

Affordable housing study indicates residents open to smaller home options

Sep 10, 2018 - 5:38pm



photo by: Journal-World File Photo

Two homes sit within the location of a formerly blighted property at 908 LaSalle Street, in this photo from Sept. 14, 2017. The homes were a project of Lawrence Habitat for Humanity and Lawrence Tenants to Homeowners and were paid for in part with \$100,000 from the city's affordable housing trust fund.

When it comes to addressing Lawrence's shortage of affordable homes, recently compiled survey results indicate that Lawrence residents are open to smaller options.

Last year, the city hired BBC Research & Consulting to complete a housing

market analysis, which also included a survey of residents about their housing circumstances and what kinds of housing they would like to see. BBC Managing Director Heidi Aggeler presented the [*recently completed study*](#) to the Affordable Housing Advisory Board as part of its meeting Monday.

The analysis found lower-priced starter homes are in short supply, and survey responses indicate at least some consensus on what home ownership options those surveyed would like to see. The majority of those surveyed were supportive of smaller homes, including smaller single-family homes and options such as town homes.

“There appears to be a recognition that this type of housing is needed, as well as support for this type of housing in most neighborhoods,” Aggeler said.

Specifically, more than half of respondents said that town homes with the same setback and height as neighboring homes; medium single-family homes between 1,500 and 3,000 square feet; duplexes on the same lot size as single-family homes; and small single-family homes less than 1,500 square feet were “appropriate” in their neighborhood. Most respondents also said that accessory dwelling units and lots smaller than 5,000 square feet were appropriate in Lawrence, though only 42 and 41 percent, respectively, responded that those housing types were appropriate in their neighborhood.

The study also examined the demographics of those who would like to purchase a home but are currently renting. The study indicated that an estimated 2,300 renters would like to buy but have few units to choose from.

Demographically, the renters wanting to buy are between the ages of 35 and 44 and have small household sizes, with an average of 2.2 people per household. The households earn \$35,000 to \$75,000 per year and can afford homes between \$110,000 and \$262,000. For those who can purchase with cash, about 300 units are available to choose from, and about 100 for noncash purchases.

The study also analyzed the rental situation in Lawrence, where some income groups actually have an abundance of affordable rental options.

The study looked at the supply of affordable rental units for 10 income categories, comparing numbers from 2000 with those from 2016. In that time frame, the gap between the number of renter households in certain income ranges and the number of affordable rental units has actually improved for some ranges.

For households making between \$25,000 and \$34,999 per year, a surplus exists of about 3,000 affordable rental units. An approximately 3,000-unit surplus exists for those households making between \$35,000 and \$49,999.

For those making less than \$24,999, though, the supply of affordable rental units has generally decreased from 2000 to 2016. For households making \$20,000 to \$24,999, there are about 700 more affordable rental units in their price range than there are households. For households making \$15,000 to \$19,999, there's a shortage of about 1,200 units. For those making less than \$14,999, there's a shortage of about 4,000 units.

“What happens in your market, if I'm a low-income renter, is that the only type of housing I can find is publicly subsidized,” Aggeler said.

The study found that thousands of Lawrence renters are cost-burdened, defined as those who spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities. The study shows about 5,200 cost-burdened households. Upkeep of rentals may also be an issue, as survey results indicate that overall, 2,950 renters indicated their units are in poor or fair condition.

The study provides various recommendations for improving the housing options in Lawrence for each subset of the population. The board voted unanimously to receive the housing analysis from BBC but noted that the board would need to further review and refine the recommendations.

The Lawrence City Commission will receive the study as part of its meeting Tuesday.