



Homes for a Changing Region: Village of University Park

Housing Action Plan 2025



Table of Contents

Project Background	1
Executive Summary	2
Background on University Park	4
Housing Needs Assessment	7
Recommendations	14
Key Contacts	30
Appendices	31



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Project Background

Homes for a Changing Region Program

Homes for a Changing Region (“Homes”) is a program provided by the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and BRick Partners and funded by the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). *Homes* is designed to help municipalities in the greater Chicago region analyze, diagnose, and develop market and evidence-based solutions for the housing challenges each community faces. Since 2005, the *Homes* team has partnered with over 65 municipalities to help them develop a balanced and healthy housing stock that serves the needs of multiple generations of residents and workers.

This report thanks the following policymakers and experts who advised University Park during its expert panel. The *Homes* team encourages the Village to stay in contact with them to implement this plan’s recommendations.

- Stacie Young, President and CEO, Community Investment Corporation
- Joe Van Dyk, Executive Director, South Suburban Land Bank
- Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development, Village of Homewood
- Bo Kemp, CEO, Southland Development Authority

An additional thanks to University Park leaders and stakeholders who contributed their time and expertise during the kickoff and expert panel meetings:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ▪ Joseph E. Roudez III, Mayor | ▪ Shirley Bolding, Resident |
| ▪ Karen Lewis, Village Trustee | ▪ Dr. Corey Bradford, Governors State University |
| ▪ Donna Fulcher, Village Trustee | ▪ Jason Okrasinski, Crete-Monee School District 201 |
| ▪ Elizabeth Scott, Village Manager | ▪ Mike Sneed, Antero Group |
| ▪ Gwen Vanarsdale, Code Enforcement Inspector | ▪ Jonathan Sherman, Antero Group |
| ▪ Chris Vargas, Public Works Director | |
| ▪ Nai Neva Jenkins, Communications Director | |

Homes for a Changing Region team:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ▪ Nancy Firfer, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus | ▪ Inoa Batista, BRick Partners |
| ▪ Beth Dever, BRick Partners | ▪ Ben Schnelle, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus |
| ▪ Robin Snyderman, BRick Partners | |

Executive Summary

Established in 1967, University Park was incorporated as Park Forest South, becoming part of a visionary federal effort through the New Communities Act of 1968 to create thoughtfully planned, inclusive communities across the country. Today, University Park is in a dynamic period of its history. New industries have located in the Governors Gateway Industrial Park and Commerce Center, Governors State University has outlined plans to expand its supply of housing, and the Village is midway through an update to its transit-oriented development plan. Village leaders see an opportunity to build on this momentum and encourage new housing development that addresses a variety of local needs. At the same time, Village leaders are also aware of the market challenges to new housing construction, maintenance needs in the community's older housing stock, and the importance of thoughtful, forward-looking housing strategies.

Over the past eight months, the Homes for a Changing Region (*Homes*) team has worked with University Park to understand its top housing needs through a kickoff meeting with Village stakeholders, a resident community survey, and attending a meeting between leaders of the Village and Governors State University. Through this process, the *Homes* team identified three key housing challenges facing University Park:

- **University Park needs more housing construction.** Identified as a top need by stakeholders, new housing development would support a variety of economic and quality of life goals. While housing construction has not yet recovered the pace of past decades, University Park's decreasing vacancy rates, rising home sale prices, and stable local property tax environment show encouraging signs.
- **University Park needs to attract a larger portion of its workforce to live within the community.** Less than 2% of the local workforce live in University Park and over 20% of the workforce commutes over 25 miles in each direction. Attracting more of the local workforce to live in University Park would benefit local employers and employees and would support efforts to attract stores that serve residents' daily needs.
- **University Park needs more resources for maintenance and improvements in its older housing stock.** Approximately 53% of homes in University Park were built during the 1960s and 1970s and 13% were built prior to 1960. Homeowners and multifamily property owners would benefit from greater access to programs that enable them to address maintenance needs and make accessibility improvements.

Executive Summary

Following these findings, the *Homes* team convened a panel of housing experts to speak with Village stakeholders about various strategies that can assist in addressing University Park's housing needs. Based on input from the expert panel, the *Homes* team recommends the following actions for the Village to pursue:

- **Continue efforts to facilitate mixed-use development and neighborhoods.** The Village should implement its ongoing transit-oriented development (TOD) plan and consider the lessons learned from Homewood such as its purchase of land and proactive marketing. The Village should coordinate development efforts with Governors State University, given its interest in adding housing for students, faculty, and student-athletes. The Village should also consider an update to its Comprehensive Plan to guide development outside of the TOD area.
- **Encourage local employers to support workforce housing solutions by joining the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.** The Village should encourage local employers to follow Governors State University's lead and incentivize workers to live closer to their work. The Village can also offer support for the Southland Employer Housing Consortium's efforts to access funding from Will County and other sources.
- **Activate the Village's partnership with the South Suburban Land Bank to redevelop vacant homes and lots.** Having signed the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) to become a member of the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLBDA) following the expert panel, the Village's next steps are to identify lots and properties in the Village that are vacant and/or tax delinquent, share this list with the SSLBDA, and identify an appropriate point of contact within the Village to work with the SSLBDA.
- **Connect residents and property owners with home repair and improvement resources.** The Village should encourage residents and property owners to utilize programs for energy-efficiency, home repair, accessibility, and property management training. The Village should consider hosting an annual housing fair to connect residents and property owners with resources provided by area nonprofits.

Background on University Park

The following section provides context on University Park’s population and households, housing stock, and workforce.

Population and Households

Located about 35 miles south of downtown Chicago, the Village of University Park is a municipality primarily in Will County with a small portion in Cook County.

Since 2000, University Park has grown slowly in population and households. Growth in households occurred at a faster rate during the 2000s and slowed during the 2010s. University Park’s population remained constant between 2010 and 2020.

Approximately 87% of University Park residents are Black or African American, 5% are White, 4% identify as Latino or Hispanic, and 4% identify as Multiracial.

Approximately 35% of households in University Park are families with children. 45% of households are households without children, which may be empty nesters or couples of any age. Single-person households make up approximately 20% of households.

	Population	Households
Village of University Park		
2000	6,631	2,253
2010	7,129	2,416
2020	7,145	2,493
Annual increase, 2000-2010	0.8%	0.7%
Annual increase, 2010-2020	0.0%	0.3%

Figure 1: Population and Household Growth in University Park

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census

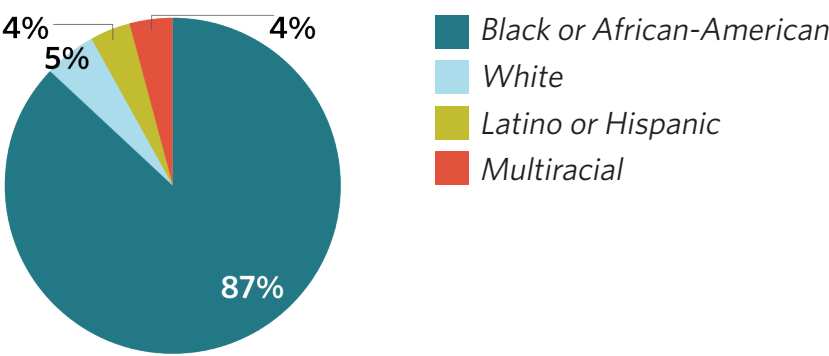


Figure 2: Population by Race and Ethnicity in University Park

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Decennial Census

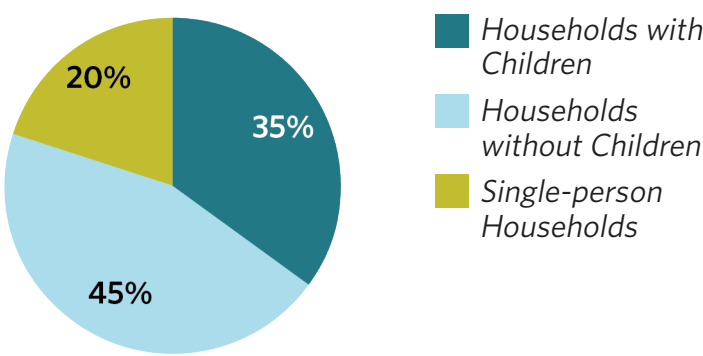


Figure 3: Household Types in University Park

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate

Background on University Park

Housing Stock

Over half of homes in University Park were constructed during the 1960s and 1970s during the community’s first decades of development.

University Park offers a diverse housing stock. Approximately 50% of homes are single family homes, 26% are townhomes, 18% are multifamily homes in buildings with 2-9 units, and 7% are multifamily homes in buildings with over 10 units.

Approximately 61% of homes in University Park are homeowner-occupied, while approximately 39% of homes are renter-occupied.

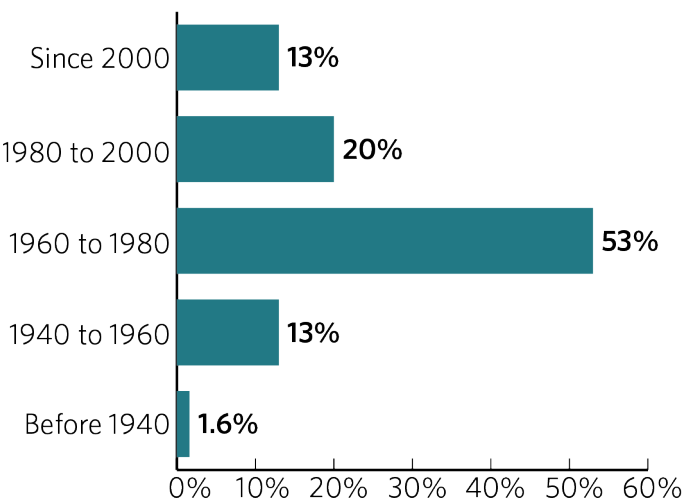


Figure 4: Housing Units in University Park by Year Built

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate

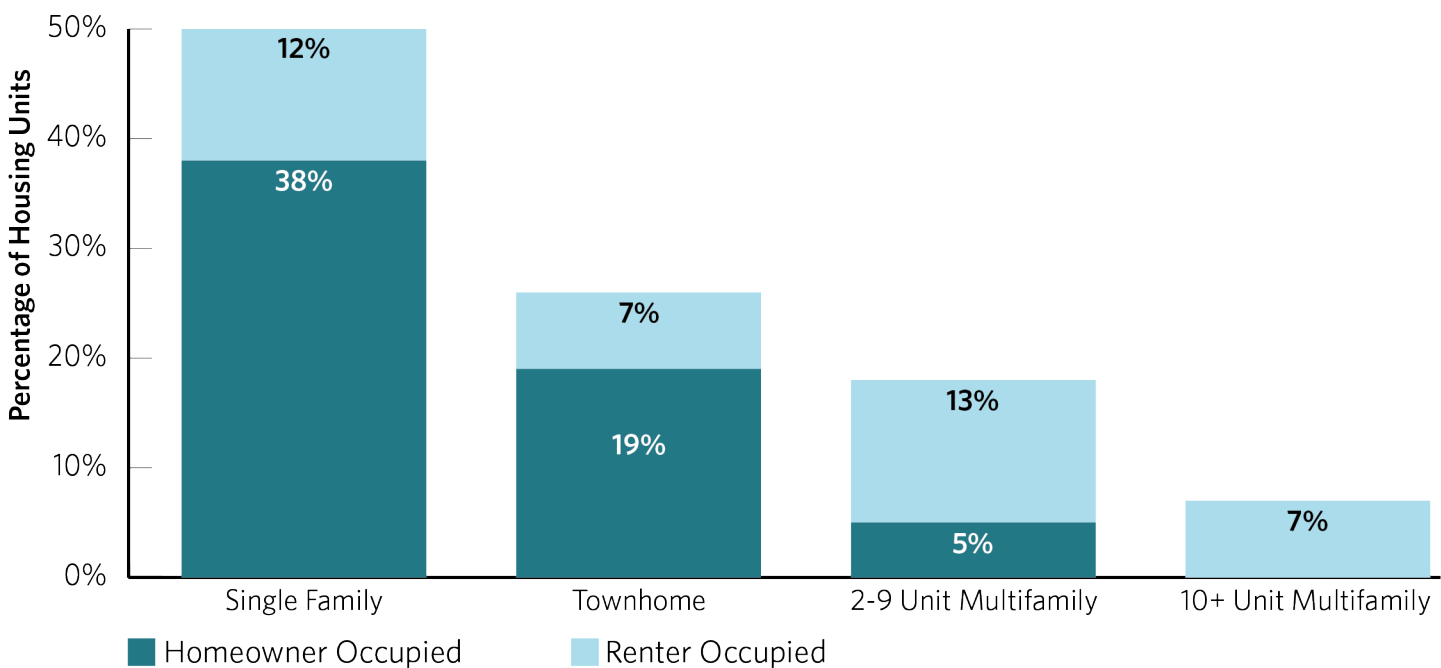


Figure 5: Housing Units in University Park by Type and Ownership

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate

Background on University Park

Jobs and Employment

University Park is a moderate-income community. The median household income in University Park is \$65,580, approximately 27% less than the Chicago region’s median household income of \$88,850.¹

Jobs in University Park

Home to Governors State University and the Governors Gateway Industrial Park and Commerce Center, University Park has a large employment base with approximately 5,545 jobs based in the community. The largest employment sector in University Park is the manufacturing sector, representing 29% of all jobs in University Park. The next largest job sectors in University Park are educational services (21%), the professional-scientific-technical service field (18%) and wholesale trade (13%).

Employment of University Park Residents

Approximately 3,358 University Park residents are employed, and these individuals work in a broad variety of industries. Approximately 23% of University Park residents work in the health care and social assistance field. The next largest employment fields of University Park residents are retail trade (10%) and educational services (9%). Behind these fields, many other residents work in transportation and warehousing (9%), administration, support, and waste management (8%), and manufacturing (8%).



Figure 6: Employment Industries of University Park’s Residents and Workforce
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

¹ Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate.

Housing Needs Assessment

The following section summarizes top housing needs in University Park, identified through meetings with local stakeholders, a community survey, and quantitative analysis.

University Park needs more housing construction.

New housing construction in University Park has not yet recovered the pace of development that occurred prior to the 2008 market recession. The US Census Bureau’s Building Permit Survey provides an estimate of privately-owned residential construction dating back to 1990. As shown in Figure 7, between 1990 and 2008, approximately 345 permits were issued for new single-family homes, averaging more than 18 permits annually. In contrast, from 2009 to 2023, the number of permits for new single-family homes significantly decreased.

Approximately 215 permits for new multifamily units were issued from 1990 to 2008, averaging over 11 permits per year. Since 2008, the only new multifamily development has been Thornwood House, a 183-unit affordable senior housing development completed in 2011.

During meetings, University Park stakeholders identified new housing development as a top need in the community and noted the many benefits that would follow. Housing development fuels economic development by increasing population and in turn helping attract commercial businesses that residents desire.

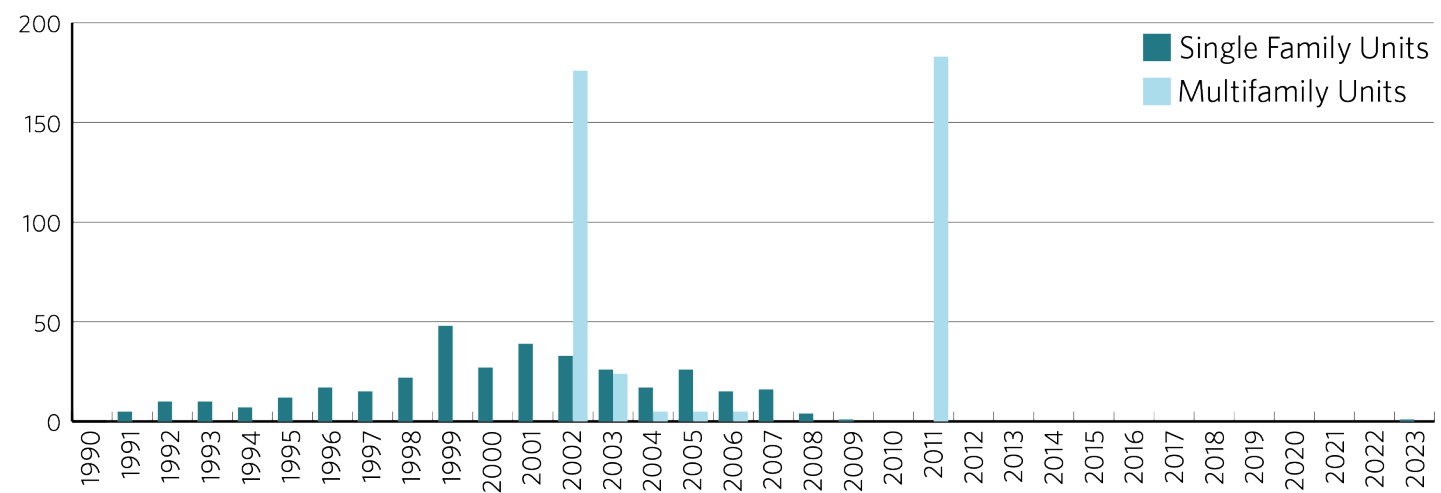


Figure 7: Estimate of Building Permits Issued in University Park by Year, 1990-2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Building Permit Survey

Housing Needs Assessment

New housing development improves the quality of life for residents by completing partially developed neighborhoods, increasing their appeal, and strengthens taxing bodies such as the Village, school districts, and University Park's new park district. New housing development can also support initiatives of Governors State University (GSU), whose recent Facilities Master Plan identified a goal to significantly expand its supply of student housing to serve international and full-time students and respond to recent increases in its enrollment of student-athletes. While the university currently offers student housing to accommodate about 300 students, GSU leaders described plans to expand student housing to one day accommodate as many as 1,000 students.

While potential for new development is influenced by many factors such as interest rates and costs of construction materials and labor, University Park is experiencing certain trends that can help encourage new housing development.

The US Census Bureau estimates that vacancy rates in University Park's homeowner and rental markets have decreased in recent years. For context, a healthy rental market's vacancy rate generally falls between 5% and 8%, while a healthy homeowner market's vacancy rate generally falls between 1% and 2%. Higher vacancy rates indicate a lack of demand, while lower vacancy rates indicate a competitive market. Shown in Figure 8, vacancy rates were estimated to be above these benchmarks during the 2010s but have since dropped to their lowest in over a decade.

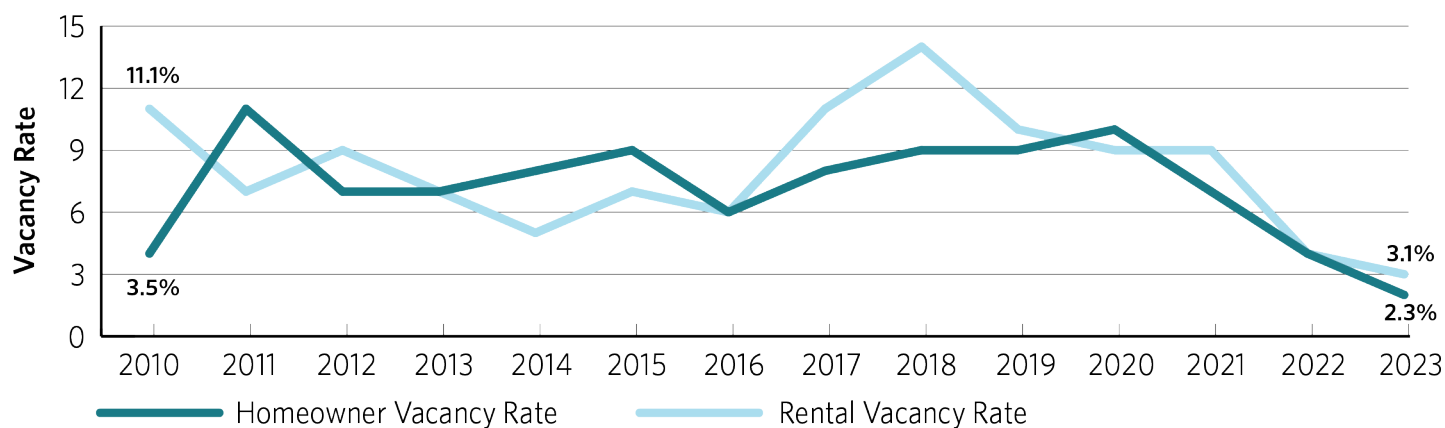


Figure 8: Homeowner and Rental Vacancy Rates in University Park, 2010-2023

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Housing Needs Assessment

Further proof of a strengthening market, median home sale prices have increased over the past decade. Shown in Figure 9, median home sale prices of single-family homes in University Park were generally below \$150,000 prior to 2020 but have since increased, rising to around \$250,000 during portions of 2024.

Village efforts have contributed to these positive changes. Economic development efforts, discussed in more detail below, have enabled the Village to maintain a stable and decreasing property tax rate. Shown in the Appendix, the Village also projects a significant increase in property tax generation due to the expiration of a major tax increment financing (TIF) district in 2024. Looking forward, University Park should continue to build upon these efforts and carefully consider which proactive strategies and partnerships would best enable new housing development that addresses community needs.

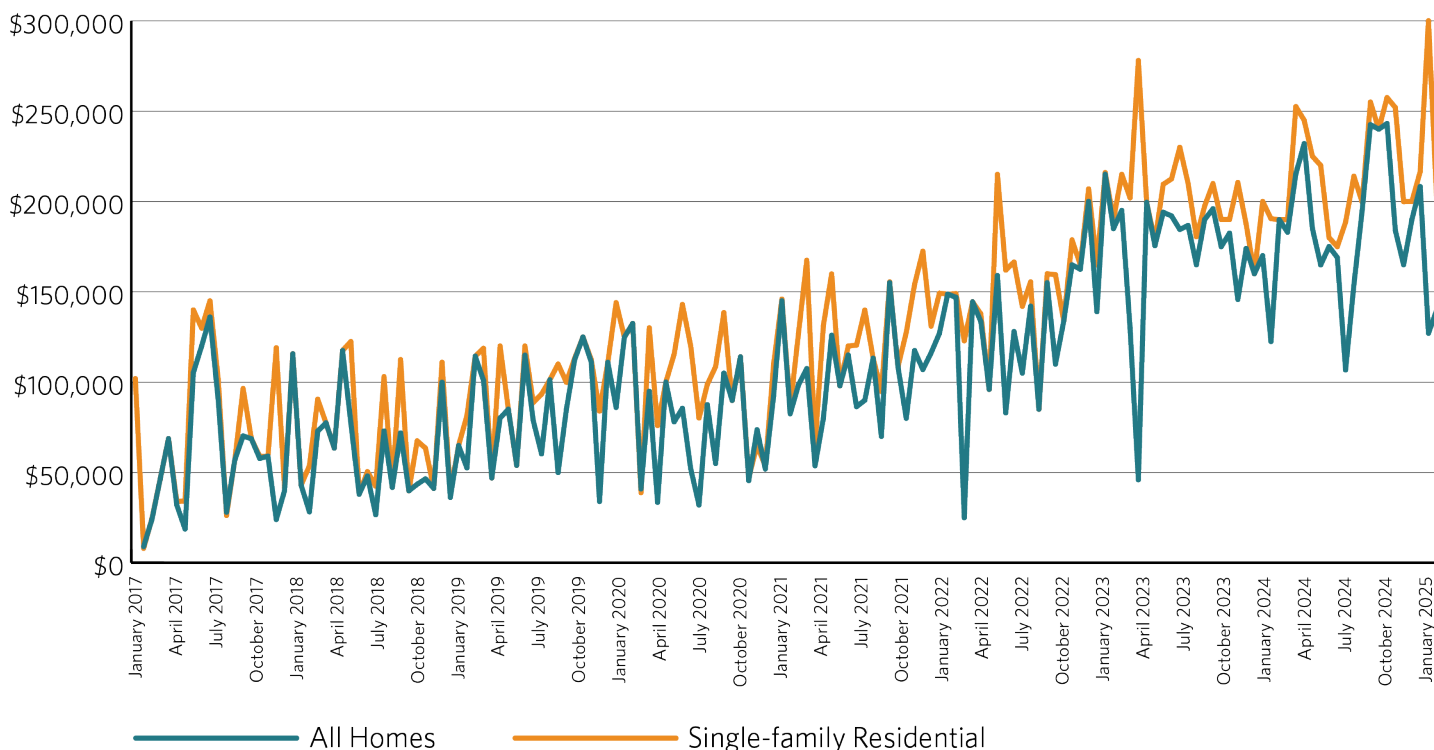


Figure 9: Median Home Sale Price, University Park, 2017-2025

Source: Redfin Data Center

Housing Needs Assessment

University Park needs to attract a larger portion of its workforce to live within the community.

University Park has seen a rapid expansion of its employment base. The number of jobs in University Park increased from approximately 3,510 in 2002 to 5,545 in 2019, a 58% increase in less than two decades.² During meetings, University Park stakeholders discussed the economic benefits of this significant job growth yet recognized that few of these workers are choosing to also live in University Park.

According to estimates from the US Census Bureau, of the 5,545 individuals who work in University Park, approximately 106, or 1.9%, also live in University Park. By attracting more of its workforce to live in the community, University Park can generate demand for new housing construction and population growth, in turn supporting multiple village goals such as attracting stores that cater to residents’ daily needs and expanding the local tax base.

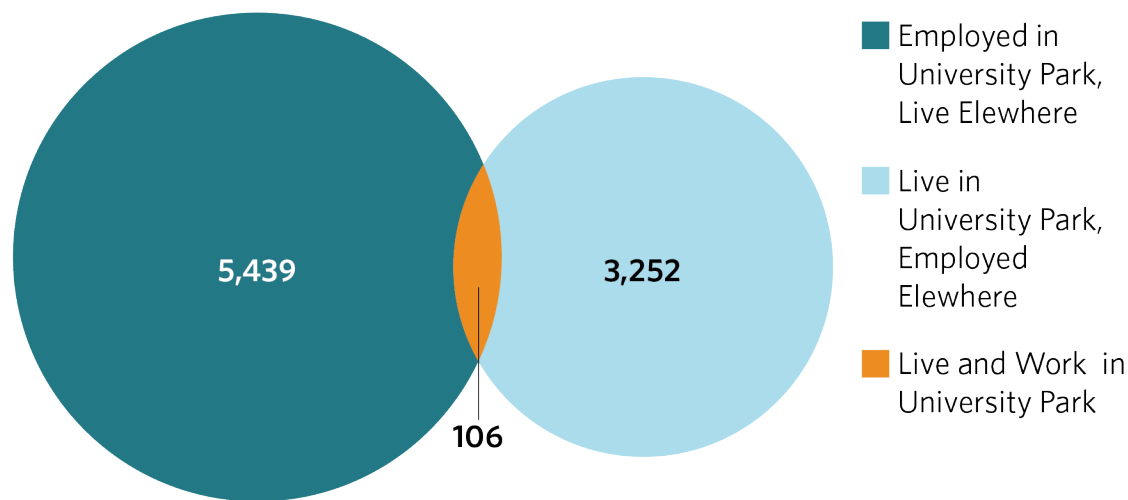


Figure 10: Worker Inflow and Outflow in University Park

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

² Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2002 and 2019.

Housing Needs Assessment

Much of University Park’s workforce currently commutes lengthy distances each day. Shown in Figure 11, only about one-third of workers commute less than 10 miles, with the remaining two-thirds commuting over 10 miles in each direction. Shown in the Appendix, University Park has a higher percentage of workers who commute over 10 miles than other communities within the region that have strong job centers.

The prevalence of long commutes can impact employers’ ability to recruit and retain employees, resulting in higher costs of training and potential inefficiencies from under-staffing. Approximately 21% of University Park’s workforce commutes over 25 miles each direction, with the majority of these workers commuting from the north or northwest. These long commuters may have an incentive to choose jobs closer to their homes if the option presents itself.

Attracting more workers to live in University Park would benefit both local employers and employees. Individuals who live close to their work save time and money from shorter commutes and have more time to spend with family.

Looking forward, University Park has much to gain if it can implement strategies that successfully attract more of its workforce to choose to live in the community.

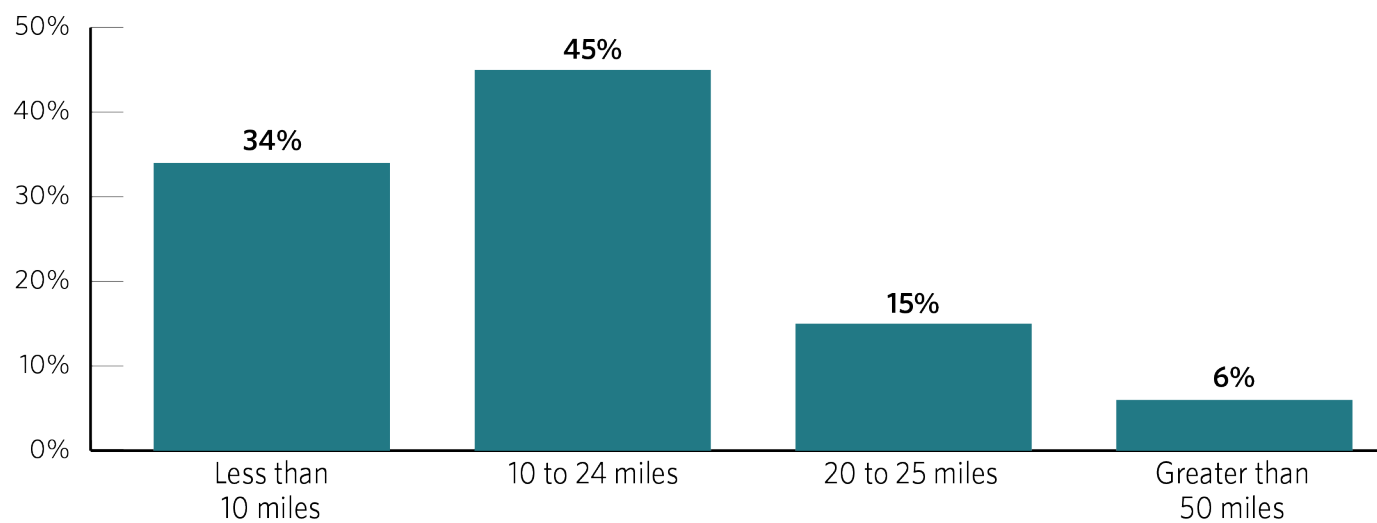


Figure 11: Commuting Distance for University Park’s Workforce
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019

Housing Needs Assessment

University Park needs more resources to help with maintenance and improvements in its older housing stock.

Shown in Figure 4, approximately 53% of homes in University Park were built during the 1960s and 1970s and another 13% were built prior to 1960. During meetings, University Park stakeholders noted that the variety in University Park’s older housing stock presents a variety of maintenance needs. Stakeholders shared that some of University Park’s older multifamily rental developments have experienced issues ranging from elevator malfunctioning to flooding. Stakeholders also noted that condominium or townhome homeowner associations have at times had difficulties addressing shared maintenance needs due to the small size of their association and, in some cases, vacancies among the homes.

While much of the homeowner stock is in good condition and well cared for by residents, stakeholders reported that certain members of the community, including senior homeowners and first-time homebuyers, are more likely to face challenges addressing housing maintenance. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau confirms this point, showing that University Park’s younger and older homeowners are most likely to have housing costs exceed what they can typically afford, leaving them fewer resources to address housing maintenance needs.

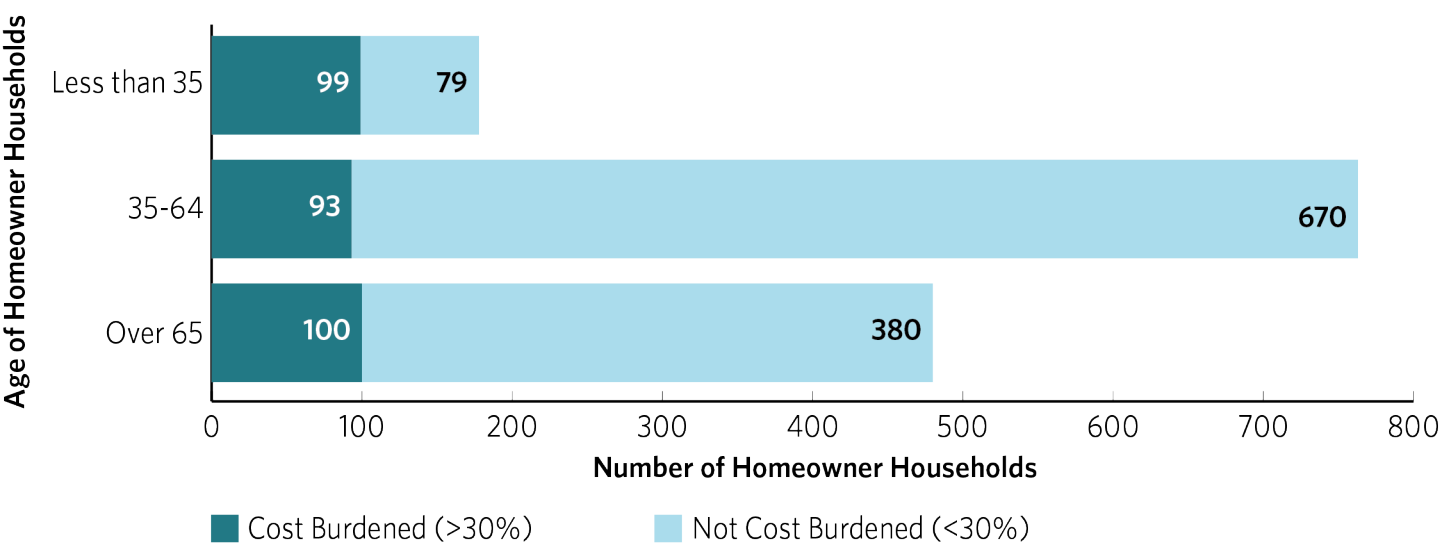


Figure 12: Housing Cost Burden Among University Park’s Homeowner Households by Age

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate

Housing Needs Assessment

Shown in Figure 12, over half of homeowners under 35 years of age are “housing cost burdened,” paying more than 30% of their monthly income on housing costs (which includes their mortgage, insurance, taxes, and utilities). About one in five senior homeowners are housing cost burdened.

Stakeholders observed that housing maintenance needs of these two groups are in some ways connected. Senior homeowners, being longtime residents, often live in older homes that require more upkeep. Younger homebuyers, in purchasing older properties as a starter home, may then inherit the outstanding repairs that previous owners were not able to address.

Aside from regular maintenance of homes, some older homeowners may need to make accessibility improvements to their homes that enable them to “age in place.” As in the rest of the region, University Park has a growing senior population. Shown in Figure 13, the number of University Park residents over the age of 75 nearly doubled over a span of 10 years.

While University Park is fortunate to have a stock of single-story ranch style homes, not all senior homeowners live in these homes. And in any style of home, senior homeowners can benefit from accessibility improvements that range from grab bars and handrails to ramps and stair lifts.

Looking forward, University Park would benefit from its homeowners and multifamily property owners accessing programs that enable them to address maintenance, make accessibility improvements, and enhance the community’s existing housing stock.

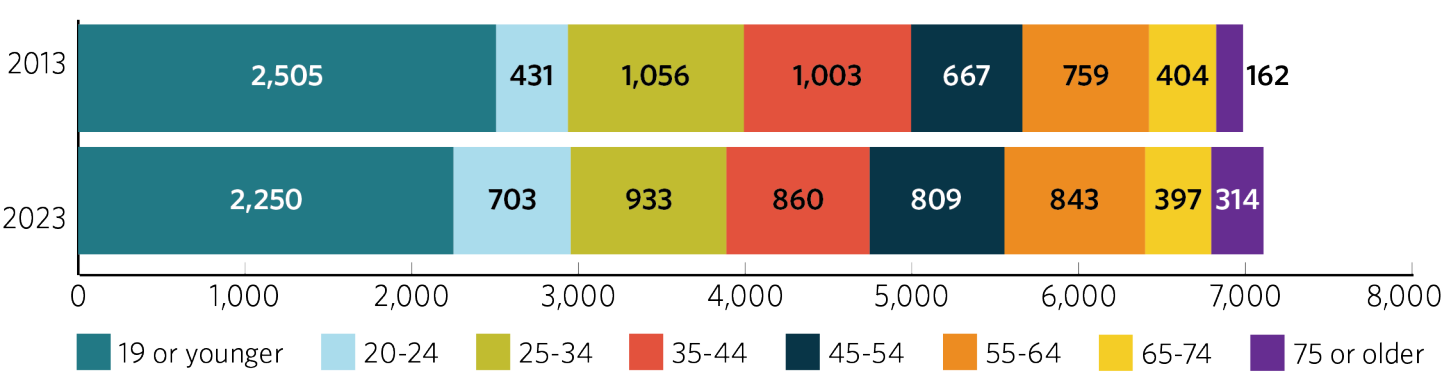


Figure 13: Population in University Park by Age Group

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2009-2013 and 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate

Recommendations

This plan has identified three key housing needs in University Park:

- **University Park needs more housing construction.**
- **University Park needs to attract a larger portion of its workforce to live within the community.**
- **University Park needs more resources to help with maintenance and improvements in its older housing stock.**

In February of 2025, the *Homes* team convened an expert panel to discuss with University Park how to address these key needs. As a follow up to this conversation, this action plan recommends the following strategies for University Park to encourage a more vibrant housing stock that meets the needs of multiple generations of residents and workers. These recommendations encompass strategies that include both new construction and housing rehabilitation efforts, to best meet current and future demand.

- **Continue efforts to facilitate new housing through mixed-use development and neighborhoods.**
 - Implement the RTA's TOD area plan to create a mixed-use neighborhood and gathering place.
 - Coordinate development efforts with Governors State University.
 - Consider an update to the comprehensive plan to guide growth outside of the TOD area.
 - Launch a community marketing plan to support new development.
- **Encourage local employers to support workforce housing solutions by joining the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.**
- **Activate the Village's partnership with the South Suburban Land Bank to redevelop vacant homes and lots.**
- **Connect residents and property owners with home repair and improvement resources.**

Each recommendation is detailed more thoroughly below. Strategies may be coordinated and addressed in tandem to support each other or pursued individually.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Continue efforts to facilitate new housing through mixed-use development and neighborhoods.

As noted earlier, University Park stakeholders identified new housing development as a top need in the community and noted the many benefits that would follow, including higher tax revenue and increased demand for commercial uses and community amenities. It is important to think carefully about what type of development is appropriate and where it fits in the community. Focusing on key locations such as the “Transit Oriented Development” (TOD) area and the Town Center, while also considering matching housing products to various University Park current and future demographics, can help the Village to ensure a successful and sustainable growth plan. The four strategies below offer ways to approach development in a forward-thinking manner while building on existing groundwork in University Park.

Strategy #1: Implement the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) TOD area plan to create a mixed-use neighborhood and gathering place.

The Village of University Park recently worked with the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) on a TOD plan for the area surrounding the existing Metra Station. This plan, adopted in 2023, builds off the 2002 TOD Plan recommendations and identifies economic development opportunities associated with local real estate market trends, significant federal investment in the Metra Electric train station, and parking upgrades.

University Park is currently moving into the next stage of this plan, focused on financing, and can evaluate steps such as creating a business or tax increment financing (TIF) district, or a Special Services Area, and purchasing land adjacent to the Metra station. As it embarks on this implementation, the Village can look to neighboring Homewood to learn how it created The Hartford, a new mixed-use apartment building in its TOD area. Homewood’s Director of Economic and Community Development, Angela Mesaros, shared the story of the Hartford at the February expert panel.

Recommendations

Homewood's 2016 Housing Study indicated a need for more density in the community and identified a demand for rental housing. Subsequently, the Village issued a request for proposals (RFP) for rental housing but received no responses. Developers were concerned that property taxes were too high, and that the market was untested. Therefore, the Village established a downtown TIF district and purchased a building that it then sold to a developer for \$1. The resulting building, the Hartford, is a 36-unit rental building, near the Metra station, in which the apartments rent at market rate. Highly successful, the Hartford leased up immediately and has a waiting list. During the expert panel, Angela discussed that having a TOD plan in place was helpful, and that now that the Hartford has done so well, the community is seeing increased private investment in the downtown.

University Park is in a similar position to Homewood, with a recently completed TOD phase 1 plan, a good amount of vacant land near the Metra station, and a goal of increasing housing options in the community. The presence of Governors State University, along with its expansion plans, as well as the influx of new employers in University Park, add to the fact that this is the right time to develop in the TOD area. Using the TOD plan's recommendations, the Village should take this opportunity to create a new mixed-use neighborhood that can serve as the catalyst for future development across the community.



Concept plan vision for potential TOD area development in University Park

Source: Village of University Park TOD Plan, 2023

Recommendations

Strategy #2: Coordinate development efforts with Governors State University.

As described in recommendation #2 below, Governors State University (GSU) has been taking an active role in planning for its future while carefully considering its role as a leading employer in University Park. GSU is not only focused on helping employees access existing housing options near work, but also in aligning its Facilities Master Plan goals to the Village's broader development priorities. The university has expressed its interest in supporting more housing for its students, faculty, and student athletes, including multifamily housing options, and could be a helpful partner in any future RFP discussions led by the Village to attract quality developers. For example, GSU has expressed openness to exploring locating a potential public-private partnership student housing development on the TOD site to help spur retail business development.

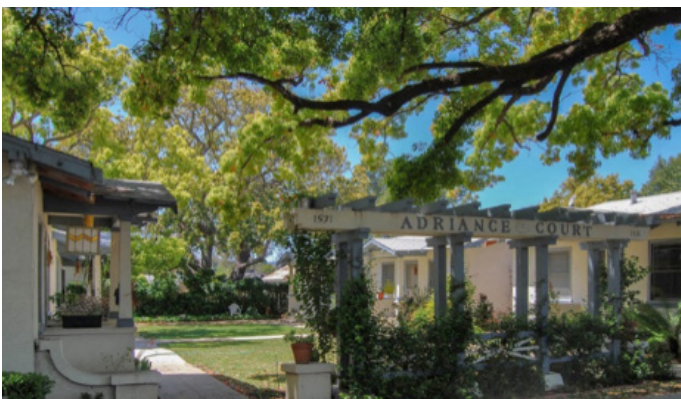
Monthly meetings between the Village and the university could facilitate greater collaboration both around workforce housing strategies as well as the relevant economic and recreational development proposals that will increase the Village's appeal to future residents. Ongoing, proactive collaboration would help ensure that new development efforts would benefit both the university and the Village. The Village may also include leadership from University Park's new park district in these discussions.

Recommendations

Strategy #3: Consider an update to the comprehensive plan to guide growth outside of the TOD area.

University Park's last comprehensive plan was completed in 2014. Much has changed in the Village since then, especially in recent years with the expansion of the economic base. As the Village grows, it may be time to update its comprehensive plan so that the needs of the full community are evaluated within the current demands and opportunities. There is momentum and focus on the TOD area and within/around Governors State University, but other parts of the Village would benefit from analysis as well. In particular, the Town Center area, where Village Hall is located, could be a focal point for both commercial and residential development.

University Park is in a dynamic period of its history. Expansion and changes at Governors State University, new industries locating in the community, the continued discussion of a new cargo airport in Peotone, and investment activity from groups like the Southland Development Authority all indicate that today's development patterns in University Park will not be like those in the past. Demand for housing from students and staff at GSU, and from employees of the new and expanding businesses in the community, will be different. Meanwhile, the population is aging and lacks enough options for empty nesters. Updating the Village's Comprehensive Plan can help to fully prepare for these changes. The plan can identify appropriate products, such as townhomes, apartments, cottage court homes, and specific areas for this new housing construction.



"Cottage Courts," offering smaller, single-story homes around a shared courtyard, can be appealing to seniors. Image source: Opticos Design



Townhomes can be an attractive option for first-time homebuyers.

Image source: Oak Ridge Subdivision in Tinley Park

Recommendations

Strategy #4: Launch a community marketing plan to support new development.

One of the lessons from Homewood, as described by Angela Mesaros at the expert panel, was that the success of the Hartford, and Homewood's recent development work in general, resulted from a number of different efforts coming together at the same time. One such initiative was the Think Homewood marketing campaign. As part of Homewood's work around its transit station and the Hartford development, the community embarked on a marketing campaign to promote life in Homewood. Think Homewood featured digital and radio advertising, an increased social media presence, and ads that were placed on the CTA Blue Line and throughout targeted neighborhoods in Chicago. The campaign required a small budget but drew a good deal of free press and the Village felt that it generated a positive return in interest in the community.

Another useful lesson shared by Angela was her team's entrepreneurial approach to attracting developers and commercial tenants. The marketing tools described above were supplemented by personalized phone and email outreach, conference attendance, and other direct engagement.

As University Park grows and changes, a marketing campaign like Homewood's could attract new potential residents to the community. Highlighting the Village's transit station, growth and new development, and its proximity to transportation, jobs, and open space, can bring a new interest in University Park.



The Hartford mixed-use building in Homewood, Illinois

Image source: Village of Homewood

Recommendations

Next Steps:

- Continue to evaluate purchasing the property adjacent to the Metra station.
- Use the Financing Strategies and Implementation Timeline provided by the RTA to help guide the development process in the TOD area.
- Identify other key properties in the TOD area or in the Town Center that would be appropriate for the Village to purchase.
- Set up a plan for regular meetings between University Park and GSU leadership.
- Determine if a Comprehensive Plan update is feasible at this time.
- Consider creating a marketing plan similar to the one implemented in Homewood.
- Explore the idea of partnering with GSU for a student class project or internship focused on creating a marketing plan.

Recommendations

Recommendation #2: Encourage local employers to support workforce housing solutions by joining the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.

During the expert panel meeting, Southland Development Authority (SDA) CEO Bo Kemp discussed that there are two ways to keep and grow tax revenue: (1) growing the local population by building new housing, and (2) bringing in industry and commercial development. In both scenarios, he stressed, workforce housing is needed to achieve this investment. In University Park and elsewhere, the SDA is pursuing both of these strategies.

With this underpinning, in addition to its core economic development work, the SDA has been on the ground floor of a new Southland Employer Housing Consortium. The Consortium's goals are to promote housing stability for workers in the South Suburbs and address neighborhood concerns that may prevent employees in the South Suburbs from choosing to live near where they work. Informed by some terrific models, locally and nationally, the Consortium commits to: (a) providing its members' employees with housing counseling and downpayment or rental assistance, (b) facilitating employer engagement in support of local housing policies and developments, (c) exploring and supporting employer interest in development activity, providing land or other resources.

Dr. Corey Bradford of Governors State University (GSU), also an expert panelist, described how and why GSU has been piloting an employer-assisted housing program through this Consortium. As the Village's largest employer, GSU recognized the handicaps resulting from the fact that less than two percent of University Park's local workforce lives in the Village. GSU launched an initial pilot in 2023, providing housing counseling and \$15,000 in down payment assistance for eligible employees to buy homes in University Park or other communities within a five-mile radius, seeing enough value in the program to launch Phase 2 in March of 2025.

Recommendations

Strategy #1: Educate local employers about workforce housing solutions by introducing them to the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.

For University Park, it is an opportune time to collaborate more deeply with GSU and the SDA on housing and development matters within the Village, and to engage other local and regional employers. Many employers have a particular interest in encouraging their employees to live close, especially those with workers whose jobs can't offer virtual options. As municipal leaders identify the programs and policies that will help encourage housing development, employers can advance these efforts in many ways, including supporting housing priorities at various governmental levels; marketing housing opportunities to employees; and creating additional employer-assisted housing programs with public and nonprofit partners, as GSU has. In University Park, it would be particularly useful to involve the SDA, GSU, and other employers that either of these partners suggest in an initial meeting to learn more about GSU's pilot program, the goals of the Employer Housing Consortium, and other possibilities.

Strategy #2: Leverage external resources to bolster the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.

Beyond SDA's growing leadership in this space, including its new Monarch Equity Fund, Illinois has some funds available to promote "live near work" and employer engagement in housing. The Illinois Affordable Housing Tax Credit Program provides a 50 cent tax credit on every dollar that employers provide qualified employees (those earning up to 120% Area Median Income; for example, \$143,880 for a family of four) for down payment and closing cost assistance, reduced-interest mortgages, rental assistance, or individual development savings account plans.

		Area Median Income			
		60%	80%	100%	120%
Household Size	1	\$50,400	\$67,100	\$84,000	\$100,800
	2	\$57,600	\$76,750	\$96,000	\$115,200
	3	\$64,800	\$86,350	\$108,000	\$129,600
	4	\$71,940	\$95,900	\$119,900	\$143,880

Figure 14: Translating "Area Median Income" Thresholds to Household Incomes
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) income limits for the Chicago region, 2025

Recommendations

Will County offers downpayment assistance of up to \$25,000 for qualified homebuyers, and also manages HOME and CDBG and other resources that the Village can support the SDA in pursuing. University Park, in partnership with the SDA, can share information on these resources so local businesses leaders know what programs are available to help them and their employees. The Village's leadership in this space may also be of interest and generate additional support from area foundations and through the Governor's new Missing Middle initiative, which is now staffing up and could surface additional opportunities.

Next Steps:

- **With SDA and GSU, convene local HR directors and executives both within the TIF Industrial Park and throughout the Village to encourage participation in the Southland Employer Housing Consortium.**
- **Explore the Village's interest in participating as an employer itself, encouraging its peers to do the same.**
- **Work with the SDA to leverage matching funds through Will County and other sources.**

Recommendations

Recommendation #3: Activate the Village's partnership with the South Suburban Land Bank to redevelop vacant homes and lots.

South Suburban Land Bank Director Joe Van Dyk participated in the expert panel, describing the extensive progress achieved by the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLBDA) since its founding in 2012 with three South Suburban communities (Park Forest, Blue Island, and Oak Forest). Specializing in the redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties, including cleaning title and bringing these sites back on the tax rolls, the SSLBDA now includes 29 municipalities across south Cook and Will Counties.

The Land Bank acquires properties, often through the abandonment statute, and becomes responsible for that property, insuring it and cleaning it up. At that point, it takes one of three paths:

1. Conducting baseline remediation and stabilization, then working with local realtors to get the property back onto the market and into the hands of a responsible owner.
2. Managing basic rehabilitation of the home, using local contractors, then getting the home onto the market.
3. Using SSLBDA contractors, doing a full-scale rehab of the home and getting it back onto the market.

In addition to this remediation and rehab work, which has comprised almost all of the SSLBDA's efforts since its formation, the Land Bank has begun a new initiative in which it engages in new construction on vacant lots. Working with Orland Park-based Toro Construction, the SSLBDA purchases and holds vacant lots while Toro does all construction work to build new single-family homes. At the end of the process, the Land Bank finds a buyer.

University Park can partner with the SSLBDA to take advantage of the Land Banks's benefits and tools for reactivating vacant or abandoned properties and strengthening its tax base as described above. The Village could work with the SSLBDA to identify vacant parcels or homes that the Land Bank could acquire to rehab and/or develop, using it as a tool in the community's efforts to add to and maintain its current housing stock.

Recommendations

Next Steps:

Having signed the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) to become a member of the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLBDA) following the expert panel, the Village's next steps are to:

- **Identify lots and properties in the Village that are vacant and/or tax delinquent.**
- **Share this initial list with the SSLBDA in order to begin addressing distressed properties.**
- **Formalize a process for continued collaboration, identifying the appropriate point people within the Village to work with SSLBDA staff as inventory becomes available and to track the process through to completion.**
- **Work with the SSLBDA to identify other ways the Land Bank could help in University Park, such as assembling and holding properties that support ongoing TOD and/or GSU priorities.**

Recommendations

Recommendation #4: Connect residents and property owners with home repair and improvement resources.

Kicking off the expert panel was Stacie Young, President of the Community Investment Corporation (CIC). CIC is a local nonprofit focused on achieving affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization through innovative financing, programs, and policy leadership aimed at providing well-maintained homes for families.

As noted in the housing needs assessment above, University Park has an aging housing stock; most housing in the community was built in the 1960s and 1970s. As these homes age, they need regular maintenance and repairs to ensure long-term safety and viability. However, some of the multifamily buildings are facing high-cost maintenance needs, such as elevator repair or flooding damage, and some of the Village's homeowners may not be able to afford necessary repairs and improvements. Stacie shared a number of resources that can help University Park homeowners, building owners and property managers ensure that needed home repairs and upkeep get done, thus maintaining the community's current housing stock.

To help residents and property owners remain informed on an ongoing basis, University Park could coordinate an annual Housing Fair as in neighboring Park Forest. Each year, Park Forest hosts a Housing Fair, at which it provides information on topics such as homeownership, available homes in Park Forest, and home weatherization. University Park could host its own Housing Fair to alert residents and local property owners to the resources described above as well as others. University Park could include partners such as Community Investment Corporation, Elevate Energy, Will County Center for Community Concerns, Will County Habitat for Humanity, Cook County, Will County, and the South Suburban Housing Center.

Recommendations

Resource #1: Property Management Training.

Well-maintained buildings require less expensive upkeep over time and contribute to the overall image of a community. The Community Investment Corporation (CIC) offers Property Management Training that can help landlords better understand how to market, manage, and maintain a residential rental property. CIC's training program began over 20 years ago and serves over 1,200 people each year. CIC also offers workshops on specific topics such as How to Choose a Contractor, Exterior Facade Inspection and Maintenance, and Pet Policies.

Resource #2: Energy Savers Programs.

Regular and unanticipated maintenance can add costs to a home or building owner's budget, but so can simply the cost of regular usage. Energy costs are directly related to housing affordability. When energy costs are decreased, the ability of people to stay in their homes is increased. Studies show homes with energy upgrades are more affordable and healthier. Multifamily housing with energy upgrades show higher net operating income and lower insurance costs. CIC's Energy Savers Program, a partnership with Elevate Energy, has provided \$25 million in loans and grants to multifamily building owners, helping reduce operating costs by conserving energy and cutting utility bills. The Energy Savers program provides building owners with a building energy assessment, connects them to financing and access to utility incentives and rebates, helps them finance the building upgrades, and offers post-retrofit assistance.

For homeowners, Elevate Energy's Single Family Energy Savers Program provides homeowners and renters of single-family homes free assessments and resources to reduce their energy bills. Households can schedule a free in-home or virtual assessment to identify ways to reduce energy use and monthly costs. A trained advisor will also provide information about available rebates for energy-saving projects or equipment. Both homeowners and renters of single-family homes are eligible for the program. Additional services are available to income-eligible customers, including free or discounted products such as smart thermostats, hot water pipe insulation, LED lights, water-saving showerheads and faucets, and advanced power strips.

Recommendations

In University Park, where residents face high water bills, the installation of water-saving equipment would help to bring down those costs and free up homeowner resources for other uses.

Although other federal resources like the Residential Energy Efficiency Tax Credit and Residential Clean Electricity Tax Credit are likely evolving, Elevate Energy and entities like Enterprise Community Partners can help track future incentives as well.

Resource #3: The Illinois Housing Development Authority's Home Repair and Accessibility Program.

In addition to the resources described above, the Village of University Park can consider applying to, or (due to the amount of administration involved) working with another organization such as the Southland Development Authority or one or more neighboring towns to apply to, the state-funded Home Repair and Accessibility Program (HRAP). The Illinois Housing Development Authority's (IHDA) HRAP assists low- and very low-income households with health, safety, and energy efficiency improvements for their homes. The program offers three project types: rehabilitation and repair of homes, for which the property is eligible for up to \$50,000 in improvements; accessibility improvements, subject to the same \$50,000 cap; and roof only projects, for which up to \$25,000 is eligible in repairs. Assistance is provided in the form of a 3- to 5-year forgivable loan. Property eligibility differs for each project type.

The 2025 application deadline was in March, but future rounds may be available in coming years. University Park can benefit by being proactive about learning about various funding programs as they change and/or new ones emerge. University Park can also maintain close coordination with organizations that receive funding through the HRAP Program and promote their resources to residents.

Recommendations

Next Steps:

- Create a communications plan (newsletters, utility bills, etc.) to market resources to local residents and building owners.
- Encourage property owners and landlords to take property management training courses.
- Host an annual Housing Fair.
- Sign up for communication from IHDA and maintain regular check-ins (i.e. every 6 months) to get ahead of new program releases.
- Remain active with key groups such as the MMC's Housing and Community Development Committee, the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, and the Southland Development Authority to keep track of available funding resources for home repair and other useful programs.

Key Contacts

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Appendix A: University Park Data

Figure A1. Village Property Tax Revenue, University Park, 2013-2024

	Village Equalized Assessed Value	Village Levy	Village Property Tax Rate
2013	\$112,446,754	\$5,534,825	4.92%
2014	\$107,521,048	\$5,756,114	5.35%
2015	\$108,138,335	\$5,994,421	5.54%
2016	\$110,826,966	\$6,416,278	5.79%
2017	\$113,258,817	\$6,605,122	5.83%
2018	\$119,257,307	\$6,836,844	5.73%
2019	\$126,640,719	\$7,050,975	5.57%
2020	\$137,328,904	\$6,617,102	4.82%
2021	\$141,496,976	\$6,713,436	4.74%
2022	\$153,659,935	\$6,914,684	4.50%
2023	\$161,004,993	\$6,635,379	4.12%
2024 Projected	\$253,370,565	\$10,300,000	4.07%

Source: Village of University Park, December of 2024

Figure A2. Workforce Commuting Distance

	University Park	Chicago Heights	Tinley Park	Orland Park	Romeo-ville	Boling-brook	Aurora	Naper-ville	Schaum-burg
Less than 10 miles	34%	54%	46%	45%	38%	35%	46%	44%	33%
10 to 24 miles	45%	29%	33%	35%	35%	40%	26%	34%	45%
25 to 50 miles	15%	11%	13%	12%	18%	17%	20%	16%	14%
Greater than 50 miles	6%	7%	8%	8%	9%	9%	8%	6%	8%

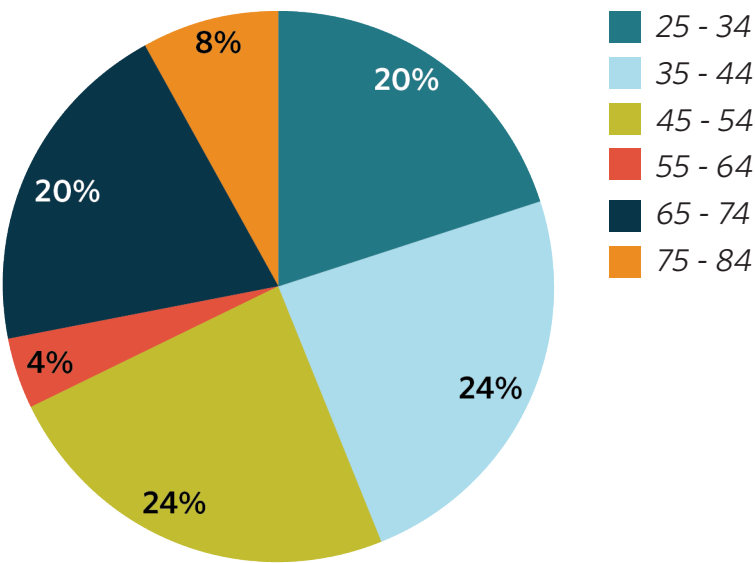
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, 2019. Figures shown represent the percentage of local workers.

Appendix B: Community Survey Input

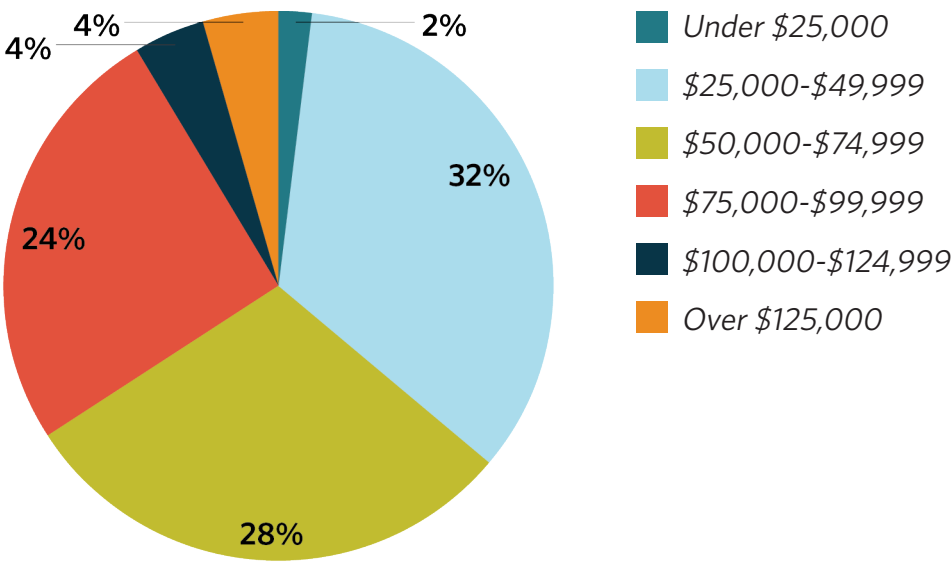
25 residents responded to the University Park community survey, which was open from November 15 through February 21.

Respondent Demographics

What is your age range?

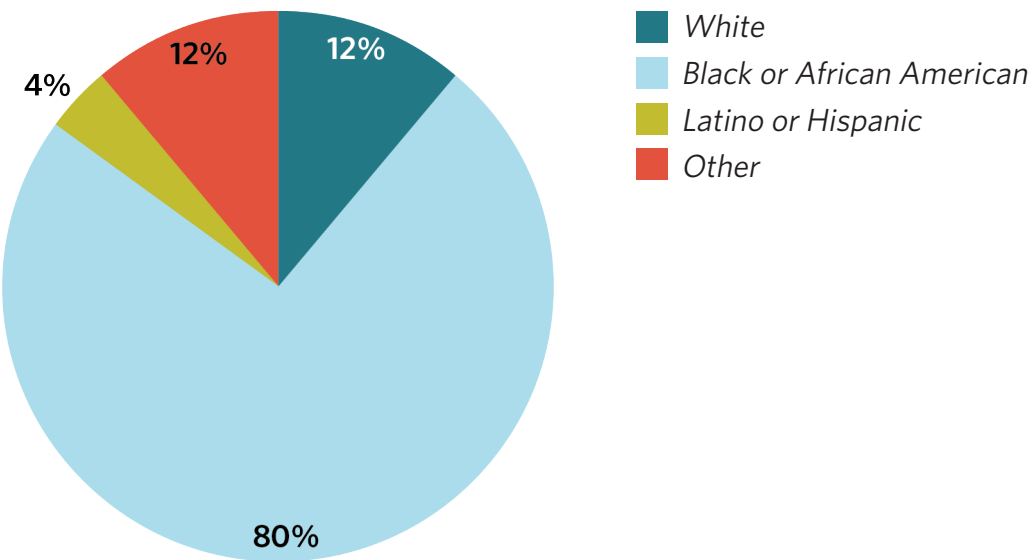


What is your household income range?

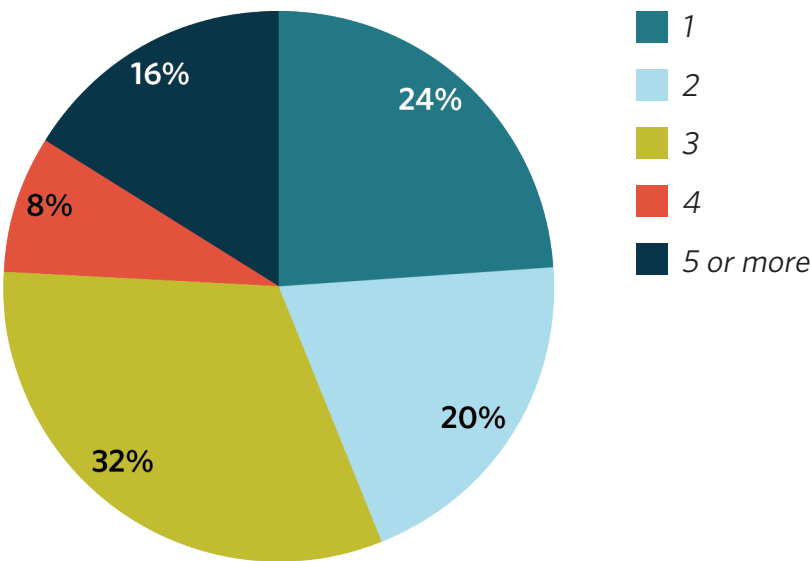


Appendix B: Community Survey Input

What is your race or ethnicity?

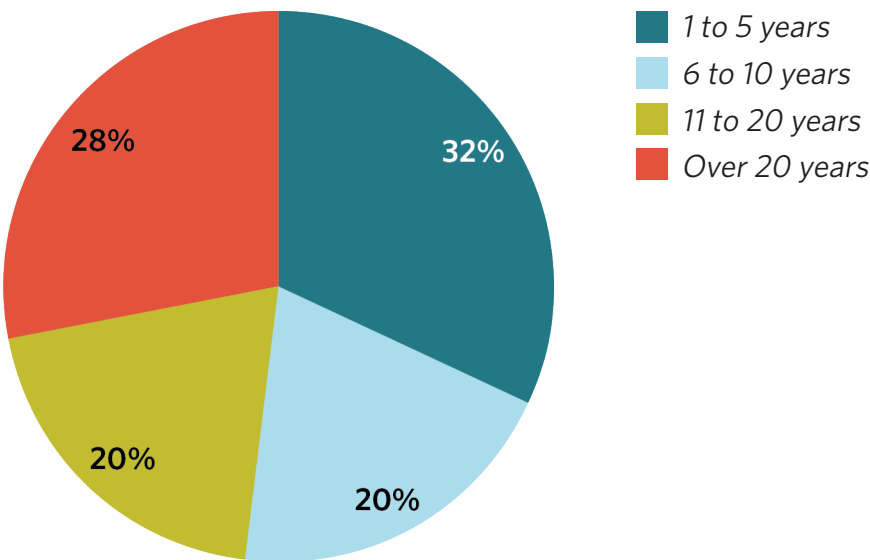


How many people are in your household?

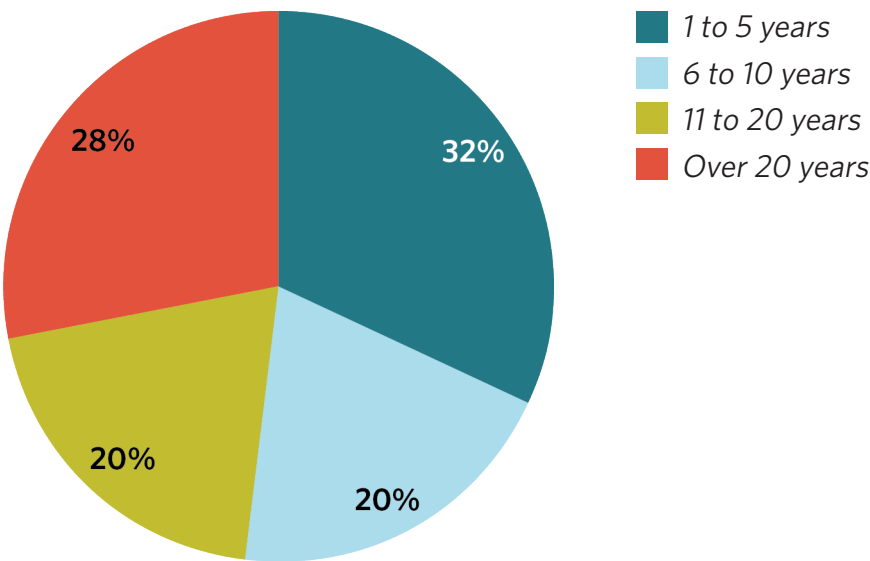


Appendix B: Community Survey Input

How long have you lived in University Park?

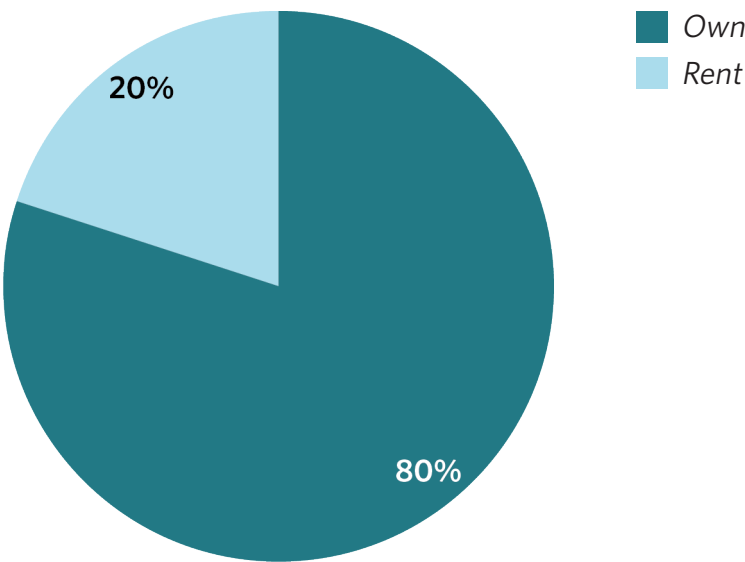


How long have you lived in your current home?

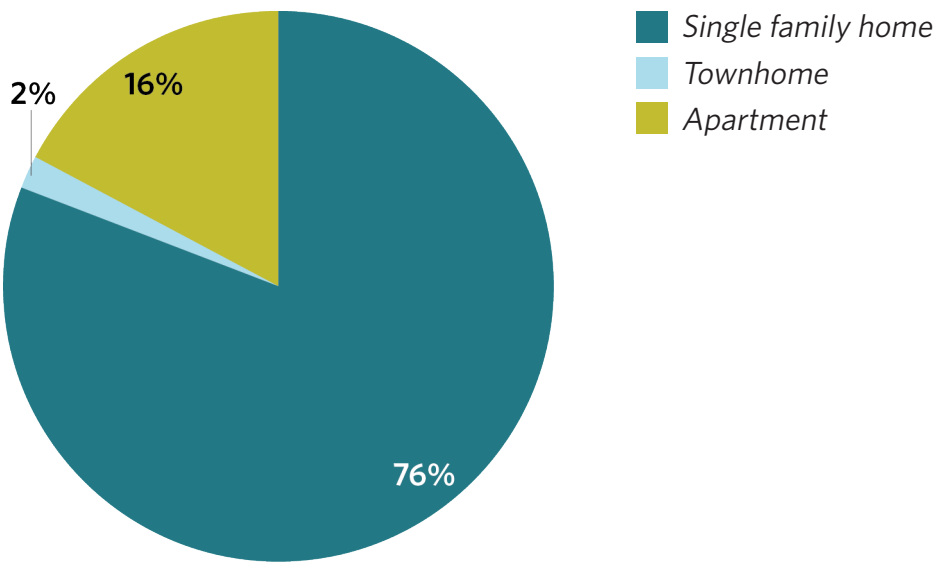


Appendix B: Community Survey Input

Do you currently own or rent your home?



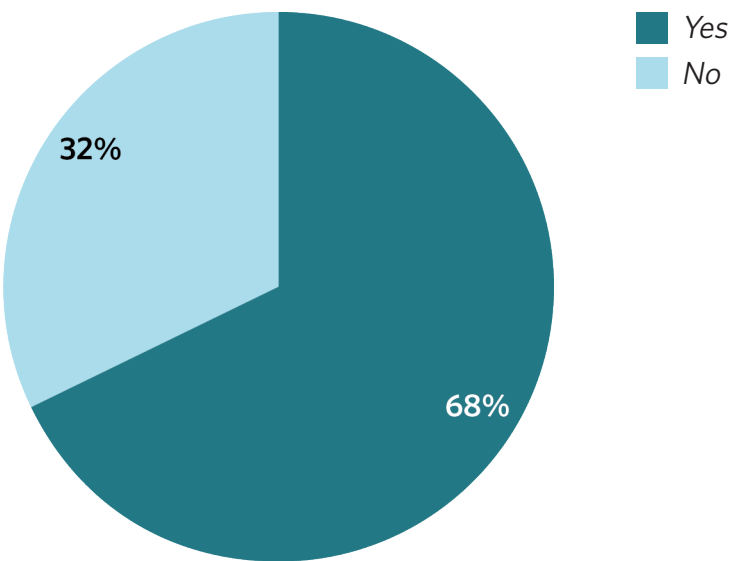
What type of housing do you currently live in?



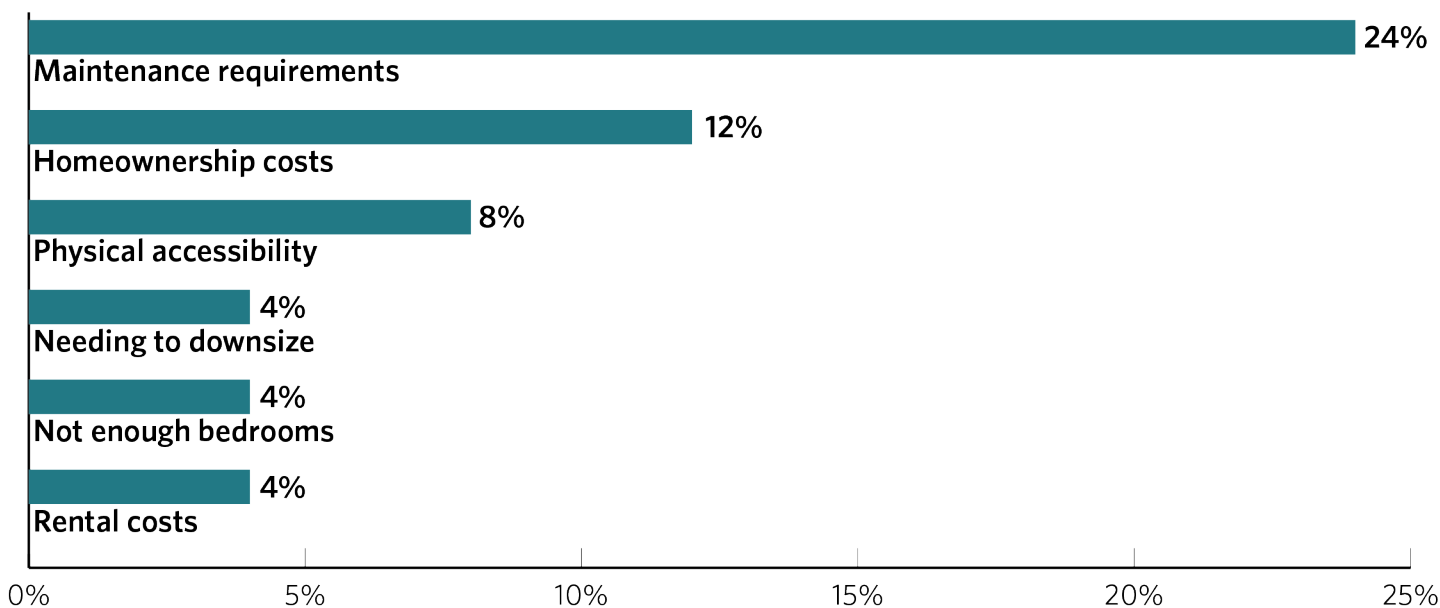
Appendix B: Community Survey Input

Personal Experience Questions

Does the home you live in meet your current needs?

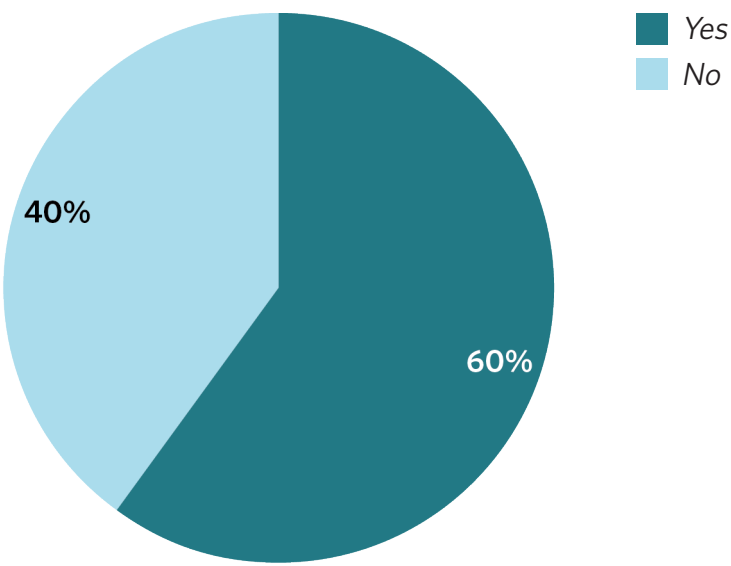


In what ways does the home you live in not meet your current needs?

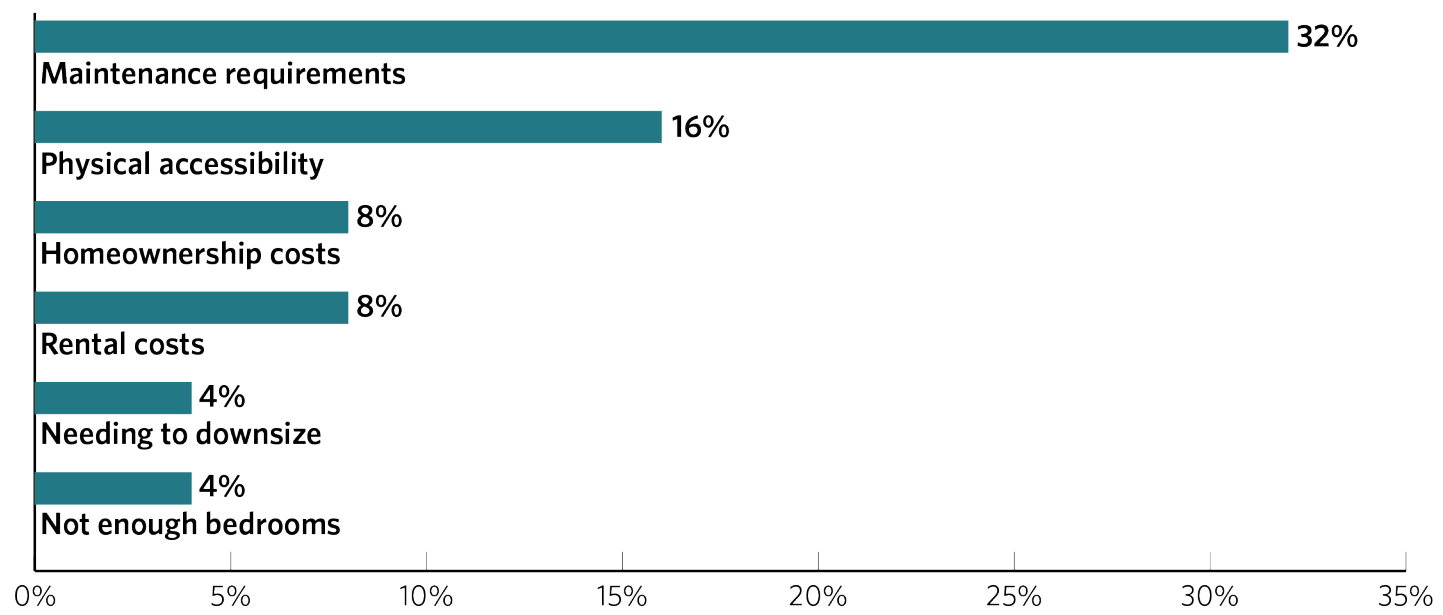


Appendix B: Community Survey Input

Do you believe that the home you currently live in will meet your future needs, allowing you to remain in this home for the foreseeable future?

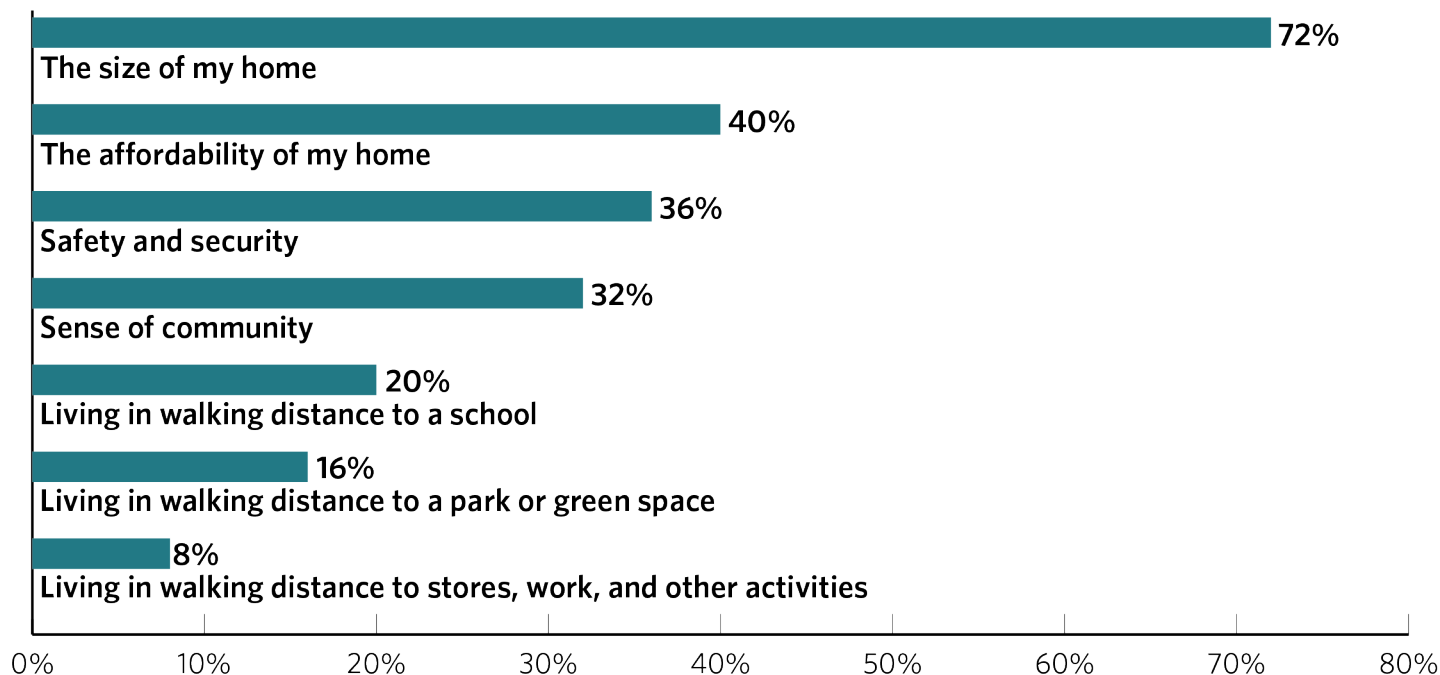


In what ways does the home you currently live in not meet your future needs?

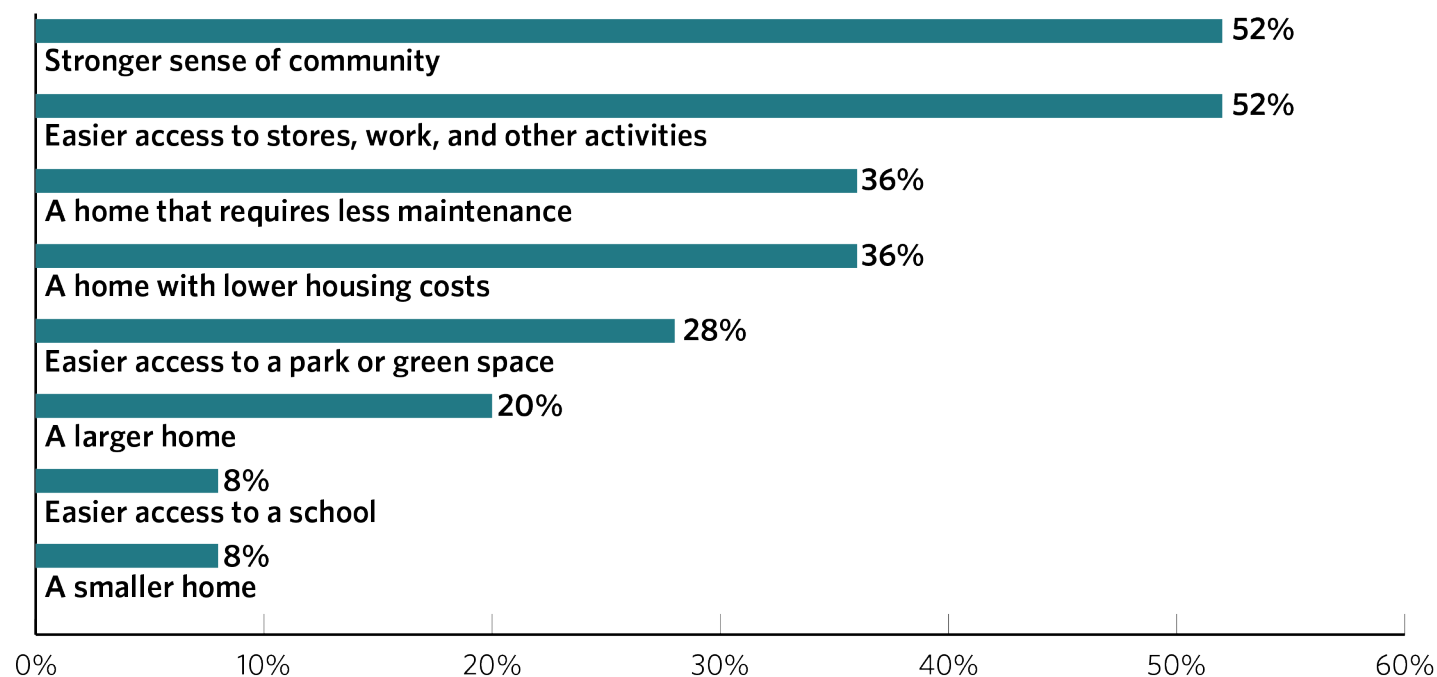


Appendix B: Community Survey Input

What do you like most about your current home and neighborhood?

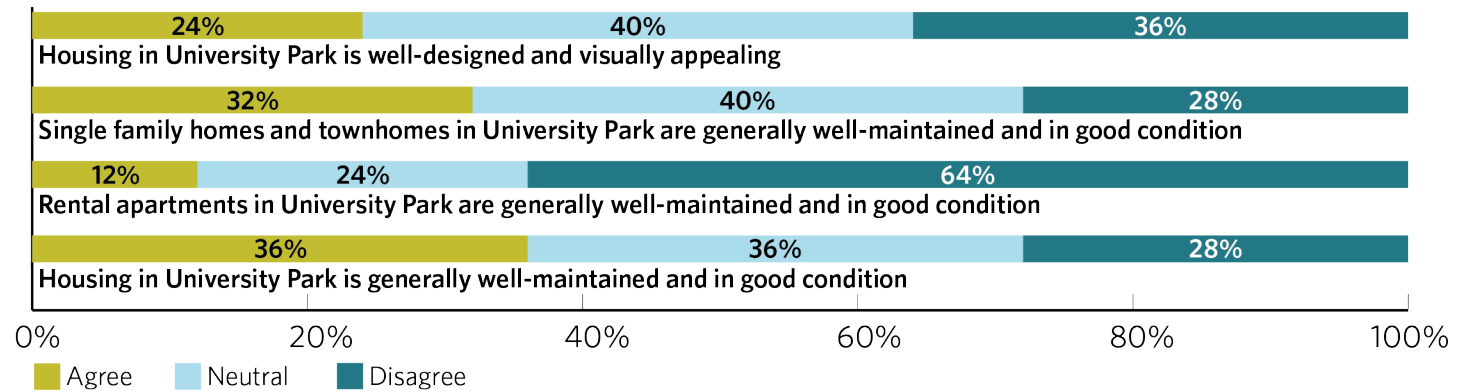


What improvements or changes would you like to see in your housing situation or neighborhood?



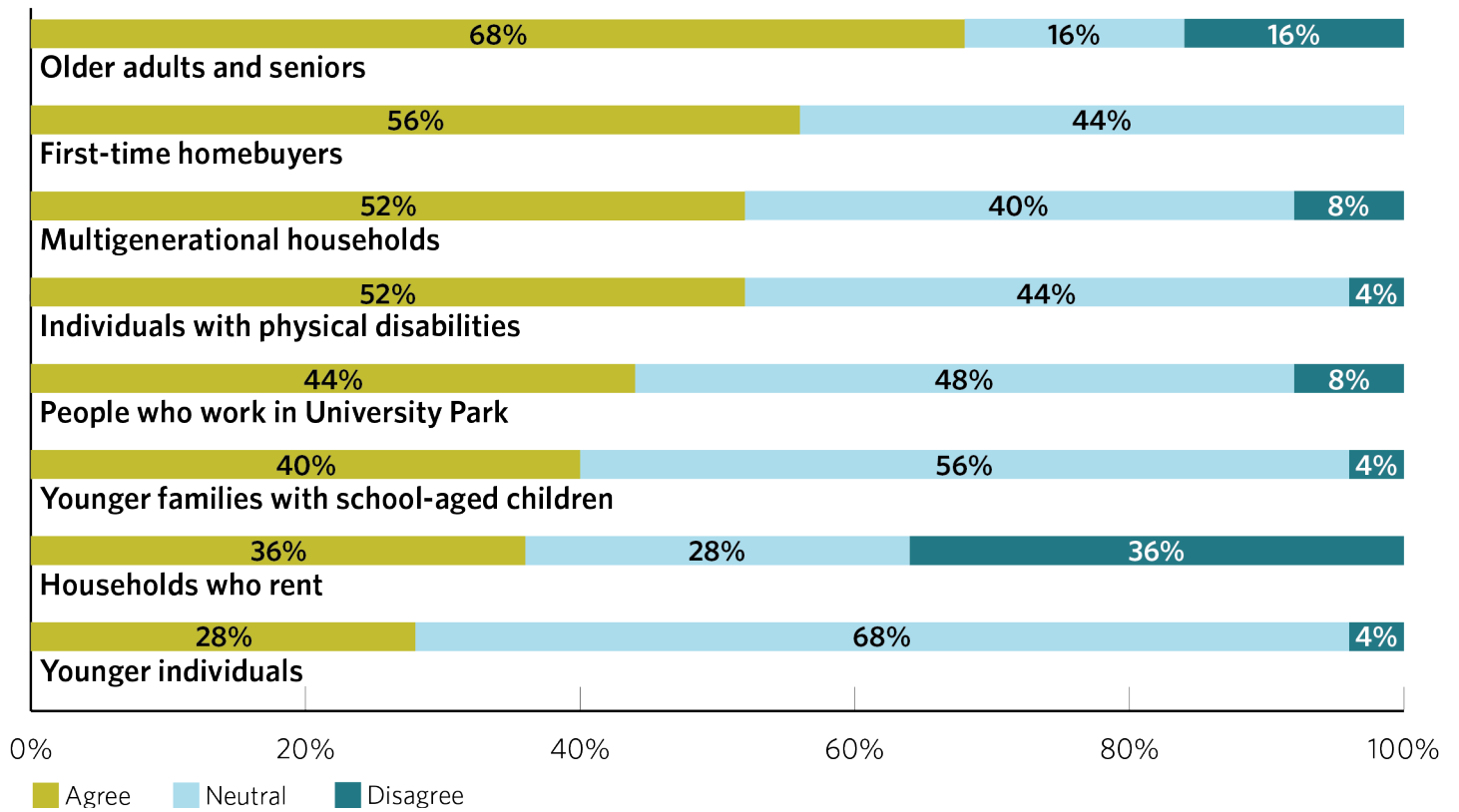
Appendix B: Community Survey Input

Housing Condition Questions



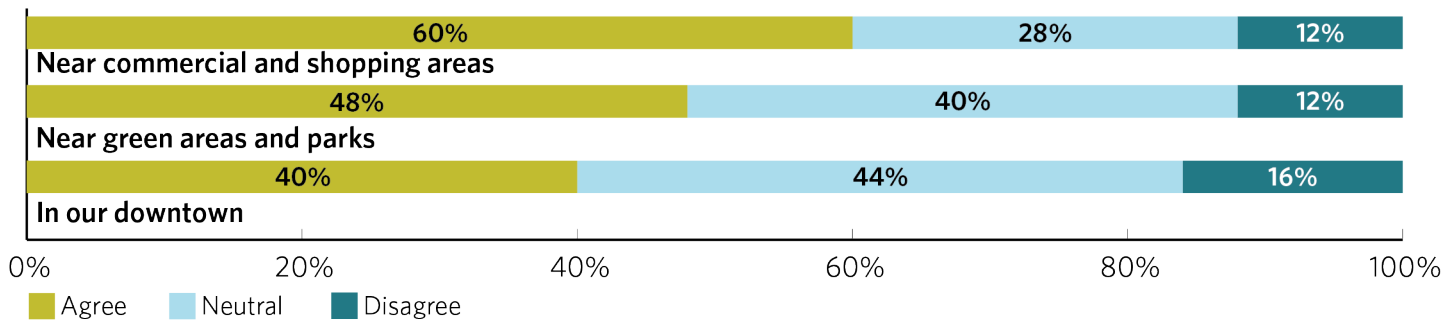
Housing Need Questions

University Park has a need for more housing options for...



Appendix B: Community Survey Input

University Park has a need for more housing options...



Responses to Open-Ended Questions

What are the major strengths of housing in University Park?

- "There's a decent mixture of apartments, townhouses and single-family homes."
- "The major strength of housing in University Park is that many homeowners have lived here for over 20 years."
- "Very affordable housing and also pretty good size houses."
- "Housing for people with disabilities."
- "The older homes have large yards. Our open, green land."

Please describe any important trends you see happening related to housing University Park.

- "More stores opening, and better upkeep of parks and recreational areas, seem to be in the process of happening which should bring more interested people to the area."
- "Too many vacant homes and dilapidated homes."
- "The houses seem like newer houses, although not maintained by previous owners so old pipes, weak foundations and a lack of upgrades."
- "I see more people purchasing homes."

Appendix B: Community Survey Input

What changes would you like to see, related to housing, in University Park?

- "Abandoned homes be torn down or ownership determined so repairs can be made, or parties held responsible for upkeep."
- "More apartments and living spaces."
- "Enforcement of exterior maintenance such as bushes and grass, weed, parking ordinances."
- "Newly built homes and townhomes."
- "Student housing for students at Governors State University."
- "Larger homes."
- "Growth."
- "Homes built for the future of climate change."

What do you like most about University Park?

- "Open space and beautiful land. Calm and serene place."
- "It is a diverse community that is relatively safe."
- "It's accessible to public transportation if I had to use it. It's more affordable than some of the other south suburbs in the area."
- "I love the area I live in and how quiet it is."
- "Resident since 1986, excellent place and nice to raise a family."
- "The affordability and the sense of community, also fairly close to restaurants and shopping centers."

What changes would you like to see, in general, in University Park?

- "Stores so we can shop in our own community! That would really be nice!"
- "Commercial, retail, community services, central gathering facility."
- "More small businesses and possibly a grocery store."
- "More recreational parks and stores/malls also maybe some better restaurants."
- "Plant more trees in front of homes for shade for walkers. Many homes do not have the standard tree-lined street."
- "Repaved streets, more beautification, more businesses."