
Subject: HOUSING POLICY**No. 50.3****Date: November 5, 2001****Page: 1 of: 7**

PURPOSE:

This policy provides the framework for decision-making regarding housing and housing-related activities that implement the community's vision and the City's goals and strategic priorities, and that affect the overall quality of life in Kalamazoo.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to the development and/or implementation of programs, projects, procedures, activities, and ordinances related to housing; to the establishment and nature of housing-related partnerships; and to the management and/or allocation of resources, including entitlement funds, other funds, and staffing.

I. GENERAL HOUSING POLICYExamples of Issues:

- a) The special skills necessary to repair, remodel and restore our older housing stock are in short supply.
- b) We have a high percentage (over 50%) of rental housing stock.
- c) Kalamazoo's poverty rate is twice the poverty rate of the county and the state, and is more than twice the poverty rate of surrounding jurisdictions.
- d) The vitality of the region depends in part upon the strength of the urban core.
- e) We have old housing stock, much of which needs major reinvestment, repair, and mitigation of problems associated with lead-based paint.
- f) Although only a small percentage of absentee landlords are "problem" landlords, addressing the problems they create by not maintaining their properties takes up an inordinate amount of staff's enforcement time.
- g) Low-income property owners often lack the resources to keep their properties up to "community standards" and in compliance with the City's ordinance.
- h) Although the housing stock in the city plays a significant part in our history and

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provides neighborhood and community character that differentiates us from the suburbs, methods to preserve both the housing stock and characteristics of individual buildings are not fully embraced community-wide.

- i) The Comprehensive Plan calls for single-family, owner-occupied housing as the preferred housing type, and even recommends lowering densities in some existing neighborhoods. It also recommends limiting multi-family development and the concentration of low-income housing. The Consolidated Plan describes the unmet housing needs of very low, low, and moderate income residents, and identifies recommendations to address them. The recommendations in the two plans could be in conflict with one another if attention is not paid to balancing both goals.
- j) An important link exists between housing and economic development -- the City needs more market-rate housing to make it economically competitive. Without it, our share of middle to upper income households will continue to relocate outside the city, even as we attract new businesses and jobs.
- k) The City's limited resources do not enable us to resolve the problems associated with the unmet housing needs of low-income persons and families in Kalamazoo.
- l) The private sector drives many decisions related to housing which are out of the City's control.

Policy Statement:

The City of Kalamazoo desires to see that all its citizens have a choice among a variety of housing types that are safe, well constructed, and affordable to people of all income levels. This will be accomplished by working in conjunction with other units of government, housing-related agencies, the private sector, and other partners to retain and improve our existing housing stock, construct new housing, and by working to promote opportunities for increased home ownership throughout the City.

II. FOCUSED HOUSING POLICY ISSUES

1. LOW-INCOME HOUSING

Examples of Issues:

- a) The City of Kalamazoo has a higher proportion of low-income housing per capita than does any other surrounding jurisdiction, and has become, defacto, the primary

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- provider of housing for low-income people in the county. This is due, in part, to being a central city; the affordability of our housing stock; the availability of public transportation; and the fact that many social service agencies are located within the city boundaries.
- b) MSHDA designates Kalamazoo as a distressed community and offers tax credits to developers of low-income housing; however, the County and other governmental units in the county are not designated. Therefore, the concentration of low-income housing in the city is exacerbated, and there is little financial incentive to locate low-income housing anywhere else.
 - c) Our Consolidated Plan identifies a significant unmet need for low-income housing. However, we also need more market rate housing construction and redevelopment. The limited amount of land available for development can put these two needs in conflict.
 - d) Access to social service agencies and public transportation tends to result in concentration of low-income residents in the City, and therefore creates the demand for a greater proportion of low-income housing than in other parts of the county.
 - e) Low-income housing tends to be concentrated within the central city neighborhoods.
 - f) Providing even more low-income housing in the City may be working against many of the City's other goals.

Policy Statement:

The City supports the development of new low-income housing in the city which: is constructed in a quality manner; is architecturally compatible with the surrounding neighborhood; includes a mix of income levels to the greatest extent possible; and distributes low-income housing throughout the city instead of concentrating it in a few neighborhoods. The City of Kalamazoo will provide its fair-share of Kalamazoo County's housing which is affordable to low-moderate income households, and will work with the County and other jurisdictions to ensure that they provide their fair-share of affordable housing to address the County's low-income housing needs.

2. CODE ENFORCEMENT

Examples of Issues:

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- a) Lack of knowledge of basic home repairs and care-taking contributes to poor housing maintenance and blight.
- b) Homeowners, tenants, and landlords often lack knowledge of city ordinances, which contributes to the need for code enforcement activity.
- c) Housing code enforcement is a critical component of maintaining and improving the quality of the city's housing stock.
- d) The City lacks enough resources to provide all of the solutions related to code enforcement.
- e) Neighborhood blight can be caused by owner-occupants, tenants, and landlords.
- f) Effective deterrence for chronic code violators is dependent upon cooperation by the courts.
- g) The time spent on monitoring properties that are regularly in compliance limits staff's capacity to focus on problem properties.

Policy Statement:

The City of Kalamazoo supports strong, multi-disciplinary code enforcement as a tool to achieve safe neighborhoods and a high quality of life. The City and its partners will educate property owners about the City's codes, will seek out new resources to assist property owners and renters in maintaining their property, and will assertively enforce all of its codes (including prosecution if necessary) to ensure that residents have a safe, quality dwelling in which to live.

3. STUDENT HOUSING**Examples of Issues:**

- a) Increased enrollment at WMU is putting a strain on the community's ability to accommodate the students' housing needs.
- b) On-campus or University-provided student housing has not kept pace with enrollment.
- c) Many problems associated with student housing are behavioral, nuisance (e.g., trash,

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- noise), zoning, and parking issues, not housing policy.
- d) Existing campus housing is not adequate for many of today's students' needs (e.g., technology, parking, "lifestyle" choices, etc.).
 - e) Students often lack knowledge of community "norms," expectations, ordinances, standards, etc.

Policy Statement:

The City commits itself to working with institutions of higher education to adequately address their student housing needs. However, the City expects university and college officials to increase on-campus housing in proportion to the growth in student enrollment. When new off-campus student housing is constructed, the City supports developments which preserve and enhance the integrity of the city's neighborhoods, are appropriately located, and which are adequately served by necessary services and infrastructure, whether inside or outside the city limits.

4. INFILL HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY

Examples of Issues:

- a) Current zoning requirements (especially minimum lot size and setback standards) do not allow for infill construction on many vacant non-conforming lots.
- b) Compliance with building codes can make conversion of old commercial buildings to residential uses difficult and/or cost-prohibitive.
- c) The lack of design standards compromises the preservation of neighborhood integrity.

Policy Statement:

The City of Kalamazoo encourages the development of a variety of new, infill housing types (e.g., single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums, apartments, etc.) that complement the character (including building scale, mass, architecture, streetscape, siting, traffic, etc.) of the neighborhood in which it is located.

5. PRESERVATION VS. DEMOLITION OF HOUSING STOCK

Examples of Issues:

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- a) Protecting the historic integrity of the City's housing stock is an integral part of comprehensive community development.
- b) The amount of time involved arranging to move a building is often in conflict with the property owner's time frame to begin construction on the subject site.
- c) When making a decision of whether to preserve or demolish a house, a financial cost-benefit analysis alone cannot fully demonstrate the "true value" of the structure to the community.
- d) The use of demolition as a blight abatement tool, without careful evaluation and/or without a plan to rebuild immediately, can contribute to erosion of neighborhood character.
- e) Historic preservation is a value in the community and should be supported.
- f) The economics of reinvestment in an existing house is generally very sound.

Policy Statement:

The City of Kalamazoo recognizes and supports the value of preserving its existing housing stock, and will allow demolitions only as an option for redevelopment or to protect public safety.

6. HOMELESSNESS

Examples of Issues:

- a) All of the homeless shelters for Kalamazoo County are located in the city of Kalamazoo.
- b) On any given night in Kalamazoo County, there are 250-300 homeless people, 47% who are children, competing for 232 shelter beds.
- c) According to an April 2000 Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness survey, the Kalamazoo County shelter occupancy rate was 131%.
- d) Based on median income levels for renters in our market, a minimum wage earner

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would need to work 78 hours per week just to make his/her fair market rent on a two bedroom apartment comprise 30% of income.

- e) Wages are not keeping up with housing costs, which contribute to more people slipping into homelessness.
- f) Insufficient mental health services to meet the demand and needs of a portion of our population contribute to the rate of homelessness.

Policy Statement:

The City of Kalamazoo will work in conjunction with area agencies, the County and other jurisdictions to meet the temporary shelter needs of all homeless persons in Kalamazoo. Ideally, however, homelessness should be eliminated, but not merely by creating shelters; rather, decent affordable housing should be available to people of all incomes, and should be available throughout the area, not just concentrated within the Kalamazoo City limits.

EFFECTIVE DATE: November 5, 2001

This policy was reviewed and adopted by the City of Kalamazoo City Commission at a business meeting of November 5, 2001

Robert B. Jones, Mayor