7 Neighborhoods & Housing

This chapter discusses the desired pattern of development in newer and older neighborhoods and rural areas and strategies for meeting future housing demand.

Introduction

One of the essential elements of the community and LPlan 2040 is housing. Ensuring safe, adequate, and affordable housing is an important function in maintaining the vitality of neighborhoods and the city as a whole. The key to both developing and existing urban neighborhoods is land use diversity. For existing neighborhoods, the diversity is often already in place, but efforts must focus on maintaining this balance and variety. The diversity of architecture, housing types and sizes are central to what makes existing neighborhoods great places to live. New construction should continue the architectural variety, but in a manner that is sympathetic to the character of existing neighborhoods.

The community continues its commitment to strong, diverse neighborhoods. Neighborhoods remain one of Lincoln's great strengths and their conservation is fundamental to this plan. The health of Lincoln's varied neighborhoods and districts depends on implementing appropriate and individualized policies.

In existing neighborhoods, preservation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of existing housing should continue to be the focus. Infill and

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redevelopment needs to respect the street pattern, block sizes, and development standards of the area, such as parking at the rear and porches, windows, and doors on the front street side. Diversity of land uses, including commercial and special needs housing, is important provided the use fits within the character of the block and neighborhood.

Guiding Principles

- Encourage public investment in neighborhood infrastructure and services such as parks, pools, libraries, and neighborhood business districts.
- Continue policies such as landmark districts and down-zonings that maintain a mix of single-family and multi-family housing and support home ownership and the preservation and enhancement of historic properties.
- Promote sustainability and resource conservation by preserving and improving housing in existing neighborhoods.
- Distribute and preserve affordable housing throughout the community to be near job opportunities and to provide housing choices within existing and developing neighborhoods.
- Make available a safe residential dwelling for all citizens.
- Provide a wide variety of housing types and choices for an increasingly diverse and aging population.
- Provide flexibility to the marketplace in siting future residential development locations.
- Strive for predictability for neighborhoods and developers for residential development and redevelopment.
- Encourage acreages to develop in appropriate areas and preserve farmland.
- Preserve areas designated for multi-family and special needs housing in approved plans to support a distributed choice in affordable housing.
- Provide safe and decent affordable and special needs housing for low- and moderate-income households.

Housing Trends

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the number of housing units in Lancaster County rose from 104,217 units in 2000 to 122,746 units in 2014 – an increase in the housing stock of 18,529 units. The increase in housing units predominantly occurred in the City of Lincoln. Lincoln had 112,122 housing units in 2014 or 91.3 percent of the housing units in Lancaster County. This ratio is consistent with data from 2000 when about 91.3 percent of the housing units (95,199 units) in Lancaster County were in Lincoln. During the planning period, there will continue to be a need to accommodate Special Needs Housing, which generally includes, but is not limited to: low income , elderly housing, assisted living facilities, group homes, domestic shelters, and children's homes.

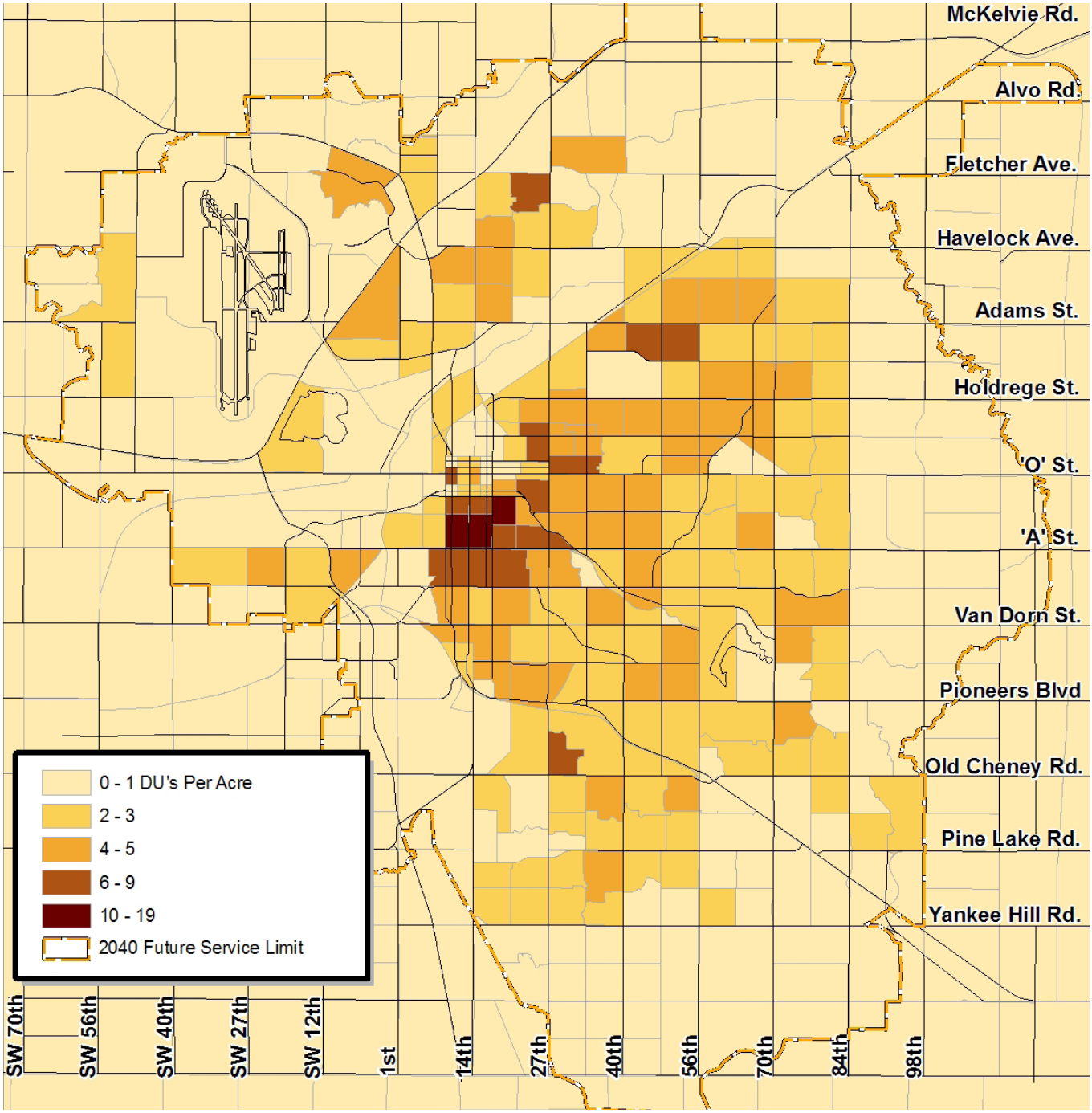
In 2014, housing occupancy for Lancaster County stood at 94.9 percent, with a vacancy rate of 5.1 percent. This rate is slightly lower than the 95.2 occupancy rate in 2000 and 95.4 occupancy rate in 1990.

The map on the following page shows the number of dwelling units per gross acre within traffic zones as of January 1, 2016. Traffic zones vary in size from as small as four blocks in the Downtown area, up to one-half of a square mile in suburban areas, and as large as several square miles in the County. The total area in each traffic zone includes all land uses, such as commercial, industrial and rights-of-way for roads in addition to residential areas. Thus, this measure is considered the "gross" density per acre. (In contrast, "net" density describes the total number of dwelling units divided by the number of residential acres, excluding all other uses.)

The density in the urban area currently ranges from 1 to 3 dwelling units per gross acre in developing neighborhoods to as much as 19 per gross acre in neighborhoods nearest to Downtown. Existing

neighborhoods generally have a greater density than developing areas. Many developing areas have low densities at this time because they are not fully developed.

Preserving our existing housing stock is one of the best ways to provide for affordable housing in our community. Over the last few years the City has been working on improvements to housing code enforcement. These efforts include an increase in fines for violations of property maintenance code and adoption of the "international" property maintenance code which is more comprehensive and stricter than the previous code. The Building and Safety Department has begun to institute more "performance-based" inspections of multifamily rental units. Performance-based inspections allow



Map 7.1: Density by Traffic Zone

a property owner who has a good inspection to have inspections every two years, while property owners with poor inspections are inspected every six months. These are big steps to improving quality affordable housing, but there may be other strategies that should be explored.

The efficiency of our existing housing stock could also be improved by allowing accessory dwelling units (ADU). ADUs allow for multiple generations of a family to live on the same property, provide smaller, more affordable units as part of an existing neighborhood fabric, and more efficiently and cost effectively utilize existing infrastructure and resources.

Strategies for Neighborhoods and Housing

- Discourage residential development in areas of environmental resources such as endangered species, saline wetlands, native prairies, and in floodplain corridors.

  - Encourage preservation or restoration of natural resources within or adjacent to development.
- Provide adequate spacing from pipelines and areas where hazardous chemicals could be used and stored; notify property owners and residents along the pipeline about hazards and emergency actions.
- Encourage substantial connectivity and convenient access to neighborhood services (stores, schools, parks) from residential areas.
- Create housing opportunities for residents with special needs throughout the city that are integrated into and compatible with residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage mixed use commercial centers to incorporate special needs housing where they could serve as a transitional use to less intensive residential development and benefit from walkable access to the commercial area and transit.
- Incorporate interconnected networks of streets, transit, trails, and sidewalks with multiple connections within and between neighborhoods and commercial centers to maximize access and mobility to provide alternatives to and reduce dependence upon the automobile.
- Provide sidewalks on both sides of all streets, or in alternative locations as allowed through design standards or review process.
- Develop and utilize a measurement tool to evaluate proposed projects and assess existing and proposed neighborhoods in terms of how well they achieve the Plan's goals for design and sustainability.
- Encourage public/private partnerships with housing entities such as *Lincoln Housing Authority*, *Affordable Housing Initiatives*, *Habitat for Humanity*, and *NeighborWorks Lincoln*.
- Design and locate special needs housing to enhance the surrounding neighborhood.
- Make available opportunities for individuals and/or organizations to raise local food.
- Provide for more education of the public about affordable housing and code enforcement.
- Pursue more proactive code enforcement for maintenance of existing buildings.
- Provide for accessory dwelling units with proper design standards.
- Principles and strategies for neighborhoods and housing associated with other chapters:
  1. Commercial Development (see the *Business & Economy* chapter).
  2. Greater Downtown (see the *Mixed Use Redevelopment* chapter).

3. Mixed Use Redevelopment Nodes and Corridors (see the *Mixed Use Redevelopment* chapter).

Accessory Dwelling Units

An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is an additional, self-contained housing unit that is secondary to the main residence. ADUs are sometimes referred to as "Granny Flats" or "Mother-In-Law Units" since many ADUs were initially constructed to provide for family members.

ADUs can take many forms. In some cases, an ADU can be attached as an addition to the house or as a second story over a garage. The garage itself may be converted to an ADU or, in rare cases, the ADU may occupy a basement if codes can be met. An ADU can even be a section of the main house that has been separated from the main living space. Additionally, an ADU can be a stand-alone unit like a small house or cottage. Alleys provide excellent opportunities for ADU development with an access that is separate from the main house. Lincoln already hosts a handful of grandfathered ADUs and five "guest houses" approved on the sites of designated historic homes.

An ADU is different from a duplex in two main ways. First, the two units that make up a duplex are usually relatively equal in size and one unit does not usually dominate the other on the lot, whereas an ADU is typically limited in size. Second, both units in a duplex may be rented. For ADUs in some communities, the owner must reside either in the ADU or in the main house. ADUs should be considered on both existing and developing neighborhoods as an additional choice of housing.

Strategies for Accessory Dwelling Units

- Examine opportunities to revise the zoning code to legalize new ADUs where appropriate and adopt design standards to facilitate the harmonious implementation of this housing choice.
- Develop a system for tracking, monitoring, or certifying ADU's to ensure they remain in compliance with the adopted codes and standards.

Developing Neighborhoods

A neighborhood is more than housing – great neighborhoods combine all the elements of parks, education, commercial areas, environmental resources, and housing together in one place. Thus, principles from multiple other chapters and the strategies for neighborhoods and housing in the preceding section also apply here.

Developing neighborhoods should have a variety of housing types and sizes, plus commercial and employment opportunities. Developing a pedestrian orientation of buildings and street networks that provides substantial connectivity is also a priority for developing areas.

There are notable differences between some types of housing and traditional multiple-family residential developments. Typically, special needs housing such as assisted living facilities will have fewer occupants per unit and will generate less traffic than housing built for the general marketplace. Thus, a location that is deemed appropriate for special needs housing may not be deemed appropriate for other types of higher-density housing such as apartments or town homes.

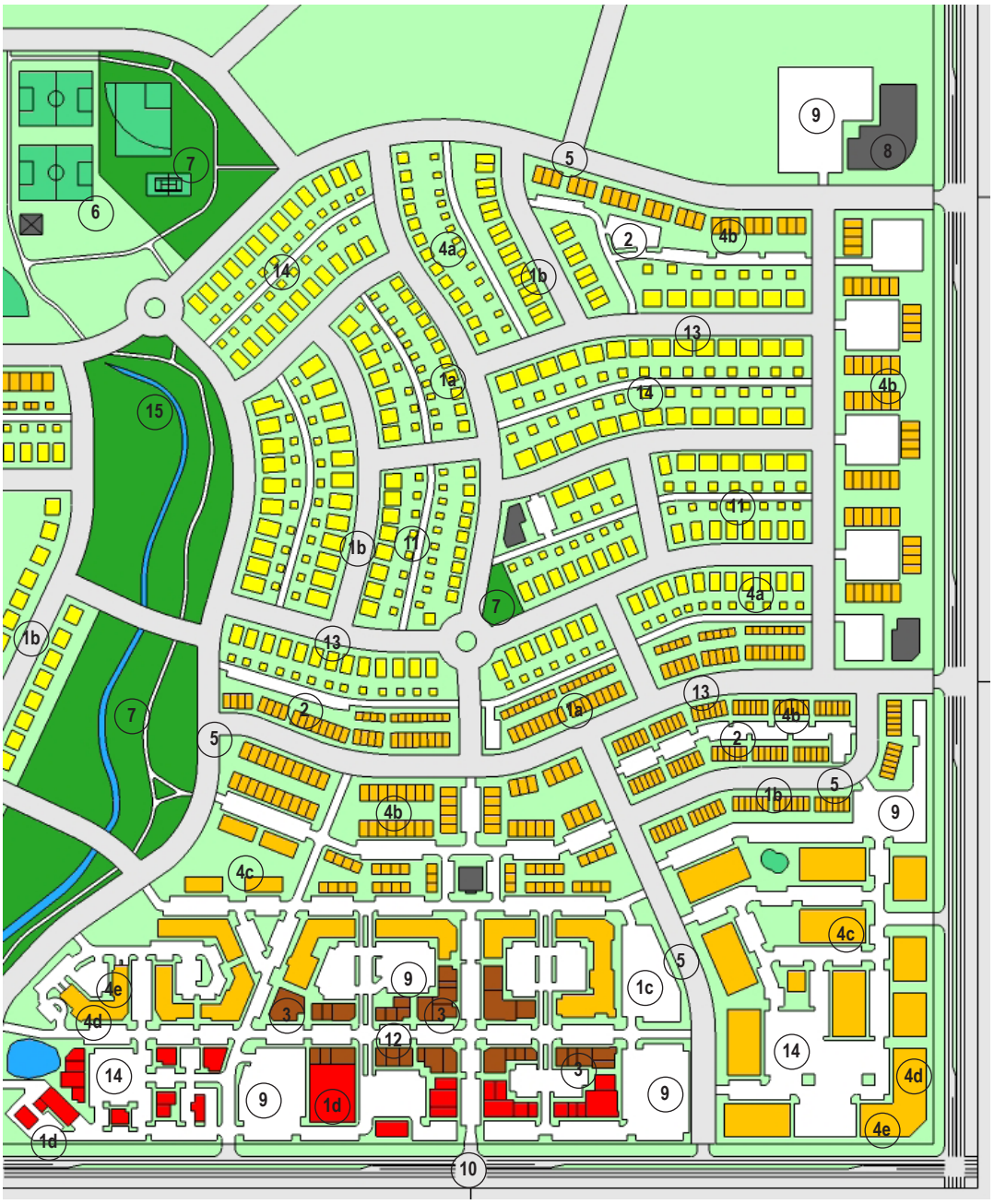
Strategies for Developing Neighborhoods

- Provide for an adequate supply of affordable land and timely infrastructure improvements.

The image on these pages is an example of how these strategies might be applied in a developing neighborhood:

Figure 7.1: Detailed Strategies for Developing Neighborhoods (pages 7.6 and 7.7)

1. Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in neighborhoods:
   a. Similar uses on the same block face.
   b. Similar housing types face each other: single-family faces single-family, change to different use at rear of lot.
   c. Commercial parking lots should not intrude into residential areas where residential uses predominate the block face.
   d. More intense commercial uses (gas stations, big box stores, car wash, fast food, etc.) may not be compatible due to impact on nearby housing.
2. Encourage pedestrian orientation with parking at rear of residential and neighborhood commercial uses.
3. Residential mixed use included in commercial center.
4. Encourage a mix of housing types all within one area:
   a. Single-family and duplex.
   b. Attached single-family and row house units.
   c. Apartments.
   d. Special needs housing.
   e. Encourage apartments and special needs housing near commercial areas and along arterials.



5. Sidewalks on both sides of all streets.
6. Encourage shared facilities (city parks and school sites) .
7. Maintain parks and open space within walking distance of all residences.
8. Encourage public and semi-public uses (elementary schools, churches) as centers of neighborhood.
9. Encourage shared parking wherever possible.
10. Integrate transit stops into commercial center, near arterial.
11. Develop with shorter block lengths for connectivity.
12. Encourage shopping and employment uses to be within the neighborhoods and within walking distance to most residences.
13. Utilize streets for parking.
14. Encourage alley access and shared driveways to reduce interruptions to pedestrians, to preserve on street parking capacity, and to reduce automobile conflict points.
15. Support the preservation or restoration of natural resources.

- Single-Family/Duplexes/Garages
- Multi-Family/Assisted Living/Rowhouses/Garages
- Residential/Commercial Mixed Use
- Commercial Uses (office, retail, and service)
- Public/Semi-Public Buildings
- Green Space/Natural Resources
- Other Open Space
- Public Right of Way: includes sidewalks, street trees, on-street parking, and street paving
- Parking Lots/Driveways/Private Alleys
- Arterial Streets

Note: This image is conceptual and does not depict a specific Lincoln neighborhood, but has been developed from examples from several neighborhoods throughout the city and elsewhere. The intent of the image is to provide examples of situations in newer neighborhoods that illustrate a range of development outcomes.

- Structure incentives to encourage higher densities to make greater use of the community's infrastructure.
- Encourage new development to achieve densities greater than five dwelling units per gross acre.
- Develop new design standards that encourage density, optimize infrastructure costs, and help lower the overall cost of property development.
- Implement procedures to provide notice to potential buyers about the location of pipelines and hazardous chemical use and storage, and to encourage adequate spacing be provided from pipelines and areas where hazardous chemicals could be used and stored.

Existing Neighborhoods

For existing neighborhoods, housing diversity is often already in place, but efforts must focus on maintaining this balance and variety. The diversity of architecture, housing types and sizes are central to what makes existing neighborhoods great places to live. New construction should continue the architectural variety, but in a manner that is sensitive to the existing neighborhoods. *Neighborhood Design Standards* for areas within Lincoln's 1950 corporate limits were adopted in 2004. Areas annexed after that are not currently covered by Neighborhood Design Standards.

Preserving existing housing and promoting homeownership should remain the focus in established neighborhoods, with modest opportunities for infill and redevelopment. "Down-zonings" in established neighborhoods to help preserve a mix of single family homes and apartments have occurred in several areas over the past decade. In acknowledgement of this trend and community desire, the City's primary strategy for residential infill and redevelopment outside of the Greater Downtown is to encourage the redevelopment and reuse of sites and buildings in commercial areas in order to create new mixed use centers that are compatible and complementary to adjacent neighborhoods. 1,000 well-designed and appropriately-placed dwelling units are projected for neighborhoods in the existing city — a one percent increase to the existing housing stock—on vacant lots, expansions of existing apartment complexes with undeveloped land, and through accessory dwelling units. Residential redevelopment in existing neighborhoods tends to occur naturally without public intervention over a long period of time, as individual properties become obsolete or are acquired piecemeal by private or nonprofit developers.

Vacant Land

Currently, there are roughly 333 acres of vacant residentially-zoned land in the existing built-out portion of the City. Some of the land is in the floodplain and lots scattered throughout the City. The Plan envisions a portion of this land will be utilized by 2040 since it has access to urban services today.

Strategies for Vacant Land

- Identify and maintain an inventory of vacant residentially-zoned land within the existing city; make the inventory available to the public, housing agencies, and developers searching for infill sites.
- Minimize impacts on flood storage when vacant land in the floodplain is developed.

Redevelopment in Existing Neighborhoods

Infill and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods typically occur through an incremental and

organic process over long periods of time. This process is chiefly led by the private and nonprofit development sector. Good design and appropriate placement are key to successful redevelopment. Widely varying techniques are utilized to achieve redevelopment in existing neighborhoods such as the following examples:

1. De-conversion of multi-family back to single-family homes (resulting in a net decrease in density);
2. Replacement of a single-family home with a new single-family home (resulting in no net change in density);
3. Tearing down more than one structure and building a new multi-family building or a group of other housing types (resulting in a net increase in density); or
4. Existing multi-family complexes identifying open areas to develop additional buildings on the existing property (resulting in a net increase in density).

Strategies for Redevelopment in Existing Neighborhoods

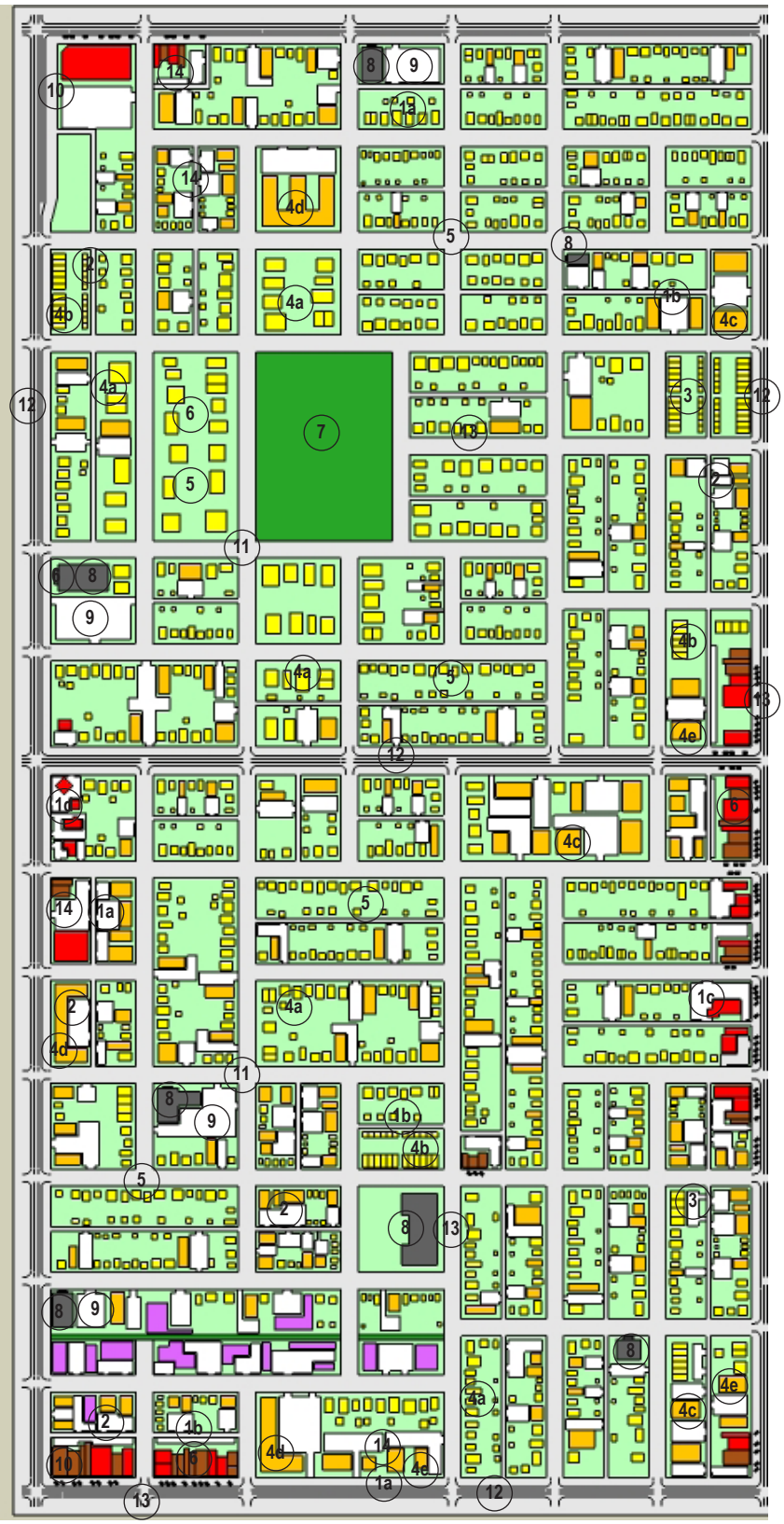
- Promote the preservation, maintenance and renovation of existing housing and neighborhoods throughout the city, with special emphasis on low and moderate income neighborhoods.
- Maintain and enhance infrastructure and services in existing neighborhoods.
- Encourage well-designed and appropriately placed density, including within existing apartment complexes and special needs housing where there is land available for additional buildings or expansions.
- Recognize that broad economic diversity within existing neighborhoods encourages reinvestment and improves quality of life for all residents while acknowledging the need for affordable housing.
- Preserve, protect and promote the character and unique features of urban neighborhoods, including their historical and architectural elements.
- Promote the continued use of single-family dwellings and all types of buildings, to maintain the character of neighborhoods and to preserve portions of our past. Building code requirements for the rehabilitation of existing buildings should protect the safety of building occupants, while recognizing the need for flexibility that comes with rehabilitating existing buildings.

- Implement the housing and neighborhood strategies as embodied in the City of Lincoln Consolidated and Annual Action Plans and subsequent housing and neighborhood plans. These plans provide the core for affordable housing and neighborhood preservation actions for public and private agencies.
- Retain existing predominately single-family blocks in some existing neighborhoods, in order to maintain the mix of housing types.

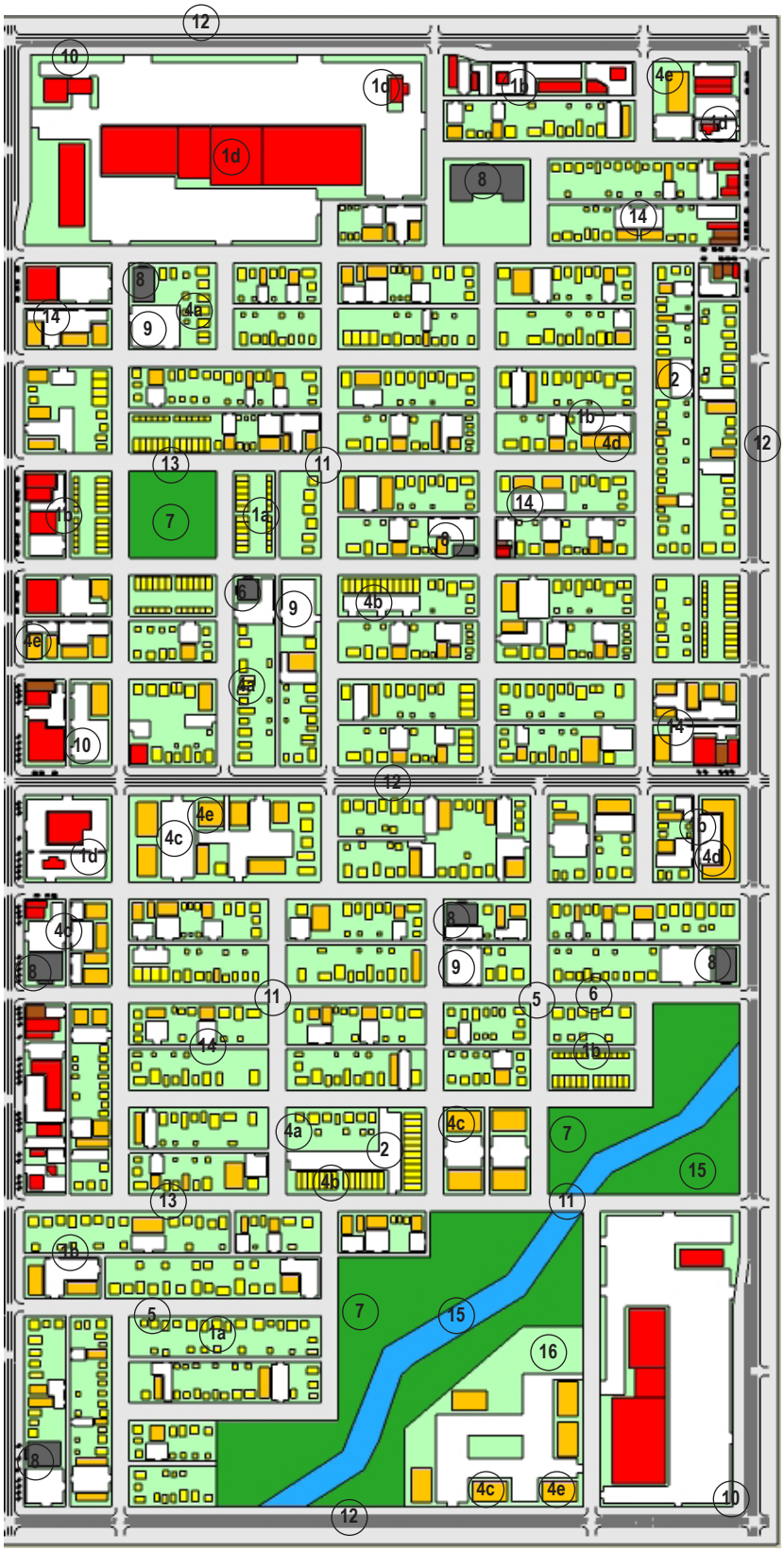
The image on the following pages is an example of how these strategies might work together in an existing neighborhood:

Figure 7.2 Detailed Strategies for Existing Neighborhoods (pages 7.10 and 7.11)

1. Encourage a mix of compatible land uses in neighborhoods:
   a. Similar uses on the same block face.
   b. Similar housing types face each other: single family faces single family, change to different use at rear of lot.
   c. Commercial parking lots should not intrude into residential areas where residential uses predominate a block face.
   d. More intense commercial uses (gas stations, big box stores, car wash, fast food, etc.) may not be compatible due to impact on nearby housing.
2. Encourage pedestrian orientation with parking at rear of residential and neighborhood commercial uses.
3. Redevelopment and infill should strive for compatibility with the character of the neighborhood and adjacent uses (i.e., parking at rear, similar setback, height and land use).
4. Encourage a mix of housing types all within one area:
   a. Single-family and duplex.
   b. Attached single-family and rowhouse units.
   c. Apartments.
   d. Special needs housing.
   e. Encourage apartments and special needs housing near commercial areas and along arterials.
5. Encourage retention of single-family uses where appropriate in order to maintain mix of housing.



- Single-Family/Duplexes/Rowhouses/Garages
- Multi-Family/Assisted Living
- Residential/Commercial Mixed Use
- Commercial Uses (office, retail, and service)
- Industrial Uses
- Public/Semi-Public Buildings
- Green Space/Natural Resources
- Other Open Space
- Public Right of Way: includes sidewalks, public alleys, street trees, on-street parking, and street paving
- Parking Lots/Driveways
- On-Street Parking Examples
- Arterial Streets



6. Encourage historic preservation and the rehabilitation and maintenance of buildings.
7. Maintain small parks and open space within walking distance of all residences.
8. Support retention of public and semi-public uses (elementary schools, churches) as centers of neighborhoods.
9. Encourage shared parking whenever possible — permit minor incursions of accessory parking for public/semi-public uses into neighborhoods if properly screened.
10. Integrate transit stops into commercial center, near arterial.
11. Maintain existing pattern of streets for connectivity.
12. Maintain arterial streets that are compatible with the existing neighborhood character with two through lanes and a center turn lane where applicable.
13. Utilize streets for commercial and residential parking.
14. Encourage alley access and shared driveways to parking areas in order to reduce interruptions to pedestrian traffic, to preserve on street parking capacity, and to reduce automobile conflict points.
15. Support the preservation and restoration of natural resources.
16. Encourage additional density of apartment complexes and special needs housing on open adjacent land areas.

Note: This image is conceptual and does not depict a specific Lincoln neighborhood, but has been developed from examples from several neighborhoods throughout the city and elsewhere. The intent of the image is to provide examples of situations in older neighborhoods that illustrate a range of development outcomes.

Rural Areas

LPlan 2040 supports the preservation of land in the bulk of the County for agricultural and natural resource purposes. However, it recognizes that some parts of the County are in transition from predominantly agricultural uses to a mix that includes more residential uses. Balancing the demand for rural living and the practical challenge of integrating acreages with traditional land uses will continue.

New acreage development is not encouraged in the *Map 1.3: Growth Tiers with Priority Areas* for Lincoln's three-mile extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ), except for areas already platted, zoned, or designated for low density residential development. Development in these tiers should only be permitted under the "build-through" model that has been established, and without use of Sanitary Improvement Districts (SIDs). For areas outside of the Lincoln three mile jurisdiction but inside a future Lincoln growth tier, the County should consider applying "build-through" standards, on a case-by-case basis, when a proposed development is in a location that is more likely than others to have city services extended in the foreseeable future. The build-through model includes provisions that are intended to facilitate a later transition to urban densities when city services are extended, including:

- A preliminary plan lot layout that accommodates first phase subdivisions on a portion of the land area with rural water and sewer systems, and shows how future urban infrastructure will be built through the land to permit further subdivision and annexation when appropriate.
- A development agreement that runs with the land and acknowledges that the acreage development is not entitled to extra buffering protection and that waives the right to protest the creation of lawful assessment districts for sewer, water and paving in the future.

The build-through model includes provisions that are intended to facilitate a later transition to urban densities when city services are extended.

All proposals for acreages, whether designated on the future land use map for low density residential or not, should be evaluated based on factors such as paved roads, adequate water quality and quantity, soil conditions for on-site wastewater management, availability of emergency services, agricultural productivity, land parcelization, the pattern of existing acreages, and plans for future urban development. Applications for acreage designation on the future land use map or rezoning to *AGR*, if planned for on-site wells, should be accompanied by information on water quality and quantity. If information becomes available that land already designated in the Plan for acreages is not suitable for acreage development, that designation should be reconsidered. Areas not designated for acreages should remain agriculturally zoned and retain the current overall density of 32 dwellings per square mile (1 dwelling unit per 20 acres). However, consideration should be given to new ways that smaller lots within the County jurisdiction can be subdivided and sold, while still maintaining that overall density and maintaining good access management along the County's section line roads.

Grouping acreages together in specific areas will limit the areas of potential conflict between farms and acreages. It also may enable services to be provided more efficiently, by reducing the amount of paved routes, reducing the number and distance of school bus routes, and taking advantage of more effective rural water district service. Clustering lots in one portion of a development site, while preserving both farmland and environmental resources on the remainder, should continue to be encouraged in agriculturally-zoned areas. A considerable supply of acreage lots has been platted in recent years in this manner. The County

also should continue to pursue state enabling legislation to enable clustering lots by "transfer of development rights" between non-contiguous parcels of land. It is important to note that the value of this tool, by which property owners "buy" and transfer rights to develop additional lots, will be negated if the owners simply are "given" those additional lots through rezoning.

Private nonprofit land trusts are operating successfully to preserve farmland in other rural areas experiencing pressure for development. They accept donations, and in some cases have funds to pay in part for land to be conserved, including land that is cropped or pastured as well as land that is held for its natural value such as prairie, wetland, or woodland. The donations of these easements qualify as charitable deductions to federal income tax. Some other states protecting farming close to cities also have adopted tax credit programs to help encourage the donation of agricultural easements. City and county officials should encourage the expansion of an existing private trust or formation of a new one to encourage more of these donations.

Many families are not well-informed of all the implications of rural living before they make that lifestyle choice. This includes an understanding of the state's *Right to Farm* law, which protects farmers from nuisance claims when conducting normal agricultural practices, and an understanding of the difference between urban and rural public services (e.g. road maintenance, emergency medical, fire protection, and police). Objective information on the pros and cons of rural living should be provided to the public through continuing education efforts by the County's extension service, handouts available to county departments and local realtors, and potentially, documents filed of record with new platted lots for disclosure to prospective buyers.

Strategies for Rural Areas

- Continue to use GIS data and other sources, along with adopted county zoning criteria, to help determine which lands are most suitable for acreage development.
- Require applicants seeking plan designation or rezoning for acreages to provide information on water quality and quantity if planning to use on-site wells.

- Pursue state legislation to enable the County to establish a transfer of development rights program that helps encourage acreage development in more suitable locations while protecting environmental resources and prime farmland, while also respecting property rights by compensating owners who agree to the transfers.
- Encourage an existing private land trust or a new one to pursue the donation of agricultural easements on prime farmland in the county.
- Expand education for prospective home buyers on the implications of rural living.

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