



Chapter 1 Introduction, 11/12/24 Draft

Highland Heights *has updated* the Comprehensive Plan *for 2024* to move the City forward as a leading Northern Kentucky community. The resulting product provides a long-term vision for community land use and development.

The Highland Heights Planning Commission *has conducted this five-year update of* the Comprehensive Plan per KRS 100 *that includes* a comprehensive review of the original data *and new data that has become available since 2019.*

Plan recommendations are linked to priority planning issues as defined by a resident, *business, and professional* - based Steering Committee.

Previous Plans

The original Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1990. Updates were prepared in 1995, 2000, 2006, 2012, *and 2019.* These plans were created based on KRS 100.183 requirements. All *Kentucky* communities with Planning Commissions are required to prepare comprehensive plans to guide the development of public and private property.



Mandatory Updates

KRS 100.197 requires planning commissions to amend or readopt their comprehensive plans every five years. The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan Update fulfills this requirement.

Historical Plan Differences

Significant differences exist between the 2006 and 2012 Comprehensive Plans. The 2012 Comprehensive Plan was the first update prepared since Northern Kentucky University (NKU) was annexed into Highland Heights.

Extensive policy consideration is provided for joint planning and implementation of mutually beneficial goals with NKU.

Beginning with the 2012 Plan, mixed-use development is emphasized in recognition of Highland Heights' potential for achieving high-quality, sustainable development.

Through the subsequent updates, the plan directed new investment in three redevelopment districts. This policy is retained with more detailed policy guidance added for land use, design and circulation.

Redevelopment district boundaries have been modified to better reflect current development opportunities and community needs.

The 2012 Plan offered for the first time a detailed Action Plan (see Chapter 5) to guide City led implementation efforts. This is continued through this 2024 update.

Planning Participants

Steering Committee

The City Administration and the Planning Commission advertised on-line, during public meetings, and at the City's 2023 Fall Celebration for volunteers to serve on a Steering Committee. The Fall Celebration was advertised in a mailing to all city residents.

The 2024 Steering Committee was a mix of residents, business owners, University representatives, and public officials. All Steering Committee meetings were publicly advertised and open to the public to attend. It was an ad hoc working group that generated ideas and suggestions to guide and assist city staff. The Committee was not a voting board – which is the role of the planning commission, however, was designed to guide staff in producing an update and a draft. The Steering Committee participants provided some lay expertise such as economy, housing market, utilities, or university topics to the process that is typically available within the Planning Commission or the general public. The Steering Committee meetings were advertised to the public and participants did not discuss the merits or data or information of this project outside of the public meetings with other members or with members of the planning commission or the city council during the process.



Public Organizations

Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 100 states that it is the duty of the planning commission to consult with public officials and agencies, boards of health, school boards, public and private utility companies, civic, educational, professional, and other organizations, and with citizens. Much of this information is contained in the Land Use and Public Facilities Element. The strategic plans and/or representatives of the following organizations were consulted:

- Campbell County Economic Progress Authority Inc. (CCEPA)
- Campbell County Planning and Zoning Developers
- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments
- Neighborhood Foundations and non-profit organizations - South Bank Partners
- Planning and Design Services (PDS) formerly Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission
- BE NKY Growth Partnership, standing (formerly TRI-ED).
- Northern Kentucky University (NKU)
- Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky (TANK)
- Campbell County School District
- Central Campbell County Fire District
- SD#1
- Northern Kentucky Water District, Campbell County
- Duke Energy – Electric
- Duke Energy – Gas
- NKADD – Housing Study 2023
- Northern Kentucky Health Department

Public Input

Public open house meetings were advertised in city newsletters and at fall Highland Heights City Celebrations. These meetings were also advertised on-line and on the city’s website and calendar. The meetings took place in November 2023, February 2024, March 2024, and October 2024. The attendees reviewed materials, asked questions, submitted comments, and became involved in the overall comprehensive planning process and the future of the city. Written and email comments have also been submitted. The comments that were received contributed to amendments adopted in the 2024 Statement of Goals and Objectives and have helped guide the update of the Comprehensive Plan Elements.

A new tab for the 2024 Update of the Comprehensive Plan was placed on the city’s website where the city planner and city clerk posted materials to review. Members of the public were encouraged to submit written comments and to follow the process through to its completion – including public hearings and public meetings. A formal comment form was provided at the meetings, at the city offices, and on-line.

The amount of energetic public input and the depth of the steering committee discussions during this community-building process emphasize the importance of preserving and continuing the local city planning work in the future. Should small cities in Kentucky like Highland Heights ever cease to perform this function or relinquish it to county or regional governments or councils, then the citizens’ direct and personal representation would be lost.



Policy and Organization

Policy Formation

Comprehensive Plan policy was developed, refined and reviewed by the Steering Committee. Five Steering Committee meetings were held over a one-year period. The resulting policies included in this Plan represent a broad-based consensus and cover a range of topics including land use, transportation and redevelopment. Draft Comprehensive Plan chapters were available on-line before the Plan was adopted. Chapter 5 Action Plan summarizes policy generated throughout Chapters 2, 3 and 4 in concise table format. Chapter 5 is provided to increase the user-friendliness of the document and to assist City-led implementation of the Plan. Planning Commission and zoning applicants must consider the Comprehensive Plan in its entirety, *both text and maps*, when determining project and zoning application compliance.

Statement of Goals and Objectives

The Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan contains Goals and Objectives throughout each Element of the document. Goals within Elements One through Four are indicated by blue bold italic font. The Statement of Goals and Objectives was adopted 7/2/24 and includes Element Five - Action Plan and specifically Tables AP1 through AP4.

The fact that they are intertwined throughout the entire Plan in every chapter/element demonstrates how closely the policy statements reflected the desires and needs of the community and how strongly the remainder of the Plan elements use the policy as a basis. Chapter Five, Action Plan also contains many goals and objectives organized into a seventeen-page Table 5.1. All of the Goals and Objectives throughout the entire Comprehensive Plan were publicly reviewed, amended, and adopted by the Highland Heights Planning Commission and Highland Heights City Council during late 2023 and the first half of 2024. The Goals and Objectives are presented throughout the Plan as they have been in previous updates and adoptions. To review the Statement of Goals and Objectives for the 2024 Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission identified and extracted them specifically for public review. Upon adoption by the Planning Commission and City Council the Goals and Objectives have been melded back into the document, and as noted above are specially noted by titles and blue bold italic font. This plan organization shows how closely the Plan follows the intentions and requirements of Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 100 and the public meeting and advertisement requirements of KRS Chapters 100 and 424.



Plan Vision

Five main planning themes emerged during the planning process. These themes transcend all plan goals and are universal in their importance. They consequently help to explain the broader vision established for Highland Heights. These five themes are unique to Highland Heights and form the overall Vision. This Vision was originally presented by the Comprehensive Plan's primary author to the 2013 Steering Committee.

Embrace Redevelopment

Highland Heights has extensive potential for growth given its strategic location and access to I-275, I-471 US 27 and NKU. Unfortunately, the City's growth potential is hindered by a lack of vacant land suitable for development.

Redevelopment is necessary in strategic locations for Highland Heights to achieve sustainable growth and remain competitive in the greater Cincinnati region. Chapter 4 is devoted to redevelopment.

Maximize Opportunities

It is important for future land development to provide maximum long-term benefits to the City consistent with Comprehensive Plan goals and policy for land use and the built environment due to a scarcity of readily developable land.

Be a "College" Town

Highland Heights is embracing its role a "college" town now that NKU is incorporated into the City.

The City must continue to leverage NKU and its numerous resources and benefits for community advancement. The City needs to work with NKU on issues of mutual importance as part of a strategy to improve the status and attractiveness of both parties.

Planning Issues Shift

It is quite clear that Highland Heights is reaching a level of maturity where new growth will not be the predominate issue.

Instead, redevelopment, land use conversion, collaboration with the Northern Kentucky University, fiscal health, traffic management, pedestrian safety, and quality of the community environment will be the dominate concerns of planning and development for future years.

Source: Comprehensive Plan, 2006 Update, City of Highland Heights

The steering committee identified standards and expectations for mixed-use and pedestrian-friendly development as a means to offer residents, faculty and students alike a desirable and attractive off-campus environment.

Seek Partnerships

Conventional government funding programs are out of money or have been greatly reduced placing pressure on local governments to fund projects locally.

Lacking adequate funds and staff, Highland Heights cannot implement this Plan alone. Seek partner support at a variety of levels to move this Plan and the City forward.



Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan

Currently available grants typically go to applicants with high local matches and multi-jurisdictional support.

Be Proactive

Additional planning and hard work is necessary to implement goals after the Plan is adopted.

To assist with implementation, the Comprehensive Plan provides short-term strategies to achieve its long-term vision and goals. See Chapter 5 Action Plan for details.

Key Drivers

Steering committee members were asked to brainstorm a list of planning issues that, due to their community importance, needed to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan update. These set the stage for the Goals and Actions (Objectives). The 2024 Steering Committee proposed the term “Key Drivers” to emphasize the foundational relationship to the Goals and Objectives and to be consistent with terminology in the 2020 NKU Master Plan.

Diversify our Economy

- Need more businesses to keep resident tax burden low.

Redevelopment

- Redevelop strategically located underutilized areas such as Gateway East, Gateway West and Town Center to promote enhanced economic activity and community vibrancy.

Be Pedestrian and Bicycle Friendly

- Enhance Highland Heights as a pedestrian, “nature friendly” community with a walkable town center and with bike paths and walkways linking the community together.
- Close missing sidewalks gaps.

Preserve Hillsides

- Preserve hillsides and other sensitive natural features, recognizing the positive benefits such areas provide including protecting private property and public health, safety and welfare in addition to enhancing the City’s community image.

Enhance Image / Code Enforcement

- Clean-up properties, particularly rentals, along major roadway corridors to improve the community image.
- Apply a streetscape on US 27 in Gateway East and its vicinity to create an attractive address that appeals to residents, promotes a stronger identity and encourages mixed use development and social interaction.

Enlarge City Boundary

- Annex to the northeast and southwest of the city for new residential development.

More Single-Family Housing

- Develop 18 acres behind Lowe’s as residential, park and trails.
- Develop 16 acres near Highland Heights Garden Center as residential, park and trails.
- Seek higher-priced housing units that target officials from Highland Heights’ major employers.

Mitigate Traffic

- Reduce congestion and backups on US 27 and I-471.
- Explore ways to mitigate NKU event traffic.



Population

According to the US Census Bureau, the City gained 2,331 new residents between 1990 and 2000 after three decades (1970, 1980 and 1990) of negative population growth.

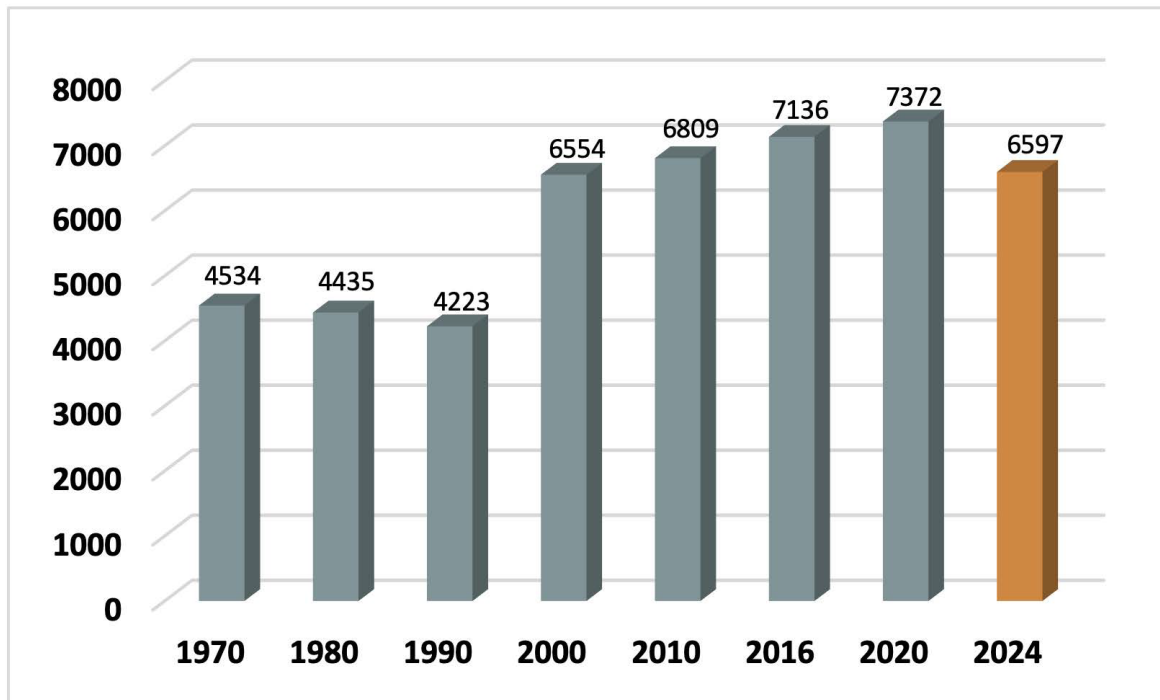
The growth between 1990 and 2000 represents an approximate 55% increase in population over a ten-year period. Population growth over this period is partially supported by new housing units developed from 1990 and 2000. See Tables IN10 and IN11.

A 2024 US Census Bureau estimate shown in Table IN 1 indicates a population decrease. This may be from the pandemic years a combination of factors – a national downturn in university enrollment, Lakeside Terrace vacancy, the demolition of some dorms, rent increases, and a slowness of NKU resident students to return.

NKU was annexed in 2008, however the increase was reflected in the previous decade - accounts for why the City’s population increase from 2000 to 2010 of just 255 residents was lower than expected. NKU was annexed into Highland Heights before the 2010 Census and Highland Heights’ population should have increased by the number of on-campus students or over 2,000. Table IN1 provides Highland Heights’ historical population from 1970 to 2024. According to DemographicsNow, the city’s population was estimated 7,343 persons by 2016 – close to the year 2020 figure.

NKU’s presence with thousands of students living on- and off-campus lowers Highland Height’s median age and median household income relative to Campbell County and the State of Kentucky as Tables IN2 and IN3 on the following page demonstrate.

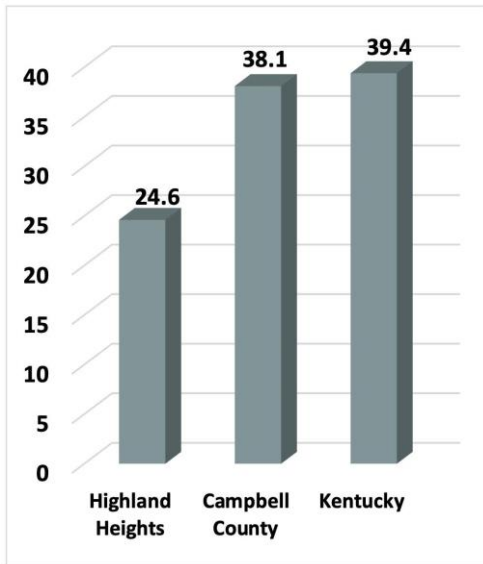
Table IN1 - Highland Heights Population



Source: 2006 Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan (1970-2000), NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) (2010), US Census Bureau, 2016, 2020 American Community Survey, Table S0101, and census.gov/quickfacts for 2024 estimate, US 2020 Census Bureau

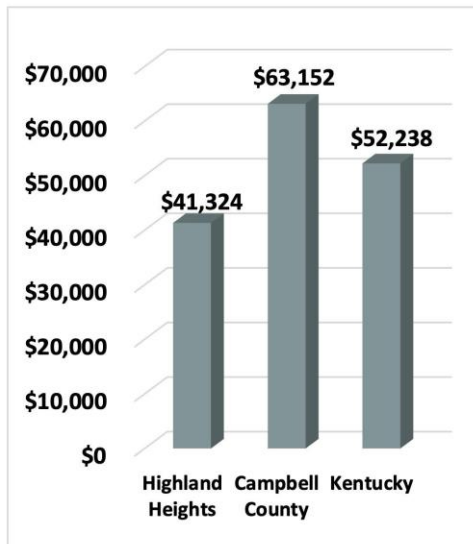


Table IN2 - 2020 Median Age



Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table S0101

Table IN3 - 2020 Median Household Income



Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table S1903

On- and off-campus student housing in Highland Heights *significantly* lowers the City’s 2020 median age compared to Campbell County and the State as Table IN2 shows.

Highland Heights has significantly more residents in the “5 to 19” age bracket as a percentage of its overall population than do Campbell County and the State of Kentucky, as Table IN4 on the next page demonstrates. The same holds true for the “20 to 24” age bracket.

This concentration of young adults in Highland Heights places unique public service and facility needs on the City.

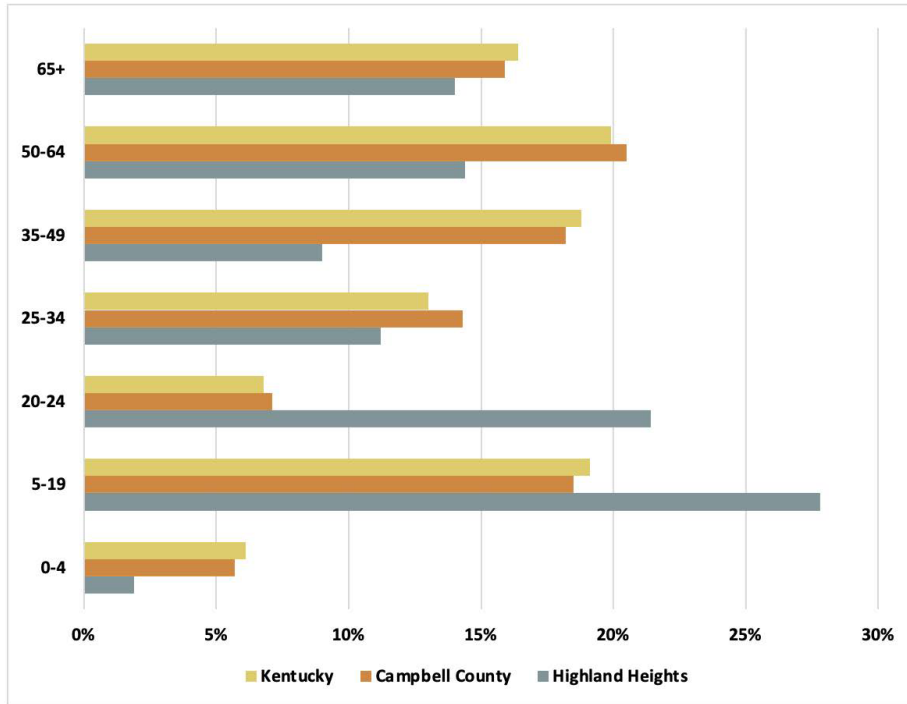
The City is encouraged to work with NKU to determine how the “18 to 24” population group can be best served as residents of Highland Heights. A few recommendations in this regard are made later in this Comprehensive Plan.

Table IN3 shows Highland Heights’ 2020 median household income compared to Campbell County and Kentucky.

As shown in Table IN3, residents at the county and state level enjoy higher median household incomes than found in the City. This is somewhat misleading because it is the large concentration of young adults living in Highland Heights that lowers the City’s median household income. Households collectively headed by older individuals likely enjoy higher median household incomes than reported in Table IN3.



Table IN4 – 2020 Highland Heights Age Breakdown



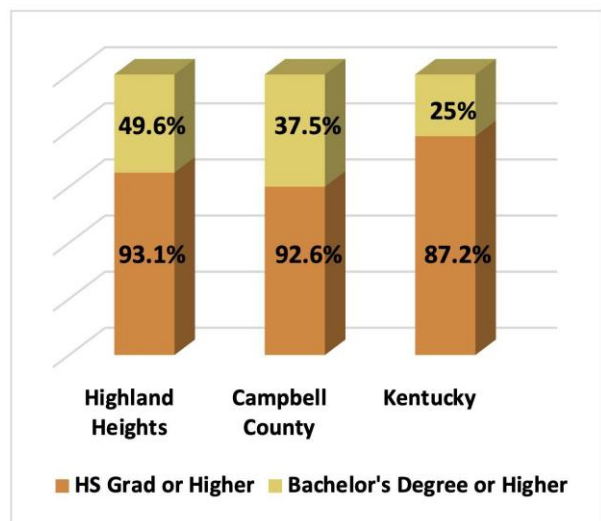
Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table S0101

Educational attainment of City residents, as shown in Table IN5, is comparable with levels found in Campbell County and Kentucky as a whole.

Due to NKU and its educated workforce, the City is in a unique position to increase the percentage of its population that have obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Achieving this goal will require the provision of additional housing units that provide modern layouts, styles and amenities. As mentioned in the next section, obtaining new housing will be a challenge but can be achieved through strategic redevelopment and annexation.

Table IN5 - 2020 Educational Attainment



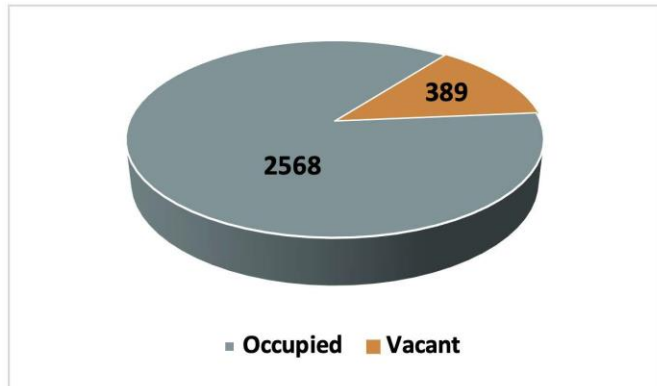
Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table S1501



Housing

According to the US Census Bureau’s 2020 American Community Survey, Highland Heights has 2,568 housing units. Of those, 389 or 15.1% were vacant – up from 9.8% in 2010.

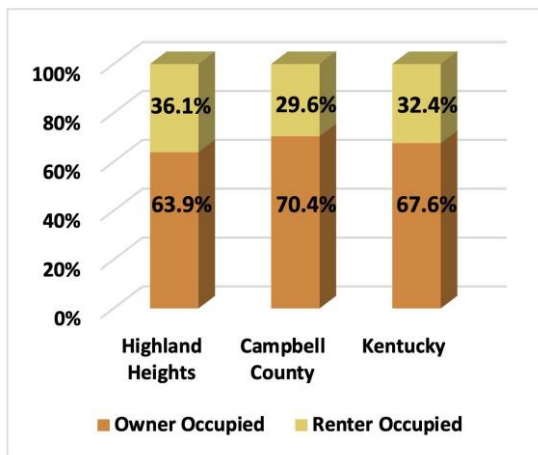
Table IN6 - 2020 Housing Occupancy



Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table DP04

Highland Heights’ percentage of owner-occupied housing units is lower than the County’s and the State’s as shown in Table IN7 below. This difference is expected due in part to the transient nature of young adults renting in Highland Heights while attending NKU.

Table IN7 - 2020 Housing Tenure



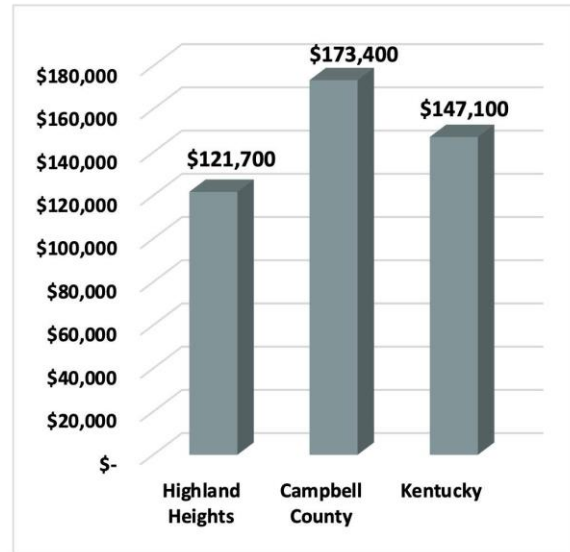
Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table DP04

Table IN8 shows the 2020 median housing value in Highland Heights at \$121,700 is \$25,000 less than Kentucky’s and approximately \$52,000 less than Campbell County’s.

Table IN9 on the next page indicates that Highland Heights has a greater amount of its overall owner-occupied housing stock valued between \$50,000 and \$149,999 than does the County and State.

Fewer units at higher price points may place Highland Heights at a disadvantage relative to the County and State at attracting and retaining higher income households.

Table IN8 - 2020 Median Housing Value



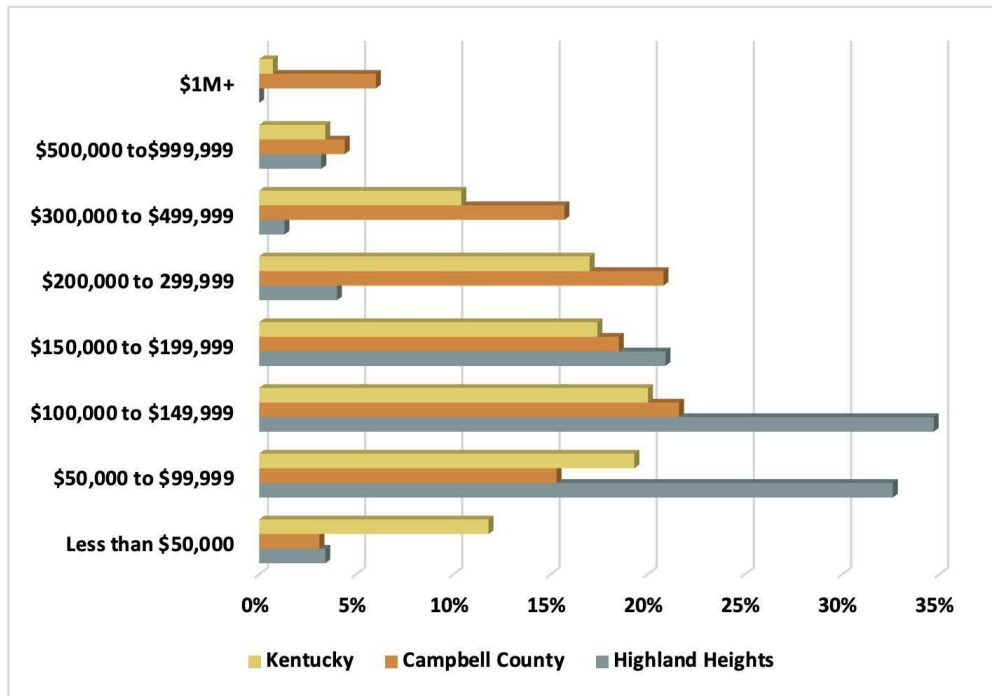
Source: US Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, Table DP04

It is important to ensure future housing construction adds new units with values from \$150,000 to \$499,999.

It is a legitimate goal to provide a well-rounded housing inventory that offers broad range of styles and price points.



Table IN9 - 2020 Housing Values of Owner-Occupied Housing



Source: US Census Bureau, Table DP04 2020 American Community Survey

More affordable housing relative to the region offers opportunities for first-time homebuyers and young families to buy in Highland Heights.

On the negative side, single-family housing at lower price points can attract investors looking for rental properties.

Some investors have found Highland Heights particularly attractive due to the potential of renting to college students.

Student rental off-campus housing is a growing concern for some longer-term residents. Action is needed by the City and NKU to promptly address negative off-campus student housing issues when they arise.

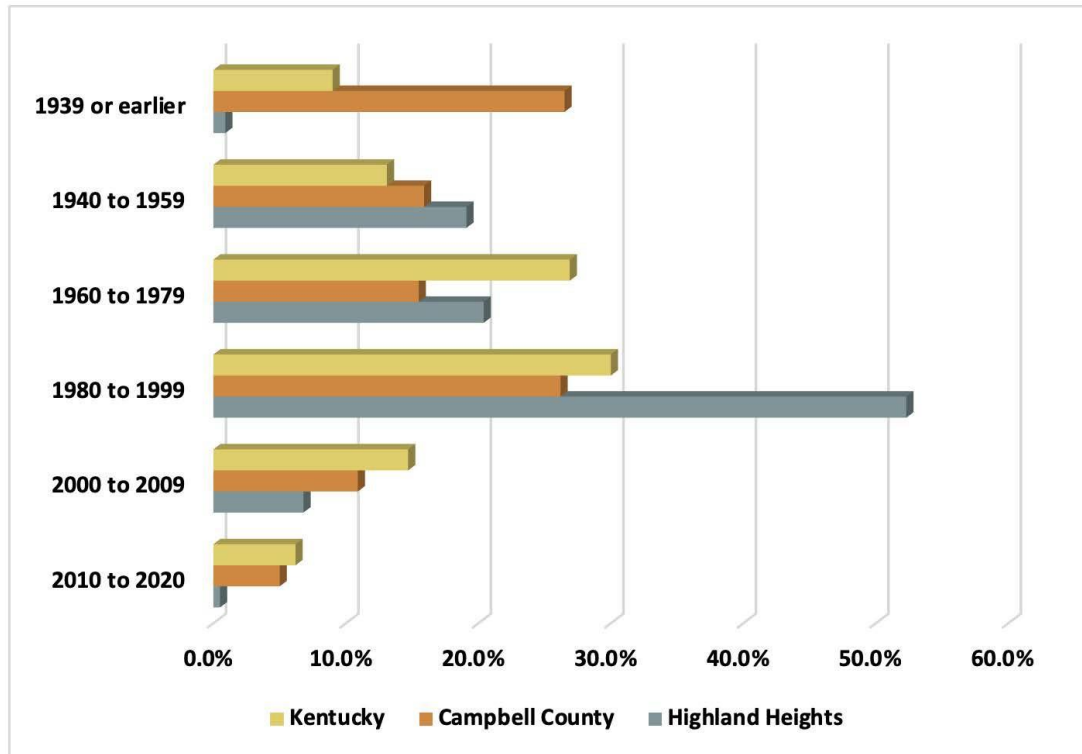
Table IN10 indicates Highland Heights has a greater percentage of housing structures built between 1980 and 1999 and fewer structures built from 2000 on than does Campbell County and Kentucky.

This trend of fewer new housing starts is expected to continue in the future due to limited land availability for new residential development in Highland Heights.

This trend could be countered through annexation and redevelopment. Such actions are encouraged to ensure Highland Heights continues to provide market-competitive housing.



Table IN10 - Year Housing Structure Built



Source: US Census Bureau, Table DP04, 2020 American Community Survey

Table IN11 – Highland Heights Housing Permit Trends

Year	Single Family	Multi-family
1991-1995	39	400
1996-2000	11	133
2001-2005	12	15
2006-2010	15	0
2011-2015	10	0
2016-2020	7	122
2021-present	3	0

*numbers reflected in above Table IN11 are City of Highland Heights estimates

Source: 1991-2000: 2000 Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan, 2001-2011: censtats.census.gov, 2016-present: Campbell County Property Valuation Administrator Office, 2019 Comprehensive Plan, Campbell County Building Inspections Dept., 2020 Census.



It can be inferred from Tables IN10 and IN11 that Highland Heights' population increase was largely driven by multifamily housing development over the 1990 decade.

Multi-family housing developed in practical response to Highland Heights' prime regional location, its excellent transportation infrastructure and NKU's growth coupled with limited on-campus housing opportunities.

Single-family development has remained largely insignificant throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s due to limited land availability.

Remaining opportunities for single family housing are limited to undeveloped lots scattered across established subdivisions.

As a result, the trend of low number of new single-family housing starts beginning in the early 1990s is expected to continue.

The multi-family development boom of the 1990s has been generally inactive since 2000. This slow growth trend is expected to continue as Highland Heights lacks land to fuel additional multi-family housing development.

The lack of large parcels suitable for housing development has driven new housing construction outside of Highland Heights where land is more plentiful such as in Wilder and Alexandria.

The recent inactivity in new housing development indicates annexations are needed. The data also suggest that redevelopment of older and obsolescent housing is a possible strategy to maintain a viable housing supply.

Housing Study – 2023

Northern Kentucky Area Development

District – *This Study presents county-level research analysis and recommendations. It generally concludes that Northern Kentucky needs more one-and-two bedroom units, and that there has been a shift in demographics from 3-and-4 bedroom units to smaller dwelling units to support the type and amount of employee population present and expected to grow.*

Unlike many cities and much of the unincorporated area, Highland Heights occupies a unique location that is readily accessible from downtown, east areas of Ohio, I-275, The Airport, AA Highway and points east and south in Kentucky. The city is situated only seven minutes from downtown Cincinnati and supports large traffic counts in the US 27 corridor, as well as stable land values. I-275 is closer to downtown at this location than any other around the entire beltway. Highland Heights also contains NKU making the city unique to all other Northern Kentucky communities.

A key finding of this NKADD 2023 Study is that the workforce is outpacing the provision of housing units that serve it. The Study recognizes that the logistics industry is setting the pace for job creation. The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee has observed that Highland Heights does not contain much of that business type and that the city is in a different economic setting than many of the communities around the I-275 beltway. The Study refers to this industry as generating "lower wage" jobs. A statistic presented in the study is that there are 2.68 jobs for each house that can be



afforded by that employment level. The steering committee concludes that these aggregate county data do not readily represent Highland Heights with this city's direct connection to downtown and the university. The logistics industry is most prevalent in Northern Kentucky in the Boone County and Kenton County areas.

The committee has also noted that the city already provides for the availability of rental housing. Well-designed patio homes, pinwheel connected units, and townhouse units both as infill and as planned unit-developments would provide housing for the young professional, college-graduate level, higher-wage population that is expected around a university and close to downtown. Highland Heights is not a favorable location to provide additional housing to serve the logistics industry.

Additional Information Additional economic, housing and population data can be obtained from the US Census Bureau and NKU's Center for Economic Analysis and Development (CEAD) (<http://cead.nku.edu/>).

CEAD's data resources can be accessed at <http://nkybythenumbers.nku.edu/>. This webpage contains several regional economic indicators.

