

How do we as a community move effectively toward diversifying housing options so that more of our citizens can afford to live in Bloomington?

This concept plan presents a development strategy to address this question, which is based on community engagement at a neighborhood scale and grounded in a time-tested, planning approach. Our 2018 Comprehensive Plan lays out the framework for development and redevelopment opportunities through the creation of the Village Center, a small-scale, mixed-use node that brings the positive aspects of density to areas fueled by active, vehicular traffic. The concept plan is comprised of four components:

- Village Centers
- Neighborhood Workshops
- Accessory Dwelling Units
- Further Opportunities - City Property Inventory

VILLAGE CENTERS

Village Centers purposefully and sensitively introduce density at the edge of existing neighborhoods. Small-scale commercial development located at busy corners of transportation corridors provide walkable, lively destinations for nearby existing single-family neighborhoods while creating opportunities for a range of multi-unit housing types. These multi-unit types, such as duplexes, triplexes, etc., called ‘the missing middle,’ not only refer to house form but also describe location as these buildings transition between single-family houses and larger Village Center buildings. These transitional forms are part of what urbanists call a ‘transect,’ an incremental change in height and mass so that adjacent buildings are compatible. Village Center buildings with a tall, first-floor commercial use and two or three housing stories above can gradually step down toward single-family neighborhoods and create a sense of a whole instead of a disruption.

This concept plan aims to develop four (4) form-based, sub-area plans for Village Centers consisting of multiple properties. This effort would take place in a phased manner, with two plans developed each year over the course of two years. The locations would be selected from the over twenty Village Center locations represented in the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map. Four locations would be selected for economic feasibility and an array of practical considerations. These areas would utilize the new Residential Urban (R4) zoning districts to support areas zoned Mixed-Use Neighborhood Scale (MN) or potentially Mixed-Use Medium Scale (MM).

More specifically, form-based planning utilizes illustrations of desirable physical form, placement, size, and bulk of buildings within the environment and addresses the size of blocks and their relationship to one another. These illustrations allow neighbors and developers see what is to be built. The buildings can be tailored to reflect various contexts. With a form-based approach, the Village Center plans could provide potential developers with pre-approved project designs coordinated with the needed infrastructure improvements while providing the community with predictable outcomes. The goal is to create actionable plans where small-scale economic development can be incentivized at some level to help get initial projects off the ground.

NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOPS

The Village Center plans would require representation from all interests – city officials, property owners, various stakeholders, and adjacent neighborhood participants -- to work collaboratively together. A

and of the planning concepts imbedded in our present-day landscapes. This background information would provide a framework to address the community goals of Village Centers and housing diversity. Based on existing neighborhood patterns and house types, different strategies would be explored with neighbors on how to utilize accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and potentially implement other housing forms in sensitive ways. These workshops would generate form-based information for ADUs used to create pattern books and/or potential zoning overlays for special provisions based on further form based information.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

While ADUs have been approved for all single-family zones, their potential remains untapped. These owner-occupied duplexes are versatile and have broad community support due to the on-site care and management of owners. Several tools could be developed to promote ADU development, including citywide workshops and an informational website to assist with zoning and building codes, development of project proforma, design approaches and configurations, design assistance and contractor selection, and financing models.

FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES – CITY PROPERTY INVENTORY

The City of Bloomington has had success in creating affordable housing development opportunities by leveraging property it owns in partnership with affordable housing developers. In addition to large parcels like the Bloomington Hospital site and excess land banked for the future convention center project, there is city-owned property scattered throughout neighborhoods -- unprogrammed areas attached to parks, underutilized parking lots, right-of-way remnants, etc.-- that can be identified for this purpose. The City, in partnership with affordable housing developers, could help introduce affordable housing into existing neighborhoods at a granular scale.

In summary, the realization of Village Centers will strengthen the identity and health of Bloomington's existing neighborhoods while actively promote the development of missing middle housing types and overall housing diversity. This concept plan effectively offers a way to integrate citizen participation and build consensus around the introduction of higher density housing forms. The development at Hillside and Henderson Streets is a successful example of a Village Center that incorporated higher density house forms. In that case, it was the unusual, upfront investment in community process by the developer of a single property that sparked the further build-out of the area. If Bloomington's administration and elected officials can come together to support this concept plan, then we can successfully bring more housing diversity to the city with the level of intention and sensitivity it requires.

To undertake this planning effort, an advisory committee with representatives from the City of Bloomington, City Council, Bloomington Economic Development Corp. and other community representatives would be assembled to select an urban design consultant to partner with local design professionals. This project team would be guided by City of Bloomington Planning & Engineering, Housing & Neighborhood Development and Economic & Sustainable Development staff. The advisory committee would generate a progress report on a quarterly basis for City Council to insure their continued involvement.