

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Background In July of 2000, the Topeka City Council and Shawnee County Board of Commissioners adopted the Neighborhood Element of the *Topeka Metropolitan Comprehensive Plan 2025*, identifying the central portion of the neighborhood as “at risk”, the northern portion of the neighborhood as “healthy”, and the southern portion of the neighborhood as “out patient”. The “at risk” rating indicated that the central portion of the neighborhood was at greater odds of experiencing health problems in the future. This “at risk” rating coupled with zoning issues were the main reasons Oakland was called out to have a neighborhood plan completed. In 2003, the Neighborhood Element was updated and the health ratings in Oakland improved. Now the central portion of the neighborhood is rated as “out patient”, as well as much of the southwestern portion of Oakland. The remainder of the neighborhood is rated as “healthy”. Even though the overall neighborhood health rating improved, nearly half the neighborhood is still rated as “out patient” and there remained the need to examine the zoning issues in the neighborhood. Therefore, completing the Oakland Neighborhood Plan is still a priority. The Neighborhood Element set forth a schedule for developing neighborhood plans, which included the Oakland area in 2003. Oakland is the 10th neighborhood plan to be initiated by Planning Department since 1997.

Purpose **The purpose of this document is to provide long-range guidance and clear direction to the City and its agencies, residents, and private/public interests for the future revitalization and development of the Oakland Neighborhood.** The Plan should be fluid, not static. The scope of the Oakland Neighborhood Plan comprehensively addresses land use, housing, public facilities, safety, and neighborhood character. It establishes a 10-year vision with supportive goals, strategies and actions. This Plan provides the policy basis from which to identify appropriate zoning, capital improvements and other initiatives for implementation.

However, it is impractical to expect all recommendations of this plan to be implemented in a timely manner. Recommendations for infrastructure, housing, and parks all involve major City expenditures that are constrained by the amount of tax revenues the City collects. Other neighborhood plans also compete for such allocations. Reliance on non-City funding sources will also determine the pace of implementation. Thus, another purpose of this plan is to provide guidance for *priorities* in order to determine the most prudent expenditures with limited resources.

Relation to Other Plans The Plan is a comprehensive community-based approach to neighborhood planning that constitutes an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan and is regularly monitored, reviewed, and updated as needed. It is consistent with the Neighborhood Element of the Comprehensive Plan, which recommends a neighborhood plan for Oakland be developed in the year 2003. The northern and eastern portions of Oakland are primarily rated

as *healthy* and the southern, western and central portions of the neighborhood are rated as *out patient* in the Neighborhood Element. In addition, the Topeka-Shawnee County Regional Trails and Greenways Plan, adopted in 2001, recommends the extension of the Shunga Trail through Oakland as part of the regional trail system.

Process

(Refer to flow chart)

This document has primarily been prepared in collaboration with the Oakland NIA. Beginning in the spring of 2003 planning staff conducted a property-by-property land use/housing survey of the neighborhood and collected pertinent demographic data. The information was shared and presented during a community workshop at the Oakland Community Center in June of 2003. Starting in July of 2003, the neighborhood held monthly meetings to formulate the goals, guiding principles, strategies, and actions recommended in the Plan. Staff also conducted a number of interviews with Oakland stakeholders (e.g., schools, churches, realtors, residents, developers, City departments, etc.). On January 10, 2004 a second community workshop was held at Oakland Community Center to validate the Plan’s recommendations and prioritize actions. The Plan was subsequently approved by the Topeka Planning Commission and the Topeka City Council, in the winter of 2004.



I. NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

A. LOCATION AND CHARACTER

Location The Oakland Neighborhood is located in northeast Topeka, across the Kansas River from North Topeka and immediately to the west of Billard Airport. For purposes of this Plan, the neighborhood is bounded by the Kansas River and the Shunga Trail on the north, the BNSF shops on the west, the BNSF railroad tracts on the south, and Strait Avenue on the east. The neighborhood encompasses approximately 1,210 acres.

Setting



History **Oakland's Earliest Settlers**

Since 1854, several families have lived in the Oakland area. Most notably the Charles Sardou and the Gilbert Billard families, who were both born in France and settled on tracts of land in present-day Oakland. From their origins in France, each family made their way to New York, where they heard about the opening up of the Kansas Territory. The two families met up in Kansas City, Kansas, and traveled together to the area of what is Oakland today, and made their land claims on adjoining properties. The Billard family settled on the 160 acres north of present-day Sardou Avenue and the Sardou family

settled on a 160-acre plot south of Sardou Avenue. Both of the family's original homes have nearly been altered completely by the original settlers siblings. However, the homes are still located today at the locations of the original home sites. The Billard house is located at the base of the Sardou Bridge, inside of the cloverleaf. The Sardou home is located on the northeast corner of Grattan and Laurent.

The similarities between the two families continued as both Gilbert Billard and Charles Sardou had children, who became prominent Topekans. Gilbert Billard had two sons, Francois, who died in a Civil War Battle in New Mexico and Jules Benoit, who was known as "JB". JB Billard founded the Shawnee State Bank and the Western Woolen Mills. But more important to Topeka history is that in



1910; JB was elected mayor of Topeka. In addition to JB's importance to Topeka, his son became even more prominent in Topeka. Louis Charles Phillip (Phil) Billard, the son of JB and grandson of Gilbert Billard, was an adventurous person, who began racing automobiles, but eventually found his way to airplanes. In 1912, A.K. Longren, who made the first airplane flight over Topeka a year earlier, built a plane for Phil Billard. Phil made the first flight between Topeka and Kansas City, and became an aviation pioneer. Phil died over France during World War I, when his airplane exploded. The Phillip Billard Airport in Oakland is named after him.



Much like Gilbert Billard, Charles Sardou and his family became more prominent in Topeka because of his children. Charles Sardou's son, Freeman, who was born during the journey from Europe to New York, became a Topeka businessman. However, unlike the Billard family, who were not steadfast at working the land and staying in Topeka, the Sardou family remained on the land which

Charles Sardou claimed. Freeman farmed the land and in 1909 founded a canning plant on the Sardou property near the base of the Sardou Bridge. Some notable events of the Sardou family include:

- In 1870, Freeman Sardou was part of the 1st graduating class of Topeka High School.
- In 1903, during the Kansas River flood, Freeman Sardou and his sons used their boats to rescue North Topekans stranded on their roofs.
- In 1961, at the dedication of the Sardou Bridge, George Robert Sardou, a great-great grandson of Charles Sardou, cut the symbolic ribbon to open the bridge.

- Until recently, the Sardou house remained in possession of relatives.

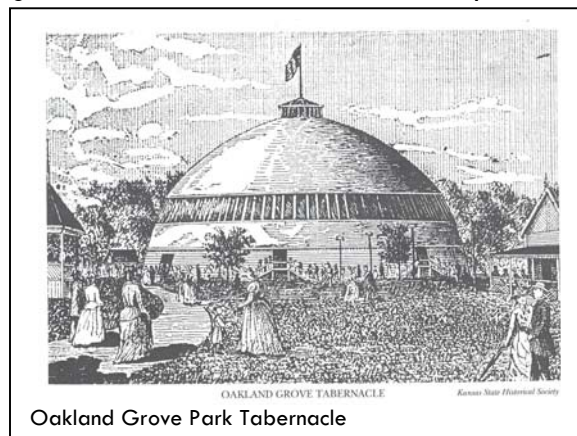
Oakland becomes a Community

It was not until J.B. Bartholomew and John Norton bought farms in the area did people begin moving to Oakland. Bartholomew, a real estate promoter, and Norton turned the mostly farmland into a booming “utopian” resort-type town in the country for the residents of Topeka to escape from the plight of the late nineteenth century city.

In 1886, the new town bounded by Chester, Strait, North, and Center Avenues was named Oakland Center, for the groves of Oak trees along the Kansas River. With the help of J.B. Bartholomew, John Norton, and Topeka’s Rapid Transit Authority the new town was created, as an escape from the City life in Topeka. To enhance their investment and hasten the development of Oakland,



Bartholomew and Norton encouraged the creation of a new rail line from Quinton Heights to Oakland Center. The popularity of Oakland Center was two-fold, it was located far enough outside of Topeka and the city’s urban ills and adjacent to the newly created resort-type park, Oakland Grove Park. This park was where Topekans would visit to get out of town, to enjoy the gardens and outdoor festival atmosphere. Oakland Grove Park was located



in an area that today is on the northeast corner of the neighborhood, bordered by Arter, North, Strait, and Springfield (a street which no longer exists today but was between North and Center Avenues). The centerpiece of the Park was the Tabernacle, which was an auditorium for meetings and entertainment. Oakland Center shortened its name to Oakland in 1889.

“Oakland Grove Park was a campground, a hotel, a zoo, and an entertainment center, all wrapped in one” (p.32)*.

All through the late 1800s, Oakland was an independent suburb of Topeka. In 1903, Oakland was organized as a city. F.A. Brigham was Oakland’s first mayor. “A Topeka Capitol article from May 2, 1915 reported that Oakland was thriving, with a population of 1800, 4 churches, 8 grocery stores, a

blacksmith, a general repair shop, a drugstore and a confectionery store. The Rapid Transit Line ran through Oakland at 20 minute intervals during midday, and at 15 minute intervals in the early morning and evening” (p.37)*. Oakland was a completely functioning small town on the outskirts of Topeka.

Noel Copeland became the city’s last mayor, when in 1925, Oakland voted 505-206 to be annexed by the Topeka. At the time the population of Oakland was 2500. On October 25, 1926 the City of Topeka passed by unanimous vote the ordinance to annex Oakland.

The German-Russian Community in Oakland

The German-Russians began arriving in Kansas in the 1870s. Many of these immigrants moved on to central Kansas, but a large number did stay in Topeka to work for Santa Fe. At first, the immigrants moved to North Topeka along the banks of the Kansas River, particularly the Little Russia area. However, in 1902, Santa Fe moved its shops to its present-day location on the southwestern corner of Oakland. With this move by Santa Fe and the subsequent Kansas River Flood in 1903, many German-Russians relocated to the growing German-Russian area on the east side of the Santa Fe shops in present-day Oakland. Santa Fe helped with this move, by building working class homes for these workers. These shops continued to bring laborers to Oakland and drastically expanded the town to the south around the Santa Fe shops. Oakland turned into more of a working class city, which was quite different from what the resort-type status it previously held before.

The Mexican-American Community in Oakland

The Mexican Revolution, the 1903 Kansas River Flood, World War I, and the Santa Fe Railroad were the main factors that brought the earliest Mexican immigrants to the Oakland neighborhood to live and work. The Mexicans “attempting to flee the unstable living conditions and poverty in Mexico, many of the poor farmers took advantage of new developments and industry in the U.S. and latched onto promises made by labor recruiters, who met them at the border. As Mexico had been struggling with revolution, the United States had been sending its men to war in Europe, leaving a shortage of workers for its developing industry. At the same time, a stoppage of European immigration during wartime had left industry leaders worrying about finding enough laborers to keep their businesses afloat”. (p.68)* Recruiters meeting these potential laborers at the border offered travel expenses to the cities where labor assistance was needed. The Santa Fe railroad company, which was headquartered in Topeka, was one of the major companies recruiting for laborers.

1908 – First Mexicans arrive in Topeka and up until 1939 mostly lived in area known as La Yarda or Little Mexico, located near SE 6th Avenue and Shunga Creek. In 1914, Pedro Lopez and Father Ocampo assisted with the organizing of the new Mexican Catholic Parish in Oakland; they rented a small building on the corner of Crane and Branner, which would serve as the parish church for

8 years. In 1923, a new parish church and school was built. In 1924, the Branner Viaduct was built directly in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and School, “damage money”* was awarded to the parish, which allowed for the building of Guadalupe Hall. This activity center would provide future fundraisers, with which to keep the parish afloat.

In 1939, the City of Topeka issued an order to evacuate La Yorda due to the unsanitary conditions. The residents, who were mainly of Mexican descent, had to find other places to live. Many moved to Oakland on the east side of the Santa Fe shops. In 1947, the construction on the Our Lady of Guadalupe church began. In 1953, the existing parish school was completed.

Fiesta Mexicana – 70 plus years of this mid-summer festival

In 1932, Father Quartero formed the Fiesta Mexicana, to help raise money for the Our Lady of Guadalupe School. Over 70 years have passed since the first Fiesta. The tradition, which started with only one night of festival activities on the parish school grounds, has now grown into a week-long carnival throughout the streets surrounding the school. It is one of the largest annual celebrations in all of Topeka. The Fiesta is still a major fundraiser for Our Lady of Guadalupe school.

Oakland Today

Oakland has nearly 6,000 residents today. Over 75 years have gone by since Oakland became a part of Topeka, but it still has retained its own small town feel. “The businesses that exist in present-day Oakland continue to be small and often family-operated. The glitter of franchise has, for the most part, remained outside the neighborhood” (p.41)*.

*(Quotes from “The Little City that Was”, The Story of Oakland as a City and a Neighborhood, by Kris Schultz, co 2002)

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Health The Neighborhood Element of the Comprehensive Plan establishes a neighborhood health rating system for all neighborhoods in Topeka to prioritize planning assistance and resource allocation. The central portion of the neighborhood is rated as “out patient”, as well as much of the southwestern portion of Oakland. The remainder of the neighborhood is rated as “healthy”.

Land Use The neighborhood is predominately residential with 90% of all parcels and approximately 55% of all land area devoted to residential uses (see Table 1 and Map #1). Within the residential land use, only 2% of all the residential parcels are non-single family. Outside of the residential land use category, the next biggest use within the neighborhood is the railroad facilities category, which takes up nearly 8% of the neighborhood. However, combined with the industrial category, which are uses that are mainly railroad related also, over 16% of the land area in the neighborhood is dedicated to railroad activities. While these activities take a large portion of the neighborhood, they are only

found on the edges of Oakland, mainly southern and western areas of the neighborhood. The parking/utility category includes the Wastewater Treatment Plant and accounts for about 8% of the land area. Parks and open space take up approximately 6% of the land area. The parks include Oakland-Billard Park, Little Oakland Park, and Santa Fe Park.

**Table 1
Existing Land Use – Oakland**

Land Use Category	Parcels	Percent	Acres	Percent
Residential - Single Family	2431	90.2%	505.34	55.3%
Residential - Two Family	25	0.9%	7.42	0.8%
Residential - Multi Family	11	0.4%	4.81	0.5%
Residential - Two/Multi-Family	10	0.4%	1.99	0.2%
Other Residential	12	0.4%	3.61	0.4%
Commercial	39	1.4%	26.73	2.9%
Institutional	31	1.2%	26.49	2.9%
Office	12	0.4%	3.84	0.4%
Light Industrial	1	0.0%	16.86	1.8%
Heavy Industrial	1	0.0%	34.39	3.8%
Agriculture	4	0.1%	26.4	2.9%
Park/Open Space	3	0.1%	55.3	6.0%
Parking/Utility	12	0.4%	70.18	7.7%
Railroad Facilities	6	0.2%	99.81	10.9%
Vacant	96	3.6%	31.38	3.4%
Subtotal	2694	100.0%	914.55	100.0%
Public R-O-W			295.45	
Total Area with R-O-W			1210.0	

Source: Topeka Planning Dept. & Shawnee County Appraisers Office (2003)

Primarily, commercial retail land uses are found along Seward and Sardou Avenues. Unlike other neighborhoods in Topeka, nearly 3% of the land in Oakland is still used for agricultural purposes. About 3% of the land in Oakland is also used for commercial activities, as well as 3% of the land is used for institutional uses.

Zoning The zoning pattern of the neighborhood is not very reflective on the actual use of the property. Nearly all of the single-family homes are zoned for two-family dwellings. The commercial corridors along Seward and Sardou Avenues

are completely zoned commercial, even though the actual uses along these streets are a mix of commercial, office, institutional, and residential uses. Many of the commercially zoned properties are zoned for much more intense uses than what the properties are actually being used for. In addition, there are areas in the middle of residential blocks that are zoned for commercial, office, and industrial uses. Oakland has a few businesses or buildings that used to be businesses that are not along major corridors, but on local residential streets completely surrounded by single-family homes. (See [Map 2](#))

Housing Density

The net housing density of 4.9 units/acre found in Oakland can be credited to the neighborhood being mostly comprised of detached single-family residential units. 95% of the housing units in the neighborhood are within single-family structures while two-family and multiple family units account for only about 4% of the total housing units.

**Table 2
Housing Density – Oakland**

Housing Type	Units	Percent	Acres	Units/Acre
Single Family	2431	95%	505.3	4.8
Two Family	50	2%	7.4	6.7
Multiple Family	44	2%	4.8	9.1
Two/Multi-Family	24	1%	2.0	12.1
Net Density Residential	2549	100%	519.6	4.9
Net Density All			914.6	2.8
Gross Density (w/ ROW)			1210.0	2.1

Source: Topeka Planning Department (2003)

Housing Conditions

Overall, housing conditions in Oakland are good. Over 78% of all the residential units surveyed had only minor deficiencies, as seen in [Table #3](#). Furthermore, as seen in [Map #3](#), none of the blocks had major deterioration. The majority of the blocks were either sound or had only minor deterioration. There is also no set pattern on which areas had sound housing conditions and which areas had more deterioration. The central portion of the neighborhood between Sardou and Seward has a collection of more sound blocks than anywhere else in the neighborhood. These blocks surround State Street Elementary and Chase Middle Schools, which may contribute to the better housing conditions.

**Table 3
Housing Conditions – Oakland**

Housing Type	Minor Deficiencies		Intermediate Deficiencies		Major Deficiencies		Total
	Prop.	%	Prop.	%	Prop.	%	Prop.
Single Family	1890	77.5%	494	20.2%	31	1.3%	2415
Two Family	17	0.7%	7	0.3%	1	0.0%	25
Multiple Family	3	0.1%	6	0.2%	1	0.0%	10
Two/Multi-Family	4	0.2%	4	0.2%	2	0.1%	10
Total	1907	78.2%	501	20.5%	32	1.3%	2440

Source: Topeka Planning Department (2003)

Tenure

Like the housing conditions, there are no set patterns that can be determined from tenure, except that Oakland has a high owner-occupied percentage. Over 75% of all housing units are owner occupied. Only one block has a homeownership rate of less than 50% and that is along Seward Avenue commercial corridor. (see Table #4 and Map #4).

**Table 4
Housing Tenure – Oakland**

Housing Tenure	Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied		Vacant		Total
	Units	%	Units	%	Units	%	Units
Single Family	1885	74.0%	513	20.1%	33	1.3%	2431
Two Family	16	0.6%	32	1.3%	2	0.1%	50
Multiple Family	8	0.3%	36	1.4%	0	0.0%	44
Two/Multi-Family	8	0.3%	14	0.5%	2	0.1%	24
Total	1917	75.2%	595	23.3%	37	1.5%	2549

Source: Topeka Planning Department (2003)

Values and Age

According to data gathered by the Shawnee County Appraiser, the mean (average) value of a single-family home is \$44,683 (see Table #5). The values of the homes in Oakland vary drastically. The value of a single-family home in Oakland ranges from as little as \$5,420 to as high as \$165,300. This difference in home prices is not surprising, since Oakland was developed at different times for varying reasons. One can go down nearly any street and will see considerably different sizes and styles of homes sitting right next to each other.

**Table 5
Property Values – Oakland**

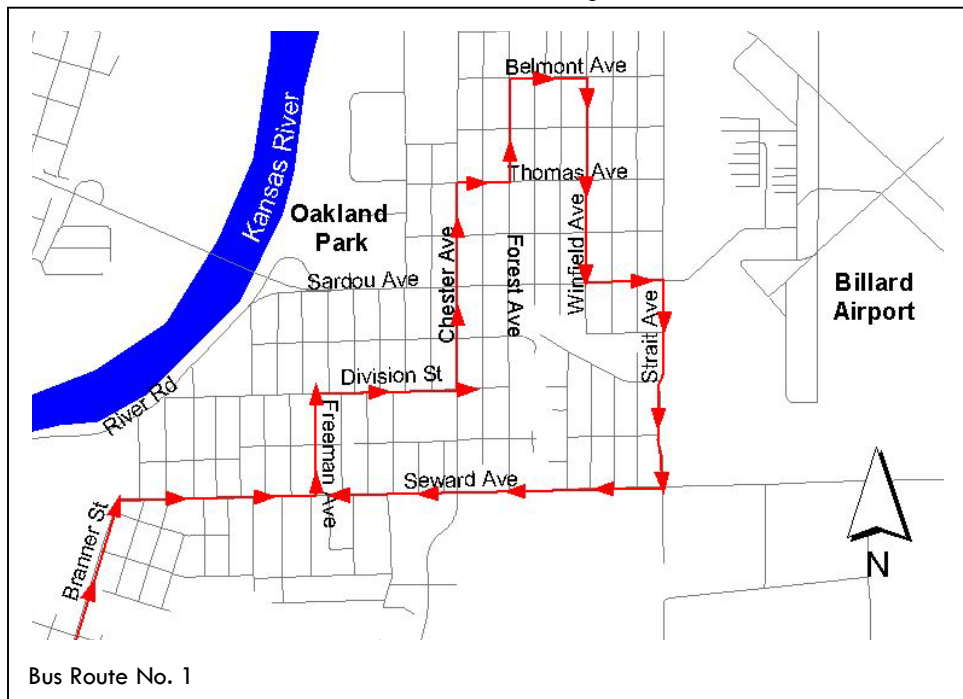
	Median	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Residential - Single Family	\$44,200	\$44,683	\$5,420	\$165,300
Residential - Two Family	\$50,100	\$54,844	\$2,380	\$145,300
Residential - Multiple Family	\$62,640	\$176,811	\$6,940	\$1,390,000
Residential - Two/Multi-Family	\$39,920	\$43,966	\$16,100	\$84,900
Vacant	\$2,330	\$3,534	\$100	\$47,900

Source: Shawnee County Appraiser (2003)

Public Safety Map #5 illustrates the number of reported major crimes committed by block according to crime statistics provided by the Topeka Police Department for 2002. The highest concentrations of reported major crimes occurred along the commercial corridors and Oakland-Billard Park. However, similar to the other neighborhood health indicators, housing conditions and housing tenure, there is no set pattern to help make conclusions on why some areas of Oakland have higher crime than others. The crime seems to be randomly distributed. Major crimes are defined as Part 1 crimes – murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and theft.

Building Activity Oakland has not received much development activity in the last decade. A few single-family building permits and demolitions have comprised much of the activity.

Circulation As identified by the Topeka-Shawnee County Transportation Plan – 2015, the neighborhood contains four arterials routes – Branner, Seward, Sardou, and Strait south of Sardou. The River Road, Division, Golden, and Chester are all classified as collector streets in the neighborhood.



Public transportation exists along Bus Route No. 1 (see map above). Oakland is serviced by a bus line running through the neighborhood from Branner, east on Seward, north on Freeman, east on Division, north on Chester, east on Thomas, north on Forest, east on Belmont, south on Winfield, east on Sardou, south on Strait, and west on Seward, back out to the Branner Viaduct.

Table 6
Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) – Oakland

Intersection	Classification	AADT
Seward Ave, east of Branner	Arterial	8,259
Sardou Ave, east of River Road	Arterial	10,011
Chester Ave, north of Seward	Collector	5054
Strait Ave, south of Division	Arterial	2792

Source: Topeka City Engineer (2002)

C. SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS

Oakland is located in parts of Census Tracts 9 and 10. Information from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census is summarized in the tables below.

Table 7
Population – Oakland

	1990		2000		1990-2000
	1990	Percent	2000	Percent	% Change
POPULATION	6241	100%	5974	100%	-4%
Female	3209	51%	3078	52%	-4%
Male	3032	49%	2896	48%	-4%
Black	69	1%	76	1%	10%
White	5474	88%	4824	81%	-12%
Other (Non-black/white)	698	11%	1073	18%	54%
Hispanic Origin	1214	19%	1457	24%	20%
Under 5 years	442	7%	424	7%	-4%
5 to 9 years	461	7%	489	8%	6%
10 to 14 years	445	7%	413	7%	-7%
15 to 19 years	376	6%	368	6%	-2%
20 to 24 years	299	5%	381	6%	27%
25 to 34 years	1075	17%	781	13%	-27%
35 to 44 years	886	14%	910	15%	3%
45 to 54 years	548	9%	767	13%	40%
55 to 64 years	578	9%	531	9%	-8%
65 and Over	1131	18%	909	15%	-20%

**Table 8
Households – Oakland**

	1990	2000	Change
HOUSEHOLDS	2527	2516	0%
Families	1741	1606	-8%
Married Couple	1345	1134	-16%
Female-Headed (no husband)	303	368	21%
Persons per Household	2.47	2.25	-9%

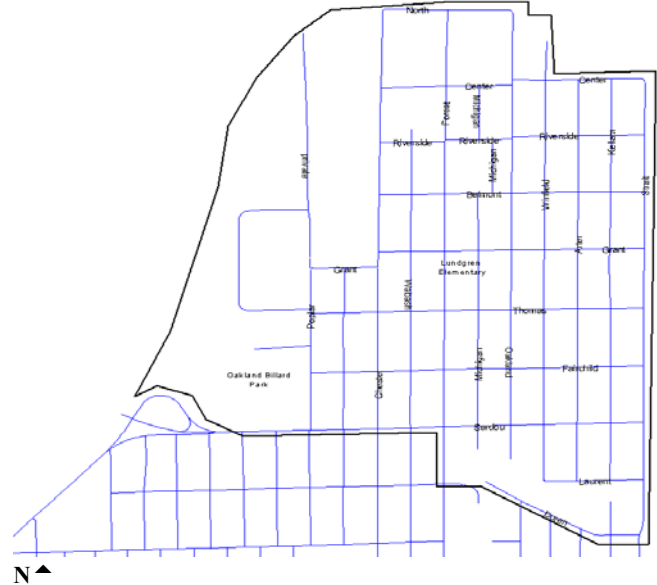
**Table 9
Income and Work – Oakland**

	1990*	2000**	Change
INCOMES			
Household Median	\$24,974	\$32,790	31%
Family Median	\$27,816	\$40,164	44%
Per Capita Income	\$10,556	\$15,109	43%
*1989 dollars			
**1999 dollars			
Below Poverty Level			
% Persons	7.0%	10.0%	3%
% Children <18	1.5%	3.4%	2%
WORK			
Persons (16+ years)	78%	77%	-1%
College Graduates	4%	5%	1%

D. SUB-AREA PROFILES

Oakland - North

2000 Population = 2,523 (Census Tract 9)



Vital Signs

Poverty Rate (2000): 7%
 Crimes Reported Rank (96-98): below average
 Median Residential Property Value (98): \$46,500
 SF Homeownership (03): 78%
 Boarded Houses (97-98): below average

Stability Indicators

Population Change (90-2000): 0%
 New Residential/Demolition Ratio (90-97): 3:10
 Median Residential Sale Price Change (95-01): +23%
 School Attendance Rate Change (98-02): -1.6%
 School Enrollment Change (98-02): -5.4%

Analysis:

The population of the north sub-area of Oakland has remained stable since 1990. The dominant land use is single family residential, although this area does include agriculture land uses. Single-family homeownership rates are high and housing conditions in general are sound. Minor maintenance of existing housing stock will be important in the future. Except for the agricultural uses in the northern part of the sub-area, this area is nearly built out with very few vacant lots. Commercial services are available to this area along Sardou Avenue. It is interesting to note that the former commercial downtown of Oakland was located within this sub-area at Thomas Street and Wabash Avenue. Today, the buildings have almost entirely converted from commercial and office uses to multiple family residential uses. Lundgren Elementary and a number of churches are present in this area. Residential property values are below average, but the median residential sale price change between 1995 and 2001 increased more than the City at-large (21%).

Diagnosis: At Risk

Stable

Notes:

Oakland - South

2000 Population = 3,451 (*Census Tract 10*)



Vital Signs

Poverty Rate (2000): 12%
Crimes Reported Rank (96-98): above average
Median Residential Property Value (98): \$42,000
SF Homeownership (03): 78%
Boarded Houses (97-98): low

Stability Indicators

Population Change (90-2000): -8%
New Residential/Demolition Ratio (90-97): 6:16
Median Residential Sale Price Change (95-01): +27%
School Attendance Rate Change (98-02): -1.6%
School Enrollment Change (98-02): -18.2%

Analysis:

The south sub-area is anchored by a number of schools, including State Street Elementary, Chase Middle School, Sacred Heart Grade School and Our Lady Guadalupe Grade School. Sacred Heart and Our Lady Guadalupe are also two of the churches that lend stability to the area. The dominant land use of the area is single family residential. Homeownership levels in this area are high and the homes demonstrate overall sound housing conditions. Minor maintenance of existing housing stock will be important in the future. The Seward Avenue and Sardou Avenue commercial corridors include a number of independent neighborhood businesses including two grocery stores and a variety of restaurants. BN&SF railroad yards are located in this area as well. Although not the large employment generator of years past, the yards still provide jobs for residents of Oakland. Residential property values are below average, but the median residential sale price change between 1995 and 2001 increased more than the City at-large (27%).

Diagnosis: Out Patient

Stable

Notes:

E. PROFILE SUMMARY

The Oakland Neighborhood is a proud neighborhood rooted in single-family development. The neighborhood was developed over time for many different reasons, which might explain why the style and size of the homes in the neighborhood vary so greatly. Similar to the random-ness of the housing styles in this neighborhood, the health indicators follow no set patterns either. Nonetheless, from the conclusions that can be made about Oakland below are some of the impediments for re-investment:

Needs/Constraints

- Zoning pattern of most of the single-family neighborhood is multiple family.
- Wastewater Treatment Plant odor issues.
- Park space that is not centralized or accessible to the entire neighborhood.
- Residents age 25-34 decreased 27% from 1990-2000.
- Overall population of the neighborhood decreased 4% from 1990-2000.
- Physical condition of Sardou and Seward Avenue commercial corridors.

On the other hand, there are many strengths and opportunities that can be seized upon to overcome these constraints:

Strengths/Opportunities

- Festivals
- Affordable and sound housing stock.
- Two commercial corridors with small, locally owned businesses.
- High level of homeownership.
- Access to public transportation.
- The Shunga Trail connection to the neighborhood.
- Three neighborhood parks.
- The neighborhood contains a number of important institutions – Chase Middle, State Street Elementary, Lungren, and a number of churches – that provide community anchors and quality of life amenities for the neighborhood.
- The neighborhood is close to major employer, BNSF.
- 95% of the housing units in Oakland are single family.

III. VISION and GOALS

A. Vision Statement

Marie grew up in Oakland, as did her parents and grandparents. Most of her family members worked at the Santa Fe shops or taught at the one of the neighborhood schools. Her family is deeply entrenched into the neighborhood fabric that is Oakland.

As the time went by, she decided to leave and go off to college. Once graduating from college, Marie began working, in time married and started a family. 15 years after leaving Oakland, her young son is about to begin school and like so many other parents, she began to think about where she wanted her son to be raised and what kind of schools she wanted him to attend.

She never thought she would return to Oakland, but everything she was looking for – good neighborhood schools, friendly neighbors, and close to family – was right here in the neighborhood where she has all those wonderful childhood memories.

Marie decided to drive around the neighborhood and check it out. While she remembers the neighborhood for the most part being nice, she does recall that there were some rough edges starting to show throughout the neighborhood.

Upon entering the neighborhood the big “Welcome to Oakland” sign and beautiful landscaping greeted her. She turned down Seward Avenue to be delightfully surprised by the new family restaurant that opened up. Marie also noticed other improvements along Seward, the new trees, the light fixtures, but what surprised her even more, was how vibrant with activity the street has become. Many of the existing buildings have been rehabilitated and a new drugstore and hardware store opened up along Seward. She was also happy to see that the neighborhood grocers were continuing to thrive.

As Marie turned off of Seward Avenue to take a look at some homes, she was delighted by the sight of the wonderful tree canopy, a canopy that has covered nearly all of the residential streets in Oakland for generations. While driving she witnesses a couple of people helping out an elderly neighbor with some of his routine housing maintenance, realizing that neighbors still help out neighbors in Oakland.

Another wonderful sight for Marie, is the schoolyard full of children playing even though school is out for the day, just as it was when she was a kid.

As Marie heads over to her parents house for dinner, she is more convinced than ever, that Oakland is the place in which she wants to raise her family.

B. Goals and Guiding Principles

LAND USE

Goal – Maintain the viable single-family residential character of the neighborhood; encourage healthy redevelopment of commercial corridors; develop strong park/trail system.

Guiding Principles

- Single-family land use, as the predominate and intended land use of the neighborhood, should remain viable and be protected from encroachment of incompatible land uses.
- Balance the needs of the institutional users with the needs of the neighborhood to maintain a viable residential community.
- Seward Avenue and Sardou Avenue corridors should maintain their mixed-use nature including neighborhood-level commercial.
- Allow for neighborhood-level commercial activities within the interior of Oakland (i.e. family restaurant).
- Integrate additional park uses within the interior of the neighborhood.

HOUSING

Goal – Maintain current level of high homeownership within the neighborhood and prevent decline of housing conditions.

Guiding Principles

- Encourage homeowners to participate in the housing rehabilitation activities.
- Create volunteer “neighbor to neighbor” programs that can address smaller housing and property maintenance issues that prolong the life of the existing housing stock and prevent the “broken window” cycle.
- Any infill housing development should be in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.
- Develop strategies to ensure a high level of property owner compliance with minimum housing/nuisance standards.

PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

Goal – Provide ongoing improvement of infrastructure and public facilities that will maintain Oakland’s capacity for viability.

Guiding Principles

- Improve the odor control systems of the wastewater treatment plant.
- Encourage trail connections to the existing regional trail system.
- Eliminate “ditch” drainage systems in areas still lacking modern street drainage.
- Create pedestrian friendly streetscapes (streets and sidewalks) that connect to the neighborhood’s amenities and assets.
- Improve family-friendliness of parks within Oakland.

SAFETY

Goal – Create a safe, clean, and livable environment for all those in Oakland to live, learn, work, and play.

Guiding Principles

- Promote a strong, working relationship with police and educational efforts so residents are fully aware of “what to look for” in detecting and preventing crime.
- Improve the environmental design (CPTED) of the neighborhood to prevent crime.
- Discourage high traffic speeds within the neighborhood through contemporary traffic calming devices and other techniques.
- Organize volunteer resources to take a more organized and proactive role in safety protection.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Goal – Promote a positive image that will preserve homeownership investment and stimulate neighborhood-level commercial development.

Guiding Principles

- Work together with community anchors and employers to help make them positive assets for the neighborhood.
- Organize as a neighborhood to provide a louder voice for positive change.
- Welcome and support a diversity of peoples.
- Work to prevent nuisance and housing code violations from occurring while prioritizing enforcement efforts on more persistent and severe violations.
- Create an identity that gives visitors a better sense of the neighborhood (i.e. create gateways at neighborhood entrances).
- Enhance Oakland's image corridor along Seward Avenue.
- Continue to promote and support Oakland as the community of festivals (i.e. Fiesta and Germanfest) and create a new neighborhood-wide celebration.

IV. LAND USE PLAN

The Oakland Land Use Plan ([Map #6](#)) graphically illustrates a conceptual guide for future development and re-development that embodies the vision and goals presented in Section III. The map is conceptual and should not be used to determine precise zoning boundaries. The following land uses, zoning districts, and densities are the “maximum recommended” and assume less intensive land uses, zoning districts, or densities are appropriate.

Residential – Low Density: This category reserves the lower density non-urbanized area of Oakland that primarily fronts “local” low volume streets where larger lot single-family and agricultural-type uses exist. This area originally developed less compact due to infrastructure constraints and exhibits rural-like characteristics (deep road-side ditches, narrow roads, very low density). Parts of the area lie below the wastewater treatment plant, which means wastewater must be pumped uphill at a significant cost. Another hindrance to higher density development in this area is the airport. Air flight path restrictions limit development close to the airport. Therefore, it is not anticipated the area will develop into urban densities over the 10-year horizon of this Plan. New development in this area should be compatible with the existing single-family character, which could include such uses as churches, small-scale daycares, and institutional uses.

Primary Uses: single-family dwellings

Zoning Districts: R-1, R-2 (Single Family)

Density: 1-4 units/acre (net)

Residential – Low Density (Urban): This category reserves urbanized areas of Oakland that primarily front “local” low volume streets where the highest concentrations of single-family uses exist without a significant mixing of non-residential uses. These areas originally developed as compact single-family areas with urbanized road/utility infrastructure. New development in this area should be compatible with the existing single-family character, which could include such uses as churches, small-scale daycares and institutional uses.

Primary Uses: single-family dwellings

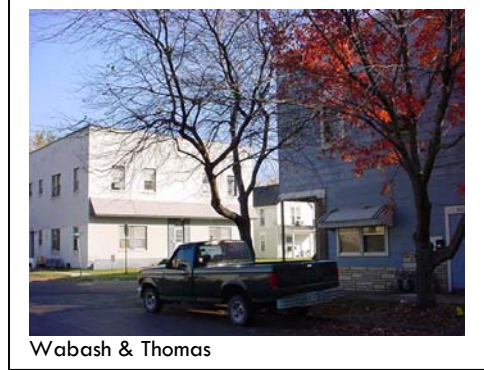
Zoning Districts: R-1, R-2 (Single Family)

Density: 5-7 units/acre (net)



Typical residential block

Mixed Use - Residential: This category applies to the Wabash and Thomas node. This area formerly functioned as Oakland's commercial downtown prior to being annexed by Topeka. The area consists of commercial and institutional buildings whose primary use now is multiple family residential with a couple commercial uses. This category is intended to promote the continued use of the buildings as a mix of medium density residential and low-intensity neighborhood commercial. A ground-level retail use with residential units above is the preferred model in the two-story buildings. Commercial uses here are to be of an even lesser intensity than those on the neighborhood's commercial corridors.



Wabash & Thomas

Primary Uses: Single to four-unit dwellings; neighborhood commercial; institutional
Zoning Districts: C-1 (Commercial)
Density/Intensity: 8-22 dwelling units/acre (net)



Seward Corridor

Mixed Use - Neighborhood: This category promotes the integration of neighborhood commercial uses with residential uses on blocks that front Seward Avenue. Neighborhood-scaled office, institutional, and commercial retail/service uses could be designed to accommodate residential uses within the same structure or on adjacent property. Residential standards should accommodate "zero-lot line" designs. High density residential (5+ units/lot)

may be appropriate based upon its compatibility to the site and quality of design. Since these blocks front a major image street, parking lots should be effectively screened from street frontages or placed at the side or rear of properties. Quality of design should be emphasized by orienting buildings close to the street, making sites pedestrian friendly, softening views where possible, restricting large pole signage, ensuring visual integrity, minimizing points of access, and buffering physical impacts from adjacent residential blocks. Adaptive re-use of residential buildings is encouraged. Current C-4 commercial zoning allows high intensity uses that threatens to render Seward Avenue to a life of "strip commercial" and visual clutter if left unchecked. It would be the purpose of this classification to provide for healthy mixed-use development and re-development along an aesthetically pleasing neighborhood corridor.

Primary Uses: Single to four-unit dwellings; neighborhood commercial
Zoning Districts: X-1 (Mixed Use); C-2 (Commercial)
Density/Intensity: 8-22 dwelling units/acre (net)

Commercial – Neighborhood: This designation allows for small-scale “mom and pop” businesses along the major corridors and that would serve local needs of the neighborhood residents. Many of the properties under this category contain existing commercial buildings and would be restricted from further expansion without meeting setback and parking requirements. In addition, expansion of existing commercial uses should be compatible with the adjoining residential neighborhood, with the most intense part of the use located away from the residential homes. New commercial uses should front the corridor street and not the residential street, and meet the design criteria for corridor development. Existing residential uses in these areas are appropriate. The commercial uses in this category are intended to be an asset to neighborhood residents that can serve pedestrian convenience. They are not intended to attract a large number of non-local visitors.

Primary Uses: small-scale neighborhood commercial stores

Zoning Districts: C-2 (Commercial)

Density/Intensity: Low

Institutional: This designation recognizes existing schools and large churches. Major expansion of existing institutional sites should be reflected on the map. Anticipated expansions are within low-density residential areas and should not pose any negative impacts on surrounding blocks.

Primary Uses: Schools, churches, etc.

Zoning Districts: primarily R-2 (Single-Family)

Intensity: Medium (limited occurrences)

Parks and Open Space: This designation represents both the passive open space areas without structural or recreational elements and the active park areas with structural or recreational elements. Current parks in Oakland include Oakland Billard Park, Oakland Park, Motorcycle Park, and Santa Fe Park. Future park space should include the Shunga Trail and City-owned property at Michigan and Laurent (**see picture at right**). Under this category, open space could be public or privately owned as long as it is accessible to the community for some form of recreation or cultural activities. It recognizes that the development of these sites is reserved for public recreational space and should not be developed for non-park uses.



Primary Use: Parks

Zoning District: OS (Open Space)

Intensity: Low

Industrial: This designation recognizes the industrial use areas of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad located primarily along the southwestern and southern boundaries of the neighborhood. This category also applies to those areas south of Seward Avenue in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood. This includes existing and future industrial expansion areas. Some attention to site buffering will be needed for the existing industrial areas since they front residential areas and Seward Avenue, a major image corridor for the neighborhood.

Primary Uses: *Light Industrial*

Zoning Districts: I-1 (Light Industrial); I-2 (Heavy Industrial)

Density/Intensity: Heavy

Utility: This designation recognizes the City's Oakland Wastewater Treatment Plant and those sites in the neighborhood related to it. The Oakland Wastewater Treatment plant serves a great portion of the City, as well as areas south of the City. The plant is currently undergoing a major upgrade/expansion. Future expansion of the plant may be beyond the scope of this 10-year plan. If expansion is necessary, it shall expand no farther than Chester Street and extensive efforts should be made to screen the plant from the adjoining residential neighborhood.

Primary Uses. *Utility*

Zoning Districts: R-1 and R-2 (Single Family)

Density/Intensity: Heavy

+ Detailed Land Use Recommendations

- **High Density Multiple Family Development (1)**

This category applies to the existing high-density multifamily complex at Gordon and Seward Streets.

Sites best suited for future high density residential development includes those areas closest to activity zones such as major thoroughfares with public transportation, mixed use areas, and retail areas. Blocks on the interior of predominantly single-family area are not ideal and should not be promoted for high-density use. Future applications for high density multiple family shall be approved on a case-by-case basis.



La Colonia Multiple Family Development

- **Interior ‘Mom and Pop’ Commercial Use (2)**



La Siesta Restaurant

The La Siesta Restaurant, located at Woodruff and Atchison, is unique to the Oakland Neighborhood in that it is a small-scale commercial business located within the interior of the residential neighborhood. La Siesta is now Topeka’s oldest Mexican restaurant having been in business at this location since the early 1950’s. While the Future Land Use Plan for the

Oakland Neighborhood does not recognize commercial land uses outside the commercial corridors, this description recognizes that this ‘mom and pop’ business has been coexisting for many years with its residential neighbors. This Plan supports a ‘mom and pop’ commercial use at this location.

- **Interior Office Use (3)**

The Super Chief Credit Union and supporting parking lot are located at State and Lake Streets. Future expansion of this use in the future should be directed west of the existing building and away from the residential neighborhood. Expansion shall not be allowed east of the existing building.



Kansas Super Chief Credit Union

- **BNSF Office Building (4)**



BNSF Office Building

This large office building is located at Atchison and Branner Streets, just south of Our Lady Guadalupe School. The building currently sits vacant. Future appropriate uses of this building include office, residential, and institutional.

- **Former airplane factory.(5)**

This is another of Oakland's unique land uses. This industrial building has been used as a mill and as an airplane factory, back in the early days of modern flight. Today it sits on the north end of the neighborhood, sandwiched between the levee and a residential neighborhood. The existing heavy industrial zoning on the property opens up the possibility for an intensity of use not appropriate for a residential neighborhood.



Former airplane factory

This Plan will support the conversion of this property to less intense uses that are less obtrusive to the residential neighborhood. Reuse ideas include conversion to loft residential and artist live/work space.

V. REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

A. Themes

"Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan."

John F. Kennedy

- ✓ **"Oakland is MY neighborhood"** – When residents identify with the neighborhood in which they live they are more likely to have a stronger sense of community. Steps should be taken that will increase residents' awareness of their belonging to the neighborhood.
- ✓ **"Corridors, Corridors, Corridors"** – Oakland's commercial corridors are key to the long-term stability of the neighborhood. Viable commercial corridors will help keep Oakland's retail dollars in the neighborhood. Oakland's commercial corridors are also Oakland's image corridors. High-quality commercial corridors will present a good image to those passing through the neighborhood and help retain and attract homeowners.
- ✓ **"Organize"** – The NIA must champion the implementation of this Plan, take the lead on what happens in the neighborhood, re-energize its volunteer system, and provide clear direction/input to decision-makers on how to realize neighborhood goals. No greater impact will be felt than if the NIA can stay committed and organized.
- ✓ **"Think Outside the City's Box"** – The NIA and the stakeholders in the neighborhood should not rely solely on the City for the neighborhood's successful renaissance. There simply are not enough resources available from the City. The NIA must find ways to raise it's own money and develop it's own programs independent of City support.
- ✓ **"Institutional Partners"** – Oakland contains important institutions that add stability to the neighborhood. Partnering with those institutions on various projects will create strength and energy in revitalization and should be a priority for the neighborhood.
- ✓ **"Crime Prevention for the Long Haul"** – Oakland is becoming more and more prone to criminal activity as fewer people feel a sense of ownership toward the neighborhood. One of the most important aspects of preventing crime is the creation "social connectivity". Social connectivity is the capability of residents to know their neighbors through chance encounters on the streets, sidewalks, and public facilities. Achieving this objective alone will help empower residents to take back their neighborhood now and into the future.

B. Housing

“Rain does not fall on one roof alone.”

Cameroonian Proverb

The overarching goal for housing in Oakland is to *maintain current level of high homeownership within the neighborhood and prevent decline of housing conditions*. The homeownership rate in Oakland is 74%, which is better than Topeka and better than the national average! What are some of the reasons this average is so high?

The neighborhood has an existing housing stock of various sizes and designs that is still in good shape. Oakland owes much of its stability to the fact it is a neighborhood that historically has drawn in families and kept generation after generation in the neighborhood. A classic grid system of streets makes for ease of getting around and most of the streets are lined with large mature trees that provide natural canopies over the streets and provide shade to the homes below.

This is a rather simplistic explanation of why Oakland remains a stable neighborhood, but it leads to a key point that will if addressed now will continue to keep Oakland a viable neighborhood. That key point is: *the existing housing stock must be maintained to sound conditions*. This will make the housing attractive to homebuyers looking at Oakland from outside the neighborhood. Protecting the existing housing stock will also make the neighborhood more attractive to those homeowners within the neighborhood looking to ‘trade up’ by buying a larger home.

Housing Improvements

The primary approach for Oakland to maintain the quality of its housing should be through rehabilitation. Vacant lots are too few to warrant any great emphasis on new construction of in-fill housing. Several approaches to affordable housing rehabilitation are available for property owners to stimulate renovation of the existing housing supply.

Rehabilitation

- Non-Profits – **Cornerstone** operates a lease purchase program for households who demonstrate an interest and ability in becoming future homeowners. Low/moderate-income families are placed in rehabilitated single-family units and gain necessary credit-worthiness in a couple of years to eventually become homeowners. Cornerstone funds rehabilitation of the property and manages it until they are ready. **Topeka City Homes** currently renovates and manages single-family rental units. These programs should be targeted on the key improvement blocks using a scattered-site approach.
- City Sponsored Programs – The City of Topeka in cooperation with Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc (HCCI) and participating lenders offer the **TOTO II** (Topeka Opportunity to Own) program for new homebuyers. The TOTO II program now offers up to \$65,000 for acquisition and rehab including a \$5,000 weatherization allowance for low/moderate-income

homebuyer renovations. Since the program gives a choice of neighborhood options to prospective homeowners, it is not surprising to note that no TOTO homes have been selected for Oakland. Other rehab incentives offered to income eligible homeowners by the City's Housing and Neighborhood Development Department include forgivable loans for **major rehab, emergency repair, and accessibility modifications.**

- Institution Partners – The neighborhood has the benefit of having a number of large institutions located throughout. These institutions include Lundgren and State Street Elementary Schools, Chase Middle School, Our Lady Guadalupe Church and School, and Sacred Heart Church and School. Strategies to partner with these institutions for the benefit of improving the housing stock in the neighborhood include:
 - Churches in the neighborhood discuss the importance of home maintenance at weekly church services. This type of peer pressure could prove effective at convincing people to keep up their properties.
 - The schools in the neighborhood have a number of children that could be involved with minor maintenance projects and clean-ups. Many of these students have community service hours they need to fulfill and there may be a number of class projects that could get the students involved in the neighborhood.
- Neighbor to Neighbor The “broken windows” theory explains that little things such as a broken window or a unkempt porch at one property can leach out to other properties as people begin to feel that no one cares about what’s going on. The problem will continue to grow block-by-block, street-by-street, until it “tips” and the whole neighborhood is suffering from an epidemic of decline. This “tipping point” can be avoided if attention is paid to the details. Volunteer “neighbor to neighbor” programs can address smaller housing maintenance issues – painting, porches, gutters, etc. – that prolong life of existing housing stock and prevent the “broken window” cycle. These simpler yet critical home improvement needs can be easily met by a dedicated group of volunteers. It is recommended that the NIA seek sponsorship to help organize volunteer rehab “parties” each year that will assist 2-3 elderly homeowners. They also could utilize existing volunteer rehab programs like **Christmas in April** to accomplish the same purpose.
- Tree Trimming – Overgrowth of trees and lawn vegetation lends to an unkempt appearance that detracts from the value of the housing and blocks lighting at night. If nothing else, trimming back trees and vegetation would make considerable difference in appeal and safety. Until a larger contingent of owner-occupied properties exist, it will be necessary to undertake major neighborhood “trim-ups” on a yearly basis. Army Reservists and Marine volunteers have helped organized something akin to this in the past and the City’s Water Pollution Control Division has offered to trim up the drainage easements.

Landlord Cooperation

While there is not a large number of rental homes in Oakland, tension can exist with homeowners who are often left to complain about the run-down condition of rental properties they live next to. In order to help implement the guiding principle of *ensuring property owner compliance with minimum housing/nuisance standards*, a couple strategies are outlined below that could help prevent blighted rental property conditions before they undermine homeowner values and bring down the neighborhood:

- Cooperative Nuisance Code Enforcement – Recently, the Shawnee County Landlords Association, City inspectors, and NIA have worked hand-in-hand to identify rental and homeowner properties that have nuisance or housing code violations. Their approach has been to educate the landlord or occupant on maintenance responsibilities prior to City inspectors citing them for a violation. This cooperative process has worked well in the past to diffuse complaints before they are out-of-hand and encourages a self-compliance approach vs. an adversarial approach.
- Rental Certificate Program – Many of the homeowner-renter tensions in the neighborhood could be avoided through establishment of rental certificate program. Housing code issues would be inspected and crime-free training would be required in return for the rental certificate. It would act as an incentive for landlords to maintain their properties in a safe and livable manner before leasing them on an annual basis. While a similar program has been initiated citywide, it could be eased into as a mandatory pilot program in Oakland for chronic code offenders. Other landlords could voluntarily seek certification of their units to make them more competitive.

New Construction

Infill Housing

While there are not a lot of vacant lots in the neighborhood, there will be instances of new infill housing construction. For the most part, Oakland is a traditional neighborhood in the sense that the houses are lined up uniformly along the blocks and are constructed with front porches. Occasionally over the years new housing was constructed that did not conform to the rest of the houses on the block. The picture on the left illustrates the incorrect way to place new housing on an existing block in Oakland. Note how far it is setback from the street and its lack of a porch. The picture on the right shows how the homes on that street have front porches, are set closer to the street and are lined up with each other, creating a uniform street front.



- The basic design guidelines for new housing in Oakland include:
 - Line up new homes with existing houses on rest of block.
 - Front doors should face the street.
 - New homes located on blocks with a preponderance of front porches should be built with front porches.
 - Access to the property, whether from the street or alley, should mimic the majority of the rest of the block.

Accessory Dwellings

The Oakland Neighborhood, like many of the older neighborhoods in Central Topeka, has a number of properties in which an accessory dwelling is located on the property along with the home. These accessory dwellings, also known as *garlows*, originated in the early 20th Century. Some were used as living quarters for a family waiting for the main house to be built. Many others were used as apartment units for family members or used to provide additional income by renting them out.



Accessory dwelling units can be located on the second floor of garages. They can also be stand-alone structures located in the rear of the property.

Although an accepted practice in years past, accessory dwellings are not allowed under today's zoning laws in Topeka. Just as accessory dwelling units provided a benefit to homeowners in years past, they should be allowed to do the same today. It is the recommendation of this Plan that any major zoning code revision undertaken by the City includes a provision for accessory dwelling units.

C. Neighborhood Character

Several livability strategies can be utilized that add significant value to the “demand-side” of the neighborhood. The quality of housing stock is but one facet of Oakland’s re-investment strategy. Non-housing strategies related to neighborhood character, infrastructure, parks and open space, appearance, and safety are critical in creating an overall environment of livability emphasizing a traditional neighborhood quality of life. Additional livability strategies are in this section and the following sections.



Market the Neighborhood – “Welcome to Oakland”

The keys to successfully marketing a neighborhood’s assets lie with getting the word out about these assets or potential assets so the neighborhood may show them off.

- Neighborhood Brochure – Oakland has a remarkable history, a history that has not only shaped the neighborhood, but also Topeka. The neighborhood has historic homes and buildings that are hidden opportunities. The Oakland NIA should develop a brochure that touts the many reasons why people should discover one of those hidden opportunities within the neighborhood. The brochure could be used to communicate with realtors that may not understand the value of the homes in the neighborhood. A brochure can also communicate to prospective homebuyers the benefits of living in an established neighborhood.
- Homeowner and Landowner Recognition & Appreciation – The Topeka Beautification Association already recognizes residents, who beautifully landscape their yards, by placing a note on their door commending them on their landscaping. The NIA should set up a similar program, but also go one step further, and recognize those people and their yards by placing photos on a Community Board, possibly in the Oakland Community Center or in some other central gathering spot for the neighborhood.
- History of Oakland Walking Tour – Hosting a history of Oakland tour would be a good way for the NIA to draw people to visit from outside the neighborhood. A specific walking tour showing off the distinctive character of Oakland will show that the neighborhood is active. Oakland is the hidden neighborhood of Topeka. Those who have never lived here do not really know much about the neighborhood and those who grew up in Oakland tend to stay and in turn keep the neighborhood their secret. Generations of families are found all living in Oakland.

- Welcoming Packet – A good way to welcome new residents to Oakland, is by developing a welcoming packet. The packet could include a detailed listing of phone numbers and locations of the neighborhood schools, churches, businesses, community centers, parks, and any other neighborhood services. These packets will serve as a dual purpose, both for providing important information to the new resident as well as providing advertising regarding the services of the local institutions and businesses.

Neighborhood Festivals

Festivals in Oakland are as old as the neighborhood itself. The early residents of Oakland were enticed to visit Oakland Grove Park by the festival atmosphere at the Park. In turn the festival at the Park helped increase awareness and interest in living in Oakland. Thousands of Topeka residents would travel to this park to enjoy the outdoors and the entertainment. Even though Oakland Grove Park and the accompanying festival activities no longer exist today, the festival tradition in the neighborhood continues to thrive.

The Mexican-American community in Oakland carried on this festival tradition and created the Fiesta Mexicana. Today, this weeklong street festival is one of the largest festivals in all of Topeka. The German-Russian community also created a festival, Germanfest, an outdoor festival located on the Sacred Heart Church and School grounds. Just like at Oakland Grove Park in the 1800s, today, thousands of people still flock to Oakland for these outdoor festivals.

In order to promote and support Oakland as the community of festivals, a new neighborhood-wide celebration should be organized. This event could possibly happen in the fall since Germanfest is celebrated every June and Fiesta Mexicana takes place in mid-July. The Neighborhood Improvement Association, local businesses, groups, and churches can organize this event.

Beautification/Image

Oakland does not have many pass through streets, like other neighborhoods in Topeka. The neighborhood is hidden behind the BNSF railroad yards and the Kansas River. Several options to be considered for enhancing the image of the neighborhood include:



Fiesta Mexicana

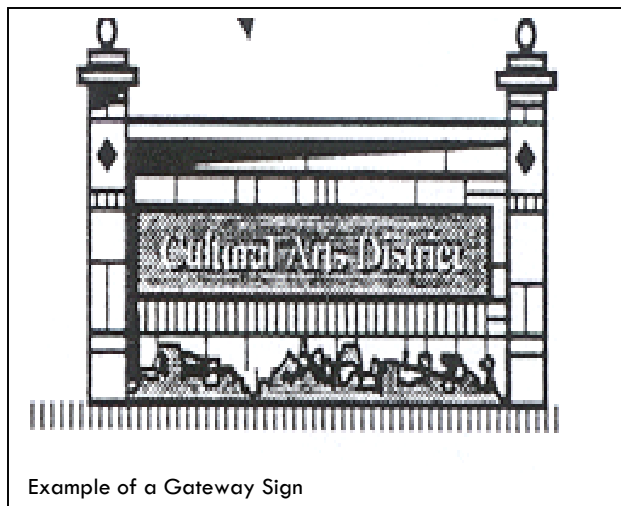


Germanfest

- Gateways – Employ a gateway signage approach instead of a centralized approach. Use a “gateway” to place signage on one or two corners angled towards the intersection or entrance street. The gateway signs should be located at all 6 access points into Oakland. The locations include entrances into the neighborhood at Branner and Seward, the River Road and Division, Golden, Seward and Strait, the Sardou Bridge and Oakland-Billard Park, and the Sardou and Strait Street entrances (see Future Land Use Map for gateway locations).

In addition to a sign being placed at the gateways, public art can also be displayed at the gateway entrances to enhance the visual appearance of the entrances.

- Gateway Sign Design Guidelines – The gateway signs in Oakland should improve the neighborhood’s aesthetics, achieve uniformity, and create a unique character. Since all entrances into Oakland are vehicle based, the signs should be large enough to be easily seen while driving into the neighborhood. Other design elements for the gateway signs include:
 - *Type* Monument Sign
 - *Location:* Located at all 6 entrances
 - *Setback:* Located behind the sidewalk and outside of the sight distance triangle minimum
 - *Materials:* Made of natural stone, cast concrete, or other appropriate masonry material.
 - *Lighting:* Any illumination shall be shielded to direct light toward the sign face only
 - *Sign Dimension:* The sign should be large, so it is easily seen. General minimum guidelines for the sign dimensions include a width of 9 feet, and a height of 4 feet.



- “Sign Contest” – A contest between the neighborhood schools is a great way to come up with a sign design for Oakland’s gateways. The children at the schools can submit their designs to the NIA. The NIA can set up a public meeting for the neighborhood residents to vote on their favorite designs.
- Neighborhood Banners and Flags – In addition to the gateway signs, banners and flags should be placed along the street poles and on the residences front porches. The benefits of banners and flags are two-fold; it shows that the residents are proud of Oakland and happy to call it home and it shows that a community spirit exists in Oakland.

The NIA should come up with a unifying logo for Oakland that can be placed on banners and flags. Like with the neighborhood signage, there are a number of different methods of coming up with the look of the banners and flags. A contest between the neighborhood schools, a program at the community centers, collaboration among the businesses, and so forth are all methods to involve the community with designing the banners and flags. These banners and flags can be placed on light poles on the major streets. Residents of Oakland could also display these banners and flags from their homes. Also, at the main entrance into Oakland, such as along Seward Avenue, east of Branner, a festive across-the-street banner may be hung between the light posts over the roadway advertising Oakland’s next festival and when it is.

Example of a neighborhood street banner is below (on left). The banner is simply placed on a standard modern light pole, but adds much to the overall character of the neighborhood.

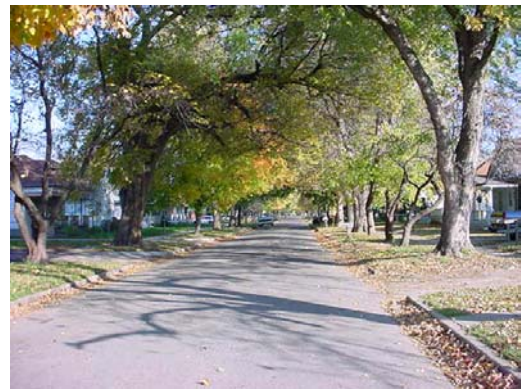


Neighborhood Street Banner



Neighborhood Flag

- Street Tree Replacement – Oakland is a mature neighborhood that was developed at a time when trees were planted along streets as a matter of course. These trees have matured over time and are now a tremendous asset for the neighborhood. Trees have a number of benefits including saving energy, improving air quality, and creating wildlife diversity.



Typical tree lined street in Oakland.

Occasionally, a street will lose a mature tree. It's important to replace this tree to help preserve the character of the street. It is also important to introduce new tree species to the neighborhood. Many of the streets are lined by Silver Maples, with very little tree diversity. A variety of trees along the street will help preserve the street canopy and prevent the susceptibility of all the trees catching a disease and having to be removed, like what happened when the City was hit by Dutch Elm Disease. This Plan recommends that the City create a street tree replacement program.

D. Community Building

"Together we find the way"

African Proverb

Community building is a key part of a neighborhood revitalization strategy because its focus is on making the neighborhood a stronger advocate for itself. Empowering the residents and institutions of a neighborhood with the notion they can foster change that impacts the neighborhood in a positive manner is one of the goals of community building. Some of the principles of community building are:

- ◆ Build on community strengths
- ◆ Support families and children
- ◆ Foster broad community participation
- ◆ Forge partnerships through collaboration
- ◆ Value cultural strengths

Capacity

Successful organizations have the wherewithal to succeed. A neighborhood's ability to complete a competitive grant application, run successful meetings that are open to all citizens of the neighborhood, and complete projects in a timely manner demonstrates to decision makers and funding organizations that the neighborhood is serious about getting things done. Ideally, the neighborhood should function like a business. Below are strategies to increase organizational capacity.

- **Non-profit status:** The neighborhood should secure non-profit status. By organizing as a 501 (c) (3) the neighborhood will open many doors to additional funding sources that aren't currently available. 501 (c) (3) groups are eligible to receive public and private grants. Individual donors to 501 (c) (3) groups can claim a federal income tax reduction of up to 50%.
- **Neighborhood Assistant Consultant:** Housing and Neighborhood Development has hired a Neighborhood Assistant Consultant. The Neighborhood Assistant Consultant is available to help NIA's recognize their organizational strengths and weaknesses. Oakland should take advantage of this resource as a means to building organizational capacity.
- **Education and Training:** NIA leaders should consider attending seminars and conferences that deal with community building, neighborhood revitalization, and other neighborhood issues. As an example, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute puts on a number of excellent training conferences each year. It is recommended that the NIA and the City explore ways to encourage neighborhood leaders to attend these conferences.

Organizing

The most important resources of any neighborhood are the people who live there. Organizing is the renewable resource that can power a neighborhood's revitalization. An organized neighborhood can be a strong advocate for itself. A neighborhood that can show it is willing to stand up for itself is a neighborhood that can be a force for change. Bringing more people into the NIA is a key step toward successful revitalization. Listed below are a number of strategies for building organization within the neighborhood.

- **Strength in numbers:** When opportunities present themselves for the neighborhood to appear before decision makers, the neighborhood must be able to demonstrate a unified voice with a large number of people. The impact of this demonstration is very difficult for decision makers to ignore.
- **Social Activities:** Fun activities that bring neighbors together are an important element of a strong neighborhood. Oakland should revive block parties as a means to get neighbors together.
- **Christmas in April:** The NIA should petition the Christmas in April organization to focus on a part of Oakland each year to do an all-out housing rehabilitation blitz. This volunteer effort will demonstrate pride in the neighborhood and will encourage others to take ownership in their neighborhood.
- **Collaborate to form partnerships:** Building community requires work by all sectors – local residents, community-based organizations, businesses, schools, religious institutions, health and social service agencies – in an atmosphere of trust, cooperation and respect. It will take time and committed work to make this collaboration more than rhetoric.

Public Safety

A major goal of this Plan is to: *create a safe, clean, and livable environment for all those in Oakland to live, learn, work, and play.* A crime problem is a multifaceted problem. There is no magic solution that is going to erase a crime problem. However, there are things that people can do to reverse the negative cycle and begin to reclaim their neighborhood.

- **Neighborhood Patrols:** The neighborhood should contact Safe Streets to help them set up a neighborhood patrol program. Stroll Patrols put people out walking the neighborhood. Neighborhood activity by residents discourages criminal activity.
- **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED):** Safe Streets and the Police Department can help the neighborhood determine which property layouts in the neighborhood encourage crime. There are ways to design property and neighborhood layouts to help prevent criminal activity. For instance, the “5 & 2 rule” states

that trees should be trimmed to at least 5 feet high and bushes should be trimmed to be no higher than 2 feet. Support adoption of Unified Development Code requiring CPTED principles be enforced for new development.

- **Crime Free Multi-Housing Program:** The Topeka Police Department, Safe Streets, and the City's code compliance program have teamed up to provide landlords with a free education in keeping their tenants safe and preventing crimes against their properties. The program uses a three-step process to help landlords and property managers make their properties secure, prevent and identify drug operators, screen tenants and learn about liability laws. The three steps landlords must take to earn certification as a Crime Free Multi-Housing property are to complete the eight-hour class, have a property inspection by code compliance services and police, and conduct a "Safety Social" for residents of the rental property at least once a year.
- **Clean-Ups** – The NIA should continue its neighborhood/ alley clean-up program and start an annual "trim-up" campaign (see pg.29). These clean-ups by the NIA are vital to avoiding environmental code problems as well as deterring crime by showing that residents care about the appearance of their neighborhood. Another program could be an "ugliest" yard clean up or neighborhood landscape contests.
- **Community Policing** – This vital program must be continued by the Topeka Police to maintain the gains made in recent years on ridding the neighborhood of serious drug activities. The individual contacts made by police officers and relationships made with the community are essential to the cooperation needed to ensure residents' safety.

Youth and Education

Youth are critical for the ongoing revitalization of the neighborhood. As these children grow up and are forced with choices about where to live, they are going to be more inclined to stay in the neighborhood if they had good experiences growing up in a place that provided a positive environment. If Oakland is "kid friendly", it will have the two-fold benefit of attracting /retaining families in the short-term and becoming assets to the community in the long-term.

Some actions include:

- **Cool Summers Program** – This drop-in program at State Street Elementary School is for ages 6-12 and sponsored by the City's Parks and Recreation Department, Weed & Seed, and USD 501.
- **Clean-Ups** – Encourage youth to help with neighborhood clean-ups, particularly of the nature area like within Oakland Billard Park, the Kansas River, and the Shunga Trail. These activities are vital to connecting youth with their neighborhood and assisting with environmental education.

- Community Gardens – Encourage youth to participate with community garden. Community gardens are used as gardens, native tree and grasses restoration areas, playgrounds, classrooms, picnic sites, etc. Community gardens create beauty, security, and neighborliness and are an educational resource for youth.

E. Parks and Trails

The quality of life in Oakland is directly influenced by the quality of the neighborhood's environment, its scenic beauty, and the variety of its cultural and recreational opportunities available to area residents. Collectively, these resources not only contribute to the physical, mental, and emotional well being of the neighborhood, but also greatly influence the perception of this neighborhood throughout the entire city.

According to the National Recreation and Parks Administrators, Oakland should have 30 acres of neighborhood-sized parks (5 acres/1,000 population). The neighborhood currently has approximately 55 acres of parks. Including Motorcycle Park (approximately 100 acres), the neighborhood has nearly 160 acres of parkland. Looking at numbers alone, it becomes quite obvious that Oakland is very well served in terms of parks and open space.

However, concerns were raised in the planning process for this Plan that the eastern side of the neighborhood is underserved in terms of parkland. Oakland's two major parks (Oakland Billard and Santa Fe) are located on the western edge of the neighborhood, and Motorcycle Park is located in the northwest corner. Oakland Park is located a few blocks east of Oakland Billard but is still located more on the western side of the neighborhood. An examination of the neighborhood turned up approximately 3 acres of vacant land owned by the City of Topeka where Michigan, Laurent, and Doran Streets converge. This land has the potential to serve as park space for the neighborhood and is located towards the eastern side of the neighborhood.



Oakland Billard Park

Given their locations on western edge of the neighborhood, the existing parks in Oakland aren't readily accessible to all elements of the population. Pedestrian access to the parks could be better as there is no internal trail/pathway system linking the bulk of the residential neighborhood with the parks. The finished segment of the Shunga Trail in Oakland does connect Santa Fe Park with Oakland Billard Park. As the Shunga Trail is completed along the Kansas River Levee, it will connect Motorcycle Park with Oakland Billard and will provide those residents in the northern part of the neighborhood with a pedestrian means of access to Oakland Billard and Santa Fe Parks. On the whole, however, pedestrian access to the parks could be better. The Oakland Park "system" should consist of parks, trails, and other pathway connections throughout the neighborhood to truly create a system of open space.

Any park improvements proposed by residents of the neighborhood should be coordinated with the City's Parks and Recreation Department.

- Oakland Billard Park – This park is significant in connecting the neighborhood’s system of parks and trails with the region’s system. The park already is connected to Santa Fe Park via the Oakland segment of the Shunga Trail. Once the Shunga is finished citywide, Oakland Billard Park will be major node along the region’s trail system. At approximately 41 acres, Oakland Billard Park contains a fairly large amount of passive open space along with its recreational facilities that include the Mouse Trap Skate Park (a regional recreational facility), a swimming pool, and ball fields. The Oakland Community Center is also located in Oakland Billard Park.

- Santa Fe Park – Approximately 12 acres, this park is connected to Oakland Billard Park via the Shunga Trail. The park contains passive open space, playground equipment, and a couple ball fields. Future improvements should include looping the Shunga Trail around the park.



Santa Fe Park

- Oakland Park – “Little Oakland” Park is approximately 2 acres. Planned improvements to the park include new sidewalks/handicap ramps, a new play structure, new walkways, lighting improvements, and making the tennis court useable for tennis and basketball.

- New Park– This City-owned property comprises approximately 3 acres and is located at the intersection of Michigan, Laurent, and Doran Streets. Access is limited to Doran Street to the east because the old Shunga channel separates the land from the neighborhood to the north, west, and south. Pedestrian bridges will need to be installed to provide access to the west and north. Decisions on the name and design of the park should be a collective process involving the neighborhood. This



New Park

land is shown on the Future Land Use Map as Parks and Open Space and is reserved for public or private parks and open space purposes.

- Motorcycle Park – The largest park in the Oakland system at 100 acres is also the park with the least amount of benefit to most of the neighborhood. Motorcycle Park is a specialty use park for motorized recreational vehicles only. The location of the park could pose problems as the Shunga Trail is extended in Oakland along the Kansas River levee in the near future. Steps will need to be taken to segregate the users of Motorcycle Park from the pedestrian users of the Shunga Trail. In the future, consideration should be given to making this park available for other outdoor recreation users and moving the motorized vehicles elsewhere.

- Shunga Trail – The Shunga Trail currently links Oakland Billard Park with Santa Fe Park. The trail also forms a loop around Oakland Billard Park. The Shunga Trail is part of the regional trail system in Topeka and Shawnee County. The section in Oakland, however, is a stand-alone part of the system waiting to be linked up with the rest of the Shunga Trail. Finishing the Shunga Trail and extending it into Oakland is a priority for the City of Topeka.



Future Shunga Trail looking east from Motorcycle Park

The trail currently starts at approximately 29th and Fairlawn Road in west Topeka and winds its way east to the Landon Trail (roughly 17th and Monroe Streets). Federal funding has been secured to extend the trail to Golden Avenue in East Topeka. In addition, the City's Water Pollution Control Department has begun to surface the trail along the Kansas River levee beginning east of the Oakland Wastewater Treatment Plant. With any luck, the Shunga Trail should be completed to Oakland from Fairlawn Road in 2-3 years. The total length of the trail will be approximately 14 miles.

- Public Schools – Although not public parks, the grounds at the public schools in the neighborhood oftentimes function as 'de facto' park space for the neighborhood. For instance, the grounds around Chase Middle School and State Street Elementary has passive open space, playground equipment, tennis courts and basketball courts, all of which can be used by the young and old of the neighborhood. These de facto parks add to the quality of life experienced in Oakland.



Playground equipment at State Street Elementary

Adopt-a-Park

Adopt-a-park programs are good ways neighborhoods, school groups, churches, businesses, etc. can assist local governments with the ongoing maintenance of park facilities. The local government gets the benefit of volunteer labor and the sponsoring group gets the benefit of "ownership" of a community resource. The neighborhood should work with the Parks and Recreation Department and other neighborhood groups to form adopt-a-park programs with the Oakland parks.

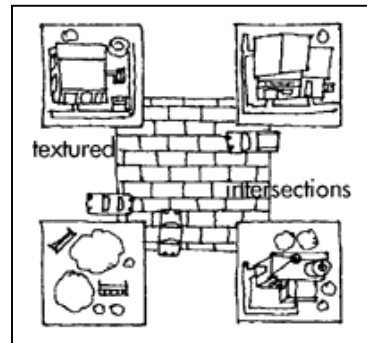
F. Circulation and Infrastructure

Traffic Calming

The traffic and pedestrian circulation within Oakland is defined primarily by a grid pattern street system that serves the needs of residential neighborhood quite well. There are problems, however, with the many uncontrolled intersections in the neighborhood. Uninterrupted travel along the long streets in the neighborhood has a tendency to encourage some to travel at higher speeds than is appropriate for this residential neighborhood. This poses risks to motorists and pedestrians alike. A number of comments were received regarding this situation.

Definitions of traffic calming vary, but they all share the goal of reducing vehicle speeds, improving safety, and enhancing quality of life. There are a variety of techniques used to calm traffic. They include the traditional forms of intersection control such as stop signs and stop lights. They also can be as simple as encouraging residents along a street to park their vehicles on the street. This has the affect of narrowing the street, which will encourage vehicles to slow down. Other techniques include:

- **Speed bumps/humps** – effective at cutting down speed and getting drivers to think about their roadway.
- **Raised intersections/changes in road texture** - Can use grooved asphalt, colored paving stones, brick, (or for the ultimate effectiveness, cobblestones). Gets drivers' attention. Good for pedestrians.
- **Traffic circles** – Slows motorists down and alters their path. Can be attractively landscaped. Examples in Topeka can be found in the Potwin Neighborhood.



Priority intersections need to be identified before decisions on techniques are made. Cost will be an issue so it will be important for the neighborhood to be creative when identifying funding sources.

Streets/Sidewalks

As discussed earlier, the traffic circulation system within Oakland is defined primarily by a grid pattern street system. In addition, most of the neighborhood has standard urban infrastructure. There are some isolated portions of the neighborhood with few or no sidewalks and open drainage systems. Infrastructure on the whole is good in Oakland. There are, however some areas that need to be addressed. Resources are limited; therefore priority areas need to be set to target infrastructure improvements where it is most needed.

Sidewalk Priorities

Nearly the entire neighborhood has sidewalks. One of the issues with those sidewalks is that many are broken and uneven because of the presence of large mature trees. Those trees have gotten bigger over the years and their roots are coming to the surface and disrupting the sidewalks. This poses problems to the elderly and handicap folks who may have difficulties navigating uneven surfaces. It also poses liability issues to property owners. State law dictates that property owners are responsible for the sidewalks adjacent to their property. Therefore, property owners are responsible for fixing broken sidewalks. The NIA should find ways to help those property owners that are unable to afford to fix problem sidewalks.



The other issue with sidewalks in Oakland is a lack of handicap ramps. Most of the sidewalks in Oakland do not have handicap ramps installed at the intersections. These situations can pose problems for those with mobility issues.

Again, resources are limited. Therefore, sidewalk priorities should include areas that are important pedestrian linkages, which includes connecting schools, parks, commercial areas (Seward and Sardou), bus routes, and other important destinations and anchors around the neighborhood.

Street Priorities

To achieve the goal of “*providing ongoing improvement of infrastructure and public facilities that will maintain Oakland’s capacity for viability*”, eliminating “ditch” drainage systems in areas still lacking modern street drainage should be a priority. It is the recommendation of this plan that those areas lacking modern street infrastructure be identified and plans crafted to bring those areas up to standards.

Wastewater Treatment Plant

The Oakland Wastewater Treatment Plant is located on the western edge of the neighborhood. This facility not only serves the Oakland neighborhood, but also a major portion of the City and areas south of the City. The facility is currently undergoing a major expansion/upgrading. The City is spending approximately \$65 million to bring the facility up to standards for the next 20 years and address concerns of the neighborhood.



The main concern of the neighborhood is the odors produced by the treatment plant. These odors oftentimes hang over the neighborhood and make life uncomfortable for some of its residents. As the City upgrades the existing facility, it is initiating a number of odor control measures it hopes will mitigate the odor problem. These measures include techniques at the plant itself, as well as treatments to waste at a few pump stations near the plant. Future odor control measures will address the compost piles at the north end of the plant.

The treatment plant treats a large amount of waste from the City, making it safe for discharge into the Kansas River. There are a number of additional benefits of the treatment plant. The compost created by the facility is given to farmers and gardeners to use on crops. The methane gas produced by the plant is used to generate electricity, saving approximately \$20,000/month. And the reclaimed water is used to water the ball fields at Oakland Billard Park.

G. Commercial Corridors

Revitalization Strategy

The physical condition of Oakland's commercial corridors strongly impacts the perception of the vitality and desirability of the adjacent residential neighborhood. Seward and Sardou Avenues are the main points of entry into the neighborhood. Currently, Seward and Sardou Avenues are not reaching their full potential as desirous front doors for Oakland; the overall image of these commercial corridors is not as pleasant or reflective of the neighborhood behind them. Realizing the goals of this Plan depends in large part to the perceived health of Seward and Sardou Avenues as the neighborhood's most important image corridors.

The importance of the corridors lies not only with the overall health of the residential neighborhood, but also with the health of the existing commercial businesses. Changes in market dynamics has meant that local neighborhood retailers have had to compete harder for the local dollar against larger chain retailers in regional locations who can afford to sell at lower prices. The physical condition of the corridors does not make that competition an easier. Healthy corridors are an important element in the local retailer's fight for those neighborhood dollars. In addition, those businesses seeking to locate in a healthy neighborhood will be influenced by the condition of the commercial corridors in Oakland.

Comments were voiced by the stakeholders about the potential to revitalize the commercial corridors to create an atmosphere that is more conducive to attracting quality businesses. The intent of a revitalization strategy for the commercial corridors should be to help create an image that says, "this is the place to be". The general goals of this revitalization strategy for the Seward and Sardou commercial corridors are as follows:

- ◆ Enhance the pedestrian environment
- ◆ Beautify the area
- ◆ Encourage local 'mom and pop' businesses to locate in the neighborhood
- ◆ Rehabilitate those businesses that are still viable
- ◆ Raise design standards for Seward and Sardou frontage
- ◆ Encourage residential consistent with its mixed-use character.

Several of these goals may be achieved ultimately through changing the zoning along the corridors (see Land Use Plan). However, the remaining goals may only be achieved through private or public intervention to revitalize parts of the corridors.

Existing Conditions

The following discussion is intended to provide a brief snapshot of the existing land use along the corridors. The focus of the review is on the portion of the corridors currently zoned for commercial uses.

Seward Avenue

This review includes that portion of the street zoned continuously for commercial purposes between Branner and Sumner Streets. The main concentration of commercial uses in the neighborhood is found along this

section of the street. Most of the businesses are located in existing commercial buildings with some adaptive re-use of residential structures. There is 47,042 square feet of existing commercial building space. Of that, 15,178 square feet (32%) is currently vacant. Residential uses comprise 57% of all the parcels, making it the dominant land use along the corridor.

Commercial uses along Seward Avenue include two neighborhood-level grocery stores, auto-related uses, neighborhood bars, and institutional uses.

Sardou Avenue

Sardou Avenue, in terms of commercial build-out, is secondary to Seward Avenue. There is 25,837 square feet of existing commercial building space. Of that, 1,584 square feet (6%) is currently vacant. Residential and institutional uses comprise 46% of the parcels along the corridor.

Commercial uses along Sardou Avenue include auto-related uses (repair and convenience/gas), a liquor store, neighborhood bar, and offices.

Commercial Development

Oakland is an isolated neighborhood. There are only 6 points of entry into this 6,000-strong residential neighborhood. Given the number of residents and its isolated nature, the neighborhood should be able to support two viable commercial corridors. One of the keys to achieving viability along the corridors is to direct commercial development to the corridors. For instance, the survey of the existing commercial development along Seward Avenue pointed out that 32% of the commercial property is currently vacant. Clearly the demand for commercial space along Seward Avenue does not rise to the level of the existing supply. As the corridors are improved, demand for space in Oakland should increase and as much as possible, new commercial business looking at Oakland should be directed towards the vacant commercial space within the commercial corridors, particularly along Seward.

Should a new business looking to locate in the neighborhood need a stop light, and they won't fit where there is vacant space, then they should be directed to one of the two areas along Seward that have existing stoplights. The existing stoplights make the properties easier to develop. The existing stoplights are located at Chandler/Seward and Chester/Seward (see Future Land Use Plan for land use designation of these areas).

The isolation of the neighborhood means that the most appropriate types of businesses are those that serve the neighborhood. These neighborhood-level, or "mom and pop", businesses aren't looking to attract customers from a larger region outside the neighborhood. Stakeholder comments about the types of businesses desired for Oakland included hardware store, drug store, more restaurants, etc. These neighborhood-level businesses would fit nicely into the corridors.

Micro Loan Program

The City of Topeka, Housing and Neighborhood Development, and GoTopeka have formed a partnership offering business loans to qualifying individuals looking to start small businesses. The loans range from \$500-\$35,000 and include

education training requirements. Anyone can apply, although the program is targeting minority and woman-owned businesses. The neighborhood should direct those persons interested in starting businesses in the neighborhood to the Chamber of Commerce for more information.

There are some existing neighborhood-level businesses in the corridors that could benefit from some aesthetic improvements to their buildings. Not only will this help the business, but will also contribute to the overall improvement of the corridors.

Commercial façade improvement program - A new program should to be created to help property owners interested in fixing up their commercial property, but cannot because they lack the technical know-how or perhaps are a few thousand dollars short of making a good impact. The program could include a dollar for dollar match of exterior renovations of commercial buildings to be consistent with adopted design guidelines. Patterned after the City's commercial storefront façade program, free design assistance could be combined with rehab match grants up to \$5,000 to encourage an owner to go the extra step towards sensitive neighborhood design. Not only would this program benefit existing businesses, but also could improve vacant properties, making them more marketable to new business.

Image Corridors

As discussed earlier in this section, the Sardou and Seward Avenue corridors are the neighborhood's most important image corridors. The perception of the entire neighborhood is largely derived from the visual appearance of these 2 major streets in Oakland. Each carry a significant amount of traffic and as such, immediate aesthetic improvements to these corridors could have a fairly dramatic impact. Both public and private investment can affect the visual image of the corridors. Public investment in the streetscape could include roadway repair, new sidewalks, lighting, street furniture, and landscaping. As discussed earlier, simple façade improvements by property owners to existing properties will go a long ways towards enhancing the visual vitality of the commercial corridors.

Seward Avenue Streetscape – Seward Avenue is the primary east/west street bisecting Oakland and is also the major commercial corridor for the neighborhood. Driving down Seward Avenue provides one with a sense that this roadway could be much more. The street is lined with a mix of homes, institutions, and businesses. However, unlike the majority of the neighborhood, there are few trees along this corridor. Therefore, repairing and replacing sidewalks,



adding trees and other plantings, and installing decorative lighting along the corridor are options for visually enhancing this important corridor. Steps should also be taken to better effectively screen industrial uses along Seward Avenue.

The improvement of the Seward Avenue corridor is a priority for the neighborhood (see Implementation Section – pg. 53). Key to securing City funding for streetscape improvements along the corridor will be developing a project with cost estimates and placing the project in the City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget. Additional planning and technical assistance beyond the scope of this Plan will be necessary to formulate a proper design and cost estimates.

A potential source of funding for additional planning and technical assistance is Kansas Department of Commerce’s Community Capacity Building Program. The purpose of the program is to encourage collaborative community development planning and plan implementation activities in the State of Kansas. An example of the use of the program in Topeka is the Washburn-Lane Parkway. Much of the technical design standards for the Parkway was funded using the Community Capacity Building Program. The neighborhood will need to secure matching funds in order to apply for this grant program.

Another option for funding to help with design and technical assistance is the City. Funds are limited, but Seward Avenue streetscape improvements are a top priority for this neighborhood.

Sardou Avenue Streetscape – Sardou Avenue is an important corridor because it is the major east-west central corridor through the neighborhood. This avenue carries as much traffic as Seward Avenue and in addition carries much of the traffic passing through between Billard Airport and Topeka. This street is mostly lined with homes with a commercial corridor in the middle of the neighborhood. Similar to the Seward Avenue streetscape improvement options, adding trees, other plantings, decorative lighting along the corridor are options for visually enhancing the Sardou Avenue corridor.



Signage is another element that can be used to improve the image of the corridor. Gateway signage is important for the corridors and is discussed in the Neighborhood Character Section (page 33). Special signs or banners could be used to show a collective pride in the corridors. Holiday and seasonal decorations can also have a positive impact.

Business Improvement District (BID) – A BID is an organization of property owners in a commercial district who tax themselves to raise money for neighborhood improvement. Core functions usually include keeping sidewalks and curbs clean, removing graffiti, and patrolling the streets. A BID could also be responsible for signage along the corridors. Once a BID is formed, the assessment is mandatory,

collected by the city like any other tax. Unlike any other taxes, however, the city returns the assessment to the BID management for use in the district. Commercial property owners along the corridors should consider this option as a way to fund improvements.

Urban Design Recommendations

- **Parking**

A parking lot should never be the focus from the street. Parking should be moved to the rear of buildings or be extensively screened from the street.

- **Building Orientation**

New buildings fronting Seward should maintain zero setbacks to position the building as close to the sidewalk as possible. New buildings along Seward and Sardou should be oriented towards those streets. Front doors should not face the secondary residential streets.

- **Pedestrian Lighting**

New decorative pedestrian lighting will help define the corridors as special and safe places to be. Using period lighting from the neighborhood's time as a city could add a bit of charm to the corridors.

- **Streetscape**

Public investment in a pedestrian oriented streetscape will complement revitalization efforts. Repaired/new sidewalks, brick crosswalks, street furniture, decorative lighting, and neighborhood banners/signs should be included in the overall development strategy.

- **Landscaping**

Landscaped setbacks and parking areas helps contribute to the pedestrian-friendliness of the corridor and its visual quality.

- **Signage and wayfinding**

Signs for offering navigational assistance include road signs, kiosks, maps and other tools.



Example of building close to sidewalk and parking to the side.

Summary

It is hoped that improvements to the commercial corridors in the Oakland Neighborhood will add to the long-term health of the neighborhood in a number of ways. Healthy corridors will present an image of the neighborhood more in line with the residential neighborhood behind them. This will hopefully have a positive impact on the overall health of the residential neighborhood as potential homeowners will be less likely to be turned off by the neighborhood by their first impressions from the corridors.

Healthy commercial corridors should make for better business for the existing commercial businesses because many of the residents leaving the neighborhood to shop may instead choose to stay. New businesses, those neighborhood-level businesses wanted by the neighborhood, are more likely to be attracted to locate here because of a healthier overall location.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this section is to provide a “framework for action” that outlines how the vision, goals, policies, and land use recommendations can be realized over the next ten years. It should be used by stakeholders and decision-makers to guide the next steps of the neighborhood revitalization process in terms of priorities, responsibilities, and feasibility.

A. Key Action Priorities

The community was surveyed at the January 10, 2004 Oakland Plan validation meeting to determine their priorities for implementing specific strategies and actions of this plan. The actions below are organized based on the ranking received at the meeting (140 votes) as well as the stakeholder meetings held since June 2003. They are not necessarily inclusive of all potential actions, but a checklist of some of the more major actions that should be undertaken. Votes are listed in parentheses.

Priority “A” Activities *(Address these before others)*

- ✓ **“Downzone” single-family areas from multi-family zoning (M-1,) to single-family zoning (R-2)**

Development policies of the Comprehensive Plan are legally implemented through the practice of zoning to reflect the desired land use and intensity patterns for an area. The Land Use Plan contained herein should be used as the guide to a neighborhood-wide re-zoning as initiated by the Topeka Planning Commission. Map #7 illustrates the specific zoning districts (per the Land Use Plan to protect the neighborhood from insensitive higher intensity development. Changes to a higher intensity zoning district should be reviewed on a case by case basis to determine their consistency with the Plan’s goals.
Who: Topeka Planning Commission; City Council
When: 2004
- ✓ **Rezone Seward Avenue to mixed-use (X-1)**

The street currently has a mixed-use character, with businesses, residences, and institutions all next to each other along this corridor. Therefore, rezoning Seward Avenue to Mixed Use will reflect the land use existing today.
Who: Topeka Planning Commission, City Council
When: 2004
- ✓ **Begin Seward Avenue streetscape improvements (19%)**

This project should be put into the City’s CIP Budget. The NIA should hire a consultant to design a unifying streetscape and cost estimates for Seward Avenue.
Who: Oakland NIA, City Council
When: 1-5 years
- ✓ **Expand the Neighborhood Clean-Up Program (14%)**

Work with neighborhood institutions (employers, schools, churches, & organizations) to expand the neighborhood clean-up program

Who: Oakland NIA, Neighborhood Institutions

When: Ongoing

- ✓ **Locate signs and enhancements at gateways into the neighborhood (12%)**
The NIA should finalize the locations and design concept with an appropriate sign/installation company as referred to in this plan and submit to Planning/Parks for the City's review and approval. Likely funding must either be applied for during the Consolidated Plan RFP process or raised privately.
Who: Oakland NIA, Parks
When: 2004
- ✓ **Repair Sidewalks (9%)**
Identify sidewalks that are in need of repair and are more heavily used.
Who: Oakland NIA, Public Works
When: Ongoing
- ✓ **Install traffic calming devices at dangerous intersections (6%)**
Work with Public Works and Police Departments to identify dangerous intersections and determine what can be installed to make these intersections safer.
Who: Oakland NIA, Public Works, Police
When: Ongoing
- ✓ **Cooperative nuisance code enforcement (4%)**
Who: Oakland NIA, Code Compliance
When: Ongoing
- ✓ **Commercial Façade Improvement Program (4%)**
Who: Business Organization
When: 1-5 years

Priority "B" Activities (Secondary, but can still be worked on)

- ✓ **Develop a New Park (3%)**
Work with the Parks Department to develop the city owned 3-acre parcel near the intersection of Michigan, Laurent, and Doran Streets into a city park for the residents in the eastern portion of Oakland.
Who: Parks Department, Oakland NIA
When: 5 years
- ✓ **Start a Crime Free Multi-Housing Program for Oakland (3%)**
Who: Topeka Police Department, Safe Streets, Code Compliance, Oakland NIA
When: Ongoing
- ✓ **Establish a Rental Certificate Program (3%)**
Who: Oakland NIA
- ✓ **Identify tree-trimming priorities (3%)**
Work with the NIA and City Forestry Department to identify the priorities for tree trimming in the neighborhood.
Who: Forestry, Oakland NIA
When: Ongoing

- ✓ **Develop a “Welcome to the Neighborhood” Packet (2%)**
Who: Oakland NIA
When: 1-2 years
- ✓ **Repair neighborhood streets (1%)**
 Work with Public Works to identify streets that need to be repaired.
Who: Public Works, Oakland NIA
When: Ongoing
- ✓ **Begin the development of community gardens (1%)**
 Community gardens are a way to add open space to the neighborhood as well as for the residents to get involved with beautifying Oakland. Vacant lots and existing city owned property are ideal locations for these gardens. The NIA must work with the City to develop the gardens.
Who: Oakland NIA, Parks, WPC
When: 1-5 years
- ✓ **Create a new neighborhood wide festival (1%)**
 Work with the neighborhood institutions, both public and private, to create this new festival. A neighborhood wide festival is a good way to bring everybody together.
Who: Oakland NIA
When: 5-10 years
- ✓ **Start a History of Oakland Walking Tour (1%)**
Who: Oakland NIA
When: 1-5 years
- ✓ **Develop a brochure of the neighborhood for realtors and new residents (1%)**
Who: Oakland NIA
When: 1-2 years

Priority “C” Activities (*Hold off until more of “A” and “B” get accomplished*)

- ✓ **Install neighborhood banners and flags**
- ✓ **Begin a “neighbor to neighbor” Volunteer Housing Rehab Program**
- ✓ **Develop a partnership with neighborhood institutions for rehabbing housing**
- ✓ **Create a new city code to allow for accessory dwellings (garlows)**
- ✓ **Develop an Adopt-a-park Program for Oakland**
- ✓ **Implement a Homeowner & Landowner Recognition & Appreciation Program**
- ✓ **Create a Business Improvement District along Seward Avenue**
- ✓ **Establish other neighborhood social activities**
- ✓ **Develop urban design recommendations for the commercial corridors**