



6.0 HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS

6.1 Overview

Goals:

Housing: *An inventory of quality housing that meets the needs of all income groups and people with special needs.*

Neighborhoods: *Quality, livable neighborhoods that retain long-time residents and attract new residents to the City of Portsmouth.*

Housing and neighborhoods are related topics that are critical to the quality of life of Portsmouth residents. All citizens have a need for decent housing that is affordable for their income level. This housing, in turn, needs to be located in a livable, safe neighborhood that provides a sense of belonging to a larger community. Portsmouth is an older, largely built out city with established neighborhoods – several of which are designated as historic – and a mature housing stock. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 65.9% of all units were constructed prior to 1970. Most (62.7%) were single-family detached homes; 8.4% were single-family attached, 28.4% multi-family, and 0.5% other types of units. The median value and rate of homeownership of the City’s housing stock is relatively low compared to other Hampton Roads communities (Tables 5 and 6).

The total number of housing units in Portsmouth declined slightly between 1990 and 2000 (by 678 units or 1.6%). Building permits for new residential construction totaled 234 in 2001, 152 in 2002, and 155 in 2003.



Historic
housing stock



Table 5. Median Housing Value, South Hampton Roads Communities

Community	# of Housing Units	Median Value
Chesapeake	75,196	\$122,300
Norfolk	95,094	\$88,400
Portsmouth	41,860	\$81,300
Suffolk	26,826	\$107,300
Virginia Beach	165,710	\$123,200
South Hampton Roads	404,686	\$109,500

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 6. Homeownership Rates, South Hampton Roads Communities

Community	# of Housing Units	Homeownership Rate
Chesapeake	75,196	74.9%
Norfolk	95,094	45.5%
Portsmouth	41,860	58.6%
Suffolk	26,826	72.2%
Virginia Beach	165,710	65.6%
South Hampton Roads	404,686	62.3%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

The City has a range of active programs in place to promote conservation and rehabilitation of Portsmouth’s housing stock and to provide for the housing needs of low income and special needs populations. These programs are documented in the City’s Consolidated Plan, which is incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan by reference. (The Consolidated Plan is currently being updated by the City.)

Approximately six percent of the housing units in Portsmouth are either located in public housing developments (1,142) or are subsidized through the Section 8 Certificate and Voucher Program (1,360).

Most neighborhoods in Portsmouth are stable and in generally good condition. Some neighborhoods, particularly in the southern part of the City and in isolated parts of Churchland, demonstrate evidence of decline or potential for decline in the form

of housing disinvestment, vacancies, and/or substandard conditions. A few residential areas, such as the former Fairwood Homes property, are in need of redevelopment to new uses. This assessment of the condition of Portsmouth’s neighborhoods is reflected in Map 6, which divides the entire City (residential and non-residential areas) into three categories:

Port Norfolk neighborhood



- **Stable:** Good quality; little change occurring or predicted
- **Transitional:** Evidence of decline or potential for decline; reinvestment needed
- **Redevelopment:** Removal of former uses and conversion to new uses needed

Neighborhood quality is a priority established by Portsmouth City Council. To address this priority, the City has developed a Neighborhood Quality Action Plan (NQAP) to improve the physical and human infrastructure of Portsmouth's neighborhoods. The NQAP defines guiding principles to nurture and sustain Neighborhood Quality; identifies desired outcomes in the areas of Neighborhood Appearance and Services, Health and Well Being, Public Safety, and Leisure and Culture; and outlines how these outcomes are to be achieved through an Operational Action Plan and a Human Services Action Plan. Like the Consolidated Plan, the NQAP is incorporated by reference into the Comprehensive Plan, and many of the policies and action strategies of this and other Plan elements (e.g., Community Appearance) are designed to support its implementation.

Key issues related to Portsmouth's housing and neighborhoods include:

- Portsmouth supports a higher concentration of affordable housing than other communities in the region. While there is a continuing need to provide housing that is affordable to persons with low incomes and special requirements, there is also a need for diversification of the City's housing stock to serve persons of all socio-economic groups.
- As noted for the Land Use and Economic Development Elements, the scarcity of available land places a premium on identifying redevelopment and infill opportunities to accommodate new housing. Two examples of the opportunities that exist in Portsmouth are the transformation of the former Ida Barbour public housing into the Westbury neighborhood and the planned redevelopment of the former Fairwood Homes complex. The latter property will be redeveloped under the City's Traditional Neighborhood Overlay District ordinance as a walkable, mixed residential community with pockets of common green space.
- There is a close relationship between the quality of the Portsmouth public schools and the quality of the neighborhoods they serve, as well as to the City's ability to retain and attract a socio-economically diverse population.
- A number of factors in addition to public schools contribute to neighborhood quality. Examples of these factors include a sense of safety and security, access to quality community facilities and services



Design for new public school

Source: Tymoff + Moss Architects



(schools, park and recreation facilities, police, etc.), economic opportunities for residents, and lack of destabilizing influences such as intrusive land uses and traffic. Citizens also identify visual quality as an important issue, including vigorous code enforcement to ensure that neighborhood stability is not threatened by substandard or unkempt properties.

- Given the constraints of available resources, the extent of Transitional and Redevelopment Neighborhoods shown on Map 6 (Community Conditions) suggests the need for a focused neighborhood improvement strategy that defines clear priorities to be phased over time. The City has begun this process by implementing a coordinated revitalization strategy for the Parkview neighborhood.

Two separate sets of policies and action strategies are presented below for Housing and Neighborhoods. The Housing policies are designed to achieve the goal of developing an inventory of quality housing that meets the needs of all income groups and people with special needs. Housing Policy #1 focuses on attracting (and retaining) middle and higher income residents as part of an overall strategy of socio-economic diversification. A key to this policy is to ensure that housing products attractive to these income groups are available in the market. Equally important is to improve Portsmouth’s competitiveness in the regional market by addressing factors that contribute to the decisions of homebuyers, such as public school quality; access to quality community facilities, services, and amenities; and the image of the City in the region.

Policies #2, #3, and #4 address housing for persons with low or moderate incomes or other



special needs. The action strategies identified for these three policies are designed to support implementation of the City’s Consolidated Plan. Policy #2 identifies ways to increase homeownership opportunities for low and moderate income families and households, a major priority of the Consolidated Plan. By becoming buyers instead of renters, residents can improve their economic status and also become more invested in the community. Policy #3 addresses the provision of decent rental and subsidized housing for low-income households. An important issue is

the need for proper maintenance of privately-owned subsidized rental housing developments to prevent them from becoming destabilizing influences on adjacent areas. Policy #4 addresses housing for special needs populations, such as the elderly, disabled, homeless, and persons with AIDS.

Neighborhood Policies #1, #2, and #3 address the three neighborhood types identified on the Community Conditions map. Policy #1 identifies action strategies to maintain and strengthen Stable Neighborhoods. These are considered “base” strategies that should be



used to support the quality of all the City's neighborhoods. Policy #2 identifies additional strategies for Transitional Neighborhoods, which require more active intervention to reverse or prevent decline. Policy #3 deals with neighborhoods characterized by conditions of blight and obsolescence that necessitate redevelopment to new uses.

Neighborhood Policy #4 addresses the range of facilities and services that are important to supporting the quality and livability of neighborhoods. These include public infrastructure (utilities and transportation), community facilities (schools, libraries, parks, etc.), and retail and service opportunities provided by the private sector that are important to neighborhood quality of life. This policy recognizes the important link between improving the quality of Portsmouth's schools and neighborhood revitalization.



Source: Tymoff + Moss Architects

The following are proposed as indicators to measure the success of the City's housing and neighborhood policies and programs:

- Increase in the median value of housing in Portsmouth in relation to the median value of housing in South Hampton Roads as a whole (Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach)
- Increase in the homeownership rate in Portsmouth in relation to the homeownership rate in South Hampton Roads as a whole
- Increase in the number of neighborhoods classified as Stable rather than Transitional or Redevelopment



6.2 Housing Policies and Action Strategies

Policy #1: Attract Middle and Higher Income Residents

Utilize the full resources of the City to increase the number of middle and higher income residents in order to improve the City's tax base, increase expenditure potential to attract higher quality retail stores, and expand the civic leadership base. [Policy Link: Economic Development #2]

Action Strategies

- Promote historic district designation of areas with housing stock that can be upgraded and which might prove attractive to middle and upper income households
- Identify locations for middle and upper income housing where values such as river views can be captured
- Promote renovation of existing commercial or industrial buildings in the downtown or historic areas that might be appealing to young professionals
- Promote the development of mixed-use, higher density projects in high amenity locations (e.g., "in-town" housing in the Effingham Street area per the ULI panel recommendation)
- Assure good quality public infrastructure and public services, including public schools and libraries as a priority
- Promote the renovation of existing private housing stock into attractive market rate structures
- Utilize creative financing techniques to support programs for first-time homebuyers
- Provide incentives to support new middle and upper income housing development

Policy #2: Affordable Ownership Housing

Utilize all available sources of financing to provide an inventory of affordable ownership housing for families and households.

Action Strategies

- Develop public sector, bank and realtor partnerships to support first-time home buyer programs, including:
 - Employer assisted housing programs and plans
 - Low down payment and soft second mortgage programs
 - Down payment assistance programs
 - Home purchase counseling or buyers club programs
- Provide affordable housing types as part of mixed-use developments (e.g., by allowing housing above retail space)
- Evaluate zoning and development regulations and processes for opportunities to facilitate the production of new affordable ownership housing units (e.g., incentives, expedited permitting), consistent with maintaining neighborhood character
- Undertake initiatives (incentives, etc.) to support the creation of affordable ownership housing in market rate developments



- If feasible, develop an urban homesteading program as a way to promote affordable homeownership and return property to the tax rolls
- Provide incentives for teachers, police officers and other city employees (e.g., use of the HUD “Officer and Teacher Next Door” programs)
- Continue and expand education programs for homeowners

Policy #3: Housing for Low-Income Households

Provide a good quality of housing stock for low-income households.

Action Strategies

- Renovate and redevelop existing public housing as needed, building on the Westbury model
- Target aggressive code enforcement towards substandard, non-compliant properties, holding the violator responsible be it the property owner or tenant
- Use public acquisition/land assembly, redevelopment, and land banking (if necessary) to remove and replace blighted housing
- Develop financial incentives in support of owners of low-income rental properties, tied to standards for maintenance and livability of the units
- Create landlord-tenant councils
- Support activities of non-profit housing developers to improve the housing inventory for low income households

Policy #4: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Provide an inventory of quality housing for individuals or households with special needs such as the elderly, the disabled, the homeless, or persons with AIDS.

Action Strategies

- Continue to implement housing assistance to persons with special needs in accordance with the City of Portsmouth Consolidated Plan
- When warranted, increase the supply of elderly housing with good access to shopping and health care facilities
- Establish a Committee made up of representatives from the elderly and the development community to review retirement and assisted living needs
- Provide financial assistance to elderly homeowners who need to renovate or retrofit their homes for safety
- Encourage the conversion of low traffic hotels or other commercial buildings into single room occupancy (SRO) buildings
- Identify surplus federal property that could be utilized as housing for the homeless
- Support the work of non-profit groups seeking to develop assisted living facilities for victims of AIDS



6.3 Neighborhood Policies and Action Strategies

Policy #1: Stable Neighborhoods

Maintain and strengthen, to the maximum extent possible, neighborhoods in the City that are presently stable. [Policy Link: Land Use #1, Economic Development #2]

Action Strategies

- Maintain and, where possible, enhance existing infrastructure (roads, utilities, sidewalks, etc.)
- Apply neighborhood conservation strategies, e.g.:
 - code/law enforcement [Policy Link: Community Appearance #1]
 - renovation or rehabilitation of existing single-family units as a priority over demolition and construction of new units
 - zoning and development standards to ensure compatibility of infill/new construction with the neighborhood context
 - protection from incompatible land uses
- Evaluate and strengthen the City’s current rental licensing and inspection program
- Maximize potential market opportunities for the introduction of new quality housing
- Initiate education and outreach programs for property owners, including written and online information on:
 - zoning and any variations (variances, nonconforming conditions, etc.) that relate to their properties
 - home maintenance and improvements
- Target public resources for neighborhood capacity building (Civic Associations, Community Development Corporations, Merchants Associations, Business Improvements Districts, etc.)
- Support efforts of organizations such as civic and business associations to maintain and improve neighborhood quality (e.g., clean-up and beautification activities)

Policy #2: Transitional Neighborhoods

Identify and reverse, to the maximum possible, negative trends affecting transitional neighborhoods and capitalize on possible new development opportunities. [Policy Link: Economic Development #2]

Action Strategies

All of the action strategies listed above for Stable Neighborhoods plus the following additional strategies:

- Target capital investments by the City (e.g., infrastructure, streetscape improvements, etc.) to support private reinvestment in transitional neighborhoods
- Utilize and strongly enforce building/property codes, holding the violator responsible be it the property owner or tenant [Policy Link: Community Appearance #1]
- Develop procedures to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of vacant properties



- Encourage new housing suitable to a mix of income groups that is developed consistent with design standards reflecting the neighborhood context
- Encourage new business development opportunities through the provision of incentives and technical assistance
- Target creative financing programs for home ownership and business development, including incentives for public employees (teachers, police, etc.) to purchase homes in neighborhoods
- Evaluate policies and development standards associated with historic districts to:
 - minimize regulatory impediments to compatible renovation and reinvestment
 - promote use of tax credits and other incentives for reinvestment

Policy #3: Neighborhoods Requiring Redevelopment

Reduce blight and obsolescence and capture new growth opportunities while preserving and building on historical neighborhood assets. [*Policy Link: Land Use #1, Economic Development #2*]

Action Strategies

All of the action strategies listed above for Transitional Neighborhoods (with the exception of historic districts) plus the following additional strategies:

- Use public acquisition/land assembly, redevelopment, and land banking (if necessary) to remove obsolescent land uses and/or conditions of blight
- Seek to regain, to the extent possible, a sense of historic identity and sense of place in revitalization/redevelopment activities for redevelopment neighborhoods
- Provide improved traffic flow, accessibility, parking, and lighting as part of redevelopment planning
- Encourage new housing suitable to a mix of income groups that is developed consistent with design standards reflecting the historic context and sense of place

Policy #4: Supporting Facilities and Services

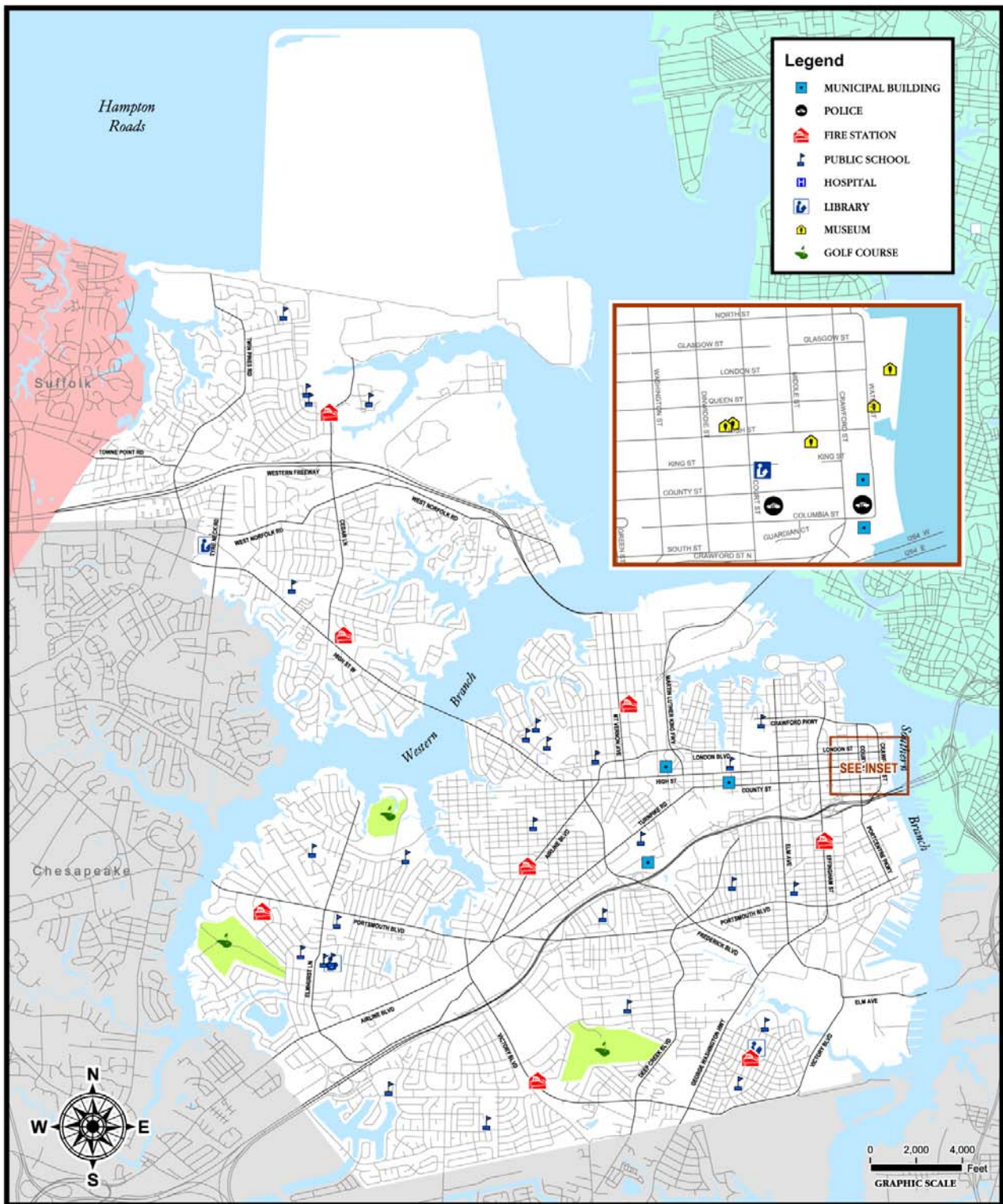
Provide public and private facilities, services, and infrastructure to support neighborhood quality and livability.

Action Strategies

- Link programming of public infrastructure improvements to an overall plan and priorities for neighborhood improvement
- Provide quality of life amenities and facilities in Activity Centers that are accessible to the City's neighborhoods, e.g.:
 - community facilities (schools, park and recreation facilities, sidewalk/trail connections, etc.)
 - retail and service opportunities
 - eating, drinking, and entertainment facilities



- Support the creation of public green spaces and landscaped areas to provide recreational opportunities and to enhance the perceived quality of adjacent neighborhoods (e.g., stormwater management facilities developed as “water gardens,” marginally developable or undersized property used to create passive-use public space)
- Provide municipal facilities and services on a regional basis so as to combine accessibility to neighborhoods with cost effectiveness [*Policy Link: Community Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure #1*]
- Link neighborhood revitalization to a strategy for improving the quality of Portsmouth’s schools, including examination of the implications for neighborhoods of school closings, consolidations, and redistricting [*Policy Link: Education #4*]
- Provide the City’s neighborhoods with convenient access to a multi-modal transportation system while preventing significant impacts from major traffic-generating uses
- Improve the visual appearance and reduce visual clutter (excess signage, overhead utilities, substandard structures, etc.) of primary and secondary roadway corridors serving neighborhoods



COMMUNITY FACILITIES

PORTSMOUTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN