AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN HUMBOLDT COUNTY:
EXPLORING BARRIERS AND RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITY

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ABSTRACT

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The cost of housing is particularly high in Humboldt County in comparison to the average rate of household income. There is a shortage of housing with prices that reflect the income of Humboldt County households. Many people who have an income do not receive enough money to reasonably afford housing at the current local rates without being cost-burdened. Shelter is a basic necessity. When people do not have a safe place to rest or to keep their belongings, the other aspects of their lives are also difficult to maintain.

This is an exploratory journalism project which examined the shortage of affordable housing in Humboldt County. The aim was to evaluate the need for low income housing in this county and gather ideas for what can be done by housing developers and housing advocates to create more apartments and houses with rental costs that reflect the income level of the people who struggle to afford housing. The methods included qualitative interviews, review of literature, and evaluation of data. The objective of this investigation was to construct an informed recommendation of how to create more affordable housing in Humboldt County.
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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, there is a shortage of affordable housing for people with very low incomes. This is particularly true in Humboldt County. There are many households in this county that qualify for housing assistance, but it appears there are not enough low-income housing units to meet this need. For the purposes of this project, low-income housing is defined as rental property in which the monthly price is subsidized at 30% of a household’s monthly income. For example, a single person who receives $900 per month on Social Security would pay a subsidized rate of $300 per month for a single room occupancy (SRO), such as a studio apartment.

The objectives of this project were to examine the need of low-income housing in Humboldt County, evaluate the barriers to creating more affordable housing, and then provide recommendations for overcoming these barriers. Examination of Humboldt County’s need for more affordable housing was measured by the use of qualitative interviews and analysis of recorded data for the county’s demographics such as population, income, and rental rates. Observation of potential barriers to providing low-income housing derived from the qualitative interviews. Recommendations for increasing the availability of affordable housing evolved either directly from the interviewees or by comparing the interviews with the data and the literature reviewed.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are two forms of government housing assistance programs for low-income families. First, there is project-based assistance. This funds the construction or rehabilitation of housing units, and subsidizes income-eligible households who live in these developments. Project-based assistance consists of programs administered by the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This assistance includes the Public Housing program and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. LIHTC falls under the U.S. Treasury Department. HUD's project-based assisted programs have been dramatically reduced in the last decade, leaving the LIHTC as the main program that develops affordable housing. (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008).

Under the LIHTC, tax credits for each state are given to the sponsors of low-income housing development. Then the sponsors sell the tax credits to individual and corporate investors. The investors invest in low income housing because the law permits them to deduct the tax credits against unrelated income over ten years. Through decreasing the housing development’s long-term debt, the availability of LIHTC money lowers rents by 20 to 30 percent below the market rate for new apartments. (J. Blau, 2007)

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is awarded to each state based on population. To qualify for LIHTC funding, property owners can (1) restrict rents of 20%
of their units to households at 50% of the area median income (AMI) or (2) restrict rents on at least 40% of units to households at 60% of area median income. Property owners set the rent based on the income restrictions applied to each unit, as opposed to other federal housing programs in which rents are determined by tenant income. LIHTC tends to serve households in a very narrow income range of 50% to 60% of AMI. The Obama administration recently suggested that incomes up to 80% of AMI qualify for LIHTC. Since LIHTC incomes tend to have 40% of AMI levels, it is uncertain how much rising the AMI cut-off to include higher income households would help. It was noted by Williamson that the higher-income renters are more inclined to take advantage of other housing opportunities, such as renting single-family homes at reduced rates. (A. R. Williamson, 2011)

Although the LIHTC does create more housing that is affordable, Joel Blau, Doctor of Social Work (2007), points out that some analysts of housing policy question whether LIHTC is an efficient way of lowering rents for low-income tenants. Underwriting, syndicating, and developer fees use 20 percent of the LIHTC’s total funds. It could be less expensive to give federal grants to reduce the cost of developing a project. Blau reasons that the bottom line of tax expenditures is that it channels public funds to the wealthy.

“We would be wise to consider what it says about the United States housing policy that the wealthy actually receive a significantly disproportionate share of all federal housing assistance”. (J. Blau, 2007)
LIHTC -- the largest government housing program—is a tax expenditure. Tax expenditures primarily aid the wealthy. In the 2004 fiscal year 22 percent of all tax expenditures went to the wealthiest two percent of all taxpayers. LIHTC may result in a low rental price to some who need it. However, because this assistance results in a tax credit, monies that would otherwise be incoming taxes are returned to the pockets of the wealthy. (J.Blau, 2007)

The second form of government housing program is Tenant-based assistance. Tenant-based assistance, also known as Section 8, provides vouchers that can be used to rent housing in the private market. Households who are approved for Section 8 housing receive a voucher from HUD and take it to a private landlord who agrees to this arrangement. The arrangement is that HUD pays the difference between 30 percent of the tenant’s income and the fair market rent. (Blau, 2007)

On February 13, 2013, President Obama presented his Fiscal Year 2013 budget request. The budget did not request full-funding for all 12-months of project-based Section 8 contracts in FY 2013. The Fiscal Year 2013 HUD budget requested $8.7 billion for the project-based Section 8 account, $611 million less than the 2012 budget request. According to statements by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, they can fund all project-based Section 8 contracts through September 30, 2013, which is the end of the federal fiscal year. Many project-based Section 8 properties may receive full 12-month funding obligations under this budget proposal, depending on when the property's contract renews. HUD claims that payments to landlords will not be delayed
or reduced and that the cut will not impact the number of families served by the program. (The National Affordable Housing Management Association, 2013)

According to Nan Roman, president and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the budget cuts to Section 8 will likely increase instances of homelessness. Additionally, fewer people who are already homeless will be able to end their homelessness. Some housing authorities have already suspended issuing new vouchers to those on the wait list. Housing authorities nationwide report that they are working to ensure that current voucher recipients do not lose assistance. The recent sequestration, which is a legal technique in which automatic budget cuts are elicited, has added to the dilemma in funding. In addition to cuts in the housing choice voucher program, the sequestration reduces funding for other federal rental assistance programs. This includes public housing and homeless assistance, which will lose an estimated $304 million and $99 million in the sequester. (C. Kiene, 2013)

Most assisted housing is administered by HUD but operated by local public housing authorities. Income-eligible households are typically defined as having incomes below 50–80% of the local area median income. The median household income in this county is just over $40,000 per year. This means that in Humboldt a family may be income eligible if they earn as much as $20,000 to $32,000 annually. (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2011; U.S. Department of Commerce).

One of the long-term solutions in the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Ten Year Plan to End Homeless is to increase the amount of low income housing available (DHHS, 2008). The Department of Housing and Urban Development
(HUD) explains the following guidelines for units to be called “low-income”. All assisted housing units must meet a set of housing quality standards so that they are ensured to be decent and safe, in addition to affordable. Rents usually cannot exceed a “fair market rent” (FMR) established for each housing market and currently set at the 40th percentile of market rents. In general, a tenant's out-of-pocket costs are set at 30% of that family's household income. The subsidy pays the difference between this contribution and the unit's rent up to the fair market rent.

Cost burden provides the criterion for determining whether housing is affordable. Housing typically represents the biggest expense in a household’s budget. Federal guidelines indicate that households can afford 30% of their gross income for housing costs. In the case of tenants, this figure usually includes rent and tenant-paid utilities such as electricity, gas, and water. Those households paying more than 30% of gross income for housing are considered cost burdened, and those paying 50% or more are considered severely cost burdened. Cost-burdened households may be at risk of having inadequate resources left over for food, clothing, medical care, child care, transportation, and other necessities. (Williamson, 2011)

Prior findings suggest a need for lower priced housing in this area. The United States Census of 2010 illustrates data as evident of financial struggle in this County. In Humboldt County, approximately 17.7% of the population lives below the poverty level, higher than the state average of 13.7%. The average household income in Humboldt County is less than two-thirds the average household income in California. (U.S. Department of Commerce)
According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Humboldt County resident working forty hours per week must earn $12.69 per hour in order to afford an apartment at market value of $660. Many working people in this area, even those who have a college degree, often are limited to earning less than $10 per hour. A person making California minimum wage of $8.00 per hour can afford to pay $416 for rent. This same person would have to work 63 hours per week to afford market-rate rent. This formula is even more distressing when one considers people who cannot work and are on aide. According to the model for cost burden, Social Security recipients can only afford $261 per month in rent. Another example of matching income with cost for housing is that a family with three children in California getting Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) receives a maximum of $694 per month. When using the model for cost burden, this family of four to five people would only reasonably afford about $230 in rent. Many of the families receiving TANF do not have any other income on which to rely. This comparison of income with the rental market helps explain why so many households in Humboldt County are cost-burdened. (Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, 2011; HUD 2011)

The City Council or Board of Supervisors of a local government in California is required to adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the city and county. The housing element is one of the seven mandated elements of the local general plan. Housing element law, enacted in 1969, mandates that local governments adequately plan to meet the existing and projected housing needs of all
There was a recent local dispute over whether the Board of Supervisors is correctly meeting their obligation in attempts to supply affordable housing. In February 2007, Humboldt Sunshine, Inc. sued the county saying its housing element was out of compliance with state law because it did not facilitate the development of adequate and affordable housing for all economic segments of the community. A local affordable housing group, known as Housing For All, intervened on the lawsuit that was filed by the group Humboldt Sunshine, Inc. In 2011, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors settled with Housing for All. After years of litigation over the county's low-income housing supply, the county has agreed to meet a rezoning deadline set by Housing For All. (Donna Tam, 2011)

Another issue that began on the state level and affects the county is the loss of tax increment financing to housing redevelopment. At the end of 2011, the California Supreme Court upheld the complete elimination of redevelopment agencies, including tax-increment financing (TIF). The redevelopment agencies went out of business on February 1, 2012. What this means on a local level is that one of the sources for financing urban revitalization has been cut and this affects the amount of low-income housing being added to the area. (W. Fulton, 2012)

The above mentioned literature describes an assortment of sources for low-income housing. Each funding source has specific requirements for what population it serves and under what circumstances. The question remains as to which funding sources...
Humboldt County has acquired and whether those sources are enough to meet the level of need for this population. What are the gaps in funding and programs, if any, that prevent this county from having enough affordable housing to go around? How can the known sources of aide be used in the future to accommodate this need? Lastly, what potential policies and funding sources can be created to increase the potential for individuals and families to get and maintain adequate housing?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory gives a frame work for the action to take in making change. The theoretical framework for this project is Dynamic Systems Theory. In Dynamic Systems, each system is a whole in itself. It is a part of larger systems, and a vessel of smaller systems. Social processes are essential and are impacted by larger social structures. Housing policy in Humboldt is affected by both state and federal policies. If funding is cut on a state or federal level, for example, it will more than likely effect the funding in Humboldt. It is essential to recognize changes in social processes on the larger systems level in order to address issues on the smaller level. (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006)

The system in which housing and development are organized affects multiple people on a local level. Each local or county level is a part of and affected by this system on the state level. The state level is affected by the federal level. When there is disruption or change in one part of the system—for example, the loss of tax-increment financing funding in the state of California—the counties within California are affected by that change. The local system of housing development loses money that it had depended on from the state level. The local system must address the impact of that change. Solutions to the dilemma of change may be found in the larger systems or within the smaller systems. (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2006)
METHOD

The information for this project was gathered from public knowledge through written documentation via databases, newspaper articles, records, literature, and qualitative interviews. Much of the data gathered in the Literature Review provided a background for understanding how low-income housing works and the main funding sources that keep it alive. Other data gathered supported the argument that there is a need for low-income housing in Humboldt County, as well as nation-wide.

The information was compiled to evaluate three issues. The first issue was whether Humboldt County currently meets its need for low income housing based on the population. Second, consider what constraints may prevent the need from being met. Third, explore ideas that may stimulate the development of more low income housing. The information from all sources was compiled into this written document to discuss the need locally for low-income housing. The end goal of this project was to recommend, if data indicated that there is an inadequate amount of low income housing, what actions might be made locally, state-wide, and federally to address this need. If the gathered information were to indicate that there is an adequate amount of low income housing in Humboldt County, the document would discuss this in the results section of the document.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain information from local sources that are knowledgeable in housing policy, social services, housing development, and zoning laws.
The questions were structured to stimulate conversation that would better inform the researcher of the legal and political constraints which prevent the county from meeting this local need. The participants in these interviews included two advocates of low-income housing, one private building developer, and two employees of local government agencies. All five of the participants have direct professional experience in low income housing.

The data gathered from the qualitative interviews was then compared with the data gathered from literature, databases, and newspaper articles to evaluate comparisons between the written data and that received from a first-hand local source. Additionally, through this comparison some evidence emerged on how changes in federal and state funding have affected Humboldt County’s ability to provide affordable housing to its population.
RESULTS

Examination of literature on housing development and policy was essential to performing this project. The analysis provided a background of information on the subject to build a working knowledge of key terms, sources of funding, and recent events in regard to low income housing. This information proved helpful in keeping the flow of conversation during interviews without needing the interviewee to clarify definitions. The interviews had four collective themes of which most of or all of the respondents expressed. First, family housing is in fairly low supply in Humboldt County. Second, single room occupancies are in very low supply. Third, the expansion of low-income housing is influenced by incentive to developers, funding sources, and costs of construction. Fourth, the bottom line to nearly all barriers was money.

In regard to rent, low-income restricted units are fixed by a schedule made by the state of California or by HUD (Housing and Urban Development). HUD establishes the Fair Market Rate (FMR). If a rental is “unrestricted” the rents are subject to increase by the landlord. There were a number of contributing factors that raise rent. The costs of maintaining property influence the amount of rent that landlords need to charge in order to make their own payments. These expenses can include property taxes, utility rates, maintenance, and repairs. Landlords typically rent properties out to get a return on their investment. Rental prices will sometimes go up in order to get that money coming in. Supply and demand influence rental prices as well. For example, during times when
fewer rentals are available, rents will often be higher because those desperate for a place to live will have fewer options.

Additionally, people moving in from other areas may offset the rates of rent. The rents in Humboldt County tend to be “slightly” lower than those in other areas of California. The average income, however, is about one third lower in Humboldt County than in the rest of the state. Therefore, those moving to this county from other areas are able to spend more money on housing than somebody who has lived here for a longer period of time.

The role of zoning laws was reported as a minimal issue in regard to low-income housing. Inclusionary zoning helps ensure that low income housing is included in community development. Zoning is, in fact, helpful for multi-family housing. It is, however, less helpful for development of Single Room Occupancies (SRO’s). There is a tendency for higher community support toward family housing than housing for a single person. This is, in part, due to the attitude that children should not be homeless but a single person should get a job and has no reason not to support him or herself. What fails to be recognized at times, though, is that a significant proportion of individuals who need low-income housing the most are those who receive Social Security because they cannot work. As these incomes are usually low to begin with and at a fixed rate, these individuals’ chances of getting housing at the fair-market rate are slim.

There were two common identified barriers to developing single room occupancies. The first barrier is that SRO’s are more expensive to build with less money being paid in rents. The cost per unit to build a Single Room Occupancy is higher than to
build a living space with multiple bedrooms. This is due to the fact that each SRO needs its own toilet, shower, sinks, stove, and refrigerator. The costs of these additions add up to make the cost of providing SRO’s more expensive to build per square foot.

The second barrier to creating SRO’s is that these units in particular tend to have a bad reputation in communities. One interviewee described SRO occupants as “not your typical neighbor”. The term NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) was used by two interviewees to describe this attitude. It was stated that the word “assistive” comes to mind when communities discuss low income housing for individuals. One interviewee attributed this attitude, in part, to community ignorance.

It was suggested that developers, county agencies and state agencies in Humboldt County have not handled the preservation of SRO’s very well. This particular interviewee said that programs are critical for successful SRO’s because they set firm boundaries by which the tenants must comply. The interviewee explained that the populations in SRO’s are often comprised of people who are vulnerable and may have a hard time saying no to those in their lives. One of the reasons that these types of units become disruptive is that tenants tend to allow other people to stay with them and then those people do not leave. This outlook was based on years of experience in working with tenants.

One of the key ideas to remedy this type of situation is to let someone else, rather than tenant, “be the bad guy”. Apartment managers or lobby attendants can play that role. As a suggestion for successful change in maintaining SRO’s, this interviewee gave the example of having one point of entry. Only tenants would be allowed in unless otherwise specified. There would be a manager or attendant at the door or lobby. This would
prevent people from staying over or hanging out with the tenants and then moving themselves in. This person gave San Francisco as an example and says that the above mentioned practice has worked there.

In regard to creating more family housing, money was identified in all five interviews as the leading barrier to development. Funding to support development and maintenance of low income housing has dramatically been cut. For example, the CDBG funding through HUD has been cut back several years in a row. There has been a sharp increase in the costs of building materials and land. Loans are now harder to get than they were before the housing market went downhill. Additionally, the restrictions for landlords, such as set rents and loads of paper work, make the idea of dealing with low income housing less appealing.

One interviewee said that the cost of construction is the main barrier to development, adding that the costs of construction affect development more so than policy. The prices for materials have greatly increased recently, especially for steel. Another interviewee, who is a housing developer, sometimes gets offers from the city for a grant to build. He does the math and sees if it is worth it. State Law requires that if you build apartments, 20% of them need to be low income rentals and 10% of them need to be very low income rentals. Recently, Governor Brown got rid of the funding for community development programs such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF). These programs gave a reimbursement to housing developers.

The interviewee gave an example of how the loss of Tax Increment Financing has affected local housing. For the most recent building project, this interviewee was given a
30 year loan at 3% interest to build the project. Since the state has pulled the community
development funds, that money is no longer available. This issue is very up in the air
because that funding is in the process of being cut right now. In this case, the developer
ended up providing the 20% of his new complex to low-income housing. The interviewee
explained that if the state is going to require builders to create low-income housing, they
have to give the builders some incentive to do it. Otherwise, companies just won’t build.
He said that the city of Arcata works with him to meet the needs of housing. The city
tries to give incentives to build.

Another interviewee gave a similar argument, advising that housing needs to be
innovative. There needs to be low cost financing and tax credits. A builder has to know
that they can pay their bills in order to be willing to take on a project. There is very little
incentive at this point in time to create more low income housing of any kind. Some
incentives that are currently available include loans at low interest to build, and some
funding or grants. Two funding sources that are currently used in Humboldt County are
the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME funds. Coincidentally,
CDBG has been cut back several years in a row and HOME funds were cut 50% last
year.

The interviewer spoke with a source from the Housing Authority of Eureka
regarding Section 8 vouchers. This person stated that there are currently 1,272 vouchers
total in Humboldt County to be distributed. 50 of these vouchers are reserved for veterans
under the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. The Housing
Authority of Eureka pays about $472 per voucher to supplement the remaining portion of
rent after the tenant pays 30% of the monthly rental price. HUD has cut funding to 80% of what it was. There are 980 vouchers that are able to be placed. There is no money to put out to cover the remaining vouchers. The wait list is going to close; no more applicants will be allowed on it for an indefinite amount of time. The number of people currently on the wait list for Section 8 is at 800 households. Openings for vouchers sometimes occur if people move out of the program. Movement from the program occurs when a participant becomes no longer eligible or gets kicked out of the program. The interviewee estimated a possibility of 20 to 30 exits per month. This person said that Humboldt County is one of the few counties in this state that are still issuing vouchers. So far, participants who were already receiving Section 8 housing are not losing their assistance.

This housing authority needs $90,000 to meet the cost of fulfilling its remaining 242 vouchers to be placed. As of April 4, 2013 there are no more vouchers. There is not enough money from HUD to meet the need of all the people who have been accepted for vouchers. The Housing Authority of Eureka recently signed papers that indicate at what point they could no longer operate. This is a result of the recent sequestration.

The information that was collected in the interviews supports the data that was collected in the above discussed written work and vice-versa. Discussions with the interviewees illustrated specifically how state and federal policy affect local practice. Each of the people that I spoke with represents an agency that deals with low-income housing on some level, either through working with tenants or in housing development and planning. All of the interviewees expressed the ways that they are trying to work with
the policy and funding sources that are in place in order to meet the housing needs of people in this county.
DISCUSSION

All of the major barriers to supplying enough low-income housing to meet the need of the population point toward funding. Funds to support the development of project-based housing as well as tenant-based housing assistance are repeatedly being slashed in both state and federal budget cuts. In addition to that constraint, the costs of materials for construction have spiked.

The findings of this project suggest that the rates of rent are not likely to go down. First, the costs of maintaining property and mortgages are ever-present to the landlord. These costs affect the rates of rent for tenants. While the costs of mortgages tend to be less than they were five years ago, the costs of maintenances and utilities are increasing. Second, if supply and demand influences the rates of rent, and a significant portion of the population will pay those rates, the fair market value will not decrease. Third, as long as there is a shortage of affordable housing, supply will be down and demand will be up. This equals higher prices for rent. Fourth, and lastly, private builders are not receiving enough incentive for it to be worth the cost for them to build low-income housing. Therefore, the supply of low-income housing will continue to be low without aide of federal funding. Federal funding continues to decrease, despite the increasing need for it. Given these circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that the deficiency in affordable housing supply is going to increase.

Although policy may not play as large a role in housing as funding does, policy plays a huge role in funding. According to data gathered from the interviews, Humboldt
County has utilized CDBG, Section 8, HOME Funds, Housing Emergency Shelter Trust Fund Act (prop 1C), and bank loans. The literature gathered points to LIHTC as the largest government housing program at this time. Although there was reference to tax breaks for developing low income housing, none of the interviewees mentioned LIHTC specifically as an incentive to creating for affordable housing.

Several of the interviewees suggested that the use of more tax incentives for developers could help to create housing because then the developers would have a financial incentive to build. However, tax expenditures have been criticized for their minimal help to those needing housing and that investors in development are the actual beneficiaries of this assistance. While a lot of funding for low-income housing has been dramatically cut, LIHTC has managed to dodge reductions. In fact, the Obama administration supported expansion of the criteria for qualification under this tax expenditure. In a society that places its faith in the advancement of the wealthy to sustain our economy, this is hardly surprising.

Clearly, the cuts in funding for housing policy have exacerbated the problem of supplying enough low-income housing for everyone who needs it. As it is now, local agencies are scraping by to maintain the housing assistance that is available. This project did not find any suggestions as to how to decrease the costs of construction. There are some general suggestions that can be made in regard to funding for low-income housing to meet those costs.

There are several methods that could potentially ease the constraints that housing assistance faces. One suggestion is to examine the job market and what can be done
locally to stimulate job growth. If there are more jobs available and more jobs with higher wages then a proportion of the households in low-income housing could reasonably move out of those services to either afford rent at the fair market rate or purchase a house. There are some funding sources to assist first-time buyers in the purchase of a house. That service was not included in this project and it would also be worth looking into as a potential aide in reducing the rates of people who need low-income rentals.

There are a proportion of residents who are not likely to move out of assisted housing programs. Those who receive Social Security due to a major disability, mental illness, or retirement would be among this population. In an ideal society, these populations would have families and community members to rely on as support. Unfortunately, that is a more complicated subject in this day and age and the fact remains that many who are in need of assistance do not have people in their personal lives that they can rely on for long term financial and housing support.

A major limitation to this project was that direct contact did not reach the state and federal level. Although local agencies are doing the best they can with what they have, they do not have enough funding to adequately supply enough affordable housing to meet the need of the population. Further projects on this subject could include interviews with state and federal representatives who can give suggestions for change through policy.

In regard to creating enough funding to meet the need for low-income housing in this county, this project can only give a general point toward policy change. Based upon the literature and the data gathered from interviews, the lack of funding for housing is due
to the systemic problems within United States housing policy. Providing shelter is not a primary concern to those who have the most power in policy. The question remains as to what can be done to convince government agencies that more funds into housing policy strengthen this country, not weaken it. Housing policy in the United States is not expected to change any time soon, even if the population made active efforts on a much larger scale, along with their representatives, to demand that more funding be put into housing policy.

Ultimately, the researcher points toward innovative ways to work with the policies that currently exist in addition to striving for more funding. One example of embracing innovation is to consider reclaimed and recycled building materials in place of new materials and working toward policy change to consider the use of these materials in low-income housing development. As this is a country that produces excessive amounts of waste, it is possible that less expensive supplies could be provided by recycling and reusing leftover materials. Builders could learn creative ways to work within current laws about environmental standards and housing policy. More research definitely is needed in this area to suggest how this idea would become possible.

In summary, more low-income housing options are needed in Humboldt County. The constraints in meeting this need are various and complex. The most notable limitations include lack of funding, decreases in funding, costs of building, costs of maintenance, and public attitude about the importance of low-income housing. The enduring trend in regard to housing is that, even though incomes are not increasing, rental prices are. In addition, as low-income housing programs are continuously slashed in
budget cuts, the low supply is becoming ever-lower. Social policy is key to understanding why there is not enough money to support low-income housing.

Those who are in support of low-income housing and want there to be more are advised to make contact with their local and state representatives to discuss this issue. Supporters can learn what can be done through policy to affect change. Additionally, supporters may research approaches to working outside the box of public policy to learn innovative ways to meet this need. Although public policy has helped house many who would otherwise be homeless, it has not and is not expected to meet the needs of everyone who needs it.

Ironically, those who would live in a Single Room Occupancy are often the people who need low income housing the most and tend to have the hardest time getting housed. A significant proportion of those in SRO’s are on a fixed income and less likely to stop needing low-income housing. I think the problem goes deeper than whether there is housing cheap enough or for them. I think that those with the most serious issues need people in their lives to help them daily. Many of the most destitute people who end up homeless got to that point because they were without adequate social support from those around them. There are social service programs that pay workers to support individuals who need help in a variety of ways such as household duties, running errands, or other daily activities. These programs do a great service to those in need of it. However, if this society placed higher importance on helping those around you because it is the right way to treat people, those formal services might not be necessary.
Community living could address the issue of affordable housing and address the issue of in home and community support for those in need of it. The work toward policy change and increases in needed funding take time. Shared housing is a solution that could help ease the housing market while the population pushes for more funding for housing. Also, community living has the potential to decrease the cost of housing, decrease the costs of living, and increase social capital all at the same time.

For example, in an intergenerational housing model senior citizens who want to spend time with children can help families by giving children the extra attention and nurturing that many parents are not available to give, because they have to work full time. Additionally, the younger adults sharing a household with an elderly person could provide transportation, home maintenance and other assistance to help that person enjoy retirement, rather than worry about how to do the physical things that are increasingly exhausting.

In recent decades, the co-housing model has become an attractive choice for those who want to live more efficiently. There are currently 21 co-housing communities in California, 90 in the United States total. Co-housing is a residential development in which individual households share some common facilities or amenities, and residents are communally responsible for managing the community. The co-housing trend started in Denmark in the middle of the 1960’s. The literature reviewed on this topic states that it costs less to live in cohousing than in a typical American home. The decreased costs of living are largely due to lower utility bills, home-cooked community meals and neighbors sharing resources. In addition to the economic benefit, sharing resources also makes
chores social activities where one can chat with neighbors while working on the common goal of maintaining the home. (The Co-housing Association of the United States, 2007)

However, the cost of actual housing units in co-housing are typically more expensive than if one were to rent an apartment. This is true for several reasons. First, the housing is built to slightly higher environmental standards than most other housing and, second, the grounds are often designed by and for a higher level of income population than those who usually receive low-income housing. To make cohousing more affordable, some projects have received subsidies for a percentage of their homes from local city or state government as part of an “Affordable Housing” program. The researcher recommends learning the co-housing model and then designing a model that fits the needs of those who need low-income housing.

In the meantime, shared housing is something that can be done now. It does not need to depend on the increase of state and federal low-income housing budgets. It only needs to have two or more people who know and trust each other enough to share housing and resources. That is shared housing at its simplest, and is essentially the same as having a roommate. Shared housing can become as complex and unique as those who live in it want to make it.

For example, a family of four can move in with a family of three into a three bedroom two bathroom house. Let’s say this group consists of two men, two women and three female children. Put the three girls into the largest bedroom and give the remaining two bedrooms to each of the couples. If the entire three-bedroom house costs $1300 to rent (fair market rate), each family is able to live in a large house for $650. This means
they could have a yard, large kitchen and two bathrooms at a lower rate than they would probably be paying for a two-bedroom apartment. $650 per month in rent is an appropriate rate for a family income of $2000 per month.

As another example, five people can choose to share a not-so spacious four-bedroom house at a fair-market rate of $1200. Suppose two of the people are a couple and take the master bedroom with attached bathroom at $450. Each of the three remaining tenants would pay approximately $250 in rent and share the remaining bathroom. This rate is within the price range for a person who receives $880 per month on Social Security. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that shared housing works out best with a goodness of fit in character and lifestyle. One method of helping people connect with potential housemates is an agency or service that works much like a dating service in that it gives each client a questionnaire and matches that person with compatible housemates. Running a background check on anyone who might live with vulnerable populations would be advised.

In conclusion, based on the acquired information, housing policy has never been acknowledged to the extent that it needs to be. It gets even less consideration now. Although it is necessary to continue to fight for policy change, societal changes should be considered to fully address housing shortages. In assessment of housing shortage, it must be considered whether each household or individual would live a higher quality of life by living in community with other households. If even a small portion of the population shared housing, the supply of housing would increase by that much. With more housing on the market to rent, the rates could go down, thus creating more affordable housing.
REFERENCES


