

05

Neighborhoods

VISION

Marion will be home to safe, attainable housing for people of all ages, income levels, and abilities. The neighborhoods in Marion will be intentionally planned with enjoyable parks and amenities that are accessible from all modes of transportation. Marion will be a community that people want to be involved in and feel proud to call home.

INTRODUCTION

Housing frames Marion’s past and is paramount for Marion’s future. The growth of neighborhoods in Marion spurs the need for more community services and housing to keep up with demand. People in Marion express desires for many housing types as illustrated in the Future Land Use map. The context for how these homes get provided or sustained is critical for meeting the vision of other parts of the Comprehensive Plan. Marion’s needs include:

- **Households with children**
- **Older adults**
- **New entrants**
- **Attainability for the workforce**

Like the Future Land Use map, the policies to meet housing goals are multi-faceted. They are not meant to enforce regulations for artificial markets but allow flexibility. Marion will be flexible to market demand and how the market can fit into the community vision for the future. Accommodating the market means accommodating new resident demands and existing resident needs, as well as the developer’s ability to help meet those demands and needs.

HOUSING 2024 SNAPSHOT


HOUSING OCCUPANCY

Owner-Occupied			Renter-Occupied		
	2010	2022		2010	2022
	75.8%	78.3% Marion		24.2%	21.7% Marion
	72.7%	74.1% Linn County		27.3%	27.3% Linn County
	72.1%	71.5% Iowa		27.9%	27.9% Iowa


HOUSING VALUES

Median Value			Median Contract Rent		
	2010	2022		2010	2022
	\$140k	\$208k Marion		\$474	\$729 Marion
	\$136k	\$189k Linn County		\$512	\$739 Linn County
	\$119k	\$182k Iowa		\$489	\$745 Iowa

VACANCY

% Vacant Units		
	2010	2022
	6.3%	4.1% Marion
	6.6%	6.8% Linn County
	8.6%	9.0% Iowa

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

% Cost Burdened Households, 2022			
	Renters	Owners	
	42.9%	13.7%	Marion
	43.6%	16.9%	Linn County
	43.4%	16.4%	Iowa

Median Year Built

1991

Median Household Size

2.45

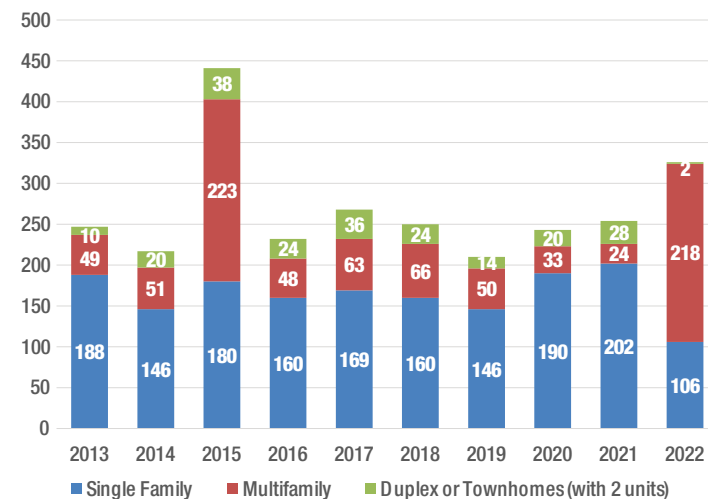
| Source: American Community Survey

NEIGHBORHOOD GROWTH

Forecasting future land use needs shows up to 3,800 acres of residential land would support the forecasted population growth. Marion is growing faster than many cities in Iowa. New neighborhoods are taking shape in all directions, as Figure 5.1 shows. New neighborhoods will continue to form and this Plan can shape the experience of people living in these neighborhoods. Equally important are the neighborhoods built before 1970, which have different needs and roles in Marion's neighborhood choices.

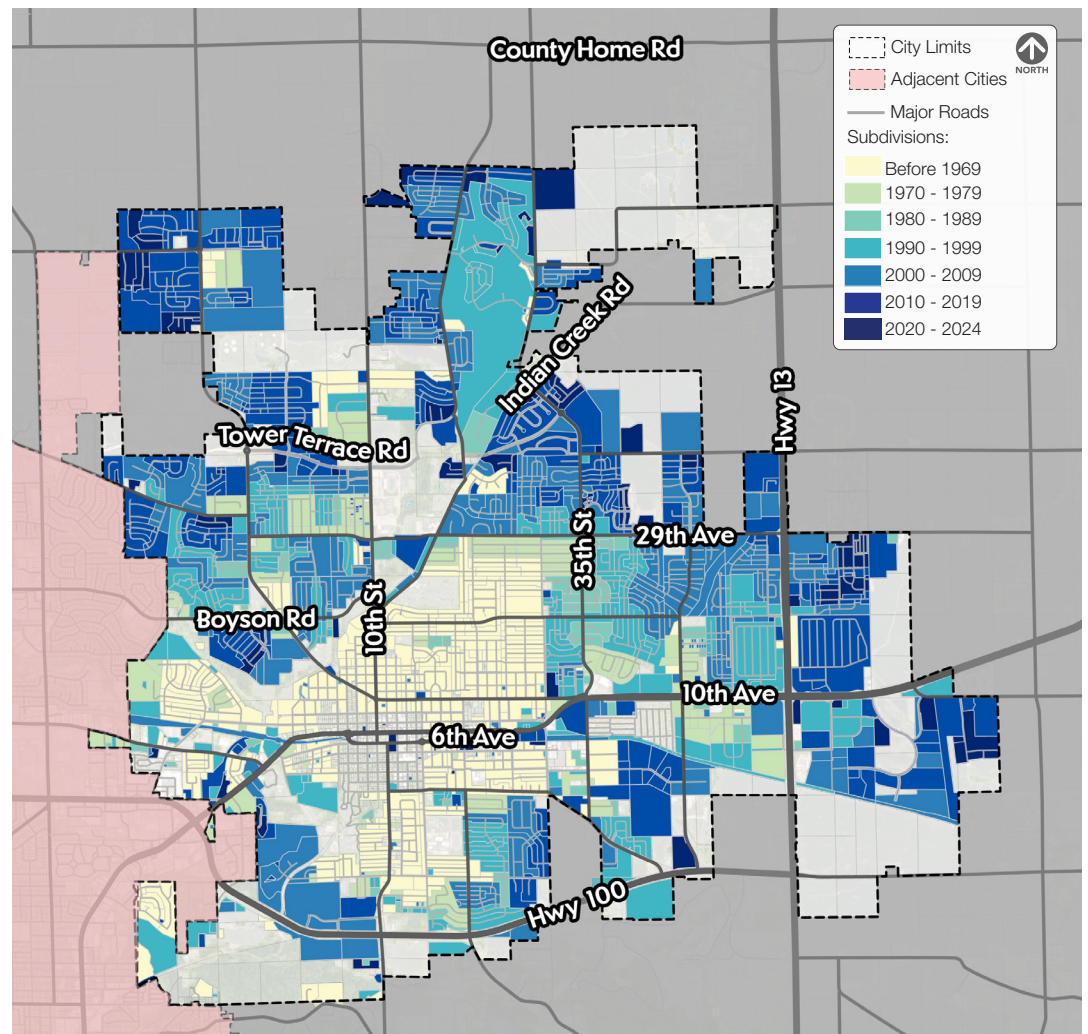
Additionally, past trends skew towards more single-family residential homes than other homes. More housing types in Marion would offer more opportunities to meet a wider variety of people's needs and preferences as Marion grows.

BUILDING ACTIVITY IN MARION



| Source: City of Marion, Planning Department

FIGURE 5.1 : SUBDIVISION GROWTH



| Source: Linn County

NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS

1.

Support attainable housing options through partnerships, policy, and public incentives

2.

Expand options for older adults to age in the community

3.

Have home variety across living types and price points

4.

Broadly maintain and upgrade core neighborhoods

NEIGHBORHOOD POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Support attainable housing options through partnerships, policy, and public incentives.

Base policies on the understanding that delivery of attainable units at lower price points requires public or community-based assistance to achieve economic feasibility. The 2022 Housing Analysis shows a need for over 350 deep subsidy products through 2030 alone.

- **Review and update ordinances and building codes, where possible, for barriers to housing diversity.** Traditional zoning ordinances value low density and separation of different land uses. The possibility of tiny homes, accessory dwelling units, lot sizes narrower than 50 feet wide, or other housing types should not require special approvals in most residential zoning districts.
- **Coordinate with private developers to discuss barriers to building mixed-income developments.** Developers often have the best insight on the market, and can help identify issues with being able to provide lower price points. Often, this requires pooling funds from many sources for the greater good of the community. The public and private sectors should work together to identify additional barriers, and create a plan for how to overcome them.

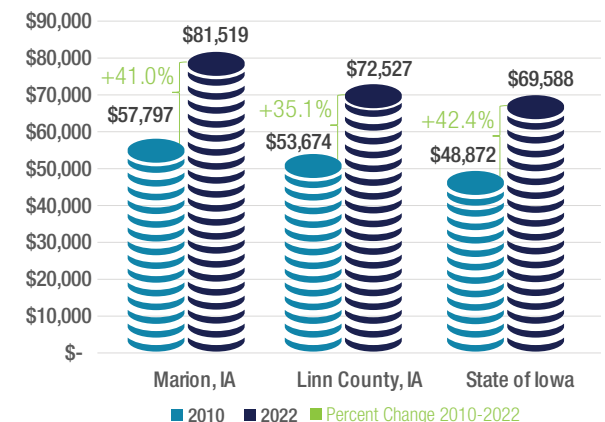
Expand options for older adults to age in the community.

Independent and active older adults in Marion seek settings that provide these same urban features, but without the problems of climbing stairs and maintaining yards. The 2022 Housing Analysis shows a demand for more senior housing across several home types.

- **Encourage through incentives that large scale projects to incorporate accessible design standards into at least a portion of units.** The City should review its codes as they relate to housing. Accessible design standards include features that are hard to add later. Therefore, homes can easily be adapted for aging or physical disabilities and should be considered as requirements in certain developments.
- **Consider Universal Design standards for at least a portion of all units within a more substantial project or subdivision.** Closely tied to accessible design, universal design means that every aspect of a home from the bathroom to the garage is more convenient and comfortable to use for every individual, not labeled by age or ability.

There is a demand for nearly 2,800 homes by 2030 alone, and demand for nearly 700 senior oriented units across price points.

Median Household Income



People Living Below Poverty Level



| Source: American Community Survey

Have home variety across living types and price points.

People in Marion understand the increasing growth pressures within the city. Directing this growth for variety offers the development community and the City the opportunity to evolve as preferences and needs evolve. This is built into the Marion Future Land Use map. Most importantly, different home types are interconnected and not isolated by large distances from other uses and services.

- **Stay tuned to the market.** Marion needs to understand what's coming or what might be preventing the market from providing homes that people desire. The City and metro are growing fast and in high demand. The City should communicate and meet regularly with local and regional private market developers to understand changing demand and barriers to building desired housing types.
- **Update regulations to align with the Future Land Use plan.** Adjustments to zoning regulations should encourage moderately priced housing forms in new developments and on infill lots. These forms include small lot single-family development, duplexes or two-unit structures that may include an owner-occupant, auxiliary dwelling units on appropriately sized lots, and smaller townhome or rowhouse structures.

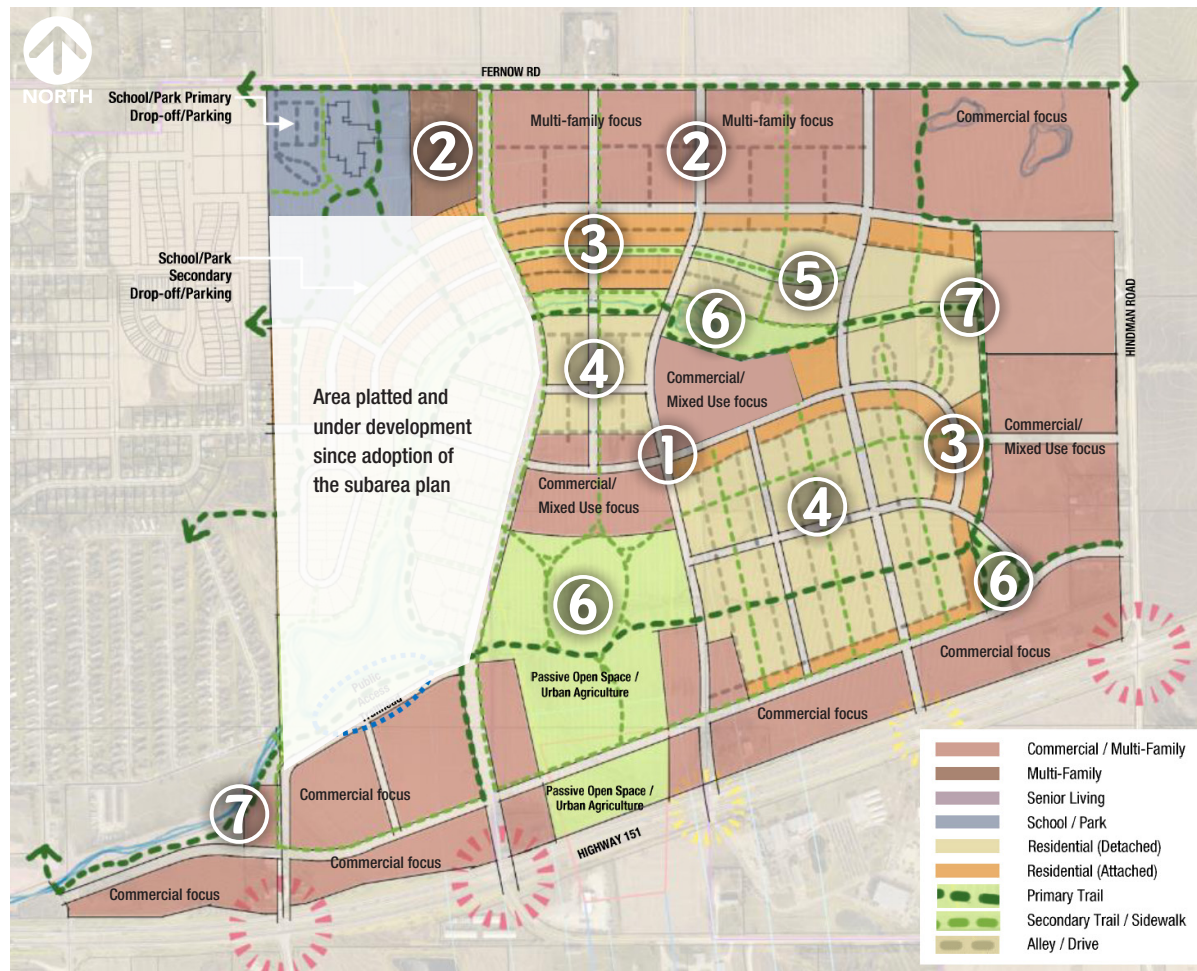
- **Accommodate innovation.** Policy should encourage and moderate the risks of non-conventional or emerging forms of residential development that accommodate emerging markets but are unfamiliar to many conventional developers and builders.
- **Use data from the most recent Housing Needs Analysis to develop & encourage policy that provides mixed-use neighborhoods.** Mixed-use areas are a significant focus of the Future Land Use map. Integrating complementary uses can help encourage activity at various times of day, increasing the security, vitality, and number of people using public spaces. Coupled with the design guidance for centers and corridors, policy should not discourage integrating services near and within neighborhoods.

Mixed-Use Neighborhood Transition Guide

1. **Mixed-Use Intersections.** Commercial uses along high traffic streets.
2. **High-Density Residential.** Apartments, fourplexes, or other multi-unit uses border commercial and mixed-use areas.
3. **Medium-Density Residential.** Row home, townhome, and flat style development along local streets that buffers from high density residential.
4. **Lower Density Transitions.** The transition from medium density residential approaches single-unit styles.
5. **Alley Development.** The space separation that alleys provide for rear parking also allows homes to be built closer to the street.
6. **Greenspace.** With increased density, greenspace provides separation opportunities and outdoor areas for those living in higher density buildings that do not have yards.
7. **Pedestrian Routes.** Pedestrian connections to adjacent development are required for community wide walkability.

POLICY APPLICATION: MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOOD

FIGURE 5.2: FERNOW ROAD SUBAREA PLAN



POLICY APPLICATION: CORE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION

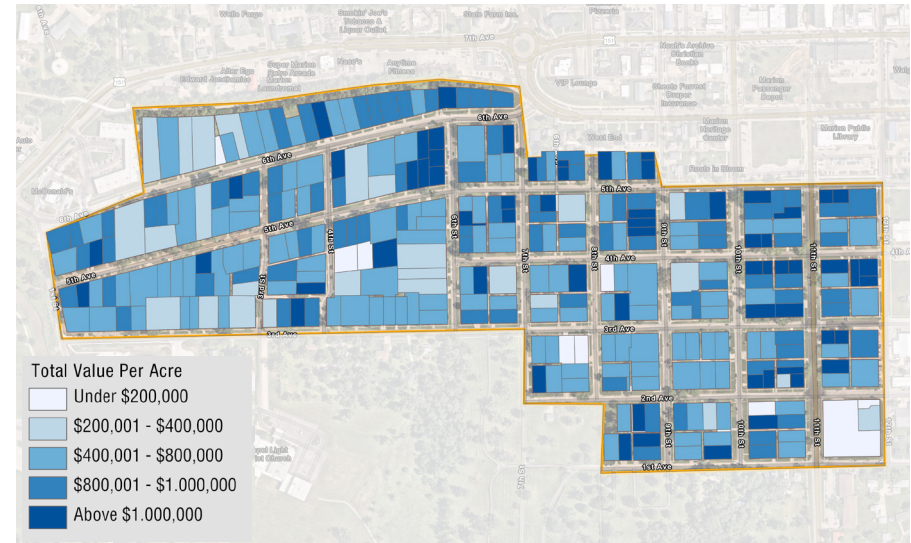
Broadly maintain and upgrade core neighborhoods.

Marion's housing stock is not as old as other cities in Iowa. However, an estimated 30% of Marion homes were built before 1970 and another 34% from 1970 through the 1990s. These are homes reaching significant maintenance needs and remodels to meet today's housing preferences, if not already. Almost all of these homes are in core Marion neighborhoods north and south of the Central Corridor and are more attainable from a price perspective than other parts of Marion.

The fabric and character of the core neighborhoods are important to people, of which housing is key. The following policies and strategies should frame Marion's approach to maintenance, reinvestment, and at times redevelopment. Marion may become a CDBG entitlement community in the planning horizon (pop. <50,000) which would open up Federal funding streams for many types of programs.

- **Complete Studies of Core Neighborhoods.** Specific neighborhood studies should identify where maintenance and rehabilitation funds can be most effective. These neighborhoods have the benefit of already installed infrastructure and can have a similar home value on a per acre basis as new neighborhoods.
- **Neighborhood Engagement Programs.** Invest in effective neighborhood engagement programs involving partnerships of the City, residents, and non-profit groups. Consider developing formal neighborhood associations that can help lead outreach and build social connections.
- **Identify programming that can leverage federal, state, and local funds to assist on neighborhood redevelopment or improvements.**

Targeting efforts and resources to select areas over time is more effective in building momentum towards noticeable results. Figure 5.3 on the next page shows where a core neighborhood program might start southwest of Uptown. Several factors make this neighborhood a candidate for conservation policies and incentives.



| Source: Linn County, RDG Planning & Design

Characteristics

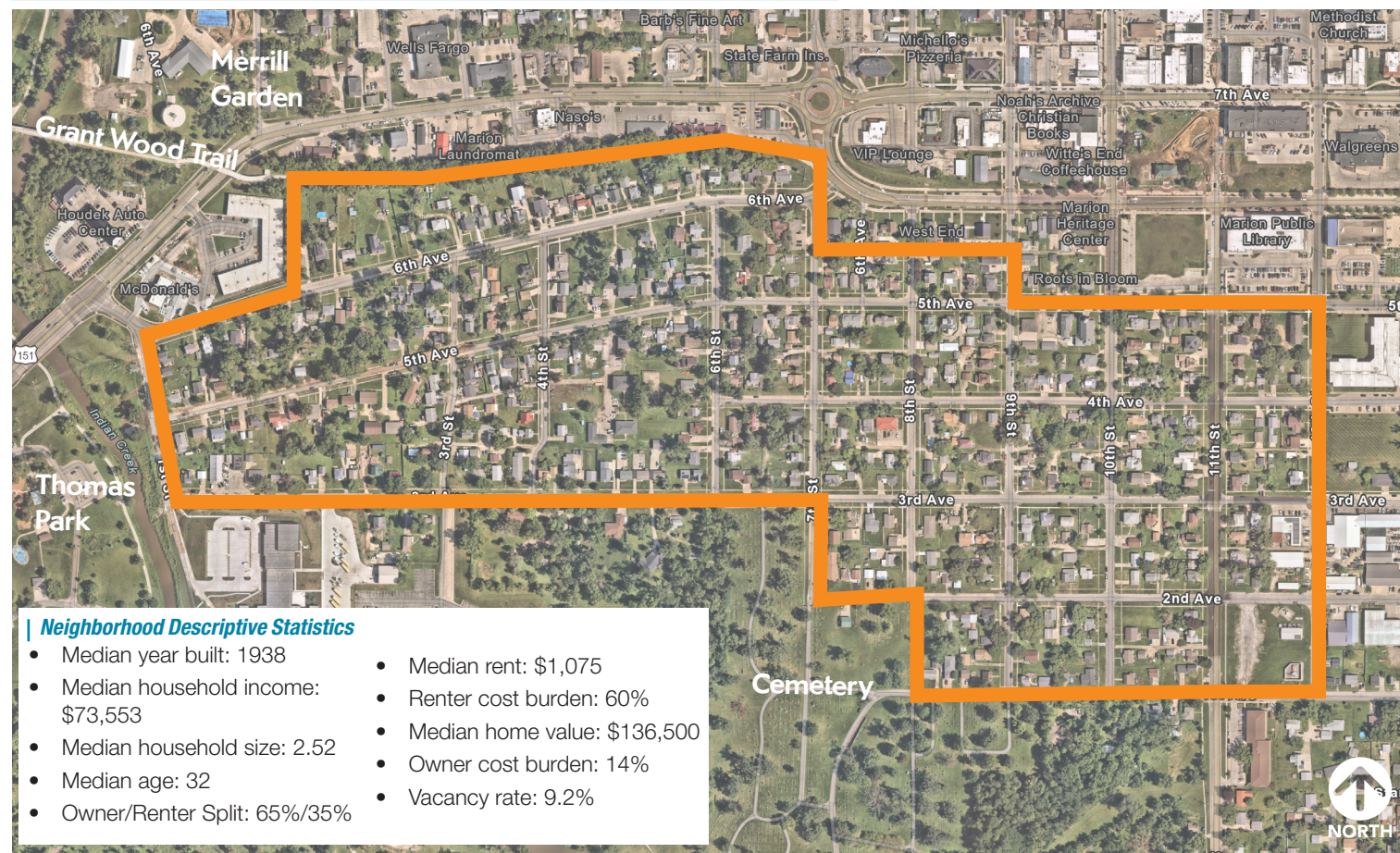
- Predominantly built as a single-family neighborhood (<85% of housing units) between Uptown and Indian Creek with some duplexes or larger homes split into multiple units.
- Older houses of various sizes and conditions. Rehabilitation need is scattered.
- Originally platted lots mostly range from 7,000-7,500 square feet. Some splits over time result in many smaller lots as small as 3,000 square feet.
- Proximity to Uptown, Marion High School, parks, and major transportation routes are significant assets.
- A broadly younger demographic with children and/or roommates.

Policy Directions

There is some evidence of home renovation in the area. However, home values overall are low and may be undervalued given prevailing household incomes. This creates a lower incentive for homeowners when they feel there will not be a return on their investment or property managers who cannot or do not want to raise rents. Younger populations in the neighborhood may also be strapped with other expenses such as loans, children, and transportation.

- **Reinvestment approach.** Maintenance and conservation policies, good market for rehabilitation programs.
 - Smaller scale city rehabilitation programs are appropriate to encourage incremental reinvestment in homes.
 - Explore methods to create an acquisition/rehab/resale program that can leverage the lower home values.
 - Create incentives or policies that discourage breaking up single-family homes into multiple living units.
- **Redevelopment approach**
 - Try to keep redevelopment to properties that are beyond repair.
- **Community building approach**
 - Maintain proactive community relationships between all residents and city staff.
 - Engage the neighborhood with events in Uptown to increase pride in where they live.
 - Evaluate ways to maintain the affordability of homes in the area as reinvestment occurs and the popularity of being close to Uptown grows.

FIGURE 5.3: NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION POLICY AREA



Source: 2018-2022 ACS*; Linn County Assessor (*Census block group does not exactly align with the policy area boundary)

