DEVELOPING AIN’T EASY
Assessing the Obstacles that Impede the Provision of Affordable Housing

Local governments, nonprofit and private developers, and other related organizations all work in tandem to provide affordable housing units in their communities. A stable supply of affordable housing is critical for the health of a community but unfortunately, these organizations face a variety of obstacles in meeting the affordable housing demand. This research study aimed to identify and discuss these obstacles, as well as to identify possible methods of reducing them.

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Objectives

| A. Define the processes that lead to the development of new, or the redevelopment of existing, affordable housing units |
| B. Identify what obstacles developers face when funding, building, and managing affordable housing units |
| C. Identify the source or cause of these obstacles |

Methods

| A. Analysis of related local, county, and national public policies |
| B. Interviews of persons involved in the provision of affordable housing |
| C. Observations of the formation of potential and existing affordable housing developments by Innovative Housing Opportunities, a nonprofit provider of affordable housing in Southern California |

Background

Stable and affordable housing is important to the health of a community because it reduces homelessness among the most vulnerable populations: seniors, veterans, and families with children. It can also improve health status as well as children’s performance in school, which reduces hindrances to attaining and maintaining higher skilled employment. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development considers housing to be “affordable” if it costs no more than 30% of a household’s income. Unfortunately, half of Americans spend about this proportion or more of their income on housing.

Key Obstacles | Potential Causes
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The Availability of Funding for Projects Is Often Unreliable | e.g. 2011 dissolution of redevelopment agencies in California
There Tends to Be a Negative Reception of Affordable Housing Projects | e.g. negative stigma associated with affordable housing units and residents
Municipalities Have Differing Vulnerable Population Housing Priorities | e.g. some cities may focus on housing seniors as opposed to large families
Building New Units vs. Rehabilitating Existing Units | e.g. cost and time savings of either option varies greatly from site to site
Pertinent Government Information Is Not Always Readily Accessible | e.g. it is often difficult to identify block grant funds availability from city to city

Policy Recommendations

| Short Term Solutions for Developers | Utilize cohesive façade designs and generate community support |
| Long Term Solutions for Municipalities | Implement density bonuses and utilize “anti-snob” zoning ordinances |

Conclusion

The affordable housing shortage cannot be fixed overnight. However, over time measures taken by local municipalities and developers alike can have a lasting impact on housing affordability for future generations.

Advanced Field Study offers undergraduate students in the School of Social Ecology an in-depth, three-quarter field study experience focused on civic and community engagement. Students work together with a community partner to prepare a professional research report which helps the organization better understand social or community problems, helps inform the organization’s strategic goals, and/or helps enhance the organization’s services.