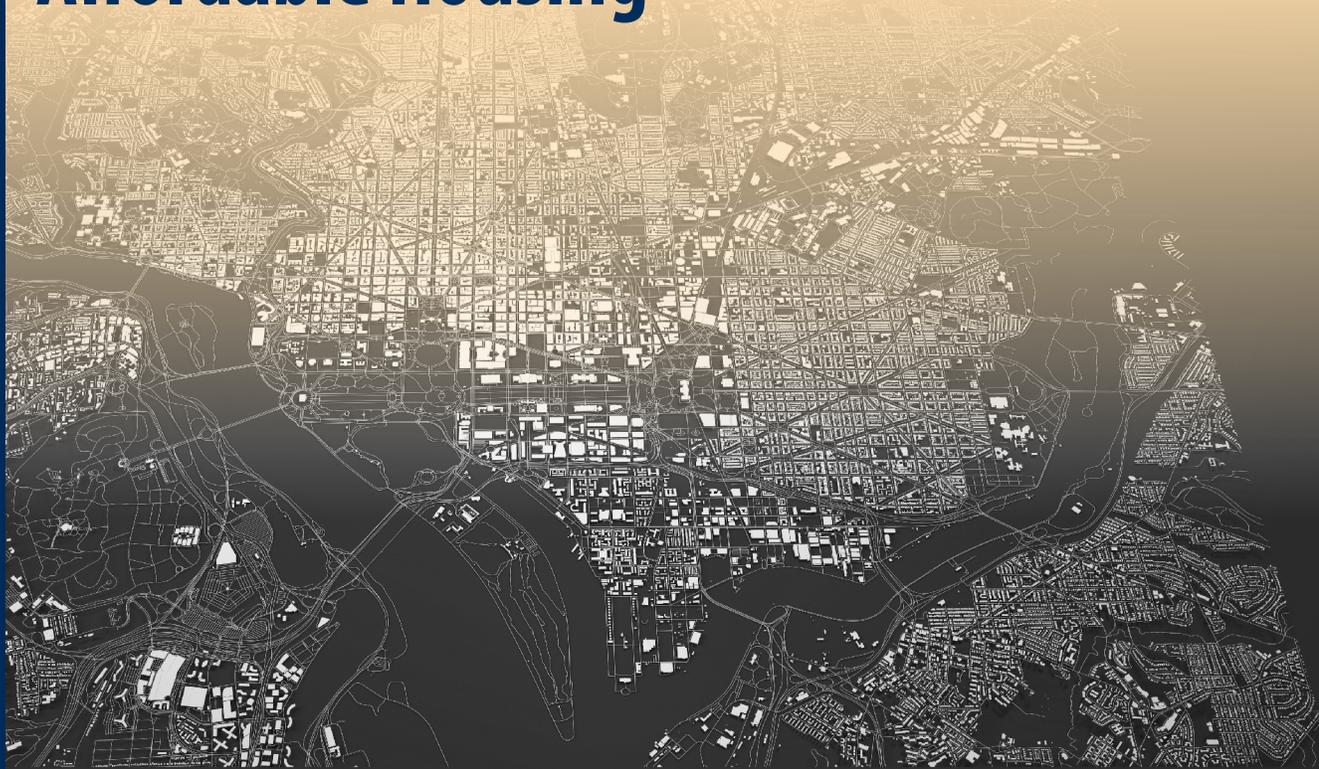


2017

Community *Scope*

Vol. 5 Issue 1

From Tenant Organizers to Housing Agencies: Using Data to Preserve Affordable Housing



Community Scope

The mission of *Community Scope* is to provide information and analysis on current and emerging issues in community development. The content of *Community Scope* is collected and developed by the Community Development department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

Community Development Department Staff

Matthew Martin

Senior Vice President and Charlotte Regional Executive

Sandra Tormoen

Assistant Vice President and Community Affairs Officer

Shannon McKay

Community Development Research Manager, Editor

Emily Wavering Corcoran

Community Development Senior Research Analyst

Samuel Storey

Community Development Senior Research Analyst

Jeanne Milliken Bonds

Regional Community Development Senior Manager
North Carolina and South Carolina

Jennifer Giovannitti

Regional Community Development Manager
Virginia and West Virginia

Peter Dolkart

Regional Community Development Manager
Maryland and the Washington, D.C. Metro Area

Design: Rodney West

A special thanks to Doug Sampson for editing assistance.

Community Scope is published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. Free subscriptions and additional copies are available upon request.

To inquire about our publications, contact:
The Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Community Development Department
P.O. Box 27622, Richmond, Va. 23261-7622
email: caorichmond@rich.frb.org
www.richmondfed.org/community_development/

Text may be reprinted with the disclaimer in italics below. Permission from the editor is required before reprinting photos, charts and tables. Credit *Community Scope* and send the editor a copy of the publication in which the reprinted material appears.

The views expressed in Community Scope are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond or the Federal Reserve System.

From Tenant Organizers to Housing Agencies: Using Data to Preserve Affordable Housing

AUTHORS

Kathryn Howell, Ph.D.

As cities attract new residents, the demand for housing and the concurrent expiration of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidies and mortgages has meant that nationwide hundreds of thousands of previously subsidized affordable housing units have been lost due to opt-out, sale or demolition.¹ Several state and local jurisdictions have begun to track the subsidy expiration of these units and offered incentives for their preservation through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and other federal funds. However, intervening in the process of opt-out, sale or conversion of affordable housing remains challenging because these buildings are privately owned.² Affordable housing in the United States has typically required land, financing and a development team to be successfully created. In the last decade, affordable housing development has, as a result of the need for preservation, become more complex, requiring knowledge of existing buildings and owners willing to engage with local housing actors, as well as complex flexible funding and the buildings themselves, suggesting that local and state actors need new tools and spaces to address this challenge.

This issue of *Community Scope* examines how in Washington, D.C., a network of organizers, government agency staff and affordable housing advocates have cooperatively developed quantitative and qualitative housing data to address the loss of subsidized, rent stabilized and market-affordable housing in gentrify-

Introduction

ing neighborhoods. The DC Preservation Network (DCPN) offers an important example of the ways in which the sharing of data between various actors has led to a broadening of the preservation effort and creates the conditions necessary for affordable housing preservation. DCPN's effectiveness, while not directly involved in building or financing affordable housing, has helped shape an environment — including shared data, access and trust among actors — that enables proactive and comprehensive intervention in buildings that are at risk of loss from the District of Columbia's affordable housing stock.

Affordable Housing Preservation Background

Subsidized housing in the United States has evolved significantly over the past several decades, led largely by changes in federal policy. Public housing, developed in 1937 with the Wagner-Steagall Act, created publicly financed, constructed and operated buildings until the 1970s. In the early 1960s, the federal government subsidized private development of affordable housing in part to address concerns about the needs of moderate-income households but also to stimulate the economy through public-private partnerships.³ In two decades, these public-private partnerships produced more than a million units of privately owned (largely by for-profit entities), publicly financed production through mortgage subsidy programs like Section 236 and the Section 8 Program for new construction and substantial rehabilitation to house low- and moderate-income households. These units have remained an important source of deeply subsidized housing, representing 20 percent of the total number of assisted units in the United States.⁴

Over past 20 years, opt-outs from Section 8 and the expiration of other sources of subsidized housing have threatened the affordable stock. As cities have changed and gentrification has become a part of the neighborhoods that were disinvested in the 1970s, the once heavily subsidized neighborhoods

have become wealthy, well-amenitized neighborhoods, with public transportation, grocery stores and access to employment. The remaining subsidized housing developments are now, as Wyly explains, “islands of affordability in the midst of wildly expensive market-rate housing that low-income people could not possibly afford and that would never accept vouchers.”⁵

Studies have evaluated the factors that lead to the loss of older place-based subsidies, including “an owner opt-out of” subsidy or prepayment of a mortgage, expiration of the subsidy and physical deterioration of the subsidized buildings.⁶ Between 2005 and 2015, 71 percent of all subsidized properties opted in or renewed their existing subsidies, while 4 percent opted out or prepaid, and 2 percent were HUD-terminated due to poor building conditions or financial insolvency. A national study from 2005 to 2015 found greater variety in the characteristics of buildings leaving the subsidized pool compared to a national study from 1998–2004. This may be due to the volatility of the market during the later period and the subsequent growth in advocacy and preservation work done by nonprofit and government actors. Nevertheless, large buildings with low rents and for-profit ownership were overrepresented in the lost units in the most recent study.⁷

In a study of New York City housing program data, Reina and Begley found that high property values, for-profit ownership and other expiring subsidies on the property were significant in increasing the likelihood of an opt-out.⁸ A study of lost properties in Florida came to similar conclusions and also suggested that lower income targeted buildings — such as those with Section 8 place-based subsidies — were less likely to remain affordable after an opt-out, compared to higher income targets that often remained close to HUD's Fair Market Rent.⁹ High neighborhood poverty rates also increased the chance that a building would be demolished after a subsidy opt-out.¹⁰ This suggests that not only are buildings in newly gentrifying neighborhoods most at risk from a subsidy opt-out, but that

the poorest households are most vulnerable to displacement.

In addition to the efforts at the government level, housing advocates have played important roles in the preservation of buildings. In a case study of multiple anti-displacement programs, Levy et al found that community organizing played an important role in preserving affordable housing in gentrifying neighborhoods by enforcing existing local and state laws, convincing owners to preserve the building, or advocating for new laws or preservation funding. They argued, “Most of the retention strategies will not succeed in reducing displacement if the people affected by the possible housing loss are not organized and motivated to act on their own behalf.”¹¹ This may be because preservation is a complex process that requires funding, affordable stock and access to information from a wide variety of actors.¹²

Unfortunately, the ability to organize tenants and be heard is impacted by the available funding. An Urban Institute report argues that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds have been largely used to fill gaps in housing development budgets rather than for community engagement and development.¹³ Moreover, the reliance of the local and state governments on private actors to develop housing, combined with a lack of funding for organizing, has meant that nonprofits compete for dollars to remain solvent. Thus, only highly sophisticated nonprofits have access to public and private funders and competitive funding such as CDBG. The structure of funding has led to a change in the political opportunity structure for small groups such as tenant organizing groups. The fear of retribution also looms large in the organizations funded by local and state governments. They are less likely to organize and appear oppositional if they are dependent on a government agency for funding.^{14 15}

Origins of the DC Preservation Network (DCPN)

In the early 2000s, local jurisdictions were losing subsidized and market-rate subsidized units as many of the HUD subsidies began to expire. At the same time, the nascent back-to-the-city movement was gaining momentum with the growth of demand in the urban housing market and delayed family formation among millennials and young generation Xers, putting pressure on the real estate markets in some of America’s fastest growing areas like Washington, D.C. At this point in time, there was no comprehensive, publicly available data source with which to track the location, expiration dates, opt-outs or HUD’s Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) inspection scores. Moreover, there were no federal initiatives to address the preservation of affordable housing.

In 2007, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) started pilot programs in Washington, Florida, North Carolina and Washington, D.C., that would help them build a national database of subsidized housing. This database would also have a component of local knowledge from “housing monitors” that would provide direct data about the conditions at the buildings. The goal of this type of data was to provide more direct housing data that could aid in preservation efforts. NLIHC received a grant from the MacArthur Foundation’s *Windows of Opportunity* initiative to initiate the pilots and focused on jurisdictions where they had relationships with local advocates.

The first pilot by NLIHC was Washington, D.C., which was selected partially because NLIHC is located in the District of Columbia. It also had an existing network of tenant organizers, legal advocates, housing policy advocates and nonprofit developers who had been working on preservation issues using Washington, D.C.’s, powerful

DCPN Origins

tenant protection laws. Specifically, the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) was cited as an imperfect but necessary tool for preservation. TOPA gives all renters in Washington, D.C., the right of first refusal when ownerships of their buildings will be transferred or if the owner applies for a raze permit. As a result, tenant associations are empowered to purchase their buildings collectively and either assign their rights to a developer to remain affordable or purchase to create an ownership structure such as a limited equity cooperative, in the case of low income purchasers.

The city supports TOPA purchases and other opportunities for preservation through its Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF) and federal sources, such as HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and LIHTC. To better equip tenants to navigate the complicated system of development finance, the city uses a portion of the CDBG allocation to fund legal advocates and tenant organizers. As a result, the NLIHC pilot fit within a larger movement by advocates who represented tenants and NeighborhoodInfo DC, a collaboration between the Local Initiatives Support Coalition and Urban Institute, which tracked affordable housing data throughout the District of Columbia.

In addition to gathering the jointly compiled data on the locations, subsidies and expiration dates of the buildings, NLIHC convened a group of advocates to gain buy-in for the housing monitor concept. However, due to Washington, D.C.'s, history of strong tenant organizations, many of which are funded by the city through CDBG, NLIHC quickly changed their strategy to use qualitative data emerging from Washington, D.C.'s, network of tenant organizers, legal advocates and nonprofit developers, including tenant complaints, housing conditions, evictions, notices of sale and relationships with the building owner and management companies. The data participant base has grown to include local government agency staff, HUD staff, funders and local nonprofit developers who share information about impending sales, subsidies, future funding, anticipated renewals, potential sanctions and other issues (see Table 1). In 2010, as foundation funding expired and NLIHC focused more broadly on the national database, the local Washington, D.C., database and convening responsibilities were transferred and split between the Urban Institute and the local Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED).

Table 1. Structure of the DC Preservation Network

Participants	Quantitative Data	Quantitative Data	Documentation	Meetings	Goal and Outcomes
Tenant organizers Foundations Nonprofit developers City agency staff Federal agency staff Policy advocates	Subsidies Inspection scores Addresses Number of units	Opt-outs Conditions and sale from tenants Affordability covenants Enforcement Funding	Continuous and updated narratives at the building level where buildings are categorized by the degree of risk of losing subsidy attached to the building	Monthly	Preservation at the building level, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assert rights • Enforce laws • Provide legal support • Approve funding for preservation

DCPN in Action

The DCPN meetings have been held monthly since the group was constituted in 2007. Participants discuss buildings that have been flagged by the conveners as: at-risk, expiring subsidy, failing REAC or more information needed. The flagged properties are added to the monthly agenda of properties, which also includes any information currently available from the local database maintained by the Urban Institute and CNHED or DCPN participants. The agenda is sent out before the meetings to give participants a chance to find additional information about the relevant properties. Agency staff particularly appreciated seeing the agenda early in order to better prepare information from a variety of sources.

Elena, a legal advocate who was involved from the beginning, said, “I remember that the purpose was to get ahead of the game on preservation. Up until that point we had been pretty reactive.” To do that, the meetings, participants and communication were designed to be a data sharing space, rather than a space for direct advocacy to allow government agencies to participate without appearing partisan. This participation has enabled significant sharing of information and learning for both governmental and non-governmental participants in the process.

Since 2008, 161 buildings have been on the preservation network meeting agendas, representing 19,897 federally- or locally-assisted affordable units¹⁶ and 21,480 total units, including those under rent control, market affordable and market rate (see Map 1 and Table 2). The reason the buildings are placed on the agenda are an expiring subsidy, conditions complaints by tenants, violation of tenant rights, missing information from the HUD databases, redevelop-

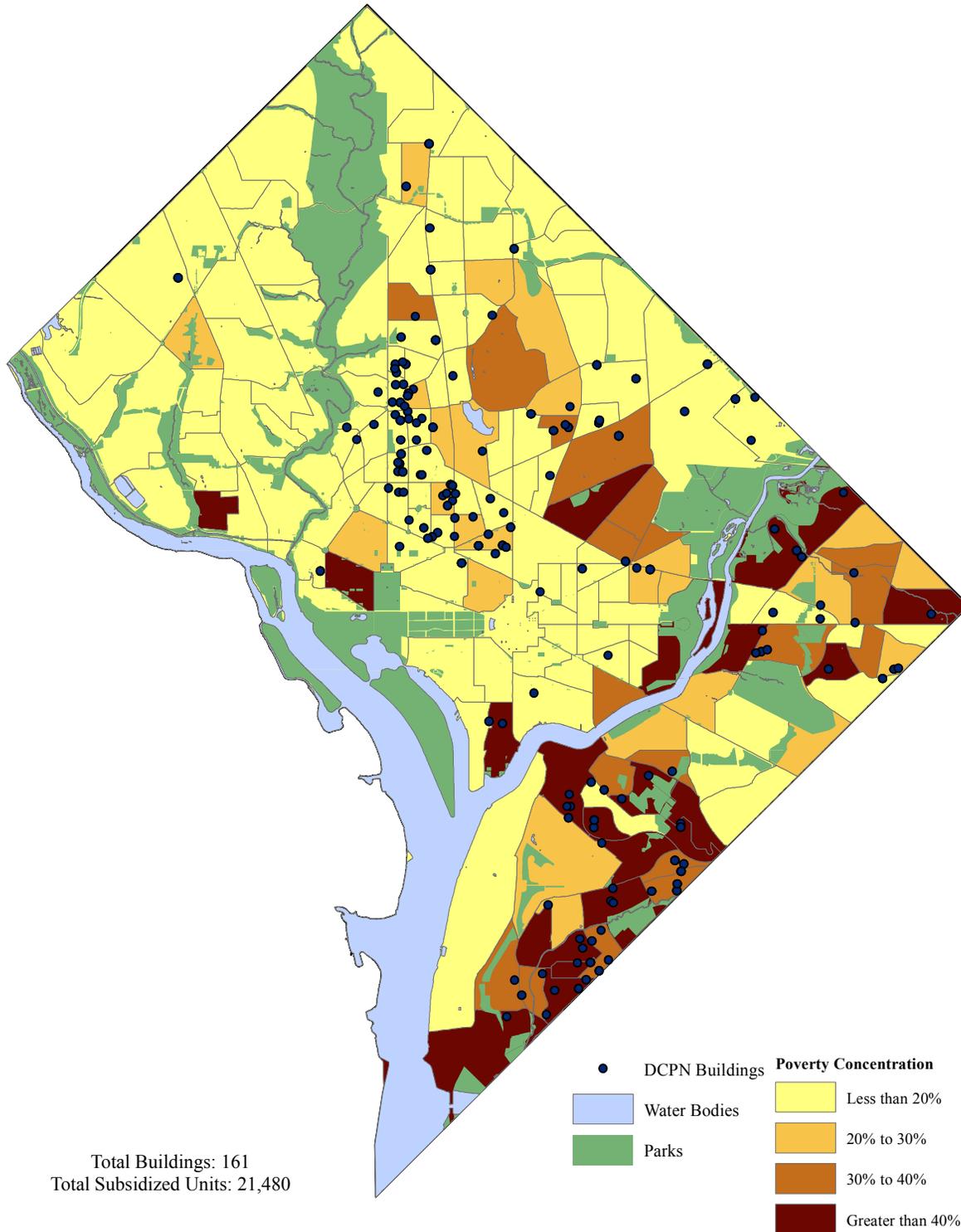
ments by the DC Housing Authority, failing REAC score,¹⁷ bankruptcy or foreclosure, an opt-out notice, a notice of sale of the building¹⁸ or condominium conversion (see Table 3). Participants share information about each building, and relevant parties take responsibility for finding additional information about the buildings as needed. The network’s actions can be categorized into the following topics: vertical information sharing, general information seeking, brainstorming, the creation of an alert, monitoring, negotiation among participants and policy changes.

Although the focus has been primarily data sharing at the building level, participants of the network have used the collected data and experiences to successfully advocate for several important changes to laws and procedures. The first of these was the reporting of opt-outs. Previously, it was unclear who received opt-out notices at the city government level. The network lobbied to ensure that the DC Housing Authority, the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Office of the Chief Tenant Advocate received the opt-out notices to ensure early awareness of an important issue.

More recently, a subset of the network developed a strategy for preserving affordable rental housing in the District,¹⁹ which was given to the newly elected mayor when she took office in 2015. The mayor’s office and relevant city agencies have subsequently developed several policies around preservation, including a set-aside in the most recent biannual RFP, a preservation strike force of high level agency staff and non-profit funders and developers to address particular buildings, and more definitive statements and actions about preservation at the project level.

DCPN Action

Map 1: Buildings on the DC Preservation Network Agenda, 2008–2015 by Census Tract Poverty Concentration 2015



Note: Poverty concentration shown is for 2015 using the American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2011–2015.
Source: DC Preservation Network, U.S. Census 2015.

Table 2: DC Preservation Network Building Agenda Appearance Statistics, 2008–2015

Total Events	243
Total Buildings	161
Repeat Building Agenda Appearances	63
Long-Term Building Agenda Appearances	51
Total Subsidized Units	21,480
Total Lost Buildings	20
Total Lost Units	2,775

Note: A “lost” building denotes a building no longer part of the subsidized stock because of opt-out, sale, demolition, etc.
Source: DC Preservation Network Agendas, 2008–2015.

Table 3: Percentage of Subsidized Buildings by Reason for Agenda Appearance

Reason for Building Appearance on the Agenda	All Buildings	Lost Buildings
Bankruptcy/ Foreclosure/ Termination	7.9%	42.7%
Conditions	6.0%	0.0%
Condo Conversion	1.2%	10.8%
Expiring Use	45.5%	9.2%
Failing REAC	9.5%	0.0%
Missing Data	8.7%	9.4%
Notice of Sale	6.9%	21.4%
Opt Out Notice	0.6%	6.5%
Prepayment	0.4%	0.0%
Redevelopment	8.7%	0.0%
Tenant Rights Violation	2.7%	0.0%
Total Buildings	161	20

Note: A “lost” building denotes a building no longer part of the subsidized stock because of opt-out, sale, demolition, etc.
Source: DC Preservation Network Agendas, 2008–2015.

DCPN Utility

The Utility of DCPN

DCPN as an entity does not engage directly in preservation work in the same way that the tenant organizers, developers, nonprofits and public agencies do. Instead, the value of the meetings for participants is in creating the conditions for preservation, including data sharing, convening a diverse set of actors, building relationships and trust among the actors, and facilitating institutional and individual learning about processes and programs.

Vertical information sharing

A central goal of the preservation network has been what can be characterized as vertical information sharing. This type of information sharing occurs when an organization in one sector shares information with an organization in a different sector. Vertical sharing was most frequent between HUD staff members and tenant organizers to clarify expiration dates, REAC scores or opt-out notices. However, tenant organizers also provided important data to government agencies about the actions of landlords, conditions within the buildings and plans by tenants to purchase their buildings. This type of information sharing was the primary reason participants cited for continuing to participate in the network. John, a tenant organizer, explained, “I went to the first meeting and this I kept going [to] because it is useful as a means of occasionally getting information from government about properties. It was also useful to get information from other non-governmental participants who happened to know something about particular buildings or developers, owners, management companies — it’s ideally for issues and information sharing.”

Through this vertical sharing, government agency participants are able to both acquire and share knowledge about buildings, acting as a warning system about projects that are troubled. Further, they have a better understanding of the organization structure and interests of the tenants living in the buildings. Finally, as both

conveners and agency staff stated, they learn about bad actors and loopholes exploited in tenant protection laws. Ben, a government agency staff member, explained that he started to participate because his agency was receiving tenant complaints about buildings and did not always know what was happening. He also saw his role as providing information and access to other parts of government. He explained, “Because a lot of the information is confidential, I have to educate them about how to go around to get the accurate information. ... My contribution was more in getting the record straight and getting the information and understanding the solutions.” He explained that many times tenants and advocates had incorrect or incomplete information that made action and advocacy difficult.

Organizers similarly found this access to government data important. As Hannah, a legal advocate stated simply, “I think it’s beneficial to clients because we have access to various government officials [through the network].” John commented that “knowledge is power,” and that having a better equity of information between grassroots organizers, government and developers evened the playing field.

In early 2013, the owner of Cleveland Place Apartments in the rapidly changing NOMA (North of Massachusetts Avenue) neighborhood received LIHTC to significantly renovate the aging 284 unit building.²⁰ Tenants received notifications to recertify their incomes early, and some were evicted based on items that had been known to landlords through background checks. Residents stated that they felt pressured to leave the building by the management company. The tenants of Cleveland Place had a history of negative interactions with the landlord, including a failed REAC inspection in 2009 and an unwillingness to allow the tenants to work with organizers in 2010. The active tenant association tried to set up meetings with the owner in 2013 when rumors surfaced about a redevelopment. When that failed, the tenant board president, tenant organizers and legal advocates attended DCPN meetings to discuss the issue with HUD

staff. HUD's involvement facilitated significant dialogue between the owner and the tenants. In addition, the DC Housing Finance Agency (DCHFA), who provided the tax credits, asked for a relocation plan and a renovation plan from the owner. Since that time, DCPN has monitored the on-going preservation work, and both HUD and DCHFA have remained in contact with the tenants and their attorneys about the ground-level challenges of the rehabilitation as it continued.

Participants matter

To make the network work well, frequent and effective participation by a diverse set of actors was necessary (see Figure 1). NLIHC conveners argued that this early participation was due to the championing of the network by key stakeholders, including city government actors. Several organizers explained that they found out about properties that they visited through the preservation network typically because there was an expiring subsidy or a failing REAC score. Many of these groups play multiple roles, such as housing development and organizing or legal services and policy advocacy.

However, while the participation by advocates was regular and significant, the quality and regularity of public sector participation was unpredictable, largely dependent on the priorities of the directors of the relevant agencies. Participation has taken two forms: direct attendance and email responses to agenda items. Some of the agency participants reported that while they may have initially been told to attend by their directors, there was often little or no interest in the results — meaning that the frequency of the participation was based on individual level interest in the issues discussed. For instance, in a previous administration, the director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, new to District of Columbia government and the advocacy community, prohibited his staff from attending DCPN meetings, arguing that it was a conflict of interest. However, more recently, agency directors have sent both more relevant and more frequent reports to the network.

Many interviewees specifically cited the participation of HUD as a key source of information.

In the first few years of the network, participants had to file Freedom of Information Act requests to acquire the REAC scores of Section 8 properties. When HUD participated, staff members were able to share the information, a particularly important element given the risk of termination and loss of a property as a result of multiple failed REAC scores. Additionally, due to delays in data reporting and the renewal process, having a HUD representative to clarify the status of particular properties was important. Those representatives also were an important source of information for properties in the process of redevelopment.

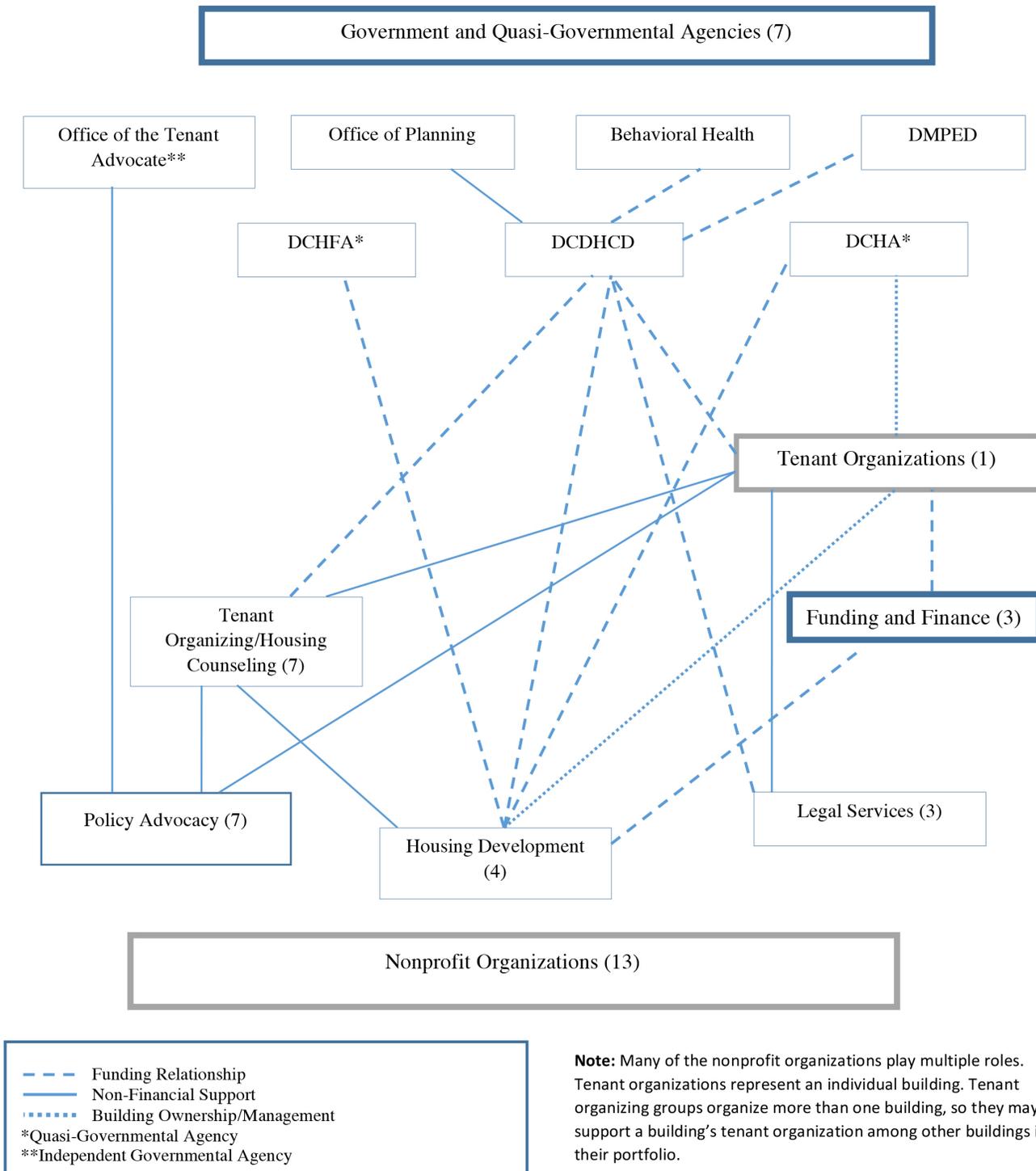
Building trust among actors

An important input and output of the network is relationship building and trust. Elizabeth, a government agency staff member participant, argued that over the years the network has been in place, “the meetings became more productive and more action-oriented ... and it was less of trying to figure out who was responsible and who should take ownership, and even in a negative way where to point a finger. It was more, toward the end, how to problem-solve.” Advocates like John talked about relationships built with particular agency staff members who engage in dialog about properties outside of meetings. Meanwhile Christine, a legal advocate, argued that the relationships built during the meetings give her greater access to government actors outside of the meetings. Ben sees part of his role as a government participant as providing access to other parts of his agency and the local government, more broadly.

Participants stated that this trust developed because meetings were focused on data-sharing. From the standpoint of tenant organizers and other nonprofits, the very act of greater transparency on the part of government actors improved the relationships and trust. Government actors commented that the fact that they would not be blamed or attacked in meetings encouraged their participation and transparency and led them to being open to working with organizers, legal advocates and other nonprofits outside of the meetings to focus on particular properties.

DCPN Utility

Figure 1. Active Participants and their Relationships in the DC Preservation Network



Elizabeth explained that she was not supportive of the network when it first began because of the potential for conflicts of interest due to the advocate participants in the room, “So I think that caused some of the public sector representatives ... to feel less comfortable about the conversations being held in the room. I think as the years passed, and definitely within the last 4–5 years, I think that there was a sense of trust that was built. ... I’ve seen it go from something that could’ve been seen purely as an advocacy tool that turned into a problem-solving tool, which, if that is the future of the network, that would be a positive thing.”

Hands-on housing finance education

Technical learning and brainstorming proved to be important to the empowerment of organizers and the tenants with whom they worked. For many organizers, the various financing programs such as Section 8, LIHTC, and Section 236 — some of which are obsolete — were relatively unknown. Anna, who has been involved since the inception of the network, explained that she felt lost in the discussion of the large number of HUD programs because she did not have a finance or housing policy background. But, as she explained, “At the time, there [were] a lot of folks in the room that were really useful — government, attorneys, HUD came really early at the beginning. ... I think both just having that mix to be able to coordinate and also just for learning.” The imbalance of information left many organizers out of the policy discussions and made it difficult to find the appropriate levers to make preservation activities happen.

This type of learning was illustrated in the ongoing discussion of LIHTC compliance periods. Properties subsidized through LIHTC since 1989 have two 15-year compliance periods. However, their expiration dates are often set for the first 15 years in the HUD database, causing confusion among participants. As Anna explained, much of the learning was facilitated through the diversity of participants — many of whom were not previously experts in housing finance or housing

policy. But learning the rules of funding sources, affordability periods for programs, impacts of prepayments, failed REAC inspections and other issues related to housing finance gave them the tools to address many challenges facing their clients.

In the case of Maplewood Terrace, a building that had gone into default with DCHFA, the attorney representing the tenants often brought housing finance questions to the network to better understand the impact of foreclosure on the existing LIHTC and Section 8 covenants.²¹ DCHFA faced a loss of \$5 million in the property and hoped to minimize that amount. Because a new owner is only required to maintain LIHTC for three years after the auction, and the fate of the Section 8 contract was unclear, the attorney worked with other participants to find alternative solutions. Ultimately, they were able to pressure DCHFA to require at least the continuance of the partial Section 8 contract in the auction of the building. The building reverted to rent control after the loss of LIHTC, and those rents were comparable or lower than the tax credit rents. Although the building was a loss in terms of the subsidized stock, the knowledge gained through the network allowed the attorney and others in the network to advocate more effectively for tenants in other buildings and to ensure that tenants in Maplewood had the best outcome given the circumstances. It also served to build relationships with DCHFA to improve the outcomes for similarly situated buildings in its portfolio.

Conclusion

In 2008, in their quarterly DC Housing Monitor report, NeighborhoodInfo DC reported that 10,000 units of subsidized housing would expire by 2010. Seven years later, at least one government agency staff member still remembers that it encouraged her to participate in the DCPN, but more importantly the connections created through the DCPN helped to change the ways in which policy can address the challenges facing low-income households as the city changes. While Washington, D.C., has preserved a significant amount of the subsidized stock in gentrifying neighborhoods like Shaw and Columbia Heights,²² the city lost 20 subsidized buildings, totaling approximately 2,775 units between 2008 and 2015.

The preservation of affordable housing — particularly in tight markets — is fraught with unique multilevel challenges unanticipated two decades ago. Preservation is complex and requires more than one toolbox to be effective. Certainly the funding, legal and organizing infrastructures were important, along with the stock of housing available to preserve. However, the conditions for preservation, including the existing relationships between building-level advocates, funders, developers and government agencies have to be in place for effective and sustained preservation efforts.

DCPN serves as an example of how to create these conditions by convening diverse groups, by sharing diverse types of data and through group learning. First, bringing together a diverse group of actors working on affordable housing preservation at many different levels is necessary for effective data sharing. Actors must be from multiple sectors of affordable housing preservation, including tenant organizing, funding, development and government. These actors should have information about individual buildings and have the power and agency support to share that information with decision-makers within their organizations.

Second, the meetings are focused on data, which has allowed for a coproduction of knowl-

edge. The focus on data over advocacy has engaged more diverse actors in a non-threatening way. Just as important as the actors, a variety of sources made a difference in the quality of analysis and ability to appropriately respond to changing conditions. Having a broad dataset allowed for government actors to make decisions about the issues faced by tenants, such as conditions, rent increases or evictions, how to best preserve buildings and whom to contact. Organizers were able to use data to know where they should organize, who controlled the building, what type of affordability covenants were part of the funding, and the current status of funding or support from government agencies.

Finally, equity of information makes for a more level playing field outside the depoliticized space. Organizers are rarely housing finance experts, and government housing agency staff rarely visited buildings in which tenants are facing unhealthy conditions, threats of eviction or harassment from their landlords. The group learning that comes from knowing the funding sources, laws and mechanisms for preservation allowed tenants and advocates to make recommendations to agency staff, better understand their rights and resist the pressures from owners and landlords.

About the Author

Dr. Kathryn Howell is an Assistant Professor in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research interests include affordable housing, gentrification and community development.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the helpful contributions of Jack Cooper, Shannon McKay, Aaron Steelman, and Sandra Tormoen. We are grateful to members of the DCPN for sharing their valuable perspectives and data with us.

Resources

For an academic look at the process and theory behind the DC Preservation Network, see Howell, Kathryn L., Housing and the Grassroots: Using Local and Expert Knowledge to Preserve Affordable Housing, Journal of Planning Education and Research, First published date: May 16, 2017.

For additional information on the organizations and resources mentioned in this article, please visit their websites.

DC Preservation Catalog

<http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/dcpreservationcatalog/index.html>

NeighborhoodInfo DC

<http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/>

The Urban Institute

<http://www.urban.org>

Coalition of Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED)

<https://www.cnhed.org/>

National Low Income Housing Coalition

<http://nlihc.org/>

National Housing Preservation Database

<http://www.preservationdatabase.org/>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Schwartz, A. F. (2015). *Housing Policy in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- 2 Reina, V., & Begley, J. (2014). Will they stay or will they go: Predicting subsidized housing opt-outs. *Journal of Housing Economics*, 14, 1-16.
- 3 Orlebeke, C. J. (2000). The Evolution of low-income housing policy, 1949–1999. *Housing Policy Debate*, 11(2), 489–520.
- 4 Schwartz, A. F. (2015).
- 5 Wyly, J. D. (2008). Running to Stand Still: Through the Looking Glass with Federally Subsidized Housing in New York City. *Urban Affairs Review*, 43(6), 810.
- 6 [Ray, A., Kim, J., Nguyen, D., & Choi, J. \(2015\). *Opting In, Opting Out a decade later. US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Washington, D.C.: HUD.*](#)
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Reina, V., & Begley, J. (2014).
- 9 Fair Market Rent is regionally-calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to determine payment levels for several federal housing programs including Housing Choice Vouchers, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html>.
- 10 Blanco, A. G., Kim, J., Ray, A., Stewart, C., & Chung, H. (2015). Affordability After Subsidies: Understanding the trajectories of former assisted housing in Florida. *Housing Policy Debate*, 25(2), 374–394.
- 11 Levy, D., Comey, J., & Padilla, S. (2007). In the Face of Gentrification: Case Studies of Local Efforts to Mitigate Displacement. *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law*, 16(3), 244.
- 12 Howell, K. (2015). Preservation from the Bottom Up: Preservation from the Bottom Up: Affordable Housing, Redevelopment, and Negotiation in Washington, D.C. *Housing Studies*, 31 (3) 305–323.
- 13 The Urban Institute. (1995). *Federal funds, local choices: An evaluation of the Community Development Block Grant Program (Vol. 1)*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- 14 Bockmeyer, J. L. (2003). Devolution and the transformation of community housing activism. *The Social Science Journal*, 40, 175–188.
- 15 Gittel, R., & Vidal, A. (1998). *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- 16 This number does not include units that were market affordable, affordable unit rent control or market rate.
- 17 REAC scores are given by HUD's Real Estate Assessment Center from physical inspections of HUD assisted properties. A failing REAC score can signal management issues and can lead to the loss of subsidy on the building if there are subsequent failed inspections.
- 18 Building owners are required by the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) to issue a notice of sale to tenants that gives them the first opportunity to purchase the building before the building is finally sold.
- 19 [DC Preservation Network. \(2014\). *Maintaining Economic Diversity and Affordability: A Strategy for Preserving Affordable Rental Housing in the District of Columbia. Preservation Strategy Working Group, December.*](#)
- 20 The name of the building has been changed to protect the confidentiality of tenants who have ongoing issues with management/owners.
- 21 The name of the building has been changed to protect the confidentiality of tenants who have ongoing issues with management/owners.
- 22 Howell, K. (2015).



**FEDERAL RESERVE BANK
OF RICHMOND®**

Richmond • Baltimore • Charlotte

Post Office Box 27622 • Richmond, VA 23261
www.richmondfed.org

**Presorted
Standard**

U.S. POSTAGE
PAID

Permit No. 2
Richmond, VA

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



Follow us on social media

