

CHAPTER 3

REVITALIZATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE HOUSING STOCK

This chapter of the Housing Master Plan reviews the current condition of all housing types in Thornton. Additionally, existing programs that work toward revitalization and the stabilization of safe and well-maintained housing are identified. The chapter also examines the important role of historic preservation in neighborhood stabilization and describes current City efforts to preserve Thornton's heritage. The chapter concludes with the City's goals for achieving revitalization and preservation of Thornton's housing stock.

For the City and its residents, a well-maintained housing stock is important because it impacts quality of life, property values, neighborhood stability and perception and occurrence of crime. Not only do unkempt homes and yards detract from the aesthetic quality of the City, but they could contribute to crime and decrease property values as well. Consequently, it is important to maintain the City's housing stock due to the perceived negative effects of substandard housing on the community.

A. Single-Family and Multifamily Housing Conditions

The most recent physical assessment of single-family and multifamily exterior housing conditions in Thornton was conducted in 2006 for the 2007 Thornton Comprehensive Plan. The findings were included in the Thornton Comprehensive Plan Technical Appendix adopted September 11, 2007. Additionally, in March 2009, a resident telephone and online survey of reported interior and exterior housing needs was conducted as part of the Housing Needs Assessment by BBC Research & Consulting. Although the methodological approach differed substantially from the on-site surveys conducted for the Comprehensive Plan, the results provide useful insight into resident satisfaction with their housing situation.



Original Thornton was one of the single-family neighborhoods examined in the housing condition survey for the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

Single-Family Housing

The single-family survey conducted for the Comprehensive Plan focused on a sample of neighborhoods where the housing was built prior to 1981. The findings indicated that the most prevalent problems for these homes were cosmetic issues including paint, minor repair, roof replacement, and door or window issues.

Multifamily Housing

According to the Comprehensive Plan survey, the quality of multifamily buildings was mixed. Some were in very good condition, but many were in need of varying levels of repair. Additionally, apartments scored low on overall building amenities. Those amenities that were provided were of a fairly low level of design quality.

Residents' Assessment

Overall, the majority of the respondents to the Housing Needs Assessment surveys were satisfied with their current housing situation, although renters were more than twice as likely as homeowners to be dissatisfied. Specifically, 73 percent of homeowners indicated that their homes did not need any repairs. Repairs that were identified for owners included painting, windows, flooring and roofing. Owners had not made the repairs either because they could not afford to or did not have time. Renters' perceptions of satisfactory conditions differed from homeowners with only 43 percent of renters indicating that their home did not need any repairs. The 57 percent of renters who indicated that their homes did require repairs identified plumbing, windows and "other" as the biggest concerns. Of these renters, 25 percent indicated that the needed repairs affected their health and safety. Most renters, however, indicated that landlords made repairs promptly.

These surveys help the City to identify areas of Thornton with concentrated housing condition problems. However, the City does not have a housing or rental code which would require owners and landlords to fix cosmetic repairs. Nuisance problems which directly violate the City Code or unsafe building conditions which violate the Building Code can be addressed by the City. The City's Code Compliance Officers and Building Inspectors regularly investigate these types of complaints.

Many of Thornton's senior citizens reside in the older housing stock located in southern Thornton. The southern portion of the City also has the heaviest concentration of rental properties. Therefore, it is important to preserve these aging neighborhoods to ensure the retention of long-time homeowners and to attract new residents.

Future Assessment of Housing Conditions

The City may want to consider directly mailing a survey to all residents within select neighborhoods in older areas of the City asking them to identify problems and needs related to the internal and external conditions of their homes. The

responses would enable the City to better identify program types and financing allocation to effectively address the common needs of residents. This would be especially useful for identifying interior needs which the City cannot directly observe.

B. Manufactured Home Conditions

The 2007 Comprehensive Plan housing assessment examined Thornton's manufactured home communities, but not individual manufactured homes. The assessment focused on the condition of public buildings and common areas. The findings indicate that public buildings were generally in good condition, but the level of building amenities was low.



Monitoring the exterior conditions of older manufactured homes is necessary to ensure that certain deteriorated homes are repaired or replaced.

In 2009, the Thornton City Council expressed concerns over potential safety and fire code violations in communities due to the deteriorating condition of older homes and the placement of double-wide homes on pad sites originally sized for single-wide homes. In November 2009, Thornton Policy Planning staff conducted an informal windshield survey of the six communities identified in *Chapter 2: Housing*

Diversity and spoke with available community managers to aid in accurately assessing conditions. Overall, cosmetic exterior housing conditions of these communities were adequate, with some deterioration more prevalent in certain communities. Staff did not observe interior conditions.

Managers monitor the exterior condition of units in each community. Most managers routinely inspect the exteriors and inform residents when repairs are needed. Additionally, when a manufactured home is sold, a "point of sale" inspection is performed. If a home does not meet the individual community's standards for external appearance, it cannot be resold and must be removed from the park. Consequently, the exterior condition of manufactured homes in Thornton is relatively good; however, some older units exhibiting substandard conditions will need to be removed and replaced entirely. The City Code currently does not require replacement of manufactured homes based on age of stock. Some community managers, particularly at Alta Ridge, have proactively removed deteriorated homes. Friendly Village of the Rockies, which has a substantial

number of older units, will need to closely monitor and adopt a removal policy for its aging stock. Nuisances, such as graffiti and yard clutter, were also observed as common problems in some communities.

Therefore, Thornton Code Compliance officers will need to increase monitoring efforts and work closely with tenants and management to ensure that nuisance problems are addressed.



“Fix ups”, such as this nicely renovated home in Woodland Hills, can enhance the aesthetics and overall appeal of a manufactured home community.

Layout and density differ among the six communities. Staff’s windshield survey did not focus on potential layout problems. Therefore, the City would need to conduct a separate investigation to determine if the placement of double-wide homes is creating overcrowding. The City Code’s zoning requirements for Manufactured Home Districts regulate building separation, dwelling unit density, maximum height, maximum pad site coverage, and minimum pad site area. These land use regulations are designed to create a safe environment without overcrowding. Persons desiring to place a new manufactured home or accessory structure are required to submit a site plan indicating measurements in compliance with these regulations. Potential layout problems may be caused by the home or accessory structure placement differing from the approved site plan. Better on-site verification from the City may be necessary if the Code is being violated.

C. Existing Resources

A variety of programs currently exist to improve housing conditions and stabilize the housing stock in Thornton. The City advocates a holistic approach utilizing volunteer and nonprofit assistance, incentives, and enforcement as methods to improve housing conditions. Despite the many existing programs, members of Thornton’s Senior Citizen Advisory Board indicated that many of these opportunities were unknown to the senior community. Therefore, to more fully promote these services, the City may need more proactive marketing strategies such as newspaper advertisements or promotions to targeted populations.

Volunteer Home Improvement Program (VHIP)

The City directly provides home repair assistance to Thornton homeowners through two VHIP programs: Help for Homes and Rebuilding Days.

- **Help for Homes**

Help for Homes is the City's year-round minor home repair program. The program targets low- and moderate-income senior citizen and disabled homeowners. Qualified homeowners are eligible to have minor repairs up to \$4,500 performed on their home, free of charge. This program is funded by federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars and donations from local businesses. Additionally, some labor is provided by volunteers. The City currently contracts with Brothers Redevelopment, Inc. (BRI), to administer the program. Typical repairs made through Help for Homes include wheelchair ramps, bathroom modifications for ADA accessibility such as widening of doors and installation of grab bars, painting, plumbing and electrical repairs, and other items that are structurally related to the home.

- **Rebuilding Days**

Rebuilding Days is coordinated through Rebuilding Together Metro Denver. Residents can participate in one of two ways, either nominate their home for repairs or volunteer their time to work with a team of Thornton residents on a low-income senior resident's home. The goal of the program is to keep residents "warm, safe and dry." Rebuilding Days is a day-long Saturday event in which volunteers make minor home repairs for low-income seniors. Rebuilding Together also offers a variety of similar home repair programs and support to senior homeowners.



Rebuilding Days volunteers help repair homes of low-income seniors.

Housing Rehabilitation and Minor Home Repair Program

The Adams County Housing Rehabilitation and Minor Home Repair Program differs from Help for Homes in two primary ways: there is no age limit for applicants and the amount of funding is higher, enabling larger projects to be undertaken.

Thornton has accessed the Housing Rehabilitation and Minor Home Repair Program for many years through its participation in the Adams County Entitlement. The City was recently approved by HUD to become an entitlement community, as discussed in detail in *Chapter 4: Affordable Housing*. Although the City will no longer be part of the Adams County Entitlement, staff will review the possibility of continuing funding for home repairs through the Adams County program annually. Opportunities to offer Thornton residents similar services through other means will also be explored.

Noise Mitigation Program

In late 2002, the City of Thornton was the recipient of an initial \$8,250,000 awarded by the District Court of Jefferson County for violations by Denver International Airport (DIA) of maximum noise levels under a 1988 Intergovernmental Agreement between the City and County of Denver and Adams County. As directed in the settlement, the City used the monies to implement a Noise Mitigation Assistance Program beginning in late 2003, for eligible Thornton homeowners living in specified locations affected by airport noise. This assistance program was open continuously until 2006 and then re-opened again during 2009.

Qualified homeowners were eligible to apply for up to \$3,500 of Noise Mitigation funds to make home improvements such as replacing windows, doors, air conditioning units and insulation to reduce the noise. The City established funding priorities based on three criteria: the age of the affected residence, resident income levels, and the level of physical disabilities affecting the qualifying resident. Ancillary benefits of the program included increased energy efficiency due to upgrades and job creation for local contractors seeking work during slow economic times.

Factoring in additional violation monies since program implementation in 2003, just over \$10,200,000 has been administered to date to Thornton residents.

Weatherization Program

Low-income or eligible renters and homeowners who meet program requirements can qualify for free weatherization services such as attic and wall insulation, sealing of windows and doors, carbon monoxide tests on gas appliances and furnace maintenance. This program is a division of the Arapahoe County Housing and Community Development Services, but serves residents in Thornton.

The Senior Solutions Program

The Senior Solutions Program at The Senior Hub, a nonprofit senior-serving agency, offers a referral network of low-cost providers of handyman services. All handymen have been interviewed and screened by The Senior Hub and work at a low rate. They provide a wide variety of services, including plumbing, electrical, painting, grab bar installation, and yard work. Subsidized home repairs are available to qualified low-income seniors, in which case The Senior Hub will pay the cost of repairs, including parts and labor. Subsidized repairs must be of an emergency or health/safety-related nature.

Safety of Seniors Handyman Program

The Volunteers of America offer minor home repairs to senior homeowners. Depending on the circumstances, the homeowner may have to pay for the materials, however, the labor is free.

D. Historic Preservation

Historic preservation is an important aspect of stabilization. Thornton is relatively young in comparison to some neighboring communities; however, it has structures and areas that are important to the City's heritage and history. Portions of southern Thornton that are at risk for deteriorating housing conditions are also areas of historic importance due to their post-World War II architecture and layout. Other structures are significant to the historic Town of Eastlake. Preservation ensures that Thornton's historic built environment and legacy survives for future generations to experience, learn from, and be inspired by.

Local Historic Preservation (Landmark) Ordinance

Currently in Thornton, historic structures and districts meeting specific criteria may be nominated and designated as landmarks at a national or state level. While no Thornton sites have attained either of these



The Eastlake grain elevator is being evaluated for nomination as a historic landmark.

designations, a National Register nomination for the Eastlake grain elevator is currently pending, with final determination scheduled for April 2010. In addition to the state and national options, however, historic preservation regulations could be established at the local level to allow flexibility in recognizing properties or areas that may not meet the requirements for state or federal designation and further regulate their preservation. At the direction of the City Council, a local historic preservation (landmark) ordinance is being drafted.

E. Goals

The City of Thornton's Revitalization and Preservation of the Housing Stock goals are to:

- 3-A** Improve image and identity of neighborhoods.
- 3-B** Promote the maintenance and rehabilitation of Thornton's housing stock.
- 3-C** Encourage the beautification of Thornton's neighborhoods.