Tiny Home Communities: Alternative Solutions to Addressing Homelessness

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Abstract:

Homelessness is decreasing nationally, but populations experiencing homelessness in certain states and unsheltered homelessness both increasing. Also, chronic homelessness still makes up large part of populations experiencing homelessness. There are significant health issues individual and costs to local and state governments associated with unsheltered and/or chronic homelessness. While decreasing national homelessness shows the effectiveness of existing programs, increasing unsheltered homelessness and prevalent chronic homelessness shows there are still issues to be addressed and ways to supplement or fix current housing programs. One way to do this would be through increased local, state, and government funded tiny home communities, especially in areas facing the most severe increasing in unsheltered homelessness or chronic homelessness. This increased funding could assist in decreasing populations experiencing chronic homelessness and could help states or cities experiencing high populations of unsheltered homeless better assist residents.

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I. Introduction

"I've found this same trend with individuals facing homelessness. My first question to someone facing homelessness I have not seen in some time is, "Where have you been staying?" The implications of that question are profound. I don't ask where they live. I ask where they stay. I ask because I know the answer is going to be different from day to day. Could be at shelter. Under a bridge. In an abandoned home. On a friends couch. At the emergency room. In jail. The bus station lobby. An ATM alcove…In contrast, it would sound silly if I was to ask a 25-year homeowner, "Hey, where have you been staying these days?" "Uhh, in my house?" There would be no question. And the advantages that come with that certainty, with that permanency, are invaluable. You've got an address so you can get mail and apply for work. You've got a shower to stay clean and healthy. You've got your own bed to support sound sleep. You've got a medicine cabinet to store your medication. You've got a place that when you come home in the evening; you know all of your belongings will be right where you left them. Imagine if you did not have just one of those. Imagine how hard it would be to keep it all together. Imagine holding down a job if you didn't have access to a regular shower. Or paying bills if you had no desk to organize them. Or staying healthy if you had no safe place to store your medication. A lot comes with stability. But for individuals facing homelessness, that stability simply does not exist. They "stay" in places and don't "live" in places." (Lunetta)

This quote from Andrew Lunetta, Executive Director at A Tiny Home for Good, summarizes some of the many issues of experiencing homelessness, either sheltered or unsheltered. Homelessness means no address or phone number for jobs, no security for your belongings, no health or safety for yourself. On a single night in January 2016, the HUD Point in Time (PIT) count claimed that 549,928 people experienced homelessness, either in an emergency shelter or unsheltered, in the United States (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 1). This count, however, does not adequately convey the true scope of the housing problem in the United States. In 2007, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimates that, in one year, 3.5 million people experienced homelessness at least once (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty). The PIT count estimate and annual estimation for people experiencing homelessness are different because the PIT count does not include individuals and families living "doubled up" with family or

friends or individuals and families staying temporarily in automobiles. The PIT count is

intended to act as a snapshot of homelessness in a community in a given year, but

because the "turnover rate" for people experiencing homelessness is very high and

situations like those mentioned above are not counted, the count cannot accurately

describe the full scope of homelessness in a given year (National Coalition for the

Homeless). Although the total number of Americans experiencing homelessness and the

percentage of those Americans utilizing emergency shelters and safe havens has

decreased since 2007, populations experiencing homelessness in places like California,

Washington, District of Columbia, and New York, and percentages of those populations

experiencing unsheltered homelessness has increased (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 13).

The overall decreasing population of Americans experiencing homelessness demonstrates

that there is some success to be found in programs, like President Obama's *Opening*

Doors Federal Policies, that are aimed at ending homelessness. However, one cannot

dispute that the perennially high number of Americans experiencing homelessness and

the percentages of certain populations experiencing homelessness prove that

homelessness and the affordable housing crisis remain an issue in the United States. It is

disheartening that such a large group of Americans- men, women, children, students, the

elderly, and veterans- must daily combat the violence, physical and mental trauma, and

the myriad other negative side effects associated with homelessness. While the overall

decrease shows that some programs are effective in decreasing the percentage of

Americans experiencing homelessness, the increase and persistent percentage growth in

some areas makes one question whether the current system could be improved and how.

To answer this question one must ask what programs are currently being implemented by

nonprofit organizations, local, state, or federal government and how might these programs be supplemented or amended to better serve the population of Americans experiencing homelessness.

Government agencies like the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and nonprofits like the National Alliance to End Homelessness unanimously agree that permanent housing (e.g. Housing First programs) is the most effective at permanently reducing the percentage of Americans experiencing homelessness in the U.S., especially among Americans experiencing chronic homelessness (USICH 25). A look at recent government policy within the past decade will also show policy trends, which tend to favor funding these permanent housing programs over transitional programs and shelters (National Alliance to End Homelessness 3). However, examination of either transitional or permanent housing programs reveals issues such as the lack in availability of permanent supportive housing, or the restriction of independence and dignity in transitional housing programs. These issues coupled with certain societal factors, like the affordable housing crisis and yearly decrease in the budgets of housing programs contribute to the growing populations experiencing homelessness in the U.S. (Office of Management and Budget 25). Local, state, and federal governments should fund "tiny home communities" as an additional measure to address homelessness in the U.S.[1] While nonprofit organizations currently fund multiple tiny home communities across the U.S., only one community, Quixote

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[1] The tiny home homeless villages discussed in this capstone should not be confused with the Microhouse movement sweeping the nation, although the two are closely related. The Micro house movement influenced tiny home homeless villages, however, the tiny home villages discussed in this capstone, however, are not focused on aesthetic value or access to urban social life. The intention of these tiny homes is to provide vulnerable populations with a safer alternative to living unsheltered, to fill the gap between those who need permanent housing and number of housing units available, and to provide more supportive services and stability to residents than those typically afforded to occupants of other transitional or shelter alternatives

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Village, is funded through federal government grants aimed at ending homelessness

(Segel 1).

Figure 1 Map of U.S. showing existing tiny home communities in dark green, communities under construction in light green, and communities in planning stages in yellow (The Village Collarborative).

Because of these communities' effectiveness and their ability to address the

issues currently surrounding homelessness in the U.S., this capstone argues that the

federal government, state governments, and local governments should move beyond

merely easing occupation and land use laws and expand funding to more of these

communities throughout the U.S. Federal, state, and local government support of these

housing alternatives would allow the U.S. to address issues with existing housing

programs and more effectively provide homeless Americans with permanent supportive

housing and supportive services.

It is important to note that the main goal of government programs aimed at ending

homelessness is not to ensure no one will ever suffer a housing crisis. Nor does this

capstone claim that the implementation and government support of these tiny home

communities would be able to prevent that suffering from ever happening. In government

terminology, an end to homelessness means simply that "every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience" (USICH 10). In accordance with that goal to end homelessness and provide response and safety net that prevents homelessness when possible and ameliorates it when not, this capstone argues that these tiny home villages could play an important role in this systematic response and reducing the suffering and negative effects of homelessness.

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II. Background

Before one can go into detail on solutions to the current issues surrounding

homelessness in the United States, it is essential for one to understand the reality and

scope of the problem. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) defines homelessness in four broad categories:

1. People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided if they were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation before entering the institution…
2. People who are losing their primary residence, which may include a motel or hotel or doubled up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing…
3. Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state…
4. People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening situations related to violence; have no other residence; and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing… (National Alliance to End Homelessness 1)

Of the 549,928 people experiencing homelessness mentioned earlier in HUD's

PIT count, approximately 68% of them were staying in some sort of emergency shelter or

transitional housing. The other 32% were completely unsheltered (Henry, Watt and

Rosenthal 1). While this is a decrease from 564,708 people in 2015, the number of people

experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased from 173,268 to 176,357 (Henry, Watt

and Rosenthal 8).

By Sheltered Status, 2007–2016
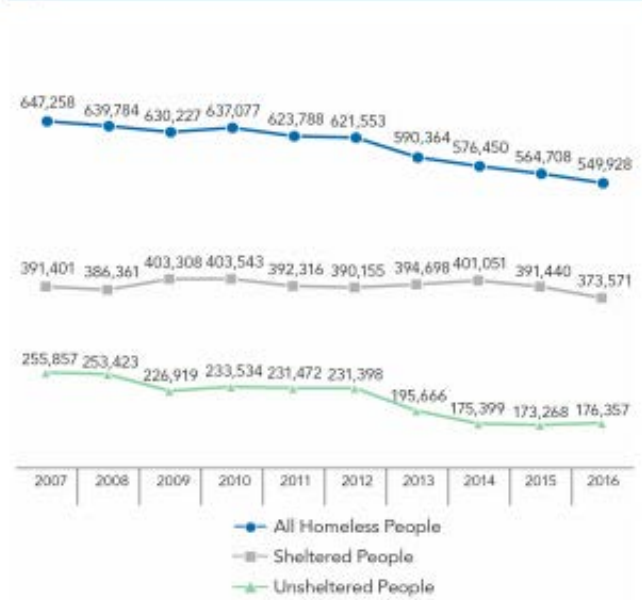
Half of those people experiencing homelessness did so in either California, New York, Texas, or Washington (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 12). HUD also reports that almost half of the people experiencing unsheltered homeless did so in California, with 66% of the population experiencing homelessness in California did so unsheltered (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 12). Despite the national decrease, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased in California, Washington, the District of Columbia, Colorado, and Oklahoma from 2015-2016 (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 14).

One of the major issues with homelessness in the United States is not a family or individual temporarily experiencing one of the categories outlined above, but families or individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. HUD and USICH define chronic homelessness as an individual or family with a parent suffering from a mental illness or substance use disorder, who have experienced homelessness continuously for a year or who have experienced four or more distinct episodes of homelessness in the past three years (USICH 1). Chronic homelessness is most often caused or influenced by a

substance abuse disorder or mental illness that has not effectively been treated by

outpatient treatment, chronic or disabling health conditions like asthma or HIV/AIDS, old

age, history of incarceration, extreme poverty, and history of sexual assault or physical

abuse (USICH 4). Chronic homelessness poses a greater risk to those experiencing it and

a greater cost to society than an episode of temporary homelessness. Dealing with the

basic healthcare, incarceration, behavioral health care, and emergency room costs

associated with chronic homelessness costs cities extraordinarily high amounts each year

(USICH 4). The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that these costs totaled

over $42,000 per single person experiencing homelessness per year in Portland, OR

(National Alliance to End Homelessness). Since most people experiencing chronic

homelessness are not enrolled in Medicaid or any other health insurance, most of this cost

falls to the city and tax payers (USICH 2). Individuals or families who experience

chronic homelessness also have a mortality rate that is 4-9times the United States average

(USICH 2). Although the total number of individuals and families experiencing chronic

homelessness has decreased from 83,170 to 77,486 in 2015 to 2016, 22% of individuals

experiencing homelessness in the 2016 PIT count were experiencing chronic

homelessness (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 62). More than half of individuals

experiencing chronic homeless in the 2016 PIT count did so California, Florida, New

York, and Texas (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 64). In states like California, Hawaii,

Nevada, Mississippi, and Oregon almost 80-90% of the individuals experiencing chronic

homelessness did so unsheltered, increasing the costs associated with chronic

homelessness (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 65). One way to most effectively address the

issue of homelessness would be to provide programs and targeted support for individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness.

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty stresses that the lack of affordable housing is one of the leading causes of homelessness in the United States, especially following the 2008 recession (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty 3). For both families and individuals in the United States, the lack of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) shows how the gap between affordable rental housing and low income households has increased since the 2008 recession (Bolton 1). The NLIHC claims that the number of extremely low income (ELI) households, households with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income, increased from 9.6 million to 10.3 million households from 2009 to 2012 (Bolton 1). Despite the increase of ELI households, the supply of affordable rental housing has not increased to meet the demand, creating a shortage of 7.1 million housing units (Bolton 1). This shortage of affordable housing for households with incomes at 15% or below the area median income, deeply low income (DLI) households, was even worse with only 16 units available for every 100 DLI households (Bolton 1). This affordable rental housing shortage is expected to increase as the NLIHC expects the number of renter households to increase in the United States. One way to significantly address homelessness in the U.S. would be to address the lack of affordable housing for ELI and DLI households.

There are three general categories of programs that address homelessness in the U.S. The first- emergency shelters, transitional housing, and safe havens- deals with people who are currently experiencing homelessness. The second- rapid rehousing, permanent

supportive housing- deals with housing those considered formerly homeless. The third

provides supportive services and rental assistance to individuals and families to prevent

them from experiencing homelessness (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 75). Emergency

shelters and safe havens are generally offered on a nightly basis, while transitional

housing is generally offered for a maximum of 2 years. The second category, on the other

hand, provides long-term or permanent support and housing for people who have

previously experienced homelessness. Rapid Rehousing programs provide short-term

rental assistance and supportive services to formerly homeless families and individuals.

Permanent Supportive Housing focuses on providing long-term housing and services for

individuals who have previously experienced homelessness, especially chronic

homelessness. There are other types of housing, however, that focus on providing

permanent housing and services for individuals who do not have a disability that requires

permanent supportive housing (Henry, Watt and Rosenthal 75). While emergency

shelters, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing programs are important models in U.S.

housing programs, one cannot rely on a single model to act as a complete solution for all

homelessness in the U.S., therefore it is important that housing programs cover a wide

range of services and address different groups of people experiencing homelessness.

　　While there are hundreds, if not thousands of nonprofits throughout the United States

aimed at serving those experiencing homelessness or ameliorating the effects of

homelessness in different ways, the United States government has adopted specific

strategies and funding availabilities to address the two major issues with homelessness:

the lack of affordable housing and chronic homelessness. The USICH 2015 "Federal

Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness" laid out five key strategies for

providing affordable housing to low income families (USICH 39-42). First, increase

rental housing subsidies for families and individuals at risk of or experiencing

homelessness. Second, increase supply of affordable rental homes by working with state

and local governments to increase construction efforts, funding the National Housing

Trust Fund, and awarding Low Income Housing Tax Credits to incentive to creation of

affordable housing. Third, eliminate unnecessary barriers to federally-funded housing

assistance programs. Fourth, promote housing availability by encouraging cooperation

between public housing agencies, multifamily housing owners, and homeless services.

Fifth, increase supportive service housing by combining affordable housing and

supportive services.

To address chronic homelessness, the USICH Plan proposes four strategies to provide

increased permanent supportive housing (USICH 41-42). First, increase access and use of

supportive housing by encouraging prioritization for people who require the supportive

services. Second, create incentives and protocols to move people who no longer need

supportive services into normal affordable housing and free up supportive housing for

those who need it more. Third, increase supply of permanent supportive housing. Fourth,

increase the use of mainstream resources like Medicaid to finance services in permanent

supportive housing.

While many of the non-profits operate on donations, there are multiple local, state,

and federal funding opportunities for housing programs. The Community Frameworks

"Tiny Homes White Paper" outlines several ways in which housing programs are funded.

The White Paper explains that HUD HOME Funding, HUD Community Development

Block Grant (CDBG), Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HUD McKinney Funding,

HUD Section 8 Funding, HUD 811 Rental Assistance, or state and local government community specific funding are all frequently used to fund housing programs (Segel 10).

The funding from these programs and grants is distributed through local Continuum of Care (CoC) units for local and state homeless assistance programs. A CoC is the body through which a community can assess the need for housing and services in a community and request funding through the McKinney-Vento grants for the programs it deems necessary. HUD requires that any CoC have four necessary factors:

> Outreach, intake, and assessment in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both; Emergency shelter to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children; Transitional housing with supportive services to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once permanently housed; and Permanent and permanent supportive housing to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live with services if needed (National Alliance to End Homelessness 1).

One can see in Figure 2 on the following page, the HUD model for a CoC includes various types of housing to effectively serve the different needs of a community. The lines between the various points on the model show how clients can move between one CoC service to another based on an individual or family's specific needs or capabilities. Unlike previous housing models, CoC do not require an individual or family experiencing homelessness to move from an emergency shelter, to transitional housing, to permanent supportive housing, to living independently in affordable housing. The CoC model, shown in Figure 2 below, leaves all the options available, but allows people experiencing homelessness and service providers to choose which service would be most effective, which is not always a linear progression.

Figure 2 HUD Model of a CoC (Burt, Pollack and Sosland 8)
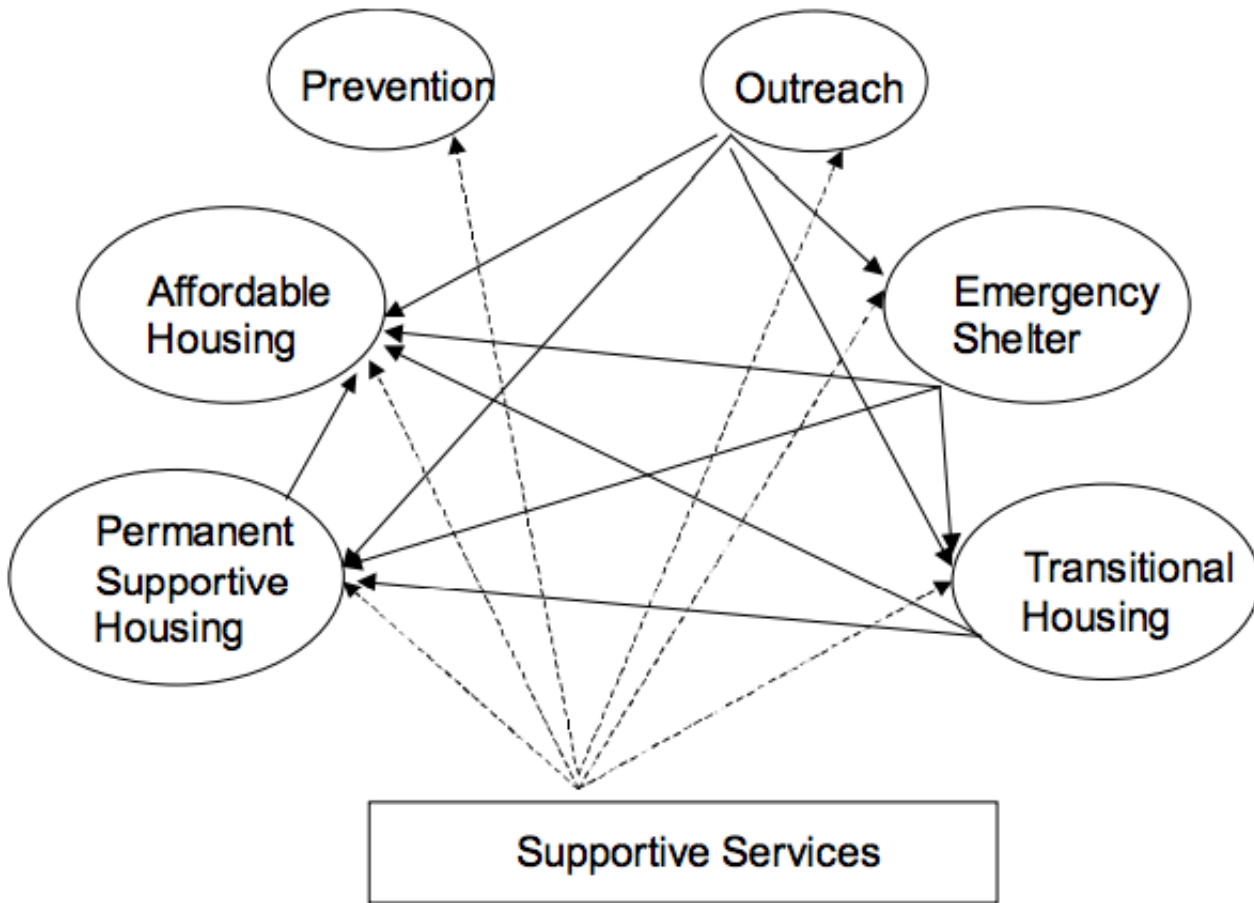
III. What are "Tiny Home Villages"

Despite the various programs and funding mentioned in the previous section, the previous section also shows that homelessness is still a severe issue in the United States. The persistence of this issue makes one consider whether there are ways to supplement or fix current programs in the United States to better serve populations experiencing homelessness. Increased government funding of "tiny home" communities in areas like California, New York, Texas, or Washington. Communities should be emphasized in these areas because either homelessness is a persistent or increasing issue in these locations or because chronic homelessness is particularly problematic. Doing so would allow the governments to supplement existing programs and assist people currently experiencing homelessness in finding stable permanent housing more quickly than the current system allows.

The "tiny home" communities currently being operated by nonprofits across the United States took their inspiration from both the rise of tent city encampments and the micro house movement following the 2008 recession. Tent city encampments or "shantyvilles" reminiscent of the "Hoovervilles" of the 1930s have been part of American homelessness for decades, but following the growing affordable housing crisis and the recession, the presence of homeless encampments increased across the United States (Hunter, Linden-Retek and Shibaya 3). Many were forced to live in these encampments because of a lack of available beds in shelter systems or permanent housing, substance abuse issues or other disabilities. Some residents, however, chose to live these encampments rather than trying to take advantage of available services because living in the camps offered greater autonomy and independence than shelter systems and other

permanent housing programs (Hunter, Linden-Retek and Shibaya 5).[2] However, city and state governments often dismantle these tent city encampments and evict the residents citing city ordinances that prevent camping on city grounds, trespassing on private property, or other housing and occupation laws (Hunter, Linden-Retek and Shibaya 23). Despite the dismantlement of the encampments and the various laws trying to prevent their existence, the tent city encampments were persistent. When local officials forcibly dismantled one location, the residents would move to another, set up their encampment and wait for the cycle to begin again.

During this same time, the Micro house movement was also gaining popularity in the United States. In a response to the ever-increasing size and cost of the average American home and the expanding affordable housing crisis, many Americans, especially young professionals who wanted the benefits of living in urban areas and the social opportunities of living in these areas without paying a premium for unnecessary square-footage, began to construct small scale, but perfectly functional homes (Salguero). Nonprofits and individuals began combining the two to provide cheap and stable homes and shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

Major variability exists in actual construction and day-to-day operations of these tiny home communities because most communities are run by different nonprofits or other organizations. Despite this variability, these tiny home communities offer similar services. The Community Frameworks "Tiny Homes White Paper" lays out the

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[2] When using the word "chose" here, it is important to note that most of these individuals were not choosing to experience homelessness. The experience with homelessness was often the culmination of a variety of social and personal factors which prevented a person from having access to or being able to take advantage of housing programs and supportive services.

groundwork for the minimum specifications that tiny homes should meet to serve as

permanent sustainable solutions and not just a temporary stopgap:

> To be more than a temporary solution, we submit that a tiny house must:
> Be large enough for a standard-size bed, chair, table, and some storage; be
> conditioned, meaning heated and insulate; have electricity; have standard ceiling
> height; have full bathrooms and cooking facilities nearby; and be sustainably built
> for long term use whether the tenant stays for a short or long time (Segel 3)

Most communities offer tiny homes anywhere between 100 to 400 sq. ft. Some

communities consist of only homes of the same size, while others offer residents homes

that range in square footage in case an individual or family requires more space.

Communities also vary on whether bathrooms and kitchens are included in the home or

whether they are offered communally.

These tiny home communities can supplement existing programs in a temporary

or permanent capacity. The Village Collaborative, a network created to promote the tiny

home or tent city model, provides two illustrations for how these communities can be laid

out and services could effectively be offered in these communities. As one can see from

Figure 3 and 4 on the following page, the Village Collaborative models include plans for

both a Transitional Village model or an Affordable Village model (The Village

Collaborative). In addition to the tiny homes, the Transitional Model includes garden

beds, a greenhouse, laundry, and micro-businesses. While the Affordable Village model

proposed does not include any sort of supportive services, it fulfills requirements for

permanent affordable housing. This Affordable Village model could also easily be

adapted to provide supportive service, as is currently being done in many existing tiny

home communities, to fulfill demand for permanent supportive housing.

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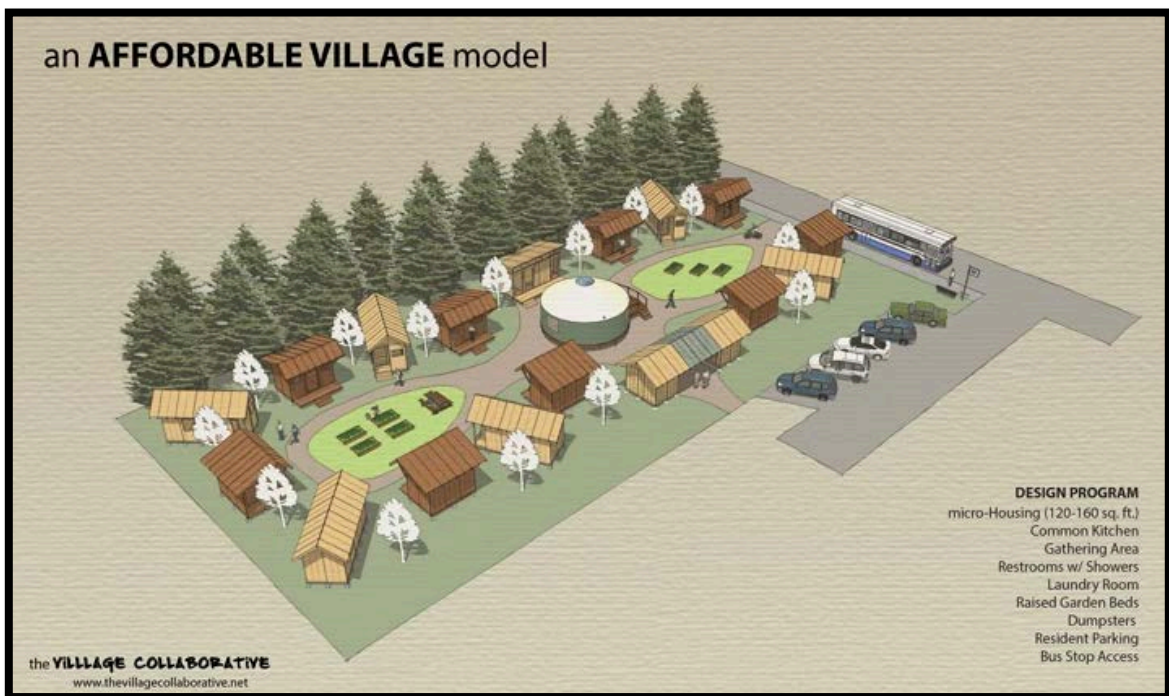*Figure 3 Village Collaborative Transitional Model*

Figure 4 Village Collaborative Permanent Housing Model

Current tiny home communities operated by nonprofit organizations offer transitional, permanent supportive, and permanent affordable housing for both low-income or mixed-income communities. Coordinating these communities with government funding and CoC's would allow tiny home communities to be built in whatever form would serve the community best. Existing tiny home communities, like Othello Village, also report that families and individuals suffering from a temporary setback or less severe contributors to homeless are often able to take advantage of the supportive services offered in these communities and move onto more independent permanent housing immediately following a stay in a tiny home village (Westneat). By facilitating a transition from supportive housing to more independent permanent housing, the implementation of tiny home villages allows cities and states to open up more supportive housing units and services for families and individuals in need of more long-term or intensive assistance, one of the goals mentioned in the USICH plan.

IV. Tiny Home Community Case Studies

When looking at how tiny home communities function and how federal, state, and local government funding can be implemented, one can take inspiration from some of the many communities currently in operation.

In 2015, the Seattle city government declared itself in a homelessness emergency (Westneat). One study has shown that for every $100 increase in monthly rent, urban populations increase by an average of 15% and suburban and rural homelessness can increase by 39% (Byrne, Munley and Fargo 615). From 2011-2015, Washington state saw average rent increases of $111, increasing as much as $250 (Washington Department of Commerce 1). To deal with this emergency, the local government proposed the creation of 1,000 tiny homes set up in several locations throughout Seattle. However, due to bureaucratic setbacks, only 28 of the 1000 units were built. Seattle's Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) Director Sharon Lee claims "For $2.2 million — less than 5 percent of what the city spends annually on homelessness — we could build all 1,000 tiny homes" (Westneat). Despite the not reaching the unit goal, the 28 units, placed in community called Othello village, have proved exceptionally effective. In its first nine months Othello Village has served 300 people in their first nine months. Half of that 300 are either currently residing in Othello Village or have moved on to what could be considered more regular permanent housing (Westneat). While construction of the Othello Village units was funded through donations, the city funded many of the plumbing and utility costs of the community. Had Othello Village had more funding to create more tiny home units, it is possible that they could have served vastly more than 300 people.

Othello Village was constructed for only $2,200 per unit. However, this low-cost comes from each unit lacking permanent foundations and plumbing, which if offered would improve the permanency and services in the village. One important of the Othello Village is that it was built near the Othello light rail center, which is essential to providing residents with access to schools, shopping, and job opportunities (Low Income Housing Institute). In addition to the 96 square feet homes, Othello Village offers a community kitchen, bathrooms, and shared living spaces and the Seattle Human Services Department also provides case management for residents requiring permanent supportive services.

One can also take examples of a permanent supportive housing tiny home community from Washington's Quixote Village. Quixote Village received funding from both Washington state, the local government, and through a HUD Community Development Block Grant and is currently the only tiny home community receiving any federal funding (Segel 1). Quixote Village started as an illegal tent city encampment, until residents partnered with a nonprofit organization to build a more permanent tiny home community. Quixote Village contains 30 tiny homes of 144 square feet each with a ½ bathroom, a front porch, and a small garden area. The Village also houses community building with fully equipped kitchens, bathrooms, living areas, community rooms, and a community garden (Segel 3). The first-year cost of Quixote Village averaged out to be $102,000 per unit (Segel 5). At first glance that seems to be a rather expensive amount for tiny homes, but it is over $130,000 cheaper than the average cost of state subsidized housing in Washington state- $239,396 (Segel 3). Quixote Village also employs a full-

time Program Manager and a full-time Community advocate who coordinate and assist residents in taking advantage of the supportive services available.

The Cass Community Tiny Home Village in Detroit, Michigan is a good example of these tiny home communities operating on permanent affordable housing basis. This community currently consists of 25 250-400 sq. ft. homes, all of which are available to low-income residents of Detroit (Cass Community Social Services). All of homes are not exclusively for people currently classified as homeless, but some of the homes in the Cass Community Tiny Home Village are set aside for people experiencing homelessness. The other homes in the Cass Community Village will go to senior citizens, college students, or anyone looking for small square footage and low rent (Cass Community Social Services). This village addresses the concerns about permanent housing because many of the homes in the community operate on a rent-to-own basis. Most of the units in the Cass Community Tiny Home Village can be rented for approximately $300/month (Cass Community Social Services). In a city where average monthly rent is almost $700 and the monthly rent for a studio apartment of similar size to a Cass Community unit is approximately $600, the construction of this tiny home village gives low-income residents, populations experiencing homelessness, or individuals and families at risk of being homeless a safe and cheap alternative (Detroit Regional Chamber). In addition to low cost permanent housing, this tiny home community is also constructed on the already existing Cass Community Social Services campus, so residents of this tiny home community also have access to the food, health, and job services provided by Cass Community (Cass Community Social Services).

While these three communities vary in how they operate, are funded, and how they serve populations experiencing homeless, they all show ways in which the tiny home community idea can serve populations experiencing homelessness and how these communities can be further assisted with local, state, and federal funds. The variability and generally low-cost of tiny home communities make them an effective alternative solution to homeless that can be constructed in communities in ways that specifically address the needs of certain Continuums of Care.

VI. Arguments for and against local or federal support of tiny home villages

Before advocating for the wholesale adoption of tiny home communities across the U.S. and government (city, state, or federal) support for these communities, one must first consider arguments against the implementation of these villages and potential obstacles to establishing them in communities. The first obstacle one must overcome is the common "why should this proposal be enacted in the first place?" First, one must answer the question of whether the government has any responsibility towards housing. Following up that question, if one does believe the government has responsibility towards ending homelessness why is it necessary or beneficial to divert government funds from existing housing programs to fund a program already operating through other venues. If tiny home communities are being funded through nonprofits and churches and the federal, state, and local governments are already funding other housing programs, why should government funding be redirected to tiny home communities. To answer the first question, one can utilize political philosopher John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights published by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man published by the International Conference of American States in 1948 establish housing as a basic human right. These documents, which state that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including, food, clothing, housing, and medical care, and necessary social services…" and "every person has the right to the preservation of his health through sanitary and social measure relating to food, clothing, housing, and medical care, to the extent permitted by public and community resources" name housing as a necessary

factor to an adequate standard of living or the preservation of health (United Nations).

Multiple studies, including one done by National Health Care for the Homeless Council,

show how homelessness is exceptionally detrimental to one's health. People experiencing

homelessness are three to four times more likely to die before individuals not

experiencing homelessness (National Healthcare for the Homeless Council 2).

Individuals experiencing homelessness are also more likely to experience malnutrition,

communicable diseases, or other physical trauma (National Healthcare for the Homeless

Council 3). In Rawls' *A Theory of Justice as Fairness* he asserts that individuals have an

equal right to basic rights (Rawls 60). Samuel Freeman's interpretation of Rawls' theory

goes farther to assert that Rawls' basic right of personal property included housing,

making housing a basic right in a Rawlsian interpretation and a basic human right under

the UN Declaration. Rawls' theory of justice as fairness continues past establishing these

basic rights to claim that people acting as unbiased contractors would agree that society

should have some sort of safety net that ensures the provision of basic liberties. Given

Freeman's extension of Rawls' theory and the UN Declaration asserting housing as a

basic human right, one can say that the principle of a basic societal safety extends to

some sort of government program providing housing for those experiencing

homelessness.

To answer the second question of whether it is necessary or beneficial to divert

government funds from existing housing programs to fund a program already operating

through other venues, one can apply both a moral argument and an economic one. As

mentioned previously in this capstone, there is currently a large gap between ELI

households and available, affordable, and safe rental units. An estimate from the Urban

Institute claims that for every 100 ELI household in the U.S. there are only 28 available, affordable, and safe rental units available, leaving 72 families experiencing homelessness or in precarious living situations which will soon lead to homelessness (Urban Institute). One could see these statistics and argue that instead of funding tiny home communities, the government should direct its focus to building more full-sized affordable housing units. However, given the almost annual decrease to the HUD budget and the current proposed $6.2 billion decrease, creating approximately 3,170,000 ELI affordable units is not economically feasible, especially when the average cost of creating a unit of affordable housing can reach $200,000 per unit (Office of Management and Budget). In regards to the other programs the government is funding, while the decrease of people experiencing homelessness shows that those programs are working, the fact remains that an almost 600,000 people experience homelessness on a single night and millions experience homelessness every year. If safe and secure housing is a basic human right, as the UN and an interpretation of Rawls shows, then, if feasible, the government should amend or supplement its current programs to address the persistent homelessness in the U.S. more effectively. The construction of tiny home communities allows governments to provide that basic liberty and human right on a smaller scale, while continuing to work on larger more traditional housing projects.

While one cannot discount the work nonprofits organizations and churches are doing with these tiny home communities, many institute codes of conduct and rules which inhibit independence and dignity of the residents or discriminate against individuals who already experience discrimination within the housing system. Some tiny home communities insist on sobriety requirements for residents and, while that is a

worthwhile and respectable goal, preconditions to housing, like sobriety, can

unnecessarily inhibit the housing programs (Reed). The National Alliance to End

Homelessness conference also stated that Housing First programs achieve better

outcomes than non-Housing First programs (Reed). The rules and regulations of some of

these tiny home communities can harm groups or individuals who already have trouble

utilizing current programs. These nonprofit or church-run communities often have rules

or entrance requirements that serve as obstacles to both heterosexual and homosexual

couples, LGBTQ individuals, single men with children, people with criminal records, and

families with teen sons (Lee). Nonprofit and church-run communities operating through

donation based funding have the undeniable right to establish their own rules for these

communities. However, government grants or government funding in the creation of

these communities could allow HUD and other government organizations to promote

Housing First programs and programs that assist discriminated against or highly

vulnerable groups.

One must also show that these communities are financially feasible. Proposing a

program like tiny home communities for people experiencing homelessness requires

money to fund said program. An examination of existing communities shows that not

only are these tiny home communities financially feasible, they are also exceedingly cost

effective. As mentioned in Section II, there are many ways communities can fund

housing programs. The Community Frameworks "Tiny Homes White Paper" outlines

several possibilities in which funding for these communities could be possible. The

White Paper explains that HUD HOME Funding, HUD Community Development Block

Grant (CDBG), Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HUD McKinney Funding, HUD

Section 8 Funding, HUD 811 Rental Assistance, or state and local government funding are all viable options for funding tiny home communities (Segel). The Quixote Village mentioned previously is currently the only tiny home community receiving a HUD CDBG funding, while the other tiny home communities in Seattle, also mentioned above, are receiving funding from the state and local government. Given the relatively low expense of these communities and their positive outcomes, federal, state, and local governments should utilize more of these funding opportunities to create tiny home communities for people experiencing homelessness.

Communities that do invest in these villages see substantial economic returns on their investment. Cities that invest in permanent housing and supportive services for homeless individuals find that money saved on public costs for shelter, health care, mental health, and criminal justice completely offset or almost completely offset the cost of implementing the supportive housing. In New York City, one unit of permanent supportive housing cost approximately $17,277 to establish and each unit of permanent supportive housing saved the city approximately $16,282 in public service costs per person per year. The numbers are even more favorable in cities like Denver, Co and Portland, Or. Providing permanent housing and supportive services costs the Denver Housing First Collaborative approximately $13,400 per unit per year and the money saved on public services, $15,773 per person a year, more than offsets that cost. In Portland, supportive housing and services cost the Portland Community Engagement Program $9,870 in the first year, this investment, however, saved the program approximately $15,000 per person per year in public expenditures (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Even the larger tiny home communities, like 27-acre 200-person

Community First! Village in Austin, TX estimated to cost $6 million is projected to save the city of Austin money, given it spends over $10 million per year in public expenditures related to homelessness (Fahlgren Mortine). While not all of the tiny home villages are intended as permanent housing, their low construction cost ($2,200 per unit in Seattle's Othello Village), rapid construction, and ability to use valuable space efficiently allow cities to move homeless people from unsheltered locations or shelters into stable, more permanent housing alternatives rapidly. This allows the cities or states to save money on the construction of housing and public expenditures related to homelessness.

Although some argue that devoting resources to building these tiny home villages will detract focus from building permanent housing, the capstone argues that when past communities are examined, this argument proves to be not true. When the Seattle city government was considering the construction of their tiny home communities, Mayor Ed Murray invited Barbara Poppe, former head of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, to consult on Seattle's "homelessness emergency." Poppe discouraged communities from allowing any form of homeless encampments or using these communities as a part of an official response because "they can distract communities from connecting people to permanent housing" (Beekman). However, construction of permanent housing placements necessary to effectively lower homelessness in Seattle and other cities considering these tiny home villages produces prohibitive barriers in terms of time required to construct these permanent placements, money required for construction, and vacant land large enough to for these apartments or subsidized housing. When examining current tiny home communities, one can find myriad solutions to address this concern.

Seattle is one of the pioneering cities in terms of creating tiny home communities and yet it would be inaccurate to say Seattle has allowed the creation of these tiny home communities to distract from the creation of other permanent housing or from addressing its "homeless emergency." In the past two years, Seattle has built more than 900 low-income housing units, not including the tiny homes (Beekman). In July 2016, Seattle residents voted on and approved a $290 million property tax levy to fund low-income housing (Young). This property tax levy would go toward building or renovating approximately 2,150 affordable housing units in the Seattle area (Young). Despite this construction of affordable housing units, the average wait time for a one-bedroom apartment in the Seattle area was anywhere from one to five years (Seattle Housing Authority). While Barbara Poppe and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness are concerned that a city promoting these communities will lose focus for the construction of permanent housing, that does not seem to be the case in Seattle. Since the construction and presence of these encampments has occurred since 2013 and Seattle is still committed to building permanent housing units. During the one to five years, families and individuals are waiting for Seattle's permanent housing availability, they are forced to deal with the negative physical and mental consequences of being homeless, which are documented in detail above. If a family or individual is not homeless and is living in transitional housing or staying in shelters, they must also deal with the negative consequences of these programs. These negative consequences include, but are not limited to obstacles in finding steady employment and detriments to physical and mental health. Construction of these communities as permanent or transitional housing alternatives to fill the gap between those who need permanent housing and number of

housing units available allows people the dignity of stable housing and shields them from many of the negative consequences.

The Los Angeles city government and other city governments have prevented or impeded the creation and placement of tiny homes because of a variety of safety concerns, however, these concerns can be addressed through proper construction and oversight of these communities. Elvis Summers, with the help of volunteers and donations, has built 37 tiny homes and distributed them throughout Los Angeles County, currently the home of 30,000 people living unsheltered. The City of Los Angeles has, however, labeled these homes as trash subject to removal and impounded several of the homes throughout the city. When asked about the removal of the tiny homes, the city officials in Los Angeles cited health and safety risks, claiming the presence of these homes on sidewalks forces residents walk on the street and that officials have found drug paraphernalia, weapons, or evidence of prostitution in the homes that have been impounded (Holland). This argument is similar to the Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) arguments found in Seattle and other cities about the implementation of tiny home homeless villages or alternative housing solutions. The common NIMBY argument against the tiny home homeless villages and homeless encampments is for the safety of the surrounding residential and business areas. These residents claim that even if the encampments and their residents are safe and respectful, their presence attracts homeless of all backgrounds and all ranges of physical and mental health. Individuals suffering from untreated mental illnesses may make their way to these communities and not be allowed to stay for various reasons. This may cause the individual to remain in the area living in the streets or surrounding areas outside the community, posing potential to either

himself or herself or someone else (Rantz). The concerns in Los Angeles and the NIMBY

arguments can, however, be addressed if the tiny home villages are supported and

overseen by outside organization and established in a community setting. By situating

these homes in communities, as seen in every example mentioned in this capstone, and

not individually or scattered as in Los Angeles, nonprofits or those overseeing these

communities can better oversee the safety and legality of actions within the community

without overly infringing on the privacy or individual rights of the residents within the

community.

There are also some concerns about the concentration of low-income families and

individuals in already poor areas of cities and the economic isolation and other the

negative effects that can have on health and social outcomes. However, studies from the

Urban Institute and HUD have shown that "place-conscious" or location conscious

programs can have an ameliorating effect on those negative outcomes (Turner and

Lynette 3). Current nonprofit run communities are attempting to address this problem by

integrating communities within all neighborhoods and cities to avoid concentration of

low-income families and individuals or people experiencing chronic homelessness in one

area. Another way this concern can be addressed in the implementation of tiny home

communities is through the Cass Community approach. The Cass Community tiny homes

are not exclusively for individuals or families who are experiencing or previously

experienced homelessness. The tiny homes are rented out on a mixed-income basis,

attracting college students, elderly retirees, or anyone looking for low-cost and smaller

square footage (Cass Community Social Services).

V. Conclusion and implications for future U.S. policy

Tiny home communities offer a cost-effective way to assist and support current housing programs in the U.S. While the tiny home communities operated through nonprofits are effective, their reliance on donations limit their span and the amount of people they can assist. By supplementing these nonprofit operations with local, state, or federal funding, as is done with Quixote Village would enable these tiny home communities to serve a wider reach of people and further ameliorate homelessness in the U.S.

Clearly, these communities are not a panacea for all issues surrounding homelessness in the U.S., their versatility as transitional, permanent supportive, or permanent affordable housing could address issues of homelessness in specific regions and states where unsheltered homelessness and chronic homelessness are increasing.

If one believe that safe and secure housing is both a basic human right, then one would agree that the current housing system in the U.S. is inadequate. While the progress made in terms of ending homelessness in the U.S. is admirable, the persistently high percentage of the population experiencing unsheltered and chronic homelessness still face a distinct lack of their basic rights. The current housing system in the U.S. needs to be supplemented or amended to provide that right to the greatest amount of people. By increasing federal, state, or local government support of tiny home communities, governments can make substantive steps toward ending homelessness, especially unsheltered and chronic homelessness.

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Capstone Half Draft

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