

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 2017, the City of Manassas received a Community Impact Grant from the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing housing conditions and trends in the Downtown South neighborhood. The neighborhood is adjacent to the City's central business district, Historic Downtown Manassas, which has seen an increase in and continued demand for new market-rate housing. Following a thorough assessment of existing conditions, this study provides City staff, leaders, key community partners and community members with a series of detailed neighborhood preservation and revitalization strategies specific to the Downtown South neighborhood.

Neighborhood Profile

The neighborhood profile provides an assessment of demographic and economic characteristics, housing trends, and quality of life indicators in Downtown South. The majority of the data used in developing this profile was sourced from the City of Manassas and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). Data provided by the City was analyzed on a parcel-by-parcel basis, and ACS estimates were examined at the Block Group and Census Tract levels. Key findings from each section of the chapter are highlighted below.

Demographic and Economic Characteristics

- Downtown South is much more densely populated compared to the City as a whole. Its population growth between 2010 and 2015 accounted for 44.4% of the City's population increase in that same time period.
- Families with children account for just over half of all households in the neighborhood.
- Residents of Downtown South tend to have lower incomes than those in other City neighborhoods. The City's median income is \$72,890 compared to a median income of \$59,459 in Downtown South.
- The neighborhood is racially and ethnically diverse. About 60% of residents reported their ethnicity as Hispanic compared to 33% in the City overall.
- Most households in Downtown South – about 66% of all households in the neighborhood – rent their homes.

Housing Trends

- Most of the housing stock within Downtown South is located within condominium developments governed by homeowners' associations or community councils. The largest development in the neighborhood is Georgetown South, which occupies almost a third of the land area and is comprised of attached brick townhouses.
- Vacancy rates are lower in Downtown South than in the City overall at 1.1% compared to 6.4%, which indicates a high demand for housing within the neighborhood.

- Foreclosures and similar transactions indicating market distress have declined since 2012, but still make up more than half of all sales transactions in Downtown South.

Quality of Life

- About 43% of all households in Downtown South are cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs.
- According to the Virginia Department of Health, households in Downtown South have lower access to opportunity compared to the City. However, the neighborhood has excellent access to transit and amenities.
- The crime rate in Downtown South decreased by more than 40% between 2013 and 2016.

Housing and Property Conditions

Downtown South's 1,537 parcels were visually surveyed in mid-September of 2017 to develop an understanding of exterior housing conditions in the neighborhood. Each residential structure in the study area was assessed from street level, noting visible deficiencies using a standardized data collection form. Each residential structure was assigned an overall property condition rating – Good, Fair, Poor, or Deteriorating – based on the number and severity of deficiencies. Key findings from the survey are summarized below:

- The field survey found that the vast majority (98.4%) of residential properties in the neighborhood are in good condition. Most of the properties in fair, poor, or deteriorating condition were dispersed throughout the neighborhood.
- There were two clusters of properties in fair to deteriorating condition at the time of the survey: six single-family homes along Liberty Street, and three single-family homes along Grant Avenue. However, the City is proactive with code enforcement and is already working with property owners to address these issues.
- The most common deficiencies found during the field survey were minor issues such as peeling paint or damaged siding.

Existing Resources

Several programs and services related to housing preservation, development, and affordability are available to City residents, including those who live in the Downtown South neighborhood. These include federally-funded programs such as the Neighborhood Housing Rehabilitation Program and First-Time Homebuyer Program, which are administered by Prince William County, and a rental Housing Choice Voucher program, which is managed by the City. Funding for these programs is extremely limited – roughly five households are assisted through the rehabilitation and homebuyer programs each year, and the waiting list for the voucher program is so long that it is closed indefinitely to new applicants.

Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) is a non-profit organization that serves the entire Commonwealth of Virginia through a multitude of financing and community development programs. Programs active in the City include the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTC), which provides developers of affordable rental housing with a federal income tax credit. There are currently two LIHTC developments in the Downtown South neighborhood, Manassas Arms and South Main Commons.

Local community development initiatives include a partial tax exemption program for residents who rehabilitate homes in older neighborhoods, proactive blight abatement and property code enforcement, and the provision of links to housing and neighborhood resources on the City's website. Nonprofit housing and community development organizations are also active within the Downtown South neighborhood. Habitat for Humanity, Project Mend-A-House, People, Inc., and Catholics for Housing assist low- and moderate-income residents with home repair and self-sufficiency.

Recommendations

The recommendations chapter builds on the existing resources summarized above and provides additional strategies for neighborhood preservation and revitalization. Target Preservation Areas (TPAs) and Target Revitalization Areas (TRAs) are established in order to focus limited resources in as effective a manner as possible. However, as most strategies require significant resources for successful implementation, it may not be possible to undertake every recommendation without increased funding and staffing levels.

Summary of Recommendations

Target Preservation Area Strategies

Preservation areas are clusters of older housing units that experience some concentration of issues related to property condition and maintenance. Renter occupancy rates are higher compared to the City overall, and thus residents here may be more susceptible to displacement that may occur due to the neighborhood's proximity to the growth in Old Town Manassas.

- 1 Continue targeted code enforcement
- 2 Focus housing rehabilitation activities in TPAs
- 3 Focus homebuyer assistance in select TPAs
- 4 Preserve affordability of homes in Georgetown South
- 5 Develop a streetscape plan for the Douglas Street, Ellicott and Garden, and Merrimack TPAs

Target Revitalization Area Strategies

Revitalization areas have one or more of the following characteristics: vacant parcels, clusters of properties in poor or deteriorating condition, functionally obsolete buildings, or land values that are greater than building values. Public and private investments in these areas could improve the quality of life for existing residents, attract new residents, and provide an opportunity for mixed-income housing.

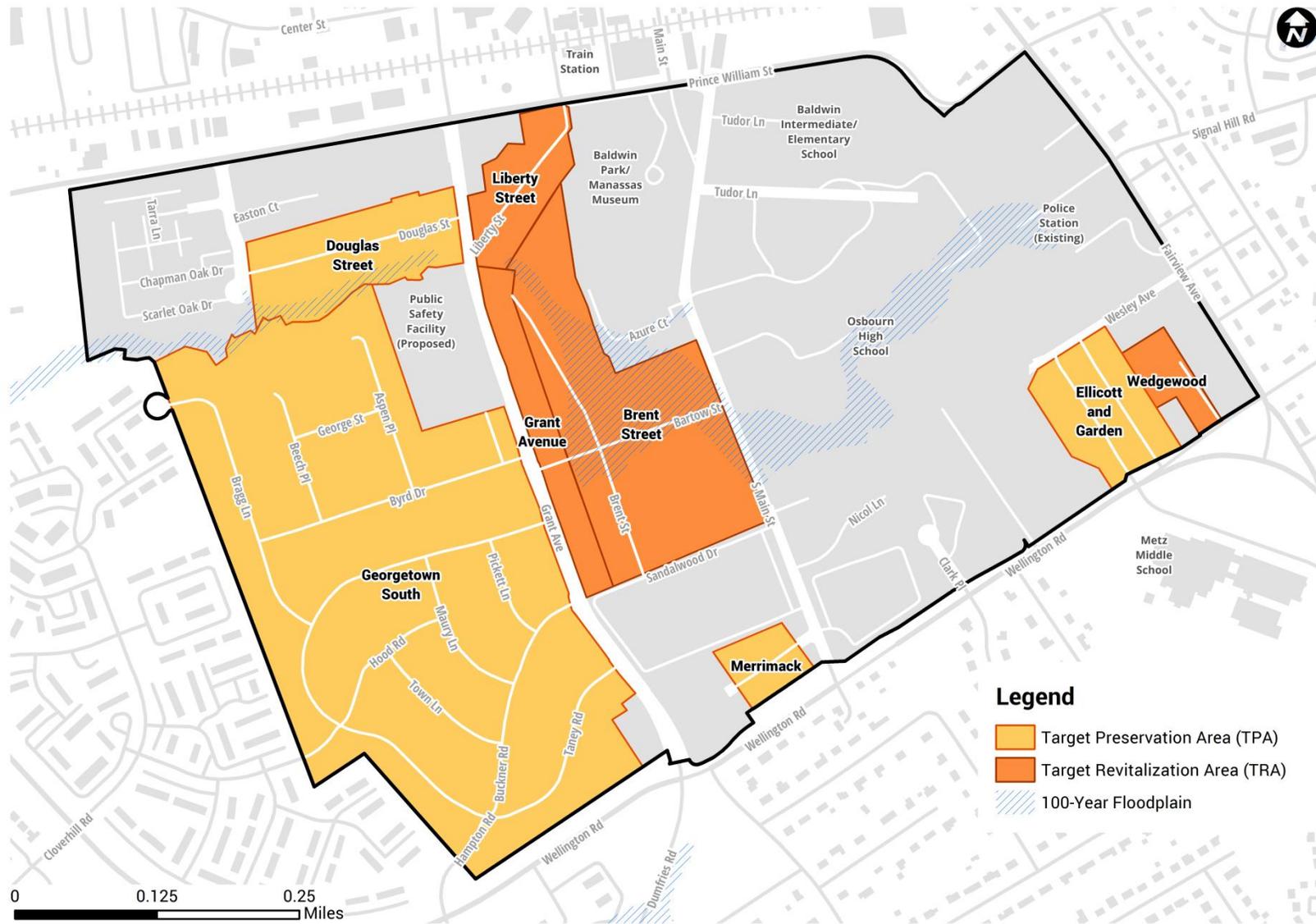
- 1 Support the development of mixed-income workforce housing
- 2 Modify the Residential Real Estate Abatement Program
- 3 Adopt an Affordable Dwelling Unit ordinance
- 4 Develop a streetscape plan for Liberty Street

Neighborhood-Wide Strategies

Several community development strategies and capacity-building efforts apply to both TPAs and TRAs and should be implemented throughout the Downtown neighborhood.

- 1 Establish a curb appeal matching grant program
- 2 Establish a pilot matching grant program for Homeowners' Associations
- 3 Develop design guidelines for infill development and home repair
- 4 Develop a comprehensive housing assistance guide
- 5 Incorporate the needs and recommendations outlined in this document into the City's comprehensive plan

Downtown South Neighborhood - Target Preservation and Revitalization Areas



Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization Toolbox

Building on the City’s existing housing programs will enable the implementation of preservation and revitalization strategies discussed above and provide an institutional structure for implementing the recommendations in the Downtown South neighborhood and the City as a whole. The Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization Toolbox includes a variety of tools for preservation and revitalization. This quick reference guide provides a summary of the resources that are discussed in more detail in the Recommendations chapter of this study.

Tool	Areas	Target Audience	Partners	Authorizing Legislation	Additional Information
Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area	Downtown South	Homeowners Renters	County HUD	24 CFR 91.215(g)	https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3329/cdbg-memorandum-neighborhood-revitalization-strategy-areas/
Housing and Redevelopment Authorities	Downtown South	Homeowners Renters	Economic Development Authority	Virginia Code, Section 36-4.1	https://vacode.org/2016/36/1/
Housing Trust Fund	Preservation	Homeowners	VHDA	Local Ordinance	http://www.housingvirginia.org/research-tags/housing-trust-fund/
Affordable Dwelling Unit Ordinance	Revitalization	Developers	Developers	Virginia Code, Section 15.2-2305	http://www.housingvirginia.org/research-tags/inclusionary-zoning/

Tool	Areas	Target Audience	Partners	Authorizing Legislation	Additional Information
Community Land Trusts	Preservation	Homeowners	Lenders VHDA Private Foundations Habitat for Humanity People Inc. Catholics for Housing	N/A	http://www.housingvirginia.org/research-tags/community-land-trusts/
Land Banks	Preservation	Homeowners	VHDA Habitat for Humanity People Inc. Catholics for Housing	Virginia Code, Section 15.2-7501	https://vacode.org/2016/15.2/IV/75/
Rental Rehabilitation	Preservation	Renters	County VHDA HUD Project Mend-A-House Habitat for Humanity	N/A	https://www.lynchburghousing.org/programs/rental-rehabilitation.html

Tool	Areas	Target Audience	Partners	Authorizing Legislation	Additional Information
Community Homeownership Revitalization Program	Preservation	Homeowners	City VHDA	N/A	https://www.vhda.com/BusinessPartners/GoandNon-Profits/CommunityOutreach/Pages/Grant-Programs.aspx
Mixed-Income/Mixed-Use Financing	Revitalization	Renters	VHDA Developers	N/A	https://www.vhda.com/BusinessPartners/MFDevelopers/MFFinancing/Pages/MFFinancing.aspx

Tool	Areas	Target Audience	Partners	Authorizing Legislation	Additional Information
New Markets Tax Credits	Revitalization	Renters	People Inc. Dept. of Treasury Developers	26 U.S. Code Section 45D	https://www.cdfifund.gov/programs-training/Programs/new-markets-tax-credit/Pages/default.aspx
Public/Private Partnerships	Revitalization	Developers	Developers	N/A	https://americas.uli.org/centers-initiatives/successful-publicprivate-partnerships/