Centralized Data Systems on Affordable Housing

Strategy description

Centralized data reporting systems that contain information on housing activity, vacant land, homeownership funds, housing needs, zoning ordinances, and other types of affordable housing data can help developers, renters, homebuyers, lenders, and municipal planners, and government housing officials in their efforts to provide and preserve affordable housing.

Target population

The direct users of the centralized data systems are local planners, advocates, and developers who are trying to anticipate and address housing needs in their jurisdictions. The ultimate beneficiaries are the households in the community that may have increased access to suitable, affordable housing because better-planned activities result from improved access to information.

How the strategy is administered

Vermont Housing Data is maintained by a collaborative of Vermont's housing community. The Florida clearinghouse is maintained by the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing at the University of Florida.

How the strategy is funded

The Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse is jointly funded by the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (Florida Housing Trust Fund) and the Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing at the University of Florida. Other centralized data reporting systems are funded by local or state government agencies.

Extent of use of the strategy

Limited use.

Examples of locations where the strategy is being used

- Vermont Housing Data is a public website that contains an abundance of housing-related information, including: housing profiles for all of Vermont's towns, villages, cities, and other municipalities; a directory of all types of affordable rental housing; a home mortgage calculator; an affordable housing needs assessment guide; rural development property information; and links to important players in the Vermont housing market.

- The Florida clearinghouse provides data on housing supply, affordable housing needs, assisted housing, special needs housing, workforce housing, population and demographics, as well as planning tools that communities and researchers can use to assess local needs and evaluate housing options.

- The Miami-Dade County Department of Planning and Zoning housing data website provides listings of government-assisted housing including federal, state, and local programs.

- A rental housing data clearinghouse is underway for Cook County, IL. Led by the Real Estate Center at DePaul University, the clearinghouse will include data on rental housing preservation needs, periodic reports on the rental market, and a risk assessment model that will determine neighborhood vulnerability to affordable rental housing losses.

Pros and cons to using the strategy and/or types of markets where the strategy is more or less effective

Pros:

- Assists many parties in the housing market in achieving their missions. Information facilitates improved planning, may help developers identify buildable lots and locate markets with housing demand, assist renters and homebuyers in locating assistance programs and available units, and help affordable housing organizations reach their target populations.

Cons:

- The strategy does not directly produce or preserve units of affordable housing.

Sources of information about the strategy

- Vermont Housing Data V2 website: http://www.housingdata.org/index.php

- Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse website:
  http://flhousingdata.shimberg.ufl.edu/AHI_introduction.html

- Miami-Dade County Department of Planning and Zoning, "Housing Data" website:
  http://www.miamidade.gov/planzone/hdc_home.asp

- "The Preservation Compact: A Rental Housing Strategy For Cook County," available at:
  http://www.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7BB0386CE3-8B29-4162-8098-E466FB856794%7D/BROCHURE.PDF

Contact information

Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse:
M.E. Rinker, Sr.
School of Building Construction
College of Design, Construction & Planning
University of Florida
203 Rinker Hall
P.O. Box 115703
Gainesville, FL 32611-5703
352-273-1192
stroh@ufl.edu

or fhdc-comments@shimberg.ufl.edu

Vacant Building Registry

Strategy description

Many cities require owners of vacant buildings to register their vacant property within an established time frame from the date that the property becomes vacant and periodically thereafter. Some cities require that owners also implement a maintenance plan for vacant buildings in order to remedy any public nuisance problems and prevent further deterioration. Owners also may be required to pay a periodic fee for each vacant building that they have registered. The fee acts as an incentive for owners to sell their vacant buildings or to maintain and occupy them.

Owners may be offered education on measures they can take to prevent deterioration and to ensure that their vacant or abandoned buildings are safe and secure. Owners may also be referred to developers who might be interested in buying their property or to agencies that may be able to offer funds to stabilize and rehabilitate properties.

History of the strategy

Albany, NY may have been the first city to implement a vacant building registry, in 2000.

Target population

Direct impact: Provides incentives for building owners to maintain or sell vacant properties.

Indirect impact: Increases the housing stock for renters and homeowners, as building owners are encouraged to sell or fill vacant properties to avoid future vacant building registration costs.

How the strategy is administered

- Local governmental bodies pass legislation that requires owners to register their vacant buildings. The registry is administered by a governmental agency. For example, In Albany, NY, the Vacant Building Committee is led by the Fire Department's Deputy Chief for Buildings and Codes and also includes representatives from numerous city offices.[153]

- Some cities establish a committee to proactively enforce the vacant building registry. This committee identifies and catalogs all vacant properties to ensure compliance with the vacant building registry.

How the strategy is funded

- Vacant building registries require little public funding. In addition, the fees and fines associated with registering and vacant properties generate funds for the locality. For example, in Pittsburgh, PA, failure to comply with the vacant building registry could result in fines up to $300 per day, and in Burlington VT the fee is $500 per quarter.[154]

- In some cities, in addition to requiring registration and levying fees, the city targets CDBG funds for the renovation (or in some cases demolition) of these properties.

Extent of use of the strategy

This strategy is widely used in cities across the country.

Examples of locations where the strategy is being used

- Several cities in New York including Albany, Geneva, and Kingston have implemented a vacant building registry.
- Richmond, VA[155]
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Burlington, VT
- Boston, MA
- Chicago, IL
- Baltimore, MD (see below)
- Wilmington, DE (see below)

Strategy results

- In Wilmington, DE, within a year of implementing a vacant property registration fee program, the program collected over $400,000 in fees. Of the 1,528 buildings initially registered as vacant, 380 became occupied, 217 were sold to new owners, and 16 were demolished.

- In Baltimore MD, when the program started in 2002, the city had more than 15,000 vacant and abandoned houses and more than 10,000 problem lots, many with significant tax arrearages. Between 2002 and 2006 over 6,000 abandoned properties with clear title have been acquired, 1,000 properties have been returned to private ownership, 2,000 more properties have been reprogrammed for a specific development outcome, and taxes and fees collected have totaled over $1.8 million.

Pros and cons to using the strategy and/or types of markets where the strategy is more or less effective

Some cities do not have significant numbers of vacant buildings; the strategy is most likely to be effective in cities that have experienced population losses and economic declines.

Pros:
- Provides incentives for building owners to maintain or sell vacant properties to avoid future vacant building registration costs.

- Encourages owners of vacant properties to prevent deterioration and ensure the safety of their buildings.

- May increase the number of properties made available for developing affordable housing.

Cons:

- Owners of vacant properties may be difficult to locate.

Sources of information about the strategy

- "Combating Problems of Vacant and Abandoned Properties: Best Practices in 27 Cities," The United States Conference of Mayors, June 2006, p. 10. (Available at: http://content.knowledgeplex.org/kp2/cache/documents/1911/191145.pdf)

Contact information

Department of Public Safety (Albany, NY)
165 Henry Johnson Blvd. - 1st Floor
Albany, NY 12210
Buildings: 518-434-5165
Codes: 518-434-5995
Albany Department of Fire and Emergency Services
518-434-8045
rcforezzi@albany-ny.org

Building Safety Division (Kingston, NY)
5 Garraghan Drive
Kingston, NY 12401
845-331-1217

Department of Community Development (Richmond, VA)
Property Maintenance Division
900 E. Broad Street, Rm. G-12
Richmond, VA 23219
804-646-6419

This document is a portion of NAHB's report
Research on State and Local Means of Increasing Affordable Housing.

Click here to view the full report.

Research on State and Local Means of Increasing Affordable Housing

January, 2008

Prepared for the
National Association of Home Builders
1201 15th Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Prepared by
Kimberly Burnett
Jill Khadduri
Justin Lindenmayer
Abt Associates Inc.
55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

NAHB.

Abt