

Permanent Supportive Housing in Los Angeles:  
The Barriers and Solutions

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## **Abstract**

Thesis Questions: What are the barriers to creating permanent supportive housing? What are some solutions to overcoming such barriers?

This paper studies the barriers to creating permanent supporting housing (PSH) in Los Angeles and solutions to overcoming those barriers. The study reviews the existing literature on the efficacy of PSH as a solution to chronic homelessness, the effect of NIMBYism and zoning ordinances on the construction of PSH, and the role of Proposition HHH in the funding and production of PSH. I conducted original qualitative research in the form of interviews with thirteen professionals in the PSH and affordable housing fields to determine specific barriers to creating PSH and innovative solutions to overcoming such barriers. The research informs policy recommendations at the local, state, and federal levels focusing on issues of funding, land use, zoning, and specific existing policies. I found that the two most pressing matters in advancing PSH are funding and zoning. Policy recommendations including expanding funding to create a single-source model and streamlining zoning processes are explained in detail, contributing to the movement to end homelessness in Los Angeles and nationwide.

## **Introduction**

Los Angeles' unhoused population has drastically increased over the past few years. According to the most recent count, there are 66,436 people in Los Angeles County experiencing homelessness in 2021, a 12.7% rise from last year's count (LAHSA, 2020). Similarly, the City of Los Angeles saw a 16.1% rise to 41,290 in 2020 (LAHSA, 2020). Numbers of chronically homeless individuals, people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year or multiple bouts of homelessness adding up to a year, while struggling with physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders, have been increasing steadily in step with the rest of the unhoused population. Prior research has shown that permanent supportive housing (PSH) -- permanent affordable and

developers face when trying to utilize the bond. The culmination of this research is a comprehensive list of policy recommendations at the local, state, and federal levels about how to overcome the barriers to creating PSH in Los Angeles County, the state of California, and the broader United States.

## **Background**

The following section will provide the background information necessary to place this study in the context of PSH and homelessness policy more broadly. The background will include the history and importance of PSH and the Housing First approach, the structure of Housing First, the framework of HHH, and what has happened since the bond passed in 2016. This section will define the terms discussed throughout the rest of the paper and provide enough information to understand the following qualitative data, analysis, and conclusion.

### **Permanent Supportive Housing**

The term “permanent supportive housing” (PSH) stems from a combination of permanent housing and supportive housing. PSH refers to housing options that are affordable (oftentimes accompanied by government subsidies), permanent, and provide on-site or easily accessible support services. These services can include mental health care, physical health care, substance abuse treatment, crisis management, counseling and therapy, career programs, and more. The target population of PSH is people who have struggled with chronic homelessness and suffer from physical or mental disabilities, oftentimes co-occurring. Because of the “permanent” in PSH, residents are able to benefit from supportive services for as long as they choose to live in their units, though many people do move on to live independently (Skid Row Housing Trust, 2020).

PSH provides an alternative to emergency shelters, long-term shelters, and transitional housing. It has been proven to be more effective than these alternatives in allowing formerly chronically homeless residents to remain housed in the community, with lower rates of relapse back to homelessness (Bailey et. al., 2016; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Tsemberis and Eisenberg,

2000; Rosenheck, 2003; Byrne et al., 2014). According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the core set of PSH principles are that “services are housing oriented, services are multi-disciplinary, and services are voluntary but assertive,” (Bailey, et. al., 2016, pg. 1).

means that services are set up to find permanent housing options, provide tenants with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, and help tenants avoid eviction.

- supportive housing provides tenants with mental and physical health needs, substance abuse treatment, and access to government and non-profit social services.

means that tenants are not required to engage in any services, but providers are assertive and consistent in offering such services. Most PSH programs utilize a Housing First model, meaning they operate under the principle that all people deserve housing without any preconditions. The following section will explain Housing First in greater detail, with an emphasis on the programmatic components of the model.

## Housing First

Housing First is a model of housing that emerged in response to older models in which individuals were provided with short-term housing while participating in service programs that would prepare them for long term housing (HUD Exchange, 2014). These models required individuals to participate in treatment for physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders, etc. before becoming eligible for long-term housing that usually did not provide supportive services. Housing First as applied to the PSH model primarily serves individuals who are required to receive services.

Individuals who are in need of supportive services

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Housing First



By utilizing a harm reduction approach, Housing First programs are able to meet the needs of their clients no matter where they are in their mental health and substance use stages. Harm reduction is rooted in human rights, preventing programs from operating with judgement or coercion, and instead allowing clients to dictate their own experience. This model is integral to Housing First, as it works to destigmatize drug use and mental health disorders, while working to improve the lives of clients struggling with these issues.

The Housing First model can be applied to a variety of permanent supportive housing models including

“scattered-site models in private market apartments, where rental assistance is provided, and tenants have access mobile and site-based supportive services; single-site models in which permanent supportive housing buildings are newly constructed or rehabilitated and tenants have access to voluntary on-site services; and set-asides, where supportive services are offered to participants in designated units within affordable housing developments,” (HUD Exchange, 2014, pg. 3).

The Housing First model is designed to provide housing and supportive services for extremely vulnerable people struggling with chronic homelessness and co-occurring mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders. By providing permanent affordable housing and optional wraparound care, the Housing First model has been proven to be highly effective in attaining and maintaining housing stability, improving mental and physical health, and reducing use of emergency services for residents.

Housing First PSH is difficult to construct due to high construction costs, local political opposition, expensive land costs, exclusive zoning ordinances, and many other factors. Los Angeles voters passed Measure HHH in 2016, a bond dedicated to funding PSH and affordable housing units throughout the city in response to the rapidly growing homelessness crisis. The following section will explore the history of HHH and the progress that has been made since its passing.

## Proposition HHH

Proposition HHH is a Los Angeles bond measure that was passed by voters in 2016, designating \$1.2 billion to build PSH and affordable housing units throughout the city. HHH was heavily supported by Mayor Eric Garcetti, who originally claimed the bond would be enough to finance 10,000 units of permanent housing for populations experiencing chronic homelessness (McGahan, 2019). Since the passing of HHH, it has

with 62 units of PSH (Matthew, 2020). LA Mag's map (Figure 1) of HHH developments shows



openings consistently for the next year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. While there may be more sites opening in the next year, Ron Galperin and the public agree that HHH's implementation has been too slow and will not meet the high demand for PSH, especially considering how many people have and will lose their homes due to the pandemic.

Figure 1. 2020 HHH Housing Projects, LA Mag, Zoie Matthew, 2020.

At the first development's opening, Mayor Eric Garcetti stated that over the next year, a new

HHH development will be opening every three weeks. It will be a

slow-moving in processing and funding new projects, units are too costly, and the homelessness crisis is worsening too quickly (Galperin, 2020). The city must take more drastic measures to address the homelessness crisis and support Angelinos in obtaining housing and support services. The data collected in this study will provide more information about the shortcomings of Measure HHH and will culminate in suggestions for how to improve the execution of the HHH and future government funding of PSH.





property values (Pendall, 1999; Monkkonen and Manville, 2019). The study of NIMBYism has shown the three common stages of NIMBY movements including “youth, maturity, and old age” (Dear, 1992). The youth stage refers to the immediate responses from NIMBYs, when they are a small, unor

NIMBY opposition are the type of proposed facility, as residential facilities are likely to face more opposition than non-residential service facilities, in addition to the client base, size, physical appearance, type of services offered, etc. (Dear, 1992). Housing developers have implemented various strategies to combat community opposition including neighborhood education and involvement, facility autonomy from surrounding communities, and integrated approaches. There is no “right” way to resist community opposition, as developers have found success in a variety of tactics.

NIMBY opposition to housing for formerly unhoused communities and other subsidized housing developments is often cited as fear of safety, decreasing property values, and neighborhood amenity (Pendall, 1999; Monkkonen and Manville, 2019; Dear, 1992). However, studies have shown that subsidized and affordable housing developments do not decrease nearby property values, and in many cases, have the opposite effect (Cummings and Landis, 2003; Pendall, 1999; Martinez, 1988). Many reports about NIMBYism are in relation to the construction of subsidized below-market rate housing, exploring local opposition to such developments. These studies show that community opposition plays a large role in whether the projects are approved or not, as the zoning boards who approve zoning variances are usually made up of community members (Monkkonen and Manville, 2019). Furthermore, community opposition often has the upper hand, as the length of time it takes to purchase a plot of land, apply for permits, and apply for zoning variances allows community members to develop diverse strategies to oppose developments (Monkkonen and Manville, 2019). As discussed above, developers utilize various strategies to combat NIMBYism, and have been successful in integrating their projects into communities. As most research on NIMBYism is about developments different from PSH, there are gaps that this paper aims to fill. Original research on



the role of NIMBYism in developing PSH will come from interviews with architects, developers, non-profits, and government employees who have direct experience in the field.

In addition to NIMBYism, zoning ordinances play an important role in the prevention or prolongation of creating PSH. Zoning laws determine the size of buildings on a given lot, how much parking must be built, what each building can be used for, etc. Because zoning ordinances in Los Angeles are so strict and historically exclusionary, finding appropriate land or obtaining permission to build PSH on a differently zoned lot is extremely difficult. The following section will outline the history of zoning in Los Angeles and point out specific difficulties that arise in the process of obtaining zoning permits for PSH.

### Zoning

Los Angeles' zoning ordinances began in 1908, with the implementation of zoning code that separated residential, commercial, and industrial spaces (Farabee, 2019). In the 1970's, the city designated 50 Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA) street blocks for the neighborhood of Skid Row, where most of the homeless population and support services were located (Farabee, 2019). In an effort to diversify and improve the area, Los Angeles changed DTLA zoning codes to allow for mixed use buildings in 2013 (Farabee, 2019). With the new zoning codes, developers moved into DTLA and began building high density, high commodity residential buildings that encroached on the Skid Row neighborhood. Instead of increasing income diversity and providing more affordable housing for low-income Angelinos, the zoning code overhaul effectively propelled the gentrification of DTLA. In the past few decades, DTLA has become an expensive, desirable location, and residents of Skid Row fear the development of new market-rate housing usurping the neighborhood (Farabee, 2019).

In Los Angeles, many residential neighborhoods have low density zoning, meaning that there are primarily single family homes and zoning restrictions prohibiting higher density housing including apartment buildings, duplexes, etc. In the last few decades, there has been a push for higher density housing, as there is a dire need for affordable housing in Los Angeles that cannot be fulfilled without multi-unit developments. Throughout the world, there has been widespread support of inclusionary zoning and upzoning. Inclusionary zoning is a response to the historic practice of exclusionary zoning, where zoning ordinances were put in place to exclude certain racial, socioeconomic, and other groups from living in certain areas. Inclusionary zoning has become prominent since the 1970s, as local, state and federal governments have implemented zoning ordinances to encourage the development of below-market rate housing units in low density areas. The concept of upzoning follows suit and refers to the rezoning of areas from low density to high density, in an effort to make communities more diverse and inclusive.

However, because zoning regulations are so strict in Los Angeles, the creation of multi-unit developments, especially affordable housing developments, is difficult to achieve. Subsidized housing developments with below-market rate units are subject to arduous zoning approval processes that can prolong or even prevent construction. A developer must find and purchase land that is zoned for multi-unit housing or submit zoning variances to have differently zoned land approved. They must be able to purchase and have land approved before applying for subsidies to fund the project, and oftentimes face heavy scrutiny from surrounding communities (Scally and Tighe, 2015). The practices of inclusionary zoning and upzoning have increased the possibility of creating affordable and permanent supportive housing, but 75% of Los Angeles is still zoned for single-family residential lots (Farabee, 2019). There are large gaps in research on

the role of zoning ordinances in creating PSH, as most zoning research is about affordable and other below-market rate housing. The research in this paper will help bridge those gaps, with a focus on the role of zoning in the barriers to creating PSH. In addition to zoning ordinances, government funding for PSH developments is crucial in understanding the already existing research of the barriers to creating PSH.

### Proposition HHH

In 2016, the city of Los Angeles passed Proposition HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond to support the development of supportive housing, with the goal of producing approximately 10,000 units (Galperin, 2019). Mayor Eric Garcetti's office has stated their commitment to ending homelessness in Los Angeles and strongly supported the measure. The funds from HHH are reserved for non-profit and for-profit developers whose projects contain demonstrated site control, or documentation demonstrating ownership or leasing rights of a plot of land adequate for development, at least 50% supportive housing units or a minimum of 20 supportive housing units, and at least 50% of supportive housing units reserved for chronically homeless individuals and families (HCIDLA, 2018).

Since the passing of Proposition HHH, little progress has been made in building new developments. According to a 2019 audit of HHH's progress by City Controller Ron Galperin, most of the loans from HHH had not been officially awarded to projects, and most projects had not yet begun construction (Galperin, 2019). Though little research has been done on why HHH has not resulted in more construction of PSH, speculation points to issues of long project approval, permitting, and zoning processes, and extremely high costs (Klasky-Gamer and Kuehl, 2017). Articles following the audit reference Galperin's analysis that the \$1.2 billion will not be enough to complete 10,000 units due to rising construction costs and soft costs including



believe that the approval process for developers should be streamlined and zoning ordinances should be modified to ensure the creation of more supportive housing units. There is some controversy over the ef

## Methodology

The goal of this study is to understand the barriers to building PSH for unhoused populations in Los Angeles. After conducting research, I propose in Losers Outlets

NIMBYism, zoning and density issues, Measure HHH, tax incentives to build PSH units, and more. I left room for free-flowing conversations, so each professional was able to explain what they are most passionate or knowledgeable about. With the interviewee'





## **Data/Findings**

Over a three month period, I contacted approximately twenty professionals who work in the PSH field. Most of the people I reached out to agreed to complete an interview with me, resulting in thirteen interviews conducted throughout a two month period (see chart below for a full list of interviewees' names and affiliations).

### **Name**

### **Organization**

Alan Greenlee

Southern California Association of Non Profit  
Housing

Alex V



governments must all allocate massive funding budgets for specific types of projects. If these various government entities created funding sources on a massive scale, individual developers and organizations would be able to fund a whole project with one source, which would likely accelerate the timeline for funding approval and pre-construction, ultimately decreasing the cost per unit and time to build the development in its entirety.

Interviewee Ben Rosen discussed dedicated funding sources for PSH developments in Los Angeles including Proposition HHH, California SB 35, Los Angeles Transit Oriented Communities, and the Los Angeles PSH Ordinance. He pointed out that while the city and state governments have been making an effort to increase funding for PSH and other homeless housing initiatives, the federal government has been absent. Rosen said,

“In order to meaningfully address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis, expanded federal funding for housing is needed. This should come through an expansion of the Section 8 program and more federal funding for affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, and transitional housing/shelter construction and operations. California and its cities and counties have made strong funding commitments to try to solve the housing problems we face, and more help from the federal government is needed to support these efforts.”

Other interviewees agreed that federal funding is necessary in the larger PSH and affordable housing movement. Without massive funding opportunities from the federal government, states and municipalities won't be able to adequately address the housing and homelessness crisis in a timely manner. Beyond funding issues, the interview subjects agreed on other topics covered, including the role of NIMBYism in creating PSH developments.

### NIMBYism

Because PSH serves a very specific demographic of formerly chronically homeless individuals, usually with chronic physical and mental illnesses, issues of NIMBYism are



worked for months with the community to create improvements to their site plan, landscaping, and other aspects of the development so that the community would be able to feel and see their impact in the new development. The interview subject spoke fondly of the community member who was initially opposed to the development, as they worked together to foster a mutually beneficial and appreciative relationship between the residents of the development and the residents of the surrounding community. While NIMBY opposition to a project is theoretically a

showing the difference between 3.0:1 to 1.5:1 (Figure 2).

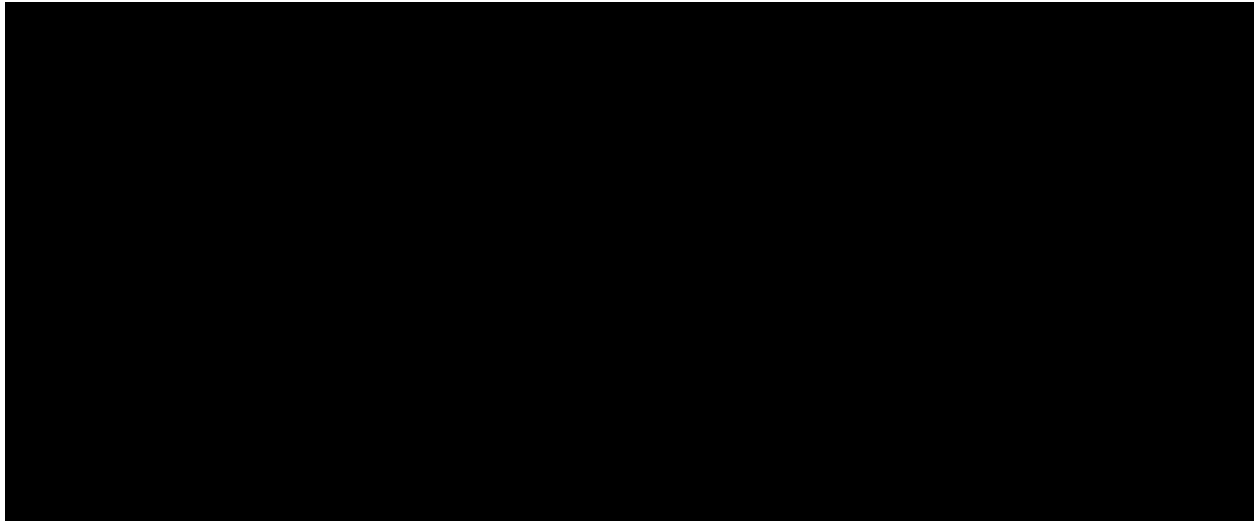


Figure 2. Illustrations of Floor Area Ratios, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, Paavo Monkkonen and Kate Traynor, 2017.

Voters approved this measure 2 to 1, effectively downzoning 70% of commercial and industrial properties throughout the city (Monkkonen and Traynor, 2017). At the time, stakeholders predicted that the Proposition would elevate property values near affected zones, and depress commercial property values, but the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies found that nearby residential property values were not influenced by Proposition U and commercial zones were in fact depressed. Interviewee Angela Brooks discussed the significance of Proposition U in decreasing the possibility of housing being built in commercial and industrial zones. Brooks said,

“We’ve actually been downzoning over the decades in Los Angeles, rather than creating good density where it should go. One of the things that we’ve done is to take our commercial boulevards, which are our c-zones, commercial zones, where you really want to put a mixture of uses, housing and commercial...And the voters decided to decrease the allowable density on all of our commercial boulevards throughout Los Angeles, so it went from an FAR of 3.0:1 to an FAR of 1.5:1... So, the downzoning has really created a bottleneck where we are not allowed to build density and everything has to get discretionary approval. And what that means is you have to ask for entitlements, and once you ask for entitlements, you add a bunch of costs, you add years of time.”

She explained that Proposition U has decreased the possibility of densification in many parts of the city, which adds to the discrepancy between the general plan and zoning codes of the city and of various areas. Brooks elaborated on this issue, stating,

“The general plan is what cities decide how their neighborhoods are going to be, so the general plan will say things like “We want Venice to be a walkable neighborhood,” for instance, the zoning is supposed to then follow. But if the zoning isn't consistent with the general plan, for instance if the zoning says in Venice, which has really tiny lots, you need to have four cars per unit, then obviously that wouldn't follow through with a walkable neighborhood. So for a long time, I've known that our zoning code is inconsistent with our general plan. The general plan says one thing and the zoning code doesn't follow.”

The significance of this discrepancy is in the resulting lack of density and lack of possibility for affordable housing near transit. Brooks supports the idea of “by-right zoning,” which means a zoning process that is streamlined, so if a development fits the zoning standards, it is automatically approved without a discretionary review process. If Los Angeles were to adopt a by-right zoning process, PSH and affordable housing developments that followed zoning standards would be streamlined into construction instead of being held up in review processes and public hearings for extended periods of time, which both increases the price per unit and allows for public opposition to build up. The Garcetti administration has outlined new zoning rules for PSH including an increase on the FAR for eligible developments, and more expansive zoning allowances in residential, commercial, and mixed use zones (LA City, 2021). While this is progress in Los Angeles' zoning code, Brooks and other interviewees agree that the city should adopt by-right zoning and discard unnecessary public hearings and review processes that make projects more expensive and extend construction timelines.

## PSH Development

In thinking about the development of PSH in Los Angeles, it is crucial to understand the role of funding, NIMBYism, and zoning. However, it is also important to have an understanding of the development process and housing placement process, as they can make or break a project. Each of the interview subjects who work with PSH nonprofits or development organizations discussed their experiences with bringing a project to fruition and finding tenants to live in the units. The pre-development and development processes involve purchasing land, obtaining enough funding to build a project and maintain it for fifteen years, and paying for architects, lawyers, contractors, construction workers, and potential legal issues that may come up throughout the entire pre-development and development periods. Developers must be able to apply for and receive the appropriate permits for their project, which usually involves public hearings that can garner attention from NIMBY neighbors. Alan Greenlee, director of Southern California Association of Non Profit Housing, explained in an interview the difficulty of public hearings and the role of City Council in zoning and land use approvals. Greenlee extrapolated on the public hearing process that is necessary to gain land use approvals in which a developer must present their plans in front of the community, giving NIMBYs an opportunity to try and complicate or derail the project entirely. Another interviewee, Ben Rosen, explained the process in which developers present in public hearings for SB 35 projects in front of the planning committee, and the planning committee must vote to approve the project. He said,

“The State of CA and City of Los Angeles have introduced many planning tools for affordable housing, such as SB 35 (CA), Transit Oriented Communities (LA), and the PSH Ordinance (LA), that have streamlined the land use entitlement process and removed much of the uncertainty associated with discretionary approvals and protracted community battles of land use approvals. Furthermore, the City of LA generally and the City Council and the City Planning Commission have supported a lot of affordable and Permanent Supportive Housing.”



Rosen explained that this process is mostly for show, as the planning commission has been overwhelmingly supportive of PSH in recent years and has been approving each project if it meets qualifications for SB 35.



shared community spaces and opportunities for community building are extremely important in PSH developments with mixed populations, allowing for empathy and community support to be fostered. Interviewees agreed that once developments have residents to occupy units,

## Data Analysis

From the data collected through interviews with PSH experts, I was able to compare information to existing literature and analyze significant similarities and differences. The interviewees provided evidence both of the effectiveness of PSH and the barriers to creating PSH in Los Angeles specifically. In each of the four data collection topics about barriers - funding, NIMBYism, zoning, and development and management of PSH - interviewees spoke of personal experience overcoming these obstacles and shared their innovative solutions. With the interview data, I analyzed and synthesized expert opinions to develop several key policy recommendations applicable to Los Angeles that will help create more PSH and contribute to ending the homelessness crisis.

There is extensive research and literature about funding housing for unhoused communities. As discussed in the literature review section, 2017's Proposition HHH allocated \$1.2 billion of public funding to build supportive and affordable housing in Los Angeles. HHH was projected to create 10,000 units of PSH in 10 years, meaning 1,000 units per year. In 2019, City Controller Ron Galperin publicized a report saying the rollout of Proposition HHH was moving too slowly and ineffectively. Galperin wrote that the 10,000 units in 10 years will not be possible at the current cost per unit and speed of construction. In his audit, he recommended that the money currently allocated to more expensive projects be reassigned to less expensive projects. He also recommended that land use approval processes be streamlined by the Planning Commission and City Council so that projects aren't waiting in pre-development for years. My interviews with stakeholders and activists contradict Ron Galperin's report on Proposition HHH and have more nuanced information on the role of funding in creating PSH in Los Angeles.

Contrary to existing literature, every one of my interviewees agrees that HHH has been extremely effective in building PSH since it passed in 2017. One expert explained the common misunderstanding about the goal of HHH. The 10,000 units in 10 years is based on the 300 units of PSH that Los Angeles already creates every year. The HHH funding is supposed to add an additional 700 units per year, coming to a total of 1,000 per year and 10,000 in 10 years. The public, including LA Magazine and the LA Times, has been overly critical of the slow rollout of HHH results because of poor publicity and lack of transparency from local government. Furthermore, the public opinion is critical over how expensive various HHH funded projects are, as the initial projection of cost per unit was \$350,000 for one bedroom apartments and \$414,000 for two or more bedroom apartments (Galperin, 2019). Galperin's report places the current median cost per unit at \$531,373, even reaching \$700,000

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interview revealed the drastic need for - in PSH. Nearly all of my interviewees spoke about the arduous process of applying for multiple funding sources, all of which have applications due at different times, have very different parameters and design requirements, and many of which require other funding sources already being secured. This extended process of searching for funding, losing

government, including City Council members and the Planning Commission, has shown its dedication to creating more PSH around the city. In the past, NIMBY opposition would likely lead to a project being heavily delayed or even terminated, but now projects are being pushed through regardless of neighborhood opposition.

Interviewees discussed combatting NIMBYism through community building projects and service days; making compromises on the physical characteristics of buildings and landscaping; and introducing community members to future residents of a development. On the government side, interviewees strongly suggest that public hearings for land use and zoning approvals should be discontinued so that NIMBYs lose their platform for complaints, and that City Council members and the Planning Commission should ignore NIMBY complaints if there are no other issues with a PSH proposal. Given the research in the literature review, I was expecting to collect data from interviews saying that NIMBYism is one of the most pressing issues in the construction of PSH, but the data actually point to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ being more prevalent concerns. It is important for developers to engage and work with the community around their developments to both improve the project and to set the stage for a harmonious relationship between the surrounding community and the future residents of the development. City officials must also engage with the community about their concerns and educate them about the importance of PSH in solving the homelessness crisis and the data showing that property values and safety do not decrease with the presence of PSH developments. City officials must work in tandem with developers to combat NIMBYism instead of conceding to opposition and denying proposals.

Unlike the disparity between my initial research on NIMBYism and the data collected in interviews, my analysis of zoning is consistent with the research explained in the literature

review. In both the data from the literature and the data collected from my interviews, there are similar narratives about the history of zoning in Los Angeles and the need for densification. Literature says zoning in Los Angeles has historically been exclusionary, designed to maintain low density (Farabee, 2019; Morrow, 2013). Greg Morrow provided the following chart mapping the change in land area use from the 1970's to the 1990's, showing how slight changes have been.

Figure 3. Summary of Total Land Areas by Use, UCLA, Greg Morrow, 2013.

75% of Los Angeles has been zoned for single family housing since the 1970's, though Downtown Los Angeles was rezoned in 2013 to allow for higher density housing with low parking requirements in an effort to help both the housing crisis as well as economic development. However, the upzoning of DTLA resulted in the construction of mostly expensive housing, pushing out lower income residents and encroaching on the boundaries of Skid Row (Farabee, 2019). In addition to the issues that come with low density



Angeles needs to be rezoned to allow for higher density housing in more areas of the city, and that the approval process for zoning and land use must be streamlined. Interviewees agreed that the zoning process should no longer include public hearings, and land use proposals for PSH must be reviewed as soon as they are received.

In addition to simplifying the land use approval process, all interviewees agreed that zoning ordinances in Los Angeles must be updated. Architect Angela Brooks spoke about Measure U, the 1986 ballot measure that reduced the Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) from 3.0:1 to 1.5:1 in commercial and industrial zones. Brooks explained that a relatively simple, but crucial, strategy to increase density in Los Angeles is to repeal Measure U so that commercial and industrial zones can host higher density housing. Brooks also rebutted the notion that increasing density will result in decreasing residential property values, citing a 2017 UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies study proving that property values in neighborhoods with increased density stayed consistent over a 6 year period of analysis (Monkkonen and Traynor, 2017). Other interviewees spoke less about specific Measures or zoning ordinances that should be changed, but agreed on the need for rezoning commercial and industrial zones to allow for multi-unit housing, rather than relying on case by case “spot zoning.”

Many interviewees referenced Project Homekey, a state initiative that is purchasing hotels and motels to convert into permanent housing for homeless individuals. Alan Greenlee, the director of Southern California Association of Non Profit Housing, highlighted the importance of converting uninhabited hotels and motels into Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units, a model of housing from the mid 1900’s. Other interviewees went further, examining the value of converting empty office space, store fronts, and industrial buildings into permanent, transitional, and shelter housing, all of which would currently require land use approvals. Zoning

reform in Los Angeles to allow for high density housing requires repealing Measure U, and updating the approval process for zoning and land use applications, as these steps would streamline the process for developers to build PSH and other types of housing for formerly unhoused individuals.

The development and management of PSH developments offers particular challenges relative to other forms of affordable housing. In the literature section, I outline the importance of PSH as a research-backed effective solution to maintaining housing stability and decreasing the amount of money spent on emergency and public other services on unhoused individuals. PSH was created in response to older models of permanent housing that required resident participation in both support services and sobriety, which proved to be ineffective and dehumanizing. The PSH model serves the chronically homeless population, people who have experienced homelessness for one year or longer, with co-occurring mental and physical disorders. It is expensive to build and run, but studies have proven that it is more cost efficient and effective in the long term compared to other forms of housing for formerly unhoused populations (Dohler et al., 2016; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Rosenheck, 2003; Byrne et al., 2014). While my initial research pointed to PSH being the most effective intervention to the homelessness crisis, data collected from interviews show that other models of housing are necessary as well because the unhoused community in Los Angeles has a wide variety of needs for which various types of housing are appropriate.

Interviewees including Alan Greenlee, Director of SCANPH; Marc Tousignant, Director of Vulnerable Populations at Enterprise Community Partners; Alex Visotsky, Legal Affairs Manager at LAHSA; Ben Rosen, Director of Real Estate Development at the Weingart Center; Becky Dennison, Executive Director of Venice Community Housing; Jan Breidenbach, housing





## **Policy Recommendations**

The data collected and analyzed in this study point to several key policy recommendations on federal, state, and local levels. While improvements have been made to housing policy in the last few decades, far more must be implemented to have a meaningful impact on homelessness and housing in the United States, and specifically in Los Angeles. My policy recommendations cover issues of funding, zoning and land use procedures, federal involvement in housing policy, and specific California and Los Angeles policies. In my data analysis, I concluded that the current system of funding for PSH and af

development, or in the creation of new taxes (locally, state-wide, and nation-wide) that pay into multiple housing funds available to developers. Potential ramifications of this updated model of funding include disgruntled police unions and supporters of police unions, upset citizens who do not want their tax money going to benefit unhoused communities, and higher levels of competition between developers applying for funding. These potential consequences could be eased by public campaigns to educate about the benefits of PSH and additional tax breaks for those who donate directly to PSH organizations. In addition to creating a single source funding model, government branches responsible for zoning and land use approvals should streamline approval processes to decrease time spent in pre-development.

Streamlining zoning and land use procedures includes reviewing applications as soon as they are submitted, disposing of public hearings that give voice to NIMBYs and increase wait times, and stripping the Planning Commission and City Council Members of their discretion in deciding whether to approve a project or not, essentially making zoning “by-right.” If a project meets applicable parameters, it should immediately be approved to begin construction, regardless of NIMBY opposition or opposition from the Planning Commission or City Council. While disposing of public hearings could lead to accusations of corruption or favoritism, making meeting minutes public and accessible would prevent Council and Commission members from practicing unfavorable behaviors. In addition to project proposals that meet zoning requirements, there will inevitably still be applications for zoning variances and land use approvals, so meetings between the Planning Commission and City Council must be held to specifically review these applications. Though a uniform policy for these types of applications does not make sense, a set of parameters should be followed to ascertain whether a development should be given land use approval, specifically looking at access to public transportation, lot size, and



organization called Community Solutions on their campaign “Built For Zero” for the last five years to identify each person experiencing chronic



cities that are meeting their Regional Housing Needs Assessments (RHNA) can qualify for S.B. 35 if they include 10% below market rate housing in developments, while cities that are not meeting their RHNA are required to build 50% below market rate housing in their developments (California S.B. 35, 2017). S.B. 35 only applies to the income brackets that are not being built for, so a city that is meeting their RHNA for market rate housing can only qualify for below market rate housing (California S.B. 35, 2017). Once a project has been approved by S.B. 35, they are given streamlined approval processes, meaning that their permits must be approved by the city within a certain time period.

Data from this study point to the need for reform of S.B. 35, as the Bill's parameters are currently too stringent for many projects to qualify and has the potential to negatively impact communities that are being gentrified. S.B. 35 should be amended to incentivize projects with greater capacity for below market rate housing (30-60% of Area Median Income), and qualification requirements should be made more lenient. Currently, S.B. 35 projects must be on land zoned for residential use and cannot be in an ecologically protected area, rules that are harmful to the effectiveness of the Bill. Projects should be qualified regardless of the zoning policy, as many below market rate projects are on differently zoned land (Public Counsel, 2017). Additionally, S.B. 35 should prohibit new market rate development in areas that have been or are being gentrified, as streamlining approvals for market rate housing in these areas will quickly worsen gentrification and displacement. In addition to local and state level policy improvements, involving the federal government in housing policy is crucial to reducing homelessness and increasing housing production.

The Housing Choice Voucher program, or Section 8, a federal government program, funds housing vouchers for income qualified participants, but the program is not funded well

enough to address the massive waiting list. The federal government should begin by increasing funding and capacity of Section 8 so the program is

housing must be built as well. Because PSH facilities are unique in their need for support services onsite, great amounts of funding must be set aside for those specific developments. If all levels of government work together to fund, streamline, and build housing, Los Angeles and other cities will be able to meet their goals of ending the homelessness crisis.

## Conclusion

In this study, I set out to discover the barriers to creating PSH and solutions to overcoming those barriers in the context of Los Angeles. To find these answers, I reviewed existing research on topics related to the construction of PSH and conducted thirteen interviews with professionals in PSH related fields in Los Angeles County. Interviewees included PSH architects, directors and employees of non profit organizations that build and manage PSH developments, individuals who work in affordable housing, housing activists, and Los Angeles City employees of homelessness and housing agencies. I analyzed this original research to determine specific barriers to creating PSH and the corresponding solutions, which informed my local, state, and federal government policy recommendations.

I discussed existing literature about issues related to PSH including the merit of PSH, NIMBYism, zoning, and Los Angeles' Proposition HHH. In the literature review, I discovered that PSH is a highly effective solution to chronic homelessness, as it has the ability to reduce residents' use of emergency services, reduce the amount of money spent on homeless individuals, and keep residents stably housed for prolonged periods of time (Bailey, et al., 2016; Caton, et al., 2016; Byrne, 2014; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Tsemberis et al., 2004). I ascertained that issues of NIMBYism, zoning, and funding are the three most critical barriers to creating PSH, which informed the questions I asked interviewees when collecting data. Once all data were collected, I analyzed them to find similarities and differences between knowledge from interviewees, determining which information should inform my policy recommendations. Data point to a dire need for increased funding from all levels of government, especially the federal government. I also determined that there is a need for policy change locally, and at the state and federal levels to insure a future where more PSH, affordable, and market rate housing is being







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