

# IMAGINE BELLEVILLE

ADOPTED  
JUNE 16, 2014

## SECTION 4

# Housing and Neighborhoods



## Introduction

The brick-lined streets and narrow lots along East Garfield Street near Mascoutah Avenue provide a glimpse of historic Belleville. Approximately two centuries ago, the City's original neighborhoods donned freshly painted homes and new infrastructure systems – similar to Belleville's recently developed subdivisions. Today, these older neighborhoods reflect their age. The architecture and color palette of historic homes exhibit an appreciation for detail not typically seen in modern construction practices. Yet many of these homes have been neglected, a struggle compounded by the shrinking pool of local, state, and federal housing programs.

These problems are all too common throughout the St. Louis area. The overall region is growing on both sides of the river - but only in concentrated areas. In part, this is due to an oversupply of new housing. Between the 1970s and the 2000s, the ratio of new St. Louis area homes to new households increased by more than 40 percent.<sup>1</sup> The City has experienced this trend first hand

as it loses existing homeowners and prospective homebuyers to Shiloh, O'Fallon, Swansea, and other neighbors in the Metro East. They offer a wider selection of new homes and more convenient access to employment centers (via Interstate 64).

This competition for residents has contributed to Belleville's increasing levels of poverty, a national trend found in similarly located suburbs. According to a recent publication by the Brookings Institution, the suburban poor are the fastest-growing low-income group in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> This statistic was attributed to lengthy and costly commutes to work, lack of public transportation, and absence of health and social services typically found in bigger cities. Belleville must fully optimize and promote its economic assets, such as Belle Valley Industrial Park, Metrolink, and Illinois Highway 15, to overcome these obstacles.

## Approach

After researching many communities in the St. Louis area, it is clear no single solution - or "silver bullet"

<sup>1</sup> "Neighborhood Change in the St. Louis Region Since 1970: What Explains Success." Todd Swanstrom and Hank Webber. Missouri History Museum. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America." Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC. 2013.

Figure 4.1

# Housing and Neighborhood Roles Among City Departments



- will solve Belleville’s housing and neighborhood issues. Instead, renewal typically occurs in long-term incremental steps at the individual, neighborhood, and community levels. The success of Downtown proves it can be accomplished using a holistic approach to planning, public-private partnerships, strategic investments, and event programming. Two professors from Washington University of St. Louis and University of Missouri - St. Louis have researched neighborhood change and rebound communities in the region. Looking back as far as the 1970s, they conclude that the higher quantity and intensity of “success factors” in a neighborhood leads to a greater likelihood of success (see page 4.11 for specific examples). This logic is rather intuitive, but how does it transfer to Belleville?

This section evaluates Belleville’s housing context and proposes a hierarchy of “success factors” for improving opportunities for existing and future neighborhoods. The approach is strategic and comprehensive, prioritizing the wide variety of capacity building,

planning, regulatory, financial, and programmatic tools offered by community stakeholders.

## City’s Role

The quality, condition, and relative affordability of Belleville homes are influenced by the housing market. However, the City has a major role in protecting the community’s quality of life and economic health through code enforcement and establishment of ordinances that dictate minimum standards. In the 2000 – 2020 *Comprehensive Plan*, the City aspired to increase the number of new residential homes, averaging approximately 200 new housing starts per year. The community accomplished this goal in 2005 and 2006, totaling 274 and 259 respectively. During the height of the housing boom in 2006, 215 new single-family homes were built for an estimated construction value of \$27.9 million. However, the City has only averaged 97 new single-family homes per year over the last 10 years, and only 43 new single-family homes within the last five.



Figure 4.2, Neighborhood Zones and Associations

# Belleville has... 27

**active  
neighborhood  
associations**

**\*13 OF THESE ARE NEW  
SINCE THE FORMATION  
OF THE BELLEVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
PARTNERSHIP IN 2012**

**ZONE A**

Franklin Neighborhood Association  
Hexenbukel Neighborhood Association  
Pleasant Hill Neighborhood Watch\*

**ZONE B**

17th Street Corridor Neighborhood Association

**ZONE C**

North Belt West Neighborhood Watch  
Schickendenz Lake Association\*

**ZONE D**

Stokey Township Association\*

**ZONE E**

Powder Creek  
Signal Hill Neighborhood Association  
West End Redevelopment Corporation

**ZONE F**

Harmony Neighborhood Association\*  
South-West Neighborhood Watch  
(Ogles Subdivision Area)\*

**ZONE G**

Lincoln Circle Neighborhood Watch

**ZONE H**

18th-21st Neighborhood Watch  
Bicentennial Park Association\*

Midland Neighborhood Association\*  
Westhaven Neighborhood Watch  
New Westhaven Association\*  
Woodridge Homeowners Association

**ZONE I**

East McKinley Neighborhood Association\*

**ZONE J**

Highland Neighborhood Association  
Meadowdale Heights Neighborhood Watch\*  
McClintock Neighborhood Association  
South Pennsylvania Association\*  
Green Mount Station and Garden Heights\*

**ZONE K**

(No Active Associations)

**ZONE L**

Northeast Neighborhood Watch\*

**ZONE M**

Brookhill Estate Homeowners Association

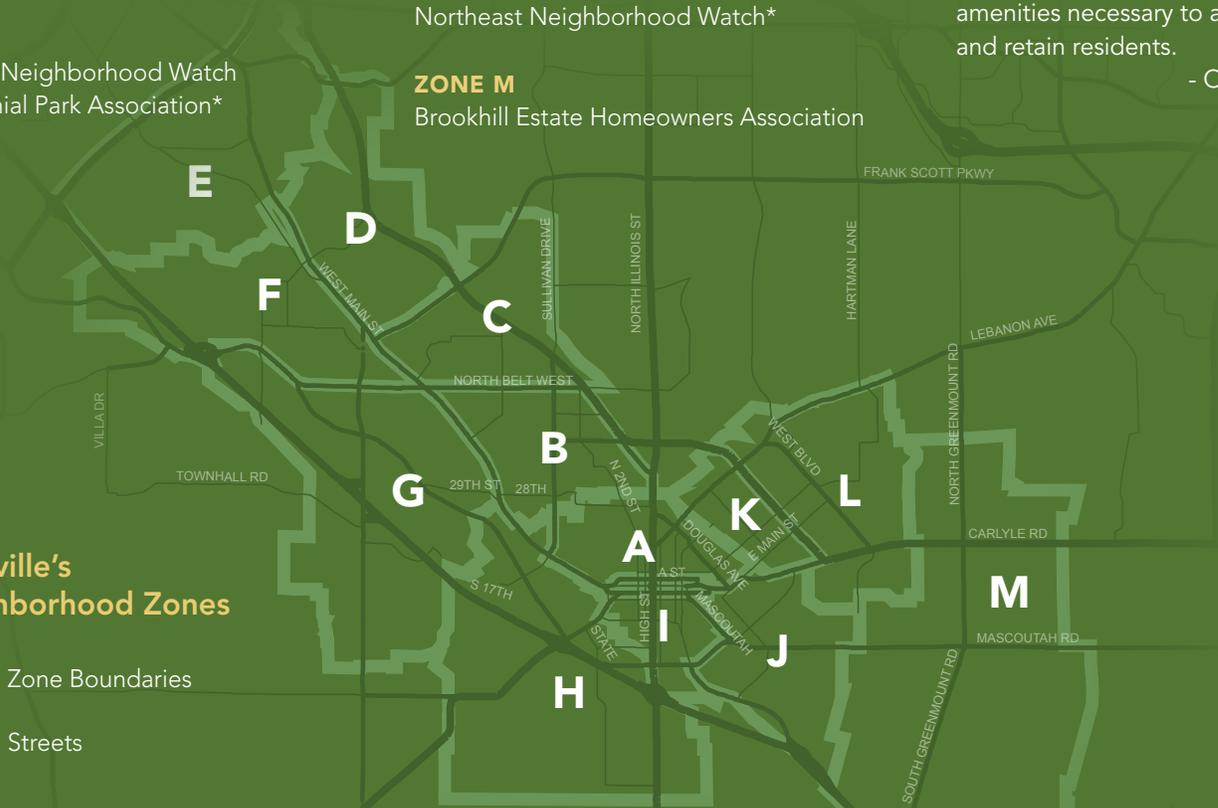
**Our Communities**

*Individual but interdependent communities give us the distinctive identity, affordable lifestyles, and approachable amenities necessary to attract and retain residents.*

- OneSTL

**Belleville's  
Neighborhood Zones**

-  Zone Boundaries
-  Streets



**Part of this new reality is that much of Belleville's housing growth will occur through the restoration or redevelopment of existing neighborhoods** rather than "greenfield subdivisions." The latter type of new construction is located on undeveloped land typically at the periphery of the community, such as The Orchards, Autumn Woods, and Westhaven Meadows. According to the U.S. Census, the City's homeowner vacancy rate is 3.4 percent and its rental vacancy rate is 7.2 percent.<sup>3</sup> Despite the low homeowner vacancy rate, anecdotal accounts indicate there is a very strong need for infill housing, both in the sense of rehabilitating deteriorated, abandoned homes that are oftentimes not captured by the Census. This need also refers to developing vacant lots in established neighborhoods. *Section 2, Growth Capacity and Infrastructure*, and *Section 6, Land Use and Character*, place more emphasis on greenfield development in new subdivisions.

Public input from this planning process was consistent with this trend. According to a community poll, Belleville's top two issues are: (1) condition, appearance, and safety of neighborhoods, and (2) infill or re-use of vacant/underutilized commercial and residential properties. The City already began to address this change two years ago by launching a community development network. It aims to strengthen the capacity and assets of public, private, and non-profit partners. Even within City Hall, housing and neighborhood responsibilities are leveraged among multiple City departments, as illustrated in **Figure 4.1, Housing and Neighborhood Roles Among City Departments** on page 4.2.

Belleville's neighborhood planning efforts first got off the ground when Belleville leaders attended the 2011 All-America City Competition hosted by the National Civic League. They came home with the "All-America City" designation - as well as fresh ideas for addressing the community's most important issues. Surrounded by other highly motivated and accomplished cities, they asked, "How can we encourage our residents to assume greater responsibility in community decision-making?" Two years later, the City established a new Community Development Department and formed the Belleville Neighborhood Partnership (BNP). This program was a spinoff of the widely praised BASIC Initiative.

Each zone has a zone leader and a number of zone ambassadors. The zone leader acts as a liaison between the zone ambassador and partner organizations, such as the City or BASIC Initiative. The zone ambassador

is a leader of an individual neighborhood association or watch and acts as a liaison between the members of that association and the zone leader. Currently, half of the zones are active and half are in the initial formation stages.

The BNP leverages the social capital of Belleville's neighborhood associations, as identified in **Figure 4.2, Neighborhood Zones and Associations** (on the previous page). The community has 27 active organizations, and 13 have been created since the formation of the BNP. Several of the more established ones, like the Franklin Neighborhood Association and 17<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Neighborhood Association, have been providing a wide range of summer camps, after-school programs, and other support services for up to 20 years. They serve as a model for optimizing the financial and human resources of the City, AmeriCorp, YMCA, BASIC Initiative, and other community leaders and organizations to meet the needs of residents.

## Key Issues and Considerations

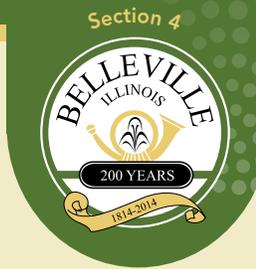
- The recent national recession resulted in a major slowdown in all forms of development activity, both new construction and additions, alterations, and remodels. The number of permits peaked in 2005 - 2006, and construction activity has not rebounded since the falloff in 2007.
- Two-thirds of Belleville's housing stock is 60 years or older, and less than 20 percent has been built in the last 20 years. As a result, Belleville offers relatively affordable options, yet many of these lack the quality that are necessary to attract young people and families. One of the critical success factors to neighborhood revitalization is the community's ability to attract and retain young people.

[Continued on Page 4.8]

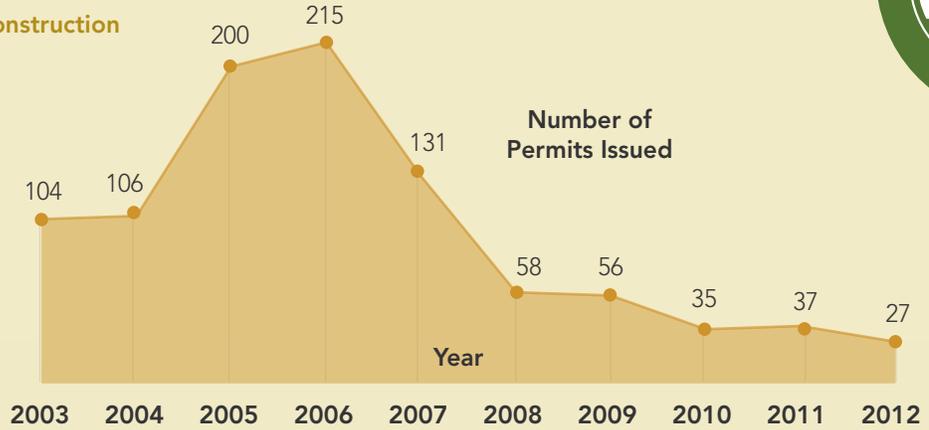
**Figure 4.3, Neighborhood Partnership Structure**



<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey (accessed August 10, 2013).



**Figure 4.4, 10-Year Housing Trends:  
Single-Family Detached New Construction**



**Figure 4.5, 10-Year Housing Trends: Major Subdivision Activity**

SF = Single-Family  
MF = Multi-Family

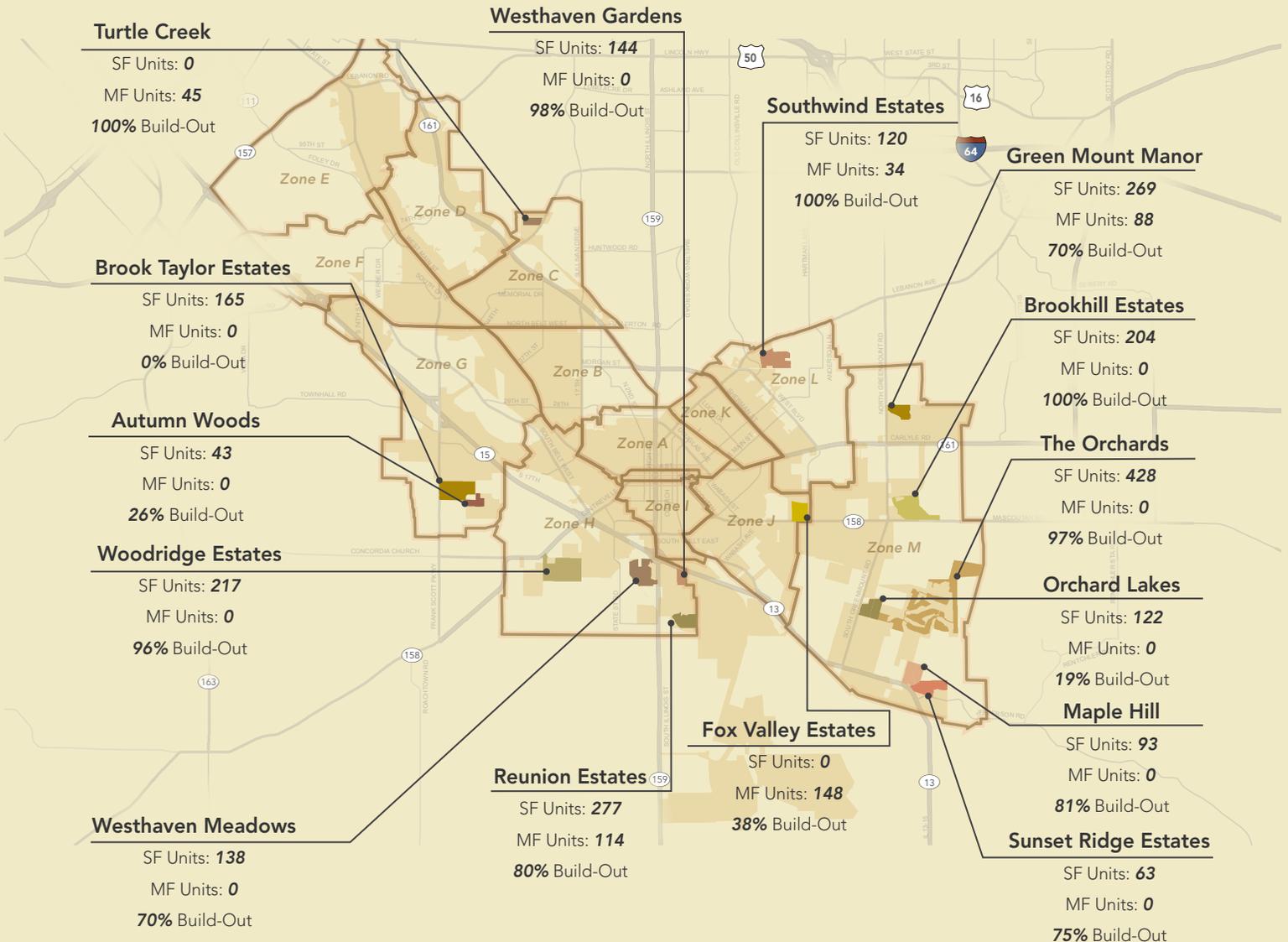


Figure 4.6, 10-Year Housing Trends: Single-Family Attached, Two-Family, and Multi-Family New Construction

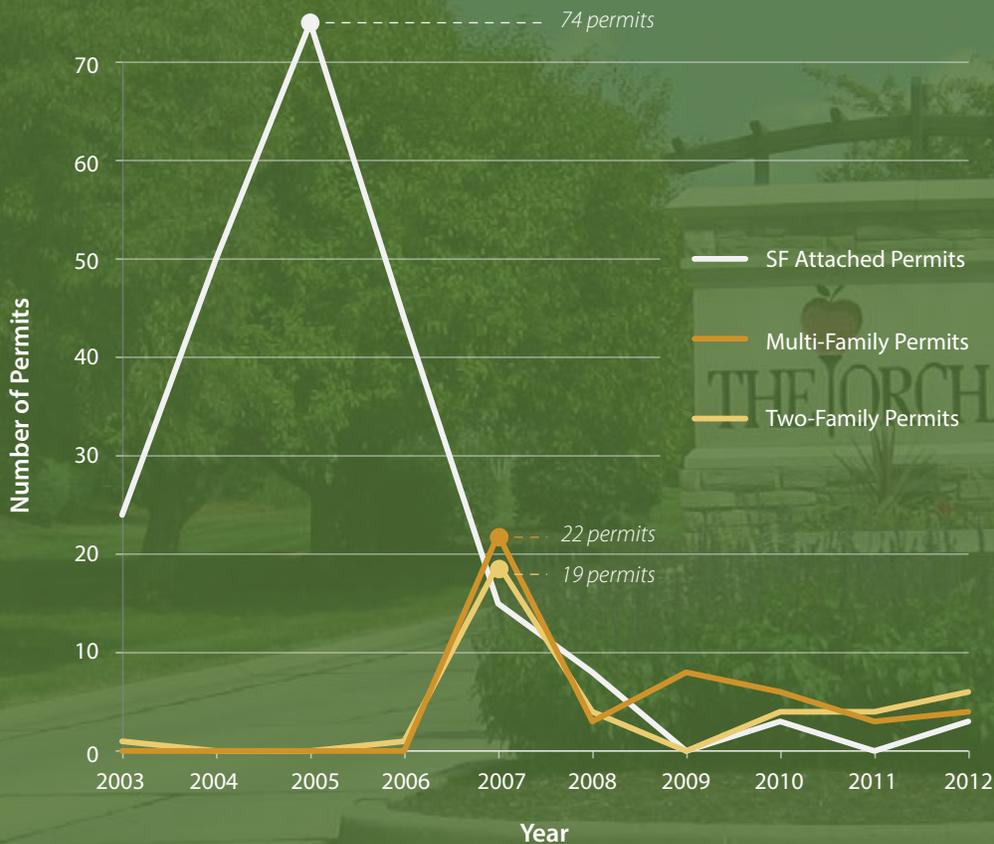
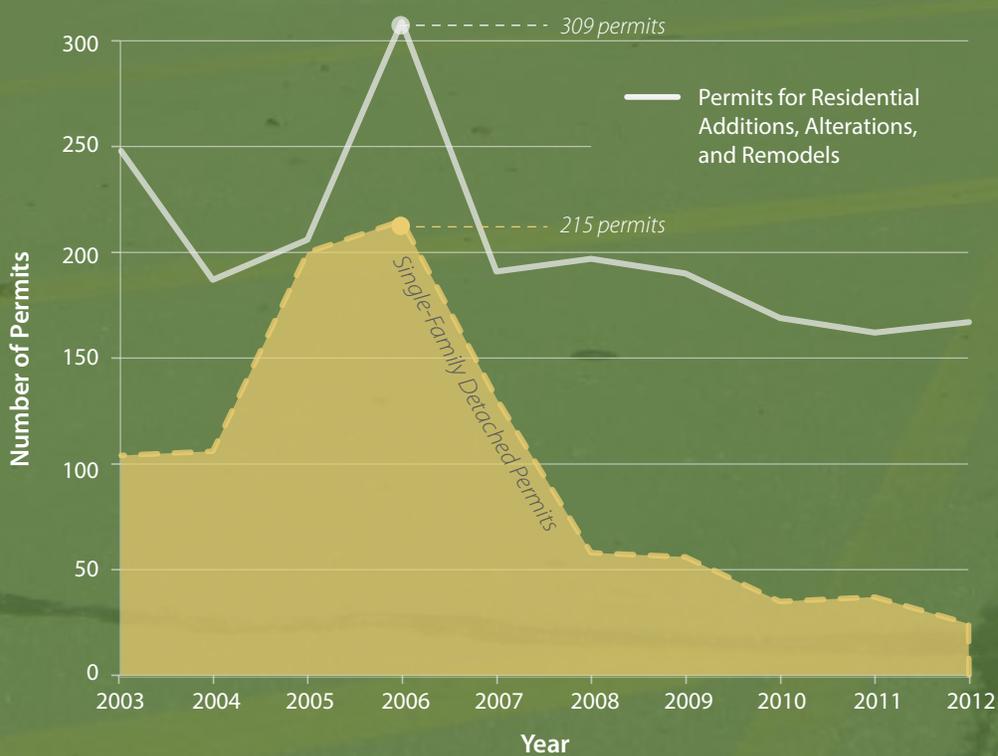
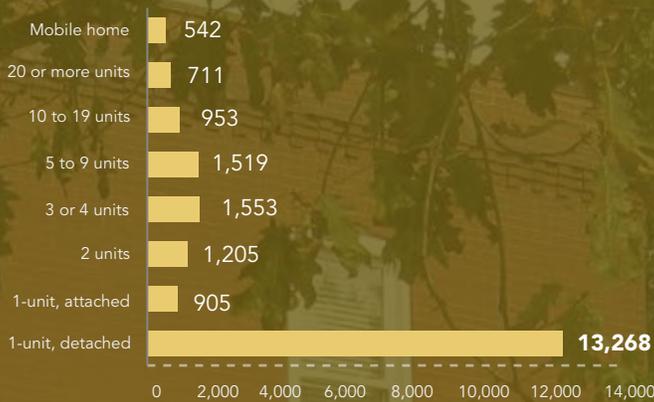


Figure 4.7, 10-Year Housing Trends: Additions, Alterations, and Remodels



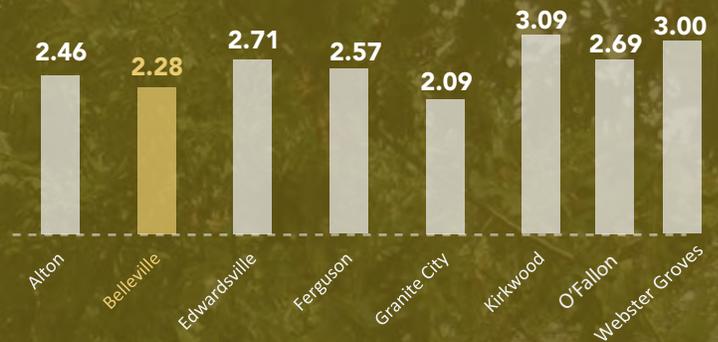
**Figure 4.8, Belleville Housing Types**

Belleville is predominately comprised of one-unit, detached housing units.



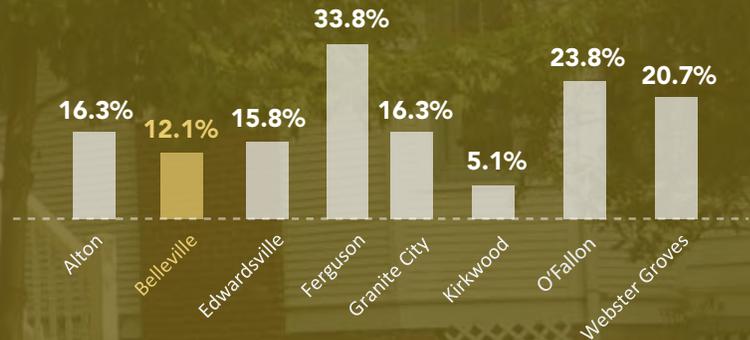
**Figure 4.9, Belleville Housing Affordability**

Belleville is the second most affordable community in comparison to its peer communities. This ranking is derived from a "home affordability index" which is based on a ratio of 2011 median home value to median household income. Part of the reason Belleville is considered affordable is the broad spectrum of old and new, poorly maintained and well-maintained properties. In contrast to some of Belleville's historic masonry homes, many neighborhoods consist of tract homes from the 1950s and 1960s that have not held up well over time. One of the community's challenges is to encourage high-quality development practices at all scales and price points - counterbalanced with the rehabilitation of the community's existing housing stock.



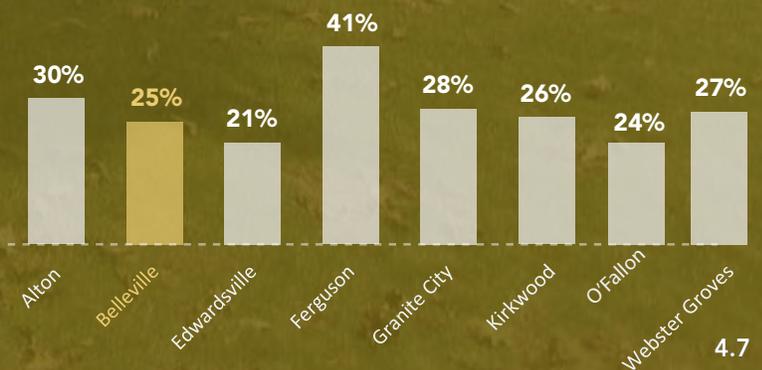
**Figure 4.10, Change in Percent of Homes Contributing 30 Percent of Monthly Income to Rent**

Belleville is the second among comparable communities to have experienced the smallest increase in the percentage of renter-occupied households contributing more than 30 percent of their monthly income to rent between 2000 and 2011.



**Figure 4.11, Percent of Homes Contributing 30 Percent of Monthly Income to Home Ownership**

One quarter of home-owning residents in Belleville devote over 30 percent of their monthly income to home ownership, which is comparable to the other peer communities.



## Belleville's High Schools

### Belleville East High School

- 2,485 total enrollment
- Recently completed a multi-million dollar remodeling/ construction project which included a state-of-the-art media center featuring over 120 new computers in three labs and a student-run coffee bar
- In 2007 and 2010, Belleville East was named a Bronze Medal School by U.S. News and World Report
- Dual-credit courses with SWIC and St. Louis University

### Belleville West High School

- 2,352 total enrollment
- New campus at 4063 Frank Scott Parkway West in August 2003
- In 2010, Belleville West was named a Bronze Medal School by U.S. News and World Report
- Dual-credit courses with SWIC and St. Louis University

### Althoff Catholic High School

- 681 total enrollment
- Dual-credit courses with St. Louis University
- Althoff reports that 98 percent of its graduates go on to further education
- In 2005, Althoff was named as the top prep sports program in the St. Louis metropolitan area for all small schools by the St. Louis Post Dispatch

### Governor French Academy

- 172 total enrollment (Kindergarten - High School)
- International students represented from Nigeria, China, Korea, Ukraine, United Kingdom, etc.
- Ungraded classroom environment

This list is not intended to be comprehensive but instead provides a snapshot of Belleville's larger high school programs. It does not include all educational programs offered within the Belleville area.

Source: Greater Belleville Chamber of Commerce and Illinois Report Card (accessed January 27, 2014); www.greatschools.org (accessed May 5, 2014)

- Many residents are concerned about the quality of rental property, as well as the imbalance between renters and owners. However, the percentage of renter-occupied units decreased by 1.4 percent between 2000 and 2011. Belleville's housing stock is 62.6 percent owner-occupied and 37.4 percent renter-occupied, only 3.5 percent higher than the national average. Several key considerations for improving the community's existing rental properties include property maintenance, aesthetics, and modernization of amenities.

- The expansion of Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) and Lindenwood University - Belleville (LU-B) presents opportunities to retain recent college graduates as future residents of Belleville. This age group typically prefers affordable housing options such as multifamily complexes and duplexes.
- Starting in 2013, federal budget sequestration reduced the amount of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for public housing and Section 8 voucher programs in St. Clair County. This means there is less money to support housing programs and no near-term solutions to solve this reduction.
- The percentage of Belleville residents below the poverty level (14.2 percent) is on par with the national average (14.3 percent) and falls in the middle among comparable communities, as illustrated on page 1.12 . However, this "averaging" disguises the disparity between poverty and affluence concentrated in different areas of the community. This is most evident in the schools. For instance, Belleville School District 118, which includes nine elementary schools and two junior highs, consists of 62 percent low-income students.
- One of the overarching themes of this plan is to improve Belleville's image and perception. Residents expressed strong concern for Belleville's negative reputation in the Metro East region. This form of communication, both by word-of-mouth and through the media, can directly influence the real estate market.
- Belleville's aging baby boomer generation will require an increased number of senior living accommodations, ranging from ADA accessible single-family homes, townhomes, multi-family



**Life-Cycle Housing**

**Families with Kids**

College Students

Young Professionals

Empty Nesters

Assisted Living



A diversity of housing sizes, prices, and design configurations allows the Belleville community to retain and attract residents at every stage in life, a positive attribute often referred to as the ability to “live in place.”

## Diverse Housing Options

Belleville’s composition of housing types should accommodate the whole spectrum of life-cycle stages: college students, young professionals, families, empty nesters, and seniors. This diversity feeds into Belleville’s economic growth outlook. Prospective employers seek a spectrum of low- and high-wage earners. The key strategy is to rehabilitate the City’s housing stock for no single user type. Instead, homes should be converted for those seeking affordable, mid-level, and premium options.

**One of the key considerations in developing new or rehabilitating existing housing stock is to focus on locations near key community destinations**, such as Belleville’s colleges, grocery stores, restaurants, and Downtown. Housing should also be convenient to employment centers, either located near MetroLink stations or accessible to major transportation routes connecting to employers within or outside of the community.



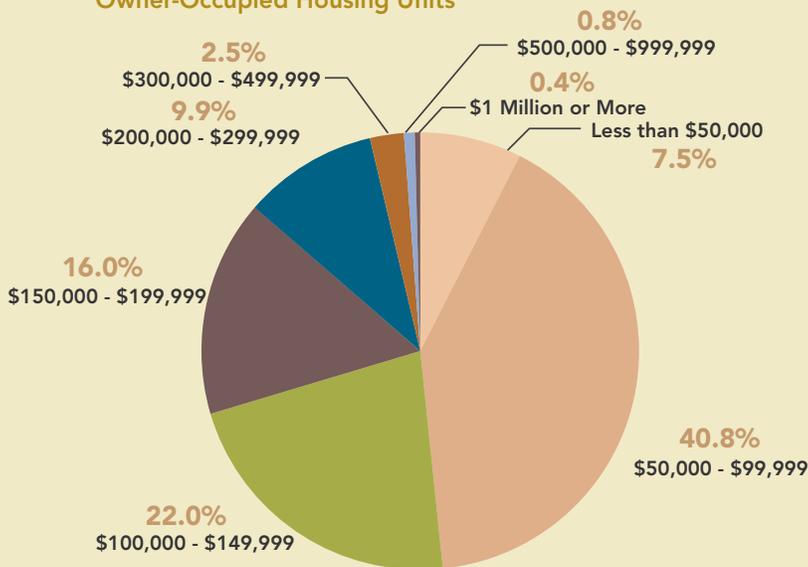
ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM

For Belleville to be a “complete” city, what are the missing pieces?

### Attractive places for young professionals to live/rent

*A lot of 20-somethings graduate from college and head back to their home towns. Belleville has few attractive places for this age group to settle in. Most recent graduates do not have the money to purchase a home and are looking for nice/upscale rental property. Almost everyone has rented at some point in their life. Not all rentals are bad. We need to find a way to promote sound redevelopment of older rentals and be willing to accept new rentals with sound business operations.*

Figure 4.12, Home Value Distribution of Owner-Occupied Housing Units



Nearly half of Belleville’s homes are valued at less than \$100,000.

One of the community’s biggest challenges is to attract new home builders that offer mid- to high-end price points for single-family houses (~\$200,000+) and quality apartment complexes. The community has a number of subdivisions and vacant tracts of land that can support this type of growth. On the other hand, the cost of modernizing existing, affordable housing units requires significant investments in more efficient and greener utilities, insulation, windows, and roofs. These major improvements can be cost-prohibitive for families struggling to pay their mortgage.

## Seven Essential Neighborhood Planning Processes

- Start with Community Building
  - Foster Leadership
  - Plan for Implementation
  - Take Advantage of the Available Tools and Resources
  - Be Financially Realistic
  - Communicate the Planning Process Effectively
  - Make the Neighborhood's Social Capital Grow
- Direct Source: "Involving the Community in Neighborhood Planning." Deborah Meyerson. Urban Land Institute. 2004.

apartments, and assisted living and nursing facilities. Similar to other communities across the nation, this increase in housing demand needs to be addressed strategically so Belleville does not end up with an overabundance of senior living once the smaller "Generation X" reaches retirement age.

foster a thriving economic and educational environment that enables residents and business owners to look beyond day-to-day survival. This economic vitality will naturally help to retain existing residents and attract new ones - two essential factors that stimulate growth and reinvestment in the housing market.

### Strategic Recommendations

- **Priority 1** | Focus on the fundamentals – diverse job opportunities, safe neighborhoods, and high-performing schools.
- **Priority 2** | Help local organizations build capacity to lead housing and neighborhood initiatives.
- **Priority 3** | Assess and optimize Belleville's financial and regulatory tools.
- **Priority 4** | Prioritize, fund, and implement the most essential projects and programs.

Refer to **Figure 4.13, Housing and Neighborhood Tools**, on pages 4.12 - 4.13 for an overview of the Strategic Recommendations.

#### Priority 1 | Focus on the fundamentals – diverse job opportunities, safe neighborhoods, and high-performing schools.

Belleville's struggling neighborhoods are inextricably tied to the community's socioeconomics. This changing nature has negative implications on the community's employment outlook, safety, school performance, and housing market values. Belleville residents correctly associate part of this issue with community image and perception. Yet there are clear indications that the recent economic downturn has negatively impacted the community's economic health, just as it has for the rest of the country. The City's long-term strategy for improving Belleville's neighborhoods should be to

The City has taken a number of pro-active measures to accomplish this first step of implementation, ranging from the recent adoption of the City's Crime-Free Housing Ordinance, expansion of Belle Valley Business Park, and partnerships with LU-B and SWIC. These milestones should be seen as initial stepping stones that lead to even greater public- and private-sector opportunities.

#### ACTION STEPS

*This plan update presents interdepartmental and multidisciplinary approaches to community enhancement. Refer to Section 2, Growth Capacity and Infrastructure, and Section 5, Economic Development, to identify specific action steps for fostering diverse job opportunities, increasing neighborhood safety, and strengthening the school system. These overarching factors serve as the foundation to healthy and prosperous neighborhoods.*

#### Priority 2 | Help local organizations build capacity to lead housing and neighborhood initiatives.

The Belleville Neighborhood Partnership (BNP) is an essential vehicle for mobilizing citizen leaders, identifying priorities, and strengthening neighborhood identity. The program is in its second year of development, having achieved many significant milestones. So far, the City and surrounding areas have been divided into 13 zones based on geographic and political boundaries (refer back to *Figure 4.2, Neighborhood Zones and Associations*). The vision of the BNP is to empower each neighborhood zone to:



## Rebound Neighborhoods in the St. Louis Area

Dr. Todd Swanstrom of University of Missouri - St. Louis and Dr. Hank Webber of Washington University in St. Louis collaborated to study neighborhood change in the St. Louis region since 1970. They identified four "rebound" communities that recovered from declining neighborhood conditions, in some ways similar to Belleville's neighborhoods. Their findings and conclusions have been included in this section to explore transferable strategies in Belleville. This information has been reproduced with the permission of Dr. Swanstrom.

### Research Findings

- Higher quantity and intensity of success factors in a neighborhood leads to a greater likelihood of success
- Location is important
  - » Proximity to growing job centers is key
  - » In the central corridor or well located suburbs considerable success is possible
  - » In otherwise declining parts of the region, stability is a victory
- Diversity is now an asset to community revitalization

### Policy Recommendations

- Focus on strengthening the economy of the urban core
- Attract, support and retain anchor institutions
- Focus on recruiting young people
- Local engagement and capacity for organizing is essential for progress
- Without strong urban schools, neighborhood revitalization is far harder

### Neighborhood Strategies and Success Factors

#### CENTRAL WEST END (ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOOD)

- Large-scale development by Washington University Medical Center
- Formation of redevelopment corporation
- Careful contextual development of Euclid Avenue and other commercial districts
- Strong citizen leadership through the Central West End Association
- Creation of new city school

- Creation of local taxing district to invest in security and area improvement
- Utilization of Historic Tax Credits and Low Income Housing Tax Credits
- Forest Park resurgence
- Reopening of Chase Park Plaza and Maryland Plaza

#### BERNARD HEIGHTS AND SHAW (ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOODS)

- Formed Shaw Historical District, which provided incentives for revitalization
- Missouri Botanical Garden formed Garden District Commission to create new market-rate housing
- Formation of UIC (Urban Improvement Company) in partnership with the Garden District Commission with the mission of redeveloping the neighborhood
  - » Began with 17 historic rehabs alongside 13 new, green infill developments

#### MARK TWAIN NEIGHBORHOOD (ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOOD)

- Formation of Union West Florissant Housing Solutions, a non-profit housing developer, with funding from Bellefontaine Cemetery
- Rehabilitated 23 units and built 49 infill housing units starting in 2003

#### CITY OF MAPLEWOOD (INNER-RING ST. LOUIS SUBURB)

- New administration with city manager and others focused on attracting and retaining businesses
- Creation of special business district
- Bonds and tax increases approved to improve school district
- School becomes one of the most diverse and highly successful in the region

## Guiding Principles for Housing and Neighborhoods

- We will mobilize our diverse network of public, private, and non-profit partners to implement a holistic approach to neighborhood assistance, incentive, and enforcement programs.
- We will facilitate compatible development of vacant or underutilized properties (i.e., infill) for the purpose of restoring vitality to existing neighborhoods and optimizing existing infrastructure systems.
- We will support the strategic placement and convenient access to community destinations - whether a workplace, school, park, community garden, recreation or community building, or neighborhood commercial center - that enliven neighborhoods and catalyze private-sector investment and reinvestment.
- We will strengthen neighborhood pride, safety, and appearance by implementing a systematic and feasible approach to improving local streets, sidewalks, off-street trails, and other neighborhood improvement projects.
- We will respect historic sites and structures for the purpose of preserving the community's culture and sense of ownership.
- We will foster an attractive and predictable development climate that accommodates market demand for multiple income levels and household age groups, while at the same time, protecting neighborhoods from incompatible or ad hoc development decisions.
- We will encourage interconnected, environmentally sustainable, and physically attractive housing practices that strengthen the identity of Belleville's neighborhoods – not just individual subdivisions.
- We will set aside conservation areas, greenbelts, and other open space amenities to encourage healthy lifestyles and mitigate the environmental impacts of land development.

### Priority 1

Focus on the fundamentals

### Priority 2

Help local organizations build capacity to lead housing and neighborhood initiatives

### Priority 3

Assess and optimize Belleville's financial and regulatory tools

### Priority 4

Prioritize, fund, and implement the most essential projects and programs



Figure 4.13

# Housing and Neighborhood Tools

## Diverse Job Opportunities

## Safe Neighborhoods

## High-Performing Schools

### Capacity Building

- Visioning
- Community Input and Consensus Building
- Identification of Neighborhood Boundaries
- Organization of Residents
- Sub-Area Planning
- Prioritization of Needs
- Citizen Leadership and Education

### Regulations and Codes

- Zoning Code
- Subdivision Code
- Building Code
- Property Maintenance Code
- Public Safety Codes
- Crime-Free Housing Ordinance

### Finance Tools

- Capital Improvement Programming
- Federal, State, Regional, and County Grants
- Creative Financing

### Safety and Enforcement Programs

- Neighborhood Watch Programs (*Several*)
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (C.P.T.E.D.) Inspection Program (*O'Fallon, IL*)
- Stricter Building and Property Maintenance Code Enforcement (*Brentwood, MO*)

### Education and Outreach

- City Neighborhood Facebook Page
- Technical Assistance to Neighborhood and Homeowner Associations
- New Homeowner Literature
- Anti-Litter Education Program in Area Schools (*Alton, IL*)
- Newsletter to Realtors

### Capital Improvements

- Sidewalk Construction
- Street Repairs
- Wayfinding and Signage
- Street Lighting (*Palatine, IL*)
- Transit-Oriented Development (*St. Louis, MO*)

### Homebuyer/Developer Gap Financing

- First-Time Homebuyer Assistance (*Several*)
- Graduation Gift Program (*Ferguson, MO - Outdated*)

### Homeowner Rehabilitation

- Rehab Program - Zero-Percent Deferred Loans (*Granite City, IL*)
- Historic Preservation
- Home Improvement Loan Program
- Emergency Repair Program (e.g., water or sewer lines)
- Energy Conservation and Efficiency

### Infill Programs

- Demolition Assistance
- Vacant Property Plan and Registration Program (*Granite City, IL - Outdated*)
- Land Banking and Scattered Lot Program (*Granite City, IL*)

### Beautification Programs

- Adopt-A-Block (*Alton, IL*)
- Adopt-A-Street (*St. Charles, MO*)
- Lawn Mowing Assistance Program for Seniors (*St. Peters, MO*)
- Residential Street Tree Program (*Chesterfield, MO*)
- Tree Removal Program (*Bellefontaine Neighbors, MO*)
- Public Art Program (*St. Louis, MO*)
- Community Garden Program (*Lawrence, KS*)



## Public Art

Public art has been celebrated for its ability to transform public space while engaging communities. Recently, public art initiatives have emerged as tools to improve neighborhoods and reinvigorate urban space. For instance, the City of St. Louis supports its public art campaign through the STL Mural Project, which focuses on the “muralization” of buildings in Downtown St. Louis. The process is a grassroots art initiative founded on the collaboration among local artists, residents, and businesses.

A similar program in Philadelphia has also gained traction. Jane Golden, executive director of Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, notes that public art “provides the environment with beauty, and is also a way of lifting up and transforming corridors. It can be a catalyst for community and economic development. Public art is often an emblem of a community or location, [and] the myriad voices [of] that make up a city.” Additionally, public art has emerged as a neighborhood revitalization tool. According to Director of Public Art Saint Paul, Christine Podras-Larson, “public art and community involvement become catalytic investments in revitalizing neighborhoods.”

Source: <http://www.thelinemedia.com/features/USpublicart101613.aspx>



A STL Mural found in downtown St. Louis.

### BNP Partner Organizations



City of Belleville

**Belleville Human Relations Commission**



**The Greater BELLEVILLE Chamber**



- Have direct input about the direction of neighborhood activity;
- Partner with community entities to maximize resources; and
- Build on strengths to address neighborhood issues.

One of the biggest challenges will be to further refine the boundaries and strengthen the identity of Belleville’s neighborhood zones. Residents tend to identify with their subdivision or neighborhood association. Yet the City has 54 total neighborhood associations and far more subdivisions. These numbers are impractical to coordinate from an organizational perspective. Therefore, future neighborhood planning efforts will require extensive community building to break down these longstanding physical and social barriers. As existing figureheads within the community, neighborhood zone leaders and ambassadors will play an essential role in forging these relationships.

### ACTION STEPS

- **Build capacity through private and non-profit partnerships.** Formation of the BNP established the framework for collaboration and helps to bridge the public and private sectors (see **Partner Organizations** sidebar above). Currently, half of the neighborhood zones are in the initial stages of development. To the extent possible, the City should recruit participation from the inactive zones and expand its ability to provide leadership and organizational training through the BNP, BASIC Initiative, Belleville Human Relations Commission, LU-B, SWIC, and faith community. As one resident explained, “There is a vast pool of untapped or under-utilized talent and resources available for properly designed and



## St. Clair Housing Authority

This section is primarily derived from the St. Clair County Five-Year Consolidated Plan (2010—2014) and 2010 Action Plan. The numbers with a footnote have been updated to reflect the most recent information.

The St. Clair County Housing Authority (SCCHA) currently has an inventory of 1,002 public housing units.<sup>4</sup> In Belleville, the program consists of 164 senior housing units, including 64 units at Amber Court, 48 units at Bel-Plaza 1, 38 units at Bel-Plaza 2, and 14 units at Gwen Court.<sup>5</sup> In September 2013, the SCCHA administered 648 Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) assisted units in Belleville.<sup>5</sup> Units for larger (3+ bedroom) households and residents with special needs (the elderly and those with disabilities) are in short supply across the County. **The SCCHA does not feel there is a need to develop more public housing, but may be interested in examining the possibility of utilizing public-private partnerships to develop mixed-income, mixed-finance developments**, particularly in addressing housing needs of the population with unmet special needs. This strategy could be critical in addressing SCCHA's aging housing stock.

The SCCHA maintains site-based waiting lists at each of their 18 County-wide developments, including 776 applicants on the wait list for Belleville's four senior housing units. This number has increased from 613 wait list applicants in 2011.<sup>5</sup> The current waiting list for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers in the County is 7,364 households.<sup>5</sup> Although these numbers seem somewhat large, many are applicants from outside the SCCHA's jurisdiction. These are people who do not reside in St. Clair County, but apply here as well as simultaneously in Madison County, St. Louis County, and City of St. Louis. They are given very low placement priority.

4 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, September 01, 2012 through December 31, 2013

5 St. Clair County Housing Authority, September 2013

## Community Gardens

A study in upstate New York found that neighborhoods near community gardens undertook more beautification efforts, planted more trees, and had more crime watch programs. Properties neighboring the garden were better-maintained.

Source: "Local Government Toolkit for Community Gardening." Centre for Sustainable Community Development. 2009.

Community gardens have been a strategy visited by many communities to address the limited access to fresh, healthy food sources while promoting community development and maintaining open space. There are a growing number of communities that have created local community gardening efforts. In the City of Lawrence, the Common Ground Program is one such initiative that seeks to convert vacant lots into local community gardens.

In Belleville, the community has developed two community gardens located near Westminster Presbyterian Church (located on North 17th Street) and Signal Hill Community Garden (located in the City on Signal Hill Boulevard). In 2013, the Signal Hill Neighborhood Association was recognized as St. Clair County's first "Get Up & Go!" community. Award recipients demonstrated residents working together to help each other be more active, exercise, and eat healthy.

**PH** = Public Housing

**WL** = Wait List

**HCVP** = Housing Choice Voucher Program

**Open/Closed** = Refers to an "open" or "closed" wait list. \*An "open" designation may refer to limited applicant types (e.g., seniors, disabilities).

### Alton Housing Authority

Approx. Service Area: 27,781  
PH Filled/WL: 246/300 Open\*  
HCVP Filled/WL: Not Available

### Granite City Housing Authority

Approx. Service Area: 29,758  
PH Filled/WL: 339/148 Open\*  
HCVP Filled/WL: Not Available

### East St. Louis Housing Authority

Approx. Service Area: 27,027  
PH Filled/WL: 2,100/1,003 Open\*  
HCVP Filled/WL: 683/440 Closed

### Madison County Housing Authority

Approx. Service Area: 269,282  
PH Filled/WL: 227/1,426 Open\*  
HCVP Filled/WL: 866/766 Closed

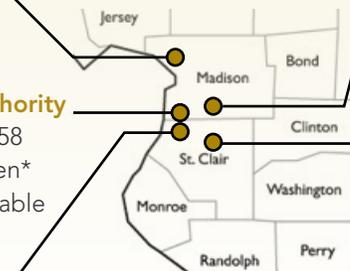
In January 2014, confirmed 1,427 wait list for public housing, and 798 active vouchers and 749 wait list for the HCVP. Source: MCHA.

### St. Clair County Housing Authority

Approx. Service Area: 270,056  
PH Filled/WL: 1,002/5,000 Open\*  
HCVP Filled/WL: 1,630/7,000 Open\*

*These numbers are not the exact same as the paragraph above given the different point in time.*

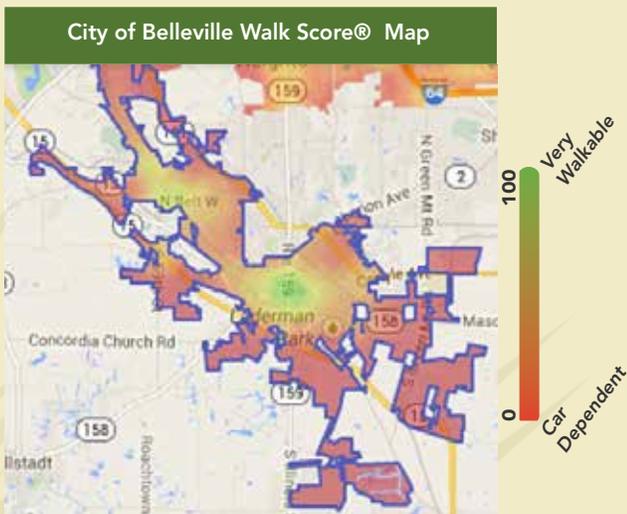
Source: CU-CitizenAccess.org. Data gathered through a survey of 108 Illinois public housing authorities in May and June, 2013, by CU-Citizen Access. The project is run by the Journalism Department of the College of Media at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



# Walkability

**Sidewalk and trail projects are important capital improvements that increase safety, connectivity, and overall vitality of neighborhoods.**

A neighborhood’s walkability plays an important role in a community’s physical health and the strength of its social ties. A walkable environment connects residents to basic services such as housing, retail, entertainments, parks and open space, and ideally office space within a quarter-mile radius. Pedestrian-friendly land use patterns and interconnected pathways result in safe connections among community amenities, and ultimately, improve residents’ quality of life. Walk Score® is an online assessment tool relied on to evaluate the walkability of neighborhoods, districts, and cities. The algorithm is based on proximity and intensity of nine pedestrian-friendly amenities, including grocery stores, restaurants, parks, and schools. Below are the Walk Score® ratings for the City of Belleville and surrounding Illinois cities.



### Walk Scores® of Comparison Cities

Alton .....	33	Ferguson.....	35
<b>Belleville .....</b>	<b>35</b>	Godfrey.....	10
Collinsville .....	30	Granite City .....	32
East St. Louis.....	28	Kirkwood.....	38
Edwardsville .....	29	O’Fallon.....	22
Fairview Heights .....	26	Webster Groves .....	45

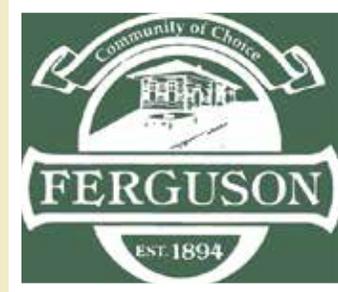
## Common Elements of a Neighborhood Plan

- Planning process validation
- Neighborhood establishment
- Functional elements
- Implementation framework

Source: “Anatomy of a Neighborhood Plan: An Analysis of Current Practice.” Growing Smart Working Paper.

coordinated community outreach programs. That talent pool includes, but is not limited to, senior citizens, college students, high school groups, healthcare providers, those in the legal and law enforcement community, business men and women and other concerned citizens. The untapped human capital is limited only by the vision, training, encouragement, recognition, and implementation of those in leadership.”

- **Build capacity through intergovernmental collaboration.** Formation of the City’s Community Development Department established a clear lead for addressing housing and neighborhood planning initiatives within the City. However, these community issues are ultimately shared across nearly all departments, as illustrated earlier in *Figure 4.1 on page 4.2*. The City should emphasize increased communication among departments to optimize City resources. For example, the City’s new GIS specialist can help to track housing statistics by neighborhood zones and map neighborhood assets and needs (e.g., sidewalk inventory, parks). Among all community development partners, the City and St. Clair County Housing Authority are best positioned to spearhead leadership training, technical assistance, and data collection. These responsibilities require a high degree of collaboration within the City and across other public agencies to prevent redundancy and optimize the use of staff time.
- **Develop neighborhood plans,** starting with the most organized neighborhood zones first. Following adoption of this plan, each zone should create a neighborhood plan that addresses the zone’s strengths, opportunities, and barriers. The plan will provide internal direction, as well as a vision that can be shared



with partner organizations. These plans should identify specific zone needs and include a cursory list of potential funding streams for zone projects (see **Common Elements of a Neighborhood Plan** sidebar on the previous page). Before initiating the planning process, the City should develop a rubric for prioritizing projects and programs across each plan. Ultimately, this tool will be useful for transferring the planning efforts into the proposed Capital Improvements Plan (see Priority 3).

### Priority 3 | Assess and optimize Belleville's financial and regulatory tools to further the community's vision.

The City has access to a number of financial and regulatory tools that are currently used for infrastructure projects and land development. Similar to most cities, the majority of these tools have been focused on new development rather than the City's oldest established residential areas. A key element to addressing housing issues is the interrelationship between desired outcomes and realities. It is essential to recognize that the efforts to revitalize Belleville's existing neighborhoods will require additional financial resources and improved management strategies.

#### ACTION STEPS

- **Develop a City Capital Improvements Plan** (CIP) to strategically fund priority projects recommended in the neighborhood zone plans, among other City improvement projects. Based on a similar recommendation from the *2000 – 2020 Comprehensive Plan*, the CIP would identify projects for a minimum of five years, and when possible, out to a 20-year planning horizon. It would help to set and manage expectations of the City's funding capacity and validate why certain

## Home Repair Loan Program

### Ferguson, Missouri

In 1989, the City of Ferguson formed the Ferguson Neighborhood Improvement Program, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, to improve the overall condition of its neighborhoods. The program's primary tool has been a low-interest loan program for home repairs. The FNIP issues loans up to \$25,000 per household, although most range in value from \$5,000 to \$6,000. The program was first funded by Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Today, the FNIP has approximately \$500,000 in reserve funds with \$350,000 of that total invested to accrue interest for new loans. Like many communities in the region, Ferguson has struggled with foreclosures over the past five years, resulting in only a handful of program participants since 2009. The City is actively campaigning to generate more program interest as the housing and employment markets rebound.

The low-interest loan program is sponsored by the FNIP, run by a Board of Directors appointed by City Council, and administered by City staff in partnership with UMB Bank. Prospective participants first apply for a standard Custom Home Improvement Loan (CHIL) from UMB Bank. If the applicant is declined, he or she applies for the FNIP's loan, which typically must be paid back over a three-year period at three-percent interest. There is no upper or lower income limit for the program and no penalty for early repayment. Many federal, state, county, and municipal loan programs, such as Granite City's, only fund core improvements like plumbing or roof replacement. Ferguson's program is much more flexible, allowing a wider range of interior and exterior improvements such as kitchen remodels and new flooring. This type of incentive program is one of many practical tools for promoting neighborhood improvement – one homeowner at a time.



## Mayor's Scattered Lot Program

### Granite City, Illinois

In 2005, Granite City started the Mayor's Scattered Housing Program, a City initiative funded by Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For the first five years of the program, the City allocated approximately \$50,000 in grant funds each year to acquire vacant lots and facilitate housing construction. The program was responsible for putting 14 families in new homes between 2005 - 2009. These properties were strategically located in older historic neighborhoods struggling with blight and disinvestment.

The program took off shortly after the election of a new mayor committed to neighborhood revitalization. The City partnered with local contractors to identify housing plans and establish costs up front, resulting in a streamlined process from day one. These contractors were ultimately responsible for building the new homes at comparable resale values - rather than new construction costs. This helped to significantly reduce the expense to homebuyers.

The program is available to low- and moderate-income residents that qualify for a bank loan. When the program first started, there was a wait list for interested buyers. However, the requirements necessary to qualify for a standard mortgage ultimately reduced the number of eligible homebuyers. At the time, low- and moderate-

income residents could leverage a 10-year forgivable loan through the City and a homebuyer program through the County to minimize costs. The City is currently pursuing grants to fund comparable programs.

Since 2009, the program has not acquired new properties or built homes due to the downturn in the economy and lack of federal funding. However, the City's inventory of readily available lots has still been useful in facilitating development by the non-profit sector. In 2010, Justine Petersen, a non-profit affordable housing developer and financial services provider, purchased 21 lots. A portion of these sites were acquired from the Scattered Lot Program at bargain rates (i.e., less than \$1,500 per site), enabling the organization to build quality homes for low- and moderate-income families.

Ultimately, the City sees opportunities for reviving the Mayor's Scattered Lot Program once the market improves. The first five years of the program were considered a major success since it helped to reduce vacancy and catalyze neighborhood revitalization. Visit Granite City's website to learn more about the 20 vacant lots that are currently for sale, ranging in price (\$1,000 to \$1,500) and lot size (50' by 125' to 80' x 155').



## Reduced Capacity of Local Governments

According to a National League of Cities survey on 2012 workplace trends:

- 48 percent of cities reduced the size of their workforce;
- One-third delayed or canceled infrastructure projects;
- 21 percent cut spending on human services; and
- 19 percent cut education funding.

With few resources, local governments have increased their reliance on the private and non-profit sectors to fulfill needs previously met by public agencies.

Source: "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America." Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC. 2013.

fiscal actions must be taken to realize this plan's goals. See page 7.6.

- **Continue expanding the community's capacity to pursue regional, state, and federal grants.**

Community leaders are currently developing a "grants central" approach under the leadership of an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives from the City, County, BASIC Initiative, AmeriCorps, YMCA, and other community organizations.

The underlying approach is to optimize the community's funding eligibility through strategic collaborations. These proposals should be derived from the housing and neighborhood initiatives recommended in the neighborhood zone plans and span a wide variety of community issues (e.g., affordability, community development, public safety, transportation, land use, parks and recreation, education and outreach, and energy). A recent milestone has been the City's partnership with the YMCA to track volunteer projects in celebration of the City's 200th anniversary.

- **Continue pursuing creative fundraising strategies and "sweat equity" (i.e., volunteer projects)** through the BNP, BASIC Initiative, and other community partners. Ongoing efforts include charity dinners, banner campaigns, solicitation of corporate sponsors (e.g., Wal-Mart, Home Depot), and community volunteerism, such as Belleville's newest Gass Park. Some cities have turned to crowd funding to raise money through websites like [www.citizeninvestor.com](http://www.citizeninvestor.com). The community of Naperville, Illinois, used the website to raise \$25,000 for a veteran memorial statue.
- **Re-evaluate the City's Zoning and Subdivision Codes** to ensure consistency with this plan. At the conclusion of this planning process, it is important for the City to undertake a comprehensive review

of these land development ordinances since they are some of the most influential tools for long-term residential growth and redevelopment. *Section 6, Land Use and Character*, provides an overview of recommendations for neighborhood conservation areas, mixed-use residential and commercial districts, single- and multi-family housing designations, neighborhood connectivity, buffering, and site design.

### Priority 4 | Prioritize, fund, and implement the most essential projects and programs.

The local and national economic climate restricts the quantity and scale of new housing projects or programs. Federal budget sequestration has reduced the amount of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for St. Clair County housing programs, with no recovery in the near future. Plus, cities are still struggling to restore their tax base and adequately staff government operations several years after the national recession.<sup>6</sup> In a recent poll by the National League of Cities, 48 percent of participating cities reduced the size of their workforce in 2012.

Therefore, new housing initiatives should be selected on a competitive basis - what programs rise to the top? Cities, counties, and non-profit organizations across the St. Louis metropolitan area have implemented a wide variety of strategies. These range from low-impact, low-cost programs (e.g., Lawn Mowing Assistance Program for Seniors in St. Peters, Missouri) to high-impact, high-cost programs (e.g., housing incentives near transit-

<sup>6</sup> "Confronting Suburban Poverty in America." Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC. 2013.



## “Neighborhoods First” Approach

Brainerd, Minnesota applied a “Neighborhoods First” approach to revitalization. The community focused on small and incremental public investments such as bike lanes, pedestrian crossings, tree trimmings, park tree plantings, and boulevard tree plantings. These types of improvements should be recommended by Belleville’s neighborhood zones to ensure consistency with the areas’ needs and vision.

Source: Strong Towns

oriented development in St. Louis, Missouri). They have been divided into seven different categories, as previously illustrated in *Figure 4.13, Housing and Neighborhood Tools*:

- Safety and Code Enforcement Programs;
- Education and Outreach;
- Homebuyer/Developer Financing;
- Beautification (see **Public Art** sidebar on page 4.14 and **Community Gardens** sidebar on page 4.15);
- Capital Improvements (see **Walkability** on page 4.16);
- Homeowner Rehabilitation and Energy Efficiency (see **Home Repair Loan Program** sidebar on page 4.17); and
- Infill and Land Banking Programs (see **Mayor’s Scattered Lot Program** summary on page 4.18).

### ACTION STEPS

- **Identify one or two priority projects or programs** using the findings from neighborhood zone plans. Key considerations for selecting programs include: political support of elected officials; ability to engage public, private, and non-profit partners; and sufficient capacity to ensure project scale results in targeted impacts. Another factor is identifying ways to mitigate the negative impacts of regulation. For instance, a new regulation might put an increased burden on some property owners. The City could help to reduce this impact by offering low-interest loans or negotiating reduced construction rates by local contractors. This “carrot and stick approach” can help to win broader community support.

- **Engage the community development network and secure revenue streams** for leading, administering, and funding projects. This step is the natural outgrowth of Priority 2 (capacity building) and Priority 3 (financial tools). The BNP serves as the backbone for soliciting community buy-in, but this outreach effort should extend beyond the City’s limits to regional non-profits. They offer a wide range of technical assistance programs for individuals, businesses, government entities, and other non-profits. For instance, Justine Petersen, a technical service provider and affordable housing developer, has been successful at implementing strategic infill programs that are independent of municipalities. The non-profit recently opened a new satellite office in Granite City and applied for Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) status in St. Clair County. This designation would give them access to federal housing funds that could be used in Belleville.
- **Develop key performance indicators** to monitor and evaluate each program’s impact. The long-term goal of Belleville’s housing and neighborhood outreach efforts is to build a broad network of projects and programs that offer cumulative benefits (i.e., sum of all parts). From the inception of each one, articulate clear objectives and identify quantitative and qualitative measurements that can be assessed on an annual basis. Establish a protocol for programs that do not meet performance standards (e.g., low participation, loss of funding).