



CHAPTER / **INTRODUCTION**

DIVERSITY OF HOUSING, DIVERSITY OF NEEDS

Topeka's status as a public sector employment center and city that draws commuters from a broad area creates unique challenges in providing quality housing across the spectrum of affordability.

About this Study

Topeka's Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy was undertaken to inform Topeka's Affordable Housing Review Committee and provide a long-term strategy for meeting the city's housing needs and addressing the obstacles and opportunities of Topeka's housing market. This effort was also seen as providing an important resource to fulfill some of the community development goals in the city's holistic community plan, Momentum 2022.

The goal of this Housing Market Study and Strategy is to establish actionable strategies to improve the existing housing stock and effectively plan to meet future demand for housing. The analyses and strategies presented in this final report seek to answer four key questions:

1. What is the **current supply** of housing in Topeka, and is the city positioned to meet **future housing demand** across a range of household affordability?
2. What **types of housing** are missing in the market?
3. What are the **barriers and opportunities** for diversifying Topeka's housing stock?

4. What **tools, programs, and organizations** are needed to advance Topeka's housing priorities?

This document is organized into six chapters that outline the Housing Market Study and Strategy. The first chapter provides context for the City of Topeka and a summary of the analysis of trends and characteristics related to people and policy, place and economy, and housing affordability and stability. This analysis is the foundation for understanding the conditions that impact housing in the city.

The second chapter considers the city's various neighborhood contexts, and establishes a framework that will enable the city and its partners to focus housing investments, programs, and interventions in a strategic and impactful way.

The third chapter provides the overall market analysis to understand the current conditions and opportunity for housing. It identifies the gaps that exist in the housing supply today and likely housing needs in the future. It concludes with a development program that sets realistic expectations for the delivery of housing based on market conditions.

The fourth chapter establishes a market-based understanding of the costs to stabilize a single housing unit. Strategies to shore up a large number of housing units, alongside more intensive investments in abandoned properties and deeply affordable housing, will all play an important role. The chapter explores the dynamic between the cost of housing stabilization and the implications of different interventions.

The fifth chapter offers a strategic framework that identifies and organizes a broad array of actions that can be taken by the city and its partners to meet the city's housing needs. This framework outlines six complementary strategies by which the city and its partners can coordinate their efforts, plan ahead, and identify opportunities for collaboration to advance the housing goals in a balanced way.

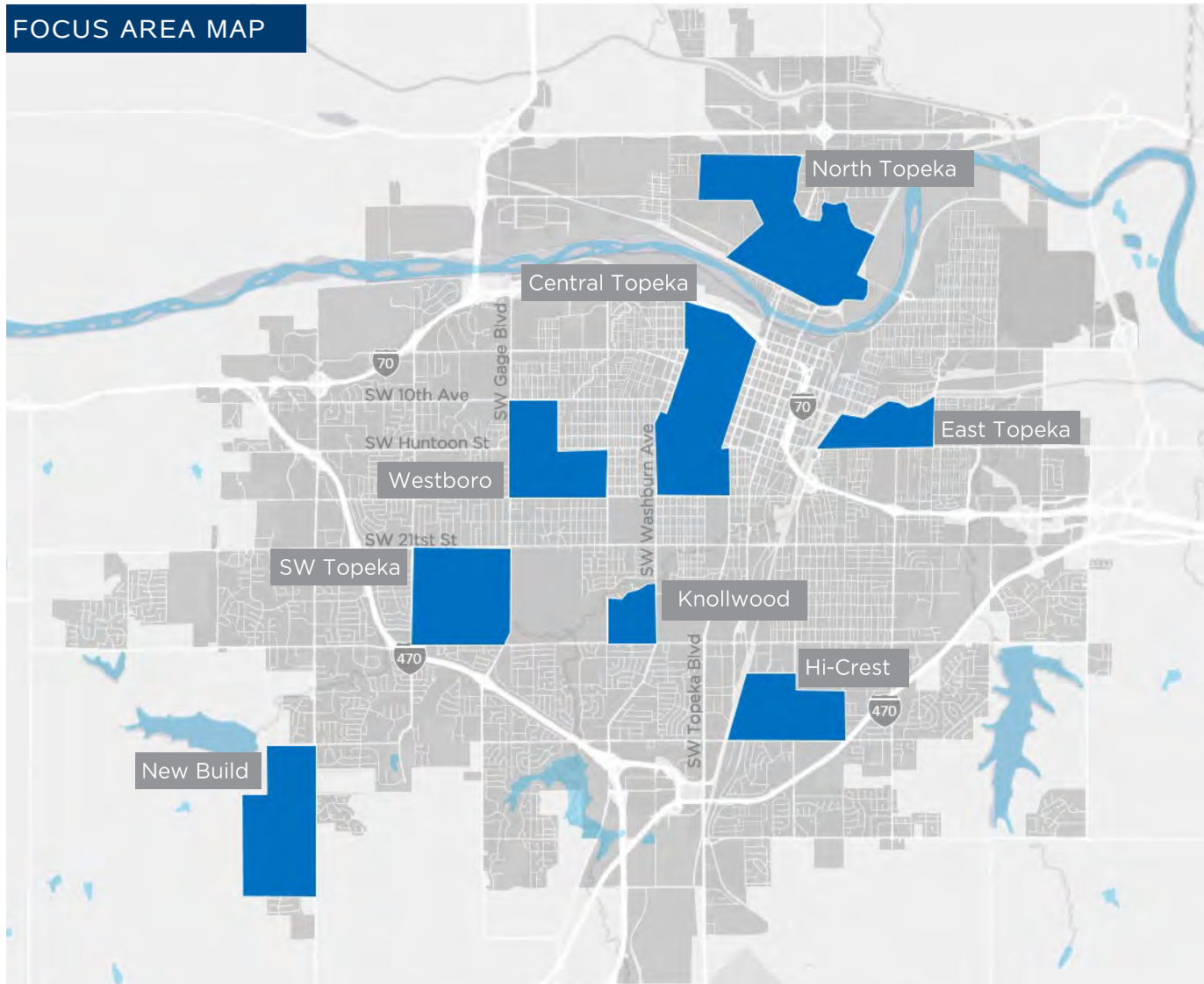
The sixth chapter lays out recommendations for strategic priority actions, including timing recommendation. The document's appendix includes a curated collection of additional analyses, which provide further detail related to content presented in the body of the report.

Focus Areas

The map on the facing page illustrates eight focus areas in the city. These areas were selected through conversations with the client team and steering committee, as well as GIS analysis of a variety of neighborhood conditions. The intent of selecting and analyzing focus areas is to illustrate the different housing conditions and contexts throughout the city. This enables the alignment of different strategies to different contexts. For instance, strategies that apply to Central Topeka will apply to other areas of the city.

We are grateful to the City of Topeka and its partners—FHL Bank, Community Action Partnership, CoreFirst Bank & Trust, Topeka Community Foundation, Kansas Housing, Cornerstone of Topeka, and Topeka Housing Authority—for the opportunity to work on this project. We hope this study serves as a useful tool in guiding efforts to improve quality of life throughout the City of Topeka.

FOCUS AREA MAP



North Topeka

North Topeka is one of the oldest areas of the city and NOTO Arts & Entertainment District has attracted renewed attention on the area. This focus area has below average housing conditions and several vacant lots that present potential redevelopment opportunity.

Central Topeka

Central Topeka includes neighborhoods between Downtown and two major employment anchors—Regional Medical District and Washburn University. Though conditions vary block by block, and some areas are very stable, overall housing conditions are below average.

East Topeka

East Topeka is a unique area, with a mix of homes and many small businesses. The neighborhood has an immigrant population who has invested in the neighborhood. It has challenging housing conditions, floodplain issues, relatively small units, and some of the lowest median values in the city.

Westboro

Westboro is one of Topeka's most stable and desirable neighborhoods. It has above average conditions, strong property values, and homes sell quickly. It was included as an example of a stable neighborhood that has seen continued investment over time.

New Build

The New Build focus area represents the most common type of housing built in the city over the past decade: single-family homes over 2,000 square feet. A number of lots remain vacant in this area due to slowing development.

Hi-Crest

Hi-Crest is one of Topeka's most challenged neighborhoods. Built following World War II to house workers and veterans, it was originally designed as short-term housing until more durable housing could replace it. Most of the housing is now rental and marginally maintained.

Knollwood

Knollwood, like Westboro, is a historically stable and desirable neighborhood. Although homes are newer and less expensive than in Westboro, it is another example of a neighborhood with continued investment and stable conditions.

SW Topeka

SW Topeka is comprised primarily of mid-century ranch homes. Conditions are average and property values are stable. It was selected because it is experiencing turn over as original residents are leaving, and some homes show signs of deterioration. Early interventions will promote its stability.

