

(RE)CODING NYC'S HOUSING

GSAPP HOUSING LAB
2020

(RE)CODING WALKUPS

**A BUSINESS PLAN FOR ADVANCING INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE AND RESILIENT
HOUSING IN EXISTING UNSUBSIDIZED BUILDINGS ACROSS NEW YORK CITY**



More than half of New York City's housing units are in walkup buildings without subsidy. These buildings and neighborhoods house many poor and vulnerable New Yorkers and newcomers, yet receive little investment and analysis.

Housing that is inclusive, resilient and accessible can be life-changing.

Investment in existing building and areas yields returns.

Central urban areas need more affordable housing.

The time to transform the walkup is now.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City's housing crisis pushes vulnerable households further to the margins of opportunity, health and access, and retrenches patterns of exclusion that follow lines of race, age, ethnicity, gender and immigration status. Interventions in housing have immense potential to change these trajectories - and increase inclusion, access, and climate resilience for all residents.

The **GSAPP Housing Lab** focused its inaugural year on how existing buildings inside cities can increase inclusion, resilience and access. Starting from a close examination of an ambitious reform 100 years ago – the 'New Law' that regulated light and air for tenements – the lab identified low-rise, high-density multi-household buildings as a space of opportunity.

This business plan lays out an integrated case for interventions in the existing stock of New York City in a way that is inventive and feasible. These interventions can deliver substantial improvements for thousands of households -and the city and climate- at relatively little cost.

Across the four sections, the interdisciplinary team identified under-examined markets and overlooked spaces for innovation in design, planning and development.

The business plan has four interlocking components. Grounded in extensive research, they propose that New York City housing actors can dramatically expand and improve housing options through:

1. Transforming buildings through **code shifts and designs that 'push the envelope' out and up** through rooftop additions, balcony and fire escape expansions and elevators.
2. Activating a network of **shared area amenities** for resiliency, financially sustained by a set of buildings; supported by **analyses of successful high density and mixed-income communities**.
3. Leveraging **new models of financial feasibility** for more units on rooftops that can provide immediate and long-term affordability.
4. **Sustaining maintenance and inclusion through alternate models of ownership and affordability**, grounded in a study of New York's long running experiment in limited-income, limited-equity co-ops.

The business plan aims to spark the imagination for broad-based, new and far-reaching interventions that can transform New York's existing stock. Each of the components developed in tandem with conversations with developers, non-profits, design firms and city agencies, and by delivering the details of the on-the-ground possibilities in code, finance and planning aspires to unlock conversations and action on the ground. Join us in the

UNMET DEMAND FOR INNOVATION: *EXISTING BUILDINGS AND THE HOUSING LAB*

EXISTING WALKUPS ARE WHERE PEOPLE LIVE.

Existing units and multifamily buildings inside cities house most needy residents. However, often they make life harder, not easier, for residents - buildings are overcrowded, have high and rising rents, are ill-suited to a changing climate, and are poorly-connected to the services, jobs, and other opportunities that could help residents. Meanwhile, ways of living and working continue to shift quickly, and informal modifications to existing stock reflect the ways that households share spaces out of need or creativity. Yet, most resources for affordable housing, whether subsidies or research initiatives, continue to focus on the production of conventionally-designed new units, often in urban peripheries - generating unsustainable social and ecological futures.

THE TIME IS RIGHT TO INTERVENE INSIDE CITIES - DIFFERENTLY.

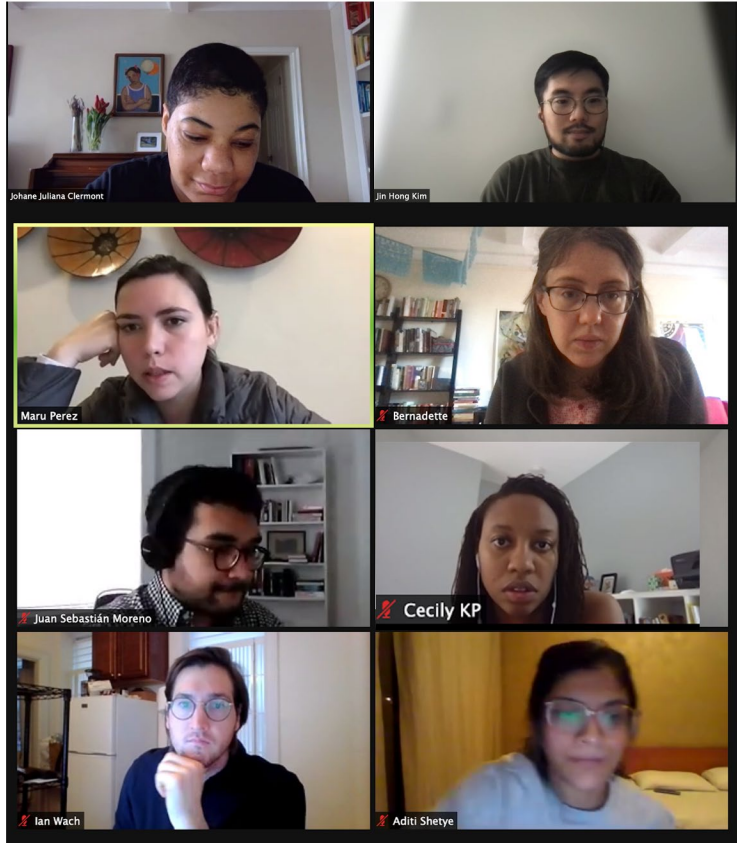
The findings will be diverse: the nature of adaptation for existing units and buildings varies widely according to regionally-specific predicted outcomes of climate change, e.g., heat, sea-level rise, winds, flooding, precipitation, and drought. For example, adaptation of many cities involves extreme temperatures. Many of the existing technologies are only implemented on high-end and new buildings or neighborhoods.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION MEANS INCREASING SURVIVAL.

Climate change carries immense consequences for the existing built environment - and the homes of billions. However, university-based initiatives responding to climate change through built environment infrequently address the existing housing stock, while those who consider it often focus on mitigation strategies (e.g., through promoting alternative energy sources through solar panel installations). Adaptation strategies and innovations, meanwhile, often concentrate at the infrastructural and regional scale and neglect the opportunities to build resilience through smaller-scale adaptive retrofits.

HOUSING GOES BEYOND THE UNIT.

Current imaginations of housing often reduce to the standard assumptions of a single unit, for a homogenous group of residents, with firm barriers between the public and private. For the bulk of urban residents who live in multifamily structures, the spatial immediacy and needs at the building level, access to adjacent streets and public areas, and connectivity to the network of urban spaces and services are the inseparable components of their 'home' and housing unit. The inventive way to re-imagine physical configurations to match a broader spectrum of living and working, while adapting for climate change as well as the demographic and economic shifts, demands the integration and cooperation of innovative design and financing and planning strategies.



TEAM AND METHODS:

the lab as an inter-disciplinary hub of innovation at GSAPP

The GSAPP Housing Lab is a hub for affordable housing innovation at the nexus of design and planning, supported by expertise in real estate development and preservation. Through practice-oriented outputs and gatherings, the center advances creative and grounded methods for effective interventions geared at shifting the rules of affordable housing practice; and help to increase the quality and availability of affordable, connected, decent, resilient, beautiful, and secure housing in dense urban environments. Located in one of the leading graduate schools of the built environment, and with collaboration across the university and community, public and industry partnerships, the center is also locus for testing and demonstrating methods of impactful practice-based scholarship, pedagogical strategies, and learning.

See ongoing work, digital products and news:

<https://www.arch.columbia.edu/research/labs/15-housing-lab>

twitter and instagram: @gsapphousinglab

The Housing Lab is an GSAPP-wide initiative, led by Dean Amale Andraos, with the support of Associate Dean Leah Cohen. The lab exists with the generous seed funding from the IDC Foundation.

The GSAPP Housing Lab is guided by the principles that housing is beyond the physical unit and can and should be:

ACCESSIBLE

Connected : embedded in quality environments, with access to services, lively communities, and opportunities

Decent : designed, constructed and maintained for health and safety

RESILIENT

Adaptive : able to withstand disasters and climate change

Secure : embedded in a community with expectation of stability and belonging

INCLUSIVE

Designed: inspires pride, well-being, allows for light and air, accessible to all ages, abilities, household types

Affordable: paying for a connected, decent, resilient, and beautiful home should not preclude health or food

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Spring 2020 Lab RAs



Ericka Song
MArch, 2020



Erin Purcell
MSRED, 2020



Juan Moreno
MSUP, 2021

IDC Fellow



Bernadette Baird-Zars,
UP PhD, 2020

Fall 2020 Lab RAs: Johane Clermont MArch, 2022, Juan Moreno, Eric Iglesias MSRED, 2021.



2020 Lab Project Associates

The Lab benefitted from the contributions of many GSAPP student associates; their names and programs are listed in each chapter. Special thanks to Maria (Maru) Perez Benevides, MArch '21, for graphics and visual identity across all sections.

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GSAPP faculty consulted on the Housing Lab's work and this project over spring and fall of 2020: Elliott Sclar, Ryan Devlin, Patrice Derrington, Lance Freeman, , Mario Gooden, Anthony Vanky, and Anna Puigjaner.

HOUSING FOR SURVIVAL

CLIMATE CHANGE, PANDEMICS, VIOLENCE AND THE HOME

Housing ‘for survival’ emerged as a concept to focus the lab's perspective on climate and socioeconomic equity on the most pragmatic and immediate: **what about housing will help households simply stay alive - in particular amidst climate change and disasters?** Housing can and should do more, but survival is the starting point. Launching our thinking of housing and space as a right for individual well-being and the collective also drew strongly on the tradition of progressive reform from New York at the turn of the last century, when the right for adequate private space with light and air to combat disease drove the new tenement law (1901), zoning resolution (1916) and multi-family dwelling law (1928). The lab’s work this year seeks to re-center housing again as decent places to survive – and live, carrying forward the tradition of these codes, and also provoking change and experimentation in their contents and concepts.

While COVID-19’s impacts only have underscored the importance of our central inquiry of this year: **how can we feasibly and imaginatively intervene in the ‘overlooked’ stock -existing unsubsidized walkup multifamily buildings- to expand inclusion, resilience and access?**

In a city under lockdown, and as the ways that we live and work compress and stretch into new arenas of time, air and meters, housing is even more visibly at the center of physical survival. Doubled-up and crowded

households isolate, work and get sick together. Twenty-four hour occupation transforms the usage and meaning of units, and made urban life only more unequal. The networks of spaces and people across buildings and neighborhoods that also form part of 'home' are suspended; 'stay at home' excludes parts of the home outside the unit. **Access to services, food and help is exponentially localized, highlighting and deepening geographic inequalities.** Rent or mortgage payments, paid or forgone, compound on tenants and owners. Is anything about housing the same anymore?

Yes: the particularities of the housing crisis continue under brighter contrast.

The Lab's focus on framing housing in terms of access, inclusion and resilience – and the understandings of how housing intersects with climate change- have only become more clearly urgent over the last months.

The tangible Lab outputs of this spring – a set of integrated proposals to transform the 'overlooked' multifamily walkups of New York City - now have higher stakes, as a result in many ways; most obviously, the affordable, unsubsidized, crowded tenements are also centers of infection, death and economic hardship.

Vulnerable buildings and neighborhoods with unsubsidized multifamily housing are ripe for design, planning and development innovations. Interventions to increase housing inclusiveness, resiliency, and affordability can have an immense impact if expanded to include where many poor and marginalized city residents live: in existing unsubsidized multifamily housing. Stock: multifamily structures. Using the lab's initial analyses of new law tenements, we plan to continue focusing on unsubsidized walkups, but will include those from other time periods and slightly smaller buildings (3 units and up).

Population

We will continue to focus on low to middle-income residents (under 100% AMI) in particular in unsubsidized buildings (not NYCHA) and with a particular focus on recent immigrants and other vulnerable populations.

Areas

Will continue to hone in on areas with relatively high population density, as well as high rates of overcrowding and other indicators of informality and illegality (e.g. 311 complaints).

High vulnerability to disasters

Flooding, heat risk- in climate change as pandemic (COVID-19 cases and deaths). The lab is well-positioned to analyze -through design and quantitative data- the relationship between crowding, contagion and mortality. We could also propose a set of design and policy interventions, perhaps also building on our code work.

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Dean Amale Andraos
Associate Dean Leah Cohen

Contributions By:

Bernadette Baird-Zars
Johane Clermont
Jenna Davis
Lanier Hagerty
Joseph Weil Huennekens
Jin Hong Kim
Jiazhen Lin
Juan Sebastian Moreno
Oghenechuko Okor
Maria Perez Benavides
Erin Purcell
Ericka Mina Song
Savannah Wu