

Holmes-Foster

Holmes-Foster is an historic neighborhood to the south and east of the Penn State Campus and Downtown. The neighborhood is a vision of high-quality architecture, tree-lined streets, and the prosperity of the 1910s and 1920s. The predominance of large, mature trees throughout the neighborhood contribute to the neighborhood's character and demonstrate the Borough's early commitment to the planting of shade trees. The neighborhood is bounded by Railroad Avenue to the north, Westerly Parkway to the south, Buckhout Street to the west and Atherton Street to the east. Railroad Avenue is named as such because it is the historic route of the Bellefonte Central Railroad's freight service.

The neighborhood is among the oldest of the Borough's neighborhoods and a substantial portion of the neighborhood is within the Highlands-Holmes Foster registered National Historic District. Annexations of land that make up the area

of the Holmes-Foster neighborhood took place from about 1917 to 1954. This land was then subdivided as the Foster Brothers, Holmes and Foster, Fairview Heights and Oak Park Plots.

As the college became more successful, and prosperity in the community grew, the neighborhood formed. Neighborhood growth began as a series of modest Victorian homes near downtown and led to much larger, architecturally detailed housing made with brick and stone from local materials. Much of the historic housing was built between 1896 and 1941 and the beginning of World War II. One house in the neighborhood dates back to the last half of the 19th Century. In 1920 and 1921, the State College Chamber of Commerce determined that there was a large number of families living in student rooming houses and, therefore, a number of houses were quickly built along Gill Street by an organization that was formed to sell the houses without profit.

College Avenue boasted many prominent buildings, including the only remaining fraternity in the western part of the Borough and an apartment building that was at one time the first hospital in State College. The section of the neighborhood north of College Avenue has come to be known as the West End in recent years and has become a very popular area for student rental housing close to campus in converted single-family homes.

Holmes-Foster is represented by a neighborhood association, which is active in representing the interests of the neighborhood's residents and in organizing several events each year, including an annual block party and a "Welcome Walk." Residents invite their neighbors and student residents to these events as a way to get to know each other and promote positive relations among neighbors.



Neighborhood Characteristics

The population of Holmes-Foster according to the 2010 Census was 1,597. This represents 3.8% of the total population of the Borough and a **X% increase in the neighborhood's population since 1990.**

The age of Holmes-Foster residents is well-balanced, with each significant age group making up roughly an equal part of the neighborhood's population. However, the largest percentage of residents are within the resumed college student age group of 18-24 with 38.2% of residents. Within 16.8% of the neighborhood's housing units reside families with children.

Of the neighborhood's 713 Occupied Housing Units, 41.8% are owner-occupied and 58.2% are renter-occupied. According to the Borough's Registered Student Home list in December of 2013, there were **XX single-family homes or duplexes with student home permits** in the neighborhood.



This represents roughly **XX% of the occupied housing units in the neighborhood.**

Land use has been and is still predominantly residential with a mix of renter and owner-occupied housing units. Some small offices, commercial establishments and churches are located along College and Beaver Avenues. Immediately outside of the Borough boundary along College Avenue, uses change to commercial uses such as gas stations, printing shops and other offices and storage facilities. The southern part of the neighborhood overlooks the State High north building and Community Field. The western part of the neighborhood transitions to a mix of multi-family housing, the Corl Street Elementary and the Borough's service facility.

Holmes-Foster by the Numbers

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|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Population (2010) | 1,597 |
| % of Borough | 3.8% |
| Age of Residents (2010) | |
| Under 18 | 14.3% |
| 18-24 | 38.2% |
| 25-34 | 10.2% |
| 35-44 | 9.7% |
| 45-64 | 17.4% |
| 65 & up | 10.1% |
| Occupied Housing Units (2010) | |
| Owner-Occupied | 41.8% |
| Renter-Occupied | 58.2% |
| Increase in Units since 1995 | X% |
| Registered Student Homes (2013) | XX |

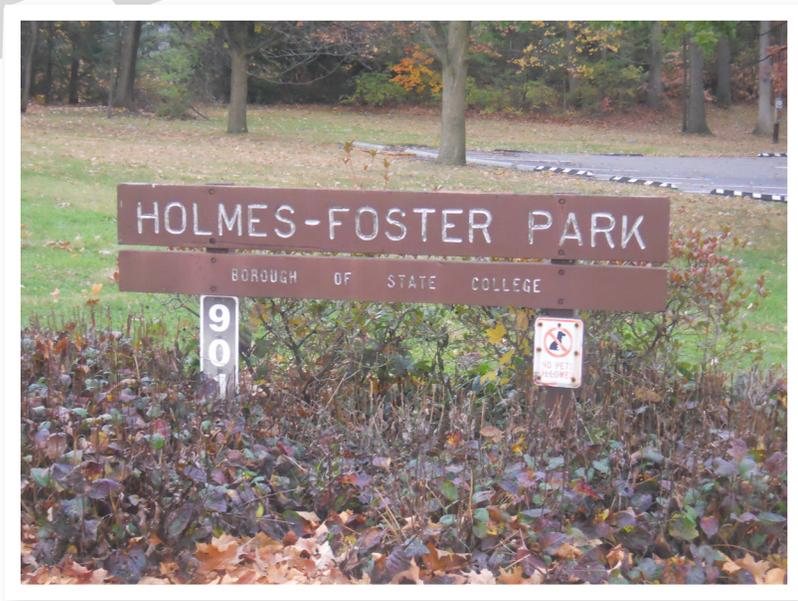
Despite a slight decrease in population over the past 20 years, occupied housing units have actually increased by 2% since 1995. (See the Land Use map on page 31 and the Housing Tenure map on page 37.)

The Centre Region Planning Agency's Growth Forecast Map for 2009-2040 indicated significant opportunities for intensification and greater mix of uses along the College and Beaver Avenue corridors. It also indicated a future opportunity for the expansion or redevelopment of the Borough's service facility near the intersections of Metz and Osmond Streets. Additionally, there were several lots throughout the neighborhood that are currently vacant that could accommodate new single-family homes. The proximity of the Holmes-Foster neighborhood to potential development areas in the downtown, on the Pennsylvania State University's West Campus, and along West College Avenue in Ferguson Township means that residents could

experience some impacts, either positive or negative, as a result of future development.

Holmes-Foster Park is an 11 acre park that virtually borders the southern edge of the neighborhood. This park includes amenities that can be used by residents, including picnic pavilions and grills, playgrounds, and basketball and bocce ball courts. A group of Penn State students worked with neighborhood residents to prepare a master plan for the park, and in 2014 the Borough will receive grant funding to implement some of the improvements in the master plan. (See the Community Facilities map on page 41.)

In keeping with its historic roots as a neighborhood with significant mature tree canopy, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources indicated just over 40% of the land area in Holmes-Foster and the West End had mature tree canopy. DCNR also indicated that there is



Neighborhood SWOT Analysis

an opportunity to increase this tree canopy in the areas of the neighborhood that are closest to downtown and campus.

Traffic and transportation have historically had significant impacts on the neighborhood. The neighborhood is bounded by Atherton Street and the College and Beaver Avenue corridor, which are major arterial streets that are managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. These roadways typically carry significant traffic volumes. In an effort to reduce through traffic and maintain quiet neighborhood streets, a pedestrian island was installed at the intersection of Foster Avenue and Atherton Street. This served to help improve pedestrian safety and reduce the number of vehicles using Foster Avenue as an alternative to College and Beaver Avenues. This device, paired with the fact that Sparks Street is the only through street traversing the neighborhood north to south has resulted in a slightly reduced traffic volume in the neighborhood. However, some streets and intersections continue to be of concern for speeding. Additionally, high volumes of traffic on College and Beaver Avenues continues to be of concern, particularly for pedestrian safety. Parking issues are minimal in the neighborhood. Many streets in Holmes-Foster have been designated as 'No Parking Anytime' zones or are restricted to 2 Hour parking or Residential Permit parking. (See the [Transportation Systems map on page 39.](#))

Accessing community amenities on foot from the neighborhood is made convenient by its proximity to downtown, campus and other attractions. Additionally, there are bike lines on Gill and Sparks Streets and Foster Avenue. These connect the neighborhood to downtown, campus, the SCASD schools and the Orchard Park bike path. Several CATA Bus routes utilize College and Beaver Avenues as a means to connect such areas as Pine Grove Mills and Cato Park to downtown and campus, which provides neighborhood residents with access if it is needed.

Strengths

Holmes-Foster residents reported many strengths in their neighborhood. The first was that there is a high aesthetic value to the neighborhood. Residents enjoy the historic roots and quality architecture in the neighborhood. Houses along alleys that are close to each other, such as the type of housing that is along College Avenue, and the fact that most of the housing is pedestrian/neighborhood scale was stated as a strength. Residents also enjoy that the neighborhood has an "arboretum" feel, with many mature trees and vegetation, views of Mount Nittany and the lack of high rise apartment buildings.

Residents also felt that the neighborhood has many amenities in or nearby that contributed to its strengths. For example, the neighborhood is close to downtown Penn State, public schools, parks groceries and pharmacies. Within the neighborhood there are private schools, daycares and religious institutions and small businesses. Residents also enjoy the neighborhood parks, green spaces, Community Field and the mature trees. Amenities within and surrounding the neighborhood are highly accessible because the neighborhood is very walkable, bikeable, the alleys are accessible and sidewalks feature ADA amenities.

Finally, residents enjoy the sense of community and spirit that they observe in their neighborhood. They enjoy living in a neighborhood with residents from a diversity of age groups and backgrounds, particularly that there are families with children. Some residents feel that there are positive relationships between them and their student neighbors and enjoy opportunities to interact with each other. They observe that it is a strength that there are many residents that have lived in the neighborhood for a long time, contributing to the sustainability and maintenance of the neighborhood.

Finally, residents feel like their neighbors help each other and they observe low crime rates and the freedom from fear.

Weaknesses

Among the major weaknesses that residents of Holmes-Foster indicated was traffic and noise, deficiencies in the Urban Village, and maintenance and behavior issues. Traffic issues include through traffic (both vehicular and pedestrians) and speeding on Sparks St. Foster Avenue and S. Atherton St. Residents feel that there aren't enough traffic control measures existing in the neighborhood, particularly during school times and on Sundays. Other neighbors find the traffic signage, particularly along Westerly Parkway to be unsightly. Residents also indicate that this traffic causes noise, as do late walkers traveling through the neighborhood at night.

Several residents expressed weaknesses in the Urban Village area of the neighborhood. These included poor sidewalk and street conditions that don't seem to be repaired as quickly or adequately as other areas of the neighborhood. Additionally, because of the quality of housing, the ambiance, and other conditions, such as the lack of a bus stop for school aged children, it is difficult to attract families to live in the Urban Village.

Property maintenance and renter behavior were frequently stated as a weakness of the neighborhood. Residents observe issues with property maintenance and neglect in some areas of the neighborhood, although they admit they can't understand why some areas are maintained at a much higher level than others. In some cases, maintenance affects public areas of the neighborhood, such as when broken glass obscures a street or alley, or snow and vegetation aren't cleared from sidewalks. Residents feel that lease pressures mean that new renters aren't always

current on local ordinances and other restrictions, which could result in poor maintenance or behavior. Finally, the neighborhood feels that party houses and the noise, litter and petty crimes associated with late night activities are a weakness.

Additional weaknesses cited by residents included a lack of knowledge regarding Borough ordinances, the Borough's methods for maintenance, such as snow clearing, sometimes being problematic for residents, and not having the appropriate mechanisms in place for getting to interact with student neighbors in a positive way. Finally, residents expressed concern that much planning work has been done for the Holmes-Foster neighborhood, but that continued planning efforts make the neighborhood feel like they must defend it from future changes.

Opportunities

One of the major opportunities identified by the neighborhood was the opportunity to make the neighborhood attractive for reinvestment as the Centre Region continues to grow outwards. This includes preserving and enhancing existing infrastructure, attracting additional amenities such as bike and pedestrian connections to campus, more green space and a coffee shop, farmers market and other community uses in the neighborhood. Additionally, careful consideration for the redevelopment of West College Avenue both in the Borough and Ferguson Township, throughout the Urban Village, the former train station and the former OWHouts site could be positive opportunities for the neighborhood.

Additional opportunities for the neighborhood include implementing amenities to help improve the functionality and aesthetics of the neighborhood. This includes slowing traffic, readdressing street lighting to be less intrusive and more pedestrian-scale, create natural buffers and barriers

to prevent trespassing between yards and developing neighborhood gateway or welcome signs.

Finally, residents observed many opportunities for improving relations both within the neighborhood and outside the neighborhood. This included opportunities for getting to know students better, including them in neighborhood projects, and changing the perception that long-term residents don't want to know students. Residents also wanted to improve connections to campus, both a physical connection and developing a working relationship with Penn State for future decision making. And finally, residents expressed interest in improving communications with the Borough and having more clarity and consistency in zoning and ordinance enforcement.

Threats

Threats that were indicated by residents included losing the amenities that currently make the neighborhood desirable and negative impacts from future development. Residents indicated that the relocation of either the Corl Street Elementary or the SCASD High School would be threats, as would losing the businesses that are currently located in the neighborhood. Aging housing stock, absentee landlords and a local historic district without the authority to prevent demolition were also indicated as threats. Some residents felt it is a threat to have the perception that all renters are students and that no families will want to live in certain areas, because high levels of investment won't take place in an area. Other threats would be anything that impacts the integrity of Community Field and high maintenance of parks and bike paths.

While well-planned development was generally thought of as an opportunity, residents also felt that development could be a threat if it doesn't take the neighborhood context into consideration. For example, the Terraced Streetscape

district and future development along West College in Ferguson Township could threaten the neighborhood scale of College Avenue. High density housing such as the development proposal for the southwest corner of College and Atherton and the Retreat could bring unintended impacts to the neighborhood. Additionally, residents felt that the uncertain future of the Urban Village due to planning stalled planning efforts is a threat.

SWOT at a Glance

- + Historic roots, quality architecture, neighborhood scale
- + Mature trees, "arboretum" feel, views of Mt. Nittany
- + Proximity to downtown, campus, SCASD schools, parks, grocery, other daily amenities
- + Neighborhood has several parks, small businesses, schools and churches
- + Walkable, bikeable, ADA accessible
- + Sense of community, positive neighbor relations, low crime rates
- Speeding, traffic, noise and late-night pedestrian traffic
- Maintenance and amenities lacking in Urban Village
- Maintenance, behavior in rental housing; renter education
- Lack of knowledge on Borough ordinances
- Much planning completed, but still planning
- Make neighborhood attractive for reinvestment
- More open space, community spaces/uses, small businesses focused on neighborhood
- Address traffic issues, pedestrian-scale street lighting
- Natural borders/buffers, and neighborhood gateway signage and other identity signs
- Improving connections among residents and into campus
- X Losing positive neighborhood & nearby amenities
- X Aging housing stock, absentee landlords
- X Local historic district with no power to prevent demolition
- X Impacts of development in Ferguson Twp & Downtown