



2023 City of Stevens Point Housing Taskforce Report

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City Vision Statement:

Stevens Point is a thriving community of choice that is inviting to and supportive of all people. We are grounded in creativity and innovation, where sustainability and healthy living are a way of life. People are the Point.



Acknowledgements

Taskforce Members

BobbieJoy Amann	CAP Services, Inc
Lisa Bellavin	M.B.A. Fellow, UW-Stevens Point
Jason Blenker	Blenker Construction
Polly Dalton, Chair	District 9 Alderperson, City of Stevens Point
Noah Eschenbach	HomePoint Real Estate
Travis Haines	Candlewood Property Management
Rev. Jane Johnson	The Beloved Community Church
Meleesa Johnson	District 5 Alderperson, City of Stevens Point
Ryan Kernosky	Director, Community Development, City of Stevens Point
Chris Klesmith	Neighborhood Planner, City of Stevens Point
Tiffany Krueger	Evergreen Community Initiatives
Idowu Odedosu	Director, Stevens Point Housing Authority
Mark Peterson	Door to Dreams
Brandon Taylor	Integrus Real Estate
Mike Wiza, Vice-Chair	Mayor, City of Stevens Point

City of Stevens Point

Mike Wiza	Mayor
Kari Yenter	City Clerk
Andrew Beveridge	City Attorney
Corey Ladick	Comptroller
Marc Christianson	1 st District Alder
David Shorr	2 nd District Alder
Ginger Keymer	3 rd District Alder
Mykeerah Zarazua	4 th District Alder
Meleesa Johnson	5 th District Alder & Council President
David Plaisance	6 th District Alder
Mary Kneebone	7 th District Alder
Dean Shuda	8 th District Alder
Polly Dalton	9 th District Alder
Keely Fishler	10 th District Alder
Shaun Morrow	11 th District Alder

Department of Community Development – Planning & Economic Development Division

Ryan Kernosky, MPA	Director of Community Development
Chris Klesmith	Neighborhood Planner/Economic Development Specialist
Adam Kuhn, MUP, MPA	Associate Planner/Zoning Administrator
Mark Kordus	Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator
Maria Mohr	Community Development Technician

Executive Summary

In September 2021, the City of Stevens Point sought to evaluate the existing housing situation through understanding community, economic, and social needs of today, and the future. As part of this evaluation process, the City hoped to determine the number of potential additional units needed, of what kind, at what price, and serving which types of local communities. At the heart of this work were the driving principals of affordability, availability, economic equality, and inclusivity. Special considerations were given to residents who are experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, who are disabled, and to special sub-groups such as students and the elderly.

Through over a year of monthly meetings that included information gathering, presentations, and thoughtful discussion the Housing Taskforce (HTF) identified three main goals the City should consider as part of addressing housing needs for all residents:

Goal #1 – Decrease Housing Insecurity in the City of Stevens Point

Goal #2 - Diversify and Expand the City’s Housing Stock for All Residents

Goal #3 – Increase Home Ownership Through Social Equity

Goal #4 – Tracking Implementation and Success of Program Initiatives

Implementation

The main charge for the Housing Taskforce was to identify ways the City could address the goals identified above. Each goal is broken down into three “opportunities” that are direct City-focused policy recommendations the City should consider:

Zoning Opportunities

Economic Development Opportunities

Community Engagement Opportunities

This is a white paper. In short, a white paper report is a policy recommendation document, put together by independent experts in the field of the policy, designed to guide a governing body through a complex issue.

Of course, housing and housing needs by nature is a complex issue. While some individuals or families may prefer and can afford a 3-bedroom, 3-bathroom home on 3/4 of an acre, others may prefer a lifestyle in an older home in the core of the community. Additionally, some individuals or families may seek the opportunity to own and build social and financial equity through home ownership, but it is often out of reach because of their financial situation. Others may be in a state of homelessness or homeless transition and simply need

a place to sleep at night. The Intellectual or Development Disabilities (IDD) community faces an uphill battle finding suitable housing. These are all items that must be taken into consideration as this white paper report is written.

In this white paper report, four goals are accompanied by honest realizations and recommended actions, based on successful examples and theories, to achieve the established goals. The goals within this white paper report are not all inclusive, nor should we claim them to be. Instead, these are achievable and measurable goals that the City can implement over the next several years to address the wide-array of housing needs within the community.

Residents, businesses, and others who have specific questions should reach out to the Department of Community Development at 715-346-1567 or by communitydevelopment@stevenspoint.com with additional questions or concerns.

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Presentations, Contributors, & Meeting Videos

As part of the information gathering phase of the Housing Task Force, several key individuals were invited to present their perspective on various issues, challenges, and opportunities facing their specific field. Those organizations, a brief statement on their presentation, and a link to their presentation is included below.

September 29, 2021

Framework and Demographic Profile

Ryan Kernosky, Director of Community Development

Lisa Bellavin, UWSP MBA Fellowship

[Link to the Meeting](#)

October 27, 2021

Housing Challenges and Opportunities for the Intellectual or Development Disabilities (IDD) Community

Door 2 Dreams

Mark Peterson & Shannon McKinley

[Link to the Meeting](#)

November 17, 2021

Overview of Public Housing in Stevens Point

Stevens Point Housing Authority

Idowu Odedosu, Executive Director

[Link to the Meeting](#)

January 19, 2022

Student Housing Needs from a Student Perspective

UW-Stevens Point Student Government Association

Will Scheder, Colin Nygren, Julia Kapp

[Link to the Meeting](#)

February 23, 2022

Portage County ALICE Report & United Way Initiatives

United Way of Portage County

Sue Wilcox, Executive Director

[Link to the Meeting](#)

March 23, 2022

Homeowner Assistance Programs offered by CAP Services

CAP Services, Inc

James Barrett, Assistant Director of Housing

[Link to the Meeting](#)

April 27, 2022

New Home Construction Challenges from a Home Builders Perspective

Origin Family Home Builders

Jeff & Matt Rice, Owners

[Link to the Meeting](#)

May 24, 2022
[Link to the Meeting](#)

June 22, 2022
[Link to the Meeting](#)

August 24, 2022
[Link to the Meeting](#)

Note: On September 14, 2022 a work group was convened at the request of Director Kernosky in response to concerns relative to social justice and inadequate acknowledgment or actionable items relative to housing insecurity. These changes and recommendations are itemized in the attached memo from the City's Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator, Mark Kordus.

October 26, 2022
[Link to the Meeting](#)

December 21, 2022
[Link to the Meeting](#)

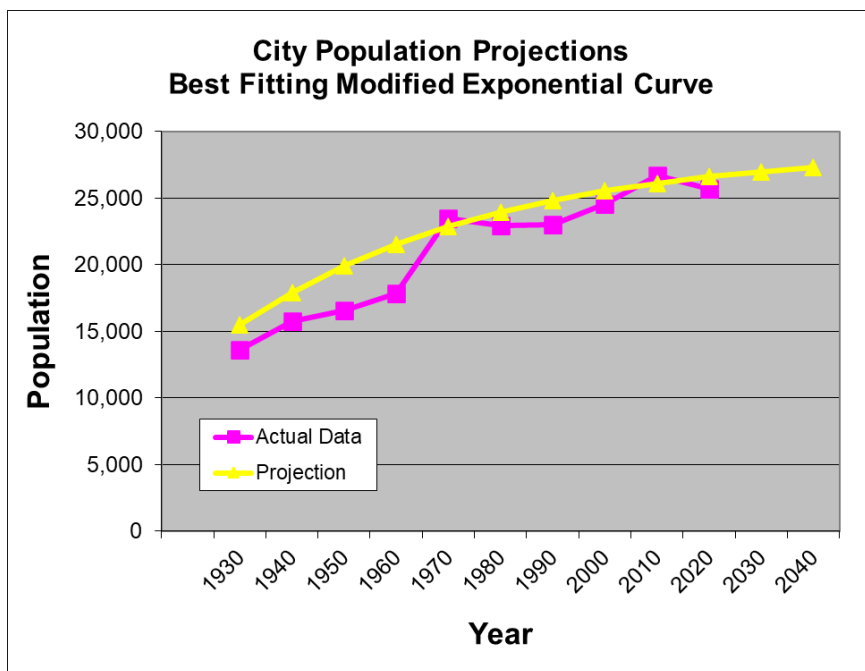
February 22, 2023
[Link to the Meeting](#)

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Quick Sheet: Background & Demographic Information

Population & Housing Supply

Conservative estimates place the City's population at 27,316 in the year 2040. Based upon existing US Census data of 2.13 persons per household, the City would need an additional 756 units of housing to fill the 2020-2040 population increase. Census estimates for household size have remained rather constant between 2011 and 2021.



Between the 2011 and 2021, Stevens Point lost 278 housing units and the vacancy rate climbed to 5.85%, which may be correlated with the population decrease between the 2010 and 2020 census counts. Majority of the housing vacancies are in the rental market, and the enrollment at University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point dropped by 1,342 students between 2011 and 2021. Owner occupancy climbed from 50.1% to 52.5% between 2011 and 2021.

MSA Professional Services, Inc. completed [a housing study for the City of Stevens Point in 2017](#) which gave clear recommendations to increase the housing supply, the variety of housing, and to make investments into existing housing stock. The recommendations from that housing study are still relevant, and include the following:

- New single-family homes.
- Improved quality of student rental housing and more non-student rentals.
- Townhomes and zero lot line homes in areas designed to be more urban.
- New senior and assisted living housing projects.
- Multifamily housing in Downtown and along community entrance corridors, such as Division St, Stanley St, and Main St.

- Tax Increment Financing incentives to accommodate new multifamily development needs and new neighborhoods.
- Allowing three unrelated occupants to live together.
- Eliminating the multifamily conditional use permit requirement in R-4 Multiple Family I Residence and R-5 Multiple Family II Residence Districts.
- Amending the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map to reserve more land for residential development east of I-39.
- Waiving permit fees for work on low-value homes
- Sponsoring design assistance for residential remodeling.
- Generating several loan and grant programs, including a housing modernization loan, rental conversion, and housing replacement program.
- Working with post-secondary students to address unsafe housing in the community.

Several of these recommendations have been implemented or are currently being launched by City staff. Programs such as the Neighbor Helping Neighbor, Multifamily Rental Conversion, and Residential Demolition grants are all currently available and are consistently being evaluated and improved by staff. Other recommendations may require new internal policies or support from Common Council to be implemented effectively.

Housing Costs and Income

Housing affordability continues to be a public concern nationwide and within Stevens Point. Based on data gathered from the American Community Survey’s 5-year estimates for Stevens Point, from 2011 and 2021, the median monthly costs of home ownership with a mortgage rose from \$1,128 to \$1,224, and the median monthly rental costs rose from \$631 to \$804. Income for Stevens Point residents is summarized in the table below.

Fig 1 - Household Median Incomes in Stevens Point, WI¹

Year	Household Median Income	Family Median Income	Married-Couple Family Median Income	Nonfamily ² Household Median Income
2011	\$39,373	\$56,992	\$66,843	\$22,110
2021	\$49,712	\$76,215	\$96,860	\$33,367

While housing costs have risen substantially in Stevens Point, so has household income. However, a significant number of households remain asset-limited, income-constrained, but employed, and Stevens Point’s nonfamily households are most likely to be cost-burdened. Deeper analysis of housing cost burden is provided in Goal #1.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2022). *2017-2021: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles*. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=DP04&g=1600000US5577200&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP04>

² ‘Nonfamily household’ is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as consisting “...of a householder living alone (a one-person household) or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related.”

Goal #1 – Decrease Housing Insecurity in the City of Stevens Point

Housing insecurity is “a real, persistent, and growing problem with implications for people’s education, health, and well-being...Housing insecurity can take a number of forms: homelessness; housing cost burden; residential instability; evictions and other forced moves; living with family or friends to share housing costs (doubling up); overcrowding; living in substandard, poor quality housing; or living in neighborhoods that are unsafe and lack access to transportation, jobs, quality schools, and other critical amenities.”³

It is estimated that over one quarter of Stevens Point residents are housing cost burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing. Housing quality and affordability remain as one of the most frequent topics discussed in the community. Through almost all of the conversations and discussions on the goals and objectives of this white paper, it was abundantly clear that the definition of family also had to be reviewed if the City was serious about addressing housing needs within the community.

Fig 2 – Estimate of Cost-Burdened Residents in Stevens Point, WI in 2020⁴

Housing Occupancy Type	Number of Cost Burdened Housing Units	Average Persons Per Unit	Estimated Number of Cost Burdened Residents (% of total population)
Rental Units	2,643	1.88	4,969 (19.3%)
Owner-Occupied with Mortgage	696	2.37	1,650 (6.4%)
Owner-Occupied without Mortgage	243	2.37	576 (2.2%)
		TOTAL	7,195 (28%)

Community Engagement Opportunities

- 1) Announce a public resolution that housing insecurity is a recurring and prevalent issue throughout Stevens Point and the City’s desire and responsibility to be an active, integral part of the solution through a resolution or some other type of action.

Realization: Households that spend 30-50% of their income on housing are considered cost burdened, and households that spend more than half of their income on housing are severely cost burdened. [Furthermore, communities where people spend more than 32 percent of their income on rent can expect a sharp and dramatic increase in homelessness.](#)⁵ According to the 2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimate, 50.3% of the city’s 5,250 occupied

³ Leopold, J. et al. (November 23, 2016). *Improving Measures of Housing Insecurity: A Path Forward*. Urban Institute. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/improving-measures-housing-insecurity-path-forward>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2020). *2016-2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles*. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=DP04&g=1600000US5577200&tid=ACSDP5Y2020.DP04>

⁵ Glynn, C., Byrne, T., and Culhan, D. *INFLECTION POINTS IN COMMUNITY-LEVEL HOMELESS RATES*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from https://wp-tid.zillowstatic.com/3/Homelessness_InflexionPoints-27eb88.pdf

rental units, not individuals, are paying more than 30% of their household income to rent. With regards to home ownership, 21% of the 3,321 homes with a mortgage are paying 30% or more of their income towards their housing costs and 11.5% of the 2,109 homes without a mortgage are paying 30% or more towards housing costs. Summing up all these groups and multiplying by the average number of persons per unit, the estimated total population of housing insecure residents based on housing cost burden alone is 7,195 residents, or 28% of the City of Stevens Point. It is reasonable to assume given the significant recent increases in housing costs (from October 2019 to October 2022, the median rent for a 2-bedroom unit has increased by \$377, or 54.2%)⁶, this number has probably increased over the last 3 years.

This housing insecurity issue manifesting itself as an outcome of unhoused persons has shown a dramatic increase as demonstrated by Wisconsin Department of Administration eviction data in Portage County. When comparing pre-COVID calendar year of 2019 to the first full year post-COVID calendar year of 2022, eviction filings increased by 31%, and the number of eviction judgments increased by 40%.

Recommendation: Adopt a resolution that acknowledges the prevalence of housing insecurity in the City of Stevens Point. Housing insecurity is less visible than what is often described as homelessness and may require further public discussion. This resolution should include definition of the unique characteristics, reasons why, and specific needs of groups experiencing housing insecurity; recognition that LMI (Low to Moderate Income) persons are most likely to be housing insecure and require more assistance, which should be prioritized through specific City action, with measurable outcomes, and annual review of housing data including, but not limited to, the following parameters: median wages, the percentage of population in which housing costs exceed 30% of income, number of new housing units, including the percentage of LMI-serving units; an acknowledgement that wages are a major component of housing affordability and increased public awareness of the City's role in elevating wages; and a direct commitment of City personnel to work cooperatively with community partners and non-profits recognizing the City must be an active and integrated part of the housing insecurity solution.

- 2) Continually evaluate the availability of federal and state funds and leverage appropriate funds to meet local housing needs.

Realization: Federal and state programs that support local housing programs are updated each year and may result in a change in finances available to improve housing options in the city. These programs require a significant amount of time and expertise to acquire, implement, manage, and improve.

⁶ Zumper (October 13, 2022). *Stevens Point WI, Rent Prices*. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.zumper.com/rent-research/stevens-point-wi>.

Currently, no single organization has enough capacity to facilitate these programs.

Recommendation: With the existing community agencies and partners, establish a housing coalition with the sole purpose of increasing the efficiency of how affordable housing, housing support programs, and wrap-around services are leveraged in Stevens Point. Identify a lead organization to facilitate this coalition. The Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care helps train organizations and staff on how to leverage these resources.

Idea: [Wisconsin Balance of State Continuum of Care](#)

Zoning Opportunities

1) Amend the zoning code to redefine the definition of family to be more inclusive and utilize unused rooms within existing dwellings units.

Realization: The City desperately needs to update the definition of family within the zoning code to be more inclusive and reflective of the current economic environment. The current definition (page 128 of the Zoning Code) is too restrictive to allow changing demographics and economic needs of the community. The current code is outlined below:

FAMILY - is an individual, or two or more person related by blood, marriage, adoption, foster child arrangement, or similar legal relationship and functioning as a single housekeeping entity, or such individual or person plus one individual not having such similar legal relationship but functioning as a part of the single housekeeping entity. The definition of family shall not apply to a Tourist Rooming House.

Below are examples of how the current code is interpreted and enforced:

Larry & Anna = couple, not married or together by legal relationship. = legal under current code.	Larry & Anna = decide to get married. = legal under current code. IF Larry & Anna invite Mary to rent a room = LEGAL under our current code.	Larry & Anna = married couple. Anna's mom and dad are aging and need assistance, so they move in. = LEGAL under our current code.
Larry & Anna = couple, not married or together by legal relationship. = legal under current code. IF Larry & Anna invite Mary to rent a room = illegal under our current code.	Anna buys a 4 bedroom house near UWSP to go to college. Rents three of the rooms to friends. = Illegal under our current code.	Larry, Anna and their two kids invite Bill and his child to live with them. = illegal under the current code. Larry, Anna, and their two kids could have Bill live with them, but when the dependent is involved, you technically exceed the code.

Recommendation:

FAMILY Household Entity - is an individual, or two or more person related by blood, marriage, adoption, foster child arrangement, or similar legal relationship and functioning as a single housekeeping entity, or such individual or person plus ~~one~~ **two** individuals not having such similar legal relationship but functioning as a part of the single housekeeping entity. The definition of family shall not apply to a Tourist Rooming House.

IDD Household Entity – is no more than four non-related individuals, all with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, residing in the same housing unit and acting as a single housekeeping entity. In such situation, live-in caregivers for those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities shall not count against the total number of unrelated individuals within the IDD Household Entity definition. The Zoning Administrator may review each case for approval or denial based upon the information provided to them.

Alternative Recommendation:

The City of Stevens Point should remove the definition of “family” from Stevens Point zoning code and regulate the number of residents by square footage requirements. If this recommendation cannot be carried out, “family” should be expanded to 4 unrelated individuals. For the rationale for this recommendation, see the memo from Mark Kordus, Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator, dated October 14, 2022, in Appendix A.

Idea: [Family definitions have historically](#)⁷ been used as [a tool to legally discriminate in urban development](#).

Economic Development Opportunities

- 1) Strategize between the Stevens Point Housing Authority and Community & Economic Development department to increase housing stock for LMI individuals and families, including development of underutilized municipally owned properties within the City.

Realization: A formal strategy to increase the housing inventory of the Housing Authority has been absent, and the City of Stevens Point has recently taken action that has resulted in a decrease in the housing stock for LMI residents.

Recommendation: The relationship between the Stevens Point Housing Authority, Redevelopment Authority, and the City of Stevens Point’s Community & Economic Development department should be modified to establish and carry out a strategy to increase available housing stock for LMI residents. A major component will be cooperatively identifying properties within the city, for acquisition, possible funding sources, and plans for

⁷ Redburn, K (June 2019). *Zoned Out: How Zoning Law Undermines Family Law’s Functional Turn*. The Yale Law Journal. Retrieved on October 14, 2022, from <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/note/zoned-out>.

development, with timelines. To avoid a negative impact to existing SPHA housing stock the city should adopt a policy not to decommission municipally-owned housing stock without having first created an equivalent number of replacement dwelling units.

- 2) Support the creation or expansion of existing programs such as Rapid Rehousing, Public Supportive Housing (PSH), Transitional Housing, (e.g. Oxford House) and other formal support services vital for the success of persons within these types of living situations.

Realization: Organizations within Stevens Point are attempting to prevent housing insecure residents from becoming unhomed, but often lack the financial resources and staff capacity to strategize and execute programs to uplift them out of housing insecurity. Federal funds exist to support programs but are not being leveraged.

Recommendations: Municipalities and non-profit organizations in communities like [Appleton](#) and [Eau Claire](#) are leveraging funds provided [by HUD](#) to decrease the amount of residents who become unhomed. The City of Stevens Point should assist the proper non-profit organizations to apply for these funds and increase the coordination of these services locally. City staff should also identify parcels near amenity-rich areas that may support PSH and Transitional Housing facilities.

Actively work to partner non-profits looking to acquire properties with property owners who may be interested in selling units which could fill these missing niches within the community, including creative ownership options such as land trusts, condominiums, or cooperatives.

Until service organizations can supply adequate transitional living facilities, landlords may be incentivized to rent to LMI individuals and families, increasing available housing stock for those with the highest housing need – see Action 3 below.

Idea: [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) facilitates programs to support organizations that manage these types of facilities and services and could be utilized in Stevens Point.

- 3) Create landlord incentive(s) to generate or hold housing stock for LMI individuals, or persons with histories that effectively prohibit them from acquiring housing. These incentives can include participation in the RentReady program, agreeing to freeze rents, or accept section 8 housing vouchers for a predetermined period in exchange for low or no interest loans.

Realization: Not all housing stock is fully utilized and the waiting list for Housing Authority assistance is extensive. Additionally, there is significant competition to lease a rental unit, making rentals inaccessible to community members with “black marks” on their background, such as evictions, bankruptcies, low credit scores, or felonies; effectively keeping them out of

the rental market for at least 5 years, due to typical landlord minimum qualifying criteria as allowed under fair housing laws. Until the Stevens Point Housing Authority can increase its stock, a partnership between landlords and the Housing Authority may be formed to provide immediate assistance to those most in need.

Recommended Action: Through the Community & Economic Development Department and/or Stevens Point Housing Authority, operate a no or low interest loan program for landlords who hold housing stock for LMI persons or residents with criminal backgrounds which mirrors the Housing Modernization Loan program. HUD provides [resources for landlords who accept housing choice vouchers](#) (HCVs), and research has shown that [landlord participation in the HCV program is necessary for success](#). Apply these programs to the operation of existing Oxford Houses and creation of new Oxford-style houses.

Idea: [U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research](#) provides research and resources to show that landlords need to be a part of any housing solution for these populations. Work must be done to grow relationships between landlords and housing support programs.

- 4) Review City grant programs to include support for the renting population, especially the housing insecure.

Realization: The City administers several grant programs that are intended to support LMI homeowners and reinvestment into residential property. These funds are not wholly utilized and may be redirected to support programs for renters. One population to consider would be those at risk of eviction - Portage County reported a 40% increase in evictions granted, from 2019 to 2022.

Recommendation: Develop a preventative program that proactively reduces the number of evictions. This program may include mediation services, legal counsel, and financial compensation to landlords for past-due rent and damages. The simplest solution is going upstream and keeping them from falling into the river – striving to proactively keep people in housing, rather than trying to rehouse them after an eviction.

Idea: Services in [eviction diversion and prevention programs](#) range from full legal counsel to tenant education and tenant-landlord mediation. There are currently 47 eviction prevention programs in the United States, the closest being the Tenant Resource Center in Dane County, WI.⁸ In Marathon County Judicare has been able to avert approximately 85% of the evictions in which there has been court order mediation. Judicare would like to train mediators in

⁸ Treskon, M. et al (April 2021). *Eviction Prevention and Diversion Programs*. Urban Institute. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104148/eviction-prevention-and-diversion-programs-early-lessons-from-the-pandemic.pdf>

Portage County, including assisting with a pilot eviction prevention program, utilizing landlords as the trigger for intervention when a payment is missed by the tenant.

Goal #2 - Diversify and Expand the City's Housing Stock for All Residents

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to expanding the style, type, density, and location of housing within the City of Stevens Point. There are, however, opportunities to reduce policy barriers to expand different types of housing within the City to achieve this generalized goal, including finding ways to increase missing middle housing, embracing form-based zoning, formalizing Tax Increment Finance policies, and better engaging the community when new housing developments are proposed.

Housing quality is one of the most referenced desires in Stevens Point. In 2022, 29 of the 11,495 housing units (0.25%) were rated by the Assessor's Office as Poor or Very Poor, indicating that housing quality may be better than perceived. Of these 29 properties, 27 are owner-occupied.

Community Engagement Opportunities

- 1) Launch an annual housing needs awareness campaign.

Realization: Many projects that increase the variety and quantity of housing in the community may be different from current housing styles and models, but may be necessary to meet the high housing demand. While this high housing demand may shift in future generations, a new method for evaluating the use of land and buildings to meet current and forecasted housing needs to be conducted with residents to expand awareness and understanding of the need to implement new or different strategies or make new options for residential development available.

Recommendation: Implement a recurring public awareness campaign that utilizes a simple housing needs assessment and prompts residents to participate while considering community-wide visions, such as in the Strategic Plan, "Stevens Point is a thriving community of choice that is inviting to and supportive of all people." Integrate recent and proposed development projects into these campaigns.

Idea: [Housing Toolbox for Massachusetts Communities](#)

- 2) Improve and create new Oxford Houses for residents with histories of alcohol or drug addiction.

Realization: Residents with criminal records face the most difficult circumstances when finding housing. These residents are often excluded from housing because of market forces and risk tolerance from landlords. Oxford Houses in the community have been a popular option and both have been consistently full.

Recommendation: As referenced in Goal #1, Economic Development Opportunity #3, public grant and loan programs may be retooled or created to incentivize certain housing development. A loan program similar to the upcoming Housing Modernization Loan program should be offered to landlords who agree to lease to an Oxford House for the length of the loan or longer. Consider coaching an organization to establish a new Oxford House.

Idea: [Oxford Houses](#).

- 3) Expand access to the Oxford House model to residents with other criminal backgrounds.

Realization: The Oxford House model is popular within the community and has had a positive impact on many communities in the nation, and it may be worth considering expanding this model. Oxford Houses are able to operate under the Fair Housing Act, which may not apply to other groups.

Recommendation: Request that housing partners pilot the construction of a transitional housing program similar to Oxford Houses, but for other criminal histories. If not allowable under FHA, reform zoning policy to allow these accommodations similar to the process of creating the IDD Household Entity.

Idea: Combination of [Oxford Houses](#) and transitional living facilities.

Zoning Opportunities

- 1) Explore ways to increase “[Missing Middle Housing](#)” through Zoning Code amendments.

Realization: Development patterns post WWII have presented the inability to build and expand “missing middle housing”. This causes the City to have limited availability for diverse housing needs within the existing community. Often, missing middle housing become part of the fabric of the neighborhoods in which they reside, mainly because their footprints and scale are not too dissimilar to the surrounding homes within the immediate neighborhood.

Recommendation: Although we could use the Planned Development Zoning (PDD), a specific zoning code change to allow via permitted use the construction of missing middle housing (up to sixteen units) with reduced street setbacks and parking minimums could address the desire to diversify our housing stock. A change to the zoning code permitting by right two or more principal structures on the same lot should also be considered.

Idea: <https://missingmiddlehousing.com/> offers zoning code amendment ideas and concepts for communities to consider when working on missing middle housing. Please note that there are excellent examples of this throughout the City already, especially in our more historic neighborhoods.

- 2) Reduce setbacks, consider the surrounding built environment, and reduce parking requirements for residential development to better fit within established

neighborhoods. Consider physical attributes of the development in addition to the use of the development.

Realization: [Form-based zoning](#) should be the driving factor as the City rewrites the City's 1979 zoning code. This will allow the neighborhood to focus more on the physical development of the property as opposed to the use of the property. Form-based zoning will also allow flexibility in older neighborhoods for owners to fully utilize their property for growth and other changes.

Recommendation: Consider a zoning code rewrite that is Form-Based to better establish and retain the unique neighborhoods within Stevens Point. Until a form-based code rewrite is completed, the [Lean Code Tool](#) can be used to reform the current zoning code in the following ways:

- Reduce setback requirements for residential development to better fit within established neighborhoods, especially for R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, and B-1 districts.
- Remove parking minimums for residential development. If parking is included in a proposed development, establish parking-location criteria that places parking behind buildings where possible; prohibit large parking lots between the building and the street.
- Reduce lot size requirements.
- Decrease minimum size requirements for principal structures. Minimum area of structures for most districts are set at 900 sq ft. Reduce this value to 600 sq ft for R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, and R-5 districts.
- Consider lot coverage requirements.

Idea: <https://formbasedcodes.org/> and [Lean Code Tool](#) as resources.

3) Small Home Cluster Development

Realization: Single-family detached housing still reigns supreme in new home construction, but is there a way to allow SFD housing while encouraging higher density and communal living? Additionally, look at ways to address homelessness in the community by providing 'tiny-home' cluster development similar to [Occupy Madison](#).

Recommendation: Although the City could use the Planned Development Zoning (PDD), a specific zoning code to allow cottage-court/small home cluster development should be adopted. This will allow a higher-density single-family unit development and communal living.

Idea: <https://missingmiddlehousing.com/types/cottage-court#overview> is a great place to start with a possible zoning change.

4) Allow multifamily housing construction to be performed by right.

Realization: Developers often are disincentivized from performing work when required to navigate a conditional use approval process because it threatens the likelihood they can proceed.

Recommendation: Amend the zoning code to allow construction of multifamily developments of 16 units or less to be completed by right. Developments larger than 16 units will still undergo the conditional use approval process.

Economic Development Opportunities

1) Adopt a formal Tax Increment Finance (TIF) policy for housing development.

Realization: The City has encouraged new high-density housing development, especially in the downtown area, with the use of Tax Increment Finance incentives. However, no formal policy exists to establish type of incentive (i.e. upfront, pay-go, hybrid) and how much incentive each project would receive. Each housing project that receives some type of TIF assistance is different. Providing some type of guidance with favorability (read: higher ratio) towards infill, affordable, IDD, or under-developed housing will help address our future needs. Additionally, some type of review of development should occur after the development is completed to better understand if the City objectives were achieved through the development.

Recommendation: Adoption of a formal Tax Increment Finance Policy that outlines incentive ratios and standards for housing redevelopment projects, greenfield projects, IDD, underdeveloped housing, among others. Consider pay go incentive with higher rate for large projects, and upfront incentive for smaller neighborhood projects. Formalize a TIF application for consistency in reviewing TIF requests.

Idea: [Sheboygan, WI TIF Policy](#), [Oshkosh, WI TIF Policy and Application](#)

2) Extend life of successful TIFs for the Affordable Housing Extension option.

Realization: Since 2009, the State of Wisconsin has allowed municipalities to extend the life of TIF districts that have successfully paid off other TIF project costs. Between 2028 and 2033, the City will close five of the nine currently active TIF districts. This provides an opportunity to extend the life of those TIF districts and further fund the City's existing Housing Trust Fund (HTF) to expand existing programs for providing affordable housing and for housing rehabilitation.

3) Contract with local builders to generate a variety of housing types that are acknowledged as missing in Stevens Point, and usher matching projects through necessary approval processes.

Realization: Builders have reported concerns about form-based codes that may prohibit certain types of housing development and displeasure with

development approval processes. Also, not all residents may have the resources to hire a builder to build new styled units, which may limit variety in the housing market.

Recommendation: Contract with local builders to generate pre-approved housing designs that fill gaps in Stevens Point's housing market. Several varieties have been identified in previous housing studies and recent planning efforts, including smaller homes, condominiums, townhouses or rowhouses, cottage courts, homes that are designed for aging-in-place, and others.

Idea: Discussed at Housing Taskforce meeting October 27, 2021.

Goal #3 – Increase Home Ownership Through Social Equity

Home ownership is one route to build wealth in our economy. Home ownership rates have dropped significantly in the state of Wisconsin between 2000 and 2020, from 68.4% to 58.9%. While we cannot retrieve data for 2000 for Stevens Point, home ownership in Stevens Point has dropped from 52% in 2010 to 50.2% in 2020.⁹ While home ownership in Stevens Point may not be decreasing as significantly as in the rest of the state, there are opportunities to increase the local rate of home ownership.

Community Engagement Opportunities

- 1) Launch a City-wide effort to educate the public on alternative forms of home ownership and existing support systems to build equity.

Realization: The public has a significant amount of power to create their own forms of housing ownership, including condominiums and housing cooperatives. Additionally, there are institutional resources that support the creation of these ownership models.

Recommendation: Generate public programming in partnership with young professionals and early retirees that increases awareness of other ownership models and institutions such as the [UW Center for Cooperatives](#) and the [USDA](#) that support these ownership models.

Idea: Cooperative ownership and condominiums may allow community members to enter ownership with less startup capital. The [UW Center for Cooperatives](#) and USDA can both provide direct education on the matter. [Limited equity housing cooperatives have been shown to be accessible to low- to moderate-income populations.](#)¹⁰ The Madison Area Cooperative Housing

⁹ United States Census Bureau (2020). *ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles*. Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=DP04&g=1600000US5577200&tid=ACSDP5Y2010.DP04>

¹⁰ Fenton, M (March 23, 2022). *Comparative Study of 4 Affordable Home Ownership Models and Market-Rate Ownership and Renting Shows Strength of Housing Cooperatives for Low- to Moderate-Income Citizens*. National

Alliance also educates interested parties in how to establish housing cooperatives.

2) Launch a city-wide housing “right-sizing or repair” campaign.

Realization: As elder care transitions to more in-home services, homes with multiple rooms may be going underutilized in the community. According to census data listed in Goal #1, 576 residents who own their home without a mortgage are still cost-burdened and may lead to further degradation of owner-occupied housing stock. The Portage County Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) provides many services to aging residents and may be a good advocate for elder residents looking to “right-size” their housing situation or repair their homes.

Recommendation: Work with home care providers and the Portage County ADRC to identify residents who may benefit from “right-sizing” their living situation by living with another elder and consolidate their housing costs and medical coverage. Connect financial professionals with elders on fixed incomes to finance necessary home repairs with appropriate tools. Market this service more consistently within the City.

Idea: Support and Services at Home (SASH), discussion with Portage County Aging and Disability Resource Center.

3) Establish build-ready floor plans for small condominiums or housing cooperatives and link them to all appropriate zoning districts.

Realization: Similar to Goal #2 Economic Development Opportunity #3, a lack of awareness, ability, or concern for project approval may be hindering the construction of buildings that are managed as a cooperative or condominium.

Recommendation: Contract with local builders to generate pre-approved housing designs that are explicitly for cooperative ownership or condominium management.

Idea: Discussed at Housing Taskforce meeting October 27, 2021.

Zoning Opportunities

Zoning Opportunities to address home ownership opportunities are addressed in previous sections of this report. Previously identified zoning opportunities increase ownership opportunity by allowing smaller home development in more areas of the City.

Association of Housing Cooperatives. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://coophousing.org/comparative-study-of-4-a%E2%AC%80ordable-home-ownership-models-and-market-rate-ownership-and-renting-shows-strength-of-housing-cooperatives-for-low-to-moderate-income-citizens/>

Economic Development Opportunities

- 1) Adopt a formal Tax Increment Finance (TIF) policy for housing development.

Realization: With the same realization as Goal #2, Economic Development Opportunity #1, TIF policies can be leveraged to generate types of housing that prioritize homeownership rather than rental property construction.

Recommendation: Prioritize incentives for developments that result in condominium or other lower-cost owner-occupied housing models in the TIF policy recommended in Goal #2, Economic Development Opportunity #1.

Idea: [Sheboygan, WI TIF Policy](#), [Oshkosh, WI TIF Policy and Application](#)

- 2) Review City grant programs for their effectiveness and redirect unused funds.

Realization: The City administers several grant programs that are intended to support LMI homeowners and reinvestment into residential property. These funds are not wholly utilized and may be redirected to ownership programs. Furthermore, stringent requirements on existing down payment assistance programs may be barring residents from utilizing them.

Recommendations: Review and update down payment assistance programs and city-administered grant programs. Study and replicate a Housing Trust or Housing Trust Fund model that generates and maintains affordable, owner-occupied housing stock.

Idea: Programs such as the [Door County Housing Trust](#) create ownership opportunities that allow residents to retain a limited amount of equity upon the sale of a trust-managed home.

Goal #4 – Tracking Implementation and Success of Program Initiatives

The recommended actions in this white paper will have varying speeds and degrees of impact on the price, availability, quality, variety, and accessibility of housing stock for the residents of Stevens Point. However, to verify success or acknowledge that other changes are necessary, both the status of action items and housing data need to be monitored.

Community Engagement Opportunities

- 1) Format approved action items into a tracking sheet and publish it on the City website.

Realization: To acknowledge success or reevaluate actions taken from this document, action steps taken must be tracked.

Recommended Action: Create a tracking sheet for all action items referenced in this document. All departments who make progress towards completing these actions shall have editing access to the tracking sheet. It will be the

responsibility of the Community and Economic Development Department to monitor and advance implementation progress.

2) Annually measure housing data and publish it on the City website.

Realization: Many of the community concerns regarding housing insecurity, affordability, and housing quality are valid and are supported by a variety of data sources. In order to accurately describe the housing trends and direct action the City has taken in the housing market, a consistent set of data points should be monitored each year.

Recommended Action: The Community and Economic Development Department should monitor and publicize at least these data points for Stevens Point as compared to two peer communities, the State of Wisconsin, and the United States:

- Quantity of housing units constructed
- Quantity of “affordable” housing units constructed
 - This should include rent-controlled or low-cost ownership units
- Quantity of housing units removed
- Median home value
- Median rental rate for studio through 4-bedroom rentals
- Quantity of owner-occupied housing units
- Percentage of owner-occupied and rental units
- Percentage of residents who are housing cost-burdened (as defined as paying 30% or more of income to housing)
- Annual median income
- Number of IDD residents supported through federal, state, and local programs and organizations
- Other measures to determine housing insecurity as they are developed

Implementation

Throughout the duration of the Housing Taskforce, many initiatives have begun to address the symptoms of housing insecurity while residents continue to express concern about the rate of expensive apartment development in our community. Many of these recent developments and actions do not meet the needs or budgetary constraints of current and future residents. For these and many more reasons, City Staff recommend that the City and community members take immediate action to address these needs. These actions are expressly designed to 1) minimize the chance of housing insecure residents to experience states of homelessness, 2) increase the quantity and variety of housing stock in the City, and 3) generate more opportunities for home ownership in Stevens Point.

Implementation of Housing Taskforce Recommendations		
Action (Goal, Opportunity)	Team Responsible	Recommended Start
1. Assist the Stevens Point Housing Authority in developing and fulfilling a growth strategy. (1ED1)	Stevens Point Housing Authority, City of Stevens Point	Immediately
2. Form a coalition to generate and execute a housing strategy that includes specific programs (e.g. Rapid Rehousing) and the adequate social work training and talent to identify and form wraparound services. Identify a lead organization to facilitate this coalition. (1CE1, 1CE2)	CAP Services, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, One Big Tent, Evergreen Community Initiatives, United Way, City of Stevens Point, Stevens Point Housing Authority,	Immediately
3. Assist the above coalition in acquiring financing through Federal, State, and local government and philanthropic programs. (1ED2)	City of Stevens Point, coalition formed in Action 2	Following Action 2
4. Take part in landlord-tenant mediation training and begin a city-wide eviction prevention program. (1ED4)	City of Stevens Point, coalition formed in Action 2	Immediately
5. Incorporate programs that support LMI residents and residents with rental “blackmarks” into City grant programs. (1ED3, 1ED4, 3ED2, 2CE2, 2CE3)	City of Stevens Point	Immediately
6. Incorporate programs that support LMI residents and residents with rental “blackmarks” into city-wide rehousing initiatives. (1ED3, 1ED4, 3ED2, 2CE2, 2CE3)	Coalition formed in Action 2	Following Action 2
7. Revise the zoning code as recommended in this document. (1Z1, 2Z1, 2Z2, 2Z3, 2Z4, 3Z1)	City of Stevens Point	Immediately
8. Contract local architects to draft sample floor plans following zoning revisions. (2ED3, 3CE3)	City of Stevens Point	Following Action 7
9. Establish a TIF policy. In this policy, include proper incentives for affordable housing developments and developments that meet housing gaps. (2ED1, 2ED2, 3ED1)	City of Stevens Point	Immediately
10. Launch an annual housing awareness campaign. Utilize this campaign to evaluate effectiveness of these initiatives and lend support to organizations as needed. (2CE1, 3CE1, 3CE2)	City of Stevens Point, ADRC, coalition identified in Action 2	Immediately. Revise message each April.

Appendix A

Memo from Mark Kordus, Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator, to the Housing Taskforce



Memo

Mark Kordus
Neighborhood Improvement Coordinator
Community Development
City of Stevens Point
1515 Strongs Avenue
Stevens Point, WI 54481
Ph: (715) 346-1567 • Fax: (715) 346-1498
mkordus@stevenspoint.com

To: Housing Task Force
From: Mark Kordus
CC: Andrew Beveridge
Date: 10/17/22
Subject: Work Group Discussion Relative to Definition of Family

On September 14, 2022 a work group was convened at the request of Director Kernosky in response to concerns relative to social justice and inadequate acknowledgment or specific actionable items relative to housing insecurity. This group included Chris Klesmith, Adam Kuhn, Mother Jane Johnson, BobbieJoy Amann, Tiffani Krueger, and myself. Several opportunities to support housing insecure (those who currently spend over 30% of their income on housing) populations in Stevens Point were identified and appended to the Housing Taskforce report, but the most immediate and simple solution to uplift our community is to remove or adequately revise the “family” definition.

There are very few actions that can immediately impact the housing market at a low/no cost. One recent example was the adoption of on-street overnight parking within the City. This was implemented through an ordinance adoption that created an immediate impact. Several residents predicted a multitude of problems, which never came to fruition. Conversely, the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance, adopted after a very lengthy hearing process, is a complex and costly option to increase housing stock only available to a select few. To date, no ADUs have been constructed. Many concerns were voiced but none manifested. The simplest solution is usually the best and should be of primary consideration, removing or revising the definition of family is the best opportunity to apply the principle.

Prior to the 1960s, it was rare for a municipality to define family. Family definitions took hold in many communities in the 1970s as an indirect, parochial way to legally discriminate through a blood/marriage family definition. These definitions were largely designed to keep populations deemed undesirable out of neighborhoods and communities, and grew to also include college student populations. *Bloomberg* recently published the article [“Why Are Zoning Laws Defining What Constitutes a Family”](#) on the history of family definitions related to zoning and summed up the deeper underlying purpose as:

“the(se) same legal mechanisms that famously reinforced housing discrimination on the basis of race, also discriminate against families that vary from the nuclear ideal of a heterosexual couple raising their biological children. There is also compelling evidence that low-density zoning, like formal family ordinances, is a significant driver of racial and class segregation. In short, formal family zoning

discriminates against non-normative families, but it also reinforces the racial and economic segregation effects of low-density zoning in general.”

For more detailed information on the legal journey of “family” definitions, intent, and zoning restrictions, and case law the *Yale Law Journal* has a well-documented history outlined in [“Zoned Out: How Zoning Law Undermines Family Law’s Functional Turn.”](#)

The current definition of family in Stevens Point can be considered a low-density zoning restriction. Both the 2017 Housing Study and the Housing Taskforce report have identified higher residential density as a solution to the city’s housing needs. The current family definition is counterintuitive to the stated goals of the city, it is a self-imposed hurdle impeding progress toward more affordable housing options.

It is worth noting that the current restriction of 2 unrelated is the most stringent for any city within Wisconsin. To date, seven states have banned using this type of (blood/marriage) family definition, four by action of their supreme courts, either declared discriminatory or as a direct invasion of personal privacy, and three as a matter of law adopted within their state statutes. These and other communities instead regulate based on the square footage requirements already within state and local codes. This option was discussed in [a 2017 city-wide survey in which majority of the respondents favored removing the family definition and basing occupancy solely on square footage.](#)

The workgroup agreed that a dramatic change such as removing the family definition may not be supported by the whole community, or Housing Taskforce. Although dissolving the definition of family should be the ultimate goal, a family definition of 4 unrelated persons should be the bare minimum recommendation. This would be the simplest, easiest, and quickest way to increase affordable housing options for cost-burdened housing insecure residents in Stevens Point, based on the following rationale:

- **Largest market impact.** The majority of rental units within the Stevens Point housing market (source: Apartments.com) are 2-bedrooms, which make up 55% of the total rental market. Within a scenario of two unmarried couples or close friends wanting to rent together, they would now be legally able to rent the most commonly available housing unit within the city.
- **Affordability.** Dividing rental costs by number of tenants decreases monthly costs incurred by each tenant. As a cost comparison, a typical 2-bedroom, currently rents at the median rate of \$1,100/month (source: Zumper.com). This would reduce the housing costs of four tenants within a 2-bedroom unit by 50% to \$275/month, as compared to \$550/month per tenant.
- **Increases housing options within existing stock.** By filling empty and unused bedrooms in 2 or more bedroom units, the supply of affordable rental and owner occupied housing options should increase. Using a simple supply and demand model, this may also decrease median rents by increasing available stock.
- **Reduce city-wide non-conformity.** This modification would also reduce the number of legal non-conforming rental properties in Stevens Point by over 100 properties, cutting it in half. This more than doubles the initial proposal to adjust “housing entity” to 3-unrelated individuals, and the primary goal of a zoning amendment.
- **Bonus Option.** If it is a priority of the city to reuse historic, non-conforming boarding houses, consider a bonus provision for owner-occupied dwellings beyond the base allowance of 4 unrelated, plus 1. This has been successfully used, most notably in the pacific northwest, to help make the purchase of old, larger, 4+ bedroom homes in city centers more economically feasible while creating the benefit of an on-site manager.

A potential definition is supplied below. This does not include the owner-occupied bonus +1 provision, which could largely follow the IDD Household Entity defined in the Housing Taskforce white paper.

Housing Entity: *One or more persons related by blood, marriage, adoption, foster care, or a group of not more than four (4) persons who need not be related, living together as a single housekeeping unit and using common kitchen facilities.*

Adequately redefining, expanding or removing family definitions is an opportunity to actively support residents in most need of relief. Current data (2020) indicates that at least 28% of Stevens Point Residents are housing insecure when *only* accounting for their housing cost burden. These residents are at the highest risk of becoming unhoused due to a job loss, medical issue, or other unexpected financial burden. If anything, these numbers have likely gotten progressively worse over the last 2 years, given the dramatic increase in housing and other related costs. The time for meaningful change is right now.

DRAFT