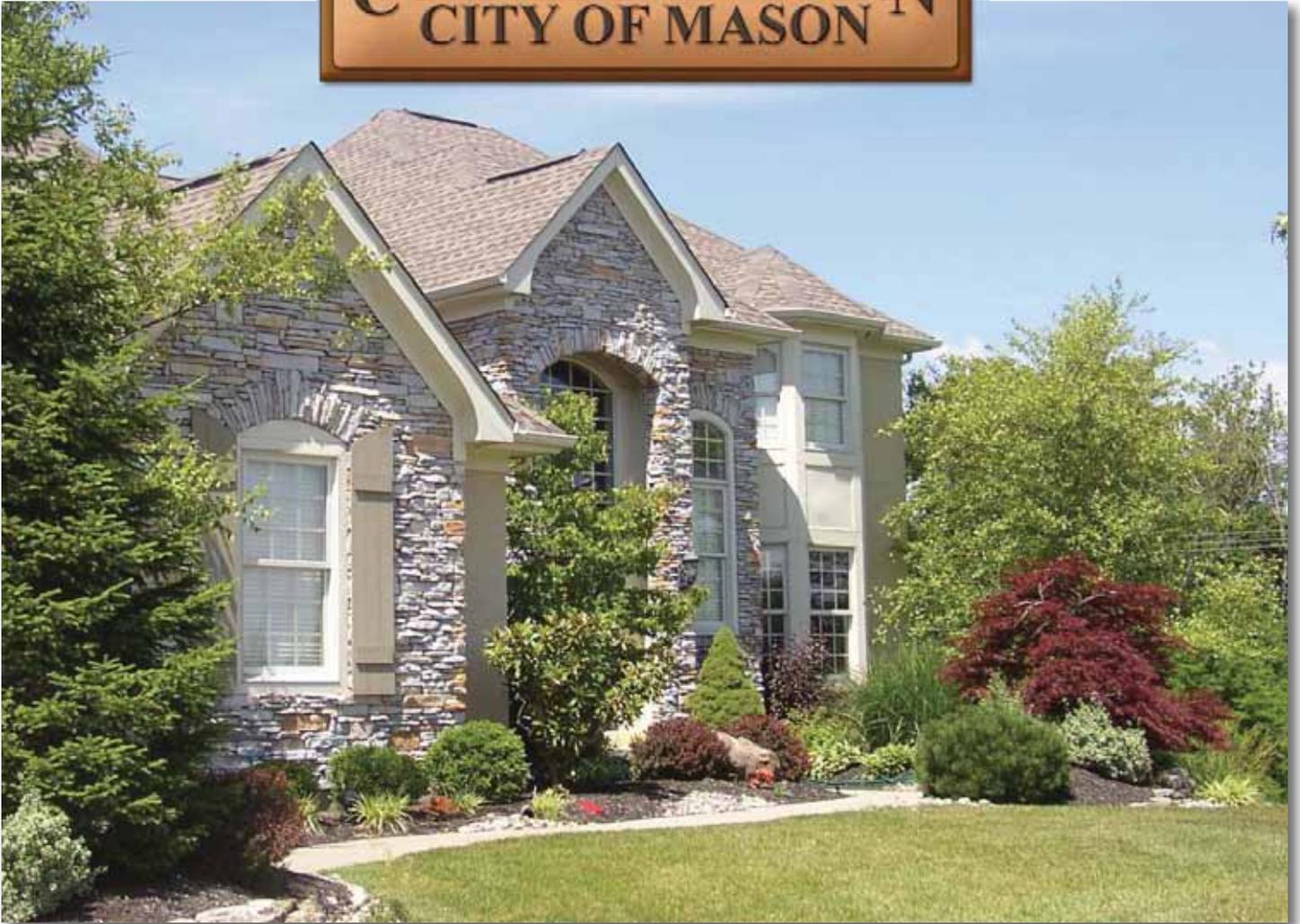


COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CITY OF MASON



Chapter 1: Housing and Neighborhoods

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Vision Statement

Mason’s neighborhoods will exhibit a strong sense of community due to their walkability, diversity and residents involvement. Walkable design will create safe and convenient neighborhoods with vibrant streets. Diverse housing choices will attract and retain a range of incomes and age groups. Viable neighborhoods will encourage residents to maintain and invest in their homes by incorporating green building practices and energy efficiency. New housing development will serve as a model for sustainable development in the region.

Section 1.1. Purpose

The Housing and Population Element identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted housing needs in Mason. This element identifies standards and programs for the elimination of substandard dwelling conditions, improvement of housing quality, variety and affordability, and for provision of adequate neighborhoods.

Primary components of this element include:

1. An analysis of subjects related to Mason’s existing neighborhoods, including trends in population, age, households, household types, and housing affordability, as well as neighborhood design issues.
2. A vision, goals and strategies aimed at improving neighborhood design, increasing the diversity and quality of housing products, and complementing the City’s network of green infrastructure.

Section 1.2. Housing and Neighborhoods Snapshot

This section contains a summary of existing housing and population conditions, issues and opportunities. Information has been gathering from a number of resources including the CBSA, Core Based Statistical Areas. A Statistical Area is a county or counties that have at least one urban core area of at least 50,000 population, plus an adjacent area that has a high level of social and economic integration with the core.

Examples of Housing in Mason



Top: Townhome condominium (left); older single-family (right). Bottom: Newer single-family (left); large-lot single-family (right)

Chapter 1 Cover Photo

Mason enjoys diverse housing options including a significant concentration of high-end custom homes as shown.

Highlights

- Mason is nearing the end of a growth cycle that has nearly tripled its population in the last 20 years.
- Much of the growth is due to migration of residents from older communities in Hamilton County.
- The City can expect an additional 12% population increase in the next five to 10 years, based on a build-out of remaining vacant land within its borders. Annexation will lead to additional growth.
- Age distribution, household size and household type characteristics indicate that Mason is particularly attractive to families with children.
- The increases that the City has experienced in the 20 to 24 and 55 to 64 age groups, combined with a recent increase in multi-family construction, indicates a demand for more affordable and/or low-maintenance housing types.
- A recent increase in the 85 and older age group, along with an aging national population, creates a need for additional senior housing and services.
- Mason's housing stock is dominated by large and high-value single-family homes on lots between 0.25 acre and one acre, built within the last 10 to 20 years.
- The local housing market remains healthy in terms of vacancy but new construction has been affected by the national downturn in the housing market.
- Mason is beginning to experience subdivision of large-lot single-family properties along thoroughfares such as Bethany Road.
- Current zoning and charter restrictions limit development of higher-density housing types such as townhomes, condominiums and apartments.

Existing Population and Household Characteristics

Population Age

- Mason's past increases in the 55 to 64 and 85 and above age groups are consistent with a nationwide trend toward an aging population. If continued, this trend may indicate a future need for housing that appeals to "empty-nesters" and seniors.

Household Characteristics

- The average size of the households in the City increased from 2.7 to 2.8 between 1990 and 2008, while it has dropped in the CBSA, State and Nation.
- The total percentage of households with people living alone (20.1 percent) and households with persons 65+ (16.5 percent) in the City of Mason are lower than the CBSA and the State percentages.

Existing Housing Characteristics

Housing Types

- The predominant land use within the City of Mason is *single-family residential* by design. The City has promoted this land use pattern with the intent of building a family-friendly community. The approximately 7,480 single-family detached lots in Mason account for 86% of the residential land area. Furthermore, nearly half of all single family homes have been built since 1995.
- *Multi-family* occupies 4.6% of the City and generally consists of townhome condominiums. Few apartment buildings exist in the community. Mason’s zoning code and charter generally discourage multi-family housing, due to lot size and density restrictions (no more than eight units per acre).

Housing Tenure

- The City has 10,418 occupied housing units, with greater than three-fourths of all occupied units being owner-occupied (8,669 units). The City has a much higher percentage of owner-occupied units and a much lower percentage of renter-occupied units than the CBSA and State.
- The percentage of rental housing increased slightly in Mason from 2000 to 2008, from 14.7% to 15.8%.

Housing Value

- The City’s median home value (\$213,887) was nearly 50% higher than the CBSA’s, and nearly 75% higher than the State’s.

Land Usage within the City of Mason

Land Use	Acreage	% of City
Agricultural	932	7.90%
Commercial	390	3.30%
Commercial Recreation	694	5.90%
Industrial Park	1,271	10.80%
Multi-Family Residential	54	4.60%
Office	89	0.80%
Public Use/Institutional	779	6.60%
Recreational/Open Space	1,424	12.10%
Single Family Residential	3,397	28.80%
Undeveloped/Vacant	1,233	10.50%
Public Right-of-Way	1,028	8.70%
Total City area	11,778	

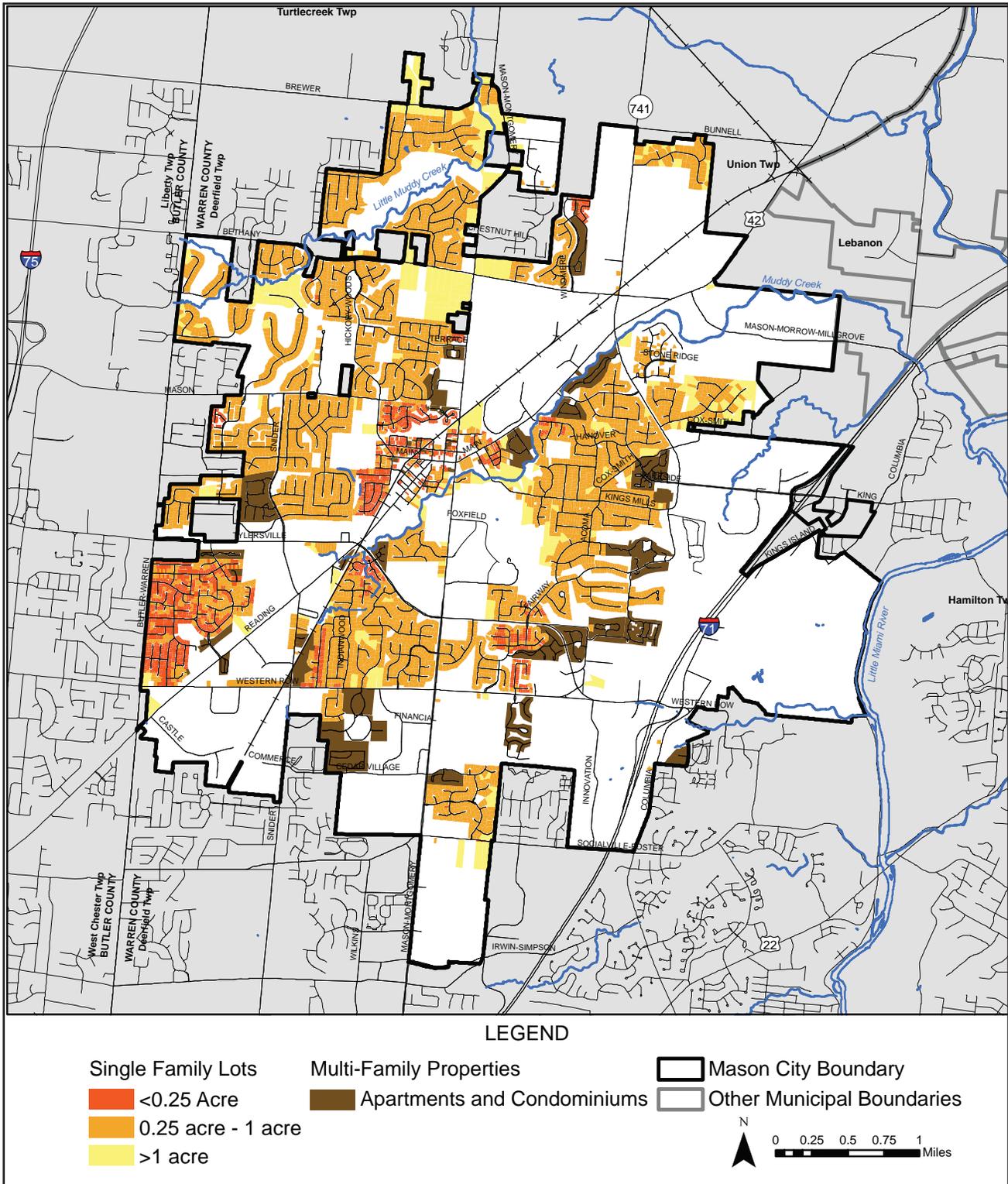
Source: City of Mason, 2008

Figure 1.2A: Housing Value Trend Comparison



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, ESRI

Map 1.2A: Existing Residential Land Use



Build-Out Analysis

- The City experienced steady growth in the number of residential building permits issued between 1990 and 2000, with the greatest number of permits (837) issued in 1999. During the 1990's, nearly 70 percent of all housing permits were issued for single-family residential units.
- The largest number of permits issued between 2000 and 2009 occurred in 2001 (672), with a steady decrease between 2001 and 2009. The decrease in new housing construction corresponds with three factors:
 - A slowdown of the national economy, due in large part to the struggling housing market.
 - Declining availability of undeveloped, residentially-zoned land in the City. Mason is approaching build-out, based on remaining available land within current boundaries.
 - Price of land and construction costs.

- Based on build-out analysis as shown on Table 1.2B, the City could add up to 1,241 housing units at build-out, increasing its population by 12% to 32,877. Based on permit trends over the last five years and depending on the housing market, this increase could occur over five to 10 years.

Denser housing development and extra-territorial growth would increase the City's buildout population further. See Chapter 7 for more details.

Table 1.2A Housing Permits Issued 2000-2007

Permits	Single-Family	Multi-Family	Total
2000	333	259	592
2001	372	300	672
2002	323	166	489
2003	264	130	394
2004	178	113	291
2005	137	155	292
2006	68	79	147
2007	60	17	77
2008	36	3	39
2009	26	8	34
Total:	1,797	1,230	3,027

Source: City of Mason Building Department

Table 1.2B Housing Build-Out Analysis

Units under construction or in the planning/plating process:	831
Units possible with subdivision of remaining undeveloped, residentially-zoned land in the City*	167
Units possible with subdivision of existing single-family, residentially-zoned lots greater than four acres*	242
Total additional units at buildout	1,241
Estimated additional population at buildout, assuming 2.82 persons per household	3,498
Total population at build-out	32,877

*Assumes current zoning

Section 1.3. Goals and Strategies

Goal HN-1. Encourage investment in older neighborhoods.

New housing development in Mason will continue to compete with existing, older neighborhoods. Keeping existing housing competitive requires continued maintenance and modernization of homes. Additionally, compatible infill housing or mixed-use development can reinvigorate older neighborhoods with new housing products, amenities and services.

Strategy HN-1.1.

Encourage context sensitive infill development in older neighborhoods.

Action HN-1.1.1. Develop residential infill design standards to ensure new housing development in established neighborhoods is compatible with existing neighborhood architecture and scale.

Action HN-1.1.2. Implement zoning text and map changes to better identify areas in which reinvestment is desired and infill development is encouraged. Incorporate infill standards developed in Action HN-1.1.1. and HN-1.3.1.



Townhouses (See HN-1.2)

Strategy HN-1.2

Encourage land use transitions between major thoroughfares and adjacent neighborhoods through selection of appropriate land uses, compatible architecture and scale of buildings, and the use of open space and buffering.

Thoroughfares are generally not desirable for detached residential product. Existing single family should be allowed to transition to a higher and better use. Live-work units and townhomes shown below offer a good alternative to single family residential and to excessive strip retail development on busy thoroughfares.

Action HN-1.2.1. Implement transitional zoning along Major Thoroughfares that allows mixed use including attached residential, particularly those areas planned as “High Intensity Neighborhood” or “Activity Nodes” on the Future Land Use Map in Chapter 7.

Strategy HN-1.3.

Promote the modernization of functionally obsolete housing units and re-investment in older neighborhoods.

Older neighborhoods typically offer housing that lack the amenities desired by today’s buyers. These neighborhoods also offer lower price points for families that don’t mind updating.



Live-work units (See HN-1.2)

Action HN-1.3.1. Create a housing modernization idea book with strategies for enhancing older housing in ways that are compatible with existing neighborhood character. Examples include aesthetic improvements such as adding front porches, shutters and dormers, or functional improvements such as garage and room additions and replacing mechanical equipment with energy efficient units.

Action HN-1.3.2. Partner with the Home Builders Association to modernize an outdated house as public demonstration project.

Action HN-1.3.3. Seek and provide financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements such as energy savings performance contracting, on-bill financing, and revolving loan funds.

Action HN-1.3.4. Promote home energy audits.

Example of Housing Modernization

The below photos depicts a modernization of house type commonly developed in the 1970s. A rehabilitation project increased the home's interior space and modified the layout to meet modern needs. A new front porch improved the home's curb appeal and relationship with the street.

Before Rehabilitation



After Rehabilitation



Strategy HN-1.4.

Promote code enforcement and proper maintenance through proactive enforcement efforts, increased community involvement and education.

Action HN-1.4.1. Look at the effectiveness of a Property Maintenance Code to maintain the desirability of neighborhoods, maintain homeowner confidence and to prevent violations from spreading.

Action HN-1.4.2. Use code enforcement to prevent code violations from spreading into adjacent neighborhoods.

Action HN-1.4.3. Educate community members about the importance of proper property maintenance and the enforcement process.

Action HN-1.4.4. Use code enforcement as an incentive. Property owners are more likely to invest in housing updates and maintenance when confidence in their street and neighborhood is high.

Action HN-1.4.5. Actively enforce codes along major thoroughfares realizing community perception is largely based on what people see traveling through a community.

Action HN-1.4.6. Track and monitor code enforcement violations using GIS. Analyze data to identify trends early and prevent issues from spreading.

Strategy HN-1.5.

Maintain, add and enhance infrastructure and public space in older neighborhoods.

Sound infrastructure, parks, natural features, schools and green space make neighborhoods attractive, provide civic pride and maintain property values. Ongoing maintenance of neighborhood infrastructure and amenities maintains a fresh appearance.

Action HN-1.5.1. Inventory neighborhood facilities and infrastructure and determine approximate age, condition and adequacy.

Action HN-1.5.2. Ensure to the extent practical that older neighborhoods have access to a public space (park, school yard, or greenspace) within a 5-minute walk or about a 1/4 mile. Older neighborhoods were platted before the city required greenspace set-asides. See Strategy CF-1.1.

Action 1.5.3. Coordinate infrastructure and public facility improvements with priority neighborhood reinvestment efforts.

Action 1.5.4. Add sidewalks and bike paths where they are missing consistent with funding availability per the Sidewalk Program as directed by Council (see Strategy TR-1.1.1. in Chapter 6).

Action 1.5.5. Seek opportunities to acquire additional property that adds benefit and value to surrounding property owners.

Action 1.5.6. Work with the Mason City Schools to ensure that school buildings stay where they are currently located. A recent trend is to move schools out of neighborhoods and rely on busing. Schools, like parks, add value to housing and serve as neighborhood anchors.

Strategy HN-1.6.

Establish redevelopment incentives in targeted investment zones. (See HN-5.1.2)

Action HN-1.6.1. Study the benefit and need to establish incentives for targeted neighborhood reinvestment. The city can incent reinvestment in specified areas by waiving building permit fees and offering property tax abatement on building improvements (i.e. Community Reinvestment Area).

Action HN-1.6.2. Use City-owned property as leverage in encouraging redevelopment.

Goal HN-2.

Promote new housing types that recognize shifts in market demand and demographics.

As the average household size decreases regionally and nationally and as the Baby Boomer generation ages, lower-maintenance housing such as townhomes and flats are gaining market appeal.

Strategy HN-2.1.

Permit higher density, lower maintenance housing in the Community Core and in Activity Nodes.

Empty nesters tend to downsize but maintain high quality housing standards. Young professionals tend to gravitate to low maintenance housing located in vibrant areas. Both market segments desire low maintenance housing to pursue life interests.

Action HN-2.1.1. Ensure that zoning permits the highest housing densities (eight units per acre) in Activity Nodes and the Community Core Subarea (see Map 7.3A in Chapter 7).

Action HN-2.1.2. Encourage redevelopment and infill development of multi-family housing, townhomes and mixed-use buildings with upper-floor housing units in the Community Core and Activity Nodes, with the incentives discussed under Strategy 1.6.

Strategy HN-2.2.

Permit and promote a variety of living options that are attractive to Mason's growing senior population.

Seniors often find it difficult to age in place due to a lack of supportive and/or affordable housing options and services such as transportation.

Action HN-2.2.1. Encourage transportation services that enable seniors to obtain necessary goods and services city-wide.

Action HN-2.2.2. Permit senior housing units within walking distance to retail, medical, personal services, and educational and cultural facilities.

Goal HN-3.

Promote street and pedestrian connectivity and design in neighborhoods.

Connectivity in neighborhoods reduces the distance a pedestrian must travel between neighborhoods. This encourages walking, reduces reliance on automobiles and increases opportunities for interaction between neighbors.

Strategy HN-3.1.

Reform zoning and subdivision codes to require pedestrian and vehicular connectivity within and between neighborhoods, as described under Strategies TR-1.1 (sidewalk requirements) and TR-2.1 (complete streets) in Chapter 6.

Strategy HN-3.2

Promote pedestrian orientated design.

Action HN-3.2.1. Encourage pedestrian-friendly design features in high intensity residential developments, such as recessed or rear garages and front porches in single-family development, and rear parking lots and front entrances in multi-family developments and mixed use developments.

Action HN-3.2.2. Establish additional street design standards that promote uniqueness and livability. Encourage the provision of traffic calming features such as chicanes, mini traffic circles, narrow streets and neck downs at intersections. These features can also be used for place-defining landscape design to brand neighborhoods, break street monotony, and encourage pedestrianism.

Action HN-3.2.3. Encourage space for pedestrian gathering and circulation during the development review process. Examples include village greens and pocket parks connected to housing by sidewalks and paths.

Strategy HN-3.3.

Encourage mixed land use patterns that place residents within walking distance of services.

In addition to design features, mixed-use development helps to achieve a walkable neighborhood. Mason’s commercial corridors represent opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment on the edges of neighborhoods.

Action HN-3.3.1. Encourage developers to adhere to the mixed land use vision proposed in Chapter 7.

Goal HN-4.

Encourage young professional housing integration.

Matching Mason’s housing stock with its workforce will help to reduced commuter traffic and make the community a more desirable place to live, work and do business.

Strategy HN-4.1.

Work with employers to identify young professional housing needs.

Action HN-4.1.1. Conduct a survey of employers to determine employees’ incomes, places of residence, and desire to move to Mason.

Action HN-4.1.2. Encourage variability of lot and unit sizes integrated into an overall development plan to offer a range of housing options.



Greenspaces enhance property values and offer additional outdoor living room for pedestrian activity and socialization. See HN-3.2.3

Action HN-4.1.3. Require similar exterior architectural materials and features to ensure such units are generally indistinguishable from the street when integrated as part of HN-4.1.2.

Action HN-4.1.4. Develop professional housing in or adjacent to employment centers as part of mixed use sustainable developments.

Action HN-4.1.5. Promote mixed-use redevelopment along major thoroughfares through zoning map and/or text amendments in accordance with the High-Intensity Neighborhood and Neighborhood Activity Center classifications on the Future Land Use Map - see Chapter 7 Land Use.



Mason's business community employs a workforce with a wide range of housing needs.

Strategy HN-4.2.

Encourage modern, high-quality, multi-family housing in high activity areas.

Renters are important as they introduce new residents and future homeowners to Mason. About 40% of the rental market chooses to rent for lifestyle reasons while others wait to purchase housing after family size and incomes increase.

Action HN-4.2.1. Push multi-family in high intensity mixed use areas integrated with other uses including retail and office through complementary architecture.

Action HN-4.2.2. Adopt multi-family design standards to avoid monotonous and homogeneous architecture on attached residential units.

Goal HN-5

Encourage downtown housing as a critical component of downtown revitalization and as a means to create an indigenous market for retail and restaurants.

Strategy HN-5.1.

Create a critical mass of downtown housing.

Housing is a crucial component of downtown vitality. When combined with retail, office and entertainment uses, urban housing contributes to the round-the-clock vitality and foot traffic that characterize a successful downtown. The City can encourage downtown housing through zoning, charter amendment, tax incentives, assistance with redevelopment, and marketing.

Action HN-5.1.1. Ensure that the Zoning Code permits and/or encourages urban housing options in the downtown. Urban housing types include rowhouses, multi-family buildings, housing on upper floors of mixed-use buildings, and live-work units that incorporate residential units with offices, artist studios, or services.

Action HN-5.1.2. Offer incentives such as Community Reinvestment Area and Tax Increment Financing to help achieve this goal. The CRA program provides tax abatements for rehabilitation or new construction projects. TIF provides funding for public infrastructure projects that support mixed-use developments. (See HN-1.6)

Action HN-5.1.3. Assist with land assembly for redevelopment projects. Redevelopment often requires public assistance to be financially feasible. Public acquisition and demolition of deteriorated or underutilized properties can be a powerful incentive. It also provides the City with leverage to control urban design.

Action HN-5.1.4. Market downtown housing opportunities. Promotional materials, presentations and walking tours can inform potential developers and residents about the opportunities for living in downtown Mason.

Action HN-5.1.5. Place a charter amendment on the ballot to gain voter approval for increased density in the Community Core and any other area where higher residential density is desired.

