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Research

Safeguarding Subsidized Housing With Better Data

New York City's inventory of 250,000 privately owned, publicly subsidized rental units is a valuable resource for both the city and its low-income households. In 2005, as an improving market enticed owners to leave subsidy programs and take advantage of rising market rental rates, the city consulted with experts nationwide to learn how to preserve these affordable units. Subsequently, the city created a database of affordable assisted housing with the help of New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, assessed the capacity and competencies at hand for preserving this crucial housing stock, and formulated a preservation **plan**.

An outgrowth of this initiative, the Subsidized Housing Information Project (SHIP), is a comprehensive database compiled from more than 50 sources of information about privately owned and publicly subsidized rental units in New York City. Developed by the Furman Center, SHIP merges information on each affordable housing unit and property concerning its financing and insurance from HUD, HUD project-based rental assistance, city or state **Mitchell-Lama** financing, and/or the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program.

A Tool for Better Planning

In a recent *Cityscape* **article**, Vincent Reina and Michael Williams of the Furman Center describe the added capacity that SHIP provides for improved planning and management of New York City's affordable, subsidized housing supply.

SHIP prevents duplicate entries for properties in the database, permitting a more accurate count of the number of units developed, preserved, and at risk of being withdrawn from the affordable stock. SHIP reports show that 15 percent of all currently affordable properties (with 171,458 units) receive subsidies from more than one source. By pooling disparate sources of data, multiple funding sources (subsidy layering) for each property become apparent, revealing patterns in subsidy distribution. For example, although more than half of the properties receiving HUD project-based rental assistance also receive another type of subsidy, few (2%) LIHTC properties do. SHIP also reveals patterns in which local and state financing programs regularly leverage HUD funds.

With the layers of financing for these properties now visible, SHIP allows researchers and policymakers to better assess the risk of losing affordable units to a market-rate venue. For example, 24,173 subsidized units had a subsidy that expired in the past 12 years, but were preserved through another program. Before SHIP, these units would likely have been considered withdrawn from the subsidized housing stock. Today, the more complete funding picture that SHIP offers allows the city to project expiring subsidies, assess their impact, and come up with a retention strategy. A property that has one subsidy ending in 2012 but two subsidies that will run through 2016 is less likely to be removed from the affordable stock than one that will lose all its subsidies in 2012.

Another advantage of SHIP is its greater capacity for analyzing financing trends, as shown in table 1. The data indicate that the 1970s was the most active decade in the past half-century for developing affordable housing in the city, supported mostly with funds from the Mitchell-Lama program and with HUD's project-based rental assistance. By the 1980s, use of Mitchell-Lama funds waned and new developments were more likely to use project-based rental assistance and HUD financing and insurance. Notably, the LIHTC program has financed the largest share of new affordable housing developments since 1990.

Table 1. Number of Units Developed by Decade and Program Subsidy Category

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
HUD financing and insurance	3,079	11,361	14,898	995	173
HUD financing and insurance/project-based rental assistance	467	7,494	22,797	5,326	2,915
Project-based rental assistance	891	4,889	11,803	2,164	1,390
Project-based rental assistance/Mitchell-Lama	0	22,996	248	0	0
Mitchell-Lama	14,772	19,199	0	0	0
Mitchell-Lama/HUD financing and insurance	0	1,788	0	0	0
HUD financing and insurance/project-based rental assistance/Mitchell-Lama	0	9,029	0	0	0
LIHTC	0	0	2,928	29,697	38,383
LIHTC/HUD financing and insurance	0	0	327	1,358	0
LIHTC/project-based rental assistance	0	0	0	103	0
LIHTC/HUD financing and insurance/project-based rental assistance	0	0	0	0	82

*HUD=U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. LIHTC=Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Source: Vincent Reina and Michael Williams, "The Importance of Using Layered Data to Analyze Housing: The Case of the Subsidized Housing Information Project," *Cityscape* 14:1, p. 220.

Yet another advantage of SHIP is that it contains housing data that link to other local information such as housing code violations, tax delinquencies, market information, school locations, and neighborhood-level amenities. As Reina and Williams conclude, "the pooling and layering of data, as well as combining the data with other local housing and neighborhood information, in databases like the SHIP allow for a clearer understanding of the existing affordable housing stock and enable practitioners to more effectively target resources toward the preservation of affordable housing."

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