

City of Oak Ridge City Blueprint Midtown Residential Subarea Draft Plan

Prepared by the City of Oak Ridge

Municipal Planning Commission

Assistance provided by City of Oak Ridge

Community Development Department

October 26, 2017



UNDER CONSTRUCTION
CONTENT WILL BE AVAILABLE SOON

Midtown Residential Area

2.09 square miles

Population Information



2016 Total
Population: 5,028

2016 Population by Gender

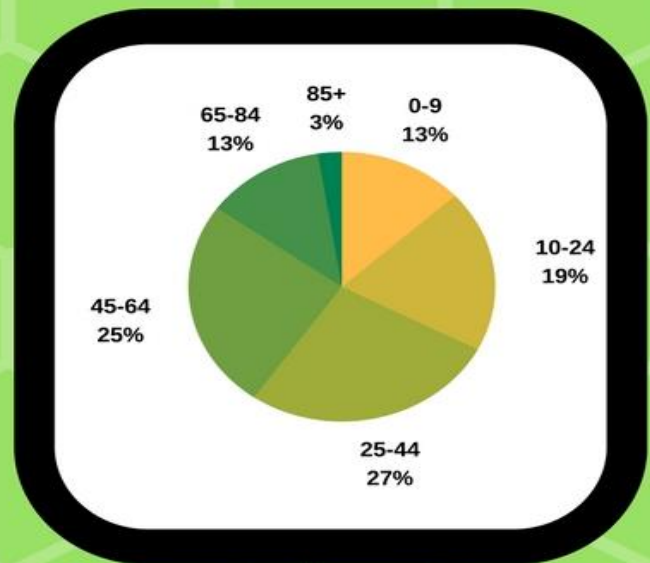


2,393

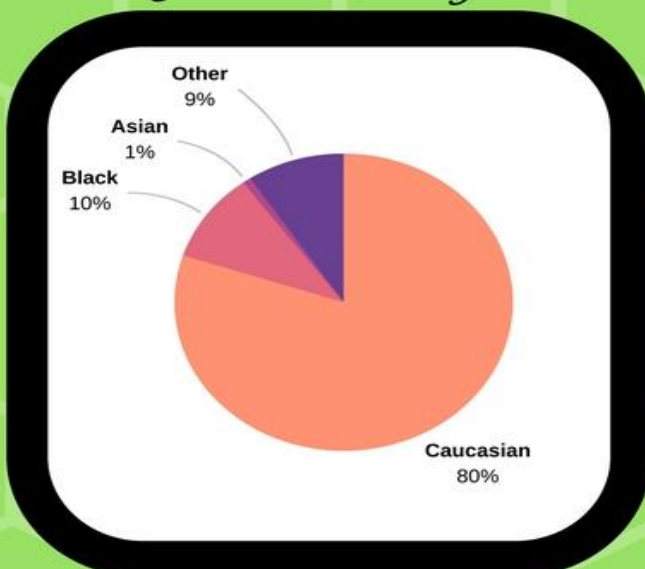


2,635

2016 Population by Age



2016 Population by Race/Ethnicity



Median Household Age:
37.50 years old

Source: Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce

LIVABILITY AND BEAUTIFICATION

Assets

Much of this sub-area consists of streets with a variety of housing and occasional beautiful views. The housing is mostly single family with a substantial inventory of “legacy” homes. More modern units are sprinkled among the older buildings. The more recent housing units tend to be larger and more costly than the older units. There are also a mix of multi-family housing units, including duplex and apartment buildings. This variety of housing is mingled, not separated into districts, although there is a tendency to cluster types. Many of the housing units along the top of Blackoak Ridge have fine views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. There are also very good views from many units on the lower parts of the slope into the mid-block greenbelt open spaces.

A variety of commercial services are close at hand along the Turnpike and Illinois Ave. There are nice city parks and schools within or immediately adjacent to the area. The Children’s Museum is located in the sub-area and there are several churches within or bordering the area.



Challenges

The primary challenge in the area is maintenance of the older housing stock and the appearance of older residential areas. Some older houses are not being well maintained. There is excessive yard and street clutter on several streets. These conditions have a negative impact on the well maintained houses in the neighborhood. Code enforcement, better economic opportunities and some shifts in attitudes will all be parts of the solution, but they will not be easy to achieve.

ECONOMIC VITALITY AND HOUSING

Assets

The main commercial core of the city at the intersection of the Turnpike and Illinois Avenue provides nearby opportunities for employment and business activity. One corner site includes a large supermarket with banking, pharmacy and clinic services while there are restaurants and other services on outparcels. There is a small commercial cluster at the intersection of Illinois and West Outer Drive but a significant part of that space is



vacant.



The housing inventory in the sub-area offers a wide variety of choices. There are many single family units. The legacy inventory tends to be smaller units that will be modest in cost, although some have been modernized and expanded. Newer housing tends to be larger and more costly. Multi-family units are available in duplex, and multi-unit apartment buildings, many of which are more recent than the legacy housing.

Challenges

The most serious challenges in this sub-area relate to “legacy” houses. There are two aspects to the challenge. The first is a product of the age of the structures and the income levels in the area. Many have been well maintained or improved. But a significant number are visibly in need of better maintenance. Code enforcement could become more aggressive, but building owners will have to respond. Owners of rental units may raise rents accordingly and homeowners may struggle to find the funds for significant “catch-up” maintenance.

The second aspect of the problem relates to the poor appearance of some enclaves within the area. These are areas where poor building maintenance is accompanied by excessive “clutter.” The “clutter” consists of the presence of a broad variety of items stored or discarded in the yard or fronting street: automobiles, boats and



trailers, lawn furniture, discarded interior furniture, trash cans and yard waste. Many

of these houses are very small and sit on

small parcels. There is little space in the structures to store items. When new things are acquired older materials migrate to porches and the yard or street.

These enclaves are mingled with predominately sound housing areas that enjoy reasonable maintenance and attractive appearance.



It could be very useful for the whole City for one of these areas to become a demonstration rehabilitation project. Such a project might include increased code

enforcement, finding some mechanism for provision of low interest loans for approved home improvement projects, creation of homeowner associations for specific blocks or streets, and training to encourage and teach homeowners the “hows and whys” of housing rehabilitation. Left unchecked the effects of the “clutter” enclaves will pull down the quality of nearby sound areas. The city has been making progress with the activities of the Land Bank, the “not in our city” clutter removal campaign, and being more aggressive in administrative actions against non-compliance properties. A focused effort in a designated area could help the city and citizens learn together what works and what does not work.

The Applewood Apartment buildings on Hillside at Hunter Circle have been a challenge for the city. The demolition of those units will remove a blighting influence and provide an important redevelopment opportunity for the neighborhood.

TRANSPORTATION

Assets

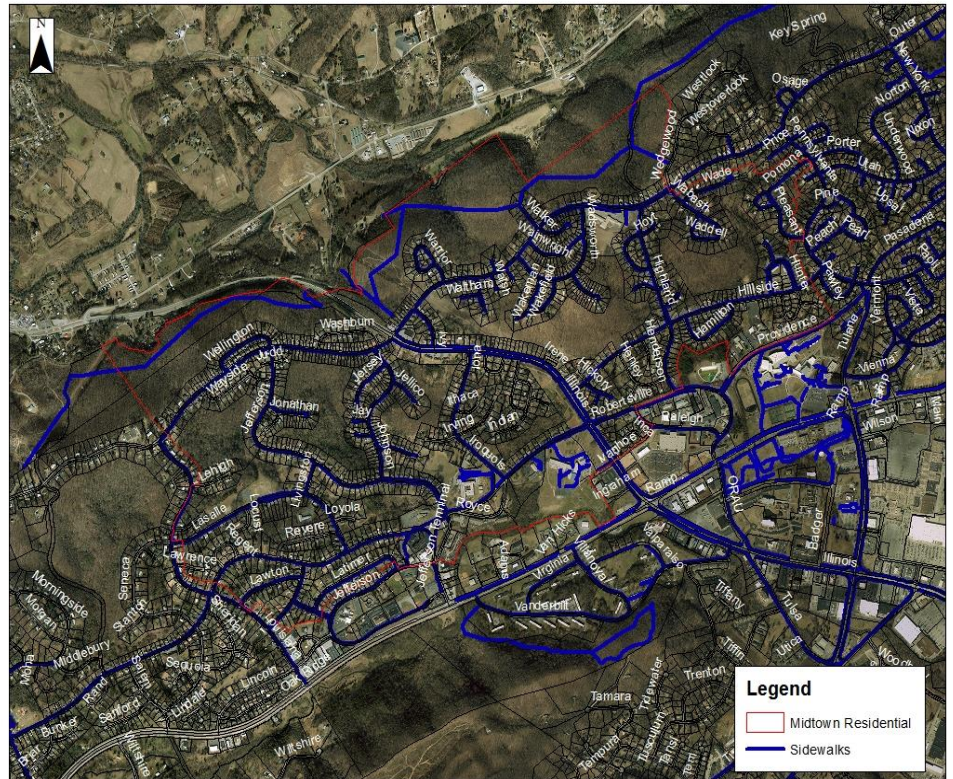
The sub-area is well served by the street system. North Illinois Avenue, an arterial street, bisects the area running north-south as state route 62, providing access to Oliver Springs and other outlying communities. Another arterial street, the Oak Ridge Turnpike, runs parallel to the southern boundary of the subarea. These two streets provide convenient connections to all of the city and the surrounding area. Within the sub-area the residential street network connects to a system of collector streets that give access into and out of the sub-area: West Outer Drive, Robertsville Road, Hillside Drive, Highland Drive, and Jefferson Avenue.

Sidewalks fit the pattern of most of the older areas of the city. Sidewalks are present on at least one side of most streets.

Challenges

There is no public bus service available in the city of Oak Ridge.

The sidewalks suffer the same kinds of problems present in other older parts of the city; occasional broken pavements and encroachment from yards that front them.



RECREATION

The sub-area is served by two city parks, one on each side of the Illinois Avenue divide. Highland View Park on the east side is nicely furnished with a climbing apparatus. LaSalle Park on the west side is a larger facility with soccer fields and play area.

There is a significant amount of greenbelt space in the sub-area; a strip of open land along the ridgeline that forms the outer boundary of the city, and six significant open spaces in the interior of residential blocks. A large number of residential lots have rear frontage to these green spaces. The greenspaces are mostly mature hardwood forest. In some places there are serious incursions of invasive plants, such as kudzu.

The Children's Museum is adjacent to Highland View Park at the intersection of West Outer Drive and Highland Avenue. It is a major asset to the sub-area even as it serves the entire city.



SCHOOLS

The sub-area is well served by public schools. Willow Brook Elementary School and Robertsville Middle School are both located centrally, just west of Illinois and near the Turnpike. Oak Ridge High School is located on the Turnpike just east of Illinois Avenue. All of these schools are well furnished modern facilities. Two day care centers are located near Willow Brook Elementary. At least one of them offers extended hours service.



SAFETY

The condition of public streets and sidewalks has some impact on accidents and public safety. In general they are good. It can be seen from on-site observation that some of the collector streets, such as West Outer Drive, are subject to speeding vehicles because they have long straight segments. The same streets have on-street parking and vertical curves that limit sight distance – conditions that are conducive to accidents. Accidents can also occur where sidewalks are absent or in such condition that people will walk in the street.

Crime can occur anywhere, but it often occurs more frequently where there is poverty and blight. The visibility of blight in the form of decaying buildings and littered private yards can produce a fear of crime that discourages walking in a neighborhood or investing in upgrades to adjoining properties. It is a part of a downward spiral that costs the entire community. There are a few streets in the sub-area where the frequency of police calls and utility disconnects is noticeably higher than in most streets of the city. These problem streets tend to be the same places where blighting characteristics are present.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Midtown residential sub-area is a centrally located older area of the city. It is almost entirely residential and greenbelt. It has features that can help its maintenance and restoration. It has good access to goods, services and employment. The housing stock is varied by density and quality. There are many nice residential streets. Most of the problems in the area arise from the need to maintain an older public infrastructure and housing stock where many households have limited resources. It is recommended that:

- The City continue to maintain and improve public infrastructure,
- The City develop a demonstration housing redevelopment project for implementation in the Highland View area. This plan should consider the integrated activities of aggressive code enforcement, infrastructure improvements, demolition of badly deteriorated housing units, provision of low interest loans for approved home improvement projects, use of historic tax credits, and technical assistance to homeowners and apartment owners. The devising of this plan should involve the participation of the ORHA and Development Corporation, the Land Bank, the Community Development Department, and other related agencies, and
- Instigate a greenbelt maintenance program that would begin an effort to control and eliminate invasive plant species, prevent encroachment into the greenbelt, and provide definition and maintenance of trails.

Midtown Residential Area

2.09 square miles

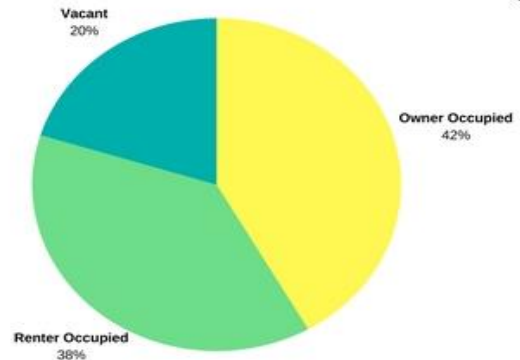
Housing Information

2016 Average Family Size:

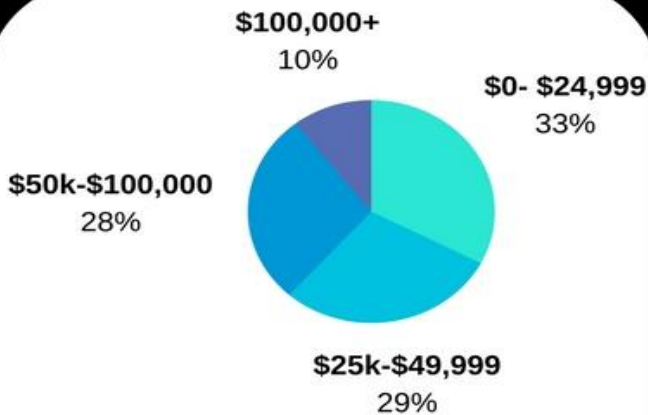
3.17



2016 Housing Unit Information



2016 Households by Income



Median Household Income:

\$51,514

Median Home Value:

\$98,817