



FilippoBacci, Getty Images

[HOUSING ACCESS AND STABILITY](#)

What's the Key to Preserving Unsubsidized Affordable Housing?

July 16, 2025

[Gabi Velasco](#), [Lizzy Ferrara](#)

Housing is [increasingly unaffordable](#) across the US. Rents are creeping higher, homebuyers are increasingly being priced out, and renter cost burdens have reached record highs. People in communities who have already been left behind are at risk of getting further boxed out.

This makes preserving unsubsidized, lower-cost rental buildings for those with low and middle incomes more important than ever. For those working to protect this [rental stock](#), variation in [housing type](#), [quality](#), ownership, and [local market conditions](#) can make the development and implementation of preservation strategies a [challenge](#). Comprehensive data on properties and neighborhood context are key for both assessing the scope of the issue and crafting proactive, tailored responses to existing and future crises.

Organizations across the country are offering community data services to connect local partners with data and guidance. By [transforming local administrative data](#) (like property records) into actionable information, they provide housing advocates and practitioners with information to shape community organizing and policy change.

[Two examples](#) in Chicago and Denver—both affiliated with members of the [National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership \(NNIP\)](#)—provide a replicable model for building effective partnerships between providers of community data services and affordable housing advocates and practitioners. They show how in the hands of trusted community partners, data can be a powerful tool for [equity and resilience](#).

Combining data with resident stories to support antideconversion ordinances in Chicago

[Two-to-four-unit residential buildings](#) make up [a quarter](#) of Chicago's housing units and are a key source of unsubsidized affordable housing, particularly in [Black and Latino communities](#). Demand from residents with higher incomes led to an increase in the deconversion of these small buildings into single-family homes, which reduced the supply of housing units and often raised the cost of housing in the market.

[The Institute for Housing Studies \(IHS\) at DePaul University](#) quantified the loss of these buildings and found that from 2013 to 2019, [11,775 rental and owner-occupied housing units](#) were lost. Of all the multiunit properties, [47.5 percent](#) were converted to single-family homes. The remaining properties became vacant land, were refurbished for nonresidential use, or became other residential property types. The IHS found this loss of multifamily two-to-four-unit buildings increased affordability pressures and displacement risk, especially in neighborhoods facing active gentrification and historical disinvestment. The IHS also created risk maps to show displacement pressure and deconversion in transit areas and produced data on the price and affordability of the two-to-four-unit housing stock.

One of the IHS's key partners is [Elevated Chicago](#), a cross-sector coalition of organizations focused on equitable, transit-oriented development. Preserving housing stability and affordability in gentrifying neighborhoods is a key component of this work. Leveraging IHS data, Elevate Chicago drove a knowledge-sharing campaign using strategies like recording narrated neighborhood walks from residents to amplify community voices and contextualize the data. Their partnership informed a two-year engagement with more than 80 community and civic stakeholders to build a truly equitable, transit-oriented development policy in Chicago—the [Connected Communities Ordinance](#).

The IHS's substantial influence in local policy is because of long-term partnerships with community organizations and policymakers built from rigorous housing analysis and ongoing engagement. The IHS's work was directly cited in two 2021 anti-deconversion ordinances that prohibit the construction of single-family homes and the conversion of multifamily-unit buildings to single-family residences in two areas dealing with rapidly increasing housing costs and displacement pressures: the 606 trail, including the Humboldt Park and Logan Square neighborhoods, and Pilsen, a predominantly Latino neighborhood in the Lower West Side of Chicago. Beyond data, the insights gleaned from the IHS's sustained technical assistance to and collaboration with community groups helped inform the [types of buildings](#) covered by the legislation and the criteria for the restricted areas.

When advocating for the Connected Communities Ordinance, this strong partnership between Elevated Chicago and the IHS produced not only data but also powerful narratives from community engagement that grounded those numbers and made the case for the ordinance. The ordinance successfully passed in 2022 and is the foundation of Chicago's current approach to equitable, transit-oriented development.

Creating tools and trainings to preserve small to midsize multifamily properties in Denver

In Colorado, [small to midsize multifamily buildings](#) (PDF) compose nearly half of the state's rental housing stock, and two-thirds of these units are occupied by households earning less than \$75,000 per year. The [Colorado Futures Center](#) (CFC) collaborated with partners to identify affordable unsubsidized units using parcel data and shared these data with the Colorado Housing Finance Agency and the Colorado Housing Preservation Network, including Enterprise Community Partners, who developed strategies with nonprofit housing agencies to acquire and preserve these properties in the Denver metropolitan area.

In 2020, the CFC and partner nonprofit and community organizations including [Mile High Connects](#) released the [Community Alert Database](#). The database centers on neighborhoods in