

An Introduction to Social Housing Models in the U.S.

City of Cambridge Social Housing Task Force
Claudia Aiken / June 24, 2026



NYU
Furman
Center



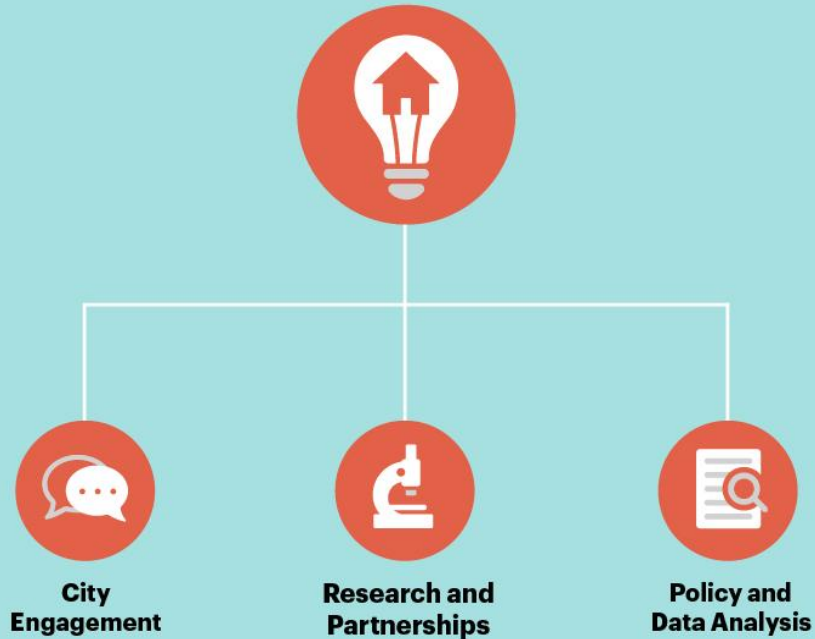
Agenda

- A brief introduction to the Housing Solutions Lab
- What is “social housing”?
- Emerging models of public development in the U.S.
- Key themes



A brief introduction to the Lab

Housing Solutions Lab





Our past work on this topic



PUBLICLY-DRIVEN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT MODELS IN THE U.S. AND GLOBALLY



Matt Bedsole
Director of the Housing Innovation Lab
Office of the Mayor
City of Atlanta



Emily Gallagher
Representative
New York State
Assembly District 50



Marc Jahr
Senior Advisor
Forsyth Street



Zachary Marks
Senior Vice President
for Real Estate
Housing Opportunities
Commission



Zach Martinez
Policy Advisor
Gary Community
Ventures



View our work here



Our role in this project is to...

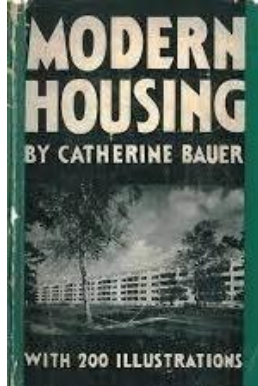
- Provide subject matter expertise and research support to the Task Force
- As needed, undertake:
 - Reviews of relevant literature
 - Scans of relevant examples
 - Deeper-dive case studies
 - Interviews with practitioners/experts



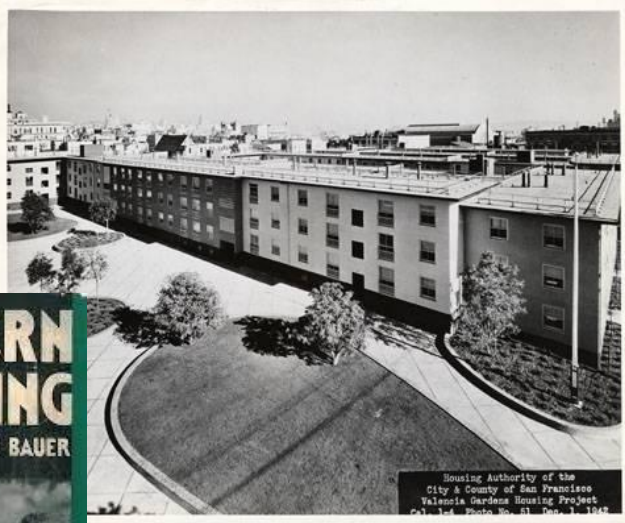
What is “social housing”?



The history of social housing in the U.S.



Modern Housing, 1934



Valencia Gardens, 1942. San Francisco Public Library




Cabrini Green, 2006. Paul D'Amato for the *New York Times*



Rendering of Atlanta UDC's first project. Source: Mill Creek Residential, Gresham Smith




The Laureate, Rockville, MD. Source: Apartments.com



COLORADO
Office of Economic Development
In International Trade

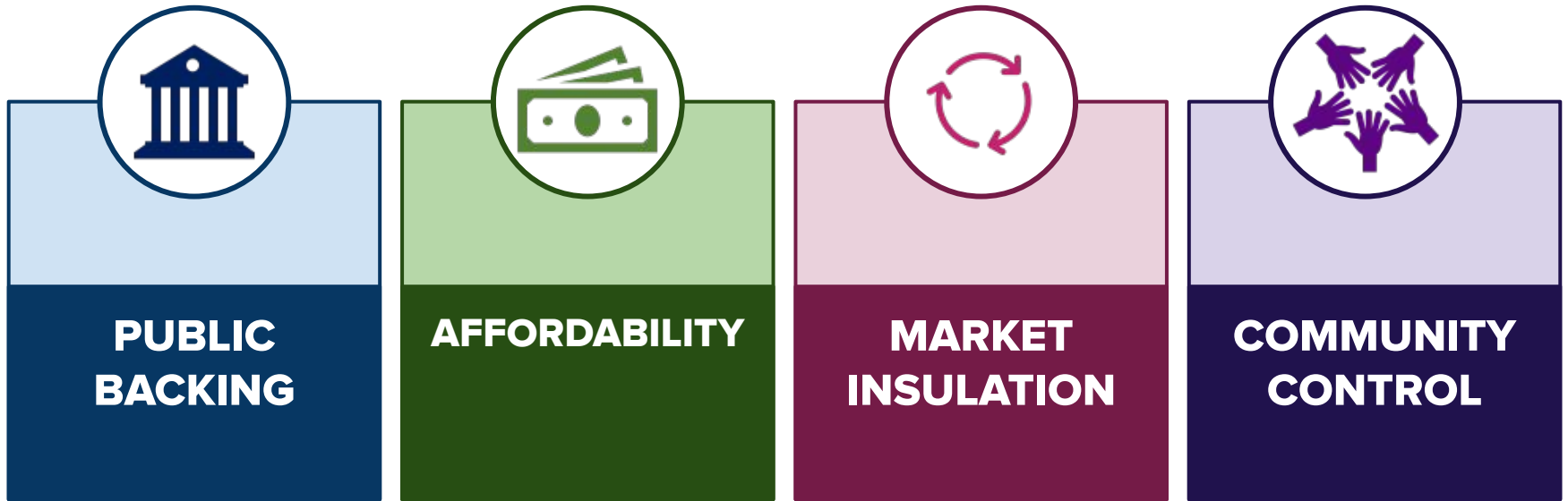
More Housing Now

Proposition 123 Equity Funds to
Help Create 648 Affordable
Housing Units






The four core elements of social housing





Discussion Question Set #1

- What is your definition of social housing? How does it map onto the core elements I suggested?



Emerging models of public development in the U.S.

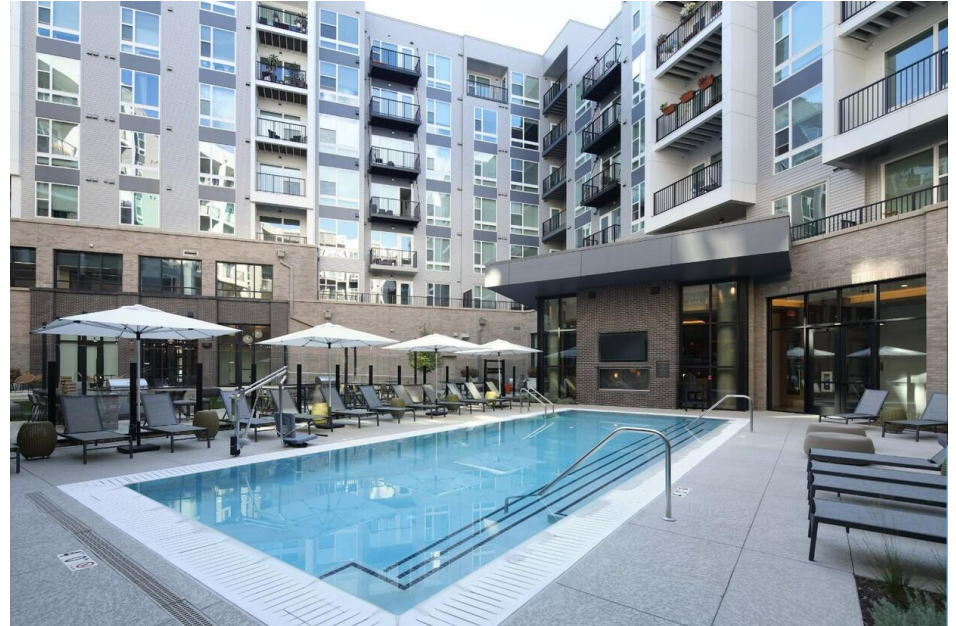


Mixed-income models

Typically use revolving loan funds (RLFs) to provide low-cost capital to development mixed-income projects in exchange for public stake

Examples:

- Montgomery County, MD
- Atlanta, GA
- Chicago, IL
- Chattanooga, TN
- Boston / Massachusetts

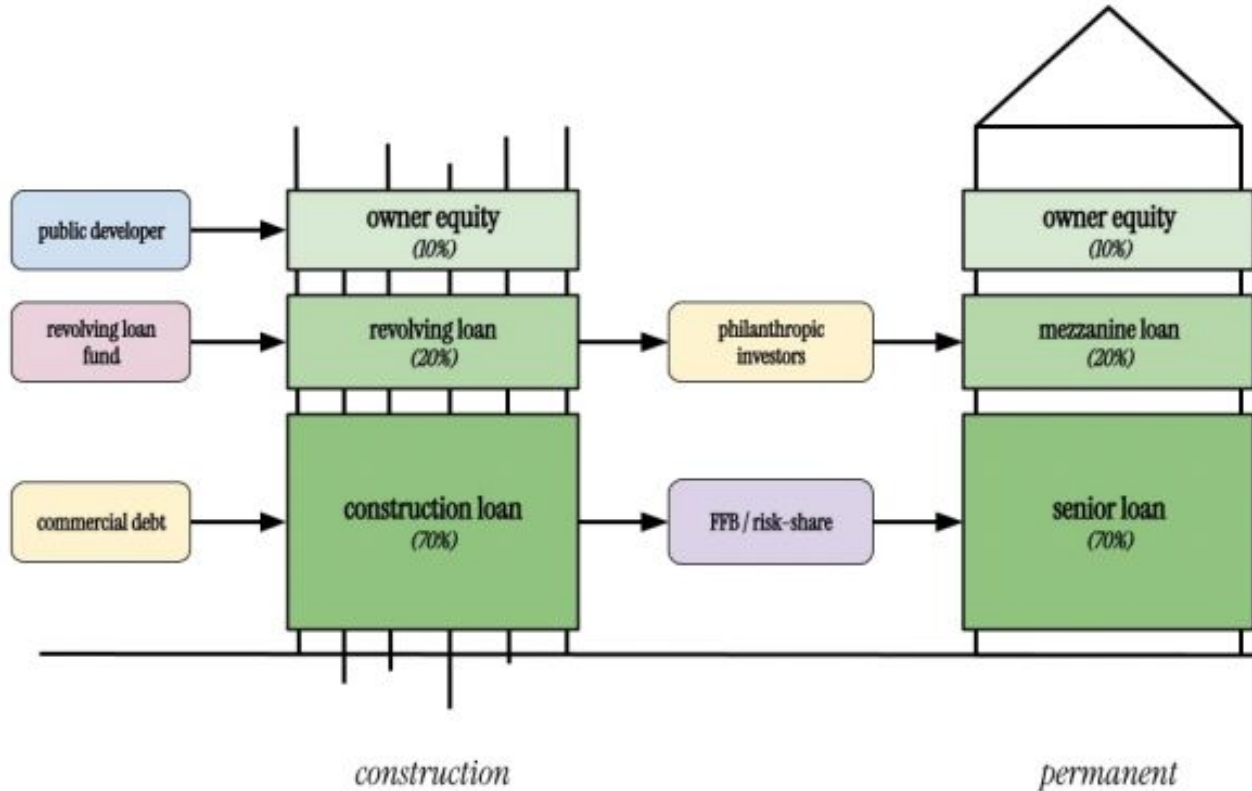


The Laureate, Rockville, MD. Source: Apartments.com

Proposed Solution: Mixed-Income Public Development Model



Public development, from construction to term





Public housing conversions + expansions

PHAs are seeking ways to redevelop and expand their portfolios using a variety of tools

One such tool is **Restore-Rebuild**, which HUD announced last month it will begin winding down

Examples:

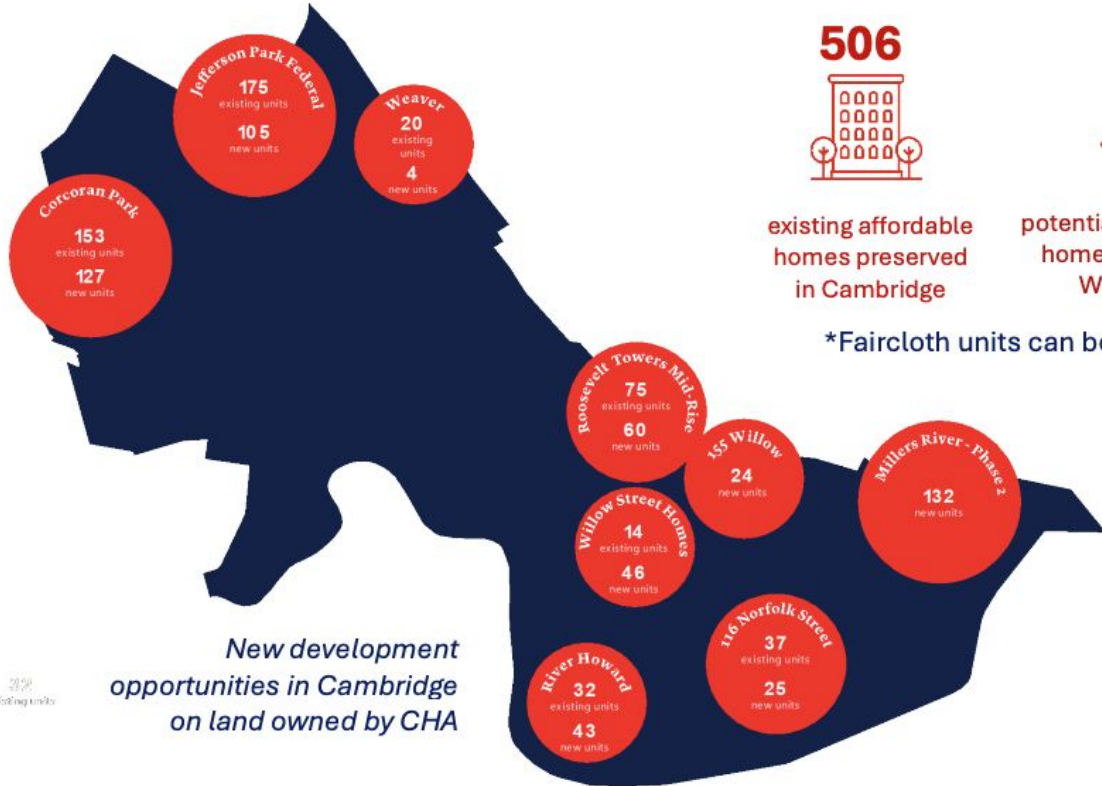
- Cambridge Housing Authority, MA
- Worcester Housing Authority, MA



Curtis Apartments, Worcester, MA. Source: Worcester Housing Authority



Faircloth unlocks opportunity for new units



506



existing affordable homes preserved in Cambridge

566



potential new affordable homes in Cambridge With Faircloth

1,018



remaining available Faircloth units*

*Faircloth units can be used in or out of Cambridge

\$16M+



additional annual subsidy from HUD for Faircloth units





Idiosyncratic models

Two longer-standing models of public/quasi-public development programs

One model of direct government investment with a reduced ownership stake

Examples:

- Dakota County, MN
- Idaho
- Colorado



Fieldhouse Apartments, Idaho Springs, CO.
Source: Developing Colorado



Financing

- The CDA issues tax exempt bond, credit enhanced with a general obligations pledge from Dakota County
- The major source of supplemental revenue to pay debt service is the CDA's Special Benefit Tax Levy





Discussion Question Set #2

- Is there a group of models that particularly appeals to you, or one that you would like to know more about?
- Do you see particular benefits or drawbacks the different models in the Cambridge context?
- Do you think there is a model that is missing from this typology?



Key themes for discussion



Contrasts with international models

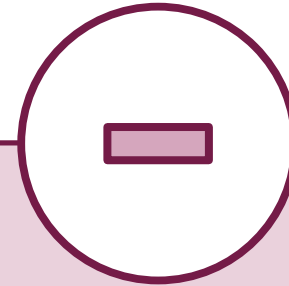
- Income-based affordability vs. cost rents
- Attention to tenant governance
- Scale:
 - National development and rehab funds
 - Social housing developer sector
 - Zoning/land use and public land disposition geared towards social housing



Benefits and risks of public development & ownership



- New housing units created
- Affordability created
- Access to public financing and land
- Potential savings on future preservation costs
- Potential profits that can be reinvested



- Risks inherent in development and real estate ownership
- Need to staff up and run like a business
- Changes in political administration
- Stigma associated with public housing



Practical questions for cities exploring social housing

- How will you structure and staff your public developer?
- To what extent will you work with private developers?
- What is your financing model?
- Where will funding come from?
- What affordability level or mix will you achieve?
- What does community control look like in a social housing project in Cambridge?
- How will you ensure long-term quality?



Discussion Question Set #3

- What do you see as the benefits of social housing?
- What are the risks?
- Acknowledging that structural differences in the U.S. would likely prevent social housing programs from mirroring international models, are there things we can learn from international examples?