

# CHAPTER 6

## QUALITY OF LIFE

This chapter includes an overview of the quality of life in Thornton based on resident input from community meetings and surveys about housing and neighborhood conditions. The chapter also highlights existing neighborhood programs and concludes with goals regarding quality of life.

### A. Neighborhood Issues Within the Scope of the Housing Master Plan

In the long-term, quality of life issues can affect housing and neighborhood conditions. When negative issues impact the residents of a neighborhood, personal investment and commitment to the neighborhood falls. This could potentially lead to deteriorated housing conditions, out-migration, and neighborhood instability. The goals and recommendations set forth in the Housing Master Plan seek to address many of the housing and neighborhood issues raised through community meetings and surveys of Thornton residents. However, while the intent of the Housing Master Plan is to offer recommendations to improve the neighborhood conditions of the City, not all of the dislikes revealed by citizens fall under the scope of this plan.

### B. Citizen Input

Citizen input regarding housing and community development needs was obtained by the City in coordination with the 2009 Housing Needs Assessment and the 2010 Consolidated Plan and Action Plan.

As discussed in *Chapter 3: Revitalization and Preservation of Housing Stock*, the City conducted an online survey as well as a random telephone survey to collect feedback on housing needs for the Housing Needs Assessment. For the 2010 Consolidated Plan and Action Plan, the citizen participation process provided residents a variety of ways to comment on community and affordability needs. The City hosted public meetings near low-income areas; held a senior citizen focus group; conducted key person interviews; and accepted e-mails, faxes, phone calls, letters and comment cards.



*Community meeting with Thornton residents*

Citizen comments received during the public input process held for the Consolidated Plan are summarized below using the following categories:

housing, senior needs, weatherization and energy efficiency, public infrastructure and community development/services.

**Housing.** Housing needs identified during the public input process were divided into two groups: the needs of the current stock, as well as the creation of new housing.

- A need for continued rehabilitation of existing stock was one of the most common themes discussed throughout the process. Accessibility improvements, particularly for seniors and residents with disabilities, were mentioned as well as a need for rehabilitation of foreclosed property. Some residents stated that multifamily rental complexes are poorly maintained, in need of repairs and had a prevalence of bed bugs.
- Residents suggested creating more affordable housing options, and expansive housing options for seniors who want to move out of their current home but still remain in Thornton. Community members discussed the need to have affordable housing that was on a public transportation route and near services such as food banks, grocery stores, drug stores, medical facilities and day care.

**Senior needs.** Five key concepts were identified for senior needs:

- Diversified housing options for seniors (market rate homes, active and assisted living options, long-term care facilities, accessible rental options);
- Rehabilitation opportunities for current homes occupied by seniors to be able to age in place, including improvements to housing condition and accessibility improvements;
- Seniors expressed a strong need for assistance with maintaining their homes to meet City Code and to allow seniors to age in place;
- Property tax assistance;
- Housing close to senior services and amenities such as care facilities, senior centers, medical facilities and transportation.

**Weatherization and energy efficiency.** Residents discussed the need for improved energy efficiency of Thornton homes and expressed a desire for “green” development. Comments about benefits included using energy efficient products to combat continuously rising utility costs.

**Public Infrastructure.** Community members and the members of the Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force identified the streetscape in south Thornton as a valuable project for blighted neighborhoods. Residents expressed an interest in improving accessibility on public sidewalks and bridges.

**Community development and public services.** Residents and service providers identified two public service categories as a priority: youth services, and nonprofit support and services. Specific needs were identified as follows:

- More services for youth, particularly in the southern portion of Thornton;

- Additional health services for low and underinsured residents and expanded emergency assistance for residents who need help with rent and utilities;
- Wrap around services (ex: transportation, counseling, referrals) that extend beyond housing;
- Assistance in providing office space and office equipment for nonprofits.

## **C. Neighborhood Services Division**

The City is dedicated to addressing residents' quality of life concerns. In 2008, the City created a Neighborhood Services Division to preserve and revitalize neighborhoods, empower individuals to maintain and enhance their quality of life, and strengthen the City's capacity to work with neighborhood groups. Neighborhood Services delivers programs and services through three focus areas: Housing Programs and Services, Community Engagement and Resources, and Neighborhood Preservation and Revitalization. Neighborhood Services supports the development of neighborhood groups and provides resources for these groups to initiate projects that positively impact their neighborhood.

## **D. Neighborhood Engagement and Resources**

Vibrant and desirable neighborhoods are not only visually appealing, they are supported by engaged residents. In these neighborhoods, residents hold a common vision of their collective future which challenges, motivates and unites them. The vitality of a neighborhood depends on neighbors coming together to resolve issues and pursue opportunities and programs provided by the City and other organizations.

The City offers residents several neighborhood-enhancement programs and engagement opportunities. While some of the programs do not directly address the physical conditions of the neighborhoods, the programs increase residents' personal investment in the neighborhood, indirectly improving conditions.

### **1. Neighborhood Beautification Programs:**

#### **Keep Thornton Beautiful (KTB)**

The City works in partnerships with KTB, a nonprofit corporation that creates opportunities for Thornton residents and businesses to partner with the public, private and nonprofit sectors on community improvement projects. Typical KTB projects include planting flowers and plants in City parks and along major thoroughfares, and picking up litter along roads, fields and public areas. KTB also supports the Community Gardens that provide excess crops to local food banks, and a Paint-a-Thon in which residents volunteer a Saturday to paint the exterior of a home owned by a low-income senior.

### **TASHCO and Arts and Culture**

The Thornton Arts, Sciences and Humanities Council (TASHCO) is a 501(c)(3) organization whose Board of Directors is appointed by the Thornton City Council. The Master Plan developed by the Thornton Arts, Sciences and Humanities Council (TASHCO) states as its purpose the emergence of art and cultural events, exhibits and amenities in the City that will serve to preserve our community's past, enhance its present identity, enrich the quality of life for our citizens and promote economic development. Each year TASHCO submits an annual grant request to the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) through the Adams County Cultural Council. These grant funds are used for various types of programming within the City.

The City is proud of Thornton's growing collection of public art. Public art enhances landscapes and expresses the community's values. Thornton currently has 26 pieces of sculpture and other public art throughout the City's parks, open spaces and facilities. The art includes both whimsical and serious sculpture pieces, murals, a mosaic, and a student art tile wall.

### **Trees for Tomorrow**

'Trees for Tomorrow' is a program offered by Thornton Forestry to provide nursery-quality trees to Thornton residents at a reduced rate. These trees are grown in Colorado and are well-adapted to Thornton's climate. Trees are planted by the City's contractor.

### **Graffiti Program**

Thornton homeowners and Homeowners Associations (HOAs) are eligible to take advantage of the City's free graffiti removal program.

Per City Code, the City can remove graffiti from single-family homes and specifically-designated HOA common property with the written permission of the property owner. Owners of single-family attached or detached homes and HOAs that are vandalized by graffiti on residential fences, walls, garages and sheds adjacent to City streets, alleys, parks and trails can take advantage of the program.



*Thornton Code Officer gets ready to remove graffiti with a power washer.*

### **Thornton Revitalization Advisory Board**

In 2009, the City began focusing on options for the revitalization of blighted areas and preservation of desirable neighborhoods and business centers in Thornton. The Thornton Revitalization Task Force was formed in January 2009 to provide

recommendations for enhancing the stability of existing areas in the community. In June 2009, the Task Force presented a report to the City Council which identified characteristics that impact the ability of an area to be healthy, established criteria for when the community should engage in revitalization efforts for an area, and developed strategies to both revitalize areas where deterioration is present and preserve healthy areas.

Based upon the recommendation of the report, in August 2009, the City Council appointed board members from Thornton's residential areas, the business community, and other relevant stakeholders to the Thornton Revitalization Advisory Board (TRAB). The goal of TRAB is to expand upon the work of the Revitalization Task Force by providing the vision, leadership and continuity necessary to produce the on-going revitalization of Thornton's residential and business neighborhoods. TRAB is tasked with providing recommendations, alternatives, and advice to City Council and staff on feasible revitalization strategies.

## **2. Community Monitoring Programs:**

### **iWatch Speed Awareness Program**

Speeding, which impacts the safety and quality of life of Thornton residents, is the most common complaint the City receives from neighborhoods. To address this concern, the City created "iwatch", a speed awareness program that engages local residents in monitoring and educating their neighborhood.

Neighborhoods in which 50 percent of the residents agree to participate and sign a pledge can participate in iwatch. Participating residents report speeders to Thornton Police, hand out educational brochures to households, and provide speed reduction reminders in their HOA newsletter, website or other neighborhood publication.



*A Holly Point resident points to one of the neighborhood's new iwatch signs.*

The City's Traffic Engineering Division provides iwatch participants with neighborhood entrance and yard signs, presentations on speed awareness education and traffic calming devices where appropriate and as permitted by City budget.

### **Neighborhood Watch Program**

Neighborhood Watch is a program in which citizens, in cooperation with the Thornton Police Department, directly participate in the detection and prevention of crime. Citizens are trained in how to recognize suspicious or criminal activities and report these activities to the Police Department. The program creates a higher degree of awareness towards crime and the prevention of crime. Citizens become the eyes and ears of the Police Department in their neighborhoods.

As of December 2009, the Neighborhood Watch program includes 80 neighborhoods representing approximately 4,100 residents. These residents are committed to remaining vigilant in their communities to ensure that crime or suspicious behavior is reported to the police immediately.

Participating neighborhoods designate an area coordinator to act as the primary contact for the Police Department and to organize resident meetings. Upon starting the program, the Police Department conducts a two-hour Neighborhood Watch presentation, free of charge, to area residents. The presentation covers topics such as crime trends in the specific neighborhood, police procedures and patrols, role of neighbor participation in crime prevention, prevention ideas and techniques, marking and inventorying personal property, and home security tips.



*Thornton police officers build partnerships with residents to improve the community.*

### **3. Youth Programs:**

#### **Portable Playground Program**

Portable Playground is a program of the Recreation Division that takes recreation “on the road.” Through Portable Playground, the City offers recreational and educational activities to children who may not be able to participate in traditional, facility-based programs due to lack of transportation, money and interest, or unfamiliarity with these programs.

The Portable Playground program introduces children to recreational activities they may want to continue outside of the program. The program operates during the summer months and is available to all children, free of charge. Recreation staff members operate the program for nine weeks at 10 different sites. The program has been in operation since 1995. The program served 1,215 children in 2008 and 1,321 children in 2009.

The Portable Playground program focuses on high-density housing developments such as manufactured home communities and apartment

complexes. The program contributes to the health of Thornton's neighborhoods by addressing issues specific to low-income neighborhoods. Areas with a large number of low- and moderate-income children are particularly receptive to the program.

In July 2009, Thornton was named a "Playful City USA," one of 93 in the country. The designation was made by KaBOOM!, a national nonprofit dedicated to bringing play back into children's lives. Thornton was selected specifically for its efforts with the Portable Playground Program.

### **City of Thornton Youth and Teen Volunteer Corp**

This is a summer volunteer program for Thornton youths, ages 11-18. Volunteers work both within the Thornton community as well as statewide. The program is designed to cultivate responsibility in participants and enhance the community through projects such as park clean-ups, trail building, nursing home assistance and special events.

### **Thornton Teen Advisory Council**

The Thornton Teen Advisory Council is a group of youths, ages 11-18, who advise the City of Thornton Recreation staff on ways to make the City a better place for youths to live and play. The Council also actively participates in Thorntonfest, Harvestfest, Winterfest, Lions Club, the community's Easter egg hunt and the Fourth of July event. Additionally, the Council worked on Teen Trip programming, the National Drive Training Workshop, a teen drinking and driving video and a nutrition and exercise video.

## **4. Neighborhood Engagement Programs:**

### **Block Party Celebrations**

Block parties provide a great opportunity for residents of all ages to meet and reconnect with neighbors. Thornton's Neighborhood Services Division provides free block party kits to interested residents that include a block party guide, planning tips, certificates for ice cream, permit applications, sidewalk chalk, balloons, and more. Typical block parties range in size from five to 15 homes. Although HOA community parties are not eligible for a kit, a neighborhood group within an HOA that is made up of less than 15 homes can receive one.

### **Other Neighborhood Opportunities**

Thornton's Neighborhood Services Division uses a variety of additional mechanisms to empower residents. Through the Neighbors Helping Neighbors program, the division connects groups and individuals interested in helping other residents with community projects. The division also assists residents who would like to develop their own neighborhood group or become a neighborhood leader. Neighborhood groups provide a forum for residents to share ideas, make their neighborhood safer and more connected, and achieve a common goal.

## **E. Goals**

**The City of Thornton's Quality of Life goals are:**

- 6-A** Continue to provide opportunities that inspire neighborhood engagement.
- 6-B** Continue to provide programs that enhance quality of life for Thornton residents.