



# Housing Improvement Focus Group N e w s l e t t e r



City of Wilson, Development Services, PO Box 10 Wilson, NC 27896 – June 9, 2005 – Issue 7

## Housing Improvement Focus Group recommends final Action Steps

*This newsletter is the final report from the Housing Improvement Focus Group of their approved Action Steps.*

### The Strategy Plan now goes to City Council

As a “grass roots” community involvement effort, the Housing Improvement Focus Group completed its review of the Action Steps recommended by its Working Committee. During two work sessions on May 21 and June 9 and with only a few modifications and additions, the Focus Group agreed with all the steps. The Actions Steps are now ready for review, modification and ultimate endorsement by the City Council as a guide to help improve Wilson’s housing and related conditions. This newsletter is the final report of the Focus Group and is devoted to the group’s **Housing Improvement Action Strategy Plan** with its important Action Steps. The plan is considered an “implementation guide” to assist Council in taking action regarding improvements in housing and related conditions.

More information about the recommended plan can be obtained from Dale Breedlove, Focus Group Chairperson (234-6011), Lillie Cooper, Vice Chairperson (237-8898), Tim Holloman (399-2210) or Jim Bradshaw (399-2213). Background information about the Focus Group is on page 15.

## Focus Group identifies priority Action Steps for Council consideration

*Prioritization by the Focus Group helped determine importance among the various Action Steps.*

### Prioritization provides an implementation guide

The Action Steps that are in this final newsletter are placed under specific categories that address special themes identified by the Focus Group regarding housing and related issues. The Focus Group prioritized all Action Steps as to their importance, so as to arrange them under each category according to their identified priority with the most important listed first in bold text followed by the other action steps in priority sequence. Any ties for importance are identified by like-colored asterisks, but in each category, the top priority received more votes than any other Action Step.

Priority only indicates importance among the various Action Steps, suggesting that initial implementation be guided by the priorities. However, all of the proposed Action Steps are considered worthy of implementation, and the committee urges that all should be given serious consideration. All together the Action Steps form a comprehensive implementation guide, arranged in an orderly fashion for a systematic approach in improving housing and related conditions within the community.

Obviously many of the suggested Action Steps may take years to implement; and even through some could be promptly implemented, the *Housing Improvement Action Strategy Plan* must be viewed as a meaningful short and long term implementation guide.

City Council is asked to endorse this plan as an implementation guide for Council, City staff, and others to use in helping improve Wilson’s housing and related conditions.

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## HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACTION STRATEGY PLAN

### A. TENANT & LANDLORD ACCOUNTABILITY

<p><b>A-I. Improve tenant responsibilities</b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> By state and local laws the tenant or occupant of a rental unit has a responsibility to insure that the rented housing property is kept clean and free of rubbish and facilities are not defaced.</p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>a. Do not give the City authority to impose fines on tenant or penalize a tenant for failing to meet duties. b. Keep this issue between the tenant and the landlord.</p>	<p><b>Strategies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide incentives to promote tenants maintaining their dwellings, such as if a tenant maintains a beautiful yard, landlord will provide equipment, tools or other incentives for tenant’s sweat equity or in-kind labor activities.</li> <li>2. Provide educational workshops for tenants to assist them in being responsible by addressing tenant responsibilities and other related issues, including limited repairs or equipment service that tenant can and should be able to do. Ultimately the landlord or property owner must decide on appropriate action for any tenant failures, but workshops can be used as appropriate to help tenants understand their responsibilities.</li> <li>3. Insure that all rental units are free of debris prior to renting (between one tenant moving out and another renting the unit) - <i>Landlords should inspect their units prior to renting</i></li> <li>4. Address predatory lending against work pay checks with high interest rates</li> </ol>
<p><b>A-II. Improve complaint &amp; enforcement process:</b></p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>Do not add expense to the landlord or tenant or impose fines on tenants by government</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a governing body (<b>Housing Appeals Board</b>, etc) with enforcement authority to investigate appeals and other related issues and bring closure to problem(s).</li> <li>2. Establish proper communication channels for housing and nuisance complaints for citizens and council members to insure orderly, organized, equally applied enforcement</li> <li>3. Hold landlords more accountable for property upkeep – expose their failures</li> </ol>
<p><b>A-III. Provide education opportunities to foster mutual respect and acceptance of responsibilities for tenants and landlords</b></p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>a. Do not up the rent every time there is an upgrade b. Help people understand that housing standards may contribute to improving aesthetics, but will not completely cure aesthetic concerns</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <p>Educate the public, tenants, landlords and owners on housing codes, general rights, knowledge of leases, rent changes and other related laws – through workshops &amp; free classes offered in order to rent a unit and other activities that foster tenant/landlord awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Encouragement for landlords and tenants to utilize <u>written</u> lease with conditions for rent changes</li> <li>4 Encouragement for tenants to report problems and be less fearful of reporting</li> <li>4 Information about misconceptions</li> <li>4 Correct information about rent increases as a result of repairs</li> <li>4 Information about tenant responsibilities and upkeep of property</li> <li>4 Respect for tenant’s home and environment</li> <li>4 Information about how landlords can improve tenant quality. (i.e. intensive background screening, application process and going into their properties regularly)</li> </ul>

### A. TENANT & LANDLORD ACCOUNTABILITY RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>A-1. Improve tenant responsibilities:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recommend that the City Council request the business and financial community to provide special financial management workshops and prepare video programs about proper financial management. In addition, the City Council is urged to request local financial community and Chamber of Commerce to sponsor and implement an annual one day “Financial Fair” to provide information and counseling about financial matters and assist local residence with specific problems Also, the committee recommends that the City Council request the School System to discourage “payday lending” by providing students an opportunity to learn about proper financial management</li> <li>2. Recommend that the Property Managers association encourage and use a “sweat equity” account to credit work performed by tenant in maintenance and up-keep, provided work is authorized with upfront agreement, involves needed repairs, and workmanship is appropriate for the task.</li> <li>3. Recommend that the Council request Wilson Appearance Commission to involve the Property Managers Association and develop sponsorship of business community for programs to reward tenants for yard and unit upkeep</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. City in partnerships and community sponsors; Channel 8, electric bill inserts, Social Services, Wilson County Schools, Churches and Housing Authority for distribution of information within the community</li> <li>2. Property Managers Association</li> <li>3. Appearance Commission; local businesses (materials &amp; tool donations); Properties Managers Association; Chamber of Commerce</li> </ol>	<p>Following endorsement of the plan</p> <p>Following endorsement of the plan</p> <p>Following endorsement of the plan</p>	<p>Funding mostly by partners &amp; sponsors with City providing “seed” funds for materials &amp; related needs as appropriate</p> <p>TBD</p> <p>TBD (many items and services could be donated)</p>

**A. TENANT & LANDLORD ACCOUNTABILITY  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<b><u>A-II. Improve complaint &amp; enforcement process:</u></b>			
<p>1. Recommend that the City Council establish Housing Appeals Board under GS 160A-446 to hear appeals from enforcement and/or institute appropriate action as a result of such appeals. (The make-up of the Appeals Board is recommended to consist of 5 regular members and 1 alternant with 1 owner occupant, 1 rental occupant, 1 property manager or construction manager, 2 at large members and 1 alternant.). The Housing Appeals Board once formed could also suggest workshop attendance or utilization of video program as options for tenants (or owners) that appear before them due to appeals.</p> <p>2. Recommend that the City Council review and develop uniform policies and procedures to guide Council and staff in addressing all housing/nuisance complaints.</p> <p>3. Recommend that the City Council establish a “hot line” with follow-up for housing and nuisance complaints.</p>	<p>1. City Council using State Law (GS 160A-446.); Board of Adjustments could also be considered as the Housing Appeals Board, subject to member make-up needs</p> <p>2 &amp; 3. City Council &amp; City Manager; Development Services &amp; other City staff</p>	<p>Following endorsement of the plan</p> <p>Following endorsement of the plan</p>	<p>NA, minimal start-up cost involving staff time</p> <p>NA - TBD</p>
<b><u>A-III. Provide education opportunities to foster mutual respect and acceptance of responsibilities for tenants and landlords:</u></b>			
<p>1. Recommend that the City Council encourage Property Managers Association to endorse use of <u>written</u> leases and utilize their meetings to bring forth new information that impacts tenant/landlord relationships and responsibilities</p> <p>2. Recommend that the City Council partnership with Property Managers Association and local agencies to implement educational workshops, including endorsement and sponsorship of workshop opportunities. The workshops should be scheduled to provide varied meeting times for maximum attendance, as well as encouragement of utilization of workshops and video by perspective or existing tenants. The City Council is urged to also request sponsorship and partnerships for development of multicultural workshops and study sessions for all tenants <u>and</u> landlords that can provide information, content and terminology about responsibilities and related interests that can be easily understood and utilized. Use of separate workshops for tenants and property managers/owners is suggested in order to encourage advantages of written leases for tenants and landlords and provide specific information about responsibilities to each.</p> <p>3. As a part of the workshops and educational opportunities the City Council is requested to authorize development of a video program from the workshops and/or through other means that addresses tenant responsibilities and proper use of facilities, including simple repairs. The Housing Improvement Focus Committee also recommends that the City Council request partnerships and sponsors to develop the multicultural video programs to help educate all tenants and landlords about their responsibilities. Such videos programs could also be aired on Channel 8.</p>	<p>1. Property Managers Association</p> <p>2 &amp; 3. Property managers in concert with City &amp; community partnerships and sponsorships. Use Channel 8 and electric bill inserts to provide information about workshops and availability of video; air video on Channel 8 and distribute at library, rental agencies, Social Services, Churches and Housing Authority</p>	<p>Following endorsement of the plan</p> <p>FY 2007 or as available sponsorships and/or budgetary allocation permits</p>	<p>NA</p> <p>Funded primarily through sponsors and partners; City could provide “seed” or limited matching funds</p>

## HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACTION STRATEGY PLAN

### B. INCREASE SUPPLY OF DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

<p><b><u>B-I. Improve affordable home ownership opportunities</u></b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> With 49% rental units in 2000, Wilson’s percentage of rental units is higher than the County (41%), State (31%) or Nation (34%). A key to stable neighborhoods is increased owner occupancy.</p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Insure owners do not sign papers for 30 year mortgages without fully understanding the information or their responsibilities</li> <li>b. Wilson does not need any more rental properties – improve what we have</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <p>Promote more affordable home ownership for the entire population by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Making available more grants for owners to improve their properties</li> <li>4 Providing mortgage incentive program that brings professionals and working families into neighborhoods (such as Durham’s housing program that provides 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyer mortgages for government workers and teachers)</li> <li>4 Providing mini grants to help owners add energy efficient facilities and construction to older dwellings</li> <li>4 Developing loan/mortgage pools coupled with homeownership counseling to help renters to become homeowners</li> <li>4 Establishing programs that promote conversion of rental property into owned homes</li> <li>4 Establishing affordable home ownership programs through City sponsored partnerships by developing a priority list for all sections of the community that encourage families to purchase homes in various</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>B-II. Address decent and affordable housing supply needs</u></b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Over 56% of low income families in the entire county pay more than 30% for housing. There is a need for more affordable rental as well as owner occupied housing to promote more affordable housing so low income families do not have to pay more than 30% of their income for housing costs.</p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Don’t put facilities in houses that are not affordable from a operating standpoint (Many tenants with central air and or heating can not afford the operating costs and do not use these resources)</li> <li>b. Addressing the continuation of the “NIMBY” attitude (Not In My Backyard) about affordable housing in neighborhoods</li> <li>c. High electrical rates</li> <li>d. Upgrading houses through programs and not insuring that repairs are done correctly or contractors are adequately performing work (This applies to previous City programs and may no longer be a problem, given the increase in inspection staff and standards.)</li> <li>e. Keep in mind that every one will not be able to own their own home</li> <li>f. Don’t transform large homes to boarding houses or apartments</li> </ol>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage use of tax credits and tax increment financing to increase supply of affordable and decent housing</li> <li>2. Support local CDCs and other private organizations, such as WCIA, in their efforts to address housing supply needs, such as             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Buildings &amp; rehabilitating housing using grants &amp; low interest loans from local government, NCHFA, HUD and banks</li> <li>4 Building human structure through tenant &amp; homeowner credit &amp; self-sufficiency counseling</li> <li>4 Expanding homeownership &amp; rental opportunities (Ex. Adventura East &amp; Beacon Point)</li> <li>4 Developing partnerships with community leaders, private financial institutions, and governmental agencies to create successful developments and serve our residents</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Support CDBG and other governmental housing efforts including redevelopment and other programs that focus on:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Homeowner opportunities through redevelopment of areas (Ex: Triangle East area)</li> <li>4 Homeownership opportunities through Home Builders</li> <li>4 Affordable rental of decent housing through partnerships (Ex: Golden Leaf Apartments)</li> <li>4 Urgent repair assistance for home owners</li> <li>4 Relocation and moving assistance where applicable</li> <li>4 Down payment assistance and rehabilitation funds in project areas</li> <li>4 Counseling as needed</li> <li>4 Bringing housing partners and public needs together and</li> <li>4 Establishing partnerships to provide housing</li> <li>4 Creating neighborhood groups</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Evaluate City’s budget and insure that it is enough to address housing needs</li> <li>5. Redevelop blighted areas</li> <li>6. Review zoning as a possible way to limit conversions of large homes into apartments</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>B-III. Develop good paying jobs in order for persons to afford decent housing</u></b></p> <p><b>Issue:</b> Minimum wage will not allow persons to afford decent housing.</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promote steady income jobs</li> <li>2. Provide affordable quality child care programs to help lead to steady income opportunities</li> </ol>

**B. INCREASE SUPPLY OF DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b>B-I. Improve affordable home ownership opportunities:</b></p>			
<p><b>1. Recommend that the City Council expand and promote Community Development Programs that address affordable housing including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a. funding down payment assistance programs for 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyers. These funds could be uses as grants or deferred loans for existing homes that met stringent requirement.</b></li> <li><b>b. expanding involvement with the NC Housing Finance Agency to obtain funds for affordable owner occupied new housing. Funds are available through Federal and/or State resources for such purposes. For example, in June 2004, HUD announced \$161.5 million in down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers for their <i>American Dream Down Payment Initiative Program</i>) The City could receive these down payment funds from the NC Housing Finance Agency by simply completing its application for the funds. The funds would be made available to assist low income 1st time home buyers throughout the community with up to a 20% down payment in the form of a deferred loan. However, the funds are limited to new construction and are a deferred loan</b></li> <li><b>c. expanding the CD program under HUD’s existing Partnership Consortium Agreement with County</b></li> <li><b>d. expanding the CD program to utilize additional NC Housing Finances Agency program funds as they become available through the HUD HOME Program or other funding programs. (HOME funds are available for a wide range of activities, including home ownership, building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership, or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. HOME is the largest Federal block grant to State and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. Each year the State of NC determines how best use these funds.)</b></li> </ul>	<p>City; City partnerships with County and other agencies</p>	<p>FY 2007 and later</p>	<p>New major City initiatives: \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more per year for down payment assistance</p> <p>Expand efforts with NC Housing Finance Agency for increased funding for home ownership</p>
<p><b>2. Recommend that the City Council consider <u>Housing Bonds</u> for affordable home ownership 2<sup>nd</sup> mortgages. Receipt of these funds would require income limits, pre and post counseling, standard houses throughout the community that fully met codes and addressed all Home Inspection Report needs, and the family had the ability to repay loan. When and if the program is self-perpetuating also consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Provide deferred loans for elderly and low income to repair homes</li> <li>4 Provide incentives (grants or “0” interest loans and down payment assistance to encourage families to move to targeted areas</li> <li>4 Provide 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> mortgages in targeted areas</li> </ul>	<p>City</p>	<p>FY 2007 (evaluate potential)</p>	<p>New major program: \$5M Bond Issue</p>
<p><b>3. Recommend that City Council consider additional CD staff to administer expanded programs and/or use existing staff as effectively as possible.</b></p>	<p>City</p>	<p>FY 2007 &amp; beyond</p>	<p>Program expansion staff Cost TBD</p>

**B. INCREASE SUPPLY OF DECENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<b><u>B-II. Address decent and affordable housing supply needs:</u></b>			
<p>1. Recommend that the City Council expand the City’s community development housing programs to encourage and welcome more affordable housing through additional partnerships with CDCs and the private sector, establishment of a local bank consortium for mortgages, and aggressively expanding available programs and seeking new funding sources and related partnerships. In addition, it is recommended that City Council consider additional CD staff to administer expanded programs.</p>	<p>1. City, partnerships and State/Federal funds</p>	<p>FY 2007 and beyond</p>	<p>TBD</p>
<p>2. Recommend that the City Council consider using the new State Law initiative under Amendment One (Tax Increment Financing) in order to pursue redevelopment of specific target areas within the community that could also include affordable housing. (Mixed use developments consisting of business, office and residential uses would probable be more economically feasible.)</p>	<p>2. City and private development</p>	<p>FY 2008 and later</p>	<p>TBD</p>
<p>3. Recommend that the City Council stress the need for additional flexibility in Historic District repair and material standards to encourage more renovations within the inner City Historic District areas.</p>	<p>3. City and Historic Properties Commission</p>	<p>Following endorsement of plan</p>	<p>NA</p>
<b><u>B-III. Develop good paying jobs in order for persons to afford decent housing:</u></b>			
<p>1. Recommend that the community continue to insure that its training and education is available at high school and beyond to assist the work force for the targeted and existing industries</p>	<p>1. WEDC, Wilson Community College, OIC, School System, Barton College, Chamber, County and City</p>	<p>Following endorsement of plan</p>	<p>TBD</p>
<p>2. Recommend that the Wilson Economic Development Council (WEDC) be supported in its efforts to fulfill its strategic marketing plan and “attract, retain and facilitate the expansion of high quality business/industry resulting in an increased tax base and new jobs” The Focus Group also recommends support for WEDC’s efforts to attract new investments in new and existing businesses and industries for steady income jobs.</p>	<p>2. City, County &amp; WEDC</p>	<p>Following endorsement of plan</p>	<p>TBD</p>
<p>3. The Focus Committee also encourages employers to provide some level of adequate fringe benefits</p>	<p>3. WEDC and Chamber</p>		

## HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACTION STRATEGY PLAN

### C. OTHER

<b>C-I. Involve Law Enforcement to decrease high volume of drug activity in low income neighborhoods</b>	<b>Strategies:</b> 1. Remove drug peddlers out of homes and apartment units where they reside 2. Hold landlords accountable for drug pushers staying in their properties if they have been told by neighbors that drug dealers live there
<b>C-II. Improve Street Lighting</b>  <b>Concerns or limitations:</b> a. General spacing rule: 400' between lights (Exceptions: trees blocking lights) b. Major streets normally have higher wattage lights than minor streets c. Unbreakable lights unavailable d. City's 3,523 lights already cost \$350,000/year	<b>Strategies:</b> More well lighted streets
<b>C-III. Encourage pride in neighborhoods and live in harmony with each other</b>	<b>Strategies:</b> 1. Encourage City Council members to demonstrate interest in districts they represent 2. Establish Forum for youth to promote involvement 3. Establish a <u>Neighborhood Advisory Council</u> to represent citizens and help neighborhoods 4. Create opportunities for neighborhood involvement and help neighbors help neighbors 5. City be responsible for frequent pick-up/clean-up in all areas of the City. Competition could be sponsored encouraged among neighborhoods (ex. yard of the month with rewards)

### C. OTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<b><u>C-I. Involve Law Enforcement to decrease high volume of drug activity in low income neighborhoods</u></b>  <b>1. Recommend that the Police Department continue drug dealer round-up programs, search warrants and drug “buy set-ups”, and continue aggressively attacking drug problems in community, including gang related problems and graffiti.</b>  <b>2. Recommend that the Police Department expand its partnership with property managers to obtain and share information and make it available.</b>  <b>3. Recommend that the Police Department initiate opportunities for more community involvement with police, such as meetings at neighborhood churches for parents and children to discuss issues.</b>  <b>4. Recommend that citizens be responsible and notify police about problems, using a 24 hour hot line (such as the 399-2353-24hr. hot line) and that the Police Department also establish a hot line for reporting graffiti.</b>	1. Public Services (Police Department) Citizens  2. Police Department and Property Managers Association  3. Citizens, community organizations, and Churches Police continue to actively seek citizen involvement  4. Police post availability of services on Channel 8 and other media and continue to involve other departments	On-going  On-going  As available and requested  On-going	Current Budget  Current Budget  Current Budget  Current Budget

**C. OTHER  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<b><u>C-II. Improve Street Lighting:</u></b>			
1. <b>Recommend that citizens notify City utility services (399-2411) about dark areas or burned out lights and that the City Council establish this number or another one as a “hot line” advertised on Channel 8 and in the electric bill newsletter notes for notification of burned out lights.</b>	1. Citizens and City Public Services Utility staff	Upon complaint	TBD
2.* Recommend that the City utility services continue/expand survey of streets at night and address street light problems using a common sense approach and that the City Council stress that other City staff members from all departments while in the field should report street light problems	2. Public Services (Electric Utilities) & other City staff	Regular basis	TBD
3.* Recommend that property owners consider security lights for their multi-family complexes and encourage residents of these units to report dark areas to them.	3. Property owners rent lights	As needed and requested	\$10 to \$40/mo for owner
<b><u>C-III. Encourage pride in neighborhoods and live in harmony with each other:</u></b>			
1. <b>Recommend that the City Council appoint a <u>Neighborhood Advisory Council</u> with representatives from neighborhood organizations and various areas of community to advise them on neighborhood matters, assist neighborhoods and address neighborhood and tenant problems</b>	1. City Council and Human Relations	FY 2005-2006	Current Budget
2.* Recommend that the City Council establish a <u>Youth Council</u> and integrate youth into other organizations and boards	2. City Council and Human Relations	FY 2005-2006	Current Budget
3.* Recommend that the City Council promote and expand assistance to neighborhoods organizations through various City departments to establish/expand community watch programs and develop ways and activities to bring neighborhoods together, such as block parties, yard of the month, clean-ups, and assist neighborhood groups in establishing newsletters, such as providing printing and/or print preparation.	3. City Departments (Community Development, Police, Human Relations, Development Services, Public Services, and Print Shop); Arts Council; Chamber of Commerce; and community businesses	FY 2005-2006 Regular basis	Current Budget; sponsors and funding from partners
4. Recommend that litter laws be enforced	4. City	As needed	Current Budget
5.* Recommend that the City Council and Arts Council encourage arts be taken into the community when ever possible or appropriate as community meeting, workshops or forums are held.	5. City & Arts Council	As appropriate	Current Budget
6.* Recommend that the City Council endorse the City using Development Services, Police Departments and Human Relations to seek out or employ the services of Landscape Designers to work with neighborhood groups and <u>provide information</u> to help neighborhood areas be more safe through neighborhood efforts to provide proper plantings and upkeep of plant materials by the neighborhood	6. City, Development Services. Police and Human Relations	As available	Current Budget
7. Recommend that the City Council authorize and initiate community gardens on city owned vacant land with donations of City services and sponsorship by local businesses	7. City	As appropriate	Current Budget

## HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACTION STRATEGY PLAN

### D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE

<p><b><u>D-I. Enforcement</u></b></p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not allow the codes to be lessened in their enforcement.</li> <li>2. Do not create more codes and enforcement – current ones are adequate – no more are needed.</li> </ol> <p><b>Working Committee’s response to concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>The committee evaluated the need for additional codes based upon the benefit to the larger community and those that are best for everyone. The committee considered ‘not creating new codes’ to not be a workable option for the good of the entire community. In considering the benefit to the entire community, the health and safety of Wilson’s residents weighed as important factors.</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enforce the ordinances that are already on the books.</li> <li>2. Treat failure to comply with codes as failure to repair and keep up unit.</li> <li>3. Keep request for courtesy inspections confidential – landlord do not need to know – only if repairs are needed.</li> <li>4. Sleeping in houses that are open.</li> <li>5. Improve the standards required for building homes (<i>Insure that new buildings fully comply with State Building Codes</i>)</li> <li>6. Should enforce minimum standards on owner occupied units (Note staffing requirements and who fixes)</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>D-II. Financial Relationship</u></b></p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Requirements that the market will not support and there is no return on repair or upgrade investments.</li> <li>2. Add expense for landlord or tenant.</li> <li>3. Up rent every time there is upgrade.</li> <li>4. Don’t give City authority to impose fines or penalize a tenant for failure to meet duties. Keep this issue between the tenant and landlord.</li> <li>5. Put facilities in houses that are not affordable from an operating standpoint (Many tenants with central air and or heating can not afford the operating costs and do not use these resources).</li> </ol> <p><b>Working Committee’s response to concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>A pro-forma will provide valuable information about costs and return on investments. Also the recommended code changes do not include fines for tenants.</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balance improvements costs with return on investments</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>D-III. Better Reading and Understanding</u></b></p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <p>Write code book so people can understand it</p>
<p><b><u>D-IV. Code Improvements</u></b></p> <p><b>Concerns or limitations:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Add a lot of things for the landlord to do unless things are also added for the tenant to do.</li> <li>2. Do not relax current codes.</li> <li>3. Create more codes and enforcement - Current ones are adequate- no more needed.</li> </ol> <p><b>Working Committee’s response to concerns or limitations:</b></p> <p>The committee recommends code standards for the tenant as well as landlord (owner). The committee also evaluated the need for additional codes based upon their benefit to the larger community and those which are best for everyone. The committee did not consider ‘not creating new codes’ to be a workable option for the good of the entire community. In considering the benefit to the entire community, the health and safety of Wilson’s residents weighed as important factors.</p>	<p><b>Strategies:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide designated parking in front yard and eliminate dirt/grass parking over the entire yard.</li> <li>2. Provide smoke detectors in proper places.</li> <li>3. Consider all the suggested code changes in staff’s Power Point presentation</li> <li>4. Have premium standards to address control of insects and rodents.</li> <li>5. Treat the conditions that cause water to stand under houses</li> <li>6. Require bacterial water samples from Health Department for rental units on private water supplies</li> <li>7. Insure that heating and/or cooling facilities in rental houses are affordable to operate by providing adequate insulation of the unit and installing efficient units that operate at the lowest costs. (Currently Minimum housing does not require heating or cooling systems or insulation.)</li> <li>8. Do not allow open heaters in rental units</li> <li>9. If code violations at premises are serious, posing a danger, prohibit landlord from collecting rent until repair is made;</li> <li>10. Have code (like Charlotte) that would allow tenant to not pay rent under certain conditions and until repairs are made if after an inspection significant hazards are found.</li> <li>11. Address lead based paint poisoning problems in housing units by working with the Health Department in cases of lead poisoned children by requiring remediation of lead hazards in the housing units and not permitting electrical power to these units that are abandoned rather than remediating until remediation of the lead based paint has been accomplished as determined by the Health Department</li> </ol>

**D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>D-I. Enforcement:</u></b></p> <p><b>1. Recommend that a defined time limit (such as 48 hours) be given to occupants and/or owners (as appropriate) after being notified in writing for fixing or repairing life threatening or potentially life threatening conditions that require immediate attention (City may cut utilities in most severe conditions):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Fire hazard in chimney in use (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> <li>4 Unsafe wiring (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> <li>4 No portable water supply or operable sanitary facilities or inoperable pipes or fixtures, including broken or frozen pipes (owner)</li> <li>4 Improper or unsafe cooking or heating equipment (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> <li>4 Unsafe fuel storage tanks (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> </ul> <p><b>Also, recommend a time limit for repairing other unsafe or hazardous conditions that pose a danger to life and require attention but not necessarily immediate repair or attention (depending upon the severity or condition):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Unsafe and falling ceiling or roof (owner)</li> <li>4 Rotted, fire, or insect damaged steps, structural supports, or flooring (owners)</li> <li>4 Severe rat infestation where dwelling is not impervious to such pests or has conditions that exacerbate the infestation (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> <li>4 No safe continuous unobstructed exit from interior to exterior at grade level (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> <li>4 Any window or door lacking operable locks (owner)</li> <li>4 No operable smoke detector (occupant &amp;/or owner)</li> </ul> <p><b>Where owners fail to repair life threatening or unsafe/hazardous conditions that are their responsibility, the tenant may withhold rent until such time the repairs are made. The committee also stressed the need for flexibility in serving notices to the property owner/agent so that they are all contacted fairly and effectively with maximum effort to provide notification of identified violation(s), time limits to repair and penalties for not repairing.</b></p> <p><b>Recommend a specific time (90 days) be established for correcting other violations, with flexibility (30 days or more) based upon type of repair required, amount accomplished and number of units to be repaired.</b></p> <p><b>Also, recommend tenant be responsible for NC Statutes related to tenant and any violation be cited by code compliance officers and submitted to the property manager/owner:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Keep premises clean and safe and cause no unsafe condition</li> <li>4 Properly dispose of rubbish, garbage and other waste, including yard</li> <li>4 Keep plumbing fixtures clean</li> <li>4 Not deliberately or negligently destroy, damage or remove parts of the premises</li> <li>4 Comply with all rules imposed on the tenant by local housing code</li> <li>4 Be responsible for damage defacement or removal of any part of the premises except as due to ordinary wear and tear, natural forces or acts of third parties</li> <li>4 Notify owner in writing of the need to replace smoke detectors (tenant to replace batteries after replaced initially by owner)</li> </ul>	<p>Other NC Communities and other related resources, City Staff, and City Council (applies to all action steps)</p>	<p>September or October 2005 for code revisions that are ready for consideration</p>	<p>TBD</p>

**D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>D-I. Enforcement (Continued):</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Recommend that occupants must operate any installed heating equipment as intended in an appropriate fashion and not remove or otherwise uninstall and move to another location</li> <li>3. Recommend that the time limit for imposing fines be reduced such that when a owner fails to comply with minimum housing standards on the fourth inspection, escalating fines be imposed</li> <li>4. Recommend that a Housing Compliance Certificate be issued when a unit is in compliance with minimum housing standards and that electrical power not be released to any written-up unit until such certificate is issued.</li> <li>5. Study additional inspector needs based upon inspection, code and enforcement needs, especially given the additional standards, enforcement and other changes to the code that might be approved. As part of the evaluation process, it is recommended that the staff research other communities and prepare a comparison matrix that presents the ratio of each city’s inspectors to rental properties in comparison with Wilson’s ratio. (This research should also include comparisons that address specialized housing inspectors vs. multi-function inspections, as in Wilson.)</li> <li>6. Recommend that all owners or authorized agents be required to designate their units with Development Services for prompt identification like in Durham and that penalties are incurred if not submitted.</li> <li>7.* Recommend expectations of proper workmanship and installation characteristics, such as in Durham Housing Code, be included in the ordinance similar to the Durham code:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>“Materials used in making any repairs shall be of a quality suitable for the purpose, likeness or improvement of the original and of the kind normally used by a contractor or tradesman to accomplish a repair.”</i></li> <li>b. <i>“Such repair shall be accomplished in a manner that is in accordance with accepted standards &amp; practices of the trade with all new work done in accordance with the State Building Code”.</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>8.* Recommend code provision for landlords and tenant responsibilities (similar to provisions in the code of Durham and several other communities regarding landlords and tenant responsibilities) and use of NC Real-estate Commission example of lease by property owners.             <p><i>For example, in the Durham Code specific &amp; detailed responsibilities are spelled out for occupants &amp; owners, including tenant responsibilities that include sanitation, extermination of insects, disposal of garbage, required operation of heating system, securing of unit after completion of tenure, &amp; cleanliness of sidewalks &amp; street gutters &amp; backyards; responsibilities of owners include disallowing occupancy until unit meets code, spelling out to tenant the maximum number of occupants allowed in dwelling(*), sanitary maintenance of multi-family units (4 or more units) &amp; removal of garbage, in 2 or more unit complex require rat proofing &amp; pest extermination, not allow debris to accumulate &amp; keep high grass mowed &amp; exterior of property free of junk or debris.</i></p> <p><small>(*)must meet Fair Housing Law as “reasonable local restriction regarding maximum number of occupants permitted to occupy dwelling”</small></p> </li> </ol>			

**D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>D-II. Financial Relationship:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Recommend that a Pro-forma (income/loss statement and return on investment analysis) be prepared to show the possible cost of improvements and return on investment over time for typical units prior to final adoption of the revised code. The Pro-forma will also show any increase required in rent in order to pay for the improvements. The Pro-forma should also address cost of heat throughout the unit as well as in the required area(s) as set forth in the proposed code change requiring heat.</b></li> <li>2. Recommend that the Historic Property Commission meet with Property Managers Association and other interest to discuss flexibility in preservation guidelines, particularly energy efficiency (such as use of energy saving materials and installation methods and lead-based paint abatement used on the outside of a unit).</li> <li>3. Recommend that owners consider allowing some of their rental units be made available for purchase by renters provided that before a unit is changed from a rental to a owner-financed unit or occupant-purchased unit the unit must comply with all minimum housing standards (Also relates to Issue B-I under the Action Strategy Plan to Increase Supply of Decent Affordable Housing)</li> </ol>	<p>Financial consultant &amp; contractor</p> <p>Historic Properties Commission, City staff, City Council, Property Owners,</p> <p>Property Managers and property owners</p>	<p>September or October 2005 along with code revisions</p> <p>Upon endorsement of the plan</p> <p>Upon endorsement of plan</p>	<p>Cost of Pro-forma</p> <p>NA</p> <p>NA</p>
<p><b><u>D-III. Better Reading and Understanding:</u></b></p> <p><b>Regarding the development of the final code with the actual revised language, the committee and Housing Improvement Focus Group recommends the action step plan regarding the “rewrite codes” strategy as <i>conceptual</i> action steps. Upon City Council agreement, approval or endorsement, the exact code standards are to be prepared by staff (possible as early as September) and brought back to the Housing Improvement Focus Group and Working Committee for final review and recommendations prior to submission to the City Council for their approval. In addition if the Minimum Housing Code is changed the standards should be very clear like Charlotte’s and other NC communities, even through Wilson is not a Charlotte and that the standards should be matched to Wilson’s interests</b></p>	<p>Other NC Communities, other resources, City Staff, Housing Improvement Focus Group &amp; Working Committee and City Council</p>	<p>September or October 2005 for code revisions</p>	<p>TBD</p>

**D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>D-IV. Code Improvements:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Recommend that the City’s customer services should require tenants to turn on all available utilities, and that the responsible individual(s) signing for utility services is the same as individual(s) on the lease.</b></li> <li><b>2. Recommend specific requirements for designated and defined parking areas in the front yard (impervious material) and require provisions to also be part of any lease</b></li> <li><b>3. Recommend general code changes to the dwelling and grounds that include:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. minimum amperage be set at 100 amps</li> <li>b. insure there are no water leaks in habitable basements</li> <li>c. insure that crawl spaces underneath a unit are clear of debris and standing water</li> <li>d. lot graded such that water drains away from the foundation</li> <li>e. loose water closets are not permitted</li> <li>f. Although concern was voiced about requiring interconnected wired smoke detectors due to cost, generally the current City policy of only requiring interconnected smoke detectors with unit in central locations and all bedrooms if no smoke detector existed in the unit being inspected is acceptable.</li> <li>f. Where there is an attic provide minimum attic access and attic ventilation</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>4.* Use Durham’s standards for lead based paint poisoning problems: <i>The Durham code sets forth that the Health Department is responsible for investigating cases of lead poisoning involving children less than 6 years old. Where poisoning is found, Health Department notifies City and City shall initiate action to require abatement of hazard or vacating of the unit. Failure to comply may result in condemnation &amp; demolition.</i> Also, provide information about lead based paint poisoning and how to address problems in informational video as part of Goal A-III (See Tenant Landlord Accountability Strategies)</b></li> <li><b>5.*Recommend code requirements that state the property manager must include in their lease agreement a pre-rental checklist at the time of agreeing to the lease and that this tenant/landlord pre-rental checklist sheet is be completed by the tenant and landlord upon entering into a lease agreement to insure that the tenant has documented all problems in conjunction with the landlord. In addition, recommend that the City Customer Services provide a pre-rental checklist for the occupant’s use at the time of a request for utility services</b></li> </ol>	<p>1. City of Wilson Customer Services and Utilities</p> <p>2. City</p> <p>3-9. Other NC Communities, City Staff, Housing Improvement Focus Group (Working Committee) and City Council (applies to all action steps)</p>	<p>FY 2006</p> <p>September or October 2005 for code revisions</p> <p>Same</p>	<p>TBD</p> <p>TBD</p> <p>TBD</p>

**D. REWRITE CODES TO BETTER SERVE EVERYONE  
RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS (Continued)**

Recommended Action Steps	Potential Resources	Possible Schedule	Costs
<p><b><u>D-IV. Code Improvements (Continued):</u></b></p> <p>6.* Recommend that primary heating equipment (vented gas wall unit, electric type base board unit, fireplace insert, or space vented heater) be provided (preferably in central location) capable of heating at least 1 room in a unit 1,000 SF or less in size to 68 degrees F 3' above the floor during ordinary winter conditions, and for each additional 1000 SF or portion thereof additional heating equipment be provide capable of also heating accordingly at least one additional room. Also, require that the tenant must appropriately operate facilities to prevent freezing of pipes. Recommend that a fireplace used for an open fire be considered only as a secondary hearing facility. In order to maintain energy efficiency with heating units recommend that attic insulation rated at R-19 be installed in all attic space or above the top ceiling, and if attic space is unavailable or installation is infeasible that other type insulation be provided in exterior walls or under the floor areas.</p> <p>7. Require painting similar to the language as set forth in Durham Ordinance: <i>In the Durham code painting is required such that all exterior surfaces not inherently resistant to deterioration shall be treated with a protective coating with sufficient frequency to prevent deterioration with all surfaces free of flaking, loose or deteriorated materials prior to painting; all interior wall surfaces shall be free of loose of peeling covering &amp; if so require removal and painting to produce a smooth sanitary surface with paint that is free of lead pigment</i></p> <p>8. Recommend that minimum standards be developed for existing mobile homes, like Raleigh's code.</p> <p>9. Place a time limit on the use or display of temporary seasonal lighting on housing units.</p>			

## Housing Improvement Focus Group

### Active Participants and Contact List for Housing Improvement Focus Group

Darren Skinner	Penny Womble	Martha Brooks
Ruby Ottimo	Cynthia Best	Joyce Morgan
Mary Lucas	Myrtle Bryan	Dale Breedlove*1
Johnnie May Williams	Richard Smith	John Benson
Scott Benson	Nathan Hawkins	Mark Gordon
Carolyn* & Leroy Harris	Carolyn Brewer	Janet Underwood
Michael Barnes	YoLanda Davis	Sylvia Coleman
Barbara Blackston	Deanie Dawson	John Keller*
Bobby Jenkins	Doris Jones*	Willie Williams
Lloyd Holman	Sheila Simms	Rodney Denton*
Evangeline Velma McNeil*	Oglatha Woodard*	Evangeline McNeil*
Shirley Parker*	Lillie Cooper*2	David Boyette
Sarah Williams	Mike McAllister	Rodney Creech
Rodney Denton*	Charlotte Turner*	Roderick Taylor
Dr. Norval C. Kneten	Morgan Dickerman	Georgia Boulo
Bill Blackman (City Council)		

\* Members of the Working Committee

1. Focus Group Chairperson
2. Focus Group Vice Chairperson

### Background Information on Focus Group

Known as the *Housing Improvement Focus Group* and sponsored by the City of Wilson Department of Development Services, participants included a variety of citizens from varied backgrounds and expertise. For example, participants or those on the contact list were representative of property managers and owners, renters, attorneys, retirees, realtors, home owners, professionals, administrators, community organizations, and educators. A City Council member also attended. Attendance varied over the duration of the project from December 2004 to June 2005, but many participants attended on a regular basis. Citizens or representatives of various organizations were continually invited to attend and included on the **Focus Group Contact List** for distribution of the newsletter. Copies of newsletters highlighting accomplishments during the meetings were sent to the all the participants, contact list, City Council and others.

After the focus group developed general strategies and limitations or concerns under the various housing themes, a Working Committee composed of property managers/owners and citizens met over the course of three months to develop specific action steps for the general strategies. The action steps were recommended to the full Housing Improvement Focus Group and subsequently approved by the Focus Group.

### City Staff Participants in the Housing Improvement Focus Group

Tim Holloman, Director of Development Services	Kevin Medeiros, Code Compliance Specialist	Anthony Brown, Housing Inspector]	Kevin O'Brien, Plans Examiner
Charles Taylor, Code Enforcement Official	Jim Bradshaw, Project Planner	Robert Ortiz, Human Relations Officer	Charles Pittman, Deputy City Manager
Harry Tyson, Police Chief	Lanette Pridgen, CD staff member	Veronica Creech, Human Relations Director	

**Facilitators:** Jim Bradshaw and Dennis Patton (Region I. Planning Director)

**Photography:** Kevin Medeiros and Anthony Brown



# Housing Improvement Focus Group

## Housing Improvement Focus Group



City of Wilson  
Development Services Department  
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