

Making the Case for Retrofitting Unsubsidized Affordable Housing: How, When and Why Cities Preserve and Green Older Multifamily Housing

Presenter: Barbara Brown Wilson, University of Virginia (bbwilson@virginia.edu)

Authors: Barbara Brown Wilson,

Many cities are employing public transportation as a method to channel, ease, or encourage growth; but the “naturally occurring” affordable housing that previously lined these transit corridors is rapidly succumbing to redevelopment pressures. This creates unsustainable development patterns that encourage the demolition of quality housing stock, diminishes ridership on those transit lines, and leaves cities with a housing gap they have limited funds to fill. This paper will assess how local policies (whether funding incentives or regulatory policies) are facilitating the rehabilitation of “naturally occurring” affordable multi-family housing for energy efficiency, long term durability and affordability. Using a comparative case study approach, this investigation will consider the strategies adopted by three cities in very different social, economic, and environmental climates to preserve previously unsubsidized affordable housing stock in transit rich areas. Through semi-structured interviews with housing developers, housing advocates, and city officials in Chicago, Denver, and the District of Columbia, as well as content analysis of the policies themselves, when applicable, this study accesses the efficacy of various approaches and their replicability based on the challenges and successes they have had in these cities thus far.

Gentrification without displacement: lessons from six cities

Presenter: Melinda Pollack, Enterprise Community Partners

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Enterprise believes that opportunity begins when people have a safe, healthy and affordable place to call home. It grows with access to good schools, jobs, transit and healthcare. In 30 years, Enterprise and its partners have created over 320,000 homes and touched over 1 million lives. Yet, in many communities, neighborhoods of previous disinvestment are gentrifying, leading to displacement and loss of rental housing that was once inherently affordable to low and moderate income families. Enterprise and NHT have been uplifting these challenges together since 2010 when we authored Preserving Affordable Housing Near Transit. Since 2010 we have been working to document the loss of housing near transit, revise city and regional preservation policies, finance the acquisition of properties, and partner with community organizations seeking to encourage gentrification without displacement. Melinda is Vice President for Transit Oriented Development, supporting Enterprise’s work in 8 regions across the US with a focus on Denver, Colorado. Enterprise has active preservation initiatives in regions including San Francisco, Denver, Atlanta, Washington DC, Seattle and New York City. She will discuss lessons emerging from this work.

Using the LIHTC to preserve affordable rental housing near transit

Presenter: Todd Nedwick, National Housing Trust (tnedwick@nhtinc.org)

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The National Housing Trust (NHT) protects and improves existing affordable rental homes so that low income individuals and families can live in quality neighborhoods with access to opportunities. NHT is the nation's leading expert on preserving and improving existing affordable rental homes. NHT was founded 25 years ago to engage in public policy development and advocacy, informed by practice and experience. NHT has conducted multiple analyses of strategies to preserve affordable housing near transit, including a path-breaking study of 20 cities, demonstrating that two-thirds of 250,000 HUD apartments that are close to transit are in danger of losing their affordability. NHT also co-authored a research report commissioned by Enterprise describing the strategies used by housing developers and local governments to preserve affordable rental housing near transit in four metropolitan areas. This paper will discuss NHT's most recent research, on how the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program can most effectively be used to promote the preservation and development of affordable rental housing near transit. The report was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and is expected to be released shortly. Todd Nedwick is Housing and Energy Efficiency Policy Director and leads NHT's efforts to advance sustainable affordable housing through policy engagement, advocacy, and research.

Preserving access to changing places: a strategy for rental housing preservation

Presenter: Elizabeth J. Mueller, University of Texas at Austin (ejmueller@austin.utexas.edu)

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Many cities are redeveloping and reshaping existing corridors to reduce travel demand and increase transit use, thereby reducing the environmental impacts of passenger travel by fossil-fueled vehicles (Ewing et al. 2008). However, recent research links the introduction of light rail transit lines to displacement of low income renters (Pollack, Bluestone and Billingham 2010). Preventing displacement requires cities to confront the tensions between planning for environmental sustainability and for socially inclusive cities. This paper reports on the results of research being carried out under a HUD Sustainable Communities research grant focused on development of metrics that cities can use to assess the vulnerability of particular areas to redevelopment and displacement, and to identify building types and locations to prioritize for preservation. While the metrics and approach are being developed and piloted in Austin, Texas, they are meant to be useful in other fast growing cities. Austin provides a rich setting for the study of these issues. Like many sunbelt cities, the bulk of its existing multifamily housing stock was built during the apartment construction boom of the 1970s and 1980s. The city's rapid and sustained rate of growth has driven up land prices precipitously, heightening the vulnerability of existing renter buildings and neighborhoods to wholesale change. At the same time, it raises other harder to quantify issues related to the value of neighborhood setting to residents in the context of rapid change. The paper will discuss the findings of this research regarding measuring vulnerability to displacement in fast growing cities, and also for investigating the benefit of particular locations to low income residents.