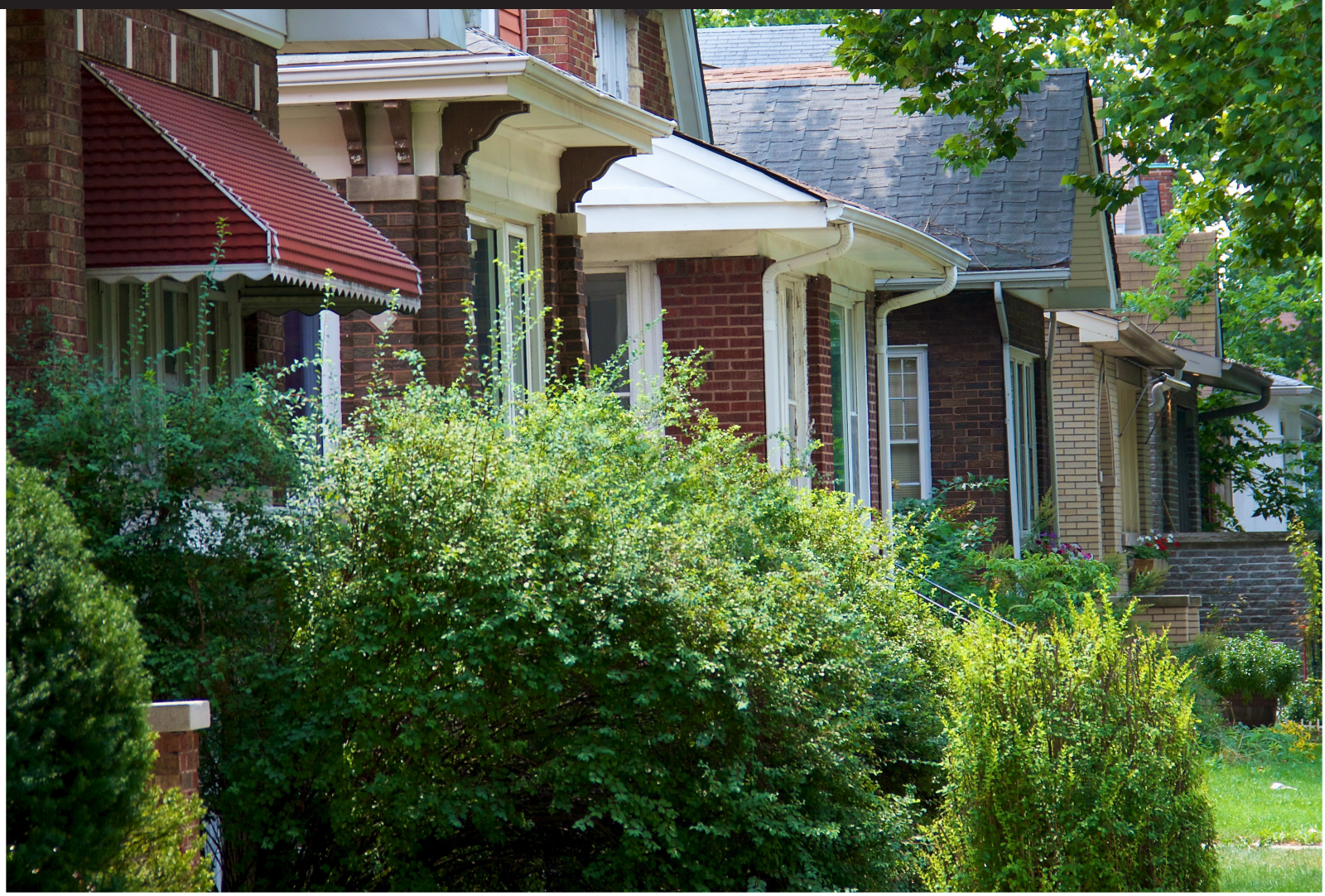
INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING STUDIES at DePaul University

IMPACT REPORT

AUGUST 2026

The Evidence Chicago Builds On



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When the Albany Park neighborhood mobilizes to save its affordable multi-unit buildings, when a coalition wins millions to build homes on vacant land in the Chicago Lawn neighborhood, when a senior on the West Side on a fixed income gets a property-tax refund she never knew she was owed, the story almost always starts in the same place: with data and support from the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University.

For almost two decades, IHS has sat at the center of Chicago's housing ecosystem: the shared source of truth that community organizations, government agencies, funders, and financial institutions all build from. Its research, tools, and hands-on assistance connect the people asking questions about Chicago's affordable housing to the answers that move policy, programs, and neighborhoods.

This report tells that story: what IHS does, who depends on it, the difference the work makes in the lives of Chicagoans – and importantly, why IHS needs your support at this critical moment.

120,000

The affordable rental gap IHS first calculated, now the benchmark across Chicago housing policy

70

Community organizations that partnered with IHS in 2025

2,500

Hours of hands-on technical assistance in 2025, primarily working with organizations serving communities of color

What's at Stake for Chicago's Neighborhoods

Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, and its neighborhoods are under pressure. Two- to four-unit buildings, long the backbone of affordable housing, are disappearing to demolition and conversion into luxury single-family homes. Vacant lots sit idle in the communities that need investment most. Investors are outbidding families for the starter homes that once served as an entry point for Black and Latino homebuyers, with IHS research showing that investors account for up to 40 percent of home purchases in some neighborhoods. And across the region, the gap between what housing costs and what families earn keeps widening.

These are not abstract market trends. They are about people: the family priced out of the community where their grandparents raised children, the senior taxed out of a home she's owned for decades, and the struggling corner store owner watching vacant lots multiply.

Meeting these challenges takes action, and action takes information. Policies are written, programs implemented, and dollars directed based on what decision-makers believe is happening on the ground. But the data that describes Chicago's housing — who is buying, how prices are changing, where housing is being lost — is scattered across government records, difficult to obtain, and tough to interpret. Without someone to gather, translate, and share it, communities are left to make their case on anecdote alone, and policymakers are left to act on incomplete pictures.

IHS: Providing the Data & Analysis for Action

The Institute for Housing Studies was founded at DePaul University to fill a glaring gap: Chicago had no independent, applied source of housing data that communities and practitioners could actually use. IHS was designed from the start to be different from a traditional academic center. Its job is not to publish journal articles, but to turn complex, fragmented housing and government records into research, tools, and analysis that allow for real-world action.

IHS does all of this as a small, focused team with an outsized footprint, serving dozens of partners across Chicago, from community-based organizations to citywide coalitions and state agencies.

WHAT IHS DOES

Applied research. Reports and analyses that illuminate housing trends, conditions, and policy questions, from the loss of small rental buildings to the displacement pressures reshaping neighborhoods across the region. These reports are often the spark for new programs, policies, and approaches that address key housing equity issues.

Data tools. Interactive maps, dashboards, and downloadable datasets that let partners ask and answer their own housing questions. Organizational partners consistently name these tools, especially the vacant-land and displacement-pressure maps, among the most useful resources in Chicago's housing field.

Technical assistance. Hands-on help for community organizations, policy coalitions and government agencies that need data and analysis to inform their policies and programs – and to better understand housing trends and realities. Thousands of hours of assistance are provided annually to organizations working in communities where displacement and affordability are a crisis, and where the gap between data needs and data resources is widest.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: QUESTIONS THAT COME THROUGH THE DOOR

» **How** many two-flats has our neighborhood lost and what happened to them?

» **Who** owns the vacant lots along our commercial corridor?

» **Which** senior homeowners qualify for a tax freeze they haven't claimed?

» **Where** is displacement pressure rising before it shows up in rents?

» **What** did our investment in this community actually change?

Behind every IHS answer: parcel-level records of property sales, mortgages, foreclosures, evictions and building characteristics, cross-referenced in ways no public source offers.

THE PHILOSOPHY

Every IHS engagement begins not with the data, but with a question: what are you trying to accomplish? Working backward from a partner's goals shapes everything—which records to pull, how granular to go, and what form the answer should take. It might be a citywide report for policymakers, or a single map pinned to the wall at a neighborhood meeting.

Underlying it all is a commitment to truth and facts, a core value at IHS. When partners bring what they are seeing on the ground, IHS puts it to the test, following the data wherever it leads. When the numbers bear out residents' experience, a neighborhood group can say not just "we know this is happening" but "the data confirms it"—evidence key decision-makers cannot dismiss. And when the numbers tell a more complicated story, that is just as valuable, because strategies built on accurate information are the ones that work.

As a research center at DePaul University, IHS carries forward the university's mission of service to those too often overlooked—pairing community engagement with pragmatic research to drive systemic change.

IHS Serves the Chicago Housing Ecosystem

IHS's reach extends across the full spectrum of Chicago's housing ecosystem — and through that ecosystem, to Chicagoans themselves. The organizations, institutions, and elected officials that serve residents rely on IHS for the information that can push forward transformative change. Through this, every IHS dataset has an impact on residents' lives: an affordable apartment preserved, a new home built on a once-vacant lot, or a displacement crisis averted.

Community-based organizations. For most neighborhood organizations, IHS is data capacity they could never build or buy, providing research, analysis and maps at little or no direct cost to the organization. IHS data often validates what community groups already know from talking to their neighbors, turning lived experience into evidence that funders and legislators cannot dismiss. It also identifies new challenges and trends in housing equity that influence missions, programs and policies.

> **"If we didn't have IHS to rely on, all our knowledge about Chicago's housing affordability would be anecdotal."**
>
> — MIKE TOMAS, GARFIELD PARK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Government Agencies. Agencies at the city, county, regional and state levels rely on IHS for policy analysis, planning, and program evaluation. Its market analyses influence the development and implementation of housing strategies, neighborhood by neighborhood, and its research allows them to better understand the impact of development projects and housing policies.

Policy and Research Coalitions. For the coalitions working for better housing policy, IHS functions as a shared research arm: a collaborative partner in convenings and knowledge-sharing, and a reliable engine for impartial and accurate data. Its data turns conversations that might otherwise become ideological into evidence-based ones, giving groups with different starting points a common set of facts to work from.

Financial Institutions and Private-Sector Partners. IHS data can help banks meet their Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) goals by providing insights into housing market conditions in Chicago's low- and moderate-income communities, informing partnerships with local organizations, and measuring the impact of their community investments. A bank that has committed millions of dollars to a neighborhood wants to understand and tell the story of what that commitment achieved, and IHS can provide the independent analysis to do it.

Philantrhropic Funders. For philanthropic funders, IHS is both a resource and a strategic partner. Its data and landscape analyses help funders direct dollars where they will matter most, and its work with community organizations amplifies the impact of the groups funders support. IHS can also help funders look backward, assessing the impact of grants already made, so the next round of giving is smarter than the last.



IHS STAFF SHARES RECENT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY DATA AT A COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CORPORATION EVENT.

TRUSTED DATA, REAL POLICY RESULTS

What happens when community organizations, coalitions, and government agencies all work from the same trusted data? Policy changes. Among the measures informed by IHS research:

Connected Communities Ordinance (2022) — citywide transit-oriented development reform protecting two- to four-unit housing, advanced by a coalition of more than 80 organizations

Anti-deconversion and demolition-surcharge ordinances (2024) — preserving affordable housing near new parks and city improvement projects

Five-Year Housing Plan and Affordable Requirements Ordinance (2021) — citywide affordable housing policy calibrated to real neighborhood market conditions

Impact in Action: Stories from the Field

The value of IHS is best understood through the change it enables: from landmark research that reshaped city policy, to a single database that puts tens of thousands of dollars back in the pockets of seniors.

SAVING CHICAGO'S TWO-FLATS AND WALK-UPS

Two- to four-unit buildings — the two-flats and small rental buildings that define so many Chicago blocks — are the city's largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing. IHS led the first comprehensive study of this stock, and the findings were stark: between 2013 and 2019 alone, Chicago lost 11,775 housing units in these buildings to conversion into high-priced single-family homes in gentrifying neighborhoods starved for affordable housing, and to deterioration and demolition in Chicago's Black neighborhoods dealing with the legacy of historic disinvestment.



CHICAGO TWO-FLATS

IHS did more than count the losses. It exposed the market forces driving them — including the luxury unit per-square-foot premiums that make it profitable to tear a two-flat down — and in doing so changed the conversation. The research became the direct impetus for Neighborhood Housing Services to launch a preservation program and secure funding for it.

The policy response has been sweeping. The City Council's first demolition moratorium near the 606 trail cited IHS research directly, and the anti-deconversion ordinances that followed for other neighborhoods drew on IHS analysis to define which buildings and areas to protect. In 2022, the Connected Communities Ordinance took the protections citywide: two- to four-unit buildings in designated communities vulnerable to rapid displacement can no longer be converted to single-family homes without a zoning change. This measure, advanced by a coalition of more than 80 organizations and powered by IHS data, won IHS a national award in 2023 for using data to change local policy.

> **"It's one thing for a community organization to say this is a problem — it's another when IHS says, 'no, this is a real thing that's happening.' It lends credibility."**
>
> — DANIEL HERTZ, IMPACT FOR EQUITY

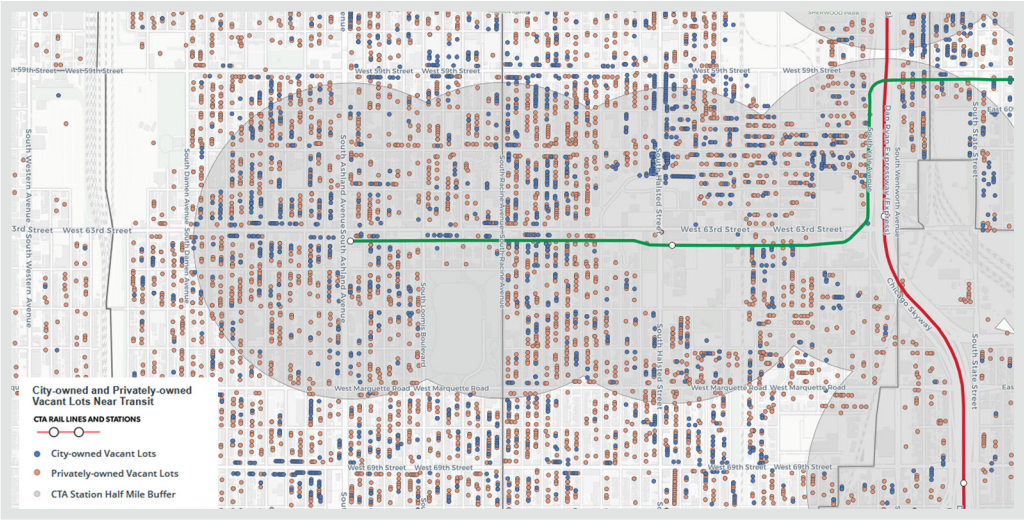
THE RIPPLE EFFECT IHS research makes hidden housing challenges visible—and provides the evidence to drive new programs, funding, and policy.

Partners in this work: Communities United, Neighborhood Housing Services, Community Investment Corporation, Garfield Park Community Council, Chicago Ald. Matt Martin (47th Ward).

FROM VACANT LOTS TO A $10 MILLION WIN

Across Chicago's disinvested neighborhoods, thousands of vacant lots sit waiting: owned by the city, by speculators and by absentee landlords. IHS's mapping tools make that hidden inventory visible, showing community developers at a glance where land is available, who owns it, and where new homes could rise.

Reclaiming Chicago, a United Power initiative building homes on vacant land in distressed neighborhoods, used IHS maps to highlight developments, pipeline projects and community assets, visualizing the potential impact of a transformative investment. In early 2026, the coalition won the $10 million Chicago Prize, one of the largest single philanthropic awards for neighborhood development in the city's history. IHS has produced similar vacant-land analyses for other community-based organizations and financial institutions, turning parcels on a map into shovel-ready development strategies.



CITY-OWNED AND PRIVATELY-OWNED VACANT LOTS NEAR TRANSIT IN CHICAGO'S ENGLEWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD. SOURCE: INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING STUDIES

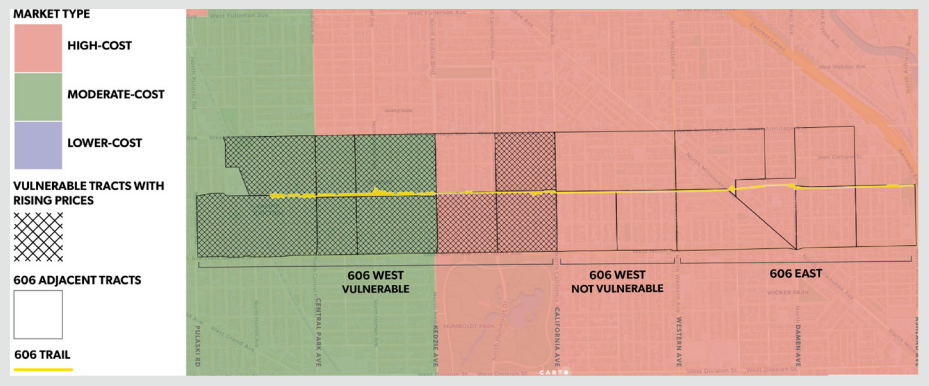
> **"The research is often a confirmation of what we intuitively knew — but we needed it validated and on paper. IHS data was an important part of our Chicago Prize proposal."**
>
> — MARY KENNEY, RECLAIMING CHICAGO

THE RIPPLE EFFECT An IHS map can be the difference between a good idea and a funded one: real dollars flowing into community-led development.

Partners in this work: Reclaiming Chicago / United Power, Elevated Chicago, Teamwork Englewood, Grow Greater Englewood.

GETTING AHEAD OF DISPLACEMENT: LESSONS OF THE BLOOMINGDALE TRAIL

When the Bloomingdale Trail, also known as the 606, opened in 2015, it was celebrated as a landmark public investment. Yet longtime residents feared displacement and gentrification. So IHS measured exactly that. Its analysis found that home prices in the lower-income western section of the trail jumped more than 48 percent after ground broke, and that the pressure kept building. It found that by 2018, the median price of a two- to four-unit building in the most vulnerable stretch had climbed from $97,000 to $462,000, and the share of two- to four- unit buildings sold at modest prices declined by more than 65 percentage points.



HOUSING MARKET TYPE AND RESIDENT VULNERABILITY TO DISPLACEMENT IN CENSUS TRACTS ADJACENT TO THE BLOOMINGDALE TRAIL, 2018. SOURCE: INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING STUDIES

That IHS research gave community organizations and policymakers the evidence to act. It informed demolition-surcharge and anti-deconversion ordinances protecting homes near the trail, policies that have slowed displacement. The results are measurable: demolition permits near the trail dropped, families stayed in their two- and four-flats, and roughly $200,000 in surcharge fees was reinvested in affordable homeownership. When the Chicago City Council debated extending those protections, IHS numbers were frequently cited and put on the record — and the protections were extended.

Just as important is what came next. IHS turned the lessons of the 606 into Mapping Displacement Pressure in Chicago, an annually updated leading indicator that flags rising housing affordability pressure on vulnerable neighborhoods. That framework shaped the City of Chicago's Five-Year Housing Plan and updates to its Affordable Requirements Ordinance, and it is now applied proactively to major investments that have come since, from the Obama Presidential Center to the proposed El Paseo trail. Because of what IHS learned from the Bloomingdale Trail, Chicago no longer has to wait for displacement to happen to see it coming.

> "Data gives us visibility into problems and opportunities."
>
> — JUAN SEBASTIAN, ELEVATED CHICAGO

THE RIPPLE EFFECT One study of one trail became the leading indicator Chicago now uses to prevent displacement, acting before the next big investment breaks ground, not after.

Partners in this work: Impact for Equity, Chicago Community Trust, Garfield Park Community Council, Community WEB, Elevated Chicago.

MONEY BACK TO VULNERABLE HOMEOWNERS

In 2025, Garfield Park saw one of the steepest property-tax increases in Chicago, a direct threat to longtime homeowners, including seniors living on fixed incomes in homes they had owned for decades. While many qualified for a senior assessment freeze and tax breaks, often they were never claimed, simply because the seniors were unaware of the benefit.

The Garfield Park Community Council asked IHS to build a database identifying senior households potentially eligible for the freeze and used it to identify approximately 100 eligible seniors who had never applied for the refunds they were owed. Then GPCC staff went door to door, helping families recover more than $30,000 in property-tax refunds, relief that helped them stay in their homes and neighborhood.



IHS STAFF AND NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS IDENTIFY HOUSING CHALLENGES

THE RIPPLE EFFECT Behind every IHS dataset are real people, from seniors on fixed incomes to struggling young parents. Data, in the right hands, can keep them in their homes.

Partners in this work: Garfield Park Community Council, Chicago Community Trust, Neighborhood Housing Services, Here to Stay Community Land Trust, Housing Opportunities and Maintenance for the Elderly.



IHS STAFF PRESENTS ITS HOUSING DATA FINDINGS AT A COMMUNITY MEETING.

The IHS Difference

What sets IHS apart isn't one thing — it's how the organization was built: local by choice, unbiased by conviction, and useful by design. Those values trace back to DePaul University, whose mission of pragmatic service to overlooked communities remains one of the institution's core priorities.

> "There's just nobody else doing this kind of work in Chicago."
>
> — DANIEL HERTZ, IMPACT FOR EQUITY

HANDS-ON PARTNERSHIP, LOCAL CONNECTION

When Chicago's housing leaders need data, they don't submit a request to a faraway research shop; they call someone at IHS who already knows their neighborhood. Two decades of local experience mean IHS understands the history behind every market it analyzes and knows the advocates and practitioners who live there. Whether the question covers a few city blocks or the entire county, the answer comes through a direct, personal partnership, the kind only a local and focused organization can offer.

> "IHS is the first call you'd make with a housing research question in Chicago."
>
> — MATT SHOMO, CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST

GROUNDED IN WHAT COMMUNITIES ACTUALLY NEED

Just as distinctive is where IHS's research agenda comes from: not from academic curiosity, but from the ground up. The questions IHS pursues are the ones residents and practitioners are actually asking — sometimes literally, as when IHS invited Garfield Park residents to name the housing questions they wanted answered, then returned to present the findings. The room stood up and applauded, a measure of the community's desire for local research and the importance of neighborhood leaders setting the agenda.

TRUSTED, DATA-DRIVEN AND COMMITTED TO TRUTH

IHS is committed to following the data wherever it leads, to the integrity of its sources and the accuracy of its analysis. That discipline is what makes its work usable across the spectrum — community groups, government, media, banks and funders — and what turns charged debates into evidence-based ones. Credibility and trust are core IHS values, allowing it to bridge ideological divides few others can.

RIGOROUS, APPLIED AND ACCESSIBLE

Free from the publish-or-perish incentives of academic research, IHS exists to produce work that is immediately usable. Its product-development mindset turns raw government data into maps, dashboards, and analysis partners act on, not papers behind a journal paywall. And the work meets people where they are: substantive enough for experts and technical staff, clear enough for community members and funders without housing backgrounds. The same report works for a housing commissioner and a community organizer — a balance few research organizations strike.

THE HUB OF CHICAGO'S HOUSING ECOSYSTEM

All of it adds up to a position at the very center of Chicago's housing ecosystem. IHS sits amid a broad network of community organizations, agencies, funders, researchers and the private sector, and data produced for one partner routinely informs the strategies of many others. One example is IHS's finding highlighting the 120,000-unit gap between the supply of affordable rental housing and demand from lower-income renters. The figure is now cited so widely across Chicago's housing ecosystem that its origin is often forgotten. That is what it looks like when research becomes infrastructure.

The Moment to Act – an Urgent Need for Capacity

Chicago's neighborhoods are entering their hardest stretch in a generation. Federal funding cuts are pulling resources out of the organizations communities depend on at the very moment when displacement, affordability pressures, and a constrained development pipeline are all intensifying. Every response the city mounts will be built on data. And the data infrastructure Chicago's entire housing field relies on runs through one small organization.

That infrastructure is more fragile than it looks. This work is not underwritten by DePaul University. IHS raises its own budget, year to year, from philanthropic grants and contracts. Meanwhile, demand keeps growing: more community organizations, agencies and coalitions are asking for data and hands-on help than IHS can currently serve. The constraint is not expertise, relationships or trust. It is funding. Which means the size of IHS's impact next year is being decided by funders right now.

> **"Small and mighty — people don't always realize how lean they are."**
>
> — MATT SHOMO, CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST

INSTITUTE FOR HOUSING STUDIES at DePaul University

Invest in IHS

Investing in IHS expands the reach of its work and fuels its capacity to innovate, allowing it to serve more communities, respond faster to emerging pressures, and build the tools Chicago and Illinois will need for the next generation of housing challenges. At a moment when misinformation and biased analysis confuse policies and public debate, support for IHS ensures it can continue providing trusted data and analysis that informs the entire housing ecosystem.

Flexible philanthropic support in particular underwrites what makes IHS responsive and effective:

» **Trusted community relationships:** the hands-on partnerships, built over years, that make IHS the first call Chicago's housing leaders make.

» **The ability to see what's next:** identifying emerging issues early and getting them in front of community organizations and policymakers before they become crises.

» **New indicators, methods, and tools:** building the next generation of data products for challenges that don't yet fit an existing grant.

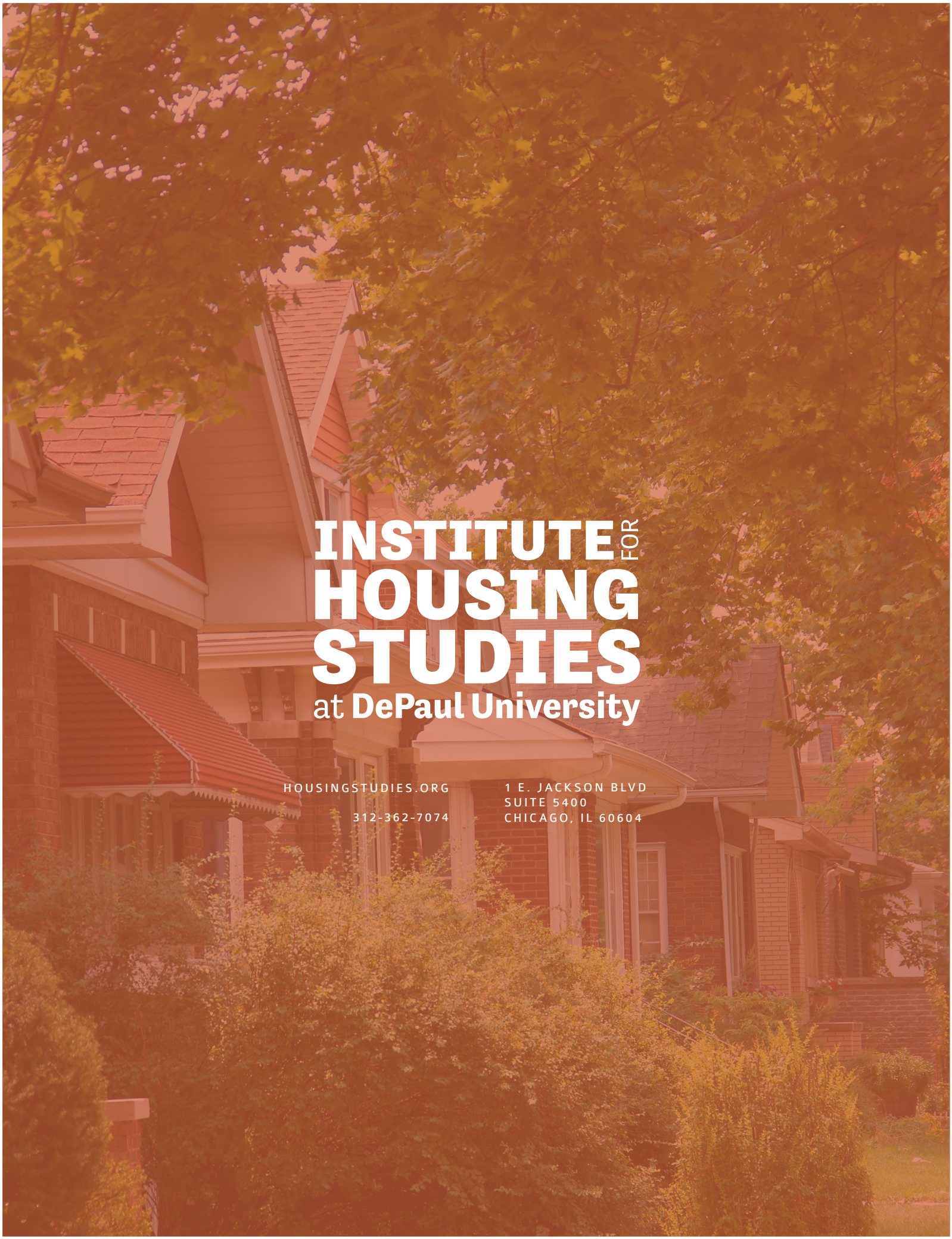
» **Knowledge the whole field can use:** turning each engagement into open resources that strengthen organizations across Chicago and Illinois.

> **"Real people would suffer without IHS, because organizations like ours — and governments — wouldn't have the data to make the case."**
>
> — ANTHONY SIMPKINS, NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING SERVICES

BUILD WITH US

IHS welcomes conversations with funders, partners, and stakeholders who want to strengthen the foundation of Chicago's housing future. Whether you are a funder looking to maximize the impact of every dollar, a community organization seeking data capacity, or an institution wanting to understand your own footprint, IHS would like to hear from you.

Please contact **IHS Executive Director Geoff Smith** at **GSMITH33@depaul.edu** to support IHS or learn more.



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