



Chapter 1 Introduction

Highland Heights commissioned the 2012 Comprehensive Plan update 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.

This update replaces the 2006 City of Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan although many polices from the 2006 Plan are retained.

Plan recommendations are linked to priority planning issues as defined by a resident-based Steering Committee.

The remainder of this chapter summarizes how this Comprehensive Plan was created.

Previous Plans

The original Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1995. Updates were prepared in 2000 and 2006.

These plans were created based on KRS 100.183 requirements. All 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 2012 Comprehensive Plan Update fulfills this requirement.

Plan Differences

Differences exist between the 2006 and 2012 Comprehensive Plans. The 2012 Comprehensive Plan is 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.

Mixed-use development is emphasized beyond the 2006 Plan in recognition of Highland Heights' potential for achieving high-quality, sustainable development.

The 2006 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 were modified to better reflect current development opportunities and community needs.

The 2012 Plan offers for the first time a detailed Action Plan (see Chapter 5) to guide City led implementation efforts.

Planning Participants

Steering Committee

City Council asked for volunteers to serve on a Steering Committee during a televised public

meeting. A similar advertisement was published in a local newspaper.

All individuals that responded to Council's request were granted a position on the Steering Committee.

Interviews

Over 15 professionals from more than ten organizations were consulted to gain a better understanding of Highland Heights' unique development opportunities and to ensure Plan policies were deemed viable by subject matter experts. Organizations consulted include:

- Campbell County Economic Progress Authority
- Campbell County Planning and Zoning
- Developers
- Kentucky Transportation Cabinet
- Neighborhood Foundations
- Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission
- Northern Kentucky Tri-County Economic Development Corporation (TRI-ED)
- Northern Kentucky University (NKU)
- Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- South Bank Partners
- Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky
- Taft Law

Additional Public Input

Residents were invited to review and comment on draft Comprehensive Plan policy during an informal open house meeting held on March 9, 2012.



Summary information boards were displayed for each Comprehensive Plan chapter.



Participants viewed draft Comprehensive Plan materials at their leisure. The City Planner and Steering Committee members were in attendance to listen, record public comments and answer questions.

Planning Commission held a public hearing on March 12, 2013 to gain public input prior to the Plan's adoption.

A public hearing notice was advertised in the Cincinnati Enquirer and the Campbell County Recorder. Neighboring communities and the Campbell County Fiscal Court received email notification of the public hearing.

Draft Comprehensive Plan chapters were available on-line before the Plan was adopted.

Policy and Organization

Policy Formation

Comprehensive Plan policy was developed, refined and ultimately agreed upon by the Steering Committee. Six Steering Committee meetings were held over a one year period.

Consensus building exercises were used to generate ideas and select preferred courses of action during Steering Committee meetings. The resulting policies included in this Plan represent a broad-based consensus and cover

a range of topics including land use, transportation and redevelopment.

Plan Organization

The main body of the Comprehensive Plan is organized around three policy chapters being Chapter 2 Land Use, Chapter 3 Transportation and Chapter 4 Redevelopment.

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 efforts.

Policy Precedent

Policy found in Chapter 2 Land Use and Chapter 3 Transportation is generally broad and is applicable city-wide. Policy in Chapter 4 Redevelopment is generally specific and is applicable only to one of three redevelopment districts – Town Center, Gateway East and Gateway West.

The more specific policy established in Chapter 4 builds upon the general policy set in Chapters 2 and 3.

In this sense, Chapter 4, being more specific, takes precedent. Planning Commission and zoning applicants must consider the Comprehensive Plan in its entirety, especially Chapter 4, when determining project and zoning application compliance.

For example, land planned as “Commercial / Business” on Map LU3 Future Land Use in Chapter 2 accommodates a wide range of commercial uses including fast food restaurants and large retail establishments.



Planned “Commercial/Business” uses are more narrowly defined in Chapter 4 Redevelopment. Fast food restaurants and large retail establishments are not desired in Gateway East and West even though both redevelopment districts have areas planned as “Commercial /Business”.

Plan Themes

Five main planning themes emerged during the planning process. These themes transcend all plan goals and are universal in their importance. In this sense, themes help to explain the broader vision established for Highland Heights.

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. Work with NKU on issues of mutual importance as a strategy to improve the status and attractiveness of both parties.

Planning Issue 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

Remaining 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 strategies to achieve long-term vision and goals. See Chapter 5 Action Plan for details.

Planning Issues

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. Planning Issues defined by the Steering Committee follow:

Diversify our Economy

- Need more family-owned small 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

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

Preserve Hillside

- 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 our community image.
- Make Gateway East look like Villa Hills.
- Apply Bardstown Road environment found in Louisville to US 27 in Gateway East.

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 Garden Center as residential, park and trails.
- Seek higher price units targeting 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.

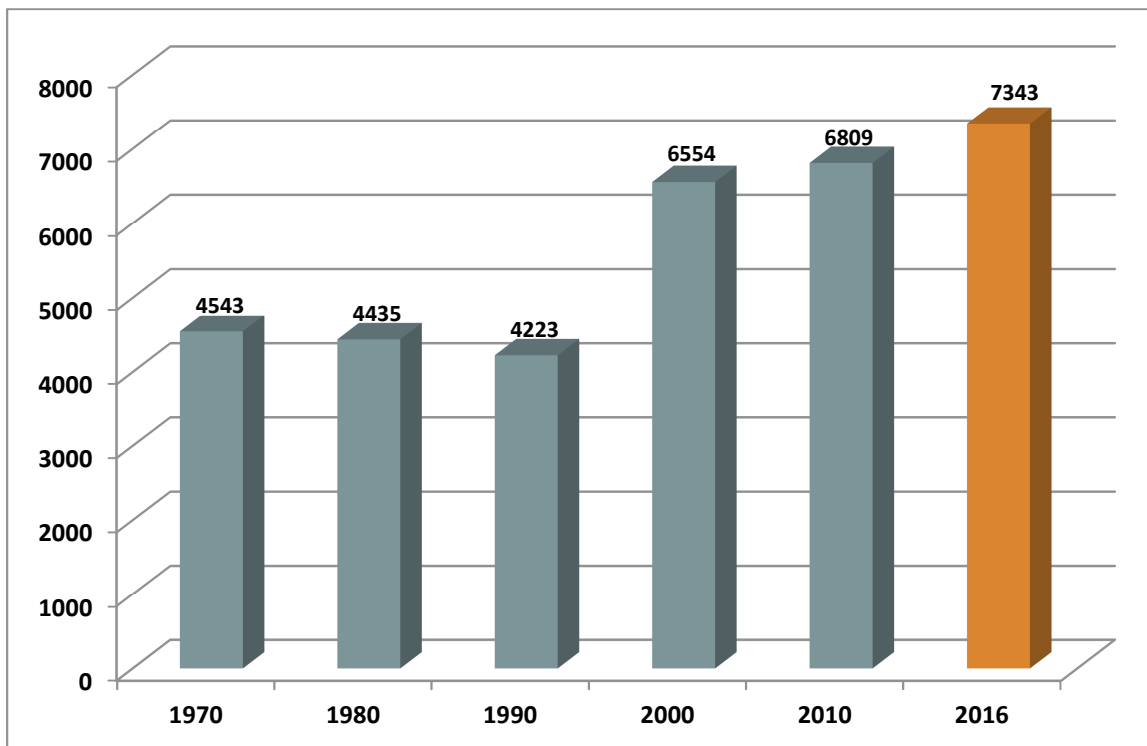
It was determined working with the US Census Bureau that some NKU students living on-campus may have been mistakenly counted as Highland Heights' residents during the 2000 US Census. NKU was annexed into Highland Heights in 2008.

This explanation may also account 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 more than reported as a result.

Table IN1 provides Highland Heights' historical population from 1970 to 2010. According to DemographicsNow, Highland Heights' population is estimated to grow to 7,343 persons by 2016 representing a gain of 534 additional people since 2010.

NKU's presence with thousands of students living on- and off-campus lowers Highland Heights' 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.

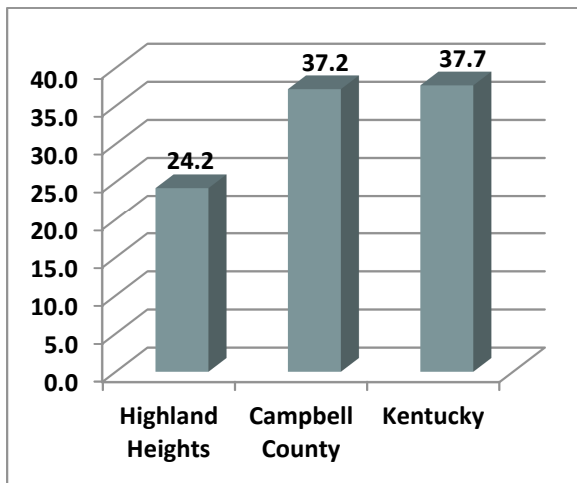
Table IN1 - Highland Heights Population



Source: 2006 Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan (1970-2000), NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) (2010) and DemographicsNow for 2016 population estimate.



Table IN2 - 2010 Median Age



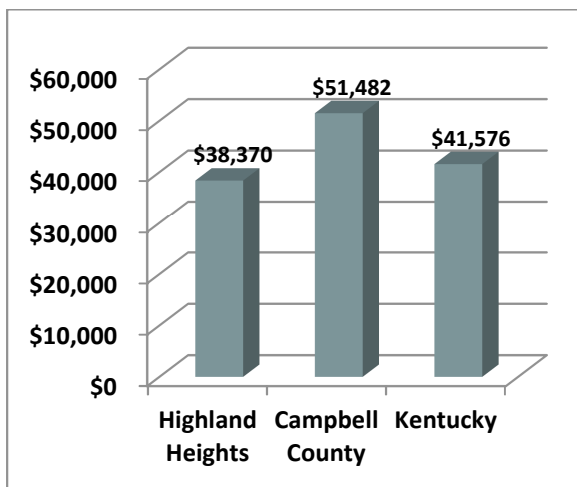
Source: NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) Demographic Look-Up

On- and off-campus student housing in Highland Heights dramatically lowers the City's 2010 median age compared to Campbell County and the State as Table IN2 shows.

Highland Heights has significantly more people established in the "18 to 21" age category as a percentage of its overall population than does Campbell County and the State of Kentucky as Table IN4 on the next page demonstrates. The same holds true for the "22 to 24" age bracket.

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

Table IN3 - 2010 Median Household Income



Source: NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) Demographic Look-Up

The City is encouraged to work with NKU to determine how the "18 to 21" population group can be best served as residents of Highland Heights. A few recommendations in this regard are made later in this Comprehensive Plan.

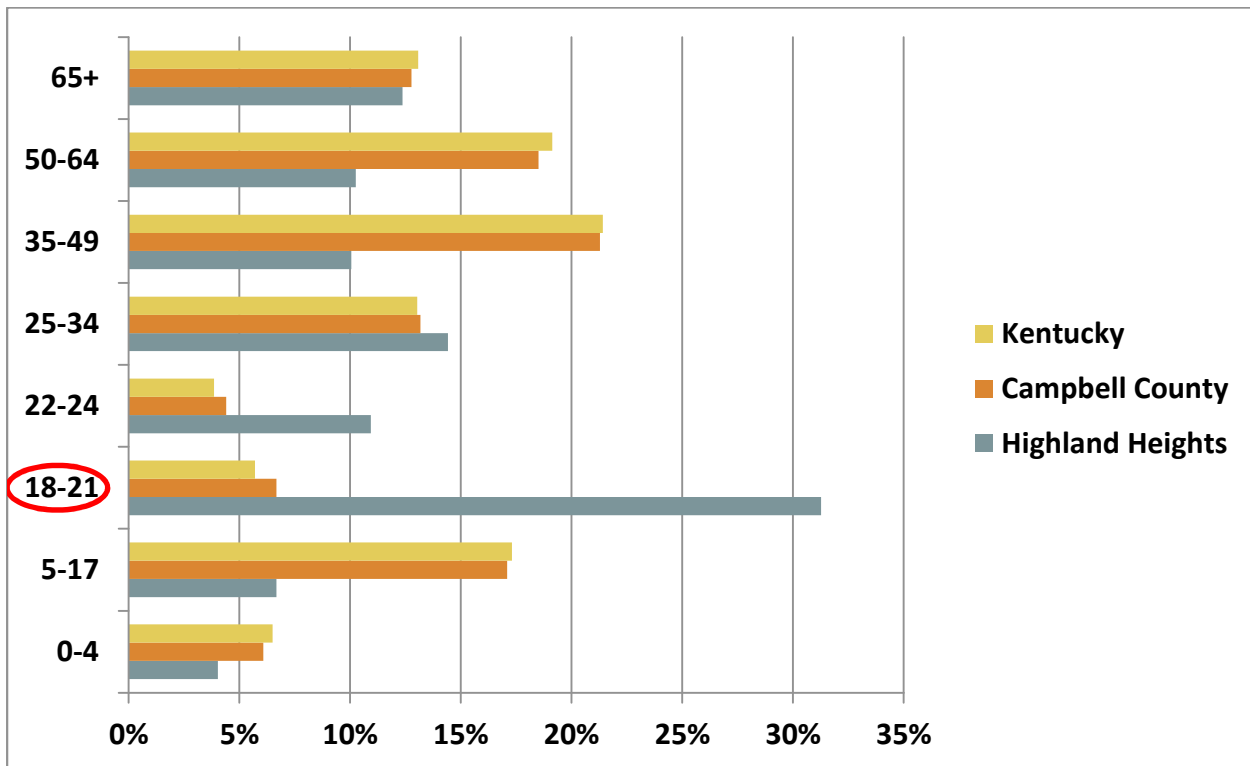
Table IN3 shows Highland Heights' 2010 median household income compared to Campbell County and Kentucky.

As demonstrated, residents at the county and state level enjoy higher median household incomes than found in the City.

This is somewhat misleading as the large concentration of young adults living in Highland Heights is lowering the City's median household income. Households collectively headed by older individuals would likely enjoy higher median household incomes than reported in Table IN3.



Table IN4 – 2010 Highland Heights Age Breakdown



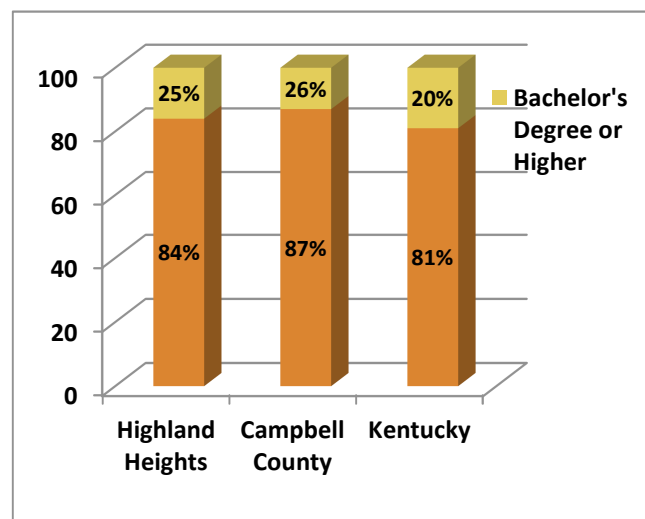
Source: NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) Demographic Look-Up

Educational attainment of City residents is comparable with levels found at Campbell County and Kentucky.

The City is in a unique position to increase the percentage of its population that report obtaining a bachelor’s degree or higher due to NKU and its educated workforce.

Such 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 - 2010 Educational Attainment



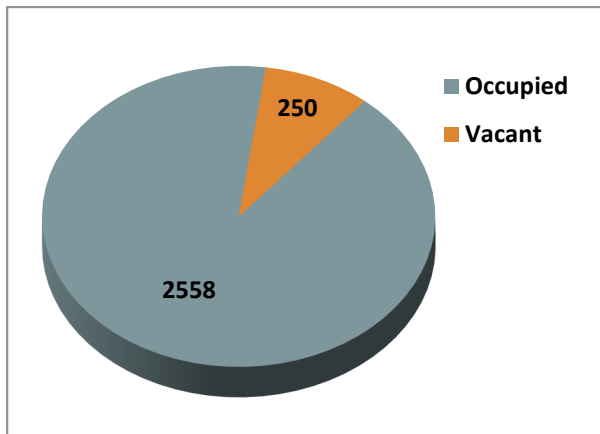
Source: NKU Center for Economic Analysis & Development (CEAD) Demographic Look-Up



Housing

According to the US Census Bureau’s 2006-2010 American Community Survey, Highland Heights has 2,558 housing units. Of those, 250 or 9.8% were vacant.

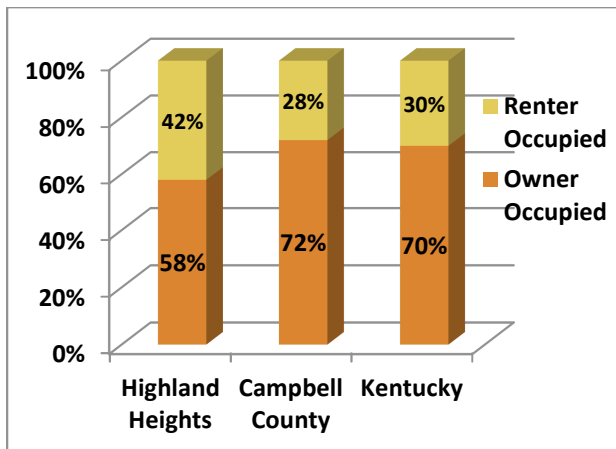
Table IN6 - 2010 Housing Occupancy



Source: US Census Bureau, 2006-2010 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 to the transient nature of young adults renting in Highland Heights to attend NKU.

Table IN7 - 2010 Housing Tenure



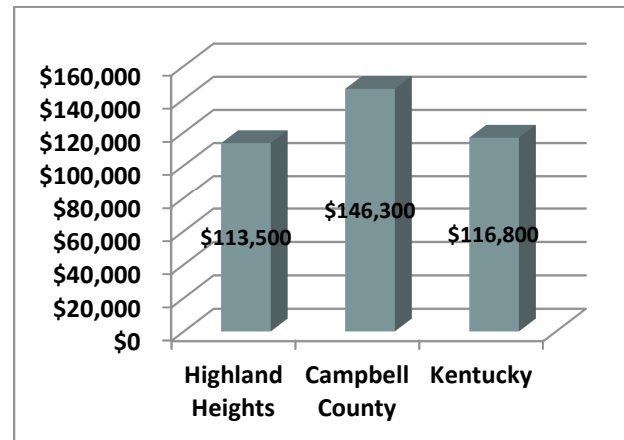
Source: US Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey, Table DP04

Table IN8 shows the 2010 median housing value in Highland Heights at \$113,500 is slightly less than Kentucky’s and close to \$33,000 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 - 2010 Median Housing Value



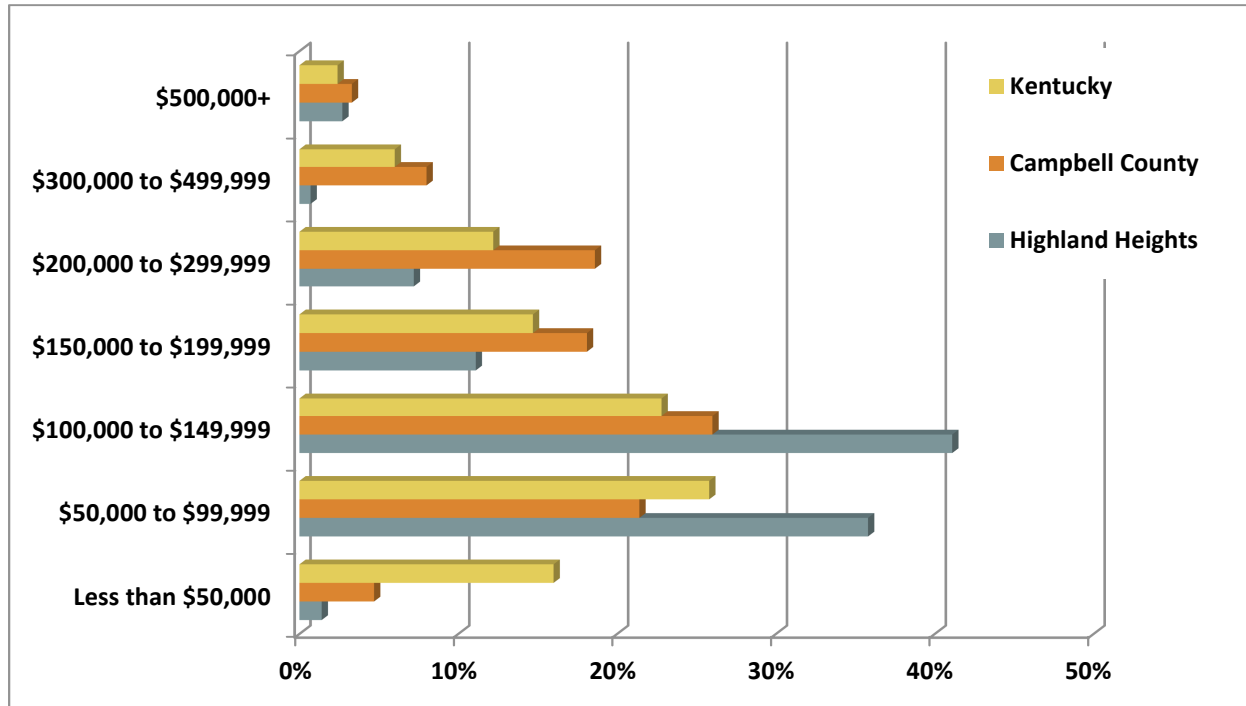
Source: US Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey, Table DP04

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 - 2010 Housing Values of Owner Occupied Housing



Source: US Census Bureau, Table DP04 2006-2010 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 address off-campus student housing issues and ensure such issues do not spread.

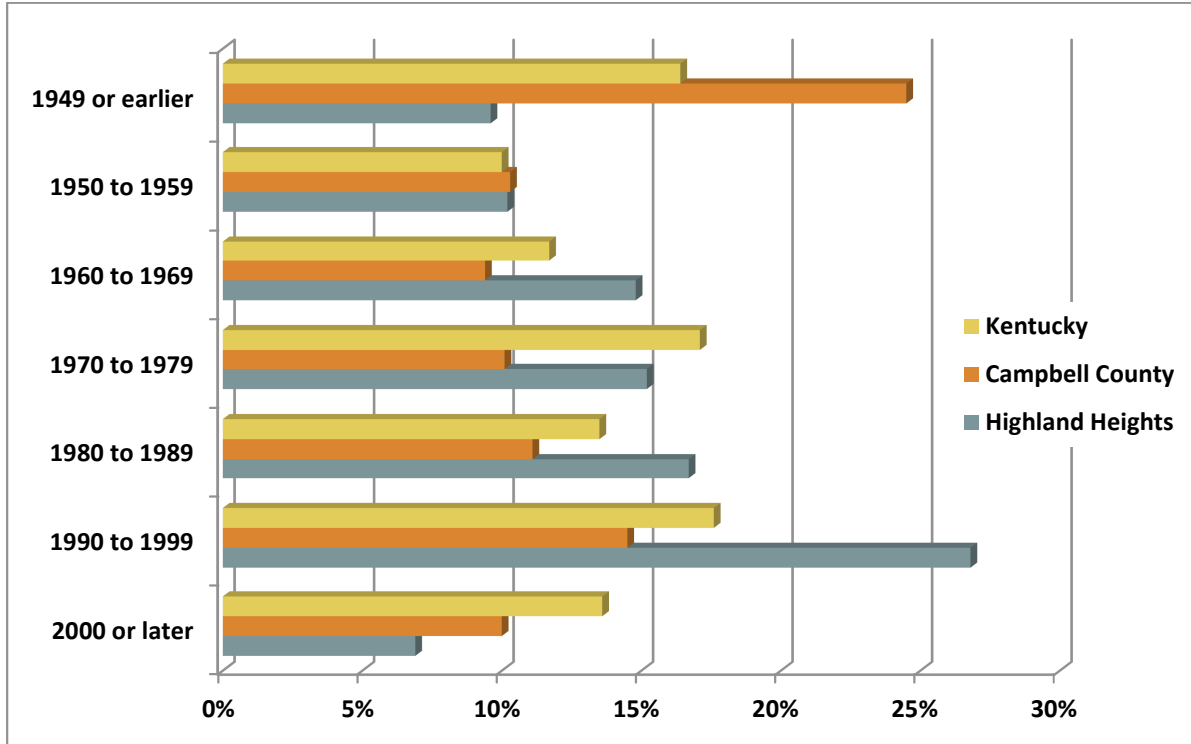
Table IN10 indicates Highland Heights has a greater percentage of housing structures built between 1980 and 1999 and fewer structure built from 2000 on than does Campbell County and Kentucky.

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, 2007-2011 American Community Survey

Table IN11 – Highland Heights Housing Permit Trends

Year	Single Family	Multi-family	Year	Single Family	Multi-family
1991	19	98	2002	2	5
1992	4	84	2003	1	5
1993	9	72	2004	3	5
1994	3	72	2005	4	0
1995	4	74	2006	3	0
1996	2	34	2007	3	0
1997	5	22	2008	3	0
1998	0	33	2009	2	0
1999	3	33	2010	4	0
2000	1	11	2011	5	0
2001	2	0			

Source: 1991-2000 - 2000 Highland Heights Comprehensive Plan, Menelaos & Associates. 2001 – 2011 - censtats.census.gov



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 over the 1990s and 2000s due to limited land availability.

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

As a result, the low number of new single-family housing starts from 1991 on 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 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.

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.

