





Issues and Strategies

3.0 ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

3.1 OVERARCHING ISSUES

The *Blueprints* Team identified three major issues within the greater Augusta area that directly and indirectly have an effect on the neighborhood issues, detailed in Section 2.2. These overarching issues include the economy, the real estate market, and Harrisburg's neighborhood identity. The solutions to regional economic and real estate challenges are well beyond the reach of this report. There are some real estate and economic development strategies that will be recommended in the remainder of this report, but recovery of the economy and the real estate market will have to occur in their own time. Neighborhood identity issues, on the other hand, have a greater ability to be resolved with implementation of the strategies discussed within this report. It will be necessary to implement both top-down (general economic and real estate market revitalization) and ground-up (neighborhood identity) strategies to address Harrisburg's challenges and provide long-term stability for this community.

3.1.1 ECONOMY

The current economic climate has affected the entire nation – the national unemployment rate is high at 9.1%.^{3.1} The economy in Augusta-Richmond County, however, is not as dire. The local economy is growing with jobs moving into the region.^{3.2} Augusta-Richmond County benefits from diverse employment opportunities at the Georgia Health Sciences University, a number of major hospital and related health care facilities, and Fort Gordon. According to the 2005-2009 American Community Survey (ACS), the educational services, health care and social assistance industry makes up 26% of jobs, with retail trade following at 13%. Unemployment in Augusta-Richmond County is lower than the national average at 5.3%. While jobs are available and the overall economy is growing, income is lower in Augusta-Richmond County at \$36,823

median household income than the national average at \$51,425 median household income. Education levels are slightly lower in Augusta-Richmond County than that of the national average as well, with 20% of Augustans over 25 years of age holding a bachelor degree or higher, compared to 27.5% in the U.S. The young professional, 25 to 34 age cohort, makes up a significant percentage of Augusta-Richmond County's population at 14.5%, indicating that some college graduates are remaining or moving to the area.^{3.3}

While this report did not focus on economic redevelopment, it is recommended that Augusta-Richmond County further study its employment and educational strengths and weaknesses, in planning for economic growth. Maintaining a mix of employment opportunities while diversifying workforce training should be a priority. Additionally, providing higher paying job opportunities for college educated professionals could help raise income levels throughout the County, which would help boost the local economy and increase tax revenue for the region. Addressing these economic issues while working to resolve Harrisburg's challenges, will help create a livable, intown community attractive to a variety of homeowners, residents and businesses.

3.1.2 REAL ESTATE MARKET

Today's real estate market is a challenge affecting communities across the country. According to the National Association of Realtors, existing home sales in the U.S. are down 15.3% in May of 2011 from May of 2010. Property values are also dropping, as evidenced in the National Association of Realtors' statistics showing a 4.6% drop in the median sales price of homes from May of 2010 to May of 2011. Comparing median sales prices from May of 2008 to May 2011, the drop is even

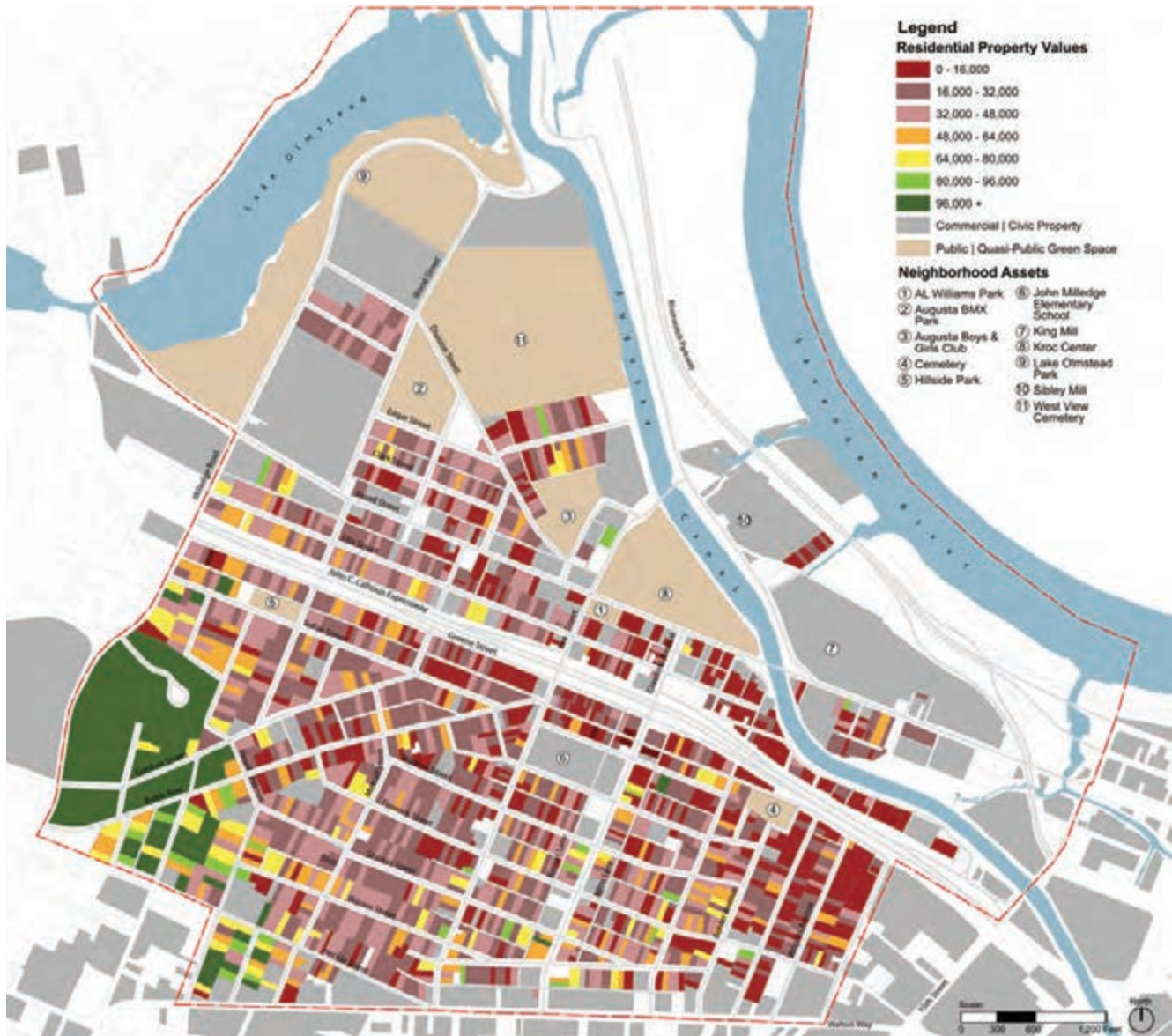


Figure 3.1a Residential Property Values

more drastic at a decrease of 18%.^{3.4} Property values in Augusta and Harrisburg, however, are much lower than the national average. According to the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, the median property value in Augusta-Richmond County is \$97,900, 47% less than the national median of \$185,400.^{3.5} Harrisburg property values are even lower still, with the median property value at less than \$32,000 (Refer to Figure 3.1a).

The number of renter-occupied housing units in Augusta-Richmond County is greater than the national

average, with 42.8% Augustans renting, compared to 33.1% of the nation.^{3.6} This number is even higher in Harrisburg with roughly 65% renter occupancy (refer to Figure 3.1b). In comparison to other neighborhoods in Augusta and Atlanta, Harrisburg renter-occupancy is still considered very high. In Summerville, Augusta and in the Atlanta neighborhoods of Cabbagetown, Inman Park and Virginia-Highland, renter occupancy is around 50% of the occupied housing units, with the highest percentage in Virginia-Highland at 57%. Virginia-Highland, unlike Harrisburg, is known for a well maintained housing stock



Figure 3.1b Renter and Owner Occupied Property

and a much higher median property value, at \$341,300.^{3.7} Similar to Harrisburg though, it is a historic neighborhood with a walkable street network and a variety of historic single family homes. With similarities in framework and renter-occupancy rates, what is it then that makes Harrisburg's property values so much lower?

To answer this question we need to look at how many multi-family housing structures each neighborhood hosts. In Virginia-Highland 36.1% of housing structures

have five or more units and 44.8% are single family/one-unit homes. In Harrisburg less than 1% of the housing structures, excluding the public housing development, have five or more units.^{3.8} So while Harrisburg has a much higher percentage of renters than Virginia-Highland, they have a much lower number of multi-unit housing structures. Harrisburg renters, in general, occupy single family or one-unit residences. The renters in Virginia-Highland, on the other hand, more commonly occupy multi-unit structures.



Figure 3.1c Housing Conditions



Housing Condition U: 11%
Undeveloped Land



Housing Condition 1: 4%
Structurally damaged



Housing Condition 2: 18%
Moderate to severe damage



Housing Condition 3: 37%, Some maintenance



Housing Condition 4: 30%, Good condition

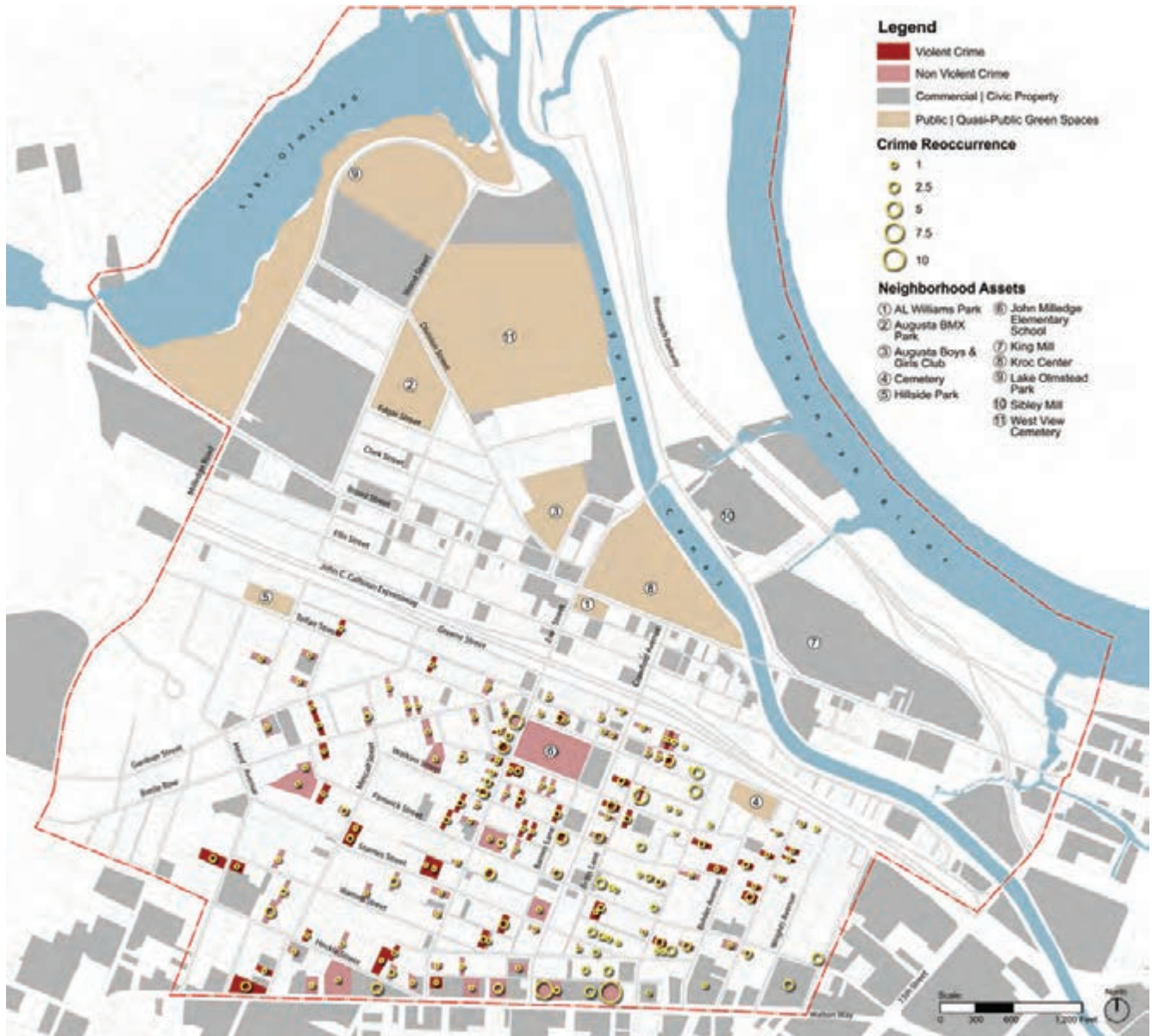


Figure 3.1d Crime

This housing situation can help explain the property value differences between Virginia-Highland and Harrisburg. Multi-unit housing structures are commonly maintained by a property management company, while upkeep of single-unit housing structures is the responsibility of the individual property owner. In Harrisburg, many of these property owners live outside of the neighborhood and are not consistent with upkeep of their homes. The maintenance of the property then falls into the hands of the renter, who has little incentive to maintain. With the

fate of so many homes in Harrisburg at the hands of the renter, the condition of the housing stock has deteriorated – nearly 1/3 of the housing stock is in poor condition (refer to Figure 3.1c), contributing to the lower than average Augusta property values. In Virginia-Highland this issue is avoided by allowing renters to occupy multi-unit structures where a property management team keeps the property in good condition and single-unit homes are occupied more commonly by property owners, who have a greater incentive to properly maintain their homes.

Including more multi-unit structures in appropriate locations in Harrisburg that do not damage the existing quality of the housing stock, and encouraging more owner-occupied homes, could have a positive affect on the upkeep and housing conditions of Harrisburg. Immediately addressing maintenance requirements, enforcement, and penalties comprehensively across Augusta-Richmond County, would have a noticeable impact on property values throughout the County, including Harrisburg.

The poor visual condition of housing and the general lack of incentive for renters to invest and care for the neighborhood have also had an effect on the crime rates in Harrisburg. Violent crime rates are higher in Harrisburg than that of Augusta-Richmond County, with Harrisburg's violent crime at 14.4/1,000 people and Augusta-Richmond County at 10.8/1,000 people.³⁹ Refer to Figure 3.1d. A formal partnership amongst homeowners, concerned residents, the Harrisburg-West End Neighborhood Association, the Harrisburg Community Council, and the Augusta-Richmond County Sheriff's Department is an important first step to better combat crime with neighborhood-based policing. Additional strategies to address crime are discussed in Section 3.2.

While the real estate market will need to recover on its own with the help of larger influences beyond the scope of this report, some steps can be taken to help improve housing conditions and property values in Harrisburg. One of the first steps would be to evaluate existing density requirements in Harrisburg and determine where multi-unit residential properties can be located. This will encourage rental properties to be maintained by property management companies and, as the market improves, single-unit residences can be sold to homeowners.

Allowing for multi-unit buildings will continue to attract a variety of residents, contributing to economic stability. Additional strategies to improve housing conditions and property values are discussed in Section 3.2.

3.1.3 NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

Neighborhood identity has become a major barrier to revitalizing Harrisburg. The neighborhood's identity has become associated with poor housing conditions and high crime. Communication with partnering organizations is absent and neighborhood initiatives have fallen short without outside support. Partner organizations are vital to implementing and maintaining many of the recommendations listed in this report. In order to get these potential partners on board, Harrisburg needs to clarify what the neighborhood is and what its vision is for the future. The Harrisburg community needs to convince partner organizations of the rich history that makes Harrisburg so unique, the many amenities the neighborhood has to offer, and the many opportunities that, if utilized and implemented correctly, could turn this neighborhood into a vibrant and vital part of Augusta.

The development of a neighborhood identity for Harrisburg has also been interrupted by many physical barriers. The Augusta Canal, the John C. Calhoun Expressway, and the neighborhood's major corridors – Broad Street, Walton Way, and 15th Street - disconnect the community not only from itself, but also from the larger framework of Augusta. The Augusta Canal is an underutilized and inaccessible amenity from which the greater Augusta community could benefit. The Calhoun Expressway divides the community in half and allows potential visitors to drive right over Harrisburg on their way into or out of downtown. The major corridors have become generic commercial streets, which provide no

clue to the history, the amenities, or the opportunities that lie within the Harrisburg community.

Establishing a positive neighborhood identity for Harrisburg is vital to gaining support from outside partners. These partner organizations have the resources, expertise, and additional strength of numbers to help implement the many recommendations found within this report. Once a neighborhood identity is created and shared, it needs to be reflected and evident to outsiders. The Augusta Canal needs to be more accessible and visible to visitors; the Calhoun Expressway needs to be redesigned to better fit in to the neighborhood context; and the major corridors need to be reinvented to better reflect the character and vision of the Harrisburg community. Such achievements would not only benefit Harrisburg, but would also strengthen Augusta-Richmond County. This point can not be over-emphasized.

3.2 OVERALL STRATEGIES FOR HARRISBURG

The following paragraphs outline strategies to help address Harrisburg's challenges in regards to economic hardship, the deteriorated real estate market, and neighborhood identity issues. While the real estate market and the economy will have to recover on their own with the help of actions beyond the scope of this report, the following neighborhood-level strategies can help improve the current state of Harrisburg and set it on a path for long-term stability and greater prosperity. Detailed analysis and recommendations are presented in the remainder of this report.

3.2.1 APPROACH TO REDEVELOPMENT - NEIGHBORHOOD SCALE

The current economic state has left little city, state, or federal funds to help improve the deteriorated housing market in Augusta. Through the following strategies, the Harrisburg residents and partner organizations can take critical steps to improve the real estate conditions in their community.

CONNECT WITH PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

Partnering with allied organizations is fundamental to making any change, as their support, expertise, and resources are vital. A list of these partner organizations and the implementation projects that they would be most able to help execute can be found in Section 9.0 Recommendations.

CREATE A NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

Simultaneous to connecting with partner organizations is the neighborhood's need to create a clear identity and a narrative to describe itself. This neighborhood narrative can then be used to better communicate with partners on the goals and desires of the Harrisburg community. Also part of defining the neighborhood identity is identifying those individuals who are invested in Harrisburg, easily defined as homeowners, and creating banners and neighborhood watch signs to be placed on their homes. These watch signs in concurrence with a neighborhood watch organization can begin to deter crime by putting a face on those who live in Harrisburg. These strategies are further described in Section 4.0 Neighborhood Identity.

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Housing and neighborhood revitalization efforts, as recommended in this report, take two forms. One, the small-scale neighborhood based strategies, which