

Barriers to Affordable Housing and Sustainable Solutions:
A Case Study of Saratoga Springs, New York

Lauren Bosche
Emily Durante
Margaret Patterson

Senior Capstone in Environmental Studies
Spring 2015
Professor Catherine Gibson

The Affordable Housing Crisis Today

Affordable, accessible housing is a global issue that is fundamental to a healthy population and functional economy. In the United States, roughly 330 million urban households, or one-third of the total urban population, live in substandard housing or are financially strained by housing costs (MGI, 2014). For every 100 households of renters in the United States who earn "extremely low income" (30 percent of the median or less), there are only 31 affordable apartments available, which greatly limits housing options for this population (NLIHC, 2013).

The purpose of this research is to contextualize Saratoga Springs as a case study for finding sustainable solutions to housing problems commonly faced by cities that undergo urban renewal. Using archival research, we will investigate the implications of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) block grants and other government funding sources, and the specific challenges that Saratoga Springs faces as a city tasked with balancing accessibility while managing the reputation that the city has built. Through interviewing governmental leaders, community organizations, program stakeholders, and community members, we will gain an understanding of the obstacles that affect access to and development of affordable housing programs in the Saratoga Springs region. The questions guiding our efforts include:

- 1. What are the barriers to affordable housing in Saratoga Springs, New York?*
- 2. How can the City of Saratoga Springs make affordable housing more accessible and sustainable?*
- 3. In what ways can we use other cities' affordable housing plans to formulate a mixed-method approach for Saratoga Springs?*

Affordable housing presents an opportunity to advance economies through developing cost-efficient ways to house a significant portion of the global population. Many of these new solutions adhere to the triple bottom line of sustainability by considering social, economic and

environmental needs. As the demand for affordable housing grows, Saratoga Springs must change the way it addresses its affordable housing needs.

Economic Implications

The affordable housing crisis is economically rooted in programs that were established in the New Deal Era and continued throughout the 1970s (Genovese, 1991). While two-thirds of U.S. households could afford to purchase homes during the 1950s using 25 percent of their income, only half could by 1970 and only 10 percent could by 1981; by 1991 many households needed to allocate 35 percent of their income to housing (Genovese, 1991). Since then, the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) stated that those citizens contributing 30 percent or more of their income to housing are deemed “housing burdened” (Census, 2006). Nearly 50 percent of renters are housing burdened in the United States, and that number is continuously rising. Renters have experienced deterioration of purchasing power in the market, experiencing real income declines and rising rents. Without access to affordable housing, large portions of the population do not have adequate resources and have severely limited opportunities to further their place in the economy. Lack of access to affordable housing creates a negative feedback loop that keeps low-income citizens at an economic disadvantage in their communities.

Social Implications

Millions of people in the United States—one of the world’s wealthiest countries—lack adequate housing. In 2005, Ms. Goli Ameri, a member of the U.S. delegation in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, stated that the “United States does not support the ‘right to adequate housing’ or ‘housing rights,’ because such a right does not exist” (Gomez and

Thiele, 2005). Despite this extreme position, many international human rights organizations have recognized the human right to adequate housing. Article 25 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proclaims that: “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing [and] housing” (UN, 2014). Housing rights have been recognized internationally by the U.N., the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and other organizations and have “long been regarded as essential to ensuring the well-being and dignity of humans” (Gomez and Thiele, 2005).

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights identifies seven criteria of adequate housing: legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy (Gomez and Thiele, 2005). Beyond satisfying these key criteria, the committee maintains that housing should be “seen holistically, encompassing the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity” (Gomez and Thiele, 2005).

Environmental Implications

Affordable housing and sustainable development have not historically overlapped in a significant way. Kaid Benfield, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Smart Growth Initiative, acknowledged that, “in the past, the environmental community has sometimes been criticized for not paying enough attention to the problems of the underprivileged,” while at the same time, “the housing community has been criticized for ignoring the environmental impacts of its projects” (Boehland, 2006). Housing and building infrastructure utilize 65 percent of total electricity consumption, 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, 30 percent of raw

materials, and 30 percent of all waste output globally (ULI, 2012). Given the fact that housing encompasses a substantial portion of the built environment, the importance of sustainable development must be considered as populations continue to grow and stress cities' resource and housing allocations.

The conservation and housing reform movements both came about in the late 19th century in response to industrialization (Braconi, 1996). While the conservation movement worked towards protecting the natural environment, the housing reform movement worked to develop the built environment (Braconi, 1996). In the last few centuries, the housing and environmental communities have come into more frequent contact as a result of greater environmental awareness surrounding the impact of urbanization and development. As consideration for environmental responsibility has grown in the housing sector, both have benefitted from “improved planning techniques, ecologically sounder development patterns, and advancements in housing quality and safety.” However, existing social and economic factors have exacerbated friction between the housing and environmental communities, making adequate housing even less affordable and less likely to be environmentally sustainable (Braconi, 1996).

Urbanism

In the context of widespread urban renewal, cities are facing the challenge of providing affordable housing to low-income community members. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, urban renewal, in its purest form, sought to redevelop urban areas of moderate to high-density urban land use through relocating businesses and neighborhoods, clearing slums, and pushing local governments to initiate development projects (Hebbert, 2003). Many cities post-urban

renewal link the revitalization of the downtown business center to gentrification, which pushes minorities and lower-income residents out of neighborhoods destined for enriched development. Through redevelopment, urban renewal, and the correlated rise in housing prices, the affordable housing sector has suffered (ULI, 2012).

Affordable housing creates a rift in the stable housing market. Those who can pay rent and live on the same income are measured against those who continuously need to prioritize their rent or other amenities such as food and health care. In the United States, major metropolitan areas have critically analyzed their housing demand in order to sustain long-term, affordable housing for those with incomes less than or equal to half of the median household income in each region. In most cities, urban sprawl has been the primary planning practice to accommodate growing populations. Affordable housing initiatives fall to bigger, bolder, and more expensive projects in areas structured around renewal. Thus, urban sprawl and, in essence, urban renewal, has taken over all usable land by creating a hierarchical and expensive market for all new development projects. Constructing new structures, repurposing old buildings, and creating legislation effectively governs the affordable housing crisis and the people it affects. Therefore, future affordable housing initiatives must promote sustainability, resilience, and long-term affordability to address the housing crisis from all angles and across all needed income brackets (NYC, 2014; Somerville, 2014).

A Brief History of U.S. Public Housing

Early housing acts in the United States (1937-1949) allowed the federal government to expand the Federal Housing Administration and provide authority and funds for construction of new public housing programs in major cities. These “projects” were intended for select segments

of the working class, specifically, the “submerged middle class” who were temporarily unemployed after the Great Depression (Stoloff, 2014). Since its inception, public housing has been seen as a solution for inner-city poverty as well as a basic human necessity for people in lower income brackets.

In 1965, HUD was created in the President’s Cabinet, to “create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all” (HUD, 2014). HUD provides funding for a wide array of affordable housing programs through their Community Development Block Grant Programs, Section 8 Rehabilitation and tax credits, and HOPE VI, which funds the revitalization of severely distressed public housing. Among their financial responsibilities, HUD also conducts environmental review assessments for each project to adequately meet federal, state, and local environmental standards.

Case Studies

Cities across the United States have enacted comprehensive planning efforts that address regional affordable housing issues through cost-reduction programs, tax incentives, and educational outreach campaigns. The case studies that follow are representative of a variety of approaches that are used to address housing issues today. The majority of the cities we focused on have adapted common techniques to best fit their individual needs. In light of the successes contemporary responses to housing issues, we plan to assess the potential for the implementation of a more suitable comprehensive housing approach in Saratoga Springs.

1. Rehabilitation Projects

Improvements to the existing housing stock through rehabilitation is essential for sustaining the useful life of America’s housing (Listokin and Crossney, 2006). In urban areas

where space is often constrained, renovation and redevelopment offer an opportunity for existing structures to continue serving their purpose and even expand in a more efficient way. Although renovation is widespread in the United States, its use as an approach to provide affordable housing is not as common.

Washington, D.C.

The Galen Terrace Apartments in Washington D.C. are reserved for families with incomes ranging from 0-50 percent of the median income in D.C., which was \$64,267 in 2013 (Census, 2013). Galen Terrace is an 83-unit Section 8 apartment complex in one of the lowest-income parts of the city, where there is access to nearby community resources like schools, churches, stores, public transportation, and green spaces (ULI, 2012). The full renovation began with energy audits to identify cost-effective energy improvement with a payback period of ten years or less (ULI, 2012). Residents now receive a utility allowance to pay for building utilities rather than placing those costs on the property owner each month. The renovation also included organic compound paints, primers, and sealants as well as formaldehyde-free wood cabinets, leak-proof pipes, and rain barrels to distribute water for landscaping (ULI, 2012). In addition, renters receive a green home guide and orientation program that explain green building features, operations, and maintenance. The project was funded partially by a \$50,000 grant from Enterprise Green Communities and housing assistance payments from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD also extended the Section 8 contracts for 20 years (ULI, 2012).

2. Linkage Fees

A few cities across the United States have chosen to utilize linkage fees to address affordable housing within city limits. Linkage fees are essentially government taxes on new developments, either commercial or residential, that are utilized for affordable housing developments. The state charges developers a set amount in exchange for allowing them to complete their new projects.

Boston, MA

In Massachusetts, voters are allowed to choose whether commercial developers are charged a linkage fee of up to 3 percent (Shaldijan, 2009). The City of Boston has more stringent standards than the state of Massachusetts, which have been in place for more than twenty years. Boston gives developers an option for ways to address the housing issues that new developments create. Large-scale commercial builders can choose to build workforce housing on their own, or pay a linkage fee per square-foot of development. The linkage fees are then collected by the Neighborhood Housing Trust, which decides where the money will be used. This program has created over 6,000 affordable housing units since its inception in the 1980s (Shaldijan, 2009).

Sacramento, CA

Sacramento, California implements a linkage fee program similar to the City of Boston. However, if developers choose to build their workforce housing, they only have to pay 20 percent of the total fee. The housing is not required to be affordable housing, which does not realistically address housing options for the incoming workforce. In spite of this flaw in the system for builders, the program has historically been a success. Since the linkage program

began in Sacramento in 1989, 1,200 homes have been built for low- to very low-income residents (Shaldijan, 2009).

3. Mixed Method Approaches

New York City

In 2014, the City of New York adopted the “10-Year, 5-Borough Plan” through Mayor Bill de Blasio, which outlined a comprehensive strategy that will address affordable housing options that help building owners reduce operating costs while also promoting sustainability, resiliency, and long-term affordability (NYC, 2014). The City plans to create an energy and water utility cost-reduction program that will assist property owners and tenants alike. In addition, the City will provide incentives to retrofit existing buildings to save energy and water resources, while helping building owners control operating costs and maintain affordability for tenants. The City is planning to partake in an inclusionary zoning effort that will require a portion of new housing developed to be permanently affordable for low- to moderate-income households. Furthermore, zoning reform will also lower costs and “unlock development opportunities” that currently inhibit affordable housing programs, such as size requirements that do not allow compact design in certain neighborhoods (NYC, 2014). These programs will inevitably achieve sustainability and health-related goals through bettering living conditions and decreasing energy usage for a significant population of New York City.

Somerville, MA

In 2014, the City of Somerville, Massachusetts launched their “Sustainable Neighborhoods Comprehensive Plan,” which outlines an affordable homes strategy to mitigate the region’s housing crisis. The City plans to expand its housing efforts to address affordability

across all income brackets, which includes the “100 Affordable Homes Strategy” that will rehabilitate and compete for existing properties available in the market with a goal of creating 100 new affordable rental units within the first three years of inception (Somerville, 2014). In addition, they will conduct a comprehensive zoning reform to expand their inclusionary zoning principles to increase family-sized housing in larger development projects while also spearheading development in transformational areas in the region. These new zoning policies will “create mixed-use zone districts and help reduce reliance on automobiles” while also removing barriers to green energy design (Duerksen, 2006). These policies will create incentives for developers and business owners that utilize energy conservation and production (Duerksen, 2006). Moreover, they plan on creating a Maker and Artist District that will permit local artists to live and work in the same spaces. Somerville also created tax credits for landlords who maintain rent at affordable prices.

The City of Somerville also created a ‘Sustainable Neighborhoods Working Group’, which has launched an ongoing design competition for developers to create innovative, affordable housing designs. The goals of the working group are to “protect and preserve the affordable housing already in the city, expand the City’s resources to create more, and broaden the initiative to include middle-income housing for working families, while recognizing that building more housing alone is not enough to control this systemic challenge” (Somerville, 2014). Through the new zoning policies and the working group, the City of Somerville plans to address sustainable, affordable housing through both independent proposals and governmental policy changes.

Madison, WI

The City of Madison, Wisconsin believes that affordable housing is essential for neighborhood prosperity, acknowledging, “the shortage of safe, stable, affordable housing for those who live at or below the poverty line in Madison leads to homelessness, constant mobility, stressed family life, challenges in gaining employment, low achievement rates in our schools and limited access to healthcare” (Madison, 2011). The city has recognized that encouraging economic diversity in all parts of the city is crucial for successful integration of families and individuals below the poverty line. Their sustainability plan suggests providing incentives to landlords to renovate existing affordable housing units to improve energy efficiency and eliminate toxic materials (Madison, 2011). Property owners are also encouraged to audit the units’ energy usage and implement necessary changes to dwellings based on those results. In addition, the City is encouraging the future location of affordable housing units near transit and employment hubs to promote urban and suburban use of available subsidies evenly throughout the city, rather than placing all affordable housing units in the same area. Government officials are working to extend transportation services to these areas and evaluate employment opportunities near existing and future affordable housing units.

Seattle, WA

Seattle, Washington recently completed a redevelopment of World War II housing that focuses on providing a healthy, sustainable environment for 1,700 residencies in West Seattle. Of these households, 796 are designated affordable units reserved for “households earning 30 percent to 80 percent of the area median income” (ULI, 2012). The project is divided between two organizations to complete the work: the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) is responsible for

building the affordable rental portion of the housing, the infrastructure for the site, and public amenities (library, health clinics, community gardens, neighborhood center, park space, paths and trails), while private developers are constructing and maintaining the market-rate units. The total costs of the green elements of the structures were \$1.5 million, roughly 3 percent of the total budget for the project (ULI, 2012).

In 2014, the Seattle City Council backed legislation that called for linkage fees to be paid for new residential and commercial projects. Upon discovering that Seattle was only producing new housing units for residents living at or above the median income, city councilman Mike O'Brien began to push for linkage fees as a way to address the housing and income disparity (Cohen, 2014). According to O'Brien, a linkage program is a way to not only address housing for extremely low income households, but also to tackle the housing challenges of people that fall around the median income. Therefore, Seattle's new program will attempt to mitigate housing challenges across a broader spectrum. Like its predecessors in Boston and Sacramento, the proposed plan for Seattle gives developers a choice; however, the cost of development could reach \$22 per square foot, which is a characteristic of high-cost neighborhoods (Cohen, 2014). Typically, linkage fees range from \$7-22. Additionally, this program places regions of the city in geographic income brackets. Developers will pay based on the geographic location of the development projects, which will hopefully incentivize new developments in lower income areas by offering lower linkage fees. If the City Council passes the final legislation, the program will be gradually introduced over three years.

4. Radical Solutions

In addition to traditional funding initiatives, many cities across the United States have begun supporting alternative affordable housing solutions, such as micro home communities that have evolved from “tent cities” in many urban and rural areas. These solutions consider space efficiency and sustainable building above all else as a means to house the homeless and economically marginalized.

Eugene, OR

Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon is a transitional micro-housing community built in 2013 “to create self-managed communities of low-cost tiny houses for those in need of housing” (Opportunity Village, 2014). The village was founded by 26-year-old Andrew Heben who wrote his senior thesis on “Tent City Urbanism” and later proposed the project to the Eugene City Council. Though the community is growing, it has already housed over 60 people in its first year in over 25 small wood shelters with shared bathroom facilities. The village is a “collaboration between the housed and the unhoused providing stable and safe places to be through cost-effective, human-scale approaches for transitioning the unhoused to more permanent living situations” (Opportunity Village, 2014). The village is partnered with local municipalities and relies on self-governance and community empowerment to help facilitate a transition to more permanent living solutions. Opportunity Village is now focusing its efforts on opening Emerald Village, another housing community that will focus on providing “more accessible and sustainable houses to transition to,” as the next step in housing the homeless (Opportunity Village, 2014). Through its unique approach in creating an affordable, autonomous and cooperative community, Opportunity Village “has been arguably the most successful—and

least controversial—response to homelessness in an American city in recent memory” (Perry, 2014).

Olympia, WA

Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington began as a self-governing tent camp of homeless adults in the state’s capitol. The original camp was started in 2007 in a downtown Olympia parking lot to protest a recent city ordinance that was passed that “forbade sitting or lying on a sidewalk” (Quixote, 2014). Local and state police threatened the camp, but soon after local churches offered the campers a safe space on their properties. For the following six years, the camp moved from different church parking lots every three to six months under a new ordinance that permitted their temporary stays. Soon after, Panza, a nonprofit organization, was created to support the camp and make democratic decisions on behalf of the tent population. Panza worked with the local and state government in Olympia to develop a site plan and lease the land. The nonprofit reports that the village cost \$3.05 million, including all development costs, infrastructure, materials, labor, permits and fees, and required road improvements (Quixote, 2014). There are a total of 30 144-square-foot cottages, a community building with a shared kitchen, dining area, living room, showers, laundry, office and meeting spaces, as well as a large vegetable garden encompassing 2.17 total acres. The funding for Quixote Village was partially supplied by the state Department of Commerce’s Housing Trust Fund (\$1.5 million), Community Development Block Grants (\$699,000), Thurston County funding from state document recording fees (\$170,000), and community donations (\$215,000).

Health, History, Horses: Saratoga Springs in Context

The population in the United States has doubled since the original Housing Acts were implemented. Since 2000, the population in Saratoga Springs has increased from 26,186 to an estimated 27,315 in 2013 (Census Bureau, 2013). With its small city status, Saratoga Springs is known for its tourism and affluence as a leading city in the Capital Region of Upstate New York. Even so, affordable housing persists as a social, financial, and environmental issue in the region. The average citizen in Saratoga Springs has a median income of \$5,560 per month and a median rent (or mortgage) of \$1,748 per month. Based on these demographics, the average citizen in Saratoga Springs contributes 32 percent of their income to housing and is considered housing burdened by HUD. Furthermore, households making slightly more than the median income, \$75,000, contribute 43 percent of their income to housing each year (Census, 2013). Affordable housing is lacking through all income brackets in Saratoga Springs, ranging from no-income to middle-income households.

The gap between need and availability necessitates the push for more affordable housing options in Saratoga Springs and the surrounding region. Currently, the city's HUD grants assist housing at four different locations: Jefferson Terrace, Jefferson II, Vanderbilt Terrace, and the Stonequist Apartments, all of which were constructed between 1952 and 1970. There are also 43 units located on Allen Drive, which are owned by the Saratoga Springs Affordable Housing Group. Combined, these buildings consist of 382 apartment units (SPHA, 2014). These units are managed by the Saratoga Springs Housing Authority, which is the primary recipient of federal Section 8 Rental Assistance funds. In addition to the Housing Authority locations, Shelters of Saratoga, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, owns two separate affordable housing units on Washington

Street and Grand Avenue (Shelters of Saratoga, 2014). Additionally, in 2014, HUD granted Saratoga Springs \$300,000 to distribute among the City's affordable housing and community development organizations (Saratoga Springs, 2014).

Methods

Population and Setting

Our capstone research focuses on the availability of sustainable and affordable housing, looking at the relatively small but affluent City of Saratoga Springs, New York as a point of particular interest. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, since 2000, the population in Saratoga Springs has increased from 26,186 to an estimated 27,315 in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Of the 27,315 citizens in Saratoga Springs, 92.3 percent are white (Table 1). The per capita income level in 2011 was \$36,148, while the median household income was \$63,145 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Despite the existing structures in the City, there is still a large gap between those who qualify for affordable housing and the available resources. Currently, there is a 36 in 100 housing discrepancy in Saratoga County; the Urban Institute states that for every 100 extremely low-income (ELI) renter households in Saratoga County, there are only 36 affordable and available rental units (Urban, 2014). In the United States, households earning less than \$23,450 (for four people) are considered ELI. In Saratoga Springs, there are 3,866 total ELI households but only 1,389 available and affordable rental units exist. In addition, there are 1,673 units serving ELI households with HUD funding (Urban, 2014).

Race (2010)	Percentage of Population
White alone	92.3
Black or African American alone	2.6
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2
Asian alone	2.0
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0
Hispanic or Latino	3.2

Table 1. Saratoga Springs, New York Race Profile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Data Collection

We utilized a mixed-methods approach while conducting our research, although the majority of the research was qualitative. We conducted multiple focus group with residents in Saratoga Springs who have been historically burdened by housing: senior citizens, Housing Authority residents, and those currently living in Shelters of Saratoga temporary housing. The questions for each focus group centered on the group's experience with housing, followed by the ways in which they thought Saratoga Springs could better address housing needs. In order to find the most appropriate group of interview subjects, we sent out a screener which was distributed by the employees of the Senior Center, the Stonequist Apartments, and Shelters of Saratoga. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with community influentials and "gatekeepers" in order to assess the current state of housing in Saratoga Springs from an administrative perspective. Peter McCarthy, professor of Social Work, was able to aid us in identifying community gatekeepers to further our research. These gatekeepers include Lois Celeste, Director of the Saratoga Springs Senior Center, Bradley Birge of the Saratoga Springs Planning and Economic Development Department, and Paul Feldman, Director of the Saratoga Springs

Housing Authority. Mayor Joanne Yepsen created the Affordable Housing Task Force in order to address the affordable housing needs of Saratoga Springs; we identified this task force as a stakeholder that could potentially benefit from our research findings.

Data Analysis

Once our primary research was conducted, we started the process of organizing and preparing our data for interpretation. We first read through our interview transcriptions in order to get a sense of the trending concerns of participants regarding affordable housing. These themes contribute to concise recommendations for the Planning and Economic Development Department. In order to advance the state of affordable housing and sustainability in the community, we plan to present a summary of recommendations and findings by submitting a white paper to the Affordable Housing Task Force and other interested parties such as Shelters of Saratoga, Sustainable Saratoga, and local developers.

Limitations

Saratoga Springs is strongly influenced by tourism and its accompanying seasonal employment, much of which is associated with the Saratoga Springs Race Track. As we are primarily conducting our research in late winter and early spring, we were limited by our inability to reach out to the seasonal worker population that lives in the City during the summer months. In addition, land use and space limit potential solutions to the challenges of providing sustainable and affordable housing in Saratoga Springs. Put simply, there are few options to build or repurpose older structures for affordable housing units within the City's limits. Therefore, our research must be reflective of the space constraints and may hinder our ability to provide adequate recommendations to suit the unhoused and lower-income communities. Lastly,

the uniformity of the researchers' race, class, age, and status in the community may have biased the collected data as it was gathered in focus groups and interviews.

Findings

After interviewing key stakeholders, organizations, and community members in Saratoga Springs, we found that there are significant social and economic barriers that prevent affordable housing from being built in the City. Considering that no new, large-scale structures have been built since 1970, these barriers have persisted for nearly fifty years and continuously avert new affordable housing plans, discussions, projects, and legislation surrounding the issue. We will discuss the economic, social, and resulting environmental barriers to affordable housing in the following sections.

Economic Barriers

There are a variety of economic barriers that create hurdles for implementing affordable housing in Saratoga Springs. Many of our stakeholders indicated that the availability and price of land within Saratoga Springs are two challenges that prevent projects from moving forward. Paul Feldman, Director of the Saratoga Springs Housing Authority, told us “there’s not a lot of available space to put new housing,” while Lois Celeste, Director of the Saratoga Springs Senior Center, explained: “You can't get property here. The property values in Saratoga are very expensive. To get a builder to come in and build affordable housing--you can't even touch the property. They'd have to get some serious money, subsidized into their projects to build it,” and make projects financially feasible.

The City of Saratoga Springs also has rigid design standards for all new construction projects. Bradley Birge noted that the City’s current standards for development are “relatively

high,” specifically for new construction projects. He continued, “there is a high demand that new construction is integrated into the neighborhood... pre-fab[ricated] housing won’t work with the character of neighborhoods.” Additionally, these design standards also require developers to implement “granite curbs, sidewalks, street trees, decorative lighting, planting strips, all of those types of amenities that adds to the cost of a project.” Sonny Bonacio, a private developer in the area, noted that “if you have to spend \$25,000 worth of curb lights, affordability falls to the bottom line.”

Mr. Bonacio also said “projects that incorporate the necessary design standards are impossible to finance at local banks (Adirondack Trust) unless you can prove there will be a decent market return on those apartment.” With the current standards in place for projects throughout the City, there have not been many affordable housing projects completed because they are not financially viable. The high standards set by the City for integrating new builds and renovations with existing buildings decreases the opportunity to concentrate on improving the bottom line of economic sustainability by keeping costs down and providing affordable housing.

In addition, the City of Saratoga Springs has stringent zoning restrictions that prevent developers from building taller structures. Not only does the current zoning in Saratoga Springs prevent building over 70 feet, but it also prohibits building residences in certain areas, despite the fact that some structures in those zones were once residential units. Sonny Bonacio noted that “once you get over that 70 foot barrier, you start to qualify for that affordable piece” because the fixed cost of the land, the structure and its utilities are already in place, so those additional floors of units can be affordable because there are constructed at a much lower marginal cost. The City does currently have a voluntary density bonus for developers that would allow them to build over

the allowable building height, but no one has taken advantage of it because of the other barriers at play.

Despite the fact that there is a voluntary program in the City, there is no “regulatory mechanism” that would require developers to dedicate a certain percentage of their units to affordable housing rent pricing, which would be for those households earning 50-60 percent of the area’s median income. Bradley Birge explained, “without a regulatory mechanism that says ‘you have to build affordable housing,’ the City is limited in what it can do.” In many other cities, such as those listed in our case studies, the mechanism at play comes in a variety of options. For example, the City of Seattle has a linkage fee in place where developers have the option to pay a tax for affordable housing that would go into a city-wide fund, or they could implement a portion of units in their own buildings.

The final economic barrier, which was echoed throughout all of our stakeholder interviews, is an overall lack of funding from federal and state entities. The City of Saratoga Springs receives roughly \$300,000 from HUD each year in the form of Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs). Nonprofits and organizations throughout Saratoga Springs apply to the City for a portion of this funding each year with applications that detail projects or programs they hope to implement. Each of these projects is essential for different community members, but the City does not have the resources to offer funding to each project. Therefore, they have created a matrix to assist with the distribution of funds. Cindy Phillips, the Director of Community Development for the City of Saratoga Springs, cited “this year, we received requests for \$610,000, double what we have to offer.”

Paul Feldman stated that the Housing Authority has no money for any type of programming. In fact, if he were to receive the funding he needs to maintain the Housing Authority's buildings, he "would probably have capital needs of several millions." HUD provides Feldman's buildings with "\$400,000 a year to maintain these developments," a fraction of what is necessary. Kelsey Addy, a Project Associate at Community Builders, echoed Feldman's experiences with funding as "there is a healthy competition for funding between organizations," and that it usually takes a few years to receive the funding they apply for.

Societal Barriers

In addition to the economic barriers, we found that there were a variety of societal barriers that also limit new affordable housing projects in Saratoga Springs. The first of these is the "not in my backyard" sentiment, which is a testament to the public being in support of these initiatives in theory, but not in practice; in general, people want an equitable community with affordable housing, but they don't want the public housing authority to develop the land behind their house in the name of affordable housing. Many of our focus group members talked about the fact that there is "an elitist attitude in Saratoga Springs" and because of this, many projects have been shut down. Our focus group members indicated that affordable housing has been a "priority" for every politician who runs on the ballot in Saratoga Springs, but in reality, no new projects, legislation, or changes to the city code have happened in decades.

Just as the City has rigid design standards for new projects, the residents of Saratoga Springs have high expectations for developers when a project is proposed for their neighborhood. Sonny Bonacio remarked that "everyone thinks affordable housing will devalue their property" and increase the demand for public services. However, many of our interviewees explained that

the negative perception of affordable housing is at the root of the social barriers at play. In fact, even if an affordable housing project is built with modern infrastructure and green architectural features, Bonacio said “it doesn’t matter what it looks like, it’s just the perception.”

Because Saratoga Springs is more of a suburban than urban city, these societal barriers carry more weight, as they restrict affordable housing as each project is proposed. As a project undergoes Planning Board or City Council review, all it takes is one neighbor to voice their opposition to the project and it is essentially shut down. Many of the individuals who qualify for affordable housing in Saratoga Springs can be described as being a part of the “workforce,” or those in the service industry around the City--firefighters, retail workers, track employees. Without the presence of affordable housing, these individuals and their families are pushed further outside the boundaries of Saratoga Springs and are forced to depend on automobiles, furthering the current unsustainable practices of affordable housing in Saratoga Springs.

Environmental Barriers

Due to the economic and social barriers, the City of Saratoga Springs has very few existing affordable housing structures and an atmosphere that turns new projects away. The City of Saratoga Springs, its developers, and its stakeholders have listed the issues that are most prominent in the region, including but not limited to negative perceptions, lack of funding, and regulatory barriers. Because of these hurdles, the City does not have the capacity to implement green or environmentally-conscious building techniques or regulations for its projects, because the projects are not on the table. However, despite these setbacks, everyone we interviewed was aware of the need for environmental efficiency. Bradley Birge noted that “the City is looking at more efficient lighting, solar panels, alternative energies, wind, as we move forward.” In

addition, Sonny Bonacio stated that “its almost impossible to find non-sustainable building materials now. Solar is now starting to make a lot of sense too.” While environmental barriers are present, they are not currently preventing the furtherance of new affordable housing projects or the support of existing affordable developments in Saratoga Springs.

Recommendations

In 2015, the Mayor of Saratoga Springs, Joanne Yepsen, assembled an eight-member Task Force on Affordable Housing as a means to address homelessness in the city. Many of the people who have been asked to sit on the task force were interviewed during our research, including Lois Celeste, Cindy Phillips, Paul Feldman, and Sonny Bonacio. As a culmination of our research, we have three recommendations for the task force, which utilize our findings and foster the cooperation of policy makers, developers, nonprofits, and the citizens of Saratoga Springs. Each recommendation addresses one of the three pillars of sustainability to ensure that the growth of new affordable housing project will be sustainable for the City.

Economic

A major inhibitor to the growth of new affordable housing projects is the lack of a mandatory regulatory mechanism to require the building of more affordable units. The current policy in place in the City consists only of a voluntary density bonus for developers. However, due to the voluntary nature of this program and the lack of strong incentives for developers, it has not been taken advantage of in Saratoga Springs. As mentioned by city planner Bradley Birge, the City needs a mandatory regulatory mechanism to take the place of the voluntary density bonus option. We recommend that the City implements a mandatory regulatory mechanism that would require a certain percentage of all new housing projects to be available at

prices below market rate. This mechanism would ensure the building of new affordable housing on a project-by-project basis.

Social

All of our stakeholders, from policy makers to community members, remarked that there is an obvious negative perception of affordable housing in Saratoga Springs. Members of our focus group attributed this to “an elitist attitude” held by many of the citizens of Saratoga Springs. To combat similar sentiments in Fort Collins, Colorado, the city implemented a poster campaign featuring the faces of citizens who qualify for affordable housing with the caption, “Can I Be Your Neighbor?” The posters pictured nurses, teachers, and firefighters to show that affordable housing allows people to live in the communities they work for. We recommend a similar photo campaign to combat the “not in my backyard” sentiment in Saratoga Springs. This campaign would show the faces of the community members who qualify for affordable housing and highlight their contributions to Saratoga Springs. This campaign will put a human face on affordable housing and reduce the stigma that is prevalent in the City.

Environmental

Our final recommendation for the task force focuses on the last pillar of sustainability, the environment. In Saratoga Springs, environmental initiatives are often left out of the conversation on affordable housing, but in order to achieve sustainability, the economic, social, and environmental pillars must all be attended to. To address this pillar, the City could choose to look at HUD Grant proposals through a new matrix which places a greater weight on proposals that include environmental initiatives or are environmentally sustainable. Therefore, the City will

be able to prioritize organizations that are working hard to ensure sustainable practices are in place across the City.

Conclusion

Looking forward, the City of Saratoga Springs could prospectively undertake rehabilitation projects, implement linkage fees, pursue a mixed methods approach, or aspire to pioneer its own radical solution in addressing the state of its housing and its great need for affordable and sustainable options. However, the more pressing economic, social and environmental barriers the City is facing are currently preventing these approaches from gaining much traction. The implementation of recommendations such as these would complete the pillars of sustainability and help to bridge the gap between policy makers, developers, and citizens of Saratoga Springs in order to foster the creation of more affordable housing in the City. With more affordable and accessible housing options in Saratoga Springs, the City and its residents will foster a more cohesive, sustainable lifestyle that allows individuals and families of various income levels to live and work in the same spaces.

References

- The Affordable Housing Crisis. (2012), *New York Times*, Opinion. Editorial.
- Audio from Focus Group with Senior Citizens* (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)
- Audio from Interviews at Shelters of Saratoga - Dax and Toni* (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)
- Audio from Stonequist Interview with John* (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)
- Belcher, J., & Rejent, D. (1993). Using company-owned housing and workfare to fill the need for low-wage workers: A solution or step backward? *Social Work*, 38(3)
- Boehland, J. (2006). Greening affordable housing. *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, 13(1), 59.
- Braconi, F. P. (1996). Environmental regulation and housing affordability. *Cityscape*, 2(3), 81.
- Carson, B., Cook, M., Deyo, T., King, D., & Warntz, R. (2011). *2011 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria*. Enterprise Green Communities.
- City of Fort Collins, Colorado. (2014). *Social sustainability: Affordable Housing Programs*. City of Fort Collins.
- City of Madison, W. (2011). *The madison sustainability plan: Fostering environmental, economic and social resilience* No. 1). Madison, WI:
- City of Saratoga Springs. (2014). *Department of planning and economic development*.
http://saratoga-springs.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=205&Itemid=

City of Seattle, W. (2014). *Affordable housing linkage fee*.

<http://www.seattle.gov/council/issues/affordablehousing/linkagefee.html>

City of Somerville, M. (2014). *City to launch affordable housing program*.

<http://www.somervillema.gov/news/city-launch-affordable-housing-program>

Cohen, A. (2014). Seattle City Council backs 'linkage fee' for affordable housing. *Seattle Pi*,

Crawford, J. (2013). *Second wind cottages for the homeless*.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/second-wind-cottages-for-the-homeless>

Duerksen, C. (2006). *Saving the world through zoning: Sustainable community development code reform project*. Clarion, Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute.

Florida, R. (2014), Solving the global housing crisis. *The Atlantic: City Lab*,

Fort Collins, Colorado, "Can I Be Your Neighbor?" Photo Campaign.

<http://www.fcgov.com/socialsustainability/neighbor-posters.php?key=affordablehousing/neighbor-posters.php>.

Galster, G., Walker, C., Hayes, C., Boxall, P., & Johnson, J. (2004). Measuring the impact of community development block grant spending on urban neighborhoods. *Housing Policy Debate*, 15(4), 903.

Genovese, F. C. (1991). Affordable housing. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 50(1), 43.

Gomez, M., & Thiele, B. (2005). Housing rights are human rights. *Human Rights*, 32(3), 2.

Haber, M. G., & Toro, P. A. (2004). Homelessness among families, children, and adolescents: An Ecological–Developmental perspective. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 7(3)

Hebbert, M. (2003). New urbanism —the movement in context. *Built Environment (1978-)*, 29(3), 193.

Housing and Economic Development Department, The City of New York. (2014). *Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan*. New York, New York.

Interview with Cindy Phillips and Bradley Birge of the Saratoga Springs Planning and Economic Development Department (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M.(Eds.)

Interview with Kelsey Addy, Project Associate at Community builders, Inc. (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)

Interview with Lois Celeste, Director of the Saratoga Springs Senior Center In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)

Interview with Paul Feldman, Director of Saratoga Springs Housing Authority (2015). In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)

Interview with Sonny Bonacio, President, Bonacio Construction. In Bosche L., Durante E. and Patterson M. (Eds.)

Listokin, D., & Crossney, K. (2006). *Best Practices for Effecting the Rehabilitation of Affordable Housing* No. 1). Washington, DC: HUD USER.

Lundalh, E. (2014). Tiny houses for the homeless: An affordable solution catches on. *Yes! Magazine*.

Morgan, D. R., & England, R. E. (1984). The small cities block grant program: An assessment of programmatic change under state control. *Public Administration Review*, 44(6), 477.

Morrison, N. (2003). Assessing the need for key-worker housing: A case study of Cambridge.

The Town Planning Review, 74(3), 281.

National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2013). *2013 annual report* National Low Income

Housing Coalition.

Opportunity village eugene. (2014). <http://www.opportunityvillageeugene.org/>

Perry, G. (2014). *A long way from opportunity*.

<http://www.gtweekly.com/index.php/santa-cruz-news/good-times-cover-stories/5623-a-long-way-from-opportunity.html>

Powell, J. (2003). Opportunity-based housing. *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community*

Development Law, 12(2), 188.

Rich, M. J. (1989). Distributive politics and the allocation of federal grants. *The American*

Political Science Review, 83(1), 193-213.

Roof, K., M.S., & Ngozi Olero, P. (2008). Public health: Seattle and King County's push for the

built environment. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 71(1)

Rosenfeld, R. A. (1984). An expansion and application of Kaufman's model of red tape: The case

of community development block grants. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 37(4), 603-620.

Rybczynski, W. (2008). Why can't we build an affordable house? *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-),

32(3), 16.

Salazar, R. (2014). *Quixote village*. quixotevillage.com

Saratoga Springs Housing Authority. (2014). *Affordable housing in Saratoga Springs, NY*.

<http://www.saratogaspringspha.org/index.asp>

- Sazama, G. (2000). Lessons from the history of affordable housing cooperatives in the united states: A case study in american affordable housing policy. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 59(4), 573.
- Schwartz, M., & Wilson, E. (2007). Who can afford to live in a home? A look at data from the 2006 american community survey. *Census*,
- Second wind cottages*. (2013). <http://secondwindcottages.org/index.html>
- Second Wind Cottages. (2014). *Homes and hope for the homeless*.
<http://secondwindcottages.org/>
- Samuels, A. (2014). Can the homeless movie into baltimore's abandoned houses? *The Atlantic: City Lab*,
- Shaldijan, R. (2009). Assessing the validity of linking programs: A case study of destin, florida's innovative attainable housing workforce program. *Journal of Land use & Environmental Law*, 24(2), 337-367.
- SOS. (2014). *Shelters of saratoga*.sheltersofsaratoga.com
- Stoloff, J. (2014). A brief history of public housing. San Francisco, Ca.
- Toro, P. A., & Warren, M. G. (1999). Homelessness in the united states: Policy considerations. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(2), 119-136.
- United Nations. (2014). *The universal declaration of human rights*.
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
- United States Census Bureau. (2012). *Poverty status in the past 12 months*.
<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2014). *Housing and urban development*. <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD>
- Urban Land Institute. (2012). *Environmentally sustainable affordable housing* No. 7).
Washington DC: ULI/Charles H. Shaw Forum.
- Weiss, J. (2003). Smart growth and affordable housing. *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law*, 12(2)
- White, C. (2013). *Environmental impacts of homeless encampments in the guadalupe river riparian zone*. Unpublished Master of Science in Environment and Management, Royal Roads University,
- Woetzel, J., Sangeeth, R., Mischke, J., Garemo, N., & Sankhe, S. (2014). *A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge: Executive summary* (Executive Report. New York, NY: McKinsey Global Institute.