# Finding Space.

Assessing how planning responds to tiny houses for homeless populations

Supervised Research Project by Laura Furst

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# Finding Space. Understanding how planning responds to tiny houses for homeless populations

Supervised Research Project Report

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Urban Planning degree

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Although great strides have been made in reducing the homeless population in the United States, in January 2015 there were still over **549,000 people who were counted as homeless on one night.** A variety of homeless assistance responses exist, ranging from emergency shelters to supportive permanent housing. However the response is not quick enough. In some cities, communities have taken it upon themselves to build tiny house villages as a cost-effective and quick way to provide housing for homeless persons and families. Tiny house villages are usually small neighborhoods of 30 to 200 dwellings that can range in size from 60 to 200 sq. ft. Although communities are pursuing the model to address urgent homeless and housing crises, it is still unclear from a sparse literature how well tiny house villages perform as a homelessness assistance and housing policy. Nevertheless, several projects continue to be proposed nationwide and local planning agencies must continue to respond. With these considerations in mind, the following research tries to answer:

To what extent do local planning practices facilitate unconventional affordable housing models such as tiny house villages for homeless populations? This paper will not attempt to provide a comprehensive measure of success for each village. Rather, as starting point for such discussions the report examines how tiny house villages fit within the current housing and homeless assistance system, if they do at all. In order to understand local planning's response it is necessary to establish to what exactly planners are responding in each context.

Four cities and their respective tiny house villages in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States were examined: Dignity Village, Portland, Oregon; Opportunity Village, Eugene, Oregon, Quixote Village, Olympia, Washington; and Nickelsville 22nd and Union St. site, Seattle, Washington. The findings of this report were based on information from in-depth interviews with village representatives and local government staff in planning or social services departments.

Planners responded according to the political and social conditions of each case study. When political will was cultivated and public support was rallied, the villages and their managing nonprofits were able to successfully negotiate for allowances with building codes and zoning laws. In addition to facilitating the specific location of each village, planning departments were found to have a broader role in developing policy that allows for tiny house building forms for both the non-profit and for-profit housing sectors.

While trying to answer the main research question, it was found that there is **some ambiguity in how tiny house villages fit the traditional housing and homeless assistance systems.** Only one village was found to closely fit a formal category of housing within the federal homeless assistance system. Two were found to be linked to a form of transitional housing and a fourth case is best described as an emergency response, not housing.

The villages are **intentional communities**, meaning that residents share a set of values which usually reflect self-sufficiency, non-hierarchical structures, and peer support. It was found that this was a key feature of the model that was facilitated by the villages' built form.

Cities considering the use of tiny house villages for their homeless response strategy must take into account their local regulatory environment, public support, current homeless services, and the goals they are trying to meet. Accordingly, planners must understand the value that alternative housing forms like tiny house villages can provide and be able to assess the model's suitability for their local context.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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#### LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACS American Community Survey
ADU Accessory Dwelling Unit

CoC Continuum of Care

FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency
HALA Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda

HUD U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

HMIS Homeless Management Information System

IBC International Building Code
IRC International Residential Code
LIHI Low Income Housing Institute

PIT Point-In-Time (Count)

SDC System Development Charges

# **ETHICS**

Approval to conduct interviews was obtained from the McGill University Research Ethics Board I. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The homeless assistance system in the United States has evolved from one that was initially a reactionary crisis response executed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the 1980s to the current system where the federal government engages local stakeholders in strategic planning and research-based interventions. Targeted programming for chronic, family, and veteran homelessness have led to a decline of these subpopulations. As a result, the national homeless population has steadily fallen by 14% since 2007 (Henry, Watt, Rosenthal, Shivji, & Abt Associates Inc., 2016). Despite an overall national reduction, in January 2015 there were still over 549,000 people who were counted as homeless on one night. Over a third of these persons were unsheltered, living on the streets, in vacant lots, or in other locations not fit for human habitation. While many Southern and Midwest states saw great decreases, states such as Washington, Oregon, California, and New York continue to experience increases in homelessness statewide that is concentrated in urban areas. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016).

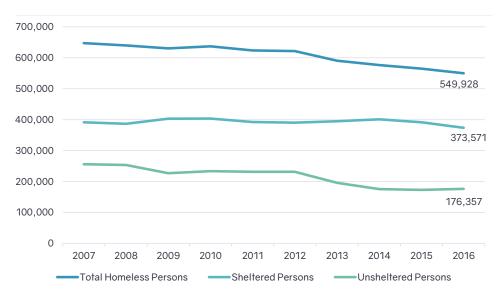


Figure 1. Annual Homeless Population Count: United States
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Homeless issues and housing affordability are not one in the same. However, they are linked by a concern for an individual's ability to access stable housing which can affect

physical, mental, educational, and occupational outcomes for individuals. The national policy response to homelessness has shifted from a "housing readiness" position which sets social service prerequisites for individuals to access housing, to the Housing First philosophy which emphasizes providing permanent housing to a person as soon as possible. This response requires the production and management of different housing options to help provide for the existing homeless populations and low-income households that are at risk of becoming homeless. The federal government engages with local governments, nonprofit partners, and the for-profit private sector to provide housing subsidies and units in order to meet communities' needs.

By contributing over 25% of the country's subsidized housing, the nonprofit sector is an essential partner in the development of housing for homeless populations (Bratt, 2009). The sector is also subject to a number of financial requirements and planning processes that delay the construction of housing. Like other for-profit housing developers, nonprofits must incur pre-development costs for site assessment, planning, and proposal formulation. Nonprofits must also heavily invest in housing management and adhere to federal wage and habitability standards if they are subsidized by the government. In light of these constraints, some nonprofits around the country have produced innovative solutions such as the construction of "tiny home" villages for homeless populations on shorter timelines and smaller budgets.

The tiny house movement has gained popularity in both the private and nonprofit housing sectors because of the efficient nature of the homes' design. The houses are typically no more than 400 sq. ft. and no smaller than 100 sq. ft., serving as a low-cost means to home ownership (Wyatt, 2016). These houses are environmentally sustainable in their compact design which lowers their carbon footprint and demand for land (Mitchell, 2015). Nonprofits have used tiny houses in pocket neighborhood configurations where homeless persons can live in a mutually supportive and self-managing environment (Figure 2). This tiny house village model varies greatly across sites in their histories, morphologies, funding, social service provision, and community living models.

Although the federal government directs policy and funding, local governments

have historically been at the forefront of responses to homelessness. Different cities have simultaneously acted in both a castigating fashion through the criminalization of uses of public space, and in non-punitive ways by providing more social and mental health services (Rosenthal & Foscarinis, 2006). The adoption of tiny house villages as a formal strategy to address homelessness is still a niche concept for many municipalities. Cities and counties have primarily provided regulatory support and in some cases financial assistance through permit waivers and grants to tiny house villages.

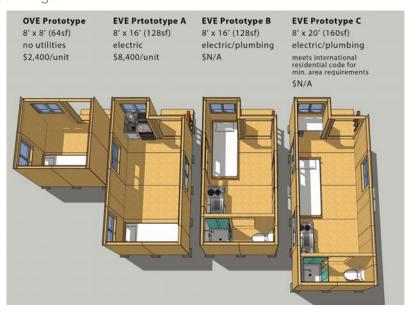


Figure 2. Tiny House Floor Plans from Opportunity Village Eugene (OVE)

Source: Tent City Urbanism

A characterization of the relationship between urban planners and tiny houses for homeless populations specifically has not been examined. While planners are considered practitioners who work on a variety of issues, much of their work becomes informed by other "street-level bureaucrats" such as law enforcement officials, public administrators, and social workers (Lipsky, 1980). Urban planners, in theory, continue to grapple with their positions as conduits for strategic city building projects focused on urban growth, and as their role of social "harmonizers" and channels for community engagement, especially with disadvantaged groups (Marcuse, 2010). Provided that planners' have a responsibility to expand opportunity for all segments of the population (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2005), examining the implementation process and after-effects of this form of housing that is geared towards

the most vulnerable is an appropriate field of inquiry for the planning profession. With increased media exposure in the past five years, more tiny houses are being built in the private market in order to cultivate a more sustainable lifestyle and obtain an affordable means to homeownership. In the nonprofit and public sectors of the housing market, tiny houses or micro-units configured in a village setting have also continued to grow. Figure 3 shows the communities that have already built or are in the process of developing tiny house villages for their homeless populations. The greatest concentration of both built and planned villages is in the west of the United States. As this report will show, tiny house villages for homeless populations hold a more complex position in the current housing system beyond the binary categories of transitional or permanent housing solutions to homelessness. Analyzing this homeless assistance model's place in the American housing system is necessary in order for municipalities to understand under what capacity tiny house villages provide a practical solution to a very complex housing problem.

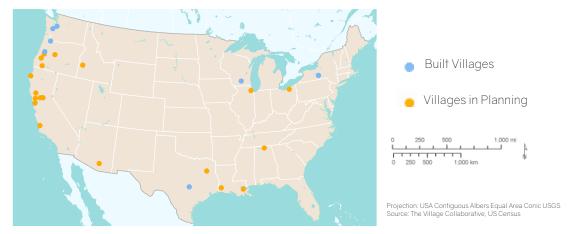


Figure 3. Tiny House Villages for Homeless Populations (US)

Possibly due to the niche nature of the model and small number of available case studies, information about the performance of the tiny house village model is quite sparse. Cost effectiveness is one measure of success claimed by villages like Eugene's Opportunity Village where \$5 is needed to house a resident a night. This compares to studies produced by the federal government on the nightly cost of emergency shelter housing being \$14 to \$61 in select cities (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010). The literature does not present any assessments on whether tiny house villages improve outcomes for their residents.

This research will try to answer to what extent local planning practices facilitate unconventional affordable housing models such as tiny house villages for homeless populations. Due to the increased interest in the model, it is important to develop an understanding of how planners can act to implement and evaluate these villages effectively. Planners encountering tiny house village proposals in their communities are challenged by an absence of information on what constitutes a successful tiny house village. Due to a limited sample size, this research will not provide success measures. However it seeks to initiate a discussion about the model's position in the current homeless assistance and housing policy system in the United States in order to show that perhaps not all cases can be measured against existing housing policy tools. Characterizing the tiny house village model will also allow planners to understand to what exactly they are responding, as it was found to be unclear at times throughout the interviews. Four cities and their respective tiny house villages in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States will be examined in order to answer these questions.

This research investigates local planning's role when communities implement the tiny house village model to fulfill their homeless assistance needs. As a very nascent model, tiny house villages are best explored through in-depth case studies. In order to obtain both an insider and outsider view of tiny houses in this context, we conducted several interviews and used publicly available materials to form an analysis as described in the Methods chapter of this report. Background on current homeless assistance and housing services is provided in order to understand the landscape of existing services into which tiny houses might enter. This is followed by a brief introduction of each village case study along with a socioeconomic profile of the village's corresponding city. The Findings and Discussion will show the limits of planners' roles in the tiny house village model. It will also diagram how three of the four village models do not fit within the federal framework of housing for homeless populations, but nevertheless hold a unique utility for their communities. Lastly, some recommendations are provided for local government officials, planners, or nonprofit staff who might consider the tiny house village model in the future. Provided that a growing number of community groups and nonprofits are in the process of planning tiny house villages, municipalities must understand their local needs and think critically about adopting tiny house villages as a solution.

#### 2. METHODS

#### 2.1 Methods

The tiny house villages examined in this paper are located in the United States and include Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon; Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon; Nickelsville 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union St. site in Seattle, Washington; and Quixote Village in Olympia Washington. These cases were selected based on the initial finding that all villages had some form of support from their local governments, thereby making an assessment on planning's role possible. All sites hold contracts with their local governments for their locations.

As shown by Figure 3, four of the seven known built tiny house villages in the United States are located in the Pacific Northwest region. As a majority of planned villages are also concentrated on the west coast, concentrating on cases in this region could help inform future projects in a context that seems to be more open to trying the tiny house model. The three other existing tiny house villages are Second Wind Cottages in Ithaca, New York; Occupy Madison in Madison, Wisconsin; and Community First! Village in Austin, Texas. A primary reason for not including these sites was due to logistical limitations and time constraints in researching for this study. These three cases could have offered insights not only based on more diverse geography but also the nature of the nonprofits spearheading these projects. For instance none of the villages in this study have an overt religious mandate in their mission, however the Ithaca and Austin sites are both sponsored by Christian nonprofits. The Occupy Madison site is most similar to the selected sites in that all built Pacific Northwest sites had some kind of affiliation with the Occupy Movement either as a founding force or loosely by association. Ultimately the selection was limited to villages in Washington and Oregon which are two states that have experienced recent rises in homelessness (Figure 4). This enables comparisons of the planning and development processes of two villages per state within their respective state social service system.

In order to answer the primary research question of planning's role in tiny house villages, three different strategies were used to collect information for a comparative case study analysis

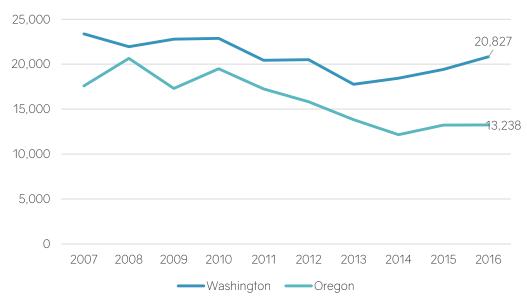


Figure 4. Total Homeless Population Count: Washington and Oregon State Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

of the four villages and their respective cities. As shown in Figure 5, these include seeking expert opinions, making empirical observations through site visits, and examining various publicly available materials. The interview responses and on-site observations are synthesized for comparison between the four contexts. A functional conceptual framework is adopted throughout this paper, where emphasis is concentrated on understanding the relationship between municipal or county policymakers, city planning and human services departments, and the nonprofit organizations and communities who have built the tiny house villages. Aspects of the local regulatory and political environments in which municipalities and nonprofits operate will also be incorporated in the analysis in order to answer of why some communities have adopted tiny houses in a particular manner.

The primary source of information for this study comes from in-depth audio-recorded interviews that were conducted with both staff at tiny house villages and local government staff between December 2016 and January 2017. A total of 11 interviews of 40 to 80 minutes were conducted. The six interviewees from tiny house villages ranged in their positions from program managers to resident leadership board members who held duties that would be commensurable to a paid staff position. These sessions with village staff aimed to better understand the

perceptions of those intimately involved in the development, operation, and future planning of their respective sites. All village interviews also included a site visit.

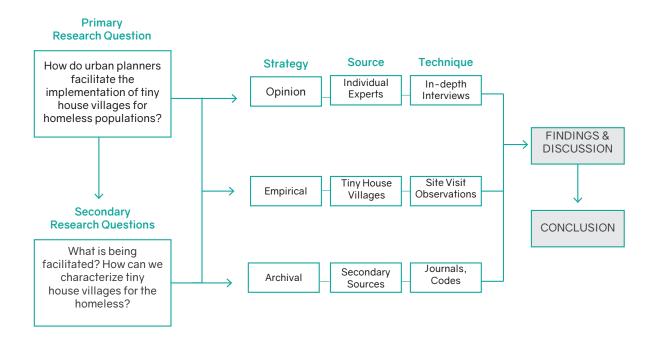


Figure 5. Research Process

Five participating government staff worked at both county and municipal levels. Although initial requests were made to interview city planners involved in housing and land use planning, very few government interviews were conducted with the planning office. Instead, most sessions with government staff were done with the human services or community development department of a municipality. These professionals were found to be key actors in the planning and development process of tiny house villages and were therefore able to speak on both social services and the history of zoning changes for each site. In addition, zoning codes, building codes, anti-homeless ordinances, social service plans, and city comprehensive plans were used to form city profiles that informed the final analysis. Tiny house villages' specific histories, goals, public responses, and political action were also researched by reading local online news sources, blogs, and grey literature.

#### 2.2 Data

Interviews and local government documents are the chief data sources for this project, however some mapping and basic sociodemographic variables were used in order to establish a profile of each metropolitan context. The 2010 United States Census was used for basic demographic data and the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates data set, selected for housing and economic characteristics. The ACS is annually surveyed at a smaller scale than the decennial census thereby providing data for government agencies to plan resource allocations. The 5-year estimates were chosen because they are considered to be more precise due to a longer survey time and larger sample size (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Geospatial data was downloaded from federal, state, and municipal websites in order to provide context maps and satellite imagery of each village's surroundings.

Housing data was collected from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) website. HUD publishes data based on microdata from the American Community Survey and HUD's adjusted median family incomes—which are used to help local governments calculate the number of households in need of housing assistance. This data set is historically known as "CHAS data" because it was employed in local governments' Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategies (CHAS) that were submitted to the federal government in order to determine which households are eligible for HUD's programs. (Joice, 2014). The CHAS data was used in this report in order to show how and at what rates different households are cost burdened in each case study city. Already analyzed data was also obtained from housing affordability reports produced by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and from the HUD Exchange website.

#### 3. BACKGROUND

The following section is designed to provide the reader with key concepts and processes that will be used in discussing each case study. It provides a brief background on two areas: homelessness and the tiny house movement. Homelessness has many dimensions found in the literature of sociology, social work, economics, health sciences, and law. Researchers study two kinds of causal factors of homelessness and their intersection: individual and structural factors (Chapleau, 2010; Sosin, 2003; Sullivan, Burnam, & Koegel, 2000; Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000). Individual factors are those concerned with personal risk factors such as mental health, substance abuse, work history, and social network dynamics. Structural factors such as housing affordability, economic policy, and access to services may contribute to a person's inability to afford housing when other negative life events occur (Crane et al., 2005; Main, 1998). As urban planners seem to play greater parts in the structural causes of homelessness such as housing and economic policy, a brief subsection is included on municipalities' roles in the criminalization of homelessness and facilitation of affordable housing.

# 3.1 Defining and Counting Homelessness

The question of whom exactly agencies, governments, and communities consider homeless is an important one, as it affects how policies are created and services are distributed. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has clarified the definition of "homeless" and "chronically homeless." Someone who is chronically homeless is an individual or family who lives in a place that is not safe for human habitation, or in an emergency shelter on a continuous basis for at least a year or on four separate occasions in the past three years. This person can be diagnosed with a mental condition, disability, chronic physical illness, or a substance abuse disorder. A chronically homeless family may be one where the head of the household meets all of these criteria. The definition of "homeless" is captured under four circumstances: 1) individuals and families who do not have adequate nighttime residence or a place fit for human habitation 2) those who may imminently lose their place of habitation, 3) unaccompanied youth and 4) individuals and families who are fleeing life-threatening situations

such as violence or sexual assault (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2015b). The biggest changes of note to the statutory definitions is that it expands the situations under which a person is considered homeless. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012).

Communities collect data on their homeless populations in order to be eligible for federal funding and plan their homeless assistance and housing responses. The annual Point-In-Time Count (PIT) is a count conducted by local governments, nonprofit agencies, and volunteers on a single night in January in cities and rural areas across the nation for sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015c). Sheltered homeless persons are those who are temporarily living in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, hotel voucher programs, and transitional housing at the time of the count, even if they sleep on the street as well. Unsheltered persons are those counted in places not fit for human habitation such as streets, parks, bus stops, doorways, vacant buildings, campgrounds, and vehicles (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2008). The PIT count is not viewed as an accurate measure of homelessness because it depends on volunteers' capacity to access certain environments and identify homeless persons, thereby leading to undercounted populations (Jocoy, 2012). This means that some individuals and families are not approached or simply never contacted because they may be living in secluded areas, vehicles, or on a friend's couch (Gee, Barney, & O'Malley, 2017). Nevertheless, the data retrieved from this count and data collected over the year from other homeless services through each region's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) provide localities with some kind of estimates to track their progress and make data-driven decisions.

# 3.2 Current Homeless Assistance System

As a source of primary funding for many communities, the federal government has the ability to direct national priorities such as targeting certain subpopulations or adopting alternative housing approaches (Schwartz, 2010). Homeless policy in the United States is currently guided by the 2010 *Opening Doors* federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness which identifies chronic, veteran, family, and youth homelessness as key areas to end and prevent. In order to encourage more coordinated responses to homelessness, HUD has encouraged

localities since the 1990s to apply for housing and homeless services funding as one regional planning body known as a Continuum of Care (CoC). The CoC model is based on across the board cooperation where efforts are focused on four key aspects: preventative outreach and assessments services, emergency shelter provision and housing referrals, transitional housing with support services, and permanent supportive housing that is long-term and meets the needs of a diverse population (Jarpe, Ray, & Reed, 2015).

In Washington and Oregon, counties and regional governments tend to be the designated lead agencies (Washington Department of Commerce, 2017). Lead agencies are responsible for administering their annual Point-In-Time Count, creating a plan to address homelessness, reporting data, and implementing coordinated entry. In cases where local governments do not assume this role, the state then chooses a nonprofit to be a lead agency. The lead agencies must subcontract with a network of nonprofits to provide services. They therefore use Coordinated Entry to create a single point of entry for persons trying to access services from multiple providers, which allows for more effective time and resource management (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015b).

# 3.3 Current Housing Provision for the Homeless

Service providers can offer different methods of housing assistance for homeless individuals and families on both the short-term and long-term basis. These include emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, permanent affordable housing and rapid rehousing. Permanent supportive housing is a long-term housing option that enables persons with disabilities, mental illness, or chronic substance abuse to live as tenants in the community with access to supportive services. Whereas transitional housing is an interim place where persons usually reside for up to 2 years before moving on to more independent living (Burt, 2006). Emergency shelters provide the first point of entry for persons who are immediately homeless and need a temporary place to stay while searching for more permanent housing.

The latest amendments to the McKinney/ Vento Act made by the Obama Administration in 2009 under the HEARTH Act (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) embody a shift in philosophy from the federal government in focusing on transitional

housing to rapid re-housing with a Housing First approach (Schwartz, 2010). Housing First is based on the premise that immediate and stable housing should be provided to persons without the precondition of mental and physical rehabilitation, and by not imposing barriers for persons with poor financial histories or criminal records. Studies on the economic, social, and health benefits of the Housing First approach corroborate that this model saves money and improves outcomes for chronically homeless individuals (Collins et al., 2010; Rosenheck, Krasprow, Frisman, & Liu-Mares, 2003). It uses tools such as rapid-rehousing for immediate housing in situations of crisis with tailored case management, rent and move-in assistance, and "just enough" subsequent financial assistance. Rapid re-housing provides an immediate solution allowing persons to search for more permanent housing while being supported. This method helps reduce persons and families' exposure to the negative effects of being without a home (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015d).

The national shift towards Housing First is evident in the change of service capacity for different types of housing for homeless populations. Nationwide, communities have increased their homeless assistance capacity by providing more beds for permanent supportive housing by 69.2% and emergency shelters by 25.1% (2007 to 2015). During the same time period, beds for transitional housing decreased by 23.4% whereas rapid rehousing increased substantially by 203.9% from 2013 to 2015 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016).

# 3.4 The Role of Municipalities

The new homelessness of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was born out of the social and economic conditions of the 1980s, characterized by the dynamic of deteriorating inner cities and rapidly developing suburban areas (DePastino, 2005). The abandonment of central urban areas and the ensuing gentrification provided the stage for evictions and the demolition of low-cost options such as SRO housing (single-room occupancy). The tone adopted towards homeless, poor, minority, and female populations is one of disdain and fear in the revanchist city of the 1990s where personal deviance is heavily emphasized over structural constraints as causes for poverty and lack of shelter (Smith, 1996). As a result, homeless individuals were substantially criminalized in various ways by their cities' policies.

Increased surveillance, policing, incarceration, and disproportionate enforcement of laws continue to be used by law enforcement (O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011). The discretionary power of law enforcement is most visible with loitering or "sit-lie" ordinances that prohibit persons from sitting, lying, or standing in particular areas under certain hours or circumstances (Amster, 2003). Even cities' physical form is designed with the intention to discourage certain activities such as sleeping on benches and standing protected by bus shelters (Flusty, 2001). The policies deployed by local governments seek to not only allay community concerns for security but also present a reputable and clean image to booster economic development (Mitchell, 1997). However to say that local governments continue to employ only vindictive mechanisms to "cure" homelessness is no longer entirely correct. Murphy argues that cities have entered a post-revanchist era where the full effects of gentrification have begun to take place and more welfare oriented sensibilities are present (Murphy, 2009). Municipalities now strive to develop compassionate support systems that also co-exist with anti-homeless laws. This ambiguity of the supportive and the punitive is one that researchers maintain must be further explored in the literature as the "messy middle ground" of homeless service provision (May & Cloke, 2013).

Housing affordability is a structural risk factor of homelessness that many municipalities have identified as a target area of improvement amongst other health and social services (Stone, 2006). Housing affordability is based on a ratio of income to housing expenses in order to determine a household's ability to pay for housing (Hulchanski, 1995). If a household spends more on than 30%, it is considered to be cost burdened by its housing costs because it may have to forgo other essential items such as food, transportation, and medical treatment. Housing cost burdens are considered severe when they exceed 50% or more of annual income (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015a). While national homeless rates are declining, the number of cost burdened renters has risen to historic levels (11.4 million) not only for the lowest income households but moderate income renter households in high-cost markets as well (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2016). Minority households and the lowest income households that are employed through part-time and minimum-wage jobs face severe housing cost burdens in greater proportion (Ault, Sturtevant, & Viveiros, 2015).

Municipalities have traditionally influenced the location, quantity, and quality of low-income housing through zoning ordinances and building codes, however the federal government's retrenchment has made local governments also take charge of developing and managing housing as well. The most common ways in which states and municipalities fund housing production are through federal block grants, tax-exempt bond financing, housing trust funds, rent regulations, tax abatements, tax increment financing, and inclusionary zoning (Schwartz, 2010).

Aside from inclusionary zoning, the role of municipal land use and zoning regulations in molding the supply of affordable housing is not yet widely established. A limited number of studies have been conducted focusing more on income or sociodemographic segregation and land use, rather than affordable housing specifically (Aytur, Rodriguez, Evenson, Carellier, & Rosamond, 2008; Lens & Monkkonen, 2016; Rothwell & Massey, 2010). Exclusionary zoning practices which have been well-studied in the past are not as blatantly exercised as they were fifty years ago. However, they have re-emerged to an emboldened state with even more extreme displacement tactics that are legitimized in the name of municipal economic development policies. In an exploratory study, Pendall has argued that zoning for singlefamily only areas, caps on permitting, and limitations on city growth boundaries contribute to a "chain of exclusion" whereby there is a shift to less housing production. The housing that is being produced is constrained by land use regulations to be single-family. Therefore it does not provide for renters but instead could reduce rental affordability because of the dwindling multifamily housing supply (Pendall, 2000). Single-room occupancy units (SROs), micro units, accessory dwelling units, eco-villages, and work-live housing that could contribute to improving housing affordability end up being vilified for falling outside of norms for minimum lots sizes, minimum number of parking places, and strict uses etc. (Hoch, 2000). However if urban planners are obliged to "seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons" (American Institute of Planners, 2016) they must also acknowledge that a range of unconventional housing currently does exist and that they have the ability and duty to provide a vehicle for zoning regulations to be transformed on the basis of community needs, and not vice versa.

#### 3.5 Tiny Houses and Intentional Living

According to tiny house advocates, to describe the housing problem in terms of only access and supply of affordable housing is a shallow assessment (Heben, 2014). The lack of affordable housing is tied to the inaccessibility of the spacious American dream home and vast backyards. In 2015, the average size of a new home in the United States reached a record high of 2,467 square feet which is over a 1,000 square foot increase from newly built homes in 1973 (1,660 sq. ft.). This constitutes an increase of living space per person in the United States from 507 to 971 square feet (Perry, 2016).

Reaching at least 30 years back, tiny house advocates have steadily grown a national movement that espouses environmental sustainability, minimalism, self-sufficiency, and independence from homeowner debt. However it is within the last 10 years or so that this movement has gained national prominence with a whole supporting industry of trade shows, online guides, organizations, and television programs. There are many websites that provide future tiny house builders with a wealth of knowledge on building plans, utility hookups, navigation of building codes, and simple living tools.

Depending on whether the houses are built by the owner or bought from a contractor, tiny houses in the for-profit market can be built cheaply for as little at \$6,000 and up to \$40,000 or more (Tiny House Talk, 2014). Tiny houses may be placed on a foundation as an accessory dwelling unit or they may be parked on a trailer in order to skirt building codes with minimum space requirements. In terms of amenities, many private houses include cooking and restroom facilities within the unit. Different utility hookup arrangements exist ranging from onsite permanent or semi-permanent water and sewer connections to off grid hookups that use rainwater collection, greywater draining, composting toilets and solar panels.

Tiny houses are an inexpensive housing option not only for persons wanting to downsize but also for nonprofits and community groups that provide low-cost housing (Mitchell, 2014). Tiny houses provided for homeless populations can be organized in a village model where each unit does not typically have full kitchen and restroom amenities. Instead, a centralized area for washing, cooking, and recreational activities is set for collective sharing of resources. The tiny

house villages for homeless populations examined in this report tend to be characterized by an intentional living model. Intentional communities are typically out of mainstream society's concept of housing because they are usually formed by individuals who share an ideology or value. They can take the form of communes, housing cooperatives, religious housing, ecovillages, and co-housing facilities (Sanguinetti, 2012). The physical design of these communities helps facilitate their activities such as communal meals, social gatherings, and open play for children.

The communal intentional living arrangement of the tiny house villages in this paper is perhaps linked to the model's roots in self-organized and self-managed tent cities. As informal shelter solutions that are frequently most visible in the city's liminal spaces, tent cities are disparaged due to their lack of water and sanitation, use of public land, trash disposal, and the perceived deviance of their residents (Herring, 2014). Although society places a high value on individuals' participation and belonging to the greater community, when intentional self-sufficient communities are formed in the most desperate of conditions, these living configurations are considered degenerative and non-contributing. While these are worrisome living conditions, researchers have begun to note that these communities have lessons for alternative housing on adaptability, safety, and community living (Heben, 2014; Loftus-Farren, 2011). In reconciling the fact that housing assistance systems are unable to provide enough shelter and support services, many municipalities have opted to sanction some tent cities and provide on-site support services or choose not to enforce anti-camping ordinances. All of the villages in this research have their roots in intentional tent city communities. Each city has a public camping ordinance in place, however arrangements for sanctioned camping space or city-run programs have been allowed as exceptions.

#### 4. CASE STUDY PROFILES

The following section seeks to provide a brief introduction to each village case study but focus on the profile of their urban contexts in order to establish each location's specific challenges and responses concerning homelessness. More in-depth details about the villages will be provided in the Findings and Discussion chapter of the report. Information regarding the villages was obtained through interviews, however all city and county specific information was taken from local government department websites, online newspapers, and the United States Census.

#### 4.1 Dignity Village, Portland Oregon

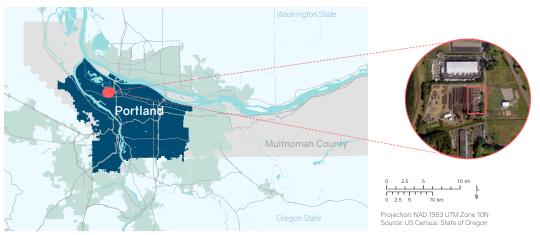


Figure 6. Dignity Village

Located in Portland, Oregon, Dignity Village is the longest operating tiny house intentional community for homeless individuals in the country. In December of 2000, Camp Dignity was established on vacant public land under a bridge by a group of homeless persons as part of the "Out of Doorways" campaign formed in the aftermath of Portland's anti-camping ordinance being overturned (Roots, 2009). Camp Dignity's organized efforts to create a self-governed and safe community eventually led to the formation of the Dignity Village nonprofit corporation. After multiple camp evictions, Dignity Village came to an agreement with the city to temporarily move to a sanctioned location in the industrial area of Sunderland Yard in Northeast Portland. Despite this move, Dignity Village still faced a precarious existence with mixed public opinion

and concerns for building and health code enforcement. The city eventually designated the Sunderland Yard site as a "transitional campground housing" under an obscure transitional accommodation state statute in 2004 (Heben, 2014).

The timing of Dignity Village's establishment coincides with a specific set of socioeconomic and political conditions in the city of Portland. It was during this time that Portland and Multnomah County endeavored to create the area's first 10-year action plan to end homelessness. Multnomah County, Portland, and the city of Gresham have since partnered to create a third updated comprehensive plan called "A Home for Everyone" that concentrates on providing every person in the region with a home. The plan focuses on increasing entries into permanent housing, investing in more emergency shelters, and strengthening system capacity for coordination of services. The plan also has a unique emphasis on racial and ethnic justice. Minorities such as African Americans are overrepresented in homeless populations, composing 24% of homeless persons but only 7% of the general county population (Multnomah County, 2017). Multnomah County provides community-based services for families, substance abuse, child assistance, and poverty alleviation while the city of Portland is responsible for homeless adults and affordable and public housing.

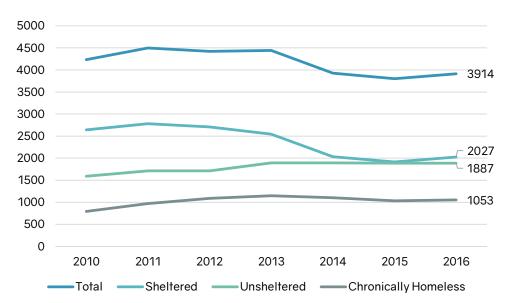


Figure 7. Multnomah County (Portland) Point-In-Time Count (2010-2016)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The city of Portland has responded to housing affordability concerns through many mechanisms. At the state level, the city has aggressively sought lifting of the statewide ban on inclusionary zoning, and is now developing its mandatory inclusionary zoning program to boost the production of affordable units. The city's 2035 Comprehensive Plan provides housing goals including fomenting housing preservation, developing workforce housing, building regional cooperation and balance, increasing renter protections and responding to social isolation (City of Portland, 2016). The Portland community voted in November 2016 for its first affordable housing bond of \$258 million. It is estimated that this will allow for the production of an additional 1,300 units of affordable housing. Other forms of revenue have also been adopted within in the last year such as obtaining portions from tax increment financing renewal zones and a small construction excise tax. In order to address the current state of homelessness, the city has prolonged its one year state of emergency from 2015 to 2016 for another year and has consolidated the city and Multnomah county offices for the Joint Office of Homeless Services in order to streamline the delivery of support services (Portland Housing Bureau, 2016).

Planning for affordable housing is certainly a challenge in a city where the population has grown by 8.3% almost double the national average from 2010 to 2015 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2015). The permitting levels have reached a 15 year high in Portland, with 700 permits for single-family homes and 4,000 permits for multi-family homes being issued in 2015 (Portland Housing Bureau, 2016). In addition, rental vacancies at 2.9% in 2016 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016a). Although these conditions do not exert any real estate pressures on Dignity Village's specific operation, they provide reasons for why housing nonprofits are constrained in building in a tight market and why less costly housing types such as tiny houses are attractive options.

Table 1. Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro Metro Area Housing Statistics 2016 Source: U.S. Census and the National Low Income Housing Coalition

	Population	Median Household Income (USD)	2 Bedroom Apartment FMR	Annual Income Needed to Afford 2 BR FMR	% Renter Households
Portland	1,864,574	60,217	1,208	48,320	40%
Oregon	4,028,977	51,243	1008	40,318	38%

#### 4.2 Opportunity Village, Eugene, Oregon

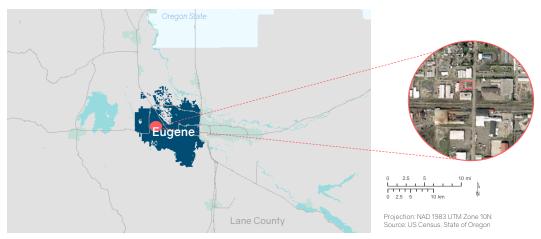


Figure 8. Opportunity Village

Born out of a settlement from the Occupy movement in 2011, Opportunity Village Eugene has evolved with the support of persons outside the homeless community since its beginning. After the Occupy encampments were closed, the city convened a taskforce to find housing solutions for the unhoused from the former settlement. The order from Mayor Kitty Piercy was to find several sites that could be run by independent nonprofits for secure sleeping. In addition to recommending the development of an urban rest stop program where persons could sleep at designated locations under nonprofit management, the creation of a tiny house village was also proposed. Opportunity Village opened its doors in 2013 as a transitional microhousing village for homeless persons in a city-owned lot in the heavily industrial area along. It is zoned as a conditional use for a homeless shelter.

In less than five years, Opportunity Village has successfully grown the site while evolving as an organization. Although now called Square One Villages, Opportunity Village secured 501(c)3 status early on. Square One Villages has also developed an online Toolbox for prospective nonprofit tiny house village builders and operators and provides consulting services to communities seeking to establish a village. Square One Villages is coordinating a follow-up project by developing a permanent micro-unit village, Emerald Village Eugene.

Like many communities around the county, Eugene's public resources for affordable and

low-income housing are limited therefore housing nonprofits like Square One Villages are crucial. Outside of Lane County funding, Eugene also cooperates to offer unique programs through the city and in partnership with nonprofits and religious charity organizations. For instance, although Eugene has limited the parking of vehicles for extended periods of time, the ordinance allows for religious and nonprofit organizations to host parked vehicles with restroom services on site under the Homeless Car Camping program. The city and the county have also launched a Rest Stop pilot program where up to 20 people are permitted to sleep in tents at six designated city and county sites, or property owned by the Eugene Mission. Nonprofits are responsible for the operation of the rest stops and residents must agree to certain rules that include a zero tolerance for violent behavior, drugs, or alcohol. The success of these types of initiatives is still under evaluation as the city council is currently discussing whether or not to extend these programs in some form or another (Hill, 2017). Being a small college town, Eugene has also responded with housing affordability programs targeting renters which make up 41% of households and student populations.

Table 2. Eugene-Springfield Metro Area Housing Statistics 2016 Source: U.S. Census and the National Low Income Housing Coalition

	Population	Median Household Income (USD)	2 Bedroom Apartment FMR	Annual Income Needed to Afford 2 BR FMR	% Renter Households
Eugene	357,060	44,103	909	36,360	41%
Oregon	4,028,977	51,243	1008	40,318	38%

Over a third of the 1,451 homeless persons counted in Lane County during their annual point-in-time count were chronically homeless (Figure 9). Another population that has increased on a statewide level is the number of homeless students in the public school system (Roemeling, 2016). Between Eugene and its neighboring city of Springfield, 1616 homeless youth were reported through three school districts in 2014. For these reasons, Lane County is not only investing in Housing First units like other communities, but also making substantial push for crisis services and over 300 more emergency shelter beds and services for individuals and families (Lane County, 2016). Although the county provides anti-poverty and housing services,

the city also invests in affordable rental housing and home repair programs.

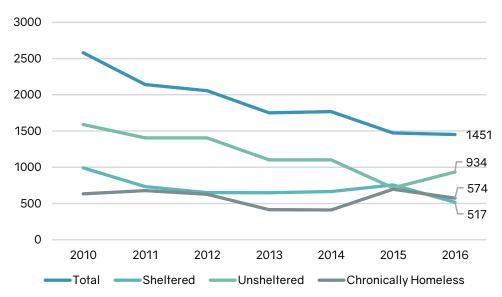


Figure 9. Lane County (Eugene) Point-In-Time Count (2010-2016)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

#### 4.3 Quixote Village, Olympia, Washington

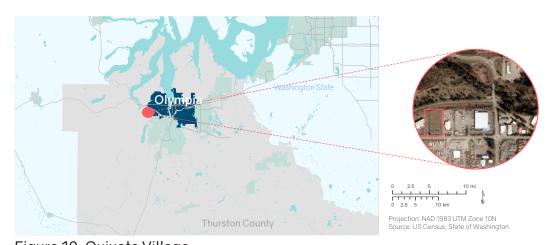


Figure 10. Quixote Village

Quixote Village opened on Christmas Eve of 2013. The development of the 30 unit village was not a quick process. Originally an itinerant encampment, Camp Quixote was first founded in order to protest Olympia's sit-lie ordinance as a self-governing community to support unhoused individuals. The tent city of homeless persons was forced to move every three months from one

church parking lot to another according to yet another limiting housing for 90 days and requiring 24 hour volunteer staff on site. Eventually Panza, the current nonprofit organization for Quixote Village, was created in order to help propel the development of Camp Quixote into its current form. After much collaborative work, the group secured a property owned by Thurston County for Quixote Village. The village is located in a light industrial area and was therefore subject to a conditional use permit for residential units. The city of Olympia changed their zoning code in order to allow for this type of conditional use in a light industrial area and also amended the ordinance restricting homeless encampments to include lands owned by the county for permanent homeless housing.

Olympia is a small city located in Thurston County in the southern area of the Puget Sound. Its estimated population is just over 50,000, however when combined with the neighboring municipalities of Lacey and Tumwater, the region reaches over 260,000 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2015). Therefore the number of homeless persons is reported on a county basis. In 2015, Thurston County reported 586 homeless persons in both sheltered and unsheltered situations. Overall homelessness has increased in Thurston County by 7.4% since 2006. As the region's main urban hub, Olympia was identified by 66% of homeless respondents to be their current city of residency in 2015. The top reasons for homelessness among unsheltered individuals was due to job loss (22%), followed by a family or relationship crisis (21%) and mental illness or health (20%) (Thurston County, 2015).

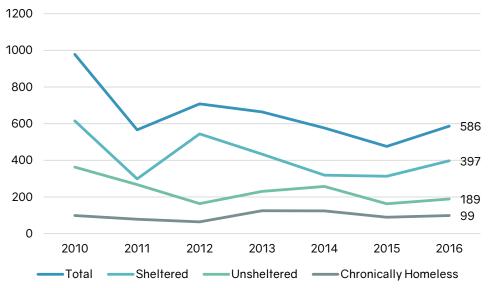


Figure 11. Thurston County (Olympia) Point-In-Time Count (2010-2016)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

As part of its homeless response, the city of Olympia contributes part of its federal funding allocations to countywide partnerships to provide rental assistance and housing rehabilitation. It also supports a number of social service nonprofits such as family support centers, youth programming, coordinated entry programs, food banks, free clinics, and even by a small amount, Quixote Village. In terms of specific city-led programs, Olympia offers a tax-exemption for multifamily housing developments in target neighborhoods (City of Olympia, 2009). Residents and businesses in the city's small downtown have repeatedly brought forth concerns for the behaviors of presumed homeless individuals. In turn, the city has responded by instating an Alcohol Impact Area which bans the sale of alcohol in the downtown area. They also developed a Downtown Ambassadors Program that focuses on cleaning up litter, graffiti, and vandalism (Hobbs, 2014). Although it is reported that the cleanliness of downtown has improved with these measures, no reports show whether or not perpetrators are in fact homeless and how they are being assisted into shelter or supportive services.

Most housing affordability policy is enacted through Thurston County's Public Health and Social Services division. It is the coordinator for a countywide public health plan called *Thurston Thrives* which includes a homeless housing component amongst other action areas for clinical and emergency care, food security, education, economy, and environment. A substantial portion of the housing component of this plan also focuses on incentivizing affordable housing through the private market and exploring a housing levy. The county acts as a lead funder by dispersing funds for acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, rental assistance, housing trust fund developments, and the operation of emergency shelters. In the case of Quixote Village, Thurston County has been the primary funder and facilitator of the project.

Table 3. Olympia – Tumwater Metro Area Housing Statistics 2016 Source: U.S. Census and the National Low Income Housing Coalition

	Population	Median Household Income (USD)	2 Bedroom Apartment FMR	Annual Income Needed to Afford 2 BR FMR	% Renter Households
Olympia	261,723	61,677	1,021	40,840	35%
Washington	7,170,351	61,062	1,203	48,119	37%

# 4.4 Nickelsville Tiny Houses at 22nd & Union St., Seattle, Washington

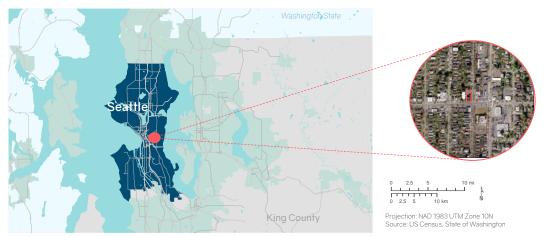


Figure 12. 22nd and Union St. Site

While the other villages in this study have their roots attached to a specific tent city community or the Occupy movement, the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union St. Site is part of a history of multiple tent cities spanning as far back as the early 1990s. Although it shares the appearance of other tiny house villages, the smallest site in this study is not considered to be a tiny house village by its residents. However its sponsoring nonprofit advertises the site as such. Interviews with a site representative revealed that the residents of 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union call it an "encampment" and staff from the city of Seattle term the units as "homeless huts". The encampment is not permanent housing, rather it fulfills an informal version of transitional housing. The 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site is still included in this study as it is advertised by the sponsoring nonprofit as a tiny house village and incorporates other intentional living characteristics that will be further discussed in the Findings chapter.

In January 2017, the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union encampment celebrated their full first year of operation on the property of the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. Its location is permitted under a city ordinance which allows religious organizations to host temporary encampments on their property. Due to this ordinance, the encampment was not required to file a land use permit. In 2015, the city of Seattle passed an ordinance allowing up to three sanctioned encampments of up to 100 residents on public or private land without a religious

affiliation. All sanctioned encampment sites must have a nonprofit management body that oversees camp organization, utilities, trash removal, and communication with the city. The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a low income housing developer and operator in the state of Washington, is the fiscal sponsor liaising with the city for the management of the encampments. SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort), which is the largest encampment network in the Pacific Northwest and Nickelsville, is an advocacy group borne out of tent city residents, and is responsible for ensuring democratic self-governance processes and daily camp operations.

Located in Seattle's Central District, the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site is more physically connected to the real estate dynamics of the city than other tiny house villages. While being hit hard during the recent recession, Seattle recovered with the tech and professional service sectors, leading to new arrivals competing for housing units. It is estimated that the city's population has grown by 12.5% within the last five years which has translated into making it the 10<sup>th</sup> densest major city in the United States with 7,962 persons per square mile (Balk, 2016). Rent increases in Seattle tend to outpace other West coast metropolitan areas. For example while the average rent increase for the whole country and western cities hovered around 4%, Seattle renters experienced on average a 7% rent increase in 2014 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016b). A recent study by the U.K. realtor group, Nested, ranked Seattle as the fifth most expensive city for renters in the U.S. and 9<sup>th</sup> in a worldwide comparison (Lloyd, 2017b). More recently, several city councilors have proposed the creation of a formal commission for renters to address discriminatory practices and rental price increases in a state where rent control laws are prohibited (Sheldon, 2017). The establishment of a formal body would be the first of any major city in the country.

Table 4. Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metro Area Housing Statistics 2016 Source: U.S. Census and the National Low Income Housing Coalition

	Population	Median Household Income (USD)	2 Bedroom Apartment FMR	Annual Income Needed to Afford 2 BR FMR	% Renter Households
Seattle	3,614,361	70,475	1,523	60,920	40%
Washington	7,170,351	61,062	1,203	48,119	37%

Seattle has a long history of addressing housing affordability for its residents through

funding, production, and regulation. Voters have approved several housing levies since the 1980s which has led to the funding of over 12,500 affordable housing units. In 2016, a \$290 million levy was approved that will produce and preserve 2,150 affordable apartments, assist low-income homeowners, and provide short-term rent assistance for families and individuals at imminent risk of being homeless (City of Seattle, 2016a). The current Mayor of Seattle, Edward Murray, commissioned the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) in order to provide recommendations and strategies that could address housing affordability in Seattle's 2035 Comprehensive Plan and ongoing housing policies. To date, HALA's implemented recommendations include passing the housing levy, expanding the Multi-Family Tax Exemption program that incentivizes the construction of rent restricted units, and strengthening tenant protections from discrimination and displacement. In fall 2016, the city also passed a Mandatory Housing Affordability program which is essentially an inclusionary zoning ordinance requiring that between 5 -11% of units be set aside for affordable housing (for households making 60% of the area median income or less) with the benefit of applying for additional development capacity (City of Seattle, 2016b).

It is accepted by government officials and the community that the number of individuals and families who find themselves homeless has reached a critical level. Of metropolitan regions in the United States in 2016, the Seattle/King County area had the third largest homeless population in the United States at 10,730 after New York City and Los Angeles. Under the harsh news that 66 homeless individuals had passed on the streets, Seattle and King County declared a state of emergency in 2015, thereby obtaining some much-needed resources (Groover, 2015). In February 2017, the city activated their Emergency Operation Center, an office that engages in disaster planning, to accelerate their response to this humanitarian crisis (City of Seattle, 2017). The Seattle Human Services Department has also been deploying the Pathways Home Plan under which funding for rapid rehousing, low-barrier shelter, and resources for unsheltered families have been proposed (City of Seattle, 2016c). More recently, the mayor's office has proposed a residential and commercial property tax to raise funds to the tune of \$55 million a year for homeless services (Lloyd, 2017a).

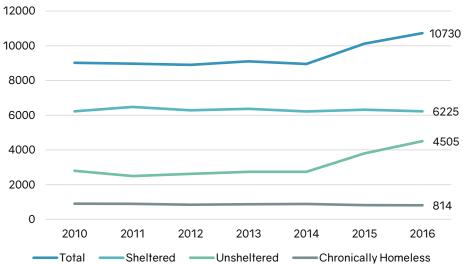


Figure 13. King County (Seattle) Point-In-Time Count (2010-2016)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

## 4.5 Summary

The cities for each village case study differ in their size, income, housing costs, and their response to homelessness. The one similar demographic trend is that of a recent increase in unsheltered homeless individuals. Also, all cities collaborate with counties and nearby cities in their Continuum of Care to provide homeless services. Olympia tends to primarily rely on county resources for homeless responses, whereas Seattle, Portland, and Eugene tend to take on greater roles as municipalities. In accordance with the intensity of their housing situations, Seattle and Portland have responded with broader policy tools to increase production and access to affordable housing.

**Table 5. Summary Population Statistics 2016**Source: U.S. Census and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Portland	Eugene	Seattle	Olympia
1,864,574	357,060	3,614,361	261,723
3,914	1,451	10,730	586
2,027	934	4,505	397
1,887	517	6,225	189
1.053	574	814	99
	1,864,574 3,914 2,027	1,864,574 357,060 3,914 1,451 2,027 934 1,887 517	1,864,574     357,060     3,614,361       3,914     1,451     10,730       2,027     934     4,505       1,887     517     6,225

## 5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In order to answer how planning has facilitated or hindered the implementation of the four tiny house villages evaluated, it is necessary to understand the extent to which these different communities can serve as policy models for other cities. The first two sections of this chapter will present the findings that are concerned with the physical, social, and administrative characteristics that make each village distinct. These are discussed in order to understand how each village fits into to the current system of housing for homeless populations. The chapter will end with an assessment of how planning was found to have participated in facilitating these case studies. The findings from 11 interviews and 4 site visits are presented according to the following themes:

- -The villages' physical and built environment
- -The villages' organization and community support
- -The villages' place in the housing and homelessness assistance system
- -Planning's responses

## 5.1 Physical and Built Environment

5.1.1 Site Location

As shown in Chapter 3, all villages except Nickelsville's 22nd and Union St. site, are located in fringe industrial areas of each city. These three properties are also not the original camping locations of the tent city villages that led to their establishment, although these were mostly itinerant in any case. Nevertheless, differences were found in the types of industrial areas as well. While Dignity Village and Quixote Village are in more secluded industrial areas, and in the case of Quixote, literally on the county line, Eugene's Opportunity Village is in a dense industrial area that is connected to downtown by a 20-minute bus ride or 2.5 mile walk. Dignity Village continues to operate on an acre of city property that abuts a municipal leaf composting facility. Villagers can catch the closest bus a few minutes down the road in front of the Columbia River Correctional Institution. A basic point of concern is that its location is over 9 miles, or

the equivalent of almost an hour long bus ride to the downtown, where social and healthcare providers are located. It is also not easily accessible to a variety of employment options, being that it is located in an industrial area close to the Portland airport. Similarly, a bus from Quixote Village to downtown Olympia takes about 40 minutes. In many cases, villagers who own vehicles and are known to offer carpooling, however this is not always guaranteed and bus passes are not complimentary with their village residency.

When asked why each site was chosen for the village, both village and city staff mentioned availability and cost of land as primary reasons. The selected properties were sites that were in the local government's inventory and were not slated for future development at the time. The 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site was the only site that did not initiate a site selection through county or city property. It was established more organically where Nickelsville already had a relationship as a tent-based encampment with the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd. On the other hand, Quixote Village maintains a 41-year contract with the County for a nominal fee as do Dignity Village and Opportunity Village with their respective cities for shorter renewal periods. One planner and one social service worker also mentioned proximity to transport being a key component in identifying the sites. As expressed by a board member of Opportunity Village, public opinion also played a role:

One site that we previously looked at had been proposed, but it's fairly close to a school and had huge public opposition to it. And so politically that didn't seem viable, then the remaining sites were just really poor...

So what you have is leftovers that just aren't very viable. This was really the only site that was attractive with natural borders and good access to a bus line.

In order to maintain these locations with their county, city, or church, each village must enter into a contract with the property owner where certain requirements such as insurance, site capacity, and service qualifications must be upheld. In this way, planning for the site went beyond just allowing for homeless shelter conditional uses but held additional reporting requirements related to monitoring the progress of the village and its residents, similar to other housing programs.

### 5.1.2 Site Configuration

Through their respective nonprofits, all of the villages have been able to gain the support of design experts, volunteers, and material donations to build structures and produce a site plan that is a physical reflection of their values to varying degrees. In approaching all villages in this study, visitors will notice that they each have some kind of fencing or gate surrounding the premises with a check-in office, hut, or center. One village representative likened the fenced site to a gated community for low income individuals. Every site except Dignity Village has been configured where common areas including the main entrance, communal spaces, gardening facilities, access to water or restrooms were clustered to the front of the village. This results in a clustering of houses at the back of the lot. All the auxiliary services to the villages are located in individual units, whereas only Quixote Village combines all laundry, kitchen, staff offices, meeting rooms, storage, and community space into one big community building at the entrance. Whether segregated into smaller units or a large facility, sharing a cooking and rest area were described as important assets for community building by village representatives. This type of configuration coincides with existing co-housing models (Sanguinetti, 2012).



Figure 14. Dignity Village Site Layout

Source: Comminute cture and San Francisco Chronicle



Figure 15. Eugene Village Site Layout Source: Author and SquareOne Villages

Being the smallest of the four sites, 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union only has a restroom area, small office, and kitchen that serves as the communal area. This kitchen is in a tent and lacks hot water. It is the only site that routinely accommodates families with children under 18. The site's representative said that a play area for children was sorely needed and could be a point of further improvements for users of all ages to socialize. When asked what additions would residents like to the village, the village representative responded that an indoor or formalized outdoor community space was needed. Currently the center of the site contains gravel but residents are interested in partnering with a nonprofit to create a garden.

At Dignity Village, tiny houses are located at the extremities of the property, extending from a central communal area. The houses are further configured into micro cul-de-sacs with planters functioning as partitions. Opportunity Village also has more pocket areas of tiny houses clustered around garden spaces, while Quixote and 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union have a linear, inner facing pattern so that neighbors can see each other. According to the village representative from Dignity Village, the cul-de-sac layout allows for residents to experience some privacy in their units. In order to reflect a non-hierarchical community, the residents considered it important for



Figure 16. Quixote Village Site Layout

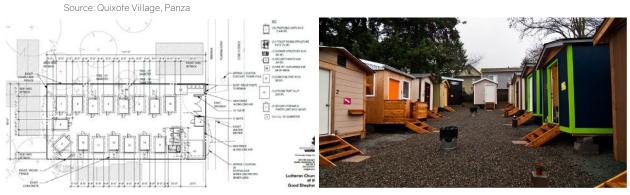


Figure 17. Nickelsville 22nd and Union St. Site Layout Source: LIHI

every member to have almost equidistant and easy access to communal spaces and resources. As part of their living models, all of the village communities in this study have incorporated participatory site planning in the past to varying degrees as evidenced by the layout and choice of unit amenities which will be discussed in the next section.

### 5.1.3 Building the Villages

The formality of the villages' built form varies in terms of amenities within the units, materials, and whether or not they were built by volunteers, residents, or contractors. The designs of the houses at Dignity Village range from octagon shaped houses to units with solar panels and rainwater catchment systems to bare-bone square boxes. Dignity Village residents use gas for heating and do not have running water in their units. Dignity Village and Opportunity Village both had initial large build days where many volunteers assembled with donated materials to help build units, however many units and community spaces were incrementally added over time. Residents also heavily contributed to the construction of units in both sites. These two villages were also the only ones to have designated visitor sleeping areas outside of the residents' tiny houses. At Dignity Village a few dormitory rooms were built next to the community village and several wagon huts also have a designated space at Opportunity Village for visitors, persons on village waitlist, or emergency needs.

Opening in 2013, Eugene's village is still young and its original units are still in place. Each house was built from a pre-manufactured kit for about \$2,000. They range in size from 60 to 80 square feet and do not have heat or electricity. In contrast, as the oldest village of its kind in the country, Dignity Village's units have seen several waves of repairs and unit replacements. Village staff however noted that the persons conducting the repairs have changed since the village's founding:

There was a church group that came in and built like 18 structures on a weekend just a hundred people jamming out, very early on in the process but now they're somewhat dilapidated. They weren't really built to be in existence for that long and it's tough. Those are the ones that we are trying to replace. As we get more. It has somewhat shifted where there's less energy and perhaps a little less skill around the folks who live here to build their own structures.

The longevity and formalization of the units has bearing on how the tiny house village model works and how the model is viewed in the housing assistance system. For example due to a greater level of amenities within the unit, Quixote Village has received federal support as permanent supportive housing. Some notable differences include the addition of a half bath, closets, and front porches for each of the units which also have heating, electricity, and running water. The village's high cost also reflects its formality. The cost to build a Quixote Village unit, including site remediation costs, the cost of land, and construction of the community building, is \$102,000. This seems incredibly high however the village makes the case on its website that this is still less than \$239,000 for a subsidized apartment, \$352,000 for a hospital bed, and \$114,000 for a jail cell. Without considering other development fees, each unit costs \$87,000 (Table 6).

The main contributions provided by local governments were in the form of land, permit and fee waivers, and in the case of Quixote Village, assistance with obtaining a federal housing subsidy. For Quixote Village, the Washington State Department of Commerce's Housing Trust Fund allocated \$1.5 million and an additional \$699,000 was granted through Community Development Block Grant funding at the city and county level. Thurston County also provided \$170,000 from state document recording fees. The final capital cost of \$3.05 million included development fees, infrastructure, permits, labor, road improvements, donated land and services. Although federal funding has been a key support, the conditions attached to the funds increased the costs to build each unit. HUD policy requires that dwellings be built under prevailing wage rates, instead of local wage rates. The fundraising success of Quixote Village was in part due to Panza hiring an outside nonprofit low-income development agency called Community Frameworks which helped them navigate the grant applications, and construction financing. Eugene's village cost approximately \$200,000 and their future Emerald Village site with permanent tiny houses is estimated to cost \$1.5 million, most of which is fundraised. Estimates for the total cost of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site and Dignity Village were not available however Table 6 shows a cost comparison for units at each village.

The nature of governments' involvement changes after the villages are built. Cities and counties continue to act in the capacity of funders but for smaller amounts in order to assist with

site operation expenses for some villages. In the case of Dignity Villages, continuous financial help is not provided however the program support specialist indicated that there have been occasions in the past when the city of Portland has assisted the village in making their general liability insurance payments, which they are required to make by contract. Quixote Village has received funding from Olympia in the past and on an annual basis receives about \$50,000 as reported by county staff.

Table 6. Summary Characteristics of Case Study Villages

	Dignity Village, Portland	Opportunity Village, Eugene	Quixote Village, Olympia	22 <sup>nd</sup> and Union St., Seattle
Village Capacity (persons)	60	30	30	14+
Unit Size (sq. ft.)	100-150	60-80	144	120
Water Access in Unit	No	No	Half-bathroom	No
Heating of Unit	No	No	Electric	Yes
Electricity in Unit	No	No	Yes	Yes
Cost per Unit (USD)	Donated materials and labor	2,000	87,000	2,200
Resident Contribution (monthly)	\$35 + volunteer	\$30 + volunteer	30% of income	\$90+volunteer
	hours	hours	(negotiable)	hours
Distance to downtown	9	2.5	2	3.5

The built environment of the villages and the conditions of their physical location matter because these characteristics help understand why tiny houses were the preferred building form to achieve each community's goals. Another recurring idea that came through in interviews with village staff was that these building forms were the preferred method of the tent city residents to carry out their living model. For example, Quixote Village's units are more expensive and are

not portable (they have foundations) but in designing the site, the original residents from the tent city, Camp Quixote, said that having their own separate unit that wasn't part of an apartment complex was important for them. A nonprofit representative from the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union Site best captures the reasoning behind the use of tiny houses:

For the cost of building one unit affordable housing we can create one tiny house village that will house about 16 people. They can be put up over the course of a few months. There is a timeliness where in Seattle it can take over 4 or 5 years to build affordable housing...There's also the process of self-management because you get people [village residents] involved in their community making democratic decisions and electing leadership for the candidates themselves. What I've heard from residents is that there is a self-worth that you might not get at a shelter because you have no stake at a shelter. The shelter kicks you out afterwards. You know they really decorate their houses and they feel that these houses are theirs. And for the period that they live there, they pretty much are. They have a lot of expanded autonomy in those camps. That is another piece that the self-management style lends itself to—in getting leadership skills.

The living model dimension of these tiny house villages will be further explored in the next section in order to provide local governments more insight into other non-physical aspects that these models require for their planning.

## 5.2 Village Organization and Support

5.2.1 Entry and Exit

All villages were found to have an extensive vetting process for persons to apply for a unit. None of the villages target a specific subgroup explicitly, such as veterans or persons with disabilities. It was noted by two city staff members and two village staff members that the physical conditions and social responsibilities associated with the villages served as selection tools for persons who could commit to these types of living arrangements. All villages have an associated monthly contribution (Table 5) however these were reported to be negotiable given the circumstances of the resident. Most residents can demonstrate that they have some form of income whether it be through a job, social security payments, or disability entitlements. Village representative reported that employed residents usually hold jobs in the construction, service,

and hospitality industries and were thereby underemployed workers who are restricted to hourly, part-time jobs without benefits.

The initial application process to live at Quixote Village is managed through SideWalk, a countywide nonprofit that screens for shelter placement and facilitates rapid re-housing and supportive housing. Sidewalk and QV staff usually interview applicants first. Applicants must pass a drug and background test whereby they are not found to have any outstanding warrants, recent violent incidents, or be sex offenders. The Resident Council's Executive Committee must also conduct an interview with applicants. The typical stay is at QV is 2 years. People move on for a variety of reasons, rarely including village expulsion, but in other cases for more positive reasons such as a growing family, a job, or a move to other opportunities. Ten out of the original thirty tenants remain.

The city of Portland and Dignity Village have a contract that is renewed on a biannual basis that dictates the village's purpose and operation guidelines. Through this contract, village occupancy is limited to 60 persons that allows for additional 10 person during a severe winter shelter overflow. At the time of interviews, the village housed 54 persons. In order to live at Dignity Village, interested persons must go through an application process and interviews with the Village Intake Committee. While on the waitlist for a unit, interested persons must agree to the community's ideals and contribute with a certain number of sweat equity hours. Once admitted, the new resident must complete an Entrance Agreement which clearly states that Dignity Village is not considered permanent housing and residents are allowed to live at the site for a 2 year period while showing signs that they have a transition plan to find housing after Dignity Village. Although this is stipulated by the city's contract, the village has negotiated the 2 year period where if a person takes on a leadership role, they are allowed to reside for a longer time. Unlike traditional shelters, the village is able to house couples and pets.

At Opportunity Village, residents' stay is not limited to a specific time, however they are expected to adhere to their community agreement and prepare a personal plan to eventually obtain permanent housing. Admission to the village is based on several criteria including willingness to participate in the intentional community living and governance model and

submission to a criminal background check. Applicants must be over 18 years old, currently unhoused and willing to go through the interview process with the resident vetting committee.

Nickelsville site stands out because it can admit persons under the age of 18 who are accompanied by their parents or guardians. Two units are set aside for families. Currently, sixteen adults and six children reside on site. Admission to the site is based on two waitlists, an internal one managed by Nickelsville where persons living at two other city-sanctioned encampments, Ballard and Othello, may apply. The other external waitlist is managed by LIHI. Seniority usually dictates eligibility when a spot opens up at the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site. Persons who wish to live at the site must go through a vetting process with the Resident Leadership Board. There is a zero tolerance policy for sex offenders, violence, illegal drug use, alcohol consumption, racial epithets, and improper contacting of donors. In addition to abiding to a code of conduct and contributing \$90 a month towards utilities, residents must also contribute with volunteer hours to the maintenance of the camp and participate in community meetings. Their hosting religious institution does not require them to attend services.

### 5.2.2 Governance

While all tiny house villages were found to be self-governing, some variations exists depending on the founding community visions and outside partnerships. Each village has a resident board with a range of positions that deal with finances, operation, site security, event planning, and external relations. In order to live at each site, residents must agree to a code of conduct and provide a contribution to the village. These codes of conduct usually entail zero tolerance rules for drugs, alcohol, and violence in addition to mandatory community meeting attendance. All villages except Quixote require volunteer hours or sweat equity contributions.

Quixote Village calls itself a self-supporting community, instead of a self-governed one. According to the program manager on site, Quixote's nonprofit, Panza, has assumed the legal responsibilities of a landlord under state law whereby residents agree to pay rent, instead of an arrangement of contributions. Therefore Panza is responsible for the village's finances, operations, and admission. Quixote's Resident Council meets on a weekly basis and make decisions regarding special activities, the maintenance of public spaces, and any emerging

community concerns. In addition, village residents are assisted by two full time staff, a program manager and resident advocate.

The nonprofit organizations of Opportunity Village and the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site help the villages with finances, contracts with the city, and intervening in village disagreements if necessary. For example the resident board member interviewed at the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site reported that their monthly utility fee is paid to their sponsoring nonprofit, LIHI, who then makes payments to the city of Seattle. It was found that self-governance models are continually evolving as well. In the case of Opportunity Village, an external Oversight Committee was added within the last year in order to provide operational support to the village's resident council. As opposed to Quixote Village where conflict is managed mostly with staff, Opportunity Village and the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union residents have a say on suspensions of evictions of other members who have broken the rules. So far this has worked very well at Opportunity Village and keeps cost low in terms of by not hiring full time staff to arbitrate disagreements, as one board member notes:

The community governance model works and it works very well. It turns out homeless folk want to live in a decent place just the same as much as anyone else. And in fact they do a better job in terms of self-policing. And you know there are some gray areas. One of the rules is no persistent disruptive behavior. What the heck does that mean? There's frequently some conflict over you know where to draw the line in a way does someone go too far.

Dignity Village, on the other hand, maintains a model of self-governance that is tied to financial self-sufficiency as well. The village prides itself on its independence from the city of Portland. At one time, some camp residents ran a hot dog stand called Dignity Dogs. The sale of chopped firewood is the community's current small business which helps pay utility bills. The site's program support specialist spoke to the challenges that self-governance can pose when residents must take on multiple responsibilities:

There are some ongoing conversations about what the village wants to continue to have as their responsibility. For a long time they [residents] were really adamant that they would like the bookkeeping and the money collection and to be left to an outside person like me. Just because historically that's been a huge source of conflict. They had the experience where an untrustworthy person has been elected to office and

steals everything and the village falls behind on their bills. They do have a pretty challenging mechanism for changing the bylaws...And I haven't pushed it too much. It's not a huge need. They just think that it's too hard to get the participation threshold.

Dignity Village's resident council must also act as a judicial body. The program specialist indicated that the village has been viewed by the public in the past as being too permissive of drug and alcohol use. However in the earlier years, evictions and the enforcement of zero tolerance rules were more commonly held by original residents. These judgments have become more infrequent and currently temporary bans for a week or a month are used, however the program support specialist indicated that infractions or disputes tend to just "blow over". Despite Quixote Village's zero tolerance rules for drugs and alcohol, village staff try to help residents in connecting them with supportive services off-site so that they can remain in the village.

When asked about their perceptions of the villages' governance structures and entry processes, both planners and city social service staff were aware of the model but explained that they are not involved in its execution unless it breaches part of their contract for the site. The planning of the village can place self-governance at the forefront however its execution is difficult and constantly evolving. Although each village adopts a different type of self-governance model, one common challenge they all confront is maintaining participation and deciding upon the grey areas on conflict.

### 5.2.3 Social Services

Although residents at Opportunity Village, Dignity Village, and 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union are encouraged to develop a transition plan into more permanent housing, not all sites seem to have supportive services funded to the same degree. For instance, at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union, the city of Seattle provides funds to LIHI, the administrative nonprofit, to provide access to a caseworker by appointment or weekly visit on site. It is required by their contract that this access be available. As previously mentioned, Dignity Village has a regularly on-site social service staff member through JOIN, which is paid by the city, to help connect residents to services. Opportunity Village has the lightest version of on-site support services where a social work student volunteers their time. This position is not funded through the city. Although they are not directly paid by the city or

county, the resident advocate and program manager at Quixote Village fulfill a similar role in providing residents with connections to social services.

Other support provided by the cities include the Seattle Public Library program to offer Wi-Fi to village residents at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union. Social service professionals have admitted that these services are not considered anything more than referral services. The question becomes to what level are more supportive services needed in this housing model? Are more intensive support services useful in a model that prizes self-governance? At the moment, there are no best practices for the operation of this specific housing type, therefore comparisons tend to be made along the lines of existing forms of homeless assistance such as emergency shelter and transitional housing. As shown in the discussion about the village's self-governance, the responsibility to look over the financial, operational, and social aspects of a village can be daunting when residents are trying to manage their personal wellness, employment, social services, and relationships. While many advocates highlight the low cost to build a unit, this is a cost that is assessed for a one-time build that does not consider the time and energy spent by residents to keep the spartan units warm and in a decent state of repair.

## 5.2.4 Community Support

Each village has a complex history of public support and opposition. All four village representatives mentioned the receipt of volunteer hours, financial contributions, and in-kind donations for the building and operation of the site. However the public's reception of the villages in their current locations has not always been welcoming. A city of Seattle staff member noted that when discussing the concept of sanctioned encampments (of which the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site is considered) that the receipt from the general public was positive, however more opposition was mounted when specific locations were proposed. Even with substantial backing from government and private funders, a county staff member reported similar conditions for Quixote Village:

As an advocate for homeless services I always am concerned when they try to place these properties and these developments in commercial areas as opposed to residential areas. I think one of them is that there's such a NIMBY attitude in many places that it's a real challenge to find a place for services and buildings and

facilities of any type.

In order to alleviate tensions that may arise with the community, village representatives mentioned two strategies they have used in the past. The first strategy that relates to development is adopting an incremental attitude towards planning the sites. As the board member from Opportunity Village explained, they had originally made a proposal for a village of 120 people at a site located near a school. They reached out to the parents and school administration but were met with intense opposition. It was too big of a dream for a first pilot. The group eventually went on to start Opportunity Village with a group of 15 people and incrementally built the village with volunteers.

A second strategy is to be a good neighbor by not only by being aware of how the village shares neighborhood spaces in front of the villages, on sidewalks or in the street. Despite being located in an industrial area, the villages have still received concerns from nearby businesses about housing a formerly homeless community. All villages welcome visitors and encourage members of the general public to learn about their community model. Some villagers participate in larger debates about homeless services and attend council meetings, thereby leading a more public voice to tiny house villages for the homeless. All of the villages in this report have websites hosted by their nonprofit sponsor that provide extensive information about the physical and organization design of each site. The Village Collaborative website hosts a library of resources on tiny house villages nationwide, tracks their development, and allows persons to advertise their interest in starting a village in their own community. Village communities are quite open about sharing knowledge and some nonprofits such as SquareOne and Community Frameworks, who works with Quixote Village, have developed blogs, reports, and websites with information on how to develop a tiny house village for homeless individuals and families. SquareOne in particular is working on providing consulting services to other communities. All this demonstrates a mounting effort to legitimize tiny house villages as a viable housing option and increase public exposure.

## 5. 3 Villages in the Housing and Homeless Assistance Systems

Each case study presents its own system of conditions that have shaped how the tiny house villages are implemented. All interviewees connected the tiny house villages to housing affordability in their cities. Their concerns is valid. As Figure 18 shows, all cities in this study had renter populations of 40% or greater who were cost burdened by their housing. Moreover, three of the four cities had a quarter of their renter populations severely cost burdened by their housing, meaning that they spent over 50% of their income on housing costs.

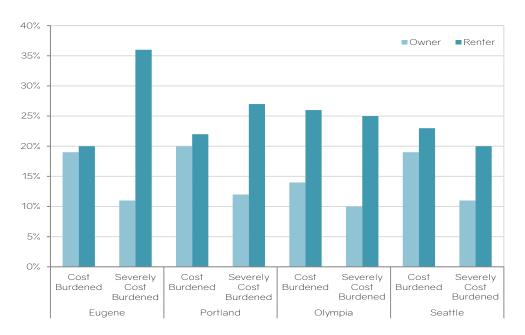


Figure 18. Cost Burdened and Severely Cost Burdened Households (2009–2014)

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Some interviewees noted that the ambiguous nature and purpose of the villages has led to some confusion as to which specific housing goals the villages address for their communities. As one planner said,

I personally think that housing agencies need to look at a more cost effective way and the sheer number that they are [tiny house villages] able to accomplish should outweigh that. I just think you can't have that conversation without having the other side: is the priority really about housing people and providing affordability? Or is it about homeownership? I mean the least at least get real about what the issue is.

The following section seeks to dissect how planners, social service departments, and village nonprofits characterize their village housing services within the broader housing system. The housing system is also linked with the homeless assistance system which is characterized by the continuum of care described in earlier chapters of this report. Although on the surface it may appear that tiny house villages for homeless populations can be simply categorized as either transitional or permanent housing, this report argues that there is more nuance to each village's identity that policymakers should understand before deciding on adopting this model. It is intimately tied to community demands, local land conditions, and existing housing and social service initiatives.

Even within village communities there is some debate as how to categorize the tiny house model. As defined by federal government, transitional housing programs provide individuals and families from shelter systems with supportive housing with the goal to eventually stabilize their situation so that they can obtain permanent housing. Support services might help overcome barriers such as obtaining documentation, finding employment, addressing substance abuse or mental illness, assisting in family reunification, facilitating financial independence, and helping in cases of domestic violence. Transitional housing programs can be site or tenant based and are limited to 24 hours of housing and support services. When considering that many village residents stay on-site for 6 months to 2 years, there is some resemblance with the residency stay and transitional housing. However none of these have the legal time limitations of federal housing because they do not receive funds for transitional housing from the federal government.

Opportunity Village and Dignity Village most closely resemble transitional housing, but do not necessarily meet HUD's habitability standards (Table 7), supportive services, and tenure qualifications. Dignity Village has a provision with the city that limits stays to 2 years unless the person takes on a position of leadership in the village and it is technically zoned as a transitional encampment. However some Dignity Village residents find the term transitional offensive and consider the village their permanent home. A report prepared by a consulting firm for the Portland Housing Bureau noted that a more appropriate term for Dignity Village's housing model would be "temporary housing". Opportunity Village is a self-described transitional micro-unit village, however residents' transition plans are not monitored by any entity and

have only received help in volunteer support. Opportunity Village is aware of this, as one board member put it there was a question of a transition to what? They realized that there was a gap in affordable and low income housing into which villagers could transition into and therefore developed Emerald Village, a permanent tiny house neighborhood that is currently under development.

Table 7. HUD Habitability Standard for Emergency Shelters

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Be structurally sound and protect from the elements

Be accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, Rehabilitation Act, and Fair Housing Act

Provide adequate space for sleep and belongings

Provide natural or mechanical ventilation

Have a contaminant-free water supply

Have properly operating sanitary facilities

Provide heating, cooling, and electricity

Contain a suitable space for food preparation

Provide one working smoke detector for all units and public areas and a 2<sup>nd</sup> mean to exit buildings

Nevertheless, not adhering to the federal government's characterization of transitional housing may not be viewed as a detrimental factor for the villages, especially during a time when the federal government is lowering its support for transitional housing programs. Through the Family Options Study which compared homeless families exiting shelter systems to different forms of housing, HUD found that families with priority entries to transitional housing services fared the same as those who just has access to usual housing and homeless assistance. In addition, the study shows that rapid re-housing is the most cost effective intervention. The average monthly cost for emergency shelter services for families was found to be \$4,819,

followed by transitional housing programs at \$2,706. In comparison, rapid re-housing programs cost \$880 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016c). The villages tend to subscribe to a low-barrier philosophy that is associated with rapid re-housing efforts.

Although many of the tiny house villages invoke Housing First policies, their entry requirements seem to emulate more housing readiness programs by requiring sobriety and criminal background checks. Some of the interviewed human service professionals have indicated concern that a vetting process for applicants through village resident committees does not allow for low barrier entry into housing because the applicant can be selected or rejected based on personal reasons such as willingness to participate in village culture. Village members are self-selecting for wanting to live under established terms. All villages except Quixote Village, place the authority to accept applicants primarily in the hands of the resident councils.

It ought to be acknowledged that HUD housing qualifications for Housing First programs cannot be expected of a community that is working with limited resources to support each other. Since these villages do not typically have full time staff who can provide support services around the clock in case of crisis, the villages must use rules in order to prevent conflict and self-manage. Even in the case of the most formal village, Quixote Village must still place these conditions for sobriety because they do not have the 24/7 staff capacity which is different from typical permanent supportive housing, according to staff. One village staff person indicated that although these conditions for entry existed, that they also helped force persons to become sober once admitted to the village.

Similarly, the requirement to contribute with sweat equity is crucial to the intentional community model provided scarce resources. Although federal public housing models requiring residents to volunteer time have been criticized for condescending and punitive attitudes, the requirement for sweat equity is not a top-down imposition but rather a key component in building a community. In the cases studied, volunteer hours are flexible forms of payment that can be lifted if a person is employed or tailored to the ability of the resident. Living in the villages can be a good learning experience for someone who has not been part of the formal housing market for some time and needs to adjust to the concept of an exchange value for their housing

needs. It provides a community of peers who value each other as contributors.

While some villages such as Quixote Village have a more well-established identity as permanent supportive housing, others such as the Nickelsville 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site don't even enter the housing spectrum. 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union residents consider themselves homeless and reject the label of transitional housing or emergency shelter. It seems that in this context, the nonprofit group LIHI is the only actor using the word tiny house to describe the units while recognizing the unsheltered status of the residents. The city's social service staff take a similar view, as previously stated where they consider the dwelling units "homeless huts" and not dwellings. Staff does not believe that the current tiny house village model in Seattle is responsive to homelessness because it does not meet the typical standard of living needs of individuals and families. The units do not meet HUD habitability standards that are applied to emergency shelters or permanent housing that would require plumbing in the units, sufficient ventilation, smoke detectors, etc. The implementation of a formal permanent housing village like Quixote Village in the Seattle context was considered an ineffective model for the city due to land demands. Olympia does not face the same pressures as Seattle in terms of limited land availability which in turn, affect costs to produce housing. Seattle staff expressed that the development of low income and affordable housing needed to be done in order to accommodate multilevel buildings that are not on the fringe of industrial spaces, but fully integrated in neighborhoods and allow for common spaces, meeting rooms, and staff offices. They saw the appropriateness of tiny houses best incorporate through the private for-profit housing market via infill.

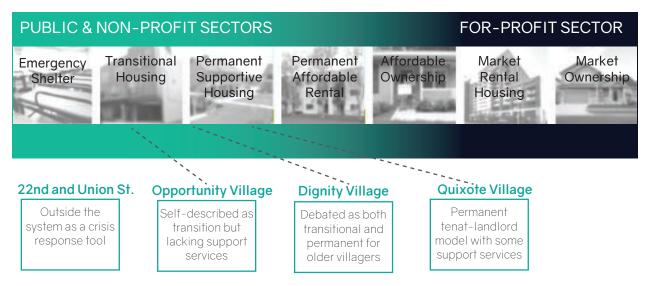


Figure 19. Case Study Positions in Housing System

The magnitude of each city's homeless crisis also affects how tiny house solutions are characterized. For example Thurston County is in the process of determining what methods are most cost effective for housing strategies. They know that rapid re-housing is being advocated broadly however it may not fit every population. Although the county's homeless population of around 400 seems small compared to other metro areas, it is a big challenge for the Olympia community. Olympia also has persons from Western State Hospital who are released as former mental patients into the community as homeless persons and the transitional housing model is the one that best fits. A county representative reported that Olympia is going against the national trend because they need the teaching that occurs in a transitional housing environment for mentally ill persons. They need more supportive permanent housing facilities that would provide even greater supports than Quixote Village offers in order to have options for these individuals to transition into.

Seattle's homeless crisis is that of larger emergency proportions which is evident in the deployment of homeless huts and encampment legalization processes. The city's housing plan managed by the Office of Housing, aims to increase the affordable stock by 3,000 units. About 30-40% of units will have a homeless set aside, however compared to the need of currently 3,000 unsheltered people, it is a challenge. Staff estimates that maybe 100 units per year might

be built over the next eight years. This isn't enough to address the demand. Only one or two units turn over each month for persons to move into designated homeless units. Seattle has shifted from transitional to permanent housing and invested more in rapid re-housing rental in the private market outside of permanent supportive housing. City staff have seen success with this model so far but the needs are still great.

We're able to do that with folks who don't have as high of service need as folks who qualify for permanent support. That seems to be successful. Yet at the same time, we still have a tight rental market. So people could be looking for housing for several months before they are actually able to get in. We've had homeless veterans with a voucher for a rental unit shopping for upwards of 6 months at a time while living unsheltered.

As this section demonstrates, the degree to which tiny house villages can impact the homeless assistance and housing systems was found to be different for each context. In each case, there was an explicit connection to either the local real estate market or changes in social services that shaped the perception of the villages as a long-term solution or an emergency response.

## 5. 4 Planning Response

Although this study emphasizes a planning perspective, tiny house villages for homeless populations involve actors from the human services, community development, and political realms, often in more dominant roles. Professionals from community development and social services departments were able to offer more comprehensive histories of the villages' development and funding. They were best able to answer questions on their local governments' initial involvement with the implementation of each village and any subsequent supports delivered once the villages were up and running. When the trajectories of each village in this study are traced in terms of different phases of their development and operations, we see that in general, the local planning offices participate during the site planning stages (Figure 20). They might have already been working on general housing affordability policies on an ongoing basis. However all four cases seem to have spurred discussions about land use and zoning policies pertinent to micro-unit housing.

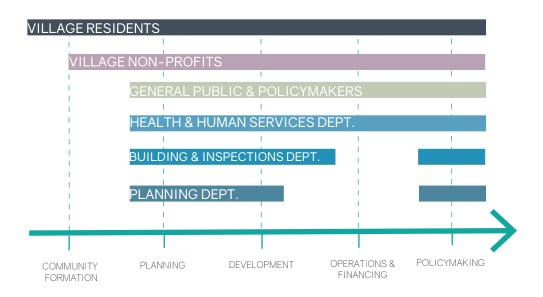


Figure 20. Actor Participation throughout Village Implementation Process

Each of the four cities examined in this report manifest many similarities but also many differences through tools and attitudes that were adopted by planning departments at different phases of each village's development. For example Opportunity Village and Quixote Village were legally established through conditional use permits linked to homeless services. Dignity Village was zoned as a transitional campground and Nickelsville's 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site did not require any zoning changes because of its location on religious property. Provided the community support and political commitment to the projects, all villages were able to overcome zoning challenges. This is not to say that the process of applying for a zoning change or conditional use permit was simple. Being that the villages were a different type of multifamily housing arrangement focused on persons who have other non-shelter support needs, a great amount of time and effort was required in educating the public on the villages. Also as discussed in the Case Study Profiles section, several of these were produced from offshoots of the Occupy movement or as a reaction to changes in camping ordinances.

The more difficult regulatory item was found to be building up to local and state building codes. Several challenges emerge including requirements for insulation that are not in keeping with the home's size, staircase design to access loft areas, minimum room sizes, and detached kitchen and restroom facilities from the dwelling units. The last two requirements seem to be of greatest concern when the villages were built. Since then, the 2015 International Residential Code (IRC) has been revised to require at least one room of 70 sq. ft. or more instead of the previously established 120 sq. ft. minimum room size. It ought to be noted that although the IRC may provide an updated code, its enforcement depends upon each state adopting the code and its municipalities in turn enforcing these standards as well.

In the case of Opportunity Village, the units are well below the minimum room requirement when they were built in 2013, however they were able to negotiate with the city's Building and Inspections Department. They made an agreement where if the village could not meet the code currently adopted by the state, that it would build at a higher code standard. Therefore they were able to build their units to 2015 IRC standards. Since then, the Oregon Residential Specialty code has issued a notice that builders are able to use the 2015 IRC code. Both Seattle and Olympia have already adopted the 2015 International Residential Code. Many

codes cannot accommodate housing arrangements where the kitchen and restrooms are not in the same physical structure. Olympia had to revise the definition and criteria of single room occupancy units into its code in order to allow for the construction of Quixote Village. This in turn was of great benefit to the village because they were able to apply for HUD housing subsidies as units legalized within the current building code (Community Frameworks, 2015).

In keeping with the general reasons why tiny houses are used in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, the houses' low costs, quick construction period, and portability were all listed as reasons for using this form. However one city staff tempered these benefits by pointing out that the units do not always meet federal, state, and municipal habitability standards such as utilities within the units, multiple exits, ventilation, supervision or food care, and monitoring of fire alarms (Table 7). The villages do not meet the minimum standards for emergency shelters, much less for permanent supportive housing. This is true for all sites except, Quixote Village. As shown in the previous chapter, Dignity Village and Opportunity Village units do not have electricity or running water in the houses. If they can afford it or receive donations, residents use propane heaters and some have solar panels to help charge small items. The 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union site does not have running water in the units but does have an electrical hookup. Nevertheless, the site's representative said that the units do not have adequate insulation and ventilation which has led to mold in just a year's time.

Another concern that was also voiced by planners and village nonprofit staff was that of disproportionate System Development Charges (SDC). Also known as Development Impact Fees, SDC are fees collected on new developments in order to help fund the newly created demand for services and capital works. These can be applied towards transportation, parks, water, and sanitation maintenance and improvements. SDC schemes differ by locality however tiny house advocates have identified that many fee structures do not make enough distinctions for smaller dwellings that tend to use less resources, as these tend to pay the same amount of fees as larger single-family dwellings. Tiny houses may not only use less water and drainage resources, but as lifestyle choices, they may also house a segment of the population that tends to cycle and have lower levels of car ownership. By considering more proportionate SDC, municipalities can help lower the cost to building more "missing middle" small housing. The

adoption of SDC that are more sensitive to the lower impacts of tiny houses would also greatly reduce the development costs for nonprofits trying to establish tiny house villages for homeless populations.

Several city staff and village representatives also mentioned that the general friendliness of their city's zoning codes for tiny houses in general was important in solidifying support for these villages. It was necessary to understand that this building form is legal in a variety of settings. Table 8 shows that some cities already have zoning codes in places that allow for legal tiny houses in certain configurations such as accessory dwelling units (ADU) or cottage clustered zoning. An age old housing accommodation, ADU are typically accessory garage apartments, small backyard homes, or basement apartments that are accessory to a main dwelling that could be a single-family home or duplex. The use of ADU housing has become so popular that in Portland one out of ten newly built housing units was an ADU in 2014 (Andersen, 2014). All cities in this report accommodate ADU, and only Olympia explicitly advises a 200 square foot minimum (Table 8). Nevertheless one of the planners interviewed noted that not many people were aware that bylaws permitting these types of units already existed in their city. Another city staff commented that these legal forms of incorporating tiny houses bring up concerns about densification which can sometimes be politically contentious.

Overall planning was found to be a facilitator in the site planning and development phases of each village's implementation. As political will and public support were present, the villages were able to successfully obtain a legalized land use status. However when asked about using this model in the future, planners and human services staff hesitated, bringing up the question of its utility for a city's specific needs. Village representatives tended to be more enthusiastic about expanding this model to other communities.

Table 8. Zoning Laws Pertaining to Tiny Homes

Source: Municipal Codes of Portland, Eugene, Seattle, Olympia

	Portland	Eugene	Seattle	Olympia
Accessory Dwelling Unit	One ADU is allowed per residential lot and cannot exceed 800 sq. ft. or 75% of the primary house's living area (whichever is less). The ADU must match the primary unit's exterior design.	One ADU is allowed per residential lot and cannot exceed 800 sq. ft. The property owner must reside in either the primary unit or the ADU.	One detached ADU is allowed per residential lot and cannot exceed 800 sq. ft. in a single-family zone and 650 sq. ft. in a lowrise zone. The property owner must reside in either the primary unit or the ADU and one off-street parking space must be provided.	One ADU is allowed per residential lot and cannot exceed 800 sq. ft. a minimum of 200 sq. ft. is advised. The property owner must reside in either the primary unit or the ADU and one offstreet parking space must be provided.
Cottage Clustering Zones	Courtyard and cottage configurations are allowed under current design standards and multifamily R-1 and R-2 zones.	No current ordinance.	Seattle's code for single family residential zones allows for clustered cottage housing in RSL/TC where individual units do not exceed 650 sq. ff. in their lot coverage.	Olympia's code for residential districts allows for clustered cottage housing in RLI, R4-8, and R6-12 where individual units do not exceed 800 sq. ft.
Minimum Lot Size for Residential Single Family Zones	3,000 sq. ft.	4,500 sq. ft.	5,000 sq. ft.	5,000 sq. ft.

## 6. LESSONS LEARNED

The following chapter provides a synthesis of key findings from interviews with village representative and local government staff. Planners, policymakers, and communities might take into account these lessons when considering the development of a tiny house village in their city.

1. In order to understand the effectiveness of this housing model, it is important to clearly establish how tiny house villages can be integrated into the local housing and homeless assistance systems.

Why is the identification of tiny houses in the current housing system so important? Is it not antithetical to strictly define the use of these villages towards a housing system when organic, grassroots growth seems so crucial to the existence of these models? The concern with defining the services that these villages provide stems from a need to measure outcomes in order for service providers and policy makers to allocate their scarce funding in keeping with need, urgency, or greatest priority. A report prepared by an outside consulting firm for the Portland Housing Bureau on Dignity Village best describes this problem, "The difference in their perspectives make it difficult to know how to measure the Village's success. If we are comparing it to emergency shelter or the street, the yardstick is very different than if we are comparing it to Transitional Housing programs or co-housing" (Kristina Smock Consulting 2010).

The analysis in this report identifies two ways in which the physical design of tiny house villages can be adopted by local governments in their homeless assistance systems. It ought to be noted that these two forms are identified based on the case studies examined in this paper, however it is possible that with further review of tiny house villages in other contexts that more variations could be included. First, it was found that tiny houses could be used as basic shelter that is one step above tent living in emergency cases (such as the 22nd and Union site). Provided that it can take massive amounts of funding and years to build site-based emergency shelter, the use of tiny houses as an informal version of emergency shelter can meet the immediate needs of places like Seattle with high homeless mortality rates. These units do

not meet the federal definitions for emergency shelters, rather they are a crisis response tool that should be coupled with increasing rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing capacity.

As in the case of Quixote Village, tiny houses can also be used by local governments as a form of permanent supportive housing. However if used as permanent supportive housing, more social service supports and less barriers to entry must be adopted. Transitional housing is not included in these recommendations because the term housing implies a habitability standard that is not present in the more transitional forms that were examined in this report, such as Opportunity Village. The two recommended forms are based on the physical design attributes of the model which provide the benefits of being cost-efficient, easily mobile, and environmentally sustainable. In assessing the utility of tiny house villages for their cities, an inevitable question that will arise is the model's efficiency when compared to already established housing and homeless assistance solutions. Tiny house villages must continue to provide information and data on their projects in order to formulate evaluative comparisons with existing housing types and provide continuous recommendations for improvements if they want this model to be more widely adopted.

# 2. The intentional community living model is of greater importance than design. Tiny house village design facilitates the intentional living model.

The tiny house villages examined in this report are intentional living communities bound by the socioeconomic identities of their residents. Unlike other forms of subsidized and public housing, tiny house villages have a unifying set of values that evolve from an understanding of homeless experiences. The past homeless experiences of their residents may have been characterized by shelter insecurity, violence, physical health concerns, mental health concerns, and substance abuse. When local governments consider tiny house villages, they must not only consider the building form as the chief component but also understand the intentional community living model of existing communities. The village representatives conveyed the notion that villagers are not just seeking a right to shelter in a tiny house but a right to exercise choice in their living

arrangements that allows for dignity and safety in their village community.

This paper argues that the intentional living component is the key feature that has helped these communities evolve from tent cities to their current village state. In establishing a vision and set of values that are created and practiced by all members, the group is strengthened in its internal identity and purpose. Village residents play the primary role in the physical and organization production and maintenance of their housing, unlike other forms of low-income housing where residents are considered clients. One characteristic that seemed to be intimately connected to the intentionality of the villages was the degree of autonomy in self-governance and self-management that each site exercised. For Dignity Village, outside financial assistance had been viewed in some instances as a threat to the community's independence. While tiny house villages are akin to co-housing communities, they are low income residents that do not have the financial independence of middle-income co-housing communities. This means that tiny house villages must work with different actors to obtain resources and are therefore subject to the requirements and availability of their sponsoring nonprofits, outside donors, and government bodies. The implication is that while the intentional living component is essential to these communities, its practice is highly variable as it depends on both the internal conditions of the village residents and external forces or actors.

Recently a study was commissioned by HUD with the University of California at Berkeley to examine the tiny house villages in Oregon (Abarbanel et al., 2016). This signals a willingness to consider this housing model at the federal level which if followed through, could allow for local governments to have more funding avenues for alternative tiny housing. As discussed in this report, the requirements and self-selecting activities of the intentional living model of tiny house villages can conflict with the philosophy of low-barrier housing which the federal government supports. On the other hand, this is a differentiating aspect that makes these communities attractive to homeless individuals and families seeking a community living experience and peer support system.

# 3. Political will and public support are critical elements in the planning, development, and implementation of the villages.

With dedication, time, and open communication, tiny house village groups can overcome regulatory burdens. As all the cases in this study demonstrated, forming respectful and transparent relationships with local government departments, public officials, and the general public helped find creative solutions to building code requirements and zoning laws. Some of the more difficult hurdles were those of NIMBYism. As in the case of Opportunity Village, the first round of site selection was not successful due to its proximity to a school and the high number of units proposed. Although the group approached the situation in a transparent manner, the community had already formed opinions before hearing the group speak. Their willingness to reconsider the size and location of the village helped alleviate community concerns. All of the villages offer guided tours in order to help inform the public about their living model. While the outreach effort the tiny house villages is commendable, it also falls to the general public to learn about and accept the visibility of poverty and unsheltered populations.

# 4. Local land markets and public land inventories will affect the character of village housing and the villages' access to outside services.

Establishing a village site within a residential context that is close to services is extremely challenging due to a lack of available public land. Current villages are located in non-residential areas that are close to transit but not to other services. Accordingly, current villages are located in outskirts of cities away from services making it more challenging for persons to reside there. For instance when asked in a village survey what would be the greatest infrastructure improvement to their village, residents at Dignity Village said that a laundry facility is necessary on site. The closest laundromat is a couple of miles away and could be best reached by car or bus. The village's integration in the community is not only important from a service access position but also when considering how they can access employment opportunities.

Unless it is parkland, most vacant public land was reported to be in the form of utility easements or lots in industrial areas to be used for future facility expansion. The exception for Nickelsville's 22<sup>nd</sup> and Union St. site being located outside an industrial area was due to an

agreement with a church. If implemented as a crisis response, tiny house villages on religious and nonprofit properties already established in neighborhoods or mixed use areas could be a way to provide residents with greater access to amenities. However closer contact to amenities would presumably mean proximity to residential areas and their potential opposition. Provided the extreme conditions of rental markets in places like Seattle and parts of Portland, designing a low density tiny house village as a permanent supportive housing could be considered inefficient where the cost of land is high.

# 5. Urban planners have a role to exercise in the production and preservation of alternative low-income and affordable housing forms.

Planners are not tasked with the direct construction and financing of affordable and low income housing, however they are obligated to help both private and public actors meet these goals. In general, land use planners have a regulatory role. They must understand how the land use controls and zoning laws can constrict affordable housing while ensuring harmonious and safe development. For this reason, educating planners should occur by not only looking to new trends in the planning profession but also connecting with other professions on social policy, economic development, and housing. As previously mentioned in this report, social and human service departments were able to provide more in-depth information about the tiny house village case studies. In turn, planners reported that their work benefited from substantial collaboration with the social and human services department, the building code department, the city manager's office, and the mayor's office on these projects. They recognized that working with many actors on the implementation of villages demanded open knowledge sharing, cooperation, and a unified vision. In addition, planners may not be responsible for allocating funding for projects, however they must be aware of housing financing and the opportunities that can be applied to mixed use or residential development projects that cross their desks. Planning professionals have an obligation to educate themselves on these topics because their research and knowledge can help educate the public on how housing supply, quality, and location impact neighborhoods.

### 7. CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Limitations and Future Study

Although some answers have been provided in this paper based on the four case studies, much more can be done to better understand what type of position tiny house villages hold in cities and counties' housing systems for homeless populations. Due to the limited number of communities included in this study, the nascent nature of most tiny house villages in the United States, limitations on available data for residents outcomes, and the unique housing affordability and social service conditions of each place, this paper does not intend to assign a success measure for the tiny house villages against other types of housing for homeless populations. Measures of success must consider what questions or needs they try to answer. As a starting point, this paper attempts to initiate the conversation in the specific dimension of housing policy by asking where current examples of tiny house villages may or may not fit within the current housing system.

In addition to obtaining perspectives from village and local government staff, interviewing political officials could also add more richness to a future analysis. The political realm was explored through council and committee minutes, local news sources, and some academic literature however the importance of political will and public support was highlighted several times in all types of interviews. After learning about the conditions set forth by state legislatures and current advocacy efforts at this level, it would have been beneficial to have also included interviews with housing advocates and state and federal officials for their perspectives.

Another large gap in this report was the inclusion of resident voices on the success of their villages and relationships with their local governments. Information on resident's concerns was obtained through site staff. A discussion of the political, regulatory, and social conditions that allow this model to work in each of the four cities examined were provided, however no metrics on successful outcomes for residents are analyzed. Some pending questions about the model's effectiveness include: How many residents successfully obtain permanent housing? How do these rates compare to local transitional housing programs? What factors do they

describe as most helpful in their transition to permanent housing? What is the long-term cost of the dwelling units when repairs are considered? Is there a demand for these units compared to other types of supportive and transitional housing? As the findings from this report indicate, the villages do not seem to support overall low barrier entry policies due to the intentional living model. Therefore is there a place for federally subsidized intentional living communities of homeless individuals within a Housing First framework?

### 7.2 Conclusion

The goal of this research was to understand how planning facilitates the development and implementation of the tiny house villages for homeless populations in the cities of Portland, Eugene, Olympia, and Seattle. Planning for these sites was done in a reactive manner according to the political and social conditions of each case study. Overall, it was found that when political will was cultivated and public support was rallied, the villages and their managing nonprofits were able to successfully negotiate for allowances with building codes and zoning laws.

While trying to answer the main research question, it was found that there is some ambiguity in how tiny house villages fit the traditional housing and homeless assistance systems. Much of this report concentrated on characterizing the different villages in order to form an idea of exactly to what local planning was responding. Each village was found to fulfill a very specific need for its community's response to homelessness and housing affordability. Only Quixote Village was found to closely fit a formal category of permanent supportive housing within the federal homeless assistance system. Dignity Village and Opportunity Village were found to be linked to a form of transitional housing and a fourth case, the 22nd and Union site, is best described as an emergency response, not housing.

The intentional community model was found to be of greatest importance when understanding why tiny house villages were valued by residents and village staff because it allowed for self-management and peer support. Similar to co-housing arrangements, tiny house villages could produce a very homogeneous living experience by being a self-selected group. Cities considering the use of tiny house villages must understand that this is one of

the core components of the model. Even the most formalized case emerged from a group of individuals of similar experiences and shared values. In the absence of best practices for tiny house villages, this report sought to open the conversation on how we could begin to imagine these communities fitting within the current housing and homeless assistance system. The research presented still grapples with how planners can exercise their responsibility to plan for the most vulnerable by expanding opportunity for all persons and a diversity of living situations.

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### APPFNDIX A

### Interview Guide

### Village Representative Interviews

#### **CORE QUESTIONS**

- 1- How involved was the city/ planning at the time of planning for the village X?
- a. How involved was the city/ planning with site selection?
- 2- How involved is the city currently with the operations of the site?
- a. Do they provide employment, health, or monetary support?
- 3- To what extent do you think city bylaws and zoning codes are flexible and supportive in establishing the village?
- 4- Do you consider the village to be a transitional or permanent service? Do you consider your perception to coincide with the city's idea of the service you provide?
- a. If there is an agreement on the transitional nature, then what is the next step in providing housing? Has the city shown support in next steps?

#### TRANSITION QUESTIONS

In order to better understand the relationship between your organization and the city I would like to know more about the needs and functions of the village.

- 1- How does the village operate with regards to funding?
- 2- What is the land ownership structure? Do residents rent or own?
- 3- What is the demographic breakdown of current residents? Any significant trends over the years? In terms of family structures?
- 4- How many residents currently reside and what is your usual occupancy rate?
- 5- How long to residents stay? Where do they go after?
- 6- How are residents admitted? Is recruitment conducted?

#### FINAL QUESTIONS

- 1- If you were to design the village again, what would you include and what would you avoid?
- 2- What are the next steps for the village in terms of expansion, services, recruitment, etc.?

### Planner/ Government Staff Interviews

#### **CORE QUESTIONS**

- 1- What is your role in the planning process for village X?
- 2- How involved were you (or the planning department) in planning for village X?
- 3- How involved are you (or the planning department) currently in the operations and future of village X?
- 4- How flexible are your zoning ordinances, building codes, and bylaws to accommodate these villages?
- 5- Does your city provide an active role in helping the villages with housing or do you support them in other ways with services?
- 6- Do you think that these villages are transitional? If so, what do you think are the next steps? Who should provide subsequent support?

### TRANSITION QUESTIONS

- 1- Were you involved in the site selection for the village? Do you know its history?
- 2- What was the main criteria for site selection of the village?
- 3- What is your understanding of the services provided by the NGOs in the village? FINAL QUESTIONS
- 1- If you were to design the village again, what would you include and what would you avoid?
- 2- What do you think are the next steps for the village?
- 3- Do you see any implications for changes in municipal bylaws through this experience?