition and operations) remains to be seen.



BACKGROUND ON WALNUT CREEK



Source: Des Moines MPO



Walnut Creek and North Walnut Creek form most of the western boundary of the City. Little Walnut Creek flows into Walnut Creek just west of the 73rd Street bridge, south of University Avenue. At this point, nearly 76 square miles of land (92% of the total watershed for Walnut Creek) has already drained into these streams. They receive runoff from areas as far west as Dallas Center and as far north as Grimes.

These streams and their adjacent open space corridor are an important environmental resource. These corridors also provide important habitat and unique movement paths for a wide variety of wildlife. Shared-use trails run parallel to these streams, providing connectivity to Clive, Urbandale, Des Moines and West Des Moines. There are also regional plans to enhance recreational opportunities by introducing stream improvements to create water trails — increasing stream use for canoeing and kayaking.

Action is necessary to improve water quality and protect and restore habitat, in order to continue to support the recreational and environmental benefits of these corridors. The Walnut Creek Watershed Master Plan was recently completed by the Walnut Creek Watershed Management Authority (WMA). The WMA is a cooperative effort of nine communities, two counties and other local government agencies which have jurisdiction over parts of the Walnut Creek Watershed. This plan identified several key issues requiring action.

Flooding

Since 1981, average annual streamflow in Walnut Creek has increased 37%. Flood events have impacted residences and businesses located along Walnut Creek and North Walnut Creeks. Increased annual precipitation and urban development within the watershed have the potential to increase flood risk. The Master Plan addresses flooding by recommending that all communities adopt the design criteria promoted by the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual (ISWMM) to address both water quality and quantity. For the largest storm events, these standards would require new developments to limit runoff rates to levels similar to what would have occurred prior to pioneer settlement. If adopted, runoff rates would be expected to decline in areas where developments meet these new standards.

Pathogens (such as viruses and bacteria)

Monitoring has been conducted within this watershed for more than 15 years. This monitoring has frequently measured levels of E.coli bacteria that are well above the State of Iowa's water quality standard (this standard is 235 organisms per 100 mL for a single collected sample). Average concentrations of E.coli at many monitoring locations across the watershed are 13 to 39 times higher than this standard. The highest level recorded through this monitoring was found in a tributary to North Walnut Creek, where the lab tested sample was found to have a concentration of 77,000 organisms / 100 mL (more than 300 times higher than

BACKGROUND ON WALNUT CREEK

Source: Des Moines MPO



the state standard. When pathogen levels are high, there is potential for illness in those who come into contact with the water. Those most at risk are the very young, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. The ISWMM design manual includes many practices which have been shown to reduce pathogen levels in stormwater runoff. These practices could be implemented as retrofits in developed areas or as required practices to meet new design criteria in redeveloping areas. Regular inspection of the sanitary sewer system is also advised to identify any potential leaks or cross connections to the storm sewer system.

Sediment

Nearly 30,000 tons of sediment each year is washed through Walnut Creek to the Raccoon River. The three largest sources of this sediment are believed to be streambank erosion, gully erosion and construction site runoff. As development within Windsor Heights is limited to infill and re-development opportunities, there is little risk for construction site impacts within the city to affect Walnut Creek. However, it is still wise to remain vigilant to ensure these sites remain in compliance with state and federal laws. There is greater potential for streambank erosion, especially along certain segments of Walnut Creek and North Walnut Creek. The Master Plan identifies several of these segments within Windsor Heights as long-term potential improvement projects.

Nutrients

Nitrate levels within Walnut Creek have often been observed above the State's water quality standard of 10 mg/L. Walnut Creek flows into the Raccoon River just upstream of the main intake point for Des Moines Water Works, the metro area's primary drinking water supplier. Elevated nitrate levels require Water Works to use advanced treatment techniques. High levels of phosphorus can be caused by use of fertilizers, detergents and other chemicals. Elevated levels of phosphorus can cause excessive algal blooms on ponds and other water bodies. These blooms can lower oxygen levels to levels that are hazardous to aquatic life and can diminish water quality. Some types of blue-green algae can be toxic to those who come into contact with it. Nitrate and phosphorus are also key contributors to the "dead zone," an area of the Gulf of Mexico where dissolved oxygen levels are too low to support many forms of aquatic life. Several practices outlined in the ISWMM design manual are capable of reducing levels of nitrate and phosphorus and could be incorporated into stormwater retrofits or redevelopment plans.

IMPROVING AMENITIES — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 7:

Improve trail signs and safety

The trail system through Windsor Heights remains popular both locally and regionally, but does provide opportunities for improvements. Wayfinding to the trail, as well as signs pointing to community desti-

nations, will enhance the trail. On-going trail safety improvements are essential, such as centerline striping. Advancements in trail standards can often be implemented when coupled with maintenance projects.



TREE CANOPY

Walnut Creek and North Walnut Creek are key resources that can enhance economic growth, create recreational opportunities and foster healthy living. These resources are being affected by the key issues identified by the Walnut Creek Watershed Management Plan. Endorsement of the plan leading to adoption of policies and implementation of practices are major steps to preserving and enhancing the value of these resources.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 8:

Continue as an active partner in the Watershed Management Authority (WMA).

Participation in the Walnut Creek Watershed Management Authority affords the city the opportunity to stay connected with upstream partners while not undermining Windsor Heights' autonomy. As a key downstream partner (along with Des Moines Water Works), upstream cooperation and collaborations are essential to successfully improving stream conditions for stormwater/flood management and water quality improvement.

ACTION 9:

Implement Windsor Heights projects identified in the Walnut Creek Watershed Plan.

The plan calls for an approximate \$175,000 stormwater management project near Clive Elementary school and a longer-term acquisition of property and/or conservation easement to protect stream buffer and wetlands along North Walnut Creek from Hickman Road to the mouth of the creek. The plan also calls for extensive stream bank restoration (see Action 12).

IMPROVING AMENITIES — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 10:

Implement Walnut Creek Watershed Plan policy recommendations.

In urban areas, these recommendations include:

- Use criteria in the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual (ISWMM) to reduce storm impacts.
 - Improve implementation and enforcement of Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans.
 - Use local ordinances to restore healthy soils.
 - Protect the 100-year flood plain by:
 - Not building new structures in the flood plain
 - Maintaining flood storage capacity
- Reserving open space where flooding or stream movement is expected
 - Setting new structures above the base floodplain elevation (100-year flood plain)
- Buffer creeks and streams

Information on these and other policy recommendations appear in the June 2016 Walnut Creek Watershed Master Plan, Chapter 9, Policy Recommendations. See that document for more detailed information.

ACTION 11:

Implement Water Trails Plan.

Despite the potentially challenged water quality in Walnut Creek, if appropriate interpretive signage and monitoring systems are in place, providing some water access as outlined in the Water Trails Plan can enhance public awareness and understanding of opportunities and challenges in our water system. The plan recommends access in the vicinity of Colby Park. (See Colby Park improvements above).



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 12:

Partner for stream stabilization.

The stream stabilization work needed along Walnut Creek within Windsor Heights will require significant partnerships for success. A number of potential funding sources are under discussion at the state and federal level. Meanwhile, working in partnership with the WMA, the community has the potential to secure support for projects through the State Revolving Fund or other granting mechanisms. This work, however, will likely need comparable upstream commitments as there will likely be a reluctance to implement downstream projects if upstream challenges continue to have negative impacts in Windsor Heights.

The Walnut Creek Watershed Master Plan notes the long-term need for streambank restoration and improvements along North Walnut Creek from Hickman Road to the mouth of the creek, affecting both

Clive and Windsor Heights. While not specified in the plan, in today's current dollars, streambank restoration proj-

ects often carry a price tag of \$1-1.5 million per stream half-mile.



WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Maintain active involvement in a Keep Windsor Heights Beautiful Committee and Catch Des Moines Active.

The Keep Windsor Heights Beautiful Committee is an initiative to pick up litter and debris. Its intent is to engage citizens and businesses to take a greater responsibility for improving the appearance of the city. Now an annual event, this initiative could be held seasonally.

Catch Des Moines Active is a regional approach to stimulate interest in experiencing, watching, and being active. Windsor Heights has many opportunities to leverage this initiative to appeal to visitors and residents alike.

ACTION 2:

Maintain active involvement in the Walnut Creek Watershed Coalition and similar organizations, promoting:

- Education about watershed, water quality, and flooding.
- Participation in clean-ups.
- Engagement in outdoor activities and overall policy and funding advocacy.

ACTION 3:

Promote and support through volunteerism.

Windsor Heights can extend their resources with the help of the community volunteers. Maintaining public spaces, upgrading parks, and ensuring clear paths to access the water trails are among some of the initiatives where residents can help. Another simple contribution is planting a tree.



WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 4:

Volunteer for a Windsor Heights Community Gardening initiative.

Community gardens add life to the city and offer opportunities for interacting with neighbors. Initiatives can be as simple as establishing planting areas at intersections and along streets. More robust opportunities include establishing a community garden to raise plants and vegetables.

ACTION 5:

Developers and businesses aid in maintaining and expanding green spaces.

Developers and businesses add to the beauty and charm of the community. Trees and landscaping are simple measures to engaging nature into their site. Businesses can help further celebrate Windsor Heights by adding even more landscaping and thinking about placing small gathering spaces on their property.

ACTION 6:

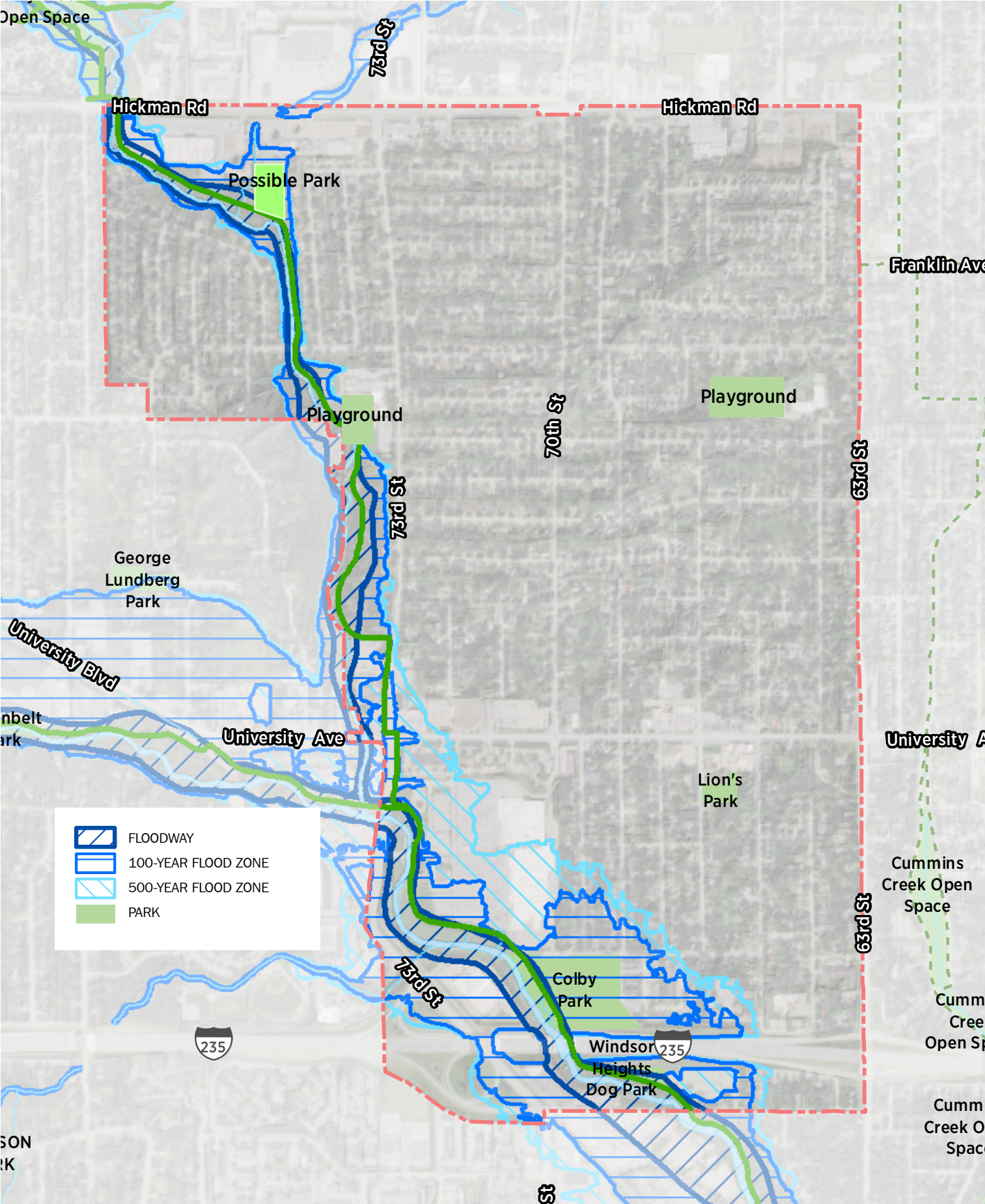
Support through volunteerism, fundraising, grant-writing, technical assistance, and other means.

Windsor Heights' effort to establish signature amenities cannot rest on the shoulders of the city's limited number of staff. Projects like the trail hub, complete streets and community gardens, must be accomplished through civic cooperation. Realizing any idea for Windsor Heights must be done through the support of its residents and businesses.

FIGURE 5.2: PARKS AND TRAILS



FIGURE 5.3: FLOOD MAP





IDENTITY & IMAGE

IDENTITY & IMAGE

For its ongoing vitality, Windsor Heights must capture the imagination of the residents of the metro through a strong, positive identity.



WHY

Generally, identity (or “brand” to use marketing language) matters a great deal when choosing where to live, work, learn and play. Identity equates with reputation and overall perception of place, service, or product. Without a community identity that speaks to a promising future, it is hard for new residents to gravitate to that city. Negative images launch downward spirals — regardless of whether they’re strongly based on reality.

Windsor Heights in particular struggles with identity. Due to its size and position “in the heart of the metro,” it is frequently a passage from point A to B or a goods-and-services destination. These are not negatives in and of themselves, but due to the strong use of speed controls within the metro, the overall image resonates poorly. Admittedly, slowing traffic has safety outcomes of value for residents, but handled as an enforcement issue, it causes residents to avoid Windsor Heights for fear they’ll “get a ticket.” This is not the foundation for a positive brand. At the same time, two school districts are within Windsor Heights, further confusing residents. With no real gateways or

OUR VISION

- We are a metro destination — our spaces/places, services and offerings hold meaning for residents and visitors.
- Living in Windsor Heights is coveted by many — we can hardly accommodate the many who clamor to join us!
- People recognize when they’ve arrived in Windsor Heights and they typically desire to stay.

entry points to Windsor Heights, its boundaries (and therefore identity) are poorly defined.

To achieve a highly livable community that also serves as an authentic regional destination, will require a community that has a common vision and understanding

OUR GOALS

1. Establish a positive, meaningful identity, unique to Windsor Heights.
2. Ensure this identity is well-understood and embraced by the residents of Windsor Heights.
3. Let residents and visitors across the metro know of Windsor Heights' future, valuable direction.

of its role within the metro. The details of this work are beyond the scope of a comprehensive plan, but the effort made to gain a foothold on understanding the community’s reflections on life in Windsor Heights can help frame this work for the future.



IDENTITY & IMAGE — AN ACTION PLAN

As the city works to improve their internal/external communications, some natural enhancement of its image will likely result. Still, a more purposeful effort to “market” Windsor Heights makes sense. No campaign will succeed in the long run unless it is rooted in reality. This is why we recommend an eventual “branding” effort, but we first encourage taking action on this plan and past planning efforts.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Implement the previous chapters.

The on-the-ground work will be some of the most obvious features that begin to reshape the image of Windsor Heights:

- Preserving neighborhoods
- Enhancing mobility for all
- Redeveloping major corridors
- Improving parks and trails
- Upgrading amenities

Equally critical is improved communication with the development and business communities, as well as the residents of Windsor Heights.

ACTION 2:

Identify highly visible pilot projects; focus attention on zones already getting attention.

Three key zones already garner regional attention:

- Colby Park and trail
- Apple Valley area east of 73rd Street and south of University Avenue
- University Avenue through Windsor Heights

Each of these zones has its benefits and challenges and is addressed at some length within this plan.

While many of the elements in this plan will take some time and resources to implement, Windsor Heights can garner positive attention through thoughtful experimen-

tation and improvements in associated public engagement (see the Communications Chapter). Piloting before full-bore implementation will provide meaningful opportunities for many to weigh in, immediately enhancing Windsor Heights’ image as a valued community. If some of this meaningful work is focused in the zones identified above, the visibility will likely give Windsor Heights a near-term uptick in appeal.

Of particular interest will be pilot projects focused on the natural slowing of traffic, moving the community away from daily speed limit enforcement as soon as possible.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO

ACTION 3:

Tap into the research started through this planning effort.

Through this planning process, the residents of Windsor Heights and others spoke to the community’s potential benefits and promise. These are tools to better understand — and “brand” — Windsor Heights of the present and future. Residents in this community value its ecological connections (leadership in Walnut Creek awareness, for example), its small-town feel and friendliness (in a big-city environment), its Mid-town (Heart of the Metro) location, and its increasing potential to provide features (walkability, food and entertainment venues) to complement its better established “goods and services” function. Tapping into thoughtful living and the sharing/ social economy were also features of value that surfaced in discussions. We encourage this content to stay current and provide the foundation for future identity exercises.



IDENTITY & IMAGE — AN ACTION PLAN

WHAT LOCALS CAN DO

ACTION 1:

Learn how to talk about Windsor Heights and its assets.

When marketing the community to prospective residents and businesses, the message needs to be consistent and reinforced by all of the partners — the city, business community, real estate agents, and the residents. The message needs to celebrate Windsor Heights' strengths and generate buzz for its future possibilities.

During the process of developing this comprehensive plan, several recurring themes of discussion were brought up by participants. These concepts need to be refined as action proceeds with this plan. Ideas like walkability and sustainability can become part of the talk as momentum emerges from the implementation of this plan. Some of the recurring themes include:

We're Midtown!

Windsor Heights is where urban and suburban meet. It's "just right" for housing, pace of life, and yet still convenient to larger shopping areas.

We're the Hub!

Windsor Heights is a "hub" for a full life, which refers to city's central location in the metro, and how a person can get to everything in the city. The concept resonates with the city's moniker — "the heart of it all."

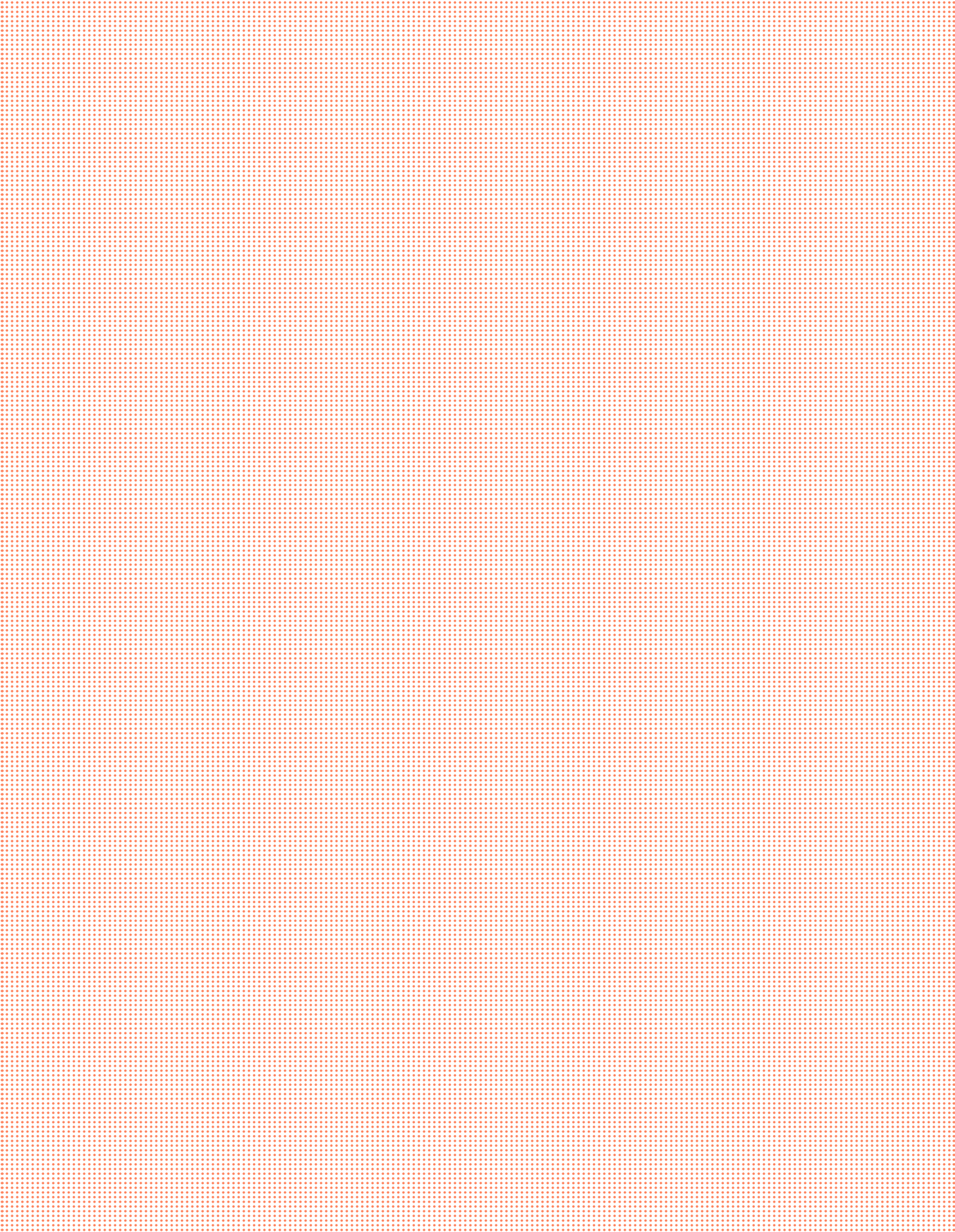
We're the City of All Ages!

Windsor Heights appeals to residents wanting to age in place and for young residents who are starting a family and needing affordable space with conveniences to downtown and western suburbs, yet still finding their daily needs in the city. Windsor Heights is a community for all ages and stages of life.



IDENTITY & IMAGE — AN ACTION PLAN





CITY WORKS

We will ensure that Windsor Heights is a destination now and in the future by creating, encouraging and investing in infrastructure, processes and people that support our present and awaken our future.





WHY

Windsor Heights is in the middle of everything and is well served by major infrastructure that serves the community as well as the region. Interstate and state highways, major water system distribution lines, large trunk line sanitary sewers and Walnut Creek all play a role in the very foundation of Windsor Heights: its physical infrastructure. These major systems also create great opportunities to partner and work with organizations who own and operate many of these systems. These collaborations create efficiencies for Windsor Heights as technical assistance, operational costs and physical improvements can be shared among a broader user group.

The internal systems of streets, water mains, sanitary sewers, storm sewers, public utilities, parks and open spaces serve the residents and facilities of the community. These systems are aging and will continue to need attention. This can be rehabilitation, maintenance and renewal; however, at some point replacement and reconstruction will need to occur.

OUR VISION

We envision a City where our systems work to create a healthy community, well built and maintained for current and future residents — here residents and businesses are proud to say “We are Windsor Heights.” There is a balanced approach to investing in extending the life of our infrastructure and replacing and modernizing that infrastructure when necessary.

Windsor Heights is a city that respects existing residents and businesses and helps them thrive while working to attract new investment and reinvestment for regional, community and neighborhood opportunities and vibrancy. Teamwork is visible as city staff, residents and business owners come together in dialogue around current and future issues to build a common set of goals to make Windsor Heights the best that it can be.

OUR GOALS

1. Plan infrastructure investments that maintain, replace and update systems to keep the foundation of our community health.
2. Create a resiliency plan to align public safety programs, hazard mitigation and continuity of service.
3. Adopt codes and standards that encourage investment in high-quality new development and housing while encouraging reinvestment and maintenance of existing buildings, structures and properties.
4. Establish development processes that are transparent and obvious to builders and developers and ensure that new projects advance and enhance Windsor Heights.
5. Create Team Windsor Heights that aligns city staff at all levels with the vision and goals of the city council, creating a culture of progress.

Windsor Heights needs regional partnerships to make this vision happen, but the city is already at the table by virtue of its own regional amenities and willingness to partner on projects.



Our City Works at a Glance:

- *Aging Infrastructure.* Windsor Heights is a mature community with aging infrastructure. Water and sewer lines that have approached or will approach the end of their useful life present challenges for maintaining service and for financing repairs and replacement.

Many of the streets in Windsor Heights are aging beyond their planned life. Work has been done to patch and overlay these streets and some have been replaced. We need an ongoing renewal of this critical transportation infrastructure.

Many of our neighborhoods have issues during wet weather. The stormwater infiltrates into the sanitary sewer either from aging pipes and manholes or sump pump discharges. Managing the repair of storm sewers, repairing sanitary sewers and reducing infiltration will improve system operations and reduce issues.

- *Walnut Creek.* Walnut Creek has also been affected by these major storms as well as upstream development; managing the flood plain and rehabilitating the creek can renew this amenity, reduce the damage of flooding and allow us to connect with this community asset. *See Chapter 5 Improving Amenities Chapter.*

Resilience and our ability to respond to a natural or man-made hazard is critical to all of us. Systems to reduce impacts from these hazards and to bounce back quickly are critical to quality of life.

- *Community Finances.* Windsor Heights, like many mature communities, finds itself balancing finances to manage quality services, rehabilitate aging infrastructure and attract reinvestment. Finding that balance with competitive and stable tax and service rates requires good planning and coordination.
- *Regulations.* Many of the codes, standards and development processes have been updated in response to incidents or activities; however, a comprehensive review and update has not been completed. This activity would create a connection to the planning that the community has done and ensure the vision for Windsor Heights comes to fruition.
- *Leadership.* Windsor Heights has an engaged and committed community and the leadership team mirrors that dedication. Key staff turnover in the recent past reminds us that maintaining a strong organizational team that is engaged with the Council and community boards and committees is critical to the future of our community.



OUR CITY WORKS TOMORROW — AN ACTION PLAN

GOAL 1: Plan infrastructure investments that maintain, replace and update systems to keep our community healthy.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 1)

ACTION 1:

Develop an ongoing evaluation and funding plan to maintain a safe and reliable water system. Work closely with Des Moines Water Works to:

- Establish an ongoing evaluation system for the condition of the water infrastructure in the community.
- Identify those properly sized lines that could have added life through anode retrofitting versus replacement.
- Identify those lines that should be replaced either due to condition of the pipe or size not meeting today's standard for adequate fire flows for current and future uses.
- Prioritize system improvements.
- Establish a consistent annual appropriation to the water system, funded through rates and bonding that ensures funding for ongoing improvements and maintenance to the system.
- Review water rates on a regular basis to ensure that adequate funding is being generated to support the purchase of water, operational costs and the capital improvement program.

ACTION 2:

Develop an ongoing evaluation and funding plan to maintain a reliable sanitary sewer system. Work closely with the Urbandale/Windsor Heights Sanitary Sewer District and the Wastewater Reclamation Authority:

- For sewer lines, apply steps from Action 1, including televising lines for condition assessment.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 1)

ACTION 3:

Develop an ongoing evaluation and funding plan to maintain an effective stormwater management system. See also Chapter 5: Improving Amenities.

- Establish an ongoing evaluation system for the condition and functionality of the system.
- Identify lines that are inadequate and in need of replacement or repair.
- Identify system needs to allow residents to separate storm and sanitary flows and have adequate discharge points for stormwater releases.
- Identify actions and projects related to Walnut Creek to eliminate further degradation and enhance drainage and stream health.
- Prioritize system improvements for piped stormwater as well as overland flows.
- Establish a consistent annual appropriation to the stormwater and drainage system funded through rates and bonding that ensures funding for ongoing improvements and maintenance to the system.
- Review stormwater utility rates on a regular basis to ensure that the percentage they contribute to improvements is adequate to support a portion of the operational costs and the capital improvement program.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 1)

ACTION 4:

Update the transportation system inventory and improvement plan and include the guidance from the Complete Streets policy.

- Continue to work on the sidewalk, trail, street and roadway network with the Center for Transportation Research and Education, the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Iowa Department of Transportation and adjoining jurisdictions.
- Establish an ongoing evaluation system for the condition and functionality of the transportation system in Windsor Heights.
- Identify sidewalks, trails, streets and rights-of-way that are in need of repair, replacement and/or reconstruction to ensure safety for all users.
- Prioritize transportation improvements and incorporate Complete Streets concepts in all plans and projects.
- Establish a consistent annual appropriation to sidewalk, intersection and Complete Streets projects through tax revenue and bonding that ensures funding for ongoing improvements, maintenance and retrofits to the transportation system.

ACTION 5:

Engage the public in Capital Improvement Program planning and execution. Promote a positive image and impact for the benefits that projects will bring.

- Develop rehabilitation project packages with the neighborhood and target other programs or resources, such as housing funding, as catalysts to encourage private investment or re-investment.
- Create public relations campaigns during technical decision-making to encourage project scoping and plans that address the desires of the neighborhoods to be served. *See also Chapter 3: Communication and Transparency.*



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 1)

MAKE ROUTINE IMPROVEMENTS

Windsor Heights has an aging infrastructure system that will continue to require attention and funding. Strategic investment to extend the life of systems or replace systems that are too old or damaged to rehabilitate are critical to providing these foundational services to existing and new residents and businesses. The community has occasionally coordinated the evaluation and planning of improvements; however, it is important to institutionalize this process in the Capital Improvement Program planning and implementation process.

PACKAGE PROJECTS

The creation of project packages that include traditional infrastructure and amenities as well as public utilities will be important. This will ensure that cost efficiencies are maximized and allow for projects that reduce the disruption to neighborhoods while

enhancing the area served. Working together with impacted neighborhoods to address needs that may not be apparent to designers will enhance designs and increase neighborhood understanding of the projects.

LOOK SHORT- AND LONG-TERM

It is critical that the city promote projects that enhance today's neighborhoods as well as the plans for future activity and future development/redevelopment of these areas. Our infrastructure systems need to be versatile and create conditions for a variety of uses first meeting the needs of current residents, but also serving the larger community and our future.

WHAT LOCALS CAN DO (GOAL 1)

ACTION 1:

Save resources; reduce your footprint.

- Conserve water by using low-flow fixtures.
- Landscape to reduce irrigation and harvest rainfall with rain barrels and rain gardens.
- Replace some daily vehicle trips by walking or riding your bike.

ACTION 2:

Be advocates. Residents often are first to see infrastructure needs.

- Report issues related to the condition or operation of infrastructure and utility systems.
- Participate in surveys, roundtables and forums related to projects and planning in Windsor Heights.

Neighbors saving resources can reduce impacts and assist in prolonging the life of improvements. Small changes can often help reduce stormwater impacts on downstream neighbors and creeks. Reducing water usage can prolong the life of treatment and delivery systems. A walk to the store reduces fuel use, saving money and providing health benefits.

Neighborhood involvement is valuable in understanding how our infrastructure systems are aging and operating. The people living in an area may not understand the workings of the systems, but often have seen or experienced the incidents that indicate infrastructure is not performing. Joining the conversation and being an active resident can help.



GOAL 2: Plan for resiliency through aligned public safety programs, hazard mitigation and continuity of service in challenging situations.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 2)

ACTION 1:

Regularly evaluate level of service to ensure safe and responsive aid to residents and businesses within Windsor Heights.

- Ensure that policies, protocols and procedures are reviewed and updated on a regular basis, perhaps as a part of the annual budget process.
- Update and maintain facility, vehicle and equipment inventories that includes usage, condition and life cycle. Exercise equipment regularly.
- Evaluate redundancy to ensure services can continuously be provided in emergency situations. Review 28E agreements and/or mutual aid as a highly probable solution to many extreme situations.
- Continue to work with Polk County and neighboring jurisdictions to keep the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan current and operative.

ACTION 2:

Evaluate programs, projects and procedures to reduce exposure and negative impacts should a hazard impact the community. Anticipate and have policy and action steps in place.

- Develop a procedure and a tabletop exercise on how the site plan and building permit process will operate. What about other systems?
- Identify sites or neighborhood areas that could rebuild versus areas where new plans might require changes in land use, infrastructure or building location. How will those proceed?
- How do operations continue if computer systems/records are lost for an extended period of time?

...continued

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 2)

ACTION 2 (...continued):

- Work with local business to assist in creating continuous operations plans in case of an incident that might affect the normal operations.
- Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to offer a series of education classes/presentations.
- Pre-plan with commercial property owners as a part of the fire inspection process.

ACTION 3:

Reduce the impact of hazards, especially natural hazards that are of higher probability, with thoughtful regulation and project design.

- Update and maintain regulations that protect the flood plain and major storm flow paths within the community.
- Evaluate and execute projects that reduce risks, starting with those that affect personal safety and moving through a spectrum of property damage to inconveniences.



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 2)

Hazard mitigation and response are a critical responsibility of local government. This requires a coordinated effort of public and private organizations in the community. Still, leadership needs a core team defining how our community will mitigate hazards, respond when a hazard impacts us, stabilize the community following an incident and then rebuild/refocus. At the staff level, this combines public safety, public works and planning/building.

On a community scale we define the most likely hazards and develop our strategy related to those hazards. The key action for each identified hazard starts with prevention. As a community, what can we do to eliminate this hazard or minimize its impact? The team translates this to actionable steps and forwards that to the City Administrator and Council. Some solutions will be simple. Some will require capital improvements and/or operational changes. Capital improvements might include projects that eliminate or

reduce flooding. Operational changes may be needed if a program to prepare local business is proposed.

The key to mitigation is to keep a broad perspective and view these situations through a resiliency lens. This will include a review of the nonconforming use and nonconforming structure sections of the city code.

WHAT LOCALS CAN DO (GOAL 2)

ACTION 1:

Be prepared.

- Understand your immediate response to threats.
 - Prepare your property to reduce impacts of hazardous events.
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ACTION 2:

Volunteer and share your expertise.

- Share information that might help in the reduction of impacts from hazards.
- Volunteer if you have experience or expertise in hazard mitigation, response or reconstruction.

Residents can stay aware of hazard impacts and how they and their property might be affected by those hazards. Inspect your properties from the viewpoint of what might happen if certain hazards occur and how immediate neighbors would be affected. An example: high winds. Are there weakened or diseased trees on your property that might drop branches? Where would they fall? Is lawn furniture susceptible to blowing into others property?

Share what you know and understand about how winds or storms affect your neighborhood. You might be experienced with other situations or trained in certain areas that could benefit the work of the city committee. Volunteer to serve or get involved in neighborhood meetings. Look for ways to participate to assist in making the city mitigation plans better and more effective.



GOAL 3: Adopt regulations that encourage high-quality development, while encouraging reinvestment and maintenance of existing investments.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 3)

ACTION 1:

Maintain the most recent Building, Residential, Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing Codes and stay consistent with Metro area communities when making amendments or additions.

ACTION 2:

Review and update subdivision and zoning codes to simplify enforcement and provide clear, understandable direction to the development community.

ACTION 3:

Maintain the most recent Property Maintenance Code, adapting it for rental and owner-occupied structures and review nuisance requirements.

ACTION 4:

Review business license regulations and liquor license regulations to ensure that they encourage the business types that the community is trying to attract.

WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 3)

BUILDING CODES

Building codes ensure that buildings, sites and neighborhoods are safe to occupy and use. They help us define the character and quality of our community. A regular review of the codes is critical to ensure they recognize legal decisions and changes in state and federal law and continue to reinforce community vision. We want our codes to be clear, understandable and enforceable, at the same time, we don't want our codes to create undue costs or put us in a non-competitive situation. That balance is important, as is the consistency of code requirements and enforcement.

The International Code Council updates codes on a three-year cycle and generally jurisdictions will review and adopt those codes in the year following their publication. This suite of codes has become a standard throughout the metro area and common amendments have been made

through a working group of area code officials. Most contractors in the Des Moines area work in all of the communities and consistent requirements make that more efficient.

ZONING CODE

The zoning code influences density, layout, use, function and appearance of development. A comprehensive review and update is highly recommended. This will allow formatting changes to improve the ease of use and understanding of the codes, and allows updates to bring the codes more into conformance with standards, uses, districts, signage, parking and processes used in the development and planning fields today. This plan recommends including developers when updating these codes.

These codes should intertwine with the neighborhood and corridor planning the city has done. Each plan should include a section on

implementation that gives clear direction to the code writers on how to implement those key elements being proposed in the plan document.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE AND NUISANCE CODES

Property Maintenance and Nuisance codes will continue to help maintain property conditions, integrity and values. These apply to both rental and owner-occupied residential, multi-family and commercial properties. This is important to insure properties that might be neglected otherwise don't draw down values in a neighborhood and that the housing stock of the community is maintained and safe. Windsor Heights, built in the post-WWII era, has affordable housing stock. These homes are attractive to young families and investors who want to create a rental portfolio. There has been some concern that the growth



WHAT THE CITY CAN DO (GOAL 3)

in rental properties might degrade home maintenance. The city could consider more aggressive enforcement of the nuisance and rental housing codes and/or some limitations on the number of rental certificates that would be issued.

BUSINESS AND LIQUOR LICENSES

Often overlooked, business and liquor licenses can affect the attractiveness of a community to new business and event organizers. In many cases, state law dictates certain regulations that are enforced by the city; however, local regulations often either encourage or discourage certain practices. The goals of strengthening Windsor Heights' image as a vibrant and active destination can be enhanced if these business licenses encourage events, activities, vendors and business types that add to the “destination” personality of the community.

WHAT LOCALS CAN DO (GOAL 3)

ACTION 1:

Maintain your property in a reasonable manner.

Most residents don't deal with codes and licenses in the course of being a good community member. We operate more from a good neighbor practice. As a property owner or investor we have some responsibility to our community and our neighbors to do our part in keeping our property safe, habitable and clean. This not only protects our value, but keeps the neighborhood value up and the potential for future attractiveness to buyers intact. If properties are not routinely maintained, they deteriorate faster and costs of repairs escalate. This impacts the property negatively and also impacts neighboring properties and the value and attractiveness of the neighborhood.

ACTION 2:

Encourage neighborhood cleanup days.

There is a physical aspect of neighborhood and there is a social aspect of neighborhood. If we know our neighbors, have an occasional block party, loan tools/equipment, etc., there is a tendency for us to want to help one another. This can translate into how well we maintain our property. Taking the lead to host a block party, support a neighborhood garage sale or a neighborhood cleanup can go a long way to improving the appearance and quality of all properties.