

# INITIATIVE 3:

Resilient Neighborhoods

# INITIATIVE 3 | RESILIENT NEIGHBORHOODS

## SUPPORT THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF STRONG, UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOODS THAT PROVIDE A RANGE OF HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION CHOICES.

Greater Des Moines already contains many different kinds of neighborhoods - from agricultural homestead areas, to suburban neighborhoods, to urban areas, to downtowns comprised of apartments. Each neighborhood offers a different set of housing options, amenities, economic opportunities, and general character. The region as a whole benefits from this range because people prefer different lifestyles. Having this range ensures that Greater Des Moines can accommodate many different lifestyle preferences.

As economic, social, or environmental conditions change over time, neighborhoods must adapt or show resilience. In the context of neighborhoods, the word "resilient" means that a community is able to easily recover from difficult conditions. Having a patchwork quilt of multiple resilient neighborhoods — each with different characteristics, assets, and strengths — makes a region flexible and able to adapt to any challenges it may face. In other words, the cumulative effect is that a region composed of resilient neighborhoods is sustainable and able to withstand the many pressures it may face over the long term.

This initiative has important connections to Initiative 1: Nodes & Corridors and Initiative 2: Greenways. Nodes of activity and strong neighborhoods connected by greenways and multi-use corridors work together to create a resilient region.

### Increasing Neighborhood Resiliency

Multiple programs exist for assessing neighborhood sustainability and livability, each with its own set of indicators and metrics. These programs include LEED for Neighborhood Development, the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, and STAR Communities, among others. Looking across these systems, several common themes emerge to describe sustainable, livable, and resilient neighborhoods:

- They are diverse, allowing them to adapt more easily to changes over time.
- They are cohesive, with strong social bonds that unite residents and help them work together towards a common vision.
- They are appealing places to live.
- They have elements of self-sufficiency, making them less vulnerable to outside changes.

Although different kinds of neighborhoods may look different and face different challenges, their ability to thrive in the long-term rests on the same elements:

1. Housing Choice
2. Transportation Choice
3. Recreation + Retail
4. Education + Jobs
5. Assured Health and Safety
6. Strong Sense of Community
7. Minimal Environmental Impact
8. Self Sufficiency
9. Inclusive Governance

Identifying and describing these nine elements of resiliency is an important step towards strengthening neighborhoods in Greater Des Moines, as it helps identify specific initiatives that would be beneficial.

Working towards neighborhood resiliency requires cooperation from many different groups. This initiative outlines regional action

steps, but municipalities and neighborhoods can support these efforts through local planning efforts, projects, and programs. Private, non-profit, and faith-based institutions can also play a role in this process. These groups play an important role in bringing additional, non-governmental resources to the neighborhood. Expanding opportunities and partnerships with these groups should be supported.

For example, the City of Des Moines has the most extensive program for neighborhood sustainability and livability in the region. The city's Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) initiated a neighborhood recognition process in 1990 that has resulted in fifty-seven neighborhood organizations. City staff, along with the City of Des Moines's Neighborhood Revitalization Board (NRB), select several neighborhoods every few years to be the focus of revitalization efforts. Since its inception, the NRP has worked with twenty-eight neighborhood groups to analyze neighborhood conditions and develop goals and strategies for ongoing maintenance and improvement. Several of these neighborhoods exist in areas identified as Racially Concentrated

Areas of Poverty (RCAP) and as Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (ECAP) in the Regional Analysis of Impediments. They have included Capitol East, Chautauqua Park, Drake, King Irving, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Park.

In 1990, a partnership between the City of Des Moines, Polk County, and the private sector created the Neighborhood Finance Corporation (NFC) as the vehicle for housing rehabilitation and new construction funding assistance in designated and low-moderate income neighborhoods. The NFC receives between \$800,000 — \$1,000,000 from the City of Des Moines and Polk County annually to fund home improvement forgivable loans, closing cost assistance, loan guarantees, and construction assistance. The Polk County portion of the funds has allowed for the extension of NFC programs to other Polk County communities. Since 1990, the NFC has provided over \$222 million in loans and grants that have assisted more than 4,000 housing units in 27 designated neighborhoods in Des Moines and West Des Moines. The following table shows the amount of NFC funding provided in RCAP/ECAP neighborhoods since 1991.

## EXISTING PROGRAMS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SUSTAINABILITY AND LIVABILITY

**STAR Communities: Sustainability Tools for Assessing and Rating Communities** is a rating system that assesses livability and sustainability in US communities. The rating framework has seven major categories: built environment; climate & energy; economy & jobs; education, arts, & community; equity & empowerment; health & safety; and, natural systems. Des Moines is currently one of 30 cities and counties participating in STAR's Community Pilot Program to test and evaluate the rating system. The pilot is underway and will wrap up in 2013. STAR has been under development since 2008 through a partnership of ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability USA, the US Green Building Council, the National League of Cities, and the Center for American Progress.

**LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND):** LEED ND is a sustainability rating system for neighborhoods. Neighborhoods earn points towards certification by fulfilling credits. Credits fall in three major categories: smart location & linkage, neighborhood pattern & design, and green infrastructure & buildings. Whole neighborhoods, portions of neighborhoods, or multiple neighborhoods can be evaluated with the tool. LEED ND was developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) in collaboration with the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

**Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities:** The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is an interagency partnership between HUD, DOT, and the EPA. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities aims to promote a range of transportation and housing choices, reduce negative impacts on the environment, and create strong local economies. The Partnership has developed a set of livability principles to guide its work:

- Provide more transportation choices.
- Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- Enhance economic competitiveness.
- Support existing communities.
- Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
- Value communities and neighborhoods.

*The Tomorrow Plan was made possible, in part, by a 2010 HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. For more information, visit <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/>.*

NEIGHBORHOOD	# OF LOANS	LOAN AMOUNT	FORGIVABLE LOAN	TOTAL AMOUNT
Capitol East	152	6,160,445	965,124	7,125,569
Chautauqua Park	53	1,806,293	349,119	2,155,412
Drake	211	12,065,366	1,435,514	13,500,880
King Irving	68	4,419,783	387,707	4,806,839
Martin Luther King Jr. Park	2	60,675	13,181	73,856
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>\$24,512,562</b>	<b>\$3,150,645</b>	<b>\$27,662,556</b>

## Overarching Action Steps

### For the Region: Resilient Neighborhoods Council for Greater Des Moines

Create a regional council for neighborhood resiliency. No regional organization with a mission aligned with this initiative currently exists. This group could be based on the above example of the City of Des Moines NRB, which links neighborhood residents, the City of Des Moines, Polk County, local business leaders, and the NFC. This regional council could encourage similar partnerships across the entire region. Membership would be comprised of city planners, neighborhood association representatives, and other stakeholders. The group could meet twice annually, with goals of:

- Encouraging connections and partnerships;
- Sharing information and best practices;
- Strengthening ties between adjacent communities; and,
- Connecting communities across the region that face similar issues.

### For Neighborhoods: Neighborhood Challenge

Building on the existing neighborhood work by the City of Des Moines, the City of Ankeny, and others, neighborhoods throughout the region should develop plans that consider their own unique qualities. With assistance from the Resilient Neighborhoods Council and their respective communities, neighborhoods can conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that identifies the characteristics of neighborhood resiliency. As a first step to this analysis, communities could create neighborhood asset maps identifying successful qualities. For more information on analyzing neighborhood strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats,

see the appendix for an overview of potential key issues relating to neighborhood resiliency by neighborhood type.

Neighborhoods could look to this appendix for examples of how to consider resiliency elements in their local context. Based on the SWOT analysis, each neighborhood can then prioritize issues and identify action steps to build upon strengths, take advantage of opportunities, and address weaknesses and threats. Neighborhoods can harness community energy to target specific neighborhood projects and motivate volunteers to implement a vision.

Though neighborhood selection is generally left to communities, the Resilient Neighborhoods Council should prioritize RCAP/ECAP neighborhoods that have not previously been targeted for revitalization studies. These include the southern portion of the Historic East Village and an area south of the Capitol East neighborhood that is not part of a recognized neighborhood.

## Addressing the Elements of Resilient Neighborhoods

### 1. Housing Choice

Different people need, desire, and can afford different types of housing. Choice includes physical design options — whether the home is an apartment, single-family home, townhouse, or live/work unit — as well as price, tenure options, and neighborhood amenities. Young, single adults and senior residents may desire smaller apartments in close proximity to a transit stop, restaurants, and shops. Families may want larger homes with access to high-quality schools. Ideally, a sufficient range of quality, affordable housing exists within each neighborhood to meet current demand.

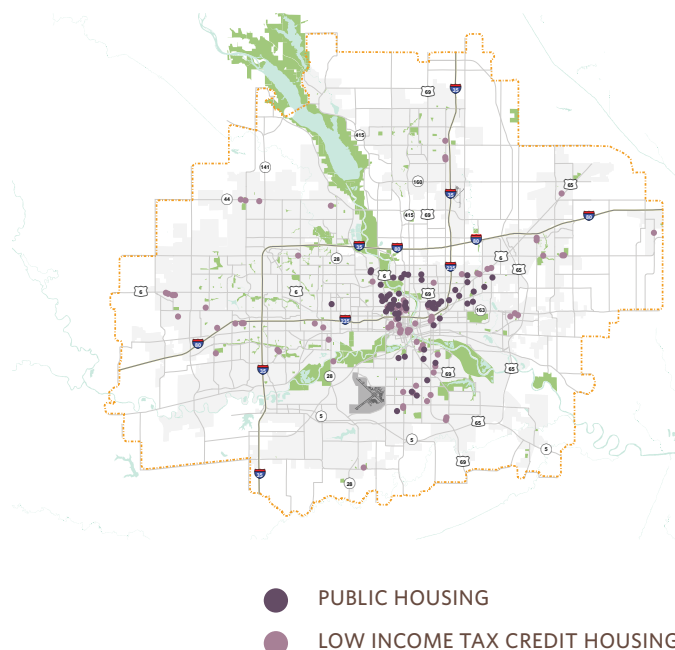
Providing a range of physical housing options, at different costs and with opportunities to own or rent, can help communities retain and attract residents. People have different housing needs throughout their lives. Housing diversity can help ensure that when existing residents are looking for a new kind of home, they can remain within the neighborhood instead of having to move away. In addition, neighborhoods with a more diverse mix of housing options are better able to adapt to changing economic conditions and continue to attract new residents as housing markets and demographics change.

Nodes, described in Initiative 1, will be the densest residential areas, with the greatest variety of housing options. Density in these areas will support public transit and provide opportunities to live close to jobs. Of course, other neighborhoods can also take steps to increase the range of options that they offer.

The Regional Analysis of Impediments examines the current barriers to fair housing in the region. Key findings are that affordability is the primary impediment to housing choice, especially for low- and moderate-income families, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. Other impediments include:

- A lack of knowledge about fair housing rights, laws, and processes. Language barriers are one component that contribute to information disparity.
- The spatial concentration of existing affordable and subsidized housing in the City of Des Moines, which concentrates poverty and limits economic opportunity. The MPO's *Horizon Year 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)* analyzes socioeconomic conditions in Greater Des Moines and shows that the greatest concentration of the elderly, persons with disabilities, and persons in poverty is in the City of Des Moines. Further, this housing is not located in close proximity to low wage job centers.
- Scarcity of affordable housing for the elderly, disabled residents, and large, multi-generational families.
- Landlord screening requirements that can have the impact of excluding seniors, the disabled population, and low income individuals.
- Shortage of support services for homeowners.
- Zoning requirements — large minimum lot sizes, minimum parking requirements, and lack of inclusionary zoning (not required in Iowa) — that tend to increase housing prices and concentrate poverty in the urban core by precluding options for lower income residents in suburban areas.

### CONCENTRATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN GREATER DES MOINES<sup>34</sup>



#### Action Steps:

- Develop regional targets for increasing the cost spread of housing and variety of types (e.g., apartments, senior living, duplexes, townhouses, condominiums, live/work spaces) according to neighborhood type. These targets will be guides, not mandates, and based on market projections for the regional housing need, the existing balance of housing types in each municipality, and the type of development deemed appropriate for the area.
- Support municipalities by introducing incentives to encourage a diversity of housing choices, particularly in and along identified nodes and corridors.
  - Create incentives for private developers to invest in the development and rehabilitation of affordable housing by creating programs that provide flexibility in meeting code compliance requirements while ensuring the health and safety of residents.
  - Leverage private dollars and work with not-for-profit, faith-based organizations, and private agencies to provide the required subsidies for rental housing.
  - Create partnerships with non-governmental service providers, private sector partners, and existing minority and

ethnic community groups to encourage links between tenants and existing services.

- Evaluate existing zoning, subdivision, and building regulations for barriers to housing choice and mixed-use neighborhood centers; provide sample ordinances and regulations that address the regulatory barriers identified in the Regional Analysis of Impediments; and, support the expansion of housing choice and mixed-use neighborhood centers into areas that currently include:
  - Minimum parking requirements;
  - Subdivision requirements (like high minimum lot sizes and wide setbacks);
  - Design standards (like lawn maintenance requirements);
  - Occupancy standards that limit the number of unrelated family members who can live together; and,
  - Zoning that allows low density in all residential zones, even those zoned for higher residential.
- Make infill housing and redevelopment easier and more attractive for developers by reducing uncertainty and expediting the permitting process.
- Develop educational materials on fair housing laws, rights, and processes, and work with non-profits, faith-based organizations, and private agencies to distribute this information. Cities also should develop information on the community benefits of affordable housing. Groups should ensure education is available in multiple languages.
- Advocate to change the State's tax credit incentives for affordable housing (IFA/low income tax credits).
- Undertake mini-market studies to gauge housing preferences and make these results widely available to developers to ensure that new housing stock meets the desires of the population and addresses changing demographic trends.
- Create a task force for affordable housing to build consensus on regional strategies to provide affordable housing choices that align with The Tomorrow Plan's recommendations. This group should include representatives from the communities, county housing trusts, and social service sectors, and it should be ethnically and racially diverse. Given the Regional Analysis of Impediments and its findings, discussions should touch on:
  - The geographic distribution of affordable housing and its relationship to transportation, especially in corridors;

- Inclusionary zoning for municipalities within the region or on a case-by-case basis for new Planned Unit Development projects;
- Housing types for large families, the elderly, and disabled residents;
- Improving quality of existing affordable housing stock as needed; and,
- The overall quantity of affordable housing.
- Create a task force for homelessness to agree upon a regional approach to preventing and reducing homelessness and to providing resources. This task force should discuss opportunities for implementing the action steps relating to the reduction of homelessness identified in the Regional Analysis of Impediments, including:
  - Adding more emergency shelter beds in more locations across the region;
  - Creating more permanent supportive housing opportunities for the chronically homeless; and,
  - Expanding the mandate of the Homeless Coordinating Council and the Continuum of Care Board to include coordination with regional planning efforts.

## 2. Transportation Choice

Although single occupancy vehicles account for many of the trips in the region today, providing transportation alternatives is important. What if driving is not always as convenient or inexpensive as it is now? What if a flood damages a major bridge? What happens when a senior resident is no longer able to drive? Are friends, work, school, grocery stores, and other destinations still accessible? A variety of transportation options gives people different ways to access destinations, so they can still get around even if conditions change. Providing choice includes two key components: modes of transportation and the arrangement of destinations.

Choice means offering different modes for moving around the region — bicycling, walking, carpooling, carshare programs, links to regional rail and air networks, buses, and other public transportation options. It also means making these options convenient, safe, and affordable. For instance, adding a guaranteed ride home, like that found in the Des Moines Commuter Club, can make carpooling more attractive. Adding electric charging stations can make owning an electric vehicle more viable. Designing neighborhoods with a gridded network of streets provides more possible routes and can help spread traffic out. A telecommuting option offered regularly also can improve choice.

The desire to maintain an affordable cost of living for all residents necessitates equal access to transportation opportunities. It necessitates considering the relationship between housing, job centers, and transportation.

Communities can increase choice through thoughtful land use planning. Planning can help ensure that destinations both within and outside a neighborhood are more convenient to access. Linking the DART Forward 2035 Plan with The Tomorrow Plan is an example. Nodes and corridors, described in Initiative 1, support the implementation of new transportation choices. The initiative outlines approximately 40 higher-density, mixed-use nodes connected by multimodal corridors and is based on the corridors outlined in the DART Forward 2035 Plan.

Nodes and corridors provide sufficient density to support public transit. Increasing housing choice — the first resiliency element — can help support transportation choice by making public transit possible. Nodes are the parts of neighborhoods that have the greatest potential for public transit service and that will act as transfer points between multiple transportation modes. Corridors link neighborhoods to destinations — an adjacent neighborhood, a different part of the region, or even a different region entirely — via multiple modes.

The desire to maintain an affordable cost of living for all residents necessitates equal access to transportation opportunities. It necessitates considering the relationship between housing, job centers, and transportation. Cost of living measures need to consider the price of transportation, housing, and food, for example. The region should strive to provide strong connections between housing, job centers, and multiple transportation modes.

Transportation choice, however, is not just about getting from Point A to Point B. Transportation choice can help communities become healthier places to live. Bicycling and walking make residents healthier. Shorter commutes improve quality of life. Choosing shorter trips and alternative modes that generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions helps mitigate climate change and helps improve the health of the planet and residents. Like housing choice, providing transportation choice makes a community more attractive, and making a community a more desirable place to live helps it remain resilient over time.

#### Action Steps:

- Identify key neighborhood locations for pilot projects that encourage alternative modes of transportation:
  - Pedestrian-friendly retrofits;
  - Complete streets;
  - Traffic calming;
  - Bicycle facilities; and,
  - Mixed-use development near transit stops.
- The most appropriate type of pilot project will depend on the neighborhood type. For example, installing raised intersections as a traffic calming measure could help make bicycling and walking safer for neighborhood children, while adding bicycle lanes could encourage alternative modes of commuting to work or running errands.
- Ensure future MPO planning expands transportation choice.
- Include more stakeholders in the decision making of projects affecting adjacent communities and, in regional projects, affecting local communities. Ensure impacted parties are involved in deciding the location of projects and in discussions about mitigating any adverse impacts.
- Support The Tomorrow Plan through neighborhood/housing-related land use decisions and potential transit-supportive zoning that bolster the relationship between housing, job centers, and transportation.

### 3. Recreation + Retail

This element focuses on strengthening and supporting recreational and retail opportunities in neighborhoods. Neighborhood recreation and retail opportunities provide conveniently accessible amenities for residents, such as options for shopping, running errands, enjoying nightlife, and dining. Having these options nearby encourages walking and bicycling,





OHIO CITY FARM, CLEVELAND. JOB INCUBATOR, COMMUNITY EVENTS, URBAN LAND REUSE.  
Source: Ohio CityFarm



Source: LAND studio



Source: Keith Berr Productions, Inc.

reduces the need to drive, promotes active lifestyles, and offers employment opportunities for residents.

The location of recreation and retail opportunities within a neighborhood frequently corresponds with the existence of either a node or a corridor. The higher densities of these areas support small-scale neighborhood recreation and retail. Neighborhood nodes are particularly important in providing neighborhood recreation and retail options for local residents.

**Action Steps:**

- Update local zoning codes, if needed, to allow for recreation and retail opportunities in ways appropriate to neighborhood character.
- Encourage self-supported municipal improvement districts (SSMIDs) to strengthen ties with the local neighborhood.

**4. Education + Jobs**

Education and jobs are key components of good neighborhoods. Providing abundant opportunities within a neighborhood for quality education, meaningful employment, and lifelong learning opportunities helps attract and retain residents. Educational initiatives should enhance K-12 schools for neighborhood children, make access to community colleges or universities convenient for young adults, and provide adults with a wide range of educational opportunities, like language classes, basic education, and even art or cooking classes. High quality schools provide strong foundations for students to excel and later find work, even if economic conditions change.

Aspects of a strong neighborhood economy could include summer employment programs for youth, job training programs, living wage jobs suitable for community residents, and live/work units. Children are more likely to remain in or return to the neighborhood where they grew up if they can find a desirable job nearby. In addition to retaining existing residents, jobs and education can help attract new residents.

Jobs within a neighborhood are especially valuable for promoting resiliency, but not all kinds of jobs will be available in every neighborhood. Corridors connect neighborhoods to jobs outside of the neighborhood, especially to those found in nodes. In this way, corridors play an important role in linking residents to economic opportunity.

**Action Steps:**

- Expand the work of the Greater Des Moines Partnership to develop an economic gardening program focused on training and support for all types of business startups, including very small-scale entrepreneurship that might encourage sustainable business cycles within neighborhoods.
- Convene education experts from across the region and charge them with creating a lifelong learning system that enhance life skills and encourage entrepreneurial activity after graduating from K-12 schools.
- Support and expand after-school programs for neighborhood youth, including young adults (programs for older students could include job skills components to attract greater participation). For example, the After School Arts Program



(ASAP) offers supplemental arts education for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders in the City of Des Moines.

- Promote facility-sharing programs among schools and with community uses.
- Use Capital Crossroads “Cradle to Career” recommendations<sup>35</sup> for more general strategies for strengthening education and workforce development across the region. For example, Capital Crossroads recommendations with implications for neighborhoods include:
  - Enhance partnerships among Greater Des Moines education, training, government, private, and non-profit constituencies to foster positive academic results for students from “cradle to career;”
  - Develop a collaborative tutor-recruitment effort for Greater Des Moines schools; and,
  - Expand and better promote Central Iowa’s internship placement programs.

## 5. Assured Health and Safety

For an existing neighborhood to thrive over time, it must remain attractive to both existing and prospective residents. Safety and health are key aspects of that attractiveness.

Resilient neighborhoods are free of crime and enjoy a sense of safety that results partially from activated buildings and well-lit streets. Healthy environments ensure quality housing in safe locations and improve substandard housing.

Healthy environments also have clean air, soil, and water, and they support healthy lifestyles. Environmental quality is important because living near environmental hazards can negatively affect health. Legacy contamination from industry, toxic spills, lead poisoning, and air pollution can cause cancer, birth defects, cardiovascular and respiratory illness, and other adverse health impacts. Improving environmental quality, by contrast, can involve:

- Reducing releases of pollution into the air, water, and soil;
- Reducing the use of pesticides, fertilizer, and other chemicals;
- Undertaking habitat restoration projects;
- Remediating brownfields;
- Installing natural stormwater utilities; and,
- Promoting low impact development for new construction.

Lifestyle decisions like diet and exercise are key aspects of wellness. Neighborhoods should provide access to convenient recreation opportunities, affordable health care, and reasonably priced, healthy food. Healthy, active lifestyles help existing residents live longer and make a neighborhood attractive for new residents.

### Action Steps:

- Develop a resource guide for the management of vacant property, thus providing local governments with tools and suggestions for how to manage these types of properties. The guide should include information about maintenance best practices, code enforcement options, and potential reuse options, including infill, urban agriculture, and natural stormwater utilities. The guide should link local municipalities with available resources and be integrated with the clearinghouse outlined in Strategy 3D.
- Explore the creation of a land bank authority in Greater Des Moines.
- Encourage communication between neighborhoods, municipalities, and the larger region to identify sites for projects that promote healthy lifestyles (e.g., trails, parks, community centers, aquatic centers, sidewalks).
- Dedicate 25 percent of Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funds for Safe Routes to School<sup>36</sup> projects that improve pedestrian safety along highly traveled student routes.
- Encourage neighborhoods to take steps that make walking and bicycling to school safer and more convenient. The Walking School bus serves as one example.
- Encourage partnerships with nonprofit organizations and nonprofit housing developers like Habitat for Humanity that replace substandard housing with units that meet basic health, safety, and welfare standards.
- Undertake local studies to identify food deserts in the region, and work with existing area businesses to increase local access to healthy food.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles. The Iowa Healthiest State Initiative includes many ideas for creating healthy communities. For example, the initiative’s Live Healthy Iowa program encourages residents to choose active lifestyles, and the Blue Zone Project strives “to make healthy choices easier through permanent changes to environment, policy, and social networks.”<sup>37</sup>

## 6. Strong Sense of Community

Creating and enhancing a neighborhood's sense of place can strengthen social ties between residents and can help the neighborhood remain intact over time. The people who live in a neighborhood, the activities that take place in a neighborhood, and the physical environment of a place all shape community identity. A neighborhood may include residents with a shared heritage, collective interest, or common school district. Special events, such as annual festivals or summer movie nights, can provide unique moments that define neighborhoods. Arts and culture help increase a sense of community while also bringing substantial economic benefits.

A neighborhood's physical characteristics, like building style and street pattern, also define it. Distinct landmarks like churches, historic buildings, parks, natural features, art installations, and special streets all contribute to neighborhood character. Edges and boundaries are important; they distinguish the neighborhood from its surroundings. While edges might be sharp physical boundaries like a highway or a river, they do not always have to be. The physical or social changes between neighborhoods may be quite subtle, and residents may have different perceptions about where their neighborhood begins or ends.

Importantly, resilient neighborhoods are welcoming and inclusive. Creating distinct neighborhoods does not mean developing enclaves; edges should not be defined with tall walls and gated entrances. Neighborhoods need a wide range of people to thrive over time. Promoting both shared interests and diverse viewpoints is important.

### Action Steps:

- Identify opportunities to simultaneously hold related series of events in neighborhoods across the region to strengthen both individual neighborhoods and the region-wide community.
- Pursue the potential designation of arts districts across Greater Des Moines as a strategy to enhance local arts and culture.
- Improve the physical and social character of a place with inexpensive solutions that can offer potentially high rewards with low risk.
- As part of the Neighborhood Challenge, encourage neighborhoods to study the qualities that give them their character. Community energy should be harnessed to target specific neighborhood projects and to motivate volunteers to implement the vision. For instance, *A Pattern Book for West Des Moines Neighborhoods* guides exterior home improvements so

that the design integrity of older neighborhoods is preserved. Other neighborhoods could adopt similar approaches to maintain neighborhood character.

## 7. Minimal Environmental Impact

Neighborhoods impact and are impacted by the natural environment. The long-term resiliency of a neighborhood depends on its relationship with its surrounding environment. Initiative 2 provides more information about the links between development, the environment, regional cooperation, and resiliency at the regional scale. Positive interactions are more likely when neighborhoods create places by conserving land and resources and by improving environmental quality. Promoting resiliency through reduced environmental impact involves two key pieces:

1. Conserving land and resources
2. Planning for natural disasters

First, neighborhoods can conserve land, energy, water, and physical materials through overall development patterns, infrastructure decisions, and building design. Conservation might take the form of energy efficient buildings, land conservation that preserves habitat for wildlife, recycling programs and composting opportunities, water-efficient landscaping practices, or development patterns that encourage walking and reduce the need to drive. In existing neighborhoods, additional natural stormwater utilities that reduce runoff can improve water quality. Individuals and families can help by making decisions to reduce overall consumption, use less water and energy, increase recycling and composting, and reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips.

Conserving resources helps avoid shortages, especially during times of scarcity. For instance, encouraging water conservation as standard practice can prevent more drastic water use restrictions during droughts.

Furthermore, reducing environmental impacts can yield economic benefits. Conservation can reduce the need to build new infrastructure, allowing for significant cost savings. Finally, a community's natural setting (overall landscape, vegetation, and wildlife) is often a critical component of its character. Preserving identity depends on respecting the environment. Preserving the environment today helps preserve it for future generations.

Second, natural disaster preparation and mitigation can help communities reduce the likelihood and severity of damage. Neighborhood risks include flooding, fire, ice, wind, severe weather (tornadoes, hail, snowstorms, etc.), drought, and mine subsidence.<sup>38</sup> Evaluating where and how damage is likely to occur can reveal opportunities for reducing the risk of damage. Some

parts of a neighborhood, like a floodplain, may be at greater risk for damage. Keeping future development out of these areas will help avoid damage when a natural disaster does occur. The greenways described in Initiative 2 keep this goal in mind. Strategies must also address existing houses and businesses located within floodplains and identify opportunities to reduce the risk of damage to people and structures. The City of Des Moines undertook a limited voluntary buy-out program in a few flood areas following the severe flooding in 2008.<sup>39</sup> Similar programs or policy changes can help remove existing residents and business owners from floodplains on a voluntary basis.

In addition to limited buyout programs, the City of Des Moines has mitigated flood damage through a substantial investment in protective levees and other flood protection improvements at the Birdland levee, the Riverpoint area south of downtown, West Grand Avenue/Walnut Creek area, and other flood-prone areas. The City of Ankeny provides an example of upstream best practices planning in its Fourmile Creek Blue Belt project.

Some types of damage may be more likely than others, and measures like updated building codes can help protect against these. Communities can also take more proactive steps to reduce the intensity of the damage. For instance, natural stormwater utilities and low impact development, which decrease stormwater runoff, can be helpful tools for flood mitigation. Readiness will become increasingly important in the future, as climate change leads to changes in weather patterns and more frequent and severe natural disasters. The Midwest is likely to see increased frequency and severity of heat waves, drought, and floods.<sup>40</sup> Resiliency is about anticipating these changes and taking proactive steps now. Resiliency must also include reducing greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change.

### Action Steps:

- Use regional infrastructure planning to guide development and redevelopment to areas that help conserve open space and agricultural land. See Initiative 4 for more information.
- Encourage neighborhoods to review a municipality's disaster readiness plan and understand how their neighborhood can take steps to be more prepared in the event of a disaster.
- Work with MidAmerican Energy, Consumers Energy, and other power providers to create a region-wide standard for more efficient street lighting types and levels.
- Take part in a Mayor's Team Challenge to reduce municipal buildings energy usage.
- Work with Metro Waste Authority to create more opportunities

## SAY NO TO H<sub>2</sub>O?

In May 2013, Des Moines Water Works asked its customers to “manage seasonal irrigation for several weeks, even as drought conditions throughout the state continue[d] to improve.”<sup>41</sup>

Water Works CEO and General Manager Bill Stowe stated, “Although drought conditions are no longer an immediate threat to central Iowa, increased nitrate levels from agricultural run-off, coupled with high demand, puts Des Moines Water Works in a difficult position. With the assistance of all metro customers using water wisely, Des Moines Water Works can effectively and efficiently use the available water supply to provide safe drinking water that does not violate nitrate standards.”

According to Water Works, “due to the recent historic nitrate concentrations found in the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers, Des Moines Water Works is not currently pulling water from either river. The utility is able to meet current demand by relying on other water sources, including Maffitt Reservoir, Crystal Lake, and aquifer storage wells. If demand increases, Des Moines Water Works will have no choice but to start taking water from the heavily polluted rivers, and may be unable to remove nitrate in a manner that keeps up with high demand.”

for neighborhood collection centers for recycling and composting if curbside programs do not already exist. Evaluate whether to process these items locally or at regional hubs.

- Convene a technical group to evaluate, revise, and recommend the adoption of a comprehensive regional standard along the lines of the Iowa Stormwater Management Manual, with additions that address FEMA National Flood Insurance Program requirements and EPA erosion, sediment control, and post-construction requirements.
- Create a regional framework for the evaluation of downstream impacts of upstream improvements. The Ankeny Blue Belt project is a good example of this.
- On a voluntary basis, remove flood prone properties from the flood plain and return the land to uses that support flood mitigation. Incorporate the already completed work for the Polk County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and expand it to include Warren, Dallas, and Madison counties. FEMA and other flood buy-out funding could be helpful resources.

## 8. Self-Sufficiency

Neighborhoods typically rely on outside sources to meet basic needs like food and energy. Supplementing outside sources with local products can provide security against outside changes. Food can be supplied through community gardens or farm shares, which link local consumers with local farmers. Local food reduces transportation costs and the need to use preservatives and excess packaging. In the energy sector, electricity can be produced throughout the neighborhood with wind turbines or solar panels.

Self-sufficiency at the neighborhood scale helps increase resiliency at the regional scale by providing additional local capacity in regional food, energy, and other networks. Many aspects of neighborhood resiliency touch on these same aspects and have similar goals of increasing local jobs and locally produced energy and food.

### Action Steps:

- Continue to encourage local spending. Spending locally creates greater economic impact and keeps more money within the community. The Greater Des Moines Partnership's Buy Into the Circle program encourages Greater Des Moines area businesses to shift five percent of their current out-of-area spending back into the local economy. The Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign encourages the purchasing of locally grown food. The same idea could be expanded beyond local food and business spending to encourage residents to support locally owned businesses as well.
- Support the development of regional food plans and of urban agriculture in neighborhoods. The success of local farmers'

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markets shows that interest in local food is already high. Hosting nearly 300 vendors and drawing 20,000 visitors each Saturday, the Downtown Des Moines Farmers' Market has been listed as one of the nation's largest, best, and "must-see" farmers markets.<sup>42</sup> Build on the work of Eat Greater Des Moines and similar organizations and continue to identify opportunities to link farmers in central Iowa with local consumers. Buying local food lowers transportation costs, reduces the need for preservatives and packaging, and supports the agricultural economy. See Strategy 3D for more information.

- Convene a technical group to develop a model code or code amendment that provides for water saving and re-use techniques, such as local water storage (like cisterns or rain barrels), and for energy production. This could include suggestions for model language additions to local zoning codes, as necessary, that would allow for alternative energy production in ways that are consistent with neighborhood character.
- Ensure power companies accommodate a two-way flow of energy, both distributing electricity and allowing for individual inputs into the system. This will enable distributed energy production.

## 9. Inclusive Governance

Residents have their own ideas about what factors make their community or neighborhood successful, as well as ideas about what efforts would make it a better place. Decision making at the community and neighborhood levels should be inclusive, transparent, and effective. Inclusive governance requires diverse, engaged residents, and competent local leaders. Decision making groups should be representative of the population of the community or neighborhood so that decisions help the whole, not just one sector of the population. Successful governance also requires the capability to implement residents' visions, which may require volunteers, donations, or other funding sources.

By helping to increase the cohesion of residents and the sense of community, governance can be a key factor in resiliency. Local enthusiasm, vision, and leadership are critical to sustaining and improving communities and neighborhoods. Local initiatives can often respond to desires and concerns more quickly and effectively than high levels of government can.

### Action Steps:

- Identify opportunities to create or expand leadership development within communities and neighborhoods. Inventory existing leadership programs and explore opportunities for connections to common programming. Assist in linking community and neighborhood leadership with programs at schools and community colleges. Opportunities for

intergenerational interaction and learning are especially important.

- Support the implementation of Capital Crossroads recommendations for cultivating local leadership:
  - Develop a program that offers a credential to confirm potential leaders' acquisition of key knowledge and skills that would support their work in the community.
  - Optimize young professional networking and programming.
  - Engage students in next-generation leadership development efforts.
  - Develop a formalized regional mentorship program.
  - Create a minority leadership development program to ensure that the region's leadership reflects the demographics of the community.
- Develop a regional grant review process to help neighborhoods undertake projects that further goals of The Tomorrow Plan. For additional information and a proposed review process, see Strategy 4D.
- Develop a mini-grant program to support cross-boundary community or neighborhood initiatives. Awards could go to projects that benefit two or more communities or neighborhoods.
- Identify a suite of metrics for community and neighborhood resiliency, and encourage communities and neighborhoods to track these data points. Identify which metrics are required and which are optional, ensuring that data is readily available. Metrics allow for consistent benchmarking and tracking of key data to gauge progress over time.
- Use a new or existing regional forum for identifying cross-boundary improvement projects that are beneficial to all.
- Coordinate with local planning initiatives on cross-boundary projects.

## Additional Action Steps

In addition to the action steps specific to each characteristic of resiliency, increasing cooperation among communities and neighborhoods in the region is an important component of overall regional sustainability. The following actions will help support cooperation and coordination:

## TURNING GREEN INTO GREEN

According to an August 2013 report from the *Business Record*, Hubbell Realty Company took a risk in 2006 by building its first conservation community in Grimes. The conservation community featured smaller lots with houses closer to streets and to one another, making way for larger expanses of green space. Additionally, stormwater was managed by planting prairie grasses and wildflowers, both of which have deep roots that soak up water runoff. Given the success of the Grimes conservation community, similar areas have been developed in Altoona, Carlisle, Johnston, and Wauke.

“When it comes to sustainability, when it comes to green concepts, that part of the environment, the [development] market understands that part. A conservation development where they can actually see prairie grass and see how it works, they understand that,” said Rick Tollakson, Hubbell’s President and CEO.

Between 2008 and 2011, conservation lots averaged 43 percent of all Hubbell lot sales. In 2012, they accounted for 56 percent of Hubbell lot sales. In 2013, Hubbell expects that 60 percent of its lot sales will be in conservation communities.