

Permanent Supportive Housing in Los Angeles:  
The Barriers and Solutions

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## **Abstract**

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

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

## Introduction

Los Angeles' unhoused population has drastically increased over the past few years. According to the most recent count, there are 66,436 people in Los Angeles County experiencing homelessness in 2021, a 12.7% rise from last year's count (LAHSA, 2020). Similarly, the City of Los Angeles saw a 16.1% rise to 41,290 in 2020 (LAHSA, 2020). Numbers of chronically homeless individuals, people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year or multiple bouts of homelessness adding up to a year, while struggling with physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders, have been increasing steadily in step with the rest of the unhoused population. Prior research has shown that permanent supportive housing (PSH) -- permanent affordable and subsidized housing with optional support services including physical, mental, and substance abuse healthcare -- is extremely effective in keeping formerly unhoused individuals housed, decreasing the amount of emergency services utilized, and improving health outcomes (Tsemberis et al., 2004; Bailey et al., 2016; Davidson, 2006; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Most PSH facilities utilize a Housing First model, which supports the idea that all people deserve to be housed without conditions of participation in support services and should be encouraged in their journey to recovery at whatever pace they see fit. While the Housing First PSH model is widely supported across the United States, developers still face immense challenges in creating PSH units and developments (HUD Exchange, 2014).

This paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the barriers to creating PSH in Los Angeles County and makes suggestions for how to overcome the identified barriers. Professionals from the homeless housing community were interviewed about their experiences working on PSH developments, and I analyzed their data to determine potential solutions. Data were collected about Measure HHH, a Los Angeles bond dedicated to building PSH units, and the obstacles

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

## **Background**

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

### **Permanent Supportive Housing**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Housing First

Housing First is a model of housing that emerged in response to older models in which individuals were provided with short-term housing while participating in service programs that would prepare them for long term housing (HUD Exchange, 2014). These models required individuals to participate in treatment for physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders, etc. before becoming eligible for long-term housing that usually did not provide supportive services. Housing First as applied to the PSH model primarily serves people experiencing chronic homelessness who are in need of supportive services. These models in conjunction with one another have produced “long-term housing stability, improved physical and behavioral health outcomes, and reduced use of crisis services such as emergency departments, hospitals, and jails,” (Pearson et al., 2009).

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Housing First programs operate with the following components:

“Few to no programmatic prerequisites to permanent housing entry; low barrier admission policies; rapid and streamlined entry into housing; supportive services are voluntary, but can and should be used to persistently engage tenants to ensure housing stability; tenants have full rights, responsibilities, and legal protections; practices and policies to prevent lease violations and evictions; and applicable in a variety of housing models,” (HUD Exchange, 2014, pg. 2).

There are few or no prerequisite requirements for individuals to obtain permanent housing, meaning people do not have to demonstrate sobriety, commit to participating in treatment programs, etc. Admissions offices for Housing First programs screen *in*, looking to first serve people facing the most barriers to obtaining permanent housing. People accepted into Housing First PSH programs are streamlined in, reducing lengthy paperwork and placement wait times. Residents are not required to participate in supportive services, but they are strongly and consistently encouraged to, in order to achieve and maintain stability. Tenants have the same rights, responsibilities, and legal protections as all other tenants, and receive support from Housing First programs in learning and asserting such rights. Within Housing First programs, there are practices and policies to support tenants in keeping their lease agreements and prevent evictions.

Housing First operates under the harm reduction principle, which tailors approaches to individuals’ stages in addiction, recovery, and mental health.

“At its core, harm reduction is a pragmatic approach that aims to reduce the adverse consequences of drug abuse and psychiatric symptoms. It recognizes that consumers can be at different stages of recovery and that effective interventions should be individually tailored to each consumer’s stage. Consumers are allowed to make choices—to use alcohol or not, to take medication or not—and regardless of their choices they are not treated adversely, their housing status is not threatened, and help continues to be available to them,” (Tsemberis, et al., 2004, pg. 1).



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

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

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

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

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

## Proposition HHH

Proposition HHH is a Los Angeles bond measure that was passed by voters in 2016, designating \$1.2 billion to build PSH and affordable housing units throughout the city. HHH was heavily supported by Mayor Eric Garcetti, who originally claimed the bond would be enough to finance 10,000 units of permanent housing for populations experiencing chronic homelessness (McGahan, 2019). Since the passing of HHH, it has been released that the bond will only cover 5,873 units of PSH and 1,767 affordable housing and manager units, as the cost per unit increases dramatically each year (McGahan, 2019). City Controller Ron Galperin released an audit in 2019 outlining the shortcomings of the execution of HHH and the city departments managing the program. In the audit, Galperin explains that the costs of building PSH usually come from purchasing land, labor and material construction costs, and soft costs, which are attributed to architectural, engineering, financing, and legal fees (Galperin, 2019). While the projected expense per HHH unit was \$350,000 for one bedroom apartments and \$414,000 for two or more bedroom apartments, the estimations have increased every year (Galperin, 2019). According to Galperin's 2019 audit, the projected median cost per unit is \$531,373, and even reaches \$700,000 in some projects (Galperin, 2019). Galperin suggests that the high costs are likely due to an increase in soft costs because the projects are drawn out for so long that the consulting fees add up exponentially (Galperin, 2019).

Almost all of the funding from HHH has been conditionally approved for projects, but very few have actually opened or even begun construction in the last four years. While it was estimated that PSH projects would take between three and six years to complete, City Controller Ron Galperin stated that the timeline does not meet the increasingly high demand for PSH or affordable housing (Galperin, 2019). The first HHH-funded project opened in January of 2020,

with 62 units of PSH (Matthew, 2020). LA Mag’s map (Figure 1) of HHH developments shows only twelve sites across the city, though city officials maintain that there will be new site openings consistently for the next year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. While there may be more sites opening in the next year, Ron Galperin and the public agree that HHH’s implementation has been too slow and will not meet the high demand for PSH, especially considering how many people have and will lose their homes due to the pandemic.



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

At the first development’s opening, Mayor Eric Garcetti stated that over the next year, a new HHH development will be opening every three weeks (Smith, 2020). However, City Controller Ron Galperin’s September 2020 report on Measure HHH’s progress shows that only three developments have opened with a total of 179 supportive units (Galperin, 2020). The government agencies and community councils overseeing the execution of HHH have been too

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

## Literature Review

PSH is a data-backed, cost effective solution to chronic homelessness that has been widely implemented across the United States over the last few decades. The Housing First model of PSH, created by Pathways New York, combines permanent housing with optional wraparound supportive services for formerly chronically homeless individuals, without the requirement for residents to participate in services. Studies have found that Housing First PSH has the ability to reduce residents' use of emergency services, reduce the amount of money spent on homeless individuals, and keep residents stably housed for prolonged periods of time (Bailey, et al., 2016; Caton, et al., 2016; Byrne, 2014; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Tsemberis et al., 2004). In the past three decades, Housing First PSH has become the leading model to reduce chronic homelessness, adopted by federal, state, and local governments. This paper will analyze the barriers to creating PSH and propose solutions to overcome such barriers. I assert that PSH is the most effective way to combat chronic homelessness and through my research, will determine why Los Angeles has been so slow in creating new developments and scattered-site units, even with the \$1.2 billion of funding from Proposition HHH. The following literature review will explore the topics of NIMBYism, zoning, and Proposition HHH in relation to the development of PSH.

### Permanent Supportive Housing

Housing First PSH was created by Pathways to Housing in New York City in 1992 (Tsemberis et al., 2004). Housing First PSH has been adopted by the federal government and many cities and states across the country, as it has been proven to assist people in maintaining housing stability, reduce use of emergency medical and mental health services, and reduce the

amount spent on services for unhoused people including through jail time, emergency room visits, psychiatric facility visits, etc. (Chalmers McLaughlin, 2011; Bailey et al., 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000; Rosenheck, 2003; Sadowski et al., 2009; Pearson et al., 2007). Some argue that the more money is spent on services for unhoused populations, the more those populations rely on outside help, but in fact the opposite is true (Chalmers McLaughlin, 2011). When more money is invested in PSH and the corresponding social services, people are more likely to utilize those services and stabilize their physical, mental, and substance abuse disorders so that they rely less on emergency services (Chalmers McLaughlin, 2011; Bailey et al., 2016). When unhoused individuals enter PSH and begin to rely less on emergency services, emergency and transitional housing, and food and other services, their overall cost of living decreases, meaning that state and local governments and outside organizations are spending less money on them. As shown in the studies above, investment in PSH and support services is more effective in reducing homelessness and government spending on unhoused populations than other interventions including emergency housing, transitional housing, and older models of permanent housing that require participation in services and sobriety. After determining that PSH is a highly effective intervention to chronic homelessness, one must consider the barriers to creating PSH including NIMBYism, zoning regulations, and lack of funding.

### NIMBYism

Research on the phenomenon of NIMBYism, “Not In My Back Yard,” has shown that local opposition to new affordable or supportive housing developments often stems from unspoken racism, classism, and general stigma surrounding client populations of PSH and affordable housing developments, masked in fear about safety, neighborhood amenity, and

property values (Pendall, 1999; Monkkonen and Manville, 2019). The study of NIMBYism has shown the three common stages of NIMBY movements including “youth, maturity, and old age” (Dear, 1992). The youth stage refers to the immediate responses from NIMBYs, when they are a small, unorganized group often using emotionally charged verbiage (ex. “We don’t want bums in our neighborhood”) (Dear, 1992). The group then grows into the maturity stage, where they have more local support, rational complaints, and attention from the public eye (Dear, 1992). Finally, they progress into the old age stage, where they are in a prolonged power struggle with their opposition, often in professional or governmental arbitration (Dear, 1992). NIMBY movements begin with anger-driven outcry over the development of facilities deemed a threat to a neighborhood and persist until both sides have made concessions or the project is outright approved or denied. The role of NIMBYs in project development is not always negative, as their opposition can lead to the improvement of proposals in ways that will benefit both the project and community.

Researchers have studied the opposition tactics of NIMBY movements, which often focus on zoning hearings, where opposing groups can attend public hearings to express their views on a given project (Dear, 1992). NIMBYs also put energy into petitions, letter-writing campaigns, lobbying of elected officials, media involvement, and public demonstrations. They utilize these strategies to gain public support and influence decision makers (Dear, 1992). Levels of NIMBYism in a given area can be studied demographically, with income, housing status, race, marital status, and physical location playing important roles. As they are commonly understood to have more racist and classist attitudes, homogenous suburban communities are more likely to oppose human service facilities than inner city neighborhoods, as such facilities usually serve diverse socially, physically, and economically disadvantaged clientele. Other important factors in

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

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



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

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

### Zoning

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

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

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

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

### Proposition HHH

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

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

consultant fees, permitting, and financing (LAist, 2019). Because the permitting and approval processes take so long, soft costs increase and must be sustained for years at a time. Galperin states that PSH usually takes three to six years to complete, but makes suggestions for the city on how to decrease development time and costs by “reallocating funds from higher-cost to lower-cost projects” and streamlining permitting with assigned government employee concierges (LAist, 2019). Though it is likely that with a streamlined process, far more units would have been built by 2020, it is unsurprising that the city government has been slow in advancing PSH projects, as government initiatives often involve multiple layers of bureaucracy, and approval process for permitting and zoning are notoriously long. There is a gap in research on the effects of HHH, and more effort should be put into studying ways to ensure the bond funds are used efficiently and effectively. This paper will make suggestions on how to streamline the creation of HHH supportive housing and increase cost efficiency.

The existing research on the barriers to creating PSH developments highlights the important roles of NIMBYism, zoning regulations, and Proposition HHH. NIMBYism has been studied as one of the main determinants of whether a development is built and successfully integrates into a neighborhood. Zoning ordinances also play a pivotal role in the barriers to creating PSH, as most neighborhoods in Los Angeles are zoned for primarily single-family housing, with separate areas for commercial and industrial zoning. Research shows that inclusionary zoning and upzoning can be beneficial in allowing for PSH developments to be built in residential neighborhoods. Other research dictates that rezoning commercial and industrial areas can be imperative in creating enough PSH and affordable housing to meet the needs of unhoused and housing insecure populations. Though there has not been much research on the effects of Proposition HHH, professionals who work in the PSH and affordable housing fields

believe that the approval process for developers should be streamlined and zoning ordinances should be modified to ensure the creation of more supportive housing units. There is some controversy over the effectiveness of Proposition HHH, as some believe the project is on track and others are pushing for faster results. The existing research on NIMBYism, zoning, and Proposition HHH leave gaps for this paper to fill through interviews with individuals who work in PSH fields, and analysis of the data collected.

## **Methodology**

The goal of this study is to understand the barriers to building PSH for unhoused populations in Los Angeles. After conducting research, I propose policy solutions to overcome these barriers. In order to understand the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles, I first researched the causes of homelessness and the reasons the crisis is continuing to worsen. I studied Measure HHH to find out where the bond money is being spent and why. I examined why building PSH is so expensive and why developments are not being built in mass numbers. All of this background research informs the original qualitative research I conducted to determine the barriers to creating housing and what organizations, policy makers, and city officials should be doing to overcome such barriers.

In order to study all of these questions, I conducted qualitative research in the form of interviews with professionals who work in the homelessness and affordable housing fields. I selected people from organizations who develop and run Housing First PSH developments, architects who design PSH units and developments, individuals who work for Los Angeles City housing departments, activists who advocate for and support unhoused individuals, and government officials working in homelessness and housing. I interviewed thirteen individuals from each of these fields, to gain a more clear understanding of the PSH issues and to inform my proposed solutions. This original research provided me with professional opinions about PSH, reasons why a sufficient number of such units and developments are not being built, and potential solutions.

In each interview, I asked the same series of questions in addition to a unique set of questions designed to prompt issue-specific responses from interviewees. Questions covered topics including current contributing factors to homelessness, the cost of building PSH units,

NIMBYism, zoning and density issues, Measure HHH, tax incentives to build PSH units, and more. I left room for free-flowing conversations, so each professional was able to explain what they are most passionate or knowledgeable about. With the interviewee's permission, I recorded each interview and transcribed it after. Once I completed all of the interviews, I went through the collected data and used them to inform my proposed solutions for building more PSH units. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What is your role at your organization?
2. How does your work intersect with homelessness and permanent supportive housing?
3. What do you believe is the most effective model of housing to rehouse people who are unhoused?
4. Do you believe in the Housing First permanent supportive housing model?
5. In your experience, what are the strengths of permanent supportive housing?
6. In your experience, what are the shortcomings of permanent supportive housing?
7. Which elements of permanent supportive housing do you find to be the most helpful in maintaining housing stability?
8. Which elements of permanent supportive housing do you find to be the most helpful in reducing use of emergency services?
9. Which elements of permanent supportive housing do you find to be the most helpful in assisting residents improve their physical and mental health?
10. Which elements of permanent supportive housing do you find to be the most helpful in assisting in recovery from substance abuse disorders?
11. Do you believe the design of permanent supportive housing developments or units has an impact on residents' experience?

12. In your opinion, what are the most important parts of a permanent supportive housing development?
13. How do you believe we should address the supply and demand for permanent supportive housing? (Ex. Build new developments, rehabilitate already existing developments, change zoning ordinances, etc.)
14. In your opinion, what are the barriers to creating permanent supportive housing?
15. How do you think each barrier can be overcome?
16. Do you believe that Proposition HHH has been successful in producing permanent supportive housing units? Why or why not?
17. To the best of your knowledge, is the process of obtaining Prop HHH funding too complicated or bureaucratic to the degree that it hinders the effectiveness of the program?
18. In your opinion, should Los Angeles' zoning ordinances be changed to allow for higher density housing? Why or why not?
  - a. If yes, what should new zoning ordinances look like for various districts?
19. To what extent does NIMBYism affect the creation of permanent supportive housing developments and units?
20. How do you think NIMBYism should be combatted?
21. Please extrapolate on other barriers to creating permanent supportive housing and potential solutions to overcoming such barriers.
22. If you were to try and make more PSH, what would be your first steps? Systematically, financially, etc.



## Data/Findings

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

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Alan Greenlee	Southern California Association of Non Profit Housing
Alex Visotsky	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Angela Brooks	Brooks + Scarpa
Becky Dennison	Venice Community Housing
Ben Rosen	Weingart Center
Dora Leong Gallo	A Community of Friends
Holly Benson	Abode Communities
Jan Breidenbach	Co-founder of Southern California Association of Non Profit Housing, current housing activist
Lisa Watson	Downtown Women's Center
Marc Tousignant	Enterprise Community Partners
Mark Lahmon	Lahmon Architects
Michael Maltzan	Michael Maltzan Architecture
Mike Alvidrez	Skid Row Housing Trust

The individuals interviewed all work with unhoused communities and PSH, some in architecture, others in nonprofit organizations focusing on PSH development and management, for profit companies building and operating PSH developments, local government organizations serving

homeless populations, and nonprofit organizations working with affordable housing and advocating for housing policy. The individuals I interviewed work for or have worked for some of the most prominent PSH and affordable housing organizations in Los Angeles. Because each interviewee is an expert in their field, I collected a large amount of data about PSH and related issues. Many of the interview subjects shared similar points of view about the topics covered, though there were some differing opinions scattered throughout the data.

## Funding

The main topics identified through the data collected are issues surrounding funding, NIMBYism, zoning ordinances, and development of PSH. Every person interviewed agreed that the current piecemeal model of funding is inefficient and leads to longer periods of pre-development, development, and construction. The current funding model requires developers to apply to multiple funding sources at different times - for example, one funding source will have a deadline in April, another in May, and three more in August. Each funding source has different requirements and approval processes, many requiring other funding sources already being obtained at the time of application, while others have specifications for minimum and maximum number of units, sustainability benchmarks, unionized labor, building design, etc. Many of these funding sources have conflicting requirements and timelines, leaving developers scrambling to find other funding, and consequently extending projects and drastically increasing the cost per unit. Because soft costs, costs that are not associated directly with construction - legal fees, taxes, design fees, etc. - are factored into the cost per unit, the longer a project sits in predevelopment, the more expensive each unit is. Many interviewees spoke about personal experiences obtaining funding for projects and all agreed that a more effective model would be single source funding. In order for single source funding to exist, local, state, and federal

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

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

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

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

### NIMBYism

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

prevalent. NIMBYs, “Not In My Back Yard” supporters, play an interesting role in the creation of all housing developments, but especially in PSH. While most people who work in housing do not agree with the general viewpoint of NIMBYs, that certain types of housing will increase crime in a neighborhood, decrease home values, take away from the character or charm of a neighborhood, and generally attract “undesirable” people, some of my interview subjects shared the value of NIMBY intervention.

One interviewee explained that when NIMBYs get involved, they usually bring complaints that are rooted in ignorance or fear of certain populations of people, but in practice, the NIMBY viewpoint can lead to beneficial improvements of a project. Because many NIMBYs argue that a development of apartment style housing will detract from the character of a neighborhood of predominantly single family homes, or not fit in aesthetically, developers are pushed to design more attractive and aesthetically cohesive buildings and landscapes. Another benefit of NIMBY opposition is the opportunity to involve community members in PSH developments and facilitate community building between residents of a new development and other community members.

One interviewee told a story about a resident of a neighborhood where a new PSH development was being built for formerly unhoused survivors of domestic violence. The resident was initially very opposed to the new development because she did not want survivors of domestic violence living in her neighborhood in fear that they would bring more violence into the community. After months of conversations between the developers and community members, the head of the developer organization facilitated a series of community improvement days with both members of the new development and other community members to allow people to meet one another and humanize the population of people living in the development. The developers

worked for months with the community to create improvements to their site plan, landscaping, and other aspects of the development so that the community would be able to feel and see their impact in the new development. The interview subject spoke fondly of the community member who was initially opposed to the development, as they worked together to foster a mutually beneficial and appreciative relationship between the residents of the development and the residents of the surrounding community. While NIMBY opposition to a project is theoretically a negative and potentially harmful phenomenon, it can open the door for community collaboration to improve a project, fostering communal investment and acceptance. In addition to issues surrounding NIMBYism, the interview subjects shared expertise about zoning ordinances in Los Angeles, and how such ordinances have evolved and must continue to grow.

### Zoning

Zoning in Los Angeles has not changed very drastically in the last few decades, making the development of new housing relatively difficult in certain areas. Proposition U, a Los Angeles ballot measure from 1986, reduced the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) from 3.0:1 to 1.5:1 in commercial and industrial zones throughout the city, excluding Downtown Los Angeles. This is relevant to PSH because much of the existing PSH is built on commercial or mixed use land, and mixed use land is often allowed in commercial and industrial zones, so the passing of Proposition U decreased the possibility for more PSH to be built on commercial and industrial land. The UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies created a diagram of the change in FAR,

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

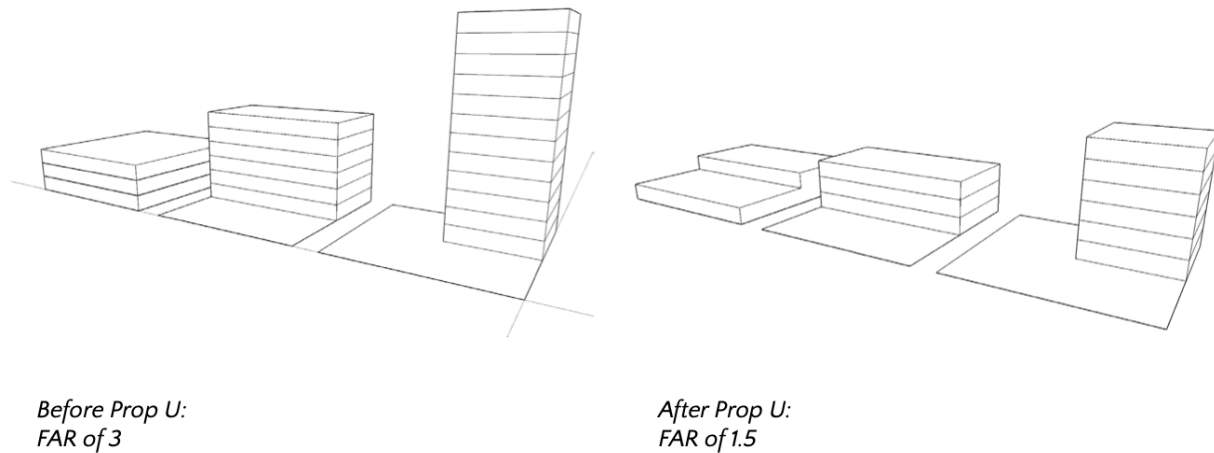


Figure 2. Illustrations of Floor Area Ratios, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, Paavo Monkkonen and Kate Traynor, 2017.

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

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

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

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

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

## PSH Development

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

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



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

Beyond these public hearing processes and approvals from the Planning Commission or City Council, developers must consider what population they are planning to serve in order to apply for the right funding sources. Because each funding source has such tight boxes into which a project must fit, developers must carefully plan out for whom they are creating housing, and how they are going to find people who meet the criteria to live in the units. Many donors or funding sources only fund projects for specific populations, so once a developer has collected enough funding for their project, they must follow through in creating buildings that best serve that population and finding residents who will qualify for their housing. Marc Tousignant spoke of the difficulties of this process, explaining the Coordinated Entry System (CES) and his thoughts about how the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) should be involved earlier on in the process to determine whether there are enough people who fit criteria for a certain housing project. Tousignant described CES as a system that facilitates the connection of homeless individuals with housing services using a highest acuity or highest needs based model. The issue with this system is that people who are not deemed high acuity get left behind, as they are not considered highest priority. Tousignant also explained his idea about LAHSA being involved in the development of housing from the very beginning, as they are currently not involved in a project until it is time to place tenants in the units. If LAHSA were engaged in conversation with developers from the beginning of a project, they would be able to collaborate with the developer to determine what population the project should be built for, how many units

they would be able to fill, and what services are most needed for the determined population. While CES is a logical system to house the most vulnerable individuals, it doesn't allow for inter-agency and inter-organizational collaboration on establishing what populations might benefit from a development, regardless of if they are the highest acuity or not. Once a population has been identified and the development has been completed, the management organization must run the operation smoothly and support residents in their transition into housing.

Many interviewees discussed their experience running PSH developments, and highlighted the need for strong case management, property management, social services, and community building. One individual explained that in recent years, PSH developments have been built for chronically homeless individuals with co-occurring mental and physical disorders, which is difficult for the management organization because they need tenants who are mentally and physically capable to agree to a legally binding rental lease. Because chronically homeless individuals often have moderate to severe mental illness, it can be difficult to determine whether a person is stable enough to live and thrive in a PSH community, or if they have higher acuity needs and should be in a long-term living facility with higher levels of care. Once qualified tenants are found, the management organization must provide highly functional case management services, access to support services, and community building opportunities to ensure a functional living environment for all residents.

Holly Benson, Chief Operating Officer of Abode Communities, spoke of the importance of a mixed acuity population in PSH developments, as entirely high acuity or low acuity populations can be isolating for residents and more difficult for management organizations to run smoothly. Mixed acuity populations allow for residents with different needs and struggles to cohabit shared spaces and work through community issues together. Benson explained that

shared community spaces and opportunities for community building are extremely important in PSH developments with mixed populations, allowing for empathy and community support to be fostered. Interviewees agreed that once developments have residents to occupy units, management teams must utilize their support tools to ensure the resident community thrives personally and as a group. In the next section, I will analyze the data collected from each of the thirteen interviews, highlighting the topics covered above including funding, NIMBYism, zoning ordinances, and development and management of PSH.

## **Data Analysis**

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

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

Contrary to existing literature, every one of my interviewees agrees that HHH has been extremely effective in building PSH since it passed in 2017. One expert explained the common misunderstanding about the goal of HHH. The 10,000 units in 10 years is based on the 300 units of PSH that Los Angeles already creates every year. The HHH funding is supposed to add an additional 700 units per year, coming to a total of 1,000 per year and 10,000 in 10 years. The public, including LA Magazine and the LA Times, has been overly critical of the slow rollout of HHH results because of poor publicity and lack of transparency from local government. Furthermore, the public opinion is critical over how expensive various HHH funded projects are, as the initial projection of cost per unit was \$350,000 for one bedroom apartments and \$414,000 for two or more bedroom apartments (Galperin, 2019). Galperin's report places the current median cost per unit at \$531,373, even reaching \$700,000 in some projects (Galperin, 2019). My interviewees attribute the drastic increase in cost per unit to the extended pre-development limbo stages that developers are held in while they find other funding sources and apply for land use approvals and entitlements. These soft costs of development dramatically increase the longer a project must wait to begin construction, and construction and labor costs add up considerably once the project begins construction. Interviewees agreed that the process of obtaining funding from HHH is overly bureaucratic and only covers a small portion of the total costs of a project. They recommend that future bond measures contain significantly higher figures to fund entire projects.

Beyond Proposition HHH, interviewees describe the current piecemeal approach to funding as inefficient and increasing the extended timeline and expense of building PSH. One interviewee spoke about two needs - a need for more PSH funding sources generally and the need for those funding sources to be significantly larger. Analyzing the data collected from each

interview revealed the drastic need for *single-source funding* in PSH. Nearly all of my interviewees spoke about the arduous process of applying for multiple funding sources, all of which have applications due at different times, have very different parameters and design requirements, and many of which require other funding sources already being secured. This extended process of searching for funding, losing funding, and applying for other funding increases timelines greatly, which inevitably increases costs. If the city, state, and federal governments all created new single-source PSH funds, nonprofit developers would be able to decrease the amount of time and amount of money it takes to create PSH developments. Data from this study show that the barriers to accessing funding are crucial in understanding the barriers to creating PSH, and in order to ease access to funding, we must restructure the process entirely. Los Angeles needs more funding sources with higher capacities to fund entire projects in addition to other measures to overcome the barriers to creating PSH.

NIMBYism is a prevalent barrier to creating affordable and permanent supportive housing in Los Angeles. While NIMBY opposition can be detrimental to a proposed project by overextending the land use approval process through public hearings that result in a City Council member or Planning Commission shutting down a project, it can also be beneficial. Some NIMBYs work with developers to improve the project, while others participate in community building projects with residents of the development. Housing developers have implemented various strategies to decrease community opposition including neighborhood education and involvement, designing facility autonomy from surrounding communities, and other integrated approaches. Data collected from my interviews show that NIMBYism, while still a common response to proposed PSH developments, has seen decreasing political power over the last decade. Though many projects still encounter NIMBY opposition, the Los Angeles City

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

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

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

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

	1970s		1980s		1990s		CHANGE <sup>1</sup>	
	%	acres	%	acres	%	acres <sup>2</sup>	net	% diff
Single-Family	<b>48.9%</b>	139,001	<b>47.0%</b>	131,283	<b>48.6%</b>	117,662	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>-0.6%</b>
Multi-Family	<b>14.5%</b>	41,283	<b>16.1%</b>	44,882	<b>13.2%</b>	31,997	<b>-1.3%</b>	<b>-9.0%</b>
Commercial	<b>5.8%</b>	16,482	<b>6.5%</b>	18,205	<b>5.7%</b>	13,822	<b>-0.1%</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>
Industrial	<b>8.3%</b>	23,497	<b>7.8%</b>	21,898	<b>7.8%</b>	18,854	<b>-0.5%</b>	<b>-5.8%</b>
Open Space	<b>22.4%</b>	63,733	<b>22.6%</b>	63,278	<b>24.6%</b>	59,527	<b>2.2%</b>	9.7%

<sup>1</sup> change is the difference between 1990s and 1970s.  
<sup>2</sup> 1990s plans report net (not gross) acreage, i.e. street areas deducted

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

75% of Los Angeles has been zoned for single family housing since the 1970's, though Downtown Los Angeles was rezoned in 2013 to allow for higher density housing with low parking requirements in an effort to help both the housing crisis as well as economic development. However, the upzoning of DTLA resulted in the construction of mostly expensive housing, pushing out lower income residents and encroaching on the boundaries of Skid Row (Farabee, 2019). In addition to the issues that come with low density, subsidized housing developments with affordable units are subject to additional arduous zoning approval processes that can prolong or even prevent development. A developer must find and purchase land that is zoned for multi-unit housing or submit land use approvals to have differently zoned land approved. The developer must be able to purchase and have land approved before applying for funding, and often face heavy scrutiny from surrounding communities. Because of the complicated and long process of obtaining land use approvals, my interviewees agreed that Los



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

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

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

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

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

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

activist and founder of SCANPH; and Holly Benson, Chief Operating Officer of Abode Communities, all agreed that *Los Angeles needs to be building multiple models of permanent, transitional, and shelter housing to truly address the homelessness crisis*. While PSH is the most effective form of housing for the chronically homeless population with co-occurring disorders, *most* of the current population of unhoused people does not need such structured housing with support services. Many currently unhoused people will thrive going from transitional housing into affordable housing, while others may only need a short term stay in a shelter to get back on their feet. Interviewees agreed the bottom line is that Los Angeles needs more affordable housing in the housing stock, more funding for Section 8 vouchers, more access to public housing subsidies, and more transitional and shelter housing. If the city were to build more affordable housing, much of the homeless population would be able to transition from living on the streets or in transitional/shelter housing to living in affordable units. There are also many unhoused people of higher acuity who need housing that is more structured and supervised than PSH, therefore more long term care facilities must be built and subsidized. While I initially believed that PSH was the primary solution to the homelessness crisis, it is now apparent that Los Angeles needs a multifaceted approach to adequately address the needs of different populations.

Once developments are built, they must also be properly managed to ensure resident success. Multiple interviewees who run PSH and affordable housing nonprofits spoke to the need for *experienced management organizations* and *in-house support service teams*. Interviewees pointed out important factors in creating and running a successful PSH development including the need for aesthetically pleasing, human-centric design with an abundance of natural light and open group spaces, mixed acuity residents, an experienced and talented social services organization, trained and experienced case managers and building managers, consistent upkeep

of properties, and engaged neighborhood involvement. Interviewees said that without these important characteristics, PSH developments are less likely to be successful in housing vulnerable populations long-term. One interviewee spoke about residents' experience transitioning from being unhoused to living in a PSH development. For months, the interviewee would visit a PSH site every morning and see numerous residents sleeping in the courtyard, as these individuals still felt more comfortable sleeping outdoors instead of in their apartments. It is important to have patience, space, and support for residents in their transition into housing, as everyone will have a different experience and some residents need longer to feel safe or comfortable sleeping indoors or in a bed. Interviewees added to existing research on how to create successful PSH developments in their highlighting of the importance of mixed acuity tenants. When a development is segregated with mostly higher or lower acuity tenants, it is easier for residents to feel isolated from the outside world. Similar to research on mixed income housing, mixed acuity PSH is more likely to be successful in maintaining housing stability and improving physical and mental health.

Data collected in this study provide clear stepping stones for the future of PSH in Los Angeles. By analyzing these data, I am able to propose several important improvements and policy recommendations for the City of Los Angeles, many of which can be applied state-wide or to other cities around the nation. The key topics of funding, NIMBYism, zoning, and development and management of PSH are crucial in understanding the barriers to creating PSH and should be studied further. The data point to the need for out-of-the-box ideas to incorporate into housing solutions. There is no single strategy to end homelessness, we must use every tool we have to encourage the construction of PSH, affordable, transitional, and shelter housing, and to run facilities effectively.

## **Policy Recommendations**

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

The current funding structure for PSH and other homeless housing models operates in such a way that a developer must obtain funding from multiple sources to fully finance a project. Interviewees agree that this piece-meal approach to funding is ineffective and results in longer pre-development periods and ultimately more expensive projects. I propose that PSH funding sources be designated significantly more money from local, state, federal, and private sources so they may fund entire projects. This would require governments and private foundations to allocate many times the amount of money they currently allocate or set up taxes that pay into a housing fund. By funding an entire project with one source, and having multiple sources in each city, state, and at the federal level with the ability to fund entire projects, developers will spend less time in pre-development, have fewer design and sustainability requirements to meet, and ultimately reduce overall costs. This single-source model of funding would require massive amounts of money dedicated to PSH and other housing models, which I propose could be reallocated from police budgets in an effort to invest in sustainable housing and community

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

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

potential hazards for residents in the surrounding area. If zoning and land use procedures were streamlined in these ways, developers would be able to drastically reduce the time spent in pre-development and the corresponding soft costs. In addition, in order to address the city's need for density, Measure U must be repealed.

Interviewee Angela Brooks explained how detrimental the passing of Measure U was to Los Angeles, as it cut the possibility of density in commercial and industrial zones in half. If the city is serious about reducing homelessness and increasing the affordable housing stock, Measure U must be repealed. By increasing the F.A.R. to 3.0:1, the capacity for dense housing in commercial and industrial zones will be doubled, allowing developers to build more housing in designated areas. While building housing in a commercial or industrial zone requires a zoning variance or land use approval, by adopting the policy recommendations outlined above, the city will be able to approve more PSH developments and other types of housing in these zones.

Better Institutions described the effects of repealing Measure U, stating that developers would be able to build significantly more transit-oriented housing, and pressure on single-family neighborhoods would be decreased as developers would be incentivized to build in currently underutilized areas (Better Institutions, 2016). The same publication predicts that Measure U prevented the construction of over one million homes, many of which could be built in the next few decades with the repeal of the Measure (Better Institutions, 2016).

Los Angeles has a high volume of chronically homeless people, which makes it difficult to track each individual experiencing it. Bakersfield, California, a nearby city that has struggled with extreme poverty and homelessness for decades, recently reached a "functional zero" of chronic homelessness, meaning that at any given time there are fewer than three people experiencing chronic homelessness (Peters, 2021). The city has been working with an

organization called Community Solutions on their campaign “Built For Zero” for the last five years to identify each person experiencing chronic homelessness by name and match them with permanent housing tailored to their needs (Peters, 2021). By personally identifying each individual experiencing homelessness and details about their situation and history, government agencies, non profits, and shelters are able to work together to meet each person’s housing needs in a way that has not been done before. Because so many agencies and organizations are working together, they are able to identify who needs the most help the fastest and provide that help in a timely and cost efficient manner. They have also been working on building relationships with and educating landlords to increase the amount of affordable units available to formerly homeless individuals that can be paid with government funded housing vouchers. Because Los Angeles has such a large homeless population, identifying each individual experiencing homelessness by name is a difficult and time consuming task, but as proven by Bakersfield and other cities around the country, it is possible and worthwhile. Los Angeles faces additional challenges because there is such a low supply of housing in contrast to the overall population size and the unhoused population size. By implementing the other policy recommendations outlined in this section in addition to a “by-name” list tracking each person experiencing homelessness and matching them to housing resources tailored to their needs, Los Angeles will be closer to reaching and maintaining a “functional zero.” However, the City of Los Angeles cannot succeed at this feat alone, state and federal government support is needed as well. At the state level, California Senate Bill 35 (SB 35) should be updated to allow for the qualification of more housing projects.

S.B. 35 is a California State Senate Bill designed to increase the construction of market rate and below market rate housing in cities and counties across the state. The Bill states that



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

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

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

enough to address the massive waiting list. The federal government should begin by increasing funding and capacity of Section 8 so the program is able to provide housing vouchers to everyone eligible. However, according to multiple interviewees, even if the federal government increases funding for Section 8, there are currently not enough empty units to house everyone eligible. Construction of housing is imperative to expanding Section 8, as is the creation of massive funding pools for PSH, affordable housing, and other homeless housing models. If more market rate housing is built, then higher numbers of existing units can become affordable. If more below market rate housing is built, there will be more capacity to house low income people and people experiencing homelessness, and more units will be able to house people with Section 8 vouchers. Currently there are no federal funding programs for PSH, a shortcoming that the Biden Administration has the capacity to remedy. I suggest the federal government allocate at least ten times what is already being spent on Section 8 to fund more vouchers, and create extensive funding sources for new PSH, affordable housing, and other homeless housing model construction.

The policy recommendations above are informed by data collected in this study, and can be implemented by local, state, and federal governments by reallocating existing financial and political resources that currently go to police and military budgets, and new tax programs. I do not have exact numbers for how much funding should be allocated by various government agencies, or from where tax dollars should be collected, but I suggest more research be done about how many units of housing - market rate, affordable, and PSH - are needed in Los Angeles and other cities across the country to decrease or eradicate homelessness. It is imperative that multiple types of housing are constructed, as there is no one model that will decrease homelessness alone. In order for already existing units to become affordable, more market rate

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

## Conclusion

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

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

built, which will increase the housing stock and allow for already existing housing to become affordable.

Data collected in this study also point to a need for updated zoning codes and streamlined land use approvals on a local level. If Los Angeles were to repeal Measure U and streamline land use approvals for PSH, other homeless housing models, and affording housing, developers would have shorter pre-development periods, which would decrease overall costs. Further, data show that the Planning Commission, City Council, and other boards with the discretionary authority to approve or decline a project should be stripped of such power and be required to approve any project that meets specific requirements set by the city or state. Projects asking for zoning variances or land use approvals should be reviewed in separate meetings and analyzed on the basis of size and height, lot size, and potential health impacts or harms to tenants in the surrounding area. All private hearings should have meeting minutes available to the public to hold public officials accountable for their actions.

This study opens the door for more research to be conducted on Los Angeles' homelessness and housing crisis specifically, and ways the city can implement new rapid re-housing models to dampen the crises. Researchers should study the Community Solutions "Built For Zero" campaign to determine whether it could be effectively implemented in Los Angeles. Additionally, research should be conducted on potential new policies for Los Angeles, the state of California, and the federal government to increase funding for all types of housing. Finally, researchers should study the effects of streamlining land use approvals and other processes for PSH, affordable housing, and other housing models, to determine how all levels of government should move forward with decreasing pre-development periods and overall costs of building different types of housing.

This study has provided answers to the questions “What are the barriers to creating permanent supportive housing?” and “What are some solutions to overcoming such barriers?.” Though there were limitations, including the level of subjectivity in responses from interviewees and the lack of availability of city employees for interviews, the data collected provide multiple views of the barriers to creating PSH in Los Angeles, solutions to overcoming those barriers, and policy recommendations for all levels of government. I hope this paper informs future research in the PSH and general housing fields, and contributes data-informed solutions to the nation-wide push to expand permanent housing for unhoused populations.

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