Study Purpose

Explore and identify opportunities for the City of Minnetonka to increase the diversity of single family housing prices and sizes, in light of changing demographics, an aging housing stock, and limited availability of redevelopable land.

Findings

1. Mid-Priced Housing

Homes priced between $200k - $350k were identified as affordable for families within or moving to Minnetonka. However, there is a significant mismatch between the low availability of updated properties and the pricing of these homes that is keeping young families from “moving-up” and baby boomers from downsizing to properties with less upkeep.

2. Design Values and Preferences

Through the use of various design tools, values and preferences of suburban homeowners can be met while still creating a housing product that is desirable to buyers and feasible for a small parcel.

Featured Case Study:
Suburban Charleston, South Carolina

Home designs in I’On Village, a suburban community of Charleston, South Carolina, incorporate a variety of traditional techniques to layer space, including two-story front porches on nearly every home, which allows residents to choose the level of privacy they would like to maintain while enjoying their outdoor, semi-private spaces. The lower level is ideal for saying hello to neighbors as they walk by, which reinforces positive relationships. Similarly, the upper level is perfect for relaxing with a cup of coffee without the threat of being bothered.

I’On Village utilizes narrow streets, short setbacks, and ample landscaping to create the perception of a beautiful outdoor room. Even though the public is in close proximity to the homes, privacy is reinforced by the narrow lots, boulevard trees, and landscaping. Complementing the narrow street layout, the deep and narrow parcels are a highly efficient use of space, especially due to the full use of the side yards, which are frequently underutilized in traditional lot configurations. Additional design concepts are displayed below.

Recommendations

1. Focus on Meeting Values and Preferences

The City of Minnetonka’s goal to diversifying the housing stock by providing small-lot, mid-priced housing for middle market buyers (young family and baby boomer age groups) will be most plausibly met by creating an attractive housing product which matches the social and physical values of the buyers and the community.

2. Pursue Small-lot Development:

In order for the City to provide a housing product which is attractive and relatively affordable for the targeted demographic groups, the City of Minnetonka needs to proactively pursue medium density housing development opportunities throughout the community.

3. Create an Intentional, Interwoven Design:

The way to effectively develop the desired housing stock diversity, target the desired middle market buyers, and meaningfully incorporate values of suburban residents (e.g., safety, beauty, privacy, positive relationships) is to intentionally use design as a solution. Deep and narrow lots, pervious paving materials, well-landscaped buffers, and dedicated community spaces, among other features, will help create a beautiful, desirable product.

4. Utilize the Design Toolkit & Engage the Community:

The specific tools discussed in the study’s design toolkit and engagement process provide the City of Minnetonka a launching point from which to begin the public engagement process, starting with providing education about density benefits and misperceptions. Ultimately, however the City plans to incorporate the tools and findings of this study into future land use and development, it must always act on the principle that public engagement (and buy-in) are essential.

Interested in Additional Information?

This project was completed as part of PA 8202: Neighborhood Revitalization, a course at the University of Minnesota, with support from the Resilient Communities Project (RCP). RCP is an initiative of the Sustainability Faculty Network at the University of Minnesota, with funding and administrative support provided by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and the Institute on the Environment.