CSU Center for Community Planning and Development
Oberlin Housing Study

COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE
September 15, 2016, 4-8 pm, Oberlin Public Library
Notes KD 9-29-16

SUMMARY

An Open House was held on September 15, 2016 at the Oberlin Public Library. The open house was announced in the Oberlin News Tribune, and through the City's multiple e-mail lists. About 34 people attended, and offered their opinions on community assets, community challenges, and vision for the future related to housing in Oberlin. 20 people also filled out an "Ad Libs" sheet, brainstorming ideas related to housing. (The responses are summarized below).

Assets. Participants were very positive about the city's small town feel, friendly and diverse people, walkability in some areas, great downtown and parks, the bike path and bikeability, the amenities provided by the College, and the presence of some "great neighborhoods".

Challenges. Participants were concerned about gaps in housing availability for middle-income and low-income seniors and low-income families; diminishing diversity in the City; and lack of housing and neighborhood maintenance, especially in some areas, and especially by landlords.

Vision for the future. There were as many comments about neighborhoods and community as there were about housing per se. There is a tension between those who want to see more affordable housing for rent and for sale, and those who would like to see more mainstream single-family housing and green space. (these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but if they are desired by different people, disagreement can arise over plans for individual projects). Many participants felt that a greater diversity of housing types (sustainable homes, tiny homes, apartments, condos, assisted living, co-housing) is desirable. Infill housing was a priority as well as strong maintenance and restoration programs for housing, sidewalks, and community amenities. Increased walkability, community connection, and transportation is desired to make housing more attractive. Some participants noted the importance of jobs and public transportation to attracting and retaining a diverse population.

MAP AND DISCUSSION NOTES

There were five stations in the room, as follows. Each station had a map of the City on a board, and participants could put comments on post-it notes on the board, or could discuss with a facilitator (who was taking notes), or could put longer written comments on 4 x 6" notecards.

1) Entry. Participants were asked to put a sticker on a map of the City denoting where they lived. They were given an overview of the other stations, and given the opportunity to record their e-mail address for further communication.
 2) Assets. Discussion focused on what makes Oberlin a great place to live/work/visit.
3)   Challenges. Discussion focused on what is needed to improve housing and neighborhoods in Oberlin.
4)   Vision for the future. Discussion focused on participants' ideas for housing in Oberlin.
5)   Finish. Participants were given the opportunity to fill out an "Ad-Libs" form which asked about their impressions of Oberlin and housing; or to make additional notes on notecards.

All notes on Boards, taken from conversations, and noted on notecards. These are organized by subject area, and reassigned to the subject area most appropriate. See also photos of the boards.

Station 1: Where Do you Live?
There were 34 attendees who signed in at the open house; 30 of them reported their place of residence using stickers on the map. Stickers were color coded with red (working in Oberlin), blue (student), and green (resident). There were two (red) who identified as working here but living outside of Oberlin, three (red) identified as both working and living in Oberlin and one (blue) was a student. The remaining 24 (green) were residents, and they were scattered among residential areas north of Hamilton. See board photos. Some attendees noted their name and e-mail to be notified of future project events and information. See attached scan.

Station 2: Assets: Oberlin Streetview. What are Oberlin's assets and opportunities?
•   Neighbors who watch out for each other, support seniors
•   Like bike path, common spaces, exercise station by community services
•   Like bike paths – here to Kipton and here to Elyria, kids rode it, very safe
•   Channel 5 [feature,]Park Street [was noted]– "best neighborhood" in Oberlin, vacant property but still great
•   World class culture
•   Ideal community for seniors
•   Senior housing is best for mid- to upper-income
•   Likes interaction with young people from the college
•   It is a "real town square" city if you want it
•   Crime has reduced since 2003 – City locked up kingpins, LMHA renovated housing, drove bad element out, screened new tenants better; better policing needs to continue

_____ (below are taken from map post-its)(location on map in parentheses when relevant)
•   Awesome downtown!
•   Beautiful parks, all over

- (At Kendal) Great place to walk
- (At Kendal) New Park! Southwest corner Maple and N Pleasant St. Save our open spaces – 6 acres!
- (At Kendal) Kendall disadvantage: new park
- Great diversity and positive people
- (NW corner - Union/Prospect): Why are we not growing here? Great neighborhood.
- (at campus) College offerings are great – college adds a lot
- Great to live in a college town
- (Park Street) Advantage Park St – best neighborhood in Oberlin, Channel 5 (plus a second yes!)
- (N side of Lorain Ave, across from Thomas) Great opportunity for new bus. (business?)
- (at Tappan Square) Tappan Square is wonderful
- (at downtown) Downtown beautiful, useful, well kept
- (at Morgan and Cedar) Walkable for people with dogs; love (heart) bike path
- (at Bike Path) Bike Paths
- (at rec center, south of Hamilton) Great parks! Premier!
- Love all walkable parts
- Diversity diversity
- Commuters are candidates who can live here
- (at Shipherd) Beautiful circle
- (at College and Oberlin – Green Acres?) Keep the park

Station 3: Challenges: What is needed? (what needs improvement)
- Need information on sewer/water pipes at houses – City should know more about location of pipes serving homes.
- Remove blighted home and replace with "simple, clean, affordable homes."
- Need to define "sustainable" – clean, safe and affordable would sell and is therefore sustainable.
- City can do more to force landlords to take responsibility.
- Landlord upkeep needs improvement – some North Park homes are noted – encourage landlords/tenants to cut grass/trim shrubs.
- Elderly need support for cost of maintaining homes – can lose homes over violations.
- There is a variability on housing maintenance enforcement between neighborhoods: broken sidewalks, capped pipes in sidewalks – street, sidewalk and right-of-way maintenance is variable.
- Will affordable housing bring in people who strain the tax base?
- There is no place to put tiny/small homes
- Students are inflating rents for everyone
- Dilapidated housing in N Park neighborhood – is it better to raze it, or find buyers wanting to fix it up?

- There is inequity in enforcement across the city
- Kendal is not eco-friendly – chemicals on lawn, lots of wastewater running into sewers, cut trees down, lots of pavement
- Some Central neighborhood housing stock has outlived its usefulness
- Need work on locating owners of abandoned housing. Still paying taxes, so not delinquent – may be paid off mortgage, so no one is watching. County needs to track who pays the tax to locate owner.
- It is an uphill road to bring families in – there are too many other choices for them.
- Former student housing needs upgrades – not attractive to families, likely tear-downs
- Former Senior Housing at Main Street – became Section 8 housing, doesn't feel safe any more
- Former Firelands Senior Housing – became college housing
- Oberlin is losing diversity over time – need affordable housing and jobs to reverse the trend – African Americans are leaving to find both; don't feel valued in town (dilapidated Boys/Girls club, variable maintenance)
- Electricity company has rates too high for families – people don't qualify for assistance but it's too expensive for them.
- There are no jobs to keep people here.
- College bought up homes for student housing, no longer available for everyone
- Need to improve City-College partnership, return to its former strength
- There are no rentals available: Most rents are for low-income (below the $723 average).

_____ (below are taken from map post-its)
- (on Park St) Raze abandoned housing, 70 and 75 N Park
- Incentives for landlords to improve housing and energy efficiency
- Improvement of apartments on W College and E Vine Sts (inspection at turnover??)
- We are in desperate need of senior housing other than Kendal that is affordable. Older people want to move out of homes but stay in Oberlin.
- Affordable rental property
- More owners, less renters
- Housing improvement (maintenance)
- (south of Hamilton) Easier zoning for agricultural buildings
- (at Morgan and Fairway) Repair West Morgan St
- More building inspections with enforcement
- Repairs on current housing stock
- Sidewalk repairs

(moved from Assets board)
- Need affordable senior housing for middle income people, $800 rent/month
- Faculty are NOT from Oberlin, college should hire local
- People need access to jobs i.e. Public transportation to Cleveland/Elyria
- If people aren't working for the College, they can't find jobs

- (at N Park): Disadvantage abandoned housing 70 N Park, 75 N Park (second tag copied – agrees)
- (SE corner Pyle-Amherst and Lorain) Where are parks and play areas on west side of town?
- (SW corner Pyle-Amherst and Lorain) Pyle S. Amherst has no sidewalks and no shoulder. Very bad for pedestrians.
- (on S Main N of Hamilton) Too many flippers and investors
- Need better sidewalks
- (SW corner, Lincoln and Professor) Need sidewalks

Station 4: Vision for the Future
- We need a comprehensive way of aging in place'
- We need more apartments
- We need reasonably priced condos – there are good locations throughout the city. Neighboring communities have nice ones easily under $100K.
- Assisted living that is reasonably affordable would be nice.
- Affordable housing is needed for different household lifestyles: cluster housing w/range of housing types to encourage intergenerational communities
- We don't need more senior or low-income housing – need more residents that will increase tax base
- We need to bring families in
- Green Acres should be for a new Boys/Girls club, would show kids they are valued; see what Elyria and Lorain are doing, identify other models
- City says it needs "Young Professional" housing (upscale?), but also affordable housing for young families is needed
- Strengthen the CDC so people have support for repairs
- Empty lot next to Kendal should be for more low income housing (Kendal bought it just to reserve it from other development?)
- Should plan for future of College-owned empty fields north of Drug Mart
- We need senior middle-income housing that is easy to care for
- Low income housing is a drain on the tax base
- Population needs to grow; need more families, not seniors to support schools. Homes should be on ¼ acre lots, $180-225K.
- We need a database or clearinghouse of vacant homes that are available for sale to people who will renovate. There is a market, but not enough homes.
-
  _____ (below are taken from map post-its)

- Zoning for small (as well as tiny) homes and duplexes
- (at tiny homes photo) Just a fad, put them all together in a park
- (at tiny homes photo) Yay! To tiny homes or tiny lodges or BnB.
- (at tiny homes photo) Tiny homes might bring more young people to live in town.
- People want to live close to downtown and the College, if they work for the College
- Entirely bike friendly community

- (at Affordable Housing photo) Anywhere
- Replacing abandoned homes with affordable homes where Needed (N Park St for example)
- The creation of communities within our neighborhoods where people look out for each other
- All of these housing options are needed
- Every "neighborhood" has a common area for informal gathering and building community
- We don't need to lose any more diversity in Oberlin; affordable senior housing
- Seniors want to move out of their homes but live in Oberlin in a smaller place, other than Kendal
- We need more median income condo's and apartments for transient people, college people, and young families
- Continue connecting communities with sidewalk programs
- (at Sustainable housing photo) Sustainable housing might be great in capturing young people and families with school-going children. Love the idea!
- More apartment complexes like College Park Manor (x43 E College) that 65+ people moving out of homes who want to have less stairs, less repairs, single floor (elevators) places can stay in Oberlin. Oberlin is low on ranch-style dwellings. (second post-it) I agree with this comment.
- Young families want to live in newer homes especially if they are energy efficient
- (NE corner of City) Annex to the East for housing
- City pay more attention to poor quality housing (comments added: Yes! Agree!)
- (on S side of Lorain, W of Orchard) Condo and single family
- (at Green Acres) affordable senior housing, middle income (Green Acres)
- Convert/reuse elementary schools for multi-purpose senior housing
- (at College and Park) Another affordable senior living community in place of Eastwood
- (at Vine and Groveland) A better Concord-type facility
-

(moved from Challenges board)
- Perhaps mixed-generation housing – walkable to town and amenities
- (at Pleasant and Walnut) A park, north side
- (North of Park and Lorain) New School
- need assisted living, less pricey than Kendal (second person agreed)
- (at industrial park) More Jobs
- (at Lorain and Oberlin) Housing
- (at Green Acres site) Eco Village – Co-Housing community at green Acres! With a mix- young, seniors, singles, etc.
- Land trust
- Senior housing
- (South of Morgan, Main) Infill needed/should be prioritized (agree)(Yes) (two different additional comments)

- Oberlin doesn't so much need new housing but it needs to improve the existing housing stock without pushing low income people out. There needs to be creative public/private partnerships for low income Oberlin home owners to make their homes more energy efficient. We need to find ways to beautify the southeast sector of town.
- (downtown, SW of College/Main) need middle priced housing in town
- Oberlin should work with the southern quadrants to improve housing stock for minorities and low-income families. EFFORTS should also be made to connect communities and make them more walkable (i.e. continue with sidewalk projects)
- Affordable housing for young families as well as smaller homes for retired folks for whom Kendal is not a choice
- Zoning laws that are people oriented rather than car oriented and allow for more infilling, various ways to use property, etc.
- Better facilities (schools); better services especially to the south/SE part of town
- Better town and gown locations [Ed. Note: meaning not clear?]
- City govt SHOULD – MUST!! Reinstate change of occupancy inspections, both rental and Sale

Additional participant comments on other topics
- Liked the event today with stations, etc.
- The study underestimated the # of bad housing
- Couldn't find a place to live, so moved out to the township
- Green Acres failed because it was "too nice a neighborhood"
- Concord facility is Senior Housing
- Interview Naomi Sabol of SCA (Sustainable Communities Associates)
- Doesn't look like Kendal was counted in units – is it "group quarters"?
- Doesn't like closed, circular neighborhoods
- Note that form is available for complaints at the building department
- City of Amherst gave tax abatements to bring in new homes, could be model? Examples: Cooper-Foster west of 58; South Lake St; North Ridgeville – Del Webb community.
- Columbia Gas does energy audits for homes
- Oberlin needs to strengthen relationship with Land Bank
- Green Acres was deed restricted to be "for the benefit of children" in perpetuity – does this still apply?

Additional facilitator notes to team:
- Slavic Village Development rehab program as model?
- How many section 8 units are in Oberlin – project based and housing choice vouchers? What is Oberlin's share of Lorain's vouchers?
- What is role of CRS Heritage Home Program in Oberlin?
- Check in with Brad Masi about housing in Oberlin
- Talk to Community Builders – Teri Hamilton Brown regarding Green Acres?

- Gladys Court – African American homeownership development – what's going on there now?
- Check list of multi-family housing detailed by one attendee: West college 8 units, opposite dorm; west end of W College , section 8; Clark Apts corner Spring/College: bad condition; Plum Creek apartments/Clark St: decrepit; East College: 4-unit complexes; Maple Grove: 32 units, on Oberlin Rd behind industrial area; Funk Complex: Lorain east of 58; College Park Manor at Park/College St.
- Can City use PUD ordinance for multi-family housing?
- Do students vote here?
- Note SCA property on College: brownfields issues on site?
- Check: how many kids are on reduced lunch? How does that relate to SNAP, poverty numbers?

RESPONSE CARDS

4" x 6" comment cards were placed around the room and some people chose to make their comments there. Some were dropped in the survey box. Each number is one card.

Card 1
- Concentrate on infill housing, harmonious with each neighborhood
- For low-income, even section 8 dwellings, follow a tenant, not project, model
- Involve Habitat, or imitate Habitat, to create a more stable neighborhood
- Make development part of the City's grid, not a suburban-style offshoot
- Try to create mixed-income neighborhoods. Putting people with similar social disabilities is not beneficial.
- Do not sacrifice greenspace.

Card 2
- Community needs more benches to be walkable
- Need services for the aging population – they need ways to maintain their homes.

Card 3
- Oberlin needs high-quality, non-smoking rental housing on the parcel of land at the corner of North Pleasant and Maple St at Kendal's doorstep. The city of Oberlin should seize the land by eminent domain.

Card 4
Problem – college and kendall [sic] take precedent – i.e. get preferential treatment
Need more homeowners
Too much rental property
- Lives (sic) here 10 years, moved from CLE
- people want to live in working class neighborhood
- lots of discrimination that's frustrating
- good city… can walk dog at night

Card 5
1)   Low-moderate income housing is needed but consider a new model. Don't concentrate it in one place.
2)   People/residents need to be invested and screened
3)   doesn't need to be another Westlake!

Card 6
Need ppl (people?) who are invested in community and who will keep up their homes

Card 7
Better advertising announcements of these meetings!

Card 8
More affordable rental apts or homes for young people, non-Oberlin college students, <$500/month

I have 2 rental properties – full, and I constantly have people asking me if I have anything else to rent out. (I wish I could afford to buy and renovate more property.)
Peg   twodogperson@hotmail.com

Card 9
- I feel we need to provide more moderately priced family homes.
- I would like to see more families come into town and increase school population
- We provide a lot of services for community and city school students. If we do not keep a reasonable tax base we will not be able to continue to provide all that we do.
- Having families move in that can afford to support the local businesses as well.

AD LIB SUMMARY

20 "Ad Lib" surveys were filled out and dropped in the box. Not everyone answered every question.

1.   I think _____ is the greatest thing about Oberlin.

Community (3)   friendly people (2)
The college   progressive character
Oberlin college   the downtown
Diversity (educational, ethnic, political,   small and cosmopolitan
economic)(4)   history/personality
Green public spaces and bike paths   Welcomeness
All that Oberlin college brings   Culture
trees

2.	We really need more _____ housing to make Oberlin the best it can be.

Senior housing

Apartments

Affordable (3)

Variety of (2)

Rental

Affordable senior

Affordable student housing

Apartments and assisted living

Both Multi-family, low-income

"family" owner (3)

reasonable property tax

owner occupied

singles/condos

quality apartments

mixed use

3.	The addition of _____ would make people more likely to move to Oberlin.

Employment (6)

Activities/locations for kids

Neighborhood communities

Better school facilities

Attractive rental property

Stronger schools (2)

Senior-friendly housing

I don't know!

Ultra high-speed internet

Lower taxes

Family homes

Newer housing, or better yet better

maintained homes

Affordable housing

4.	The cost of owning/renting a home in Oberlin is _____.

High(2)

Owning/expensive (2)

Reasonable (4)

Alright, lower than the average in NE Ohio
cities

Decent

Owning/high due to the small tax base

Highest in the county

Renting/high

Affordable

owning/increasing

a strain

exhorbatant (sic)

relatively low

5.   Housing values in Oberlin would increase if _____.

Don't need to
Built better new projects
City policed housing throughout the ENTIRE city
There were more jobs
There was a home improvement program
There was more consistent care and maintenance of homes and property
There was public transport
Rundown houses were razed or repaired
More people wanted to live here

New schools were built
More ownership
We keep raising the quality of our schools
We invested
Better maintenance of existing stock
Sustainable reserve funds were used for energy-efficiency improvements
More funding was available for updates
We attracted more businesses
we assisted low income homeowners to improve their homes

6.   Oberlin will be most successful in meeting residents' housing needs in the future if _____.

The city could/would take action on infill housing
The City actually listened and served
They listen and implement public feedback
It is willing to try new things
City council would work together
If there is more follow through
They cater to small families and students and seniors
It tries new things
we do not allow the process to be held hostage by the ultra-green community of Oberlin
stop catering to the College and Kendal

we do our best to take into account ALL needs
we invest now
better maintenance of existing and annexing property for new housing
answers to 2-5
more people were willing to speak up for what they want
the south end of town was treated like the NW side of town (services etc)
the city listened more to residents than the college
if we gave seniors on a fixed income the ability to make their homes more energy efficient to reduce their energy bill

7. Tell us anything else you'd like us to know here or on the back:

- The college needs to contribute more
- This is a superb place to live that can get better. More bike friendly streets and …[ends]
- Housing in Oberlin is unevenly respected by the City. The problems in lower econ/mixed neighborhoods would not be tolerated in wealthier areas
- Adopt form-based zoning codes
- The City needs to enforce building codes, holding landlords accountable