City of Fargo

CORE NEIGHBORHOODS

Master Plan

JANUARY
2021

THE CITY OF Fargo FAR MORE

Prepared by czbLLC

Prepared for
City of Fargo

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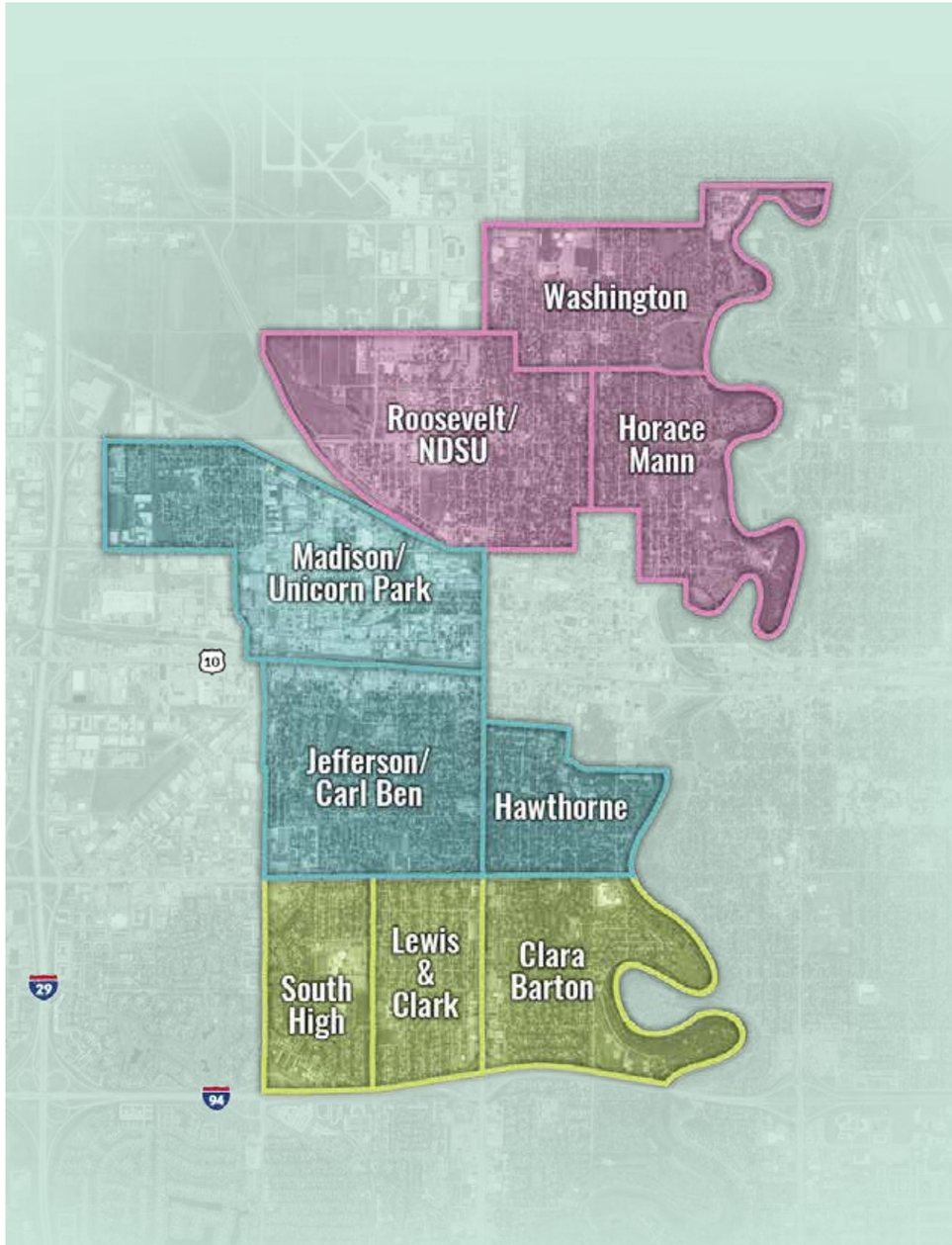

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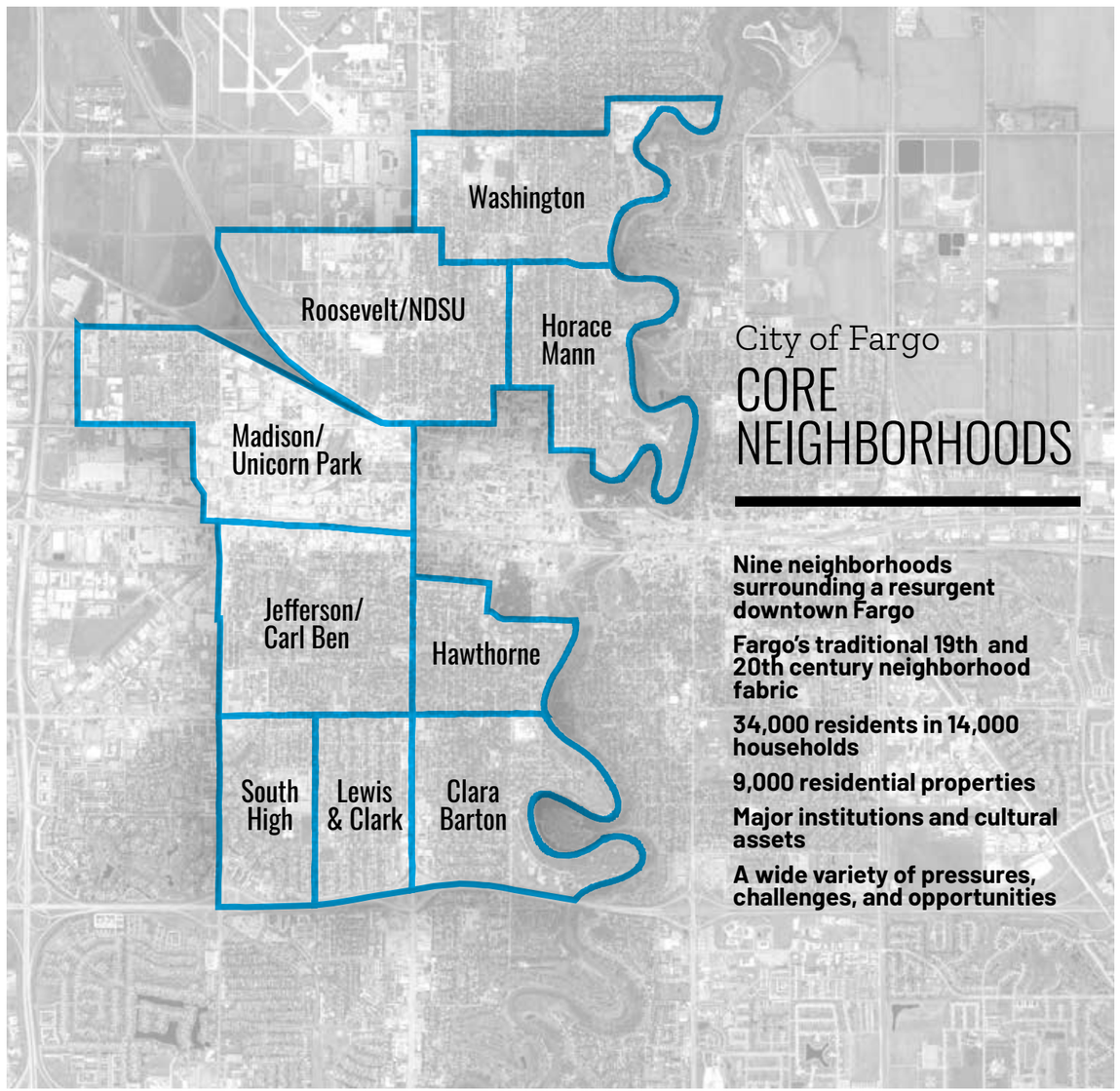
INTRODUCTION



City of Fargo

CORE NEIGHBORHOODS

Nine neighborhoods surrounding a resurgent downtown Fargo

Fargo's traditional 19th and 20th century neighborhood fabric

34,000 residents in 14,000 households

9,000 residential properties

Major institutions and cultural assets

A wide variety of pressures, challenges, and opportunities

Fargo's core neighborhoods embody the story of Fargo's first century. From blocks of late-Victorian houses and commercial buildings that spilled over from a bustling urban center (today's downtown), to streets of bungalows, Colonials, Tudors, and small apartment buildings from the 1910s and 1920s, to tracts of postwar ranches and multi-family complexes, the core neighborhoods trace Fargo's growth from a frontier river and railway town to a small but vibrant Great Plains metropolis.

The neighborhoods also reflect a history of community-building in Fargo. A commitment to public education is seen in the number and quality of neighborhood schools and the role of North Dakota State University as a cultural and economic anchor. Stewardship of the urban forest and the valuing of public space is evident on every tree-lined street. And a commitment to making public parks a centerpiece of Fargo's civic life and quality of life is made clear by historic parks such as Island and Oak Grove, along with numerous neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

The legacy of Fargo's core neighborhoods is an important part of their present and a critical part of their—and the entire city's—future. At a time when most Fargo residents now live outside of the core neighborhoods, there is growing recognition of their value to the Fargo-Moorhead region as places of character, durability, livability, vitality, and opportunity that contribute in significant ways to the region's economic competitiveness, image, and sustainability.

What is the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan, and why was it developed?

Appreciation of the role that the core neighborhoods collectively play in the life of Fargo is the impetus for this Core Neighborhoods Master Plan. In the wake of the Downtown InFocus plan (completed in 2018) and the earlier Go2030 comprehensive plan, the need for renewed and focused attention to issues in core neighborhoods was broadly recognized given the wide range of concerns that were surfacing on a regular basis—from residential and commercial blight, to school enrollment levels, to the design of infill development, to pedestrian safety, and everything in between.

Rather than a piecemeal approach to core neighborhood planning that would create one plan at a time for each neighborhood over a period of years, a more holistic approach was chosen. A process was designed whereby the nine neighborhoods in Fargo's core—encompassing an area with over 30,000 residents, 9,000 residential properties, and most of Fargo's major institutions and cultural assets—would come together to create a unified master plan for the core while simultaneously developing or updating neighborhood-level visions, outcomes, and implementation steps.

The result is a Core Neighborhoods Master Plan that achieves both a core-wide vantage point—helpful for identifying common issues and conditions and devising collaborative interventions—and a localized focus on implementation.

Essential Takeaways

This Core Neighborhoods Master Plan provides detailed findings on a number of issues that were identified through stakeholder outreach and data analysis during the planning process. When boiled down, these findings become four essential takeaways that summarize what needs to be accomplished in Fargo's core neighborhoods as well as how to approach and manage the work.

Preventive maintenance—to avoid more serious and widespread problems in 10 or 15 years—is what Fargo's core neighborhoods need in the 2020s

Blight is not widespread or overwhelming in the core neighborhoods today, but it is likely to become a bigger issue over time without careful intervention. While the housing market in the core is now generally strong, it would be a mistake to not induce property owners to catch-up on deferred maintenance costs while they can do so for pennies on the long-term dollar.

Fargo is in an enviable position to invest resources it possesses into disciplined preventive maintenance activities over the next decade. If it can do this, strong blocks can be kept strong, stable blocks can become stronger, and struggling blocks can receive the attention they need.

A comprehensive set of tools—not an isolated policy or two—will be needed to address the issues and opportunities that exist in the core neighborhoods

Neighborhoods, especially older ones, are complicated and influenced by a wide range of social, economic, and environmental factors. Such factors are rarely within the sole discretion of any single neighborhood or any single public agency to manage.

Consequently, multiple well-integrated policy tools are needed to ensure that neighborhood health is maintained and advanced.

A citywide—and even regional—perspective is needed to achieve core neighborhood goals and sustain broad public support for policies and investments

The core neighborhoods contribute much to the city and the Fargo-Moorhead region in terms of the desirability and diversity of the housing stock and the institutional, cultural, and recreational assets located there. The relative age of their housing also means they contain a vital repository of the city's less costly housing.

A strong core, in other words, puts the entire region in a stronger position to meet the needs of current residents and compete for new residents and business activity well into the future.

Patience, risk tolerance, and collaboration are required for success to be achieved and sustained

While the task at hand for Fargo is preventive maintenance in its core neighborhoods, changes to current practices are needed and this is never easy or quick work. A tolerance for trying new and bold approaches to longstanding issues, and giving those approaches the time and space to be tested, will be required of City leaders, residents, and everyone else involved.

That will mean neighbors putting themselves out there as leaders on a regular basis to build more engaged and resilient neighborhoods. It will mean City leaders making decisions consistent with neighborhood goals year after year to create more predictability and confidence. It will mean staff working inter-departmentally routinely to address complex issues in need of a range of expertise and capacities. And it will mean overcoming a tendency to underinvest—disguised as civic and household frugality—when doing so has costly long-term consequences.

The Core Neighborhoods Master Plan provides an approach to preventive maintenance to make sure that smart, and quite modest, investments in the near term save the community from having to make far costlier interventions in the future.

The Core Neighborhoods Master Plan includes a toolkit for the core that covers land use policy, resident engagement, housing reinvestment, public infrastructure, and enforcement of basic health and safety codes. It also provides a set of values and planning principles to serve as a flexible decision-making framework.

The Core Neighborhoods Master Plan identifies investments in housing, regulatory systems, and infrastructure that make good long-term fiscal and strategic sense to the City of Fargo. It also identifies opportunities to rethink how growth occurs within and beyond the core, how affordable housing opportunities are distributed, and how to balance preservation and redevelopment in order to keep core neighborhoods and their housing markets vibrant and competitive.

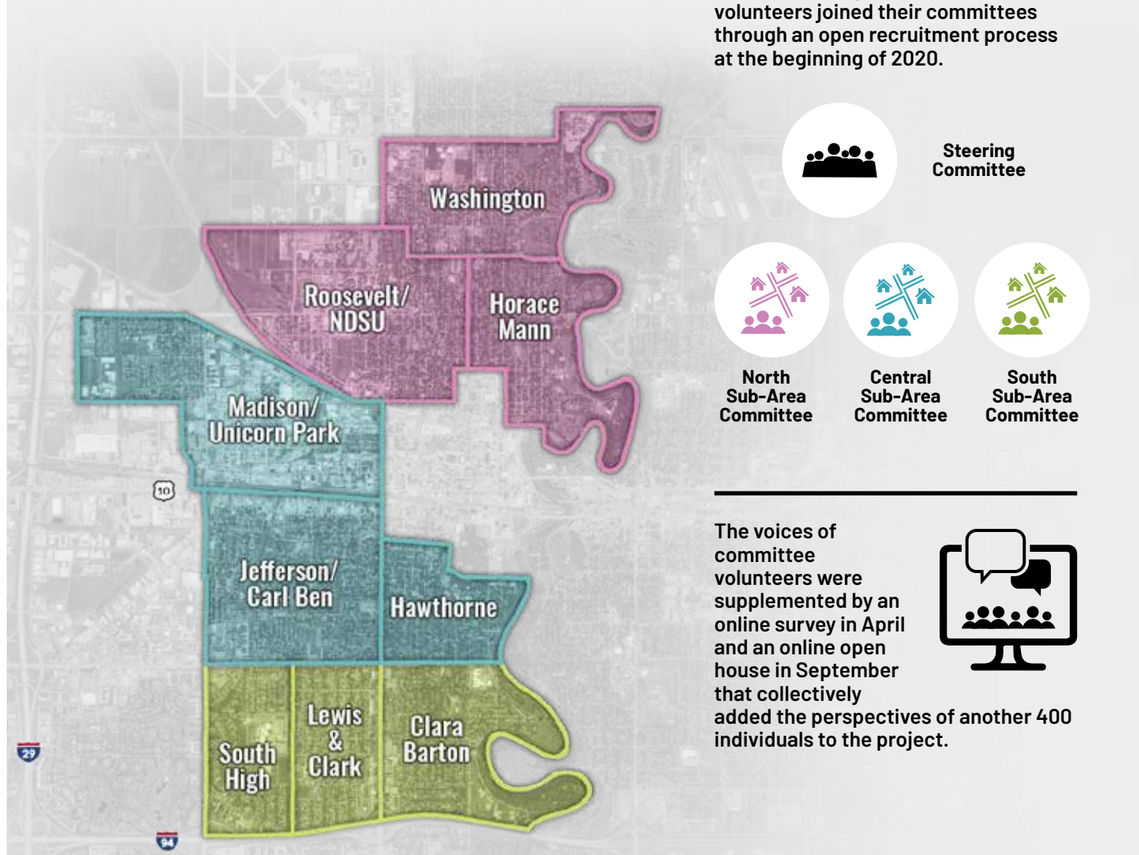
The Core Neighborhoods Master Plan is designed to be implemented over the course of a decade and will rely on high levels of coordination, ingenuity, and trust to work. It recommends specific tools but leaves many details up to those doing the work to collectively design, test, and adapt those tools as needed.

Process Overview

City of Fargo
CORE NEIGHBORHOODS MASTER PLAN

Development of the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan took place over three phases during 2020 and was coordinated by the City of Fargo's Department of Planning & Development and its consultant, czb. At the heart of the project, however, were four committees with over 80 community volunteers.

The Project Steering Committee provided a citywide perspective to the project while three 'Sub-Area' committees—each comprised of three neighborhoods—provided more localized guidance. Sub-Area volunteers joined their committees through an open recruitment process at the beginning of 2020.



Steering Committee

North Sub-Area Committee

Central Sub-Area Committee

South Sub-Area Committee

The voices of committee volunteers were supplemented by an online survey in April and an online open house in September that collectively added the perspectives of another 400 individuals to the project.

PHASE 1
Issue Identification and Data Analysis

Committee volunteers identified what was "working" and "not working" in their neighborhoods, as well as outcomes to achieve.

An online survey in April revealed selling points, turn-offs, and priority problems to solve in each neighborhood.

Committee volunteers and NDSU students contributed to a field survey of residential property conditions throughout the core.

Data relating to demographics, household types, housing types, home sales, residential investment patterns, levels of maintenance, and other conditions were compiled into a Neighborhood and Housing Market Analysis of the core neighborhoods to inform the planning process.

PHASE 2
Vision Identification and Toolkit Development

Findings on key issues and trends from Phase 1 were used to draft and refine a core neighborhoods toolkit of responsive policies and programs.

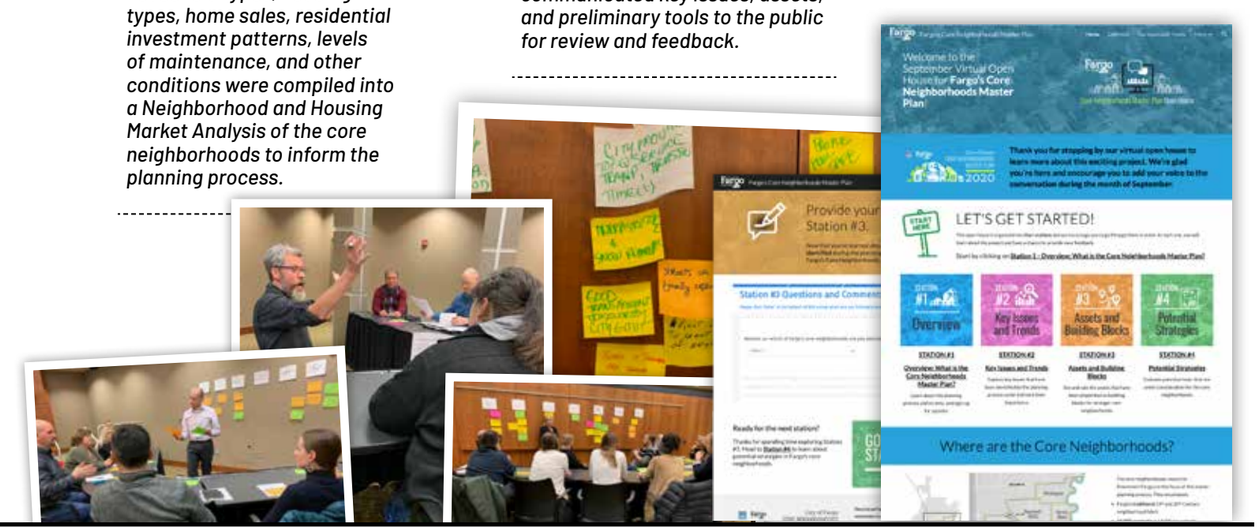
Through neighborhood branding exercises, committee volunteers identified core neighborhood attributes and target markets that were distilled into brand/vision statements for each neighborhood.

An online open house in September—an accommodation to the COVID 19 pandemic—communicated key issues, assets, and preliminary tools to the public for review and feedback.

PHASE 3
Plan Development

All components and findings of the planning process were pulled together into a short preview document for committee review in October.

A draft plan was prepared for committee volunteers to review in November, followed by finalization and stakeholder presentations in December.



How to use this plan

While understanding the nature and impact of localized issues was a priority of the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan, the core-wide vantage point provided an opportunity to understand the connections between conditions at the block level and systems at citywide and regional levels—including policy systems, markets, public and private decision-making, and other influences that ultimately impact every block in Fargo in some way.

A few decaying homes on one block, for example, do not represent root problems on their own. Instead, they are symptoms of wider forces that influence investments in homes, socioeconomic patterns, school enrollments, levels of neighbor-to-neighbor engagement, the City's capacity to maintain infrastructure, and other factors that all combine to shape a neighborhood's health and resilience.

This document is structured in a way to identify or clarify linkages between issues, trends, policies, strategies, and desired outcomes—and to provide a framework for consistently making decisions that have the future health of core neighborhoods in mind.

PART 1 — Key Issues, Conditions, and Trends

Part 1 identifies and explores what is known about issues that emerged during the planning process. Almost every issue was raised in multiple neighborhoods and is connected in some way to every other issue.

Who does this aim to help?

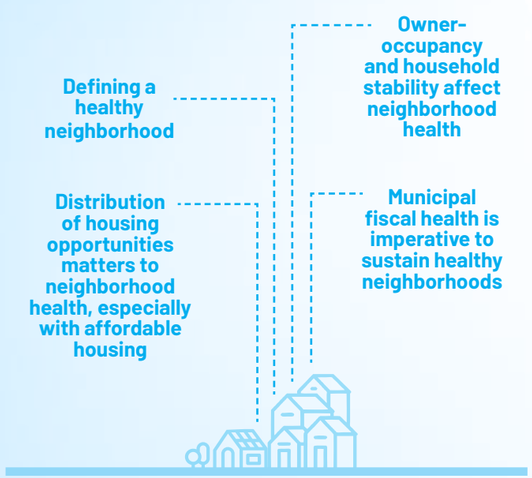
All neighborhood stakeholders and City officials can use Part 1 to better understand the nature and distribution of the most important issues in Fargo's core.

PART 2 — Critical Concepts for Neighborhood Planning in Fargo

Part 2 presents four critical concepts for neighborhood planning in Fargo that influence many of the issues described in Part 1 and have a bearing on the ability of neighbors and the City to address existing and future challenges.

Who does this aim to help?

The concepts in Part 2 are especially relevant to elected and appointed officials in the City of Fargo, planners, neighborhood leaders, and agencies that work in the core.



PART 3 — Vision, Values, and Planning Principles

Part 3 presents a core-wide vision drawn from common themes in the visions and desired outcomes of each neighborhood. That overall vision speaks to a set of shared values which, when combined with concepts from Part 2, can be translated into planning principles to guide decision-making.

Who does this aim to help?

Content in Part 3 can be used by any individuals or groups who make decisions that affect core neighborhoods and who want to have a way of aligning their decisions with this Core Neighborhoods Master Plan.

VALUES

Character
Sustainability
Inclusion

PLANNNING PRINCIPLES

Housing is balanced, diverse, and contributes to neighborhood character

Neighborhoods are amenity-rich

Settlement patterns do not inhibit economic mobility

Growth pays for itself (including negative externalities)

PART 4 — Core Neighborhoods Toolkit

1. **Development Regulation and Incentive Tools**
2. **Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Tools**
3. **Housing Reinvestment Tools**
4. **Public Infrastructure Investment Tools**
5. **Public Health & Safety Tools**

Part 4 presents five components of a toolkit for Fargo's core neighborhoods. Together, they represent a comprehensive set of interventions for addressing key issues from Part 1 while applying planning principles informed by critical concepts for neighborhood planning.

Who does this aim to help?

The toolkit components offer guidance to elected officials, department heads, and other staff who will be closely involved in refining or reenginnering systems to achieve core neighborhood outcomes.

PART 5 — Neighborhood Implementation Briefs

Assets
Issues
Conditions
Vision
Outcomes
Implementation Guidance

Part 5 includes an implementation brief for each core neighborhood. Each brief focuses on local conditions, defines a vision to aim for and outcomes to achieve, and provides guidance for implementing Part 4 tools at the neighborhood level.

Who does this aim to help?

The implementation briefs are useful to neighborhood residents and leaders who want to know how to play their important role in plan implementation. They also provide critical local context for elected officials and staff at agencies closely involved with implementation.

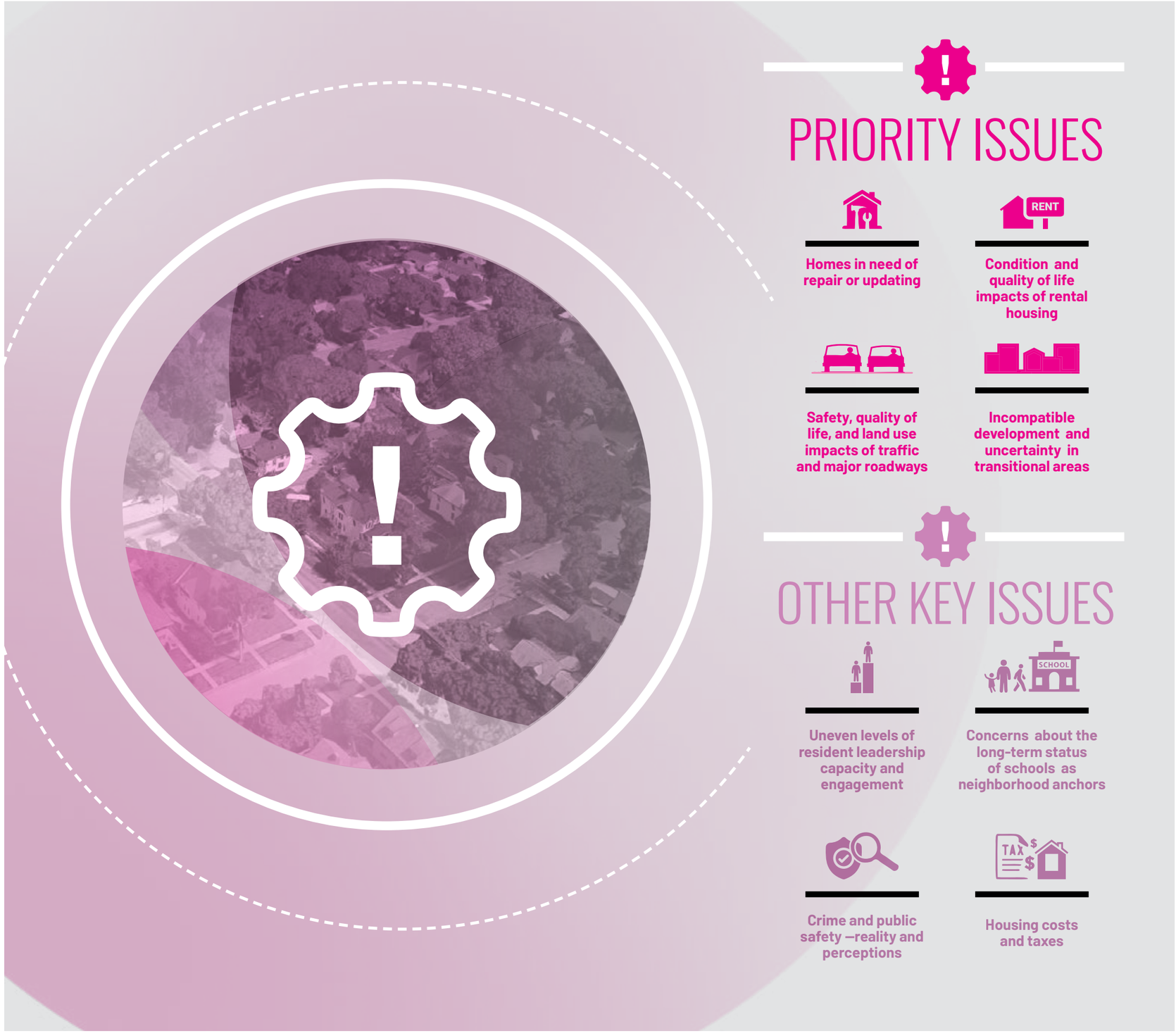
PART 1

KEY ISSUES, CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

The range of issues that matter to people in Fargo's core neighborhoods is as diverse as the core itself. The planning process, however, revealed that **a relative handful of issues are considered important across the core**. They might be expressed in slightly different ways in each neighborhood, but these issues represent opportunities to focus effort and resources in ways that are likely to be meaningful to multiple neighborhoods.

PART 1 Part 1 describes issues with currency in multiple neighborhoods, including how they have been expressed during the planning process, what is known about each issue based on broader analysis of neighborhood conditions, and why each issue matters to the health and prospects of core neighborhoods in Fargo. It calls out **four priority issues that were most consistently expressed as important** to many if not most of the core neighborhoods while also describing some other key issues that rose to the surface.

PART 5 In Part 5 of this plan, **neighborhood-level nuances** around each issue—especially distinctions likely to influence plan implementation—are described in more detail, as are any issues that are much more localized in their impact and importance.



Homes in need of repair or updating

How has this issue been expressed?

Project committee representatives from across the core identified distressed-looking properties as a problem to address.

30% of respondents to an online survey identified homes in disrepair as the most important issue to address in their neighborhood, making it the single most common answer received overall and the most common for nearly all of the core neighborhoods.

Small or outdated homes were identified as a common turn-off to potential homebuyers in core neighborhoods—especially given the newness of housing elsewhere in Fargo.

What is known?

Over 1,500 properties in the core neighborhoods—or **1 in every 6**—are slipping or distressed

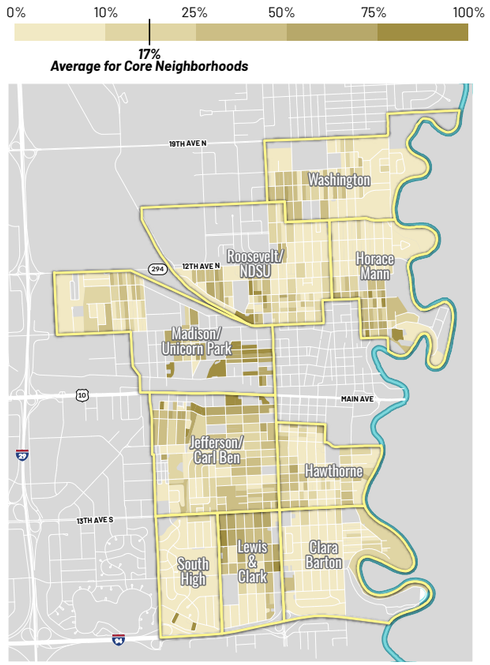
A spring 2020 field survey of residential property conditions across the core found that over 1,500 properties showed signs of visible disinvestment when viewed from the street or sidewalk—such as peeling paint, worn siding, a roof or porch in disrepair, and other signals of neglect.

If the average "catch-up" cost to bring these 1,500 properties into a good state of repair—inside and outside—is $35,000, that equates to at least $50 million in deferred maintenance in the core's private residential stock.

These properties can be found across the core but are **not evenly distributed**

While each neighborhood in Fargo's core is affected to some degree by homes with deferred maintenance, some areas are much more affected than others. Neighborhoods adjacent to downtown each have multiple blocks with higher-than-average concentrations of slipping or distressed properties as well as blocks with relatively low concentrations. Further out, Washington and Lewis & Clark both have several blocks where deferred maintenance is noticeable.

Share of Properties that are Slipping or Distressed According to Field Survey



Source: 2020 Field Survey of Residential Conditions

Some property characteristics correlate with relatively **high levels of disinvestment**

Certain property characteristics are good predictors of disinvestment in the core neighborhoods—especially size and configuration. Of the most common single-family home configurations in the core, for example, 2 bedroom/1 bathroom properties had worse condition scores than other property types and were more likely to be absentee-owned.

Most Common Small Home Configurations *(in order of frequency)*	Average Year Built	Average Assessed Value	% Owner-Occupied	Average Field Survey Score *(lower score indicates better condition)*
2 bedrooms / 2 bathrooms	**1939**	**$150,353**	**82%**	**2.67**
2 bedrooms / 1 bathroom	**1937**	**$132,175**	**77%**	**2.84**
3 bedrooms / 2 bathrooms	**1948**	**$165,795**	**86%**	**2.59**
3 bedrooms / 1 bathroom	**1943**	**$148,893**	**82%**	**2.74**

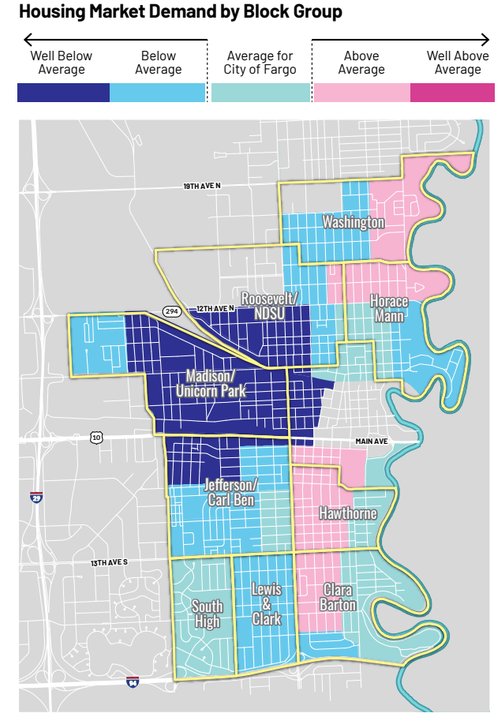
Source: czb analysis of City of Fargo assessment data

Disinvestment is a symptom of relatively **soft markets**

Fargo's housing market is, on the whole, a healthy and stable one where the supply of housing is well-matched to demand. But some areas in the core have levels of housing demand that are relatively low for the Fargo market. Such areas tend to correlate with blocks where disinvestment is visible.

The adjacent map of housing market demand is from a citywide typology produced during the planning process that used a combination of value per acre, average sales prices, owner-occupancy rates, and building permit concentrations to gauge relative levels of demand and investment throughout Fargo.

Housing Market Demand by Block Group



Source: czb Summary of Neighborhood and Housing Market Analysis for the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan, June 2020

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

While distressed housing is an important issue in Fargo's core neighborhoods, it is also true that blight is not yet overwhelming. This is an advantage. Fargo has an opportunity to learn from cities that waited too long to counteract blight in a concerted manner. Among the lessons that can and should be applied to Fargo's core neighborhoods:

It pays to intervene sooner: By the time disinvestment becomes visible, it is usually preceded by years of withdrawn maintenance. And if it continues, it becomes more and more costly for the owner (and, eventually, the City) to address with each passing year.

Housing conditions influence quality of life and safety: Deferred exterior maintenance is often an indication of deeper levels of disinvestment that can diminish quality of life and safety for individuals at a specific property and others in close proximity.

Each troubled property has a wider impact, especially on confidence: A few distressed properties on an otherwise stable block can undermine the confidence of other property owners and dissuade potential residents from moving in. Over time, disinvestment can spread to other properties and ultimately undermine the City's financial capacity to intervene.

Separating "ability" and "willingness" of property owners is critical: Are distressed conditions the result of financial hardship or physical disability? Or are they the result of an owner who is capable of keeping their property in good repair but chooses not to? The answers to these questions must shape any intervention.

RENT

Condition and quality of life impacts of rental housing

How has this issue been expressed?

Project committee representatives from several neighborhoods cited a variety of concerns about rental housing, including conditions at older apartment complexes, the transitioning of single-family homes into rentals, and the location of multi-family infill development.

18% of respondents to an online survey identified declining conditions at rental properties as the most important problem to solve in their neighborhood—the second most common answer.

Maintenance or nuisance-related issues at rental properties were cited by survey respondents as major turn-offs for potential residents in six of the nine core neighborhoods.

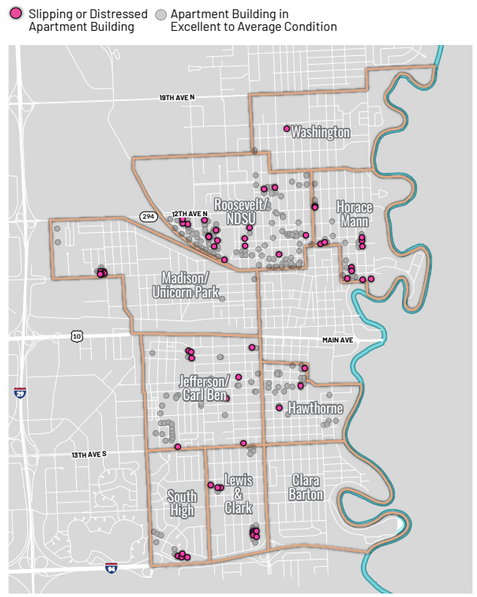
What is known?

Over 50 of the 286 apartment buildings in the core neighborhoods—**or 1 out of every 5**—are slipping or distressed

Apartment buildings in the core neighborhoods (buildings with four or more units) account for almost 3,400 housing units—around 20% of all housing units in the core. Of these 286 buildings, 57 were found to have visible signs of disinvestment in the 2020 field survey of residential properties. These buildings tend to be older (86% were built before 1980) and have fewer units than newer apartment complexes.

Every neighborhood in the core has at least one apartment building or complex considered slipping or distressed—with the exception of Clara Barton, which has no rental properties with four or more units.

Distribution of Slipping or Distressed Apartment Buildings in Fargo

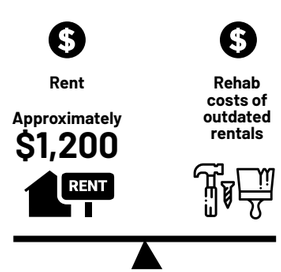


Source: 2020 Field Survey of Residential Conditions

Rents in older, underimproved properties are relatively low and widely affordable—which makes them **less likely to be improved**

Analysis by czbLLC of regional construction costs suggests that major rehabilitation work to outdated rental complexes will often require that rent be raised to at least $1,200 upon completion for the owner to fully cover their construction and operating costs. If owners or investors are not confident that such rent can be achieved—in a market where median rent is $800 and older complexes compete with thousands of more recently built units—major rehab will be delayed indefinitely in favor of minor fixes.

Break-even rent for rehab of outdated rentals



Single-family rentals tend to be smaller and more poorly maintained than owner-occupied homes

Of the more than 7,500 single-family homes in the core neighborhoods, just over 1,200—or 16%—are estimated to be absentee-owned based on owner address data. Analysis of the size, value, and condition of single-family properties by ownership status reveals a clear pattern: those that are absentee-owned are, on average, 10% smaller, have assessed values that are 17% lower, and average conditions that are less healthy than their owner-occupied counterparts. Once single-family homes decline to a certain price point in the core (generally below $130,000, but higher closer to NDSU), their feasibility as investment properties rises and investors out-bid the owner-occupant competition.

Characteristics of Single-Family Properties in the Core Neighborhoods, by Ownership Status

	Absentee-Owned	Owner-Occupied
Number of Properties	1,202	6,366
Average Size of Property *(Square Feet)*	1,168	1,307
Average Assessed Value, 2019	$153,063	$184,892
Average Field Survey Score *(lower score indicates better condition)*	2.94	2.46

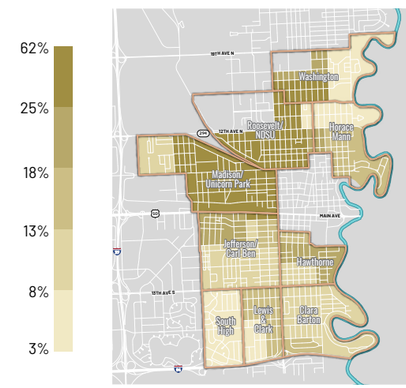
Source: czb analysis of City of Fargo assessment data

Absentee ownership of single-family homes is concentrated near NDSU but on the rise in most areas of the core

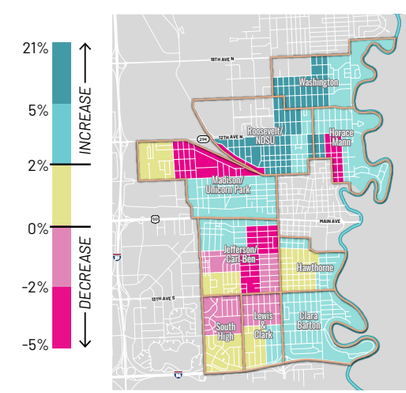
More than 25% of single-family homes are absentee-owned in much of the Madison/Unicorn Park and Roosevelt neighborhoods, and in parts of Washington. Notable concentrations also exist in Hawthorne, Jefferson/Carl Ben, and Horace Mann.

Between 2011 and 2019, absentee-ownership rose to some extent in each neighborhood, though a few areas saw modest decreases.

Share of Single-Family Homes that are Absentee-Owned, 2018



Changes in Absentee-Ownership of Single-Family Homes, 2011-2019



Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

A distressed or problematic rental property is very often a symptom of the same market forces that influence neglect at an owner-occupied property. But distressed rentals are often thought of as distinct issues in older neighborhoods for good reasons. They tend to be in highly visible locations along or near busier streets and are thus more noticeable and likely to have a bigger impact on internal and external impressions of a neighborhood than a typical house. They also happen to be businesses, which means that the owners have different motivations and responsibilities than a homeowner.

Understanding the motivations and responsibilities of rental property owners and investors is an important part of designing policy tools or programs that are likely to keep healthy rental properties healthy or turn around properties that are in trouble. This is true for an apartment complex with 20 units owned by a large management company—and for the single-family house being rented out by a smalltime landlord.

Safety, quality of life, and land use impacts of traffic and major roadways

How has this issue been expressed?

Concerns about the impacts of major roadways on neighborhood atmosphere and quality of life, on the walkability and bikeability of core neighborhoods, and on the marketability of properties along or near major roadways were raised by all three of the project's Sub-Area committees.

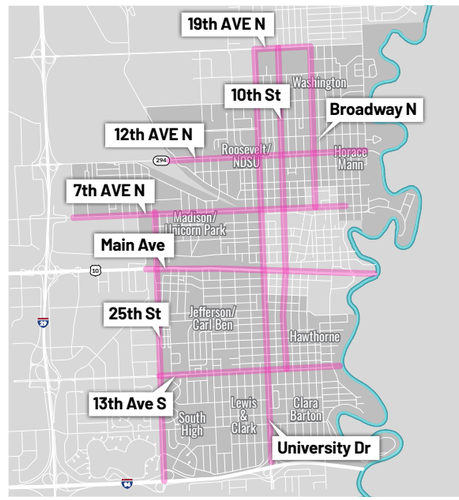
16% of respondents to an online survey described a combination of concerns about traffic and streets—speeding, noise, conditions—as neighborhood detractors, making it the third most common issue cited.

What is known?

All core neighborhoods are influenced in some way by **busy, auto-oriented arterial roadways**

The presence of busy, auto-oriented roadways are a fact of life for all core neighborhoods and help to make driving within and between parts of the core fast and efficient. For the most part, these roads follow auto-oriented highway-design principles from the late 20th century, which means that accommodations for neighborhood character or the experience of other users (pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders) is largely a secondary concern.

Arterials that carry at least 10,000 vehicles per day



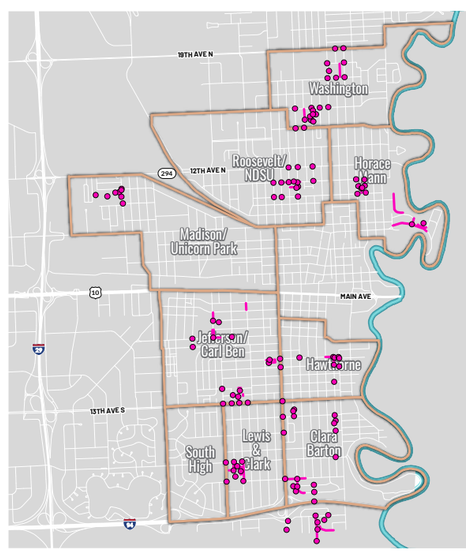
Source: czb analysis of NDDOT traffic counts

Pedestrian safety issues exist throughout the core, especially as it relates to **school walking routes**

While pedestrian and bicycle safety and convenience have become more prominent issues in Fargo than they were in previous eras, substantial room for improvement remains.

A Safe Routes to School Plan completed for Fargo in 2020 found numerous opportunities to improve pedestrian safety in core neighborhoods—in areas adjacent to schools and along key streets leading to school facilities.

Safe Routes to Schools Opportunities



Source: Fargo Safe Routes to School Plan

Arterial roadways have an **influence on residential property** ownership and condition patterns

Just over 550 single-family homes front arterial roadways in the core neighborhoods. Among these properties, the absentee-ownership rate is 31%—nearly double the 16% rate for the core overall.

Additionally, recent average sale prices, average assessed values, and property condition scores for single-family homes are all lower, on average, along arterial roadways than in the core as a whole. Key exceptions include Broadway and University Drive South, where conditions, owner-occupancy rates, and values are relatively strong.

Absentee-ownership rate of single-family homes by proximity to arterials

Absentee-owned

With frontage on arterial roadways	31%
Within 500 feet of arterial roads, but not with frontage	20%
More than 500 feet from arterial roads	12%

Source: czb analysis of City of Fargo assessment data

Reconstruction of Main Avenue is a model for arterial roadway redesign

The reconstruction of Main Avenue between University Drive and 2nd Street in 2020— enhancing the street's safety for all users and its visual appeal—serves as a model for arterial redesign in Fargo. Its presence is likely to influence public demand for similar work elsewhere in the core when opportunities arise for full reconstruction or more limited traffic-calming efforts.

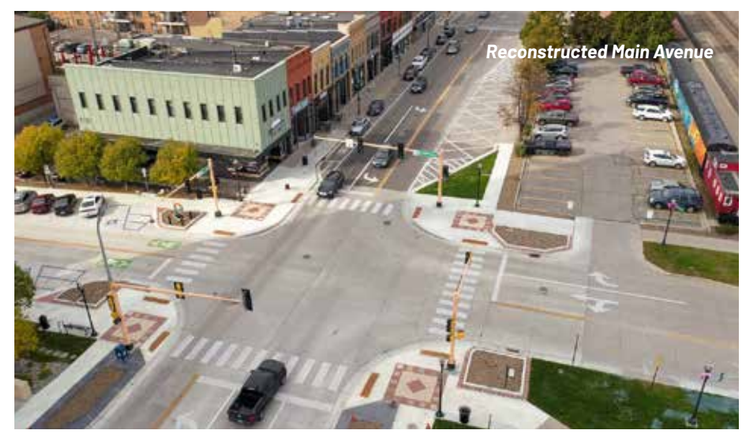


Photo credit: Apex Engineering Group

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

The environment along major streets in Fargo's core is often at odds with the quieter, tree-lined atmosphere found on interior streets. This is unavoidable in some respects—after all, traffic volumes and noise will be higher on major streets, and arterials help to limit the number of cars that use local streets to get through a neighborhood.

It is also true, however, that busy streets can be designed in ways that enhance rather than detract from a neighborhood's general character, and that they and their adjacent land uses can be designed to feel safe to non-auto users.

Perhaps the most significant advantage that core neighborhoods have over other locations in the region is a strong sense of place. Everything that can be done to reinforce that sense—especially the design of well-traveled streets—is a step towards making the core more livable to current residents and more appealing to future residents.

Incompatible development and uncertainty in transitional areas

How has this issue been expressed?

Concerns about the design, density, and/or land use of infill development has been expressed in a number of ways by volunteer committee members and survey respondents in most of the core neighborhoods. Specific concerns have included:

The design of new homes, garages, or rental infill being out of step with established vernacular character

Higher density housing or mixed-use structures being developed in an ad hoc manner that is difficult to anticipate

What is known?

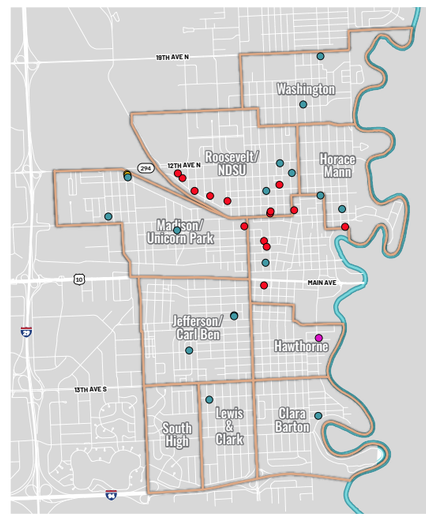
New construction has occurred in most core neighborhoods since 2015, but especially in areas adjacent to downtown and NDSU

Whenever infill development is proposed in established neighborhoods, concerns can arise if it represents a deviation from what is expected or desired by others who have a stake in the neighborhood. Those expectations might be formally expressed in plans or by the Land Development Code, or they might be informal preferences.

While new residential construction is not a widespread occurrence in Fargo's core neighborhoods, it has been happening with more frequency in recent years—especially in areas abutting downtown Fargo and NDSU—creating flashpoints around opposing visions for particular properties, blocks, or neighborhoods. Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) have been used as a tool to flexibly negotiate development details for many of the larger projects in the core, but this ad hoc approach often leaves disagreements over neighborhood vision unresolved.

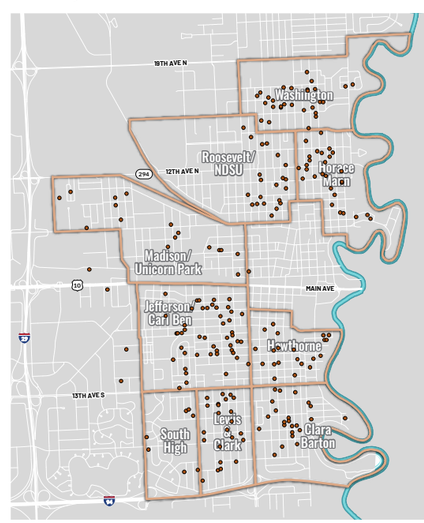
New Residential Properties Built Since 2015

Single-family · Twin Home Unit · Townhouse Unit · Apartment



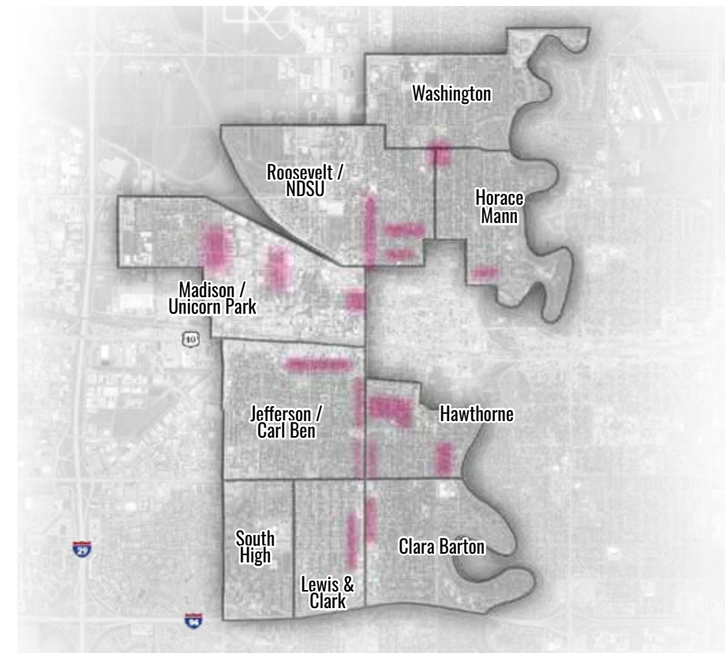
Permits Issued for Garage Construction, 2015-2019

Garage



Source: City of Fargo building permit data

Map of edges / transitional areas in the core



'Edges' in the core neighborhoods are the areas most likely to be transitional and contested

The boundaries between certain land use or development patterns—between single-family blocks and commercial or mixed-use blocks, for example—are the areas where new development is most likely to be contested. This is especially true if land use demands are changing and leading to proposals to redevelop underutilized land.

Almost every neighborhood in the core has edges that are either currently or could become areas where evolving land use demands might conflict with long-held or more recent expectations.

Fargo's Land Development Code (LDC)

Analysis of Fargo's Land Development Code (LDC) in 2020 has found it to be at odds in several important ways with goals expressed by the Go2030 comprehensive plan and other plans that have been developed since the last time the LDC was substantially revised in the 1990s.

Shortcomings include inadequate development standards, especially as they relate to urban form—or how new buildings relate to the physical fabric of a neighborhood or street.

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

Too much uncertainty about what can be built and what it will look like—especially in areas where land uses mix or transition from one use to another—is a bigger issue for some stakeholders than others. It matters to neighborhood vitality, though, if it causes enough existing owners to hesitate on making investments to their properties because they lack confidence in the direction of the neighborhood or their own willingness to remain there. It also matters if it steers away homebuyers who sense uncertainty and have plentiful options elsewhere that give them more confidence.

Incompatibility of development matters if new development has the effect of lowering standards in a given neighborhood or disrupting urban form in a way that detracts from a neighborhood's established physical character. Either change can have the effect of setting a tone for future investment that erodes certain advantages that core neighborhoods have over other parts of the Fargo-Moorhead region.

Uneven levels of resident leadership capacity and engagement

How has this issue been expressed?

The response to the call for volunteers to participate on committees for the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan largely reflected existing levels of resident leadership capacity and organization. Areas with a longer history of organized engagement had more residents expressing an interest to participate than those with less formal or visible resident leadership structures.

What is known?

Resident leadership capacity in the core appears to correlate with a combination of factors

The two neighborhoods with the most volunteers for the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan—Hawthorne and Horace Mann—are two that have longstanding and fairly active neighborhood associations. There may be a number of reasons for this, but a few key ones appear to be:

Rallying Points

These areas have some of the oldest housing in the city and have been dealing with cycles of disinvestment, reinvestment, and change for decades. Often, some precipitating event or issue is needed to compel people to become and stay engaged.

Identity

Like the presence of issues to rally around, a clear neighborhood identity is something that existing residents and newcomers alike can connect themselves to. Fargo's most engaged neighborhoods tend to have the clearest or strongest identities.

Income

Resident affluence and education can influence the degree to which neighbors feel comfortable interacting with City government and seek to actively manage change in their neighborhood. Higher incomes also frequently translate to concentrations of middle-aged homeowners who have been in the neighborhood for enough time to connect with others.

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

Resident leadership can seem like an abstract or intangible force in a neighborhood, but its absence can have very tangible consequences. If residents are not connected and organized in some way—either formally or informally—a neighborhood's capacity to address small issues before they become larger issues, and to effectively advocate for neighborhood interests, will be limited

Concerns about the long-term status of schools as neighborhood anchors

How has this issue been expressed?

Schools were singled-out as critical assets in almost all core neighborhoods—serving as physical and cultural anchors—during the planning process. But concerns were also raised that schools in the core have been falling behind newer schools in newer neighborhoods. If schools in the core, and the neighborhoods themselves, have a harder time competing for young families, there are fears that certain facilities may not be viable in the long-term.

What is known?

Elementary enrollment projections reflect growth expectations and trends in Fargo

Fargo's growth in recent decades has been concentrated in the city's southern end, where residential development and a growing population have been served by new and expanded school facilities. Over the next few years, elementary enrollments based on student residence show that core neighborhood enrollment will be flat if not declining while enrollment beyond the core will grow by almost 5%.

In terms of enrollment as a percentage of school capacity, core elementary schools are expected to be at 74% in 2023/2024, while non-core elementary schools will be at 82%.

Projected Elementary School Enrollment by Student Residence

	2020/ 2021	2023/ 2024	% Change
Core Elementary Schools	2,004	1,979	-1.2%
Non-core Elementary Schools	3,333	3,491	+4.7%

Source: Fargo Public Schools Long Range Facility Plan (2019)

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

The symbiotic relationship between core neighborhoods and their schools–with each neighborhood reflecting and reinforcing the strength of its schools, and vice versa—make schools an important part of neighborhood planning. In Fargo, uneven growth patterns and their influence on planning for school facilities means that the proper scale for addressing this issue is citywide.

Crime and public safety —reality and perceptions

How has this issue been expressed?

In an online survey, crime and safety were identified as priority problems to address in Jefferson / Carl Ben and Madison / Unicorn Park. But it was also among a range of issues noted by participants in a few other neighborhoods, including Horace Mann and Roosevelt / NDSU.

In some cases, crime was raised during the planning process as an issue that impacts neighborhood quality of life. In other cases, it was raised as more of a perception problem, where the external image of crime does not align with reality.

What is known?

A greater density of incidents in and adjacent to downtown Fargo than in most other parts of the city

Crime data in Fargo is not yet reported in a manner conducive to detailed analysis and meaningful comparisons of neighborhood-level crime rates. However, the Fargo Police Department does use CityProtect as an online mapping tool to share incident reports with the public—allowing residents and neighborhood organizations to see the types of incidents that have been reported over recent periods on specific blocks or near specific intersections.

Mapping all reported incidents from the previous 12 months using CityProtect reveals a greater density of incidents in and adjacent to downtown Fargo than in most other parts of the city. This is to be expected given the relative density of population and activity in Fargo's urban core, as well as levels of economic need that are higher than average (for Fargo). This concentration of incidents—however experienced or communicated—can influence how safe people feel about living in or visiting certain parts of Fargo's core.

Source: CityProtect

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

Feeling unsafe—regardless of how that impression is generated—can lead some potential residents to look elsewhere and compel existing residents to withdraw from civic life or move someplace that feels safer. But it can also motivate neighbors to reach out, work together, and collaborate with City leaders to make a block feel more orderly, neighborly, and secure.

Housing costs and taxes

How has this issue been expressed?

While the affordability of the core neighborhoods was often mentioned during the planning process as a key asset, concerns about housing costs and taxes were also raised. Rather than concerns about prices or rents, those raising this issue tended to focus on the maintenance and repair costs related to older housing and Fargo's practice of placing special assessments on properties to pay for infrastructure improvements.

What is known?

While Fargo's housing market has been strong for years due to rapid growth, it remains broadly affordable.

For example, the median gross rent in Fargo in 2018 was well within the affordability range of the typical renting household, and the value of the median owner-occupied house was well within the purchasing range of typical Fargo homeowners.

The affordability of the housing stock—especially in the core—is often a reflection of age and condition. With nearly 80% of the residential properties in the core neighborhoods now 60-years-old or older, and there being a clear difference in average condition between older and newer properties according to the 2020 field survey of residential conditions, homes in the core present owners with financial decisions and challenges that are more complicated than paying more for a newer house in a newer neighborhood. When the costs of upgrading older infrastructure get added as special assessments, owning an older home in an older neighborhood becomes a particular challenge for households with low or limited incomes.

Comparison of Median Incomes and Housing Costs, 2018

	INCOME NEEDED	INCOME ACTUAL
RENT	Income needed to afford median rent in Fargo **$31,840**	Actual median household income of renters in Fargo **$36,867**
FOR SALE	Income needed to affordably purchase a home priced at Fargo's median home value **$66,000**	Actual median household income of homeowners in Fargo **$86,970**

Comparison of Property Conditions in Core Neighborhoods by Age

Year Built	Number of Core Residential Properties	Average Field Survey Score (lower score indicates better condition)
1939 or Earlier	**3,667**	**2.63**
1940 to 1959	**3,354**	**2.56**
1960 to 1979	**1,444**	**2.44**
1980 to 1999	**222**	**2.45**
2000 or Later	**154**	**2.00**

Least Healthy ← 4.75 3.75 3.25 2.75 2.25 1.0 → Most Healthy

Source: czb analysis of American Community Survey 2018 5-Year Estimates and 2020 field survey of residential conditions

Why does this issue matter, and how does it affect neighborhood planning?

Affordability in the core neighborhoods can be a double-edged sword—providing a wide range of options for homeownership in a strong regional housing market, but putting a greater onus on owners to maintain and improve aging properties to prevent serious degradation. If a growing share of owners are unable to keep up with maintenance for financial reasons, or are unwilling to pay for costly and disruptive upgrades, housing quality and conditions eventually erode along with neighborhood quality of life and the City's tax base.

How did we get here?

The priority issues in Fargo's core neighborhoods have not emerged overnight, and they are not isolated from each other or from other issues. They represent choices and processes long in the making that affect older neighborhoods across the country.

Identifying strategies to address these issues requires an understanding of where the issues come from, the problems that need solving, and the interconnectedness of problems and potential solutions.

Homes in need of repair or updating

When disrepair becomes visible at the scale now apparent in Fargo's core neighborhoods—one in every six residential properties—it is a sign that disinvesting in older housing makes more sense for many owners than investing and actively improving. Plentiful, newer, and generally affordable options on the edges of Fargo make it easier for households to look past the core when they decide where to put their housing dollars.

If the market doesn't respond to an aging and outdated house by substantially renovating it and making it competitive again to the broader homebuying market, the cost of the house will increasingly reflect its condition and it becomes a source of affordable housing. While this is an important role for the house to play and an asset for a community where low-wage workers have a declining range of affordable options, deferred maintenance is likely to mount over time without intervention. And if homes in disrepair become concentrated, poverty is also likely to become concentrated.

Condition and quality of life impacts of rental housing

Rental housing is a significant part of Fargo's housing supply (56% of all occupied units) and an essential part of a healthy housing market that provides access to the full spectrum of housing types. As with owner-occupied housing in Fargo, plentiful and largely affordable options—especially newer units—have contributed to disinvestment in some older rental properties. An older and outdated apartment rents for less than its more modern competitors, which makes them affordable—but it also limits reinvestment into the property and can lead to degradation over time if market or other forces fail to intervene.

The renting of single-family houses—generally not a viable business model—has become viable in areas where acquisition costs are especially low (due to declining condition or unfavorable location) or if the market can bear high rents (as in areas adjacent to NDSU). With thousands of new rental units having been built citywide in recent years, though, landlords of single-family homes may find it increasingly difficult to compete for renters. This has the potential to create affordable homebuying opportunities for some households, but it might also hasten disinvestment in the most marginal properties.

Safety, quality of life, and land use impacts of traffic and major roadways

When most of Fargo's core neighborhoods were built in the early-to-mid 20th century, Fargo was a much smaller city with far fewer cars. As the city and traffic volumes grew, major streets were re-engineered to better accommodate the efficient flow of cars—something that happened in every American community. Cities are now a full generation into rethinking these practices, and Fargo is no different. While some major roads have been thoughtfully redesigned, many in the core are still stuck in a mid-century model that feels unsafe to pedestrians and bicyclists and detracts from neighborhood character.

The recent reconstruction of Main Avenue has the potential to reset expectations and make it easier for similar redesigns to occur on other corridors. But the physical and behavioral adaptations that will make corridors throughout the core feel safer will take years, patience, and resources to accomplish.

Incompatible development and uncertainty in transitional areas

Cities and neighborhoods change—any effort to preserve a place in amber will inevitably be met with disappointment. While change cannot be prevented, it can be managed and guided in ways that reflect a general community consensus about the pace, nature, and geography of change, as well as the compromises that stakeholders are willing to acknowledge and make.

In parts of Fargo's core neighborhoods where change has been happening the fastest, efforts to fully recognize and reconcile competing goals have often been inadequate, resulting in feelings of frustration, distrust, and uncertainty. Decisions are being made on a regular basis where key stakeholders disagree about which principles and goals should be the basis for a decision— disagreements that go unresolved and carry over to future decisions.

What issues require attention?

Overcoming both a hesitancy and an inability to make large home improvements

Isolated examples of blight that threaten stable areas

Limited financial motivation to upgrade aging multi-family properties

Preservation of affordable opportunities currently provided by underimproved rental properties

Making single-family properties in decline less appealing targets for rental investors and more appealing to homebuyers

The design and function of major roadways (and of the overall network they form)

Uncertainty and disinvestment stemming from evolving land use demands along some corridors

Too much uncertainty about what can go where and what it will look like

Inadequate processes for mediating disagreements between competing interests and visions

PART 2

CRITICAL CONCEPTS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING IN FARGO

To address issues that are emerging or longstanding in Fargo's core neighborhoods, understanding the nature of those issues and how they connect to each other is an important starting point. But to arrive at a framework for making decisions and implementing tools that will make a difference, an understanding of critical concepts for good neighborhood planning is also needed.

The following pages present four interrelated concepts that are particularly relevant for the core neighborhood and provide a foundation for identifying the types of actions that are likely to yield outcomes in favor of vibrant and sustainable neighborhoods and actions that might undermine long-term neighborhood health.

Defining a healthy neighborhood

Every neighborhood wants to be "healthy," but what does that really mean? In the context of neighborhood planning—especially when talking about revitalization or maintaining vitality—a healthy neighborhood refers to one that functions well on four specific factors: market, capacity, conditions, and image.

When a neighborhood is faring well on each of these factors, the primary work for neighborhood leaders and their public and non-profit partners is centered around maintaining these strengths and recognizing that a fall off on any one of the factors feeds a downward cycle. If resident capacity to manage problems begins to slide, for example, conditions are apt to slide in some way, which translates to a shakier image and a weaker market that begets further decline in capacity.

When a neighborhood is not strong on one or more of these factors, work should center on improving the weak points and recognizing that doing so will have ripple effects within the Healthy Neighborhoods cycle. If residents in a neighborhood organize to identify and manage small problems before they get out of hand, conditions are apt to improve, which influences a more positive image, which results in more people seeing the neighborhood as a desirable place to live.

While there are other goals a neighborhood may want to achieve besides these four factors of neighborhood health, being healthy puts a neighborhood in the driver's seat of its own future.

MARKET

Who is living in the neighborhood and who would like to live in the neighborhood

The market is strong

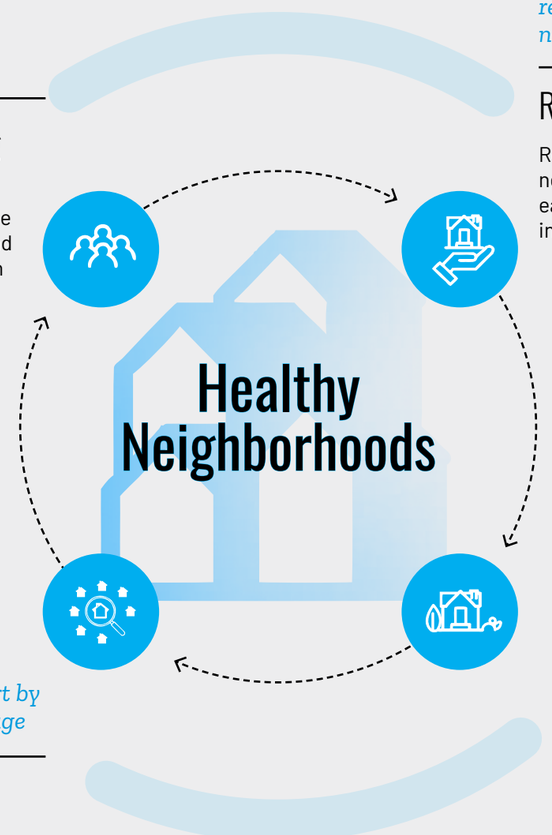
Demand for housing is in balance with or exceeds the supply; prices are rising and keeping pace with inflation

CAPACITY

Ability and willingness of residents to manage home and neighborhood

Resident capacity is high

Residents actively manage neighborhood issues and engage each other and wider stakeholders in constructive ways



IMAGE

Perception of the neighborhood by non-residents; shaped in part by neighborhood's self-image

Neighborhood image is positive

Signals sent by conditions communicate pride and instill confidence

CONDITIONS

Level of care and investment committed by residents of the neighborhood; level of infrastructure upkeep committed by public sector

Housing and neighborhood physical conditions are good

Residential blocks are appealing to potential buyers and renters from outside the neighborhood

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Distribution of housing opportunities matters

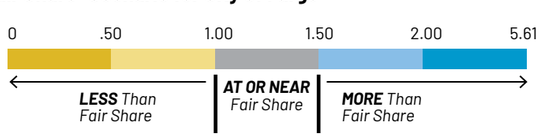
Fargo does not have an abnormally high level of households with low incomes. As of 2018, just under 22% of households (or 11,500) earned less than $25,000, compared to 20% nationally. For these households, however, housing options are constrained by their ability to afford no more than $625 per month without becoming overly burdened by housing costs.

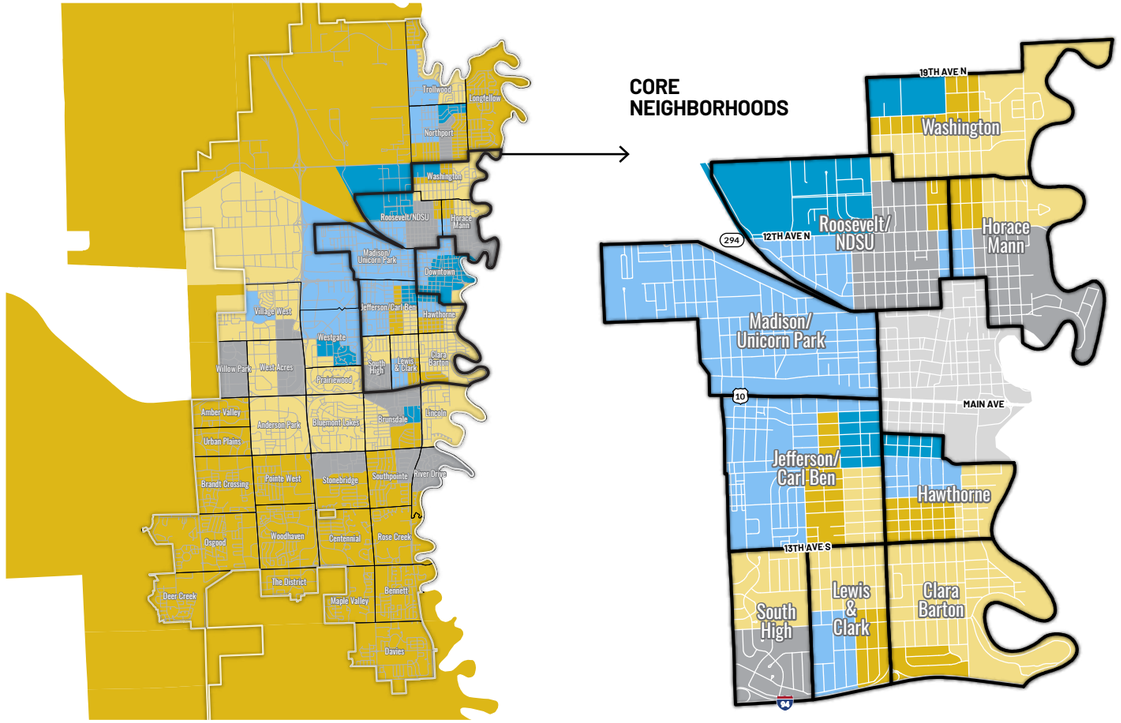
The distribution of inexpensive housing heavily influences where many of these households settle, and the distribution in Fargo (as in most cities) is far from even. These households are disproportionately located in older neighborhoods—particularly in the core—where older housing serves as an important source of affordable housing. And within the core, these households are disproportionately distributed in areas where housing is least expensive and rental opportunities are numerous.

Why are these very common patterns of household distribution noteworthy from a neighborhood planning standpoint? When efforts are not made to intentionally distribute affordable housing opportunities on a wider basis within a region, concentrations of poverty inevitably result over time in rising levels of disinvestment, declining conditions, limited commercial opportunities due to low discretionary spending capacity, and the wide range of social issues that arise when neighborhoods are sharply polarized by income.

In other words, how affordable housing opportunities are distributed within a region—whether they are part of every neighborhood's housing fabric or relegated to a handful of areas—ultimately shapes just how healthy an older neighborhood with older and less expensive housing can be.

Share of Households Making $25,000 or Less Compared to Expected Share Under "Fair Share" Scenario for City of Fargo





Source: czb analysis of household income distributions in the City of Fargo from the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018

Owner-occupancy and household stability affect neighborhood health

Just as neighborhood health becomes harder to build and sustain if a neighborhood has an outsized share of a region's low-income households, neighborhood health is more difficult to achieve and maintain when owner-occupancy is a small or declining component of a neighborhood's residential fabric.

As a rule of thumb, a 50% owner-occupancy rate for housing units in a neighborhood (or higher, if the housing stock is predominately single-family dwellings) is an important threshold to stay above, ensuring that a critical mass of residents have a significant personal stake in the neighborhood's health and a strong incentive to invest both socially and financially. It is harder for an owner-occupant to get up and leave when neighborhood health is at risk, therefore giving them extra motivation to actively address issues as they arise in collaboration with other residents (owners and renters).

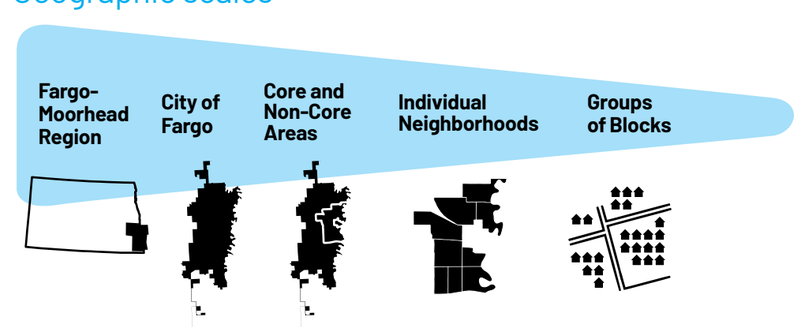
Owner-occupancy is also correlated with household stability—as measured by characteristics such as length of tenure, earning potential, and education—and a critical mass of stable households is another contributor to neighborhood health for all residents.

Sustained neighborhood health derives from no single indicator. Strong neighborhoods have renters and homeowners across a range of proportions. What matters most is that owners—home owners or rental property owners—find long term-value in maintaining their properties to a high standard that signals pride of residency, and having a housing ladder that is balanced and well-distributed regionally, citywide, and at the neighborhood-level.

Neighborhood health in Fargo is served by having a balance of housing types and opportunities at all geographic scales

Housing types and opportunities

Geographic scales



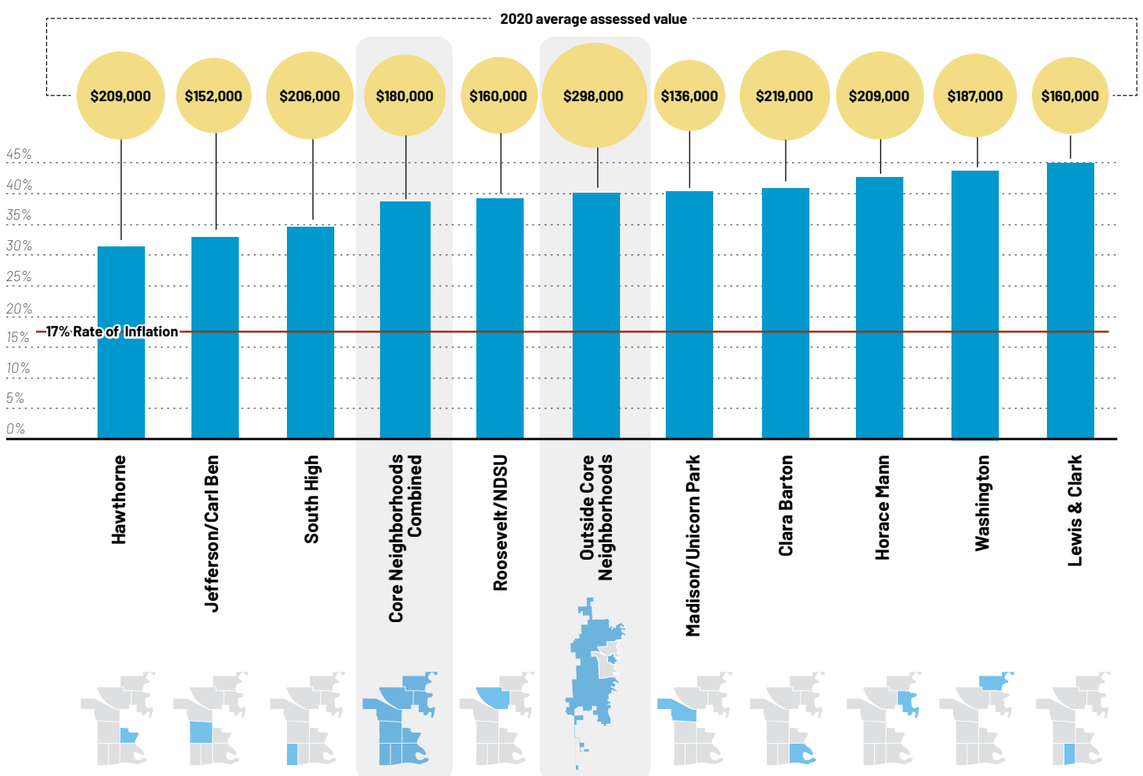
The City's fiscal strength is imperative

An often overlooked but crucial objective of neighborhood planning is a neighborhood's contribution to the fiscal health of the City—especially when property taxes are an important source of municipal revenue as they are in Fargo. If the City's fiscal position erodes, investments in infrastructure and services are likely to fall behind desired levels, and the City's ability to help pay for a wide range of neighborhood goals will be reduced. Consequently, monitoring long-term changes in property values—and whether those values keep up with or fall behind inflation—is one important way to gauge how neighborhoods contribute to fiscal health.

Given Fargo's rapid growth in recent decades and rising demand for housing, the average assessed value of single-family homes has been able to outpace inflation in each of the core neighborhoods by a considerable margin. Though average values in all core neighborhoods remain well below the average value of newer housing stock outside the core, five of the nine core neighborhoods have experienced value growth since 2011 that exceeds the rate of growth in non-core neighborhoods.

These value trends, combined with the fact that blight is not yet at overwhelming levels in any core neighborhood, are an indication of Fargo's strong position to invest in ways that will foster and maintain healthy core neighborhoods.

Percent Change in Average Assessed Value of Single-Family Homes, 2011-2020, Compared to Inflation



Source: czb analysis of current and historical assessment data from City of Fargo

How should these concepts influence planning and policy for Fargo's neighborhoods?

What these four concepts reveal is a need to think expansively from a planning and policy standpoint on a few different levels—and to recognize that building or sustaining neighborhood health is not a one- or two-dimensional task that can be accomplished by focusing narrowly on the core neighborhoods themselves. Specifically:

Defining a healthy neighborhood

The four interrelated factors that drive neighborhood health all require different types of attention from neighborhood residents, City leaders, and other neighborhood stakeholders. Stimulating engagement between neighbors requires certain tools in the same way that encouraging home reinvestment requires specific resources and approaches. Good planning and policymaking must pay attention to all four factors.

Distribution of housing opportunities matters

Intentionally distributing affordable housing opportunities to avoid concentrations that would be harmful to low-income households and neighborhood health is not something that can be done by narrowly focusing on affordable housing in the core neighborhoods. City- and region-level action are necessary to make movement in a fairer direction possible.

Owner-occupancy and household stability affect neighborhood health

In the same way that well-distributed affordable housing opportunities requires at least a citywide policy perspective, achieving a healthy balance of owner-occupancy throughout the core neighborhoods requires a way of thinking about the integration of different housing types at the block scale, the neighborhood scale, and beyond.

The City's fiscal health is imperative

Making the City's long-term fiscal health part of decision-making and planning at the neighborhood level—and not just from the standpoint of whether the City can afford to pay for something at any given moment—forces planning to be mindful of the consequences that every action might have on a neighborhood's ability to compete for housing demand and maintain a property base that can strongly contribute to service delivery and infrastructure investments.

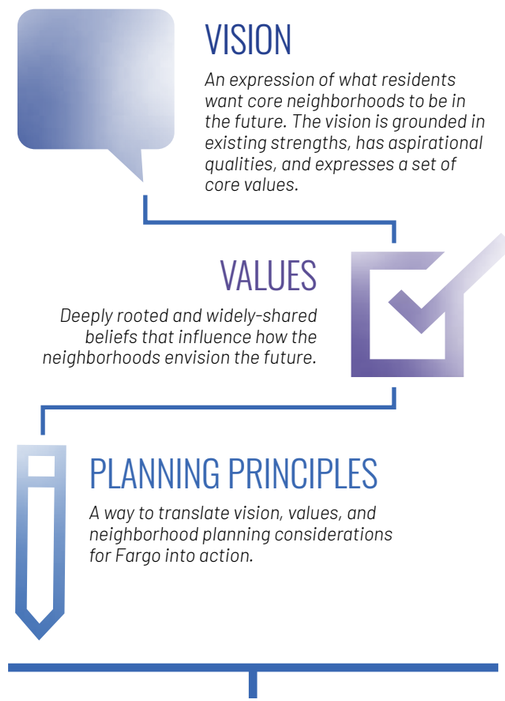
PART 3

VISION, VALUES, AND PLANNING PRINCIPLES
FOR THE CORE NEIGHBORHOODS

Each of Fargo's core neighborhoods has a vision for the future grounded in specific strengths and opportunities that residents wish to build from and challenges they seek to overcome. These visions—in the form of neighborhood brand statements and a set of measurable outcomes—can be found in the implementation briefs in Part 5.

Although each neighborhood has its own vision, the process behind the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan revealed many common themes in these visions and the specific outcomes being sought across the core—commonalities that speak to an overarching vision for the core and a set of shared values. When those values are combined with what is known about prominent issues in the core (Part 1) and concepts for neighborhood planning in Fargo (Part 2), a set of planning principles comes into focus.

Together, the shared vision, values, and planning principles presented here in Part 3 form the building blocks of a decision-making framework. As City officials and neighborhood leaders are confronted with choices that have the potential to influence core neighborhoods, this framework can serve as a basis for making decisions that consistently and thoughtfully align with what residents in the core value and want to achieve.



Building blocks for a consistent decision-making framework for Fargo and the core neighborhoods

Fargo's core neighborhoods all have a strong and distinct sense of place that reflects their history and their role in Fargo's collective story.

Their homes, parks, schools, and trees are points of pride that contribute to a high and improving quality of life that attracts residents looking for character and community.

There is a strong commitment to investment and stewardship as well as equity and diversity, ensuring that desirable residential environments are neighborly and accessible.

Statement of Shared Vision for the Core Neighborhoods

VALUES

We are committed to...

Character

Our neighborhoods have vernacular character that reflects where we've come from and who we are in Fargo—we value it and recognize that it contributes value to our neighborhoods. We believe in preserving local character whenever possible and being thoughtful about new additions to the built environment.

Sustainability

As a community, we are responsible with our resources and assets—this means we are careful about what we invest in as a community, but we are not cheap. We recognize that building and maintaining desirable places (public or private) requires investment, far-sightedness, and stewardship to achieve durability and lasting benefit.

Inclusion

While we have room to improve on matters of inclusion, a sense of fairness and common interest have long shaped our civic culture. We recognize that moving forward as a community is something that happens when all feel included as contributors to and beneficiaries of our success.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

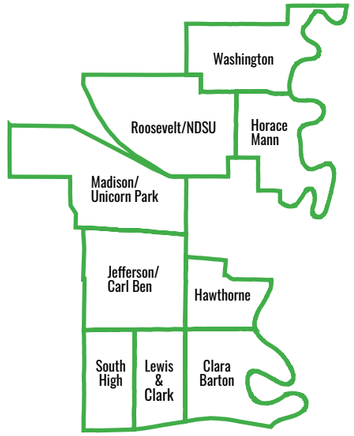
How would this work as a decision-making framework?

Gauging whether a decision aligns with a value or planning principle will not always be straightforward—such a framework requires a willingness by the community to openly interpret and discuss what the values and principles mean and how they apply to the decision at hand. At a basic level, however, there are some clear "dos" and "don'ts" that go with the values and planning principles presented in this plan.

	DO	DON'T
Housing is balanced, diverse, and contributes to neighborhood character Having a wide range of housing types and price points—from a strong and well-preserved single-family stock to a range of appealing rental options—will keep our housing market resilient and responsive to housing demand and need. We will strive to ensure that the core neighborhoods collectively provide this range of opportunities and that housing diversity is thoughtfully integrated within individual neighborhoods.	Use the City's Land Development Code to require adherence to basic principles of good urban form in order to strengthen the physical fabric of core neighborhoods Support a mixture of housing opportunities in each neighborhood, including multi-family housing along corridors where higher densities make the most sense Encourage preservation of and reinvestment in the core's single-family housing supply	Allow infill development to compromise the quality of existing neighborhood form (but, at the same time, don't be overly prescriptive about style and design) Allow redevelopment patterns to emerge that (1) compromise confidence and continuity on stable, single-family blocks or that (2) result in mixed-use, higher density areas that feel unplanned or haphazard
Neighborhoods are amenity-rich High-quality parks and other amenities contribute to quality of life for all residents and the desirability of our core neighborhoods. We will preserve, invest responsibly in, and add strategically to the amenities we have. Whenever possible, we will make an extra effort to turn underutilized or one-dimensional public spaces—including streets—into stronger quality of life assets.	Invest in high-quality park and public space improvements—including connections between improvements—to bolster quality of life in core neighborhoods and position them as neighborhoods of choice in the region Involve neighborhoods in planning amenities to create a sense of ownership and confidence that translates to parallel investments by private homeowners	Skimp or underinvest in neighborhood amenities and expect core neighborhoods to successfully compete for residents and investment in the long-run Plan improvements to neighborhood amenities without considering how they connect to and support other amenities and neighborhood goals
Settlement patterns do not inhibit economic mobility Our actions promote the maintenance and emergence of balanced, mixed-income neighborhoods citywide and in the core. If a project or policy is likely to directly or indirectly concentrate poverty and disinvestment into small areas or specific neighborhoods, we will reject or rethink it.	Use City incentives to encourage and support residential projects that help the City and its neighborhoods achieve mixed-income results Use federal and state housing resources in ways that create durable housing opportunities for low-income households in mixed-income settings near job centers, services, and amenities	Use City incentives to encourage or support projects that will reinforce concentrations of poverty or exclusive development patterns Use federal or state housing resources in ways that steer new affordable units to areas with the lowest land costs or areas isolated from economic opportunities or amenities
Growth pays for itself (including negative externalities) Growth comes with direct costs, such as infrastructure construction and expansion. But it also comes with externalities, such as diminished demand for older neighborhoods and older public facilities. In addition to paying its own way, growth must contribute to solving its indirect consequences.	Ensure that new development on Fargo's edges is both covering the cost of new infrastructure and services AND helping to pay for reinvestment in the City's core Plan for growth in a more comprehensive manner that takes ramifications for schools, parks, and existing neighborhoods into full account Put an onus on core neighborhoods to absorb a share of Fargo's future population growth—the most sustainable way for Fargo to grow	Assume that having new development pay for new infrastructure and service costs alone is sufficient to cover the full fiscal impact on Fargo Mistake preservation goals in core neighborhoods as a rationale for not absorbing growth in the core

PART 4

CORE NEIGHBORHOODS TOOLKIT



The process behind the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan revealed a comprehensive range of issues to address and principles to apply that will require a citywide vantage point. Consequently, a toolkit for the core neighborhoods focused narrowly on a few localized programs or policy tools would have been inadequate to the task of achieving the shared and individual visions of the nine neighborhoods.

The toolkit outlined here responds to the complexity of these neighborhoods and the issues to address by identifying five general categories of intervention tools that form a comprehensive toolkit for a diverse collection of older neighborhoods.

For each tool category, the following information is presented:

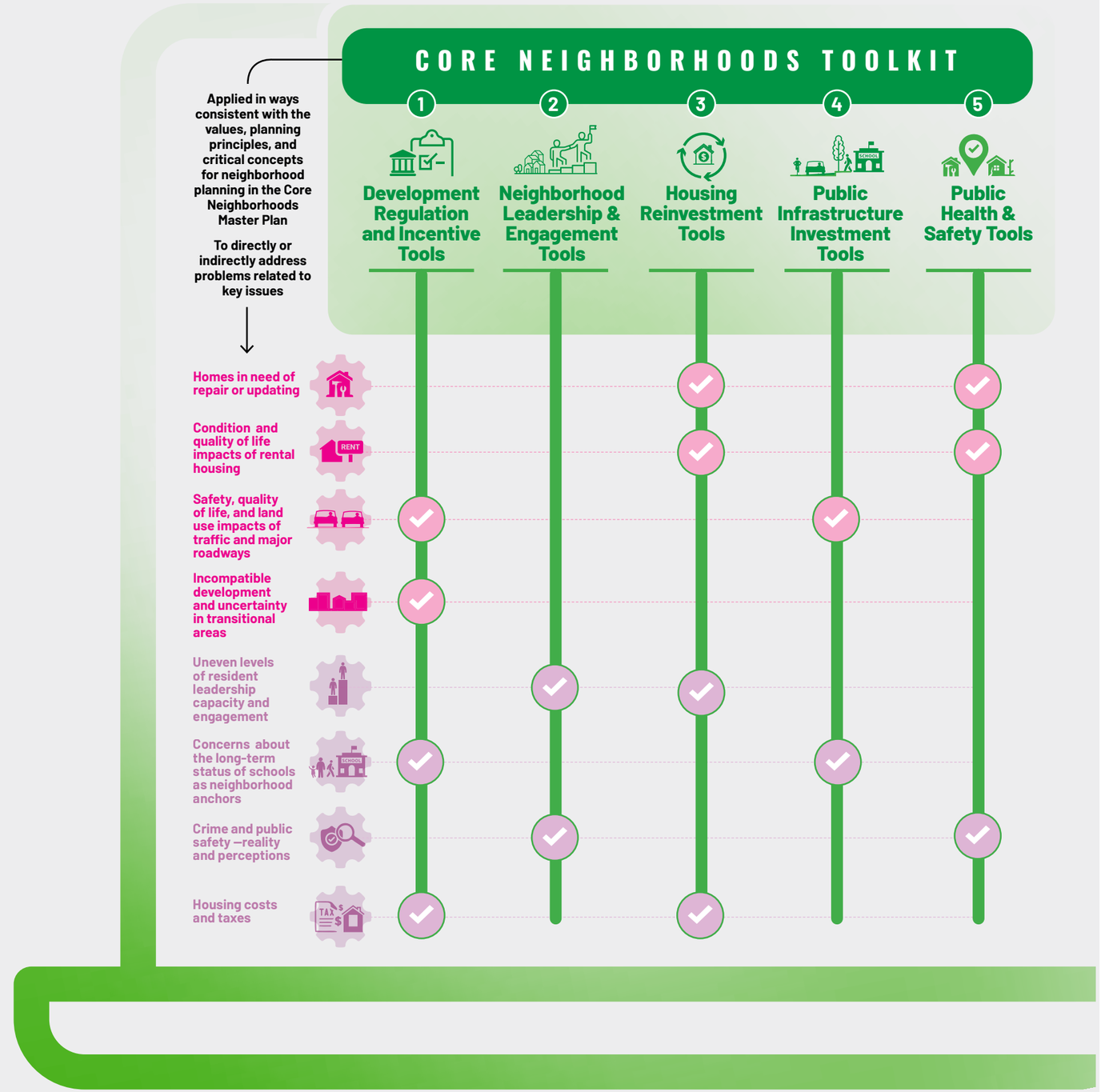
PROBLEMS TO SOLVE ····· CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS ····· CHANGES TO MAKE

Problems to Solve in the core neighborhoods that can be addressed in some form by the tool category.

Current Practices and Conditions, outlining how the City of Fargo and its partners currently utilize tools within the category.

Changes to Make, covering recommended actions that would bring policies and programming in Fargo into better alignment with the issues that need to be addressed and the planning concepts and principles outlined in this plan.

Part 4 concludes by proposing a realistic sequencing of implementation steps and highlighting the most critical steps to achieve in the near-term to put implementation on a positive course.



1

Development Regulation and Incentive Tools

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

What are the core neighborhood problems that can be addressed by this category of tools?

Too much **uncertainty about what can go where and what infill development will look like**, which can contribute to current or potential owners hesitating to invest in existing properties.

Uneven distribution of affordable housing options across Fargo, with higher-than-optimal concentrations of low-cost options (and therefore poverty) in some core neighborhood areas where the housing stock is older and outdated.

CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

How are these tools currently configured or used?

A Land Development Code that, according to a separate LDC Diagnostics project, is outdated and not a good reflection of goals stated in the Go2030 comprehensive plan or other, more recent, plans. This includes the absence of design standards in base zoning districts as well as zones close to downtown that permit a broad range of uses and densities (perhaps too broad given existing, desired, or foreseeable land use patterns).

A Go2030 comprehensive plan that does not acknowledge certain ambitions that are important to the health of core neighborhoods, such as an ambition that all neighborhoods be healthy or that affordable housing be addressed in a manner that does not concentrate poverty in a few poorer neighborhoods.

Routine use of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) by developers to negotiate the details of core neighborhood infill projects, including use and density—which leads to decisions that can seem ad hoc and unpredictable to neighborhood stakeholders.

Aging housing stock in the core neighborhoods serving as Fargo's default supply of affordable housing, with no policies in place to require or encourage a more even and equitable distribution of affordable housing.

A system of development incentives, including tax exemptions, tax increment financing (TIFs), and payment in lieu of tax agreements (PILOTs) with policies and guidelines that are regularly reviewed to ensure they are aligned with City objectives and plans.

CHANGES TO MAKE

What changes to current practices substantially address the "Problems to Solve?"

1. Update the Land Development Code (LDC) to reflect principles and goals expressed in this Core Neighborhoods Master Plan.

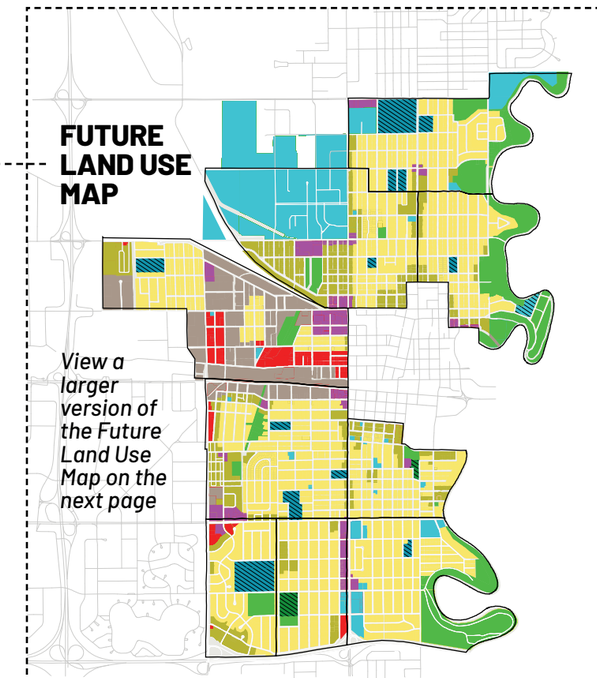
A successful update of the LDC will take a wide range of planning and policy goals into account for the entire city. Special attention, though, should be given to outcomes sought in the core neighborhoods and the ways that the LDC can assist in achieving those outcomes.

ACTION

Use the following resources and recommendations to guide the LDC update:

- ☑ **Future Land Use Map for the core neighborhoods, which has been created to express land use and development goals in the core neighborhoods.**
- ☑ **Integrate development standards into a revised Land Development Code as a commitment to the "Character" value in this plan. Development standards are a set of design requirements that are used to establish a minimum level of design quality and address the use of materials,transparency, overall building articulation, and other basic elements of urban form.**

Who	Cost
City of Fargo	No direct cost in addition to what is expended on the LDC update



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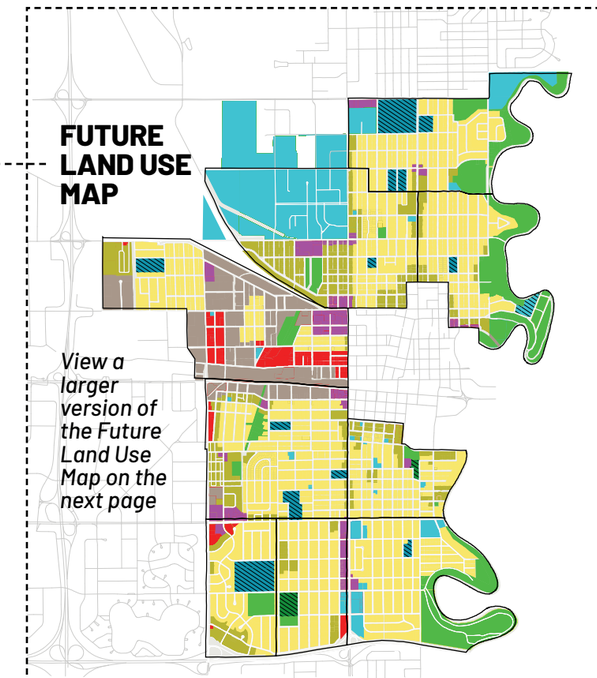
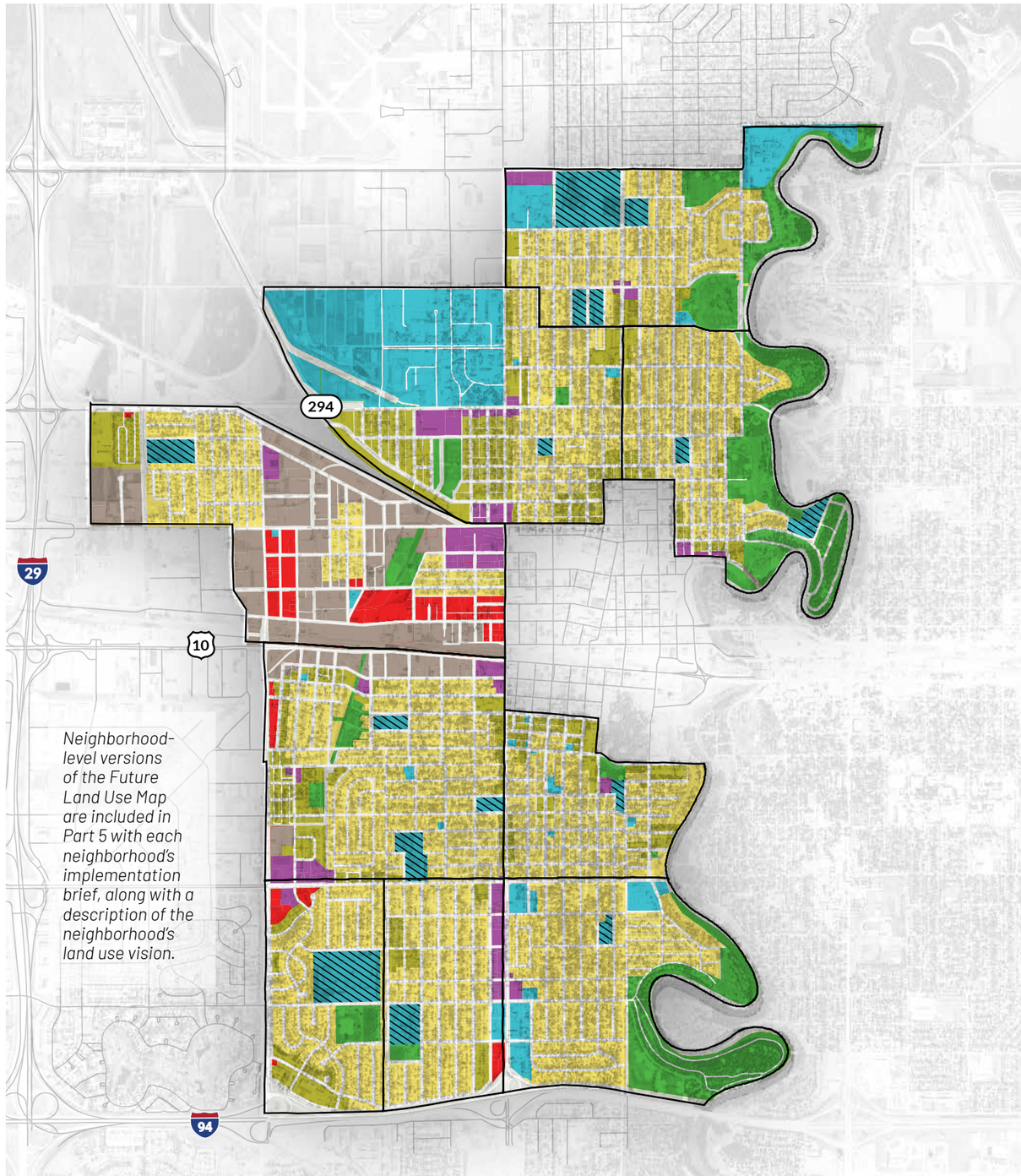




Neighborhood-level versions of the Future Land Use Map are included in Part 5 with each neighborhood's implementation brief, along with a description of the neighborhood's land use vision.

Future Land Use Map (FLUM)

What is a FLUM?

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is the community's visual guide to future planning efforts and identifies recommended locations for specific land uses. In the case of Fargo's core neighborhoods, many land uses have been in place for decades and the existing land uses are the same as the proposed future land uses. The challenge is to clearly identify those locations, often at the block level, that are transitional and recommended to be something different than they are today. The FLUM is a map of what the community wants to have happen; it is not a prediction.

How is it used?

The FLUM provides a generalized view of how land in the core neighborhoods is intended to be used. It does not necessarily show land uses as they exist today nor does it illustrate zoning information; it is not an official City map. Rather it should be used to inform any updates for a new zoning map associated with revisions to the Land Development Code (LDC). If the FLUM depicts a land use differently than what actually exists on the ground it does not mean the existing use (technically defined as a "nonconforming use") must be removed or cease operation. In this case, the standards for continued operation included in *Article 20-10, Section 20-1002, Nonconforming Uses* of the Land Development Code apply.

What land use designations are illustrated on the FLUM?

Single-Family Residential

Single-family housing is the primary building typology recommended within this land use designation, a designation that could also be considered a de facto preservation area for the single-family building fabric that dominates these areas.

Multi-Family Residential

Duplexes, townhouses and apartment buildings are likely to be interspersed alongside single-family structures within this designation to provide a greater range of housing options for households within the community.

While neighborhoods are not typically considered for mixed-use neighborhood commercial opportunities, the City should explore allowing small cafes (coffee shops, tea houses, bakeries, etc.) or a local mom-n-pop shop, a hardware store, or a pottery or art shop within this land use designation. And because the Planning Department cannot always predict where a need, or opportunity, for such services will arise, the City should consider a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to allow neighborhood commercial uses (with detailed criteria for approval) per the existing Land Development Code (LDC).

Institutional

Schools, churches, nonprofit centers, community centers, hospitals, medical centers, and public facilities make up the majority of uses within the institutional land use designation.

Schools with recreational amenities

Industrial/Warehousing

Industrial/warehousing facilities tend to be concentrated in specific areas as a result of transportation needs as well as the size of buildings needed for fabrication of materials, and they should be limited to specific sites as noted. Opportunities may exist in some areas to retrofit these properties for mixed-use development, including artist live/work spaces, loft apartments, or commercial uses such as brewpubs. Landscaping and screening requirements should be strongly implemented and enforced.

Park, Open Space and Trails

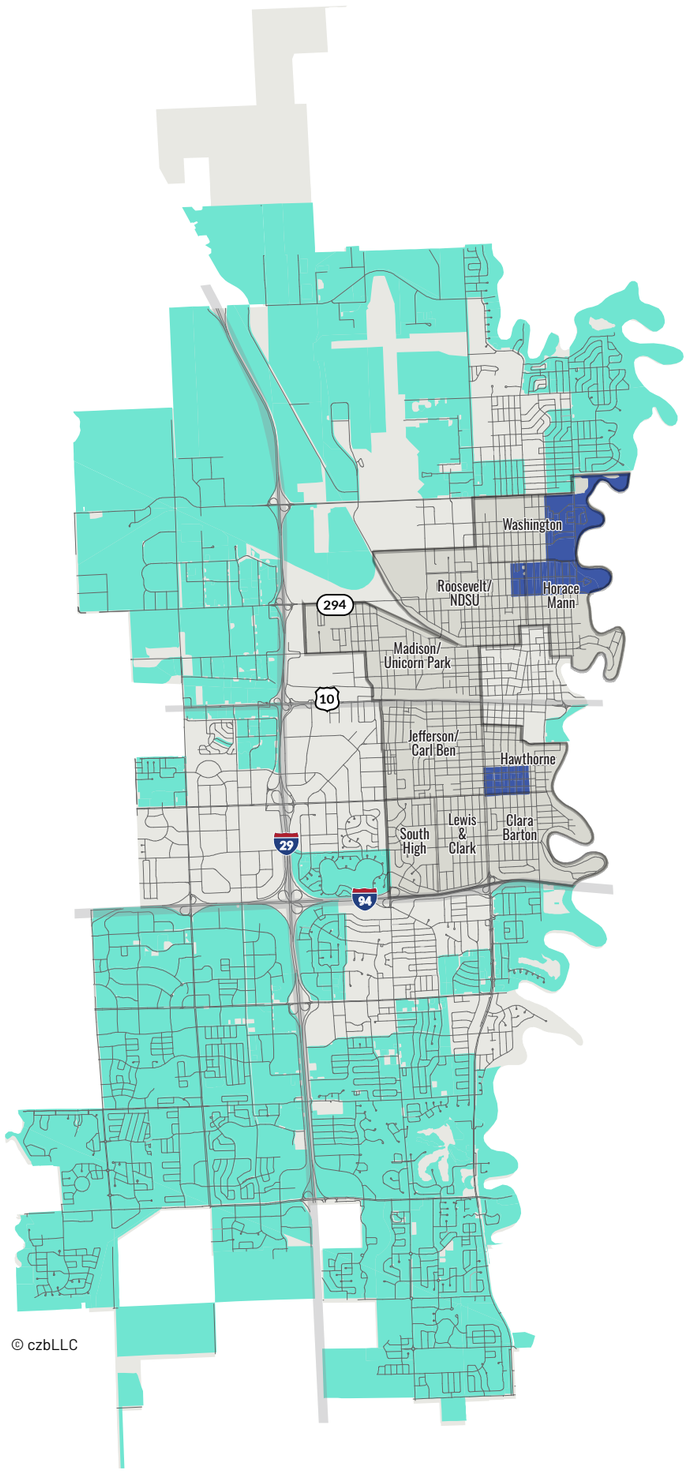
In addition to parks, playgrounds, open spaces, and trails this land use designation also includes environmentally sensitive areas.

Commercial

While a variety of commercial uses make up the majority of these areas as designated on the map, these areas should increasingly be considered for mixed-use development. Residential development and/or offices on the upper floors of retail establishments are encouraged within this land use designation. Residential development should be designed at higher densities in these areas.

Mixed Use Neighborhood

Neighborhood commercial opportunities such as restaurants, local retail establishments and community gathering spaces with residential uses incorporated into the development are the primary components of this land use designation. Unlike the Commercial designation, mixed-use development requires the inclusion of a residential component to ensure 24-hour viability. Additionally, walking and cycling access must be fully integrated into these developments.



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Inclusion Priority Areas

Non-Core Housing Inclusion

Core Housing Inclusion

This map of inclusion priority areas identifies blocks that have well-below average shares of Fargo's low-income households AND housing market demand conditions that are above average for Fargo. If a residential project in these areas is to receive any form of incentive from the City of Fargo, it is recommended that the incentive be granted only if the project has an affordable component of at least 10% of developed units.

2. Revise development incentives and subsidies to reflect goals and planning principles of this plan

Just as the Land Development Code needs to be updated to reflect recent plans, the same applies to development incentives and subsidies (from local, state, or federal sources) that are used by the City to aid development of certain types and in certain locations. The City has a process in place for periodic reviews and updates to these tools.

ACTION

During Fargo's next review of policies governing development incentives and subsidies, integrate changes that reflect the planning principles and goals of the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan. These may include:

- **Mixed-use incentives in areas designated on the FLUM (and codified in the LDC) as emerging neighborhood centers**
- **Mixed-income, inclusionary housing requirements** for:
  - Any project with a residential component that seeks assistance through TIF or PILOT
  - Any multi-family residential project seeking a remodeling exemption
- **Withholding City-controlled incentives or support for any project that contributes to or reinforces concentrated poverty,** such as:
  - Any project with a substantial affordable housing component that is also in a Census block group with 20% or higher poverty

Who	Cost
City of Fargo	Value of potential tax revenues forgiven to achieve core neighborhood goals (potentially offset by tax revenues not forgiven for mis-aligned projects)

3. Create a regional housing trust fund to support inclusive housing development at a regional level

While the City of Fargo can actively pursue a wider distribution of affordable housing opportunities through modifications to development incentives, a truly fair distribution of affordable housing opportunities requires action at the regional level. Without a regional approach to this issue, default concentrations of affordable housing in the least expensive communities will remain an issue and undermine the long-term health of older neighborhoods across Fargo-Moorhead.

ACTION

- **Through inter-jurisdictional agreements, create a consortium of communities** that agree to pay annually into a housing trust fund based on a combination of population and recent volume of market-rate development, among other possible criteria. Use allocated funds to assist financing of low-income and mixed-income housing development in a manner that does not contribute to or reinforce concentrations of poverty.

Who	Cost
Fargo-Moorhead Council of Governments (Metro COG) as the potential convener or coordinator of participating communities; the new Cass County Land Trust as the potential home and manager of a housing trust fund	Annual cost to participating communities dependent on long-term production goals tied to regional housing needs

2

Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Tools

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

What are the core neighborhood problems that can be addressed by this category of tools?

Cultivating greater resident leadership capacity where it is low and maintaining it where it is high in order to successfully manage issues at the neighborhood level.

CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

How are these tools currently configured or used?

A few core neighborhoods have well-established neighborhood associations that interact with residents and City officials, though maintaining and growing their volunteer base is an ongoing challenge. Most areas in the core neighborhoods do not have anything so formal, and any informal leadership structure that exists is often hard for the City to interact with routinely.

The City of Fargo used to employ an individual who helped to facilitate the development and operation of neighborhood associations and the cultivation of neighborhood leaders, but such a position has not existed for at least a decade.

The Fargo Neighborhood Coalition exists to connect neighborhood leaders and amplify neighborhood issues but has limited, volunteer-driven capacity.

CHANGES TO MAKE

What changes to current practices substantially address the "Problems to Solve?"

1. Create capacity to cultivate and connect residential leaders and to oversee programming that stimulates neighbor-to-neighbor engagement.

Having dedicated staff to work with neighborhood associations and emerging neighborhood groups was critical to past achievements on the issue of residential leadership development. Such a capacity is needed again, and over a sustained period, to boost the capacity of neighborhoods to manage issues and interact effectively with City Hall and other entities.

ACTION

- ☑ **Establish a "Neighborhood Coordinator" position**. Position the coordinator as primarily responsible for designing and executing programming related to neighborhood leadership and engagement, and as a key liaison between neighborhood groups and City departments.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo as lead financial sponsor of the position; position would ideally be housed at the same entity responsible for new housing reinvestment programs identified in this plan (see Housing Reinvestment Tools)	Salary and benefits of coordinator position

2. Develop and implement programs designed to identify emerging leaders, support the work of emerging or established neighborhood groups, and to connect neighborhood leaders to information and each other.

A number of simple and time-tested approaches can be used to empower residents who want to engage and organize their neighbors and to create locally-driven momentum that builds confidence and a sense of ownership for neighborhood conditions.

ACTION

Design and execute programs, such as:

- ☑ **Block activities and small beautification/improvement projects for motivated groups of neighbors (using small matching grants and providing facilitation support)**
- ☑ **Annual 'neighborhood improvement summit' that brings neighborhood leaders together to engage with City departments and each other, supplemented by routine, topical workshops.**
- ☑ **Technical assistance and/or small grants to aid in the implementation of activities that reinforce neighborhood brand and vision (as identified through the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan process).**

Who	Cost
Programs administered by Neighborhood Coordinator	Resources for small matching grants, organizing the annual summit and routine workshops (estimated range: $15,000 to $30,000 per year)

3

Housing Reinvestment Tools

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

What are the core neighborhood problems that can be addressed by this category of tools?

Overcoming owner hesitancy and/or inability to make large improvements to older homes that are in need of repairs/updates to maintain the health and marketability of core neighborhood housing stock.

Addressing isolated examples of blight that threaten stable areas.

Limited financial motivation to upgrade aging apartment complexes that also serve as a source of affordable housing.

Making single-family homes that are currently slipping less appealing targets for rental investors and more appealing for potential homeowners.

CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

How are these tools currently configured or used?

The City of Fargo has two longstanding Community Development programs in this category of tool that are too limited in size and impact to address these problems at the proper scale.

Housing Rehabilitation Program: A program funded with federal dollars for income-eligible homeowners that currently rehabs 5 to 7 properties per year due to limited resource availability and limited contractor capacity to do the rehab work (due in part to regulations tied to the funding source).

Additional federal resources from the Community Development Block Grant program and H.O.M.E. are dedicated to a variety of programs, especially those that serve the housing needs of the homeless and very low-income households.

Neighborhood Revitalization Program: The City of Fargo and Gate City Bank partner on a low-interest loan program that serves approximately 10 homeowners per year, on average; approximately $2 million in loan capital is allocated annually; the program provides an attractive home improvement financing option for those who use it, but it does not appear to stimulate work that would not have happened otherwise.

The City of Fargo also has tax incentives aimed at reinvestment in both commercial and residential real estate. This includes the remodeling property tax exemption that exempts the value added by remodeling for five years.

The City's Historic Overlay Districts—of which there are seven in the core neighborhoods—do not provide resources or incentives to assist owners with property improvements. But they do provide a measure of predictability, and therefore confidence to owners who make investments in historic homes, by ensuring that exterior modifications in the districts are reviewed for architectural sensitivity.

CHANGES TO MAKE

What changes to current practices substantially address the "Problems to Solve?"

1. Continue to allocate Fargo's federal housing and neighborhood resources in a manner that serves the greatest housing needs, but look for opportunities to serve goals of this plan.

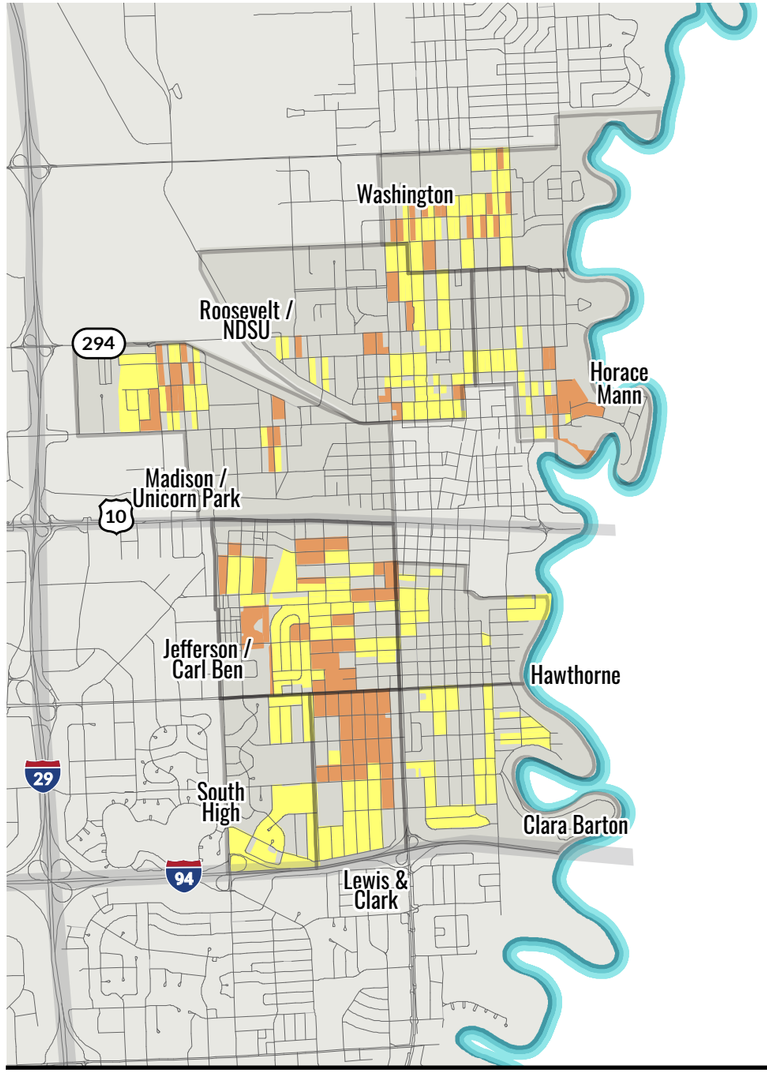
Existing federally-supported housing and neighborhood programs managed by the Division of Community Development have shortcomings that limit their reach and impact, and this is largely a consequence of resource limitations and restrictions on how they can be used. Nevertheless, they help support vital services for the city's most vulnerable populations.

ACTION

Continue the City's emphasis on using federal housing and neighborhood resources to address the immediate and long-term shelter needs of households and individuals at 30% of area median income and below, including services to prevent homelessness. Whenever and wherever possible, however, use these resources to support the following activities:

- ☑ **Blight reduction** on core neighborhood blocks (in eligible Census tracts) where distressed housing conditions are an impediment to neighborhood stability
- ☑ **Infrastructure improvements** that reduce the cost of mixed-income housing developments in the core neighborhoods

Who	Cost
City of Fargo Division of Community Development	Allocation of existing federal funding streams



2. Create new housing reinvestment capacity to flexibly and proactively intervene with approximately 225 homes and 10 apartment buildings over a ten-year period.

- Based on the existing scale of residential disinvestment in Fargo's core, it is estimated that roughly 235 interventions over the next decade—of the right types and in the right locations—will do much to raise standards, bolster confidence, and prevent blight and disinvestment from becoming a more significant issue in 15 or 20 years.
- The recommended volume of intervention is based on the Pareto principle, also known as the 80/20 rule. Experience elsewhere has shown that by focusing directly and strategically on a modest number of disinvested properties, behaviors can be shifted in a manner that influences investment patterns neighborhood-wide.
- Given the important link between neighborhood improvement and high levels of resident capacity, marrying reinvestment programming with leadership and engagement programming may be advantageous.

Promising Areas for Reinvestment Resources

The blocks identified on this map are especially promising targets for strategic housing reinvestment resources.

Core Reinvestment "A" Blocks

"A" blocks represent blocks that are largely stable with modest levels of deferred maintenance. Strategic investments have a high probability of making them stronger and spurring reinvestment by neighbors.

Core Reinvestment "B" Blocks

"B" blocks have higher levels of deferred maintenance but still retain a number of healthy properties. Larger investments are needed here to bolster confidence, but there are identifiable strengths to build from.

ACTION	Who	Cost
Establish a new entity (or reposition an existing one) that would be charged with designing, promoting, and managing a series of residential reinvestment programs aligned with this plan, as well as cultivating resident leadership. These programs may include:	City of Fargo as lead sponsor with numerous other financial and strategic partners	**Capital**: Ideally, the costs of housing reinvestment projects will be covered by a combination of owner capital and debt, capital supplied by the City of Fargo, and state or federal tax credits (where applicable). Public resources would cover revolving capital needs as well as subsidies to pay for appraisal gaps and affordability gaps. It is estimated that the City of Fargo would need to commit approximately $4 million over 10 years to support the target of intervening with 235 properties across the programs here. **Operations**: Estimated need for administrative and operating funding to target, plan, and manage 20 to 25 projects per year, as well as neighborhood engagement capacity.
☑ **Owner-Occupant Home Improvement Program** **Target:** 125 houses over 10 years Partner with existing owner-occupants on significant home improvement projects that would elevate home marketability and neighborhood standards.		
☑ **Home Turnaround Program – Acquisition and Renovation** **Target:** 50 houses over 10 years Proactively acquire and renovate troubled houses in strategic locations and sell to qualified owner-occupants.		
☑ **Home Turnaround Program – Acquisition and Demolition** **Target:** 50 houses over 10 years Acquire and demolish troubled properties that are unsalvageable. Sell the resulting lot to a non-profit or for-profit buyer with capacity to rebuild in a manner sensitive to neighborhood goals, or undertake sensitive infill without partners.		
☑ **Apartment Revitalization and Affordability Preservation Program** **Target:** 10 buildings over 10 years (with roughly 80 units total) Partner with property owners on significant rehabilitation of outdated and declining apartment buildings. Require preservation of affordable rents on a share of rehabbed units.		
☑ **Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Program** See description of leadership cultivation and engagement capacity described under Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Tools.		
☑ **Small Grants for Clustered Curb Appeal Improvements** Use small matching grants for exterior home improvements as a way to encourage groups of at least 10 neighbors to make simultaneous and visible upgrades to their block in order to build confidence and stimulate neighbor-to-neighbor engagement.		

Return on Investment:

When a number of conditions are met, capital committed to this activity by the City of Fargo should be expected to result in at least a dollar-for-dollar increase in the taxable assessed value of properties that are improved, as well as indirect value gains elsewhere on affected blocks. Maximizing ROI will require (1) that improvements noticeably and meaningfully increase marketability of the property by virtue of quality construction and use of quality materials, (2) improvements to the exterior of properties and to landscaping are prioritized, (3) delayed/deferred capital improvements to systems (foundation, roofing, heat/cooling, plumbing, electrical, weatherization) occur, and (4) that complementary public and private improvements be made or encouraged in close proximity.

4

Public Infrastructure Investment Tools

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE

What are the core neighborhood problems that can be addressed by this category of tools?

Streets

The design and function of arterial streets, most of which reflect an outdated auto-centric approach to street design.

Speeding on residential side streets.

Overparking on residential streets near busy institutions (namely NDSU).

Noise from Interstates is a problem to solve in some areas.

Trees

Trees are a recognized asset that need continued stewardship and investment to remain so, especially as mature trees die off and need replacement.

Parks

Parks are a recognized asset and have the potential to be greater quality of life assets.

Schools

Schools are a recognized asset, but some core neighborhood stakeholders fear that facilities and programming is falling behind newer schools in newer neighborhoods.

CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

How are these tools currently configured or used?

Streets	The City of Fargo has already implemented 'low-hanging fruit' bike infrastructure throughout much of the core. Main Avenue was rebuilt in 2020 between the river and University Drive in a manner that serves as a model for 'complete streets' design. Previous efforts to redesign streets to better accommodate all users have run into opposition from property owners, especially when on-street parking spaces are threatened. A system of sound barriers exists along parts of the Interstates bordering the core neighborhoods, but it is incomplete. A Safe Routes to School study was completed in 2020 and identified areas that pose the greatest risks for pedestrians in general and children specifically.
Trees	Fargo has a well-established Forestry Department that tracks the health and size of 57,000 trees in public rights-of-way and oversees maintenance and replanting efforts.
Parks	Fargo parks are managed by a special-purpose government (the Fargo Park District) that collects revenue through a tax levy, facility fees, and a fundraising foundation. Matching parks planning and neighborhood interests/needs is a continuous challenge, and long-range planning for the overall system of spaces within the core (and citywide) could be stronger and more closely tied to neighborhood visions and goals. The Park District will start work soon on a comrehensive strategic plan, which will provide an opportunity to connect neighborhood and park strategies.
Schools	Development of new housing in the City of Fargo and school facility planning are not currently coordinated. Impacts on the latter are figured-out in the aftermath of the former through redistricting and facility expansion that tries to balance a range of competing interests. Currently, many facilities in the core are well under capacity while facilities in fast-growing southern areas of Fargo are facing pressures to expand.

CHANGES TO MAKE

What changes to current practices substantially address the "Problems to Solve?"

1. Use rising levels of neighborhood leadership and engagement to consistently inform infrastructure planning and investments in the core neighborhoods

Planning for infrastructure investments can have a tendency to solicit public input in ways that reinvent the wheel for each project rather than building on priorities and goals that have been memorialized by previous efforts. This can create an environment where projects and investments are fragmented rather than combining with others to realize long-term community outcomes.

ACTION

- **Through newly created neighborhood coordination capacity (see Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Tools), leverage engaged residents to routinely inform planning efforts** related to specific types of infrastructure in the core neighborhoods through the lens of established neighborhood priorities and goals. Use the continuity of this engagement to ensure that new investments in parks, streets, trees, schools, and other infrastructure builds on existing momentum.

Who	Cost
Neighborhood Coordinator working with residents and departments/agencies overseeing infrastructure planning & investments	Improved coordination of existing public engagement resources

2. Develop a strategy to implement "complete streets" principles and character-enhancing improvements on all major corridors in the core neighborhoods, as well as traffic calming measures on busy side streets

Turning from an auto-focused orientation of major streets in the core to a more balanced consideration of multiple users (which has already begun on some streets, including Main Avenue) is a long-term process that requires thoughtful phasing and planning to achieve the right design for each street. The same goes for any effort to use street infrastructure to express and reinforce neighborhood character.

ACTION

- **As part of the upcoming Fargo Transportation Study, identify a process for gradually implementing complete streets principles along major corridors in core neighborhoods,** taking into consideration reconstruction schedules and the potential for inexpensive short-term modifications to test concepts. Include neighborhood associations, Fargo Public Schools, the Park District, and Forestry as key partners in the planning process.

Who	Cost
Metro COG, City of Fargo, NDDOT, and USDOT, along with other relevant partners	To be determined

3. Explore modifications to traffic patterns along University Drive and 10th Street corridors

University Drive and 10th Street became tandem one-way arterials decades ago, before I-29 and I-94 were built. Stakeholders from neighborhoods along these corridors (north and south of downtown) have asked if the streets can return to two-way traffic—a practice that many cities and highway departments have adopted in recent years (including Fargo, with Northern Pacific and 1st Avenue).

Below 13th Avenue South, the current two-way configuration of South University Drive is not pedestrian or bicycle friendly and hinders the potential for the street to become a mixed-use neighborhood corridor.

ACTION

- **Request NDDOT evaluation of the conversion of these corridors from one-way to two-way traffic, and of "complete street" options for South University Drive.**

Who	Cost
Metro COG, through its Metropolitan Transportation Planning processes	To be determined

4. Implement residential parking permits in areas of demonstrated need and at residents' request

Concerns about overparking—particularly in the Roosevelt neighborhood due to parking demand by NDSU students and the conversion of single-family homes into rentals—have been raised as a quality of life and traffic safety issue.

ACTION

- **Utilize the Residential Parking Permit District mechanism established under the City's Code of Ordinances.** There is currently one such district in the city (downtown). The process for designating a district involves a petition submitted to the City Engineer by a resident, with signatures from at least 50% of property owners in the proposed district.

Who	Cost
Neighborhood association or group of residents demonstrating support for a parking district and reasoning for the district's establishment	Nominal permit issuance and renewal fees to offset administrative and enforcement costs

5. Expand system of sound barriers between Interstate highways and core neighborhoods where they are missing and deemed necessary

While a system of sound barriers protects several parts of the core neighborhoods from Interstate highway noise, other areas have no such protection. The area between South University Drive and 25th Street South, in particular, has been noted for the impact of highway noise on neighborhood quality of life and marketability.

ACTION

- **Include core neighborhood noise impact and mitigation analysis** in Metro COG's upcoming Interstate Operations Study and introduce recommended mitigation measures into Metro COG's Long-Range Transportation Plan processes. Build on analysis performed and feedback received during recent planning efforts and work collaboratively with neighborhood leaders on understanding impacts and solutions.

Who	Cost
Metro COG and NDDOT	Dependent on determination of impact and form of mitigation chosen

6. Maintain strong commitment to tree maintenance and replanting

It would be a mistake to take the high caliber of Fargo's forestry management for granted, or to assume that trees can take care of themselves. What Fargo has today is the result of wise stewardship that requires resources and support to continue.

ACTION

- **Maintain or increase current levels of investment in Fargo's Forestry Department to ensure that trees remain a primary asset of the core neighborhoods.** Doing so can ensure the proper pace of replanting as mature elms die off and contribute to neighborhood character-enhancing changes to major corridors.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo	At minimum, keep Forestry Department funding (currently at $2.3 million per year) paced with inflation

7. Develop a comprehensive strategy for improving and maintaining public spaces as critical neighborhood assets

Public spaces in the core neighborhoods are owned and managed by the Park District, Fargo Public Schools (school yards, athletic fields, and playgrounds), and the City. Currently, there is no process for thinking about these spaces as a cohesive network of connected spaces—but there should be to make the most of these spaces as neighborhood assets and to ensure that a long-term vision melds with neighborhood needs and aspirations.

ACTION

- **Develop a 'Fargo Parks and Public Space Master Plan' through a partnership between the Park District, City of Fargo, Fargo Public Schools, and other relevant stakeholders.** Use this core neighborhoods plan and other plans to guide the process, which would lay out a long-term, network-wide vision and investment strategy for public spaces in Fargo. Use the Park District's upcoming strategic planning efforts as a starting point for this work.

Who	Cost
Park District, City of Fargo, and Fargo Public Schools	Estimated range: $100,000+

8. Strengthen the long-term planning relationship between the City and Fargo Public Schools with a new focus on recognizing and addressing the negative externalities of growth

The City of Fargo and Fargo Public Schools have a good working relationship when it comes to monitoring housing development and demographic changes that will impact school enrollment. But Fargo currently lacks a long-term vision for development and growth that takes into account the effect that new development on the periphery has on core neighborhoods and school enrollment patterns.

ACTION

- **Update Fargo's 2007 Growth Plan and the Go2030 Comprehensive Plan** to provide a long-term vision for growth that more adequately accounts for the costs and benefits of how and where growth happens. Use this as a basis for an updated policy framework that may include impact fees and other tools to ensure that new development (wherever it happens) contributes to a strengthening of Fargo's core.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo	To be determined

5 Public Health and Safety Tools

PROBLEMS TO SOLVE ····· CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

What are the core neighborhood problems that can be addressed by this category of tools?

Overcoming owner-occupant hesitancy to make large improvements to older homes that are in need of repairs/ updates— especially hesitancy stemming from lack of confidence in neighborhood direction.

Overcoming owner inability (financial, physical, or otherwise) to make basic repairs to bring their properties up to code.

Making single-family homes that are currently slipping less appealing targets for rental investors and more appealing for potential homeowners.

Alleys that are unkempt and detract from neighborhood character and confidence (road condition, presence of junk/debris, condition of adjoining private property and yards).

How are these tools currently configured or used?

Fargo's Inspections Department interacts with residential property conditions in the core neighborhoods in two primary ways:

- ***Complaint-based enforcement*** of the property maintenance code, which is the traditional method for most communities. Based on conversations with core neighborhood stakeholders, this approach is not well understood by many residents who assume that code enforcement should actively seek out code violations.
- ***Active public safety inspections of rental properties*** through a rental inspection program. In its current form, the program is not communicated clearly to the wider public and gives considerable discretion to code inspectors to determine when inspections are needed and when to follow-up.

A Code Enforcement Task Force exists that brings together Inspections, Law, Planning, Fire, and Police for coordination. However, an integrated problem-solving approach that addresses physical disorder before it becomes a more serious social problem does not yet exist.

Rebuilding Together has an active Fargo/Moorhead chapter that assists homeowners in need with critical home repairs and improvements, including abatement of code violations.

The City has limited resources to assist low-income owners with acute "Code Compliance Assistance" activities.

CHANGES TO MAKE

What changes to current practices substantially address the "Problems to Solve?"

1. Strengthen existing complaint-based code enforcement by expanding communication/ outreach with neighborhoods and property owners

Complaint-based code enforcement is most effective when the public understands how it works, their role in communicating issues to the City, and the limitations of code enforcement (what it can and cannot address).

ACTION

- **Continue this model of code enforcement, but expand outreach** (in collaboration with a new Neighborhood Coordinator position described elsewhere in the plan toolkit) to better inform residents and neighborhood groups about their role in this partnership.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo Building Inspections, in collaboration with Communications and Governmental Affairs and Neighborhood Coordinator	Potentially nominal through enhanced coordination between Building Inspections, Communications and Governmental Affairs, Neighborhood Coordinator, and neighborhood organizations

2. Supplement the basic complaint-based code enforcement method with periodic sweeps of core neighborhoods

Targeted code enforcement activities run the risk of unfairly focusing on specific neighborhoods and populations. The key to active but fair code enforcement is to have a systematic approach, such as a process for regular sweeps.

Comprehensive sweeps offer significant opportunities to communicate with property owners about the purpose of code enforcement, about programs to assist those who need help to remedy violations, and about programs that exist to stimulate property improvements and rehab.

ACTION

- **Institute a system of code enforcement sweeps that divides the core neighborhoods into a series of zones that receive a block-by-block sweep for code violations on a regular basis.** For example, the core could be divided into four zones, each with a similar number of properties. Starting in Year 1, Zone #1 would be the focus of a strategic code enforcement sweep, followed by Zone #2 in Year 2. Properties in Zone #1 would be subject to another sweep in Year 5 when the cycle starts again.

  Alternativley, a system of city-wide sweeps could be instituted that goes north-to-south and covers the core neighborhoods early on in a multi-year cycle. Or, sweeps can be designed to focus only on certain violations that pose the greatest risk to public safety and neighborhood quality of life.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo Building Inspections	Additional full-time staff at Building Inspections will be needed, with exact numbers dependent on the chosen approach and resulting work load

3. Upgrade the existing rental inspection program into a license and inspection system

The current rental inspection program is an excellent start to regulating the rental housing business to ensure safe and healthy housing conditions for renters and a level playing field for good landlords. But there are practices to adopt that would make for a more comprehensive and transparent system, such as a system that ties inspections to rental unit licensing.

ACTION

- **Require all rental units in the City to operate with a license that is obtained and maintained by passing a basic health and safety inspection.** Exemptions can be granted to properties that are the lowest risks, including relatively new properties, rental buildings where the owner lives on site, rental units occupied by close family of the owner, and other sensible exclusions.

  All properties would begin with a provisional, or automatic, license. Then, the City would begin a process of inspecting a certain percentage of all rental units each year, granting a full license if the property passes inspection—a license that would be good until the time comes for the next routine inspection. If the City made each license good for five years, this would require execution of a repeating five-year inspection cycle.

  If properties fail an inspection, additional inspections would be required until all violations are abated. And if a property is a source of repeat complaints and problems, or if the owner has a problematic track record, the term of the license can be shortened to ensure that inspections are more frequent.

  To pay for administration of this system, charge a fee for all inspections to cover program costs. This effectively penalizes property owners who require repeated follow-up inspections and rewards those who require fewer inspections. Moorhead currently has a similar fee-based rental registration system that is worth study.

Who	Cost
City of Fargo Building Inspections	Additional full-time staff will be needed at Building Inspections, with costs offset by inspection fees

4. Build on the Code Enforcement Task Force currently in place to create a closer working relationship between Inspections, Community Development, the Police Department, Municipal Court, social service providers, and other relevant partners

Collaboration between multiple departments enhances the City's ability to identify root problems behind physical disorder to inform the application of appropriate tools (such as compliance assistance for matters of financial need, community policing where disorder is affecting safety and quality of life, acquisition of problem properties in strategic locations, etc.).

ACTION

- **Formalize the Code Enforcement Task Force via direction from the City Commission that prescribes participating departments and the Task Force's mission.** Broaden the range of collaborators to include relevant non-City agencies and devise a system of "field teams" that would prioritize subject properties, investigate circumstances, identify probable solutions, and put the solutions into motion.

Who	Cost
Building Inspections as potential lead partner on Task Force	Potentially nominal through enhanced coordination of partnering agencies

5. Create a "Compliance Assistance" partnership between Community Development, Building Inspections, and relevant private sector partners

Having labor and financial resources to coordinate and deploy as needed to assist with code compliance for homeowners unable to abate violations is a critical part of achieving the desired outcomes of code enforcement.

ACTION

- **Identify a pool of resources (financial and labor) from City departments and non-profit partners that can be used to assist eligible homeowners with emergency repairs and other forms of basic code compliance.**

Who	Cost
Community Development, Building Inspections, and Rebuilding Together, among other potential partners	Allocate small pool of City resources to help cover compliance assistance costs and match with resources from Rebuilding Together and other non-profit partners

6. Use alley maintenance and cleanup efforts as a neighborhood improvement and engagement tool

Alleys are an important part of the infrastructure in several core neighborhoods, but their status as shared space can lead to neglect and accumulation of junk and debris.

ACTION

- **Create a partnership between Public Works, Community Development, Solid Waste, Forestry, neighborhood associations, and other partners that treats alley cleanup efforts as an opportunity to connect neighbors with each other and to create a firmer sense of local ownership for alley conditions.**
  Beyond alleys, identify other activities involving the same partners to improve resident engagement while improving neighborhood conditions.

Who	Cost
Neighborhood Coordinator in partnership with relevant City departments and neighborhood associations	Refocus existing resource and capacity

Timing and Prioritization

The actions identified in this Core Neighborhoods Toolkit—all of which would build from or modify Fargo's existing approach to these five types of tools—are ambitious and will collectively require a patient, long-term commitment of resources and energy from the City and a variety of neighborhood stakeholders and partners to achieve results.

As a comprehensive package, the actions identified in this plan would be impossible and inappropriate to implement all at once, or even over the span of a few years. There are some actions that are foundational in nature and require attention in the first 12 to 24 months after plan adoption to put systems and policies in place that will lay the groundwork for activities and decision-making over the coming decade—and ensure that the table has been set for additional work to be done.

		Foundations to Lay in the First 24 Months	Building on Foundations in Months 12-36	Longer-term Momentum-building Actions
Development Regulation and Incentive Tools	Update the Land Development Code (LDC) to reflect principles and goals expressed in this Core Neighborhoods Master Plan	✔		
	Revise development incentives and tax exemptions to reflect goals and planning principles of the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan		✔	
	Create a regional housing trust fund to support inclusive housing development at a regional level			✔
Neighborhood Leadership & Engagement Tools	Create capacity to cultivate and connect residential leaders, and to oversee programming that stimulates neighbor-to-neighbor engagement	✔		
	Develop and implement programs designed to identify emerging leaders, support the work of emerging or established neighborhood groups, and to connect neighborhood leaders to information and each other.		✔	
Housing Reinvestment Tools	Create new housing reinvestment capacity to flexibly and proactively intervene with approximately 225 homes and 10 apartment buildings over a ten-year period	✔		
	Continue to allocate Fargo's federal housing and neighborhood resources in a manner that serves the greatest housing needs, but look for opportunities to serve goals of this plan		✔	
Public Infrastructure Investment Tools	Create capacity to continuously link neighborhood residents and leaders to infrastructure investment planning and decisions	✔		
	Develop strategy to implement "complete streets" principles and character-enhancing improvements on all major corridors in the core neighborhoods, as well as traffic calming measures on busy side streets		✔	
	Explore modifications to traffic patterns along University Drive and 10th Street corridors		✔	
	Implement residential parking permits in areas of demonstrated need and at residents' request		✔	
	Expand system of sound barriers between Interstate highways and core neighborhoods where they are missing but may be required by current federal guidelines			✔
	Maintain strong commitment to tree maintenance and replanting	✔		
	Develop comprehensive strategy for improving and maintaining public spaces as critical neighborhood assets		✔	
	Strengthen the long-term planning relationship between the City and Fargo Public Schools, with a new focus on recognizing and addressing the negative externalities of growth		✔	
Public Health & Safety Tools	Strengthen existing complaint-based code enforcement efforts by expanding communication/outreach with neighborhoods and property owners	✔		
	Supplement the basic complaint-based code enforcement method with periodic sweeps of core neighborhoods		✔	
	Upgrade the existing rental inspection program into a license and inspection system			✔
	Build on the Code Enforcement Task Force model currently in place to create a closer working relationship between Inspections, Community Development, the Police Department, Municipal Court, social service providers, and other relevant partners	✔		
	Create a "Compliance Assistance" partnership between Community Development, Rebuilding Together, and other relevant partners	✔		
	Use alley maintenance and cleanup efforts as a neighborhood improvement and engagement tool		✔	

Top Five Implementation Steps

To get plan implementation underway in a manner that builds confidence and momentum for other plan activities, the five utmost priorities for the first 24 months of implementation are listed below.

Number one on the list is not a tool identified in this plan—rather, it is the recognition that a plan of this complexity needs to have a committee or person clearly designated as the coordinator tasked with overseeing an implementation planning process, connecting involved stakeholders, and tracking progress on all policy and program fronts.

#1

Designate an implementation coordinator or coordinating body

The coordinator could be an individual based in City Hall, or it could be a newly established or repurposed committee assisted by City staff. Developing and overseeing annual action plans will be an important part of this work.

2021 will be a year dominated by detailed implementation planning, policy work, and the identification of resources to allocate in 2022 and future budgets.

#2

Update the Land Development Code (LDC) to reflect principles and goals expressed in the Core Neighborhoods Master Plan

The update to the LDC is expected to begin in 2021 and will help lay policy groundwork to activate principles and realize goals from this and other plans.

#3

Create capacity to cultivate and connect residential leaders and to oversee programming to simulate neighbor-to-neighbor engagement

Establishing and filling the Neighborhood Coordinator position in 2022 (a distinct role from that listed as priority #1) will be an important part of building on the momentum generated by resident volunteers during this planning process. Part of that individual's early work would be the development of programming and projects to cultivate neighborhood leadership capacity.

#4

Create new housing reinvestment capacity to flexibly and proactively intervene with approximately 225 homes and 10 apartment buildings over a ten-year period

This decade-long process of strategically reinvesting in the housing stock of core neighborhoods in order to bolster market strength is the biggest single departure from current practices and will take time to put into place. At least 18 months will be needed to create a new entity or repurpose an existing entity, secure capital commitments from the City of Fargo and other sources, build administrative capacity, and design financial products/programs before money can start flowing into worthy projects.

#5

Strengthen existing complaint-based code enforcement efforts by expanding communication/ outreach with neighborhoods and property owners

Expanding code enforcement efforts in Fargo will require a process of building a better understanding in the community of the purpose of property maintenance codes and roles that the City, neighbors, and property owners play in keeping neighborhoods safe, healthy, and attractive. This begins with building partnerships and understanding around the current, complaint-based approach to enforcement.