

By Philip ME Garboden

Due to the generosity of the Hawaii Community Reinvestment Corporation (HCRC), I was able to begin service as the HCRC Professor in Affordable Housing Economics, Policy, and Planning in the fall of 2018. Since that time, I have been able to maintain a vigorous national research agenda, while simultaneously working to inform housing policy in the state of Hawaii, particularly those policies that target the most disadvantaged. As the HCRC Professor, I have a particular kuleana to engage in local discussions around housing affordability, and have worked to incorporate local issues into my research.

The funding from the HCRC endowment, specifically, has been invaluable in the flexibility it gives me to pursue pilot projects and those that do not necessarily fit into the purview of standard funding sources. With the exception of some travel, nearly all of the HCRC funds have been spent on student research assistants, training the next generation of planners and housing researchers.

In the pages that follow, I outline my local¹ research agenda thus far, as well as my plans for the upcoming year:

Public Housing Needs Assessment

I was fortunate to be able to hit the ground running via a collaboration with Dr. Jennifer Darrah, Assistant Professor of Sociology, whom I knew from a previous collaboration in Baltimore. Dr. Darrah and I are conducting a needs assessment for public housing throughout Hawaii. To do this, our team has conducted over 75 interviews with a random sample of residents in three public housing projects (with an over 80% response rate). The team is in the process of compiling a *Needs Assessment Report* for HPHA that, we hope, will help drive public housing policy going forward.

Beyond the practical mission, we designed the study in such a way as to provide data suitable for academic publication. Using pilot data, we have drafted a paper looking at the complex position of Micronesian “COFA” households within Hawaii’s public housing supply and the stigma associated with their liminal legal status. This paper, entitled “Contesting the Right to the City under Scarcity: The Case of Micronesians in Hawai‘i’s Public Housing” was drafted with two graduate students and is currently under review.

We are also planning several other analyses of this rich dataset. Specifically, we hope to better understand the role that race and ethnicity plays in public housing’s social support networks (Hawaii being somewhat unique for the diversity of its public housing population). We also plan to examine how public housing supports economic upward mobility, particularly the challenges and opportunities associated with employment (well over 50% of our random sample is employed).

The Affordable Housing VISTA

This spring, I partnered with Hawaiian Community Assets to hire an Americorps VISTA volunteer dedicated to bridging the divide between the University and housing practitioners across the state. The position, which is funded for three years, will provide crucial support for my local work and, I hope, benefit those working to increase affordable housing supply in Hawaii.

The first project identified by the Housing Affordability Coalition was to compile a database of all explicitly affordable housing in the state (produced, generally, with supply-side subsidies such as the Low Income Housing

¹ I’m happy to share my national work as well, but I’ve removed it from this document for the sake of parsimony.

Tax Credit). This database will not only support multiple analyses, but provide an early warning system for subsidy expirations well in advance of the potential loss of affordable units.

In addition to this work, the VISTA position will partner with community leaders (such as those from Pu'uhonua o Waianae and Pu'uhonua O Waimanalo) to develop a grassroots training curriculum around affordable housing policy and practice. This process has just begun, and we look forward to sharing best practices throughout the state.

Housing and Well-being in Hawaii

With funding from the Ulupono Foundation, Dr. Inessa Love and I recently completed a collaborative project looking at subjective well-being in Hawaii. This project used Gallup data to assess the demographic and neighborhood predictors of individual well-being across the state. Data limitations were endemic to this work and the project was designed to be explorative in nature. Nevertheless, two core findings emerged. First is that there does not appear to be substantial variation in subjective well-being across neighborhoods after adjusting for individual characteristics.

Second, the oft-stated fact that Hawaii's population has the highest subjective well-being is not consistent throughout the income spectrum. The poor in Hawaii are just as unhappy as the poor on the mainland (using both adjusted and unadjusted poverty thresholds). And the rich in Hawaii are just as happy as the rich elsewhere. The major difference is that individuals around 300 percent of the poverty line are significantly happier here than elsewhere, suggesting that the quality of life benefits associated with our state mostly accrue to this group.

Two reports from this project are available on UHERO's website as working papers.

Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing

I am in the final stages of finalizing an MOU to conduct the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing across the state (partnering with HPHA, DHHL, DCS, HHFDC, and each county housing agency). This review is required every five years by the Department of Housing and Urban Development for all agencies receiving federal housing funds. It is designed to identify the degree to which agencies are complying with Fair Housing Act in terms of direct discrimination, disparate impact, and the goal of affirmatively promoting housing opportunity regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, family state, and disability.

The project includes researchers from DURP (myself, as PI, and Hayden Shelby), Sociology (Krycia Mossakowski and Jennifer Darrah), and the Richardson Law School (Dina Shek, and Deja Ostrowski). It is divided into two phases. The first phase, designed to meet federal requirements, consists of a policy review, an analysis of fair housing complaint data, and a fair housing knowledge assessment tool distributed to all agency staff. Once this work is completed, the second portion of the project is largely at the discretion of the researchers and will consist of a combination of stakeholder engagement, in-depth interviewing, and demographic data analysis.

PHAs And Affordable Housing (Re)Development

I am nearing the completion of a study looking at the role PHAs can play in the production of affordable housing above and beyond the standard HUD programs. Specifically, many PHAs across the country are leveraging their land assets to not only preserve public housing (through RAD conversions) but also increase density and allow for economic integration. These projects are complex and often controversial, but hold great promise for the Hawai'i case, specifically for HPHA's low-density public housing developments within the urban core. A report on best practices (specifically those that support existing public housing residents) is forthcoming before the end of the year.

Other Research Activities

At a smaller scale than the projects described above, I am actively working on several analyses related to core policy issues. It is largely thanks to the generosity of the HCRC endowment, that I am able to pursue these unfunded projects:

- *Permitting*: A core issue with housing development on Oahu is the amount of time to approve building permits. In forthcoming work, I argue that the permitting process is counter cyclical – when housing markets are hot, the time to permitting increases. When they are cold, it declines. However, because time saved during lean periods cannot be “banked” for use during hot times, a growing backlog has produced extended delays with negative implications for supply elasticity.
- *Airbnb*: Recent legislation has produced rampant speculation regarding the impact of Airbnb on rents, and the effect of the new Airbnb law on tourism. While such estimates have been produced in other municipalities, the unique contours of the Oahu market make their applicability somewhat suspect. Using data from InsideAirbnb, a team at UHERO has been tracking the impacts of the new legislation and plan to expand this into a broader analysis the impacts of the bill on the housing market.
- *Tax Records*: UHERO has recently entered into a partnership with DOTAX to use state tax records to produce more timely estimates of small-area median income than those provided by the Census. We are in the process of assessing those new estimates as a valid alternative.
- *Housing Gap Estimates*: In cities across the country, and most notably in Hawaii, there is a constant refrain on that “this city needs X number of new units to keep up with demand.” In my limited experience, such estimates are both highly flawed and highly politicized. In order to make such a critique systematically, I am having students collect methodologies from housing gap estimates for the top 100 metropolitan areas in hopes of identifying best practices.
- *(Affordable) Housing Finance*: There is a fundamental misunderstanding among politicians and the general public regarding the amount of time it takes to develop new housing. I am currently working to set up a partnership with EAH Housing, the largest affordable housing developer in HI, to examine pro formas and track changes in costs, the capital stack, and overall timing.

Public Engagement and Non-Partisan Advocacy

In addition to my research work, I have also invested significant time in engaging local stakeholders around housing issues. I am a member of the Housing Affordability Coalition (organized by HI Appleseed, HACBED, and HCA) and the Hawaii Business Roundtable’s Housing Working Group.

In my first year, I was hesitant to explicitly advocate for any piece of legislation, given my obvious lack of knowledge about local issues. I have however given a number of talks related to housing policy more generally: I have testified in the State Senate, the Kauai Realtors Association, the Faith Action Housing Summit, the Palolo Neighborhood Association, the HI American Planning Association, and the APA World Town Planning Day. And I served as a keynote speaker at the Building Industry Association of Hawai‘i’s annual luncheon. I was also invited in for somewhat confusing debate on Inclusionary Zoning at the Federalist Society.

LOOKING FORWARD: CONTINUING THE HCRC IMPACT

Looking to this coming year, two new major projects are on my radar. The first is to develop the inaugural “State of Hawaii’s Housing” report, which will summarize key aspects of the state’s housing market (modeled after the national reports produced by the Joint Center at MIT). This report will summarize the housing situation in the state, looking at both spatial and temporal trends. I hope that it will represent a reliable resource for information that can drive housing policy debates on Hawai‘i.

Second, I hope to merge HCRC funds with other monies to bring a series of seminar speakers from the mainland to UH to speak about affordable housing issues from planning, economics, sociology, and law. By bringing in these experts, I hope to expand the realm of the possible for housing policy, pulling in best practices from other localities, and rigorously assessing where Hawai‘i could do to improve the lives of its residents.