

# Land Lines

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LINCOLN INSTITUTE OF LAND POLICY

SPRING/SUMMER 2025



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**Why Housing Design Has to Evolve**  
**Preparing for Climate Relocation**  
**A Lasting Conservation Legacy**



# Land Lines

SPRING/SUMMER 2025 | VOL 37 | NO 1

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*Land Lines* is published as a digital and print magazine to report on Lincoln Institute-sponsored programs and related topics.

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OF LAND POLICY

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Newly built houses  
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Credit: David Papazian/  
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## For Polanyi, Whenever I May Find Him

**LET'S JUST SAY** Santayana was right. As history repeats itself in a whirlwind of populist movements around the world, many of us are scrambling for answers. Populist uprisings often follow (or coincide with) extended periods of extreme inequality in wealth and income. The usual populist response—expressed at the polls in more democratic countries or more violently in less democratic ones—includes the frustration of the “common” people with their economic circumstances and with the “elites” they hold responsible. In the US, this frustration is often summed up by the price of eggs or housing.

In this era of uncertainty, some people spend their time doomscrolling, looking for comfort or rational explanation. My version of doomscrolling is reading economic theory. I've found guidance in three books by my favorite sages: *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* by Thorstein Veblen, and *The Great Transformation* by Karl Polanyi. These relatively obscure authors offer profound insights into our current sociopolitical situation. The first two, writing at the birth of modern populism, help us to understand economic and social structures that promote and preserve inequality. The third, writing during the Second World War, explains newer structures that undergird our more recent vintages of inequality and populism.

Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879) explores the paradox of explosive wealth generated by the Industrial Revolution and concurrent stubborn and increasing poverty. George argues that economic progress can lead to greater inequality if the benefits of economic growth are disproportionately captured by the wrong people—in his view, landowners who idly accumulate wealth.



Tired of doomscrolling? Try these economic texts on for size. Credits (l-r): Read & Co. Books, Beacon Press, Penguin Classics.

Because land, unlike labor and capital, is a finite resource, its value increases due to population and economic growth, not from the efforts of owners. This leads to higher rents and land prices, benefiting landowners at the expense of others. Meanwhile, a disproportionate burden is placed on productive members of society—labor and capital—through income taxation. George proposed taxing away land value and redistributing the unearned income to the rest of society. This tax would also discourage land speculation and make land more accessible for productive use.

*The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) explains the tendency of inequality to worsen over time through social structures. For Veblen, the wealthy display their status through extravagant spending



he dubbed *conspicuous consumption*. Members of the lower classes, attempting to deny their status, try to adopt these consumption standards through *emulative consumption* that they can only afford through the accumulation of debt. This false consciousness leads them to identify with the wealthy, despite having little chance of joining their ranks.

In modern society, these consumption patterns are most readily visible in housing markets. Over the last six decades (at least), we've seen housing prices outstrip incomes. Meanwhile, around-the-clock reporting on the housing choices of the elite has sent American households repeated messages about new "minimum standards" for housing—like granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, or engineered flooring. In the same period, the average size of a new home grew from less than 1,300 to more than 2,200 square feet. Today, one-third of American households are cost burdened (paying more than 30 percent of pretax income on housing). In 2001, total housing debt was 62 percent of household disposable income. In 2024, it was 74 percent.

*The Great Transformation* (1944) describes new forces in the modern market economy that create and perpetuate inequality. Polanyi argues that the rise of market liberalism, which prioritizes self-regulating markets, led to significant social dislocation and inequality. He contends that markets are not naturally self-regulating and require social and political institutions to function effectively. Polanyi's analysis centered on fictitious commodities—land, labor, and money—which are not produced for sale but nonetheless are treated as commodities in a market economy. Polanyi argues that land, labor, and money are integral to human existence and social stability, yet they are commodified in a market system. Because

these elements are not inherently designed for market exchange, treating them as commodities results in social dislocation and environmental degradation as the market fails to account for their intrinsic value and the broader implications of their use.

When land is treated as a commodity, it is subject to market forces that prioritize profit over social and environmental considerations, with profound impacts on society and the environment. Socially, it leads to the displacement of communities and the loss of traditional livelihoods. As land prices rise, marginalized groups are forced to relocate, disrupting social networks and cultural practices. This displacement exacerbates social inequalities and contributes to urban sprawl and the fragmentation of communities.

In the built environment, commodification treats housing more as an investment than a basic human need, driving speculation and price inflation and producing housing crises characterized by rising homelessness and housing insecurity. The unentitled are disproportionately affected, leading to increased social inequality and the erosion of community bonds. The commodification of housing undermines the social fabric of communities, shifting focus from creating livable, cohesive neighborhoods to maximizing returns on investment. Today, amid what is arguably the worst housing crisis since the Great Depression, investors are snapping up the existing housing stock at a blistering pace.

These three works provide a framework for understanding not only the persistence of inequality in modern society, but also the spontaneous rise of a new populism. As economic and political power gets concentrated in the hands of a few, the inevitable cycle of worsening inequality inspires populist revolts.

As land prices rise, marginalized groups are forced to relocate, disrupting social networks and cultural practices. This displacement exacerbates social inequalities and contributes to urban sprawl and the fragmentation of communities.

George shows how economic progress itself can lead to unequal distribution of wealth. By taxing productive members of society (labor and capital) and allowing landowners to capture unearned income, we support a system that perpetuates inequality and political unrest. Veblen demonstrates how social norms and cultural practices reinforce class distinctions. The lower classes are encouraged to emulate the consumption habits of the wealthy by accumulating debt. Ultimately, their inability to manage that debt inspires revolt.

Polanyi highlights the dangers of relying on self-regulating markets to address social needs. Markets, left to their own devices, exacerbate inequality and social dislocation. He introduces the concept of the *double movement*, wherein society pushes back against the negative effects of market liberalism. Populism is an example of this double movement.

There is only one way out of an inequality crisis: redistribution. And what better place to start than with a land tax.

So where does this leave us? It is not inequality per se that leads to the spontaneous combustion of populism. Every society in human history has tolerated some inequality. It is the level of inequality that matters—and the current level of income and wealth inequality, which also concentrates political power in the hands of a few, is unprecedented. As wealth and power become concentrated, political institutions become less responsive to the needs of the broader population, whose lives are increasingly difficult. This leads to disillusionment and unrest.

Inequality has significant social consequences, including increased crime rates, poorer health outcomes, and a recognition that intergenerational upward mobility is ending. The social fabric of communities is weakened as economic disparities grow, leading to greater social fragmentation and unrest. It is no mystery why the price of eggs or housing sparks new populist movements. It is a

predictable response to the failure of political and market systems to address inequality.

Buried deep inside of all this analysis is land (you knew it was coming). Whether it is idle landowners siphoning the benefits of economic growth, speculators trading houses like commodities and further inflating housing prices, or a real estate industry building demand for homes that are bigger than families need and saddling them with unsustainable debt to live in them, land is at the bottom of everything.

There is only one way out of an inequality crisis: redistribution. And what better place to start than with a land tax that slowly taxes away all the unearned value of land and attenuates the benefits of speculation in real estate.

We can start with a steep land value increment tax that claims a significant share of the windfalls of speculation—the shorter the duration of ownership, the higher the rate of taxation. We can follow that with new property tax structures that include huge homestead exemptions combined with significantly higher tax rates. This will diminish the returns for those hoping to convert owner-occupied homes to single-family rentals (sadly, a new term of art). If we really want to redistribute the unearned wealth at the root of wealth inequality, we'll have to find a way to claim the unrealized gains made by those who buy and hold land. If you ask Thomas Piketty (another favorite sage), a progressive tax on real estate (e.g., the more valuable the property, the higher the tax rate) is a good first redistributive step to address growing inequality across the globe.

The thing about recovering unearned land value is that it doesn't matter when you start. But if you don't start, inequality will only get worse, because property values almost always increase faster than wages, and that difference has been accelerating. History shows us that if we don't act to address inequality before it hits a tipping point, the results are almost unimaginable.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of redistributing unearned land value is the concomitant redistribution of political power. And who knows, maybe it will reduce the price of eggs. □





## Of Potshots and Potholes: Social Media and Urban Infrastructure

**FOR YEARS**, a certain resident of New Orleans, someone who drives a lot for work, would turn one corner or another and encounter an all-too-familiar sight: a road pocked with potholes and broken pavement. “Look at this freakin’ street,” he would say to himself. Actually, he said something a little more salty than “freakin’.” Eventually, he converted his repeated utterance into the handle of an Instagram account devoted to documenting, and venting about, the many flaws of the Crescent City’s infrastructure.

Today the account (we’ll just call it LATFS) has more than 125,000 followers, including employees of city agencies and water utilities whose accounts it tagged in some snide posts. “I figured I’d just get blocked,” says the account’s creator, who has chosen to remain anonymous. Instead, those agencies started to pay attention to the account—and, in some cases, problems flagged (and mocked) on LATFS promptly got fixed. Today the account’s creator mostly curates

submissions from others, and while the account quite clearly is not an official part of New Orleans’ infrastructure maintenance system, it’s hard to deny that it’s part of the conversation. It might hold lessons for cities looking to harness citizen input to manage infrastructure maintenance.

The use of technology to strengthen communication between government and citizens is of course a long-established practice. The Federal Communications Commission designated 311 for non-emergency government service in 1996. Baltimore was the first city to implement a 311 system that year, and other cities followed, offering an easy way for citizens to report

While the account is not an official part of New Orleans’ infrastructure maintenance system, it’s hard to deny that it’s part of the conversation. And it may hold lessons for cities looking to harness citizen input to manage infrastructure.

Credit: PixelsEffect via Getty Images.

potholes, graffiti, malfunctioning stoplights, and so on. This early version of crowdsourcing soon moved online, evolving into web- or app-based systems that can (depending on the municipality) respond to texts, accept photo or video submissions, and incorporate back-end software that can collect and consolidate service data.

Along the way, private sector services emerged to provide cities with more consumer-friendly and efficient citizen connection platforms. SeeClickFix, a pioneer in that category, was created in 2007; it was acquired in 2019 by CivicPlus, a public sector tech firm with over 10,000 municipal clients. CivicPlus offers a variety of services, from local government software to websites to an emergency alert system. One of its clients' top priorities is making these systems work together as seamlessly as possible, says Cari Tate, solutions director at CivicPlus.

For 311-style products, that means getting user concerns to the right part of city government smoothly, and making sure people feel heard. "Residents ultimately want to see their communities improved," says Tate, a SeeClickFix veteran who came to CivicPlus with the acquisition, "and they want to partner with their local governments to do so. But they often don't know how, or they feel like their comments go into the void."

Partly that's a matter of improving functionality. The publication *Government Technology* surveyed app-store reviews for 75 city and county 311 apps and identified Improve Detroit as one of the most praised. The app, which uses SeeClickFix software, is regularly updated with relevant new features—for example, after flooding in 2021, the city added a tool to file water damage claims.

But part of the effectiveness of a citizen-to-government tech connection may also be meeting residents where they are, which is increasingly on social media. Over the years, some municipalities have publicized hashtags—like #502pothole in Louisville—that citizens could use to flag problems.

Not surprisingly, social media users don't need an invitation to sound off about the flaws or blemishes of their local infrastructure.

And sounding off in public digital spaces often feels more satisfying than going through official channels. New Orleans, for example, has a 311 line, but it can feel like a "black box" compared to the buzzy camaraderie of Instagram, the LATFS creator points out. When the latter actually gets results, that fact just heightens the attention. A recent example: A series of images of a fallen stop sign and its citizen-painted replacement caught the attention of a city councilor who leaned on city services to make a real fix—and credited LATFS to local media. (A spokesperson for the city's sewer and water utility says the entity does not "actively follow" LATFS, but is aware of the account; often the utility is aware of issues before they show up on social media, the spokesperson added, pointing to the official "robust" customer contact phone number as the best way to report an issue.)

One challenge with making practical use of social media is that reactions to fleeting problems may lack context. For infrastructure planning, social data is "actually really muddy, not specific," says Julia Kumari Drapkin, CEO and founder of ISeeChange, a climate risk data and community engagement platform that works with New Orleans, Miami, and other municipalities and utilities. Its approach takes in social media data

This hand-painted stop sign gained notoriety—and inspired a municipal fix—after it appeared on Instagram. Credit: LATFS.





and uses AI to help craft bigger-picture solutions. As it happens, it has worked with LATFS, asking it to direct followers to the ISeeChange app during flood events, enabling residents to upload real-time reports and photos.

ISeeChange's software can combine that information with client data, and "deliver insights directly to cities, utilities, and engineering firms," Drapkin says. In one recent project with engineering and design firm Stantec, ISeeChange collected flood data that helped improve a flood infrastructure project in New Orleans, reallocating \$4.8 million in federal funding and more than doubling stormwater capacity in one low-income neighborhood. Residents on the ground, she maintains, can provide the best data. (This year, ISeeChange began taking flood and storm drain reports for New Orleans' sewer and water utility.)

Social media's role in reporting infrastructure issues may be somewhat messy, but its sheer popularity makes it hard to ignore. Last year, Tulane University sociology PhD candidate Alex Turvy published an article in the journal *Social Media + Society* analyzing LATFS posts and comments provided to him by the account's founder. Boiling user strategies down into categories (shaming, mocking, and exposing), he contends that the account allows residents, through humor, connection, and "in-group knowledge," to "take back the narrative of their city's infrastructure challenges." And while there is plenty of anger and snark, users also swap explanations and practical information.

Turvy acknowledges both the utility of 311-style systems and the challenge a city government would face trying to corral the disgruntled and profane discourse of something like LATFS. And while similar citizen-driven accounts have popped up elsewhere—Pittsburgh's PWSA Sinkholes on Instagram is a notable example—many fizzle out if they fail to attract followers. But even if LATFS is an outlier, cities might still learn from it, Turvy argues.

"The core lesson is that cities need to move beyond treating citizen reports as individual service requests and instead view them as part of

"Residents ultimately want to see their communities improved, and they want to partner with their local governments to do so. But they often don't know how, or they feel like their comments go into the void."

a collective narrative on infrastructure issues," he says. While traditional systems feel transactional, LATFS feels like a shared story. Its success, he notes, "highlights the power of storytelling over service processing." To encourage that "organic, citizen-driven" feel, cities could work with community groups, communicate more proactively, and demonstrate how feedback is being put to work.

Some of this may seem a bit utopian, but it also overlaps with trends and aspirations for 311-style systems. Cities are looking "to provide a way for residents to actually hear back and to see all of the other things that they're doing," says Tate of CivicPlus. Too often, "you see all of the problems, but we don't see what the city is actually doing." Cities are increasingly looking for systems with strong data analytics that also "provide visibility, and actually shift that mindset and build trust."

While LATFS remains a highly irreverent forum focused more on complaints and jokes than on civics or the complexities of infrastructure planning, the city's engagement with the account has probably softened its original oppositional feel. "We try not to post things that are in the middle of repair, which I get a lot of," says its founder. "We can't shame the city for repairing things." That said, he is also quick to point out that he's a citizen, not a stealth urban planner or city activist. As he put it: "I'm just a guy posting on Instagram." But sometimes, that's exactly who cities need to hear from—and who they want to engage. □

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**Rob Walker** is a journalist covering design, technology, and other subjects. He is the author of *City Tech: 20 Apps, Ideas, and Innovators Changing the Urban Landscape*. His newsletter is at [robwalker.substack.com](http://robwalker.substack.com).



As the 39th mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, Brett Smiley is addressing public safety, affordable housing, education, and climate resilience. Before being elected in 2022, Smiley—who was born and raised in the Chicago area and moved to Rhode Island to work in politics in 2006—was head of the state Department of Administration, chief operating officer of Providence, and chief of staff for former Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo. With a population of about 191,000, Providence is the third-largest city in New England after Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts. Once home to extensive manufacturing and mills, the city in recent years became known for embracing New Urbanism, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse, and for its culinary, cultural, and arts innovations.

Mayor Smiley sat for an interview with Anthony Flint this spring at City Hall. Listen to their full conversation, which has been edited here for length and clarity, on the *Land Matters* podcast: [www.lincolnst.edu/podcasts/land-matters](http://www.lincolnst.edu/podcasts/land-matters).

Nearly a million visitors a year flock to Providence for WaterFire, a seasonal public art series held along the city's three rivers. Credit: Chen Yiming via Moment/Getty Images. Inset credit: City of Providence.

## Small City, Big Changes

**ANTHONY FLINT:** *The narrative arc of Providence over the last 30 years has been remarkable: a second city brought out of economic doldrums by dismantling highways and daylighting rivers and paying attention to urban design. Now there are concerns about affordability, beginning with housing. Where does the city go from here?*

**BRETT SMILEY:** I appreciate you mentioning the remarkable progress that the city has made. We've come a long way, and while many postindustrial cities continue to struggle, Providence is on an entirely different trajectory. Through the pandemic, we had an influx of people wanting urban amenities, wanting arts and culture and diversity and walkability, but with a little bit less work than it is to live in Manhattan or Brooklyn, certainly less expensive than living in those places or in Boston.

One of our competitive points is that we were less expensive. But we've not kept pace with building, and as a result, housing prices are skyrocketing. We are on the top five list of net inflow migration, but 50 out of 50 for new housing starts. Our task is to make it easier to build more densely, and to do so in the context of the world in which we find ourselves, so that means incorporating green infrastructure, preparing for climate change, while also allowing for more growth.



We think we can actually lead the way in doing both. It's an exciting time in the city. We don't have a hard time selling Providence. What we have a hard time doing is making sure that there's a home available for everyone who wants one.

**AF:** *You've got different places where you can build infill, including surface parking lots. You've got some places that don't require tearing anything down.*

**BS:** We have plenty of places to build. One of our economic challenges has always been that we are in, from a cost perspective, the same economic market as Boston, yet our rents or sales prices are significantly discounted to Boston. We've got a gap to fill there in terms of the price that the housing unit can command and the cost it takes to construct it . . . which is why we're working so hard on allowances for things like bonuses for density and the relaxation of parking minimums, ways to try to allow developers to help projects become financially viable, while also looking at some more innovative solutions that cities around the country are trying, such as changes to the fire code and other ways that actually will reduce the cost of construction by relaxing some of the regulatory requirements.

**AF:** *Unlike the mayors of Boston or Paris, you've been a little less enthusiastic about the complete streets concept of pedestrian, bike, and bus lanes. How has your thinking evolved?*

**BS:** We know that only two to four percent of the population commutes by bike. We have aspirations of doubling or quadrupling that number. It's still going to be less than 10 percent of people commuting by bike. We do want to see more people choosing that as an alternate means of transportation, but when we're talking about five percent of the commuting public, sometimes it feels like 75 percent of the conversation. I try to devote time and resources to the means and methods of transportation that most people actually use.

**AF:** *Can you reflect on the challenge of retaining major employers, like the toy manufacturer Hasbro, and the practice of offering things like tax breaks for economic development?*

**BS:** The tactics for economic development have changed. The meaningful growth that we've seen over the last decade, and particularly since the pandemic, is people moving here with good jobs in hand that are located somewhere else—or nowhere at all. The way we think about economic development has shifted, which is one of the reasons that housing is so primary in my priorities—because housing is, in fact, an economic development strategy.

**"We don't have a hard time selling Providence. What we have a hard time doing is making sure that there's a home available for everyone who wants one."**

Nevertheless, there is still a role for major site-based employers. Companies that people know can be very important to your city's economic prospects and its brand, if you will. There's also real value in making sure that there is a core corporate community that helps support and sustain civic institutions, artistic organizations, and other groups that rely on corporate philanthropic support.



Industrial evolution: 60 King, a former knife factory converted into a 60-unit apartment building. Credit: ICON Architecture.

**AF:** *A recent study found that Providence nightlife generates nearly a billion dollars a year in economic activity, but pointed out that many workers can't catch a bus to go home after the bars and restaurants close. What can Providence, lacking a light rail or subway, do to improve transit?*

**BS:** It's important that we refer to it as life at night, because it's not just nightlife. There are thousands of employees that work during what we refer to as "the other nine to five": 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. That's restaurants and hospitality and nightclubs, but also someone working the overnight shift at a hospital and other jobs like that.

We don't have a subway or light rail system here in Providence or anywhere in Rhode Island. We have a bus system that works reasonably well during the day but is less frequent—and in the case of some lines, shuts down—late at night. The solutions are to look at other means of transportation like ridesharing and micromobility, and with our bus system, RIPTA, to provide better service to these major employment centers. We don't need brand-new innovations. We just need to think about the delivery of services for this other period of time that often gets overlooked and forgotten.

**AF:** *Given the experience of a major bridge having to be closed because of structural integrity issues, what is your vision for investing in infrastructure, particularly now that cities might be looking at a different framework from the federal government?*

**BS:** Part of the story of the Washington Bridge on I-95, which is a major artery here in the city—it's a state-owned bridge and a Rhode Island DOT-funded project—was inadequate maintenance. The lesson I draw from that is the importance of ongoing maintenance to avoid the much bigger price tag that comes for

replacement. We need to make sure that we're all taking care of this infrastructure, particularly after four years of significant investment in some real big infrastructure projects here at home and all around the country. Secondly, we need predictable revenue [such as user fee tolls on heavy trucks] to be able to pay for these projects. You can repair it today or replace it tomorrow, and the replacement is always the worse investment.

**AF:** *Similarly, are you worried about the health of the "eds and meds" anchor institutions, which continue to be a critical component of the Providence renaissance, amid the disruptions in federal funding?*

**BS:** I'm very worried about the financial stability of the eds and meds. The change of the indirect cost recovery for NIH grants is affecting Providence already. Both our hospitals and our primary research institution, which is Brown University, depend on those funds. To change the rules of the road midstream is hugely disruptive.

Our largest employers are the hospital and the colleges. It will find its way into our community one way or another with these cuts, whether it's job losses, depressed real estate values, diminished investment. And all of the

Old meets new: Customers buy Del's lemonade, a Rhode Island staple since 1948, in a redeveloped area along the waterfront. Credit: WireStock Inc./Alamy Stock Photo.





A Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus stop at the State House in Providence. Credit: Christopher Shea/Rhode Island Current.

good things that might not come as a result of this—the cures to diseases that may not be discovered and solutions to real problems none of us get to benefit from, if the research never happens. It's a real problem and a real shame. It's no way to treat really critical partners.

**AF:** *You're a different kind of politician compared to some past leaders in Rhode Island, who might be described as more old-school. How would you rate yourself in terms of engaging with constituents? In a recent interview, you said, "There are times when public leaders need to say, pencils down, we've heard enough. This is what we're doing."*

**BS:** I think about things in two ways. One is around priorities, and the other is around style. With respect to priorities, I didn't know him, but the late Boston Mayor Tom Menino talked about being an urban mechanic, [and that] has always been a phrase that resonated with me. I've tried to set my priorities on core quality of life issues, things that impact people's daily lives, and try to make them better. Just try to fix the problems that people actually care about.

I think there's going to be a huge erosion in trust in government in general. The antidote to that is to show competence and efficiency and effectiveness, particularly at the local level, because our residents know us by name.

They're not shy to tell us what they think isn't working well. I try to stay focused on those things and not on solving all the world's problems, but solving a neighborhood's problems.

In terms of style, I'm a pretty low-key person, and I don't have high highs, I'm not bombastic, I try to listen to people. We do a lot of community engagement. We've tried to do community engagement in some new ways [such as using Zoom and online surveys]. There does come a moment when the leader just needs to make a decision and move on. That's what I got elected to do. I'll be on the ballot again next year. If the voters of Providence don't like it, they can pick someone else.

I feel like it's my job to say, "Okay, we've heard everyone's feedback. We've made modifications where we think it makes sense. We can agree to disagree on other things. This is what we're doing moving forward and the day of accountability is election day." I'm entirely comfortable with that. I think that's what it takes to get things done.

That's what I think our residents actually want us to do, is to get things done. Inaction is the enemy of progress. It's something I don't want to fall victim to. [□](#)

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**Anthony Flint** is a senior fellow at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, host of the *Land Matters* podcast, and a contributing editor to *Land Lines*.



# STORM/

## How Can Cities and Regions Plan for Climate Relocation?

*By Jon Gorey*

**THE DAY AFTER** Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast in August 2005, Jessica Dandridge-Smith turned 16. But instead of celebrating her milestone birthday at home, she and her family had evacuated from New Orleans, with what remained of her possessions stuffed into a single suitcase. When she eventually returned to the city, the suffering she saw—disproportionately wrought upon Black neighborhoods, and accompanied by a slow federal relief response—angered her. The pain and damage was the work of a violent storm, yes, but she recognized that Katrina had found a ruthless accomplice in centuries of structural racism and policy failures.

So began a two-decade career in community organizing and advocacy. For the past five years, as executive director of the Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans, Dandridge-Smith has been working to “actualize water as a human right” in southeast Louisiana, she says. That involves lifting community voices in pursuit of systemic, sustainable changes around water issues—everything from nature-based storm-water solutions and flood risk reduction to

ensuring water access and affordability. One of the questions guiding her work, she says, is, “What does it look like to turn community perspectives into policy?”

Her dedication to answering that question led Dandridge-Smith to Cambridge last spring, where the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the University of Massachusetts Amherst held a convening on climate migration. The event’s roughly two dozen attendees came from all corners of the United States, representing research and academic institutions, nonprofits, municipal governments, utilities, and regional planning agencies, among other organizations.

During their time together, they shared lived and learned knowledge and unique perspectives from their communities. And they talked about how to plan and prepare for an inevitability: As the impacts of climate change intensify, making life inconvenient or intolerable in places more prone to drought, wildfire, or flooding, people will increasingly relocate to safer places. These moves may happen slowly, with forethought, given the means; or abruptly, out of necessity, in the face of disaster.

*As the impacts of climate change intensify, making life inconvenient or intolerable in places more prone to drought, wildfire, or flooding, people will increasingly relocate to safer places. These moves may happen slowly, with forethought, given the means; or abruptly, out of necessity, in the face of disaster.*

Facing page: Cars evacuate ahead of a hurricane. Credit: Darwin Brandis via iStock/Getty Images Plus.



***SURGE***



They may take people just up the road, or to places that have been touted as “climate havens,” such as the Great Lakes region or northern New England.

Some convening attendees, like Dandridge-Smith, came from disaster-prone areas. Others live in receiving communities—places anticipating an influx of newcomers displaced by climate change. “We’ve had stagnant population growth in the county for years and years,” says Mike Foley, who heads up Cuyahoga Green Energy in Ohio, a county-owned utility tasked with creating renewable electricity microgrids. Foley notes that Cleveland had three times as many residents just 60 years ago. “So we’re able to be a receiving community, theoretically.”

Over the course of the two-day event, however, some recurring themes emerged, as described in a recent working paper (Infield et al. 2024). One of the more surprising conclusions that surfaced was a somber one: There’s no such thing as a climate haven—no place is fully, truly sheltered from climate risk.

## Where People Go, and Why

Attendees from Vermont, often dubbed a climate haven, recounted how the fear and flooding residents faced during Hurricane Irene in 2011 returned just over a decade later in July 2023, when heavy downpours flooded the state capital and other areas, causing \$2.2 billion in damage across northern New England and New York. The same realization struck again with fiercer clarity last year, when western North Carolina, long considered a climate haven with a relatively low risk of drought, wildfire, or sea level rise, suffered catastrophic flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The storm and related flash flooding left at least 96 dead in North Carolina and caused an estimated \$53 billion in damage.

These events make it clear that no place can truly be considered immune to climate change, which made all those storms stronger and more damaging. But with projections showing that by 2100, at least 13 million Americans will be

Central Vermont homeowners contending with damage from a flood meet with US Senator Peter Welch, at right. Long considered a climate haven, the state has increasingly been affected by extreme weather events. Credit: Office of Senator Welch.







Flooding in Richmond, Vermont, in July 2023. The statewide flood caused more than \$1 billion in response, recovery, and social support costs, according to the office of Governor Phil Scott. Credit: Vermont National Guard via Flickr CC BY 2.0.

No place can truly be considered immune to climate change. But with projections showing that by 2100, at least 13 million Americans will be displaced by sea level rise alone—to say nothing of wildfire, extreme heat, or drought—some areas do present fewer or more tolerable risks than others.

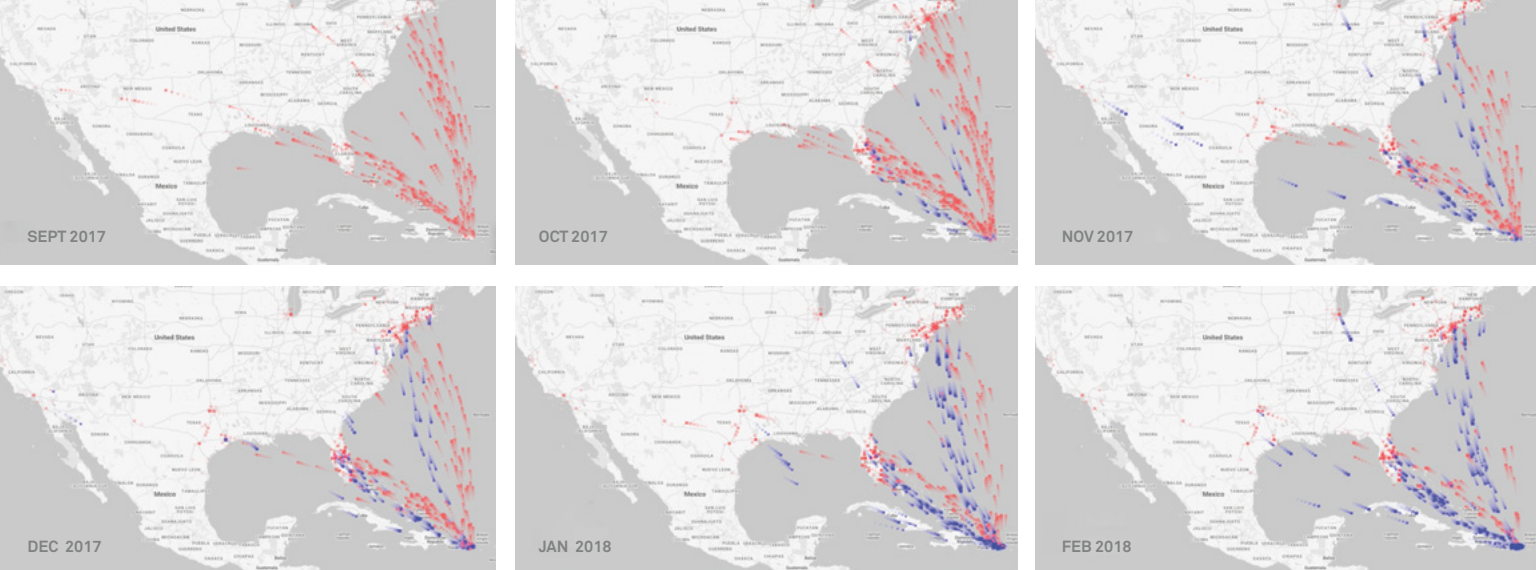
displaced by sea level rise alone—to say nothing of wildfire, extreme heat, or drought—some areas do present fewer or more tolerable risks than others. That doesn't just mean so-called “climate havens” halfway across the country. It can also include crosstown neighborhoods a few miles inland that are less susceptible to flooding, or downtown apartment blocks that are safer from wildfires than those on a city's outskirts.

So what can cities and regions do to prepare for large-scale, climate-induced population shifts? The convening of this cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary group—which may have been the first of its kind dedicated to climate mobility, says Amy Cotter, director of urban sustainability at the Lincoln Institute—elicited valuable insights that can guide planners, elected officials, and researchers attempting to answer that question. “We gained so much from having such a rich variety of perspectives in that conversation,” Cotter says, noting that the participants shared a wealth of hard-earned

lessons and engaged in the kind of policy pollination that helps advance both creative and time-tested strategies.

One of the early insights to emerge from the roundtable was that people and communities impacted by climate mobility have very different needs, depending on the context. A Californian who takes a new job in the Midwest after one too many close calls with wildfire is arriving under very different circumstances than a family who just lost their home to a hurricane, for example.

To that end, it's helpful to distinguish between “fast” and “slow” relocation. The former commonly occurs in a state of urgency after a disaster, as a result of displacement, and can often be temporary in nature. Slow climate relocation, on the other hand, tends to be a more permanent and deliberate decision influenced by myriad factors. These could include typical concerns like job opportunities and housing costs, but also fatigue from successive climate impacts such as repeated fire evacuation warnings or sunny-day flooding incidents.



Data analytics company Teralytics used cell phone data from a sample of 500,000 people to map relocation patterns after Hurricane Maria in August 2017. More than 407,000 people left Puerto Rico (outbound travel shown in red) for states including Florida (43 percent), New York (9 percent), Texas (7 percent), and Pennsylvania (6 percent). By February 2018, more than 359,000 of those people had returned (inbound travel shown in blue). Credit: Teralytics/teralytics.net.

That distinction carries major equity implications, Cotter says, and determines what kind of support and resources newcomers and their receiving communities will need. “People who are confronted by crisis have no choice but to relocate. But this slow migration is also happening; it’s poorly understood, and it’s being done by people who have the wherewithal to make a choice to move,” she says.

In most cases, though, people tend to relocate to places where they can find opportunity, safety, and *connection*—be that family, friends, or a familiar cultural environment.

Sometimes that brings them only a few miles away, to the nearest safer place within their metro area. Other times, their new home is more distant, but along an existing cultural corridor. After Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017, for example, tens of thousands of residents left the island, many resettling within existing Puerto Rican

communities in Florida, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts.

“Regardless of whether they’re moving in response to a crisis or because they’re making a choice to avoid a future unlivable situation, people are going where they have relationships,” Cotter says. “And that’s why we’re seeing people move to nearby locations, or places that might be distant, or even . . . other places that are also in harm’s way. It’s because that’s where they have relationships or can find something affordable, not necessarily because they’re choosing some place with empirically lower risk.”

Those existing cultural and economic pathways could provide clues about who will migrate where, and inform the kinds of infrastructure—both hard infrastructure like transit, power grids, and water supplies, and soft, or social, infrastructure like health and human services—that communities need to settle newcomers in a sustainable, equitable way.

“Regardless of whether they’re moving in response to a crisis or because they’re making a choice to avoid a future unlivable situation, people are going where they have relationships. And that’s why . . . people move to nearby locations, or places that might be distant, or even . . . other places that might be in harm’s way.”

## What the South Can Teach the North

When it comes to displacement and fast relocation, participants agreed that places in the northern United States could learn a lot from their southern counterparts, which have historically dealt with disasters more frequently. The five Gulf Coast states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, for example, have experienced as many billion-dollar disasters in just the past five years as the entire Northeast region did from 1980 to 2018 (even adjusted for inflation), according to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA 2025).

But the changing climate has left the North increasingly vulnerable. After averaging just one or two major disasters a year for three decades, the Northeast is now seeing about seven of them annually. (The Gulf Coast states averaged nearly two billion-dollar disasters *per month* in 2023.) And because most people tend to evacuate to the nearest safe place where they have family or friends, southern cities and organizations also have lessons to share with receiving communities in the North.

Legal aid nonprofits in the South, for example, have more experience navigating federal disaster assistance programs and securing relief funds for communities and evacuees. Dandridge-Smith and other attendees from the South were also surprised to learn that few participants from the Northeast had solid evacuation plans in place—even if such plans exist on paper, they're not top of mind in the way they are in more disaster-prone areas—and that regional coordination on such matters is limited.

"That was definitely a wide awakening experience," Dandridge-Smith says. "Without that emergency preparedness planning—and that requires communication, at every level of government, preparing people in advance and post-event—community members are not going to know how to react."

New Orleans has always been a challenging place to live, she says, going back hundreds of years. But that redundancy helps build resiliency, at both the municipal and personal level. "Being in Louisiana after a hurricane is an amazing sight, because we've done it so many times that there is no panic. There's sadness, and there's frustration, and maybe even fear, but I've never seen people come together the way that Louisianans do," she says. "Whatever happens in the future of the climate crisis, Louisianans will still be there, we can survive anything. And that's not just a testament to our resilience, it is also a testament to learned resilience."

Dandridge-Smith and others don't love the way the current climate conversation tends to focus on resilience, since it subtly places a burden on people to endure more hardship than they should have to. But the hard-won tenacity of the New Orleans community helped spark an innovative and potentially replicable initiative she highlighted at the roundtable event.

"After Hurricane Ida, some people didn't have power for weeks," Dandridge-Smith explains. "What ended up happening is that people who did have power, whether they were on a different grid or maybe they had a generator, they took extension cords and put them in their front lawn, and people could come and charge their phone or computer, or medical equipment. And a lot of the churches got involved in that as well."



Drivers and pedestrians navigate a flooded area of Brooklyn. As extreme weather events increase in the North, the traditionally harder-hit South may have lessons to offer. Credit: Joann Amitrano.



That inspired a group called Together New Orleans to form the Community Lighthouse program, a coalition of 85 faith-based organizations that will act as community resilience hubs during power outages. Each lighthouse—including churches, temples, mosques, and other institutions across the city—will be equipped with commercial-scale solar panels and backup batteries, so they can act as emergency cooling or heating centers during a power outage and provide food, charging for light medical equipment and communications devices, and other essential services.

After Hurricane Francine caused power outages in September, nine of the first Community Lighthouse locations, four of them completely solar- and battery-powered, served some 2,300 residents. Each pilot location is being equipped with a trained disaster response team—the “human infrastructure” so crucial in these kinds of crises—and can provide aid organizations like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the Red Cross with a trusted location from which to distribute supplies, food, communications, and other assistance to residents. Such centralized response centers could also be set up in communities receiving evacuees, where newcomers typically need help finding housing, applying for disaster assistance, enrolling their kids in local schools, and generally getting settled and stabilized in a new community.

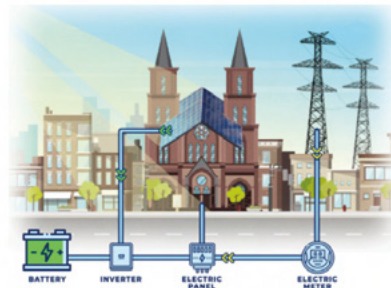
## Affordable Housing and Climate Relocation

While there are still a lot of unknowns around slow migration—for example, what are the tipping points that push people to relocate, and where or how far away do they go?—Cotter contends that housing costs are a central issue. “We’re already seeing climate relocation, but trends show people have been moving *toward* harm rather than *away* from it,” she says, often lured by housing affordability. The most fire- and flood-prone counties in the US, particularly those in Texas and Florida, continue to see a net inflow of new residents, according to Redfin (Katz and de la Campa 2024).

“Looking at maps of domestic migration and housing cost burdens, it’s impossible to ignore the fact that people are accepting more risk to find a place that’s affordable for their families,” Cotter says. “And that’s a trade-off they’re being forced to make because of policies that leave us with a lack of affordable housing, particularly in low-risk places.”

Americans have been moving to the Sun Belt for decades, ever since home air conditioning became commonplace in the 1960s. The Phoenix metro area, for example, saw its population more than double between 1950 and 1970 (to over 1 million), then double again by 1990 (to 2.2 million),

The Community Lighthouse program in New Orleans is a coalition of 85 faith-based organizations that have agreed to serve as community resilience hubs during power outages after major storms. Credit: Together New Orleans.



In normal times, the **solar array** helps defray electricity costs.



If the grid goes down, **battery storage** restores power so community institutions can respond.

and then double again by 2020 (to 4.8 million)—despite increasingly long and scorching heat waves that now kill hundreds of residents each year (Bartunek and Covarrubias 2024). The median Phoenix home sold for \$451,000 in October, according to Redfin; that's around the national average, but less than half the price of homes in San Diego (\$950,000) or Los Angeles (\$1,040,000).

Meanwhile, in California and other places in the US, as urban sprawl (combined with restrictive zoning and parking rules) pushed new home construction into exurban areas—further into the wildland-urban interface, where nature and humans collide—millions more people moved into areas at risk of wildfire in recent decades, just as climate change was making those fires more frequent and more severe. The LA County wildfires in early 2025 served as a tragic reminder of this truth.

Getting more people to choose relative safety over climate risk, then, means creating more affordable homes and neighborhoods in safer places.

That's a challenge Maulin Mehta is trying to address as New York director for the Regional Plan Association. In terms of climate mobility, the New York metro area—like many others—could be viewed as both a sending and receiving community. Parts of the city have already succumbed to the effects of climate change—hundreds of New York homeowners participated in voluntary buyout and acquisition programs after Hurricane Sandy, a storm made more severe by climate change—and sea level rise threatens many more homes. Some 52,000 New York City homes would be at risk from a (soon-to-be routine) five-foot flood, according to Climate Central. Yet the economic and cultural gravity of America's largest metropolis continues to draw a steady stream of new arrivals.

The region is already in the grip of a housing crisis, Mehta says, and climate change will only exacerbate that as more areas become uninhabitable. So creating the conditions to encourage more housing—especially in suburbs that have



The advent of home air conditioning (left) made the prospect of living in formerly modest Sun Belt cities like Phoenix (right) appealing for millions of new residents. Credits (l-r): Patti McConville/Alamy Stock Photo, Hum Images/Alamy Stock Photo.

long used exclusive zoning to stifle growth—is fundamental to the region's future.

"We've been trying to figure out how we can promote zoning reform at scale to facilitate broader housing supply, without concentrating it in specific communities and specific areas that might be more open to development, because one neighborhood is not going to solve the housing crisis for the entire state," Mehta says. "We've seen some more reverse commuting from New York City out to the suburbs, because there's no place to live in the suburbs. So we're just trying to figure out, how can we address the practical need for housing more broadly?"

To do that—to get reticent suburban residents to give up exclusionary zoning practices and allow much more much-needed housing—Mehta says the narrative around affordable and dense housing needs to change. "One thing we've been trying to do is fundamentally reframe what affordable housing means," Mehta says. "If you think your single-family neighborhood is going to be overrun with [strangers], people balk at that. But when you see that, 'Oh, my kid's teachers can't even afford to live here, our police officers and firefighters can't afford to live here'—I don't think that's in people's psyche when they think about affordable housing."

Most climate relocation to date has been fairly local or regional—which means New York’s climate migrants are as likely to come from Long Island as from, say, Houston. “We can make the case that this is not just about new people coming in, this is about your own neighbors, your own family members that are going to be in jeopardy,” Mehta says. “Part of the narrative change requires people to reframe how they view new types of housing—away from it being outsiders, and more about the people that they care about.”

## Wires, Pipes, and Pumps— and How to Pay for Them

Housing is critical, but so are the physical landscapes and structures supporting it.

While the Cleveland area could use a population boom, and has plenty of nearby freshwater and more affordable housing than most US cities, Foley does worry about the readiness of the area’s aging infrastructure—much of which hasn’t received enough investment over the past few decades—to handle tens of thousands of new residents. After a storm last summer, he says, some 350,000 people were without power for multiple days. “Our electric grid is still pretty frail in most parts,” he says.

But the region also has a key advantage for growing sustainably: existing rights of way for new infrastructure. While some areas face legal battles when trying to site new renewable energy generation and transmission lines, Foley says, “We’ve got a fairly mature network of legal rights of way that exist, so we don’t have to reinvent the wheel or spend a lot of time and money on lawyer fees to figure out where wires and lines and pipes should be going.”

In that sense, much of the needed work is a matter of upgrading and modernizing service along current corridors that are out of harm’s way. But while having rights of way in place simplifies things, it doesn’t necessarily make it cheap. “We’re going to electrify vehicles, we’re going to electrify home heating systems,” Foley says. “We’ve got embedded infrastructure in all these homes and buildings that are reliant on natural gas, and to address climate change we need to start electrifying all that stuff, which is expensive, and not simple. . . . But then add on top of that a potential 100,000 or 200,000 more people in the region, and that’s a greater stress.”

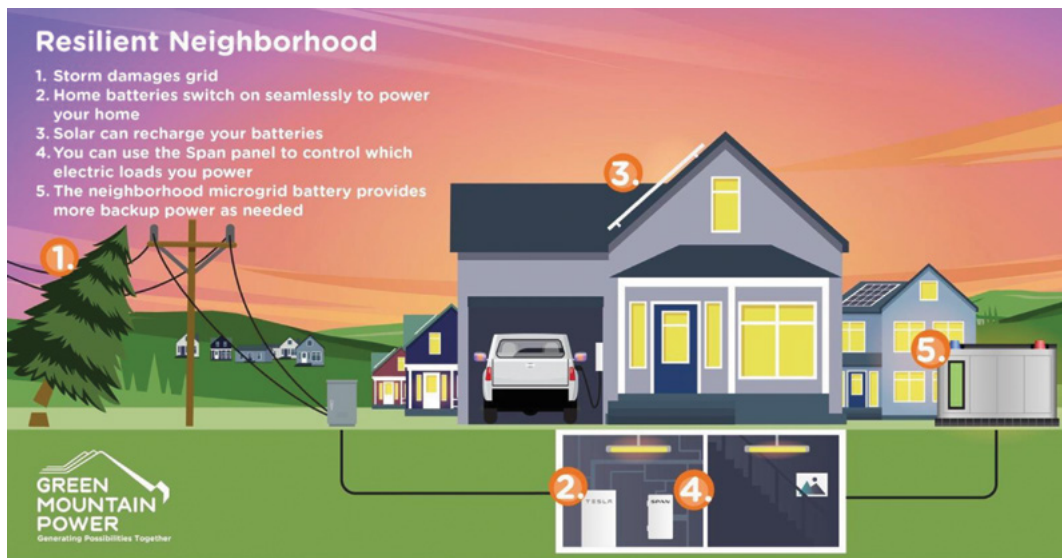
Since Cuyahoga Green Energy is a newly formed utility, it isn’t yet burdened by the costly upkeep of old or failing equipment, Foley says, “but we’ve got new infrastructure we’re going to have to build.” He hopes the public-private partnership model the utility has developed will help accomplish that in a cost-effective way.

A third-party operator will build and own the initial projects “underneath the utility’s auspices, and then we’ll have the right, after the investments have been paid off, to take over and own that infrastructure,” he explains. “So that model may be a way for us, if we get smart about it, to build out the infrastructure of the future without breaking the bank of local government.”

In Vermont, Green Mountain Power recently expanded its popular backup battery program. The utility offers heavily discounted leases or rebates of up to \$10,500 on installed backup batteries if homeowners enroll to share stored energy during peak power surges—for example, the hottest few hours of a July afternoon. This helps localize and stabilize the overall grid, allows excess solar and other renewable energy to be stored, and reduces the use of more expensive and dirtier “peaker plant” power.

“We need to start electrifying all that stuff, which is expensive, and not simple. . . . but then add on top of that a potential 100,000 or 200,000 more people in the region, and that’s a greater stress.”





Vermont utility Green Mountain Power offers discounts and rebates for customers who install backup batteries and agree to share stored energy during periods of peak demand. Credit: Green Mountain Power.

And in New Orleans, the Water Collaborative has been pushing for a stormwater fee, called the Water Justice Fund, to more equitably pay for its massive, aging, and expensive water utility and drainage system.

New Orleans owes its modern existence to 97 drainage pumps, two dozen of which operate every day, Dandridge-Smith says, turning what was once marsh and swamp into dry—but slowly sinking—land. The pumps are “a blessing and a curse,” she says. For one thing, they are old—one has been in use since 1913—and expensive to operate. More than that, fighting nature is a hard bargain. “We were meant to be soft and wet and continually replenished with water. If you drain the water out, you sink,” she says. Most of 19th-century New Orleans was above sea level; today, some areas sit five feet below sea level.

The water utility in New Orleans doesn’t just drain the city, it also handles water quality and sewage. “It is so big, it has its own power company,” Dandridge-Smith says, “so it’s expensive to run.” Historically, that cost has been funded through property taxes paid by businesses and homeowners, but not by nonprofits and other large landowners. “We’re a tourism economy. We don’t have high-end tech jobs to pay for this expensive endeavor that is New

Orleans,” she adds. “So we needed to find a way to fund that, but also fund our way out of the pumps.” The Water Justice Fund, which supporters hope to get on the city’s ballot in 2025, would charge all city properties a stormwater fee based on total square footage of impervious surfaces.

The stormwater fee would fund not just the operation and maintenance of the city’s gray water infrastructure, but also neighborhood-scale green infrastructure and stormwater management projects, urban reforestation, blue and green job training programs, insurance innovations, and other forward-looking investments. Residents themselves helped shape the plan, ensuring greater community buy-in.

“The main recommendations came out of a 10-part workshop series where regular residents, ranging from the age of 16 to 82, learned the nitty-gritty, most boring, nuanced things about infrastructure and systems, and helped build out what we know as the Water Justice Fund,” says Dandridge-Smith. “People can solve people problems, so doing any type of climate migration work requires human interaction and authenticity. People fear they’re not going to have a say. But if you tell people you do have a say, and you can participate in any level you want, suddenly the experience is very different.”

## RESIDENTS, REFRAMING, AND RENEWABLES

With climate relocation on the rise, three thoughts on what lies ahead



**Jessica Dandridge-Smith**

Executive Director, Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans

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## Seeking Safety, Seeking Justice

In both sending and receiving communities, climate migration is fraught with justice issues. Why was someone in harm's way to begin with? How much assistance goes to homeowners rather than renters? How can communities resettle newcomers without displacing existing residents?

The modern-day topography of climate risk and mobility has to some extent been shaped by centuries of injustice. Historically redlined neighborhoods—those areas mortgage lenders once deemed too risky to write loans in, based on the racial makeup of residents—carry a higher risk of extreme heat and flooding today. People of color continue to experience disproportionate exposure to harmful environmental hazards like toxic chemicals and air pollution because of where they live.

Even after the Fair Housing Act made housing discrimination illegal, many places employed exclusive zoning rules, large minimum lot requirements, and other tactics to effectively keep residents out based on race and income. Those who managed to build generational wealth through homeownership despite these obstacles now face the possibility of losing their homes to climate change.

Dandridge-Smith's parents, for example, own properties that have been passed down from various family members over the years. "In a normal scenario, I would acquire that wealth one day and be able to sell it, care for it, or rent it out," she says. "But I think about how, not just myself, but everybody in Louisiana is going to lose

generations of wealth building" if the region succumbs to flooding. "Knowing the history of this country and how they've treated Louisiana in particular, we will be blamed, and we will not be protected or cared for. And I have a hard time grappling with that, because I know it's not right—but it's what's going to happen," she says.

In New York, Mehta says, home prices are so high that a low-income homeowner who accepts a voluntary buyout may not end up with enough money to buy another home without taking on a new mortgage. "If that's how we build wealth as a society, and now we're telling folks in areas at risk—who may live there because of historical policies that have pushed them to be there—that this asset of yours is no longer viable? If a buyout program doesn't guarantee a one-to-one exchange of your existing house for a safer house?" Mehta says. "We're not creating enough opportunity for low-income homeowners in general, and if we're now saying even those assets they do have need to be sunsetted, what's the strategy? Renting will work for some people, but what if they wanted to pass this on to their kids?"

Mehta says communities and planners need a thoughtful framework to make the kinds of hard choices that await. "It's only going to get harder, and if we're not proactive about it now, we've seen what happens," he says. "We wait for the disaster, chaos ensues, people's communities get erased or displaced, and we repeat that cycle over and over, which is to the detriment of the whole region."

In both sending and receiving communities, climate migration is fraught with justice issues. Why was someone in harm's way to begin with? How much assistance goes to homeowners rather than renters? How can communities resettle newcomers without displacing existing residents?



# Planning and Policy Tools

As the roundtable event wrapped up, participants shared suggestions about what types of policy tools, planning approaches, and research could help ensure communities are better prepared for a world beset by climate movement.

Cotter says the inherent uncertainty around climate relocation—whether, when, and how many people will move, where to, in what circumstances, and how a massive influx or exodus could displace or destabilize communities—lends itself to exploratory scenario planning (XSP). This planning technique helps communities consider a range of possible futures and prepare for the unknown. The Lincoln Institute’s Consortium for Scenario Planning Conference in January included workshops on disaster recovery and resilience, among other topics.

With more thoughtful, community-driven, and cooperative planning, Cotter hopes this disruptive challenge could also present an opportunity. “What are the planning approaches that can help leverage this phenomenon for positive, transformational change?” she asks. “To both facilitate people moving out of harm’s way, when they make that decision, and then for places to receive them in an equitable manner without causing burdens on existing residents?”

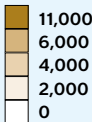
Cotter says land policy tools such as the transfer of development rights (TDR)—in which the owners of an at-risk property could sell their legal right to build a bigger structure to an owner in a safer location who wishes to build a taller-than-permitted development, for example—could also help play a role in thoughtfully redirecting development and creating more housing in safer areas.

## RISK FINDER: HOMES WITHIN SIX FEET OF HIGH TIDE IN NEW YORK CITY BY NEIGHBORHOOD

### Top threatened areas on map

Hammels-Arverne-Edgemere	10,513
Breezy Point-Belle Harbor-Rockaway Park-Broad Channel	9,749
Seagate-Coney Island	9,307
Sheepshead Bay-Gerritsen Beach-Manhattan Beach	8,825
Brighton Beach	6,078

### Homes

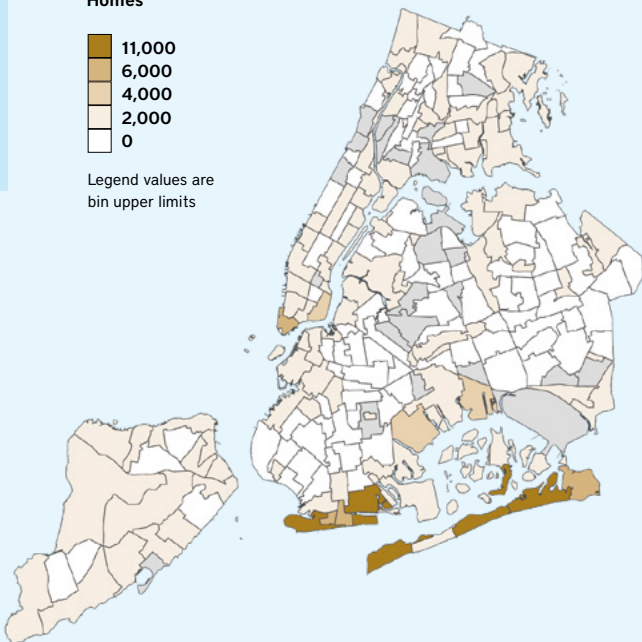


Legend values are bin upper limits

Climate Central’s Risk Finder tool allows users to explore sea level and coastal flooding risks based on a variety of inputs. The properties mapped here, which are within six feet of the high-tide line, are home to 219,679 people—77 percent of whom fall into medium or high social vulnerability categories in the US Census.

*Note:* Values exclude sub-six-foot areas potentially protected by levees or other features. Elevation is defined relative to local high-tide lines.

*Source:* Climate Central Risk Finder, 2024. [www.riskfinder.org](http://www.riskfinder.org).



New York City has allowed this practice for decades in certain scenarios. For example, owners of historic Broadway theaters who agreed to preserve their properties as entertainment venues could sell their forfeited “air rights” to nearby developments. Arlington, Virginia, allowed owners of historic garden apartments to sell unused development rights to other builders, in exchange for preserving the apartments as affordable housing for at least 30 years. And the TDR market in Seattle has helped preserve 147,500 acres of would-be sprawl in King County, redirecting development from forest and farmland to downtown. While TDRs have traditionally been used to preserve open space or historic landmarks, there’s no reason they couldn’t be employed to create more affordable and climate-resilient housing.

“Quite frankly, one of the best things you can do to prepare for an influx of population is to make sure that you’re building housing and infrastructure out of harm’s way, making your existing built environment and infrastructure more resilient, because then it will serve both your existing population and any newcomers better,” Cotter says.

Whether or not climate change delivers an influx of new residents to a community, making investments in preparedness is never a wasted effort, she adds.

“Housing out of harm’s way, sound and adequate infrastructure, disaster response—all of these will serve your existing population well,” Cotter says. “And if you do get an influx of population, you’ve got the stage set to do what governments should do: ensure that your residents and your business owners have what they need to thrive. That includes being safe in the face of a changing climate.” □

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American Households Have Changed.  
Our Homes Should Too.

# Housing Design

Has to Evolve



By Lynn Richards

IN 2001, a good friend became pregnant with twins. As a single parent, she decided to move into a newly established co-living compound, which she hoped would provide support and company as she raised her new family. A seemingly radical idea nearly 25 years ago, co-living—a housing approach that offers a combination of private and shared space—is now a fast-growing market. Its increasing popularity underlines an obvious truth about housing in America: Our household demographics are changing, and our housing designs need to change too.

Since World War II, most housing in America has been built to support a nuclear family structure: two parents living with their children. But in the last several decades, family structures have evolved to include fewer nuclear families and more single-parent families, intergenerational families, nonfamily groups, and downsizing or unrelated seniors. As the American family evolves, housing design must evolve with it.

In cities and towns large and small, communities are struggling to provide adequate and affordable housing that meets the varied needs of today's population. Changing the way we design houses—and offering more housing choice at more price points—will not only better meet the needs of our evolving households, it will also help provide more affordable and attainable options, which will lead to more stable, thriving, and sustainable communities.

## Changing Demographics

In the era after World War II, the majority of the adult American population was married: 87 percent in 1950. By 2022, that figure had dropped to 47 percent (Hemez, Washington, and Kreide 2024). The same time period saw a dramatic rise in people living alone, growing to almost 28 percent of the population in 2023 from less than 10 percent in 1950 (Perry, Mendez-Smith, and Laughlin 2022; Anderson, Washington, Kreider, and Gryn 2023). US Census statistics from 2022 tell us that American households are now just as likely to include single-parent families (31 percent), extended or multigenerational families (8.1 percent), families without children (36 percent) or stepfamilies whose household size changes weekly based on custody schedules, and nonfamily groups (8 percent).

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Facing page: Flora and Ulysses, a co-living project in Portland, Oregon, consists of two houses on adjacent lots, each with an attached accessory dwelling unit (ADU). The homes face each other to create a sense of community. Credit: Polyphon Architecture and Design.

Economic factors are also changing housing needs. Baby boomers, numbering more than 76 million, are finding that “aging in place” in car-centered exurbs is more difficult than they thought. Many who can afford to move also want to downsize. Millennials (representing almost 22 percent of the population) and Gen Z (representing more than 20 percent in 2023) are struggling to launch careers and pay off college debt, and are slower than previous generations to marry or have children. Homeownership is lower for these generations than it was for previous generations due to factors including a high debt-to-pay ratio, low inventory, and high interest rates.

Finally, most cities in the US are facing an incredible housing shortage, which drives demand and prices for the available housing stock. Estimates suggest that the US is currently short approximately 4.5 million to 5 million homes. The stock that does exist provides little variety or flexibility. In 2023, around 1.45 million homes were built; that included one million single-family units and about 450,000 multifamily units.

These forces are prompting an urgent examination of how local governments can incentivize new housing, including housing designs that better accommodate how people are living now.

## Evolving Housing Design

Since the post–World War II era, the housing market has been dominated by single-family homes. This was due in large part to local and federal policies that supported the creation of suburban neighborhoods through disinvestment in downtown neighborhoods by redlining practices and transit disinvestment, new highway investments, and the marketing of the “American Dream” targeted to returning service members. Little has changed in the last 50 years.

The lack of variety and stagnant housing design contribute to the national housing shortage as people are forced to live in housing situations that fail to meet their needs. To better meet the housing needs of the 21st century, builders, developers, and local governments should offer a wider range of choice and variety. Expanding housing designs will not only help increase the housing supply, it will also enable more people to live as they want and choose.

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Integrating tiny homes or ADUs into existing neighborhoods represents an opportunity to expand existing housing supply. Credit: Lynn Richards.





Interior of a Cohabs co-living space in Washington, DC. By sharing kitchens, living rooms, and other common areas, residents of co-living spaces significantly reduce their rent, utility bills, and other expenses. Credit: Cohabs.

## 1. RESTORE THE BOARDING HOUSE

Traditionally, the boarding house was a transitory step between family life and independence. Boarding houses offered meals and housekeeping, providing a valuable housing option for single adults. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, between one-fourth and one-third of urban households took in boarders. However, after World War I, boarding houses morphed into single-room occupancy (SRO) units, which became associated with low-income housing. As such, many local governments put significant zoning restrictions on where and how they could be built. Approximately one million SRO units were demolished in major cities between 1960 and 1980, including Chicago, New York, Denver, Seattle, and San Diego.

That negative perception is slowly changing as more businesses realize the value of—and demand for—housing with shared amenities. A global company called Cohabs offers co-living for people 18 or older in shared homes in New York, London, Brussels, and Paris, among other cities. In 2024, the company opened 16 houses in the NYC area and 36 rooms in DC, with plans to increase supply to 500 or even 1,000 beds.

Each tenant has their own bedroom, which comes furnished with a bed, desk, and safe, and bathrooms are shared by up to three people. The kitchens—a central one on the first floor and a smaller one on each floor above—have dishes and basic provisions. Each tenant gets a shelf in a refrigerator, as well as a locker to use as a pantry.

The common areas include living rooms, workspaces, a movie room, a gym, and a laundry room, as well as an outdoor terrace and a roof deck.

The growth of co-living arrangements is predicted to significantly increase, with estimates suggesting the market will grow from \$13.3 billion to \$63.8 billion by 2028. As housing in urban areas becomes more expensive, co-living offers an affordable alternative, especially for young professionals and students. By sharing living spaces and communal facilities, residents can significantly reduce expenses such as rent, utilities, and maintenance.

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The demand for all types of living space is in many places matched by an enormous potential supply. Large old homes can easily be converted into co-living spaces. To facilitate these conversions, in 2022, the City of Toronto legalized rooming houses citywide. Expanding the design options for the boarding house and enabling homeowners to legally transform their houses could be a sustainable business model; it could also provide a housing alternative in cities and towns of all sizes, providing income for homeowners and much-needed housing for renters.

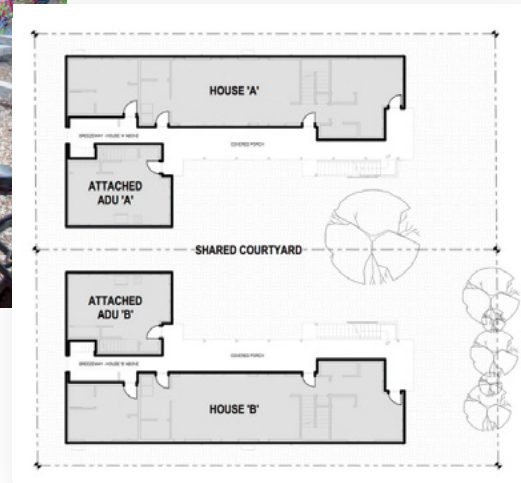




Left: Flora and Ulysses integrates the boarding house model into its co-living concept. Credits (left, below): Brian Foulkes, Polyphon Architecture and Design.

Figure 1

The Flora and Ulysses layout plan.



## 2. EXPAND THE BOARDING HOUSE CONCEPT

In addition to retrofitting existing homes, some developers are meeting the demand for boarding houses with new builds. Eli Spevek, a developer in Portland, Oregon, is integrating the boarding house model into his practice. His Flora and Ulysses Courtyard Co-Living model comprises two side-by-side structures, each consisting of a primary home and an accessory dwelling unit (ADU), that share a central courtyard (see figure 1). The structures are built on adjacent standard-sized lots, creating an alternative housing option within existing residential zoning regulations. Each side has a common area with a living room and kitchen on the ground floor. Space for smaller social gatherings is available on the ground floors of the ADU and on the second-floor decks overlooking the courtyard. The Flora and Ulysses offers one-bedroom and two-bedroom options.

Renters are selected carefully—within the parameters of fair housing laws—to ensure a safe, welcoming, and supportive community. When an opening arises, existing residents give tours and make recommendations to the management company. The on-site manager, who is a resident and receives a slight rent discount, manages and facilitates this process.

This raises a critical point: This type of housing can come with unconventional management responsibilities. Most management companies are not set up or even prepared to navigate the process of facilitating community. When neighbors share a large kitchen or even a courtyard, their relationships become essential. In fact, these living situations can succeed or fail based on the connections among the people living in them.

Some new houses include living spaces that are designed to be more separate from the rest of the house; these could be used by an aging parent, a returning college student, or a tenant, or all three over time. These spaces are generally not considered legally separate units and often have built-in amenities, so the space could be used as an entertainment area or as a short- or long-term rental.

As housing stock continues to be constrained in many cities, the traditional and expanded boarding house concept can offer immediate housing options for a number of demographic populations. To facilitate an expansion of these options, local governments would need to modify or change zoning codes that currently prohibit or limit them.

### 3. LEGALIZE AND INCENTIVIZE ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), sometimes referred to as granny flats, come in many forms. They can be created by building a basement apartment, modifying the space above a garage, or even constructing a backyard cottage. These units can help increase the housing in a neighborhood by integrating into the existing fabric and using existing infrastructure. Additionally, they can provide an income stream for homeowners, which in turn can help residents age in place or enable a home purchase.

Many local and state governments are taking steps to legalize ADUs, as these smaller living spaces can provide more affordable housing in high-demand areas. In 2023, the ADU market was \$16.5 million, and it is projected to more than double by 2032.

Santa Cruz, California, was one of the first municipalities to make ADUs easier to build. The city revised its zoning ordinance to eliminate a parking requirement for single-family homes, which freed up space for accessory units. In addition, the revision included design elements that ensure ADUs complement the surrounding homes. Seven architects designed compact building prototypes (500 square feet) that address a variety of site needs. These plans were pre-reviewed by city departments, and homeowners can select from any of these designs to expedite the permitting process and reduce planning and design costs.

Santa Cruz was on the forefront of broader legislative reform allowing ADUs in California, which led to a 15,334 percent increase in permits between 2016 and 2022, resulting in nearly 84,000 completed units. Seattle followed a similar regulatory path, and by 2022, construction of ADUs had outpaced construction of single-family homes in the city.

In most places, however, the promise of ADUs has not been fully realized. While these accessory units are now legal in many communities, local governments are often imposing

significant requirements, such as dictating the minimum lot size or limiting ADU residents to relatives of the homeowner. Even when these restrictions are removed, the cost of building a small, simple backyard cottage can easily exceed \$300 per square foot, which puts it out of reach for many homeowners.

Given the current suburban landscape, integrating ADUs into existing neighborhoods represents an incredible opportunity for local governments to increase housing supply. To maximize the potential of this housing model, local governments should simplify and streamline ADU regulations, work with architects and designers to develop preapproved designs, and offer incentives such as five years of reduced property taxes to help offset the construction cost burden to the homeowners.

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Accessory dwelling units come in many forms, from basement apartments to backyard cottages. Credit: irina88w via iStock/Getty Images Plus.





#### 4. EXPAND INTENTIONAL LIVING COMMUNITIES

The hippie communes of the 1960s and 1970s have given way to intentional living compounds, which consist of a group of people who choose to live together or share resources based on common values. Intentional communities usually consist of a small number of apartments or single-family homes built around central squares or common spaces; they operate with a focus on connection, often including weekly dinners at a community center or other common area, shared babysitting services, and shared gardens or games. They are rising in popularity as a way to save money, create community, and reduce the stress of modern living. Such a living situation is especially attractive to young families, single-parent households, empty nesters, and seniors who are still living independently and want to combat isolation.

It's hard to gauge how many people live in intentional communities, as they can be anything from friends living together with an open-door policy for each apartment to urban developments designed to house multiple families. The Foundation for Intentional Community estimates that 10,000 to 30,000 intentional communities likely exist worldwide (Tina 2021). One of the greatest attributes of intentional communities is that they can be formed within existing building stock (e.g., a duplex or other multifamily configuration), or be designed and built to meet specific population needs and values.

Intentional communities can range from those created around a singular purpose—such as Arcosanti, an Arizona community whose founding “arcology” concept mixes architecture and ecology to minimize the impact of human-built structures on the environment—to more organized social communities such as Takoma Village Cohousing in Washington, DC, where my friend with twins moved. In some cases, two or three families buy a multifamily house together, where each manages their own unit but they live together as a community.



Arcosanti, an intentional community in central Arizona, provides a home for 40 to 80 people who have embraced its mission of blending architecture and ecology. Credit: R. Steven Lewis.



Intentional communities are also well suited for seniors. Rushall Park, a retirement village in North Fitzroy, Australia, provides independent and assisted living accommodation and support. Unlike most assisted living communities in the US, Rushall Park has exceptional architecture and community design, which enables seniors to live in their own houses. The homes are located near public transit, shops, restaurants, and medical centers. The community center includes a communal dining room, activities area, informal sitting room, and library.

At a time when senior living options are both expensive and unappealing, creating a family compound can provide support for aging seniors, growing young families, and young adults. Some organizations have turned to well-planned “multigenerational villages” to help simultaneously support aging seniors and foster children. Hope Meadows, established in 1994 on a former military base in Rantoul, Illinois, was the first to provide a place for foster families with similar challenges to share resources and experiences, and to live among older adults who needed community and could support families with their time, skills, and care (Schubert, Moseley, Magnuson, and Feldman 2021). Inspired by Hope Meadows, the Treehouse Foundation created a community to support foster families and older adults in Easthampton, Massachusetts.

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Blue Zones, LLC, an organization that studies place-based longevity, has researched the effects of multigenerational living, finding that children who live with—or who have frequent contact with—their grandparents have lower rates of disease and mortality. The research also suggested that grandparents who care for their grandchildren can increase their longevity. This may be because the grandparent stays more active and engaged. (Ed. note: The author formerly served in a leadership role at Blue Zones, LLC.)

Realtors can help facilitate intentional and multigenerational communities by identifying and marketing existing housing structures that could easily be divided into separate units. Local governments can also support intentional communities by streamlining permit requirements for developers. Given increasing housing costs, the isolation many people experience, and the documented health impacts from loneliness, supporting and facilitating intentional living arrangements can ease housing shortages as well as improve quality of life.



At Rushall Park, a retirement village in North Fitzroy, Australia, seniors live in their own homes and share a community center. The houses are located near public transit, restaurants, and other services. Credit: MGS Architects.

## 5. ENCOURAGE COTTAGE COURTS

While intentional communities can be created within existing housing stock and have the expectation of integrated community, cottage courts are small groupings of housing around a shared public space that offer more independent living. Cottage courts can be built in urban, suburban, or rural contexts, and offered as for-sale or rental units.

In some communities, a cottage court can be built as of right in areas with multifamily zoning. With the right design, a cottage court can achieve the same 14 to 16 dwelling units per acre as a group of two-story “garden apartments,” with buildings that are more easily accepted by neighbors than generic apartment buildings.

Even with multifamily zoning, cottage courts are still not permitted by many municipalities. The density is higher than single-family zoning typically allows, and the units sit on a very small footprint, which often is prohibited by lot size and setback requirements. The houses tend to be smaller than average. The parking is grouped, rather than individual to each unit. Often these kinds

of developments need zoning adjustments for parking, setbacks, and minimum lot sizes.

As with the co-living examples mentioned earlier, it's essential to develop management mechanisms to support and facilitate community as these kinds of developments evolve and expand. For example, in one cottage court community, the common space fell into disrepair, a “tragedy of the commons” situation. In another, an owner decided to build a tall fence around their individual property, undermining the development's carefully designed sense of community. In many cases, transitioning from the original residents to new owners can be especially problematic, as new residents may not necessarily be looking for community. Again, realtors can play a key role in supporting cottage courts by identifying and marketing them as properties more focused on community.

Cottage courts have incredible potential to help create supportive communities while allowing residents to maintain a high degree of independence and privacy. They could be an ideal living arrangement for seniors, single-parent households, or families looking for a supportive community in which to raise their children.

Cottage courts like Conover Commons in Redmond, Washington, feature several small dwellings clustered around a shared public space. They are built to encourage and foster community. Credit: Ross Chapin Architects.





Left: Katrina Cottages in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The manufactured homes were designed as an alternative to FEMA trailers. Right: Despite struggling with outdated perceptions of quality, the manufactured housing sector is growing thanks to improvements in design and energy efficiency. Credits (l-r): Harry Connolly via CNU Public Square, timnewman via iStock/Getty Images.

## 6. SUPPORT AND INCENTIVIZE MANUFACTURED AND MODULAR HOUSING

Manufactured housing has been around for decades and has the potential to radically transform the housing industry by providing well designed housing at a lower cost than standard construction. Given the mass production scale, manufactured housing could be used to create the small, more flexible housing options that are increasingly in demand and discussed here.

One example is Katrina Cottages, which are small, affordable, and sturdy residences designed after Hurricane Katrina tore through the Gulf Coast in 2005. The cottages were created as a safer, more livable, and more humane alternative to the FEMA trailers provided to flood victims. The cottages were built on narrow infill lots in walkable neighborhoods and were assembled on site from factory-made panels. Ranging in size from 300 to 1,800 square feet, they often had two small bedrooms, a kitchenette, a full bathroom, a living room, a sleeping loft, and a full-size refrigerator. In the same vein as the Sears housing kits of the 20th century, the plans and lumber for these cottages were exclusively provided by Lowe's, until the company discontinued the product in 2011.

Unfortunately, Katrina Cottages did not catch on as an alternative to disaster housing, nor for housing more broadly. In some places, the design faced pushback from local officials and potential neighbors, who viewed its size and factory origins with skepticism. This is not unusual for the manufactured housing industry, which has been burdened by outdated public perceptions about quality.

But that appears to be shifting: The quality, energy efficiency, and design of manufactured housing has evolved dramatically. In 2022, manufactured housing accounted for more than 10 percent of single-home starts in the US. Here, too, community plays a role: 31 percent of manufactured homes are placed in a community setting, and resident-owned communities are gaining momentum across the country.

In addition, more architecture and design firms are using modular techniques for larger projects. David Baker Architects, which has built modular multifamily housing throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, credits the building method for greatly reducing the project timeline of its 145-unit Tahanan building in San Francisco. In Los Angeles, the developer Thrive Living is using a modular design to build 800 rental apartments on top of a Costco, with 23 percent of the units dedicated to low-income residents.



## 7. MAKE RETROFIT AND REUSE EASIER

Adaptive reuse has long been a common redevelopment strategy, but has largely been applied to former industrial buildings. But as single-family homes get larger and families decrease in size, new designs are needed to enable easier retrofits of existing homes into multiple living spaces or apartments. This is not a new concept: The New York City brownstone was originally designed as a single-family home in the early 19th century. Now, almost all of them have been converted into multiple apartments.

The large single-family homes that dominate much of the suburban landscape are primed to be retrofitted into multiple living spaces. Yet two significant barriers prevent such conversions: layouts and local zoning.

Multifamily units achieve economies of scale when essential water and sewer elements are stacked (that is, located in the same place on each floor). Modifying the designs of single-family homes can provide greater flexibility for future uses, either as stand-alone apartments for short- or long-term rental, ensuite living areas for aging parents or returning children, or even as condos or a cooperative structure that allows a single-owner property to be owned by many. Further, developing floor plans that anticipate a future redevelopment, redesign, or retrofit can not only add value for the homeowner, it can also provide maximum flexibility for residents to age in place. And that's essential because space needs change over the course of a person's adulthood. Many of these modifications can be done in the architectural design phase.

But these modifications need to be allowed by municipalities. In most suburban communities in the US right now, converting a single-family home to a two-family home would be illegal. Unless expressly allowed, very few developers would be willing to gamble that future zoning would allow two- or three-family homes. While many communities are now considering following the lead of cities like Minneapolis and Cambridge, which have eliminated single-family zoning, one possible intermediate step may be to allow



The brownstones of New York City, designed as single-family homes but largely converted to apartments, offer an example of adaptive reuse. Credit: David Grossman/Alamy Stock Photo.

conversions if the second unit meets certain design requirements, such as fitting into the architectural context of the neighborhood.

Local governments can also help incentivize or nudge the broader adoption of these types of retrofits by reducing fees for multiple electric systems or sewer lines for designs that support planned densification, which is a process that plans for and enables the evolution of a property or a piece of real estate. In most cases, developers will build an initial use—single-story retail, for example—because that's what the market supports at the time of construction, but will design the first floor and utilities to accommodate future floors or expansions. Local governments can put approvals in place that accommodate future possibilities, which is essential for securing financing for the future project.

Planned densification can occur at all scales, from a single building to an entire block. A good example of large-scale densification is the Potomac Yard project in Alexandria, Virginia. The development was originally constructed as a standard strip mall in the mid-1990s, as that was the only use prevailing market trends would support. However, the county, developers, and owners were confident that once a new Metro station stop was added, the property would be primed for redevelopment. Therefore, only 20-year leases were made available for tenants. The entire area is now being redesigned into a high-density, transit-oriented development that will contain 7.5 million square feet of office, retail, and residential space, as well as open space.

## Benefits of Evolving our Housing Designs

Providing development opportunities for a variety of housing types promotes diversity in housing price, style, and size. It also contributes to neighborhood stability by offering more affordable and move-up homes and accommodating a diverse income mix. And integrating more housing variety into existing neighborhoods gently increases density, which can lead to improvements in housing values, walkability, and social interaction.

Additionally, living in a community with greater population variety provides significant health benefits. Loneliness is quickly becoming a serious problem. It now affects half of all Americans. Lack of social connection has been found to be as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.

A housing gap exists between market-rate housing and subsidized affordable housing; providing housing choices that better meet

the needs of more families and individuals can reduce that gap without additional subsidy (see figure 2). For example, rent for a 500-square-foot ADU will be lower than for a 1,200-square-foot apartment. Co-living arrangements will often cost less due to the shared spaces such as kitchens, courtyards, and guest rooms. The gap between market-rate housing and subsidized housing can be further reduced when interiors are streamlined and made more energy efficient. Consequently, providing a variety of housing types and enabling a range of living situations creates significant economic value.

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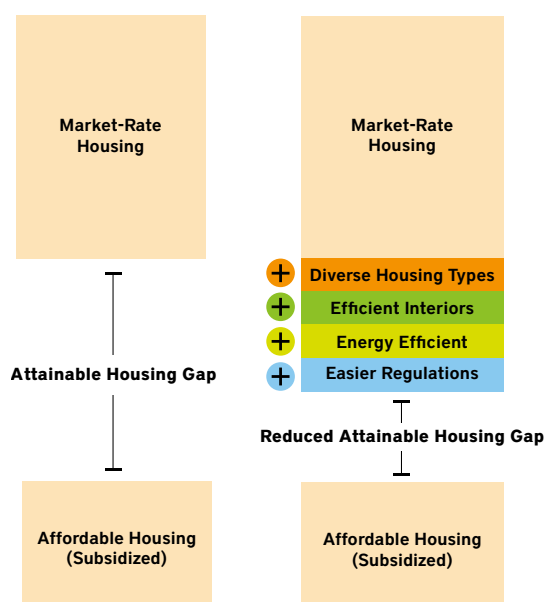
Locating these housing options in walkable areas can further support stronger local economies. Walkable downtowns, town centers, and neighborhoods comprise only 1.2 percent of metropolitan land area—and 0.07 percent of total US land area—yet they generate 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. Despite walkable places taking up only “a tiny sliver of land,” they have an outsized impact on the US economy (Rodriguez and Leinberger 2023). Expanding housing choice not only supports a community's residents, it can also be good for its economy.

## Legalizing Housing Variety

One of the primary reasons America has limited housing variety is zoning and building codes. In most towns and cities, land development regulations limit building types. Without regulatory reform, innovative housing designs will not be widely adopted. Cities can make it easier to build variety into the housing market through regulatory reform. For example, Colorado banned limits on household size in 2024.

Figure 2

**Greater Housing Diversity Reduces the Housing Affordability Gap**



Source: Lynn Richards

“This issue is both a housing issue and a civil rights issue,” Colorado Governor Jared Polis said when he signed HB24-1007 into law, prohibiting local governments in Colorado from restricting how many unrelated roommates could live under one roof unless a strong case can be made for health, safety, or fire code needs. “For housing, the opportunity for people to officially be on the lease—it gives them protections, allows them to start establishing their credit, gives them the certainty that they get to live here.”

Additional regulations that could be modified to better support housing variety include:

- allowing boarding houses as a by-right use;
- eliminating minimum lot sizes;
- eliminating minimum parking requirements;
- legalizing ADUs and simplifying related requirements;
- adjusting sprinkler requirements for smaller multifamily buildings;
- allowing more units on a lot;
- removing provisions that prohibit inclusionary zoning;
- allowing adaptive reuse of any building for residential use; and
- allowing by-right building conversions from single units to multiple units.

Changing land development regulations and building codes provides a strong incentive to developers to build more housing variety. Updating zoning is the number one action local governments can take to promote more affordable housing.

## Next Steps

The housing design changes discussed here can be built almost anywhere; for example, in a greenfield for new development or as part of an urban redevelopment project. They can be built as part of a broader community or added to an individual house or lot. To facilitate broader adoption of these housing types, cities and towns across the country should adopt a “don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good” approach and seek to remove or modify many of the regulatory barriers that prevent wide-scale adoption.

Changing where and how housing is designed and built does not happen overnight. But local and state governments can take several incremental steps to help support the process:

- **Lead with adjustments.** For communities that want to unleash the market potential of evolved housing choices, the first step is to lead with adjustments, or variances, in a specific neighborhood or district. Instead of making wholesale zoning changes, make it easier (and less time-consuming) to apply for variances or apply zoning code changes to an overlay zone, if a particular geographic area or neighborhood would benefit from—or become more desirable with the addition of—different housing designs. (For example, in neighborhoods surrounding a university or with a fixed rail stop or a natural amenity such as a park or lake.) When several homes or neighborhoods have been successfully built with the adjustments, a local government can complete a wholesale code change to enable broader adoption.
- **Establish desired outcomes.** Be clear about the goal (housing variety) but don’t be too prescriptive (sticking to a specific kind of housing). Often a local government will modify its zoning codes to require “first-floor retail” when the desired outcome is a vibrant street experience. This one zoning change has the unintended consequence of requiring only retail, thereby limiting other activities that could serve the desired outcome.


American households increasingly include multiple generations. Credit: Jecapix via E+/Getty Images.





- **Establish metrics for success.** This will provide information on when and how to expand zoning changes to another geographic area or to the whole city. Additionally, success metrics may vary for different stakeholders. Identifying what success means for each stakeholder group is critical.
- **Use governmental tools,** such as streamlined permitting or infrastructure improvements or upgrades, to incentivize the type and location of housing variety desired.
- **Align political will.** Knowing who is likely to support efforts to diversify housing—and who is likely to oppose it—is essential to success. Identifying champions and core supporters is critical in any effort involving housing changes. Equally important is knowing areas of opposition, because that makes it possible to bring opponents into the process.

For much of the post–World War II era, this country has built the same kind of housing—either single-family homes or large apartment complexes. But well into the 21st century, cities and towns need to rethink how housing can better meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse population, and of the new household combinations that are increasingly common.

Developers need to rise to the challenge of building a greater variety of housing at different price points to increase our affordable and attainable housing supply. As consumers of housing, we all deserve housing that is more flexible to accommodate our changing household needs, more affordable, and more accessible. 

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**Lynn Richards** has spent the last 25 years working to create more walkable, livable, and sustainable communities throughout the US. Most recently, she served as the executive vice president and chief policy and implementation officer at Blue Zones, LLC. Prior to Blue Zones, she served as president and CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism and had a distinguished career as a policy maker at the Environmental Protection Agency.

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The Lasting Land Conservation  
Influence of an American Poet

# A View of the Charles



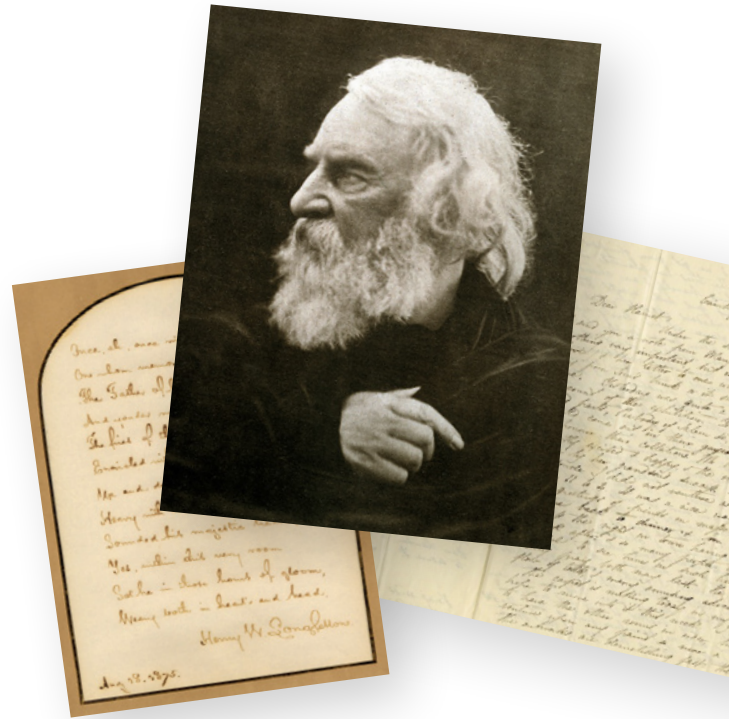


By Lily Robinson and James N. Levitt

IN 1807, a boy was born by the shores of Portland, Maine, then a rugged port town roamed by sailors. With a grandfather who had been both a hero of the American Revolution and a representative in the United States Congress, and a father who also served in the United States Congress, the boy was taught to revere his nation's history. At the same time, the richness of nature in his hometown stirred a romance between the boy and the natural world in which he would indulge for the rest of his life. His love of history and of natural beauty led him to own, care for, and venerate a house and plot of riverside property that had once served as George Washington's headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Best known for his contributions to American literature, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a lifelong steward of the earth, and his legacy is part of an important chapter in the nation's conservation coming of age story.

Today, Cambridge is known as a city bursting with innovation, culture, green space, and world-class universities. The city's rich mix of amenities is the gift of forward thinkers, including Longfellow and his family. They perceived the value of open space and local connections to nature, and they foresaw how the city's rapid growth could fundamentally change the landscape adjacent to the Charles River. As an early conservationist, Longfellow's love for a bucolic riverfront estate kept a few acres of the city intact and open to the public long after he penned his last words.



Best known for his contributions to American literature, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a lifelong steward of the earth, and his legacy is part of an important chapter in the nation's conservation coming of age story.

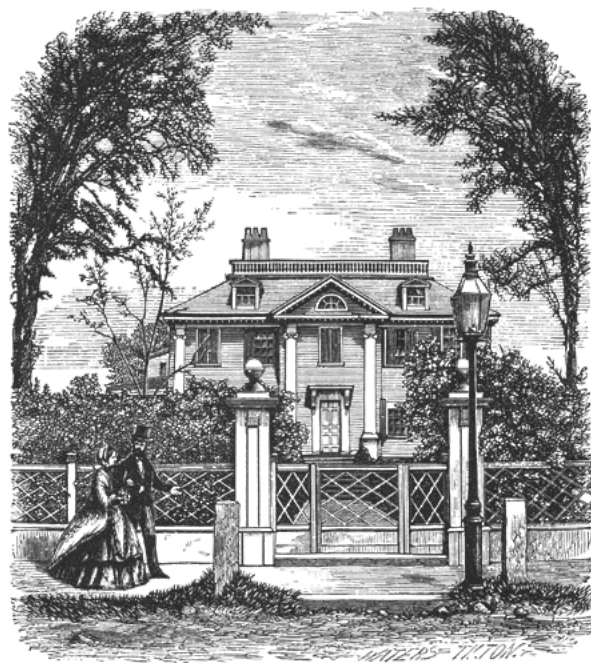
This article is an excerpt from a recently published International Land Conservation Network paper. To read the full paper, including notes and references, visit [landconservationnetwork.org/resources-education](https://landconservationnetwork.org/resources-education).

Left: The Charles River between Cambridge and Boston. Credit: Design Pics Inc/Alamy Stock Photo. Above (l-r): An autograph copy of a stanza from the poem "To a Child" references the history of the Longfellow House; a portrait of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1868; a letter from Longfellow's wife, Fanny, lamenting the local "mania to build in every direction." Credits: Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site Museum Collection.



## Falling for Craigie House and the River Charles

In 1837, Longfellow was rebuilding himself. Two years earlier, he had been traveling across Europe and studying modern language to prepare for a professorship at Harvard University when his 22-year-old wife, Mary Storer Potter Longfellow, died following a miscarriage. In his grief, Longfellow ended his studies in Europe and traveled to Cambridge to take up his professorship. His wife's body was buried in a plot he purchased on Indian Ridge Path at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and Watertown. That now-historic landscape had been dedicated only a few years earlier, the land having been carefully surveyed by Longfellow's first cousin, Alexander Wadsworth.



Boston: Longfellow's Home.

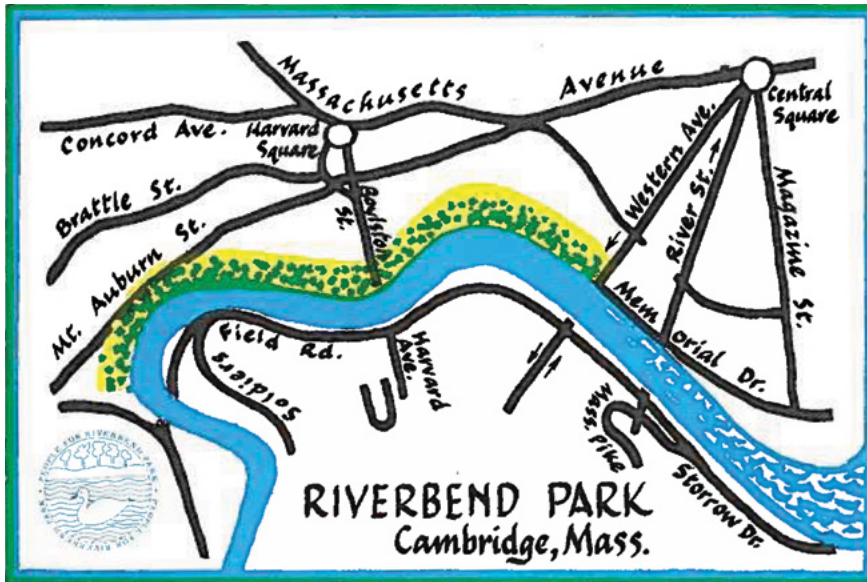
An engraving of the Longfellow family home on Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The home, now managed by the National Park Service, is next door to the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Credit: ZU\_09/DigitalVision Vectors via Getty Images.

Longfellow took solace in the tranquil cemetery grounds. In an 1837 letter to a childhood friend, he wrote, "Yesterday I was at Mount Auburn, and saw my own grave dug; that I, my own tomb. I assure you, I looked quietly down into it, without one feeling of dread. It is a beautiful spot."

The 30-year-old Longfellow was also taken by a nearby estate, then owned by Elizabeth Craigie, which he called Craigie House. On his first visit he fell in love with the grandeur of the home, the tranquility of its surroundings, and its association with George Washington, who had a makeshift headquarters there during the Siege of Boston. Longfellow wrote of that first visit to the house, which stands on the traditional territory of the Massachusett people: "The window blinds were closed but through them came a pleasant breeze and I could see the waters of the Charles River gleaming in the meadows." Three months later, he had become a boarder occupying two rooms of the Craigie House, where he boasted to friends and relatives that he lived "like an Italian Prince in his Villa."

"The window blinds were closed but through them came a pleasant breeze and I could see the waters of the Charles River gleaming in the meadows."

Despite the pleasure he found in his new accommodations, Harvard friendships, and vacations to the White Mountains and the coastal town of Nahant, Longfellow faced persistent melancholy from the loss of his wife. He expressed his sadness, and his hopes for better days, in "The Rainy Day," which includes the famous line "in each life some rain must fall." That poem was published in *Ballads and Other Poems* in late 1841. In the same book, Longfellow offers insight into how the natural environment could bring him profound comfort. The poem "To the River Charles" gives perspective into the long-lasting attachment to the waterway that



The Longfellow family donated part of the land that later became Riverbend Park. In 1975, Cambridge resident Isabella Halsted founded the People for Riverbend Park Trust to restore and protect the area and to ensure continued public access. Halsted designed this map. Credit: Courtesy of People for Riverbend Park Trust.

shaped much of his life, work, and philanthropy. In the poem, Longfellow references a place

*Where yon shadowy woodlands hide thee  
And thy waters disappear  
Friends I love have dwelt beside thee  
And have made thy margin dear.*

It is likely that these lines refer to his wife's grave at Mount Auburn Cemetery, which lies less than a mile upriver to the west. The solace he found in his view of the river paralleled that which he found at her graveside.

Thus began Longfellow's lifelong love for the geography of Cambridge and its surroundings. Over the decades he spent in the city, he was motivated to conserve land for a variety of patriotic, historic, aesthetic, emotional, and health reasons. He adored the Craigie House for its ties to George Washington; its extensive gardens, where Longfellow took contemplative walks; its stately elms that cast shade over the poet on warm days; the sweetness of its fruit trees; and—especially—its views of the river, which brought Longfellow and his family tranquility, comfort, and joy.

Over his lifetime, Longfellow and his family were careful to steward the house and property to preserve its original character. This work led, eventually, to the creation and conservation of Longfellow Park and the Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, as well as parts of Riverbend Park and Harvard University's Soldiers Field athletic complex. Similar values motivated Longfellow's contemporaries to protect other historical sites in Greater Boston, including Boston Common, the Bunker Hill Monument, Mount Auburn Cemetery, and several extensive private estates, such as the nearby Gore Place in Waltham.

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A map from the 1890s shows the parcels acquired by Longfellow and their division among his heirs. Detail, Plate 20, G.W. Bromley & Co. Atlas of the City of Cambridge, Massachusetts (Philadelphia, 1894). Harvard Library via History Cambridge.



## Acquiring and Expanding the Estate

The event that most clearly lifted Longfellow's spirits following his first wife's death was the acceptance of his longstanding proposal of marriage by the woman who became his second wife, the young Boston socialite Frances (Fanny) Appleton. It was Fanny, and her father's fortune, that formally united Longfellow with the Brattle Street property.

After their wedding on July 13, 1843, Fanny joined Longfellow in his room in the eastern half of the Craigie House, which by then he was subleasing from Joseph Worcester, who had leased the entire house from Mrs. Craigie's heirs. Fanny immediately began to write home about the beauty of the house and grounds and the newlyweds' love for the place. She more than hinted to her wealthy father, Nathan Appleton, that she might like to own the estate, as well as the surrounding acreage. She wrote to him, "If you decide to purchase this [Craigie House] would it not be important to secure the land in front, for the view would be ruined by a block of houses?"

Appleton could not resist his child's wish. He purchased the house and the surrounding acreage for \$10,000. The house and five acres were presented to the couple as a wedding gift. In the following decade, Longfellow purchased the balance of the surrounding land (approximately four acres on the south side of Brattle

Street) from his father-in-law for \$4,000. Over the years, the property's history and its aesthetic and recreational value drove Henry and Fanny—and, later, their five children—to preserve it.

From the late 1840s to 1870, Longfellow continued to expand the property, purchasing adjacent land to preserve views and establish an inheritance for his children. He tacked on an additional 2.26 acres to the four-acre meadow south of Brattle Street and bought a 1.7-acre triangle of land wedged between Mount Auburn Street and the Charles River. He then began to divide the land among his children.

Longfellow's friends living near Harvard likely approved of his landscape conservation efforts. Longfellow lived within walking distance of many important figures in the founding of the modern preservation and conservation movement in America, including Judge Joseph Story, a US Supreme Court associate justice and a founder of the Mount Auburn Cemetery; Edward Everett, who served in the late 1840s as the president of Harvard University and was a key supporter of the privately funded Bunker Hill Monument, the Mount Auburn Cemetery, and the preservation of Washington's Mount Vernon estate; Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., whose 1859 poetry commemorated the effort to raise funds to erect the equestrian statue of Washington that was eventually built in the Boston Public Garden; and James Russell Lowell, who in 1857 penned a proposal to create a society for the protection of trees in *The Crayon*.



## Scrambling to Save the Meadows

In 1869, a slaughterhouse was proposed to be built across the river from the house, which threatened to sully Longfellow's view of the water. Longfellow scrambled to organize a corporation to purchase the lot from under the developer. Within a year, the acquisition was complete. The corporation then donated the plot to Harvard College, with the stipulation that it remain as marshes and meadows, or be used for gardens, public walks, ornamental grounds, "or as the site of College buildings not inconsistent with these uses." The land was adorned with the name Longfellow Meadows.

The land that Longfellow had been piecing together to leave to his heirs stretched all the way from his house to the north side of the Charles River. Longfellow Meadows, which Longfellow himself did not own, extended the scenic view on the south side of the river. Today, Longfellow Meadows is part of Soldiers Field, the Harvard University athletic complex. While not protected from all development, it maintains some open space and certain facilities, such as the track, that are open to the public.

In addition to conserving the land around his home through private acquisition or with special purpose corporations, Longfellow had an interest in more public conservation efforts. The archivist

of the Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Kate Hanson Plass, reports that the site's collections include two prints of the remarkable 1861 photographs of the Grizzly Giant sequoia in California taken by Carleton Watkins. The prints were sent east by Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King and lawyer Frederick Billings, both of whom were transplanted New Englanders with strong connections to literary, scientific, and political leaders of the era.

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Prints sent to easterners in Boston, New Haven, New York, and Washington, DC, are believed to have played a key role in convincing Congress to protect western lands during the Civil War era. Abraham Lincoln signed the bill to create a state park at Yosemite in June 1864. Yosemite was the precursor to Yellowstone, the first true national park in the world, which Billings helped to create in 1872. Today there are national parks in nearly every country that is a member of the United Nations.



Harvard University's Soldiers Field athletic complex, across the Charles River from Cambridge. Longfellow organized a corporation to buy 70 acres and donate it to the university to prevent the construction of a proposed slaughterhouse on the land. Credit: SuperStock/Alamy Stock Photo.

## An Attempt to Save the Elms at Craigie House

The estate's trees were another special interest of Longfellow, but his love for the property's old elms caused him mostly heartache. In the late 1830s, the trees were afflicted with cankerworms. Longfellow described the infestation as a plague more troublesome than war, pestilence, or famine. In a lamenting letter to his father, he dreamed of sitting beneath their canopies "without being covered with creeping things, and brought daily like Martin Luther before a Diet of Worms." Longfellow was desolate and spoke of rallying a "Society for the suppression of Canker Worms" to make "a regular crusade."

He waged his own war on the pests, tarring the trees in hopes of ridding them of the worms. Joseph Worcester cut off the tops of the trees to try to arrest the infestation, but the effort was futile, Longfellow wrote: "Thus fell the magnificent elms which signalized the place and under whose shadow Washington had walked."

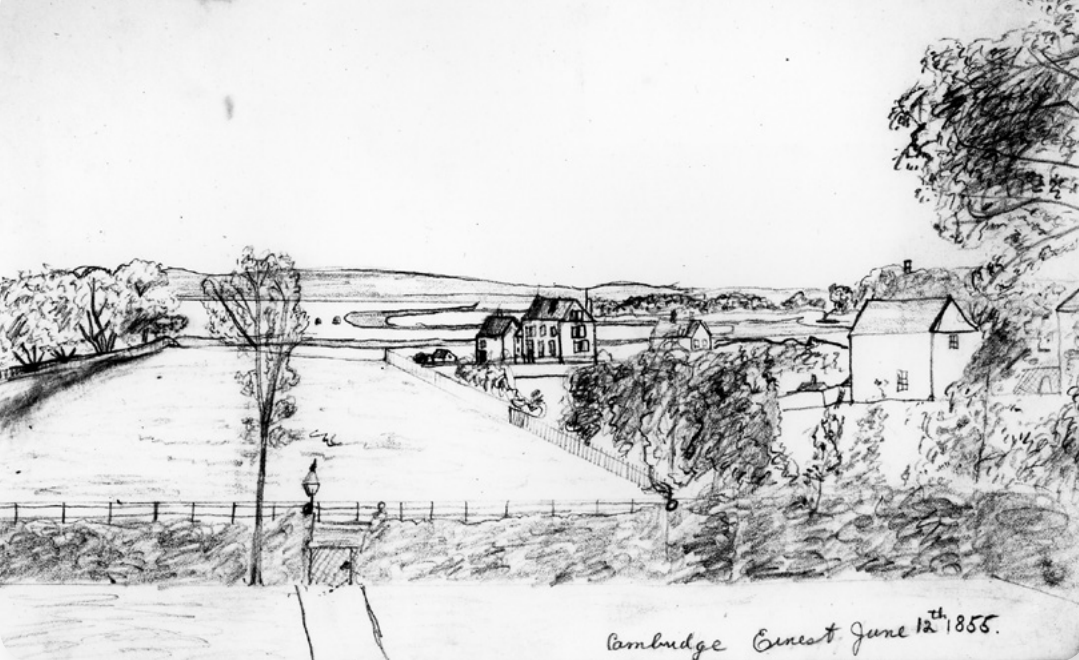
In addition to honoring Washington's memory, Longfellow was concerned with his own legacy. He dreamed of his descendants walking where he walked and savoring the same connection to place. In 1843, he planted a row of acorns, from which he hoped great oaks would grow. He wrote to his father, "you may imagine a whole line of little Longfellows, like the shadowy monarchs in *Macbeth*, walking under their branches for countless generations. . . ."

Longfellow repeatedly campaigned to prevent the City of Cambridge from cutting down trees along the sides of roads to make room for wider streets. Learning of Longfellow's love for the trees, the children of Cambridge took up a collection to help pay for a special chair to be carved from the trunk of a chestnut tree that once stood in front of the blacksmith's shop at 56 Brattle Street. This was the tree that had inspired Longfellow to write the line, "under the spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands" in the poem "The Village Blacksmith." That chestnut wood chair, which was presented to Longfellow in 1872 on his birthday, now sits in the front study of the Longfellow House.

"Thus fell the magnificent elms which signalized the place and under whose shadow Washington had walked."

A recent Juneteenth celebration at 105 Brattle Street, now known as Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site and managed by the National Park Service. The poet's primary home for 45 years, it remained in the family for 90 years after his death. Credit: National Park Service/Chris Beagan.





An 1855 drawing by Longfellow's son Ernest, age 10, shows the view toward the Charles River from the second floor of the family home at 105 Brattle Street. Credit: Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site Museum Collection.

## Stewardship as a Social Identity

With fellow 19th century artists and writers including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, and Henry David Thoreau voicing their reverence for nature, Longfellow tried his hand at nature writing, but this flavor of his work never earned the same acclaim as his other pieces. He also enjoyed styles of nature and landscape art that were gaining popularity among his peers. He traveled to exhibitions by the emerging group of Northeast-based landscape painters called the Hudson River School; attended artist lectures; and casually collected pieces in this style.

He was also influenced by his in-laws, the Appletons, who were avid art enthusiasts and may have encouraged Longfellow's interest in the topic. One of Longfellow's own pieces of work, "Song of Hiawatha," even shaped some of the art emerging at the time. Several prominent landscape painters, inspired by the epic poem, created notable works depicting its scenes. It is important to note that, while the poem is one of Longfellow's most successful pieces, it is now considered to perpetuate cultural stereotypes and false narratives about Indigenous people.

There was an element of cultural conflict in the conservation movement at the time. A vein of anti-urbanism and anti-modernism ran through America's mid-19th century elites. Both Henry and Fanny Longfellow wrote of their concern about the houses springing up around them, suggesting they felt protective of their exclusive enjoyment of the area. Similarly, Longfellow's scramble to have the land across from his home purchased and conserved—not by him personally, but through a newly established corporation—is salted with not-in-my-backyard sentiments.

When a neighbor built a fence in the meadow across from the Longfellows, Fanny wrote that the structure grieved the family "whenever we glance at our lovely river." Knowing that a house was slated to be built there as well, she lamented, "Is not this very vexatious? Until we came this neighbourhood was left in peaceful beauty, & now there seems a mania to build in every direction."

*"Is not this very vexatious? Until we came this neighbourhood was left in peaceful beauty, & now there seems a mania to build in every direction."*



## Making Land the Longfellow Legacy

Longfellow's values regarding the property lived on through his six children. To honor their father after he passed, they hoped to preserve a plot along the river as a memorial. When friends and colleagues of the poet incorporated the Longfellow Memorial Association to facilitate this plan shortly after his death, his children donated two parcels to kickstart its work, though they did not serve as members. The goal of the association was to erect a statue of Longfellow as a memorial and designate the land it stood on as a public park, to be gifted in trust to the City of Cambridge.

The children were more concerned with preserving the meadow as open space than they were with the monument itself. Ernest Longfellow wanted the area to be a “breathing space” on the river. He wrote that, as the city continued to grow more crowded, the park's value as such would only grow and “would be a better monument to my father and more in harmony than any graven image that could be erected.”

However, the vision of the public that the surviving Longfellows hoped to serve may not have been entirely inclusive. As the park was designed and debate turned to the placement of their father's monument, the children pushed back on recommendations for siting the statue. They worried that the suggested location would be too wet, and that the area was “not frequented by the same class of people” as others.

As a new century dawned, plans for Longfellow Park continued to develop. Upon donating the land, the Longfellow heirs stipulated that a road be built along the lot within five years. In 1900, Charles River Road—later renamed Memorial Drive and extended west along the river—was complete and was lined with plane trees. The Charles River Dam, finished in 1910, stabilized the area's hydrology. The land was later incorporated into a linear park by the Metropolitan District Commission.

Some of the people involved in creating Longfellow Park went on to make notable contributions to conservation across the region. Charles Eliot, who helped design the park, later founded the nation's first land trust, The Trustees of Reservations. He also led the establishment of the Metropolitan District Commission, whose first acquisition was the Beaver Brook Reservation in Belmont, Massachusetts, to protect the Waverly Oaks, a stand of 22 white oak trees. Only one of the Waverly Oaks remains, but the park is still home to impressive elder-growth trees, several of which may be much older than the park itself.

## In the Care of Alice

Alice Longfellow, the poet's eldest daughter, was one of only two heirs not to build a house on the estate after it was divided among the siblings. She lived in, and oversaw the upkeep of, Craigie House from 1888 to 1928. (Charles, the other heir who resisted building, was a world traveler with a downtown apartment on Boston's Beacon Hill.)

Born at Craigie House, and raised in its rooms and gardens, Alice Longfellow's connection with the home was, perhaps, even deeper than her father's and was fostered over a lifetime. The special affinity each of her parents held for the estate pulsed through their eldest daughter. The solemn and precocious child grew into a sharp-witted and capable woman who saw and responded to inequality in the world around her. She was a leader and advocate for opportunities in education for women and people of color and a philanthropist for schools for the blind. Her political savvy also manifested in her conservation work.

Her time as the estate's matriarch marked an era of particularly lively community use. Alice hired the young and ambitious landscape architect Martha Brookes Brown (later Hutcheson), who refreshed and redesigned the gardens. The renovations restored some of the layout from the days when Henry Longfellow walked the



The banks of the Charles River in Cambridge, with Boston visible in the distance. Credit: Brooks Payne/Moment via Getty Images.

grounds, but also made changes to better lend the area to social gatherings. When Alice traveled, which she often did, the house, porch, lawn, and gardens were all open to visitors. The space was often used for ceremonies, as a play area for children and dogs, as a baseball field, and as the grounds for an annual circus.

As the Longfellow children aged, they thought deeply about the future of the estate. They were concerned that future generations might not be well positioned to care for and preserve it. Alice was particularly articulate regarding these issues. After considering several options for preserving Longfellow's home, the siblings decided on an Indenture of Trust, established in 1913. The trust transferred management of the estate to the Longfellow House Trust for the immediate benefit of the Longfellow descendants and the long-term consideration of the American people. Alice and other heirs could continue to reside in the house, but if and when they left, it would continue to be maintained.

After Alice Longfellow's death, the trust became responsible for the estate and its maintenance. In the 1930s, the trust started to struggle financially and began a decades-long crusade to pass the house over to the National

When Alice traveled, which she often did, the house, porch, lawn, and gardens were all open to visitors. The space was often used for ceremonies, as a play area for children and dogs, as a baseball field, and as the grounds for an annual circus.

Park Service. The Longfellow National Historic Site was finally established by an act of Congress in 1972. It was later renamed Longfellow House–Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site to preserve the memory of Washington's time there during the Revolutionary War.

By the late 1800s, the waterfront had rapidly commercialized. The family parcel closest to the water was bounded by wharves, warehouses, a Cambridge Gas-Light Company structure, and the Cambridge Casino. The city undertook an ambitious riverbank improvement project two decades after Longfellow purchased the triangular parcel that became part of Riverbend Park. Without the family's stewardship, it likely would have seen the same development that was being built nearby along the Charles River.



Left: View from the Longfellow House in 1899. Credit: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University via History Cambridge. Right: The Charles River rolls on. Credit: Artography via Shutterstock.

## A Legacy and a Vision

Though it is only a portion of the property that once flourished under the Longfellow family line, the Longfellow House is—both historically and financially—more valuable than ever. Nestled amidst the built-up Cambridge of today, the house and gardens occupy two acres on Brattle Street, flanked by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and a campus of Lesley University.

The grounds are a National Historic Site and look out over Longfellow Park, another two-acre strip stretching from Brattle Street to Mount Auburn Street. Longfellow's cherished river view has been partially obscured by Memorial Drive, which the city widened over time. Between Memorial Drive and the northern bank of the Charles River, another wedge of land escaped Cambridge's rapid urbanization thanks to the Longfellow family. Today, the parcel is owned by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. When Longfellow owned the property, it was marshy and prone to flooding. Today, it is grassy with a bank of woody shrubs and trees that thrive in stabilized hydrologic conditions engineered by the city.

Across the river, Harvard University students enjoy a sprawling athletic complex along Soldiers Field Road, thanks partly to Longfellow, who rallied friends and family to purchase 70 acres of the land in 1870 and subsequently donate it to the university. Back on the other side of the river and to the west, the Cambridge Cemetery and the adjacent Mount Auburn Cemetery complete, across several roadways, an arc of green that reaches from Cambridge into Boston and Watertown. With the nearby Fresh Pond reservoir as well as connective bike paths and the green median islands along Aberdeen Avenue, these protected landscapes form an expansive greenway in the midst of a busy, modern city.

The remarkable protected view of the Charles River from the Longfellows' front parlor helped to frame what might be possible, through private and public action, across the nation, and around the globe. □

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**Lily Robinson** is a program coordinator at the International Land Conservation Network (ILCN), a program of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy that connects private and civic sector conservation organizations around the world. She worked previously as a freelance reporter for the Harvard Press and *CommonWealth* magazine.

**James N. ("Jim") Levitt** is director and cofounder of the International Land Conservation Network. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Mount Auburn Cemetery.

The authors would like to acknowledge the remarkably helpful and dedicated staff of the Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site in Cambridge, Massachusetts, including Chris Beagan, Kate Hanson Plass, and Emily Levine.

The remarkable protected view of the Charles River from the Longfellows' front parlor helped to frame what might be possible, through private and public action, across the nation, and around the globe.





## TO THE RIVER CHARLES

River! that in silence windest  
Through the meadows, bright and free,  
Till at length thy rest thou findest  
In the bosom of the sea!

Four long years of mingled feeling,  
Half in rest, and half in strife,  
I have seen thy waters stealing  
Onward, like the stream of life.

Thou hast taught me, Silent River!  
Many a lesson, deep and long;  
Thou hast been a generous giver;  
I can give thee but a song.

Oft in sadness and in illness,  
I have watched thy current glide,  
Till the beauty of its stillness  
Overflowed me, like a tide.

And in better hours and brighter,  
When I saw thy waters gleam,  
I have felt my heart beat lighter,  
And leap onward with thy stream.

Not for this alone I love thee,  
Nor because thy waves of blue  
From celestial seas above thee  
Take their own celestial hue.

Where yon shadowy woodlands hide thee,  
And thy waters disappear,  
Friends I love have dwelt beside thee,  
And have made thy margin dear.

More than this;—thy name reminds me  
Of three friends, all true and tried;  
And that name, like magic, binds me  
Closer, closer to thy side.

Friends my soul with joy remembers!  
How like quivering flames they start,  
When I fan the living embers  
On the hearth-stone of my heart!

'Tis for this, thou Silent River!  
That my spirit leans to thee;  
Thou hast been a generous giver,  
Take this idle song from me.

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## Lincoln Institute 2023–2024 Annual Report

In fiscal year 2024, the Lincoln Institute reorganized to better integrate our cross-cutting programs and initiatives, with an eye toward responding to the enormity of the global climate crisis and finding solutions in land to improve quality of life. Learn more about what we do and why we do it in our newly published annual report.

[www.lincolnst.edu/about-lincoln-institute/annual-report](http://www.lincolnst.edu/about-lincoln-institute/annual-report)



## Housing Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean

CAF/Lincoln Institute

The 2024 LAC Housing Yearbook, a collaboration between the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and CAF—Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, catalogs more than 250 housing and financial indicators from 12 countries to allow new comparisons across the region: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay. The report is available in Spanish, English, and Portuguese.

[www.anuariovivierendalac.com](http://www.anuariovivierendalac.com)



## Updates on the State of Statewide Housing Policy

Semida Munteanu, Jenny Schuetz, and Sydney Zelinka

Housing affordability has emerged as one of the most economically and politically salient challenges across the US. In response, statewide legislation to encourage housing production continues to gain momentum. This new digital Policy Download shares some of the high-level lessons learned as states continue to adopt and implement statewide housing policy.

[www.lincolnst.edu/publications/policy-downloads/updates-state-statewide-housing-policy-new-insights-implementation-and-results](http://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/policy-downloads/updates-state-statewide-housing-policy-new-insights-implementation-and-results)





WHERE WE WORK BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

## How can cities use land-based financing to combat climate change?

As part of its efforts to scale up promising climate solutions, the Lincoln Institute's Urban Sustainability team commissioned a series of working papers by a Buenos Aires-based researcher about the opportunities and challenges ahead for that city and for several others around the world, including Ho Chi Minh City, Copenhagen, Lagos, and Miami.

To learn more about this research into land-based financing, visit [www.lincolnst.edu/publications/working-papers/funding-climate-action](http://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/working-papers/funding-climate-action).

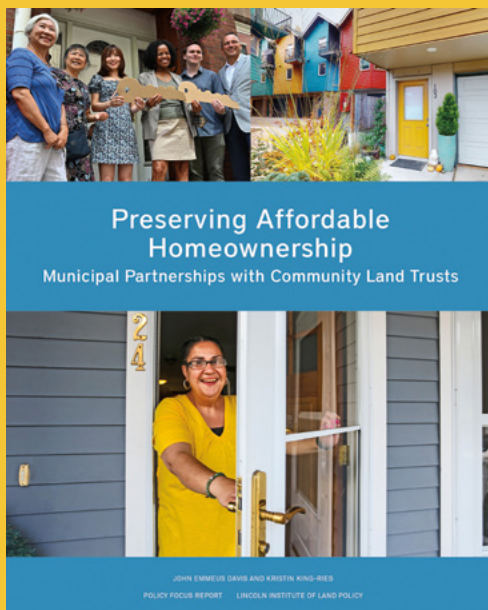
To learn more about the work of the Urban Sustainability team, visit [www.lincolnst.edu/centers-initiatives/urban-sustainability](http://www.lincolnst.edu/centers-initiatives/urban-sustainability).



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NEW PUBLICATION



## Preserving Affordable Homeownership: Municipal Partnerships with Community Land Trusts

Drawing on insights from 115 community land trusts across the country, this report explores how an innovative, collaborative model is helping to address the housing affordability crisis—and how more communities can get on board.

“Community land trusts represent a transformative approach to affordability. This report offers a timely and compelling framework for addressing our housing challenges.”

—**Ruthzee Louijeune**, President, Boston City Council

[www.lincolninst.edu/preserving-affordable-homeownership](http://www.lincolninst.edu/preserving-affordable-homeownership)