

C. BUCHANAN'S NEIGHBORHOODS/ HOUSING

1. Overview

The Village's prior Master Plan (1986) described the Village's residential areas as follows:

"The residential areas in Buchanan are generally stable, cohesive and well protected from dramatic change or encroachments."

The *Inventory and Analysis* component of this Comprehensive Master Plan reveals that the same holds true today. The *Inventory and Analysis* revealed that the Village's housing characteristics have remained substantially consistent over the last few decades with only certain relatively minor exceptions. For example, the Village's household characteristics (e.g., mean household and family size, number and percent of family households, etc.) have remained substantially consistent over the years. In addition, the variety of housing types existing in the Village has remained consistent over the years (i.e., the percentage of 1-family, 2-family, 3- or 4-family dwellings and 5+ family structures is substantially similar to that existing in 1960). However, perhaps the single most notable exception to this stability is the price of housing in the Village. The past 5 or so years has seen a meteoric rise in the price of housing throughout the New York metropolitan area (and Westchester County in particular). Buchanan has not been immune to this increase in housing costs.

When asked in the Public Opinion Survey to name the three things that residents like best about living in the Village, the most frequent response mentioned (at 72% of the respondents) was the small, quiet and safe nature of the Village.

Although no major changes have significantly affected Buchanan's residential areas in the past two decades, a number of housing and neighborhood character issues have been identified. They are as follows:

a. Development of Undeveloped Residentially-Zoned Land in the Village

The "Future Land Use Change" discussion in the *Land Use and Zoning* section of the *Inventory and Analysis* component of this Plan identified the potential amount and location of additional residential development within the Village of Buchanan based on existing zoning. Such additional residential development would result from one of the following sources:

- Large residentially-zoned properties to the north/west of Westchester Avenue (within the R-20 and R-40 Districts);
- Potential future subdivision of "over-sized" lots existing in Buchanan's neighborhoods, particularly in the Bannon Avenue/ Seward Street/ Cortlandt Street area and a 4-acre property on the west side of Tate Avenue on Lake Meahagh which allows the last opportunity for direct public access to Lake Meahagh; and

- Undeveloped residential lots scattered throughout Buchanan's neighborhoods.

As described in the "Future Land Use Change" discussion, factors affecting the potential development/ redevelopment of such areas include:

- The property's zoning;
- Development constraints (e.g., lot size, power lines, utility easements, access opportunities, and environmental considerations such as steep slopes, rocky conditions and wetlands); and
- Ownership (e.g., Con Ed. Or otherwise).

The "Future Land Use Change" discussion identified the followed residential development potential existing within the Village:

- A potential for thirty-four (34) residential lots if the large residentially-zoned properties to the north/west of Westchester Avenue (within the R-20 and R-40 Districts) were to be subdivided. Twenty-five (25) of these potential lots would result from the subdivision of land owned by Con-Edison. Most of this area is bisected by a series of large electric transmission towers and overhead wires. In addition, a large portion of this area, particularly around the perimeter, is occupied by steep slopes and rocky conditions. Another large area in the interior of this area is occupied by wetlands and/or hydric soil conditions. Such factors would make subdivision of this area difficult.
- A potential four (4) lot subdivision of the large property on the west side of Tate Avenue on Lake Meahagh.
- Approximately twenty-four (24) undeveloped parcels are scattered throughout the residential areas of the Village. Most of these parcels are located within the Village's R-7.5 District (17 lots). It would appear that most, if not all, of these undeveloped parcels do not have potential to be subdivided in the future. Thus, the maximum number of additional dwelling units that could be reasonably expected to result from development of these lots would be 24 (i.e., one additional home on each undeveloped lot).

Since the overall number of additional potential residences within these areas is relatively low, the potential planning implications (e.g., traffic, impact to community services including schools, tax revenues) if such properties were to be developed is not expected to be significant.

b. *Potential for Future Subdivision Within Existing Neighborhoods, Including the Creation of "Flag-Lots" on Deep, Over-Sized Lots*

A number of additional "over-sized" lots exist in the Village's residential areas. Such "over-sized" lots are at least twice the minimum lot area of the zoning district in which they are located (e.g., greater than 20,000 square feet in size if located in the R-10 District) and thus potentially subject to further subdivision. The vast majority of the "over-sized" lots are located in the R-10 District in the Cortlandt Street/ Seward Street/ Bannon Avenue area of the Village. Each of these "over-sized" lots, however, are currently occupied by a residence. Thus, any future subdivision of these lots would be significantly affected by the location of the existing residence (which could be expected to significantly affect subdivision potential in most cases – unless the existing home was to be removed). In addition, most of these lots are long and narrow and would require a "flag-lot" configuration (a subdivision configuration that is not permitted by Buchanan's Zoning Code) in order to create a second lot. As a result of these factors, the number of additional lots resulting from future subdivision of "over-sized" lots is not expected to be significant. Such subdivisions (where one home would be placed in the perceived rear yard of another home) would not be consistent with, and would detract from, the character of Buchanan's neighborhoods.

c. *Construction of "Over-Sized" Homes*

In addition, many communities have become concerned about the tearing down of existing homes and their replacement with new homes which are usually significantly larger than the older homes they replaced and commonly out-of-scale and inconsistent in character with the other homes in the neighborhood. Although not a major issue in the Village now, the potential exists for this to be an issue in the future (as it has become in other communities in Westchester).

d. *Need and Opportunities for Affordable Housing, Including Housing Opportunities for Seniors*

The Village is, and has historically been, one of the more affordable communities in Westchester County. Not only are the single-family homes in the Village more affordable than most of the County, but a variety of housing options are available in the Village (and/or permitted in Village zoning), including multi-family housing, accessory apartments and mixed-use development. As a result, a lower percentage of Buchanan's households pay a disproportionate amount of their income towards housing costs. For example, approximately 1/4 of the Village's households are "cost burdened,"¹ a percentage that is lower than experienced in surrounding communities and the County as a whole.

¹ According to the Westchester County Department of Planning, "cost-burdened" is defined by the US HUD as those paying in excess of 30% of their income toward housing cost.

Historically, the Village of Buchanan has offered the opportunity for more affordable single-family ownership than the majority of Westchester County. However, as indicated above, like the rest of the New York metropolitan area and Westchester County, the Village has experienced substantial increases in housing prices over the last few years. For example, the median increase in sales price for homes in Westchester County increased 48% between 1993 and 2000. Similarly, the median sales prices for single-family homes in the Town of Cortlandt increased 49% during that same period (an increase of approximately 7% per year). It is likely that housing prices in the Village have increased at a rate similar to that experienced in the rest of Town of Cortlandt and Westchester County as a whole.

It is likely that increases in housing prices may have a disproportionate impact on the Village's senior citizens. There is a desire to seek opportunities to keep Buchanan's seniors within the community.

e. Other Issues Affecting the Character of Buchanan's Neighborhoods.

The Master Plan Committee has identified the following additional issues that affect the character of Buchanan's neighborhoods:

- Size and placement of accessory structures, particularly in front yards.
- Storage of recreational vehicles, campers, boats, commercial vehicles and parking of cars in front yards or within street rights-of-way.
- Off-street parking within neighborhoods. The public raised this as a significant issue in the Public Opinion Survey when asked to suggest changes in land use regulations. The Master Plan Committee noted this issue as well. However, the Committee noted practical limitations in certain areas of the Village where homes were built within insufficient garage or driveway space to accommodate necessary parking off the street.
- Temporary buildings.

2. Planning Objectives:

- #1: Maintain the existing overall density and protect the character of the Village's residential areas.
- #2: Promote a range of rental and home ownership opportunities in varied housing types and prices for Village residents, including those available for senior citizens and other smaller households.
- #3: Preserve the quality, character and stability of the Village's neighborhoods by preventing the intrusion of incompatible uses in residential areas and distributing

land uses in such a manner that potential conflicts between uses are minimized.

3. Planning Recommendations:

#1: *Investigate changes to zoning or other Village laws to address some of the identified issues, including:*

- Additional language in the Zoning Code to more specifically prohibit the potential creation of additional “flag-lots.”
- Revised restrictions on the size and placement of accessory structures. A number of temporary and other accessory structures and buildings such as tent garages have been proliferating throughout the Village to the detriment of the neighborhood appearance. This plan recommends that all accessory structures be required to be kept behind the front of the house, and limited to a maximum height of one story or 15 feet. Where located on large lots (greater than 20-30,000 square feet in area), all such accessory structures should be required to meet the setbacks for principal buildings.
- Appropriate regulations regarding the storage of recreational vehicles and limitations on parking of, campers, boats and commercial vehicles in residential zones. The parking and storage of recreational vehicles should be regulated in the same manner as recommended for accessory buildings above.
- Limitations on parking in front yards in neighborhoods. Considerations could include restricting parking of vehicles on the front yards and/or limitations on the amount of pavement in the front yard. The feasibility of any recommended regulations would need to be considered in light of limitations in certain areas of the Village (e.g., insufficient room for garage or driveway space, shallow lots and shallow front yards). Grandfathering of such conditions should be considered.
- Common driveways should be avoided and discouraged.
- Limitations on-street parking in residential zones including permitting parking on only one side of the street. As indicated above, however, the Committee noted practical limitations in certain areas of the Village where homes were built within insufficient garage or driveway space to accommodate necessary parking off the street. This reality would need to be taken into account.
- More specific separation and/or buffer requirements between residential and commercial properties.

- Modifications to zoning requirements (e.g., creation of “building coverage”, larger setbacks for larger homes, height-setback ratios, and/or “floor area ratio” requirements) to address potential impacts related to construction of “over-sized” homes.

#2: Encourage additional senior housing.

While the Village has taken certain steps to encourage opportunities for senior and other smaller households (e.g., accessory apartments), the following additional options have been identified:

- Construction of new housing for seniors (e.g., in the Lent's Cove area, near Village Circle, Greentown Road, etc.).
- “Set-asides” (i.e., requiring developers to “set-aside” a certain portion of their units as price-restricted units for seniors.

#3: Consider preparation of conceptual development plans for large lots to demonstrate the preferred form of development.

There are a few large parcels of land which represent opportunities for considerable development in the future. The Village could pro-actively prepare conceptual plans or recommendations for the future use and development of such properties. As part of such plans, the Village may recommend and seek conservation easements over areas of special concern or environmental value, or consider mandating conservation (cluster) development, or even recommend alternative types or forms of uses. Two such areas where such consideration may be appropriate include:

- The lands of Con Edison, including Bleakley Woods west of Westchester Avenue.
- The vacant Arch Diocese property located on the east side of NYS Route 9A abutting the school district bus garage facility at the southern village boundary.