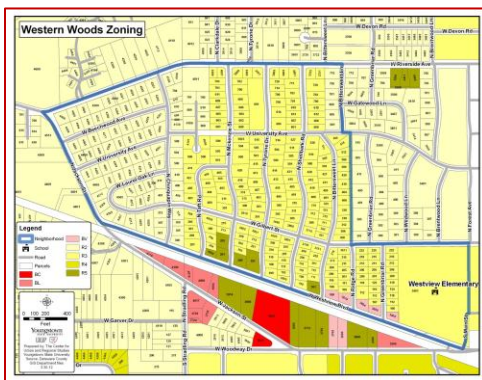


Muncie Action Plan



Final Report

Western Woods Neighborhood Plan



Submitted to: Western
Woods Neighborhood
Association

Submitted by:
MUNCIE ACTION PLAN

JULY, 2012

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Appendix A: Draft Code Awareness Flier A-1

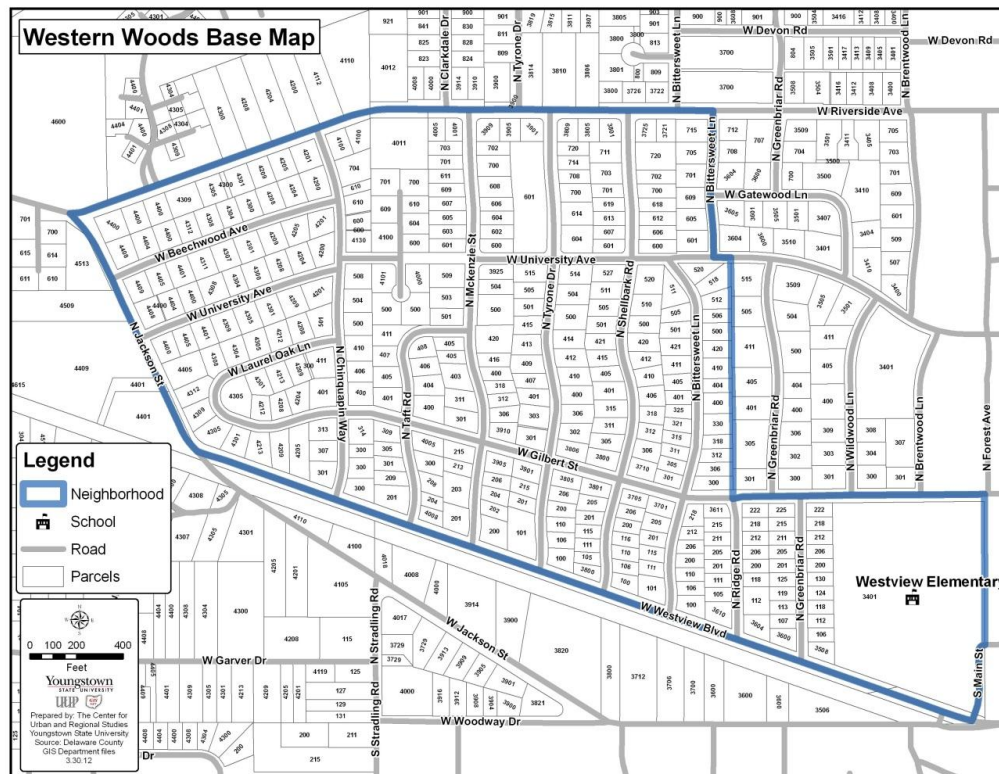
1. Introduction

Muncie, Indiana is a city in Center Township, Delaware County, located in east central Indiana. It is the home of Ball State University. Formerly, a major industrial center with the Ball Corporation at its hub, Muncie was dubbed “Middletown” in the 1920s because it was considered a typical American city. In the last 50 years, Muncie has lost most of its manufacturing base including companies such as Ball Corporation, General Motors, and Borg Warner. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there are about 70,000 people living in Muncie.

The Muncie Action Plan (MAP) is an initiative that evolved from a community-wide planning process in 2009 and 2010. One of MAP’s major initiatives is Initiative 2: Fostering Collaboration. A major goal of this initiative is to help create and support neighborhood organizations among the City’s 41 neighborhoods. As part of that effort, MAP is initiating a series of neighborhood plans to provide direction for existing and active neighborhood associations. Western Woods is a small neighborhood of 759 residents located just west of the Ball State University’s campus. It is bordered by W. Jackson Street, Westview Boulevard, W. Riverside Avenue, and N. Tillotson Avenue (Figure 1-1). As part of MAP outreach, the Western Woods Neighborhood Association (WWNA) was formed in September 2011. It currently has 55 dues paying members. Its board meets regularly.

Through this neighborhood planning process, the Western Woods Neighborhood Plan will act as a comprehensive framework to ensure the neighborhood remains an attractive and healthy community.

Figure 1-1: Western Woods Neighborhood



2. Existing Conditions

2.1 Land Use and Demographics

Western Woods is a predominantly single-family residential area with a small amount of multi-family apartment units and commercial businesses along Westview Boulevard (Figure 2-1). Houses in the eastern part of the neighborhood were constructed in the 1950's and 1960's and those in the western part in the 1980's and 1990's. Residents of this neighborhood are generally older, with only 17.7 % of the residents below the age of 18. Many residents of Western Woods have lived here for most of their lives, leading to a neighborhood with mostly owner-occupied housing, with 600 (74.3 %) residents in owner-occupied housing units and only 159 (25.7 %) residents renter-occupied housing units (most of which are in the apartments along Westview Boulevard). Only 6.7 % of the housing units in the neighborhood area are vacant, which is compared to 11.2 % in Muncie and 10.3 % in Delaware County. Table 2-1 presents demographic information for the neighborhood.

Figure 2-1: Zoning and Land Use

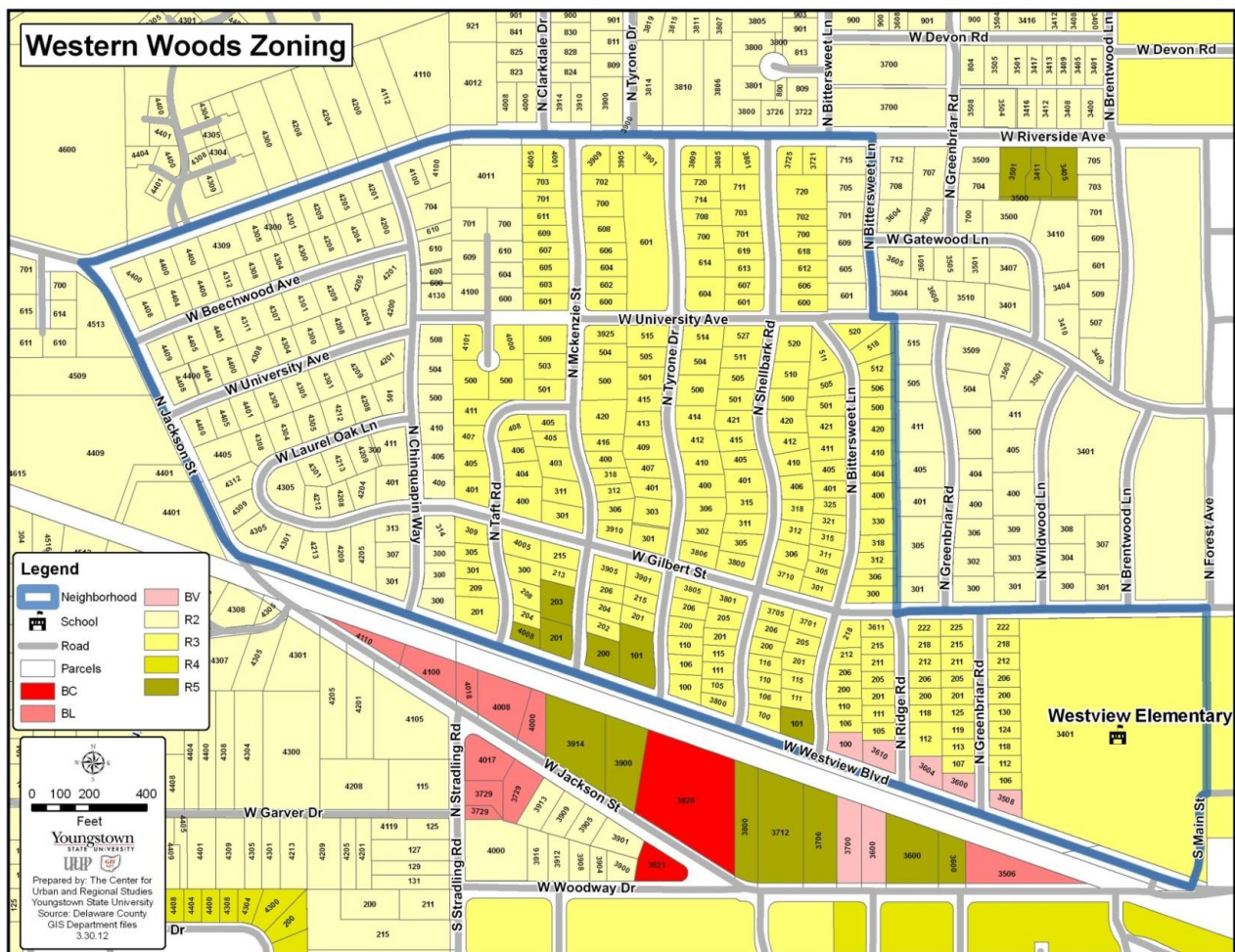


Table 2-1 Demographic Information

- Housing units – 388
- Vacant housing units – 26 (6.7%)
- Owner occupied housing units – 269 (74.3%)
- Renter-occupied housing units – 93 (25.7%)
- Population in owner-occupied housing units – 600
- Population in renter-occupied housing units – 159
- Owner-occupied housing units headed by householder 15 – 64 years - 85
- Owner-occupied housing units headed by householder 65 years and older – 196
- Total population – 759
- Race – 94.5% White; 3% Black or African American
- Gender – Female 396; Male 363
- Under 18 years of age – 135
- 18 – 54 years of age - 352
- 55 – 64 years of age - 109
- 65 years and over – 109
- Male householder family households – 165
- Female householder family households – 90

Source: 2010 Census Summary File block statistics

2.2 Structure and Property Survey

The structural conditions of the homes and other buildings in Western Woods are mainly in above average condition or excellent condition, based on a visual survey of the neighborhood in February of 2012. From this overview it is estimated that fewer than 25 % of the properties in Western Woods are of below average or poor structural condition. The property conditions visual survey (also done in February of 2012) revealed that only one property in the neighborhood was in poor condition; whereas about half of the properties were kept in excellent condition. Generally speaking the properties west of N. Chinquapen Way are in above average or excellent condition. Farther east there are higher percentages of below average properties. This is to be expected because the housing stock on the eastern side of the neighborhood dates to the 1950's while subdivisions further west have been built out in the last decade. Figure 2-2 presents the results of the structural survey. Figure 2-3 presents the results of the property survey. The structures and properties were rated on a four-point scale with:

- 1 – Poor
- 2 – Below Average
- 3 – Above Average
- 4 – Excellent

It should be noted that these surveys were conducted for planning purposes only and have no impact on an appraisal for any particular property.

Figure 2-2: Structure Survey (February 2012)

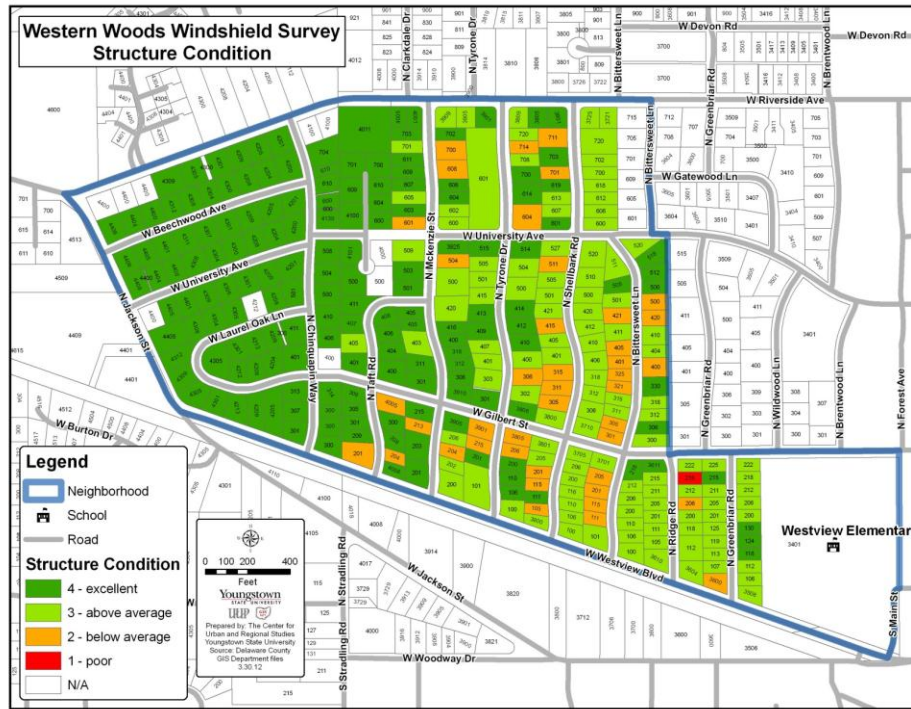
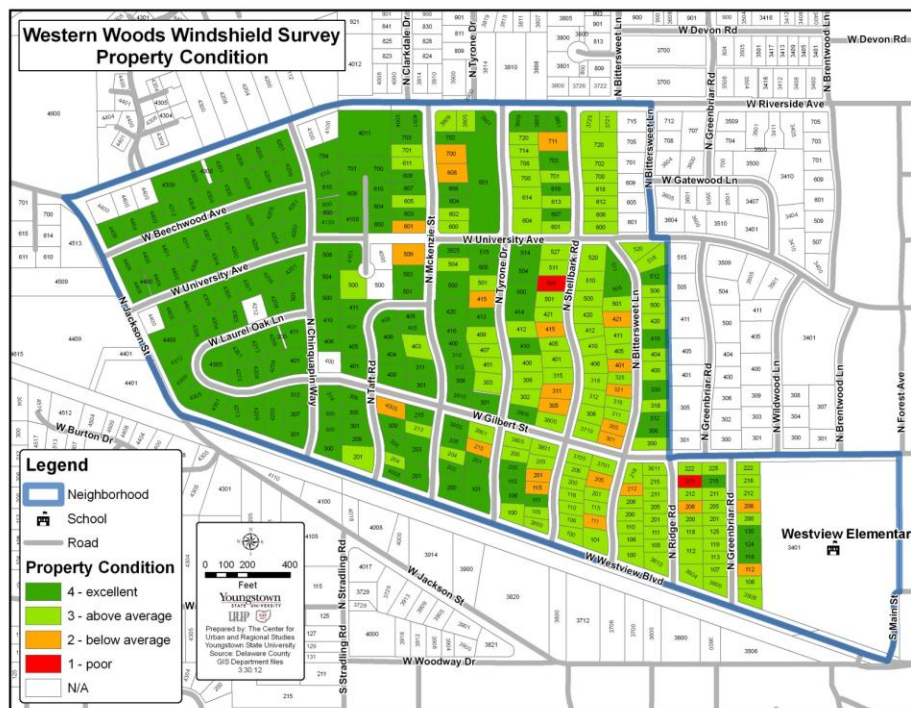
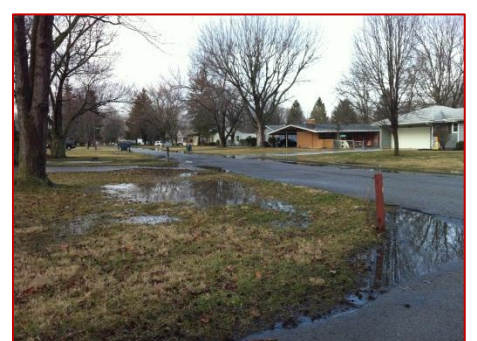
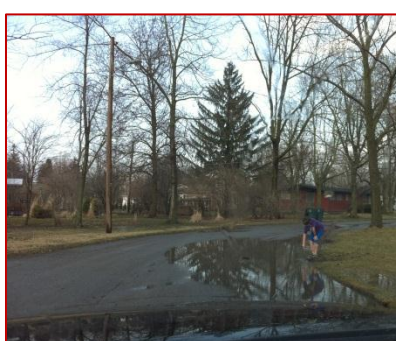


Figure 2-3: Property Survey (February 2012)



2.3 Drainage and Pavement Conditions

Drainage conditions in the neighborhood have been and continue to be a major issue. When the neighborhood was built, the drainages were designed as side ditches; however, many residents filled them in with soil because it gave a better appearance and was easier to mow. Another issue is that the existing drains have probably not been cleaned for years. Now, the water has fewer places to go than when there were ditches, therefore it collects in the roadways and makes road conditions hazardous after a heavy rain. One solution to this current drainage problem would be a curb and gutter system, so the excess water flows into the sewer system. Another option would be to implement additional natural drainage solutions, such as bio-swales and rain gardens along the roadways. These additions of native plants help to absorb the water back into the soil and divert it from the sewer system, lessening the chances of over hauling the sewer system. To get any improvements made, the neighborhood needs to petition the Board of Public Works to implement these changes. Funding may be possible through the Barrett Act assessment. The pictures shown below are from a heavy storm in March 2012.



Western Woods, as many neighborhoods in Muncie, has issues with subpar pavement conditions. Typically, the Public Works Department repairs the roads, but they prefer to fix drainage issues before fixing pavement issues. Generally, the reason for this is that the water from the bad drainage tends to corrode the pavement where the water sits in the street.

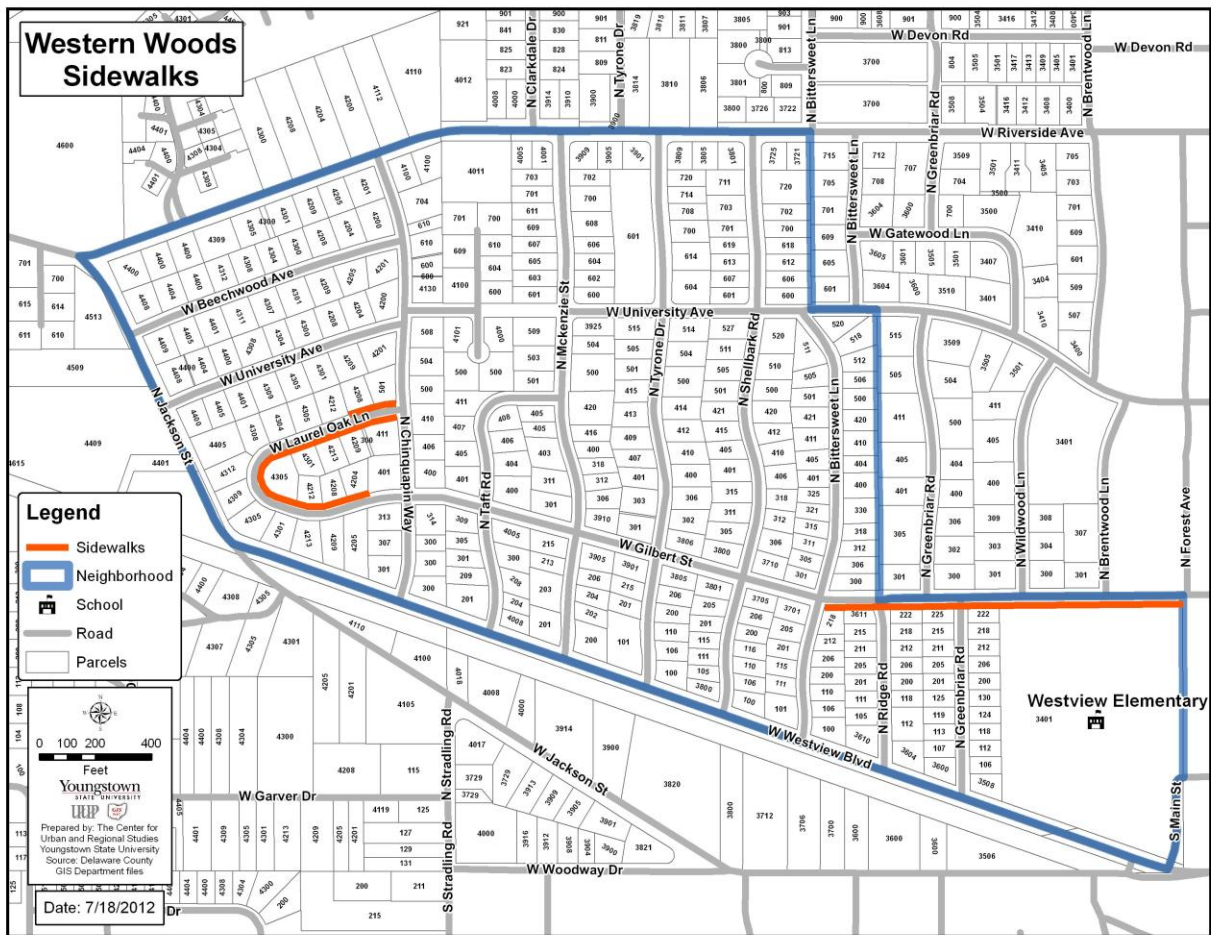
Muncie has recently initiated a city-wide pavement plan, when the pavement report is complete, it will be shared with the Public Works Department. Figure 2-4 illustrates location in the neighborhood where pavement deterioration is evident.

Figure 2-4: Pavement Conditions



There is only one residential sidewalk in Western Woods; it is a small section located on the west side of the neighborhood (Figure 2-5). There is also a sidewalk bordering West View Elementary School. However, a comprehensive network of sidewalks is not a priority. Most residents feel safe walking throughout the neighborhood, because of the low speed limits in this residential area. Bike paths were mentioned at the public meetings as a way to connect the residents to the different parks in the neighborhood, as well as connect them to attractions outside of their neighborhood. This action would be part of Muncie’s new Complete Streets policy, which works to open the roadways in Muncie to all forms of transit, rather than just cars. There are private companies, like New Belgium’s Fat Tire Brewing Company that have grants specifically for the implementation of bike lanes and bike paths in communities.

Figure 2-5: Sidewalks in Western Woods



2.4 Recreation and Parks

There are two nearby recreational facilities. West View Elementary School has a park that recently had new playground equipment added (see photo) through the efforts of the West View Community Association, Ball Brothers Foundation grant, and Muncie Community Schools (matched all funds raised by the WVCA through on a \$1 per \$1 basis). The new playground equipment is on the west side of the school. Future phases include new playground equipment on the east side of the school, refurbishment of the baseball field (which is overgrown with grass and needs new fencing and dugouts), and a health walk around the perimeter of the campus.



Guthrie Park is several blocks east of the neighborhood. Guthrie Park is a city park. It is a “passive” park with three park benches (two were added after a recent meeting of MAP’s Neighborhood Presidents Council) and no other equipment. At this time the parks department is not anticipating putting playground equipment at this location.

Although not in the neighborhood, the Catalina Swim Club is at the end of Clarkdale (which is the extension of McKenzie after a slight jog on Riverside). A number of residents of Western Woods are members of the club and it is common to see small children walking or on bicycles crossing Riverside to get to the pool.

3. Key Issues and Neighborhood Plan Goals

At the first neighborhood planning meeting for this project (held in January 2012), several issues were identified by residents as key. These are:

- Drainage
- Pavement
- Open garage doors
- Rental property/landlord issues
- Lack of curbs
- Railroad
- Dogs
- Feral cats

The discussion at the focused on obvious (pavement, drainage) issues in the neighborhood and others such as open garage doors (i.e., doors that are never shut), the railroad (blocked crossing, noise, visual appearance due to sloppy or non-existent lawn care), and issues with animals (both the number of animals allowed at a single property and feral cats). There was concern expressed that too many properties in the neighborhood were becoming rentals. There was some discussion of the lack of sidewalks but there was no consensus that sidewalks were a major priority. At a meeting in May, the consultant established a set of goals based on input received to serve as a base for the neighborhood plan. They then participated in a ranking and were also allowed to add goals. As a result of this exercise, a table listing key issues and their general priority was developed (Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: Preliminary Neighborhood Plan Goals

Goal	Scoring	Priority
Make neighborhood bike/pedestrian friendly	7	1
Improve neighborhood appearance	6	2
Improve drainage and pavement conditions	5	3
Develop pocket parks	5	3
Address property conditions by encouraging residents to be compliant with city codes	3	4
Ensure a minimum of single-family house rental	3	4
Attract more families with children	0	na

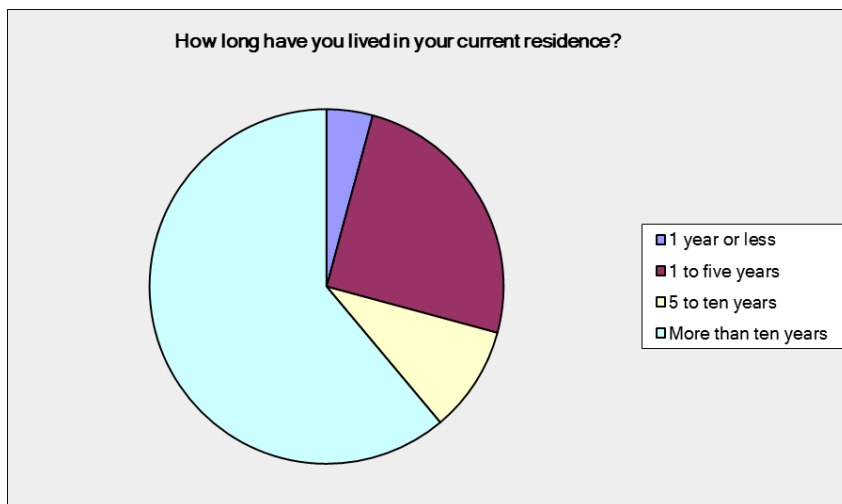
4. Resident Survey

A neighborhood survey was conducted in the spring of 2010. The survey was designed around the information provided by residents at the first two neighborhood meetings (see discussion of key issues in Chapter 3). The survey forms were delivered by volunteers throughout the neighborhood and the survey was also distributed to the mailing list maintained by the Western Woods Neighborhood Association. Following are the results of the survey (Table 3-1).

4.2 Resident Survey Results

Table 3-1: Neighborhood Resident Survey Results

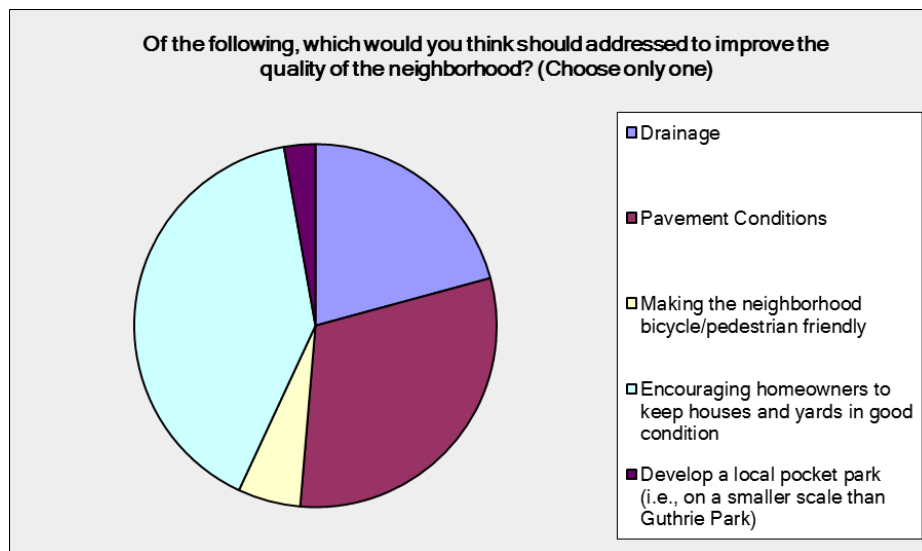
1. How long have you lived in your current residence?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1 year or less	4.2%	3
1 to five years	25.0%	18
5 to ten years	9.7%	7
More than ten years	61.1%	44
<i>answered question</i>		72
<i>skipped question</i>		2



2. How do you rate the overall appearance of the neighborhood?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Poor	4.2%	3
Below Average	21.1%	15
Above Average	69.0%	49
Excellent	5.6%	4
<i>answered question</i>		71
<i>skipped question</i>		3

3. Of the following, which would you think should be addressed to improve the quality of the neighborhood? (Choose only one)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Drainage	20.8%	15
Pavement Conditions	30.6%	22
Making the neighborhood bicycle/pedestrian friendly	5.6%	4
Encouraging homeowners to keep houses and yards in good condition	40.3%	29
Develop a local pocket park (i.e., on a smaller scale than Guthrie Park)	2.8%	2
<i>answered question</i>		72
<i>skipped question</i>		2



4. Are there other problems or issues in the neighborhood that should be addressed?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50.7%	34
No	22.4%	15
Not sure	26.9%	18
If yes, please describe:		37
<i>answered question</i>		67
<i>skipped question</i>		7

If yes, please describe:

Code enforcement for vehicles on grass

Parking on grass

Soliciting

Drainage issues due to tree roots

Parking in yards

Grass not being cut

Water pools

Neighbors stealing stuff

Barking dogs and loose pets

No sidewalks/littering from cars

Code enforcement for mobile or recreational vehicles

Eliminating 20' trailer parked at 420 Shellbark

Soliciting

Serious drainage issues 25 years ago due to tree roots into drainage lines.

Parking in yards

Many overgrown trees.

Develop a neighborhood crime watch, Develop a committee to stay in touch with neighbors who are homebound.

Several houses and yards are not kept up and just plain look bad and detract from the value of the neighborhood.

Noise ordinance for trains and a crossing arm for Jackson and Westview.

Vehicles parked in yards; work trucks parked in street blocking view; Unkempt homes between West View and McKenzie.

I would like residents to have some education regarding the harmful effect of eliminating trees from their property.

Structures such as garages without doors; poor maintenance along West View Boulevard businesses; poor lighting.

Keep what sidewalks we have clean -- example near West View School.

The neighborhood varies in problem areas; some need to be addressed more than others.

Some streets are in poor condition. Better snow removal in winter.

Besides my neighbor's backyard turning into a jungle and pushing my fence down trouble with people running stop signs.

Drainage

Encourage residents to put their cars in their garages at night.

People need to cut their grass regularly!

There is too much traffic that uses certain roads because of yield signs as opposed to stop signs.

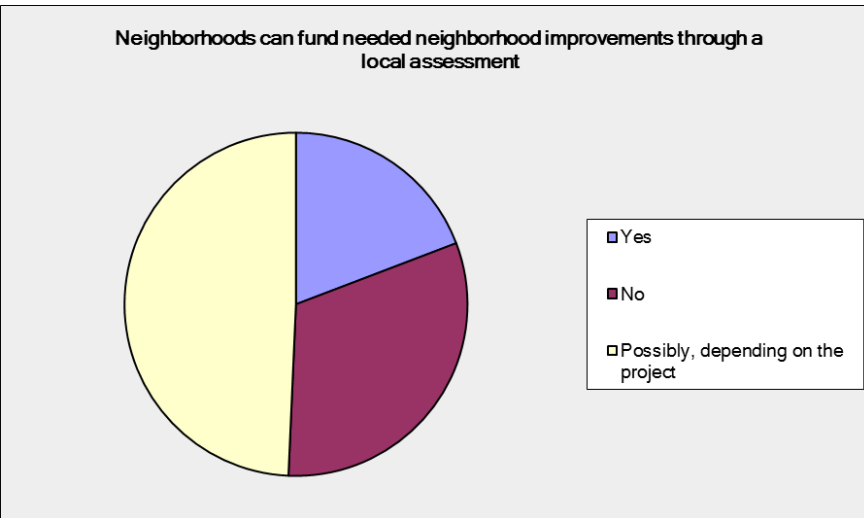
Drainage & Property up-keep are also very important.

Streets--potholes, patches

Barking dogs and cats allowed to roam. Unusually loud unmuffled autos.

5. Neighborhoods can fund needed neighborhood improvements through a local assessment authorized by the Barrett Act. This would involve a payment like a property tax spread over several years. If a project to improve pavement or drainage conditions or some other action that would improve property values, would you consider participating?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	19.2%	14
No	31.5%	23
Possibly, depending on the project	49.3%	36
<i>answered question</i>		73
<i>skipped question</i>		1



6. Do you:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Own	93.2%	69
Rent	6.8%	5
<i>answered question</i>		74
<i>skipped question</i>		0

7. Do you have any other comments about how to improve the neighborhood:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	28.2%	20
No	62.0%	44
Not sure	9.9%	7
If yes, please describe:		20
<i>answered question</i>		71
<i>skipped question</i>		3

If yes, please describe:

More lighting (solar?)/ house improvement

Many overgrown trees

Demolish buildings at 305 Taft.

Maybe adding speed bumps to reduce speeding

People aren't friendly

Wish for more safety when walking in the neighborhood

Crime watch

More lighting (solar?). Some houses look like they could use improvement. Vacant houses for sale.

Appreciate what you are trying to do.

I feel that all of the items in question #3 are important and would like to see addressed over time.

Crime watch

Yearly closing of a street for a neighborhood party; neighborhood watch.

Make residents more aware of City Code violations and how to report them.

Removed

Can we make our neighbors cut down their weeds

Make it illegal to leave trash toters in front of house. Require that leaves be raked in fall.

Leaving trash toters in the front of neighbors houses

Curbs should be added, through Barrett Act if necessary.

I think the suggestion of promoting the availability of a neighborhood elementary school is a good selling point.

How about a neighbor hood crime watch program?

4.2 Conclusions

Most respondents who completed the survey (over 90%) own their own home and 70 percent of the respondents have lived in the neighborhood longer than five years. Sixty-nine percent of respondents rated the neighborhood as being in above average condition while 21 percent rated it as being in below average condition. Asked what should be done to improve the neighborhood 40 percent stated encouraging property owners to keep their properties and homes in good condition. The comments to both the open ended questions generally mirrored the comments during the public meetings – i.e., pavement, drainage, cars parked in yards, etc. Something new that had not come up before was cars speeding through stop signs. A Barrett Act assessment (which is part of the city code) is an assessment that is levied on a particular area for an infrastructure project such as sidewalks that is then paid by property owners over a period of five to ten years. Nineteen percent of respondents said they would support such an assessment while 31 percent said they would not. Forty-nine percent said they may support an assessment, depending on the project.

5. Implementation Plan

As part of the investigation into key issues, the consultant met with the parks department, public works, and community development to identify realistic solutions to neighborhood concerns. The plan presented in Table 5-1 represents possible actions the Western Woods Neighborhood Association could take to achieve the goals identified through the planning process.

Action	Description	Action	Cost	Funding Source	Year
Code Enforcement and Neighborhood Enhancement	Mailer detailing property maintenance and clean up program. Six-month window to address code violations.	WWNA would mail letter and flier identifying code issues. Letter would stress that WWNA is not trying to intrude but respectfully working to improve the neighborhood.	\$300 for copies, envelopes, and postage	WWNA	2012
Pavement and Drainage Improvement	Public Works has indicated the City is developing a 4-year paving plan. Based on information provided Tyrone and Shellbark are priority streets for improvements.	Public Works said they would coordinate with Muncie Sanitary District to address drainage issues prior to repaving. They also would contact Vectren and MSD to ensure there are no pending plans for road cuts in the next several years.	High	City or neighborhood assessment	2012 - 2016
Bicycle-Pedestrian Improvements	Signage and striping at the McKenzie, Clarkdale and Riverside Intersection and at the Westview Boulevard, Jackson, and Normandie Intersection.	City is examining the feasibility of doing signage and striping to make motorists aware of these crossings.	Low	City	2012
West View Boulevard Gateway Improvements	Combination of public and private sector improvements to create gateway effect on West View Boulevard.	WWNA should recruit a MAP/BSU volunteer to draft an initial boulevard design taking into account city/railroad right-of-way and private sector businesses. WWNA would then take the concept to the City and businesses to recruit support.	Moderate	City, MPO, Federal Funds, Grant	2013-2014
West View Elementary School Park Improvements	Support/attend various fundraisers conducted by the West View Community Association for playground improvements	Aluminum can dropoffs, fall and spring festivals, and other events support the WVCA efforts to raise funds for the east side playground and baseball field improvements.	None	na	2012/2013
Crime Watch	Although not identified as a priority WWNA may want to put up crime watch signs similar to Gatewood	Contact Gatewood Neighborhood Association about sign cost and implementation.			2013
WWNA Membership	Use volunteers to reach out to neighborhood once per year to recruit organization members and add to the e-mail list.		Volunteer Time		Annually
Block Party	Hold a Neighborhood Association Block Party	Request street closure permit.	\$200 - \$500	WWNA	Annually
Pocket Park	WWNA could acquire a property for a pocket park.	Parks Department has indicated it would maintain and cut the grass at a park but not provide playground equipment. The WWNA would need to procure equipment if desired.	Moderate	WWNA, Grant	2014

The following recommendations are suggested for consideration by the neighborhood association.

1. Create a mailer such as presented in Appendix A and either hand deliver or mail (recommended but cost may be prohibitive) to every property owner in the neighborhood. The flier should be accompanied by a letter that states the WWNA is embarking on a program to enforce code violations that detract from the appearance and value of the neighborhood. People should be given 3 months to address their code violations. After that, they should be made aware obvious violations will be reported to the city. The letter should be written such that people are aware the WWNA is not trying to be intrusive but wants to keep the neighborhood in good condition.
2. The public works department has said the city is preparing a 4-year repaving plan. Shellbark and Tyrone have been identified as the priority streets for initial consideration. Public works said they will coordinate the pavement program with utilities and the Muncie Sanitary District to ensure no near-term road cuts are planned for the streets being repaved. WWNA should follow up with public works at least every six months either by phone or in person to check on the status. The City has released an initial paving plan and only Ridge Road has been identified for paving. WWNA may want to follow up with public works to re-emphasize the neighborhood's priorities for paving.
3. Signage has already been erected at the McKenzie/Riverside/Clarkdale intersection to alert motorists to the presence of non-motorized traffic and pedestrians. A set of stripes has been painted for the crosswalk. This first attempt is not very visible. WWNA should contact public works to make the crossing more prominent.
4. WWNA should contact Muncie Action Plan about getting a volunteer or BSU intern to draft an initial Westview Boulevard design.
5. WWNA should forward information about all West View fundraising events to the mailing list.
6. The Gatewood Neighborhood Association, immediately east of Western Woods, recently purchased and installed five crime watch signs. The cost for the signs and anti-vandal hardware was \$117. Posts and installation fees are not included. WWNA should consider erecting similar (or the same) signs in several locations throughout the neighborhood.
7. The WWNA should continue to recruit new members through annual membership drives and possible "block" parties. One possibility for a "block" party discussed at the June public meeting was to hold it at West View Elementary near the new playground equipment. Muncie Community Schools would need to be consulted to see if this is a possibility. Also, there would probably need to be some tables brought in as there are only two picnic tables at the site.

5.1 Next Steps

The consultant will meet with WWNA representatives to determine a schedule for meeting with the Muncie-Delaware Metropolitan Planning Commission to present the plan.

Appendix A: Draft Code Awareness Flier

Western Woods Neighborhood Association – Notice to Residents, July 2012

The Western Woods Neighborhood Association (WWNA) worked with Muncie Action Plan to develop a neighborhood plan. The plan was developed from January to July, 2012. In a survey of the neighborhood, residents were asked what should be done to improve the residents from a choice of several items as shown in a snapshot of the survey question below. As can be seen, encouraging residents to keep their properties in good condition had the greatest response (40% of respondents). This directly relates to code issues because a number of properties in the neighborhood exhibit obvious code violations that detract from the appearance of the neighborhood.

3. Of the following, which would you think should be addressed to improve the quality of the neighborhood? (Choose only one)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Drainage	20.8%	15
Pavement Conditions	30.6%	22
Making the neighborhood bicycle/pedestrian friendly	5.6%	4
Encouraging homeowners to keep houses and yards in good condition	40.3%	29
Develop a local pocket park (i.e., on a smaller scale than Guthrie Park)	2.8%	2
	<i>answered question</i>	72
	<i>skipped question</i>	2

WWNA would like you to review the code restrictions identified below and, if you feel perhaps you are violating one of these ordinances, try to fix the problem. We are suggesting a three-month grace period for people to comply with code issues in the neighborhood. Beginning in 2013, the WWNA will report to City officials obvious code violation. A resident of any particular property will be notified at the time a code violation is reported. Thank you for your consideration of this request. It is our hope that by addressing these issues our property values and yours will rise.

A copy of the Muncie City Code can be found on-line at http://www.cityofmuncie.com/upload/assets/db_Documents/Muncie_IN_code_of_ordinances_12_04.pdf or at the City Clerk’s office.

Key code issues identified during Western Woods Neighborhood Association Planning Process

- ✓ Open garage doors
- ✓ Dogs
- ✓ Feral Cats
- ✓ Cars parked in yard
- ✓ Grass and weed issues
- ✓ Number of unrelated people living in the same house

Several of the entries on this list represent building and housing code issues discussed in section 152 and 155 of Muncie’s City Ordinance respectively. The purpose of this flyer is to explain these issues and to

point to Muncie’s City Ordinance to better understand the code and proper compliance within that code.

Garage doors

Unsecured Garage doors: A building without a garage door, or an inoperable, permanently up garage door, is not secure and can be cited under the unsafe building law and the local housing code. Open buildings are considered a public nuisance and a potential fire hazard.

Garage doors are not specifically mentioned in Muncie’s housing code, but fall under sections 155.25.B.1.4 which states that all accessory structures must be maintained and in good repair, and section 155.26.2.F-G which mention that all doors, windows, and hatchways shall be tight and be kept in sound condition and repair

Property Maintenance

Also covered in section 155.25 are minimum requirements for land maintenance. Grass and weeds have been cited as a problem in the neighborhood, and the city’s code specifically mentions “All exterior property areas shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, free from any accumulation of rubbish or garbage” and “shall be kept free from species of weeds or plant growth which are noxious or detrimental to the public health.”

Occupancy Requirements

The number of unrelated people that can live in a house is based on a square footage formula on page XV: 159 of the Muncie Code under section 155.32. It states:

All existing and subsequently erected residential structures shall have not less than the following living area per adult occupant:

- ✓ 250 sq. ft. for one
- ✓ 400 sq. ft. for two
- ✓ 650 sq. ft. for three
- ✓ 900 sq. ft. for four
- ✓ 1400 sq. ft. for five
- ✓ 1900 sq. ft. for six

More than six adult occupants requires a variance under section 155.21 herein which may be granted upon good cause shown.

Further information on occupancy requirements is available in chapter 155 of Muncie’s City Code, on the city’s website, listed below.

Pet Issues

A single residence may house no more than 3 dogs, 3 dogs and 2 cats, or 6 cats total. The city has no program for feral cats. Residents can trap them themselves and take them to the City animal shelter or they can contact Action for Animals, who may trap them, spay or neuter them, and release them to live out their natural life. The number for Action for Animals is (765) 774-3509. Code violations and other neighborhood problems can be reported on e-Gov at www.cityofmuncie.com.