

On 12 June 2009, Columbia University's Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture convened a day-long policy and design workshop with students and faculty to investigate the need and the potential for public housing in the United States.

The financial crisis added urgency to this effort to reinvigorate a long-dormant national conversation about public housing, which remains the subject of unjust stigmas and unjustified pessimism. Oriented toward reframing the issue by imagining new possibilities, the workshop explored diverse combinations of architecture and urban policy that acknowledged the responsibilities of government and the limits of the private markets. Principles were discussed, ideas were tested, and scenarios were proposed. These were distributed along a typical regional cross-section, or transect, representing a wide range of settlement patterns in the United States. The transect was broken down into five sectors: Urban Core, Urban Ring, Suburban, Exurban, and Rural. Participants were asked to develop ideas within these sectors, taking into account the contents of an informational dossier that was provided in advance. The dossier laid out five simple propositions, as follows:

PUBLIC HOUSING: A New Conversation

1 Public housing exists. Even today, after decades of subsidized private homeownership, publicly owned rental housing forms a small but important portion of the housing stock and of the cultural fabric nationwide.

2 Genuinely public housing is needed now more than ever, especially in the aftermath of a mortgage foreclosure crisis and increasingly in nonurban areas.

3 Public infrastructure also exists, though mainly in the form of transportation and water utilities.

4 Public infrastructure is also needed. Not only is existing infrastructure in disrepair; as a core element of a sustainable and equitable future, it requires significant reinvestment and reimagining led by the public sector.

5 Public housing is a form of infrastructure. As with other physical and social infrastructures, a robust commitment to public housing is an essential component of a vital—and sustainable—civic realm.

PUBLIC
HOUSING:
A New
Conversation

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www.arch.columbia.edu/buell

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This publication is based on a day-long policy and design workshop on public housing sponsored by the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University on 12 June 2009. The workshop was attended by over forty faculty, students, and recent graduates from Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (GSAPP), and took place in GSAPP's Studio-X space in lower Manhattan.

Participants in the workshop were grouped into five teams, as follows:

Urban Core: Kadambari Baxi, Anna-Maria Bogaddotir, Sarah Carpenter, Markus Doschanti, Janette Kim, Karen Kubey, Andrea Marpillero-Colomina, Tiffany Lau, Jae Heon Lim, Marlisa Wise

Urban Ring: John Becker, Diedre Gould, Laurie Hawkinson, Esteban Koff'smon, Laura Kurgan, Eileen K. Leung, Ingrid Olivo, Theodore Prudhon, Deborah Richards

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Rural: Luca Farinelli, Dalia Hamati, Dory Kornfeld, Daniel Payne, Karla Rothstein, David Salazar, Jay Shah, Mathew Staudt

Public housing.

The term is barely heard in public today, except in reference to historical policies and the buildings they produced, many of which now face demolition. In the United States, when discussing future policies and practices, you are more likely to hear terms like “affordable housing” or “mixed-income housing.” Among other things, this shift in terminology reflects a gradual shift in cultural meaning, where the “public” aspects of public housing have come to signify dependence or subordination, while responsibility for the basics of human habitation has fallen mainly on the markets.

But “public” can and ought to carry a positive meaning. It can mean the kind of responsibility that government traditionally upholds on behalf of its citizens. It can also refer to all of those others without whom any individual could scarcely prosper, regardless of personal ability or resources. And, at another level, it can refer to the realms in which collective responsibilities are discussed and debated, as in the expression the “public sphere.”

A new conversation about public housing in the United States has begun to take these meanings into account. In the context of a financial crisis that began, in part, as a crisis in the housing markets, it is not surprising that the term “public housing” has reentered the public sphere. But what this might mean, and to what effect, seems less evident.

This publication contributes to such a conversation. It is based on the results of an intensive policy and design workshop, organized by the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University in June 2009 and attended by over forty faculty, students, and recent graduates from Columbia’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (GSAPP).

Its purpose is not to outline solutions to a preexisting “problem.” It is to restate the problem by reconsidering the facts: that public housing exists in the United States in a variety of forms, that more of it is needed in other forms, and that these needs are connected to those public needs addressed by recent investment in other types of infrastructure.

We have assembled the results of the workshop into a narrative about public housing that might serve as the basis for further discussion. We offer this story as evidence of the growing conversation among academics, professionals, policymakers, students, and activists, which we hope will extend further into those arenas where responsibility is measured and the future is decided. For in the end, the “public” in public housing refers to everyone, whether they live there or not.

We invite you to join the conversation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reinhold Martin', with a stylized, flowing script.

Reinhold Martin

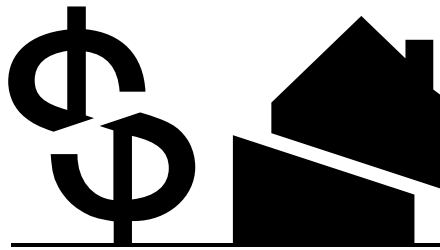
**Director, Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
Columbia University**

The Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture was founded in 1982. Its mission is to advance the study of American architecture, urbanism, and landscape. Located within the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University, it sponsors programs and research projects focusing on issues of both scholarly and general interest. The Buell Center initiative on public housing was launched in 2008. This publication represents one aspect of that ongoing project.

For further information see www.arch.columbia.edu/buell

A New Conversation

The Financial Crisis Is a Housing Crisis

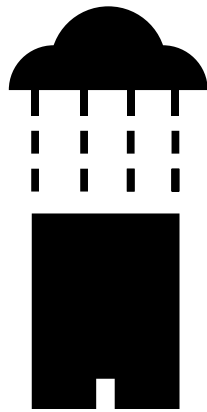


While primarily affecting individual homeowners, the recent subprime mortgage and foreclosure crisis has triggered questions regarding the number of Americans living in housing beyond their means. Patterns and concentrations of foreclosure underscore the need for new public housing construction or adaptive reuse across the country to provide a viable alternative for those who cannot afford to own or rent at market rates.

The large number of foreclosed homes reveals a great deal about the values that have shaped them, as government has now stepped in as a lender-of-last-resort to rescue the symbolic individuality and self-sufficiency of the single-family house. Such landscapes offer both challenges and opportunities. One commonly proposed strategy is to reclaim these homes themselves for use as public housing or other civic amenity.

THEREFORE, the policy and design problems posed by the financial crisis are not merely those of coping with its worst short-term effects. They require long-term planning that would avoid a repetition. This can mean reinventing the formulas by which ownership is financed; but it can also mean reinventing the houses and apartments themselves and the policies behind them. Or, in the case of “shrinking” cities, it can mean preservation, consolidation, and reoccupation along more sustainable lines.

Public Housing Gets a Bad Rap

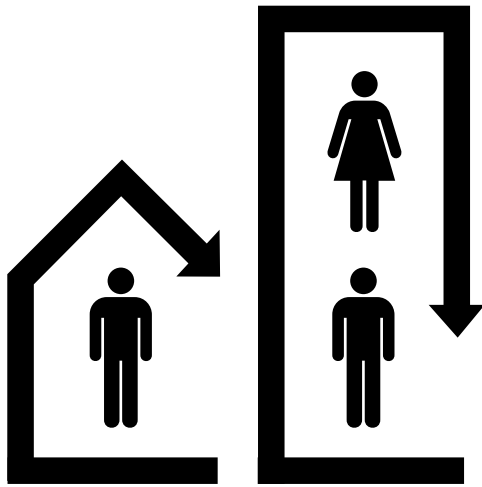


The stigma surrounding public housing in the United States revolves mainly around perceptions of life in housing “projects.” These are often seen as hotbeds for crime and myriad social problems, from substandard education to drug abuse and joblessness. Frequently, public housing is also associated with racial segregation, or ghettoization. Such stigmas often mask unspoken fears, or worse.

While acknowledging the many unresolved social and economic conflicts that have produced such perceptions, it is equally important to acknowledge the success of many such “projects.” Clearly, the mistakes of the past should be avoided; but this does not mean that public housing has failed in principle. In many cases, it had been “made to fail” through underfunding or neglect, while in others, everyday needs were insufficiently accommodated at the outset.

THEREFORE, new policies and design strategies are required that recognize the underlying cultural stigmas and work to overcome them. Progress has been made in this direction with more integrated, mixed-use developments. But more importantly, policy and design can support the idea that the “public” in public housing does not signify dependence; it signifies collective responsibility and mutual achievement.

Housing Is a Verb

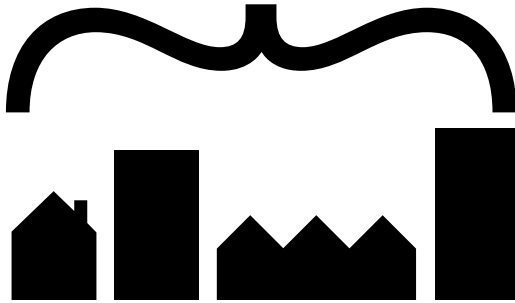


In contrast to “house,” the word “housing” is sometimes thought to imply rigid, anonymous blocks of apartments imposed on communities from the top down, generally by government bureaucracies. But “housing” can also mean a participatory process, an ongoing collaboration between different stakeholders: residents, planners, architects, public officials, property owners, and community representatives. Participation can take many forms, and it is not necessary to assume that all parties will always agree.

In that sense, the “public” aspect of public housing can refer to this type of ongoing dialogue, a collaborative decision-making in which disagreements and conflicting interests are resolved. Similarly, the act of housing does not end when a building is completed and residents move in. It continues as the building is used, maintained, changed, or preserved over time. The needs of occupants may change, or new possibilities and opportunities may arise. So, like housing, the public is not a static entity. It is always in flux.

THEREFORE, new policy and design strategies for public housing must be participatory and responsive, at all scales and at all times. They must anticipate change. And they must adjust to the requirements and characteristics of particular contexts, taking into account diverse needs and conflicting interests.

All Housing Is Public Housing



Public housing in the United States has come to mean only that housing provided by government directly to those in dire financial need. However, to varying degrees, all housing in this country is partially subsidized by government. For example, federal homeownership tax credits aim toward making the “American Dream” of homeownership accessible and affordable. In fact, all housing in this country exists along a spectrum of public subsidy; “privately” owned homes, privately built “affordable” housing developments, and “low-income” housing are all aided by tax credits.

Public housing is thus not the only way in which government intervenes in the housing markets; instead, it is one among many ways in which government helps to provide housing for all its constituents. While some require minimal assistance, others require more.

THEREFORE, the principle of public housing is not at all foreign to Americans. Strategies for reevaluating government responsibility would take this entire spectrum of subsidy into account, without giving a higher symbolic value to one or the other type of subsidy. Similarly, these strategies would recognize that individuals and groups live along a spectrum of collectivity; each individual is also a member of a public, sharing in its benefits and its responsibilities.



PRIVATELY OWNED HOME

"PRIVATELY" OWNED HOMES ARE PARTIALLY SUBSIDIZED BY FEDERAL HOMEOWNERSHIP TAX CREDITS.

HIGH DENSITY HUBS

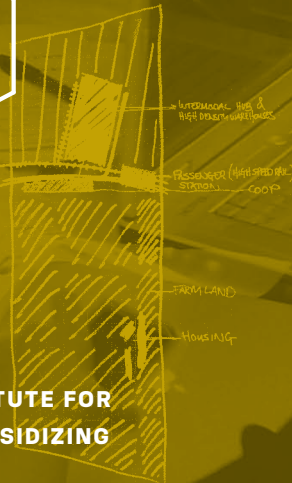
- * EVENLY DISTRIBUTED BETWEEN CITIES
- * DENSITY NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE
 - 1) MORE UP AND FOR AGRICULTURAL
 - 2) REDUCE CAPITARY INFRASTRUCTURE
- * PROMOTES LINEAR / VERTICAL GROWTH

① HIGH DENSITY HUB



SECTION 8 VOUCHER

SECTION 8 VOUCHERS ACT AS A DIRECT SUBSTITUTE FOR BUILT PUBLIC HOUSING WITH GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZING A RESIDENT'S MONTHLY RENT.

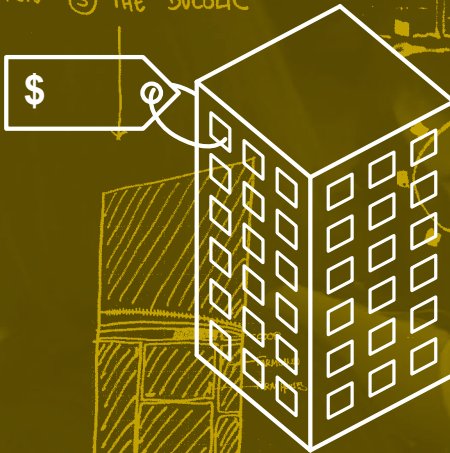




LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDIT

LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDITS PROVIDE TAX SUBSIDY AND INCENTIVE TO PRIVATE DEVELOPERS CREATING AFFORDABLE HOUSING WITHIN LARGER COMMUNITIES.

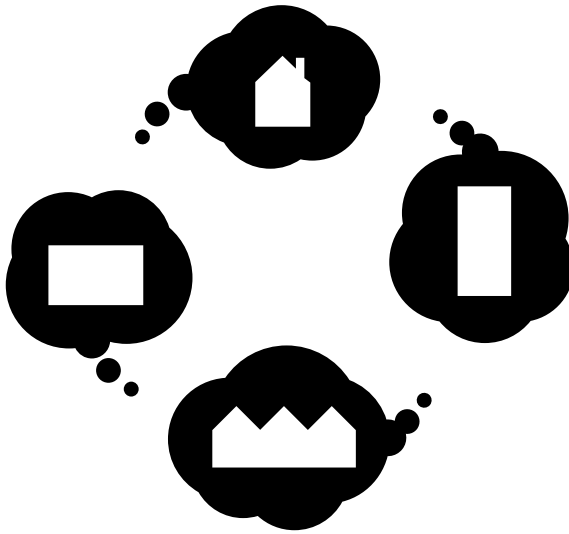
② LOCAL COLLECTION ③ THE BUCOLIC



PUBLIC HOUSING

TRADITIONALLY, PUBLIC HOUSING IS UNDERSTOOD AS HOUSING BUILT AND MAINTAINED BY GOVERNMENT AND RENTED BELOW MARKET RATES.

Dreams Change



The “American Dream” is, at its core, a dream of ownership. But it is just that: a dream, a metaphor. Federal policy underscores this dream with programs meant to encourage renters to become owners. However, the dream of homeownership and the policies that encourage it have arguably masked a much more real need for public housing. In pursuit of the social ideal of ownership, many individuals and families have sought to own even when renting was safer and more financially advantageous.

This fixed view of the “American Dream” can be costly. For example, the renting lifestyle is often more unencumbered and flexible, and in an economy that often requires mobility, renting can make it easier for individuals to pursue or accept employment opportunities that appear unexpectedly in different locales. Symbolically, mobility and rootedness may also appear as opposed sets of values. But in fact, ours is a society in which these values coexist in complex and sometimes conflicting ways.

THEREFORE, reconsidering the future of public housing in the United States means reconsidering the symbolic and practical values attached to renting and other forms of tenancy. It also means reconsidering the meanings of ownership, both public and private, as they apply to the individual house, the collective dwelling, and the surrounding lawns, roads, and other spaces. And it means rethinking, at all scales, the relationship between mobility and belonging.

New SYSTEM OF RENTING?

PUBLIC HOUSING

model 2: Govt as manager

Tenant
(Right)



Govt: Responsibility to subsidize tenants to change housing eligibility
to income level
Subsidies
Landlords
Responsibility to take subsidized tenants



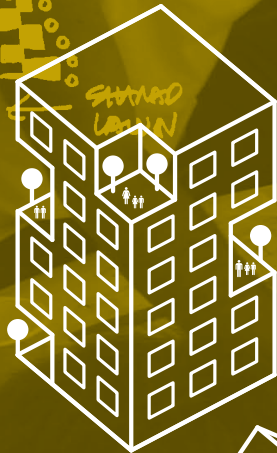
AMERICAN DREAM

DETACHED HOUSES W/ LAWN

LOW HOUSING PUBLIC GROUND

RENTING ISN'T LESS THAN OWNING

THE RENTING LIFESTYLE IS JUST AS DIGNIFIED AS THE OWNING LIFESTYLE.

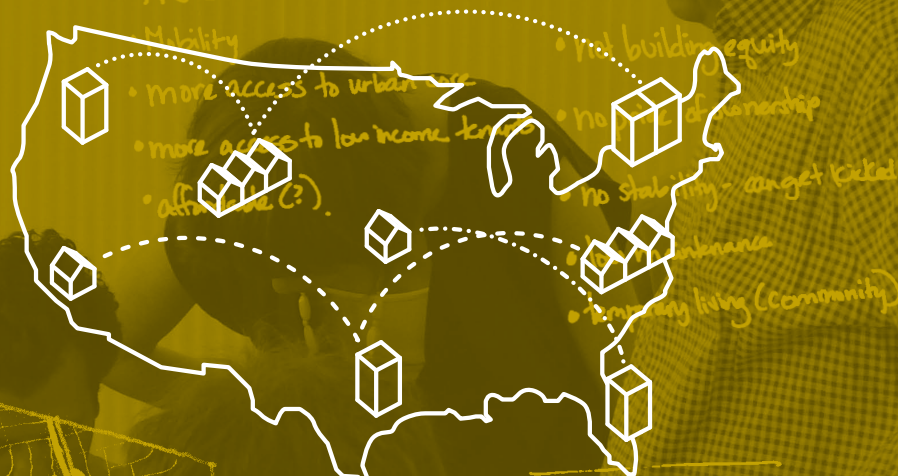


SHARED COMMONS

THE IDEAL REPRESENTED BY THE PRIVATE LAWN CAN TRANSFORM INTO THE COMMON GROUND OF SHARED LAWNS OR VERTICAL GARDENS.

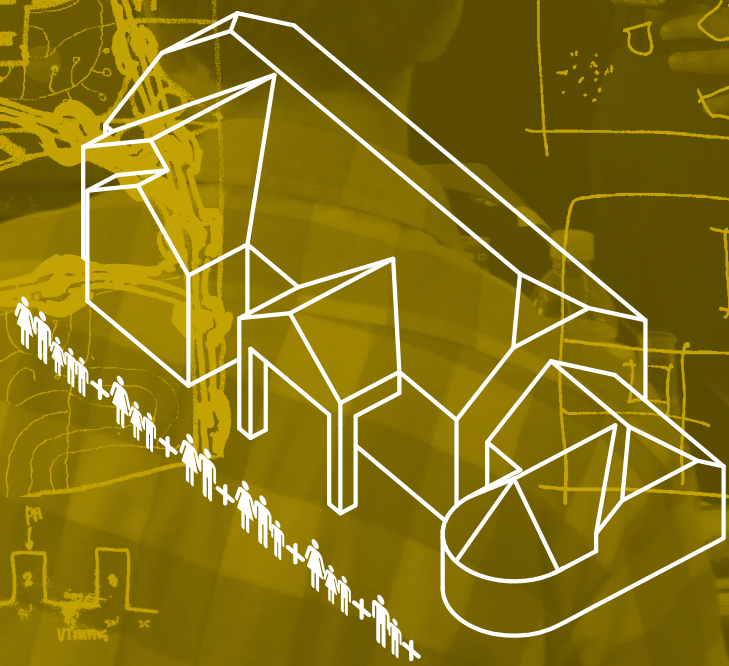
PROS: A NEW CONVERSATION

CONS:



MOBILITY IS AN ASSET

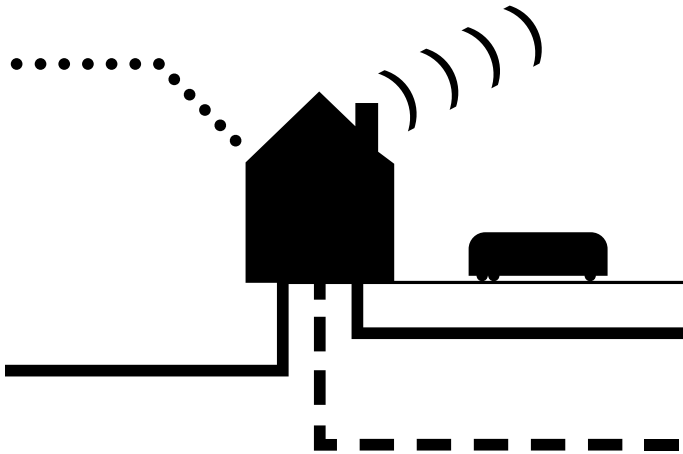
THE MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY AFFORDED BY RENTING ARE OFTEN DESIRABLE AND BENEFICIAL IN TODAY'S ECONOMY.



ADAPTIVE REUSE

UNSUSTAINABLY LARGE HOMES CAN BE REINHABITED AS MULTIFAMILY HOUSING.

Housing Is Public Infrastructure



There has been much discussion about federally funded infrastructure projects as a means of stimulating a sluggish economy. In these discussions, however, the term “infrastructure” mainly conjures images of new roads, bridges, and rail lines criss-crossing the nation. While these are sorely needed, it is important to remember that housing, and particularly public housing, is also a key component of the country’s physical, social, and economic infrastructure.

Enhanced infrastructure can mean enhanced communications lines, or it can mean more sustainable and more environmentally responsible ways of producing and delivering energy. But it can also mean housing. Many of the new infrastructures ultimately connect to housing, whether through lines of communication or transportation. And public housing, as a component of this landscape, is just another piece of sorely needed infrastructure.

THEREFORE, housing strategies that are both economically and ecologically sustainable are an integral part of “next generation” infrastructure in the United States. This means new forms of public housing, where government can take direct responsibility for environmental impact and coordinate most efficiently with other types of infrastructure such as high-speed rail, so that the regions served by these infrastructures might be ecologically integrated to maximize the common benefit.



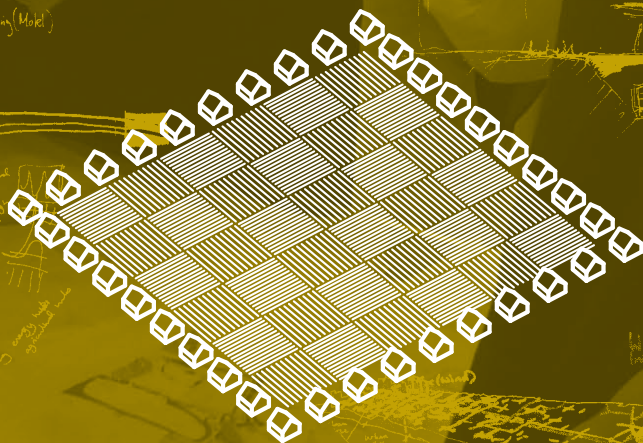
REIMAGINING THE HIGHWAY

**STRATEGICALLY LOCATED PUBLIC HOUSING CAN BE
THE CENTERPIECE OF A NEW AND MORE SUSTAINABLE VISION OF
THE AUTOMOBILE LANDSCAPE.**

PUBLIC HOUSING AND TRANSIT

**PUBLIC HOUSING DEVELOPED NEAR TRANSIT HUBS PROVIDES
TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES AND ACCESS TO WORK.**

NEW PUBLIC HOUSING CAN BE INTEGRATED WITH SUSTAINABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURES TO OPTIMIZE EFFICIENCY AND LOCALIZE DISTRIBUTION.



**PUBLIC HOUSING CAN SUPPORT THE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE
BY HOUSING THOSE WHO WORK ON THE FARM.**

There Can Be Mixtures at All Scales



Mixed-use and mixed-income strategies for housing are frequently viewed as a means of laying the groundwork for vital and diverse towns and cities. Increasingly, however, such mixtures already exist across the spectrum. From the typical highway traffic jam, to the typical suburban supermarket, to the typical country store, mixtures of different kinds—from income to age to gender to race—define the American landscape. They are the rule rather than the exception.

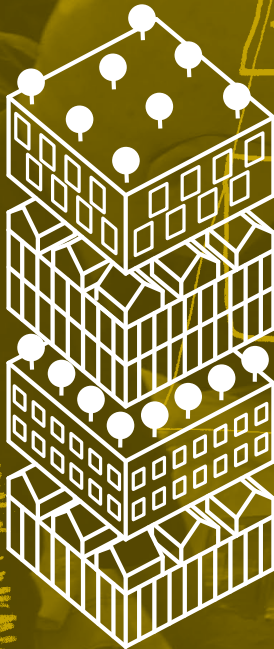
In that sense, mixture is normal, and the “public” in public housing can be regarded as inherently plural and sometimes contradictory. The real challenges lie in enabling different people and different activities to mix in different ways, non-exclusively. For example, non-traditional families might participate in a variety of neighborhood organizations, or a single individual might inhabit diverse social networks. There is a strong spatial element to this that ranges from enabling intimacy to the accommodation of large groups.

THEREFORE, policies and designs that seek to maximize or optimize mixtures of various sorts must recognize plurality as a starting point rather than a destination. This can mean scaling down the mixtures to the individual building and building up to something more common at a larger scale; or it can mean interspersing what is common, in the form of schools, medical centers, transportation, and other shared services, with what is unique. It can also mean recognizing the needs of those who are not officially part of the mix, such as the informal workers on whom local and regional economies often depend.



"LET A THOUSAND FLOWERS BLOOM"

**THE CONSTITUENCIES SERVED BY PUBLIC HOUSING ARE
MULTIPLE AND DIVERSE.**



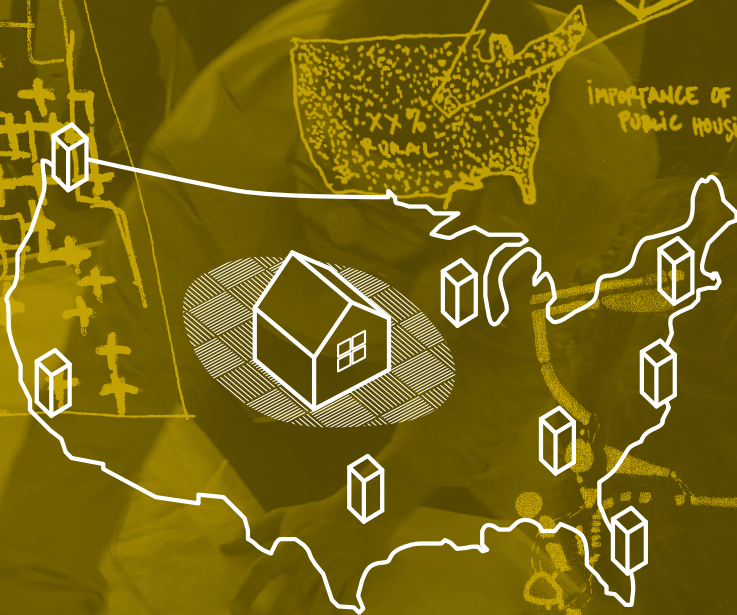
MIXTURE WITHIN THE TOWER

**VERTICAL MIXED-USE STRATEGIES CREATE THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY-
BASED BENEFITS NEEDED FOR PUBLIC HOUSING TO SUCCEED.**



MIXTURE OF BUILDING TYPES

A MIXTURE OF PUBLIC HOUSING TYPES WITHIN THE CITY
CREATES A VARIED AND VITAL ENVIRONMENT.



RURAL AMERICA NEEDS PUBLIC HOUSING TOO

A MIXTURE OF POLICY PERSPECTIVES AND SCALES ENSURES THAT
PUBLIC HOUSING IS AVAILABLE WHEREVER IT IS NEEDED.

Public Housing Supports the Economy

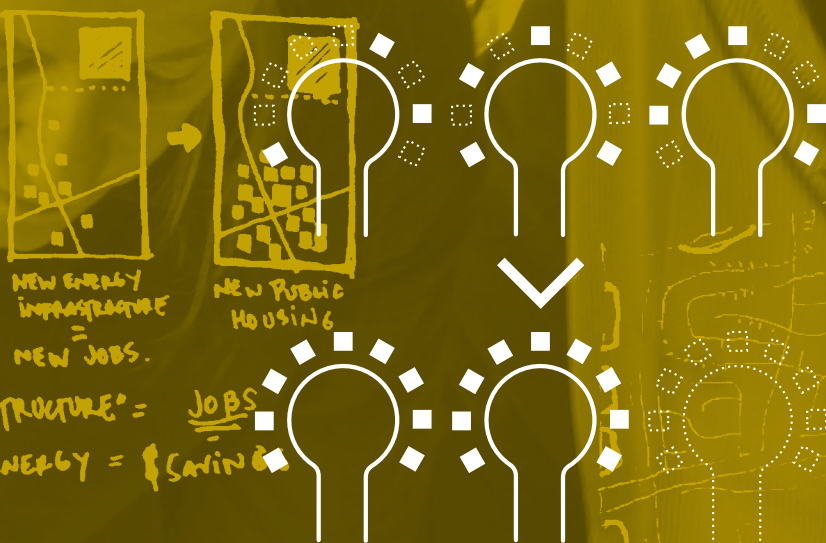


Housing is where the producers and consumers who generate economic activity actually live. As a result, adequate housing should be a self-evident component of any effort to stimulate and maintain an economy. Public housing is therefore an investment; in the long run, the provision of stable, livable, and affordable dwellings can help offset the skyrocketing expenses associated with the social traumas that affect rural, suburban, and urban settings alike.

Adequate housing is also the basis of many social freedoms that come with economic stability, and truly public housing is an indispensable element in any economic equation that aspires to a sustainable future. As with other infrastructures, large-scale construction of public housing can lead to job creation. And as in other sectors such as health care, direct governmental involvement can yield economies of scale when seen from an industry-wide perspective.

THEREFORE, new policy and design approaches should consider the many economic benefits of a large-scale public housing program, as well as the economic productivity of housing residents. The latter include recent immigrants and migrant workers, who contribute to economic growth without benefitting fully from it due to their under-representation in formal politics. Just as no one lives outside the “economy,” no one lives outside the “public” realm, especially when it comes to housing.





SAVING CITIES WITH PUBLIC HOUSING

SHRINKING CITIES CAN BE PRESERVED BY CONSOLIDATING
EXISTING HOUSING STOCK.

AS ECONOMIC
STRUCTURE.



GOVERNMENT CAN COMPETE

THE BUYING POWER AND COORDINATION OFFERED BY GOVERNMENT
CAN PROVIDE ECONOMIES OF SCALE THAT REDUCE THE COST
OF HOUSING NATIONWIDE.

Appendices

THE WORKSHOP: AN URBAN-TO-RURAL TRANSECT

Each workshop team concentrated on one section of this hypothetical urban region.

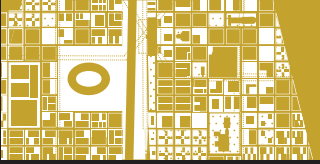
The workshop on which this document is based used a regional cross-section, or “transect,” as its point of departure. Ranging from urban to rural in character, the transect’s details are drawn from a diverse range of conditions typical in many parts of the United States.

The transect is subdivided into five sectors: Urban Core, Urban Ring, Suburban, Exurban, Rural. The site area of each sector varies continuously with density, to allow a more accurate sense of inherent territorial and infrastructural relationships. As a result, the overall transect is wedge-shaped. Each sector contains a comparable mixture of land uses. These include both residential and commercial uses, as well as schools, hospitals, religious institutions, and different types of open space and infrastructure.

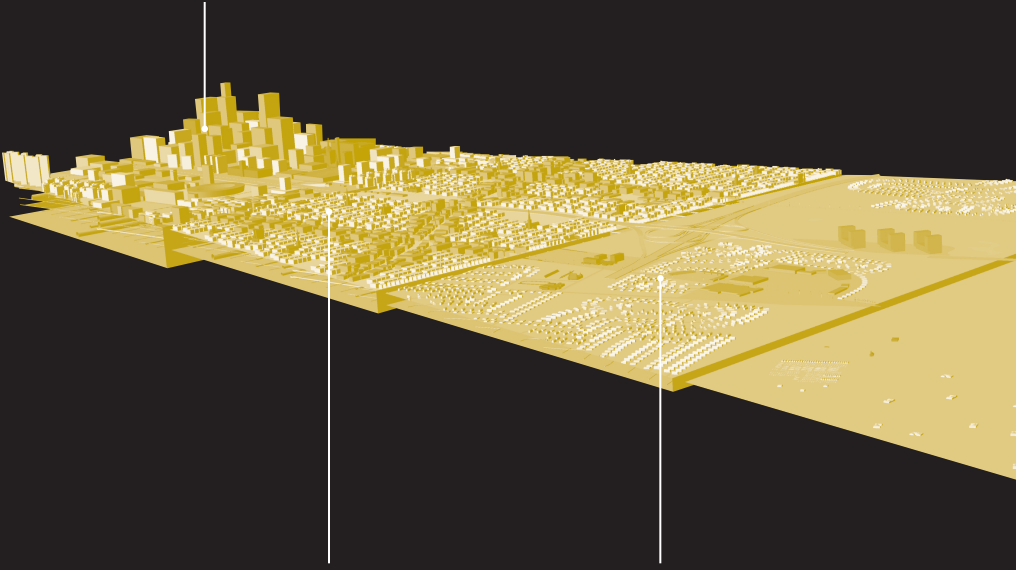
Each of the five teams developed proposals for one of these sectors, with no expectation that these be fully coordinated or integrated. This document combines aspects

of these proposals, thus emphasizing the idea that strategies developed for one setting, while specific to that situation, might also be adapted to other settings.

This suggests that innovative policies and designs for public housing—traditionally associated with large cities—might originate anywhere along the transect. Public housing can be rural, suburban, or urban in character. The fact that it is needed across the spectrum also underscores the interdependence of these settings.



The Urban Core is the most dense of the five scenarios. Much of its infrastructure is located underground, except that the inner-city highway encircles the central business district. Its public housing is located mostly in high-rise towers, segregated into housing "projects."



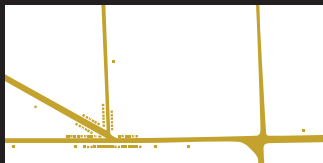
The Urban Ring is characterized by swaths of densely developed low-rise (three- to five-story) residential areas bisected by multi-lane boulevards of commercial activity and interspersed with community uses such as schools, religious buildings, and small parks. Of the five scenarios, the urban ring contains the most housing units.



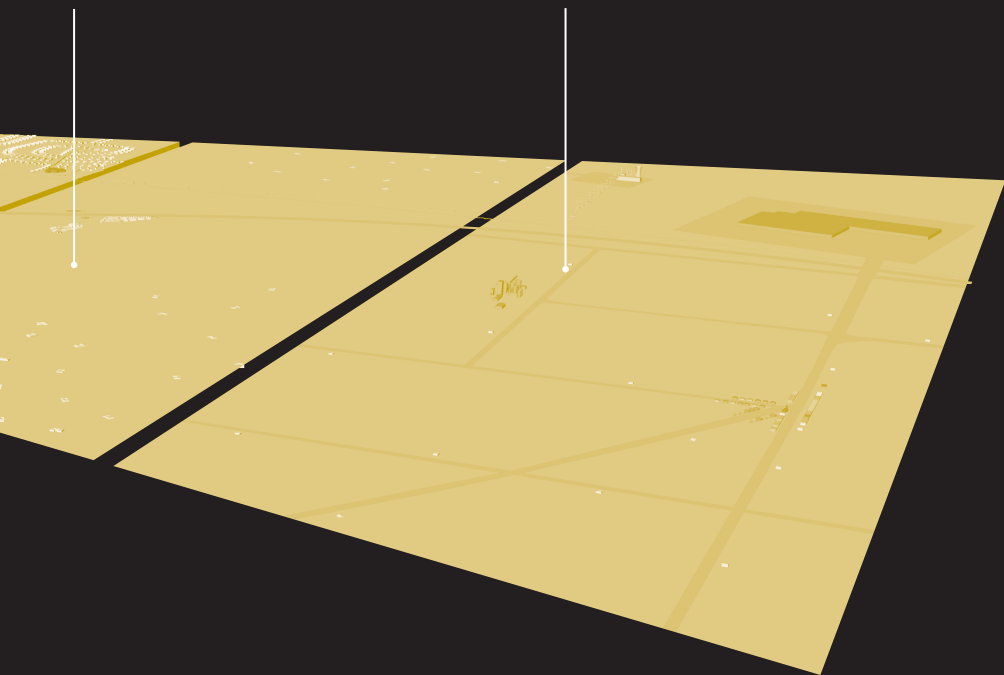
Suburbia introduces the single-family home to the transect as well as larger recreational uses while abandoning a gridded structure in favor of cul-de-sac developments. This scenario contains a highway interchange, "big-box" retail, a golf course, and planned residential communities.



Exurbia is dominated by two main housing types: the private estate (large single-family homes built on very large private lots emblematic of the picturesque exurban lifestyle) and the mobile home, usually aggregated to capitalize on shared utility resources. Commercial and institutional uses are concentrated near prominent transportation nodes.



The Rural scenario reintroduces the grid as organized farmland. The transect's rural site includes single-family farm houses as well as a few housing units located within a rural "town center" with necessary commercial and institutional uses. Near the highway (which at this point in the transect is limited to two lanes) and the railroad sits a super-distribution center.



PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE UNITED STATES

Below is a condensed version of the dossier that was provided to workshop participants.

Public Housing Exists

Public housing already exists in the United States, along a spectrum of housing types and urban conditions. From inner cities to suburbs to rural locations, from high-rise multi-family apartment buildings to single-family detached houses to Section 8 vouchers, the public housing system is a complex amalgam of policies and types. The housing stock exists in varying states of repair and in neighborhoods of varying levels of vitality and diversity.

According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), there were approximately 53,000 HUD-sponsored housing projects in the United States in 2000. Almost 14,000 of these projects are “public housing” as we know it. That is, they are completely public investments. Such projects account for almost 12.5 million housing units across the country. The remainder of the projects are various types of public/private affordable housing, the majority of which are

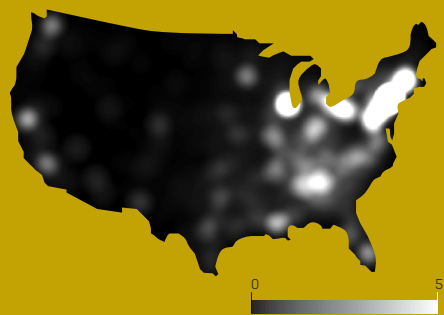


FIG. 1. Density of Public Housing Projects per square kilometer, 2000

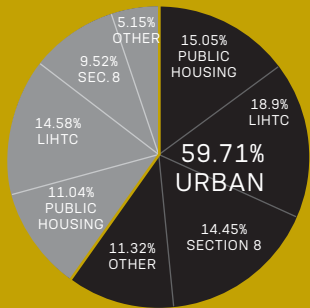


FIG. 2. Percentage of all HUD Programs, Urban and Non-Urban, 2000

private developments receiving Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). Generally speaking, these public/private developments are less densely built, creating fewer housing units per project. In fact, when public/private programs are aggregated, they reveal a striking picture of housing policy in the United States: 74% of government-sponsored housing projects (and 66% of HUD units) in the country are provided, in part, by the private sector.

Geographically, the western United States remains severely underserved by public housing. While 23% of the country's income-eligible renters reside in the west, the region accounts for only 9% of the residents in public housing. In contrast, 24.2% of the nation's voucher recipients live in the western United States.

Housing Need Exists

According to HUD's "Affordable Housing Needs 2005" report, all U.S. regions are affected by affordable housing need and share in the worst-case needs. Despite this, geography still plays a role in housing need. Between 2003 and 2005, there was a 14.9% increase in need in central cities, a 5.3% increase in suburbs, and a 51% increase in nonmetropolitan areas. Further, in 2003 almost 38% of the population eligible for public housing lived in suburbs, while these areas accounted for only 21% of public housing residents. In contrast, almost 69% of public housing residents lived in central cities, while these urban areas contain 47% of the country's eligible population. The comparison between the distribution of actual public housing residents and the population in need of affordable housing strongly suggests that those areas outside of central cities have thus far been neglected.

Additionally, the availability of rentable housing units for the poor is drastically low. In 2005, "there were only 77 units affordable and available for rent for every 100 very-low-income renter households.... For extremely-low-income renter households, the ratio is worse: 40 units per 100 households" ("Affordable Housing Needs 2005"). Here, "very low income" is defined as households earning no more than fifty percent of their area median income (AMI). "Extremely low

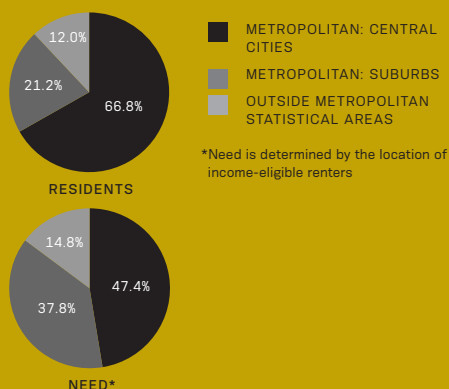


FIG. 3. Metropolitan Percentage of Public Housing Residents (top) vs. Percentage of Affordable Housing Need* (bottom), 2003

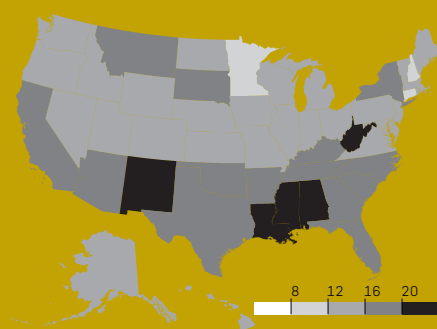


FIG. 4. Percent of the Population Living beneath the Poverty Level, 1999

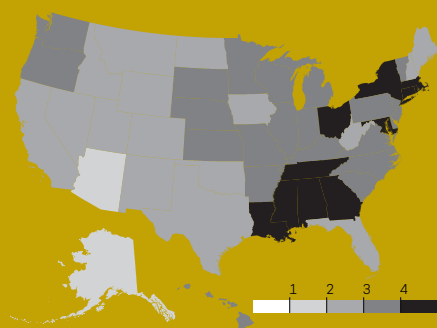


FIG. 5. HUD Units as a Percentage of Total Housing Units, by State, 2000

income” households are those earning no more than thirty percent of AMI.

In recent years, high-rate mortgage loans have been pervasive throughout the United States, concentrating in low-income neighborhoods, but also affecting middle-income and more affluent areas. In 2006, high-rate mortgages (which include subprime mortgages) constituted 29% of all originated home loans. This figure represents a recent trend and a marked increase from previous lending practices. The willingness of banks toward subprime lending has helped to mask the need for public housing. With sufficient affordable housing stock unavailable, low-income households have taken on these high-interest loans, transitioning from renter households to precariously positioned homeownership. Federal policies have aided this transition by promoting homeownership as an alluring ideal. Often, low-income buyers cannot sustain homeownership beyond five years.

Public Infrastructure Exists

The American public has long accepted (and sometimes invited) federal investment in infrastructure projects. The Works Progress Administration, part of the New Deal of the 1930s, set a modern precedent for the federal government’s role in providing basic infrastructure to keep the economy moving and increased the popularity of government spending on public works as a means of job creation. Public acceptance of state-supported infrastructure projects only grew with the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Again, it was the role of the federal government to provide national infrastructure.

However, such investment has typically been limited to physical infrastructures and mainly to transportation and water systems. In 2004, nearly 75% of the federal infrastructure expenditure supported transportation. Federal spending on social infrastructures has largely been limited to schools and prisons. Other public infrastructure investment is generally provided by state and local agencies.

The vast majority of the transportation infrastructure supported by government investment is devoted to highways. In 2004, \$30.2 billion of federal funds were allocated

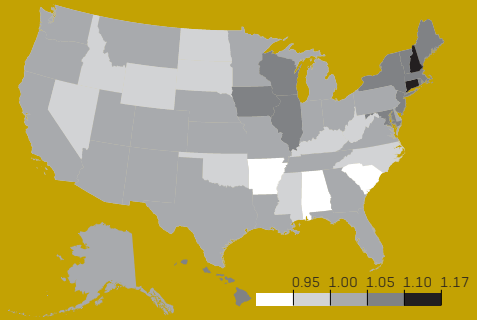


FIG. 6. Ratio of Percentage of Housing Units that are Renter-Occupied, 2007:2000 (a level greater than 1 indicates an increase in renting)



FIG. 7. Density of Home Foreclosures per square kilometer, 2007–2008

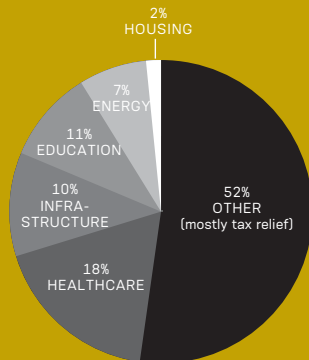


FIG. 8. Percentage of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Spending

to highway repair and construction, with an additional \$37 billion from state and local governments. Compare this to the \$700 million spent (solely by the federal government) on passenger railroads or the combined \$15.6 billion spent on mass transit, and implicit federal support of automobile dependency becomes clear.

Unlike water and transportation infrastructures, energy and telecommunications investments are dominated by the private sector. In 2004, the private sector invested over twenty times more in telecommunications infrastructure than did public agencies. Following suit, energy expenditure by private companies outweighed that of government by a factor of almost eight.

Public Infrastructure Is Needed

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 has allocated over \$80 billion to infrastructure investment both to aid in economic stimulus and to build, repair, or upgrade needed infrastructures, including \$51.2 billion going directly to core transportation infrastructures throughout the country.

However, these physical infrastructures are not the only ones requiring investment. Social programs (in education and healthcare for example) need and are receiving funding. The ARRA has allocated \$147.7 billion to healthcare, including funding Medicare, health insurance premium subsidies, and the health information technology program. Another \$90.9 billion has been earmarked for education spending, almost half of which is intended as direct benefit to local schools.

Public Housing Is Infrastructure

Public housing is a part of our built social infrastructure. This is recognized through its inclusion in the ARRA spending. Yet, the Act addresses housing far less vigorously than it does other forms of infrastructural need, despite the mortgage foreclosure crisis. With little more than \$4 billion allocated to HUD to repair existing public housing stock and \$2 billion meant for Section 8 assistance, the Act provides only for the construction of new low-income housing privately, through \$2.25 billion in tax credits.

FIG. 9. Infrastructure Capital Spending, 2004

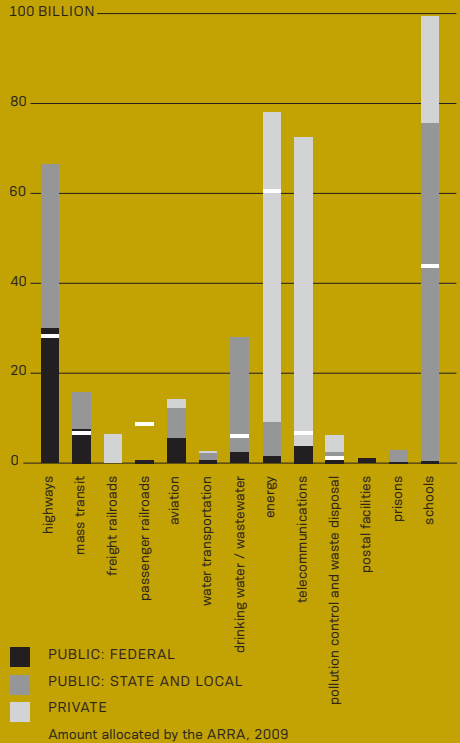
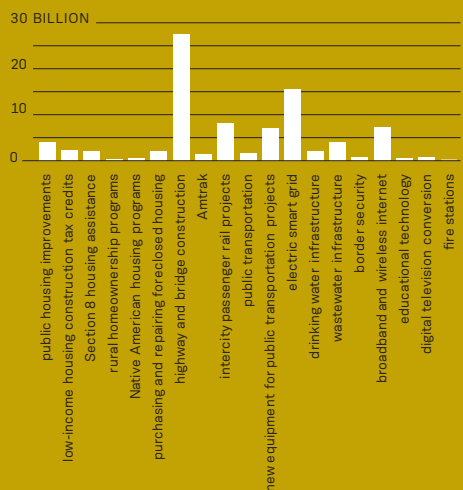


FIG. 10. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Selected Spending



When understood as interrelated, infrastructure and housing account for 12% of the ARRA spending package, totaling approximately \$93.6 billion. Thus, when combined with infrastructure the possibilities for affordable (and ultimately public) housing development are greatly multiplied. It remains only to recognize and build on their interrelationship.

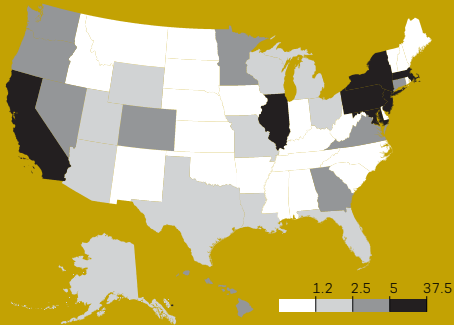


FIG. 11. Percentage of Workers Using Public Transportation to Work, 2000

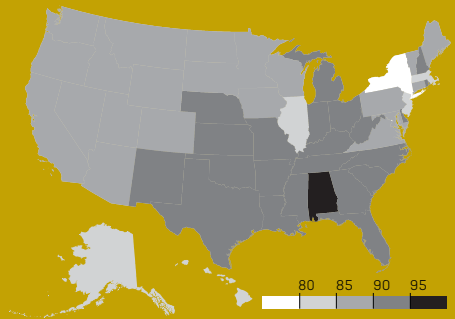


FIG. 12. Percentage of Workers Driving to Work, 2000

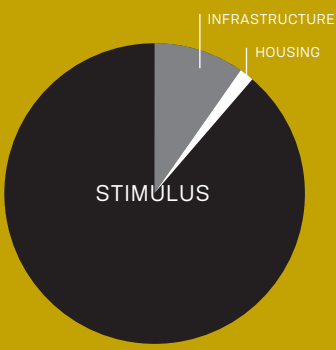


Fig. 13. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Spending

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ONCE AGAIN, a conversation about public housing has begun in the United States. This conversation construes housing as a right and not a privilege, which means reconsidering the role of government in providing a basic element in the nation's physical, social, and economic infrastructure. But most importantly, this is a conversation about new possibilities for housing, in its design and in its underlying policies. Here are some of its major themes:

PUBLIC HOUSING IS NOT SOLELY AN URBAN ISSUE; the need for it runs across the full urban-to-rural spectrum.

TRADITIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PUBLIC HOUSING NO LONGER APPLY. Geographies of race, class, and gender have shifted considerably in the last fifty years, and though the problem of ghettoization remains, it can no longer be raised as a straw figure with which to preempt serious reconsideration of the issue. Together with policy, design can contribute significantly to overcoming these historical difficulties.

PUBLIC HOUSING IS NOT THE ONLY GOVERNMENTAL INTERVENTION INTO THE HOUSING MARKET, nor is it the only way that the federal government or the states help to provide housing. Balanced against the predominance of federal homeownership tax credits at the other end of the policy spectrum, public housing has been meant to provide for those with the greatest need.

CULTURALLY, HOMEOWNERSHIP TAX CREDITS SUPPORT THE "AMERICAN DREAM." But as the recent financial crisis has reminded us, this dream is just that: a metaphor that cannot always be translated into reality. Many of the possibilities explored here can be interpreted as alternative versions of this dream, where adequate housing is the ultimate goal, and home ownership is only one among many means, rather than an end in itself.

PUBLIC HOUSING ADDRESSES INFRASTRUCTURAL NEEDS NATIONWIDE. Like schools and hospitals, housing is an element in the social infrastructure that is necessary for society to function, and it will be a key factor in an environmentally sustainable future. It is also

a component in the nation's economic infrastructure. It is where many workers, entrepreneurs, and managers actually live. Without adequate housing, things fall apart.

Since it was last the subject of sustained discussion and debate outside academic or professional circles, the topic of public housing has changed dramatically. Its constituents and its demographics have multiplied, and the geographic distribution of need has shifted. Lagging far behind, policy options have gradually been limited to the now-dominant model of public-private partnerships, along with low-income housing tax credits and housing voucher programs. It is time to approach this issue more broadly, and to find ways of imagining and of realizing new possibilities for exercising the responsibilities of government, as well as those of the private sector. This means finding effective ways of developing innovative and sustainable models for public housing across the United States in all regions and locales.

THEREFORE, the conversation continues....

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