

Housing, Community Development and Revitalization

Housing

Brooklyn Park was largely developed in the early to mid-1900's as a relatively dense suburban community. As such, the area is to a large extent built-out, with few large tracts of land remaining to be subdivided or developed. The predominant type of housing in the area is single family detached homes, with smaller areas of townhouse development. As discussed in the previous section, the vast majority of residential land in the Brooklyn Park area is zoned R5, which is considered a low to medium-density residential district allowing either single-family detached, duplex, or townhouse units.

Age and Composition of Housing Stock

The majority of the housing stock in the Brooklyn Park Planning Area is aging, with little new home construction occurring. It is estimated that over 70 percent of the housing units in the area were built prior to 1960, while in the County only 32 percent pre-dated 1960, making Brooklyn Park one of the largest concentrations of older housing in the County. The housing mix is approximately 35 percent townhouses or duplexes, and 65 percent single-family detached homes. In the Brooklyn Heights and Belle Grove communities, there are concentrated blocks of older row houses or duplexes, the majority of which were constructed in the 1940's and 1950's when the pace of construction in Brooklyn Park was two to three times that for the County as a whole. Within this aging housing stock is a higher incidence of deferred maintenance and neglect attributed in part to the area's income levels.

Rental vs Owner Occupied Housing

Based on 1990 census data, of the total 5,443 housing units in the Brooklyn Park Planning Area at that time, 78 percent were owner-occupied units, 18 percent were rental units, and 4 percent were vacant. The 2000 census data indicated a total of 5,339 housing units in Brooklyn Park, of which 77 percent were owner-occupied, 18 percent renter-occupied, and 5 percent vacant. This compared to 72 percent owner-occupied and 24 percent renter-occupied, with 4 percent vacant, for the County as a whole in 2000. This would indicate that the overall split between homeowners and renters in Brooklyn Park has remained fairly constant over the past decade and that there is a healthy mix of renters and homeowners. However, in the Brooklyn Heights community the percentage of renter-occupied units is much higher (nearly 30%), and there appears to be a recent trend toward owner-occupied units being converted to rental units by investors when homeowners sell their homes. In addition, rents tend to be lower in the area than in other communities in the County. With the exception of the Olde Brooklyn Park community where the median gross rent in 2000 was \$819 per month, median gross rents in the remaining Brooklyn Park census tracts in 2000 ranged from \$518 to \$690 per month, as compared to a County-wide median rent of \$798. Gross rent is the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities and fuels if these are paid by the renter.

New Housing Construction

As existing housing stock ages and declines, few new homes have been constructed in Brooklyn Park over the past decade to encourage potential homebuyers to move to the area for closer proximity to inner-city jobs, or to purchase “move up” homes in the area. After a peak in 1987 and 1988 when 178 and 117 building permits were issued respectively for new dwelling units, the average number of new dwelling units authorized by building permits issued each year during the ten-year period from 1989 through 1998 was only 10. This must be largely attributed to the fact that these communities are primarily built out to the maximum densities allowed under the current zoning. While there are opportunities for infill lots to be developed, larger areas of vacant land that could be subdivided for residential lots are few and scattered. However, two new residential developments have recently been constructed in Brooklyn Heights and Roland Terrace. The new Camden Hills subdivision on Ballman Avenue contains approximately 40 single family lots.

Home Sales Activity

The median housing price for residential properties in the Brooklyn Park Planning Area was \$95,600 for the time period from January 1996 through October 1997. This was significantly lower than the median home price of \$139,404 for the entire County during that time period. At that time, there was a significant difference in home prices on the east side of the Harbor Tunnel Thruway (I-895) as compared to the west side. Since all of the area’s rowhomes are located east of the Thruway, this median price difference is not surprising. In the communities east of the Thruway, the median home price was \$85,000 which was 43 percent less than the Countywide median. West of the Thruway (Pumphrey, Lynnbrook, Sunnyfield Estates), the median price was \$121,900. These trends in home sales are continuing presently, with home sale prices staying much lower than average prices across the County. A more recent estimate by CACI indicated an average home value in Brooklyn Park of \$87,643 in the year 2000 and an average home value Countywide of \$178,465. Real estate listings in the Planning Area in late 2002 covered a wide range from around \$50,000 to \$250,000. The new single family homes in Camden Hills are being listed in the \$180,000 to lower \$200,000 price range.

The pace of sales of existing residential units also remains quite slow when compared to most other areas of the County, in spite of the locational advantage of being in close proximity to employment centers and downtown Baltimore. The slow pace can be attributed to the older condition of much of the housing stock and a negative image that has resulted from ongoing problems of crime and nuisance conditions.

Obstacles to Investment

Declining Housing Market

The housing market in the Brooklyn Park Planning Area is suffering from a combination of factors. First, because the majority of the housing stock was built prior to 1960, most units have a smaller square footage of finished floor area than in more contemporary housing, and many units are in need of renovation. Secondly, because a large portion of residents fall within the low or moderate income brackets, many do not have readily available financial resources for

major home improvements or renovations.

Another contributing factor to the decline is the high concentration of rental units in certain areas. Within the Brooklyn Heights community, it has been estimated that a third or more of the mid-twentieth century rowhomes which were originally built for owner occupancy are now investor-owned. As in other communities where there is a large number of investor-owned rental units, the management quality and tenant responsibility varies. Although some of these units are structurally sound, a lack of proper maintenance and upkeep has allowed them to deteriorate. The County continually receives complaints from residents reporting hazardous health conditions and code violations, according to the County Department of Health. Although there is no estimate of the current number of substandard housing units, the number of vacant housing units has been increasing slightly. Approximately 258 vacant housing units were reported in 2000 compared to 234 units in 1997. Nearly half of the vacant units in Brooklyn Park in 2000 were located in the Brooklyn Heights community.

Crime and Safety

In the neighborhoods known collectively as Brooklyn Heights, crime and safety have been ongoing problems. Crime incidents in this area include illegal drug activity, burglaries, and vandalism, in addition to health and safety-related issues such as nuisance cases, truancy, overcrowded homes and trash.

According to statistics from 1998, there were 221 Violent Part I Crime incidents (ie. felony crimes) in that year in Brooklyn Heights. Ten percent of all calls for emergency services in the County occur in Brooklyn Heights. Substandard properties and absentee ownership are further instigating the amount of crime in this concentrated area.

Because of this, the Brooklyn Heights area east of Ritchie Highway and north of Kramme Avenue to the Baltimore City line, as shown on Map 3, was designated as a HotSpot in 1999 and awarded State funding for extra resources to fight crime. Through this initiative, an organized community group has worked closely with Police Department and other County officials to implement a strategy for the area to prevent crime incidents and improve safety conditions in the community.

Nuisance Conditions and Code Violations

Zoning code violations have been an ongoing problem in Brooklyn Park, particularly in the Brooklyn Heights area. A significant number of townhomes in the area are used as two family dwellings. Almost a third of the townhomes in Brooklyn Heights are not owner-occupied and house anywhere from one to three families, some of whom rent by the week. With few standards required to rent an apartment, many people who cannot meet rental agreement standards anywhere else find a home in this community. With them come problems like crime,

Map 3

unkempt properties, outside storage of junk and debris and unregistered vehicles, vicious and unlicensed animals and a general lack of concern for the community in which they reside.

Since the inception of the Brooklyn Heights HotSpot program in 2000, the State's Attorney's Office has successfully litigated against at least two landlords and has identified their properties as Nuisances. Among other standards and fines associated with nuisance cases, all landlords cited must now obtain approval for all of their tenants from the State's Attorney's Office, where a check is run for felony convictions. This has proved quite successful, especially since one of these landlords owns more than 17 townhomes in the area. This screening service is currently available to all landlords in the HotSpot area free of charge.

The County's Zoning Enforcement office has established the goal of surveying properties within the HotSpot area to identify and require correction of zoning violations. The office has focused primarily on junk and debris in yards, untagged or inoperable vehicles, and, working in cooperation with the Health Department, multiple family dwellings. Zoning Enforcement has attempted to identify all multiple family dwellings, determine the number of permitted units, and require that all dwellings obtain a zoning certificate of use and maintain only the permitted number of units.

Deficiencies in Public Infrastructure

Problems related to crime and safety in the community are further exacerbated by the deteriorating condition of, or in some cases the lack of, public infrastructure such as sidewalks and streetlights. The HotSpot Community Partnership has been working with community representatives in Brooklyn Heights to identify locations where citizen safety and crime enforcement is hindered by a lack of sufficient lighting and/or sidewalks. Other Brooklyn Park communities such as Pumphrey are in also in need of improved street lighting and sidewalks.

In summary, the aging housing stock, the concentrated areas of investor-owned housing units, and a relatively high concentration of low income households are all factors that continue to contribute to decline in the Brooklyn Park area and to discourage private investment. With a significant number of absentee landlords, many of the properties have not been maintained, and crimes involving illegal narcotics, along with related burglaries and assaults have become a problem. Although measurable improvements have occurred over the past few years, continued efforts are needed in order to stabilize these communities.

Community Development and Revitalization

Planning Initiatives

The Brooklyn Park area is designated as a commercial revitalization area in the County's 1997 *General Development Plan*. It is one of seven areas targeted for State and County revitalization efforts. These are existing commercial centers or highway-oriented commercial corridors which serve communities but are in need of improvement. In these areas, public and private improvements are encouraged to enhance buildings, parking areas, landscaping,

streetscapes and signage.

The *Anne Arundel County Consolidated Plan for Fiscal Years 2001-2005* constitutes a strategic plan for addressing housing and community development needs in the County. Prepared by Arundel Community Development Services, Inc. (ACDS), the plan provides an analysis of housing and community development needs of County residents and then sets out specific goals, strategies and objectives which will be used to address those needs over the five year period. All State, federal, and local housing and community development funds are directed towards meeting the needs set forth in the plan. The plan designates Brooklyn Park as one of four targeted areas for neighborhood revitalization in the County and establishes a strategy of providing an acquisition/rehabilitation program to promote homeownership, improving public facilities and infrastructure, and promoting activities which reduce crime and strengthen the neighborhood.

The State established a new Community Legacy Program in 2000 with a goal of revitalizing and stabilizing the State's transitional neighborhoods. The program is designed to assist communities that are experiencing decline and disinvestment, but that have the potential, with modest public and private investment, to be vibrant places to live and work. In 2001, the County applied for and was granted designation of the Brooklyn Park Planning Area as a Community Legacy Area and received State funding to implement several programs in Brooklyn Park.

Commercial Revitalization

Ritchie Highway is the primary commercial corridor in the Brooklyn Park area. All of the local and regional shopping centers within the Planning Area are located along this highway. An inventory of all shopping centers in Anne Arundel County with over 10,000 square feet of floor area was conducted in 1995. Information from that inventory on the four major shopping centers in the Brooklyn Park Planning Area is shown below. Currently, storefronts in the Southview Shopping Center are vacant and boarded shut.

Table 9. 1995 Shopping Center Inventory

Shopping Center	Year Built	Square Footage
Arundel Village	1985	44,280
Brooklyn Park Plaza	1960	122,265
Ritchie Highway Center	1962-70	124,950
Southview Shopping Center	1956	83,090

The Ritchie Highway Shopping Center lost many key tenants who went out of business or moved prior to acquisition of the center by U.S. Realty and Investment Company in 1997. At that time, the property was in a significantly deteriorated condition. Since then, U.S. Realty has leveled a portion of the old complex and built a new strip-style building. In addition to a new 60,000-square foot Metro supermarket, improvements included a repaved parking lot, a new entrance and a covered pedestrian plaza with benches. In 1999 U.S. Realty acquired the adjacent Southview Shopping Center and is currently developing a plan to renovate that shopping center.

A field check in 2001 indicated that there were only two vacant storefronts out of 15 available at the Brooklyn Park Plaza, and the two pad sites at the plaza were occupied as well. Businesses and retail stores here include a video store, music dealer, a nail salon, an animal clinic, a financial services office, a general merchandise retailer, and a few eating establishments. The County Police Department has a satellite storefront office here as well, from which the HotSpot program is operated. Many of these retailers have been at this location for several years. The physical structure itself is old and in need of rehabilitation.

In the Arundel Village Plaza to the south, there are 18 storefronts of which five were vacant in 2001. Services here include a dental office, barber shop, nail salon, a church, and a few eating establishments. The location of the stores in the rear strip center is somewhat disadvantaged by four occupied pad sites along the frontage of the site which to some extent obstruct the view from Ritchie Highway.

All of these commercial centers are comprised of local-scale businesses and retail stores. The businesses that lack a presence in the Planning Area are those whose market area is more regional, and up-scale and specialized boutiques which generally rely on a larger market area.

A portion of the Brooklyn Park Planning Area (that portion east of the Harbor Tunnel Thruway) was approved in 1998 as a designated neighborhood eligible for participation in the State's Neighborhood Business Development Program. Available funds from this program will be combined with other State and County resources to provide assistance to property owners and businesses desiring to upgrade, expand or rehabilitate their commercial properties.

In an effort to further facilitate revitalization in some of the County's older commercial corridors, in 2002 the County adopted legislation creating sixteen Revitalization Districts throughout the County and establishing a community revitalization program which allows taxpayers who revitalize commercially or industrially zoned properties to receive a property tax credit for up to five years equal to the incremental increase in their real property tax assessment. Two Revitalization Districts lie entirely or partly with the Brooklyn Park Small Planning Area and are shown on Map 4. A subsequent legislative bill was adopted which established new conditional uses, including commercial uses and residential dwelling units and apartments, to be allowed on properties in Revitalization Districts that are zoned for general commercial or

Map 4

highway commercial uses (C3 or C4 zones) and that have principal buildings that are vacant or being leased temporarily. It is hoped that this new legislation will help to reduce the number of vacant commercial facilities in these Districts and promote reuse or redevelopment of these properties.

Highway and Streetscape Improvements

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has also identified this area for investment of State Highway Administration (SHA) funds. With funding through the Neighborhood Conservation Program, the State recently completed a \$3 million reconstruction project along Ritchie Highway from I-695 to the Baltimore City line. The project included roadway improvements, sidewalks, landscaping, pedestrian crosswalks and other amenities. The project became the catalyst for significant private investment along this highly visible commercial corridor.

In addition, a \$2+ million reconstruction project along Church Street (MD 171) east from Ritchie Highway was undertaken as a joint venture of the County in cooperation with the State. The recently completed project included replacing deteriorated curbs, gutters, sidewalks, street surfacing and lighting along this residential street. Improvements such as these encourage private reinvestment in real property and community stability in the long term.

Funding from SHA's Neighborhood Conservation Program has also been applied to a Streetscape Project along Belle Grove Road (MD 170) between Baltimore Annapolis Boulevard and Ritchie Highway in Brooklyn Park. As part of the Phase I study focusing on the section west of the Harbor Tunnel Thruway, a task force comprised of State and County officials and members of the Pumphrey community identified several key issues to be studied including lack of sidewalks, poor drainage, traffic speeds, street and pedestrian lighting, landscaping opportunities, parking and utility impacts. Some preliminary concept studies have been completed; however, the project is currently on hold due to a lack of funding.

Crime Prevention and Public Safety Initiatives

Within the Brooklyn Park Planning Area, the Brooklyn Heights community east of Ritchie Highway was designated a HotSpot in 1999 under the State HotSpot Communities Initiative. Through this program, the County is working closely with community members to implement a safety strategy targeting illegal drug activity, vandalism, overcrowded homes in disrepair, truancy and trash. The safety strategy includes community mobilization; increased law enforcement; increase supervision through a community probation/police team; nuisance abatement; an after-school youth crime prevention program; victim outreach and assistance through the YWCA Domestic Violence Program; and support for addiction recovery.

Housing Initiatives

Arundel Community Development Services, Inc. (ACDS) administers housing and community development programs on behalf of the County. Several programs offered by ACDS

are open to all County residents. The Homeownership Counseling Program provides community outreach and individual counseling that is targeted towards renters who wish to become homeowners. The Mortgage Assistance Program provides deferred repayment loans for mortgage write down, down payment and settlement costs to first time homebuyers with household incomes at or below 80 percent of the median income for the area, as adjusted for household size. The Property Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program provides deferred repayment and/or low interest loans to low income households whose homes are found to contain violations of health, occupancy and other codes which endanger the health and welfare of the occupants. The Handicap Modifications Program works in conjunction with the Property Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program to provide handicap modification of owner-occupied housing for household members with long-term disabilities.

In the *Anne Arundel County Consolidated Plan for Fiscal Years 2001-2005*, Brooklyn Park was designated as one of four targeted neighborhoods for revitalization. Housing and community development funds are concentrated in these targeted neighborhoods to promote revitalization, create or retain affordable housing, stabilize neighborhoods and improve the overall quality of life for residents. Therefore, ACDS implements several programs within the neighborhood that are intended to meet that goal. The Brooklyn Park Revolving Loan Fund Program acquires and rehabilitates properties in Brooklyn Park, which are then sold to limited income first time homebuyers. Once the homes are sold, the proceeds are returned to the Loan Fund so that additional properties can be purchased and rehabilitated. Additional State funds were provided to ACDS in 2002 to enhance this program so that additional homes could be purchased and rehabilitated. Since 1999, ACDS has purchased and rehabilitated seven homes in the community, all of which have been resold to first time homebuyers.

In a related effort to increase homeownership in Brooklyn Park, the County applied for and received \$5 million in four percent mortgage money through the State's Smart Growth/Smart Ideas Homeownership Initiative Program to assist first-time homebuyers in the Brooklyn Park area. This program worked in conjunction with other locally-funded programs administered by ACDS including the Homeownership Counseling Program, Mortgage Assistance Program, and Acquisition/Rehabilitation Program. Through these programs, 49 qualified households were able to purchase homes in the Brooklyn Park area over the past few years.

The Brooklyn Park Rental Rehabilitation Program was established by ACDS in 2003. The program, funded with Community Legacy funds, provides up to \$50,000 in low interest loans to owners of rental properties located within a target area of Brooklyn Heights to make code-related as well as general improvements to their properties. In an effort to reduce density in the community, properties must be converted to single dwelling units to be eligible for the program. As an additional requirement, landlords using these funds must agree to certain terms and conditions to ensure that they are leasing their units to qualified tenants and are using sound property management practices. As a component of the Rental Rehabilitation Program, the

Community Enhancement Program provides participants with deferred loan funds of up to \$10,000 for exterior improvements to the properties.

In 2004, ACDS established a Brooklyn Park Property Rehabilitation Program to encourage homeowners who live within a target area of Brooklyn Heights and Arundel Village to upgrade their homes and remain in the neighborhood. The program provides interest free deferred loans up to \$40,000 to homeowners to upgrade and modernize their homes. Participants are required to spend up to \$10,000 in loan funds on facade improvements to improve the exterior of the units. The program is intended to encourage homeowners to remain in and stabilize these neighborhoods, which are showing an increasing rate of property conversions from homeownership to rental units.

Goals and Recommendations

The core of Brooklyn Park near Ritchie Highway and Church Street represents one of the oldest established “town centers” in Anne Arundel County. With the high density of housing in the surrounding communities, many residents can walk to public services, shopping, community facilities, and public transportation. The library, post office, two elementary schools and the new middle school, community parks, fire station, and many retail stores are all located in the town center within walking distance of much of the residential areas. The Nursery Road and North Linthicum Light Rail Stations are within a one to two mile walk or drive for most Brooklyn Park residents. In addition, it is one of the relatively few places in the County where there is a significant concentration of affordable housing for low income or first-time homebuyers. The community’s easy accessibility to downtown Baltimore with its array of employment, entertainment, cultural, and shopping opportunities make it a highly desirable location in which to live if the negative perceptions of the area can be reversed with continued investment in the area. Steps taken over the past few years have had some very positive results, but continued efforts are needed in order to completely stabilize the community and to prevent a reversal of the measurable successes over the past few years.

Goal: Revitalize the area’s housing market and improve the housing stock to attract a mix of incomes among residents and homebuyers.

Recommendations

1. Reduce residential density in the Brooklyn Heights and Belle Grove areas through conversion of multi-unit structures to single family homes.
 - Develop an inventory of vacant and sub-standard housing units. Identify areas where land parcels or platted lots can feasibly be assembled for clearing and redevelopment.
 - Develop a strategic demolition plan to remove sub-standard and vacant multi-unit structures and replace them with updated single family townhomes or detached homes.
 - Target structures that are severely deteriorated, but also focus on properties with

maximum visual impact on the housing market and on homes and homeowners with potential for strengthening housing prices and raising maintenance standards.

2. Increase homeownership in the Brooklyn Heights area to improve neighborhood stability.
 - Continue to provide homeowner assistance programs such as counseling, mortgage assistance, and low-interest loans and to seek additional funding to continue these programs.
3. Encourage property owners and landlords to participate in home improvement and rental rehabilitation programs that are currently available as well as new programs initiated in the future.
4. Develop and use a range of flexible incentives for homeowners to improve their properties.
5. Use infill opportunities to provide a wider range of housing types and prices.
6. Provide assisted living and long-term health care opportunities for the elderly.

Goal: Improve the image of the Brooklyn Park area by creating and maintaining attractive neighborhoods.

Recommendations

1. Improve the image of the area through streetscaping, maintenance, and other improvements.
 - Use the design concepts presented in this plan as a guide for implementing improvements in the area.
 - Develop standards for exterior building improvements.
 - Encourage higher maintenance standards for private yards.
 - Promote both County and community involvement in providing better maintenance of public facilities such as schools and parks.
 - Conduct an inventory to identify infrastructure needs including street lighting and pavement repairs.
2. Improve the appearance of neighborhood alleys, where trash dumping, poor lighting, and illegal activities have been ongoing problems.
 - Work with community representatives to identify the most troublesome alleys so they can be prioritized for improvements.
 - Encourage property owners to replace damaged and unattractive fencing.
 - Explore alternative enforcement strategies to reduce trash dumping.
 - Install lighting where needed to discourage illegal dumping and other activities.

Goal: Improve the image of Brooklyn Park by strengthening the sense of community identity.

Recommendations

1. Promote increased community involvement in property maintenance, monitoring, and enforcement.
 - Create an umbrella organization to unite local civic associations.
 - Work with representatives of local civic associations to encourage proactive community support as opposed to reactive actions.
2. Promote interaction among community residents through organized block projects and community projects.
3. Promote the positive aspects of the community through public outreach.

Goal: Reduce the number of nuisance cases and code violations.

Recommendations

1. Encourage better property management and maintenance practices by landlords and tenants.
 - Develop a program that will promote more interaction and encourage better relationships between area landlords, tenants and homeowners.
 - Build upon existing programs designed to educate landlords about property maintenance and tenant selection.
2. Develop an organized structure to reduce nuisance cases and code violations in the area.
 - Allocate County staff resources so that sufficient Zoning Enforcement, Health Department, and Police Department staff can be dedicated to the Brooklyn Park area.
 - Create a coordinated team of staff from the appropriate County agencies and community representatives to provide continued monitoring and enforcement for nuisance cases, zoning code violations, and other issues of health and public safety.

Goal: Reduce crime and improve public safety in area neighborhoods.

Recommendations

1. Continue support and funding of community-based crime prevention programs.
 - Continue the community-based policing and youth crime prevention programs initiated under the HotSpot Community Initiative.
 - Provide another police beat or an overlap beat to cover the HotSpot area.
2. Develop a long-term liaison with the City of Baltimore and develop a coordinated

response to crime and safety issues of mutual concern in adjoining City-County neighborhoods.

Goal: Revitalize the commercial real estate market along Ritchie Highway.

Recommendation

1. Use existing programs such as the State's Neighborhood Business Development Program and the Anne Arundel Economic Development Corporation's Small Business Incentive Program, to encourage an interesting mix of small businesses, and particularly community-oriented businesses and restaurants, to locate in the area.

Goal: Promote redevelopment of the Ritchie Highway commercial corridor to function as a town center for the Brooklyn Park communities.

Recommendations

1. Develop a long range redevelopment strategy and concept for the commercial areas along Ritchie Highway, focusing on the corridor from 9th Avenue to Cedar Hill Lane.
 - Promote redevelopment plans that relate in function and scale to the surrounding residential communities.
 - Incorporate green areas and public spaces into redevelopment plans.
 - Promote pedestrian-oriented redevelopment with connectivity to residential neighborhoods and across Ritchie Highway.
2. Apply for State designation as an Arts and Entertainment district in the vicinity of Ritchie Highway and Hammonds Lane in order to attract arts-related uses which will benefit from and promote the Chesapeake Arts Center.

Community Design: Brooklyn Heights Opportunity Area

Introduction

Design opportunity areas defined as part of the Small Area Planning (SAP) process are selected based on the determination that the improvement of such areas would have a significant positive impact on the community. A wide range of opportunity sites were considered before deciding that among the features of the area most in need of improvement were the deteriorating brick row houses prevalent throughout the Brooklyn Heights community. In addition, it was felt that much of the commercial shopping strip along Ritchie Highway was also in need of upgrading. Local residents have expressed the view that these residential and commercial “eyesores” project a negative image of the Brooklyn Park community for both residents and those passing through the area.

It was determined, therefore, that a set of residential and commercial rehabilitation design guidelines would be established for a specifically defined area, but that these could then be generalized to other, similar sections of the community. The area selected as the target for this effort comprises a portion of Brooklyn Heights bounded by Ritchie Highway on the west, Townsend Avenue on the north, Ballman Avenue on the east, and Seward Avenue on the south. This area includes two strip commercial shopping areas; several blocks of brick rowhouses; the Park Elementary School, Brooklyn Park Library, and Brooklyn Park #2. This area was selected for several reasons. First, the intersection of Ritchie Highway and 11th Avenue is the primary entrance to the Brooklyn Heights community as well as the school and library, making it a prime target for revitalization. In addition, Arundel Community Development Services is developing several housing rehabilitation programs for implementation in the area and this project provided a partnership opportunity for further developing those programs. It was decided that Ballman Court, a housing development within the defined opportunity area, would be used as a “test case” for developing residential rehabilitation guidelines. These guidelines and recommendations can then be transferred to other neighborhoods within Brooklyn Park that have similar housing types. (See Figures 1 and 2).

Existing Community Character

The target area comprising the “opportunity site” is in the Brooklyn Heights community. Because of the confluence of social issues, and particularly crime in this area, Brooklyn Heights was designated as one of the “hot spots” under Maryland’s Hot Spots Program. Within the opportunity site, the residential area contains many rental properties, many housing units with multiple dwelling licenses, and many units classified as “open zoning enforcement cases” as of June 2002.

Visually, the area presents a deteriorating and generally neglected appearance. The housing is poorly maintained, in need of cleaning and repair, and yards are typically overgrown and many are protected by chain link fencing or a variety of other fence and wall conditions in

various states of disrepair. Sidewalks throughout the area, where they exist, are in poor condition, lacking any streetscape amenities. Streetlights mounted on old wooden poles, the lack of mature trees, and the poorly maintained sidewalks all contribute to the negative image of the overall area. Similarly, the alleys running behind all of the housing in this area are also in poor condition, with broken paving, a variety of old fences in various stages of disrepair, and views into backyards that are frequently cluttered with broken furniture, trash cans, and other unsightly conditions. Figure 3 depicts a variety of these problems within the Ballman Court housing area.

Nevertheless, throughout Brooklyn Park, one can find examples of similar types of housing to those in the target area that are in good condition and are attractive assets to the community (see Figure 4). These can serve as guidelines in developing rehabilitation recommendations for residential units within the target area.

The commercial area along Ritchie Highway also does not provide an attractive gateway into the target area. Both the Arundel Village Plaza (to the south of 11th Avenue) and Brooklyn Park Plaza (to its north), provide unbuffered views from the road of outdated facades and the typical “sea of parking” in front of the shops. These stores also provide an uninviting view from and to the adjacent residential community, which looks out on an alley filled with dumpsters, vehicles and the unattractive backs of buildings (see Figure 5). There are, however, some glimpses of design opportunities to be drawn from this area (Figure 6).

Design Recommendations

Recommendations for improving both the residential and commercial portions of the target area have been divided into two phases: short term improvements that could be implemented within a 3-5 year time frame; and longer term improvements that would be expected to take up to 10 years to implement. Each of these phases is discussed below.

Phase 1 Improvements

The short term **improvements in the two commercial areas** focus on the public realm and parking facilities (see Figure 7). For Brooklyn Park Plaza, the plan calls for creating a planting buffer between the parking lot and Ritchie Highway. This can be accommodated without losing parking spaces by restriping the parking lot with 60'-wide bays. This parking lot reorganization will also allow space for tree planting areas within the lot itself. These improvements will soften the appearance of the commercial strip and will hide some of the negative appearance of the parking lot and current building facades (see Figure 7A). The plan does not call for façade improvements during Phase 1 since the current structures would be eventually removed and replaced under Phase 2.

The Phase 1 plan also recommends **upgrading the entrance** to the target area via streetscape improvements along 11th Avenue, starting at Ritchie Highway. This element is important as it serves as the primary entrance to and provides a first impression for those

entering into the community. In addition, these improvements complement the open space area adjacent to the library/school site, and enhance that site. The recommended improvements include:

- The installation of trees along both sides of 11th Avenue starting at the Ritchie Highway entry,
- Creation of a small median for trees/plants,
- The addition of a “Welcome to Brooklyn Heights” sign,
- The creation of a “greenbelt” of trees and sidewalks along 11th Avenue on the side of the library/school site,
- The installation of buffer planting to screen the library site from the adjacent commercial space.

Finally, the Phase 1 plan calls for **installation of new sidewalks** along Ballman Avenue, adjacent to Ballman Court, along the existing public right-of-way; and improvements to Ballman Court itself. The recommended **Ballman Court rehabilitation improvements**, as illustrated in Figure 8, include:

- The development of the **open space** in the center of Ballman Court to create the “Ballman Court Park.” After meeting with several community members regarding possible facilities or activities they would like to see planned for this park, the recommended improvements encompass: brick paths throughout the park, benches under trees along the paths, a tot lot, a raised flower bed, a “Ballman Court Park” sign, a new concrete curb and sidewalk around the park, and a decorative wrought iron fence with gates to secure the park at night. Lighting will also be critical to allow the interior of the park to be visible at night. Community representatives discussed the use of various community organizations (e.g., the Girl Scouts) to help plant flowers and maintain the plantings in the park.
- The creation of adequate and attractive **sidewalks** on Ballman Court was felt to be an important factor in upgrading this area. In order to accomplish this, the width of the current road would be decreased to 24’, an area wide enough to accommodate parking and vehicular traffic. The existing sidewalk would be replaced with a 4’-wide tree planting zone and a 4’-wide sidewalk with curb and gutter. Parking, which is now front-end in, would become a mixture of parallel and front-end parking. Finally, the existing, unattractive pole-mounted streetlights would be replaced by new, high quality light standards.
- It is recommended that design guidelines be established for **front yard improvements** that would include the eventual removal of walls and fences, upgrade of entrance walkways to concrete or brick, and would provide ideas for simple, easily maintained landscaping. It should be noted that such guidelines

would have to be affordable for the residents to maximize participation in any improvement program.

- Several improvements are also recommended for the **buildings** themselves. These range from power washing of the exterior brick surfaces to the addition of elements that could tie together and improve the overall appearance of the court. Such elements include: front porches, shutters, trim color palettes, and roof line improvements (see Figures 9 and 9A). It is recommended that design standards be established and adopted by the County with regard to these elements in order to guide facade improvements in this area.
- Finally, proposed **improvements for the alleyways** behind Ballman Court include: resurfacing of the asphalt paving and construction of a consistent 5'-tall wooden fence, with trash can enclosures and gates (see Figures 10 and 10A).

The renovation/rehabilitation process described above recognizes that recommended improvements to Ballman Court will be accomplished over time depending on whether those improvements are the responsibility of the public or private sectors. While public sector changes could feasibly be carried out in a single phase, it is likely that improvements to private property will occur over time, as individual property owners “buy into” these upgrades. If ACDS or other community based organizations are able to provide rehabilitation loans and other incentive programs, such private sector upgrades are likely to occur more quickly. Figures 11 and 11A illustrate the impacts of public sector improvements alone, and public/private sector improvements on Ballman Court.

Phase 2 Improvements

The longer term, Phase 2, plan recognizes that some of the more major changes recommended for the area will need to occur in a more gradual way as funding becomes available and as market conditions enforce this scale of renovation (see Figure 12). Under the Phase 2 plan, renovation activities include:

- **Major commercial area redevelopment** to allow for a more interesting, lively, and pedestrian-oriented commercial corridor along Ritchie Highway. This would involve redeveloping the commercial buildings up to the property line; this will allow for more interesting and accessible streetscape access and will bring parking to the rear and sides of the buildings --- thus reducing the visual impact of these lots. In addition, this configuration would allow for the establishment of buffer planting areas between the commercial and residential areas. Finally, the eventual undergrounding of the power lines is recommended when this is feasible.
- The **11th Avenue entry corridor** will be further enhanced with the planting of trees on both sides of the street.

- Finally, the **streetscape improvements and residential renovation guidelines** established for Ballman Court (Phase 1) would be applied to the remainder of the residential streets throughout the target area.

Design figures p1

Design figures p2

Design figures p3

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