

## **Highland Park Neighborhood Profile Summary**

The Highland Park neighborhood is a stable, attractive, and highly desirable residential section of Manchester. Easy highway access, a largely interconnected sidewalk and street system, historic properties, and publicly owned open space create a setting which combines the best aspects of small city living with access to nature and neighbors.

Development of the Highland Park area proceeded from the west near the town center to the east and south, with street car suburbs of the 1920's and 1930's giving way to larger lot suburban style development which still continues in the Birch Mountain Road area today. Over time lots and house sizes increased, but interconnecting streets, street trees and yard landscaping, sidewalks and handsome architecture remained a constant theme. A few Victorian era architectural styles are present, as are more recent contemporary styles. The variety of styles and settings creates distinctive sub-neighborhoods within Highland Park, but maintains an overall harmony throughout the neighborhood.

Traffic circulation is very convenient with three major east-west routes and several north-south routes. Porter Street is the spine of the Highland Park neighborhood north of I-384, and runs parallel to East Center Street/Middle Turnpike East, Highland Street and I-384 itself. Most of the residential streets within the Highland Park neighborhood are connected allowing dispersal of traffic. As such, traffic volumes are not concentrated but speeding, especially on Porter Street, is a neighborhood concern.

The sidewalk system throughout the neighborhood, and again in particular on Porter Street, encourages walking, jogging, biking and other activities which are accessible to large portions of the neighborhood. There is always an active street scene on Porter Street, the most active scene being the Thanksgiving Day road race.

Extensive open space holdings are a major amenity for the neighborhood and the town overall. The Oak Grove Nature Center, the Porter and Howard Reservoirs, and Case Mountain provide habitat for wildlife, source protection for drinking water supplies, and educational and recreational opportunities for residents. Smaller properties such as the land trust owned pond on Adelaide Road and Porter Street, land around the Highland Park school, and the East Cemetery add to the variety of open space in the neighborhood.

The Town Plan of Development recommendations to acquire additional land around Case Mountain, extend the Charter Oak greenway near and through the neighborhood, and develop a trail system which would interconnect the open space areas would serve to expand this amenity for the neighborhood into the future.

Although residents appreciate the recreational opportunities afforded by the large open space holdings, there was some interest in more active recreation facilities as well. In particular residents mentioned there were no ball fields or play fields convenient to the neighborhood, nor was there a public swimming pool in the neighborhood. Perhaps in future facilities planning the park and recreation department can examine the need and possibilities for developing such facilities inside the Highland Park neighborhood.

The conditions of both public infrastructure and private property are very good in the Highland Park neighborhood. There are only some isolated residential properties exhibiting signs of disrepair. The great majority of the properties are very well maintained and in very good condition.

The same is true for highway and road surfaces throughout the neighborhood. Sidewalks, where they exist, are generally in good condition, although there are certain streets such as Ludlow and Mountain Road where sidewalk replacement is warranted. The larger issue for the town is building sidewalks where they do not exist, especially in locations which would create the main pedestrian linkages for the neighborhood and would be located on major streets. Completing the sidewalk system on both sides of Porter Street, and adding sidewalks on Autumn Street, Wyllys Street and East Center Street to the Green are important projects. There are also opportunities on certain streets such as Finley Street, Oak Grove Street, Camp Meeting Road, and New Bolton Road to provide pedestrian ways such as stone dust trails or bituminous paths to provide pedestrian connections in keeping with the more rural settings of these areas.

Residents in the Highland Park neighborhood are obviously proud of their individual properties, and take pride in the fact that their neighbors maintain their properties as well. Residents find their neighborhoods to be safe and secure and their neighbors to be friendly. There is some desire for more neighborhood activities, both formal and informal. In particular, because of the high percentage of two income households, many of the sub-neighborhoods are fairly deserted during the work day and during the school year. Those residents at home during the day occasionally feel isolated. There were a number of recommendations regarding neighborhood and community activities to help deal with this aspect of residential living in Highland Park.

The resident population in Highland Park is predominantly white based on the 1990 census, with the major age groups being the middle-aged and young elderly populations, which are found in higher proportions in this neighborhood than in the town as a whole. Likewise incomes in the neighborhood are higher than the town as a whole with larger percentages of households earning more than \$75,000 compared to the town as a whole. Consistent with the age and income characteristics, the housing values in the Highland Park neighborhood and sale prices tend to be higher than those of townwide averages.

The housing market in the neighborhood has been stable over the years and, although house values have fallen consistent with the overall real estate conditions in the Hartford market area, the pace of sales has been relatively steady over the past five years. This gradual turnover of single family homes to younger households, many in the move up or second home market, brings property improvements to the newly acquired properties and adds to the neighborhood's diversity but not at a pace which results in a rapid transition throughout the area. The one exception is the Birch Mountain Road area south of I-384 which began large scale residential development in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In this area the population is more homogenous in terms of age and income, which is typical in new housing developments.

The Highland Park elementary school is an important aspect of neighborhood life and a point of pride for neighborhood residents. Highland Park school has opened its doors to a variety of

neighborhood oriented functions including scout groups, town supervised recreation programs in the evening, and many other activities available to families in the neighborhood and enrolled in Highland Park school. The school grounds are in generally good repair, although residents would like improvements to the conditions of the playfields to the rear of the property and the western edge of the property. There is also a flooding problem on the eastern side of the property which should be investigated and addressed.

The school's relationship to the Oak Grove Nature Center and the Porter Reservoir off of Ferguson Road, and the fact that there is vacant land near the school, indicate that the school could take advantage of the environmental education possibilities as well as connect to these other nearby open space holdings via trails or paths.

As housing in the neighborhood continues to develop and as more families with children buy existing residential properties, the population in Highland Park school will continue to grow. Improvements to the physical plant as well as possible expansion must be studied as part of the Board of Education's future facilities planning.

The land use pattern of single family detached development interspersed with large open space holdings is expected to continue until the neighborhood is built up. The only exception to this residential pattern is the possibility of building either deed restricted single family or assisted living elderly housing. There are some parcels interspersed throughout the neighborhood that could accommodate this type of residential development which, although it may take a different form and density than single family detached, could easily blend into the neighborhood and take advantages of the convenience to highways, shopping and services.

In the near future we can expect to see additional residential development on subdivisions which have been approved but not yet built, especially toward the Middle Turnpike East side of the neighborhood and the Birch Mountain area. This development, and hopefully the acquisition of additional open space, will maintain the basic character of the Highland Park neighborhood, allowing it to maintain its unique characteristics and to meet the goals and visions espoused by neighborhood residents.