

CHAPTER 7. HOUSING STRATEGY

SERVICE MISSION

Preserve and improve the city’s supply of existing good-quality housing. Encourage high-quality new development with competitive marketing appeal.

There are five aspects of the Housing Strategy:

1. Aggressively pursue the renovation of existing housing and the construction of new housing.
2. Ensure that rental housing and owner-occupied housing is maintained in good repair, thus contributing to the neighborhood in a positive way.
3. Market the city’s existing good-quality housing that meets the needs of all economic groups.
4. Demonstrate the city’s commitment to housing by cooperating in the development of a region’s strategic housing plan.
5. Ensure that there is an adequate supply of safe and sanitary affordable housing throughout the metropolitan area.

RESULTS

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the housing opportunities in their neighborhoods, the city, and in Polk County (Table 7-1). Table 7-1 also shows

the percent of the “Don’t know” responses to the housing opportunity questions. As the geography moved from the house/neighborhood to Des Moines, and then to Polk County, the percent of the “Don’t know” responses increased. This is not unusual considering that most people are more knowledgeable about opportunities in their immediate living area than about opportunities outside their community.

Table 7-1. Percent Satisfaction with Housing Opportunities

	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	Don’t Know
Neighborhood	84	8	8
Des Moines	69	17	13
Polk County	60	8	33

Several questions addressed the city’s efforts to expand and improve housing opportunities in Des Moines. Half or more of the respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the variety of housing (66%) and historic preservation efforts (50%).

Over 40 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with affordability, building restoration, historic rehabilitation, and mixed income housing. However, more respondents were dissatisfied than satisfied with the city’s efforts related to homelessness, public housing maintenance, use of vacant land, and housing for elderly.

From Table 7-2, it is evident that a high percentage of respondents were unfamiliar with many of the city’s efforts, as indicated

by a “Don’t Know” response. About half of the respondents did not know about city efforts to work with the public on policy, neighborhood notification of proposed building/code changes, or maintenance of publicly owned housing.

The city provides several ways to help people improve, buy, and rehabilitate their properties. Some of the programs, which provide home improvement financing, include the Owner Occupied Rehabilitation

Table 7-2. Satisfaction with Des Moines’ Effort Toward Expanded and Improved Housing Opportunities

	Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	Don’t Know
Variety	66	14	20
Historic preservation	50	30	20
Affordability	48	32	20
Building restoration	47	29	24
Historic rehabilitation	47	30	23
Mixed income housing	42	18	40
Code enforcement	32	28	40
Change notification	30	26	44
Working with public on policy	29	21	50
Housing for elderly	29	36	35
Use of vacant land	28	33	39
Public housing maintenance	26	33	41
Housing for homeless	25	39	36

Program, Homeless Assistance Program, and Housing Fund. Funding is also derived from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, which receives most of its funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME programs. The intent of these programs is to expand the supply of decent and affordable housing for low- and very low-income persons, implement strategies to provide decent and affordable housing, and provide financial and technical assistance to homeowners (and others).

Survey results show that only 25 of 561 respondents (4%) confirmed that they had used one of the publicly financed housing improvement programs (Figure 7-1). Due to the low percentage of people familiar with these programs, it is difficult to convey how people really think about the programs. However, of those who were familiar with one or more programs, they were relatively satisfied with the service delivery, understandability of the program, and ease of access for program information (Table 7-3).

Figure 7-1. Users of Publicly Financed City Home Improvement Programs

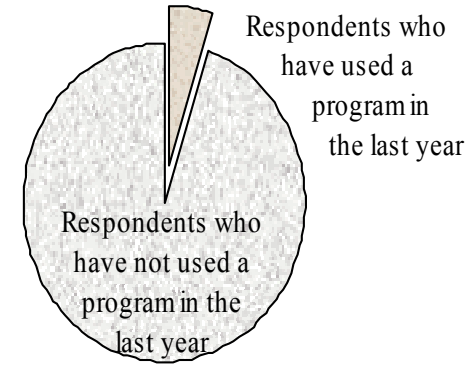


Table 7-3. Rating of Aspects Related to Publicly Financed Housing Improvement Programs

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Access to inform	5.48	3.15	25
Understandability of program	5.65	2.98	23
Service delivery	5.79	2.64	24

Scale: 1=poorest to 10=outstanding

COMMENTS

The removal or tearing down of housing was the most frequently mentioned comment (Table 7-4). This includes tearing down abandoned, vacant, burned out, and structurally unfit homes. Affordable and low-income housing was also mentioned frequently. A distinction is made between affordable and low-income housing due to the nature of their determination for federal and other grants and loans. Affordable housing means that the monthly rent or mortgage payment plus utilities is not more than 30 percent of the household’s monthly income. Low-income housing means rental or ownership units that are affordable to households earning 80 percent or less of an area’s median income (adjusted for family size).¹

In addition to the comments listed in Table 7-4, respondents noted that home ownership should be encouraged, incentives should be developed for home rehabilitation, and more housing should be developed. Additional comments noted that housing codes should be eliminated to permit homeowners to do what they want to their property and that high-income housing should be developed to increase home values. Finally, some made comments that low-income housing was a reason housing values were low and should be eliminated.

Table 7-4. Housing Strategy Comment Categories

	Number
Affordable housing	8
Low-income housing	5
More downtown housing	2
Housing for the elderly	2
Restoration/rehabilitation	8
More control of rental housing	10
Remove/tear down	
Abandoned homes	4
Burned-out homes	2
Structurally unfit housing	2
Vacant housing	4

¹Land Use and Affordable Housing. <http://www.housingforall.org/david.htm>