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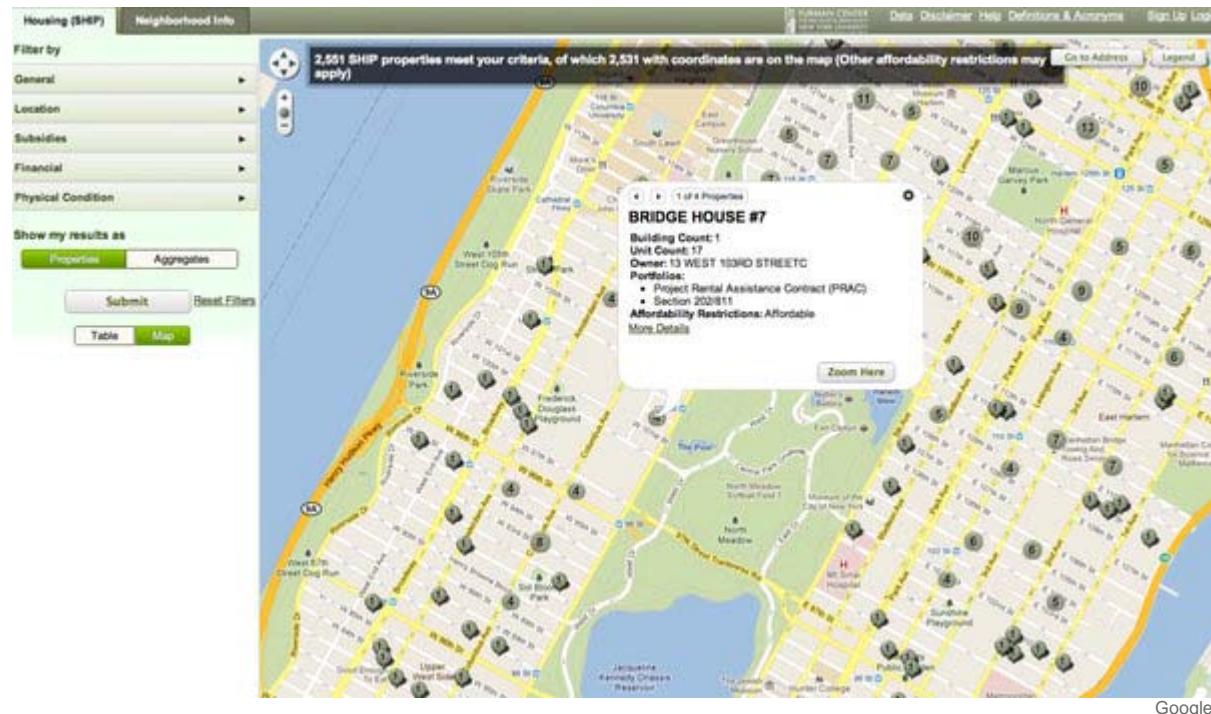
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A Search for Subsidized Housing, Simplified

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An interactive map developed by the Furman Center lets those looking for subsidized housing filter searches by location and other criteria.

By ALISON GREGOR

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A NEW interactive database developed by [New York University](#) lets renters and buyers track nearly all the privately held subsidized housing in [New York City](#).

The need to take stock of affordable apartments, which were quickly disappearing in the last decade as market-rate real estate boomed, led city officials to select the university's [Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy](#) to compile the database, called the Subsidized Housing Information Project.

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The database has extensive information about 304,800 affordable rental and co-op units in about 2,600 properties. A tutorial is available online at www.furmancenter.org/data/search. An interactive map that lets users filter searches by location, subsidies and physical condition, as well as other criteria, can be reached directly at <http://datasearch.furmancenter.org>.



The database, which cost just over \$1 million to create, consolidates information from 50 public and private data sources, a testament to how complex affordable housing programs are in New York City, said Vicki L. Been, the faculty director of the Furman Center. That complexity has made it hard to track the affordable housing supply.

"Especially in the up market, the very hot market of the early 2000s," Ms. Been said, "there was a real concern that the city was losing or failing to preserve a lot of the housing that had received subsidies but was reaching the end of those subsidies."

For instance, dozens of buildings that went up as part of New York's Mitchell-Lama program were due to leave the system, and their owners were electing to quit the program. That was quickly shrinking the stock of subsidized housing, in a city where the high cost of construction and land and the potential profits from market-rate real estate make it difficult to create more.

"It's usually much more efficient and much cheaper to preserve an existing affordable unit than to have to rehabilitate or build a new one," Ms. Been said.

With a \$940,000 grant from the [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#) and additional foundation and individual support, the center sent recent law graduates into the records rooms of various public agencies, sometimes with dust masks and gloves, since much of the information was not electronic, Ms. Been said. After almost three years of labor, the center was able to pull together data from four major government programs to include the vast majority of New York City's affordable housing. It is still working on capturing what remains from a fifth program.

Of the 235,000 affordable rental units in the database, about 171,000 continue to receive some sort of government subsidy and have a rent or income restriction associated with them, she said. The new database will enable city officials and affordable-housing advocates to see which housing subsidies are about to expire, so they can plan ahead and focus on housing that can be saved.

"It allows us to better understand both what kinds of buildings do expire out of the system, and what happens as a result of that," she said. "So we're using the database internally to do research on trying to understand what will predict whether a particular development will expire out or not."



The center's Institute for Affordable Housing Policy has already used the database to identify 227 properties throughout the city that are at risk of expiring out of affordability programs by the end of 2015.

While most of those property owners are unlikely to opt out of their subsidy programs, 34 properties with more than 10,300 units are in nonrenewable programs. Those properties will be studied in an effort to preserve them as subsidized, perhaps by shifting them into other programs, Ms. Been said, whereas in the past, they might simply have been lost from the affordable housing stock.

The Furman Center also incorporated its extensive collection of neighborhood information into the database. Visitors to the site can select from a host of variables to create customized maps and tables that can be downloaded, as well as track trends over time.

Martin Dunn, the president of the Dunn Development Corporation, a developer of affordable housing, was a consultant on the database, along with other private housing developers, to ensure data was accurate. He said it should add a wealth of information to create affordable housing policy moving forward.

"There are projects that come to the end of their restriction periods that are in great shape and have real value, and there are ones that are a wreck," he said. "As government sets policies today that will have implications for 30, 40 years into the future, trying to understand what has worked well in the past is obviously very important."

A version of this article appeared in print on October 23, 2011, on page RE2 of the New York edition with the headline: Tracking Subsidies.

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