
Chapter 5. Housing

Housing is a fundamental need for all people, and is a critical consideration in community planning efforts. Housing is many individuals' largest source of personal wealth and is often the largest investment that a person will make. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2020 housing made up nearly 35% of consumer spending. Housing has a large impact on the individual quality of life within a community. Where people live affects who their friends are, where their children go to school, job opportunities, and many other aspects of daily life.

Housing is an issue that is incredibly important to local governments. In many cities, housing can account for 50% of land uses, and residential property tax revenues make up a large portion of local government budgets. Because of its high level of importance, housing affects all of elements that are listed in this plan. The costs of many of the public services that people require are highly associated with the number and density of home within a municipality. Infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity are all examples of public services that are influenced by housing. Individual travel behavior is greatly affected by where people live, and as a result, housing and transportation planning must be closely coordinated.

Housing serves an important role in the regional economy, as it affects an employers' ability to attract and retain high quality employees. If housing costs are too high or if supply is limited, employers may see workers leave the area to find places with a lower cost of living. The housing sector also employs many workers within the region. Builders, lenders, construction workers, lawyers, real estate brokers all play important roles in the regional economy.

Quality housing is one of the core foundations of a stable and prosperous community. If community planning efforts are to be effective; they must integrate a community's housing policies. The objective of this chapter is to encourage the development of a housing stock that offers a variety of options that can serve individuals and families at all stages of their lives.



Homes in Mechanicsville

Housing Trends

The US Census Bureau provides information on housing through the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS). The following tables from the Census and from the City and County depict the most important aspects of housing in the City of Mechanicsville.

Housing Occupancy

As of the 2020 Census, the City of Mechanicsville had 488 housing units, a decrease of 8 units from the 2010 Census. Still, this is an overall 9 unit increase from 2000. Of the 488 units that are currently constructed 459 of them are occupied and 29 are vacant. Mechanicsville’s vacancy rate of 6% is slightly lower than the average for the state of Iowa which was 9% as of the 2020 Decennial Census. It should be noted that there may be a larger margin of error in census data that is taken from communities with smaller populations such as Mechanicsville, so there may be a small difference in these figures and what the actual housing occupancy and tenure is in Mechanicsville.

	2000		2010		2019*Estimate	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Housing Units	479	--	496	--	463	--
Occupied Housing Units	452	94%	471	95%	417	90%
Vacant Housing Units	27	6%	25	5%	46	10%

US Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000, 2010, ACS Estimates 2019

Housing Tenure

Of the 417 occupied housing units in Mechanicsville in 2019, 351 were owner occupied and 66 were renter occupied. Overall, the percentage of renters has decreased only slightly over the last two decades. When compared with Cedar County and the State of Iowa, Mechanicsville has lower rates of renter-occupied housing. Using 2019 estimates, rentals made up 19% of Cedar County occupied housing units. The state of Iowa renters accounted for 29% of occupied units. Table 2 includes Mechanicsville’s housing tenure data.

Table 2. Mechanicsville Housing Tenure

	2000		2010		2019*Estimate	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Occupied Housing Units	452	--	471	--	417	--
Owner Occupied	354	78%	402	85%	351	84%
Renter Occupied	98	22%	69	15%	66	16%

US Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000, 2010, ACS Estimates 2019

New Housing Construction

New housing construction will be incredibly important to Mechanicsville's future. While the city may not be expecting any rapid growth in the short term, it must make housing and construction a priority if city wants to maintain the existing population. The City may have to consider building new units to replace older deteriorating units. New construction will also be a priority in Mechanicsville if the city wishes to add a larger variety of household types to better suit a wider range of demographics.

In recent years very little new construction has occurred within Mechanicsville. In the last 10 years only 9 homes have been built. Previous to that, the last large residential development that occurred in Mechanicsville was the Sandberg development in the NE corner of town which occurred in the late 80s/90s. There are about 5-6 lots that are still to be sold/developed from that project. The city also received grants for housing rehab through ECIA which resulted in the rehab of 10 houses for \$24,999 per house.

If the City wishes to encourage more new housing construction, it has a variety of options available. The State of Iowa has several programs to help cities construct more housing. Examples of state programs include the Iowa Finance Authority's Workforce Housing Loan and Iowa Economic Development Authority's workforce housing tax credit program. The City also has the ability to use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to finance housing related projects. Ultimately, many successful housing projects employ a combination of funding sources and are the result of partnerships between the city, state government, private investors, and local economic development agencies. One particular issue in the case of Mechanicsville is that is bounded by agricultural property in all directions. Owners of these properties have not been interested in selling or developing their land which limits the City's ability to grow. That being said, it is incredibly important to plan ahead and be ready in the event that the property owner does eventually wish to sell his/her property.

Housing Varieties

Senior Housing

Demographic data shows that the Baby Boomers, which make up a large segment of the City's population, are now reaching retirement age. As this trend continues, older residents will make up a larger portion of the population, and as a result, Mechanicsville will need to consider the needs of this population in future housing plans. Mechanicsville residents have identified a need for additional senior housing through the community survey. Many of the community's older residents would prefer to stay in Mechanicsville rather than move to another town. Many seniors are no longer able to utilize their entire house due to disability, so it's useful to have smaller, single-story options that are ADA accessible.

Young Adult Housing

Another important demographic for housing is young adults, many survey respondents wished there were more options for young families who have little need for a large single-family home. Making sure that there are affordable, smaller housing options in addition to single family housing helps to give individuals and families options during all stages of their lives.

Housing Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to guide the City of Mechanicsville in providing safe affordable housing for all residents of the City.

- Encourage a housing stock that offers a variety of options for all stages of life.
- Identify strategies to help cultivate public/private partnerships to help incentivize development in Mechanicsville.
- Support the creation of new housing needed to help the community maintain its population.
- Support housing redevelopment in existing vacant or underutilized structures such as upper floors of downtown buildings.
- Develop an inventory of vacant and underutilized properties.
- Encourage maintenance and rehabilitation of existing homes in Mechanicsville.
- Support community volunteer efforts to assist those in need with home maintenance tasks.
- Identify areas for future housing development in the City's future land use map.
- Encourage infill housing development on existing vacant lots in the city's existing neighborhoods.
- Support the development of quality, affordable owner and rental housing.
- Support the development of housing for the elderly.
- Start a positive dialogue with agricultural property to discuss why housing is an important issue to the City of Mechanicsville's ability to grow and prosper.