

APPENDIX B: OUTREACH METHODOLOGY

This report was commissioned by the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments.

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Outreach Methodology Appendix

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the development of the Regional Housing Strategy for the Mahoning Valley, GOPC conducted multiple forms of outreach with key stakeholders at each stage. Outreach took the following forms:

- **Stakeholder Meetings** with key regional partners
- **Interviews** with housing related professionals and others with a stake in the future of the region's housing
- **Focus Groups** with:
 - regional housing service providers
 - private and non-profit developers
 - local and regional government officials and administrators
- **Survey** of regional housing professionals

This appendix provides an overview of the GOPC's outreach to stakeholders and shares the overarching themes of the received feedback.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

During the Research Phase, GOPC held two region-wide meetings with key stakeholders from the Mahoning Valley. These stakeholders included local government officials and their administrators; region-wide entities including employers, and philanthropic organizations; and regional housing service providers and professionals within the housing sphere such as developers, builders, and realtors.

The first stakeholder meeting was held on November 9, 2023 at the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County and had 41 attendees. This meeting served as a kick-off to the project and introduced local stakeholders to the research components (the Housing Needs Assessment and the Market Value Analysis), the development process of a regional strategy, and goal setting what stakeholders would like the strategy to accomplish.

The second stakeholder meeting was held on April 17, 2024 and was hosted at the Raymond John Wean Foundation in Warren with 59 attendees. This meeting served as an opportunity to review preliminary findings from both research components, and validate the data that had been collected, which would serve as the factual basis of recommendations presented throughout the regional housing strategy.

INTERVIEWS

GOPC conducted interviews with more than 50 individuals in one-on-one and small group settings and via Zoom throughout 2023 and 2024. While some interviews were single-instance conversations, multiple individuals were contacted for follow up conversations throughout the duration of the project. Interviewees included current for-profit and nonprofit developers, builders, rehabbers, realtors, employers, economic development professionals, regional housing service providers, local and regional government, and community stakeholders, like philanthropy.

Interviews were held at various stages of the project, with targeted goals in mind. Interviews conducted in 2023 Q4 – 2024 Q1 were used to assess needs of various stakeholders, identify target areas of concern and accumulate qualitative data on current conditions. Interviews conducted in 2024 Q2 were used to solicit suggestions of proposed solutions, collect recommendations on programs and policies that local stakeholders would like to see implemented, and identify opportunities for redevelopment.

Later in 2024, interviews were held to preview and test recommendations in the strategy, assess their validity and identify any potential concerns regarding implementation.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Group Methodology

In 2024 Q3, GOPC held multiple roundtable discussions, prioritizing the following focus groups:

- regional housing service providers
- private and non-profit developers
- local and regional government officials and administrators

Regional Housing Service Providers

On July 22, 2024, GOPC convened a focus group with roughly 30 housing and social services providers serving vulnerable and at-risk populations in the Mahoning Valley. GOPC invited 65 providers in total. The purpose of this focus group was to validate the data trends presented in the Housing Needs Assessment, collect local context to understand what these trends mean, and hear directly from housing and social services workers about the greatest challenges they face in their work. The topics raised by the group included: the condition, availability, and affordability of housing units and other barriers to providing housing within the Mahoning Valley.

Developers

On September 18, 2024, GOPC convened a focus group with approximately 25 for-profit and nonprofit developers operating within the Mahoning Valley at various levels of experience. GOPC invited 70 developers in total. The purpose of this focus group was to provide a forum for developers to discuss the challenges they face when doing residential development in the Valley, as well as identify opportunities to improve the efficacy of the regional housing market. The topics raised by the group included: zoning, permitting, access to utilities, the availability of capital and access to public funds, use of financial incentives, relationships with local government, economic development, and lack of development expertise within the job market of the Mahoning Valley.

Local Government Officials and Administrators

On October 2, 2024, GOPC convened a focus group with roughly 22 elected officials and administrative staff serving either a local or regional government entity within the Mahoning Valley. GOPC reached out to 73 officials and administrators with an invitation to the group. The purpose of this focus group was to better understand community priorities, ensure that the most pressing concerns are accurately represented and addressed and identify the potential of preliminary roadblocks to implementation of the regional strategy. The topics raised by the group included: reviewing strategic goals, zoning, access to utilities, annexation threats, local government service provisions, tax abatements and other financial incentives, and deterrents to development within the Mahoning Valley.

Focus Group Themes

Themes of the Regional Housing Service Providers Focus Group

Housing Stock and Unit Quality

Providers report a shortage of single bedroom and family units. Focus group participants said there is a shortage of rental housing at the right size and price making it extremely difficult for them to find permanent housing for their clients. This lack of supply can result in longer stays in emergency housing while clients wait for permanent units to become available. In turn, this limits the number of available beds at the emergency shelter for new clients.

Properties are often in poor condition. Housing providers spoke at length about concerns with the physical condition of properties and their struggles to find housing their clients want to stay in or that will pass the agency's inspection process. Many properties have deferred maintenance issues, bed bug infestations, and proximity to drug use and violence.

Providers also worry that landlords that do improve units will then increase rents above the Fair Market Rents (FMR) limits their agencies must adhere to. Because the rents are often high on the better maintained properties, these units are effectively off the table for vulnerable populations because they cost too much.

Focus group participants also noted that the units that their clients can afford that are of decent quality tend to be located in food deserts or are physically inaccessible to senior and disabled clientele.

Some private landlords are challenging to work with. Focus group participants report that even when properties fail required inspections, landlords may refuse to make repairs, which results in continued poor living conditions. Focus group participants also report that some landlords are reluctant to rent to their clientele because they worry they will cause more damage than can be covered by the security deposit.

Housing providers also reported that some landlords will only rent to clients with rental subsidy and others will never rent to clients with rental subsidy. All focus group participants had interacted with landlords who had discriminated against their clients based on: mental health challenges, income status, criminal records, credit records, etc.

Emergency shelters are not able to accommodate all the needs of the unhoused population or all the demand. Local governments that receive federal funds from HUD must do a census of homeless people once a year, called "point-in-time" counts. One focus group participant estimated Mahoning Valley's unhoused population was three times greater than the numbers federally reported numbers.

Shelters in the Mahoning Valley often limit stays to a month or a month-and-a-half. This timeframe doesn't line up well with the Housing Authorities' long waiting lists or limited supply of privately-owned rental housing. As such, when clients have to leave shelter, permanent housing may not be available for them.

One focus group participant noted that the availability of shelter beds has decreased since the start of the pandemic. Due to the lack of beds, there are times when housing providers rely on hotels for emergency housing. The complexity of mental health, behavioral health, and other challenges among those served also makes hiring and keeping qualified shelter staff challenging.

Housing Authority wait lists are long and occupancy rates are high. Wait lists are often more than 12 to 18 months at the housing authorities. Clients waiting in shelters can rarely stay in the shelter that long and often become homeless again before becoming eligible for services from the housing authority. Similarly, recovery housing providers reported instances of clients finishing their treatment program before permanent housing is available, leaving them without housing at a critical juncture in their recovery.

Barriers to Providing Housing

Rents are increasing and vulnerable populations are at risk of being priced out of housing. Since 2020, rents have increased significantly all throughout the Valley, a trend that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. Focus group participants report that some landlords see the availability of emergency rental assistance as an opportunity to increase rents above market rates.

Providers also report that they've had to relocate clients entirely because of rocketing rents. Focus group participants described instances of landlords increasing the rent two, even three, times between tenants, making the units too expensive for people relying on subsidy. Veterans and Housing Choice Voucher holders on fixed incomes have suffered as rent increases make their units unaffordable even with subsidy.

Some special populations have an especially challenging time finding housing. Focus group participants noted that citizens returning from the justice system and sex offenders have very few permanent housing options available to them.

Veterans often struggle to find housing as well because their incomes can be too high for subsidized housing but still too low to comfortably afford much private market rate housing.

Focus group participants also noted that clients with arrests or disruptive behavior at shelters are often prohibited from returning to the shelters and can be ineligible for housing through the housing authority. Private landlords may also be unwilling to rent to them. Focus group participants also reported it was very common for their clients with poor credit history, to struggle to find adequate housing.

It is challenging to find units that meet the mobility needs of seniors and people with disabilities.

Focus group participants report that their elderly clients often experience housing cost burden via increasing property tax rates and an added burden of living in housing that is not updated to universal design standards. Limited incomes often prevent seniors from moving to better suited properties and can also lead to extensive deferred maintenance, which decreases their property's value.

Similarly, clients with disabilities struggle to find units that meet both their mobility and affordability needs. For example, first floor units with few or no exterior or interior stairs are difficult to find in the area.

Immigrant families face additional challenges when looking for housing. Many of the New Americans who live in the Mahoning Valley tend to need larger housing because they have larger, multi-generational households.

Focus group participants shared that immigrants in the area opt to live in overcrowded housing rather than face homelessness. One effect of "doubling up" in smaller units is that these families do not show up in homelessness counts and these residents do not qualify for homelessness supportive services because they are technically housed.

Focus group participants mentioned that outreach programs for immigrants exist but aren't typically connecting residents to permanent supportive housing. Landlords have also been resistant to renting to New Americans, due to communication barriers and preconceived prejudices, further limiting the options for this population.

NIMBY attitudes to housing impact many facets of housing vulnerable populations. Almost universally, focus group participants reported encountering “not in my back yard” attitudes when trying to find or build housing for special populations.

Participants reported that communities in the Mahoning Valley have fought efforts to add family housing and low-income housing for their clients. They also shared that communities have objected to housing for clients with mental health and substance use issues. Focus group respondents believed these attitudes hinder new housing creation throughout the region.

Lack of transit is a significant obstacle when housing vulnerable populations. Focus group participants frequently mentioned that a lack of high-quality transit can make it difficult for clients to access services if where they live isn't within walking distance. Missing important appointments can jeopardize clients' abilities to maintain long-term stable housing.

The lack of transportation options also narrow job prospects for clients, who are unable to reach many higher-waged employment centers without a car.

To mitigate the impact of limited public transportation options, many housing providers attempt to place their clients in housing in downtowns, where their clients are walking distance to services. But housing in downtown Warren and downtown Youngstown is still limited.

Addressing Needs

Housing providers coordinate with each other to strive for efficient and effective coverage. Focus group participants hold regular prioritization meetings and case management meetings (once per month in Mahoning and twice per month in Trumbull). The Continuum of Care does prioritization for the homeless and many housing providers refer clients to Catholic Charities for wrap around services. This coordination is helping to maximize every available bed, but some participants felt that information was not “real time” enough. Other participants wished colleagues provided more information about the requirements other providers or a facility might have. For example, not all approved 3rd party housing providers rent to sex offenders but that prohibition is not always obviously stated.

Housing providers want long-term supportive services and transitional housing to help keep clients in permanent homes once they are placed. Housing providers stress that many clients are still at-risk even after securing permanent housing. They said that it is not uncommon for people to end up homeless again after a year. Providers noted that new programming would help clients gain long-term independence and life skills, like budgeting, bill paying, and home and vehicle maintenance skills. Job placement services were also mentioned as critical to helping stabilize clients long-term.

In conclusion, the focus group conversation with social service providers and others confirmed many of the trends quantified by the Housing Needs Assessment and put a human face on the consequences of insufficient housing in the Mahoning Valley.

Themes of the Developers Focus Group

Local Market

Participants believe there is demand for new housing in the region, particularly affordable, senior housing, and apartments. Developers report that they often receive multiple offers for their listed homes. Some have plans to produce senior living units in the Mahoning Valley, in order to accommodate the region's aging population. Recently there has been very little apartment construction, particularly in Mahoning Co., and developers believe there is a large appetite for development of this kind. Current multifamily buildings and apartments are out of date, and functionally obsolete.

Developers struggle with the appraisal gap when developing projects and need sophistication to overcome it. The gap between what it costs to build a house or apartment building, and what it will sell or rent for makes it challenging to attract development. Current appraisals aren't high enough to cover costs in many areas, so developers in the region aren't able to finance large-scale development projects. To overcome this gap, developers need extensive expertise in creative and sophisticated financing and funding sources.

Developers believe that locally-sourced development and neighborhood stabilization efforts will be needed to establish the market strength of the Mahoning Valley. Developers understand that development is a high-risk field to operate in, and to outsiders, Mahoning Valley's market appears too risky for most companies to tolerate. Locally-led development will help mitigate risk and establish Mahoning Valley as attractive and successful. Developers believed locally-led development could pave the way for more regional outfits over time. Participants believe repairing and updating old infrastructure, updating housing stock, and addressing other visible markers of distress, such as broken sidewalks or streets that need to be repaved, will help improve the market.

Project Financing/Funding

The scarcity of pre-development funds is a big impediment to development. Developers need help paying for environmental impact studies, surveys, market studies, economic impact studies, etc. Once a project is close to the construction phase, they report a much easier time accessing capital sources. Participants think having funding for pre-development costs can lower developer risk and would help increase the number of development projects.

A lack of comparable construction projects is an impediment to securing financing for some, but not all, of the developers we spoke to. Lenders and investors look for housing projects that have sold in the past 6 months that can be used as a basis for comparison to demonstrate market demand and that the housing is a solid investment. The lack of comps can make it hard for developers to secure investors. And for some developers, the lack of these comps can create problems convincing banks to issue construction loans to projects. This is particularly true for emerging developers who aren't well-established with banks or for development projects that deviate, even slightly, from standard subdivisions.

Participants would like to see Trumbull and Mahoning Counties adopt a 100% tax abatement, but say this must be done as part of a cooperative partnership with school districts that ensures school funding needs are adequately addressed. Participants believe that a successful agreement would help open up demand for housing in center cities, like Youngstown and Warren. One participant suggested that banks and school districts should develop a loan agreement for the term of a project's tax abatement that would finance school districts during the tax abatement and be paid back using the increased property values when the abatement expires.

Some participants feel that there needs to be an educational campaign to help current residents and local government officials understand the long-term benefits that tax abatement tools such as CRA offers development.

Local Regulations

Developers report that there is significant need to change local zoning regulations to be more accepting of increased density and development on smaller lot sizes. Participants stressed that minimum lot sizes and specific zoning designations can make or break a project. They emphasized that making changes to these rules will allow for more development.

Participants also would like zoning to allow for more uses and density than R1 alone, which is typically low-density, allowing for one residential unit and, in some cases, an accessory dwelling unit, in residential areas. Current zoning codes, make it difficult for developers to produce multifamily housing, which could produce significantly more units with less additional costs.

Because existing zoning codes are not well-tailored to market needs, developers today report spending too much time on zoning variance requests, which can cause projects to stall and costs of construction to rise, or kill the project entirely.

Local administration of zoning and permitting is variable and may present an opportunity for collaboration or shared services. Currently, responsiveness, expertise, and a customer service mentality are extremely variable across the counties. More training is needed as expertise and experience in the technical fields of permitting and zoning are also variable.

Some developers thought there would be value in a common, county-wide zoning code that local municipalities can reference when doing local zoning reform. Relatedly, some participants believe that a countywide permitting or zoning variance commission (that has knowledgeable professionals on the commission) could make the process more consistent. In the absence of this type of commission, regional or county-level entities with the requisite experience could provide technical assistance and training to local municipalities to standardize the level of knowledge around zoning among administrative staff within the region.

Extending utilities and navigating the associated jurisdictional boundaries is a significant challenge to development. Developers felt that the lack of willingness to extend utilities, or offset their costs in-fill contexts, was the biggest impediment to development. Some developers felt affordably-priced sewer and water was even more significant than incentives like tax abatements. Several participants had projects that did not move forward due to utility access issues.

Participants felt that JEDDs (Joint Economic Development Districts) are a useful, yet underutilized tool for enabling development, because these economic agreements can be used to extend infrastructure.

**GOPC editorial comment: While there may be potential to facilitate new housing development in townships through JEDDs, extending sewer/water lines to low-density development will have long term fiscal implications for the participating municipality and township, which could be negative. Comprehensive planning should carefully consider the utilization of JEDDs, as overuse could lead to sprawling development.*

Participants said that strategic, proactive planning around key sites could help pave the way for development. Developers believe having a proactive plan for where development should go help could encourage jurisdictions to work together to lay the ground work for a plan. They believe acting proactively, rather than reactively, can help get permitting and necessary utility agreements established.

Partnerships

Participants think there are opportunities for employers to help address housing challenges and also enjoy a financial benefit from doing so. Many developers have begun to view housing as a function of economic development, and thus believe that employers should have increased stakes in housing development and the production of housing units. Participants also suggested that employers could invest in Welcome Home Ohio projects and receive tax benefits from doing so. They suggested that employers could receive tax benefits via other philanthropic investments in housing development.

Participants think existing programs need to be widely advertised and development information needs to be shared. Participants discussed programs like the YSU/Youngstown City Schools partnership they say languished for years until it was well-publicized. Similarly, they see a need for sharing more information related to development, including updated data and property information, information on demolitions that have occurred, and the status of lots. They would also like to share data from recent projects to help provide more information on real project costs to ensure that developers are working with realistic budgets.

Participants identify a need for collaboration among groups to unleash opportunities. Participants identified opportunities for partnerships among many institutions in the Valley including, local governments, utility districts, school districts, and large employers. They cited the partnership between the city of Youngstown, Youngstown city schools and YSU which offers families with children a free college education at YSU if they move to Youngstown and their children attend Youngstown City Schools.

These collaborative efforts do not need to be restricted to housing development only. Some private sector developers feel that quality of life issues need overall improvement in the Mahoning Valley. Population attraction efforts will be expedited if there are amenities, well-paying work opportunities, and developed infrastructure. In turn, the current population will reap the benefits of this investment.

Other Topics

Respondents see opportunities for industrial leaders in the Valley to incubate emerging technologies and innovative materials to create environmentally-sustainable and attainably-priced housing development. They believe workforce development and training of existing residents can happen in conjunction. Focus group participants spoke about several efforts to scale up 3D printing and additive manufacturing that can be applied directly to housing development efforts and result in more environmentally sustainable and attainably-price housing development. They spoke of efforts to attract a federally-funded additive manufacturing center to Youngstown while also acknowledging that even if that investment doesn't occur, significant amounts of industry incubation already happen in the Valley. Participants believe there are opportunities to upskill the existing workforce around these technologies.

Themes of the Local Government Focus Group

Housing Goals

Local governments share a strong desire for new housing but specifics varied by location. All participants that spoke said that “new housing” was important to their jurisdiction.

For Youngstown and Warren, participants focused on the need for quality homes that were safe for residents. Representatives from both talked about home rehabs, especially for LMI residents. Both cities also talked about their goal of attracting residents with higher incomes. Both cities want to increase homeownership rates.

Local governments in the balance of the county believe their residents want more housing choices, including options to downsize, smaller scale multi-family units, duplexes, and attached single-family homes. Several local governments described efforts they’ve taken in comprehensive plan and zoning code updates to allow for a fuller range of housing types in their communities. Many also shared that condominium projects are already in development in their jurisdictions and other participants said there was a need a need for villas.

Among participants from the balance of the county, there was general agreement that more attainably-priced options for downsizing are needed to keep aging residents in their communities. Aging populations and the need to provide downsizing options are an important topic in many jurisdictions. Participants see the introduction of a range of housing types as a strategy to keep existing residents in the community and near services and their social network, while also making their vacated larger homes available to younger families. Participants stressed that these options need to be attainably-priced and many condominium developments happening now are priced too high.

There is a general agreement that development will go to the places with good school districts, services, and amenities. Local governments believe that the most valuable land is in places with good schools, services, and other amenities. Many expressed a desire to cultivate these features in their own community and spoke about how comprehensive planning is being used to develop green space, pedestrian areas, and mixed-use districts to support an attractive community.

Housing Challenges

A knowledgeable staffer confirmed that homelessness rates are rising in the area and school district representatives confirmed they are also seeing elevated homelessness rates among students. There are increasing numbers of actual homelessness and increasing numbers of people who cannot leave the shelters because the systems cannot find units for people to move into. Households earning 0-30% AMI are hit especially hard by these circumstances. The school district confirmed that city school kids experience troubling rates of transition, mobility, and homelessness.

Participants that work in Youngstown and Warren spoke at length about the challenges of addressing the appraisal gap and financing. The cost to rehab a home to livability, using HUD funds, can easily cost \$70,000. And even after the improvements, the house may still be valued at less than \$30,000. This means that significant subsidy is needed to improve a house and it cannot be sold at a price comparable to that investment. Several participants said that they their geographies need tools to overcome the appraisal gap.

One participant discussed historic homes and how important they are to the character of the major cities and how difficult it is to find financing to rehab historic homes. Historic homes need gap financing and rehab loans that can be greater than the value of the home.

Some local governments said developers bring projects to them for review without first ensuring the proposal aligns with the existing code, despite their efforts to make the codes easy to use.

Reviewing these projects becomes time intensive and costly for the local governments. Some jurisdictions are considering adding additional fees to their review process to offset these costs.

Funding for Housing

Participants from Youngstown and Warren report federal and state programs limit the ability of local governments to achieve the outcomes they want, especially homes for residents with incomes at 80-120% AMI. HUD funds cannot be used on homes for residents earning >80% and HUD requires prevailing wage on all HUD-funded projects. Additionally, HUD requires homes to pass strict inspections, which are important but cost money. Participants believed households earning 80%-120% AMI were falling through the cracks because there are not programs for them to buy homes.

Participants from Youngstown and Warren believe local dollars, namely through philanthropy, could provide more flexibility and thus impact. Local dollars, without HUD-like restrictions could produce more homes because the costs are lower. One participant suggested homes could be made structurally sound but did not need to be fully finished before turning the homes over to potential homebuyers. Ensuring homes are structurally sound and to code, but lack extras, would be one way to contain costs.

Jurisdictions in the balance of the county report that subsidy is needed to extend utilities to some potential development sites; they would like to see state funding allocated for this and for other services that resulting new residents require. Participants report that developers are asking for help paying to extend utilities to undeveloped sites but their local governments do not have the funds to pay for this. This is particularly true for townships. Participants from the balance of the county would like to see state funds to help pay for the extension of utilities and to help shore up other services that new residents will require, like schools and emergency services.

New Subdivisions and Utility Extensions

County staff report that they try to encourage developers to think about the long-term maintenance costs of utilities and look at sites that already have utilities or are near utilities. This approach makes real estate projects cost efficient, especially with the current subdivision regulations in place.

Local governments in the balance of the county said property tax from new housing will not cover all the cost of providing services to new residents. Local governments expressed concern about the strain on services that would come from a large housing subdivision being added to their community. They stressed that property tax assessments have not kept pace with the cost of services and cite how some jurisdictions already cannot afford their own emergency services as an example of these shortfalls.

Desire for Regional Coordination

Participants from the County Seat group said they want to coordinate their local government’s strategy with existing strategies and with a regionwide strategy. One person observed that they thought their county and the two-county region did not have a shared housing strategy that everyone was working toward. Relatedly, one city noted that it wanted to take a comprehensive approach to housing and neighborhoods and thought the Regional Strategy might help nudge along their community toward that type of integration.

Townships believe a regional conversation about annexation is needed; they are concerned about annexation threats. Even home rule townships are concerned about the ever-present threat of annexation by a neighboring city. They said the threat of annexation can lead to less ambitious zoning changes, because newly rezoned districts can be subsequently annexed out of the township. Representatives from the townships would like to elevate this topic for regional discussion.

Tax Abatement

The participants representing a local school district said that the school district wants to see their community advance. The school district would be willing to work with the city to do what is best, even if that meant 100% tax abatements. For this participant, 100% tax abatements were a pinch in the short term, but should result in long term benefits to the community by increasing residents and incomes. At the end of the day the Schools want to protect attendance, which can be accomplished, in large part, through stable homes for students.

Other participants thought the 10-year, 75% abatement was fine for areas that wanted to undertake new development (e.g. run new utilities). The same participants thought a 15-year, 100% tax abatement in in-fill areas made a lot of sense.

Zoning

Zoning codes vary across the region. Every township has different zoning codes. Some address development in great detail and others don’t. There has been a resurgence of mixed-use zoning in downtowns and the staffer GOPC spoke with suggested that lays the groundwork for more housing in denser infill settings.

Planning Commissions in both counties report providing a lot of technical support to townships and village though no staff at either Commission suggested they were trying to pro-actively steer local zoning decisions or encourage similar zoning codes be adopted regionally.

Youngstown currently has a consultant looking at its zoning and making suggestions. The Youngstown staffer reports that the goal is to build flexibility back into the plan and allow duplexes in with single family units, etc.

One county helps its townships do a land use plan every 10 years; these plans expire in 2026 offering an opportunity for coordination around similar codes. Planning Commission and townships will start to update their land use plans in 2025. This presents an opportunity for land use plans to think more strategically around providing more opportunities for a variety of housing types and the long-term costs of converting greenfields to development. This is also an opportunity to encourage the pro-active adoption of similar zoning codes throughout the region. One county explained that the county has subdivision regulations and that comp planning should help with land use.

Some local governments in the balance of the county are making zoning changes to modernize codes, address non-confirming sites, and allow gentle density and mixed-use development. Some local government representatives expressed an interest in including uses beyond R1 in their zoning codes, finding ways to make multi-family development aesthetically acceptable, and a desire to promote some mixed-use development. Another reported wanting to do a major zoning update. To date, there has been one ADU request in one county so far. Planning Commission folks do expect ADUs to become more popular in the future. That will probably necessitate zoning changes. Respondents said that achieving these zoning changes requires outreach to the community to get them to understand benefits of multi-family and other zoning changes.

SURVEY

Introduction

In March 2024, GOPC circulated a survey to local housing professionals on the conditions of housing in the Mahoning Valley. The survey was electronic and a link was emailed to housing professionals. The link was also shared at the public stakeholder meeting held in Warren in April 2024. The survey was anonymous, and respondents were asked a variety of questions concerning demographics, infrastructure, programming, and housing impediments. The survey was emailed to 76 people and received 37 responses.

The results of that survey are as follows:

Individual Question Analysis

The full list of questions can be found at the end of this appendix. This outline summarizes key themes and highlights responses that highlight the overarching themes according to each question asked throughout the survey.

Housing Issues

Highest Priority Housing Issues in the Mahoning Valley

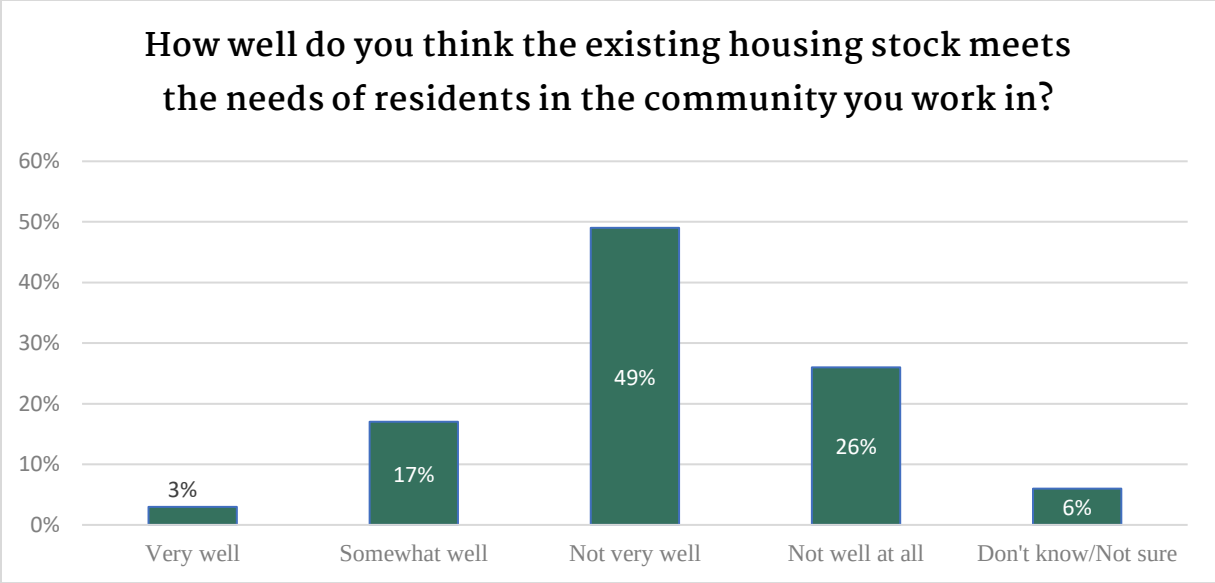
- a. Creation of homes to buy
- b. Creation of homeownership opportunities for residents of color
- c. Creation of homeownership opportunities for low- or moderate-income residents
- d. Addressing out-of-town/out-of-area landlords
- e. Creation of more subsidized, affordable housing
- f. Home repair

Additional Issues of Note

- a. Lack of Accountability for Landlords
 - i. Code Enforcement
 - ii. Tenant Protections
- b. Racial Inequity in Housing
- c. Zoning

Quality of Housing Stock Assessment

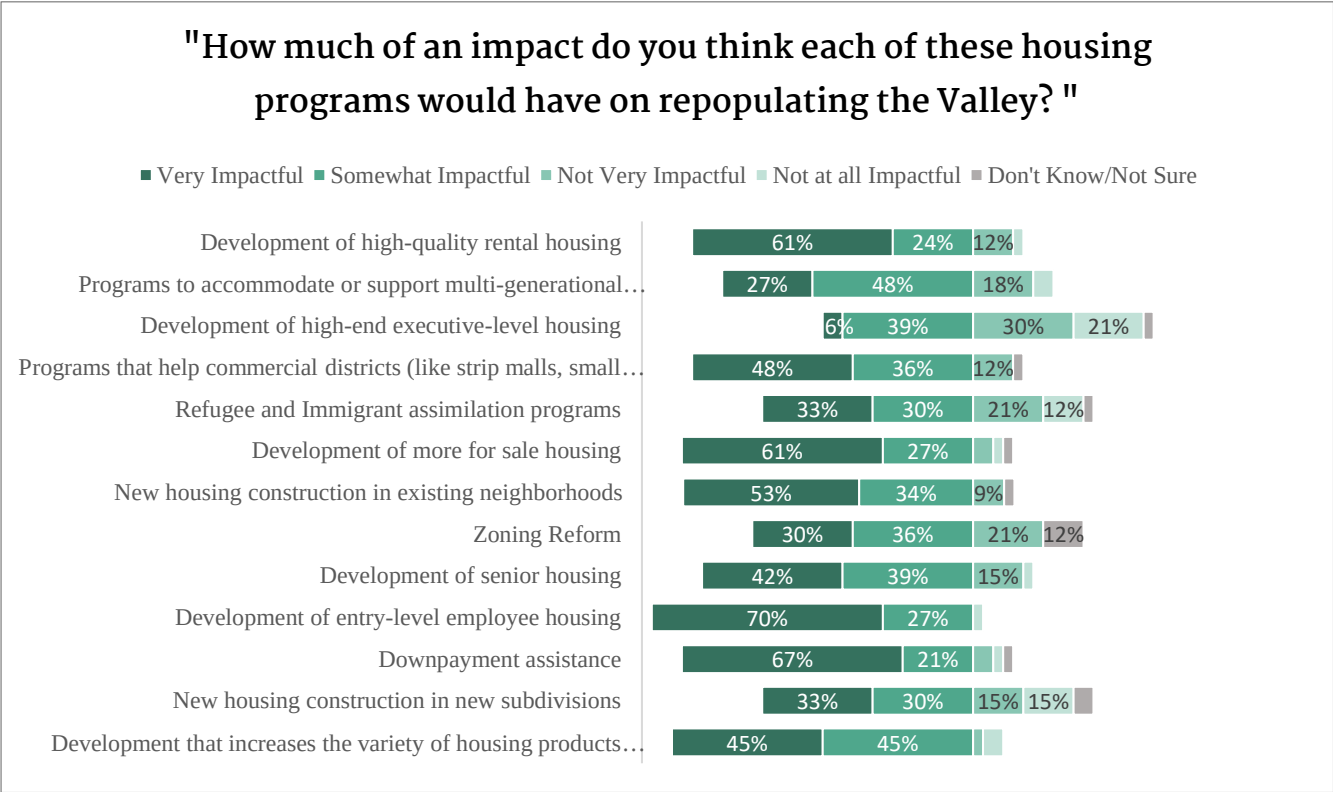
Participants were asked to rate the quality of existing housing stock within their community using a Likert Scale ranging from Very Well to Not Well at All. The majority of respondents believe that existing stock does not meet the needs of their community's residents.



Highlighted Quote: *Generationally, we have lost three generations of young adults, we must give them a reason to either come back or stay.*

Analysis of Programming in the Valley

The following is a Likert scale measuring the potential impact of several listed housing programs on repopulation efforts.



The majority of programs were viewed as largely impactful (darker teal colors), while development of high-end executive-level housing was the only program seen as largely **unimpactful** (lighter teal colors). There was some disagreement regarding Refugee and immigrant assimilation programs, as well as New housing construction in new subdivisions but sentiments remained overall positive. The programs respondents thought would be the most impactful are: development of entry-level employee housing, down-payment assistance, development of high-quality rental housing, and development of more for sale housing.

The overall sentiment for additional programming is that programs already exist in the Valley for housing, they are just under-funded, poorly advertised, not supported effectively, and have little impact as a result. Several people mentioned that programs need to be better advertised and eligibility requirements expanded.

- a. Multiple people expressed a need for:
 - a. Financial Literacy Programs
 - b. Homeowner Education Programs
 - c. Assistance for rent and mortgage (down-payment programs)
 - d. Home repair funds
- b. Other programs that were mentioned less frequently are:
 - a. Welcoming Infrastructure (Accessible Transit, Walkability, Green Spaces)
 - b. Aid for Construction Costs (funds as well as construction/repair training programs)
 - c. Tenant Protections, Education and Advocacy (Including Sealed Eviction Records)

Highlighted Quote: *The Valley has a record of starting programs and not seeing them through. ...We need to develop solid plans that are structured for success, and see them through. ...The collaborative is a nice first step.*

New Development Challenges and Opportunities

Impediments

- A. Construction Costs were by far the most listed concern among respondents in regard to new development. GOPC developed a word cloud to measure the variety and frequency of topics throughout answers:

“What are the largest impediments to new development projects?”



Opportunities

- B. Respondents want a diverse housing stock, and identified different types of housing that could contribute to that goal. They also recognize that the Valley has received an influx of funding recently which creates opportunities for development.
 - a. Types of housing:
 - i. Mixed Use
 - ii. Affordable
 - iii. Entry Level
 - iv. Modular
 - v. Single Family

Highlighted Quote: *We need programs that support the stabilization of existing housing stock: it would be ideal to have younger families backfill the homes of seniors, and seniors can be relocated into senior housing developments.*

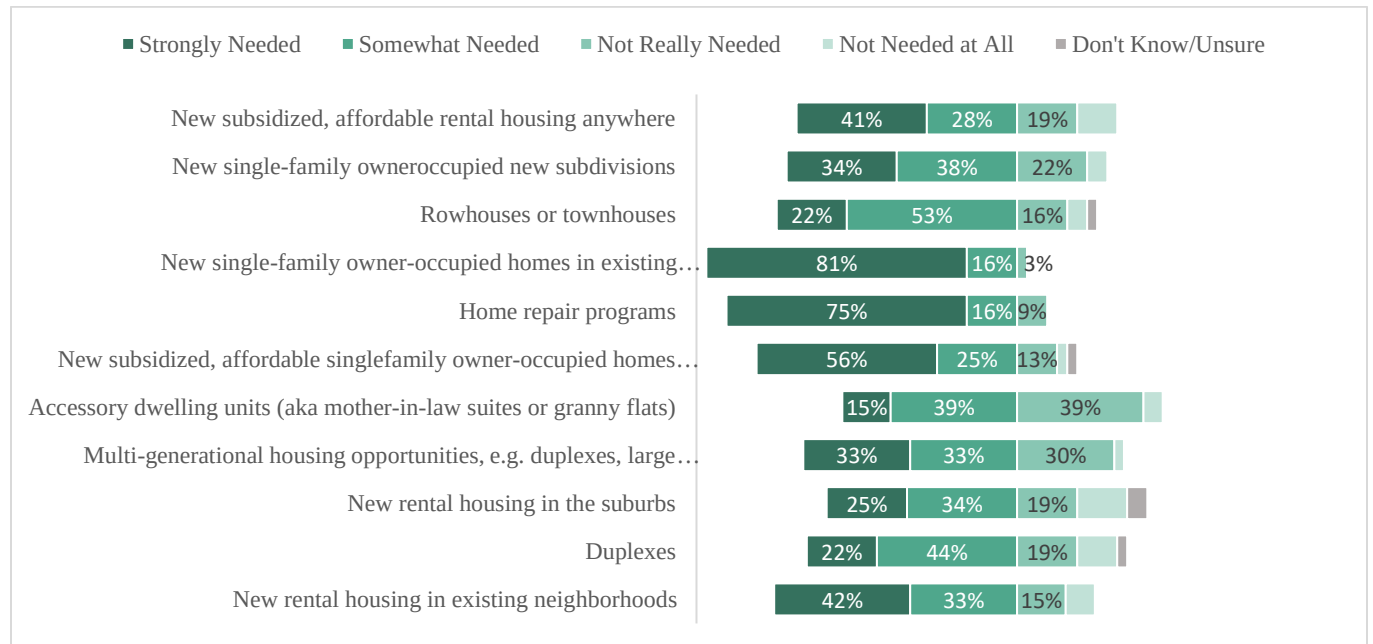
Housing Demand

The three groups with the greatest demand for housing.

Existing residents looking to downsize, especially older people	52%
People looking for starter homes	70%
People looking for stable, affordably-priced housing	85%

In addition to identifying who needs housing, respondents were asked to identify what types of housing are most needed:

- a. Home repair and SF housing in existing neighborhoods were overwhelmingly supported.
- b. New subsidized affordable single-family homes also were strongly needed
- c. ADUs, Multi-generational, rental housing and duplexes received less support but overall approval



Survey Questions

1. Please tell us what type of organization you represent. Please check all that apply.
 - a. Government
 - b. Housing non-profit
 - c. Social services non-profit
 - d. Developer
 - e. Realtor
 - f. Economic Development
 - g. Private Business

2. Please tell us which of these geographic areas are a main focus of your organization's work. Check all that apply.
 - All of the below
 - Austintown Township
 - Bazette Township
 - Beaver Township
 - Berlin Township
 - Braceville Township
 - Bristol Township
 - Campbell, city
 - Canfield Township
 - Canfield Village
 - Champion Township
 - Coitsville Township
 - Cortland, city
 - Ellsworth Township
 - Farmington Township
 - Fowler Township
 - Girard, city
 - Hartford Township
 - Hubbard, city
 - Jackson Township
 - Johnstown Township
 - Lordstown Village
 - Lowellville, city
 - Mahoning County
 - McDonald, city
 - Mecca Township
 - Milton Township
 - New Middletown, city
 - Newton Falls, city

- Newton Township
 - Niles, city
 - Poland Township
 - Poland Village
 - Southington Township
 - Struthers, city
 - Trumbull County
 - Vernon Township
 - Warren Township
 - Warren, city
 - Weathersfield Township
 - West Farmington Village
 - Youngstown, city
 - Other, Please Specify
3. The following is a list of housing issues. Please indicate how high of a priority you think each issue is for the Mahoning Valley, “Very High”, “Somewhat High”, “Not Very High”, “Not a Priority”, or “Don’t Know / Unsure”.
- Creation of rental units
 - Creation of homes to buy
 - Creation of more subsidized, affordable housing
 - Updating housing floor plans to reflect current trends
 - Home repair
 - Home demolition
 - Remediation of environmental contamination, like lead and asbestos
 - New housing construction
 - Creation of homeownership opportunities for low- or moderate-income residents
 - Creation of homeownership opportunities for residents of color
 - Creation of senior housing
 - Updating zoning codes
 - Streamlining development process
 - Addressing out-of-town/out-of-area landlords
 - Meeting needs of unhoused people/Homelessness
 - Prevalence of group homes
 - Prevalence of substance use recovery homes
 - Addressing suburban sprawl/New development far outside of existing communities instead of within them
4. Aside from the items mentioned in the previous question, what are other housing-related issues do you consider to be significant issues facing the Mahoning Valley?
5. How well do you think the existing housing stock meets the needs of residents in the community you work in? Please select either “Very Well”, “Somewhat Well”, “Not Very Well”, “Not Well at All” or “Don’t Know/Unsure”.

- If you said “Somewhat well” “Not very well” or “Not well at all”, please explain.
6. Efforts to repopulate the Mahoning Valley are underway. How much of an impact do you think each of these housing programs would have on repopulating the Valley? Please select either “Very Impactful”, “Somewhat Impactful”, “Not Very Impactful”, “Not At All Impactful” or “Don’t Know / Unsure”.
- Downpayment assistance
 - Refugee and Immigrant assimilation programs
 - Programs that help commercial districts (like strip malls, small scale retail and restaurants) revitalize
 - New housing construction in new subdivisions
 - New housing construction in existing neighborhoods
 - Development of senior housing
 - Programs to accommodate or support multi-generational households
 - Development of entry-level employee housing
 - Development of high-end executive-level housing
 - Development that increases the variety of housing products available, like duplexes, townhouses
 - Development of high-quality rental housing
 - Development of more for sale housing
 - Zoning reform
7. What are the top 2 opportunities for new housing development in the Valley?
8. Please rate the level of need for each of the following types of housing development in the Mahoning Valley on a scale of “Strongly Needed”, “Somewhat Needed”, “Not Really Needed”, “Not Needed At All”, and “Don’t know / Unsure”.
- Home repair programs
 - New single-family owner-occupied new subdivisions
 - New single-family owner-occupied homes in existing neighborhoods
 - New subsidized, affordable single-family owner-occupied homes anywhere
 - New rental housing in existing neighborhoods
 - New rental housing in the suburbs
 - New subsidized, affordable rental housing anywhere
 - Rowhouses or townhouses
 - Duplexes
 - Accessory dwelling units (aka mother-in-law suites or granny flats)
 - Multi-generational housing opportunities, e.g. duplexes, large home conversions
9. Looking at the list below, please choose the three groups that you think represent the largest demand for housing.
- Existing residents looking to downsize, especially older people
 - Existing residents looking to upgrade

- New residents moving to the Valley for jobs
- People looking for starter homes
- People looking for “next homes” (after starter homes)
- People looking for downtown apartments or condos
- People looking for stable, affordably-priced housing

The following questions are open-ended. Please feel free to provide answer in bulleted lists or in narrative form.

10. Are there housing programs, services, or other supports that you believe should be available in the Mahoning Valley but aren't?
11. What are the largest impediments to new development projects?
12. Which organizations doing housing work do you trust to do a good job?
13. What are your top priorities for the Mahoning Valley Regional Housing Strategy?
14. Is there anything else that the strategic planning consultants should know about or consider when developing the Mahoning Valley Housing Strategy?
15. If you are interested in a follow-up discussion about the Regional Housing Strategy, please add your email here.