



PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION MEETING
Tuesday, April 25, 2023 • 7:00 p.m.
West Branch City Council Chambers, 110 N. Poplar St.
Council Quorum May Be Present

<https://zoom.us/j/829677991> or
dial in phone number 1-312-626-6799 with Meeting ID 829 677 991

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approve Agenda/Move to action.
 - a. Approve minutes from the March 28, 2023 Planning & Zoning Commission meeting.
4. Public Hearing/Non-Consent Agenda. /Move to action.
 - a. Review Chapter 6: Housing (West Branch Comprehensive Plan)
 - b. Discus Future Land Use Map
5. Old Business
 - a. Building design standards
 - b. Tree standards
6. City Staff Reports
7. Comments from Chair and Commission Members.
8. Next regular Planning & Zoning Commission meeting Tuesday, May 23, 2023.
9. Adjourn

Planning & Zoning Commission Members: Chair John Fuller, Vice Chair Ryan Bowers, Sally Peck, Brad Bower, Matt Van Scoyoc, Jim Hoffman, Madison Conley • **Zoning Administrator:** Terry Goerd
Mayor: Roger Laughlin • **Council Members:** Colton Miller, Nick Goodweiler, Jodee Stoolman, Jerry Sexton, Tom Dean
City Administrator: Adam Kofoed **City Clerk:** Leslie Brick • **Fire Chief:** Kevin Stoolman • **Police Chief:** John Hanna
Parks & Rec: Matt Condon • **Public Works Director:** Matt Goodale

(These minutes are not approved until the next Commission meeting.)

City of West Branch Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting
March 28, 2023
West Branch City Council Chambers, 110 North Poplar Street

Chairperson John Fuller called the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Roll call:

Commission members present: Ryan Bowers, Madison Conley, Sally Peck, Jim Hoffman.

Absent: Brad Bower, Matt Van Scoyoc.

City Staff present: City Admin Adam Kofoed, and Zoning Administrator Terry Goerd.

Attending via Zoom: Dave Schechinger

Public Attendees: None

APPROVE AGENDA/CONSENT AGENDA/MOVE TO ACTION.

Approve the agenda for the March 28, 2023 Planning & Zoning Commission meeting. /Move to action.

Changes requested City Admin Adam – Removal of Section 4(b),4(c), and 4(e). Chair Fuller requested land use stay in for future discussion.

Motion by Bowers, second by Fuller to approve the amended agenda. Motion carried.

Approve the minutes from the February 28, 2023 Planning & Zoning Commission meeting. / Move to action.

Motion by Bowers, second by Hoffman to approve the minutes. Motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING/NON-CONSENT AGENDA

Review/Approve a REVISED Site Plan for Heritage Hill. / Move to action.

Multiple changes covering site, structures size, covered parking. Adam covered them in developer absence, and provided reasoning and background information. Ryan inquired about look of the building. Terry commented that they would be like design to original concepts seen in prior meetings. Ryan also inquired about the pond. Dave confirmed that volume would be the same, and handle the storm water retention.

Sally inquired about inclusion about playground within site. Adam cited that both trail and greenspace is covered within the site plan. Thresholds for construction costs were set to optimize tax credits. Addition(s) could significantly influence these targets.

Terry cited that he agreed with the changes in terms of utilizing code and cost containment.

Motion by Bowers, second by Conley to approve the revised site plan. AYES: Bowers, Conley, Peck, Hoffman NAYS: None ABSENT: Bower, Van Scoyoc Motion carried.

Review Chapter 5: Land Use (West Branch Comprehensive Plan)

Chair Fuller provided Chapter 5 overview and background.

Sally initiated discussion around increase traffic flow, aligning with increased density from developments and potential plans to remediate. Terry cited development plans are targeted to completely fill. Chair Fuller explored of utilization of bumps, as well as elimination of street parking as examples of mitigation. Adam conveyed that in peak times and/or specific locations

based on stop sequencing there can be inconveniences. The duration of these events appears brief and have not driven the need to for City Council to invoke more permanent remediation/actions. Increased communication (Signage) and enforcement was met with group agreement. Ryan inquired about updating tables captured withing Chapter 5 with current data. Chair Fuller remarked that it would be premature to update land use while significant changes are occurring. There may be value updating the base, but resources and priorities challenge prioritization to complete. Madison inquired where the table data was gathered from. Adam was unsure which software was utilized. Comprehensive plan update is targeted to be updated every 10 years, but not a requirement. There is no plan for complete update, but section(s) could be targeted for iterative updates, as required. Adam reiterated need to keep bringing up at Strategic Planning sessions to convey the need for updates.

Discuss Future Land Use Map homework

Chair Fuller provided vision for utilization of Land use map.

- Target doubling in 20 years, increased residential community
- Increase in local commerce – professional practice(s), potential hotel.
- More recreation - parks
- Revitalization of aging housing
- Maintaining historic nature

Sally cited emphasis to maintain flow. Infill not to focus on spot zoning. City has controlled developments to date to maintain consistency.

Terry inquired about creating program of maintenance enforcement on existing property. Madison inquired on alignment with Housing rehabilitation program. Terry concurred, and confirmed existing maintenance Code. Chair Fuller cited the carrots – programs of financial support. Grants exist for the public to utilize. Adam outlined nuisance plan – combining mutual milestones and evidence of progress. International Maintenance Property Code is utilized.

OLD BUSINESS:

a. Review suggested Code update – establishing Front Setback Coverage

Terry performed research on recent site plans – which do meet the targeted setback percentage – 50%.

Motion by Fuller, second by Peck to approve the updated Code AYES: Bowers, Conley, Peck, Hoffman NAYS: None ABSENT: Bower, Van Scoyoc Motion carried.

b. Review suggested Code update – defining Parking space

Language was revisited and change wording from must to shall. Madison inquired about existing parking spaces. Terry confirmed this change is not retroactive. Sally inquired about permeable surface. Team response that it was covered.

Motion by Peck, second by Conley to approve the updated Code AYES: Bowers, Conley, Peck, Hoffman NAYS: None ABSENT: Bower, Van Scoyoc Motion carried

c. Building design standards

Pending State changes leave this activity in flux.

d. Tree standards

Tree commission meeting currently and will bring proposals to Planning and Zoning at a future date.

STAFF REPORTS:

Historic preservation meeting set for April 12

Parks and Rec survey out – good response. 98 returned

Utilization of Owl - evidence of State actions, outcome of budget changes.
April 3rd City Council meeting – Adam will be covering budget updates and insight.

Terry report that initial rough-in on 4 unit building on 4th street is close to inspection.

COMMENTS FROM CHAIR AND COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Chair Fuller commented the State activities includes topsoil focus.
ISU holding training sessions within state.

Adjourn

Motion by Bowers, second by Hoffman to adjourn the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting.
Motion carried on a voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Submitted by:

Jim Hoffman

Planning & Zoning Commission

CHAPTER 6: HOUSING IN WEST BRANCH

Introduction.

Housing is the most important item in the household budget, and a key element of livable neighborhoods and cities. This chapter begins with a number of recommended goals for West Branch, followed by explanations of why those goals are suggested and information about the status of housing in the city.

West Branch Housing Goals

Goal 1: Maintain and Revitalize Older Housing Options.

Objective 1: The City of West Branch will strive to maintain and rehabilitate older housing.

Older housing usually is associated with lower mortgage and property tax costs, which makes homeownership and housing rentals more affordable for median-income, or below-median-income, families.

Objective 2: West Branch should lead the way in supporting a variety of older housing units to meet a wide range of housing needs.

According to the Cedar County Assessors Website in 2017, the median value of houses over 100 years in West Branch was \$108,800.¹ With the right amount of maintenance and rehabilitation, such older homes, making up of almost 15% of the housing supply, can provide affordable home ownership options. West Branch has a comparably large number of housing units built after 1970 and after 1999. However, as of 2015, the latest date available in 2019, West Branch had only a moderate number of new units compared to some of its peer cities. West Branch should strive to maintain and revitalize older housing, constructed before 1970, in order to make available a variety of options for affordable homeownership.

Many older homes are less energy efficient. This can be for a number of reasons such as poor insulation or less efficient energy appliances. West Branch should support and investigate ways to help reduce energy costs among homeowners and renters.

Picture 6.1. North Downey Condominiums Constructed in 2005.



Source: Adam Kofoed, 2010.

Goal 2: Reduce Exposure to Hazards and Lower Energy Costs, Especially in Older Housing Units.

Objective 2-1. The City of West Branch should search for innovative ideas and financial support to reduce health-related issues among children.

In Iowa, and in communities with an abundant amount of older housing, lead-based paint can exist and be hazardous to families. In 1978, lead-based paint was banned from housing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), lead-based paint is one of the most hazardous sources of lead in children.

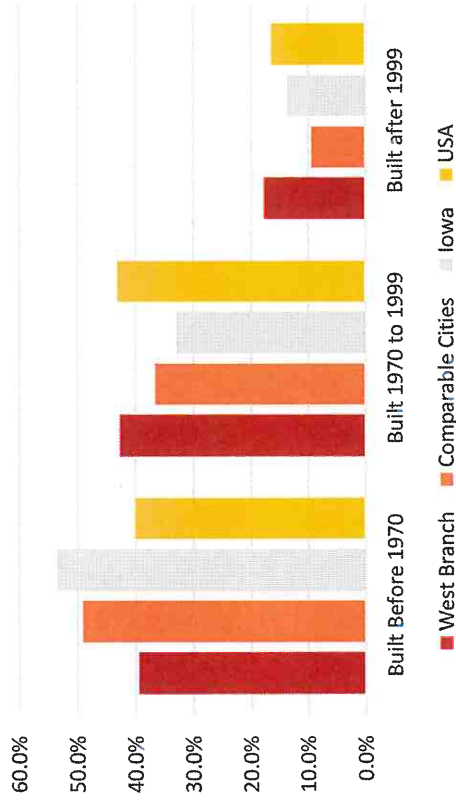
As noted in Figure 6.2, 55.4% of the housing units in West Branch built before 1980 have a high probability or likelihood of having lead-based paint. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in Cedar County alone there were roughly 3 to 8 cases of high lead-blood levels per year from 2005 to 2012.

Asbestos was a concern expressed at a July 25, 2017 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting. Asbestos usage in the United States peaked from 1973 to 1977² but asbestos use is still permitted in the United States.³ Materials made from asbestos after the 1970s were artex, a decorative stipple finish from the 1980s to 1990s, and siding.⁴

Objective 2-2. Support radon testing in West Branch.

Radon is a major health hazard throughout Iowa, but when discovered can rather easily be mitigated. Radon testing is not required in Iowa, but the City should support testing and tie its incentive programs for new housing to a requirement for testing and, if necessary, mitigation.

Figure 6.1. Year Structures were Built in West Branch, Peer Cities, the State of Iowa, and the U.S., as of 2015, by Percentage of Housing Stock.



Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Figure 6.2. Housing Units Built Before 1980.



Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Goal 3: Address Affordable Housing Needs by Increasing Aging-in-Place Ownership and Rental Options.

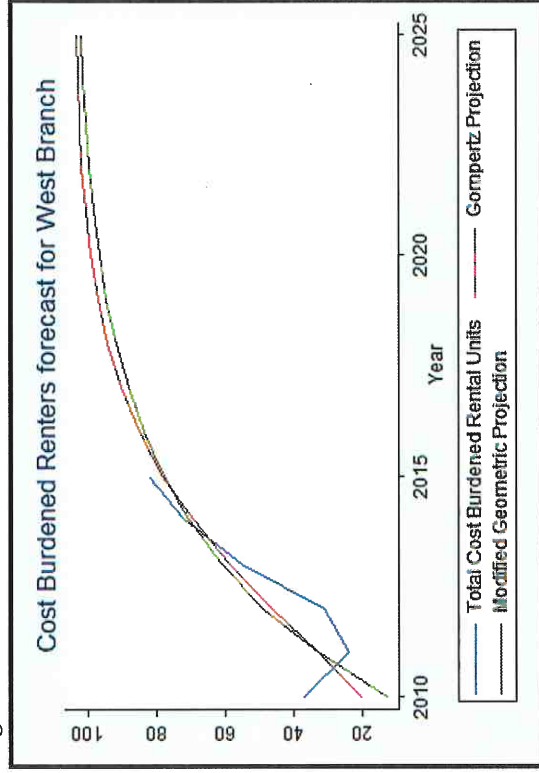
Objective 1: West Branch should address its expected issues with affordable housing by investigating solutions to improve housing affordability for all age groups.

Trends indicate the number of cost-burdened renters will continue to increase in West Branch, spurred by an expected increase in young adults who earn less, competing in a rental market that is not increasing in number of units in accord with the population.

At the same time, senior rental and ownership options have been limited, leading to financial stress on some seniors who no longer are paying a mortgage. Forecasts of cost-burdened renters to the year 2025 are provided in Figure 6.3.

The City should encourage more construction of rentals in the 50% - 80% AMI range (\$752-\$1,200) to reduce downward pressure from higher income renters.

Figure 6.3. Forecasted Cost-Burdened Renters in West Branch.



Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Table 6.1. Rental Gap Analysis for West Branch in 2015.

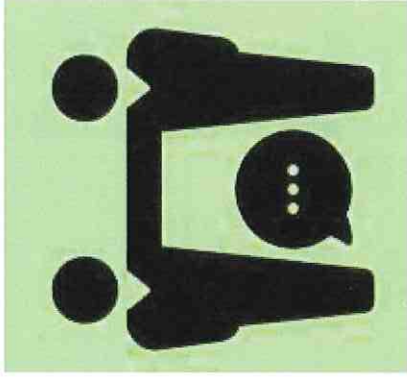
Rental Gap Analysis	0-30% AMI (less than \$18,015)	30-50% AMI (\$18,015-\$30,025)	50-80% AMI (\$30,025-\$48,040)	80-110% AMI (\$48,040-\$66,055)	110%+ AMI (more than \$66,055)
Maximum Affordable Rent	<\$450	\$451-751	\$752-1201	\$1202-1651	>\$1651
Number of Units	40	124	21	23	0
Number of Renters	30	68	59	43	32
Gap in Units	10	56	-38	-20	-32

Source: American Community Survey 2015.

A rental gap analysis measures the supply of rentals by price and compares it with the demand of rental price based on renters' income. The analysis indicates downward pressures from higher income renters on medium income renters indicating a strong demand for both medium (\$752-\$1,201) and higher priced rents (>\$1,200).

Additional Possible Objectives to Achieve Goals.

Coordination.



Investigate establishing a Housing Task Force or Commission to help the city.

Improve older housing, increase affordability, encourage more rental properties, and help the city seek grant funding.

Continue incentives to encourage more housing development, but to promote public health, ensure as a condition that radon testing and mitigation take place.

Assist developers and building owners to apply for grants that encourage affordable housing for individuals earning 50 to 80% of the area median income, and investigate provision of an inclusionary zoning ordinance.

Housing Diversity.



Strive to build one rental or “middle housing” unit for every three housing units built.

Increase the number of rentals and condominiums available in West Branch.

Encourage aging-in-place renting or ownership to reduce the income burden on seniors and improve the competitive renting market for young adults. This includes: allowing second small buildings to be built in the backyard, often termed “granny flats,” and larger rental facilities which are compatible with seniors and young adults.

Innovative Zoning Policies.



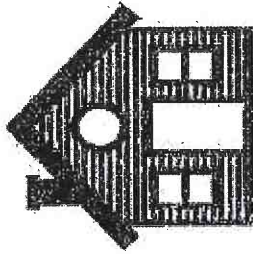
Reexamine zoning policies to encourage more affordable lot sizes, reduce street width to lower development costs, allow for small dwelling units for seniors to live separately but on the same lot as their children, and reduce restrictions on apartment complexes.

Reduce zoning restrictions to make rentals or innovative housing options easier or less expensive to develop.

Update the future land-use map to allow for more rentals, middle-cost housing such as duplexes and town homes, and a possible expansion of mobile home facilities.

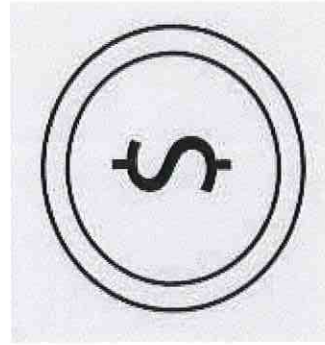
Cluster zoning and planned unit developments should be considered for all new construction.

Improve Older Housing Quality.



Join with the Historic Preservation Commission to investigate adopting a Revitalization District or revitalization programs to encourage the maintenance and revitalization of older housing units.

Improve Housing Affordability.



Consider requiring 10% of the City's new housing developments to be low-income, or an in lieu payment be made to support lower-income housing. This would be accomplished through an inclusionary zoning ordinance (such as adopted in Iowa City).

Encourage developers to apply for Community Development Block Grants and Rural Housing Grants that will enable more affordable housing among those at 50-80% of the Area Median Income (\$29,000-\$48,000).

Reduce the minimum lot-size requirements to allow for more affordable ownership housing among those at 50-80% of the Area Median Income (\$29,000-\$48,000).

Housing Background.

Housing is the dominant form of development in West Branch. A significant amount of land in West Branch's 2032 Land Use Plan was earmarked for residential use. The supply of housing plays an important role in shaping the community. To a large degree, the size, form and type of housing units determine who lives in West Branch. The characteristics of West Branch's neighborhoods and its historic structures play an important role in shaping the identity of the community and its quality of life.

Including housing policies and initiatives in a comprehensive plan is typical and appropriate for two reasons. First, the housing needs of a community are not met completely by private market forces or through the guidance of land-use controls. Community plans and ordinances create the framework for private land development, land development that is almost universally profit-driven. Private market forces need to be supplemented by programs and funding sources that bridge the financial gap for members of the community who cannot afford market-rate housing. Accordingly, this chapter can help identify housing needs and provide a foundation for local decision making to guide residential development and redevelopment efforts in West Branch to promote community health and welfare.

The second reason that housing is addressed in this plan is to meet the intent of Iowa Smart Planning legislation enacted by the Iowa Legislature. The Smart Planning legislation defines components that are suggested content for comprehensive plans. These components are presented in Chapter 2 as ten Smart Planning principles, one of which addresses housing. The housing principle stresses housing diversity. It states:

“planning, zoning, development and resource management should encourage diversity in the types of available housing, support the rehabilitation of existing housing, and promote the location of housing near public transportation and employment centers.”⁵

The legislation further states that when developing or amending a comprehensive plan the following are desirable; “objectives, policies and programs to further the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods and new residential neighborhoods and plans to ensure an adequate supply of housing that meets both the existing and forecasted housing demand. The comprehensive plan or

land development regulations may include an inventory and analysis of the local housing stock and may include specific information such as age, condition, type, market value, occupancy, and historical characteristics of all the housing within the municipality. The comprehensive plan or land development regulations may identify specific policies and programs that promote the development of new housing and maintenance or rehabilitation of existing housing that provide a range of housing choices that meet the needs of the residents of the municipality.”⁶ This chapter provides these housing components for West Branch's comprehensive plan.

Characteristics of the Existing Housing Supply. Assessed Value.

Table 6.2 shows the assessed value of residential properties in West Branch, according to 2015 American Community Survey data.

- Roughly 78% of West Branch's housing has an assessed value between \$50,000 and \$200,000.
- Over 48% of the City's housing is valued between \$100,000 and \$200,000, a range that is considered affordable for middle-income households.
- Over 25% of the housing valued below \$100,000 is in the affordable category for lower-income households.

In most cases, the assessed value of a given home closely correlates with its age of construction. Residential units lying to the west of the city, in Johnson County and in the newer subdivisions on the Cedar County side of West Branch, generally have higher assessed values than properties located in downtown and in older areas of the City.

Table 6.2. Assessed Value of Owner-Occupied Housing in City of West Branch for 2015.

Assessed Value	# of Units	Percentage
<\$50,000	171	19.90%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	74	8.60%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	230	26.80%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	195	22.70%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	159	18.50%
> \$300,000	30	3.50%

Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Year Housing was Built.

With 61.5% of the total units in West Branch built since 1970, the housing stock is considered relatively new.⁷

Over 39% of the City's housing stock was built prior to 1970 with the majority of those, 21.5%, being built before 1940.

- Homes constructed prior to 1960 will require increasing amounts of ongoing maintenance.

The city will need to:

- Continually monitor overall housing quality to ensure the long-term integrity of its older neighborhood areas.
- Moreover, as discussed in the City's Historic Preservation Plan (an appendix to this comprehensive plan that is available through the city offices and website), the city may wish to consider establishing a program of financial assistance for the maintenance and rehabilitation of older structures, so as to encourage the continuance of established neighborhoods. Further, in support of the historic nature of the community the City Council should consider establishing design guidelines and standards for construction in the historic district, and construction in the vicinity of historic homes, and new commercial construction in West Branch.

Housing Types and Availability.

The availability of affordable, high-quality housing is an important factor in a community's ability to maintain, or develop, a healthy economy. The availability of housing can be an important location factor for new businesses and residents when considering a community. A community that is better prepared to meet a variety of housing needs is likely to have an edge in attracting new development, as well as in retaining current residents. Housing must be made available for low-to-moderate income households, the first-time home buyer, residents seeking to upgrade homes within the community, and for those looking to move to or retire in the community.

Picture 6.2. North 4th St House in West Branch. Built in 1900.



Source: Google Maps 2013.

Picture 6.3. An Example of A Row Housing Development.



Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cityofedmonton/6996193260>. Row housing, attached houses, and townhomes are good options to provide housing for a broad range of resident looking to both rent and own. The picture provided is an example of row housing development which could take place in more dense areas of West Branch.

Owner-Occupied and Renter-Occupied Inventory.

Table 6.3 contains an inventory of the types of housing located in West Branch, in comparable cities, and overall in Iowa. Owner-occupied housing is by far the dominant form of housing within West Branch, accounting for 74.8% of the total. This is consistent with Tipton but is slightly higher than most comparable or peer cities and nearly 10% higher than for the state of Iowa. A higher percentage of owner-occupied housing tends to be an indication of a traditional small town, and is to be expected in a more rural area. The lower percentage in Iowa is attributed to the high demand for rental units in or near Iowa’s metropolitan areas and its Universities; although it is a moderate difference,

- West Branch should strive to have its rental percentage (currently 20.2%) closer to the median peer city (23.3%) through encouraging the construction of new rental units.

Table 6.3. Housing Units in 2015 West Branch Compared with Peer Cities and Iowa.

City	Owner-Occupied		Renter-Occupied		Vacant	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
West Branch	859	74.76%	232	20.19%	58	5.05%
Durant	620	70.06%	203	22.94%	62	7.01%
Earlham	493	73.25%	142	21.10%	38	5.65%
Mitchellville	469	65.87%	149	20.93%	94	13.20%
Roland	425	80.04%	68	12.81%	38	7.16%
Tiffin	690	64.91%	332	31.23%	41	3.86%
Tipton	1054	74.28%	301	21.21%	64	4.51%
Wilton	822	60.26%	402	29.47%	140	10.26%
Median Peer City	655	70.24%	217.5	23.32%	60	6.43%
State of Iowa	883,308	65.22%	352,601	26.04%	118,355	8.74%

Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Rental and ownership balance needed in West Branch.

A low supply of rentals could lead to upward pressure on the local rental market as the population ages. To compare West Branch to its peer cities see Table 6.3 and Figure 6.4.⁸

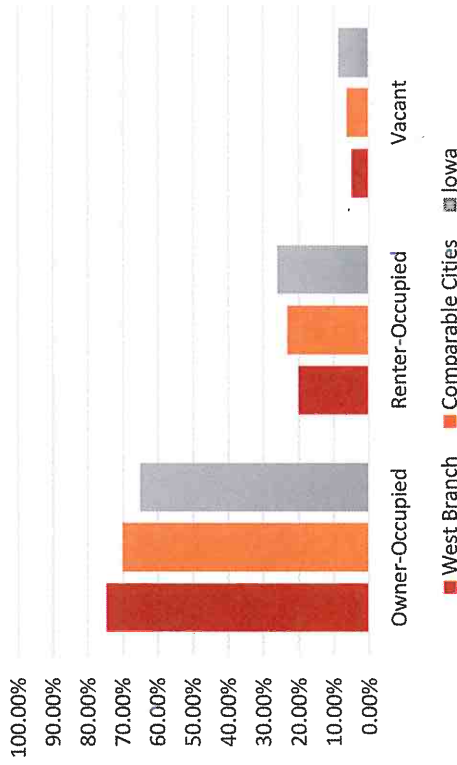
Figure 6.5 shows the distribution of housing units in West Branch. West Branch has 74.8% of its homes classified as owner-occupied and 20.2% as rental units. The American Community Survey shows that West Branch has 1,149 housing units. The HUD vacancy standard is

that 5% of the total housing units would be available for sale or rent.

The 2015 Five-Year American Community Survey shows: 31 units available for rent, which is more than a reasonable expectation. There are numerous reasons rental units are available. This might include a larger margin of error that comes with the American Community Survey. The 2014 survey estimated there were 13 rentals available and the 2013 survey estimated there were 6 rentals units available. Surveys before 2013 indicate there were 0 available rentals. Based on

the other survey years, there likely was a low vacancy rate for rentals in 2015.

Table 6.4: Housing Unit Types as a Percentage in West Branch Comparable Cities; and Iowa in 2015.



Source: American Community Survey 2015.

A Shortage of Housing Units for Sale.

A 5.0% vacancy rate within West Branch was experienced in 2015 (Figure 6.5).

This is slightly lower than expected and may be even lower because newly bought and rented homes are still considered vacant until the new homeowner moves in. West Branch’s rate matches the 5% the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers a “normal vacancy rate.”⁹ This vacancy rate may be the result of stable growth. The West Branch rate is substantially lower than the average state rate of nearly 9% and lower than the rates for most of West Branch’s peer cities.

Based on a HUD standard, West Branch should have:

- 58 units available.¹⁰
- Of the 58 units, 42 would be available for sale.
- 16 would be available for rent.

The 2015 Five-Year American Community Survey shows:

- There were only 4 Units for Sale.
- Based on HUD standards, there should be an additional 38 housing units for sale.

The City should:

- Encourage new housing lot developments.
- Maintain its building incentive program.

Picture 6.4: New House Construction on Ridgeview Drive.



Source: Picture taken by Lisa Kofoed August 18, 2013.

Mobile or Manufactured Homes.

Although mobile homes are in relative decline nationally¹¹, they are still a large part of housing in West Branch. The 2015 American Community Survey estimates that roughly 15% of the city’s housing supply consists of mobile homes.

Most mobile homes come in two different sizes, often referred to as a “single wide” or “double wide,” and are parked in a rented space commonly referred to as a mobile home park.

Picture 6.5 Single-Wide Manufactured Home.



Source: 2010 Cedar County Emergency Hazard Plan. Mobile homes are an affordable housing ownership option for many families as the median mobile home in West Branch is valued at \$20,000.

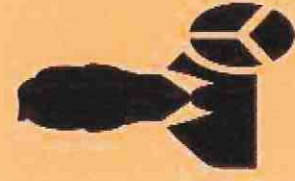
Community Surveys.

In the community survey conducted for the comprehensive planning process in 2011, housing was an issue of concern to residents. The housing issues of highest importance focused on property maintenance and a lack of senior housing availability. Other areas of less concern included high purchase prices, a lack of choice in moderate price ranges (for move-up housing units), and a lack of affordable housing. Similar results were found in a Cedar County comprehensive plan public workshop held in West Branch on October 3, 2017 and centered on local issues.

The issues brought up in both surveys are a focus of this housing chapter as indicated in the housing affordability section and goal three of this housing chapter.

A Community of Well-Maintained Housing.

An analysis of the age of West Branch's housing stock showed that a significant portion of the housing in the community was built before



The 2011 survey showed over 40% of respondents believed a lack of affordable housing options was a top-three issue of concern in West Branch.

In the 2017 survey, over a third of the participants (34%) pointed to a lack of affordable housing. The second important concern was a lack of senior housing (21%), while the third concern was too few rental housing units (17%).

1960. Homes that are over 50 years old tend to require more maintenance. The Comprehensive Plan surveys noted concerns about property maintenance. It is possible that some deteriorating housing units may be located in prominent locations. When such properties deteriorate they negatively impact the image of the community. In some cases, property owners defer desirable maintenance due to a lack of funds. The City may consider implementing a property maintenance code and applying for grant funding to assist grant-eligible property owners. Efforts should also concentrate on property maintenance and enforcement in all areas of the City. Neighborhood deterioration due to abandoned vehicles, peeling paint, junk storage, etc. can be addressed with property maintenance standards.

Housing Development that Respects the Natural Environment.

The City of West Branch has a topography that includes slopes and floodplains. Environmental regulations, such as the City's Floodplain Ordinance, strive to protect these features for safety reasons or as distinct benefits for community "quality of life." Too much of the land west of the city is being developed with large-lot, single-family homes. Such development must be designed in a manner to preserve and protect natural features, and to the extent possible provide community parkland and continue to allow some agricultural pursuits. West Branch's land-use plan is committed to preserving the existing character of this estate area through less intensive land development, including Low-Impact Design and other sustainable urban practices. These practices seek designs that will manage storm water runoff, thereby reducing flooding and minimizing impacts on the development and neighboring properties to maintain the predevelopment status to the extent possible. One such practice is to restore topsoil removed during development, as discussed in Chapter 10.

“heavily cost burdened.” Every community, big or small, has households who are cost burdened by housing. The section following explains how the City of West Branch compares to other peer cities regarding housing for cost-burdened households.

Housing Affordability. HUD standards indicate that households spending more than 30% of their income on housing are “housing cost burdened.”¹² Households spending more than 50% of their income on housing are termed

Table 6.4: Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income for West Branch, Peer Cities, and the State of Iowa in 2015.

City	Renters			Homeowners			Homeowners Without Mortgage		
	Cost Burdened	Heavily Cost Burdened	Total	Cost Burdened	Heavily Cost Burdened	Total	Cost Burdened	Heavily Cost Burdened	Total
	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units	Units
West Branch	43	39	39.5	66	32	11	0	49	19.8
Durant	0	49	24.9	9	21	6.3	12	25	12.9
Earlham	16	4	3.0	21	56	15.1	0	4	3.4
Mitchellville	0	50	33.6	31	56	17.5	8	6	9.4
Roland	3	9	16.4	10	22	7	0	6	5.6
Tiffin	42	51	28.1	37	57	11.1	7	12	10.6
Tipton	8	107	40.5	30	34	6	0	50	10.3
Wilton	23	93	30.4	45	56	10.8	0	10	3.3
Median Peer City	8	50	28.1	30	56	10.8	0	10	9.4
State of Iowa	27,286	116,611	36.1	81,334	34,870	6.5	9,456	28,812	8.5
			44.6	15.1	21.6	2.8	21.6	8.5	11.3

Source: American Community Survey 2015.

Cost-Burdened Renters in West Branch.

According to HUD standards, 39.5% of renters were cost burdened in West Branch in 2015.

- That is 40% higher than the peer city median.
- 11 percentage points lower than the state of Iowa average.
- American Community Survey data suggest there is a high portion (20.7%) of West Branch renters paying 30-35% of their income on housing costs. This is 276% higher than the median peer city.

Cost-Burdened Seniors in West Branch.

Affordability is a struggle for some West Branch homeowners. However, the 98 cost-burdened homeowners with a mortgage fare well in West Branch, where only 16.3% of such homeowners are cost burdened, fewer than the median comparable city (18.3%) or overall in the state of Iowa (21.6%).

The 49 cost-burdened homeowners without a mortgage show a higher cost-burden rate in West Branch. Some 19.8% of West Branch residents owning a home without a mortgage are heavily cost burdened, which is 110% higher than the median peer city and 75% higher than the state average.

Figure 6.5: Affordable Housing Graphic.



Source: <http://www.cchlt.org/what-is-affordable-housing/>.

Fair-Market Rent.

Fair-market rent is a tool the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses to measure how much a household should pay for rent.¹³ Although the calculations are only done by county, it can still be used as an indicator for West Branch. For the purposes of this evaluation we used only the peer cities located in Cedar County.

Figure 6.6 compares the 2015 rent averages in peer cities located in Cedar County and compares those averages to the 2015 and 2017 fair-market rent calculator provided by HUD. This table shows the rent for one, two, and three bedroom apartments adjusted to 2015 dollars.

However, 3-bedroom rentals in West Branch are below the fair-market rate and are lower than for peer cities in Cedar County. There are a number of possible reasons, such as 3-bedrooms are cheaper to construct or maintain in West Branch, the rent for these units is more equitable between renters and landlords, or the housing quality of 3-bedroom rentals might be lower in West Branch.

Table 6.5. 2015 Monthly Rent Averages for West Branch and Cedar County Peer Cities Compared to Cedar County Fair Market Rent in 2015 and 2017.

City	One Bedroom	Two Bedrooms	Three Bedrooms
	Cost	Cost	Cost
West Branch	575	684	790
Durant	581	666	863
Tipton	410	710	843
Wilton	425	607	832
Median Peer City	425	666	843
2015 Cedar County Fair Market Rent	472	639	827
2017 Cedar County Fair Market Rent	513	682	918

Source: American Community Survey and HUD Fair Market Rent. What stands out is that West Branch rents in 2015 for 1-bedroom and 2-bedrooms (\$575 and \$684) were higher than the 2015 (\$472 and \$639) and 2017 (\$513 and \$682) fair-market rates in Cedar County.

Future Affordability Trends.

To better address the needs of its community, West Branch should track trends in affordable housing. By addressing changes in the affordability of housing, West Branch has the opportunity to improve the future market for such housing. From 2010 to 2015, cost-burdened homeowners with a mortgage dropped from 29.6% to 18.3%, which indicates a better homeownership market after the 2008 housing crisis.¹⁴ In that same time period, affordability for homes without a mortgage stayed relatively the same (19.2% in 2010 and 19.8% 2015).¹⁵

As shown in Table 6.6, West Branch should expect an increase in renters who are housing-cost-burdened. From 2010 to 2015 cost-burdened renters increased from 37 rental units (15.9%) to 82 (39.5%). If the five-year trend continues, forecasts¹⁶ indicate that by 2025, West Branch will have 103 rental units that are cost burdened which will be roughly 45.6% of the rental market.

Why Affordability is Worsening.

Decreased affordability in West Branch is due to a number of reasons. From 2010 to 2015, the population increased by 248 people, yet the number of rentals increased by roughly 20 units.¹⁷ During this five-year period about 18-24% of the population lived in rentals. However, the new housing growth over this period indicates that only 10% the population living in new housing lived in rentals. This indicates a shift in homeownership among the new population, but it also likely suggests there are not enough rentals being constructed. Such changes strain the rental market, as an increasing population will demand more rentals and without an adequate increase in rental units, which did not take place from 2010 to 2016, rent prices will increase. The median rent rose by 10% in five years, which is a moderate increase, suggesting other factors are involved.

Table 6.6. Forecasted Total Cost Burden Renters.

Year	Cost Burdened	
	Units	Percent
2010	37	15.9
2011	24	11.2
2012	31	14.9
2013	55	20.6
2014	72	34
2015	82	39.5
2016*	85	40.7
2017*	90	42.8
2018*	94	44.3
2019*	97	45.2
2020*	99	45.7
2021*	100	46.0
2022*	101	46.1
2023*	102	46.0
2024*	103	45.8
2025*	103	45.6
* indicates forecasts		

Source: Staff estimates.

Young Adult Affordability Issues.

Much of West Branch's population increase was due to more residents in the 25-34 year range. That population group rose by 119 people, which was responsible for 48% of the population increase in West Branch. At the end of this period there were 35 more rental units being rented by that age group, and most of them are renting in larger complexes consisting of five or more rental units. In 5 years the rental population in large complexes increased by 147 people, indicating these renters have more dependents.

With 119 more people aged 25-34, earning about 10% less, with more dependents, higher rents, and little change in the number of rental housing units, West Branch has more cost-burdened renters. Without change, this situation can be expected to worsen. It is recommended that West Branch investigate strategies to improve rental housing affordability.

In 2010, individuals aged 15-24 earned roughly \$40,156 while people aged 25-44 earned \$61,121 on average. But their salaries in 2015 dropped to \$17,000 and \$56,607, for an income reduction of -57.7% and -8.9%. The salaries in this age group are below 2015 Iowa Averages (\$26,513 and \$60,591) and below 2015 United States averages (\$26,228 and \$58,985).¹⁷ The 2015 American Community Survey indicates rental units where the household income is \$20,000 to \$24,999 and \$30,000 to \$34,999 increased by 11 and 39 units.

Aging Population Affordability Issues.

Housing affordability is also a problem for some of those aged 60 and over in West Branch. Table 6.4 shows 49 cost-burdened homeowners without a mortgage in 2015. Few older residents of West Branch rent, which could mean there are few rental options for seniors. The population aged 60+ has been increasing in West Branch, and by a 4-to-1 ratio people in that age group own rather than rent.

The respected Urban Institute has stated that people aged 55 and over are renting at higher rates, and the 2017 State of the Nation's Housing Report found rental demand in America is strong, even after recovery from the 2008 recession.¹⁸

In West Branch there was an increase from 38 to 45 households owning a house but with an annual income under \$10,000. This information suggests some older individuals are staying in their houses, perhaps due to lack of rental options. West Branch should consider city policies to encourage aging-in-place housing planning principles¹⁹, policies to increase rental options so as to reduce burdens on both seniors and young adults.

Housing Incentives.

Housing incentives are a useful tool to encourage more housing development and improve the existing housing stock. This section describes the current building incentive programs available in West Branch, lists potential available funding options, and describes programs offered in other cities which West Branch may be able to duplicate.

Picture 6.6. Senior Housing Example.



Source: <https://www.jabacares.org/content/affordable-housing>.

Building Incentive Program.

The West Branch Building Incentive Program provides up to \$5,000 in property tax rebates as well as reduced permit fees for new homes. The program was developed by a group of builders, realtors, bankers, and associated professionals who reside and work professionally in the West Branch Community and was approved by the City Council in May, 2015. After the homeowner receives an occupancy permit, that homeowner is eligible to receive a 100% rebate on the City of West Branch portion of the homeowner's tax bill.

Picture 6.7. Building Incentive Program.



Source:http://westbranchiowa.org/sites/default/files/BuildingIncentiveDoc_2.pdf. Accessed January, 2019.

The rebate is available for up to \$5,000 or five years from the date of the occupancy permit, whichever comes first.²⁰ Since inception, 59 eligible homes had been constructed (or were currently in progress) as of February, 2019. Builders had saved more than \$86,000 on permit fees, the water and sewer fund had lost \$42,000 in revenues, and just over \$12,000 in homeowner rebates had been paid out. The City plans to make changes to the program to continue to meet future infrastructure needs.

One program change the City Council should consider is requiring radon testing and mitigation to qualify for its incentives, and eventually to the issuance of all occupancy permits. Radon is a major human health risk throughout Iowa, and is rather inexpensively mitigated.²¹

In Iowa, over 100 cities and counties are using historic preservation as a tool for community survival, stabilization, and development. Often the local historic preservation commission works in partnership with the local Main Street organization. In addition, some cities have utilized historic preservation incentive and grant programs to revitalize older neighborhoods and downtowns.²²

Historic Preservation Plan.

The Historic Preservation Plan (HPP) from 2017 reflects the values of West Branch residents and their desire to preserve historic resources, including residential properties. The seventh goal of the HPP is to establish a residential historic preservation program for housing and neighborhood development.²³ One available action item to achieve this goal is to encourage historic preservation and revitalization of local residential properties by establishing a historic housing incentive and financing program. As stated in the HPP, incentives such as tax abatements, tax credits, freezing assessed home values over a number of years, and financial aid all help reduce possible burdens of owning historic homes and will therefore tend to increase the quality of housing in West Branch.

Additionally, the 2017 Historic Preservation Plan lists the following incentive programs for historic preservation:

Table 6.7. Historic Preservation Plan Programs for Historic Preservation

Resource	Purpose
Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits	Gives tax credits to property owners for qualified historic property rehabilitation projects. The credits are available for income-producing properties that are National Historic Landmarks, that are listed in the National Register, and that contribute to National Register Historic Districts and certain local historic districts.
Charitable Contributions for Historic Preservation Purposes	Available for partial-interest contributions in historic properties.
Historic Resource Development Program	Provides grants to those in the CLG program for rehabilitating city or county-owned properties that are listed on the National Register. One potential structure is Town Hall.
Certified Local Government Grant Program	Competitive, matching program to be used to underwrite historic preservation activities other than building rehabilitation.

Housing Rehabilitation Incentive Programs.

The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) administers the Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Rehabilitation Fund.²⁴ IEDA provides rehabilitation grants for housing rehabilitation, especially for low and moderate-income families. Small cities can be eligible for “non-entitlement grants”. With sufficient technical support, these programs may facilitate improving some of the deteriorating historic housing stock in West Branch. One example includes Dubuque, Iowa, which has received numerous state tax credits to improve its historic district.

The City of Iowa City created the General Rehabilitation Improvement Program (GRIP) to assist homeowners with low-cost loans for home improvements. Qualified homeowners are eligible for 20-year loans at 2.75% interest. Iowa City also created the Housing Exterior Loan (H.E.L.P.) program for income-qualified homeowners to make exterior improvements to their homes. This program provides a zero-interest loan for half of the cost of eligible improvements, up to \$10,000.²⁵

The town of Fairfield, Iowa, created an “Urban Revitalization Tax Exemption” program. This provides strong incentives for

homeowners to invest in improvements to their properties and incentivizes developers and contractors to pursue new housing construction. The City offers a three-year, 100% property tax exemption on the first \$75,000 of actual value added by the improvements.²⁶

Picture 6.8. Iowa Economic Development Authority Logo.



Source: <https://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/>. Accessed January, 2019.

Fairfield also offers a refund of state sales, service, or use taxes paid during construction and an investment tax credit for construction and rehabilitation in “enterprise zones.” The program is eligible for developers within these zones who rehabilitate at least four single-family homes or at least one multi-family building containing three or more units.²⁷

The Fairfield Revitalization Loan Program provides low-interest loans for the improvements of buildings within three blocks of the Fairfield town square. This was developed through a partnership

with the Chamber of Commerce and local lenders. Finally, the housing trust fund which serves Fairfield allocates funds toward owner-occupied housing rehabilitation.

EIRHC.

The Iowa Finance Authority administers the State Housing Trust Fund to ensure decent, safe, and affordable housing through the Local Housing Trust Fund Program.²⁸ Cedar County is within the Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Corporation Housing Trust Fund (EIRHC). It is administered by East Central Intergovernmental Association (ECIA) to promote the general social welfare of eligible occupants of rental housing. Their mission is to acquire, construct, provide and operate rental housing and related facilities suited to the special needs and living requirements of eligible occupants.²⁹ The 2018 FY budget for the EIRHC Housing Trust Fund allocated \$211,718 for owner-occupied housing rehabilitation and an additional \$296,309 for rental rehabilitation.³⁰

Each year, the EIRHC prepares a Housing Assistance Plan (HAP) to describe regional needs for housing, identify organizational goals and objectives, outline planned activities, and communicate the program guidelines to potential funding applicants. The 2018 HAP states ECIA has developed and secured funding for over 91 owner-occupied rehabilitation and down payment programs in the last 23 years.³¹

Within Cedar County, 33.2% of existing housing stock was built before 1940. By comparison, approximately 26.5% of the housing stock across the state was built before 1940.³² Among the counties served by ECIA, only Jackson County has more housing stock built before 1940, at 33.3%. Within the ECIA service region, over 50% of the population earn less than \$50,000 per year.³³ Given housing age and residents' income, the EIRHC concluded that the residents' ability to afford rehabilitation of the older housing stock is diminished. Based on housing need assessments, ECIA concluded owner-occupied rehabilitation is the most common need in the EIRHC housing service area.

Picture 6.9. Iowa Finance Authority Logo.



Source: www.iowafinanceauthority.gov. Accessed January, 2019.

The EIRHC HAP allocates 30% of the Housing Trust Fund to owner-occupied rehabilitation activities. The Fund provides financing to low and moderate-income households for general rehabilitation activities. The focus is on major health and safety concerns, including repairs of furnaces, electrical infrastructure, plumbing, roofs, and energy efficiency items (i.e. windows, insulation, weatherproofing). The repayment schedule for owner-occupied rehabilitation funding is a forgivable 5-year loan for those below 80% of the median household income level.

There is no housing rehabilitation program listed with ECICOG for Cedar County in 2018. Per discussion with Mark Culver at ECICOG, Cedar County is not within their jurisdiction for housing rehabilitation programs.³⁴ While there is overlap with ECICOG for transportation programs, Cedar County is solely in the ECIA district for housing programs. The Iowa Finance Authority allocates funding to the respective agencies for disbursement within the counties they serve.