

## **Executive Summary**

The "Old Forest Neighborhood Profile and Analysis" was developed by a team of four MSU Urban and Regional Planning students for the Old Forest Neighborhood Association. With the assistance of the MSU Extension Lansing office, the partnership between the Urban and Regional Planning Program and the Old Forest Neighborhood was formed.

This study lays the groundwork for future revitalization efforts in the Old Forest Neighborhood. It consists of a demographic profile of the neighborhood, a list of problems and issues as identified by the community, a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis, and a historic district feasibility study. Short and long-term recommendations, which address the ways in which the community can achieve their goals, are also included.

The Old Forest Neighborhood study area boundaries are Martin Luther King (MLK) Boulevard and Seymour Street, defining the west and east borders; Willow Street and Saginaw Street form the north and south boundaries. The boundaries form the borders for Census Tract blocks 3 and 4, from which some of the data was derived. The following information summarizes the neighborhood's unique characteristics and was used to make recommendations for the report.

- Old Forest is racially diverse, claiming higher percentages of minorities than the city of Lansing.
- With 75 percent of its population 44 years old or younger, Old Forest can be considered a relatively young community.
- Income levels vary tremendously throughout the neighborhood, but when compared to Lansing, Old Forest has a higher percentage of low-income residents. Thirty percent of residents earn \$ 14,999/year or less.
- Approximately 20 percent of Old Forest's population lives at or below the poverty line of \$10,000/year.
- In recent years, the percentage of renter-occupied housing units has significantly increased from 57.9 percent in 1990 to 71 percent in 2001.
- The overall physical conditions of the neighborhood's housing stock ranges from fair to good. Fifty-eight percent of residences had only minor exterior damage and 22 percent had no damage at all.
- Seventy-three percent of the housing stock is historic (built prior to 1949). Therefore the development of a historic district is a possibility.
- Criminal activity is present in the neighborhood. On average, 33 crimes were reported every month in the year 2000.
- Environmental conditions are generally good for the area, but there is the presence of several leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs) within the neighborhood boundaries.

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A table summary of the SWOT analysis performed by the Practicum Team is listed below.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Young population Institutions and organizations Proximity to downtown and Old Town Traffic flow along major arterial roads Historic character of buildings Parkland and open space	Poverty levels Deteriorated housing stock Saginaw Street commercial district Criminal Activity
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Historic district. designation Rent-to-own housing Demand for restaurants, grocery stores, and other service-oriented businesses Resident involvement	Illegal activity Deteriorating physical elements High rentership of homes

Recommendations were based upon the data in the report, the housing assessment, resident interviews, and the SWOT analysis. The following is a summary of the recommendations.

### **Social Recommendations**

- Encourage more resident involvement in the neighborhood. As noted in the community survey results, there is a particular need to reach out to the youth and renter populations.
- Utilize existing resources (institutions, neighborhood groups, etc.) to assist community in organizing recreational events or hosting neighborhood forums.
- Implement a neighborhood crime watch program. The neighborhood can benefit from the joint efforts of two neighborhoods by correlating crime watch activities with the Walnut Neighborhood Association.

### **Housing Recommendations**

- Develop a training program with the City or a similar public agency that will educate landlords about neighborhood responsibility.
- Require landlords with excessive fines to get involved in the community by attending neighborhood meetings and doing community service.
- Encourage landlords to follow uniform and fair standards for screening potential tenants.
- Educate renters about available resources for owning a home, particularly in the Old Forest Neighborhood. Local non-profit groups, such as the Franklin Street Housing Commission, provide financial assistance to low-income residents interested in owning their own home. (References: "Consolidated Strategy and Plan Submission" or "The Greater Lansing Neighborhood Handbook")

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- Develop home maintenance education programs for residents.
- Provide tools for residents to borrow for home maintenance activities.

### **Environmental Recommendations**

- Encourage residents to contact the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and non-profit environmental groups (Michigan Environmental Council) for information on local and statewide environmental issues.
- Advise residents to read publications such as Recommendations for Michigan's LUST Program and Citizen's Guide to Natural Resources and the Environment to increase their knowledge on environmental regulations.
- Organize a neighborhood environmental group that promotes public awareness of community environmental issues (such as LUSTs), plans neighborhood clean-ups and beautification events, and encourages resident participation in recycling and composting.

### **Commercial District Recommendations**

- Conduct resident survey on commercial district to determine the types of businesses desired by residents.
- Develop a diverse commercial district by attracting a variety of businesses (in accordance with the needs of the community represented in the above survey).
- Improve aesthetics of district by adding landscaping, street benches, and additional trash receptacles.

### **Traffic and Roads Recommendations**

- Allow parking along Saginaw Street to encourage patronage of commercial district businesses.
- Remove meters from parking lots to encourage patronage of businesses. Construct additional crosswalk signals on major intersections, such as, MLK Boulevard and Saginaw Street.
- Repair crumbling, potholed sidewalks that threaten the safety of pedestrians.