Traditional neighborhoods include special public spaces, such as parks and civic buildings, functioning as gathering places. Large parks and public golf courses define areas of the city and create special places. The size of the major parks and the way in which they break the grid pattern of the city emphasize the special significance of these parks including Greenwood, Grand View, Union and Birdland, Waterworks, and the State Fair grounds. The public spaces occupy important sites, overlooking a particular view into the downtown or ravines. They serve as a symbol of community permanence and pride.

Institutional and school buildings define many of our neighborhoods. Elementary, middle, and high schools provide open space for many neighborhoods and a sense of identity. Because of the long history of many of our schools, generations of families from the neighborhoods attended a school. The public plazas and grand buildings of Drake University and Grandview College add character to the neighborhood and provide gathering places.

Roosevelt High School grounds are used for athletes and families.
Development of New Residential Areas: Neotraditional Neighborhoods

It is important to incorporate the principles of traditional neighborhoods into new residential developments as they too should be made up of the components that promote social interaction and cohesiveness, resulting in a sense of community. Whereas, current zoning and patterns of new development can create isolation and economic segregation, traditional neighborhood development promotes interaction and connections. The process of incorporating traditional neighborhood characteristics into new development is referred to as new urbanism or neotraditional neighborhoods.

Development based on traditional neighborhood principles is also a growth management technique, which can reduce urban sprawl and traffic congestion. This is achieved by producing compact, yet quality urban development and by providing more connections. These connections disperse traffic rather than concentrate it. As a result, the pedestrian is able to move freely throughout the development.

There are approximately three square miles of land in southeast Des Moines anticipated to develop into new neighborhoods over time. Des Moines also has plans for additional annexations to bring in land for residential and neighborhood development.

Southeast Des Moines will grow incrementally as individual developments come forward. Therefore it is necessary to develop a specific area plan for southeast Des Moines and future annexed areas, to ensure a logical, well connected street system and land uses. The entire area must develop according to an overall street and land use plan. The Southeast area plans will incorporate the principles of traditional neighborhoods.

New urbanism architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zybeck propose a Traditional Neighborhood Development model in which commercial services for one’s daily needs be no more than a five minute walk from residences (no more than one-quarter mile). A neighborhood park or open space should be within a three minute walk.
New neighborhoods will be of a “walkable” size.
- Plans will focus on a neighborhood planning unit of approximately 160 acre increments, one quarter mile in radius. Natural topography may be a factor in the determination of the neighborhood size.
- Development should be compact and supportive of public transportation, at approximately 6 to 8 dwelling units per acre for the entire area.

New neighborhoods will have a definable edge and center.
- The new street pattern and natural environment will combine to give the new neighborhoods a definable boundary. Commercial centers to provide primary services will be placed to complement the residences approximately every half or full mile.
- Commercial land uses should include convenience retail, professional office uses, restaurants, service commercial, and entertainment uses.
- Public uses, bus stops, plazas, and park areas should be located in the village center, and are an important component of neotraditional development design.

New neighborhoods will include a variety of uses including dwellings, schools, shopping and recreation.
- Developments or plats may be submitted in any size, however, a development must be compatible with the overall plan for the 160 acres.
- New development should be composed of a mixture of between 25% to 35% multi-family housing units to 60 to 75% single family housing units and should be incorporated into the street pattern. To complement the multi-family housing, a developer should strive to develop the single family detached units to be at least 90% owner-occupied. (The specific area plans will more closely detail the placement and number of units in a particular district or neighborhood.)
- New development should include a variety of lot sizes.
Connections among new neighborhoods will be provided by pedestrian-friendly streets and multi-purpose paths.

- Establish a coherent, recognizable, interconnected street system within a district and provide direct auto and/or pedestrian/bicycle connection to the village center, including bus stops, school and park areas.
- The street system should contain a clear hierarchy of streets to clarify primary and secondary routes. An arterial passing through the village should be designed to slow traffic with features such as islands, signage, marked cross-walks, and/or reduced number and size of lanes.
- Street design should be direct and memorable. Cul-de-sacs, other dead end streets, and circuitous routes should be clearly avoided. A grid or modified grid pattern should be used unless there are topographic or other natural features.
- Organize the site planning of new neighborhoods around existing natural linear greenways and enhance them as public open spaces and as pedestrian connectors between adjoining neighborhoods.
- Streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian pathways should be designed so that each are safely and effectively visible and accessible to each other.
- Street design should create locations for safe pedestrian crossing to the neighborhood center, especially to bus stops in the neighborhood.
- Sidewalks and shade trees should be installed along all streets.
- Pedestrian routes should be located along, or be visible from streets and be linked to destination points within the neighborhood.
- Pedestrian routes should lead to building fronts and not be placed at the rear of lots. Pedestrian routes should be connected to the street system by short pathway connectors.
- Street right-of-way should vary within a development. Narrowing the lane width is an effective strategy to slow traffic.
- On-street parking should be encouraged for overflow parking.

Suburban Sprawl

Traditional Neighborhood

This graphic shows the contrast between suburban street layouts and a traditional neighborhood street pattern. The typical suburban development has minimal street and path connections among and within neighborhoods. Homes are isolated from different uses. The traditional neighborhood has more and stronger connections among housing, commercial and civic uses.
New neighborhoods will incorporate amenities to provide for the needs of the pedestrian and to promote socialization in the public realm.

- Develop street standards that require installation of wide sidewalks and street trees as a part of the platting process.
- Develop design incentives that encourage neighborhood interaction and street life by enhancing the public view area. Encourage placing garages behind the house, decreasing front yard setbacks, and encouraging front porches.
- Residential building facades should be varied and provide interest to pedestrians.
- Entrances to residential buildings should be oriented to the street and not to interior blocks or parking lots.

**Commercial Amenities** (Also see Chapter 5)

- Commercial buildings should be located within 10 to 20 feet of the sidewalk.
- Commercial building facades should be varied and articulated to provide interest to pedestrians.
- Ground floor use of commercial buildings should be retail or office with second floor areas to be used for office or residential.
- Ground floor entrances of commercial buildings should be oriented to pedestrian street, plaza or park areas.
- The configuration of commercial buildings should balance the needs to pedestrian and auto traffic, visibility and accessibility.

New neighborhoods should include special public spaces to function as gathering places.

- Squares, parks, and schools need to be incorporated into the specific area plan providing civic sites for civic uses and gathering places. These should not be provided by using "left-over spaces". Because of the importance of these sites, they may break the grid pattern.
- Public uses, plazas and parks should be the focus of building orientation.
existing character of neighborhoods and housing chapter 4

Chapters Four and Five analyze the three major land uses that comprise Des Moines: Residential, Commercial and Industrial. The analysis results in the identification of categories or types of development within each land use. The categories are then assembled into a typology. The composition of the categories within the typology is unique to Des Moines, although it has characteristics common with the land uses of other cities.

The purpose of the housing and neighborhood typology detailed in Chapter Four is to protect and enhance both single family and multi-family housing in a neighborhood context. Types of housing and neighborhoods are not looked at in isolation but are examined for how they contribute to the entire character of Des Moines. Policies result as an examination of the character and form of the neighborhood. Policies focus on guidelines for new construction that will complement neighborhoods and on specific standards for placement and design of multi-family housing. Standards for well designed transitions between land uses are also developed within this chapter.

Neighborhood and Housing Typology

Des Moines' residential neighborhoods provide much of the character of our city. Their preservation and enrichment maintains the tax base and the "hometown" atmosphere. Within Des Moines there are three types of predominant neighborhood or village development patterns:

- Traditional;
- Post World War II; and
- Contemporary or Newly Developing.

These development patterns are further differentiated into Eras of Housing Development. The eras reflect different time periods and technology, different views of the family and community, and various transportation systems.

There are additional distinctions within these broad neighborhood patterns that are important to an area's physical character. These factors include the placement of accessory buildings, the spatial dimensions of the lots, and the relationship of the buildings to the street. The analysis of these neighborhood development patterns and distinctions identifies qualities to protect in existing neighborhoods and development standards to be created in newly developing areas of the city.

Multi-family areas fall within each of the predominant neighborhood patterns. Zoning has traditionally divided residential areas into those which are predominately single family and those in which duplex, three-plex and large multi-family buildings have been allowed. Because of the different types of policies proposed for neighborhoods that have historically contained multi-family housing and for ease of organization, neighborhood and housing typology separates single-family neighborhoods from those that incorporate multi-family.
## Eras of Housing Development

### Timeline

- **1880**
- **1900**
- **1910**
- **1920**
- **1930**
- **1940**
- **1950**
- **1960**
- **1970**
- **1980**
- **1990**
- **2000**

### Traditional

**Era**
- Victorian
  - Italianate
  - Stick
  - Queen Anne

**Arts and Crafts**
- Prairie
- Craftsman
- Mission

**Revival**
- Tudor
- Spanish Revival
- Dutch Revival
- Colonial Revival

**Modern**
- Simplified Colonial Revival
- Minimalist Decoration
- Eclectic Styles from Earlier Eras

**Contemporary**
- Styles from earlier eras

### Post World War II

**Era**
- Arts and Crafts
- Revival

**Modern**
- Post-WWII

**Contemporary**
- Mid-Century Modern

### Newly Developing

**Era**
- Post-WWII

**Modern**
- Contemporary

**Contemporary**
- Styles from earlier eras

### Street Layout

**Victorian**
- Grid system
- Streetcar lines
- Walking city

**Arts and Crafts**
- Grid system
- Bungalow Court
- Curvilinear streets

**Revival**
- Grid system
- Curvilinear streets

**Modern**
- Plat/Cul-de-sac
- Infill along existing streets

**Contemporary**
- Cul-de-sac
- Modified grid system

### House Types

**Victorian**
- Large Single Family
- Worker's Cottage
- Multi-family flats-often architect designed

**Arts and Crafts**
- Foursquare
- Bungalow
- Worker's Cottage
- Multi-family flats-often architect designed

**Revival**
- Beavertail Brick
- Cape Cod
- Mansions
- Multi-family appear as large Single Family Structures

**Modern**
- Ranch/Split level/Shed
- Starter house
- Pod Multi-Family/Garden Style building

**Contemporary**
- Two Story
- Split Level Ranch
- Townhouses
- Pod Multi-Family Garden Style building

### Construction Characteristics

**Victorian**
- Roof Ridge Perpendicular to Street
- Cross gabled roofs
- Multi-textured wall surfaces
- Front & Side Porches
- Carriage House

**Arts and Crafts**
- Roof Ridge Perpendicular to Street
- Ridge Parallel to Street
- Hipped Roof
- Exposed rafters & large roof overhang
- Two types of wall surface
- Tuck under garage or behind house

**Revival**
- Roof Ridge Parallel to Street, broken by steep gables
- Gambrel Roof
- Use of brick
- Concentration of detail at doors & windows
- Garage behind house

**Modern**
- Roof Ridge Parallel to Street
- Ubiquitous Shutters, but little architectural detail
- Low roof pitch & horizontal lines
- Attached garage

**Contemporary**
- Roof Ridge Parallel to Street
- Multiple Gables
- Create architectural detail
- Attached garage
Traditional Neighborhood (Village)

Traditional neighborhoods in Des Moines were typically developed from the 1880s, when an extensive street car line was being built, until the early 1940s and the beginning of the Second World War. Generally, traditional neighborhoods in Des Moines included clusters of houses extending as far as a person might comfortably walk from their house to the street car line. Building lots were platted on grids, sometimes disturbed by natural areas, that made land subdivision efficient. Churches, schools and other land uses were included within the neighborhood providing a diversity of uses. Small, neighborhood oriented commercial services were located at the transportation stops to provide services to the houses within walking distance.

- Traditional neighborhoods generally focused the multi-family housing on the street car corridors. Some public uses such as churches and schools are incorporated into the neighborhood and functioned well with the single family homes.
- Density and lot size vary from approximately 5000 sq. ft. per single family lot to over one acre in size. Most lots are in the 6500 to 10,000 sq. ft. range. An alley is a common form element in the traditional neighborhood.
- As transportation systems improved, the trend began during this time period to move away from the city to find peace and seclusion.
- Some estate areas broke from the traditional mold and developed exclusively as single family homes without commercial services located near the residences.
- The Traditional Neighborhood development pattern occupies the largest land area of development on Des Moines’ west and east sides. (See Eras of Housing Development Map)

Three eras of housing, Victorian, Arts and Crafts, and Revival, are prevalent in Traditional Neighborhoods.
**Victorian Era** housing was generally built in Des Moines from about 1880 to approximately 1905. Victorian era neighborhoods remain near the downtown. Isolated Victorian structures are spread throughout the community.

Victorian housing became unpopular because of changes in values within about twenty years. The houses were considered fussy, difficult to maintain, and functionally obsolete because they did not contain modern features. Over time many of the large structures were divided into several living units as the need for housing grew and there was limited housing development during the Depression and World War II. Smaller workers cottages just fell into disrepair. Several Victorian neighborhoods were redeveloped or converted to commercial uses because they were located in proximity to the downtown or located on original street car routes which became main thoroughfares.

After 1908, many single family Victorian houses were torn down to make way for multi-family “flats”, changing the density of single family neighborhoods to more urban. These early multi-family structures still incorporated the basic character of the neighborhood and provided connections to the neighborhood. In the sixties, three-story apartment complexes invaded several of Des Moines Victorian areas, hindering their historic significance.

Remaining Victorian neighborhoods in Des Moines have a variety of lot arrangements and spatial layouts depending on the part of town and the natural features framing the neighborhood. Workers cottages are sometimes located on lots of 40' by 100'. Some of the large Victorian homes along the rivers have large lots and wide streets to draw attention to the important homes. The plats usually incorporate an alley and the vehicle entrance was originally from the rear.

The most common Victorian house styles in Des Moines include Queen Anne, Stick, and Italianate. The houses featured steep roof planes, multiple siding surfaces, and ornate trim. The wealthy and middle-class Victorian homes in Des Moines were well built and often contained over 3,000 sq. ft. One or several porches served as a place to entertain, a transition from exterior to interior, and transition from public to private space.

Des Moines also retains Victorian neighborhoods with smaller housing referred to in this plan as Worker’s Cottages. The smaller Worker’s Cottages were often built quickly on small lots but incorporated some decorative trim and more than one siding surface. These houses were often less than 1200 sq. ft. in size.
The Arts and Crafts Era followed the Victorian Era with construction beginning in about 1905, peaking in the teens, and trailing off by the beginning of World War II. Large amounts of this type of housing remain throughout many areas of Des Moines.

Arts and Crafts homes were built with a simplicity that contrasted with Victorian architecture. The houses themselves were usually utilitarian in style often times containing built-in furniture. They focused on being “germ-free” and up-to-date. Homes were usually well-maintained into the 1950s because of the lack of new construction during the Depression and World War II. The houses were generally not converted into additional units because they were smaller in size, 1200-2000 sq. ft., and rooms were more integrated into the whole of the house.

Arts and Crafts Era housing varied in cost and income of owners but the bungalow house type contains some of the more affordable older housing in the city. Bungalows were often cited for their affordability and efficient character. Conversely, some of the most elaborate and expensive homes in the city were built in the Arts and Crafts style on the western edge of the city and south of west Grand Avenue. Fashionable subdivisions built on the edge of the city prospered from streetcar and automobile connections. Such subdivisions also included restrictive covenants citing the type and cost of a house that was to be built.

For the most part these Arts and Crafts neighborhoods were built with a traditional grid, some utilizing an alley. Lots of 50’ or 60’ frontage by 130’ are common. Drive approaches moved around to the front but the garage was often away from the house on the back lot line. Acre size lots in both the northeast and northwest parts of the city were advertised as investments in self-sufficiency. Advertisements lauded such areas as “garden spots... Where a man could increase his income.”
Classical Revival Era homes were built in much the same time period as Arts and Crafts homes, approximately 1890 up to World War II. Although Revival and Neoclassical style homes were built during the Victorian and Arts and Crafts era, numbers of houses peaked in the twenties rather than the teens. Some houses continued to be built during the Depression in Des Moines, taking advantage of new federal financing schemes that were introduced.

Large numbers of houses from this era exist in the Beaverdale area of Des Moines and on the far west side. The East side has a neighborhood of classical revival houses around Grandview Park, and houses from this era are scattered throughout the southside.

One of the most popular styles in Des Moines was Tudor Revival style which ranged in size from a “Beaverdale Brick” to large estate housing south of Grand Avenue. The Tudor revival signified stability, wealth, and English values. Some of the largest, architect designed houses were built by 1910. The new brick veneer technology invented in 1915 allowed wide use of brick housing in the 1920’s and 1930’s.

Other styles popular in Des Moines included Spanish Mission, Dutch Revival and Colonial Revival. The houses in these Revival and Neoclassical neighborhoods look much as if they were traditional but were built to modern codes. They combined the best of the old and new cultures in the opinion of the developers and owners. Front porches were not common, but the houses had a well-defined front entrance.

Most of the neighborhoods were built on the traditional grid with few alley’s. Lots were similar in size to Arts and Crafts homes, a 50’ by 130’ lot was common. Garages became more important for these homes, the garage was sometimes integrated into the house or matched the house in design. Some neighborhoods such as Ashby Avenue and Chautauqua Parkway took advantage of natural contours to create a unique area.

Estate areas south of Grand Avenue were built on lots of over one acre. The homes were large and still needed domestic help to ensure they were kept up. The streetcar provided connections for the daily help to come in and go home.
Post World War II Neighborhood

Development patterns changed dramatically after the Second World War throughout the country. Newly forming families required additional housing and were looking to get away from the density of the cities and escape to the country side. In Des Moines this resulted in growth at the edges of the city and within the suburban communities. Housing was located much further from the downtown and neighborhood commercial centers. Schools, churches, and retail establishments became larger and separated from the homes. As a result, residents became dependent upon the automobile.

• Residential developments were generally located in isolation from commercial and industrial areas. Multi-family housing was built as large multi-family complexes separate from the single family structures in design and location.
• New street layouts, such as cul-de-sacs and meandering roads, are designed to keep traffic from the residential areas. The house on the cul-de-sac became the home of choice.
• The exclusively single family neighborhood developed at a lower density because of the predominance of the automobile. Frontage became an important part of the lot layout, to accommodate a 1-2 car garage attached to the house. Lot area for a single house was 8,000-10,000 sq. ft. with 80 feet of frontage desired.
• Subdivisions became larger and housing more homogeneous within the subdivision.
• Houses generally became more horizontal with low hipped roofs. The front door was emphasized but the traditional paneled door was not used.
• The street pattern developed plat by plat with few street connections across plats.
• The Post World War II neighborhood is represented on all sides of the rivers but occupies the most land area on the south side as sewers, street improvements and annexation opened up the southside of Des Moines for development.

The housing and buildings from this era can all be attributed to the Modern Era.
The Modern Era comprises the Post World War II Neighborhood and contains housing built from the late 1940s to late 1970s. Houses were built on land opened up by the automobile and were not dependent on public transportation. Residents enjoyed their dependence upon the automobile. This was a time of expansion for the city and the school district.

There are several housing types that were prevalent throughout this Modern Era. In Des Moines the most common house types included Traditional Starter Homes, Ranch, Split Level and Shed. The housing in this era varied more in form than in style. The styling and details on the ranch house is usually the same as the split level; it became an era of homogeneity. Many homes have some traditional decorative detailing but their different form and massing mark them as houses from the Modern Era. What the house contained was more important than how it looked.

After the war there was a rigid standardization of building materials. An 8' ceiling became the standard. A family room and den were added and the floor plan of the house became oriented to the children. Private space was provided in the back yard and the porch was lost to air conditioning and TV. The front yard or public view space became much less important as the home focused on the family rather than the community space. The split level allowed families to separate quiet living areas, noisy living and sleeping areas on different levels.

As the country became more affluent, homes generally became larger, however, the size and cost of houses from this period vary tremendously. Simple split foyers in neighborhoods show an attention to affordability and easy maintenance and were approximately 1500 square feet. Large ranches of over 2500 sq. ft., using combinations of brick, stone, and wood occupy large areas south of Grand Avenue. “Executive houses” on curvilinear streets with special street lights were built on the southwest side.

Typically the garage was connected to the house, either flush with the house or in front of the living space itself. In early “California Ranches” a carport was designed as part of the house. In mass designed houses, the garage is usually well in front of the living areas saving paving costs and allowing the rear yard to provide more “private space”

Traditional Starter Homes satisfied the pent up demand for housing immediately following World War II until the mid-1950s. Large numbers of these houses were built in the northwestern and far eastern parts of the city. Houses were made smaller, some under 1,000 sq. ft., by the elimination of the dining room. The kitchen became the control center for the house and was open to the rest of the house. The front porch was also eliminated to cut costs. Most had applied shutters. In the true starter houses a garage was rare but the home often had a car port. Most of these areas have had garages added later. Such garages are generally detached and located well behind the house.

Ranch and Split Level house types were built starting in the 1950’s through the 1970’s. The ranch or split level house incorporated little decoration or trim on the exterior although might have a combination of wall surfaces such as brick and clapboard. Most houses featured horizontal lines, low pitched roof and overhanging eaves. A garage is often attached.

The Shed house became popular in Des Moines in the 1970s and shows a more radical departure from traditional styles. Many of these houses were architect designed. These houses represented a break from tradition. The house often featured vertical siding and avoided all decoration. The style takes its name from its roof form which usually had very little overhang. A single board may be used as the cornice.
Newly Developing

During the early 1980s Des Moines saw little development as interest rates soared and little virgin land was available within the existing city limits. In 1987, the City of Des Moines instituted a tax abatement program for all new housing that spurred construction. In 1989, a successful annexation on the city's southeast side provided large areas of vacant land for new subdivisions.

- Subdivisions submitted in the 1990s have ranged from 80 acres to over 200 acres. Large lots are laid out with 60, 70, or 80 feet of frontage.
- Development is usually phased in order to create demand and lessen the developer's exposure.
- Cul-de-sacs and curving roads continue to be the developer's choice for laying out roads.
- Most development has occurred on the south and northeast side, although smaller development has been built on the city's northwest side.
- Creative developers have developed small, “left-over” parcels of ground within the city.
Contemporary Era. The houses built within newly developing areas generally are the same in massing and form as the houses built in the Modern era. Modified Split levels and ranches are still the predominant house type. Houses are generally more ornate than those house styles of the 1970s. Traditional detailing has returned. A house of this era often features several roof planes with several gables built into the facade. Small porches and concentration of detail at the entrance area are now common on the front facade. The porches are more decorative than useable but provide a transition from the exterior to the interior. Attached garages accommodate two or three cars but are still placed in a dominant position in front of or flush with the living area.

Improved technology has allowed a return to some of the charm of yesteryear without some of the maintenance problems of an older home. New, energy efficient windows provide inserts between pieces of glass for the appearance of divided lights. The windows appear to be similar to double hung windows of the early twentieth century but require less maintenance and are more energy efficient.

Town house developments on Des Moines' north and south sides have become an alternative form of owner-occupant housing and represent a new housing type. Such developments are a tribute to the 1990s busy life style. Although the homes are individually owned, yardwork and snow clearance are delegated to a central homeowners association or management company. However, this housing type is often built as independent developments with little integration into the surrounding neighborhood or adjacent developments by streets or pedestrian connections.
Single Family Proposed Policies
Preservation of the character of our neighborhoods is a fundamental goal of the 2020 Community Character Plan. Neighborhoods are the single largest land use in the City of Des Moines. Preservation of the housing stock, through compatible infill and additions is an important implementation step for the plan.

Proposed Policies
- Develop a set of compatible development standards or "palettes" for infill development and additions consistent with the predominant character of the neighborhood
- Implement the compatible development standards through administrative review prior to issuing a building permit.
- Insert the compatible development standards into the Board of Adjustment criteria for review of exceptions and variances
- Eliminate the extent of parking 100' into a residential zone as a matter of right.
- Develop administrative review for placement of garages. In traditional neighborhoods a garage should be placed behind the house.

The map on the next page details the location of housing development throughout the city. The striped areas indicate that more than one era of housing development is common in the neighborhood.

Developers were often optimistic during the city's history and proceeded with laying out plats well before houses could be built. Consequently, plats and areas of town often contain a mix of housing styles and infill development from later eras.
ERAS OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Traditional
- Victorian
- Arts & Crafts
- Revival/ Neoclassical

Post WW II
- Modern
- Areas of Special Significance

Newly Developing
- Contemporary
Traditional Neighborhood
Diverse Density

In a traditional neighborhood multi-family housing was generally clustered along a corridor or near a street car line. Double houses and buildings with four units were often developed as a part of the single family portion of the neighborhood. The multi-family housing shared many of the stylistic elements of the single family housing and was integrated into the street pattern.

Because of this mixed density pattern of development, most traditional areas of the city near the downtown and Drake University were designated as high density and zoned accordingly in the earliest planning documents for Des Moines. Most of these areas were originally built as primarily single family but over the past sixty years multi-family conversion and infill have altered the original single family developments. A 1980 policy document for the city stated that

Although originally developed with single-family, owner-occupied housing, these neighborhoods have gradually changed to a point where many of the larger homes have been converted into multiple dwellings and the majority of the housing is renter-occupied, central city neighborhoods cannot be reasonably planned for low density single-family housing. At the other extreme these areas could not and should not be rebuilt solely with medium or high density multi-family. A reasonable approach to central city neighborhoods is to allow a variety of housing types from single-family to small apartment buildings of up to 8 units per building and more flexibility in commercial uses within residential densities.

During the 1990's, neighborhood associations and the Plan and Zoning Commission have expressed concern about the negative impacts of converting an existing building to a higher density or of building multi-family housing not in character with the existing homes. Incompatible developments have an impact both on the economic value of neighborhoods and quality of life. Increasing residential density within an existing building can overload the street and utility systems, further causing decay and disinvestment. New, and large multi-family infill development are often built in an incompatible architectural style with large amounts of pavement for parking and little integration into an existing neighborhood. In both cases, the quality of life is reduced for existing and future residents.
The diverse density neighborhoods throughout the city have unique situations because of their location, time of development and amount of redevelopment. Each varies in the amount of multi-family that has occurred and in the ability of the structures and infrastructure to handle the increases in density.

Neighborhoods such as Drake and parts of River Bend have a mixture of multi-family developments dating from the 1910's and garden style apartments dating from the 1960's and 70's. The neighborhoods also contain single family housing that has been converted into two or more units. Single family housing, both rental and owner-occupied, also continues to exist.

Neighborhoods such as parts of Capitol Park, the western part of River Bend and King-Irving have significant numbers of housing structures that have been converted to small multi-family or duplex units. The multi-family buildings have existed for decades but continue to tax the infrastructure and create parking problems. Additional multi-family buildings are considered an intrusion.

Other central city neighborhoods of Des Moines never experienced substantial change to multi-family or duplex housing regardless of the high density land use designation and multi-family zoning classification. Several of these areas are not conducive to multi-family because of the small house size and predominance of small lot sizes. Some areas are not appropriate for multi-family due to the continued strong market demand for single family dwellings.

Proposed Policies

- In older neighborhoods where the current character is over 30% multi-family structures, a land use classification that acknowledges and allows multi-family housing should be used. A future zoning classification “R-3 Compatible” should include compatibility standards to assure that the existing and any future multi-family housing promotes investment in the building, a variety in size and price range of housing units, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

Creative adaptations to multi-family housing are possible. Unfortunately an increase in density has not always resulted in greater investment. Too often encouraging investment and providing lower cost housing has been at the sacrifice of quality units that included amenities such as parking and open space. These unplanned conversions to multi-family and random infill housing units result in an increase in density of the neighborhood.
A four-plex on Polk Boulevard well integrated with low density housing.

- Compatability standards and amenities for structures proposed to be converted to multiple units or built as multiple units may include:
  - Square footage of open space per unit;
  - Minimum square footage of living area per unit;
  - Parking spaces related to number of bedrooms and design layout of unit;
  - Building compatibility of massing, materials, roof pitch, and presence of porch or well defined front entrance; and
  - Administrative review prior to new construction or conversion of multiple units.

- In older neighborhoods where the current character is more than 15% of the structures are two-family and more than 20% of the structures are non single-family residential, a land use classification “R-2 Compatible”, should encourage the provision of well-designed, single family and duplex housing. Additional multi-family housing would not be allowed. A resulting zoning designation should include compatability standards that ensure any density increase reinforces affordable owner-occupancy, provides for adequate off-street parking, and makes a positive contribution to the neighborhood’s character. Compatability standards and amenities for properties proposed to be converted to two units or built as two units may include:
  - Square footage of open space per unit;
  - Minimum square footage of living area per unit;
  - Parking spaces related to number of bedrooms and design layout of unit;
  - Building compatibility of massing, materials, and roof pitch, and presence of porch or well-defined front entrance;
  - Maximum number of duplex/multi-family units on a block face;
  - Land use transitions/seams; and
  - Administrative review prior to new construction or conversion to duplex units.

- A low density land use designation and a single family zoning classification is appropriate where under 25% of the housing stock has been converted to duplex or multi-family development.