

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The City of Thornton initiated the 2010 Housing Master Plan to replace the existing Housing Master Plan adopted by the Thornton City Council on October 23, 2000 and as a supplement to the 2007 Thornton Comprehensive Plan. The Housing Master Plan is intended to provide direction and vision to implement a key goal of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan, which is to make Thornton a city of quality and diverse neighborhoods.

This Plan provides an overview of current housing conditions in Thornton, as well as numerical data and exhibits intended to form a basis for comparison of housing-related issues over time. Specific priority housing strategies and action steps recommended for implementation over the next five years are identified in Chapter 7. The strategies focus on achievable approaches to balancing Thornton's identified housing needs within the constraints of the current downturn in the economy and housing market. The City will update the Housing Master Plan approximately every five years to assess accomplishments and set new priorities based on changing market and demographic conditions.

Commitment to Thornton's Neighborhoods

The City successfully implemented many of the recommendations of the 2000 Housing Master Plan and has noticeably strengthened its commitment to the quality of life in Thornton's neighborhoods. Notably, the City created a new Neighborhood Services Division in 2008 with full-time staff dedicated to the development of new and existing programs that 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. This division will also start administering the annually appropriated funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program as a result of the City becoming an entitlement community in March 2010.

The City has also strengthened architectural standards in an effort to enhance the identity of the City and to maintain housing values. Architecture and subdivision quality has substantially improved during the last decade as a result of the adoption of these higher design standards.

New Challenges and Opportunities

Thornton has continued to experience rapid growth since the 2000 Housing Master Plan and is now the sixth largest city in Colorado by population with approximately 121,000 people and 44,000 housing units. New housing needs have naturally emerged from this growth. Over the next five years, Thornton will need to continue to diversify the type and distribution of its housing stock to meet the divergent life-cycle needs of aging baby boomers and young families, as well as varying household incomes. Based on an assessment of Thornton's housing gaps and projected needs, the Housing Master Plan

focuses on options for promoting affordable housing, executive housing and senior housing. Increased awareness and access to housing and support services for the homeless or near homeless population is also recommended.

Housing diversity can also be achieved through the development of new types of higher-density, mixed use neighborhoods. In October 2009, the City adopted a Mixed Use Zoning District ordinance to implement the future land use framework of the Comprehensive Plan. Transportation developments such as the proposed RTD FasTracks North Metro Corridor commuter rail line and the northeastern link of E-470 will provide opportunities for mixed use Transit Oriented Developments (TOD). Although the North Metro Corridor is not expected to obtain rail service within the next five years, current TOD planning in locations near the anticipated transit stations will help expand desirable housing choices in the future.

Consistent with City Council's 2009 priorities, the Housing Master Plan also emphasizes revitalization and preservation of existing housing stock. An ongoing collaboration between City staff and the Thornton Revitalization Advisory Board will be an important mechanism for evaluating areas in need of revitalization and formulating feasible strategies targeting these areas. The City currently recognizes that the aging neighborhoods in the southern portion of Thornton are in need of a concentrated revitalization effort. The anticipated creation of the South Thornton Revitalization Subarea Plan will be a critical step towards establishing targeted strategies for this area. Additionally, the City can help improve housing quality for low-income residents and assist seniors to age in place by expanding minor home repair programs and disseminating resource information.

Historic preservation, an important tool for neighborhood stabilization, will be a new focus for the City starting in 2010. The post-World War II Original Thornton neighborhoods and the Town of Eastlake are two areas of local historic importance. The development of a local historic preservation (landmark) ordinance will provide a mechanism for the preservation of historic structures throughout Thornton.

Maintaining home ownership rates also helps neighborhood stabilization. Foreclosure prevention assistance for financially-distressed homeowners will continue to be an important focus of City efforts. The City implemented a foreclosure education campaign in 2007 which has helped stem the high foreclosure rate in Thornton. However, recession, declining home values and high unemployment rates remain constant threats to ownership.

The Housing Master Plan also encourages residential green design and sustainability. In 2009, City Council identified "Greening Thornton" as a priority for the City and set a goal of reducing Thornton's carbon footprint. A greenhouse gas inventory was completed in April 2010 which determined that the building sector was responsible for 41 percent of Thornton's total community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, of which 60 percent of total buildings emissions were attributed to the residential sector. As

Thornton continues to grow, the City will need to explore options for green building and energy efficiency in order to reduce household emissions.

Overall, the City's housing needs represent exciting opportunities to further enhance Thornton's appeal as a desirable place to live. Strong commitment to creating quality neighborhoods through careful planning and community engagement has resulted in Thornton becoming one of the fastest growing communities in Colorado. The recommended housing strategies identified in this Plan capitalize on the City's existing efforts and provide a thorough framework to help achieve the vision of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.