

HOUSING REPORT
City of Lynchburg
Department of Community Development
“Lynchburg is Listening: A Conversation on Housing”
Results & Strategies

Through a series of meetings known as “Lynchburg is Listening: A Conversation on Housing” the City of Lynchburg engaged citizens and stakeholders on housing issues in the City. Over one hundred (100) people participated in the housing conversations, including representatives from the City’s business community, housing & social service providers, realtors, institutions and land development professionals. About 80% of attendees were above the age of 50, which is consistent for public engagement sessions in the City. Although geographic diversity of the stakeholders lacked somewhat, nearly half of those that participated were from the Rivermont/Boonsboro area of the City. Given the level of participation in the process, the City feels it received an accurate estimation of the housing needs

The City started the process to evaluate its current housing stock. Lynchburg contracted with HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal) to prepare a City-wide Housing Assessment to facilitate the stakeholders’ housing conversations. The housing assessment covers demographics, housing characteristics, subsidized housing, homelessness, and a market analysis.

October 2011 – January 2012 (Housing Conversations)

During the first housing stakeholders meeting, the City’s housing partners opened with a synopsis of the services they provide. The nine housing partners include Greater Lynchburg Habitat for Humanity (GLHFH), Lynchburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (LRHA), Lynchburg Neighborhood Development Foundation (LNDF), Lynchburg Community Loan Fund (LCLF), Rebuilding Together Lynchburg (RTL), Lynchburg Community Action Group (Lyn-CAG), Rush Lifetime Homes (RLH), Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship (LCF), and Community Housing Partners (CHP).

Following the housing partners presentations, City staff provided an analysis of the housing trends. Highlights of the data included considerable growth of Lynchburg’s “student” (18-24 years old) and “baby boomer” (55-64 years old) populations over the past ten years which increased $\pm 80\%$ and $\pm 40\%$, respectively. Owner-occupied housing is affordable in the City when compared to other localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The housing choice voucher program which is designed to offer low income families housing choices throughout the City, is actually doing somewhat of the opposite, as the City has seen that the vouchers are predominantly used in areas that do not afford the greatest variety of housing choices and opportunity - a common trend throughout the United States. Finally, the data highlighted the significance of housing as an economic development driver, especially the relationship between employment and housing choices.

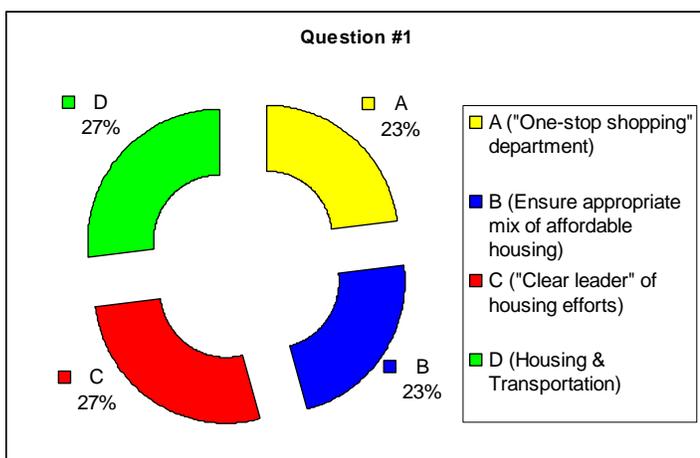
The second housing meeting provided the stakeholders an opportunity to discuss strategies to address the needs identified within the analysis and their workgroups. As part of the process the stakeholders were asked a few questions regarding housing in the City, and their responses were used to target future strategies. The stakeholders returned for a third and final meeting to rank the targeted strategies using interactive technology.

During the three meetings it became apparent that there were several areas of housing in the City in which the stakeholders thought needed to be addressed. The following are the most prevalent ideas that were developed during the stakeholders' sessions:

- The stakeholders felt that although the City recently facilitated the housing conversations, there is no “clear leader” in the housing efforts. Moving forward, the stakeholders feel a leader of the housing efforts should be identified and a housing resources inventory is needed to help identify service gaps.
- The stakeholders also placed a high level of importance on youth development in relation to housing. Examples include housing education within the public school system and tracking the health of children relative to their living/housing conditions.
- A common theme within the conversation was the importance of addressing blight and substandard housing conditions. The stakeholders made a connection to economic growth and housing conditions. They concluded that improvements made to one home within a blighted neighborhood can be infectious and neighborhood experiences continued improvement.
- The stakeholders felt more effort was required to address special-needs population housing needs, such as encouraging universally designed housing.

Below are the questions that were presented to the stakeholders and charts indicating the top three to four strategies developed by the stakeholders. The strategies that were not as popular will also be retained for reference. Although the strategies have not yet been prioritized, they will be refined and prioritized by a future group of stakeholders known as the Housing Collaborative.

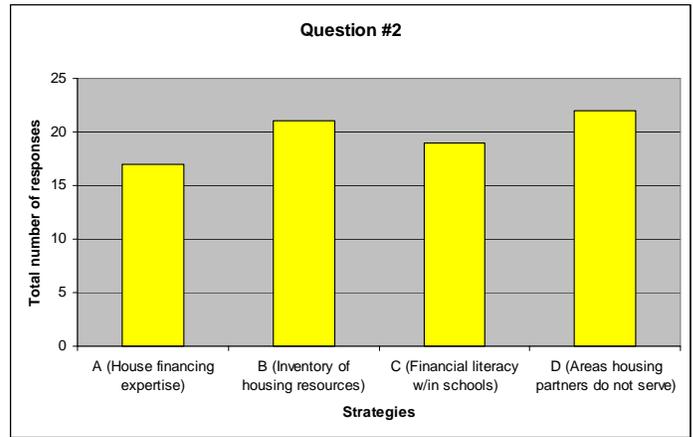
1- What are some of the needs that can be identified in working towards meeting the housing goals that are identified in the Comprehensive Plan?



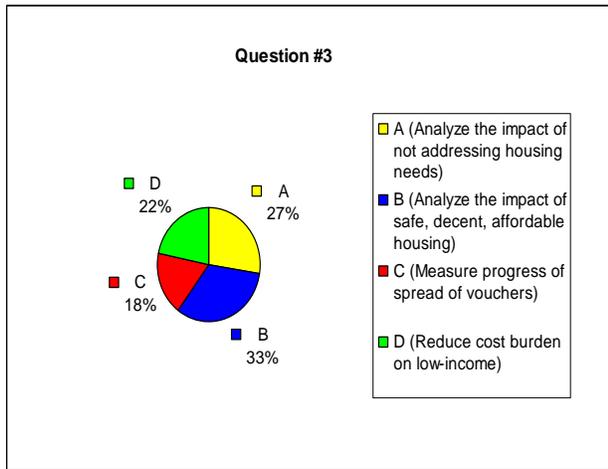
- A. “One-stop shopping” office/department to handle anything related housing.
- B. There needs to be a mechanism to ensure an appropriate mix of affordable housing.
- C. There needs to be a “clear leader” of the housing efforts.
- D. Need for correlation between housing and transportation.

2- Given what you have learned from the Housing Assessment as well as the work of the Housing Partners, what are some strategies to achieve the City’s housing goals and eliminate the gaps in housing?

- A. Develop expertise on housing financing, laws and programs at the local level.
- B. An inventory of housing resources should be collected, which at minimum includes acquiring information on availability, vacancy, and distribution of housing.
- C. Financial literacy should be taught within the public school system.
- D. Identify areas of need that the Housing Partners do not serve.



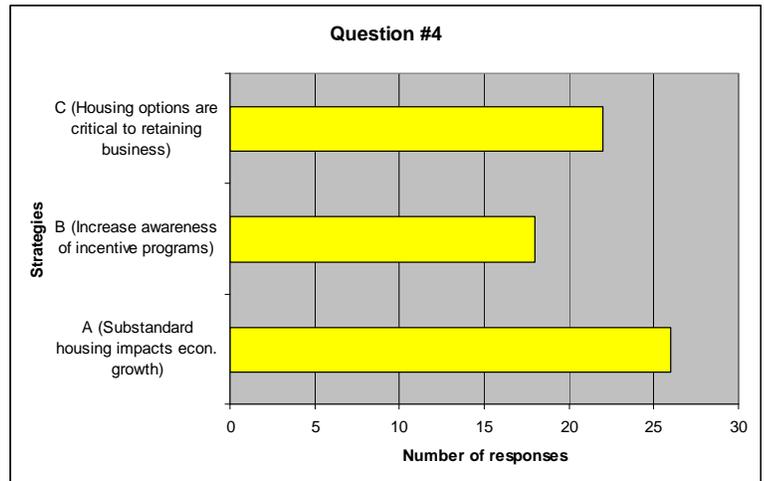
3- What are some metrics that can be used to measure our success in closing the gap between current housing availability and housing needs?



- A. Analyze the impact of not addressing housing needs (i.e. impact of reduction of code enforcement).
- B. Analyze the impact of safe, decent, affordable housing relative to school attendance and health (track with the goal of reducing or improving).
- C. Data indicates that housing vouchers are used in concentrated areas of the City. Regularly measure progress on the availability of vouchers throughout the City.
- D. Reduce the burden of housing costs on low-income persons/families.

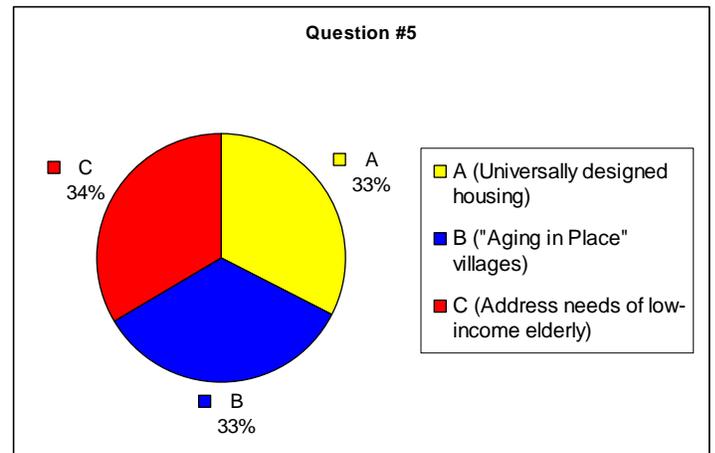
4- What connections can be made between economic growth and housing conditions?

- A. Substandard housing needing rehabilitation negatively impacts economic growth; while increasing the value of one home in a neighborhood is infectious and often the neighborhood sees continued improvement.
- B. Increase awareness of the incentive programs available for housing needs.
- C. Housing options are critical to retaining business and industry in our City.



5- What measures can be taken to plan for the elderly & student populations' housing needs within the City?

- A. Universally designed housing should be encouraged.
- B. "Aging in Place" villages should be supported and developed.
- C. Address the needs of the low-income elderly.



Conclusion and Recommendations

In order for these strategies to take shape, a Housing Collaborative should be formed to initiate and facilitate the strategies. The Housing Collaborative, at a minimum, should include a housing partner representative, realtors, developers, bankers and other engaged stakeholders, as well as city staff from the Community Development and Economic Development departments. As part of the grant agreement with Housing Virginia the Collaborative will meet at least twice each year to review data, identify trends and monitor the progress of strategies identified.

The results of the conversations have allowed the City to set a path for the future of housing and the strategies that have been developed by the stakeholders reflect the housing needs of the City. To that end, the City feels that this is simply the beginning of many conversations needed on housing. The Housing Collaborative will be tasked with continuing the conversation and facilitating the updates in housing trends.