

# Planning for Homelessness: Land Use Policy, Housing Markets, and Cities' Homelessness Responses

Urban Affairs Review

1–31

© The Author(s) 2024

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/10780874241258446

[journals.sagepub.com/home/uar](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/uar)

Katherine Levine Einstein<sup>1</sup>   
and Charley E. Willison<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Many American cities are in the midst of a homelessness crisis. Through their control over zoning and land use policy, local governments can reduce homelessness by facilitating housing construction and improving housing affordability. Using administrative data and surveys of local public officials, this paper asks whether (and which) cities connect their homelessness and land use policies. We find that cities rarely link homelessness policies with zoning and land use. Cities in California and the Pacific region are generally more likely to make these connections, suggesting an important state role in guiding local homeless and planning policies. Cities with high and low levels of unsheltered homelessness show little difference in their propensity to connect land use and zoning policies with homelessness.

## Keywords

local politics, housing, homelessness, land use and zoning

---

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Boston University, Boston, MA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public and Ecosystem Health, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Katherine Levine Einstein, Department of Political Science, Boston University, Boston, MA, USA.

Email: [kleinst@bu.edu](mailto:kleinst@bu.edu)

Much of America is in the midst of a homelessness crisis.<sup>1</sup> This problem is especially acute in cities, which are disproportionately home to America's unhoused (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2021). Addressing this problem is of paramount importance: unhoused people experience greater physical and mental health struggles, higher mortality rates, and poorer education, economic, and social outcomes (Fazel, Geddes and Kushel 2014; Fusaro, Levy and Shaefer 2018; Roncarati et al. 2018).

The primary cause of homelessness is insufficient affordable housing (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine 2018; Colburn and Clayton 2022).<sup>2</sup> Local governments thus play a pivotal role in shaping the well-being of unhoused people. Through their power over zoning and land use, local governments shape how much housing gets built in a community, where it can be built, and how easy it is to construct affordable housing (Burns 1994; Trounstone 2018; Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019). A wide array of economics and public policy research has linked zoning and land use restrictions with higher housing costs, as well as racial and economic segregation (Metzger and Pelletiere 2013; Trounstone 2018).<sup>3</sup> The federal government has recognized local jurisdictions as critical partners (or obstacles) in the production of new housing.<sup>4</sup>

Individual examples abound of onerous zoning and land use processes obstructing the development of much needed affordable housing and dedicated housing for unhoused people. For example, in 2022, Multnomah County, OR was stymied in its efforts to open up a women's shelter in Portland by a lawsuit claiming that the shelter violated the neighborhood's industrial zoning.<sup>5</sup> In Pawtucket, RI, zoning laws prevented a local nonprofit from adding additional affordable housing to an existing building in the name of "protect[ing] the quality of life and character" of the neighborhood.<sup>6</sup>

In short, zoning and land use have a profound impact on the development and location of affordable housing, as well as overall housing supply in a community. Yet, we know little about whether local governments see land use regulations and zoning as tools to address local homelessness.

A burgeoning body of local politics research explores land use, zoning, and housing policy. This line of scholarship reveals the entrenched nature of opposition to new housing (Hankinson 2018; Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019; Marble and Nall 2021); the pivotal role of zoning and land use regulations in increasing housing costs and producing economic and racial segregation (Burns 1994; Trounstone 2018; Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019); and, the political power and organizing strategies of homeowners (Hall and Yoder 2022) and renters (Michener 2020). This research on land use and housing, however, makes scant mention of homelessness.

In contrast, there is little scholarship focused on the local politics of homelessness. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on case studies of the

criminalization of homelessness (Stuart 2016; Robinson 2019; Giamarino and Loukaitou-Sideris 2024)—sometimes using land-use policy (Goetz 1992)—with less work on the full scope of city responses to homelessness (Willison 2021). The seminal National Academies report on solutions to homelessness in 2018 lamented the need for more research on the political challenges associated with ending homelessness (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine 2018). Federal homelessness policy similarly ignores the role of local governments (Willison 2021).

Marshaling a wide array of data, including a national survey of mayors and homelessness and housing plans from the nation's 100 largest cities, we ask: (1) whether cities highlight land use regulation and zoning as part of their toolkits for addressing homelessness; and (2) what factors predict when cities connect land use regulation and zoning with homelessness.

We find that in general, few cities see homelessness policy as connected to land use and zoning. State policy may explain those that do draw these links: cities in California are more likely to connect land use and zoning policy with homelessness. Similarly, mayors of cities in Oregon, Washington, and California are significantly more likely to believe that an inadequate supply of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness. In contrast, we find little difference in the propensity to make these connections between cities with high and low levels of unsheltered homelessness. These results suggest that cities largely are not implementing preventative policies to increase the housing supply and reduce homelessness. While building more housing alone will not end homelessness, it is an essential component of effective local homelessness policy, both for preventing homelessness (Colburn and Clayton 2022) and to successfully, permanently house people actively experiencing homelessness (Padgett, Henwood and Tsemberis 2015).

## Literature Review and Theoretical Expectations

This article takes up land use and zoning policies *that regulate the development of new housing*. There are a myriad of other important ways that land use and zoning policies have been used as informal and formal homelessness policy. For example, cities have used zoning codes to sanction encampments and to re-adapt parking lots to use for vehicular dwellings (Giamarino, Brozen and Blumenberg 2023; Przybilinski, 2023). Here, we specifically are focused on *upstream, preventative policies that shape the housing supply*, like regulations that facilitate the development of more affordable housing. Land use policies that effectively criminalize homelessness, such as camping bans, are pivotal, reactive homelessness policy tools deployed by many local governments (Robinson 2019; Amaral 2021; Giamarino and Loukaitou-Sideris

2024) that adversely impact unhoused people (Herring 2014, 2019). Our analysis, though, focuses on land use and zoning policies with more long-term, preventative aims centered on increasing the housing supply.

Restrictive land use and zoning policies in many American cities make it difficult to build housing of all types. They have contributed to escalating housing costs, racial and economic segregation, and unequal provision of public goods (Trounstine 2018; Gyourko, Hartley and Krimmel 2021). Here, we define “restrictive land use” and “exclusionary zoning” as zoning or land use policies that limit the creation or production of different types of housing.

The scholarly consensus surrounding land use, zoning, and escalating housing costs is not siloed in academic journals. A wide array of policymakers at the federal, state, and local level have endorsed land use reform as a pivotal part of their housing policy. Both the Obama<sup>7</sup> and Biden Administrations<sup>8</sup> have promulgated plans to reduce local governments’ use of exclusionary zoning. Multiple states, including California,<sup>9</sup> Massachusetts,<sup>10</sup> Oregon,<sup>11</sup> and Montana,<sup>12</sup> have recently passed policies to preempt local governments’ power to implement restrictive zoning.

By making housing more affordable, zoning and land use reforms are important tools for reducing homelessness (Colburn and Clayton 2022). Yet, local institutions and politics may create potent obstacles to forging connections between these two policy areas to the detriment of long-term, preventative homelessness policymaking.

Below we highlight two factors. First, guidance (or lack thereof) from higher levels of government may create a fragmented bureaucratic structure, which naturally divides homelessness policymaking from traditional local government policies like land use and zoning. Second, Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) sentiments make it politically unpalatable for many local communities to reform their zoning to build more housing in general—especially if new housing is affordable and oriented towards homeless people. These NIMBY sentiments may be exacerbated by unsheltered homelessness; unsheltered homelessness refers to visible homelessness where persons are not residing in transitional shelters or permanent housing, instead sleeping in areas not meant for human habitation, such as vehicles or highway underpasses. Unsheltered homelessness may pose a particularly thorny political challenge for local governments, worsening public opposition to long-term housing solutions and instead generating public demands for immediate crisis response.

### *Policies from Higher Levels of Government*

The first factor that may lead local governments to fail to connect zoning and land use with homelessness is federal government policy; policy actions in

some states, though may lead to more cohesive homelessness policymaking. Local governments are dependent on higher levels of government for important resources and legal powers (Peterson 1981; Frug 1999; Oliver, Ha and Callen 2012; Schragger 2016). The federal government helps to set the fiscal and regulatory context in which local governments operate in a variety of policy arenas, determining the resources available to communities and the incentives they have to pursue particular policies (Dreier 2007; Michener 2017). For example, federal transportation legislation has created powerful incentives for local governments to regionally plan their transportation decisions through designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (Gerber and Gibson 2009).

What's more, guidance from state and federal governments can create *policy awareness and knowledge* among public officials. Local officials are faced with a wide variety of complex challenges as they lead cities, including housing, policing, infrastructure, and, in some communities, schools. No official can develop deep substantive expertise in all of the arenas in which they govern. One important source of information and technical assistance is the federal government, whose plans and policy documents can provide rafts of detailed guidance about complicated policies (Dreier 2007).

Policy choices at the federal level may lead local governments to have fragmented homelessness plans that fail to connect different policy systems. Federal homelessness policy has long marginalized local governments. Rather than coordinating homelessness policies and programs with local governments (and potentially incentivizing local governments to implement desired policies) (Oakley 2002), the federal government has instead delegated this authority to Continuums of Care since the early 1990s (Jarpe, Mosely and Smith 2018). Continuums of Care are (mostly)<sup>13</sup> non-governmental organizations; they typically feature representatives from non-profit and faith-based organizations, the business community, and county governments (Housing and Urban Development 2017; Jarpe, Mosely and Smith 2018; Klasa et al. 2021). Continuums of Care receive and distribute federal funding according to local communities' perceived needs (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development 2009).

These federal government programs have eschewed both acknowledging local governments as important implementers of homelessness policy *and* the centrality of the production of affordable housing to reducing homelessness. We hypothesize that this will generally lead to fragmented and inconsistent local homelessness planning. Moreover, we anticipate that public officials will not make links between zoning, land use, housing affordability, and homelessness policies.

In contrast, we anticipate that public officials will largely show awareness of the links between land use policies and housing affordability. Indeed, as

noted in the introduction of this article, multiple federal administrations and state governments have called for or implemented policies that reduce local governments' ability to use exclusionary zoning to limit the development of new housing. Alongside a rising social movement pushing for more housing construction, these government actions reflect a growing understanding of the gross consequences of undersupplying housing for decades on housing affordability (Schuetz 2022). While many members of the public (Nall, Elmendorf and Oklobdzija 2022) and some public officials (Been, Gould Ellen and O'Regan 2023) do not believe that increasing the housing supply will reduce prices, we anticipate that local public officials will, by and large, accept federal (and, in some places, state) government guidance about the connection between relaxing land use regulations, increasing the housing supply, and reducing housing prices.

Finally, as creatures of the state, local governments' powers and decisions are also powerfully shaped and prescribed by their state governments (Frug 1999). We are therefore also attentive to the possibility that state policy may shape local government behavior in either direction. We anticipate that in states that provide no guidance or requirements on the links between zoning and land use and homelessness, local governments' policies will evince a similar disconnect. In contrast, we similarly expect cities and towns located in states that do provide such guidance or requirements to high-light zoning and land use in their homelessness policymaking.

### *NIMBYism and Unsheltered Homelessness*

We also expect the politics of local NIMBYism to reduce local governments' likelihood of highlighting land use and zoning as part of their homelessness policies. We anticipate that political pressures from vocal local constituents may also shape and constrain the extent to which local governments coordinate zoning and land use with homelessness policies. Important decision-makers in local politics are elected, and thus might care about issues that are important to their constituents (Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014). Since local elections are famously low turnout affairs (Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Trounstone 2008; Anzia 2014), these electoral pressures mean that the preferences of interest groups (Anzia 2014), public sector employees (Anzia and Moe 2019), and more privileged, high turnout segments of the population, such as senior citizens (Kogan, Lavertu and Peskowitz 2018), wield greater influence in local politics and policy making.

The impact of small groups with strong views is especially potent in land use and housing policy, where advantaged and vocal opponents to new housing construction predominate (Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019). Indeed, opposition to new housing is deeply entrenched (Hankinson 2018;

Marble and Nall 2021)—especially when affordable housing is on the table (Tighe 2010).

In contrast, people experiencing poverty are less civically engaged as a result of resource constraints and negative experiences interacting with government when trying to access social services (Michener 2018). Unhoused persons face compounded challenges to civic engagement, especially unsheltered individuals. Addressing basic necessities of life on a daily basis, such as finding food, hygiene facilities, a safe place to sleep, takes precedence over political participation. America's voting registration system is based on place of residence (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2012), creating significant obstacles to political participation for individuals who lack a fixed address. In short, unhoused people are unlikely to be a critical electoral constituency in most communities to overcome or even compete with staunch public opposition (Willison 2021).

We therefore expect the preferences of housing opponents to impact local land use, zoning, and homelessness policy. We generally predict that cities will be reluctant to allow for the construction of higher density housing, and we anticipate that these forces will be especially pronounced when it comes to providing housing for homeless people. In short, we hypothesize that public pressure should make the coordination of preventative land use, zoning, and homelessness policies a rare occurrence, with little public tolerance for housing in general, let alone housing set aside for the unhoused.

We anticipate that the unique challenges presented by unsheltered homelessness may worsen local NIMBYism and prevent cities from incorporating zoning and land use in their homelessness policies. In particular, unsheltered homelessness may generate especially strong community pressures that militate against preventative homelessness policies rooted in land use and zoning. Unsheltered homelessness is highly visible, and presents distinctive social, political, health, and safety challenges. While unsheltered homelessness is a challenge nationally (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>14</sup>), it is disproportionately clustered in west coast communities due to high housing costs, fewer shelter options, and a more temperate climate; indeed, many communities outside of the West have adopted either informal, or in a smaller number of cases, formal policies requiring the production of enough temporary shelter beds to accommodate their unhoused population (Hoch 2000; Colburn and Clayton 2022). So, while New York City, for example, has a sizable unhoused population that rivals or exceeds many west coast cities in some years, its right to shelter laws mean that the homeless population is largely sheltered, and thus less visible.

Higher rates of unsheltered homelessness may generate public safety and public health concerns. The public has long-standing negative perceptions of persons experiencing homelessness, but in particular unsheltered

homelessness (Grob, 1994; Schneider and Ingram 1993). Public opinion research demonstrates the majority of Americans think drug and alcohol use is the primary cause of homelessness and that people experiencing homelessness should not be allowed to gather in public in the interest of public safety (Tsai et al. 2019). Exposure to visible homelessness reduces public support for redistribution (Sands 2017) and increases support for the removal of unhoused people from public spaces (Clifford and Piston 2016). Instead, unsheltered homelessness generates public demands for “order maintenance” policing strategies, which use the criminal justice system to target the behaviors of unsheltered homeless people, including loitering, sleeping in public, and publicly visible symptoms of mental illness (Wilson 1978, 118–27; Vitale 2017; Herring 2019). Beckett and Herbert (2012) show that public officials, in an effort to appear responsive to their constituents, use the police to effectively ban unhoused people from public spaces.

Unsheltered homelessness, then, leads the public to demand that their local government police highly visible manifestations of homelessness. Officials in these places likely think of homelessness as an immediate safety and health problem, not as a problem to be targeted by preventative, long-term housing policies. We consequently anticipate that local governments facing greater rates of unsheltered homelessness will be relatively less likely to connect homelessness with land use and zoning reform.

## **Data**

In this article, we ask whether communities connect land use policies and homelessness, and, if so, which kinds of communities make these links. Drawing from prior scholarship, we generate several predictions. We broadly anticipate that few cities will connect zoning and land use with homelessness. We predict that in states that do provide guidance or require such connections, we will observe stronger links between zoning, land use, and homelessness in local policymaking. Finally, we expect that these links will be especially rare in cities with high rates of unsheltered homelessness.

Assessing these predictions required collecting multiple sources of novel data. The study of local governments suffers from a paucity of systematic data across a variety of policy areas (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2020). Scholars of local politics must frequently rely on a patchwork of surveys of public officials and administrative datasets to document basic information about policy implementation in cities and towns (Trounstine 2008, 2018; Gyourko, Hartley and Krimmel 2021; Anzia 2022). Similarly, most analyses of homelessness policy focus on either a small set of cases or a narrow set of policies (such as criminalization ordinances) (Herring, Yarbrough and Alatorre 2019; Robinson 2019; Thompson et al. 2020;



Amaral 2021; Laneyonu and Byerly 2021). This limited set of homelessness policy analyses seldom focuses on broader local government decision-making.

We amass a wide array of administrative data and novel survey data of local public officials to illuminate the relationship between housing and zoning, and homelessness policy in the nation's largest and mid-sized cities. These data sets include homelessness and housing plans from the nation's 100 largest cities and a nationally representative survey of mayors of all cities over 75,000.

### *Homelessness and Housing Plans*

To understand cities' homelessness policies, we collected and analyzed homelessness plans from the nation's 100 largest cities in summer 2022. We included plans from local CoCs if they were linked from city government websites, reflecting a degree of cooperation and coordination across government entities. While CoC plans are federally mandated, cities are not required to produce homelessness plans by either state or federal law. Thus, their very existence is a signal of at least some local interest in coordinating and planning homelessness policy (Willison 2021). Indeed, plans are, by their very nature, non-binding, and, at times, aspirational documents. If anything, they represent the most optimistic possible version of city policymaking; studying them biases us in favor of finding cooperation and coordination. Moreover, much of homelessness policy occurs through a regulatory capacity, rather than through legislation (Willison 2021). Plans are well-suited to capture such regulatory policies.

Decentralized homelessness policy means that other, separately developed plans and policies may connect land use, zoning, and homelessness. In particular, city housing plans may make such linkages. We thus also explore the housing plans for America's 100 largest cities to see whether housing bureaucracies are setting homelessness policies separately. Some cities produced separate housing plans, while others incorporated housing elements into their comprehensive plans. Unlike homelessness plans, housing plans are state-mandated in many communities.

Our empirical approach focuses on large- and mid-sized cities. If anything, an emphasis on larger communities should bias us in favor of finding a more centralized homelessness policy apparatus focused on prevention: smaller governments often wield fewer powers and are generally less professionalized and contested (Oliver, Ha and Callen 2012).

### *Survey of Mayors*

Surveys of political elites are a valuable tool for learning basic policy information (Gyourko, Hartley and Krimmel 2021), perceptions of political power

(Anzia 2022), and the constraints facing policy implementation (Einstein and Glick 2017). In the summers of 2021 ( $n = 116$ ) and 2023 ( $n = 114$ ), we fielded nationally representative surveys of mayors of cities over 75,000 as part of Boston University Initiative on Cities' Menino Survey of Mayors.<sup>15</sup> Researchers conduct almost all interviews in person or over the phone, ensuring that responses are from the mayors themselves, and not city staff.<sup>16</sup> Annual response rates are consistently over 25%, in keeping with other academic elite surveys (e.g., Anzia 2022) (response rates in 2021 and 2023 were 26% and 25%, respectively). Mayoral and city-level demographics were similar to the full population of cities over 75,000.<sup>17</sup> Because interviews were conducted over the phone, we are able, in many cases, to obtain lengthy elaborations from mayors, even on closed-ended questions, that illuminate their thinking on important political and policy issues.

Our survey questionnaires in both years explored a variety of topics, including federal stimulus spending, the racial wealth gap, and homelessness. Mayors thus did not opt in (or out) of the survey based on a particular interest in homelessness. In 2021 and 2023, our modules on homelessness generally sought to understand a mix of mayors' priorities and political pressures, alongside basic details about what policies were in place in their cities. The questions we employ in this analysis measure whether mayors believe that: (1) the housing supply, land use regulations, and housing prices are connected; (2) housing prices are connected to homelessness; and (3) zoning and land use regulations are connected to homelessness. We use the following questions to measure these concepts:

- *Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statements (2023): Building new market-rate housing in my city will reduce the cost of housing for residents.*
- *Oregon and Montana recently passed state legislation that required cities over a certain size (10,000 in Oregon and 5,000 in Montana) to eliminate single-family zoning and allow the development of duplexes by right. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?*
- *California and Oregon have recently passed state laws allowing property owners to construct Accessory Dwelling Units without going through a lengthy permitting process. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?*
- *What do you think is the single biggest cause of homelessness in your city? (2023) [Open-ended question with responses coded into the following categories: housing; mental health; substance use; poverty]*
- *How much do each of the following hinder your ability to address homelessness? (2021) (public opposition to new housing and shelters,*

**zoning and land use regulations**, limited funding, lack of coordination between different government and social services, limited human and social services, evictions, and lack of quality data for decision-making).

## Methods

To document connections between homelessness policy and land use and zoning in planning documents, we conducted open-coding content analysis of all homelessness and housing plans from the 100 largest cities (156 total plans). Qualitative content analysis was conducted in an iterative process to allow researchers to identify emergent themes from the free text data and adjust the codebook as necessary. We used a similar approach when analyzing open-ended responses in the survey of mayors.

We use descriptive cross-tabulations to identify predictors of city homeless and housing plan contents and mayoral survey response. We opt for these intuitive cross-tabulations as a consequence of our small sample size and the high collinearity between several of our key independent variables, especially between regional location and unsheltered homelessness rates. In particular, California cities have extraordinarily high rates of unsheltered homelessness. Thirteen of the twenty cities with the highest percentages of unsheltered homelessness were located in California in 2019.

We present two key sets of cross-tabulations across all data types to evaluate the hypothesized roles of state policies and unsheltered homelessness in driving variations in homelessness policy. To assess the potential role of state government, we: (1) compare cities located in California to those in the rest of the country; (2) compare cities by census division. We focus on California cities in particular because of California's unique laws surrounding Housing Elements. In 2008, California Senate Bill 2 (SB2) amended the state's Housing Element Law and Housing Accountability Act to "require removal of specific zoning barriers to development of supportive and transitional housing and emergency shelters."<sup>18</sup> Government Code Section 65583 and 65583.2 require that California housing elements zone for "a variety of housing types" including "multifamily housing" and "emergency shelters."<sup>19</sup> We do not present cross-tabulations for other individual states because no state other than California has: (1) clear state law in place providing a theoretical reason to evaluate distinctive patterns in homelessness and housing plans and local public official preferences; and (2) a sufficient number of cities in plan and survey data sets to draw statistically meaningful conclusions about state-level practices.

To explore the hypothesized role of unsheltered homelessness, we calculate city-level per capita unsheltered homelessness using 2019 Point in Time Count data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development

and 2019 ACS data 5-year population estimates.<sup>20</sup> We cut this variable into terciles using data from all CoCs, and report data from the highest and lowest terciles of per capita unsheltered homelessness. City and CoC boundaries do not, in most cases, perfectly overlap, making these data imperfect estimates of the actual prevalence of city-level homelessness; however, all cities in our sample can be matched with one unique CoC. To ensure that this boundary mismatch between many CoCs and cities does not lead to biased results, we re-run all analyses on subsetted data limited to the small number of cities in which the CoC boundaries are aligned with those of the municipality. None of the results reported below substantively changed.

## Results

We begin our results section by presenting the overall frequency with which: (1) homelessness plans discuss zoning and the housing supply and (2) housing plans connect homelessness with zoning and the housing supply. We then move to data from our survey of mayors to evaluate whether local public officials link the local housing supply, land use policy, and homelessness. After illuminating these overall patterns, we then move to exploring *variations* in these links, focusing on the role of state-level policy and local unsheltered homelessness rates.

### *Connections Between Land Use Policy, Housing Supply, and Homelessness*

*Homelessness and Housing Plans.* We begin our analysis of homelessness and housing plans with summary statistics about their prevalence. Of the one hundred largest cities, fifty-six had homelessness plans. Forty-four percent of the nation's largest cities had *no separate homelessness plans*. Plans are important local government documents. They present clear goals and policy proposals (Moynihan 2003; Soss and Moynihan 2014). While plans might be fairly critiqued for offering overly optimistic and non-binding proposals, they provide a clear sense of governments' vision and priorities. To not have one at all for homelessness suggests a low level of policy interest and cohesion.

There was considerable variation in the scope and level of detail among homelessness plans. Some were comprehensive reports with over 100 pages of in-depth documentation on the drivers of homelessness and the variety of policies and programs the city was pursuing; others were more cursory lists of policy priorities and programs housed on city websites.

As of 2017, twenty-three states required that local governments produce a housing element as part of their regular planning processes (Ramsey-Musolf 2017). Virtually all cities (99%) had some form of housing plan available

online.<sup>21</sup> What's more, of those cities with a plan, most (76%) mentioned homelessness at least once, suggesting that housing plans are a fruitful venue for better understanding cities' homelessness policies.

With these broad statistics on plans in mind, we turn to analyzing patterns in which cities have established homelessness plans. Consistent with previous scholarship, a mix of capacity and needs predict city-level homelessness plans. The fifty largest cities were thirty-two percentage points more likely to have a homelessness plan in place than the next fifty largest cities (70% versus 32%). Similarly, cities with higher housing costs were considerably more likely to have homelessness plans: 42% of cities with lower housing costs had no homelessness plan, compared with only 33% of high housing cost cities.<sup>22</sup> Fifty-six percent of cities in the upper tercile of per capita homelessness<sup>23</sup> had homelessness plans in place, compared with only 38% in the lowest tercile.

To further examine the relationship between homelessness policy, and upstream land use policy, we turn to our analysis of all homelessness and housing plans from the 100 largest cities (156 total plans). Text from the homelessness plans reveals that a number of local governments do consider housing policies such as eviction reduction, rental assistance, and land use and zoning to be important parts of homelessness policy. A majority of homelessness plans mention eviction (61%) and affordability (87%) at least once, suggesting at least some engagement with broader housing market conditions. Yet, consistent with our core prediction, cities seldom connect land use, zoning, and homelessness policy. Only 30% mention zoning or land use—the set of public policies where local governments can likely have the greatest impact over the provision of affordable housing and homeless shelters.

A small minority of communities clearly linked zoning and land use with homelessness in their homelessness plans. Charlotte, NC, for example, proposed a number of zoning changes designed to make it easier to build affordable housing including a revised accessory dwelling unit policy, an increase in the monthly zoning slots available, fee reimbursements, and expedited inspections and plan reviews. Albuquerque, NM outlined similarly ambitious zoning reforms: “Increase development of market-rate housing development targeted for low-income families, review zoning codes, parking requirements, and other development regulations to allow and encourage a broader range of housing types such as ADUs, SROs, traditional NM compounds, lofts, and apartments above commercial developments.”

As in the homelessness plans, our analysis of housing plans evinced few connections between land use and homelessness policy. Only 16% of the 100 largest cities (and 21% of cities that mentioned homelessness in their housing plans) included links between land use and homelessness in their housing plans.

This small minority of cities discussed the importance of zoning in facilitating the development of temporary and permanent housing for homeless people. Oakland, CA, for example, lauded a zoning change that “permit[ted] the placement of emergency homeless shelters in several neighborhoods throughout the City.” San Antonio, TX emphasized removing regulatory barriers to affordable housing in conjunction with combatting NIMBY opposition to new housing: “An expansion of housing supply is facilitated not only through greater funding and incentives, but through greater production and administrative efficiencies. Some of the most entrenched barriers to affordable housing, however, are not only buried deep within a city’s regulatory environment, but also within opposition to development and/or additional density.”

Many housing plans emphasized the importance of housing stability in preventing homelessness, consistent with the focus of homelessness plans on evictions. Others mentioned rental assistance, and the need to create housing for specific populations experiencing homelessness, like veterans. Most frequently, plans articulated the need for better connections with local service agencies to adequately address the needs of their cities’ unhoused residents. While most discussed zoning and land use as part of their broader housing policy, few connected these important policy arenas with homelessness.

### *Survey of Mayors*

We now turn to the survey of mayors as an additional measure of the relationship between homelessness policy and upstream land use and zoning policy in U.S. cities. Across multiple questions and survey years, a majority of mayors fail to connect housing, land use and homelessness.

In 2023, we asked mayors generally about their understanding of land use regulations, housing prices, and homelessness. Strong majorities of mayors both believe that increasing the housing supply will reduce housing prices, and support zoning changes that would facilitate an increased housing supply, consistent with our predictions. A majority of mayors (57%) believe that facilitating the construction of market rate housing will reduce housing prices; only 23% disagree. Sixty percent support statewide policies that would allow property owners to construct Accessory Dwelling Units without going through a lengthy permitting process. Importantly, this strong support does not extend to all proposed land use and zoning reforms: only 37% support statewide policies that would effectively eliminate local single-family zoning.

A majority of mayors fail, however, to make the connection between housing prices and homelessness: they did not see housing prices as the

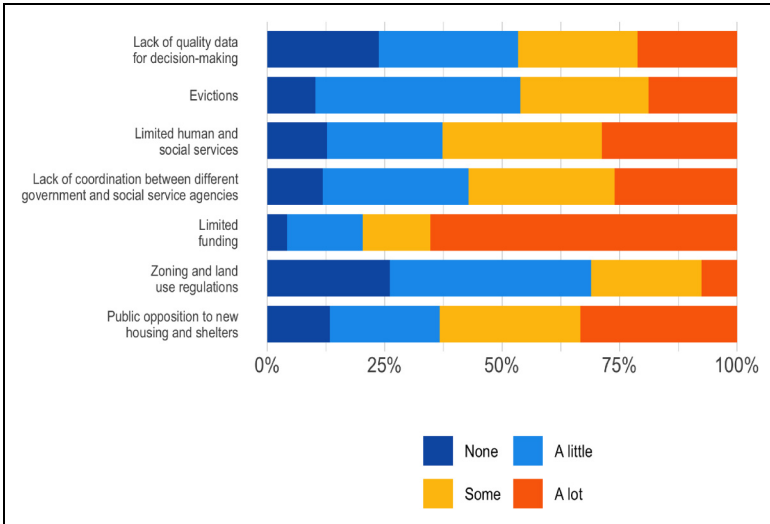
key driver of homelessness in their cities. In response to an open-ended question about the causes of homelessness in their community—in which they could provide multiple answers—only 40% of mayors cited housing prices. Forty-six percent of mayors cited mental health, 30% substance abuse, and 9% poverty. For example, one mayor explicitly eschewed housing prices when outlining the causes of homelessness in his community: “It’s mental illness and a lack of desire to be within housing. To not want to be housed. And drug and alcohol addiction. These are people who want to live on the street, and they don’t want to take advantage of the shelters that we have.” Indeed, a sizable minority of mayors saw mental health and substance abuse as inextricably linked drivers of homelessness. As one mayor put it, “I want to mention two [causes], because it’s the co-occurring issues with addiction and mental health.”

Given the relatively small percentage of mayors that recognize the primacy of housing prices in driving homelessness, it is perhaps unsurprising that our 2021 survey of mayors reveals that an even smaller share of local officials see zoning and land use as connected to homelessness. Only 32% of mayors see zoning and land use regulations as a significant obstacle to addressing homelessness. Forty-six percent of mayors perceive evictions as a major obstacle. In contrast, strong majorities of mayors identify limited funding (79%) and public opposition to new housing and shelters (63%) as hindrances. Figure 1 displays these results. While a few mayors saw clear links between their regulatory regimes and the affordable housing supply, most mayors pointed to the behavior of external actors—the federal government, nonprofit partners, and the general public—as the most potent barriers to reducing homelessness in their communities.

*Predicting Variations in Homelessness Planning Processes.* We turn to predicting variations in the inclusion of land use and zoning in local homelessness policymaking using cross-tabulations of key independent variables. We start by exploring state/regional context before moving to the role of unsheltered homelessness.

### *State-Level Effects*

We begin our state and regional analysis with homelessness and housing plans. We then delve into results from the survey of mayors, focusing on responses to two questions: (1) whether mayors perceive homelessness as driven by housing market conditions; and (2) whether mayors perceive zoning and land use policies as hindrances to addressing homelessness. We present cross-tabulations that compare: (1) California cities to those in the rest of the country and (2) cities by census division.



**Figure 1.** Barriers to addressing homelessness.

How much do each of the following hinder your ability to address homelessness? (Menino Survey of Mayors).

*Homelessness and Housing Plans.* We first evaluate whether state and regional location predict the discussion of land use and zoning in homelessness and housing plans. Due to unique state-level legislation, we begin by assessing whether location in California predicts discussion of land use and zoning. Conditional on having a homelessness plan in place, CA cities were eight percentage points more likely to discuss land use and zoning in their homelessness plans than other cities (36% of CA cities versus 28% of non-CA cities). CA city housing plans were sixteen percentage points more likely to connect land use and zoning with homelessness than their non-CA counterparts (29% of CA cities versus 13% of non-CA cities; see Table 1. We only include census regional divisions with at least five cities with homeless/housing plans).

Broadening the geographic scope, we also find stark differences by census division. Conditional on having a homelessness plan in place, half of cities located in the Pacific region (California, Oregon, Washington) and South Atlantic region (Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) include land use and zoning in their homelessness plans. Over 20% of cities in those same census divisions connected land use and zoning with homelessness in their housing plans; in no other census division did that figure rise above 20%. Collectively, these results



**Table 1.** Land Use/Zoning and Homelessness Connections by Location in California and Census Division.

	% of homelessness plans including land use/zoning mention ( <i>n</i> = 56)	% of housing plans including connection between land use and homelessness ( <i>n</i> = 99)
<b>CA Cities</b>	36%	29%
<b>Non-CA Cities</b>	28%	13%
<b>New England</b>	Fewer than 5 cities <sup>29</sup>	Fewer than 5 cities
<b>Middle Atlantic</b>	Fewer than 5 cities	0%
<b>East North Central</b>	20%	9%
<b>West North Central</b>	Fewer than 5 cities	0%
<b>South Atlantic</b>	50%	24%
<b>East South Central</b>	Fewer than 5 cities	Fewer than 5 cities
<b>West South Central</b>	43%	18%
<b>Mountain</b>	25%	13%
<b>Pacific</b>	50%	27%

suggest potential policy learning between states and cities within regions (Shipan and Volden 2008; Shipan and Volden 2021).

Importantly these regional effects do not appear to be merely a consequence of higher housing costs. Conditional on having a homelessness plan, 30% of cities in the highest tercile of median housing values included land use and zoning in their homelessness plans—virtually identical to the 31% of cities in the lowest tercile of median housing values who did the same. Twenty-two percent of cities in the highest tercile of median housing values connected land use and zoning to homelessness in their housing plans, compared to 13% of cities in the lowest tercile of median housing values.

These results broadly suggest that state law, rule-making, guidance, and procedures shape cities' homelessness plans. California cities are somewhat overrepresented among homelessness plans that mention land use and zoning as well, though not as starkly as in the housing plans. This relatively lower frequency, compared with housing plans, indicates the potentially pivotal influence of state politics and policies: in contrast to the strong state role in housing elements, to our knowledge, there are no state-level guidelines about the inclusion of land use and zoning policies in city-level homelessness plans.

*Survey of Mayors.* We turn to evaluating whether we observe similar state-level effects in mayoral attitudes. In contrast to California's distinctive

homelessness and housing plans, only 45% of California mayors highlighted housing costs as a leading cause of homelessness in response to our open-ended question; this figure is fairly similar to mayors in the country as a whole. Intriguingly, mayors in the Pacific census region (California, Oregon, and Washington) were significantly more likely to name housing prices as a leading cause of homelessness. Table 2 shows that this region was the only region in the country for which a majority of mayors (53%) believed housing was the main driver of homelessness. In contrast, only 33% of Pacific region mayors cited mental health, and 30% substance abuse. These results are also not merely a function of the West Coast's elevated housing prices: 46% of mayors of cities in the upper tercile of housing costs cited housing as a main driver of homelessness. Importantly, city-level housing costs still hold some predictive power: only 25% of mayors of cities in the lowest tercile of housing costs believed housing was the most important cause of homelessness in their cities, twenty-one percentage points less than mayors of the most expensive cities.

Finally, we find little evidence of state-level differences in mayors' perceptions of zoning and land use policies as hindrances to effectively addressing homelessness in their communities. Six percent of California cities perceive zoning and land use as significant obstacles, compared with 8% of mayors elsewhere in the country. We also observe few regional differences when we draw comparisons by census division; in no census division did more

**Table 2.** Mayors' Perceptions of Connections Between Housing Supply, Land Use/Zoning, and Homelessness by State and Census Division.

	% of Mayors listing housing as a main cause of homelessness (2023, $n = 114$ )	% of Mayors rating zoning and land use as a significant obstacle to addressing homelessness (2021, $n = 116$ )
<b>CA Cities</b>	45%	6%
<b>Non-CA Cities</b>	39%	8%
<b>New England</b>	43%	14%
<b>Middle Atlantic</b>	43%	0%
<b>East North Central</b>	31%	6%
<b>West North Central</b>	38%	33%
<b>South Atlantic</b>	33%	8%
<b>East South Central</b>	40%	33%
<b>West South Central</b>	14%	0%
<b>Mountain</b>	41%	0%
<b>Pacific</b>	53%	4%

than two responding mayors state that zoning and land use hindered their efforts at addressing homelessness “a lot.”

### *Unsheltered Homelessness*

We first compare the homelessness and housing plans of cities with higher and lower rates of unsheltered homelessness. We then explore the survey responses of mayors representing each type of city.

*Homelessness and Housing Plans.* As noted earlier in this article, cities with higher per capita rates of unsheltered homelessness are significantly more likely to have homelessness plans in place. Conditional upon having a plan, we find that cities with high rates of unsheltered homelessness included land use and zoning at similar rates to their counterparts with lower rates of unsheltered homelessness. This runs counter to our expectations, which predicted a negative relationship between unsheltered homelessness and connections between land use and zoning and homelessness policymaking. Twenty-eight percent of cities in the upper tercile of per capita unsheltered homelessness mentioned land use and zoning in their homelessness plans, compared with 31% of cities in the lowest tercile of per capita unsheltered homelessness (see Table 3).

Our results for housing plans are remarkably similar. Eleven percent of cities in the lowest tercile for per capita unsheltered homelessness connect zoning and land use to homelessness in their housing plans. Fifteen percent of their counterparts in the upper tercile of unsheltered homelessness do the same.

*Survey of Mayors.* Mayors of cities in the highest and lowest terciles of per capita unsheltered homelessness hold similar views on the key causes of

**Table 3.** Land Use/Zoning and Homelessness Connections by Rates of City-Level Per Capita Unsheltered Homelessness.

	% of homelessness plans including land use/zoning mention ( $n = 56$ )	% of housing plans including connection between land use and homelessness ( $n = 99$ )
Top tercile per capita unsheltered homelessness	28%	15%
Bottom tercile per capita unsheltered homelessness	31%	11%

homelessness. Forty percent of mayors of cities with high rates of unsheltered homelessness saw housing as a main driver of homelessness in their community, compared with 47% of their counterparts in communities with low rates of unsheltered homelessness (see Table 4). While these differences are fairly muted, they are consistent with our expectation that places with less unsheltered homelessness would be more likely to connect homelessness with upstream housing market conditions and policies.

Mayors of cities with high and low per capita rates of unsheltered homelessness are both unlikely to rate zoning and land use as a significant obstacle to addressing homelessness. Only 4% of high homelessness cities and 6% of low homelessness cities say that zoning and land use hinder their ability to address homelessness by “a lot.”

## Discussion

We find mixed evidence in support of our hypotheses. We generally find support for the importance of federal and state guidance (or lack thereof). Homelessness planning is deeply fragmented: even among large, high-capacity cities, only half have homelessness plans. This absence of centralized coordination is remarkable. To not even have a plan on file suggests that a city is doing little to coordinate or organize its homelessness policy.

We also find support for our prediction that most cities would eschew zoning and land use as part of their policy approach for addressing homelessness in their communities. Zoning and land use policies alone are insufficient tools for addressing homelessness. But, they are pivotal components of long term, homelessness prevention that treats homelessness as a “housing problem” (Colburn and Clayton 2022). Indeed, changes in zoning and land

**Table 4.** Mayors’ Perceptions of Connections between Housing Supply, Land Use/Zoning, and Homelessness by Per Capita Unsheltered Homelessness.

	% of Mayors listing housing as a main cause of homelessness (2023, $n = 114$ )	% of Mayors rating zoning and land use as a significant obstacle to addressing homelessness (2021, $n = 116$ )
Top tercile per capita unsheltered homelessness	40%	4%
Bottom tercile per capita unsheltered homelessness	47%	6%

use take years to have an effect on the housing supply (Freemark 2023), making its incorporation into long-range planning absolutely essential.

Contrary to our hypotheses, there is little relationship between community-level unsheltered homelessness and local connections between land use and zoning, the housing supply, and homelessness. Cities with high and low levels of unsheltered homelessness were similarly unlikely to make links between these sets of policies.

Consistent with our expectations, state policy appears influential in driving variations in connections between zoning/land use, the housing supply, and homelessness. In California, Housing Element guidance and requirements means that cities consider how their land use policies do (and do not) allow for the construction of affordable housing and emergency shelters. Recent federal policies may help to make recognition of these links—and adoption in planning documents—more widespread. In December 2022, the Biden administration released the Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness. This expansive plan highlights the nation’s inadequate housing supply as an important driver of homelessness, and lists restrictive land use and zoning as root causes of the housing shortage. It encourages federal incentives to both state and local governments to reform their zoning to allow for more multifamily housing and greater housing density.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, California’s present homelessness crisis illuminates the challenges higher levels of government face in getting local governments to comply with state-level zoning guidance and requirements. California faces a multitude of challenges in building enough housing to meet demand: onerous land use regulations (Marantz, Elmendorf and Kim 2023), state environmental laws (Elmendorf and Duncheon 2022), and the state’s infamous Proposition 13 tax laws (Fissher 2022) have all served as potent barriers to new housing development. While California has unusually strong standards for its Housing Elements, enforcement has been fairly limited, and state housing production (affordable and otherwise) has lagged other states (Ramsey-Musolf 2017; Elmendorf et al. 2020). Moreover, even if local zoning does permit the development of emergency shelters and affordable housing, there are a variety of local process requirements, such as mandatory public hearings, and substantive zoning requirements, such as parcel shape regulations and setbacks, that can obstruct the development of new housing (Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019; Bronin, 2023). Indeed, local zoning policies can sound housing-friendly on paper, while, in practice, create onerous permitting requirements. Moreover, state-level land use regulations and individual legal challenges, sometimes actively promoted by local economic elites, remain formidable obstacles (Giamarino and Loukaitou-Sideris 2024). For example, in Los Angeles and San Francisco, residents used California’s Environmental Quality Act to file lawsuits against proposed

homeless shelters. Such lawsuits can trigger years of additional delays, even if a project is ultimately approved.<sup>25</sup>

In short, having the land use planning in place that allows for homeless shelters and affordable housing is a necessary first step; but, California highlights the limits of incorporating zoning and land use into homelessness policy plans without stringent requirements (and enforcement) about the actual development of housing for the homeless. Many of the homelessness and housing plans we reviewed discussed zoning in fairly broad strokes without detailed discussion of policy implementation, rule-making, and process. Long Beach, CA's homelessness plan recommended "strengthen[ing] the City's efforts to identify and implement affordable and homeless housing opportunities by creating a position dedicated to positioning the City for future housing funding, addressing zoning and entitlement concerns, and participating with expanded governance structure." It also suggested "provid[ing] zoning accommodations to developers who wish to convert existing motels into supportive housing" without specifying what those procedural and regulatory changes might look like.<sup>26</sup> Stockton, CA similarly (and vaguely) supported "evaluat[ing] and modify[ing] codes and zoning laws at City and County levels that unnecessarily restrict the development of high-density affordable housing."<sup>27</sup>

Notably, some plans did consider detailed procedures. For example, Oklahoma City, OK acknowledged potential procedural zoning challenges and suggested that the city "complete [an] evaluation of Zoning Ordinance and ensure addition of elements that allow for easier development of affordable units." The city also proposed a "review [of] permitting costs and impact fees for possible reductions in cost." Indeed, the city was unique in discussing problems with the public review process, and the extent to which it disproportionately represented the voices of privileged residents.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Drawing stronger links between homelessness, land use, zoning, and the housing supply comes with significant political peril for state and local officials. Land use and zoning have long been used as tools to wall off communities, allowing privileged white homeowners to limit access to their communities, and the high-quality public goods within (Rothstein 2017; Trounstein 2018). Those same homeowners use these tools today to block developments large and small, affordable and market rate (Einstein, Glick and Palmer 2019). In this context, it makes perfect political sense that public officials at the state and local levels would opt for short-term tools immediately responsive to highly visible homelessness, and avoid the potentially more politically toxic long-term solutions. The failure to connect the

housing planning process with homelessness not only hampers potential efforts at reducing homelessness (Colburn and Clayton 2022); it may actually worsen the crisis by spurring cities to implement punitive policies (Stuart 2016; Herring 2019).

Yet, a small, but significant, minority of cities do pursue upstream land use and zoning policies that regulate the development of new housing. Moreover, a growing number of states, including Massachusetts, California, Oregon, and Montana, have adopted stringent state-level laws requiring local communities to increase their allowable density. Future research might begin to qualitatively unpack the political conditions—including pivotal organizations and public official decision-making—that drove these policies at the state and local level. These land-use reforms also present an exciting opportunity for researchers and policymakers to explore *which* land use changes are most effective at increasing the supply of affordable housing and reducing homelessness.

Our research suggests, though, that city policymakers must draw clearer connections between land use and zoning policies and tackling their homelessness crises. Cities that do not make these links are unlikely to take the next step of actually implementing upstream policies that are critical to successfully reducing homelessness. While our findings reveal that cities largely fall short of coordinating important homelessness and housing policies, they also may indicate a promising role for centralized state (and potentially federal) policy. Guidance and requirements from higher levels of government appear to shape the likelihood that cities link zoning and land use with homelessness policy.

## **Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to Ali Dewald and Naquia Unwala for their research assistance, and to Community Solutions, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Citigroup for their financial support. We also thank Boston University's Initiative on Cities, David Glick, Maxwell Palmer, Stacy Fox, and Katharine Lusk for their partnership on the Menino Survey of Mayors. All errors are our own.


## **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **Funding**

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, Community Solutions.

**ORCID iD**

Katherine Levine Einstein  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7487-3646>

**Notes**

1. [https://www.hud.gov/house\\_america/why\\_house\\_america](https://www.hud.gov/house_america/why_house_america).
2. Importantly, there is a wide mismatch between the scholarly body of literature which shows a tight connection between housing prices and homelessness and public perceptions of the drivers of homelessness, which tend to focus on mental health and substance abuse (Colburn and Clayton 2022). Health and substance use, of course, are important drivers in homelessness; within a given housing context, they shape *an individual's risk* of becoming homeless. Untreated mental illness or substance use disorders may lead to situations that end in homelessness (Larimer et al. 2009; Stergiopoulos et al. 2014)—particularly in high cost communities where affordable housing is scarce. Yet, there is also an important bi-directional relationship between homelessness and mental health—further underscoring the centrality of housing and housing markets to addressing this crisis. People who experience homelessness are more likely to develop mental illness and substance use disorders as a result of extreme stress associated with homelessness, with risks increasing dramatically with the duration of homelessness.
3. While their legal powers and financial resources vary, some local governments can also mitigate homelessness by implementing tenant protections to reduce evictions and directly funding the production of subsidized housing and housing vouchers (Michener 2020).
4. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/16/president-biden-announces-new-actions-to-ease-the-burden-of-housing-costs/>
5. <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/homeless/market-street-shelter-complaint-central-eastside-developers/283-99553840-c6a9-4e58-842c-7a02471cd800>
6. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/20/metro/during-crisis-zoning-laws-are-hindering-construction-affordable-housing-units/>
7. [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Housing\\_Development\\_Toolkit%20f.2.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Housing_Development_Toolkit%20f.2.pdf)
8. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/16/president-biden-announces-new-actions-to-ease-the-burden-of-housing-costs/>
9. <https://www.latimes.com/homeless-housing/story/2021-09-17/what-just-happened-with-single-family-zoning-in-california>
10. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities>
11. <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-single-family-zoning-law-effect-developers/>
12. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-28/montana-s-yimby-revolt-aims-to-head-off-a-housing-crisis>
13. Over 70% of CoCs are non-governmental entities (Klasa et al. 2021; Willison 2021).
14. By 2019, homeless encampments had grown to levels that the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) noted “had not been seen in a century.” The problem has only become more severe in the face of the



COVID-19 pandemic. In response to HUD and CDC guidelines on the reduction of disease spread, many communities moved away from the traditional congregate shelter model. This shift led to a major increase in encampments—and associated substance use disorders. HUD commissioned a series of policy reports investigating encampments and potential solutions (Dunton et al. 2021) and established formal Encampment Management policies.

15. <https://www.surveyofmayors.com>
16. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 interviews were all conducted over the phone, rather than in person.
17. More details about the full demographic breakdown of the sample population can be found here: <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2022/01/2021-MSOM-Homelessness-Report.pdf>
18. <https://homeless.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Public-Counsel-SB-2-Best-Practices-Guide.pdf>
19. <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/housing-elements/building-blocks/zoning-variety-of-housing-types>
20. We rely on 2019 because of COVID-related distortions to the Point In Time counts in 2020 and 2021.
21. Some plans were separate, stand-alone plans, while others were incorporated into the city’s comprehensive planning process.
22. To define high and low housing costs for cross-tabulations, we cut all cities over 75,000 into two categories: high housing cost (above the median housing value of those cities) and low housing cost (below the median housing value of those cities). We used cities over 75,000 as our population in order to keep cross-tabulation cut-offs consistent between our analysis of city plans and the survey of mayors (the survey of mayors queries leaders of cities over 75,000).
23. As with our analysis of unsheltered homelessness, we calculate per capita homelessness using population figures from cities and 2019 homelessness figures from the CoC.
24. [https://www.usich.gov/All\\_In\\_The\\_Federal\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_to\\_Prevent\\_and\\_End\\_Homelessness.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/All_In_The_Federal_Strategic_Plan_to_Prevent_and_End_Homelessness.pdf)
25. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-ceqa-homeless-shelter-20190515-story.html>
26. <https://www.longbeach.gov/globalassets/everyone-home-lb/media-library/documents/news/everyone-home-lb-task-force-recommendations-sm-file>
27. <http://www.sanjoaquinoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/San-Joaquin-Community-Response-to-Homelessness-Strategic-Plan-June-2020.pdf>
28. <https://www.okc.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/25089/637686947197230000>
29. We do not calculate cross-tabulations for cells with fewer than five cities.

## References

- Amaral, David J. 2021. “Who Banishes? City Power and Anti-Homeless Policy in San Francisco.” *Urban Affairs Review* 57 (6): 1524–57.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Eitan Hersh. 2012. “Validation: What Big Data Reveal About Survey Misreporting and the Real Electorate.” *Political Analysis* 20 (4): 437–59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/PAN/MPS023>.

- Anzia, Sarah F. 2014. *Timing and Turnout: How off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2022. *Local Interests : Politics, Policy, and Interest Groups in US City Governments*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Anzia, Sarah F., and Terry M. Moe. 2019. "Interest Groups on the Inside: The Governance of Public Pension Funds." *Perspectives on Politics* 17: 1059. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718003468>.
- Beckett, Katherine, and Steve Herbert. 2012. *Banished: The New Social Control In Urban America*.
- Been, Vicki, Ingrid Gould Ellen, and Katherine M. O'Regan. 2023. "Supply Skepticism Revisited." NYU Law and Economics Research Paper. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4629628#:~:text=In %202019 %2C%20we%20noted%20the,26](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4629628#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20we%20noted%20the,26). Accessed on January 4, 2024.
- Bronin, Sara C. 2023. "Zoning by a Thousand Cuts." *Pepperdine Law Review* 50 (4): 719–784. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol50/iss4/2/>.
- Burns, Nancy. 1994. *The Formation of American Local Governments: Private Values in Public Institutions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clifford, Scott, and Spencer Piston. 2017. "Explaining Public Support for Counterproductive Homelessness Policy: The Role of Disgust." *Political Behavior* 39 (3): 503–25.
- Colburn, Gregg, and Aldern Page Clayton. 2022. *Homelessness Is a Housing Problem How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns*. Berkeley, CA University of California Press. <https://homelessnesshousingproblem.com/>.
- de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin de, and Christopher Warshaw. 2020. "Politics in Forgotten Governments: The Partisan Composition of County Legislatures and County Fiscal Policies." *The Journal of Politics* 82 (2): 460–77. <https://doi.org/10.1086/706458>.
- Dreier, Peter. 2007. "The New Politics of Housing: How to Rebuild the Constituency for a Progressive Federal Housing Policy." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 63 (1): 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369708975721>.
- Dunton, Lauren, Jill Khadduri, Kimberly Burnett, Nichole Fiore, and Will Yetvin. 2021. *Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost: City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost*. Publications. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/Exploring-Homelessness-Among-People.html>.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine, and David M. Glick. 2017. "Cities in American Federalism: Evidence on State–Local Government Conflict from a Survey of Mayors." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 47 (4): 599–621. <https://doi.org/10.1093/PUBLIUS/PJX026>.
- Einstein, Katherine Levine, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elmendorf, Christopher S., Eric Biber, Paavo Monkkonen, and Moira O'Neill. 2020. "‘I Would, If Only I Could’ How Cities Can Use California’s Housing Element to Overcome Neighborhood Resistance to New Housing -." *UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies*. <https://www.lewis.ucla.edu/research/overcoming-neighborhood-resistance/>.

- Elmendorf, Christopher S., and Timothy G. Duncheon. 2022. "When Super-Colliders Collide: CEQA, the Housing Accountability Act, and Tectonic Change in Land Use Law." *Ecology Law Quarterly* 49: 655–713.
- Fazel, Seena, John R Geddes, and Margot Kushel. 2014. "The Health of Homeless People in High-Income Countries: Descriptive Epidemiology, Health Consequences, and Clinical and Policy Recommendations." *Lancet (London, England)* 384 (9953): 1529–40. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61132-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61132-6).
- Fisher, Paul J. 2022. "The Role of Property Tax in California's Housing Crisis." Working Paper. [https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/property-tax-webinar-series/2022-2023/fisher-p13-accessible.pdf?sfvrsn=2c017df\\_4](https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/docs/default-source/research/cpr/property-tax-webinar-series/2022-2023/fisher-p13-accessible.pdf?sfvrsn=2c017df_4).
- Freemark, Yonah. 2023. "Zoning Change: Upzonings, Downzonings, and Their Impacts on Residential Construction, Housing Costs, and Neighborhood Demographics." *Journal of Planning Literature* 38: 548–70.
- Frug, Gerald E. 1999. *City Making: Building Communities Without Building Walls*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fusaro, Vincent A, Helen G Levy, and H Luke Shaefer. 2018. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Lifetime Prevalence of Homelessness in the United States." *Demography* 55: 2119–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0717-0>.
- Gerber, Elisabeth R., and Clark C. Gibson. 2009. "Balancing Regionalism and Localism: How Institutions and Incentives Shape American Transportation Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (3): 633–48.
- Giamarino, Christopher, Madeline Brozen, and Evelyn Blumenberg. 2023. "Planning for and Against Vehicular Homelessness: Spatial Trends and Determinants of Vehicular Dwelling in Los Angeles." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 89 (1): 80–92.
- Giamarino, C., and A. Loukaitou-Sideris. 2024. "The Echoes of Echo Park": Anti-Homeless Ordinances in Neo-Revanchist Cities." *Urban Affairs Review* 60 (1): 149–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874231162936>.
- Goetz, Edward G. 1992. "Land use and Homeless Policy in Los Angeles." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 16: 540–54.
- Grob, Gerald N. 1994. "Mad, homeless, and unwanted. A history of the care of the chronic mentally ill in America." *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 17 (3): 541–558.
- Gyourko, Joseph, Jonathan Hartley, and Jacob Krimmel. 2021. "The Local Residential Land Use Regulatory Environment Across U.S. Housing Markets: Evidence from a New Wharton Index." <https://realestate.wharton.upenn.edu/working-papers/the-local-residential-land-use-regulatory-environment-across-u-s-housing-markets-evidence-from-a-new-wharton-index/>.
- Hajnal, Zoltan L., and Paul G. Lewis. 2003. "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections." *Urban Affairs Review* 38 (5): 645–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087403038005002>.
- Hall, Andrew B., and Jesse Yoder. 2022. "Does Homeownership Influence Political Behavior? Evidence from Administrative Data." *The Journal of Politics* 84 (1): 351–66. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714932>.

- Hankinson, Michael. 2018. "When Do Renters Behave Like Homeowners? High Rent, Price Anxiety, and NIMBYism." *American Political Science Review* 112 (3): 473–93. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000035>.
- Herring, Chris. 2014. "The New Logics of Homeless Seclusion: Homeless Encampments in America's West Coast Cities." *City and Community* 13 (4): 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12086>.
- Herring, Chris. 2019. "Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space." *American Sociological Review* 84 (5): 769–800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419872671>.
- Herring, Chris, Dilara Yarbrough, and Lisa Marie Alatorre. 2019. "Pervasive Penalty: How the Criminalization of Poverty Perpetuates Homelessness." *Social Problems* 67 (1): 131–49. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spz004>.
- Hoch, Charles. 2000. "Sheltering the Homeless in the US: Social Improvement and the Continuum of Care." *Housing Studies* 15 (6): 865–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030020002582>.
- Housing and Urban Development. 2017. "Part 578 — Continuum Of Care Program." *Code of Federal Regulations* 2017, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2017-title24-vol3/xml/CFR-2017-title24-vol3-part578.xml>.
- Jarpe, Meghan, Jennifer E. Mosely, and Tran Smith. 2018. "Understanding the Collaborative Planning Process in Homeless Services: Networking, Advocacy, and Local Government Support May Reduce Service Gaps." *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* 25 (3): 262–69.
- Klasa, Kasia, Naquia Unwala, Scott L. Greer, Julia A. Wolfson, and Charley E. Willison. 2021. "Continuums of Care Survey 2020: Results and Recommendations." *Publications: Public Health Governance Lab* 2021, <https://www.publichealthgovernancelab.org/home/publications>.
- Kogan, Vladimir, Stéphane Lavertu, and Zachary Peskowitz. 2018. "Election Timing, Electorate Composition, and Policy Outcomes: Evidence from School Districts." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (3): 637–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/AJPS.12359>.
- Laniyonu, Ayobami, and Shakari Byerly. 2021. "More Than Spare Change: A Case Study of Contact and Voter Support for the Homeless in Los Angeles County, California." *Urban Affairs Review* 57 (4): 1149–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087420905337>.
- Larimer, Mary E, Daniel K Malone, Michelle D Garner, David C Atkins, Bonnie Burlingham, Heather S Lonczak, Kenneth Tanzer, et al. 2009. "Health Care and Public Service Use and Costs Before and After Provision of Housing for Chronically Homeless Persons with Severe Alcohol Problems." *JAMA* 301 (13): 1349–57. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.414>.
- Marantz, Nicholas, Christopher S. Elemendorf, and Youjin B. Kim. 2023. "Where Will Accessory Dwelling Units Sprout Up When a State Law Lets them Grow? Evidence from California." *Cityscape (Washington, D C)* 25 (2): 107–88.
- Marble, William, and Clayton Nall. 2021. "Where Self-Interest Trumps Ideology: Liberal Homeowners and Local Opposition to Housing Development." *The Journal of Politics* 83 (4): 1747–63. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711717>.

- Metzger, Molly W, and Danilo Pelletiere. 2013. "Patterns of Housing Voucher Use Revisited: Segregation and Section 8 Using Updated Data and More Precise Comparison Groups, 2013." *Center for Social Development*. Working Paper. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frbstl/stlouisfed/files/pdfs/community%20development/econ%20mobility/sessions/metzgerpaper508.pdf>
- Michener, Jamila D. 2017. "People, Places, Power: Medicaid Concentration and Local Political Participation." *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* 42 (5): 865–900. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b460/3953e99128265eb73c740029d788d15096f5.pdf>.
- Michener, Jamila D. 2018. *Fragmented Democracy*. *Fragmented Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Michener, Jamila D. 2020. "Power from the Margins: Grassroots Mobilization and Urban Expansions of Civil Legal Rights." *Urban Affairs Review* 56 (5): 1390–422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087419855677>.
- Moynihan, Donald P. 2003. "Normative and Instrumental Perspectives on Public Participation: Citizen Summits in Washington, D.C." *The American Review of Public Administration* 33 (2): 164–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074003251379>.
- Nall, Clayton, Christopher S. Elmendorf, and Stan Oklobdzija. 2022. "Folk Economics and the Persistence of Opposition to New Housing." Working Paper. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4266459](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4266459). Accessed on January 4, 2024.
- National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine. 2018. *Permanent Supportive Housing : Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness*. Washington D.C.: The National Academies Press. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25133/permanent-supportive-housing-evaluating-the-evidence-for-improving-health-outcomes>.
- Oakley, Deirdre. 2002. "Housing Homeless People: Local Mobilization of Federal Resources to Fight NIMBYism." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24 (1): 97–116.
- Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Padgett, Deborah K., Benjamin F. Henwood, and Sam J. Tsemberis. 2015. *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press. .
- Peterson, Paul E. 1981. *City Limits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Przybilinski, Stephen. 2023. "From Rejection to Legitimation: Governing the Emergence of Organized Homeless Encampments." *Urban Affairs Review* 60 (1). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10780874231162923>.
- Ramsey-Musolf, Darrel. 2017. "State Mandates, Housing Elements, and Low-Income Housing Production." *Journal of Planning Literature* 32 (2): 117–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412217693569>.
- Robinson, Tony. 2019. "No Right to Rest: Police Enforcement Patterns and Quality of Life Consequences of the Criminalization of Homelessness." *Urban Affairs Review* 55 (1): 41–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087417690833>.
- Roncarati, Jill S, Travis P Baggett, James J O'Connell, Stephen W Hwang, E Francis Cook, Nancy Krieger, and Glorian Sorensen. 2018. "Mortality Among Unsheltered Homeless Adults in Boston, Massachusetts, 2000-2009." *JAMA*

- Internal Medicine* 178 (9): 1242–48. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2018.2924>.
- Rothstein, Richard. 2017. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Sands, Melissa L. 2017. “Exposure to Inequality Affects Support for Redistribution.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114 (4): 663–8. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1615010113>.
- Schneider, Anne, and Helen Ingram. 1993. “Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy.” *Source: The American Political Science Review American Political Science Review* 87 (2): 334–47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2939044>.
- Schragger, Richard C. 2016. *City Power: Urban Governance in a Global Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schuetz, Jenny. 2022. *Fixer Upper: How to Repair America’s Broken Housing System*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2008. “The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 840–57.
- Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2021. *Why Bad Policies Spread (and Good Ones Don’t)*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Soss, Joe, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2014. “Policy Feedback and the Politics of Administration.” *Public Administration Review* 74 (3): 320–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/PUAR.12200>.
- Stergiopoulos, Vicky, Agnes Gozdzik, Patricia O’Campo, Alixandra R Holtby, Jeyagobi Jeyaratnam, and Sam Tsemberis. 2014. “Housing First: Exploring Participants’ Early Support Needs.” *BMC Health Services Research* 14 (1): 167 <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-14-167>.
- Stuart, Forrest. 2016. *Down, Out and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tausanovitch, Chris, and Christopher Warshaw. 2014. “Representation in Municipal Government.” *American Political Science Review* 108 (3): 605–41.
- Thompson, F. J., J. Farnham, E. Tiderington, M. K. Gusmano, and J. C. Cantor. 2020. “Medicaid Utilization and Spending among Homeless Adults in New Jersey: Implications for Medicaid-Funded Tenancy Support Services.” *The Milbank Quarterly* 98 (1): 106–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12446>.
- Tighe, J. Rosie. 2010. “Public Opinion and Affordable Housing: A Review of the Literature:.” *Journal of Planning Literature* 25 (1): 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412210379974>.
- Trounstine, Jessica. 2008. *Political Monopolies in American Cities. The Rise and Fall of Bosses and Reformers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Trounstine, Jessica. 2018. *Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsai, Jack, Crystal Y. S. Lee, Jianxun Shen, Steven M Southwick, and Robert H. Pietrzak. 2019. “Public Exposure and Attitudes About Homelessness.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 47 (1): 76–92.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2009. “The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act As Amended by S. 896 The Homeless Emergency

- Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009.” HUD Exchange. 2009. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessAssistanceActAmendedbyHEARTH.pdf>.<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/homeless/mckin/intro.html>.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2021. “The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress.” <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.
- Vitale, Alex S. 2017. *The End of Policing*. New York: Verso Books.
- Willison, Charley E. 2021. *Ungoverned and Out of Sight: Public Health and the Political Crisis of Homelessness in the United States*. New York and London: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, James Q. 1978. *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.