Established in April 2018, the McLean County Regional Housing Initiative is an inter-jurisdictional effort to proactively address housing issues in the region. The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities undertaken since the inception of the effort through the end of 2019.
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Background

The need for a regional approach to housing was first identified during the development of the City of Bloomington Comprehensive Plan in 2015. In 2017, the McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC) partnered with the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal and the Bloomington Housing Authority (BHA) to complete the region's first housing study: *BN Home*. One of the key recommendations was to create an inter-jurisdictional group to proactively address housing issues in the region as identified in BN Home and other relevant community plans.

With MCRPC taking the lead, the Regional Housing Advisory Committee was established by an intergovernmental agreement in May 2018. The Committee consists of two separate, but interrelated, working committees:

- The Affordable and Supportive Housing Committee focuses on increasing the inventory of safe, high quality, affordable and supportive housing particularly for lower income groups, seniors, and persons with disabilities. Committee members represent 14 organizations that have a direct stake in affordable or supportive housing in McLean County. This committee meets quarterly.

- The Staff Committee utilizes its professional expertise to inform priorities and policies of the Regional Housing Advisory Committee and acts as the conduit between local housing efforts and state and federal housing agencies. Committee members represent the following organizations and meet monthly:
  - McLean County Regional Planning Commission (MCRPC)
  - City of Bloomington
  - Town of Normal
  - Bloomington Housing Authority (BHA)
  - PATH Crisis Center
  - McLean County Behavioral Health Coordinating Council (BHCC)
BN Home, as well as both the City and Town’s Comprehensive Plans, found that there are gaps in the supply of affordable housing in McLean County. As the Regional Housing Committee began a deeper dive into these issues in the summer of 2018, the group immediately recognized that the concept of affordable housing is complicated and multi-dimensional. In order to address the issue effectively, the Committee determined that the community needed a better understanding of what affordable housing means, specifically in the context of McLean County.

Therefore, in December 2018, the Staff Committee published a white paper entitled “What is Affordable Housing in McLean County,” which defines the term “affordable housing” and explores the key components that affect it.

The next white paper, published in February 2019, explored the concept of Area Median Income (AMI) in McLean County. “Income-Qualified Housing in McLean County Issue 1: Area Median Income (AMI)” looked at household income levels in McLean County as they relate to eligibility for certain housing programs, and compared them to the average salary of various occupations in McLean County. The next white paper involved months of research and collaboration with the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). “Income-Qualified Housing in McLean County, Issue 2: Types of Units and Vouchers” (June 2019) explained the different types of housing assistance, quantified the availability of income-qualified housing units and compared that to the need for such units in McLean County. This white paper also explored the terms of affordability restrictions on these units.
Website and Housing Dashboard

As the Regional Housing Initiatives progressed, the MCRPC created a webpage dedicated to housing in McLean County. As part of the MCRPC website, the BN Home page houses all the plans and studies related to neighborhoods and housing, the McLean County Housing Dashboard, published white papers and other research, news and events, and a special page dedicated to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) information.

At the first meeting of the Affordable and Supportive Housing Committee, members identified the need for a centralized hub where they could locate all local housing data. Over 70 housing-related metrics were collected and evaluated, and an interactive dashboard was published on MCRPC’s website. The dashboard paints a picture of the Bloomington-Normal region's housing elements including demographics of residents, general data on housing units and costs, and affordability and housing options for persons experiencing homelessness.
Consolidated Plans

The biggest undertaking by the Regional Housing Advisory Committee to date has been the joint development of the Bloomington and Normal 5-year Consolidated Plans for the Community Development Block Group (CDBG) program. This was the first time in the history of the CDBG program that the City and Town had collaborated in this way. Beginning with the development and adoption of a joint Citizen Participation Plan in 2018, the 5-month public outreach process consisted of the following:

- Launch of CDBG website
- Citizen Survey in English, French and Spanish - nearly 1,300 responses
- Stakeholder Survey - 29 responses
- 30 events and 60 hours of survey outreach
- 2 Public Meetings in Bloomington and Normal - 59 attendees
- 5 Stakeholder Focus Groups - 40 attendees
- 2 Illinois State University (ISU) Student Focus Groups
- 1 Spanish-speaking Focus Group

**TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 1,210**

![Graphs showing age and ethnicity distributions.](image)

**Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**

Consolidated Plan Surveys & Public Meetings

Between April 20th, 2018, over 1,200 Bloomington and Normal residents responded to the Consolidated Plan survey. In order to further prioritize and understand the needs identified in the survey, two public meetings were held in Bloomington and Normal. Below you can find the districts identified during these meetings.
Consolidated Plans

The results of the outreach process directly informed the development of funding priorities for the Bloomington and Normal CDBG programs over the next 5 years. As the results were being analyzed, the Regional Housing Committee saw a potential impact beyond the CDBG program. Thus, the committee made the Consolidated Plan results widely available to policy makers, stakeholders and the public at large through three Public Outreach Analysis Documents. Each of the three has a geographic focus - one for Bloomington, one for Normal, and one for the region.

Drafts of both the Bloomington and Normal 2020-2024 Consolidated Plans are complete. The public hearing and council approval processes have begun and will be completed in early March 2020.

This process could not have been successful without the assistance of members of the Affordable and Supportive Housing Advisory Committee, as well as others in the community, who helped promote the surveys, provided space at events for survey outreach, and helped organize focus groups.

Regional Housing Staff Advisory Committee

Mercy Davison, Town Planner
Town of Normal

Vasudha Gadhiraju, Executive Director*
McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Lauren Gibson, Community Planner
McLean County Regional Planning Commission

Jeremy Hayes, Executive Director
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Raymond Lai, Executive Director**
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Taylor Long, Associate Planner
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Trisha Malott, Supervisor
McLean County Behavioral Health Coordinating Council

Katie Simpson, City Planner
City of Bloomington

Jennifer Toney, Grants Coordinator
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Erik Zdansky, Program Manager-Homeless Services
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*through June 2019
**as of January 2020
Regional Housing Partners

The Regional Housing Initiatives are just a part of the work that is being done to address housing issues in the Bloomington-Normal area. Recent accomplishments by partner organizations include:

- Dedication of 6 properties to the Countering Domestic Violence (CDV) Transitional Housing Program (Mid Central Community Action)

- Designation of a HUD-Certified Housing Counselor offering Mortgage Default and Default Resolution Counseling, Pre-Purchase Counseling, Rental Housing Counseling, Financial Management /Budget Counseling, Non-Delinquency Post-Purchase Workshops, Financial, Budgeting, and Credit Workshops, and Pre-Purchase Homebuyer Education Workshops (Mid Cental Community Action)

- Initiation of a Fair Housing Program to help Bloomington residents facing housing discrimination. A similar program is anticipated in both the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal in 2020. (Prairie State Legal Services)

- Completion of 6 new homes and expansion of A Brush With Kindness (ABWK) exterior repair program to serve 10 families (Habitat for Humanity of McLean County)

- Award of $1.4 million in Low Income Housing Tax Credits for the construction of a 56-unit apartment for income-qualified households. Bloomington Housing Authority will provide 17 project-based vouchers to subsidize rents based on tenants’ income.

- Continued renovation of the former Bloomington High School into 59 income-qualified units for people 55 and over. The City of Bloomington will provide assistance through a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreement.