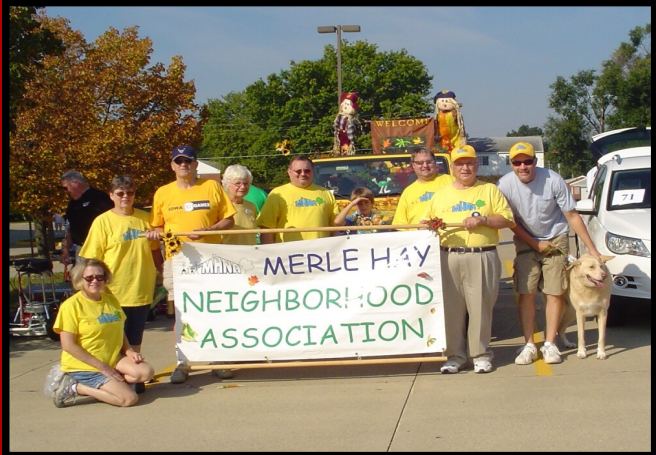


Merle Hay



Merle Hay
Neighborhood Plan
October 2008

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Special thanks to Steve Berry, Bill Linthicum, and Jane Linthicum for their assistance in creating the plan.

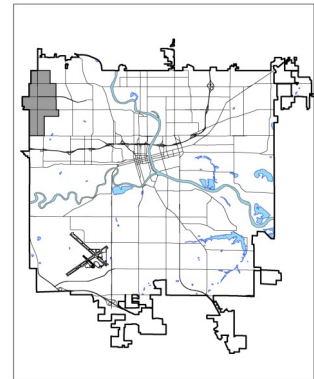
Introduction

The City of Des Moines and the Polk County Board of Supervisors established the Neighborhood Revitalization Program in the early 1990s to help stabilize and improve Des Moines' neighborhoods. To coordinate this program, the City's Community Development Department formed the Neighborhood Development Division.

The Neighborhood Revitalization Program uses a strategy that calls for neighborhood residents, the City of Des Moines, Polk County, and local business leaders to develop a public/private partnership that addresses revitalization issues within the City. In Spring 2006, the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association (MHNA) submitted an application and made a presentation to the Neighborhood Revitalization Board (NRB). The Neighborhood Revitalization Board recommended the Merle Hay Neighborhood become Designated. In June 2007, the recommendation of the NRB was approved by the Des Moines City Council and Polk County Board of Supervisors.

The neighborhood planning process relies on active stakeholder groups to identify critical issues in their neighborhood. The staff of the Neighborhood Development Division provides technical assistance and planning coordination. Neighborhood planning staff works with the stakeholder group to develop and implement appropriate goals and a feasible action plan. These neighborhood

plans provide a list of activities and identify parties responsible for implementation. The success of the revitalization effort depends on a continued coordination of efforts among the neighborhood organization, the City, the County, and other public and private organizations.



Merle Hay Neighborhood
Vicinity Map

This plan was prepared through a joint effort of the City of Des Moines Community Development Department's Neighborhood Development Division and the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association. The approved plan becomes an amendment to the City of Des Moines Comprehensive Plan.

This document is strategic in nature and is intended to guide development decisions in the neighborhood for the next decade. The Merle Hay Neighborhood Association is charged with leading the day-to-day implementation of the plan with technical assistance from the City of Des Moines and Polk County.

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan



History

The Merle Hay Neighborhood was annexed into the City of Des Moines in 1890 as part of an area informally known as “Urbandale”. The area was named for Glidden, Iowa native Private Merle David Hay. Merle Hay was one of the first three American soldiers to die in World War I on November 2, 1917. Three weeks later, the Des Moines City Council renamed 58th Street Merle Hay Road. Fifty-Eighth Street was chosen to bear Hay’s name as it was the major roadway between Des Moines and Camp Dodge, a military training facility. A 16-ton memorial boulder honoring Private Merle Hay was dedicated near Aurora Avenue along Merle Hay Road on May 30, 1921.

The municipal boundaries within the Merle Hay Neighborhood have been the subject of two court cases. Joseph Stuart was a farmer who owned land on 62nd Street between Douglas Avenue and Aurora Avenue. Stuart did not want his farmland annexed into the City of Des Moines. Eventually, both Urbandale and Des Moines wanted the land, but when the case was heard in court, only representatives from Urbandale were present and case was decided in their favor. Because of this, there is a 300 foot jog in the municipal boundaries along 62nd Street north of Douglas Avenue.



Merle Hay Plaza postcard circa 1960

The western city limit between Hickman Road and Urbandale Avenue was not settled until 1960. The dispute included a vote to annex the area into Urbandale and a court case. However, a compromise was reached with the City of Urbandale to include the Westover area within Des Moines, more than 50 years after the area was first platted in 1906.

The proximity to Camp Dodge played an important role in pre World War II development in the neighborhood. Merle Hay Road from Camp Dodge south to the corner of Douglas Avenue was paved with brick in 1918. The proximity to Camp Dodge also provided electrical service and running water to the area in the early 1900s.

Douglas Avenue and Merle Hay Road were designated highways in the 1920s by the Iowa Highway Commission. Merle Hay Road between Douglas and Hickman Road and Douglas Avenue between Beaver Avenue and Merle Hay Road were paved in 1935. In 1954, the federal government proposed the location of the new interstate roadway about 1½ miles north of the intersection of Douglas Ave. and Merle Hay Road. By 1959, the Merle Hay Road interchange with I-80/35 opened with additional segments opening in the following years.

The Merle Hay Neighborhood has been home to two airfields. Clyde Herring Airport was at the northeast corner of Merle Hay Road and Douglas Avenue from 1918 to 1924. The second airfield, White’s Field, may have replaced Herring Airfield, existing from 1924 to 1926. It was at the corner of 49th Street and Hickman Road where Tower Park is today. Planes flying toward the old Herring Airfield were directed toward the new airport on Fleur Drive by a large arrow on the top of the Hazen Water Tower (located at Tower Park).

The first homes in the neighborhood were built in the 1890s. In 1905, the Inter-urban Railway tracks were laid in what is now the grassy median strip down the center of Urbandale Avenue. This sparked new housing development in the area. The early development near the streetcar was on large “country” lots between 8-20 acres in size. However, the Great Depression and World War II prevented much of the area from being developed.

After World War II, the area experienced major changes. Subdivisions of starter homes, built for returning veterans and their new families, sprouted up throughout the

History

neighborhood. A typical house in the area was a single floor, approximately 1,000 square feet, and placed on large lots to allow for home additions in the future.

The booming population led to the development of other amenities. The largest building in the area was St. Gabriel Monastery, built in 1921 on the NW corner of the Merle Hay Road and Douglas Avenue intersection. In 1956, the monastery and its extensive grounds were sold in 1956 to Chicago-based developers Joseph Abbell and Bernard Greenbaum for commercial development.

The new development was originally planned as a strip mall. However, before construction began in early 1958, it was redesigned as an open-air plaza. The mall was known as Northland Shopping Center until Younkens Department Store executives suggested the new shopping center be named for Merle Hay.

Merle Hay Plaza opened in 1959 with 31 stores and a bowling alley. It was the largest retail center in Iowa. Sears, a second anchor store, opened in 1959. Other early tenants included a Safeway supermarket, S. S. Kresge department store, Bishop's Buffet, and Walgreens drug store. A movie theater and six story office building were added in 1965.

In the early 1970s, several major changes occurred on the shopping center's property. In 1972, Merle Hay Plaza was enclosed and renamed "Merle Hay Mall." In 1974, Merle Hay Mall made a major westward expansion by purchasing the abutting property that crossed into the City of Urbandale. The renovation doubled the mall to over 1.1 million square feet. In 1978, a major fire destroyed a portion of the Younkens anchor store killing ten people.

The area's commercial success continued into the 1980s. Several "big box" stores developed north of Merle Hay Mall. However, competition from other local commercial areas, including Valley West Mall, Southridge

Mall, and the growing suburbs began to diminish the uniqueness of Merle Hay Mall.

By the 1990s, newer Des Moines metro commercial centers and malls in other parts of the state eroded the market area of Merle Hay Mall and its surrounding commercial corridor. Many of the "big box" stores underwent changes with the original tenants moving to newer, more suburban locations. Schools have been an important part of the neighborhood.

Built in 1917, Riley Elementary school stood on the corner of 53rd Street and Urbandale Avenue along the Inter-urban Railway line. Riley School was home to students from 1917 to 1973. Following demolition of the building, the site was sold to the City of Des Moines and is now home to Riley Park. Moore Elementary School was built in 1950 at the intersection of at 52nd Street and Douglas. It served as a neighborhood school until 2007.



St. Gabriel Monastery (undated photo)

Two elementary schools remain in the area, Hillis and Windsor. Hillis was originally known as "Tower" school due to the proximity to the Hazen Water Tower. The school was renamed for long-time child advocate Cora Bussey Hillis who founded the Iowa Congress of Mothers. The school opened in 1949 as a temporary wooden building. The first permanent section was completed in 1953. Windsor Elementary was named for Henry Clay Windsor who settled near the area in 1840. It began as a two-room brick school in 1918, with the current structure being built in 1949. At that time teachers had to walk 10 blocks from the end of a street-car line at 49th and University to the school. Windsor was renovated in 2006.

Description & Demographics

The general boundaries of the Merle Hay Neighborhood are the City's corporate boundary on the west, 49th Street on the east, Aurora Avenue on the north, and University Avenue on the South. The neighborhood boundary does not include the area between 49th and 56th Street south of Franklin Avenue and the area north of Douglas Avenue between 49th Street and 51st Street. Most of the neighborhood consists of single-family residential structures with commercial corridors along Merle Hay Road, Douglas Avenue, and Hickman Road.

Median Household Income

Des Moines	\$39,104
Merle Hay	\$44,412

According to the 2000 Census, the Merle Hay Neighborhood has 10,070 residents. Compared to the City as a whole, the neighborhood is older, more educated, with fewer children, smaller households, and has more income.

The Merle Hay Neighborhood entered the Neighborhood Revitalization Program as a Transitional Neighborhood based on housing conditions, property values, homeownership rates, and home sales information.

Neighborhood landmarks include Tower Park, Windsor School, Merle Hay Mall, Riley Park, Hillis School, and many churches. Today, the neighborhood is at a crossroads. Many of the long-time homeowners are "cycling" out of the neighborhood. The post-war housing stock is over 50 years old and showing signs of aging. Many of these homes lack amenities like second bathrooms, third bedrooms, and double stall garages that attract today's homebuyers.

The commercial corridor is beginning to deteriorate. Many of the commercial structures in the neighborhood are over 30 years old and do not meet the demands of today's competitive retail environment. The Merle Hay Mall, once a statewide shopping destination, is no longer the premier shopping destination in the Des Moines Metro area. Over the past year, several businesses along Merle Hay Road have closed, leaving vacant buildings.

Age Distribution	Merle Hay	Des Moines
Under 18	21%	25%
Age 18-34	27%	27%
Age 35-50	23%	22%
Age 50-64	13%	14%
Over 65	16%	12%



Description & Demographics

Three schools in the neighborhood have undergone changes in the last year. Hillis School was renovated during the 2007-2008 school year and will reopen in August 2008. Windsor School reopened in 2007 and now boasts a new gymnasium, cafeteria, library, and auditorium. Moore School closed as a neighborhood school in May 2007. Currently, Moore is serving as an interim school while Hillis and King School are renovated. The future plans for the building are unknown at this time.

Des Moines Population

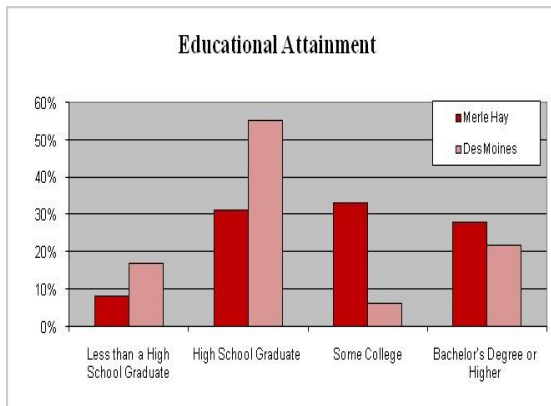
	2000	1990
Total Population	198,682	193,187
Minority Population	35,188	20,770
Percent Minority	17.7%	10.8%

The Merle Hay Neighborhood is a very desirable place to live, work, and shop. The neighborhood plan creates a unique opportunity to address both residential and commercial redevelopment issues to help keep the neighborhood competitive in a changing marketplace. Most neighborhoods require significant decline before investment is made in redeveloping the area. Developing these strategies now, will allow for redevelopment and reinvestment to occur more efficiently.

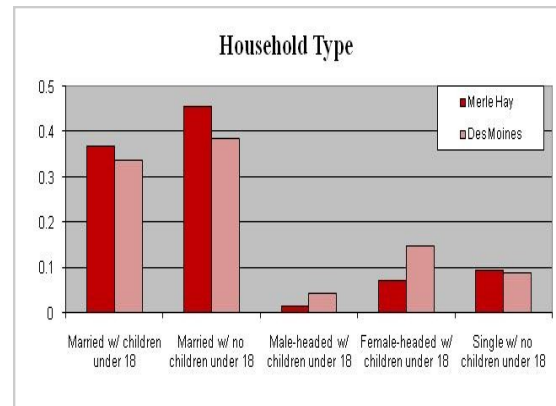
Merle Hay Population

	2000	1990
Total Population	10,701	10,295
Percent of DSM Population	5.4%	5.3%
Minority Population	715	309
Percent Minority	7%	3%

Educational Attainment



Household Type

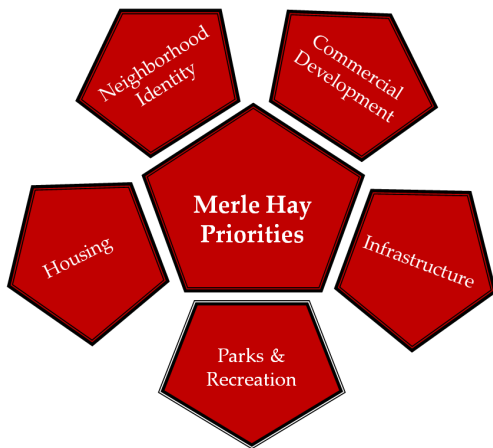


Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan



Priorities & Vision Statement

The planning process kicked off with a neighborhood meeting on March 28, 2007. At the meeting, residents were given an opportunity to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the neighborhood. This input helped staff, planning committee members, and residents create priority areas and set objectives for the plan. Based on this input, the priority areas for the Merle Hay plan included:



Vision Statement

After reviewing the discussion from the neighborhood meeting, the planning committee developed the following vision statement. This vision is the ideal neighborhood after the objectives in the plan have been completed. The goals and objectives of the plan were written to help achieve this vision.



Merle Hay Neighborhood Vision Statement

The Merle Hay Neighborhood strives to be a neighborhood of choice where residents feel engaged with their neighbors and involved in their community; a neighborhood that features quality schools and housing for all ages and diverse backgrounds where residents can enjoy vibrant businesses and recreational areas. We envision a neighborhood that...

- Provides high quality housing where owners and renters of all ages can find desirable housing options for: families, singles, young professionals, owners, renters, and seniors.
- Utilizes a vibrant Merle Hay Mall as a shopping destination for all metro residents, while maintaining a common streetscape and other neighborhood commercial areas for residents to enjoy and support. Merle Hay welcomes businesses and has a positive business environment.
- Contains streets, sewers, storm water management, and sidewalks that are well maintained.
- Features attractive parks and trail connections that provide year-round recreational opportunities for residents.
- Is well known throughout the area as a desirable place to live, shop, work, and raise families.



Infrastructure Improvements

A key component of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program is the Neighborhood Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program (NIRP). This program targets infrastructure rehabilitation in Designated Neighborhoods and provides improvements above and beyond the City's annual street, curb, and sidewalk maintenance programs. Unmet needs remaining after NIRP will continue to be considered for inclusion in the City's annual infrastructure maintenance programs as conditions, priorities, and funding permit. The NIRP improvements planned for the Merle Hay Neighborhood will be primarily funded by the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).

The Merle Hay Neighborhood was allocated \$1,038,070 in NIRP funds to make repairs to streets, sidewalks, and curbs. At the neighborhood input meeting, residents were given an opportunity to discuss specific infrastructure concerns. The Des Moines Public Works Department then surveyed the streets, sidewalks, and curbs in the Merle Hay Neighborhood to determine the areas of greatest need for repairs. Public Works staff presented their recommendations to the planning committee for their input. Along with street, sidewalk, and curb improvements, the planning committee determined that sidewalks along school walk routes and residential arterial streets should be prioritized for improvements. A summary of the improvements and their costs for the neighborhood are listed below.

Summary of NIRP Improvements in the Merle Hay Neighborhood

- 16,000 lineal feet of repaired sidewalks (\$320,000)
- 36,100 lineal feet of hot mix asphalt overlay (\$397,100)
- 7,500 lineal feet of new curbs (\$150,000)
- 2,860 lineal feet of concrete restoration (\$143,000)
- 1,330 lineal feet of slurry seal coat (\$19,670)
- Median repairs on Douglas west of Merle Hay Road (\$8,300)

Another infrastructure concern was storm water mitigation. The planning committee identified five areas where there were significant concerns: 3600 Block of Merle Hay Road, 5400 block of Douglas Avenue, 5800 block of Urbandale Avenue, Hickman Road near Hillis School, and the area near the intersection of Douglas Avenue and 50th Street. Public Works staff is in the process of designing appropriate mitigation techniques for each area and will strive to have the improvements completed as soon as possible.



Infrastructure Improvements

NIRP Improvements in the Merle Hay Neighborhood

<p>Hot Mix Asphalt (HMA) Street Resurfacing</p> <p>\$397,100 from FY2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>49th Street – Hickman Road to Urbandale Avenue 50th Street – Hickman Road to Urbandale Avenue 56th Street – Douglas Avenue to 3825 56th Street 61st Street – Crown Lane to Clark Street 62nd Street – Hickman Road to New York Avenue Aurora Avenue – Merle Hay Road to 57th Street Boston Avenue – 62nd Street to 6219 Boston Avenue Boston Avenue – Merle Hay Road to 62nd Street Crown Lane – 63rd Street to Cummins Parkway</p>
<p>Slurry Seal Coat</p> <p>\$19,670 from FY2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>49th Place – Urbandale Avenue to South Dead End 56th Street – Madison Avenue to 3825 56th Street 56th Street – Douglas Avenue to Ovid Avenue 59th Street – Douglas Avenue to Boston Allison Avenue – Merle Hay Road to East Dead End</p>
<p>Curb Replacement & Repair</p> <p>\$150,000 from FY2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>49th Street – Urbandale Avenue north for 1250’ 62nd Street – Urbandale Avenue to Boston Avenue Douglas Avenue – Merle Hay Road to 55th Street Douglas Avenue – 50th Street to 53rd Street</p>
<p>Concrete Restoration Program (CPR)</p> <p>\$143,000 from FY 2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>Urbandale Avenue – 50th Street to 64th Street</p>
<p>Sidewalk Replacement & Repair</p> <p>\$320,000 from FY2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>Approximately, 16,000 lineal feet of defective sidewalk will be replaced by the Public Works Department throughout the neighborhood.</p>
<p>Median Island Repairs</p> <p>\$8,300 from FY2008 CIP NIRP</p>	<p>Douglas Avenue – West of Merle Hay Road</p>

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan



Housing

Most of the Merle Hay Neighborhood was developed during the middle of the 20th Century. The homes are comparable with many Post-World War II neighborhoods developed across the country. Over 70% of the neighborhood housing stock consists of ranch and bungalow single story homes with 1 bathroom, 2-3 bedrooms, and 800-1,000 sq. feet of living space. Sixty-nine percent of the homes in the neighborhood were built between 1940-1959. They were marketed as starter homes that could be expanded in the future.

Average Merle Hay House

Size	1,092 sq. ft.
Bedrooms	2.7
Bathrooms	1.4
Condition	Above Ave.
Year Built	1951
Assessed Value	\$118,247
House Type	Ranch

The houses in the neighborhood have been well-kept and are in good condition. According to the Polk County Assessor, only 3% of the structures in the neighborhood are in below normal or worse condition. The neighborhood is filled with modest sized houses and well-manicured lawns.

The housing market is changing. The original generation of homeowners is being replaced by new residents. The majority of homes in the neighborhood are over 50 years old and require increased maintenance and upkeep. Many homebuyers today desire amenities that houses in the neighborhood do not have. Two-thirds of the houses in the neighborhood only have 1 bathroom, and half of the neighborhood homes only have 2 bedrooms. The average home, of approximately 1,100 sq. ft., does not appeal to many of today's families. Due to the small rooms inside the structure, internal improvements such as adding dish washers, showers, and attached garages are difficult. Combining all of these factors, homes in the neighborhood are more difficult to market as the housing stock "cycles" to new homeowners.

Number of Bedrooms

	Number	Percent
1	83	2%
2	1,766	46%
3	1,574	41%
4	345	9%
5 or more	35	1%
Totals	3,803	100%

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan



Average 2007 Home Sale Information for Merle Hay, Des Moines, and Polk County

Location	Number Sold	Sale Price	Year Built	Area	Bedrooms	Bathrooms
Merle Hay	267	\$117,100	1946	1,059	2.5	1.4
Des Moines	4,448	\$115,999	1945	1,195	2.7	1.7
Polk County	10,320	\$160,919	1969	1,401	2.8	2.3

Source Polk County Assessor

Housing

This market disadvantage of the housing stock is one of the biggest issues facing the future of the neighborhood. Because the neighborhood features affordable houses in ideal locations, they are prime investor opportunities. As a new generation of property owners moves into the neighborhood, it is imperative the housing stock have the amenities that today's home buyers desire. If not, it is likely that many of the well-maintained houses in the neighborhood will become rental properties.

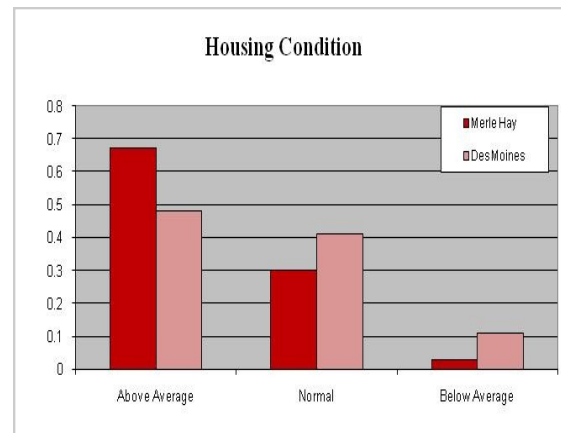
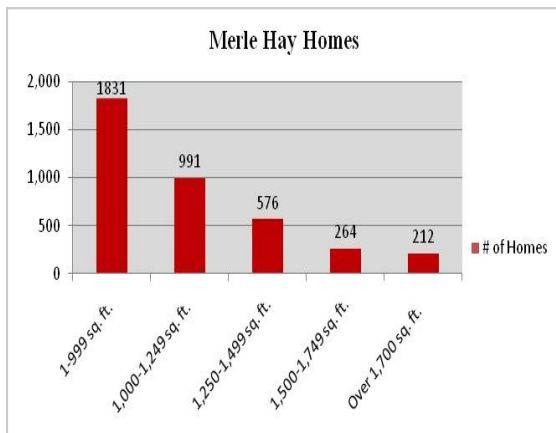
The table below highlights 2007 home sale statistics for the Merle Hay Neighborhood, City of Des Moines, and for Polk County. Houses in the Merle Hay Neighborhood had a higher sale price, while having less living space, fewer bedrooms, and bathrooms than homes sold elsewhere in the City of Des Moines.

Number of Bathrooms		
	Number	Percent
1	2,559	67%
2	904	24%
3	316	8%
4	44	1%
5 or more	51	1%
Totals	3,874	100%

2007 Home Values		
	Merle Hay	Des Moines
Mean Assessed Value	\$118,247	\$111,874
Average Sale Price	\$117,500	\$115,999

However, when comparing the Merle Hay Neighborhood to all homes in Polk County the neighborhood does not compare as well. The average house in Polk County sold for \$160,919 which is 37% more than the \$117,100 average sale price for homes in the Merle Hay Neighborhood. These homes have

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan



Housing



Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

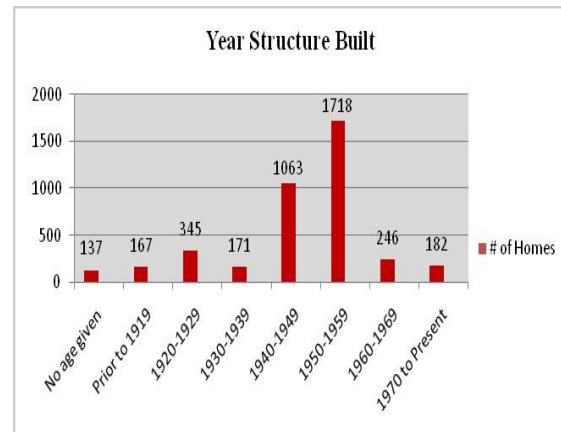
Housing Tenure		
	Merle Hay	Des Moines
Owner-Occupied	73%	65%
Renter-Occupied	27%	35%

significantly more amenities with significantly more living space, bedrooms, and bathrooms. Overall, homes in the Merle Hay Neighborhood were older, less expensive, and had fewer amenities than all houses sold in Polk County.

One strategy to counter the market disadvantage of the housing stock is to utilize the Neighborhood Finance Corporation (NFC) to make home improvements. Renovations, specifically, second bathrooms, third bedrooms, paving gravel driveways, and building double stall garages are necessary to help the housing stock compete with nearby neighborhoods. The MHNA and the NFC will work together to enhance outreach efforts in

the neighborhood and to maximize the impact the NFC can have in the area.

Another concern for the planning committee was the lack of diverse housing options in the neighborhood, especially the lack of townhouses, condos, and senior housing options. As many long time residents age, there are no alternative living arrangements that can help to keep long-time residents in the neighborhood.



Housing

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
Maintain and enhance the neighborhood's well-maintained housing stock.	Promote NFC financing for home purchases, home refinance, and repair and remodeling loans.	NFC will promote products to neighborhood residents including targeted mailings, newsletter inserts, and other items as needed.	NFC, MHNA	High
		MHNA will promote the NFC's programs through the Merle Hay newsletter.	MHNA, NFC	High
	Target NFC lending to address housing issues of "functional obsolescence".	NFC and MHNA will target homeowners for specific improvements to enhance the functionality of the housing stock. Examples may include: 2 nd bathroom, 3 rd bedroom, handicap accessibility, double-stall garages, and other improvements as needed.	NFC, MHNA	High
	MHNA will work with neighborhood residents to begin highlighting the positive changes in the neighborhood housing stock.	Utilize the MHNA website to highlight positive home improvement projects, including contractors who performed the work.	MHNA, Homeowners	Low
	Promote foreclosure assistance programs to prevent foreclosures from occurring in the neighborhood.	MHNA will use the newsletter, website and other neighborhood activities to promote foreclosure assistance programs.	MHNA, NFC, Iowa Mortgage Help	Medium
	Limit the negative impact of foreclosed homes on the neighborhood.	MHNA will work with the City of Des Moines Neighborhood Inspection Division to ensure that foreclosed properties do not become a nuisance for the neighborhood.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Neighborhood Inspection Division	High

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Housing

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
Residents will have the opportunity to stay in their homes as their housing needs change.	Assist senior residents in maintaining their homes so they can remain in the neighborhood.	MHNA will work with agencies that assist seniors to highlight programs available for them.	MHNA, City of Des Moines, Aging Resources of Central Iowa, CHDC SeniorWise and others	Medium
	Encourage the development of townhouses, condos, and other diverse housing options, so residents of all ages can remain in the neighborhood.	MHNA and neighborhood residents will work with developers to examine ways to increase the diversity of the housing stock.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Community Development, Private Developers	Policy
Improve the “curb appeal” of the neighborhood.	MHNA will form a subcommittee to help improve the “curb appeal” of the neighborhood.	MHNA will create a subcommittee to create incentives to maintain the appearance of the neighborhood, such as letters to landlords, yard improvement contests, and reporting nuisance properties to the City of Des Moines.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Neighborhood Inspection Division	High
	Encourage residents to participate in the City’s SCRUB program.	MHNA will promote SCRUB Day and will provide volunteers to participate in the program.	MHNA	High
Promote neighborhood friendly reuses of Moore School.	MHNA will work with Des Moines Public Schools to determine possible reuses for the Moore School site.	MHNA will work with Des Moines Public Schools to remain updated on future of the Moore School site, and to encourage appropriate reuses if necessary.	MHNA/Des Moines Public Schools/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Policy

Neighborhood Identity

Many neighborhoods surrounding the Merle Hay area have a built-in identity. Beaverdale, Drake, and Sherman Hill are all well-known neighborhoods with images of distinctive housing styles and neighborhood features. The Merle Hay Neighborhood does not have this kind of name recognition. When most people think of Merle Hay, they envision Merle Hay Mall and the commercial corridor surrounding the area.

The planning committee examined real estate listings for the Merle Hay and Beaverdale Neighborhoods. What the planning committee found was that many of the houses in Beaverdale were marketed as Beaverdale Brick, or charming Beaverdale homes. Similar homes in Merle Hay were marketed as starter homes or investment opportunities. Several homes on the east side of the Merle Hay Neighborhood were marketed as being located in Beaverdale.

Highlighting the positive aspects of the Merle Hay Neighborhood will draw real estate agents and perspective buyers to the area. The goal of this strategy is to make the Merle Hay Neighborhood a place where people want to live. If people want to live in the area, they may be more willing to overlook some of the limitations of the housing stock. By utilizing MHNA communications, events, publicity, and working with realtors, the Merle Hay Neighborhood can become a branded identity like some of the areas (Urbandale, Beaverdale, and Windsor Heights) that surround the neighborhood.

The key to the success of this strategy will be a strong neighborhood association. It is imperative the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association continue to develop new leaders and leadership capacity. One resource available to The Merle Hay Neighborhood Association is the Neighborhood Resource Office and Neighborhood Resident Leadership Program. The Neighborhood Resource Office can provide technical assistance to neighborhood leaders including newsletters, website development, and volunteer recruitment.



The Neighborhood Resident Leadership Certificate Program is a series of classes designed to give neighborhood residents leadership training along with assistance on neighborhood specific issues such as volunteer recruitment, newsletter development, and fundraising. These classes assist neighborhood leaders in developing the skills that are critically important to help the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association successfully implement the neighborhood plan.



Neighborhood Identity

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
MHNA will have the organizational capacity to implement the Neighborhood Action Plan.	MHNA members will continue to build the skill sets necessary to implement the neighborhood action plan.	MHNA will send representatives to the Neighborhood Resident Leadership Certificate Program and other classes which help to build capacity for the MHNA.	MHNA	Medium
Create a sense of place in the neighborhood to help give residents and non-residents a positive image of the Merle Hay Neighborhood.	Explore the addition of enhanced entrance signs into the City of Des Moines and the Merle Hay Neighborhood.	MHNA will work with area businesses and the City to examine the feasibility of enhanced entrance signs into the neighborhood.	MHNA, Business owners, City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation, City of Des Moines Engineering	High
	Develop a sense of “neighborhood” for the residents of Merle Hay.	MHNA will continue to hold neighborhood-wide meetings and community building events on a regular basis to encourage people to meet their neighbors and to promote neighborhood identity.	MHNA	High
	Work with neighborhood residents and realtors to market for-sale homes in the neighborhood.	The MHNA will meet with area realtors to educate them on the positive aspects of the neighborhood.	MHNA, Realtors	Medium
	Create an “annual festival” to highlight the positive aspects of the neighborhood.	MHNA will create an annual event to showcase the neighborhood.	MHNA, Area businesses	High

Commercial Development

The health and viability of the commercial corridors in the Merle Hay Neighborhood is essential to the long term vitality of the area. Updating these areas to keep them competitive in today's marketplace is a key priority for the neighborhood. Many of the commercial structures are considered obsolete in terms of today's retail environment.

One particular area of concern is the area surrounding Merle Hay Mall. As the largest retail facility in both Des Moines and Polk County, Merle Hay Mall is a huge asset for the neighborhood. However, in recent years, both the mall and the surrounding retail area are beginning to show signs of decline. There are several buildings in this area that have recently become vacant.



In June 2008, the City Council approved an Urban Renewal Plan for the commercial corridors including and surrounding Merle Hay Mall. This plan will allow Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for improvements made in the area. Currently, Merle Hay Mall plans to utilize TIF funds to help finance façade improvements and space reconfiguration within the mall.



The streetscape in the area surrounding the mall needs enhancements. The asphalt on Douglas Avenue east of Merle Hay Road is breaking up. Many of the medians are in need of improvements, and off-center power lines, signs, and billboards create a visual environment that is not appealing.

Currently, Merle Hay Road between Douglas Avenue and Madison Avenue does not have sidewalks. Creating pedestrian access to the mall and other attractions will help to improve the connection between the mall and

the neighborhood. TIF funds could be used for pedestrian, streetscape and/or façade improvements as funds became available.

Improving the look of the intersection of Merle Hay Road, Merklin Way, and Hickman Road is a planning committee priority. This area features several businesses including an auto body shop, abandoned gas station, and a payday loan store. The Merle Hay Neighborhood Association is working with land owners to encourage owners to make investments in their properties.

Making enhancements to the commercial corridors will require a coalition of stakeholders including neighborhood associations, property owners, business leaders, and political leaders. Before any improvements can take place, the MHNA must create these partnerships to build one unified voice for improvements in the area.



Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Commercial Development

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
Create a coalition of neighborhood residents, property owners, businesses, and political leaders to enhance the commercial corridors in the neighborhood.	Form a subcommittee of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association to work with area businesses.	MHNA will form a subcommittee to work on commercial development issues.	MHNA	High
	Establish a committee of area stakeholders to explore streetscapes and other enhancements on Merle Hay Road and other commercial corridors.	MHNA will work with the area businesses and city leaders to begin planning possible improvements to the area streetscapes.	MHNA, Area businesses, City of Des Moines Community Development, City of Des Moines Economic Development	High
	Work with area businesses to explore the feasibility of creating a Merle Hay Business Association.	MHNA and Merle Hay Mall will work with other businesses to engage interest.	MHNA, Merle Hay Mall, Area Business Representatives	High
	Work with property owners to explore ways to reuse currently vacant businesses.	MHNA will periodically attempt to contact owners of vacant properties to encourage them to reuse the property in a neighborhood friendly manner.	MHNA, property owners	High
	Encourage business owners to make improvements to their properties.	MHNA will contact property owners and encourage them to make improvements to their property.	MHNA, Property Owners	High
Keep the Merle Hay commercial corridor a vibrant commercial destination.	Create an Urban Renewal /TIF District to help finance improvements along the commercial corridors. These improvements should include building façade improvements and streetscape enhancements.	The City will work with property owners in the area to create an Urban Renewal Plan.	City of Des Moines, Property Owners	High

Commercial Development

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
	Explore using TIF revenue to improve the building façade for properties within the TIF District.	The City will work with area property owners to determine if this is a viable use of TIF revenue.	City of Des Moines Economic Development, MHNA	Policy
	Work with City and State officials on the redevelopment of the intersection of Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue.	MHNA will work with city and state officials to ensure that redevelopment of the intersection include streetscape improvements.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Traffic and Transportation, and Iowa Department of Transportation	High
	MHNA will work with City officials to ensure that all properties are in compliance with the City's zoning code and junk and debris ordinances	MHNA will contact City officials to report properties that are in violation of the zoning and junk and debris ordinances.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Neighborhood Inspection Division, Zoning Enforcement	High
Improve the walk ability of the Merle Hay Neighborhood	Encourage the placement and improvement of sidewalks along private property.	MHNA will work with property owners to ensure that all existing sidewalks along commercial corridors comply with the City's sidewalk ordinance.	MHNA, property owners, City of Des Moines Public Works	Medium
Support neighborhood commercial areas.	Maintain and enhance the viability of neighborhood commercial areas including: Franklin and Merle Hay Road, Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue, Urbandale Avenue and 49 th Street, and others.	MHNA will work with residents, business owners, and other interested people to ensure the neighborhood commercial nodes continue to thrive.	MHNA	Policy
Improve the aesthetics of the intersection of Merle Hay Road, Hickman Road, and Merklin Way.	Work with property owners to encourage them to make improvements to the appearance of their property.	MHNA will work with property owners to make voluntary improvement to the appearance of their properties.	MHNA, Property Owners	High

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Land Use & Zoning

When the Merle Hay Neighborhood plan is approved, it will become an amendment to the City of Des Moines' 2020 Community Character Plan. Zoning changes will need to be initiated by the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association and the City Council at a later date.

One land use issue the planning committee discussed was the expansion of commercial uses and zoning into residential areas. Currently, one of the major draw backs to redeveloping the commercial corridors is the lack of available space. Merle Hay Road and



Douglas Avenue were platted as residential areas. Therefore, the lots are only 60 feet wide by 120 feet deep. These smaller parcels make it difficult to provide

adequate commercial space that meets current parking and open space requirements.

Because of this, the planning committee believes the neighborhood could consider supporting the expansion of commercial uses and structures onto the "back sides" of commercial areas surrounding Merle Hay Road, Douglas Avenue, and Hickman Road so long as the proposals are neighborhood friendly and create a sufficient buffer between the commercial buildings and the residential neighborhood. This would allow sufficient space for commercial redevelopment while minimizing the negative impact to the neighborhood.

Listed below are the proposed land use and zoning changes. Most of the changes involve only a few parcels.

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Timeline
Protect green space in the neighborhood.	Amend the 2020 Community Character Land Use Plan's future land use designation at 53 rd Street and Urbandale Avenue (Riley Park) from Low-Density Residential to Park/Open Space.	Adoption of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Immediately
Protect the neighborhood commercial retail environment.	Amend the 2020 Community Character Land Use Plan's future land use designation on the SE and SW corner of 49 th Street and Urbandale Avenue from Low-Density Residential to Neighborhood Node.	Adoption of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Immediately

Land Use & Zoning

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Timeline
	Amend the 2020 Community Character Land Use Plan on the NE corner of Merle Hay Road and University Avenue from Low Density Residential to Neighborhood Node.	Adoption of the Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Immediately
	Rezone parcel at 5739 University Avenue from “R1-60” One Family Low-Density Residential District to “C-1” Neighborhood Retail Commercial District.	MHNA will initiate this zoning change, with assistance from the City of Des Moines Community Development Department.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Medium
Enhancing the commercial environment in the Merle Hay Neighborhood.	Consider supporting expansion of commercial zoning into residential areas.	MHNA may consider supporting land use amendments and rezonings along the “back sides” of Merle Hay Road, Douglas Avenue, and Hickman Road to commercial uses.	MHNA	Policy

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Land Use & Zoning

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Timeline
	Rezone parcel at 6220 Hickman Road from “C-0” Commercial-Residential District to “R1-60” One-Family Low-Density Residential District.	MHNA will initiate this zoning change, with assistance from the City of Des Moines Community Development Department.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Medium
Protect the quality of commercial development along Merle Hay Road.	Support rezoning of parcels along Merle Hay Road between Urbandale Avenue and Douglas Avenue to “C-1” Neighborhood Retail Commercial District.	MHNA supports “C-1” Neighborhood Retail Commercial District zoning for parcels along this corridor.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Policy
	Rezone the parcel at the corner NW of Franklin Avenue and Merle Hay Road (5801 Franklin Avenue/ Video Warehouse) from “R1-60” One-Family Low-Density Residential District to “NPC” Neighborhood Pedestrian Commercial District.	MHNA will initiate this zoning change, with assistance from the City of Des Moines Community Development Department.	MHNA/City of Des Moines Community Development Department	Medium

Traffic & Transportation

The Merle Hay Neighborhood has a diverse transportation system that features local, collector, and arterial streets along with major highways. The area features several roads under the jurisdiction of the Iowa Department of Transportation, including portions of Merle Hay Road, Hickman Road, Douglas Avenue, and 63rd Street.

Many of these highway corridors are in need of improvements. One project the planning committee supported was the widening of Merle Hay Road between Urbandale Avenue and Douglas Avenue. The project was once a part of the Iowa Department of Transportation's 5 Year Plan. However, budget cuts eliminated the project from consideration before it was completed.

There are several transportation improvements planned for the area. The intersection of Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue will be rebuilt in 2010. The new intersection will feature left-hand turn lanes and other safety enhancements. Stoplights are scheduled to be added at the intersection of Hickman Road and 48th Street. The City of Windsor Heights is redeveloping the intersection of Hickman Road and 63rd Street. This redevelopment will include turn lanes at the intersection and a stop light at Westover Boulevard.

Along with being a regional shopping destination, Merle Hay Mall is a major hub in the Des Moines Area Regional Transit (DART) bus system. Four DART routes utilize the

mall as a hub and another route runs through the southern portion of the neighborhood. The MMHA will work with DART to enhance the bus routes in the neighborhood.



Traffic & Transportation

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Timeline
Improve traffic flow along Merle Hay Road.	Improve the intersection of Merle Hay Road and Urbandale Avenue to include left turn lanes on Merle Hay Road.	Construction is scheduled to begin in 2010.	City of Des Moines Traffic and Transportation Division, Iowa Department of Transportation	Action
	Lobby City and State officials to place widening of Merle Hay Road from Urbandale Avenue to Douglas Avenue in the 5-year statewide transportation plan.	Work with City and State transportation officials to place the project on the DOT's 5-year plan.	MHNA, City of Des Moines traffic and transportation division	Policy
	Partner with Windsor Heights to improve the intersection of Hickman Road and 63 rd Street.	The project is currently in the planning stage. It is unclear when construction will begin.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Traffic and Transportation, City of Windsor Heights	Policy
Improve pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood.	Explore ways to improve sidewalk connections throughout the neighborhood.	MHNA will determine priority areas for sidewalk installation and work with area property owners to determine if there is support for installation of new sidewalks.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Engineering Department	Medium
Support improvements to the DART transportation system in the neighborhood.	MHNA will work with DART maintain and enhance bus service in the neighborhood .	MHNA will advocate for improvements to the neighborhood bus transportation system.	MHNA, DART	Medium

Parks & Recreation

Recreation is an important quality of life issue in all of our neighborhoods, and Merle Hay is no different. The neighborhood features two attractive parks, the Inter-urban Trail, and a future connection from the Waveland Trail.

In 2007, a renovation of Riley Park was completed. The park now contains a new play area, shelter house, and parking area. The neighborhood celebrated in July 2007 with a grand opening that drew over 200 neighborhood residents into the park for a night of fun family activities.

The other large park in the neighborhood is Tower Park. The creation of a master plan for Tower Park is scheduled to begin again in the near future. The master plan will address future uses for the facility .

A major trail connection will be added to the neighborhood when the Waveland Trail is completed. This trail will run from the Northwest Community Center south through the Waveland Golf Course and will connect to the Walnut Creek Trail and the rest of the Central Iowa Trail System.

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Goal/Outcome	Strategy	Implementation	Responsible Party	Priority
Enhance recreation opportunities in the neighborhood.	Des Moines Parks and Recreation staff will create a master plan for Tower Park.	MHNA will work with the City's Parks and Recreation Department to create a master plan for Tower Park.	MHNA, City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department	High
Encourage bicycling, running, and walking in the neighborhood.	Enhance the City trail network by increasing trail connections to the Merle Hay Neighborhood.	Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department will link the neighborhood to the Central Iowa Trail Network via the Waveland Trail.	City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department	Medium



Implementation

Implementation of the plan is the hardest part of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program. As the organization responsible for implementation, it is imperative that the Merle Hay Neighborhood Association (MHNA) has the organizational capacity to achieve the goals of the plan. It will be necessary for the neighborhood association to create subcommittees to tackle the various components of the plan and to build coalitions with other organizations in order to achieve success.

Some of the goals in the plan are policy changes that will require action, direction, or resource allocation by the City Council. MHNA will need to work closely with council members, city staff and other interested parties in order to effectively implement these policy changes.

It will also be necessary to categorize and prioritize the goals of the plan. An initial prioritization exercise was completed with the planning committee. Many of the goals were given a “high” priority. At the August 14, 2008 neighborhood meeting, attendees voted on their top implementation priorities. The top priorities were:

- Visual improvements to the intersection of Merle Hay Road, Hickman Road and Merklin Way.
- Improve the curb appeal of the neighborhood: landscaping, fencing, and working with property owners to improve the appearance of their properties.
- Improve storm-water mitigation in the neighborhood.

Leadership development and volunteer recruitment will be vital to the success of the plan. The MHNA has laid the necessary groundwork to implement the plan, but it cannot become complacent in its ongoing effort to improve itself. The City of Des Moines’ Neighborhood Development Division, the Neighborhood Resource Office, and other City staff will provide the technical assistance necessary to assist with the implementation of the plan. Continued commitment and support will also be required from the Des Moines City Council and the Polk County Board of Supervisors.

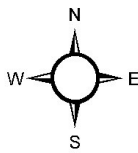


The Neighborhood Development Division will conduct periodic assessments of the progress of the Merle Hay Neighborhood plan. It is possible that certain activities may be investigated and found not to be feasible or require an unreasonable demand of resources. Once the plan has been found to be complete, a report is prepared with input from the MHNA and forwarded to the Neighborhood Revitalization Board for a recommendation. Its recommendation will then be forwarded to the Des Moines City Council and the Polk County Board of Supervisors for final approval. At this point the Merle Hay Neighborhood becomes a Charter Neighborhood and is phased out of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program.



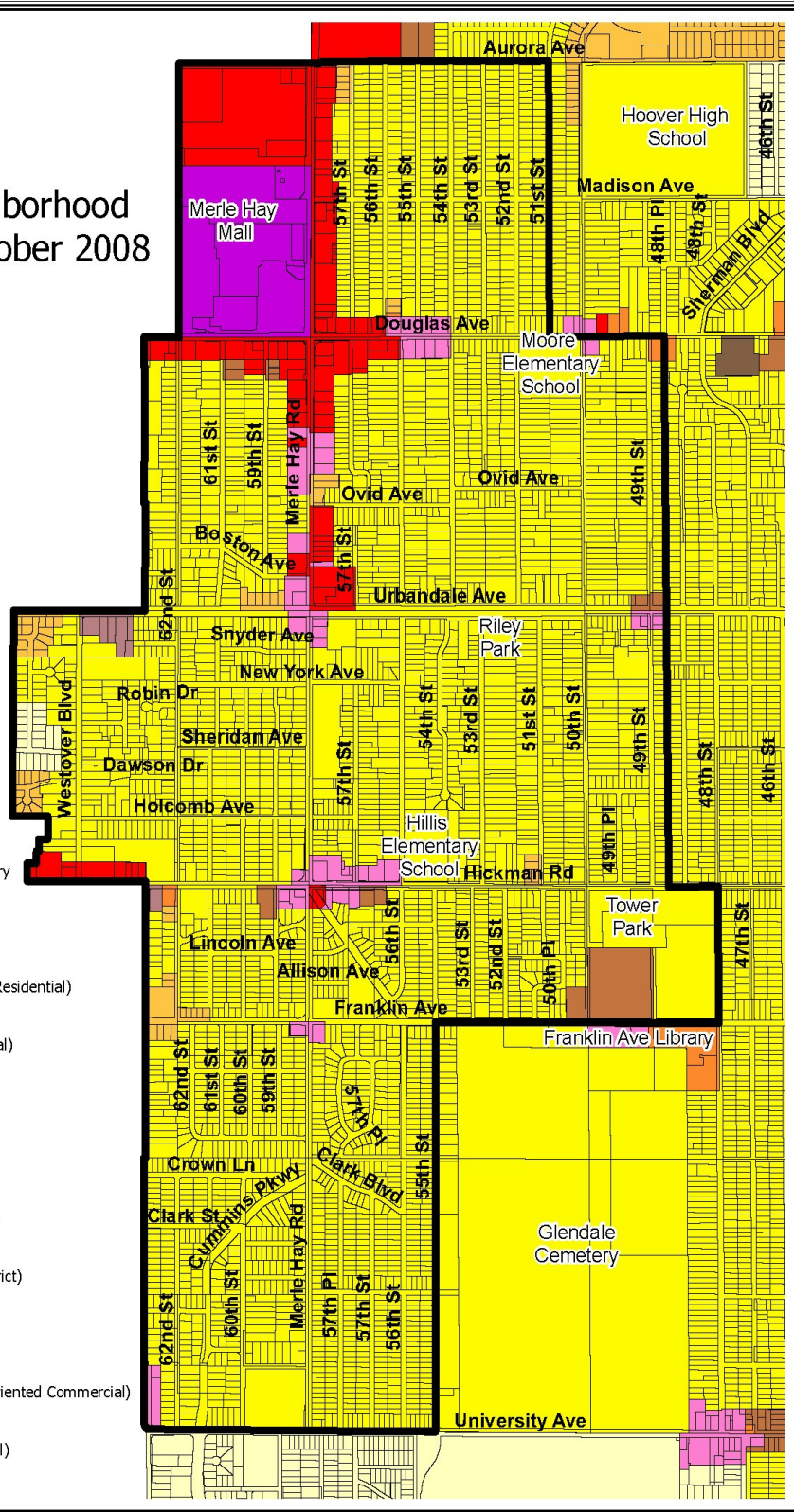
Zoning Map

Merle Hay Neighborhood Zoning Map - October 2008



Legend

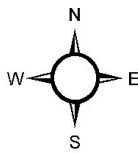
- Merle Hay Neighborhood Boundary
- R1-80 (One-Family Residential)
- R1-60 (One-Family Low-Density Residential)
- R-2 (One & Two Family Residential)
- R-3 (Multiple-Family Residential)
- R-4 (Multiple-Family Residential)
- PUD (Planned Unit Development)
- C-0 (Commercial-Residential District)
- C-1 (Neighborhood Commercial)
- C-2 (General Retail & Highway Oriented Commercial)
- C-4 (Shopping Center Commercial)



Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

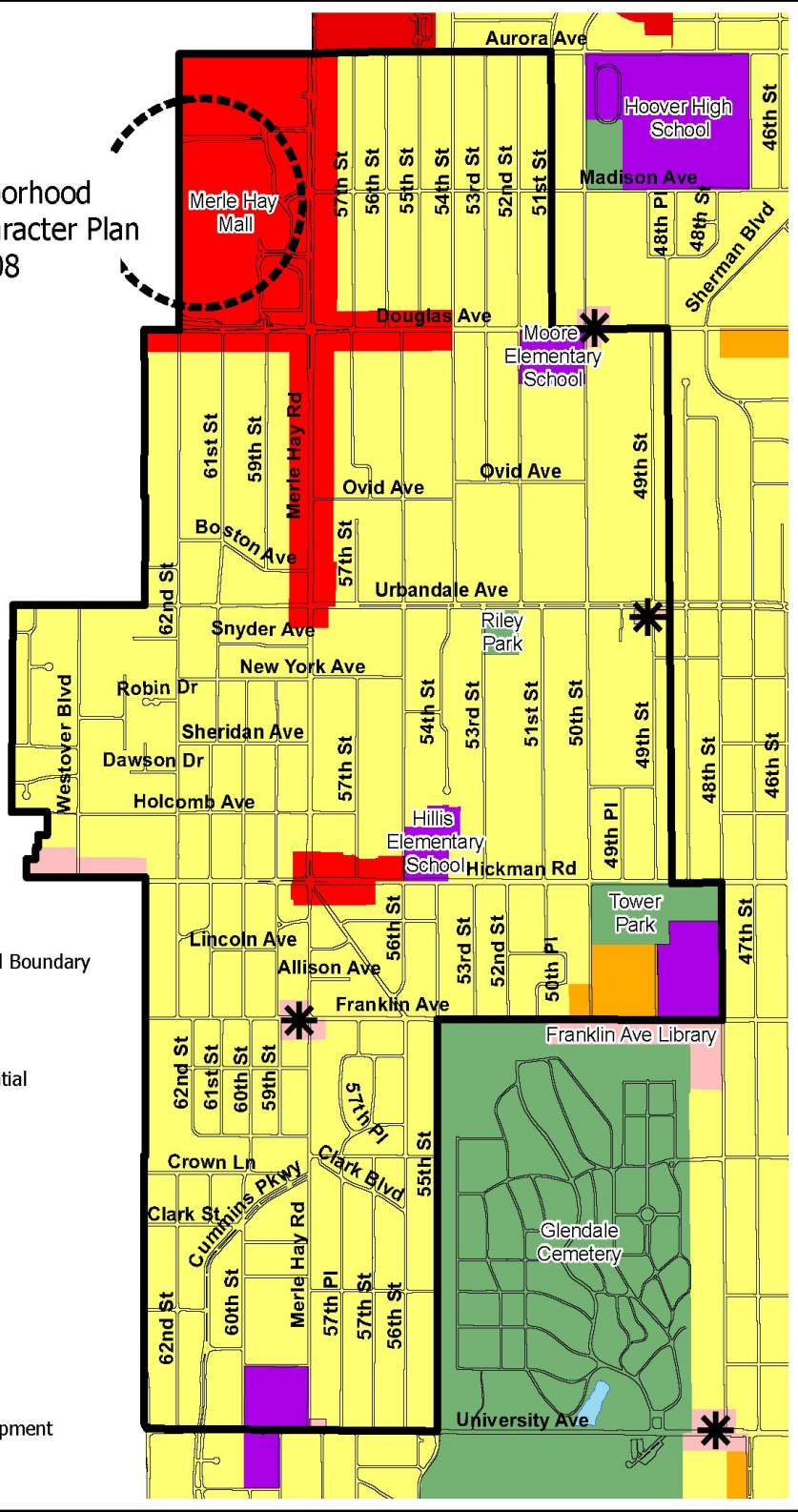
2020 Land Use Map

Merle Hay Neighborhood
2020 Community Character Plan
October 2008



Legend

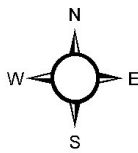
-  Merle Hay Neighborhood Boundary
-  Commercial Corridor
-  Medium Density Residential
-  Regional Shopping Mall
-  Low Density Residential
-  Neighborhood Node
-  Park/Open Space
-  Public/Semi Public
-  Small Scale Strip Development










Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

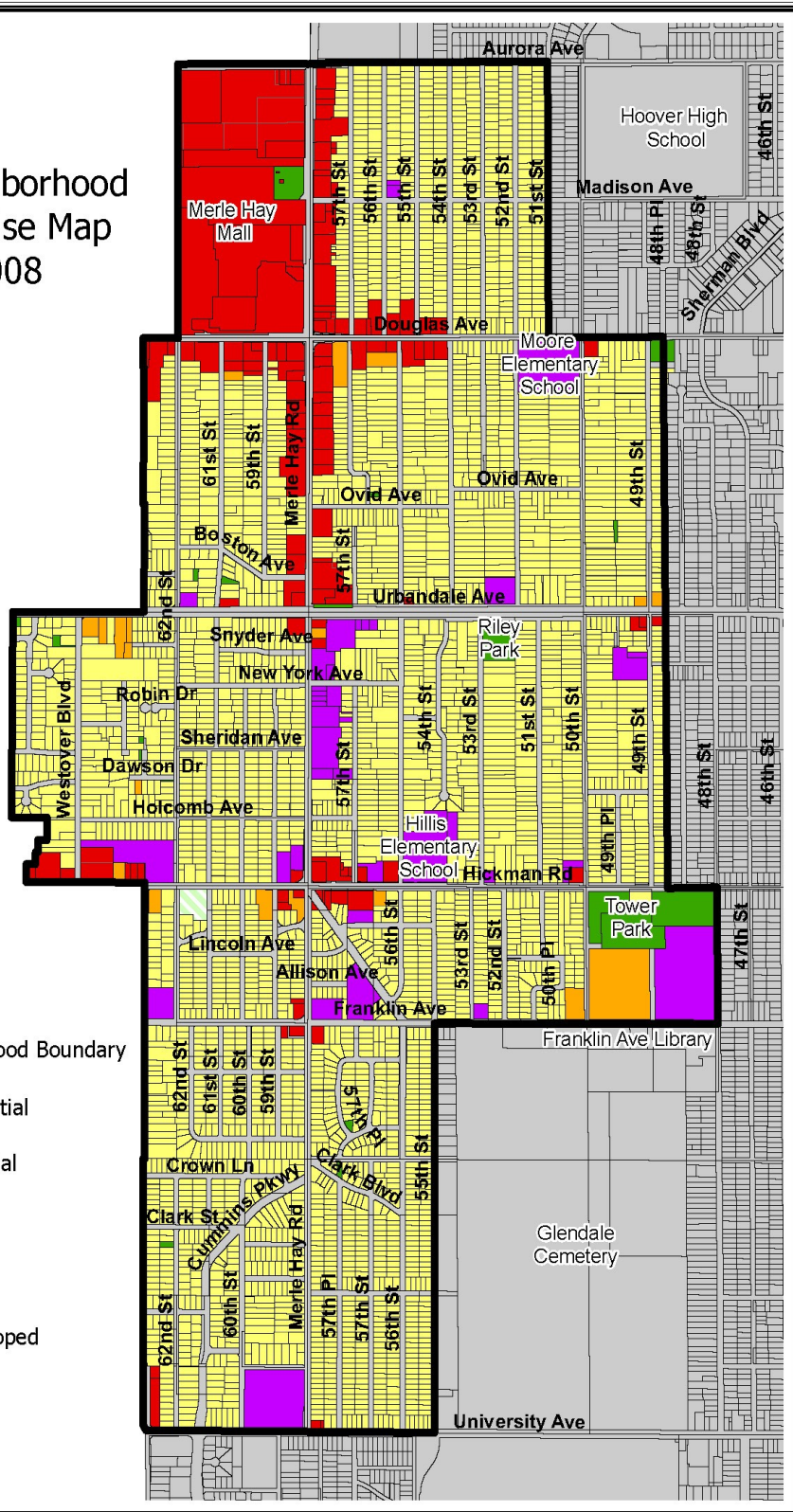
Existing Land Use Map

Merle Hay Neighborhood
Existing Land Use Map
October 2008



Legend

-  Merle Hay Neighborhood Boundary
-  Single-Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Commercial
-  Public/Semi-Public
-  Open Space/Undeveloped
-  Agriculture



Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Planning Committee



Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

From Left to Right
Saundra Miller, Pat Meiners, Mark Richards, Al Hopp, JoAnn Hanover, Scotney
Fenton, Ed Pagliai, Lela Behn, & Laura Peters

Not Pictured
Bruce Glauberg, and Linda Johnson

Merle Hay Neighborhood Plan

Merle Hay Neighborhood Association
August 2008

Neighborhood Revitalization Board
September 2008

Des Moines Plan & Zoning Commission
October 2008

Polk County Board of Supervisors
October 2008

Des Moines City Council
October 2008